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BARTOSZ AWIANOWICZ

Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń

Peculiarities and Errors in the Legends Attributed to Antioch Denarii of Pescennius Niger and of Septimius Severus

In the now almost 80-year-old, but still fundamental, catalogue for the coinage of the years 193–217, vol. IV of the *Roman Imperial Coinage*, H. Mattingly and E.A. Sydenham state that the coins (almost exclusively denarii) issued by Pescennius Niger, the ruler of the Eastern provinces (mainly those in Asia and, briefly, Egypt) from June 193 to the latter half of 194, “are in part of the normal Roman pattern, in part exotic – and, no doubt, Syrian of Antioch,” whereas in the case of the stylistically similar types of Septimius Severus’ denarii dated 193–196, which they assign to the mint (3), they stress that despite similarities, they are “certainly not identical with it,” because it began “to strike at a time when we must suppose Antioch to have been still in the hands of Niger.”¹ Consequently, they attributed the whole group to Emesa as the native city of Julia Domna, the emperor’s wife, while rejecting the possibility of the minting of denarii at Antioch in the years 194–196/7, on the basis of the degradation of the capital of Syria (seized by the troops of Septimius Severus) from an autonomous *municipium* to κώμη of Laodicea ad Mare, as attested by Herodian (3.6.9).² However, the lowering of the

¹ H. MATTINGLY, E.A. SYDENHAM, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. IV, part I: *Pertinax to Geta*, London 1936 (thereafter cited as *RIC IV/1*), p. 19 (on Niger’s coinage) and p. 57 (on the coinage of Septimius Severus).

² *RIC IV/1*, pp. 57–58: “Mint (3) may be conjecturally assigned to Emesa, the seat of the priestly dynasty to which Julia Domna belonged” and p. 58, n. 1: “(...) we know that for some years Antioch was reduced to being κώμη of Laodicea, we naturally suppose that for these years Laodicea usurped the normal privilege of her rival.” A more conservative opinion by Mattingly can be found in his introduction (14 years later) to vol. V of *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, where he admits that Zeugma, alongside Emesa, may have been the location of the mints of the early Eastern aurei and denarii of S. Severus (see H. MATTINGLY, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. V: *Pertinax to Elagabalus*, London 1950, p. CXVIII – thereafter as *BMCRE V*).

city's stature did not have to result in the discontinuance of the minting there, particularly as the Eastern issues of denarii would not impart any prestige to the issuer, unlike the silver tetradrachms traditionally struck with a Greek legend and the eagle on the reverse, and above all with Tyche of Antioch, the issues of which (in small amounts) had been ordered by Septimius Severus after the year 202.³ On the other hand, the minting of denarii in the East over the years 193–196/7 (of Niger in 193–194 and in the early rule of Severus) mostly served the purpose of funding the military campaigns.⁴

The frailty of the argumentation of Mattingly and Sydenham was revealed thanks to a thorough analysis of Niger's denarii die types from Antioch and some of Severus' types from "Emesa," as performed by T.V. Buttrey, which highlighted the fairly obvious fact that the reverse type attested for the coinage of the both rulers, and associated with Niger (who adopted the cognomen *Iustus*), namely VICTOR(ia) IVST(i) AVG(usti), was made by one and the same engraver. The question looks similar in the case of a simple updating of the above-mentioned type by changing the legend into VICTOR(ia) SEVER(i) AVG(usti).⁵ Regardless then whether in the case of Niger's Eastern denarii, traditionally attributed to Antioch, or those of Severus, traditionally linked with Emesa, we are actually concerned solely with Antioch or, as R.A. Bickford-Smith suggests,⁶ a mobile military mint used by Niger, which Severus had taken over even before his conquest of the capital of Syria, the point is that there is certainly just one minting centre operating for the two emperors, as shown by the analysis of the relevant legend inscriptions with their numerous grammatical and "logical" mistakes (discrepancies between the description and the image represented on the reverse) as well as certain abbreviations that cannot be found in the coinage from the mint of Rome.

Below, a listing of the peculiarities and errors in reverse legends and in the titles of the obverses of Pescennius Niger and Septimius Severus, excluding the

³ See Pl. 1, Figs. 1.1-1.3. as well as R. McALEE, *The Coins of Roman Antioch*, Lancaster/London 2007, pp. 261, 264: nos. 651–657.

⁴ As attested by a very limited number of denarii from Laodicea and Antioch/Emesa in the hoards of Syria, Israel, and Jordan (see H. GITLER, M. PONTING, *The Silver Coinage of Septimius Severus and his Family (193–211 AD). A Study of the Chemical Composition of the Roman and Eastern Issue*, Milano 2003, p. 42) and, at the same time, their considerable presence in the hoards from the territories of Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, and Great Britain (see T.V. BUTTREY, "The President's Address," *Numismatic Chronicle* 152 (1992), p. VII, R.P. DUNCAN-JONES, "The Denarii of Septimius Severus and the Mobility of Roman Coins," *Numismatic Chronicle* 161 (2001), pp. 81–87 and IDEM, "The Denarii of Septimius Severus and the Mobility of Roman Coins: Further Comments," *Numismatic Chronicle* 162 (2002), pp. 342–345 and CHR. HOWGEGO, "The Denarii of Septimius Severus and the Mobility of Roman Coins: A Reply," *Numismatic Chronicle* 162 (2002), pp. 339–342).

