

THE RITUAL OF SACRIFICE AND ENTERTAINMENT.
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ROMAN *LUDI SAECULARES*
IN COINAGE*

EL RITUAL DEL SACRIFICIO Y EL ESPECTÁCULO.
REPRESENTACIONES DE LOS *LUDI SAECULARES* ROMANOS
EN LAS MONEDAS

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Resumen: Todo el esplendor de los Juegos Seculares (*ludi saeculares*) –celebración religiosa que conmemoraba el inicio de un nuevo *saeculum* (nueva era o periodo de aprox. 110 años) en la antigua Roma– se puso de relieve en objetos y piezas relacionados con la numismática. La abundancia singular de representaciones iconográficas en monedas conmemorativas de los juegos seculares celebrados en la época de Domiciano (*Titus Flavius Caesar Domitianus Augustus*) (88 CE) palía de algún modo la escasez de testimonios epigráficos con relación a tales celebraciones. Sin embargo, las imitaciones de los patrones iniciales pasaron de mano en mano con su reelaboración creativa y adaptación al gusto artístico de la nueva era. La serie de monedas acuñadas con motivo de los juegos seculares (*ludi saeculares*) desvela la quintaesencia de los juegos, que a través de símbolos y representaciones demuestran ser un ritual de sacrificio y de espectáculo. A pesar de las poderosas connotaciones religiosas y políticas, los juegos seculares siguieron siendo lo que habían sido –juegos con un carácter y naturaleza verdaderamente extraordinarios.

Palabras clave: juegos seculares, *ludi saeculares*, acuñación de monedas.

Summary: The full splendour of the secular games (*ludi saeculares*) – a holiday celebrating the onset of a new *saeculum* in ancient Rome, comes to light in the numismatic artefacts. The singular abundance of iconographic representations on coinage commemorating secular games held under Domitian (88 CE) makes up in a way for the shortage of epigraphic testimonies relating to the celebrations. However, the emulation of earlier patterns went hand in hand with their creative reworking and adaptation to the artistic taste of the new era. The series of coins minted on the occasion of *ludi saeculares* reveals the quintessence of the games, which through symbols and depictions are shown to be a ritual of sacrifice and entertainment.

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Despite potent religious and political overtones, secular games remained largely what they had been – games of truly extraordinary nature and character.

Key words: secular games, *ludi saeculares*, coinage.

INTRODUCTION – BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY

Ludi saeculares is a Roman festivity whose origins were a mystery even for the ancients. Valerius Maximus, the author of *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, living during the reign of emperor Tiberius (14-37 CE), observed that the roots of other holidays may be ascertained thanks to their names, while little is known about the *ludi saeculares*.¹

The sentence provided a pretext to quote a myth about a Sabine by the name of Valesius, whose children became severely ill. The augurs told him to go to Tarentum which, as he thought, lay in the faraway Apulia. On his way, he stopped at the norther edge of the Field of Mars and gave his children some water from the Tiber to drink. As it turned out, the place bore the same name as the colony of Sparta, i.e. Tarentum. The miraculously cured children related to their father a dream, in which it was commanded that a ritual in honour of Dis and Proserpina be performed and an offering of black coloured animal be made on a subterranean altar. The rite was to last for three nights.² Valesius, thankful for the saving of his children, decided to erect an altar, but a servant found another, earlier altar below the ground. Valerius Maximus explains that the first time when Romans turned to the to the underground deities, Dis and Proserpina, was when they waged war on Albanians, and the nightly celebrations were also to be performed by Publius Valerius Publicola.³ However, the author of *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* did not account for the origin of the name, nor did he mention the first *ludi saeculares*, which took place in the times of the Empire, in 17 BCE.

A similar story, though enhanced by numerous details and a Sibylline prophecy, was cited by Zosimus – an eyewitness of the downfall of pagan religion and triumph of Christianity, who lived in Constantinople, most likely during the reign of emperor Anastasius I (491-518 CE). In his *New History* (Ἱστορία νέα), Zosimus concludes that such state of affairs was due to neglecting the worship of old gods. He found that the one to blame was emperor Constantine, who failed to celebrate secular games as another *saeculum* elapsed, thus

¹ Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, 2.4.5. Even modern researchers studying *ludi saeculares*, such as Briquel failed to solve the quandary conclusively. See Briquel, D., *Ludi, Lydi jeux romains et origines etrusques*, *Ktema* 11, 1986, 161– 167.

² According to Valerius Maximus, the celebrations were to last three nights, since three children of Valesius were healed (*ibidem*).

