

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft
Band: 92 (2013)

Artikel: Regulus, Caesar, and a brutish bull
Autor: Woods, David
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-515026>

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: 08.01.2026

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

DAVID WOODS

REGULUS, CAESAR, AND A BRUTISH BULL

PLATE 14

The college of moneyers of the year 42 BC – L. Livineius Regulus, P. Clodius, L. Mussidius Longus, C. Vibius Varus – issued a large variety of types, most of which commemorated the triumvirate of Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian, formed on 27 November 43 BC, although there were some purely personal types also. Of the coins commemorating the triumvirate, most depicted the head of one of the triumvirs on the obverse. However, a small group depicted the head of Julius Caesar on the obverse instead, since the triumvirs claimed the avenging of his assassination as one of their main aims¹. Clodius issued a denarius pairing an obverse depicting the laureate head of Caesar with a reverse depicting a standing figure of Mars (*Pl. 14, 1*) and he paired the same reverse also with two obverses depicting the busts of Antony and Octavian respectively². Mussidius issued a denarius pairing an obverse depicting the laureate head of Caesar with a reverse depicting a cornucopia on a globe between a rudder to the left and a caduceus and an apex to the right (*Pl. 14, 2*)³. Finally, Regulus issued a denarius pairing an obverse depicting the laureate head of Caesar between a laurel branch and a caduceus with a reverse depicting a bull galloping to the right (*Pl. 14, 3*)⁴. In the case of the coins issued by Clodius and Mussidius, the meaning of the reverse is obvious. Clodius paired a reverse depicting Mars, god of war, with obverses depicting busts of two of the triumvirs as well as of Caesar himself in order to make the point that the triumvirs were fighting the republicans in order to avenge the death of Caesar⁵, while Mussidius paired the head of Caesar with a reverse depicting the emblems of domination on land and sea in order to celebrate the extent of Caesar's military conquests. However, the interpretation of the galloping bull which Regulus depicted on his reverse paired with the head of Caesar is much more problematic.

¹ On the various measures adopted by the triumvirs in honour of Caesar at the start of 42 BC, see Dio 47.18–19.

² RRC, p. 505, nos 494/16 (Caesar), 494/17 (Antony), 494/18 (Octavian).

³ RRC, p. 508, nos 494/39 a–b.

⁴ RRC, p. 506, no. 494/24.

⁵ This meaning is reinforced by the fact that he also issued a denarius pairing an obverse depicting the head of Octavian with a reverse depicting Pietas. See RRC, p. 505, no. 494/19.

Any investigation of the significance of this bull needs to begin with the Roman numismatic tradition. Had anyone depicted this type of bull on the coinage previously, and why had they done so? The moneyer L. Thorius Balbus had issued a denarius pairing an obverse depicting the head of Juno Sospita with a reverse depicting a bull in a very similar pose in 105 BC (*Pl. 14, 4*)⁶. The main difference is that the bull of Thorius' coin always raises both forelegs well above the ground, so that it appears to be rearing back onto its hind legs, while the bull of Regulus' coin only ever raises its forelegs a short distance from the ground, and on some specimens even this is doubtful, as if it was really leaping forward rather than rearing back. However, in the case of Thorius' coin, the bull seems to have been some sort of pun or play upon his name. The suggestion is that it is a play upon the similarities between his name and either the Latin term *taurus*, meaning 'bull', or the Greek adjective θούριος, meaning 'rushing, impetuous, furious'⁷. Hence this precedent does not help except to alert us to the possibility that the bull on Regulus' coin may conceal a similar play upon a Roman name. Here one also needs to ask what exactly the bull on Regulus' coin is doing. Many examples of this coin depict it with a slight tilt to its head rather than with a properly lowered head. However, it is always depicted in full flight with legs outstretched both behind and to the front. If the intention had been merely to depict an angry bull, then Regulus ought to have depicted the bull standing with a fully lowered head and, most importantly, with one foreleg pawing the ground. This is the classic pose of the angry bull as described by Pliny, and as depicted on the coinage of Augustus subsequently (*Pl. 14, 5*)⁸. Hence Regulus seems to place the emphasis upon the bull's motion rather than its emotional state. It is not entirely clear, therefore, whether this is an angry bull charging to the attack or a fearful bull charging in flight, although these are not necessarily contradictory states, so that a bull could be both fearful and angry.

