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DOMITIAN THE SECOND?[1]

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The historicity of the 'Gallic Emperor' Domitianus has long been disputed, but two quite separate events in 2003 have now provided incontrovertible confirmation of his existence. The first was the rediscovery in the collections of the Musée Dobrée in Nantes of what had been for a century the only known coin carrying the obverse legend IMP(ERATOR) C DOMITIANUS P(IUS) F(ELIX) AUG(USTUS), discovered in a coin hoard at the villa of Cléons at Haute-Goulaine near Nantes in 1900, but mislaid at some point after its arrival in the museum in 1929. Its reappearance in turn allowed Sylviane Estiot to disprove conclusively the aspersions cast on its authenticity by various influential scholars during the twentieth century.[2] In addition, however, and with a serendipity which for most scholars is the stuff of dreams,[3] a coin hoard containing a second coin of Domitianus, minted from the same dies as the first, was discovered in farmland at Chalgrove near Oxford.[4] This numismatic evidence, combined with the failure of Domitianus' regime to show up in the historical record—aside from Zosimus' brief notice (1.49.2) of three rebellions against Aurelian early in his reign, by 'Septiminus,[5] Urbanus and Domitianus', the latter presumably referring to the same man—suggests that this usurper occupied a position of power very briefly indeed, but *did* occupy a position of power. Not only was Domitianus capable of issuing official coinage, albeit in extremely

[1] The research for this article has taken me a long way from my natural territory, and I have relied heavily on the guidance that a number of numismatists and ancient historians have been generous enough to offer. Prof. Sylviane Estiot and Dr Richard Abdy shared with me their articles on the first and second Domitianus 'antoniniani' (the denomination is also known as a 'radiate') in advance of publication, and they, Dr Chris Howgego, Prof. Fergus Millar and Dr Ed Bispham also made time to comment on earlier drafts of my argument. A bibliographical problem was swiftly remedied by Prof. Dominic Rathbone. If my lack of expertise still shows, it is despite their best efforts.

[2] S. Estiot and G. Salaün, 'L'usurpateur Domitianus', *RN* 160 (2004), 201 ff.

[3] Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 217.

[4] R. A. Abdy, 'The second-known specimen of a coin of Domitian II recorded in a hoard from Oxfordshire', *RN* 160 (2004), 219 ff. The hoard was found by Mr Brian Malin, and was his second such discovery in the same location. It was taken to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, then sent on to the British Museum for conservation and preliminary identification. It was here that Dr Abdy identified the Domitianus coin.

[5] See Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 215 n. 38 for the recovery of this name from a corrupt text.

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small quantities (his absence from all but two of the numerous coin hoards from this turbulent period is telling), but also, as Estiot's research reveals, he would appear to have combined the two hitherto separate mints that produced the coinage of the Gallic Empire—the feat of a man who exerted real control over significant elements of the Gallo-Roman state machinery, however momentarily.[6]

Domitianus' short-lived ascendancy may have left only the slightest trace in the written sources, but if we follow Estiot in identifying the Domitianus of the coins (and Zosimus) with a general of the same name operative a decade previously, a rather fuller portrait emerges of this disappointed aspirant to the purple. At three points in the *Historia Augusta* (*Gall.* 2.6–7; *Tyr. Trig.* 12.13 f.; 13.3) mention is made of the contribution of one Domitianus to the defeat of the Macriani in 262.[7] Macrianus, a high official of the emperor Valerian, had claimed the empire in the name of his two sons after Valerian's capture by the Persians in 260, and in 262 he and the younger Macrianus attempted to extend their hegemony with an invasion of the western empire. The incursion was defeated by forces of Valerian's son, the emperor Gallienus, in Illyricum *uel in Thraciarum extimis* (*Tyr. Trig.* 12.13), and the general named Domitianus, a subordinate of Aureolus, Gallienus' commander of cavalry, is given much of the credit for the victory. If this is our Domitianus, and Estiot does posit an extremely plausible *curriculum vitae* for such a man,[8] he will in all likelihood have found refuge in the secessionist 'Gallic Empire', established by Postumus in 260,[9] after the abortive insurrection against Gallienus that his superior Aureolus, proclaiming himself an ally of Postumus, staged at Milan in 268.[10] Domitianus will subsequently have made his bid for supreme power after the assassination of the third 'Gallic Emperor' Victorinus, in which he may have had a hand, early in 271. He will

