

Quintus Pomponius Musa, otherwise unknown, minted a series of coins in 66 BCE. Each of Musa's reverses type featured one of the nine muses, each identifiable by her attributes, as a pun on his cognomen. In the field behind a bust of Apollo, each obverse type bears a control mark which appears to correspond to the attribute possessed by the muse on the reverse. The Clio type, for example, features the muse holding a scroll on the reverse, with a scroll as the control mark on the obverse. The strong connection between obverse control mark and reverse attribute, also evident in the Calliope, Euterpe, Polymnia and Urania types, suggests that the relationship can be logically extended to the remaining types.

I argue that we must reconsider the organization of these coins based on an understanding of the relationship between the muses' attributes on the reverse and the control marks on the obverse. My paper identifies a problem with seriation of Musa's coins (Crawford 1974) wherein two separate obverse types—one bearing a tortoise, the other a flower otherwise associated with the Erato type—are assigned to Terpsichore based on the similarity of the reverse dies. Given the rarity of the Erato type (Seaby 1952) it seems that the flower control mark was intended to be associated solely with her. That both goddesses have a lyre as their attribute may have resulted in some conflation or confusion of the two, as is attested elsewhere with these muses in ancient art (Cohon 1991-1992 & 2009). The attribution of two obverse types to Terpsichore may also point to a vestige of the minting process wherein reverse dies were mixed between the Erato and Terpsichore obverses. This phenomenon is attested elsewhere in Roman coinage, including in an additional example from Musa's coins where the Thalia obverse type is paired with the Clio reverse (Ghey, Leins & Crawford 2010). By reevaluating the organization of Musa's coins we will arrive at a better understanding of the minting process at Rome and representations of the muses in antiquity.

Works Cited

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