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THE LEGIONARY COINS OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

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Abstract: As Severus faced his opponents in the Year of the Five Emperors, his mint produced a series of legionary coins that named each of the legions fighting for him. This article shows how those coins not only celebrated Severus soldiers but framed Severus in relation to previous leaders. Previous scholarship has focused on how the coins allude to the most famous series of legionary coins, that of Mark Antony before Actium, but that was not the only connection the coins made. Though not included in the *Roman Imperial Coinage* descriptions, coins for several of Severus' legions also include Capricorns, which this article shows were the first of the many ways that Severus connected himself to Augustus. Similarly, Severus coins also linked him to Marcus Aurelius, the last emperor to use the iconography of a legionary eagle between standards before Severus himself.

Keywords: *Severus, legions, Capricorn, Augustus, Year of the Five Emperors.*

In June 193 CE,¹ Septimius Severus' soldiers had already marched to Rome to defeat one rival imperial claimant, Didius Julianus. Ahead of them was a war against another rival, Pescennius Niger. To the north in Britain, Clodius Albinus had gone from yet another of Severus rivals to his ally and heir, but before long he too would face Severus in the field.² To solidify his soldiers' loyalty at this crucial moment, Severus gave them a donative.³ At the same time, the Rome mint issued for its new emperor a series of coins celebrating the legions that were fighting for Severus (Fig. 1). Considering the timing and the coin's military iconography, they were likely first minted to pay the donative.⁴ The iconography of Severus' legionary coins stretched back to the republic, most famously to Mark Antony's prodigious series of legionary *denarii* (Fig. 2),⁵ and it is to Antony that scholars often suggest Severus' coins allude.⁶ A soldier inclined to look at the iconography on his coins might well have thought of Antony, whose legionary coins were so numerous that they constituted 20% of circulating silver under Vespasian and continued to circulate in large numbers into the third century, albeit by then often worn into illegibility.⁷ Antony's coins, though, were not the only ones Severus' were in conversation with. This article shows how Severus' legionary coins not only celebrated his military might and linked him to Antony but also framed him

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all dates are CE and all translations are my own.

² See BIRLEY 1988, 96–128, as well as PASEK 2013 and PASEK 2014.

³ DIO 46.46.7; HDN. 2.14.5; HA *SEV.* 5.2.

⁴ *RIC* IV, 1 Severus nos. 2–17. Minted for the donative: OMAN 1918, 86 and *RIC* IV, 1, 65. KUBITSCHKEK 1914 suggests they were minted before Severus reached Rome, but the stylistic similarity to the Rome mint and sheer quantity of coins disprove this: *BMCRE* V, lxxvii.

⁵ *RRC* nos. 544/1–39.

⁶ *BMCRE* V, lxxxiii; *RIC* IV, 1, 65; ZIEGLER 1971, 1n3.

⁷ WOYTEK 2007, 511–18.

as another Augustus through the inclusion of Capricorns on select legions coins and as another Marcus Aurelius, the last emperor to use the iconography.



Fig. 1. *Denarius* of Septimius Severus, Rome, 193–4 (RIC IV, 1 Severus no. 14). Obverse: laureate head of Severus, IMP CAE L SEP SEV PERT AVG. Reverse: eagle between standards with Capricorns, LEG XIII GEM M V TR P COS (American Numismatic Society, no. 1946.92.3).



Fig. 2. *Denarius* of Mark Antony, unknown mint, 32–1 BCE (RRC no. 544/19). Obverse: galley, ANT AVG III VIR R P C. Reverse: eagle between standards, LEG VI (American Numismatic Society, no. 1944.100.6320).

COINS AND LEGIONS

The reverses of Severus legionary coins showed an eagle (*aquila*) between two military standards (*signa*). The legend specified the honoured legion. Both the eagle between standards and the naming of particular legions recalled the legionary coins Antony minted before facing Octavian at Actium,⁸ though it will become apparent that Severus' iconography differed in a few key details.

Severus' coins named fifteen of his sixteen legions. That comprehensiveness suggests coins were minted for the absent *legio X Gemina* but have either not survived or been misidentified.⁹ Unlike Antony, Severus did not mint coins for the praetorians, since he had cashiered them as punishment for the murder of Pertinax earlier that year.¹⁰ Also omitted were Nigers nine legions. Like other military series, these were to solidify the bond with ones own troops, not bids for the loyalty of others. An emperor could easily get coins (and the messages on them) into the hands of their own soldiers as pay but had no similarly reliable way to distribute them to an enemy force. Though not presently hostile, Albinus four legions were excluded as well. Imperial legionary coins identified the legions commander on their obverse, which would have posed a problem: Severus was doubtless disinclined to mint coins in Albinus name, but to put his own portrait on the obverse would cast doubt on Albinus control over his legions.¹¹ Minting only for his own legions

⁸ On Antony's legionary coins, see DILLON 2007; ROWAN 2018, 109–16; WOYTEK 2007, 503–18.

⁹ *Legio X Gemina* included: BRACE 2003, 119; PASEK 2013, 144–5; VERMEEREN 1991, 80. Intentionally excluded: BMCRE V, lxxxii; CARLSON 1971, 51; DOMASZEWSKI 1885, 48–49n1; HASEBROEK 1921, 22–3; OMAN 1918, 85; RIC IV, I, 65; RITTERLING 1924–1925, 1310, 16876; SCHUMACHER 2003, 361; WITTWER 1986, 135. ZIEGLER 1971, 1–2 is agnostic.