³ *Ibidem*.

breaking *pax deorum*. The *saeculum* itself was key to the understanding of *ludi saeculares*. Zosimus explains that the games bear the name of *ludi saeculares* because the period of time between its successive celebrations equals the longest lifespan of a man. Romans after all refer to «century» as «*saeculum*».⁴ The notion had been addressed long before by Censorinus, grammarian and author of the *Birthday Book – De die Natali Liber*, who lived in the 3rd century CE. In chapter seventeen, invoking the ritual writings of the Etruscans and the authority of Varro or Titus Livius, the author deliberates on time and types of centuries (*saeculum naturale* and *saeculum civile*), often citing contradictory views and noting all the nuances and inaccuracies.⁵ In the chapter's introduction, the author finds that *saeculum est spatium vitae humanae longissimum partu et morte definitum*.⁶ It may be surmised that he drew upon the findings of Marcus Terentius Varro from the missing *De scaenicis originibus*. Comparing source accounts, Censorinus demonstrated varied durations of *saeculum naturale* and described the exceedingly interesting method employed by the Etruscans to count centuries. The first *saeculum* was measured by the lifetime of a man who was born on the day when the city and state were established. On the day of his death, one *saeculum* came to an end and another one began, with a person born on that very day. In the case of the Etruscans, the cycle was to last nine centuries, after which a total annihilation was to follow.⁷

The passage of the Roman *saecula* was to be punctuated by *ludi saeculares*, which in the times of the Republic used to be called *ludi tarentini*.⁸ Although the sources mention 100- or 110-year-long centuries, or intervals between the consecutive secular games, there is evidence pointing otherwise. Censorinus noticed significant discrepancies between the dating of Republican *ludi saeculares* by Valerius Antias (1st cent. BCE, only several dozen fragments of his writings have survived) and the testimony of the protocols of the *quindecimviri (quindecimviri sacris faciundis)*, a sacerdotal college responsible for the organisation of centennial games (see Table below). In view of the doubtful credibility of source accounts, one of the researchers posed a provocative question, namely whether the Republican secular games are not merely a confabulation of authors of annals.⁹

Although attempts to dismiss the «historicity» of events which took place during the Republic (and earlier), as well as disputes concerning precise dating seem futile; it is much more important to recognise that this entailed

⁴ Zosimus, *Historia Nea* II 1.1.

⁵ Censorinus, *De Die Natali Liber* XVII 12: *From which it may be glimpsed that the Games were repeated neither every hundred nor even every hundred and ten years.*

⁶ Censorinus, *De Die Natali Liber* XVII 2.

⁷ Censorinus, *De Die Natali Liber* XVII 5-6.

⁸ See Jaako Aronen, *Il culto arcaico nel Tarentum a Roma*, *Arctos* 23, 1989, pp. 19-39.

⁹ Peter Weiss, *Die Säkularspiele der Republik – eine annalistische Fiktion? Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der kaiserzeitlichen ludi saeculares*, *MDAI(R)* 80, 1973, pp. 205-217;

forging of a memory, creating a tradition, in the spirit of which Augustus organised *ludi saeculares* in 17 BCE, while investing them with an altogether different significance.¹⁰ Augustan *ludi* were purposely set in the Republican tradition, and proclaimed as the fifth games.¹¹

Tab. 1.¹²

	XVviri	Valerius Antias or dependent sources	ther sources
I	298 AUC ¹³ /456 BCE <i>coss. M. Valerius Maximus Lactuca, S. Verginius Tricostus Caeliomontanus</i>	245 AUC/509 BCE <i>coss. P. Valerius Poplicola, S. Lucretius Tricipitinus</i>	250 AUC/504 BCE <i>coss. P. Valerius Poplicola IV, T. Lucretius Tricipitinus II</i> (Plut. Popl.)
II	410 AUC/344 BCE <i>coss. C. Marcius Rutilus III, T. Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus II</i>	408 AUC/346 BCE <i>coss. M. Valerius Corvus II, C. Poetelius Libo Visolus II</i>	406 AUC/348 BCE <i>coss. M. Valerius Corvus, M. Popillius Laenas IV (V ?)</i> (Zos. NH) * the date is highly doubtful as the relevant string of text is flawed
III	518 AUC/236 BCE <i>coss. P. Cornelius Lentulus Caudinus, C. Licinius Varus</i>	505 AUC/249 BCE <i>coss. P. Claudius Pulcher, L. Iunius Pullus</i>	
IV	628 AUC/126 BCE <i>coss. M. Aemilius Lepidus, L. Aurelius Orestes</i>	605 AUC/149 BCE <i>coss. L. Marcius Censorinus, M'. Manilius</i>	608 AUC/146 BCE <i>coss. Gn. Cornelius Lentulus, L. Mummius Achaicus</i> (L.C. Piso, Cass. Hem., Gn. Gell.)

The actions of the princeps and the college of the quindecimviri are fairly well known thanks to an epigraphic artefact¹⁴, which is now found in the Museum at the Baths of Diocletian in Rome. The 169 verses convey a letter from Augustus to the college, *senatus consulta*, a number of decrees as well as a detailed schedule of the games. The text also preserved the names of members of the college and the creator of *Carmen saeculare* – Horace. The

¹⁰ See Bärbel Schnegg-Köhler, *Die augusteischen Säkularspiele*, Archiv für Religionsgeschichte 4, Leipzig 2002.

