

THE USE OF LOCAL IDENTITIES IN THE MONETARY PROPAGANDA OF THE POMPEIANS DURING THE WAR WITH CAESAR 49-48 BC

Abstract: The issue of audience targeting is crucial in studies of contemporary propaganda. Meanwhile, it is usually ignored in analysis of Roman propaganda despite the fact that studies of ancient rhetoric clearly shows that speakers were well aware that they must use a different language when performing in front of different audiences. The primary aim of this paper is to consider the possibility of targeting propaganda messages encoded on coins struck by the Pompeians (RRC 444, RRC 445/1-3) during the war with Caesar. The analysis of the imagery placed on these coins may indicate that different types were in the first instance intended for the inhabitants of Epirus and Greece (RRC 444, RRC 445/2), Sicily (RRC 445/1) and West Asia Minor (RRC 445/3). Considering the fact that those were the most important areas of recruitment for the Pompeians, it is possible that by placing images that referred to them they tried to influence locals also in this way.

Keywords: Late Roman Republic, Republican Coinage, Pompey the Great, Caesar, Propaganda

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The main purpose of money is to serve as a medium of exchange and a unit of account. Its value is confirmed by a state authority by placing special marks on banknotes, coins or other legal tenders. Usually these marks serve as a decoration but sometimes, as in the case of Roman coinage, also as a medium of propaganda or self-advertisement. The potential propaganda value of Roman coins has been the subject of extensive discourse². However, symptomatic of these discussions is the surprising lack of references to modern theory of propaganda, even definitions of the phenomenon. Traditionally, iconographic and comparative analyses were used when studying the subject. Subsequently, the tools of the theory of communication³ were introduced⁴ and recently some studies were published that involve the theory of mass communication⁵ to analyse both money⁶ and

¹ . This study is part of the project “*Auctoritas et dignitas: the study of propaganda in the period of the Late Roman Republic on the example of the Pompey family (gens Pompeia Magna) in the light of archaeological and written sources*” financed by the National Science Centre, Poland granted based on a decision no DEC-2012/07/N/HS3/000878

² . cf. BURGON 1837; JONES 1956; GRANT 1957; SUTHERLAND 1959; BUTTREY 1972; BELLONI 1974; BELLONI 1976; MORAWIECKI 1980; CRAWFORD 1983; SUTHERLAND 1983; NEWMAN 1990, 37-39; KUNISZ 1993.

³ . More on the communication theory see: e.g. HEALTH/BRYANT 2000; LITTLEJOHN 2002

⁴ . A leading example being: ZANKER 1990.

⁵ . More on the theory of mass communication see: MCQUAIL 2010.

⁶ . e.g. LAUER 2008, and regarding Roman coinage: HEKSTER 2003.

other elements of ancient culture⁷. However, all this remains in the margins of the debate. The primary goal of this article is to illustrate how the introduction of the notion of target group, crucial for the theory of propaganda, enhances our understanding of money as a medium of propaganda in Roman times, allows us to properly label some of its aspects and enlarge the pool of questions we can ask about it.

According to Terence Qualter⁸ propaganda is:

*The deliberate attempt by some individual or group to form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups by the use of the instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be that desired by the propagandist.*⁹

Qualter strongly emphasizes purposefulness of propaganda and the existence of a target group or groups. Thus propaganda cannot be accidental. Moreover it should be targeted at a specific group of people whom a propagandist wants to influence. According to the theories of communication and mass communication, depictions and legends on Roman coins were in fact encoded (propaganda) messages¹⁰. Although in the theory of mass communication a message is intended for a wide range of recipients who are treated as a homogeneous mass¹¹, sometimes (and as stated above always in the case of propaganda messages) a broadcaster wants to target a specific group of people in the first instance. In the case of Roman coinage soldiers are often seen as one of the main target groups of monetary propaganda.¹² Based on our knowledge of Roman rhetoric we can assume that the Romans knew they had to communicate differently with different social groups.¹³ The Greco-Roman culture was not uniform. The inhabitants of various regions distinguished themselves with distinct cultural codes and sub-codes. It is therefore possible that in specific conditions they used so-called geographical targeting, i.e. adaptation of a transmission to a local recipient.

Between the outbreak of the civil war and the battle of Pharsalos the Senate's or the Pompeian faction minted several very interesting coin types¹⁴. These issues may have been intentionally targeted at specific, geographically defined, groups. The main obstacle to determine whether that is the case lies in our inability to recreate detailed a chronology of their production. We do not know whether all coins in question were struck simultaneously or, at least to some extent, whether changes in iconography followed the progress of events.

The story of the coins in question began not too long after the outbreak of the war, on 10 January 49 BC. On this day, Caesar had spoken one of the most recognizable sentences in history – “Let the die be cast”¹⁵ – and crossed the Rubicon. Both the fact that he started his campaign in winter and the quickness of his movements caught the Senate and the commander-in-chief of its army, Pompey the Great, completely off guard. Pompey boasted: “in whatever part of Italy I stamp upon the ground, there will spring up armies of foot and horse”¹⁶ but the conqueror of Gaul did not give him the chance to do so. Soon, Pompey realized that it was impossible to handle Caesar's veteran legions with the scarce troops he had under his command and to maintain control over Rome¹⁷. This was when the idea of evacuating Italy came up for the first time¹⁸. Caesar's rapid advancement changed this possibility into a necessity in the end of February¹⁹. Pompey eventually sailed from Brundisium and on the 17th of March landed in Dyrrachium²⁰. The failure to evacuate the state's treasury from Rome probably forced the Pompeians into minting coins. Thus, the production of “the Senate's coins” probably began around the same time Caesar captured the City.

The first coin in question is a *denarius*²¹ (fig. 1) signed by praetor Caius Coponius²² and monetal triumvir Quintus Sicinius²³. The obverse of this coin features the head of Apollo²⁴. The selection of a deity is curious. Of course, Apollo



Fig. 1. Denarius signed by praetor Caius Coponius and monetal triumvir Quintus Sicinius

has been known in Rome for centuries by the time of minting the *denarius* (as illustrated, to mention just on example, the fifth century temple of Apollo Medicus). Nevertheless, he was not particularly popular in Republican coinage. Apollo only appeared more frequently in the 90s and 80s of the first century BC, in particular during the struggle between Sulla, on the one hand, and Marius and Cinna on the other²⁵. The god was depicted on *denarii* struck in 97-96 BC²⁶ and almost

⁷ . e.g. MORSTEIN-MARX 2004.

⁸ . There are many other definitions of propaganda (the existence of which researchers of ancient propaganda should be aware of) but for the purpose of this article I use Qualter's, because it draws attention to issues that are crucial for this study, mainly the target group.

⁹ . QUALTER 1962, 27

¹⁰ . HALL 1974/1980; MCQUAIL 2010, 80, 89, 381.

¹¹ . MCQUAIL 2010, 71-72.

¹² . Moreover, Olivier Hekster (HEKSTER 2003) recently published an interesting paper, in which he considered the possibility of an interdependence of denomination and target group.

¹³ . cf. MACK 1937, 18-48.

¹⁴ . RRC 444, RRC 445/1-3 along with already mentioned RRC 446 and RRC 447. Maybe we should also include RRC 402 in this group but inability to date this coin makes it highly uncertain.

¹⁵ . Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 60.2.9; Suet. *Iul.* 32.

¹⁶ . Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 57.5.

¹⁷ . Cic. *Att.* 7.11.

¹⁸ . Cic. *Att.* 7.12.

¹⁹ . cf. Cic. *Att.* 9.10 where Cicero summarised correspondence between him and Atticus from the end of January to till the beginnings of March focusing on the theme of a growing probability of leaving Italy by Pompey.

²⁰ . Cic. *Att.* 9.15; App. *BCiv.* 2.40.160; Dio Cass. 41.13-14.

²¹ . RRC 444.

²² . BROUGHTON 1952, 257.

²³ . BROUGHTON 1952, 453; HARLAN 1995, 182-184.

²⁴ . CRAWFORD 1974, 727.

²⁵ . Though it is worth mentioning that Apollo appeared on two emissions of Roman-Campanian silver coins and two bronze ones (cf. CRAWFORD 1985, 29-41).

²⁶ . In 97 by C. Egnatuleius (RRC 333) and L. Pompnius Molo (RRC 334/1). In

every year between 90 and 80 BC²⁷. Since then, Apollo had disappeared from coins almost completely. The son of Zeus and Leto was used only on the coins of three moneyers in the 70s²⁸, 60s²⁹ and 50s³⁰ of the first century BC. Why, then, was the head of Apollo placed by Coponius and Sicinius on the obverse of their coin? Crawford³¹ believed that the god is an indicator of the mint and that the *denarii* were struck in Illyrian Apollonia (near the modern village of Pojani in Albania). The city not only owed its name to Apollo but was also an important centre for his cult³². This hypothesis is supported by Cicero³³, who mentioned Apollonia as a mint of at least some “Pompeian coins”. Yet, placing production there could be problematic, since we know that Coponius was commander of the Rhodian section of the Pompeian fleet³⁴. Other scholars³⁵ have therefore pointed to Ephesus as the mint. One way or another, such a narrow interpretation may not be the whole story. It is possible that the use of Apollo was not so much a reference to Apollonia or Asia Minor³⁶ but simply to one of the most popular deities in the region. Thus, the “propaganda message” was perhaps intended for the Greeks (maybe specifically for those from Epirus) to whom the son of Zeus and Leto was one of the most important gods in the pantheon. In this context it is important to recall the fact that Apollo was also a “messianic” god and – especially with a diadem and a star – the symbol of a Golden Age³⁷.

On the reverse of the coin in question, there are the attributes of Hercules – a lion skin, a club, a bow and an arrow. By placing them there, the moneyers probably referred to Hercules Victor³⁸ or Hercules Invictus. Why the moneyers did use the image of the son of Zeus/Jupiter and Alcmena? First, he was a very popular deity among soldiers. Second, he was one of the patron deities of Pompey the Great³⁹. However, Pompey’s admiration for Hercules was no exception and many, if not all, Roman generals from Scipio

to Antony worshipped the hero⁴⁰. Third, as Battenberg⁴¹ observed, the imagery on the reverse may refer to local Asian cistophors, which would support the hypothesis of an Asian mint and the notion of adjusting the propaganda messages to local recipients. Finally, the family of Coponius originated from Tibur⁴², where there was a famous sanctuary of Hercules Victor⁴³. Therefore, maybe Coponius used the image of the deity he personally identified with the most. It seems that all of these possibilities are equally probable. We also cannot exclude that the ambiguity was intentional. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the possibility that the imagery of both the obverse and the reverse were adjusted to match the preferences of the local recipients of these coins and thus to reach out to them easier. If this was the case, the message encoded in the coins of Sicinius and Coponius was not a non-Roman one in nature. It rather went both ways being Greek (or Hellenistic) and Roman at the same time⁴⁴. The possible targeting here should be treated more as a shift of the centre of gravity, than as a radical change.

The coins signed by the consuls of 49, Caius Claudius Marcellus and Lucius Cornelius Lentulus⁴⁵, are even more



Fig. 2. Denarius signed by the consuls Caius Claudius Marcellus and Lucius Cornelius Lentulus

interesting in this context. On the obverse of the first⁴⁶ (fig. 2) the moneyers placed a symbol of Sicily – a *triskeles* with the head of Medusa and ears of corn between her legs. No wonder that the coin is being connected with the island. Most scholars⁴⁷ see it rather as a reference to Consul Marcellus’ glorious ancestral past, i.e. the deeds of famous Marcus Claudius Marcellus, than as an indication of the place where this type was minted⁴⁸. As was already mentioned above, the biggest problem we have with these coins is the lack of a detailed chronology. Therefore, we do not know whether their production started before or only after the evacuation of Pompey’s forces to Greece.

Sicily was a strategically important island⁴⁹. First, it gave easy access to Italy. Second, it was an excellent base for

96 by L. Caecilius Metellus (RRC 335/1), C. Poblucius Malleolus (RRC 335/2) and A. Albinus (RRC 335/10).

²⁷ . cf. coins struck in 90: by L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi (RRC 340/1-3), by Q. Titius (RRC 341/5), by Q. Vibius Pansa (RRC 342/3-5); in 88 by C. Marcius Censorinus (RRC 346/2), in 86 by Gargilius, Ogulnius and Vergilius (RRC 350/1-2); in 85 by L. Iulius Bursio (RRC 352/1) and by Mn. Fonteius (RRC 353/1); in 82 by P. Crepusius (RRC 361/1) and L. Marcius Censorinus (RRC 363/1); and in 82-80 by M. Caecilius Metellus (RRC 369/1), C. Servilius Vatia (RRC 370) and Q. Fabius Maximus (RRC 371/1); and an anonymous issue dated to 81 (RRC 373).

²⁸ . On the obverse of the *denarii* of M. Volteius (RRC 385/5) in 75 BC.

²⁹ . On the obverse of the coins of C. Calpurnius Piso Frugi (RRC 408/1) in 67 BC. It is worth mentioning that the diversity of symbols and images appearing on the coins of Piso Frugi indicates that his emission was rather a large one and therefore it could have influenced the receivers considerably.

³⁰ . On the obverse of various types of Q. Pomponius Musa’s coins (RRC 410/1-10) struck in 56 BC.

³¹ . CRAWFORD 1974, 378-379; see also: SYDENHAM 1952, 157, 223; HARLAN 1995, 182.

³² . SMITH 1854, 60.

³³ . Cic.*Fam.*13.29.

³⁴ . *Caes.BCiv.*3.5.3, 26.2; BROUGHTON 1952, 257, 276.

³⁵ . GRUEBER 1910, 445; BATTENBERG 1980, 78-79.

³⁶ . Some moderns argued for Ephesus as the mint: GRUEBER 1910, 486; BATTENBERG 1980, 78-79.

³⁷ . BATTENBERG 1980, 79.

³⁸ . CRAWFORD 1974, 737-738.

³⁹ . cf. *Vitr.De Arch.*3.3.5; *Plin.HN.*34.57. WEINSTOCK 1957, 228-229; ZIÓŁKOWSKI 1988 313-314; RICHARDSON 1992, 187-188; COARELLI 1993, 20-21.

⁴⁰ . cf. WEINSTOCK 1957; GALINSKY 1981, 1004-1007.

⁴¹ . BATTENBERG 1980, 78-79.

⁴² . cf. FARNEY 2007, 274-275.

⁴³ . HALLAM 1931, 276-282.

⁴⁴ . We have to remember that separating Greek and Roman elements in the Roman culture, since it was under a heavy influence of Greek and Hellenistic cultures, is very tricky, if possible at all.

⁴⁵ . BROUGHTON 1952, 256

⁴⁶ . RRC 445/1.

⁴⁷ . CRAWFORD 1974, 462; BATTENBERG 1980, 80-82; ZARROW 2003, 128.

⁴⁸ . MATTINGLY 1960, 81.

⁴⁹ . KOPIJ 2012;.

the operations in both the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Thus in the case of naval dominance it gave complete control over the shores of Italy and allowed to block grain shipments to Rome. Finally yet importantly, the island itself was one of the most important granaries of the Roman Republic⁵⁰. Not long after the outbreak of the war, the Senate appointed Porcius Cato as governor of the island. His task was to recruit soldiers as well as prepare the fleet by repairing old ships and demanding new ones from the Sicilian cities⁵¹. Moreover, Pompey later wanted to send the consuls there⁵², or at least one of them⁵³. Even though this plan was never carried out – the consuls sailed to Dyrrachium on 4 March⁵⁴ – it gives us an idea of how important Sicily was⁵⁵. Even if the coins in question were produced only after the evacuation – in Illyrian Apollonia or in Asia Minor⁵⁶ – it is probable that they were meant to fund Cato’s activities on the island⁵⁷. It is also possible that they were intended for this purpose but because of the course of events were never sent to Sicily. Cato left the island rather unexpectedly on 23 April⁵⁸, i.e. about a month after Pompey had started the evacuation of Italy. This gave the Senate’s officials in Greece time for starting the production of coins. There is also an interesting possibility that this type of the consuls’ *denarii* were somehow interconnected with the coins of Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus (Fig. 3), later one of Caesar’s quaestors⁵⁹; especially if Marcellinus’ *denarii* were minted in 49. A clear reference to the famous M. Claudius Marcellus and, therefore, to Sicily was made here⁶⁰.

On the reverse of the *denarius* in question there is Jupiter/Zeus holding a thunderbolt in his right hand and an eagle on the other. A legitimate question here is



Fig. 3. Denarius signed by Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus

whether the god himself or rather one of his statues was depicted. The answer is of great importance to the subject of this article. Only the identification of the image with a particular statue could give us an idea about the possible target group the message was intended for. Although it is impossible to identify the depiction without a doubt, the

strongest claim made so far has been to connect it with Zeus Eleutherios⁶¹. Zeus Eleutherios was strongly linked to Sicily, especially to Syracuse, where the famous statue of the god stood⁶². Yet this deity was also very popular in Greece (to mention just the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios in Athens). On the most basic level of interpretation, the presence of Zeus/Jupiter indicated the support of the deity for the cause of the Pompeians. At the same time as being the king of the gods, he was also a symbol of the consuls that indicated the legality of their power. Nevertheless, it is possible that on a deeper level both the imagery of both sides of the coin could have been interpreted with the connection to Sicily, either by showing the well-known symbol of the island or by referring to the deity worshipped there.

The consuls Marcellus and Lentulus minted another type of *denarius* in 49 (fig. 4)⁶³. If fact this type can be treated as a combination of the obverse of Coponius and Sicinius’



Fig. 4. Denarius signed by Marcellus and Lentulus

coin with Apollo, and the reverse of the “Sicilian” consuls coin with Zeus/Jupiter. Based on this “hybrid” issue some scholars indicate that all three “consular” types must have been minted in the same place⁶⁴. If true, it would suggest that Zeus/Jupiter on RRC 445/1 was not distinctively Sicilian and therefore, could have been depicted on the coins intended for Sicilians as well as on the coins intended for Greeks in the Balkans and perhaps Asia Minor⁶⁵. It is worth mentioning that there is yet another explanation for the presence of Apollo on the Pompeian coins. Battenberg⁶⁶ suggested that the star depicted next to the head of the god was meant to be an indicator of the Golden Age to come under the supervision of Apollo after Caesar’s defeat.

The third type of the “consular” *denarii* of 49⁶⁷ (fig. 5) bears a bearded head interpreted as Zeus/Jupiter on its obverse. It is possible that it was intended as a reference to the statue of Zeus Eleutherios depicted on the reverses of RRC 445/1 and RRC 445/2. The presence of Zeus/Jupiter on all of the consuls’ coins is not a coincidence. Clearly, it was intended to recall a dominant position of the god as the king of all gods and, thus, emphasize the position of the Roman

⁶¹ . FURTWÄNGLER 1895, 218. HUTTON 1896-1897, 152; HOLM 1897, 362; PÉREZ 1986, 94-95.

⁶² . FURTWÄNGLER 1895, 218; HUTTON 1896-1897, 152; HOLM 1897, 362; PÉREZ 1986, 94-95.

⁶³ . RRC 445/2.

⁶⁴ . BATTENBERG 1980, 81-82.

⁶⁵ . For other interpretations of the presence of Zeus/Jupiter, see: BATTENBERG 1980, 80-81.

⁶⁶ . BATTENBERG 1980, 78-79.

⁶⁷ . RRC 445/3.

⁵⁰ . RICKMAN (1980, 308-309), has estimated that Sicily delivered 3 mln *modii* of grain as a tax. The total amount of grain sent to Rome oscillated around ca. 10 mln *modii*.

⁵¹ . Caes.BCiv.1.30.2-4; Cic.Att.7.15; Plut.Vit.Cat.min.53.1; Flor 2.13.33.

⁵² . Cic.Att.8.12c.

⁵³ . Cic.Att.8.3, 8.12a.

⁵⁴ . Caes.BCiv.1.25.2; App.BCiv.2.40.159.

⁵⁵ . More on the importance of Sicily, see: KOPIJ 2012.

⁵⁶ . CRAWFORD 1974, 462, 737-738.

⁵⁷ . KOPIJ 2012.

⁵⁸ . Caes.BCiv.1.30.2-4; Cic.Att.10.16; Plut.Vit.Cat.min.53.3; App. BCiv.2.41.165; Dio Cass.41.41.1.

⁵⁹ . BROUGHTON 1952, 274.

⁶⁰ . HARLAN 1995, 175; more on this possibility: KOPIJ 2012.

consul⁶⁸. Therefore, it can be seen as part of an attempt to legitimize the power of the evacuated Senate and at the same time to undermine the claims of Caesar.

Discussing the possibility of a target shift within the set of the coins in question would be somewhat unwarranted if not for the reverse of the last “consular” issue. On it, the moneyers decided to depict the statue of Artemis of Ephesus. The statue of this goddess appears on a local coinage of many Asian cities⁶⁹ as well as rarely Achaean⁷⁰, Syrian⁷¹ and Bithynian-Pontic⁷² ones⁷³. Usually, the presence of the statue is interpreted as an indication of the mint supposedly placed in Ephesus⁷⁴. Caesar’s passage⁷⁵ describing Lentulus’ efforts to oversee personally the recruitment in Asia advocates for the Asian provenance of the coin. Both Caesar’s testimony and the fact that the depiction of the statue of Ephesian Artemis had never appeared on a Roman coin before – although other incarnations of Artemis/Diana did – strongly support the notion that the shift of messages towards different groups of local recipients really took place in the case of the coins in question.

Certainly, this article does not end the discussion of the possibility of audience targeting practices in Roman coinage. Quite the contrary, by presenting another case it is aimed at making numismatists aware that this kind of shifts to match local recipients could have happened. Therefore, looking at Roman coinage from the perspective of the theories of propaganda and mass communication can be fruitful and adds some new tools to the repertoire of numismatic research.

For the coin in question, some more research can be done either to reinforce the notion presented in this paper or to weaken it. First of all, there is a need for more statistical analysis of the finds of these *denarii* and in particular the possible differences in their of geographical distribution patterns. Such an analysis could show us whether some types are found more frequently in some regions, and whether their distribution differ from those of other types. Admittedly, the results would not be final, since the example of the “Sicilian coin” clearly showed that the coins that could have been intended for Sicily might have never been used there. Nonetheless, for sure, such an analysis would be valuable. Second, the chemical analysis of the alloy used – especially chemical analysis of lead isotopes in it, either using thermal ionization analysis (TIMS) or laser-ablation multi-collector inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (LA-MC-ICP-

⁶⁸ . CRAWFORD 1974, 737-738; BATTENBERG 1980, 80-81.

⁶⁹ . e.g.: Acrasus, Aezani, Amorium, Ancyra, Anineta, Apamea, Cadi, Cilbani Superiores, Cyzicus, Dioshieron, Sionysopolis, Ephesus, Heraclea, Hierapolis, Iulia Gordus, Laodicea, Neapolis ad Harpasum, Nicaea Cilbianorum, Nysa, Pergamum, Synnada, Tabala.

⁷⁰ . e.g. Corinth, Minoa on Amorgos.

⁷¹ . e.g. Neapolis.

⁷² . e.g. Prusa.

⁷³ . The list of second century AD examples is to be found at RPC Onlie: http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/search/icono/?search&design_group=1&provinces=any&design-0=411&page=1.

⁷⁴ . CRAWFORD 1974, 737-738; BATTENBERG 1980, 82.

⁷⁵ . Caes.BCiv.3.4.1.

MS)⁷⁶ – could tell us if the coins were struck in one mint or more (on the assumption that if they were issued in a couple of mints the ore came from different sources).

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