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# Violence on Roman Imperial coinage

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Violence was a constant and generally approved factor in Roman life and culture, often playing a central role in art and popular entertainment, in major festivals and even the historically conditioned sense of what it was to be Roman. It is therefore surprising that violent imagery comes rather late to Roman coinage, and perhaps more surprising that the topic has attracted so little attention. Images of violence tend to be seen simply as instances of the military representation of the emperor. To a certain extent that must obviously be true, but violent imagery goes beyond simple military images. The standard depiction of the emperor as armed and armoured is military, but not explicitly violent. Violence requires a level of activity and a relational, personal element, in that the violent action needs to be inflicted on some target. The emperor in armour posing near standards, is military; the emperor marching with a standard in one hand and dragging a captive by the hair with the other, is violent. Both encode military superiority, but each offers a different message, indeed signals a different ethos, to the viewer.

Coinage can best be read as a mirror of imperial ideology, in much the same way as we can read a court poet, a panegyrist, or even monumental architecture.<sup>1</sup> These present a constructed representation of reality, a world-view acceptable to, even appreciated by, the emperor, and often a Court-sponsored set

of official values. Developments in iconography can, therefore, be connected to shifts in imperial ideology, and the two track quite closely during the Late Empire. The latter third and early fourth centuries see the adoption of an imperial ideal of the emperor as a heroic warrior and, at the same time, the widespread adoption and elaboration of violent iconography. During the fourth century the imperial government comes to be conceptualised as *militia*, military service, which sees the militaristic ethos made routine and the emphasis of government shift to one of hierarchic service. Later, again, the more overtly violent coin types disappear from contemporary coinage, leaving those which emphasise power relations and dominance, now under the Christian banner.

Violent motifs on imperial coinage may be divided into two broad categories, each with two primary types. Firstly, those depicting scenes of combat, images of the mounted emperor charging into battle, and also scenes of the emperor, or a divinity, in single combat on foot. The second group primarily depicts violence aimed at captives: we see them on the one side being trodden upon by their vanquisher, and on the other being dragged along by the hair. These four types show varying patterns of production and imagery, but when seen together over time indicate important developments in imperial ideology.



Figure 1. Increasing imperial violence: (a). *aureus* of Augustus for C. Caesar, RIC I 198, 8 BC, Lugdunum; vs. (b). *antoninianus* of Probus, RIC V 817, AD 277, Siscia.

Perhaps the most dramatic type is the ‘charging horseman’, which depicts the emperor armed and armoured, riding into battle, and actively spearing or trampling an enemy. This is a development of the much older image of the emperor mounted and armoured, often brandishing a spear, the standard portrayal of a Roman general, also to be seen on equestrian statues.<sup>2</sup> The image is militaristic, but does not necessarily imply battle; it may signify engaging in exercises, or even riding in pageant.<sup>3</sup> It is instructive to compare (Fig.1) Gaius Caesar, galloping on his horse in front of standards<sup>4</sup>, with that of Probus, over two centuries later, riding down and skewering a barbarian, with a legend announcing his *virtus*, his valour and might.<sup>5</sup> Both have military resonance, but Probus’ is also overtly violent, and the change between these two scenes reflects changes in the imperial ideology. The more

violent type is not a replacement, but rather offers a parallel alternative alongside the traditional image. The charging horseman, with the emperor as not just a general but himself a warrior in the heroic mode, is particularly prominent from the later third century. The timing is of particular importance: it is precisely during the third century *Crisis* that the military role of the emperor changes, from that of a good general, even a hard working fellow soldier, to that of a great, even heroic, warrior, a crucial new element in the imperial persona. The position of the Augusti had always been military, and was often portrayed as such, but something has changed dramatically when the official currency displays the emperor in the act of stabbing someone to death.

The charging horseman type first appears in AD 72/3, issued in bronze for Titus as Caesar (Fig.2).<sup>6</sup> The issue apparently celebrated victory over the Jewish rebels, appearing one year after the Triumph, and one before the revolt’s actual end with the fall of Masada.<sup>7</sup> Clustered around the same time are a number of innovative types, particularly the well known IVDAEA CAPTA issues, which show the personified Judaea in mourning, often with the clearly dominant emperor nearby.<sup>8</sup> The commemorative horseman was simply one type among many, but it seems to have set a precedent.<sup>9</sup> It returns in annual bronze issues of AD 85–89, following Domitian’s victory over the Chatti, depicting the emperor riding down a German warrior.<sup>10</sup> It then reappears AD 103–111, now also on gold and silver, for Trajan’s conquest of Dacia.<sup>11</sup> It is notably absent for his invasion of Parthia, indicating that it still commemorated real victories, not promised ones. The



Figure 2. The first 'charging horseman': *sestertius* of Titus as Caesar, RIC II 613, AD 72, Rome.

horseman type returns again in AD 164–7 for Lucius Verus' Eastern campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

Only one charging horseman appears, in bronze, for Commodus at the beginning of his reign in AD 180, perhaps representing the end of the Marcomannic wars as a victory, or perhaps an attempt to pander to, or advise, the new sole Augustus.<sup>13</sup> It may even be a foretaste of the later use of the scene, anticipating (or inventing) victories. Commodus reapplied the motif on hunting scenes, and also introduced a crucial extra element *VIRT(us) AVG(usti)* into the legend, which had heretofore used imperial titulature.<sup>14</sup>

Hunting scenes themselves became a sub-motif of the type and need not be further pursued here. Nonetheless, the link Commodus made between virtue language and the horseman image was extended back and intensified in its proper military usage by Septimius Severus. Although the old reverse legends with imperial titles were still struck, we now find *INVICTA VIRTVS*, pointing to an imperial quality, rather than a necessary commemoration.<sup>15</sup> More variations on the image are produced, particularly by Caracalla, and the emperor is found not only spearing, but hurling javelins and even trampling his enemy.<sup>16</sup> Over the next decades, the

horseman recurs only very occasionally: two bronze medallions of Maximinus Thrax, which show the emperor, supported by a spearman, in combat against two barbarians, one beneath his horse<sup>17</sup>; and a more standard horseman on one bronze issue of the young Gordian III.<sup>18</sup>

