

Part Two

(Im)materialities: Engaging with Crisis

Displays of Power: Imperial Ideology on the Coinage of Galba during the Crisis of 68/69 A.D.

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The death of Nero in 68 A.D. plunged the Roman Empire into a state of total crisis. In the last years of his reign, the unpopular Nero already faced major uprisings in Gaul and Rome.¹ Once he was declared a public enemy by the senate, he committed suicide. Plutarch compares the perilous situation following Nero's death, which marked the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, to the revolt of the Titans in Greek mythology. The empire, he writes, was "torn into many fragments, and again in many places collapsing upon itself" because "the house of the Caesars ... received four emperors, the soldiery ushering one in and another out, as in play."² This is hardly an exaggeration: in just one year and 195 days, four emperors donned the purple: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian.

69 A.D. was a year of great upheaval and civil strife. This year was a period of transition from the Julio-Claudian dynasty to the Flavian dynasty with a heavy focus on the unprecedented role of martial imperative in the formation of imperial power. Each emperor had to seek different ways to mobilize support for their cause, not in the least because their claims were almost always attested by other opportunistic senators and generals.

In recent decades, many monographs have studied the events of 68-69 A.D. Among the most influential are *The Year of the Four Emperors* by Kenneth Wellesley and the nearly synonymous *69 A.D.: The Year of the Four Emperors* by Gwyn Morgan.³ Most

¹ Suet. *Ner.* 49.

² Plut. *Vit. Galb.* 1.

³ Wellesley, *The Year of the Four Emperors*.

research into this period, including that of Wellesley and Morgan, fails to consider numismatic evidence. This research misses an important opportunity, as ancient coins are much more than simple monetary instruments. Above all, they are tools of political communication. Studying the numismatic sources from 68-69 A.D. offers vital insight into how emperors responded to crisis. Only in the last decades of the 20th century have scholars concluded that imagery on Roman coins communicated specific political messages to explicitly delineated audiences.⁴ In 1988, Niels Hannestad first considered Roman coins as articles of propaganda. Coins, he argues, are the best sources available for studying Roman political history because although “the information they provide is perhaps distorted, ... they are authoritative in that they represent the officially formulated views of the ruling powers.”⁵ Likewise, Reinhard Wolters argues in a 1999 study that the Romans continuously changed their coin designs because these images communicated specific messages.⁶ In more recent scholarship, Erika Manders argues that any media form can contain visual compositions representing imperial ideology. According to Manders, the ideological dimension of ancient coinage is best exemplified

by the fact that emperors, the short-lived ones included, issued coin types immediately after their accession, that even usurpers who claimed the imperial throne for a short time minted their own coins and that the minting of coins by other persons than the emperor was considered a challenge to imperial power.⁷

In this article, I aim to fill a lacuna in numismatic research of political ideology. I seek to address how Roman emperors used coinage as a medium for political ideology and how this coinage allowed emperors and their imperial administrative bodies to advance claims to the imperial throne. This will be done through an extensive study of imperial coinage minted during the reign of

⁴ Kemmers, *The Functions and Use of Roman Coinage*, 16.

⁵ Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy*, 11.

⁶ Wolters, *Nummi Signati*, 256.

⁷ Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, 29.

Servius Sulpicius Galba, who ruled over the Roman Empire from June 68 A.D. to January 69 A.D. The reasoning for studying coinage minted under Galba is threefold: first, such research might provide new insights into how emperors utilized coinage to negotiate times of crisis; second, the reign of Galba signaled the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which had ruled over the Roman Empire for 95 years. Galba, who had no lineage with the Julio-Claudians, had to provide some sort of legitimation for his usurpation. Justifications for Galba's claims to legitimacy might be found in the numismatic evidence; third, the imperial coinage of Galba has not been extensively studied in such a fashion. For this reason, a better understanding of his coin-types might provide new insights into coinage as a medium for political communication.

The imperial coinage of Galba comprises 521 coin-types, which were minted at the imperial mints of Taracco, Vindobona, Narbo, Lugdunum, Rome, and Carthage. The primary source evidence studied in this article appears in the second edition of the *Roman Imperial Coinage, vol. I*-catalogue (henceforth *RIC*). All references in this article to the coinage of Galba and his predecessors will therefore be taken from this catalog. One series mentioned in the *RIC* deserves extra clarification: 143 coin-types do not refer to any emperor and date from between Vindex's revolt and the Nero's death. These coins have strong correlations with some coin-types minted under Galba but were most probably minted in anticipation of the excommunication of Nero, prior to the official ratification of Galba as emperor. This series is referred to in this article as the "Civil Wars"-series.⁸

This article will study the coinage of Galba by first providing an overview of the factors that led to Galba's rule and how this rule eventually collapsed. Such an overview is necessary to place the coin-types of Galba in the context of his reign. After this overview, I will discuss Roman coinage as vehicles for imperial ideology. This discussion will substantiate the claim that the Roman administration used coinage to convey political messages. I will also discuss the government body was responsible for the minting process. Subsequently, I will analyze Galba's coin-types by examining both

⁸ Sutherland and Carson, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, 197.

sides of his coinage, with an emphasis on the reverse (the back face of the coin). I will argue that Galba wished to convey three distinct images through the inscriptions and images on the reverse side of his coinage: that of the rebellion of Galba that led to the downfall of Nero, that of the subsequent era of internal peace, and that of Galba's competence and magnanimity.