¹¹ *Fasti Consulares Capitolini 737* [in:] CIL, *Inscriptiones Latinae antiquissimae ad C. Caesaris mortem*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Guilelmo Henzeno, 1863, p. 442;

¹² After Censorinus. The table was included in the typescript of this author's doctoral dissertation entitled *The Idea of the Golden Age and Ludi Saeculares in Ancient Rome*.

¹³ AUC=Ab Urbe Condita – from the foundation of Rome.

¹⁴ CIL VI 32326-32335;32327=Dessau 5050.

song corresponded with the ritual of sacrifice, while its performance by a choir of 27 boys and girls was an integral component of the message that *ludi saeculares* were supposed to communicate. The subsequent games should have taken place after 100 or 110 years, but Claudius organised those in 47 CE, combining the celebrations with the anniversary of the founding of the City. In the case of imperial *ludi saeculares*, one notices a certain duality in the method of counting the centuries. Some followed in the footsteps of Claudius and adhered almost entirely to his chronology: Antoninus Pius (147 CE), who celebrated the 900th anniversary of the foundation of Rome, and Philip the Arab (248 CE), who celebrated the millienium ab Urba condita. The *saeculum* of Augustus was observed by Domitian (88 CE) and Septimius Severus and Caracalla (204 CE) – see Table 2. The discrepancies in the manner of counting the passage of centuries and the fact that they were celebrated «in advance» provoked snide remarks of the ancients. In Book 21 of the *Life of Claudius*, Suetonius wrote:

He (Claudius) also celebrated secular games, asserting that Augustus had been too hasty to give them and had not awaited their legitimate time; yet he himself writes in his own History¹⁵ that, following a long hiatus, Augustus restored them to their proper place having made a most careful calculation of the passing years. Therefore laughter was the response to the voice of the crier, who solemnly invited all to games «which no one had ever seen or would ever see again», as some were still alive who had seen secular celebrations under Augustus, and some actors who then performed were to appear now.

Tacitus spoke in similar vein, being an eyewitness and above all a quindecimvir during Domitian's *ludi saeculares*.¹⁶ It should be noted that questioning the validity of Claudius's games rendered legitimacy to *ludi saeculares* of Domitian's, who took care to have his games remembered. An extensive series of coins was to serve that end.¹⁷

¹⁵ The work in question begins with the words „A pace civili».

¹⁶ Tacitus, *Annales* 11.11.

¹⁷ Some of Domitian's coinage was described and discussed in an 18th-century work by Pierre Rainssant (*Dissertation sur douze medailles des jeux seculaires de l'empereur Domitien*, Versailles 1684).

Table 2.

Date	Ruler	Ritual ¹⁸
737 AUC /17 BCE	Augustus	<i>ludi saeculares</i>
800 AUC/47 CE	Claudius	anniversary of the foundation of Rome and <i>ludi saeculares</i>
841 AUC/88 CE	Domitian	<i>ludi saeculares</i>
900 AUC/147 CE	Antoninus Pius	anniversary of the foundation of Rome and <i>ludi saeculares</i> (?)
957 AUC/204 CE	Septimius Severus and Caracalla	<i>ludi saeculares</i>
1000 AUC/247 or 248 CE	Philip the Arab	anniversary of the foundation of Rome and <i>ludi saeculares</i>

THE RITUAL OF OFFERING PREPARATIONS FOR THE GAMES

The details of *ludi saeculares* given by Augustus (17 BCE) as well as the games of Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla (204 CE) are known from the relatively well preserved fragments of protocols.¹⁹ These particulars, supplemented with the information obtained from numismatic sources amount to a picture of an extraordinarily interesting undertaking, which served to reinforce the authority of the ruler.

Preparations for the games involved the contribution of the so-called *apparitores*.²⁰ Zosimus wrote about them: criers walked everywhere to encourage all to partake in the observances in honour of goddess (?), a celebration they had never seen before nor would ever see.²¹ One of the messengers can be seen on a coin of Marcus Sanquinius, who in 17 BCE held the function of *tresvir monetalis*, a moneyer, along Publius Licinius Stolon and Tiberius Sempronius

¹⁸ List of sources concerning all *ludi saeculares*: Giovanni Battista Pighi, *De ludis saecularibus populi Romani Quiritum*, Amsterdam 1965; Theodor Mommsen, *Commentarium ludorum saecularium quintorum et septimorum*, EE 8, 1891, 617-672.

¹⁹ See Jussi Rantala, *Maintaining Loyalty, Declaring Continuity, Legitimizing Power. Ludi saeculares of Septimius Severus as a Manifestation of the Golden Age* (typescript of doctoral dissertation). Hereinafter I employ the following abbreviations: Acta Aug. = protocol of the fifth secular games – 17 BCE – under Augustus (after Bärbel Schnegg-Köhler, *Die augusteischen Säkularspiele...*) and Acta Sev. – protocol of the seventh secular games – 204 CE, under Septimius Severus and Caracalla.