The second, rather less common, violent type involves scenes of single combat, with the divine or imperial figure shown fighting on foot. The motif is an infrequent one generally, and is almost entirely absent from the Principate, with one exception: a unique issue of Marcus Aurelius, showing *Jupiter* hurling his thunderbolt at an enemy in AD 177.<sup>19</sup> The type is otherwise only found between the late third and mid fourth century, chronological boundaries which closely tie the scene to the official ideology of this period of crisis and restoration, the very same time at which the theme of the imperial warrior is most stressed. The same distinction between the Principate and Late Empire can also be seen textually. Pliny's presentation of Trajan in battle speaks of the emperor's imagined, conditional exploits: he can imagine Trajan's victory, that he would stare down the enemy general and scare away his foes, and that perhaps the Triumph would show shields he had broken.<sup>20</sup> Nazarius' image of Constantine, in great contrast, is of the emperor as a bloodthirsty slayer of men, an almost epic hero, destroying an enemy army himself, and returning to camp covered in gore.<sup>21</sup> The distinction between the two is obvious and, as we shall see, is precisely that observable in the iconography.

The types depicting brutality and violence shown to captives, though initially less frequent, show a similar



pattern during the Principate. The first shows the emperor or a god, generally armed, treading on an enemy, who is usually bound or prostrate. The posture, known as *calcatio colli*, trampling on the neck, is one of domination and is very old and extremely widespread. The 'enemy as footstool' had a long history in the East, in Egypt and Assyria, among the Hebrews and the Persians; treading down an enemy indicated the prestige, power, and dominance of the ruler.<sup>22</sup> Classical Greek and Republican Roman iconography shied away from *calcatio*, though the Seleucids adapted it, and it is clearly understood as a sign of dominance in Propertius.<sup>23</sup> There is no evidence for *calcatio* as an actual part of Roman triumphal ritual until the Late Empire: the first allusion to it is perhaps under Honorius in AD 416, when he triumphed over the Gothic puppet usurper Priscus Attalus.<sup>24</sup>

On Roman coinage, *calcatio* first appears around AD 70, with one issue, probably struck at Tyre, showing Titus, or perhaps Virtus, with his foot on a defeated enemy.<sup>25</sup> Next, Domitian is seen placing a foot on the Rhine<sup>26</sup>, and Trajan issues an obviously allegorical, but more active scene of a figure, perhaps Father Tiber, forcing Dacia to the ground.<sup>27</sup> More importantly, Pax and Trajan are both depicted treading on a Dacian head, perhaps intended to be that of the conquered Dacian king Decebalus, famously sent to Rome.<sup>28</sup> The image then disappears until the late third century, except for one issue of Geta, probably connected to campaigns in Britain, which shows him treading on a captive.<sup>29</sup> There is something of the air of the nineteenth century big game hunter about these scenes, posing with his kill for a

photograph; Hadrian does almost exactly this, showing himself with one foot on a crocodile, despite having no other violent coinage.<sup>30</sup>

Such a symbolic use of the *calcatio* as the conqueror presenting his trophy represents developments of two other motifs combined to indicate imperial violence. As with the charging horseman, there is a progression from earlier static images of a figure placing a foot upon an object, often a helmet or armour, generally as a sign of conquest.<sup>31</sup> The use of a person, instead of a shield or helmet, as trophy gives a fundamental violence to the scene; a more active suppression of the enemy underfoot humanises, and thus brutalises, this motif of conquest. In some cases of *calcatio*, the relation of leg to target is not simply a placing of the foot upon, but seems to indicate a more forceful stomp, or even in some cases a kick.<sup>32</sup> It is unclear whether this is intentional, or simply an ambiguity in the art. The second element is the simple appearance of captives. They are found often simply bound and waiting nearby, perhaps intended as an attribute of the emperor's victorious nature, rather than actual figures in the scene.<sup>33</sup> When the captives are part of the main action, particularly on the receiving end of a forceful act, they take on a new importance. The intersect between the icon of conquest, the bound captive, and the posture of dominance, the imposition of the conqueror's foot, is the *calcatio colli*, and it thus bears violence implicitly. A somewhat more extreme parallel is on the later *adventus* coinage, where a bound captive is seen beneath the emperor's horse, or in some trampling scenes, which could be interpreted as a kind of equine *calcatio*.<sup>34</sup> The captive there is a reminder

of imperial victories, but the horse's hooves, like the emperor's foot, will land with some force on the bound, defenceless captive; there is impending violence.

Indeed, the motif can be read as actually more violent than the combat types, while a taste for blood is acceptable in the field, *clementia* is supposed to follow war, not brutality.<sup>35</sup> This is particularly so for the other captive-centric image, the emperor or a divinity dragging their captive off by the hair. This appears under the Principate only once, under Caracalla, where Victory is doing the dragging.<sup>36</sup> Dragging captives extends the same dynamic that introduced *calcatio* in the first place. The power of the scene is increased first by having an actual person being trodden upon, but later a different ethic introduced a more forceful brutality by dragging them about by the hair.

Before AD 260, violent images on coinage are quite rare, issued mostly as commemorations of successful military campaigns, separated by large gaps during which no violent numismatic imagery is produced.<sup>37</sup> The emperors minting the violent types are all conquerors, or at least wish to show themselves as such, and J.E. Lendon has argued that it is in fact precisely Titus, the first to mint violent types, who also reintroduced the idea of heroic military leadership to the Roman stage<sup>38</sup>; soldiers' gravestones, in fact, as early as the first century show scenes which resonate strongly with the charging horseman type.<sup>39</sup> In the latter third century, the situation changes dramatically.