Galba's revolt, reign, and downfall

In 68 A.D., Vindex, the governor of Gaul, launched a revolt against the corrupt government of emperor Nero. Instead of proclaiming himself as ruler, Vindex reached out to Servius Sulpicius Galba, the governor of Hispania, to lead the revolt. Galba accepted his request and was hailed emperor in Nova Carthago around April 68. He sent messages to the inhabitants and governors of neighboring provinces asking them to support his claim, while Nero hastily tried to raise armies to defend Italy. It was during this time that the praetorian guard chose to abandon Nero; shortly after, the senate proclaimed him an enemy of the state. Upon learning this, Nero lost all hope and committed suicide on the 9th of June 68.

Despite Nero's suicide, the rebellion did not run as smoothly as Vindex had hoped. Forces that remained loyal to Nero's rule defeated Vindex near Vesontio. After this defeat, Vindex was either killed or committed suicide. Upon hearing the news of Vindex's death, Galba quickly retreated to the Spanish town of Clunia. He came out of hiding only after learning that, after Nero had died, he himself had been ratified by the senate as the new Roman emperor. Upon receiving this news, Galba triumphantly marched on Rome.

Imposing heavy taxes and financial sanctions, Galba quickly made himself unpopular with the Roman armies, praetorian guard, and aristocracy. According to Cassius Dio, he "collected money insatiably, since he required much, and spent of it very little."⁹ Galba tasked himself with replenishing the state treasury, emptied by the free-spending Nero, and this job won him few friends. Cassius Dio tells us that Galba refused to reward the praetorian guard with the bonuses that were promised in exchange for their support, as "I

⁹ Cass. Dio, 64.2.

[Galba] am accustomed to levy soldiers, not to buy them.”¹⁰ Galba also refused to reward the legions of Upper Germany, retaliating because they had previously fought, on Nero’s orders, against the armies of Vindex.¹¹ Concerning the aristocracy, evidence suggests that Galba only granted offices to those who did not seek it, while simultaneously revoking grants made under Nero.¹² In January 69 A.D., the legions across the Rhine border mutinied, rallying under the banner of Vitellius, governor of Germania Inferior and future emperor. After slighting his confidante Marcus Salvius Otho by appointing someone else as his successor, Otho, feeling betrayed, secured the support of the praetorian guard for a claim to the throne, leading a plot against Galba which resulted in his assassination on January 15th, 69 A.D.¹³

Roman coinage as vehicles of Imperial ideology

Broadly speaking, Roman imperial coinage served two purposes. First, coins were monetary units functioning as means of exchange. Above all else, they served as economic instruments. Their second function, however, was as vehicles for the distribution of images and messages.¹⁴ On the one hand, imprinted images lent coins credibility. These images helped make coins appear to their users as valid instruments of monetary exchange in the Roman empire. On the other hand, the images and inscriptions on the coins contained informational that served purposes other than facilitating economic exchange. I have already briefly noted above how different historians tended to approach coinage in light of these purposes. Here I will elaborate on these approaches.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill proposes four functions of imperial coinage. First, he argues that obverse and reverse images convey imperial authority not only by signifying the emperor as the head of state, but also by implying his authority through a wide variety of images that portray his grandeur, his qualities, and his virtues. Second, he argues that both sides of the coin are value-laden: the

¹⁰ *Id.*, 64.3.

¹¹ Suet. *Galb.* 16.2.

¹² *Id.*, 15.1

¹³ Morgan, *69 A.D.*, 31-56.

¹⁴ Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, 29.

emperor and any references made to him serve to strengthen the narrative of the emperor as the focal point of the Roman empire and to emphasize that he is to be worshipped. Third, the coin is persuasive. “It is the coin that speaks, not the emperor,” Wallace-Hadrill writes. By this, Wallace-Hadrill means to draw attention to the fact that the coin functions as an independent agent that appeals to an ideology outside of itself. When the coinage honors the emperor, it does so as a seemingly autonomous institution and persuades the user to grant the emperor the same honor. Finally, as I have briefly noted above, the coin derives its meaning from its economic value, but this economic value, in turn, is the result of its non-economic image.¹⁵

As Wallace-Hadrill emphasizes, coinage was much more than a mere instrument of exchange. Coinage had an undeniable economic function, but it also disseminated imperial messages. These messages were not simply depictions of the emperor and the imperial family. A wide variety of images, including of deities and personified virtues, functioned as symbols of imperial ideology.¹⁶ As Olivier Hekster argues, this distribution of messages might parallel the modern marketing strategies of consumer product brands such as Coca-Cola and Levi’s: both the coins and modern brands aim “to create a good name for themselves, for now and posterity, in an empire where most of the inhabitants would never physically see their ruler.”¹⁷ This kind of branding might be interpreted positively or negatively, a variability described in a passage of Arrian:

But I mean the things which belong to him as a man, the marks (stamps) in his mind with which he came into the world, such as we seek also on coins, and if we find them, we approve of the coins, and if we do not find the marks, we reject them. What is the stamp on this Sestertius? The stamp of Trajan. Present it. It is the stamp of Nero. Throw it away.¹⁸

¹⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, “Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus,” 69-70.

¹⁶ Norena, “The Communication of the Emperor’s Virtues,” 154.

¹⁷ Hekster, “Coins and Messages: Audience Targeting on Coins of Different Denominations?,” 24.

¹⁸ Arr. *Epict. diss.* 4.5.9-10.

According to Arrian, a coin's user would attach positive and negative attitudes towards the coin independent of its monetary value. It is the emperor's face — the “branding,” to use Hekster's terminology — that determines whether or not the coinage is desirable.

The question arises of who was responsible for determining the images which appeared on coin-types. Was the emperor himself concerned with the imagery and inscriptions on the coinage, or was an imperial administrative body in control of the imperial mints? This question has puzzled many modern scholars for years. While several administrators, such as the *triumviri monetales* (monetal supervisors), the *a rationibus* (secretary of finance), or the *procurator monetae* (mint director), were tasked with at least one part of the minting process, their exact responsibilities are not recorded in the ancient sources.¹⁹ As a result, we do not know the extent of their artistic constraints, or whether these constraints left space for the emperor to influence the design process. The coins are the only sources that leave room for interpretation.

Earlier numismatists such as Buttrey and Levick have argued that the emperor in all probability did not play any part in the design process, and that if he did, his preferences would have played an insignificant role. According to these numismatists, the mint-masters decided what was to be placed on the coinage.²⁰ Later numismatists have left some more room for imperial interference. Wolters, among others, argues that the emperor intervened in the work of the minters when it did not correspond with his wishes. Under normal circumstances, the plans for coin designs would have been brought to him for review and were either circulated or dismissed according to his decisions.²¹ By now, however, it is generally accepted that the question of the emperor's role in the design process cannot be conclusively answered. Regardless of what this role may have been, in all cases it was the imperial court, which centered around the emperor, that issued orders for coin designs, sometimes also actively intervening in the minting process. As Hekster put it, “it seems inevitable that these decisions originated at the top and that coins,

¹⁹ Claes, “A Note on the Coin Type Selection by the *a rationibus*,” 163-164.

²⁰ Buttrey, “Vespasian as Moneyer,” 108-109; Levick, “Propaganda and the Imperial Coinage,” 107.

²¹ Wolters, “Die Geschwindigkeit der Zeit,” 189.

thus, propagated the ideological claims of the ruling regime.”²² Howgego shares Hekster’s view, arguing that regardless of who made the final decision, the coins ultimately showcased how the emperor wished to be seen – or at least, how his close associates thought he wished to be seen.²³ Significantly, while in theory the emperor did not actively make design choices for every coin-type, in practice he was held accountable for all of them. It was not only *his* coinage with *his* portraiture that circulated in the empire; the coin-types reflected *his* ideologies and *his* attitudes.²⁴ “Galba’s” coinage, then, does not necessarily refer to pieces that he personally admitted for circulation, but rather to coins that were circulated in his name which therefore reflect his official imperial authority.²⁵

The Coinage of Galba

I have demonstrated above that Roman coins are not mere monetary units, but moreover can be understood as vehicles of imperial ideology. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that even if the emperor himself may not have been actively involved in the design decisions, the coin-types still convey his imperial messages. The designs were not randomly chosen but rather reflected particular ideologies that an emperor, or at least his administration, would have wanted to disseminate. Let us now consider the question of what ideology the coinage of Galba reflects. First, I will discuss the obverse’s of Galba’s coin-types. After this, I will study the relevant reverse coin-types, observing on them three distinct themes that Galba wished to convey.

The obverse of Galba’s coinage

In almost all instances, the obverses show either the head or the bust of the emperor. In just a handful of cases, they depict Galba riding a horse.²⁶ The reason for the representation of Galba on horseback is that the mints did not have an official portrait of the emperor

²² Hekster, “The Roman Army and Propaganda,” 349.

²³ Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins*, 70.

²⁴ Ellithorpe, “Circulating Imperial Ideology,” 66.

²⁵ Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, 32.

²⁶ *RICI*. Galba, 1-3 (Taracco), 85-94 (Vindobona).

readily available.²⁷ While it might be tempting to assume that the horseback depiction of Galba is an explicit reference to his military career, it should not be read in this way. Rather, it is best understood as a temporary substitute for the head of the emperor that otherwise decorated Roman coinage.

The inscriptions on the obverse list the different honorary and political offices that Galba held. In doing so, the coinage legitimizes Galba's position as head of the state and aligns him with his predecessors. They refer to his declaration as *imperator* (IMP), his acceptance of the *tribunicia potestas* (TR P), his role as *pontifex maximus* (PONT MAX), and his honorary titles *Caesar* (CAESAR) and *Augustus* (AVGVSTVS). These titles are by no means merely honorary in nature; they also have political significance. The *tribunicia potestas* were a series of privileges that in Republican times were only reserved for the *tribuni plebis*, while the *pontifex maximus* was the religious head of state. The title *imperator* referred to the emperor's *imperium*. Augustus was the first emperor to hold held these titles, and it became a custom for his successors to be given similar honors.

The titles *Caesar* and *Augustus* explicitly align Galba with his Julio-Claudian predecessors (see figure 1). All emperors before Galba received and accepted these titles based on their familial ties to Julius Caesar or the emperor Augustus. Suetonius tells us that upon hearing of Nero's death, Galba assumed the title Caesar.²⁸ It is probably around the same time that Galba also adopted the title Augustus. Hekster argues that the appropriation of the hereditary titles can be understood as an attempt by Galba to align himself with the *domus augusta*, thereby solidifying his legitimate claim to the imperial throne.²⁹ Of course, the employment of *Caesar* and *Augustus* might also signal a broader transformation of hereditary titles into non-hereditary imperial designations. This view, however, is untenable in light of the fact that emperor Vitellius only employed the title "imperator." If "Caesar" and "Augustus" were simply imperial designations, Vitellius would certainly have used them. While Galba's use of the titles *Caesar* and *Augustus* does not

²⁷ Sutherland and Carson, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, 218.

²⁸ Suet. *Galb.* 11.1.

²⁹ Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*, 53.

preclude the view that for him these designations referred generally to his supreme position at the head of the Roman Empire, it does show that Galba aligned himself specifically with the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Let us now turn to the reverse of the coinage of Galba and consider the first of the themes that appear here: Galba's rebellion against the reign of Nero.

The first reverse theme: Galba's rebellion

Images on the reverse of the coinage allude in several ways to the rebellion that Galba and Vindex led against Nero. One way they do this is by depicting personifications of Hispania and Gallia and referencing the city of Clunia. These depictions refer to the region where Galba accumulated the base of power that facilitated his rise to emperor, serving as reminders of how and by whom the tyrannical Nero was overthrown. These images also depict Mars Victor, who symbolizes the successful conclusion of the civil war and the restoration of order within the Roman empire.

Hispania is invoked both through personification, appearing as a female bust or figure, and through the legend **HISPANIA**.³⁰ Likewise, the province of Gallia, the original location of Vindex's revolt, is personified and appears as a female bust or figure accompanied by the inscriptions **GALLIA** or **IMP**.³¹ The two female figures appear on particular coins either by themselves or together jointly clasping hands. When they appear together, they are supplemented by the legend **GALLIA HISPANIA** (see figure 2).³² Four other coin-types depict three female busts with the inscription **TRES GALLIAE** (see figure 3).³³ This immediately recalls the opening phrase of *De Bello Gallico* of Julius Caesar: "Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres."³⁴ But rather than referring to the war of Caesar in Gaul, these coin-types allude to the union of the region's three parts under Galba's rule.

³⁰ *RICI*, Galba 1-3, 50 (Taracco), 86 (Vindobona), 144, 155, 190-193, 225-226 (Rome), 515, 516-518 (Carthago).

³¹ *RICI*, Galba 85 (Vindobona), 145, 156, 227-228 (Rome).

³² *RICI*, Galba 15-18 (Taracco), 109 (Narbo), 154 (Rome).

³³ *RICI*, Galba 89-92 (Vindobona).

³⁴ Caes. *B Gall.* 1.1.1: "All Gaul is divided into three parts."

The coinage pays homage to important geographical locations in the revolution that overthrew Nero's reign and led to Galba becoming emperor. Furthermore, while the coinage makes no direct mention of Vindex, because Vindex was of Gallic descent one could suggest that the invocation of Gallia on the coinage alludes to him. The effigy of Gallia and Hispania clasping hands is a particularly strong image. It represents the harmony of the two provinces, projecting an appearance of cooperation between Galba and Vindex, and their legions. This was not the first instance that such harmony had been represented on coinage, as already in the Civil Wars-series Gallia and Hispania were depicted together on the reverse of one coin-type. Tellingly, the inscription on these coin-types reads *CONCORDIA HISPANIARVM ET GALIARVM* (Harmony of Hispania and Gallia).³⁵ Similarly, the reverse inscription on five coin-types reads *HISPANIA CLVNIA SVL S C* (see figure 4).³⁶ This inscription refers to Clunia Sulpicia, the city in northern Hispania to which Galba retreated when he learned of the defeat and death of Vindex. It was while contemplating suicide there that Galba heard of Nero's death and his own proclamation as new emperor by the senate. Why would the coin-type so explicitly refer to Galba's place of refuge and recall the death of his ally? It could be argued that Galba did not associate Clunia with those unhappy events. Considering that Clunia was the location where he learned of his elevation to the principate, Galba may have wished to honor the city as the birthplace of his reign. This theory is strengthened by the fact that after becoming emperor, Galba elevated Clunia to the rank of *colonia*.³⁷ Furthermore, Galba held an additional connection with Clunia: it was here, or so Suetonius tells us, that Galba received favorable auspices from a priest of Jupiter and was encouraged by a young girl to take on the role of emperor.³⁸ The invocation of Clunia on his coinage, therefore, not only refers to Galba's revolt but might also serve to reinforce the myths around his persona as emperor.

³⁵ *RICI*, Civil Wars, 15 (uncertain mint).

³⁶ *RICI*, Galba 469-473 (Rome).

³⁷ Haley, "Clunia, Galba and the Events of 68-69 A.D.," 159-160.

³⁸ Suet. *Galba* 9.2.



Figure 1: Obverse of Galba with imperial titelature. *RIC* I. Galba 55 (De Nederlandsche Bank).



Figure 2: Reverse of Gallia and Hispania. *RIC*. Galba 18 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18227154).



Figure 3: Reverse of Tres Galliae. *RIC*. Galba 92 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18215155).



Figure 4: Reverse showing Clunia. *RIC*. Galba 473 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18215158).



Figure 5: Reverse depicting Libertas with inscription LIBERTAS PVBLICA. *RIC*. Galba 328 (De Nederlandsche Bank).



Figure 6: Reverse depicting Pax. *RIC*. Galba 277 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18227781).



Figure 7: Reverse depicting arch surmounted by two equestrian statues, three captives with officer; inscription reads QVADRAGENS REMISSAE. *RIC*. Galba 80 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18215166).



Figure 8: Reverse depicting Livia; inscription reads DIVA AVGVSTA. *RIC*. Galba 55 (De Nederlandsche Bank).



Figure 9: Reverse showing adlocutio of Galba. *RIC*. Galba 463 (De Nederlandsche Bank).

Finally, the reverse of two coin-types depicts Mars, the god of war, accompanied by the inscription *MARS VICTOR S C*.³⁹ While both figures and busts of Mars had previously appeared on the coinage of Augustus and of the Civil-Wars series, it is novel to see such depictions together with the epithet “the victorious.” This pairing suggests that all parties who were involved in the tumult and civil strife of 68 A.D. felt the war had been concluded and that, with Galba as emperor, order in the empire was restored.

The second reverse theme: a new era of internal peace

The second theme that Galba’s reverse coinage addresses is peace. The coinage represents Galba’s reign as the peaceful conclusion to a period of turbulent upheaval. This is done through depictions of a wide array of deities and virtues: *Libertas*, *Salus*, *Securitas*, *Roma*, *Victoria*, and *Pax*. All convey the message that Galba’s rule must be understood as the antithesis of what had been a state of crisis: the conclusion of a period of civil strife and the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity.

Libertas is always accompanied by the legend *LIBERTAS RESTIVTA* or *LIBERTAS PVBLICA* (see figure 5). Coinage with the former inscription carries images of a female figure,⁴⁰ a standing *Libertas*,⁴¹ and Galba.⁴² The symbolism of this coin-series is ambiguous: on the one hand, the inscription and the depiction of *Libertas* clearly refer to the primary ideological justification for Galba’s revolt: to free Rome from the yoke of Nero’s tyrannical reign. This aim can be traced back to the Civil Wars-series, where the inscription *LIBERTAS RESTITVTA* is found.⁴³ On the other hand, the reverses that depict Galba show the emperor lifting up a kneeling *Libertas*. The submissive posture of *Libertas* — only able to stand upright with the assent and aid of the emperor — has been read to mark a transition from principate to outright autocracy.⁴⁴

Coinage with the inscription *LIBERTAS PVBLICA* is

³⁹ *RICI*, Galba 481-482 (Rome).

⁴⁰ *RICI*, Galba 8-9 (Taracco).

⁴¹ *RICI*, Galba 37-39 (Taracco).

⁴² *RICI*, Galba 479-480 (Rome).

⁴³ *RICI*, Civil Wars 24-27, 132-133 (uncertain mint).

⁴⁴ Kraay, *The Aes Coinage of Galba*, 42.

likewise attended by images of a female figure⁴⁵ or Libertas.⁴⁶ The inscription and the image of Libertas on this coinage indicate a similar communicative intention as that of the RESTITVTA-series: to proclaim a new freedom. But unlike in the RESTITVTA-series, freedom here means “freedom of the people.”⁴⁷ The coinage is reminiscent of another series of coin-types: those that depict a female figure, with the inscription SALVS GEN HVMANI: “safety for the human race.”⁴⁸ While the SALVS-types “ask” for the welfare of the people, the LIBERTAS- category proclaims it.

These are not the only of Galba’s coin-types to express a desire for the welfare of the Roman people. Securitas, the deity for security and stability, is attested on three coin-types.⁴⁹ That the inscription SECVRITAS ROMANI appears on these coin-types indicates that the deity is invoked to convey a desire that the Roman people enjoy security and stability. While Securitas is attested on the coinage of Caligula and Nero, it is only during the Civil Wars-series that the inscription is related to the welfare of the Roman people. Here, the inscription reads SECVRITAS P R.⁵⁰ Other coinage in this series commemorates the revival of Rome through a series of closely related references. This is mainly done through depictions of the deity Roma, who is personified as a helmeted woman, at times in a military outfit, at times draped. Some of the coins depicting Roma have inscriptions reading either ROMA RENASCENS or ROMA VICTRIX. The former inscription emphasizes the same sentiment as invoked by the LIBERTAS RESTITVTA-coins: that of a renewed, reborn, Roman people.⁵¹ The latter inscription corresponds to that of MARS VICTOR, although it places special emphasis on the strength of Rome.⁵² Neither inscription has been

⁴⁵ *RICI*, Galba 138-139 (Lugdunum).

⁴⁶ *RICI*, Galba 22-23, 56, 68-76 (Taracco), 136-137 (Lugdunum), 158-159, 237, 275-276, 309-310, 318, 328, 346-349, 363-367, 372-373, 387-391, 423-427, 459-461 (Rome).

⁴⁷ Boruch, “Galba’s Propaganda Motifs,” 74.

⁴⁸ *RICI*, Galba 146-147, 171-172, 205-214, 231-232 (Rome), 96-97 (Narbo).

⁴⁹ *RICI*, Galba 504-506 (Rome).

⁵⁰ *RICI*, Civil Wars 37-38 (uncertain mint).

⁵¹ *RICI*, Galba 24-29, 40-43, 57-58 (Taracco), 87-88 (Vindobona), 95 (Narbo), 160-162, 194-204, 229-230 (Rome).

⁵² *RICI*, Galba 44-45, 53, 59-60 (Taracco), 130 (Lugdunum).

attested in the numismatic output of the Julio-Claudians, although some coin-types from the Civil Wars-series do bear the same inscriptions.⁵³ On the reverse of the ROMA VICTRIX coin appears a kneeling Roma holding up a child to a gesturing Galba, a scene which is reminiscent of the LIBERTAS RESTITIVA coin's depiction of Galba and a kneeling Libertas. The inscription appearing alongside this scene reads ROMA RESTI S C.⁵⁴ The scene can be read allegorically: Galba, in the role of *pater familias* deciding on the fate of the newborn, is the sovereign who decides on the future of a newborn Rome.

There are two further types that must be considered. The first is that of the deity Victoria, who is invoked on a considerable number of coin-types.⁵⁵ The inscriptions on these coin-types read either S C, VICTORIA GALBAE AVG, VICTORIA IMPERI ROMANI S C, VICTORIA P R S C, or VICTORIAE IMP GALBAE AVG. While it might be tempting to read these as simple proclamations of victory, the fact that Victoria has been used by all the Julio-Claudian emperors that preceded Galba means that the appearance of Victoria on Galba's coinage is best understood as a continuation of a numismatic policy already put in motion by Galba's predecessors. The second type that must be considered is that of PAX (see figure 6).⁵⁶ On this coin, the deity of peace is accompanied by the inscription AVGVST(I). We find similar inscriptions on the coinage of Claudius, who employed the plural PACI AUGUSTAE.⁵⁷ Alisdair Gibson argues that this inscription honors the peaceful character of Claudius' reign, which followed that of Caligula, and announces a return to the glorious era of the *pax Augusta*.⁵⁸ The fact that references to peace on Galba's coinage are reminiscent of references to peace on Claudius' coinage suggests

⁵³ For ROMA RENASCENS: *RIC*¹ I, Civil Wars 8-9, 10 (uncertain mint); for ROMA VICTRIX: *RIC*¹ I, Civil Wars 59 (uncertain mint).

⁵⁴ *RIC*¹, Galba 485 (Rome).

⁵⁵ *RIC*¹, Galba 10-11, 48 (Taracco), 98, 110-113 (Narbo), 131-133 (Lugdunum), 148, 173-175, 215-217, 233-234, 250-258, 313-315, 350-357, 397-403, 456-458, 490, 510-514 (Rome), 519-520 (Carthage).

⁵⁶ *RIC*¹, Galba 129, 140 (Lugdunum), 277-285, 319-323, 368-371, 413-415, 444-445, 496-498 (Rome).

⁵⁷ *RIC*¹, Claudius 9-10, 22, 27-28, 38-39, 46-47, 51-52, 57-58, 61-62 (Rome).

⁵⁸ Gibson, *The Julio-Claudian Succession*, 117-118.

that Galba may have pursued similar goals as Claudius and wanted to emulate both his and Augustus' reigns. Telling in this respect is that in the Civil Wars-series, when peace was far from established, we find coin-types with the aspirational inscription *PACI AVGVSTAE*.⁵⁹

The third reverse theme: Galba's competence and power

Let us now turn to the third theme that is reflected in Galba's coinage. This coinage uses a number of rhetorical strategies to assert Galba's military and political prowess. Where the coinage discussed above contained messages relating to the wellbeing and the peaceful state of the Roman Empire, this series contains representations of Galba as supreme leader of the state. As I will show, these representations draw on legend of his "abolishment of the fortieth," images and inscriptions of Augustus' wife Livia, and the depiction of Galba's *adlocutio*.

Several of the coin-types concerned with asserting Galba's military and political prowess carry the inscription *QVADRAGENSUMAE REMISSAE*. This refers to Galba's "abolishment of the fortieth", an act by which Galba ended a litigation tax that Caligula had imposed several decades prior.⁶⁰ This inscription is the only reference on Galba's coinage to a political policy he implemented during his reign. It is telling for the role of coinage that such a financially strict emperor as Galba would have publicly advertised his suspension of a tax. The inscription is even more interesting in light of the imagery that accompanies it. In eight instances, an image of a standing *Libertas* accompanies the inscription.⁶¹ In eight other instances, the reverse shows an arch on top of which are two equestrian statues. Three captives and an officer proceed towards the arch (see figure 7).⁶² How might this scene be interpreted? We know from Suetonius that Galba was awarded the triumphal regalia for his service in Africa and Germania.⁶³ Those governorships, however, dated from the reign of

⁵⁹ *RICI*, Civil Wars 56-57 (uncertain mint).

⁶⁰ Pölönen, "QVADRAGESIMA LITIVM," 80.

⁶¹ *RICI*, Galba 293, 296, 327, 422, 438-441 (Rome).

⁶² *RICI*, Galba 77-84 (Taracco).

⁶³ Suet. *Galb.* 8.1.

Caligula and Claudius and were too long ago to be held eligible for a triumph. Another possible interpretation is that it signifies Galba's military triumph after defeating Nero's forces. This answer can be discredited, however, given that no ancient source mentions that Galba had a triumph instituted for his victory in the civil war and given the fact that celebrating a triumph over other Romans was looked down upon.⁶⁴ Yet another possible interpretation is that the triumphal arch signifies the victory of Rome and Galba's forces *an sich* and was not meant to refer to any particular conflict or bloodshed. But this idea might also be discredited, given the fact that the coin explicitly depicts captives in chains. In the past, emperors such as Augustus, Claudius, and Nero had adopted a triumphal arch on their coinage, but this coinage did not also depict captives. The fact that Galba's coinage depicts captives when his predecessors' coinage did not suggests that these captives have specific identities. According to Sear, the "three prisoners doubtless represent Nero's rapacious procurators in Spain who, having denounced Galba at the time of his revolt, later paid the price with their lives."⁶⁵ It could be that Nero's procurators in Spain were those who, according to Suetonius, were instructed by Nero to have Galba killed.⁶⁶ There is no doubt that before Galba left Spain to march on Rome, he put to death loyalists of Nero.⁶⁷ Again, the depiction of Roman administrators in chains on coinage conflicts with Roman values.

Outside of this scene and the other two images previously mentioned, two additional distinct scenes can be found on particular coins with the litigation-tax inscription QVADRAGENSUMAE REMISSAE. One coin depicts Galba being crowned by Victory.⁶⁸ The significance of Victory has already been discussed above and will not need further clarification. The other coin, however, carries an image relating to a series of coin-types that has not yet been discussed. It features a depiction of Livia, the deified widow of emperor Augustus.⁶⁹ As many as 31 other Galba coin-types also

⁶⁴ Lange, "Triumph and Civil War in the Late Republic," 71-72.

⁶⁵ Sear, *Roman Coins and their Values*.

⁶⁶ Suet. *Galb.* 9.2.

⁶⁷ Morgan, *69 A.D.*, 38.

⁶⁸ *RICI*, Galba 134 (Lugdunum).

⁶⁹ *RICI*, Galba 433 (Rome).

depict Livia, either seated or standing (see figure 8).⁷⁰ All of these coin-types are inscribed with *DIVA AVGVSTA* (“the deified Augusta”) and refer to Livia’s official deification during the reign of emperor Claudius. Only one earlier coin-type, from the reign of Claudius, depicts Livia.⁷¹ Why would Galba depict the former empress? The most obvious answer is that Galba, according to Suetonius, had a close relationship with Livia and owed much of his fortune to her. She elevated his position in the inner circles of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and left him a sum of five million *sestertii* in her will.⁷² Furthermore, the reference to Augustus’ widow also could have been related to the *pax Augusta* trope found in the internal-peace series of coin-types. The portrayal of Livia thus not only emphasizes Galba’s fondness for the former empress but also establishes a dialogue between Galba’s times and those of Augustus, which Galba wished to recreate.

Finally, another series of coin-types with the litigation-tax inscription *QVADRAGENSUMAE REMISSAE* depicts Galba standing in military dress alongside several officers. Standing with the officers on a raised platform, he addresses a handful of soldiers. The inscription reads *ADLOCVTIO S C* (see figure 9).⁷³ It is clear that the coins depict Galba addressing the praetorian guard. Coins from the reigns of Caligula⁷⁴ and Nero⁷⁵ similarly portray the emperor addressing the praetorian guard. The inscription confirms that the reverse refers to the custom of adlocution, in which an emperor performatively establishes the legitimacy of his power through a speech to his personal guard. At the same time, these coin-types symbolize the basis of Galba’s power: it was only after his military support for Vindex’s rebellion and his subsequent victory over Nero’s armies, that the senate proclaimed him emperor.

⁷⁰ *RICI*, Galba 142-143, 150-153, 184-189, 223-224, 331-338, 432 (Rome), 13-14, 36, 52, 55, 65-67 (Taracco).

⁷¹ *RICI*, Claudius 101 (Rome).

⁷² Suet. *Galb.* 5.2.

⁷³ *RICI*, Galba 462-468 (Rome).

