



## Sestertius depicting the head of Hadrian and the same raising a kneeling personification of the Orbis Terrarum, or the entire world (119-121 CE)

## Sestertius depicting the head of Hadrian and the emperor standing above a kneeling personification of the Orbis Terrarum (the entire world) (119-121 CE)



[1]

**Denomination:**

Sestertius

**Date:** 119 CE to 123 CE

**Material:**

Brass (Æ)

**Mint:**

Rome

**Name of Ruler:**

Hadrian

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Inscription: IMP CAESAR TRAIANVS HADRIANVS AVG P M TR P COS III

Image: Laureate bust of Hadrian, draped, facing right

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):**

Inscription: RESTITVTORI ORBIS TERRARVM; in exergue: SC

Image: Hadrian wearing a toga, standing facing left, extending his right hand to raise up a female figure, draped and kneeling right holding a globe in her left hand. Hadrian holds a roll in his left hand.

**Weight (g):** 24.80g

**Commentary:**

(RIC II, Hadrian, no. 594b, p. 416)

This sestertius, minted in Rome between 119 and 121 CE, depicts on the obverse the laureate head of Hadrian, and on the reverse the emperor raising a kneeling woman who wears a turreted crown and holds globe. The woman is identified as a personification of the entire world, *orbis terrarum*, otherwise known as the *oikoumenè* (the Greek term for the civilised world). The inscription on the obverse, "IMP CAESAR TRAIANVS HADRIANVS AVG P M TR P COS III," refers to the emperor as Hadrian, Augustus, *pontifex maximus*, or high priest of the Roman state religion, holder of the *tribunicia potestas*, and consul for the third time. The inscription on the reverse, "RESTITVTORI ORBIS TERRARVM; in exergue: SC," celebrates Hadrian as restorer of the world, with the initials SC, which stand for the words *senatus consultum*, indicating that the senate had given its assent to the minting of this bronze coin, whose value was less than the nominal one.

The iconography of the personification of the *orbis terrarum* is quite similar to, and probably stemmed from the depiction of the famous statue of the Tyche of Antioch (see <http://museum.classics.cam.ac.uk/collections/casts/tyche-antioch> [2] and also the commentary on [Lucan, \*The Civil\*](#)



[War I.183-203](#) [3] for the Roman adoption of her). This Hellenistic sculpture, which depicted a woman wearing a turreted crown, portrayed the personification of the city of Antioch (for a discussion of Hadrian's fondness for Greek culture, see the commentary on [The Hadrianeum](#) [4]). The turreted crown symbolized the city walls, and therefore acted as a visual depiction of the city, embodied in the Tyche. Therefore, in this sestertius, the turreted crown worn by the personified *orbis terrarum* suggests that the idea of universe was identified with the concept of a city. This was a particularly important message for Hadrian, who visited the cities of numerous Roman provinces during his reign (for further discussion see the commentary on the [reliefs of the Hadrianeum](#) [5], which discusses the depictions of female personifications of various provinces). Indeed, Hadrian minted coins which commemorated visits to particular places; for instance, a sestertius celebrating his *adventus* to Arabia shows the emperor standing with the personified province and a camel (RIC II, Hadrian no. 943f) (see Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 231-232).

