

# Sixteenth-Century *Notklippen* as Objects of Warfare?

*Realia*, Representation, Narration

## Introduction: The Coin as an Object of Warfare

In a discussion of the many sixteenth-century portrayals of German and Swiss mercenary soldiers gambling or arguing over payments owed, the historian J. R. Hale observed that “no other occupational group, apart from merchants, was shown by artists so frequently in circumstances involving money as were soldiers”.<sup>1</sup> Urs Graf’s drawing of a *Landsknecht* striding homewards, for example, alludes to money by way of its loss (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The sword hefted to the shoulder and pointing backwards carries the candid inscription *AL MEIN GELT VERSPILT* (all my money gambled away), indicating the impoverished status of the purse dangling from it and, by implication, a previous time of plenty. Money mattered to soldiers in sixteenth-century Europe because it was the engine of military action, enticing men to enlist and to travel farther and farther from their homes in search of greater riches. The motivating role of money in the mercenary lifestyle was the well-known subject of satirical critique by Graf and his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> Yet money had long been understood as inextricable from martial existence, an interdependence evident in the very word ‘soldier’ (*Soldat*), indicating a person paid to fight and derived from coin-names in various languages connected ultimately to the Latin *solidus*, a late Roman gold currency.<sup>4</sup> In early modern Europe, post-feudal systems of payment developed in which, as Fritz Redlich demonstrated, military commanders operated as proto-venture capitalists, putting up funds at great risk in the hope of large-

- 1 I thank Romana Kaske and Julia Saviello for organizing the *Objekte des Krieges* conference, and for the opportunity to share my work there, in stimulating discussion with international colleagues. I appreciate Julia Oswald’s graceful editorial eye, which helped refine some of the language in this text. Adam Eaker deserves thanks as well for giving my words a final polish. Hale 1986, pp. 92–93.
- 2 Basel, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. U.X.69. On this drawing, see Rogg 2002, pp. 159–160.
- 3 See Andersson 1978; for extensive bibliography, see Rogg 2002.
- 4 See the entries on ‘soldier’, in Soukhanov 1992 and Stevenson 2010, p. 1697; and ‘Soldat’ in the online Duden, <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Soldat> (accessed 10 May 2018).



1 Urs Graf, Landsknecht who has gambled away his money, 1519, Basel, Kupferstichkabinett

scale future profits.<sup>5</sup> Many were ruined in the process, but the memoirs of successful military campaigners read at times like accountants' ledgers, listing the thousands of thalers gained as a result of this or that battle.<sup>6</sup>

When payments failed to materialize, as they so often did when the military ambitions of cash-poor rulers outstripped their ability to remunerate forces, soldiers gave up and went home or resorted to looting to recover their missing wages. The latter could have significant consequences. The proximate cause of the Sack of Rome in 1527, which decimated the city physically, culturally, and financially, was the delayed payment of soldiers on campaign in the Italian peninsula over many months.<sup>7</sup> For imperial forces owed back wages, the plunder of Roman churches, private homes, and civic institutions was a means by which to extract value, in whatever form they could find it.

5 Redlich 1964.

6 Schertlin von Burtenbach 1858.

7 Hook 2004.



2 Siege coin minted in Haarlem, 1572, London, British Museum

Coins, however, were the period's most common physical instantiation of payment and were often signaled metonymically by the purses designed to contain them, as in the case of the *Geldbeutel* swinging behind Graf's profligate soldier. Despite the acknowledged centrality of money to early modern warfare and its appearance in scenes of enlistment, coins themselves do not feature prominently in literary and visual conceptions of the category of 'war objects', which tend to privilege, perhaps for obvious reasons, arms and armor, especially those alluding to the ancient and medieval past.<sup>8</sup> The relative absence of coins in martial material culture might be explained in part by their overdetermined nature. Circulating across lines of class and profession, coins signified variously in visual and textual representation. In the sixteenth century, however, a genre of ersatz currency developed that can be associated explicitly with military events and thus with the soldiers who fought in them.

