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Military coins during the reign of Commodus Types: VICT BRIT, CONC MIL, FID EXERC, FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG and FIDEI COH*

Annotation: This article outlines the reconstructed circumstances which led to minting of the military coins during the reign of the emperor Commodus. The recipients of the issued coins presented in this study are soldiers having served active duty in various Roman Army formations. In spite of depicting iconographic images and ideas well known in the Roman coinage, the presented coins are exceptional due to specific circumstances under which they were minted. It relates directly to the situation in the Roman Empire at that time. Correctly defining the symbolic and propaganda messages which were supposed to be conveyed through each coin type would not be possible without a thorough contemplation of other types of information sources and the related literature.

Keywords: Commodus military coins, Roman military propaganda, domestic issues in Rome, wars, mutinies, Roman military formations

Wojskowe monety Kommodusa. Typy VICT BRIT, CONC MIL, FID EXERC, FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG i FIDEI COH*

Streszczenie: W artykule zostały zrekonstruowane okoliczności, w jakich doszło do wybicia tzw. wojskowych monet cesarza Kommodusa. Adresatami emisji każdego z zaprezentowanych numizmatów byli żołnierze odbywający służbę czynną w różnych formacjach armii rzymskiej. Analizowane numizmaty, choć uwieczniono na nich ikonograficzne wyobrażenia i idee, które były już dobrze znane w rzymskim mennictwie to ze względu na czas ich wybicia będzie wyróżniać nieco bardziej specyficzny charakter co w sposób ścisły łączyło się z aktualną sytuacją w państwie rzymskim. Właściwe zdefiniowanie symboliki i przekazu propagandowe-

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go, jaki miały wyrażać wyszczególnione typy monet, nie byłoby możliwe bez pogłębionej refleksji nad innymi typami źródeł i ukierunkowanej na tę problematykę literatury przedmiotu.

Słowa kluczowe: monety wojskowe Kommodusa, rzymska propaganda wojskowa, sytuacja wewnętrzna w Rzymie, wojny, bunt, rzymskie formacje wojskowe.

Amid coins minted in Rome during the reign of the emperor Commodus (Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus)¹, the ones which are relatively numerous and particularly interesting were dedicated to the soldiers of Roman armies. Minted since 184 AD, they included series of the following coins: golden (aureus), silver (denarius) and bronze (sestertius, asses). Moreover, some of the images appearing on coins addressed to the soldiers were also used on medallions from that period. The following inscriptions appeared on such artefacts: VICT(ORIA) BRIT(ANNICA), CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM), FID(ES) EXERC(ITVVM), FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG(VSTI) and FIDEI COH(ORTIVM)². On the obverse of both coins and medallions, there was the head of Commodus turned right dressed in a laurel wreath. The coin type 'VICT BRIT' featured on the obverse was minted for the first time in the second half of 184 AD. It was exactly the same year where Commodus assumed the title BRIT (ANNICVS). On the obverse of this particular sestertius, the image of the emperor's head is encircled by an inscription: M(ARCVS) COMMODVS ANTON(INVS) AVG(VSTVS) PIVS BRIT(ANNICVS). The reverse was graced by an image of a half-nude, winged Victoria with a torso turned right while sitting on a heap of weapons and shields. This version of personifying a Roman goddess wields a burin in her right hand which she had used to carve the following caption VICT BRIT - VICT(ORIA) BRIT(ANNICA) or VICT(ORIAE) BRIT(ANNICAE) on the oval shield propped on her left knee. In front of her, we could see a "victory sign" (tropaeum). The inscription of the sestertius reverse reads clockwise: P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) VIII IMP(ERATOR) VII CO(N)S(VL) IIII P(ATER) P(ATRIAE) VICT(ORIAE) BRIT(ANNICA). The initials of the Roman senate: S(ENATVS) C(ONSVLTO), placed on the reverse on the left and right part right by to the edge, forming a symbolic closure for the scene, appear in the two subsequent series of coins from 185 AD presented in this article³.

Moreover, the two types of coins which have the captions CON MIL and FID EXERC incorporated were issued in 185 AD. There were silver coins (denarii) quite different in terms of inscriptions and images represented on the obverses. In case of coins with an inscription CON MIL, there was an additional caption: COMM(ODVS) ANT(ONINVS) AVG(VSTVS) P(IVS) BRIT(ANNICVS), and denarii with the inscription: FID EXERC had a unique feature including the title of Commodus by the ruler's image on the reverse which reads: M(ARCVS) COMM(ODVS) ANT(ONINVS)

¹ PIR¹ A 1232; PIR² A 1482.

² H. Mattingly-E.A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 3: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1930, 357-360 [hereafter: RIC]; H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 4: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1940, CLI-CLXX, CLXXIV-CLXXV, CLXXX [hereafter: BMCRE].

³ F. Gnechchi, *I medaglioni romani, descritti ed illustrati da Francesco Gnechchi*, Milano 1912, vol. 2, no. 80, 60; RIC 3, no. 440, 416, no. 451, no. 452, 418, no. 459e, 419; BMCRE 4, 796, no. 550, no. 551, 797, no. 560, no. 561, 800, no. 566, 801-802; D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt 2004, 149.

AVG(VSTVS) P(IVS) BRIT(ANNICVS) FEL(IX) aka M(ARCVS) COMM(ODVS) ANT(ONINVS) P(IVS) FEL(IX) AVG(VSTVS) BRIT(ANNICVS). Including CON MIL and FID EXERC inscriptions respectively on the very bottom of the reverse, under the images there was a common feature for both these types. The phrase CON MIL, i.e. CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM), was placed somewhat under the feet of Concordia positioned standing up with her head turned left. The goddess holds military banners vertically in both her hands and her image is determined by the inscription which reads: P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) X IMP(ERATOR) VII CO(N)S(VL) IIII P(ATER) P(ATRIAE). In case of a denarius on the reverse of which there was an abbreviation referencing "Fides", namely FID(ES) EXERC(ITVVM), and on the very top there was an image of Commodus and a sub-unit of four to six soldiers depending on the series.

