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SOME EXAMPLES OF COURT MINT MOBILITY OF WESTERN ROMAN RULERS (VALENTINIAN III AND JULIUS NEPOS)

The mobility of the late imperial court mint and its work and activities is a numismatic theme recognized long ago. Although interesting and important, due to a lack of acceptance in numismatic circles outside the former "Viennese" numismatic school in which it originated, it eventually fell into oblivion and was (and remains) largely unexplored, but is still here or there timidly or stealthily mentioned. In the period when this aspect of mint activities was explicitly noted, the available numismatic material and possibilities of research were much more modest in comparison to the present day. Therefore, it seemed worth placing this topic back on the table and beginning with questioning and investigating on a new basis. For this occasion, mobility in one part had to be conceptually redefined and factually and directly connected (when possible) with both known and unknown imperial itineraries and the circumstances that led to it. Two randomly chosen examples of the mobile activities of the Western Roman court mints aided in this: the first, based on the known itineraries from the lengthy reign of the emperor Valentinian III (425-455) and the numismatic material created during his stays outside of his residential seat, and the second, based on the numismatic material from the brief reign of the emperor Julius Nepos (474-475), where features attributed to the mobility of the court mint aided in detecting imperial itineraries unrecorded in the historical sources.

Key words: Western Roman Empire, Eastern Roman Empire, Valentinian III, Galla Placidia, Theodosius II, Licinia Eudoxia, Julius Nepos, Ravenna, Thessalonica, Milan, Arles, coin mints, mint mobility, solidi

A full two decades have passed since, through a new interpretation of existing historical sources, it was attempted to prove that during the first half of the 5th century — in contrast to the hitherto mostly accepted thinking of many — it was Rome and not Ravenna that occasionally represented the primary residence of the western Roman emperors, while from ca. 450 it once again became the primary residence, and up to 476 it mostly remained so. This theory was presented by the Australian historian *Andrew Gillett*, who based it on an analysis of the itineraries of twelve western Roman emperors recorded in historical sources for the period from 401 to 476, i.e. from the early years of the reign of the emperor Honorius (395-423) to the end of the reign of the emperor Romulus Augustulus (475-476).¹ Other than in the itineraries, *Gillett* also attempted to find a confirmation of his claims in the rare observations of contemporaries, who, when writing about these two cities as a rule emphasized the urban characteristics and social

¹ *Gillett* 2001, 131 ff. About the problem of imperial presence in Rome – considering the absences of the Roman emperors, the non-arrival or even lack of interest for staying in Rome recorded as early as in the 3rd century, and particularly noticeable during the 4th century – a scientific congress on *The Imperial Presence in Late Antique Rome (Third-Sixth Centuries AD)* was organized at the Göthe-Universität in Frankfurt in March 2015, where a paper was given and later published by McEvoy 2017, 95-112, on the late Western Roman period and the reasons for the renewed interest of the emperors for staying in Rome (mostly emperors of military origin or connected to the military).

events in Rome and not Ravenna, and while mentioning the physical traits of them, as a rule advantages were generally associated with Rome and disadvantages with Ravenna. It also turned out, which was not unexpected, that for the lengthy reigns of Honorius (395-423) and Valentinian III (425-455), as well as for the significantly shorter reigns of Majorian (457-461), Libius Severus (461-465), and Anthemius (467-472), there were usually more extensive data about the imperial itineraries, in contrast to the not small group of similarly much more scarce data about the brief reigns of Joannes (423-425), Petronius Maximus (455), and Avitus (455-456), and those in this same group with the later reigns of Olybrius (472), Glycerius (473-474), Nepos (474-475), and Romulus Augustulus (475-476). In this later four-member group of brief rulers, the longest were those of Glycerius and Julius Nepos (around 14 months), but the few pieces of information about the itineraries of these two, as well as the data about the itineraries of the other two brief reigns of Olybrius and Romulus Augustulus, were mostly set aside or even limited almost exclusively to mention of the locations of their proclamations as emperors and the sites of their removal from power.

The numismatic testimonies, which in and of themselves represent original historical sources, were only utilized selectively by *Gillett*, mostly using the reference work of the English numismatist *J.P.C. Kent*,² as confirmation of the travels, absence, or sojourns of emperors could be adequately served only by the rare dateable series of Western Roman gold coins, and in the 5th century these were mainly minted on the occasion of imperial anniversaries of Honorius and Valentinian III. Because of this, as well as the then still fairly poorly known chronology (still true today) of the majority of the numismatic series of the Western Roman rulers, individual important observations and insights of *Kent* related to the rules that determined the participants, their number, the procedures, and the order of activities tied to the preparation, design, production and minting of the Western Roman gold coinage could not be applied.

The organization of the late imperial mints of gold coins, as well as the processes and practices used are known primarily thanks to the provisions preserved in the laws of the emperor Theodosius II from 438, and Justinian from 529,³ which say much but still not enough about special features and many still unknown details to which the monetary system of that time was or could have been subject. One of the more important special features primarily and most commonly written about came to life at the beginning of the last third of the 4th century, when through the monetary reforms of Valentinian I and Valens the physical separation was carried out of the mints of gold and silver coinage associated with the court (*Moneta Comitatusensis*) from the mints and minting of bronze coinage (*Moneta Publica*),⁴ while the connection of the court mint and its staff (*aurifices solidorum*) with the imperial travels and sojourns beyond their court seat uncovered the evidently mobile character of these mints and presented this mobility as one of the forms of its activities.⁵ Examples from practices known to the

² *Kent* 1994.

³ *CJ XII/XXIII/7* (384) = Blume (trans.)—Frier et alii (eds.) 2016, 2895-2898. Incompletely preserved in *CTh VI/XXX/7* (384) = Pharr 1952, 148 (6.30.7).

