

1916

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Recommended Citation

Boot, David H. (1916) "An Old Roman Coin in Dakota," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 23(1), 73-74.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol23/iss1/12>

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AN OLD ROMAN COIN IN DAKOTA.

DAVID H. BOOT.

In 1910 the writer was at work in Lincoln county, South Dakota, and had his attention called one morning to a curious piece of metal that had just been dug up by one of his neighbors. The find was apparently an old coin, but no one in that region could identify it. It was sent to the Smithsonian Institution and there identified as a coin of Septimius Severus, Emperor of Rome, A. D. 193 to 211. Some account of this Roman Emperor will be of interest in this connection. He was the only negro that ever ruled the world. In 193 he was commander of the Roman army on the Danube, engaged in holding off the armies of the barbarians. He was an Ethiopian who had risen from the ranks by his great energy and force of character. The Emperor Pertinax having been murdered in Rome,



FIG. 3—Coin of Septimius Severus found in South Dakota.

the praetorian guard auctioned off the empire to the highest bidder and it was sold to Didius Julianus for a price equivalent to \$12,000,000 of our money. At this time there were three armies in the field protecting the empire, one on the Euphrates,

one on the Rhine and one on the Danube. When the soldiers heard of the disgraceful transaction at home they rose in revolt and at once set out for the capital. Septimius Severus had the shortest distance to go and reached Rome first. The praetorians did not even attempt to defend their emperor who was put to death along with forty senators, and the army proclaimed Severus emperor. He knew that as soon as the excitement of the moment had passed, the people would not tolerate a negro ruler so he very wisely committed the management of affairs at the capital to the prefect of the new praetorian guard and returned to the frontier where he spent a long and prosperous reign, only returning two or three times and then for a few days only. He finally died in Britain at York.

The cuts (figure 3) show front and back views of the coin found in Dakota. Conjecture is useless as to how it came there, for the first white man to cross Dakota is supposed to have been the French explorer Venendre, but the coin was more than 1400 years old when Venendre was born. French Jesuit priests later worked among the Indians of Dakota, but it would be difficult to arrive at any reasonable hypothesis involving their connection with it.

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