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DIOCLETIAN'S REFORM OF THE COINAGE: A CHRONOLOGICAL NOTE¹

By C. H. V. SUTHERLAND

Diocletian's reform of the coinage included the following elements:—

- (1) The raising of the weight of gold coins from a norm of about 70–72 to the Roman pound to one of 60 to the Roman pound.
- (2) The abandonment of the silver-washed coin now known as the *antoninianus* and its replacement by a silver coin of the weight of Nero's reduced *denarius*, i.e. at a rate of 96 to the Roman pound.²
- (3) The introduction of the so-called *folles*—a copper coin³ of about 10 gm. in weight and struck at all 'reformed' mints with something very near uniformity of types.⁴ The *folles* was accompanied by fractional denominations.⁵

The date of (1) is discernible (even if it cannot be fixed with absolute precision) by weighings of dated gold coins from A.D. 284, when Diocletian succeeded to power. 'There was a change in basic standards not later than A.D. 286. One hundred and twenty-seven coins from the mints at Rome, Cyzicus, Lyons, and Antioch dated in the years 284 to 286 show an average weight of 71 grains, indicating a basis of 70 or 72 to the pound. Twenty-seven coins from the mint at Cyzicus dated in A.D. 286, twenty-three from the mint at Rome dated A.D. 286–7, and at least ten each from the mints at Siscia and Antioch dated in A.D. 286–9 all show average weights of 82 or 83 grains, indicating a basis of 60 to the pound. No later group containing five or more coins varies more than 5 per cent from this average, except one dated A.D. 296–9 from the mint at Treves.'⁶ The same phenomenon had previously been observed by K. Pink, who associated the change of standard with Maximian Herculus' elevation to the rank of Augustus on 1st April, A.D. 286.⁷

The timing of (2) is also discernible, though here again absolute precision is lacking. It is agreed that *antoniniani* of the pre-reform system, mint-marked PTR, continued to be struck at Treveri, from *officinae* which signed themselves C and D, down to A.D. 293–4. This date is gathered from the varied *vota x* types borne by coins of Diocletian, Herculus, and Galerius: ⁸ the tenth *vota* are those of the senior partner in power, Diocletian, shared with his colleagues ⁹ and reckoned as having been fulfilled for all four alike in 293–4 ¹⁰—during the tenth year after Diocletian's accession, in which the automatic renewal of

¹ I had collected the material for this paper, and had begun to arrange it in its present form, when the brief report of Dr. H. A. Cahn's remarks to the Société française de numismatique was published in the *Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique*, Nov., 1954, 307 f. As Dr. Cahn's reported views appeared to coincide so closely with those which I had reached independently it seemed worth while to work the problem out in closer detail.

Abbreviations used below are as follows:—Cahn XIII = Monnaies et Médailles S.A. Bâle, *Vente aux enchères* XIII (17–19 June 1954). Lallemand = Jacqueline Lallemand, 'Le monnayage de Domitius Domitianus,' in *Revue belge de numismatique* 1951, 89 ff. *NNM* = American Numismatic Society's *Numismatic Notes and Monographs*. *NZ* = *Numismatische Zeitschrift*. *RN* = *Revue Numismatique*. *RIC* = Mattingly, Sydenham, and others, *Roman Imperial Coinage*.

² The contemporary name of the new Diocletianic silver pieces is unknown. Nor has the degree of purity of these relatively rare pieces been yet, so far as I am aware, determined.

³ *Folles* are frequently found on which an apparently even and—one would say—deliberately applied silvery coating covers the surface of the copper, as, for example, in the hoards discovered at Seltz (N. Lewis, *NNM* 79; H. Herzfelder, *RN* 1952,

31 ff.), and Fyfield (E. T. Leeds, *A Hoard of Roman Folles . . . found at Fyfield, Berks*). But nine *folles* from the Seltz hoard which were analysed because they 'seemed to have a "white" or silvery coating were found . . . to have a thin layer of copper salt deposited on the surface. On very close examination it was further revealed that this copper salt was actually green in color' (H. L. Adelson, *Museum Notes* VI, 116 f.). The former assumption that *folles* were silver-washed in order to increase their intrinsic value is therefore questionable.

