William E. Metcalf. Photo by Alan Roche.
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Nathan T. Elkins and Jane DeRose Evans
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Seeing Caesar’s Symbols: Religious Implements on the Coins of Julius Caesar and his Successors

ROBERTA STEWART

This chapter explores the civil war coinage of Julius Caesar and the re-use of his designs by his successors and the republican leaders who assassinated him. The argument develops an idea about a pattern in numismatic iconography that I saw when I had the privilege to study with Bill Metcalf at the American Numismatic Society summer seminar.

When Caesar invaded the Italian peninsula in 49 BC and then engaged with Pompeian and senatorial forces in Italy, Gaul, Spain, Greece, and Africa, he issued coins that made extensive use of religious iconography. His successors and his assassins copied and adapted those assemblages of religious symbols. The usual explanation of the assemblages is that they provided visual shorthand for Caesar’s office as pontifex maximus.1 I argue that this mistakes the character of the assemblages as a conscious selection, and also the nature of symbols that carry multiple particular resonances.2 Several symbols, e.g., the ancile, or shield, of the Salian priests, do not correlate or correlate badly with Caesar’s offices and with the careers of those who re-used the types.3 Even if and when the symbols correlate with a priesthood, the equation of a variety of different symbols and assemblages to a single meaning—religious office—produces a reductive banality. The coins of Julius Caesar, his successors, and his assassins have the potential to bring us into the historical moment and offer tantalizing evidence for the competing discourses during the civil wars of the 40s.

I argue that Caesar’s coins were innovative in their designs, their use of symbols, and in their legends. They develop a theme of piety, both ritual correctness and respect for the oldest religious

3. RRC: 735, n. 6: “This is, as far as I know, the only evidence that Caesar was a Salius.” For attempts to explain the apex, see Woytek 2003: 120–21.
traditions of Rome, particularly the *pignora imperii* (tokens of empire). They also reflect and develop the two-fold critique of senatorial government that Caesar articulated in *De Bello Civili*: the failure to carry out traditional rituals properly, hence the essential illegality of the senatorial government and its members (*BCiv.* 1.6); their treatment of priestly offices as empty titles and plunder of war (3.82, cf. Sallust, *BJ* 31.10).4 His successors (A. Hirtius, Cn. Domitius Calvinus, M. Antonius, M. Aemilius Lepidus, C. Octavius) copied his religious symbols wholesale; his opponents (M. Iunius Brutus, C. Cassius Longinus) manipulated them to frame the assassination as religious sacrifice; all show the effectiveness of his messages.

The frequently changing repertoire of Roman coinage produced a rich body of contemporary evidence for historical study. Coins offer a window into government policy, individual self-representation, and cultural values both at the moment of issue and as a seriation, showing change across time. How do we interpret the symbols and their possible meanings appropriately? As Metcalf (1999) insisted, the value of the coin as historical evidence depends on appreciation of it first as a material artifact. The internal evidence of the coins—their symbols and inscriptions—needs first to be evaluated in terms of numismatic conventions, not as transparent symbols with self-evident meaning. For example, legends identified the names of moneyers and so functioned to regulate the minting process,5 even as a name made a political claim. Second-century generic battle scenes may connect obliquely with historical events or family history, but communicated shared military values.6 Repetition and remodeling of types and symbols is evident as an aesthetic principle of coin design already by the mid-second century BC.7 Roman visual media and literary sources aid interpretation, by illustrating larger contexts and possible significations. Coins had the potential to carry messages wherever Roman money changed hands, making them cost-effective, but also making the audience multiple and indeterminate, thereby further complicating arguments about the meaning of a particular symbol for any individual viewer.

Caesar's military coins form a distinct group—for their design and iconography—even among his own coin production. With one notable exception, the coins minted by Caesar's supporters during the civil wars, at Rome and elsewhere, feature the name of the moneyer, a range of deities on the obverse (e.g., Mars, Medusa, Fides, Venus, Roma, Apollo), and a wide range of themes, including but not exclusively, martial themes on the reverse.8 This group of coins (*RRC*: 448–51, 453–55, 457, 463–66) closes with the one outlier, an enormous issue of *aurei* minted by the praetor A. Hirtius at Rome in 46 BC for Caesar's quadruple triumph (*RRC*: 466/1); the *aureus* adopts the iconography of Caesar's military issues and shows a veiled female (Vesta?) on the obverse and three religious symbols (*lituus*, jug, axe) on the reverse. By contrast, Caesar's own military coins, minted on campaign, contain only the legend CAESAR (*RRC*: 443, 452, 458, 468) or Caesar's titles (*RRC*: 467/1).9 Caesar's coins are filled with religious symbols, with one outlier (*RRC*: 468), minted in Spain in 46/45 BC, after the final defeat of the Republican forces at Thapsus; that coin shows Venus on the obverse and a trophy displaying Gallic weaponry with two bound captives. What was the force of the religious symbols on Caesar's civil war coins?