Hadrian was in fact the first emperor to be celebrated on coins as *restitutor orbis* (see Alföldy, "The crisis of the third century," p. 92). This title subsequently came to be used very frequently by emperors during the second half of the third century CE, especially by Aurelian (for a more detailed presentation of this topic than is briefly provided here, see [Aurelianus depicting the head of Aurelian and a woman presenting a wreath to Aurelian restitutor orbis \(274-275 CE\)](#) [6]). The epithet *restitutor* dates back to the Flavian and Antonine periods, when it was associated with various motifs, such as an emperor being praised as the *restitutor* of prosperity or concord, for instance, in a specific province. Indeed, Hadrian himself is famous for having been the *restitutor* of numerous provinces (see [Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia](#) [7]). Among the variants of the same kind, the *restitutor* could be associated with the Urbs, that is, Rome, a virtue, such as *pietas* (piety), *libertas* (freedom), or *securitas publica* (public security), or the army (*restitutor exerciti*). Finally, the epithet *restitutor* could be used to refer to a more global spatial or temporal entity, such as the *restitutor saeculi* ("restorer of the time"), the *restitutor orbis (terrarum)* ("restorer of the world"), the *restitutor generis humani* ("restorer of humankind"; see [Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\)](#) [8]), and the *restitutor patriae* ("restorer of the fatherland"). Essentially, the term *restitutor* implies that the emperor has put an end to some form of degradation processes by reversing it, and re-establishing an ideal state and/or age. After first appearing under Hadrian, *restitutor orbis* reappears on coins minted under the emperor Valerian (RIC V/1, Valerian, no. 116-119, p. 47, produced between 256 and 258 CE). Moreover, the first emperor to be celebrated in epigraphical documents as *restitutor orbis* was Severus Alexander, who reigned between 222 and 235 CE (see the inscription CIL VIII, 8797a = AE 1940, no. 151; Alföldy, "The Crisis of the Third Century," p. 92; for a representation of Severus Alexander as ruler of the world, see [Denarius depicting the head of Severus Alexander and the emperor symbolically depicted as the ruler of the orbis terrarum \(the entire world\) \(224-225 CE\)](#) [9]). From then on, many emperors of the third century CE continued to present themselves as *restitutor orbis*, and this trend continued under the Tetrarchs.

Jocelyn Toynbee sees this particular coin issue as the "forerunner" of the *restitutor* types, which celebrated Hadrian's visits to the cities of various provinces, even though the coin was in fact minted well before Hadrian started his travels. The imagery therefore likely indicates Hadrian's intent to visit the whole Empire, which is identified here with the whole universe. For Toynbee, this sestertius was therefore used to advertise the emperor's conception of Empire, "a fellowship united by a common Graeco-Roman civilization" (Toynbee, *The Hadrianic School*, p. 54). While Toynbee's interpretation focuses on the idea of empire, Paul Veyne focuses on the relationship between the emperor and the provincial elites. According to Veyne, the main purpose of Hadrian's travels in the provinces was to convey to the provincial elites a new message, namely that they shared with the emperor the task of ruling of the empire. Veyne even goes so far as to use the word "decolonization" to describe this situation (Paul Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque*, p. 607). Contrary to Toynbee, who refers to a Graeco-Roman model, Clifford Ando views the scene depicted on the reverse as symbolic of the idea of Romanization. Thus, the purpose of the issue for Ando is the creation of a new pattern to outline, or rather redefine, the ideal political community. For Ando, the idea behind the minting of this issue is not the association of the provincial urban elites with imperial rule, but a new universal model of Romanization. This model places Hadrian himself at the head of the empire, and the concept of any type of shared responsibility that Veyne alludes to is absent. Indeed, only a century later, Caracalla was successful in further solidifying this model of Romanisation with the bestowing of Roman citizenship to all the free inhabitants of the Roman Empire with the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (see, for example, the commentary on [P.Giss. 40 and the Constitutio Antoniniana](#) [10]). Clifford Ando states that "before Hadrian restored the world by raising the provinces from their knees, the work of Romanization—of establishing a new paradigm for the political community, of creating new definitions of 'us' and 'them,' of endowing literary and everyday language with new metaphors for the state—had begun. Hadrian made the completion of that task inevitable, long before Caracalla formalized expressions of *consensus universorum (civium)*" (Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, p. 410-411).



