

# The Roman Coins from No. 1 Poultry

Site code: ONE94

**Undated**

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# THE ROMAN COINS FROM NO. 1 POULTRY

Michael Hammerson

## Introduction

The excavations from No.1 Poultry produced a total of approximately 790 Roman coins. This is an important and major group, perhaps the largest one so far recovered from the City under controlled excavation conditions, with the exception of the Guildhall Yard site (GYE 92), which produced some 1,400 Roman coins. It represents, for example, some 75% of the total so far recovered from the large Roman suburb of the City across the Thames in Southwark, and is probably higher than the total from many Romano-British towns.

Of the total from No.1, Poultry, the writer was able to examine only some 550 (70%) of the coins, and this has been limited to spot-dating of the coins, most of which have been only partially cleaned, or remain uncleaned. Therefore, dating of most coins has been limited to regnal periods, or to numismatic periods within which the coin was judged to have been manufactured. It was nevertheless possible to assign tolerably close dates to some 75% of the coins studied (c.52% of the total excavated), but it must be borne in mind, in reading this report, that detailed future identification of all the coins from the site might have some effect on the coins statistics from the site, though it would, in all probability, be unlikely to have a significant impact on most of the conclusions drawn here. The lack of cleaning did mean, though, that it was not possible to carry out a detailed study of the state of wear of individual coins, especially the heavier bronze issues of the 1st and 2nd centuries. This would give some relative idea as to the length of time a coin might have been in circulation prior to being lost, and can be a useful additional aid in stratigraphic dating, since these coins circulated until at least the end of the 2nd century, and sometimes into the mid-3rd century. Heavy wear would indicate that the coin had been circulating for some considerable time - perhaps many decades - prior to being lost, and context dating on the basis of the regnal date of the coin could, under such circumstances, produce a misleading result.

The study also suffered from a further significant disadvantage in that, despite some 30 years' intensive excavation in the City of London, there has been no synthesis of the Roman coinage from excavations in Londinium. Even if this was available, however, the statistics and conclusions on which it would be based could be subject to some amendment once the 1,400 coins from Guildhall Yard have been identified, and at the time of writing (April 2000) only some 16% of these have been spot-dated. An accurate coin histogram for Roman London is therefore not yet available, and comparison of London's overall coin pattern with that of other major Roman towns, as well as smaller towns and settlements in the hinterland of Londinium for which histograms are available - Southwark, Staines, Brentford, Enfield and Old Ford (Hammerson 1996) - is not yet possible. In the comparative study of 1st-2nd century coinage from a range of Roman-British towns in Hammerson 1979, the histogram for Londinium was based in the old Guildhall Museum, a random collection of predominantly larger 1st-2nd century coins, many of which were found in the Thames, and is therefore unsatisfactory.

Neither, therefore, are the final coin histograms for any other major site in the City yet available, all the identifications carried out by the writer for sites excavated since 1992 being similarly based on spot-dating only. The importance of studying and comparing individual site histograms is considered in Hammerson 1996. This cautioned that it is unsafe to use the coin pattern from an individual site within a town to draw conclusions about the town's history and occupation in general, or from that of a town in general to make overall assumptions about the intensity of occupation over time in any part of it. Study of histograms from nine sites within the Roman settlement of Southwark showed that most of them resembled neither each other, nor the town's overall coin pattern although, interestingly, sites of a similar nature - waterfront, roadside, major buildings, edge of settlement - bore a closer resemblance to each other than to any of the other sites. Since there is currently no other substantial site data with which to compare No. 1 Poultry

(except for the partial comparison with Guildhall Yard attempted below), the value of its coins at present is mainly in stratigraphic dating, and in drawing some conclusions about the site's own internal history.

## The Roman Coin Assemblage from No.1 Poultry

The 552 Roman coins identified for this report, out of the 790 excavated, can be summarised as follows, in Fig. 1:-

	AR	AE	Total
Pre-Conquest (to c.43 AD)	4	6	10
Claudian (incl. irregular, to c.64 AD)	1	99	100
Neronian (c.64-8)	1	26	27
Flavian (69-96)	7	51	58
Nerva-Commodus (96-192)	3	33	36
Uncertain 1st-2nd C	5	30	34
1st half 3rd C.	6	1	7
Central & Gallic Empires (253-c.285)		25	25
Carausius & Allectus (287-296)		6	6
Possibly 1st-3rd C. Greek Imperial issues		3	3
Tetrarchy (c.295-310)		1	1
310-330		8	8
<i>Official issues, 330-355</i>		12	12
Irregular, 340-50		74	74
Irregular, 350-65		67	67
<i>Valentinianic (364-78)</i>		14	14
<i>Theodosian</i>	22	22	
<i>Undertain later 3rd-4th C</i>	22	22	
<i>Uncertain</i>	25	25	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>552</b>

*Fig 1 Summary of coins identified, by major periods*

These can be further broken down, into reign or numismatic period, as follows, in Fig. 2:

Pre-Conquest		AR	AE	Total
	Republic	1		
	Mark Antony	2		
	Augustus(?)	1		
	Agrippa		4	
	Tiberius		1	
	Germanicus		1	
				10
Claudian (c.41-c.64)				
	Claudius I official	1	10	
	Claudius I irregular		66	
	Claudius I prob. irregular		9	
	Claudius I poss. Irregular		7	
	Tiberius irregular		1	
	Antonia official		1	

