



# THE DENARII OF FAUSTUS

For the son of Lucius Cornelius Sulla, a notorious Roman general and dictator, five silver coins are an enduring legacy.

**F**AUSTUS CORNELIUS Sulla was the only surviving son of the Roman general and dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla and his fourth wife, Caecilia Metella. Sulla was notorious (or renowned, depending on your perspective) as the first Roman general to cross the city limits with his army and for his conservative reforms of the Roman constitution.

Faustus was born sometime prior to 86 B.C.; the exact date is uncertain. After his father's death in 78 B.C., Faustus and his twin sister, Fausta, were brought up by their guardian, the famous general Lucullus. Plutarch reports that, as a schoolboy, Faustus boasted about his father's exploits; his classmate Cassius, later one of Julius Caesar's assassins, became so exasperated by this that he resorted to boxing young Faustus' ears.

Sometime after 59 B.C., Faustus married Pompeia, the daughter of Pompey the Great, with whom he had at least two children. Through this marriage, he united some of the key actors of the waning days of the Roman Republic, though these distinguished connections perhaps overshadowed

Faustus' considerable accomplishments. He was an *augur* (a priest who studied the flight of birds as a means of determining the will of the gods) and a *quaestor* (an elected Roman financial official.) He was commissioned by the senate to oversee the rebuilding of the *Curia Hostilia* (a senate house), which was burned by rioters in 52 B.C. Faustus accompanied Pompey on the latter's triumphant military campaigns in Asia, and was reported to have been the first to clamber over the walls of the Jewish Temple during Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.

Germane to our purposes here, Faustus also was a moneyer in 56 B.C., one of the college of three officials in charge of the Rome mint that year. As a moneyer, Faustus was responsible for an extraordinary series of silver *denarii* which, with its rich combination of aesthetic appeal, iconographic complexity and historical evocation, is almost without parallel in the numismatic history of the Roman Republic. Four main types and one sub-variety are classified as 426/1 to 426/4 by Michael Crawford in his standard reference *Roman Republican Coinage* (ANA Library Catalog No. BC80.C7r). Each of these denarii honors or alludes to Faustus' father, Sulla, or his father-in-law, Pompey.

The first denarius (Crawford 426/1) is illustrated in Figure 1. The obverse portrays Diana, goddess of the hunt and the moon, with a crescent moon above and, behind her, the augural staff known as a *lituus* (a crooked wand used to delineate a ritual space in the sky through which birds might



▲ **FIGURE 2:** The obverse depiction of Hercules could allude to Sulla's victories in North Africa.

Actual Size: 19mm

pass). To the right is the inscription FAVSTVS. The reverse depicts the most celebrated scene from Sulla's early career as an officer in the army of Gaius Marius, before the two became bitter enemies. Represented is the surrender of Jugurtha, ruler of the North African kingdom of Numidia, to Sulla in 106 B.C.

This coin type details the scene depicted on Sulla's signet ring. Sulla is seated in the center; to his left, Bocchus, ruler of Mauretania, kneels in supplication, extending an olive branch as a sign of peace. Despite being Jugurtha's father-in-law, Bocchus had betrayed Jugurtha to Sulla. Jugurtha himself kneels behind Sulla, his status as a captive rather than a supplicant made clear by his hands tied behind his back. Jugurtha was brought to Rome and paraded through the streets as part of Marius' triumph; eventually he died of starvation in a Roman prison in 104 B.C.

To the right of this complex scene is the inscription FELIX (meaning "lucky"), adopted by Sulla as part of his name. The inclusion of FELIX in this context is, in fact, anachronistic, as Sulla did not add this name for nearly a quarter century after Jugurtha's



▲ **FIGURE 1:** The obverse of this denarius of Faustus depicts the goddess Diana, and the reverse shows a scene from his father's most celebrated victory—the surrender of Jugurtha. Actual Size: 19mm

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▲ **FIGURE 3:** The goddess Venus is honored on the obverse of this silver denarius, while the reverse represents trophies from Pompey's victories on three continents.

Actual Size: 19.4mm

surrender. By including it here, Faustus makes it clear he intended to celebrate his father's entire career, including his more controversial time as dictator.

The obverse of Figure 2 (Crawford 426/2) portrays Hercules wearing a diadem and lion skin with the inscription FEELIX to the left. Hercules' associations with North Africa are many. For example, his eleventh labor—the theft of golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides—takes place in North Africa. Presumably, his appearance on this coin is another allusion to Sulla's success in North Africa.

The reverse again shows Diana, holding the augural lituus and the reins of a two-horse chariot called a *biga*. Two stars and a crescent moon can be seen above the horses, with a third star below. At the bottom is the moneyer's name, FAVSTVS. Sulla was known to be especially devoted to Diana, perhaps because of the time he spent in Ephesus, where she (as Artemis) was the object of a prominent cult. The lituus here and on the preceding coin is perhaps an allusion to Faustus' augurship, although Sulla held that priestly position as well.

The obverse of Figure 3 (Crawford 426/3) depicts Venus, Sulla's protective goddess par excellence. Behind her head are a scepter and the inscription S·C, the standard Roman abbreviation of *senatus consultum*, meaning "by decree of the Senate." The letters' presence on this and the coins shown in Figure 4, combined with the absence of Faustus' monogram on one variety (and some other considerations), has led some scholars to date these coins later than the first two considered here. (This is a real possibility, but the arguments are complex and technical, and can't be properly evaluated in this brief article.) However, Crawford's date of 56 B.C. for all Faustus' coins is accepted here.

The reverse of this type introduces an unmistakable reference to Faustus' father-in-law, Pompey the Great. It features three military trophies between a jug and a lituus; Faustus' monogram appears below the exergual line. The trophies signify the three "triumphs" awarded Pompey in recognition of his victories on three continents—Europe, Africa and Asia. (A Roman triumph was a public celebration held by the Senate to honor a particularly successful military commander.) Pompey commemorated this unprecedented accomplishment on his own signet ring.

The jug and lituus again refer to the augurship, the office held by the three men discussed here. Venus held a special place in the hearts of Pompey and Sulla, the former having commissioned a temple to *Venus Victrix* ("Venus of Victory"), later incorporated into the first

permanent theater in Rome, dedicated by Pompey in 55 B.C.

The fourth and last coin (Crawford 426/4a and 4b) is known in two varieties, illustrated in Figure 4. The two differ in the presence or absence of Faustus' monogram on the obverse. The obverse again shows Hercules, but it is a more youthful depiction than that on Crawford 426/2. He wears a lion-skin headdress on both, but it is much more prominent on the present coin. S·C is located to the left; sometimes Faustus' monogram appears as well. The reverse is "anepigraphic" (i.e., without a legend or inscription) and pictures a globe surrounded by a large wreath and three small ones; below is an *aplustur* (an ornament on a ship's stern) and an ear of grain. The Roman philosopher Cicero had famously praised Pompey as holding the world in his hand. The three small wreaths again signify Pompey's three triumphs; the fourth represents Pompey's right to wear a golden crown and ceremonial clothing at public occasions. The *aplustur* and grain-ear refer to Pompey's control of Rome's grain supply.

When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 B.C. and initiated a civil war with Pompey, Faustus withdrew to Greece with his father-in-law. Faustus fought with some success on Pompey's behalf in Macedonia, but after Pompey's defeat at Pharsalus in 48 B.C. and subsequent assassination on a beach in Egypt, Faustus fled to Cato in the Peloponnese, and together they crossed to Africa.

It was there that Faustus met his death. Ironically, he was ambushed while trying to join his forces with those of Numidian king Juba I and perished in the same kingdom where his father previously had achieved such great success. Faustus died before he could fulfill his promise, and the coins described here serve as his most enduring legacy.



▲ **FIGURE 4:** The two varieties of this denarius display a portrait of Hercules. The one at the left (Crawford 426/4a) includes Faustus' monogram on the obverse. Actual Size: 19mm

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