¹⁰ DIO 75.1–2; HDN. 2.13; HA SEV. 6.11–7.1, 17.5.

¹¹ RIC IV, 1, 65; SCHUMACHER 2003, 361; VERMEEREN 1991, 80–1. The omission of *legio III Augusta* provides a *terminus post quem* for its desertion of Niger for Severus: PASEK 2013, 144.

also drove home how many more legions supported Severus than Niger or Albinus.

Each of Severus' legions received coins, but that is not to say that each received only coins bearing its own name. Coins for Antony's various legions are found mixed together in hoards, suggesting his legions were paid with a mixture of coins naming different legions.¹² Severus did the same. The database Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire (CHRE) records 34 hoards that include one or more of Severus' legionary coins.¹³ No hoard with three or more legionary coins contains coins from only one legion. The Shapwick Villa hoard, consisting of 9,238 coins deposited after 224 CE, has the second largest concentration of Severan legionary coins with three coins for *legio I Adiutrix*, two for *legio VII Claudia Pia Fidelis*, and two for *legio XXII Primigenia*.¹⁴ The third-century Reka Devnia 1929 hoard of 101,096 coins is the largest concentration of Severan legionary coins.¹⁵ Table 1 shows the breakdown by legion.

Table 1. Severan Legionary Coins from Reka Devnia 1929 Hoard by Legion.

| Legio | RIC IV, 1 Severus nos. | Quantity |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| <i>I Adiutrix</i> | 2 | 1 |
| <i>I Italica</i> | 3 | 1 |
| <i>I Minervia Pia Fidelis</i> | 4 | 1 |
| <i>II Adiutrix Pia Fidelis</i> | 5 | 4 |
| <i>II Italica Pia Fidelis</i> | 6 | 4 |
| <i>III Italica</i> | 7 | 5 |
| <i>III Flavia</i> | 8 | 1 |
| <i>V Macedonica</i> | 9 | 4 |
| <i>VII Claudia Pia Fidelis</i> | 10 | 1 |
| <i>VIII Augusta</i> | 11, 357 | 4 |
| <i>XI Claudia</i> | 12 | 1 |
| <i>XIII Gemina</i> | 13 | 2 |
| <i>XIV Gemina Martia Victrix</i> | 14, 358, 397, 608A, 652 | 19 |
| <i>XXII Primigenia</i> | 15–16 | 2 |
| <i>XXX Ulpia Victrix</i> | 17 | 0 |

Like the other hoards, Reka Devnia 1929 includes a mixture of coins from different legions. The one seeming exception to this is *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* with its 19 coins. It is unlikely, however, that this comes from a soldier from that legion having been paid only in *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* coins. As we shall see, that legion received more different coin types in more metals and from more mints than any other Severan legion, making it unsurprising for its coins to outnumber the other legions in a random sample.

Indeed, though all received *denarii*, Severus legions were not treated equally. Only coins for *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* and *legio VIII Augusta* were minted again in 194 in

¹² ROWAN 2018, 110–1.

¹³ The hoards are Baretswil Zh 1993, Caister by Yarmouth, Carnuntum, Courcelles-sur-Nied 2005, Eastern Turkey, Ercsi, Erythrai, Falkirk, Flonheim, Frâncesti, Gëbice, Gësseling, Kecel 1934, Kirchmatting, Köln Gertrudenstraße 1909, Linsberg, Malyech, Mastacän, Mazepintsy, Mehovine (no 2000), Mircesti, Muntenești, Oberebach, Præstemosen, Reka Devnia 1929, Resko, Russe 1916, Shapwick Villa, Solin, Stara Romanovka, Supska, Tell Kalak, Turiya, Zbuzh.

¹⁴ For the hoard, see ABDY/MINNITT 2002.

¹⁵ For the hoard, see MOUCHMOV 1934.

an Eastern mint (sometimes identified as Emesa),¹⁶ and Alexandria only minted coins for *legio III Italica*.¹⁷ Only *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* received *sestertii*.¹⁸ That legion's various honours and station at Carnuntum, where soldiers first acclaimed Severus emperor, suggest the fourteenth was the legion that first acclaimed him.¹⁹ *Aurei*, likely made for officers, were another matter.²⁰ Though once known only for *legio I Minervia*, *legio VIII Augusta*, and *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix*, specimens have now been found for *legio IV Flavia* and *legio XXII Primigenia*, suggesting *aurei* were made for all legions but have largely been lost due to the small number made for each legion.²¹

More varied still were the standards on the coins. Unlike Antony's, not all of Severus's legionary coins depicted the same standards. One might think each coin depicts the standard of the named legion, but closer examination reveals this was at best a nod towards a particular standard rather than an accurate depiction of it. Though some scholars have tried to match the standards depicted on these or other coins to a legion's actual standard,²² there is reason to believe standards on coins were in fact standardized. As K. M. Töpfer points out, each legion had over sixty distinct standards within it, as indeed was necessary if soldiers were to follow the standard into battle and the legion wished to execute manoeuvres more complex than moving in one large group. Nor were a legion's standards unchanging. Each new decoration a unit won went on its standard, making any hypothetical depiction of a standard on a coin only a brief match.²³

Comparing standards on coins with standards on other media also suggests standards on coins were simplified. To be sure, standards like those seen on Antony's legionary coins do appear in relief sculpture (e.g., Fig. 3). Either some such standards did exist or those sculptures were also simplifying. Either way, most sculptural standards were more complex. For instance, the gravestone of a standard-bearer (*signifer*) of the very fourteenth legion whose coins Severus minted so prolifically shows a standard with far more decorations than appear on any coin (Fig. 4).²⁴ Considering that

standard's numerous decorations and a coin's small size, it makes sense that the engravers simplified the design.



