

Carausius: his Mints and his Money System

by HAROLD MATTINGLY

CARAU SIUS, our British Emperor, has not been too badly served by commentators. He first attracted the wayward and erratic genius of Stukeley, (1) then, after a long interval, the solid and devoted labours of Webb. (2) Of Stukeley little can be retained beyond a handful of brilliant guesses. Webb, on the other hand, has laid the foundations of a 'Corpus' of the coinage and has succeeded in stating most of the problems of the reign and solving many of them. But still there is room for a history of Carausius, in which the very scanty literary evidence shall be reinforced by the evidence of the coins, when the pure gold has been extracted from the masses of rough ore. There is perhaps not a very great deal to add to Webb's materials, but a great deal of sorting remains to be done. Included in his lists are many coins of a more or less barbarous character—ancient, but the product of no regular mint. Inside each mint, the order of mint-marks must be established and the types classified under them; only so can we venture to interrogate the types for their meaning. Here is a task of great interest and promise for a young scholar. No disparagement of Webb's fine work is implied. Books as good as his ought to have progeny.

In this little paper, I confine myself to questions of mints and monetary system, only occasionally glancing at other problems.

The chief mint of Carausius, far more prolific than any other, is that which signs L. It continues after A.D. 296 to strike for Diocletian and his colleagues as L or LON. There is no possibility of doubt that it is London. Second in importance comes the mint that signs c, rarely CL or CC. (3) It has usually been taken to be Camulodunum, less commonly, Corinium (Cirencester). I think that the balance of evidence certainly tilts in favour of Stukeley's suggestion, Clausentum (Bitterne); it is one of those few cases in which his intuition was triumphantly right. It is agreed by all that the rare CL coins are of exactly the same style as the c ones. CL is obviously appropriate for Clausentum, obviously not for Corinium. It will only suit Camulodunum, if one can persuade oneself that CL, not CA or CD, is the natural form, if two letters are to be used at all. CC occurs side by side with CL (4). Applied to Camulodunum, it might be read as 'Colonia Camulodunensis'—a mint signature for which there is no parallel. We might just as well guess at some reference to the fleet (*classis*) at Clausentum. It is of course to the temporary importance of the fleet, partly based on the Isle of Wight, that the choice of Clausentum as mint-city would be due. A comparison of the coin-types of c with those of L and RSR (see below) seems to clinch the question. c and RSR both have the 'advent' type of EXPECTATE VENI, the early programme type of RENOVAT ROM, She-wolf and twins, and the naval type of FELICITAS AVG, Galley; all of these are missing at L. c has ABUNDANTIA AVG, analogous to RSR's VBERTAS AVG, both again missing at London. So too Allectus has FIDES EXERCITVS, FIDES MILITVM, VIRTVS EXERCITVS at c and not at L (5). It is suggested that there is strong evidence that both c and RSR were ports and stations of troops. There is no strong evidence from finds to help us. L always outnumbers c—

¹ *Medallic History of Carausius*, 1757.

² In *Num. Chron.* 1907, and vol. v 2, pp. 426 ff. of Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage* (hereafter quoted simply as 'Webb').

³ Webb, p. 483, p. 216: in n.1 he quotes from Stukeley CLA, but as unverified and doubtful. For Allectus, see Webb pp. 565 ff, no. 69, 79, 105, 108, etc. ⁴ Webb, p. 483, nos. 217-9.

⁵ All these coin-types can readily be checked in Webb's lists. The argument from types must be used carefully. London has types of the army and many legions; yet we have no reason to think it was a garrison town.

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often very considerably. In one hoard from Essex the c coins were nearly half the L in number. But this sort of evidence is not enough to turn the scale. The coins of both mints no doubt travelled freely in Britain.

The various marks, additional to L and C (except XXI, for which see below) certainly mark issues following one another in succession. At present we are simply reduced to guessing if we try to expand them, e.g. BE into ' Bonus Eventus ' or SP into ' Salus Publica '. An arrangement of the coins under issues is obviously the next step in advance.

Next in order comes the mint that signs RSR—for one mint it certainly is, even if some of the recorded specimens are ' barbarous ' imitations. We have just seen how, like C, it seems to have had a special interest in Carausius' first arrival and to be a port and station for troops. As it celebrates one legion, and one legion only, LEG IIII FL, we must infer that troops of that legion were stationed there ; the normal quarters of the legion were in Gaul, but it need only have been a detachment (*vexillatio*) that accompanied Carausius. The mint, then, is clearly Rutupiae (Richborough), the door of Britain to the Continent. Here again Stukeley guessed well. But Rutupiae accounts for only one letter of the signature ; an S and a second R remain. The most probable guess is ' Rationalis Summarum Rutupiiis ' (6). Allectus was chief financial officer of Carausius, an office correctly described by the term ' Rationalis Summarum '. His later history proves that he was ambitious, and it would not be surprising, therefore, if he left his mark on the coinage.

Two coins, one found near Wroxeter, the other first noted in a dealer's tray, bear the mark BRI. Webb inclines to regard this as a rare use of the provincial name, BRITANNIA. I, personally, have no doubt that Hill was right (7) in taking BRI to equal VRI and be the signature of ancient Wroxeter, Uriconium, or, more properly, Vriconium.