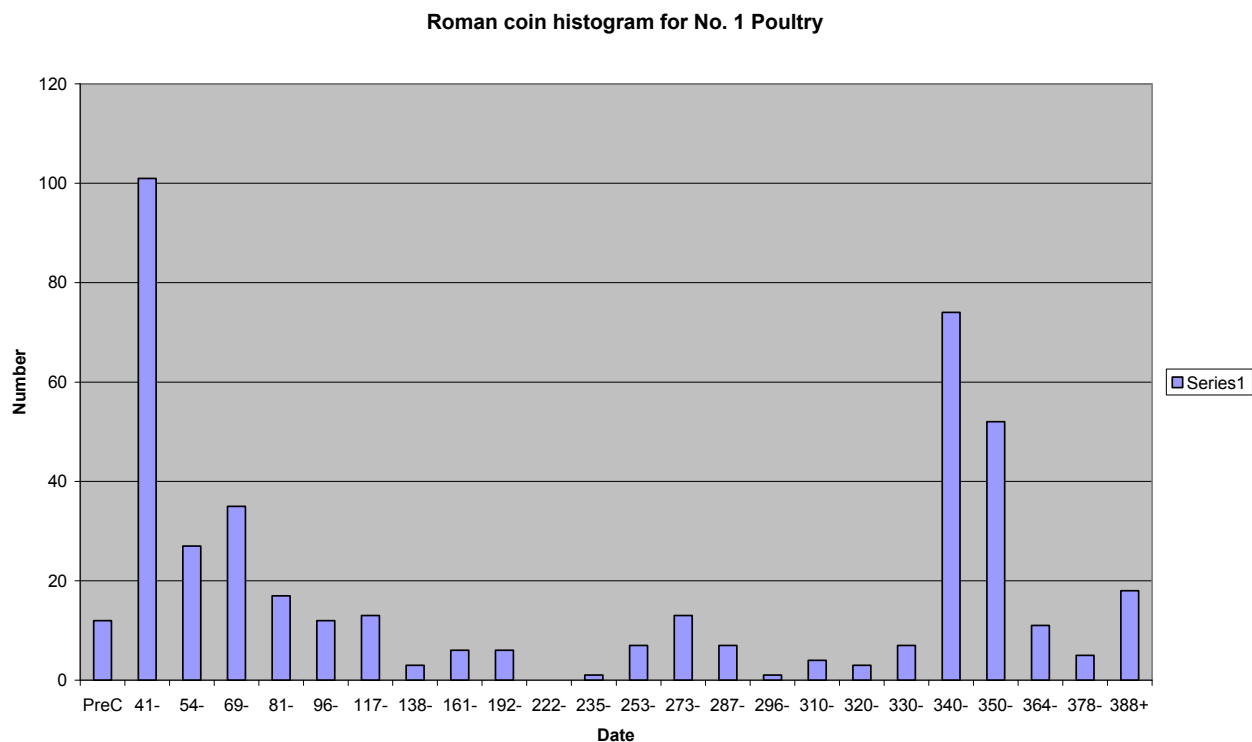
	Antonia irregular		2	
	Unc., poss. Julio-Claudian		2	
				99
Neronian (c.64-68)				
	Nero		23	
	prob. Nero		3	
	Nero - irregular		1	
	Vitellius	1		
				28
Flavian (69-96)				
	Vespasian	5	26	
	Vespasian prob.		3	
	Vespasian "lightweight" copies		2	
	Titus		1	
	Domitian	2	13	
	Uncertain		6	
				58
Trajanic-Antonine (96-192)				
	Nerva			
	Trajan		1	
	prob. Trajan		4	
	Trajan, plated copy	1		
	Hadrian	1	12	
	prob. Hadrian		2	
	Antoninus Pius (semis)		1	
	Marcus Aurelius		3	
	Faustina I		2	
	Faustina II		1	
	Commodus		1	
	Crispina?		1	
				36
Uncertain 1st-2nd c.				
	Illegible 1C (one cut in half)		16	
	Illegible later 1st C		2	
	Illegible 1-2C	4	7	
	Illegible 2C		4	
	Illegible, poss. Antonine	1	1	
	Unc. plated copy	1		
				36
Severan-Mid 3rd C				
	Severus	1		
	Plated copies	2		
	Caracalla	1		
	Unc. Severan	1	1	
	Maximinus I/Philip I (235-249)	1		
				7
253-c.285				

	Gallienus		2	
	Salonina		1	
	Claudius II		3	
	Tetricus I		2	
	Unc. Gallic Empire		1	
	Unc. antoninianus		2	
	Irregular - Claudius II		1	
	Irregular - Claudius II Gallic Empire		9	
	Irregular - Claudius II unc., later 3rd		1	
	poss. irregular		3	
				25
Uncertain, possibly 1-3C Greek Imperial			3	
				3
Carausius & Allectus (287-296)				
	Carausius		4	
	Allectus		2	
				6
Tetrarchy, 285-310			1	
				1
310-30				
	310-320		5	
	310-330		1	
	320-330		2	
				8
Constantinian, 330-65, official				
	"Two Standards"		2	
	Theodora		3	
	Unc. 330-41 types		3	
	"Two Victories"		2	
	Fel Temp Phoenix		1	
	Fallen Horseman		1	
				12
Irregular, c.340-350				
	Urbs Roma (4 probable ident.)		10	
	"Two Standards"		12	
	Unc. "Two Standards" or "One Standard"		2	
	"One Standard" (3 probable ident.)		13	
	Theodora		1	
	"Two Victories" (3 probable ident.)		9	
	Uncertain		27	

				74
Irregular c.355-365				
	Fallen Horseman (10 probable ident.)		41	
	Magnentius (one cut in half)		8	
	Uncertain		18	
				67
Valentinianic (364-78)				
	Official		5	
	Prob. cast copies		8	
	Irregular		1	
				14
Theodosian				
	Valentinian II		1	
	Magnus Maximus		2	
	Theodosius I		2	
	Unc. Theodosian (5 probable ident.)		17	
				22
Unc. later 3rd-4th C				
	Uncertain c.270-400		16	
	Uncertain c.330-350		1	
	Uncertain 4th C. irregular		5	
	Uncertain ?4th C		9	
				31
Uncertain		1	15	
				16