*Notgeld* – emergency money – was produced during sieges and while on campaign, often quickly and with limited minting resources.<sup>9</sup> Precious metal vessels were transformed into usable tokens or *Klippen*: either shorn directly into rough quadrilaterals, or melted down, flattened into sheets, cut, and struck with a die, as in the case of tokens produced during the siege of Haarlem in 1572 (fig. 2).<sup>10</sup> These metal pieces, which were often intentionally distinct from contemporary currency, served as temporary payment, securing the continued cooperation of soldiers who might otherwise mutiny or turn to looting. The modern terminology applied to these numismatic objects calls attention to the mar-

8 On depictions of enlistment and payment, see Rogg 2002, pp. 22–33.

9 The standard reference catalogues remain Mailliet 1868–1873; Brause-Mansfeld 1897–1903.

10 British Museum, London, inv. no. G3, SSP2.2

tial contexts in which they were produced: emergency coins, siege coins, war currency, and even field coins, referring to the field of battle.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the traditional symbols of warfare, emergency coins were not usually carefully designed and crafted in anticipation of battle. Instead, they were made within the context of ongoing military struggles, a product of, rather than a preparation for, war. Their irregular forms and often abbreviated legends were indices of emergency both in the sense of the physical hardships that arose on campaign as well as the socio-economic upheaval caused by war. Unlike the medals struck after the fact to memorialize early modern sieges, *Notgeld* served urgent, practical needs in the context of a still unfolding martial event. Intended to be taken out of circulation and recoined when the crisis ended, examples of emergency coins nevertheless survive in relatively large numbers. This unintended longevity resulted from a tendency to save *Notmünzen* as souvenirs of significant martial events. Because of their origins within the conflicts themselves, siege coinage claimed a higher degree of authenticity than manufactured commemorative objects. The special status accorded emergency coins in the possessions of private citizens and within numismatic collections was located not in visual or textual characteristics, but in the coins' material history. By 'material history' I mean the processes of physical transformation that the coins' metal underwent as it was converted – most often, from church plate to soldiers' pay – in wartime conditions of scarcity. Having undergone radical formal change within the midst of the historical event, the metal has a particular claim as material witness to that event, a status I conceive of as *metallic presence*. As I will argue in this essay, knowledge of the emergency coin's metallic presence drove the preservation, and later explanation and illustration, of these intentionally ephemeral objects.

While such coins have most often been approached from a numismatic perspective, considering them as distinctly early modern 'objects of war' reveals something crucial about their original context and reception. Surviving *Klippen* and instances of their portrayal in early modern prints demonstrate that contemporary beholders recognized the origins of these objects in sieges and battles, valuing them as keepsakes rather than coins. The representation of emergency coins – in images, in texts reporting on their creation, and even in the words later inscribed on their very surfaces – played a role in constructing them as historical narrators whose authority originated not simply in their material properties, but in the transformational experiences that shaped those properties.

11 Emergency coins (German *Notmünzen*, Dutch *noodmunten*, French *pièces de nécessité*); siege coins (German *Belagerungsmünzen*, English *obsidional*, French *pièces obsidionales*, Italian *monete ossidionali*); *Kriegsklippen*; *Feldklippen*. As an example of the deployment of such adjectives and their potential interchangeability, see Brause-Mansfeld 1897–1903.

## Emergency Coins in Early Modern Warfare and Numismatic Representation

The history of emergency coins does not begin in early modern Europe, but flourished at that time and place for at least two reasons. The first is that modes of military engagement and financing created the conditions for the production of temporary currency. Mercenary soldiers fought in years-long operations, often with very little food, clothing, or necessary equipment. Their motivation for fighting was not ideological, patriotic, or a matter of mere survival, but rather financial, and if they were not paid, they could simply lay down their weapons or refuse to continue to the next battlefield. As armies became geographically more dispersed, paymasters no longer traveled with individual companies; captains became responsible for paying their soldiers themselves, doling out the money when it arrived, or fronting soldiers cash from their own purses while awaiting funds from superiors.<sup>12</sup> Paying troops in coin, even if it meant liquidating a commander's personal treasure or ransacking local stores of plate to do so, was a high priority because it reduced the likelihood that soldiers would go on plundering sprees, which not only devastated local populations but could put troops in a state of mania and disorganization that distracted from broader military goals.<sup>13</sup> During sieges, when currency circulated in a closed system and cities were dependent on soldiers for their vigilant defense, the need for adequate payment could become acute, which explains the large numbers of coins produced in such contexts during an era of continued and innovating siege warfare.