²⁰ See Suetonius, Claudius 21.

²¹ Zos. II 5. (translated by H. Cichocka).

Gracchus. The obverse of a Roman denarius (RIC I 340, Fig. 1) shows the messenger dressed in a long robe, holding a caduceus in his right hand and a shield embellished with a star in the left, wearing a plumed helmet on his head. The legend states: AVGVST DIVI F LVDOS SAE (*Augustus divi filius, ludos saeculares fecit*). On the reverse, there is a head of Iulius Caesar adorned with a laurel and the Julian Star (*sidus Iulium*), with the following legend: M SANQVINIVS III VIR (*Marcus Sanquinius III vir*).²²



Fig. 1.

In the Greco-Roman world, the caduceus was primarily an attribute of Hermes/Mercury, and stood for reconciliation of dispute, a symbol of peace.²³ On coins, it also functioned as an attribute of Felicitas.²⁴

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Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

A slightly different likeness of the messenger may be found on a coin minted in 88 CE, during the reign of Domitian (Figures 2 and 3). The messenger is represented in motion, with a stick/cane (not a caduceus) in the right hand, a shield with the effigy of Minerva in the left, and a helmet on his head. The legend is as follows: [COS XIII] LVD SAE FEC – under 14th consulship gave secular games.²⁵ The obverse shows the ruler in a laurel and the legend IMP

²² See Ernest Babelon, *Description historique et chronologique des monnaies de la République romaine vulgairement appelées monnaies consulaires*, vol.2, Paris 1886, p. 27..

²³ See RIC II 75, II (2007) 703.

²⁴ RIC 9b, C 37.

²⁵ RIC II (2nd edition 599), RSC 76/77

CAES DOMIT AVG GERM P M TR P VIII, i.e. *Imperator Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunicia Potestate octavum*.²⁶

*

The protocols of centennial games suggest that prior to their commencement people would be handed out *suffimenta*, pieces of bituminous wood, sulphur and tar to make torches, as well as *purgamenta* – cleansing agents. Zosimus described it thus: *in the summer season, several days before the celebrations, the college of the fifteen would sit on the Capitoline hill and in the temple on the Palatine, and distribute among the population objects with which offerings were to be purified*.²⁷ The people collected these cleansing agents and disinfectants before the temple of Jupiter Capitoline, on the Capitoline Hill and before the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill.²⁸ These paraphernalia were also represented on the coins of Augustus and Domitian. The celebrations in 17 BCE were shown on an aureus of Lucius Mescinius Rufus (RIC I 350, Fig. 4). The obverse features the head of Augustus in a laurel wreath, and the legend IMP CAESAR TR POT IIX (*tribunicia potestas* of Augustus for the 8th time). The coin was therefore struck a year after *ludi saeculares* were held. Its reverse shows the ruler sitting on a dais marked with LVD • S and hands out the purifying agents from a container in front of him to two subjects standing next to him. The scene is captioned underneath with AVG SVF P, i.e. *Augustus suffimenta populo (distribuit)*– Augustus distributes *suffimenta* to the people, while the name of the moneyer, L MESCINIUS – *Lucius Mescinius (Rufus)*, was placed above.



Fig. 4.

A similar coin may be found among numismatic artefacts commemorating *ludi saeculares* of emperor Domitian, although it was not minted due to efforts of a *tresvir monetalis* but following the consent of the Senate.²⁹ The head of the

²⁶ *Imperator Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunicia Potestate octavum*.

²⁷ Zosimus 2.5.1.

²⁸ Acta Aug. 30, Acta Sev. II 3-4.

²⁹ RIC II, I 2nd edition 609. BMCR 0428

emperor in a laurel wreath was shown on the obverse, accompanied by the legend IMP CAES DOMIT AVG GERM P M TR P VIII CENS PER P P, which stood for *Imperator Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunicia Potestate octavum, Censor perpetuus, Pater Patriae*.³⁰ The reverse reads COS XIII LVD SAEC – *Consul quartum decimus*, consul for the fourteenth time gave *ludi saeculares*. The emperor is sitting on a raised platform with the inscription SVF P D – *suffimenta populo distribuit*, depicted in the moment of distributing disinfecting agents to two figures, including a child who raises its hands towards the ruler. In the background, a temple with four-column facade may be seen (*tetrastylos*); most probably this was the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, rebuilt by Domitian after the fire of the year 80.³¹ The SC underneath stands for *senatus consultum*, which means that the coin was struck by virtue of a senatorial decree.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

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Another practice taking place several days before the games was *acceptio frugum*, in which the quindecemvirs accepted the gifts of early crops (first fruits). The people deposited it in front of the temples of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Jupiter Tonans on the Capitoline Hill, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill, and the temple of Diana on the Aventine Hill.³² The event was commemorated on one of Domitian's coins³³ (Figures 7 and 8). The legend on the obverse is the same as on the previous coin, just as the head of the emperor in laurels. The reverse shows a member of the quindecemviral college (or the ruler himself) sitting on a podium, receiving first fruits from a subject. The temple with four columns appears in the background yet again. The marking on the dais reads FRVG AC – *fruges accepit* – accepting crops.

