

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft
Band: 76 (1997)

Artikel: Vergil's siren on the coins of 19 BC
Autor: Damsky, Ben L.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-175565>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 10.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

BEN L. DAMSKY

VERGIL'S SIREN ON THE COINS OF 19 BC*

Plates 11–12

Introduction

For the years 19–4 BC, Augustus adopted a policy of increased prominence for the moneyers. Their names once again appeared on the coins and several of the designs are references to distinguished ancestors or family history. We do not know if they were given completely free reign or, alternately, to what extent the designs were approved by Augustus or his agents, but some such oversight process seems likely.¹

J.-L. Desnier has recently studied the first college of moneyers within this set (P. Petronius Turpilianus, L. Aquillius Florus and M. Durmius) and noted that their coinage is unusual in both the variety and complexity of its types.² He traced five themes which he observed in the types of the coinage struck by that college of moneyers: 1) national union; 2) the end of internal dissension; 3) the revival of economic prosperity; 4) victory in the East and 5) honor to Augustus. Desnier's well researched paper traced the historic events which one would expect to see commemorated on the coins and this paper has no argument with the majority of the explanations which he assigned to the coin types. A subset of the coins, almost all of which are rarer than the others, however, seems to have a different (and most interesting) interpretation.

In 1930 H. Mattingly proposed, as an explanation of several baffling types struck by this first college of moneyers, that the coins in question commemorated the death of Vergil in 19 BC, but his writing in this area is little known today.³ This paper will review his thoughts and add additional arguments which expand and bolster the evidence Mattingly published in his brief note.

* The author wishes to thank Carmen Arnold-Biucchi, Curtis Clay, Charles Hersh, Roger Hornsby, Silvia Hurter, James Lamb, William E. Metcalf, Susan Treggiari, Marcus Weder and Rick Witschonke for their help and encouragement.

¹ For a discussion of the possible authority in charge see C.H.V. Sutherland, Roman Imperial Type Selection: The Degree of Immediacy, SNR 65, 1986, pp. 106–107.

² OB CIVES SERVATOS, SNR 72, 1993, pp. 113–133.

³ H. Mattingly, The Date of Virgil's Death: A Numismatic Contribution, *Classical Review* 44, 2, 1930, pp. 57–59; mentioned briefly in BMCRE 1, p. ciii. Neither Sutherland (RIC 1²) nor Giard (CBN 1) mention the Vergil hypothesis, nor do C. Foss, *Roman Historical Coins* (London 1990) and J.M. Jones, *A Dictionary of Ancient Roman Coins* (London 1990). Several curators with whom the author spoke were also unaware of Mattingly's suggestion. Mattingly's Class. Rev. paper was in response to J.K. Fotheringham, The Two-Thousandth Anniversary of Virgil's Birth, Class. Rev. 44, 1, 1930, pp. 1–3. Desnier notes at several points that the poetry of Vergil and Horace expresses governmental wishes and attitudes and he refers to the death of Vergil in the year he studies, but he draws no explicit connection between the types and Vergil's death.

The explanation of this set seems more significant than the interpretation of most Roman coin types since it contributes to our understanding of governmental policy and public attitudes towards literature, especially quasi-official literature, areas of high interest and limited knowledge. The relationship between «patron» and poet has been one of keen interest and the existence of these coins and the modes of their expression are important evidence as to the nature of that bond.⁴ Correlating the coins with a historic event of known date also provides a useful chronological point for the moneyer coins, a series which is challenging to arrange and date.

The Coins

The following types struck by P. Petronius Turpilianus and M. Durmius in 19 BC on aurei or denarii are nominated to be references to Vergil (see *Plates 11, 1 and 12, 5-12*):⁵

Designs by Turpilianus

1) Siren	Denarius
2) Lyre	Aureus
3) Pan	Denarius
4) Satyr	Denarius
5) Star above crescent	Denarius
6) Pegasus	Denarius

Designs by Durmius

7) Crab holding butterfly	Aureus
8) Victory crowning man-headed bull	Denarius
9) Bust of Hercules	Denarius

Mattingly's Arguments

Mattingly points out that Vergil has «sung the praises of Italian country life, of the gifts of Ceres and Liber. He has sung of the country gods and we have the types

⁴ See B. Gold (ed.), *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin 1982); P. White, *Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome*, *JRS* 68, 1978, pp. 74–92; and P. White, *Promised Verse* (Cambridge 1994) which included the information (p. 9) that Augustus was named as Vergil's second most important legacy and was Horace's sole heir. Note this line from Horace's *Epistle* 7.37: «'King' and 'father' are my words for you» (evidently to Maecenas). The links of which we speak were deep and significant from evidence in addition to the coins. What the coins do is add evidence concerning the attitude of Augustus and of his government toward this relationship.

⁵ The coins are catalogued in *BMCRE* 1, pp. 2–6 (the date is given as 18 BC); in J.-B. Giard, *CBN* 1, pp. 73–78 (the date is given as 19 BC); and in *RIC* 1,² pp. 62–63 (the date is given as 19 BC). The date of these coins has been discussed most recently by J.-L. Desnier (op. cit. in n. 2), p. 128. n. 62. It will be seen that accepting the Vergil hypothesis firmly ties the date to 19.

of Pan and the young satyr to represent the *Eclogues*. And his favorite home had been at Naples, the Siren Parthenope». He went on to note that Parthenope was mentioned at the end of Vergil's Fourth Georgic. He then added that «The type of crescent and star, which has not yet been satisfactorily explained here, is a type of immortality represented by the crescent moon and star as signs of the sky, to which in the belief of the time, the souls of the dead were supposed to mount». He commented only that the lyre and Pegasus types were «obviously suitable» (for commemorating Vergil).

Mattingly went on to discuss the possibility that two rare and enigmatic types of M. Durmius were also references to Vergil's death. «In silver there is the type of the man-headed bull crowned by a flying victory, the well known reverse type of Naples and so suitable for the poet who lived the latter part of his life there. And in gold there is the type of a crab holding a butterfly in its claws». «It is perhaps not too fanciful to think of the butterfly as the emblem of the soul, and to see in the clutches of the crab a symbol of mortality».

Expanded Discussion of the Types

The Siren

Sirens (*Pl. 11, 1*) are known today primarily as the seductive creatures whose alluring song so entranced sailors that they died, being unable to move from the spot where they listened. The famous episode from the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus had himself tied to the mast of his ship in order to experience the music is familiar to us all.⁶ Less known, but equally charming is the parallel story of the escape of the Argonauts while sailing past the sirens' home. In this case, their song was defeated by the overwhelming sound of Orpheus' lyre.⁷

The sirens' central role was to carry the souls of the dead from earth and they did this task with sympathy and sorrow. Late archaic Attic grave stele are often decorated with sirens at the top or in the pediment (*Pl. 11, 2*). These creatures are clearly presented as heartfelt mourners and as indicative of the passage of the dead from this life.⁸

⁶ Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.

⁷ See Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 4.886–921.

⁸ The interested reader is directed to S. Mollard-Besques, *Catalogue raisonné des figurines et reliefs en terre-cuite grecs et romains*, II, Myrina (Paris 1963), pp. 74–76 and plates 75 and 92; and M. Collignon, *Les statues funéraires dans l'art grec*, (Paris 1911), pp. 214–225 for a variety of mourning and decorative Sirens. Various facets of sirens are discussed by E. Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley 1979), pp. 75–76 and 201–205. Some examples of sirens decorating the tops of Greek grave stele on display are 08.258.41 and 65.11.11 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NM 2583 at the National Archeological Museum in Athens, 03.757 at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and 23.174 at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. A Siren lovingly carrying a soul, shown as a small figure, is at the British Museum: 60.3635.

