

From Octavian to Augustus: Numismatics and Augustan Propaganda

In this paper, I examine how the coins minted in Rome under Augustus can shed light on how Augustus employed his propaganda. In order to do this, I surveyed the 666 coins of Octavian/Augustus in both *Roman Republican Coins* and *Roman Imperial Coins*. Whether the coins were minted in Rome or in an imperial mint in a province does not matter, since, as Bruun states, coinage is a “medium that could reach every corner of the realm with the messages of the ruler transmitted by image or text. No other medium had the same widespread effect” (Bruun 1999, 31). Through my exploration of the coinage, and its dialogue with Augustan literature, I show how particular numismatic representations emphasize Augustus over Octavian. I will first survey the catalog of Augustan coins, indicating the most prominent imagery, before focusing on one particular image that represents the transition from Octavian to Augustus.

Among these 666 coins, I have found that 231 of them (35%) have some sort of religious association, either a divinity or religious object. Looking specifically at coins depicting Olympian deities, I examine how Augustus’ coins correspond (for the most part) harmoniously with the *Res Gestae* and literature of the age to present a systematic religious image. 89 of the 666 Augustus coins have the image of an Olympian god. All of these coins have the image or name of Augustus (or both) on one side and the image of an Olympian god on the other. It is no surprise that when it came to depicting deities on his coins, Apollo (19%) and Mars (49%) took precedence, as they are the two deities most associated with Augustus in his building program and literature—Augustus built temples to both during his reign, and his services to both are highlighted in the *Res Gestae*, where Apollo is mentioned five times, and Mars six. However, these were not the only Olympians pictured in his coinage: Jupiter (9%), Venus (6%), and Diana (17%) also feature prominently.

The deity that stands out most in her frequency is Diana, as she is not really featured prominently elsewhere in Augustus' propaganda. Diana appears frequently in both coins and literature but not in the *Res Gestae*—a representation that has been under-explored due to the goddess' affiliation with Augustus' patron god, Apollo. But the goddess seems to have been more important to the emperor than this—she comes to represent 'Augustus' as opposed to 'Octavian.' In addition to a series of coins featuring Diana as huntress, all minted between 15 BC and 10 BC, *RIC* 403, minted in 13 BC, depicts Augustus on the obverse, and a bust of Diana on the reverse—but that bust seems to be Augustus with Diana's signature hairstyle, suggesting a close connection between the two. Augustus also seems to have inserted the goddess into his crowning achievement, the *ludi saeculares*. As Miller states: "The Greek hexameter oracle that dictates the shape of the festivities lists Apollo as the final recipient of sacrifices... But Diana is strangely absent, the only deity lacking from the inscriptional summary... either Diana was added to the celebration in a later Augustan stage of planning" (Miller 2011, 270-1). By inserting Diana into the Saecular games, Augustus is in a way inserting himself, as sibling and partner to Apollo. Finally, the effect that these associations with Diana had on the image of the emperor can be seen in Horace *Odes* 4.6, where Diana appears as a goddess of hunting and fertility—the emphasis on her bow and control of wild animals alters the emperor's association with the vengeful Apollo to the more benevolent Diana. This image of Diana acting as a peaceful leader instead of punisher of the guilty closely echoes Augustus' own changing roles during his time in power, from avenger of his father's death to the *princeps* who controls the people with his peace. Therefore, Apollo and Diana represent two sides of the same coin: Apollo the vengeful Octavian and Diana the benevolent Augustus.

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