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On Caesar's Coinage in 48BC

According to the standard catalogue by Crawford, Caesar's second issue of coinage during the civil-war with Pompey consisted of an aureus (RRC no. 452, 1), three slightly different varieties of denarius (RRC no. 452, 2 (fig. 1), 4, 5), and a quinarius (RRC no. 452, 3 (fig. 2)) ([1]). These all display the same basic reverse-type, the legend CAESAR across a trophy. While the details differ slightly in each case, the presence either of a long-haired, bearded captive at the foot of the trophy (RRC no. 452, 4, 5) or of a Gallic shield or carnyx on the trophy itself (RRC no. 452, 1, 2), reveals that this trophy was intended to celebrate Caesar's conquest of Gaul. As for the obverse, the aureus and the denarii all display the same female head, facing right, adorned with diadem, wreath, ear-ring, and necklace, while the quinarius displays a different female head, facing right also, but veiled. In each case, however, the only obverse-legend consists of three letters or numerals at the back of the neck, usually read LII, the number 52 in Roman numerals, where what looks like a reversed letter T is read as the older form of the numeral L ([2]). Hence Crawford comments : 'The figure LII can hardly be taken as a reference to anything other than Caesar's age ; since the Romans seem to have regarded a man as 30 when 30 years of his life were completed and since Caesar was born on 13 July 100, this issue belongs after 13 July 48. Its failure to appear in hoards which contain the issues of moneyers striking since the beginning of 48 is no surprise' ([3]). Crawford traces this reading of the brief legend back to Elberling in 1860, and this interpretation has dominated since ([4]).

(1) M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* [RRC], 2 vols., Cambridge, 1974, p. 467.

(2) See J. S. and A. E. Gordon, *Contributions to the Palaeography of Latin Inscriptions*, Berkeley, 1957, p. 81. The use of the reversed *T* for 50 remained the norm until the reign of Augustus.

(3) Crawford [n. 1], p. 92. The fact that the legend remains the same on all known specimens of these coins suffices to prove that it is not a counter-mark. Furthermore, the fact that it occurs on three different denominations proves that it cannot be a value-mark.

(4) M. Elberling, *Mélanges de numismatique romaine* in *RBN* 4, 1860, p. 117-32, at 123-28. S. L. Cesano, *Le Monete di Cesare* in *RPAA* 23-24, 1947-49, p. 103-51, at 109-110, reviews the older literature in brief only to conclude in favour of its interpretation as the numeral LII in reference to Caesar's age. See also T. Rice Holmes, *Was Caesar Born in 100 or in 102BC ?* in *JRS* 7, 1917, p. 145-52, at 148-49 for a somewhat different list of commentators favouring the same interpretation. This seems to remain the standard interpretation. See e.g. S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, Oxford, 1971, Plate 3, no. 11 ; D. L. Vagi, *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Chicago, 1999, p. 191.

There are, however, several possible objections to this interpretation. First, it is not clear why Caesar, or any other Roman, should have wanted to celebrate his 52nd year rather than any other age. If he had meant to celebrate something that had happened during his 52nd year rather than his age itself, then he could easily have done so, but did not. Second, the failure by Caesar to declare his age in a similar fashion upon any other of his issues until his assassination on 15 March 44 raises serious doubt whether this is what he had intended on this occasion ([5]). Third, if Caesar had placed his age upon his coinage, for whatever reason, this would have aroused fears that this was but the first step on the way to placing his portrait on the coinage also in the manner of a Hellenistic king. It is doubtful that he would have risked any apparent step in that direction yet.

The purpose of this note is to propose a different reading of the legend accompanying the female head. One begins by noting that it is not clear even how one is to view this legend. On the one hand, one can read it as if the bases of the letters or numerals rested upon the circumference of the coin, with their heads towards the centre. This produces the reading LII. On the other hand, one could also read it as if the heads of the letters or numerals touched the circumference of the coin, with their bases towards the centre. This produces the reading IIT. Unfortunately, one cannot distinguish which is the correct approach to reading the legend because mint practice was not consistent in this matter. The same moneyer could produce different types where the legends had to be read both ways ([6]). While Eckhel suggested that the legend should be read IIT, and that this should be interpreted to mean I(mperator) IT(erum), this can easily be rejected on chronological grounds ([7]). It is now clear from the hoard evidence that this type dates to 48, but Caesar had been acclaimed as imperator at least 4 times already even by 52 ([8]). Curiously, however, the obvious interpretation of the reading IIT has been overlooked. The key point here is that the reading IIT produces a Latin word written in full, the third person singular of the perfect indicative tense of the verb *ire* 'to go', meaning basically 'He/She/It has gone', although this may be understood in a variety of different ways ([9]). So who or

(5) As far as parallels are concerned, E. Babelon, *Monnaies de la république romaine*, II, Paris, 1886, p. 18-19, draws attention to the fact that the future triumvir M. Antonius issued two quinarii in 43-42 which bear the numbers XL and XLI on the reverse in apparent reference to his age. See RRC no. 489, 5-6. There is an important difference, however, because the letter A, to be read A(nno), precedes each numeral on Antonius' coins. Hence the parallel is not exact, and the absence of a similar clarification on Caesar's coinage raises doubt whether LII, if it is a numeral, can refer to his age.

