

## Sulla, Caesar, and Selene: Revolutions After Dark

This paper takes up the enigmatic coin type, RRC 480/1, as well as the anecdote at Plutarch, *Sulla* 9 that has been deployed in its interpretation for centuries. The coin—a denarius—has a head of Venus on the obverse, and its reverse seems to depict the famous scene of Selene visiting Endymion as he sleeps, stock-in-trade for vases, sarcophagi, and other venues. Fine so far, except that a third figure intervening between goddess and beloved, of Nike/Victory, lends the reverse a peculiar, military dimension, which gave rise, as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to a theory that the minter was referring to a story preserved in Plutarch whereby Sulla was visited in a dream “by a certain Cappadocian goddess, whether it be the Moon, or Pallas, or Bellona,” just before his assault on the city in 88 BCE. Plutarch implies that Sulla attributed his success to this vision, and the fact that she had “nam[ed] his enemies one by one” may also mean that it inspired his *ad hominem* proscriptions years later. In this scenario, the sleeping figure on the coin may represent Sulla himself, or if it be Endymion, he may be meant to evoke, or to elide with, Sulla.

The final piece of the puzzle for decoding the coin’s significance is its timing and production: it was part of the momentous series minted by Lucius Aemilius Buca in 44 BCE. Crawford and others dated the coin to the earliest months of that year, for how could an issue have been silent on Julius Caesar if it came after the Ides of March, especially since the same Buca otherwise made rich numismatic commentary on post-assassination politics? And so, we have the essential riddle for RRC 480/1: if we accept the January or February timeline for it (though some disagree), then why has Buca chosen this complex imagery here and now? Is it an allusion to Sulla at all, and if so, what about 44 BCE motivated its use? Or, if the picture has nothing to do with Sulla, then what *does* it mean?

The new contribution of this paper is to consider what might be called the ‘politics of the night’ for each of the three moments relevant to how we’ve read the coin thus far—Sulla’s campaign of 88; Buca’s minting in 44; and Plutarch’s memory of Sulla in the early second century, CE (and thus this paper is more an historical study than a numismatic one). As recent work in Chaniotis 2018 and Kerr and Wessels 2020 has shown, the night in antiquity—Selene’s domain—was fraught with uncertainty, and easily could become associated with political resistance and subversion. In many ways Sulla and Caesar both understood this phenomenon and incorporated concern for the night in their strategies of statesmanship, reform, and self-presentation. As different as the two were (or have been thought to have been) in their ideologies and approaches, the nocturnal realm and its denizens factored in important episodes for both, and beyond just 88 and 44. Buca, I argue, was aware of this. Ultimately the paper endeavors to join the path breaking work of Wilson 2021 in exploring the enduring influence of Sulla on politics in subsequent generations.

#### Works Cited

- Chaniotis, Angelos (ed.), *La Nuit: imaginaire et réalités nocturnes dan le monde gréco-romain* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 2018).
- Ker, James and Antje Wessels (eds.), *The Values of Nighttime in Classical Antiquity: Between Dusk and Dawn* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
- Wilson, Mark, *Dictator: The Evolution of the Roman Dictatorship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).