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Autor: Woods, David
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AUGUSTUS AND THE HEIFER

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to propose a new interpretation of the heifer on the reverse of a small series of aurei struck under Augustus at an unknown eastern mint sometime after 27 BC (*Fig. 1*).¹ Rambach and Walker have recently catalogued 21 different specimens of this series which they divide into five types according to minor differences in the obverse and reverse.² As far as the obverse is concerned, the main device is always a bust of Augustus, facing either right or left, either with or without a laurel wreath. The obverse legend always reads simply CAESAR. As far as the reverse is concerned, the apparent heifer may be depicted facing either right or left, and either walking with head lowered or standing with head raised. The associated legend always reads only AVGVSTVS. Finally, it should be noted that Rambach and Walker include a sixth type within this series with an animal on the reverse which they identify as a bull rather than a heifer, where three specimens of this type survive.



Fig. 1 Aureus of Augustus (7.96 g), unidentified Eastern mint. RIC I², p. 84, no. 538.

The traditional interpretations of the heifer

So what was the significance of this heifer? One possibility is that it was intended to represent a sacrificial victim, whether offered by the emperor himself or by others in thanks for the blessing of his rule or for some other reason altogether.³

¹ RIC I², p. 84, nos. 536–538.

² H. RAMBACH and A. WALKER, *The «Heifer» aurei of Augustus*, SNR 91 (2012), pp. 41–62.

³ So H.A. GRUEBER, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum II* (London 1910), p. 543, suggests that the heifer «possibly has a special reference to the sacrifices which were offered up in all the Asiatic cities on the granting to Octavius of the title of Augustus in B.C. 27».

Against this, however, there is nothing to suggest a sacrifice, no altar or sacrificial implements of any type. One may contrast the stark simplicity of this type to the reverse of a denarius struck by the moneyer A. Postumius Albinus in 81 BC where the fact that this depicts a togate figure holding a sprinkler over a heifer next to a lighted altar makes the intended fate of the animal abundantly clear (*Fig. 2*).⁴ Of perhaps greater relevance because of its more contemporary nature, one may also contrast the simplicity of this type to the variety of complex and detailed ways in which the moneyer C. Antistius Vetus sought to convey notions of priesthood and sacrifice upon his coinage at Rome in 16 BC, particularly his aureus depicting a *victimarius* leading a bovine towards a veiled priest holding a *patera* over a lighted and garlanded altar (*Fig. 3*).⁵ In this case, the idea of sacrifice is reinforced by the associated legend reading PRO VALETVDINE CAESARIS S P Q R, «The Senate and the people of Rome for the health of Caesar», so providing a motive for the sacrifice.



Fig. 2 Denarius of A. Postumius Albinus (19 mm, 4.06 g). RRC, p. 389, no. 372/1.



Fig. 3 Aureus of Augustus (8.18 g), unidentified Eastern mint. RIC I², p. 69, no. 369.

⁴ RRC, p. 389, no. 372/1. The scene illustrates the story of how, during the reign of Servius Tullius, a Roman priest sacrificed a magnificent heifer to Diana when it was prophesied that whatever nation's citizens performed this sacrifice would one day rule the world, so Crawford errs in identifying the animal as a bull. See Livy 1.45.4–7; Valerius Maximus 7.3.1. It is tempting to identify the heifer of the aurei as the animal offered by the priest to Diana, and the mint as Ephesus, the home of a magnificent temple to Artemis, the Greek equivalent of Diana, and interpret the type in flattering praise of Augustus as the man who had fulfilled the destiny of Rome set in motion by this sacrifice to Diana. Nevertheless, the absence of any indications of sacrifice must tell against this also.

⁵ RIC I², pp. 68–69, nos. 363–369.

A second possibility is that the heifer was intended as a symbol of fertility, whether the fertility of the particular region where the series was struck or the fertility of the empire more generally.⁶ The purpose here would be to praise the emperor for providing the necessary conditions, peace and stability, for the empire to thrive and display its fertility. Again, the stark simplicity of the type under discussion does not suffice to convey this notion properly. Certainly, one could use the image of a cow to convey this notion, but there would need to be a clearer emphasis on the productivity of the cow in order to do so. For example, the emperor Carausius (286–293) struck a type of denarius depicting the reverse legend *VBERITA(s)*, «fertility», or some slight abbreviation thereof, above a cow being milked (*Fig. 4*).⁷ The point of this particular image is that the noun *uberitas*, «fertility», was directly related to noun *uber*, «breast» or «udder». The legend combines with the action being depicted to leave the significance of the type beyond doubt. However, this type was unique to Carausius. In the late republic or early empire, the normal means of conveying this idea of fertility or prosperity was the *cornucopia*, «horn of plenty». So, for example, when the moneyers Lamia, Silius, and Annius struck quadrantes at Rome in 9 BC, their three reverse types included a *caduceus*, symbolising peace, and a *cornucopia*, symbolising plenty, and the moneyers Pulcher, Taurus, and Regulus repeated the same types on their quadrantes in 8 BC.⁸