Commentators have offered several distinct explanations of the significance of Regulus' galloping bull. First, it has sometimes been interpreted as a reference to the fact that Caesar introduced the novel spectacle of Thessalian bull-fighting during his triumphal games in 46 BC⁹. Next, it has also been interpreted as a sign of the zodiac, the constellation Taurus, even though Caesar had not actually been

⁶ RRC, p. 323, no. 316/1.

⁷ CRAWFORD, RRC, p. 323, seems to favour a play upon the similarities between the name Thorius and the Latin for bull. J. ECKHEL, *Doctrina Numorum Veterum V* (Vienna 1796), p. 325, interprets the bull as a play upon the similarities between the name Thorius and the Greek adjective. He also refers to an older explanation that it alluded to the agrarian law by Sp. Thorius Balbus, tribune of the plebs c. 111 BC.

⁸ Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 8.181. See RIC I², p. 52, nos 166 a – 169; p. 53, nos 176 a – 178 b; p. 54, nos 186 a – 189 b.

⁹ ECKHEL (*supra*, n. 7), p. 235, credits this interpretation to Sigebert Havercamp (1684–1742). On Caesar's introduction of Thessalian bull-fighting to Rome, see Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 8.182. There does not seem to have been another display of Thessalian bull-fighting there until the reign of Claudius. See Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3.

born under this sign, because the goddess Venus, ancestress of the *gens Julia*, ruled this sign¹⁰. Thirdly, it has also been interpreted as a reference to the foundation legend of the town of Bovillae, according to which Bovillae had taken its name when a bull that had escaped sacrifice at Alba Longa was recaptured there¹¹. To be more precise, it has been argued that Caesar had required his legions to adopt the bull of Bovillae on their standards, and that Regulus had then reproduced the bull from their standards on his reverse. Next, Crawford explains it as a possible reference to a favourable omen that Caesar had obtained in 47 BC, or so he dates it, when a bull had escaped from a sacrifice that he had been about to perform¹². Sear follows Crawford, or so he believes, in seeing a reference to a sacrifice that had occurred just before Caesar's final expedition to re-conquer Africa from Scipio and King Juba of Numidia in 47 BC, and argues that the moneyer Regulus was probably the son of the Livineius Regulus who had served under Caesar during this campaign¹³. Finally, Evans identifies the bull as a symbol of southern Italy, a continuation of the bull that had appeared on rebel coinage during the Social War 91–88 BC, and sees it as an allusion to Caesar's victories in southern Italy in 49 BC in an attempt to bolster public confidence that the triumvirs would enjoy similar success against Sextus Pompey in particular, who was then conducting raids upon Italy from his base in Sicily¹⁴.

These interpretations all have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, there are two main arguments in favour of interpreting the galloping bull in reference to Caesar's introduction of Thessalian bull-fighting to Rome. The first is that the galloping bull of the coin suitably depicts such a style of fighting where the bulls were set racing first before the Thessalians galloped alongside in order to leap upon their backs. The second is that Caesar's introduction of Thessalian bull-fighting to Rome would have been an obvious topic of interest to a moneyer who included a wild beast fight on the reverse of a denarius issued as part of a small series in honour of the praetor Regulus, his father presumably (*Pl. 14, 6*)¹⁵. However, there are two major weaknesses with this interpretation. The first is that Caesar's introduction of Thessalian bull-fighting to Rome does not seem a significant enough event in itself to have been commemorated in this way. Why latch upon this minor achievement or distinction when there was so much more from which to choose? The second is that it is not clear what relevance, if any, this topic could have had to Romans in 42 BC. Why should it have been commemorated in that year rather than in any other year? One could perhaps attempt to answer

¹⁰ Th. MOMMSEN, *Die römische Chronologie bis auf Caesar* (Berlin 1859), pp. 305–08.

¹¹ S. WEINSTOCK, *Divus Julius* (Oxford 1971), pp. 6, 116–20.

¹² CRAWFORD, *RRC*, p. 510.

¹³ D. R. SEAR, *The History and Coinage of the Roman Imperators 49–27 BC* (London 1998), pp. 78–79. On this Regulus' service in Africa, see Caesar, *B Afr.* 89.

¹⁴ J. D. EVANS, *Bulls on Republican and Early Imperial Coins*, *NAC* 25 (1996), pp. 197–211, at pp. 203–04, 211.

