
DAILY COIN RELIEF!

A BLOG FOR ANCIENT COINS ON THE PAS BY SAM MOORHEAD & ANDREW BROWN

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Fractional *nummi*, c.AD 307-313 (Reece Period 15)



The establishment of the tetrarchy in AD 293 heralded not just political change but also currency reform¹. Diocletian's *Edict on maximum prices* and currency edict, preserved in part in the *Aphrodisias currency inscription* (Aphrodisias, Turkey), in AD 301 fixed the maximum prices that could be charged for certain goods or services empire-wide. They also help explain his new currency system, notably the introduction of the silver *argenteus* and a bronze denomination, the *nummus*. This bronze coin was valued at 25 *common denarii* (or *denarii communes*) and by c.AD 310 weighed about 4.5g or 1/72 to a (Roman) pound. During the tetrarchic period several mints struck smaller, fractional denominations whose weights suggest they had a value of a half, third, quarter, or perhaps even less in some instances, of a *nummus*. Several features characterise the fractional *nummi*, not least their smaller size in relation to full *nummi*. Many have shortened legends on both obverse and reverse, while the smaller fractions often carry *vota* legends that celebrate anniversaries of the accession of the tetrarchs. They are thought to have been thrown into crowds as *donatives* during Imperial celebrations².

Although generally scarce, and almost completely absent from hoards, fractional *nummi* have been reported in increasing quantity through the PAS. To date, there are 132 examples from the mints of Trier, Ostia, and Rome dating to the Tetrarchic period, the majority dating to between c.AD 307-313.

¹ A good introduction to this period can be found in R. Abdy 'Tetrarchy and the House of Constantine' *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, 2012: Chapter 31.

² Good introductions to the fractional *nummi* can be found in D. Wigg 'An Issue of Follis Fractions with Denominational Marks by Constantine I at Rome' <https://tinyurl.com/gotgkv2> ; V. Drost, 'Les fractions du nummus frappées à Rome et à Ostie sous le règne de Maxence (306-312 ap. J.-C.)' 2011 <https://tinyurl.com/sg66zos> . The standard references are **RIC VI** and **VII**

Trier

Fractional *nummi* on the PAS database are most common from the mint of Trier. The mint here produced a series of fractional *nummi* from c.AD 302 (see **RIC VI, p. 198, nos. 562-571**) with no mintmark, these unmarked issues having *vota* reverse types within wreaths. Fractional coinages continue into the reign of Constantine I as late as c.AD 318 (see **RIC VII, p. 180, nos. 200-207**), but with just three exceptions (see below **Figs.1-2, 19**) the PAS examples can essentially be divided into two basic groups. One clusters around AD 307 – Constantine's elevation to *augustus*. The second around Constantine's *quinquennalia* in AD 310-311, the celebration of his 5th year in power.

To date, 129 coins from Trier have been identified on the PAS database as fractional *nummi*. For Reece Period 15 (AD 294-317), this makes up just over 9% of the total number of copper-alloy denominations so far recorded (see **Table 1**). It is likely there will be more found, and indeed there could be some already hiding amongst the large numbers of *nummi* already recorded, so it is worth double checking your coins! A photograph is *important* for all of these types, in particular the extremely rare *vota* issues.

VOT/XX/AVGG – AD 303³

The earliest Trier mint fractional nummus is a *vota* issue dating to AD 303, probably an eighth *nummus*, that commemorates Diocletian's *vicennalia* (20th anniversary of his reign).



Fig. 1

Copper-alloy fractional *nummus* of Diocletian (AD 284-305)
Obv.: DIOCLETIANVS P AVG, Laureate head right
Rev.: VOT/XX/AVGG, within a wreath.
Trier: -/-
RIC VI, p. 201, no. 610a
WMID-991F07

QVIES AVGG – AD 305-306

The *quies augustorum* referred to on this coin commemorates the retirement (*quies* = 'rest') of the senior *augustii*, Diocletian and Maximian, in AD 305.