⁵ BUTTREY, "The President's Address," pp. XX–XXI.

⁶ R.A. BICKFORD-SMITH, "The imperial mints in the east for Septimius Severus: it is time to begin a thorough reconsideration," *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica e Scienze Affini* 96 (1994–1995), p. 59, no. 21.

proper names and untypical abbreviations of reverse legends (numbers as per *RIC* IV, italics have been used to indicate variants unattested in the catalogue, which have surfaced in *BMCRE* V and in auction catalogues in recent years – the latter ones have been included in the illustrations to this article):

Pescennius Niger:

A instead of AVG: 5(a), 23, 25, 26(b), 35, 61A, 67, 70(d), 73(b), 74

ACES instead of CAES: 5(d)

AG instead of AVG: 5(e)?

AV instead of AVG: 2(a), 3(a), 3(c), 3(f), 4, 5(d), 5(e)?, 7 note, 10(a), 11, 13(b), 14(b), 20, 26(c), 30, 31(a), 34(a) and (b), 41, 44(a) and (b), 45(a), 46, 47(a) and (c), 48(a), 52, 55, 58A, 70(c), 75(a), 78, 81(b), 87(b) and (d), 88(b) and (c)

ISTI instead of IVST(?): 7 n., 8, 32, 74

IV instead of IVS: 10

IVSTI instead of IVST: 5(d) and (e), 7 note, 11, 14(b), 23, 30, 34(b), 35, 44(b), 70(d), 73(b), Pl. 2, Figs. 2.3 and 2.4

Septimius Severus:

CA instead of CAES: 382 n., Pl. 5, Fig. 3.6

CAE instead of CAES: 343–436A

CE instead of CAE(S): Group II (6a) and (7a)

C II instead of COS II: 366(c), 369(a)

II C instead of COS II: 370B, 411

CO II instead of COS II: 365, 412A

CO III instead of COS II: 418A

II CO instead of COS II: 366(a), 392, 392a, 395

COS V instead of COS II: 389 note

OCS instead of COS: 411 note

Grammatical errors in the legends of the reverses of P. Niger and Septimius Severus constitute a larger group (numbers as per *RIC* IV):

Pescennius Niger:

CELERI FRVGIFER instead of CERERI FVGIFER: 7 note, 11

CELERI FRVGIFERE instead of CERERI FRVGIFERAE: Pl. 2, Fig. 2.2

CERERI FRVGIFERI instead of CERERI FRVGIFERAE: 10

CERERI FRVGIFERE instead of CERERI FRVGIFERAE: 10 note

CERERI FRVFER instead of CERERI FRVGIFER: 7 note, 10A

FIDEI EXERCITVI instead of FIDEI EXERCITVS: 19

FR FR FRVG instead of CERERI FRVG(?): 7 note

FRFRF AVG instead of CERERI FRVGIF: 7 note⁷

IMVISTO IMPER instead of INVICTO IMPER: 32

⁷ *BMCRE* V notes instead of FRFRF AVG the legend FRF AVG (p. 75, note *).

INVICTO IMP TA instead of INVICTO IMPERAT(?): 36
 INVICTO IMP TROPHAEA instead of INVICTO IMP TROPAEA: 39
 INVICTO MPERAI instead of INVICTO IMPERAT: 40
 INVISTO IMP instead of INVISTO IMP: p. 77, § note
 INVISTO IMPER instead of INVICTO IMPER: Pl. 2, Fig. 2.3
 MINER VICTRIS instead of MINER VICTRIX or VICTRIC: 60, 61, 61(a)
 MONETAE AVC instead of MONETAE AVG: Pl. 2, Fig. 2.4
 MONETE AVG instead of MONETA or MONETAE AVG: 65(a) – (c) and 66(a) – (b)
 PIETATE AVG instead of PIETATI AVG: Pl. 2, Fig. 2.5
 ROMAE AETERAE instead of ROMAE AETERNAE: 70(b) note
 ROMAE ATERNAE instead of ROMAE AETERNAE: Pl. 3, Fig. 2.6
 SAECVLI FLICITAS instead of SAECVLI FELICITAS: 74
 VICTO IMP TROPAEA instead of INVICTO IMP TROPAEA: 80
 Septimius Severus:
 BONA SPEI instead of BONA SPES or BONAE SPEI: 365
 BONI SPES instead of BONA SPES: 367
 BONI EVENTVC⁸ instead of BONI EVENTVS: 369 note
 FELICIT TEMPOM instead of FELICIT TEMPOR: 373 note (= p. 92, 350)
 FORETVN REDUC instead of FORTVN REDVC: 382A
 FORT RDEVC instead of FORT REDVC: 385 (error, instead of 386) note
 FORT REDVG instead of FORT REDVC: p. 88, §
 FORTVI REDVC instead of FORTVN REDVC: 383B
 FORTVN REDVG instead of FORTVN REDVC: 355, 383A
 FORTVN REDVS instead of FORTVN REDVC: Pl. 4, Fig. 3.3
 FORTVNA REDVCI instead of FORTVNAE REDVCI: 381, 385
 FORTVNAE RE REDVC instead of FORTVNAE REDVC: p. 93, 364
 I(?)MP VI RIB POT IIII CO[S...] instead of IMP VI TRIB POT IIII CO[S...]: 436
 INVICTO IMP TROPEA instead of INVICTO IMP TROPAEA: 393
 INVICTO IMP TROPEI instead of INVICTO IMP TROPAEA: 394
 LIBERT AVG instead of LIBERAL AVG: 400 note
 LIR AVG instead of LIBER AVG: 403A
 LIRERAL AVG instead of LIBERAL AVG: p. 95, 372
 MAREI VICT instead of MARTI VICT:405B
 MONETA II AVG instead of MONETAE AVG: 412
 POMA AETERNA instead of ROMA AETERNA: 414 note
 SAECVLL FELLICIT instead of SAECVL FELICIT: 418B (= p. 98, 392)
 VENVP VICT instead of VENVS VICT: 419 (= p. 98, *)
 VIRTUTE AVG instead of VIRTUTI AVG: 431 and 431A

