

DIES ALLIENSIS

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The civil wars of the late Roman Republic and the founding of the principate engendered a vast coinage, its types and legends many and frequently novel, its propaganda innovative in its directness.¹ Once in power, the Julio-Claudians celebrated duller themes; the message on the coins became more restrained. The last years of the dynasty and the ensuing struggle for power produced once more a flood of new or recast ideas. The coins, documents of the programs of emperors and rebels, present their claims and aspirations, some of them formidable: the Gallic insurgents' *SALVS GENERIS HVMANI*; Otho's *PAX ORBIS TERRARVM*. To be interpreted, the coins must be dated, placed against a background of specific events. Precise chronology has especial importance in times of civil war, when propaganda may respond to swift and radical changes in the historical situation. In the course of a die-study of the coins of Vitellius, I have tried to clarify the chronology of Vitellian coins struck by the mint at Rome.²

Of these coins, the gold and silver issue can readily be assorted into four series on the basis of obverse type and legend:³

Series I: head of Vitellius, bare; legend *A VITELLIVS GERMANICVS IMP*.

¹ For suggestions made at several points, I am indebted to Profs. T. V. Buttrey and J. W. Eadie of the University of Michigan and R. S. Stewart of Columbia University. In what follows, *BMC* stands for H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 1 (London 1923). All references to Tacitus are to the *Historiae*. Coin legends are frequently denoted by continuous capitals. All dates are A.D.

² Vitellian coins were issued also by two provincial mints, one in Spain (perhaps Tarraco), the other in Gaul (Lugdunum).

³ For fuller descriptions, *BMC* 368–74. With the exception of one *sestertius* die, Vitellian coins of the Roman mint have the obverse portrait facing right.

Series II: head of Vitellius, bare; legend A VITELLIVS GERMAN IMP TR P.

Series III: head of Vitellius, laureate; legend A VITELLIVS GERMAN IMP TR P.

Series IV: head of Vitellius, laureate; legend A VITELLIVS GERM IMP AVG TR P.

The reverse types appearing on this issue are:

1. CONCORDIA P R, Concordia seated, left.
2. FIDES EXERCITVVM, clasped hands.
3. IVPPITER VICTOR, Juppiter seated, left.
4. LIBERI IMP GERMAN, busts of Vitellius' two children, facing one another.
5. LIBERI IMP GERM AVG, busts of Vitellius' children, as above.
6. LIBERTAS RESTITVTA, Libertas standing.
7. L VITELLIVS COS III CENSOR, bust of the emperor's father, right.
8. L VITELLIVS COS III CENSOR, the emperor's father seated, left.
9. PONT(ifex) MAXIM(us), Vesta seated, left.
10. SPQR OB C(ives) S(ervatos), in oak wreath.
11. XXVIR SACR(is) FAC(iundis), tripod with dolphin and raven.
12. Victoria seated, left; no legend.

These reverse types occur with the obverse Series as follows:

	Series	I	II	III	IV
CONCORDIA P R		×	×	×	×
FIDES EXERCITVVM		×			
IVPPITER VICTOR		×	×	×	×
LIBERI IMP GERMAN				×	×
LIBERI IMP GERM AVG					×
LIBERTAS RESTITVTA				×	×
L VITELLIVS (bust)				×	×
L VITELLIVS (figure)					×
PONT MAXIM					×
SPQR OB C S		×		×	
XVVIR SACR FAC		×	×	×	×
Victoria seated		×	×	×	×

Series I and II appear in silver only, Series III and IV in both silver and gold. From 930 specimens whose dies could be distinguished on both faces, I identified 479 obverse dies and 542 reverse dies. Series I contains 62 obverse dies; Series II, 7; Series III, 121; Series IV, 289.

