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Medallions, Protocontorniates, and Contorniates in the Museum of Art and Archaeology



NATHAN T. ELKINS

The Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri possesses in its collection a total of thirty-nine Roman medallions, protocontorniates, and contorniates. One is an imperial coin inserted into a medallitic frame; two are medallions proper, struck at official imperial mints; fifteen are “protocontorniates,” regular coins later hammered around the edges to create a rim; and twenty-one are contorniates, late Roman “medallions,” either cast or struck, that often portray past Roman emperors and have a small groove around the edge. The exact purpose and function of protocontorniates and contorniates are unknown, but suggestions have included their use as game counters, or as admission tickets to the circus or theater, or as distributions to the people during New Year celebrations. This article surveys the functions of Roman medallions, protocontorniates, and contorniates in reference to those in the Museum of Art and Archaeology. A catalogue of medallions, protocontorniates, and contorniates in the collection follows the end of the article.

From the first through the fourth century C.E., the Roman imperial mint occasionally struck medallions for special distributions. In the first to third centuries, these medallions most often appeared in bronze, technically as double sestertii (e.g. Fig. 1, cat. no. 2), although gold and silver medallions were occasionally produced. In the fourth century, imperial medallions were most commonly gold or silver multiples of standard denominations. Many of these later precious-metal medallions were set into bezels or frames or had attachment loops at the top of the obverse as has the gold medallion of Constantius II in the museum’s collection (Fig. 2, cat. no. 3). Medallions are easily differentiated from normal coinage by their larger diameter, and greater thickness and heft.¹ Die engravers typically cut deeper into medallitic dies than



Fig. 1. Medallion of Trebonianus Gallus and Volusian (251–253 C.E.), obverse and reverse. Roman, 251–252 C.E., bronze bimetallic. Gift of Cornelius Ruxton Love, Jr. (59.97). Photo: Kenyon Reed.



Fig. 2. Medallion of Constantius II (337–361 C.E.), obverse and reverse. Roman, 350–355 C.E., gold. Gift of Maureen C. Mabbott in memory of her husband, Thomas O. Mabbott (71.37). Photo: Kenyon Reed.

they did into the dies for normal coins, creating a pronounced sculptural quality and a medallion in high relief; their level of detail and artistic execution is superior to that of simple coins. Reverse designs on imperial medallions often referred directly to an event of immediate historical or political significance or to the emperor's policy. Imperial medallions are rare and were probably imperial gifts given, directly or indirectly, by the emperor to aristocrats or military leaders as a reward for imperial service.² Many medallions were well suited as gifts for New Year celebrations (Latin: *strenae*), while others were struck for specific dynastic events such as imperial adoptions or marriages.³

A protocontorniate is a normal, large-module bronze coin, typically a sestertius, which at some point was later altered by hammering the edges of the coin so that it could serve some other use. A common assumption is that protocontorniates functioned as game counters since the rim created through hammering could protect the designs.⁴ Andreas Alföldi believed protocontorniates to be forerunners of the contorniates of the fourth and fifth centuries. He argued that protocontorniates were New Year's gifts and that the older coins were actually hammered in the fourth century before the contorniates proper came into being.⁵

The term "contorniate" derives from the Italian verb *contornare*, which means to surround; it refers to the groove that surrounds the edge of the objects. Contorniates were struck from the mid-fourth century C.E. through the fifth century C.E., as is evident through marks applied to contorniates that coincide with symbols struck on dated coins and medallions from the same period.⁶ The obverses of contorniates usually feature a deceased and well-remembered emperor from Rome's past. Such emperors include Divus Augustus (cat. no. 23), Divus Traianus (cat. nos. 31–38), and Divus Hadrianus, but also some emperors such as Caligula and Nero, who were viewed less favorably, at least by historical sources (cat. nos. 25–30). Very rarely is a contemporary emperor shown. (An exception is cat. no. 39, which depicts Valentinian III.) Other figures that appear on the obverses are Roma (cat. nos. 20–21), Alexander the Great (cat. no. 22), Olympias, Homer, Euripides, Demosthenes, Socrates, Horace, Terence, Sallust, Apuleius, Apollonius, and Serapis.⁷ The reverse designs of contorniates tend to refer explicitly to the circus or circus events and often name charioteers. Others show mythological subjects connected with Roman pantomime or theater productions. The reverse iconography may explain why Caligula and Nero

appear on some obverses; both emperors were known for their patronage and love of popular entertainments. One contorniate in the museum's collection, which bears Nero's portrait on the obverse, depicts the myth of the Rape of the Sabine Women taking place before a *meta* (turning post) in the Circus Maximus (cat. no. 30). The contorniates were manufactured in Rome and are found primarily in the Roman West. No eastern emperor is portrayed on a contorniate after the division of the Roman Empire in 395 C.E.