[6] Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 207 f.; cf. 216. Estiot shows how the first coin of Domitianus (and now also by extension the second, die-identical discovery) has an obverse image (the emperor cuirassed, without a *paludamentum*) which originated in the second of two workshops that produced coinage for the Gallic Empire ('Atelier II'), but a reverse image identifiable (from the representation of the *chiton* at neck-level worn by female personifications such as Concordia) as deriving from the first workshop ('Atelier I'). As Estiot concludes (208), 'Ce caractère hybride de l'antoninien de Domitianus laisse donc supposer que Domitianus au moment de son usurpation a pu mettre la main sur les deux ateliers monétaires alors en fonction sous les empereurs gaulois, ou du moins regrouper en un même lieu, sous son autorité, le personnel des deux Monnaies de l'empire dissident.'

[7] For the date, see D. S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395* (London, 2004), 259.

[8] Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 215 ff.

[9] Potter (n. 7), 257 for the date.

[10] I. König, *Die gallischen Usurpatoren von Postumus bis Tetricus* (Munich, 1981), 125 ff.; Potter (n. 7), 263 f.

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then himself in turn have been supplanted, probably after no more than a few days, by supporters of the last Gallic Emperor, Tetricus, although Zosimus' statement to the effect that the rising of Domitianus was suppressed by the emperor at Rome, Aurelian, rather than Tetricus or his most influential supporter Victoria (Victorinus' mother, allegedly), remains a potential complication.

The speculative nature of this discussion of Domitianus may already have lost me some readers, though I would argue in my defence that it is hard to approach the third century in any other way. But a detail in the *HA* may shed just a fraction more light on this shadowy imperial claimant, a glimpse perhaps of the propagandistic strategies that brought him to power, or at the very least evidence that Domitianus' route to imperial power followed a pattern that was in certain respects paradigmatic for the 'Third-century Crisis'. At *Tyr. Trig.* 12.14 the reference to the leading role that Domitianus, *dux Aureoli fortissimus et uehementissimus*, played in the defeat of the Macriani is embellished by the detail that Domitianus claimed descent from 'Domitian and Domitilla' (*qui se originem diceret a Domitiano trahere atque a Domitilla*). It would certainly seem that he gave unusual emphasis to the name he had in common with the first-century emperor. Sylviane Estiot (*pers. comm.*) has identified as a peculiarity of Domitianus' coinage that the pretender fails to present his full nomenclature on the obverse. It is a convention of this period that emperors or would-be emperors publicize their identity and image by presenting their full *tria nomina* on their first monetary emissions, settling for an abbreviated form thereafter. We cannot be completely sure, of course, that Domitianus himself did not have a first issue carrying his full titulature: we may simply be unlucky only to have coins from a later emission. But it seems much more likely that what we have today represents Domitianus' one and only issue of coinage, and that the unusual emphasis on his *cognomen* is a matter of deliberate choice. This does tend to suggest that he considered it a significant asset.

Stein nevertheless considers the claim of descent from Domitian 'nugatory',[11] and as a statement of fact it does deserve to be treated with the utmost scepticism.[12] But the actual truth of what the

[11] *PIR*^{2} D 114; cf. *Wiener Studien* 24 (1902), 339 ff.; *RE* V.1 (1903), Domitianus 1–2, col. 1311 f.

