

The Power of Images in Antonio Agustín's *Diálogos de Medallas inscripciones y otras antigüedades* (1587)

PLATES 27–41

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The author provides an overview of the use of coin and other images in the important early numismatic work, *Diálogos de Medallas* by Antonio Agustín.

Surprisingly, the power of images in the highly acclaimed work of Antonio Agustín, the *Diálogos de Medallas*, published in Tarragona by Felipe Mey in 1587 has been largely overlooked by students of early numismatic books in general and of Agustín's oeuvre in particular.¹

The images that illustrate this book can be related to a series of phenomena that had great consequence for the final appearance of the 1587 edition. The first of these was the delay that the publication of this book suffered while awaiting delivery of the engraved prints. The second is the order in which the images were presented, since unlike many numismatic books in which the coins are organized by chronology, size, or material, the order of the images in Agustín's book is determined by the text. This arrangement endows the illustrations with a strong didactic character. Third, particular mention should be given to the single-mindedness displayed by Agustín in obtaining the best possible prints available from Rome, as the quality of the Spanish printing workshops at that time left much to be desired. And finally, Agustín's untimely death in Tarragona in May 1586, suspended work on the engraving of the coins, which meant that only the first two dialogues in

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¹ The discussion undertaken here draws on the splendid first edition of the *Diálogos de Medallas* belonging to the Hispanic Society of America.

his book were ever illustrated. However, before examining these phenomena in more detail, I shall begin with a brief introduction to the life and times of Antonio Agustín.

The archbishop of Tarragona, Antonio Agustín (Zaragoza, 26 February 1517–Tarragona, 31 May 1586), was born in a particularly tumultuous period in Spanish history.² At the same time that the Renaissance attempted to recover the beauty of the classical world in all its splendor, it also faced fundamental ideological and religious conflict between the Reform movements (Lutheran, Calvinist, etc.) and the Counter Reformation. Agustín took an active role in the struggles of the period, as evidenced by his magnificent funeral chapel in the Cathedral of Tarragona—a veritable manifesto of the Counter Reformation.

At the same time that the archbishop of Tarragona was involved in the religious crises of the period, he also established himself as a major representative of Renaissance humanism in Europe. Without doubt, one facet that has gone largely overlooked in the biography of Antonio Agustín, and one which deserves much more attention, is his work as a collector, since this activity provides a rich framework of elements that can shed considerable light on this eminent humanist and his times. For a collection is much more than a set of objects, it also describes a metaphorical world of values, and is at the same time an illustration of the thinking and tastes of its owner. Thus, Archbishop Agustín, in addition to being a highly respected jurist and leading humanist, was also a discerning collector of books, coins, carnellians, bronzes, paintings, tapestries, sculptures, and inscriptions—some of which he housed in his archaeological *hortus*, alongside the Bishop's Palace in Tarragona. These objects transport us back to the world of humanism and its recovery of the ancient world. Although most of his collection has now disappeared, what remains are the texts and certain vestiges that speak eloquently of it. Of particular importance was his collection of coins, some of which are housed today in the Library of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. This collection established Antonio Agustín as one of the most distinguished collectors in Europe in the 1500s, a man who, as Carbonell Manils reminds us, together with

Fulvio Orsini set numismatics on the road to the modern era by considering it an auxiliary science at the service of history, and taking it beyond the mere interest or simple curiosity expressed by the collector or antiquarian (author's translation).³

2 The literature on the life of Antonio Agustín is extensive. Among others, the reader might consult the following: Schott 1586; Agustín 1734; Agustín 1765–1774 (at the end of this work there is an extensive biography of Antonio Agustín, an obligatory point of reference for those writing about the archbishop of Tarragona); Simón Díaz 1972; Serrai 1992. Regarding Agustín's extensive bibliography, the reader should consult, among others, Simón Díaz 1986; Carbonell Manils 1992; Duran 1993; Carbonell 1995; Alcina Rovira 2008.

3 Carbonell Manils and Barreda Pascual 2003.

As a result of this reawakened interest in the ancient world, the second half of the sixteenth century saw the creation of numerous coin collections and the simultaneous publication of works dedicated to their history. Among the best of these are *Le promptuaire de médailles* (1553) by Guillaume Rouillé, *Epitome du Thrésor* (1553) by Jacopo Strada, *Discorsi sopra le medaglie de gli antiche* (1555) by Enea Vico, *Discorso sopra le medaglie* (1559) by Sebastiano Erizzo, and the *Diálogos de Medallas* (1587) by Antonio Agustín. This rich collection of publications is eloquent proof of the importance attached to numismatic studies in this period, and which together with ancient texts and resplendent archaeological remains constituted a fundamental source for understanding and reevaluating classical antiquity. Francis Haskell is quick to explain that these ancient coins were appreciated by antiquarians principally as historical records, as in the case of Enea Vico, who commented that were it not for existence of the coins, the inscriptions, and the *mirabile rovine* it would be possible to call into question the veracity of the great episodes in the history of Rome.⁴

Moreover, as Aurora Egido reminds us, the collections of the humanists, including those of Fulvio Orsini, Jacopo Strada, and Enea Vico, combined forces with the arts in general, and this pairing contributed to the emergence of the descriptive poetry of coins, statuary, and commemorative obelisks, as well as to collaborative undertakings with artists—drawers and engravers—both in preparing illustrated editions and in copying archaeological objects and coins for this particular kind of collector, writer and scholar.⁵ This was very much the case of Antonio Agustín, who not only collected exquisite works of art, but was also greatly concerned to obtain good engravings for one of his best known books, namely the *Diálogos de Medallas* (1587).⁶ In the present article, I am specifically interested in the images that appear in this book, taking as my point of reference the splendid copy housed by the Hispanic Society of America, undoubtedly one of the best copies that survives of this controversial edition. But, first, I wish to look briefly at some of the circumstances surrounding the creation and publication of the *Diálogos de Medallas*, so as to contextualize the work and to understand the process by which the images of the coins were made.

The death of Antonio Agustín in Tarragona on 31 May 1586, deprived him of the opportunity of ever seeing the *Diálogos de Medallas* in completed form, but his family and friends decided to publish the work posthumously in his honor.