Andreas Alföldi believed that contorniates were distributed to the lower classes by pagan aristocrats in Rome during New Year celebrations and that they served in part as reactions against the Christian emperors.⁸ The theory that they served as political statements against Christian authority is, however, by no means widely accepted as there is little in the designs or legends on the contorniates themselves to support such an assertion. Other suggestions associate contorniates with circus and theater performances as admission tickets or souvenirs, or as gaming pieces.⁹ A likely, but unpublished, theory was substantiated by Curtis Clay at the Tenth International Numismatic Congress in 1986. He argued that the contorniates were distributed at New Year celebrations associated with the circus and the theater; in this way the contorniates may simply be understood as successors of the imperial bronze medallions of the first to third centuries C.E. that were struck for the New Year.¹⁰ In a more expansive thesis, Peter Franz Mittag has also viewed them as successors to Roman imperial medallions in the sense that they were primarily gifts struck for the New Year. Unlike Roman imperial medallions, however, the majority of contorniates were produced at workshops as New Year gifts for private consumption; only the *Kaiserserie* depicting reigning emperors (e.g. cat. no. 39, with an obverse of Valentinian III) may have been struck by imperial prerogative, as were the earlier imperial medallions.¹¹

Many scholars believe that the protocontorniates were forerunners of the contorniates,¹² although the protocontorniates were coins altered by individuals, and the contorniates were manufactured in workshops. The presumed function of the protocontorniates as game counters is doubtful. As both Peter Kos and Mittag have demonstrated, protocontorniates are rarely found in excavations, and they have not appeared in excavations that have produced games and game counters.¹³ Andreas Alföldi's assumption that older coins were hammered in the fourth century and distributed at New Year celebrations before the

commencement of the production of the contorniates is also dubious, as the types of coins formed into protocontorniates are known from many periods and throughout the Roman Empire's wide expanse. Greek (cat. no. 4), Roman imperial (cat. nos. 5–12, 14–17), and Roman provincial coins (cat. nos. 13, 18) were hammered and are classified under the umbrella of protocontorniates; such a diverse array of individual types would not have been in circulation in the fourth century. As Roman provincial bronze coins circulated locally, such coins would have been hammered in the area where they were struck, not in Italy where contorniates were later made and used.¹⁴

Admittedly, there are many similarities between the protocontorniates and the contorniates such as the application of incised designs and symbols and, for the contorniates, copying of old coin designs. This suggests continuity in use and function, although the very limited provenance evidence and the existence of Greek and Roman provincial protocontorniates provide a potential concern. It should also be pointed out that the term “protocontorniate” creates the idea of a homogeneous class of objects to which all coins with hammered edges may not necessarily belong. Coins across time and space in the ancient world were frequently altered by private individuals. Coins were often drilled so that they could be mounted to objects or worn as jewelry. The hammering of the edges of ancient coins, in some instances, could be a simple modification to allow it to be set into a frame or a bezel. The edges of the framed sestertius of Caligula in the Museum of Art and Archaeology collection (cat. no. 1) appear to have been raised in order to fit it into the frame.¹⁵ In addition, a rare sestertius of Domitian wearing an aegis on the obverse and depicting a decastyle temple within two enclosure walls on the reverse exists in the Walters Collection and has a raised rim; another coin of this type and from the same dies was excavated in Germany and found in a frame.¹⁶ Coins with this reverse type are exceedingly rare, known from only three examples. The edges of these regular, large-module bronze coins were evidently raised and flattened in order to drive them into medallion frames. They functioned much like an imperial medallion, although the frames would imply that they were handled by individuals of high status rather than by commoners who later dealt with protocontorniates and contorniates. It is unlikely that common people used and altered these medallion-like coins; they are closer to “pseudo-medallions,” coins that were specially struck or altered to serve as commemorative objects, not currency,

before Roman imperial medallions began to be produced with greater regularity under Hadrian and the Antonines.¹⁷ Without the context of the frame, might both the sestertii of Caligula and Domitian have been dubbed protocontorniates and assumed to have been common Late Antique New Year gifts? While it is conceivable that some coins with hammered edges were predecessors of the contorniates proper, allowance must be made for other uses and purposes, especially when the original context of the object is unknown.

