

## THE IMPALED KING: A HEAD AND ITS CONTEXT

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The cover of this volume is adorned by a reworked sestertius of the emperor Caius Iulius Verus Maximinus (AD 235–238), better known to posterity as Maximinus Thrax.<sup>1</sup> This coin (see also fig. 1) is a fascinating testimony to civil war, and it captures in a nutshell the key themes of this volume: in striking fashion it illustrates the impact of internal and external wars on the Empire, and how such conflicts were conceived by the various protagonists. The coin was originally produced as part of an extensive issue of coinage in celebration of victory over the Germans in 236 – the *victoria germanica* of the reverse legend. It presumably entered circulation as regular pay or as part of a special donative to a member of the imperial guard or a soldier of the *legio II Parthica*; it was reworked after the emperor's death in the civil war against the senatorial emperors Pupienus and Balbinus in 238. It is one of the most striking examples of the *damnatio memoriae* of a defeated emperor.<sup>2</sup> The modifications that radically altered the coin's message cast a spotlight not only on the dramatic events of a violent regime change but also on the strategies with which those involved sought to integrate a new political and ideological order. This epilogue is dedicated to this exceptional coin and its historical context, reflecting the key themes of this volume.

- 1 The epithet “Thrax” was given to Maximinus to distinguish him from Maximinus Daza; it indicates the emperor's Thracian origins, which were emphasized already by Herodian (6.8.1): ἦν δέ τις ἐν τῷ στρατῷ Μαξιμίνοιο ὄνομα, τὸ μὲν γένος τῶν ἐνδοτάτῳ Θρακῶν καὶ μίξοβαρβάρων; cf. also Herodian. 7.1.2. On the coin itself, see the following note.
- 2 The coin is a specimen of RIC IV Maximinus 90 (= COHEN no. 109 = ALRAM 1989: no. 27-5; BMC nos. 191–195 correspond to this type). This particular coin was first mentioned in the auction catalogue Lanz (Graz) 10/1977: no. 792; at the time, it was sold to a German private collector, in whose possession it remains today. The first scholarly study dedicated to this coin was published by OVERBECK 1988; in ALRAM 1989: 85, the coin is listed as no. 6 under the heading “Technika und Kuriosa” and is illustrated in black and white on plate 15, no. 6. The coin weighs 21.73 g and has a diameter of 31 mm. The provenance and collection history of the piece prior to the auction in 1977 cannot be reconstructed with certainty. The auctioneer Hubert LANZ states that the coin was originally in the Trau Collection, which was sold in May 1935, and came to him via the Hohenkubin Collection. In the Trau auction catalogue, however, the piece does not appear (although a coin from the same series is listed as no. 2579), and neither can the connection to the Hohenkubin Collection be substantiated further for lack of documentation. Statements by further individuals variously involved (the private collector, Curtis CLAY, Karl SUBAK, Bernhard OVERBECK) do not produce a coherent picture. I wish to thank the collector for permission to depict the coin and Mr LANZ for producing the image.



Fig. 1: RIC IV Maximinus 90, reworked specimen

The modifications made to the original iconographic and textual program of the sestertius can be assessed most clearly by direct comparison to an unmodified specimen made from the same pair of dies (see fig. 2 for comparison).<sup>3</sup> The obverse of the unmodified piece shows a portrait of Maximinus in cuirass, *paludamentum*, and laurel crown surrounded by the titulature *Maximinus pius aug(ustus) germ(anicus)*; the military nature of the type is emphasized by the short haircut and closely trimmed full beard.<sup>4</sup> On the reworked sestertius, in contrast, all imperial insignia have been scraped off, and the emperor's shoulders and neck have been reduced to a thin line. There is no doubt that these modifications to the emperor's official portrait depict Maximinus' gruesome end: he was overthrown and killed by his own soldiers, and his severed head was carried on a pole first through Aquileia and later through Rome in the subsequent victory processions. Two further modifications can be observed: a tapering, snakelike line appears behind the emperor's head in the middle of his titulature, rendering it partially illegible. Another shape is drawn before his eye, expanding to take on the characteristic shape of a wing.

3 This unmodified specimen made from the same pair of dies is held in the same private collection as the reworked sestertius; again, I wish to thank the private collector for permission to reproduce the coin here and Mr LANZ for taking the photograph. The comparison piece weighs 20.29 g and has a diameter of 30 mm.

4 On this portrait type for Maximinus, see ALRAM 1989: 53. ALRAM describes this as a "Triumphal-Porträt" of Maximinus, "der sich hier als riesenhafter, unbesiegbarer Triumphator präsentiert." This portrait type was introduced in late summer 236 together with the *victoria germanica* reverses. Alram assumes (as already CARSON BMC, p. 95f. had done) that the new portrait type had first been used on pictures that Maximinus had displayed before the Roman curia after his victory; on this, see n.12 below.



Fig. 2: RIC IV Maximinus 90

The auctioneer Hubert Lanz, who in 1977 composed the earliest description of this exceptional piece, already interpreted these two elements as a worm and a bird;<sup>5</sup> Michael Alram accepted this interpretation in his corpus of the coinage of Maximinus, and there is no reason to dispute it today:<sup>6</sup> instead of the dignified ruler portrait that the coin originally showed, the reworked coin depicts the severed head of the toppled emperor on a pole, as a worm gnaws through his skull and a bird pecks at his eye. The reverse is a variation of the same macabre theme: instead of the goddess Victory on the unmodified original, the reverse again shows the emperor's severed head on a pole. The undignified demise of Maximinus is depicted with considerable attention to detail on both the obverse and reverse of the modified piece and thus worked over an iconographic program originally intended to glorify the disgraced emperor.