Political upheaval always leaves some numismatic traces.<sup>40</sup> In the third century *Crisis* it came partly in the excessive debasement of currency, silver *antoniniani* now basically copper with a silver wash,

which rubbed off quickly. It also came in an overt militarism: more military images were struck, and these were generally more warlike.<sup>41</sup> The chaos of the latter years of the century meant emperors felt they needed ever more to stress their prowess to maintain military loyalty and bolster public confidence. Of course, much the same would be true of the emperors of the fifth century, who emphasised a different kind of violence in their iconography. The varying ideologies of the two periods lead to different responses to crisis.

Obverse portraiture shifts in the third century from the Hellenised *civilitas* of the Antonines to portraits with cropped hair, the short stubbly 'campaign' beard instead of the longer flowing civic beard<sup>42</sup>, and facial features read as expressive of anxiety, vigilance, and harsh military vigour, emphasising imperial ability to lead troops and crush barbarians.<sup>43</sup> The obverse bust is usually shown armoured, increasingly in more realistic chain or scale armour, rather than the traditional but anachronistic sculpted breastplate. Often the portrait also carries a spear, shield, and helmet, emphasising the emperor as warrior in no uncertain terms.<sup>44</sup> There comes to be a proliferation, even a consistent policy, of types that are not just military, but show actual violence. They are no longer simply issued to celebrate a victory, but are minted consistently over time, indicating a shift in ideology, using violence to stress the qualities underpinning imperial greatness and legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> Simple military images, of course, continued to be struck, but it is the upsurge in violent types, indicating the newly prominent place of the emperor as warrior in the overall complex of Roman thought, that is crucial to understanding the new ethos of the day.

In AD 258, forty-six years after Geta's, Valerian issued the first *calcatio* scene showing Victory treading on a captive; and the first of any violent type since Gordian III, sixteen years prior.<sup>46</sup> The type proleptically promised a 'Parthian' victory, but soon proved particularly ironic, as in AD 259 the dynamic Shahanshah of the renewed Persian Empire, Shapur I, defeated and captured Valerian. Interestingly, Shapur himself made deliberate political use of *calcatio*: the Bishapur monument shows him trampling on a Roman, usually considered to be Gordian III, and Lactantius claimed that he also used Valerian as a step to mount his horse, deliberately mocking Roman imagery.<sup>47</sup>

The next year, AD 260, brought the nadir of the *Crisis*. The Empire fractured into three separate realms, the frontiers collapsed before Goths and Germans, Persians, Moors, and Sarmatians, and endless internal rebellions. In the midst of it all, Gallienus, Valerian's son, co-Augustus and now successor, ruling the central Empire, began to issue charging horseman and *calcatio* types as an ongoing programme<sup>48</sup>, although the dominance of military imagery makes it difficult to distinguish between commemorative and proleptic issues. Gallienus also takes the innovative step of enlisting the gods to participate in battle. Mars appears for the first time in actual combat, spearing a fallen foe, an entirely new scene and a new use of the god, who previously tended to be depicted simply standing or marching.<sup>49</sup>

Subsequent emperors embrace similar violent types, though there are variations in emphasis.<sup>50</sup> The violent types stress, above all, *virtus*, and each emperor shows his right to rule through its quasi-mystical

possession, which enables him to fight personally, to crush barbarians and to defend the Empire. The consistent message is one of personal military excellence as an active warrior, encoded in *virtus* and *victoria*. Claudian II issues a horseman type in which he fights a new total of three barbarians, but shies away from other violent types.<sup>51</sup> Aurelian also issues only one charging horseman reverse from Antioch, to celebrate his victories over Palmyra; he does however utilise the horseman scene, apparently closely modelled on the reverse type, as decoration for the shield increasingly often depicted on obverse portraits.<sup>52</sup> There is a minimising of the motif, perhaps, but not an abandonment. Aurelian instead issues numerous scenes of *calcatio*, perhaps indicating a shift in focus from campaigning to his successes in reuniting the Empire. The horseman returns under the short-lived Florian<sup>53</sup>, but the emphasis shifts back most clearly under Probus, who particularly favoured the horseman type with legends propagating his personal VIRTUS PROBI AVG (Fig.1).<sup>54</sup> He also spent most of his imperial career fighting off barbarians, and comparison with Aurelian suggests a possible reason for such shifting emphasis; violence to captives seems to stress dominance, rather than the active heroism of the horseman.

In 283 Carinus, ruling the West, minted horseman types for himself and his co-Augustus and brother Numerian, who made no such issues in his brief imperial tenure.<sup>55</sup> Carinus also issued a type of Numerian fighting on foot, about to strike a cowering foe, with the legend PACATOR ORBIS, a very telling type for contemporary imperial mentality.<sup>56</sup> As well as this, Carinus issued a gold medallion,



Figure 3. *Sol in calcatio*: *antoninianus* of Aurelian, RIC V 279var, c.AD 274, Serdica.



Figure 4. *Jupiter in combat*: *aureus* of Diocletian, RIC V 146, c.AD 293–4, Rome.

with Numerian's portrait on the obverse, which inflated the violence of the horseman scene further, showing the two of them fighting as cavalry against no fewer than six barbarians, with two Victories to crown them.<sup>57</sup>

Captives continued to be shown mistreated, again with variations in emphasis. Gallienus favours *calcatio* before his father's capture, but afterwards seems to focus on the combat types.<sup>58</sup> Aurelian, as noted, is particularly fond of treading on captives and, in particular, introduces his patron god, *Sol Invictus*, as doing the same. *Sol* subjects Aurelian's foes to *calcatio*, sometimes even seeming to kick at them, and legends stress primarily the god, but also imperial *virtus*<sup>59</sup>; the connection to Aurelian's victories under *Sol*'s patronage is clear (Fig.3). Probus issues relatively few *calcatio* types, portraying both himself and *Sol*. Customary *virtus* legends appear, but he also claims to be *restitutor*, a familiar slogan from Aurelian's reign.<sup>60</sup>