The second reason that early modern emergency coins survive in great numbers from this period has to do with opportunities for preservation. By the early sixteenth century, numismatic collections were beginning to absorb coins that related directly to contemporary figures and events. This interest in the present, as well as in recent European history, expanded what had been the dominant prior focus on ancient Greek and Roman specimens. Siege coinage and other ersatz currency thus began to find lasting homes in elite and humanistic collections; in these new repositories, emergency coins could survive for centuries as earlier examples had not.<sup>14</sup> Collections also created new 'publics' for siege coins beyond their original mercenary recipients, which included coin connoisseurs and currency theorists.<sup>15</sup> For the latter, emergency coins significantly expanded the conceptual possibilities for monetary systems by suggesting the viability of fiat money.<sup>16</sup> Early illus-

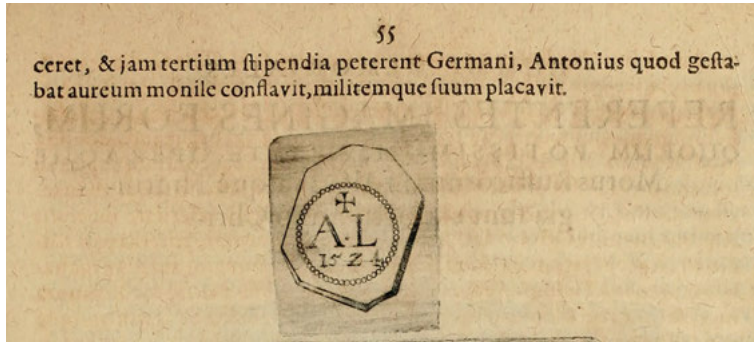
12 Redlich 1964, vol. 1, p. 33; Mallett / Shaw 2012, p. 210.

13 Hook 2004, p. 158. On plunder in late medieval and early modern warfare, see Contamine 2000.

14 The comprehensive catalogues of Mailliet and Brause-Mansfeld show that emergency coinage does survive from earlier historical moments, but these examples are far rarer than their sixteenth-century counterparts, suggesting that they were not as easily preserved over centuries.

15 For the applicability of Michael Warner's concept of 'publics' to the circulation of early modern coins and medals, see Benzan 2009.

16 The value of fiat currency is not intrinsic (like the commodity currencies of gold and silver) or representative (as in paper currency backed by gold), but is rather determined and maintained by



3 The Pavia siege coin, from: Johann Jakob Luck, *Sylloge numismatum elegantiorum*, Strasbourg 1620, p. 55

trated publications produced by and for these audiences served to stabilize siege coinage for posterity by means of the printed image.

The early case of Pavia offers an instructive example of the circumstances in which sixteenth-century emergency coins were produced and the context of their later preservation and representation. In 1524, during the wars on the Italian peninsula that preceded the Sack of Rome, the imperial garrison at Pavia mutinied because of conditions in the town, as nine thousand waited to engage French forces. The commander Antonio de Leyva seized church treasures and, liquidating this collection of precious metal objects, had coins struck for his men.<sup>17</sup> These coins are among the earliest surviving sixteenth-century *Notmünzen*. Uniface ducats, they bear only the initials of De Leyva (A. L.) and the year.<sup>18</sup> A numismatic publication of 1620 illustrated the Pavia coin in a small engraving indicating its blunt quadrilateral borders and succinct legend (fig. 3).<sup>19</sup> The intended ephemerality of the coin is made clear by its non-standard shape (and thus weight) and its obscure markings, which would have been unfamiliar to those beyond the original context of creation.

Emergency coins usually looked crude because they represented a rupture in the systems by which early modern currency circulated. By the sixteenth century, coins were fairly regular in size and facture across a single type, and bore elaborate images and legends referring to the authorities securing monetary systems; they also sported bordered edges that were designed to discourage the practice of clipping.<sup>20</sup> Emergency coins, on the

a government. *Fiat* refers to the currency's function as a medium of exchange simply *by decree*. On the possibility of fiat currency suggested by emergency coins in materials like paper, lead, and leather, see Sargent / Velde 2001.