The emperor standing on a platform (tribune) – on the right side of the reverse – wearing a military uniform with a torso turned left. The emperor holds his right hand high in a greeting gesture while wielding a sceptre, spear or a javelin. Commodus addressing the soldiers (adlocutio) facing him – left side of the reverse). Soldiers are displayed wearing helmets, girding swords by belts with torsos turned right wielding military banners and shields while listening to the emperor. The scene is captioned by the following: P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) X IMP(ERATOR) VII CO(N)S(VL) IIII P(ATER) P(ATRIAE) – which is a reference to year 185 AD and was the date when the series was issued. The Roman Senate's initials: S(ENATVS) C(ONSVLTO) was placed in both left and right sides of the reverse of the presented type of coin – *vide* P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) XI IMP(ERATOR) VII CO(N)S(VL) V P(ATER) P(ATRIAE) – denarius minted in 186 AD⁴.

The image of 'fidelity' (Fides) as a godly personification was placed on the reverse of both coin types including the following inscription: FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG and FIDEI COH. The former could be interpreted as FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG(VSTI), and the latter as FIDEI COH(ORTIVM). The last one already appeared on the reverse of a sestertius minted in 186 AD. A series issued with an inscription: FIDEI COH(ORTIVM) in the following years (186, 187, 189, 190, 191 AD) applied to both bronze nominal values (asses, sestertii) and silver (denarii)⁵. Whereas the coin type FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG(VSTI) was minted as a denarius and exclusively in 189 AD⁶. On the obverse of this denarius, there is a figure of a Commodus' head decorated by a laurel wreath and turned right with an inscription: M(ARCVS) COMM(ODVS) ANT(ONINVS) P(IVS) FEL(IX) AVG(VSTVS) BRIT(ANNICVS) P(ATER) P(ATRIAE). The reverse shows a personification of Fides i.e. 'Fidelity' turned left holding ears of grain in the right hand and a military banner in her left. The phrase FIDEI

⁴ F. Gnechchi, *I medaglioni romani, descritti ed illustrati da Francesco Gnechchi*, Milano 1912, vol. 3, no. 182, 36; RIC 3, no. 107a, 377, nos. 110^a-110^d, 378, no. 126, 380, no. 130, 380, no. 148, 382, no. 457, 418, no. 459c, 419; BMCRE 4, no. 159, 717, no. 160, 718, nos. 199-201, 725, no. §, 729, nos. 577-580, 805; D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 148-149.

⁵ RIC 3, no. 207, 389, no. 220, 390, no. 229^a, 392, no. 496, 423, no. 580, 432, no. 590, 433. Cf. RIC 3, nos. 232-234, 392; BMCRE 4, no. 274, 739, no. *, 741, nos. 298-299, 744, no. §, 745, footnote no. §, 809, no. +, 830, no. +, 832.

⁶ RIC 3, no. 199, 388; BMCRE 4, no. *, 739.

COH(ORTIVM) included in the inscription is a reference to the date when the series was issued: P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) XVI CO(N)S(VL) VI – meaning 191 AD. This time, the initials which are a reference to the Roman senate: S(ENATVS) C(ONSVLTO) were included in the inscription on the reverse of a sestertius from 187 AD – *vide* FIDEI COH(ORTIVM) P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) XII CO(N)S(VL) V S(ENATVS) C(ONSVLTO)⁷.

Inscription content and the circumstances under which a series was issued

The type of coins minted by the Roman mint on the reverse in which we could see the image of the goddess Victoria with an inscription reading 'VICT(ORIA) BRIT(ANNICA)' is an iconographic evidence of commemorating the conflict of Romans with the peoples then residing in the Central and Southern part of today's Scotland.

A year after the independent reign of Commodus in Rome (beginning March, 180 AD), Brittones, hostile towards the Romulus' descendants, charged from the North on a Roman province in Britannia. The attacking tribes, namely Maeatae and Caledones⁸ started what eventually turned in a four-year conflict (181-184 AD). According to Cassius Dio Cocceianus, they did not manage to get across the "wall" (τείχος) which was aimed at separating them from Roman military posts. Nevertheless, during clashes, barbarian aggressors did succeed in assassinating a Roman ^{general}⁹ and the soldiers accompanying him. Allegedly, their attacks caused a lot of "losses" not only to Romans themselves but also to Brittones living under Roman rule and deported after the campaigns of Lollius Urbicus (Quintus Lollius Urbicus, legatus Augusti pro praetore provinciae Britanniae) from territories between the two border walls, meaning a line of defence of Antoninus Pius (vallum Antonini) and Hadrian (vallum Hadriani). Cassius Dio, at the time already residing in Rome (since 180 AD) as a senator, used the term 'wall' but not specifying which line of defence it meant exactly. As a matter of fact, the discussion on this issue¹⁰ is still not concluded. However, it is beyond any doubts that

⁷ Cf. RIC 3, no. 496, 423; BMCRE 4, footnote no. 8, 809; D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 148-149.

⁸ Cf. Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 73.8.2; 77.12.1-4; H. Stephano, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, vol. 7, Parisiis 1848-1854, 843; PIR² C 492; PIR² L 327; G.L. Cheesman, *The Auxilia of the Roman Imperial Army*, Oxford 1914, 86; T.D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*, Bruxelles 1978, 81-82; 151; G. Liddell, R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996, 16511652; N. Hodgson, *The British Expedition of Septimius Severus, Britannia*, 45 (2014) 32, 34.

