CHAPTER FIVE

THE DAWNING OF A GOLDEN AGE

The emperor’s possession of the virtues propagated on imperial coins provided the inhabitants of the Roman Empire with both material and immaterial benefits. Coin types that refer to material benefits (e.g. money, corn, games, thermae) have been allocated into the representational category ‘euergesia’. The category ‘saeculum aureum’ encompasses those types referring to immaterial benefits, and is discussed in this chapter.

Although this type of propaganda was already a permanent theme on imperial coins of earlier periods, the circulation of messages referring to the prosperous state of (parts of) the Empire expanded in the period during which the Roman world faced the most pressing difficulties. Few areas of the Empire experienced prosperity in the period 193–284, yet imperial coinage would lead one to suspect otherwise (see figure 27). This discrepancy between publicity and practice implies that coin types propagating saeculum aureum not always referred to actual immaterial benefits. A substantial proportion of these third-century coin types must thus reflect promises, wishes or efforts to obscure a reality that was characterized by grave military problems, financial deficits and difficulties regarding imperial succession. This apparent link between the problematic state of the Empire and the high number of coin types communicating prosperity and success can probably be explained by attempts of the imperial authorities to maintain or (re)establish the subjects’ confidence in the regime and to guarantee the unity within the threatened Empire.

Representations of success and prosperity on third-century coinage consist of references, through legend, image or both, to abundantia, concordia, fides, felicitas, fortuna, laetitia, libertas, pax, salus, securitas, spes, and uberitas. These particular benefits, which appear on most coins together
with additions such as AVG(G), PVBLICA, FVNDATA, VBIQVE, FELIX and BONA, point to different aspects of prosperity, namely happiness, hope, faith, harmony, liberty, peace, wealth, health and security.\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Felicitas, laetitia} and \textit{securitas}, moreover, are often combined with adjuncts of time (\textit{temporum} and \textit{saeculû}) as well as adjuncts of place (\textit{orbis}, \textit{imperii}). Rare types that bear the legends \textit{SAECVLVM NOVVM}, \textit{MILIARVM SAECVLVM}, \textit{SAECVLVM FRVGIFERVM}, \textit{BONVS EVENTVS} and \textit{TELLVS STABILITAS} also propagate the Empire’s prosperous state, whereas \textit{oriens} can be considered a more abstract rendering of the dawning of a golden age.\textsuperscript{5}

In modern literature, attention has usually been paid solely to the representation of one of the aforementioned immaterial benefits.\textsuperscript{6} Amit’s article in \textit{Iura} offers an exception to this. This author focuses on numismatic references to \textit{pax}, \textit{securitas}, \textit{salus}, \textit{felicitas}, \textit{fortuna}, \textit{laetitia}, and \textit{ hilaritas} which, altogether, he considers propaganda of success and euphoria. Therefore, Amit’s contribution has been of great significance to this chapter, which, however, takes the issues one step further. It provides not only a quantitative analysis of all third-century coin types referring to success and euphoria or, in other words, to a golden age, but also an in-depth examination, both quantitatively and qualitatively, of four of the most frequent third-century immaterial benefits.

\textbf{SALVS MILITVM) are divided into the category ‘military representation’, whereas coin types with dynastic connotations (CONCORDIA AVGG, CONCORDIA FELIX in combination with an image of Caracalla and Plautilla or CONCORDIA AVG together with an image of emperor and empress clasping hands) belong to the category ‘dynastic representation’. Types referring to the eternal state of a particular benefit (CONCORDIA AETERNA, PAX AETERNA, SECVRITAS PERPETVA, FELICITAS AETERNA, SPEI PERPETVÆ etc.) are divided into the category ‘\textit{Aeternitas} messages’. Coin types bearing the legend FORTUNA REDVX are considered belonging to the representational category ‘elevation’. However, the below discussion of particular immaterial benefits (\textit{felicitas}, \textit{pax}, \textit{securitas}, \textit{salus}) includes all types referring to these specific benefits and not only coin types that are assigned to the category ‘\textit{saeculum aureum}’.  

\textsuperscript{4} Rare additions on third-century coin types referring to \textit{salus} and \textit{libertas}: SAL GEN HVM (\textit{RIC} IV.1, Caracalla, nos. 42a–42c), 350), OB CONSERVATIONEM SALVTIS (\textit{RIC} V.1, Gallienus sole reign, nos. 59, 144, 423), OB LIBERTAT(EM) REC(APTAM) (\textit{RIC} V.1, Gallienus sole reign, nos. 60, 61, 145, 424), OB REDDIT LIBERT (\textit{RIC} V.1, Gallienus sole reign, nos. 146, 247, 425). A coin type of Pertinax bearing the legend LIBERATIS CIVIBVS can be understood as referring to \textit{libertas} (\textit{RIC} IV.1, Pertinax, no. 6).

\textsuperscript{5} Coins bearing the legend \textit{ORIENS} (AVG(G)) refer both to the dawning of a golden age and to the geographic east and are therefore divided into the category ‘\textit{saeculum aureum}’ and ‘geographical messages’, see above, pp. 127–128.