⁴ Haskell 1994: 23

⁵ Egido 1996: 188.

⁶ Agustín 1587. See Penney 1965: Cat. 148/147 (HAS cop). This copy, comprising 470 pages in quarto format, was probably bought from the accredited London bookseller, Bernard Quaritch, with whom Archer Milton Huntington had plenty of dealings. Quaritch (1895: 14) describes it as follows: “*Diálogos de Medallas*, 1587. Small 4° with 27 plates giving engravings of about 300 coins; fine large copy in green morocco extra, gilt edges, from de Salva ‘Library.’ See Socias 2004.

However, a number of authors, including Andreas Schott, a Jesuit from Antwerp (1552–1629), and the eminent scholar Nicolás Antonio (1617–1684),⁷ suggested that the book was in fact already in print before Agustín died. This claim has subsequently been refuted by Mayans y Siscar:

I have seen no Spanish edition other than the one that I own. Nicolás Antonio says that an earlier edition was printed, in 1575, in quarto format. But he does not justify why he said that, nor does he provide any convincing evidence; since we see that Andres Escoto, who wrote a catalogue of the *Escritores de Medallas*, did not mention such an edition; and that there is clear evidence from Don Antonio himself and his nephew Rodrigo Zapata, who claim that, in 1578 and in the year that followed, it had not been printed (author's translation).⁸

It may well be that both parties were in fact partly right. A letter written by Antonio Agustín to his friend Fulvio Orsini in 1583 indicates that the text of the *Diálogos de medallas* was by then already printed, and that the author was awaiting delivery of the coin engravings so as to complete publication.⁹ Therefore, it is more than likely that the death of the eminent humanist in May 1586 in Tarragona disrupted the engraving process of the book's illustrations. This would explain why only the first two *Diálogos* ever came to be illustrated.

Another argument related to the technical nature by which the images were reproduced should also be taken into consideration. Copper plate engravings could not be printed together with text, because of their lower typeface. In books illustrated with engravings, therefore, printing was a two-part process with the text and the images being printed separately. Examination of this first edition reveals that the paper used for the engravings is heavier than that used for the printed text. It should be pointed out that the black and white tones of the engravings are perfectly printed and that the printing coincides exactly both on recto and verso of the page. These circumstances point to a high level of printing expertise and suggest that the engravings were printed in Rome, whence they were sent to Tarragona to be bound together with the book's text at Felipe Mey's workshop. All of this resulted in a considerable delay in the publication of this work, and meant, according to Mayans, that very few copies were printed, thereby making this a very rare and much prized first edition.¹⁰

Setting aside the circumstances of publication, I shall now focus my attention on the engraved images in the copy held by the Hispanic Society. These images include those on the front cover, the portrait of Antonio Agustín and, of course, those of his coins.

7 Antonio 1783–1788.

8 Agustín 1765–1774: VII, 166.

9 Agustín 1765–1774: VII, 262.

10 Agustín 1734: 84.

THE TITLE PAGE OF THE *DIÁLOGOS DE MEDALLAS* (1587)

The title page of the 1587 edition of the *Diálogos de Medallas* is arguably one of the most often imitated and studied in the history of the book (Pl. 27).¹¹ A number of authors, including Antonio Palau and above all Christian Edmond Dekesel have faithfully documented the existence of various front covers for this edition.¹² However, in this article I wish to make a series of points regarding some of its graphic features.

The cover of the Hispanic Society's copy comprises a fine typographical border within which is situated the title, the escutcheon of the archbishop, and the edition's imprint (Pl. 27). This organization of the typographical space is virtually identical to that of other works, including, for example, that of the *Metamorfoseos de Ovidio*, a work also published by Felipe Mey in Tarragona in 1586 (Pl. 28).¹³ Just below the title of the *Diálogos de Medallas* appear the words: *Ex Bibliotheca Ant. Augustini. Archiepiscopi. Tarraconen.*, which indicates the posthumous nature of this publication.

Interestingly, the typographical border on the Hispanic Society's edition is different from that used on the other copies, including those of Tarragona, Paris, Madrid, and London (Pls. 29–32).¹⁴ Its lettering also differs, pointing to the existence of variations within the first edition

The archbishop's escutcheon appears on other works by Agustín, including, for example, *De legibus et senatus consultis liber* (1583),¹⁵ as well as on the aforementioned edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The creator of this image was probably a local engraver based in Barcelona or Tarragona, who would have copied the coat of arms from some of these works and made a fairly rudimentary woodcut relief. This image contrasts markedly with the detail and graphic quality of the coins that illustrate the first two chapters of the *Diálogos de Medallas*.

The coat of arms is formed by the cardinal's hat and by two cords that form two broad, open knots, in the middle of which is a Latin cross, while on either side hang the tassels indicating Agustín's ecclesiastical rank, as described in the treatises on heraldry:

The bishops wear a hat lined in green like those of the patriarch and the archbishops, with silk cords of the same color, intertwined, but with six tassels on each side, which begin with one and finish with three.¹⁶

¹¹ A copy of the *Diálogos de Medallas* is housed in the National Library in Madrid. Its front cover is drawn with a nib, further proof of the fame and rarity of the famous 1587 edition (R.7708).

¹² Palau 1948: no. 4097; Dekesel 1997. Dekesel reproduces six different front covers of the 1587 edition..

¹³ Ovid 1586. Cited in del Arco Molinero 1916.

¹⁴ Hemeroteca Municipal de Tarragona. R.10307; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, RES PJ 37; Biblioteca Nacional de España, R 7722; British Library, C13587.

¹⁵ Agustín 1583.

¹⁶ On this question, see Costa 1856: 165. I am indebted to Sofía Mata, at the Universidad

This structure frames an oval-shaped shield divided in four quadrants, decorated with two seven-pointed stars and with two eagles, which form the family arms of Antonio Agustín.¹⁷

THE CAPITAL LETTER AND COIN-SIZE MODULE

In the copy held by the Hispanic Society, various types of image can be discerned. One of these is the initial letter with which each chapter begins, and which, in common with the escutcheon on the front cover, is a somewhat rudimentary woodcut relief print, illustrative of a rather simple technique (Pl. 33, 1). However, unusually for a book of these characteristics, the same letter (the letter B) is used to begin each of the dialogues. This initial letter is accompanied by a curious and somewhat crude stone herm and eagle, elements that are intertwined by a simple, curvilinear plant motif.

