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**Acting Up: The Post of Master of the Mint
as an Early-Career Move in the Late Republic***

Christopher Burden-Strevens

Abstract

This article seeks to analyze the opportunities for political leadership provided by one of the most poorly documented of the Republican magistracies: the post of *triumvir monetalis* or master of the mint. Using case studies from the 60s and 50s, it argues that a position at the mint was a valuable means for young politicians not only to introduce themselves to the people or respond to political issues in general terms, but also – crucially – to galvanize opinion for or against *specific* proposals and initiatives. Thus, at the same time as using their issues to promote the achievements of their families – as is well-recognized – the young moneyers discussed here all sought to influence the political agenda directly by articulating messages of support or criticism directed at the particular decisions of their elders and superiors. This important but under-recognised aspect of the political function of the mint in the late Republic reveals that political leadership and agency were not, in fact, solely the privilege of the major magistrates or middle-aged men, but rather a negotiation – sometimes public, but usually private – between established statesmen and young politicians at the start of their careers, providing also key opportunities for alliance-formation, patronage, and consensus-building. However, during the most extreme period of Caesar’s autocracy, the mint permanently lost its independent function and therefore also lost its viability as a means for young politicians to establish their own political identities.

Keywords

Magistrates; youth; numismatics; political competition; dictatorship; communication; consensus

1. Introduction

The late Republic is often presented, in both ancient and modern historiography, as a story of established politicians. The two consuls, at the pinnacle of the *cursus honorum*, shaped the political agenda in various ways and marked, literally and figuratively, their period of office as *their* year. Below them, the praetors – numbering eight in Sulla’s dictatorship and finally sixteen in that of Caesar – commanded the armies of the Republic abroad and administered its justice at home. There were

* I am grateful to Roman Frolov for kindly agreeing to read and comment on a draft of this chapter, as well as the anonymous reviewer of an earlier manuscript who made invaluable suggestions for its improvement. The exquisite drawings of the types discussed here were produced by Mellissa Fisher (<https://www.mellissafisher.com/>) with my special thanks. All dates are BCE.

then the popular magistracies, the ideal stepping-stones to greater things for an ambitious man in his thirties: the four aediles, with their superintendence over markets, roads, and, public games; and the ten tribunes, notionally the inviolable representatives of the *plebs* within the *populus Romanus* and the champion of its interests. A cluster of quaestors – twenty under Sulla, forty under Caesar – kept the accounts of Rome’s magistrates and the provincial governors of its ever-expanding empire in check. Finally, the two censors, the most senior magistrates responsible for the census and the care of public morals, ensured that this cacophony of up to around seventy politicians behaved themselves. Such was the regular order of the *cursus honorum*, formalized with the *lex Villia annalis* in 180.¹ We would be forgiven for believing the myth we learned as students and still teach our own: that the magistrates – without a doubt the main active agents in the republican political system – were the only legitimate channel for speaking to the People and the essential locus of political agency or initiative;² high politics was the business of middle-aged men.

The problem with this compellingly neat and attractive myth is that it is untrue. Now it is clear that republican Rome privileged seniority, from the division of *seniores* from *iuniores* in the popular assembly,³ to the distinctive position of leadership offered to former consuls, as Catherine Steel demonstrates in this volume. Even the most “junior” statesmen in the *cursus*, the quaestors, were far from green: aged at least thirty, by the time of Sulla they could expect a seat in the Senate – literally and etymologically a meeting of older men, *senes* – and will for most periods have already served their ten years of military service as *tribuni militum* or in other roles. Controversial anomalies notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that age was the barometer of experience.

However, to reconstruct Roman politics according the framework of the elected magistrates – an enduring habit which may derive from generations of reading the Roman annalists⁴ – is to ignore the reality of events on the ground. Alongside (and sometimes in competition with) this framework were many dozens of energetic and ambitious elite men in their twenties. They developed their own means of engaging, directly or indirectly, in political life and shaping public opinion, and had

¹ On this law and its scope, see Evans & Kleijwegt 1992, with particular reference to the status of young men in the republican magistracy.

² So helpfully North 2005, 266: “The magistrates as a group were the main active agents in the Roman system. They held between them, for their year of office, the capacity to take political initiatives. Without their support, nothing could be done in the way of administration, legislation, or the furthering of any policy.”

³ So Livy 1.43, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.16.

⁴ That is, reading Roman history year-by-year, where years commence with the consuls and close with an overview of the elections or of the magistrates-elect for the following year; the effect is thus to *frame* the events of the entire year in terms of the magistrates in office. See, e.g., Swan 1987 & 1997 for a survey of this structure. While Livy is our chief exponent of this model and cannot be assumed to be generally representative it is likely that similar techniques were used elsewhere in the prior annalistic tradition, now mostly inextant.

established institutions to represent the contribution of the *iuventus* to the *res publica*.⁵ Yet they additionally enjoyed access to offices which, lacking a minimum age requirement, gave them valuable opportunities to influence the political agenda, instigate initiatives, or respond to those of others. The tribunate of the plebs was of course one route, but was very often held as part of a public career already established; it is, in any case, already a well-known quantity within our knowledge of the late Republic and a regular focus of our sources. I wish to focus instead here on another elected office which our literary narratives often wrongly ignore, and with which many of the most successful politicians of the late Republic began their careers: the moneyership – that is, the masters of the mint.

The three *triumviri monetales* (briefly four under Julius Caesar)⁶ have left us with some of our most exciting direct evidence for the political views and ambitions of members of the elite outside of both the magistracy and the Senate. Late republican Rome struck new coins on a considerable scale to finance new projects as well as standing orders; but unlike its Hellenistic neighbors, it did not choose a stock image to recur on its types as a straightforward indication of origin, as for example the owl of Athens or the silphium plant of Cyrene. Rather, from the mid-second century onward Roman coinage developed a “coherent and complex visual language unique to Rome” of symbols particular to individual statesmen and their families.⁷ These symbols might indeed celebrate Rome herself in some recognizable types – a bust of the goddess Roma here, a propitious Mars there – , but more often than not they articulated specific ideas about the identity of the moneyer and his family’s achievements. Some coins recounted entire historical stories, such as that of the moneyer C. Minucius Augurinus, portraying a legendary ancestor who saved the city from famine and the column dedicated to his honor as a result (RRC 242/1). Others, for example those of L. Caesar, commemorated a family’s claim to divine ancestry (RRC 320/1). The hopeful candidate for a future election might even use the moneyership and his coins to promise “bread and circuses” to the People should they wisely select him again next time, such as Titus Didius (RRC 294/1). The republican coinage was not, therefore, merely an instrument of spending but rather a *vehicle* of political competition and self-promotion.

The use of coins for such *monumentalitas* – grandly celebrating one’s services to the state or those of the family – is self-evident and well recognized.⁸ Less well recognized, however, is the scope that the *triumviri monetales* had for interacting with political initiatives on the ground, for example by using their coins to advocate for, or militate against, a *specific proposal* rather than simply promoting themselves or their families. This chapter argues that the moneyership presented young

⁵ On which see Jewell forthcoming.

⁶ Crawford 1974, 599; see Suet. *Iul.* 41.

⁷ Welch 2005, 532.

⁸ See Meadows & Williams 2001.

and ambitious men in late republican Rome with an often overlooked – and highly valuable – way to engage directly in politics and to respond to the specific initiatives of others, “acting up” in two senses: first (and most importantly) by weighing in on major points of debate among their elders and betters, praising or criticizing the key players and supporting or undermining their initiatives; and secondly, by advancing themselves in the vertical hierarchy of republican politics, seeking to place themselves at the center of often major political debates and to exert an influence beyond their station.

In other words, the moneyership in the last century of the Republic offered distinctive avenues for young men to court public opinion and even to demonstrate political leadership on the great issues and initiatives of their day. If the argument pursued in this chapter is even partially correct, then it will be necessary for us to rethink our approach to the practice of politics in late republican Rome: to move away from what we can see clearly in our surviving evidence – grand debates in the Senate, edicts of the major magistrates, and turbulent tribunes – and to think instead about what we cannot immediately see:⁹ collaboration or conflict between minor officials, private conversations and *consilia*, and even secret deals between the major actors and young men on the make.

2. The Evidence

This chapter discusses the coinage produced by *monetales* across three historical episodes whose events are known in specific detail: the so-called “Catilinarian conspiracy” and its aftermath, including disputes over land reform; the electoral crises of 55–52, culminating with (for a time) Pompeius’ sole consulship and nearly his dictatorship also; and the last months of Julius Caesar’s *de facto* monarchy and the maneuvers following his assassination. My aim is to select examples of coin issues, mostly silver *denarii*, according to two apparently straightforward criteria: they must have been produced by *triumviri monetales* who had not yet held an elected position within the *cursus honorum* and who, being aged only in their twenties, were still ineligible to do so.

It will be immediately apparent that these criteria are not as straightforward as they seem. Some of the evidence is controversial and poses several interpretative problems. First, we know remarkably little about the moneyership itself and how precisely the *monetales* fulfilled their role, including the artistic design of their types (1); secondly, it is usually very difficult to specify the age of a republican statesman in any particular year, even ones otherwise well known (2); and thirdly, the dating of a coin can provoke a range of answers which will sometimes alter its political interpretation (3). None of these issues are so severe as to make the question posed here unanswerable, but their implications for the present study deserve a note.

⁹ On the visibility (and often invisibility) of agency and initiative in our surviving evidence, see Frolov in the introduction to this volume.

(1) Since our literary sources are almost wholly silent on the *triumviri monetales*,¹⁰ our knowledge of the office itself is patchy. It is assumed that its holders were elected annually rather than appointed, probably from the late third century onward.¹¹ This must be correct, not only because it corresponds with the procedure for most other regular officials but also because responsibility for the coinage was a legislative rather than administrative matter and so rested with the People.¹² The presiding magistrate for the election of a *monetalis* is unknown, and therefore likewise the assembly used; but it is difficult to imagine any electoral mechanism other than the *comitia populi tributa*, i.e. the meeting of the whole *populus Romanus* (rather than a segment of it) organized by tribe, used for the selection of other younger magistrates with financial responsibilities such as aediles and especially quaestors. This is yet more probable if we accept Crawford's view that the duties of quaestors and *monetales* overlapped: like moneyers, quaestors appear to have been *ex officio* permitted to mint new coins in their own name and regularly did so (e.g., RRC 330/1), and moneyers will have needed to collaborate with the *quaestor urbanus* to exchange bullion for the mint and new coin for the treasury to finance projects.¹³ We will only focus here on issues minted by *monetales* as such.

