

A SMALL HOARD OF CARAUSIUS  
FOUND NEAR BICESTER, OXFORDSHIRE

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*The Hoard*

This small group of seventeen coins was discovered with the aid of a metal detector approximately six miles from Bicester. The exact location is unknown as the finder did not wish to divulge it. When the hoard was first brought to the Ashmolean Museum it was noted that with the exception of three pieces the coins were fused together in a lump. According to the finder, there was no sign of a container but the way in which the coins were fused together in two approximately parallel rows suggests that they may have been wrapped in rolls or stored in a container which would have allowed them to be fused into this sort of shape. The coins were returned to the finder who had them separated and cleaned after which he brought them back to the Ashmolean so that they could be studied. All the coins are illustrated in the plate, and listed in the catalogue below.

Sixteen of the seventeen coins had obverses of Carausius and the seventeenth was minted by him in Maximian's name. The absence of any coins of Allectus suggests a burial date prior to the latter's accession in 293. The small number of coins in the find is characteristic of hoards composed solely of coins of Carausius and Allectus, the notable exception being Little Orme's Head which may have had as many as 700 coins.<sup>1</sup> Ten of the coins were from the London mint, four from the 'C' mint and three were unmarked.

The coins ranged in weight from 5.69g to 3.69g and their average was 4.54g although the sample is too small for any valid inferences to be drawn from it. Most of the die axes were at six o'clock.

The type distribution is as follows: thirteen coins had a PAX reverse, three had PROVIDENTIA and there was one VIRTUS. The dominance of PAX is hardly surprising since it is the most common reverse on Carausius's coins.

On the whole the coins were in excellent condition and difficulties in deciphering the legends possibly resulted from failure in the striking process rather than from wear. On a number of coins part of the obverse legend is missing or indistinct (nos. 3, 6, and 9) and the same is true of some reverses (nos. 1, 3, 5, and 9). None of the coins in the hoard could be die-linked to each other or to coins in the museum and there did not seem to be any irregular coins in the find.

*The Classification and Date of Carausius's Antoniniani*

For over a decade Carson's arrangement and dating of the issues of Carausius and Allectus has served as the basis for the classification and

chronology of the coinage of the British empire.<sup>2</sup> He divided the antoniniani of Carausius into two periods: the earlier, in which a shorter obverse legend was in common use (IMP CARAVSIVS...), and the later, during which a longer obverse (IMP C CARAVSIVS...) predominated.<sup>3</sup> While this division is in general correct and can be supported on stylistic grounds as I shall try and show below, it none the less tends to obscure another potentially important aspect of the coinage; namely, that mints behaved quite differently in regard to the number of obverse legends they used. This emerges quite clearly from an examination of the obverse legends recorded by Roger Bland in the Blackmoor hoard (Table 1).<sup>4</sup> From this table it is clear that London had the fewest variants and the 'C' mint had significantly more. By far the largest range of variation occurs on the unmarked coins. These pieces are generally attributed to the London mint before it began marking its coins but if the unmarked pieces are from London then the mint changed its behaviour radically once it began to mark coins.<sup>5</sup> In this context Bland has commented that it is possible that the unmarked pieces were produced at more than one mint.<sup>6</sup> However, the problem of the unmarked coins is a vexed one since irregular pieces abound in the early part of Carausius's reign and can be extremely difficult to distinguish from the regular pieces which are themselves often rather crude in style.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly the portrait style of Carausius's coins also falls into two distinct groups. In the first the emperor is represented as bearded, jowled, and quite gross in appearance, while in the second his portrait seems to be imitating much more closely that of his legitimate colleagues, Diocletian and Maximian, and therefore has become much more 'tetrarchic'. Compare, for example, the style of obverses one to five with that of numbers ten to thirteen. A similar change in portrait style can also be observed on the silver and the gold.<sup>8</sup>

There is no doubt that the 'tetrarchic' portrait is later in date than the other since it alone is found in the  $\frac{S|P}{ML}$  mark which spanned the end of Carausius's reign at London and the beginning of that of Allectus.<sup>9</sup> It was also the portrait style in use during the period when Carausius recognized Diocletian and Maximian either with the triple portrait and obverse legend CARAVSIVS ET FRATRES SVI or individually with the AVGGG reverses.<sup>10</sup> The longer obverse legend (IMP C CARAVSIVS...) is commonly found with the 'tetrarchic' portrait. Examination of the portrait style at the Rouen mint suggests it too was meant to be 'tetrarchic' which is supported by the obverse legends which, on the antoniniani at least, invariably appeared with the longer form.<sup>11</sup> By contrast the unmarked coins are almost always found with the 'jowled' portrait and shorter legend which supports their issue relatively early in the reign.