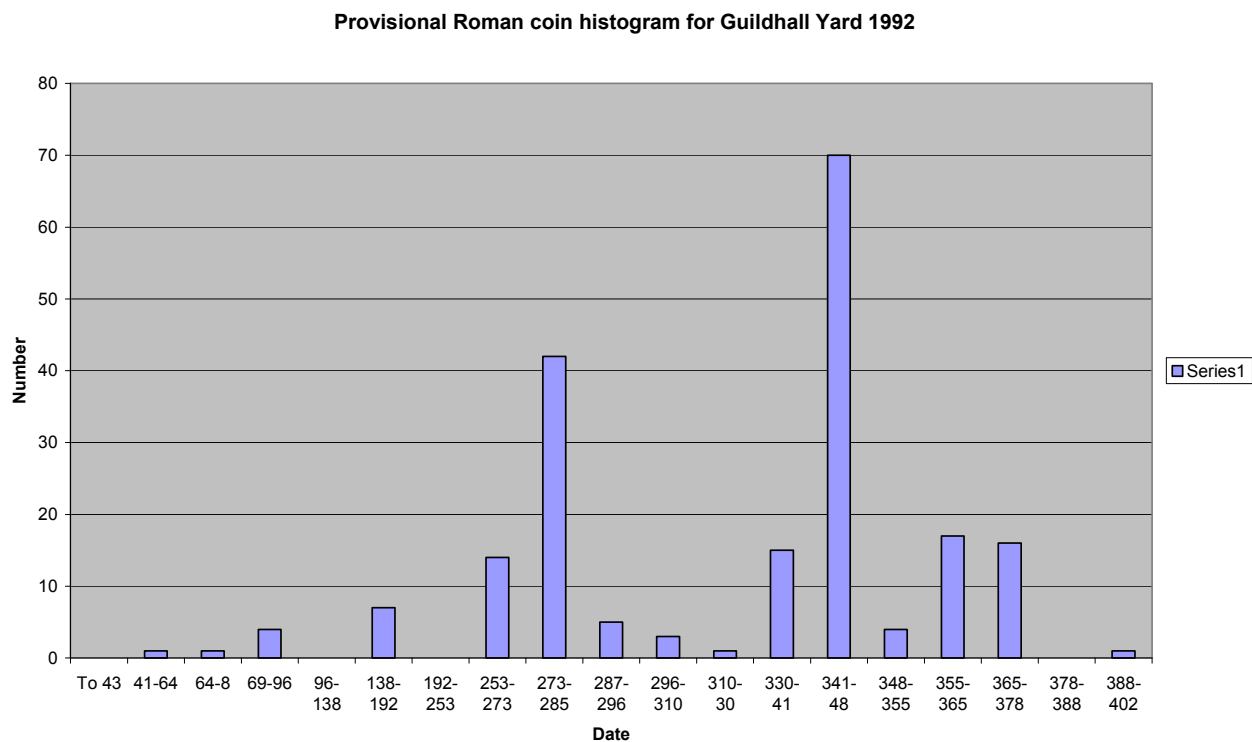
*Fig 2 Detailed coin summary*

Finally, the totals can be shown as a histogram (Fig. 3):

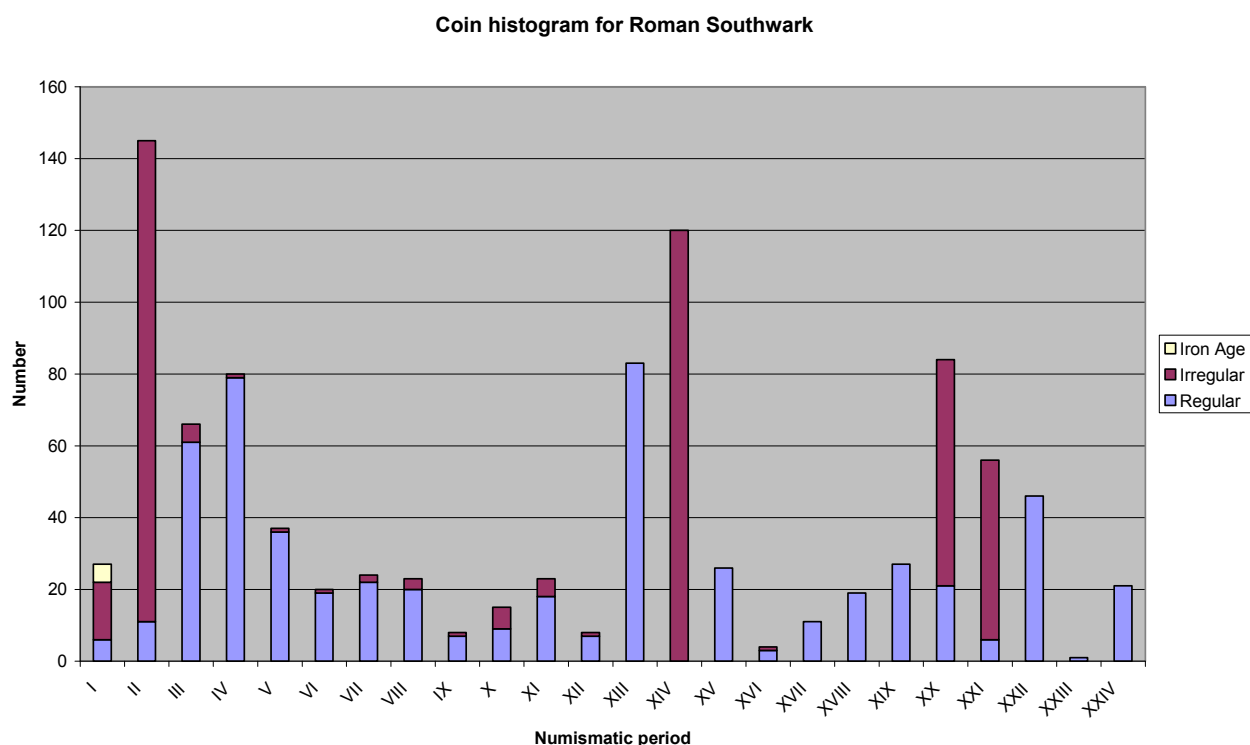


*Fig 3 Roman Coin Histogram for No. 1, Poultry*

In order, first, to submit these figures to comparative analysis, two more histograms will be given: the provisional one for Guildhall Yard 1992 (Fig. 4) and that for Roman Southwark, directly across the river (Fig. 5, taken from Hammerson 1996):



*Fig 4 Provisional Roman Coin Histogram for Guildhall Yard 1992*



*Fig 5 Coin Histogram for Roman Southwark*

It is immediately clear that the coin patterns from No. 1 Poultry and that from Guildhall Yard differ significantly, even allowing for the fact that only 16% of the coins from the latter have so far been assessed and the final picture may be somewhat different (Some of the numismatic periods at Guildhall Yard, notably the later 1st-mid 3rd Centuries, have been combined, but this would make little difference if re-drawn on the same basis as No.1 Poultry).