[12] The first-century Domitian's consort was called Domitia, and there was apparently no surviving offspring of the marriage: G. W. Mooney, *C. Suetoni Tranquilli de vita Caesarum, Libri VII-VIII* (London, 1930), at Suet. *Dom.* 3.1. On the other hand, the sons of Domitian's cousin Flavius Clemens, who was married to Domitian's niece Domitilla, were adopted by the emperor.

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third-century Domitianus said (and let us assume for the sake of argument that the claim *can* be attributed to Domitianus rather than to the imagination of the *HA* author) is of course less important than the impact that such an assertion might have had on a third-century audience that *did* give it credence—and this will potentially have been far from nugatory. Asserting kinship with figures from happier periods of Roman history is a tactic readily paralleled in the third century,[13] but claiming the notorious Domitian as an ancestor may nevertheless strike us an inept attempt at self-promotion. However, it rather depends on the audience to whom the claim was addressed: one interest group in particular may have been quite impressed by such a connection. There is a case to be made that claiming such an unsavoury figure as an ancestor might actually be, in the circumstances obtaining in Domitianus' lifetime, a sharp move, and a likely one for a pretender who carried this name to make.

Our sources are clear that Domitian divided opinion across the various sections of Roman society (Suet. *Dom.* 23.1):

occisum eum populus indifferenter, miles grauissime tulit statimque Diuum appellare conatus est, paratus et ulcisci, nisi duces defuissent; quod quidem paulo post fecit, expostulatis ad poenam pertinacissime caedis auctoribus. contra senatus adeo laetatus est ut repleta certatim curia non temperaret quin mortuum contumeliosissimo atque acerbissimo adclamationum genere laceraret, scalas etiam inferri clipeosque et imagines eius coram detrahi et ibidem solo affligi iuberet, nouissime eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam decerneret.

The people bore his killing with indifference, but the soldiers took it very badly and immediately attempted to style him 'the God'; they were quite prepared to avenge him also, had there been anyone to lead them. And they did achieve this end a little later, demanding with great persistence for punishment the authors of the murder. The Senate, on the other hand, were so overjoyed that they raced to fill the House and did not refrain from assaulting the dead man with the most insulting and abusive

He, 'abolishing their former names, had ordered one to be called Vespasianus and the other Domitianus' (Suet. *Dom.* 15.1), and the two boys were tutored by Quintilian (*Inst.* 4 *praef.* 2). Their natural father was executed, and Domitilla banished to a small island, supposedly on the grounds that they had converted to Christianity: Mooney at Suet. *Dom.* 15.1, citing Dio 67.14.1 f.; Hieron. *Epist.* 108.7; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.18. The death of Clemens was in turn allegedly the main catalyst for Domitian's own assassination. But *if* T. Flavius Domitianus the younger survived the deaths of both his natural and adoptive father, and retained a name which will have been a serious encumbrance after 96, not to mention personally distasteful, he might just have had descendants who could claim a lineage from Domitian and Domitilla.

[13] Thus compare *HA*, *Gord.* 2.2 on Gordian I's descent from Trajan (and *Tyr. Trig.* 30.2 on Zenobia's claim to be descended from Cleopatra: cf. Potter [n. 7], 267 and 643 n. 28); Potter (n. 7), 241 on Trajan Decius; and also König (n. 10), 137 f. on the auspicious overtones of the full name of Marius, Postumus' immediate successor as ruler of the Gallic Empire, Marcus Aurelius Marius.

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kind of shouting, nor from ordering that ladders be brought and shields and images of Domitian pulled down before their eyes and smashed on the ground there and then. Finally they decreed that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased and all record of him obliterated.