The very first issue of the civil war (*RRC* 443; Fig. 1) had an elephant confronting a snake (or trampling a Gallic war club, or *carnyx*) with the legend CAESAR on one side and on the other side an assemblage of religious implements: a single-handled cup, sprinkler, axe, and *apex*.10 Minting

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9. Woytek 2003 is fundamental: a review of hoard and stylistic evidence, and previous scholarly opinion on each coin. Crawford’s review (2012) should be consulted.
technique—multiple dies mounted together into the anvil—localizes some production in Gaul or Spain. The issue was the largest of the civil wars: Crawford’s die estimates yield 22.5 million *denarii* at 30,000 coins/die.

The obverse design has few comparanda. Whatever the significance—a civil war clash of good elephant over evil snake (Pliny *HN* 8.23) or competitive factional politics—interpreting and over-interpreting the obverse design affirms a precept of Metcalf (1999: 3), not to focus on the unusual design because we simply do not have the evidence to interpret it appropriately. Whatever the significance of the obverse—and it was comprehensible because it was re-used twice by Roman commanders in Gaul (*RPC* 1: 501, 502)—the reverse counterpoised Roman religion, a typical Roman discourse, especially in moments of crisis.

Caesar’s use of religious symbols as central elements of a design, was not itself new. Sulla first used ritual symbols as a substantive type: a jug and *lituus* flanked by military trophies and enclosed in a laurel wreath (*RRC* 359); the symbols invoked rituals of political legitimation and associated these with his military success, as he invaded Italy and fought a civil war in the 80s. Caesar’s assemblage (single-handled cup, sprinkler, axe, *apex*) is new, and its significance emerges from consideration of its individual elements that have precedents in Republican coinage and were part of a known numismatic vocabulary.

The single-handed cup first appears on coins of Sulpicius Galba in 69 BC (*RRC* 406). These feature a knife and axe, forming a pediment and enshrining a cup; the inscriptions AED CVR and P GALB identify the moneyer; on the obverse, a portrait of a veiled female with a distinctive hair roll at the forehead represents Vesta. The cup appears as a subsidiary symbol on a coin of 61, behind the head of Vesta (*RRC* 419/3b), and held in the hand of a standing veiled female on a later issue of 42 BC (*RRC* 494/1). Thus, the single-handed cup had an association with Vesta and with sacrificial implements. As a subsidiary symbol on later coins, the cup appears as a linked pair with the sprinkler (*RRC* 492/2), axe (*RRC* 502/1 and 2), or *apex* (*RRC* 502/4). Cumulatively, these coins copy Caesar’s initial assemblage of 49. Although the cup became a short-hand symbol of the pontifical college in imperial coinage (beginning in 16 BC: *RIC* 1°: 69, n. 367; cf. *RIC* 1°:125, nos. 76–77), reliefs of ritual implements that adorned Roman temples and altars make clear the enduring significance of the cup as a sacrificial implement in the popular imagination. Thus, before Caesar, the libation vessel is associated particularly with Vesta, although it had a broader use that might factor into its apprehended meaning on Caesar’s coins.

Later coinage illustrates its use. A medallion of Lucilla, the wife of Verus, dated AD 164–168/9, shows a sacrificial scene in front of the temple of Vesta (*Gnechi 1912: 2.51, no. 13, pl. 76, 9*). A priestess standing to the right of a lighted altar holds forth incense to the fire; the priestess on the left holds the single-handed cup at the altar (cf. *RIC* III: 276, no. 788). Libation could be a complete offering, or the preliminary offering, the *praefatio*, of incense and wine that initiates the sacrifice (*Cato Agr. 134.1*).

