

THE UNMARKED COINS OF CARAUSIUS

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IN 1945 Harold Mattingly stated that Percy Webb had laid the foundations of a corpus of the coinage of Carausius and had succeeded in isolating most of the problems of the reign and in solving many of them.¹ Mattingly himself had clearly discerned the main difficulty in confronting Carausius's coinage when he said it was not necessary to add much to Webb's materials but a good deal of sorting needed to be done. Despite significant advances made in the classification of the mint-marked pieces, most notably by Robert Carson who has published a convincing arrangement of the issues of the L and C mints, the difficulties presented by the unmarked coins remain refractory.²

The critical problem in regard to the unmarked pieces of Carausius is to distinguish the official (or genuine) pieces from the unofficial (i.e. the ancient copies). The distinction is made more difficult by the fact that many of these pieces seem to occur fairly early in the reign at a time when mint practice was very fluid. Even when the first marked issues began to be produced at the L and C mints they displayed a variability in style, fabric, and size which often make it difficult to decide which were official and which were not.

This is due in part to the fact that the coinage of Carausius had been produced largely in Britain which had never really had an official mint which engraved its own dies. As a result Carausius had no stable of die engravers on which to draw and while he could have used local craftsmen, perhaps gem engravers, the crudeness of many of the earliest coins suggests that the artists he used were anything but of the first rank. In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that the early coins of Carausius were rough, often blundered (in type and legend) and individual in style.

This paper will make a preliminary attempt to classify the unmarked coins by the following method: 1) Distinguishing ancient copies from coins which are possibly official but blundered; 2) Identifying coins which seem to be unquestionably official. Within each category, wherever coins can be grouped on the basis of style and fabric, these groups will be identified and illustrated and the criteria by which they have been arranged will be stated. It is not possible at this stage to present a complete study of these unmarked pieces since I have not yet gathered enough material to be able to do so. However, by grouping coins on the basis described above we may begin to see how the unmarked coinage relates to those of the marked issues. References below to coins numbered 1-50 are to those illustrated in the accompanying Plates 1-4.

Irregular Coins

It is perhaps easiest to begin by isolating coins which almost certainly are irregular (Nos. 1-11). On the whole these pieces were struck although there is the occasional cast (No. 1). While it is difficult to be certain whether a cast of this sort is ancient or was produced in more recent times, it seems fair to assume that even if the cast is modern, it is copying an ancient imitation, since there would be very little point in anyone producing such a barbarous piece other than a contemporary forger.

In some cases the obverses of irregular coins are far better rendered than the reverses (e.g. Nos. 4-5, 8-11). The obverse of No. 11 is comparable in style and quality to No. 12

¹ H. Mattingly, 'Carausius: his Mints and his Money System,' *Antiquity* 19 (1945), 122.

² R. A. G. Carson, 'The Sequence-marks on the Coinage

of Carausius and Allectus', *Mints, Dies and Currency*, edited by R. A. G. Carson, (London, 1971), pp. 57-65.

and at first sight one would accept the former as genuine. A comparison of their reverses, however, reveals that the legend of No. 11 is a retrograde and badly blundered attempt to render PAX AVG while that of No. 12 reads SECVRIT ORBIS and the type, although clumsy, is acceptable and stylistically compatible with coins which seem to be genuine (No. 37). Thus the problem is to decide whether No. 11 is an ancient imitation, or a blundered official piece and how it relates to No. 12. On the basis of the barbarous quality of the lettering and type, I think No. 11 can be classified as an ancient copy, while No. 12 is almost certainly genuine. Identification of more pieces with similar obverses, however, and comparison of their reverses is the only certain means of determining whether these pieces form a significant subgroup of Carausian coins and how they relate to one another.

As a preliminary stage in classification, I have chosen to designate as copies pieces which are badly blundered in some way. In some cases the legend is gibberish (Nos. 1, 4, 10–11), in others the reverse legend and type are totally unrelated (e.g. Nos. 2–3 where the legend is Pax and the type Moneta, No. 5 where the intended legend seems to be PV(DICITIA) and the type is Fortuna, No. 6 where the legend reads SALVS and the type seems to be Laetitia, No. 9 where the legend is probably intended to be LAETITIA AVG but reads LETIT AV and the type is Salus), or the legend is misspelled (e.g. No. 6 where CARAVSIVS is spelled CAPAVSIVS or No. 9 where LAETIT is spelled LETIT). On other coins the style of the obverse is so different from those of accepted genuine pieces that it is difficult to believe they are official (compare for example No. 1–7, 10 with Nos. 33–4).

None of these criteria by which I have distinguished barbarous from genuine pieces of Carausius is necessarily sufficient in itself to label a coin barbarous and they are to some extent subjective. Still, until one has made some attempt to set aside doubtful pieces, it is difficult to see any sort of limits for the acceptability of genuine pieces. Therefore as a working hypothesis it can be assumed that some coins are probably barbarous and that coins sharing several of the characteristics given above can in a preliminary classification be excluded as genuine.