⁹ It is not known who Cassius Dio meant in this passage. The word he used *strathgōj* in ancient Greek, it meant an office administrator with both military and civilian privileges. So this word could be used to describe both a governor as well as a general-commander (*dux*). On the other hand the term 'legatus Augusti pro praetorae' – as highlighted by Marie-Laure Freyburger-Galland – was expressed by Cassius Dio in Greek: *presbeut* | *j aŭtoā* (= *Ka...sarōj*) *†ntistrat*»*gouj*. Cf. M.-L. Freyburger-Galland, *Aspects du vocabulaire politique et institutionnel de Dion Cassius*, Paris 1997, 158-159, 197-199; A.R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1981, 136; idem, *The Roman Government of Britain*, Oxford 2005, 136.

¹⁰ In a discussion initiated by the end of the 19th century and based on the results of archaeological research – especially involving discovered artefacts dated back to 180-190 AD – we could see, almost as through a lens, the complexity and the richness of meanings. Since this constitutes a secondary source (such as remains of Roman military installations, burial monuments of soldiers, treasures and finally Scottish ceramics). The subject literature capturing the interpretation of the aforementioned materials and conclusions drawn by various authors shows a discernible tendency of departing from the theory that the "wall" as reported by Cassius Dio was supposedly the line of Roman enforcements located North from today's Glasgow in the South of Scotland built during the reign of Antoninus Pius (139-142

there was an attack on territories of a Roman province in Britannia. The impetuosity and the suddenness of the charge forced the Romans, especially in the first two years i.e. 181 and 182 AD, into defensive. From the Roman perspective, the disadvantageous situation at the frontline had to have been precarious enough for Commodus himself, as highlighted by Cassius, to take decisions regarding who should lead the military operation in order to repulse Scottish warriors from the Roman part of Britannia. Such was the conviction over the fact that the emperor sent for Ulpus Marcellus ([Lucius?] Ulpus Marcellus) – consular governor of Britannia (*legatus Augusti pro praetore provinciae Britanniae*) who ruled over Roman armies stationed at this province (*exercitus provinciae Britanniae*)¹¹. Ulpus Marcellus was most likely a senator and a seasoned of-

AD) between two rivers, Firth of Clyde from the West and Firth of Forth from the North. These forts and checkpoints forming a “*vallum Antonini*” were abandoned by Romans no later than at the turn of the 150 and 160 AD. Hence, the “wall”, as related by Cassius Dio was most likely the Hadrian wall located in the South and built between Solway Frith on the West and Wallsend on Tyne on the East as early as 120s AD. Cf. J.R. Boyle, *The Roman Wall: A Reconsideration of its Problems*, *The Archaeological Review*, 4/3 (1889) 175-176; R.G. Collingwood, *The British Frontier in the Age of Severus*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 13 (1923) 69-72; M. Rostovtseff, H. Mattingly, *Commodus-Hercules in Britain*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 13 (1923) 96-97; R.G. Collingwood, J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, Oxford 1937, 151-154; K.A. Steer, *The Antonine Wall, 1934-1959*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 50, Parts 1-2 (1960) 91-93; F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio*, Oxford 1964, 127; B.R. Hartley, *The Roman Occupation of Scotland: the Evidence of Samian Ware*, *Britannia*, 3 (1972) 39-41; A.R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1981, 136-137; idem, *The Roman Government of Britain*, Oxford 2005, 148, 167; N. Hodgson, *Were There Two Antonine Occupations of Scotland?*, *Britannia*, 26 (1995) 40-41; R. Tomlin, *Britannia Romana. Roman Inscriptions and Roman Britain*, Oxford 2018, 143.

¹¹ Cf. Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 73.8.2-6; PIR² V 828; G. Migliorati, *Iscrizioni per la ricostruzione storica dell'impero romano da Marco Aurelio a Commodo*, Milano 2011, 384-388. This army consisted of three legions: *legio II Augusta* (Caerleon), *legio VI Victrix* (York) and *legio XX Valeria Victrix* (Chester). From auxiliary units (*auxilia*) stationed in Britannia of the 2nd century AD we could indicate the units of horsemen (e.g. *ala Augusta Gallorum Proculeiana ob virtutem appellata*; *ala II Asturum*; *ala Praetoria I Hispanorum Asturum*; *ala Gallorum et Thracum Classiana*; *ala Petriana*; *ala Picentiana*; *ala I Pannoniorum Sabiniana*; *ala Sarmatarum*; *ala Hispanorum Vettonum*; *ala Augusta Vocontiorum*) infantry and mixed (*cohortes equitatae*), consisting of both footmen and horse riders (e.g. *cohors I Baetatorum*; *cohors I Batavorum*; *cohors III Brevcorum*; *cohors I Celtiberorum equitata*; *cohors I Ulpia Traiana Cugernorum*; *cohors I Aelia Dacorum*; *cohors I Delmatarum*; *cohors II Delmatarum*; *cohors I Frisia-vonum*; *cohors II Gallorum veterana equitata*; *cohors III Gallorum equitata*; *cohors IV Gallorum*; *cohors V Gallorum equitata*; *cohors I Hamiorum sagittaria*; *cohors II Hispanorum pia fidelis equitata*; *cohors I Lingonum equitata*; *cohors II Lingonum equitata*; *cohors III Lingonum*; *cohors IIII Lingonum equitata*; *cohors I Menapiorum Nautarum*; *cohors I Morinorum*; *cohors I Augusta Nerviorum alias cohors I Augusta Nervana Germanorum*; *cohors II Nerviorum*; *cohors IV Nerviorum*; *cohors VI Nerviorum*; *cohors I Sunucorum*; *cohors I Thracum*; *cohors II Thracum (veterana) equitata (pia fidelis)*; *cohors VI Thracum*; *cohors VII Thracum*; *cohors I Tungrorum*; *cohors II Tungrorum milliaria equitata*; *cohors I Vangionum*; *cohors I Fida Vardullorum equitata*). Cf. E.G. Hardy, *The Movements of the Roman Legions from Augustus to Severus*, *The English Historical Review*, 2/8 (1887) 652, 656; J. Spaul, *Ala². The Auxiliary Cavalry Units of the Pre-Diocletianic Imperial Roman Army*, *Andover* 1994, no. 8, 39-41, no. 9, 42-44, no. 14, 55-57, no. 26, 87-88, 180-181, no. 64, 185-186, no. 66, 189-190, no. 67, 191, no. 84, 236-237, no. 86, 240-241; G.L. Gregori, *Un nuovo senatore dell'età di Commodo?*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 106 (1995) 274; V.G. Swan, *The Twentieth Legion and the history of the Antonine Wall reconsidered*, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 129 (1999) 435-438; L. Keppie, *Legiones II Augusta, VI Victrix, IX Hispana, XX Valeria Victrix*, in: Y. Le Bohec (ed.), *Les légions de Rome sous le Haut-Empire*, t. I, Lyon 2000, 28-32n; J. Spaul, *Cohors². The Evidence for and a Short History of the Auxiliary Infantry Units of the Imperial Roman Army*, Oxford 2000, 102-103, 105-107, 124-125, 157-158, 163-165, 168-169,