17 Sherer 2017, pp. 43–44.

18 Traina 1975–1977, vol. 2, pp. 203–217.

19 Luck 1620, p. 55.

20 Clipping involved the careful shaving-off of edges to win bits of precious metal without noticeably altering the coin's appearance.

other hand, show none of these refinements and in several respects appear to return to a more primitive form of coinage. They are often single-sided, lumpy, unevenly sized, with large fields of unmarked metal. It is important to note that, despite their common name, *Notmünzen* are not actually, by modern numismatic standards, coins. Instead, they reside in the category of tokens “representing value or coin” on account of the fact that, unlike true coins, their minting was usually non-standard and they were designed for only temporary usage.<sup>21</sup> However, long before numismatists developed the special category of ‘tokens’ or *Klippen* to refer to emergency currency, early modern observers described them simply as coins or, in some cases, even “war coins”.<sup>22</sup>

If the Pavia *Feldklippe* were truly an ephemeral object – ineffective as a standard coin and destined to have its precious metal repurposed for its commodity value – what explains the longevity suggested by its appearance in representation almost a hundred years later? While the coin was intended to serve as temporary currency, it swiftly developed a commemorative function that made it worthy of preservation – first by those immediate witnesses to the military context of its making, and later by connoisseurs whose collections would become the basis for illustrated numismatic publications. As a physical product of extreme wartime conditions necessitating the transformation of ecclesiastical treasure into rough coinage, the Pavia coin would have been a particularly potent memento of those events, perhaps even more specific than a weapon, which was likely to have been used on multiple occasions.

When, in February 1525, imperial troops handily defeated the French and captured Francis I, the 1524 siege coins might be understood to have undergone a transition in signification. For the imperial soldiers before the victory, the coins constituted a small token of value with the promise of future redemption and, perhaps, a material reminder of the instability that often characterized military service. But after the victory, the coins became something more: attainable souvenirs of milestone achievement. In this way, the Pavia emergency coins might be seen as rank-and-file equivalents of the singular trophies captured by elite commanders, like the French pennant and sacred relics taken and carefully preserved by the Spanish Juan Lopez Quixada.<sup>23</sup> The seizure and transformation of church plate by De Leyva the previous year became part of the narrative of triumph at Pavia, a noteworthy anecdote in accounts appearing even decades after the event.<sup>24</sup>

After periods in the possession of those who had direct contact to the event, emergency coins eventually made their way into numismatic collections. In certain cases the

21 Grierson 1975, p. 165.

22 Fickler 2004, p. 105, no. 1018 a/16.

23 A leather box that once held these objects, which bears an inscription recording the origins of its former contents, resides in the collection of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Bagnoli / Klein / Mann / Robinson 2010, p. 235, no. 139.

24 For example, mention of De Leyva’s emergency currency appeared in the account of Pavia in a much later biography of Georg von Frundsberg, another imperial commander: “[...] hat Antonius de Leua der Kirche Kleynot angegriffen / und muentz dem Kriegsvolck geschlagen”, Reißner 1572, p. 62.





4 Friedrich Brentel, Frontispiece to Johann Jakob Luck's *Sylloge numismatum elegantiorum*, Strasbourg 1620



transition into the collector's cabinet could be rapid – a gold coin minted during the siege of Vienna in 1529, for example, was sent to a humanist coin collector within weeks of the event's conclusion, suggesting the historical value that siege coins were understood to have even in the immediate aftermath of their production.<sup>25</sup> This historical value derived not simply from a geographical and temporal connection to significant events like battles and sieges, but rather from the fact of the coins' having been physically precipitated out of those events as repurposed precious metal vessels. An awareness of the transformational experience undergone by siege coins is evinced by early modern inventories that record the metallic origins of *Notmünzen* in ecclesiastical and secular treasures.<sup>26</sup>

By the time the Pavia coin appeared in Johann Jakob Luck's *Sylloge numismatum elegantiorum* in 1620, it was clearly understood as a material instantiation of the famous battle in which Frances I had been captured by imperial forces.<sup>27</sup> In Luck's text, coins are the driving evidentiary force for a history of Europe in the years 1500 to 1600, serving not as mere material footnotes but as a narrative itinerary for epochal events. The frontispiece designed by Friedrich Brentel announces the military context: the armored figures of Charles V and Henry II stand on a pediment, flanked by piles of weapons and pennants, the decorative architectural ovals filled with scenes of a naval battle (below) and the siege of a city (above) (fig. 4).<sup>28</sup> Two female allegorical figures flank the vignette of the siege. Fame grasps a trumpet whose banner bears images of ears, eyes, and tongues, while Plenty holds an overturned cornucopia, from which falls a pile of medals and coins, including several *Klippen*.<sup>29</sup>

Brentel's figure of Plenty is an updated version of a device used by the sixteenth-century Flemish artist and numismatist Hubert Goltzius in his publications on coins.<sup>30</sup> The inclusion in her horn of *Klippen* – a clearly early modern form – brings the numismatic approach to historical narrative into the seventeenth-century present. Fame's sensory organs of perception and expression suggest that coins are a means of witnessing and communicating significant events, like those portrayed in the inset cartouches. By setting the coins – the subject of the ensuing text – into relation with the royal armor and traditional weapons ornamenting the lower section and with the scenes of modern warfare in the cartouches, the frontispiece suggests that they too are 'objects of warfare' that act as unique witnesses to, or at least prompt the narration of, more recent martial histories.

