

DAVID R. SEAR

Certificate of Authenticity

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This coin has been personally inspected and authenticated by

Issued to: Jens Georg Feierabend

On: October 3, 2017

David R. Sear

State: Roman Empire

Ruler: Elagabalus (AD 218-222)

Denomination: orichalcum sestertius

Mint: Rome

Date: AD 218-219

Weight: 20.15 grams

Maximum Diameter: 30.22 millimeters

Die Axis: ↑

Obverse: IMP CAES M AVR ANTONINVS PIVS AVG, laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Elagabalus right.

Reverse: VICTORIA ANTONINI AVG S C, Victory advancing right, holding wreath and palm branch.

References: RIC 377; BMCRE 362; Cohen 297; Thirion (*Le Monnayage d'Elagabale*) 66; Sear (*Roman Coins & Their Values II*) 7582.

Grade: good F with dark patina

Historical & Numismatic Note: At the time of Caracalla's assassination in Mesopotamia (April, AD 217) his mother, the Empress Julia Domna, was residing in the Syrian capital of Antioch. When news of her son's death reached her, she decided to take her own life despite assurances from the new emperor Macrinus that she had nothing to fear. Her elder sister, Julia Maesa, then returned to the family home in Emesa, Syria, where she set about organizing a plot to overthrow the new regime and restore the Severan house to the imperial throne. Her grandson, Varius Avitus Bassianus, held the hereditary priesthood of the Emesan sun god Elah-Gabal, hence the Romanized name Elagabalus by which he is known to posterity. The rumor was spread that Elagabalus was the illegitimate son of Caracalla, the intention being to appeal to the loyalty of the troops who had been devoted to their former emperor and were suspicious of the circumstances under which Macrinus had come to power. The ruse was successful and Elagabalus, assured of the backing of a large army, was proclaimed emperor under the name of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Macrinus was defeated and subsequently put to death and Elagabalus was left in undisputed possession of the imperial throne. Rome's new ruler, only 14 years of age, proceeded on a leisurely journey to his capital, taking with him the black stone or baetyl of his deity. On his arrival, in the autumn of 219, this holy object was enshrined on the Palatine and the *deus invictus Sol Elagabalus* became, if only briefly, the chief deity of Rome. The emperor's wild excesses outraged Roman society and the shrewd Julia Maesa soon realized that all her work might be undone through a popular reaction against her grandson's flagrant profligacy. Accordingly, she arranged for the advancement of her younger grandson Alexianus and did everything possible to make him the focus of attention for the moderate element of public opinion. She had acted wisely, for in March 222 the praetorian guard mutinied and Elagabalus and his mother Julia Soemias were both murdered, the 14-year-old Alexianus being proclaimed emperor in his place under the name of Severus Alexander. This orichalcum sestertius was struck at Rome early in the reign of Elagabalus, probably even before his arrival in the capital from the East. The obverse portrait is of conventional Roman style, quite unlike the more realistic representations on coins issued in the East and at Rome in the latter part of the reign. The reverse celebrates the "Victory of the Emperor Antoninus" (*Victoria Antonini Augusti*) and depicts the goddess Victory hurrying to right, carrying her usual attributes of wreath and palm branch. This is a clear reference to the defeat of Macrinus in the battle fought near Antioch in Syria on 8 June AD 218.

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