ficer who began his office term a consular governor in 177 AD. Nevertheless we cannot be sure of his origins, was he a son of Ulpus Marcellus, a renown jurist and an advisor to Antoninus Pius or was he the Lucius Ulpus Marcellus, a Roman consular governor of Lower Pannonia (Lucius Ulpus Marcellus, *legatus Augusti pro praetore Pannoniae inferioris*) in office in approximately 175 AD? Due to an energetic leadership over his subordinate troops, in the two following years (183 and 184 AD) the Roman governor succeeded in forcing the enemy over the reinforcement line of the Antoninus wall. It is worth to mention that the coping stone of his 184 AD achievement was founding a military camp in Carpow (Scottish Caledonia) where the Romans stationed until probably even 205 AD. On this occasion, the soldiers acknowledged Commodus as the emperor (*acclamatio imperatoris VII*), assuming his official title "Britannicus" represented the formal end of war. Ulpus Marcellus, in order to avoid anti-Roman attitudes among local people residing in Southern Scotland launched a so-called 'buying peace' policy. Sadly, the result of these endeavours did not stand the test of time. Even more so since Ulpus Marcellus himself left Britannia not long after the victory – as per Anthony Birley – due to the conflicts within Roman contingents which could possibly have been a reaction to rigid methods applied by the consular governor regarding his subordinate soldiers during the war. Roman contingents stationed in this area raised a mutiny no later than 184 AD¹².

Before this news reached Commodus, the mint already produced a sestertius, the reverse of which illustrated an image of the aforementioned Victoria. The goddess – as displayed on the coin – engraved herself VICT(ORIA) BRIT(ANNICA) on a shield propped on her left knee. In front of a nude, winged goddess sitting on a pile of arms there is a 'victory sign' (*tropaeum*). Both the detailing and symbolic of this display were unambiguous. It was the sustenance and aid from Victoria – one of the oldest Roman war gods (*dii militares*), worshipped in equal measure along Jupiter and Mars – that led to the successful repulse of the barbarian Scots on the lands of Britannia.

The term "victoria Britannica" appeared in Rome much earlier. Such phrasing could be found in inscriptions on the base of the Victoria monument from 45 AD funded by a certain Aulus Vicirius Proculus. This Roman officer (*tribunus militum*) and a priest (*flamen Augustalis*) financed both the build of the monument and the epitaph in hope of fulfilling the promise. Heading into war in Britannia in 43 AD, he pleaded to goddess Victoria for his safe return home. The aforementioned funder also wanted to express gratitude for the victory of the Roman troops led by Claudius, the emperor (Tiberius Claudius Nero Drusus). Not only did they manage to overcome the resistance of Brit-

176, 177-178, 179, 180-181, 185, 186, 209-210, 217-219, 220, 222, 223-224, 225-227, 228-230, 236-237, 239-240, 241-242, 248, 249-251, 302-303, 304, 322, 344, 357-358, 371-372, 380-381, 382, 408-409.

¹² Cf. Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 73.8.2-6; PIR² V 831; PIR² V 832; J. Crook, *Consilium Principis: Imperial Councils and Counsellors from Augustus to Diocletian*, Cambridge 1955, 67, 71, 190; A.R. Birley, *Officers of the Second Augustan Legion in Britain: The Third Annual Caerleon Lecture*. In *Honorem Aquilae Legionis II Augustae*, Cardiff 1990, 26; idem, *Hadrian to the Antonines*, in: A.K. Bowman et al. (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XI, Cambridge 2000, 188; idem, *The Roman Government of Britain*, Oxford 2005, 163-167; idem, *The Frontier Zone in Britain: Hadrian to Caracalla*, in: L. de Blois, E. Lo Cascio, *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC – AD 476)*, Leiden-Boston 2007, 361-363; J. Casey, *Who built Carpow? A review of events in Britain in the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus*, *Britannia* 41 (2010) 229-231; N. Hodgson, *The British Expedition of Septimius Severus*, *Britannia*, 45 (2014) 42, 44.

tones but also to conquer a substantial part of the island which would later become a Roman province¹³. Despite the lack of certainty over the fact whether the Victoria personified in the monument funded by Aulus Vicirius Proculus was goddess Victoria or even already then, a “Victoria Britannica”, the inscription dated to 45 AD is one of the earliest testimonies relating directly to a Roman victory in wars taking place in Britannia (Victoria Brittanica) and most likely to the new, godly image of “Victoria Brittanica”.

