



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network



Open Library of Humanities

Article

How to Cite: Turner, A 2016 The Importance of Numa Pompilius: A Reconsideration of Augustan Coins. *Open Library of Humanities*, 2(1): e16, pp. 1–19, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/olh.58>

Published: 23 June 2016

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Open Access:

Open Library of Humanities is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

ARTICLE

The Importance of Numa Pompilius: A Reconsideration of Augustan Coins

Aimee Turner

Monash University Clayton VIC, AU
altur8@student.monash.edu

During the principate of Augustus Caesar, a series of *asses* (RIC I² Augustus 390–396) were minted bearing the image of Augustus on the obverse and Numa Pompilius on the reverse. Discussion of this coin in the context of Augustan ideology has been limited (Evans, 1985; Grant, 1953). Although one aspect of the coin's message relates to the promotion of the moneyer's family, a closer analysis of its iconographical and historical context provides important evidence for the early public image of Augustus, particularly in regard to religion. To that end, this article intends to establish the traditional use of kings in Republican coins and the development of religious iconography in early Augustan coinage. Examination of these *asses* can be divided into two groups of coins which were minted at different times, first in 22 BCE (RIC I² Augustus 390–393) and then again in 12 BCE (RIC I² Augustus 394–396).

Augustus Caesar,¹ born Gaius Octavius, was the nephew of Gaius Julius Caesar and was adopted by the dictator in his will. Following the assassination of Caesar in 44 BCE, he co-ruled with Marcus Lepidus and Mark Antony. Over the years that followed, he amassed support and power until, after defeating Mark Antony in battle at Actium, he became the sole power in the city and the first official emperor of Rome. He was inarguably adept at manipulating his public image through a range of visual imagery, from the subtle to the overt. One important aspect of his visual imagery is his use of numismatic iconography, which he began to develop, and experiment with, in the triumviral period and continued to utilise into his principate. Augustus' interest in numismatics is evidenced not only by the coins he minted and

¹ Although this article deals with coins minted before he acquired this religious title, to avoid confusion I have referred to him as Augustus throughout the article. References to ancient authors use the abbreviations of the Oxford Classical Dictionary.

the iconography he imposed (Evans, 1985: 39; Grant, 1972: 5; Levick, 2010: 208f.), but also by the reforms he introduced in materials and denominations (Bay, 1972: 114–16; Sutherland, 1984: 3). Many of the images he employed in his visual propaganda focus on religious iconography that promote Augustus as a restorer of Roman tradition. According to Zanker (1988: 159), Augustus set himself up ‘as the greatest exemplum’. In this regard, a series of *asses* produced featuring the image of Augustus on the obverse and Numa Pompilius on the reverse, offer important evidence for the early public image of Augustus and the *exemplum* he intended to follow. His propaganda was quite fluid, changing to meet the demands of the times, but this coin appears as the culmination of a careful iconographic campaign. In order to fully understand the significance of this particular coin, it must be placed into its iconographical context. This article will briefly review the traditional use of kings in Republican and triumvirate coins, in order to highlight the numismatic traditions that Augustus was drawing on, and the development of religious iconography apparent in early Augustan coinage, that is, during the triumvirate and early principate. This article limits its focus to coins minted for use in Rome, not the provinces. Using this background, a closer examination of the *asses* featuring Augustus and Numa will be conducted in order to posit new understanding of the coins.

It is important to pause at this point to review the career of Numa Pompilius. Numa was the quasi-legendary second king of Rome, following Romulus (Cic. De re pub. 2.25; Livy 1.18.5–10; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.58; Plut. Num. 3.3–4, 5.1), who was credited with establishing the major religious practices of the city as well as its first peaceful period. He established the pontifices (Ennius Ann. 1.2 fr.115; Varro Ling. 7.45; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.73.1; Plut. Num. 9.1), and the flamen Quirinus (Ennius Ann. 1.2 fr.115; Varro Ling. 7.45; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.64.2–3; Plut. Num. 7.4–5), introduced the Vestal Virgins (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.64.5; Ov. Fast. 6.257–60; Plut. Num. 9.5–10.2), the fetiales (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.72.1; Plut. Num. 12.3–7), the Salii (Cic. De re pub. 2.26; Livy 1.20.1–5; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.70.1; Ov. Fast. 3.361–92; Plut. Num. 13), and increased the number of augurs (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.64.4). Hooker (1963) has completed a survey of his life and religious reforms. Overall, this figure was distinctly religious in nature and served as an *exemplum* worthy of

aspiration. With this background in mind, let us examine the use of kings on coins before the second triumvirate.