Though, as already noted, no reliable histogram for Roman London is currently available, the Poultry pattern may be contrasted with the 1st-2nd century pattern for London as shown in Hammerson 1979, p.599. This, made up of finds from various excavated and other City sources in the old Guildhall Museum collection, comprises the larger bronze coinage of the first two centuries AD and thus is presumably a not entirely inaccurate reflection of the overall pattern of Londinium's coinage during that period. It shows a relatively small amount of Claudian (AD 41-c.65), coinage, an increase in the Neronian coinage (produced c.64-68), and a peak under Vespasian (69-79), slowly falling off again from the later Flavian through the Antonine periods (79-192). This led the writer of that study to conclude that the 1st-2nd century coinage from London indicated an origin somewhat later in the Claudian period than that of Southwark. The latter, with its high proportion of irregular Claudian coinage, and substantial quantities of Neronian and Vespasianic coins, dropping off dramatically in numbers till a later 3rd century "recovery", had a pattern similar to those others sites (such as Richborough, Sea Mills, Fingringhoe and Fishbourne) which were considered to have originated as later conquest-period supply bases, suggesting that it was established in about c. AD 50. The London pattern showed a considerably more gradual tailing-off down to the later 2nd century, perhaps indicative of a more consistent pattern of occupation there than in Southwark, where initial studies both of the coinage and other finds suggested some form of decline there during the 2nd century.

One of the complexities of Roman coinage which must be borne in mind in interpreting Roman coin patterns generally, is that its production and, as a concomitant, its importation into Britain, was spasmodic throughout the Roman period. Moreover, the nature of Roman coinage changed substantially throughout the Roman period, with individual coins at some periods having high



intrinsic value, and at others - particularly the later Roman Period - very little. Therefore, "peaks" and "troughs" observed in coin patterns over time will to some extent be illusory, and any departures of the coin pattern from the norm will thus reflect local conditions, and therefore be of more importance. Abundance or scarcity of any particular period of coinage on a site will - assuming reasonable survival of archaeological levels - reflect a combination of coinage use on the site during that period, and of availability from the official mints in comparison with previous or subsequent periods. Other things being equal, therefore, the pattern of coinage on different sites should to some extent be similar. Differences in coin patterns between sites should therefore indicate differences in the nature or intensity of occupation or coin use.

The most significant difference in the 1st-2nd C. Poultry coin pattern from that of the City as a whole (as presented in Hammerson 1979) is in the clear predominance of Claudian coinage, comprising mainly the irregular issues of c. AD 45-65. (Note that the pre-Claudian Roman coins present would have circulated with the Claudian coinage, and would have entered Britain with it; it is most unlikely to have circulated here prior to the Conquest). The coinage for the remainder of the period reflects to some extent the overall City pattern, with a rise from Nero to a peak under Vespasian, and a gradual tailing-off to the end of the 2nd century, though the Poultry histogram is considerably more accentuated in its rises and falls than the overall London one.

Both patterns reflect the general behaviour of the "average" Roman coin pattern during the period. As cautioned above, this will reflect the availability of coinage during different periods as much as any local differences in "intensity of occupation"; though, considering the wide variation in local conditions which must have prevailed - areas covered by buildings, open areas regularly swept, neglected areas and areas of dumping where debris accumulated, pits and waterlogged deposits from which coins would not be recoverable once lost - it is interesting that consistency in coin patterns across sites can be identified at all.

Contrasting No.1 Poultry with the provisional histogram for Guildhall Yard (fig.4), a radically different pattern is observed at the latter, where there is perhaps no similarity at all except for the peak during the 340-350 period. Lest the Guildhall Yard pattern be interpreted by non-numismatists at face value, a word of explanation is required in that, for the period AD 250+, it does reflect the proportions of coins found on Romano-British sites in general, and should not be interpreted to represent fluctuations in intensity of occupation. From a distinct scarcity of coinage during the early-mid 3rd century, a general increase does occur during c.253-270, usually followed by a much larger increase in numbers during the "barbarous radiate" period (c.270-287); however, any attempt to interpret this increase in numbers as a rise in "intensity" of occupation must bear in mind that these coins were produced in greater quantity because they had a lower real value, and may represent copying in response to shortage, or inflationary pressures, or both. The appearance of a much better quality coinage, occurring as site finds in much lower numbers, during the more politically and militarily stable period c.296-320, strongly supports this. Moreover, the situation appears to be repeated, following the deterioration in the quality of official coinage from 330, followed by two periods of production of low quality copies, first during c.340-350, and again during c.355-365, the latter comprising the very numerous "Fallen Horseman" copies, which are usually of very poor quality and small size.

The Guildhall Yard pattern for the later Roman period is quite a typical one. The Poultry pattern therefore shows differences which must reflect local conditions. The first is the unusually low numbers of "barbarous radiate" imitations, suggesting that the circumstances favouring coinage use on the site during that period (c.270-287) were limited. The numismatic evidence can, of course, only indicate this as a possibility, and it is for the overall archaeological evidence to demonstrate whether this is a result of localised decline, or merely of the nature of use of the site at the time. The second difference is, likewise, the low quantities of coins from 330-340, when there is often an appreciable increase in numbers on many sites. This in turn distorts the pattern further by making the increase in coinage from the next two periods, 340-350 (later Constantinian copies) and 355-365 (including the "Fallen Horseman" copies) appear more sudden than it should be; again, this may indicate some change in the nature of occupation on the site during the period 330-365.. However, this quantity of coinage does not represent a significant amount in terms of

actual value, in a period when large quantities of a debased coinage were in circulation. Indeed, their numbers are not significantly larger than those of the 1st-2nd century coins from the site, with their much higher individual value and purchasing power. The coin pattern for much of the Roman period (i.e. from c. AD 140 onwards) therefore suggests a site where, especially in a major Roman city, use of coinage - or, it must always be cautioned, loss of coinage! - was not necessarily a prominent feature of occupation there.