In Luck's endeavor to narrate a recent history of Europe by way of coins, emergency currency played an outsized role. As the direct products of military clashes, they could bring the narrative close to the field of battle, unlike more commemorative coins and med-

25 Stielau 2015, p. 249.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

27 On Luck and the *Sylloge*, see Dekesel 2003, vol. 2, pp. 1665–1666.

28 Friedrich Brentel produced the title page and the work was published by Peter Aubry of Strasbourg. Wegner 1966.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

30 Woodall 2017, p. 668.

als. Luck's enthusiasm for this quality of authentic connection caused him to over-apply the designation of ersatz military coin. Later numismatists would criticize his *Sylloge* not only for forcing connections between extant coins and significant historical events, but also, and perhaps more egregiously, classifying too many examples as emergency currency, even going so far as to describe clearly commemorative medals as *nummi castrenses* or (military) camp money. The entry on Pavia 1524 appears under precisely this heading. Its illustrations include both known emergency coins produced in Pavia as well as medals of relevant kings and commanders – Emperor Charles V, Francis I, Antonio de Leyva.<sup>31</sup> The identification of clearly commemorative artifacts as 'field money' is, as Frederick Stopp aptly noted, "open to obvious objections, firstly that such items clearly could not be produced in extemporized field conditions, and secondly that no sane leader strikes a medal commemorating a victory or warlike episode before the fortunes of war have decided the outcome."<sup>32</sup>

The 1620 *Sylloge* also exemplifies some of the problematics involved in transforming three-dimensional numismatic artifacts into two-dimensional images in early modern printed publications. For many of the true emergency coins included, this was their first appearance in printed illustration. But the images could be extremely loose interpretations of authentic coins and medals, or even wholesale inventions.<sup>33</sup> Some early illustrations seem to slightly misinterpret siege coins, for they depart from surviving examples in orthography, image, and even the identification of the coin's original material.<sup>34</sup> There are also cases of 'apocryphal' emergency coins – illustrations based on descriptions of coins that may never have existed but which, through their repetition over time, take on the force of historical reality.<sup>35</sup>

## Representation vs. Metallic Presence

The modifications produced in the transformation of coin to print were reinforced by the copying of printed illustrations for subsequent publications. The replicated image of the coin now existed separately from its original metal source. Flattened and simplified, this iconic form took the place of what had been rough, irregular, even ugly individualities. John Cunnally has argued that early numismatic publications of the sixteenth century separated ancient coin types from their material substrates, "the mind from the

31 Luck 1620, pp. 53–55.

32 Stopp 1970, pp. 139–140. On Luck's other categorizations for coins, see the entry in Cupperi / Hirsch / Kranz / Pfisterer 2013, p. 132, no. 34.

33 Stopp found seventy examples in which the *Sylloge* engravings borrowed reverse types from a famous book of Renaissance devices. Stopp 1970, p. 140.

34 See the case of illustrations of the 1529 Vienna siege coins in Stielau 2015, pp. 257–264.

35 For one example of this phenomenon from the emergency currency issued by Pope Clement VII, see Traina 1975–1977, vol. 3, p. CCCV.

matter”, allowing them to circulate as images in a variety of materials and sizes.<sup>36</sup> This approach departed significantly from the interests of earlier Renaissance numismatists, “who looked for the *numen* in the *nummus*, and the *aura* in the *aurum*, and convinced themselves that the spirits of the ancients were somehow preserved and conveyed in these bits of metal.”<sup>37</sup> Whereas ancient coins had once been relics of the past, their physical characteristics (alloy, heft, evidence of wear) allowing them to serve as almost amuletic portals to history, by the sixteenth century the meaning of ancient coins resided less in their material – their ancient metal – and more in the images that could be extracted from their surfaces to be reproduced across the artistic field.<sup>38</sup>

