

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: April 7, 2022

David R. Sear

State: Roman Empire

Ruler: Caracalla (as Caesar under Septimius Severus, AD 195-198)

Denomination: orichalcum sestertius

Mint: Rome

Date: circa AD 196

Weight: 16.33 grams

Maximum Diameter: 30.17 millimeters

Die Axis: ↗

Obverse: M AVR ANTONI—NVS CAES, bareheaded and draped bust of young Caracalla right.

Reverse: SEVERI AVG PII FIL (around), S C (in exergue), lituus, axe, patera, tall jug, simpulum, and sprinkler (emblems of the priestly colleges).

References: BMCRE, p. 150, 611; RIC 400; Cohen 585; Cayón 142.4 (*same obverse die*); Banti 124; Sear (*Roman Coins & Their Values II*) 6685.

Grade: good F/fair, attractive youthful portrait of Caracalla

Historical & Numismatic Note: Caracalla (more correctly Caracallus) was born in AD 188, the firstborn of the Roman senator Septimius Severus and his young wife Julia Domna, daughter of the high priest of the sun-god Elah-Gabal at Emesa in Syria. His original name was Julius Bassianus, after his maternal grandfather the high priest, but after his father became emperor, his name was changed to Marcus Aurelius Antoninus: this was in accordance with Severus' policy of adopting himself into the recently defunct Antonine dynasty. Caracalla was merely a nickname derived from the flowing Gallic cloak that was his favorite attire. Promoted to the rank of Caesar at the end of 195, at the age of only eight, he was further advanced just two years later to become his father's co-emperor. Doubtless, this was the basis of the mutual hostility felt between Caracalla and his brother, Septimius Geta. Although Geta was only a year younger he was obliged to retain the junior rank of Caesar for more than a decade (198-209) before he, too, was promoted to be Augustus and co-emperor with his father and brother. The deep-rooted animosity of the two brothers was to have devastating consequences for the future of the Severan dynasty. In 202, Caracalla, still only fourteen, was obliged to marry Plautilla, daughter of the powerful and influential praetorian prefect Plautianus. The union was a disaster and Caracalla was instrumental in bringing about his father-in-law's downfall three years later and the banishment of Plautilla. In 208, he accompanied his father, together with the other members of the imperial family, to Britain where the situation on the northern frontier demanded urgent action. Caracalla played a leading part in the military operations in Caledonia (Scotland) and because of Severus' ill health led the final campaign in person. This provided an excellent opportunity to ingratiate himself with the army, thus giving him a considerable advantage in the upcoming struggle for supremacy with his brother. On the death of the old emperor at York early in 211, the two imperial brothers hastened back to Rome where they lived in mutual suspicion for the remainder of the year. Caracalla then tricked Geta into accepting an invitation to a supposed private meeting in the empress's apartments, but the young emperor was murdered in his mother's arms by officers loyal to Caracalla (December, AD 211). His last five years were principally devoted to campaigning on the German frontier and in the East where, wishing to emulate the achievements of Alexander the Great, he made elaborate preparations for a war against Parthia. In April, 217, he was struck down in Mesopotamia by a conspiracy of his principal officers. His death, at the age of twenty-nine, brought to an end the initial phase of the history of the Severan dynasty. Caracalla's coinage is interesting in several respects. In the realm of portraiture it is possible to follow the changes in his physical appearance from the comparative innocence of a young boy of eight (as on this piece) to a very mature and ferocious-looking man of twenty-nine. An important numismatic development that took place late in the reign (AD 215) was the introduction of the silver double-denarius, commonly called antoninianus after the emperor's official name Antoninus. This inflationary move was eventually to lead to the disappearance of the denarius after a remarkable history of four and a half centuries. This example of an orichalcum sestertius (worth one-quarter of the silver denarius) was one of the first issues produced by the Rome mint in the name of the eight-year-old Caesar. The reverse features symbols representing the principal priestly colleges of Rome, a type frequently used by heirs to the throne in commemoration of their adoption into these institutions. The accompanying legend identifies the young prince as "the son of the Emperor Severus Pius".

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