

A solidus hoard from the vicinity of Karanis

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JAVIER ARCE

A SOLIDUS HOARD FROM THE VICINITY OF KARANIS

The solidus hoard published here is preserved in the small local Museum of Kom Ushim (Egypt), ancient Karanis. It was not possible to determine precisely the place in which it was found despite the help of the Director of the Museum, Mr. Sabry, who took office after 1974 when the coins were discovered. All the information available is that the solidi were not found at Karanis itself, but in its vicinity. I had the opportunity to see the coins during a visit to Karanis in 1983. Later, while travelling in Egypt, Jean-Yves Empereur, Secrétaire général de l'Ecole française d'Athènes, kindly took the photographs of the solidi for me; the negatives are now deposited in the Photothèque of the French School at Athens. Circumstances have prevented me from including weights and die axes in my study. However, I consider it useful to publish the hoard, despite the poor state of preservation of all the coins, because of its homogeneity and its potential interest to numismatists and late Roman historians. The ideal weight of an unworn solidus is 4.5 grams; from Constantine onwards this was maintained as a fixed figure¹.

Catalogue

Emp. = Emperor; r. = right; diad. = diademated; pal. = paludamentum; lab. = labarum.

| Obv. | Rev. | Mint-Mark | References |
|---|---|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE ² Emp. lab. and Victoria | + — *ANTI* | |

¹ I would like to express here my gratitude and warm thanks to Mr. Sabry, director of the Kom Ushim Museum (Karanis) for his help and the facilities he made available for studying the coins; to Madame Dia Abu Dia, former director of the Cairo Museum and General Director of Antiquities, for the permission to publish them, and to Dr. J. P. C. Kent of the British Museum who read my manuscript, corrected my English and helped me to avoid some errors. In a letter he made the following comments which I think deserve to be quoted in full: «The condition of the coins is reminiscent of that noted on numerous lots of solidi that have passed through the international market in recent years. And it may be suspected that all are from the same find. Coins in these lots have been cut down to an average weight of about 3.9 g. Early solidi of Gratian in these groups would date the deposit shortly after his accession in 367, though the worn and damaged condition of even the latest pieces poses a problem.»

² It was unfortunately impossible to obtain a photograph of the obverse of no. 1; it must, however, have been exactly as the obverse of no. 2.

| | | | |
|----|---|--|---------------------------|
| 2 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | + ----- *ANTA* |
| 3 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | + ----- *ANTA* |
| 4 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | + ----- *ANTA* |
| 5 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | + ----- *ANTB* |
| 6 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- 'ANTA' |
| 7 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- 'ANTB' |
| 8 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- 'ANT€' |
| 9 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- SMN⊙ |
| 10 | DNVALENS-PFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- *CONS Ω |
| 11 | DNVALEN-SPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- ANTS |
| 12 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- ANTA' |
| 13 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | ----- ANTS' |

| | | | | |
|----|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 14 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> KONS $\bar{\nu}$ | |
| 15 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> ANTI* | |
| 16 | DNVALENS-PFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> SMNI | |
| 17 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | + $\frac{ }{ }$ <hr/> *ANT ϵ * | |
| 18 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> ANTI' | |
| 19 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> ANTI' | |
| 20 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> ANTI | |
| 21 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | <hr/> RT Ω | |
| 22 | DNIOVIAN-VSPEPAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | SECORITA(sic)-SREI- PVBLICAE VOT V/MVL X Roma and Const. seated | <hr/> ANT $\bar{\Gamma}$ | RIC VIII, p. 532 and p. 510 |
| 23 | DNIOVIAN-VSPFPAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | SECVRITAS-REI-PVBLICAE VOT V/MVLT X Roma and Const. seated | <hr/> *SMN' | RIC VIII, p. 469 |
| 24 | DNCONSTANTIVS · MAXAVGVSTVS Emp. r. diad. pal. | GLORIA-REI-PVBLICAE VOT XXX/MVLT XXXX Roma and Const. seated | <hr/> 'TES' | RIC VIII, pp. 399-400 and 420 |

| | | | |
|----|---|--|-----------------|
| 25 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | _____ SMN€ |
| 26 | DNVALENS-PERPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | _____ ANTA' |
| 27 | DNVALENTINI-ANVSPFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | _____ ANTA |
| 28 | DNVALENS-PERFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | _____ :ANTB' |
| 29 | DNVALENS-PFAVG Emp. r. diad. pal. | RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE Emp. lab. and Victoria | _____ SMNI |