Fig. 4 Denarius of Carausius (3.85 g). RIC V.2, p. 513, no. 583.

A third possibility is that the heifer was a pun upon some key term denoting the origin or purpose of this type.⁹ The coinage of the late Republic had often

⁶ See L. LAFFRANCHI, *La Monetazione di Augusto, V: Zecche della Provincia d'Asia*, RIN 29 (1916), pp. 283–298, at 290–291. He refers vaguely to the depiction of the cow on the ancient coinages of Cyzicus, Apollonia and other towns in support of this interpretation, but these are of dubious relevance at best. For example, the coinage of Apollonia depicts a cow feeding a calf, which reveals a very different emphasis to a type depicting a lone cow walking or standing.

⁷ RIC V.2, p. 513, nos. 581–590. It seems to have formed part of a larger series celebrating an alleged new «Golden Age» under Carausius. See G. BARKER, *The coinage of Carausius: Developing the golden age ideology through the saecular games*, NC 175 (2015), pp. 161–170.

⁸ RIC I², pp. 74–75, nos. 420, 423 (*caduceus*); 422, 425 (*cornucopia*).

⁹ One may exclude as trivial any suggestion that the depiction of a heifer was designed to illustrate the traditional Roman derivation of the Latin *pecunia* «money» from the term *pecus* «a head of cattle, one of a herd». On this derivation, see e.g. Varro, *Ling.* 5.92; Pliny, *NH* 33.43.

depicted visual puns, primarily upon the names of the moneyers themselves.¹⁰ Indeed, the last coin to depict a single bovine as its main device, a denarius struck by Q. Voconius Vitulus in c. 40 BC, had done so in play upon the name of Vitulus, literally meaning «male calf» (*Fig. 5*). The moneyers of the early imperial period continued the use of visual puns, as when L. Aquillius Florus depicted a large flower upon the reverse of both an aureus and a denarius in play upon his cognomen derived from the Latin noun *flos* (stem: *flor*), «flower», in c.19 BC.¹¹ Similarly, as already met, C. Antistius Vetus depicted a variety of priests upon the reverses of his coins in play upon his name Antistius derived from the Latin noun *antistes*, «priest», in 16 BC. Therefore, it would not be particularly surprising should other early imperial reverse types conceal the occasional pun, and not just upon the name of the moneyer. The difficulty here lies in identifying the nature of a pun when it is not clear whether it was made in Latin or Greek and the precise identity of the key image, whether it was a cow or heifer or something even vaguer, a quadruped, beast, animal, however exactly described in either Greek or Latin, is no clearer. Grant focussed on the identity of the animal as a bovine of some sort, Latin *bos* (Greek βούς), in order to detect a reference to a place-name containing this element, and came up with the Latin *Bosphorus* (Greek Βόσπορος).¹² He then had to discover some explanation as to why any Roman official would have struck coins apparently alluding to Bosphorus, whether the Thracian Bosphorus or the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The fact that Marcus Agrippa, Augustus' colleague and son-in-law, had quelled a revolt against Roman authority in the client-kingdom of the Cimmerian Bosphorus in 14 BC seemed to provide that reason, so he dated the aurei to 14 BC and interpreted them as a celebration of Agrippa's defeat of the Bosphorani.¹³ Indeed, he even went so far as to detect two puns in reference to this event, since the animal depicted on the coins could be identified not only as a bovine *bos* in pun upon the name Bosphorus, but also as a «calf», *vitula/us*, in pun upon the verb *vitulor*, «to utter a cry of joy or exultation» such as would have been appropriate at such a time of victory.