⁴ *Kent* 1956, 199-201; *Hendy* 1972, 123-125, 131-132; *Kent* 1994, 26.

⁵ For the first observations of the travelling character of these mints and their evident mobility, see *Elmer* 1930, 136; *Elmer* 1936, 30; *Pearce* 1951, XXVII.

present show that on such occasions in the first half of the 5th century, and probably later, at least two versions of the behaviour of the court mint staff were utilized: the same obverse die was used either in combination with a reverse die marked with the mint marks (e.g. A-Q, R-M, R-V) of the residential dwelling of the actual ruler (**Fig. 1A:1-3**) or a combination of the same obverse and reverse dies utilized in the residence of the ruler was used in the case of a change of location, but in that case the mint mark of the previous site (e.g. R-M) was simply re-engraved into the mint mark of the new residence (e.g. R-V).⁶ (**Fig. 1A:4-6**). It is presumed that the choice of versions and their design were not merely the result of chance or some *ad hoc* decision, rather the decision was made by the *Comes sacrarum largitionum* or someone from the narrowest circle of his high ranking officials (*palatini*). This would certainly indicate, although it cannot be claimed with certainty, the fact that the use of individual versions was nonetheless determined by some also previously existing rules.

In the same chronological context, it is possible to recognize certain considerably more complicated processes, among which a special place is occupied by the preparations for and minting of solidi of the Western Roman court mint during the period of the sojourn of the emperor Valentinian III in Thessalonica and Constantinople (October 437 to March 438). The occasion for this was the emperor's wedding to Licinia Eudoxia, the daughter of the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II, held in Constantinople on the 29th of October in 437. The route taken by Valentinian III and his entourage and the way he travelled to Thessalonica, the originally agreed upon venue for the wedding⁷ — either by sea directly to Thessalonica or by sea to Dyrrachium and overland to Thessalonica (*Via Egnatia*) — have not been recorded in the historical sources.⁸ There, after arrival from Ravenna, and not from Rome, as was truth be told written

⁶ Kent 1956, 200 n. 5 did not document this example with an image. For a pictorial illustration of the claims made in 1956, see Kent 1991, 275, Taf. 16:19-20 (Galla Placidia); Kent 1994 (= *RIC X*), no. 1808/AQ and no. 2007/RM (both Galla Placidia), and no. 2034/RM and no. 2035/RV (both Valentinian III). For the previously elaborated chronology of these editions that I use here, see Kent 1991, 271-275.

⁷ *Soc.* VII, 44. Certainly, Thessalonica need not have been chosen by chance, as in that very city, most probably in the former palace of the emperor Galerius (305-311), thirteen years earlier the five year old son of Galla Placidia, the sister of the emperor Honorius (395-425), who had died just over a year previously, was engaged to his future wife, the then two year old Licinia Eudoxia, the daughter of the emperor Theodosius II. On that occasion, Valentinian was declared Caesar of the West (23 October 424), then probably taking unknowingly the first important step in his future almost thirty year long career as ruler of the Western Roman empire. For a contrasting, not at all sentimental, and quite different political context of the choice of Thessalonica for the venue of the wedding, see Sivan 2011, 120-121. For the political background of the enthronement of Valentinian III as caesar and the events of 424-425, see *Van Nuffelen* 2013, 131-136. For the biography of Licinia Eudoxia, see *Martindale* 1982, 410-412 (s.v. "Licinia Eudoxia 2"); *Busch* 2015, 177-188.

⁸ The mention of both Ravenna and Rome as the starting points for Valentinian's trip to Thessalonica and subsequently to Constantinople may perhaps not be by chance, as it could indicate the possibility that from these mentioned places two separate groups of Western Roman officials set off on this trip — one headed by Valentinian from Ravenna, and the other headed by representatives of the Senate from Rome — and that these two groups planned to meet somewhere en route to Thessalonica (southern Italy, Albania) or at Thessalonica itself. In Thessalonica, Valentinian would find or have been awaited by Theodosius' proposal to change the venue of the wedding ceremony, which he gladly accepted, followed by the trip to Constantinople, where the Western Roman delegation arrived on the 21st of October 437 (*Chron. Pasch.* s.a. 437).

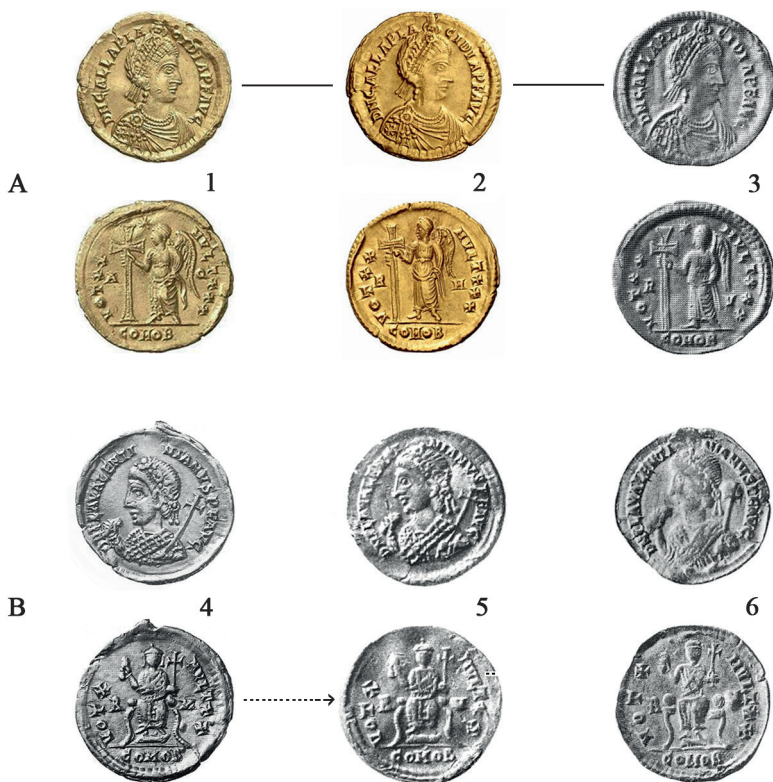


Fig. 1A – *Solidi* of Galla Placidia minted with the same obverse die in the mints of Aquileia, Rome, and Ravenna from the summer of 425 to the beginning of 426. **1** – Aquileia, summer 425 (GM 146/2006, no. 535). **2** – Roma, autumn 425 (NAC 46/2008, no. 746). **3** – Ravenna, end of 425 and beginning of 426 (Musée de Saint-Omer: Amandry 1983, 47 no. 141).