The violent types were not discontinued under the new stability of the Tetrarchy, for they had continuing ideological relevance even after the end of the *Crisis*. The type of the charging horseman was still struck, more often by the Western mints, though it now tended to

celebrate the *virtus* of the entire Tetrarchic college.<sup>61</sup> The ideal of the *virtus*-fuelled warrior-emperor, who fights victoriously to bring order to the entire world was not abandoned but embraced in the coinage and in imperial ideals generally: the AD 289 panegyric to Maximian shows the Tetrarch as a new Hercules, rampaging across the field far in advance of his men, alone routing the Germanic hordes.<sup>62</sup> The images are not identical, the panegyric Maximian lacks a horse, but the ideas behind them are. Tetrarchic coinage also expands the role of the gods in combat, being clearly connected to the theological programme of the Tetrarchy. Maximian, adopting Gallic types found under Postumus and Probus, shows *Hercules* in combat against monsters<sup>63</sup>, while Jovian Diocletian shows the great god smiting his enemy, a Titan or giant, with the thunderbolt (Fig.4).<sup>64</sup> *Mars* in battle continued to be employed by Maxentius in Rome.<sup>65</sup>

Captives continue to be subjected to *calcatio* by the emperors, by *Sol*, *Mars*, and even by *Jupiter* himself, or perhaps Diocletian in the god's guise.<sup>66</sup> The Tetrarchy also (re)introduced the motif of captives being dragged, in much greater quantity. This is a new factor, insofar as it is touted widely on coinage as something





Figure 5. Personalised *virtus*: follis of Constantine as Caesar, RIC VI 111, AD 307, Aquileia.

the victorious, heroic emperors are happy to display themselves doing, and which gods also engage in.<sup>67</sup> It is, like the *calcatio*, a sign of dominance, but one which is more brutal.

The rise of Constantine to sole power altered the iconography. He abandoned obverse portraiture of the standardised Tetrarchic style, thereby signalling his construction of a new imperial image.<sup>68</sup> From AD 305 he issued the common Tetrarchic charging horseman type, promoting the *virtus* of the imperial college, but as early as AD 307, true to form, Constantine changed the legend to declare his own personal *virtus* (Fig.5).<sup>69</sup> This also indicates a return to the more heroic single warrior ethic of the latter *Crisis*, and Constantine seems more keen on this iconography than his peers. Part of the reason was, doubtless, Constantine's greater initial need to legitimise himself in the West.<sup>70</sup> Violent *virtus* still justified claims to rule, but had shifted from a third century focus on the idea of necessity to a fourth century idealised virtue.

After the defeat of Maxentius, Constantine co-opted the junior Tetrarchic gods, having *Mars* and *Sol* brutalise his captives, while linking new legends to the violence: *FVNDATOR PACIS*, the founder of peace (via war); *GAVDIVM*

*ROMANORVM*, an entirely new idea, the joy of the Romans being the brutal treatment of enemies.<sup>71</sup> Constantine declares himself *debellator*, defender and avenger of the Empire, on issues showing more captives being dragged along<sup>72</sup>, and even celebrates his personal *gloria* by dragging one captive with him as he kicks, or performs *calcatio* on, another.<sup>73</sup> Victory, easy enough to allegorise, continues to be shown and is a particular scourge of Constantine's captives; she is even shown, on a AD 328 issue from the new second capital, rather lazily kicking a captive while seated on her throne.<sup>74</sup> The ongoing maintenance and expansion of violent types again links with this ideology. The image of Constantine as warrior in panegyric has already been noted, and he was not averse to actually treating captives brutally.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, it is under his reign that major steps are taken to construct an image of the civil administration in the form of *militia* service.<sup>76</sup>

The three sons of Constantine initially maintain the traditional horseman and captive-based types<sup>77</sup>, but after the death of Constantine II the bronze coinage changes drastically, with the introduction in AD 348 of the new *FEL(icitatis) TEMP(orum) REPARATIO* issues.<sup>78</sup> The series introduced several different types: a phoenix, the emperor with *labarum* and captives, Victory and the emperor on a boat, and the warrior-emperor leading a little barbarian out of a hut.<sup>79</sup> Two violent types are included, the charging horseman, and a new scene of combat, a Roman warrior killing a fallen barbarian cavalryman.<sup>80</sup> This image was particularly preferred by Constantius II and the Eastern mints. While the ideology behind it is the same, the new image is, strangely, almost a



Figure 6. FEL TEMP violence: AE of Constantius II, RIC VIII 347, c.AD 351–5, Siscia.

complete reversal of the old horseman type: now the Roman warrior is on foot, slaying a cavalryman (Fig. 6). Mattingly argues that the attacking figure is probably not *Mars*, but he is a bit too prominent to be just an ordinary soldier.<sup>81</sup> It is most likely the emperor himself, or some cipher for *Romanitas*, the point being to refer to the great deeds of Constans and Constantius in defending the Empire from the Germanic and Persian barbarians, both of which are depicted.

The other bronze types gradually disappear, and the FEL TEMP charging horseman was the last use of that venerable image as a reverse.<sup>82</sup> After AD 353, perhaps connected to an attempted currency reform<sup>83</sup>, the ‘fallen horseman’ single combat type, with its many minor variations, became the only one struck on bronze<sup>84</sup>, saturating the Empire with murderous small change. It was ultimately short-lived: the FEL TEMP coinage was discontinued by Julian in AD 361, probably to indicate a break with his hated dynastic forebears, rather than with the imperial ethos. He issues only one violent type, a soldier with his hand on a captive’s head, generally seen as a dragging scene; it honours the *virtus* of the army.<sup>85</sup>

imagery, coming to a peak in the complete dominance of bronze coinage by scenes of a Roman slaying a barbarian. These types are tied repeatedly to victory and to violent, heroic *virtus* as a way of legitimising rule: the emperor’s role and excellence was to destroy his enemies and safeguard the Empire. In the latter half of the *Crisis*, this was more obviously topical; warfare was endemic, and most of the emperors started as Illyrian military officers. Scenes of violence continue in the more stable fourth century as a facet of the imperial image, not simply as part of the inheritance of the *Crisis*, but as part of a systematic way of conceptualising the world: Ambrose, making much of the related ethos within Christianity, claims that all citizens perform *militia* for the emperors, who themselves do so for God.<sup>86</sup>