Several writers connect the sirens with Persephone and with Demeter's search for her missing daughter.⁹ Euripides has Helen invoke the sirens as sympathetic companions for her lament.¹⁰ Plato places the sirens in the outer spheres of the universe, emitting continuous music as part of his fanciful cosmological model.¹¹

The sirens were also known as extraordinary musicians and singers and many siren references are to this aspect of their persona. Several pairs of Hellenistic earrings are known which present a distinct siren for each ear (*Pl. 11, 3*).¹² A version of the Ulysses myth featuring three sirens, each delineated as to her art, is shown in a Roman wall painting from shortly after the time of Vergil (*Pl. 11 4*).¹³

In particular, the siren Parthenope was said to have lived and been buried near Neapolis, the district of the farm given to Vergil. The original name of the Greek settlement on the Bay of Naples was Parthenope until it was changed about the year 450 and the unidentified female head on her coinage is said by several authorities to be this siren.¹⁴

P. Vergilius Maro died on September 21, 19 BC in Brundisium.¹⁵ Death occurred during an unexpectedly early return from a long-planned Greek trip during which he had thought to finish the Aeneid, on which he had been working for many years.¹⁶ He was buried near Neapolis and his tomb inscription was recorded:

*Mantua me genuit, Calabri napuere, tenet nunc Parthenope: cecini pascua, rura, duces.*¹⁷

A district of western Naples today retains the name « Partenope » and it seems likely that the historical development of the mid fifth century was that this initial community was simply supplanted by a town centered on another harbor in the bay located a few kilometers away. The funerary monument identified today as the tomb of Vergil is located in this Partenope district of Naples.¹⁸

⁹ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5.552–562 and Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 141.

¹⁰ Helen, 186 ff.

¹¹ Republic, 40.

¹² Metropolitan Museum of Art 08.258.49. Ancient sources differ widely in the number (usually two, three or four) and names of the sirens. Typically they are represented as flute player, lyre player and singer.

¹³ British Museum 1867.5–8.1354; the provenance is unknown. Another Roman work showing three sirens (tempting Ulysses) is a sarcophagus: see F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, (Paris 1942) p. 331, Fig. 73.

¹⁴ N.K. Rutter, *Campanian Coinages 475–380 BC* (Edinburgh 1979), p. 42–45; H.-P. Isler, *Achelous* (Bern 1970).

¹⁵ Evidence from ancient sources for his birth and death dates are tabulated and discussed by Fotheringham (see n. 3 above). Consuls were M. Licinius Crassus and Cn. Pompey for his birth; Cn. Sentius Saturninus and Q. Lucretius Cinna for his death. Vergil died a few days short of his fifty-first birthday.

¹⁶ Horace's Ode 1.3 asks the gods to protect Vergil as he sets out for Greece.

¹⁷ *Mantua gave me birth, Calabria gave me death; now Parthenope holds me.*

I have sung of pastures, of the countryside and of leaders.

(Quoted in Suetonius, *De Viris Illustribus*, Vergil 36).

¹⁸ The tomb is on a hillside in a lovely simple park located a short distance from the Mergilina Station. It certainly is an important grave monument of the late Republic or early Empire. The history of thoughts about his grave have been chronicled by J.B. Trapp in: *The Grave of Vergil*, J. Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 47, 1984, pp. 1–31.

At the conclusion of his fourth Georgic, Vergil makes a direct personal reference. Describing his own training in poetry in the third person, he says, « Vergil was nursed of sweet Parthenope ».¹⁹ We know that there was a sanctuary of the sirens on the north side of the Sorrento peninsula and a temple of Parthenope was located in Neapolis.²⁰ Her cult centered around what was accepted as her nearby tumulus.²¹

There were earlier precedents for associating sirens with literary figures. Pausanias passes to us the story that Dionysos appeared in a dream to the general of the Lacedaemonian army as it prepared to attack Athens and commanded that he «commemorate with all due ceremony the death of a new siren.» It was immediately understood that this was a reference to the recent death of Sophokles and the ceremonies requested by Dionysos were held – even by the enemies of Athens during a state of war. Pausanias adds a comment at the end of the episode which is especially significant for this paper «and down to the present day men are wont to liken to a siren whatever is charming in both poetry and prose.»²²

The use of a siren on a coin commemorating the death of Vergil was particularly fitting in light of the above information. There was a quadruple significance: 1) the creature who carries off spirits of the dead to connote death and mourning; 2) a celebrated singer and musician to recall Vergil's supreme art; 3) a renowned mythological resident of Vergil's district after whom the nearby city was originally named; and 4) the chastity proclaimed by the Siren's name and Vergil's unmarried state.

The Lyre

We hear Ovid using the lyre as a metaphor for his poetic voice: «Add the fact that my lyre, after busily practicing the complaints of her master, has turned with difficulty to a happy poem». Horace too uses this natural image: «Polyhymna, who tuned Sappho's lyre». And Statius writes of finding inspiration at Vergil's tomb where he plucks at a lyre.²³

The lyre on the aureus of Turpilianus (*Pl. 12, 5*) is an archaic form whose main elements are a tortoise shell sounding box and vertical posts made from or resembling horns or bones. The Greek term for this instrument was *chelys lyra* or tortoise lyre. Latin adopted the word *lyra* for its own use, but called this specific

¹⁹ Georgics 4.563–564, the line mentioned by Mattingly, see above.

²⁰ Strabo, I 2.12; Dionysius Perieg. 357–8.

²¹ Pliny, Hist. Nat. III, 62; Lycophron, Alexandra, 732–7; Strabo V 4.7.

²² 1.21. Translation: W.H.S. Jones, Loeb edition. Mattingly in BMCRE 1, p. ciii, mentions that the dramatist Sextus Turpilius, a relative of Turpilianus the moneyer, was termed the Novella Sirena. This information was described as being from an article by Cavedoni, but Mattingly gives no further citation and I am unable to locate the reference. It is commonly accepted that the siren is a family reference by the moneyer, but the Pausanias quote establishes that calling an author a siren was far from a unique occurrence.

²³ Epistulae ex Ponto 3.4.45–46; Odes 1.1.44; Silvae 4.4.51–55.

type *testudo* using the Latin for tortoise.²⁴ It was used as a symbol of lyric poetry itself by Ovid and Horace.²⁵

According to one tradition, Orpheus was the inventor of the *chelys lyra*: «Orpheus, much versed in music, Son of Kalliope, was the first to build the *chelys*». ²⁶ According to another tradition, Hermes invented this design and presented it to Apollo in compensation for cattle which he had stolen.²⁷ Maas and Snyder comment that «The Muses ... are most frequently portrayed playing the *chelys lyra*». ²⁸

The lyre recurs as a coin type under both Domitian and Hadrian.²⁹ The significance on these later occasions is not clear, but my suggestions would be a theatrical or poetic contest or perhaps, in the latter case, a commemoration of a visit by Hadrian to Athens.³⁰

Lyres appear regularly on Roman provincial coins as a perusal of RPC will show. The common case is an obverse head of Apollo coupled with a lyre reverse. Occasionally one sees the head of an emperor and the lyre reverse, especially if Apollo seems to be an important local deity. But there is an occurrence which reinforces the thought that the lyre was a recognized reference to mortal poetry. A small bronze of Mytilene from the Roman period has a portrait head of Sappho labeled as such and a *chelys lyra* on the reverse.³¹ A middle bronze, also from Mytilene, dating to the second half of the second century shows a bust of Julia Procula on the obverse and a seated Sappho playing a *chelys lyra* on the reverse.³²

Pan or Faunus

Not only is Pan (*Pl. 12, 6*) an appropriate creature for recalling the woods which were the settings for Virgil's Eclogues, but the spirit has a special significance for

²⁴ Vergil, Georgics, 4.464; Horace, Carmina, 3.11.3 and 4.3.17. The practice continues well into Roman times: see Pausanias 8.54.7 «Mount Parthenion rears also tortoises most suitable for the making of lyres.»

²⁵ Ovid, Ars Amatoria 2.18.26; Horace, Carmina 1.6.10.

²⁶ Timotheus, Persae 221–223.

²⁷ Homeric Hymn to Hermes 4.499.

²⁸ M. Maas and J. M. Snyder, Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece (New Haven and London 1989), p. 83. For many examples the reader can consult E. Theophilidou, Die Musenmosaike der römischen Kaiserzeit, Trierer Zeitschr. 47, 1984, pp. 239–348.

²⁹ Domitian: BMCRE 2, p. 367, 318; Hadrian: BMCRE 3, pp. 437–441, *, 1354 and 1359.

³⁰ Suetonius (Domitian 4) mentions Domitian's sponsorship of musical and literary contests.

³¹ Coin of Mytilene: BMC Troas 169: Sappho head/lyre, see BMC pp. lxx–lxxi. This piece is shown in A. Johnston, «Pseudo-Autonomous» Greek Imperials, ANSMN 30, 1985, p. 107, 7 and pl. 32. Another case with no explicit label, but recognizable by comparison has an earlier date: BMC 149. Note also the fragment of Sappho:

*I took my lyre and said:
Come now, my heavenly
tortoise shell: become
a speaking instrument.*

J.M. Edmonds, Lyrae Graeca (London 1922), 80; this translation by M. Barnard.