³⁰ All coins of Domitian were given an identical or almost identical obverse showing the head of the emperor, therefore I chose not to mention them in each case, merely noting the characteristic at this point.

³¹ Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.53.1-4

³² Acta Aug. 33. *Acceptio frugum* lasted three days – from May 29th to the 31st.

³³ RIC II-1² No. 608



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

MAY 31ST/JUNE 1ST

The proper festivities of *ludi saeculares* began at night as May ended and June began – 17 BCE and 204 CE at the second hour of the night, or 11 PM, in Tarentum. In 17 CE Augustus and Marcus Agrippa made an offering to the Moirai, the Fates, sacrificing nine chilvers (*agnas feminas*) and nine doelings (*capras feminas*) of black colour³⁴ on three altars.³⁵ Domitian proceeded similarly in 88 (though he changed the location of the sacrifice),³⁶ while in 204 the same is certain to have been done by Septimius Severus and Caracalla.³⁷ Unlike in the case of the *ludi saeculares* of Augustus and Septimius Severus, the protocol of the quindecimviral college from the *ludi saeculares* of Domitian has not survived, but this shortage is set off in a way by the wealth of numismatic testimonies.

Some researchers refrain from identifying the temples shown in Domitian's coinage,³⁸ preferring to use such denominations as hexastyle or tetrastyle temple. However the visible detail of the representations suggests something more than merely *scaenae frons*.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

³⁴ Acta Aug. 90-91.

³⁵ Zos. 2.5.3.

³⁶ RIC 621.

³⁷ Acta Sev. 3, 52.

³⁸ Melanie Grunow-Sobociński, *Visualizing ceremony: The design and audience of the Ludi Saeculares coinage of Domitian*, *American Journal of Archaeology* 110. 4, 2006, pp. 581-602

The moment of making the offering to the fates was commemorated on the coin RIC 619 = BMCR 430 (Figures 9 and 10). On the left of the obverse there is the ruler, accompanied by lyre and flute players. There is also the *victimarius*,³⁹ who holds a lamb and a baby goat to be sacrificed. The temple in the background gives rise to considerable doubts, with its façade based on six Corinthian columns and a eagle in the tympanum, as no temple of this magnitude stood in Tarentum, the place where offerings to the Fates were made (by Augustus and Septimius Severus). It should therefore be concluded that the represented temple is the most important religious edifice of the Eternal City, i.e. the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which had been rebuilt by Domitian. The ruler did not begin his *ludi saeculares* in *extremo Campo Martio*, but in the heart of Rome. Incidentally, this was not the only innovation which Domitian introduced into the ritual, since as the coin shows he did not make the offerings *capite velato* (with his head covered).

JUNE 1ST – DAYTIME

On the following day, the sacrificers made the offering of three white bulls to the Jupiter, which took place on the Capitoline Hill (in front of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus)⁴⁰ – «in Capitolium ante aed[em Iovis optimi maximi – – –]». ⁴¹ This sacrificial ritual is also evidenced on a Domitian's coin (Figures 11 and 12).⁴² Five figures are represented on it: the ruler standing to the right of the altar, flute and lyre players, the *victimarius* holding up the head of the bull and the *popae* with a hammer.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.

³⁹ It was a servant who led sacrificial animals. The duty of the servant called *popae* was to stun the animal with a hammer.

⁴⁰ Acta Aug. 103.

⁴¹ Acta Aug. 9.

⁴² RIC II 1, 2nd edition, 625.

JUNE 1ST – NIGHTTIME

The reverse of the coin RIC no. 621 depicts the moment of sacrifice being made on the Tiber (Figures 13 and 14). The figure of Domitian can be seen on the right, as he places the offering on the altar, accompanied by persons playing flute and lyre. Personification of the Tiber is shown at the bottom, while the background reveals two temples, which are argued to prove the existence of temples of Dis and Proserpina on the Field of Mars (in the locus of Tarentum).⁴³ I assume that this illustrated the sacrifice to Eileithyia, who must have been offered 27 consecrated cakes (9 of each of the 3 kinds – *libeis*, *popanis*, *pthoibos*), as no sacrificial animal is to be seen.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

JUNE 2ND – DAYTIME

Protocols from the games given by Augustus and Septimius Severus state that on June 2nd, offerings of two white heifers were made to Juno Regina.⁴⁴ The relevant fragment reads: *in Capitoll[io] inmolavit Iunoni reginae bovem femin[am] propriam Achivo ritu— —*. Juno was a patron of married couples, as well as women who were pregnant, giving birth or in confinement. This is how she is shown in the Sibylline oracle conveyed in the writings of Zosimus: *on that day, women burdened with the yoke of matrimony shall on their knees beseech Hera⁴⁵ before the famed altar of the goddess.*⁴⁶ It is uncertain whether the text refers to the temple of Juno Moneta of the Temple of Capitoline Triad.