The early modern dematerialization of the numismatic artifact was not, I contend, at work to the same extent for siege coins, despite their appearance in print. The characteristic that made *Notmünzen* valuable – first to soldiers and other witness-participants, and later to collectors – was not the image borne on their surfaces, but rather the coarse unevenness of their metal substrates. The rough materiality of *Klippen* indexed the emergency situations that necessitated their making and acted as the connective tissue between the possessor of the coin and the significant historical event from which the coin emerged. This process of transmission is a function of what might be called ‘metallic presence’, in which the provenance of metal and the process of its transformation lends the coin or metal artifact a special status. Evidence that siege coins functioned as physical transmitters of metallic presence can be located in their use as a keepsake worn on the body. Many surviving examples bear holes or metal frames converting them into pendants.<sup>39</sup>

A mid-seventeenth-century portrait print indicates both how siege coins might have been worn and, more importantly, how they were understood to connect historical actors to events, as mute but potent chunks of *realia* (fig. 5).<sup>40</sup> Pieter Adriaansz. van der Werff was Leiden’s burgomaster in 1573–74 when the city was besieged by Spanish forces during the Dutch Revolt. Based on earlier sculpted and printed portraits, the engraving by Pieter Philippe accompanied verses in Latin and Dutch.<sup>41</sup> Van der Werff is captured with his face turned slightly towards the right, in a recessed space behind a parapet with an inscription recording, after his name, the years of his birth and death. Surmounting the recess is a rectangular frame with a pair of martyrs’ palms that form an oval around the burgomaster’s bust, their thick stems tied together and jutting out illusionistically over the base of

36 Cunnally 1999, p. 144.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

38 Amuletic powers are usually understood to come from an object’s material, whereas talismanic powers derive from an image or inscription. On this distinction, see Láng 2008, p. 81. On prints as paper ‘surrogates’ for ancient coins that had become difficult and expensive to procure, see Viljoen 2003, p. 223.

39 On the non-currency function of coins, see Maué / Veit 1982.

40 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-OB-60.185.

41 See the drawing by Jan de Bisschop based on the sculpted bust by Hendrik de Keyser (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-T-2015-29) and the later print by Hendrik Bary (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1888-A-12753).



5 Pieter Philippe, Portrait of Pieter Adriaansz. van der Werff, detail, 1661, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

the frame. On a wide ribbon draped around his neck, Van der Werff wears one of the coins produced during the siege. Some of the Leiden coins were a subject of particular fascination because they had been made of paper, specifically the repurposed pages of religious texts.<sup>42</sup> The square coin around Van der Werff's neck is probably not intended to represent one of the paper coins, which would have been round in shape, but rather one of the silver *Klippen* produced in the later stages of the siege from church plate. Many of these coins

42 Van Gelder 1955, pp. 21–25. The paper siege coins were interesting to monetary theorists, for example, because they opened up the possibility of a nonmetallic fiat currency. See Budel 1591, book I, p. 8.

were preserved and later given elaborate, personalized embellishment that included gilding, additional engraved decoration, and fittings to become pendants.<sup>43</sup>

The siege coin – recognizable by the heraldic lion that grasps a liberty pole, flanked by the year ‘1574’ – breaks the fiction of the static portrait’s framing parapet by appearing to fall out and over the lettering below the figure. Situated between the second and third units of the Latinized moniker *Petrus Adriani Werffius* and over the bookend dates of his life, the coin intrudes inescapably into these personal details. The connection made here between insignia and name exceeds that of traditional heraldry, which links individual identity with a codified image asserting family or political affiliation. Instead, here the coin has swung into the field of Van der Werff’s identifying inscription – a material object that casts a slim shadow and overlaps by a smidgen the “W” to its right. A previous state of the engraving, printed before the addition of the lettering, shows that the coin in fact preceded the words it appears to rest on; the shadow was added later, to heighten the three-dimensional effect.<sup>44</sup> The inscription was thus designed to accommodate and emphasize the materiality of the siege coin, confirming its significance to Van der Werff’s identity as a historical figure.

