



Arras Medallion

Copy of the original “Arras medallion” (copy photographed at the British Museum)



[1]

Arras Medallion

Denomination: medallion (ten *aurei*)

Date: 302 CE to 303 CE

Material: gold

Mint: Trier

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Museum of Arras

Name of Ruler: Constantius I

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Constantius I looking right

Inscription: FL VAL CONSTANTIVS NOBIL CAES; Fl(avius) Val(erius) Constantius nobil(is) Caes(ar).

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image : Constantius I riding a horse, holding a spear in his right hand, facing a kneeling female figure with outstretched arms, in front of a fortified city-gate. Below this first scene a Roman galley full of soldiers, perhaps in the Thames.

Inscription in the superior part of the reverse: REDDITOR LVCIS AETERNAE; “restorer of the eternal light”.

Inscription under the represented city and the supplicating character: LON for Londinium (London).

Inscription under the Roman galley: PTR, the mint mark of Trier.

Border of dots.

Weight (g): 52.88g

Commentary:

First publication: Babelon and Duquénoy, “Médailles d’or du trésor d’Arras”.

RIC VI, Treveri, no. 34, p. 167; Bastien and Metzger, *Le trésor de Beaurains*, no. 218, p. 94-95.

The piece presented here corresponds to a medallion equivalent to 10 *aurei*, that was discovered in 1922 in a hoard found at Beaurains, close to the actual city of Arras in France. A part of the coins, medallions, jewellery and silverware were sold to the city of Arras by the workers who discovered it, but another part of the hoard had been previously embezzled by them. As a consequence, some of the coins and jewellery were dispatched throughout the world. Pierre Bastien and Catherine Metzger have established the reference edition of the coins, medallions and jewellery that they consider to have been part of the hoard found at Beaurains. Pierre Bastien has estimated that the hoard may have been formed originally by 700 coins or medallions, whereas the catalogue of the coins or medallions he assigns to this hoard is composed of 472 pieces. Among them, he counts 389 coins or medallions produced between 285 and 315 CE. On this total of 389 coins/medallions a large majority of them are made of gold (around 370) and were minted at Trier (see Bastien and Metzger, *Le trésor de Beaurains*, p. 25, 193-194). Considering the dating of the various emissions produced at Trier, it appears that many of them had been produced for *donativa*, that is, for exceptional gifts of money made by the emperor to the soldiers, especially on the occasion of imperial birthdays, celebrations of victories or consulships. Due to the fact that some coins/medallions



show signs that they have been hoarded as soon as they have been distributed, Pierre Bastien has concluded that the person who received them must have been a soldier who took part in numerous *donativa* between 285 and 310 CE. For instance, in 297 CE he might have received an amount of money equivalent to 59 *aurei*, and among them 8 multiples of gold. According to Pierre Bastien that would be for his taking part in Constantius's campaign in Britain, which corresponds to the event represented on the medallion presented here (Bastien and Metzger, *Le trésor de Beaurains*, p. 213).

This medallion represents on its reverse the end of Constantius's campaign in Britain. Interestingly, we are informed about this campaign thanks to another source, the panegyric of Constantius that is part of the *Latin panegyrics*. This speech may have been delivered on the 1st March 297 CE, at Trier, on behalf of the city of [Augustodunum](#) [2], modern Autun, in presence of the emperor (more details about this panegyric in [Latin Panegyric IV\(8\).21.1](#) [3] and [IV\(8\).21.2](#) [4]). In terms of historical context, one should recall that on the 1st March 293 CE Constantius I was appointed Caesar, and was thus in charge of the operations against the usurper Carausius. Before the end of 293 CE, Constantius recaptured Boulogne from the "piratical faction" (IV(8).6-7). Carausius was still leading the revolt at that time, but he was murdered and replaced by Allectus in 294 CE (Burnett, "The Coinage of Allectus," p. 22). Then, two powerful fleets were prepared to recover Britain and were led by Constantius and by the praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus (the expedition is described in IV(8).14-17). Once landed, Asclepiodotus's armies would have captured and killed Allectus (see IV(8).16). Then the panegyrist narrates that the Roman troops reached London, where they massacred many Frankish mercenaries who were survivors of Allectus's troops and finally took the control of the city (see IV(8).17). The defeat of Allectus and the takeover of London are commonly dated from 296 CE (on the dating, Seston, *Dioclétien et la tétrarchie*, p. 106-113; Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 60; Birley, *The Roman Government*, p. 385-386, n. 5). The aim of this panegyric is dual: first, to celebrate Constantius's recent military expedition in Britain; second, to ask the emperor to be generous concerning the reconstruction of the city of Autun (on this second point see [Latin Panegyric IV\(8\).21.2](#) [4]). We will see that there exist interesting correspondences between this medallion and some passages of this panegyric.