The second image refers to the module (a very typical feature of numismatic books) which is used to indicate the size of the coins (Pl. 33,2). This engraving comprises seven concentric circles, within each of which there is a Greek letter (A, B, Γ, Δ, E, Z, H), denoting the size of the various coins that appear in the book given that the engravings are all done at the same size.

THE COINS: DRAWINGS AND ENGRAVINGS¹⁸

The third image type, and obviously the most relevant to us here, is that of the coins themselves. The Hispanic Society's edition is magnificently illustrated with 51 numismatic prints, of which three plates illustrate the first chapter and 48 the second.

The illustrated coins are primarily Roman, but Greek, Byzantine, and medieval Spanish specimens also appear. Each plate depicts the obverse and reverse sides of six coins. The great majority of these coins formed part of the archbishop's own excellent collection and when this was not the case he scrupulously cited the collection to which they belonged. When he did not possess or could not locate pertinent coins for illustration, Agustín left an empty space, as was then the custom among collectors. The engraver obviously respected this decision of the collector, as can be seen in a number of plates from the *Diálogos de Medallas* (Pl. 34).

The use and function of these numismatic engravings were meticulously thought out, while at the same time they provided a source of fundamental information, as we shall see below. A small lozenge enclosing a Roman numeral appears between the obverse and reverse of each coin. This feature refers to the text paragraph that the image illustrates (Pl. 34). On one side of the lozenge a Roman letter indicates the metal from which the coin was made (O for gold, P for silver, or C for

Rovira i Virgili de Tarragona, for this bibliographic reference.

17 Antonio Agustín speaks of his lineage in a letter dated 10 April, 1573. See Agustín 1765-1774: VII, 253. See Alcina Rovira 2004: 42 and Alcina Rovira *et al.* 2007.

18 On engraving and its relation to coins, see among others Cennini 1988; Hill 1920. Villena 2004.

copper) while on the other, a Greek letter keyed to the coin-size module indicates the diameter of the actual coin.

The images, which depict a range of human figures, mythological beings, and objects, are of a highly acceptable quality. Likewise, the textures and the black and white tones are well realized in most of the images. The engraving reproduces the structure of the coins and organizes their composition within their edges and beaded borders, within which appears the legend. On their obverse side, there appears a gallery of portraits and figures, while on the coins' reverse the images depict a range of imperial, religious, and domestic values. It should also be stressed that the coins are not flat depictions, but rather they show a part of their edge, thus giving a perspective of their thickness.

These engravings, completed with a fine and elegant burin, were made in Rome. To date the authorship of this gallery of metal images is unknown. The only inscription visible on these engravings is the letter of the alphabet, placed in the lower right corner, undoubtedly a simple system for keeping them in order (A, B, C, D....EEE) (See Pl. 34).

If Jacopo Strada, antiquarian and collector, immortalized by Titian, had supervised his engravings,¹⁹ Agustín, also went to great lengths to obtain high quality illustrations for his book. In *Dialogo 11*, the author dons his critic's hat and turns his attention to the illustrations that appear in various publications saying: "they are well realized," "well or poorly depicted," and "very well drawn."²⁰ He also writes:

There are those [books] of a Venetian gentleman called Sebastian Erizo, which contain many coins from many ages, and which show their reverse images most skillfully, but in the books that I have seen the medals are very poorly painted (...). Another discourse is to be found in the ancient religion of the Romans and of other matters, by Guillermo Choul, a French gentleman from Leon: he includes very good paintings of his medals and their reverse sidesThe poster book is of the Families of Fulvio Ursino, which contains well drawn images of all the Roman silver medals up to the times of Caesar Augustus (author's translation).²¹

At the end of the sixteenth century there were no workshops in Tarragona or anywhere else in Spain capable of offering a level of quality similar to that obtained in the engravings of these coins. The archbishop, moreover, was well aware of this situation as he stresses in his letter to Fulvio Orsini:

Per fornir di me dialogi, hó bisogno d'un giovane che sappia far in legno, ó in rame le medaglie, et la difficulta batte in far bene il ritratto della faccia, che delli roversi ben si trova in queste parti chi li faccia bene. Manco male fara mandarvi il disegno et farli far in Roma.²²

19 Haskell 1994: 15.

20 Agustín 1587: 11

21 Agustín 1587: 464-466

22 Agustín 1765-1774: VII, 263.

Agustín is quite clear in his mind that while in Spain it might have been possible to find craftsmen capable of providing engravings of the coins' reverse faces, those of the effigies of the emperors represented a physiognomic task that required much greater skill.

Thus Antonio Agustín, in his efforts to obtain high quality images of excellence, decided to have them engraved in Rome. To this end, he ordered that a series of drawings be made of his coins. In a letter to his friend Fulvio Orsini, dated 1583, he says:

Desidero que stampino le medaglie secondo li designi mandati. E' ben vero che in alcuni retratti non riesce bene la pittura, la quale potra cossi acconciarsi cercando simili medaglie. V.S. mi fara gratia di favorire questa impresa, poiche mi scrive il mio Mollano, che non dispiace se non la lingua.²³

The lengths to which Agustín went to obtain high quality images were neither trivial nor anecdotal, but rather should be seen within his own cultural perspective, perceiving image in its modern sense, that is, as an instrument of knowledge at the service of collectors and numismatists. Herein lies the explanation for his insistence on obtaining good images for his *Diálogos de Medallas*.

We should not forget that Agustín, as a learned humanist, operated in Tarragona as a patron and that under his patronage were to be found painters such as Isaac Hermes Vermey (c. 1540–1596), responsible for decorating his holy sacrament chapel in Tarragona Cathedral. He may well also have been in contact with the painter Luca Cambiaso (Genoa, 1527–Madrid, 1585), whose painting entitled the “Coronación de la Virgen” is to this day preserved in the same cathedral chapel.²⁴ Similarly, mention should be made of the painter Francesco Stella who, and as was common at that time, resided in the archbishop's palace. We know that Stella completed a number of works for Agustín, among them a painting of the Franciscan counter-reformer, Beato Nicolás Factor (1520–1583). What is of particular interest to us here is that Stella was responsible for the drawings that were made of the coins and which were subsequently sent to Rome for engraving.