The portrait depicts the Leiden *Klippe* in this manner, I suggest, because its status as a piece of *realia* – an object for which physical space has to be made, rather than a dematerialized image – more effectively associates Van der Werff with his role in the defense of the city during the siege. A commemorative medal struck in 1574 offers an instructive comparison to the siege coin’s particular claims as material witness.<sup>45</sup> Bearing on one side an aerial view of the city’s fortifications, with the Spanish forces in retreat beneath an inscription marking the date of the end of the event, the medal provides much more textual and visual information than the siege coin itself. One might expect Van der Werff to be portrayed wearing this type of medal, which, because it was produced after the conclusion of the siege, could more confidently reflect on the event’s successful outcome for the Dutch. And yet the commemorative medal lacks the crucial characteristic of the siege coin, its metallic presence, which derives from the knowledge that it was made in the direst of circumstances, when Leiden’s citizens were starving and perishing from the plague. Van der Werff attempted to keep morale up and to resist surrender, even offering, famously, his own body to be taken and eaten in order to subdue the people’s hunger.<sup>46</sup> The siege coin is an artifact from this moment, when the city’s fate still hung in the balance. It thus has the testimonial force of the eyewitness – or, in this case, of the *material* witness – to the severe conditions of wartime existence.

43 See the eighteenth-century print that records a Leiden siege coin set into a frame, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-OB-79.583.

44 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-OB-60.184.

45 British Museum, London, inv. no. G3, FD.131.

46 Pollmann 2017, p. 63.

## The Emergency Coin as Narrator

The ability of the siege coin to communicate its special provenance as the product of climactic events was restricted by the very characteristics that gave it its potent authenticity: rough facture, as well as limited image and textual fields. The initials of military commanders ('A. L.' on the Pavia coin, for example) or other abbreviations appearing on *Klippen* often assumed a temporary and narrow 'readership' and were thus, for later observers, opaque and prone to misinterpretation.<sup>47</sup> Some coins, like the examples from Leiden, came to be illustrated and described in printed materials decades after the events for which they were struck, creating an auxiliary archive that made the coins and their stories known to ever-widening audiences.<sup>48</sup> For the majority of early modern emergency coins, however, narrative contextualization came only with the advent of systematic numismatic catalogues.<sup>49</sup> With little textual information to explain their origins, they could be fairly inarticulate historical witnesses, leaving them vulnerable to simple obscurity, if not outright destruction. As if to overcome their muteness, some *Klippen* received embellishment that reasserted their role as eyewitnesses to, or even material actors in, the upheaval of war. Owners of siege coins found ways to identify and transmit the origins and meanings of these tokens by way of engraved inscriptions and other framing devices. These narratives opened up a wider and more articulate existence for what were often otherwise obdurate chunks of metal.

The blank reverse of the siege coin offered something that standard coins did not, that is, space for further marking. Ideally, all coins of a given issue were identical in form and weight, which is what allowed them to circulate freely, functioning equally for every user. Fully imprinted, they resisted the inscriptions commonly added to other precious metal artifacts, like silver plate, to record details of ownership and provenance. Countermarking is one form of intervention on the coin's surface, but the countermark must always compete with the original images and words on the imprinted surface. Coins have a long history as adventurous protagonists in so-called thing-narratives because, as media of exchange, they travel at greater speed and to greater distances, and change owners more often than functional objects like clothes and furniture. But the imagined itineraries of coins belie, or are perhaps enabled by, their inability to manifest or express experiences beyond their origins in a specific mint in a specific year, information which is usually encoded visually on a coin's surface.<sup>50</sup>

47 Stielau 2015, p. 254, note 51.

48 See for example the illustration in Budel 1591, p. 8, or seventeenth-century illustrations like Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-OB-79.591.

49 Klotz 1765; Duby 1786. See also the articles on siege coins in the numismatic periodical *Johann David Köhlers ... wöchentlich herausgegebener historischer Münz-Belustigung*, which was published between 1729 and 1765.

