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A New Mint for Julian II: Rauracum rather than Ravenna

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Abstract: The existence of solidi struck by Julian II as Augustus with the mint-mark RAV has been confirmed by an example recently sold at auction. It is argued here that this mint-mark probably abbreviates the name of Rauracum (modern Kaiseraugst in Switzerland) rather than of Ravenna as currently assumed.

THE CATALOGUE of the coin-collection assembled by Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim (d. 1848) includes a description of a solidus of Julian II (360-63) with the reverse legend VIRTVS EXERCII GALLI 'The Courage of the Gallic Army' surrounding a soldier with right hand on the head of a kneeling captive and a trophy in left hand, and the mint-mark RAV followed by a wreath in the exergue.¹ Unfortunately, the catalogue does not preserve an illustration of this piece, and the fact that no other coin with this mint-mark was known from the reign of Julian encouraged the belief that the mint-mark had been misread. So Cohen included it in his catalogue of Roman coins with the warning that it had not been properly read, while others have preferred to omit any mention of it at all from their works.² However, a similar piece has recently been sold by auction (*Fig. 1*). It depicts a bearded bust of Julian surrounded by the legend FL CL IVLIANVS PP AVG on the obverse, a soldier with right hand on the head of a kneeling captive and a trophy in his left hand surrounded by the legend VIRTVS EXERCII GALLI on the reverse, and, most importantly, the mint-mark RAV followed by a wreath in the exergue. The coin is in excellent condition and there is no doubt that the mint-mark does in fact read RAV.



Fig. 1. Solidus of Julian II with mint-mark RAV (20mm, 4.33g). *RIC* 8, -. (2x)
Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XXI (10 Jan. 2018), lot 866. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

¹ See *Verzeichniss der Münz- und Medaillen-Sammlung des kaiserl. königl. Hofrathes und Mitgliedes mehrerer gelehrten Gesellschaften, Herrn Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim, Bd. 1* (Vienna, 1844), p. 255, no. 15358.

² See H. Cohen, *Description historique des Monnaies frappées sous l'Empire romain, communément appelées Médailles imperiales*, T. 6 (Paris, 1862), p. 362, no. 26.

So what does this apparent mint-mark mean, if that is what it is? The obvious assumption, given the standard practice of the time, is that it abbreviates the name of a town beginning with the letters RAV.³ Cohen assumed that such a sequence of letters could only abbreviate the name of Ravenna, and so dismissed this reading of the mint-mark on the basis that the mint at Ravenna had not been opened yet under Julian. The author responsible for the catalogue description of the coin recently offered for sale assumed similarly that RAV could only abbreviate the name of Ravenna, but did not have the luxury of being able to dismiss the legend in the same manner as Cohen, faced as he was by the coin itself. Hence he was forced to search for some activity under Julian at or near Ravenna that might possibly have required the urgent striking of gold coinage. However, Julian never visited Ravenna.⁴ Furthermore, it was never itself the centre of any important military or political development during his reign. The nearest event of any military or political importance was when some troops whom Julian had captured at Sirmium during the summer of 361 and who were travelling through northern Italy on the way to Gaul, revolted against Julian and seized Aquileia in the name of his cousin and rival Constantius II (337-61).⁵ The result was a prolonged and hard-fought siege that only ended in early 362 when the besieged were finally persuaded that Constantius II really had died. Because a river ran near part of the walls of Aquileia, the besiegers used siege towers constructed on a platform built of three ships tied together during their main attack on the city. This is of interest because part of the imperial fleet was based at Ravenna.⁶ Consequently, the author of the catalogue description sought to explain the solidus under discussion as part of an 'emergency coinage' struck at Ravenna 'in order to defray urgent expenses' associated with the participation by the fleet at Ravenna in the siege of Aquileia. However, there is no evidence that the fleet at Ravenna contributed in any way to the siege of Aquileia. Indeed, given that the besiegers only used three ships, and that these did not need to be properly equipped military craft simply to serve as floating platforms, there seems no good reason why the besiegers should not have used existing local resources rather than send to Ravenna for assistance.

³ The alternative possibility is that it abbreviates a political slogan in the manner, for example, of the sequences RSR and I.N.P.C.D.A. used on the coins and medallions of Carausius (286-93). See G. de la Bédoyère, 'Carausius and the marks RSR and I.N.P.C.D.A', *NC* 158 (1998), pp. 79-88. One can easily imagine some slogan befitting the reverse type, e.g. R(edit) A(ugustus) V(ictor) 'Augustus returns victorious', but more evidence is necessary to support such a reading.

⁴ On the movements of Julian before his arrival in Constantinople in December 361, see T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (London, 1993), pp. 226-8.

⁵ See Ammianus Marcellinus 21.11.1-12.20. For commentary, see J. den Boeft, D. den Hengst, and H.C. Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXI* (Groningen, 1991), pp. 147-80. On the identity of the rebels as elite troops whom Constantius had sent ahead of his main forces to Illyricum in order to forestall a potential invasion by Julian, see D. Woods, 'Constantius, Julian, and the fall of Sirmium', in A. Sánchez-Ostiz (ed.), *Beginning and End: From Ammianus Marcellinus to Eusebius of Caesarea* (Huelva, 2016), pp. 177-91, at 178-81.

