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Title	The late Roman 'camp gate' reverse type and the sidus salutare
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Publication date	2017-12-01
Original Citation	Woods, D. (2017) 'The late Roman 'camp gate' reverse type and the sidus salutare', Numismatic Chronicle, 177, pp. 159-174.
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
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Download date	2026-11-15 18:46:27
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/9602

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The Numismatic Chronicle 177 Offprint

The Late Roman 'Camp Gate' Reverse Type and the Sidus Salutare

by

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LONDON
THE ROYAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY
2017

The Late Roman 'Camp Gate' Reverse Type and the *Sidus Salutare*

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Abstract: The so-called camp gate reverse type proved popular on late Roman coinage from the reign of Diocletian (284-305) until that of Valentinian III (425-55). It is argued here that the traditional description of the structure on these coins as a camp gate is incorrect, and that in the vast majority of cases it is a city gate. The type celebrates the *providentia* 'provision' of the emperor for the *salus* 'safety' of the empire using the imagery of the *adventus* 'arrival' ceremony. Hence the star depicted above the city gate on most examples is the *sidus salutare* symbolising the saving presence of the emperor who has arrived through the open gates of the city. Contrary to the traditional interpretation, there is no connection with the *limes* or any programme of fortification.

One of the more common reverse types on the Roman coinage of the fourth and early fifth centuries, particularly on the bronze coinage, was the so-called camp gate type depicting an open gate within a wall consisting of several layers of stonework and with two or more turrets on top. [1] This type is consistently described as a camp gate in the standard works of reference as well as in most of the secondary literature, with only rare acknowledgement that it might in fact depict a city gate instead.[2] The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to some relatively neglected details in the depiction of this type suggesting that it is best understood in terms of the language and imagery used to describe the imperial *adventus* , 'arrival', at a city, so that it seems preferable to interpret it as the gate of a city rather than of a camp in most instances of its use.

[1] On the history of architectural types on Roman coinage, see E. Baldwin Smith, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages*, Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology 30 (Princeton, 1956); A. Burnett, 'Buildings and monuments on Roman coins', in G.M. Paul and M. Ierardi (eds), *Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire: E. Togo Salmon Papers* II (Ann Arbor, 1999), pp. 137-64; N. Elkins, *Monuments in Miniature: Architecture on Roman Coinage*, ANS NS 29 (New York, 2015). On this type in particular, see also T. Bayet, 'L'iconologie des enceintes et des portes de camp sur les monnaies du bas-empire', *RBN* 140 (1993), pp. 5-17; N. Elkins, 'A note on late Roman art: the provincial origins of camp gate and baldachin iconography on the late imperial coinage', *AJN* 25 (2013), pp. 283-302, at 286-88, anticipating the relevant sections of his book.

[2] E.g. *RIC* 6-10 always describe the structure on these types as a camp gate in their catalogue descriptions; Burnett, 'Buildings and monuments', p. 159, describes the 'camp gate' types as 'generic representations of the fortifications that the emperors had to provide to defend the empire'.

The Origin and Continuation of the 'Camp Gate' Reverse Type



Fig. 1. *Argenteus* of Diocletian, *c*.295. *RIC* 6, Nicomedia 19a (x1.5).
Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 87 (18 May 2011), lot 1130. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

One should begin any discussion of the significance of this reverse type by surveying its usage over time with due attention to the various changes both in the detail of its depiction and in the types of legend used in association with it. When Diocletian reformed the coinage in 294, he introduced a new silver coin, the *argenteus*, which was struck at nine different mints throughout the empire, from Antioch in the East to Trier in the West, with the same initial reverse type in each case.[3] This depicted a group of four men, presumably Diocletian and his three imperial colleagues, sacrificing over a tripod while standing before an open gate within the crenellated wall of a camp or city, where this wall is depicted in such a way as to allow the viewer to see its full circumference (**Fig. 1**). Four different legends were used in association with this reverse type, PROVIDENTIAE AVGG 'for the provision (or foresight) of the Augusti', VICTORIAE AVGG 'for the victory of the Augusti', VICTORIAE SARMATICAE 'for the Sarmatian victory', and VIRTVTI MILITVM 'for the courage of the soldiers', or slight grammatical or abbreviated variants of the same.



Fig. 2. *Argenteus* of Diocletian, *c*.295. *RIC* 6, Nicomedia 25a (x1.5).
Ex Nomos AG, Auction 3 (10 May 2011), lot 205. © Nomos AG.



Fig. 3. *Argenteus* of Galerius Maximianus, 307. *RIC* 6, Trier 635 (x1.5).
Ex Nomos AG, Auction 3 (10 May 2011), lot 228. © Nomos AG.

[3] *RIC* 6, Trier 100-133; Ticinum 12-19; Rome 10-42; Siscia 32-62; Heraclea 1-11; Nicomedia 18-20; Cyzicus 4-6; Antioch 31-33; Alexandria 7-8.