The above listing shows that even though the irregular abbreviations (AV instead of AVG, CAE instead of CAES, C and CO instead of COS) and the more numerous errors can be found with equal presence on the Antioch denarii of Pes-

⁸ Or EVENTUC.

cennius Niger and Septimius Severus (their higher number on the coins of the latter emperor is only due to the longer period of their effective issue), these are peculiarities and errors that are different for the two emperors, although some of them may have been of the same provenance.

As a starting point for our further interpretation, let us make a classification of the above legends according to various types of character errors that can be divided into six groups: (a) engraver's omission of a certain character, (b) only a fragment of a given character is etched into the stamp die, (c) a superfluous character is etched, (d) letters in a legend are interchanged, (e) a different, incorrect, letter is etched in a given Latin word, (f) up to several of these errors are made in one and the same legend.

The group "a", apart from A<V>G(ustus)⁹ in the title abbreviation on Niger's denarii and C<A>E(sar) in Severus' titles, comprises the following reverse legends of the denarii of the both emperors: CERERI FRVGIFER<A>E, CERERI FRV<GI>FER(ae), ROMAE AETER<N>AE and ROMAE A<E>TERNAE, SAECVLI F<E>LICITAS on the coins of the former, and FELICIT(as) TEMPO<RV>M¹⁰ FORTVNA<E> REDVCI, INVICTO IMP(eratori) TROP<A>EA, LI<BE>R(alitas) AVG(usti) and <T>RIB(unicia) POT(estate) IIII, on those of the latter. Most of the errors in this group are accidental omissions probably due to the engraver's unfamiliarity with Latin,¹¹ although the spelling CE, instead of CAE, FRVGIFERE, instead of FRVGIFERAE, and TROPEA, instead of TROPAEA, may just as well have been caused by the conscious adoption of the phonetic representation, in line with the then already disseminated pronunciation of the diphthong *ae* as *e* (in the provinces).¹² It may be assumed then that the reverses with the traditional correct spelling of the diphthong had been executed on the basis of a recorded example, whereas the legends with AE reduced to E are the result of the etching "on hearing." In that case, the engraver would not have been someone totally unacquainted with Latin, but most likely a Greek¹³ with a very basic knowledge of Latin, rather spoken than written. This group would also include the VICTO IMP TROPAEA, for the iconography of the reverse suggests that there should be the legend

⁹ Angle brackets <> are used herein to denote letters omitted or changed by mistake, curly b. - {} - letters etched by mistake, round b. - () - complementation of abbreviations.

¹⁰ It is also possible that the engraver had used an untypical abbreviation, unattested on other coins (not only those of Severus), or, intended to use the well-known abbreviation TEMPOR and put a wrong letter at the end.

¹¹ As most mistakes are interpreted by BUTTREY, "The President's Address," pp. IX-X.

¹² This pronunciation is confirmed in various notes of the 4th- and 5th-century grammarians (see, e.g., Servius, *In Don.* 421, 17 K and Pompeius, 285, 6 K), but some extant letters of a Greek-born freedman, Gaius Novius Eunus of Puteola, preserved on tablets, attest to the consistent rendering of *ae* as *e* in as early as the first half of the 1st century AD (see, e.g., J.N. ADAMS, "The Latinity of C. Novius Eunus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 82 (1990), pp. 227-247).

¹³ On the influence of Greek on errors in Latin coin legends, see below.

INVICTO IMP TROPAEA (an abbreviated legend e.g. VICTO(ris) IMP(eratoris) TROPAEA seems to be much less plausible).

The group “b” shall comprise the absent in the *RIC* IV (but noted by Buttrey)¹⁴ Niger’s legend FE{I}<L>ICITAS TEMPORVM and MONETAE AV{c}<G>, and Severus’ legend FORTV{I}<N>(ae) REDVC(i) and {P}<R>OMA AETERNA. Let us take note of the latter example: POMA AETERNA – a variant of the fairly popular type of Severus’ denarius *RIC* IV/1 414, which, if one assumes that the Greek had been the engraver’s first language, can be viewed as an accidental Greek-Roman amalgamation (P would be the Greek character *rho* – “P”, not the Latin “R”, without the slanting *hasta*).

