

Catalogue des monnaies de l'Empire romain III. du soulèvement de 68 après J.-C. à Nerva [Jean-Baptiste Giard]

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Jean-Baptiste Giard

*Catalogue des monnaies de l' Empire romain III.
Du soulèvement de 68 après J.-C. à Nerva.*

Paris/Strasbourg: Bibliothèque nationale de
France/Poinsignon Numismatique, 1998.
xvi + 366 pp., 132 plates + 16 plates in color.
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Catalogues appear all the time. Most of them describe smaller collections, and the existence of standard handbooks and, above all for the Roman empire, the British Museum Catalogue, simplifies the task of organization and description. In fact, apart from the relatively small Hunterian collection in Glasgow, BMC has had a chilling effect on the continuing publication of collections. No other major cabinet ever undertook the publication of its Roman imperial coins, nor has seriously contemplated doing so – with the exception of Paris, which began the series in 1976.

Everyone who has been privileged to work with the coins in Paris knows that this magnificent collection is rendered less accessible by the vagaries of its organization. Thus a catalogue – particularly one by Jean-Baptiste Giard, a sensitive and prolific student of the Roman world, was welcome. The first two volumes did not disappoint. Giard's introductory material, particularly in the first volume, was not as full as Mattingly's in BMCRE, but of course much of the groundwork had already been laid; Giard skillfully built on the foundations laid by Mattingly, brought modern scholarship to bear, and offered his own insights into the Julio-Claudian coinage. BNC 1 and 2 earned a place next to BMCRE on any library's shelves.

This third volume is less impressive. For comparison to earlier volumes, the Paris collection is about twice as large for Augustus as the published London collection; for the reign of Vespasian the numbers are almost identical, so the user is not constantly seeing something new. The illustration is much more full, only a few coins being omitted from the excellent plates. What is missing, I fear, is any new insight into the material itself, and indeed there are some signs of haste in the presentation. In what follows I want to focus on a few problem areas, with attention to problems of attribution and arrangement.

The Civil War coinage, in spite of a study by P.-H. Martin, remains enigmatic.¹ Questions have been raised about whether all the coins are in fact products of this period, particularly those which replicate more or less faithfully the issues of Augustus (here nos. 48-52, 54-6, 58-61): are these truly issues of 68, or are they no more than imitations of coins of Augustus?² The question is not a frivolous one, for the

¹ P.-H. MARTIN, *Die anonymen Münzen des Jahres 68 nach Christus* (Mainz 1974).

² This argument was made by C.T.H.R. EHRHARDT at the Berlin Congress: 'Pseudo-augustus – Pseudo political' in: *Vortragsszusammenfassungen / Abstracts Papers*, XII. Intern. Numism. Kongress Berlin 1997, p. 68 no. 78.

coins, despite the difficulties surrounding their authority and circulation, provide what insight we are likely to get into the mentalities of those who produced them. Who, for example, was responsible for the aurei 63-65, which clearly form a group (63 and 65 seem to share an obv. die, though this is not stated, and the reverses of 63 and 64 are so similar as to suggest identity)?

In fact Sutherland in RIC I² followed the lead of Mattingly and Kraay in attempting to attribute various series on the basis of type-content and the very limited significant die linkage. Martin concluded that the quest for mint sites was purely speculative, and that perhaps we were looking at a moving mint. That assessment seems valid today. It is unfortunate that the RIC arrangement is validated here by adherence to attributions to 'Gaul' or 'Spain' or 'Southern Gaul' as if they had any substance; or especially to 'Germania inferior' when the coin itself is acknowledged as 'douteux' (no. 86)! Martin arranged the coinage in alphabetical order of reverse legend – like the much-reviled Cohen – but in this case his practice, though it makes it hard to associate coins with one another, recognizes the insecure state of our knowledge of the series.

Galba. Things are scarcely better for Galba. The *aes* was given a sort of arrangement by Kraay which, despite (once again) enshrinement in RIC I², obscures rather than illuminates the coinage.³ Kraay's arrangement was difficult, but it was made more difficult still by the compression of RIC: 22 different obverse legends, 12 different bust styles and who knows how many reverse variants make it one of the more complicated earlier imperial coinages. Giard's adherence to RIC order means that coins that would be placed together in any other catalogue are separated here (the list is no doubt not exhaustive but illustrative):