Reverting briefly to the provisional Guildhall Yard histogram, its most significant feature is the lack of coinage prior to the mid-3rd century. This must indicate distinctive local conditions - perhaps large-scale site clearance for construction of the amphitheatre - and will be studied in the analysis of the coins from that site.

Finally, in this section, comparison with the Southwark histogram (Fig. 5) may briefly be made. The presence of quantities of irregular Claudian coinage at No.1, Poultry is a feature not previously observed in the City, but recognised as a distinct feature of the coinage of Southwark (Hammerson 1979 and 1988). Here, study of the "Grades" of the coins and of comparative studies elsewhere was used to suggest that the Southwark settlement was established by c. AD 50, perhaps slightly prior to the City, as an administrative or supply base for the Roman armies engaged in establishing control over lowland Britain. Indeed, until the excavations at Poultry, the coinage of Roman London was particularly distinguished from that of Southwark by its relative paucity of Claudian coinage. However, it is now evident that, on some City sites at least, quantities of irregular Claudian issues may be anticipated.

There are both similarities and contrasts between the patterns for No.1, Poultry and Southwark. One notable difference is seen at the beginning, several Iron Age coins having been found in Southwark, but none from the City. The high incidence of irregular Claudian issues has been noted, but at Southwark, the high proportions of Neronian and early Flavian issues relative to later issues may suggest some exceptional degree of activity during Southwark's period as an (?)administrative centre, which has distorted its coin pattern during that period. The coinage from periods V (81-96) through IX (161-192) is very similar on both, and may suggest a closer similarity of occupation or coinage use.

Interestingly, however, the subsequent periods X-XII (AD 192-253) show a distinct absence of coinage at both Poultry and Guildhall Yard, while in Southwark as a whole the period - which is one during which site finds of coinage in Britain are generally scarce - is one of comparative abundance of coins. This is a period during which some decline in the London area has been suggested (Sheldon 1975) and while this possibility is suggested - as far as any such inference can be drawn from two sites within a settlement - by the coinage from the first two sites, the current overall coin evidence from Southwark is less clear and there is clearly a need for a synthesis of the archaeological evidence from the region during the first half of the 3rd century. However, when interpreting these figures, it must again be cautioned that, although the coin numbers are low in relation to other periods, the coinage of the late 2nd-mid 3rd century is generally scarce as site finds throughout Britain (though a number of large hoards have been recovered), and the individual coins are of higher value than those of subsequent periods.

It is also notable that, during the later 3rd century, Poultry has very few of the normally common unofficial copies of the antoniniani of the Central and Gallic Empires, popularly known as "barbarous radiates". These are well in evidence at Southwark, and also at Guildhall Yard, though some coins from the latter site may derive from spoil from elsewhere dumped in the disused amphitheatre and may not reflect the sequence of occupation there. This is at variance with the statement in Perring 1991 that "London shows some signs of renewed activity in the later 3rd century. Excavations throughout the City, but curiously not in Southwark, have produced an exceptional number of unofficial coins, known as barbarous radiates, of the later 3rd century... surely connected to the military presence in the City." This point is studied in some detail in Hammerson 1996, 159-60, and is a further caution against a too-literal interpretation of the coin evidence.

The period 296-320 is a generally period of low coin finds on most sites, the individual coins being of good quality and high intrinsic value - and, being large, considerably easier to find when dropped. However, except for the period of unofficial coin production during the 340s and, at Poultry, the 350s-early 360s, the two City sites do not exhibit the steady increase in coins of the period 320-65 seen at Southwark. The two very distinct patterns need more detailed study, to ascertain whether, or to what extent, Poultry and Guildhall Yard reflect the wider City picture.

During the final 40 years of the Roman period, Romano-British sites throughout Britain show varying coin patterns which are nevertheless consistent in their variation and indicative of the dates at which final "decline" sets in. Southwark and Poultry show not dissimilar patterns, though coinage of the Valentinianic period (364-378) from Poultry drops off more sharply than might be expected. It might be noted here that the Valentinianic coins from Poultry show a characteristic noted by the writer at most other London and Southwark sites: namely, that a high proportion of the coins - in this case, 9 out of 14 - appear to be cast copies of the official coinage. It is tentatively suggested in Hammerson 1996, 155-6, that this final, and hitherto unrecognised, phase of copying in Britain might be connected with the disruptions occasioned by the invasions of Britain (the *barbarica conspiratio* of Ammianus Marcellinus, 27.8) of 367. Study of the Valentinianic coinage in Britain could help determine whether this is a localised London phenomenon or more widely encountered.

#### Roman coin finds, by site and numismatic period

A stratigraphic analysis of the coins, summarising the numismatic evidence according to the major site periods, can be conveniently shown in tabular form (see Fig. 6).

*Fig 6 Roman coins, by site and numismatic period (see ONE94\_cointab06.xls - key below)*

Uncertain, illegible, etc., coins unassignable to a specific period, and thus not included in the table:

Period 2 - "Lightweight" imitation of Vespasian, prob. 2nd C (1); unc. irregular c.270-365

Period 3 - Illegible 1st-2nd C (5); Illegible (2)

Period 5 - Illegible Pre-Flavian (1); Illegible 1st-2nd C (2); Illegible (3)

Period 6 - Illegible 1st C (3); Illegible 1st-2nd C (2); Illegible 2nd C? (2); Illegible (3)

Period 7 - Illegible 1st C (3); Illegible c.270-365 (4); Illegible c.340-365 (1); Illegible (2)

Period 9 - Illegible (2)

Period 12 - Illegible 1st C (2); "Lightweight" imitation of Vespasian, prob. 2nd C (1)

Period 14 - Illegible c.270-365 (4); Uncertain c.330-350 (1)

Period 18 - Illegible 1st-2nd C (4); Uncertain c.340-365 (7); Illegible c.270-365 (5); Illegible (11)

Period 20 - Illegible (1)

Period 21 - Illegible 1st C (1); Illegible c. 270-365 (2); Illegible (1)

Period 22 - Illegible 1st C (3); Uncertain 2nd-early 3rd C (2); Illegible 4th C (2); Illegible (2)

Period 32 - Uncertain c.340-365 (3); Illegible, c.270-365 (3)

Period 33 - Uncertain c.340-365 (3); Illegible 4th C (2)

Period 34 - Illegible 1st C (1); Illegible 1st-2nd C (2); Uncertain c.340-365 (1); Illegible 4th C (1)

Period 36 - Illegible 1st C (1); Uncertain c.340-365 (2); Illegible c.270-365 (3). Also 11th C (1)

Period 40 - Prob. 14th C (1)

Period 42 - All coins from this period 16th-17th century.