¹⁵ *RRC*, p. 507, no. 494/30.

these questions by arguing that it was not so much the introduction of Thessalian bull-fighting to Rome that was important, but what this represented. The key point here is that Caesar won his decisive victory against Pompey the Great in 48 BC at Pharsalus in Thessaly, and then granted their freedom to the people of Thessaly in order to commemorate this fact¹⁶. It has been suggested, therefore, that the Thessalians may have volunteered to send a team of bull-fighters to participate in his triumphal games in 46 BC out of gratitude to him for their freedom¹⁷. Whatever the case, an apparent reference to the introduction of Thessalian bull-fighting to Rome may well have been intended to allude to Caesar's victory in Thessaly. The relevance of this to the Romans in 42 BC is that it quickly became apparent that the decisive battle between the triumvirs and the assassins of Caesar would take place that year and in the same broad region that Caesar had once defeated Pompey. Hence Regulus may have intended his reverse to bolster the confidence of the triumviral party by reminding them of the decisive victory which Caesar had gained over Pompey in 48 BC in circumstances very like those in which they currently found themselves.

The claim that the bull on Regulus' reverse represents the bull of Bovillae suffers from similar strengths and weaknesses. Again, the galloping bull of the coin suitably depicts a bull in full flight from his intended sacrifice. However, there is no firm evidence that Caesar ever adopted the bull as the symbol of his legions, although this remains a common assumption¹⁸. Here one can merely note that the evidence adduced by Weinstock in this respect dates to a much later period¹⁹. One does not doubt that the bull did become an important legionary symbol, but the question as to when precisely each of the relevant legions began to include it among its symbols remains open. Furthermore, the bull was a common symbol in the ancient world, and it is by no means clear that any legion began to include it among its symbols simply because it was Caesar's favoured symbol. Most importantly, however, the galloping bull of Regulus' coin bears no resemblance to the bull adopted by the relevant legions among their symbols, which seems to have been a standing bull normally²⁰. Hence the bull of Regulus' coin has no clear relevance to the bull as legionary symbol, even if one could attribute the use of the bull in this fashion to Caesar, which itself remains doubtful. Next, one may doubt whether the story of the bull of Bovillae would have been well enough known to have been commemorated on the coinage in this way. If Regulus had wanted to commemorate some aspect of

¹⁶ Plutarch, *Caesar* 48.1.

¹⁷ G. JENNISON, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (Manchester 1937), p. 59.

¹⁸ See e.g. L. KÉPPÉ, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (London 1984), pp. 139–43.

¹⁹ WEINSTOCK (*supra*, n. 11), p. 119, refers the reader to pl. 12.1–3, illustrations of a second-century shield-boss from the river Tyne and a third-century tombstone from Carrawburgh fort on Hadrian's Wall.

²⁰ See e.g. RIC V.1, p. 96, Gallienus nos 357–58 (Leg. X Gemina); RIC V.2, pp. 468–69, Carausius nos 66–7 (Leg. III), 74–6 (Leg. VII Claudia), 77 (Leg. VIII Augusta).

the origin myth of the *gens Julia*, he would have been better advised to focus on the more familiar tale of Aeneas. This is what Caesar did when he issued a denarius with a reverse depicting Aeneas bearing his aged father Anchises on his shoulders as he fled Troy, a theme which Regulus himself repeated on an aureus in the name of Octavian²¹. So why depart from an important topic at the heart of a familiar tradition in pursuit of an obscure detail of only tangential relevance to the main story?

One turns next to the claim that Regulus' bull is identifiable as an intended victim that had escaped from a sacrifice that Caesar had been about to make. Here one notes that his intended sacrificial victim had actually escaped from Caesar on two separate occasions, first in late 49 BC, then again in late 47 BC²². In the case of the second escape, from the sacrifice that Caesar had been about to offer before his departure to Africa, one notes that our main source does not actually identify the intended victim as a bull. This incident is mentioned in passing only, as the first in a brief list of examples designed to prove Caesar's disregard for religious convention:

No regard for religion ever turned him from any undertaking, or even delayed him. Though the victim escaped as he was offering sacrifice, he did not put off his expedition against Scipio and Juba²³.