Fig. 3. Monument of an *aquilifer* (Museo Archeologico al Teatro romano di Verona, no 22537; photo courtesy of Dr Margherita Bolla).



Fig. 4. Tombstone of C. Valerius Secundus, *signifer* of *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* (Landesmuseums Mainz, no. 611; photo courtesy of Heiko Fischer).

Severus' mint did try harder than any previous minters of legionary coins to capture the variation of standards between units. Since Romans thought of the designs on coins as coming from the emperor,²⁵ the idea may have been to increase the honour the type paid to each legion by depicting its own standard, decorated with that legion's own hard-won honours, and so make that legion feel seen by their emperor, much as Roman military thinking emphasized the motivating power of the commander's gaze in combat. When describing one of his battles against the Gauls, for example, Caesar writes, 'the remainder of the struggle was a matter of courage, in which our soldiers were easily superior, and all the more so since the fight was waged in view of Caesar and the whole army, so that nothing done a little more bravely could escape notice.'²⁶ Emperors sought to use their gaze

¹⁶ Scholars agree that *RIC IV*, 1 357–8 and 397 were minted in the east, but that they were minted at Emesa is just a guess of Mattingly (*BMCRE V* cxviii; *RIC IV*, 1 57–8). See BICKFORD-SMITH 1994, 57–67, as well as PINK 1933, 49; VERMEEREN 1991, 82; WITTWER 1986, 133–4. VERMEEREN 1991, 88–90 suggests detachments from those two legions were already in Syria.

¹⁷ *RIC IV*, 1 Severus no. 608A, which shows Julia Domna on the obverse. BICKFORD-SMITH 1994, 55–6 also notes legionary coins minted at Alexandria with Severus on their obverse.

¹⁸ *RIC IV*, 1 Severus no. 652.

¹⁹ HA *SEV.* 5.1, preferable to *EPIT. DE CAES.* 19.2. See BIRLEY 1988, 97; DOMASZEWSKI 1885, 48–49n1; FRANKE 2000, 201; HASEBROEK 1921, 17; *RIC IV*, 1, 65; RITTERLING 1924–1925, 1741–2; PASEK 2013, 145–6; VERMEEREN 1991, 88; ZIEGLER 1971, 1–2.

²⁰ For officers: *BMCRE V*, lxxxii; BRACE 2003, 120; PASEK 2013, 146; *RIC IV*, 1, 65; VERMEEREN 1991, 87.

²¹ *Legio XXII Primigenia*: CNG Electronic Auction 102 lot 1030. *Legio IV Flavia*: VERMEEREN 1991, 87. BRACE 2003, 120 and *RIC IV*, 1, 65 also suggest *aurei* for the missing legions were minted. Each additional legion for which *aurei* are found makes it likelier that they were made in small quantities for the others rather than that the *aurei* were another honour reserved for Severus' favourite legions, as has been suggested by RITTERLING 1924–1925, 1428; VERMEEREN 1991, 87–8; WITTWER 1986, 132–3.

²² KRAAY 1949, 135–6; ROSSI 1965.

²³ TÖPFER 2011, 204. For the meaning of the different decorations, see MAXFIELD 1981.

²⁴ Cf. the similarly complex standards shown on Trajan's Column scene

XXIV. For further comparanda, see the exhaustive catalog of standards in TÖPFER 2011, 265–460. D'AMATO 2018 and D'AMATO 2020 are also richly illustrated, though with a mixture of ancient depictions of standards and more hypothetical modern reconstructions.

²⁵ SÜET. *AUG.* 94.12, *NERO* 25.12. See ANDO 2000, 215–6 for further examples. This does not of course mean that emperors actually did select all their coin designs, but here what matters is the perception that they did. For the debate as to who did select the iconography on coins, see ELKINS 2018–2019, with ample earlier bibliography.

²⁶ *CAES. BG* 3.14: *Reliquum erat certamen positum in virtute, qua nostri milites facile superabant, atque eo magis quod in conspectu Caesaris atque omnis exercitus res gerebatur, ut nullum paulo fortius factum latere posset*, cf. for similar sentiments 2.25 and 6.8.

in the same way, such as when both Tiberius and Severus observed the course of sieges from elevated platforms that had the fortuitous side-effect of allowing the observing emperor to himself be observed by the fighting soldiers.²⁷ Unfortunately, when it came to making each legion feel seen by letting them see their own standard on the coin marked with their legion's name, the ambition of Severus' mint exceeded its ability. T. Vermeeren documents not only instances of different units receiving the same standard but inconsistencies among the standards of a particular unit, inconsistencies that increase in direct proportion to the number of specimens considered.²⁸ Nor are standards all that varies.