Catalogue

The information provided in this catalogue is based primarily on the records from the museum, but where possible references have been added or augmented and new attributions provided. During research, one protocontorniate from the museum's collection was condemned as a forgery (cat. no. 19). All the objects, except the medallion of Trebonianus Gallus and Volusian (cat. no. 2), were gifts of Maureen C. Mabbott in memory of her husband, Thomas O. Mabbott, professor of literature and scholar of Edgar Allen Poe. The medallion of Trebonianus Gallus and Volusian was a gift of Cornelius Ruxton Love, Jr. All images in the catalogue are shown at actual size. Photographs by Kenyon Reed.

Framed Coin



1. AE framed coin (sestertius) of Caligula, 37–38 C.E., 41 mm, 40.82 g, mint of Rome (72.208).

Obv: Laureate head of Caligula I. [C CAESAR] AV[G] GERMA[NICVS PON M TR POT], legend not completely visible; groove around edge.

Rev: [SPQR/ P P/] OB C[IV]E[S/] SER[VATOS] in wreath; groove around edge.

Ref: *Roman Imperial Coinage* (henceforth *RIC*) I, 2 (Caligula) 37.

Comment: Cut marks on Caligula's portrait possibly reflect contemporary vandalism of the emperor's image after his death.

Roman Imperial Medallions



2. AE bimetallic medallion of Trebonianus Gallus and Volusian, 251–252 C.E., 39 mm, 57.97 g, mint of Rome (59.18) (Fig. 1).

Obv: Bust of Trebonianus Gallus to r., facing bust of Volusian to l., both laureate, draped, and cuirassed. IMP VOLVSIANVS AVG IMP GALLVS AVG.

Rev: Winged Victory striding l. and holding a wreath in her r. hand, leading the two Augusti, each Augustus mounted and with raised r. hands. The Augustus in the foreground holds a spear in his l. hand, a praetorian advances to the l. behind the two Augusti, helmeted and carrying a round shield in his l. hand, a spear over his r. shoulder in his r. hand. Behind the emperors, a vexillum, an aquila, and two insignia. ADVENTVS AVGG.

Refs: Francesco Gnechi, *I medaglioni romani*, vol. 2 (Milan, 1912) p. 50, 8 (similar reverse only); Anna S. Benjamin, “A Medallion of Two Roman Emperors,” *Muse* 2 (1968) pp. 21–24; *Illustrated Museum Handbook: A Guide to the Collections in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri–Columbia*, Osmund Overby, ed. (Columbia and London, 1982) p. 65.

Comments: This medallion of Trebonianus Gallus and Volusian is one of only seven known bimetallic medallions issued by the two emperors; the museum’s example is the only one with an *adventus* scene, thus making it unique, although its obverse die has been linked with another known medallion.¹⁸ This particular medallion seems to be associated with the return of the Augusti to Rome after their settlement of the Goths after June 251 C.E.¹⁹



3. AU four solidi medallion of Constantius II, 350–355 C.E., 40 mm, 19.2 g, mint of Thessalonica (71.37) (Fig. 2).

Obv: Pearl-diademed, draped, and cuirassed bust of Constantius II to l. FL IVL CONSTANTIVS PERP AVG.

Rev: Constantinopolis draped and seated l. on a high-backed throne, her l. foot resting on a prow, holding a globe in her r. hand, surmounted by a Victory with a wreath and palm, and scepter in her l. hand. GLORIA ROMANORVM, TES in exergue.

Refs: *RIC* VIII, p. 416, 141; Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, pp. 174, 188, and pl. 38, 3–4 (different mints but the same types); Gnecci, *Medaglioni*, p. 31, nos. 22–27 (different mints but same types); Overby, *Illustrated Museum Handbook*, p. 68; Toynbee, “Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947) pp. 139–141; *Muse* 6 (1972) p. 6.

