

**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: February 5, 2021

*David R. Sear*

State: Roman Empire

Ruler: Aquilia Severa (second wife of Elagabalus)

Denomination: orichalcum sestertius

Mint: Rome

Date: AD 220/21

Weight: 18.91 grams

Maximum Diameter: 30.15 millimeters

Die Axis: ↑

Obverse: IVLIA AQVILIA SEVERA AVG, diademed and draped bust of Aquilia Severa right.

Reverse: CONCORDIA S C, Concordia standing left, sacrificing over lighted garlanded altar from patera held in extended right hand, and holding double cornucopiae at her side in left, star in right field.

References: RIC 390; BMCRE 433 and pl. 96, 8 (same obverse die); Cohen 4 (citing the Paris specimen, likely from the same dies); Banti (*I Grandi Bronzi Imperiali*) p. 46, 4 (same obverse die, 25 specimens cited); Thirion (*Le Monnayage d'Elagabale, 218-222*) 482; Sear (*Roman Coins & Their Values II*) 7681.

Grade: good F and very rare

Historical & Numismatic Note: following the assassination of Caracalla (April, AD 217) and the subsequent suicide of his mother at Antioch, Julia Domna's elder sister Julia Maesa returned to the family home at Emesa in Syria to set about organizing a plot to overthrow the new regime of Macrinus and restore the Severan house to the imperial throne. Maesa's 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 legions 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. It was not long, however, before the new emperor's wild excesses began to outrage Roman society, one of his greatest offenses being his marriage in AD 220 to a vestal virgin, Aquilia Severa, following his repudiation of his first wife, Julia Paula. The vestals were under a solemn vow of chastity, but Elagabalus defended his behavior in a letter to the Senate arguing that a child begotten of the high priest of Elah-Gabal by a priestess of Vesta could be little short of divine; but he betrayed his true motive when he added that he was in love with her. She was, it seems, the one woman able to overcome his distaste for the opposite sex. But the Roman historian Dio spoke for establishment opinion when he described the violation of a vestal as an act "for which he [Elagabalus] ought to have been publicly scourged, thrown into jail and put to death". The indignation aroused was such that the emperor was forced to yield and Aquilia had to retire after only a brief period as empress. This sestertius, with an attractive portrait of the ephemeral empress, doubtless was struck on the occasion of Aquilia Severa's marriage to Elagabalus. It has the standard reverse type for such occasions, depicting the goddess Concordia personifying conjugal harmony and is one of 12 specimens recorded from this die-combination. Interestingly, Elagabalus returned to his second wife the following year after he had divorced her successor, Annia Faustina. On this occasion, however, there was no outcry as Aquilia's earlier nuptials had deprived her of vestal status.

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