Keywords in the original language:

- [Augustus](#) [11]
- [pontifex maximus](#) [12]
- [tribunicia potestas](#) [13]
- [orbis terrarum](#) [14]
- [restitutor](#) [15]
- [senatus consultum](#) [16]
- [imperator](#) [17]
- [Caesar](#) [18]

Thematic keywords:

- [Hadrian](#) [19]
- [oikoumenè](#) [20]
- [city](#) [21]
- [Roman benevolence](#) [22]
- [Roman rule](#) [23]
- [globe](#) [24]
- [universalism](#) [25]
- [province](#) [26]
- [Roman citizenship](#) [27]
- [crown](#) [28]
- [restorer](#) [29]
- [restorer of the world](#) [30]

**Bibliographical references:** Géza Alföldy, [The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries](#) [31], Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 15 (1974) : 89-111

Birley, Anthony R., [Hadrian. The Restless Emperor](#) [32] (Roman Imperial Biographies; London: Routledge, 1997)

Ando, Clifford, [Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire](#) [33] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)

Toynbee, Jocelyn, [The Hadrianic School. A Chapter in the History of Greek Art](#) [34] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934)

Veyne, Paul, [Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique](#) [35] (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976)

**Other sources connected with this document:** Architecture

## [The Hadrianeum \(145 CE\) \[36\]](#)

## [Reconstruction of the area in Campus Martius \[37\]](#)



## [Reconstruction of the Hadrianeum \[38\]](#)



## [View of Columnade \[39\]](#)



- [Read more about The Hadrianeum \(145 CE\) \[36\]](#)

Relief / Sculpture

## [The Hadrianeum \(145 CE\) Reliefs \[40\]](#)

- [Read more about The Hadrianeum \(145 CE\) Reliefs \[40\]](#)

Numismatic item

## [Aurelianus depicting the head of Aurelian and a woman presenting a wreath to Aurelian restitutor orbis \(274-275 CE\) \[41\]](#)

- [Read more about Aurelianus depicting the head of Aurelian and a woman presenting a wreath to Aurelian restitutor orbis \(274-275 CE\) \[41\]](#)

Inscription

## [Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia \[42\]](#)

Hadrian issues an edict to prevent the abuse by soldiers crossing Asia during one of his imperial visits

- [Read more about Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia \[42\]](#)

Numismatic item

## [Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\) \[43\]](#)

- [Read more about Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\) \[43\]](#)

Numismatic item

## [Denarius depicting the head of Severus Alexander and the emperor symbolically](#)

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## [depicted as the ruler of the orbis terrarum \(224-225 CE\) \[44\]](#)

- [Read more about Denarius depicting the head of Severus Alexander and the emperor symbolically depicted as the ruler of the orbis terrarum \(224-225 CE\) \[44\]](#)

Papyrus

## [P.Giss. 40 and the Constitutio Antoniniana \[45\]](#)

An edict issued by the emperor Caracalla records a universal grant of citizenship as an expression of magnificence and gratitude to the immortal gods.

Language English

- [Read more about P.Giss. 40 and the Constitutio Antoniniana \[45\]](#)

Realized by:

### [Samuele Rocca \[46\]](#)



### [Kimberley Fowler \[47\]](#)



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[2] <http://museum.classics.cam.ac.uk/collections/casts/tyche-antioch>

[3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/lucan-civil-war-i183-203>

[4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/hadrianeum-145-ce>

[5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/hadrianeum-145-cereliefs>

[6] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aurelianus-depicting-head-aurelian-and-woman-presenting-wreath-aurelian->



restitutor-orbis-274-275%C2%A0ce

[7] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/hadrian-roman-soldiers-and-asia>

[8] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/antoninianus-depicting-valerian-restitutor-generis-humani-walking-and-holding-globe-254-255-ce>

[9] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/denarius-depicting-head-severus-alexander-and-emperor-symbolically-depicted-ruler-orbis-terrarum-224>

[10] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/pgiss-40-and-constitutio-antoniniana>

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[13] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/tribunicia-potestas>

[14] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/orbis-terrarum>

[15] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/restitutor>

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[19] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/hadrian>

[20] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/oikoumen%C3%A8>

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[45] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/pgiss-40-and-constitutio-antoniniana>

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