Comments: The medallion has an added gold loop above the obverse portrait, evidently for wearing as a pendant. The seated depiction of Constantinopolis is most likely to be associated with celebrations for the 1100th anniversary of Rome, the occasion for which the medallion would have been struck.²⁰

Alternatively, the medallion may have referred to the transference of Constantinople to Constantius’ rule in 339 C.E. or Constantius’ vicennalia in 343–344 CE.²¹

Protocontorniates



4. AE protocontorniate (dilitron) of the Timoleontic symmachy coinage, ca. 344–336 B.C.E., 26 mm, 19.21 g, mint of Syracuse, Sicily (72.232).

Obv: Diademed and bearded head of Zeus to l. [IEYΣ EA]EYΘ[EΠIOΣ].

Rev: Horse prancing l. [ΣΥΠΑΚΟΣΙΩΝ].

Ref: *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, (henceforth SNG) *American Numismatic Society*, Part 5, Sicily III, 533.



5. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of an unknown emperor, first to third century C.E., 26 mm, 15.21 g, mint of Rome (72.229).

Obv: Head of emperor to r.

Rev: Animal (?) walking l. or r.; heavily corroded and legend illegible.



6. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Nero, ca. 65 C.E., 29 mm, 17.5 g, mint of Rome (72.225).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero to r.; legend illegible.

Rev: Roma seated l., holding Victory in r. hand, S C to l. and r., ROMA in exergue.

Ref: *RIC* I, 2 (Nero) reverse type 23 or 24, see nos. 272–282.



7. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Vespasian, 69–79 C.E., 29 mm, 18.1 g, mint of Rome (72.245).

Obv: Laureate head of Vespasian to r., palm branch inscribed over portrait; legend illegible.

Rev: Heavily worn; legend illegible.

Comments: The palm branch inscribed over Vespasian's portrait is unusual. Symbols added post-striking are typically inscribed in the field, not on the portrait itself.



8. AE protocontorniate (as) of Vespasian, 69–79 C.E., 24 mm, 9.48 g, mint of Rome (72.222).

Obv: Laureate head of Vespasian to r. [...]CAES VESP AVG[...].

Rev: Victory advancing r. on prow, holding out wreath. [VICTORIA NAVA]LIS, S C to l. and r.

Ref: *RIC* II, 2 (Vespasian) 605.



9. AE protocontorniate (dupondius) of Domitian, 88–89 C.E., 27 mm, 10.34 g, mint of Rome (72.234).

Obv: Radiate head of Domitian to r. [IMP CAES DOMIT AVG] GERM COS XIII [CENS PER P P].

Rev: Fortuna standing l. holding rudder and cornucopia. [FORTVNAE AVGVSTI], S C to l. and r.

Ref: *RIC* II, 2 (Domitian) 1447.



10. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Hadrian, ca. 124–128 C.E., 31.5 mm, 22.18 g, mint of Rome (72.244).

Obv: Laureate head of Hadrian to r. [HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS].

Rev: Virtus standing l. [COS III], [S C] to l. and r.

Ref: *RIC* II (Hadrian) 638.



11. AE protocontorniate (as) of Antoninus Pius, 140–144 C.E., 26 mm, 8.6 g, mint of Rome (72.233).

Obv: Laureate head of Antoninus Pius to r. [ANTONINVS] AVG PI[VS P P TR P COS III].

Rev: Bonus Eventus stg. l. sacrificing over altar. [BONO EVENTVI], [S C] to l. and r.

Ref: *RIC* III (Antoninus Pius) 676.



12. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Antoninus Pius, 150–151 C.E., 30 mm, 20.08 g, mint of Rome (72.223).

Obv: Laureate head of Antoninus to r. ANTONINVS AVG PIVS PP TRP XV.

Rev: Fortuna draped standing to r. holding rudder and cornucopia. COS IIII, S C to l. and r.

Ref: *RIC* III (Antoninus Pius) 885.



13. AE protocontorniate of Marcus Aurelius, struck under Antoninus Pius, 138–161 C.E., 27.5 mm, 16.79 g, mint of Magnesia ad Maeandrum, Ionia (72.235).

Obv: Bare headed, draped bust of young Marcus Aurelius to r. M AIAIOC AVPHAIIOC BHPOC [KAICAP].