Overstrikes

Many of the unmarked pieces of Carausius were overstruck on earlier coins, usually those of Victorinus or Tetricus. This may explain why so many of the unmarked pieces have significantly smaller flans than the marked issues of the L and C mints. Compare for example Nos. 5–12 with Nos. 33–36 and Nos. 42–43). Nos. 2, 4, 10, and 13–15 give some idea of the variety of overstrikes which can occur. The reverse of No. 4 shows clear traces of the earlier obverse legend while on No. 14 the bust of the earlier Gallic emperor (Victorinus or Tetricus I) is clearly visible to which the head of Carausius is awkwardly joined. The obverse of No. 15 begins in small letters CPIVI(CTOR-INV. . .) and ends in large ones . . .SIVS AVG. The portrait is clearly that of Carausius. The grotesque figure on the reverse appears to be Spes who has been given the legend [L] ETITIA AVG (*sic*). Some of the overstrikes are barbarous in style (Nos. 4, 10, 13, and 14) while others are much less so (Nos. 2 and 15). At this stage, therefore, it is not possible to classify all overstrikes as unofficial but it seems clear that some of them are.

Semi-Official Pieces

In theory this is a category which should not exist since in effect its creation is an admission that the criteria by which genuine pieces are distinguished from ancient copies are not sufficiently rigorous. At this preliminary stage of classification, however, it is not yet possible to see exactly how or where all of the unmarked coins fit into the system and in these circumstances it seems sensible to set up an intermediate category for uncertain pieces.

In some cases the style is acceptable but the coin is blundered (e.g. No. 19 where the reverse legend is well carved but retrograde and No. 22 where the reverse legend VOT. . .

QVI CAE is coupled with a mintmark MX which does not fit into the L or C series. On No. 18 the obverse legend and portrait are rather crude while the reverse again misspells LAETIT as LETIT. No. 16 has a very clumsy obverse portrait but the reverse is perfectly acceptable while the obverse of No. 20 is of reasonable quality (compare, for example, Nos. 48–50) but the lettering on the reverse is rather crude and uneven in size. The portrait of No. 21 is rather unlike that of the other marked and unmarked pieces but the reverse is of very good quality.

All of these coins have features which suggest that they are official and features which suggest they are not. As a result they are the most difficult sort of coins to classify especially in the context of the variability of style and quality of the coinage of the first part of Carausius's reign. It is for this reason that they have been labelled semi-official at this stage.

Official Coins

A significant number of unmarked coins are of good style and fabric and are clearly genuine. They can be grouped stylistically in the first instance by their reverses. The first group has a style which is rather stiff, angular and clumsy (Nos. 24–27, 39 and 45). It has affinities with the reverse style found at Rouen (No. 23) but the lettering is different and it would be dangerous to push the analogy too far since the obverses are very different. The obverses of Nos. 24 and 25 are die-linked. A related piece may be the ADVENTVS AVG reverse in the ML issue (No. 33). Note the similarity in the way the head and arms of the emperor are rendered with those of the prince in No. 24. Other related pieces may be the reverses of Nos. 16 and 17. Although No. 16 has been classified as semi-official on the basis of its obverse, its reverse does have affinities with this group. No. 17 lacks the long stalk-like neck characteristic of this group but the lettering and linear quality of the drapery are similar.

A second group of reverses can also be isolated (Nos. 28, 29 and 37). Their most conspicuous feature is the way in which the faces are drawn; the eyes, noses, and mouth are engraved as dots. Once again this style of engraving is also found on some London reverses (e.g. No. 5). This group can be contrasted with reverses where a clumsy attempt has been made to carve the features of the face (e.g. Nos. 38 and 41).

Finally, there are a group of reverses of much better execution in which the figures are engraved in a rather more flexible manner (Nos. 30–32, 40–41, 44, and 47–50). An attempt has been made to engrave the faces more naturally as well. This group has affinities with some coins from the C mint (e.g. Nos. 42 and 46) where the figures are also rendered more naturally.

The obverses of the unmarked coins can also be grouped stylistically but before doing so it is necessary to distinguish three types of Carausius's portrait. In the first Carausius is bearded and has a full moustache (e.g. Nos. 24–28 and 48–50). In the second he is still bearded but his moustache is either non-existent or else much less emphatic (e.g. Nos. 29–30, 33–34, 40–43 and 45). In the third Carausius is much more tetrarchic in appearance, he is still bearded, and a moustache is often engraved, but again much less obviously than on coins of the first group (e.g. No. 35 and 46).

The third portrait style (the 'tetrarchic' one) which is the latest, does not occur on unmarked coins.³ This seems to suggest that they may have ceased being issued before this portrait was introduced. Portrait style two occurs commonly on L mint, C mint and unmarked coins, but the 'moustache' portrait seems to occur mainly on C mint coins and unmarked pieces, and only very rarely on L mint pieces. At the C mint this portrait is restricted to the CXXI and MCXXI marks.

³ C. E. King, 'A small hoard of Carausius found near Bicester, Oxfordshire,' *BNJ* 52 (1982), 7–16 esp. 8–10.

Unmarked coins of portrait styles one and two can be subdivided into two groups which probably represent two different die engravers or workshops. The simplest criterion by which to distinguish the two in the first instance is the way in which they engrave the mouth.

