

Conquest, Colonization, and Coinage: The Roman Subjugation of Gaul in the Late Republic

The Roman subjugation of Gaul challenges long-held assumptions about Roman practices of conquest, colonization, and coinage (Crawford. 1975). In 120 B.C.E. two Roman generals defeat Gallic tribes in southern Gaul and celebrate typical triumphs in Rome; Roman denarii of 119 B.C.E. show typical displays of “conquest” iconography, with a helmeted Roma crowning a trophy of typical Gallic war emblems. In 118 B.C.E., however, the Romans authorize the foundation of Narbo Martius in southern Gaul, the first Roman colony ever founded outside of mainland Italy, and its organization likewise deviates from previous Roman practice. While foundation laws typically authorize three commissioners to supervise the foundation of new settlements (Livy 32.29.3-4), only *two* commissioners are appointed for Narbo Martius, despite its strategic and political importance (Cicero, *Brutus*, 158-160). In the same year, an issue of denarii appearing in connection with the colony displays features so unusual in design, iconography, and organization, that they also raise questions about Roman intentions and practices regarding Gaul at this time (Harl. 1996). Typically, a board of three moneyers responsible for the production of coinage each year places their names on the coins and also controls their design and iconography. For the Narbo Martius issue, however, there are *five* moneyers, and these are subordinate to the two foundation commissioners, whose powers have been expanded to include minting responsibilities. Neither the five moneyers nor even the two foundation commissioners have control over the iconography on the coinage, since the design on all the coinage is the same. The iconography of the coinage itself differs significantly from typical “conquest” iconography, with a triumphant Gaul standing astride in a biga, carrying a *carnyx*, the Gallic war trumpet, and a Gallic shield. This contrasts starkly with both the denarii of the previous year, and Caesar’s later denarii depicting his conquest of Gaul.

The subjugation of southern Gaul in 120 B.C.E. was a major victory for the Romans, and was initially celebrated in the usual manner of triumphs and triumphal coinage. Thereafter, conquest, colonization, and coinage went in seemingly atypical directions, and this secondary conquest in 118 B.C.E., through the creation of a Roman colony with a new foundation structure, and the production of a coinage with a new production structure and new iconography, should be incorporated into a new understanding of a more flexible and innovative Roman expansion policy in the late second century B.C.E.

Bibliography:

Crawford, M. 1975. *Roman Republican Coinage*. Cambridge.

Harl, K. 1996. *Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 B.C. to A.D. 700*. Baltimore.