

NERO'S ANCESTRY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY IN THE EARLY EMPIRE. A METHODOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

Abstract: Within the discipline of ancient history, diverse types of sources, such as coins, inscriptions, portraits and texts, are often combined to create a coherent image of a particular ruler. A good example of how such a process works is the way in which reconstructions by modern scholars of the emperor Nero tend to look for a clearly defined 'Neronian image', by bringing together various types of primary evidence without paying sufficient attention to these sources' medial contexts. This article argues that such a reconstruction does not do justice to the complex and multi-layered image of the last Julio-Claudian. By focusing on one particular aspect of Neronian imagery, the propagation of this emperor's ancestry, we will argue that different types of sources, stemming from varying contexts and addressing different groups, cannot unproblematically be combined. Through an investigation of the ancestral messages spread by imperial and provincial coins, epigraphic evidence and portraiture, it becomes clear that systematic analysis of ancient media, their various contexts and inconsistencies is needed before combining them. Such an analysis reveals patterns within the different sources and shows that, in creating imperial images, rulers were constrained by both medial and local traditions. Modern studies of ancient images should therefore consider this medial and geographical variety in order to do justice to the multi-faceted phenomenon of imperial representation.

Keywords: ancestry, ancient media, imperial ideology, Julio-Claudian dynasty, Nero

I. INTRODUCTION

Most historians like to create a coherent image of the past. Increasingly, at least in the study of ancient history, this is done by bringing together even more different types of source materials within relevant theoretical frameworks. This is, at first sight, a sensible approach, especially since the relative dearth of evidence from antiquity necessitates cooperation between philologists, archaeologists and historians. The methodology leads to sophisticated analyses but runs the risk of neglecting the very specific contexts in which the source material took shape. This article aims to analyse an important topic within the study of Roman history, the communication of imperial power, to test the extent to which various source types can and should be linked to construct a consistent image of the representation of Roman imperial rule. In doing so, it places different

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kinds of source material, and the disciplines through which they can be analysed, alongside one another, rather than assuming that the various sources can be unproblematically combined to create a narrative framework.

In recent years, most research on the communication of Roman emperorship has aimed to analyse agency. In other words, the main methodological question was who 'produced' the image of emperors. In simplified form, the answer has been to assume either a bottom up or a top down model. There have been various alternatives and mixtures – often highly refined – leading to recent reciprocal models¹. In essence however, the discussion is whether the centre (the roman imperial court, or indeed the emperors themselves) took primacy in creating an imperial image, or whether the initiative lay within the provinces (mainly through the elites of the various cities in the empire), or at least how the relationship between the two took shape. An unwritten assumption seems to be that the imperial image emerging from the different types of regional sources (coinages, inscriptions, portraiture and reliefs) coheres, as does 'central' imagery². This assumption should be questioned.

Coins, inscriptions, and the other-mentioned sources can be usefully interpreted as 'media' of the Roman world. Through coinage, portraiture and inscribed names and titles, different audiences in the Roman world came to know their rulers. Coins, portraits and titles were shaped with an audience in mind; occasionally, it is even possible to recognise audience targeting³. However, different media may follow different rules. This applies to the Roman world as much as to ours. We can see ancient roman 'media' developing differently over time. What people (both in Rome and in the provinces) expected to see on a coin was – at any given time – different from what they expected to read in an inscription or see in a statue. This must be taken into account when looking at the transmission of changing imperial images. Some media will have been more malleable to changing imperial images than others. In turn, this will have made communication of the image of emperors more complex and more fractured than has been acknowledged so far.

One of the clearest – and certainly one of the best known – examples of an imperial 'image' is that of the emperor Nero. Our evidence shows a highly enigmatic and confusing figure, with good years of rule, matricide, cultural innovation and political instability that lead to the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Scholarship, however, has tried to interpret the highly biased evidence in order to create a coherent Neronian image⁴. One element that has been central

¹ See most recently NOREÑA 2011, which can be usefully contrasted to the argument set out by WITSCHER (forthcoming). WINTERLING 2011 is a useful attempt to look at emperorship over a longer period of time, as is ANDO 2000. The influence of ZANKER 1987 and HOPKINS 1978 in recent analyses of the emperors' ideological role in the Roman Empire can hardly be overestimated.

² Again, ZANKER 1987 is indicative, as is HANNESTAD 1989. More recently, a coherent visual programme is assumed by OSGOOD 2010 and (implicitly) by POLLINI 2012. Some of the points raised in this article have already been approached more cursorily in HEKSTER/MANDERS/ SLOOTJES 2014.

³ HEKSTER 2011 and HOFF 2011, 19 for the existence of 'parallel images' for different audiences. Cf. HÖLSCHER 1987 and MUNDT 2012 for a useful application of communication theory in the interpretation of ancient evidence.

⁴ Most intriguingly, CHAMPLIN 2003, emphasizing the 'mythological' image

in these analyses has been emphasis on Neronian ancestry. Nero's lineage was paramount in his accession to the throne. He was connected to the first emperor Augustus through maternal and paternal lineage. His mother, Agrippina Minor, was Augustus' great-grand daughter, whereas Nero's father Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus was the grandson of Mark Antony and Augustus' sister Octavia⁵. Consequently, it is often assumed that the emperor spent more attention in broadcasting his family to legitimate his position than his predecessors. Almost all recent works on Nero underline how important this impressive ancestry, and especially his direct descent from Augustus, was for the young emperor. Not all of them go as far as Malitz, who near-continuously stresses that Nero was 'Augustus' great-great-grandson'⁶. Still, almost all-recent serious scholarship on the last Julio-Claudian emperor, including the work by Champlin, Meulder and Osgood, places emphasis on the fact that 'the blood of the first *princeps* ran in his veins'⁷. Nor is it coincidental that Griffin's seminal biography explicitly talks about 'Nero's paternal clan'⁸.

The point in itself does not warrant debate. Clearly, the various imperial successions, from AD 14 onwards, had shown the principate to be a *de facto* (though not *de iure*) dynasty⁹. Much of modern literature assumes that because Augustan ancestry was of importance for Nero, the emperor systematically stressed this ancestry. Champlin, for instance, discusses various instances throughout Nero's reign, which he describes as 'Nero's *imitatio Augusti*'¹⁰.

To justify this assumption, different types of source material are brought together. A cameo in the collection of the Hermitage which shows Nero 'flanked by facing busts' of his great-great-grandfather and Livia (figure 1) is placed alongside inscriptions which for the first time in imperial history mention both the emperor's patrilineal and matrilineal ancestors. These inscriptions are linked to the famous coins that show Agrippina and Nero together; the first time in Roman history that a woman joined the emperor on the obverse of centrally minted coinage.¹¹ All this evidence, in turn, is related to a statement by the great Roman historian Tacitus, who mentions how the senator

of the emperor, influencing COWAN 2009. Note the important collection of essays in ELSNER/MASTERS 1994, that rightfully challenges the reliability of sources, but ultimately aims to replace one coherent account of Nero's reign (GRIFFIN 1984) by another.

⁵ For references see GRIFFIN 1984, esp. 20–32; BARRETT 1996.

⁶ MALITZ 2005 who even has 'Augustus' great-great-grandson' as the title of Ch. 1.

⁷ Quote from CHAMPLIN 2003, 139. According to WARMINGTON 1981, 12, Nero was 'connected to the imperial family on both sides'; MEULDER 2002, 364–365; OSGOOD 2011, 245 cites how 'in Nero's veins flowed the blood of Augustus'; see further 246–247 and 250–251. Cf. MEISE 1969, 174–177, on the importance of Nero's ancestry as a motive for Claudius in marrying Agrippina; LEVICK 1990, 69–70; BARRETT 1996. Cf. COWAN 2009, 82–83, on Juvenal's emphasis in the case of Nero 'on the disparity between noble ancestors and degenerate descendants who are signified by the same name'.

⁸ GRIFFIN 1984, 20–23.

⁹ On the role of succession on the construction of the imperial system, see now NOREÑA (2010). FLAIG 1992 and 1997, 20 emphasises that the principate was essentially an acceptance system, not one founded on constitutional legitimacy. However, this does not deny a *de facto* dynastic principle, HEKSTER 2001.

¹⁰ CHAMPLIN 2003, 139–140 Cf. ROSE 1997, 46–48; KUTTNER 1995.

¹¹ CHAMPLIN 2003, 139; NÉVÉROFF 1979, 80; ROSE 1997, 46–48 and 73, with references; GINSBURG 2006), 55–74.



Figure 1. Cameo, showing Nero flanked by Augustus and Livia; Hermitage, St. Petersburg, inv. no Ж 149.

Rubellius Plautus was perceived or presented by some as a possible alternative to the throne because his descent to the divine Augustus was as near as Nero's.¹²

This article questions to what extent it is valid to place these different kinds of sources alongside one another to create an image of Neronian 'ideology', focusing on central and provincial coinage, and with further attention on a variety of epigraphic material, and to a much lesser extent portraiture. By analysing the occurrences of ancestral messages within their medial contexts, we will show that different source types sent out widely different ancestral images. Not only were Nero's ancestors much more visible in some sources than others, the moments at which the ancestral messages changed also diverged widely for central coins, provincial coins and the different kinds of epigraphic evidence. These variations seem to reflect a 'construction' of imperial imagery in which the centre was constrained by traditions in its formulation of imperial representations, and in which directions from the centre compete and interact with culminations of local variants. In other words, the images on the different media can be much better explained within the context of their own internal discourse than as a reflection of a coherently constructed visual programme. It seems reasonable to suggest that such constraints in constructing an imperial image would have applied equally for other Roman emperors, and need to be taken into account when we look at the economy of images in the early Roman Empire.

II. IMPERIAL COINAGE

Imperial coinage will form an obvious point of departure. Centrally minted coins are commonly (though not universally) seen as the most important vehicle for

¹² Tac. *Ann.* 13.19.3: *pari ac Nero gradu a divo Augusto*. Cf. *Ann.* 13.1.1, 13.23.1, 14.22.1-2, 14.57.1-2, 15.35.1. For the position of imperial relatives who were perceived as possible threats, see still RUDICH 1993, esp. xxviii-xxix, 19-20, 30-31, 44-46, 66-74, 82, 137-139, who in this context coins the term 'dynastic dissidents', and now also LYASSE 2008, 264-266.

imperial representation. Although they were originally minted and brought into circulation because of economic needs, their ideological importance is obvious: the repeated introduction of new coin types, the fact that every emperor issued coins immediately after his accession to the throne and that the minting of coins by other persons than the emperor was considered a challenge to imperial power prove this. Moreover, as decisions about the legend and imagery on coins originated at the imperial top, the messages on imperial coins can be considered clear reflections of how the emperor wished to be seen or how people within the imperial entourage thought he wanted to be perceived. When also taking into account that (imperial) coins were issued uninterruptedly, that they reached a wide cross-section of the Roman population, and could broadcast fairly clear messages through the dialogue between legend and image, it is evident that they form a frequent starting point for discussing imperial ideology.¹³ The intelligibility of coin messages by ancient audiences is difficult, if not impossible, to properly explore, and some aspects, such as the circulation of new and old coinage together, may even have hindered effective communication between the imperial centre and intended audiences. The article, therefore, will only focus on how imperial coinage represented the ruling emperors in different stages of their reigns, and not on how their messages may have been perceived.

Recent research has demonstrated that it is justified and helpful to analyse imperial coin types quantitatively in order to gain insights into specific ideological aspects. An imperial coin type is defined as a Julio-Claudian coin tabulated in the *Roman Imperial Coinage* (RIC) I, which differentiates itself from other types through its obverse and reverse legends and images as well as through its denomination, issue place and date.¹⁴ By calculating the percentages of the ancestral types in relation to the total types issued under an emperor's reign, the method provides a tool to compare messages between different emperors, despite their various lengths of reign, and subsequently, it allows us to map the broad ideological patterns on imperial coins in general.¹⁵

The quantitative analysis takes both obverse and reverse of the coin types minted at the imperial mints into account.¹⁶ Obverses not only portrayed the emperor, but also (deceased) members of the *domus Augusta*.¹⁷ Reverses were

¹³ HOWGEGO 1992, 1-31 and 1995, 62-69; LEVICK 1999, 41-59; NOREÑA 2001, 147 and NOREÑA 2011, 248-262; HEKSTER 2003, 20-35; MANDERS 2012, 33-40. Note that debates are still pursued about the official who decided the coins images (see for the latest contribution CLAES, 2014) and about their communicative value for imperial ideology (see for instance NOREÑA 2013).

¹⁴ Here, the left or right position of a portraits or spelling errors in the legend do not define a different types. For a detailed overview of this coin type definition, see CLAES, 2013, 28-33.

¹⁵ The analyses presented here are based on the *Roman Imperial Coinage* (RIC) I² 1984 dataset, and do not reflect actual numbers or relative frequency of actual coins. MANDERS 2012, 53-62 on the correlation between coin types and the actual coin numbers, with the cautionary remarks by NOREÑA 2011, 29.

¹⁶ The so-called imperial mints are, apart from Rome, those of Gaul: Lugdunum and Nemausus; by general consent, Colonia Patricia and Colonia Caesaraugusta are identified as the Augustan Spanish Mints; the Eastern mints include Pergamum, Samos (?), Ephesos (?), Antioch, a North-Peloponnesian mint and some other uncertain mints. For the difference with so-called 'provincial coinage' see below, p. 8.