Fig. 1B – *Solidi* of Valentinian III minted in 435 and 436 in Rome and Ravenna with the same obverse and reverse dies. **4** – Rome, last third of 435 (ex coll. G. Lacam: Dürr-Michel 1999, no. 129 = Lacam 1974, 71 Pl. XXVI-below). **5** – Ravenna, reverse mint mark R-M re-engraved as R-V, early 436 (Hess 155/1917, 4611); **6** – Ravenna, reverse mint mark R-M re-engraved as R-V, early 436 (SHM 17911: Fagerlie 1967, no. 86).

in certain sources,⁹ the first of a total of three series of solids with Western Roman characteristics was probably minted, inasmuch as they could be recognized because of the obligatory COMOB in the exergue of the reverse but also other Western Roman traits (the depiction on the obverse, the portrait style, the appearance and graphics of the letters) as the work of Valentinian's *aurifices solidorum* created on the occasion of the emperor's marriage. In favour of the claim that Ravenna was the starting point for Valentinian's route would be the use of the Ravennan (and not Roman!) obverse die for minting the solidi of the first series and the Ravennan reverse die for minting the third series of Valentinian's Eastern Roman solidi with Western Roman characteristics during the emperor's stay in the East in the last quarter of the year 437.

1. The solidus with the previously utilized obverse die of the Ravenna mint (**Fig. 2A:1**) was minted in combination with a reverse die prepared in advance and quite suitable for this occasion of the type *Adventus* (the emperor on horseback with his arm raised in salute), with the legend VICTORI-A AVGGG unexpected with such a reverse depiction, and with the exergue COMOB characteristic for the Western Roman mints, to which the awkwardly engraved mint marks of T-S (= *Thessalonica*) were added in the fields to the left and right of the horseman.¹⁰ (**Fig. 2A:2**). The example of this still sole and unique solidus is a confirmation of the tradition of giving coins on the occasion of the arrival of an emperor, in this case Valentinian III and his entourage in Constantinople, which was said to have occurred a week before the wedding itself.¹¹ For the same occasion in Constantinople was minted in the name of Valentinian III a so far still unique Eastern Roman variant of the same reverse depiction with a value of one and a half solidi (*sesquisolidus*),¹² with a star in the field to the left, the legend ADVENTS – S D N AVC, and the exergue CONOB (**Fig. 2A:3**).

2. The not very long stay in Constantinople before the wedding was used by the Western Roman moneyers for minting solidi with an entirely new obverse depiction of the emperor (Valentinian III with a helmet on his head) in combination with a reverse without mint marks but with a ceremonial iconography and the legend FELICITER NUBTIIS, almost completely in agreement with the simultaneous issuing by the Eastern Roman imperial mint, whose examples differ from the Western Roman ones only in the

⁹ The mention of Rome as the starting point for the emperor's trip to the East is based on information cited by *Marcell. Com.*, 926 (AD 437) and transmitted by *Theoph.*, 92.16-19 (AD 433/434). For commentary on and interpretation of Marcellinus' claim, see Croke 1995, 82.

¹⁰ The subsequent engraving of the mint mark T-S is further indicated by the entirely unsuitable position of the letter S.

¹¹ *Chron. Pasch.*, 582 (s.a. 437); Whitby 1989, 72 (s.a. 437); McEvoy 2013, 257.

¹² Until the appearance of this coin, the only known multiples of the *Adventus* type minted during the 5th century (all as a rule *sesquisolidi*) were of the emperors Honorius and Marcian, *Kent* 1994 (= *RIC X*), 12, 97, 125, 318 no. 1202 (Honorius); *Hahn* 1989 (= *MIRB*), 37 no. 1 (Marcian). For the depiction of *Adventus* on medallions, see *Toynbee* 1944, 107-109; for a still instructive historical overview, see *MacCormick* 1981, 17-92.



Fig. 2A – *Solidi of Valentinian III minted with the same obverse die in Ravenna and Thessalonica and a multiple (sesquisolidus) of Theodosius II minted in Constantinople in the name of Valentinian III, summer/autumn 437. 1 – Ravenna, solidus minted prior to Valentinian's departure from Ravenna to Thessalonica in August 437 (N \square N 49/2017, no. 751). 2 – Thessalonica, solidus of type *Adventus* minted before the departure for Constantinople where Valentinian III arrived on 21 October 437 (NAC 54/2010, 660 = NAC 31/2005, 174 = NAC 23/2003, 1718). 3 – Constantinople, multiple (sesquisolidus) of the type *Adventus* minted on the occasion of the arrival of Valentinian III in Constantinople on 21 October 437 (Tkalec 18/2/2002, no. 279).*

style of workmanship, the formation of the letters (**Fig. 2B:4**),¹³ the obverse depiction of Theodosius II typical for the regular emission of that time (the emperor in armour with a spear), and the legend CONOB in the exergue of the reverse (**Fig. 2B:5**). The identical reverse depiction of the Western Roman and eastern Roman mints was dominated by three standing figures, all three ceremonially attired and with aureoles around their heads: in the middle Theodosius II as the father of the bride (*pronubus*) with his hands on the shoulders of the newlyweds towers over Valentinian II (left) and Eudoxia (right), whose right hands are clasped (*dextrarum iunctio*).¹⁴ The Western Roman variant of Valentinian III, so far known in a smaller number of examples, is composed of the same combination of obverse and reverse, while in contrast to this, the so far somewhat more numerous Eastern Roman variant of Theodosius II utilized at least three reverse dies and

¹³ One of the typological features of the Eastern Roman series of wedding solidi was certainly the replacement of the letter U with the letter Ч (FELICITER NЧBTIIS). This detail was first pointed out long ago (Dressel 1898, 247-248), to be refreshed almost a hundred years later with new numismatic observations, *Grierson-Mays* 1992, 89.