Coinage of the Republic presented symbols and images to commemorate the families of individual moneyers, which makes coins an excellent source of evidence for the representation of early legends and the kings of Rome. Those of the Imperial period, in contrast, advertised the achievements and political aims of the emperors (Grant, 1958; Foss, 1990). Examination of coins reveals that only four kings were regularly used: Romulus and the three Sabine kings (including Numa). The six coin types identifying the iconography of Romulus have been discovered. Examination of these coins has been published elsewhere,² with the following conclusions. The earliest is a series of silver *didrachm* (RRC 20), dated between 269 BCE and 266 BCE, which clearly refers to the well-known legends surrounding the birth of Romulus (Varro, Ling. 5.54; Livy 1.4.6–7; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.77–80; Plut. Vit. Rom. 2.5–6; Cass. Dio 1.5.1). The minting of these coins coincides with the establishment of the Ogulnian statue of the she-wolf suckling twins on the Capitol, and this is likely to have been the inspiration for the image on the coin (Carter, 1909; Wiseman, 1995; Cornell, 1997; Mazzoni, 2010). The same wolf image is used on the coins in 217–215 BCE (RRC 39/3), 169–158 BCE (RRC 183/1; RRC 183/2) and 115–114 BCE (RRC 287/1), all authorised by unidentified moneyers. That the iconography of Romulus had not become fixed in the third century BCE is evident from the addition of details, such as a bird feeding the twins.³ This suggests that other early myths were most probably also not fixed at this time, including the stories and representations of Numa. The *asses*, *triens* and *denarii* featuring Romulus also use traditional iconographical features on the obverse of their respective coin types, with Janus and Minerva appearing in 169–158 BCE and Roma in 115–114 BCE. The addition of the she-wolf suckling twins, incorporating the foundation of Rome into the numismatic iconography without altering the original markings, represents the beginning of a deviation from the

² For the full text, see A. Turner (2015).

³ Although it is more commonly identified as a woodpecker, a bird associated with Mars, it is believed that a connection between the eagle and victory influenced its use on these coins and represents a variation of the original myth (Curran, 1973: 26; Jones, 1990: 106.)

standard archetypes of the bronze and silver denominations previously employed (Mattingly, 1980: 3, 8–9).

In 137 BCE, the moneyer Sextus Pompeius minted a series of *denarii* featuring a detailed scene in which a she-wolf suckling twins is situated in front of a tree containing birds, while a man, identified as Faustulus by the inscription FOSTLUS, looks on from the left (RRC 235/1C). This is the only coin featuring the iconography of Romulus with an identifiable moneyer. Mattingly (1980: 6) claims this coin is one of the first instances of a moneyer promoting their family, believing that Sextus Pompeius claimed descent from Faustulus. The obverse depicts the traditional image of Roma. In all six coin types the she-wolf holds the same pose, as do the twins, suggesting that they were based on an image their audience would immediately recognise, such as the previously mentioned Ogulnian statue of 296 BCE. The coins featuring Romulus further demonstrate that the representation of kings did take on stereotypical forms in the iconography of the Republic and this conclusion can be applied to the image of Numa as well.

Numa and the other two kings recorded on coins are of Sabine origin, indicating the esteem in which these kings were held by the Roman families who could claim Sabine ancestry; they represent the rising popularity of claiming Sabine descent, which began in the third century BCE (Cornell, 1997: 75–77). In 89 BCE and 70 BCE, coins featuring Titus Tatius were minted. In all of these coins, Tatius is presented in profile as a bearded man of middle years, facing right, with short, well-kept hair and identified by the inscription SABIN, demonstrating the established image of the king that connected him to the rustic origins of the city.

Numa Pompilius is represented on coins from 97 BCE, when L. Pomponius Molo, who claimed descent from Numa through a son called Pompo (Plut. Num. 21.2), minted a series of *denarii*. These carried the head of Apollo on the obverse, while on the reverse is a sacrificial scene, being conducted by Numa who stands to the left of an altar, as a *victimarius*, leading a goat, approaches from the right (RRC 334/1). This coin establishes the religious character of the king through sacrificial acts. In c. 88 BCE, C. Marcus Censorinus, who claimed descent from Numa through his grandson Ancus Marcius (Plut. Cor. 1), also minted a series of *denarii*