Antonio Agustín himself provides us with interesting clues regarding Stella, saying that the method of obtaining the drawings of the coins was particularly appropriate, among other aspects, because in this way the original was safeguarded:

Un certo pittore Stella che venne seco in queste parti è fermato in casa mia; se in qualche lettera di V.S. si trovará il nome delle medaglie, che ricerca le faremo dipingere, ó vero improntar per mandarle et cosí non si perderá l'originale.²⁵

Unfortunately, nothing is known as to the whereabouts of Stella's drawings, but it can be assumed that Agustín sent them to accredited workshops in Rome, such as that of Salamanca or Antoine Lafrery. In this way, he followed in the footsteps

23 Agustín 1765–1774: VII, 262. The archdeacon Pedro Mollan or Mollano was Agustín's representative in Rome.

24 Socias 2007: 352–353. Socias 2008.

25 Agustín 1765–1774: VII, 261.

of his friend, Fulvio Orsini, who had also used the services of Lafrery, a highly reputed publisher.²⁶ Aware of the difficulties involved in engraving the coins at a site far from the original source, Antonio Agustín advised that if “in alcuni retratti non riese bene la pintura”²⁷ the artist should bear in mind other coins of similar characteristics.

Although, as we have said, the whereabouts of the drawings of the coins commissioned by Agustín from Francesco Stella are unknown, we should stress two situations that might shed some light on the process by which the images of the coins were completed. First, as we know, before the invention of the photographic image, engravings played a key role in the transmission of knowledge and the gradual democratization of culture. Thus, engraving gave the patrons of the arts and collectors the possibility of “photographing” their collections and bringing them to a wider audience, promoting the publication of books and the collecting of prints. Second, we should not forget that one of the key contributions of Renaissance aesthetics was the mimetic verisimilitude of the image with respect to that of the original source. Seen from this perspective, the engraving of coins became an exceptional means for facilitating their identification, classification and study. And, as I have discussed above, this was one of the key reasons that induced Antonio Agustín to seek an engraver capable of capturing his coins convincingly.

Below, I briefly outline the steps taken in the process of the engraving of these numismatic images. The process of obtaining the images involved three main stages: 1) the source (the coin); 2) a drawing of the coin; and, 3) its eventual engraving. Although we have access to no complete sequence, we can call on two pertinent examples.

The first is a coin and a drawing of it, which are used to illustrate the *Familiae Romanae* by Fulvio Orsini (Pl. 35, 1a–1b),²⁸ while the second is a coin and an engraving of it, which corresponds precisely with that found in the *Diálogos de Medallas* by Antonio Agustín (Pl. 35, 2a–2b). In both cases the images seek to obtain, with uneven results, the verisimilitude of their sources, a fundamental practice in the aesthetic concerns of the Renaissance.

Quite unlike the spectacular flourishes of other collectors and numismatists, such as Jacobo Strada (1515–1588) and the Dutch artist Hubert Goltzius (1526–1583),²⁹ who used to combine the features of different coins and make large scale reproductions, Antonio Agustín set great store by the verisimilitude of his images.³⁰

Related to this practice of the reproduction of the images of coins, I have also been able to examine a number of drawings made of coins. One such source is the

²⁶ Nollhac 1976: 40–44.

²⁷ Agustín 1765–1774: VII, p.262

²⁸ Orsini 1577.

²⁹ Haskell 1994: 16.

³⁰ Jansen 1993:219. Among the works examining the engraving of medals see Ignacio San Vicente and Santos Yanguas 2003.

interesting *Album de Medallas de Emperadores Romanos* from the eighteenth century.³¹ This contains excellent numismatic drawings, completed in black ink, with aquatint used for shading (Pls. 36–37). Mayer speaks of the need

...to point out the careful copying of the latter, somewhat within the style, if we ignore the shading, of the coins reproduced in the various editions of the *Diálogos de Medallas* by Antonio Agustín.³²

Another well-known example is provided by the *Colección de dibujos de monedas romanas de emperadores* in Spain's National Library (Pl. 38).³³ This album arranges drawings of coins depicting the Roman emperors in alphabetical order. The drawings, which are cut out and pasted onto the pages of the book, are much more schematic than those in the Barcelona album.

IMAGES AND TEXT

Although only the first two dialogues are illustrated, Agustín had originally intended to illustrate all of them. This intention is clearly indicated by the numbering in the book's margins, which corresponds to the Roman numerals associated with the oval-shaped lozenges connecting the coins' obverse and reverse.

Undoubtedly, it is quite remarkable that the publication of the *Diálogos* should have been delayed a number of years because Agustín wished to be able to use high quality engravings of his coins when bringing his collection to public attention and also because he sought to tie together as closely as possible the work's iconic and textual structures, a relationship that Agustín considered eminently didactic in nature. Thus, the dialectic established between image and text avoids being merely functional. It seeks rather to achieve conceptual clarity and deductive rigor. The following example is a good illustration of how this correlation is established between text and image:

IV [keyed to engraved image IIII, Pl. 39, 1] In Suetonius we read that Caesar Augustus valued so greatly the fact that he was born under Capricorn that he made it public by putting this sign on his coins. I can show a number of these in silver as well as in copper. And of particular merit is a coin from Corinth with two Capricorns and a world and a crown of oak with the legend OB CIVES SER. or SERVATOS. It is true that this medal was minted

31 Library of the University of Barcelona. Ms. 271. *Album de Medallas de Emperadores Romanos*. An inscription indicates that this manuscript came from the former convent of Sant Josep in Barcelona. Written on a page attached to folio. no. 1 we can read: "Libro en el que hay copiadas muchas medallas perfectamente."