¹⁴ *Kent* 1994 (= *RIC X*), 79, did not record a single example known to him, although he presumed that solidi must exist of the *Feliciter nubtiis* group minted in the name of Valentinian III. Only six years later, this hypothesis by Kent was proven correct, as the first example minted for Valentinian III appeared at an auction of the firm Anton Tkalec held in Zürich on the 29th of February 2000 (no. 452 = Tkalec 19/02/2001, no. 432). This same coin also appeared later at other auctions (*Berk, CNG*), the last time it seems in 2017 (NAC 100/2017, 724).

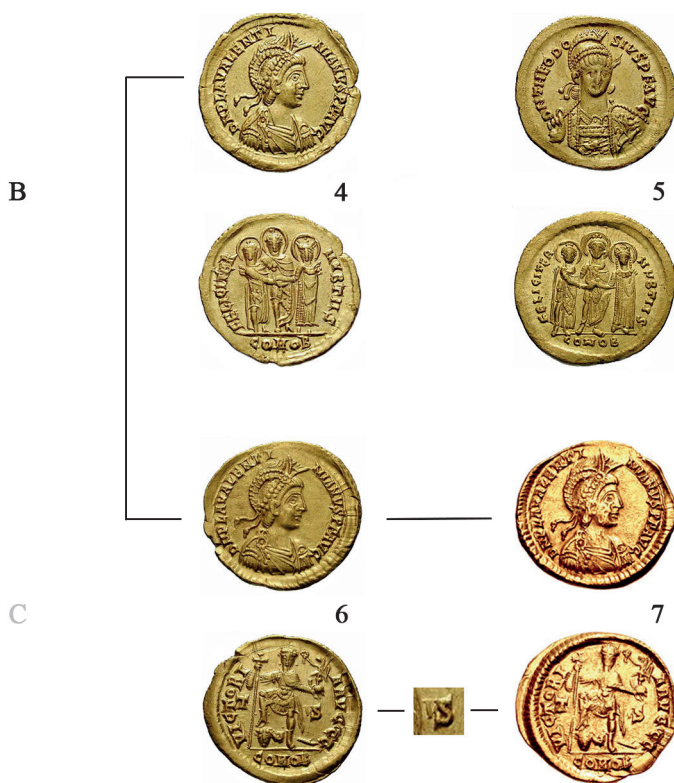


Fig. 2B – *Solidi* of the type *Feliciter nubtiis* of Valentinian III and Theodosius II minted in Constantinople to be distributed to those present at the ceremony of the wedding of Valentinian III and Licinia Eudoxia on 29 October 437. **4** – *Solidus* of the Western Roman engravers with an image of Valentinian III on the obverse (Tkalec 29/2/2000, no. 452 = NAC 100/2017, no. 724). **5** – *Solidus* of the Eastern Roman engravers with an image of Theodosius II on the obverse (Tkalec 29/2/2000, no. 437).

Fig. 2C – *Solidi* of Valentinian III minted with the Western Roman obverse die of the group *Feliciter nubtiis* and the Ravenna reverse die of the Western Roman type *Victoria* in Thessalonica after the wedding with Licinia Eudoxia, November 437. **6** – *Solidus* with traces of the mark R-V re-engraved with the T-S mark on the reverse (Tkalec 29/02/2000, no. 453). **7** – *Solidus* with traces of the mark R-V re-engraved with the T-S mark on the reverse (CNG 96/2014, no. 453).

at least twice as many obverse dies. Both versions were certainly minted to be distributed to guests on the occasion of the wedding ceremony,¹⁵ but because of the evident political significance of the event itself, it was particularly important to emperor Theodosius for the promotion of his new conception of the harmony and unity of the two empires

¹⁵ Grierson-Mays 1992, 145.

(a coordinated-subordinated relationship dominated by the ruler in Constantinople),¹⁶ and it could be assumed that the eastern Roman variant would have been sent in certain quantities throughout the empire to the addresses of high ranking members of the aristocracy, and also religious and administrative authorities.

3. The third series of the Western Roman moneyers was minted in Thessalonica where the newlyweds arrived soon after the wedding, remaining there for the entire winter of 437-438. For the minting of this series the same obverse die was used that had previously been used to mint the Constantinople emission *Feliciter nubtiis* of Valentinian III. For the reverse a probably already used reverse die of the Ravenna mint was used, with a typical Western Roman depiction for that time of Valentinian (the emperor with a long cross in the right hand and with the right foot on the anthropoid head of a snake) and with the legend VICTORI AVGGG, whose mint mark of R-V (= *Ravenna*) was re-engraved on this occasion into T-S (= *Thessalonica*).¹⁷ (Fig. 2C:6-7) The small number of specimens known to date suggests that this minting in Thessalonica could have been very short lived, and it is hence very likely that the Western Roman moneyers, together with part of Valentinian's entourage, returned to Italy considerably earlier than Valentinian and his spouse.

