
DAILY COIN RELIEF!

A BLOG FOR ANCIENT COINS ON THE PAS
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The coinage of the emperor Clodius Albinus (AD 193-7)

Clodius Albinus was probably governor of Britain when Commodus was murdered in AD 192. He was certainly governor in AD 193 after the short reigns of Pertinax and Didius Julianus. After the death of Pertinax, in 193, Albinus was one of three contenders for the throne, along with Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger. In order to neutralise Albinus, Severus offered him the role of junior emperor (Caesar), an offer which Albinus accepted. Severus then marched East and defeated Niger, thus securing the Empire for himself, with Albinus as his Caesar.

Fig 1: Head of Clodius Albinus(?) from Lullingstone Villa in the British Museum (Room 70)



There are no inscriptions or other direct pieces of evidence for Clodius Albinus as governor in Britain, but at Lullingstone Villa (Kent) two marble busts were found in the cellar of the villa during excavations. It has been argued by scholars, such as Martin Henig, that one of these busts might in fact be Pertinax (who was governor in Britain from AD 185 to 187). However, Richard Abdy has recently suggested that this head is in fact of Clodius Albinus, and I have to say that I agree with him (having published it as being of Pertinax in the *Romans Who Shaped Britain!*). Lullingstone has always been a rather odd ‘villa’, being too small to be a major residence. I would argue that it was possibly a retreat or a hunting lodge for the Roman Governor of Britain (like Chequers is for the Prime Minister now).

The Coinage of Clodius Albinus as Caesar under Septimius Severus (c. AD 193-5)

Coins were struck in gold, silver and copper-alloy for Albinus, alongside issues for Severus, at the mint in Rome from AD 193 to c. AD 195. On the coins, Albinus is given the name Decimus Clodius Septimius Albinus, emphasising his subordination to Septimius Severus.

On the PAS Database there are 74 coins of Clodius Albinus. Of these, 64 were struck when he was Caesar under Septimius Severus. (We will come to the coins struck when he was Augustus later). The most common coin of all the early issues is a *denarius* which features Minerva (**Fig. 2**):



Fig 2: BERK-5EDB2B

Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Caesar (c. AD 193-5) (Reece Period 10)

Mint of Rome, c. AD 194-5

Obv. D CLOD SEPT ALBIN CAES; Bare head right

Rev. MINER PACIF COS II¹; Minerva standing left holding branch and shield on the ground; spear rests against left arm.

RIC V, pt 1, p. 45, no. 7

On the PAS, there are around 50 *denarii* of Albinus as Caesar, but a few are plated or base metal copies. Of the 42 official coins, 29 (69%) are of this Minerva type. It is interesting to compare the spread of types on the PAS Database with the 92 Albinus *denarii* contained in the Shapwick Hoard (Somerset; *tpq* AD 224) of 9,238 coins.² Table 1 shows a comparative breakdown of the coins. The Minerva type is also the most common type in the Shapwick Hoard, but with a lower proportion (50%).

¹ MINER[va] PACIF[era], CO[n]S[ul] II: Minerva the Bringer of Peace, Consul for the second time.

² R. Abdy and S. Minnitt, 'Shapwick Villa, Somerset', in *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain XI* (2002), pp. 169-233.

RIC no.	Rev. Type	PAS	Shapwick
1a-c	PROVID AVG COS; Providentia	1	14
2	COS II; Aesculapius (Fig 3)	2	11
4	FELICITAS COS II; Felicitas	3	5
5	FORT REDVCI COS II; Fortuna	-	1
7	MINER PACIF COS II; Minerva (Fig 2)	29	46
8	SAEC FRVGIF COS II; Saeculum Frugiferum (Fig 5)	1	1
11	ROMAE AETERNAE; Roma (Fig 4)	6	14
Total		42	92

Table 1: A comparison of the reverse types of Clodius Albinus as Caesar *denarii* on the PAS Database with those in the Shapwick Hoard.

It is interesting to note that the Minerva and ROMAE AETERNAE issues are the most common for both the PAS and Shapwick; However, it can be noted that Shapwick also has significant numbers of Providentia and Aesculapius coins, pieces which are rare as PAS finds. Quite why this is the case is unclear. What is very interesting, though, is that there are **no** coins of Albinus as Augustus in the Shapwick Hoard, a matter to which we will return later on.