Chronology

It is worth noting, in the first place, the absolute chronological uniformity of the hoard. With the exception of three coins (no. 22–24 of the catalogue), all belong to the period between 364–367 A.D.

Valentinian I was elected Emperor just after the death of Jovian on 26 February 364³. On 28 March of the same year he raised his brother to the throne⁴. They were together until Valentinian divided the Empire in two parts in August, sending Valens to the *Pars Orientis* and remaining himself in the West. However, the division was more a distribution of competences than a real partition: the Empire continued to be an unity; vota coins and legislation are good evidence of this⁵.

According to J.W.C. Pearce the solidi issues of the Restitutor Reipublicae-type were the first struck by Valentinian immediately after his accession; they were produced at all the mints of the Empire⁶. Valentinian issued coins equally for Valens, clearly associating him as his colleague. The two emperors were e.g. associated in the consulate in January 365⁷. The Restitutor-type was continued until 367 at which date Gratian was elevated to the throne as *iunior Augustus*⁸. Almost all the specimens of our hoard belong to this period (26 out of 29).

No. 11 of the catalogue, nevertheless, presents a peculiarity which allows us to be more precise about the chronology of our hoard. According to Pearce and his important study of

³ Cf. *Amm. Marc.* 26.1.7; O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* (Stuttgart, 1919), 214.

⁴ Cf. *Amm. Marc.* 26.4.3; Seeck (above, n. 3), 214.

⁵ *RIC IX*, xvii-xix.

⁶ *RIC IX*, xxxiii.

⁷ Seeck (above, n. 3), 220–221. *Amm. Marc.* 26.5.6.

⁸ *Amm. Marc.* 27.6.4; Seeck (above, n. 3), 218.

the broken and unbroken legends, the coin must belong to the very first months of Valens' reign, i.e. April-May 364, because the obverse legend VALEN-S fits only to this moment; DNVALENS-PERFAVG corresponds to a later date, perhaps after August 364⁹.

As often in such solidus hoards of the Late Empire, coins belonging to an earlier date are very poorly represented. In our case only three examples antedate 364. Whatever the significance of this, it is enough to say for the moment that two belong to Jovian (no. 22-23), and one to Constantius II (no. 24). All three belong to the VOTA series of Jovian (V/X) and Constantius II (XXX/XXXX). The solidus of Constantius is the earliest coin of the hoard: it was issued on occasion of the tricennalia of the emperor in 353¹⁰. Those of Jovian belong to the only issue of VOTA that took place during his short reign, between June 363 and February 364¹¹. Thus, the chronology of the hoard extends between 353 and 367; the number of coins of the time of Valentinian, however, is so significant that we must have a hoard typical of his earlier years as Emperor. It was perhaps hidden just after 367 (but see Kent's letter in note 1).

Mints and Officinae

The mints represented are: Antioch (20 items); Nicomedia (5 items); Constantinople (1 item); Rome (1 item); Thessalonica (1 item) and Arles (1 item). In terms of percentage, the proportion is that

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|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Of a total of 29: | | Of a total of 29: | |
| Antioch | 20 = 68,9 % | Rome | 1 = 3,4 % |
| Nicomedia | 5 = 17,2 % | Thessalonica | 1 = 3,4 % |
| Constantinople . | 1 = 3,4 % | Arles | 1 = 3,4 % |

These percentages are typical of what we know of the Restitutor Reipublicae-type series of Valentinian and Valens. All mints struck the type, but Antioch was especially active. The predominance of pieces from the eastern mints (Nicomedia, Constantinople, Thessalonica, Antioch) could be explained if our treasure belonged to someone from the East. In any case, it is clear that Western pieces did not circulate much in the Eastern part of the Empire.