and *asses* featuring the heads of both Numa and Ancus on the obverse. The image of Apollo on the *denarius* of 97 BCE and the *desultor* of 88 BCE are both referring to the *ludi Apollinares*, creating a connection between the minter's family and their founding (Crawford, 2001: 361; Farney, 2007: 84; see fig. 7A). The harbour scenes of some *asses* refer to the founding of Ostia, which was attributed to Ancus Marcius (Crawford, 2001: 361; Farney, 2007: 85; see fig. 7B). The *ludi Apollinares* were established in Rome in 211 BCE, featuring games in the circus, animal games and theatrical performances, and became an annual event from 208 BCE as a way of fending off disease (Auguet, 1994: 212; Olivova, 1984: 168; Scullard, 2007: 614). The connection between the descendants of Numa and the *ludi Apollinares* suggests that they wanted to promote their, or their families', concern for religion by displaying their regal ancestor, and the appearance of Apollo. It is evident that the religious nature of the king remained his most important feature. In 49 BCE, Pompey the Great and Cn. Piso issued *denarii* featuring the bearded head of Numa, wearing a diadem inscribed with NUMA on the obverse (RRC 446/1). Piso's connection with the obverse is created by the inscription CN PISO, and he claimed descent from Numa (Farney, 2007: 114). The reverse is clearly designed to promote Pompey, as indicated by the inscriptions MAGN and PRO COS, featuring the use of a prow, which promotes his naval dominance, demonstrated by his victories over pirates in 68 BCE and his position as augur.

In all of these images, Numa appears as a mature, bearded man, revealing his stereotypical depiction as a representative of the Sabine race, as his beard, like that of Tattius, represents the traditional rustic and frugal type who embodied the moral ideals of Rome's past. Farney (2007: 97–101) has examined the Sabine stereotype, which represented *prisca virtus* 'old-fashioned virtue.' He found that these values were portrayed through their disciplined and austere image and their unkempt and hirsute physical appearance, reflecting a rustic upbringing. Although the Sabine background certainly became a feature of Roman literature, the bearded, unkempt image of Numa and Tattius on coins demonstrates that the stereotype had found physical expression by 97 BCE. The repeated use of setting, expression and iconography suggests that the image of Numa appeared in a temple of the city as a source for

the stereotype, in the same way that the representation of Romulus appears based on existing imagery.

The increased appearance of identifiable moneyers connected with their regal ancestors coincides with a shift in the Roman political landscape. With the unprecedented consulships of Gaius Marius (107–100 BCE), an example was set for powerful individuals to wield control of both the Senate and, more importantly, Rome herself. In addition, the conclusion of the Social War and passage of the *lex Iulia* in 90 BCE saw the enfranchisement of many Italian allies, who were slowly enrolled in the voting tribes over the following years (Bispham, 2007; Lintott, 1999). The increased use of Sabine imagery in coins may thus have arisen from a desire to promote the antiquity of a family's connection with Rome, an important element in political elections in the city.

Numa's name and deeds were preserved in the traditions of the great patrician *gentes* who claimed descent from him or Sabine origin – the Marcii, the Aemilii, the Pomponii, the Calpurnii and the Pinarii – and evidence of these family traditions has survived in the archaeological record, in the form of monuments. An important example of this is the Basilica Aemilia, located in the Forum Romanum, which was erected and maintained or restored by the Aemilian family over a number of generations and which contained friezes depicting Sabine legends. Only a length of twenty-two metres out of the estimated original one hundred and eighty-four of the frieze of the Basilica Aemilia, believed to have encircled the structure, has survived (Albertson, 1990: 801). The extant friezes of the Basilica Aemilia depict the earliest legends of the Sabine-Roman tradition: the abduction of the Sabine women and the treachery and punishment of Tarpeia, which are present on the coin types featuring Tatius. It is plausible, therefore, that incidents from the reign of Numa appeared among the missing scenes of the frieze. Such scenes may well have served as the basis for the Numa coin types.

The later Sabine king Ancus Marcius, who appears on three coins in conjunction with his grandfather Numa, does not follow the Sabine stereotype of Tatius and Numa, instead appearing beardless (RRC 346/1A; RRC 346/3; RRC 346/4A; RRC 346/4B). There is only one series of *denarii* in which he appears alone, from 56 BCE, produced by the moneyer L. Marcius Philippus, the step-father of the later

Augustus. Again, the same beardless face of Ancus is used (RRC 425/1). The lack of beard symbolises the integration of the Sabines into Rome; Ancus is no longer foreign and rustic but now urbanised (Crawford, 2001: 448; Farney, 2007: 98–9). Since Ancus does not represent the same elements of the Sabine stereotype, as Tatius and Numa, it is evident that the stereotype of each king was unique in the coins of the Republic, and relied on the legends surrounding the figure as much as their genealogical background.