The bronze coinage of the Roman mint—*asses*, *dupondii*, and *sestertii*—has an obverse bust of Vitellius, laureate, with the legend A VITELLIVS GERM(-A, -AN, -ANICVS) IMP AVG P M TR P; there are numerous reverse types.⁴

Otho's forces were defeated at Bedriacum on 14 April, 69; Otho was a suicide on the morning of the 16th.⁵ On the 19th, in Rome, the senate decreed to Vitellius *cuncta longis aliorum principatibus composita*; the Fratres Arvales celebrated the date as Vitellius' *dies imperii*.⁶ This is the *terminus a quo* for the Roman mint's issue of Vitellian coins.

That Series I was the first to be struck can be inferred from the lack of imperial attributes. Vitellius' head is bare; the legend is the simple A VITELLIVS GERMANICVS IMP.⁷ Of the six reverse types which appear in this Series, SPQR OB C S is an anomaly: it is found on only one die, which links to Series III, where it properly belongs (26 dies). Two of the reverse types, IVPPITER VICTOR and Victoria seated, emphasize the recent victory and make up a great proportion of the reverse dies used with Series I.⁸ Another, FIDES EXERCITVVM, was used on earlier anonymous⁹ Gallic issues and

⁴ BMC 375-83.

⁵ L. Holzapfel, "Römische Kaiserdaten," *Klio* 13 (1913) 293-95. These dates are not absolutely certain, and conceivably might be late by one or two days.

⁶ *Ibid.* 294; *CIL* 6.2051.1, lines 84 ff.; Tac. 2.55, who is in close accord: *Ceriales ludi . . . spectabantur*, the news being announced in *theatrum*. The celebration ran from 12 to 19 April, with the *circenses* on the last day: *CIL* 1, pp. 305, 317, 341.

⁷ For *Germanicus* and *Imperator*, assumed in January, see Tac. 1.57, 62 and Plut. *Galba* 22.6-7.

⁸ 28 of 88 dies (31.8%). In Series II, they are 3 of 12 (25%); in Series III, 24 of 140 (17.1%); in Series IV, 12 of 314 (3.8%). These reverse figures total to more than 542 because 11 dies appear in more than one obverse Series. The above figures and those in n. 28 are calculated from dies. I have checked them against, first, counts of my specimens by metal and type, and second, some 250 *denarii* reported in the published hoards that I have read to date. Naturally there are significant discrepancies in the rarer types (which tend to be over-represented in collections and auction catalogues), but all the evidence for the common types is in general accord. See n. 26.

⁹ BMC 305-6. Mattingly assigned these latter to upper Germany, late 68-early 69, but they come from the same mint as the later Vitellian Gallic issues and are to be

does not appear in the other Roman Series. Moreover, Vitellius was still in Gaul, and the obverse portraits of Series I—as of Series II and III—are vigorous ones that often resemble Othonian coin portraits; not until Series IV (issued, as we shall see, after Vitellius reached Rome) do we find the jowled, rounded head and huge nose also found on the bronze, a more realistic depiction.¹⁰

At the previous elevation of an emperor (15 January), the senate had decreed to Otho *tribunicia potestas et nomen Augusti et omnes principum honores*.¹¹ Tacitus is less precise in 2.55, but surely the specific *honores* were included in the *cuncta . . . composita* of 19 April, and indeed Vitellius soon sent an edict from Lugdunum in which he rejected the titles Augustus and Caesar.¹² It might be argued that 30 April, when the Fratres Arvales immolated several beasts *ob comitia trib pot ||||| Germanici Imp*,¹³ is a *terminus* between Series I and II, the latter adding TR P to the obverse legend. But Otho's *comitia* had been celebrated on 28 February, forty-four days after the senate had granted his *tribunicia potestas*; ¹⁴ all of Otho's coins bear TR P, and it is difficult to believe that he delayed their issue until after what was, in effect, a formality. The same may well be true of Vitellius, and although an issue's quantity is no precise guide to its duration, Series I was not insubstantial.