CAPRICORNS AND THE MEMORY OF AUGUSTUS

Though not included in the *Roman Imperial Coinage* descriptions, Capricorns are visible jutting out from the sides of the standards on some of Severus' legionary coins (Fig. 1). Domaszewski noticed them on coins for *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix*, and some scholars follow him in seeing it as an honour for Severus favourite legion.²⁹ Töpfer, however, also records Capricorns on *legio IV Flavia* coins, S. Pasek on those of all legions save *V Macedonica* and *VIII Augusta*.³⁰

To get a better grasp on the prevalence of these Capricorns, the following tables show the percentage of coins with Capricorns out of the total number of Severan legionary coins collected on two websites. The first is Online Coins of the Roman Empire (OCRE), a database combining the numismatic collections of the American Numismatic Society, the British Museum, and other major museums. The second is the online auction site Classical Numismatic Group (CNG).³¹ Those sites do not, of course, contain every Severan legionary coin ever found, but together they have 198 specimens, enough to get a sense of the general proportion of Capricorns. While both museums and auction sites might be biased toward well preserved specimens, neither appears to have been biased toward or against those with Capricorns. Though 80 of the 198 coins depict Capricorns, that abnormality is only noted in 14 of the descriptions, and two of the descriptions that do note the oddity describe it as an antelope rather than a Capricorn.³² When a specimen was unclear or ambiguous, I have, for the sake of consistency, counted it

as without a Capricorn, so the following count if anything undercounts Capricorns.

Table 2. Capricorns on OCRE and CNG Coins from Rome.

| RIC IV, 1 Severus no. | Legio | Capricorns/Total Coins |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2 | <i>I Adiutrix</i> | 0/14 ³³ |
| 3 | <i>I Italica</i> | 0/5 ³⁴ |
| 4 | <i>I Minervia Pia Fidelis</i> | 0/2 ³⁵ |
| 5 | <i>II Adiutrix Pia Fidelis</i> | 0/8 ³⁶ |
| 6 | <i>II Italica Pia Fidelis</i> | 1/7 ³⁷ |
| 7 | <i>III Italica</i> | 9/10 ³⁸ |
| 8 | <i>III Flavia</i> | 1/8 ³⁹ |
| 9 | <i>V Macedonica</i> | 2/10 ⁴⁰ |
| 10 | <i>VII Claudia Pia Fidelis</i> | 0/7 ⁴¹ |
| 11 | <i>VIII Augusta</i> | 0/9 ⁴² |
| 12 | <i>XI Claudia</i> | 4/16 ⁴³ |
| 13 | <i>XIII Gemina</i> | 4/12 ⁴⁴ |

³³ OCRE: Digital Coin Cabinet of Mainz University, no. ID 387; Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14116, RÖ 42673; British Museum, nos. R1946,1004.766, R.15139; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, no. ID1502. CNG: EA 61 Lot 1879, EA 63 Lot 1395, EA 70 Lot 62, EA 115 lot 418, EA 115 Lot 419, EA 533 lot 557, EA Triton VI Lot 910, Coin Shop 519297.

³⁴ OCRE: Münzkabinett Wien, RÖ 42675. CNG: EA 63 Lot 1396 (= 37 Lot 1632), 63 Lot 1397, EA 419 Lot 381, EA 560 Lot 720 (= EA 86 Lot 289).

³⁵ OCRE: Münzsammlung des Seminars für Alte Geschichte der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, no. ID3179. CNG: EA 61 Lot 1881.

³⁶ OCRE: Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14117, RÖ 14118 RÖ 42674. British Museum, no. 1927,0303.2. Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, no. ID1503. CNG: EA 134 Lot 357, EA 548 Lot 534, EA 560 Lot 721 (= EA 61 Lot 1882 = 54 Lot 1671).

³⁷ OCRE without Capricorns: Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14119, 42676; British Museum, no. 1938,0207.48. CNG Capricorns: EA 70 lot 64. CNG without Capricorns: EA 63 Lot 1398, EA 252 Lot 472, EA 560 Lot 722 (= EA 62 Lot 1883).

³⁸ OCRE Capricorns: Münzkabinett Wien, RÖ 42677; British Museum, nos. 1997,1203.105, 1986,1214.1, R.15140; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, no. ID1505; Münzsammlung des Seminars für Alte Geschichte der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, no. ID3181. CNG Capricorns: EA 454 Lot 376, EA 509 Lot 715, EA 560 Lot 723 (= 61 Lot 1884). CNG without Capricorns: EA 134 lot 358.

³⁹ OCRE Capricorns: British Museum, no. R1946,1004.768. OCRE without Capricorns: American Numismatic Society, no. 1955.21.15; Münzkabinett Wien, RÖ 14121; British Museum, no. 1992,0509.4; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, no. ID1506. The OCRE count does not include British Museum, no. 1946,1004.769, of which no photo was available. CNG without Capricorns: EA 60 Lot 66, EA 112 Lot 637, EA 561 Lot 663 (= EA 61 Lot 1885 = EA 54 Lot 1674).

⁴⁰ OCRE Capricorns: British Museum, no. 1992,0509.5. OCRE without Capricorns: Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14122, 42678; British Museum, no. 1927,0303.21. CNG Capricorns: EA 101 lot 145. CNG without Capricorns: EA 61 Lot 1886, EA 85 Lot 940, EA 115 Lot 421, EA Triton VI Lot 911.

⁴¹ OCRE: American Numismatic Society, no. 1986.161.91; The Digital Coin Cabinet of Mainz University, no. ID389; Münzkabinett Wien, no. RÖ 14123; British Museum, no. 1864,0716.8. CNG: EA 61 Lot 1887, EA 561 Lot 664, EA 562 Lot 581.

⁴² OCRE: Münzkabinett Wien, RÖ 42679. CNG: EA 61 Lot 63, EA 61 Lot 1888, EA 70 Lot 67, EA 113 lot 281, EA 148 Lot 343 (= EA 39 lot 1515), EA 561 Lot 665, EA Triton VI Lot 912, Coin Shop 737414.

