

Nero's Altar of Lugdunum type

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Vorliebe mythologische Wesen, oft aus dem bacchischen Kreis herangezogen, wie an der reichen Serie der Phalerae abzulesen ist⁴⁰. Daß das, wie nicht anders zu erwarten, auch für den figürlichen Schmuck der Turnierhelme gilt, bezeugt der schon genannte Gesichtshelm des Museums Kam, der allgemein für flavisch gehalten wird. Dafür sprechen auch die nur ganz wenigen Ornamente auf seinem Stirnband, die den Mustern auf dem Helm von Amerongen ähnlich, jedoch deutlich schon erstarrter sind⁴¹. Die dem flavischen Helmdiadem aufsitzenden, gut erhaltenen kleinen Büsten sind zweifellos keine Porträts von Titus und Vespasian, wie neuerdings für zwei unter ihnen nochmals vorgeschlagen wurde⁴². Bei den fünf nach Art von Kameen auf dem Stirnband angebrachten Büstchen handelt es sich eindeutig um männliche und weibliche «Kindergenien», die miteinander abwechseln. Solche hochplastisch ausgeführten Büsten göttlicher Wesen finden sich auch späterhin als Schmuck von Helmdiademen⁴³.

⁴⁰ Glasphalerae: Alföldi I 79. — Ders. II 90 ff. Silberphalerae: F. Matz, Die Lauersforter Phalerae, 92. Berl. Winckelmannsprogramm. 1932.

⁴¹ Neben der Gesamtform des Stirnbandes also der gestrichelte Rundstab als Gesamteinfassung und, hier schon stark verflacht und nur ziseliert, nicht auch getrieben, die dem Rundstab auf der Innenseite folgende flache Halbbogenreihe. Vgl. die in Anm. 38 genannten Abbildungen.

⁴² So Braat II 62. J. Curle, auf den sich Braat a. O. Anm. 6 beruft, drückt sich aber hierüber sehr vorsichtig und im ganzen ablehnend aus: «That the heads are intended to represent Titus and Vespasian is possible. On the other hand, in neither case do they bear any imperial attribute. They do not wear the laurel wreath, nor does the drapery, which is poorly executed, give any indication, which might help to identify them» (Journal of Roman Studies 5, 1915, 84 f.).

⁴³ Wie etwa auf den oben Anm. 23 genannten Beispielen.

NERO'S ALTAR OF LUGDUNUM TYPE

David W. MacDowall

The rare coins of Nero which have the reverse type of the Altar of Lugdunum¹ have aroused considerable interest. The type was first introduced by Augustus and referred to the dedication of the celebrated Altar at Lugdunum to Rome and Augustus in 10 BC. It was the only reverse type that was used on the sestertii and asses of the first Altar series² — the Gallic *aes* struck c. 10–3 B.C., and on the sestertii dupondii, asses and semisses of the second Altar series³ struck in the later years of Augustus and early years of Tiberius' principate. Both these series were struck in large quantities, and *aes* of the Altar of Lugdunum type constituted the bulk of Augustan *aes* circulating in Gaul.

I am indebted to the keepers of the collections in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Koninklijke Bibliotheek, the Hague; Rijksmuseum G.M. Kam, Nijmegen; and the British Museum, London for allowing me to study and publish coins in their collections; and to the keeper of the Nationalmuseet Copenhagen for sending me casts.

¹ We must be careful to distinguish the ROM ET AVG Altar of Lugdunum type which I discuss here, from the other commoner altar type of Nero — that of the ARA PACIS.

² RIC I Augustus, 359–360.

³ RIC Augustus, 361–371 and Tiberius, 11–13.

There was a further issue of the ROM ET AVG Altar of Lugdunum type on semisses of Claudius ⁴. These seem to have been medalettes or souvenirs commemorating the 50th or 60th birthday of Claudius, who was born at Lugdunum on 1st August 10 B.C., the very day on which the Altar was dedicated ⁵. But in marked contrast to the first and second Altar series of Augustus and Tiberius, these semisses of Claudius are very rare. Coins of Nero with the Altar of Lugdunum type are similarly rare. The large deposit found in the river at Mayenne ⁶ is a useful indication of the degree of rarity of these issues. Of the 3479 *aes* coins of Augustus and of Tiberius struck during the principate of Augustus 3357 (including 335 semisses) are of the ROM ET AVG Altar of Lugdunum type. But among the 3806 *aes* coins of Claudius and 959 *aes* coins of Nero, the Lugdunum altar types of Claudius and Nero are not represented.

Various suggestions have been put forward to explain the revival of this type under Nero. Mowat ⁷ thought that it marked the closing of the autonomous mint at Lugdunum. Sydenham ⁸ suggested that it was an «emergency» coin, and that its *raison d'être* was to be found in the disastrous fire at Lugdunum in A.D. 65 when the city of Lugdunum was almost totally destroyed. In the confusion coins would be struck from any dies that came to hand, and as there must have been many dies used for striking the Altar of Lugdunum coins of Tiberius, Sydenham thought it not improbable that some would have survived to be reused in this way during the emergency of 65. More recently Grant ⁹ has suggested that the type was one of the anniversary issues of Nero struck in 64 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Augustus.

But further study of the surviving coins of Nero with this type suggests a very different explanation. Four examples are known to me so far: —



⁴ RIC I Claudius, 70.