When elected, the three moneyers were responsible for minting new coin to fund expenses determined by the Senate, and probably in an amount and denomination decided by the Senate also. The months of December and January, when first the quaestors and *monetales* and then the major magistrates took up their posts, were busy ones indeed; they may have culminated with a budget early in the year where spending (and therefore how busy the quaestors and moneyers were likely to be) was allocated and the relevant instructions issued to the treasury and the mint.¹⁴ From this point, the *monetales* appear to have been free to fulfil their commission as they saw fit. We do not know how they did so behind the scenes in practical terms, but three points – all related – are obvious from the surviving material evidence.

First, it is rare for all three of the elected moneyers to use their prerogative to mint coins during their term: one or two *monetales* may strike an issue under their own name, but seldom all three. It is therefore possible that they divided the year into three blocks and that the demand for new coin may already have been satisfied before the second or third moneyer was needed. Secondly, they were

¹⁰ Literary references to the moneyership are few. That they were a college is confirmed by Cicero, who defines them as *minores magistratus* (Cic. *Leg.* 3.6; cf. *Fam.* 7.13.2); see Cass. Dio 54.26.6 for the moneyership in the Imperial period and Justinian's *Digest* (1.2.2.27–32) for its creation. The epigraphic evidence for moneyers is far more substantial; surveys in Mommsen 1860, 366 and Jones 1970, 70 with additions from Crawford 1974, 599, n. 1.

¹¹ See Crawford 1974, 602.

¹² Mommsen 1860, 363; hence the *lex Clodia* and *lex Papiria* regulating the denominational structure of the coinage, both naturally requiring the consent of the People (cf. Plin. *NH* 33.46).

¹³ Crawford 1974, 603.

¹⁴ Crawford 1974, 602, n. 5.

evidently not a unified board: *monetales* might occasionally strike a joint issue under the names of two masters, but rarely – and almost never a “collegial” issue displaying the names of all three.¹⁵ Thirdly (and therefore), there is a strong tendency toward individuality in the issues. The range of symbols displayed in the type, and the political or ideological message it conveyed, must be held to be the choice of the individual moneyer: it is hardly possible in my view that the *signator* or *sculptor* (i.e. the artist at the mint who engraved the die before striking) was sufficiently versed in the history of each moneyer’s family as to “invent” types that reflected them without the moneyer’s specific instructions. We will work on the assumption that all the issues discussed below indicate the opinions or ambitions of the individual moneyer responsible for their production, excepting the later Caesarian coinage, where it is clear that the mint came under the influence of the regime.

(2) As our focus is on young *monetales* who had not yet held a magistracy and were still ineligible to do so, determining the age of the officials is obviously important. This is easiest when the moneyer moved on to a more senior post later, and where the approximate dates of this post and the moneyership are known:¹⁶ in such cases we can count back, assuming that the later post was held at least *in suo anno* (for example, below: M. Aemilius Lepidus; L. Scribonius Libo; M. Junius Brutus; M. Valerius Messalla; Lollius Palicanus).¹⁷ Though imprecise, this at least enables us to indicate whether tenure occurred in a moneyer’s twenties or thirties. Other clues are more casual: a *monetalis* might be so junior as to have never attained a position in the *cursus*, possibly using the moneyership at the start of an otherwise failed political career (perhaps, below: L. Furius Brocchus; P. Sepullius Macer);¹⁸ alternatively, he might be known to be engaging in public activities typically indicative of young men around the same time, such as pleading in the courts (for example L. Aemilius Buca, below).¹⁹ In what follows, I will take both of these latter cases to suggest that these moneyers – whose careers outside of the mint are otherwise unknown – were junior politicians at the time. Again, the approximate age of *monetales* known to have moved on to a more senior position later is considerably easier to determine; our suggestions are more provisional for those moneyers about which nothing is otherwise known.

¹⁵ There are only six clear instances of all three moneyers being named on a republican coin issue: RRC 283, 284, 285, 335, 350a, 360.

¹⁶ The index of careers in volume two of Broughton’s *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* (Broughton 1952, 524–634) is indispensable.

¹⁷ M. Aemilius Lepidus = RE (Lepidus) 73; L. Scribonius Libo = RE (Scribonius) 20; M. Junius Brutus = RE (Junius) 53; Lollius Palicanus = RE (Lollius) 20. M. Valerius Messalla may be either RE (Valerius) 95 or 97. Crawford 1974, 457 prefers RE 97 and his assumption will be followed here (cf. also Syme 1955, 155–160).

¹⁸ L. Furius Brocchus = RE (Furius) 39; P. Sepullius Macer = RE (Sepullius) 1.

¹⁹ L. Aemilius Buca = RE (Aemilius) 37. On the important role of court appearances in the rhetorical formation of young aristocratic men, which continued well into the Imperial period (Cass. Dio 74.12), see Steel 2006.

Where there is a pattern, it is indeed for *monetales* to enter the mint in their twenties;²⁰ for many republican statesmen the moneyership was also their first known political office. Exceptions to this general trend can be found throughout the last century of the free Republic, when we find a number of established politicians entering the mint in their late thirties shortly before election to the praetorship or even the consulship. However, these exceptions mainly cluster around two historical periods. The first is the decade following the secret ballot laws (*leges tabellariae*) of the 130s: since the move from voting *à haute voix* to casting ballots privately reduced the effectiveness of patronage (*clientela*) and the scope for candidates to cajole or intimidate voters,²¹ Crawford assumes that even established politicians from the *nobilitas* temporarily used the moneyership as an alternative way to advertise themselves to the electorate.²² The second period is the Caesarian civil war and its aftermath, where a cluster of moneyers move on to senior magistracies only a few years later;²³ this suggests that Caesar may have promoted their careers or installed them in the mint in their mid–late thirties. Although we shall indeed see evidence from one of these periods, none of the *monetales* discussed below moved swiftly into senior office and all were probably in their late twenties at the time of striking.

(3) Third and finally, we must grapple with the problem of dating. In cases where we know accurately when an issue was minted, it follows that we can date the moneyership responsible and *vice versa* (e.g., RRC 435/1). Very rarely we can even pinpoint the month in which a coin was probably issued (e.g., RRC 480/6, 480/21). However, we do not usually have this luxury. The major collections of the republican coinage often give radically divergent estimates for the same moneyership: for example, M. Aemilius Lepidus (RE 73) – the future *triumvir*, praetor in 49 and consul in 46 and 42 – may be listed as *monetalis* as late as 60 (so Babelon) or as early as 66 (Grueber, Sydenham).²⁴ In such cases Broughton's *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* is not a great help, and often makes no attempt to synthesize such wild variations. In addition, older collections frequently suggest datings that seem unusually early for the type. For the well-known *denarius* of Sexus Pompeius (Fostulus?) – whose design (RRC 235/1) boasts the moneyer's *tria nomina* and a highly distinctive scene on the reverse – the dating of c. 150 proposed by Mommsen and Grueber seems impossibly early;²⁵ coins of this period prefer stock types (prows, ship's beaks, the Dioscuri, goddesses in chariots and the like), and they rarely spell out the *tria nomina* in full. Since the

²⁰ Crawford 1974, 710.

²¹ Cicero forms this connection more or less explicitly at *Leg.* 3.33–40.

²² Crawford 1974, 728–9.

²³ Crawford 1974, 711.

²⁴ Mommsen 1860, 632; Babelon 1885, 121–3; Sydenham 1950, 64.

²⁵ Mommsen 1860, 551; Grueber 1910, 131.

approximate year in which a coin was minted and therefore its specific historical context are essential for the interpretation of its political significance, these estimates are important for our purposes.

Fortunately, in most cases Crawford's more up-to-date *Roman Republican Coinage* reconciles this dizzying array very plausibly, providing date ranges that are more convincing both for their historical context and the artistic design of the type. The dates provided by Crawford generally tally with those posited by Sydenham twenty years earlier (which Broughton's *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* also prefers), and arrive in my view at a more credible interpretation of the significance of the issues. The PROVOCO type of P. Porcius Laeca (RRC 301/1) – obviously celebrating the three Porcian laws on a citizen's right of appeal – is a good example of this tendency, where older datings are either mythically early or dubiously late (e.g., 150–90), leading Sydenham, Broughton, and Crawford to agree on a more reasonable common estimate (110–104).²⁶ It will be necessary to return to these controversies in the notes below, but in general this study follows the dates proposed by Crawford.

Having now noted our approach to the evidence the *triumviri monetales* of the late Republic have handed down to us, let us turn to one of the most dramatic examples of the unique opportunity provided by their office to engage with politics on the ground: the year of Cicero's consulship and the struggle for *consensus* and *concordia* it left in its wake.

3. Cicero, Cato, and Catiline in 63–62

The moneyers of the last years of the 60s were junior and likely at the beginning of their public careers in the city. However, political developments both in the capital and in Italy as a whole gave them great scope to use their prerogatives at the mint to shape and court public opinion, adding their own voices in support – or criticism – of magistrates as yet beyond their station. The events of this year, and our focus here, are well known: agitation surrounding agrarian reform, the rising influence of Caesar, Cicero's consulship, the so-called Catilinarian conspiracy, and its aftermath.²⁷ The historiography of these events is at times controversial;²⁸ but as Katarina Nebelin's contribution to this volume reminds us, there appear to have been genuine popular grievances around 63 concerning a range of issues connected to the distribution of wealth: use of public land and its confiscation from the Italian *municipia* by Sulla; access to adequate subsistence, especially grain; and high levels of

²⁶ See Broughton 1952, 449.

²⁷ See Tempest 2011, 85–100 for a very readable survey of this year.

²⁸ Controversial insofar as the entire historical tradition ultimately depends upon a single contemporary source who was directly involved in the affair – Cicero himself – and Sallust, again contemporary but also derivative of Cicero's anti-Catilinarian narrative. For the vigorous and often amusing debate on the veracity of the alleged Catilinarian Conspiracy, compare Waters 1970; Seager 1973; Phillips 1976.

indebtedness which pushed many families (including apparently some elite ones) into crisis. Sallust's monograph on Catiline's "conspiracy" to overthrow the state in this year uses these (real) economic issues to explain the moral turpitude and desperation of Catiline and his followers,²⁹ but this is a moralistic distortion: archaeological and other literary evidence suggests that parts of the Italian population were indeed suffering profoundly from increasingly insecure access to capital, food, and land on which to grow it.