It is worth mentioning that from 40 AD, Victoria was considered in Rome not only as a “godly protector” of the entire Roman society (Victoria populi Romani). This practice initiated firstly by Sulla (Lucius Cornelius Sulla) – *vide* Ludi Victoriae Sullae-Victoria Sullana – was continued by Octavius known as Augustus (Imperator Caesar Augustus) who turned this goddess into a ‘personal protector’ of all Roman emperors (*vide* Victoria Augusta-Victoria Caesaris-Victoria Augusti). The subsequent principes sustained this tradition. Basking in mercy of Victoria, as superior leaders of the army, they succeeded and by achieving that, ensured the peace (pax) for the entire Roman community. This was the reason behind each great ‘victoria’, as solely Roman governors were privy to the privilege of displaying triumph in order to highlight both their ‘strength’ and ‘dignitas’¹⁴.

Nevertheless the news reaching Commodus not only did prevent him from celebrating this victory but also became a reason for a serious concern. It quickly became apparent that Ulpius Marcellus leaving the island did not appease the ‘military uprising’ involving the soldiers stationed in that area¹⁵. To add an insult to injury, the conflict was exacerbated by Perennis (Sextus Tigidius Perennis), the ‘praefectus praetorio’ and a then trusted advisor of Commodus who, in hope of restoring discipline (disciplina militaris) among those legionnaires decided to demote their legates (legati legionum). The legates which were formerly members of the senate nobility were replaced by new legates of the Equites class (ordo equester), which was unprecedented. Roman soldiers in Britannia, enraged by this resolution, attempted at announcing the new emperor Priscus who was one of the legionnaire legates (Priscus, legatus legionis). After he unequivocally declined, they headed to Rome with the aim of meeting Commodus and

¹³ AE 1980, 457 (Etruria / Regio VII / Roselle / Rusellae / Rusella) 45 AD.: Voto [s]uscepto / [p]ro salute et reditu et / Victoria Britanni/ca Ti(beri) Claudi Caesa/ris Aug(usti) Germanici / pont(ificis) max(imi) tr(ibunicia) pot(estate) V (25.01.45-24.01.46 r.n.e) imp(eratoris) / X (45 r. n.e.) p(atris) p(atriciae) co(n)s(ulis) des(ignati) IIII (46 r. n.e.) / A(ulus) Vicirius Proculus / flamen Aug(ustalis) tr(ibunus) mil(itum) / Victoriae Britanni/cae votum solvit; G. Standing, *The Claudian Invasion of Britain and the Cult of Victoria Britannica*, *Britannica*, 34 (2003) 283-284; R. Tomlin, *Britannia Romana*. Roman Inscriptions and Roman Britain, Oxford 2018, issue 1.08, 11-12. Cf. D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt 2004, 91.

¹⁴ Cf. H.L. Axtell, *The Deification of Abstract Ideas in Roman Literature and Inscriptions*, Chicago 1907, 15-18; J. Toynbee, *Britannia on Roman Coins of the Second Century A.D.*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 14 (1924) 149-154; J. Toynbee, *Further Notes on Britannia Coin-Types*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 15 (1925) 104-106; B.M. Levick, *Propaganda and the Imperial Coinage*, *Antichthon*, 16 (1982) 110, 114; K. Balbuza, *Triumfator. Triumf i ideologia zwycięstwa w starożytnym Rzymie epoki cesarstwa*, Poznań 2005, 84-85; K. Galinsky, *Continuity and Change: Religion in the Augustan Semi-Century*, in: J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion*, Oxford 2007, 75-76; F. Bernstein, *Complex Rituals: Games and Processions in Republican Rome*, in: J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion*, Oxford 2007, 231.

¹⁵ Cf. Th. Pekáry, *Seditio. Unruhen und Revolten im römischen Reich von Augustus bis Commodus*, *Ancient Society*, 18 (1987) 144.

defeating Perennis. The animosity towards the praetorian prefect (praefectus praetorio) could also be a result of the lack of monetary incentives (donativa) they were hoping for after a successful end to a campaign against the Scottish tribes. Nevertheless, they organised an expedition corpus consisting of military units stationed in Britannia amounting to 1500 soldiers. They most likely to have represented all Roman military contingents in Britannia (legatos exercitus). Soldiers formed separate units (vexillationes) led by specially selected mutineers from independent legionnaire commanders (praepositi). After travelling to Europe by sea, they most likely continued their journey to Italy on land. The meeting with Commodus, in 185 AD, was held most probably near Rome. The soldiers arriving from Britannia allegedly informed the emperor that Perennis had organised a conspiracy against him in hope of Perennis' son becoming a new emperor. Commodus convinced of the scheme to be true, released Perennis to the soldiers who without any further ado, proceeded with lynching. The prefect's family members were also sentenced to death¹⁶.

These events have a direct relation to the origin of two types of coins captioned CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM) and FID(ES) EXERC(ITVVM) on the reverse¹⁷. In case of the first coin, the personification of the godly "Concordia" holding banners in both hands (aquila-signum) was a symbolic representation of the 'accord with the soldiers', namely 'militēs' of Britannia with Commodus himself. This interpretation is suggested by the legend: COMM(ODVS) ANT(ONINVS) AVG(VSTVS) P(IVS) BRIT(ANNICVS) visible on the obverse of this denarius. The image of the emperor was accompanied by the caption "PIVS" assumed by Commodus in 183 AD after being 'miraculously' saved during an assassination attempt plotted by his own sister Lucilla (Annia Aurelia Galeria Lucilla). Moreover, the title "BRIT(ANNICVS)" was meant to remind of the victory (in 184 AD) achieved by Roman soldiers in Britannia in fending off the Scottish tribes. It is worth mentioning that in the second issue of this series with the inscription CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM) from 186 AD, the titular caption of Commodus commemorated on the obverse included an addition of "FELIX" - *vide* M(ARCVS) COMM(ODVS) ANT(ONINVS) P(IVS) FELIX AVG(VSTVS) BRIT(ANNICVS) - which was a direct reference to the aforementioned plot by Perennis, the 'praefectus praetorio', discovered in 185 AD¹⁸.