32 See Mayer 1976: 138–143.

33 Biblioteca Nacional de España. *Colección de dibujos de monedas romanas de emperadores y de cartas y otros escritos de Antonio Agustín*, with notes by Juan Antonio and Gregorio Mayans y Siscar. MSS/13835. At the beginning of this album there is a manuscript page that says the following: "What in this book is written in my brother's hand, D. Juan Antonio Mayans Siscar, are his observations and should not be confused with those of Antonio Agustín. Nor should what is signed by me" (author's translation).

by Tiberius Caesar after the death of Augustus, but I have others of silver in which he appears with the Capricorn (author's translation).³⁴

Furthermore, Antonio Agustín commented on and undertook interpretations of his coins in the light of an extensive and scholarly library of ancient writers, including Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Catullus, Cicero, Quintilian and others, claiming, among other things, that coins can constitute a visual and artistic source of the highest order:

There can be no doubt that the painters and the sculptors and the silver-smiths, and the other masters of similar works, and primarily those that make coins or commission them, can draw on the ancients in many ways: having lost all these arts, as can be seen in the works of a hundred years ago... From the medals [*viz.* coins] we learn how to paint the crocodile and the hippopotamus, and the sphinx and the rhinoceros, and learn how the ancient craftsmen painted Scylla and the Chimera, and Pegasus and the Sirens... (author's translation).³⁵

The coin's obverse is typically dedicated to a gallery of Roman emperors, and their imperial consorts, including Agrippina, Faustina, etc., albeit in smaller number. In general, the representation of these portraits is convincing and captures the nobility of their expression. The figures' hair, crowns, and tunics are engraved with sensitivity, although, on occasions, the combination of sizes might appear somewhat artificial.

If the obverse is dedicated to the Roman emperors, the reverse usually depicts an exponent of moral values or the highest Roman virtues including *Pax*, *Concordia*, *Pietas*, *Equitas*, *Iustitia*, *Securitas*, *Tranquilitas*, *Felicitas*, etc. (Pl. 39, 2). Here, it is quite surprising that the images in other editions, which are arguably more sophisticated typographically (for example, the 1592 Rome edition),³⁶ do not achieve the same level of graphic excellence as observed in the engravings in the Hispanic Society's first edition (Pl. 39, 3-4).

The effigies of the emperors had a particularly significant impact on portrait painting, while the coins' reverse sides are a very rich and important source for our understanding of the history of Rome, its architecture and mythology.³⁷ Similarly, they enriched the allegorical and emblematic language of the age, influencing the treatises for example of Cesare Ripa, among others.³⁸ Indeed, Antonio Agustín highlights the importance of coin reverse types as a source of our knowledge of the ancient world, recognizing that,

there are in these medals [*viz.* coins] a great display of the perfect drawing

³⁴ Agustín 1587: 12, nos. IV and V.

³⁵ Agustín 1587: 12.

³⁶ Agustín 1592.

³⁷ Among those researchers who have pointed to a relationship between the history of medals and that of art we find Bermejo 1994; Bardon 1974. López Torrijos 1993.

³⁸ Ruíz de Eguilaz 1996. See also, Egido 1984: 211-227.

and posture of all the figures and objects that are depicted so naturally that they cannot be bettered. There are some of low and middle relief as alive as in the most perfect statues (author's translation).³⁹

He also stresses that the coins might serve as an inestimable source of inspiration that can

help the inventions that often are needed for the ornamentation of a public party, in the entrance or coronation of a Prince, for jousts or tournaments or costly masks, or for painting a lord's palace or a public or private building, and as you said for making tapestries and cloths; but the greatest benefit to be gained from them is to remember to use them where most appropriate (author's translation).⁴⁰

As Francis Haskell comments, the desire to decipher the symbols and allegories found on a coin's reverse virtually eclipses any other concern for Agustín. The theories regarding their meaning occupied the correspondence between Antonio Agustín and Fulvio Orsini (1529–1600), the Roman librarian to the Farnese family, that was maintained from 1559 until 1583.⁴¹ Furthermore, and as Carbonell Manils stresses,

The great figures of humanism, from its beginnings in the trecento and throughout the quattrocento, extolled the primacy of classical textual sources on any material element, establishing as fundamental a strict training in philology... Agustín, although unable to escape this general background and as a child of his time, received a solid grounding in philology. But he knew, valued and enhanced the value of the image. Thus, when asked about the value of the iconographic description of the "virtues", he reaffirmed their documentary and moral value, to the extent that they are a model of behavior.⁴²

The first (use) is to understand all these medals, which are the best books and memoirs of the ancient world that we have. The second to understand better the other books that have dealt with these things. The third to appreciate these figures (of the virtues) in compositions...and thus make them in accordance with these medals or in imitation of them...But the greatest benefit to be gained from them is to remember to use them where most appropriate (author's translation).⁴³

THE COPPER PLATES

The present whereabouts of the engraved copper plates for the illustrations of the *Diálogos de Medallas* are unknown. Sada was already unable to locate them for his

39 Agustín 1587: 18.

40 Agustín 1587: 87.

41 Haskell 1994: 21.

42 Carbonell Manils 2007: 11–12.

43 Agustín 1587: 88.

1592 edition of the book and therefore ordered the engraving of more than 300 additional coins for illustration.⁴⁴ These images are more linear and schematic than the 1587 originals (Pl. 39, 5).

Andreas Schott also engaged in a fruitless search for the plates in order to publish the images in his Latin version of the *Diálogos de Medallas*. In its prologue he explicitly refers to the engravings:

Nam quas Romae olim Ant. Augustinus, vir clarissimus, laminas suo aere sculpendas curarat, eae Praesule vita, qua immortalis dignus erat, functo, in Hiberiam translatae, possessore mutato, redimi pretio non poterant.⁴⁵

According to this account, Agustín went to great lengths to have the images engraved in Rome, paying for them from his own fortune, but following his death they were sent to Spain and passed into the hands of others, who did not wish to sell them. Mayans y Siscar reiterates what Schott says, stating that the plates “were engraved in Rome, and with the archbishop dead, they were transported to Spain to the Librería del Escorial, as I understand it (author’s translation).”⁴⁶ But it appears that Mayans was ill-informed, as the copper plates were never deposited in the Laurentian Library at El Escorial. Andres González Barcia also appears to have had no luck when producing his 1744 edition of the *Diálogos de Medallas*, since the book was published without any images whatsoever.⁴⁷

The mystery of the famous copper plates continued until 1803 when the bibliophile Charles Antoine La Serna Santander made a surprising declaration:

ces planches ne sont pas perdues, elles existent encore. Je m’empresse d’apprendre aux savants que ce monument précieux se trouve déposé dans ma bibliothèque, et que les planches sont dans le meilleur état possible, comme on peut s’en convaincre par l’épreuve ci-jointe.⁴⁸

He reproduced an engraving corresponding to one of the plates from the 1587 edition (Pl. 40), but then the copper plates disappeared from view yet again. They have not resurfaced since 1803.

