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SERRATI NUMI

By Len Henderson

Coins that are described in this way are a particular series that came out mainly in Roman Republican times. Much has been written about them, and more has been conjecture with suppositions extending over several possibilities for their *raison d'être*.

The name derives from the fact that the coins have saw-toothed edges. These notches were put in, not when the pieces were being made, but afterwards. They came out in the Civil War period immediately before the imperial times. It was claimed that many of the issuers were from the Spanish areas rather than mainland Italy. This opinion has now been reconsidered. The coins can be dated from about 120 BC to about the time of Augustus (29 BC). They seem to have been issued by families with strong republican feelings. Nearly all claimed to be descendants of great heroes who had overcome oppression by dictators and tyrants. Grueber, writing last century in his "Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum", says that the coins of this period were often in the same types as the earlier period. Rear Admiral William Henry Smyth in his "Descriptive Catalogue of a Cabinet of Roman Family Coins belonging to the Duke of Northumberland" (printed in 1856) made claims for them that were at variance with those of continental scholars such as Count de Salis, Babelon or Svoronos.

"numerous suggestions have been made as to the purpose this peculiar mode of treating coins may have served. It could not have been adopted to prevent clipping of coins, since a ragged edge would have lent itself

more readily to this fraud than a plain one. Nor could it have been with the object of proving the genuineness of the metal" AH Grueber.

Mattingly's opinion about them is another that has now been superseded and the current thoughts favour those of Michael Crawford in his "Roman Republican Coinage". He also demolishes the view that they were struck outside of Italy because many of them are from the same dies as coins known to have been struck in Rome. He says,

"Clearly serrated and unserrated denarii were being produced not only at the same time, but in the same place. Since serration was not systematic, it would not have prevented forgery, we are left with the likelihood that it was no more than a casual decorative fashion." Michael Crawford.

Certainly, whatever view is followed, hardly one is to be found after the time of Augustus except on a few coins in the far Colonies.

The specimens of this ancient style are to be found on the coins of Antonia, Aquilia, Claudia, Cornelia, Domita, Mamilia, Maria, Memmia, Papia, Porcia, Postumia, Proclia, Proscia, Sulpicia and other families. I have given the names alphabetically rather than the date of issue.

Pinkerton, writing in 1804, was of the opinion that this style of manufacture was to overcome forgery. He came to this opinion because of a small reference in Tacitus where it is stated:

"The Germans preferred the old style serrated edge coins as they trusted the quality

of them.”

The reason for his belief was that so many areas were issuing their own coins by taking castings of Greek and Roman coins and the weight and fineness was being adulterated. Grueber (op cit, page 158) reminds us of the revaluing of the denarius with inflation.

In the very early days Rome used a variety of coins minted by the Greek colonies to the south - Tarantum, Sybaris, Poisedonia, Neopolis, and others. When the tribes of Latium decided to make their own coins they used large cast pieces of bronze in the shape of cow-hides and pigs. They weighed up to thirty kilos each and were of no use for simple trading, barter was the main means of exchange. With gem-cutters coming in from Greece on a visiting basis dies could be cut for the manufacture of proper coinage. The silver coins were struck but copper coins continued to be made in moulds for some time.

The senate retained control over the issuing of bronze coins even after the Augustan period but silver became the business of the Emperor. The issuing authorities in the early days and Civil War periods were three men each elected on a yearly basis and permitted to vary the reverse designs. They usually used some design commemorating an event famous in their own family history; either a successful battle or their descent from the gods. These men were designated as *Tresviri auro argento aere flando et feriundo* - the three men for the striking of gold, silver and copper - a simple enough title which was ignored in the provinces where the generals needed money to pay their troops and therefore had struck their own money. At first these officials were known to us by name and were considered of little importance in the 'civil service'.

They held their position for one year and there was an overlap in their appointments so that when names did appear on the pieces it became possible for us to date them in the series. Their original anonymous position had given rise to the possibility of fraud by issuing copper coins with a thin silver wash. Moneyers connected with some particular political party were quick to show that their issues were genuine weight and fineness by striking silver coins and then cutting, or filing notches in them to show the purity of the underlying silver. This did not always work as the copper could receive its silver wash after the cuts were made and the coin would appear to be genuine.

Not only were the coins forged but even genuine ones were down-valued. The denarius had originally been valued at sixteen asses but was reduced to twelve and rapidly further reduced to ten asses. The coins were marked accordingly. Any political party that wanted to gain power merely had to come out with the catch-cry "put value back into the money" and they were on a sure thing, even if they knew nothing could be done to turn back the clock. Revolution was rife. One of the main parties was the Marian Party - even friends of Caesar were involved with this group. The Marians were a plebeian family who thought they had the right to govern, and families with similar aspirations joined them.

Not all issuers of serrated edge coins were associated with the Marian faction, but all had puritanical feelings. I give a selection.

Aquillia: Mn. Aquillius (BC 71-68). This moneyer issued several types of coins which honoured an ancestor of the same name who was consul in 101 BC and who had success in Sicily. He must have had a sense of fun for he featured stars on his coins which were a punning allusion to the con-

stellation of Aquila.