³² BMC p. 200, 165.

poets. We know that poets regarded him as a patron from a passage in Horace in which he describes escaping from a harrowing brush with a falling tree. Horace ascribes his good fortune to the agency of his protector Faunus.³³ It happens that Horace later repeats the story with the only significant alteration being that the saving spirit is now named Liber.³⁴ It would seem that the two are so closely associated in Horace's mind that they can be interchanged. Perhaps to him they are differing manifestations of the same abstraction.

Since the coin shows Pan with his *syrinx*, we are led to focus on his musical role. Vergil himself mentions Pan in ways that indicate his respect for the god's gifts. In the famous Eclogue 4 he cites Orpheus, Linus and Pan as the greatest song-makers. Another quote ties Pan to music and song: « Pan it was who first taught man to make reeds one with wax.»³⁵ Those quotes show us that Pan was remembered for his music and highly regarded.

Satyr

The pensive pose of this creature (*Pl. 12, 7*) and his pipes so prominently set aside on Turpilianus' denarii are indicative of the intended theme, sorrow at the loss of a source of poetry. While all will accept the appropriateness of a satyr to evoke the woodland settings of Vergil's Eclogues, it may not be clear how strong a reference to poetry is made. Some lines from Horace are instructive:

... *I want only*
Ivy wreathes, the prizes poets earn:
I pray to the gods for cool groves
And dancing nymphs and satyrs
And I stay away from vulgar mobs, I pray to
Euterpé, mistress of flutes, to
*Polyhymna, who tuned Sappho's lyre.*³⁶

The Star and Crescent

The star and crescent (*Pl. 12, 8*) are certainly natural symbols for immortality and would be an appropriate symbol for the eternal fame won by Vergil for his poetry. It is also possible that we encounter here a reference to the passage of souls from earth-bound bodies to a space beyond the moon.³⁷ The reverse of Turpilianus' denarius is perfectly explained as being an expression of this belief applied to the sublime spirit of Vergil.

³³ Odes 2.17.22–30: «Me the trunk of a tree, descending on my head, had snatched away, had not Faunus, protector of poets, with his right hand warded off the stroke.» (trans. C.E. Bennett, Loeb).

³⁴ Odes 3.8.7–8: «I had vowed to Liber a savory feast and a pure white goat, what time I narrowly escaped destruction by the falling tree » (trans. C.E. Bennett, Loeb).

³⁵ Eclogue 4.55–59 and Eclogue 2.33.

³⁶ Odes 1.1.38–44.

³⁷ For a full discussion of this belief, see F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, (Paris 1942) chapter 3.

It is necessary to admit that this interpretation seems not to be universal for the star-and-crescent type, and that there are points we do not understand. The type was commonly used for coins of Diva Faustina Sr. and Jr., cases for which the interpretation suggested above is entirely appropriate.³⁸ However, it also occurred commonly on denarii of Hadrian which lack the title PP.³⁹ This makes them prior to the accepted dates for the deaths of Plotina, Antinous, and Sabina and I cannot think of other names convincing as an explanation. It is more likely that the meaning for the Hadrian type is the eternity of the Principate, a topic suitable for Hadrian's anticipated *decennalia*.

There is a provincial coin which uses the star and crescent as an immortality symbol for Hadrian after his death, however. A bronze of Abdera has heads of Antoninus Pius and Divus Hadrian on the two sides and a small star and crescent have been added behind the head of Hadrian.⁴⁰

Pegasus

The famous winged horse, son of Poseidon by Medusa, often employed as a symbol of Corinth, was already familiar on Greek and Roman coins when Turpilianus chose him as a coin type.⁴¹ But the Augustan Pegasus (*Pl. 12, 9*) is shown in a specific pose, different from the common views: standing and pawing the earth with one hoof. Note on the coin that three legs are straight; the creature is not moving. This stance depicts his role in producing the spring Hippocrene on Mount Helicon, home of the Muses. He pawed the earth and pure water flowed forth to nourish and inspire the Muses, thus establishing Pegasus as their benefactor.⁴² So this Pegasus type used by Turpilianus is especially relevant as a comment on Augustus as the patron and protector of Vergil.

There are literary references that establish that a stream was regularly invoked as a symbol of poetry and Hippocrene would be the preeminent example of this

³⁸ Faustina Sr.: BMC^{RE} 4, p. 44, 293 (star alone); p. 237, 1476 (seven stars with crescent); Faustina Jr.: p. 656, 1593 (seven stars and crescent). The concept of a spirit taking its place among the stars certainly seems intended by the types of Faustina Jr. with legend SIDERIBVS RECEPTA, p. 655, 1584 and p. 656, 1591.

³⁹ BMC^{RE} 3, p. 296, 456. The occasional addition of the globe suggests we are in the realm of Eternity, but also the earth.

⁴⁰ AMNG 2/1 p. 19, 253 = SNG Cop 388; an example in trade: Auctiones 15, 1985, 237.

⁴¹ For the Roman examples see RRC p. 131, 4 (Anonymous of 280–242 BC); p. 136, 18/2 (Anonymous of 275–270); p. 143, 27/3 and 4 (Anonymous of 230–226); p. 344, 341/1–3 (Q. Titi of 90); p. 408, 395/1 (L. Cossuti C. F. Sabul of 74) (Bellerophon brandishing spear and riding Pegasus).

⁴² Some telling lines occur at the start of Propertius Elegies 3.3:

*Among Helicon's gentle shadows I seemed to recline
By the stream that first flowed at the stamp of Pegasus' hoof.*

Pausanias 9.31.3: «On Helicon... is what is called the Horse's Fountain (Hippocrene). It was made, they say, by the horse of Bellerophon striking the ground with his hoof.» (trans. Jones, Loeb).

association. Greek references range from Hesiod to Callimachus.⁴³ In the Roman world, Lucretius, Horace, Vergil, Ovid, Propertius, Juvenal, Martial and Pliny all used the image of a stream to represent poetry, so its appearances were frequent and occurred over many years.⁴⁴ Vergil even speaks to Arethusa as he would to his special Muse.⁴⁵

Pegasus is most often shown in visual art in several standard scenes: fighting the Chimera, being tamed by Bellerophon, and being born from Medusa. There are occasional representations of Pegasus with Nymphs or Muses. The best preserved is a second century mosaic from the Villa del Nilo in Leptis Magna, now at the Bardo Museum in Tunis: three Nymphs bathe Pegasus and adorn him with garlands of flowers as he stands at a spring. The same scene is found at the Maison des Nymphs in Neapolis (Nabeul) and at the Baths of Ocean at Sabratha.⁴⁶ Poorly preserved, but most relevant for this discussion, is a large Spanish mosaic combining Pegasus, Nymphs and the Muses. Nymphs adorn Pegasus in a central medallion while the Muses are depicted in nine segments arranged radially around.⁴⁷ By directly associating these elements, this mosaic establishes that the intent of the designs with Pegasus and the nymphs is a reference to artistic inspiration and patronage. A fifth century terra-cotta tablet in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo shows Pegasus pawing the earth as one Muse or Nymph gives him a drink from a bowl, a second strokes his forelegs and a third pours water from an amphora over his hindquarters.⁴⁸

Pausanias considered the most noteworthy fountain in Corinth to be one showing Bellerophon and Pegasus. He reported that the structure was engineered so that the water flowed out of the hoof of Pegasus, a feature he did not explain but whose meaning is clear from the above paragraphs.⁴⁹ There are also coins of Corinth struck under Tiberius and Caligula which show Pegasus in the «pawing pose» rather than the usual leaping or fighting poses.⁵⁰

⁴³ Hesiod: Theogony 6 speaks of the Muses bathing in the holy waters; Callimachus: A. P. 7.55.5-6 again associates the Muses with sacred waters, other references are: H. Apollo, 112 and A. P. 9.64.5.