ANTONIO AGUSTÍN’S PORTRAIT

Portraits acquired exceptional importance during the Renaissance in relation to questions of semblance, memory, and identity. Francis Haskell speaks of medals as a source for other portrait types⁴⁹ and indeed the anonymous image of Antonio Agustín has many features of a medal. This medallic quality was reproduced in his subsequent portraits. However, it is not my intention to undertake an exhaustive

44 Agustín 1592.

45 Agustín 1617.

46 Agustín 1734: 85.

47 Agustín 1744.

48 La Serna Santander 1803.

49 Haskell 1994: 35.

study of these portraits here, but rather to focus on the portrait that appears in the Hispanic Society's edition of the *Diálogos de Medallas*.⁵⁰

At the end of the book, on an unnumbered page glued to the binding, we find an engraved portrait of Antonio Agustín. Its creator is unknown but, like the coin images, it is presumably the work of an engraver in Rome. The archbishop is depicted within an elliptical shape enclosing the Greek legend ANT. ΑΥΤΟΥΣΤΙΝ * ΕΠΙΣΚ * ΙΑΕΡΔ * ΕΤ * ΝΒ—"Antonio Agustín, Bishop of Lerida, 52 years old." This inscription is also to be found in a number of other works of Agustín. The Latin form of this inscription (*Ant. Augustinus, Archieps. Tarrac. Annorum LII*) also appears at the top of the portrait page in the Hispanic Society's copy (Pl. 41, 1).

Agustín is depicted wearing his liturgical dalmatic—a tunic adorned with figures of the Apostles, and fastened with a brooch bearing a seven-pointed star, the symbol on his heraldic shield. The formal composition of the portrait is highly reminiscent of that of a medal, no doubt as a means of recognizing this illustrious numismatist.

Although the engraver seeks to capture the physical features of the learned scholar, the result is quite poor. However, and despite these technical and artistic limitations, this portrait enjoyed considerable critical acclaim, becoming the model for later depictions of Antonio Agustín. This is apparent, for example, in the portrait engraved by Juan Bernabé Palomino (1692–1777) for the back cover of Agustín's *Diálogos de las armas y linages* (Pl. 41, 2). The engraver was inspired by the original print and maintained the original dimensions of the composition. However, Palomino magnifies and ennobles markedly the physical features of the archbishop of Tarragona. Agustín's standing is accentuated by an epigram taken from the work of the Latin poet Martial, one of his favorite authors: *Ars utinam mores animumque effingere posset. Pulchrrior in terris nulla tabella foret.*

A further example is provided by the painting of Antonio Agustín by Antonio Ponz (1725–1792), which hangs in the Librería del Escorial (Pl. 42, 1). As Zarco Cuevas recalls, most of the portraits of the illustrious figures in the Laurentian Library must have perished in the fire of 1671.⁵¹ With the aim of replacing this gallery of illustrious writers, Carlos III commissioned a collection of illustrious figures from Ponz, the artist responsible for the highly acclaimed *Viaje de España* (1772). As is evident, the source Ponz drew upon was also this engraving, which is the earliest known image of Antonio Agustín. Its initial numismatic structure, although now somewhat blurred, remains present, as does the decoration on the bishop's cope and the inscription at the base of the bust.

If we compare these portraits with that used to illustrate the 1592 Rome edition (Pl. 42, 2) we see the range of underlying concepts alluded to. Unlike the

⁵⁰ See the pioneering portrait studies of Antonio Agustín by Ma Barcia (1901) and López Serrano (1952).

⁵¹ Zarco Cuevas 1932.

earlier portraits, this Roman engraving by an unknown artist, depicts Antonio Agustín *en face*. Although the portrait adheres to the tradition of using an oval composite space and repeats the inscription *Antonius Augustinus Archiepisc. Tarraconen.*, there can be little doubt that it is much more ostentatious and celebrative than the earlier portraits. This is evident in the rich decorative scroll and vegetal motifs that frame the effigy, as well as in the various decorative elements around the portrait, such as the putto with unfurled wings at the top of the portrait, while in the lower part appears the archbishop's coat of arms, flanked on either side by two cornucopias—a clear reference to the fertile mind of this genius.

In these three portraits, Antonio Agustín is depicted at the pinnacle of his intellectual maturity, but while the engravings contained in the Tarragona, Madrid, and El Escorial editions emphasize his ecclesiastical dignity, that in the Rome edition offers a more secular perspective, presenting Agustín as an antiquarian and as a humanist scholar of the Renaissance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the Hispanic Society of America for their invaluable support, and especially to John O'Neill, Curator Manuscripts and Rare Books. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Robert W. Hoge of the American Numismatic Society, Jonathan H. Kagan, Joan Carbonell Manils at the Universidad Autónoma of Barcelona, and Marta Campo and Albert Estrada at the Numismatic Department of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

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Plate 40

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1. Painted portrait of Antonio Agustín by Antonio Ponz. San Lorenzo Library, El Escorial.
2. Engraved portrait of Antonio Agustín in the *Dialoghi intorno alle medaglie*, 1592.