#### Notes:

(i) (\* excludes uncertain or illegible coins - see notes following table)

(ii) italicised figures indicate intrusive coins;

(iii) As indicated in the main excavation report, some site periods are contemporary with, but not specifically assignable to, others, and are therefore designated separately. The table is thus not completely sequential: Period 4(no coin finds) = Periods 2 and 3; Period 8 = periods 6 and 7; periods 10 and 11 are broadly contemporary with parts of periods 7-9 and 12-17; period 12 = periods 13-17; Period 18 = periods 19-22.

(iv) Periods 31-42 are post-Roman.

The period of circulation of Claudian coinage was discussed in Hammerson 1979, 590-1, where study clearly suggested the circulation of coins of that period, including irregular issues, through

the 1st century, particularly during the Flavian period, and probably into the Trajanic period, after which their numbers fell substantially except as clearly residual finds.

The Poultry evidence appears to support this. Fifteen per cent of Claudian coins derive from pre-Boudican levels, and 48% from Neronian and Flavian contexts, indicating the greater concentration of loss during that period. Moreover, 75% of the Claudian issues derive from contexts dating up to the Hadrianic fire, 20% from clearly residual contexts, and only 5% from the mid-later 2nd century, during which it is possible, though uncertain, that they may have seen some use. These were virtually the only bronze coinage available in Britain until the mid-later Neronian period, but despite their often poor quality, they appear to have continued in circulation after renewed supplies of good Neronian bronze coinage would have been available, following the Boudican uprising. It was suggested in Hammerson 1979 that they may have circulated as a fractional coinage, perhaps taking the place of the semisses and quadrantes more commonly found on the Continent but extremely rare in Britain. Since the evidence suggests that their circulation ended during the Trajanic period, this may have been a deliberate policy decision, perhaps related to Trajan's coinage reform. However, caution is once more needed when assigning a numismatic phenomenon to a convenient known historical event, since the smaller bronze asses and dupondii of the 1st and early 2nd century seem generally to become scarcer during the 2nd century relative to the sestertius, and the disappearance of the irregular Claudian issues may in some way be related to this.

Circulation on the site of the other earlier Roman coinage most in evidence - Nero, Vespasian and Domitian - is also predominantly within the same period, the figures being respectively 65%, 62% and 58% (with the definitely residual figures at 22%, 34% and 29%). Actual 1st-2nd century coinage circulation and loss at Poultry therefore appears to predominate during the years prior to c. AD 120.

The picture for 2nd century coinage post-120 is less clear. This is partly because of the lower numbers found - though, as indicated earlier, this is probably as much a numismatic feature as a reflection of the local economy. However it is also because a high proportion occur residually (9 of 12 Trajan (96-117), 9 of 13 Hadrian (117-38), and 10 of 15 Antonine (138-192)), a total of 70%. A higher percentage of residual 2nd century coins may be explainable, in that a number derive from contexts associated with 3rd and 4th century buildings, and may themselves have come from later, and thus higher, levels more likely to be disturbed by subsequent building operations. Since hoards dating as late as the 270s have been found which contain very worn 1st and 2nd century bronze coins, some of them may have seen 3rd-century use. Indeed, site period 18, which includes masonry and clay-and-timber buildings dating to the 3rd century, contains interestingly high numbers of 1st-2nd century coins, pointing as much to the possibility of their use as the time, as to their residuality.

If this were the case, however, the absence of the normally much more common post-260 antoniniani of the Gallic and Central Empires is even more puzzling, and suggests the possibility of a real and clear break in occupation on the site somewhere around the middle of the 3rd century. In addition, the fact that it has not been possible to reliably determine the state of wear of the 2nd century coinage means that we do not have this possible extra evidence for coins in long circulation being lost on the site.

However, there is site evidence which may help to clarify the matter. Coins of the 250s-290s are noticeably scarce in post-Roman contexts at Poultry, though coins of other periods, both previous and subsequent, are clearly in evidence in those levels. Indeed, 4th century coins are, as often, quite plentiful in post-Roman levels, suggesting that there was sufficient post-Roman disturbance of Roman contexts to have displaced a number of 3rd-century coins, had they been present. The evidence, therefore, is that the scarcity of antoniniani at Poultry was a real one, and if other archaeological evidence from the site suggests a continuation of occupation during the second half of the third century, the nature of that occupation should be carefully considered in the light of the absence of coinage generated by it, during a period when coins are, *prima facie*, plentiful.

There is little that can be usefully said on the stratigraphic aspects of the 4th century coinage, since all contexts with coins of this period, both Roman and residual, contain issues from all decade. The evidence they give shows that they are present in the proportions which might be expected on many sites, and this is covered under discussion of the histogram, above). Uncertain and illegible coins of all periods are noted at the foot of fig. 6. Though there are a large number of these (110) - many not identifiable because not cleaned - the majority date to the period 270-365, and of these, the greater proportion probably date to the much narrower period 340-365, in which case the conclusions reached above would not materially differ.

At this juncture, the writer is constrained to point out that, in his view, the above paragraphs clearly indicate that residual coinage, long despised by excavators as being of little importance, can, in the right circumstances, provide valuable archaeological evidence through its very residuality. If the full potential of a site's Roman coinage is to be realised, therefore, excavators are urged to ensure that coin specialists have the opportunity to examine all finds, stratified or unstratified.