- 113, 119 revs. ROMA/S-C and S P Q R /OB CIV/SER in wreath have the same obv. die. Kraay (221a) thought 117 also shared the obv. die; it is difficult to be sure from the plates, so close are the three. The question is perhaps one of retouching.
- 114, 121 rev. ROMA/S-C and S P Q R/OB CIV/SER in wreath have same obv. die.
- 166, 174-5 revs. CONCORD AVG / S C with Victory to r. or l. have the same obv. die. Their separation in the catalogue is due to Giard's following Sutherland, who arranges the material by 'Groups' roughly corresponding to Kraay's, then by rev. type rather than by die.
- 188, 200 CONCORD AVG / S C Concordia std. l. and SALVS AVGVSTA/S C Salus std. l. have the same obv. die.
- 193 (EX S C / OB / CIVES / SERVATOS in oak wreath), 204 (S – C Victory adv. r.) and 211 (S P Q R / OB / CIV SER in oak wreath) have the same obv. die.
- 194 (LIBERTAS PVBLICA / S C) and 203 (S – C Victory adv. r.) have the same obv. die. Note that in the descriptions 203, which is better preserved, has the interpuncts noted.

³ The Aes Coinage of Galba, NNM 133 (New York 1956).

- 201, 205 (both S – C Victory adv. r.) have the same obv. die.
- 202, 207 (both S – C Victory adv. r.) have the same obv. die.
- 222-3 with AVGVSTA, 'Livia' std. l., noted as having the same obv. die, also share it with 225, LIBERTAS AVGVSTA / S – C Libertas stg. l.
- 236 (ADLOCVTIO) has same obv. die as 238-9 (the die link between which is noted).
- The rev. of Galba 240 is the same as that of Vitellius 90, as was noted by Kraay.⁴
- 241 also has the same obv. die as 238; though it is not noted here, Kraay (359b) identified the coin as a cast, along with other die identical specimens in Vienna and London.
- 245, 246: Giard notes that 245 has the same obv. as a coin in Vienna with rev. ADLOCVTIO, but omits the link between 245 and 246 as well as two occurrences of the same die with rev. HISPANIA CLVNIA SVL (Kraay 366, 367).
- 247, a dupondius with SECVRITAS P ROMANI / S C Securitas std. l., and 252, an As with PROVIDENT / S – C Altar, have the same obv. die.

On balance it might have been better to revert to a more straightforward classification based on legends or types; this would at least have facilitated comparisons, which often have to be made from back-to-back plates. But all would have been easier had these die links been noted in the first place. For the most part Giard was content, here and throughout, to note only consecutive die-linked coins.

We do not have the benefit of a study comparable to Kraay's for the Galban gold and silver, but the attributions are a little easier here: the 'Spanish' mint includes HISPANIA, the mint of 'Gaul' TRES GALLIAE, and there is enough stylistic homogeneity within the associated groups to suggest common origin. Still, the absence of significant die linkage is depressing.

Otho. The collection is surprisingly small and contains nothing that is new; it is odd that here the RIC order, which gains a sort of confirmation from the reviewer's own work, is abandoned. This results in easy presentation of like reverse types, but interdigitates obverse legends that probably define discrete issues, and obscures the historical development of the coinage.

Vitellius. No. 88 is a recent acquisition (Münzen und Medaillen 79, 1994, 482), as cited in Giard's note. One has to go to the sale catalogue to find that the reverse die is one of those carried over from the coinage of Galba. On 90 see above. Since the carryover of dies is mentioned by Giard in the introduction (p. 12) one would have expected some notation in the catalogue.

Vespasian. The collection is a little larger than that presented in BMCRE, but the photographic documentation is far more comprehensive. The introduction sets out two groups of die links, one intended to show that the mint of 'Illyricum' is a myth, the other that some surprising portraits of as late as 71 are in fact Roman

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 52 n. 66 with his cat. no. 355.

(pp. 10-11) and not from Tarraco. This last has hardly required demonstration since Kraay's discussions, but it is usefully placed here in a cautionary way.⁵

Titus. The questions surrounding the attribution of the 'restoration' issues of Titus have been passed over in silence and the attribution to Rome is maintained; Cahn's 'Bithynian' attribution of certain sestertii and dupondii assigned in BMCRE to Lugdunum is used here, without defense, in spite of questions raised by their commonness in Balkan collections. It seems better to follow them: «Before we can accept that Bithynia really did produce these coins we must have a satisfactory explanation for the various features, such as western typology and die-axis and use of copper, that distinguish them so clearly from the usual local coinages of the area.»⁶

