

**Clare Rowan, *Under Divine Auspices: Divine Ideology and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severan Period*.** Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1107020122. Pp. xvi + 317. £65.00.

The Severan dynasty is one of the more colourful in Roman history, entertaining readers with multiple assassinations, Caracalla's fratricide, and the alleged madness of Elagabalus. In *Under Divine Auspices*, Clare Rowan argues that the Severans drew upon imagery of previous dynasties and undergirded their imperial authority with divine sanction and assimilation, demonstrating this with evidence from a range of material and literary sources, but primarily coinage. Rowan has worked with both the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies and the University of South Florida's Severan Database Project, and this volume reflects her thorough expertise in this area. There is a brief but careful handling of the convoluted literary evidence from Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the *Historia Augusta*. While Rowan maintains focus on the Severans throughout, when necessary she makes judicious diversions to trace briefly the origin of an idea from Augustus' reign, or the development of an idea down to Constantine's. She responsibly acknowledges the possible limitations of numismatic evidence, whilst maintaining a strong case that coinage had a deliberate role in imperial image-building. Subsequent chapters examine this theme from the founder of the dynasty, Septimius Severus, down to its last member, Severus Alexander.

Rowan opens her chapter on Severus by demonstrating how numismatic images reinforced the imperial claims of various rivals following the death of Pertinax, particularly Severus' successful use of Hercules and Liber Pater coinage during the civil war, followed by Jupiter coinage following his eventual victory. She also argues that Dio's report of Commodus' numismatic use of Heracles imagery, complete with his lionskin, was understood widely enough that it was adopted by Severus (equally resplendent in lionskin), who in turn adopted himself into the Antonine dynasty as Commodus' brother. The other members of the imperial family were given the same treatment, with Hercules and Liber Pater imagery extended to Geta in A.D. 200–2, on a similar coin type to that used for Severus and Caracalla in 204. The images of the same two deities are present on the arch at Lepcis Magna, appearing on the imperial chariot in which the three rulers rode. Severus maintained this theme in coinage commemorating the Secular Games, an event which he used to promote the unity of the empire and his own fracturing dynasty. Commemorative medallions in Perinthus celebrated the festival of the *Philadelphia*, drawing upon the 'visual language of the Severan dynasty', predominantly images of Hercules and his labours (p. 103). Rowan concurs with Brilliant (*The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum*, p. 123) regarding the identification of Hercules on Septimius' arch in the Roman forum, constructed between A.D. 195 and 203. Tying this to Dio's statement that Severus constructed a temple to Hercules and Liber Pater, she posits that this was the no longer extant colossal temple on the Quirinal Hill. While Severus' later Neptune coinage might seem out of place, Rowan

connects this to his British expedition, pointing out that the Emperor's campaign depended upon reinforcements and supplies safely crossing the English Channel.

Following Caracalla's murder of his younger brother Geta, the new sole ruler emphasised Apollo, Asclepius, and Sarapis in the coinage of his own reign, an official line reflected back in local inscriptions. Rowan ties Caracalla's Apollo coinage to his attending Apollo Grannus' sanctuary in Germany, and his consultation of Apollo's oracle at Claros in late 213. Rowan argues that Caracalla's Asclepianic coinage of A.D. 214–8 not only emphasised his divine endorsement, but reflected the emperor's actual visit in late 213 to the Asclepianum in Pergamum. The emperor's relationship with Sarapis is similarly tied to the visit to Alexandria, with coins specifically dated to the time of his visit in 214–5. Caracalla's later Alexander coin types, of course, reflect his interests in his Persian campaign.

The sections on Elagabalus and Alexander Severus are not nearly as detailed, due to the less adequate evidence and inconsistency of literary evidence. Elagabalus' memory was abolished following his death in 222, and Rowan points out that the obliteration of Elagabalus' image extended to painting him in literature as a stereotypical non-Roman and bad emperor. She further considers that coinage featuring the god Elagabal may have been melted down as part of the same campaign, abolishing the memory of the emperor's new deity. Based on both the *Historia Augusta* and Herodian, Rowan argues that Elagabalus built a large temple to his deity in Rome. However, she maintains that the emperor was not trying to enforce the worship of this god throughout the empire, but that localities responded to his choice, seeking imperial favour and the status that came with the right to host regional cult as a *neokorate*.

The chapter on Severus Alexander details his reversal of Elagabalus, in which Rowan focuses on his association with traditional Roman deities such as Jupiter and Mars, and suggests that Severus Alexander enhanced this reversal with the conversion of a temple of Elagabal to Jupiter Ultor, based on numismatic imagery. Rowan stresses that Alexander's solar coin types did not feature the Emesan Elagabal, but the Roman Sol, whom she associates with Eastern expansion. She also points out that while Jupiter may have been praised by Alexander as *Conservator* for preserving his life from Elagabalus, it was possibly a redressing of Elagabalus' use of that title for his own deity, which dovetails well with Alexander's stripping cities of the *neokorate* status granted by his predecessor. Numismatic statistics support a dramatic drop in Jupiter coinage during Elagabalus' reign, followed by an even more dramatic increase for Alexander. As Augustus, the re-creator of Rome, had cast himself as a new Romulus, Alexander in turn attempted to align himself with Augustus. Indeed, from A.D. 228 onwards, Alexander used Romulus imagery on coins, ambiguously portraying himself *as* Romulus, in line with the *Historia Augusta's* presentation of him as imitating the statues of Roman heroes in Augustus' forum in the Forum of Nerva, conveniently located next door.

Rowan argues her thesis well, interacting with specialist literature without making her narrative inaccessible. She reminds historians how their work can be enriched by

numismatic evidence; and shows numismatists an example of how to engage non-specialists without overwhelming them. Cambridge has produced an attractive volume, which, although it is glue-bound, has enough page width to lay flat on one's desk. The work is copiously illustrated, and yet organised well enough that it never strays into appearing cluttered. The criticisms are both few and, indeed, minor. Rowan uses the term *damnatio memoriae* in a number of places, which she does identify as a 'useful modern term' to explain this varied process (p. 165), although it would have been helpful to discuss its referral in ancient sources as *abolitio memoriae* (e.g., *abolendamque omnem memoriam*, Suetonius, *Domitian* XXIII.1). Although it is well-edited and indexed, at one point Dio is referred to in the text but missing from the footnote (p. 132 n. 136). These quibbles should not deter anyone from purchasing the volume, as Rowan has turned her thesis into a very accessible monograph which will prove valuable for individual researchers in a number of subfields, not least for its current bibliography. This volume is a worthy addition to the scholarly literature, but carries a high enough price tag that university libraries will likely be the primary purchasers until Cambridge releases an affordable paperback edition.

DAVID NEAL GREENWOOD  
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
d.n.greenwood@sms.ed.ac.uk