Fig.: 2

Copper-alloy fractional *nummus* of Diocletian (AD 284-305) (LON-A2BB2A)
Obv.: DIOCLETIANO SEN AVG, Laureate head right
Rev.: QVIES AVGG, Quies standing holding branch and leaning on sceptre.
Trier: -/-
RIC VI, p. 209, no. 681a

³ See 'Coin Register' *British Numismatic Journal*, 86, 2016: p. 266, no. 25; P. Strauss 'Les monnaies divisionnaires de Trèves après la réforme de Dioclétien' *Revue Numismatique* 1954: p. 51, no.11

Fractional *nummi* AD 307-308

A total of eleven examples are recorded for the first major group of fractional *nummi* from Trier. Six carry mintmarks and are mostly *half nummi*, while the remaining five are unmarked smaller fractions of *nummi*.

Mintmark: S A//PTR



Fig. 3

Copper-alloy *half nummus* of Maximian (AD 286-310), c.AD 307

Obv.: D N MAXIMIANO P F AVG,

Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust right

Rev.: GENIO POP ROM, Genius standing left holding patera and cornucopiae

Trier: S A//PTR

NOT IN RIC, cf. RIC VI, p.213, no. 738

Fig. 4

Copper-alloy *half nummus* of Constantine I (AD 306-337), c.AD 307

Obv.: FL VAL CONSTANTINVS N C, Laureate and cuirassed bust right.

Rev.: MARTI PATRI PROPVG, Mars advancing right holding spear and shield

Trier: S A//PTR

RIC VI, p. 213, no. 741

WILT-E0D584 (see also LEIC-D7AEE8)



Fig. 5

Copper-alloy *half nummus* of Constantine I (AD 306-337), c.AD 307

Obv.: FL VAL CONSTANTINVS N C, Laureate and cuirassed bust right.

Rev.: PRINCIPI IVVENTVTIS, Prince standing facing, head left, holding vertical standards

Trier: S A//STR

RIC VI, p. 214, no. 743

LEIC-3F6FBC (see also FAPJW-C0FAF1)



Fig. 6

Copper-alloy *third nummus* of Divus Constantius I, c.AD 307-308

Obv.: DIVO CONSTANTIO PIO, Laureate bust right

Rev.: MEMORIA FELIX, Lighted and garlanded altar, eagle to either side.

Trier: -//PTR

RIC VI, p.218, no. 790



Unmarked fractional *nummi*

None of these small fractions carry a mintmark. All are extremely rare as British finds. Their *vota* legends relate to the Imperial anniversaries of Constantine and Maximian.



Fig. 7

Copper-alloy fractional (1/8?) *nummus* of Constantine I (AD 306-337) as *caesar*, c.AD 307

Obv.: FL VAL CONSTANTINVS NOB C, Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust right.

Rev.: PLVR/NATAL/FEL⁴, within a wreath

RIC VI, p. 213, no. 746

FASAM-D2B3F8

Fig. 8

Copper-alloy fractional *nummus* of Constantine I (AD 306-337), c.AD 307

Obv.: CONSTANTINVS N C, Laureate head right

Rev.: VOT/X/CAES within a wreath

RIC VI, p. 214, no. 748 (FASAM-F1F281)



Fig. 9

Copper-alloy fractional *nummus* of Maximian (AD 286-310), c.AD 307

Obv.: IMP MAXIMIANVS P F AVG, Laureate and cuirassed bust right.

Rev.: VO/TIS/XXX within a wreath

RIC VI, p. 214, no. 754

ESS-EE8282

Fig. 10

Copper-alloy fractional *nummus* of Constantine I (AD 306-337), c.AD 307-308

Obv.: IMP CONSTANTINVS P AVG, Laureate and cuirassed bust right.