This brief reference does not even allow us to identify the god or goddess to whom the sacrifice was about to be offered, which might have preserved some hint as to the nature of the intended sacrifice since female victims were normally offered to goddesses and male victims to gods. Certainly, a bull had once escaped from a sacrifice that Caesar had been about to make, but that had occurred at Rome in late 49 BC, not in 47 BC. Fortunately, Dio preserves a fuller description of this earlier incident as part of his more detailed chronological narrative:

After accomplishing this and removing all the offerings in the Capitol, as well as the others, Caesar hastened to Brundisium towards the close of the year, before entering upon the consulship to which he had been elected. And as he

²¹ RRC, p. 471, no. 458/1 (47–46 BC), the reverse theme repeated by RRC, p. 502, no. 494/3 a–b. Note, however, that Regulus does not simply copy the earlier reverse.

²² The same happened to Pompey immediately before the battle of Pharsalus (Dio 41.61.2), taken as a bad omen. Note also that a bull that had been sacrificed in the temple of Vesta at Rome following an earthquake in late 44 BC or early 43 BC suddenly leapt up afterwards (Dio 45.17.4). This apparent resurrection seems to have been interpreted to mean that the dead Caesar would somehow live again, that is, in the policies of the triumvirate and eventually, of course, in the sole reign of Octavian. Hence it would seem a far more relevant event to have celebrated in 42 BC than any failed sacrifice by Caesar himself whether in 49 BC or 47 BC. However, no one seems to have argued this.

²³ Suetonius, *Caesar* 59.1: Ne religione quidem ulla a quoquam incepto absterritus umquam vel retardatus est. Cum immolanti aufugisset hostia, profectionem adversus Scipionem et Iubam non distulit. Text and translation from J. C. ROLFE, Suetonius I, Loeb Classical Library 31 (Cambridge MA 1913), pp. 80–1.

was attending to the details of his departure, a kite in the Forum let fall a sprig of laurel upon one of his companions. Later, while he was sacrificing to Fortune, the bull escaped before being wounded, rushed out of the city, and coming to a certain lake, swam across it. Consequently he took greater courage and hastened his preparations, especially as the soothsayers declared that destruction should be his portion if he remained at home, but safety and victory if he crossed the sea²⁴.

One should beware of reading greater parallels between these events than actually were the case, not least because the soothsayers gave very different advice on the basis of these apparently similar omens. While the soothsayers advised Caesar in 49 BC that victory would be his if he crossed the sea, it is clear from Suetonius' words that they had wanted him to at least delay his intended expedition against Africa in 47 BC, if not cancel it altogether. Cicero's evidence suggests that they wanted him to postpone it until after the winter solstice²⁵. So why did they offer such contrasting advice on this latter occasion? Perhaps the most plausible explanation is that the intended victim did not escape unharmed in 47 BC, but was already seriously wounded, so that it escaped only to die shortly thereafter. Certainly, one cannot simply assume that it escaped unharmed. To the extent, therefore, that the intended victim who escaped from Caesar in 49 BC was certainly a bull who escaped unharmed, while there is doubt concerning both the identity and condition of that which escaped him in 47 BC, it is clearly preferable to identify the bull on Regulus' coin with the intended victim in 49 BC rather than in 47 BC. But why should a moneyer have chosen to celebrate this event in 42 BC, if ever? The most plausible explanation seems to be that there were certain broad similarities between the situation facing Caesar during late 49 BC in the campaign that began with the sacrifice from which the bull escaped and that

²⁴ Dio 41.39.1–3: Καῖσαρ μὲν δὴ ταῦτά τε πράξας καὶ τὰ ἀναθήματα, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ Καπιτωλίου πάντα, ἀνελόμενος ἐς τὸ Βρεντέσιον ἐπ' ἐξόδῳ τοῦ ἔτους, καὶ πρὶν ἐς τὴν ὑπατείαν ἐς ἣν ἐκεχειροτόνητο ἐσελθεῖν, ἐξώρμησε. καὶ αὐτοῦ τὰ τῆς ἐκστρατείας ποιοῦντος ἵκτινος ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ κλωνίον δάφνης ἐνὶ τῶν συμπαρόντων οἱ ἐπέρριψε· καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο τῇ Τύχῃ θύοντος ὁ ταῦρος ἐκφυγὼν πρὶν τιτρώσκεσθαι, ἔξω τε τῆς πόλεως ἐξεχώρησε καὶ πρὸς λίμνην τινὰ ἐλθὼν διενήξατο αὐτήν. καὶ τούτων ἐπὶ πλέον θαρσύνσας ἠπειχθή, καὶ μάλισθ' ὅτι οἱ μάντις μένοντι μὲν αὐτῷ οἴκοι ὄλεθρον, περαιοθέντι δὲ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ σωτηρίαν καὶ νίκην ἔσεσθαι ἔφασαν. Text and translation from E. CARY, Dio's Roman History IV, Loeb Classical Library 66 (Cambridge MA 1916), pp. 66–9. In so far as CRAWFORD, RRC, p. 510, refers specifically to this passage, but then dates this event to 47 BC, one can only assume this to be a slip for 49 BC.

²⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.52: Ipse Caesar cum a summo haruspice moneretur, ne in Africam ante brumam transmitteret, nonne transmisit? ('Again, when Caesar himself was warned by a most eminent soothsayer not to cross over to Africa before the winter solstice, did he not cross?'). Text and translation from W.A. FALCONER, Cicero XX, Loeb Classical Library 154 (Cambridge MA 1923), pp. 430–1.

facing the triumvirs during the first part of 42 BC²⁶. Both needed to transport their armies across the Adriatic from southern Italy to Epirus in the face of an enemy who dominated the sea in order to pursue that enemy and force him to a decisive battle within Macedonia²⁷. So Regulus may have intended his reverse to bolster the confidence of the triumviral party by reminding them that Caesar had faced a similar situation during the winter of 49/48 BC, but had persisted in his aims and had eventually triumphed.

Finally, one turns to the suggestion by Evans that Regulus' bull represents southern Italy, including Sicily, and that he uses it to allude to Caesar's victories in southern Italy in 49 BC in order to bolster public confidence that the triumvirs would enjoy similar success against Sextus Pompey in particular. This interpretation fails to convince for two reasons. The first reason is that it seems inherently unlikely that either Caesar himself, or anyone who claimed to honour his memory, would have adopted the imagery used by the rebels during the Social War, not least because Caesar's uncle Sextus Julius Caesar, consul in 91 BC, had played a prominent part in the war against the rebels and had died of disease during the siege of Asculum in 90 BC²⁸. The second reason is that the real danger to the triumvirs in 42 BC came less from Sextus Pompey in Sicily than from the growing forces of Brutus and Cassius in the East. Furthermore, whatever else one could say about Sextus Pompey, he had not participated in the assassination of Julius Caesar, and did not, therefore, represent the same priority for the triumvirs as did the assassins Brutus and Cassius. It is not clear therefore, why Regulus should have issued a reverse that focussed on him rather than on the actual assassins with the larger military forces.

None of the above interpretations is entirely convincing, not least because they each require a sometimes quite detailed knowledge of relatively obscure events or imagery in order to make their point in a quite indirect and allusive manner. None of them credits the reverse with the galloping bull with the sort of immediate impact and relevance that one might have hoped for of a reverse issued by a moneyer whose only other triumviral denarius paired an obverse depicting the head of Octavian with a reverse depicting a standing Victory holding a palm-branch and wreath (*Pl. 14, 7*)²⁹. A new approach is needed.

²⁶ So B. WOYTEK, *Arma et Nummi: Forschungen zur römischen Finanzgeschichte und Münzprägung der Jahre 49 bis 42 v. Chr.* (Vienna 2003), p. 461, n. 635, seems to assume.

²⁷ On Caesar's difficulty in transporting troops across to Epirus, see Caesar, *B Civ.* 3.2–30; Appian, *B Civ.* 2.49–59; Dio 41.44–48. On the triumvirs' similar difficulty, see Appian, *B Civ.* 4.86, 115–16; Dio 47.36.4.

²⁸ Appian, *B Civ.* 1.48. Julius Caesar left his son, also called Sextus Julius Caesar, in charge of Syria in early 47 BC, where he was killed the following year. See *B Alex.* 66.1; Appian, *B Civ.* 3.77, 4.58; Dio 47.26.3.

²⁹ RRC, p. 506, no. 494/25.