Series II is transitional: it introduces no reverse types and continues the bare head of Series I; but, like Series III, it has TR P in the obverse legend and drops the FIDES EXERCITVVM reverse. Series III bears the *cuncta . . . composita*: TR P; a laureate head; the reverse type SPQR OB C S, a traditional accession issue recalling Augustus' claim

considered as anonymous Vitellian coins. They thus date from early January to some time before 19 April, 69. Galba (and Vindex) had followed this anonymous practice: *BMC* clxxxix, 288 ff.

¹⁰ Compare *BMC* pl. 60, #11–26, with, e.g., pl. 61, #1, 5, 8; for the bronze, pl. 62–64. The early portrait is also found in Series IV, *BMC* pl. 61, #4, 12. The Gallic mint, which presumably knew from the start what Vitellius looked like, always produced a realistic portrait: *BMC* pl. 62, #1–4, 6, 8–11 (#5, 7, and 12 are forgeries).

¹¹ Tac. 1.47; for Vespasian, 4.3: *cuncta principibus solita*.

¹² Tac. 2.62. Tacitus says *differret* of the title Augustus, but was writing in hindsight (2.90). See Suet. *Vitel.* 8.2; Tac. 1.62.

¹³ *CIL* 6.2051.1, lines 81 f. Vitellius' name is usually (as here) erased, evidently due to *damnatio memoriae*. The same occasionally occurs, perhaps in error, to his brother's name.

¹⁴ Tac. 1.47; *CIL* 6.2051.1, lines 58 ff.

to having ended civil war. Die-study tends to confirm this temporal sequence: Series I and II link to each other and to Series III; Series IV links only to Series III. Although we cannot tell when Series II and III were introduced, there is hope for dating Series IV.

Vitellius had rejected the title Augustus, but Tacitus tells us (2.90) that on the day after Vitellius reached Rome he acceded to a clamorous crowd and adopted the title. Series IV, which introduces AVG into the obverse legend and which alone uses the reverse legend LIBERI IMP GERM AVG,¹⁵ and which also alone employs the realistic portrait, must have been issued after his arrival. The same is true of the bronze coinage, which also employs the realistic portrait, has AVG in the obverse legend, and uses AVGVSTI on a number of reverse types.

A date traditionally given for Vitellius' arrival is shortly before 18 July. The argument goes as follows. Series IV introduces the reverse type PONT MAXIM, and the bronze has P M in the obverse legend. Vitellius' assumption of this priesthood, which entailed a formal *renuntiatio* before an assembly,¹⁶ undoubtedly took place at Rome. This is certainly the case, and is further evidence for placing Series IV (and the bronze) after Series I-III. But some are misled by the literary sources. Suetonius gives a brief account of Vitellius' entry and subsequent events (*Vitel.* 11.1-2):

Urbem denique ad classicum introiit paludatus ferroque succinctus, inter signa atque vexilla, sagulatis comitibus ac detectis commilitonum armis.

Magis deinde ac magis omni divino humanoque iure neglecto Alliensi die pontificatum maximum cepit. . . .

Tacitus, after a more lengthy account of the entry (2.89) and of events of the following day (2.90, including the accepting of the title Augustus), writes (2.91):

Apud civitatem cuncta interpretantem funesti ominis loco acceptum est quod maximum pontificatum adeptus Vitellius de caerimoniis publicis xv kalendas Augustas edixisset, antiquitus infausto die Cremerensi Allien-
sique cladibus: adeo omnis humani divinique iuris expers. . . .

¹⁵ The earlier legend LIBERI IMP GERMAN is used in both Series III and IV, one die being shared. This type and the L VITELLIVS COS III CENSOR (bust) were evidently introduced towards the end of Series III.

¹⁶ Mommsen, *Staatsrecht* ³ 2.1106 ff.

