

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TYPOLOGY ON ROMAN COINAGE:

120 BC - c. 32 BC¹

The cataloguing of the CAESAR DIVI F(ilius) and IMP(erator) CAESAR coin series of c.32-27 BC as well as the other Octavianic coins minted from 29 BC to the so-called First Settlement of 27 BC as the first Roman “imperial” coins is the inevitable result of the current typological classifications of Roman Republican coinage from the third century BC to c. 32 BC. Numismatists tend to use a tripartite division for categorizing Republican coin types that roughly corresponds to the last three centuries of the Republic. Early Roman coinage from the third century BC to the late second century BC is interchangeably termed “state”, “ancient”, “traditional”, “fixed”, “public”, or “general”. Coins from the late second century BC to the time of Sulla are known as “familial”. From Sulla to c.32 BC, coins are “factional” and/or “personal”. The specific employment of the term “personal” has thus led to the cataloguing of the Octavianic CAESAR DIVI F and IMP CAESAR series as “imperial” coinage. An extremely valuable study would be to move away from the broad generalizations that plague these typological classifications and to create new terminology that would better describe these coin types. The focus would be on the first century BC, the period which is most crucial for the understanding of the final phase of Octavianic coinage.

The term coin type seems simple enough, but it is actually much more complex.

Numismatists define a coin type as the design on a coin that is distinct from an attribute,

¹ I have chosen 120 BC as the start date, not because H. Zehnacker (see below) has chosen this date as the beginning of the “phase classique” of Republican coinage (e.g. the start of the “familial” coin types), but for two simple reasons. Although the 130s BC is normally considered to be the decade when a “dramatic” change occurred, the increase in changes of types does not occur until after c.120 BC. What is more, from c. 120 BC, Marius began to emerge as a leading figure. This rise of a leading figure is thus important to the answering this important question: are the Octavianic coins minted from c.32-27 BC “imperial”?

symbol, border, or legend. Each coin has both an obverse and a reverse type. An attribute is a design placed to the side of the type and generally refers to the type. Attributes most commonly identify deities, and are seen next to a head, bust, or figure of a deity. For instance, the trident on the obverse of *RRC 507/2* is an attribute of the type, which is the head of Neptune. A symbol is also a design placed to the side of the type, but its significance is generally independent of the type. For instance, the corn-ear on the obverse of *RRC 323/1* is not related to the head of Roma or to the Victory in a biga that is depicted on the reverse. It most probably refers to the moneyer's involvement in corn-distributions. However, the terms attribute and symbol are often used interchangeably. What is more, a primary and secondary importance is imposed on types and attributes. A type is often given the additional value of "chief", "principal", or "substantive". Attributes are at times given the value of a "subsidiary" or "secondary" type.² These assigned values diminish the significance of some attributes. For instance, the four wreaths which Victory carries on *RRC 436/1* and the trophy with Gallic arms which she carries on *RRC 448/1* are listed in Crawford's index of types as attributes. However, the importance of these "attributes" should not be missed. Since the image of Victory is common to both reverses, these "attributes" are what distinguish these types – the three wreaths refer to Pompey's three triumphs (Plutarch, *Pomp* 45.5 – triumphs over the continents of Libya, Europe and Asia -the fourth wreath is a *corona aurea* (golden crown) awarded to Pompey in 63 BC) whereas the trophy with Gallic arms refers to Caesar's Gallic campaign – and may allow one coin to be termed "Pompeian" and the other "Caesarian". Another example is the reverse on *RRC 497/2a*. The wreath is listed as an attribute while the curule chair it is placed on is a "substantive" type. It is the jewelled wreath awarded to Caesar by the Senate in 45 BC for his triumph at the Battle of Munda, and so, is in fact very significant. A coin type is often composed of numerous

² E.g. Zehnacker (1973): 181, and *RRC*: 859.

elements; that is, for instance, the priestly implements on RRC 489/2 make up what T. Hölscher calls a complex composition.³ A couple more examples will suffice for the moment: RRC 359/1, 426/4b, 440/1, 450/1a, and 480/6. There are times, though, when not all of the elements are listed as “substantive” types. For instance, I would suggest that the *carnyces* (Gallic trumpets) in saltire on 450/1a should be regarded as a “substantive” type rather than as an attribute. Thus, the meaning of every image on any given coin must be carefully evaluated before assigning levels of importance to coin designs. The smallest image on a coin may be the key to discovering the true interpretation of the coin.

