

Contesting and Asserting *Libertas Augusta*

During the first century CE, *Libertas Augusta* or *Augusti* coins appeared only twice: under Claudius and during the 68-9 civil wars. Scholars typically interpret this legend as a way to bind the idea of liberty to the emperor (Elkins 2017; Hammond 1963; Lyasse 2003). Though accurate, this interpretation leaves out the way that the coins make particular claims about the principate and the minting emperor's predecessors. Claudius' coins, I argue, respond to the particular circumstances of his accession and rebutted both tyranny and Republicanism. Decades later, Galba adopted Claudius' anti-tyrannical message, but the different nature of the opposition Galba faced allowed him to combine *Libertas Augusta* with Republicanism.

As Levick (1990) suggests, Claudius' coins (*RIC* Claudius 97, 113) responded to the restoration of the Republic advocated by some senators during the interregnum after Caligula's death. Pagán (2012) and Wiseman (2013) show the senate's Republicanism saw all emperors as inherently tyrannical. Saturninus, for instance, dated Rome's fall into tyranny with Caesar (*Jos. AJ* 19.187). This denied any emperor, Augustus included, the position of liberator. The senate's comparisons between Caligula's killers and Late-Republican tyrannicides helped establish their *terminus ante quem* for *libertas*.

In response, Claudius pinned Caligula's failings on the man's personal flaws rather than on the principate itself. He also used Augustus, under whose rule many thought the Republic lived on, as proof that all emperors were not tyrants. A Cyzican victory arch referred to Claudius as *P. P. Vind. Lib.*, thus echoing Augustus' *libertas* coinage (*ILS* 217.4, cf. *RIC* Augustus 476). Claudius' self-presentation, thus, did not simply make a promise about his behavior as emperor but argued that *libertas* and *principatus* could go together because Augustus had already shown

that they could. This association between Claudius and Augustus twisted the senate's messaging back against it. The senate and conspirators drew on the *exemplum* of Brutus and Cassius, but Claudius took their analogy to its logical conclusion: their path led to civil war, but he, like Augustus, had ended strife and restored liberty and peace.

The paper's second half then shows Galba's reception of this message. Galba turned to the examples of Augustus and Claudius, the last emperor who arose after a purported tyrant's fall. His *Libertas Augusta SC* coin was one way he promoted these identifications (*RIC* Galba 442-3). This focus on Augustus as the Republic's continuator partially explains his anonymous 68 issues, a mix of old Republican and Augustan types (Martin 1974; Gallia 2012). I show how the combination of Republican and Augustan types differed from the practice of Claudius, who did not mint Republican images. Crucially, though, and unlike Claudius, Galba only had to set himself apart from a purported tyrant rather than also from a Republic-espousing senate. This allowed him to appropriate some of the senatorial rhetoric from 41, such as references to Brutus (*RIC* Civil Wars 24). Galba still wished to be emperor, however, so none of the senate's claims that tyranny had reigned since Caesar appeared. In their absence, he recast Brutus not as the end of an era but as a timeless *exemplum* of opposition to individual tyrants. After his death, Vitellius and Vespasian reused this type along with many of his others, after which it fell out of the Roman numismatic repertoire until the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

This argument explains how one strand of imperial messaging about *libertas* developed. Coins proclaiming Augustan *libertas* let Claudius and Galba make a specific connection to Augustus, but, while Claudius' *libertas* messaging only hearkened back to Augustus, Galba's managed to blend both Augustan and Republican themes.

Select Bibliography

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