¹⁶ Cf. Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 73.9.2a; 73.9.2; 73.9.3-4; 10; PIR² P 957; PIR² T 203; P.A. Brunt, *The fall of Perennis: Dio-Xiphilinus 72.9.2*, *Classical Quarterly*, 23 (1973) 172-173; A.R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1981, 145, 260; G. Gregori, *Un nuovo senatore dell'età di Commodus?*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 106 (1995) 270, 273-274; M.-L. Freyburger-Galland, *Aspects du vocabulaire politique et institutionnel de Dion Cassius*, Paris 1997, 200-202; O.J. Hekster, *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads*, Amsterdam 2002, 62-63; A.R. Birley, *The Frontier Zone in Britain: Hadrian to Caracalla*, in: L. de Blois, E. Lo Cascio, *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC-AD 476)*, Leiden-Boston 2007, 363; M. Vitale M., *No, 'Britannia' on Coins of the Severans*, *Classical Association of Ireland*, 25 (2018) 7, 16-17.

¹⁷ A more extensive study on the images of "Concordia" and "Fides" as well as their relation to the Roman propaganda see: G. Salamone, *L'imperatore e l'esercito. Tipi monetali di eta romano-imperiale*, *Falzea* 2004, 17-18, 36-40; I. Łuć, *CONCORDIA PRAETORIANORVM i FIDES PRAETORIANORVM z roku 69 n.e.*, *Przegląd Historyczny*, 96/3 (2005) 403-419; K. Balbuza, *Concordia, Aeternitas Imperii i kwestie dynastyczne w mennicznym programie ideologicznym okresu pierwszych Sewerów*, *Studia Europaea Gnesnensia*, 12 (2015) 62-64, footnote no. 11.

¹⁸ Cf. HA, *Vita Commodi* 6.2; RIC 3, no. 107a, 377; no. 465, 420 - the legend on the reverse says: CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM) P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) XI IMP(ERATOR)

Placing a representation of the godly 'Concordia' on the reverse of the discussed denarius type along with the caption 'Concordia militum' (the military accord), the initials of which could be seen in the inscription could symbolically mean only one thing – the conflict of Commodus and the soldiers serving in the provincial army in Britannia (*exercitus provinciae Britanniae*) was finally concluded. The examples of this coin, as mentioned before, were minted in Rome exactly in 185 AD which leaves a possibility that initially they were handed to the 1500 soldiers from the aforementioned military corpus as an incentive (*donativum*). These soldiers, after the assassination of Perennis, the 'praefectus praetorio', quartered near Rome. And it was there, in their military camp fields, where they met with Commodus. Most likely it was the order of the emperor himself that led to the design of the discussed type of coin captioned CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM) and in the following years of Commodus reign, the issue of this series was distributed to soldiers from other Roman military units as pay (*stipendium*) or incentives (*donativa*).

Returning to the subject of the circumstances under which the Roman soldiers from Britannia could be handed the discussed coin captioned CONC(ORDIA) MIL(ITVM) on the reverse as first, it most likely would have been before their marching out of Italy, the midpoint or the second half of 185 AD when the meeting with Commodus on the military camp field near Rome took place. It was there when the Emperor, adhering to the military routine, participated in a military assembly (*contio militum*) during which he made an official speech addressing the soldiers (*adlocutio ad exercitum*)¹⁹. Then, he received the military parade before most likely paying them an unknown amount, possibly including the discussed type of denarii. What is important, there is iconographic evidence of this event where Commodus spoke to an assembly of soldiers from the Britannia corpus which is displayed on the reverse of another denarius, minted in 185 AD, in Rome with the inscription: FID(ES) EXERC(ITVVM)²⁰.

The ideological significance of this event commemorated on the reverse of the coin with the inscription FID(ES) EXERC(ITVVM), issued again in 186 AD, was a reference to the idea of 'military fidelity'. Roman "Fides", one of the most ancient representations related closely to Jupiter, associated the phenomenon of 'fidelity' and 'devotion'²¹. The meeting of Commodus with the soldiers arriving from Britannia was a great challenge. The emperor had to 'rationalise' his own judgement of their character. As we could only imagine, it had to have been rather difficult. All the more so, as the emperor must have remembered the circumstances under which the said 1500 soldiers appeared in Italy. He must have known of their recalcitrant rowdy and entitled attitude towards

VII CO(N)S(VL) V P(ATER) P(ATRIAE) S(ENATVS) C(ONSVLTO) - 186 AD; BMCRE 4, CLIX-CLX; no. 159, 717, no. 576, 804.

¹⁹ On the subject of ADLOCVT COH type see e.g.: G. Salamone, *L'imperatore e l'esercito. Tipi monetali di eta romano-imperiale*, Falzea 2004, 17, 23-26n; I. Łuć, *Hadrian's Military Coins. The Types COHORTES PRAETORIAE, EXERCITVS and DISCIPLINA AVGVSTI*, in: *Hortus Historiae. Księga Pamiątkowa ku czci Profesora Józefa Wolskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin*, E. Dąbrowa, M. Dzielska, M. Salamon, S. Sprawski (Eds.), Kraków 2010, 367-384; I. Łuć, *Wojskowe monety Nerona. Typy ADLOCVT COH i DECVRSIO*, *Vox Patrum*, 37 (2017) vol. 67, 361-372.

²⁰ Cf. RIC 3, nos. 110^a-110^d, 378; BMCRE 4, no. 160, 718 - the legend on the reverse says: P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMVS) T(RIBVNICIA) P(OTESTATE) X IMP(ERATOR) VII CO(N)S(VL) IIII P(ATER) P(ATRIAE) FID(ES) EXERC(ITVVM) (185 AD).