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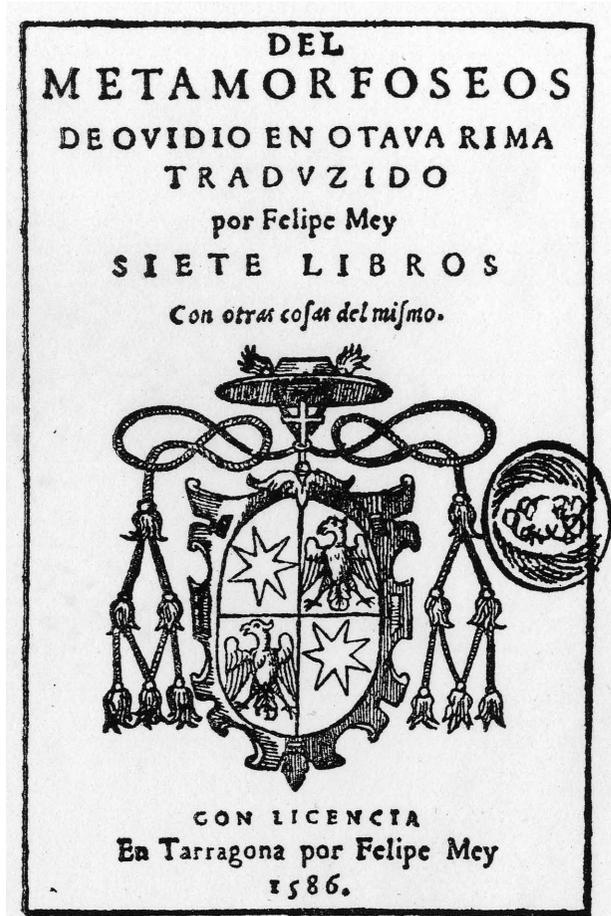
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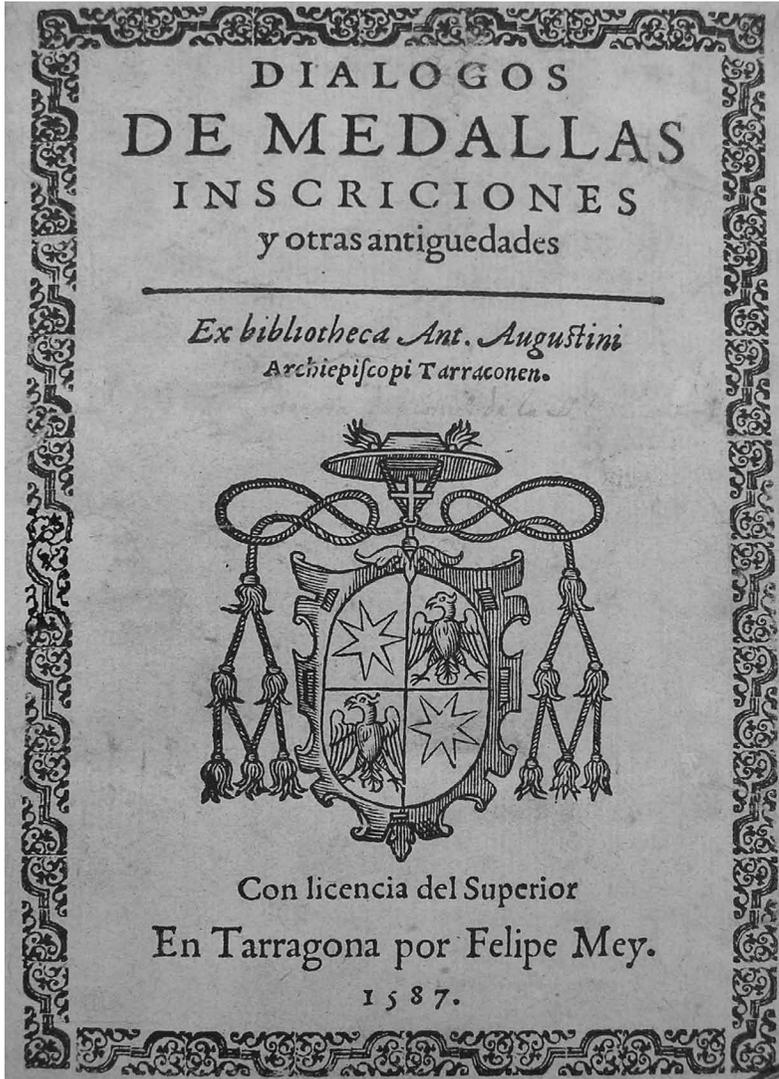
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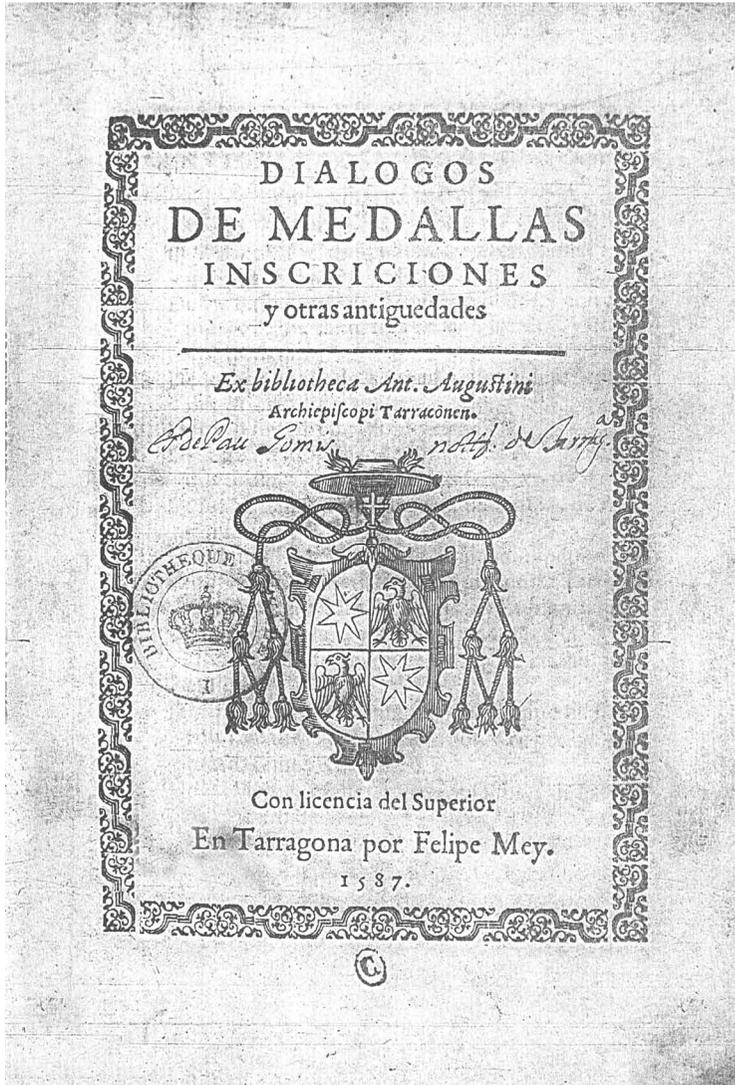


