

The *sulcus primigenius* and memory-making on Roman colonial coinages

This paper considers depictions of the rite of the *sulcus primigenius* on the coinage of colonies in the Roman provinces. The *sulcus primigenius* was the ritual ploughing of a city's sacred boundary upon founding, an act done at Rome by Romulus himself and also employed when founding Roman colonies (Varro, *Ling.* 1.143; Dion Hal, *Ant Rom.* 1.88; Plut *Rom.* 11.2–3; Colonna 2004; Stevens 2019). Depictions of the rite were often featured on the coins minted by Roman colonies for local use as a way to celebrate the city's foundation and connection to Rome. These *sulcus primigenius* coin designs typically include a founder (sometimes the emperor himself) or a priest directing a plow pulled by two oxen, or an ox and a cow (e.g., Emerita, *RPC* I, 5; Sinope, *RPC* I, 2129). The *sulcus primigenius* ritual was not the only foundation procedure to appear on coinage; depictions of the official *deductio* and drawing of lots to parcel out land also appear, but exceedingly rarely (Eckstein 1979; Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, 35–36). The *sulcus primigenius* types, in contrast, usually appear with the first colonial coin issues, and often persisted as a reverse type for centuries after the foundation of the colony. In addition, the design was sometimes localized to refer to the circumstances of a city's location or the colonists' origins; for example, military *vexilla* might be included on the types of veteran colonies (Dabrowa 2020, 118–9), while the oxen on some coinages in Asia Minor were clearly based on the proportions and features of the local livestock (Filges 2005, 244–50).

A full study of the *sulcus primigenius* motif across all Roman colonial coinages is wanting. The type appears as part of numismatic treatments of individual cities (e.g. Castelin 1946, 71–2; Kindler 1983, 63–4) and in several important regional studies (e.g. Papageorgiadou-

Bani 2004, 35–7; Filges 2005), but these works cannot address several fundamental questions about the use and meaning of the design, such as: how frequently were the *sulcus primigenius* types localized? Is there evidence for diachronic change in the use of the motif, or its manifestation? Was the motif more frequently used in certain regions than others, and why? How did the motif contribute to establishing a sense of a colonial identity, or a tie to Rome? This paper is a contribution toward answering these questions through a systematic study of the *sulcus primigenius* colonial type, cutting across regional lines and following the motif from its origins in the Republican period to its final florescence on civic coins in the third century CE.

I first explore how the ploughing founder motif appears on the civic coinages of nearly 30 cities, from Colonia Iulia Constantina Zilil in Mauretania (*RPC* I, 866B), to Rhesaena in Mesopotamia (*RPC* IX, no.1596; Castelin 1946, nos.189–91). I review how communities in various regions localized the type through small but significant changes to the iconography. Ultimately, I argue that the changing nature of a colonial title in the second and third centuries CE impacted the use of the *sulcus primigenius* type, making the representation of the rite more important than the actual ritual itself in inventing a specifically Roman moment of colonial foundation.

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