⁴⁴ Lucretius: 1.926-928; Horace: Ode 1.1.19-22 and Ode 3.16.29-32; Vergil: Georgics 2.174-176 and 4.319, Eclogues 1.51-52; Ovid: Amores 3.1.3-6 and Metamorphosis 5.263; Propertius: Elegies 3.1.1-4; 3.3.5, 16, and 57; Juvenal: 3.13; Martial 4.57.7-8; Pliny: Letters 7.9. For discussions of these passages see: S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace* (New Haven 1962) especially pp. 11-13; F.M. Dunn, *Horace's Sacred Spring* (Ode, 1.1) *Latomus* 48 (1989) pp. 97-109; I. Troxler-Keller, *Die Dichterlandschaft des Horaz* (Heidelberg 1964) especially pp. 70-99.

⁴⁵ Eclogues 10.1: «This last verse, Arethusa, grant me now.»

⁴⁶ The mosaics are listed in K.M.D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Oxford 1978) pp. 264, 265 and 267.

⁴⁷ Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, Nr. 30. For a photograph and discussion of the mosaic, see E. Theophilidou, (above, n. 28), pp. 291-304, especially 300-304.

⁴⁸ Inventory 42742. For a discussion see J. W. Salomonson, *Spätömische rote Tonwaren mit Reliefverzierung aus nordafrikanischen Werkstätten*, *BABesch* 44, 1969, pp. 4-7.

⁴⁹ Description of Greece, 2.3.5.

⁵⁰ Tiberius: RPC p. 252, 1145 and 1147; Caligula: H.C. Lindgren, *Ancient Greek Bronze Coins*: European Mints (San Mateo 1989) p. 76, 1606.

Pegasus appeared several times on Roman coins and one thinks of the well-known appearances by Q. Titius and L. Cossutius C. F. Sabula during the Republic and under Hadrian and Gallienus during the Empire.⁵¹ But those occasions presented a warrior horse, suitable for recalling military might or perhaps for signifying Corinth. The Turpilianus type was repeated in exact detail just once, under Vespasian, on a denarius struck with the head of Domitian as Caesar (*Pl. 12, 18*).⁵² There is ample evidence that Domitian then and later was a patron of poetry to an unusual extent so the design with a reference to poetry is appropriate for him.⁵³

Butterfly and Crab

This is an exceptional design without precedent or repeat in either Greek or Roman coinage (*Pl. 12, 10*). Its interpretation cannot be given with certainty, but the proposal of Mattingly is the most easily supported.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Titius: RRC p. 344, 341 assigned to 90 BC; L. Cossuti: RRC p. 408, 395; Hadrian: RIC pp. 427-8, 671 & 687; Gallienus: RIC 324. See also note 43 above. The Titius coin was among those restored by Trajan in 107: RIC 2, p. 306, 776.

⁵² BMCRE 2, p. 36, 193, dated to 76 by a COS IIII title. L. Laffranchi dealt with the coins of Durmius and Turpilianus: *La monetazione di Augusto* (Milan 1919). On p. 54 he noted this reappearance of the Pegasus type under Domitian and incorrectly ascribed it to a centennial commemoration (the interval is only 94 years). He cited E. Gabrici, *Un denaro d'Augusto con toro Campano*, in: *Sumbulæ Litterariae in honorem Julii De Petra* (Naples 1911), who proposed that the man-bull type commemorates Augustus' return to Rome through Campagna.

⁵³ Suetonius tells the story that Domitian «made a pretense of an interest in poetry, an art which had previously been as unfamiliar to him as it was later despised and rejected, and he even gave readings in public.» Domitian 2.2, J.C. Rolfe trans. (Cambridge and London 1979). Suetonius here puts an emphasis on this being a deception despite that fact that he elsewhere records a number of occasions on which Domitian quoted poetry: Vergil in 9.1; Homer on two occasions, in 12.3 and 18.2; and an unknown Greek author in 14.2. Tacitus also provides an independent witness, Hist. 4.86.2: « he ... affected a devotion to literature and a love of poetry». Discussions of this topic are: H. Bardon, *Les empereurs et les lettres latines d'Auguste à Hadrien* (Paris 1940) pp. 281–287; and K.M. Coleman, *The Emperor Domitian and Literature*, ANRW 2.32.5, pp. 3087–3115; and in a more restricted vein, P. White, *The Presentation and Dedication of the Silvae and the Epigrams*, JRS 64, 1974, pp. 40–44.

There are denarii of an eastern mint which couple Pegasus with heads of Vespasian and Titus: BMCRE 2, p. 101, 482 & *. Vespasian and Titus are given their proper COS numbers so we are not looking at mules. This seems to be either a misunderstanding or carelessness at the remote site. No such Vespasian or Titus coins are known from Rome.

⁵⁴ See the section on Mattingly's arguments above in this article. The first attempt at interpretation was made by J. Eckhel, *Doctrina Nummorum Veterum* (Leipzig 1826–1828), vol. 5, p. 204. He noted the aphorisms which Suetonius (*Divus Augustus* 25) called the emperor's favorite, the substance being «Make haste slowly» and suggested the pair of creatures are intended to contrast the fast but unfocused butterfly with the purposeful crab. One would expect, however, that if the populace were expected to understand this, we should find other examples in prose or visual arts paralleling the coin and none seem to exist. The same text has also been proposed to explain the enigmatic denarii and aurei of Titus with a dolphin coiled about an anchor. This seems to be a better pair to illustrate speed and steadfastness, but then no one has connected Titus to the aphorism in question.

There are numerous examples in Roman art associating butterflies with the human soul. A medallion of Antoninus Pius shows Prometheus making the first man, with Minerva bringing him to life by applying an uncertain object to his head.⁵⁵ Several sarcophagi show this scene and one at the Louvre is most revealing because of the details possible on its larger scale.⁵⁶ Prometheus finishes work on a figure of man while Minerva applies a butterfly chrysalis to his head. Apparently the spirit or *anima* is to enter the lifeless body directly from the chrysalis and this can only be in the form of a butterfly. The adjoining group on this sarcophagus depicts the later death of this man; his body lies prone while his *anima* rises from it, carried by her butterfly wings. An interesting Endymion sarcophagus in Malibu shows Hypnos with butterfly wings.⁵⁷ Psyche is regularly depicted in all forms of Roman art as having butterfly wings; sarcophagi often show her with Cupid.⁵⁸ There is also an interesting engraved gem that combines a butterfly with a *chelys lyra*.⁵⁹ While the meaning of this design is no more explicit on the gem than the coins under study, it is interesting to encounter the combination of these two symbols in another context.

The butterfly appeared once on a Republican coin, but it is unclear whether it was an item of some significance or, more likely, if it was a meaningless mint symbol chosen by whimsy.⁶⁰

The most significant relevant objects were treated by O. Brendel.⁶¹ He showed that there was a set of Roman mosaics depicting a skeleton or skull (representing death or mortality) and that these usually included a butterfly beside the skeleton. He also located a number of related artifacts such as a bronze skull shown with a large butterfly perched atop. These constitute undeniable evidence that the butterfly was used as a symbol of the soul, especially evident when dealing with death. The butterfly is appropriate because, like the soul, it is «weightless» or at least insubstantial, and because its emergence from its chrysalis and subsequent flight are parallel to the departure of the soul from the body.

Recently Dunbabin has revisited this area to study the symbolism of miniature skeletons of the period of the Republic and early Empire.⁶² She points out that the

⁵⁵ F. Gnechi, *I medallioni romani* (Milan 1912) 2, p. 20, 98, Tav. 54, 8.

⁵⁶ F. Baratte and C. Metzger, *Catalogue des sarcophages en pierre d'époques romaine et paléochrétienne*, (Paris 1985), pp. 112–3.

⁵⁷ G. Koch with K. Wight, *Roman Funerary Sculpture, Catalogue of the Collection, J. Paul Getty Museum*, (Malibu 1988), pp. 32–35.

⁵⁸ F. Baratte and C. Metzger, (above, n. 56), pp. 200 and 230; see also H. Sichtermann, *Die Flügel der Psyche, Opuscula*, pp. 49–58.

⁵⁹ H.B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos, Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the British Museum* (London 1926) no 2652.

⁶⁰ RRC p. 236, 184 assigned by Crawford to the period 169–158 BC.

⁶¹ O. Brendel, *Untersuchungen zur Allegorie des pompejanischen Totenkopf-Mosaiks, JDAI RM 49, 1934* pp. 157–179.