17. On Galba, *MRR* 2.136, n. 4. The symbols are connected with Galba’s pontificate by *RRC*. As curule aedile Galba would have led the public ritual at the *ludi* and used the *simpulum*, see Wilhelm 1988: 82–83. On the image of Vesta, see Lindner 2015: 81.
Literary sources describe the vessels of sacrifice and their associations. A vessel, termed a *simpulum*/*simpuvium*, was used for libation during sacrifice (Festus p. 455).\(^{21}\) Varro distinguishes two vessels (*guttus*, *simpulum*) retained for sacrificial practice, the *simpulum* used as a ladle (Ling 5.124). The ladle is identified with curule aediles (Cic. *Har. resp.* 23), pontifices (Cic. *Rep.* fr. 9; Schol. Iuv. 6.343), and Arval Brethren (*CIL* VI.1. 2104, 26–27). Cicero connects the use of the *simpulum* by the curule aediles with a prayer that began the games (Cic. *Har. resp.* 23). Two hundred years later, the acts of the Arval Brethren (*CIL* VI. 2104.26, a. 218) recorded use of a *simpulum* to fill the *skyphoi* (cups) for an offering of wine.\(^{23}\)

The sprinkler appears in use on the issue of A. Postumius Albinus (*RRC*: 372/1, 81 BC): a togate sacrificant extends a sprinkler over an acquiescent bull standing at the lighted altar.\(^{24}\) The sprinkler occurs as a subsidiary symbol together with a cup (*RRC*: 492/2) and in a second assemblage of ritual implements minted by Caesar; it appears frequently among sacrificial implements in the ritual friezes that adorned temples.\(^{25}\) The sprinkling of the sacrificial animal with liquid (wine or water) and then with *mola salsa* (salted meal) constituted the preliminary ritual to the sacrifice (Serv. *Aen.* 9.641a).\(^{26}\)

The axe appears together with the *apex* as a linked pair of religious symbols on the earliest Roman denarii, during the Second Punic War (*RRC* 59:1a and b). The axe on Caesar’s coin type—as well as the earlier issue of Galba in 69 BC—does not resemble the implements illustrated in use in sacrificial reliefs, but is clearly a ceremonial implement.\(^{27}\) Festus records a special ritual axe of the pontifices, called *scena*, *sacena*, or *dolabra pontificalis* (p. 444 Lindsay).\(^{28}\) The Ara Pacis features a togate figure, *capite velato* (with covered head), who processes behind the *flamines* (priests), and carries on his shoulder an axe with a rectangular blade.\(^{29}\) The figure is not dressed as the sacrificial worker (*popa*) who regularly wields the axe in scenes of sacrifice, nor does he carry the appropriate fasces with axe of the lictor; he may represent the *rex sacrorum* (senatorial priest) or an attendant of the pontifical college.\(^{30}\)

The axe and the knife were the two key tools of large animal sacrifice: wielded from above, the axe functioned to sever the spinal cord of the sacrificial victim and immobilize it; driven from below, the knife severed the carotid arteries and jugular veins of the neck for a quick bleed-out.\(^{31}\) The axe is thus a crucial ritual tool that created the impression of a yielding animal, guaranteeing a propitious sacrifice. The raising of the axe began the sacrifice (Ovid *Fasti* 1.319–22) and Ovid describes the formulaic dialogue of sacrificial worker, who raised the axe and paused for permission, and officiant, who ordered the strike and so controlled the sacrificial act.\(^{32}\) The axe thus has a ritual function (to create a compliant sacrificial victim) and a theological significance, when the will of the sacrificant and the divine presence were focalized. Thus, the reverse of the first coin issued during the civil war (443/1) reads left to right, as a narrative frieze of the act of sacrifice: the cup for the libation, the sprinkler for the immolation, the axe for the ritual moment of sacrifice.

The assemblage ends with an *apex*. The *apex* first appears as a substantive type here on the coin of Caesar. It is a subsidiary symbol on the earliest Roman coins of 211–208 BC (*RRC*: 59), in

\(^{21}\) “A small vase, not unlike a *cyathus*, with which wine is offered in sacrifices,” ed. W. M. Lindsay, 1930.

\(^{22}\) “incertae sedis”, quoted by Nonius p. 398M; see Powell 1998.


\(^{25}\) *ThesCRA* 5: 188, with pl. 18, n. 18, pl. 20, n. 23 (Holscher); La Follette 2011/2012: 21–22.

\(^{26}\) Dumézil 1970: 558; Prescendi 2007: 36–37, 111.

\(^{27}\) For forms of the sacrificial axe, Aldrete 2014: fig. 2. On the axe on Galba’s and Caesar’s coin as ceremonial implement, Siebert 1999: 72.

\(^{28}\) On archaeological evidence, see Fris Johansen 1932: on Festus, idem 140–41.


\(^{31}\) Aldrete 2014: 45–46.