From the AD 360s there is a great reduction in the variety of coin types generally.<sup>87</sup> The only violent images left are dragging enemies by the hair and (more commonly) *calcatio* scenes. From the reign of the brothers Valentinian and Valens to the death of Theodosius I, AD 364–95, these types are found regularly minted with an apparently standardised set of legends, VICTORIA AVGG, as well as SECVRITAS, SALVS, and SPES REI PVBLICAE, and GLORIA ROMANORVM (Fig.7).<sup>88</sup> Personal imperial *virtus*, in fact, begins to be crowded out by these state virtues. Brutality towards enemies of the Empire no longer simply showed the valour of the emperor, but was now necessary to the health and stability of the state.<sup>89</sup> Violence was increasingly made a routine element of Roman imperial rule. This is clear not only

There was thus a century of violent

through the lack of combat types, but also



Figure 7. Violence, state virtues, and the *labarum*: (a). AE of Valentinian I, RIC IX 5a, c.AD 364–7, Siscia; and (b). AE of Valentinian II, RIC IX 65a, c.AD 388–92, Thessalonica.

through changes in symbols associated with the remaining violent scenes. The emperor increasingly holds the *labarum*, rather than a spear or banner. This not only indicates Christianisation, but also a movement away from personal violence. Although used as a military standard, the *labarum* was considered to have its own power, to be able to ensure victory via divine force. The dominance represented by violent treatment of captives comes about not through personal valour, but by grace of God. The imperial image is thus divorced from that of the warrior, and instead serves under the Christian banner.

The use of the charging horseman motif on obverse shields is related to this. Under Aurelian and, in particular, Probus, the armoured obverse portrait had come to bear a decorative shield, which sometimes depicted close copies of coin reverses. The charging horseman was one of these,



Figure 8. Honorius *Signifer*: *solidus* of Honorius, RIC X 1206, c.AD 398–402, Mediolanum.

tending not to be paired with the horseman reverse.<sup>90</sup> This shield motif continued well after the reverse type of the charging horseman had disappeared<sup>91</sup>, indicating perhaps a continued legitimacy attached to the image. It also serves as a symbol of the routinisation of imperial violence in more settled times, a memory of the warrior ethic. As a reverse, it had depicted the heroic warrior-emperor; disappearing thence, it was maintained in miniature to recall imperial military connections even as *militia* came to signal a hierarchic service ethos, rather than a military one.

Fifth century coinage shows a further limiting of types, with variations of the *calcatio* as the primary motif.<sup>92</sup> Western *solidi* were dominated by two particular violent images.<sup>93</sup> First, Honorius' famous *Signifer* type (Fig.8), named for a passage of Claudian<sup>94</sup>, and showing the emperor with *labarum* or *vexillum*, treading down a captive.<sup>95</sup> This was issued until AD 426. Under Valentinian III, the *Signifer* was replaced by a second, more allegorical scene, the emperor with his foot on a human-headed serpent, while holding a long cross and *victoriola* (Fig. 9).<sup>96</sup> The serpent most likely was an allegory for 'the enemy', whomever it might be (heretics, rebels, barbarians) its use probably recalls Constantine's famous



Figure 9. The serpent's *calcatio*: *solidus* of Valentinian III, RIC X 2010, c.AD 426–55, Ravenna.

issue showing a *labarum* piercing a serpent, signifying his defeat of Licinius, and perhaps, as it was later interpreted, of paganism.<sup>97</sup> The serpent *calcatio* monopolised Western coinage from 425 almost until the Western collapse<sup>98</sup>, and seems to be a generalising of the earlier motifs. The captive is replaced by a symbol for all enemies, the *labarum* itself replacing a spear or standard by the Cross, no longer a military symbol. Imperial dominance is no longer military but universal, the violence now more than ever symbolic. Avitus, AD 455–456, briefly showed people being trampled again<sup>99</sup>, but the serpent *calcatio* continued to proclaim imaginary imperial victory over all enemies on the western coinage of Marcian and Leo I, under Majorian<sup>100</sup>, Libius Severus<sup>101</sup>, and rarely under Anthemius.<sup>102</sup> Olybrius in AD 472 issued it not at all, while Glycerius, AD 473–474, finally replaced the allegorical serpentine ‘enemy’ simply with an actual footstool.<sup>103</sup> Thus passed from imperial coinage the iconography of violence; the Western Empire (on traditional dating) outlasted it by a mere two years.

Violence on coinage tracks with imperial ideology. There are bursts of numismatic violence with notable

conquests during the Principate, which give way to a consistently elevated level of violent imagery after the near collapse of the AD 260s and the struggle to restore the Empire. The emperor was now military, first and foremost: emperors fought and even died in the field, and their ideal was that of a heroic warrior. Legitimacy was won in battle. The fourth century, although considerably more settled, continued the violent imagery for some time, in conjunction with the co-opting of the concepts of military service as a new ethic in imperial culture. Combat types came to dominate, but a century after the great expansion of violent coinage, they disappear, leaving only scenes of violent domination of captives. In the fifth century, the violence was made routine, the emperor conceptualised as always trampling his foes, ensuring victory by his nature and, more importantly, by grace of the God the emperors served. The heroic ethos and the violent imagery were made routine and made much more symbolic, producing an imagery of dominance and implied violence, alongside an official ideology of *militia*-service, an institutionalised divinely sanctioned dominion by force. In the face of the Western collapse and transformation of the East, violence disappeared from the coinage, but for two centuries, it had declared that the Late Antique Augustus was a legitimate ruler, and one worthy of the title.