The group “c” includes INVICTO IMP(eratori) TROP{H}AEA on the reverses of Niger’s denarii, in which legend the insertion of “H” may be seen as a mistake as much as an admissible, from the viewpoint of language development, variant of a Latin transcription of the Greek τροπαιον, as well as FOR{E}TVN(ae) REDUC(i), FORTVNAE {RE} REDVC(i) and SAECVL{L}(i) FEL{L}ICIT(as) in the legends of the reverses of Severus’ coins. The same group shall also include the erroneous attribution of a third consulship to that emperor on a coin dated to the year 194 or 195: CO(nsul) III instead of II. Moreover, this group should very likely also comprise an abbreviation that is fairly frequent in Niger’s titles on his denarii, namely IVSTI, instead of IVST(us), as the *gen.* form suggested by “I” is not logically justifiable here. It may be assumed, however, that in the present case it is not so much an ungrammatical Latin form as an ending transferred automatically from an abbreviated form of the Greek rendition of the Latin *Iustus* – Δίκαιος, i.e., ΔΙ, which can be found on the obverses of certain Antiochene tetradrachms of Niger.¹⁵

The group “d” comprises the interchanged titles of the two emperors: ACES instead of CAES(ar) in the obverse legend of Niger’s denarii, OCS instead of COS(ar) on Severus’ coin, and, in his titles, his second consulship shifted to a position before the abbreviated office inscription: II C(onsul) and II CO(nsul), as well as FORT(unae) RDEVC instead of REDVC(i), on the reverse of one of his denarius types.

The group “e” comprises the following reverse legends of Niger’s denarii: CE{L}<R>ERI¹⁶ FRVGIFER(ae), CERERI FRVGIFER{I}<AE>, FIDEI EXERCITV{I}<S>, I{M}<N>VI{S}<C>TO IMPER(atori), INVI{S}<C>TO

¹⁴ BUTTREY, “The President’s Address,” p. X.

¹⁵ See Pl. 1, Fig. 1.1. (=McALEE, *The Coins of Roman Antioch*, p. 261: no. 655A) and M. and K. PRIEUR, *Syro-Phoenician Tetradrachms and their Fractions from 57 BC to AD 253*, Lancaster and London 2000, no. 177 v.) and Pl. 2, Figs. 2.1 and 2.3 – 2.5.

¹⁶ Although this particular legend is grammatically correct, it does not make much sense; of course, the actual meaning reads “harvest-bringing Cereris,” not the “swift” one.

IMP(eratori) and IMPER, MINER(vae) VICTRI{S}<C>(i),¹⁷ PIETAT{E}<I>AVG(usti), and those of Severus: BON{I}<A>SPES,¹⁸ BONI EVENTV{C}<S>, FORT(unae) and FORTVN(ae) REDV{G}<C>(i), FORTVN(ae) REDV{S}<C>(i), LI{R}ERAL(itati) AVG(usti), MAR{E}<T>IVICT(ori), MONETA{II}<E> AVG(usti), VENV{P}<S> VICT(rix) and VIRTVT{E}<I>AVG(usti). The reverse legend of Niger's denarii MONETE AVG(usti) may be categorized just as well into the group "a" or "e," as for his coinage the attested forms are in the *nom.* MONETA AVG(usti), in the *gen.*, or in the dedicatory *dat.* MONETAE AVG(usti).¹⁹ It is similar to the inscription BONA SPEI on the denarii of Severus, as the reverses of his coins from Antioch feature both forms: the *nom.* BONA SPES and the *gen.* BONAE SPEI.²⁰ On the other hand, the form PIETATE AVG on a very rare denarius of Niger should be most likely interpreted as the *abl.*, used in error instead of the dedicatory *dat.*, although the juxtaposition of this legend and the representation of Fides,²¹ which is identical to that on the reverses with the legend BONI EVENTVS,²² if not completely accidental, may also convey the following message based on associations with the more popular denarii of the ruler: the faith (*Fides*) in an auspicious outcome (*Bonus Eventus*) is possible thanks to the piety (*abl.: Pietate*) of *Augustus*. A separate group is formed by the erroneous spellings of IMVISTO, INVISTO IMPER, and MINER VICTRIS, on the reverses of the denarii of Niger as well as FORTVN REDVS and BONI EVENTVC on the reverse of a denarius of Severus. In the first four legends, "S" instead of "C" seems to have stemmed from the wish for some ill-conceived Latin correctness: knowing that the Latin character "S" corresponds to the Greek lunar *sigma*, the engraver put it in the place of the Latin "C," so as to stress the fact of his acquaintance with Latin lettering, whereas on the coin of Severus "C" in EVENTVC is apparently exactly the lunar *sigma*.

