

# THE LAVA TREASURE OF ROMAN GOLD

(France, Corse-du-Sud), *terminus* 272/273/A.D.



## Up-to-date catalogue

Any reconstitution of the treasure is based on hypotheses, and relies on four types of sources :

- the material published in the *Revue Numismatique* in 1958 and in 1980,
- some private information given in 1986 to institutional collections, especially the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the British Museum,
- the group of coins seized by the French justice on the coin market in 1986 – which the Ministry of Culture has given on loan to the BnF in 1996 after a judicial decision,
- a study of sales catalogues since 1986.

The catalogue now contains 450 specimens. A number of sources leads us to guess that the treasure contained at first a minimum of 1200 to 1400 gold coins. We would now therefore have a third of its content, and hopefully every type it contained.

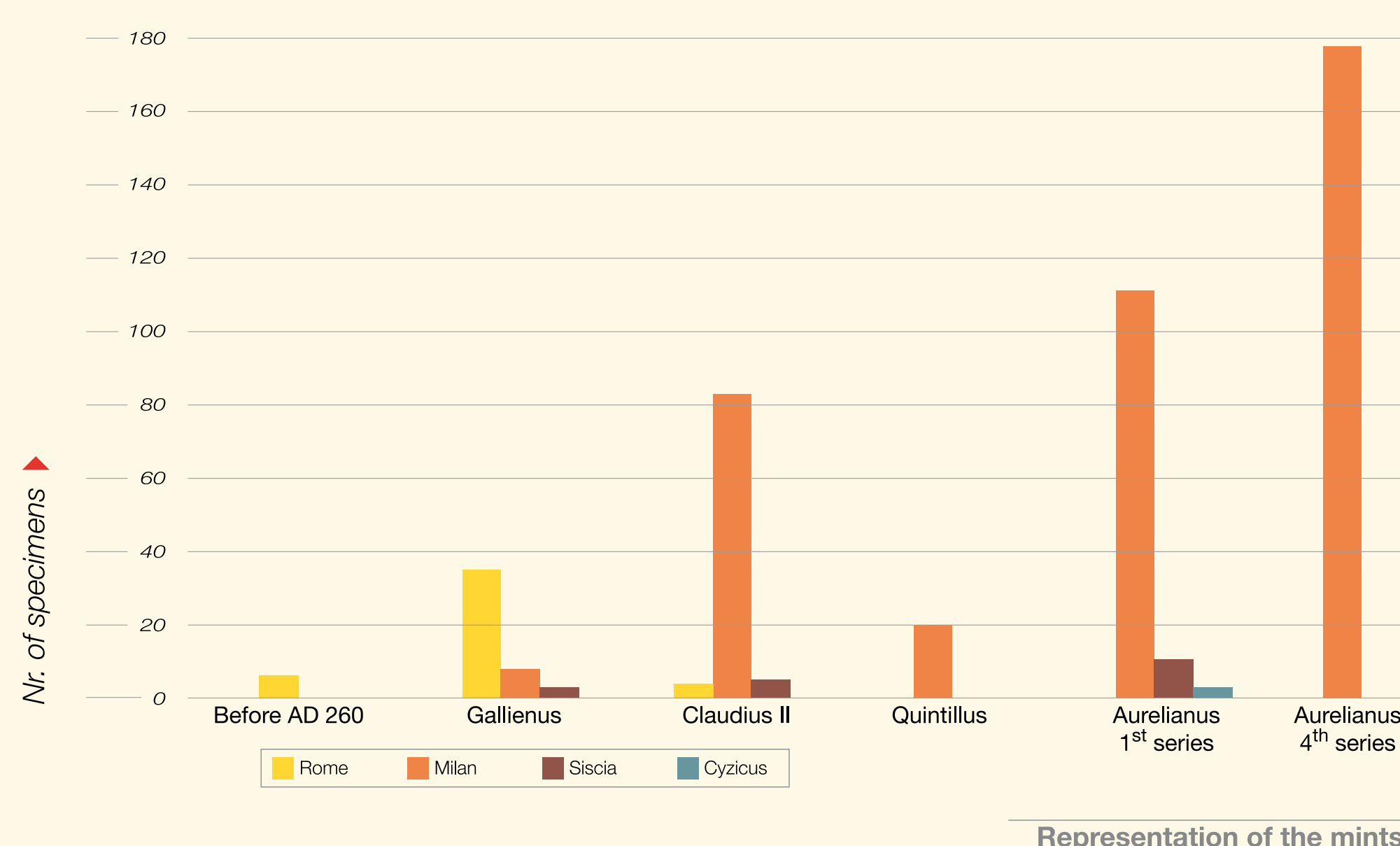
## Catalogues of the Lava hoard

	Lafaurie RN 1958	Huvelin & Lafaurie RN 1980	Estiot TM 2010
Before Gallienus, sole reign	0	1	4
Gallienus, sole reign (incl. medallions)	1	10	40 (3)
Claudius II (incl. medallions)	21 (6)	38 (13)	87 (41)
Quintillus	2	5	19
Aurelianus	17	31	297
Non monetary objects	0	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>450</b>

The steps of the Lava hoard cataloguing

## Composition of the Lava Treasure

The current state of the treasure proves the importance of Aurelianus's strikes – whose reign is the predominant one with two-thirds of all the coins. The difference comes especially from the 177 specimens of the last issue – an issue discovered by the submarine finds of 1985-86 – as they form 39% of the hoard in quantity.



Nr. of spec.	1-50	51-100	101-500	501-1000	+1000	Nr. of hoards
I <sup>st</sup> -II <sup>nd</sup> cent.	19	8	15	3	4	49
193-235 AD	9	1	5		3	18
235-253 AD	4		1			5
253-275 AD	28		1		1 (Lava)	30
275-285 AD	6					6
285-310 AD	12	1	2	1		16

Size of Roman gold coins hoards (I<sup>st</sup> - III<sup>rd</sup> cent. AD)  
(after C.E. KING, 1993, p. 440-441)