Yet there are two main weaknesses to Grant's interpretation, the first being that no attributes are depicted in association with the heifer in order to clarify that this type celebrates military victory, if that is what it actually does, no joyful Roman Victory, no trophy, no dejected barbarian, no scattered and broken arms and armour, where this is problematic because there is no obvious reason why some of these could not have been included. The second weakness is that the heifer is too calm considering that she is supposed to symbolise a defeated state. One may contrast its calm pose to the obvious distress of the recumbent bull on the reverse type of an aureus struck probably at Pergamum c. 19 BC (*Fig. 6*). This type depicts the goddess Victory straddling the bull as she attempts to cut its throat, with a legend reading ARMENIA CAPTA, «Armenia has been captured».

¹⁰ On the Roman love of such puns, see A. CORBEILL, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humor in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton 1996), pp. 57–98.

¹¹ RIC I², p. 63, nos. 308–309.

¹² M. GRANT, *Complex symbolism and new mints, c. 14 BC*, NC 9, 6th series (1949), pp. 22–35, at 26–29.

¹³ On Agrippa's action against Bosphorus, see Dio 54.24.4–6; Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* 16.16–23.



Fig. 5 Denarius of Q. Voconius Vitulus (20 mm, 3.96 g). RRC, p. 530, no. 526/2.

This type is of particular relevance here because it conceals a geographical pun, since the term *Taurus*, «bull», was also the name of the mountain range extending into southern Armenia, the Taurus Mountains. However, the designer did not rely upon the recognition of this pun to signal the significance of this type, even when the depiction of a distressed bull being slain by Victory clearly set a military tone, but added a legend that left no room whatsoever for ambiguity.



Fig. 6 Aureus of Augustus (22 mm, 7.80 g), Pergamum. RIC I², p. 83, no. 514.

A fourth possible interpretation is that the heifer on the coin depicts the famous bronze statue of a heifer by the fifth-century BC Greek sculptor Myron of Eleutherae. This then raises the question whether the coin celebrates the statue itself or some new purpose to which it was put following its transfer perhaps to Rome.¹⁴ In either case, there are several arguments also against this identification. First, if one accepts the types as identified by Rambach and Walker, there seems to have been two basic depictions of the heifer, either walking with head down (types 1–4) or standing with head erect (type 5), but the existence of two different types in this way proves that the series as a whole cannot have been modelled upon the one statue. More importantly, however, the identification of the animal on what Rambach and Walker identify as type 6 within the same series as a bull is highly

¹⁴ On this statue, see A. CORSO, *La Vacca di Mirone*, *NAC* 23 (1994), pp. 49–91. In favour of this interpretation, see e.g. E. GÀBRICI, *La numismatica di Augusto: Studi di tipologia, cronologia e storia*, in L.A. MILANI (ed.), *Studi e materiali di archeologia e numismatica II* (Firenze 1902), pp. 148–171, at 166–169; RAMBACH and WALKER (*supra*, n. 2), pp. 44–45.



Fig. 7 Denarius of Augustus (20 mm, 3.48 g). RIC I², p. 79, no. 475.



Fig. 8 Denarius of Augustus (19 mm, 3.83 g), Lyons. RIC I², p. 52, no. 167a.

questionable. The same image appears on a denarius (Fig. 7), and has often been identified as a heifer rather than as a bull.¹⁵ In order to understand how a bull was normally depicted, one should compare this alleged bull to the bull as depicted on the aurei and denarii struck at Lyons during the period 15–10 BC (Fig. 8).¹⁶ Four characteristics enable the bull on the coins from Lyons to be identified as such: (1) a prominent penis sheath beneath the lower body; (2) testicles between and behind its rear legs; (3) an aggressive posture, with head down and pawing the ground as if about to charge; (4) a muscular body, particularly about the neck and shoulders. Since the bovine animal on the eastern coins displays none

¹⁵ On the denarius with «bull», see e.g. Sutherland, RIC I², p. 79, no. 475, attributing it to Samos c. 21–20 BC, while noting the potential existence of the aureus of this type only in the footnotes. In contrast, H. MATTINGLY, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum I: Augustus to Vitellius* (London 1923), p. 107, nos. 662–663, identifies the animal as a «heifer standing». Similarly, J.-B. GIARD, *Catalogue des Monnaies de l'Empire Romain, I: Auguste* (Paris 1976), nos. 941–943, identifies the animal as a «vache debout». C.H.V. SUTHERLAND, *L'attribution des deniers augustéens aux type du «Temple», de la «Couronne» et du «Jeune Taureau»*, RN 16 (1974), pp. 49–67, at 61, argues in favour of identifying the animal as a bull rather than a heifer on two grounds, that the neck is wrinkled like that of a bull and that most specimens depict the animal with testicles, although with the anatomical details suppressed. However, the absence or presence of neck-folds cannot safely be used to sex cattle, and the admitted absence of anatomical detail renders the supposed testicles as likely to be udders as testicles. In fact, most coins show no discernible lump or object at all.