There is, finally, the question of forgeries. The problem faces any cataloguer, and is particularly acute for this period, which because of its broad typological interest (Judaea, the secular games, the monuments at Rome) has proved particularly attractive to forgers. Giard has included plated coins and those of 'fabrication locale' in the catalogue proper – a questionable practice, in my view, since they clutter the presentation of the imperial coinage proper.⁷ But pp. 338-45 and plates 129-32 present some 44 identified modern fakes, for the most part fairly credible ones. Many of these display vagaries of style or manufacture (17 of them are cast) that leave little doubt about their rejection, but some are more problematic. Faux 4, for example, was accepted by Kraay (350b) as genuine; how are we to choose between Kraay's opinion and Giard's? particularly when the obverse die is a version of Galba 240, accepted here as genuine. There is also 43, an as of Domitian with rev. Ara Pacis which the BN has owned since 1873 and was apparently unique until the Lanz sale of 22 May 1989, 576. At 18.10 gm the Paris piece is heavy – or perhaps the weight is a misprint? – but the Lanz piece is within normal range (9.82 gm), and the two share their dies. Giard offers no reason for condemning the coin here. I carry no brief for either coin, but do not find the grounds for their condemnation clear or convincing.

I fear it is also the case that some unconvincing pieces have found their way into the catalogue. Vespasian 748 jumps off the plate, first for its reverse type and then for its appearance. A reading of the catalogue betrays no sign of suspicion: the coin is after all RIC 575 (cited from C. 448 = this piece); the note indicates that it is not in BMCRE. But in fact it is described there, at p. 166 n. †, as 'probably altered,' and he is doubtless correct.

⁵ See above, note 3 and 'The Bronze Coinage of Vespasian; Classification and Attribution, in: R.A.G. CARSON, C.M. KRAAY (eds.), *Scripta Numaria Romana. Essays presented to Humphrey Sutherland* (London 1978), pp. 47-57.

⁶ See I.A. CARRADICE, M.R. COWELL, *The Minting of Roman Imperial Bronze Coins for Circulation in the East: Vespasian to Trajan*, NC 147, 1987, pp. 26-50 at 48-50; H.A. CAHN, *An Imperial Mint in Bithynia*, INJ 8, 1984/85, pp. 14-26.

⁷ For Giard's defense of this practice see p. 3; I do not find the analysis at all convincing. Even when die links are at issue the arguments of M.H. CRAWFORD, *Plated Coins – False Coins*, NC 1968, pp. 55-59 seem to me compelling.

Something odd is going on with Domitian 324-5 and 478. 324 has a COS XI (=A.D. 86) obv. of Domitian in combination with an arch rev.; 325 is a brockage of that rev. die. Then comes 478, with an SC obv. of COS XV (90-1). The reverse seems to be the same die with the flanking S – C removed, either in antiquity or modern times. 478, which like the other two comes from the ancien fonds, has the Gonzaga countermark of eagle with wings spread, but that in itself is not probative. More to the point, the pieces have been condemned by Carradice in an article Giard knew (see p. 20) but failed to cite.⁸

In addition there is Domitian 506, a sestertius with rev. tetrastyle shrine that is apparently unique, though the BM has a cast from the same rev. die and a different obv. die. Giard's note says, as so often, 'BMC -,' but in fact Mattingly commented on many otherwise unpublished pieces in Paris. At BMCRE 2 p. 407 * he says of this one, 'Cast(?)', and the plate suggests that his suspicions were well-founded. Once again Carradice has condemned the coin, and once again Giard fails to mention that fact.⁹

The President of the Bibliothèque Nationale remarks (p. vii) «A l'heure de mutations technologiques profondes et de nouvelles méthodes d'accès à l'information, la Bibliothèque nationale de France perpétue sa vocation: être l'une des premières mémoires du monde. Si l'accès en ligne aux collections grâce à BN-OPALINE, la base de données des départements spécialisés sur Internet, n'est plus une utopie, l'accès par le livre demeure une exigence du lecteur.» Perhaps; but as the catalogue moves on, as planned, there will be more and more coins and fewer and fewer novelties. But apart from the sentiment and tradition that affect all of us – who does not love to own and admire a beautifully-produced book with beautiful coins? – only more systematic integration of text and catalogue, and more thorough treatment of the coins in relation to one another and to those in other collections, can set future treatments apart from electronic images.

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⁸ I.A. CARRADICE, *Coins, Monuments, and Literature: some important sestertii of Domitian*, Acted du 9^e congrès international de numismatique Berne 1979 I (Louvain-la-Neuve 1982), pp. 371-383 at 374.

⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 379-380.