Fig. 4. *Argenteus* of Galerius Maximianus, *c*.298. *RIC* 6, Antioch 43b (x1.5).
Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XVIII (6 January 2015), lot 1239. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

This reverse type was quickly replaced by a second basic type, apparently a variant on the same theme, depicting an open gate within a wall topped by three or four domed turrets, where only the immediately facing section of the wall is visible. This creates the impression of a rectangular wall about the camp or city, whereas the isometric view on the initial reverse type had created the impression of a circular wall around it. There were several important variants to this basic type. When the mint at Nicomedia introduced this type, and it was probably the first to do so, it depicted an eagle upon each of four turrets above the wall, but no other mint struck this particular variant.[4] This variant also depicted two doors folded back against the walls on either side of the gate, emphasizing the fact that the gate was indeed open. The next variant struck at Nicomedia omitted the eagles, but retained the doors folded back against the walls, and included a star immediately above the open gateway (**Fig. 2**).[5] Thessalonica also stuck the same variant.[6] Both mints struck this variant in association with the legends PROVIDENTIAE AVGG, VICTORIAE SARMATICAE, and VIRTVTI MILITVM, or slight variants thereof, to which Thessalonica also added the legend CONCORDIA MILITVM 'the agreement of the soldiers'. Trier struck a number of slightly different variants in 307 mostly depicting various combinations of star and crescent immediately above the gate with doors folded back (**Fig. 3**).[7] However, the most common variant struck at Thessalonica, and elsewhere throughout the empire, depicted neither eagles nor doors folded back against walls nor star, or any other symbol, above the gate. It depicted only the simplest of designs, an open gate within a wall of several layers of stonework, usually topped by three turrets (**Fig. 4**).[8] In most cases, this type was accompanied by the legend VIRTVS MILITVM, although the mint at Siscia sometimes used VICTORIA AVGG instead.

[4] *RIC* 6, Nicomedia 21-23.

[5] *RIC* 6, Nicomedia 24-26.

[6] *RIC* 6, Thessalonica 6-12.

[7] *RIC* 6, Trier 635-36. Unfortunately, the description of these coins in *RIC* does not note the presence or type of symbol above the gate. For a detailed analysis of these issues, see G. Gautier, 'Les *argentei* émis à Trèves et à Lyon entre juillet et décembre 307 apr. J.-C. : particularités et énigmes', *RN* 171 (2014), pp. 317-40. The combinations of symbols above the gate were a crescent between two stars, a dash between two annulets, two crescents side by side, a dot between two crescents, and two stars side by side. This variety of combinations suggests that the engravers at Trier misunderstood the function of the star above the gate on some model, interpreting it as some form of decorative motif that could be changed at will. Furthermore, one also suspects that their use of the crescent may result from a misunderstanding of the two door sockets prominently depicted on either side of the star above the gate on that model, exactly as on the star-above-gate type from Nicomedia (see **Fig. 2**).

[8] *RIC* 6, Thessalonica 13-18; Trier 637-638 (four turrets), 757-63 (four turrets); Aquileia 75; Rome 43-44, 153-54, 155-56 (four turrets), 192-93; Siscia 63-67; Serdica 1-2, 11, 21-22; Thessalonica 13-18; Antioch 34-43; Alexandria 9-13.



Fig. 5. *Follis* of Constantine II, *c*.325. *RIC* 7, Trier 463 (x1.5).
Ex Numismatik Naumann, Auction 43 (1 May 2016), lot 1038. © Numismatik Naumann GmbH.



Fig. 6. *Follis* of Constantine I, *c*.328. *RIC* 7, Arles 321 (x1.5).
Ex Roma Numismatics, E-Sale 31 (26 November 2016), lot 590. © Roma Numismatics Ltd.

This second type proved immensely influential and continued to be used on the coinage throughout the fourth and early fifth centuries with only minimal variation. Licinius (308-24) used it on the reverse of *folles* struck at Heraclea in Thrace *c*.316-20 with legends celebrating the provision or foresight of the emperors once more, whether PROVIDENTIAE AVGG 'for the provision (or foresight) of the Augusti', that is, the provision of Licinius and his colleague Constantine I (306-37), or PROVIDENTIAE CAESS 'for the provision (or foresight) of the Caesars', that is, the provision of their sons Licinius II, Crispus, and Constantine II.[9] Constantine used it with the legends either VIRTVS AVGG or VIRTVS CAESSS on *folles* struck at Rome *c*.318-19, when, most unusually, the gate was sometimes shown closed.[10] More significantly, he also used this as the main reverse type on the *folles* struck *c*.324-29 at fifteen mints throughout the empire, continuing with the legends either PROVIDENTIAE AVGG or PROVIDENTIAE CAESS (**Fig. 5**) in most cases.[11] However, there was an important change in that a star was added above the centre of the wall where nothing had appeared previously, so that the number of turrets had to be reduced to two in order to create space for this star. At the same time, the mint at Arles also struck *folles* with reverse depicting the gate with doors folded back against the walls and a star above four turrets with the legends either VIRTVS

[9] *RIC* 7, Heraclea 14-49.

[10] *RIC* 7, Rome 165-93. The occasional depiction of a closed gate is best explained as the decision of a local die engraver who did not understand the origin or significance of the type.

[11] *RIC* 7, London 293-98; Lyons 225-33; Trier 449-57, 461-64, 475-80, 504-07, 509-14; Arles 264-76, 280-84, 286-90, 301-03, 309-12, 318-19, 325-30; Rome 264-69, 287-90, 323-26; Ticinum 189, 200-01, 207-08; Siscia 183-86, 193-95, 200-03, 214-17; Sirmium 53; Thessalonica 153-58, 169-72; Heraclea 65, 67-68, 74-78, 83-84, 88, 96-98, 107-08; Constantinople 7-10, 20-21, 27-28, 39-40; Nicomedia 90-94, 121-28, 144-47, 153-58; Cyzicus 24-27, 34-38, 44-48, 51-53, 55-64; Antioch 63-66, 71-74, 78-79, 81; Alexandria 34-37, 41-43, 45-47, 49-52, 54-56.