## **The Claudian Coins**

In both Hammerson 1979 and 1988, a more detailed analysis of the Claudian coins was attempted, in order to study more closely the Grading System originally proposed by Sutherland (1935), who categorised the copies into Grade I (large, well-produced and well-engraved), Grade II (generally smaller and less well made), Grade III (small and more or less crude), and Grade IV (designs facing the wrong way from the originals, and normally crudely executed).

The evidence did, indeed, appear to support Sutherland's suggestion that, in the earlier stages of their production at least, they were likely to have been produced semi-officially by the Roman authorities (many having been found on Continental military sites); that the better grades of copy were the earlier ones; and that all saw circulation at least into the Flavian period. A site founded before the start of their production would also produce quantities of official coinage. Production of the copies probably started soon after the Conquest; in its earlier stages at least, it is likely to have been an official response to the shortage of coins following the apparent cessation of production of bronze coinage at Rome, early in the reign of Claudius, for some two decades. Though silver was still available, a smaller fractional currency was still needed for everyday use, and some means of overcoming this dearth had to be found. Sutherland analysed the coins from Colchester, a conquest-period foundation, and found the proportions of Grades there to be: Grade I, 61%; Grade II, 29%; Grade III (8%); Grade IV (2%). The equivalent figures from Southwark (1979 figures) were 21%, 53%, 26%, and 0%.

The quantities and site periods of the Poultry examples are shown in Fig. 7.

*Fig 7 Analysis of Claudian coinage, by site period (periods 31+ post-Roman) (see ONE94\_cointab07.xls)*

Of the 87 classifiable Claudian imitations, 20% were Grade I, 55% Grade II, and 24% Grade III - remarkably similar figures to those from Southwark. If this were reflected in the Claudian copies from other City of London sites, it would suggest some form of close affinity between the areas north and south of the river during the period c. AD 45-65, when it is likely that most, if not all, of the Claudian copies were produced, and it is therefore to be hoped that a study of this nature can be undertaken.

As noted in Hammerson 1979, the Grading system is to be regarded more as one of convenience and general guidance than one to be followed rigidly, since it is difficult to assign many borderline cases to a particular Grade, and the wide range of styles and degrees of crudeness or competence suggest that there was little close control of their production. However, comparative study of the Poultry and other coins suggests an overall validity in the approach, and does not contradict these findings.

Can any further inferences, beyond those discussed earlier, be drawn as to their appearance in, and length of, circulation? For this purpose, of course, only periods 2 to 8 are valid, Claudian coins from the remainder being residual. Of the 74 coins from 1st-2nd century contexts, almost exactly half were from early to mid-Flavian levels, a further 16% came from Later Flavian - Hadrianic levels, and only 22% from pre-Boudican levels (though the coins had probably been produced for 15 years or more by the time of the revolt). This suggests strongly that they circulated on the site throughout the Claudian to Trajanic periods.

As to when the various Grades of coin appear, this is less obvious for Grades I and II, both of which were present in pre-Boudican levels, and it must await the excavation of a site with more pre-Boudican phases for any clearer trends to be discerned. Whilst all but one of the Grade II copies derive from post-Boudican fire levels, one is nevertheless present in a late pre-Boudican context, possibly indicating that production of all three Grades was under way by that date.

However, it is of interest to note that the greatest number of coins of all three Grades in any one period come from early to mid-Flavian levels, further evidence for the circulation of all Grades into the later 1st century, though it will be far more difficult, and perhaps impossible, to assess whether they circulated at par, or whether the better coins were more acceptable or tarified at a higher value than the cruder ones.

Claudian copies vary widely not only in their Grades and quality, but also in their diameters, those from Poultry ranging from 28mm, close to the size of the official coins, to 20mm; these are shown in Fig. 8:

*Fig 8 Analysis of diameters of Irregular Claudian coins, by Grade and Site Period (see ONE94\_cointab08.xls)*

Can it be inferred from this that the larger the diameter, the earlier the coin must be? For all three Grades of coin, it will be seen that the largest diameters only appear during site Period 6, though in the case of the Grade I and possibly the Grade II examples, the smaller modules do appear mainly in post-Boudican contexts. Furthermore, the Grade I coins from non-residual contexts are of mainly larger diameters, and occur almost solely in Periods 3-6; therefore, given a sufficient quantity of coins and dated pre- to early post-Boudican contexts, it might be anticipated that larger diameters and higher grades could be seen to be more characteristic of early date.

The diameters of the Poultry Claudian copies may be compared with those from Southwark, and also from Usk, a military site considered to have been founded c. AD 55, a few years later than Southwark (Boon 1974). In his report, Boon calls the copies "the last stage of the epidemic" of copying, clearly suggesting that the predominance of smaller-module examples implied a late foundation date for the site. This does not, however, explain why no coins larger than 25mm found their way to Usk from outside. Details follow in fig. 9:

*Fig. 9: Claudian copies from Poultry, Southwark and Usk, by diameter (see ONE94\_cointab09.xls)*

In both the Poultry and Southwark figures, diameters within the range 27-23mm predominate, though Poultry has a much higher proportion in the range 22-20mm. Since the archaeological evidence for both suggests circulation of all the coins beyond the end of the first century, little can at present be inferred from this, beyond observing that more coins of small module appear to have circulated at Poultry. Whether there is any significance in this difference must await the study of Claudian copies from elsewhere in the City. The Usk coins, by contrast, show a very different pattern, with 75% of the coins lying within the 25-23mm range; this suggests the possibility that the coins may have been manufactured locally, with the intention of only being used within a restricted

area; metallurgical analysis of the finds from a range of sites might aid in confirming or disproving this.

#### Individual coins of note

Among the large number of coins excavated, several individual specimens merit discussion, either in themselves or for the archaeological or historical evidence they can contribute.

Denarius of Claudius I (RIC 43) (sf.5178 - Period 5): Denarii of Claudius I are uncommon as site finds, and very few have been recorded from the London area. This example, dated with Claudius' Imperial year XVII (= A.D. 50), is the earliest accurately datable post-Conquest coin from the site. It derives from a context interpreted as the hiatus immediately following the Boudican fire, and shows only light wear, compatible with the possibility that it may have been lost during that period, some ten years after issue.

