‘Debasement. Manipulation of Coin Standards in Pre-Modern Monetary Systems

 24-25 March 2017

The debasement of coinage, particularly of silver, was a common feature of pre-modern monetary systems. Most coinages were issued by state authorities and the condition of a coinage is often seen (rightly or wrongly) as a indicator of the broader fiscal health of the state that produced it.

On 24-25 March 2017 an international workshop was held in the Institute of Advanced Study, Millburn House, with speakers from the UK, the United States, France and Austria, to discuss the motives behind debasement in ancient and medieval coinages. It was organized as part of a three-year, AHRC-funded project run jointly by Kevin Butcher (Department of Classics and Ancient History, University of Warwick) and Matthew Ponting (University of Liverpool), and additional funding was generously provided by the Humanities Research Centre and by the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Warwick.

The programme included papers by Martin Allen (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), Gilles Bransbourg (American Numismatic Society), Colin Elliott (Indiana University, Bloomington), Nick Mayhew (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), Julien Olivier (Bibliothèque nationale de France), Rory Naismith (King’s College, London), Arnaud Suspène (Université d’Orléans / CNRS), and Bernhard Woytek (Austrian Academy of Sciences). The venue offered an excellent forum for cross-disciplinary discussion for specialists in the monetary history of different periods and in the metallurgy of coinage, and examined a broad range of potential causes of debasement: from fiscal problems, to problems of supply of raw materials, to changes in minting technologies.

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