FACES ON POWER
IMPERIAL PORTRAITURE ON ROMAN COINS

NICHOLSON MUSEUM

Peter Brennan, Michael Turner & Nicholas L. Wright
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Faces of Power
Imperial Portraiture on Roman Coins

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Virginia Buckingham Graphic Design.

Photographs by Rowan Conroy.

COVER & ADJACENT IMAGES:
DOMITIAN
ROME MINT: 75–79 AD
AUREUS
OBV: CAESAR AVG F DOMITIANVS;
LAUREATE, BEARDED HEAD OF DOMITIAN R.; DOTTED BORDER
REV: CERES AVGVST.
DRAPE CERES STANDING L. HOLDING EAR OF CORN IN R. HAND, SCEPTRE IN L.; DOTTED BORDER
NM 2004.2624 (BMC 322.)
CONTENTS

FOREWORD 5
Michael Turner

FACES OF POWER 7
Peter Brennan

A QUICK GUIDE TO ROMAN COINS 9
Nicholas L. Wright
Romans – The people with the three names 9
Legends & their abbreviations 10
Greek Imperial coinage 12
Glossary of descriptive terms & abbreviations 12

COIN DENOMINATIONS 14
Primary Imperial Roman denominations 27 BC – 294 AD
Primary Imperial Roman denominations after 294 AD
Primary civic (Greek Imperial) denominations in Eastern provinces

THE COINS 15
Peter Brennan

THE DYNASTIES 79
Nicholas L. Wright
Coin Index 82
FOREWORD
Michael Turner

Faces of Power: Imperial Portraiture on Roman Coins
is the catalogue of an exhibition held in the Nicholson
Museum at the University of Sydney that opened in
April 2007. 132 coins trace the changing face of power
(both real and perceived) from 44 BC to 491 AD, from
Julius Caesar to Zeno.

Every effort has been made to use coins from the
Nicholson’s extensive collection, however 33 were
borrowed, either where there was a gap in the
Museum’s collection, or where a borrowed coin could
be used to better demonstrate the concept of the use
and abuse of power. I would like to thank the follow-
ing for so generously lending coins as well as passion-
ately discussing them: Dr Ken Sheedy, Director of
the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies
(ACANS) at Macquarie University, Dr Andrew
Wright, and Walter Holt, as well as an anonymous
Sydney collector, who came good with one of my
personal favourites, the redoubtable Galla Placidia
(coin 130). I would also like to express my apprecia-
tion for the assistance given by Colin Pitchfork and
Jim Noble of Noble Numismatics.

The exhibition and the catalogue are a testament
to the dedication of two people – Dr Peter Brennan
and Nicholas Wright. Peter Brennan has written the
majority of this catalogue, including the entries for all
but two of the coins, in his own whimsical yet highly
scholarly fashion. Nicholas Wright has provided all of
the details for each coin as well as most of the back-
ground information for both the exhibition and the
catalogue. Both gave freely of their time and for that I
am eternally grateful. It has been a joy to work with
them; as it has with Rowan Conroy, photographer of
the coins, and Virginia Buckingham, designer of the
catalogue. The intention of the catalogue is that it will
be read in its own right as a continuous narrative of
the history of the Roman Empire.

The imagery of power has always been seductive.
In an earlier pre-modern world, before our current
one of image overload, he who controlled the image
(and the written word) controlled the people, and their
minds – or at least tried to. The way in which power-
ful men and women have used imagery to promote
the agendas of themselves, their institutions, or of
those they controlled, is as fascinating as the media
they used. Coins, especially of the Roman imperial
rulers, are a telling window on the minds and per-
ceived needs, hopes and ambitions of such figures.

From Elagabalus with a horn coming out of his
forehead describing himself as the priest of the
Eastern Sun God, Elagabal on coin 48, to the forlorn
hope of Valerian on coin 70. The reverse of this coin,
minted between 256 and 260 AD, bears the legend
‘RESTITVT[OR] ORIENTIS’ – proclaiming Valerian
as the Restorer of the East (to Roman rule). In 260
AD, he was captured at the Battle of Edessa by the
Persians, becoming the only Roman Emperor to die
in captivity – the personal slave of King Shapur until
his gruesome death.

By their very nature, coins are durable in both the his-
torical and the archaeological context. They are small
and unbreakable. They could be easily hidden. They
were not at the whim of later historical exaggeration
or rewriting. They are a true reflection of their time –
of a ‘face of power’s’ perception of what he had done,
what he was going to do, what he was going to get
others to do, or what others were going to get him or
her to do.
THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE 2ND CENTURY AD

MAP BY NICHOLAS L. WRIGHT
FACES OF POWER
Peter Brennan

The story of Rome does not begin with Julius Caesar, but with the settlement of a motley group of asylum-seekers, boat people from the East and local brigands in a mythical past. 753 BC was as good a date as any. The story of the Roman Empire also had a long past, having grown topsy-like, with the conquest of Latins, Italians, Carthaginians, Iberians, Greeks, Macedonians and a mosaic of Oriental peoples before Caesar added Gauls and Germans on the Roman side of the Rhine. When, however, Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC and led an army to Italy to defend his rank and honour, he cast a die that was to turn a Republican face of power into an autocratic one. Caesar's fortune and virtue led him to victory over Pompey at Pharsalus and inexorably to the Rome of the emperors. When he was made Dictator for life in 44 BC, he had become the first ruler of Rome since Brutus had expelled the Tarquin kings and entrusted the state to the Senate and Roman People (SPQR) in 509 BC.

Rome was still not quite ready for a ruler. Another Brutus, along with others of Caesar's friends and enemies, killed the would-be new king of Rome in the name of a freedom and a republic (or, as they might have put it, democratic) state. For this, and their subsequent struggle with Caesar's political heirs, they were to be called “the last of the Romans”, the first of a long line of Romans to be so named for trying to save the incorporative Roman state from itself and to conserve its civilisation in a pure form. Rome could not be quarantined from its nature and its fate.

In 31 BC, Caesar's adoptive son, calling himself Imperator Caesar divi filius (General Caesar, Son of the Deified One) and soon Augustus (Revered One), won the final war at Actium against his remaining rivals, Anthony and Cleopatra, and set about winning the peace. He was ruler in all but name, but carefully avoided all titles or posts that might suggest kingship or uncontrolled rule. Without Julius Caesar, Caesar Augustus would have been impossible. But it was Caesar Augustus who managed the transition from a republican system into the long line of Roman emperors that was to preside over the successes and the failures of the next centuries. The system threw up some remarkable men and was strong enough to survive many madmen, megalomaniacs and adventurers before coming to an end – in the western part of the Empire with the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 AD or, as some prefer, the death of Julius Nepos in 480 AD; in the eastern part of the empire not until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The image of Roman emperor is too potent for there to be a last Roman emperor. The image – and often the name – has been kept alive in Germanic Holy Roman emperors, Russian Tsars, 20th century dictators and modern films.

This exhibition uses coins to reflect on some few of the millions of stories that make up the history of Roman emperors. It stretches from the prototype emperor Julius Caesar to the last Roman emperors in the West and their contemporaries in Constantinople. Coins, like statues, give a physical face to power, sometimes realistic, sometimes idealised, not only of emperors, but also of those whose faces on coins show their importance in the physiognomy of power. These are the men and women who shaped the emperor's power; would-be heirs who never made it; failed usurpers; imperial women – the wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, even aunts and nieces. Coins convey other messages to those who cared to look beyond the faces to the words and visual images. This is the world as the Roman government wished it to look: the harmony of the state; the prosperity and success of the times; the virtues of the emperor and his family. Such recurring images are sometimes justified by the reality, but often represent a programme or a mere nod to an ideal or even an attempted cover for civil war or economic crisis or tyrannical rule. One message is constant from the first coin to the last: Roman emperors bring victory for the state. Julius Caesar brings victory through his divine ancestress, the goddess Venus. The last emperors of Rome bring victory through the Christian god represented by his cross or labarum – in this case, as so often, the appearance of Victory on a coin is a sign of its absence; it is a promise or no more than a hope.

There is another constant – the presence of religious ideas, a crucial facet of Roman power. Every coin links its imperial figure to the divine world, whether a Roman world full of gods or one in which the Christian God had triumphed.
executed yet another alleged conspirator. Still, how ever many he killed, he could not kill his successor. Some thought it better to rule through fear, even hatred, others through love or respect or trust – an age-old conundrum.

Most knew that circuses were more important than bread. Most knew the value of public image and propaganda; if a good deed, or a bad, were not recorded or publicised, it might as well not have existed. It was coins that pre-eminently provided the faces and proclaimed the publicity and values of those who ruled the Roman world. This was why they should remain as emperor. But coins were even more important in circulating wealth, especially to the soldiers, and in the later empire, the bureaucrats, for whose pay and other rewards the gold coins at least were primarily minted. This was the other reason for their staying in power. Coins give access to both tools of power.

In a sense every generation got the Roman emperor it deserved, for the story of Rome's emperors is also the story of the changes in the government and civilisation that was Rome. It mirrors the erosion of relative freedom into absolutism, despite intermittent periods of benevolent dictatorship alongside dark despotism. It mirrors the globalisation of the Roman imperial elite, as Rome incorporated peoples and cultures into its adaptive culture and threw up emperors from outside Rome and Italy – from Spain, from Africa, from the Levant, from the Balkans. It mirrors the triumphal march of Christianity from its origins in an obscure sect of the despised Jewish culture to be the religion of the Roman emperor and the Roman state. It mirrors the impact of the settlement of largely Germanic peoples within the Roman Empire, as immigrants and invaders, as they became the backbone of Rome's military force from the 4th century AD. While it was too much of a jump for their generals and kings to become Roman emperors, they made, controlled, and unmade Roman emperors, married into their families and carried much of the Roman way into the medieval kingdoms. But these they ruled, not as Roman emperors, but as kings and that is another story.

The context for these coins is the larger history and mythology of Roman emperors. How did one become Roman emperor? It was best to be linked to the existing dynasty. Relatives by blood were expected successors – and often suffered from the fears of reigning emperors, not always unfairly, and of successful usurpers. Adoption by the existing emperor was almost as good. Even posthumous adoptions, looked on with suspicion, were generally accepted as giving legitimation. Marriage to a female relative of the emperor raised hopes (and fears). Marriage to his widow or a surviving close relative strengthened claims, if the woman had been a power in her own right. Family trees of imperial families reveal amazing continuities and links. If you were not linked to the imperial family, then the support of the military was really the only way to go, often through a military coup, either in Rome or at court, with the support of the Praetorian or palace guards, or in the provinces, with the support of the increasingly regionalised Roman armies.

How did one remain a Roman emperor? There is no easy answer, for it is only partly to do with the way each emperor used a power that was absolute in fact and limited only by his personality, character and social pressures to conform to idealised traditional Roman forms of behaviour. To some, becoming emperor was like entering Aladdin's Cave and taking all its treasures – untrammelled power, sex, wealth, luxury. Being Roman emperor could be fun, though those who found it so usually set loose a Pandora's Box of troubles on the world – and eventually themselves. To others to become Roman emperor was to take on a watch, a duty assigned by training, ambition or fate: to preserve the greatness of Rome or to change the world for the better. Being ruler of Rome was not meant to be easy. Some of the better emperors tired of their watch and looked forward to its end, but only one, Diocletian, voluntarily abdicated. Assassination was an occupational hazard.

Conspiracy was rife, though no one believed in its existence, unless it was successful, as more than one emperor lamented, with crocodile tears, as he
The production of coinage is generally believed to have begun in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in the seventh century BC. From there it gradually spread east and west, being first adopted as the standard currency in Rome during the Republican period, perhaps around 269 BC.

The exhibition *Faces of Power: Imperial Portraiture on Roman Coins* covers the period from 48 BC with the dictatorship of Julius Caesar through to the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD. During this period, the production of coinage was ultimately controlled by the government and the images portrayed on either side of each coin were chosen with care to convey a message to the people of the empire. Even if an illiterate labourer could not read the legend (the script around the edge of the coin), he could understand the images.

The obverse, or ‘Heads’, side of the coin usually portrayed the emperor or someone related to him, his father, mother, wife or son for instance. The reverse, or ‘Tails’, side of the coin carried a message. This might be an image of a god that the emperor wanted associated with his reign such as Victory or Pax (Peace), or it might commemorate a famous event such as a military victory or the opening of the Colosseum.

What was shown on the coinage and what we now know happened in reality were often very different, but the coin image expressed an idea that the emperor wanted to be believed. During the Roman Republic, and in the early days of Empire, the magistrate in charge of the production of coinage would add his own name to the legend. This practice does not seem to have continued on imperial coinage after the reign of Augustus.

**ROMANS**

**THE PEOPLE WITH THE THREE NAMES**

Within the Italian system of personal names, free-born men bore three or more names, the *tripia nomina*. The first of these, the *praenomen*, was chosen from a small group of names used to distinguish between individuals within a family. Octavian (Augustus) created a new *praenomen* for himself, Imperator, or ‘victorious general’. During the reign of Nero, Imperator (‘emperor’) began to be used as the first name for all Roman rulers.

*Praenomina* were generally abbreviated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Aulus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Decimus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Gaius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cn.</td>
<td>Gnaeus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>Lucius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Marcus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
<td>Publius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>Quintus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ser.</td>
<td>Servius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex.</td>
<td>Sextus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti.</td>
<td>Tiberius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.</td>
<td>Titus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second name, the *nomen* or family name, was used by men and women as well as by freed slaves, who received the *nomen* of their former master or mistress. Examples of *nomina* include Julius/Julia, Aurelius/Aurelia.

The third name, the *cognomen*, was an acquired nickname, initially descriptive or commemorative, such as Calvus (bald) or Caesar (fine head of hair). It subsequently became an inherited name to distinguish between branches of the same family.
Imperial coinage often included an abbreviated nomen and cognomen, the following are represented in this exhibition.

A  Aurelius  
AEL  Aelius/Aelia  
ALB  Albinus  
AVREL  Aurelius  
CAEL  Caelius  
CL or CLAVD  Claudius  
CLOD  Clodius  
DID  Didius  
ETR  Etruscus  
ESV  Esuvius  
FL  Flavius/Flavia  
GAL  Galerius  
HER  Herennius/Herennia  
HOSTIL  Hostilianus  
IVL  Julius/Julia  
LIC  Licinius  
M  Messius  
MAG  Magnus  
MES  Messius  
PLA  Placidus  
OPEL  Opellius  
OTACIL  Otacilia  
SEP  Septimius  
SEV or SEVER  Severus  
TREB  Trebonianus  
VAL  Valerius  
VIB  Vibia  

After the cognomina, successive agnomen could be adopted to further identify individuals within a family. The agnomen might form a title celebrating a victory, such as Germanicus or Armeniacus, or recognise an adoptive father, such as Marcus Aurelius taking the name Antoninus. The title ‘Augustus’ was an agnomen invented for the first emperor.

From the second century AD Roman nomenclature became ever more complex. Romans added names to show all sorts of links, such as to their extended families and even political friends. The consul of 169 AD is recorded with 39 names!

LEGENDS & THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

It was customary to abbreviate many of the titles employed on Imperial Roman coinage. The following list constitutes the most common abbreviations found on the coinage of this exhibition.

AEQVITAS  equity  
AETERNITAS  eternity  
ARM  Armeniacus  
– victor over Armenians  
AVG  Augustus/Augusta  
AVGG  two Augusti ruling jointly  
AVGGG  three Augusti ruling jointly  
AVGVSTVS  title meaning revered; came to be equated with ‘emperor’  
AVGVSTA  title given to imperial women; indicative of a virtue/quality  
BEATA  blessed  
C  Caesar  
CAELESTIS  celestial/of the stars  
CAES  Caesar  
COMITI  to the companion  
CONCORDIA  harmony  
CONOB  indication of the purity on the metal of the coin  
CONSECRATIO  deification of a member of the imperial family  
COS  consul  
D N  Dominus Noster – our lord  
DACIA  personification of the province of Dacia  
DD NN  Domini Nostri – our lords  
DEI SOLIS  of the Sun God  
DEORVM  of the gods  
DICT  Dictator – an official position giving a man absolute authority  
DIVA  deified imperial female  
DIVI F  divi filius – son of a god  
DIVIN  divinus – divine/sacred  
DIVVS  deified imperial male  
ELAGAB  Elagabalus  
ET  and  
EXERCITVVM  of the armies  
F  filius – son; filia – daughter  
FEL  Felicitas  
FELICITAS  happiness/success  
FELIX  happy/successful
FIDES good faith/loyalty
FIL filius – son; filia – daughter
FORTVNA luck/fortune
FVNDATOR founder
GENIVS embodying spirit
of a person/group/place
GERM Germanicus
– victor over Germans
GLORIA glory
HERCUL Hercules
IVDAEA personification of the province
of Judaea
IMP Imperator
– victory acclamation to a general
unconquered
INVICTVS to Jupiter
IVN junior
IVVENT Iuventus
– personification of youth
LIB liberalitas – public liberality/
generosity/largess
LIBERALITAS public liberality/generosity/
largess
MARTI to Mars
MAT Mater – mother
MAX Maximus – the greatest
MEMORIAE to the memory of
MILIT of the soldiers
MILITVM of the soldiers
MVLTIS for/with, many
N Noster – our;
Nobilissimus – the most noble;
Nepos – grandchild
NEP Nepos – grandchild
NOB Nobilissimus – the most noble,
used by heirs/junior emperors
OB C S ob cives servatos
– for having saved citizens
OPI to Ops
OPTIMO to the best
ORIENTIS of the east
OST Ostia – the port of Rome
P F Pius Felix – dutiful and successful
P FEL Pius Felix – dutiful and successful
P M Pontifex Maximus (Chief Priest)
P P Pater Patriae
– the Father of the Fatherland
P R Populi Romani
– of the Roman people
PACIS of peace
PARTH Parthicus – victor over Parthians
PAX peace
PERP perpetuus – perpetual/lifelong
PIETAS duty/piety
PIVS dutiful towards the gods/
family/fatherland
PON M Pontifex Maximus
PONT MAX Pontifex Maximus
POPVLI ROMANI of the Roman people
PRINCIPI to the leader
PROPVRGNATORI to the defender
PROVID Providentia – foresight
PROVIDENTIA foresight
PVBLICA public
PVDICITIA modesty/chastity
QVIES rest/relaxation/retirement
REDVX returning
REIPVBLICA of the state
RESTITVT Restorer
ROMA personification of Rome
ROMANORVM of the Romans
S C Senatus Consulto – by decree
of the senate of Rome
SACERD sacerdos – priest
SAECVLI of the Age
SALVS health and welfare
SARM Sarmaticus
– victor over Sarmatians
SECVRITAS personification of security
SOL god of the sun
SPES hope
SPQR Senatus Populusque Romanus
– the senate and people of Rome
T P; TR P; TR POT Tribunica Potestas – one of
the legal powers of the emperor
TEMPOR temporum – of present times
TRANQVILLITAS tranquillity
VIRTVS virtue, particularly bravery
VOT Votis – with vows to the gods/
offered/redeemed
VRBS ROMA the City of Rome
XV VIR SACR FAC member of the board of 15 priests
in charge of sacred matters
Roman numerals in coin legends indicate the number of times the person had held an office, won an award, or made a public distribution. For example, COS V shows that the coin was minted in or after the fifth consulship of the person named; LIBERALITAS IIII records that four public largesses had been made; TR P II indicates the second year of holding the tribunician power. As Tribunicia Potestas was taken by the emperor on a yearly basis, the presence of TR P or its variants as part of a coin legend can precisely date a coin to within a specific year.