Suetonius' claim that the military took Domitian's assassination very hard is repeated by Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 11.9), and finds an echo in a distinctly implausible story told at Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.7 about Dio Chrysostom: happening to be present in a military camp after the assassination of Domitian, and realising that the troops were shaping up to mutiny, the philosopher delivered an eloquent indictment of the dead emperor, and persuaded the soldiers to fall in with the wishes of the Romans. But in fact much of the military remained disenchanted with the new regime. The belated revenge taken by the Praetorians under Casperius Aelianus, in the face of Nerva's objections (it was the motivation for his adoption of Trajan, precisely to provide the credibility in the eyes of the army that Domitian had had but Nerva lacked),[14] is described at [Aur. Vict.], *Epit.* 12.6 ff., Dio 68.3.3 and John of Antioch fr. 110.[15] Juvenal meanwhile makes no mention of the army, but also implies that Domitian's persecution of the senatorial aristocracy was met with indifference by other sections of Roman society (4.150 ff.).

There was one very good reason for the army's warm feelings towards Domitian, and it was that he had awarded the military its first pay rise since the time of Caesar, and the last until Septimius Severus.[16] It was extremely generous, an increase of one third from

[14] A visual expression of Nerva's anxiety regarding the military is perhaps provided by the so-called Cancelleria Reliefs, on one of which (Frieze A), depicting a scene of either *profectio* or *aduentus* to or from one of Domitian's foreign campaigns, Domitian's head has been recarved to represent Nerva. The resultant image is unconvincing, the new head too small for its body, and this may explain why the reliefs seem never to have been displayed in their adapted forms. They are nevertheless clear evidence of a felt need to provide Nerva with the kind of military status that Domitian had enjoyed. On the Cancelleria Reliefs, and the extensive bibliography associated with them, see D. E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven, 1992), 191 f. A similar impulse is reflected by the bronze equestrian statue of Domitian/Nerva (in this case only the anterior part of the face has been altered) now in the Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei at Baia, representing the emperor as a victorious commander in the act of hurling a spear, on the model of a Lysippan statue of Alexander: description and images in P. Miniero, *Baia. Il castello, il museo, l'area archeologica* (Naples, 2000), 55 ff. The emperor is accompanied on the Cancelleria relief by Minerva, and she is alluded to also on the statue by the Gorgon's head on the rider's breastplate. The martial aspect of this goddess was certainly a large part of the reason for Domitian's devotion to her, on which see K. M. Coleman, *Statius*, Silvae *IV* (Oxford, 1988), at *Silv.* 4.1.22. On Statius' martial epic for Domitian, the *De Bello Germanico*, see E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the* Satires *of Juvenal* (London, 1980), 195 ff.

[15] C. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (Paris, 1841–70), iv. 580.

[16] M. A. Speidel, *JRS* 82 (1992), 88.

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225 to 300 denarii per year.[17] Nor was this the only concession Domitian made to the army, since he also granted (or confirmed an earlier grant of) immunity from tax to veterans, and citizenship and immunity to their families.[18] Thus in 94 a legionary veteran of the *X Fretensis*, M. Valerius Quadratus, recorded the conditions of his discharge on a stone tablet,[19] mentioning at the end the grant of citizenship to three children born to him whilst in service, *beneficio eiusdem optumi principis*.[20] But this son of Vespasian cultivated throughout his career the image of an energetic military commander who identified closely with his armed forces. During his reign he took personal charge of a series of military campaigns, and as a result spent what was, in comparison to the run of emperors thus far, an unusually large amount of time away from Rome, in the company of his army.[21] This emphasis on good relations with the military is reflected in his coinage too,[22] and the regular allusions to Domitian's strategic prowess in Frontinus' *Strategemata* (1.1.8; 1.3.10; 2.3.23; 2.11.7), a work self-evidently composed during Domitian's reign, suggest that this was a style of flattery appreciated by the emperor. It may well be true, as Campbell suggests, that Domitian was more explicit than his predecessors about the military basis of his power,[23] and by the same token more explicit about marginalizing the old ruling class.