Fig 3: LIN-EA0992 - Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Caesar. COS II, Aesculapius.



Fig. 4: IOW-0A48F3 - Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Caesar. ROMAE AETERNAE; Roma seated left.



Fig. 5: LEIC-A6B048 – Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Caesar. SAEC FRVGIP COS II; Saeculum Frugiferum standing left, holding caduceus and trident.

Copper-alloy coinage of Clodius Albinus as Caesar

There was quite a significant issue of base metal coins for Albinus, the vast majority apparently being *sestertii* – on the PAS Database, there are 15 *sestertii* and only one *dupondius* / *as*. However, there are proportionally many fewer *sestertii* than there had been for Commodus who has over 700 on the Database: Commodus has over 50 *sestertii per annum* on the Database, whereas Albinus has around 7.

The majority of *sestertii* on the PAS Database are for RIC 52 (FELICITAS COS II S C; Felicitas standing left) (**Fig. 6**), RIC 53 (FORT REDVCI COS II S C; Fortuna seated left) and RIC 54 (MINER PACIF COS II S C; Minerva standing left).



Fig. 6: DOR-3FD9B4 - Copper-alloy *sestertius* of Clodius Albinus as Caesar. FELICITAS COS II S C; Felicitas standing left holding caduceus and sceptre. (RIC 52c/d).

An unpublished *sestertius* and *dupondius* / *as* of Clodius Albinus on the PAS Database

There is one *sestertius* featuring the Saeculum Frugiferum in RIC (no.56). We have already seen this god on a silver coin (**Fig. 5**, above). Clodius Albinus was North African, coming from a patrician / senatorial family of the town of Hadrumentum in Tunisia. Saeculum Frugiferum can be translated as the ‘Fertility of the Age’ but this is really the Latin name for Ba’al-Hammon who was a Carthaginian / Punic weather god responsible for fertility. The god obviously had a close association with Hadrumentum because the town had the Latin title *colonia Ulpia Traiana Frugifera*.³ RIC 52 has the legend SAECVLO FRVGIFERO COS II S C, with Saeculum Frugiferum standing left, as on the *denarius* (**Fig. 5**). The unpublished PAS coin, found in Bedfordshire, has the same legend, but with Saeculum Frugiferum **seated** left, between two sphinxes. His Punic headdress is most distinct (**Fig. 7**). The discovery of this coin should not come as a complete surprise as there is a gold *aureus* known of the type (RIC 10).

³ A. R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (2010), p. 177



Fig. 7: FASAM-92F583 - Copper-alloy sestertius of Clodius Albinus as Caesar. SAECVLO FRV GIFERO COS II S C; Saeculum Frugiferum seated left, between two sphinxes, holding up right hand and holding corn-ears in left. (RIC 56var).

What does come as a further surprise is that this type is now also known for a *dupondius* or *as* (weighing 9.81g, I think probably a *dupondius*) as a result of another PAS find in Herefordshire. It also has the legend [SAECVLO FR]VGIFERO COS (II) S C with Saeculum Frugiferum seated left, as on the *sestertius* (**Fig. 8**). These two coins are quite unexpected discoveries, but one should note that hoards of *sestertii*, *dupondii* and *asses* tend to be rarer than those of *denarii* so fewer new coins have been available for study in the past. Furthermore, base-metal hoards often contain very worn and / or corroded pieces. With the sheer quantity of Roman copper-alloy coins of these denominations recorded by the PAS, it should not come as such a surprise that new types are being found.



Fig. 8: HESH-714F80 - copper-alloy *dupondius* / *as* of Clodius Albinus as Caesar. [SAECVLO FR]VGIFERO COS (II) with Saeculum Frugiferum seated left as on Fig. 7.