The aristocracy were evidently aware of these issues, and some capitalized upon them to garner public appeal. The first salvo arrived with P. Servilius Rullus' agrarian bill. After entering the tribunate on December 10th, 64, Rullus' first action was to propose a *lex agraria*: the bill intended to redistribute large plots of public land in Campania to some five thousand poor colonists, funded by new taxes on land outside of Italy and by the disposal of lands already destined for sale. The sole authority over this measure was to fall to ten commissioners, elected for a period of five years, who would inevitably gain significant status and popularity from their membership as well as extraordinary power over the revenues of the state.³⁰ It has long been accepted that Rullus was not acting on his own initiative: a coalition of interested parties – including C. Julius Caesar and M. Licinius Crassus – are usually held to be the main instigators of his *lex agraria*. They sought to strengthen their own power-base as well as to provoke Cicero and others to publicly embarrass themselves by opposing the move.³¹ Rullus may have been the one to *propose* his bill, but the initiative evidently did not rest with him alone. Newly elected as consul, Cicero took the bait, if that is indeed what it was: he successfully defeated Rullus' (or rather Caesar and Crassus') initiative by means of four speeches *de lege agraria*, delivered in the Senate and in *contiones* throughout January 63. The distribution of land was, temporarily, off the table.

It is doubtful, in my view, that popular agitation over agrarian reform and the divisions this caused among the governing elite were lost on the moneyers of this year. A new *denarius* issue minted by one of the newly-elected *monetales* for 63, L. Furius Brocchus, is therefore of special interest.

²⁹ E.g., Sall. *Cat.* 5, 10–11, 13, 16, 21, 28.

³⁰ The provisions of the proposed law can be chiefly reconstructed from Cicero's first and second speeches *de lege agraria*.

³¹ Mommsen 1889, 181–2; Afzelius 1940, 230; Gelzer 1960, 37; Scullard 1963, 111.



Fig. 4.1. Silver *denarius* of L. Furius Brocchus (RRC 414/1). 63 BCE (Crawford 1974) or 61 BCE (Sydenham 1950; Broughton 1952)

A head of Ceres – facing right and crowned with ears of corn – fills the obverse, flanked on either side by representations of corn and barley. The reverse type displays the curule chair of a republican magistrate, surrounded by the bundled rods and axes which symbolize his authority (the *fasces*). The *tria nomina* of the moneyer straddle both sides, plus his office: L•FURI CN•F BROCCHI III VIR. Crawford attributes no particular significance to the type: the grain, he suggests, refers to an aedilician ancestor of the moneyer and perhaps alludes to the family’s historic care for the grain supply – neither of these factoids are otherwise known – , while the curule chair may indicate the moneyer’s own ambitions for higher office.³²

However, it is suspect to date this issue to this year while divorcing it from the major political debates of the day. Assuming that the attribution is correct, Brocchus entered his moneyership on December 5th, 64: both Rullus’ bill and the public debate surrounding it followed only a week or two later. The reverse type may indeed represent Brocchus’ own ambitions for office – his desire to “act up” within the hierarchy of the *res publica* – but the obverse type goes further than that. This is a highly distinctive issue: representations of Ceres on republican coins are rare, and this is the only surviving type from the 60s to display explicit frumentary imagery.³³ Brocchus seems to have been marking himself out as a supporter of agrarian reform; at the very least, it is certain that he sought to

³² Crawford 1974, 414.

³³ Prosperina, the daughter of Ceres, appears on the obverse type of several issues of one moneyer in 69 (RRC 405), and there is one representation of a cornucopia in 67 (RRC 403/1); nevertheless Brocchus’ type is unique for the 60s in its explicit focus on agrarian prosperity.

connect prosperity and abundance, symbolized through Ceres and the profusion of grain, to his own name. Whether the issue is polemical is less clear: it may be read as an expression of disapproval for Cicero, or of approbation for Rullus or Caesar, but that is not the most important point. What is clear is that this otherwise unknown junior official – who never attained greater heights in the *cursus* – visibly used his new office to respond to the popular desire for subsistence (and, therefore, land). This interpretation holds especially if we follow Crawford’s dating; but even if we accept that of Sydenham and Broughton instead (61), then the controversy of land and grain was scarcely less important two years later.

Tensions and discontent surrounding the distribution of wealth – land, food, and debt – evidently did not dissipate simply because Cicero gave a few speeches. These problems were a key campaign question on the political agenda of the year of Brocchus’ moneyership; in this context, his choice for his *denarius* issue makes sense. The July elections of 63 brought a notable failure and an equally notable success: L. Sergius Catilina was defeated in the consular ballot for the second year running, and M. Porcius Cato was elected to the tribunate of the plebs for the following year. Both were eager to respond to the economic concerns of the lower strata: Henriette van der Blom has shown that Cato made a concerted effort to focus on subsistence,³⁴ while Katarina Nebelin in this volume explores the importance of debt to Catiline’s electoral ticket; Catiline evidently aimed at voters below the richest class (the *prima classis*) with a program of debt-relief. The similarly popular strategy of these two quite different politicians vis-à-vis the basic needs of the people is suggested by the surviving terracotta election-cups now held in the Baths of Diocletian, by means of which both Cato and Catiline gifted food and drink to the *populus*: CATO QUEI PETIT TRIBUNU PLEBEM on the left, mirrors a similar statement of support for Catiline on the right. Brocchus’ coin, with its emphasis upon agrarian prosperity, reflects related concerns and executes a similarly popular strategy by different means; it may have been minted at any point in the year. “Bread and circuses” indeed.



³⁴ Blom 2011.

Fig. 4.2. Terracotta propaganda cups of Cato and Catiline (CIL VI 40904 / 40897). 63 BCE

The disappointment of Catiline in the elections led, of course, to his alleged leadership of a “conspiracy” to overthrow the Republic and his flight to Etruria in November; there he joined forces with an apparently separate uprising of C. Manlius,³⁵ a former centurion of Sulla, that was already in train. They were defeated at the Battle of Pistoria in January 62 – in which Catiline himself was killed – by the forces of Q. Metellus Celer and C. Antonius Hybrida, lately Cicero’s consular colleague. By this time, five of the leading conspirators in Rome had already been executed without a trial at the (veiled) urging of Cicero,³⁶ almost at the end of his term, and of Cato as tribune of the plebs.³⁷ The controversy of this decision is obvious: it was not only expressly prohibited by several specific Roman laws on the citizen’s right of appeal (*provocatio*) but was also implemented under a dubious quasi-legal instrument, invented quite recently for the purpose of executing citizens without trial and seldom invoked (the *senatus consultum ultimum*).³⁸

The debate surrounding this extraordinary punishment for the associates of Catiline necessarily drew in established politicians: Cicero the consul, Cato the tribune, Julius Caesar as *pontifex maximus* and praetor-designate, Silanus the consul-designate,³⁹ and the Senate as a whole. However, I suggest that the newly-elected moneyers for 62, who had entered office just in time for this heated debate, had their own thoughts to offer on the consul’s initiative and a public statement to add in his support. The first of these is M. Aemilius Lepidus – the future *triumvir* – who began his career with the moneyership.

³⁵ Waters 1970, 201.

³⁶ Veiled because Cicero as consul was not supposed to sway the Senate in either direction, but his intentions are clear enough in his sustained attack on Caesar’s motion for the sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment at *Cat.* 4.6–13.

³⁷ Sall. *Cat.* 52.

³⁸ For scholarly takes on the essentially illegal and unconstitutional nature of the *senatus consultum ultimum*, see Widemann 1994, 44; Kefeng 2004, 125; Flower 2010, 86.

³⁹ Although *responsibility* for the execution of the Catilinarian conspirators is usually attributed to Cicero (and appears also to have been at the time, certainly – and tragically – by 58), the *initiative* belonged to the consul-elect D. Junius Silanus, who formulated the proposal.



Fig. 4.3. Silver *denarius* of M. Aemilius Lepidus (RRC 415/1). 62 BCE (Crawford 1974)

The reverse of this issue is typical of the *monumentalitas* we would expect of a republican moneyer: at the center stands a tripod laden with booty. The scene depicts a comically large togate general (with PAULLUS in exergue), accepting the surrender of three figures on the left: an adult and two children. It depicts the capture of King Perseus of Macedon and his sons by the moneyer's (fictitious) ancestor following the Battle of Pydna in 168, and therefore commemorates the family's achievements in an entirely typical manner. The obverse, on the other hand, is extraordinary and its importance has not been sufficiently appreciated. The identification of the moneyer, LEPIDUS, is crammed in to the left (the legend PAULLUS is a reference to the general mentioned above, not the name of the moneyer himself); finally, a large bust of a veiled female deity, personifying the goddess Concordia, is accompanied by the legend CONCORDIA to the right.

Crawford rightly notes that the obverse type “presumably reflects the *concordia ordinum* which was central to Cicero's policy in 63,”⁴⁰ but the evidence justifies more than this. Lepidus' coin – which could feasibly have appeared as early as January 62 – was an unambiguous public statement of support for the consul's action in the near or immediate aftermath of his controversial and divisive initiative. Lepidus' personal loyalty to Cicero is well known.⁴¹ But his coin is indicative of more than a straightforward approbation of the consul or his pleasing noises about *concordia* – the harmony amongst citizens (and especially the elite of equestrians and senators) that had been disrupted by arguments over the composition of juries and other questions in recent decades.⁴² In choosing this

⁴⁰ Crawford 1974, 441.

⁴¹ Sall. *Cat.* 31.4; Cic. *Fam.* 15.13.2; *Vat.* 25.

⁴² For important recent treatments of the decline of *consensus* in the late Republic, see Eder 1996 and Hölkeskamp 2010.

type, Lepidus selected a message of approval that could only be read with reference to the recent initiative of December 63 to put the alleged plotters to death. We should recall that Cicero delivered his *Fourth Catilinarian* – in which he obliquely encouraged the Senate to adopt the proposal to execute the five conspirators – *within* the Temple of Concordia, a carefully selected symbolic location. His oration additionally emphasized the *concordia* between equestrians and senators, and the unanimity of the whole *populus Romanus*, to exaggerate the distance between the majority of the *boni* and the minority of the treasonous Five.⁴³ Concordia was linked, explicitly, to the decision of that fateful Senate-meeting, and that is why Lepidus selected it for his issue.