Rev: Cult statue of Artemis Leukophryne, standing facing, with fillets hanging from wrists, two Nikai on shoulders, eagles with open wings at her feet, polos on head. [ΕΠΙ ΔΙΟΚΚΟΒΡΙΔΟΝ ΓΡΑΤΟΒ ΜΗΤΡΟ ΜΑΓΝΗΤ], ΑΕ VK/OΦP VC in field to l. and r.



14. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Divus Marcus Aurelius, struck under Commodus, after 180 C.E., 32 mm, 25.58 g, mint of Rome (72.237).

Obv: Bare head of Marcus Aurelius to r. DIVVS M ANTONINVS PIVS.

Rev: Eagle standing r. on globe, head turned back to l. CONSECRATIO, S C to l. and r.

Ref: *RIC* III (Commodus) 654.



15. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Commodus, 186–187 C.E., 27.5 mm, 22.8 g, mint of Rome (72.240).

Obv: Laureate head of Commodus to r. M COMM[ODVS ANT P FELIX AVG BRIT].

Rev: The three Monetae standing facing, heads l., each holding scales and cornucopia. [P M TR P XII IMP VIII COS V PP], [MON AVG/S C] in exergue.

Ref: *RIC* III (Commodus) 500.



16. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Maximinus I, 236 C.E., 27.5 mm, 21.11 g, mint of Rome (72.239).

Obv: Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Maximinus I to r. IMP
MAXIMINVS PIVS AVG.

Rev: Fides standing to l. holding standards in each hand. FIDES M[ILITVM], S
C to l. and r.



17. AE protocontorniate (sestertius) of Maximus, 236–237 C.E., 27.5 mm, 15.8 g, mint of Rome (72.238).

Obv: Bare headed, draped, and cuirassed bust of Maximus to r. MAX[IMV]S
CAES GERM, two palm branches inscribed to l. and r.

Rev: Prince, in military dress, standing to l., with two standards to r. [PRINCIPI
IVVENT]VTIS, S C to l. and r.



18. AE protocontorniate of Philip II, 244–247 C.E., 28 mm, 13.22 g, mint of Samosata, Commagene (72.228).

Obv: Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Philipp II to r., multiple circles punched on the design. [AYTOK] K M IOYAI ΦI[ΔIΠΠOY CEB].

Rev: Tyche seated l. on a rock, holding a branch, Pegasus springing r. below. CAM[OCATEΩN].

Comments: The obliteration of the portrait with the circular punches appears to be deliberate defacement.



19. AE protocontorniate of Valerian I, 253–260 C.E., 31 mm, 23.62 g, mint of Mallus, Cilicia (72.224)– MODERN FORGERY.

Obv: Laureate and cuirassed bust of Valerian I to r. IMP C LIC VALERIANVS PI FE AVG.

Rev: Amphilochos, naked, standing l., holding palm branch in r. hand, boar below, serpent around tripod to r. MALLO COLONIA, S C in exergue.

Ref: SNG Levante, 1298.

Comments: Forgery. A continuous seam along the edge is evidence of modern casting.

Contorniates



20. AE contorniate featuring Roma, ca. 395–410 C.E., 33.5 mm, 21.2 g (72.203).

Obv: Helmeted bust of Roma to r., spear behind, TΓ (?) inscribed to r.

Rev: Minerva standing to l. with shield, leaning on spear.

Refs: Alföldi, *Kontorniaten*, p. 187, no. 573, and plate 52, 15; Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 169, no. 542, pl. 25,9.



21. AE contorniate featuring Roma, ca. fourth to fifth century C.E., 35.5 mm, 19.31 g (72.204).

Obv: Helmeted bust of Roma to r., figure inscribed in l. field.

Rev: Three standing figures.



22. AE contorniate featuring Alexander the Great, ca. 356–395 C.E., 36 mm, 22.11 g (72.205).

Obv: Head of Alexander to r. wearing lion's skin. ALEXANDER MAGNVS MACEDON.

Rev: Cybele seated r. in peristyle temple, Attis at r. MATRI DEVM SALVTARI.

Refs: Alföldi, *Kontorniaten*, p. 130, no. 7 and plate 4, 9; Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 130, no. 7, pl. 3,11.