Two studies generally define Roman Republican coin typology. The first is “The Main Aspects of the Political Propaganda on the Coinage of the Roman Republic”, the 1956 work of the erudite A. Alföldi. Alföldi lays out this scheme for Republican types:

The historical transformation of the structure of the Roman state, as reflected by the increasing change of the character of the coin-types, has roughly three stages, which approximately correspond to the three centuries of the later Roman Republic. In the third century BC, the coin-pictures announce the aims and ideas concerning all the Romans and their state...In the second century the aspirations of the ruling class begin to overshadow the manifestations of the state...At the beginning of the first century the symbols of the state to a great extent disappear...The era of the great oligarchies gives place to the powerful individuals...gaining ground continually until the final success [i.e., the portraiture of living persons on the obverses] about the middle of the first century.⁴

His scheme can be roughly paraphrased. In the third century BC, Rome minted “public” types. By the end of the second century BC, “family” types commemorating the deeds of the ancestors of the moneyers began to be depicted. In the first century BC, “personal” types that refer to leading figures (Pompey, Caesar, Antony, Octavian, and so on) overtook these “family” types. Similarly, in Chapter 9 of *RRC*, entitled “Types and Legends”, Crawford writes:

³ Hölscher (1982): 275.

⁴ Alföldi (1956): 65.

A discussion of the legends and types of Roman Republican coinage thus falls naturally into three parts: the period with public types, the development of private types, and the propaganda of the Civil Wars.⁵

The scholarship prior to Alföldi and that follows Alföldi and then Crawford offers the same basic framework. Early handbooks on Roman coinage, such as those by T. Mommsen, E. Babelon, G. Macdonald, and Mattingly employ the terms “state” and “ancient” for coins issued from the third to the late second centuries BC. Mommsen refers to the “fixity” of these types.⁶ Babelon writes that the coinage minted to 134 BC, the traditional date for the first “familial” type (i.e., C. Minucius Augurinus’ coin depicting the Columna Minucia),⁷ had “official” types of the Roman State. In Mattingly’s fourth period of Roman coinage, which comprises the period from 118 BC to the Social War, the “fixed” types of the denarius gave way to constantly changing “free” types.⁸ In *CRR*, Sydenham refers to the obverse head of Roma and the Janus-Roma/prow bronze series as “normal” types.

Following Alföldi’s study, focus centred around the inclusion of the term “factional” type. Alföldi’s stages remained intact. The only modification was the date when the third phase of coinage (i.e. the “personal” types) began to be minted. Alföldi begins his third stage in 70 BC with the first consulate of Pompey and Crassus.⁹ T.J. Luce agrees with all of Alföldi’s divisions except for moving the phase of “personal” types to a start date of the Sullan age. He suggests the coins depicting Venus that were minted in the eighties BC are an “anticipation of Prof. Alföldi’s last stage in Republican coin types.”¹⁰ B.W. Frier writes that the augural symbols (i.e., the jug and the *lituus*) on the reverse of *RRC* 374/2 have “party

⁵ *RRC*: 712.

⁶ Mommsen (1865): II.184.

⁷ *RRC* 242.

⁸ Mattingly (1928): 20.

⁹ Alföldi (1956): 72.