The Power of Images in Antonio Agustin's *Diálogos de Medallas*

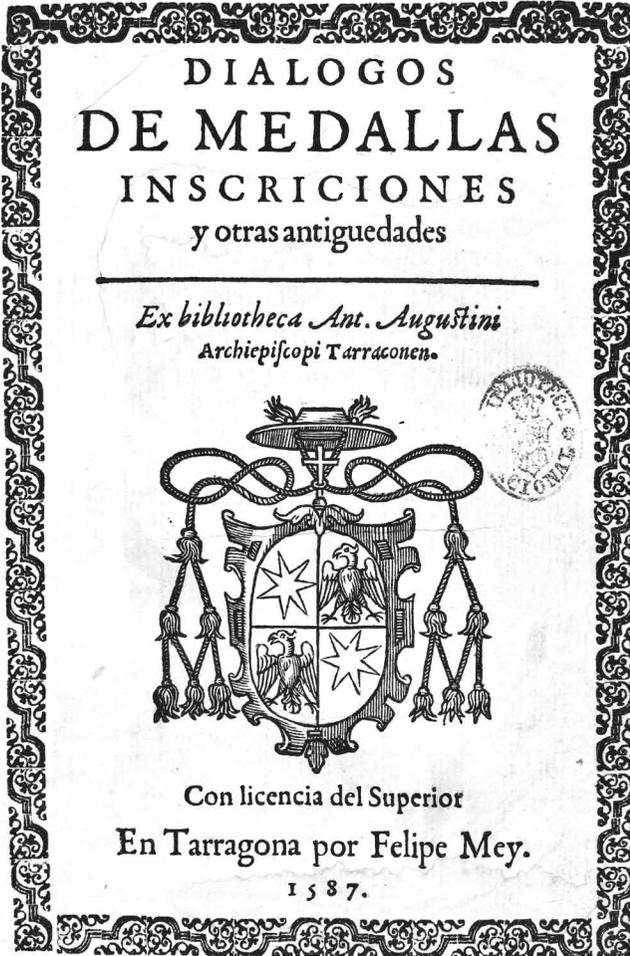




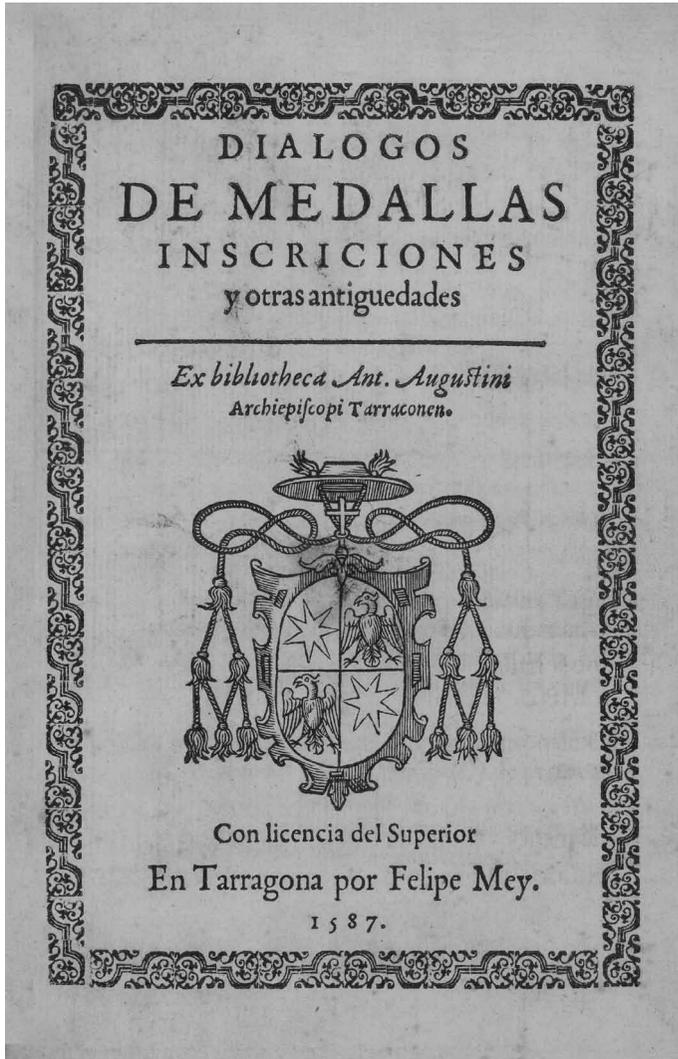
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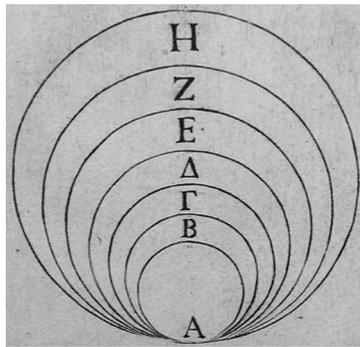
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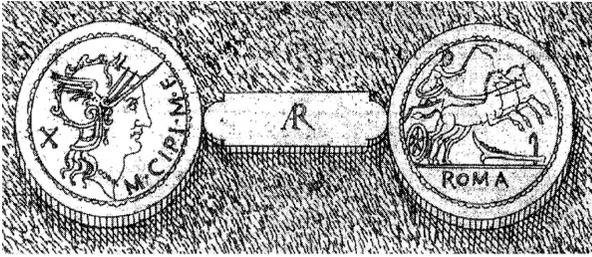
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2



The Power of Images in Antonio Agustin's *Diálogos de Medallas*



1a



1b



2a



2b



The Power of Images in Antonio Agustín's *Diálogos de Medallas*



The Power of Images in Antonio Agustin's *Diálogos de Medallas*



The Power of Images in Antonio Agustín's *Diálogos de Medallas*



1



2



5



3



4



The Power of Images in Antonio Agustín's *Diálogos de Medallas*



1



2



1



2