The hoard covers a short period, the decade from AD 262 to AD 272. It includes a very small group of earlier gold coins (4 *aurei* dating from Nero to Otacilia Severa) together with the freshly struck issues and with non-currency gold (plate [450], rings and bracelets). All this hardly suggests an accumulated familial wealth, but rather proof that the imperial liberalities could take very various shapes. In case the emperor were to face urgent expenses for distribution, then he could not only strike gold coins especially for the *donativa*, but also use earlier coins held in the Treasury, as well as goldwares produced by official workshops.

The gold treasure of Lava, first known as the « Corsica hoard » or « Mediterranean Sea hoard », has had a chaotic history. The find was never officially declared ; its discovery by divers and its dispersal on the market has followed several stages since 1958, and this prevents us from knowing its true face. We can know fairly exactly its general content, and the reigns that it covered – from the A.D. 262 Decennalia of Gallienus to the reign of Aurelianus in A.D. 272 – but we will never know for sure its exact size, nor will we have the complete catalogue of the exceptional collection of gold.

Despite our fractional sight of its content, it is nevertheless a unique testimony for our knowledge of Roman imperial coinage and on the praxis of imperial liberalities (*donativa*) in the third-century A.D.



## Gallienus

The forty gold coins of Gallienus were struck during three periods :

- the *donativum* for the late AD 262 / AD 263 Decennalia [10] ;
- the “grain-ear wreath” *donativum* celebrating the emperor's return in Italy at the end of AD 265 [11, 14, 30] ;
- a further group, without special coherence, from the end of the reign around AD 266-268.



## Claudius II

Of the 87 specimens of Claudius II in the hoard, 82 are from Milan and therefore give a striking image of the mint's production. They renew wholly the known material, especially for the accession *donativum* of the autumn 268, which is illustrated by multiples-medallions of 8 and 5 *aurei* [47, 62], but also for the attractive series of *aurei* with military busts which celebrates the victory of Lake Garda over the Alamanni [114, 117], and for the series with the bare bust turned left issued after the victory of Naissus over the Goths [121, 126].