Since, the argument continues, Vitellius became pontifex maximus on 18 July, we not only have the *terminus a quo* for Series IV and the bronze, but also possess, through the close sequence of events in the two sources, a close approximation of the date of Vitellius' arrival in Rome. This, with Tacitus' reference (2.87) to Vitellius' army passing through *maturis iam frugibus* on the approach to Rome, is the evidence cited.

The *maturis iam frugibus* phrase means very little. It is fairly indefinite in time; it is also embedded in a stock description of the evils wrought by an army's passage, the tenor of the sentence suffering if the crops are not ripe. The sequence of events is an exiguous clue: the literary sources knew very little about Vitellius in Rome apart from a few anecdotes, generally derogatory.¹⁷ Moreover, the PONT MAXIM reverses (and the bronze) might well have been issued some time after the introduction of Series IV.

The traditional argument is thus generally weak. It founders entirely on a more serious objection. Under close inspection, the passages used to date Vitellius' priesthood are in fact contradictory. Suetonius states that Vitellius became pontifex maximus on 18 July. But what Tacitus quite clearly says is that Vitellius, having assumed (*adeptus*) the priesthood, issued an edict concerning public ceremonies on 18 July. Tacitus says nothing of when Vitellius became pontifex maximus.

It has long been recognized that Suetonius and Tacitus drew upon a common (lost) source for their accounts of the year 69.¹⁸ The words underlined in the cited passages make it clear that the common source lay behind this anecdote.¹⁹ It should be emphasized that Suetonius here shows no sign of providing additional or more precise information: he uses the same words, but contradicts Tacitus; the

¹⁷ The period from his arrival to his learning of the Vespasianic revolt in August (Suet. *Vitel.* 15.1, reckoning from January) takes up only six chapters in Tacitus, 2.90-95; see Suet. *Vitel.* 11-14; Dio 65.1.4-8.2. There is little apparent chronological order to the anecdotes, many of which appear in more than one author.

¹⁸ E.g., Ph. Fabia, *Les sources de Tacite dans les Histoires et les Annales* (Paris 1893); E. Groag, "Zur Kritik von Tacitus' Quellen in den Historien," *Jahrbücher für class. Phil., Supp.*-Band 23 (1897) 761 ff.

¹⁹ Parallels also exist in the two accounts of the entry: e.g., Tacitus' *paludatus accinctusque* (2.89). The merits of arguments that Suetonius used the *Historiae* need not concern us here: if this were the case, the error is even more evident.

passage is an excellent example of error arising from condensation. Tacitus preserves what will have been the original anecdote: Vitellius, the apex of the priestly hierarchy, made the blunder of proclaiming an edict concerning ceremonies on 18 July, one of the darkest days in Rome's past.²⁰ The punchline is preserved in both sources: Vitellius was ignorant/heedless not only of human law (*sc.* by nature) but of divine law as well, his priesthood a mockery. Suetonius is at this point giving examples of Vitellius' lack of any virtue and has compressed the rest of the anecdote into a chronological error. All that we may legitimately derive from the literary sources is that Vitellius became pontifex maximus prior to 18 July.

When, then, had Vitellius come to Rome? Tacitus tells us (2.70) that on his way to Bononia Vitellius visited the battlefield of *Bedriacum* intra quadragensimum pugnae diem; that is, sometime before 24 May, reckoning from 14 April. From Bononia to Rome was 294 Roman miles, via Ariminum.²¹ Fortunately, we are saved from depending on a computation of days of march by a piece of epigraphic evidence:²²