¹⁶ RIC I², pp. 52–54, nos. 166a–169, 176a–178b, 186a–189b. In general, see J. D. EVANS, *Bulls on republican and early imperial coins*, QJ 25 (1996), pp. 197–214.

of these characteristics, it is difficult to understand why it should be identified as a bull. On the other hand, the animal on type 5 as identified by Rambach and Walker seems to mark an intermediate phase in the transition from the heifer of type 4 to the «bull» of type 6, so that one is arguably dealing with different styles of depiction of the same animal over time by different engravers rather than a sudden transition from one animal, a heifer, to another, a bull.

A second argument against the identification of the heifer with the statue by Myron lies in the fact that there is no evidence that Augustus had any interest in this statue. Cicero wrote in 70 BC as if the statue was in Athens still, and Procopius of Caesarea records that it was at the Temple of Peace in Rome by the mid-sixth century AD, but there is no evidence as to when exactly it was transferred to Rome.¹⁷ Since it ended up in Vespasian's new Temple of Peace, the final resting place of other works looted by Nero during his tour of Greece in AD 66–67, it seems more likely that it was Nero who brought it to Rome rather than Augustus.¹⁸ Certainly, Augustus did manage to acquire a group of four bronze cattle by Myron which he placed around the altar of his new Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, where the poet Propertius claimed to have seen them at its opening in October 28 BC, but this does not necessitate that he was also responsible for the transfer of Myron's statue of a heifer to Rome.¹⁹

Next, it should be pointed out that Augustus acquired many famous Greek works of art which he displayed in three great collections in the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine hill, the Forum of Augustus, and the Portico of Octavia.²⁰ So, even if he did bring Myron's statue of a heifer to Rome, it is not clear why he, or any one acting under him, should have singled it out for celebration on the coinage when so many other works of equal or perhaps even greater fame were left unacknowledged.

Finally, it should be noted that the heifer on the coins displays no indication that it represents a statue rather than a live animal. The fact that it is depicted standing on the ground represented by an exergue line rather than on a base or pedestal is important here. One should contrast this absence of a base to how statues at Rome were normally depicted upon the coinage at this period. So, the moneyer L. Mescinus Rufus struck denarii depicting a statue of Mars upon an inscribed pedestal in 16 BC, and the moneyer Cossus Cornelius Lentulus struck a denarius depicting an equestrian statue of Agrippa upon a pedestal ornamented with two prows in 12 BC.²¹

A complicating factor in any discussion of the significance of the heifer on the coinage of Augustus is that Vespasian struck a number of aurei and denarii

¹⁷ Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.135 (*ex aere Myronis buculam*); Procopius, *Bella* 8.21.14 (τὸ τοῦ Μύρωνος βοῦδιον).

¹⁸ So CORSO (*supra*, n. 14), pp. 78–79.

¹⁹ Propertius 2.31.7–8 (*atque aram circum steterant armenta Myronis, / quattuor artificis, vivida signa, boves*).

²⁰ See S.H. RUTLEDGE, *Ancient Rome as a Museum: Power, Identity, and the Culture of Collecting* (Cambridge 2012), pp. 235–266.

²¹ RIC I², p. 68, nos. 351–353 (Rufus); p. 73, no. 412 (Lentulus).

in imitation of this type at Rome in AD 76 (*Fig. 9*).²² It has sometimes been claimed that he struck these coins to celebrate the completion and dedication of his Temple of Peace in AD 75.²³ However, it is not clear why he should have waited until the following year to do this and «to posit the representation of a single sculpture, however famous, as an adequate commemoration of an entire monumental complex is simply untenable».²⁴ More importantly, this approach pays too little heed to the wider numismatic context, the fact that Vespasian struck numerous imitations of other types also from before, during, and after the reign of Augustus, so that it is misleading to focus on one imitation alone. In fact, such was the variety of types imitated, both by Vespasian and by other emperors later when they also engaged in what they described as the «restoration» of the coinage by imitating older types, that it becomes clear that it was the very fact of «restoration» or imitation that was important rather than the specific nature of the types imitated.²⁵ In short, Vespasian's imitation of the heifer of Augustus is unlikely to contribute to an understanding of why this design was used under Augustus in the first place.