In addition to the fate of the five conspirators, the aftermath of Catiline’s defeat at Pistoria provided further opportunities for the young *monetales* of 62 to express their support for the initiatives of their superiors. More prosaically, they presumably also hoped that some of the glitter of prestige issuing from these events would rub off onto their own names by virtue of association with them. A second moneyer probably of this year, L. Scribonius Libo, chose a design similar in many respects to that of his colleague:



Fig. 4.4. Silver *denarius* of L. Scribonius Libo (RRC 416/1c). 62 BCE (Crawford 1974)

Like Lepidus’ issue, the choice of reverse type for Libo’s *denarius* recalls the historic achievements of his family in a show of *monumentalitas*: it depicts the Scribonian Puteal, an obscure altar in the Forum dedicated or restored by an ancestor of the moneyer to mark the bidental where a lightning-bolt deemed sacred to Vulcan had struck. Decorated with a garland and lyres to the left and

⁴³ Cic. *Cat.* 4.15: *quos ex multorum annorum dissensione huius ordinis ad societatem concordiamque revocatos hodiernus dies vobiscum atque haec causa coniungit.* At length, *Cat.* 4.14–17.

right, its exergue legend SCRIBON identifies both the monument itself and the moneyer. But also like Lepidus', the obverse fulfils a more immediate political function. The *cognomen*, Libo, again merits little space; instead, a male personification of Bonus Eventus, the deity of happy or fortunate outcomes, fills the type, accompanied by the legend BON•EVENT to the right. If we accept Crawford's revised dating for this issue (on which more will be said below), then its purpose becomes clear: Libo's *denarius* proclaims the approval of the moneyer for the recent actions of the consul Cicero as well as his colleague Hybrida, the proconsul Metellus, and possibly the new consul Silanus also, and praises their initiative as the source of the happy outcome – the *bonus eventus* – of recent troubles.

Strikingly, Lepidus and Libo (later?) combined these two issues to express what seems to me a united declaration of support for the recent decisions of the senior magistrates. The resulting *denarius* is a most special artefact for two reasons: rare insofar as the two moneyers minted it together as colleagues in their joint names, rather than individually; and practically unique in that it is a direct combination of two different issues minted separately by the moneyers at a presumably earlier point, incorporating Lepidus' schema on the obverse and that of Libo on the reverse.



Fig. 4.5. Silver *denarius* of M. Aemilius Lepidus & L. Scribonius Libo (RRC 417/1a). 62 BCE (Crawford 1974)

The type is hurried and evidently the work of a different *signator* to the previous issues; the reverse legend is particularly poorly executed. Nevertheless, this coin gives a fascinating indication of the collaboration shared by two young officials “behind the scenes”: both agreed to mint a quasi-commemorative issue in order to build consensus around the initiative of the magistrates in December 63 – January 62. The two *monetales* of this year made a public statement of support for Cicero's words in the Temple of Concord: that the Catilinarian conspirators were enemies of the state and

harmful to its *concordia*, and only by disposing of them could *concordia* be maintained. They appear to have been working on a joint ticket, “acting up” both by capitalizing on their privileges to weigh in on the controversies of recent months, and by ingratiating themselves to the superior decision-makers responsible within the vertical hierarchy of republican politics.

Lepidus and Libo were equally junior statesmen at the beginning of their careers: for both, the moneyership was their first step on the road to greater achievements and a key opportunity to place themselves at the center of events.⁴⁴ The date of their office in the mint (and, related to it, their approximate ages) is controversial, but we fortunately have some guiding clues. Libo held the consulship in 34; it is also known that he was a senator by 56, presumably after a quaestorship. Grueber dated his moneyership to 71.⁴⁵ This is an outlier and would make him a ludicrously young *monetalis*.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the dating of c. 54 suggested by Mommsen, Babelon, and Sydenham appears late.⁴⁷ Libo will by this time have been well into his thirties, a *nobilis* from an established family and aiming at a significant public career; he could expect (and would go on to achieve) more than a moneyership by such a stage, and the trend – as discussed above – for older moneyers will not arrive until Caesar’s civil war. Then there is Lepidus. Clearly Lepidus and Libo were *monetales* in the same year, hence their joint *denarius* issue; Broughton was mistaken in placing them at the mint in different years.⁴⁸ Lepidus, as is well known, held the consulship in 46. Assuming that he did so *in suo anno* (aged forty for a patrician), he will have been born at the latest in 86, and possibly a little earlier. Entering the mint in 62 aged at least twenty-four, perhaps a few years older, was a good start to a glittering career. Crawford’s revision to 62 as the date of Lepidus’ and Libo’s term is more plausible within his reconstruction of the series of moneyers, as well as in the correlation between the types and the historical events, and for what is known about the trajectories of these *monetales*.

Although (certainly) junior figures at the start of their political careers and (probably) in their twenties, the moneyers of 63–62 attempted to exert a public influence beyond their station on major points of debate. Brocchus may or may not have sought to criticize the opposition of the *optimates* to agrarian reform. But he surely wished to identify himself with the cause, and perhaps sought to stoke up enthusiasm for it; even Cato, whose tribunician *lex Porcia* in the following year extended the grain

⁴⁴ For the overviews of their respective careers with approximate dates, see Broughton 1952, 527, 614.

⁴⁵ Grueber 1910, 418.

⁴⁶ Assuming that Libo obtained the quaestorship at the minimum required age of thirty in 57 in order to enter the Senate the following year, he will have been only *sixteen* upon entering the mint in 71; if he obtained the quaestorship a good deal later, perhaps at thirty-five, then at a more reasonable twenty-one he will still have been a *very* young moneyer entering the mint in 71.

⁴⁷ Mommsen 1860, 632; Babelon 1885, 121–3; Sydenham 1950, 64.

⁴⁸ Compare the list of moneyers and index of careers at Broughton 1952, 431, 451, 527, 614 for Scribonius Libo (RE 20) and Aemilius Lepidus (RE 73).

subsidy, clearly recognized its popular appeal. Having no power to propose such initiatives himself, Brocchus nevertheless found in the moneyership a way to publicly support and identify himself with them. The following year, Lepidus and Libo went further: their issues communicated their unambiguous support for the recent actions of the senior magistrates toward Catiline and his associates – actions which were not without controversy – and sought to create consensus surrounding them. It is tantalizing to imagine who was ultimately responsible for their coin issues. Did they take the initiative to design and produce them together *sua sponte*, or were they privately persuaded to do so by Cicero, Silanus, Cato, and their associates? This question is unanswerable, but Caesar and Antonius – discussed further below – were fully aware of the mint’s potential for political propaganda; the outgoing magistrates of 63 may have been also. In any case, a public show of allegiance to this group (and to Cicero at the peak of his career) will have seemed an astute political move for two young men on the make.

4. The Electoral Crises of 55–52

A decade later, the fierce competition for electoral success provoked a crisis of a very different kind, creating scope for young *monetales* to respond to current political developments in a distinctive way. The consular elections were once again at the center of a scandal. The events are complex and merit a brief summary.⁴⁹ By the end of the summer in 54, all four candidates for Rome’s highest magistracy had been charged with bribery or electoral misconduct (*ambitus*). The *comitia* ordinarily convened in July still had not materialized by October: deliberate obstruction by tribunes of the plebs and a series of inauspicious auguries made it impossible for the incumbent consuls to organize the election of their successors for the following year. Matters were not helped when the consuls themselves were accused of attempting to orchestrate these elections corruptly. When they resigned from their office on the last day of 54, there remained no eligible candidates to succeed them the following day; their prerogative to consult the gods and command armies on behalf of the *res publica* (the *imperium auspiciumque*) devolved to irregular emergency officials known as *interreges* (on which see especially Dementyeva in this collection).

The letters of Cicero are our only contemporary witness for these chaotic events; our later sources (Plutarch, Appian, Cassius Dio) each give a different complexion to them. All, however, emphasize that Pompeius was involved in one way or another. As the crisis deepened toward the winter of 54, some espoused the view that it was necessary for the consuls to appoint Pompeius dictator, so abrogating the regular magistracies and giving him full power to take any action necessary

⁴⁹ Our sources for the chaos surrounding the consular elections of 54 are App. *B Civ.* 2.19–20; Cass. Dio 40.45; Cic. *Att.* 4.17–18; *QFr.* 3.8.4–6, 3.9.3; Plut. *Pomp.* 54.2–3.

to organize the elections for next year's vacant posts (*comitiorum habendorum causa*). This appears to have only been the whisper of a rumor in the summer; but by November the initiative had the shape of a formal proposal which the incoming tribune of the plebs, C. Lucilius Hirrus, planned to submit upon entering office the following month.⁵⁰

Pleasingly to the associates of Cicero and the orator himself – who reacts with horror at the suggestion of a dictatorship –,⁵¹ this did not come to pass. Pompeius returned to Rome early in 53 and insisted that he would not accept a dictatorship even if offered it. This refusal was probably genuine,⁵² since by this point Pompeius knew that without consuls in office an appointment to the dictatorship was no longer possible in the regular way; he would have to revive controversial methods employed by the last dictator, Sulla.⁵³ Instead, Pompeius appears to have genuinely attempted to rectify the situation (and, helpfully, in his own interest). Alongside the *interrex* Ser. Sulpicius Rufus, Pompeius used his wide influence to organize new elections: two new consuls – Cn. Domitius Calvinus and M. Valerius Messalla Rufus – finally entered office in the summer of 53 to serve a short term of only five months or so.⁵⁴

Though invaluable, Pompeius' assistance in this matter was not altruistic. It is a further example of the grandee's efforts to sanitise his reputation and to court new networks of favour and goodwill in his own interest. Jeff Tatum has convincingly demonstrated that at this late stage of the 50s, Pompeius was working to re-align his allegiances. The death of his wife – Caesar's daughter Julia – in 54 and the long absence of Caesar himself from Rome both facilitated a *rapprochement* between Pompeius and the conservative elements in the 'old guard' of the traditional aristocracy;⁵⁵ this attempt at reconciliation culminated in his marriage to the daughter of the arch-conservative Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius Scipio Nasica in 52. Pompeius' refusal of the dictatorship in 53 and his sudden conversion to the cause of the old Republic bore fruit a few months later. Although our sources are vague about the chronology, it appears that during the chaos surrounding the murder of Clodius in January 52, a proposal was tabled in the Senate to give Pompeius the right to stand for election as sole consul for the year 52, i.e. without a colleague (*sine collega*). Surprisingly, this extraordinarily innovative suggestion was proposed by a conservative faction in the Senate which included Cato and Bibulus. The only reasonable explanation for this otherwise baffling move is the one offered by

⁵⁰ See Burden-Strevens 2019 for a review of the evidence and the chronology.

⁵¹ Cic. *QFr.* 3.4.1; 3.8.4–6.

⁵² Burden-Strevens 2019.