When did the change in style and obverse legend occur? At London it is clear that the changes took place in three distinct stages. The first was the addition of XXI to the mintmark in the  $\frac{B|E}{MLXXI}$  issue, followed at a later stage by the adoption of the longer obverse legend and a gradual change in portrait. It was not until the appearance of the next issue, however, that the full blown 'tetrarchic' portrait appeared. This mark,  $\frac{S|P}{MLXXI}$ , was the one in which Carausius minted coins in the name of Diocletian and Maximian. In his final issue at London Carausius retained the longer obverse legend and 'tetrarchic' portrait but no longer recognized his official colleagues.

The evolution of the coinage at the 'C' mint is not quite so easily

TABLE 1  
Obverse Legends in the Blackmoor Hoard

LEGEND	UNMARKED	LONDON						'C' MINT							'RSR'	ROUEN	
	<u> </u>	<u> </u> ML	<u> </u> ML	<u> </u> ML	<u>F O</u> ML	<u>B E</u> MLXXI	<u>S P</u> MLXXI	<u> </u> C	<u> </u> MC	<u>F O</u> C	<u> </u> CXXI	<u>S C</u> C	<u>S C</u>	<u>S P</u>	<u>S P</u> C	<u> </u> RSR	<u> </u>
IMP CARAVSIVS PF AVGG	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS PF AVG	132	19	1	6	22	13	-	13	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS PF AV	15	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS PF AG	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS PF A	7	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS P AVG	28	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS P AV	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS AVG	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIUS AV	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS PI AVG	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS PI AV	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CARAVSIVS I AV	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IMP CM CARAVSIVS PF AVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	3	-	-	-	-	13	16	1	-	-	-	1	5	10	-	-	1
IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AV	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
IMP C CARAVSIVS P AVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	3	-	-	-	1
IMP C CARAVSIVS AVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	1
IMP C CARAVSIVS PF IN AVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
IMP C CARAVSIVS PF I AVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
IMP C CARAVSIVS PI AVG	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
IMP C CARAVSIVS IVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
VICTORIA CARAVSI	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
VIRTVS CARAVSI AVG	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UNCERTAIN LEGEND	42	2	-	-	2	2	1	3	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1
TOTAL	250	26	1	6	25	28	17	24	1	1	2	8	12	15	3	3	4

HOARD OF CARAVSIUS

divisible into stages but is none the less clear. The number XXI was added to the CXXI and MCXXI issues which seem to have been much less common than their equivalent issues at London. There were, for example, only two CXXI coins in the Blackmoor hoard, one CXXI and one MCXXI in the Little Orme's Head hoard, three CXXI and one MCXXI in the Linchmere hoard and none in the Colchester hoard. The change to the longer obverse legend occurred in the  $\frac{S|C}{C}$ ,  $\frac{S|C}{C}$ ,  $\frac{S|P}{C}$  marks according to Carson's arrangement. He has grouped them together as he can see no clear way of separating them chronologically but there is no doubt that the longer legend forms were predominant in these issues and the change in portrait style is also evident.<sup>13</sup> It was in the course of the next issue,  $\frac{S|P}{C}$ , that the 'fratres' pieces appeared and Carausius minted coins for Diocletian and Maximian.

Carson has argued that the shift from the shorter to the longer obverse legend took place late in 290 or in 291 because aurei with reverses which refer to Carausius's quinquennalia occur with both.<sup>14</sup> If his proposed date is correct then the first stage of the changeover (the addition of XXI to the mintmark) should have taken place shortly before this time. But Carson's argument cannot be unreservedly accepted for, while it is always tempting to date coins referring to a specific anniversary (in this instance VOT V and MVLT X) to the year in which it would have occurred, it is somewhat hazardous to do so when it is known that such celebrations were often anticipated by several years in the later Roman coinage.<sup>15</sup>