AVGG (**Fig. 6**) or VIRTVS CAESS.[12] The mint at Ticinum did something different again when it struck the doorless twin-turreted 'camp gate' with star in association with the legend D N CONSTANTINI MAX as well as the usual legends celebrating imperial provision.[13]



Fig. 7. *Aes* 3 of Valentinian II, *c*.384/88. *RIC* 9, Thessalonica 59a (x1.5).
Ex Numismatik Naumann, Auction 42 (3 April 2016), lot 1000. © Numismatik Naumann GmbH.



Fig. 8. *Aes 4* of Flavius Victor, *c*.385. *RIC* 9, Aquileia 55b (x1.5).
Ex Nomos AG, Obolos 2 (14 June 2015), lot 498. © Nomos AG.



Fig. 9. *Aes* 4 of Valentinian III, *c*.425/35. *RIC* 10, no. 2123 (x1.5).
Ex Classical Numismatic Group, E-Auction 235 (23 June 2010), lot 495. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

This basic type saw renewed use sometime during the period 367-75 under both Valentinian I (364-75), with his son Gratian, at Trier and Valens (364-78) at Constantinople, when it was used on the reverse of an issue of *aes* 2 in each case.[14] Both mints used the legend GLORIA ROMANORVM 'the glory of the Romans' in association with it. However, there was an important difference in that both replaced the star above the wall of Constantine's type with a letter S. The mint at Thessalonica also used this type on the reverse of *aes* 3 struck in the names of Valentinian II (375-92), Theodosius I (379-95), and Arcadius (383-95) during the period 384-88 with the legend GLORIA REIPVBLICE 'the glory of the state'.[15] However, it replaced the star of the Constantinian type with a staurogram instead (**Fig. 7**). During the same period, the mint at Thessalonica also struck *aes* 4 with similar reverse type, and precisely the same legend once more, but it did not depict any object at all where the star or letter S had previously appeared.[16] In contrast, when the mints at Trier, Arles, Aquileia and Rome struck this reverse type on *aes* 4 in the names of the western

[12] *RIC* 7, Arles 291-97, 304-06, 313-16, 321-23, 331-39.
[13] *RIC* 7, Ticinum 198-99, 205-06.
[14] *RIC* 9, Trier 29; Constantinople 40.
[15] *RIC* 9, Thessalonica 59.
[16] *RIC* 9, Thessalonica 62.

usurper Magnus Maximus (383-88) and his son Flavius Victor, they retained the star of the Constantinian type, but used the legend SPES ROMANORVM in association with it instead (**Fig. 8**).[17] Finally, Valentinian III (425-455) struck *aes* 4 at Rome depicting the apparent camp gate on the reverse in association with a variety of legends – VOT PVB, VICTORIA AVGVST, CASTRA, CAS VIC.[18] The VOT PVB type depicted the *officina* number between the turrets (**Fig. 9**), but the other types depicted the standard star between two turrets instead.

Why a 'Camp Gate'?

In the case of the final examples of the 'camp gate' type struck by Valentinian III with the legends CASTRA 'camp' or CAS(*tra*) VIC(*toriosa*?) 'victorious camp', there can be no doubt that this structure was in fact intended as a camp gate. However, the same emperor had struck the same type with the legend VOT(*a*) PVB(*lica*) 'public vows' only a few years previously, and Kent notes that this legend 'suggests the vota and consular celebrations of 434-5', so that in this case the gate 'may symbolize an imperial *Adventus*, that is, that this gate may have been intended as that of a city.[19] Curiously, none of the main commentators on this type, either before or since, seem to have considered this possibility in the case of any of the earlier examples of its use. The result has been a rather uncritical consensus that this structure was always the gate of a camp, never that of a city.

To focus on the most detailed recent discussions of this topic, Alföldi identifies the wall before which the four tetrarchs sacrifice on the reverse of the first type of *argenteus* struck *c*.294 as that of a military camp, and continues to identify all subsequent depictions of a gate within a wall as depictions of a military camp also.[20] Hence she concludes that Constantine's *folles* of PROVIDENTIAE AVGG or CAESS type struck *c*.324-29 celebrated his policy of 'camp building and border fortification'.[21] However, she never offers any actual argument in favour of her identification of these walls and gates as those of a camp rather than of a city. In contrast, Smith identifies the structure on the first type of *argenteus* as a 'conventionalized city, seen in partial perspective', and the subsequent depictions of a gate within a wall as a 'castrum façade'.[22] Yet he never properly explains how or why the the reverse of the *argentei* suddenly jumped from the depiction of a city to the depiction of a camp, all the while depicting a similar variety of legends in association with each. His argument for identifying the so-called 'castrum façade' as such seems to rest

[17] *RIC* 9, Trier 87; Arelate 29; Aquileia 55; Rome 59.

[18] *RIC* 10, nos 2123-2128, 2135, 2159-2164.

[19] *RIC* 10, p. 60.

[20] M.R. Alföldi, '*Providentia Augusti*: to the question of Limes fortifications in the 4th century', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 3 (1955), pp. 245-59. Reprinted in M.R. Alföldi,*Gloria Romanorum: Schriften zur Spätantike zum 75. Geburstag der Verfasserin am 6. Juni 2001*, Historia Einzelschriften153 (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 154-66.

[21] This remains a common assumption in modern biographies of Constantine. See e.g. R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (London, 1969), p. 232; P. Stephenson, *Constantine: Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor* (London, 2009), p. 226.