⁵³ See Ramsey 2016 for this point.

⁵⁴ Cass. Dio 40.45.1 writes that Calvinus and Messalla were elected in the seventh month, but App. *B Civ.* 2.19 in the eighth.

⁵⁵ Tatum 2008, 125–127.

Plutarch and followed by Cassius Dio.⁵⁶ Cato, Bibulus, and their allies were working to prevent a dictatorship – apparently still a possibility in early 52 – and, faced with a possible repetition of the Sullan experiment, saw a sole consulship as the lesser of two evils. So great was their aversion to the prospect of a dictatorship that the old guard were prepared to hold their noses and accept such a proposal, with Pompeius as its (now slightly more palatable) beneficiary.⁵⁷

The turbulent events of the past twelve months evidently required leadership at the highest level to settle; yet from his place on the board of the most junior of the regular urban officials, one young moneyer was by no means silent on them. It is symptomatic of the chaos and confusion that the mint appears to have been mostly inactive throughout 53: only one *monetalis* appears to have struck in this year under his own name and in only one denominational issue. But remarkably, this young moneyer – M. Valerius Messalla – was the son of one of the two consuls recently elected in the *comitia* to hold office for the final months of 53, and clearly used his position to add his own voice to recent debates on the stability of the *res publica*.



Fig. 4.6. Silver *denarius* of M. Valerius M. f. Messalla (RRC 435/1). 53 BCE

The obverse type is perfectly conventional: a helmeted bust of the goddess Roma, facing right with a spear over her shoulder, would not have been out of place in *denarii* produced a century earlier.⁵⁸ This design is not especially interesting in itself, and that is perhaps the point; the obverse eschews any grand allusion to the achievements of the illustrious *gens Valeria*, preferring instead a

⁵⁶ App. *B Civ.* 2.23.1; Plut. *Pomp.* 54.3.

⁵⁷ Ramsey 2016, 308–18 discusses the ways in which the proposal may have been framed in a way palatable to conservatives.

⁵⁸ For discussion of the evolution (and gradual disappearance) of Roma on republican coins, see Crawford 1974, 721–5.

patriotic – and conservatively straightforward – representation of the grandeur of Rome in the abstract with a comfortingly bland and familiar image.

The political significance of the reverse type, on the other hand, cannot be doubted in the specific historical context, and forms a coherent pairing with the conservatism of the obverse. Like Brocchus in 63, the younger M. Valerius Messalla chose to represent the official chair (the *sella curulis*) of a Roman consul; unlike Brocchus, he made important innovations to the design. Brocchus' *sella curulis* sat upon a vertical line representing the floor, so creating a blank exergue for inscription if desired. In Messalla's *denarius*, on the other hand, the consul's seat rests on top of (and therefore *subordinates*) the symbols of a Hellenistic monarch: the scepter, with its triangular head facing right, and a royal diadem – a single strip of white ribbon tied so as to form a crown.⁵⁹ The curule chair is flanked by the monogram S·C (SENATU CONSULTO), and headed prominently by the legend PATRE·COS: “in my father's consulship.” The coin is an unambiguous and direct statement of support for traditional patterns of office-holding and a typically republican rejection of monarchy (*regnum*).

There are two complementary ways to interpret the political message of this *denarius*. The first, on the more general level, has already been noted by Crawford: the reverse type celebrates “the temporary exclusion of Pompey from the possibility of achieving sole rule.”⁶⁰ The sceptre and diadem, the habitus of the Hellenistic despot, are physically suppressed by the symbols of the republican magistracy; the reverse thus castigates Pompeius' real or supposed intentions of tyrannizing the *res publica*, for which he had evidently been under suspicion during the electoral crises of 54–53. Such a view becomes clearer, I would suggest, when we recall that as recently as 56 one witty aedile had more or less explicitly quipped that Pompeius resembled a Greek tyrant wearing a *diadema* (in this case a white bandage on his leg, not his head).⁶¹ Messalla's choice of imagery was therefore especially apposite for a polemic against Pompeius.

The second possible interpretation, on a more distinct level, is that Messalla used this issue to militate against the *specific ongoing proposal*, or initiative, of a dictatorship for Pompeius. The prospect had been defeated but was not definitively off the table; the willingness of the Senate to countenance a sole consulship in order to prevent it around January 52 confirms this much, and whispers of the possibility remained in the anxious final months of 53. It is even possible that there were whispers of a consulship (with or without a colleague) for Pompeius in those months prior to the murder of Clodius – so great was the enthusiasm of the people – although the Senate had not yet

⁵⁹ For comparable designs of such diadems in Greek and Roman coinage, see RRC 507/2; SNG München 1124; SNG Alpha Bank 1049; AMNG III 2.

⁶⁰ Crawford 1974, 457.

⁶¹ Val. Max. 6.2.7: *cui candida fascia crus alligatum habenti Favonius “non refert” inquit “qua in parte sit corporis diadema.”*

formulated that enthusiasm into a specific proposal.⁶² Messalla's coin is a stark response to this controversy. The obverse type with the curule chair obviously celebrates the consulship of the moneyer's father, but also points to its traditional function in ideological terms. Only the traditional framework of office-holding, it states, has the strength to subordinate the sceptre and diadem of the tyrant. Take away the traditional offices, appoint a dictator, and Rome is left with a monarch. The reverse type praises the historic diarchy of consuls in conversation with the Senate (hence the legend S·C) and insinuates that to drift away from these traditions of the *res publica* will lead to tyranny. I have suggested elsewhere that in the wake of Sulla the dictatorship as such had come to acquire an odious reputation, and was regarded by contemporaries as a locus of despotic power.⁶³ Accordingly this coin serves to arouse suspicion of Pompeius' intentions and to rebuke his supposedly tyrannical position, which further discussion of a dictatorship could only serve to exacerbate. We may also speculate that it serves to warn the old guard of the Republican aristocracy, now apparently being courted by Pompeius, to take his overtures with a pinch of salt.

Pompeius entered his sole consulship on the 24th day of the intercalary month between February and March. The endorsement of Cato and Bibulus may have made this unusual step more palatable to conservatives, but it can hardly have commanded universal support. It is notable that Pompeius selected a fellow-colleague quite speedily after assuming his sole consulship, but does not appear to have been compelled to do so; our remaining testimony of the senatorial decree which authorised his election *sine collega* suggests that he was entirely at liberty to choose,⁶⁴ while recent scholarship frames the assumption of a colleague as an *expectation* rather than a demand.⁶⁵ It is entirely possible that Pompeius was prompted to act quickly to restore the semblance of regular constitutional government as soon as possible by choosing a colleague, either at the urging of the Senate and his associates or by the clamour of the People. Messalla's recent *denarius* issue – certainly in circulation in the city by this time – perhaps represented one small but appreciable part of that groundswell of support for traditional *libertas*, and may have played a part in creating it. It is fascinating to envisage

⁶² I am grateful to Roman Frolov for drawing to my attention that Asconius (33C) suggests that even early in 52 the people appear to have still been demanding a dictatorship for Pompeius: *tum fasces ex luco Libitinae raptos attulit ad domum Scipionis et Hypsaei, deinde ad hortos Cn. Pompeii, clamitans eum modo consulem, modo dictatorem*. In this light it is possible that sections of the people, in their enthusiasm for Pompeius, were not concerned about the form that his extraordinary honour take, merely that it be granted. Popular calls for a sole consulship appear to have arisen *alongside* those for a dictatorship according to Asconius, and so we should be wary of trying to put the two proposals into entirely separate and distinct boxes.

⁶³ Burden-Strevens 2019. See also Kalyvas 2007, who argues that it was later Greek historians (e.g., Appian and Cassius Dio) who first formed the connection between the republican *dictatura* and conventional ideas about tyranny, but in my view that development is already clearly traceable in the late Republic and decades before Julius Caesar's term also.

⁶⁴ Plut. *Pomp.* 54.4. Suet. *Iul.* 26.1 is very brief and does not specify the parameters of the decree.

⁶⁵ Ramsey 2016.

the criticism that Pompeius would (correctly) have imagined being levied against him, every time he opened his coin purse.

The 50s were a time of significant turmoil and innovation. Many members of the political class believed that their established institutions were under threat, and that the traditions of the *res publica* were being corroded by the tyranny of factions – not least the illegal cabal grandly known as the Triumvirate. It is surely in response to the activities of this Triumvirate that a much better-known moneyer of this period, M. Junius Brutus, used his office to champion the traditional order and galvanize public opinion to its defense. An especially well-known result of this activity is his LIBERTAS issue, displaying a personification of the goddess of liberty on the obverse, facing right, and on the reverse a representation of his mythical ancestor, L. Junius Brutus. Here the ancient Brutus – Rome’s first consul and the founder of the Republic after the expulsion of the tyrannical Tarquins –⁶⁶ is depicted in his consul’s garb, surrounded by lictors. The coin not only commemorates the achievements of the *gens Iunia*; it also emphasizes the importance of expunging *regnum*, the tyranny of sole rule, from the state by means of legitimate constitutional government.



Fig. 4.7. Silver *denarius* of M. Junius Brutus (RRC 433/1). 55 BCE (Cerutti 1993)

The dating of Brutus’ early coinage (and thus also its interpretation) is much debated: older work posited a very early date, perhaps as far back as Caesar’s consulship in 59.⁶⁷ The discovery and publication several decades ago of two major hoards – one of which closes with the above *denarius*

⁶⁶ Although to speak of Brutus as Rome’s first “consul” is a misapprehension, since their function at the dawn of the Republic appears to have been fulfilled by praetors. See Urso 2018.

⁶⁷ Grueber 1910, 479.

and the other with Messalla's PATRE·COS issue of 53 – does suggest that 54 is the latest probable year for the production of Brutus' much-discussed LIBERTAS issue above and therefore his early coinage as a whole.⁶⁸ This date is also the one given in Crawford's *Roman Republican Coinage*.