Further, Shiel has argued that the portrait style of the aurei in question belongs to the early part of Carausius's reign.<sup>16</sup> He has divided the gold coinage into three groups: 1) aurei attributed to the 'Rouen' mint; 2) aurei minted in the period when Carausius was recognizing his legitimate colleagues; and 3) the group which has the jowled portrait.<sup>17</sup> There are only five aurei known from this last group, including the one with the IMP C obverse. Shiel has die-linked these early aurei to the unmarked and RSR silver (which again have the 'jowled' portrait) and, although he has recorded nearly 150, again only one has the longer obverse.<sup>18</sup> Thus the occurrence of the longer obverse on gold and silver seems to have been the exception rather than the rule and leads one to query whether it can validly be linked to the date when the longer legend began to be used on the antoniniani. This doubt is reinforced by the fact that the gold and very rare silver minted by Carausius when he was recognizing his official colleagues has a 'tetrarchic' portrait but very short obverses (CARAVSIVS PF AVG, MAXIMIANVS PF AVG). The gold minted at 'Rouen' does not obviously support Carson's argument either since the portrait is 'tetrarchic' and both the shorter and longer obverse legends occur and are die-linked to the same reverses. This implies, if not a simultaneous emission, one very closely connected in time. It is possible that the 'Rouen' mint was operating towards the end of the 'transitional' period at London and the 'C' mint but this brings us no closer to establishing the date of the changeover.

The hoard evidence is not incompatible with the suggestion that the 'Rouen' coins could have been minted in the same period as the changeover in portrait and legend on the antoniniani of the London and 'C' mints. The latest coins in the Little Orme's Head hoard are MCXXI and SC from the 'C' mint dated by Carson to 290 and 291 respectively. The Penard hoard ends with a coin of 292 (VIRTVS AVGGG,  $\frac{S|P}{C}$ ) which belongs to the period when Carausius was recognizing Diocletian and Maximian.<sup>19</sup> Both hoards have 'Rouen' coins with the 'tetrarchic' portrait. Although it could be argued

that the 'Rouen' coins should be earlier in date than the British coins since they came from a continental mint and therefore needed more time to reach hoards in Wales, the rate of speed at which coinage moved at this time is an unknown quantity. The exact site of the 'R' mint, which is beyond the scope of this paper, is also still open to doubt.

Linked to the date of the changes in portrait and obverse legend is the reason for them. It has been argued that the changes occurred in 289 after an abortive invasion by Maximian's fleet and that they were a sign of the acceptance by the central emperors of an unpalatable status quo.<sup>20</sup> Whether or not the legitimate emperors tacitly accepted Carausius (as some ancient sources suggest), they were in no position having lost their punitive fleet to control what he put on his coinage.<sup>21</sup> It is significant that they minted no coins in his name and never openly recognized him.

It has also been suggested that by imitating the coins of Diocletian and Maximian Carausius may have been seeking to persuade them to accept him as 'legitimate'. This argument is not altogether satisfactory since it seems to assume that the legitimate emperors (and their subjects) would have actually seen Carausius's coins. In this context it is worth noting that the circulation of Carausian coins never reached significant proportions in Gaul.<sup>22</sup> Nor does there seem to be any particular reason to believe that Carausius would have thought this would be a suitable means of influencing imperial policy.

The nature of the changes which Carausius made in his coinage do suggest however that he was asserting his official status and possibly his implicit recognition by Diocletian and Maximian. Norman Shiel has suggested, and Carson has agreed, that the changes may have been motivated by a desire on Carausius's part to persuade those within his sphere of influence that he was a legitimate ruler.<sup>23</sup> Although plausible, this argument too has its weakness. If Carausius were attempting to influence opinion largely or exclusively in Britain or even northern Gaul, he was dealing with a population which apparently had little experience of handling the official coinage of the 270s and 280s since very little of it seems to have reached these areas.<sup>24</sup> Given these circumstances there seems little point in introducing such dramatic changes in the coinage but the fact remains that Carausius did so. The nature of the changes suggest that he was asserting his equality of status with Diocletian and Maximian and possibly his readiness to conform with official mint policy.

In the circumstances it is worth considering for whom these coins were intended. Clearly one major group of recipients must have been Carausius's soldiers and they logically could have been expected to have some familiarity with the coinage of the legitimate rulers. The choice of obverse legends, portraits, and the recognition of Diocletian and Maximian may well have been intended to impress or influence Carausius's army, although precisely why he chose these particular means of doing so is less clear.