ISD[EM COS IIII K] IVN [M]AG VITELLI GER[M I]MP III 6
 PROMAG [L MAECIO] / POSTVMO COLL[EGI FRATR
 ARVAL NOMINE IM] MOL AD ARAM DEA[E DIAE]
 PORCAS PIAC[ULARES II] / ITEM VACC IND[E IN
 AEDE IN FOCO SACR]IFICIO FACTO IM[MOL DE]AE
 DIAE [AGNAM OPIMAM / QV]O PERFECTO [SACRIFICIO
 E CARCERIB]VS RICINIATVS CO[RONATVS] SIGNVM
 [QVADRIGIS] // ET DESVL[TORIBVS MISIT IN COLL ADF 10
 L] MAECIVS POSTVMVS. [ISDEM C]OS III NON IV[N /
 MAG VITELLI GERMANICI IMP III PR]OMAG L MAECIO
 POSTVMO [COLL FRAT]R ARVAL NOMINE [IM / MOL
 IN CAPITOLIO OB NATA]LEM GALERIAE GERMANIC[I
 IMP III A]VG IOVI B M IVN [VACC MINERVAE / VACC 13
 SALVTI P P R VACC CO]NCORD VACC GEN IPS
 TAVRV[M IN COLL ADF L MAECIV]S POSTVM[VS....]

²⁰ See *CIL* 1, pp. 324, 328; Gellius 5.17.2; Macrobius 1.16.23. The day was, however, comital.

²¹ *Itin. Ant.* 124-27.

²² *CIL* 6.2051.2, lines 6-13; G. Henzen, *Acta Fratrum Arvalium quae supersunt* (Berlin 1874) xciv-v, who saw the significance of the fragment. A complete photograph or squeeze is not available to me; A. S. Gordon, *Album of Dated Latin Inscriptions* (Berkeley 1958-65) 1.121 and pl. 53b, does not include the crucial fragment 5 (which I take the bottom of frag. 2 to be).

Line twelve is the critical one: [mol(avit) in Capitolio ob nata]lem Galeriae Germanic[i imp(eratoris) III A]ug(usti) Iovi b(ovem) m(arem), etc. [Jug. can scarcely be anything but Aug(usti)].²³ The date is 5 June: III NON IV[N] cannot be III NON IV[L], since line six contains the entry ISD[EM COS IIII K] IVN, and ours is the next entry; there is not room in line ten for the introduction of the consuls who took office on 1 July, Arrius Antoninus and Marius Celsus.²⁴ Vitellius had the title Augustus on 5 June; he was therefore in Rome by 4 June at the latest. This accords with the march from Bononia, which was thus made from sometime before 24 May to sometime before 5 June. Vitellius was evidently in something of a hurry,²⁵ but given the 294 Roman miles between Bononia and Rome, he cannot have arrived much before the 4th.

This will suffice as a *terminus*; the potential inertia of the mint in introducing new issues makes any date approximate. The following chronology will serve. Series I was introduced after 19 April; it was followed by the brief Series II and then by Series III. Series IV was issued after the early part of June, as was the bronze coinage. It is possible that the PONT MAXIM reverses and the bronze (with P M in the obverse legend) were introduced after Series IV began.

Interpretation of the coins' propaganda is not without danger, and deserves a lengthy discussion.²⁶ What follows is intended as a summary.

Series I is martial, stressing the recent victory. The later Series display a shift to more pacific messages, a more conservative image,

²³ A conceivable alternative, *Aug(ustae)*, would be far out of the normal word order. I owe this point to Prof. C. E. V. Nixon.

²⁴ Tac. 1.77, who is consistent with the inscription where it is intact: *CIL* 6.2051.1, lines 46, 63, 81. Vitellius is not, where we can check it, titled Augustus on earlier parts of the inscription, which is as far as we can go towards certifying that the *Aug* is not a stonemason's anachronism.

²⁵ In Gaul, he left his army behind and went ahead by boat (Tac. 2.59); he went from Cologne to Bononia in about a month (Tac. 2.57–70); note the impressive display of force when he entered Rome (2.89). The bulk of the army, inactive since Bedriacum, could have been sent on towards Rome. Close attention to Tacitus' narration of Vitellius' progress, supposedly slow, from Cologne to Rome is repaid with insight into the techniques of literary character assassination.