\(^{32}\) On the ritual, Prescendi 2007: 37.
a linked pair together with an axe or hammer, a tool of sacrifice, on four denominations and two reverse types, i.e. the symbols are not control marks. The apex perhaps served to make a pun on the name of the moneyer T. Quinctius Flamininus (RRC: 267), thus suggesting the referent of the symbol as the flamen. The apex represented the most distinctive feature of the office of the flamen, as on the processional frieze on the Ara Pacis. Thus, the Roman viewer seeing the apex would most likely recognize the flamen.

But what would apex—and a reference to the flaminate—mean in 49? It is hard to imagine it as short-hand for personal tenure of the priesthood. Caesar had been designated flamen Dialis (priest of Jupiter) after the dramatic suicide of the flamen Dialis Cornelius Merula, precipitated by the actions of Caesar’s own uncle (by marriage) C. Marius and father-in-law Cinna. Caesar avoided the office because of the change of government and Sulla’s annulment of Marius and Cinna’s acta (Vell. Pat. 2.43.1). Merula’s suicide, including a curse on leadership and a libation of his own blood for the safety of the state (Vell. Pat. 2.21.1–2), lived in cultural memory and would provide the paradigm for a political suicide in order to challenge the government of Nero. Merula’s dying curse may have affected religious policy until 11 BC, when Augustus finally appointed his successor (Suet. Aug. 31.4; Tac. Ann. 3.58.5; Dio 54.36.1). Thus, the apex on the type could conjure up the remembrance of forced political suicide during civil war and Caesar’s questionable avoidance of a religious office—an unlikely signal on Caesar’s coins. These would be the political memories stemming from the civil war of the 80s, the most recent incursion of renegade armies on the peninsula. It is relevant, though perhaps tangentially relevant, that in De Bello Civili Caesar himself consistently identified his senatorial opponents, their actions and aspirations, with Sulla (BCiv. 1.4, 1.7).

To be sure, the pontifex maximus regulated the pontifical college, the Vestals and the flamines; and the pontifices supervised the performance of public, state sacrifices. It is possible to read the symbols as a short-hand for Caesar’s office as head of the pontifical college. But for the elites, Caesar secured the office of pontifex maximus in 63 by bribery, and his election was a scandal that caused ill-will (Suet. Iul. 13); his unilateral action and disregard of the pontifical colleagues in 59, over the adoption of P. Clodius, caused hostility, and, in 57, Cicero argued that Caesar’s actions deprived him of his claim to religious legitimacy (Cic. De domo sua 104). An allusion to Caesar’s flaminate or his pontifical office on the first coin of the civil war would hardly be positive or offer effective rhetoric to win hearts and minds.

Reading the symbol as a signifier of the priesthood, rather than personal tenure of the priesthood, produces an allusion to attentive ritual work on behalf of the Roman community. The flamines, a priesthood ascribed to Numa (Enn. Amm. 2.117–19; Livy 1.20), served individual gods (Cic. Leg. 2.20) and represented the gods whose names they carried (Dialis, Quirinalis, Martialis) an incarnation of the divine. They had crucial public roles and recognition. Their ritual work protected the community: the Quirinalis celebrated the Consualia (21 August), Robigalia (25 April) and Larentalia (23 December); the Martialis participated in the Larentalia. The Dialis lived a life of continual sacrifice to Jupiter for the good of the Roman State, and Plutarch describes him as the living embodiment of the god Jupiter. Regulations on the Dialis separated him completely from the secular world (he could not see an army or swear an oath) and committed him

33. The Salius also wore an apex; for an attempt to distinguish typologies of apex, see Schäfer and Ganzert 1980.
34. On Merula’s suicide, see Lion-Gille 1999: 440–42, who suggests that Caesar, Marius’ nephew, and his wife Cornelia, Cinna’s daughter, were selected precisely because they were related and would close the curse or at least regain public favor. On priestly murder in the first century, Várhelyi 2011.
37. Stepper 2003: 31–32
39. “flaminem Iovi adsiduum sacerdotem creavit,” Livy 1.20.2; “cotidie feriatus est,” Gell. NA 10.15.16.
to constant service to Jupiter. So Caesar's symbol to a Roman familiar with the ritual cycles of the city would conjure the priestlyhoods whose ritual work protected the Roman State. The apex also focalized ritual piety (Serv. Aen. 8.664): the flamen Dialis might not remove his cap sub divo (while outdoors, Gell. NA 10.15.17) and loss of the apex meant the loss of office, e.g., for Q. Sulpicius in 223 BC (Val. Max. 1.1.4–5; Plut. Marc. 5.3–4). The Martialis and Quirinalis needed to wear the apex for sacrifices.41