23. AE contorniate featuring Augustus, ca. 356–395 C.E., 36 mm, 21.11 g (72.206).

Obv: Laureate head of Augustus to r. DIVVS AVGVST[VS PATER], ☉ in r. field.

Rev: Hector in Phrygian dress standing to front, his head r., his r. arm around Andromache, draped, standing l., resting her l. hand on his shoulder.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 34, no. 119, 3, and plate 40, 5 (this example).



24. AE contorniate featuring Agrippina the Elder, ca. 356–395 C.E., 36.5 mm, 23.10 g (72.207).

Obv: Draped bust of Agrippina to r. AGRIPPINA M F MAT C CAESARIS AVGVSTI, Ξ to r.

Rev: Carpentum drawn to l. by two mules, its front and sides ornamented. SPQR/MEMORIAE/AGRIPPINAE above.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 144, no. 425, 3, and plate 180, 3 (this example).

Comments: This type is modeled on a sestertius struck under Caligula: *RIC I*, 2 (Caligula) 55.



25. AE contorniate featuring Nero, ca. 356–395 C.E., 38.5 mm, 23.36 g (72.209).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero r. [NERO CL] CAESAR AVG [GERM IMP], Ξ to r.

Rev: Cybele and Attis in a quadriga drawn by lions galloping to r.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 50, no. 168, and pl. 59, 6 (this example).

Comments: Holed and plugged at 3 and 9 o'clock; an attempted hole plugged at 12 o'clock on rev.



26. AE contorniate featuring Nero, ca. fifth century C.E., 33 mm, 29.02 g (72.210).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero to r.; legend (?) illegible.

Rev: Roma seated l. holding Victory in r. hand; two concentric circles inscribed in the field below Victory.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 172, no. 550, 3, and plate 97, 4 (this example).



27. AE contorniate featuring Nero, ca. fourth–fifth century C.E., 37 mm, 22 g (72.211).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero to r. [IM]P NERO CAESAR AVG P MAX.

Rev: Charioteer driving quadriga to l., holding reins and palm branch.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 48, no. 164, pl. 57.



28. AE contorniate featuring Nero, ca. 356–395 C.E., 39 mm, 26.82 g (72.212).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero to r. IMP NERO CAESAR AVG P MAX, **A** inscribed in r. field.

Rev: Female figure, draped, seated r., resting her head on her l. hand and facing a naked male figure, his hands bound, standing by a tree; at far r., a seated prisoner.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 63, no. 199, 27, and pl. 76, 5 (this example), identified as Amphion, Zethus, and Dirce; Cf. Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pls. 6 and 25.



29. AE contorniate featuring Nero, ca. 356–395 C.E., 36.5 mm, 19.7 g (72.213).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero to r. IMP NERO CAESAR AVG P MAX, **A** in field.

Rev: Female figure, draped, seated r., resting her head on her l. hand and facing a naked male figure, his hands bound, standing by a tree; at far r., a seated prisoner.

Ref: Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pls. 6 and 25.



30. AE contorniate featuring Nero, ca. 356–395 C.E., 37.5 mm, 22.6 g (72.242).

Obv: Laureate head of Nero to r. NERO CLAVDIVS CAESAR AVG GERM P M TRP IMP PP.

Rev: Romans raping Sabine women in front of a *meta* of the Circus Maximus, [SABINAE] in exergue.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 2, p. 378, no. 182, 3a, and plate 216, 6 (this example).



31. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. after 410 C.E., 38.5 mm, 19.2 g (72.214).

Obv: Laureate head of Trajan to r. DIVO NERVAE TRAIANO.

Rev: Apollo Cytharedes, resting lyre on tripod with serpent entwined around it to r.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 125, no. 370, 2, and plate 155, 8 (this example).

Comments: holed in center.



32. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. fourth–fifth century C.E., 37 mm, 17.9 g (72.215).

Obv: Laureate, draped bust of Trajan to r. DIVO NERVAE TRAIANO AVG.

Rev: Mars advancing to r. in helmet with ladder and spear, resting foot on prow.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 95, no. 294, 1, and plate 122, 2 (this example).



33. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. fourth–fifth century C.E., 34 mm, 15.4 g (72.216).

Obv: Laureate head of Trajan to r. TRAIANVS AVG COS III P P.