⁵ Suetonius, Claudius, 2.

⁶ Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie, Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres de la Mayenne 1865, 9 ff.

⁷ RN 1895, 160 ff.

⁸ NC 1917, 53 ff.

⁹ M. Grant, Roman Anniversary Issues, 1950, 82.

1. Obv. NERO CLAVD CAESAR AVG GERM

Head of Nero bare left, with globe at point of bust

Rev. The altar of Lugdunum

a) Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale ¹⁰.

b) Nijmegen, Rijksmuseum G.M.Kam. Fig.1

c) Private Collection, sale photograph in BM. Fig.2

d) Private Collection, sale photograph in BM. Fig.3

All four coins are clearly unofficial and irregular coins. Nero's head is treated in a stiff angular way — with a crude globe derived from the normal Lugdunum globe, at the tip of the bust truncation. The letters of the obverse legend are irregularly formed and badly spaced. On the reverse side, two of the examples have a meaningless linear design instead of showing the detail on the altar. One has the letters WO, which seem to be part of the legend of ROM ET AVG upside down and retrograde.



The size and general appearance of these coins suggests that they were meant to pass as copper semisses; and this impression is confirmed by the fact that example (d) is struck from the same obverse die as an equally unorthodox copper semis of Nero in the Hague (Fig.4) which has on its reverse the gaming table of the Certamen Quinquennale type — one of the normal semis types used by Nero. In fact the altar of Lugdunum semisses of Nero seem to be part of a larger group of unofficial semisses produced locally in the Rhineland provinces to supplement the meagre issues of small change below the As denomination towards the end of Nero's principate.

The local imitations of asses and dupondii of Claudius made in Britain and the Rhineland ¹¹ are well known. During the later years of Claudius and for the first decade of Nero there had been no official issues of *aes* ¹², and extensive local imitations had usefully supplemented the scarce supply of official coins in Britain and Germany. The large scale issues of Nero's asses and dupondii at Lugdunum from A.D. 65 ¹³ seems very largely to have remedied the position and to have removed the need for unofficial moneyers to supplement the government's provision. But in the Lugdunum issues of these years, there were comparatively few semisses ¹⁴, and there seems to have been a continuing shortage of the subdivision of the As. While there are virtually no local copies of Nero's asses, local copies of Nero's semisses are more frequently encountered.

As in other periods of unofficial copying ¹⁵, the local imitations copy types well known to the copyist and readily to be found on coins already in circulation; but

¹⁰ Quoted in Cohen I², Nero, 256 and RIC I Nero, 438.

¹¹ Cf. C. H. V. Sutherland, Roman-British Imitations of Bronze Coins of Claudius I, Numism. Notes and Monogr. no 65, and Ritterling, Annalen des Vereins für Nassauische Altertums-kunde und Geschichtsforschung 1904 and 1912.

¹² Cf. BMC I, CLXVI and my forthcoming monograph «The Western Coinages of Nero».

¹³ Cf. C. H. V. Sutherland, Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy, 1951, 168.

¹⁴ From Mayenne there were 827 copper asses of Nero but only 7 copper semisses.

¹⁵ Cf. J. P. C. Kent, Barbarous Copies of Roman Coins, Limes-Studien 1957, 61 ff.

they do not always respect the combinations of detail determined by the official mint. Some of the unofficial copies of Nero's semisses correctly reproduce the obverse and reverse types of an official semis, but have a blundered and retrograde legend – as in the coin from the British Museum Fig. 5. Others combine the design of one of Nero's semisses with the reverse legend of his second type, as in the following coin from the British Museum: –



Obv. NERO CLAVD CAESAR AVG GRM
Head bare r.

Rev. CER QVINQ ROM CON, SC in exergue:
Roma seated l. Fig. 6

Some substitute the Roma type of the sestertii for that of the semisses, as the coin from the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: –

Obv. NERO CLAVD CAESAR AVG GRM
Head bare r.

Rev. ROMA in exergue: Roma seated l.,
holding victory ¹⁶. Fig. 7

Others again combine the obverse of the Nero with the reverse of the commonest semisses still in circulation – that of the ROM ET AVG Altar of Lugdunum semisses of the second Altar series, as we have described them above. A further group combines reverse types and legends of the time of Nero with obverse types of the time of the second Altar series under Tiberius ¹⁷. It is therefore important to exclude these varieties, which are only in irregular copies, from the corpus of the *aes* coins of Nero.

There is another example of an Altar of Lugdunum semis of Nero in Copenhagen:



Obv. NERO CLAVDIVS CAE AVG
Head laur. r.

Rev. ROM ET AVG
Altar of Lugdunum. Fig. 8

which is struck from the same obverse die as a gold aureus in the Hague: –

Obv. NERO CLAVDIVS CAE AVG
Head laur. r.

Rev. LEIBERTAS
Head of Libertas l., 7,0 g. Fig. 9

Once again this portrait is clearly not the normal product of an official mint. It is less easy to establish that the die is the work of an ancient rather than a modern forger, but in either case we can safely exclude these two varieties from the corpus of issues from Nero's official mints.

¹⁶ Quoted in Cohen I² Nero, no. 272 in RIC I Nero, 239.

¹⁷ Quoted in Cohen I² Tiberius, 1. 7. 11; RIC I Tiberius, 47–49.