⁴ See my 'Flexibility in the reformed coinage of Diocletian' in *Essays in Roman Coinage presented to Harold Mattingly*, forthcoming.

⁵ cf. Cahn XIII, 34 ff.

⁶ L. C. West, *NNM* 94, 183 ff.

⁷ *NZ* 1931, 57.

⁸ *RIC* v (2), 230, 275, 306; Cahn XIII, 28 f.; H. Mattingly, 'The Imperial "Vota",' in *Proc. Brit. Acad.* xxxvi, 175 ff.

⁹ cf. *RIC* v (2), 275, no. 485; Mattingly, *op. cit.*, 192 f., notes 66–8. It is by chance alone that no relevant pieces for Constantius have been so far recorded.

¹⁰ Mattingly, *op. cit.*, 193, note 68, points out that 'the "vota decennialia" of the Caesars . . . belong to the same year, but not to the same day as the "vot. x mult. xx" of the Augusti'. The *vota*-day of the Caesars was 1st March.

vota would undoubtedly have been foreseen. Other such *antoniniani*, similarly celebrating the conclusion of *vota x*, are attributed to Lugdunum¹¹ and Rome.¹² Yet more *antoniniani*, bearing tribunician and consular dates,¹³ are known for the immediately preceding years. But no dated *antoninianus* of any kind can be found for the period after A.D. 293-4.

Thus when we find new-style silver pieces, not (it is true) bearing the mint-mark TR in any form, but signed C and D and showing portraits which are in every way similar to those both of the PTR *antoniniani* and also of the new *folles* incorporating the TR mark, these must be regarded as successors to the *antoniniani* at Treveri c. A.D. 294.¹⁴ It is possible that the succession of the C and D silver pieces to the C and D *antoniniani* was, indeed, very briefly interrupted by an intermediate silver issue, for rare silver coins exist, without mint-mark or *officina*-mark but bearing unmistakably Treveran portraits, which on the analogy of other mints ought to precede the marked issues.¹⁵ (Any attempt to assign such pieces to London—which claims no marked silver at all—must fail in the light of the strongly differentiated portraiture of British *folles*, many of them (even though not all)¹⁶ still reminiscent of Carausius and Allectus.¹⁷) A date c. A.D. 294 may therefore be assigned to the new Treveran silver, even if the introduction of the new silver was later elsewhere.¹⁸

The date of element (3)—the introduction of what is now known as the *follis*—is very much more difficult to fix. To a considerable extent it depends on the evidence supplied by the coinage of the mint of Alexandria, which alone shows clearly any inter-relation between the *follis* coinage and a previous *aes* system. The Greek-style coinage of Alexandria stops with the Alexandrian year ending 28th August, A.D. 296—Diocletian's (twelfth) year IB, Hercules' (eleventh) IA, Constantius' and Galerius' (fourth) Δ.¹⁹ Alexandria's final Greek-style issues must plainly have overlapped the beginning of the new, Latin-style *follis* coinage which succeeded them. For a Latin-style *follis* of Alexandria is recorded for Constantius with the Greek date LB (year 2 = 29th Aug. 293-28th Aug. 294),²⁰ and even in A.D. 295-6 Hercules was signing new, Latin-style *folles* with the Greek date LIB.²¹ The extent of this period of overlap, which is a problem in itself, involves yet another problem in connection with Domitius Domitianus, the date of whose revolt in Egypt²² coincides with the overlap. He struck, on the one hand, Greek-style pieces of the old Alexandrian system,²³ and, on the other hand, both Latin-style gold (of the greatest rarity)²⁴ and also new, Latin-style *folles*.²⁵ His Greek-style pieces, with a single possible exception,²⁶ are dated LB = year two—probably about A.D. 295. His Latin-style pieces, all undated, were struck from *officinae* A, B, and Γ, and show normal post-reform *officinae* of Alexandria²⁷ temporarily wrested from the legitimate emperors of the time.²⁸

While certainty is therefore lacking, it appears that the *follis* was introduced at Alexandria about 294, and that it ran parallel with the Greek-style series until the latter

¹¹ RIC v (2), 230, 273.