⁴³ OCRE Capricorns: Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14125, 14126. OCRE without Capricorns: American Numismatic Society, nos. 1948.19.1428, 1986.161.92; Münzkabinett Wien RÖ 14127. The OCRE count excludes British Museum no. 1864,0716.7, of which no photo was available. CNG Capricorns: EA 70 lot 70, EA 90 lot 1603. CNG without Capricorns: EA 61 Lot 1889, EA 64 Lot 1129, EA 70 lot 68, EA 96 lot 156, EA 134 lot 359, EA 134 lot 360, EA 336 Lot 382, EA 561 Lot 666, Coin Shop 802225.

⁴⁴ OCRE Capricorns: Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14128, RÖ 42683. OCRE without Capricorns: Münzkabinett der Universität Göttingen, ID

²⁷ DIO 56.13.4, 76.11.4. For further examples and analysis, see EATON 2020, 123–4; GOLDSWORTHY 1996, 162–3; LEVITHAN 2013, 36; MACMULLEN 1984, 451.

²⁸ VERMEEREN 1991, 82–87, as well as TÖPFER 2011, 204.

²⁹ DOMASZEWSKI 1885, 49, followed by *BMCRE* V, lxxxii; SÁNCHEZ 2010, 135; VERMEEREN 1991, 85, 92–3; ZIEGLER 1971, 3.

³⁰ PASEK 2013, 143; TÖPFER 2011, 208.

³¹ CNG coins are identified by electronic auction (EA) and lot numbers. Excluded from the following count are EA 115 lot 430 (identified as a 'barbarous imitation') and EA 387 lot 475 (a legionary issue but one where the surviving legend does not identify the legion). Neither of those have Capricorns. Also excluded are legionary coins sold as part of larger groups of coins if the picture of the larger group did not include a clear enough image of the legionary coin to ascertain the presence or absence of a Capricorn.

³² Descriptions noting the Capricorns from OCRE: British Museum, nos. R1946,1004.768, 1992,0509.5, 1933.0401.1, R.15652; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, nos. ID1509, ID1510. From CNG: EA 70 lot 74 (misidentified as an antelope), EA 102 lot 1030, EA 192 lot 263 (another antelope misidentification), EA 561 lot 673, EA Triton XIII lot 1461, EA Triton XIV lot 748, EA Triton XIX lot 592, EA Triton XX lot 784.

| RIC IV, 1 Severus no. | Legio | Capricorns/Total Coins |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 14, 652 | XIV Gemina Martia Victrix | 45/55 ⁴⁵ |
| 15–16 | XXII Primigenia | 2/15 ⁴⁶ |
| 17 | XXX Ulpia Victrix | 0/9 ⁴⁷ |

Table 3. Capricorns on OCRE and CNG Coins from Other Mints.

| RIC IV, 1 Severus no. | Legio | Capricorns/Total Coins |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 357 (eastern mint) ⁴⁸ | VIII Augusta | 0/2 ⁴⁹ |
| 358, 397 (eastern mint) | XIV Gemina Martia Victrix | 2/9 ⁵⁰ |
| 608A (Alexandria) | III Italica | 0/0 |
| N/A ⁵¹ (Alexandria) | III Italica | 9/9 ⁵² |

The chart proves coins for *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix*

186530; Münzkabinett Wien, RÖ 42680; British Museum, no. R.15141. The OCRE count excludes American Numismatic Society, no. 2000.17.292, which is described as a 'modern die for replicas.' CNG Capricorns: EA 134 lot 361, EA 560 lot 724 (= EA 70 lot 73). CNG without Capricorns: EA 63 Lot 1399, EA 90 Lot 1604, EA 537 Lot 465, EA 561 Lot 667 (= 61 Lot 1890), EA Triton VI Lot 913.

⁴⁵ OCRE Capricorns: American Numismatic Society, nos. 1987.59.2, 1944.100.50121, 1946.92.3, 1944.100.50121, 1946.92.3, 1956.127.1251, 1954.18.172, 1944.100.50284, 1944.100.50285; Münzkabinett Wien, no. RÖ 14129, RÖ 14131, RÖ 14133, RÖ 14506, RÖ 14507, RÖ 42681, RÖ 42682; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, nos. ID1509, ID1510; British Museum, nos. 1933.0401.1, R.15652. OCRE without Capricorns: American Numismatic Society, nos. 1956.127.1252, 1995.11.1487; The Digital Coin Cabinet of Mainz University, no. ID388; Thuringian Museum for Pre- and Early History, no. 122676; Münzsammlung des Seminars für Alte Geschichte der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, nos. ID3183, ID4074; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 88.450. CNG Capricorns: EA 61 Lot 1891, EA 70 lot 74, EA 85 Lot 941, EA 90 Lot 1605, EA 115 Lot 423, EA 148 Lot 344, EA 163 Lot 316, EA 192 Lot 263, EA 352 Lot 445, EA 366 Lot 845 (= EA 22 Lot 402), EA 372 Lot 466, EA 376 Lot 446, EA 379 Lot 669, EA 385 Lot 558, EA 447 Lot 476, EA 500 Lot 791, EA 514 Lot 518, EA 548 Lot 535, EA 560 Lot 725, EA 561 Lot 668, EA Triton VI Lot 914, EA Triton VI Lot 915 (= EA 54 Lot 1682), EA Triton XIII Lot 1461, EA Triton XIV Lot 748, EA Triton XIX Lot 592. CNG without Capricorns: EA 169 lot 269, EA 410 lot 349, EA 513 lot 414.