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If it is possible to rely on the already observed, recognized, and analyzed manners of dealing with the court mint in cases of the sojourn of the emperor outside the residential seat during the first half of the 5th century, then it is also not without reason permitted to assume that the acquired knowledge in a similar manner or even completely and *per analogiam* can also be applied to the period of the reigns of the Western Roman emperors in the second half of the 5th century. Some of the latter, truth be told, did not stay a single day in Rome during their reign (Majorian), or supposedly never even left Rome (Anthemius), while the movements and sojourns of those whose reigns were considerably briefer or even very short have left very few or even barely noticeable traces in the written sources. One such short-lived reign of the second half of the 5th century was that of the emperor Julius Nepos, after Anthemius the second Western Roman ruler in a row to be enthroned by the will and with the aid of the emperor in Constantinople. He did not gain this support by chance, as apart from the name and services for the Empire of his predecessor Marcellinus, his family connections to him but also to the imperial family in Constantinople, and his own military career (*magister militum*) and the experience gained in this and similar tasks, he surely showed readiness and determination to exchange the administration of Dalmatia for the uncertain fate of the ruler of Italy.

The historical sources are mostly agreed when they mention Rome as the site of Nepos' proclamation as emperor, but the place in Italy (*apud Ravennam*) where he first arrived on the journey from Dalmatia is mentioned only once, in a source created in the

¹⁶ One of the most often mentioned indicators of this project of Theodosius was undoubtedly his long prepared collection of laws (*Codex Theodosianus*), promoted in both parts of the empire, in the East in February 438, and in the West in January 439. For more details, see *Matthews* 2001, 6-7, 10-11, 29-30, 51; *Millar* 2006, 55-59; *Salvey* 2013, 1-4.

¹⁷ The possibility should not be ruled out that prior to the re-engraving, this reverse die made a pair with the obverse die of Valentinian's first Western Roman series with Ravenna traits minted in Thessalonica (Fig. 2A:1/obverse).

middle of the 6th century.¹⁸ Although the information was recorded decades later than the event itself, it nonetheless uncovers something about the manner, intention, and direction of Nepos' movements before June 474, supporting the claim that by landing not by chance at Ravenna he was first declared caesar (*Caesarem ordinavit*).¹⁹ After through this act he had evidently successfully and in a short time gained the trust of the military commanders there, he continued his trip to Rome, where he was proclaimed emperor (*augustus*) – two chronologically close dates are mentioned, both in the second half of June 474 (19 or 24 June) – and in the port of the city of Rome (*ad Portum urbis Romae*)²⁰ he captured the dethroned Glycerius without a fight either after an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the harbour by boat or because this was where the latter had voluntarily surrendered. There is no direct news about any sojourns of Nepos in Rome or outside of it during his almost fourteen months long reign in Italy. Hence, the belief was probably formed that after establishing power he remained in Rome for almost a year, and that only shortly before the hostile acts of his supreme military commander Orestes he had set out for Ravenna,²¹ from where, escaping conflict, imminent defeat, and certain death, he set sail on the 28th of August 475 for his native Dalmatia.

About Nepos' plans and political activities in Italy in the first months of his reign, other than the numismatically recognizable move oriented to renewing mint activities in the eastern part of the Italian prefecture, where in Salona, the main city of the province of Dalmatia (or in the nearby palace of Diocletian in Split) he established a mint and began minting gold coins,²² only in the written historical sources is Nepos' focus more or less clearly presented on the problem of the survival of Western Roman rule in Gaul, which during his reign was threatened by the danger that it would finally be lost entirely to the empire. At the end of the last third of the 5th century, the Visigoths led by King Euric (466-484) had expanded to such an extent that they increasingly began to threaten openly not merely the still unoccupied sections of southern Gaul, but also ruthlessly threatened attacks on the very prefecture of Italy itself. One such attempt was successfully thwarted by Nepos' predecessor, Glycerius in 473,²³ but only briefly, as the

¹⁸ *Jordanes*, 42 no. 338-339.

¹⁹ For this as well as certain other aspects of this information, see *Mathisen* 1998.

²⁰ *Anon. Val. PP*, 7.36; *Martindale* 1980, 777 (s.v. "Iulius Nepos 3"), in this completely omitted the data about Nepos' arrival in Ravenna and proclamation as *caesar*, considering that he entered Italian soil in Rome, where he was declared emperor (*augustus*). Kent, on the other hand, suggested that Glycerius acted "cooperatively" with Nepos, and that he accordingly came to Rome so as to surrender to Nepos (1994, 201, 202).

²¹ *Gillet* 2001, 154-155, 161; *McEvoy* 2017, 100.

²² The credit for the hypothesis about the existence of a mint in Salona during the period of the nominal reign of Julius Nepos (475-480) and the minting of gold coins, primarily solidi, goes to *G. Lacam* (1983, 702-713), although the examples that he presented in support were not minted in Nepos' Dalmatia. This mint, located either in Salona or in Diocletian's Palace in Split, in contrast to the Italian mints primarily minted tremisses, whose numerous variants, often tied by the use of the same obverse or reverse dies, frequently come from finds and museum acquisitions from the region of Dalmatia, *Demo* 1988, 247-262 (where rare solidi are also attributed to this mint); *Demo* 2005, 187-194; *Demo* 2020, 56-85 [Engl. 71-85]. For another solidus attributed to this same mint of Nepos, see *Demo* 1989, 41-44 [engl. 43-44].