As of Nero, AD 64-68, rev. Genio Augusti, counterstamped "SPC" on the obverse (sf.2476 - Period 6): Counterstamped coins of Nero are a recognised feature of the coinage used by the contending sides during the Civil Wars of AD 68-9 which followed Nero's assassination. A small number of sestertii, bearing the stamp of Vitellius, have been found in Britain, though none of them from securely dated contexts, the example from the excavations at 15-23 Southwark Street, London, being unstratified; they were commented upon in Hammerson 1992, pp.140-1.

The as from Poultry bears a clear cartouche, c. 8 x 4mm, with the letters SPC. Though a range of different countermarks from the Civil Wars is known from various sites in Europe, struck by the various factions including Galba, Vitellius, Vespasian and possibly Vindex, it appears to have no parallel (Abdy 2000). Marks such as SPR and SPQR, possibly attributable to Vindex, and CV, are known, but the letters SPC on the coin under discussion are clear. However, their significance is at present not understood, though it must be assumed that it was struck for one of the contenders during the wars of 68-69.

Two counterstamped coins of the period have now been found during recent excavations in London. The Southwark example was struck for Vitellius, and it is unfortunate, for assessing the evidence as to where London's loyalties might have lain during the wars, that the present specimen cannot as yet be attributed. Its context is dated to the early-mid Flavian levels immediately post-dating the post-Boudican fire period, suggesting that the coin was lost during or not long after the period when it was counterstamped.

Denarius of Vitellius, AD 69 (Sf.3014 - Period 18), and sestertius of Vespasian, rev. Judaea Capta, AD 71 (sf.2491 - period 7): both coins are uncommonly encountered on British sites.

Cast copies of asses of Vespasian (sf. 3792 - Period 2, sf.3777 - Period 12): Small, poorly-produced examples of 1st and 2nd century bronze coins, usually asses and dupondii, of a flan suggesting they had been cast in an unofficial mould rather than struck at an official mint, are occasionally found. They are commonly known as "Lightweight" copies, but their date of manufacture has not been defined any more closely than as probably 2nd century, and their purpose may have been either as simple forgeries or as an attempt to make up the deficiency of smaller bronze coins in evidence during the course of the 2nd century, as sestertii become the predominant form of bronze coinage.

The Poultry examples unfortunately contribute nothing to the debate on their dating, sf.3792 coming from a pre-Boudican context and thus presumably intrusive, and sf.3777 from a context of mid-3rd century or later.

More likely to be deliberate forgeries are the denarii regularly, though not commonly, found on many Romano-British sites, comprising a silver-plated exterior on a copper alloy core. This plating is normally so thin that the smallest scratch is sufficient to break it and start corrosion in the core which makes its nature very clear to the archaeologist. Amongst this class of coin, issues of the Severan period (192-222) tend to predominate, a phenomenon perhaps related to the significant debasement of the silver coinage under Septimius Severus. However, issues of most of the 1st

and 2nd century Emperors are found, and Sf.3156 (Period 18) is a plated copy of a denarius of Trajan (98-117).

Superficially, the coins appear to be excellent specimens, suggesting that the bronze cores were made in moulds obtained from official specimens before receiving a thin silver coating; this increases the likelihood that they were deliberate attempts at forgery. This is supported by a copy of a denarius of Augustus from a Flavian context at 199 Borough High Street, Southwark (Hammerson 1979, 588), with an 'X' scratched into the obverse. This was interpreted as an attempt by a recipient to test whether it was a fake by exposing the bronze core below the surface. Interestingly, the scratch does not appear to have achieved the objective, since there was no corrosion around it but, rather, elsewhere on the coin - an instructive comment on the prevalence of forgeries at the time, awareness of the problem and, not least, the skill of the forger.

Though, as mentioned, Severan types tend to predominate, forgery was not an exclusively Severan phenomenon, as evidenced both by the finding of examples, such as the Augustan one just mentioned, in much earlier contexts, and the relatively unworn condition in which copies of earlier issues are often found. It is therefore likely that plated forgeries would tend to be of good examples of coinage current at the time.

Illegible as or dupondius, probably pre-early Flavian, cut in half (sf.5222 - Period 6): It is convenient, and perhaps traditional among archaeologists, to lump such difficult-to-explain coins as this under the heading of "Ritually Mutilated". This may, indeed, be the explanation, since defaced coins and other objects have been found together in contexts, such as wells or other deposits, clearly open to interpretation as religious. One example from the London area is at Eden Street, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, 1989 (Hammerson 1996, 154-5), where an illegible sestertius, apparently held firmly in pincers and cut or torn in half, was found together with other deliberately mutilated coins and broken jewellery deposited in a stream. A more prosaic explanation might be found in the creation of impromptu fractional coinage, but sufficiently few examples are found to suggest that this was not a common method of obtaining small change, and the ritual explanation may therefore be the more likely one.

Though the as was the smallest official denomination normally found in Britain during the 1st and 2nd centuries, smaller bronze coins were minted and are more commonly found on the Continent - the semis, half of an as, and the quadrans, one quarter of an as. One of each of these was found at Poultry - a Semis of Nero (sf.5635, Period 7), and a Quadrans of Antoninus Pius (sf.3901, period 18). These are found so infrequently in Britain that it appears unlikely that they would have commonly served as a fractional currency, and it may be that they found there way here as change in the purses of visitors to Britain, or even, perhaps, as souvenirs kept by those travelling to the Continent.

Finally, the excavations produced three coins - sf.3915 (Period 5), sf.3652 (Period 7) and sf. 3858 (Period 18) - which, though all corroded and illegible, bore some close resemblance, in the writer's view, to the Greek Imperial issues of the 1st-3rd centuries, either in the thick flans or the treatment of the edges characteristic of that coinage. The few finds from the London region of these coins, which did not normally circulate beyond their city or state of manufacture in the eastern Empire, have been discussed briefly in Hammerson 1996, 154, and metallurgical analysis would clearly be desirable to determine whether these specimens might indeed be of this type.



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