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What can we say about the historical and political-military background of this exceptional coin? Despite his brief, three-year reign, Maximinus normally is considered highly significant for the history of the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> His accession in 235 ended the Severan dynasty, which had steered the history of Rome for the preceding four decades. The roughly fifty-year period after the Severans, the last

5 Lanz (Graz) 10/1977: no. 792.

6 GORINI 1984: 289 n.15 describes the wormlike element as a "coda di cavallo."

7 The most recent monograph on Maximinus Thrax is HAEGEMANS 2010, with references to earlier literature, among which DIETZ 1980 and BÖRM 2008 deserve special notice. Even though Maximinus' reign has been covered in Matthias HAAKE's contribution to this volume, it is worthwhile to reconstruct the events in somewhat greater detail here.

great ruling dynasty of the Principate, is usually regarded as the age of the “soldier emperors” (“Soldatenkaiser”): this rapidly changing cast of Roman rulers usually had advanced in the army and often showed considerable distance from the senatorial aristocracy in Rome. This period saw a military monarchy remote from the capital city take shape. Its breeding ground was the equestrian administrative and military elite, which ultimately would result in the imperial residence system of the Tetrarchic and Constantinian period and the rest of Late Antiquity. Maximinus is a transitional figure, even if on closer scrutiny his accession is not such a sharp caesura as is sometimes claimed.<sup>8</sup>

Maximinus came to power in Mainz in early 235 when the *Legio XXII Primigenia* rebelled against the unpopular Alexander Severus.<sup>9</sup> The new ruler, who had a distinguished military career behind him, appears to have rapidly been recognized by the senate after his predecessor’s violent end – even though, as Aurelius Victor puts it, he had hardly been touched by education. After Macrinus (217–218), Maximinus was only the second emperor in the history of the Roman Empire who was not a member of the senatorial order.<sup>10</sup> Events did not bring the new emperor to the capital on the Tiber; instead, he was engaged in military conflicts with external enemies on the Rhine and Danube frontiers, not without success. He victoriously concluded a costly expedition against enemy Germanic tribes across the Rhine in summer 236. For this victory, his troops acclaimed him *imperator*, and shortly thereafter the senate officially conferred on him the prestigious honorific title *germanicus maximus*.<sup>11</sup> Maximinus had his success also celebrated in

8 Already Herodian (see esp. 7.1.1) saw the transition from Severus Alexander to Maximinus Thrax as a profound change; he traces this μεταβολή on the one hand back to Maximinus’ character and, on the other, to the fact that he was the first person who had risen to such a prominent position from such humble origins (ibid.: ὅτι πρῶτος ἐξ εὐτελείας τῆς ἐσχάτης ἐς τοσαύτην τύχην ἦλθε). Aur. Vict. 25.1 also describes Maximinus as *primus e militaribus*. Earlier scholars accepted this assessment and considered Maximinus’ accession the epoch-making caesura at which the age of the soldier emperors begins. Against this view, however, recent research stresses the examples of continuity that run through this regime change; see esp. BÖRM 2008 and HAEGEMANS 2010.

9 For discussion of his date of accession, see PEACHIN 1985.

10 Aur. Vict. 25.1: *litterarum fere rudis*. For Maximinus’ biography and military career, see esp. BANG 1906; HOHL 1918; DIETZ 1980; HAEGEMANS 2010. On overall trends of this period: EICH 2005; HEIL 2006; JOHNE 2006. For a history of research on this subject, see the overview by GERHARDT 2008.

11 According to Herodian. 7.2.9, Maximinus already spent winter 235/236 on the Danube. Numismatic evidence corrects this claim: *victoria germanica* first appears in the second part of the third issue that can be dated to summer 236. Not long afterward, probably in late summer 236, Maximinus appears for the first time with the title *germanicus maximus*. Maximinus thus seems to have waited for the senate’s official confirmation of this prestigious victory title before he began to use it in his titulature. On this complex question, see WHITTAKER 1970: 164f. with n.1 and 166f. with n.3; STYLOW 1974: 520–523; ALRAM 1989: 26f.

Rome, among other things, with large-sized pictures typical of Roman victory celebrations.<sup>12</sup>

After his victory on the Rhine, Maximinus turned his attention to the problems on the Danube frontier, probably from late summer 236. This conflict would occupy him until the outbreak of unrest in the African provinces early in 238. The struggle against Gothic tribes on the lower Danube in particular was a great success, bringing Maximinus further acclamations as *imperator* and the victory titles *dacicus maximus* and *sarmaticus maximus*.<sup>13</sup> These military successes gave Maximinus the necessary legroom to found a new dynasty: in the course of 236, he elevated his homonymous son to *Caesar*, thus identifying him as his presumptive successor.<sup>14</sup>