²³ *Mathisen* 1998a. In Gaul, not merely was the military situation unfavourable for the Empire, but the political conditions were significantly disrupted by the increasingly widespread process of the dissolution of the Gallo-Roman identity, see *Mathisen* 1993, 126-128.

instability of the Western Roman central government continued through the persistent refusal of the Eastern Roman rulers to recognize the legitimacy of the reign of Glycerius (Leo I, Zeno). This was more than encouraging to Euric's aspirations, because of which Nepos soon after ascending to the throne attempted to act quickly and decisively, wishing to slow down and possibly even halt the Visigothic expansion so that it would not later spill over from Gaul into the northwestern parts of Italy. He intended to achieve this through negotiations, hoping to gain time in this manner, and motivated by the promises from Constantinople for military preparations in order to restrain Euric, whose aim was evidently to occupy all of Aquitania I. The efforts of Nepos are documented in the form of missions sent to Euric on two occasions. The first mission was entrusted to Epiphanius, the Bishop of Pavia (*Ticinum*) and took place in circumstances favourable to Nepos in the summer of 474, with the task of solving the problems that (seemingly) bothered only the inhabitants of Liguria, while in the preparations for the mission that gathered together the powerful of Liguria (*consilium Liguriaie*) Nepos himself probably participated.²⁴ At that time, but certainly after the first mission, Nepos was still present in northern Italy, as is indicated by the travel of the quaestor Licinianus (*quaestor sacri palatii*), who was sent from Ravenna to Gaul, so as to entrust the defence of the Gallo-Romanic population of Aquitaine to Ecdicius, the son of the emperor Avitus, and to inform him in relation to that that he had been appointed the military commander (*magister militum*) and raised to the rank of patrician.²⁵ A second mission composed of the bishops of several southern Gallic cities (Basilius, Aix-en-Provence/*Aquae Sextiae*; Leontius, Arles/*Arelate*; Faustus, Riez/*Regium*; Graecus, Marseilles/*Massillia*) would have had a later date and would have occurred in circumstances not favourable to Nepos in the (early) spring of 475, after at the beginning of that year the fugitive Zeno was replaced on the throne in Constantinople by Basiliscus. The bishops ingloriously ended this task in the summer of 475 with an agreement to hand over to Euric all the so far unoccupied parts of Aquitania I,²⁶ in exchange for the Visigothic renunciation of attacks on the southern parts of the provinces of Viennensis and Narbonensis II, the only remaining parts of the prefecture of Gaul still under the control of the Western Roman emperor.

As worded in the sources, these data only hint at the reasons for Nepos' sojourn in northern Italy, as well as the possible directions of his itinerary during the second half of 474, and partly later in the first half of 475. A clearer confirmation is offered by the contemporaneous numismatic material which show that from the very beginning of the reign of Nepos in Italy, the mint in Ravenna was first in minting solidi, with somewhat less production from the mint in Milan, and even less production from the mints in

²⁴ *Ennod.*, LXXX (Opusc. 3), 80-94; *Mathisen* 1998 (spring of 475); *Wolfram*, 1988, 186 (spring of 475). For Ennodius' description of the meeting between Bishop Epiphanius and the Visigothic King Euric in Toulouse, and the interpretation of this event, see *Posavec* 2007, 173-175; *Arnold* 2014, 21-25. For the dating to 474 and the local character of Epiphanius' mission (the problem of Visigothic incursions into Liguria), as well as Nepos' role in the preparation of the mission itself, see *Gillett* 2003, 152, 162, 167-168, 284-285.

²⁵ *Sid. Ep.*, V.16/1; *Martindale* 1980, 384, sv. "Ecdicius 3", 682, s.v. "Licinianus 1" (late 474); *Henning* 1997, 102 (autumn/winter 474), *Mathisen* 1998; *MacGeorg.*, 2002, 275 n. 1153 (late 474); *Posavec* 2007, 185 (474)

²⁶ *Sid. Ep.*, VII.6-7. For the dating of this event in the summer of 475, *Mathisen* 2013, 222-223.

Rome and Arles, and when the minting of solidi is in question, the production of the newly established mint of Nepos in Dalmatia was quite symbolic. Such positioning and the predominant effect of the mint in Ravenna were the result of its court status that it had once again acquired during the reign of the emperor Glycerius.²⁷ The example of Glycerius and the conditions that he found in northern Italy prompted Nepos to set up his own court (*comitatus*) in Ravenna, probably considering that from there he would be able to follow the situation more efficiently both in the west (southern Gaul) and in the eastern prefectures (Dalmatia; Pannonia). The access to the sea and the sea routes enabled him a direct connection, not merely with the eastern Adriatic coast and southern Italy but also with the emperor in Constantinople.

The moves aimed at continuous control of the situation in Gaul and the strategic decisions he had to make required from Nepos speed and direct involvement and certainly represented – because of the increased expenses for military and court needs – the main reason for the dominant monetary production of the Ravenna mint. By taking over the role of the court mint, it took control not merely of the organization and staff, but also the mode of operation and forms of work concomitant to that status. One of these responsibilities involved the equipment, training, and readiness for the mobile work of individual segments of the mint on the occasion of travels or sojourns of the emperor outside of his actual residential seat. There must have been more or less clear rules about work in such circumstances, and some of them applied during the reign of Valentinian III in the first half of the 5th century were certainly also applied later. Despite the inevitable adjustments of the dies, the simplest for quick application was the use of the obverse die of the court mint in combination with some of the (already utilized) reverse dies of the mint in the place of the temporary residence of the emperor or in the mint closest to that place. For the reign of Nepos, examples of the use of the obverse die of the court mint in Ravenna appear on solidi characterized by the reverse mint mark of A-R for the mint in Arles (*Arelate*) and M-D for the mint in Milan (*Mediolanum*).

1. The solidi of Nepos minted in Arles because of their small number are usually presented in the referential numismatic literature as a homogeneous group of coins classified as *Kent* 1994 (=RIC X), no. 3223,²⁸ *Depeyrot* 1996/2004, no. 29/1,²⁹ or *Ferrando*

²⁷ The presence and operations of the court mint (*comitatus*) in Ravenna during the reign of Glycerius was considered probable by *Kent* 1994, 201. – For the court of Glycerius in Ravenna, *Gusso* 1992, 184-185; *Henning* 1999, 50, n. 132.