⁴⁶ OCRE without Capricorns: Münzkabinett Wien, nos. RÖ 14134, 42684; British Museum, no. 1864,0716.5, 1946,1004.773; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, no. ID1511. The OCRE count excludes Harvard no. 2008.115.284, actually a sestertius of Balbinus. CNG Capricorns: EA 102 lot 1030, EA Triton XX lot 784. CNG without Capricorns: EA 61 Lot 1893, EA 61 lot 1894, EA 63 Lot 1400 (= 54 Lot 1686), EA 70 lot 75, EA 372 Lot 468, EA 561 Lot 669, EA 561 lot 670 (= EA 111 lot 6849), Coin Shop 802224.

⁴⁷ OCRE: American Numismatic Society, 1978.213.1; Münzkabinett Wien, no. RÖ 95264; British Museum, no. 1938.0207.36; Münzkabinett der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, nos. ID1512, ID 1513; Münzsammlung des Seminars für Alte Geschichte der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, no. ID3184. The OCRE count excludes British Museum no. 1946,1004.771, of which a photo of the reverse was unavailable. CNG: EA 115 lot 424, EA 282 lot 318, EA 563 lot 899 (= EA MBS 61 lot 1895).

⁴⁸ See note 13.

⁴⁹ OCRE: British Museum, nos. 1927,0619.9, 1997,1203.160.

⁵⁰ OCRE with Capricorns: British Museum, no. 1864,1128.93; Münzkabinett Berlin, no. 18277829. OCRE without Capricorns: The Digital Coin Cabinet of Mainz University, no. ID390; Münzsammlung des Seminars für Alte Geschichte der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, no. ID4020. CNG without Capricorns: EA 61 Lot 1914, EA 475 lot 75, EA 475 Lot 475, EA 563 Lot 908, EA 563 Lot 909.

⁵¹ See note 14.

⁵² CNG Capricorns: EA 61 lot 1907, EA 61 lot 1908, EA 148 lot 348, EA 475 lot 138, EA 496 lot 496, EA 560 lot 475, EA 560 lot 746, EA 561 lot 673, EA 563 lot 911.

did include Capricorns. Capricorns appear on 47/64 coins of that legion, on all three metals, and from multiple mints. Were one legion to be singled out for Capricorns, *legio XIV* makes sense even besides Severus favouritism. Though perhaps founded by Caesar, it appears to have been refounded after Actium by Augustus by combining a legion of his with a legion of Antonys (hence *Gemina* or *Twin*).⁵³ It therefore made Augustus Capricorn its emblem.⁵⁴ The second thing the chart shows is again the inconsistency of Severus legionary coinage. The chart shows Capricorns for 8/15 legions, a total that rises to 14/15 when cross-referenced with PASEK, but Capricorns are only a majority on coins for two (*legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* and *legio III Italica*), and some *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* coins have no Capricorns (e.g., Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Denarius of Septimius Severus, Rome, 193–4 (RIC IV, I Severus no. 14). Obverse: laureate head of Severus, IMP CAES L SEP SEV PERT AVG. Reverse: eagle between standards without Capricorns, [LEG XIII GE]MMV TR P COS (American Numismatic Society, no. 1956.127.1251).

But need we conclude Capricorns for legions besides *legio XIV* were erroneous? That would make 33/80 of the observed Capricorns errors. Nor are, despite the inconsistencies, all the Capricorns random. It is *legio III Italica*, not *legio XIV*, that most consistently has Capricorns, which adorn all but one of its 19 coins (Fig. 6). *Legio III Italica* was, along with *legio XIV*, also one of the three legions honoured with coins at a mint besides Rome. This suggests that, even allowing for the evident messiness of the minter's execution, the minter's intention was to honour at least one legion besides *legio XIV* with Capricorns.



Fig. 6. Denarius of Septimius Severus, Rome, 193–4 (RIC IV, I Severus no. 7). Obverse: laureate head of Severus, IMP CAES L SEP SEV PERT AVG. Reverse: eagle between standards with Capricorns, LEG III ITAL TR P COS (Münzkabinett Wien, no. RÖ 42677).

Indeed, Capricorns were not just the emblem of *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* but a symbol of Augustus. Augustus soon had so much faith in his destiny, Suetonius writes, that he publicized his horoscope and issued a silver coin with the sign of the constellation Capricorn, under which he was

⁵³ DIO 54[55].23.7. See KEPPIE 1994, 117, 182, as well as BIRLEY 1928; FRANKE 2000, 191; RITTERLING 1924–1925, 1727–46.

⁵⁴ For Capricorns as an Augustan legionary emblem, see PARKER 1971, 262 and RITTERLING 1924–1925, 1727. RIC V, 1 Gallienus no. 361 uses a Capricorn for *legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix* in a series representing legions by their emblems, on which see OKAMURA 1991.

born.⁵⁵ This seemingly straightforward passage has caused much confusion, since Augustus was born on the 23rd of September 63 BCE, which would suggest that he was actually born under Libra or Virgo rather than Capricorn.⁵⁶ What matters here, however, is not how Augustus calculated his star sign but that, for whatever reason, he associated himself with the constellation Capricorn and that the symbol graced numerous Augustan coins (Fig. 7).⁵⁷ Capricorns therefore became a way for later emperors to reference Augustus. The rebels of 68–69 minted anonymous coins showing on their reverse a Capricorn with the legend AVGVSTVS (Fig. 8), iconography reprised on the coins of Nerva and other later emperors.⁵⁸ Capricorn appeared in the same way on the coins of Severus opponent Niger (Fig. 9).