GREEK IMPERIAL COINAGE

The cities of the Greek speaking East had been minting their own coinage long before Rome's rise to power. It was customary under the Empire to allow many eastern cities the right to produce coinage with Greek legends for local use. Such coinage would often display an honorary portrait of a prominent Imperial family member on the obverse and an image of local importance on the reverse. As with Republican Roman coins, the city magistrates in charge of the Greek civic mints would often add their name to the coin legend. The practice continued longer on Greek Imperial issues than on their western counterparts and forms the key to providing definite dates for the Greek issues. The following Greek words occur in legends in this exhibition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Text</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ΑΓΡΙΠΠΕΙΝΑΝ</td>
<td>Agrippina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΝΘΥΠΑΤΩ</td>
<td>proconsul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ</td>
<td>Antinoüs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΙΧΜΟΚΛΗΣ</td>
<td>Achimokles – a local magistrate’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΟΥΙΟΛΑ</td>
<td>Aviola – name of a proconsul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΑΝΤΟΚ</td>
<td>imperator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔΕΜΟΣΤΡΑΤΟΥ</td>
<td>Demostratos – a local magistrate’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔΟΜΙΤΙΑΝΟΣ</td>
<td>Domitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔΟΜΙΤΙΑ</td>
<td>Domitia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΓΑΙΟΝ</td>
<td>Gaius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΓΕΡΜΑΝΙ</td>
<td>Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΓΕΡΜΑΝΙΚΟΝ</td>
<td>Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΓΕΡΜΑΝΙΚΟΣ</td>
<td>Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΕΦ</td>
<td>Ephesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΕΦΕ</td>
<td>Ephesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΕΠΙ</td>
<td>under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΗΡΟΟΣ</td>
<td>Hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΚΑΙ</td>
<td>Caesar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΚΑΙΣ</td>
<td>Caesar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΚΑΙΣΑΡΑ</td>
<td>Caesar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΚΛΑΥΔΙ</td>
<td>Claudius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΚΟΥΣΙΝΟΣ</td>
<td>Kousinos – a local magistrate’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΜΕΣΣΑΙΝΑ</td>
<td>Messalina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Messalina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΜΕΝΟΦΑΝΗ</td>
<td>Menophanes – a local magistrate’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΝΕΡΩΝ</td>
<td>Nero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΠΟΠΠΑΙΑ</td>
<td>Poppaea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΡΩΜΗ</td>
<td>Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΕ</td>
<td>Sebastos – Augustus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΕΒΑ</td>
<td>Sebastos – Augustus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΕΒΑΣ</td>
<td>Sebastos – Augustus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ</td>
<td>Sebastas – Augusta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΧΙΟΙΕ</td>
<td>Seios – a local magistrate’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΟΣ</td>
<td>strategos – general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΤΙ</td>
<td>Tiberius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΖΜΥΡΑΙΩΝ</td>
<td>of the people of Smyrna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GLOSSARY OF DESCRIPTIVE TERMS & ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aegis</td>
<td>goat skin breastplate usually used by Minerva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquitas</td>
<td>personification of equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aeternitas</td>
<td>personification of eternity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>god of light, music and the arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aquila</td>
<td>eagle topped legionary standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustus</td>
<td>title meaning revered which came to be equated with ‘emperor’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>title given to imperial women/indicative of a virtue/quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caduceus</td>
<td>herald’s staff, usually used by Mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caesar</td>
<td>personal name adopted by the emperor and later his heir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cantharus</td>
<td>a deep bowled drinking cup with vertical handles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Rho</td>
<td>the first letters of the Greek word Christos/Christ’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concordia personification of harmony  Mars god of war
Consul chief magistrate of Rome Mercury messenger of the gods, god of travel and commerce
cornucopiae ‘Horn of Plenty’, Minerva goddess of travel and commerce
a symbol of prosperity modius a basket of grain occasionally worn as a headdress
cuirassed wearing a cuirass/ armoured breastplate Neptune god of the seas
Dacia personification of the province Dacia Obv: obverse
Dacia diadem simple Greek style fillet-crown Pater Patriae Father of the Fatherland
Dioscuri heroic twin sons of Jupiter, patrons of the nobility patera a shallow bowl with vertical handle used to sacrifice to the gods
Elagabalus Syrian son god Pax personification of peace
Felicitas personification of prosperity Petas personification of duty/piety
and success Pontifex Maximus chief priest of Rome
Fides personification of good faith and loyalty Providentia personification of foresight
Fortuna personification of luck/ fortune prow the front section of a ship
Genius personification of the embodying spirit of a person/group/place Pudicitia personification of modesty and chastity
Globe symbolic of rule over the world Quies personification of rest/ relaxation/retirement
Harpocrates Greco-Egyptian god of youth and silence radiate wearing a crown made of rays of light
Hercules son of Jupiter who was deified because of his labours on earth quadriga chariot drawn by four horses
hem-hem crown headdress, usually worn by Harpocrates reverse Rev:
Isis Greco-Egyptian universal mother goddess Roma personification of Rome
Imperator Victorious general, the origin of the modern word ‘emperor’ Securitas personification of security
Juno queen of the gods/ goddess of marriage Serapis Greco-Egyptian god of the underworld and healing
Jupiter king of the gods/ god of the sky simpulum a small ladle
l. left togate wearing a toga
labarum military standard showing the Chi-Rho monogram tripod three-legged stand
laureate wearing a laurel wreath tripod-lebes a bowl supported by a three-legged stand
Liberalitas personification of liberality/ generosity/largess Venus goddess of love and beauty, ancestor of Julius Caesar
lyre musical instrument similar to a harp Vesta goddess of the hearth and home
mappa white cloth dropped to start the races in the Circus Virtus personification of virtue, particularly bravery
# COIN DENOMINATIONS

## PRIMARY IMPERIAL ROMAN DENOMINATIONS 27 BC – 294 AD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gold</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aureus</td>
<td>25 denarii/400 asses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinarius</td>
<td>200 asses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silver</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antoninianus</td>
<td>32 asses (from 214 AD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denarius</td>
<td>16 asses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinarius</td>
<td>8 asses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bronze</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sestertius</td>
<td>4 asses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dupondius</td>
<td>2 asses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As</td>
<td>1/2 as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semis</td>
<td>1/3 as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrans</td>
<td>1/4 as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sextans</td>
<td>1/6 as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncia</td>
<td>1/12 as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semuncia</td>
<td>1/24 as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PRIMARY IMPERIAL ROMAN DENOMINATIONS AFTER 294 AD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gold</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aureus</td>
<td>uncertain relationship to other denominations, struck at 60 per lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidus</td>
<td>replaced the aureus from 310 AD struck at 72 per lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semissis</td>
<td>1/2 solidus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tremis</td>
<td>1/3 solidus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silver</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siliqua</td>
<td>silver fraction worth 1/24 solidus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argenteus</td>
<td>100 denarius communis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miliarense</td>
<td>replaced the argenteus from 310 AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bronze</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XII follis</td>
<td>20 denarius communis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follis</td>
<td>10 denarius communis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoninianus</td>
<td>4 denarius communis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiate</td>
<td>2 denarius communis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laureate</td>
<td>1 denarius communis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PRIMARY CIVIC (GREEK IMPERIAL) DENOMINATIONS IN EASTERN PROVINCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silver</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tetradrachm</td>
<td>4 drachms/24 obols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drachm</td>
<td>basic unit of currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obol</td>
<td>1/6 drachm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bronze</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Æ unit</td>
<td>In the Greek east, there were few occasions where bronze coinage was struck with any indication of its denomination, therefore there is an uncertain relationship between the various sizes of bronze coins and between bronze coinage and silver denominations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE COINS

PETER BRENNAN
CONVENTIONS USED FOR COIN DESCRIPTIONS IN THE CATALOGUE

EMPEROR NUMBER / EMPEROR NAME
MINT: DATE
DENOMINATION
OBV: OBVERSE LEGEND; OBVERSE TYPE
REV: REVERSE LEGEND; REVERSE TYPE
COLLECTION INVENTORY NUMBER
(GENERAL REFERENCE WORK AND NUMBER)

GENERAL REFERENCE WORKS
BMC BRITISH MUSEUM CATALOGUE
CNR I CORPUS NUMMORUM ROMANORUM I
HUNT HUNTERIAN COLLECTION
NM NICHOLSON MUSEUM
RIC ROMAN IMPERIAL COINAGE
RPC ROMAN PROVINCIAL COINAGE
JULIUS CAESAR

Julius Caesar, conqueror of Gaul – and Britain, though Britons were less aware of this than Romans who read Caesar’s *Gallic War* unthinkingly – was by 48 BC ruler of Rome. He was a man in a hurry. At his age Alexander the Great, a man and image never far from the mind of Roman generals and emperors, had conquered the world and long since been dead. By 44 BC Caesar was *dictator for life* – the post had been held by others, but only for brief periods during times of crisis. He set stamping the Roman state in his own image.

Caesar is most remembered as general, thanks to his war commentaries. His post as *pontifex maximus* should however not be ignored. The two were inextricably linked. It was in their sense of religion that Romans believed they were superior to all other peoples. Their military success depended on their right relationship with the gods.

The coin describes Caesar as *dictator* for life, depicts him with veiled head as *pontifex* and shows on its reverse his ancestress Venus offering victory and the sceptre of rule. Is it offered to Rome or is it to Caesar, dictator, priest and Roman victor? Or are Rome and Caesar already inseparable? Within a year, on the Ides of the next March, Caesar was dead. Britons sighed with relief, so did Parthians, for now Romans would return to killing each other. Could one destroy Caesar without destroying Rome?

AUGUSTUS

20 years of civil dissension later, Rome had a new ruler, the adopted son of the dead but now deified Julius. The adolescent butcher of the civil wars was soon to turn himself into Augustus (the Revered one) and later into the father of the fatherland. He set the mould for Roman emperors, even when it was broken. Unlike Caesar, he was not in a hurry. *Festina lente* (hasten slowly) was the maxim of this consummate politician.

The great expansion of the Roman Empire under Augustus is often forgotten, though not by Poros, ‘king of 600 kings’ in India (or so he claimed), who sent eight slaves in scented loincloths with gifts including a freak, large snakes, a large turtle and a partridge larger than a vulture. Few forget the disastrous loss of three legions under Varus in the Teutoburg Forest, or the end of the German expansion, or the image of the dishevelled emperor wandering his palace lamenting: *Quinctilius Varus, give me back my legions.*

Images of victories littered Rome and the Empire in his lifetime, as on our coin, which celebrates the tenth of the 21 occasions he was acclaimed *imperator* for major victories. These Alpine and Raetian victories were won by his stepsons, Tiberius and Drusus, in 15 BC and led to the annexation of these areas. But credit is given only to the ultimate commander, Augustus, and to his patron god Apollo, the civilising god more associated with the peace and civilisation that justified such victories than with victories *per se.*
JULIA & MARCELLUS

The Fates shall allow the earth one glimpse of this young man – one glimpse, no more. Too powerful had been Rome’s stock, o gods, had such gifts been granted it to keep.

Marcellus is chiefly remembered as this last figure in the parade of future Roman heroes waiting in the underworld to be reborn in Virgil’s Aeneid 6.860–886, a figure of hope unfulfilled. Things had been so different in 25 BC. A great celebration in Rome had marked the marriage of the 17 year old only son of Augustus’ sister Octavia to his only child, Julia. She was 14. In the same year, in a far off province, this coin was minted by the provincial governor Acilius to honour Augustus in association with two figures, who can only be Julia and Marcellus.

These were the faces of Rome’s future. Marcellus had already figured in the Actian triumph of Augustus in 29 BC, riding the right-hand horse beside his triumphal chariot; Tiberius, Augustus’ stepson, had ridden the left. Fate had other plans for both riders. Marcellus died, aged 20 and was the first of several would-be successors of Augustus to be buried in his Mausoleum.

Julia’s role as the instrument of her father’s plans for a dynastic succession was just beginning. She next married Agrippa, her father’s contemporary and best general and then in 12 BC, her step-brother Tiberius. What a scenario for the two mothers-in-law, Scribonia and Livia. In 2 BC, the year in which Augustus became father of the fatherland, the troublesome Julia was sent into exile. It was not only Marcellus who was hope unfulfilled.
TIBERIUS

Could this have been the very coin type presented to Jesus to produce the immortal, though also mischievous, words: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s?

The reign of Tiberius began with the death of Agrippa Postumus, the last surviving son of Julia and Agrippa. His mysterious death set the tone of fear, suspicion and terror that was to turn a still relatively free state into despotism. In the name of the security of the emperor and the state, and in response to conspiracies, real or imagined, measures were introduced to restrict the civil liberties and freedoms of the people of Rome. The Praetorian guard was concentrated in Rome under a single commander; minority foreign groups were expelled from Rome so as not to infect traditional Roman values; charges were laid against unpatriotic writings; spies infiltrated households; men and women were incarcerated for long periods without charge; show trials were held; almost anything could be construed as treason.

The enigmatic Tiberius only attained personal security by spending the last decade of his life on the island of Capri, ruling in splendid unloved isolation. His closest friend, Nerva, starved himself to death to highlight the evils of the state. Tiberius in turn was only worried by the slur this would cast on his reputation. An Australian opposition leader once called his Prime Minister ‘Tiberius with a telephone’ – the image was also mischievous, but telling. Beware of men like Tiberius.

GERMANICUS

Germanicus, the adopted son of Augustus, and his wife Agrippina, Augustus’ granddaughter, were the glamorous stars of an increasingly dreary imperial house. As a couple, they were to be the next emperor and empress of Rome, the bearers of Augustus’ hopes for the succession in his bloodline. Yet again, Fate mocked his plans. The emperors in his bloodline were to be Caligula and Nero.

Germanicus died in mysterious circumstances that brought unpopularity on Tiberius in 19 AD. Germanicus and Agrippina had acted as a foil to Tiberius while alive (a contrast even more dramatised by later historians). The emperors who succeeded this brooding, fun-hating emperor revived their images. Claudius used the image and name of his brother to compensate for what he himself lacked in dignity, colour and military reputation. Coin 6 says it all. It was also an act of love for the brother who had always been there for him when others poked fun at him. It was a nice touch when spare statues of Germanicus were recarved with the head of Claudius. The head whose dozing nodding had found itself the owner of a troupe of gladiators auctioned to him at great cost by Caligula was now the face of power; the body and name were those of Germanicus.

Germanicus really was a name to conjure with – not only by Claudius. His birthday was still being celebrated in a Roman religious calendar of the 220s AD found in Dura-Europus on the Euphrates, more than two centuries after the death of a man who never became emperor.
Germainicus & Agrippina I

Agrippina and Tiberius spent most of the decade following the death of Germanicus staring past each other – an emperor with unfathomable intentions and a theatrical imperious would-be mother of the next emperors. Her two older sons, Nero and Drusus, became the victims of Tiberius' descent into terror, but Caligula survived and owed much of the popularity of the early part of his reign to his public appeal to the memory of his dead parents and brothers. This was the promise of the arrival of the Golden Age that had been expected, but that had been so cruelly wrested from the people of Rome. It was only sensible to follow the lead of the emperor, but many were probably true believers.

Local and provincial officials around the empire honoured both Caligula’s parents, as on coin 7 from Smyrna (Izmir) in Asia. Coin 8 shows the senate and people of Rome honouring Agrippina in the role of Caligula’s mother. What might have been if she had been a living rather than a dead mother! The coin depicts a real event, his return of his mother’s ashes to Rome in the ceremonial carriage of state, an act at once of filial piety and political acumen. Caligula always put his dead relatives to good political use – he also deified his dead sister Drusilla. His living relatives had as much trouble with him as anyone else.
ANTONIA

Antonia had the grandest of connections: daughter of Octavia and Mark Antony, niece of Augustus, sister of Marcellus, wife of the Elder Drusus, sister-in-law of Tiberius, mother of Germanicus, Claudia and Livilla, grandmother of Caligula and the other children of Germanicus and Agrippina. Despite having no husband to protect her since the death of Drusus in 9 BC and having children and grandchildren marked out as future emperors, there is hardly a harsh word spoken of her – no attempts at poison, no conspiracies, no adultery, no debauchery. She sounds too good to be true.

It was she who made Tiberius aware in 31 AD of the poisoning of his son Drusus by Sejanus and her daughter Livilla and, allegedly starved her daughter to death as punishment. Her grandchildren, Caligula and Drusilla, were brought up in her house after the death of their grandmother Livia in 29 AD. Did they learn there, from the eastern princes in their house, like the Herodians of Judaea, the Hellenistic ruler practices that were to turn the appearance of a principate into the form of a kingship under their brother-sister rule. Caligula named Antonia Augusta on his accession, the first woman to be so named since Tiberius had so honoured his mother. It was an ominous precedent, but she died soon after; some say that she censured and fell out with Caligula and then rejected the title and took her own life. It would be a fitting end to a grand life and make her even fitter to be resurrected by her son Claudius as a political icon of how things would be under his reign, as appears on coin 9.

DRUSUS

It was the fate of Tiberius' son, Drusus, to play in the shadow of Germanicus, in much the same way that his father had played second fiddle to a succession of preferred heirs. Germanicus' cousin, now his adopted brother, accepted what fate had given him and the two were on singularly good terms, despite the dynastic rivalries screwing up all those around them.

Drusus, unlike his father, was a splendidly uncomplicated man, though perhaps a bit too bloodthirsty; even the people at a show of gladiators produced by him were alarmed at his gloating over the bloodshed. He handled the mutinies on the Danube following Augustus' death in 14 AD effectively, perhaps better than Germanicus' more theatrical handling of those on the Rhine.

Following Germanicus' death, Drusus took a greater role. He became sick in 21 AD and Clutorius Priscus recited an elegy in anticipation of his death; Drusus recovered, Clutorius did not. In 22 AD, at the same age that his father had been made partner in rule by Augustus (as Tiberius told the senate), Drusus received the tribunician power, the same mark of the same partnership. It was a typically cryptic Tiberian critique of those who gave such powers prematurely. Our coin shows Drusus in the second, and last, year of this power: just his portrait and a list of titles. His death was accepted as natural at the time. Ten years later, after the death of Sejanus, his death was reconfigured as poisoning. The truth is out there somewhere. Trust no-one.
Caligula is the paradigmatic figure in western literature for corruption by absolute power. In the beginning he raised hopes that he would be the emperor expected of the son of Germanicus and Agrippina and right the wrong course that had turned the reign of Tiberius into despotism. He was everywhere reminded of his parentage, as in the coin from Smyrna (coin 6) authorised by the governor, Aviola, or in the Roman coin (coin 7) in which the senate and people replicated his own honouring of his mother. Within a year he had moved to the Dark Side. Was this the corruption of power? Or the result of an illness or madness? Or the emergence of the real Caligula, inherently evil or psychologically damaged by his family’s roller-coaster ride of hope and despair under Tiberius?