The coinage of Clodius Albinus as Augustus, c. AD 195-7. Mint of Lugdunum

In the autumn of 195, the *entente cordiale* between Albinus and Severus came to an end, apparently because Severus was lining up his son Caracalla to be Caesar. Albinus declared himself Augustus and crossed to Gaul with much of the Roman army of Britain. He had some successes, defeating one of Severus' generals and taking Lugdunum (Lyons). At Lugdunum he started to strike silver *denarii* in significant numbers, with a few gold *aurei* (RIC 24-25) and ever fewer *asses* (RIC 64). His title was now IMP CAE[sar] D[ecimus] CLO[dius] SEP[timius] ALB[inus] AVG[ustus], or a variant thereof. The title of a senior emperor, Augustus, is clearly stated, but it is interesting that he keeps the name Septimius, suggesting that he wanted to fight his way to some agreement of parity. The other main difference is that the emperor is no longer bare headed but laureate. There is quite a wide range of types, but they are generally rare (Figs. 9-13); they are certainly rarer than his coins as Caesar struck in Rome. Furthermore, they are not of such good quality with more crudely cut legends and types.

What is really interesting is that there are ten of these pieces on the PAS Database, but there are **none** in the Shapwick Hoard. Is this a genuine case of coins of a usurper being withdrawn from circulation after his defeat? It is notable that many of the PAS coins are in fresh condition so might have been lost soon after striking, not remaining long enough in the currency pool to be withdrawn by the authorities. Amongst the PAS finds are:



Fig. 9: BUC-677D31

Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Augustus. AEQVITAS AVG COS II, Aequitas standing left. (RIC 13a).





Fig. 10: LEIC-FFD7B7 – Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Augustus. FELICITAS AVGVSTI, Felicitas standing left. (RIC 16b).

Fig. 11: BERK-2E1F87 – Silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Augustus. FORTVNA AVGVSTI, Fortuna standing left. (RIC 22).



Fig. 12: LIN-3FA983 – silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Augustus. SAECVLI FELICITATIS, Felicitas standing left. (RIC 38).

Fig. 13: PUBLIC-3ECA5C – silver *denarius* of Clodius Albinus as Augustus. SPES AVGVSTI, Spes advancing left. (RIC 42a)



The defeat of Clodius Albinus at Lugdunum, February AD 197

Septimius Severus wasted little time in advancing against Albinus. In a ferocious battle near Lugdunum, 150,000 men fought it out until Severus was victorious. Albinus and his son(s) were killed and Septimius Severus was now sole ruler of the Roman Empire and able to promote his sons Caracalla and Geta as Caesars and then Augusti. As noted above, it does appear that coins of Clodius Albinus as Augustus were withdrawn from circulation.

Distribution of findspots for coins of Clodius Albinus in Britain

Denarii of Albinus are found across the Province (**Fig. 14**). However, the 15 *sestertii* and one probable *dupondius* have quite a different distribution (**Fig. 15**). They tend to be found in the 'Lowland Zone' to the south of the Fosse Way with only two outliers, one in South Wales and one just north of the Humber in East Yorkshire. This might just be a result of a small sample, but it could also support Philippa Walton's research which showed that in general silver coins were relatively more common north of the Fosse Way and that *sestertii* tended to be more common to the south.⁴

