

Clive Stannard, 'Two-headed and two-tailed denarii in the Roman Republic',
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Two-headed and Two-tailed Denarii in the Roman Republic

CLIVE STANNARD

[PLATE 22]

The British Museum has a denarius of **L. FVRI CN.F. BROCCHI** with the obverse type of a head of Ceres on both sides of the coin.¹ Grueber condemned it: 'a forgery of this denarius, perhaps ancient, . . . has the obverse type repeated on the reverse.'² But there is no real reason to condemn the piece. The Museum was kind enough to have the S.G. taken;³ it is 10·56, or

¹ Accession number R 0040; Crawford's issue 414, of 63 BC; 3·68 g.

² *BMCRR* i, pp. 486 f., n. 3.

³ I thank Andrew Burnett for this, and for his help and advice generally. I owe illustrations, as well, to the kindness of Michel Amandry at the Bibliothèque Nationale and to William Metcalf at the ANS.

good silver, and an ancient forgery in good silver would be a nonsense. The style is in no way out of the ordinary. A second piece from the same dies has now appeared in a private collection, said to come from a recent hoard. It is in virtually mint state, weighs 4.03 g, and seems good silver.

These coins can be compared with other two-headed and two-tailed Republican denarii. We now know of six such issues, from four moneyers. None stands alone, since each is linked to another, more normal pair of obverse and reverse types, one of which it simply repeats on both faces. In listing them, by Crawford's references, I shall distinguish between those which have a different legend on either face (usually dividing the moneyer's name) and those which have the same (and, thus, an anomalous half only of the usual legend).

L. SATVRN, 104 BC, Rome

317/1, two-headed, - / L.SAT, **Pl. 22, 1.**⁴

317/2, two-tailed, ROMA / L.SATVRN, **Pl. 22, 2.**⁵

C. VIBIVS C.F. PANSA, 90 BC, Rome

342/6a, two-tailed, PANSA / C.VIBIVS C.F., **Pl. 22, 3.**⁶

342/6b, two-tailed, PANSA / C.VIBIVS C.F., **Pl. 22, 4.**⁷

L. FVRI CN.F. BROCCHI, 63 BC, Rome

414/–, two-headed, repeated legend: BROCCHI III VIR, **Pl. 22, 5**, the BM specimen; **Pl. 22, 6**, the new one.

MAGN. PROCOS with VARRO PROQ, 49 BC. Mint moving with Pompey

447/1b, two-headed, repeated legend: VARRO. PRO.Q, **Pl. 22, 7.**⁸

These coins stand out from the more normal issues of the time, in which there is almost invariably a clear distinction between the types of obverse and reverse; the obverse is the main type—usually a head—which the reverse develops or parallels. No other issues quite so obviously break the pattern. For Grueber, 'the variations in the type of denarius seem to point to some exceptional circumstances',⁹ but it may not be a question of circumstance, but of minting technique, as one possibility is that, in these issues, obverse dies were simply pressed into service as reverse dies, and *vice versa*.

⁴ Paris, Ailly 4797, 3.94 g.

⁵ Paris, Ailly 4804, 3.92 g.

⁶ Paris, Ailly 16501, 4.05 g.

⁷ Paris, Ailly 16504, 3.91 g.

⁸ Paris 2579, 4.08 g.

⁹ *BMCRR* i, p. 216 n. 1, of series 317.

Although, in the case of 317/1 and 2, and 342/6a and 6b,¹⁰ the legends on either side of the pieces differ, we can discount this as sufficient proof of their being from true obverse and reverse dies if we assume the designs only were first cut into a large batch of dies and the legends added later, just as, in series with sequential control-marks, like these, the symbols presumably were.

We then face the question, can a die be simply turned over? Although we cannot be sure what these particular dies looked like, Vermeule illustrates some dies of Augustus in which there is no essential difference between the forms of obverse and reverse.¹¹ This was probably the case for our issues, too. Besides which, if the obverse could be wedged into an anvil, and the reverse, perhaps, into a die-case, to protect it from direct blows, then I can see nothing to prevent dies being inverted.¹² The only distinguishing feature in the products of obverse and reverse dies in the Republic which seems to me often valid is that the reverses of certain (but not all) issues are slightly concave, and must come from slightly convex reverse dies.

The full set of hypotheses for these issues appears to be:

1. the piece in question was struck from a pair of deliberately-cut obverse and reverse dies;
2. the wrong types were mistakenly cut into blank dies intended for the complementary die, obverse types onto reverse blanks and *vice versa*;
3. dies were simply turned over and used, either because the supply of the side needed was temporarily finished, or deliberately, to create a new coin type, or by mistake.

The same solution need not apply to all the issues,¹³ and the following seems to me the most plausible.

1. Issues 317/1 and 2 were deliberately created, probably by inverting a die originally intended to serve the other way up (it is impossible to be sure, as

¹⁰ The difference in types between these two coins is that, on 6a, the obverse quadriga goes left, the reverse, right; on 6b, both go left. Disregarding legends, 6a pairs the reverses of the normal two-typed 4b and 5b; 6b, two 4b reverses.

¹¹ C. C. Vermeule, *Some Notes on Ancient Dies and Coining Methods* (London, 1954), p. 30, fig. 5.

¹² There is a definite case of the inversion of an obverse die among the staters of Metapontum, Noe's No. 375, which pairs the reverses of Nos. 373 and 374: 'a very singular condition arises with No. 375, which, without the three specimens recorded might be viewed with suspicion. For this coin, two reverse dies were used. For a time the mint may have been without a single obverse die' (S. P. Noe, *The Coinage of Metapontum, Parts 1 and 2*, with additions and corrections by Ann Johnston (New York, 1984), p. 60).

¹³ There are parallels under the Empire. Two-headed asses of a number of emperors are known. As an example, I illustrate (Pl. 22, 8) the as of Nero mentioned in David W. MacDowall, *The Western Coinages of Nero* (New York, 1979), p. 180 n: 'obv. dies of this issue (one with head r., the other with head l.) have been used to strike a curious two-headed coin in the ANS'; 10.07 g, axes ↓. All the published pieces I know are two-headed, which might suggest they are deliberate and 'medallic' in intent; against this hypothesis are the following two pieces: a two-headed quadrans of Claudius (for who would make a medal of a quadrans?) (Pl. 22, 9; RIC² 84-91, 2.71 g, axes ↓, in a private collection), and a two-tailed as of Faustina the Elder (Pl. 22, 10; RIC 1170, 11.28 g, axes ↓, which recently entered the BM (1987-7-4-1)).

there is no convexity to reverse dies in the issue), to create a new and controllable batch of dies in an issue where the normal control-marks had become unwieldy. The legends were cut once this decision was made. I can see no difference in the lay-out of 'obverse' and 'reverse' types to allow for different legends, and note that, on 1, the usual legend, **L. SATVRN**, has been abbreviated to **L. SAT** only, and that, while the standard coin (3) has no obverse legend, on 2, **ROMA** has been added to fill an otherwise empty exergue: this suggests accommodation, not planning. Crawford, then, is probably wrong in believing 1 and 2 preceded 3:¹⁴ this is counter-intuitive, and I do not agree that 'the style of 1 and 2 is markedly better than that of 3a-b'.

2. This established a precedent which 342/6a and b copied: again, we cannot be certain, since the reverses are not concave. In the two-typed issues (4b and 5b), however, the control-mark is on the obverse, and, as these are two-reverse types, an issue without control-marks results; the inversion establishes no new controllable set of dies, but this apparent illogicality fits a period where the system of control-marks had become much less coherent than in 317.¹⁵

3. Issue 414/- is probably a case of an obverse type being cut on a blank die intended for reverses, the finished die being then filed with them and used as such. In both specimens known, the one side (the 'reverse', on the right in the illustrations) appears concave. That there is only one known pair of dies strengthens the supposition.

4. Issue 447/1b¹⁶ is probably the result of running out of reverse dies under the emergency conditions of Pompey's field mint; obverse dies, with the legends already cut, were then used as reverses. Grueber noted that 'the repetition of the obverse type for that of the reverse . . . may be due to the exigencies connected with the striking of the coins, and to a scarcity of reverse dies'.¹⁷ There is no telling concavity to the reverse in the specimens I know.

¹⁴ *RRC*, p. 324.

¹⁵ For the imprecise use of control-marks on 3a-5b, see *RRC*, pp. 348 f.

¹⁶ The BM has three regular and three two-typed pieces, one broken and obviously silver, and two plated. All are so worn that it is impossible to say if any are from the same dies.

¹⁷ *BMCR* ii, pp. 362 f., n. 1.



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2



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