These two coins open the door to further speculation. The reader of Webb will soon find that apart from coins of the regular mints L, C, RSR, apart too from the barbarous imitations, there are whole series of decent, well-struck coins, either bearing no mark at all or only such marks as S P, S C, which we take to be marks of series, not of mints. As Webb observes, many of these show a style that may be called either that of L or of C. Under Allectus this class of issue stops. How are these coins to be regarded ? They are not exactly barbarous, and must be closely associated with the official coinage. It is hard to believe that they belong either to L or C, mints which so steadily marked their city. There remains the theory that they were struck at the main cities of Britain, either by the direct permission or with the tacit connivance of the government. It is for the writer of the future to try out this hypothesis further. I feel little doubt that it is already nearly correct ; the two BRI coins are of this class, exceptionally marked by an enterprising artist with the name of the place of origin.

The one remaining class of coins of Carausius interests us less. Though found occasionally in Britain, it was certainly struck on the Continent (8). Such coins occur more freely in finds there, they are more like coins of the Gallic Empire, and they have their own stock of coin-types, varying considerably from the British. There are a few marks—of mints (?)—R, OP, OPR. Webb thought that R stood for Rotomagus (Rouen), and indeed a hoard was found there. But Carausius's chief stronghold on the Continent was Gesoriacum (Boulogne), and it seems impossible to deny that city at least a share in the coinage.

⁶ Or, as Webb, ' Rationalis Summarum Rationum '. But Webb is certainly in error attributing the RSR coins to London, because the style is in some cases very similar.

Stukeley's ' Rutupii Signator Rogatorum ', ' distributor of bounties at Rutupiae ' condemns itself. Another suggestion, ' Rutupiae Stativa Romana ', will not find many supporters. See Webb, p. 434. ⁷ *Num. Chron.* 1925, pp. 336 ff. Cf. Webb, p. 435. ⁸ Webb, pp. 516 ff.

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Behind the monetary policy of Carausius there was certainly a brain, which I suspect to have been that of Allectus. The gold of Carausius is very rare—too rare for its standard to be fixed with certainty; it was probably 72, or even 70, to the pound (9). The standard of Allectus was probably the same, but recorded weights run a little higher. From about the beginning of his reign (A.D. 286-287) to 289 Carausius struck a piece of pure silver—apparently a denarius of a weight superior to that of Nero (10). Allectus did not strike the coin, but Diocletian and his colleagues borrowed the idea and struck a similar, but somewhat lighter, piece in A.D. 295. The common coin—the Antoninianus—is at first struck rather smaller than the contemporary Roman, and bears no mark of value. Soon after the peace with Rome, the module improves, the mark of value XXI is added (11) and the coins correspond in every particular to Continental issues of the Empire. After the breach of the peace in A.D. 292, the XXI disappears again; it is never used by Allectus. To complete the argument, it must be added that coins of the Gallic Empire and of Rome before Aurelian occur in great numbers in hoards buried under Carausius and Allectus, while coins of Rome after Aurelian's reform occur in much smaller numbers (12). The conclusion is certain. The Britain of Carausius in A.D. 287 was still refusing, as the West had steadily refused, to accept the reform of Aurelian; it still clung to its old coinage. As part of the price of peace with Rome, Carausius came into line and accepted the valuation of the radiate coin at two denarii (XX-1). He may have abandoned his pure silver issue for the same reason. Bronze coinage of Carausius can hardly be said to exist. A few rare specimens are recorded, but the most interesting of them (still to be published) has every look of being no ordinary coin but a strike in bronze from dies intended for a gold medal. The reign of Allectus has just one problem, which deserves a passing glance. Both at L and C mints he has coins, well below normal module, though more than halves, marked QL, QC, and bearing exclusively types of galleys—legends VIRTUS AVG, LAETITIA AVG (13). These coins present a pretty problem. If they were just halves of the ordinary coins we should expect a laureate instead of a radiate head, and, perhaps, a greater variety of types. Further, Q, if, as seems probable, it equals Quinarius, is not half an 'Antoninianus' worth two denarii (XX-1). The coins really look as if they are the last issue of the reign, when the great trial of strength by sea was at hand. In that case, Allectus might be adopting the policy that Diocletian himself employed of reducing the nominal value of his standard coin (14). But this is one of the questions which our students of tomorrow must settle; it is enough for us to have sketched its outline.

⁹ Gold at 70 to the pound was struck by Diocletian in his early period. The 72nd of the gold pound is the famous piece of Constantine I and his successors—the 'solidus'.

If the gold piece was struck at 72 to the pound and the silver at 84, 12 silver pieces would give a ratio of gold to silver 1 : $\frac{7}{2}$ or $10\frac{2}{3}$ ths. 15 would give a ratio of nearly 1 : 13, 20 a ratio of 1 to just over 17. We are not sure of the ratio and can therefore only guess at the relation of the pieces to one another.

¹⁰ The weight was apparently over 60 grains; individual specimens run as high as 78.

¹¹ For some reason not yet explained the mark is rare at the C mint. Coins struck by Carausius for Diocletian and Maximian are without it. (Webb, pp. 553 ff, 555 ff).

¹² Webb, pp. 448 ff. The great Blackmoor Hoard contained over 28,000 Gallic, etc., some 1200 odd Roman (post Aurelian), 545 of Carausius and 90 of Allectus. No doubt many other hoards of Gallic coins belong to the same period, but do not chance to contain any coins of the British Emperors. The Linchmere Hoard consisted mainly of Carausius with something like half the number of Roman (post Aurelian) and hardly any Gallic. ¹³ Webb, pp. 563 f, 569.

¹⁴ Diocletian reduced by half. If Allectus did the same, his own Antoninianus would be one, not two, denarii. That is perhaps a possibility worth considering.