On the same day, a choir of 110 matrons sang a prayer to Juno, and the scene was depicted on Domitian's coins (see Figures 15 and 16). The verses of the prayer ran as follows:

Juno the Queen, if a better lot may befall the Roman People, Quirites, we the hundred and ten mothers and wives of the Roman People, Quirites, beseech

⁴³ Filippo Coarelli, *Navalia, Tarentum e la topografia del Campo Marzio meridionale*, QITA 5, 1968, pp. 34-37;

⁴⁴ Acta Aug. 119-122.

⁴⁵ Zosimus changed the names of deities from Roman to Greek.

⁴⁶ Zosimus 2.6.1.

thee imploringly on our knees that you may bring what we plead for, preserve the might and majesty of the Roman people, Quirites, at war as at home, and that the Latins may forever remain in submission⁴⁷, that you may grant eternal safety, victory and health to the Roman People, Quirites, and bestow you favour on the Roman People, Quirites and their legions, safeguard and increase the republic of the Roman People, Quirites, and lend your propitious will to the Roman People, Quirites, to the fifteen men of the sacred ritual, and to us, the hundred and ten mothers and wives who on their knees beseech, pray and entreat.

Iuno regina ast quid est qu[o]d meli[us] siet p[opulo] R[omano] Quiritibus matres familias CX p[opuli] R[omani] Quiritium] nuptae genibus nixae te [– –] precamur oramus obsecramusque uti tu imperium] maiestatemque p[opuli] R[omani] Quiriti[um] duelli domique auxis utique semper Latinus obtemperasit – – –] sempiternam victoriam [valetudinem p[opulo] R[omano] Quiritibus duis faveasque p[opulo] R[omano] Quiritibus legionibus p[opuli] R[omani]

Quiritium remque publi[cam] p[opuli] R[omani] Quiritium salvam serves maioremque faxis, uti sies volens propitia p[opulo] Romano]]

Quiritibus XV vir(is) s(acris) f(aciundis) no[bis] domibus familiis – – matres familias CX p[opuli] R[omani]]

Quiritium nuptae geni[bus] nixae, precamur, oramus, obsecramus.⁴⁸

The obverse of Domitian's coin, just as in other cases, features the likeness of the emperor in a laurel wreath, with the legend: IMP CAES DOMIT AVG GERM PM TR P VIII CENS PER P P. The reverse shows Domitian in a toga and laurels, with his right hand raised (as during *adlocutio*), in a pose called *contrapposto*. The bare feet of the ruler, which symbolized divinity, are a noteworthy element of the representation. Matrons are kneeling with their arms raised at the feet of a temple in the background (with a four-column facade, possibly the temple of Juno Moneta). The legend reads COS XIII LVD SAEC FEC, with and S C struck at the bottom.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.

⁴⁷ Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol.2, Cambridge 1998, p. 142 – translate that fragment as: *the Latins may always be obedient*.

⁴⁸ Acta Aug. 125-131.

JUNE 2ND – NIGHTTIME

Mother Earth was given a pregnant sow— *noctu autem ad Tiberim [suem plenam propriam prodigivam Terrae matri Achivo ritu inmolavit imp(erator)],*⁴⁹ fulfilling the precept conveyed in the Sibylline oracle: *thereupon for Earth (Tellus) to bear fruit you shall slaughter a black hog with a sow.*⁵⁰ The obverse of the coin RIC II 1² 613 (see Figures 17 and 18) is analogous to other coins, but the reverse shows as many as five figures, a harpist, a flute player, a personification of Tellus with cornucopia and the *victimarius* with the pig. In the centre, there is an altar adorned with a garland. The legend reads COS XIII LVD SAEC FECIT, with SC below. Pierre Rainssant erroneously argued that the figure at the bottom is the personification of the Tiber.⁵¹



Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.

JUNE 3RD

The festivities of June 3rd, taking place on the Palatine Hill, celebrated a pair of gods, Apollo and Diana, who received the offering of 27 cakes (just as the goddess of labour Eileithyia). Perhaps this is the scene represented on the coin RIC 623 = BMCRE 434 (Figure 19). The temple façade with its six columns may suggest the Capitoline temple of Jupiter, but the detail on the altar – a laurel tree⁵² would rather indicate that the ritual is performed on the Palatine Hill in front of the temple of Apollo. This would tally with the protocol of *ludi saeculares*.