To summarise, the archaeological and numismatic evidence, which dates between c. 269 BCE and 49 BCE, reveals that Sabine legends and characters had become popular in the promotion of aristocratic families, suggesting a respect for the stereotypical traits associated with the Sabine ethnicity. This allowed the development of a physical iconography specific to each king, as revealed by the numismatic evidence. The image of Numa is one of a hirsute appearance, which was in keeping with his ancient Sabine origins. In addition, Numa is depicted performing religious rites in the only surviving scene that portrays more than Numa's profile, suggesting that an association between the king and religious practice had been established. This consistent iconography indicates that a physical image of Numa can be inferred in a temple frieze of the period and further suggests that there were an accepted number of stories about Numa, which possibly developed at the same time. At this point, it is important to examine what Augustus was trying to achieve through his intense interest in coinage.

Augustus' earliest coins were an exercise in self-promotion and political expression (Küter, 2014: 1). They reveal a fierce competition between the triumvirs that included promotion of priestly offices.⁴ As the youngest triumvir, Augustus was competing against men of experience who already held priestly office: Lepidus as *pontifex maximus* and Antony as augur. Augustus had been made a pontiff by Julius Caesar in 48 BCE and had also become an augur prior to 42 BCE.⁵ There was no way

⁴ For in-depth analysis, see Turner (2015).

⁵ Beard, et al. (2008: 186). Beard et al. claim that Augustus became augur in 41–40 BCE, but the appearance of coins featuring Augustus and the lituus in 42 BCE strongly suggest an earlier date.

for Augustus to promote his position as pontiff and remain on equal footing with Lepidus, but he clearly tried to put himself on a par with Antony by incorporating the *lituus* into his numismatic iconography. This promotion of augury continued until the death of Lepidus in 13 BCE, which then made vacant the position of *pontifex maximus* for Augustus. Augustus did not limit promotion of his religiosity to his portrait on the coinage. The prominence of the augury also appears in the depiction of Julius Caesar, togate and bearing a *lituus* (Pollini, 2012: 137–8). By promoting the religiosity of his adoptive father, Augustus promoted his familial connection with the priestly offices. Augustus also emphasised a personal connection between himself and Apollo, dedicating part of his own house to the god when it was struck by lightning (Vell. Pat. 2.81, 3; Suet. Aug. 18, 29; Cass. Dio 49.15) and thanking Apollo for his victory at Actium (Hor Carm. 1.2; Prop. 4.6.69f). Horace connects them as responsible for ridding Rome of hunger, plague and war (Hor. Carm. 1.21). From 42 BCE to 13 BCE, Augustus' coins featuring augural symbols worked as a means of promotion, in competition with the various positions held by Lepidus and Antony.

A number of coins from the 40's also promote Augustus as the heir to Julius Caesar. In these coins, the political and religious status of Caesar is paralleled by the offices held by Augustus (RRC 490/2; RRC 490/4). Caesar's position as dictator is paralleled by Augustus' role as consul; Caesar's rank as *pontifex maximus* is paralleled by Augustus' co-optation as both pontiff and augur. Although Augustus had not obtained the same exalted position as Caesar, he is clearly indicating his continuation of family service to Rome. These coins were contemporaneous with those of Antony, featuring himself and Augustus and endorsing Antony's augurate. It is clear that Antony had been promoting himself as the political heir to Caesar, and Augustus was highlighting his testamentary adoption in response to this. Augustus focused on his role as the political heir of Caesar again in 42 BCE (RRC 497/2A). In the same year, coins issued by P. Clodius and L. Livineius Regulus promoted the *pietas* of Augustus (RRC 494/19; RRC 494/3A; RRC 494/3B). The iconic image of Aeneas carrying Anchises represented the *pietas* of the Julian family, who claimed descent from Aeneas. *Pietas*

also personified the Roman sense of duty towards the gods and the State, as well as to the family. Augustus' role as the avenger of Julius Caesar was being emphasised in the lead-up to Philippi, as well as his role as Caesar's heir. This connection between Augustus and Julius Caesar was essential for this stage of Augustus' political career. Both Lepidus and Antony had played public roles as supporters and lieutenants for Caesar and could expect to inherit his political position. Augustus had not received such public opportunities before Caesar's assassination and so needed to promote his personal connection and right to follow in Caesar's role.