We are left, then, with the problem of the date when these changes occurred. It seems reasonable to assume that they did not begin before Maximian's abortive campaign in 289 and that any recognition of Diocletian and Maximian would certainly have ceased after the nomination of Constantius as Caesar in 293. This leaves the years 290 to 293 for the change in portrait, obverse legend, the 'fratres' issue, and the recognition of Diocletian and Maximian. Beyond this it is impossible to be certain when the changes began or how long the process took since mint output was not necessarily continuous in this period.

It is conceivable that the 'fratres' issue, the gold and the silver with the short obverses (CARAVSIVS PF AVG, MAXIMIANVS PF AVG), and the gold and the antoniniani with the AVGGG legends can be associated with Carausius's quinquennalia. Certainly it was the sort of occasion when precious metal issues and special pieces like the 'fratres' coins were minted and it would have been a suitable time for Carausius to have stressed his legitimacy. The earliest date when he would have celebrated this anniversary would have been late in 290 or in 291 which would mean that the changes in legend, portrait, etc. would have had to occur earlier in 290 or even in 289. This is compatible with the changes having taken place after Maximian's fleet was destroyed.

Carson, however, has dated the 'fratres' pieces and the AVGGG coinage to late 291 or 292, suggesting that they were intended to serve as internal propaganda.<sup>25</sup> His date for these issues rests on his argument that the change to the longer obverse legend cannot have taken place before late 290 and that the issue of antoniniani at London ( $\frac{B|E}{MLXXI}$ ), which spans the change from the shorter to the longer obverse, was a large one and may have lasted for almost a year. However, if his dating is not accepted there is no obstacle to placing the special issues in Carausius's quinquennial year.

The problem of relating the unmarked antoniniani and the issues from the 'Rouen' mint to the London and 'C' mint issues remains. Not only is it still uncertain exactly where the mint (or mints) in both cases may have been located but the dating of the respective issues is equally contentious. Apart from suggesting that the unmarked antoniniani should have been minted before the change in portrait and obverse legend (i.e. 286-9) and the 'Rouen' pieces during or after the transitional period, there is little evidence on which to base an exact chronology. A detailed discussion of these problems is beyond the scope of this paper although it is important to remember that until all the elements of Carausius's coinage have been considered in terms of their relationship to one another it will be difficult to construct even a relative chronology which has validity, never mind an absolute one.

#### NOTES

1. N.Shiel, *The Episode of Carausius and Allectus: The Literary and Numismatic Evidence*, British Archaeological Reports, 40 (1977), pp.58-60, 74-75.
2. R.A.G.Carson, 'The Sequence-marks on the Coinage of Carausius and Allectus'. in *Mints, Dies, and Currency: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Albert Baldwin*, edited by R.A.G.Carson (London, 1971), pp.57-65.
3. Carson, 'Sequence-marks', p.58.
4. R.Bland, *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain, Volume III, The Blackmoor Hoard*, British Museum Occasional Paper No.33 (London, 1982), pp.63-78.
5. P.J.Casey 'Carausius and Allectus - Rulers in Gaul?', *Britannia*, 8 (1977), 289, note 38.
6. Bland, *Coin Hoards*, p.11.
7. H.A.Seaby, 'A find of coins of Carausius from the Little Orme's Head',