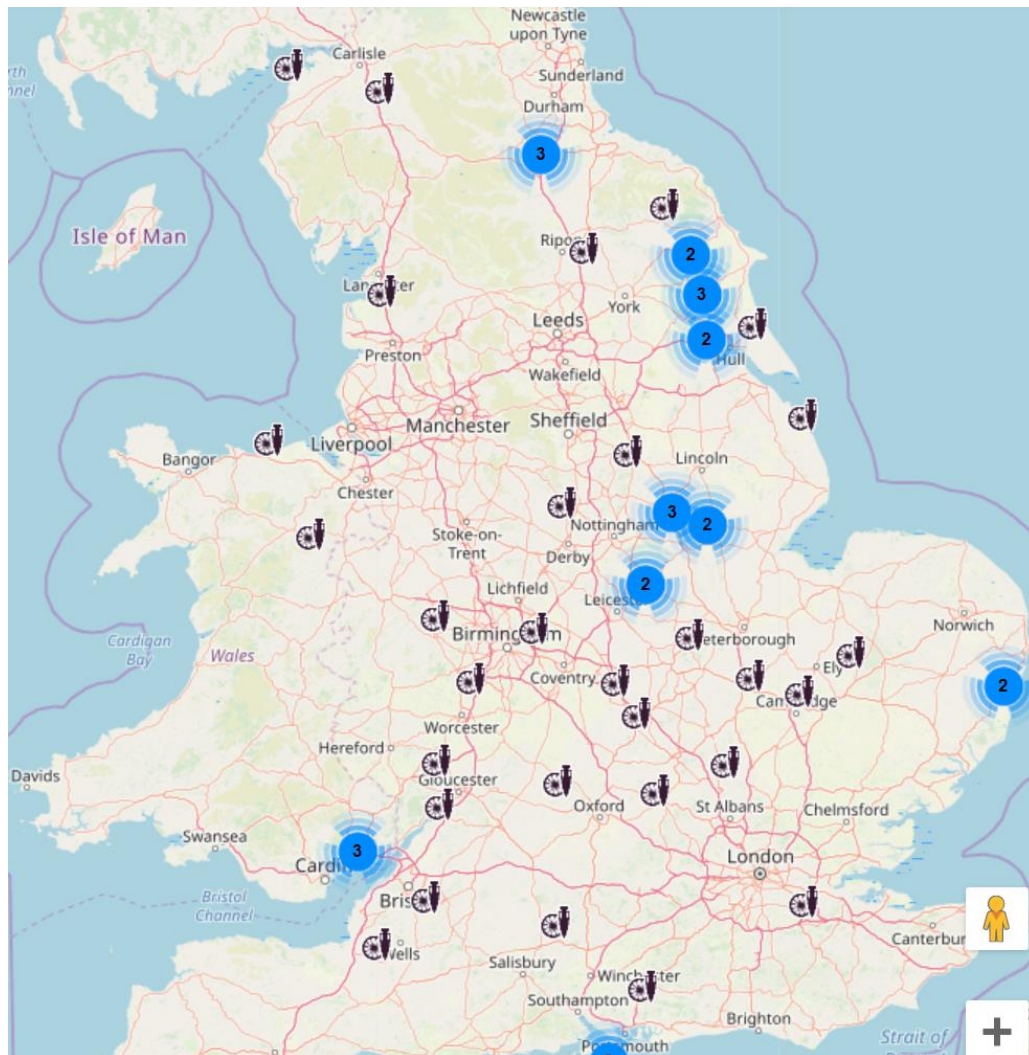


Fig. 14: Distribution of 57 *denarii* of Clodius Albinus on the PAS Database.

⁴ P. Walton, *Rethinking Roman Britain: Coinage and Archaeology* (2012), pp. 43-52

