



Aureus depicting the head of Maximian and the same as Rector Orbis (294-295 CE)

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[1]

Denomination:

Aureus

Date: 294 CE to 295 CE

Material:

Gold

Mint:

Antioch

Name of Ruler:

Maximian

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Laureate head of Maximian looking right

Inscription: MAXIMINUS AUGUSTUS

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: emperor draped in toga, holding a globe and sceptre

Inscription: CONSUL IIII PP PROCOS - SMA

Diameter (mm): 27.00mm

Weight (g): 11.40g

Commentary:

(RIC VI, Maximian, Antioch, no. 4)

This aureus, minted in 294-295 CE at Antioch, depicts on the obverse the laureate head of Maximian, and on the reverse the emperor draped in a toga holding a globe and sceptre. The inscription on the obverse, "MAXIMINUS AUGUSTUS," refers to Maximian as Augustus, and then continues on the reverse to acknowledge him as "CONSUL IIII PP PROCOS - SMA," consul for the fourth time, *pater patriae*, or father of the fatherland, and as proconsul. "SMA" denotes the mint of Antioch.

While the inscription does not explicitly state it, as in coins issued by other emperors, the imagery on this aureus resembles that on coins which depict emperors as "*rector orbis*" (world ruler). The first emperor depicted as ruler of the world/universe, and displaying a similar iconography was Antoninus Pius, who minted various issues in 151-152 CE (e.g. RIC III Antoninus Pius, no. 206; 226C-F, the reverses of which depicts the emperor standing, togate, holding a globe and roll). Didius Julianus (reigned 28th March – 1st June 193 CE) was in fact the first emperor to issue coins with the legend "RECTOR ORBIS" accompanying his own image (see, for example, [Aureus depicting the head of Didius Julianus and the same symbolically depicted as the ruler of the orbis terrarum \(193 CE\)](#) [2]). However, the iconography of the Roman emperor holding a globe, as we also see in the present



aureus, was quite familiar. As Erika Manders has recognised, Caracalla and Septimius Severus used this legend on their coinage above a figure which is likely the sun god (*Coining Images of Power*, p. 233). In Maximian's case, we see a very similar reverse image to that on the aureus of Didius Julianus mentioned above (RIC IV/1, Didius Julianus no. 3, p. 15), with the exception that Maximian holds a sceptre rather than the roll which Julianus is pictured with. Maximian's coin might not state that he is "*rector orbis*," therefore, but the imagery on this aureus certainly suggests that he is presenting himself as world ruler. Similar imagery was incorporated on coins minted by other emperors (for instance, see [Denarius depicting the head of Severus Alexander and the emperor symbolically depicted as the ruler of the orbis terrarum \(224-225 CE\)](#) [3] in which the emperor wears a turreted crown and holds a globe and spear).

In addition to the globe, symbolising the entire world (or *orbis terrarum*), Maximian also holds a sceptre, which indicates the *imperium maius*, the greater authority conferred on the emperor. Moreover, Maximian is depicted wearing a toga, in order to emphasise his status as *princeps senatus*, the most important member of the senate. The iconography of the emperor on these so-called *orbis terrarum* coins, including the present aureus, mirrored that of Zeus-Jupiter, the king of the gods, who ruled the celestial sphere. Therefore, this iconography emphasized the emperor's standing as the ruler of the earth, the earthly counterpart of the Olympian-Capitoline god. With the Christianization of the empire in the fourth century, soon the globe would be topped with a cross, to symbolize that the universe was Christian (e.g. from Theodosius I's reign: RIC IX, Constantinople, no. 75B-C; RIC IX, Mediolanum, no. 37C). By 294-295 CE, when this issue of Maximian was minted, the collegiate rule initiated by Diocletian in 284 CE as a diarchy, had reached its final form as a tetrarchy. In 285 CE Diocletian appointed Maximian as Caesar, and then the next year appointed him as co-ruler with the title of Augustus. In 293 CE, Diocletian decided to further divide the territory of the empire, appointing two more junior rulers, Galerius and Constantius Chlorus, with the title of Caesars (for more details on the Tetrarchy, see Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, p. 61-70). The four tetrarchs contributed to the restoration of Roman rule over the world, yet this issue refers specifically to Maximian as having this role. The year in which he became Augustus (286 CE), Maximian fought the Franks and Heruli in Gaul and at the mouth of the Rhine, and continued to drive these tribes back in 287 CE. In that same year he also joined with Diocletian in a campaign against the Alamanni (see Southern, *The Roman Empire*, p. 141-143). While he was not the only member of the Tetrarchy who had been engaged in securing the empire and asserting Rome's dominance over the world, these military achievements may well have contributed towards Maximian's portrayal of himself as world ruler (Diocletian also minted coins with similar reverse imagery: RIC V, Diocletian, no 285; moreover, Diocletian and Maximian appear together on an aureus in which they each hold globes: RIC V, Diocletian, no. 292).

Keywords in the original language:

- [Augustus](#) [4]
- [consul](#) [5]
- [proconsul](#) [6]

Thematic keywords:

- [Rector Orbis](#) [7]
- [tetrarchy](#) [8]
- [Diocletian](#) [9]
- [Orbis Terrarum](#) [10]
- [oikoumenè](#) [11]
- [Roman rule](#) [12]
- [Roman empire](#) [13]
- [eternity of the Roman empire](#) [14]
- [globe](#) [15]
- [universalism](#) [16]
- [Maximian](#) [17]

Bibliographical references: Manders, Erika, [Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284](#) [18] (Leiden - New York: Brill, 2012)



Southern, Patricia, [The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine](#) [19] (London: Routledge, 2001)

Williams, Stephen, [Diocletian and the Roman Recovery](#) [20] (London: Routledge, 1997)

Other sources connected with this document: Numismatic item

[Sestertius depicting the head of Valerian and the same raising the personification of the Orbis Terrarum \(256-257 CE\) \[21\]](#)

- [Read more about Sestertius depicting the head of Valerian and the same raising the personification of the Orbis Terrarum \(256-257 CE\) \[21\]](#)

Numismatic item

[Denarius depicting the head of Severus Alexander and the emperor symbolically depicted as the ruler of the orbis terrarum \(224-225 CE\) \[22\]](#)

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[2] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aureus-depicting-head-didius-julianus-and-same-symbolically-depicted-ruler-orbis-terrarum-193-ce>



- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/denarius-depicting-head-severus-alexander-and-emperor-symbolically-depicted-ruler-orbis-terrarum-224>
- [4] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/augustus>
- [5] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/consul>
- [6] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/proconsul>
- [7] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/rector-orbis>
- [8] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/tetrarchy>
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- [11] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/oikoumen%C3%A8>
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- [19] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/roman-empire-severus-constantine>
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