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# DAILY COIN RELIEF!

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

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Issue 8 by Andrew Brown – 26 March 2020

### **The *quadrans***



The smallest Imperial bronze denomination of the Roman period was the *quadrans*.<sup>1</sup> Valued at just one quarter of an *as* (or 1,600 to a gold *aureus*!) it was clearly of very low denomination, arguably more of a token coinage, but still circulated during the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. Entrance to public baths may have cost a *quadrans* (e.g. Martial 3.30, 8.42) and there is the famous, probably apocryphal, account by Petronius of a miserly Trimalchio who built his fortune by being “*prepared to use his teeth to extract a quadrans from a dung-heap*” (Satyricon 43)! These small coins (c.15-20mm in diameter; 2-3g in weight) usually do not carry an Imperial portrait on the obverse and when in very worn condition can easily be confused with later 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century bronzes. They appear in the Republican period and survive until the coinages of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161).

*Quadrantes* are rare as British finds and are not commonly found outside Italy<sup>2</sup>, especially north of the Alps (although see below). A key analysis of the *quadrans* and its circulation in Britain was published by Frances McIntosh and Sam Moorhead in 2011<sup>3</sup> and identified 34 examples, nine of which were PAS finds. By 2020 this number has increased to 72, with at least 17 PAS examples. This is a substantial increase, particularly given that recent analyses of the Trajanic and Hadrianic<sup>4</sup> coinages has now reclassified some of these small bronze coins (notably Hadrianic examples on the PAS) as *semisses*.

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<sup>1</sup> The best source for *quadrantes* is J. van Heesch *Studie over de semis en de quadrans van Domitianus tot en met Antoninus Pius* 1979 (in Flemish) here: <https://tinyurl.com/t36v66d> ; see also J. van Heesch ‘Providing Markets with Small Change in the Early Roman Empire: Italy and Gaul’ *Revue Belge de Numismatique* 155, 2009: 125-142: <https://tinyurl.com/tmr5k4j>

<sup>2</sup> Large numbers of *quadrantes* were recovered from the Tiber and published by C. King ‘Quadrantes from the river Tiber’, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1975: 56-90

<sup>3</sup> F. McIntosh and S. Moorhead ‘Roman *quadrantes* found in Britain in light of recent discoveries recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme’ *British Numismatic Journal* 81, 2011: 223-229

<sup>4</sup> See B. Woytek *Die Reichsprägung des Kaisers Traianus (98-117)* (MIR 14, Vienna, 2010); R. Abdy’s new *Roman Imperial Coinage* volume on Hadrian (RIC II.3)

## Augustus (31 BC-AD 14)

A total of six Augustan *quadrantes* have been recorded in Britain to date. All are of different types from the range of coins that were issued by Augustus, with just one – KENT-308A3C – recorded through the PAS. They demonstrate some of the key features to look out for in *quadrantes* though. None carry an Imperial portrait, instead they have legends that refer to the moneyer or emperor and characteristically also have a large S C (*Senatus Consulto*) on the reverse denoting their issue under the authority of the Roman senate. This is a useful thing to look out for on any very worn small bronze coin – the S C will likely point you to a date in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries rather than a worn radiate or nummus!



**Fig. 1: KENT-308A3C**  
*Quadrans*, Rome, c.9 BC  
 Obv.: [LAMI]A SILIVS  
 AN[NIVS], Simpulum on  
 left and lituus on right  
 Rev.: [IIIVIR AAAFF],  
 legend surrounding S C  
**RIC I, p.74, no. 421**