The dating of this type of medallion remains a debated topic. It has been commonly assumed that the minting of this type of medallion would have taken place immediately after Constantius's victorious campaign in Britain, that is in 296 CE or in 297 CE (for 296 CE, see Christol, "Panegyriques et revers monétaires," p. 422 – however the scholar revised his opinion later on –; for 297 CE, see Bastien, and Metzger, *Le trésor de Beaurains*, p. 94, no. 218). Pierre Bastien has argued that, because of the similarities between the panegyric IV (8) and the scene represented on the reverse of this coin, it may be possible that this type of medallion had been produced the same year, at the same time as the important *donativum* that occurred at the beginning of 297 CE (see Bastien, and Metzger, *Le trésor de Beaurains*, p. 195). Pierre Bastien has even suggested that there exist striking similarities between this medallion and the so-called [Medallion from Lyon](#) [5] which corresponds in fact to a lead proof of the reverse of a gold medallion. On this lead proof two emperors are represented on top, perhaps Diocletian and Maximian, the latter being depicted while distributing money to barbarian peoples. In the lower half of the medallion, a scene symbolising the crossing, by barbarian peoples, of the boundary zone between barbarian lands and the Roman territory is represented. Among the similarities between the Medallion from Arras and the one from Lyon underlined by Pierre Bastien, there is the fact that both of them represent a half kneeling character, and the way of representing the roof of the towers which seems very similar (see Bastien, "Le médaillon de plomb," p. 24-25, 38). However, this proposal of dating of the medallion from Arras has been contested by Michel Christol who has convincingly argued that it might have been produced at the occasion of the *decennalia* of the *Caesares* (Constantius I and Galerius) in 302-303 CE (see Christol, "La piété des Tétrarques," p. 223-231; followed by Hostein in "Panegyrique et revers monétaire," p. 253).

Among the two most interesting correspondences between the Arras medallion and the panegyric delivered on the 1st March 297 CE, one is related to the attitude of the kneeling character represented on the reverse and to the nature of the scene here depicted. Scholars have proposed various identifications of the character represented kneeling and extending his arms towards Constantius on his horse. The fact that this character has a long tunic suggests that it must be a woman. This woman could thus be the personification of the city of London, city whose name is mentioned behind the character and the fortified city represented, or, more generally the personification of the province of Britain (for London, see Hostein, "Panegyrique et revers monétaire," p. 253; for Britain, see RIC VI, Treveri, no. 34, p. 167; Bastien, "Le médaillon de plomb," p. 24, n. 4). As rightly analysed by Michel Christol, the reverse of the medallion represents one of the most important events of Constantius's operations in Britain, the takeover of London and the entry of the emperor in the city. Contrary to what has been written about this personification of London or Britain extending her arms towards the emperor, the meaning of this scene was probably not to show the submission by the emperor of a defeated city or province (see Christol, "Panegyriques et



revers mone?taires,” p. 422 and n. 26). As Michel Christol argues, the extended arms of the woman should rather be interpreted as embodying the gratitude of the inhabitants of London and of the Britons towards the emperor who delivered them from the usurper and his barbarian mercenaries who placed Britain outside the Roman commonwealth during ten years (see Christol, “Pane?gyriques et revers mone?taires,” p. 422). In a few words, the woman embodying London or Britain welcomes his saviour Constantius through a gesture which can be interpreted as a “call for help” or a “call for good governance” (Hostein, “Panégyrique et revers monétaire,” p. 254). This interpretation is confirmed by a passage of the panegyric of 297 CE dealing with the welcoming of Constantius by the Britons: “So as soon as you (i.e. Constantius) stepped onto that shore, a long time expected avenger and liberator (*exoptatus olim vindex et liberator*), it is with good reason that a triumphal crowd spread out to meet your majesty, and that Britons exultant with joy came forward with their wives and children, venerating not only you whom they gazed as if you had descended from heaven, but also the sails and oars of that ship that had conveyed your deity, and prepared to feel you walking upon their prostrated bodies (*Latin panegyric IV (8).19.1*; the similarities between this medallion and this passage have been already noticed in Babelon and Duquénay, “Médaillons d’or,” p. 48-49). As stated by Michel Christol, this passage obviously echoes the representation on the reverse of the medallion of Arras which should rather be interpreted as representing a scene in which the personification of London or Britain manifests its gratitude and love to the victorious emperor who is just about to undergo his *adventus*, that is his triumphal entry in the city (about the *adventus*, see Christol, “Pane?gyriques et revers mone?taires,” p. 422-423). The message conveyed by the scene depicted on the reverse medallion is thus not simply a martial one and it is not only based on an opposition between the dominant Roman power and the defeated Britons. It rather brings out the idea that, thanks to the operation of re-conquest led by Constantius, the Britons were happy to be settled back inside the Empire and to enjoy its unity and prosperity.