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### Notes

1. That coins are monuments in miniature is



- persuasively argued by A. Cheung, 'The Political Significance of Roman Imperial Coin Types', *Schweizer Münzblätter*, 191, 1998, pp. 53–61; cf. R. Hedlund, "... *Achieved Nothing Worthy of Memory*": *Coinage and Authority in the Roman Empire, c. AD 260–295*, *Studia Numismatica Uppsaliensia* 5, Uppsala, 2008, pp.23–8, 39, following the artistic models of Hölscher and Zanker. R.R.R. Smith, 'The Public Image of Licinius I: Portrait Sculpture and Imperial Ideology in the Early Fourth Century', *JRS*, 87, 1997, p. 194, makes a similar point about the discursive nature of official images.
2. As noted in RIC IV.iii, p.11.
  3. E.g., in Nero's DECVRSIO issues: RIC 103–108, 163–77, 395–7, 436, 437, 507–9, 577–582.
  4. RIC 198.
  5. Many examples, e.g., RIC 233, 283–286, 817–19, 900.
  6. RIC 523 (Vespasian); RIC 613, RIC 632 (Titus). The Republic offers no model for this type, although there is an almost unique commemorative design showing armed horsemen carrying an enemy's head; see H. Mattingly, 'Some Historical Coins of the Late Republic', *JRS*, 12, 1922, pp. 230–9.
  7. N. Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, 1986, pp.120–121.
  8. E.g., RIC 427. Cf. the remarks of A.C. Levi, *Barbarians on Roman Imperial Coins and Sculpture*, *Numismatic Notes and Monographs* 123, American Numismatic Society, New York, 1952, p.10.
  9. G.G. Belloni, 'Significati storico-politici delle figurazioni e delle scritte delle monete da Augusto a Traiano (Zecche di Roma e 'imperatorie')', *ANRW* II.1, 1067, notes that Titus maintained the insistence on Judaea types in his sole reign; this was not the case with the charging horseman.
  10. RIC 257, 284, 317, 344, 361.
  11. RIC 208–9, 534–545.
  12. RIC 543–5, 549, 567, 1362–1363, 1402–7; J.M.C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, *Numismatic Studies* 5, 2nd ed., American Numismatic Society, New York, 1986, p.136 pl.XX.3, for Verus as a horseman in mêlée.
  13. RIC 299. On Commodus' truce, see Dio, LXXIII.1–2.
  14. RIC 39, 114, 332a, 453a. It may be connected to the Antonine 'redefinition of *virtus*' to include hunting: see S.L. Tuck. 'The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of *Virtus* under the Principate', *G&R*, 52(2), 2005.
  15. RIC 146, 269, cf. 231, 238, 463.
  16. Caracalla: RIC 113, 118, 155, 431, 438–9, 443, 446, 449, 526, 547; cf. Geta: 64, 68, 72. E. Manders, *Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage AD 193–284*, Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, p.87, links the aggressive violence, particularly on Caracalla's PROPECTIO coinage, to his claims of *commilitio* status.
  17. RIC 115 and 121; Gneccchi, *Medaglioni Romani*, pl.109.9. Hannestad, op.cit., 290, suggests that Maximinus' medallions may have been copies of the famous paintings of himself in battle, which he sent to the Senate: Herodian, VII.2.6–2.8.
  18. RIC 327.
  19. RIC 1224–1225. This pose of Jupiter, but without an enemy to smite, is quite common.
  20. Pliny, *Panegyric*, XVII.2–3.
  21. *Pan. Lat.*, IV(X).26.1–4.
  22. As in *Psalms* 110 [109].1; see the comments of J. Babelon, 'Le Thème Iconographique de la Violence', in G.E. Mylonas & D. Raymond (eds.), *Studies Presented to David Moore Robinson on his Seventieth Birthday*, vol. 2, Washington University Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 1953, pp. 278–279.
  23. Propertius, *Elegies*, I.1.4. Cf. C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1890, pp.106–108, on the motif. Cf. Babelon, op.cit., 279.
  24. See M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp.57–58. The practice was rapidly accepted as traditionally Roman a bare century later: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III.51: *Spina infelicitum captivorum sortem designat: ubi duces Romanorum super dorsa hostium ambulantes, laborum suorum gaudia perceperunt*.