(6) See e.g. the reverse-legends on RRC no. 449, 1 and 2, by C. Vibius Pansa in 48.

(7) J. Echkel, *Doctrina Numorum Veterum*, Vienna, 1795, p. 6.

(8) See Weinstock [n. 4], p. 104-05.

(9) See P. G. W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1992, p. 610-11, s.v. *eo* ; *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* V, 2, Leipzig, 1986, cols. 626-51.

what is the subject of the verb, if this is a verb, and what exactly does it mean to say that he/she/it 'has gone' ?

It is tempting to interpret this verb in reference to the female bust with which it is associated. The obverse of republican coins normally depicted the bust of some divinity or personification, and these were normally identified by means of their name in legend or by the depiction of some defining symbol in association with the bust. In this case, the bust on the quinarius is accompanied by a *cululus*. This, together with the veil, suggests that the bust is identifiable as the goddess Vesta ([10]). On the other hand, the bust on the aureus and the denarii bears a strong resemblance to that depicted on the reverse of a denarius (RRC no. 450, 2) issued by one of the moneyers for 48, D. Iunius Brutus Albinus, where the bust is specifically identified as Pietas by the accompanying legend ([11]). Each bust faces right, wears an ear-ring and necklace, and displays the same basic hairstyle. The only significant difference is that the bust on Caesar's issue wears a wreath and diadem also. It is identical, however, to the bust depicted on the reverse of a denarius (RRC no. 448, 1) issued by another of the moneyers for 48, L. Hostilius Saserna, where the bust is not identified by a legend. This suggests a sequence where Saserna felt it unnecessary to identify his obverse-bust by name because Brutus had already done so, and Caesar felt able to rely on the same fact. It is arguable, therefore, that the bust on Caesar's coinage is identifiable as Pietas, and was intended to be recognised as such by comparison to the types already issued by Brutus and Saserna ([12]). Whatever the case, it is clear that the quinarius depicts a different bust, and the fact that the same legend IIT accompanies both busts raises a serious doubt whether it has any real connection with either. Furthermore, it is not clear in either case why Caesar should not have been content with a simple depiction of the bust alone in the traditional manner, where it is accompanied by the necessary name or symbol of identification at most, rather to try and spell out some more elaborate message in an associated legend.

There is an alternative explanation of the subject of this verb. Here one notes that the legends on the obverse and reverse on Caesar's next issue of coinage, a

(10) For earlier busts of a veiled Vesta, see RRC no. 406 by P. Sulpicius Galba in 69 ; no. 413 by L. Cassius Longinus in 63 ; no. 428, 1, by Q. Cassius Longinus in 55. For a depiction of Vestal Virgin holding a *cululus*, see RRC no. 512, 1-2, by C. Clodius Vestalis in 41.

(11) For an earlier bust of Pietas identified by legend, see RRC no. 308, 1, by M. Herennius c. 108. For a bust of Pietas identified only by defining symbol, a stork, see RRC no. 374, 1-2, by Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius in 81.

(12) See WEINSTOCK [n. 4], p. 242, n. 2, against her identification with Clementia as favoured in some earlier works. However, he also rejects her identification with Pietas (p. 253), although only for the reason that she is not specifically identified as such by a legend or symbol.

small issue of aurei in 47 (RRC no. 456), were designed to be read together, the legend on the reverse in continuation of the legend on the obverse. Hence while the obverse bears the legend CAESAR DICT in association with an axe and *cullullus*, and the reverse bears the legend ITER in association with a jug and *lituus*, these must be read together as CAESAR DICT(ator) ITER(um), 'Caesar, Dictator for the Second Time'. Furthermore, there was nothing particularly unusual about this approach to reading the legends, as the names of moneyers had often been split between the legends on the obverse and on the reverse, so that one needed to read them together in order to reconstruct the moneyer's name in full. The principle remains the same in this case, even if the conjoined obverse- and reverse- legends do not construct a full name or set of titles. It is possible, therefore, that the legends on Caesar's second issue had been intended to be read together also, as CAESAR IIT, making him the subject of the verb. Hence this issue may proclaim 'Caesar has gone'. But what would this mean ?