It is no longer possible to separate fact from fiction in the tales of Caligula’s megalomaniac behaviour as oriental king and god, and of his macabre sense of humour. His victims had their revenge in the monster known to history, but that does not mean that the stories are untrue or even exaggerated. What one can say is that his coins carry relatively traditional Roman messages. He may well have dressed up as a god – or goddess; even the young Octavian did so, before he got morality. No such images feature on his coins. They represent the gods, as here Vesta, in conventional form. Perhaps he did not have the interest to oversee the coin images. His real mistake was to give his middle finger to the man who had survived the mutiny against centurions in 14 AD.

Claudius was an accidental emperor. His physical disabilities induced Augustus to withdraw him from public gaze and Caligula to display him to ridicule, but he had survived where so many of the imperial family had not. He was the choice of the Praetorians, and rewarded them with a double donative. It was not enough however by itself. Caligula’s ancestors had remained unusable political currency and Claudius drew on the reputation of his father (the Elder Drusus), his mother (Antonia, coin 9), his brother (Germanicus, coin 6) and his grandmother (Livia, whom he deified). He also promised the restoration of libertas (freedom) and order.

The reverse of the coin shows his title, father of the fatherland (P P), and the associated crown wreath awarded for having saved citizens. It is a recurrent image of new emperors claiming to have ended civil war or strife. But a Roman emperor without a track record needed to play the role of victor. Britons looked good victory material. In 43 AD, Claudius sent off a massive army (and some elephants), came himself for 16 days and spent the rest of his reign living off the glory of this new conquest, the first since Augustus. There was a triumph, arches in Rome and Gaul, annual commemorations, a parade of the British king, Caratacus (and his harem), the name Britannicus for his son; most featuring on coins. By 46 AD, the year of coin 12, this most unmilitary of emperors had 11 victory acclamations (several, uniquely, taken for the same war in Britain); by 52 AD, he had 27.
Already in his lifetime some wondered whether the face of real power belonged to Claudius or to his wives and freedmen ministers. Under Caligula he had married Valeria Messalina, his cousin (their ancestor in common was Augustus’ sister Octavia, whose name was given to their first child). It may have been one of Caligula’s little jokes to marry the late 40ish academic Claudius to his teenage cousin, regardless of whether she was the nymphomaniac of later depictions. They lived in parallel worlds, except for sex – and their two children, Octavia and Britannicus, who may well be the two small figures she holds in coin 13, the source of her power, she on one side of the coin, Claudius on the other. The parallel worlds clashed when Messalina publicly “married” a dashing young aristocrat Silius; déjà vu. There was no place for public polygamy in the Roman world and no longer a place for Messalina as the emperor’s wife. There was a struggle at court to find the aging emperor a new wife.

Where for Messalina sex was the source of pleasure, for Claudius’ next wife, his niece Agrippina, it was the source of power. Already on coin 14, she appears joined to Claudius, as she does so often elsewhere, most famously in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias: art imitating life imitating art. In 50 AD Claudius adopted her son, the renamed Nero and made her Augusta, the first female to be so officially recognised in her lifetime, since Livia and perhaps Antonia – and that was not by their husbands. It was time for Claudius to become a god, a feat achieved by a plate of mushrooms (henceforth known as the food of the gods) and mocked by a satire on his deification, known popularly, if not technically, as How Claudius was turned into a Pumpkin.
NERO

Nero never really wanted to grow up to be an emperor, but an “actor” or “artist”. Roman emperor was not a job for an artist and Roman emperor was the one role that Nero was not suited to play, at least in traditional form. Sadly, it was the one role his mother had cast for him, with herself as the leading lady. Once he had killed her and most of his other relatives and burned down most of the city of Rome (to his operatic performance of the Sack of Troy and to the encore of Christians burning on gibbets as suitable scapegoats), he had both the personal and the physical space to retune Rome in an artist’s image. An artist with lots of wealth – there were advantages in being an emperor artist. You won most of the prizes, too. There was the glorious expansive Golden House, so wantonly destroyed by the barbarians who followed him. There were the most aesthetically pleasing coins that Rome ever minted, such as the exquisite birds-eye view of the new harbour of Ostia, begun by Claudius in 42 AD and completed by 64 AD to ensure the grain supply for the city that he found marble and made golden. He took on the hair-style worn by actors and charioteers. His last words provide a truly fitting epitaph: *What an artist dies with me.*

POPPAEA

Nero’s first wife had been his 13 year old step-sister, Octavia. Her wedding day in 53 AD was the start of her long drawn-out funeral. On her murder in 62 AD, her severed head was taken to Rome to be gloated over by Poppaea Sabina, Nero’s long-time mistress from Pompeii and her rival. Nero was besotted with Poppaea. She had incited him to the murder of his mother, Agrippina, in 59 AD. They were a well matched pair, for he seemed to find macabre pleasure in gazing on the body of his mother: *How beautiful!* or on the severed head of Rubellius Plautus: *I didn’t know he had such a big nose.*

Nero still took three years after his mother’s death to divorce Octavia and see to her death. It was perhaps Poppaea’s pregnancy that stirred him to action. The birth of a daughter in 63 AD brought her the title Augusta, but the daughter died and was deified. In 65 AD, Poppaea died while pregnant, after being kicked by Nero in a rage. She was embalmed, contrary to Roman practice and deified by a remorseful emperor. Within a year he had married Messalina.
ONE DAMN EMPEROR AFTER ANOTHER

GALBA

In 68 AD there was a rebellion against Nero in Gaul. There were many reasons to end the Neronian experiment, but this did not seem a promising start. Yet the time was ripe and it led to the death of Nero and a rapid succession of men staking their claims to be emperor. Emperors could be proclaimed anywhere, but it was armies who made them. The first would-be emperor on stage was Sulpicius Galba, a 73 year old patrician governor in Spain, the sort of man who was thought capable of being emperor until he became emperor. He promised to restore the Augustan model, imitating that emperor by using imperator as a first name (a practice followed by most of his successors and leading to our calling Roman rulers “emperors”) and using the oak wreath to signify his saving of the citizens (awarded to Augustus in 27 BC); both are seen on coin 18. But Augustus had seduced the soldiers by material benefits and the disciplinarian Galba (I levy soldiers, I do not bribe them) upset both the Praetorians in Rome and the German armies on the Rhine, both of which had been reluctant to desert Nero. It was not enough for a Roman emperor to be without vices if he was also without virtues or at least a sense of the possible in politics.

STATILIA MESSALINA

Messalina had been Nero’s mistress even before the death of his beloved Poppaea. He was a jealous lover. Vestinus Atticus, one of Nero’s associates had married her and upset Nero for having done so. In 65 AD, Nero tried to incriminate the now-consul Vestinus in the Pisonian conspiracy against him, but failed, even though names of conspirators were being offered up easily – the poet Lucan named his mother! Nero ordered Vestinus to commit suicide anyway. Otho, who had been the earlier husband of Poppaea had only been sent to govern Spain when Nero snatched her from him. It was best not to be the husband of a woman Nero fancied. Messalina left a reputation for wealth, beauty and talent. Nero’s wife had to be an artist too.

Coins such as 16 and 17, minted in Ephesus, seem at first sight almost monotonous standard expressions of loyalty to the imperial couple, but there are meaningful differences. On coin 16, the couple are joined on the obverse, but on coin 17 each has his/her own side. Messalina survived Nero, since Otho, one of the would-be emperors of 69 AD sought marriage with her to strengthen his claims.
It was no secret that an emperor could be unmade at Rome. Salvius Otho, an early supporter of Galba, disappointed in his expectation of becoming heir of the childless new emperor, suborned men from the Praetorian guard to kill Galba and his newly adopted son Piso and make him emperor. He had been part of the Neronian circle, before losing his wife, Poppaea, to Nero in 58 AD and being sent out of the way to govern a province in Spain. In some of his titles he added the name Nero, a sign, like the rise of False Neros, of significant regret for the dead emperor; he also sought to marry Nero’s widow Messalina. He, too, promised security for the Roman people (coin 19). He was not likely to provide it, for the German armies had already (unknown to him as yet) proclaimed one of their commanders, Vitellius, as emperor. When they marched to Italy, his vastly outnumbered forces were defeated in two battles. Otho balanced the atrocity of killing an emperor with a noble suicide; he at least died like a Roman emperor.

Aulus Vitellius was a non entity. He owed his career not to any ability or leadership quality, but to the renown of his father, an adaptable confidant of Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius. Appointed by Galba to replace Verginius Rufus, a man who at least twice refused the position of emperor during these civil wars, Vitellius was too weak either to refuse the position of emperor or to grasp the role won for him by his armies and their commanders. Coin 20 asserts his right to rule through his victory acclamation Germanicus and his membership of one of the four priestly colleges – a curiously muddled claim, heightened by the absence of the name Augustus or the chief priesthood. He was another accidental emperor, misplaced from the banqueting table where his reputation for gluttony better placed him. When the eastern and the Danubian armies proclaimed the experienced general Vespasian emperor, Vitellius looked for somewhere to hide.
VESPASIANUS

In terms of birth Vespasian was the least qualified of the four men proclaimed emperor in the civil wars. In religious terms, none was better than another, since none had divine relatives. He did find and use a prophecy that the ruler of the world would come out of Judaea, though there was another claimant. He did, however, have by far the best military qualifications. He had been decorated as a legionary legate in Claudius’ invasion and conquest of southern Britain and had for three years been in command of the expeditionary forces massed to end the Roman-Jewish War. Coin 21, celebrating his victory over Judaea and advertising the triumph that would be soon celebrated gave him the legitimacy that he needed as a usurper. An arch in Rome shared the glory with his son, Titus, who became his partner in rule, but not yet Augustus. He knew that a secure dynasty was the best provision for the restoration of stable rule and pointedly offered the stark alternative to a critic: Either my sons will succeed me or no-one. Rome could hardly have found a better helmsman to right its floundering ship than this affable, no-nonsense, good man, most famously summed up in his dying words: I think I’m becoming a god.

TITUS

Everyone (except his brother Domitian) loved Titus, the heart-throb of the human race and in particular of the Jewish queen Berenice. When he succeeded his father in 79 AD, some remembered with trepidation the liaisons of great Romans with another foreign queen, Cleopatra. Most expected great things, at the very least the abolition of the urinal tax of his penny-pinching father, introduced against Titus’ objections; see, Titus, they don’t have any smell, he had said, pushing some gold coins in front of Titus’ nose, perhaps coin 23 showing his brother Domitian as Caesar.

What Rome got was the greatest show on earth, the grand opening of the amphitheatre to end all amphitheatres, known from the Middle Ages as the Colosseum, and 100 days of the spectacles that Romans thought most Roman, the serial fighting and killing of men and animals. Nature had graced the opening of his reign with an equally spectacular killing-field in the eruption of Vesuvius that buried Pompeii and other settlements around the Bay of Naples. He was to reign little over two years and die to much regret, for he regarded a day on which he had done nothing for anybody as a day lost. Some spoil sports had begun to wonder what would happen when the money ran out.
DOMITIAN

Where the outgoing Titus needed to be loved, his insecure brother Domitian needed to be revered and honoured as master of the world. He had tasted power early as the only face of the new imperial family in Rome in 70 AD and never really got used to being pushed into the background when his father and brother returned. He modelled himself on neither his father nor his brother. Some called him “the bald Nero” – not to his face, since he was very sensitive to hair-talk – but he was too Roman, too serious to be a new Nero. It was the memoirs and addresses of the dark and riddling Tiberius that formed his reading and his idea of how to be a Roman emperor. Not surprisingly, his reign showed the same descent into fear and terror in the name of security, the same loss of civil liberties, the same rise of spies, agents provocateurs, informers and treason trials. This time there were poison-needle murders around the empire, for terror and the war on terror had been exported to the provinces.

Domitian was the most paranoid of emperors. He had the walls of his rooms and the colonnades in which he walked lined with reflective materials. He refused to eat mushrooms. It was not enough. He had flaunted his power in the face of the elites, not without a black sense of humour as in a celebrated dinner with a gravestone theme. He had also spread mistrust into those closest to him. He had kept the favour of the soldiers, giving them a pay increase, but soldiers are better at making or revenging emperors than protecting them.

DOMITIA

In 70 AD, the 19 year old Domitian was so smitten by the daughter of the famous Claudian and Neronian general Corbulo, that he took her from her husband, Aelius Lamia, and married her. Such things were easier when your father had just become Roman emperor. 26 years later Domitian was assassinated. Domitia was part of the conspiracy.

Thiers had been a stormy relationship. She had borne him a son, who was to die young, was made Augusta in 81 AD following Domitian’s accession, was divorced on a charge of adultery with the actor Paris and later taken back as his wife. We only have our imagination to intersplice this story with that of Domitian’s liaison with his niece Julia, begun in the reign of her father, who had made her Augusta, and perhaps continuing until her deification in 90 AD, presumably soon after her death. If we knew more, we might know why the new emperor Nerva chose not to marry Domitia to strengthen his claims. She lived on, at least until 126 AD, without hiding her relation to the non-person whom Domitian had become. She did make one change to the face of power: a new hairstyle that almost alone survived the damnation of her husband’s regime.
NERVA

The death of the last of the Flavian emperors in 96 AD might have ushered in another clash of armies like that which had produced the year of four emperors after the death of the last of the Julio-Claudians. The new emperor Nerva was the man for the occasion.

For Nerva, everything always turned out right in the end. The great survivor had won triumphal ornaments for his role in suppressing the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero. He had survived the life and death of Nero to become a leading light in the new Flavian dynasty. He had even managed to get himself exiled in the last years of Domitian. He secured the support of the German armies by adopting their commander, Trajan, as his son and heir and by the same act persuaded the eastern armies not to move. This coin claims the concord of the armies, but Nerva was also the man to bring together the supporters and the opponents of Domitian. The story goes that at a dinner party he asked “I wonder what would have happened to Catullinus (one of the major agents of Domitian’s terror) if he were still alive”. The sardonic answer from one of Domitian’s opponents was “he would be dining here with us”. Having achieved the concord both of the armies and of the aristocracy, he died after an 18 month rule that introduced what Edward Gibbon saw as “the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous”. His timing was perfect, as always.

TRAJAN

Trajan was a Roman’s idea of an ideal Roman emperor. He gave autocracy a human face, restored concord to the elite, cared for his people and returned Rome to its divine destiny – conquering the world. The title optimus princeps (best leader), as seen on the reverse of this coin, was awarded to him in 103 AD. It unmistakably associated him with Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the great god of Rome. In depicting military trophies, the coin also drew attention to his new titles ‘Germanicus’ and ‘Dacicus’ won for victories over Germans earlier and Dacians in 103 AD.

His victories were celebrated by continuing spectacles at Rome, 10,000 gladiators fought and 11,000 animals were killed, and by the bloody war narrative spiralling skywards on his great Column. He was now a real Roman emperor. But military glory was addictive. There was still unfinished family business in Parthia (modern Iraq). His father had won some success there several years earlier and been awarded triumphal ornaments (the triumph you had when not given a triumph). The son found a pretext in Parthian actions construed as an attack on Rome’s dignity and authority, invaded Parthia, instituted regime change (unsustainable) and annexed new provinces. Warfare became bogged down in this land of alien cultures and guerilla tactics. Trajan died while returning to Rome. His successor withdrew Rome’s forces from the region. Some see this as an arrogant superpower overextending itself and beginning the inexorable decline and fall of the Roman Empire. If so, it took a long time to fall.
Matidia

Matidia was the only male in an imperial house full of women, all of whom have left a reputation for harmonious and respectable behaviour. The absence of stories of scandal and intrigue makes them seem dull, especially in comparison with more colourful imperial women. Their proverbial harmony was made easier by their lack of male children, the major apple of discord in imperial families was the wish to become mother of an emperor.

Many emperors had influential sisters and Trajan had always been close to Marciana. Nothing indicates discord between her and his wife, Plotina. Both were named Augusta. When Marciana died in 112 AD, she was immediately deified and her daughter, Matidia, replaced her as Augusta.

Trajan loved Matidia as the child he had not had. It was no surprise that her daughter was married soon after his accession to his nearest male relative, Hadrian. Matidia and Plotina accompanied Trajan to the east on his Parthian expedition and both were surely complicit in the suspicious posthumous adoption of her son-in-law as Trajan’s son to keep power and rule in the family. The two women escorted Trajan’s ashes back to Rome and retained their position and influence with Hadrian until their deaths. When Matidia died in 119 AD, the emperor spoke the eulogy at her funeral and had her deified. A copy of his eulogy memorialised her at his grand new villa at Tivoli. One of the virtues he had assigned to her was Pietas (Dutifulness), a virtue already celebrated on this coin, minted under Trajan. She had shown duty in abundance, to state and family.

Hadrian is a paradox. His governance of the empire, his care for its people, his artistic achievements, as architect and builder, all receive high praise. This restless emperor was not, however, an easy person to like. It is hard to like a meddlesome control freak, who knew everything, was always right, and brooked no rival – in anything. He never lived down the mysterious deaths of Trajan’s four generals that opened his reign or the deaths of his closest relatives that closed his reign (his 90 year old brother-in-law and that man’s 18 year old grandson), as well as several of his friends. All gave a sense of déjà vu. Yet this Spanish descendant of Latin colonists had the vision to make the provinces and their inhabitants as important as Rome.

Hadrian travelled the Empire for more than half of his reign, visiting nearly every province, not, as with previous emperors, to make wars on behalf of Rome, but rather to bring sound government and prosperity to all parts of the Empire. For both practical and symbolic reasons, he oversaw the construction of demarcation markers between Roman and barbarian, such as Hadrian’s Wall in Britain and an equivalent structure in Africa. He visited all the armies and observed their military exercises. He visited most cities and encouraged their munificence.

Coin 28 shows the personification of Africa, in elephant headdress, presenting sheaves of grain to Hadrian as Restorer of Africa. It proclaims the achievements of this first Roman emperor to set foot in Africa. It was the same everywhere. Hate the man. Love his works.
SABINA

Sabina was the wife of Hadrian for nearly 40 years, a marriage made for dynastic reasons and not a real one, as gossip had it. True or not, it cannot have been easy being the wife of Hadrian.

Sabina is conspicuous by her absence from any public role while Plotina and Matidia, the two Augustae inherited by Hadrian from Trajan, fulfilled the roles required of imperial women, both in life and in death. The emperor’s wife still had to be above suspicion, though it was not Sabina, but the historian Suetonius and the Praetorian prefect Septicius Clarus, who were removed from their posts for being more familiar with her than respect for the imperial house required (whatever story underlies this bald fact). By 128 AD, she has the title Augusta, presumably linked to Hadrian’s acceptance of the title pater patriae (father of the fatherland) in that year.

The titles are linked on the coin, a type that may have been first minted in 128 AD to publicise the promise inherent in the titles. The new father of the state needed a public wife, even if only to counter gossip about his relationship to Sabina and perhaps to Antinous. The unusual specification of Sabina as wife of the pater patriae makes the point. The image of Concordia on the reverse could serve to proclaim the new concord both of the couple and of the state. It was perhaps out of duty that Sabina accompanied Hadrian to Egypt, where graffiti on the singing statue of Memnon mark their stay and elsewhere. Hadrian deified her on her death in 138 AD. She deserved no less.