In 40 BCE, Q. Salvidienus Rufus issued *denarii* with the head of Augustus on the obverse and a thunderbolt on the reverse (RRC 523/1A; RRC 523/1B). The thunderbolt was an attribute of Jupiter that required expiation by an augur, perhaps further promoting Augustus' ability to interpret the signs of the gods as an augur. Although this is an attribute of Jupiter, it could also allude to the tradition of Numa, who, through conversations with divine beings, learned how to appease the wrath of Jupiter, indicated by lightning (Livy 1.20.7; Ov. Fast. 3.321–49; Plin. HN 28.14; Plut. Num. 15.3–6). Although this connection is tentative, and, admittedly, speculative, it may have been at this time that Augustus began to contemplate utilising the image of Numa more explicitly for his own ends. The promotion of Augustus as the heir to Caesar continued as seen in coins of 38 BCE, which feature images of the deified Caesar and either the head of Augustus (RRC 534/2) or the inscription IMP·DIVI·IVLI·F·TER·III·VIR·R·P·C (RRC 534/1). In 36 BCE, Augustus combined promotion of the augurate with his role as the heir of Caesar by minting a series of *aurei* and *denarii* with Caesar depicted inside his temple, dressed as an augur, on the reverse (RRC 540/1). The head of Augustus on the obverse is accompanied by the inscription IMP·CAESAR·DIVI·F·III·VIR·ITER·R·P·C, signalling Augustus once again as the son of Caesar.

Following the exile of Lepidus in 35 BCE, *denarii* issued by Augustus featured his two priesthoods, featuring a *simpulum*, to symbolise his role as pontiff, and the *lituus*, to represent his role as augur (RRC 537/1; RRC 538/1). It is also worth noting his dual membership in the two most important priestly colleges recurs on

coins of 16, 13, 9 and 8 BCE (RIC 368; RIC 367; RIC 410; RIC 402; RIC 421; RIC 424). Coins from the previous year, examined above, had been used to promote Augustus as following in the footsteps of his adoptive father. Caesar, like his nephew and adopted heir, had also been a member of both colleges, a relatively rare honour. Since the end of the third century BCE, the accumulation of priest-hoods had been rare, and Caesar had been the first to obtain dual membership since T. Otacilius Crassus in 211 BCE (Szemler, 1974: 76). Both colleges were allegedly established by Numa, a feature emphasised in the accounts of his reign (Cic. De re pub. 2.14.26; Livy 1.20.5–7; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.64.4, 73.1–4; Plut. Num. 9.1–5). Augustus' references to his membership of these priestly colleges creates a subtle link between himself and their founder, Numa. By creating this connection, Augustus was establishing his own religious authority and associating himself with the traditions of the city. Augustus in this period developed a strong image of himself as a protector of Roman tradition and religion. As a result, it is possible that the figure of Numa, indirectly referred to in the coins of the 40's and again the 30's, became more attractive, as a direct result of his campaign against Antony.

This brings us to the Numa *asses* minted in Rome under Augustus. Cn. Calpurnius Piso (son of the consul of 23 BCE), with his fellow moneyers Surdinius and Rufus, minted coins featuring Augustus on the obverse and Numa Pompilius on the reverse (RIC Augustus 390–396). Although Amandry (2009) has speculated that several coins of C. Plotius Rufus are modern forgeries from the Tardani workshops, Küter (2014) finds that the evidence does not support the Numa *asses* being faked as well. These coins have been divided into two distinct groups. Group 1 features the names of all three *tresviri monetales*, Cn. Calpurnius Piso, L. Naevius Surdinus and C. Plotius Rufus (RIC I² Augustus 390–393), along with the legend CAESAR DIVI F AVGVST (see **Fig. 1**). Group 2 is inscribed with only the name of Cn. Calpurnius Piso and the legend CAESAR AVGVST TRIBVNIC POTEST (RIC I² Augustus 394–6; see **Fig. 2**).⁶ Although the office of *tresviri monetales*, minor magistrates in their own

⁶ Küter (2014: 38f) outlines in detail the differences between these coin groups.



Figure 1: As with head of Augustus on the obverse and head of Numa on the reverse, RIC I² Augustus 390. Photo credit: The British Museum http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=635929001&objectId=1202793&partId=1.