Fig. 7. Denarius of Augustus, 18–17 BCE (RIC I² Augustus no. 125). Obverse: head of Augustus. Reverse: Capricorn holding globe and rudder below a cornucopia, AVGVSTVS (American Numismatic Society, no. 1955.191.11).



Fig. 8. Anonymous denarius, unknown mint, 68–69 (RIC I² Civil Wars 82). Obverse: head of Augustus. Reverse: Capricorn holding globe with rudder below a cornucopia, AVGVSTVS (American Numismatic Society, 1966.110.6).



Fig. 9. Denarius of Pescennius Niger, 193–4 (RIC IV, 1 Pescennius Niger no. 44). Obverse: laureate head of Pescennius Niger, IMP CAES C PESCE N NIGER IVSTI AV. Reverse: two Capricorns over a small shield, supporting a shield (or globe) with seven stars, IVSTI AVG. (CNG EA 94 lot 1050).

The symbol appealed to Severus too. That is hardly surprising, considering Severus penchant for astrology. He made astrology part of his self-representation, depicting the position of the stars at his birth on the ceiling of the palace

⁵⁵ SUET. AUG. 94.12: *Tantum mox fiduciam fati Augustus habuit, ut thema suum vulgaverit nummumque argenteum nota sideris Capricorni, quo natus est, percusserit.*

⁵⁶ See WARDLE 2014, 532 and BARTON 1995.

⁵⁷ RIC I² Augustus nos. 124–30, 174–5, 477, 480, 488–9, 493, 521–2, 541–2, 544–8; WARDLE 2014, 532.

⁵⁸ Capricorn coins between Augustus and Severus: RIC I² Civil Wars nos. 81–5, 97; RIC II, 1² Vespasian 769, 781, 1058–60, Titus 4–5, 17–20, 36–38; RIC II Nerva no. 126; RIC II, 3² Hadrian 727. See BARTON 1995, 47; SHELAIH 2022, 13

and including astrological signs and other portents in his autobiography.⁵⁹ The *Historia Augusta*, likely drawing on stories Severus himself put into circulation, recounts not only an astrologer's prediction of a young Severus' future accession but also how he chose to marry Julia Domna because her horoscope predicted she would wed a king.⁶⁰ More broadly, Cooley has shown how ardently Severus strove to compare himself to Augustus, who had also marched on Rome to found a glorious dynasty.⁶¹ Severus, for example, praised Augustus alongside Sulla and Marius as examples of admirable severity.⁶² To give just one more example, Severus in 204 celebrated the *Ludi Saeculares*, which Augustus had memorably held in 17 BCE. In using those games to connect himself to Augustus, Severus was following the examples of Claudius and Domitian, but—unlike Claudius and Domitian—his iteration of the festivities fit Augustus' schedule of games every 110 years.⁶³ The Capricorns on Severus' coins, however, predate the other links Severus drew to Augustus that Cooley explores. That the Capricorns are a reference to Augustus is certain if they were intentionally used for legions like *III Italica* without a Capricorn emblem,⁶⁴ but even if one views as intentional only the fourteenth's Capricorns, the question remains why Severus celebrated the legion in that particularly Augustan fashion.

Reading these coins as Augustanizing reveals not only an early stage in Severus' self-representation but the reaction to it. As discussed at the beginning of this article, Severus' soldiers probably received these coins as a donative not long after entering Rome in June 193. In response to their donative paid in legionary coins whose Capricorns alluded to Augustus, the soldiers demanded more. The *Historia Augusta* tells us, When he [Severus] was in the Senate, soldiers demanded from the senate at the point of mutiny ten thousand *sestertii*, by the example of those who had brought Augustus Octavian to Rome and received such a sum.⁶⁵ In other words, they threw Severus' self-representation of himself as another Augustus right back at him. Though they did not get the full ten thousand *sestertii* they asked for, they did get one thousand each.⁶⁶ The immediacy of that dialogue would be enhanced if J. B. Campbell is right that emperors personally distributed donatives whenever possible,⁶⁷ something Severus would have as much if not more reason to do in the middle of his civil war as any other emperor.

⁵⁹ Ceiling: DIO 77.11. Astrology in autobiography: HDN. 2.9.4.

⁶⁰ HA SEV. 2.8–9, 3.9. See CRAMER 1954, 209–10 and POTTER 1994, 163–4.

⁶¹ COOLEY 2000.

⁶² DIO 76.8.1.

⁶³ COOLEY 2000, 391. RANTALA 2017, the most detailed look at Severus' games, concurs with Cooley's connection between Severus' and Augustus' games: RANTALA 2017, 22n82.

⁶⁴ RIC V, 1 Gallienus nos. 339–41 use either a stork or a bull for *legio III Italica*.

⁶⁵ HA SEV. 7.6: *sed cum in senatu esset, milites per seditionem dena milia poposcerunt a senatu, exemplo eorum qui Augustum Octavianum Romam deduxerant tantumque acceperant*, cf. DIO 46.46.7 and APP. BC 3.94. See BIRLEY 1988, 104; COOLEY 2007, 388–9; DOMASZEWSKI 1900, 232; VERMEEREN 1991, 75; WATSON 1969, 113.

⁶⁶ DIO 46.46.7.

⁶⁷ CAMPBELL 1984, 183–4.