[22] Smith, *Architectural Symbolism*, pp. 44-45.

on his interpretation of it as a simplification of what he describes as 'a schematic representation of a fortified enclosure, like a military camp' appearing on *aurei* from Rome and Ticinum. However, there are two problems with this interpretation. First, these *aurei* were only struck at Rome *c*.298-99 and at Ticinum *c*.299-300, that is, about four or five years after the 'castrum façade' had already begun to be struck at Nicomedia, Antioch, and Alexandria.[23] Second, there is no explanation as to why the enclosure on the *aurei* is itself described as 'like a military camp' rather than as like a fortified city, and no explanation as to why it is interpreted so differently to the enclosure on the reverse on the first type of *argenteus* which he describes as 'conventionalized city, seen in partial perspective'. The main difference between the structures on these reverse types lies in their shape, so that the enclosure on the *argentei* is circular or oval in shape, while that on the *aurei* is square or rectangular. However, that does not in itself provide any good reason for identifying one as the wall of a city, the other as the wall of a camp or fort. Finally, Elkins adds nothing to the debate. He hesitates between Alföldi and Smith when identifying the structure before which the four tetrarchs sacrifice on the first type of *argenteus*, describing it as 'an isometric view of a camp or city', but proceeds confidently to describe all subsequent fourth-century depictions of a gate within a wall as a camp gate.[24] Hence his conclusion that 'the tetrarchic and Constantinian camp gate types were symbolic of tetrarchic efforts to strengthen the *limes*', and that 'the camp gate types struck in the later fourth century and under Valentinian III between *c*.425 and 435 were stock types derived from earlier precedents and, as their legends indicated, symbolized military strength'.[25] Again, no actual arguments are offered as to why one should identify the 'camp gate' as such rather than as the gate of a city.

A key factor in the identification of the enclosure before which the tetrarchs sacrifice on the reverse on the first type of *argenteus* as a camp rather than a city seems to be the militaristic nature of most of the legends used in association with this type, celebrating either victory or the courage of the soldiers. The emperors offer sacrifice for some reason, and the obvious suggestion is that they do so in thanksgiving to the gods for their victory and the courage of their troops. However, they do not necessarily do so at some frontier camp rather than at the city to which they return after their victory. After all, one can still celebrate victory and the courage of the soldiers far from the frontier itself. Indeed, one could argue that this was the proper occasion for a full celebration of both, in accordance with the ancient tradition of the triumph, whether this was actually a formal triumph or not, when the emperors had returned to their imperial seats. Against this, one may object that this reverse type does not depict them offering sacrifice at some temple or other permanent structure within the walled enclosure as one might have expected had it represented the city to which they had returned after their victory. However, one ought perhaps to resist the easy assumption that this type was intended to depict the tetrarchs offering sacrifice outside the walled enclosure, that is, as the static, naturalistic representation of a

[23] *RIC* 6, Ticinum 8-10; Rome 5-8.
[24] Elkins, *Monuments in Miniature*, pp. 124-29.
[25] Elkins, *Monuments in Miniature*, p. 134.

single event, when the close association of sacrificing tertrarchs and city may have been intended instead to convey the idea that they were about to enter the city in order to offer sacrifice, or even that they had already done so.

No identification of the walled enclosure before which the tetrarchs sacrifice is complete without an investigation into the identity of the open gate within a wall, the 'camp gate', as depicted on subsequent *argentei* and the bronze coinage even later. It is clear from their quick succession on the *argentei*, and the fact that similar legends occur in association with each, that these are best treated as different representations of the same object. It is important, therefore, that due attention is paid to any new or unusual elements occurring in association with the depiction of the 'camp gate' as these may throw some fresh light in turn upon the identification of the walled enclosure as depicted earlier. This brings us to the significance of the star that sometimes appears immediately above the gate on the 'camp gate' type *argentei*, and enjoys an even more prominent position later on the PROVIDENTIAE type *folles* under Constantine where it appears above the wall itself, a position which it continues to enjoy even as late as the reign of Valentinian III.

The Emperor as Sidus Salutare 'Saving Star'

Neither Alföldi nor Bayet say anything about the origin or significance of the star so often depicted in association with the 'camp gate'.[26] However, Smith is more forthcoming on this subject. He claims that the star appearing immediately above the gate on the tetrarchic *argentei* 'recalls the stars which were a mark of deification on the coins of the Hellenistic kings, thereby suggesting another connection between the city-gate motif with its celestial symbolism and the ceremonial custom of welcoming a ruler with such titles as "Lord of all the Sun and Earth"'.[27] As for the star above the 'camp gate' on the coinage of Constantine, he claims in this case that 'the ascendant "Day Star" over the gateway is no longer merely a sign of deification, as it had been on the Hellenistic coins, but is the *Sol Domini imperii Romani* and pertains to the rising power of the imperial Lord of Heaven and Earth'.[28] However, there are two problems with this approach. First, it is not persuasive that the star immediately above the gate on the tetrarchic *argentei* and that above the 'camp gate' on the Constantinian coins can really have been intended with two such different meanings, so short was the time between their periods of production, and so strong was the continuation between these types otherwise, including the use of the same or similar legends in association with them. Second, the interpretation of the star is not persuasive in the individual cases either. In the case of the tetrarchic

[26] Alföldi, 'Providentia Augusti', p. 249, n. 17, discusses the appearance of a star on a common type of Pertinax depicting the personification Providentia raising her hand to a star. She denies its identification as a comet, arguing that it was 'some sign of heavenly support to the ruler', but does not comment on its relevance, or not, to the star on the 'camp gate' types. Bayet, 'L'iconologie des enceintes', p. 6, notes the depiction of the star without further comment.

[27] Smith, *Architectural Symbolism*, p. 45.