¹⁷ WALLACE-HADRILL 1986, 69.

even more varied, including ancestors with some regularity.¹⁸ Additionally, it seems clear that displaying the emperor on one side of a coin and a member of the imperial family on the other side, or paired busts of imperial figures, express a close relation between the depicted individuals, such as a family connection, a marriage, or shared power.¹⁹ There is a further distinction between the expression of ancestry through coin legends, regularly by using *divi filius* ('son of a god') in the emperor's nomenclature—but occasionally also by the use of kin terms such as *nepos* (grandson) and *pronepos* (great-grandson)—and the visualisation of ancestry through depictions on obverse or reverse. To make all these distinctions apparent, our analysis differentiates between coin types referring to the emperor's descent in the coin legend and types referring to ancestry through imagery.²⁰ The dataset created in this way allows us to systematically place references to ancestry in Neronian central coinage in chronological context. In this way, it becomes possible to judge whether and if so when and how, the images on central coinage under Nero differentiated from earlier Julio-Claudian practices, which will create a framework against which to place other Roman 'media'.

The first two graphs show the proportions of coin types of Julio-Claudian emperors referring to ancestry in the emperor's nomenclature (graph 1, see end of article),²¹ and through visual means (graph 2, see end of article). The first graph instantly shows that Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Nero denoted their ancestry in the legends of their coin types, and that Claudius did not. The first two emperors and Nero proclaimed themselves *divi filius* whilst Gaius used *divi Augusti pronepos*. Being able to refer to deified ancestors must have raised status, and in the cases of Augustus and Tiberius there cannot have been any doubt about whom was the referred-to ancestor. With Nero, there may have been more ambiguity. His use of *divi filius* referred to his adoptive father and imperial predecessor Claudius, but the formula makes the ancestral reference less precise, especially after Augustus and Tiberius already had used the same formula for different deified ancestors. In any case, ancestral references occur far less frequently on Neronian coinage than they had done under Augustus, Gaius, and especially Tiberius. Though all Julio-Claudians—with the exception of Claudius—mentioned their direct deified paternal ancestor in their nomenclature,²² they did not do so in equal measure, nor systematically in all denominations. Differentiation between one reign and the other, and between gold, silver, and bronze is pronounced. Interestingly, moreover, comparing the two graphs, emphasis on ancestry in nomenclature did not necessarily mean emphasis on ancestry through visual

means in central coinage, nor *vice versa*.

In order to place Nero's coinage in its proper context, we have to reflect upon the preceding development in ancestry on central imperial coinage.²³ Some points are rather unsurprising. Augustus' reign seems to have been a period of experimentation, as it was in other aspects of rule. During his period of power, coin types from the mints of Gaul regularly identified Augustus as *divi filius*, but this title appeared more sporadically on the coinage of other mints.²⁴ Furthermore, there is clear differentiation between the different metals (35% of all gold; 22% of silver; 11% of bronze denote the emperor as *divi filius*), but any suggestion that 'being the son of the deified Caesar' was a more important message to be broadcast to the elite and/or the army, who were more likely to handle gold and silver coinage, can only be tentative.²⁵ Very few Augustan coin types, moreover, linked ancestors to the emperor by representing them on either obverse or reverse (graph 2), all of them, unsurprisingly, visualising his adoptive father; the deified Julius Caesar ('divus Julius').²⁶

In contrast, all Tiberian coin types struck in Lugdunum and Rome displayed the legend 'son of the deified Augustus'.²⁷ Ancestral images increased dramatically in comparison to the Augustan reign, in this case especially for silver and bronze coins depicting Augustus.²⁸ To hammer the message home, types were even struck in the name of Augustus—that is types dated to the reign of Tiberius for Augustus—as many as 18% of all bronze coins.²⁹ Through this intense promotion, Tiberius' coinage seems to have aimed to present him as the legitimate successor of Augustus.

Gaius' ancestral coinage is more remarkable. References to ancestry disappeared from the legend on gold and silver coin types, but 65% of the bronze denominations carried the legend *divi Augusti pronepoti*. At the same time, images of ancestors are much more prominent on his gold and silver issues.³⁰ Gaius' parents, Germanicus and Agrippina Maior, as well as his great grandfather divus Augustus, are abundantly represented on gold (73%) and silver (88%).³¹

²³ As the focus in this article is on Neronian representation, Republican coinage is excluded here from considerations. Republican precedent was an issue for Augustan coinage, but the attention to one central figure substantially changed the dynamics of minting, and the centrality of the ruler had certainly become normative by the time of Nero. Cf. NORENA 2011, 5–6, 79, 190.

²⁴ See above, n 15.

²⁵ Cic. *Phil.* 13.11.24; Suet. *Jul.* 88; Dio 45.7.1–2; Plin. *Nat.* 2.93–94; Serv. *A. ius. Ecl.* 9.46; Serv. *A.* 10.272. See especially ZANKER 1987, 33–57 on Augustus' advertisement as the son of divus Julius. For more about coin messages targeting particular audiences, see LUMMEL 1991; METCALF 1993; ELSNER 1995; HEKSTER 2003; BUTTREY 2007, 101–112; MARZANO 2009, 125–158.

²⁶ *RIC I² Augustus* 37a–b, 38a–b, 102, 337–340, 415. See also WEINSTOCK 1971, 370–379; GURVAL 1997, 39–71; BERGMANN 1998, 101–102; VALVERDE 2003, 25–40.

²⁷ SEVERY 2003, 194–199.

²⁸ *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 23–24, 47, 49–51, 56–57, 62–63, 68–69.

²⁹ *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 70–83.

³⁰ *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 28–29, 34–35, 41–42.

³¹ *RIC I² Gaius* for Germanicus, nos. 10–11, 16–17, 22–23. For Agrippina Maior: nos. 6–7, 12–13, 18–19, 24. For divus Augustus: *RIC I²* nos. 3–5, 8–9, 14–15, 20–21, 25. Two ancestral coin types, *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 1–2, which belong to the first coin issue of Lugdunum, display a nameless portrait which features resemble Tiberius. However, in the second series, the portrait was replaced by that of divus Augustus accompanied by the legend *Divus Augustus Pater Patriae*. Most likely, the mint authorities of Lugdunum thought it was just a matter of time before Tiberius should be deified, but without official consecration they omitted Tiberius' name on the first coin

¹⁸ See for coin type definitions: SZAIVERT 1989; GÖBL 2000; KACZYNSKI/NÜSSE 2009, 95; KEMMERS 2009, 137–157.

¹⁹ Cf. BASTIEN 1992–1994; KING 1999, 132; HORSTER 2007, 297–298.

²⁰ On warnings when working with numismatic data and comparing these data with other sources, see HEESCH 2011, 311–325. On nomenclature on coins, though focusing on provincial coinage, see now BURNETT 2011, 12–20, with 18–19 discussing Nero.

²¹ On the X-axis, the total coin types in gold, silver and bronze of each emperor is given. Number of gold coin types for Augustus: 96, Tiberius: 20, Gaius: 15, Claudius: 44, Nero: 34. Number of silver coin types for Augustus: 152, Tiberius: 3, Gaius: 16, Claudius: 36, Nero: 36. Number of bronze coin types: Augustus: 125, Tiberius: 39, Gaius: 26, Claudius: 33, Nero: 191.

²² See especially ROSE 1997, 11–12, 22, 34, 46–47.

Yet, as under Tiberius, only bronze coins were struck in the name of members of the *domus Augusta*, in this case bronze coins in name of Augustus and Agrippa, as well as for his mother Agrippina and father Germanicus. Together, they form 38.5% of Gaius' total bronze coin types.³² Clearly, there is much of interest here (not least of which the differences between the precious metals and bronze), and one could suggest that coin types were used to commemorate and rehabilitate the memory of Gaius' deceased parents—an issue that seems to have been of great importance to the emperor.³³ Yet, for our present purposes, the relevant issue is the prominence which ancestors were yet again given and the ease with which (seemingly) patterns of issuance were adapted to the wishes of the ruler.

This ease of adaptation might explain the near-complete absence of ancestral allusion from Claudius' coins.³⁴ Claudius may have become emperor because of his Julio-Claudian lineage, but unlike his predecessors, he was not a linear descendant of the deified Augustus. Nor were Tiberius or Gaius deified – probably referring to them less attractive.³⁵ Hence, probably, the lack of references in nomenclature, and the very limited number of references to Augustus and Livia in his further coinage.³⁶ Strikingly, however, and in a break with precedent, precious metal coinage was issued in the name of ancestors who had not been directly linked with the throne, in this case the emperor's parents Drusus (11%) and Antonia (14%).³⁷

The frequency of different types of ancestral references seems to roughly coincide with the importance attached to different ancestors for legitimating the position of an emperor, in which the figure of Augustus loomed large. In that light, one would have expected Nero to emphasise his ancestry abundantly on his coins. Augustus' great-great-grandson would have every reason to use the name of his famous ancestor in his nomenclature. Instead, Augustus was omitted in favour of his adoptive father Claudius, who was consecrated shortly after his death on 13 October 54. And even Claudius was referred to only marginally. Ancestral references to his deified father are there in the titulature on Nero's first gold and silver coin issues, minted between October and December 54 (figures 2-3). But a gold *quinarius*, minted between December 55 and December 56, refers to Nero as *divi filius* for the last time. No further coin legend

issue. In reaction, Rome ordered gold and silver coin types for divus Augustus alone. Although two types of Gaius display Tiberius, this study has to take into account that Augustus was likely to have been intended. MATTINGLY 1920, 37; WOLTERS 1999, 303–304. Cf. RIC I², 133; WOLTERS 1999, 61–85; 144–170; 200; 307–308.

³² RIC I² Gaius, nos. 49, 47–46. The RIC assigned the Germanicus *dupondius* to Gaius' reign (RIC I² Gaius, no. 57). Cf. WOLTERS 1990, 7–16; WOLTERS 1999, 286 who re-dated the type to the years 19–20.

³³ TRILLMICH 1978, 33–35; ROSE 1997, 32–33; FOUBERT 2010, 113–114 and 123–124. Cf. Suet. *Cal.* 10 and 15; Tac. *Ann.* 14.63; WOOD 1999, 204; BARRETT 1989, 61. Gaius' deceased brothers, who were sentenced to death by disloyalty under Tiberius' reign, were also commemorated on two coins types. RIC I² Gaius, nos. 34 and 42.

³⁴ For the dominant themes on Claudius coinage, see MARTIN 1998, 201–212.

³⁵ OSGOOD 2011, 30 and 54–63.

³⁶ RIC I² Claudius, nos. 65–74 and 101. See also TRILLMICH 1978, 63–79.

³⁷ RIC I² Claudius, nos. 65–74, 92–93, 98, 104; 109, 114. Cf. MARZANO 2009, 135, who notes how Claudius struck coins depicting the arch of his father Drusus in all denominations, whereas usually arches are depicted solely on bronze.



Figure 2. Aureus showing Nero and Agrippina, Rome, 54 AD (Photo and collection National Numismatic Collection, DNB, Amsterdam, inv.no. RO-02411).



Figure 3. Aureus, Rome 55 AD, with on the reverse Divus Claudius and Divus Augustus on an elephant quadriga (Photo and collection National Numismatic Collection, DNB, Amsterdam, inv.no. RO-02409).

alludes to the imperial lineage. The name *CLAVDIVS* even disappears from Nero's nomenclature on gold and silver types, with the emperor being (mostly) referred to as *NERO CAESAR AVGVSTVS* after 56 (with *GERMANICVS* added occasionally), only to reappear on the bronze types between 62/63 and 68. What is more, Neronian bronzes never mention 'son of the deified Claudius'.³⁸ Nor were Nero's ancestors displayed prominently on reverses, with divus Claudius, divus Augustus and Agrippina Minor figuring on a mere 3% of Neronian golds and silvers. The pattern is consistent: only one gold and one silver type were struck in the name of divus Claudius, and just two reverse types honoured divus Claudius and divus Augustus together (figure 3). None of the many new coin types, which were introduced on the Neronian, bronzes from 62/63 onwards referred to an ancestor.³⁹ There were, then, far fewer references to ancestry on central coinage in the whole period of Nero's rule than under previous Julio-Claudians.

Attention in modern scholarship, however, tends to focus on a seemingly remarkable innovation. Under Nero, for the first time, obverses of gold and silver coin types showed paired busts of ancestors and emperors, though only in limited numbers, with depictions of Nero and Agrippina. Notwithstanding the small quantity, these coin types have received much attention. One coin type (figure 2), famously, showed Agrippina and Nero facing each other, but with the obverse legend reading *AGRIPP AVGVSTVS PATER*.

³⁸ MACDOWALL 1979, 75–109; RIC I136, 2–144. On the so-called desecration of Claudius around 55, see below (Suet. *Cl.* 55). From stylistic arguments, some scholars, like MACDOWALL 1979, 37–39 and 75–79; WOLTERS 1999, 79–83 and GIARD 2000, 28–31, have argued that the production of bronze restarted in 64.

³⁹ MACDOWALL 1979, 75–109; RIC I144–136, 2.