¹⁷ Also possible is an emendation of the form in *nom.*: MINER(va) VICTRI(x), but the dedicatory *dat.* appears to be more likely, as in Severus' coinage from Antioch the abbreviation MINER VICTRIC is well attested, clearly suggestive of a dedication here (*BMCRE V*, at no. 309, lists the said coin *RIC IV 60* with a mistaken description of the rev. legend MINER VICTRIC – cf. tables Pl. 13, 19 in the *BMCRE V*, and Pl. 2, 6 in the *RIC IV/1*; for the coins of Severus, see *RIC IV/1 409* and *410*).

¹⁸ The reason why the erroneous adjective form appears here (*gen. sing. for masc.*, instead of *fem.*) may have been likely due to an automatic copying of the first segment of the legend BONI EVENTVS, common on the Eastern denarii of Severus (cf. *RIC IV/1 352, 369, 369A*).

¹⁹ MONETA AVG: *RIC IV/1 63(a)* and (b); MONETAE AVG: *RIC IV/1 64 (a)–(c)*.

²⁰ BONA SPES: *RIC IV/1 364*; BONAE SPEI: *RIC IV/1 351A, 366(a)–(c)*.

²¹ See Pl. 2, Fig. 2.5. On the connection between the personification of Fides with the legend BONI EVENTVS on the denarii of Niger and Severus, and (mistakenly) with BONA SPES on those of Severus, see B. AWIANOWICZ, "Rzadki denar Septymiusza Sewera z legendą rewersu BONA SPES z Wiednia" / "Rare denarius of Septimius Severus with reverse legend BONA SPES from Vienna," *Wiadomości Numizmatyczne LIV* (2010), 1 (189), pp. 73–82.

²² See *RIC IV/1 5(a)–(f)* and 6.

The last group (f) is composed of such legends as that on the reverse of Niger's denarius: <C>{FR}<ER>{F}<E>R(i) FRVG(iferae), where "C" is omitted and the character "E" twice is substituted by "F" ; <CERERI> FR<VGI>F<E>R{F}<AE> or FR<VGI>F(erae) {AVG}, where CERERI is omitted, the abbreviation FRVGIF or FRVGIFER very corrupted and AVG added mistakenly; as well as CE{L}<R>ERI FRVGIFER<A>E with one substituted and one omitted character and INVICTO IMP(ER)<A>T{A}(ori), very likely with an untypical abbreviation (the middle "ER" being omitted), the characters "T" and "A" interchanged, and INVICTO <I>MPERA{I}<T>, where the initial "I" is omitted, while the final "I" is a "T" with the upper *hasta* missing. The latter group would also include I<V>STI in the cognomen adopted by Niger, in which "V" is erroneously omitted, whereas the final "I," like in the case of the abbreviation IVSTI, appears to be a superfluous addition, perhaps influenced by a Greek abbreviation of the counterpart of the cognomen *Iustus* – ΔΙ(καίος).

Among the peculiarities of the denarii minted at Antioch for Pescennius Niger and Septimius Severus, let us take note of the aforementioned abbreviations: A(ugustus) and AV(gustus),²³ which are attested in the titulature on the obverses of the denarii of the former ruler, as well as CA(esar) and CAE(sar),²⁴ present on the obverses of the latter. The use of the first form has never been evidenced in the Imperial coinage before, whereas the other one is attested merely in more than ten types of Nero's quadrantes, two variants of Vespasianus' denarii, as well as a Roman denarius and an Eastern aureus of Hadrian,²⁵ while for the overwhelming majority of Imperial coins, beginning from Augustus, these and most of the other abbreviations would be finished with a consonant. The origin of the abbreviations ending in a vowel can be fairly easily explained by citing, as their immediate context, the provincial coinage of the Greek-speaking area of the Empire. In fact, as early as the Antoninian dynasty, in a majority of the Eastern mints, from Moesia and Thrace, through Asia Minor and Syria, to Egypt, KAI was used as a prevailing abbreviated form of the Greek transcription of the title *Caesar* – Καῖσαρ, while in the case of the Greek transcription of the *nomen gentile* of Marcus Aurelius,

²³ See Pls. 2 and 3, Figs. 2.1., 2.2., 2.3. and 2.9. (AV), 2.4. and 2.7. (A).

²⁴ See Pls. 4 and 5, Figs. 3.1. – 3.6. (CAE) and 3.7. (CA).

²⁵ See C.H.V. SUTHERLAND, R.A.G. CARSON, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. I: From 31 BC to AD 69, London 1984, *Nero*, nos. 126, 127, 251, 252, 255, 256-258, 260-262, 317, 321, and 322; I.A. CARRADICE, T.V. BUTTREY, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. II, part I (second fully revised edition): from AD 69-96: Vespasian to Domitian, London 2007, *Vespasian*, nos. 159 and 190; H. MATTINGLY, E.A. SYDENHAM, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. II: Vespasian to Hadrian, London 1926, *Hadrian*, nos. 22c and 145 (the aureus struck at an unidentified Eastern mint). The abbr. CAE began to be used on a wider scale for the coins minted in Rome only in Trajan Decius' reign (see the antoniniani of Hostilianus: H. MATTINGLY, E. A. SYDENHAM, C.H.V. SUTHERLAND, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. IV, part II: *Gordian III – Uranian Antoninus*, London 1949, nos. 186, 189, and 190-192).