Such conflicts of interest between the military and the political élite continued to have a resonance in the later third century, of course. It is entirely likely that fond memories of this great benefactor of the common soldier—the very opposite of that senatorial *damnatio memoriae*[24]—persisted among the armed forces for a very long time indeed: pay rises, after all, came around rather less frequently than Secular Games (although the pace increased in the third century),[25] and the army, then as now, had a long corporate memory. In *that* case

[17] Dio 67.3.5; Suet. *Dom.* 7.3 with Mooney (n. 12), *ad loc.*

[18] *FIRA*^{2} 1, no. 76; J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 B.C. – A.D. 235* (Oxford, 1984), 284.

[19] *FIRA*^{2} 1, pp. 426–7.

[20] Campbell (n. 18), 443 f.

[21] B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London, 1992), 150.

[22] Campbell (n. 18), 44: 'Domitian built up an excellent rapport with his men: several of the coins of the reign show the emperor shaking hands with a soldier across a lighted altar, symbolising the comradely association of ruler and army.'

[23] Campbell (n. 18), 45.

[24] Compare O. Hekster, *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads* (Amsterdam, 2002), 163 ff. on the popularity that even Commodus could command outside senatorial circles and after his death, amongst the military especially—a status exploited by Didius Julianus in his efforts to secure control: Herodian 2.6.10 ff.; cf. *HA*, *Did. Jul.* 2.6 f.; Dio 73.12.1.

[25] The increases are tabulated conveniently by Speidel (n. 16), 88.

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a claim of kinship with Domitian (carrying with it an implication that this second Domitian would match the generosity of his namesake and relative) will have been a very effective way indeed of securing the loyalty of soldiers, particularly soldiers experiencing the unpredictable economic conditions of the Gallic Empire.

The coins of Domitianus themselves may reinforce the impression of a pretender to power who gave the interests of the fighting man even greater attention than was generally the case during the period. The text on the reverse of each coin reads CONCORDIA MILITUM, an overtly militaristic legend in itself, with a single (ominous) precedent amongst Gallic Empire issues in the coinage of Marius, short-lived predecessor of Victorinus in 269, and in this and other cases a glaring instance of wishful thinking.[26] In the case of Domitianus' coins, furthermore, it is accompanied by an unparalleled representation of this specifically military *concordia* holding a patera and cornucopia, tokens of universal peace and prosperity, not just harmony amongst the troops. One would expect, and one finds elsewhere, legionary standards or clasped hands illustrating CONCORDIA or FIDES MILITUM.[27] But it is very suggestive of the centrality of the military to Domitianus' thinking and strategy that it is *concordia militum*, according to the symbolism of the reverse, that will bring about universal peace. Tellingly, perhaps, the man who was probably Domitianus' successor, Tetricus, imitates the image on Domitianus' coins, but also effectively demilitarizes it. Coins at the start of Tetricus' reign display a similar image of Concordia holding a patera and cornucopia, but the legend now reads CONCORDIA AUG.[28] At this point we enter (if we have not already) the realms of historiographical fantasy, no doubt, but the civilian instincts of the senatorial Tetricus, according to the portrait painted in the sources, surrendering to Aurelian with a quotation from *Aeneid* 6 (*eripe me his, inuicte, malis*) 'when he could not bear the impudence and

[26] In the third century claims of military concord or loyalty were of course as common as the actual phenomenon was scarce. A pertinent parallel from earlier Roman history is Nerva's issue of coins throughout his reign with the reverse legend CONCORDIA EXERCITUUM, eloquent of a source of support he sorely missed. On these coins, 'le contraste entre paroles et réalité', and the insight they offer into the nature of Nerva's principate, see J. Béranger in R. Stiehl and H.-E. Stier (eds.), *Beitrage zur alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben. Festschrift für Franz Altheim zum 6.10.1968*, *vol. 1* (Berlin, 1969), 484 f.

[27] Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 207 f. T. Hölscher, *JdAI* 95 (1980), 306 f. explains how subtle modulations can be made to the significance of the figure of Concordia in numismatic representations by the variation of her attributes. What is striking about the Domitianus coin is the lack of any peculiarly military symbolism in a reverse image that depicts *Concordia Militum*.

[28] Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 208.