50 On so-called 'it-narratives', see Lamb 2016; Blackwell 2007.



The blank reverses of siege coins, conversely, invited narrative elaboration of the circumstances in which they were produced. These ranged from the simplest of phrases – *GOTHA EROBERT* (Gotha Conquered) – to more historically specific details of places and dates.<sup>51</sup> Such additions helped secure the continued existence of emergency coins by giving information that might otherwise have remained illegible to the common observer. The blank reverse was evidence of the *Klippe's* authenticity as well as an opportunity to verbally shore up that authenticity by way of an inscription. It was a reminder that these coins were not just images to be circulated in various media, but were also materially specific objects with individual provenances. A siege coin from Jülich bears on its reverse the engraved inscription: “Besieged / the 5<sup>th</sup> of September / taken 3<sup>rd</sup> February / year 1622.”<sup>52</sup> The reverse of a *Feldklippe* produced during the siege of Schweinfurt relays yet more detail of the events surrounding the siege: “June 6 1553 Margrave Albrecht of Brandenburg took Schweinfurt / June 20 1554 he burned down Bamberg, Würzburg, Nuremberg.”<sup>53</sup> Were these lines written in pride, by a soldier who had participated? Or is the list a condemnation of the margrave’s path of destruction? Whoever was responsible for the engraved message on the Schweinfurt coin likely had different associations with this coin-type than did the female members of Albrecht’s family, who kept an example of it in their personal collections, where it served, as Miriam Hall Kirch suggests, “as a remembrance” of their kinsman.<sup>54</sup>

A coin from Middelburg in Zeeland, dating to the time of its siege between 1572 and 1574, was inscribed with the following lines on its blank reverse: “When I was struck, Middelburg was under siege, so that the citizens ate out of hunger their own horses, dogs, and, as the length of the emergency increased, cats, rats and linseed waffles instead of bread.”<sup>55</sup> These lines emphasize the material transformations, occurring under duress, that were a standard detail in early modern siege narratives.<sup>56</sup> Hunger caused the citizens of Middelburg to transform pets and vermin into food; the financial strain of defending their city required them to convert accumulated treasure into coin. Another *Klippe* from Haarlem in 1572 bears an inscription incorporating the coin into a first-person narrative that refers directly to its function as wages with a phrase that reiterates linguistically the close

51 Brause-Mansfeld 1897–1903.

52 On the Jülich *Klippen* of 1621, see Neumann 1974.

53 1553 6. IVNII HAT M[arkgraf] A[lbrecht] V[on] BRAN[denburg] SCHWINFVRT INGENOMEN 1554 20 VNII VON BOM[berg] WIRTZ[burg] NVRNBER[g] VERBRENT. The current location of this coin is not known, but a cast of it resides in the Staatliche Münzsammlung in Munich. See Jordan 1979, p. 212.

54 Kirch 2017, pp. 110–111.

55 DOEN IC VVAS GESLAGEN VVAS MIDDELBURGH BELEGEN SO DATTER TVOLC AT VAN HONGERS VVEGEN PAERDEN HONDEN HVEN DVER NOOT KATTEN RATTEN ENDE LINSETVVAFELEN VOOR BROOT. Van Gelder 1955, pp. 18–19, no. 38a.

56 In Münster in 1534 to 1535, for example, hunger supposedly forced the besieged “to turn into food things that were shunned by human nature under other circumstances”. See Kerssenbrock 2007, vol. 1, p. 673.

link between payment and military labour: “When Haarlem was besieged by the Duke of Alba’s tyranny, I was given to the soldiers (*soldate*) in payment (*soldie*).”<sup>57</sup>

The “I” in these two engraved inscriptions does not endow the *Klippen* with interiority so much as it offers the beholder access to a narrative that might otherwise remain unexpressed by the objects’ physical appearance, akin to what Jesper Svenbro has called in a different context “egocentric inscriptions”.<sup>58</sup> We might be tempted to relate their narration of experience to that of figures appearing in early modern verse, like the *Landsknechte* who speak in the first person from mid-sixteenth-century woodcuts explaining their martial roles and boasting of the payments they will earn.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the *Klippen* narrate the hardships and material transformations that produced them and identify the perpetrators and victims of military conflicts. These inscribed narratives are ‘self-representations’ that construct the emergency coins not as the mere, mute product of conflict, but as articulate material witnesses to upheaval and ensuing suffering. Like the sword in Urs Graf’s drawing of a homeward-bound fighter, with its jagged edge evidencing wear and its own egocentric epigraph, the inscribed *Klippen* are objects that continue to declaim the story of war – down to the very ‘mercenary’ facts of food and money – even when its protagonists are unable, unavailable, or disinclined to do the same.

57 *DOEN HAERLEM BELEGERT WAS DOOR DUCDALVES TIRANIE WAS ICK DE’ SOLDATE GEDEVEN TOT SOLDIE*. Van Gelder 1955, p. 13, no. 2b.

58 Svenbro 1993, pp. 26–43.

59 On printed series of German soldiers explaining their roles, see Rogg 2002, pp. 260–268; Moxey 1989, pp. 67–71.

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