Lucius Verrus, Commodus, and later of Caracalla and Heliogabalus – Ἀυρελῖος,²⁶ the coins from various Greek-speaking centres would have, more often than not, the abbreviations A and AV, instead of AVP, more directly corresponding to the Latin AVR.²⁷ In consequence, A, AV, CA, and CAE appeared on the obverses of the denarii of Niger and Severus as a result of the customary practice used by Greek-speaking engravers, who would have likely worked before on the dies of provincial coins from the mints of Antioch or some other centres in Asia Minor and Syria.²⁸

The hypothesis of the Greek origin of the engravers active at the Syrian mint, working for Pescennius Niger and afterwards for Septimius Severus, is supported by the legends of the denarii struck there as well as their lettering. It turns out that the engravers encountered particular difficulties with those Latin characters that were non-existent in the Greek alphabet.²⁹ A very good example may be the “F” in the legend FORTVNAE REDVCI or its abbreviated form FORTVN REDVC: the re-creation of this letter that would have more or less closely resembled the denarii legends used by the mint of Rome is relatively rare,³⁰ more frequently, on the coins of Niger and Severus alike, the “F” is there with a clearly marked additional horizontal *hasta* (to left, at the bottom of the character),³¹ and, for Niger’s denarii, a thickly engraved “F,” very much like “Γ.”³² The engravers of Antioch would also have some difficulties with the character “R,” sometimes missing the vertical *hasta*, thus making the letter resemble the miniscule-style *lambda* – “λ”³³ or,

²⁶ As for legends in Greek, it is much more difficult to find an analogy with the abbreviation AV, from *Augustus* / Gr. Ἀυγουστος, as this title would be usually rendered (also at Antioch) in Greek as σεβαστος (abbr. CEB).

²⁷ See the legend AVT K M A ANTΩNEINOC CEB and similar ones on some of the tetradrachms of Caracalla minted at Antioch (McALEE, *The Coins of Roman Antioch*, pp. 270–274: nos. 677–695, including 694A with M AY instead of the prevailing M A); whereas in the period of about 30 years preceding the Antioch issues of denarii of Niger and Severus, A – as an undisputed abbreviation from Ἀυρελῖος – had appeared in the titles of Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verrus, and Commodus on the coins of, e.g., Nikaia in Bithynia (W. SZAIVERT, C. DABURON, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum Österreich: Sammlung Leybold, Wiener Neustadt. Kleinasiathe Münzen der Kaiserzeit*, Band I: *Pontus – Lydien*, Wien 2000, Band II: *Phrygien – Kommagene*, Wien 2004, no. 154 – thereafter as SNG Leybold), while AV / AY on the coins of Iuliopolis and Nikomedia (SNG Leybold 117 and 216), Germe (SNG Leybold 314), Ephesus (SNG Leybold 567 and 568), Magnesia (SNG Leybold 655), Antiochia ad Maeandrum (SNG Leybold 793), Dioshieron and Hierokaisarea in Lydia (SNG Leybold 934 and 973), Laodicaea in Phrygia and Smyrna (SNG Leybold 1670 and 757.1), as well as Anazarbos, Laerte, Syedra, and Titiopolis in Cilicia (SNG Leybold 2229, 2507, 2640 and 2718). There are as many examples from the coinage of Caracalla, Heliogabalus, and Severus Alexander, but, for obvious reasons of chronology, they are not of as much relevance to our discussion.

²⁸ It is worth noting that on the well-represented coinage of Severus Alexander the abbreviations CAE and AV (either *Augustus* or *Aurelius*) can be found only for some single denarii types of irregular issues minted at Antioch (H. MATTINGLY, E.A. SYDENHAM, C.H.V. SUTHERLAND, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. IV, part II: *Macrinus to Pupienus*, London 1938, nos. 297 and 308).

²⁹ For the period in question, the alphabet used on the Greek inscriptions and coins from the territory of Syria was basically almost exclusively the classical one, composed of 24 characters.

³⁰ See Pl. 3, Fig. 2.9. and Pl. 4, Fig. 3.5.

³¹ See Pl. 3, Fig. 2.8. and Pl. 4, Figs. 3.1 - 3.4.

³² See Pl. 3, Fig. 2.7.

³³ See Pl. 4, Fig. 3.2.

occasionally, “A,”³⁴ alongside the evident problems with the “G,” which, on some of the dies of the both rulers, is in no way different from “C.”³⁵