CAES MATER, and Nero's titulature only visible on the reverse. A second (figure 3), consecutive, type was amended slightly, with jugate busts of the emperor with his mother behind him, and with Agrippina's names on the reverse.⁴⁰ The prominence of Agrippina being the living mother of the emperor clearly was a novelty. Yet, as is well known, portraying female ancestors on imperial coinage was in itself no Neronian innovation (graph 3, see end of article). Livia, as so often, set precedent.⁴¹ Two bronze Tiberian types recalled Livia's recovery in 22, displaying the *carpentum* she received from the Senate, but not physically depicting her.⁴² Livia was shown as diva Augusta with divus Augustus on a Claudian bronze.⁴³ Gaius' coins show a major innovation. Apart from oft-discussed depictions of his sisters on coins, his gold and silver coinage shows Agrippina Maior with regularity (20% of gold and 25% of silver).⁴⁴ Under Claudius, too, a substantial percentage of all ancestral types referred to women, resulting in a nearly equal male–female balance, though because of Claudius' limited references to his family, the numbers are small.⁴⁵

This is, of course, not to say that the coins depicting Nero and Agrippina together fitted precedent. Agrippina was the first mother—though not the first female family member—to receive a coin type portrait when she was still alive. Furthermore, Agrippina's portrait is paired with Nero's on the obverse, much like coin portraits of the Hellenistic consanguineous queens and sons.⁴⁶ Finally, as stated above, in the first type Agrippina seems to hold the more prominent position. These coins, then, do seem to form evidence for a centrally made decision to put ancestry to the fore, through the figure of the emperor's mother, who was almost as visible on Nero's early coins as his male ancestors.⁴⁷

References to ancestry, as must be clear by now, are remarkably infrequent in Neronian coinage as compared to Julio-Claudian precedent when Nero's whole reign is considered. Yet, the image looks quite different when only coins between 54 and 56 are taken into account.

⁴⁰ *RIC I² Nero*, nos. 1–3, 6–7. See now GINSBURG 2006, 55–57 and 72–74; FOUBERT 2010.

⁴¹ Though Livia was not the first Roman woman who received a 'Roman' coin type. Before her, Fulvia and Octavia, as well as Julia, appeared on the Roman coinage. Fulvia: *RRC* 489.5–6; *RPC*, nos. 512–513; 3139–3140; 4509. Octavia: *RRC* 527.1; 533.3a–b; *RPC*, nos. 1453–1456; 1459–1465; 1468–1470; 2201–2202; 2574; 4088–4091. Julia: *RIC I² Augustus*, nos. 403–405; ROSE 1997, 215.65. On Livia as precedent for female public roles in the early empire, including her role as a 'builder', but not referring to her portrayal on coinage, see still PURCELL 1986.

⁴² *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 50–51; Tac. *Ann.* 2.64; *BMCRE* I, cxxxv. Various scholars identify a female coin portrait accompanied with the legend *Salus Augusta* as Livia. *RIC I² Tiberius*, no. 47; BARTMAN 1999, 112; GINSBURG 2006, 60–61; FOUBERT 2010, 140–141.

⁴³ *RIC I² Claudius*, no. 101.

⁴⁴ *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 6–7, 12–13, 18–19, 24. There is also a sesterce type for Agrippina, which is similar to the *carpentum* type for Livia, and seems to have aimed to rehabilitate Agrippina's imago and, by implication, enforce Gaius' status as legitimate emperor. *RIC I² Gaius*, no. 55; TRILLMICH 1978, 33–35; ROSE 1997, 32. On Gaius' sisters: *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 33, 41. These are further excluded from this article, since they do not form part of Gaius' ancestry.

⁴⁵ *RIC I² Claudius*, nos. 65–68, 92, 101, 104 (types of female ancestors); nos. 69–74, 93, 98, 101, 109, 114 (types of male ancestors).

⁴⁶ GINSBURG 2006, 57–58 and 72–74. For instance, Cleopatra and her son Caesarion are depicted on a coin types struck in Cyprus: *BMC Greek* (Ptolemies) 122.3. Cf. ROSE 1997, 4–7.

⁴⁷ *RIC I² Nero*, nos. 1–3, 6–7 (types of female ancestors); nos. 1–5 (types of male ancestors).

From October 13, 54 until December 56, Nero's ancestral advertisement was intensive. In Nero's first year as emperor, a full 100% of coin types referred to ancestors.⁴⁸ Here, the difference with established patterns under the other Julio-Claudians was pronounced. In other reigns, ancestors figured in coinage throughout their reign, but—apart from under Tiberius—less prominently than in Nero's first year (see graphs 1 and 2).⁴⁹ And even Tiberius' coinage was less dominated by ancestral messages—the 100% in his coinage refers to the legend, not to iconography (graphs 1 and 2). Still, the actual imagery appearing on the coins from 54 to 56 did copy earlier iconography. Two reverse types displayed both divus Claudius and divus Augustus in a *quadriga*, drawn by elephants, in clear analogy of a similar Tiberian coin type for divus Augustus (figure 4).⁵⁰ In the first year, then, it seems very likely that the aim was to institutionalise Nero as the legitimate emperor through his ancestry, though—perhaps surprisingly—more by referring to Claudius and Agrippina than to Augustus.⁵¹

One reason for the relative absence of Augustus may be that the principate had now become sufficiently 'institutionalized' that the charismatic authority of Augustus had become less important as a legitimating principle.⁵² In any case, Claudius was, effectively, Nero's *auctor imperii*, and

⁴⁸ *RIC I² Nero*, nos. 1–7.

⁴⁹ *RIC I² Augustus*, nos. 37a–b; 38a–b; 102 (19 BC–18 BC): DIVVS IVLIVS with eight-rayed comet. *RIC I² Augustus*, nos. 338–340 (17 BC): rejuvenated head of divus Julius. *RIC I² Augustus*, no. 415 (12 BC): Augustus with shield placing star on head of figure identified as the divus Julius. *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 23–24 (20 October 14–16 March 37): Augustus' portrait with star. *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 70–73 (1 January 15–31 December 16): on the obverses radiated Augustus with star and thunderbolt, on the reverses draped female or Tiberius. *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 74–78 (1 January 22–31 December 23): on the obverses radiate Augustus, on the reverses round temple or Victory. *RIC I² Tiberius*, no. 76 (1 January 22–31 December 26): radiate Augustus. *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 80–81 (1 January 22–31 December 30): Augustus radiate and PROVIDENT altar. *RIC I² Tiberius* no. 49 (27 June 22–26 June 23): Augustus seated. *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 47 and 50–51 (27 June 22–26 June 23): Livia as Salus and *carpentum* of Diva Augusta. *RIC I² Tiberius*, no. 83 (1 January 24–16 March 37): Augustus and winged thunderbolt. *RIC I² Tiberius*, no. 82 (1 January 34–16 March 37): radiate Augustus and eagle on globe. *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 57, 63, 69 (27 June 34–26 June 35, 27 June 35–26 June 36, 27 June 36–16 March 37): shield OB CIVES SER and *quadriga* of elephants with riders pulling car with radiate Augustus. *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 46, 47, 49 (18 March 37–24 January 41): Agrippina (no. 46), divus Augustus (no. 47), Agrippa (no. 49). *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 1–17 and 28–29 (18 March 37–31 December 38): Tiberius with star (nos. 1–2), Agrippina (nos. 6–7 and 12–13), divus Augustus (nos. 3–5; 8–9; 14–15), Temple of divus Augustus (no. 29), Germanicus (nos. 10–11, 16–17, 28); 18 March 39–17 March 40: no. 34: Germanicus; no. 35: Temple of divus Augustus. *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 18–23; (1 January 40–17 March 40): Agrippina (nos. 18–19), divus Augustus (nos. 20–21), Germanicus (nos. 22–23). *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 41–42 (18 March 40–24 January 41): Temple of divus Augustus (no. 42), Germanicus (no. 41). *RIC I² Gaius*, nos. 24–25 (1 January 41–24 January 41): Agrippina (no. 24), divus Augustus (no. 25). *RIC I² Claudius*, nos. 65–74 (25 January 41–31 December 45): Antonia (nos. 65–68), Drusus (nos. 69–74). *RIC I² Claudius*, nos. 92–93, 98, 101 (25 January 41–31 December 50): Antonia (no. 92), Drusus (no. 93), triumphal arch of Drusus (no. 98), divus Augustus and diva Livia (no. 101). *RIC I² Claudius*, nos. 104, 109, 114 (1 January 50–12 October 54): Antonia (no. 104), Drusus (no. 109), triumphal arch of Drusus (no. 114).

⁵⁰ *RIC I² Tiberius*, nos. 56; 62 and 68; *RIC I² Nero*, nos. 6–7; CLAES 2013, 85–86, 259.

⁵¹ ROSE 1997, 46; GINSBURG 2006, 57–58. Note how HANNESTAD 1988, 106–107 argues that the early coinage directly reflects Agrippina's influence, without analyzing references to Claudius.

⁵² Cf. OSGOOD 2011 on the importance of Claudius in this process, noting how (p. 256), 'Claudius actually in many ways helped to strengthen the nascent institution of the principate'.



Figure 4. Sestertertius, Rome 36-37 AD, showing Divus Augustus on an elephant quadriga (Photo and collection National Numismatic Collection, DNB, Amsterdam, inv.no. RE-06123).

it might be useful to remember that Claudius had already put Nero forward on his coins, excluding Britannicus in the process.⁵³ Unsurprisingly, Britannicus did not figure on Nero's coinage either. After 56, family references disappeared altogether, an enormous break with precedent and maybe also a first sign for the waning influence of Agrippina over her son.⁵⁴ The pronounced emphasis on lineage was not replaced by a similarly clear theme in the later reign, though much attention on Nero's later coinage went to the city of Rome, with ca. 15% of coin types celebrating the city (out of the 622 types issued throughout his reign) and an additional ca. 8% of types showing new buildings in Rome (and Ostia). On top of that, there was pronounced attention for the arch of Janus (ca. 12% of types), and for Victoria (ca. 10%). None of the central coinage under the earlier Julio-Claudians had celebrated the city in remotely similar terms, with the arch of Janus a wholly new type. The attention to Rome might have been a reaction to the great fire of Rome in 64, or a testament to Nero's building activities.⁵⁵ In any case, central coinage abruptly stopped depicting Nero as a Julio-Claudian ruler.

An analysis of central coinage, in sum, seems to demonstrate that at some level Neronian coins followed Julio-Claudian precedent, especially in the choice to refer more extensively to his direct predecessor Claudius than to Augustus, the importance of whom is so often stressed in modern literature. Strikingly, however, there was an abrupt and complete abandonment post 56 of ancestral messages in imagery and legend.⁵⁶ This choice to break from Julio-

Claudian precedent and, especially, the practice of Nero's first year of rule was far too drastic to take without explicit imperial consent and creates a relevant touchstone to compare our other evidence against.

III. PROVINCIAL COINAGE

In the Roman Empire, coins were struck at both central and local level. Important individual cities and certain regions had the right to issue what modern scholarship calls 'provincial coins', that is, coins struck in the provinces by mints that were not under the direction of the centre.⁵⁷

Linking these provincial coins to their imperial counterpart seems obvious at first glance, especially for the Julio-Claudian period. Both source types are coins, the portrait of the emperor (or imperial family members) was frequently present on the obverses of provincial coins (which was the standard on imperial coins), and the large variety of provincial reverse types issued in the Julio-Claudian period presumably reflected the diversity of imperial reverse types.⁵⁸

There was, however, a systematic difference between the types of messages on central and provincial coins. As is often recognized, 'provincial' iconography was often characterized by references to local events and circumstances, such a nearby temples, local festivals and myths, and a city's magistrates. Equally, and less often recognized, specific cities and regions will have had more direct ties with individual rulers, stronger traditions in depicting powerful women, less hesitation in equating rulers with divinities etc. In short, local expectations of what was usually depicted on local coinage may have been more influential than central examples in the types of messages that were broadcast by coin types issued in a particular city or region.⁵⁹

A quantitative analysis of provincial coins is more complex than one of imperial types:⁶⁰ (1) provincial coins are often difficult to date, (2) new types still come to the surface, (3) cities' coin production was not always continuous, and (4) we are dealing with very small issues of many local coinages, creating problems of sample size. For these reasons, our examination is only used here to map broad outlines and not to determine exact patterns.⁶¹ The following graphs the two are obviously difficult to separate. Not also that *denarii* of 67-69 again read *AVG* rather than *AVGVSTVS*.

⁵⁷ See esp. HEUCHERT 2005, 30, with BUTCHER 1988, 15 on the complexities on which coins were issued where, and who was in control. Coins which cannot be dated to a particular emperor's reign or cannot be ascribed to a particular province are excluded from the below analysis.

⁵⁸ HEUCHERT 2005, 49.

⁵⁹ This is illustrated, for example, by large number of pseudo-autonomous coins issued in Asia (e.g. HEUCHERT 2005, 47) which all lack a portrait of the emperor, and by the fact that coins minted by Roman colonies and *municipia* bear Latin and no Greek legends.