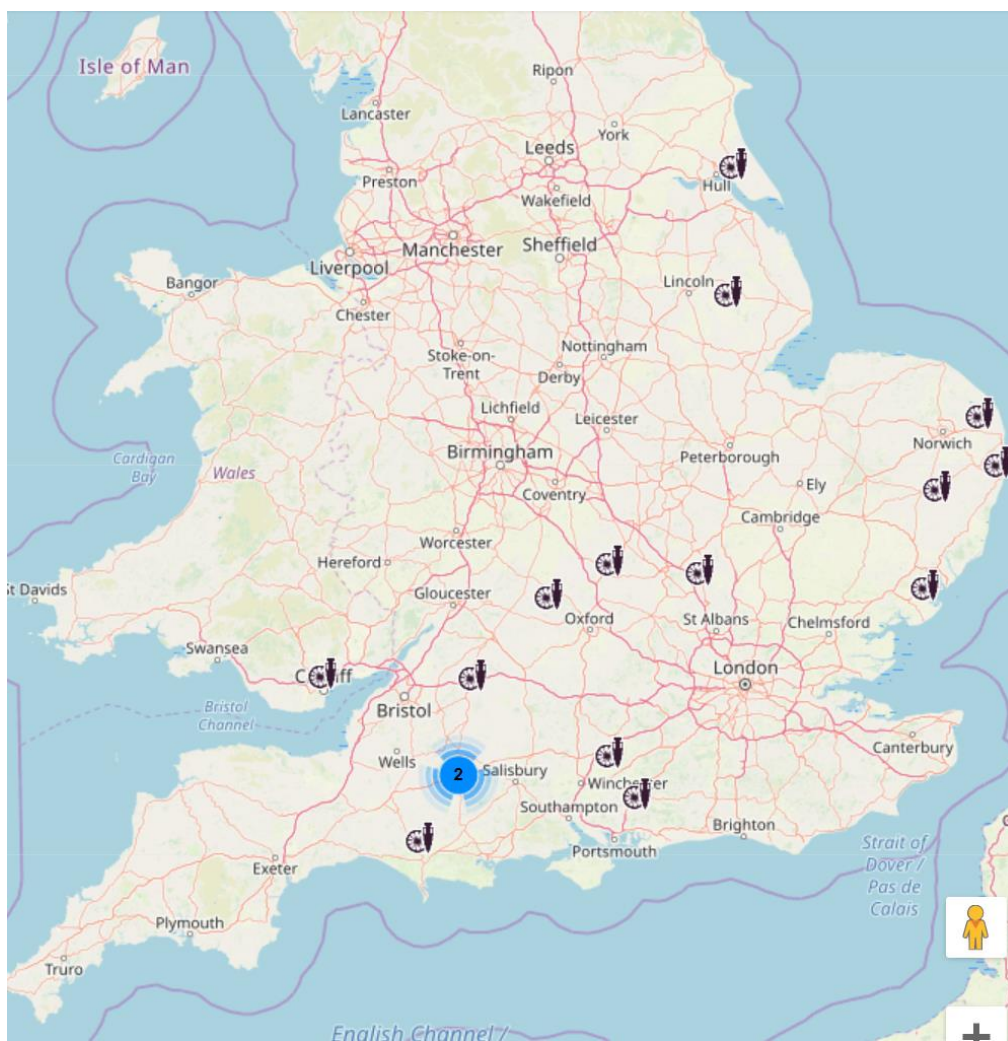


Fig. 15: Distribution of 16 copper-alloy coins of Clodius Albinus on the PAS Database.

A recent find of a copper-alloy medallion of Clodius Albinus in Scotland

In 2014, I received an email from a Scottish metal-detectorist, with the images, below, attached. It had been discussed on various detecting forums on the web and people tended to suggest that it was early modern. Someone finally suggested the finder contact me.

It did not take long to identify it as a medallion of Clodius Albinus. It is much larger than a *sestertius*, with a diameter of 39.4mm. The obverse type is D CLODIVS SEPTIMIUS ALBINVS CAES with the draped and cuirassed bust of the emperor left. The reverse is of the MINER PACIF COS II type (see **Fig. 2**, above). The obverse and reverse types are known from other pieces, but not in this combination.

The medallion would have been struck in Rome. Such pieces were apparently presentation pieces to officials or soldiers and evidence from finds of such pieces in graves suggests that they were often cherished by their owners. This piece is now a cherished artefact in Clydebank Museum. However, sadly, because Scotland is not part of the PAS, it is not on our database.



Fig. 16a: Copper-alloy medallion of Clodius Albinus as Caesar.

This medallion was found near Cardross, just north of the River Clyde, in a region which was outside of Roman control at this time – ie. in *Barbaricum*. How did it get to be there? It is possible that this was a gift from the emperor to a local chieftain? We might have a possible explanation because in AD 197 the Caledonians and Maeatae threatened the Romans and had to be bought off by the new governor of Britain, Virius Lupus. Dio (75.5.4) tells us:

‘Because the Caledonians did not keep to their promises and had prepared to aid the Maeatae and because Severus was then devoting himself to the Parthian(?) War, Lupus was compelled to buy peace from the Maeatae for a large sum, receiving some few captives.’

Is it possible that when Clodius Albinus took much of the British army to the Continent in AD 195/6 he secured a promise from the Caledonians not to assist the Maeatae? Was this the promise which was broken?⁵ Was this medallion an imperial gift to a Caledonian chieftain to seal part of this agreement? We will never know, but Fraser Hunter (National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh) is soon publishing this piece in an academic article.

Greenwich, 23 March 2020

⁵ A. R. Birly, *ibid* pp. 180-4