25. *Roman Aurei*, 799. The place of minting may be important given the Eastern provenance of the gesture.
26. *BMC II*, p. 71.2, 75.5, 76.7.
27. RIC 556–9. Babelon, op.cit., 280, suggests the Danube. It seems odd behaviour for any river god; a rough sculptural analogue may in fact be Claudius dominating Britannia, from Aphrodisias. For the sculpture, see I.M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians through Roman Eyes*, Stroud, Sutton, 2000, pp. 55–8.
28. RIC 190a, 503–506, 592 (Pax); 210 (Trajan). It is perhaps simply a metonym for a captive, or Dacia as a whole. G.B. Ladner, 'On Roman Attitudes toward Barbarians in Late Antiquity', *Viator*, 7, 1976, 12, thinks it a deliberate icon or bust; Levi, op.cit., 17, points to a statue of Hadrian, or an earlier one rather like it, as a possible model, and notes that this odd type disappeared relatively quickly. It may be intended as a real head, though Belloni, op.cit., 1096–7, argues for a more general identification of 'Dacian'.
29. RIC 82.
30. RIC 830. Caracalla would later adopt the motif, apparently to indicate a visit to Egypt: RIC 544.
31. E.g. under Nero: RIC 25, Virtus places a foot on a pile of arms; cf. Vespasian's pose on IVDAEA CAPTA issues, eg, RIC 427.
32. E.g., Probus RIC 405, where the emperor's foot connects frontally with the small of the seated captive's back, rather than being placed on top.
33. On this see Levi, *Barbarians on Imperial Coinage*, esp. 25–8, 32–40.
34. E.g., Aurelian: RIC 42; Probus RIC 157.
35. A common trope. See for example Claudian, *IV Cons. Hon. Aug.*, 111–117, 241–77; *Pan. Lat. IV(X)*, 26.3–26.4; cf. the famous Virgilian line, *Aeneid*, VI.853: *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*.
36. RIC 172; cf. Septimius, who leads one by the hand in RIC 302. The imagery appears earlier outside of coinage, as for example on Trajan's column.
37. J.R. Fears, 'The Theology of Victory at Rome: Approaches and Problems', *ANRW II*, 17.2, p. 813, points out that Victory types generally could be narrowly linked to a specific manifestation of imperial *virtus*, but that Victoria was a 'consistent and inextricable aspect of the imperial personality and guarantee of the social order'.
38. J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 256–260.
39. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 155–60.
40. C.T.H.R. Erhardt, 'Roman Coin Types and the Roman Public', *JNG*, 24, 1984, p. 45.
41. Hedlund, op.cit., 51, notes the numismatic iconography's shift to the issue of expressive war-images. For similar developments on provincial coinage, see V. Heuchert, 'The Chronological Development of Roman Provincial Coin Iconography', in C.J. Howgego, V. Heuchert, and A.M. Burnett (eds.), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 52–55.
42. Hedlund, op.cit., 94–5.
43. R.R.R. Smith, 'The Public Image of Licinius I', 179.
44. Hedlund, op.cit., 52–54. The armoured obverse begins under Caracalla, but is used primarily between Severus Alexander and Probus, becoming very common from Valerian onwards: L. de Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, Leiden, Brill, 1976, pp. 111–112. R.H. Storch, 'The Coinage from Commodus to Constantine: Some Types that Mirror the Transition from Principate to Absolute Monarchy', *Schweizer Münzblätter*, 23(91), 1973, pp. 95–103, makes a case for increasingly militaristic portrayals on non-military types during the third century, though perhaps overstates some relatively minor elements.
45. See Manders, op. cit., 91–93.
46. RIC 22.
47. Babelon, 'Le Thème', 279. Lactantius, *De Mort. Pers.*, V.2–3. It is unclear whether Lactantius means us to understand Shapur as referring specifically to *calcatio* scenes, or just Roman claims in general. The reliefs at Bishapur and Naqsi Rustam show Valerian's capture, as well as Shapur's horse trampling on Gordian.
48. RIC 88, 312, 529, 538, 589, 593. McCormick, op.cit., 28; Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, 159–160.
49. RIC 57, 238–9, Cohen, 627, MARTI PROPVGNAT. Cf. the armed Gallienus stomping on a prostrate enemy, RIC 314.
50. Hedlund, op.cit., 166–7, notes that the Gallic emperors issue some violent types broadly similar to those of their central rivals: RIC 82, 181–182, 252 (Postumus); 33–34, 43 (Tetricus); 9 (Victorinus).

51. RIC 227.
52. As a reverse, it is absent from RIC; *Roman Aurei*, 4031 lists one, RESTITVTOR ORIENTIS, from Antioch c.270–275; for the shield: RIC 219var.
53. He reigned some three months. RIC 13, 44, 108; also 16, a *calcatio* scene.
54. RIC 233, 283–286, 312, 446–455, 806–808, 817–19, 877–885, 889, 900, 912.
55. RIC 287 (Carinus), 398–99 (Numerian). Note that Carinus had previously issued coins with types of horsemen: 169–70.
56. RIC 390, from Lugdunum.
57. RIC 401.
58. RIC 3, 38, 44–5, 53–5, 62–4; 313–315, 378, 403, 530a.
59. RIC 283, 309–17, 383–385. See E.H. Kantorowicz, ‘Oriens Augusti. Lever du Roi’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17, 1963, pp. 123–4, cf. Hedlund, op.cit., 62.
60. RIC 13, 56, 456 (*virtus*), 45 (Oriens), 403–6 (*restitutor saeculi*).
61. RIC 87–9 (Treveri); 65–9, 80–91, 108–12 (Aquileia); 71–72, 78–9, 81–83 (Ticinum), 115 (Siscia); 3 (Cyzicus).
62. *Pan.Lat.*, X(II).5.1–3.
63. E.g., RIC 528 (Rome) strangling the lion; 9 (Treveri) fighting the Hydra.
64. RIC 144–6 (Rome); 20, 22–3, 56–58 (Treveri), 7 (Siscia), all but two minted under Diocletian’s name.
65. RIC 222, 270.
66. Jupiter: RIC 127 (Rome); emperors at Treveri: RIC 123 (Diocletian), 701 (Maximian); Sol, c.312–313: RIC 344 (Maximinus, Rome), 93 (Constantine, Ostia); Mars: RIC 1054 (Carausius).
67. Emperors (VIRTVS AVGG ET CAESS): RIC 153–4 (Severus and Maximinus, Siscia c.306–7); VIRTVTI EXERCITVS: 169a–b (c.312. Licinius and Maximinus, Antioch); Mars: 269 (Maxentius, Rome).
68. On this see P. Bruun, ‘Notes on the Transmission of Imperial Images in Late Antiquity’, in K. Ascani, T. Fischer-Hansen, F. Johansen, S.S. Jensen, and J.E. Skydgaard (eds.), *Studia Romana in Honorem Petri Krarup Septuagenarii*, Odense, Odense University Press, 1976, pp. 122–131.
69. VIRTVS AVGG ET CAESS: RIC 82b, 84b, 86b, 89 (Aquileia), 71–72, 78–9 (Ticinum); VIRTVS CONSTANTINI CAES 108–112 (Aquileia); cf. the slip from *virtus Augustorum* to *virtus Augusti* around 313–315: RIC 11 vs. 34–7 (Treveri).
70. Particularly violent are issues from Treveri, RIC VII p. 47, 51 notes that his iconography promotes his “achievements and super-human qualities”, though after 324, stereotyping sets in.
71. RIC 15 (Treveri) Mars in *calcatio*, GAVDIVM RO-MANORVM, cf. 52 (Ticinum), a soldier dragging a captive to the emperor, with the same legend. 61 (Treveri) and 12 (Rome), Mars dragging captive, FVNDAT PACIS, all c.313–315.
72. RIC 356–357 (Treveri) DEBELLATORI GENTIVM BARBARARVM, emperor dragging captive, waving to soldier, 531 the same but GOTHIA in exergue.
73. RIC 206 (Siscia) GLORIA CON-STANTINI AVG. Strangely, Levi, op.cit., 26, claims this as an example of what she sees as a complete lack of actual interaction between emperors and captives on all coinage, captives being simply accoutrements of the emperor. This is true on some types, where captives just sit around, but it simply cannot be the case when Constantine drags one and kicks another that he is “unaware” of them, regardless of the apparent lack of eye contact.
74. RIC 29–38 (Constantinople); she also treads on captives to celebrate particular conquests: RIC 435–8, SARMATIA DEVICTA, minted for Constantine and his sons as Caesars.
75. Above, n. 21; cf. *Pan.Lat.*, XII(IX).9.3–6. Captives: Eutropius, 10.3.2; *Pan.Lat.*, IV(X).16.5–16.6.
76. See for example *Cod.Theod.*, VI.36.1, AD 326.
77. RIC 339, 342, 344–60, charging horsemen types with DEBELLATORES, VIRTVS, and VICTORIA. Cf. the similar but post-Constantine II 103A, 378, all from Rome. Gold and silver maintained the ongoing inherited pattern, mostly via *calcatio* and dragging scenes, eg., RIC 3, 4, 37 (Siscia), 162 (Thessalonica).
78. H. Mattingly, “‘Fel. Temp. Reparatio.’”, *NC*, 5th ser., 13, 1933, suggests *felicium* or *felix*, but Constantius is restoring not the old golden age, but *felicitas* itself; further *felicitas tempor* was used as early as the Severi: RIC 22. *Felicitas* was seen as a virtue of military leaders already under the Republic: Cicero, *De Lege Manilia*, 28.