ANTINOUS

Great mystery surrounds Antinous, the lovely Bithynian boy or youth who was part of Hadrian’s imperial entourage on his journey through Egypt in 130 AD. His death on the Nile catapulted him into history, fame and legend.

The true story of Antinous will never be known. The official version was that he had fallen into the Nile and accidentally drowned. It did not satisfy those who preferred to believe that Antinous had sacrificed himself, either voluntarily or with Hadrian’s complicity, as a surrogate to extend the emperor’s life. There were more salacious innuendos of a lover’s tiff. Hadrian’s public reaction was seen as disproportionate, especially since he had done nothing to honour his recently dead sister. The scenario has excited the curiosity of observers from ancient times.

Antinous was deified, a new city was founded, named Antinoopolis after him, near the site of his death, and statues and images of the new god began to appear all around the empire. This was not surprising in the Hellenised east or in Egypt, where this coin, minted in Alexandria, honours the new god. The appearance of Antinous as a god at Lanuvium, not far from Rome, is more curious. Here this most un-Italian of gods has a temple and is paired with Diana, the most Italian of goddesses, as joint divine patrons of a burial society. It is an intriguing pairing (let’s just say they had a common interest in hunting). Equally intriguing, the society refused burial ceremonies to suicides. Is there a message here about Antinous’ death?
ANTONINUS PIUS

Where the restless, hands-on Hadrian had ruled by travelling his empire, the sedate Antoninus ruled through correspondence from Rome, a city whose vicinity he did not leave during his 23 year reign. It was as if King Log had succeeded King Snake in the frog-pond, to the relief of those who remembered Phaedrus’ Aesop-like fable.

A contemporary, Aelius Aristides, saw the role of emperor – he clearly had Antoninus in mind – as that of the conductor of a harmonious orchestra; all the players, from emperor to slave, knowing their parts in a perfect democracy. One of his parts was that of public benefactor and our coin publicises his fourth act of public generosity; the distribution of three or four gold coins to the Roman people coinciding with the marriage of his adopted son, Marcus Aurelius, to his daughter, Faustina. There had been no such marriage of the heir to the throne since Nero and Octavia and the distribution would have made the celebration even more joyous.

Every one of Antoninus’ nine public distributions was associated with a celebration of the regime’s achievements or hopes. None of them were military victories. A contemporary, Appian, reports having seen embassies from poor and profitless barbarian peoples offering themselves as subjects and the emperor refusing them on the grounds they would be no use to him. For the time being at least, Rome’s mission to conquer and civilise the world was on hold. It needed barbarian invasions to remind Rome of her destiny.

FAUSTINA I

Faustina was made ‘Augusta’ on her husband’s accession in 138 AD. He may have partly owed her the throne, since it was her nephew, the young Annius Verus, later Marcus Aurelius, who Hadrian had in mind as his successor when he adopted Antoninus as his son.

Faustina was dead within three years of her husband’s accession. Antoninus’ grief was palpable in the honours that kept her memory alive. He particularly wanted her statutes to be set up in all the circuses at Rome – there must be a story here. He established in her name an endowment scheme for the upbringing of girls, Puellae Faustinianae. Naturally, she became a goddess, with a temple and priests, which she would share with her husband when he finally joined her among the gods.

A sculpture on the base of the Column of Antoninus shows the imperial pair being transported to the upper world. The temple survives in Rome within the Church of San Lorenzo in Miranda.

Coin 32 is one of many honouring the new goddess, stressing Aeternitas (Eternity), both hers and that of the Roman empire which she would ensure. The reverses depict a range of goddesses with whom she was to be associated in that task, in this case Juno, Jupiter’s consort. Faustina’s Girls were a practical example. A late-Roman fabricator accused her of loose living, without details; probably another attempt to make Roman Imperial women conform to type.
Marcus Aurelius

Rome mint: 175–176 AD
Denarius
Obv: M ANTONINVS AVG GERM SARM;
laureate head of Marcus Aurelius r.; dotted border
Rev: TR P XXX IMP VIII COS III;
draped Felicitas standing l., holding caduceus in r. hand,
cornucopiae in l.; dotted border
NM 2004.1927 (BMC 675–7)

Faustina II
wife of Marcus Aurelius
daughter of Faustina I
Rome mint: 146–161 AD
Denarius
Obv: FAVSTINA AVG PII AVG FIL;
draped bust of Faustina r.; dotted border
Rev: CONCORDIA;
draped Concordia seated l., holding flower in r. hand,
resting l. elbow on cornucopiae
NM 2004.1932 (BMC 1086–8)

MARCUS AURELIUS

Where other members of his family demonstrated the rule that those trained in imperial houses were corrupted by power, Marcus Aurelius was the exception who proved it. Accepting the role that Fate had cast for him, he dutifully devoted his life to Rome to the best of his considerable ability, as both conscientious and thoughtful administrator and as gracious autocrat. Fate had been unkind. What Rome needed most in this time of foreign attacks on the integrity and prosperity of its empire was a general. He dutifully shouldered that ungenial burden, too, and spent most of his reign away from Rome, penning in any spare time his Meditations on his life.

Coin 33 is a public comment on that life. The year was 175 or 176 AD. Marcus Aurelius had been ruler as Caesar and Augustus for 30 years. A brief usurpation by Avidius Cassius in the East had just imploded. It had been serious enough for the emperor to bring his son, Commodus, to the Danube to ensure the future rather than to lighten his burdensome load. It had also forced him to put on hold his war plans on the Danubian front. The two most recent of his eight victory acclamations were for victories won over Germans and Sarmatians. For these he had taken the titles Germanicus and Sarmaticus. Some Sarmatians were sent to Britain, no doubt the original recruits of the Sarmatian unit garrisoned at Ribchester, near Manchester in England, who appear in a late-Roman list of military units. It was said that Marcus intended to annex new provinces of Germania and Sarmatia. He had restored Rome's destiny and fortune, and the suppression of barbarians had allowed the return of Rome's prosperity, represented on coin 33 by felicitas with her brimming horn. Or had he?

FAUSTINA II

Faustina was the daughter of Antoninus Pius. Her main role, like that of daughters and granddaughters of emperors since the time of Augustus, was to ensure the succession of the bloodline of the emperor. She did her job better than most, only the Elder Agrippina came close. The precedent was not encouraging. Agrippina's son who survived to be emperor was Caligula, Faustina's was the twin, Commodus. She was to have 14 children. The birth of the first in 147 AD saw her rewarded – it did not matter that it was a daughter. The day after the birth she became Augusta, even though her husband was only named Caesar. During her father's reign she appears on coins in much the same form as here, as Augusta and daughter of the Augustus. The reverses of the coins depict a range of Roman virtues, especially those associated with women. Coin 34, depicting Concordia, draws attention to the harmony of father and daughter, as well as that of husband and wife. The flower and the horn in turn promise bounty.

The only change when her husband became Emperor was that she dropped the reference to her father. The appearance of a new title from 174 AD, mater castrorum (mother of the camps) is a sign of the times and the future; war was no longer only men's business. There were general stories, as always, about sexual liaisons and a specific one involving an agreement to marry Avidius Cassius if Marcus were to die, to guarantee her son's rule. None of this seemed to worry Marcus, who wrote of her in his Meditations as obedient, affectionate and artless. He had her deified on her death in 174 AD, renaming the city where she died Faustinopolis.
Like other emperors, Marcus Aurelius directed the life of his daughter, Lucilla, for political purposes. She was betrothed to his co-emperor Lucius on his accession in 161 AD, and as a 14 year old married the 34 year old Lucius in 164 AD, at the same time becoming Augusta. Marcus seemed to embrace, rather than fear, the potential rival to his own sons that this marriage might produce; perhaps it was enough that he would be his grandson. The coin, which gives her relationship to her father, not her husband, publicises Concordia, with its usual multiple messages of the concord of the brothers cemented by the marriage and of the hope for an heir from this concord. The statuette of Spes (Hope) held by Concord on the reverse often represented the hope implicit in an heir.

Lucilla and Lucius were to produce three children, but only a daughter survived infancy, despite the fiction of the movie Gladiator. On Lucius’ death in 169 AD, Lucilla was immediately married to her father’s leading general, Pompeianus. At first sight, it is like Augustus marrying his widowed daughter to Agrippa, but its real purpose was probably to sideline and control Lucilla, not to produce more heirs. Neither she, nor her mother Faustina, was amused at this marriage to an aged man regarded as socially beneath entry into the imperial house. She retained, however, her title as Augusta under her father and her brother. She was involved in the unsuccessful conspiracy against Commodus in 182 AD that also included her daughter by Lucius Verus and other relatives. It was a turning point in his reign. She was exiled to Capri and soon killed. Pompeianus survived, to be offered the throne on the death of Commodus.
Soon after Commodus was named Augustus in 177 AD, the 15 year old was given a wife, Bruttia Crispina. It was a rushed occasion, for Marcus needed to get back to Rome's wars. One wonders why it could not have waited for a grand public ceremony, such as Marcus and Faustina had celebrated.

Crispina came from the heart of the old Antonine aristocracy, not hitherto married into the imperial family. Her father had been part of the court of Marcus Aurelius during his northern wars and was to be consul for the second time in 180 AD. Crispina became Augusta. Her coins, such as this, were the conventional ones for such imperial women, depicting all the traditional Roman goddesses and virtues of whom the Augusta was a model; in this case Venus, the goddess of love and beauty with her apple prize. There had frequently been two Augustae in second century imperial houses, but not two like Crispina and Lucilla, who now lost the precedence she had held since her mother's death in 176 AD. The rivalry was fatal to Lucilla. It was said to have pushed her into conspiracy against her brother. It may also have had something to do with the charge of adultery against Crispina, but that was a conventional way to get rid of an unwanted wife. Both were exiled to Capri – together, one hopes – and killed. Crispina's relatives were untouched by her fall. Commodus never married again.

Commodus believed the reign of Commodus turned Rome from an age of gold to one of iron and rust. How could that happen? He had in his father the model of the perfect Roman emperor. That may have been his problem. Dissidents in Alexandria rebuked him for not being the man his father was. Others were not so blunt, but implied it by their actions. This coin shows him finally casting off the ghost of his father, withdrawing the element Antoninus from his name and inserting Aelius to recall Lucius Verus or Hadrian. Names meant much to Roman emperors.

His father's death left Commodus on the Danube, longing for Rome. His brother-in-law, Pompeianus, tried to get him to finish the job with the fatal words: Rome is where the emperor is. He was not persuaded to stay, but the implication of the words came to haunt Romans when he later named Rome and all the months of the year after himself. He returned to Rome, not to rule his empire, but to indulge his fantasies. He was not interested in government, leaving it to short-ruling regents. He devoted himself to pleasures and arena sports, fancying himself as gladiator and marksman. The coin, from his last years mirrors his losing touch with the real world, as he does one of his Hercules impersonations, with lionskin and club. Hercules was a popular Roman god, particularly among soldiers and often appears associated with Roman emperors on coins. But not like this. On the last day of 192 AD, as he prepared to appear as a gladiator in public for the first time, a conspiracy within his court put an end to the posturing of a mad Roman emperor wanting to be a Gladiator. He was in the wrong job.

**COMMODEUS**

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The next emperor, as in 69 AD, was the choice of the Praetorians. They had no candidate, so there ensued one of the most notorious events in Roman history, the auction of the throne in the Praetorian camp. Contemporaries tell the theatrical story (so it must be true!) of two candidates gradually raising the sum to be paid as donative, before the hammer came down on Julianus’ bid of 25,000 sesterces, the equivalent of five years pay.

The Praetorians play the bad guys, but it was the bidders who made the auction. Donatives were usual on the accession of emperors and the size of this one was not that exorbitant granted inflation. Marcus and Lucius had paid 20,000 in 161 AD. The thrifty Pertinax had only paid 12,000, not a sensible economy as it transpired.

There were other reasons for the choice of Julianus. He promised to restore the honours of Commodus and the other candidate was Pertinax’ father-in-law. The Praetorians gave their support to Julianus and asked him to take the name Commodus. Sensibly, he did not include this among the names on his coins.

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There were other reasons for the choice of Julianus. He promised to restore the honours of Commodus and the other candidate was Pertinax’ father-in-law. The Praetorians gave their support to Julianus and asked him to take the name Commodus. Sensibly, he did not include this among the names on his coins. Coin 40, like most, proclaimed the Concord of the Soldiers, whose emblems she holds. It applied to the Praetorians, but looked to the provincial armies. It was not to be. As in 69 AD, once the Praetorians had killed the first successor of a despot, the empire was up for sale to any army whose commander wished to scramble for it. The Praetorians’ choice once more did not outlast the first of them to reach Rome. Julianus, reputedly one of the richest men in Rome, had not bought the empire, but a two month taste of it.
Next on the scene were the commanders of the major Roman armies, on the Danube, Septimius Severus, and in the East, Pescennius Niger. Clodius Albinus, commander of the armies in Britain, might also have been expected to make a move. For the moment, this threat was neutralised by Septimius, who offered him the position of Caesar and thus heir, while Septimius himself went to Rome to depose Julianus and then to the east to fight and defeat Niger.

Albinus’ position as Caesar was problematic. The only precedent for naming a commander of major legions as Caesar and heir was Trajan by Nerva. Nerva had no sons. Septimius had two. When Septimius named his seven year old son Caesar, Albinus’ position became untenable, for both of them. Albinus became the first of a line of generals who made their play for the Roman throne from a base in the armies of Britain. He had himself declared Augustus in late 195 AD and crossed to Gaul. Coin 41 is from this period. Its reverse refers to the source of his power in the Fides (Loyalty) of his legions, visually represented in the emblematic clasped hands image. Some might have remembered that the British legions had been unruly and put up at least one usurper under Commodus. Albinus retained their loyalty, but it was not enough when they faced the mightier forces of Septimius near Lyons in early 197 AD. Oddly, Albinus’ coins continued to use among his names that of ‘Septimius’ taken as a compliment to the emperor following his appointment as Caesar.

Septimius was from Africa. His homeland, particularly his home city of Leptis Magna, was to reap benefits from his rule. By 197 AD, he became the final victor in the struggle for power that had begun in 193 AD. In order to legitimise his rule and promise its direction, he had taken the hugely creative step of adopting himself posthumously as the son of Marcus Aurelius and renaming his own son M. Aurelius Antoninus. More intriguingly, he also deified his newly found brother, Commodus.

He had already won several victory titles for wars against Parthian vassals in the East, but in 198 AD he returned to invade Parthia itself and annex two new provinces. An unintended consequence was the rise of the Sassanid Persian dynasty to replace the destabilised Parthian one and turn the prevailing cold war into the more frequent hot wars of the next centuries. The title Parthicus Maximus, publicising his achievements, was still being celebrated in coin 42 of the year 201 AD, both in the emperor’s titulature and in the image of submissive Parthian captives. He had now simplified his names and added Pius, a potent symbol in its multiple positive allusions.

Septimius became a great traveller, overseeing the progress of the empire, like Hadrian, but also attracted by the lure of conquest, like Trajan. He went to Britain and almost conquered the whole island. Or so it was said. Sons, who only wanted to get back to Rome, saved Britain from this fate, as had Domitian’s jealousy of a general earlier. Unlucky Britain!
JULIA DOMNA

The rise of Septimius brought to power his Syrian wife, Julia Domna, whose father, Julius Bassianus was priest of the sun god, Elagabalus, at Emesa (modern Homs). In 193 AD, she became Augusta, dropping the name Domna in 196 AD (as on coin 43). With her background, she became a conduit for the introduction of more oriental features into the public life of the Roman state. This coin is indicative. The traditional Roman image of Felicitas Saeculi (Good Fortune of the Age) is here represented visually in the form of the Hellenised Egyptian goddess Isis, the universal mother goddess who guaranteed success and happiness. Elsewhere Domna is represented as Isis herself, with the Isis cult becoming part of the state religion.

The first part of Septimius’ reign sees a power struggle between her and Plautianus, her husband’s African Praetorian prefect. His fall restored her influence and she was a major figure in the continuity of rule. Even she, however, could not reconcile her quarrelsome sons or protect Geta from his murderous brother or prevent the erasure of his name so thoroughly from inscriptions that he might well never have existed. She cloaked her sadness well enough to be in Caracalla’s entourage at the time of his death. She fell out with his successor – there was presumably no place for her in the new regime – and committed suicide; better this than to return to private life after 24 years of the power and the glory, whatever its sad moments.

CARACALLA

It was reputed that Septimius’ dying advice to his sons, Caracalla and Geta, was: Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, don’t worry about the rest. Caracalla, as he is known to history – officially M. Aurelius Antoninus – soon killed his brother and showed little interest in what the aristocracy thought of his actions. They could do little about it while he lived, but took their revenge in their histories.

Caracalla based his rule on the soldiers and spent a large part of his life with them on campaign. War had moulded him. He was made Augustus and co-ruler with his father, aged ten, in 198 AD in conjunction with the Great Parthian victory of that year. He was in Britain to share his father’s victory, and during his own short five year sole reign campaigned on the Danube front and finally in the East.

His model was Alexander the Great more than any Roman emperor, he even created Macedonian phalanxes for his Roman army. Coin 44 shows the one victory title he had to show for his wars, Germanicus won in 213 AD. He claimed victory over the Parthians in his last year, but too late for it to appear on his coins. He deserved better of his soldiers than to die ignominiously by the sword of a disgruntled soldier during a toilet stop in the desert. The reverse of the coin shows Apollo, a strange choice for such a military emperor, but perhaps chosen to protect the health of the notoriously hypochondriacal emperor. Caracalla did leave one legacy, but not a military one. When he gave Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Empire, new citizens took his names, Marcus Aurelius.
Geta was another brother whose elder sibling was marked out by superior honours and positions. Unlike Marcus and Lucius, there was a fierce, competitive, rivalry between these brothers. Unlike Titus and Domitian, it was the older brother who was blamed for the bad relationship, but that might merely be part of the later damning of Caracalla. The rivalry was glossed over in the coins that often show the brothers in harmony, often with their mother separating them – prophetically!

Coin 45 shows Geta with the traditional Roman image of Felicitas Temporum representing the Good Fortune of the Times; it contrasts with the similar coin of his mother (coin 43) showing the non-Roman Isis in this role. Septimius made the relationship between the brothers even more problematic for the future by making Geta Augustus and co-ruler with Caracalla before his death. We can only guess how he thought co-rule would turn out. One proposal after his death was to divide the empire between the brothers. Their mother tried to put a stop to such nonsense: You can divide the empire, but you cannot divide your mother. One of them had to go.

Rome had a tradition of fratricide going back to Romulus and Remus. Caracalla did not appeal to tradition but to an alleged assassination attempt by Geta, when he organised his death – in his mother’s arms. It was to give thanks to the gods for having saved him that Caracalla said he gave everyone Roman citizenship. Dio thought it was to make aliens eligible for taxes on Roman citizens. Geta became a non-person.

It was not only emperors who made use of their daughters in an attempt, if the marriage was to the son of an emperor, to produce an emperor in their bloodline.