Rev: Luna seated l. on rock facing Endymion lying r. with hound at his side; Eros above holding torches.

Refs: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, p. 380, no. 339, 11, and plate 220, 6 (this example); Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pls. 8, 19.



34. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. 356–395 C.E., 38 mm, 25.18 g (72.217).

Obv: Laureate bust of Trajan to r. TRAIANVS P P AVG.

Rev: Cybele and Attis in quadriga of lions galloping to r.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 92, no. 281, 9, and plate 119, 1 (this example).



35. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. 356–395 C.E., 35 mm, 19.70 g (72.218).

Obv: Laureate head of Trajan to r. TRAIANVS AVG COS IIII P P.

Rev: Bacchus, naked, standing to front, holding a thyrsus in l. hand, a kantharos in r. hand; at his feet, a panther; to l., two bacchantes, draped, each holding a thyrsus and a grape cluster (or aulos ?); to r., a satyr holding a *pedum* (shepherd's crook) and a grape cluster below, a maenad with *krotaloi* (?) (castanets) above.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 97, no. 300, 7, and pl. 124, 1 (this example).



36. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. fourth–fifth century C.E., 37.5 mm, 24.55 g (72.219).

Obv: Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Trajan to l.; palm branch incised in field to r. [IMP CAES NERVAE] TRAIANO AVG GER DAC [P M TR P COS III].

Rev: Blank; groove around edge.

Ref: Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pl. 7.



37. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. 395–410 C.E., 36 mm, 18.4 g (72.220).

Obv: Laureate head of Trajan to r.

Rev: Athlete standing to the front.

Comment: Ties for the wreath are incised behind the head.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medailleurs*, vol. 6, 1, p. 180, no. 600, and plate 166, 8 (this example).



38. AE contorniate featuring Trajan, ca. 356–395 C.E., 38.5 mm, 23.3 g (72.227).

Obv: Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Trajan to r. [TRA]IANVS AVG [C]
OS IIII PP, Ξ in r. field.

Rev: Female figure, draped, seated r., resting her head on her l. hand and facing
a naked male figure, his hands bound, standing by a tree; at far r., a seated
prisoner.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 102, no. 317, 4
and plate 129, 7 (this example), identified as Amphion, Zethus, and Dirce; Cf.
Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pl. 25.

Comments: Two holes, one at 12 and one at 6 o'clock.



39. AE contorniate featuring Valentinian III, ca. 425–455 C.E., 43.5 mm, 36.78 g (72.221).

Obv: Diademed and cuirassed bust to r. D N PLA VALENTINIANVS P F AVG

Rev: Central recessed pellet within concentric circle; groove around edge.

Ref: Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 6, 1, p. 152, no. 467, 3, and plate 189, 9 (this example).

NOTES

* A debt of gratitude is owed to Kenyon Reed who checked and corrected several attributions while updating the museum's catalogue and photographic records.

