

DAVID R. SEAR

Certificate of Authenticity

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This coin has been personally inspected and authenticated by

Issued to: Jens G. Feierabend

On: March 22, 2019

David R. Sear

State: Roman Empire

Ruler: Aelius, Caesar under Hadrian (AD 136-138)

Denomination: orichalcum sestertius

Mint: Rome

Date: AD 137

Weight: 25.87 grams

Maximum Diameter: 31.37 millimeters

Die Axis: ↙

Obverse: L AELIVS CAESAR, bare head of Aelius right.

Reverse: TR POT COS II S C, Spes advancing left, holding flower and lifting drapery of dress behind.

References: RIC 1055; BMCRE 1914; Cohen 56; Cayón 25.84 (die match with specimen in Kricheldorf Auction XXI, 6-7 April, 1970); Hill (*The Undated Coins of Rome, A.D. 98-148*) 825; Sear (*Roman Coins & Their Values II*) 3986.

Grade: VF, struck on a thick flan but with areas of surface erosion, especially on obverse where the largest one affects the back of Aelius' neck

Historical & Numismatic Note: Lucius Ceionius Commodus, son and grandson of the consuls of AD 106 and 78, was born probably about 104. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Hadrian regarded him as a suitable candidate for succession to the imperial throne. He was praetor in AD 130 and in 136 celebrated his first consulship. Later in the same year, he was adopted by Hadrian, whereupon he took the name of Lucius Aelius Caesar. To gain administrative and military experience he was sent to govern the two Pannonias and in December, he received the tribunician power (*tribunicia potestas*). On January 1st, 137, he celebrated his second consulship and it was at this time that he began to participate in the coinage. This was issued in all denominations, from aureus to as, and was likely produced by the two officinae that had formerly been assigned to the late empress Sabina. Unfortunately for Hadrian, his designated heir did not enjoy a strong constitution and his health problems were aggravated by his addiction to luxury and the pleasures of the table. He died suddenly of a massive hemorrhage on New-Year's Day, AD 138, thereby creating something of a constitutional crisis as Hadrian's health was by now failing fast. The problem was solved by the adoption of the 52-year-old senator Antoninus on February 25th and the new heir immediately received imperium and the *tribunicia potestas*. Interestingly, as one of the conditions of the adoption Hadrian insisted that Antoninus himself should adopt both M. Annius Verus (later the emperor Marcus Aurelius) and L. Ceionius Commodus, the 8-year-old son of the late Aelius Caesar, who was destined to ascend the throne as the co-emperor Lucius Verus. This curious stipulation fueled popular gossip that Aelius Caesar was, in fact, the natural son of Hadrian and that Lucius Verus would thus have been his grandson. There is no way of knowing whether this rumor had any basis in fact. This orichalcum sestertius of Aelius depicts on the reverse Spes, goddess of Hope, a fitting sentiment for the heir to the imperial throne.

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