²¹ Cf. H.L. Axtell, *The Deification of Abstract Ideas in Roman Literature and Inscriptions*, 20-21.

their commanders which stands in conflict with the Roman principle of military discipline (*disciplina militaris*) which required for the emperor's speech to be particularly considerate about words such as "incentive" and "encouragement"²². It is what was always expected in 'allocation' by subordinates according to Roman traditions. In his speech, he needed to appeal to them by enumerating their achievements while also condemning their flaws inconsistent with the ethos of Roman soldiers. During this meeting, as strongly suggested by the context of the events at the turn of 185 and 186 AD – the speech had a reconciling overtone. It was most likely influenced the unsettling news from the German and Gallic provinces threatened by Maternus and his "latrones". Shortly after this assembly, maybe immediately or with a few days delay, the said 1500 soldiers from Britannia instead of returning to their positions headed to another province to repulse 'latrones'²³.

Another type of coins with the inscription: FIDEI COH(ORTIVM) was minted in the following year of Commodus reign, in 186 AD. This coin, as well as the previously featured types, was addressed to the Roman soldiers. It is possible that among them there were mostly the Praetorian Guard (*cohortes praetoriae*) and other soldiers constituting the contingent of the Roman capital (*vide cohortes urbanae, cohortes vigilum, equites singulares Augusti*). In case of praetorians, their main duty was to serve the ruler. They were responsible for protecting him from harm as well as the other imperial family members. Nevertheless, after the death of a praetorian prefect Perennis in 185 AD, the aforementioned praetorians and other soldiers from that mentioned contingent were more and more influenced by Cleander (Marcus Aurelius Cleander), one of the most prominent advisors of Commodus. This former imperial freedman (*libertus Augusti*) most likely based on the will of the aforementioned ruler was appointed to the Equites class. Unofficially at first, as an imperial minister – *vide* "a cubicul(o) et a pugione Imp(eratoris) Commodi Aug(usti)" – he led a group of soldiers serving as personal escorts to the emperor tasked with protecting him (the so-called *Hastilarii*). However, after the death of Publius Atilius Aebutianus, who was the 'praefectus praetorio' (a praetorium prefect), Cleander was officially appointed to this position along two other unknown individuals. As a new prefect, in 189-190 AD (or 187-190 AD) he was certainly given the right of command not only over the praetorians and soldiers from the personal mounted German guard of the emperor (*equites singulares Augusti*), but also the ones from other contingents in the Roman capital²⁴.

²² Cf. I. Łuc, *Wojskowe monety Nerona. Typy ADLOCVT COH i DECVR SIO, Vox Patrum*, 37 (2017) vol. 67, 362.

²³ Cf. I. Łuc, „Bellum desertorum” cesarza Kommodusa – accepted to be published by „Res Historica”.

²⁴ CIL 6, 41118 = AE 1961, 280 (Roma, 180-186 AD): M(arcus) Aurelius Cleander / a cubicul(o) et a pugione / Imp(eratoris) Commodi Aug(usti); Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 73.9.3-4; 10.2; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum libri*, 26.6.8; HA, *Vita Commodi* 7.1-2; Herodian, *Ab excessu Divi Marci*, 1.12; PIR² A 1294; PIR² A 1481: *servus Romam venum datus ad aulam imperatoriam venit*; L.L. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian (A.D. 180-305)*, Roma 1966, no. 6, no. 7, no. 8, 66-67; G. Boulvert, *Domestique et fonctionnaire sous le Haut-Empire romain. La condition de l'affranchi et de l'esclave du prince*, Besançon 1974, footnote no. 397, 69, footnote no. 102, 130, 207, 254-255, 281-282; M.P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar. The Roman Emperors' Horse Guards*, London 1994, 52; O.J. Hekster, *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads*, Amsterdam 2002, 55-56; J. Den Boeft et alia (eds.), *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVI*, Leiden-Boston 2008, 144; G. Migliorati,

Issuing a coin with the legend: FIDEI COH(ORTIVM) could also be linked to the rebellion of Maternus and his "latrones". It needs to be highlighted that the spelling of this phrase in its Latin form "the fidelity of the cohorts" along with the inscription with the same message in a different form (*vide* Fides Cohortium) did not appear on coins before that time, only after officially having declared war against Maternus and his company (bellum desertorum). It was a result of the failed attempt of the rebels to attack a military camp of Augustus' Eighth Legion (legio VIII Augusta) in Argentoratum (today's Strasbourg). This camp had been established on an island near the river Ill, a left-bank tributary to Rhine. This attack (August, 185 AD) was somewhat of a pinnacle of the pillaging and plundering by "latrones" of Maternus (since 180/181 AD). It called for a coordinated offensive action by the Roman armies. The scale and intensity of it deprived Maternus of any hope of continuing his former strategy of waging war on the provincial territories. This is why he abandoned his people cordoned off by Romans and accompanied by a small group of accomplices, headed to Rome in order to plot an assassination of Commodus. A possible occasion in mind to hit the emperor was a celebration of goddess Magna Mater and Attis. It was during this event, celebrated every year on 25th of March, which includes a festive procession of people rejoicing and wearing disguises as well as masks. Maternus and his accomplices in the so-called 'day of joy' (Hilaria) dressed as praetorian guardsmen (Hastilarii) attempted at approaching Commodus and assassinating him in an ambush. However, this bold plan was brought to light by none other than a few "latrones" from the Maternus contingent. The leader of the rebellion was apprehended as well as his followers. Praetorians themselves directly participated in the operation of capturing Maternus. It is also possible that they could have been supported by the soldiers from urban cohorts (cohortes urbanae) or vigiles (cohortes vigilum). Within those three formations constituting the Roman contingent, soldiers served as parts of specific cohorts (cohortes). On the same day 25 March 186, there were parallel events, the aforementioned jubilant procession in the "day of joy" (Hilaria) in which the emperor and the inhabitants took part and the execution of Maternus. Hence, it cannot be categorically ruled out that commemorating the 'fidelity of the cohorts', namely the soldiers who served in them and took part in apprehending Maternus, meant that the emperor rewarded them financially. Amid the coins distributed, there could have been examples of the coins minted in Rome to celebrate their loyalty by including an inscription: FIDEI COH(ORTIVM). The personification of "Fidelity" on the reverse of this coin clearly suggested what the emperor expected of his subordinates. What is more, in the following years this type would appear in series issued up until 191 AD²⁵, i.e. until the death of Commodus (31 December 192 AD). Examples of this coin would be distributed not only to praetorians but also other members of the Roman contingent.