Figure 2: As with head of Augustus on the obverse and head of Numa on the reverse, RIC I² Augustus 394. Photo credit: Classical Numismatic Group, www.cngcoins.com.

right, produced thousands of coins over the course of Roman history, little is known about how they functioned. In the Republic, this magistracy was an early position for young men as they began their political careers, undertaken prior to becoming a quaestor (Hamilton, 1969: 182). The three men, presumably elected each year, minted coins at the direction of the consul and senate and their names are preserved on the coins they minted, although frequently only one or two would be named on the coins produced (Lintott, 2009: 140). In 23 BCE, Augustan reforms moved control

of the *tresviri monetales*, that is, of the magistrates filling these roles, into the hands of praetors rather than the direct instruction of the consul (Küter, 2014: 5–6, 17). Between 6 BCE and 10 CE, the names of the *tresviri* disappeared from the coins that they minted.

Küter (2014) has convincingly argued that the Numa *asses* were minted in 22 BCE, through a thorough examination of the evidence and this is, in part, accurate. However, there is one point that has been overlooked. It has been assumed that both groups of coins were minted in the same year. Discrepancies in the portraits of Numa, which include the inclusion of a moustache and hair patterns, have been attributed to different working groups involved in the minting process for 22 BCE (Küter, 2014: 44). However, it seems unlikely that two working groups would have been needed to produce the same coin in the same year, particularly as the rarity of the coins suggests a limited release. In addition, the analysis of the coins of Group 2, which feature only the name of Piso, shows their composition is closer to the standard set by Augustus in terms of weight and levels of pollution (Küter, 2014: 10, 38). With this in mind, I propose that Group 1 was minted, as Küter argues, in 22 BCE, while Group 2 was minted at a later date.

An analysis of Piso's known career helps date the second minting. Tacitus claims that Piso, during a trial in 20 CE, cited 45 years of service to the principate. This places the beginning of his career in 25 BCE. His initial service would have been with the military and should have continued for at least ten years, finishing in 15 BCE. Küter argues that this service was interrupted in 23 BCE, when his father, also Cn. Calpurnius Piso, was elected as consul. It was through the promotion of his father that the younger Piso, according to Küter, secured the early magistracy for 22 BCE, following which he resumed his military career, eventually becoming a *legate* under Tiberius in 15 BCE and consul in 7 BCE. In 9 or 10 CE, he served as *consular legate* in Hispania Tarraconnensis and from 14 to 17 CE he was in Syria, where he eventually came into conflict with Germanicus, ultimately leading to Piso's suicide in 20 CE. It seems likely that Piso was praetor between serving as *legate* in 15 BCE and consul in 7 BCE. Under the reforms of Augustus, which placed praetors in control of the *tresviri* and the favour that Piso enjoyed,

it is plausible that his praetorship was spent overseeing the mint. As such, the second group of coins, which contain the name of Piso alone, could have been minted while he was praetor, between 15 BCE and 7 BCE.⁷ If this is the case, why would he inscribe the coins with III VIR A A A F F? This is included because the coin is designed to remind the audience of the prior issues, both by Piso and, before this, by his father. The importance of this is tied to the date of its minting and will be discussed further below.

Analysis of the meaning and connections implied by the Numa portrait support this interpretation and allow us to date the second group. The image is clearly that of Numa, and follows the stereotype presented in coins of 88 BCE and 49 BCE, which show Numa with beard and diadem. The use of Numa on coins no doubt carries multiple messages. The first, and most commonly accepted of these, was the use of Numa to promote the family of Piso who claimed descent from the king (Evans, 1985: 133; Farney, 2007: 114; Grant, 1953: 102; Küter, 2014: 45). As we saw above, Piso's father had issued a series of *denarii* for Pompey the Great, which featured the same image of Numa on the obverse that his son used. The use of Numa on the later coins reflects the replacement of Pompey with Augustus in the Pisonian loyalties (Galinsky, 1996: 35). This is not the only space in which Pompey was being publically replaced with Augustus. Augustus' restoration of the Theatre of Pompey created an association between this public space and the emperor's family, and *denarii* issued in the thirties by Augustus usurped Sextus Pompey's association with Neptune.