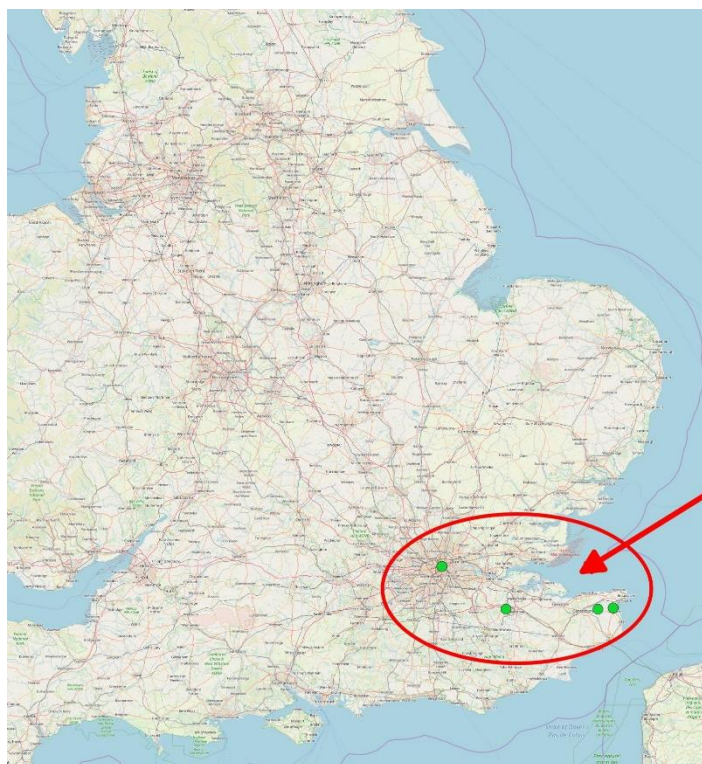


**Fig. 2: BM R.6224**  
 Obverse:  
 LAMIA.SILIVS.ANNIVS,  
 Simpulum right (on left),  
 lituus left (on right).  
 Reverse: III.VIR.A.A.A.F.F.  
 around S C  
**RIC I, p. 74, no. 421**



**Fig. 3: BM 1904,0203.73**  
 Obverse:  
 GALVS.SISENNA.III.VIR,  
 Garlanded altar  
 Reverse:  
 MESSALLA.APRONIVS.A  
 .A.A.F.F. around S C  
**RIC I, p. 77, no. 452**

As with the Republican<sup>5</sup> period, *quadrantes* of the Augustan period are pre-Claudian invasion and so perhaps should not be reaching Britain in any volume. It is interesting to note, though, that all of the examples known to date cluster in the south east, in Kent and London. I do wonder whether this reflects contact with Gaul in the late-1<sup>st</sup> century BC or immediately prior to the Claudian invasion resulting in the odd example crossing the Channel. More plausibly, it demonstrates troop movement to Britain in AD 43 and later - more on this below.



**Fig. 4:** Augustan *quadrantes* in Britain

<sup>5</sup> Only one Republic *quadrans* has been identified on the PAS (BH-91A0C3) – this will be dealt with alongside the Republican bronze coinage on the PAS in a later blog post.

### Claudius I (AD 41-54)

It is with Claudius I that we see the highest volume of *quadrantes* in Britain. In total there are 30 known specimens, although just three of these are recorded through the PAS (which includes one hoard coin: IARCH-DD946A). We can add two examples of Caligula (AD 37-41), one from Richborough and the other from London, to this total since these likely circulated at the same time as the Claudian examples, giving 32 coins or 44% of the British finds.

There are essentially two main types represented, with a few variations to the legends:



**Fig. 5: BERK-897F8B – *quadrans*, Rome, c.AD 41-42**

Obverse: [TI CLAVDI]VS CAESAR A[VG], Hand holding pair of scales, below PNR.

Reverse: [PON M TR P] IMP COS DES IT around S C

**RIC I, p. 126, no. 85**

**Note** – there are three variants of this with slightly differing reverse legends reading PON M TR P IMP COS DES IT (**RIC I no. 85**) or PON M TR P IMP COS II (**RIC I no. 89**) or PON M TR P IMP P P COS II (**RIC I no. 91**)