In the first group it is engraved either as a straight line or a slightly diagonal one (portrait style 1: e.g. Nos. 24–27, portrait style 2: No. 28, Nos. 29–30, 32, 37, 39). Obverses of similar style are found at the L mint (Nos. 33–36) and at the C mint (No. 43).

The second group engraved the mouth with an upward curving line which makes it look as if Carausius is smiling (Nos. 40–41, 44–45, 47 and 38). Once again pieces of similar style are found at the C mint (Nos. 42–3 and 45) and the L mint (which I have not illustrated). The obverses of Nos. 48–50 probably belong to this group as well although the curve of the moustache obscures the line of the mouth. They are quite different from the ‘moustache’ portrait of the preceding group.

Examination and comparison of the features of the obverses of the L mint, C mint and unmarked coins, e.g. the engraving of the hair, radiate crowns, wreath ties, etc. while revealing occasional differences in technique, do not allow the coins to be separated by mint, since any feature which the unmarked coins have can also be found on the marked pieces. This is true even of the lettering.

Mint Attribution of Unmarked Pieces

On the basis of the analysis above, the logical conclusion would be to suppose that many if not all of the genuine unmarked coins and the marked pieces were engraved by the same two groups of engravers. This indeed seems to be the case, but the tempting corollary argument that all of these pieces come from the same mint is much more difficult to maintain. There are administrative differences in the ways in which the three mints worked which militate against this suggestion. For example, the L mint was conservative in its use of obverse legends. In the Blackmoor hoard coins of the L mint had six different obverse variants of the IMP CARAVSIVS AVG legends, coins of the C mint had eight variants and the unmarked pieces had eleven. There were eight variants of the IMP C CARAVSIVS legend produced at the C mint, seven at the unmarked mint, and only one at the L mint.

This divergence suggests both that the C mint and unmarked ‘mint’ were closer in practice to one another than to the L mint and that a difference in behaviour such as this signals different mints following different practices.

A similar sort of divergence may exist with regard to reverse types as well. Preliminary analysis of approximately 1,800 specimens from sale catalogues suggests that a majority of Pax types were produced at London while Providentia seems to predominate at the C mint.

Webb maintained that the unmarked coins preceded the marked ones.⁴ However, this suggestion may now be questioned since there is evidence to suggest that some at least of the unmarked pieces were produced midway through the reign. If Carson’s arrangement of the marked issues is correct, then the CXXI and CMXXI issues occurred towards the middle of the reign of Carausius.⁵ Yet it is in this group that the ‘moustache’ portrait is common and the style is very similar to that of the ‘moustache’ portrait on the unmarked coins. This implies that the latter were minted well after the C mint began marking its issues, a suggestion already put forward on somewhat different grounds by Roger Bland.⁶

Norman Shiel has argued that Voetter’s belief that the L and C mints were the same mint needs re-examination.⁷ On the basis of the style of the pieces, as I have attempted to

⁴ P. Webb, *The Reign and Coinage of Carausius* (London, 1908), pp. 51–2.

⁵ Carson, p. 64.

⁶ R. Bland, *The Blackmoor Hoard*, *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain*, III, BM Occasional Paper No. 33 (London,

1982), pp. 10–11.

⁷ N. Shiel, *The Episode of Carausius and Allectus*, BAR 40, 1977, pp. 176–7 citing O. Voetter, *Münzen der römischen Kaiser: Sammlung Gerin* (1921), and P. Gerin, ‘Britische Munzstätten’, *NZ* 10 (1917), 48–50.

demonstrate, his argument has some validity since the same hands seem to have produced dies for L mint, C mint and unmarked coins. However, given the differences of practice between mints discussed above, it does not seem possible at this stage to deny the separate existence of the L and C mints or to clarify how the unmarked pieces relate to them. If all three are the same mint, then one must explain why they behave differently and why it was thought necessary to issue parallel series with no marks or virtually identical mint marks.* If all three are not the same mint, then either they were close enough geographically to share die engravers or dies were engraved centrally and sent elsewhere. Once again in a third-century context the question arises of how a mint can be defined and its production isolated from those of other mints.

At this stage I can make no claim to have identified every hand that produced coins for the L mint, C mint, and unmarked pieces. A detailed die-study of the antoniniani of Carausius is necessary before it will be possible to see exactly how many mints there were and how they were related to one another. However, an attempt has been made to show how coins can be grouped in order to isolate genuine from unofficial pieces and to suggest that the genuine unmarked pieces of Carausius are closely related to the products of the L and C mints and in some instances were minted at the same time as their marked counterparts.

* L. Laffranchi, 'Notes on the Coinage of Roman Britain under the First Tetrarchy', *NC* 5th series 7 (1927), 233–43 argues that there is only one mint under the tetrarchy but

believes he can see differences in style suggesting there are two under Carausius.

PLATE 1

All illustrated coins are in the Ashmolean Museum and are reproduced $\times 1\frac{1}{2}$



PLATE 2



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PLATE 3



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THE UNMARKED COINS OF CARAUSIUS
PLATE 4

