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Learning from Mistakes: Iconographic and Artistic Errors
by Late Antique Die Engravers

One of the most fundamental questions about Roman coinage is the extent to which the messages of reverse types were intentional propaganda on the part of the issuing authority, and to what extent those messages were understood by those who used the coins. This paper looks at a rather unorthodox source to shed new light on this old question – the imitations of the bronze coins of the Gallic emperor Postumus (A.D. 260-269). In a period when silver coins had almost been debased to the point of being bronze themselves, Postumus made the unusual decision to strike large bronze *sestertii* and double *sestertii*. After four years, the experiment was abandoned, but the need for the fractional coins seems to have remained, with imitations being struck at local workshops in the Western Empire until at least A.D. 260. Unlike the more common imitations of contemporary *antoniniani*, the imitations of Postumus' bronze coins had a much larger field on which the die engraver could practice his craft. An examination of these coins reveals a number of interesting mistakes, suggesting that even the more talented of the unofficial engravers had only a minimal understanding of the iconography of the official coins they copied.