The symbols on Caesar's reverse make a ritual narrative. Reading them left to right reproduces the ritual of sacrifice: the libation (single-handled vessel), then immolation (sprinkler), then sacrifice of the victim (axe); and the sequence culminates with a symbol of a priestlyhood whose life-work was defined by ritual service and piety. The symbols evoke and reinforce the hierarchies of libation, sacrifice, dutiful perpetual service to deity.42 Scheid has emphasized the character of the rituals of libation and sacrifice as performative of hierarchies, of gods and mortals, and a "system of being."43 The symbols on Caesar's coins give graphic expression of the rituals that oriented man and gods. The expressed piety of the coin gives point to Caesar's critique of senatorial government in the opening chapters of De Bello Civili: he noted the disregard or poor performance of ritual regulating public life and charged his opponents with a disrespect of religion and a general disregard of divine and human law (BCiv 1.6.8: “money was exacted from the towns, and taken from the sanctuaries: all human and divine laws were thrown utterly into confusion”).

Caesar's second issue of the war associated his military victories with the central cults of the state. The aureus and denarius (RRC 452/1, 2) feature a female portrait wearing a diadem, wreath, and pearls on the obverse, and a trophy with Gallic weapons and a Roman ritual axe in the field. The quinarius (452/3, Fig. 2) shows on the obverse a veiled female portrait with a distinctive hair roll at the forehead, suggesting the identity of Vesta, and a single-handled cup figured in the field behind; the reverse pairs a trophy with Gallic weapons and the ancile, or sacred shield of the Salii, with the legend CAE – SAR.44 The inscription LII on the obverse indicates Caesar's age, as confirmed by Antony's appropriation of this feature to identify his age (XL and XLI).45 This dates the coin to the year beginning 13 July 48 BC.

Sulla had paired trophies with the jug and lituus, symbols that alluded to the rituals legitimating his command, the sacrifice and sacrificial wine and the auspicia, both rituals of Jupiter.46 Caesar paired trophies with Vesta and the ancile of the Salii. Again, the symbols have been read as short-hand for Caesar's priesthood, but this is unconvincing, for Caesar was not a Saliius, nor was he a Vestal. Even if the image of Vesta could be construed to refer to Caesar's office as pontifex maximus, the short-hand reduces the cultural resonance of the symbols to banality and elides the importance of Vesta in Roman religious and political life.

Representations of Vesta, labelled and not, but with her distinctive roll of hair at the forehead, first appear on coins in 69 BC, opposite sacrificial implements (RRC 406) and scenes of voting (RRC 413, 61 BC; RRC 428 in 55 BC). Establishment of Vesta's fire and cult was attributed to Numa. Vestals participated in major state cults: the Fordicidia and Parilia in April, the Argeii in May, the Vestalia in June, the Consualia in August, and the Bona Dea in December.47 The Vestals prepared the mola salsa for public sacrifice and so their work guaranteed the integrity, the efficacy of all state sacrifices.48 But the fire and the ritual work of the Vestal Virgins that preserved

41. On the apex and ritual roles, Goldberg 2015: 337.
42. Scheid 2012: 84–98, esp. 93–94.
43. Scheid 2012: 87.
44. Lindner 2015: 81.
47. On the ritual roles of Vestals, see Wildfang 2006: 22–36.
that fire, guaranteed Roman military success and the perpetuity of the State. Vesta was named in all prayers and sacrifices (Cic. Nat. D. 2.67; Serv. Aen. 1.292). Vesta’s fire was a talisman of the safety of Rome, one of the pignora imperii (Livy 26.27.14), and major military defeat during the Republic was correlated with disruption of her cult and solved with punishment of the Vestal Virgins, in 228, 216, and in 114/3 BC. Political history and Roman moral anecdote document a close association of the pontifex maximus with Vesta. When the temple of Vesta and its relics were threatened by fire in 241, the pontifex maximus L. Caecilius Metellus (cos. 251) braved the flames, lost his eyesight—and earned enduring repute and the privilege of conveyance by carriage for his efforts (Cic. Scaur. 48; cf. Livy Per. 19; Pliny HN 7.141). In 82 BC, when pursued by assassins, the pontifex maximus Q. Mucius Scaevola vainly sought refuge in Vesta’s temple, anticipating the protection of the god or of the temple (Cic. De or. 3.10; Nat. D. 3.80). Caesar’s quinarius could be seen to exploit a close association of the pontifex maximus with Vesta. But coincidentally or conspicuously, the Senate had responded to portents reported at Caesar’s invasion of the peninsula by organizing an amburbium in which the Vestals and the priests marked the boundaries of the city against the external threat (Luc. 1.592–98). Caesar’s coin uses a traditional equation of Vesta on the obverse and military success on the reverse to claim that Vesta was on his side.