⁶² K.M.D. Dunbabin, *Sic Erimus Cuncti ... The Skeleton in Graeco-Roman Art, JDAI 101, 1986* pp. 185–255; see especially pp. 204, 212–215 and 224–226.

famous silver cups from Boscoreale with skeleton representations of philosophers and writers also present a butterfly among them.⁶³

The crab is not so straightforward. There is an exhaustive paper which aimed to understand the iconography of the exact coin we consider, but it was not able to reach firm conclusions – perhaps because the author was not aware of the connection with Vergil.⁶⁴ It may be that the best we can say goes back to the words of Mattingly quoted above.

There is, however, a reference in Propertius that seems to refer to the crab as a Roman symbol of death:

*Now I tell you, your ship may struggle amidst the waves,
Unarmed yourself you may meet foes armed to the teeth;
The earth may quake and open a yawning chasm
At your feet: but reserve your fears for the sinister
Eight-footed crab.⁶⁵*

Victory and Man-Headed Bull

Mattingly observed that the type (*Pl. 12, 11*) was a copy of the coin of Neapolis and thus relevant for Vergil because of geography.⁶⁶ While this is true, there is an additional aspect that makes this design considerably more appropriate. The composite man-bull figure is Acheloos, a river god who is best known in Greek mythology for his defeat at the hands of Herakles, a contest in which he lost a horn. A further detail, however, is that Acheloos was the father of the sirens and of the nymphs of springs.⁶⁷ With this understood, the coins of Neapolis (recall that the

⁶³ Louvre Bj 1923; shown in her paper in figures 37–42. They have been much discussed and published: K. Schefold, *Die Bildnisse der antiken Dichter*, Redner und Denker (Berlin 1943) pp. 166 and 216; M. Gigante, *Civiltà delle forme letterarie nell'antica Pompei* (Rome 1979) pp. 69, 103–122, 138 and plate 13; G.M.A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks* (New York 1965) figs. 1697–1704.

⁶⁴ W. Deonna, *The Crab and the Butterfly: A Study in Animal Symbolism*, J. Warburg & Cortauld Institutes 17 (1954), pp. 47–86.

⁶⁵ Elegies 4.1B, final lines – written within a few years of the coin in question (R. Musker trans). Commentators have explained this as a reference to the crab of the zodiac, but I do not understand why a particular month should be a time of fear and so do not find that explanation persuasive.

⁶⁶ Mattingly, n. 3 above.

⁶⁷ Father of the sirens: Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 4.893, describes the sirens as coming from Acheloos and Terpsichore; Pausanias, 9.34.3, agrees. Hyginus describes the sirens as daughters of Acheloos and the Muse Melpomene twice, as he tells the story of Odysseus' passage and as he relates their own story: *Fabulae* 125 and 141. Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 7.19 has this same parentage. There is a comprehensive treatment of the specific subject: H.-P. Isler, *Acheloos* (Bern 1970), which includes the Durmius denarius in a catalogue of art works showing Acheloos, but only speculates (p. 89) that the moneyer may have had Campanian roots. LIMC shows numerous objects which depict Acheloos together with Nymphs, but there are only a few items which combine him with the sirens. A splendid early fifth century gold necklace which alternates pendant Acheloos masks with stylized sirens is an exception: F.H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Jewellery in the British Museum* (London 1911), p. 148, 1461.

dominant settlement in the area was called «Parthenope» until about the year 450) can be seen as an organic whole. They have the head of the siren Parthenope on one side and her father, the powerful Acheloos, on the other. The denarii of M. Durmius honor Augustus for his patronage of Vergil, noting the parallel to the father of the sirens. These coins are thus Durmius' counterpart for the denarii of Turpilianus with Pegasus which honor Augustus for his supporting role. Like the siren design this coin also has a multiple association: both local association with Vergil's home and a reference to the sirens.

Hercules

The bust of Hercules (*Pl. 12, 12*) could have many different interpretations and it will never be possible to prove the original intent with certainty.⁶⁸ Certainly the most common association for Hercules is the feat of his labors, but he has another aspect in Roman thought which fits appropriately the theme postulated by this paper: the leader and protector of the Muses. The coins of Q. Pomponius Musa struck ca. 58 BC have a punning theme of the Muses, all of whom are shown. They were apparently so associated with Hercules that a coin showing him and labeled HERCVLES MVSARVM was also included in the set.⁶⁹ Presumably this was done because of the *Aedes Herculis et Musarum*, constructed by M. Fulvius Nobilior shortly after 187 BC and restored in 29 BC by L. Marcius Philippus, the stepfather of Octavian.⁷⁰ So Hercules, through this well known temple, probably came easily to mind for a Roman thinking of the Muses. The association was certainly much stronger for a Roman than for a Greek accustomed to many and varied references to Herakles in literary and visual arts. It may be significant that the *colligium poetarum* met at this temple.

This Hercules type too could be a way of honoring a patron of the arts. The reverse for the type is a scene of Parthia returning standards; apparently Augustus is so well known that he need not even be named, just suggested through this indirect reference. Or alternatively, this very small issue was done at the last moment and there was no time to make reverse dies with a new, more appropriate design.

⁶⁸ RIC 314 = BMC 59. In a rare error Mattingly comments that these pieces are unusually crude. A recent example which was in trade (Leu 59, 245) shows that this was not so. J.-B. Giard, CBN, *Monnaies de l'Empire Romain* 1 (Paris 1976) p. 81, 205 was aware of only three specimens. The appendix to this paper identifies a total of nine specimens from two dies, still quite a small number.

⁶⁹ Crawford, RRC p. 437–438, 410/2–10 show the Muses; Hercules playing a testudo lyre is shown on p. 437, 410/1.

⁷⁰ See L. Richardson Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore and London 1992) p. 187; and an article with more details by the same author: Hercules Musarum and the Porticus Philippi in Rome, *AJA* 81, 1977, pp. 355–361. Fulvius seems to have had literary interests and had taken the poet Ennius with him on his campaign as a companion. Pliny the Elder records that he brought back a set of statues of the Muses which were installed in the new temple (Nat. Hist. 35.66).

Richardson proposes that the figures of the Muses on denarii of Q. Pomponius Musa were based on the statues set up by Fulvius.⁷¹ A logical extension would be that the figure of Hercules was also from a statue in the shrine. We can reasonably ask the question, what is the source of the Durmius portrait of Hercules? It clearly differs from the Musa version which features the lion skin over his head and it lacks the club at his neck, so there is no support for the Muse association on the basis of iconography.

In both overall impression and in details of presentation, this denarius repeats the design used in about 269 BC for the didrachms which were Rome's first silver coins (*Pl. 12, 13*).⁷² Both share a youthful, unbearded head with rows of curly hair, sideburns, prominent jaw line, diadem, lion skin draped over his shoulders and club decorated with pips at his near shoulder. This must have happened by design; there are too many details for this to be purely coincidental. It is possible that both coins represent an interpretation of the same statue or other work of art and naturally are quite similar. The resemblance is so close, however, that I can only believe this was a direct copy of the earlier design.

What I am proposing is remarkable because of the long elapsed time between the two coins, enough to make it quite difficult for a specimen to have survived. But another detail raises its head at this point and demands discussion. The commonly accepted dating of the two issues in question spaces them exactly 250 years apart. Is it possible that this anniversary was noted and that it played a part in the particular choice of a prototype portrait for Durmius' denarius?

Prototypes from Magna Graecia

The discussion immediately above linked a denarius design of Durmius to a «Romano-Campanian» didrachm. There is a wider phenomenon evident in the designs chosen by M. Durmius, a recalling of historical types seen much earlier on coinage. The city of Velia used a design of a lion attacking a stag (*Pl. 12, 14*) whose details are exactly echoed by one of the denarius designs of M. Durmius (*Pl. 12, 15*) and it has often been noted that his type of Acheloos crowned by a flying Victory was a common coin type of Neapolis (*Pl. 12, 16*).⁷³ What are we to make of this set of three denarii of 19 BC based on Greek prototypes? Clearly M. Durmius

⁷¹ Strong arguments have been made against this seemingly reasonable hypothesis. M.T.M. Moevs, *Le Muse di Ambracia*, BdA 12 (1981) pp. 1–58 shows from analysis of Terra Sigillata molds which show the muses and Hercules Musarum (named Herakles Moson) that the coins are not accurate representations, but simply an eclectic assembly of recognizable types. In particular, the molds show Hercules wearing a theatrical mask at the top of his head and resting his club on the ground. It seems our 19 BC portrait of Hercules matches neither the Musa coin or the representation which Moevs suggests through her study.