⁶⁰ An analysis of this material has only become possible through the publication of the *Roman Provincial Coinage* project (RPC I: supplement 1; RPC I: supplement 2; RPC II; RPC VII; for a first systematic analysis of what the historical implications of Roman provincial coinage are, see HOWGEGO et al. 2005). Volume I (supplement 1 and 2 included) will form the starting point for our analysis. It is the only catalogue which provides a systematic overview of Roman provincial coinage for the period 31 BC-AD 68 (Augustus-Nero). An analysis of actual provincial coin numbers is not possible because of the state of publication. For a possible correlation between imperial coin types and actual imperial coin numbers, see above n. 13.

⁶¹ KATSARI 2006, 1-32 aims to analyze provincial coin types quantitatively, but runs into methodological problems. BURNETT 2011 has now convincingly shown how the variety of local coinages in the Julio-Claudian period can be used to indicate some rough patterns, especially in the use of

⁵³ The coin types of Nero among Claudius' coinage include 7.1%. *RIC I² Claudius*, nos. 76-79, 82-83, 107-108. Of the two coin reverse types of Agrippina's coinage, by then she was the wife of Claudius, one type displays Nero, *RIC I² Claudius*, no. 75.

⁵⁴ Noticeably, in the year that Agrippina disappeared from the coins, Pallas, was also dismissed (*Tac. Ann.* 13.14.1; *Dio* 62.14.3). As head of the imperial *fiscus*, he may well have been involved in the design selection of Claudius' and Nero's coin types. The appearance of Nero and of Agrippina's ancestry on Claudian coins coincides with his arrival in the post, and Agrippina disappears from Nero's coins as soon as Pallas has to retire as a *rationibus*. Cf. CLAES 2014, 163-173; CHEUNG 1998, 60; MACDOWALL 1979, 31.

⁵⁵ *RIC I² Nero*, 150, ². For Nero's building activities, see ELSNER 1994; PERASSI 2002; MOORMANN 2003.

⁵⁶ SHOTTER 2008, 195, has argued that 'The rendering of the title, *Augustus*, in full [on coin types from 65] certainly points to a deliberate attempt by Nero to associate himself with Augustus', referring to *RIC I² Nero*, nos. 44-72, but this seems overly confident. The absence of any iconographical references to the first emperor (apart from-possibly-references to the closing of the gates of Janus on *RIC I² Nero*, nos. 50 and 58), and, more importantly, a similar rendering in full of *AVGVSTA* for Poppaea (*RIC I² Nero*, nos. 44, 48, 56) makes it possible that the office, rather than Augustus himself, is referred to, though

reveal these outlines of local preferences and constraints, as discussed above. They combine silver and bronze coins to provide a complete picture of both the regional distribution of provincial coin types and a particular aspect of imperial representation through provincial coinage as a whole.⁶²

Graph 4 (see end of article) shows the regional distribution of the coin types issued between 31 BC and AD 68 used for this analysis, rendered per emperor.⁶³ The absence of Neronian coins in the western part of the Empire is immediately striking and easy to explain. The production of provincial coins in cities in the western part of the Empire stopped under Tiberius, Gaius or Claudius.⁶⁴ In addition, percentages of Neronian coinage stand out from the rest in four provinces. Whereas no coins of Nero are attested for Cyprus,⁶⁵ the number of Neronian coin types that are recorded in the *RPC* for Cappadocia, Achaëa and Thrace are exceptionally high when compared with the other Julio-Claudian emperors.⁶⁶ Because of these obvious differences, our analysis of provincial coinage will differ from the analysis of imperial coinage, in that a differentiation between provincial silver and bronze and attention to the dating of coins (where possible) within reigns will only be made for case studies at the local level.

The frequency of coins referring to ancestry is the main criterion for the selection of case studies.⁶⁷ Which areas stand out, either positively or negatively, in the number of references in the coins' legend and/or image to (imperial) predecessors, other family members of earlier generations (emperors' mothers, biological fathers, grandmothers), mythical ancestors (e.g. Aeneas), and references to the Julian *gens*?⁶⁸ Graphs (5-7, see end of article) provide an overview.

From the information on which these graphs are based, it seems fairly evident that an analysis of the coinage from Cappadocia and Achaëa will yield interesting results. After all, the numbers of Neronian coin types that are recorded in

imperial portraiture.

⁶² Obviously, there are profound differences between silver and bronze, as provincial silver varied less than bronze in reverse types and lacked explicit reference to place or people in which or by whom the coins were produced, probably because of a larger degree of central control over production. Absolute numbers of silver provincial coin types for each province: Africa Proconsularis: 1, Egypt: 168, Asia: 27, Cappadocia: 31, Thrace: 3, Crete: 27, Lycia-Pamphylia: 7, Syria: 219.

⁶³ The geographical and chronological classification of the coins as provided by the *RPC* is followed here.

⁶⁴ BURNETT 2005, 177. Possible reasons for the end of civic coinage in the western part of the Empire are given in *RPC* I, 18–19, and by RIPOLLÈS 2005, 93, and BURNETT 2005, 177–178.

⁶⁵ 'No coinage is known for Nero', *RPC* I (1992), 578.

⁶⁶ The high percentage for Achaëa might be explained by the emperor's visit to this province during his reign (cf. COUVALIS 2007, 115–116, Levy 1991, 191–194, MANDERS/SLOOTJES, forthcoming), and resulting attempts by local elites to emphasise their closeness to the visiting ruler. The high number of Cappadocian coins recorded for Nero might well be linked to the campaigns of the Roman general Corbulo in the war against the Parthians (58–63), in which control over the kingdom of Armenia was at stake, and probably to the Armenian invasion in 64. Thrace's peak for Nero is decided mainly by the large number of Neronian coins struck in the city of Perinthus, which was the administrative centre of the province and held an important economic position. See SCHÖNERT-GEISS 1965, 15–16. Armenia was Cappadocia's neighbouring state. *RPC* I, no. 555 and *RPC* I, no. 557.

⁶⁷ Obviously, the number of coin types that were issued in the provinces also played a role in the selection process (see graph 4).

⁶⁸ Coins of which it is unclear whether they bear references to imperial ancestry (e.g. because an image cannot be identified properly) are excluded from the total number of coin types propagating imperial ancestry.

the *RPC* for Cappadocia and Achaëa are exceptionally high when compared with the other Julio-Claudian emperors (graph 4), with the percentage of Neronian coin types referring to ancestry in Cappadocia being extremely high, and in Achaëa noticeably low (graph 5).⁶⁹ Furthermore, there are no Neronian types referring to male family members in Achaëa. All coins referring to ancestry honour female family members.⁷⁰ In contrast, Cappadocia has the highest percentage of Neronian coins honouring male ancestors (graph 6) and the lowest percentage of Neronian coins honouring female ancestors (graph 7).

For the purposes of this article, focus on the two provinces which form an aberration of 'normal' provincial coinage seems warranted. It clearly reveals local variety and thus the bandwidth of the economy of images on provincial coins. Yet, we do not claim that interaction between provincial and imperial coins never took place; one should, of course, keep in mind that Neronian coinage from other provinces may have cohered much more closely to what happened at the centre. As the examination of Cappadocian and Achaean coin types shows, however, a reciprocal relationship between both source types should not be considered as given.

As for Cappadocia, the vast majority of relevant coin types stem from Caesarea, the mint of which was one of the three large centres where provincial silver was minted (probably for the military).⁷¹ This seems immediately relevant when one notes that out of 33 Caesarean coin types, only 4 are bronze types—all of which were minted under Claudius, with one of them referring to imperial ancestry⁷²—with the rest constituting of provincial silver.

Looking at the individual Caesarean coin types, those from Nero's reign can be divided into two groups. One group was probably struck in the period 58–60 (in connection with Corbulo's campaigns),⁷³ and the bulk of the second group can probably be dated to 64 (in connection with the Armenian invasion in that year).⁷⁴ All Caesarean silver types refer to Claudius, through a portrait of Claudius, references

⁶⁹ It may also be relevant to note that all Neronian Cappadocian coin types propagating imperial kinship honour family members of earlier generations and none of them propagate empresses or family member of later generations. A further analysis of this observation, however, falls outside the scope of this article.

⁷⁰ In this, Achaëa differed slightly from Macedonia as well. Neronian coins issued in the province of Macedonia honoured both male and female ancestors, though far more females than males (from the six Macedonian coin types issued under Nero that refer to ancestors, one honours a male ancestor and five female ancestors).

⁷¹ It is important to note that the production of provincial silver was probably under provincial or imperial control (HEUCHERT 2005, 30). Butcher and Ponting even argue that various groups of Roman silver coins that were issued for the eastern provinces were actually products of the mint of Rome (BUTCHER/PONTING 1995, 63). This was for instance the case with the silver coins of Caesarea for Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. See BUTCHER 1988, 36. Yet, if the production of silver coinage at Caesarea was indeed under imperial control or even if the Caesarean coins were products of the mint at Rome, the differences between Nero's central coinage and Nero's Caesarean coinage, as mentioned on this page, are telling. Caesarea: Tiberius 4 types, Gaius 1, Claudius 8, and Nero 26. Some coins were struck in other cities: Tyana (Nero 2) and Hierapolis (Nero 2). Regarding two Cappadocian coins (both Nero) it is not clear in which city they were minted. Possibly, they were also struck at Caesarea. Coin types from Tyana and Hierapolis do not bear references to imperial ancestry.

⁷² *RPC* I, no. 3657, refers to Antonia, Claudius' mother.

⁷³ *RPC* I, nos. 3631–3638 and 3640–3643.

⁷⁴ *RPC* I, nos. 3647–3651.

in the titulature (either NERO CLAVD DIVI CLAVD F CAESAR AVG GERMA(NI) or DIVOS CLAVDIVS AVGVST GERMANIC PATER AVG) or through both. Most coins (16 types) refer to Claudius solely on the obverse (through the legend),⁷⁵ but some mention Nero's predecessor both on obverse and reverse (4 types).⁷⁶ Nine of the coin types which refer to Claudius on the obverse (probably issued both in the period 58–60 and in 64), show and name Nero's mother Agrippina on the reverse.⁷⁷ Thus, Nero's direct imperial predecessor and adoptive father Claudius was emphasised at different points within Nero's reign on Caesarean silver, at least up to 64, a substantial difference to central coinage. Considering that the production of provincial silver is generally held to have been under provincial or imperial control, the differences between central and Caesarean coinage are striking.⁷⁸

This difference between the attention on Claudius on central coinage and on the provincial coins of Caesarea does not seem to be the result of standard patterns of coin issuing in Caesarea. When the Neronian Caesarean coin types are compared to the Caesarean coin types of Tiberius and Claudius, we do not see similarly high percentages of coin types referring to ancestry, nor the—almost—consistent attention to the direct predecessor. Of the 4 types struck under Tiberius, one refers only to Augustus,⁷⁹ and one to Augustus on the obverse and Germanicus (posthumously on the reverse).⁸⁰ Of the 8 coin types minted during Claudius' reign, one refers to his father Drusus the Elder, one to Antonia and Octavia on the reverse (with Britannicus on the obverse), and one to his mother Antonia, again on the reverse (with Messalina on the obverse).⁸¹ Noticeably, as we have seen above, the emperor's natural parents were depicted on central coinage during Claudius' reign as well. The Neronian coin types with ancestral messages, then, do not only stand out among the rest of the Neronian ancestral provincial coins, but also from the coins issued under the reigns of his predecessors.

The story is very different for Achaëa.⁸² Unlike Cappadocia, where coin types predominantly originated from one city, the Julio-Claudian coins from Achaëa that are analysed here were produced by 16—or even 18—different cities, as well as by the Thessalian League.⁸³ Still, the majority of Achaëan coin types was produced by

Corinth (82 types).⁸⁴ Though Buthrotum and Patras, with respectively 37 and 31 types, also coined significant numbers of types, their Neronian coins do not bear any reference to imperial ancestry.⁸⁵ The other Achaëan cities produced at the most thirteen coin types, and most of them far fewer. The Thessalian League also issued 37 coin types, but again without references to imperial ancestry on the Neronian coins.⁸⁶ One reason for the substantial number of provincial coins issued in Achaëa under Nero was the emperor's visit to Greece.⁸⁷ As none of the coin types that can be linked to this visit bear references to imperial ancestry, an explanation for the relatively low percentage of ancestral messages on Neronian provincial coins seems evident—giving a clear indication about the importance of local events when trying to analyse overarching patterns.⁸⁸

As Corinth was the most active mint during the Julio-Claudian period and many Corinthian coins bear references to imperial ancestry, the focus in the following analysis lies on the Corinthian types, all 82 of which are bronzes, all with Latin legends. Of the 82 types, 21 were issued under Nero, and four of these bear references to ancestry. All four of them can be dated to 54–55 and refer to Agrippina Minor on the obverse, both through portraying a bust of the imperial mother, and through the legend AGRIPPIN(A) AVGV(STA).⁸⁹ The reverses of these types name M. Aci Candidus and Q. Fulvius Flaccus, *duoviri* at Corinth (figure 6).⁹⁰ The fact that these coins were struck contemporarily with the early central coin types featuring Agrippina is striking, though in Corinth, the emperor and his mother were not combined, and the legend was different. Still, the combination of these Agrippina coins and a complete absence of ancestral messages on Neronian coinage post 55 is noticeable, and very different from what we saw at Caesarea.



Figure 6. Bronze coin (AE 20 mm) from Corinth, with on the obverse Agrippina the Younger and the legend AGRIPPIN(A) AVGV(STA) (Photo: Numismatik Lanz München, auction 94, lot 227).