The above errors and other peculiarities of the legends of the denarii of both Pescennius Niger and Septimius Severus from the location identified as the mint of Antioch corroborate Buttrey’s conclusions, in whose opinion some of them are so similar that “they must have been cut by the same engravers,” who would often have made the same mistakes.³⁶ The analogies are evident in the errors themselves, but also in the peculiar shape of some individual letters, perhaps indicative of the same author. Some of the errors and peculiar abbreviations are present only on the coins of just one pretender to the Imperial throne, the most significant example being the consistent use of the abbreviated form CAES on the denarii of Niger and AVG on those of Severus. Therefore, it may be conjectured that there would have been a personnel rotation among the engravers charged with the execution of obverse dies, who may have been assigned to the reverse-striking part of the minting process or removed following Severus’ takeover of the mint. Nonetheless, irrespective of these differences in the errors of obverse, and some of the reverse, legends, it can be seen very clearly that most of them were due to the engravers’ insufficient acquaintance with Latin, thus leading to their rather undisciplined treatment of traditional Latin abbreviations, mistakes indicative of the use of phonetic transcription, and the difficulties with re-creating particularly those characters that were absent in the Greek alphabet. It may be then highly probable that the striking of the denarii for the troops of Pescennius Niger and, subsequently, Septimius Severus was entrusted to the minters previously involved in the production of local coins with Greek legends, and usually of a larger diameter, facilitating proper legend arrangements. Considering our current state of knowledge, it is not possible to resolve whether those denarii had been minted only by the then active engravers of the tetradrachms at Antioch (certain similarities in Niger’s depiction appear to point to their work³⁷) or also by some other engravers brought from other centres in Syria and Asia Minor. Without the latter ones, however, it would be difficult to imagine such a diversity of die variants and the simultaneous existence of the correct legends, at times in several declension variants and different abbreviations, and the legends marked by a variety of errors.

Contact the author at: bartosz.awianowicz@umk.pl

Translated by Marcin Fijak

³⁴ See Pl. 5, Fig. 3.6.

³⁵ See Pl. 2, Fig. 2.4. and Pl. 5, Fig. 3.7.

³⁶ See BUTTREY, “The President’s Address,” p. xxi: “dies of Severus’ early eastern denarii not only copy many of Niger’s types, but do so so closely that they must have been cut by the same engravers. (...) Meanwhile the same engravers were making the same mistakes.”

³⁷ Cf. Pl. 1, Fig. 1.1. and Pls. 2 and 3, Figs. 2.1 – 2.9.

STRESZCZENIE

Osobliwości i błędy w legendach denarów Pescenniusza Nigra oraz Septymiusza Sewera przypisywanych Antiochii

Denary Pescenniusza Nigra (bite od czerwca 193 do drugiej połowy 194 r.) oraz Septymiusza Sewera (bite we wschodnich mennicach w latach 193–196/7) służyły głównie opłaceniu kampanii wojskowych. Znaczna część z nich, jak dowodzą podobieństwa stylistyczne oraz analogiczne legendy na denarach obydwu władców, pochodzi z tego samego warsztatu: albo Antiochii, albo ruchomej mennicy Nigra, przejętej przez Sewera. Na tę samą mennicę wskazują również błędy w legendach, które można podzielić na sześć grup: (a) grawer pominął jakąś literę (np. CERERI FRVFER na rewersie monet Nigra lub CE w tytulaturze Sewera); (b) nie wyrył w stemplu całej litery, lecz jedynie jej część (np. MONETAE AVC na rewersie denarów Nigra lub POMA AETERNA na rewersie monet Sewera); (c) grawer wyrył o jakąś literę za dużo (np. IVSTI w tytulaturze awersu monet Nigra lub SAECVLL(i) FELLICIT(as) na rewersie denarów Sewera); (d) przestawił litery (np. ACES w legendzie awersu denarów pierwszego i OCS w tytulaturze drugiego z cesarzy); (e) wyrył inną literę, niż powinna być w danym wyrazie łacińskim (np. błąd logiczny CELERI FRVGIFER(ae) na rewersie denarów Nigra lub BONI EVENTVC na rewersie monet Sewera); w ostatnim z wyróżnionych typów (f) grawer popełnił kilka wymienionych wyżej błędów w jednej legendzie jednocześnie (np. CELERI FRFRF na rewersie denara Nigra). Osobną grupę stanowią nietypowe formy skrótowe niepoświadczone dla monet bitych w Rzymie lub poświadczone jedynie dla nielicznych typów, zwłaszcza A(ugustus) i AV(gustus) w tytulaturze na awersach denarów Nigra oraz CA(esar) i CAE(sar) w tytulaturze Sewera. Zarówno wspomniane błędy i skróty, jak też liternictwo wskazują, że produkcję denarów na użytek wojska najpierw Pescenniusza Nigra, a następnie Septymiusza Sewera powierzono mincerzom wytwarzającym wcześniej monetę lokalną z greckimi legendami i zwykle o większej średnicy, ułatwiającej właściwe rozplanowanie legend. Obecny stan wiedzy nie pozwala jedynie rozstrzygnąć, czy owe denary bili tylko dotychczasowi antiochijscy wytwórcy tetradrachm, czy również rytownicy sprowadzeni z innych ośrodków Syrii i/lub Azji Mniejszej, których udział w produkcji zdaje się sugerować mnogość wariantów stempli oraz równoległe występowanie legend zawierających rozmaite błędy i inne osobliwości.