Fig. 9 Aureus of Vespasian (19 mm, 7.29 g). RIC II².1, p. 120, no. 857.

A new interpretation of the heifer

It is clear that the discussion of the significance of the heifer on the eastern coinage of Augustus is far from settled, and that there remains an opportunity for new and more convincing explanations. It is my suggestion, therefore, that the heifer is identifiable as the mythological figure Io, the daughter of Inachus.

²² RIC II².1, pp. 119–121, nos. 840–844, 857–859, 868–869.

²³ See e.g. P.V. HILL, *The Monuments of Ancient Rome as Coin Types* (London 1989), p. 73; S.E. COX, «Innovative antiquarianism: the Flavian reshaping of the past», in B. ALROTH and C. SCHEFFER, *Attitudes towards the Past in Antiquity. Creating Identities* (Stockholm 2014), pp. 243–254, at 248.

²⁴ C.F. NOREÑA, *Medium and Message in Vespasian's Templum Pacis*, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 48 (2003), pp. 25–43, at 39. As R. DARWALL-SMITH, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Brussels 1996), p. 61, also puts it: «why should Vespasian choose only this statue, and no other to glorify his new building so discreetly, without any explanatory legends?».

²⁵ See T.V. BUTTREY, *Vespasian as moneyer*, *NC* 12, 7th series (1972), pp. 89–109. More generally, see H. KOMNICK, *Die Restitutionsmünzen der frühen Kaiserzeit: Aspekte der Kaiserlegitimation* (Berlin 2001); A.B. GALLIA, *Remembering the Roman Republic: Culture, Politics, and History under the Principate* (Cambridge 2012), pp. 217–270.

According to Greek myth, Zeus fell in love with Io, she was transformed into a heifer, and Hera, the wife of Zeus, sent a gadfly in order to sting her. Io then fled all over the world in an effort to escape the gadfly before Zeus finally transformed her back into a woman again upon her arrival in Egypt. This was an extremely well-known myth, so that, to focus on the literature of the Augustan era alone, Virgil and Propertius refer to it in passing on several occasions, while Ovid also describes it at greater length.²⁶ The relevance of Io here is that her name bears a close similarity to that of the district of Ionia in the Roman province of Asia. This had traditionally consisted of twelve city-states, from Phocaea in the north to Miletus in the south, including the islands of Chios and Samos.²⁷ However, by the Roman period the most important town by far was Ephesus. The Greeks claimed that Ionia derived its name from the Ionian colonists who had settled it, where these had derived their name in turn from Ion, the son of Xuthus.²⁸ However, they also explained the name of the Ionian Sea as derived from that of Io rather than of Ion.²⁹ For this reason, because Io was believed to have had several areas named after her in this way, any depiction of her would have tended to call Ionia to mind, especially in a context where some form of naming pun might be expected. The importance of this is that Ionia was strategically located across the Aegean Sea from Athens, so that it was a natural stopping point for anyone travelling to the East via Athens. Accordingly, Augustus spent the winter of 21/20 BC on the island of Samos, and also returned from the East by this same route, staying there again during the winter of 20/19 BC.³⁰ Furthermore, Agrippa certainly visited Ephesus and Samos following the return of his Bosphoran expedition in 14 BC, and may also have visited Ionia during a first trip to the East in 23–21 BC.³¹

It is my argument, therefore, that the coins depicting the heifer were struck in Ionia, probably during the presence of Augustus there. To be more precise, the legend AVGVSTVS combines with the depiction of the heifer Io in punning reference to Ionia to declare that Augustus was in Ionia.³² There are five main arguments in support of this interpretation. The first argument is that this apparent pun on the name of Ionia is consistent with the general fondness for such puns as demonstrated by so many reverse types struck during the late Republic and early Empire, not least the recumbent bull of the ARMENIA CAPTA aureus struck probably at Pergamum c. 19 BC which conceals a similar geographical pun. The second argument is that the pun's emphasis on the identity of Io, rather than

²⁶ Virgil, *Aen.* 7.789–92, *Georg.* 3.146–53; Propertius 1.3, 2.28, 2.3; Ovid, *Met.* 1.583–746

²⁷ Herodotus 1.142.

²⁸ Herodotus 7.94; Pausanias 7.1–2.

²⁹ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Vincit* 839–41; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.1.3.