An important item of the celebrations was singing Horace's *Carmen saeculare* – Acta Aug. 147-149: *sacrificioque perfecto puer. XXVII quibus denuntiatum erat patrimi et matrimi et puellae totidem carmen cecinerunt; eodumque modo in Capitolio, Carmen composuit Q. Horatius Flaccus.*⁵³ Three singers from a choir of 27 girls and 27 boys were represented on another one of Domitian's

⁴⁹ Acta Aug. 134.

⁵⁰ Zos. 2.6.1.

⁵¹ Pierre Rainssant, op. cit.

⁵² Laurel tree was the symbol of Apollo.

⁵³ Acta Aug. 139.



Fig. 19.

coins (Fig. 20).⁵⁴ The children are holding up laurel branches as they walk in a procession from the Palatine to the Capitoline Hill, where they would sing Horace's song yet again. The coin also shows two men : one of them is Domitian, who instead of a globe is rather likely to be holding a rattle, i.e. the *sistrum*.



Fig. 20.



Fig. 21.

This ended the three days and nights of official sacrifices. With respect to the *ludi saeculares* of Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla, there exists an interesting numismatic piece which suggests that Bacchus and Hercules were included among the deities worshipped during *ludi saeculares*. On the obverse, the coin designated as RIC 257 depicts the ruler, with the legend SEVERVS PIVS AVG. The legend on the obverse reads COS III LVDOS SAE-CVL FEC, and shows Liber wearing a leopard skin and Hercules with a club and lion's skin. Given the fact than neither deity is mentioned in the protocol of the secular games of 204 CE , it may be surmised that they were an allusion to the animals which Septimius Severus brought to Rome specially for the games.

⁵⁴ RIC II-1² No. 615.



Fig. 22.

THE RITUAL OF ENTERTAINMENTS

Quite aptly, Paul Veyne observed that *one should bear in mind that in a Greek or Latin text the word «sacrifice» would always imply «feast»*.⁵⁵ Already on the first day of the games, or when the night fell to be precise, the noble matrons would begin *sellisternia*, or banquets in honour of Juno and Diana: *sedibus centumque et X [maltronae quibus denuntiatum erat XV virorum verbis sellisternia habuerunt Iunoni et Dianae dua[bus] sellis positis*.⁵⁶ *Sellisternia* were also held on June 2nd. However, this part of the festivities was not commemorated on coins.

It should not be forgotten that *ludi saeculares* were also a pageant. Stage performances would be held already on the first night of the games (Acta Aug. 100-101)⁵⁷, and every detail of the events was provided for. In his description of *ludi saeculares* given by Augustus, Suetonius wrote: «During the Secular Games, young people of both sexes were not allowed to attend the nightly entertainments without the supervision of an older member of the family».⁵⁸

After the three days and nights of official sacrifices followed by a day's intermission, two weeks of *ludi honorarii* would begin. These included Greek and Roman theatrical performances (*ludi scaenici*), displays of riders and acrobats, chariot races, as well as *venationes* and *lusus Troiae*.⁵⁹ The games attracted crowds of people because of their extraordinary nature, which also meant the opportunity to experience the exotic element. In the protocol, Septimius Severus enumerates animals shown during the games: *leones lea[o] leopardi ursi bisones onagri str[uthiones]*,⁶⁰ while Philip the Arab depicted some of

⁵⁵ *Historia życia prywatnego. I: Od Cesarstwa Rzymskiego do roku tysięcznego*, Paul Veyne (ed.), Wrocław 2005, p. 189.

⁵⁶ Acta Aug. 101-102.

⁵⁷ See Wojciech Muszyński, *Ludi scaenici w igrzyskach wiekowych za Augustusa i Septymiusza Sewera*, *Antiquitas* 13, 1987, pp. 147-161.

⁵⁸ Suetonius, *Augustus* 31, 4.

⁵⁹ Acta Aug. 163-165.

⁶⁰ Acta Sev. V 43.

them on coins: there is a hippopotamus,⁶¹ an elk,⁶² a lion,⁶³ a deer,⁶⁴ or an antelope⁶⁵ (see Figures 23-27).



Fig. 23.

Fig. 24.



Fig. 25.

Fig. 26.



Fig. 27.

The centennial games of Claudius, Antoninus Pius and Philip the Arab were combined, respectively, with the 800th, 900th, and millennial anniversary of the foundation of Rome; a coin of the latter ruler shows therefore the wolf-figure with Romulus and Remus.⁶⁶ The obverse features the bust of Philip the Arab in a radiate crown, with the legend: *IMP PHILIPPVS AVG*, and the

⁶¹ RIC 116b.

⁶² RIC 224 (Philip I)

⁶³ RIC 012.

⁶⁴ RIC 656A var (Asian Mint).

⁶⁵ RIC 021.

⁶⁶ RIC 015.

reverse shows the aforementioned she-wolf with the twins, accompanied by SAECVLARES AVGG / II.



Fig. 28.