⁷⁵ RPC I, nos. 3632–3634, 3636–3638, 3640–3646, 3649–3651.

⁷⁶ RPC I, nos. 3631, 3635, 3647–3648.

⁷⁷ RPC I, nos. 3632–3633, 3636–3638, 3640–3643: AGRIPPINA AVGVSTA MATER AVGVSTI.

⁷⁸ See above, n. 112.

⁷⁹ RPC I, no. 3620 (obverse, Greek legend).

⁸⁰ RPC I, no. 3620: produced somewhere between 17 and 32. RPC I, nos. 3621–3623 can be dated to 33–34. Cf. two coin types referring posthumously to Tiberius' natural son Drusus on the obverse: RPC I, nos. 3621–3622.

⁸¹ Drusus: RPC I, no. 3628; Antonia and Octavia: RPC I, no. 3656; Antonia: RPC I, no. 3657. Cf. RPC I, no. 3627 referring to Messalina (obverse) and his three children Britannicus, Octavia and Antonia (reverse). RPC I, nos. 3626–3628: produced between 43 and 48. RPC I, nos. 3656–3657 can be dated to 48. On the importance of Britannicus on provincial coinage up to the adoption of Nero by Claudius (and beyond) as a mode of expressing support for Britannicus (or the expectation that he would be emperor), see REBUFFAT 1998, 341–343.

⁸² On the coins issued by Corinth, see AMANDRY 1988.

⁸³ Sparta: 10 types, Corinth: 82, Sicyon: 7, Patras: 31, Dyme: 4, Melos: 1, Athens: 7, Tanagra: 2, Locri: 1, Chalcis: 13, Carystus: 4, Nicopolis: 8, Buthrotum: 37, Phoenice: 2, Peparethus: 1, Magnetes: 5, possibly Aegina: 1, possibly Nicopolis: 8, Thessalian League: 37.

⁸⁴ AMANDRY 1988, 3.

⁸⁵ Ancestry was referred to at Patras during Tiberius' reign, though only through two types bearing the legend DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER and portraying a radiate head of Augustus (RPC I, nos. 1253 and 1254).

⁸⁶ For the previous period, there was 1 type referring to Augustus under Tiberius (RPC, no. 1430), and possibly three types referring to Livia (RPC I, nos. 1431, 1434, 1438), though these are disputed.

⁸⁷ See RPC I, and AMANDRY 1988 14–22. On Nero's visit, see CHAMPLIN 2003, 54–61.

⁸⁸ MANDERS/SLOOTJES (forthcoming).

⁸⁹ RPC I, nos. 1190, 1193, 1196, 1198.

⁹⁰ Apart from coins depicting Agrippina, there are also three coin types with Flaccus' name on the reverse obverses referring to Octavia on the obverse, again through legend (OCTAVIAE NERONIS AVG) and a bust. RPC I, nos. 1191, 1194, 1199. See AMANDRY 1988 22–26.

What was the pattern of ancestral reference on earlier Corinthian coins? Only two of the Augustan coin types, from respectively 27/6 BC and sometime between 10/9 and 5/4 BC, from Achaëa refer to ancestry, both portraying the laureate head of Caesar. Later on, there are still several kinship references, but only indicating the (children of) possible successors, instead of parents or predecessors, in a rough echoing of the pattern on central coinage.⁹¹ Regarding Tiberius, there are 13 coin types (out of 28) referring directly or more indirectly to imperial ancestry. Two types are dated to 21–22, the remaining twelve probably to 32–33. The first two honour Livia on the reverse, and depict Drusus Minor on the obverse.⁹² They are more direct in their references to Livia than the central coinage from 22 (see above) which only showed the *carpentum*. Instead, they show Livia veiled and seated, holding the *patera*, ears of corn and a sceptre, or *patera* and sceptre. The Corinthian coins may antedate (and, if so, may have influenced) the central coinage, and in any case go much further by the actual portrayal of the empress. Innovation in the provinces was always a possibility. That much is demonstrated by eleven types from—probably—32–33, all with the same remarkable reverse: a hexastyle temple inscribed GENT IVLI.⁹³ Whether these coin types bear a connection with an actual temple that was built under the reign of Tiberius in Corinth, must remain speculative.⁹⁴ The obverses of nine of these eleven types, in any case, seem to refer directly to Tiberius' ancestry, with two depicting a radiate head and a radiate bust of Augustus respectively, and seven probably depicting Livia. The other two obverses linked to the 'temple-type'-reverses do not seem to refer to ancestors.⁹⁵

Corinthian coins from Gaius' reign, like central coinage from that time, depict the emperor's natural father and mother. Agrippina Maior is shown on the obverse of two coin types, with (probably) the emperor's brother Nero Caesar on the reverse of one, and his other brother Drusus Caesar on the reverse of the other.⁹⁶ Gaius' father Germanicus, moreover, seems recognisable on the obverse of two coin types, and his grandmother Antonia Minor on the obverse of yet two other types.⁹⁷ The similarities to the individuals depicted on central coinage are striking. Equally, however, it is noticeable that the differentiation of which figures were referred to in the different denominations in central coinage does not seem to apply at this local level. Finally, though strictly speaking not part of this article, the complete absence of Gaius' sisters from Corinthian coins—and indeed from the coins of Cappadocia—is salient. Unlike the coins from Caesarea and central coinage, there are no ancestral references on the nine types minted during

Claudius' reign in Corinth. It would, then, be pushing the evidence to suggest that Corinthian coinage copied central constructions of emperorship. However, the link between the messages issued from Rome and local coinage seems to have been much stronger in Corinth than in Caesarea.

Additional research on the (chronological) developments of provincial coinage in a larger corpus of cities is clearly needed for systematic analysis of the relation between central and provincial coinage. It should prove useful to take a closer look at those responsible for the mint within specific cities. The coins from Corinth depicting Agrippina, for instance, were minted in the very period in which M(arcus) Aci(lius) Candidus and Q(uintus) Fulvius Flaccus were *duoviri*. Unfortunately, too little about them is known to draw any conclusions about a possible connection to Rome, let alone the imperial court. Yet, analysis of other cities, with their relevant magistrates, may yield better results. Alternatively, it might be worth looking at the number of mints issuing coins for specific individuals from one reign to another. There was, for instance, a massive increase in towns minting coins that showed Agrippina during Nero's reign. Forty-one (and possibly even forty-three) did so, an astounding number in itself, and a massive increase from the twenty-three towns striking coins depicting Agrippina under Claudius. References to *divus* Augustus seem to have become rare in provincial coinage fairly rapidly, with thirty-seven mints depicting the first *princeps* in the reign of Tiberius, but only five mints under Gaius, ten under Claudius and seven under Nero.⁹⁸ Again, the changes of emphases in central Neronian ancestral references did not run parallel to similar changes in provincial coins.

Graphs 5-7, uncovering overall patterns within the representation of imperial ancestry, and the two case studies clearly illuminate the local variety, and thus the complexity, with respect to the communication of one particular ideological theme by means of this specific medium. The micro-analyses above moreover show that provincial messages could cohere with central messages (e.g. Achaëa) but that such a correlation was certainly not obvious (e.g. Caesarea). Simple paralleling of the two types of (at first sight very similar) sources, does therefore not do justice to the complicated and fragmented modes of representing imperial power.

IV. EPIGRAPHIC MATERIAL

One might argue that a comparison between imperial and provincial coinage will always end in different outcomes in the analyses because of their fundamentally different mode of production, one centrally motivated, the other directed by provincial and thus local incentives. In countering such criticism, this section examines epigraphic evidence as a different and unique type of media in that it offers us a glimpse of both imperial and local involvement leading to the actual inscribing of texts on monuments and archive walls. Such texts have been found in substantial quantities in many cities of the empire.

⁹⁸ The numbers for Augustus are assembled from *RPC* I.2, p. 734; for Agrippina p. 734. Further relevant comparisons might be the nine towns that issued coins under Claudius for Messalina, or the forty-five mints issuing coins with Livia under Tiberius' reign, which then still included western mints.

⁹¹ From 2 BC: Gaius and Lucius (*RPC* I, no. 1136, reverse). From AD 4–5: Tiberius (*RPC* I, nos. 1140 (obverse), 1144 (reverse), Agrippa Postumus (*RPC* I, no. 1141, obverse), Germanicus (*RPC* I, no. 1142, obverse), and Drusus Minor (*RPC* I, no. 1143, obverse).

⁹² *RPC* I, nos. 1149 and 1150.

⁹³ *RPC* I, nos. 1151–1161.

⁹⁴ See AMANDRY 1988, 59–62 and WALBANK 1989, 368–370.

⁹⁵ Augustus: *RPC* I, nos. 1151 and 1157. Livia: *RPC* I, nos. 1153–1156. No imperial relatives: *RPC* I, nos. 1152 and 1158. Gaius and probably to Tiberius Gemellus on the reverse: *RPC* I, no. 1171.

⁹⁶ *RPC* I, nos. 1174 and 1175.

⁹⁷ Germanicus: *RPC* I, nos. 1178 and 1179. Antonia Minor: *RPC* I, nos. 1176 and 1177.

What is there to be said about Nero and the ways in which references were made to his ancestry in official letters, pronouncements, edicts, or rescripts that were inscribed in the various cities of his empire?⁹⁹ The contents of such inscriptions, one could assume, would also be closely monitored by central authorities, although the decision to order the actual inscribing would mostly be taken at the local level of the cities where the inscriptions have been found.¹⁰⁰ Although Nero's rule spanned more than a decade, only a handful of official Neronian documents have survived in the inscriptional evidence.¹⁰¹

Nero's references to his ancestry in these documents are predominantly found in his titulature.¹⁰² That titulature shows many recurring elements, although these are not always put in the same order. First, in his official correspondence Nero used *Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*, which means that his personal *praenomen*, gentile *nomen* and family *cognomina* officially connected him to his father by adoption the emperor Claudius, to his grandfather Germanicus, and his imperial great-grandfather the emperor Augustus.¹⁰³ Similar official documents of Nero's predecessors Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius demonstrate that they had referred to their imperial lineage in comparable fashion.¹⁰⁴

Apart from Nero referring to imperial ancestors in his name and titles, he also employed additional references that identified him as son, grandson and great-grandson of his deified ancestors. Such references were, again, not without precedent, as for instance Tiberius had similarly presented himself as *Tiberius Caesar, son of the deified Augustus, grandson of the deified Julius, Augustus*.¹⁰⁵ Our inscriptions with

⁹⁹ This theme is explored for the cities in Achaia in Neronian time in MANDERS/SLOOTJES 2015, raising some of the problems and notions that are discussed below.

¹⁰⁰ See ECK 1997 and 1999; SMITH 1998; HAENSCH 2009 and NOREÑA 2011, 180–189, 210–214 for discussions on problems modern scholars face when attempting to interpret inscriptional evidence from the provinces of the Roman Empire. The mere chance of survival, the fact that inscriptions were part of a larger monuments such as statues, altars or buildings, or the decision making process of what inscriptions to put up, are all issues that need to be taken into account. See SLOOTJES 2015 for a more extensive discussion on these issues in relation to a particular set of inscriptions that were issued by imperial pairs.

¹⁰¹ The corpus under review contains documents that were found in both halves of the empire, written in Greek, Latin, or in both. OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, nos. 33 (=P. *Genova* 10, inv. 8562, *inverso*: letter to the Alexandrians of 55), 34 (=ILS 8793: letter to the Rhodians of 55), 35 (=IGRR 4.561=OGIS 475=MAMA 9.178: letter to the Menophilus of Aezani), 36 (letter to the Thasians of 64/65 or later) and 39. MONTEVECCHI 1970 dates this document to Nero's reign, although Oliver is more cautious; incomplete document, no titulature. SMALLWOOD 1967, no. 64 (Nero liberating Greece), nos. 385 and 386 (Nero restoring land and boundaries). ILS 1987 (military diploma in which Nero offered citizenship and *conubium* to a large group of soldiers). SHERK 1988, no. 65b (=CIL 3.6741=ILS 232). Inscriptions in which the emperor *restituit* buildings or roads: CIL 3.346, ILS 228 and 231 (=CIL 3.6123). Inscriptions in which only the titulature of the emperor has survived: CIL 2.4719, 2.4884, 2.4928, and ILS 225.

¹⁰² See also the authoritative article on the formulaic character of imperial titulature, HAMMOND 1957. Cf. WITSCHERL 2011, 98 with n. 238 on the heuristic value of the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' elements of imperial titulature.

¹⁰³ Not all documents contain *Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*: OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, no. 35 (Nero to Menophilus of Aezani), presents Nero merely as 'Nero'; SMALLWOOD 1967, no. 64, as *Imperator Caesar*.

¹⁰⁴ For instance Tiberius as *Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus* (CIL 6.930), Gaius as *Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus* (IGRR 4.145), Claudius as *Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus* (CIL 6.930; CIL 5.5050=FIRA 1.70).