[28] Smith, *Architectural Symbolism*, p. 46. Similarly, M. Faintich, *Astronomical Symbols on Ancient and Medieval Coins* (Jefferson, 2008), p. 111, claims of Constantine's addition of the star to the camp gate type: 'Whether it represented Sol or Mars, the message was clear: Constantine was honouring his pagan gods'.

argentei, the tetrarchs were not deified while still living, so it is not plausible that that they should have intended their use of the star to suggest the deification of any of them. Furthermore, one would more naturally have expected two or more stars in association with some bust or depiction of the tetrarchs if it had really been intended to celebrate their deification, not just one star and this in association with a gate.[29] As for the Constantinian coins, it is not plausible, given that Constantine had already abandoned the depiction of Sol on his main coinage by *c*.319, that he should have re-introduced a new type focussed on Sol as his main bronze type throughout the empire *c*.324-29 in complete contradiction of the direction of his religious policy otherwise.[30] One can accept that some of his subjects may have misinterpreted the star in celebration of Sol, and that he may even have expected them to do so, but not that this was his own intention in depicting the star in this manner. Finally, Elkins claims that 'cosmological iconography is apparent in many of the fourth-century camp gate types through the depiction of the star', but does not explain further.[31] He also claims that 'the star or stars, which appear over Constantinian and many of the later fourth century types, could have recalled deification', but without any explanation here either. Indeed, as this last assertion conflates different numbers of stars used in very different contexts, it merely serves to confuse.

Stars were a common feature of Roman art, and there had been no shortage of them on the coinage either. As a result, it would be all too easy to digress at length on their potential significance in a variety of different contexts. However, there is only one context that is important here. Any explanation of the significance of the star on the tetrarchic *argentei*, and subsequent coins, must play careful attention to the circumstances of its introduction. The sequence of reverse types at Nicomedia proves particularly instructive here. The first reverse type depicting four tetrarchs sacrificing in front of a gate within a walled enclosure is replaced by the depiction of a gate within a wall topped by four turrets bearing one eagle each, which is in turn replaced by the depiction of a gate within a wall topped by four turrets with a star immediately above the gate itself. It is obvious from their number and nature that the four eagles of the second reverse type continue to symbolise the presence of the four tetrarchs depicted in full on the first reverse type. However, the fact that there are no other changes between the second and third reverse types except the removal of the eagles and the addition of the star suggests that these two phenomena are more closely related than might initially seem to be the case, that the star performs much the same function as performed by the four eagles previously in symbolising an imperial presence. This idea, that a star could symbolise the emperor, is supported

[29] E.g. the bust of the deified Augustus was depicted between two stars on the coinage of Caligula (*RIC* 1^2, Gaius 1-2, 6). Strictly, speaking the stars represent heaven where the subject of deification is supposed to have gone. So Domitian struck coins depicting his deified son sitting on a globe and surrounded by seven stars (*RIC* 2^2, Domitian 152-55).

[30] See P. Bruun, 'The disappearance of sol from the coins of Constantine', *Arctos* 2 (1958), pp. 15-37. One does not deny the occasional re-occurrence of solar imagery later, most notably on a *solidus* struck at Antioch in 324 (*RIC* 7, Antioch 49), but this was rare. See M. Wallraff, 'Constantine's devotion to the sun after 324', *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001), pp. 256-69.

[31] Elkins, *Monuments in Miniature*, p. 135.

by a passage in an anonymous panegyric delivered in honour of the emperor Constantius at Trier in *c*.297, so almost exactly contemporary with the reverse type under discussion:

> 'But neither the Sun itself nor all **the stars** watch over human affairs with such unremitting light as you, who illuminate the world with scarcely any discrimination of night and day and **provide for** the **well-being** of nations not only with those eyes which animate your immortal countenances, but much more with those eyes of your divine minds, and bless with your healing light not only the provinces where the day rises, passes by and disappears from view, but also those in the northern belt.[32]

The tetrarchs are compared here to stars (*sidera*; sing. *sidus*) in the manner in which they light up the earth and 'provide for' (*providetis*) the well-being (*salus*) of nations. Furthermore, as in English, the Latin verb used to describe how they 'provide for' (*providetis*) the nations is directly related to the Latin noun PROVIDENTIA, exactly as found on many of the tetrarchic *argentei* and on the Constantinian *folles c*.324-29. The obvious suggestion, therefore, is that these coins refer to an imperial presence using the same metaphor as can be found in this contemporary panegyric.[33] In fact, and as as will become clearer next, this idea of the emperor as a star radiating well-being upon the empire below seems to have been quite common. For example, ordinary Romans had hailed Caligula (37-41) as a *sidus* upon his accession, and Seneca had compared a young Nero (54-68) to a *sidus* shining its light upon the world.[34] More relevant here, Claudius Mamertinus used the same imagery when speaking in praise of the emperor Julian at Constantinople on 1 January 362:

> 'This city, newly named but of ancient nobility, is your birthplace, here you were first brought forth, here you arose like a kind of **saving star** for the human race'.[35]

[32] *Pan. Lat.* 8(5).4.3: *Sed neque Sol ipse neque cuncta* ***sidera*** *humanas res tam perpetuo lumine intuentur quam vos tuemini, qui sine ullo fere discrimine dierum ac noctium inlustratis orbem,* ***salutique*** *gentium non his modo quibus immortales vultus vestri vigent sed multo magis illis divinarum mentium vestrarum oculis* ***providetis****, nec solum qua dies oritur et praeterit et conditur sed etiam ex illa septentrionali plaga salutari beatis luce provincias*. Text and translation from C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley, 1994), pp.114, 545.

[33] It is important to note that this comparison of the emperor providing for the safety of the world to a star illuminating the world is a simple metaphor of light. There is no suggestion of astrological belief here, that stars could affect the destiny of people below on earth. For this reason, the continued use of this symbolism into the reign of Constantine and beyond, when Christianity became dominant, would not have been problematic

[34] Suetonius, *Caligula* 13; Seneca, *Consolatio at Polybium* 13.1.