I begin by making four main points. The first point is that there was a long literary tradition of comparing warriors to bulls and generals in particular to bulls in command of their herds. For example, Homer declares that Zeus appointed King Agamemnon in command of the Achaeans like a bull in command of his herd³⁰. However, when it comes to battle itself, Homer compares the victorious warriors to lions and their defeated foes to bulls, so that he describes Patroclus' defeat of Sarpedon as the slaughter by a lion of a bull, and compares Automedon's bloody appearance after he had stripped Aretus of his armour to that of a lion that had devoured a bull³¹. This tradition continued throughout the Roman period so that Lucan (d. AD65) eventually compared Pompey's retreat from Italy before the advance of Caesar in 49 BC to the flight of a bull from its rival³². The second point is that the Romans were extremely fond of puns and word-play, and their names often lent themselves to such word-play³³. The third point is that the Romans were also prepared to use images of animals to symbolise themselves on their coinage in graphic pursuit of their love of word-play, as we have already noted in the case of the denarius issued by Thorius Balbus in 105 BC. Of more contemporary relevance, Julius Caesar had issued a denarius throughout 49–48 BC whose reverse depicted an elephant about to trample on a snake where the elephant symbolised Caesar himself and the crested-snake his enemy King Juba of Numidia, because *iuba* in Latin meant 'crest' (*Pl. 14, 8*)³⁴. Similarly, the quaestor designate Q. Voconius Vitulus displayed a calf upon the reverse of his coinage c. 40 BC in play upon his cognomen meaning 'calf' (*Pl. 14, 9*)³⁵. Finally, the cognomen of the main leader of the republican forces, Brutus, meant 'devoid of intelligence or feeling, irrational, insensitive, brutish'³⁶. It easily lent itself to puns or word-play, as when Cicero referred to him as a *homo brutus* in play upon his name in a letter that he wrote in 50 BC³⁷. Furthermore, the adjective *brutus* was commonly used of a wide variety of animals, including cattle. Here one notes that Pliny refers

³⁰ Homer, *Iliad* 2.481–84.

³¹ Homer, *Iliad* 16.487–91; 17.540–42.

³² Lucan 2.601–09. See J. E. THOMAS, Lucan's Bulls: A Problematic Simile at Bellum Civile 2.601–9, *Classical Journal* 105 (2009/10), pp. 153–62.

³³ See E. S. MCCARTNEY, Canting Puns on Ancient Monuments, *AJA* 23 (1919), pp. 59–64; id., Puns and Plays on Proper Names, *Classical Journal* 14 (1919), pp. 343–58. For a full discussion of this topic, see A. CORBEILL, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humor in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton 1996), pp. 57–98.

³⁴ RRC, p. 461, no. 443/1. See D. WOODS, Caesar the Elephant against Juba the Snake, *NC* 169 (2009), pp. 189–92.

³⁵ RRC, p. 530, nos 526/1–4.

³⁶ P.G. W. GLARE (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1982), p. 243. It was believed that his ancestor had first acquired this name as a result of feigning stupidity in order to protect himself from the tyrannical rule of the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus (*Livy* 1.56.8).

³⁷ Cicero, *Att.* 6.1.25. The combination of the names Bubulcus, meaning 'cattle-driver' (*Pliny, Hist. Nat.* 18.10), and Brutus, as in the case of the Gaius Junius Bubulcus Brutus, consul in 317, 313, and 311, seems also deliberately humorous.

to a theory that the ‘brutishness’ of animals depended on the texture of their skin or bodily covering, so that molluscs or tortoises were particularly badly afflicted, but the hides of cattle and bristles of pigs acted similarly³⁸.

In light of the above, it is my suggestion that the galloping bull on Regulus’ reverse represents Brutus, the main leader of the republican forces³⁹. He is depicted as an animal in play upon his cognomen Brutus often used in description of ‘brutish’ animals, but as a bull in particular because of the literary tradition of depicting warriors as bulls. There is an additional dimension to the play upon his name in that it reminds the viewer of the correspondence between the meaning of his name ‘devoid of feeling’ and his behaviour in assassinating one who had shown him so much favour⁴⁰. The bull is depicted galloping in flight in reference either to Brutus’ flight from Italy in 44 BC or, more probably, to the retreat of republican forces before triumviral forces as they advanced through Epirus and Macedonia during the summer of 42 BC⁴¹. It appears, therefore, that the reverses of Regulus’ only two triumviral denarii form a co-ordinated pair where the reverse depicting the standing Victory celebrates the success of the triumviral forces, and that depicting a galloping bull the flight of the republican forces subject to Brutus before these victorious triumviral forces.

³⁸ Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 11.226. He argues against this theory with reference to the cunning of crocodiles and the intelligence of elephants.

