

ON THE ASTRONOMICAL SYMBOLS ON ROMAN REPUBLICAN AND IMPERIAL COINS

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Abstract. We present examples of astronomical symbols, like stars, the Sun, the crescent Moon and comets on coins of Roman republic and Empire.

Various astronomical symbols like stars, crescent Moon, comets, personifications of constellations, meteorites... may be found on ancient roman coins and its appearance has been considered and described many times (see e.g. Faintich (2008), McIvor (2005), Rovithis-Livaniou and Rovithis (2014, 2015a,b)). Here we present several examples.



Figure 1: Silver denarius of Julius Caesar struck by moneyer P. Sepullius Macer in Rome in January and february 44 BC, the year when Caesar has been murdered. Obverse: Wreathed head of Caesar right, behind, eight-rayed star. Inscription: CAESAR IMP. Reverse: Venus, protectrice and mythic ancestor of Caesar, standing left, holding Victory and sceptre resting on star. Inscription: P SEPVLLIVS MACER. C(Cohen) 41. Sydenham 1071. Portraits of living people did not exist on Roman republican coins until Julius Caesar's portrait which appeared on denarii in january 44 BC. This was an additional reason for his assassination on the Ides of March (15 March).



Figure 2: Four months after the assassination of Julius Caesar in July 44 BC, during the traditional funeral games (Ludi Victoriae Caesaris) for him, a bright comet (C/-43 K1) appeared. Octavian supported belief of Romans that this was Caesar's soul ascending the heavens and a divine manifestation of his apotheosis. The comet is known as Sidus Iulium ("Julian Star"). According to Suetonius, when games started, "a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about the eleventh hour, and was believed to be the soul of Caesar." Octavian build a temple of Divus Iulius, with a colossal statue of Caesar surmounted by comet. Silver denarius struck for Octavian 19 - 18 B.C. in Spain (Caesareaugusta (Zaragoza)?). Obverse: Head of Augustus with oak wreath (corona civica - During the Roman Republic this was a decoration "for Roman citizens who saved the lives of fellow citizens by slaying an enemy on a spot held by the enemy that same day"), left. Inscription: CAESAR AVGVSTVS. Reverse: Comet Sidus Iulium of eight rays, a central dot and flaming tail. Inscription: DIVVS - IVLIVS (horizontal). RIC I 37a, BMCRE I 323.



Figure 3: Silver denarius struck in Rome in 17 BC by the moneyer M. Sanquinius, for Octavian Augustus, commemorating Julius Caesar, in connection with Ludi Saeculares (Games after a period of 100 or 110 years, revived in 17 BC by Octavian) held in 17 B.C. Obverse: Bare head of Augustus to right. Inscription: AVGVSTVS DIVI F (Augustus son of the God). Reverse: Laureate head of Julius Caesar to right, Above comet showing four rays and tail (Rovithis-Livaniu and Rovithis (2015a - Fig. 1b) write that this is a star but in Fig. is clearly represented a comet with tail). Inscription: M SANQVI NIVS III VIR. RIC I 338, BMCRE 71.



Figure 4: Silver denarius struck 128 in Rome by Hadrian (24. January 76 - 10. July 138, Emperor 117-138). Obverse: Laureate head of Hadrian right. Inscription: HADRIVS AVGVSTVS. Reverse: Star within and above crescent, pellet below crescent Moon. Inscription: COS III, which means that he has the third consulship. RSC II 460a, RIC II 200.



Figure 5: Silver denarius struck late 125 - early 128 in Rome by Hadrian. Obverse: Laureate head of Hadrian right. Inscription: HADRIVS AVGVSTVS. Reverse: Seven stars within and above crescent Moon. Inscription: COS III. RSC II 465, RIC II 202(c), BMCRE III 463.



Figure 6: In the year 215, Caracalla (4. IV 188 - 8. IV 217, Emperor 211-217) introduced a new coin, which was considered to have been worth two denars, but by weight and quantity of silver, it corresponded to one denar and half. It is not known how it was then called, and today it is called antoninianus in the numismatics. It is denoted by a radiated crown, symbol of the Sun on the head of the ruler, and the bust of emperess was on a crescent, because she “shines” by the reflected light of her husband, like the Moon. Left: Antoninianus minted 215-217 in Rome. 216 AD. Draped and cuirassed bust of Caracalla with radiated crown, right. Inscription: ANTONINVS PIVS AVGVSTVS GERM. RIC IVa 312c, C 612. Right: Antoninianus of Julia Domna (c. 180 - spring 217) mother of Caracalla, minted in Rome 215-217. Her diademed and draped bust right on a crescent. Inscription: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVGVSTVS (Emperess Julia pious and happy). RIC IVa 388 (Caracalla), C 211. Both coins are from the former collection of Sergije Dimitrijević.



Figur 7: Double majorina, struck in Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) within the period summer 361 - 26 June 363 by Julian Apostate (331 or 332 - 26/27 June 363, Emperor (360 usurper) 361-363). Obverse: Pearl-diademed, draped, and cuirassed bust of Julian right. Inscription: DN FL CL IVLI-ANVS P F AVG (Dominus noster Flavius Claudius Iulianus pius felix Augustus). Reverse: Bull standing right; two stars above. Inscription: SECVRITAS REIPVB (security of the state). Below mark of the Sirmium mint: star ASIRM wreath. A denote the first of two officinas. RIC VIII 106 (Sirmium). Coin from the former collection of Sergije Dimitrijević. The usual interpretation is that this is Egyptian god Apis and two stars are symbolizing its divine nature. Other hypothesis, because always are present two stars, is by Marshall Faintich (2008 and <http://www.faintich.net/primer.htm>), who noticed that “on 4 May 360, Venus joined Mars to form a single star between the horns of Taurus... Two weeks earlier, Mars was between the horns, and Venus rested on the shoulder of the bull”. Since in the spring 360. Julian has been proclaimed Augustus by his soldiers, as usurper, obviously for him this was a very important celestial sign. Also, it is worth to mention that in Taurus constellation there are two impressive star clusters Hyades and Pleiades.

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