¹² id., 238, 278-9.

¹³ Occasionally mis-combined: cf. RIC v (2), 206; 261, nos. 344-5, by confusion with Diocletian's legends, RIC v (2), 221 f., nos. 4-5.

¹⁴ So also Pink, NZ 1930, 22; he associates the new silver issue with the nomination of Constantius and Galerius as Caesars on 1st March, 293, but it is difficult to see the aptness of this view since the new Caesars in fact had time—as the coins themselves show—to strike not only some *antoniniani* but also some *denarii* and *quinarii* on the old, pre-reform system.

¹⁵ Pink, NZ 1930, 22 f., 1st emission; Cahn XIII, 32, nos. 396-7.

¹⁶ The attribution of the unmarked *folles* to British mints (cf. Leeds, op. cit., 21 ff.), mainly on the grounds of observed hoard-frequencies, is here accepted. Such *folles* vary considerably in portrait-style, as Leeds' plates make plain.

¹⁷ P. Gerin, NZ 1917, 49 f.

¹⁸ Pink, NZ 1930, 38.

¹⁹ J. G. Milne, *Catalogue of Alexandrian coins in the Ashmolean Museum*, 123 f.

²⁰ Lallemand, 91, citing Voetter, NZ 1911, 173, no. 1; cf. H. A. Cahn as reported in *Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique*, Nov. 1954, 307. It is uncertain if this is the same coin illustrated by G. Dattari in his paper on the chronology of Diocletian's coinage reform in Egypt in RN 1904, 394 ff.; in any case Dattari's views in that paper appear to be vitiated by the incorrect dating which he assigned to the Greek-style, pre-reform coins of Constantius at Alexandria.

²¹ Lallemand, pl. 6, 18 (Vienna).

²² Lallemand, 90, and in *Aegyptus* 1953, 97 ff., where (within the broad theoretical limits of A.D. 293-7) a year c. A.D. 295 is preferred.

²³ Lallemand, 94 ff.

²⁴ Lallemand, 99 f.

²⁵ Lallemand, 100 ff.

²⁶ Lallemand, 88, n. 2.

²⁷ O. Voetter, NZ 1911, 172: *officinae* Δ and E are at first very rare.

²⁸ It should be noted that Hercules' LIB *follis* of A.D. 295-6, noted above, came from *officina* A.

came to an end in the Alexandrian year 295-6. Elsewhere, even if the introduction of the *follis* may have come about by stages,²⁹ there is no obvious reason to doubt that some of the larger and more prolific mints began to strike the new denomination at the same time as it was brought in at Alexandria.

Diocletian's reform of the coinage might therefore be given a chronological summary as follows. Gold coinage was increased in weight c. A.D. 286. *Antoniniani* were driven out by the new silver pieces, at least at Treveri, c. A.D. 294. *Folles*, at least at Alexandria, were introduced probably by A.D. 294. The 'reform', in fact, should be regarded as a fairly lengthy process carried out in two stages, of which the second and perhaps more radical stage—affecting the new silver and large copper pieces—was conceivably intended to coincide with the celebration of the imperial *decennalia*. To date the silver-copper reform in A.D. 296³⁰ is to put it certainly one year too late, and probably two.³¹

²⁹ Being apparently later, for example, in certain of the eastern mints.

³⁰ cf. Hettner, *Westdeutsche Zeitschrift* VI, 141;

P. H. Webb, *RIC* v (2), 204 ff.; and, most recently, H. Mattingly in *Num. Chron.* 1946, 112.

³¹ cf. Pink, *NZ* 1930, 21 ff.