³⁹ In general, see M. L. CLARKE, *The Noblest Roman: Marcus Brutus and His Reputation* (London 1981).

⁴⁰ Caesar had pardoned Brutus for fighting with Pompey at the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC (Plutarch, *Brutus* 6.1–2), had made him governor of Cisalpine Gaul for 46 BC (Plutarch, *Brutus* 6.10–12), and *praetor urbanus* for 44 BC (Plutarch, *Brutus* 7.1–5).

⁴¹ This is not to imply that Brutus himself was driven back. Although he had seized control of Macedonia, Illyria and Greece in late 44 BC (Appian, *B Civ.* 3.24; Plutarch, *Brutus* 24; Dio 47.21.1–3), and had defended these against Mark Antony’s brother in early 43 BC (Appian, *B Civ.* 3.79; Plutarch, *Brutus* 25–26; Dio 47.21.4–24.4), Brutus had subsequently travelled to Asia Minor where he was still campaigning against the Lycians in early 42 BC (Appian, *B Civ.* 4.75–82; Plutarch, *Brutus* 31–32; Dio 47.34). Triumviral forces took advantage of the fact that the bulk of republican land forces were still detained in Asia Minor to make a quick push across Macedonia and into Thrace during the summer of 42 BC (Appian, *B Civ.* 4.87; Dio 47.35).

Abstract

In 42 BC, the moneyer L. Livineius Regulus issued a denarius depicting the laureate bust of Julius Caesar on the obverse and a bull in full flight on the reverse (RRC 494/24). This paper surveys several earlier interpretations of this unique reverse type before arguing that, in accordance with the Roman love of word-play and common numismatic practice during the late Republic, the bull was probably intended as a visual pun, most likely upon the cognomen of the leading republican general, and assassin of Julius Caesar, Marcus Iunius Brutus. The bull is depicted galloping in full flight probably in reference to the retreat of republican forces before triumviral forces as they advanced through Epirus and Macedonia during the summer of 42 BC.

Zusammenfassung

42 v. Chr. liess der Münzmeister L. Livineius Regulus einen Denar prägen mit der Darstellung der Büste des Julius Caesar mit Lorbeerkrantz auf der Vorderseite und stossendem Stier auf der Rückseite (RRC 494/24). Der vorliegende Beitrag gibt zunächst einen Überblick über ältere Interpretationen dieses einmaligen Rückseitentyps und legt danach dar, dass, wegen der Vorliebe der Römer für Wortspiele, wie sie auf Münzen der späten Republik gebräuchlich sind, der Stier wohl als visuelle Anspielung zu verstehen ist, sehr wahrscheinlich auf das Cognomen des führenden republikanischen Generals und Caesar-Mörders Marcus Iunius Brutus. Der Stier ist im Galopp wiedergegeben, geradezu im Flug, und bezieht sich wohl auf den Rückzug der republikanischen Truppen vor den militärischen Einheiten der Triumvirn auf dem Vormarsch durch Epirus und Makedonien im Sommer 42 v. Chr.

David Woods,
Dept. of Ancient Classics,
University College Cork,
Western Road,
Cork,
Ireland
d.woods@ucc.ie

Key to Plate 14

1. Denarius of P. Clodius, 42 BC (RRC, p. 505, no. 494/16): BM R.9167.
2. Denarius of L. Mussidius Longus, 42 BC (RRC, p. 508, no. 494/39a): BM R.9222.
3. Denarius of L. Livineius Regulus, 42 BC (RRC, p. 506, no. 494/24): BM R.9172.
4. Denarius of L. Thorius Balbus, 105 BC (RRC, p. 323, no. 316/1): BM R.7903.
5. Denarius of Augustus, 15–13 BC (RIC I², p. 52, no. 167 a): BM 1844,0425.429.
6. Denarius of L. Livineius Regulus, 42 BC (RRC, p. 507, no. 494/30):
BM 1843,0116.729.
7. Denarius of L. Livineius Regulus, 42 BC (RRC, p. 506, no. 494/25): BM R.9173.
8. Denarius of Julius Caesar, 49–48 BC (RRC, p. 461, no. 443/1): BM 1843,0116.653.
9. Denarius of Q. Voconius Vitulus, c. 40 BC (RRC, p. 530, no. 526/4): BM R.9373.

For all photographs © Trustees of the British Museum.



David Woods
Regulus, Caesar, and a Brutish Bull