**Fig. 6: LON-EDEF06 – *quadrans*, Rome, c.AD 41-42**

Obverse: TI CLAVDIVS CAESAR AVG, a Modius

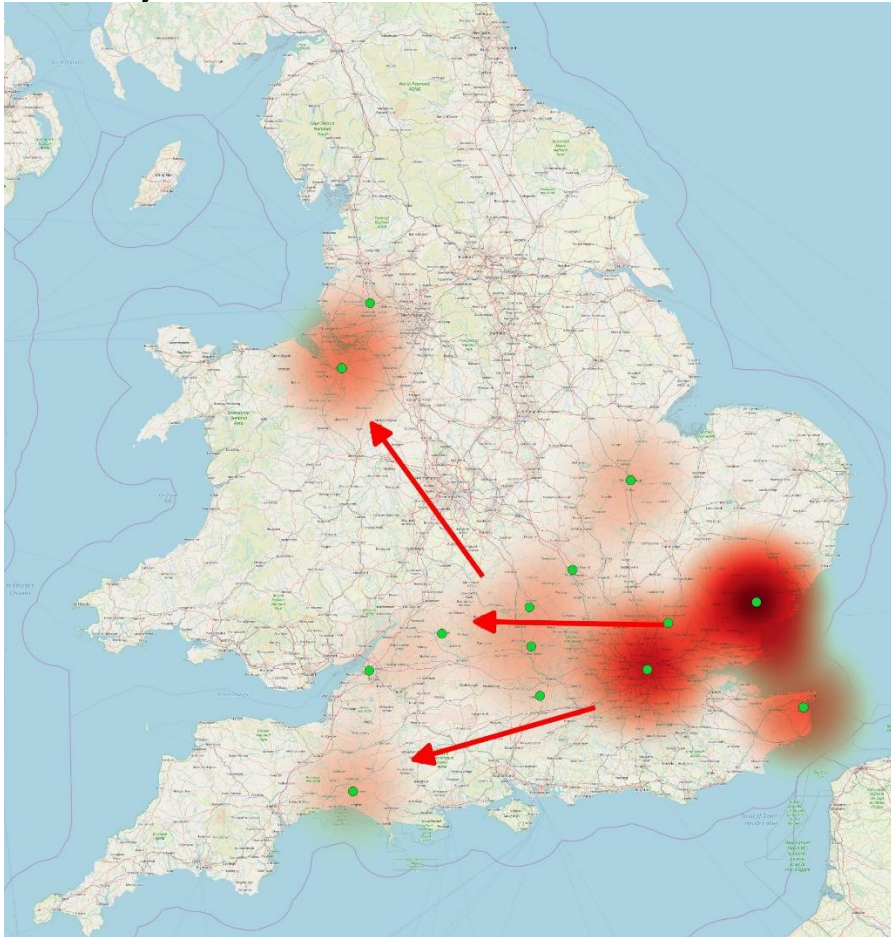
Reverse: PON M TR P IMP COS DES IT around S C

**RIC I, p. 126, no. 84**

**Note** – there are again several variants in the reverse legend for this type, cf. **RIC I nos. 84, 86, 87, 88, and 90**



The distribution of Claudian *quadrantes* (**Fig. 7**) is obviously more widespread than that of the Augustan examples. What is interesting, however, is that there are clear concentrations in the south east – Kent (Richborough in particular), London, and Colchester – extending towards the south west and then north towards a small cluster around Chester. In many respects, this arguably follows the movements of the Roman legions in the decades immediately after the Claudian invasion, occupying strongholds first in the south east before expanding west towards Devon and north to locations such as Chester, whose legionary fortress was founded by AD 70.



**Fig. 7:** Claudian *quadrantes* in Britain

### Domitian (AD 81-96)

The next largest group of *quadrantes* belongs to the emperor Domitian, with no other identified examples dating to the Neronian or Flavian periods. A total of eleven coins are known, four of which appear on the PAS (without images; including one in a hoard – IARCH-966B3C). Six of these have a distinctive type depicting a rhinoceros facing left or right (RIC II nos. 248-250), while the remainder have wreaths, olive branch, or corn ears.



**Fig. 8: BM R.11460**

Obverse: Rhinoceros standing left

Reverse: IMP DOMIT AVG GERM around SC

RIC II (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), no. 250

## Trajan (AD 98-117), Hadrian (AD 117-138), and Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161)

After the reign of Domitian, *quadrantes* are much rarer. Six Trajanic examples are known, four of which are PAS finds and those that can be securely identified to type all carrying a head of Herakles on the obverse and either a club or boar on the reverse (**Fig. 9: RIC II, nos. 699, 702**). Most of the examples that had previously be attributed to Hadrian – with ship's prow (*rostrum tridens*) reverse – now appear to be larger denomination *semisses*, which will be dealt with in a later blog post. The three remaining coins of Hadrian (including one hoard coin - IARCH-966B3C) are not closely identifiable to type. There is just one securely identified example of Antoninus Pius from Essex (**Fig. 10: ESS-797301**) with a possible second coin from Kent (D. Holman, pers. comm.).



**Fig. 9: DENO-5F8BE9, quadrans, Trajan, c.AD 98-117**  
Obverse: IMP CAES TRAIAN AVG GERM, Head of Hercules right  
Reverse: S C, a club.  
**RIC II, p. 293, no. 699**

**Fig. 10: ESS-797301, quadrans, Antoninus Pius, c.AD 143-144**  
Obverse: [ANTONINVS AVG PIVS P P], Laureate head right  
Reverse: TR POT COS III, S C, a Cornucopiae  
**RIC III, p. 118, no. 714**



### ‘Anonymous’ *quadrantes*

There is a substantial group of *quadrantes* that cannot be closely attributed to an individual ruler or tight date range. These carry no Imperial portrait or legends, hence they are referred to as ‘anonymous’. Traditionally, they are dated broadly to the period from Domitian to when *quadrantes* disappear with Antoninus Pius, c.AD 81-161, although many may well be late in the date range.<sup>6</sup>

Eleven British examples are known and include six from the PAS. The most common type, which accounts for eight of the known examples, has a winged *petasos* (hat) of Mercury on the obverse with a reverse depicting a caduceus (**Fig. 11; RIC II, p. 219, no. 32**). The remaining two that are identifiable to type have a bust of Mars on the obverse with cuirass on the reverse (**Fig. 12; RIC II, p.218, nos. 19, 21**).

<sup>6</sup> See J. van Heesch ‘Une représentation remarquable des Quatres Saisons sur semisses de l’époque antoninienne’, S. Scheers (ed.), *Studia Paulo Naster oblata, I, Numismatica antiqua (Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta 12)*, Leuven, 1982, p. 193-197 who suggests the majority may be Antonine in date



**Fig. 11: LVPL-05B7D1, *quadrans*, Anonymous, Rome, c.AD 81-161**  
Obverse: Petasus of Mercury  
Reverse: S C, Winged caduceus  
**RIC II, p. 219, no. 32**

**Fig. 12: ESS-EE5CF3, *quadrans*, Anonymous, Rome, c.AD 81-161**  
Obverse: Helmeted ad cuirassed bust of Mars  
Reverse: S C, Cuirass  
**RIC II, p. 218, no. 19**



### How did they get here?

As already noted, *quadrantes* are traditionally seen not to have circulated much, if at all, outside Italy. Large numbers are known from the Tiber as well as sites like Pompeii, but they are generally scarce elsewhere and especially in Gaul and Britain. Even then, they are such a low denomination coin that it isn't always clear how they would have functioned from a practical perspective within the Augustan monetary system.

Fascinating work by Fleur Kemmers<sup>7</sup> looking at the evidence from Nijmegen in particular has demonstrated that *quadrantes* did find their way outside Italy and occasionally in large numbers. At Nijmegen 412 post-Augustan *quadrantes* were found and of the 303 that were identifiable all were of the same type for Domitian, RIC II no. 436. Kemmers' analysis of the Nijmegen finds in relation to the broader Roman *limes* demonstrates that these likely represent batches of *quadrantes* deliberately shipped from Rome to top up the pool of small change being used particularly by the Roman legions in these regions. Similar conclusions have been drawn by J. van Heesch<sup>8</sup> for Gaul more generally and we can also point to potential batches of *quadrantes* being shipped to Jordan<sup>9</sup> and to the Roman mines in Danube and Balkan regions during the Trajanic to Antonine periods.

In Britain the evidence suggests these small coins did not enter general circulation and if they did this was not widespread. Indeed, there were absolutely no examples amongst the 12,595 coins from the Sacred Spring at Bath! *Quadrantes* also make up just a fraction (in fact a fraction of 1%) of contemporary bronze coinage recorded through the PAS. But the potential military link noted in Gaul and the presence of coins moving in batches does raise some possible explanations. Frances McIntosh and Sam Moorhead noted this likelihood in their 2011 article, concluding that the *quadrantes* seen in Britain are likely the result of the movement of Roman military into the province, with clusters in the south east, south west, and the north reflecting the areas most affected by military activity. If we plot all the currently known British finds (**Fig. 13**), this seems well borne out, with clear groups in the

<sup>7</sup> F. Kemmers 'Quadrantes from Nijmegen : small change in a frontier province' *Revue suisse de Numismatique* 82, 2003