⁷² RRC p. 137, 20/1. Crawford speculates on p. 714 that the didrachm portrait derives from a statue of Hercules Victor. He has further comments in note 7 of the same page.

⁷³ Velia: SNG ANS 1398–1407; Neapolis: SNG ANS 293 sq. The connection of the types of 19 with Italian populations was also discussed by J.-L. Desnier (see n. 2 above) p. 129 who emphasized the hostility toward Rome remaining at this date.

had a taste for old designs. In addition to the Magna Graecia prototypes, he also used a design of a boar pierced by a spear which had as a prototype a Republican denarius.⁷⁴ Is there any connection with the fact that Turpilianus' denarius of Tarpeia is also a copy of an earlier design, in this case one by an ancestor of the moneyer?⁷⁵ Or that Florus, the third member of this college, repeated the type of warrior with prostrate Sicily?⁷⁶ It certainly seems like an extraordinarily large set of repeated designs for a single year.

Honors for Other Literary Figures

Vergil is hardly unique among ancient literary figures in receiving honors and commemoration – even official. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods coins with Homer were often struck by that set of cities which claimed to be his birth place.⁷⁷ Coins with the head of Sappho from Mytilene were cited above in the section dealing with the lyre. Halikarnassos showed its pride in having produced Herodotus by using his portrait. Paul Zanker has found no less than five coin designs with different intellectuals of one sort or another from different cities during the Hellenistic period.⁷⁸ On a private level, there were Roman homes which were decorated with wall paintings and mosaics of dramatists and poets.⁷⁹ SHA notes that Severus Alexander kept an image of Vergil in his *lararium*.⁸⁰

On the other hand, it is reasonable to look for the commemoration of others on coinage, if Vergil was so honored. Horace, after all, was also a semiofficial poet of the regime, having written hymns for the Secular Games of 16 and accompanied Augustus on delicate missions. But when Horace died in 8 BC, the phase of moneyer coins with changing and topical designs had already ended. This was the period of few designs held fixed for a number of years, a mint philosophy that lasted through the reign of Tiberius. Propertius died in 15 BC or shortly thereafter, but was hardly a comparable public figure. However popular his poetry, he was in no way involved with the emperor, public events or history.

⁷⁴ The prototype was RRC p. 419, 407, struck by C. Hosidius C. F. Geta and assigned by Crawford to 68 BC. Is there any significance that the interval here is also so close to a round number? Crawford described the boar as the Calydonian Boar and interpreted it as an extension of the obverse type of Diana.

⁷⁵ RRC p. 352, 344/2.

⁷⁶ RRC p. 412, 401.

⁷⁷ See C. Heyman, Homer on Coins from Smyrna, in: S. Scheers (ed.), *Studia Paulo Naster Oblata* (Leuven 1982) pp. 161–173, and K.A. Eadsdale, An Essay Toward Classification of Homeric Coin Types, *JHS* 1912, pp. 318–339; K. Schefold (above n. 63). For specific examples see RPC 1, Smyrna: 2480, 2482, 2487; Colophon: 2523. Heyman mentions Chios and Cyme as well without mentioning the emperor (and they are not in RPC 1). A coin of Nicaea in Bithynia with head of Commodus/head of Homer: Waddington 430, 249 and see auction Waddell, 9 December 1982, 108.

⁷⁸ P. Zanker, *Maske des Sokrates* or, in the English translation, *The Mask of Sokrates: the image of the intellectual in antiquity* (Berkeley 1995) pp. 162–166.

⁷⁹ See for instance, K. Schefold, *Griechische Dichterbildnisse* (Zürich 1965), or for a more focused work, H. von Heintze, *Das Bildnis der Sappho* (Mainz & Berlin).

⁸⁰ Severus Alexander 31.4.

The questioning reader may object that the Roman coinage in 19 BC had never been used to commemorate a recent death, and, even later, was restricted to straightforward publicizing of the consecration of members of the imperial family. It has, however, recently been established that the complex scene on the coinage of L. Aemilius Buca is just such a precedent from a time not far from the death of Vergil (*Pl. 12, 18*).⁸¹ The denarius in question shows the eternal sleep of Endymion on Mount Latmos and the nightly visit of Selene, a scene often used in the second century for sarcophagi.⁸² This use of mythological design on the denarius is a reference to the recent death of Julius Caesar and marks the moneyer as a member of Caesar's faction.

The Singular Position of Vergil and Later Coin Commemorations

The skeptical reader may also object that it was one thing to commemorate Caesar and another to mark the passing of a poet whose major work had not yet even been published. We have some evidence that Vergil was a person of considerable renown within his lifetime. Tacitus recalls a telling occasion concerning Vergil: «The people, when they heard his verses in the theater, all rose and cheered the poet, who happened to be present, as if he were Augustus himself.»⁸³ Suetonius commented that «The first edition of the Bucolics was so successful that they were frequently performed by singers on the stage».⁸⁴ There are also the lines of Propertius praising the Aeneid, clearly written a few years before Vergil's death:

*Yield, all you writers of Rome and writers of Greece;
Something greater is now being born
Than the Iliad even.*⁸⁵

Somewhat later we have a letter of Pliny commenting on a friend who felt a deep admiration for Vergil and who treated his tomb near Naples as a shrine and

⁸¹ CRR p. 487, 480/1 = BMCRR Rome 4160; see J.R. Fears, Sulla or Endymion: A Reconsideration of a Denarius of L. Aemilius Buca, ANSMN 20,1975, pp. 29–37. Crawford interprets the design as a reference to Sulla's dream. He does admit that all other designs of the four moneys he groups together refer to Caesar. His explanation of the Venus head on the obverse also becomes awkward.

⁸² Discussions of the theme on sarcophagi: F. Cumont, (above n. 37), pp. 246–250 and H. Sichtermann, Späte Endymion-Sarkophage (Baden-Baden 1966), pp. 82–87.

⁸³ Tacitus, Dialogus 13.

⁸⁴ De Viris Illustribus, Vergil 26–27.

⁸⁵ Elegies 2.34C lines 7–9. The body of the poem notes that different poets have different themes and expresses the hope that there will be an enduring fame for the author's love poetry. Some measure of reputation is provided by the fact that more than half the lines concern Vergil; the rest of the poem treats Varro, Catullus, Calvus, Gallus and Propertius. The most important aspect for the present discussion is that, because of Vergil's reputation during his lifetime, it was believable that the unpublished poem was to rival the Iliad.

commemorated his birthday each year.⁸⁶ Several mosaics attest to the fame of Vergil's name and the public his works continued to attract for centuries.⁸⁷

It is very informative to see later cases in which homage to Vergil occurs on coinage. A design of Carausius shows Britannia greeting Carausius with the legend EXPECTATE VENI (*Pl. 12, 19*). This exceptional legend is known only for this one occasion and has been recognized as a quote from the *Aeneid*, an unexpected tribute from a soldier whom one might not have thought to have felt significant regard for even the greatest Latin poet.⁸⁸

An extremely rare antoninianus of Probus has resisted explanation until now. The reverse shows a seminude female standing right playing a lyre and resting her left foot on a globe. The legend CALLIOPE AVG identifies her as the muse of epic poetry (*Pl. 12, 20*).⁸⁹ The abrupt end of Probus' reign came in the autumn of 282, exactly 300 years after the death of Vergil. Marcus Weder, a close student of late third century coinage, has commented to me that he believes this undated type was not included in Probus' last issue, but appeared about a year earlier. He points out however that it was not unusual for a coin type to be introduced ahead of the event which it commemorated.⁹⁰ Possible explanations of its rarity are that production was stopped prematurely by Probus' death or that it was a special issue devoted to a single occasion.

⁸⁶ Pliny Letters 3.7 (to Caninius Rufus concerning the late Silius Italicus). Martial mentions this as well and adds the fact that Silius bought the land of the tomb: *Epigrammata* 11.48–50. This evidence is from a period long after publication of the *Aeneid*, but it seems significant that Vergil's birthday was still known a century after his death.

⁸⁷ The most often reproduced is from Maison de l'Arsenal at Hadrumetum, now in the Sousse Museum (inventory 57.104) and, appropriately for this paper, Vergil is shown seated with scroll of the *Aeneid* in his lap while a Muse stands on each side of him. The passage to which the scroll is open can be read and is a call to his muses (*Aeneid* 1.8).