³⁰ Dio 54.7.4, 9.7.

³¹ Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* 16.23.

³² Io had not been depicted on Roman coinage previously, and did not appear on Roman imperial coinage again. However, she was sometimes depicted on Roman provincial coinage, particularly on that of Gaza during the second and third centuries AD. See e.g. M. and K. PRIEUR, *A Type Corpus of the Syro-Phoenician Tetradrachms and their Fractions from 57 BC to AD 253* (Lancaster, PA 2000), p. 187, no. 1684, a tetradrachm of Caracalla with reverse depicting an eagle with outstretched wings supporting a heifer. Indeed, Gaza was also known as «Ione» or «City of Io», since Io was believed to have landed there (Libanius, *Or.* 55.33; Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnika* s.v. Gaza).

on anything being done to or by her, explains the stark simplicity of the type, the focus on the heifer itself and the absence of any other attributes. The third argument is that viewers of the coinage would have been conditioned to expect gods, goddesses, or figures from the stories about the gods or goddesses, on the coinage when there was not some more obvious military or political message, such as the prevalence of such imagery on the coinage in the past, Greek or Roman. Hence they would naturally have sought an identity for this beast from among the famous heifers of mythology when there were no obvious indications to the contrary. The fourth argument is that the story of Io's transformation into a heifer was a well-known Greek myth, even before its occurrence in the poetry of the Augustan era as already noted above, so that the pun would have been easily intelligible by a large number of people when and where these coins were first struck, presumably somewhere in Ionia. At a later date, however, when these coins began to circulate beyond the region where they were initially struck and paid out, and when those handling them would have had little or no knowledge of Augustus' stays in Ionia, the nature of the pun would have been far less intelligible. Fifthly, the strategic importance of Ionia, the fact that it enjoyed two prolonged visits by Augustus as he twice wintered there, renders it highly likely he did indeed strike coinage during one or both visits there.

This being said, it would add considerably to the strength of this interpretation if one could discover evidence of any other indication of an association between Augustus and Io. It is therefore noteworthy that he may have named a villa on the island of Capri the «Villa of Io». Suetonius describes how the emperor Tiberius remained in a certain villa on Capri for nine months following the execution of Sejanus in AD 31, and while most modern translators render the name of this villa as the *villa Iovis*, «Villa of Jupiter», most of the manuscripts, including the best, actually refer to it as the *villa Ionis*, «Villa of Io», so that the editor of the standard edition prefers the latter reading.³³ It was actually Augustus who had first bought this island and transformed it into an imperial residence so that, as Champlin, who has recently re-examined this issue, admits, «Tiberius may not himself have been responsible for naming the villa», but that «the name must have had some significance for him or for Augustus».³⁴ Despite this initial admission, Champlin proceeds to assume that it was probably Tiberius who named the villa, and then, because he cannot explain why Tiberius would have named a residence after Io, argues that the text should be amended to read *villa Inonis*, «Villa of Ino» instead, after the goddess Ino, also called Leucothea, who had saved Odysseus from drowning, in accordance with Tiberius' known fascination with the story of Odysseus. He rejects earlier suggestions, for example, that the villa was so-called

³³ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 65: *per novem proximos menses non egressus est villa, quae vocatur Ionis*. Ed. M. IHM, *C. Suetoni Tranquilli Opera* I (Leipzig 1907), p. 156. See M. IHM, *Die sogenannte Villa Jovis auf Capri und andere Suetoniana*, *Hermes* 36 (1901), pp. 287–304, at 287–291.

³⁴ See E. CHAMPLIN, *The Odyssey of Tiberius Caesar*, *Classica et Mediaevalia* 64 (2013), pp. 199–246, at 227. On Augustus' purchase of the island, see Strabo 5.4.9; Suetonius, *Augustus* 92.2; Dio 52.43.2. If Dio can be trusted, Augustus seems to have purchased it in 29 BC.

after a depiction of Io where this represented Egypt in reference to Augustus' «liberation» of the same for no firm reason, but that is not the only possibility here.³⁵ Since Io was known for her tortured wanderings about the world, Augustus, or one of his friends, may well have referred to his new residence on Capri as the «Villa of Io» in witty reference to the fact that his duties drove him all around the (Roman) world so that, like Io, he could not enjoy any peace either.³⁶ Once given in jest, the name may then have stuck. Regardless of the precise explanation, however, knowledge of this association between Augustus and Io may have encouraged the authority ultimately responsible for the depiction of the heifer upon the eastern coinage in so doing. The pun between the names of Io and Ionia worked at a more general level, but the knowledge of an earlier association between Augustus and Io, perhaps identification even, may have rendered this choice of design even more appealing, and witty, as far as the members of the imperial court were concerned: Augustus, like Io, was wandering far from his desired home, the «Villa of Io», in, of all possible places, the land of Ionia!