THE MEMORIES OF MARCUS AURELIUS AND PERTINAX

Augustus was not the only connection Severus legionary coins forged. His obverse titulature included PERT(INAX), a feature of his early coins that framed him as Pertinax's avenger.⁶⁸ It had a particular point on these military coins, since Herodian suggests the adoption of the name was largely motivated by the fact that all the soldiers in Illyricum remembered Pertinax's command.⁶⁹ The coins also recalled Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the last emperors under whom legionary coins, or indeed any coins featuring standards, had been minted. Those emperors' mint had restored Antonys' *denarius* honouring *legio VI* (Fig. 10, cf. Antonys at Fig. 2). The new coin was not identical to the old. To avoid confusion between Marcus Aurelius and Mark Antony, the obverse legend ANTONIVS AVGVR III VIR R P C. Reverse: eagle between standards, ANTONINVS ET VERVS AVG REST LEG VI (American Numismatic Society, no. 1944.100.49097).



Fig. 10. *Denarius* of Marcus Aurelius, Rome, 164 (RIC III Marcus Aurelius no. 443). Obverse: galley, ANTONIVS AVGVR III VIR R P C. Reverse: eagle between standards, ANTONINVS ET VERVS AVG REST LEG VI (American Numismatic Society, no. 1944.100.49097).

This coin has prompted two recent die studies with conflicting interpretations. M. Beckmann dates it to 161–163 based on its large letters and sees the restoration as designed to demonstrate imperial concern for the condition of deterioration in a group of important objects, the superabundant but now worn Antony legionary *denarii*.⁷⁰ M. Baer argues that Beckmann's own criteria of letter size best fits 164 and defends the traditional association of the restoration with Verus' victories in the Parthian War, in which *legio VI Ferrata* fought.⁷¹ That numerous emperors had minted coins with the iconography of an eagle between standards after Antony, often to celebrate victories or glorify their soldiers, supports Baer's reading.⁷²

Understanding the restoration in the terms of the Parthian War also explains why the minter went back to Antony. Antony differed from the other issuers of restored coins, since he was hardly someone Marcus and Lucius

would want to be compared to.⁷³ The point of the comparison might, however, not have been that they were like Antony but that they were better than him, for Verus succeeded in Parthia, where Antony had failed. This Parthian context should not be diluted by following Askew's suggestion that a variant with a Victory honoured instead *legio VI Victrix* in Britain.⁷⁴ A Victory would hardly have been enough to specify *legio VI Victrix*, and commemorating two legions involved in unrelated conflicts at opposite ends of the empire would have been overly obscure.⁷⁵

Severus drew numerous links between himself and Marcus Aurelius. His hair and beard on his portraits recalled Marcus Aurelius.⁷⁶ He would also soon claim that both he and Marcus had been saved by similar weather miracles before even claiming the long dead Marcus as his adoptive father.⁷⁷ Minting the first legionary coins since Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus was another such link. Indeed, Severus was himself planning a war against Parthia, which was on friendly terms with his rival Pescennius Niger. In that, Cooley suggests, Severus was once more taking inspiration from Augustus by using victories against a foreign foe to mitigate the stain of a civil war.⁷⁸ To be sure, Marcus Aurelius was not the first thing that would come to the mind of a soldier looking at the legionary coins with which he had just been paid. As Beckmann shows, Marcus' restored coinage was not a major part of his overall coin production and is outnumbered in the third-century Shapwick hoard roughly one hundred to one by Antonys' originals.⁷⁹ Still, that hoard does attest to the broad circulation of the restored coins. The connection between them and Severus would also have been especially clear to the Rome mint producing most of Severus' legionary coins.

CONCLUSION

Severus' legionary coins celebrated his soldiers while engaging in a conversation with previous Roman leaders and coin types. Severus' titulature on the coins emphasized his claim to be Pertinax's avenger, while the iconography of the eagle between standards harkened back to Antony and Marcus Aurelius. The Capricorns tied Severus to Augustus. When Severus' soldiers responded to the donative he paid them in Augustanizing legionary coins by citing Augustus back to him, they showed that at least some soldiers understood the implications of these coins and even saw themselves as participants in that conversation.

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⁶⁸ BECKMANN 2017, 140–1, drawing on KOMNICK 2001, 165–78.

⁶⁹ ASKEW 1951, 15, followed by BIRLEY 1971, 93; BÖRNER 2012, 206; ROSSI 1965, 77; TÖPFER 2011, 62

⁷⁰ For further arguments against ASKEW 1951, see BAER 2020, 18 and SÁNCHEZ 2010, 132.

⁷¹ BAHARAL 1996, 25.

⁷² Miracle: DIO 75.7.6–7; HDN. 3.3.7–8, Cf. HA MARC. 34.4 and Marcus Aurelius' Column. Adoption: DIO 76.7.4; HA SEV. 10.6, 11.4; RIC IV, 1 Severus nos. 65, 686, 700. See BIRLEY 1988, 116–7; COOLEY 2000, 385–87.

⁷³ DIO 75.8.3; HDN. 2.8.8, 3.5.1, 3.9.1; COOLEY 2000, 389.

⁷⁴ BECKMANN 2017, 143–4. For the hoard, see ABDY/MINNITT 2002.

⁶⁸ BIRLEY 1988: 97; LANGFORD 2013: 39–40.

⁶⁹ HDN. 2.9.8: πάντας τοὺς κατὰ τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸν στρατιώτας μεμνημένους τῆς Περτινάκου ἡγεμονίας. See CASSOLA 1965, 477; COOLEY 2007, 390; PLAT-NAUER 1918, 61n1.

⁷⁰ BECKMANN 2017.

⁷¹ BAER 2020.

⁷² For the history of the iconography between Antony and Marcus Aurelius, see KATZ 2023; ROSSI 1965; TÖPFER 2011, 200–7; VERMEEREN 1991, 71–3.

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