Such was the sad fate of Plautilla, the daughter of the ambitious Fulvius Plautianus. This fellow African and distant kinsman of Septimius was constantly at his side, even before his appointment as Praetorian prefect in 197 AD. He shares with Sejanus under Tiberius the honour of being the most evil and scheming man ever to stand behind an emperor. His power was already great when his daughter was married to Caracalla, the 14 year old son of Septimius in 202 AD. There was a great wedding celebration in Rome and Plautilla was made Augusta. Coin 46 publicises the Pietas (Dutifulness) of the imperial house that would strengthen the rule by producing the child held by the goddess. As far as is known, no child arrived. Plautilla and Caracalla were not a happy couple.

Plautianus fell in 205 AD, on an elaborate, and probably false, charge engineered by his 17 year old son-in-law, who struck him down when he tried to defend himself. It was a roundabout way of getting rid of a wife. Plautilla was collateral damage and exiled to Lipari and, but only after Septimius’ death, executed. The names of Plautianus and Plautilla were rubbed out of texts around the empire. Caracalla never remarried, which raises lots of questions about Caracalla, as well as Septimius and Domna. Did no-one want the heir that propaganda so often promised and continuity of rule needed?
It was a nice irony that Caracalla was succeeded by Macrinus, the client of Plautianus, the prefect he had murdered. Macrinus was a Moor with a pierced ear and humble origins who just happened to be Praetorian prefect when Caracalla was assassinated. He was in the right place, but not the right man. No Moor, man of equestrian status, or Praetorian prefect had yet been emperor, but none of that disqualified him. His lack of political skills did. He had come to his post as Praetorian prefect, not as a military man, but as a lawyer and administrator (like his predecessor, the great jurist Papinian). His colleague, Adventus, was a military man and the first choice, but he declined on the grounds of age. Macrinus owed his support to the soldiers, but rapidly lost it. He had a lawyer’s plan or an accountant’s – he had been both – to save money by enlisting new soldiers on lesser pay and conditions than existing soldiers. Though he promised that it would not apply to existing soldiers, they regarded it, probably correctly, as a thin end to later attacks on the increased pay and privileges they had received under Caracalla. The Foresight of the Gods (Providentia Deorum) promised to himself and the empire by coin 47 was not enough to save him, especially when a legion wintering outside Emesa found there a member of the Severan family. The revolt spread and Macrinus fell in the ensuing battle with his rival’s forces, after a rule of just over a year.

Elagabalus’ grandmother and mother sought, as far as possible, to convey a sense of normalcy and most of the coins of the reign show the traditional Roman forms and traditional messages, but propaganda can only achieve so much. The public appearances of the emperor only fuelled the reports of his scandalous and extravagant private life. Those who were seen to disapprove often lost their lives. If the dynasty was to survive he had to go. His grandmother prepared to sacrifice him for another grandson who could play better the role of Roman emperor.
Where Julia Domna gave up hope of retaining a role in the new regime of Macrinus, his sister, Julia Maesa, who had been part of the court through the Severan rule, seized her chance to replace the regime as Macrinus floundered.

She had two daughters, whose husbands are absent from the events that unfolded. Both had a son. The son of one, Elagabalus, was presented to the troops in the guise of Caracalla’s illegitimate son and renamed M. Aurelius Antoninus; a gift of money helped to gain their support. It was the idea of an actor friend of Maesa, but the 14 year old Elagabalus was good at playing roles. In the ensuing battle, he rode his horse with drawn sword to rally his fleeing troops. It was a role worthy of an emperor and not necessarily to be disbelieved.

The wilful new emperor proved not to be so good at playing the Roman emperor at Rome. Since he was not interested in government, Maesa, as Augusta, became the virtual ruler of the Roman empire. Her coins have the traditional messages of Roman virtues, as Pietas on coin 49.

When the behaviour of Elagabalus threatened the survival of the dynasty, she pragmatically engineered the transfer of the role to her other grandson. She retained her role until her death about 225 AD and was deified.

Soaemias was the mother of Elagabalus and colluded with her mother, Julia Maesa, in organising his succession. She, like her mother, was made Augusta, but where Maesa sought to control or cover up his religious and personal excesses, Soaemias is said to have pandered to them.

Coin 50 would seem to support this. Where most of her coins have the traditional representations of Roman deities and idealised virtues, Venus in the particular form Caelestis is most unusual. It brings to mind Caelestis, the Carthaginian goddess whose statue was brought from Rome to be the bride of Elagabalus’ Sun God. She only otherwise occurs on the coins of Elagabalus’ Vestal wife Aquilia. Soaemias seems to be complicit in her son’s religious ideas and practices. That the Carthaginian Caelestis, was usually identified with Juno rather than Venus (the goddess of love) was merely another perversion.

It was all a world away from her role as a Roman matron in Septimius’ Secular Games, that most Roman of religious celebrations, in 204 AD. When Maesa organised for her second grandson to be adopted by Elagabalus and made Caesar, it brought together two imperial mothers with very different ideas of what a Roman emperor could and should do. There could be only one winner. When the Praetorians could bear Elagabalus’ behaviour no more and ended his life, Soaemias shared his fate. He died in her arms.
Cassius Dio says that Elagabalus had five wives; coins attest three of them. Not a bad record for a man who failed to reach his 19th birthday. Each became Augusta, presumably only while wife of the emperor. The first, Julia Paula, was from Rome's highest aristocracy. That is all we know of her ancestry, but it is enough to show her purpose. She was to give a proper public face to the regime and does so on her coins, such as coin 51 representing Concordia. On another, Venus Genetrix (Mother Venus) holds out the hope of an heir. It was an unlikely hope; no wife of Elagabalus produced an heir. Paula was clearly not his choice and was forced into private life on the grounds that her body was blemished.

Elagabalus had a better idea. Why not marry a Vestal Virgin? True, it violated Roman religious lore, but tradition should not stand in the way of innovation and duty. He married the Vestal, Aquilia Severa, out of duty, so that godlike children might come from the marriage of Elagabal’s high priest to Rome’s high priestess. He was boasting of an act for which he should have been publicly scourged and executed and she buried alive. A little of his thinking creeps into coin 52. It depicts Concordia as on coin 51, but shows her sacrificing, as he himself does on coin 48.

He soon appears with a new wife, Annia Faustina. She was a great-granddaughter of M. Aurelius. This is surely another attempt of the imperial women to give his reign Roman respectability and the coins duly show her presiding over the Public Good Fortune (coin 53). Soon Aquilia appears again on the coinage. Dio says that he had returned to her, but he had probably never left her. His choices for wife and those of the imperial women may have run separate courses. Neither Romans nor mothers understood these things. There is no numismatic reference for Dio’s two other wives; he may be referring to the ‘marriages’ to men that scandalise the sources.
ALEXANDER SEVERUS

When Julia Maesa made her second grandson Caesar, she had perfected the formula. Severus Alexander was alleged to be the illegitimate son of Caracalla and given a make-over in his names to reflect this. The added Alexander (a variation of his original name Alexianus) was a master-stroke, it promised a conquering ruler in the image so favoured by Caracalla. Severus recalled another conqueror, and regretted emperor, Septimius Severus.

Alexander was presented as a simple, good-natured boy with a mother, Julia Mamaea, who exercised control over him. This was to be good in his boyhood – as a contrast to Elagabalus and his mother, Julia Soaemias – but was a problem when she retained her control in his manhood. At first his reign went well, but by the late 220s AD Rome needed a general not an administrator. The new Persian dynasty had begun its quest to reclaim the Persian Empire lost to Alexander over 500 years earlier. Who better than the new Alexander to defeat them again?

Coin 54 shows a new style of coinage, beginning in 231 AD, to push this idea. His names, now reduced to Alexander Pius (the latter an addition), promise military success, the reverse brings Jupiter the Defender on the campaign. He went to the east, with his mother; he claimed success, but not enough for a victory title to appear on his coins. He soon had to move to the Rhine front, again with his mother. These armies had not seen an emperor for 20 years and did not see that his presence made much difference. They wanted a general, not a mother’s boy. A general was proclaimed emperor; the emperor, now 25, was killed in his mothers’ arms.

JULIA MAMAEA

When Alexander Severus became Augustus in 222 AD, his mother, Julia Mamaeia, became Augusta. She never left his side. Her own mother, Maesa, probably continued to rule in Rome until her death some three years later, when power passed to the younger woman. It ended with Mamaea’s murder in 235 AD. Rome had had 17 years of continuous rule by women, by Mamaea for ten of them. Only in the fifth century AD did Rome have longer periods of rule by women, with Galla Placidia in the West and Pulcheria in the East ruling through a son and a brother respectively. Our sources are not good enough to allow the history of Mamaea’s power. Coin 55, with its anodyne image of Mamaea associated with the Public Good Fortune, reveals nothing of it.

We cannot be sure that Alexander did not try to free the shackles of his mother, as Nero freed himself of Agrippina (but he had had to kill her to do it). He certainly did not succeed.

In 225 AD, Alexander married the very aristocratic Seia Herennia Sallustia Barbiana Orbiana. Herodian gives bits of the story. Mamaeia suggested the marriage, but was not happy when Orbiana became another Augusta, the doing of Maesa or Alexander, and soon had her rival banished from the palace. Alexander, who loved her, accepted the insult; Orbiana’s father, Seius, did not. Mamaeia arranged for Seius’ murder and Orbiana to be exiled to Libya. Alexander opposed all her actions, but did not stop them. What a story Tacitus would have made of it!
The old ruling aristocracy had never accepted Maximinus as emperor. Their dissatisfaction had grown worse with the cost to them of policies, which attacked their wealth for the benefit of the soldiers. It was inevitable that one of them would try to replace him. In early 238 AD, Gordian, the proconsul of Africa, an unarmed province, proclaimed himself Augustus and his son Caesar. He was in his 70s and spectacularly wealthy – he may have been responsible for the magnificent amphitheatre at El Djem (Tunisia), third largest in the Roman world. But age and wealth were nothing without arms; the only governor in Africa with an army soon snuffed out his claim.

The senate in Rome took up his lead. They formed a committee to look after the empire for Gordian until he arrived (the senate was always good at committees); when he was killed, they chose two of the committee to be co-emperors. It was a compromise decision reflecting an indecision that was unpromising. One of them, Balbinus, seems to have had a civilian career; the well-nourished head on his portraits, as on coin 57, offers a contrast with that of Pupienus. The man behind the face remains in oblivion.

MAXIMINUS THRAX (THE THRACIAN)

The murder of Alexander and the accession of Maximinus at Mainz in 238 AD was another sign of changing times. This was the first time that an army had unmade an emperor who was with them on campaign. Armies would no longer accept commanders seen as ineffective; soon, as they became more and more regionalised, they would not accept those who did not campaign personally on their front.

Maximinus was also a new type of emperor, a man who had risen through the ranks as a ‘semi-barbarian’ Thracian peasant. He was a soldier’s emperor. His success in turn depended on the loyalty of the soldiers (as publicised on this coin) and in the military virtues proclaimed on most other coins. He campaigned continuously, but found that, in the new circumstances, the loyalty of the soldiers was fickle. In 238 AD, disgruntled soldiers killed him and his son outside Aquileia. They do not seem to have had anyone in particular in mind as emperor – unless they were happy to accept the two senatorial emperors he was on his way to Rome to fight, Pupienus and Balbinus.

BALBINUS

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The second emperor chosen by the senate was Pupienus, a man with considerable military experience. His portraits give him a severe, military face, as on coin 58; its reverse shows what he was meant to contribute, the restoration of the Good Fortune of the empire, visualised in the traditional image of felicitas. His face is about all he has left to history.

Publicly the two emperors asserted their harmony. Coin 57 advertises the Concordia of the emperors and visualises it through the traditional image of two clasped hands. As so often, this was a mere pretence and a sign of the discord it denied. The discord became greater rather than less when Maximinus was unexpectedly killed. While the emperors squabbled, the Praetorians acted. They killed the two emperors and put forward as emperor Gordian, the 13 year old grandson of the short-reigning African usurper of the same name. As in 69 AD and again in 193 AD, an emperor/emperors acceptable to, even if not made by, the senate had been unmade by the Praetorians. Where in earlier times it had led to a long year of civil war, this time it set the Roman empire on the path to a long half-century of unstable imperial rule.

PUPIENUS

The young Gordian seemed an odd choice in the circumstances, but he survived. The Providentia or Foresight, proclaimed on coin 59 as looking after Rome and its Empire, also looked after him, at least for six years. Foresight’s human incarnation was Timesitheus, the Praetorian prefect, whose daughter he married – another ambitious prefect, about whom nothing bad survives.

Gordian went to war with Persia. Shapur’s monument at Naqsh-I-Rustam claims that the Persian king killed Gordian in battle. Roman sources claim that Gordian won a victory, but was killed by his own men. How does one choose? It is an engaging possibility that Plotinus, the Neoplatonist philosopher, and Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, might have met on this expedition. With the death of Timesitheus, Foresight left Gordian in 244 AD when he was killed by his troops, instigated by the new and more sinister prefect, Philip.
PHILIP I (THE ARAB)
MARCIA OTACILIA SEVERA
PHILIP II

The events of 244 AD and the reign of Philip were another sign of changing times. It was not so much that a Roman emperor could come from a town in Arabia, which he later renamed Philippopolis (Shahba) and benefited greatly during his reign. It had long been clear that origin, either geographical or social, was no bar and that home-towns would be magnified. But this was the first time that a Roman emperor on campaign was killed and replaced by members of his court, usually the generals of his increasingly large and important court army. It was to become the norm in the later stages of the ‘military anarchy’ that it ushered in.

To celebrate his return to Rome from the Persian war (on the results of which Persian and Roman sources are again contrary), Philip distributed his second public largess, as publicised on coin 60.

His wife Severa had been Augusta from his accession. Coin 61 shows her representing the usual virtues of the regime, in the very common form of its Concord.

His ten year old son, Philip, was made Caesar in 247 AD and represented as the hope of the future as principi iuvent, Leader of the Youth (as on coin 62). He was soon Augustus. It was during Philip’s reign that Rome celebrated its millennium. One has to guess how extravagantly, though the masses of animals prepared for Gordian’s triumph that never came were its main feature.

Christian sources say that Philip sought and received a letter from Origen, the patristic father, which may have led to their belief that Philip was the first Christian emperor, albeit a closet one. Philip’s reign was never secure, as he faced constant usurpations and barbarian invasions from every corner of his empire. He fell to the first usurper who came to Italy to face him. An emperor based in Rome had too few troops to withstand the commander of major armies; both Philip’s died.

Philip began a line of emperors who learned this lesson – Decius, Trebonianus Gallus, Aemilian. Later emperors spent much more time away from Rome.
DECIUS

A tradition had developed that a new emperor was congratulated with the wish, or perhaps request or hope, that he be more fortunate than Augustus and better than Trajan (*felicior Augusto, melior Traiano*).

Decius played to this acclamation by taking on both names. Trajan’s most lasting achievement had been the conquest of Dacia (south eastern Europe). The province had suffered greatly. It had perhaps, for practical purposes, even been lost in the recent wars. Coins such as this, with its personification of Dacia, represent a promise, or claim (one of the values of images is that they have multiple readings), that all was again right in the region.

Decius appears as a reluctant usurper – a role that is easier to claim than to prove or disprove – and is best known for two achievements not recorded on his coins. One is his order that everyone should participate in a sacrificial supplication of the gods. This was an attempt to unify the empire and restore traditional religion. It is best remembered however for one of its consequences, probably unintentional, the persecution of Christians, whose beliefs did not allow them to participate. The other was his death in battle with the Goths at Abrittus. There were some, and they were not only pagans, who connected the two things and saw the latter as divine retribution by the Christian God for the former.

A reluctant usurper who died in a blaze of glory or an ambitious soldier who was punished for his evil actions? Take your pick. In either case, he had not fulfilled the promise in his names.

ETRUSCILLA

Etruscilla, wife of Decius, became Augusta on his accession and played her part in her husband’s plan to persuade Rome that the good old times of Augustan and Trajanic Rome were about to return. Central to this was the restoration of the Roman religion and the Roman values and ideals that had made Rome great. Female virtues were important in this, and Etruscilla’s *Pudicitia* (Modesty), the quintessential virtue of the idealised Roman matron, is the main legend on her coins, as shown here. *Fecunditas* (Fertility) was another and highlights something else that this Roman matron offered in an exemplary fashion – her two sons. She seems to have lived on to experience a parent’s saddest fate – to survive her children – and an empress’ worst fear – to lose power. Coins up to 253 AD seem to give her a role in the new regime, but an empress without husband or children could be no more than a token.
HERENNIUS ETRUSCUS

The elder son of Decius and Etruscilla became Caesar soon after his father’s accession. His age is hard to determine, but his portraits and his father’s probable age, in his 50s, suggest the early 20s. Initially, he was of greatest use to his father as the bright young hope for the future – a more mature hope than the young boys put forward in recent times, such as the younger Philip.

Pietas (Dutifulness), as exhibited on this coin, was an all encompassing Roman virtue, shown reciprocally between children and parents and in the duty of all to the gods and the fatherland. Etruscus was soon given a more active role and sent to the Danubian front to face the invading Goths and Carps. Having proved himself with some victories, he was made Augustus and partner in rule with his father. The success was ephemeral and both were soon to perish in the Danubian marshes and achieve more in legend, with the dutiful sacrifice of their lives than they had in their historical lives as Roman emperors.

HOSTILIAN

There are some emperors whose brief appearance in history is so fleeting and puzzling that one might doubt their existence, were it not for their coins. Hostilian is such an emperor.

He seems to be the second son of Decius and Etruscilla, though his names do not include the major elements of either parent. His coins as Caesar show him as a younger version of his brother and have reverses that simply copy those of his brother. This coin is one such, using the image of Mars the Defender, obviously appropriate for a time when Mars’ city, Rome, was in dire need of his help. Someone at Rome, perhaps his mother, made him Caesar to strengthen the dynasty’s claim on power, either before or after his father’s death, and soon promoted him to be Augustus. Trebonianus Gallus, the new emperor acclaimed by the armies on the Danube on the death of the Decii, adopted him as his son. Hostilian died shortly after. Many put two and two together and came up with a poisoning. Officially, the death was blamed on the great plague that had long been raging in the Roman world. Some identify Hostilian with the warrior figure in the great Roman battle frieze on the Ludovisi Sarcophagus. That raises more questions than it solves.
TREBONIANUS GALLUS
VOLUSIAN
AEMILIAN

Following the death of Decius, three emperors held the rule briefly and then passed it on to others who won and lost it in much the same way. Each won it through the agency of one provincial army before coming to Rome and losing it to another general coming with his forces to Italy. Little is known of the history of any of them.

Trebonianus, an Italian from Perugia, had been proclaimed by the Danubian armies which survived Decius’ disastrous wars with the Goths. He came to Rome and stayed there, while his generals fought wars on all fronts. He made his son Volusian Caesar and then Augustus, but both stayed in Rome.

He had replaced himself as commander of the Danubian armies by Aemilian, an African from the island of Djerba. Aemilian and his armies betrayed that trust by proclaiming as emperor the man who led them to victories to replace the one in whose name and under whose auspices those victories were won. Aemilian brought an army to Italy. Once again an emperor could not maintain himself in Italy with the forces available. He had called together a reinforcing army from other northern frontiers. It arrived under Valerian, too late to save Trebonianus and his son, but in time to avenge them by ending Aemilian’s three month rule and making their general emperor. Coins provide little help in filling out a story that is not known from written records or histories. Coins 67 and 68 simply show Trebonian and Volusian claiming Dutifulness and Concord as stereotyped promises or claims for their rule. Coin 69, amongst a host of issues stressing military gods and virtues, offers the forlorn hope that Aemilian has brought Pax (Peace) to a troubled world.