¹⁰ Luce (1968): 27.

functions”.¹¹ Luce’s interpretation of coin types is strongly based on the importance he imposes on the term “faction” as can be seen, for instance, in his analysis of coins portraying Apollo. It should be noted that Crawford later shows that the image of Apollo on these coins should not be considered a “factional” type for the *populares*.¹²

Crawford’s contribution to typology in his *RRC* is rather lacking despite the fact that his catalogue has now become the standard work on Republican coinage. Burnett justifiably says that the interpretation of designs does not receive a complete treatment.¹³ He uses the term “private” to denote his section on “familial” types and applies sweeping generalizations to some of his interpretations of the coin types. For instance, the introduction of portraiture of living persons on the obverses to his chronological assessment of Republican coinage immediately yields to a section entitled “Approach to Empire.”¹⁴ The companion piece to *RRC* is H. Zehnacker’s 1973 *Moneta: Recherches sur l’organisation et l’art des émissions monétaires de la République romaine (289-31 av. J.-C.)*. Despite the fact that Zehnacker relies on the dating and mint attributions found in Sydenham’s *CRR* (i.e. *RRC*’s chronology and mint attributions have replaced those in *CRR* and are now considered to be the standard norm), he offers three extremely detailed chapters on typology that will be examined later as a case study of methodology employed for analysing Republican coin typology. For the moment, it should be noted that Zehnacker interchangeably employs the terms “ancient”, “traditional”, or “fixed” type for coins minted from the third century BC to 120 BC. Coins minted after 120 BC are “new” types. In fact, he begins his chapter on “libération typologie” by defining 120 BC as the start date for the “phase classique” of Republican coinage.¹⁵

¹¹ Frier (1967): 118.

¹² *RRC*: 731-732.

¹³ Burnett (1987): 178.

¹⁴ *RRC*: 734-744.

¹⁵ Zehnacker (1974b): 629.

After these two monumental works of the seventies on Republican coinage, only a couple of modifications of the basic terminology employed for Republican coin typology have occurred. T.R. Martin still uses the term “personal”, but attempts to give the term a more specific meaning. Martin writes about the innovation of “purely personal types”. For him, “personal” types comprised only of types referring to the contemporary status of the person whose identifying inscription they carried and the ultimate development of “personal” types, “no matter how this term is understood” came with the innovation of the portraiture of living persons on coins.¹⁶ Thus, the first “personal” type for Martin is *RRC* 359/1, the coin of Sulla which bears the obverse legend *L SVLLA* and the reverse legend *IMPER ITERVVM*, that he dates to late 82 BC. Even though J. DeRose Evans attempts to show that numerous “familial” types do not depict claims of descent, she continues to use terms such as “general” and “factional”.¹⁷

Within this existing framework of “public”, “familial”, and “personal” coin types, numismatists also focus on the character of these types. For instance, the “public” types are considered to be religious in nature.¹⁸ “Familial” types are commemorative in nature. The recent article by J. Williams and A. Meadows explores this “monumentalizing of typology” in great detail.¹⁹ W. Hollstein, in his examination of coins minted from 78 BC to 50 BC, divides coin types into two categories: (1) familial themes and (2) current events. His first category is then subdivided into another category referring to the moneyer’s own career and his second category is then subdivided into two categories: (2a) *res publica* themes and (2b) ruler propaganda. Extensive lists referring to the character of types (e.g., coins showing

¹⁶ Martin (1989): 21.

¹⁷ Evans (1992): 17-34.

She suggests that political and social interpretations should be imposed on types where a claim of familial descent cannot be found.

¹⁸ Macdonald (1905): 186.

¹⁹ Williams and Meadows 2001.

battle scenes, geographical personifications, games, etc.) have been produced and read as if they would be encyclopaedic entries. Mattingly, Alföldi, Zehnacker, Hölscher, Evans, Hollstein, and H. Flower have all provided lists of this kind.²⁰ The most interesting one is perhaps that of G. Alteri. His catalogue for a 1990 exhibition at the Vatican is specifically structured to read as an encyclopaedia of Republican coin types.²¹