Rev.: VOT/X/AVG/N within a wreath

RIC VI, p. 219, no. 791 or 792

NMS-B9DF9B



Fig. 11

Copper-alloy fractional *nummus* of Maximian (AD 286-310), c.AD 307-308

Obv.: IMP MAXIMIANVS P F AVG, Laureate and cuirassed bust right

Rev.: VOT/XXX/AVG/N within a wreath

RIC VI, p. 219, no. 793

BERK-DF6FC1

⁴ The legend PLVR[es] NATAL[es] FEL[iciter] probably celebrates Constantine receiving his *imperium*, so the anniversary of the 'birth' of his reign (see Melville Jones 2010, p. 207)

Fractional *nummi* AD 310-311

The majority of the fractional *nummi* from Trier recorded through the PAS date to the period AD 310-311 with Constantine's *decennalia* (10th anniversary). A total of 111 *half nummi* are recorded to date, with just three *quarter nummi* that each carry a *vota* legend referencing the *decennalia*.

The *half nummi* of this group are by far the most common type on the PAS and are readily identifiable – I am sure more will appear, so it is worth familiarising yourself with them if you are recording material on the database. There are only **two** *half nummus* types from this period on the PAS, both for Constantine I with obverse legend CONSTANTINVS AVG and with the mintmark -//PTR.

MARTI CONSERV, Mars standing right with reversed spear and shield (30 PAS examples; two are unclear)

There are two varieties of this issue:

RIC VI, p. 227, no. 896 – **Laureate** and **draped** bust right **viewed from behind** (4 examples)

RIC VI, p. 227, no. 897 – **Laureate** and **cuirassed** bust right (24 examples)



Fig. 12

Obv.: CONSTANTINVS AVG, Laureate and draped bust right viewed from behind
Rev.: MARTI CONSERV, Mars standing left holding reversed spear and shield
Trier: -//PTR

RIC VI, p. 227, no. 896

SOM-Cf5E82

Fig. 13

Obv.: CONSTANTINVS AVG, Laureate and cuirassed bust right
Rev.: MARTI CONSERV, Mars standing left holding reversed spear and shield
Trier: -//PTR

RIC VI, p. 227, no. 897

WILT-63858D

SOLI INVICTO, Sol standing left raising right hand and holding globe (81 examples; 20 are unclear)

There are three varieties of this issue:

RIC VI, p. 228, no. 898 – **Laureate** and **draped** bust right **viewed from behind** (6 examples)

RIC VI, p. 228, no. 899 – **Laureate** and **cuirassed** bust right (50 examples)

RIC VI, p. 228, no. 900 – **Laureate**, **draped**, and **cuirassed** bust right **viewed from behind** (5 examples)



Fig. 14

Obv.: CONSTANTINVS AVG, Laureate and draped bust right viewed from behind
Rev.: SOLI INVICTO, Sol standing left raising right hand and holding globe
RIC VI, p. 228, no. 898
WILT-8D8727



Fig. 15

Obv.: CONSTANTINVS AVG, Laureate and cuirassed bust right
Rev.: SOLI INVICTO, Sol standing left raising right hand and holding globe
RIC VI, p. 228, no. 899
SOM-AA89F1



Fig. 16

Obv.: CONSTANTINVS AVG, Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust right viewed from behind
Rev.: SOLI INVICTO, Sol standing left raising right hand and holding globe
RIC VI, p. 228, no. 900
SOM-907EC6

Quarter nummi – only three examples on the PAS



Fig. 17

Quarter nummus of Constantine I
Obv.: [...]CO[...]N[...], Laureate and cuirassed bust right
Rev.: VOTIS/X within a wreath
Trier: -/-
RIC VI, p. 228, nos. 903-906
SF-B9EB46



Fig. 18

Quarter nummus of Constantine I
Obv.: CONSTANTINVS AVG, Laureate and cuirassed bust right
Rev.: VOT/X/MVL/XX within a wreath
Trier: -/-
RIC VI, p. 228, no. 913
BM-E7717C

Later Trier issues, AD 313-318

Only two fractional *nummi* are recorded from the Trier mint that post-date AD 311. The latest is a commemorative *half nummus* for Divus Constantius I dating to c.AD 318 (**RIC VII, no. 206**), but lacks an image on the database. The only other example dates to AD 313-315 and its reverse legend FVNDAT PACIS (‘*Founder of Peace*’) references peace in the Empire following Constantine’s victory over Maxentius at Milvian Bridge in October 312 and the subsequent of the Edict of Milan by Constantine and Licinius in 313.



Fig. 19

Fractional *nummus* of Constantine I, c.AD 313-315

Obv. IMP CONSTANTINVS P F AVG,
Bare head right

Rev.: FVNDAT PACIS, Mars with trophy
dragging captive right

Trier: -//PTR

RIC p. 169, no. 61 var.

WILT-C47400

Rome

Only one *third nummus* is known from the mint of Rome amongst a total of 56 copper-alloy denominations recorded on the PAS database for Reece Period 15. This coin, with SAPIENTA PRINCIPIS reverse type, is contemporary with the FVNDAT PACIS example noted at Trier and is likely part of the same general commemoration of Constantine’s successes and relative peace in the Empire. The owl on the reverse represents Minerva and the wisdom (*sapientia*) of the leader (*princeps*).



Fig. 20: *third nummus* of
Constantine I, c.AD 313

WILT-5F15AD

Obv.: IMP CONSTANTINVS P F
AVG, Bare head right

Rev.: SAPIENTA PRINCIPIS,
Altar with owl, spear across altar
and shield to left, helmet to right

Rome: -//R[...]

RIC VII, p. 297, no. 16

A single later example dating to c.AD 317-318 is also recorded:



Fig. 21: *third nummus*, Constantine I, c.AD 317-318

Obv.: [DIVO MAXIMIANO SEN FORT IMP],
Draped and veiled head right

Rev.: [MEMORIAE AETERNAE], Lion
advancing right, club in field above

Rome: -//RP

RIC VII, p. 311, no. 120

NCL-CB3741

Ostia

As Sam highlighted in **Daily Coin Relief Edition 9**, there are just two fractional *nummi* amongst the 32 coins from Ostia, in this case *third nummi*. Both are of Maxentius, with *vota* reverse types dating to c.AD 310-312.



Fig. 22: BM-F43616 – *third-nummus* of Maxentius (AD 306-312), Ostia, c.AD 310-312
Obv. MAXENTIVS P F AVG; Laureate head right
Rev. VOT/QQ/MVL/X in wreath
RIC VI (Rome) 281a; Drost 2013, no. 91
See also: NMS-7328D6

Fractional *nummi* on the PAS

Table 1 highlights the numbers of fractional *nummi* compared to the total numbers of bronze coin for each of the three mints, Trier, Rome, and Ostia, that are represented on the PAS in Reece Period 15. What is perhaps most surprising is the large number of examples from Trier, making up over 9% of the total for that mint. These are generally rare coins and the lack of large numbers in hoard contexts has often been assumed to demonstrate that they didn't circulate widely within the currency pool, or at least were not removed from it for hoarding. The suggestion is that these were *donativa* or a form of *missilia* thrown out to the crowds during the commemoration of specific Imperial events⁵. This makes much sense given the frequent use of *vota* legends and references to the emperor, but also raises the question as to why so many appear as single finds in Britain when they are largely absent from hoards.

| Mint | <i>Nummi</i> | <i>Fractions</i> | Percentage |
|-------|--------------|------------------|------------|
| Rome | 56 | 1 | 1.7 |
| Ostia | 32 | 2 | 6.25 |
| Trier | 1405 | 129 | 9.1 |
| Total | 1493 | 132 | 8.84 |

Table 1: Totals and percentages for fractional *nummi* recorded through the PAS

The distribution of fractional *nummi* is relatively wide (**Fig. 23**) and largely conforms to the spread of coinage seen in the tetrarchic period (Reece Period 15) generally within Britain. Notable concentrations are evident in the south west, in particular around Wiltshire, and again in East Anglia, but the fractional denominations are clearly absent west of Dorset and with very few examples north of the Wash. The lack of any obvious differences in distribution patterns between the two main types from Trier – SOLI INVICTO and MARTI CONSERV – offer little further clues with regard to their circulation. What we can say is that their numbers appear quite high and perhaps this reflects the movement of these small fractional denominations more widely than is often thought. The more we record, of course, the clearer this picture will become...!

⁵ See Drost, 2011

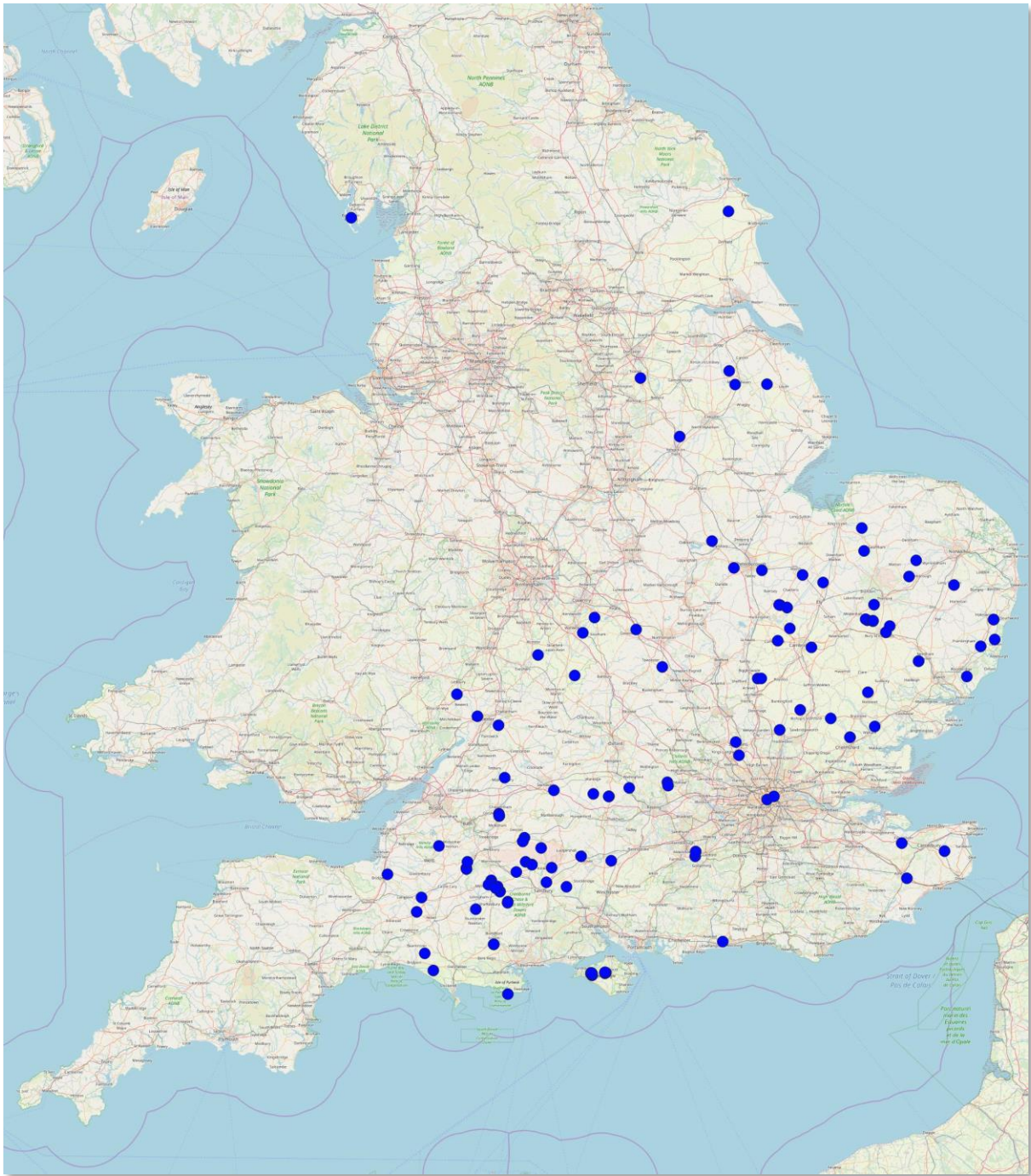


Fig. 23: Distribution of all fractional *nummi* recorded through the PAS.

Anerley, 4 April 2020