¹⁰⁵ CIL 2.4712, *Ti. Caesar divi Augusti f. divi Iuli nepos Augustus*. These

these additional references show that Neronian titulature always referred to the emperor's adoptive father Claudius, his maternal grandfather Germanicus Caesar, his great-grandfather by adoption on his mother's side Tiberius, and his maternal great-great-grandfather by blood Augustus. The following official titulature on a military diploma is exemplary for this type of reference: *Germanicus Nero Claudius, son of the deified Claudius, grandson of Germanicus Caesar, great-grandson of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, great-great-grandson of the deified Augustus, Caesar Augustus Germanicus*.¹⁰⁶

As other scholars have already acknowledged, Nero's titulature in the epigraphic evidence shows a direct family line between the emperor and Augustus.¹⁰⁷ The difference between the more focused, and certainly less long-lasting attention in central coinage is remarkable, though the attention on matrilineal descent coincides with the prominent position given to Agrippina at the beginning of Nero's reign. Augustus and Tiberius had underlined their patrilineal descent, and Nero's immediate predecessor Claudius did not include specific references to his ancestors in his official titulature at all—similar to the ways in which ancestry was expressed in the central coinage for these emperors. In fact, Nero's emphasis on his matrilineal descent shows similarities to Gaius, who in one of his documents also presented himself in the matrilineal line as 'descendant of the deified Augustus', as he was a great-grandson of Augustus via his mother Agrippina Maior, who was the daughter of Julia (daughter of Augustus). Again, this can be usefully linked to the attention paid to Agrippina Maior in Gaius' gold and silver coins.¹⁰⁸

As far as specific location within the titulature is concerned, Hammond has argued that both the emperors Claudius and Nero placed their affiliation with ancestors 'with equal consistency' *between* their gentile *nomen* Claudius and their *cognomina* Caesar Augustus. In several cases, however, the evidence available now points to a second possibility by which Nero placed his affiliation *after* both his *nomen* and *cognomina*. A clear example is his letter to the Alexandrians (of 55) that opens as follows: 'Nero Claudius [Caesar Augustus], son [of a divinity], great-grandson of Tiberius Caesar and of Germanicus Caesar, descendant of deified Augustus by birth, Germanicus', or even behind the entire official titulature as seen in the military diploma above.¹⁰⁹ This particular letter to the Alexandrians additional references became a phenomenon that appeared more frequently in the imperial titulature of the second century. See SLOOTJES 2015 on the importance of ancestry in the titulature of imperial co-rulers.

¹⁰⁶ Military diploma: found in Pannonia, near the Danube, relating to three cohorts of Upper Germany. See DÜSANIĆ 1978, 461–475 and ILS 228 (*Nero Claudius divi Iulii f. Germanici Caesaris Augusti n. Tiberii Caesaris Augusti pronep. divi Augusti abnepos, Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) = SMALLWOOD 1967, no. 352, milestone on the Forum Iulii-Aquae Sextiae road, Gallia Narbonensis, AD 58. Military diplomata always indicated the full official name of the emperor. Other 'official' inscriptions were less systematic, and it is the difference between these and the 'official' names on coinage, which is of particular interest here: see further HEKSTER 2015.

¹⁰⁷ See also ROSE 1997, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Augustus, in his earlier years until 12 BC, would refer to himself as the son of the deified Julius. Tiberius, in those instance where he referred to ancestors, called himself son of the deified Augustus and grandson of the deified Julius. For Augustus, see for instance OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, nos. 4, 6–7, 15. For Tiberius, see OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, nos. 14–15. For Gaius, see OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, no. 18.

¹⁰⁹ HAMMOND 1957, 55. The cases in which Nero placed his affiliation after

contains two notable features. First, whereas in most other inscriptions Nero is called the son of deified Claudius (*divi Claudii filius*), in the letter to the Alexandrians and also in that to the Thasians (of 64/65 or later) he is called 'son of a deity'.¹¹⁰ Presumably, this general description would also be a reference to Claudius. This particular formula 'son of a deity' has parallels, both in inscriptions of earlier emperors and in three passages in the Gospel of Matthew.¹¹¹ As Mowery has argued, this expression was used by Augustus and Tiberius, but not by Gaius or Claudius, and only reappeared during the reign of Nero.¹¹² Titus and Domitian used the expression as well. Second, the appearance of the word, 'by birth', seems to represent a unique feature in the official Neronian documents, as it emphasizes Nero's direct connection by blood to Augustus, his great-great-grandfather by blood.

Again, the explicit attention to Nero's ancestry in his titulature throughout the reign, using unambiguous kinship terms, whilst not simply following predecessors' examples, is in striking contrast to what we have seen in coinage. That there was such continuity is suggested as documents from ca. 55 and from 64/65 show remarkable similarities.¹¹³ To a large extent, the differences between coins and inscriptions have to be sought in the difference between the nature of the media of coinage and inscriptions, as the dissimilarities cannot be explained away by claiming that Nero was simply following precedent, or by pointing at the differences of available space on coins and in epigraphic documents. A closer look at the nature of both media brings two issues to the fore that are both connected to visibility of the media. First, the official documents that were sent from central level to the cities of the empire were directed in first instance to the provincial or local authorities, who were expected to take note of the official imperial message, to read them aloud in public and to store the documents in the provincial or local archives. On occasion, certain documents ended up being inscribed on archive walls or monuments, although unfortunately we are pretty much in the dark about the decision making process of which documents were to be inscribed and which ones made it only to the archives. The imperial titulature in these documents was part of a bureaucratic system and one might argue that its stability, as analyzed above, was to a large extent defined by its bureaucratic nature. The titulature was employed to confirm and legitimize the position of the emperor as an official validation for the contents of the documents. In the case of Nero, his ancestry down to Augustus would of course be an ideal validation, and one might then argue that he, thus, had no reason to make significant changes to the official titulature in his official correspondence. Furthermore, a comparison shows that coinage lends itself more for quick changes in imagery and text, because it had a more 'flexible' nature in the sense that central level could and would decide which images and text to

both his *nomen* and *cognomina* are OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, nos. 33 (letter to the Alexandrians) and 36 (letter to the Thasians).

¹¹⁰ According to OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, 111–112, the reconstruction in the letter to the Alexandrians is partly based on an inscription on the Parthenon in Athens (*IG II² 3274*). For a discussion on the use of *divus* for deceased emperors in inscriptions, see CHASTAGNOL 2008, 119–131.

¹¹¹ Matthew 14.33, 27.43, 27.54. See MOWERY 2002.

¹¹² MOWERY 2002, 103–105. Examples of Augustus are for instance OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, nos. 3 and 6–7.

¹¹³ OLIVER/CLINTON 1989, nos. 33–34 and 36.

use from one issue to the next issue. From the imperial view point, this flexibility offered a broad range of possibilities for the sake of an emperor's image. Official documents were a less attractive medium for subtle though obvious changes in imagery. This difference between coinage and inscriptions as media for conveying imperial messages is best illustrated by the situation in Nero's reign from the period of 56 onwards, when we, as said above, observe, a difference between the absence of ancestral messages on central coinage and the continued references to *divus* Claudius and other family members in 'official' documents.

The Neronian epigraphic evidence suggests that there was a decision at the centre at the beginning of Nero's reign to emphasise patrilineal and matrilineal ancestry. This was a less-focused and much longer-lasting attention to lineage than appears on central coinage (though there is some overlap in initial emphasis, such as the importance of Agrippina), yet also a break from modes of ancestral references in predecessors' documents. As argued, these variations should be analysed in close connection to the different types of media, and should not be linked together for the sake of a more coherent image of the emperor, as such a coherent image would not do justice to the internal discourse and meaning of the individual media.

V. PORTRAITURE

The above analysis might be usefully extended by looking at a further medium of imperial communication, mentioned at the outset of this article: portraiture. We turn to this source type only briefly, to show how the differentiation between sources is not limited to coins and inscriptions. A systematic analysis would be worthwhile, but is complicated as we know little about the ways in which portraiture was designed or disseminated. It has long been maintained that there was strict control over imperial portraiture, with exact models sent out from the centre and replicated (with only minor deviations) throughout the empire. The introduction of new models (portrait types), in this view, coincided with imperial visits or momentous events within a rule. All these notions have recently been challenged.¹¹⁴ At the same time, portraits were of undoubted importance as vehicles for imperial (self)presentation, and they were near-ubiquitous. Recent studies estimate that there were between 25,000 to 50,000 portraits of Augustus alone.¹¹⁵ Through these imperial busts, dynastic continuity could be claimed, especially by assimilating the features of various members of a dynasty.¹¹⁶ Julio-Claudian princes copied Augustan iconography and hairstyle. This applies to Nero's images too, but only up to 59 and 64 (figure 5), when new portraits of Nero were created, with a fat, fleshy face and long fuller strands of hair combed leftwards in something resembling a radiate. These portraits were radical departures from earlier imperial busts, and showed Nero as ruler in his own right, rather than as Augustan

¹¹⁴ BURNETT 2011, 29 and HØJTE 2009, 104, Overview of the traditional view: MACMULLEN 2000, 124–137 and HØJTE 2005, 86–87, with SMITH 1996 and HOFF 2011, 16 with n. 7 and 20 for further references.

¹¹⁵ FEJFER 2008, 384–389, 393–394; HOFF 2011, 31.

¹¹⁶ MASSNER 1982; BOSCHUNG 1993; FEJFER 2008, 272. Cf. OSGOOD 2011, 219.



Figure 5. Neronian portrait, Rome 59 AD (Museo Palatino, Rome, ex terme, inv. 618).

descendent.¹¹⁷ The changing portraiture can be recognised through both sculpted examples, and the imagery on coins. From 59 onwards, then, sculpted portraits had stopped linking the emperor to his ancestors, and this was made even more emphatic in 64. Portraiture, much like coinage, could apparently be easily adapted to imperial wishes (the radical change in sculptural imagery must have followed central initiative).¹¹⁸ Ultimately, both sculpted portraits and coins omitted references to earlier Julio-Claudians—as opposed to the titulature in official documents—but they did so at very different moments.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This article has looked at ways in which Julio-Claudian ancestry was put forward in the different media at imperial disposal and at the local level, paying specific attention to the reign of Nero. It shows that looking systematically at the available evidence in its own right, rather than assuming that various types of sources all form part of a coherent narrative, makes patterns visible within the various sources, differencing from one reign to another, within certain reigns, and from one region to the next. Importantly, substantial changes in one medium did not necessarily coincide with (similar) changes in the other media.

The substantial differences in references to ancestry

¹¹⁷ SCHNEIDER 2003; FEJFER 2008, 273; MLASOWSKY 1996, 385–386; WOLTERS 1999, 81; CHAMPLIN 2003a, 280; HIESINGER 1975. Cf. WINSOR-LEACH 1990, 25.

¹¹⁸ See for a more extensive discussion HEKSTER 2015.

on imperial coinage issued under the various Julio-Claudian emperors, often reflecting politically relevant circumstances, strongly suggest that the political centre had significant opportunities to issue forth ideological messages from the centre through central coinage. At the same time, there were at least some notions of continuity, as is suggested by explicit references to, and copying images on, previously issued central coinage. Early Neronian coinage emphasising *divus* Claudius (and only to a much lesser extent *divus* Augustus), furthermore indicate the importance of immediate predecessors when legitimisation of imperial power was concerned. The case of Gaius, however, who referred back to his parents and Augustus, rather than to his immediate predecessor Tiberius, shows that there were, under the Julio-Claudians at least, still different modes of dynastic legitimisation at central disposal. It also seems clear that the exceptional watershed of 56, when the number of central Neronian coins referring to ancestry dropped from a 100 percent to nothing, cannot be understood without assuming a decision taken at the highest level. Such direct imperial impact on central coinage coheres well with recent findings about substantial changes of ideological focus on imperial coinage issued in name of Caracalla before and during his sole rulership.¹¹⁹ These emphatic changes of emphasis between rulers and within some of the longer rules form strong evidence for some deliberate and controlled image-making at the centre in the early Roman Empire.

Deliberate image making in one medium need not mean similar control in other media. The shift away from references to the Julio-Claudians on central coinage is echoed in imperial portraiture, but not at all at the same time. The change from a recognisable Julio-Claudian to a unique Neronian type only took place in 59 or even in 64. The death of Agrippina is often put forward as direct cause for this change in imperial representation, but follows a full three years from the similar change in coinage. The differences between the various media are even more evident when the epigraphic corpus is taken into account. On the one hand, there is the clear attention in official documents to matrilineal terminology, which was systematically integrated into titulature for the first time under Nero, and seems to confirm central decisions on deliberate image-making. Indeed, they cohere well with the image broadcast through central coinage in the first year of Nero's rule. Nevertheless, these same documents continue to lay stress on imperial ancestry throughout the reign. A highly visible rejection of ancestral references on central coinage and in portraiture coincided with continued emphasis on ancestry in the imperial names. Here, one could argue, are clear examples of variety in the 'adaptability' of a specific medium to central needs – possibly linked to the importance of tradition and standardisation within those media.

The more quantitative-comparative approach of this survey also shed some light on the relationship between the imperial image which was broadcast at the centre, and the one visible in the provinces, based on an analysis of the ways in which messages of ancestry appeared within Roman provincial coinage. There was a substantial variety, with vast local differences, and the hint of the possibility that, at least

¹¹⁹ MANDERS 2012 229–252, 324–331; appendix 4; Rowan (2012), 111–112.

occasionally, the centre could follow a provincial example rather than the other way around. Julio-Claudian emperors appear to have managed their image in a deliberate way, especially in the messages on imperial coinage. However, modes of representation were not as easily changed for all media at central disposal. It is too easy for modern historians to assume that combining the available sources allows us to create a coherent image of the past. We can only do so after giving full attention to the internal discourses of individual types of sources. Rulers were constrained by the different practices and expectations linked to the different media, and by local interpretations of and variants to central prototypes. The last Julio-Claudian emperor certainly was Augustus' great-great-grandson, but the various ways in which that was put forward were much less consistent than much of modern literature, perhaps influenced by the knowledge that Nero was the last of his dynasty, lead us to believe.