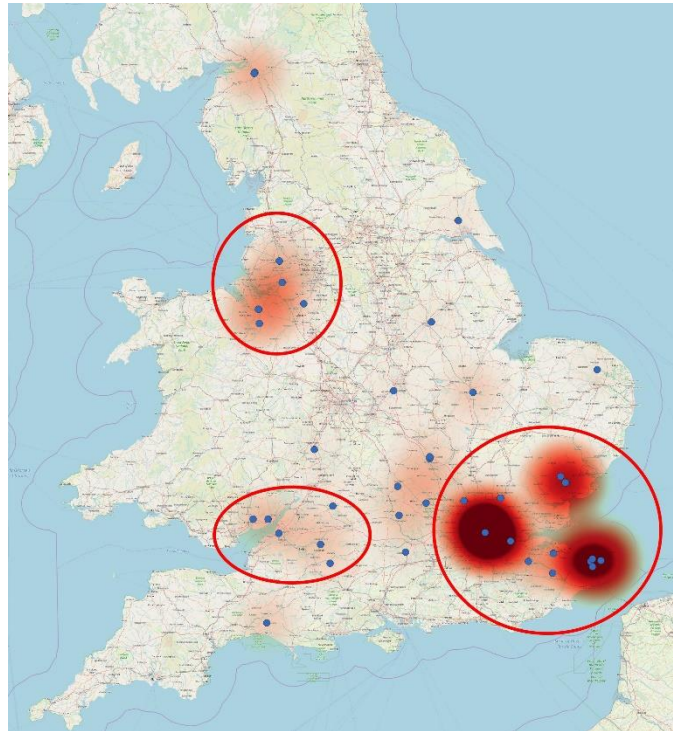
<sup>8</sup> J. van Heesch, 'Providing Markets with Small Change in the Early Roman Empire: Italy and Gaul' *Revue belge de Numismatique*, 155, 2009, p. 125-142

<sup>9</sup> J. Bowsher, 'Trajanic quadrantes from Arabia', *Numismatic Chronicle* 1987, 147: 166–8.

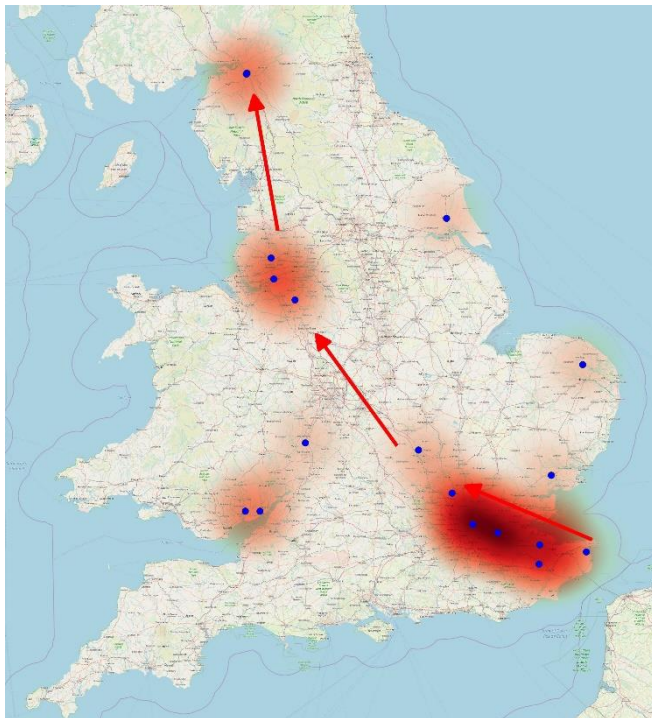


south east (Richborough, London, and Colchester in particular), the south west towards Caerleon, and then north towards Chester and Hadrian's Wall.

**Fig. 13:** All *quadrantes* with British findspots (as of March 2020)



**Fig. 14:** *Quadrantes* of Domitian through Antoninus Pius and 'Anonymous' issues in Britain (as of March 2020)



Perhaps we can take this one step further even. We have seen how the Augustan examples cluster in the south east, but that there is a wider distribution under Claudius I. These could both arguably reflect the advance of the legions through Britain after AD 43. If we also then plot the coins of Domitian along with the later anonymous issues (and those of Trajan through Antoninus Pius) they give us an equally curious distribution, drawing a nice neat line from Kent, through London, and to the north east! This may just be fortuitous, but it does raise the thought that these small bronze coins could actually be providing some (limited) evidence for Roman military activity and movement within the province. If we think, too, that the examples of Domitian and the Anonymous issues are largely all of one

type, are we perhaps seeing in Britain what has been noted elsewhere – batches of *quadrantes* struck in Rome and distributed to plug a need for small change, their circulation largely the result of soldiers carrying them in their purses?

It is an interesting possibility, but we need more examples...!

Anerley, 26 March 2020