There are, however, several problems with 54 as the date of Brutus' moneyership. First, Caesar offered him a place on his military staff for this year;⁶⁹ such an offer would make no sense if Brutus had already been elected to the mint in Rome for the same period. Secondly, Brutus was elected quaestor for 53, in which capacity he would spend two years assisting the governor of Cilicia.⁷⁰ If he were a *monetalis* at the time of the elections for this position in 54, this would mean that he not only failed to observe the legally sanctioned hiatus between one post and another but even presented himself for election to a magistracy while still holding another office. In consequence, Steven Cerutti convincingly proposes a slight revision to the date of Brutus' moneyership: 55, a year in which we know that Brutus was in Rome and demand for new coin to service state expenditure was at its highest point for thirty years.⁷¹

The tendency among most scholars has been to view Brutus' *denarii* as a veiled critique of Pompeius' unassailable position within the *res publica* in general.⁷² If, however, we accept 55 as the year of Brutus' moneyership, then an alternative interpretation becomes possible – connected not only to a critique of Pompeius' ambitions as such but rather to a *specific* constitutional flashpoint and a *specific* political initiative. Once again, the controversy surrounds the consular *comitia*. The elections for 55 had descended into chaos and violence:⁷³ Pompeius and his fellow-triumvir M. Licinius Crassus both presented themselves as candidates, hoping to divide up the empire between themselves and their ally Caesar. Their canvass was met with vigorous opposition from a weighty proportion of the Senate, including the incumbent consul Marcellinus, M. Porcius Cato, and Cato's brother-in-law L. Domitius Ahenobarbus. Ahenobarbus was himself a candidate for the consulship; he was only intimidated into withdrawing when associates of Pompeius attacked him en route to the Forum, killing one of his assistants and wounding Cato. As a result, the two triumvirs succeeded in delaying the elections well past the end of the year. Their election was finally orchestrated by an *interrex* in the early months of 55, by which point they could rely on the electoral and physical clout of Caesar's veterans, recently returned to Rome, to carry the vote.

⁶⁸ Chirila 1983; Caramessini 1984.

⁶⁹ *De vir. ill.* 82.3–4.

⁷⁰ *Cic. Fam.* 3.4.2; *Att.* 6.1.

⁷¹ Cerutti 1993; on the budgetary position, see 82–3.

⁷² So Crawford 1974, 455; DeRose Evans 1992, 146.

⁷³ *App. B Civ.* 2.17; *Cass. Dio* 39.31; *Plut. Crass.* 15; *Pomp.* 51–2.

It is inconceivable to date Brutus' moneyership to 55 without drawing any connection between his selection of types and the major controversy of the moment. Oddly, Cerutti suggests that Brutus' silver issue – appealing to the goddess Liberty and linking her presence explicitly to the expulsion of tyrants and *the election of Rome's consuls* – makes no comment on contemporary political events.⁷⁴ Moreover, he argues that it cannot be read as an anti-Pompeian statement because Cicero and his brother Quintus emphasize the need to cultivate good relations with both Caesar and Pompeius in their letters.⁷⁵ By that logic, Brutus must have been working to ingratiate himself to Pompeius in 55 because that was what Cicero was doing. Brutus additionally “chose Pompey's side” in the civil war, so cannot – so Cerutti – have opposed his rising power five years earlier.⁷⁶

There are several problems with this reconstruction. First, as Brutus' own uncle and a close ally whom he had just spent two years assisting in Cyprus,⁷⁷ Cato is a much better guide to the young moneyer's ties of personal loyalty and obligation in 55 than the policy of Cicero and Quintus. Secondly, on Cerutti's line of thought it was not possible to oppose Pompeius' bid for power in 55 (which Cato did) and yet also fight against Caesar in the civil war (which Cato did). Thirdly, according to Cerutti, one had to either court Pompeius or Caesar in 55 (one did not), because those were the options Cicero communicated to his brother. Since we know that Brutus' uncle and ally Cato was working actively against both Caesar and Pompeius at this time, it follows that it was possible for Brutus to make anti-Pompeian statements and still oppose Caesar later. Fourthly, it is doubtful that Brutus was filled with friendly feeling for Pompeius just after the latter had attacked and wounded his uncle in a scheme to usurp the consular elections through violence. Finally, Cerutti's interpretation of Brutus' coinage as neutral toward Pompeius seems especially suspect when we recall that the *adulescentulus carnifex* had besieged Brutus' father at Mutina in early 77 and was widely held to be responsible for his murder after the fall of the city.⁷⁸

It is more reasonable to view Brutus' LIBERTAS issue in the light of Messalla's PATRE•COS type of 53: a public objection to the triumvirs' ambitions and an appeal for the governing class to take the necessary initiatives to resist their designs. Early in 55, the young moneyer saw the offices of consul still unfilled after a chaotic campaign, and the authors of that chaos – including his enemy Pompeius – being rewarded for their efforts. The Senate, long frustrated in their attempts to prevent it, had no choice but to permit the *interrex* to organize the triumvirs' election to the consulship. In response,

⁷⁴ Cerutti 1993, 80: “Even if Pompey were aspiring to monarchy in 54, there is no evidence to support the claim that Brutus' two coin types were intended to allude to anything more than his ancestors' historical achievements.”

⁷⁵ Cerutti 1993, 80.

⁷⁶ Cerutti 1993, 81.

⁷⁷ Plut. *Cat. Min.* 36; *Brut.* 4; Vell. Pat. 2.45.4.

⁷⁸ I am grateful to Roman Frolov for alerting me to this final point.

Brutus used his time at the mint to delegitimize this move. The bust of *Libertas*, accompanied by the reverse displaying Rome’s first consul, appeals to the viewer to protect the integrity of the consulship and so republican liberty by expelling tyranny from the *res publica*, just as the legendary L. Junius Brutus once did. The close link to the historical situation in early 55 is plain. A similar message is clearly present in a second issue struck at the moneyer’s instruction in 55, but here its intent is perhaps even more direct. While the obverse again displays the mythical Brutus, the reverse type commemorates C. Servilius Ahala, the famed tyrannicide who stabbed to death the populist Spurius Maelius in 439 to prevent his plot to make himself king.



Fig. 4.8. Silver *denarius* of M. Junius Brutus (RRC 433/2). 55 BCE (Cerutti 1993)

The young *monetalis* naturally had ambitions of his own within the state. A series of coin issues memorializing the historic services of his own *gens Iunia* and his mother’s *gens Servilia* must have been an advantage at the beginning of his public career in the city, as his election to the quaestorship by the People two years later suggests. But like Messalla, his time at the mint provided Brutus with an opportunity to “act up” in another sense. Though probably not yet thirty, Brutus and Messalla found a mechanism to give their *sententia* in public while the *curia* and *contio* were as yet inaccessible to them. They commissioned sharp rebukes of the political initiatives of their superiors – Messalla against the tribune Hirrus, Brutus against those responsible for permitting an *interregnum*, and both unequivocally against Pompeius – and in response to electoral crises appealed for the return of traditional *libertas* as encapsulated in the diarchy of fairly-elected consuls. Identifying their prompt must be speculative. It is reasonable to assume that Messalla’s father, eventually consul for the latter half of 53, will have discussed the potential benefit of a new *denarius* issue with his son; Brutus is more likely to have acted *sua sponte*, although his uncle Cato or his uncle’s ally Ahenobarbus may

well have impressed upon him the need to take a stand in public. In any case, both realized the distinctive potential offered by the moneyership to exert political influence and rally public opinion.

5. Dictatorship and Aftermath (45–43)

Ten years later, the once free *res publica* was accustoming itself to the reality of Julius Caesar's *de facto* monarchy. All its most important offices and magistracies had fallen under the control of the new regime. The Battle of Munda near Cordoba in March 45 sealed the fate of the Pompeian faction, and Caesar moved to consolidate his position and his public image as victor, liberator, and bringer of *pax* and *concordia*. This was always going to be a hard sell. His decision to return to Rome in triumph from his victory in Spain, celebrating the bloodshed of fellow-citizens, was a crass mistake that his heir Augustus would later resist repeating.⁷⁹

The moneyership, too, came gradually under the influence of Caesar's monarchy; it accordingly assumed even greater importance as an instrument of shaping public opinion. The number of *monetales* was increased from three to four; the choice of types in general clearly began to reflect the ideological claims of the regime rather than the political message of the individual moneyer; and we see a number of unusually old masters at the mint, some in their mid or late thirties, installed by Caesar in preparation for an imminent senior magistracy. The aftermath of Munda furthermore saw significant demand for new coin and a consequently marked increase in the activity of the *monetales*. A series of new temples voted in honor of Caesar at this point, all indicative of his propagandistic claims – to Concordia, Felicitas, and Libertas – all required finance. Veterans of the recent campaigns were waiting to be paid off. “Gifts” were also made to new adherents of the regime or former opponents.

Some of the most prolific moneyers of this period are also the most obscure, but the chronology of certain issues can be reconstructed with exciting precision. Three, all junior, represent three distinct stages in the Caesarian coinage of 45–43: the aftermath of Munda (Lollius Palicanus, RE 20); the grant of the dictatorship in perpetuity (L. Aemilius Buca, RE 37); and the immediate aftermath of Caesar's assassination (P. Sepullius Macer, RE 1). While it is already well-recognized that all three used their types to promote the ideology of the regime, I would also suggest that they struck in order to create consensus around *specific* events and specific proposals or initiatives. The *monetales* who struck under Caesar in this period also seem to me to show a marked preoccupation with the physical and architectural landscape of Rome as a reflection of the claims of the regime.

⁷⁹ See Cass. Dio 43.19 and 43.42, who records the popular displeasure at Caesar's perceived celebration of the death of fellow-citizens in Africa. For Augustus' rather more careful use of the triumph, see Lange 2016, esp. Chapters 6–7.



Fig. 4.9. *Quinarius* of Lollius Palicanus (RRC 473/3). 45 BCE

It is in the twin context of the victory at Munda and the slew of temples awarded in Caesar's honor that we must in my view interpret the first of Palicanus' four issues for 45. The obverse depicts a crowned bust of Felicitas with an accompanying legend: she personifies the good fortune or strategic "luck" of the ideal military commander blessed by the gods (both Sulla and Pompeius had emphasized their own *felicitas* by various means, including coinage).⁸⁰ The reverse is filled by an image of the goddess *Victoria*, riding in a *biga* drawn by galloping horses and holding the laurel wreath of the victor in her right hand. The moneyer, PALIKANI, is indicated below in exergue. The message of Caesar's divine favor leading to military victory is obvious; this was a "commemorative" issue, celebrating Caesar's recent success at the Battle of Munda.⁸¹ A chance note in Cassius Dio reveals that news of this victory did not reach Rome until the day before the festival of the Parilia, i.e. April 20th;⁸² if we accept 45 as the year of Palicanus' moneyership then the connection to Munda is clear and it follows that his *quinarius* was only minted after April.