The second main correspondence between the Arras medallion and the panegyric delivered on the 1st March 297 CE is related to the legend appearing on the reverse of the medallion which states that Constantius is the *redditor lucis aeternae*, “restorer of the eternal light”. First, it is important to note that this reference to the *lux aeterna* refers to Roman domination and is indirectly connected to the idea that this domination is unavoidable and beneficial. As the sun, everything in the rest of the universe is ordered around this Roman rule which appears thus as the main and unique source of life. It has been often noticed that the panegyric of 297 CE is pervaded by associations between the light lexicon and Roman domination (these examples are quoted in Christol, “Pane?gyriques et revers mone?taires,” p. 423). The equation between light and Roman domination is made explicit in IV (8).10.1 when the secession of Britain is compared to a break with “Roman light” (*a Romana luce discidium*). Moreover, in another passage of the same panegyric that follows the one quoted above and mentions the Britons being full of joy when they welcomed Constantius, it is stated: “It is not surprising that they (i.e. the Britons) were carried away by such a joy after so many years of miserable captivity, after the violations against their women, and the shameful enslavement of their children: they were free at last, at last Romans, at last restored [to life] thanks to the true light of the empire (*tandem liberi tandemque Romani, tandem vera imperii luce recreati*)” (*Latin panegyric IV (8).19.2*). In this last sentence, it is obvious that the fact that the Britons had been restored to their condition as provincials taking part in a united Roman Empire, is explicitly presented as a rebirth. The connection between the light lexicon – itself embodying a beneficial and prosperous Roman domination – and the idea of restoration to a previous state is asserted as in the medallion presented here.

Second, one should note that the term *redditor* is a hapax in numismatic legends and that it appears only rarely in other sources (see Christol, “Pane?gyriques et revers mone?taires,” p. 423). As stated by Michel Christol this term has a dual meaning. It can be legal vocabulary, as the *redditor* is the one who repays a debt. However, it also has a general meaning, by referring to somebody who gives back to a person or a group of persons, as for instance to a city or a province, who had been deprived of something. It can also refer to somebody who sorts out an injustice or who re-establishes a situation (see Christol, “Pane?gyriques et revers mone?taires,” p. 423). One should note that references to the idea of restoration or to the figure of the emperor as being a restorer are quite frequent in other *Latin panegyrics*, especially in the speech pronounced in 289 CE at Trier to celebrate Maximian on the day of Rome’s birthday. In this text, the panegyrist does not use the term *redditor* but that of *restitutor* to qualify Maximian and Diocletian, meaning that both of them worked for the reestablishment of Rome’s power (see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1 \[6\]](#)). In addition, this theme of the restoration is one of the major themes that appears throughout the *Latin panegyric IV (8)* addressed to Constantius in 297 CE. It is developed via the common motif of the *restitutio provinciae* “provincial restoration,” in this specific case that of the *restitutio Britanniae* (expression used in IV (8).17.2 and 18.7); and via the idea that Constantius should continue to work for the restoration of the city of Autun; especially when it is stated that: “Now it (i.e. the city of the Aedui) considers that this old appellation of “brother of Rome” has had to be restored to it (*sibi redditum*), since it has in you a founder” (see [Latin Panegyric IV \(8\).21.2 \[4\]](#)). Coming back to the connection between the image represented on the reverse and the legend of this medallion, the message is simple: Constantius restored the “eternal light,” that is the Roman domination to the provincials, in this case the Britons.



In conclusion comparing the reverse of the medallion of Arras with that of the panegyric pronounced at Trier on the 1st March 297 CE and addressed to Constantius, it appears that these sources convey a message which is quite similar. Both of them do not insist on the fact that the emperor subjugated the Britons, but rather present Constantius's operations in Britain as having led to the restoration of freedom inside the province, the Britons being thus re-established in their enjoyable condition as Roman citizens. On the medallion of Arras, the personification of London/Britain is represented while addressing prayers to the emperor and perhaps asking for good government rather than appearing as a vanquished character (see Hostein, "Panégyrique et revers monétaire," p. 254). The panegyric of 297 CE and the reverse of the Arras medallion both show asymmetric relationships between the emperor and the provincials, as the emperor can accept or reject the prayers. Yet, behind both sources there is also implicitly the idea that the emperor has fulfilled an essential aspect of his charge: to ensure the protection and liberty of the Roman provincials which corresponds to one of his fundamental duties towards the inhabitants of the Empire (for that perspective see Christol, "Panégyriques et revers monétaires," p. 426-427). Even if the relationship between the two is asymmetric, the role of *restitutor* here ascribed to the emperor implies that there exists a union and a contractual relationship between the city/the provincials and the imperial power (see Hostein, "Panégyrique et revers monétaire," p. 258). Finally, if we admit that the medallion of Arras had not been produced immediately after Constantius's victorious operation in Britain, and so at the time of the composition of the panegyric of 297 CE, we can interpret the image of the reverse as fitting in an official imperial rhetoric which consisted of exalting the Tetrarchs for having succeeded in restoring peace everywhere in the Empire (see Hostein, "Panégyrique et revers monétaire," p. 253). For Constantius, the main military operation that could be recalled to illustrate this point was his past operations in Britain, whereas for Galerius, the reliefs of the arch of Thessalonica attest that it was his definitive settlement of the Persian threat that occurred in 299 CE (on that point see Christol, "La piété des Tétrarques," p. 229-230).