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shamelessness of his own soldiers' (*Tyr. Trig.* 24.2 f.; cf. Eutr. 9.13), mark a contrast with the impression of stark reliance on the armed forces that emerges from the (admittedly sketchy) record of Domitianus. Perhaps this was Domitianus' pitch for support to the Rhine armies: I am a Domitian, defender of the troops and enemy of the senate like my ancestor, and a better choice by far for you soldiers than a noble and senator like Tetricus.[29]

Another great friend of the legionary, Septimius Severus, is famously credited with the advice to his sons, 'Be united, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men' (Dio 77.15.2). It is the message of Domitianus' antoniniani as well, if we read them hard enough, and it is also the implication of trumpeting a connection with Domitian, an emperor who notoriously advanced the interests of one societal group to the detriment of others. Severus' words are of course practically the motto of the third century in general, but Domitianus may nevertheless mark an extreme instance of the 'Soldier Emperor'. At any rate, it is hard to think of too many periods of Roman history when offering the prospect of Domitian *redivivus* might confer political advantage.[30]

It is a striking coincidence that a fairly natural analysis of Domitianus' claim to be descended from Domitian takes us back to the original cause of all the recent interest in Domitianus II—money. Domitianus clearly did not succeed in striking much currency, but Estiot's insight regarding Domitianus' amalgamation of the two imperial mints suggests that he nevertheless gave particular attention to things monetary—made control of the minting process a high priority—and so also, I have argued, does his bruited kinship with Domitian. It is quite possible that the coins which survive constitute part of his attempt to fulfil the promise of his name and ancestry, by improving the financial circumstances of the soldiers—bribing them, to put it less delicately—and to do so, at least in part, with coins carrying his own totemic name. But if so, the analogy between Domitian I and Domitian II did not stretch far. For whereas the first Domitian paid close heed to the quality of his silver coinage, as he did to every aspect of his administration, restoring it in 82 to the

[29] Insofar as the conqueror of the Macriani looks like a more effective opponent for Aurelian than Tetricus, the massacre at Châlons sur Marne (the so-called *clades Catalaunica*, *Pan. Lat.* 5 (8) 4.3) that ended Tetricus' reign and the Gallic Empire as a whole in 274 would tend to vindicate such a claim.

[30] For Domitian's lasting role as a negative *exemplum* outside military circles see Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 3, writing shortly after the reign of Domitianus II, but from the peculiar perspective of a Christian apologist, and Procopius, *Secret History* 8.12 ff., whose strange tale of Domitian's death and reconstitution may yet reflect a more mainstream elite assessment of the emperor.

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Augustan level of silver content, and even when obliged to devalue again in 85 only reducing it to the Neronian standard rather than the debased Vespasianic,[31] the theoretically silver antoniniani of Domitian II shared with those of Victorinus and Tetricus the dubious accolade of being the nadir of the long process of debasement of the silver currency which Nero had begun, but which had accelerated dramatically in the third century.[32] The troops of Domitian I, in other words, could trust the coinage they received in their wage packets: 'it was in the year after this reform that Domitian raised military pay by a third, paid, presumably, in the new and more pure currency.'[33] The money that Domitian II coined, on the other hand, was in terms of its bullion value practically worthless.

There will have been many reasons for Domitianus' failure to establish his regime securely. The sources[34] give a major role to Victorinus' (possibly fictitious) mother Victoria and her lavish bribery of the troops (*Victoria amisso Victorino filio legionibus grandi pecunia comprobantibus Tetricum imperatorem facit*): more lavish than Domitianus', evidently. But if Domitianus did seek to make mileage out of his name and purported ancestry, the debased coinage that he minted would have done little to substantiate any promise to improve the financial circumstances of the soldiery. The degree to which the metallic content of Roman currency affected the public perception of its face value is in fact debatable,[35] and it may have been rather less than some emperors assumed, judging by the 'roughly tenfold leap in prices' that seems to have accompanied Aurelian's reforms of the coinage in 274.[36] But if we accept Howgego's suggestion that Roman

[31] D. R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage, Part 1. From Augustus to Domitian*, BAR Supp. 5 (1976), 115.