There are, however, additional meanings that arise from this coin. Augustus could claim a Sabine background through Caesar's mother, Aurelia, following his testamentary adoption. The Aurelii had long promoted their Sabine ancestry and Caesar's mother is noted in our sources as providing a strict upbringing for her children in the Sabine tradition (Cass. Dio 44.38.6). These coins created a physical connection between the *princeps* and the second king of Rome, and this connection

⁷ There is evidence of special mints being completed by magistrates other than the *tresviri monetales* (Hamilton, 1969; Wallace-Hadrill, 1986).

must have been approved by Augustus who, despite returning control of the mint to the Senate, no doubt maintained some right of veto for any coinage issued. This suggests that Augustus was the driving force behind the creation of this association between himself and Numa, fully in line with earlier coins demonstrating subtle allusions to the second king of Rome. The use of Numa may also be fortuitously linked to the achievements of Augustus, who undertook the closure of the temple of Janus, allegedly founded by Numa, both in 29 BCE and again in 25 BCE. A third closure is recorded by Augustus in *Res Gestae* 13. This likely dates to 12 BCE due to the return of Agrippa from the East and Augustus from the West in 13 BCE, having secured peace across the empire. These conditions were necessary to ensure the closure of the temple of Janus. Therefore, the second minting should be placed at this time, making the image of Numa topical, matching other iconography displayed on Augustan coins. If the Group 2 coins date, as I propose above, to Piso's praetorship between 15 and 7 BCE, this closure of the temple would have served as an excellent reason for Piso to re-mint the image of Numa. The closure of the temple of Janus is not the only possible topical reference. In 13 BCE, the Senate decreed that a temple to the Augustan Peace, the Ara Pacis Augustae, be built. Although not completed until 9 BCE, it is probable that the design of this building was determined at this time. The south-western panel of the building depicts Numa, likely in the process of dedicating his own altar of Peace.⁸ Numa had created religious traditions in order to ensure the peace and prosperity of Rome and, under Augustus' guidance, Rome was returning to more traditional religious practices (Livy 1.21.1; Plut. Num. 20). Based on these events, it is plausible that Piso held the praetorship in 12 BCE, when events suggested that the connection between Numa and Augustus be promoted, encouraging Piso to mint coins demonstrating his support of the *princeps*. By reminting a coin, including the title of the office he had previously held, Piso was able to remind Augustus of his earlier support, while simultaneously promoting his family's

⁸ This panel was originally interpreted as Aeneas (Rehak, 2001: 190; Rossini, 2007: 30). However, recent scholarship has shifted to the view that this panel actually reflects a Numa scene (Rehak, 2001; Rehak, 2006; Weinstock, 1960). Despite Pollini's (2012) recent rebuttal and return to Aeneas, examination of the panel reveals serious flaws in his interpretation that deserve a deeper discussion than this article allows.



Figure 3: Denarii with Augustus on obverse and ancilia on reverse, RIC I² Augustus 343. Photo credit: The British Museum http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=631250001&objectId=3087064&partId=1.

ongoing service to the Roman state. This also fits with the propaganda that Augustus was employing, as a restorer of traditions.

These are not the only coins to suggest a connection between Augustus and Numa. In 17 BCE, *denarii* were minted by P. Stolo which featured the head of Augustus on the obverse and two *ancilia* on the reverse (RIC I² Augustus 343–4; see **Fig. 3**). The *ancilia* were shields of an old-fashioned shape, oval and indented, carried by the Salian priests during their rites whose origins were connected with Numa. After one dropped from the sky, the king ordered eleven copies to be created, for a total of twelve, and that they were to be carried through the city (Cic. De re pub. 2.14.27; Varro Ling. 7.43; Livy 1.20.4; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.70–71; Ov. Fast. 3.259–392). In 29 BCE, Augustus' name, at the time Octavian, had been added to their hymn (Res Gest. 10; Cass. Dio 51.1). The coins of Stolo create a link between the person of Augustus and the preservation of Rome. The use of the *ancilia* on these coins recalls the traditions then restored, which were being celebrated as the beginning of a new age in the Secular Games of that year, 17 BCE.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the image of Numa on the Augustan *asses* follows the traditional imagery of the king established in the

Republican period. As such, the image would recall the values embedded within that iconographic framework – the regard for traditional religious practice and the idea of peace following war. Second, the coin fits within the established practice of Augustan numismatics, as it is topical and draws on the iconography of the state religion. Although primarily reflecting the shifting loyalties of the Pisonian family, the coin also fits with the Augustan usurpation of Pompeian public identity and further connects Augustus to the ideas of Numa. It is likely that Augustus approved or authorised, and possibly even played a role in designing, the coin of 22 BCE. This indicates that, at this time at least, Augustus had an interest in promoting himself in connection with the tradition associated with Numa. This was a tradition of peace and of the establishment of many of the religious practices that were the core of the Roman experience, and may have arisen from a desire to distance himself from the turmoil and bloodshed of the triumvirate and civil war period. A second minting of *asses* featuring Numa and Augustus was undertaken during Piso's praetorship in 12 BCE, to celebrate the decree to build the Ara Pacis Augustae and the third closure of the temple of Janus.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