⁸⁸ RIC V/2, pp. 439 and 510, 554–557; commented on by H. Mattingly in CAH 12, p. 333 and see N Shiel, Proc. Vergil Soc. 12, 1972–73, pp. 51–53. The original phrase is *Aeneid* 2, 282–283. More recently a second coin of Carausius has been identified as a reference to Vergil: P.J. Casey, Carausius and Allectus, *The British Usurpers* (London 1994). On p. 58 he discusses the EXPECTATE VENI design and then adds the VBERITAS design with a cow being milked. This is the same word play VBERA/VBERITAS (udder/plenty) that Vergil used in *Georgics* 2.524.

⁸⁹ Cohen 83, citing Tanini. Not included in RIC, but I am informed by Curtis Clay that there is a specimen at Rome in the Museo Nazionale from the Gnechi collection and another at Belgrade in the university collection. The piece photographed appeared recently in trade and is now privately held.

⁹⁰ The existence of anniversary issues has been a debated point since the publication of M. Grant, *Roman Anniversary Issues* (Cambridge 1950.) That book cites many examples which do not withstand close scrutiny, but there do seem to be genuine cases of commemorated anniversaries. Some of Grant's firmer instances are the legionary design used by M. Antony on his denarii which was repeated after 100 years and appeared again after 200 years with a specific reference to the design being a restitution, see p. 107, and the Vesta temple design which apparently mourned the 50th, 200th, and 250th anniversaries of Augustus' death.

If there is another explanation for this coin, it is not obvious. I believe that Calliope's lyre is the same one seen on the aureus of Augustus, the lyre symbolizing Vergil's poetry. The type is certainly exceptional; this is the only appearance of a muse on a Roman imperial coin.

Now that we have a reasonable thesis that the 300th anniversary of Vergil's death was commemorated, let us check for other, earlier commemorations. The centennial occurred in 82 and we have rare semises of Domitian with head of Apollo and reverse of a lyre dated to 85. There may be no connection, but note that publication of the *Aeneid* was delayed «two years» after Vergil's death while editors worked on the incomplete manuscript. The publication centennial was probably 84. The 150th anniversaries of these events occurred in 132–134 and we have common coins of Hadrian with a lyre, though they seem to be somewhat earlier since they do not call him *Pater Patriae*, a title awarded in 127.

The significance of these coins with lyres becomes stronger when their singularity is considered: these two occasions, together with the aureus of Augustus by Turpilianus, were the only times a Roman coin design consisting of a lyre. It may or may not have some subtle significance that Hadrian used a different form of the lyre from the one chosen by Turpilianus and repeated by Domitian. Hadrian's is a *kythara*, an elegant wooden design contrasted with Turpilianus' more archaic form.

The bicentennials of death and publication occurred in 182–184 under Commodus, the 250th anniversaries in 232–234 under Severus Alexander, but these occasions do not seem to have any commemoration.

Comments

It is interesting to note how the designs in question refer either to the poet – his art and death – or, alternatively, to the role of Augustus, his sponsor. Six of the nine (siren, lyre, Pan, satyr, star and crescent and butterfly and crab) can reasonably be interpreted as a direct reference to Vergil. The other three (Pegasus, Acheloos and Hercules) are appropriate for a sponsor or begetter rather than the artist himself and so compliment Augustus for his patronage of the literary arts.

The anniversary coins which appeared three centuries after Vergil's death (and possibly at some intermediate dates) are compelling corroborative evidence that, in interpreting the designs of 19 BC, we are not reading spurious meanings into innocent coins.

We are told that, upon the death of Vergil, Augustus rescued the manuscript of the *Aeneid*, contrary to the will of the poet which stipulated that any of his yet unpublished work should be destroyed, and ordered Varius to publish the work in its unfinished state.⁹¹ Vergil, like a siren, was able to sing from the grave. The motivation for the Augustan coins, however, did not come immediately from the

⁹¹ Virgil's will: Donatus, *Vita Verg.* 35-41 and Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 7.114.

long awaited publication of the semi-official epic. Editing of the unfinished manuscript, which had alternative, variant passages occupied two years.⁹²

Key to Plates 11–12

1	Augustus / Siren	RIC 296	Leu 57, 216
2	Attic grave stele		Indiana Univ. (inv. 65.195.15)
3	Ear ring		Met. Mus. Art (inv. 08.258.49)
4	Wall painting		BM (inv. 1967.5-6.1354)
5	Augustus / Lyre	RIC 293	Private coll. (LBB). 163
6	Augustus / Pan	RIC 294	BN 168
7	Augustus / Satyr	RIC 295	Ryan 2058
8	Augustus / Star and crescent	RIC 300	Leu 13, 376
9	Augustus / Pegasus	RIC 297	Leu 57, 215
10	Augustus / Crab and butterfly	RIC 316	Private coll. (LBB) 157
11	Augustus / Man-headed bull	RIC 319	BN 219
12	Augustus / Hercules	RIC 314	Leu 59, 245
13	Romano-Campanian Didrachm	RRC 20/1	Leu 48, 273
14	Velia, Didrachm	Williams 541	Leu 71, 1997, 34
15	Augustus / Lion and stag	RIC 318	Leu 59, 246
16	Neapolis, Didrachm	SNG ANS 297	Leu 38, 4
17	L. Buca	RRC 480/1	Leu 17, 748
18	Domitian	RIC 238	Num. Ars Class.
19	Carausius	Coh. 56	Class. Num. Group
20	Probus	Coh. 83	H.J. Berk

⁹² The relationship between Augustus and Virgil is discussed in: J. Griffin, *Augustus and the Poets: Caesar qui Cogere Posset*, in: *Caesar Augustus, Seven Aspects*, eds. F. Millar & E. Segal (Oxford, 1984) pp. 189–218; C.G. Hardie, *Octavian and Eclogue 1*, in: *The Ancient Historian and his Materials, Essays in Honor of C.E. Stephens on His Seventieth Birthday*, B. Levick (ed.), pp. 109–122; J.K. Newman, *Augustus and the New Poetry*, *Latomus* 88 (Brussels 1967); W.Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age, Virgil* (Oxford 1908); C.G. Starr, *Virgil's Acceptance of Octavian*, *Am. J. Phil.* 76, 1955, pp. 34–46; P. White, *Promised Verse* (Cambridge, MA and London 1993). Although it is not a factual account, I cannot omit mention of a significant novel which is pertinent: Hermann Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil* (Vienna 1935) translated as *The Death of Virgil*, (New York 1945; reprinted, San Francisco 1983), translation by J.S. Utermeyer.

Appendix

Known Specimens of the Rarer Types

As evidence that an unplanned set of designs was added late in the year, consider the number of reverse types used by the moneyers of 19 BC and compare that sum with the number of types known for subsequent years. RIC shows the following annual numbers of types for precious metal coins during the period of the moneyers:

Year	Number of types
19	22
17	6
16	20
13	15
12	8

So the college in question has the largest number of types, rivaled only by the year commemorating the Secular Games, an event which we would expect to prompt extra types. A plausible explanation is that unscheduled types were added when Vergil died unexpectedly. Since this was toward the end of the year, the types commemorating him are the rarer ones.⁹³ Notice too that if one removes the types associated with Vergil, the number becomes a more typical one.

There are no coins of Florus with a reference to Vergil that I can identify. This may have been a reflection of his taste or interests, but it could also be that he had ended his minting activity by the time news of Vergil's death reached Rome at the end of September.

The tables below are an attempt to identify all specimens of the Vergil coins, exempting only the two more common types mentioned in the next paragraph. The listing cannot pretend to be perfectly comprehensive, but is an honest attempt to be reasonably complete. My hope is that it includes all dies and that it will provide information to judge relative rarity of all types. There is such a variation in the number of surviving specimens that this information seems to be important for understanding the series.