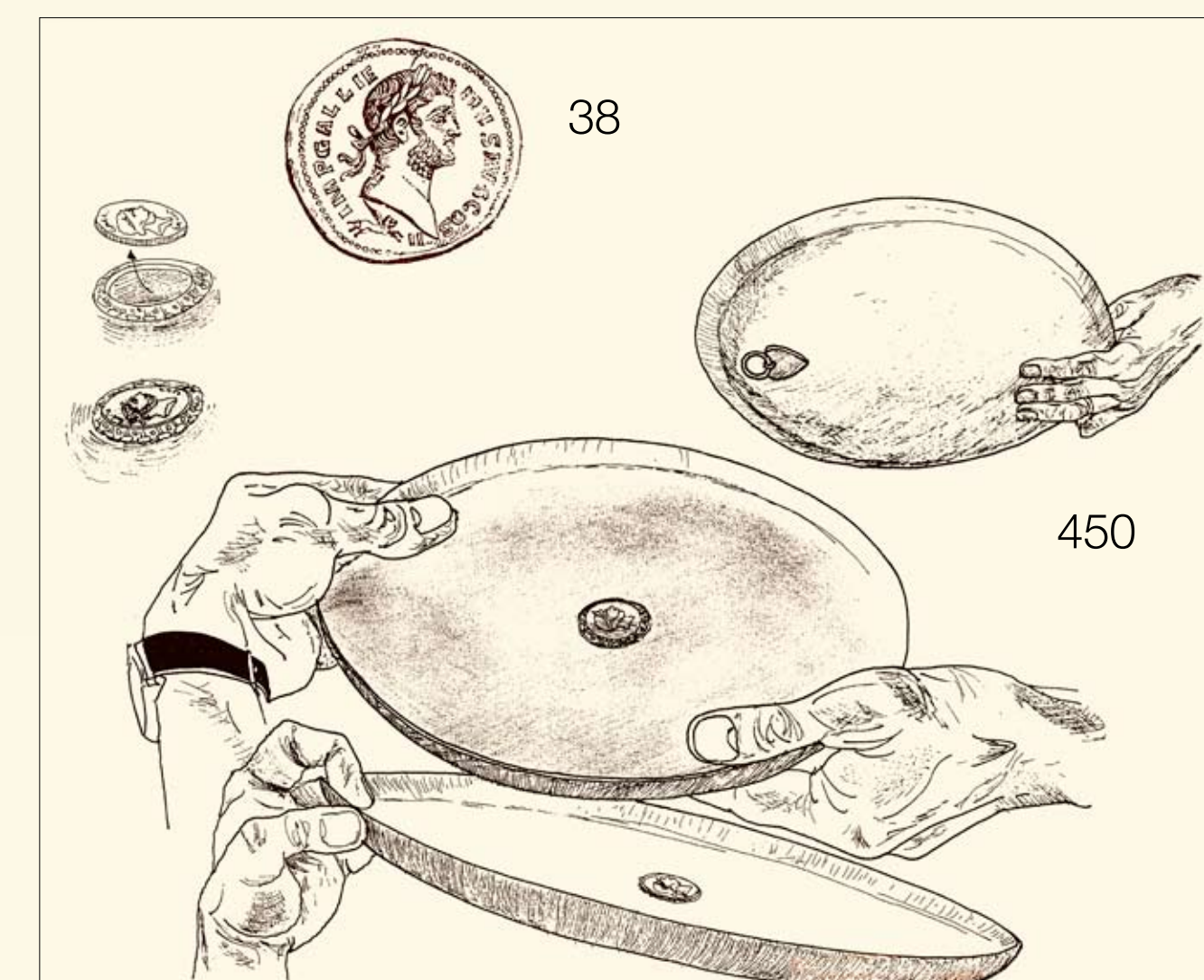


## Aurelianus

It is for this reign that the Lava Treasure has modified most our knowledge of gold coinage. Coins were found to have been struck in Siscia (Pannonia, nowadays Sisak) [446], and in Cyzicus (Mysia, near the modern Erdek) [447], but the majority of the coins discovered were from the Milan mint. Two series are found from there :



The second series marks the chronological end of the treasure, and its 177 *aurei* were issued with just 3 obverse-dies and 3 reverse-dies (one pair of die having struck up to 82 specimens) [261-370]. This final group, which left the mint's *officinae* without being split up, went directly into the possession of the high-ranking owner of the treasure. This allows us to date the shipwreck very closely to the issuing of this series, at the end of 272 or the beginning of 273.



## The gold plate

This piece is only known from drawings [450], and its fate is unknown. A date is suggested by the central medallion with Gallienus's portrait – struck in Milan for the Decennalia [38].



## Quintillus

19 *aurei* of Quintillus were found in the Lava Treasure – all struck in Milan which was Quintillus's headquarters, from which he had been charged by his brother Claudius II to head the army and protect Northern Italy. Milan is the only mint to have struck gold coins during this short reign that lasted only from mid-August to November 270 [132, 143]. Actually, before this hoard, only two genuine gold coins with Quintillus's portrait were known.