[35] *Pan. Lat.* 3(11).2.3: *Haec tibi nominis novi sed antiquissimae nobilitatis civitas patria est, hic primum editus, hic quasi quoddam* ***salutare*** *humano generi* ***sidus*** *exortus es.* Text and translation, slightly amended, from Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors,* pp. 395, 630. For a detailed discussion of this line in the context of similar descriptions of the emperor, see M. *Pilar* García *Ruiz,* '*Quasi quoddam salutare sidus* (*PL* III [11] 2,3): el tópico y su contexto histórico', in E. Calderón, A. Morales, and M. Valverde (eds), *Koinòs lógos: homenaje al profesor José García López* (Murcia, 2006), pp. 293-304.

Acceptance that the star follows the four eagles on the tetrarchic *argentei* from Nicomedia in symbolising the imperial presence at the fortified enclosure, whether camp or city, is reinforced by the fact that the doors of the gate appear folded back against the walls in each case, emphasizing that the gate is in fact open. This suggests that someone or something has already arrived at the camp or city, and one is reminded here of the words of an anonymous panegyricist describing the *adventus* of the emperor Constantine at Autun in late 310:

> 'What a day then shone upon us (for now my speech has reached in its course the celebration of your divinity's assistance), when you entered the gates of this city, which was the first **sign of salvation** for us. And the gates, drawn back in the likeness of a curve, with towers projecting on either side, seemed to receive you in a kind of embrace.'[36]

The common emphasis between coins and text on the open gates of the city as a feature of the imperial *adventus* which brings salvation to the people encourages one to explore the language and imagery of the imperial *adventus* for more material relevant to the depiction of the star above the 'camp gate' on the coinage, and two passages emerge as of particular importance here.[37] In the first, Ammianus Marcellinus describes the arrival of the emperor Julian at Sirmium in the sumner of 361:

> 'There, rejoicing in his success and in the good omen, and with increased hope of the future, since he believed that following the example of a populous and famous metropolis the other cities also would receive him as **a saving star**, he gave chariot races on the following day, to the joy of the people'.[38]

In the second, he describes the arrival of Julian at Antioch in Syria in the summer of 362:

> 'But hastening from there [Tarsus] to visit Antioch, fair crown of the Orient, he reached it by the usual roads; and as he neared the city, he was received with public prayers, as if he were some deity, and he wondered at the cries of the great throng, who shouted that **a saving star** had risen over the East'.[39]

In the context of this material, and of the evolution of the star from the earlier depiction of the four tetrarchs sacrificing together outside a walled enclosure,

[36] *Pan. Lat.* 5(8).7.6: *Quisnam ille tum nobis inluxit dies (iam enim ad praedicanda remedia numinis tui ordine suo pervenit oratio), cum tu, quod primum nobis* ***signum salutis*** *fuit, portas istius urbis intrasti! – quae te habitu illo in sinum reducto et procurrentibus utrimque turribus amplexu quodam videbantur accipere*. Text and translation from Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors,* pp. 277, 589.

[37] In general, see S.G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 1 (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 17-89.

[38] Amm. 21.10.2: *Ubi eventu laetus et omine, firmata spe venturorum, quod ad exemplum urbium matris populosae et celebris, per alias quoque civitates ut* ***sidus salutare*** *susciperetur, edito postridie curuli certamine, cum gaudio plebis*, … Text and translation, slightly amended, from J.C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus* II, Loeb Classical Library 315 (Cambridge, MA, 1940), pp. 132-35.

[39] Amm. 22.9.14: *At hinc videre properans Antiochiam, orientis apicem pulcrum, usus itineribus solitis venit, ubique propinquans, in speciem alicuius numinis votis excipitur publicis, miratus voces mutitudinis magnae,* ***salutare sidus*** *illuxisse eois partibus acclamantis*. Text and translation, slightly amended, from Rolfe, *Ammianus* II, pp. 250-51.

it becomes clear that the coins depicting a star in association with a 'camp gate' actually depict the emperor as *sidus salutare* radiating his *salus* upon a city which has just received him with open gate, where this process of radiating his *salus* upon the city demonstrates his *providentia* for it. But what does this city represent? Given the mobile nature of the emperor during the third and fourth centuries, and the fact that these coins were usually produced at multiple cities across the empire at any one time, it seems unlikely that it represents any city in particular. Instead, it was probably intended to represent any and every city that the viewer could imagine it to represent. In other words, this type depicts the emperor radiating his *salus* upon the Roman world in general using the imagery of the *adventus* ceremony.

That the concept of *salus* is key to the proper understanding of this type is reinforced by the slight variations that occur during the late fourth century. The occurrence of the letter S above the gate on the reverse of *aes* 2 struck under Valentinian and Valens at Trier and Constantinople respectively may abbreviate the word *sidus*, but more probably abbreviates the word *salus*, that which the emperor was understood to be radiating over the world. As to the significance of the associated legend GLORIA ROMANORVM, the meaning was probably that the emperor was the 'glory of the Romans' for radiating his *salus* down upon them. More interesting still is the fact that the mint at Thessalonica replaced the star of the Constantinian type with a staurogram on the *aes* 3 that it struck dring the period 384-88. The importance of this lies in the fact that Christians regarded the staurogram as another form of saving sign, just like the saving star of earlier tradition, because it contained the cross upon which Christ had died in order to save mankind from sin. Strictly speaking, these coins depict the saving sign of Christ, rather than the emperor, radiating his salvation down upon a city, and it is this sign that is the subject of the associated legend GLORIA REIPVBLICE rather than the emperor himself, but the emperors reigned using this sign as their emblem, so this distinction was almost irrelevant. As for the *aes* 4 with the 'camp gate' reverse type which various western mints struck in the names of Magnus Maximus or Flavius Victor, they declare that it was the emperor as *sidus salutare* who was the SPES ROMANORVM.