67: Trebonianus Gallus
Rome mint: 251–253 AD
Antoninianus
Obv: IMP CAE C VIB TREB GALLVS AVG; draped and radiate bust of Trebonianus Gallus r.; dotted border
Rev: PIETAS AVG; draped and veiled Pietas standing l. raising both arms, sun or star to r.; dotted border
NM 2004.2418 (HUNT 10–1)

68: Volusian
Rome mint: 251–253 AD
Antoninianus
Obv: IMP CAE C VIB VOLVSIANO AVG; draped and radiate bust of Volusian r.; dotted border
Rev: CONCORDIA AVG; draped Concordia seated l. holding patera in r. hand, cornucopiae in l.; dotted border
NM 2004.2424 (HUNT 6–7)

69: Aemilian
Rome mint: 253 AD
Antoninianus
Obv: IMP AEMILIANVS PIVS FEL AVG; draped and radiate bust of Aemilian r.; dotted border
Rev: PACI AVG; draped Pax standing l., holding branch in r. hand, sceptre in l., leaning on a column; dotted border
COLLECTION OF ANDREW WRIGHT (HUNT 13–4)
Valerian had reaped the whirlwind of the usurpations, civil wars and foreign incursions under his predecessors. He had no immediate answer and in his reign Rome reached its nadir. He began with the usual expedient of making his son, Gallienus, Augustus and co-ruler. Unusually, Gallienus was in his 30s and for once of an age to be an effective ruler. He also deified his already dead wife, Mariniana, as her Consecration scene on coin 71 shows.

Valerian is best remembered for two things that have uncanny resemblances to the two things for which Decius is remembered: persecution of Christians and death at the hands of Rome’s foreign enemies. Unlike Decius, this persecution of Christians was a deliberate attack on its religion, its adherents, its institutions and its sacred texts. It produced large numbers of both martyrs and apostates, each important in the future history of Christianity. He then went east to deal with the Persians. Some see it as part of a conscious plan to divide the world between two administrations, an idea that had occasionally surfaced earlier and was to be the essence of later rules.

Coin 70 proclaims the hopes of his time in the east as the *Restitutor Orientis* (Restorer of the East). Far from restoring the East, he was defeated in battle and captured by the Persian King, Shapur. The humiliation was a disaster for Rome in both ideological and practical terms. The Persian version, in Shapur’s inscribed record and visually in the reliefs at Naqsh-I-Rustam, show Valerian as a humiliated subject. Most Romans tried to cover it up, but Christian authors gloated about his being used as a mounting stool and then flayed alive.
GALLIENUS & SALONINA

Gallienus was a man who learned lessons. He immediately withdrew his father’s edict against Christians and Christianity and allowed the religion the official toleration it was to receive for the next 40 years. He also set about creating a new army. Publicity had always stressed his military virtues, as on coin 72 depicting him as the cuirassed warrior symbol of Virtus. But usurpers kept rising and invasions kept occurring. Something more practical was needed and he created a larger court army, with a greater emphasis on cavalry, to help him better deal with both enemies.

His wife, Salonina, figures in a number of roles on coins, including that of Mother of the Camps. Her main public attribute, however, was as mother of their two children, the fortune provided to the emperors and state by the goddess of love (shown on coin 73 as Venus Fortuna); both were, sadly, to die before their parents, doing their duty to the state as Caesars.

One wonders how Salonina regarded Gallienus’ steamy affair with Pipa, daughter of a German king. Perhaps she consulted her friend, the philosopher Plotinus, who had asked them to re-found a city in Campania with a constitution based on the laws of Plato and call it Platonopolis. They died together in a court plot at Milan in 268 AD.
EMPERORS IN GAUL

POSTUMUS

MARIUS

Gallienus could not be everywhere and sent his young son, Saloninus, to be his face in Gaul and to his armies on the Rhine, but the armies wanted more than a face. In 259/260 AD they proclaimed their commander, Postumus as Augustus. His coins, as 74, show him as a cuirassed warrior figure, much like Gallienus on coin 72. The message may be that he is the real warrior that Gallienus claimed to be through his depictions of himself as Virtus (the legend pointedly omitted by Postumus).

Postumus retained his position for over a decade, recognised as emperor in Gaul and Spain, despite barbarian attacks, local usurpations and campaigns by Gallienus against him. He outlived Gallienus, just, and was killed in 268 AD by his own soldiers because he would not let them sack the city of Mainz after a victory.

They proclaimed as emperor a certain Marius, whose coins, like coin 75, ritually, and improbably, assert the Concord of the Soldiers, who soon killed him, after two or three days according to the sources. There are so many of Marius’ coins that it may have been longer, perhaps his mints were working overtime. Some of his successor’s coins from Trier have his portraits. It was said he had been a blacksmith – a good career change in an age when a Marius could become an emperor.
VICTORINUS
TETRICUS I
TETRICUS II

In 268 AD, Victorinus, an associate of Postumus, killed Marius and was proclaimed emperor promising the restoration of Peace, as on coin 76. His fall, two years later, was said to be revenge exacted by the quartermasters in his army at Cologne on behalf of one of their colleagues whose wife Victorinus had seduced. His mother, Victoria or Vitruvia, subsequently bought the throne for Tetricus. The suspiciously named Victoria may never have existed; she appears neither on coins nor in any official record, uniquely for one claimed to have been Augusta. We need not believe all that we read about Rome’s imperial families. At any time.

Tetricus was a Gallic senator governing the non-military province of Aquitania based around Bordeaux. He ritually presented himself with the qualities of a cuirassed warrior, as on coin 77, reminiscent of Gallienus on coin 72 and Postumus on coin 74. His son, Tetricus II, was made Caesar and presented as the great Public Hope for the future. Whether the soldiers got what they wanted, they got what they deserved. Tetricus deserted to Aurelian at a battle around Chalons. Gaul, from its armies to its old elite, seemed ready to be reunited with the rest of the empire under a real Roman emperor.

Both Tetricii, after undergoing the indignity of being paraded in Aurelian’s triumph at Rome, retired to the private senatorial life and public service from which they had been so rudely and surprisingly removed. Few emperors can have sent such inappropriate messages through their coins, ‘Virtus Augustorum’ for the Augustus who deserted his army in battle and ‘Spes Publica’ for the Caesar of an Augustus with no prospects.
In 268 AD, Gallienus won a great victory at Naissus (Nis) over Goths and Heruls, who had got so far into the empire as to sack Athens. Once again, just as things were looking better, the emperor had to face a new usurpation, this time by Aureolus, the commander in Milan of his new cavalry force. He was on the point of defeating Aureolus, when he was killed by a plot emanating from his staff of generals. He was succeeded by one of those generals, a career soldier from Dalmatia named Claudius.

The new emperor continued the campaigns against barbarians in the central part of the empire, first pushing Alamanni out of northern Italy and then winning a victory over Goths in the Balkans. For the latter he took the victory title *Gothicus* by which he is known to history. For the moment he ignored the further West, with its own emperors in Gaul, and the East, which was being ruled by the Palmyrene queen, Zenobia. The East still accorded some recognition to Claudius, for coin 79 is from Antioch in Syria with Claudius’ portrait and the representation of Youth (not Claudius who was in his 50s) in the guise of Hercules. One might compare it with coin 37 of Commodus as Roman Hercules.

Claudius died in 270 AD, probably of plague, though later sources liked to see it as another self-sacrifice of a Roman general in battle. Constantine was to discover that Claudius had been his ancestor, almost certainly one of his fictions.

Claudius’ brother, Quintillus, who had been left with the army in northern Italy, succeeded for long enough to mint coins such as coin 80, asserting the Loyalty of the Soldiers. A loyalty however that lasted even less time than it had for Maximinus (coin 56), about a month. He did not even test their loyalty when the Danubian armies proclaimed Aurelian as emperor. He was either killed or committed suicide.
AURELIAN & SEVERINA

Aurelian was another career soldier from an Illyrian background. He was to be the man to reunite the fragmented Roman world under one emperor and celebrate it with the title *Restitutor Orbis* (Restorer of the World).

First however, he had to fight barbarians in most of the regions south of the Danube. He did not seem overly confident of success when he began in 271 AD to build the great Aurelian Wall around the city of Rome. But success was to come, though it involved the pragmatic decision to give up Trajan’s conquest of Dacia across the Danube. In 272 AD, he took his army to the East to claim back its regions for the Empire from Zenobia. She was to be paraded in his triumph in Rome and live on there into old age. He then went to Gaul and reclaimed the West from its emperors.

Coin 81, with its portrait of the cuirassed emperor and its reverse of *Fortuna Redux* (Returning Fortune) is either a hope, if it dates from the early part of its reign, or a claim, if it dates from the end.

Coin 82 of his wife, the Augusta Severina, being from the Antioch mint, must date after the recovery of the east. It is indicative that the wife of this most military of emperors is associated, unusually, with the Concord of the Soldiers. Other coins mirror a significant religious change, The Invincible Sun God (*Sol Invictus*), to whom Aurelian built a great temple at Rome, becomes ever more prominent.
Great confusion surrounds the death of Aurelian on his way to another Persian war and its aftermath. His death was not a military coup, but the result of obscure machinations within his domestic staff. It is not known what happened next. The next emperor was Tacitus, perhaps after an interregnum, perhaps the choice of the senate – a 75 year old is an unlikely choice by an army. He was with his army in Anatolia when he died, or was killed, less than a year later. His army proclaimed as successor Florian, his Praetorian prefect, perhaps also his half brother. Another army in the east proclaimed its commander Probus as emperor. Probus won the war between the claimants. The rest is invention, or elaborate and ingenious recreation. Coins give no help, they are conventional types. The portraits of both Tacitus and Florian are cuirassed warrior figures – it would be surprising if they were not at such a time. Coin 83 associates Tacitus with the Good Fortune of the Times and coin 84 (its Roman mint shows that Florian was recognised in Rome) associates him with Salus (Health/Safety) and its guardian snake deity. Both are totally conventional for any circumstances. Probus was another Illyrian career soldier. There were still wars to be won against barbarians and usurpers and he spent most of his reign at war on the Rhine and Danube or in the East. He seems to have hoped for better times, for he notoriously stated that there would come a time when the world was at peace and there was no need for soldiers. The soldiers may have taken this out of context – it was not a new rhetoric even in the Roman world. Nor were they happy when he started employing them on non-military tasks, like draining swamps. Contemporary Roman soldiers were not used to working on non-military projects. A disgruntled group of soldiers killed him. His coins do seem to reflect a move from man of war to man of peace. The religious type represented by coin 85 spans the whole reign, for Sol Invictus was his, as it was Aurelian’s personal god. Other coins from Cyzicus, the eastern mint of this coin, make the relationship even clearer. They call the Sun God his comes (Companion); it was to be the same with Constantine (coin 100).
The next emperor was Carus, Probus’ Praetorian prefect, a Gaul with a joint civil and military career. It is not clear whether his acclamation by an army on the upper Danube preceded or followed Probus’ murder on the middle Danube.

In 282 AD, Carus made his sons Caesars, Carinus a man in his 30s and Numerian in his late 20s, the older slightly before the younger, to preserve proper hierarchy. Carus then left Carinus in charge of the west, while he and Numerian led the expedition against Persia that several emperors had started but none completed. Some have seen in this a trial run for dividing the empire between his two sons, both of whom he named Augustus while in Persia, again Carinus slightly before Numerian.

He took the answer to his grave for, less than a year after becoming emperor, he was struck by a thunderbolt. Some said that Aper, his Praetorian prefect and Numerian’s father-in-law, had wielded the bolt. When the army finally reached Roman territory (about a year later, a worryingly long time) Numerian was found to be dead in his carriage – the smell of his decomposing body was a bit of a giveaway. It might be bad luck to lose one emperor on your watch, but to lose two is suspicious. Aper was sent to the underworld to join his son-in-law by one of the court generals, Diocles, the same Diocles who was to become Diocletian, the much-admired emperor.

Coins 86–88 were all minted in the west by Carinus during his co-rule with his brother Augustus. Coin 86 publicise the deification of his father. Coins 87 and 88 show each with warrior portraits; their reverse legends refer to Equity and Peace, which each emperor shares and both provide. Just as Rome in coin 87 (and all other western mints) publicise Numerian, all eastern mints publicise Carinus.

Carinus put down two usurpers and died in battle against Diocletian, not, it was said, by the hand of the enemy, but by that of one of his officers whose wife he had seduced.
Diocletian

Lugdunum mint: 305–307 AD
Follis
Obv: D N DIOCLETIANO P F S AVG; laureate bust of Diocletian wearing imperial mantle r. holding branch and mappa; dotted border
Rev: QVIÉS AVGG; draped Quies standing l. holding branch in r. hand, sceptre in l.; dotted border
NM 2004.1337 (RIC 225)

Maximian

Alexandria mint: 294–305 AD
Radiate
Obv: IMP C M A MAXIMIANVS P F AVG; draped and radiate bust of Maximian r.; dotted border
Rev: CONCORDIA MILITVM; cuirassed Maximian r., receiving Victory on globe in r. hand from naked Jupiter standing l., l. hand on sceptre
NM 2004.1344 (HUNT 111)

THE ROMAN EMPIRE DIVIDED

DIOCLETIAN

Diocletian saved the Roman Empire by restoring order and constructing the footprint for its future evolution. Many, then and now, have wondered whether it was worth saving at the cost of a tightly regulated, bureaucratic, totalitarian state in which you lost your head for selling “oxhide sandals, single soled” for more than was allowed under his Edict of Maximum Prices for Goods and Services. Compulsion had replaced social processes as the glue of the concord of the state.

No one could easily leave the position allotted to them, and to their sons, in the service of the state, whether they were soldiers, city councillors or peasants. Still, one has to admire an emperor who could safely abdicate from his position to look after his roses, admittedly inside a palace at Split that resembled a massive fortification. The retired emperor remained a comforting presence in the reign of his successors, who enlisted his name (and sometimes his person, as they began to squabble) and status as Senior Augusts to ensure Quies (freedom from troubles), as on coin 89. From early in his reign he had embraced the concept of the administrative division of the empire and appointed an Illyrian military associate to be emperor in the West.

Maximian was to be Hercules to Diocletian’s Jupiter (each emperor was associated with his patron god) and played the role loyally and well during their co-rule. He won many victories through the Concord of the Soldiers asserted on coin 90 from one of Diocletian’s mints. He was not, however, a natural abdicator, as was seen when he was forced to abdicate along with his Hercules. More than once this Senior Augustus sought the power of a real Augustus, until Constantine brutally rid himself of his troublesome and interfering father-in-law.
EMPLOYERS IN BRITAIN

CARAUSIUS

ALLECTUS

Carausius was a Gallic naval commander under Maximian in 286/287 AD when he took his forces to Britain (to cover up embezzlement, it was said) and turned himself into a Roman emperor over the water – and in later legend, British patriot. Maximian made one failed attempt to regain the region; peace followed, nicely mirrored in the coinage. Coin 91 is a coin minted by Carausius with Maximian’s titles and portrait; its reverse legend, Pax Auggg (the triple G means three Augusti) and image promises the Peace that three emperors in concert would bring. The message is even clearer on coins showing three imperial heads in profile with the legend ‘Carausius and His Brothers’. There is no indication that Diocletian and Maximian officially recognised Carausius as Augustus; it was not for his want of trying by such stealth to introduce himself into the imperial college. It did not work. Diocletian did increase the number of emperors from two to four in 293 AD, but Carausius was not one of them.

At about the same time Carausius was killed by his chief accountant, Allectus, who then ruled in his place. Nothing much changed, except the names, as a comparison of coins 92 and 93 shows; but, prophetically, Allectus has no cuirass to back up his claim to Peace. It was no surprise when the army of the new Caesar, Constantius, defeated him in 296 AD and restored Britain to the empire.
In 293 AD, Diocletian decided that if two emperors were good, four were better. Two more Illyrian career soldiers, Constantius and Galerius were made Caesars. They were real junior emperors, carrying out duties, primarily military, for their respective emperors.

Constantius won victories on the Rhine and in Britain and the imperial college took two titles, Germanicus and Britannicus. Galerius, after an initial defeat, won a decisive victory against the Persians and captured the king's harem; its return cost the King of Kings five regions across the River Tigris. Galerius then moved onto the Carps across the lower Danube, won six victories and transplanted into the Roman Empire all who survived.

Such competitive rivalry might have easily caused tensions in the college. Diocletian had sought to prevent this by making the individual emperor less important than the imperial office. The fiction was that they were one. Each emperor took the victory titles won by his colleagues. All laws were issued in the name of the college. All emperors issued coins with comparable images. Coins 94 and 95, with the most common reverse in this period, show this well. Both emperors honour the Divine Spirit of the Roman People, restored to prosperity in Roman terms by the new imperial college; its two warrior Caesars are virtually indistinguishable, like all four in the famous porphyry group of emperors clasping hands, with the other on hilt, now outside St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice.

On the abdication of the Augusti, both duly became emperor. Constantius died in York fighting the Britons in 306 AD. Galerius died of disease in 311 AD after first tolerating the Christians whose bitter persecution he had begun in 303 AD and then asking them to pray to their god for him.
SEVERUS II
MAXIMIN DAIA

Severus and Maximin were chosen as the new Caesars when Constantius and Galerius were promoted to become Augusti in 305 AD. Coin 96 shows the change as seamless and unproblematic (the official view); Severus’ coin is virtually indistinguishable from coin 94 (of Constantius), except for his name. The choices, however, surprised many, not because they were more Danubian career soldiers – that was normal but because they were not Maxentius and Constantine, the adult sons of the two men in the imperial college with sons. For the moment, the choices were accepted.

When Constantius died the in the following year, there was the inevitable clash of artificial plans and human behaviour. There were soon four western emperors. Severus succeeded Constantius through the blueprint. Maxentius and Constantine were proclaimed emperors in Rome and York through their bloodlines. Maximian became emperor again through lust for lost power.

Severus was the first victim. His soldiers deserted him as he marched against Maxentius, whose father had once led them. This only encouraged the old man to return to power. The power struggle moved up a notch.

Meanwhile, the problem in the East for Maximin (a nephew of Galerius, so blood was not totally ruled out) was different. He had no rivals, but he was not satisfied to remain Caesar when everyone else was becoming Augustus. He became Augustus, also; the Genius he acknowledges (coin 97) is that of the Augustus. He was a much more thoughtful emperor than the uncouth barbarian tyrant of Christian vilification. He continued Galerius’ persecution of Christians inventively; he circulated the Acts of Pilate as a counter scripture to the synoptic Gospel versions of the death of Jesus; he instituted apartheid for Christians. He thought of marrying Diocletian’s widow to strengthen his position. When civil war finally came to the East, he fell in 313 AD.
LICINIUS I

Licinius was another in the production line of Illyrian career soldiers. Galerius chose him to replace the defeated Severus as Augustus in the West, but he, like others before him, found Maxentius too well entrenched. Coin 99, names aside, almost replicates the coins of the earlier Caesars (Constantius, Galerius and Severus – coins 94–96); it must have been like seeing the same advertisement hundreds of times. There was however one significant difference. Licinius was not Caesar, but had become Augustus straight away; Maximin, who was still only Caesar in the East was not happy. He was not mollified by the title ‘Son of Augustus’ and positively alarmed by the betrothal of Constantine’s half-sister to Licinius. That alliance would first defeat Maxentius and then Maximin, before Constantine and Licinius fought each other for the final prize, sole rule of the Roman Empire. Licinius was allowed to live, on the intercession of Constantia – but soon accused of plotting with Goths and executed. Old emperors cannot, and cannot be allowed to, fade away peacefully. The last civil war had taken on some of the contours of a religious war, between Christianity and Roman religion. This made yet another great victory to Constantine under the Christian God a great fillip to the success of Christianity.