Zehnacker's study may appear to be most detailed and complete work on Republican coin typology. However, there are four fundamental problems with his methodology. The first problem concerns his definition of a "fixed" and/or "ancient", "traditional" type. "Fixed" types are the obverse head of Roma (i.e. the obverse image for the *denarius* from 211 BC) and of the reverses of (1) Victory crowning a trophy (i.e. the reverse image of the *victoriatu*s and later variations of this image on the *quirinus*), (2) Jupiter in a quadriga (i.e. the reverse image for the *didrachm* from 225 BC), (3) prow (i.e. the reverse image on bronzes minted from 225 BC), (3) the Dioscuri galloping (i.e. the reverse image for the *denarius* from 211 BC), (4) Luna in a biga (i.e. reverse image for the *denarius* from 179 BC), and (5) Victory in a biga (i.e. the reverse image for the *denarius* from 157 BC). He also attempts to show that other "fixed" types later appear in the coinage of some Roman moneyers from 48-44 BC and in Antony's fleet bronze, c. 38 BC.²² The emphasis he places on these "fixed" types leads to a rather useless examination of the comparison between "fixed" types and "new" types in certain series (i.e., coins of Caesar, Antony, Octavian, and so on). This examination does nothing more than provide a percentage of how many coins of Caesar, for instance, are not these "fixed" types.²³ The second problem is his theory of the "hierarchy of types". He attempts to show how certain images occur only on certain denominations.

²⁰ Mattingly, etc.

²¹ Alteri 1990.

²² Zehnacker (1973): 683-690.

²³ *Ibid.* 673-677.

However, in this section he only examines the coins in the respective series he is discussing. This, then, does not provide a complete picture which would show that, indeed, the certain image he mentions is found on other denominations outside of the series under study.²⁴ In the same way, he examines twenty-two isolated series depicting “types multiples complémentaires”. In this section, he also does not discuss coins outside of the series under study that portray the same images.²⁵ His third chapter on typology, which is devoted to the subject of style, is on the one hand useful if one wants to find, for instance, all the coins depicting the obverse type of the head of Vesta, veiled and facing right.²⁶ On the other hand, this chapter is limited by his decision to only list the obverse types depicting heads or busts of deities.

Thus, the typological classifications of Republican coinage to date must be re-examined. Is there a more specific term that can be applied to coins minted from the third century BC to the late second century BC? The “religious” character that is applied to these coins also seems too broad. Is a coin “personal” simply because it bears a legend attesting to the contemporary status of the individual mentioned on the coin? Is it reasonable to say that some coins from 78-50 BC reflect a theme related to the *res publica*? It seems hardly likely, for instance, that *RRC* 394/1 (portraying Diana and a hound) is an obvious example defining the *res publica*. The primary and secondary levels of importance Hollstein gives to his categories is again a tentative means of establishing his classifications.²⁷ Is it possible to say a coin is truly Caesarian, Antonian, Octavianic, and so on? For instance, how many of Caesar’s coins are original? A couple examples show, for instance, the influence of the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. 717.

²⁷ Hollstein 1993.

coinage of the period of Marius and Sulla. *RRC* 452/4 can be compared to *RRC* 427/1 while the reverse of *RRC* 456/1a can be compared to *RRC* 374/2.

EXERCISES – refer to TYPOLOGYEXERCISES.pdf

1. Compare the Athena/owl tetradrachms minted in Athens in c. 5th century BC to the Roma/Dioscuri denarii minted in Rome after 211 BC.
2. Would you consider the Victory depicted on the Pompeian and Caesarian coins as “personal”? How else would you describe Victory? What about the wreaths on the Pompeian coin and the Gallic arms on the Caesarian coin? (i.e. what is general or specific about these coins?)

For further reference on Caesar and Pompey’s coins (and much, much more!), see:

<http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/acans/caesar/Home.htm>

http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/acans/caesar/CivilWars_Pompey.htm

3. Compare the Antonian coin to the Octavianic coin. What do the omissions and/or additions of titles and priestly symbols tell us about the rivalry between Antony and Octavian?

For further reference, see:

http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/acans/caesar/Battle_RivalClaims1.htm

Newman, R. (1990) ‘A dialogue of power in the coinage of Antony and Octavian 44-30 BC’, *AJN* 2: 37-63.

4. Compare the Antonian coin to the Octavianic coin. Would you necessarily consider the Octavianic coin as “new”? How might you rather characterize it?

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