Yet the allusion to Felicitas has a more specific significance in the aftermath of Munda than the mere fact of the victory, and relates to a particular initiative. In Caesar's triumph of the year prior, his chariot had broken down before the Temple of Felicitas once adorned in the previous century by the great conquerors of Spain and Greece, L. Licinius Lucullus and L. Mummius. The accident was apparently received as an inauspicious omen and a public embarrassment at the moment of his

⁸⁰ See, e.g., App. *B Civ.* 1.94; Cic. *Leg. Man.* 10, 28, 47; Plut. *Sull.* 6.5–7; RRC 381/1a, 426/1.

⁸¹ So Crawford 1974, 473.

⁸² Cass. Dio 43.42.3.

triumph: Caesar was not *felix* after all.⁸³ It therefore comes as no surprise that he ordered the dedication of a new, second Temple of Felicitas on a portion of the site of the former *curia Hostilia*:⁸⁴ a highly significant symbolic location at the center of Roman political life overlooking the *comitium*, the *rostra*, and the dictator’s new senate-house. Our source for these events is very imprecise about the chronology, but work appears to have been at least ongoing and perhaps even complete in 45 under the direction of Caesar’s *magister equitum*, Lepidus, whose own activities at the mint we have seen above.⁸⁵ It is hard to escape the conclusion that Caesar or his associates wished to correct the ill omen of 46 and emphasize his divine good fortune. I would suggest that Palicanus’ choice of type forms an important and coherent part of this consensus-building narrative. He selected images that would not only celebrate the dictator’s victory in general terms but also supported the decision to place a new temple to Felicitas in his honor on an historic (and contested) site.⁸⁶ It may even have coincided with the temple’s dedication.



Fig. 4.10. Silver *denarius* of Lollius Palicanus (RRC 473/1). 45 BCE

A further issue of Palicanus in this year seems to have had a similar intent, but with some important and surprising additions. The reverse type selected for his *denarius* displays the *rostra*, the

⁸³ Cass. Dio 43.21.1.

⁸⁴ Cass. Dio 44.5.2.

⁸⁵ Dio states (44.5.2) that Lepidus “brought it to completion as master of horse” (ὄν καὶ ὁ Λέπιδος ἱππαρχήσας ἐξεποίησεν). We may be inclined to speculate that the choice of an aorist rather than perfect participle suggests that he had not yet laid down his office as *magister equitum* and therefore that the temple was completed before his office lapsed along with the death of the dictator.

⁸⁶ On contested symbolic space in the Roman Forum, especially after Caesar’s death, see Sumi 2011; on the dynamics of public space in the Forum in general, see Russell 2016, Chapters 3–4.

speaker's platform at the heart of the Roman Forum, with the bench (*subsellium*) of a tribune of the plebs sitting on top of it. A diademed bust of the goddess of liberty, Libertas, fills the obverse, facing right with an accompanying legend. It is obvious enough that the interplay between the obverse and reverse types reflect the propaganda of Caesar's monarchy: in the wake of the slaughter of fellow citizens at Munda by a Roman dictator, it was clearly necessary to highlight that the *libera res publica* remained essentially unaltered.⁸⁷ In more general terms, the reverse type also surely reflects Caesar's much-vaunted claim to have marched against his own country in order to defend the rights of the tribunes of the plebs, whose vetoes of Senate procedure, offered in Caesar's interest, had been countermanded by his enemies in the fateful senate-meeting of January 7th, 49.⁸⁸

Yet previous studies have overlooked the connection between this design and *specific* initiatives and proposals which again concerned Caesar's planned monumental refashioning of the political heart of the city. Dio records that upon his return from victory in Spain in 45, the Senate passed a number of laudatory decrees, "and furthermore called him 'Liberator,' entering this also in their *acta* and voting for a Temple of Liberty at public expense."⁸⁹ It is hard to escape the conclusion that in a similar fashion to his *quinarius* issue displaying Felicitas, Palicanus' LIBERTAS issue here indicates his public support not only for the decree of the Senate acclaiming Caesar as "liberator" (ἐλευθερωτής) but also for that dedicating a new Temple to Liberty in celebration of his deeds. It is also possible that the reverse design commemorates the dictator's decision to relocate the *rostra*, although here the chronology and the intent are more difficult to discern.

It is important to recall that many of these measures in honor of Caesar may not have been sincere and will have been vexatious to various quarters. The theory of Cassius Dio is worth repeating: the more extravagant of the honors decreed for the dictator – some of which approximated the divine – were not truly intended to celebrate him but rather to bring him under suspicion as a vain and haughty tyrant and so precipitate his demise.⁹⁰ Such controversial and unprecedented measures as

⁸⁷ So Weinstock 1971, 142–3 for Caesar as "Liberator" after the Battle of Munda. Morstein-Marx 2004, 52–3 takes a dim view of this interpretation, arguing that the coin makes no explicit reference to Caesar. This is undeniably true, and (as I note below), a sign that in 45 the moneyership does not yet appear to have fallen under the total control of the regime; there remained some scope perhaps for Palicanus to use his office as he thought fit and to promote his own family achievements; yet it is also difficult not to envisage an at least indirect support of the regime being expressed here.

⁸⁸ See Caes. *BCiv.* 2–3 for this rather shady justification, rendered all the more so by the fact that Caesar must already have been marching south with his army by this point. I am again grateful to Roman Frolov for drawing this to my attention.

⁸⁹ Cass. Dio 43.44.1: καὶ προσέτι αὐτόν τε Ἐλευθερωτὴν καὶ ἐκάλουν καὶ ἐς τὰ γραμματεῖα ἀνέγραφον, καὶ νεῶν Ἐλευθερίας δημοσίᾳ ἐψηφίσαντο.

⁹⁰ Cass. Dio 44.1–8.

these will have required public statements of approbation in order to command acceptance: Palicanus' *denarius* seems to me one aspect of that undertaking of consensus-building communication.

The question remains of whose initiative prompted this junior and inexperienced *monetalis* to act. It is tempting to read his efforts as the work of a stooge, installed at the mint to do Caesar's bidding. However, Palicanus' choice of types suggests that he was striking independently – or, at the very least, that the regime did not yet exert direct artistic control over his designs. Palicanus' four coin issues in 45 never mention the dictator by name, and all proudly identify only the moneyer himself. More importantly, two of the four minted make quite explicit allusions to the recent achievements of the *gens Lollia*. Crawford reads the *subsellium* on the LIBERTATIS issue as a reference to the tribunate of the moneyer's father M. Lollius Palicanus, who in 71 agitated for the return of the office to its ancient powers. Such a popular strategy enabled the elder Palicanus to move quickly up the *cursus honorum*, attaining the praetorship a few years later;⁹¹ this too seems to be celebrated in another of the young moneyer's issues displaying HONOS and the curule chair of a praetor.⁹² We can imagine, therefore, that a pleasing design may well have been pushed beneath the dictator's gaze when complete for the sake of flattery; but the choice of types and the expression of support for the new regime that they entailed must be taken as Palicanus' own. His coins demonstrate that even after the final defeat of the Republicans at Munda and years into Caesar's dictatorship, the moneyership continued to offer young politicians a vehicle to court public opinion and to attach their own names to the illustrious initiatives of their superiors.

The case is rather different for the coinage produced by the four *monetales* in the last months of Caesar's monarchy. Here the subordination of the moneyership to the regime is patent and the independent initiative of its officials is harder to identify; probably it had fallen into abeyance. The ultimately fatal decision to grant Caesar the dictatorship for life – which to contemporaries will have seemed an impossible contradiction in terms, not merely controversial – in February 44 called for significant efforts from the mint. M. Aemilius Buca, a junior official otherwise unknown but for his defense of Scaurus in the latter's trial for provincial corruption (*res repetundae*) a decade prior,⁹³ was the most active of the four moneyers at this time.

⁹¹ Probably by 69; see Broughton 1952, 582.

⁹² RRC 473/2a.

⁹³ Asc. 28C.



Fig. 4.11. Silver *denarius* of M. Aemilius Buca (RRC 480/6). February 44 BCE

Like his colleagues M. Mettius (RRC 480/2a), C. Cossutius Meridianus (RRC 480/15), and P. Sepullius Macer (RRC 480/13), the *monetalis* fills the obverse type with a wreathed bust of Caesar, facing right and surrounded by the legend CAESAR DICT PERPETUO. The recurring obverse designs of the four moneyers are almost identical and suggest that they were working in concert as a college on specific instructions in February 44.

Nevertheless, the reverse type of Buca's *denarius* is exceptional for the Caesarian coinage of this period. Buca's colleagues generally chose Venus (and thus the dictator's allegedly divine heritage) as the reverse type for their issues in these months.⁹⁴ Yet this *monetalis* appears to have opted for a very different design, thereby interacting with specific political developments in addition to communicating the ideology of the regime on a more general level. The reverse type is divided into four registers by the cruciform arrangement of the *fasces* (the rods of a republican magistrate) lying horizontal and the *caduceus* (the staff of the god Mercury) standing upright. The former obviously symbolizes the positive power of the republican magistrate, but without its coercive potential, hence the absence of axes; Crawford is surely right to see an allusion to *libertas* here. The staff of Mercury, on the other hand, is typically an attribute of *felicitas*.

It is not a coincidence that these two divine attributes reflect precisely the divinities to which new temples had lately been decreed in Caesar's honor (Libertas shortly after April 45 and Felicitas some time before, as discussed above). Furthermore, the two clasped hands in the bottom-left register of the reverse of the *denarius* are a clear allusion to amity, friendly feeling, and reconciliation: in other words, *concordia*. The globe in the top-left register indicates that this *concordia* has been

⁹⁴ See Crawford 1974, 487–95.

secured through *pax*, achieved by means of Caesar's dominion over the entire world. This seems, yet again, to be the moneyer's attempt to promote or commemorate the very recent decision to dedicate another temple – this time, significantly, a Temple of Concordia – in the dictator's name. Therefore, as well as reflecting the ideology of the regime, Buca's activities at the mint appear to have intended to add to the groundswell of support for ongoing and controversial political decisions, including both the grant of the dictatorship in perpetuity and yet another temple decreed in acclamation of his rule.

After Caesar's assassination in March, the mint did not extricate itself from the grip of his faction. It continued in the role it had recently adopted and would continue to serve for the remainder of its history: an instrument for the organized promotion of the individual dynast in charge of affairs. Buca's colleague and fellow *monetalis*, P. Sepullius Macer, was the last of the four junior officials installed by the regime to strike in the year of Caesar's death.