While Maximinus was engaged on the Danube, new flash points opened up on the Eastern front. Ultimately, though, it was not external enemies that spelled doom for the emperor, but rather symptoms of disintegration from within the Empire. In early March 238, an angry mob lynched an imperial procurator in the North African city Thysdrus.<sup>15</sup> Sifting through the unclear depictions of the ancient historiographical sources, F. Kolb has reconstructed the event as an act of desperation on the part of tenants on imperial lands against the excessive financial demands of an imperial official; it thus appears initially to have been a strictly local problem.<sup>16</sup> Yet this bold act of violence quickly escalated into a usurpation in which Gordian, governor of the province Africa proconsularis, and shortly thereafter his homonymous son were elevated to *Augusti*.<sup>17</sup> A few days later, they brought Carthage under their control, one of the largest, most significant cities of the Empire, and established the headquarters of the uprising there, which soon spread to further areas of North Africa.<sup>18</sup> Letters and envoys were sent to the capi-

12 The conflict with the Germans is described by Herodian. 7.2.1–7. Herodian. 7.2.8 mentions the victory report sent to the senate and people of Rome and also the εἰκόνας mentioned above. These images of Maximinus' successful military deeds were erected before the curia.

13 On Maximinus' titulature, see CIL III 10649, V 8076, XI 1176, III 5742, III 11316. On his acclamations as *imperator*, see KIENAST 1990; among earlier literature, see especially BERSANETTI 1941: 9 and SIENA 1955.

14 Aur. Vict. 25.2.

15 The sources for the revolt and its aftermath are: Herodian. 7.4.1–8.7.8. See MULLENS 1948; TOWNSEND 1955; KOTULA 1959; KOLB 1977; DIETZ 1980: 322–326.

16 KOLB 1977. TOWNSEND 1955 argues that the usurpation was a senatorial rebellion planned long in advance. The scarcity of the sources make it impossible to decide the question; see also BÖRM 2008: 72–76; HAEGEMANS 2010.

17 The ancient sources do not attest when and where Gordian II was elevated to co-emperor. According to Herodian. 7.7.2, Gordian II was first proclaimed *Augustus* in Rome; in *HA Max.* 14.3, this event already takes place in Thysdrus; and *ibid. Gord.* 9.6 in Carthage (information that potentially derives from Dexippus).

18 Herodian. 7.5.8 reports that Maximinus' inscriptions and statues were toppled and desecrated in Libya, and Gordian's imperial portrait was erected in their place. These events are also attested epigraphically by erasures; cf. BERSANETTI 1940: 68 and TOWNSEND 1955: 80. In Carthage, Gordian allegedly appeared as emperor in procession with a bodyguard and *fasces* (He-

tal on the Tiber to win the senate and people of Rome for the rebellion.<sup>19</sup> The traditionally close ties between North Africa and the senatorial aristocracy of Rome seem to have played an important part in this, even if prior to this dramatic turn of events no clear cases of conflict between the senate and Maximinus are known.<sup>20</sup> There nonetheless appears to have been considerable readiness among political power-brokers in Rome to renounce their loyalty to the emperor, who was distant from both the senate and the city. The senate now quickly began to appeal to other provinces to rebel and dispatched letters and envoys of its own, in some cases with success.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, news of the rebellion had reached Maximinus in his winter quarters in Sirmium.<sup>22</sup> It was impossible to ignore the threat: with Carthage and Rome, two of the most important cities of the Empire threatened to be lost, and with North Africa an important source of the food supply; the same consideration might inspire other parts of the Empire to join the revolt. Maximinus therefore hastily assembled his troops and set out for Italy.<sup>23</sup> In North Africa, though, events had taken an unfavorable turn for the senate. Capellianus, a senatorial *legatus* in Numidia appointed by Maximinus and entrusted with an important military command over border troops, made an attack on the usurpers with his forces (partly Roman legionaries, partly auxiliary troops) from his headquarters in Lambaesis and other, smaller strongholds.<sup>24</sup> Gordian had the support of the *plebs*, but he could not muster adequate military support of his own, so Capellianus was able to quickly crush the rebellion and eliminate the usurpers.<sup>25</sup> Roughly just three weeks after it began, the matter seemed over.<sup>26</sup> For this victory, Maximinus received his

rodian. 7.6.2), so that “for a brief period Carthage was Rome in appearance and prosperity” (ὡς ὄντιν καὶ τύχην ἔχειν πρὸς ὀλίγον, ὥσπερ ἐν εἰκόνι, τῆς Ρώμης τῶν Καρχηδονίων τὴν πόλιν; trans. ECHOLS 1961).

- 19 Herodian. 7.6.3 mentions letters to high-ranking senators and an open letter to the senate and people of Rome.
- 20 Historiographical sources make only vague references to alleged tensions between the senate and the emperor, mainly applying the usual *topoi* regarding tyranny. The sources are more specific about rising financial burdens (e.g., Herodian. 7.3.1–6), which is possible and plausible, but cannot realistically be quantified.
- 21 It is unclear exactly which provinces joined the rebellion; see BERSANETTI 1940: ch. IV; TOWNSEND 1955: 67.
- 22 Herodian. 7.2.9; *HA Max.* 13.3. Aur. Vict. 27.3, in contrast, places Maximinus in Thrace.
- 23 Herodian. 7.8.9f. stresses the considerable size of the troops Maximinus had assembled for the civil war. The defense of the Danube frontier indeed seems to have suffered from these troop movements; cf. *HA Max. Balb.* 16.3.
- 24 Herodian. 7.9.1–11. Capellianus will thus have also resisted his dismissal by Gordian (7.9.2).
- 25 Accounts of the death of Gordian I are contradictory. Herodian. 7.9.4 and 7.9.9 mentions suicide; Zos. 16.1 and Zon. 12.17D respectively report a shipwreck and death after Gordian’s arrival in Rome. Gordian II supposedly was killed in battle at Carthage: Herodian. 7.9.7.
- 26 The length of Gordian’s reign is put at twenty-two days by *Chron.* 354 and twenty-one by Zon. 22.17.