MAXENTIUS

Maxentius, like Constantine, was an emperor’s son who sought to gain by war the position he had twice been denied by the non-dynastic nature of the Diocletianic imperial college. His father came out of retirement, ostensibly to help him, but with his own return to power in mind. Constantius dead was much more use to his son than Maximian alive was to his. Oddly, at the same time as being ignored for the post of Caesar, Maxentius was married to Galerius’ daughter, Maximilla. What would happen to their children? Maxentius’ answer became fairly clear when he named their child Romulus. He had in mind a royal future, as well as a royal model. Perhaps coin 98, heralding the Eternity of Our Augustus, placed the hope for it in the new Romulus. That hope was soon dead and deified.

Maxentius fought off several armies sent to Rome against him, but finally succumbed to his brother-in-law, Constantine, when the two once jilted dynasts fought off at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome on 28 October 312 AD. The victorious Constantine finally ended the unsavoury history of the Praetorian guards; the palace guards took over their role and reputation.

Maxentius’ head was sent to Africa to win support. In the brutal world of Roman politics, faces did not lose all power when they were dead.
CONSTANTINE
HELENA
CRISPUS

Constantine will forever be remembered for two momentous things. He was the first Roman emperor to mark Rome with a Christian face of power, to ‘Church the Old Whore’. There were no immediate signs after his victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge that he had become a Christian, though he tolerated and even supported Christians and their Church. The sign he allegedly saw in a dream/vision and inscribed on his soldiers’ shields only appears later in the public record as the monogram of Christ. Old gods did not disappear. In coin 100, the warrior Constantine still acknowledges, years after his victory over Maxentius, the support of his Companion, Sol, the Invincible Sun God, as had Roman emperors since the time of Aurelian. He repaid his vows to the victory-bringing Christian God by supporting his Church, but did not need to offend the old gods. He was no religious zealot, but a pragmatic emperor, and not one in a hurry.

His second enduring legacy was the foundation of a new capital named after him, Constantinople, where he was buried in the new Church of the Holy Apostles at his own instructions, as the 13th Apostle; Augustus had placed himself in his Forum at the apex of Roman triumphing generals. This change in the exemplars shows the drift in images of power.

Constantine’s mother, Helena, figures more in legend than in history, famous for finding the True Cross and its nails. She gained a public face when she became Augusta in 324 AD, along with Constantine’s wife, Fausta. Neither enjoyed the title for long. Both were linked to the fate of Crispus, Constantine’s son by an earlier marriage, and Caesar in Gaul since 317 AD. The Virtus of Crispus’ armies, claimed on coin 102, had indeed won victories, graphically supported by the captives on the coin. In 324 AD, Crispus helped his father to final victory over Licinius. By 326 AD, he was dead, executed by his father, and Fausta had suicided. Was it sexual tension in the imperial household perhaps – a replay of the myth of Hippolytus and Phaedra? Wicked stepmother or scheming grandmother?
Constantine took a message from the failure of Diocletian’s blueprint to produce political stability by ignoring dynasty. He tweaked Diocletian’s tetrarchic idea and created territorial jurisdictions for his four Caesars: his three sons and his nephew, Dalmatius. He remained sole Augustus. What did he think would happen on his death? Not that the first crime of the new rule would be the death of Dalmatius and most male descendants of Constantius by Theodora. His sons, Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans, descendants of Constantius’ first wife Helena, ruled as if in separate empires. Constantine II lasted for three years, invaded Constans’ part to assert his alleged authority and lost his own part. Constans ruled for 13 years, Constantius for 23. There was much friction between the two, especially over Christian issues. Constantius, as sole ruler, proclaimed as Caesars the two cousins who had survived the massacre of their families in 337 AD. He executed the first, so it was no surprise that the second, Julian, was proclaimed Augustus in Gaul by his troops. Constantius died before adding to his reputation for being successful in civil wars, but not in foreign ones.

Constantine’s return to a dynastic system had not been a roaring success. The coins record vows for continuing Serenity or restored Good Fortune, whether as Caesar, as coin 103, or as Augustus, as coin 104 and coin 105. They conceal the frictions, but show each emperor going his own way.
MAGNENTIUS
DECENTIUS
VETRANIO

Should Rome fear those it had brought to Rome in chains? Scipio’s question began to receive a different answer. Magnentius was a *laetus*, a barbarian given Roman land with the obligation to farm it and provide army recruits. It was this man, not one of the ‘Romans’ in the conspiracy, who was chosen to replace Constans as Augustus in 350 AD. Coin 106 promises the Good Fortune of the State through Christian victory (note the *labarum*), perhaps answering Constans’ conventional claim, coin 105, to the Restoration of Fortunate Times. Nepotian, Constantine’s nephew in Rome, thought dynastic connection was a better qualification, but could not trump Magnentius’ loyal army. Constantius II did beat him, thanks to the treason of Silvanus, his Frank general, who made himself emperor, briefly, in 355 AD. It was a passing phase. No later emperor or usurper was of barbarian origin; barbarians found better ways to power than being Roman emperor. Decentius rose and fell as a footnote to his relative, Magnentius; his coin 107 records vows for the continuing victory of both. In the confusion, Vetranio, commander of the Illyrian armies, was also proclaimed Augustus. Some thought it a ploy by the wily Constantius to distract Magnentius, especially when Vetranio grovelled before Constantius and retired into private life rather than fight him. Magnentius’ wife, Justina, later married Valentinian I. The widow of a usurper of barbarian origin had something to offer a new Roman emperor more than a decade after his failure. Perhaps it was love.

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**106: Magnentius**

Augusta Treverorum mint: 350–351 AD
Follis
Obv: D N MAGNENTIVS P F AVG; draped bare headed bust of Magnentius r.
Rev: FELICITAS REIPVBLICAE; cuirassed Magnentius standing l.,
holding Victory on globe in r. hand, *labarum* in l.
NM 2004.3979 (HUNT 18)

**107: Decentius**

Axima mint: 351–353 AD
Follis
Obv: DN DECENTIVS NOB CAES; cuirassed bare headed bust of Decentius r.; dotted border
Rev: VICTORIAE DD NN AVG ET CAE; VOT V MVLT X
within wreath held by two Victories facing one another; dotted border
NM 2004.4120 (HUNT 1)

**108: Vetranio**

Siscia mint: 350 AD
Follis
Obv: DN VETRANIO PF AVG; draped and diademed bust of Vetranio r.; dotted border
Rev: CONCORDIA MILITVM; cuirassed Vetranio standing l., holding *labarum* in each hand; dotted border
W.L. GALE COLLECTION AT THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR ANCIENT NUMISMATIC STUDIES, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY (RIC SISCIA 281)
109: Julian the Apostate
Lugdunum mint: 360–363 AD
Siliqua
Obv: FL CL IVLIANVS P P A VG; draped and diademed bust of Julian r.; dotted border
Rev: VOT V MVLT X; wreath border
NM 2004.2607 (HUNT 6–8)

110: Jovian
Rome mint: 363–364 AD
Follis
Obv: D N IOVIANVS P F AVG; draped and diademed bust of Jovian r.
Rev: VOT V MVLT X; wreath border
NM 2004.2599 (HUNT 4)

JULIAN
JOVIAN

Rarely has a man compensated so spectacularly in legend for what he has failed to do in history as Julian, sole emperor for 19 months from 361–363 AD. In legend he is the romantic Canute standing against the waves of a triumphant Christianity set in motion by his hated uncle, Constantine. In history he has gained as little support for his radical alternative as he did in his lifetime. Its innovative reconstruction of pagan beliefs was over-intellectualised and its institutions an inferior copy of the Church. The world was not yet ready to take Christ out of Christianity and keep the rest. Would it have been if he had lived longer? The Christian reaction turned lambs into lions.

In legend Julian is the great general, restoring Rome’s glory after the failures of Constantius. In history, his great Persian expedition ended with the loss of much of his army, the regions won under Galerius, and his own life taken by a silent missile. Who threw it is the stuff of more legend. Not even an emperor can change the world against its grain, especially one in a hurry. The best life of this restless, flawed genius is the historical novel by Gore Vidal, Julian.

His Christian successor Jovian reigned only long enough to drop Julian’s controversial religious acts and negotiate the loss of Roman lands across the Tigris. Coins 109 and 110 represent vows for continued success; nothing indicates that one is a pagan emperor, one a Christian.
VALENTINIAN I

VALENS

In 364 AD, a court enclave considered alternatives, all naturally military, as Jovian’s successor and fixed on an unpretentious Illyrian named Valentinian. He chose his brother, Valens, to share power with him and the empire was divided into much the administrative shape it retained to the end.

The sons of Constantine had offered ominous precedent for fraternal rule, but these brothers got on well. Separate empires can work, if one emperor has accepted authority; Valentinian, like Diocletian, had such authority. Nevertheless, the interests of their own half took precedence when push came to shove. Faced with a choice of helping Valens against a usurper or warring against the Alamans, Valentinian chose the latter.

Coins 111 and 112 were both minted by Valentinian. One shows the warrior Valentinian as Restorer of the State, winning victory through the Christian labarum. The other associates Valens with the victory-wielding City of Rome, a city that Valens had never visited – Rome became even more the symbol of stable, united Empire, when the emperors were elsewhere. Both reigns were marked by spectacular trials, in Rome and Antioch, that uncovered among the glittering classes a world of magic, witchcraft, damning horoscopes, and ambiguous ouija boards pointing to future emperors. Both emperors were to die in their cuirasses, Valentinian of a stroke brought on by the insolence of barbarians, Valens while losing the Battle of Hadrianople against Goths and Alans in 378 AD. Less than a third of the Roman army at the battle escaped, the worst Roman defeat since that by Hannibal at Cannae in 216 BC. Valens was never seen again. The Goths were here to stay.

111: Valentinian I
Arelate mint: 364–367 AD
Solidus
Obv: D N VALENTINIANVS P F AVG; draped and diademed bust of Valentinian I r.; dotted border
Rev: RESTITVTOREIPVBLICAEC; cuirassed Valentinian I standing r., holding labarum in r. hand, Victory on globe in l.; dotted border
NM 2004.2625 (HUNT 14)

112: Valens
Augusta Treverorum mint: 364–367 AD
Siliqua
Obv: D N VALENS P F AVG; draped and diademed bust of Valens II r.; dotted border
Rev: VRBS ROMA; draped, bare breasted Roma seated l., holding Victory on globe in r. hand, spear in l.; dotted border
NM 2004.4105 (HUNT 7)
Gratian
Augusta Treverorum mint: 375–378 AD, 383 AD
Siliqua
Obv: D N GRATIANVS P F AVG;
draped and diademed bust of Gratian r.; dotted border
Rev: VRBS ROMA;
draped, bare breasted Roma seated l.,
holding Victory on globe in r. hand, spear in l.;
dotted border
NM 2004.4204 (HUNT 12–3)

Valentinian II
Augusta Treverorum mint: 378–383 AD
Siliqua
Obv: D N VALENTINIANVS P F AVG;
draped and diademed bust of Valentinian II r.;
dotted border
Rev: VIRTVS ROMANORVM;
draped, bare breasted Roma seated l.,
holding Victory on globe in r. hand, spear in l.;
dotted border
NM 2004.2598 (HUNT 11)

Valentinian’s son, Gratian, became emperor as a child; his role to link the new rulers to the old through marriage to Constantius’ posthumous daughter. If there was an heir, none survived. Gratian was not a strong ruler, but a pious, pleasure-loving man (the two have never been incompatible) under the influence of others, initially the family of his tutor, Ausonius, later the powerful Christian bishop of Milan, Ambrose. He had little personal interest in military things, except for his new guard of barbarians, the Companion of Alans, but public representations still identify the emperor as the source of Rome’s victory, as on coin 113. Gratian received no help from the armies in Gaul, when the usurping emperor Maximus Magnus brought his armies from Britain. He was assassinated in 383 AD.

Meantime, his half-brother, Valentinian II, a ‘sleeping’ emperor in his toddler years, was given an area for his court based at Milan where his mother, Justina, held power. As an Arian Christian she came into screaming conflict with the orthodox Christian Ambrose. When Maximus reached Italy, Valentinian and his mother fled to Theodosius in the East; after Maximus’ defeat in 388 AD, Theodosius gave Valentinian his father’s old Western empire, once again to be ruled from Trier. He was not the man his father was. The real ruler was now the Frank general Arbogast. Valentinian was 22 when he died. He had been emperor for all but four of those years. He had ruled for none. In 392 AD, when he finally tried to rid himself of his minister, he was soon found hanged – either murder or suicide.
THEODOSIUS I & AELIA FLACCILLA

In 379 AD, the Spaniard Theodosius replaced Valens as eastern emperor – a puzzling choice, since his father had been the victorious general of Valentinian mysteriously executed in Carthage only two years earlier. His solution to Rome’s military problems after Adrianople was to settle the Goths in the Balkans. The ceremonial funeral of the Gothic leader Athanaric in Constantinople helped conceal, for the moment, the flaw in the arrangement. The settlers lived, effectively, under their own rulers. They were to move like a cancer through the Empire.

Theodosius was a pious Christian, the first Roman emperor not to take the title pontifex maximus. This would leave space, in time, for the bishop of Rome, but now for the bishop of Milan. Ambrose used it extensively to influence Theodosius’ government of the state. Christianity, as defined by the Nicene creed, became the official state religion in a year ironically named after two pagan consuls. Neither non Christians nor Christian heretics were to have important posts, unless, of course, they were Arian barbarian generals. His Spanish wife, Flaccilla, was Augusta to her death in 386 AD, bore his two sons and left a reputation for Christian piety and charitable works. The coins of the pair, as 115 and 116, associate each with the victory brought by the labarum or the Christian monogram. The Salus of the state (coin 116) might allude to Salus in its guise as Salvation, the Saving act of Christ, that saved souls rather than bodies.

115: Theodosius I
Nicomedia mint: 392–395 AD
Follis
Obv: D N THEODOSIVS P F AVG;
draped and diademed bust of Theodosius I r.
Rev: GLORIA ROMANORVM;
cuirassed Theodosius standing r.,
holding labarum in r. hand, globe in l.; dotted border
NM 2004.3984 (HUNT 48)

116: Aelia Flaccilla
wife of Theodosius I
mother of Arcadius & Honorius
Nicomedia mint: 383–386 AD
Follis
Obv: AEL FLACCILLA AVG;
draped bust of Aelia Flaccilla r.; dotted border
Rev: SALVS REIPVBLCIAE;
draped Victory seated r. inscribing shield with
Chi-Rho monogram
W.L. GALE COLLECTION AT THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
ANCIENT NUMISMATIC STUDIES, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY (HUNT 8)
In the last two generations of Roman rule on the island, Britain produced two faces of Roman power, the emperors Magnus Maximus (383–388 AD) and Constantine III (407–411 AD). Classical writers dismiss the emperors as usurpers, a Spanish provincial and a common soldier respectively, short interludes in the history of the late Roman empire. British folklore and tradition, from the chronicles of the Welsh monk Gildas in the 6th century to the pseudo-history of Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th, kept alive, in their own way, the memory of Roman rule in Britain and the careers of these home-grown emperors.

Magnus Maximus, known in Welsh as Macsen Wledig, emerges as a noble Roman descended from both Constantine the Great and the British Old King Coel of children’s nursery rhyme fame. Invited by the Britons to protect them from the ravages of their neighbours, he was victorious against the Irish and Picts, subsequently becoming king, marrying the British princess Elen Luyddog, and ruling the island for seven years. According to other versions, he then either became thirsty for more power, or was challenged by the usurper Gratian in Rome. Gathering an army, he invaded Gaul, conquering Brittany and settling it with his victorious Britons. Perhaps this was felt a more noble history than the story of British exiles fleeing Saxon invaders. The emperor never returned to the island; the stories vary but he is usually said to have conquered Rome before being killed by Saxon mercenaries employed by the eastern emperor Theodosius I.

Nicholas L. Wright
Arcadius

Ravenna mint: 402–408 AD
Solidus
Obv: D N ARCADIUS P F AVG;
cuirassed, draped and diademed bust of Arcadius r.;
dotted border
Rev: VICTORIA AVG;
cuirassed Arcadius standing r.,
holding standard in r. hand, Victory on globe in l.,
foot on prostrate captive facing l.; dotted border
NM 2004.2627 (HUNT 13)

Aelia Eudoxia
wife of Arcadius

Nicomedia mint: 400–404 AD
Follis
Obv: AEL EVDOXIA AVG;
draped bust of Aelia Eudoxia r.; dotted border
Rev: SALVS REI PVBLICAE;
draped Victory seated r. inscribing shield
with Chi-Rho monogram
W.L. GALE COLLECTION AT THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
ANCIENT NUMISMATIC STUDIES, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
(RIC ARCADIUS 105)

THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE EAST
AFTER 395

ARCADIUS

When Theodosius died in 395 AD, the empire
was divided between his two sons, Arcadius and
Honorius. A contemporary called them Lizard
Emperors, a good description of emperors who
remained impervious to everything that happened
outside the shells provided by their palaces.

Arcadius seems another weak emperor. It is hard to
name a significant achievement of a reign dominated
by a rapid succession of aristocratic Praetorian pre-
fects, barbarian generals, palace eunuchs and court
bureaucrats. The turnover belies the existence of a
puppetmaster, unless it was Arcadius, or Eudoxia.
Coin 119, celebrating the Victory won by a warrior
Arcadius, was particularly inappropriate for the
Lizard emperor.

AELIA EUDOXIA

Arcadius’ wife was Aelia Eudoxia, the daughter
of the Frank general, Bauto, brought up in the
Constantinopolitan house of a non-barbarian gen-
eral. One story has her chosen to attract Arcadius by
her beauty and stymie the hopes of the Praetorian
prefect, Rufinus, marrying Arcadius to his own
daughter. She was made Augusta in 400 AD, bore
five children, and was dead by 404 AD.

Aelia Eudoxia was a pious Christian. This gave the
preaching bishop John Chrysostom the chance to
criticise her habits, but he went too far, likening her
to Jezebel. The emperor’s wife was more powerful
than the patriarch of Constantinople. John went into
exile. Coin 120, with the same reverse images as coin
116 (for her mother-in-law, Flacilla) shows imperial
women continuing to be associated with the Salvation
of the State.
THEODOSIUS II & AELIA EUDOCIA

Theodosius II succeeded his father, Arcadius, in 408 AD, and reigned for 42 years. His reign is mostly remembered for the publication of the Theodosian Law Code. His unmarried sister, Pulcheria, was however the real ruler. Sisters were often important in the rule of emperors, but Christianity had given Pulcheria a different source of authority, as Virgin of God rather than as political womb. She persuaded her sisters, too, to be Virgins of God. However if Pulcheria did not need a husband, for dynastic reasons her brother certainly needed a wife. Pulcheria chose her. She was an Athenian named Athenais, highly educated and a great beauty. Originally pagan (so a surprising choice), she took the name Aelia Eudocia following baptism and became as pious a Christian as any Theodosian woman.