Strictly speaking, it remains possible that a mint located outside of Ionia may have struck these coins in honour of Augustus' visits there, but this is not particularly plausible. If the coins depicting the heifer were struck in Ionia, then the possibility that they were struck at or near Ephesus in particular deserves serious consideration, and not merely because it was the largest city in Ionia proper, the capital of the wider province, and the site of an active mint in both silver and bronze under Augustus.³⁷ The fact that Ephesus chose an animal, a hind, by which to represent itself on both its silver and bronze coinage may also be important (*Fig. 10*).³⁸ Familiarity with the use of a hind in this way may have suggested to the originator of the heifer type that he too should use an animal by which to symbolise the origin of this coinage, the area then being visited by the emperor. However, he rejected the use of the hind itself, partly because its use might have seemed to blur the boundaries between imperial and civic coinage, and partly because he wanted a more inclusive symbol of a wider region, while

³⁵ CHAMPLIN (*supra*, n. 34), p. 227, n. 60, rejecting e.g. F. GHEDINI, *Una pasta vitrea aquileiese e il mito d'Io nella propaganda giulio-claudia*, *Aquileia Nostra* 57 (1986), pp. 665–676.

³⁶ While he presumably visited Capri on many occasions earlier, his only confirmed stay there was for a period of four days shortly before his death in AD 14. See Suetonius, *Augustus* 98. The same passage records that Augustus jokingly called part of Capri Apragopolis «The City of Idleness», and it may have been in the same vein that one of his friends there had referred to his villa as «The Villa of Io», meaning the villa of someone who was never there.

³⁷ On Ephesus at this period, see J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN, 2008).

³⁸ During the reign of Augustus, the mint at Ephesus struck four denominations of bronze civic coinage, each distinguished by the use of a different design, so that the 2-unit coin depicted the forepart of a hind, the 1-unit a standing hind with quiver above, and the $\frac{1}{2}$ unit a standing stag with no other attribute. The only denomination not depicting a hind was the $\frac{1}{2}$ unit which displayed the cult statue of Artemis instead. See RPC 1, nos. 2575–2612. Ephesus also struck a series of cistophori c. 25 BC, of which one type depicted an altar decorated with two confronting hinds. See RIC I², p. 80, no. 479. The significance of the hind is that it was an attribute of the goddess Artemis, and Ephesus contained a major temple of Artemis.



Fig. 10 1-unit bronze of the *archiereus* Asklas under Augustus (21 mm, 7.33 g), Ephesus.

proceeding nonetheless to imitate the animal symbolism. He then turned to the heifer Io in punning reference to Ionia partly because of the general Roman love of such puns and partly because there was no more obvious animal by which to symbolise this general area.³⁹ This argument is reinforced by the striking resemblance between the standing hind on the bronze civic coinage of Ephesus and the heifer on the denarius, both standing facing right with head erect and two forelegs running straight down together. On the other hand, one notes that while animal symbolism was relatively unusual at this period, the hind of Ephesus was by no means unique. For example, a crocodile was used to symbolise Egypt on the reverse of the AEGYPTO / CAPTA aurei and denarii from an unidentified eastern mint probably before 27 BC.⁴⁰ Hence the originator of the heifer as a symbol of Ionia may have been influenced by the recent use of the crocodile as a symbol of Egypt rather than the use of the hind as the symbol of Ephesus.⁴¹

³⁹ Over time, various animals were recognized as the symbols of different regions or provinces. So the personification of Hispania was often accompanied by a rabbit (RIC II, p. 465, Hadrian, nos. 952–955), while the personification of Arabia was often accompanied by a camel (RIC II, p. 261, Trajan no. 245). However, nothing similar occurred in the case of Asia.

⁴⁰ See RIC I², p. 86, nos. 544–546. See also the depiction of a chained crocodile on the coinage of Nemausus in Gaul (RPC I, pp. 153–154, nos. 522–526).