seventh acclamation as *imperator* and again was sole ruler of the entire Roman Empire.<sup>27</sup>

By supporting the rebellion, though, the senate had stuck its neck out too far. The *patres* now desperately sought a way out to avoid putting themselves at the mercy of the offended emperor.<sup>28</sup> In this delicate situation, the senate resolved to take an unusual, risky step: it decreed to continue the confrontation, that is, to keep the usurpation going. To this end, the senators elevated not one, but two new emperors, nominally equal in rank.<sup>29</sup> At an emergency session in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the distinguished senators Clodius Pupienus Maximus and D. Caelius Calvinus Balbinus were jointly declared emperors in opposition to Maximinus.<sup>30</sup> Pupienus is credited with extensive military experience, and Balbinus with exceptional civil leadership qualities.<sup>31</sup> At the urging of the Roman *plebs*, and with the support of the *remansores* of the Praetorian Guard (who had been left behind to maintain the camp in Rome and for the most part awaited their *honesta missio*), a homonymous grandson of Gordian's, who at this point was just thirteen years old, was elevated to *Caesar*.<sup>32</sup>

These new developments in Rome made the situation precarious for Maximinus, even if the suppression of the rebellion in North Africa had shifted the balance of power considerably to his advantage. He thus continued his march on Rome. After descending from the Julian Alps, he encountered the first city to oppose him at Aquileia.<sup>33</sup> Aquileia was one of the largest and most economically and strategically important cities of Northern Italy. The city controlled not only a broad hinterland in Venetia and the sea routes in the northern Adriatic, but also the strategically important supply routes between Illyricum and Italy. Maximinus thus had no choice but to capture Aquileia, if he wanted to continue successfully on his way to Rome.<sup>34</sup> The emperor had apparently hoped that Aquileia would soon surrender and open its gates willingly, but the population of the city decided to risk armed conflict: Aquileia could rely on its strong fortifications and ample reserves, and the local elite was closely tied to the senatorial aristocracy in

27 On acclamations as *imperator*, see BERSANETTI 1941: 12.

28 Since Maximinus had been declared a *hostis publicus*, the senate and emperor had declared open hostilities (Herodian. 7.10.1: ὁμολογούμενοι ἐχθροί).

29 This was potentially due to differences of opinion among the senators.

30 For the location of the senate session: Herodian. 7.10.2. The famous session after Caligula's death in AD 41 also took place in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus: Suet. *Calig.* 60; Ios. *ant. Iud.* 19.2.

31 On Pupienus and Balbinus, see BRANDT 1996.

32 On the elevation of Gordian III, see Herodian. 7.10.5–9. On the age of Gordian III, see Herodian. 8.8.8.

33 Herodian. 8.1.4. He had previously found the city Emona (modern Ljubljana) abandoned.

34 For Herodian, the siege of Aquileia seems to have been symbolic: Herodian. 8.4.8: οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλως αὐτῶ τὴν ἐπὶ Ρώμην ὁδὸν εὐπρεπῆ καὶ ἐνδοξὸν ἔσεσθαι, μὴ τῆς πρώτης ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ πόλεως ἀντιστάσης καθαιρεθείσης (“for if they did not demolish this, the first city in Italy to oppose them, they could not decently make their triumphant march on Rome”; trans. WHITTAKER 1970).

Rome.<sup>35</sup> Maximinus' only option was a siege, but his troops were unable to make any decisive breakthrough. Time was against the besiegers. A tight blockade by land and sea established by the senate exacerbated the supply and communications problems for Maximinus and his troops.<sup>36</sup>

As hope of quickly taking Aquileia evaporated, so too did Maximinus' prestige and authority. According to Herodian (whose account is not implausible in this respect), the decisive actors were the soldiers of the *legio II Parthica*. They were regularly stationed in the legionary camp *Castra Albana* in the Alban Hills near Rome (the origin of the modern city Albano Laziale) and had left behind their wives and children along with a handful of units.<sup>37</sup> Since central Italy was firmly under the control of the senatorial faction, the relatives of these soldiers apparently feared reprisals from the opposing side or had already experienced them.<sup>38</sup> In Rome, disassociation from Maximinus' regime had assumed a dynamic all its own, which Herodian attributes to the hatred and fearlessness of the *plebs*:<sup>39</sup> not only were Maximinus' statues, images, and honorary dedications toppled and desecrated, but anyone who was suspected of any kind of relationship with Maximinus was driven out or killed by the mob (ὄχλος): Herodian explicitly evokes civil-war-like conditions (ἐν προσχήματι ἐλευθερίας ἀδείας τε εἰρηνικῆς ἔργα πολέμου ἐμφυλίου ἐγένετο).<sup>40</sup> Adherents of Maximinus were supposedly also persecuted and killed in provinces that joined the revolt (7.7.6).