It occurred to me that the crescent and star type might have an interpretation other than a reference to Vergil's death. This suspicion was strengthened because I suspected it was the most common of the coins proposed for this set of Vergil coins. A large number of specimens might then suggest that the type was struck for a longer period than was available for the true Vergil pieces. It is clear that the two most common types in the set are the denarii with Pegasus and with the crescent

⁹³ It is not surprising that aurei of Augustan moneyers are rare, but the rarity of several of the denarii under discussion is exceptional. The Pan and the Satyr exist in only a handful of specimens. The Hercules and Acheloos pieces are almost as rare. The siren is less so, but still scarcer than most moneyer denarii.

and star. Comparing these types in the ANS photo file, I found that there were 46 cards for the Pegasus type and 36 for the crescent and star type. This is no exact measure, but it is an indication that the crescent and star type is probably a bit rarer than the Pegasus type and so this numerical tabulation is no evidence to exclude the type from the series.

Siren (19 specimens from 3 dies)

Die 1: Long right forearm, «VIR» at right

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 154
- 2) Bibliothèque Nationale 155
- 3) BMC 28
- 4) Leu-M&M 1966 (Niggeler 2), 1035 = Glendining 1950 (Platt Hall 1), 735 = Ars Classica 17, 1934 (R. Burrage, Sir Arthur Evans et al), 1209 = A.E. Cahn-A. Hess, 1933 (Haeberlin), 3251
- 5) Leu 13, 1975, 377 (*Pl. 11, 1*)
- 6) C. Crippa FPL 2, 1972, 232
- 7) Sotheby's 1982 (Alnwick Castle), 527

Die 2: Lettering circles into exergue

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 156
- 2) ANS
- 3) A.E. Cahn FPL 31, 1934, 671 = A. E. Cahn-A. Hess 17 July 1933 (Haeberlin), 3250
- 4) M. Baranowski FPL 1932, 351
- 5) Glendining 1931 (Nordheim), 285 = Egger 43, 1913, (Herzfelder), 311 = Egger 17, 1904 (Prowe) # 2278
- 6) R. Ratto 1924 (Bonazzi), 1521
- 7) Charles Hersh Collection

Die 3: Short right forearm, «VIR» at left

- 1) BMC 27
- 2) Glendining 1952 (Ryan 5), 2056
- 3) A. Hess 1912 (Prowe), 1174 = G Sangiorgi 1907 (Francesco Martinetti), 1491
- 4) Leu 57, 1993, 216
- 5) Damsky collection = NFA 1988 (Dr. George Brauer), 732

Lyre (16 specimens from 3 dies)

Die 1: P PETRON TVRPILIAN III VIR «RPI» between uprights

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 106
- 2) Mazzini 496 = Santamaria 1949 (Magnaguti 2), 430
- 3) Milan Civic Collection: Martini p. 64, 154
- 4) Dorotheum 1955 (Apostolo Zeno), 6 = St. Florian
- 5) Private collection (LBB) 163 = Glendining, 20 February 1951 (Ryan 4), 1631 (*Pl. 12, 5*)
- 6) Gnechi collection, cited by BMC p. 5
- 7) L. Hamburger 96, 1932, 787

Die 2: «NV» between uprights

- 1) BMC 22 = Thomas Collection 1844
- 2) M&M 21, 1960, 13 = Egger 39, 1912, 667
- 3) Canessa 1923 (Caruso), 145 = Rollin & Feuardent 1909 (Sir John Evans), 19 = Rollin & Feuardent 1887 (Ponton d'Amécourt), 78
- 4) F. Gnechi, RSN 7, 1897, pl. 14

Die 3: «LIA» between uprights

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 107
- 2) Turin (cited by Giard)
- 3) Berlin = Rollin & Feuardent 1898 (Hoffmann), 1260 = Rollin & Feuardent 1896 (Montagu), 84
- 4) G. Sangiorgi 92, 1900 (Chev. F. Rusconi di G.), pl. 1, 29
- 5) Damsky collection, said to have been found in about 1994

Seated Satyr (4 specimens from 2 dies)

Die 1: Pipes angled upward

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 167
- 2) Glendining 1952 (Ryan 5), 2058 = A.E. Cahn-A. Hess 1933 (Haeberlin), 3252 = Rollin & Feuardent 14, 1888 (de Quelen), 697 (Pl. 12, 7)

Die 2: pipes almost vertical

- 1) Berlin 219/1907 = J. Hirsch 18, 1907 (Imhoof-Blumer), 343 = Rollin & Feuardent 14, 1888 (de Quelen), 697
- 2) F. Panvini Rosati, Archeologia Classica 1951, pl. 15,8
Unknown: Hunter p. 3, 10 is described as plated

Crab & Butterfly (12 specimens from 2 dies)

Die 1: Butterfly aimed at «M»

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 111
- 2) Ars Classica 17, 1934 (R. Burrage, Sir Arthur Evans et al), 1199 = Hess 1929 (Vogel), 697 = J. Hirsch 18, 1907 (Imhoof-Blumer), 207 = Rollin & Feuardent 1896 (Montagu), 107
- 3) Glendining 1951 (Ryan 4), 1628 = Naville-Ars Classica 11, 1925 (Levis), 233 = Naville 3, 1922 (Sir Arthur Evans), 20 = J. Hirsch 24, 1909, (Consul Weber), 891
- 4) Sotheby's 1979 (Patrick Doheny) 73 = M&M 17, 1957, 365 = Hess 1912, (Prowe) 711 = J. Hirsch 1910 (J. P. Lambros et al), 919 = Egger 17, 1904 (Prowe), 2211 = L. Hamburger 1901 (ausländischer Cavalier), 147 = G. Sangiorgi 92, 1900 (Chev. F. Rusconi di G.), 311 = Rollin & Feuardent 1889 («M Le Comte de D» = Comte du Chastel) 207
- 5) Private collection (LBB) 158 = M&M 13, 1954, 622 (Pl. 12, 10)

Die 2: Butterfly aimed between «R» and «M»

- 1) BMC 60
- 2) Bibliothèque Nationale 112
- 3) Turin (shown on Plate V, b of Giard, CBN)
- 4) F. Gnechi in R.S N. 7, 1897, pl. 14 = Rollin & Feuardent 1887 (Ponton d'Amécourt), 77
- 5) Rollin & Feuardent 14, 26 May 1888 (de Quelen), 681

6) Class. Num. Group 32, 1994, 349
 7) F. Panvini Rosati, *Archeologica Classica* 1951, pl. 15, 3

Man-headed bull (7 specimens from 1 die)

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 219 (*Pl. 12, 11*)
- 2) BMC 66 = purchase from Spink in 1920 = Egger 43, 1913, (Herzfelder), 299 = Egger 17, 1904 (Prowe), 2271
- 3) BMC 67
- 4) ANS
- 5) Charles Hersh Collection = NFA 11, 1982, 357 = M&M 53, 1977, 242
- 6) M. Ratto 1955 (Giorgi), 203
- 7) A.E. Cahn-A. Hess 1933 (Haeberlin), 3235
 (A. Hess 20 May 1912, 712 is clearly a forgery from the style of the portrait.)

Bust of Hercules (9 specimens from 2 dies)

Die 1: Nose of Hercules aimed at middle of «R», «I» at back of diadem, nose more pointed, hair does not cover back of neck

- 1) Bibliothèque Nationale 205 = Collection of Baron d'Ailly 9226
- 2) BMC 59 = Feuardent 1904 (?)
- 3) Berlin 153/1934 Geschenk Grünthal (Berlin has another piece which is plated and has a weight of only 2.25 grams; it comes from the Royal Prussian collection)
- 4) Leu 59, 1994, 245 (*Pl. 12, 12*)
- 5) R. Ratto 1930 (Martini), 1530
- 6) Glendining 1950 (Lawrence), 359
- 7) Charles Hersh Collection = Glendining 1950 (Platt Hall 1), 721 = A.E. Cahn-A. Hess 1933 (Haeberlin), 3230 = R. H. Lawrence Collection (presumably this specimen is the one misdescribed by Babelon as an aureus in the Lawrence Collection, p. 468, 1)

Die 2: Nose of Hercules aimed at upright of «R», sideburns more pronounced, «I» above back of diadem

- 1) Glendining 1952 (Ryan 5), 2038 = A. E. Cahn FPL 31, 1934, 671 = A. E. Cahn-A. Hess 1933 (Haeberlin), 3229
- 2) Damsky collection = Crédit de la Bourse, 19–21 April, 1995, 173

Ben L. Damsky
 c/o EPRI
 3412 Hillview Avenue
 Palo Alto, CA 94304 USA



1



2



4



3

Ben L. Damsky, Vergil's Siren on Coins of 19 BC



Ben L. Damsky, Vergil's Siren on Coins of 19 BC