²⁸ *Kent* 1994 (=RIC X), no. 3223 includes a group of 7 solidi: in the textual part (p. 430), specimens are listed from London (BM), Washington (DO), Paris (BnF), and Vienna (KHM-MK), with the accompanying notes citing examples from hoards in Bulgaria (Razgrad, Roman *Abritus*) and Poland (Radostowo/Radstuhle), and an example from an auction of a well-known Frankfurt auction house (*Peus* 330/1991, 492) today owned by the Österreichische Nationalbank in Vienna (AN 00417). The corresponding table (Pl. 69) shows the solidus from London (BM 1860.0329.277), and not the example from Vienna, as was noted with an asterisk in the textual part of the publication (p. 430). – A solidus of Nepos from the Radostowo hoard was attributed to this type by Renata Ciolek, who offered various very interesting and useful information about this find and its sad fate after World War II (2007, 197-199).

²⁹ *Depeyrot* 1996/2004, no. 29/1 for a representative of the group of Nepos' solidi minted in Arles (1996, 139 no. 29/1, Pl. 7) chose the example from Paris (BnF), later adding another 7 solidi (*Depeyrot* 2004, 29 no. 29), among them a second example from this mint in the collections of the KHM-MK in Vienna not mentioned by J.P.C. *Kent* in 1994.



Fig. 3 – *Solidi of Julius Nepos minted in Arles (Arelate), second half of 474 (summer/autumn). 1* – *A solidus minted with the obverse and reverse dies of the Arles mint, Sovana-San Mamiliano, hoard from 2004 (Arslan-Turchetti 2015, 208 no. 483). 2* – *A solidus minted with the obverse die of the Ravenna mint, Razgrad (Abritus), hoard from 1971 (Stojanov 1982, 17). 3* – *A solidus minted with the obverse and reverse of the Arles mint (NAC 33/2006, no. 632).*

2010, no. 1731.³⁰ Among these, because of the distinctly different workmanship of the obverse depiction and the lettering in the standard obverse legend DN IVL NE – POS P F AVC, four solidi stand out, all four minted with the same combination of the Ravenna obverse and the Arelate reverse dies: one example each from the museum collections in Paris (BnF)³¹ and Vienna (KHM-MK), and one example each from the large hoards of gold coins found in Bulgaria (Razgrad, Roman *Abritus*)³² and in Italy (Sovana-San Mamiliano, no. 483).³³ (**Fig. 3:2**) In terms of the production of the mint in Arles, this group of solidi can be placed in the early (but not the earliest) period of Nepos' minting – this is confirmed by the ties of its reverse die to the Arelate series that preceded it, but also to series minted later (**Fig. 3: 1, 3**) – and it can be suggested with great probability that the Arelate solidi with the Ravenna obverses were minted during the second half of 474, most probably at the end of the summer or in early autumn of that year.

³⁰ Ferrando 2010, no. 1731 encompassed a group of 6 solidi (p. 356): 2 examples from unlisted private collections and 4 examples from unspecified public collections. An example seen often at auctions was presented with an illustration (recently *Heritage* 3071/2019, no. 32317), already commented on in the numismatic literature (*Lacam* 1983, 601 no. 2, 603 Pl. CXLVI:Leu, Pl. 37:8), mentioned again in 2004 (*Depeyrot* 2004, 29 no. 29/1 = *Hess-Leu* 28/1965, no. 546 = *Leu* 25/1980, 465), and once again offered and sold at auction in Zürich two years later (*NAC* 33/2006, 632).

³¹ *Lacam* 1983, 601 no. 1, 603 Pl. CXLVI:B.N., Pl 37:7. He noticed the non-Arelate features of the obverse of this solidus, considered them the work of the engravers of the Roman mint, but did not attempt to investigate or interpret the reasons for them (op. cit., 602).

³² *Stojanov* 1982, 17.

³³ *Arslan-Turchetti* (eds.) 2015, 208, no. 483.