1. J. M. C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions* (New York, 1944; reprinted 1986) p. 17.
2. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 112–121; Curtis Clay, “Roman Imperial Medallions: The Date and Purpose of Their Issue,” in H. Cahn and G. Le Rider, eds., *Proceedings of the 8th International Congress of Numismatics, New York–Washington, September 1973* (Paris, 1976) pp. 253–254, and *passim*.
3. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, pp. 73–111.
4. For proponents of the game counter theory, see Friedrich von Schrötter, *Wörterbuch der Münzkunde* (Berlin, 1930) p. 393, and Maria R.-Alföldi, *Antike Numismatik* (Mainz, 1978) p. 214.
5. Alföldi, *Die Kontorniaten, Ein verkanntes Propagandamittel der stadtrömischen heidnischen Aristokratie in ihrem Kampfe gegen das christliche Kaisertum* (Budapest, 1943) p. 9.
6. Peter Franz Mittag, *Alte Köpfe in neuen Händen: Urheber und Funktion der Kontorniaten* (Bonn, 1999) p. 31.
7. Andreas Alföldi and Elizabeth Alföldi, *Die Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 1 (Berlin, New York, 1976) pp. 1–32.
8. See Alföldi, *Kontorniaten*; Alföldi and Alföldi, *Kontorniat-Medaillons*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1990) pp. 12–62, and *passim*; cf. also Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, p. 234.
9. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, pp. 234–235; Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pp. 180–213, and *passim*.
10. See an abbreviated discussion in David L. Vagi, *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire, c. 82 BC – AD 480* (Sidney, 1999) pp. 113–114.
11. Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, pp. 182–187 on the *Kaiserserie* and pp. 211–215 on the production of the majority of contorniates for private demand and distribution as New Year gifts.
12. E.g. Mittag, *Alte Köpfe*, p. 206, who sees a progression from protocontorniates to contorniates in their similar edges, some similar symbols applied post-striking, and their use by common people.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–25 and Peter Kos, “Proto-contorniates?” *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* 95 (1993) pp. 431–438.
14. Cf. Kos, “Proto-contorniates?,” pp. 435–437, figs. 4 and 5, who illustrates two coins with hammered edges from the mint of Viminacium in Moesia Superior.
15. I am grateful to Kenyon Reed who reexamined this sestertius for me as I was unable to return to Columbia before this article's publication.
16. For the Walters coin, see Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum, Volume II: Vespasian to Domitian* (London, 1966) p. 406* (plate 81.3); Ian Carradice, “Coins, Monuments and Literature: Some Important Sestertii of Domitian,” in T. Hackens and R. Weiller, eds., *Proceedings of the 9th International Numismatic Congress, Berne, September 1979* (Louvain-La-Neuve, 1982) pp. 377–378; Peter Franz Mittag, *Römische Medaillons. Caesar bis Hadrian* (Stuttgart, 2010) pp. 38–40 and 135, no. 13.

17. On “pseudo-medallions,” see Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, pp. 24–27.
18. Anna S. Benjamin, “A Medallion of Two Roman Emperors,” *Muse* 2 (1968) p. 22.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24.
20. Toynbee, “Roma and Constantinopolis,” pp. 140–141.
21. *Illustrated Museum Handbook: A Guide to the Collections in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri–Columbia*, Osmund Overby, ed. (Columbia and London, 1982) p. 68.

About the Authors



William Barcham, (retired) professor of art history at the Fashion Institute of Technology, S.U.N.Y., studies Venetian art and history, concentrating on the early modern period. He has published books on Giambattista Tiepolo, Antonio Canaletto, and Federico Cornaro, the patron of Gianlorenzo Bernini, and has contributed essays to catalogues for exhibitions held in New York, Washington, London, Rome, and Venice. His articles have appeared in scholarly journals, and he has given public talks in the United States, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Israel, Russia, and Colombia. He is a recipient of awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Studies, the American Philosophical Society, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Bogliasco Foundation, and he is a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome. He won the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarly Activity from the State University of New York in 2004.

Nathan T. Elkins is assistant professor of Greek and Roman art history in the Department of Art at Baylor University. He holds a B.A., *magna cum laude*, in archaeology and classical studies from the University of Evansville, an M.A., with distinction, in the City of Rome from the University of Reading (UK), and a Ph.D. in Greek and Roman art and archaeology from the University of Missouri. His primary research interests and publications revolve around numismatics, especially Roman imperial coin iconography. He was the numismatist for the excavations of the late Roman auxiliary fort at Yotvata, Israel, and is currently the numismatist for the excavations of the synagogue at Huqoq, Israel, and the late Roman fort at Ayn Gharandal, Jordan. He is also an expert on the trafficking and indiscriminate trade in ancient coins.

Mary L. Pixley, Ph.D. and M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, held the position of associate curator of European and American art at the Museum of Art and Archaeology from 2007 to 2012, following research and curatorial posts at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A Fulbright scholar and recipient of a Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation Grant, she spent several years doing research in Italy. Her studies concentrate on European art in relation to cross-cultural and cross-temporal influences and encompass a variety of media, including paintings, sculpture, prints, ceramics, metalwork, glass, rock crystal, ivory, textiles, and carpets. She has both published and taught on the theme of intercultural artistic influences between Europe, the Islamic world, and China. More recently, her interest in the connections between the past and the present resulted in the creation of the traveling exhibition and accompanying catalogue *The Voyage of a Contemporary Italian Goldsmith in the Classical World: Golden Treasures by Akelo*. Her research has appeared in scholarly art publications such as the *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, *The Burlington Magazine*, and *Apollo*, and she has contributed essays and catalogue entries on European and American art to a variety of publications.