

Caracalla's edict of 212 conferring Roman citizenship upon (almost) all free inhabitants of the Roman empire, the so-called *constitutio Antoniniana*, continues to excite debate. Most discussion has focused on the complex legal, administrative, and fiscal issues arising from the grant of universal citizenship (e.g. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*<sup>2</sup> [1973], 279-87, 380-94). This paper argues that the edict can also be understood within the context of a set of ideological frameworks concerning imperial character, imperial patronage, and an emperor's relationship to his predecessors. Viewed in this light, the *constitutio Antoniniana* emerges as a grand symbolic gesture designed above all to demonstrate, on an empire-wide scale, the emperor's supreme *indulgentia*.

The paper begins with the official publicization of the edict during Caracalla's reign. The main evidence comes from the imperial coinage. One distinctive feature of the coinage under Caracalla was the marked prominence of the *Indulgentia* type (*RIC* 214, 300, etc.). The type had appeared during earlier reigns, but analysis of the relative frequency of the *Indulgentia* type reveals that it was far more common under Caracalla than any of his predecessors. This emphasis on the *Indulgentia* type on Caracalla's coinage is interpreted here as the regime's attempt to publicize the grant of universal citizenship on its most pervasive medium of communications—not, however, through advertisement of the edict itself, but rather, in characteristic Roman imperial style, of the virtue that had underpinned it: *indulgentia*.

In order to establish the connection between the *Indulgentia* type and the edict of 212, the paper then turns to analysis of the term *indulgentia*. *Indulgentia* was regularly employed in conjunction with other virtues, especially *liberalitas*, *munificentia* and *clementia*, and often meant simply "generosity;" it also had a paternalistic flavor (cf. Cic. *Cael.* 79). With reference to the emperor, *indulgentia* was used most often to characterize various imperial *beneficia*, including grants of citizenship (Cotton, *Chiron* 1984, 254-55). This usage is attested in both literary (e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 10.5, 10.106, *Pan.* 39.2) and documentary (e.g. the *Tabula Banasitana*, ll. 4-5) sources. The association of the term *indulgentia* with generosity and paternalism in general, and with imperial grants of citizenship in particular, suggests that this was the most appropriate virtue through which to commemorate the grant of universal citizenship.

The paper concludes by measuring the impact of the *Indulgentia* coin type through analysis of Italian and provincial honorific inscriptions for the emperor. Inscriptions employing the epithet *indulgentissimus* were erected throughout the second century, but really proliferated under Caracalla. Inscriptions lauding Caracalla as *indulgentissimus* have been found from Italy (e.g. *ILS* 6597), North Africa (*ILS* 2933), and Gaul (*CIL* 12.1851) to the Rhine frontier (*CIL* 13.6531), the Balkans (*CIL* 3.5745), and Dacia (*AE* 1979.492). In addition, the formulaic phrase "*super omnes retro principes*" first became common on honorific inscriptions under Caracalla (Scheithauer, *ZPE* 1988, 155-77). This epigraphic evidence shows that provincials—many of them enfranchised by the edict of 212—understood the message that Caracalla, as author of the *constitutio Antoniniana*, was an exemplar of *indulgentia*, as his coinage asserted, and indeed that his *indulgentia* surpassed that of all his predecessors.

The legal aspects of the *constitutio Antoniniana* are undoubtedly important. But to focus exclusively on these, as most of the scholarship on Caracalla's edict has done, is to miss the pronounced ideological resonance of this grand gesture. This paper shows that a symbolic interpretation of the edict can be illuminating, and will, I hope, contribute to a better understanding of public discourse and imperial ideology in the Severan age.