⁷⁴ *RICI*. Caligula 32, 40, 49 (Rome).

⁷⁵ *RIC I*. Nero 95-97, 130-136 (Rome), 371, 386-388, 429, 489-492, 564-565 (Lugdunum).

Reflection

When studying the ways Galba and his administration used imperial coinage as a device of political communication, it becomes clear that with this coinage Galba wanted to convey three themes in particular: first, his connection with and original base of power in the regions of Hispania and Gallia; second, the coming of a new period of stability and prosperity; and third, Galba's own military and political power. It is interesting to note that these third coin-types do not always coincide with Galba's actual military and political policies: no mention is found of his financial discipline and in only one instance (RIC² I, Galba 77-84: reverses depicting the triumphal arch with prisoners) a reference is made to his political persecutions. The plethora of coin-types issued during Galba's brief reign falsely suggest that this period was a prosperous and kind one, laden with financial remissions and political stability. Despite these false suggestions, however, Galba's coinage clearly projects Galba's legitimacy as the head of state. These coins imply unequivocally that Galba – not the senate nor any other military figure who might have opposed him – held the position of highest authority. To project legitimacy, Galba aligned himself with his predecessors by adopting their titulature and, in some cases, their numismatic symbolism. His use of the titles *Caesar* and *Augustus*, references to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, are the clearest examples of this.

It must be stated that this article has not covered every deity or reference that has been employed by Galba's coinage. Multiple references to, for example, Asclepius, Vesta, Ceres, and Pietas are attested, but because these deities or personifications were also such a substantial part of the symbolism of Galba's predecessors, their appearances on Galba's coins did not function to distinguish Galba's reign from those of his predecessors. The practice of referencing such figures on coinage was already widely established before Galba came to power and would endure years after his death. For this reason, they do not carry any specific political meaning in the context of Galba's reign.

During his reign, Galba, the first emperor in decades to bring civil war to the Italian peninsula, also dealt with military crises across the Rhine border. None of these events are reflected in his coinage. While the coinage clearly functions to establish Galba as the

supreme leader of the Roman Empire, it does not address directly the military mutinies and other challenges to power that he confronted. This fact shows that in times of crisis, coinage was not used to address specific internal struggles, but much rather to formulate a broad counter-message: one of internal prosperity with a strong leader.

It is telling that Vespasian, the fourth of the emperors that ruled between 68-69 A.D., borrowed quite a lot of numismatic symbolism of Galba. Becoming emperor after defeating Vitellius in several battles, Vespasian possibly found himself in a similar situation as Galba. Both led revolts against an emperor who was officially recognized as such by the Roman senate, and both were burdened with the task of uniting an empire that was stricken with civil war. It is therefore not surprising to find that many of the deities Galba employed to symbolize internal peace and stability also appear on Vespasian's coinage. Examples of such deities are *Libertas Restituta*⁷⁶ and *Publica*⁷⁷, *Securitas Romani*⁷⁸, and *Roma Victrix*.⁷⁹ While the full significance of Vespasian's coin-type choices can only be explained in a study specifically devoted to his numismatic output, the parallels between the coinage of Galba and that of Vespasian suggest a continuity between Galba and the Flavians that was not disrupted by the reigns of Otho and Vitellius.

Conclusion

While the coinage of Galba does not contain references to the ongoing political crises and civil wars that threatened the existence of the Roman Empire following the death of Nero, it certainly chooses to obliquely respond to this crisis in a number of ways: first, it clearly reflects on the origins of the revolt against Nero through numerous references to the provinces of Hispania and Gallia and the town of Clunia. The depiction of Mars Victor, in turn, signifies the ending of the civil war and introduces the second theme Galba addresses through his coins: the new era of internal peace. The frequent depictions in his coinage of *Libertas*, *Salus*, *Securitas*,

⁷⁶ *RICI*, Vespasian 52, 88-89.

⁷⁷ *RICI*, Vespasian 63, 82-87, 137, 141, 173-174, 237, 272, 309.

⁷⁸ *RICI*, Vespasian 38, 281, 326-327.

⁷⁹ *RICI*, Vespasian 196, 397, 506, 619.

Roma, Victoria, and Pax enable Galba's administration to propose an antithesis to the times of civil war and crisis. Finally, through the references to the repeal of the litigation tax of Caligula and to Galba's *adlocutio*, the coinage legitimizes Galba's claim to the imperial throne and his imperial policy.

As stated above, the coinage does not refer to Galba's financial policies other than his repeal of the litigation tax. In this, we see clearly that Galba's coinage only conveyed the messages that Galba and his administration wished to send and only depicted Galba as he wished to be depicted: as a benevolent and just ruler of the Roman Empire ushering in a new era of prosperity and peace after a time of crisis. Mutinies across the Rhine border quickly gave the lie to this narrative. After Galba's assassination, Galba's successors used imperial coinage as a tool to convey different messages informed by their own particular interests and ambitions. When Galba's brief and tumultuous reign came to an end, Galba's portrait was replaced on new coinage by that of Otho, and in just the same way, the messages on the reverse of those coins reflected Otho's ideology rather than that of Galba.

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