Ad futuram rei memoriam

In 17 BCE, the Senate adopted the following resolution:

*Quod C. Silanus co(n)s(ul) v(erba) f(ecit) pe[r]tine[n]te ad **conservandam memoriae** tantae r[eligionis] --- commentarium ludorum] saecularium in colum[nam] aheneam et marmoream inscribi st[---] eo loco ubi ludi futuri s[un]t q[ui] d(e) e(a) r(e) f(ieri) p(lacuerit) d(e) e(a) r(e) i(ta) c(ensuerunt) uti co(n)s(ul) a(lter) a(mbo)ve **ad futuram memoriam** tantae religionis columnam] eheneam et alteram marmoream in quibus commentari[um ludorum] inscriptum sit eo loco ubi ludi futuri sint] lucent praetoribusque q(ui) [a(reario)] p(raesunt) inperent uti redemptoribus ea[m] pecuniam dandam adtribuendam current⁶⁷*

The creation of two columns, one in bronze (*eheneam*) and one in marble (*marmoream*) was intended to perpetuate the memory of *ludi saeculares*. The location where they were erected, i.e. next to the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome, is also a significant one. Werner Eck's conjecture is that the bronze column was probably melted down.⁶⁸ We have access to the fragments of its marble version, which was re-used to prop up the flood wall on the Tiber.⁶⁹ The act of building the columns is also presented on coins minted under Augustus, Domitian and Philip the Arab.

One of the examples is a denarius of Augustus (RIC 354, see Fig. 29) with the obverse featuring the head of the emperor and the legend CAESAR AVGVSTVS TR POT. The reverse shows the so-called *cippus* with the caption: IMP

⁶⁷ Acta Aug. 59-63.

⁶⁸ Werner Eck, *Documents on Bronze: a Phenomenon of the Roman West?* [in:] *Ancient Documents and Their Contexts: First North American Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy*, J. Bodel, N. Dimitrova (eds), Leiden 2014, p. 130.

⁶⁹ See Robert Coates-Stevens, *Epigraphy as spolia. The reuse of inscriptions in early medieval buildings*, PBSR 70, 2002, pp. 275-296.

/ CAES / AVG / LVD / SAEC. The legend reads: L MESCINIVS RVFVS III
VIR / IMP / CAES / AVG / LVD / SAEC / XV – SF.



Fig. 29.

On a Domitian's denarius, the *cippus* is surrounded with a laurel wreath.⁷⁰



Fig. 30.

Another denarius of the same emperor represents a much more interesting case:⁷¹ the reverse shows a column with the inscription: COS XIII LVD SAEC FEC, and a herald bearing a shield (with the effigy of Minerva).



Fig. 31.

⁷⁰ RIC 0604.

⁷¹ RIC 0601.

In turn, the coins of Philip the Arab depict respectively a *cippus* without inscription,⁷² a low column⁷³ and a higher column⁷⁴ (Figures 32-34).



Fig. 32.

Fig. 33.



Fig. 34.

CONCLUSION

The effort put into ensuring that the memory of *ludi saeculares* lived on for centuries to come, proves how important they were for the ancients. The games were mentioned in historical sources, of which only a part has survived until today. The celebrations were documented in official protocols and displayed for view in a public place, but the language of images was used as well.⁷⁵ The ancients recognised the significance of coin in disseminating specific ideas and commemorating events,⁷⁶ which is well manifested in the coinage associated with *ludi saeculares*.⁷⁷ A particular wealth of iconography has been preserved for the games which took place in 88; fortunately the

⁷² RIC 202b.

⁷³ RIC 024(c)

⁷⁴ RIC 265 b.

⁷⁵ See Tonio Hölscher, *The language of images in Roman art*, translated by Anthony Snodgrass and Anne-Marie Künzl-Snodgrass, Cambridge u. a. 2004,

⁷⁶ See discussion on the importance of coins in Barbara Levick, *Propaganda and the imperial coinage*, *Antichthon*, Vol. 16, 1982, pp. 104-116; Ada Cheung, *The political significance of Roman Imperial coin types*, *Schweizer Münzblätter* 48049. 191, 1998-1999, pp. 53-61 et alia.

⁷⁷ See Victoria Györi, *The Aurea Aetas and Octavianic / Augustan Coinage*, *OMNI NO* 8, 11, 2014, p. 36-56.

ludi saeculares of Augustus, Septimius Severus and Philip the Arab are also represented in several artefacts. It may be surmised that Domitian imitated the patterns struck by the first princeps, though he did not create faithful copies. He interpreted the games of Augustus, adapting them to his own notions, as evidenced by the effigy of Minerva on the shield of the messenger. One should also note the detailed depictions of architecture, even attempts at showing perspective and visualisations of almost all offerings made to the gods. Domitian's coinage relating to *ludi saeculares* conveys the quintessence of games as a ritual of sacrifice. As regards the ritual of entertainments, much importance was attached to the representation of the exotic component, which was the key attraction of the games combined with the anniversaries of the foundation of Rome.

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