PLATE 1

Fig. 1. Tetradrachms of Pescennius Niger and Septimius Severus struck at Antioch

- 1.1. Pescennius Niger, tetradrachm, Antioch, 193–194 (Prieur 177 var.; McAlee 655A): obv. AVTOK. KAICAP Γ. ΠΕCK NIGΠΘ ΔI; rev. [ΠIΠO]NOIA Θ<E>ΘN.
Photo: NAC AG, Auction 39 (16.05.2007), 132.
- 1.2. Septimius Severus, tetradrachm, Antioch, 202–211 (Prieur 185; McAlee 656): obv. AVT. KAI. CEOVHPOC CE.B.; rev. ΔHMAPX EΞ VIATO. Γ.
Photo: egb.fr numismatique.
- 1.3. Septimius Severus, tetradrachm, Antioch, 202–211 (Prieur 200; McAlee 659): obv. AVT. KAI. CEOVHPOC CEB.; rev. ΔHMAPX EΞ VIATO. Γ.
Photo: Sincona AG, Auction 1 (29.06.2011), 93.

PLATE 2

Fig. 2. Denarii of Pescennius Niger struck at Antioch

- 2.1. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (RIC IV 11): obv. IMP CAES [C P] ESCEN NIGER IVSTI AV; rev. CELERI FRVG[IF]ER
Photo: Heritage Auctions, Inc., 2011 April Heritage-Gemini Signature Ancient Coins Auction (14.04.2011), 375.
- 2.2. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (RIC IV -; BCRE V -): obv. IMP CAES PESC NIGER IVST AV; rev. CELERI FRVGIFERE Photo: F. R. Künker GmbH and Co. KG, Auction 243 (21.11.2013), 4939.
- 2.3. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (obv. RIC IV 34b, rev. RIC IV 32): obv. IMP CAES C PESC NIGER IVSTI AV; rev. INVISTO IMPER
Photo: Pegasi Numismatics, Auction XXII (20.04.2010), 503.
- 2.4. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (see RIC IV 64(b) – unrecorded variant of the obv. and rev. legend): obv. IMP [CAES] C PESCE NIGER IVSTI A; rev. MONETAE AVC
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, 10th eAuction (14.07.2011), 360.
- 2.5. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (variant with the rev. legend unrecorded in the RIC IV): obv. IMP CAES C PESCEN NIGER IVSTI AVG; ev. PIETATE AVG
Photo: Fritz Rudolf Künker GmbH and Co. KG, Auction 133 (11.10.2007), 8953.

PLATE 3

- 2.6. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (variant with the rev. legend unrecorded in the RIC IV): obv. [IMP CAES C PESCEN?] NIGER IVSTI A; rev. ROMAE ATERNAE
Photo: Gerhard Hirsch Nachfolger, Auction 248–249 (06.02.2007), 2001.
- 2.7. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (see RIC IV 26(b) – variant of the obv. legend without C in PESC): obv. IMP CAES C PES NIGER IVS A; rev. FORTVNAE REDVCI
Photo: Jean Elsen & ses Fils S.A., Auction 86 (10.12.2005), 288.
- 2.8. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (see RIC IV 26 – different variant of the obv. legend): obv. IMP CAES C PESCE NIGER IVS AVG; rev. FORTVNAE REDVCI
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Auction New York 2009 (11.01.2009), 112.
- 2.9. Pescennius Niger, denarius, Antioch, 193–194 (see RIC IV 29 – different variant of the obv. and rev. legend): obv. IMP CAES C PESC NIGER IVS AV; rev. FORTVNAE REDVC
Photo: Numismatik Lanz München, Auction 114 (26.05.2003), 447.

PLATE 4

Fig. 3. Denarii of Septimius Severus struck at Antioch

- 3.1. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (RIC IV 377): obv. IMP CAE L SEP SEV PERT AVG COS II; rev. FORTVN REDVC
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Summer Auction 2010 (13.09.2010), 809.
- 3.2. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (RIC IV 377): obv. IMP CAE L SEP SEV PERT AVG COS II; rev. FORTVN R[EDVC]
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Summer Auction 2008 (15.09.2008), 692.
- 3.3. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (RIC IV 377): obv. IMP CAE L SEP SEV [PERT AVG] COS II; rev. FORTVN REDVS
Photo from the author's archive, by Magdalena Awianowicz.
- 3.4. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (RIC IV 379): obv. IMP CAE L SEP SEV PERT AVG COS II; rev. FORTVN REDVC
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Auction 91 (05.12.2012), 433.
- 3.5. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (RIC IV 381): obv. IMP CAE L SEP SEV PERT AVG COS II; rev. FORTVNA REDVCI.
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Summer Auction 2011 (19.09.2011), 756.

PLATE 5

- 3.6. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (obv. RIC IV 364 ff., rev. RIC IV Julia Domna 630): obv. IMP CAE L [SEP SEV] PERT AVG COS II; rev. VENER VICT
Photo: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Auction 90 (04.06.2012), 550.
- 3.7. Septimius Severus, denarius, Antioch, 194–195 (see RIC IV 425 – different variant of the obv. legend): obv. [IMP] CA L SEP SEV PER AVG COS II; rev. VICTOR AVG
Photo from the author's archive, by Magdalena Awianowicz.



1.1



1.2



1.3



2.1



2.2



2.3



2.4



2.5



2.6



2.7



2.8



2.9



3.1



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



3.6



3.7