After the revolt had been suppressed in North Africa and the senate had appointed Pupienus and Balbinus as its own emperors, conflict between the adherents and opponents of Maximinus seems to have escalated, even coming to dramatic street battles between soldiers and the city population.<sup>41</sup> It is thus very plausible that the remaining units and the family members of the *legio II Parthica* stationed or settled in the immediate vicinity of Rome, but who supported Maximinus, found themselves in danger. The soldiers of the second legion thus apparently had a personal stake in the conflict between the senate and the em-

35 Herodian. 8.2.1–6. On the close ties between the elite of Aquileia and the Roman aristocracy, see CALDERINI 1972: 467f. and 548–550.

36 Herodian. 8.5.4f., 8.6.4.

37 For the archeological remains of the legionary camp, see BUSCH 2011.

38 Herodian describes in detail the measures taken against Maximinus' followers from the beginning of the revolt on, both in North Africa and near Rome. Herodian states that Gordian I had offered *πραότης*, i.e., *clementia*, but *συκοφάνται* (an elastic concept) had already been exiled on his initiative (7.6.4). The only drastic measure Herodian reports is the killing of Vitalianus on Gordian's orders; this probably was P. Aelius Vitalianus, an equestrian official. Vitalianus is attested as governor of the province Mauretania Caesariensis ca. 236 (AE 1957: 278) and afterwards seems to have stayed in Rome on Maximinus' orders. On the remaining points, see the following footnotes.

39 Herodian. 7.7.2: τὸ κρυπτόν πρότερον διὰ φόβον μῖσος ἀδεῆς καὶ αὐτεξούσιον γενόμενον ἀκολούτως ἐξεχείτο.

40 Herodian. 7.7.1–4.

41 Cf. Herodian. 7.11.1–12.7.



peror.<sup>42</sup> They saw eliminating Maximinus as the only way out.<sup>43</sup> According to Herodian, they made allies in the imperial bodyguard, with which the *legio II Partica* demonstrably had good contacts and which also had comrades and family in Rome. The units thus faced similar problems, and they took action jointly.<sup>44</sup> They allegedly struck down Maximinus in his tent in broad daylight, and with him his son, the military prefect, and his closest followers.<sup>45</sup>

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As to the killing of Maximinus and his followers, Herodian reports that "their bodies were thrown out for anyone to desecrate and trample on, before being left to be torn to pieces by dogs and birds."<sup>46</sup> Maximinus' head was cut off; it henceforth constituted the semantic center of the staging of the victory, while according to the *Historia Augusta* the corpses of the dead were thrown in the river.<sup>47</sup> The act of killing Maximinus became the first scene of victory in the civil war against him, and the desecration of his corpse allowed Maximinus' soldiers to prove to the new rulers their rejection of the fallen regime.<sup>48</sup> The public desecration and ridicule of the mutilated bodies constituted a kind of semantic bridge over which Maximinus' former adherents could easily switch sides and place themselves under their new rulers.

Maximinus' head came to serve a decisive function as manifest proof of his downfall. The head was brought by cavalymen to Ravenna, where Pupienus was mustering troops at the time. Already en route, the messengers were joyously welcomed by the individual cities.<sup>49</sup> As they entered Ravenna, the first significant victory celebrations broke out. Herodian mentions public thanksgiving offerings and songs of joy.<sup>50</sup> After receiving favorable *omina*, Pupienus supposedly ordered the cavalymen to bring the head to Rome. A large victory festival was celebrated

42 WESCH-KLEIN 1998: 117f. discusses further signs that the civilian population blamed Maximinus' soldiers for social problems.

43 Maximinus' fall is recounted in Herodian. 8.5.8f.

44 On the extensive ties between the *legio II Parthica* and the elite imperial troops, see already RITTERLING 1925.

45 Herodian. 8.5.9.

46 Herodian. 8.5.9: ῥίψαντές τε τὰ σώματα τοῖς βουλομένοις ἐνουβρίζειν καὶ πατεῖν εἶσαν κυσί τε καὶ ὄρνισι βοράν.

47 *HA Max.* 31.5: *sepulchra eorum nulla exstant. In profluentem enim cadavera eorum missa sunt ...*

48 According to Herodian. 8.5.9, the imperial standards were desecrated even before the emperor was killed.

49 Herodian. 8.6.5.

50 Herodian. 8.6.7.

the day after they arrived; Maximinus' head, fixed on a pole, stood in the center of the festivities.<sup>51</sup> Herodian gives an essentially credible description:

ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀφίκοντο εἰσέπεσόν τε ἐς τὴν πόλιν δεικνύντες τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ πολεμίου ἀνεσκολοπισμένην, ὡς πᾶσι περίοπτος εἶη, οὐδ' εἰπεῖν ἔστι λόγῳ ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας τὴν ἑορτὴν. οὔτε γὰρ ἡλικία τις ἦν ἢ μὴ πρὸς τοὺς βωμούς τε καὶ τὰ ἱερά ἠπεύγετο, οὔτε τις ἔμμενον οἶκοι, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐφέροντο συνηδόμενοι τε ἀλλήλοις καὶ ἐς τὸν ἱπὸδρομον συνθέοντες ὥσπερ ἐκκλησιάζοντες <έν> τῷ χωρίῳ. ὁ δὲ Βαλβίνος καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκατόμβας ἔθυσεν, ἀρχαί τε πᾶσαι καὶ σύγκλητος, ἕκαστός τε ὥσπερ ἀποσεισάμενος πέλεκυν τοῖς ἀγέσιν ἐπικείμενον ὑπερευφραίνετο.

It is impossible to describe the scenes of celebration that day after the arrival of the messengers, and their sudden entry into the city with the head of the enemy stuck on a pole for all to see. People of all ages ran to the altars and the temples; no one stayed indoors. They were swept along as though a spirit was in control of them, congratulating each other and all rushing together to the circus, as though there were a public assembly there. Balbinus actually in person sacrificed hecatombs, while all the magistrates, the senate and every ordinary man was bursting with joy, as though he had shaken off a sword that was hanging over his head.

At the same time as the celebrations in Rome, Pupienus celebrated the victory in Aquileia.<sup>52</sup> The inhabitants supposedly welcomed the emperor joyfully, while from across Italy envoys in ceremonial dress brought Pupienus statuettes of their civic deities and golden crowns as tokens of their reverence and showered him with flowers. Even soldiers from the army that not long ago had besieged Aquileia joined in the celebrations in civilian dress. Herodian further describes numerous thanksgiving offerings, the emperor's address to the army, and the announcement of a donative. Finally, Pupienus set out on the journey back to Rome with the palace guard and the second legion that Maximinus had led.<sup>53</sup> There Balbinus, Gordian *Caesar*, and the senate and people of Rome met him to escort him on his triumphant entrance into the city.<sup>54</sup> Both Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* mention gifts of money to the soldiers, and specific coin issues referring to the emperors' *liberalitas* suggest gifts of money to the people, as well.<sup>55</sup> The *Historia Augusta* also mentions a decree of the senate to erect a golden equestrian statue of Pupienus.<sup>56</sup> Our sources do not say whether Maximinus' severed head was paraded on a pole during the triumphant entrance into the city and played a part in the following victory festivities in Rome. The *Historia Augusta* merely remarks in a note that cannot be placed chronologically that the severed head was burned by the enraged mob on the Campus Martius.<sup>57</sup>

51 Herodian. 8.6.8 (trans. WHITTAKER 1970).

52 Herodian. 8.7.1–7.

53 Whittaker emends the passage to σύν τε τοῖς ὑπὸ Μαξιμίνῳ ἐστρατευμένοις, while the manuscripts read Βαλβίνῳ στρατευομένοις, that is, the soldiers of Balbinus, which makes little sense. The *legio II Parthica* seems to be meant.

54 Herodian. 8.7.8 formulates this as ὥσπερ θριαμβεῖοντα, as if conducting a triumph.

55 Herodian. 8.7.7; *HA Balb.* 12.9; *RIC IV.2* Pupienus 3, 13f., 25.

56 *HA Balb.* 12.4f.

57 *HA Max.* 31.5: ... *et capita eorum in Campo Martio insultante populo exusta.*

The desecration of Maximinus' corpse is the focus of a semantic revaluation that took the form of a comprehensive *damnatio memoriae*.<sup>58</sup> *Damnatio memoriae* is usually the public and ritualized desecration of the memory of a person and can take many forms not limited to the dishonorable treatment of the corpse of the person condemned. In Maximinus' case, too, *damnatio memoriae* encompassed various aspects of his imperial *memoria*, such as the *imagines* of the toppled emperor, his inscriptions, coins, and edicts.<sup>59</sup> Herodian credibly reports that the senate had Maximinus' honorary dedications destroyed, as well as the victory paintings that had been displayed before the senate house after his German victory.<sup>60</sup> Archeological evidence of erasures in inscriptions and the mutilation of imperial statues has also been found for Maximinus.<sup>61</sup> The *damnatio* of the toppled ruler went hand in hand with declarations of loyalty to the new regime. Thus Maximinus' former followers proved their rejection of the fallen emperor to the inhabitants of Aquileia by revering the laurel-crowned portraits of Pupienus, Balbinus, and Gordian *Caesar* and acclaiming them as their new rulers.<sup>62</sup>

\* \* \*

The sestertius that adorns the cover of this volume and is illustrated again in fig. 1 of this epilogue was apparently reworked over the course of these events. What can we say about this extraordinary coin? It was produced in the mint of Rome, which was the only place where Roman imperial coinage was produced under Maximinus.<sup>63</sup> Production of the *victoria germanica* type (to which the modified sestertius belongs) began in late summer 236 in the second part of the third emission, apparently immediately after the victory that concluded the costly German campaign.<sup>64</sup> The military action in question was an extensive conflict between Romans and Germans that saw Roman units penetrate deep into German territory. We now possess detailed archeological insight into this confrontation: as recently as 2008, a Roman battlefield was discovered at Harzhorn that is very probably connected to Maximinus' German campaign. The site is a complex of archeological find spots near the Wiershausen area of the city Kalefeld, in the county Northeim of Lower Saxony. This spectacular discovery was covered comprehen-

58 On *damnatio memoriae* in general, see VITTINGHOFF 1936; STEWART 1999; VARNER 2004; KRÜPE 2011.

59 In particular on the *damnatio* decreed against Maximinus, see DIETZ 1980; VARNER 2004: 201–203; HAEGEMANS 2010: 206f. with references to previous literature in n.57.

60 Herodian. 7.2.8.

61 References to erased inscriptions and the corresponding pages may be found in VARNER 2004.

62 Herodian. 8.6.2.

63 ALRAM 1989: 35; WOLTERS 2013: 118.

64 ALRAM 1989: 53; cf. WOLTERS 2013: 119–121. In RIC IV.2, p. 146f., the minting period is dated less precisely to the time from January 236 until March/April 238.

sively in the large exhibition “Rome’s Forgotten Campaign: The Battle of Harzhorn” (“Roms vergessener Feldzug: Die Schlacht am Harzhorn”) at the State Museum of Braunschweig (Sept. 1, 2013, to March 2, 2014).<sup>65</sup> The archeological remains show that Maximinus’ German victory was the result of an astonishingly extensive military undertaking.

The series of coins to which the reworked sestertius originally belonged celebrated the greatness of Maximinus’ military accomplishments: it originally showed on its reverse the goddess Victory with a laurel crown in her right hand and a palm branch in her left, while a chained barbarian crouches at her feet. The obverse of the coin displayed the ruler portrait that Alram has described as a “triumphal portrait”.<sup>66</sup> This portrait type exhibits a stocky, almost quadratic shape intended to present the conqueror of the Germans as a “gigantic, invincible triumphator.”<sup>67</sup> The official victory title *germ(anicus)* – a most prestigious *cognomen ex virtute* – can still clearly be recognized on the reworked sestertius.<sup>68</sup> However, when the coin series was initially launched, Maximinus’ official victory title was not yet advertised: the series thus entered production after the victory but before the senate had confirmed the victory title. The *victoria germanica* design was then continued through the fourth, fifth, and sixth emissions, it was thus used over a time span from late summer 236 to March/April 238. The official victory title *germ(anicus)* is integrated into Maximinus’ titulature from the fourth emission on, starting in fall 236. Since no die links are known for the *victoria germanica* series that would enable us to reconstruct the order in which the coins were produced, we cannot say more precisely when the piece that would eventually be reworked was originally minted and issued. At the earliest, though, the piece was produced in fall 236.

With over one hundred known specimens, the *victoria germanica* sestertii constitute one of the most frequently attested coin types of Maximinus and thus one of the most extensive issues in the years 236–238.<sup>69</sup> The high quantity of the coin and its explicit reference to the victory over the Germans in 236, evoked by its iconography and legends, suggests that the series was primarily minted and used to finance the Roman troops active on the Rhine, and that the sestertius under discussion here was distributed either as a soldier’s regular pay or as part of a donative. As recipients, Roman legionaries or members of the auxiliary troops who had served in one of the units involved in the campaign come into question. We have direct evidence only for the involvement of a single legion, namely the *legio III Flavia*, the presence of which is attested in epigraphic sources. However,

65 The exhibition catalogue contains an overview and discussion of the current state of the findings: PÖPPELMANN/DEPPMEYER/STEINMETZ 2013.

66 ALRAM 1989: 53; cf. WOLTERS 2013: 120, who calls it a “Triumphaltyp.”

67 Thus ALRAM 1989: 53.

68 ALRAM 1989 distinguishes them as follows: emission 4 (fall until the end of 236); emission 5 (1/1/237 until the end of 237); emission 6 (1/1/238 until March/April [?] 238).

69 On the frequency of the pieces, see ALRAM 1989: 69.

the involvement of vexillations from the *legio II Parthica* and the Praetorian Guard cannot reasonably be doubted, and further legions (for instance, the *VIII Augusta*, *XXII Primigenia*, *I Minervia*, *XXX Ulpia Victrix*) and auxiliary troops were also most probably involved.<sup>70</sup>

We thus may conclude with some degree of probability that a soldier directly involved in the fighting had received the sestertius, potentially in a special payment in fall 236, when the victorious emperor celebrated the official assumption of his victory title. The rest is speculation, but it may be worthwhile to offer some further reflections. It was the members of the *legio II Parthica* and the Praetorian Guard who, as mentioned above, had the strongest reasons to distance themselves publicly from Maximinus after his fall. Vexillations of the *legio II Parthica* not only contributed decisively to the victory over the Germans; they were also the driving force behind the emperor's fall: after the victory in 236, the vexillations present in the German campaign were first transferred to Pannonia to fight the Sarmatians. When civil war broke out, these units were recalled from Pannonia and led back to Italy, until their soldiers joined forces with members of the Praetorian Guard, renounced their loyalty to the emperor, and killed him at Aquileia. As stated above, this deed made it possible for the legionaries to change sides easily and to return unharmed and unhindered to their legionary camp at Castra Albana.