On the other hand, the character of the coin with the inscription: FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG(VSTI), issued in 189 AD was more ephemeral. Despite the fact that the previously discussed type of coin - *vide* FIDEI COH(ORTIVM) - could eventually reach

Iscrizioni per la ricostruzione storica dell'impero romano da Marco Aurelio a Commodus, Milano 2011, 435-437; S. Ruciński, Praefecti praetorio. Dowódcy gwardii pretoriańskiej od 2 roku przed Chr. do 282 roku po Chr., Bydgoszcz 2013, 420-433.

²⁵ See footnote no. 5.

soldiers outside Rome, e.g. fleet formations (*classis Misenensis*, *classis Ravennatis*), or even outside Italy (*legiones*, *auxilia*). In case of this denarius, it was distributed most likely only to praetorians. Since it was the praetorians who somewhat happened to uncover a plot of Cleander, namely his behind-the-scenes ventures and actual disloyalty regarding Commodus. This prominent and bright freedman, after becoming a praetorium prefect was charged with supervision of the city supplies of grains. His sheer greed led to the starvation of Rome inhabitants. Without batting an eye, he sent a unit of "equites singulares Augusti" to disperse the crowd which gathered to protest against his devious policies. The German horsemen from the emperor's personal guard initiated a brutal pacification of the demonstrators. However, praetorian cohorts stood against them to defend to Rome inhabitants. In a flash, the Roman capital became a battlefield witnessing the defeat of the German guardsmen. After the event, Cleander tried to conceal the facts. However, Commodus learnt of everything and disheartened by such perfidiousness of Cleander, sentenced him to death. It most likely when the aforementioned denarius, minted in 189 AD in Rome, with the inscription: FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG(VSTI) and the image of 'Fidelity' goddess on the reverse was the resonating expression of gratitude of Commodus for the actions of praetorians in this difficult time. Even though the issue of this series was symbolically dedicated to the "loyalty of Augustus' cohorts", the actual recipients of this coin were praetorian guards. It was a token of gratitude and underlining how much their military 'fides' matters to the emperor.

The origins of the featured types of coins were related to a chain of subsequent events taking place in Rome during the Commodus' rule. Coins were issued and addressed to Roman soldiers since the second half of 184 AD, whereas the most recent of the aforementioned types were designed and minted for the first time as late as 189 AD. This specific set of coins constitutes a limited portion of a rich and diverse catalogue associated with Commodus²⁶.

The featured coin types reflect, from the ideological and propaganda point of view, a stereotypical selection of images and ideas known and recognised from coins of the predecessors of the Marcus Aurelius' son. The characteristics of the presented coins was a direct reference to then current events in the Roman empire. We could see a discernible process of using standard themes and ideas meant as propaganda. Commodus, as the issuer of the aforementioned series, intended each to fulfil a specific short-term political goal. It should be highlighted that with the support of the coins minted, he managed, remarkably well, to create an image of himself which in spite of his extravagances and flaws hardly befitting his position - *vide* Commodus-gliadiator, the son of Marcus Aurelius as an emanation of Hercules - and which allowed him in order to be universally accepted by the majority of Roman soldiers until almost the end of his reign.

²⁶ Cf. e.g. M. Rostovtseff, H. Mattingly, Commodus-Hercules in Britain, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 13 (1923) 91-109; R.H. Storch, The Coinage from Commodus to Constantine: Some Types that Mirror the Transition from Principate to Absolute Monarchy, *Schweizer Münzblätter*, 23-27 (1973-1977) Heft 91, 95-103; M.P. Speidel, Commodus the God-Emperor and the Army, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 83 (1993) 109-114.

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APPENDIX

The Chosen Examples of the Commodus' military coins.
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The VICT BRIT type (sestertius; obverse-reverse) Rome, 185 AD.

H. Mattingly, E.A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 3: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1930, nos. 451-453^b, 418, no. 459^a, 419.

H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 4: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1940, nos. 559-561, 800.



The CONC MIL type (denarius; reverse) Rome, 185 AD.

H. Mattingly, E.A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 3: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1930, no. 457, 418.

H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 4: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1940, no. 159, 717; no. 195-196, no. 197 (aureus), no. 198, 724, 801, 802, 804, 807.



The FID EXERC type (denarius; obverse-reverse) Rome, 186 AD.

H. Mattingly, E.A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 3: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1930, nos. 110^a-110^d, 378, no. 130 (denarius), 380, no. 148, 382 (denarius), nos. 468^a-468^d, 450.

H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 4: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1940, no. 160 (denarius), 718, no. 199 (denarius), no. 200 (denarius), 725, 729, nos. 577-580, 805.



The FIDEI COHORTIVM AVG type (denarius; obverse-reverse) Rome, 189 AD.

H. Mattingly, E.A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 3: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1930, no. 199, 388.

H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 4: Antoninus Pius to Commodus, London 1940, no. 274, 739.