The reverse brings together a military trophy and the shields of the Salii, another of the pignora imperii (Serv. Aen. 7.188). The Salian shields were sacred relics: a shield fell from the sky, a gift from Jupiter and a promise of Roman military greatness; King Numa, the founder of Roman religion, had copies made to protect the original (Plut. Numa 13; cf. Cic. Phil. 11.24). Numa’s role can be documented as early as Ennius (Ann. 2.114). Numa furthermore instituted the Salian priesthood, patrician youth who sang a hymn and danced with the shields through the city of Rome during the month of March (Cic. Rep. 2.26; Livy 1.20.4). The annual rituals that protected Roman militarism would have been witnessed communally, and the Quinquatrus, one of the March rites celebrated by the Salii at Rome on 19 March, continued to be observed by the Roman army in the provinces into the third century AD (PDura 54). The shields were stored in the sacrificium Martis in the Regia, and departing military commanders, as part of the ceremonies of departure, touched the shields (Serv. Aen. 8.3). Caesar must have done this. The general symbolism reminds of Caesar’s Gallic victories as the embodiment of Jupiter’s promise of military success.

Again, there could be a personal reference in the coin type. The pontifex maximus had a special association with Vesta, selecting the Vestal Virgins and regulating their primary work of tending the fire, so any allusion to Vesta could be an allusion to Caesar’s job. Moreover, the sacred shields were stored in the Regia, the house of the pontifex maximus. Detailing the prodigies before Caesar’s death Dio (44.17.2) records that the shields of Mars moved the night before Caesar’s murder. Moreover, Caesar may have made himself literally a patron of Vesta’s cult and the cults housed in the Regia with his building program in the Forum. Recent excavations have identified significant rebuilding of the Domus Publica and Aedes Vestae, as well as the reorganization of streets coming into the Forum at the north end, in the first century BC. Scott has argued that these be associated with Caesar, because of his building of the Basilica Julia (dedicated in 46) and because of his priesthood. But more generally, in De Bello Civili Caesar criticized his opponents in the civil war for their disrespect of religion and their despoiling of sanctuaries (1.6.8) and cited his own protection of sanctuaries against planned predations (3.33). Caesar’s coin could have invoked his military, religious, and economic patronage of these state cults.

49. Prescendi 2007: 54 and 93, n. 245.
53. On the Regia, see LTUR 4.489–92 (Scott).
The aureus Caesar issued after Pharsalus (RRC 456/1, Fig. 3) contains only religious symbols.55 The design is new: obverse (axe and two-handled cup) and reverse (jug and lituus) combine to make a continuous frieze of ritual implements. The division of the legend—CAESAR DICT on the obverse and ITER on the reverse—emphasizes the unity of the doubled round fields. The coin was minted in the East. The legend dates it to the year that began in October 48.56 Once again, interpretation of the symbols as referents to personal tenure of priesthood runs into problems: although the lituus was the insignia of the augur, Caesar was not augur when he issued the coin.57

The jug and lituus had appeared as a linked pair on coins since Sulla: they invoked the traditional rituals that turned power into authority, and thereby worked to answer claims of constitutional irregularity. While the legend on Caesar's coin defined his absolute—and irregular—position as dictator for one year (Dio 42.21), the symbols asserted that his authority accorded with the political and religious traditions of the Republic.58 The obverse shows the axe and the cultullus, a two-handled sacrificial cup associated particularly with the Vestal Virgins and pontifices.59 A coin of Clodius Vestalis in 41 BC (RRC: 512) shows on the reverse a veiled, seated female holding a two-handled cup, with the legend VESTALIS, an apparent pun of the moneyer's name.60 The axe resembles the sacrificial axes shown in use in Roman public art.61 The implements again invoke rituals of libation and sacrifice, rituals that enacted the hierarchical relationship of man and god on behalf of the legitimate state. The issue paired political and religious ritual guaranteeing the welfare of Rome in the first coin Caesar issued after defeating Pompey and the forces of the senatorial government. M. Iunius Brutus would re-use this coin design in a way that makes very clear he understood—and imagined a Roman audience to understand—the symbols not as short-hand for personal tenure of priesthood but as claims of religious piety and authority.