References

- Albertson, F C** 1990 The Basilica Aemilia Frieze: Religion and Politics in Late Republican Rome. *Latomus*, 49: 801–15.
- Amandry, M** 2009 Mazzini, Auguste 503. *SchwNumRu*, 88: 211–14.
- Auguet, R** 1994 *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games*. New York: Routledge.
- Bay, A** 1972 The Letters SC on Augustan Aes Coinage. *JRS*, 62: 111–122. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/298932>
- Beard, M, North, J and Price, S** 2008 *Religions of Rome; Volume 1: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bispham, E** 2007 *From Asculum to Actium: The Municipalization of Italy from the Social War to Augustus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199231843.001.0001>

- Carter, J B** 1909 The Death of Romulus. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 13(1): 19–29. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/496877>
- Cornell, T J** 1997 *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000–264 BC)*. London: Routledge.
- Crawford, M H** 2001 *Roman Republican Coinage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Curran, B F** 1973 *The Cult of Mars*. Unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Newcastle.
- Evans, J D** 1985 *The Legends of Early Rome Used as Political Propaganda in the Roman Republican and Augustan Periods*. Unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Pennsylvania.
- Farney, G D** 2007 *Ethnic Identity and Aristocratic Competition in Republican Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foss, C** 1990 *Roman Historical Coins*. London: Seaby.
- Galinsky, K** 1996 *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Grant, M** 1953 *The Six Main 'Aes' Coinages of Augustus: Controversial Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Grant, M** 1958 *Roman History From Coins: Some Uses of the Imperial Coinage to the Historian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grant, M** 1972 *Roman Imperial Money*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert.
- Hamilton, C D** 1969 The Tresviri Monetales and the Republican Cursus Honorum. *TPAPA*, 100: 181–99. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2935909> (Last accessed 18 May 2016).
- Hooker, E M** 1963 The Significance of Numa's Religious Reforms. *Numen*, 10(2): 87–132. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3269302>
- Jones, J M** 1990 *A Dictionary of Ancient Roman Coins*. London: Seaby.
- Küter, A** 2014 *Zwischen Republik und Kaiserzeit: Die Münzmeisterprägung unter Augustus*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag.
- Levick, B** 2010 *Augustus: Image and Substance*. Cambridge: Pearson.

- Lintott, A** 1999 *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mattingly, H** 1980 *A Guide to Republican and Imperial Roman Coins in the British Museum*. Chicago: Obol International.
- Mazzoni, C** 2010 *She-Wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511761768>
- Olivova, V** 1984 *Sport and Games in the Ancient World*. London: Orbis.
- Pollini, J** 2012 *From Republic to Empire: Rhetoric, Religion, and Power in the Visual Culture of Ancient Rome*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Rehak, P** 2001 Aeneas or Numa? Rethinking the Meaning of the Ara Pacis Augustae. *The Art Bulletin*, 83: 190–208. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3177206>
- Rehak, P** 2006 *Imperium and Cosmos*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Rossini, O** 2007 *Ara Pacis*. Rome: Electa.
- Scullard, H H** 2007 *A History of the Roman World: 753 to 164 BC*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Sutherland, C H V** 1984 *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume 1: From 31 BC to AD 69, Revised Edition*. London: Spink and Son Ltd.
- Szemler, G J** 1974 The Dual Priests of the Republic. *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 117: 72–86. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/stable/41244767> (Last accessed 18 May 2016).
- Turner, A** 2015 Kings on Coins: The Appearance of Numa on Augustan coinage. *Iris*, 28: 70–83.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A** 1986 Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus. *JRS*, 76: 66–87. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/300366>
- Weinstock, S** 1960 Pax and the 'Ara Pacis'. *JRS*, 50: 44–58. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/298286>
- Wiseman, T P** 1995 *Remus: A Roman Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zanker, P** 1988 *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

How to cite this article: Turner, A 2016 The Importance of Numa Pompilius: A Reconsideration of Augustan Coins. *Open Library of Humanities*, 2(1): e16, pp. 1–19, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/olh.58>

Published: 23 June 2016

Copyright: © 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Open Library of Humanities is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS 