



Aureus depicting the head of Augustus and the Clipeus Virtutis (19 BCE)

Aureus depicting the head of Augustus and the Clipeus Virtutis (19 BCE)_obverse.jpg



[1]

[Aureus depicting the head of Augustus and the Clipeus Virtutis \(19 BCE\) reverse.jpg](#) [2]



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Denomination: Aureus

Date: 19 BCE

Material: gold

Mint: *Hispania. Colonia Patricia* (modern Cordoba)?

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Münzkabinett. Inventory no. RÖ 4675.

Name of Ruler: Augustus

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Bare head of Augustus looking right

Inscription: CAESAR AVGVSTVS

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Round shield inscribed CL(IPEUS) V(IRTUTIS), with S P Q R in corners between two military standards

Inscription: SIGNIS RECEPTIS

Diameter (mm): 20.10mm

Weight (g): 7.90g

Commentary:

RIC I², Augustus, Spain, no. 85a, p. 47.

This *aureus* probably minted in Spain, perhaps at *Colonia Patricia* (modern Cordoba), around 19 BCE, depicts on the obverse the head of Augustus and on the reverse the *clipeus virtutis* that had been awarded by the Senate to Augustus in 27 BCE. The original golden *clipeus virtutis* was displayed in the Roman *Curia*, however copies of that shield were made and probably displayed in many cities throughout the Empire. One of these copies, dated from 26 BCE, has been found in Arles; it must have been part of a local monument to Augustus. The text of the inscription reads: *Senatus populusque Romanus Imp(eratori) Caesari divi f(ilio) Augusto co(n)s(uli) VIII dedit*



clipeum virtutis clementiae iustitiae pietatis erga deos patriamque, that is: “The Senate and the people of Rome gave to Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of a god, during his eighth consulship, a shield of virtue, clemency, justice and piety to the gods and the fatherland” (see [Shield of Augustus \(AE 1952, 165\)](#) [4]). As rightly recalled by Paul Zanker, the *clipeus virtutis* became “something of a mystic symbol” as “those qualities singled out for praise came to define what the Senate expected in a virtuous ruler and how that ruler defined himself” (Zanker, *The Power of Images*, p. 95). We will return later to how the association of the *clipeus virtutis* with the military symbols or leitmotif appearing on the reverse of the type presented here originated.

It is first important to recall that many coins minted with the image of Augustus and bearing on their reverse a representation of the *clipeus virtutis* associated with the legend C V – as the coin presented here – have been identified by numismatists as groups of gold and silver coinage produced in Hispania, mostly in 19-18 BCE. To justify their view, they quote the singularity of the imperial portrait in all these coins, but also the fact that there exist many *aes* produced in various Spanish cities during the Augustean period that present the same portrait idioms as the gold and silver types previously quoted (for the bibliography see RIC I², p. 25-26). Following this interpretation, the weight of these gold and silver coins and the image represented have made it possible to distinguish two groups of coins, probably minted in two different mints in *Hispania*. The first mint, possibly settled at *Colonia Caesaraugusta* (today Saragossa), may have produced coins between 19 and 18 BCE, coins that commemorated the successes of Augustus’s policy against the Parthians and the Armenians. The second mint, possibly settled at *Colonia Patricia* (today Cordoba), presents a more important production, dated between ca. 20 and 17/16 BCE, that refers to Parthia and Armenia, but also to the *Ludi Saeculares* held in 17 BCE. On many reverses of these coins probably produced in these Spanish mints, the *clipeus virtutis* is depicted in various situations; the most common type being the one in which it is held by a flying Victory (see for instance [RIC I², Spain, no. 47a, p. 44](#) [5]).

The association of the image of the *clipeus virtutis* with victory is also present on the reverse of the coin presented here. In fact, the legend *signis receptis* can be translated as “the military standards (having been) taken back”. It certainly alludes to the fact that the standards lost by Crassus at the battle of Carrhae had been restored to the Romans in 20 BCE, following negotiations with the Parthian ruler, King Phraates IV. This episode is mentioned in the *Res Gestae*: “The Parthians I compelled to restore to me the spoils and standards of three Roman armies, and to seek as suppliants the friendship of the Roman people. These standards I deposited in the inner shrine which is in the Temple of Mars Ultor” ([Augustus, Res Gestae 29](#) [6]). This success was celebrated by architectural and sculptural programs, as for instance by the erection of the Parthian Triumphal Arch (see [Temple of Divus Iulius and the Actian and Parthian Triumphal Arches \(29 BCE\)](#) [7]), but also through coins produced in various mints of the Empire. For instance, among other types bearing also the legend SIGNIS RECEP(T)IS, there are *cistophori*, *aurei* and *denarii* minted in 19-18 BCE at Pergamum (RIC I², no. 508-510, p. 82 for the type representing a triumphal arch; no. 521-522, p. 83 for the type representing a Capricorn; no. 524-526, p. 83 for the simple legend SIGNIS PARTHIC RECEP(T)IS). In Hispania, aside from the type presented here and its variants that may have been produced in the second mint only, that is possibly *Colonia Patricia* (see the *aurei* and the *denarii* dated around 19 BCE in RIC I², Spain, no. 85a-87b, p. 47), there is another type bearing also the legend SIGNIS RECEP(T)IS. It represents on its reverse Mars helmeted and cloaked, standing front, and two military standards (type minted both at *Caesaraugusta* and *Colonia patricia*, see for instance [RIC I², Spain, no. 60, p. 46](#) [8]). These types can also be put in relation to another one, also possibly produced in *Colonia Patricia* around 18-17 BCE, which represents a triumphal arch with the legend CIVIB(us) ET SIGN(is) MILIT(aribus) A PA-RT(his) RECVP(eratis), “The citizens and the military standards (having been) taken back from the Parthians” ([Denarius of Augustus depicting the Parthian triumphal arch \(18-17 BCE\)](#) [9]). All these examples show that the numismatic production of these Spanish mints in the years 19-17/16 BCE was clearly focused on the celebration of Augustus’s successful negotiations with the Parthians that led to the restorations of the lost Roman standard.

Finally, one may consider why these coins had been minted in Hispania at that time, and why iconographic programs – such as the one presented on our coin – had been chosen. In 26-25 BCE, Augustus took part in military operations against two peoples who lived in the North-West of Hispania, the Cantabri and the Astures, who caused significant unrest. This military campaign was the first for the new *princeps* and *imperator* and it had been the one that he led in person as Augustus (Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique*, p. 41-42). After the Roman legions achieved various victories, Augustus went back to Rome in 24 BCE. Yet, other campaigns had then been necessary to definitively defeat the Cantabri and Astures, which happened only during the summer 19 BCE. It has thus been estimated that, at the peak of mobilisation, there must have been no fewer than seven legions that took part in the military operations (Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique*, p. 46). So, it is easy to imagine that in 19 CE, and even in 18 BCE, that is precisely at the time the series of gold and silver coins commemorating the Parthian successes were minted in the Spanish mints, various Roman legions were still stationed in Hispania and that payments in gold and silver were then required for them (for that perspective see RIC I², p. 26). Thus, the coin presented here could be



interpreted as having been minted, as numerous series of coins bearing the same message and minted in one of these Spanish mints, in order to pay these soldiers. Moreover, one particularity of this coinage produced in Hispania is that most of these types produced in the years 20-17/16 BCE are the only ones – compared with the other coins produced at that time in the other parts of the Empire – to use so frequently the image of the *clipeus virtutis* to celebrate the diplomatic success with Parthia and the restoration of the Roman standards. To understand this association, it is important to recall that the original golden *clipeus virtutis* had been displayed in 27 BCE in the Roman *Curia*, and was thus associated with the statue and altar of Victory that had been also settled in that very place after the victory at Actium. As stated by Paul Zanker: “The result [of this association] is that in the future the shield was almost always combined with the goddess of victory and became a symbol of perpetual and god-given right to rule” (Zanker, *The Power of Images*, p. 97). This interpretation is totally relevant to interpret the message conveyed by our coin.

To conclude, as we have said, the coin presented here, like many gold and silver coins produced in Hispania around 19 BCE, may have been produced to pay the soldiers who served in the legions then present in Hispania. To celebrate the *princeps* and *imperator*, there must have been no better choice than to commemorate the recent diplomatic success with Parthia that had led to the restoration of the lost Roman standards, a restoration praised in the legend of the coin but also through the representation of the standards themselves. The association of the *clipeus virtutis* with that scene is typical of the new Augustean pictorial language consisting in associating the honorary tokens voted to Augustus in 27 BCE with recent “symbols of victory of salvation” (Zanker, *The Power of Images*, p. 97). The coin presented here also fitted in an official propaganda that consisted of celebrating the diplomatic agreement between Rome and Parthia in 20 BCE as a real military victory, but also in implicitly praising Augustus through a symbol, the *clipeus virtutis*, embodying the idea that he was and remained the perpetual saviour and ruler of Rome.

Keywords in the original language:

- [virtus](#) [10]
- [clipeus](#) [11]
- [signum](#) [12]

Thematic keywords:

- [Augustus](#) [13]
- [shield](#) [14]
- [Roman army](#) [15]
- [Roman victory](#) [16]
- [virtue](#) [17]
- [bravery](#) [18]
- [justice](#) [19]
- [piety](#) [20]
- [clemency](#) [21]
- [eagle](#) [22]
- [Parthia](#) [23]
- [military standards](#) [24]

Bibliographical references: Le Roux, Patrick, [La péninsule ibérique aux époques romaines \(fin du IIIe s. av. n.è. – début du VIe s. de n.è.\)](#) [25] (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010)

Zanker, Paul, [The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus](#) [26] (Ann Arbor (Mich.): University of Michigan Press, 1990)

Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Shield of Augustus \(AE 1952, 165\) \[4\]](#)

Marble copy of the 'clipeus aureus' (Golden Shield) of Augustus.



- [Read more about Shield of Augustus \(AE 1952, 165\)](#) [4]

Numismatic item

[Denarius of Augustus depicting the Parthian triumphal arch \(18-17 BCE\)](#) [9]

- [Read more about Denarius of Augustus depicting the Parthian triumphal arch \(18-17 BCE\)](#) [9]

Architecture

[Temple of Divus Iulius and the Actian and Parthian Triumphal Arches \(29 BCE\)](#) [7]

[Reconstruction of the Temple of Divus Iulius](#) [27]



[The Temple of Divus Iulius](#) [28]



[Reverse of a denarius depicting the Actian Arch \(16 BCE\)](#) [29]



- [Read more about Temple of Divus Iulius and the Actian and Parthian Triumphal Arches \(29 BCE\)](#) [7]

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- [2] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/aureus-depicting-head-augustus-and-clipeus-virtutis-19-bcereverse.jpg>
- [3] http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/aureus_depicting_the_head_of_augustus_and_the_clipeus_virtutis_19_bce_reverse.jpg?itok=MZhsP6KU
- [4] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/shield-augustus-ae-1952-165>
- [5] [http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1\(2\).aug.47A](http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1(2).aug.47A)
- [6] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/augustus-res-gestae-divi-augusti-general-background>
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- [28] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/temple-divus-iulius>
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