Antonia: Q. Antonius Balbus (BC 81). This man was a member of the Marian faction and was appointed Praetor in Sardinia in BC 82. He was driven from there by L. Philippus, the legate of Sulla, and killed.

Baebia: Cn. Baebius Tampilus (BC 120). This gens was of plebeian but consular family. An ancestor was twice sent as Ambassador to the Carthaginians and at length declared war on them on behalf of Rome. This was a gens with several branches involved in wars against the Ligurians and Antiochus.

Claudia: Ti. Claudius Ap. (BC 87-76). This was a gens of Sabine origin. The most illustrious member of the family was consul five times. This was M. Claudius Marcellus who captured Syracuse in BC 212. In BC 222 he dedicated, in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, the booty he had captured in Gaul when he slew Britomartus. The family were related to the Comellia gens.

Comellia: L. Cornellius Scipio Asiagenus. This was the son of the great Scipio Africanus. This was another gens that started out as plebeian and came from Sabine stock. It was an extended family, most branches of which were opposed to Caesar.

Domitia: This was a pragmatic family, who, during the late period of the Civil Wars was determined to be on the winning side. They issued a number of coin types that commemorated the defeat of the Gallic tribes under Bituitus in BC 121. Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (BC 42-41) belonged to the Pompeian party. He returned to Italy in BC 46 and was pardoned by Caesar. After the death of Julius Caesar he followed Brutus to Macedonia and was among those condemned under the Lex Pedia. He was placed in command of a fleet and won

a decisive victory on the day of the first battle of Philippi, for which he was proclaimed Imperator. In BC 40 he was reconciled to Marc Antony who made him governor of Bithynia.

Mamilia: A plebeian family from Tusculum, descended from a son of Ulysses and the goddess Circe. To show they were quite humble about having such distinguished ancestry they portrayed Ulysses on their coins in his humble garb when he returned to Ithaca in beggar's dress and was only recognised by his old dog Argus. They were also descended from Tarquin the Proud.

Maria: A plebeian gens that wanted everyone to go back to the old ways and to this end showed rural designs of farmers ploughing, either that or the goddess Ceres. They issued forty six different types of coins and after the civil wars became moneyers to Augustus and issued coins honouring him as Pontifex Maximus.

Memmia: A plebeian gens which issued pieces relating to the Ludi Cereales. They claimed descent through Romulus from the Trojan Menestheus.

Papia: A plebeian gens of consular rank who were responsible for passing the laws named Papias respecting vestal virgins and strangers. Some of their coins refer to the legendary foundation of Lanuvium by Aeneas and his Trojan companions. Their great days were yet to come with one of the family usurping the purple in Africa in 265 AD but only lasting seven days!

Poblicia: Another plebeian family but of consular rank. They issued a revolutionary piece but one which shows Hercules strangling the Nemean Lion and may refer to Sulla's victory over the Marian party. They were allied with Pompey the Great, whose coins had a similar reverse design.

Porcia: The family were responsible for the Lex Porcia de Provocatione which granted Roman citizens living outside Latium the right to appeal in criminal matters against magistrates acting in their military capacity. The most famous member of the gens was Cato the Censor who had lived earlier than the time covered in this monograph.

Postumia: One of the most ancient patrician families at Rome whose members had held the highest offices since the banishment of kings and the downfall of the Republic. L. Postumius Albinus had a victory over Spain and led successful expeditions against the Vaccari and Lusitani. The most famous member of the gens was Decimus Junius Brutus who was adopted into the family and became one of the assassins of Julius Caesar. The family had first served under Caesar in Spain and received many favours from him. The story of Brutus and Caesar is too well known to be retold in a paper of this size.

Roscia: Another gens that came from Lanuvium as did the Marcia and Fabia families. The obverse design on their serratii shows the head of Juno Sospita and the reverse shows a virgin and serpent. The type is in honour of the yearly festival at Lanuvium where a virgin was placed in the pit under the temple. She took food for the serpent who dwelt there. If the girl who was selected for the ceremony was chaste she would come out alive and return to her home with much rejoicing. If she was not a genuine virgin she would be destroyed by the serpent. There are an enormous number of variations on this type of coin.

Sulpicia: An ancient family with a name vaguely related to pig farming (Suispicus) but the family changed it and claimed they were descended from one of Aeneas' soldiers who saw a wild sow and her young under a tree. They were famed (?) for their puritani-

cal outlook and one member, Publius Suispicus Galba, was appointed one of the judges at the trial of Verres in BC 70 but was removed from the panel because of his reputation for severity. The family occupied priestly office from time to time and many have been the progenitors of the Emperor Galba.

Volteia: An obscure family known only from its coins. The one I have was found in Transylvania (as most were). All the types seem to relate to the five principal festivals which were celebrated annually at Rome. Jupiter and his temple refers to the Ludi Plebeii celebrated in September. The other coins types are Hercules and a boar in November; Liber and Ceres for the Ludi Cereales in April; and Cybele to the Ludi Megalenses, which were also celebrated in April; the head of Apollo and a tripod is for the festival held in July. Even the spelling of the name of this family is uncertain.

The success of Octavian Augustus put a virtual end to this type of coinage.

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