Fig. 4.12. Silver *denarius* of P. Sepullius Macer (RRC 480/21). April 44 BCE



Fig. 4.13. Silver *denarius* of P. Sepullius Macer (RRC 480/22). April 44 BCE

We can comfortably date both types to the aftermath of Caesar's assassination. The obverse of the second issue, displaying a bust of the late dictator's ally and *magister equitum* M. Antonius, has the latter bearded and veiled as signs of mourning. The identical reverse images (struck with different dies and possibly the work of more than one artist) portray a leaping horseman holding a whip in his right hand and reins in the left. The figure is evidently a competitor rather than a soldier, dressed in civilian garb and accompanied by a laurel wreath which sits behind. If it is indeed correct that this image represents the games of the Parilia⁹⁵ – this seems both plausible and attractive, since these games marked the first anniversary of the news of the victory at Munda and were therefore closely connected to Caesar's memory and achievements – then these issues must have been produced in or after late April 44.

From the most prosaic point of view, it is clear enough that the *monetalis* wished some of the magnificence of the public games to rub off onto his own name: the legend P•SEPULLIUS MACER envelops the scene of the galloping competitor (*desultor*). In a similar fashion to T. Didius over half a century earlier⁹⁶ – and indeed to Brocchus in the late 60s – the moneyer perhaps realized that one could indirectly claim the popular credit for “bread and circuses” by simple association even where one had no initiative to furnish them. “Acting up” was still possible, even now.

Yet most important of all from the point of view of political initiative is the obverse type of the first of these *denarii*. It is filled by a tetrastyle temple containing a globe in the pediment and surrounded by the legend CLEMENTIAE CAESARIS. Just as the other Caesarian moneyers we have seen above, Sepullius Macer chose to allude to the program of temple-building which accompanied the last months of Caesar's dictatorship – in this case to the Temple of Clemency probably awarded in the early months of 44.⁹⁷ The shrines to Felicitas, Libertas, and Concordia decreed in his honor throughout 45–44 were central expressions of the ideology of the regime which the *monetales* were instructed to commemorate. But unlike those of his colleagues above, Sepullius Macer's *denarius* appeared at a tempestuous and fractious political flashpoint. By April 44 the controlling hand of the dictator had passed away. Mere weeks earlier the leaders of the Caesarian and tyrannicide factions had been occupying different portions of the Roman Forum, hurtling once again toward armed conflict. An uneasy truce had just been brokered by Antonius at the urging of Cicero and others, inevitably short-lived.

Hence, the issues of Sepullius Macer – who seems to have been working under Antonius' influence or even his instructions – were far from anodyne. Their appeal to Caesar's virtues

⁹⁵ Crawford 1974, 495.

⁹⁶ RRC 294/1.

⁹⁷ App. *B Civ.* 2.443; Cass. Dio 44.6.4; Plut. *Caes.* 57.

(especially his famed *clementia*) and the pitiable grief, partially confected, of his friend Antonius, was not neutral; it served to keep alive the popular anger at the deeds of the tyrannicides. In this respect, the moneyer's strategy clearly reflects the delicate balancing-act of Antonius' own policy in the weeks following Caesar's assassination: that is, to *seem* to be de-escalating the crisis and mediating between the two sides, while really working to enflame popular anger and stoke up the maximum possible division in his own interest. Perhaps Antonius had persuaded the moneyer that an issue of this kind would be persuasive and desirable; we will sadly never know whether he made promises of reciprocal favors and advancement to come further down the line. In any case, this was high politics at work in all its usual duplicity – and young officials, too, had their part to play.

6. Propaganda Now and Then

It is a mark of the importance of the moneyership as a channel of public communication that Caesar, Antonius, and all the dynasts to follow in their wake chose to bring it under their influence. By the mid 40s and the end of the free Republic, the *triumviri monetales* had ceased to exert an independent initiative of their own. That shift is most palpable of all in the changing design of obverse types in 44, which came to replace familiar deities we have seen here – Roma, Libertas, Ceres, Concordia – with the portrait of the man of the moment. It is symptomatic of the decline that even the “liberator” Brutus, whose famous EID•MAR issue celebrating Caesar's assassination was known even to ancient historiographers (RRC 508/1), had his own likeness struck onto the issues produced by the moving mint which followed his army. So stark a contrast with his LIBERTAS coinage of the 50s demonstrates how rapidly the march toward autocracy had advanced. The Rubicon had indeed been crossed; it was not possible to turn back.

However, we have seen here that this was a very recent development. Though young and inexperienced, the *monetales* of the late Republic found in their office a distinctive route to engage in public life and to exert political influence under their own names right up to the end of the Republic. The highly competitive political culture of the 60s and 50s saw multiple controversies which demanded the leadership of Rome's most senior and experienced statesmen. Economic crisis, spiraling debt, and disputes over access to land and food presented an opportunity for populists and a menace for conservatives. The Catilinarian “conspiracy” required quick action on the part of the consuls, concrete proposals from the *designati*, and significant efforts of consensus-building after the Senate had made its controversial decision on the fate of those implicated. The elections for 55 collapsed into chaos and violence, ending with an *interregnum* and the consulship of Pompeius and Crassus, who proceeded to divide up the empire with their fellow-dynast Caesar. A repeat performance two years later narrowly avoided the inauguration of a dictator, but ended with a proposal scarcely less controversial: the inauguration of the first sole consul in Rome's history. This

was high politics – but young politicians too had their place, and we have seen that the young *triumviri monetales* were by no means silent on these events.

I do not wish to suggest that the masters of the mint used their position to *instigate* some new initiative in response to such controversies, nor that they intended their types to articulate or bring about some specific proposal of their own. That would be to read too much into the evidence. Instead, their public function was basically reactive. The moneyers of 62, Lepidus and Libo, clearly seem to me to have issued a direct and unambiguous statement of support for the divisive and controversial initiatives of the most senior magistrates with respect to Catiline and his alleged co-conspirators in the recent winter. The previous year, Brocchus' *denarius* marked him out as a champion of agrarian reform and/or frumentary legislation, so endorsing the initiative of Caesar and Rullus. In the electoral crises of the 50s, both Brutus and Messalla selected types that could only be interpreted as opposition to the autocratic designs of the Triumvirate and especially those of Pompeius, as is already well recognized; yet they also had *specific proposals* in mind for censure, in particular the proposed dictatorship and possibly the sole consulship also. Even under Caesar's rule, the *monetales* did not abandon what we may now conclude was their common tendency to respond to specific ongoing events in public life: all three of those we have discussed here vigorously promoted the program of temple-building that accompanied the most extreme period of Caesar's autocracy and sought (or more likely were asked) to create consensus around such excessive and controversial honors.

This latter fact points to another important function of the moneyership which has not been hitherto appreciated: namely, the role of the mint in building support for an initiative or proposal *after* the event, *viz.* after its ratification or successful passage. Hence, *monetales* could not only add to the groundswell of public support for a specific proposal already on the table, but also maintain its momentum and ensure its continuing acceptance in the aftermath. If we accept a consensus-led model of Roman republican political culture, then the commemoration of initiatives after the event – partly through coinage – appears just as important an aspect of consensus-building as the debates that led to them, and an essential part of their “after-care.” The coins struck after the state-sanctioned murder of the Catilinarian conspirators in January 62, after the Battle of Munda, and after the award or dedication of Caesar's temples to Felicitas, Libertas, Concordia, and Clementia are all examples of this tendency of *post factum* consensus-building.

It is unfortunate that perhaps the most exciting aspect of the moneyership in the late Republic happens to be the least visible to us, and this aspect again concerns the question of initiative. It is this: who prompted these young officials to act in the way they did? What was the nature of the negotiations and deals conducted behind the scenes? Any answer can only be speculative. Our sources make almost no mention of *monetales* in general. It is worth returning to the recent example provided

by Harriet Flower of Servilia's *consilium*.⁹⁸ then as now, a vast proportion of real politics happened behind closed doors. It is quite obvious that by 44 the *monetales* were not acting on their own initiative and had received instructions of considerable specificity. But the case is less clear for the 60s and 50s. It is entirely possible that all of the moneyers discussed here were privately persuaded by their elders and betters that an issue "commemorating" their actions in office would be an astute move.

However, it is important to remember that these individuals were themselves young and ambitious members of the elite – in some cases, distinguished members of the *nobilitas* – who were preparing themselves for their next election. Brutus and Lepidus, both *nobiles*, went on quickly to achieve significant public careers; Messalla attained the suffect consulship in 32; Libo may have been consul around the same time, and a praetor by 50; and even Lollius Palicanus, in office under the yoke of Caesar, was governor of Crete and Cyrene in the mid-30s and the scion of a proud tribunician heritage. All, as we have seen, began their urban careers at the mint and clearly used their coinage to promote themselves and the distinction of their families at the same time as responding to political developments on the ground.

In contrast, *all four* moneyers of 44 – Mettius, Sepullius Macer, Aemilius Buca, and Cossutius Maridianus – went on to achieve nothing. They disappear from the record after 44 and are not further attested in the *cursus honorum*. Since these moneyers were, so far as we can see, *installed* in the mint and instructed to issue propaganda for the regime, it is tempting to conclude that their time at the mint was a dead end. Unlike their predecessors, they were not afforded the opportunity to make use of their office to introduce themselves to the People, to weigh in on the major issues of the day, and to place themselves at the center of events. Consequently, the *populus Romanus* did not reward them with further office. The future triumvirs apparently did not reward them either. This casts into higher relief the distinctive potential offered by the mint to demonstrate statesmanship and court public opinion, if used wisely by a young and ambitious politician.

It is therefore more tempting to imagine that the moneyers of the 60s and 50s had their own strategies in mind, and exploited their office as a means to apprehend their own political agency. These were indeed political actors in their own right with their own ambitions and allegiances. Lepidus made clear his alliance with Cicero and Silanus in 62; Libo wisely perceived that this was a winning ticket, at least for the time being. Brutus threw his support behind Cato and the conservatives, and marked himself out before the People as a defender of *libertas*. Messalla was eager to be seen both as an opponent of Pompeius' tyranny and, at the same time, the son of a consul – eminently electable. Lollius Palicanus was one of the more independent-minded of Caesar's moneyers with a proud tribunician heritage; Brocchus turned out to be a nonentity. All were "acting up" in the

⁹⁸ See Flower 2018.

competitive world of the republican aristocracy and distinguishing themselves as prominent voices in the *res publica*. In this sense, high politics in the last decades of the Roman Republic appears less the business of middle-aged men, and more a dynamic of intergenerational exchange – of competition here, collaboration there – between senior and junior politicians, wrongly ignored by the ancient historians. The coinage tells a compelling story about the agency and leadership sought by Rome’s apprentice politicians. It must have been an exciting, vital, and uncertain time to be young.

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