[32] Estiot and Salaün (n. 2), 207: both coins are of very low silver content, in the vicinity of 1%, and extremely lightweight, the Cléons coin being 2.20g (2.19g after cleaning), the Chalgrove 2.07g: Abdy (n. 4), 220. At the time of burial they would still presumably have had the thin surface wash of silver that was used to conceal the lack of precious metal in such debased issues.

[33] Walker (n. 31), 120.

[34] Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 33.14; *Tyr. Trig.* 24.1 ff.

[35] C. Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins* (London, 1995), 121 ff.

[36] D. Rathbone in C. E. King and D. G. Wigg, *Coin Finds and Coin Use in the Roman World. The Thirteenth Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History, 25–27.3.1993* (Berlin, 1996), 337. Rathbone argues that the progressive debasement of the coinage through the third century had little inflationary impact; what did cause inflation were the twin reforms apparently undertaken by Aurelian in 274, the decoupling of the silver coinage from its guaranteed ratio of 25 denarii to 1 aureus and the issuing of 'silver' coins explicit about their (still limited) silver content: the mark XXI found on Aurelian's antoniniani apparently indicates twenty parts base metal to one part silver. See also Potter (n. 7), 273 f. Aurelian's mistake, if Rathbone's analysis is correct, was to overestimate public concern for intrinsic value and underestimate the capacity of the imperial government to generate confidence simply by its own authority: judging by the

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coinage fell somewhere between the status of 'token' (in which case, 'its face value was simply what the government said it was') and 'ingot' ('worth its metal content'), Domitianus' coinage would have been weak on both counts. It was light and low in silver content, and thus unlikely to impress any recipients who were alert to its intrinsic value. But at the same time to have value by virtue of governmental say-so there needed to be confidence in the issuing authority, in Domitianus' right to claim the role of head of state, and it was to secure precisely that recognition that he was in all likelihood issuing the coins in the first place—a viciously circular state of affairs. The parallel offered by the coinage of Domitianus' erstwhile victim Macrianus and his brother Quietus suggests a likely fate for currency minted by a pretender who enjoyed less than universal recognition: a surviving notice issued by the strategos of the Oxyrhynchite nome in 260 (*P Oxy.* 1411) insists that bankers and other business people accept 'the sacred currency of the Sebastoi', the *Sebastoi* (or *Augusti*) here being Macrianus and Quietus. As Potter interprets the situation, 'people seem to have been unwilling to accept them precisely because they did not trust the authority of those who minted them.'[37] Of course the very existence of coins carrying a pretender's name, the evidence (in other words) of his control of that crucial department of the imperial administration, will have carried the strong implication that he was a force to be reckoned with. But it is unlikely that anybody would have been convinced by the products of *this* pretender's mint that the Golden Age of Domitian, the soldier's *optumus princeps*, had been restored.

evidence on prices adduced by Rathbone, that government-sanctioned 25:1 ratio was enough on its own to prevent inflation prior to 274, despite the massive debasement that the coinage suffered during that time. But Aurelian was not alone in thinking that there did exist a constituency that cared about the bullion value of their money. Postumus had been aiming for a similar impact earlier with the legend MONETA AUG, presumably designed to advertise his maintenance of a relatively high intrinsic value as compared with the Central Empire, on which see König (n. 10), 82 ff. And for evidence that the official ratio was recognized, in some circles at least, as artificial, and that payment in gold coin could be construed as a benefit, see Howgego (n. 35), 142 n. 2.

[37] Potter (n. 7), 274. I find this reading of the circumstances that provoked the edict more persuasive than that of Rathbone, who attributes the rejection of the coinage to fears of the same kind of retariffing as Aurelian would carry out a decade later: Rathbone (n. 36), 335 f.

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