Finally, one must return to those 'camp gate' types which omit the star above either the gate or even the wall itself. They represent the final step in the simplification of the iconography of this type, its reduction to a bare minimum. To return to the tetrarchic *argentei* again, the four figures standing sacrificing before an open gate were replaced by four eagles, the eagles were replaced by a star, and it was then realized that all that was really necessary to imply the arrival and continued presence of an emperor was an open gate. Furthermore, the presence of the emperor also necessarily implied the presence of a large army, his bodyguard units and his elite mobile troops. For this reason, it did not matter much whether the legend associated with the 'camp gate' read either VIRTVS MILITVM, as it so often did on the *argentei*, or VIRTVS AVGG or CAESS, as it did later on the bronze coinage under Constantine, because the presence of both emperor and army was equally implied.

The Sidus Salutare on Other Types

If a single star was used as a symbol of the emperor on most of the 'camp gate' types, then it is possible that it may have seen similar use on other reverse types also. Certainly, single stars are relatively common upon the coinage of Constantine I. For example, the mint at Thessalonica struck *folles* in the names of Helena and Fausta in *c*.318-19 with a reverse depicting a large eight-pointed star within a wreath, while the mint at Constantinople struck bronze coins with a similar reverse type in apparent connection with the dedication of that city in 330.[40] However, the reign of Constantine represents a special case in that he witnessed some sort of solar phenomenon in Gaul in 310 which deeply influenced his subsequent religious development, so that these apparent stars are probably best interpreted as radiant suns in reference to his vision then rather than to anything else.[41] As far as his coinage is concerned, he seems to have preferred to allude to this vision by means of a shining star representing the sun so as not to offend his pagan subjects, even though he himself seems to have been quickly persuaded that what he had actually witnessed was a chi-rho symbol. However, his successors had no qualms about the open and unambiguous use of the chi-rho symbol, and there is no need to identify the stars used upon their coins as deliberately ambiguous references to the vision of 310.



Fig.10. *Siliqua* of Constans I, 337-40. *RIC* 8, Siscia 67 (x1.5).
Ex Classical Numismatic Group 105 (10 May 2017), lot 973. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

If one turns to the period after Constantine, two reverse types in particular emerge as strong contenders for potential depictions of the *sidus salutare*. The first, unique to Siscia, was used on *siliquae* struck in the names of Constantius II and Constans as Augusti in 337-40. It depicted a star directly above the central branch of three large palm branches (**Fig. 10**). In the case of those coins with the bust of Constantius on the obverse, the reverse legend reads CONSTANTIVS AVG.[42] In the case of those with the bust of Constans on the obverse, the reverse legend reads CONSTANS AVG.[43]

[40] *RIC* 7, Thessalonica 48-49; *RIC* 8, Constantinople 22. A variety of silver and bronze medallettes depicting a large star upon one side and a wreath upon another have also been attributed to the time of the dedication of Constantinople. See L. Ramskold, 'Coins and medallions struck for the inaguration of Constantinopolis, 11 May 330', in M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium, Ninth Symposium, Niš, 3–5 June 2010* (Niš, 2011), pp. 125–57, at 146-54. One notes that Faintich, *Astronomical Symbols*, pp. 98-120, interprets various depictions of stars on Constantinian coinage as symbols of planetary conjunctions in an approach which pays little attention either to primary sources or modern scholarship.

[41] See P. Weiss, 'The vision of Constantine', *JRA* 16 (2003), pp. 237-59, at 251. However, Weiss goes too far when he seeks to interpret the star on Constantine's 'camp gate' type as a reference also to his solar vision also, failing to note that the combination of star and 'camp gate' originates with the tetrarchic *argentei*.

[42] *RIC* 8, Siscia 60-64.

[43] *RIC* 8, Siscia 65-69.

The intended message seems to be that the emperor is like a *sidus salutare*, and that the *salus* which he bestows upon the Romans includes victory. The number of the palm branches recalls the number of surviving sons and successors to Constantine I, and the intention may have been to signify that a victory for one was a victory for all. Alternatively, the number may have been the coincidental result of a need for a symmetric pattern about the central star.



Fig. 11. Base billon of Constantius II, 350. *RIC* 8, Siscia 280 (x1.5).
Ex Numismatik Naumann, Auction 39 (3 January 2016), lot 1047. © Numismatik Naumann GmbH.

Next, when the usurper Vetranio took power in Illyricum in 350, he introduced a new reverse type on his *aes* 2 depicting a standing emperor holding a *labarum* (a standard with the chi-rho banner) in each hand and a star above him, all surrounded by the legend CONCORDIA MILITVM 'the agreement of the soldiers' (**Fig. 11**).[44] He struck this type in both his name and that of the eastern emperor Constantius II, and it is clear that the depiction of an emperor holding two imperial standards was intended to signify that each emperor recognised the legitimacy of the other. As for the star above the emperor's head, this is best identified as the *sidus salutare* once more, the idea being that the *salus* which the emperor bestows upon the world in this case includes the *concordia militum* consequent upon his recognition of his colleague as such.