The marriage produced three children. Two powerful women at court however, now both Augusta, was a recipe for disaster. When the dust settled, Pulcheria remained at her brother’s side, while his wife, still Augusta, went off to live in Jerusalem, to do good deeds and write books of poems on subjects ranging from military victories to Christian and biblical texts. She sent an icon of the Virgin Mary to adorn Pulcheria’s new Church of the Mother of God – how should one read this? Coin 121 represents the military glory of the Romans by depicting two emperors acting in concert. In fact, the two parts were in close contact, but rarely with military help. Coin 122 with its simplified Christian symbol makes Christianity the only thing.
When Theodosius fell off his horse in 450 AD and lay dying, a successor had quickly to be established. His only son was dead, Pulcheria was ruled out as a woman. The powerful general Aspar was further ruled out as Arian and barbarian, attributes permitted for the man who ruled, but not for the man who reigned.

They chose Marcian, a lesser court military official, who then married Pulcheria to strengthen his claim and to maintain her power. It was not a real marriage for the Virgin Augusta, but the symbolic pretence was enough. The aging pious soldier had considerable military achievement in his seven years of rule. He is credited with forcing Atilla to take his Huns to the West – which was not so good for the West – but is most remembered for the Christian Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Its acclamation of Marcian as the new Constantine and Pulcheria as the new Helena revealed how legend had replaced fact. Its decisions had far-reaching consequences. It established the bishop of Constantinople as equal to the bishop of Rome, reverberations that are still felt today. Its position on the nature(s) of Christ divided eastern Christianity in religion and politics. Marcian was better at war. Coin 123, like coin 122 of Eudocia, shows Christianity Unadorned – nothing else is needed. When Marcian died in 457 AD there was no named successor. His son-in-law, Anthemius, might have expected to succeed, but the post went to a court general, Leo, probably again Aspar’s doing. Anthemius was to be emperor elsewhere.

LEO I

One of the most evocative images of late antiquity is that of the Roman emperor, Leo, known as ‘the Butcher’ for his brutal behaviour, standing at the foot of the pillar of Daniel the Stylite outside Constantinople taking advice on foreign policy, among other things, from the Christian ascetic standing high above him. How the source of authority had changed with the triumph of Christianity in the East. Coin 124, however, still attributes Public Safety to the warrior emperor with no Christian symbol.

Since 465 AD, there had been no emperor in the West. As senior emperor in the fictive college of emperors, Leo showed interest in the Western part of his empire and sent Anthemius, who entered Rome early in 467 AD. Since he had been a rival claimant to the throne in the East on Leo’s accession, this could be seen as exporting a threat. If so, it was risky to give a rival such a break but relations between the two seem to have been politically good; one of Leo’s daughters married Anthemius’ son.

When Anthemius was killed, Leo sent Julius Nepos, a relative of his wife, to replace him: the last Western Roman emperor, at least in the eyes of Byzantium. He had earlier mounted a massive armada to retake Africa from the Vandals. None of these ventures bore lasting fruit, but Byzantium did not ignore the West in the days of its last Roman emperors.
125: Zeno
Constantinople mint: 474 AD
Solidus
Obv: D N ZENO PERP AVG; cuirassed bust of Zeno wearing helmet facing, holding spear behind head in r. hand, shield showing horseman riding r. over fallen enemy in l. hand
Rev: VICTORIA AVGGG; draped Victory standing l., holding cross in r. hand; dotted border
W.L. GALE COLLECTION AT THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR ANCIENT NUMISMATIC STUDIES, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY (HUNT 12)

126: Basiliscus
Constantinople mint: 475–476 AD
Tremis
Obv: D N bASILISCVS P P AVG; cuirassed, draped and diademed bust of Basiliscus r.
Rev: VICTORIA AVGVSOTRM; draped Victory standing l., holding wreath in r. hand, cross on globe in l. hand, sun or star to r.
COLLECTION OF WALTER HOLT (RIC 1009)

Leo’s death unleashed a massive dynastic struggle in the East. He left a boiling cauldron of relatives: two daughters with husbands and one, at least, with a son; a widow; the widow’s brother; the now almost obligatory virgin sister; assorted other relatives. The beginning and end are the only things clear.

Leo’s grandson, Leo II, succeeded as emperor. Things become murky when the seven year old nominated his father, the Isaurian general Zeno, as co-Augustus, even murkier when Leo died within a year. The widow, Verina, and her brother, Basiliscus, who had commanded the Vandal expedition, plotted against Zeno either together or separately. Zeno went into exile and Basiliscus became emperor. In a little over a year Zeno returned to Constantinople and Basiliscus departed the scene for a Christian sanctuary and death. The story can be written almost any way.

Coin 125 seems to anticipate the chaos by claiming Zeno to be lifelong emperor, but the epithet was becoming quite common at the start of reigns. Both emperors were in dire need of the claim to victory won by Christian aid seen in coins 125 and 126.

Basiliscus’ coin-makers could have done with a spell-check, AVGVSOTRM instead of AVGVSTORVM, perhaps they were in a hurry.

In the years 474–476 AD the East was as unstable as the West. The East could not have helped, even if it wanted to. Zeno was a great survivor, but partly by seeing the West as a place to park his problems, such as Theodoric the Ostrogoth, sent officially to remove Odoacer.
In 407 AD, a last attempt was made by the Roman legions in Britain to elect their own emperor. They chose an officer of humble origins, Constantine III. Constantine left little impression on the British, removing soldiers from the island in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to gain power in Rome. He was executed by the future Constantius III, one of Honorius’ generals, in 411 AD.

Following the decree of Honorius in 410 AD, the British chieftain, Vortigern, had emerged as the leader of the beleaguered island. Vortigern based his legitimacy to rule on his marriage to Severa, the daughter of Magnus Maximus. He is best remembered as the king who invited the Anglo-Saxons into Britain to help defend it against the Picts and Irish. Rather than help, the Saxons rebelled and settled in the island creating the foundations of modern England. Vortigern was challenged and replaced by the two sons of Constantine, Ambrosius Aurelius and Utherpendragon.

Utherpendragon was the father of the legendary King Arthur, who was therefore the grandson of Constantine III. He was the last leader of the Britons to repel the Saxons and attempt the conquest of the Roman Empire. Geoffrey of Monmouth has Arthur mirror the actions of Maximus and Constantine. He invaded France, defeated the Roman emperor Lucius and was about to capture Rome itself when, like his predecessors, the treachery of a trusted companion, Mordred, forced him to withdraw. Like his predecessors, Arthur was unbeatable in battle but was in the end killed through intrigue and deceit.

Nicholas L Wright
VALENTINIAN III
Coin 129 depicts another victory-winning warrior that never was. Valentinian was another Theodosian emperor who did nothing in particular, but at least he did it very well, for a tediously long reign of 30 years. Just how well only became clear with the first decisive act of his reign, the assassination of the real ruler, the general Aetius. Aetius had engineered a successful coalition of the willing (Goths, Franks, Armoricans, Sueves, Alans) to defeat Attila and his Huns in Gaul in 451 AD. It was Aetius, as Procopius observed from Constantinople a century later, who deserved to be called the last of the Romans. Only his public relations people and coin-makers considered Valentinian for this role.

Valentinian’s reign was remarkably free of usurpations and dynastic struggle. His mere existence may have held at bay political instability, but his reign did little to prevent the slow, but inexorable, retreat of the empire in the West towards its Italian core. Once again the Theodosian women are more interesting than the men. Valentinian’s mother, Galla Placidia, struggled with the generals for control of the emperor, sometimes winning, sometimes losing. His sister Honoria, caught in a scandalous love-affair, made overtures to Atilla the Hun, on the basis of which Atilla demanded half the western Roman empire as dowry. Valentinian’s wife and daughter were captured in the Vandal Sack of Rome in 455 AD.

GALLA PLACIDIA
What stories Galla Placidia might have told of her life; the granddaughter, daughter, sister and mother of emperors; the wife of a Gothic king and a Roman general.

She was captured by Alaric in the Sack of Rome in 410 AD – much better than being with her brother in Ravenna waiting for the Goths to go away or with her nephew in the East regulating the size of water pipes in accord with status. She happily married Athaulf, Alaric’s successor as Gothic king and the man reputed to have said that he first intended to turn Romania into Gothia, but decided that Goths were too lawless and it was better to be the protector of Rome. They named their son Theodosius – what future did they have in mind?

After Athaulf’s death she returned to Rome, ransomed as the price for the Gothic settlement in Aquitaine. She became the wife of Constantius, Honorius’ general, who had rid the empire of usurpers but not barbarians – an uncongenial husband, but she did her duty and had a son, Valentinian. She struggled, first with the childless Honorius and then with Theodosius II in Constantinople, to make her son western emperor. Her coin, number 130, offers vows for the next decade, counting from the accession of Theodosius II in the East: the Empire is again one. When her granddaughter was captured in the Vandal Sack of Rome in 355 AD and married the Vandal’s king’s son, history seemed to be repeating itself. Galla was no longer alive to enjoy it.
SEVERUS III

Roman emperors pass rapidly across the stage in the years after the death of Valentinian III in 455 AD, but the kingmaker remains the same. He was Ricimer, an Arian Christian of mixed Sueve and Gothic royal descent. In 461 AD, he deposed Majorian, but did not appoint a successor for many months. Technically, the existing emperor in the East should have been informed, perhaps there were negotiations with Leo in the East.

By the end of 461 AD, Ricimer had chosen as emperor Libius Severus. He was from Lucania in Italy, but otherwise a face without a story. Perhaps Ricimer only wanted a face, after Majorian’s activism. Leo did not recognise Severus as emperor, but Severus maintained his position until he died three years later – or, of course, was poisoned. Coin 131 shows him in the common pose of his time as warrior emperor. After his death in 465 AD, no emperor in the west is known until Anthemius arrived in Rome in early 467 AD, sent by Leo. Meanwhile, Ricimer ruled the empire in the West as the agent of the absentee emperor in the East. It was a foretaste of what was to come with Odoacer and Theodoric. Was an emperor needed in the western part of the Roman Empire? It depends on who you ask?

ANTHEMIUS

Leo chose Anthemius to be western emperor. He was a man of both status and substance, grandson of a powerful adviser of Arcadius, son-in-law of the previous eastern emperor (Marcian), father-in-law of Leo’s daughter and an experienced general in his own right. He also came with strong Christian credentials; his coins often reflect the motifs common on eastern coins (compare coin 132 with 122 and 123).

He married his daughter, Alypia, to Ricimer, the man who had really ruled Rome since 357 AD. One wonders how she felt. Galla Placidia had been happier with the barbarian Athaulf than with the Roman Constantius. The marriage was not enough to create or preserve harmony between the patrician Roman emperor and the imperious scion of barbarian kings. Ricimer’s contemptuous nickname for Anthemius, Greekling, says it all.

Ricimer found another to be his pawn. His choice fell on the son-in-law of Valentinian III, Olybrius, who had been sent by Leo from Constantinople to mend relations between Ricimer and Anthemius. Anthemius was killed by Ricimer’s nephew, Gundobad, king of the Burgundians, who succeeded him as Master of the Soldiers; there is now dynastic succession among Masters. The east tried to impose one last emperor, Julius Nepos, without success. By this time the face of the Master of the Soldiers would have been more important than that of the emperor. Soon there would be no Roman emperors to kick around any more.
THE DYNASTIES
THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPERORS

Julius Caesar
Julia = M. Attius Balbus
Gaius Octavius = Atia
Octavia = Mark Antony

AUGUSTUS
Scribonia = (2) Livia = Ti. Claudius Nero

Marcellus = (1) Julia = Agrippa
Vipsania = (1) Tiberius = (2) Julia = Nero Claudius Drusus = Antonia

Livilla = Drusus = Livilla = Germanicus = Agrippina / Messalina = (3) Claudius

Gaius Caesar = Lucius Caesar = Julia = Agrippina / Agrippa Postumus

Tiberius
Octavia = (1) Nerio = (2) Poppaea = (3) Statilia Messalina

THE ANTONINE EMPERORS

M. Annius Verus = Rupilia Faustina

Antoninus Pius
Faustina II = M. Annius Verus = Domitia Lucilla

LUCIUS VERUS = (1) Lucilla = Pompeianus

Commodus = Crispina

THE SEVERAN EMPERORS

Septimius Severus
Julia Domna = Julia Maesa = C. Julius Avitus Alexianus

L. Secus = ?

Severus Alexander
Julia Paula = (1) Elagabalus = Aquilla Severa = (2) Anna Faustina

Gessius Marcianus = Julia Mamaea

-Alexander Severus = Orbiana

Fulvia Plautianus = ?

Plautilla = Caracalla

Geta = Julia Soaemias = Sex. Varus Marcellus

Aelia Faustina = Julia Soaemias = Sex. Varus Marcellus

233-235 AD

80
COIN INDEX

1. CAESAR 48–44 BC
2. AUGUSTUS 27 BC–14 AD
  3. Julia & Marcellus daughter & son-in-law of Augustus
  4. Gaius Caesar son of Agrippa & Julia grandson & adopted son of Augustus
5. TIBERIUS 14–37 AD
  6. Germanicus nephew of Tiberius brother of Claudius father of Caligula
  7. Germanicus & Agrippina I father & mother of Caligula
  8. Agrippina I wife of Germanicus mother of Caligula
  9. Antonia mother of Claudius & Germanicus grandmother of Caligula
 10. Drusus son of Tiberius
11. GAIUS CAESAR (Caligula) 37–41 AD
12. CLAUDIUS 41–54 AD
  13. Claudius & Messalina third wife of Claudius
  14. Claudius & Agrippina II fourth wife of Claudius sister of Caligula
15. NERO 54–68 AD
  16. Nero & Poppaea second wife of Nero
  17. Nero & Statilia Messalina third wife of Nero
18. GALBA 68–69 AD
19. OTHO 69 AD
20. VITELLIUS 69 AD
21. VESPASIAN 69–79 AD
22. TITUS 79–81 AD
23. DOMITIAN 81–96 AD
  24. Domitian & Domitia wife of Domitian
25. NERVA 96–98 AD
26. TRAJAN 98–117 AD
  27. Matidia niece of Trajan mother of Sabina
28. HADRIAN 117–138 AD
  29. Sabina wife of Hadrian daughter of Matidia
  30. Antinous companion of Hadrian
31. ANTONINUS PIUS 138–161 AD
  32. Faustina I wife of Antoninus Pius mother of Faustina I
33. MARCUS AURELIUS 161–180 AD
  34. Faustina II wife of Marcus Aurelius daughter of Faustina I
35. LUCIUS VERUS 161–169 AD
  36. Lucilla wife of Lucius Verus daughter of Marcus Aurelius
37. COMMODUS 177/180–192 AD
  38. Crispina wife of Commodus
39. PERTINAX 193 AD
40. DIDIUS JULIANUS 193 AD
41. CLODIUS ALBINUS 193/195–197 AD
42. SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS 193–211 AD
  43. Julia Domna wife of Septimius Severus mother of Caracalla & Geta
44. CARACALLA 198/211–217 AD
  45. Geta 209/211–211 AD brother of Caracalla
  46. Plautilla wife of Caracalla
47. MACRINUS 217–218 AD
48. ELAGABALUS 218–222 AD
  49. Julia Maesa grandmother of Elagabalus & Alexander Severus
  50. Julia Soaemias mother of Elagabalus daughter of Julia Maesa
  51. Julia Paula first wife of Elagabalus
  52. Aquilia Severa second wife of Elagabalus
  53. Annia Faustina third wife of Elagabalus
54. ALEXANDER SEVERUS 222–235 AD
  55. Julia Mamaea mother of Alexander Severus daughter of Julia Maesa
MAXIMINUS THE THRACIAN 235–238 AD
BALBINUS 238 AD
PUPIENUS 238 AD
GORDIAN III 238–244 AD
PHILIP I THE ARAB 244–249 AD
Marcia Otacilla Severa wife of Philip I
PHILIP II 247–249 AD
DECIUS 249–251 AD
Etruscilla wife of Decius
HERENNIUS ETRUSCUS 251 AD
HOSTILIUS 251 AD
TREBONIANUS GALLUS 251–253 AD
VOLUSIAN 251–253 AD
AEMILIAN 253 AD
VALERIAN 253–260 AD
Mariniana wife of Valerian I
GALLIENUS 253–268 AD
Salonina wife of Gallienus
POSTUMUS 260–269 AD
MARIUS 269 AD
VICTORINUS 269–271 AD
TETRICUS I 271–274 AD
Tetricus II son of Tetricus I
CLAUDIUS II GOTHICUS 268–270 AD
QUINTILLUS 270 AD
AURELIAN 270–275 AD
Severina wife of Aurelian
TACITUS 275–276 AD
FLORIAN 276 AD
PROBUS 276–282 AD
CARUS 282–283 AD
CARINUS 283–285 AD
NUMERIAN 283–284 AD
DIOCLETIAN 284–305 AD
MAXIMIAN 286–305 AD
Maximian minted by Carausius
CARAUSIUS 286–293 AD
ALLECTUS 293–297 AD
CONSTANTIUS I 305–306 AD
GALERIUS MAXIMIANUS 305–311 AD
SEVERUS II 306–307 AD
MAXIMINUS DAIA 310–313 AD
MAXENTIUS 306–312 AD
LICINIUS I 308–324 AD
CONSTANTINE I THE GREAT 307–337 AD
Helena mother of Constantine I
Crispus son of Constantine I
CONSTANTINE II son of Constantine I
CONSTANTIUS II son of Constantine I
CONSTANS son of Constantine I
MAGNENTIUS 350–353 AD
DECENTIUS 351–353 AD
VETRANIO 350 AD
JULIAN THE APOSTATE 361–363 AD
JOVIAN 363–364 AD
VALENTINIAN I 364–375 AD
VALENS 364–378 AD
GRATIAN 367–383 AD
VALENTINIAN II 375–392 AD
THEODOSIUS I 379–395 AD
Aelia Flaccillia wife of Theodosius I mother of Arcadius & Honorius
MAGNUS MAXIMUS 383–388 AD
EUGENIUS 392–394 AD
ARCADIUS 383–408 AD
Aelia Eudoxia wife of Arcadius
THEODOSIUS II 408–450 AD
Aelia Eudocia wife of Theodosius II
THEODOSIUS II 408–450 AD
THEODOSIUS II 408–450 AD
THEODOSIUS II 408–450 AD
MARCIAN 450–457 AD
LEO I 457–474 AD
ZENO 474–491 AD
BASILISCUS 475–476 AD
HONORIUS 393–423 AD
CONSTANTINE III 407–411 AD
VALENTINIAN III 425–455 AD
Galla Placidia mother of Valentinian III daughter of Theodosius I
SEVERUS III 461–465 AD
ANTHEMIUS 467–472 AD