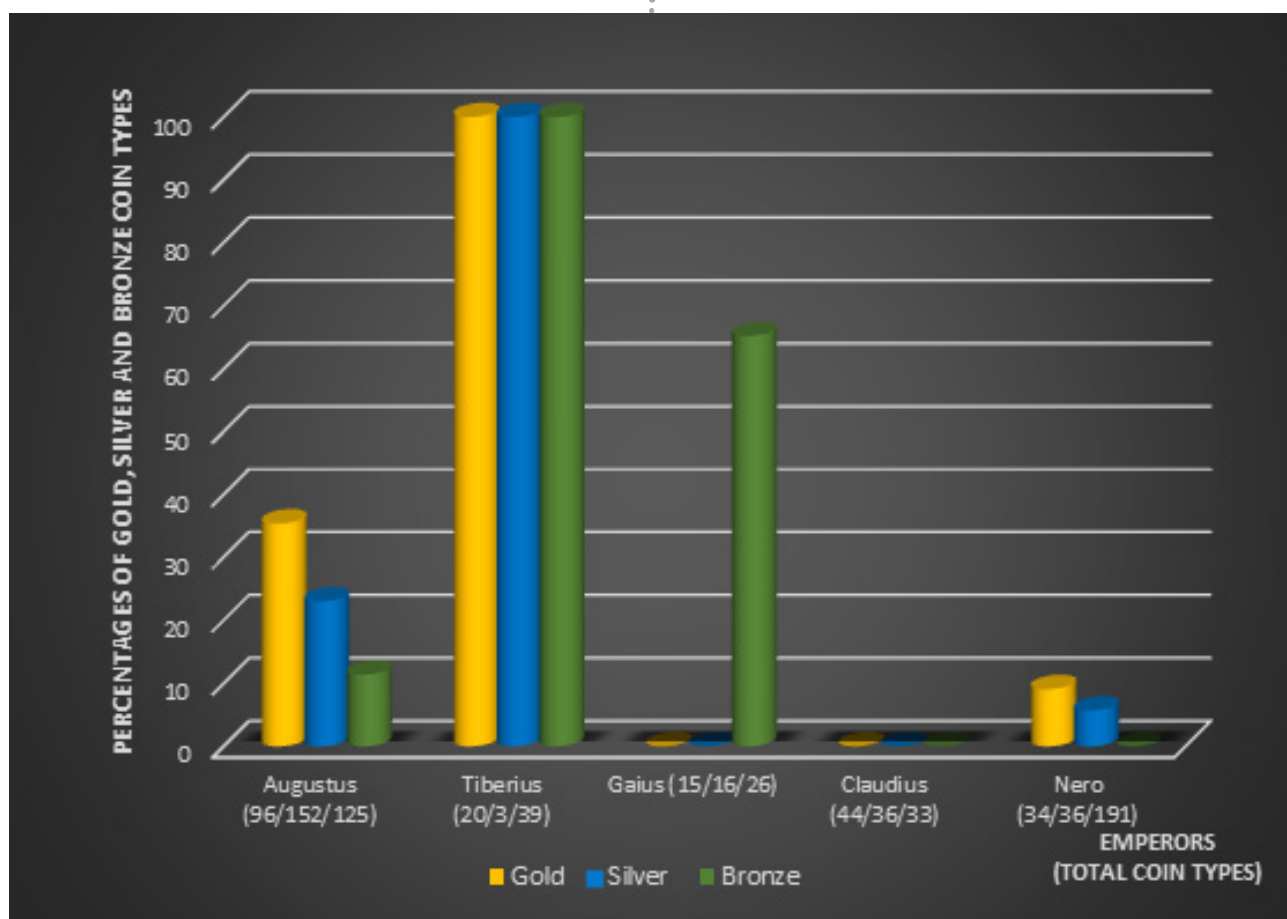
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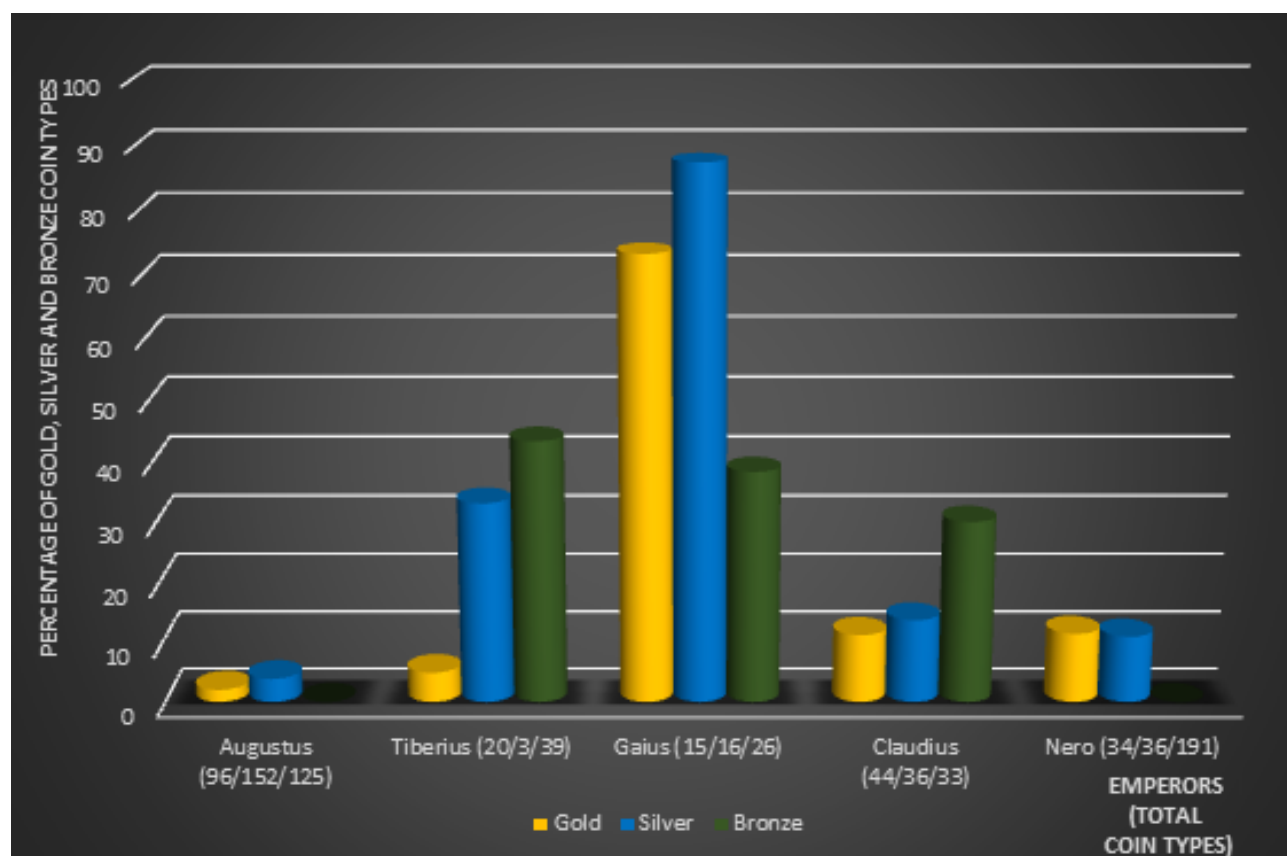
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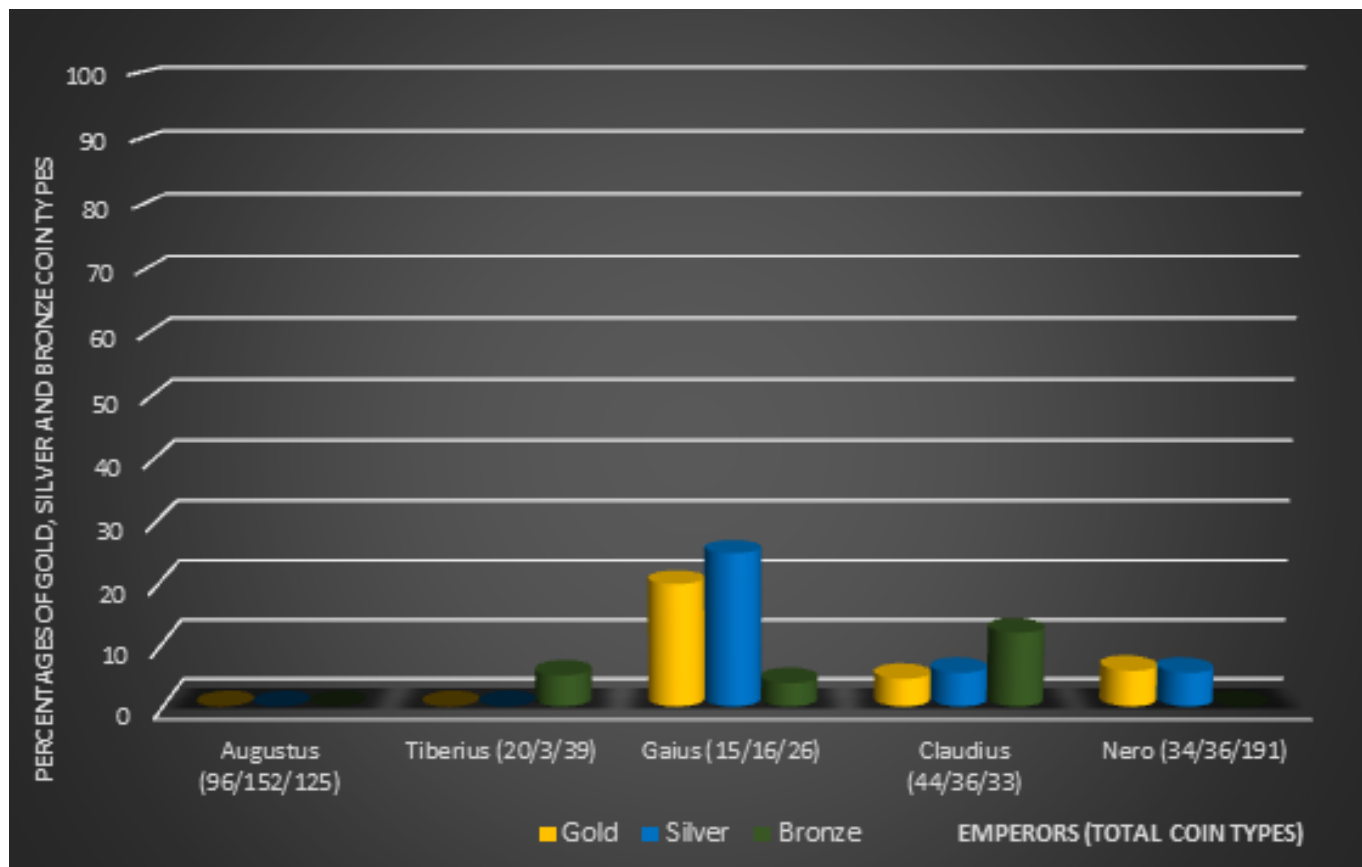
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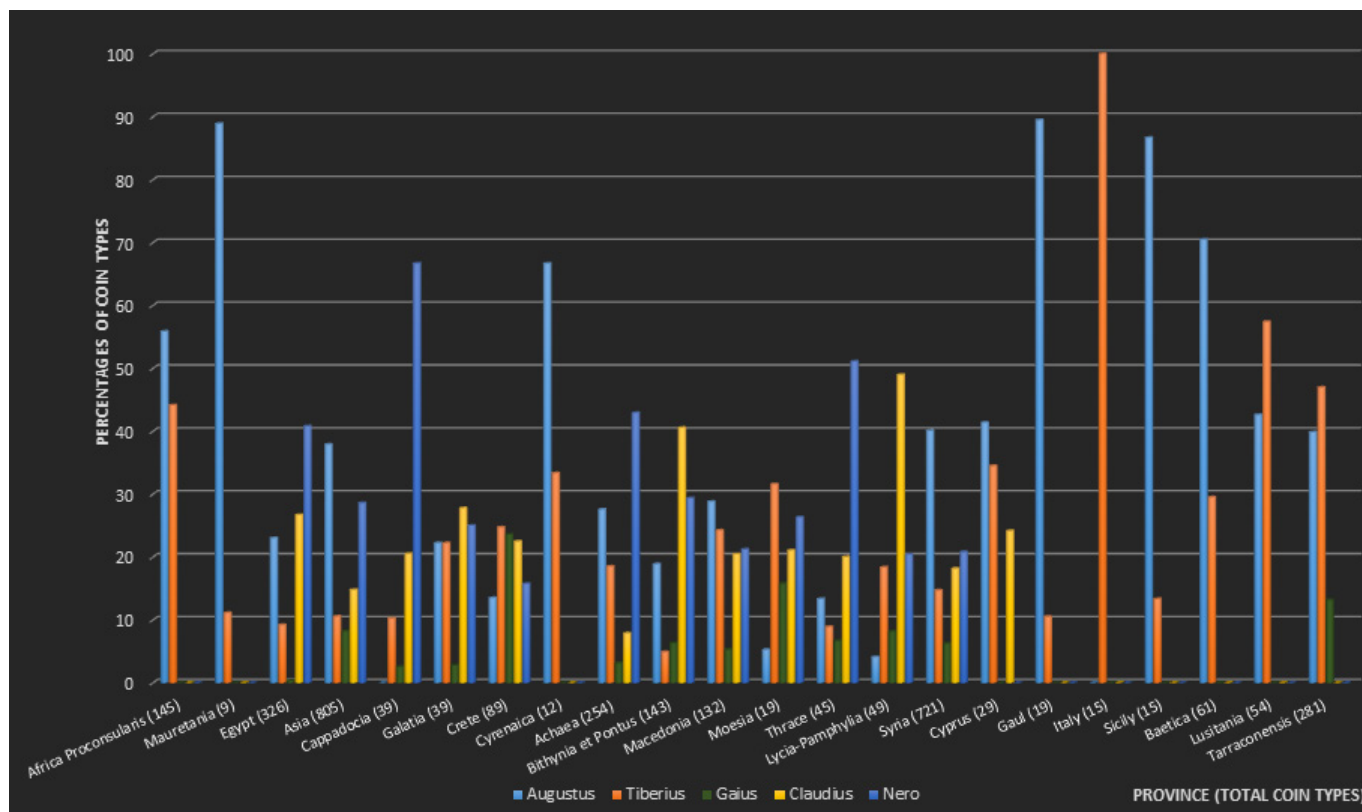
Graph 1. Proportions of coin types propagating ancestral references in the emperor's nomenclature.