²⁶ With attention to the relative frequency of types, the prior use of types and legends, the historical situation, etc. A thesis in preparation (*Vitellius Imperator*) deals at length with the literary and numismatic sources for Vitellius' rebellion and rule.

an appeal for normalcy. The rather blatant *FIDES EXERCITVVM* is abandoned; *IVPPITER VICTOR* and *Victoria* seated are used with decreasing frequency. Series III displays the legitimate attributes of rule: *TR P*; the laureate head; the reverse *SPQR OB C S*. The quest for legitimacy (and stability) continues with the presentation of ancestry and heirs (*L VITELLIVS* and *LIBERI IMP GERMAN*): *L. Vitellius* had within memory been thrice consul, partner of *Claudius* as censor and regent during the British expedition; *Nero* and *Galba* had had no heirs. *LIBERTAS RESTITVTA*, at first thought an obvious choice, defies ready summary: there is evidence that *Vitellius* wished to avoid using the *Julio-Claudian* principate as a model.²⁷ Series IV, using *AVG* on the obverse (and on the reverse type *LIBERI IMP GERM AVG*) and introducing the *PONT MAXIM* reverse, provides further evidence of the stress on legitimacy; *SPQR OB C S* is dropped, perhaps as too blunt a reminder of the origins of *Vitellius'* rule. Through it all runs the claim (or plea) *CONCORDIA P R*. *XVVIR SACR FAC* is a puzzle; it celebrated what was now a minor accomplishment, yet is the most frequently used reverse.²⁸ *Vitellius* had been a member of the college for some time (since at least 57); he may merely have been inordinately proud of it.

The bronze, using its size, is more imaginative. Some themes are carried over: victory (*VICTORIA AVGVSTI, MARS VICTOR*); *SPQR OB CIV SERV*; another depiction of *L. Vitellius*; *CONCORD(-IA) AVGVST(-I)*. *ANNONA AVGVSTI* and *CERES AVGVSTI* represent the emperor as guarantor of the grain supply. Finally, a number of more abstract claims: *AEQVITAS AVGVSTI, HONOS*

²⁷ An argument sufficient for the point would require considerable space. The evidence is diffuse, and is obscured by the fact that a basic question is to date not firmly answered: what was the nature of the lost source upon which the surviving literary sources drew? Antecedents include the *Pisonian* conspiracy and the nature of *Galba's* claim to the principate as revealed on his coins and in the written sources. As for *Vitellius*, his refusal of the titles *Augustus* and *Caesar*, as well as the reverse in question, are major clues; his provincial coinage offers confirmation in both legend and type. Various anecdotes are food for thought: reorganization of the praetorians; the consular elections (in which he canvassed in person); his relations with senate and populace (*Tac.* 2.91, 93-94, 3.68; *Suet. Vitel.* 11.2, 15.2-4; *Dio* 65.7.2). Of interest is *CIL* 6.929: *A VITELLIVS L F IMPERATOR COS PERP*.

²⁸ 25.3% of all reverse dies (25.5% of Series IV), followed by *CONCORDIA P R* (21.2%), *PONT MAXIM* (14.6%, and 25.2% of Series IV); and *LIBERTAS RESTITVTA* (13.5%); the other reverse types range from 0.6% to 4.8%. See n. 8.

ET VIRTVS, PROVIDENT, SECVRITAS P ROMANI, TVTELA AVGVSTI, and, above all, PAX AVGVSTI: all that a subject could wish.

A benefit of the revised chronology is that we may now be fairly certain that the message had been decided upon quite early in the summer (surely well before Vitellius learned of trouble in the East): propaganda was an established art. There is a dividend. Vitellius' stay in Rome, prior to his learning of the Vespasianic revolt, is lengthened by some six weeks. The literary sources that survive can tell us very little of this summer; this is a clue to the nature and intent of the lost source upon which much of our knowledge of the year 69 ultimately depends.