⁴¹ One may ask why, if animal symbolism in this manner was so readily intelligible, the designer of the AEGYPTO / CAPTA type with crocodile included the name of region symbolised as part of the legend, but the designer of the heifer type did not. The answer to this is not that the crocodile was not instantly recognisable as a symbol of Egypt, but that the designer was trying to convey something that had happened to Egypt, and not merely punning upon its name or the name of the animal symbolising it, and that required a more explicit statement that something was CAPTA, at which point one might as well include the name of the something as well. In fact, if he had had the presence of mind to depict the crocodile with chain and collar, as on coinage of Nemausus in Gaul (*supra*, n. 40), no explanatory legend would have been necessary.

Conclusion

On the basis of the present evidence, there can be no definitive answer as to the identity or significance of the heifer as depicted on a series of aurei struck at some unidentified mint in the East after 27 BC. However, the identification of the heifer as Io in punning reference to Ionia better respects key aspects of the contemporary numismatic context, that is, the continued use of visual puns upon the coinage and the use of animals as geographical symbols, than do several of the traditional explanations of this beast. The combination of the legend AVGVSTVS with the heifer symbolising Ionia, in conjunction with the probable possession by Augustus of a «Villa of Io» on Capri, suggests that these coins were struck during a visit by the emperor Augustus to Ionia, and so should probably be dated to c. 20 BC. It is not clear where exactly they were struck, but their subject matter probably requires that they were struck within Ionia itself, and so Ephesus must emerge as the most plausible candidate.

Abstract

This paper reviews the traditional interpretations of the identity and significance of the heifer depicted on a series of aurei struck at an unidentified eastern mint sometime after 27 BC. It concludes that the heifer is probably identifiable as Io in punning reference to Ionia, and that these coins were struck in Ionia during one of the emperor Augustus' stays there in c. 20 BC.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag prüft die herkömmlichen Interpretationen und die Bedeutung der Färse (Kuhkalb) auf einer Serie von Aurei aus einer östlichen Prägestätte unbestimmter Zuweisung irgendwann nach 27 v. Chr. Er kommt zum Schluss, dass die Färse wahrscheinlich mit Io zu identifizieren ist als sprechendes Zeichen für Ionien und dass diese Münzen auch in Ionien geprägt wurden während eines der Aufenthalte des Augustus dort um ca. 20 v. Chr.

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

Key to figures

All coins are at the scale 1:1.5

Fig. 1 Aureus of Augustus (7.96 g), unidentified Eastern mint. RIC I², p. 84, no. 538: Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 84 (20 May 2015), lot 875. © Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG.

Fig. 2 Denarius of A. Postumius Albinus (19 mm, 4.06 g). RRC, p. 389, no. 372/1: Ex Roma Numismatics, Auction IV (30 September 2012), lot 482. © Roma Numismatics Ltd.

Fig. 3 Aureus of Augustus (8.18 g), unidentified Eastern mint. RIC I², p. 69, no. 369: Ex Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 31 (26 October 2005), lot 14. © Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG.

Fig. 4 Denarius of Carausius (3.85 g). RIC V.2, p. 513, no. 583: Ex Fritz Rudolf Künker, Auction 248 (14 March 2014), lot 7578. © Fritz Rudolf Künker GmbH & Co. KG.

Fig. 5 Denarius of Q. Voconius Vitulus (20 mm, 3.96 g). RRC, p. 530, no. 526/2: Ex Roma Numismatics, Auction XIII (23 March 2017), lot 625. © Roma Numismatics Ltd.

Fig. 6 Aureus of Augustus (22 mm, 7.80 g), Pergamum. RIC I², p. 83, no. 514: Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 85 (15 September 2010), lot 65. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

Fig. 7 Denarius of Augustus (20 mm, 3.48 g). RIC I², p. 79, no. 475: Ex Nomos AG, Auction 14 (17 May 2017), lot 315. © Nomos AG.

Fig. 8 Denarius of Augustus (19 mm, 3.83 g), Lyons. RIC I², p. 52, no. 167a: Ex Nomos AG, Obolos 5 (26 June 2016), lot 520. © Nomos AG.

Fig. 9 Aureus of Vespasian (19 mm, 7.29 g). RIC II².1, p. 120, no. 857. Ex Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 85 (15 September 2010), lot 872. © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

Fig. 10 1-unit bronze of the *archiereus* Askas under Augustus (21 mm, 7.33 g), Ephesus. *RPC* 1, p. 436, no. 2585: Ex Gitbud & Naumann, Auction 19 (6 July 2014), lot 380. © Gitbud & Naumann.