Keywords in the original language:

- [Londinium](#) [7]
- [redditor lucis aeternae](#) [8]
- [redditor](#) [9]

Thematic keywords:

- [Constantius I](#) [10]
- [hoard](#) [11]
- [donativum](#) [12]
- [provincials](#) [13]
- [London](#) [14]
- [Britain](#) [15]
- [war](#) [16]
- [eternal light](#) [17]
- [restorer](#) [18]
- [peace](#) [19]
- [imperial unity](#) [20]
- [Roman rule](#) [21]
- [spear](#) [22]
- [horse](#) [23]
- [war galley](#) [24]
- [Roman soldiers](#) [25]

Bibliographical references:

["Médailles d'or du trésor d'Arras" \[26\]](#)



Babelon, Jean, Duquénoy, A. *article-in-a-journal* 45-521 "Médaillons d'or du trésor d'Arras" *Aréthuse* 1924

[The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine](#) [27]

Barnes, Timothy D. *book* *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press 1982

[Le trésor de Beaurains \(dit d'Arras\)](#) [28]

Bastien, Pierre, Metzger, Catherine *book* *Numismatique romaine, Suppl. 10 Le trésor de Beaurains (dit d'Arras)* Wetteren Éditions Numismatique romaine 1977

["Le médaillon de plomb de Lyon"](#) [29]

Bastien, Pierre *article-in-a-book* *Numismatique romaine, Suppl. 18 "Le médaillon de plomb de Lyon"* Wetteren Éditions Numismatique romaine 1989

[The Roman Government of Britain](#) [30]

Birley, Anthony R. *book* *The Roman Government of Britain* Oxford Oxford University Press 2005

["The Coinage of Allectus: Chronology and Interpretation"](#) [31]

Burnett, Andrew M. *article-in-a-journal* 21-4054 "The Coinage of Allectus: Chronology and Interpretation" *British Numismatic Society* 1984

["Panegyriques et revers monétaires: l'empereur, Rome et les provinciaux à la fin du IIIe siècle"](#) [32]

Christol, Michel *article-in-a-journal* 421-4342 "Panegyriques et revers monétaires: l'empereur, Rome et les provinciaux à la fin du IIIe siècle" *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 1976

["La piété des Tétrarques: une retractatio"](#) [33]

Christol, Michel *article-in-a-book* *Romanité et cité chrétienne. Permanences et mutations, intégration et exclusion du Ier au VIe siècle. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Yvette Duval* 219-231 "La piété des Tétrarques: une *retractatio*" Paris De Boccard 2000

["Panégyrique et revers monétaire. L'amplexus entre la cité et l'empereur"](#) [34]

Hostein, Antony *article-in-a-journal* 249-2606 "Panégyrique et revers monétaire. L'amplexus entre la cité et l'empereur" *Hypothèses* 2003

[Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie, I](#) [35]

Seston, William *book* *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie*, I Paris De Boccard 1946

Other sources connected with this document: Numismatic item



[The Lyon Medallion](#) [5]

The Lyon Medallion

- [Read more about The Lyon Medallion](#) [5]

Text

[Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#) [6]

Celebration of Rome's birthday under Maximian and Diocletian

- [Read more about Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#) [6]

Text

[Latin Panegyric IV \(8\).21.2](#) [4]

About the revival of the city of Autun thanks to Constantius Chlorus's generosity

- [Read more about Latin Panegyric IV \(8\).21.2](#) [4]

Realized by:

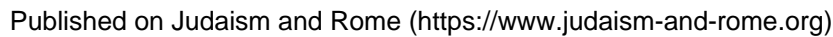
[Marie Roux](#) [36]



Source URL: <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/arras-medallion>

Links

- [1] https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/arras_medallion.jpg?itok=3eI_CEKV
- [2] <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/177460>
- [3] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/latin-panegyric%C2%A0iv8211>
- [4] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/latin-panegyric%C2%A0iv-8212>
- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/lyon-medallion>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/latin-panegyric-ii-101>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/londinium>
- [8] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/redditor-lucis-aeternae>
- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/redditor>
- [10] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/constantius-i>
- [11] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/hoard>
- [12] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/donativum>
- [13] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/provincials>



- Page 7 of 7