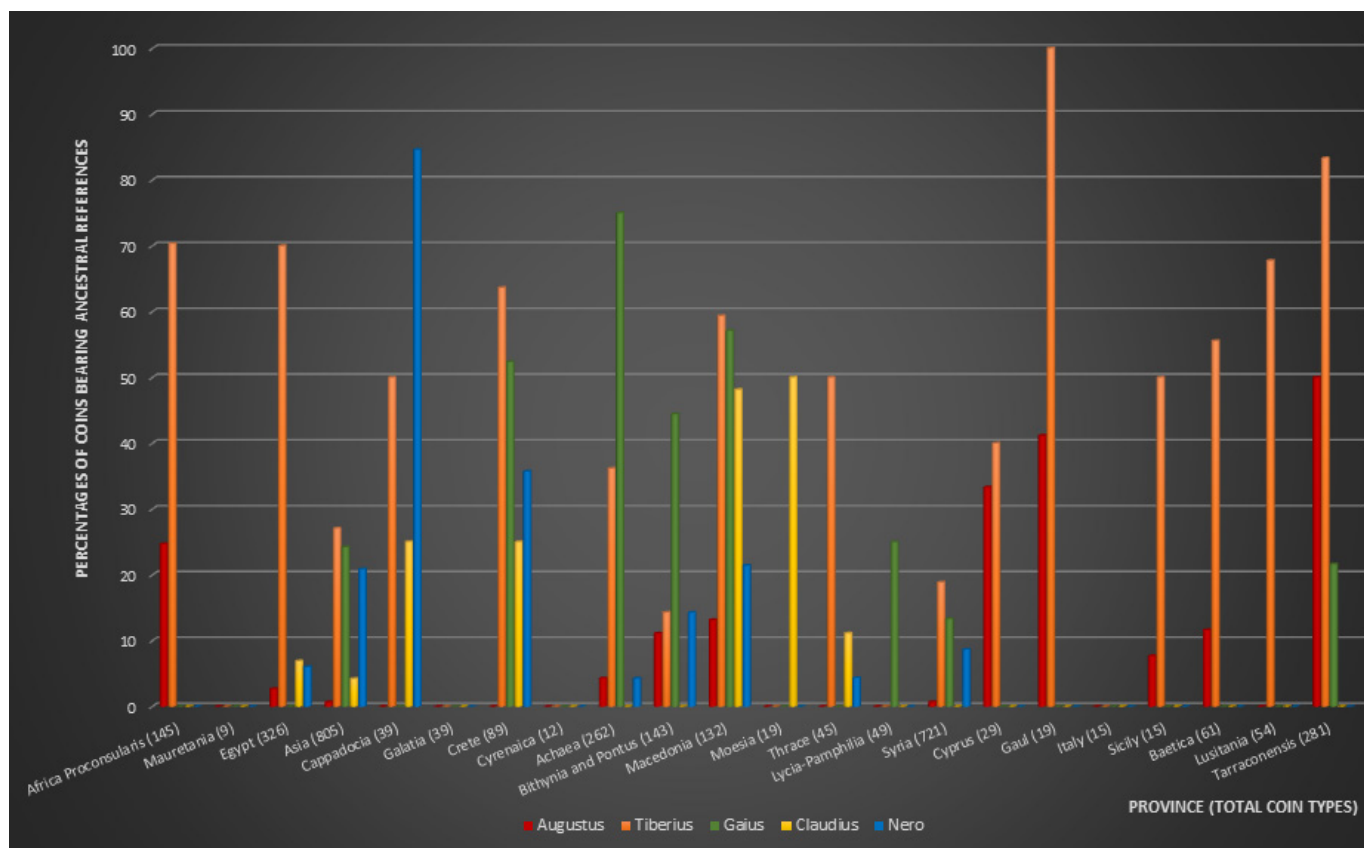
Graph 2. Proportions of coin types propagating ancestry.



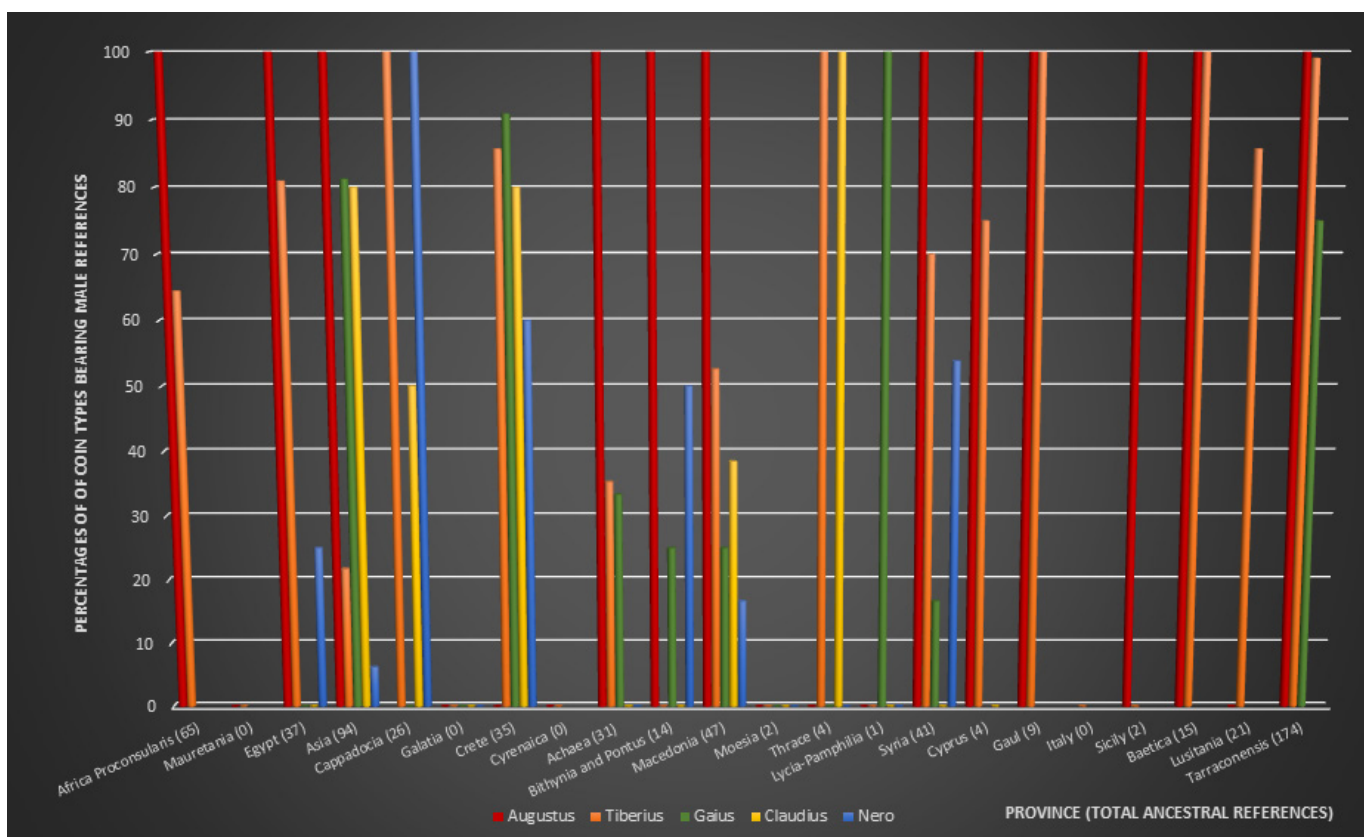
Graph 3. Proportions of coin types promulgating female ancestors.



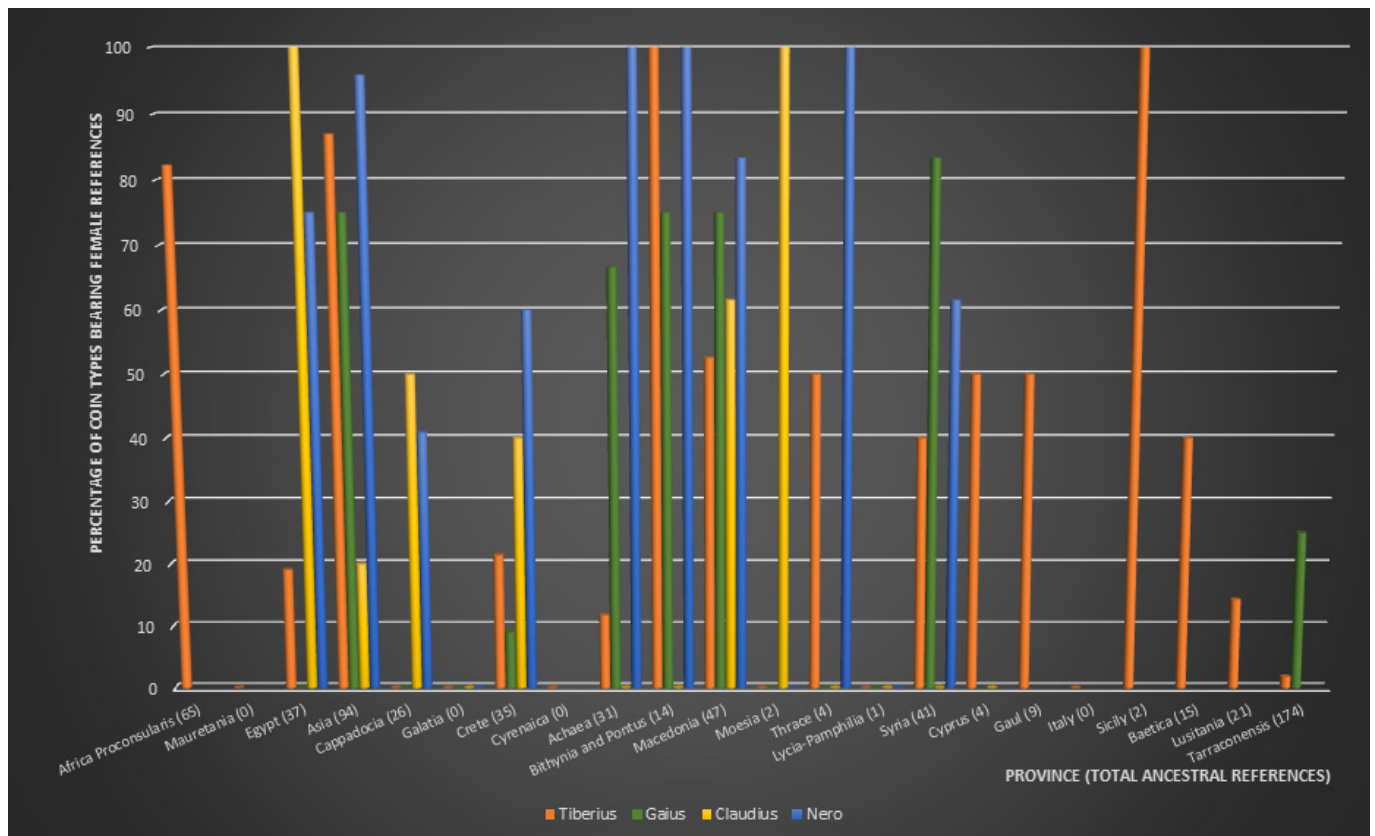
Graph 4. Geographic dispersal of Roman provincial coin types, 31 BC - AD 68



Graph 5. Proportions of Roman provincial coin types propagating ancestry.



Graph 6. Proportions of Roman provincial coin types referring to male ancestors.



Graph 7. Proportions of Roman provincial coin types referring to female ancestors.