The third CAESAR coin (RRC 458/1, Fig. 4), the second largest emission of the civil wars, minted in 48–47 BC, shows on the obverse a female portrait with diadem and wearing pearls; the reverse features Aeneas carrying his father Anchises and the Palladium, another relic and another one of the talismans of the safety of the city (Livy 5.52.6–7; Serv. Aen. 7.188).62 The Vestals kept the Palladium in the temple of Vesta (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.69.3–4).63 The mere representation of Venus by a military commander is not new: Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar all claimed Venus as their patron god during civil war.64 And representations of Venus on coins of the Julii began with an issue of Sex. Iulius Caesar in 129 BC (RRC: 258).65 Caesar's design similarly claims Venus, a claim of descent he first made in the highly political funeral oration for his aunt Julia in 69.66 His patronage of the goddess was persistent and significant: a temple of Venus Genetrix vowed at the Battle of Pharsalus; the use of her name as a password before the battle ("Venus Victrix," App. BCiv. 2.76); dedication of the Temple of Venus Genetrix on 26 September 46,
the last day of his quadruple triumph. Roman use of the Aeneas legend to make political claims is not new: claims to Trojan origins supported a treaty of alliance between Segesta and Rome during the First Punic War. Aeneas on coins is not new: an issue of M. Herennius, traditionally dated to 108–107 BC, shows a male figure bearing an older man on his shoulders opposite a female portrait labelled PIETAS (RRC: 308/1), the first representation of Aeneas and Anchises on coins. Caesar's coin is new in representing the Palladium and the featured role of his family member Aeneas in preserving a relic associated with the safety of the city. In a courtroom defense speech in 54 BC, Cicero described the Palladium as a guarantor of Roman safety and a *pignus imperii* ("that Palladium which is a surety, if you will, of our safety and of our empire, is preserved by the protective care of Vesta," *Scaura*. 47), and he invoked the personal service of the defendant's family to the state, when an ancestor risked life and limb in order to save the Palladium from fire. Claims to protect the Palladium had a cultural currency. Caesar's coin thus referred to the crucial role of his family in Roman history. In adding the Palladium and Aeneas to a representation of Venus, Caesar made Roman history and protection of a *pignus imperii* into his family history. The Aeneas coin again reflects a claim of *De Bello Civili*, that Caesar protected the Roman state religion.

In dedicating his *Antiquitates* to Caesar in 47, Varro likened his scholarly project of recording and keeping religious practice safe from oblivion to Aeneas' rescuing the Palladium from Troy or to a *pontifex maximus* who preserves the sacred relics that keep Rome safe. Varro's language suggests a larger Roman discourse affirming a conception of the *pontifex maximus* as protector of the *sacra* that protect Rome. The dedication also may have flattered Caesar with his own self-conception as protector of religion.

A final coin issue in Africa in 46 BC (RRC: 467/1a, Fig. 5) continued Caesar's heavy use of symbols affirming the ritual traditions of the Republic. The obverse shows a female head facing right with the legend DICT ITER and COS TERT. The reverse legend AVGVR and PONT MAX frames a frieze of ritual implements: the single-handled cup, sprinkler, jug, and *lituus*. The coin design lacks Caesar's name, and scholars, imagining that he would never omit his name, suggest that it was minted by an underling. But the titles are clever: they do not define a particular historical moment (DICT ITER=after Pharsalus; COS TERT=46 BC) and create a selective resumé with the absence of Caesar's name underscoring the identity. This is the first time that a Roman used a coin to name his own priesthood. Newman (1990) has shown that titles on the coins of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus in the 30s were part of competitive discourse on the sources of their authority: names, titles, and their placement indicate relationships of power as well as political and religious offices; recurrent symbols and legends make claims and counterclaims, in response to coins issued by opponents. That tradition arguably began with Caesar in 46.

Caesar's ritual friezes were distinctive, and were repeated by his heirs and foes. The reverse type of the first issue of the civil war, the first assemblage of religious symbols, was copied by A. Hirtius and C. Carrinas in Gaul in 45/44 and 30/29 BC (RPC I: 501, 502; Woytek 2003: 123–24), Cn. Domitius Calvinus during campaigns in Spain in 39 BC (RRC: 532/1, Fig. 6), on a joint coin of M. Antony and M. Aemilius Lepidus in 43–42 (RRC: 489/1), by Africanus Fabius Maximus in Africa in 7/6 BC (RPC I: 781), and in modified form by the town of Ebora in Roman Spain after