Mint of Antioch

At the time of Valentinian the mint of Antioch worked with ten officinae (A to I)¹². In our hoard six officinae are represented: A, B, € , S, I , I. There is only one mint-mark not to be found in Pierce: *ANTI* (Cat. no. 1). Some details dealing with the number of issues can be noticed: three issues of the officina A (*ANTA*; ANTA'; ANTA); three of the officina B (*ANTB*; ANTB'; :ANTB'); two of the officina € (ANTE€'; *ANTE€*); I is represented only once for Jovian: ANT I; S twice (ANTS; ANTS'); and I four times: *ANTI*, ANTI*; ANTI'; ANTI.

⁹ RIC IX, xxxvii and 272.

¹⁰ RIC VIII, 51.

¹¹ RIC VIII, 54.

¹² RIC IX, 264 ff.

Mint of Nicomedia

The mint of Nicomedia which used six officinae for gold under Valentinian, but only three during Jovian's short reign, is represented by four issues: one for Θ, one for I, one for the first officina represented by *SMN (for Jovian), and one for €¹³.

Mint of Constantinople

It produced the three metals of the Restitutor-type series, but in much lesser volume: there were only four of Constantinople against fifty-five of Antioch in the Dortmund treasure. However, in our hoard there is only a single issue: *CONS Ϟ.

Mint of Rome

Valentinian was particularly interested in the mint of Rome and her four officinae worked intensively. We have only one example from the officina tertia (RT Ϟ), in spite of the mint's large issues.

Mint of Thessalonica

It is represented only for Constantius II: TES.

Mint of Arles

There is a single example of Valentinian with the mint-mark KONSϜ.

Finally, a significant detail can be stressed: the drastic reduction of officinae carried out by the emperor Julian for base metal currency control and volume of production did not apply to the solidi. It was in any case soon abandoned when Valentinian reactivated all the mints, perhaps because he needed current coins in great quantity for his military campaigns.

Obverses/Reverses

They do not present special features. On the obverse the Emperor is always represented to the right with the diadem and paludamentum. It is impossible to distinguish the portraits of Valentinian and Valens. On the contrary it is possible to see clear differences in the portraits of Jovian and particularly Constantius II (no. 24), Jovian with a larger and fatter appearance; Constantius stylised.

The reverses of the type of the Restitutor series show the Emperor holding a labarum with the Christian sign (the chrismon) in the right hand, bearing in the left the globus and the Victoria crowning him. It stresses the Christian character of the new dynasty and is, perhaps, a continuation of Jovian's series with labarum and chrismon which in the AES 1 replaced the bull type of Julian¹⁴. The legend Restitutor is a clear allusion to the emperor's

¹³ Officinae for Jovian: RIC VIII, 469; for Valentinian: RIC IX, 248 ff.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Elmer, Die Kupfergeldreform unter Julianus Philosophus, NZ 70, 1938, 25–42.

propaganda as a real «restorer»: refortification of the European frontiers, preparation for a new Persian campaign.

It can be suggested that the hoard reflects the relatively enormous amount of gold in the second half of the IV century, not for circulation purposes, but for paying taxes¹⁵. Finally, I should mention the suggestion of J. P. C. Kent that «the only dies available at the provincial mints after 367 would have been those of Valentinian I's and Valens first issue with legend Restitutor Reipublicae – as a consequence of CTh.9.21.7; and that the relative abundance of this type . . . is due to the fact that these dies continued to be used to convert private bullion into gold long after they had ceased to be used for official issues»¹⁶. In this category may be included the hoard of the Karanis Museum.

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¹⁵ J. P. C. Kent, *Gold coinage in the late Roman Empire*, Essays in Roman coinage presented to H. Mattingly (Oxford, 1956), 190 ff.

¹⁶ Kent (above, n. 15).



Javier Arce, A solidus hoard from the vicinity of Karanis



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Javier Arce, A solidus hoard from the vicinity of Karanis