⁶ On the *classis Ravennatis*, see e.g. C.G. Starr, *The Roman Imperial Navy 31 BC-AD 324* (Ithaca, 1941), pp. 21-6.

The prime factor driving Cohen and the author of the catalogue description to assume that RAV must abbreviate the name of Ravenna seems to be the knowledge that an important mint would in fact open there in 402.⁷ However, the military and political situation was very different in 402, and the only reason that an important mint was established there then was because the western emperor Honorius (395-423) had decided to transfer his capital to there from Rome as he considered it more defensible than Rome and better able to receive reinforcements from the East. It is clear, therefore, that any assumption that RAV must abbreviate Ravenna is highly anachronistic. One needs to approach the problem of the identity of the town intended by the sequence RAV in a more methodical and open-minded manner. However, one need not perform an exhaustive search for any and every settlement with a name beginning RAV.⁸ Two factors serve to set important limits to this search.



Fig. 2. Solidus of Julian II, Arles (20mm, 4.45g). *RIC* 8, Arles 303. (2x)

Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XIII (5 Jan. 2010), lot 396. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.



Fig. 3. Solidus of Julian II, Sirmium (20mm, 4.20g). *RIC* 8, Sirmium 96. (2x)

Ex Numismatik Naumann, Auction 54 (4 June 2017), lot 623. © Numismatik Naumann GmbH.

The first factor is that a reverse legend celebrating the valour of the Gallic army in particular is more likely to have been used at a mint situated within the wider Gallic region, that is, within the region defined by the praetorian prefecture of the Gauls,

⁷ In general, see E. Ranieri, *La monetazione di Ravenna antica dal V all' VIII secolo. Impero romano e bizantino, regno ostrogoto e langobardo* (Bologna, 2006).

⁸ In fact, there seem to have been surprisingly few settlements with names beginning RAV. The gazetteer in R.J. Talbert (ed.), *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton, 2000) lists four in addition to Ravenna and Rauracum: Rauda in north-east Spain, Rauranum in south-west Gaul, Rhaukos on Crete, and Raunathou Kome on the Red Sea coast in Arabia. Julian's travels as Augustus never brought him near any of these four settlements.

than elsewhere within the empire. Under Julian as Augustus, the mints at Arles (Constantina) and Lyons (Lugdunum) both struck solidi with the reverse depicting the legend VIRTUS EXERC GALL surrounding a soldier with right hand on the head of a kneeling captive and a trophy in left hand (*Fig. 2*).⁹ However, the mints at Rome, Siscia, Sirmium, Thessalonica, Constantinople, Nicomedia, and Antioch struck the same basic type with the legends either VIRTUS EXERCITVS ROMANI 'The Courage of the Roman Army' or VIRTUS EXERCITVS ROMANORVM (*Fig. 3*) 'The Courage of the Army of the Romans' instead.¹⁰ There is a clear pattern here whereby the mints within Gaul prefer to celebrate the courage of the Gallic army, while the mints situated outside Gaul prefer to celebrate the courage of the Roman army instead. Similarly, Constantine II (337-40), the direct ruler of the prefecture of the Gauls alone, was the only one of the three sons of Constantine I to strike solidi with the legend VIRTUS EXERCITVS GALL during his brief reign.¹¹ However, one must also acknowledge that the pattern of celebration of the courage of the Gallic army was not always so simple. For example, the mints of Trier and Arles both struck solidi with reverse depicting the legend VIRTUS EXERCITVS GALL surrounding Mars advancing between two kneeling captives in the name of Constantine I (306-37) in about 317, while the mints at Siscia and Thessalonica struck solidi with the same legend and device at about the same time.¹² Yet the key point when considering the mint responsible for the solidus under discussion must be the pattern of similar issues under Julian himself rather than under earlier emperors.

The second factor is that there was a close association between the presence of the emperor and the production of precious metal coinage. This was not always a given, but the association between the two increased as the fourth century progressed until the point where practically all the precious metal coinage was struck by the comitatensian mint in the presence of the emperor following the administrative reforms of Valentinian I and Valens during the period 366-69.¹³ This association is disguised somewhat by the fact that the emperors tended to winter in large cities possessing traditional Diocletianic mints during the course of their journeys about

⁹ *RIC* 8, Lyons 226, Arles 303-04. See also P. Ferrando, *L'atelier monétaire d'Arles de Constantin le Grand à Romulus Augustule, 313-476* (2010), no. 1361. The coins from Arles also included an eagle with a wreath in its beak in the field on the reverse. This eagle appeared on most issues struck at Arles under Julian as sole Augustus and was an issue mark peculiar to Arles rather than an intrinsic part of any of the reverse designs. See D. Woods, 'Julian, Arles, and the eagle', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 7 (2014), pp. 49-64. P. Bastien, *Le monnayage de l'atelier de Lyon. De la mort de Constantin à la mort de Julien (337-363)* (Wetteren, 1985), pp. 79, 148, 157 dismisses *RIC* 8, Lyons 226 as an imitation. However, he includes a coin of identical type, but with a different issue-mark not known to *RIC* 8 in his catalogue (no. 267) instead. A quick survey of solidi of this type in various databases (e.g. BM collection database, OCRE, pro.coinarchives.com) and the publications already mentioned here does not reveal any strong stylistic similarities between the RAV specimen and examples from Arles and Lyons.