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70. *Ant. Rer Div 1 fr. 2a* (=August. *De civ. D.* 6.2): "He says that he was afraid that the gods would perish not by enemy attack but by neglect of the citizens. He says that they were liberated by him from this ruin and that by means of books of this sort the memory of the gods is stored away and protected in the memory of good men; and that this is a more useful act of care than when the pontifex Metellus preserved Vesta’s sacred relics from fire, or when Aeneas preserved the *penates* from the Trojan destruction."
12 BC (RPC I: 51a). Re-use under Augustus suggests that the designs themselves were well known even years after the first emission. In 37 or 36, Octavian minted a coin (RRC: 537/1, Fig. 7) that appropriated the iconography but not the legend of the coin issued in Africa in 46 (RRC 467/1a). The reverse design of the coin of 46 later became a "succession coin" after Vespasian re-used the type to define his constitutional position in 71 (RIC II: 42). The reverse assemblage, minus the titles, was re-used by Nerva from the beginning of his reign (RIC II: 47, 1–25 January), then by Hadrian and Antoninus Pius.71

Caesar's assassins manipulated Caesar's religious symbols. Coins issued to pay the republican forces at Philippi repeated the iconography of Caesar's Pharsalus coin (RRC: 456), both restoring and omitting the knife (RRC: 500/7, Fig. 8; RRC: 508/2, Fig. 9; cf. RRC: 508/3, Fig. 10). The iconography has been explained as a reference to Brutus' priestly office as a pontifex.72 For the assassins, repetition reminded of Pharsalus and lent legitimacy to Cassius and Brutus in 42. What was new (and was played with) was the knife. Varhelyi (2011) has studied the framing of political murder as a priestly act of sacrifice in the accounts of the suicide and murder of priests in the first century and observed the subsequent framing of Caesar's murder as a sacrilege. The alternation of sacrificial knife (associated with the pontifical, Vestal ritual) and the assassins' knife accords with Brutus' own attempts to posture as the (re)founder of the Republic, when he publicly displayed his bloody dagger after Caesar's assassination and issued a call to freedom (App. BCiv. 2.119; cf. Livy 1.59). Brutus' coins invest a political act with ritual significance and attempt to align it with the traditional rituals that preserved Rome, after a Roman court in 42 had condemned both him and Cassius in absentia for the murder of Caesar (Livy, Per. 120; App. BCiv. 3.95, 4.27; Dio 46.48.2–3, 49.5).

I have suggested that Caesar's coins innovated in their designs, their use of symbols, and in their legends. The coins developed claims about piety, both ritual correctness and respect for the oldest religious traditions of Rome. The coins fall into two groups. One group showcased the pignora imperii (Vesta, the shields of the Salii, and the Palladium) and associated Caesar's military victories, his family history, and his own priestly role with the protection of these oldest religious traditions of Rome. A second group featured ritual friezes that selectively invoke sacrificial ritual and the traditional rituals that framed political authority.

The claims of Caesar's coins correlated with the critique of senatorial government that he developed in the De Bello Civili. He faulted the senatorial government for its failure to perform properly the traditional rituals for investiture of commanders and the ceremonies of departure, and he implied that the government was illegal. His own coins invoked traditional rituals that legitimated political authority. Caesar claimed that his opponents robbed sanctuaries and temples (although we have no documented instance of the pillaging). His coins illustrated and insisted on proper relationships with deity. Caesar claimed that his opponents viewed priesthood as plunder of war (BCiv. 3.82, cf. 3.83):

And so among themselves they were competing openly for prizes and for the priesthoods, they were allocating the consulsipship for years, some wanted the homes and property of those who were in Caesar's camps.

Sallust repeats Caesar's critique and suggests a larger discourse (BJ 31.10, cf. Cat. 4.7–8, 21.2):

71. The reverse assemblage, minus the titles, was re-used by Nerva at the beginning of his reign (RIC II, p. 224, n. 12, and p. 226, nos. 41, 47), then by Hadrian (RIC II, p. 362, nos. 198, 384), with a modified design by Antoninus Pius (RIC II, p. 29, n. 28).
72. For example, RRC, p. 741, no. 4.
Nor does it shame or cause remorse to those who have done these things. But they process before your eyes, some holding forth their priesthoods and consulships, some their own triumphs, as if these things counted for honor and not for plunder.

Caesar's coins illustrate repeatedly the ritual work of the priesthoods and signal that priesthood was more than a title. When we read the symbols on Caesar's coins as “titles of his office as pontifex maximus,” we, too, become subject to Caesar's and Sallust's critique of late Republican office and we miss the history.

Bibliography