Fig. 12. Solidus of Theodosius II, 425. *RIC* 10, no. 233 (x1.5).
Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XIX (4 January 2016), lot 668. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

Finally, one notes that a star seems to have been placed in the field of the gold and silver coins struck to celebrate the consulship of Theodosius II in 403, and was then retained on the precious metal coinage until 420.[45] It seems to have been reintroduced again on those coins struck to celebrate the tenth consulsip of Theodosius in 422,

[44] *RIC* 8, Siscia 270-71, 273-74, 276-77, 280-81; Thessalonica 130-31, 135.

[45] P. Grierson and M. Mays, *Catalogue of Late Roman Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection: From Arcadius and Honorius to the Accession of Anastasius* (Washington, D.C., 1992), pp. 87-88.

after which it was retained as a standard element of the design until into the reign of Justin II (565-78). On most of these types, it is best treated as an accessory symbol rather than as a part of the design proper, and should not be confused with the earlier depiction of the star on certain individual reverse types as already discussed. However, there was at least one occasion when the star may have performed a dual role, that is, where the 'frozen' accessory symbol may have been set to a secondary purpose also as a *sidus salutare*.[46] The key to recognizing this lies both in the position of the star and the consistency of its identification as a *sidus salutare* with the overall message of the type. As far as its position is concerned, it is important to note that since the reign of Constantine the *sidus salutare* had always been depicted centrally at the highest point of the reverse design. In contrast, as a 'frozen' acessory symbol on the precious metal coinage of the fifth and sixth centuries, the star was normally depicted low down and to the side of the main object of the design. It is noteworthy, therefore, that it appears at the top of the reverse at the head of the senior emperor on the *solidi* struck by Theodosius II in 425 depicting him seated while his Caesar Valentinian III remains standing.[47] It is noteworthy also that the associated legend refers to the SALVS REI PVBLICAE 'the salvation of the state'. It is possible, therefore, that in this instance the star doubles as the *sidus salutare*, the message being that Theodosius is the *sidus salutare* who radiates his *salus* upon the empire by his support of Valentinian III against the western usurper John.

Conclusion



Fig. 13. Bronze coin of Caracalla from Augusta Traiana, Thrace (x1.5).
Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 88 (14 September 2011), lot 736. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

The traditional interpretation of the structure on the 'camp gate' reverse type pays surprisingly little attention to the fact that the gate was normally depicted as open. This is in marked contrast to the standard depiction of city gates on Roman provincial coinage of the second and third centuries AD which had often depicted their gates

[46] Kent, *RIC* 10, p. 46, notes that 'the emperor was a *salutare sidus*' and that in this sense the use of a star on the coinage 'was appropriate at any time as indicative of his beneficence', and that 'this is probably the origin of its wide use on fifth century coinage, particularly in the East'. It seems to me that this is probably too broad a categorisation.

[47] *RIC* 10, nos 233-36. A later type struck 426-429 depicts both emperors seated together, since both are now Augusti (*RIC* 10, nos 237-45). However, Theodosius remains the larger figure, and the star remains more closely associated with him.

as closed (**Fig. 13**).[48] It also runs counter to the supposed significance of this type in celebration of various programmes of military fortification, according to which one might more naturally have expected more emphasis on stout doors that keep the enemy safely outside. Indeed, there is a surprising failure to emphasize the military effectiveness of these alleged military camps: no defeated enemy is ever depicted outside their walls, no Roman troops parading their arms in victory.[49] It has been argued here that the combination of this open gate with the star shining brightly overhead recalls the imagery of the imperial *adventus* as described in a variety of late Roman literary sources. However, one should end by noting also an important early numismatic parallel.

The language and imagery of the standard 'camp gate' reverse type during the fourth century is less detailed or explicit than on the famous 10-*aurei* medallion from the Beaurains (Arras) hoard struck to celebrate the recapture of Britain from the usurper Allectus in 296, but the message is arguably similar.[50] The reverse of that medallion depicts the emperor Constantius I on horseback approaching the kneeling personification of London reaching out to him from between the twin turrets of the city gate. The associated legend identifies him as the REDDITOR LVCIS AETERNAE 'the restorer of eternal light'. In the case of the standard 'camp gate' type, one could argue that the emperor has already entered the city through the open gate and restored the light of his presence to its inhabitants, as symbolised by the star shining high above. Indeed, the fact that Constantine began striking his 'camp gate' type with newly added star immediately after his defeat of his rival Licinius in 324 suggests that it is best treated as a victory type directly comparable to the reverse of the medallion. It too celebrates the restoration of the light of pious and beneficial rule to those oppressed by a tyrant, Constantine's liberation of the subjects of Licinius in the manner that his father Constantius had once liberated the subjects of Allectus, even if those responsible for Constantine's type probably did not make this specific connection but simply used the same conventional imagery to describe similar circumstances. The key difference is that the larger diameter of the medallion (42mm) compared to that of the *follis* (19mm) provides greater scope for artistic invention and detail, but the message remains much the same.

[48] Elkins, *Monuments in Miniature*, pp. 162-66, argues that the depictions of city gates on the provincial coinage of Moesia, Thrace, and Bithynia inspired what he describes as 'the city views and camp gates on tetrarchic and Constantinian coins'. However, the argument rests on a superficial resemblance between the types, geographical coincidence, and an over-estimation of the significance of the numismatic evidence simply because it survives when other media did not.

[49] A captive barbarian is depicted on either side of the gate into Trier on a *solidus* of Constantine dated *c*.314 (*RIC* 7, Trier 1).

[50] *RIC* 6, Trier 34. In general, see R. Abdy, 'In the pay of the emperor: coins from the Beaurains (Arras) treasure', in E. Hartley, J. Hawkes, M. Henig and F. Mee (eds), *Constantine the Great: York's Roman Emperor* (York, 2006), pp. 52-8.