- NC 6th ser. 16 (1956), 207 grades the style in five stages from good to very barbarous. See also Shiel, *Episode*, pp.166-70.
8. Shiel, *Episode*, pp.146-47, Pl.A; Pl.E, no.2 is a silver coin from gold dies.
  9. Carson, 'Sequence Marks', p.61.
  10. R.A.G.Carson 'Carausius et fratres sui: A reconsideration', in *Studia Paulo Naster Oblata I*, edited by S.Scheers (Leuven, 1982), plates xxix-xxxi.
  11. E.B.Beaujard and H.Huvelin, 'Le trésor de Rouen et l'occupation de la Gaule par Carausius', in *Histoire et Numismatique en Haut-Normandie*, edited by N.Gauthier, *Cahiers des Annales de Normandie*, 12A (Caen, 1980), pp.81-91.
  12. Bland, *Blackmoor Hoard*, p.68; Seaby, 'Little Orme's Head', p.214; P.H. Webb, 'The Linchmere hoard,' *NC 5th ser.* 5 (1925), 175; A.H.F.Baldwin, 'A find of coins of Carausius and Allectus from Colchester', *NC 5th ser.* 10 (1930), 191-95.
  13. Carson, 'Sequence-marks', p.62.
  14. Carson, 'Sequence-marks', p.58; *RIC V*, pt.2, nos.3 and 4.
  15. Shiel, *Episode*, pp.153-54.
  16. N.Shiel, 'Un aureus de Carausius conservé au Cabinet des Médailles de Paris', *RN 6th ser.* 16 (1974), 165-66.
  17. Shiel, *Episode*, pp.145-48, Pls. A and B.
  18. Shiel, *Episode*, pp.94-142, plates E-N; A.S.Robertson, *Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet*, IV, Pl.61, no.172.
  19. Seaby, 'Little Orme's Head', 213-214; G.C.Boon, 'The Penard Roman imperial hoard: an interim report and a list of Roman hoards in Wales,' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22 (1968), 294-97.
  20. H.G.Pflaum, 'Émission au nom des trois empereurs frappée par Carausius', *RN*, 6th ser. 2 (1959-60), 53-73, esp. 71-73; *RIC V*, pt. 2 442-43; B.Beaujard and H.Huvelin, 'A propos de l'atelier monétaire rouennais de Carausius', *BSFN*, 33 (1978), 360-67.
  21. *Aur. Vict.*, xxxix, 39; *Eutr.*, IX, 22.
  22. X.Loriot, 'Trouvailles de monnaies de Carausius sur le continent', *BSFN*, 34 (1979), 577-83; P.-H.Mitard, 'Trouvailles de monnaies dans le Vexin français (Val d'Oise)', *BSFN*, 35, (1980), 675-76.
  23. N.Shiel, 'Carausius et fratres sui', *BNJ* 48 (1978), 10; Carson, 'Carausius', pp.257-58.
  24. H.Mattingly, 'The clash of the Coinages circa 270-296', in *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honour of A.C.Johnson*, edited by P.R.Coleman-Norton (Princeton, 1951), pp.275-89; C.E.King, 'The Circulation of Coin in the Western Provinces A.D. 260-295', in *The Roman West in the Third Century; Contributions from Archaeology and History*, edited by A.King and M.Henig, *British Archaeological Reports, International Series*, 109 (1) (Oxford, 1981), pp.89-126 esp. pp.93-94.
  25. Carson, 'Carausius', pp.256-57.

## CATALOGUE

			<i>RIC</i> <i>ref.</i>	<i>Die</i> <i>axis</i>	<i>Weight in</i> <i>grammes</i>
UNMARKED PIECES					
	PAX AVG (vertical sceptre)				
1.	IMP CARAVSIVS P AVG	r. rad. dr.	-	2	4.73
	PAX AVG (transverse sceptre)				
2.	IMP C CARAVSIVS AVG	r. rad. dr.	-	7	5.69
	PROVIDE AVG				
3.	[IMP] CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr.	-	6	4.72
LONDON					
	$\frac{I}{ML}$				
	PAX AVG (vertical sceptre)				
4.	IMP CARAVSIVS PI AVG	r. rad. dr. cuir.	112c	2	4.54
	$\frac{F O}{ML}$				
	PAX AVG (vertical sceptre)				
5.	IMP CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr. ?cuir.	101a or c	12	4.16
	$\frac{B E}{MLXXI}$				
	PAX AVG (vertical sceptre)				
6.	IMP CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr.	101a, c or f	6	4.02
7.	IMP CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. cuir.	101f	6	3.69
8-9.	IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. cuir.	98c	6	5.22, 4.28
	$\frac{S P}{MLXXI}$				
	PAX AVG (vertical sceptre)				
10-11.	IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr. cuir.	98c	6	4.06, 4.66
	PAX AVG (transverse sceptre)				
12.	IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr. cuir.	121c	6	5.03
	PAX AVGGG (vertical sceptre)				
13.	IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr. cuir.	141e	6	3.73



			<i>RIC</i> <i>ref.</i>	<i>Die</i> <i>axis</i>	<i>Weight in</i> <i>grammes</i>
'C' MINT					
		$\frac{I}{C}$			
		PROVID AVG			
14.	IMP CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr.	348a	5	5.31
		$\frac{S C}{C}$			
		PROVID AVG			
15.	IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr.	498a	6	4.68
		$\frac{S P}{C}$			
		PAX AVGGG (transverse sceptre)			
16.	IMP C CARAVSIVS PF AVG	r. rad. dr.	354a	6	4.03
		VIRTVS AVGGG			
17.	IMP C MAXIMIANVS PF AVG	r. rad. cuir.	30	6	4.71

NOTE: Die axes are given in terms of the clock face.

## PLATE



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15



16



17