In certain contexts, the verb *ire* means 'to continue moving, advance, go or move on' ([13]). This suggests two different interpretations of CAESAR IIT. On the one hand, if one interprets the use of the perfect tense here as the historical perfect stating an action without reference to its duration, then one could translate it to mean 'Caesar advanced'. In this case, it is most likely that the legend refers solely and directly to Caesar's conquest of Gaul as illustrated by the trophy with Gallic shield and/or bearded captive on the reverse. On the other hand, if one interprets the perfect tense here as the pure perfect describing the present result of a more remote action, then one could translate it to mean 'Caesar advances'. In the political context of 48, this makes good sense, since it was Caesar who took the offensive against Pompey that year rather than vice-versa ([14]). In this sense, the legend reinforces the message of the reverse-type, the trophy with Gallic shield and/or bearded captive. For while it does not refer to the capture of Gaul as such, it celebrates the same capacity for swift and bold initiative which, as the trophy reminds the viewer, Caesar had so amply displayed already in his capture of that region. In either case, however, the coin celebrates Caesar as a man of action, the one who takes the offensive. Indeed, one is immediately reminded of Caesar's famous description of his victory over Pharnaces II of Pontus at the battle of Zela in 47BC, both in a letter to a friend at Rome and on

(13) *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 610, s.v. *eo*, 5(a).

(14) Caesar set sail from Brundisium to Epirus on 4 January 48 in order to surprise Pompey and take the war to him while he was still gathering his forces. See CAES., *B. Ciu.* 3, 6 ; PLUT., *Caes.* 37 ; APPIAN, *B. Ciu.* 2, 53-54. Beginning with his crossing of the Rubicon in January 49, Caesar repeated this tactic throughout the civil-war, and clearly prided himself upon his ability to move fast and take his enemies by surprise. Even when he disengaged from Pompey's forces at Dyrrhachium in the summer of 48, the fact that he then marched eastwards, deeper into enemy territory, would have allowed him to claim to be on the offensive still right up until the battle at Pharsalus.

a placard displayed during his subsequent celebration of his Pontic triumph there in 46BC : 'Veni, vidi, vici' ([15]). In each case, he strives to portray himself as a man of action in the most laconic form possible. It was his latter phrase, however, that proved the more memorable and best achieved the result for which he had been striving in order to cement his reputation in popular memory.

If one accepts that the legends on Caear's second issue of civil-war coinage ought to be read as CAESAR IIT, then one can no longer date the commencement of this issue quite so precisely to the period after his birthday on 13 July 48. It is tempting to assume that Caesar would not have been content merely to proclaim his prowess as a man of action in this manner had he already achieved his crushing victory against Pompey at Pharsalus on 9 August 48 ([16]). Alternatively, one may prefer to assume that the legend alludes discretely to this battle, because it would have been impolitic to celebrate a victory in a civil-war against fellow Romans too openly. Unfortunately, therefore, this new reading of the legends on Caesar's second issue of civil-war coinage does not allow us to set the production of this issue within a more precise political context.

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(15) Plut., *Caes*. 50 ; Suet., *Caes*. 37.
(16) Caes., *B. Ciu*. 3, 92-99 ; Plut., *Caes*. 42-46 ; Appian, *B. Ciu*. 2, 75-82.

INFORMATIONS

Deux colloques en septembre 2010

« 5ème congrès sur l'armée romaine : le métier de soldat dans le monde romain », qui se tiendra du 23 au 25 septembre 2010 à l'Université Jean Moulin (Lyon III). Organisé par l'Université Paris IV-Sorbonne (Centre Lenain de Tillemont), l'Université Jean Moulin de Lyon III (Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur l'Occident romain) et l'Université d'Avignon et des Pays de Vaucluse. Personne de contact : Mme Catherine Wolff (catherine.wolff@univ-avignon.fr).

Colloque « Potere e politica nell'età della famiglia teodosiana (395-455). I linguaggi dell'impero, le identità dei barbari », organisé à Ravenne les 23 et 24 septembre 2010. Personne de contact : M. Salvatore Cosentino (salvatore.cosentino@unibo.it).

Colloque sur le professeur humaniste dans l'Europe de la Renaissance

Un colloque aura lieu à Paris (Maison de la Recherche, rue Serpente, F-75006 Paris), du jeudi 28 au samedi 30 octobre 2010, sur le thème : « Nouveaux regards sur les 'Apollons de collège' : Figures du professeur humaniste en France dans la première moitié du XVIe siècle ». Les organisateurs sont : M. Ferrand (E. P. H. E. / Université de Paris-IV) et N. Istasse (E. P. H. E. / Bibliothèque royale de Belgique). Programme et renseignements : <nathael.istasse@kbr.be>



FIG. 1. — A denarius from Julius Caesar's second issue of civil-war coinage in 48BC (RRC no. 452, 2). © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. (www.cngcoins.com)



FIG. 2. — A quinarius from Julius Caesar's second issue of civil-war coinage in 48BC (RRC no. 452, 3). © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. (www.cngcoins.com)