

## GALBA'S PROPAGANDA MOTIFS ON VESPASIAN'S COINS

One of the most visible characteristics of the propaganda pursued on the coins of emperor Vespasian (VII 69–79 A.D.) was a broad use of motifs and slogans employed by his predecessors.<sup>1</sup> In the context, the reception of emperor Galba's (IV 68–I69 A.D.) motifs on Vespasian's coins deserves closer examination.<sup>2</sup> Our interest will focus on reviewing these motifs, determining reasons for issuing them, and their ideological message.

In the light of literary sources, Vespasian's attitude toward Galba and his reign is rather vague. Ancient sources provide no grounds for reconstructing any ideological connection and consequent commonality in both emperor's propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

One highly popular propaganda motif used in the anti-Nero rebellion in the spring of 68 A.D. was a personification of the Roman goddess of liberty, Libertas. In Galba's coinage, Libertas personified appears as: LIBERTAS PUBLICA S.C.,<sup>4</sup> LIBERTAS RESTITUTA S.C.,<sup>5</sup> LIB. AVG. R. XL.,<sup>6</sup> LIBERTAS AVG S.C.,<sup>7</sup> LIBERTAS P.R.<sup>8</sup>

For Galba, Libertas was an antithesis of Nero's autocratic rule and at the same time a herald of good cooperation between the princeps and the senate. The personification of libertas was promoted consistently throughout Galba's reign, and particularly in the spring and summer of 68 A.D. The Libertas motif appeared on all denominations struck in all mints working for Galba, Vespasian however, took from Galba only some forms: LIBERTAS PUBLICA,<sup>9</sup> LIBERTAS

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1 E.g. T.V. Buttrey, "Vespasian as Moneyer" in: N.C. vol. 12, ser. 7 (1972), pp. 89–109, and esp. pp. 89, 101.

2 See E. Bianco, "Indirizzi programmatici e propagandistici nella monetazione di Vespasiano" in: RIN, vol. 70 (1968), pp. 188–200; C.M. Kraay, *The Aes Coinage of Galba* (New York: 1956), pp. 33–50; C.H.V. Sutherland, RIC, vol. 1 (London: 1984), pp. 216–231, and esp. pp. 220–221, 222–223, 229–230.

3 See Tac. Hist. III 7, IV 20; cf. Suet. Galba 23; cf. J. Gage, "Vespasien et la memoire de Galba" in: Rev. Etud. Anc., vol. 54 (1952), pp. 290–315, and esp. pp. 290–307. The author describes in detail the attitude of Vespasian toward Galba in the light of literary sources.

4 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 22; 23; 56; 68–76; 136–137; 158–159; 237; 275; 309; 318; 328; 346–349; 363–367; 372; 387–391; 423–427; 459–461; cf. 327.

5 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 7–9; 37–39; cf. 479.

6 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 293; 296; 237; 422; 438–441.

7 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 294–295; 436–437; 422–443.

8 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), No. 157.

9 H. Mattingly; E.A. Sydenham, RIC, vol. 2, London: 9126, (Vespasian), Nos. 267; 429; 492.

RESTITUTA,<sup>10</sup> and LIBERTAS AVGVSTI S.C.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, Vespasian accepted the basic propaganda message of Galba's reign, which referred to restoring broadly conceived political freedom. Interestingly, Vespasian's coins do not bear Libertas personified as LIBERTAS P.R. or LIB. AVG. S.C. XL. This fact does not seem merely incidental. The slogan of LIBERTAS P.R. substantially departed from Vespasian's principle of returning to Augustan imperial tradition.<sup>12</sup> The motif LIB. AVG. S.C. R.XL., in turn evoked specific tax concessions granted by Galba to some Gallic and Spanish municipalities.<sup>13</sup> The fact ran counter to Vespasian's rather strict fiscal policy aimed at restoring the empire's treasure ruined by the civil wars of 68–69 A.D.<sup>14</sup> It should be stressed that Vespasian's repetitions of Libertas personifications were issued (on most denominations issued at the time) solely in the years 69–71 A.D. It may therefore be claimed that, Vespasian, in accepting this original propaganda motif of 68–69 A.D., treated it as instrumental in ingratiating himself with political opposition and emphasizing his departure from political practices pursued under late Nero. Once Vespasian's rule had been firmly established, Libertas personified ceased to appear in this emperor's coinage.

The events of 68–69 A.D. shook the empire's political and military foundations. This called for increased propaganda of the goddess Roma, patron of the city of Rome, the whole state, and the ruler himself. The worship of Roma was usually associated with a revival of Roman statehood and Rome itself.<sup>15</sup> In Galba's coinage, Roma appears consistently throughout his principate. Her personification was usually pictured holding a spear and parazonium, or resting on the seven hills accompanied by Gemini and the Tiber personified.<sup>16</sup> Not infrequently her personification also wields Victoria and spear or Victoria and an eagle. Typical for Galba, these motifs found their way to Vespasian's coinage unchanged.<sup>17</sup> Characteristically, Roma personified is found almost exclusively in the emperor's bronze coinage. This may indicate the issuer's intention to reach out to the empire's broadest social strata. The personification of Roma appears on Vespasian's coins especially in the years 69–73 A.D. This is accounted for by

10 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 290 and 430.

11 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), No. 428.

12 Out of the very rich literature on the subject, see T.V. Buttrey, "Vespasian...", p. 89, notes 1–3. In Polish, cf. the recent M. Cary, H.H. Scullard, *Dzieje Rzymu. Od czasów najdawniejszych do Konstantyna* [A History of Rome. From the Earliest Times to Constantine], vol. II (Warszawa: 1992), pp. 172–199; cf. W. Boruch, *Propaganda polityczna na monetach cesarza Galby* (Political Propaganda on the Coins of Emperor Galba) (under preparation).

13 Tac. Hist. I, 8.

14 For the financial policies, see Suet. Vesp., 8; 16; 18; 23; Tac. Hist. IV, 9; Aur. Vict. Caes. 9; C. Plinius Secundus, *Historia Naturalis*, XVIII 6.

15 Cf. M. Jaczynowska, *Religie świata rzymskiego* [Religions of the Roman World] (Warszawa: 1987), pp. 123–128.

16 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 141; 238–249; 311; 316; 392; 448–452.

17 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 309, cf. 370; 394–395; 401; 441–444; 476; 519; 610; 649; 663; 734; 741; 755–756; 772–773; 781.

the propaganda message in the cult of Roma who was held to be the protector of the empire and ruler when the state's structures foundered and its inhabitants' welfare was in jeopardy.

Another propaganda motif in Roman coinage associated with the events of 68–69 A.D. was the personification of the goddess of concord, Concordia. Among Galba's many original propaganda motifs, one deserving special attention is CONCORDIA AVG.<sup>18</sup> It conveyed an image of a stable internal situation in the empire after the shock of Nero's fall. In reality, no such stability was achieved under Galba (IV 68–I 69 A.D.), which resulted in his overthrow and violent death. A similar propaganda intent can be traced in Vespasian's Concordia. What is characteristic, the Concordia Aug. motif was propagated only until 74 A.D. on all denominations issued.<sup>19</sup>

The events of 68–69 A.D. added urgency to calls for peace and stability. The traditional motif to meet this demand was the Roman goddess of peace, Pax. Vespasian's propaganda borrowed from Galba's coinage<sup>20</sup> the motif PAX AUG. S.C., adding to the reverse (Pax personified with an altar, palm, and caduceus) an olive branch. On Galba's PAX AUGUSTA coins, taken up by Vespasian,<sup>21</sup> the caduceus was replaced with a cornucopia.

An interesting and original propaganda motif in Galba's coinage is PAX AUGUSTI S.C. Insofar as PAX AUGUSTA simply denoted peacetime, PAX AUGUSTI was the princeps' personal quality. In this sense, the emperor, through goddess Pax, became a "giver of peace".<sup>22</sup> Heavily used by Galba, this motif was not only picked up by Vespasian, but it was maintained throughout his principate.

Another motif, HONOS ET VIRTUS, had clearly different nature and message in the coinage of both rulers. The propaganda of soldierly virtue at a time of domestic unrest and external threat seems quite understandable. Yet, HONOS ET VIRTUS does not appear in Galba's coinage until late in his reign.<sup>23</sup> This contradicts the propaganda need to promote martial virtue in the spring of 68 A.D., during the armed confrontation with forces loyal to Nero. Let us add that the same HONOS ET VIRTUS motifs appear on Vespasian's coins only as late

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18 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 339–345; 380–384. Significantly, this motif was only used in the bronze coinage of this emperor.

19 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 43; 360; 365; 417; 471; 538; 647; cf. Nos. 269; 312; 320; 329; 336; 340; 345; 348; 372; 416; 470; 484; 641.

20 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 322–323; 415; cf. 129; 140; 319–320; 444; cf. 277–285; 368–371; 413–414; 445.

21 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), No. 400; cf. Nos. 18; 47; 56; 63; 156; 161; 434–436; 475; 541; 543; 552; 559; 564; 573–574; 582; 589; 597; 668; 673; 693; 696; 718; 727; 740; 748; 776–780.

22 For Galba, see RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 496–498. The characteristic spelling is PAXS, see M. Amit, "Propagande de succès et d'euphorie dans l'empire romain" in: *Jura*, vol. 16 (1965), pp. 55–57. For Vespasian, see RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 356; 403; 405; 410; 437–439; 515; 517–518; 534; 609.

23 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 474–478.



1. Ser. Sulpicius Galba, as [photo after Frank Sternberg, 1982, pl. XII, no 555]      2. Ser. Sulpicius Galba, as [photo after Frank Sternberg, 1988, pl. XIX, no 367]



3. Ser. Sulpicius Galba, sestertius [photo after Frank Sternberg, 1981, pl. XXXII, no 597]      4. T. Flavius Vespasianus, denarius [photo after Frank Sternberg, 1988, pl. XIX, no 364]



5. T. Flavius Vespasianus, sestertius [photo after Frank Sternberg, 1985, pl. XVI, no 366]      6. T. Flavius Vespasianus, sestertius [photo after Frank Sternberg, 1985, pl. XXXII, no 611]

as 71 A.D., i.e. after the hostilities in the empire had ceased.<sup>24</sup> This being so, the intentions behind these issues arouse controversy. The correct answer is probably what C.M. Kraay proposes<sup>25</sup> as he refers the HONOS ET VIRTUS propaganda to the 300-th anniversary of the temple to Honos and its reconstruction in 68–71 A.D. However, a connection may also be gleaned between Galba's HONOS ET VIRTUS issue and the threatening mutiny of the legions on the Rhine in the fall and winter of 68 A.D. aimed against this emperor's rule.

One propaganda motif unquestionably connected with the events of the "year of four emperors" was Mars, the Roman god of war. On Galba's coins Mars appears as MARS VICTOR S.C.<sup>26</sup> Vespasian reused on his own coin the scene portrayed next to the above legend, showing a personification of Mars with a spear and a trophy.<sup>27</sup> Characteristically, this scene was exploited with varying intensity (without any clear chronological preference) throughout Vespasian's reign. For Galba, MARS VICTOR S.C. was only an announcement of intention – never fulfilled – to overcome his political opponents. The same motif in Vespasian's propaganda can be referred to Flavius' actual military successes in 69–71 A.D. These successes gave Vespasian's rule a certain legitimacy and hence Mars personified kept coming up on this ruler's coins in gold, silver, and bronze alike.

Imperial propaganda could not have ignored so popular a theme of Roman coinage as the personification of goddess Victoria. Among the many ways of presenting Victoria in Galba's coinage, one remarkable type is VICTORIA P.R.<sup>28</sup> The most interesting fact from our point of view is the fact that the scene on the reverse of this type was exactly reproduced in Vespasian's coinage with a radically different legend: VICTORIA AVGVSTI.<sup>29</sup> Galba's type VICTORIA P.R., in our opinion, stressed that Nero's fall had been primarily a victory of "the people of Rome", and not a personal success of the issuer, who had merely executed the people's will. In this type, the emphasis is on the "will" of an unspecified "Roman people". That the type had a prestigious nature is clear from the fact that it was only issued on aurei and denarii. In this way Galba tried to give the slogan special propaganda significance. In Vespasian's type VICTORIA AVGVSTI emphasizes the "victorious nature" of the issuer, resplendent in the glory of his military success. Placing stress on the ruler's personal merit as a new regime was forming seems quite understandable. It is important to note, however, that the propaganda of these personal qualities was maintained on virtually all denominations throughout Vespasian's principate.

24 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), No. 423.

25 C.M. Kraay, *The Aes Coinage...*, p. 41.

26 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 481–482.

27 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 7; 103; 195; 257; 272; 278; 389; 432; 447; 522; 533; 535; 590; 611; 630; 636; 646.

28 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 10–11; 48; 49; 110–113; 148; 173–175; 215–217; 233–234; 519–520. This motif is propagated only on aurei and denarii.

29 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 52; 62; 78–79; 127–130; 134; 165–166; 216–217; 296; 362; 397; 466; 502; 526; 550; 585; 626; 634; 661; 766; 788; cf. 465; 467–468; 614; 640.



Many controversies in literature are roused by Galba's motif of AEQVITAS AVGVSTI S.C.<sup>30</sup> It was under Galba's reign that this theme had appeared in imperial coinage for the first time. With slightly different attributes, the personification of Aequitas appears in Vespasian's coinage throughout his principate.<sup>31</sup> The controversy referred to above has to do with the propaganda message in a personification of Aequitas in both rulers' coinage. A. Wallace-Hadrill<sup>32</sup> has recently argued that the propaganda of Aequitas was primarily to convince users that the coin kept its weight standard and, in broader sense, that the state's financial administration was honest and dependable. This daring interpretation of Aequitas and its propaganda import arouses a number of doubts, especially in reference to Galba's and Vespasian's basic intentions. Let us note that Aequitas personified is featured on gold and bronze coins. However, it has long been stressed in numismatic literature that this emperor's silver issues considerably exceeded the weight standards set by Nero in 64 A.D.<sup>33</sup> Bearing the latter in mind, the propaganda of Aequitas seems far more convincing and justified in the beginning of Galba's reign: in the spring and summer of 68 A.D. It was then that the question of trust in the coin he emitted was of paramount importance.

As regards Vespasian's propaganda intentions, the interpretation of Aequitas advanced by A. Wallace-Hadrill also presents difficulties. Vespasian's silver coins, especially in the first years of his reign, had a lowered precious metal content compared to Nero's standards mentioned above.<sup>34</sup> Characteristically, Aequitas personified on Vespasian's gold and silver coins is not accompanied by the reverse legend AEQVITAS AVGVSTI, as it is the case in this emperor's bronze coinage. The latter had kept the standards set as far back as Augustus.<sup>35</sup> Let us note that Aequitas was recurrently propagated throughout Vespasian's reign without displaying any palpable time preference. Thus, if we accept A. Wallace-Hadrill's position on the propaganda message behind Aequitas' personification, we must bear in mind several doubts and fundamental research questions concerning this issue.

An interesting propaganda topic in both rulers' coinage is that of the empire's provinces.

One characteristic quality of the events of 68–69 A.D. was the role played by the provinces in promoting candidates for the imperial throne.<sup>36</sup> For Galba, who had been governor of the province of Hispania Tarraconensis under late Nero,

30 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 493–495; cf. 121–122.

31 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), Nos. 5; 12; 260; 277; 282; cf. 399; 482–483; 527; 542; 557–558; 568; 580; 615; 618; 652; 666; 676; 694; 709; 758–759.

32 A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Galba's Aequitas" in: N.C., vol. 141 (1981), pp. 20–39.

33 See C.H.V. Sutherland, RIC<sup>2</sup>, pp. 217; 220; cf. p. 230.

34 For a detailed bibliography, see A. Kunisz, *Mennictwo w Cesarstwie Rzymskim w I w.n.e.* [Coinage in the Roman Empire in the First Century A.D.] (Katowice: 1978), pp. 107–118.

35 A. Kunisz, *Mennictwo...*, pp. 115–117.

36 For the role of the provinces in the events of 68–69 A.D., see P.A.L. Greenhalgh, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (London: 1975), p. 20.

the support from Spanish and Gallic provinces proved crucial in his ascendancy. In his coinage, Spain personified appears at regular intervals throughout his reign.<sup>37</sup> The overthrow of Vitellius and the assumption of power in the empire by Vespasian forced the new regime to seek political allies. The memory of Galba must have been vivid in Spanish and Gallic provinces. So much more so far the fact that they had received a number of tax privileges from him. This fact was something that Vespasian – who had been acclaimed by the army in the East – had to reckon with. Yet, in his coinage, the personification of Spain appears only in 69–70 A.D. and is struck only in one type in a local mint in Tarraco.<sup>38</sup> Since it was there that Galba had declared himself the "legate of the Roman people" in 68 A.D., Vespasian's propaganda appears to be making a reference to the event. Later the type was discontinued. Vespasian's propaganda referring to the provinces is limited to recounting his military successes in Judea.

Summarizing this review of the propaganda motifs used on Vespasian's coins and borrowed from Galba's coinage, it is thus important to stress a number of essential points.

First, we need to remember that C.M. Kraay's<sup>39</sup> research on Galba's bronze coinage finally refuted the belief current in early twentieth-century literature that a number of this emperor's propaganda motifs was struck on Vespasian's order after Galba's death. The striking resemblance between the themes on the coins of both rulers must therefore be reinterpreted. One of Vespasian's most urgent propaganda tasks was to create an image of the new ruler and his closest family (especially sons Titus and Domitian). Vespasian himself, too, needed sufficient legitimacy for his power. Vespasian had ascended to power in the second half of 69 A.D. as a result of the developments of 68/69 A.D. This fact required the emperors's propaganda to refer to the still vivid memory of the civil war and its consequences.

We might risk claiming that out of the emperors of 68–69 A.D., the person politically the closest to Flavius was, despite some reservations, none other than Galba.<sup>40</sup> Hence it seems understandable that Vespasian should take up at least some propaganda motifs in Galba's coinage. Moreover, in the first years of his reign, Vespasian made use of the mints previously working for Galba.

The above examples of the reception of Galba's propaganda motifs in Vespasian's coinage have clear chronological and thematic limitations.

A lion's share of the examples cited date from 69–73 A.D. The reference, however, is to the events of 68–69 A.D. as they echo the heated political propaganda of the time.

Among the motifs that were continued throughout Vespasian's principate are only those that referred to the ruler's personal qualities and virtues. This theme, as more universal and topical, was constantly broadened by original designs developed under Vespasian.

37 RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1 (Galba), Nos. 1–3; 19–21; 50;; 86; 144; 155; 190–193; 225–226; 515.

38 RIC, vol. 2 (Vespasian), No. 256.

39 C.M. Kraay, *The Aes Coinage...*, pp. 47–50; cf. C.H.V. Sutherland, RIC<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1, pp. 222–224.

40 Cf. J. Gagé, *Vespasien...*, pp. 292–293; 296–297.

## Motywy propagandowe Galby na monetach Wespazjana

### Streszczenie

Jedną z najistotniejszych cech propagandy, lansowanej na monetach cesarza Wespazjana, było szerokie wykorzystywanie motywów i haseł stosowanych uprzednio przez jego poprzedników, w tym i cesarza Galbę. Stosunek Wespazjana do Galby i jego rządów jest w świetle źródeł literackich dość niejasny. W tej sytuacji niezastąpionym źródłem jego rekonstrukcji staje się mennictwo obu władców.

Na szczególną uwagę zasługuje analiza przesłania propagandowego personifikacji Libertas, Romi, Concordii, Pax, Honos et Virtus, Marsa, Victorii i Aequitas.

Analiza wspomnianych motywów w mennictwie Galby i Wespazjana nasuwa kilka zasadniczych spostrzeżeń.

W pierwszym rzędzie recepcja motywów propagandowych Galby na monetach Wespazjana jest wyraźnie ograniczona ramami chronologicznymi i tematycznymi.

Znakomita większość przedstawionych przykładów powtórzeń w mennictwie Wespazjana odnosi się do lat 69–73 po Chr. Ich tematyka zaś jednoznacznie odnosi się do wydarzeń lat 68–69 po Chr. i jest echem bardzo intensywnej propagandy politycznej tego okresu.

W późniejszym okresie w propagandzie na monetach Wespazjana dominującą pozycję zdobyczą motywów i hasła oryginalne.

Można jednak zaryzykować twierdzenie, że spośród cesarzy lat 68–69 po Chr. postacią politycznie najbliższą Wespazjanowi był właśnie Galba. Stąd też wydaje się zrozumiały fakt powtórnego użycia przez Wespazjana przynajmniej niektórych motywów propagandowych mennictwa Galby.