

Roman coin find rewrites history as rebel emperor confirmed.

The discovery of a coin of a hitherto unrecognised rebel Roman 'emperor' – Domitianus - has excited experts at the British Museum and looks set to rewrite history. The coin, part of a hoard, was discovered by Brian Malin whilst using a metal-detector on farmland ten miles from Oxford in April 2003.

You are invited to attend a press/photo call to announce the find on **Tuesday 24th February at 10.30am** in the Hartwell Room. Directions from the Front Gate, British Museum, Great Russell St. The curator and finder will be present to be interviewed.

Richard Abdy (Curator of Roman Coins, British Museum) said 'so little is known of Domitianus that some scholars have seriously doubted his existence. The new discovery makes it certain both that this shadowy claimant to the Imperial throne existed, and that he mounted a serious challenge for the position of emperor in the troubled period of the early 270s AD', known as the 'Gallic Empire' (see notes overleaf).

The antiquity of this coin of Domitianus is beyond doubt as it came from a hoard consisting of over 5,000 common Roman coins fused together in a third century AD pot, which had to be painstakingly separated by British Museum conservators.

Abdy continues, 'there are only two, fleeting references, to Domitianus in historical sources as a high-ranking army officer punished for treason by the Emperor Aurelian (ruled AD 270-275). But neither identify him as a rebel emperor (called 'tyrants' by the official Roman sources). Only the archaeological evidence of this coin shows that he was indeed emperor and provides us with a face to go with history's forgotten ruler.

There is one other known coin depicting Domitianus in existence, which was found in the Loire area of France in 1900. Since it was unique and unprecedented the coin was dismissed as a modern hoax. It then disappeared into the collections of a small museum in western France and has only recently been traced. The Oxfordshire coin matches the French example and together the coins provide the final indisputable proof of the existence of Domitianus.

It is possible that there are other coins of Domitianus in existence which have been previously misidentified by the people who found them. The British Museum would encourage people who have 'Gallic Empire' coins in their collections to take a look at them again or show them to an expert, such as their local Finds Liaison Officer (see notes)

For further information please contact Hannah Boulton on 020 7323 8522 or email hboulton@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

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Notes to editors:

- The coin of Domitianus can be seen on temporary display at the British Museum's **Buried Treasure: Finding our Past** exhibition which runs until 14 March 2004. Sponsored by Anglo-American and Tarmac. The hoard will then go through the Treasure process.
- The 'Gallic Empire' is the name given to the secessionist state that was created in the aftermath of the Roman Empire's greatest humiliation. In AD260 the Emperor Valerian was captured alive by the Persians. He was used as a living footstool by the Persian king and upon his death was stuffed and displayed in a Zoroastrian temple. This was the cue for Gaul (the area comprising modern France and the Rhineland) to revolt in order to look after their own security; taking Britain and initially the Iberian peninsula with it. An officer called Postumus became the first breakaway Gallic 'emperor' with his capital in Trier - this is the probable location for the minting of the Domitianus coin. AD 269 was a particularly turbulent year for the Gallic Empire with three successors to Postumus staking rival claims. Finally power settled on Victorinus (r.AD269-71). Victorinus was reportedly prone to raping the wives of his courtiers. It is possible that Domitianus was one of these wronged husbands and assassinated Victorinus, briefly seizing power and taking control of the mint. Domitianus must then have been overthrown (an incident left historically unrecorded) by Tetricus, the governor of Aquitaine who became emperor from AD271-4. Tetricus was subsequently confronted by the Roman emperor, Aurelian who as we have seen punished Domitianus for treason.
- The Portable Antiquities Scheme (www.finds.org.uk) is a voluntary scheme for the recording of archaeological objects found by members of the public across the whole of England and Wales. Finders wishing to report their discoveries should contact their local Finds Liaison by logging on to www.finds.org.uk, Email info@finds.org.uk, or Tel: 020 7323 8611. The major funding partners of the Portable Antiquities Scheme are the Heritage Lottery Fund, the DCMS, the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council, the British Museum and the National Museums & Galleries of Wales.