79. Mattingly, *op.cit.*, 187–188.
80. See RIC VIII for a great mass of examples. E.g. for Lugdunum, 79–83, 100–103, 183–200.
81. Mattingly, *op.cit.*, 192, declares that this is Achilles, but admits no firm basis for the identification, which is caught up in his stress on the *saeculum*/centenary coincidence in 348. He also (p. 193) sees the hut type as a reference to Virgil's 'messianic eclogue'. J.P.C. Kent, 'Fel. Temp. Reparatio', *NC*, 7th ser., 7, 1967, pp. 83–90, disagrees with Mattingly's model of a *saeculum* celebration, but agrees with the 348 dating on other reasoning. W. Portman, 'Die politische Krise zwischen den Kaisern Constantius II. und Constans', *Historia*, 48(3), 1999, p. 308, argues for a year or two earlier.
82. With one single exception, a medallion minted at Aquileia c.383–8, under Valentinian II: RIC 43.
83. Mattingly, *op.cit.*, 194ff; cf. D. Nash, 'The Roman Imperial Coinage VIII [Rev.Art.]', *Class. Rev.*, 33(1), 1983, pp. 109–10.
84. Kent, 'Fel Temp', 85–88. For a discussion of the many variations, see W. Faulkner, 'The Falling Horseman: An Internet-Based Examination', *Celator*, 16(6), 2002, pp. 6–22.
85. E.g., RIC 95 (Sirmium)
86. Ambrose, *Epistles*, XVII.1.
87. So A.R. Bellinger & M.A. Berlincourt, *Victory as a Coin Type*, Numismatic Notes and Monographs 149, p. 62. This does not of course mean that the violent types were the only ones minted.
88. Examples of these common patterns: RIC 3a–b (Nicomedia), SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE, Victory in *calcatio*; 33a–d (Rome) VICTORIA AVGVSTORVM, Victory dragging captive; 58a–d (Aquileia) and 64a–e (Rome) SALVS REI-PVBLICAE, Victory dragging captive, likewise the emperor, 1a–b (Siscia) SALVS REIP; 63a–c (Rome) SPES REI-REPVBLICAE, emperor in *calcatio*; 5a–c (Treveri) GLORIA RO-MANORVM, emperor dragging captive.
- these types "give the sanction of the general welfare to a scene that looks like mere brutality". Cf. D. Shotton, 'Roman Historians and the Roman Coinage', *G&R*, 25(2), 1978, 157; Ladner, *op.cit.*, 14.
90. On the topic, Hedlund, *op.cit.*, 54–55, 62–4. E.g., Probus: RIC 737, reverse of a temple of Roma; 779, reverse of Sol in his chariot.
91. It is still there under Julius Nepos, RIC 3212 (VICTORIA AVGG, victory with a long cross).
92. E.g., RIC 1–2 (Arcadius); 282–284, 367 (Theodosius II); 652–4 (Leo I).
93. The mints nonetheless strike for both emperors, as with Western AE4 issues for Arcadius: *LRC* 92–109, 112, 114–116, 119–28, 131–6, 139–44, 148–54, struck under Honorius.
94. Claudian, *VI Cons. Hon.*, 22: *Latiae sublimis signifer aulae*.
95. Obviously a very common type: e.g., RIC 1254 (Honorius); 1507 (Constantine III).
96. Again, a very common motif: e.g., RIC 2019.
97. RIC 19 (Constantinople)
98. The reader may, once again, easily observe this from RIC X.
99. RIC 2401–4, 2408.
100. RIC 2604–8, 2612–2615, 2623–26239.
101. RIC 2702–6, 2718–27125, 2729.
102. RIC X says unknown, but note Cohen 18.
103. RIC 3101–7, 3112–3.

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89. Bellinger and Berlincourt, *op.cit.*, 61, specifically about SALVS REI PVBLICAE, comment that