It is not known where the reworked sestertius was found, so we cannot narrow down where exactly it might have been modified. A similar piece, however, was found during archeological excavations at Ostia in 1953/1954; its obverse had similarly been reworked. Since this other coin was recovered from the Roman sewer, the historical context of this comparison piece can be described much more precisely.<sup>71</sup> The coin in question is a sestertius from the *salus augusti* series, which likewise was produced from the fourth to the sixth emission of Maximinus' coinage and is attested in comparably high quantities.<sup>72</sup> The close proximity of the find spot to Rome may indicate that the piece belonged to someone who wanted to emphasize his deliberate change of sides from the camp of Maximinus to the senatorial emperors with this personally executed *damnatio memoriae*: we may speculate that it was a legionary whose main camp was in Rome or environs, thus possibly a member of the Praetorian Guard or the *legio II Parthica*. In any case, this exceptional *damnatio memoriae* attests to a certain sensitivity to the nuances of imperial representation and a heightened political awareness; the desecration of the coin type, moreover, makes most sense if the coin itself originally served as

70 The presence of the *legio III Flavia* from Singidunum is attested by an inscription on a *do-labra* (axe); see WIEGELS et al. 2011. For good reasons, FISCHER 2013: 199 regards the presence of vexillations of the *legio II Parthica* as certain even without direct archeological evidence.

71 BERTACCHI 1958/1959, with fig. 1 on plate 4. The piece belongs to the series ALRAM 1989: 24-5 (= RIC 85 = BMC 175f. = HCC 56f.) and is cited under the heading "Technika und Kuriosa" as ALRAM 1989: 85 no. 5 (plate 15, no. 5).

72 ALRAM 1989: 69 cites ninety-four known exemplars of this type.

proof of the connection between its owner and the emperor, and that is particularly the case if the coin came into its owner's possession as an imperial gift.<sup>73</sup>

By analogy, there is some probability that the extraordinary piece in question here also belonged to one of the soldiers that Herodian reports were not entirely happy about Maximinus' downfall. The emperor's severed head on a pole, however, left no room for personal preferences. As Herodian aptly writes, "Not all of [the soldiers] acted from genuine feeling, but they pretended to show their loyalty and to honour the emperor of necessity, because of the prevailing conditions in the principate."<sup>74</sup> The fate of Maximinus seems to have had no further consequences for the vast majority of the soldiers in the imperial guard and the *legio II Parthica*: it was by no means the first violent regime change in the history of the Praetorian Guard, and the *legio II Parthica* also continued to be deployed regularly. The next significant test for the soldiers of this unit would be Gordian III's Persian campaign in the years 242–244.<sup>75</sup>

Nothing, at any rate, is known about lasting conflicts between the *legio II Parthica* and the successors to Maximinus. Epigraphic evidence, on the contrary, indicates that the legion was smoothly integrated into the service of the new ruling power. Inscriptions give us even the names of soldiers of the *legio II Parthica* who lived through the legion's defection from Maximinus to the senatorial emperors. We know such sources especially from Rome, from the vicinity of the army camp on the Alban Mount and its local military cemetery, and farther afield from the central Italian city of Aveia as well as from the winter camp in Apamea (here also with an associated cemetery). One example is the *praefectus* Pomponius Iulianus: he was first recruited in 216, then saw the end of the Severan dynasty and that of Maximinus during his years of service, and finally received his *honesta missio* and retired under Gordian III.<sup>76</sup> The legion and likewise the Praetorians and their families thus seem to have managed their change of sides quite successfully.

73 The hoard find at Borča (Serbia) belonged to a soldier who amassed a small collection of coins he had received at imperial donatives; on the find itself, see ELMER 1930; for its interpretation as an intentionally deposited collection, see BEYELER 2011: 196–200. The sensitivity toward the iconographic and textual program of the modified sestertius suggests that, in this case too, someone was at work who was generally interested in coins as a medium of representation. The coin probably did not circulate once it had been reworked; its owner will most likely have kept it as a kind of souvenir to show around. The surface texture of the coin suggests that it was only minimally worn before reworking (the obverse legend is as fresh as from the mint), but irregularly worn after reworking (the reverse legend is moderately worn and the emperor's head on the obverse is heavily worn).

74 Herodian. 8.7.2: οὐκ ἐξ ἀληθοῦς μὲν διαθέσεως πᾶς, προσποιήτω δὲ εὐνοία καὶ τιμῇ διὰ τὴν παροῦσαν ἐξ ἀνάγκης τῆς βασιλείας τύχην (trans. WHITTAKER 1970).

75 There is extensive archeological and epigraphic evidence for this; see esp. BALTJ/VAN RENGEL 1993: 42f.; HOLDER 1994 and RICCI 2000.

76 On Pomponius Iulianus: AE 1981: 134; ILS 505; ILS 9087. For further members of this legion attested epigraphically, see esp. the sources mentioned in RE XII.2, cols. 1476–1478 and RICCI 2000. Most of the soldiers who fell in battle at Apamea under Gordian III and whose grave-

If at least the basic drift of the hypothetical reconstruction presented here is correct, the reworked sestertius is a striking illustration of how former followers of Maximinus wanted their pragmatic decision to overthrow the emperor to be understood and how they tried to legitimate their change of sides. By ostentatiously distancing themselves from Maximinus, they maintained their significance as players in the game of Empire: by being the first to take part in the *damnatio memoriae* against Maximinus, the *milites* showed that their defection from their former sovereign and (re-)integration in the political order of the Roman Empire were genuine.

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## PICTURE CREDITS

Fig. 1–2: Private collection; courtesy of the owner. Image: H. LANZ, Munich.