¹⁰ *RIC* 8, Rome 323-24, Siscia 409, Sirmium 92-100, Thessalonica 217-19, Constantinople 156-58, Nicomedia 115, Antioch 195-203.

¹¹ *RIC* 8, Trier 12-14.

¹² *RIC* 7, Trier 192-94, Arles 115-17, Siscia 29-30, Thessalonica 15-18.

¹³ See M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c.300-1450* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 386-94.

their territories, but the exceptions prove the reality of this association. For example, a unique sesqui-solidus seems datable to the brief residence by Constantius II in Milan from autumn 352 to summer 353, while a very rare solidus seems to be datable to one of his other brief residences in that city during the period from autumn 354 to spring 357.¹⁴

In the light of these two factors, it is clear that the best candidate for identification as the town denoted by the apparent mint-mark RAV would be a town in the prefecture of the Gauls that had also served as the residence of Julian. One must investigate this possibility as a priority before turning elsewhere, and it is no surprise that one strong candidate immediately suggests itself, Rauracum or Castrum Rauracense (modern Kaiseraugst in Switzerland), situated on the upper Rhine in the province of Maxima Sequanorum within the prefecture of the Gauls.¹⁵ It had served as the residence of Julian as Augustus on two occasions in close succession. The first was during autumn 360 when Julian concluded his campaign against the Frankish Attuarii there, and then returned to Vienne in time to celebrate his quinquennial games on 6 November.¹⁶ The second occasion was during spring 361, following a short campaign against the Alamanni, when he stayed there briefly in preparation for his march down the Danube to attack the territory of Constantius II.¹⁷

It is my argument, therefore, that Julian struck the solidi with the mint-mark RAV while staying at Rauracum either during autumn 360 or spring 361. It is difficult to choose between the occasions, because it is not clear why Julian should have struck coinage there at either time. It may have been to reward allied chieftains who had assisted the Romans during either of the completed campaigns. Alternatively, it may have been to reward the Roman troops, perhaps as part of some effort by Julian to ingratiate himself with them and reinforce their loyalty to him prior to taking the offensive in the civil war with Constantius II. One can only speculate. However, one might express a slight preference for spring 361 in so far as Julian is likely to have been joined by his whole court then as he prepared for his final march eastwards, and so would probably have had more resources at hand, both treasure and skilled craftsmen, in order to enable him to strike coins then.

The principal effect of recognising that the sequence RAV ought to be read as an abbreviation of the name of Rauracum is to prove that the VIRTVS EXERC

¹⁴ *RIC* 8, Milan 1 (sesqui-solidus), 2 (solidus). On the movements of Constantius II, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, pp. 219-24.

¹⁵ For the form Rauracum, see Ammianus Marcellinus 14.10.6. For the form Castrum Rauracense, see *Notitia Galliarum* 9.9. The new fort of Rauracum needs to be distinguished from the nearby town of Augusta Raurica (modern Augst) destroyed by successive Alamannic raids. As J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), p. 394, recognizes, Ammianus' description of the position of Rauracum on the banks of the Rhine clarifies that he describes the new fort rather than the traditional town. Castrum Rauracense is most famous now for the large silver treasure deposited there in c.351. See H.A. Cahn and A. Kaufmann-Heinimann (eds), *Der spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst* (Derendingen, 1984); M.A. Guggisberg (ed.), *Der spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst: Die neuen Funde* (Augst, 2003).

¹⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus 20.10.3. He refers to it as Rauraci here. See also 15.11.11.

¹⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus 21.8.1. He refers to it as Rauraci again.

GALL reverse type began to be struck in late 360 or early 361 rather than later. In an early study of the coinage of Julian, Kent had originally argued that ‘the special reference to the Gallic army strongly suggests that the issue was struck for payment immediately before Julian’s advance into the Balkans’, which ought to date it to spring 361.¹⁸ Yet he later rejected this dating in favour of a date at ‘the very end of Julian’s reign’, that is, in early summer 363 apparently.¹⁹

In contrast, Bastien dated the production of the VIRTVS EXERC GALL reverse type at Lyons to spring 361.²⁰ The present coin proves that Bastien was correct.

¹⁸ See J.P.C. Kent, ‘An introduction to the coinage of Julian the Apostate (AD 360-63)’, *NC* 19 (6th ser.) (1959), pp. 109-17, at 112-13.

¹⁹ *RIC* 8, pp. 174-5.

²⁰ Bastien, *Le monnayage de l’atelier de Lyon*, pp. 79, 167.