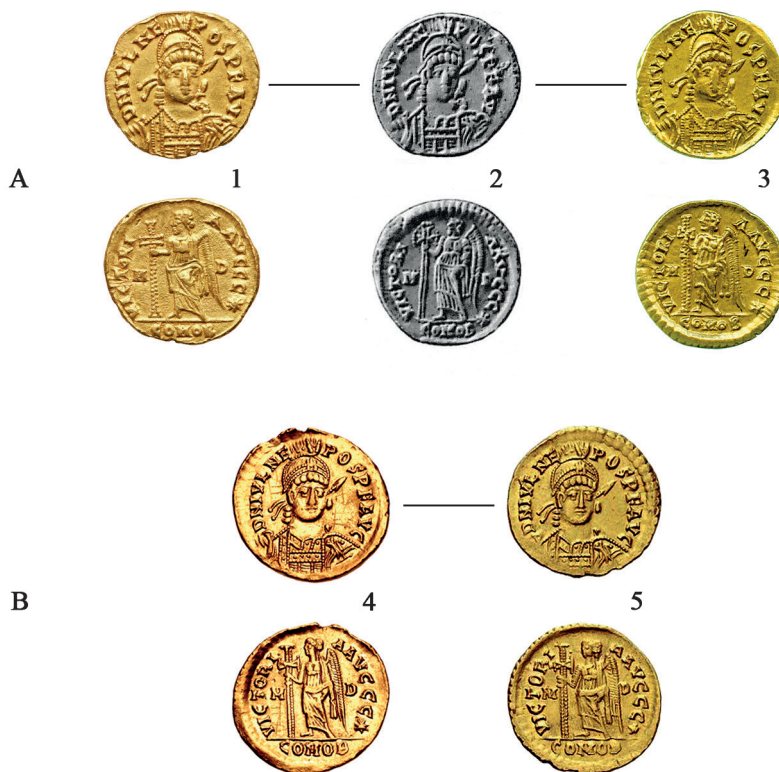


Fig. 4A – *Solidi of Julius Nepos minted in Milan (Mediolanum) with the same Ravenna obverse die and different Milan reverse dies, first series, second half of 474 (summer).* **1** – First series, first reverse die (Goldberg 120/2021, no. 1152 = Mazzini 1958, 292 no. 5, Pl. LXXVII:d.5 = Santamaria 1938, no. 1111). **2** – First series, second reverse die (Gilhofer & Ranschburg/Hess 1935, no. 4706 (coll. F. Trau) = Ulrich-Bansa 1949, no. 152 = DO, 67.35.21, Grierson–Mays 1992, no. 943). **3** – First series, third reverse die (The Fitzwilliam Museum, CM.RI.2023-R / © The Fitzwilliam Museum).

Fig. 4B – *Solidi of Julius Nepos minted in Milan (Mediolanum) with the same Ravenna obverse die and two Milan reverse dies, second series, second half of 474 (summer/autumn).* **1** – Second series, first reverse die (Triton XXI,3-4/2017, no. 872). **2** – Second series, second reverse die (NAC 62/2011, no. 2131).

2. The solidi minted in Milan with the obverse die of the Ravenna mint belong to Lacam's group Milan-II/C,³⁴ which corresponds to the group Kent 1994 (=RIC X), no.

³⁴ Lacam 1983, 636, 638 (Pl. CLVIII:2-5), Pl. 38:34-35, 39:37-38. From this group, I excluded the solidus from the auction Gilhofer&Ranschburg/Hess 1935, no. 4706 (coll. F. Trau) = Ulrich-Bansa 1949, no. 152 (op. cit., Pl. CLVIII:1, Pl. 38:1) as it is identical to the solidus in D.O. 67.35.21 (Grierson-Mays 1992, no. 943).

3218,³⁵ as well as the majority of examples in the group *Depeyrot* 1996/2004, no. 38/1.³⁶ In contrast to the minting in Arles, the minting staff of Nepos' court mint judging from the material known to date for the minting of solidi in Milan used two of their Ravenna obverse dies and five Milan reverse dies: the first obverse die was minted in combination with three reverse dies (**Fig. 4A:1-3**), and the second obverse die in a combination with two reverse dies (**Fig. 4B:4-5**). The number of the reverse dies suggests a more extensive and longer period of minting in the same place – longer in terms of the minting in Arles – and the use of two obverse dies, showing the existence of two series, other than a lengthy period of minting also suggests the possibility that this minting occurred on two occasions, and that the first time it was somewhat longer (the first Ravenna obverse die) and the second time somewhat shorter (the second Ravenna obverse die). The position of this entire group of Milan solidi within the total minting by nepos in Milan places the beginning of the minting of the court series there in a period earlier than the minting of the court series in Arles, and the ending in a period certainly later than that at Arles.

To compare these two groups it is necessary to add the fact that for the minting of the solidi of Nepos' court series in Arles and Milan not in a single case was the same Ravenna obverse die used. If this was not a mere coincidence, it might indicate a hitherto unrecognized rule for the mobile operation of the court mint that was adhered to and taken into account in this late imperial period. Despite the absence of a direct connection of the Ravenna obverse dies, the beginning of minting by the court mint outside the residential seat of Nepos (Ravenna) could be determined by the positioning of the dies of the analysed groups in the total production of the two mints, and with great certainty it can be claimed that both groups belonged to a chronological period that was considerably closer to the beginning than the middle or end of Nepos' rule in Italy. This defined and approximately determined the chronological span of the minting of both groups, and it is certain that minting occurred in the earlier period of the second half of 474. The positioning of the dies of the analysed groups has also shown that the minting of the court series in Milan began prior to the minting of the solidi of the court group in Arles, but also that it ended after the minting in Arles. Hence, it is permissible to consider some possible successive relocation of the court minting staff from Milan to Arles, and from Arles back to Milan, where the brief minting of the second court series of the Milan solidi would have ended the mobile activities of the staff of the court mint, after which their return to Ravenna would have followed in the autumn of 474.

The mobility of the court mint on the Milan-Arles-Milan route is a reflection of Nepos' sojourn outside of Ravenna and his concentration on resolving the situation and conditions in Gaul and particularly in its southeast, where the Visigothic expansion was just reaching its peak. On the western borders of the Prefecture of Italy, Nepos decided

³⁵ *Kent* 1994 (=RIC X), no. 3218, encompassed a group of 4 solidi: in the textual part (p. 429) examples are documented from Berlin (SMB), Cambridge (FM), Washington (DO), and Vienna (KHM-MK). On the corresponding table (Pl. 69) the solidus from Berlin (SMB) is depicted, but with the mark of group no. 3219 (obverse ending *NC*), to which that solidus from Berlin does not belong.

³⁶ *Depeyrot* 1996, 178 no. 38/1, Pl. 14:38/1 (specimen from the BnF); *Depeyrot* 2004, 53 no. 38/1, where in the same group, in addition to solidi minted in Milan with one of the two Ravenna obverse dies documented to date, there were also individual "regular" emissions of solidi from the Milan mint (e.g. *MuM* 44/1971, no. 206).

to oppose Euric and his Visigoths through a policy of negotiation (Ephanius) while at the same time encouraging the Romano-Gallic resistance (Licinianus, Ecdicius), in the belief that he would gain time for the preparation for a possible military intervention in the spring of the following year. He certainly must have invested considerable funds in realizing his aspirations, probably counting on support from Constantinople. The effort and hopes soon proved to be futile, as Zeno was overthrown in Constantinople at the beginning of 475. With the arrival of Basiliscus on the throne, things began to go downhill for Nepos, first slowly and then faster and faster.

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