

**Jörg Jarnut, Jürgen Strothmann (Hg.), Die Merowingischen Monetarmünzen als Quelle zum Verständnis des 7. Jahrhunderts in Gallien, Paderborn (Wilhelm Fink Verlag) 2014, 663 S., 10 farb. Taf. (MittelalterStudien, 27), ISBN 978-3-7705-5548-2, EUR 89,00.**

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The volume under review contains the published proceedings of a conference held in 2009 with the challenging title, »Merowingische Monetarmünzen und der Beginn des Mittelalters«. These Merovingian »Monetarmünzen« are a distinctive group of coins of which less than 10 000 are currently known. Quite suddenly, in the late sixth century, this type of gold coinage appears, with the name of a moneyer (*monetarius*) on the obverse and the place name on the reverse (presumably, but not necessarily in all instances, the mint). Thus, over a thousand moneyers and 722 place names are recorded, many only attested once or twice. In the late 7<sup>th</sup> c. these coins slowly give way to a system based on the silver penny/denier, no longer showing names of moneyers. Who were these moneyers? What was their relationship with the court and the kings? To what ends were those coins produced, and how were they used in daily commerce? Why are so many different mints attested? These questions have occupied scholars for several generations now. However, Jarnut and Strothmann have added a new perspective: in how far are these coinages and the associated monetary policy a continuation of late Roman practices, or do they represent something altogether different and can, therefore, be understood as an expression of a fundamentally altered society that could be termed medieval?

The conference and the resulting proceedings have brought together an impressive and interdisciplinary array of scholars trying to find answers to these problems. After a brief introduction by the editors, no less than 23 papers of varying length follow. They make for very rewarding and stimulating reading. Almost every specialist of early medieval numismatics seems to be on board, as well as a number of historians, archaeologists and linguists. Not every single study can be discussed here. Therefore, I will focus on one aspect in particular: the moneyers.

Without explicitly stating so, several contributions investigate the persons behind the names of the moneyers. Here, the interdisciplinary approach really shows its worth. First, Walter Pohl addresses the interconnection between coins and identity on a theoretical level, arguing for coins both reflecting the self-image of issuers and shaping a point of reference for users. He argues that moneyers' issues should be viewed as a continuation of roman practice, where provincial issues reflected both, the local community and the overarching imperial system. This, in part, could help to explain the diversity of the names and places on the moneyers' coins, whilst maintaining their uniformity in iconography. What Pohl does not address, however, is that not only were roman provincial issues (after the very early first century AD) never an integral part of the western Roman Empire (the area in which the moneyers' issues developed), they also had come to an end in the Eastern Empire in the late third century AD.

Continuity in this respect is thus not very likely, which does not mean that his explanation for the unity and diversity in the early medieval coinage does not hold.

Although the linguistic contributions have a highly technical character, several statements combined give an insight into the social and ethnic group behind the coinage. Rembert Eufe and Maria Selig note that in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. approximately 75% of the moneyers' names are Germanic in origin, whereas this is the case for only about half of the contemporary bishops. On average, Germanic names are more dominant on coins minted in the central and northern parts of the Merovingian realm. Connected to Wolfgang Haubrichs' paper, which shows that moneyers' names with East-Germanic roots mainly occur in formerly Visigothic territory, one gets the impression that these people were recruited from the regional middle to upper classes, but not from top-elite circles (as e.g. bishops).

But should we envisage the moneyers as local businessmen, who minted coins only occasionally, against a small fee from whoever brought bullion to be minted? Matthias Metcalf proposes this model, arguing that the investments for dies, furnaces and fuel were considerable and could only be made by gold- and silversmiths with their technical expertise and the necessary equipment. The sharp increase in moneyers' names should, according to him, be linked with an economic boom in Gaul in the 7<sup>th</sup> c., thus making it more attractive to become active in the business of coin production. As evidence for this model, he points to the lower social class of the moneyers (contra Eufe and Selig), drawing parallels to historically attested coin production in 11<sup>th</sup> c. England. Clearly, he sees the Merovingian moneyers' issues in a medieval coin tradition, in which this so-called »free-minting« was standard practice. There are no indications this ever existed in Antiquity. All other contributions, which address the identity of the moneyers, trace them back to late Roman institutions and practices of tax collecting. Bernd Kluge sees them as appointed state officials who were responsible for collecting taxes, in gold, at a local or regional level and then reminting the gold to fit the accepted standard. Karsten Dahmen differentiates between the actual craftsmen involved in minting (sharing many similarities with Metcalf's point of view), and the overseers responsible – the actual moneyers as named on the coins. He agrees that their role in tax-collecting and reminting existed, but rather than central involvement he argues for an organisation on the regional level.

The most eye-catching of all moneyers is Eligius, who started out as a goldsmith and moneyer, became a bishop and was then sanctified after his death, resulting in an extensive contemporary vita. Both, Martin Heinzemann and Matthias Hardt, however, stress that Eligius forms a singular case, by no means the norm. Heinzemann argues that Eligius, because of his high social status and personal relationship with the king, should be considered a chief-moneyer, with duties including the minting of coins, but not exclusively so. Hardt goes one step further and makes the extremely interesting suggestion that Eligius was in fact a Merovingian version of the late Roman *Comes Sacrarum Largitionum*. This high ranking official was not only in charge of the treasury, but also of tax-collecting, minting and distribution of precious-metal tableware as gifts to worthy recipients. This would explain the emphasis placed on Eligius' capabilities as a goldsmith, and the appearance of his sigil on a piece of Merovingian silverwork. If this assumption is true, then this is another argument in favour of

continuity of (aspects) of late Roman practice in Merovingian taxation, minting and fiscal organisation.

Other themes, and interdisciplinary approaches to them, can be followed across the various contributions in this volume in a similar way. The order of the contributions seems to be rather random however, and there is a fair amount of repetition of basic facts. On the other hand, the final essay by Hans-Werner Goetz tries to bring the various strands together. Sometimes it results in conflicting interpretations of the same evidence, but by and large the impression is that most contributors would place the Merovingian moneyers' issues in a post-roman, rather than a medieval framework. The real break is supposed to have come with the introduction of a system based on silver coinage in the late 7<sup>th</sup> c.