Divus dum Vivus: Augustus' Divinity as Seen Through His Coinage

Augustus forcefully promoted himself as a religious authority. His *Res Gestae* mentions ten different instances where he acted as such in Rome, including as a temple builder; his coins sometimes pair him with king Numa (legendary founder of the state religion). In contrast to the provinces, Augustus was not worshipped as a god in Rome. And yet the idea persisted, so that Horace in Epistles II 1 states that Augustus is amply owed cultic honors in his lifetime. I argue that Augustus actively stimulated such public perceptions, and used especially his coinage both at home and abroad to create the impression that he was a living divinity.

My survey of the 666 coin types of Octavian/Augustus in the standard references (Crawford, RRC; Mattingly and Sutherland, RIC I 2nd ed.) shows that 231 coins (35%) have a religious association, with an image of either a divinity or religious object. In this presentation I focus on coins that show an image of Augustus on obverse, with the filiation DIVI F (i.e., "son of the deified [Julius Caesar]) or the image of an Olympian deity on the reverse. Here I analyze the ways in which Augustus exploits his divine filiation, and explain his frequent evocation of the goddess Diana, the most anomalous of the deities on his coins, as she is not prominent in his other forms of propaganda.

I argue that Augustus used his filiation to emphasize his relationship not with his mortal father, Julius Caesar, but with his divinized form. I show how Augustus used depictions of the goddess Diana on his coins to strengthen his relationship with the god Apollo, and subtly suggest that he is a sibling of the god. This is an important contribution to the study of Augustan coins, as not much has been written on his use of the goddess Diana.

Select Bibliography

Bruun, Patrick. "Coins and the Roman Imperial Government." *Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire: E. Togo Salmon Papers II*. Ed. G. M. Paul and Michael Ierardi. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1999. 19-40. Print.

Miller, John F. *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.

Varner, Eric R. "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 7 (2008): 185-205. *JSTOR*. Web.

Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1988. Print.

Audio-Visual Needs

This paper will be accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. It will be on a laptop that uses HDMI connection.