



## Denarius depicting the head of Venus and Aeneas leaving Troy (47/46 BCE)

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[1]

**Denomination:**

Denarius

**Date:** 47 BCE to 46 BCE

**Material:**

Silver

**Mint:**

Africa

Moneyer: Julius Caesar

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):**

[British Museum. Registration number: R.8923](#) [2].

**Name of Ruler:**

Roman Republic

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Head of Venus right, wearing diadem. Border of dots.

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Aeneas left, carrying palladium in right hand and Anchises on left shoulder; on right, inscription. Border of dots.

Inscription: CAESAR

**Weight (g):** 3.93g

**Commentary:**

RRC 458/1, p. 471.

This denarius, minted in 47/46 BCE, depicts on the obverse the head of Venus and on the reverse Aeneas leaving Troy burning, carrying palladium in right hand and Anchises on left shoulder. This coin was minted in the middle of the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey, albeit after the latter's defeat and death. Already in 50 BCE, the Senate commanded Caesar to return to Rome because his term as governor was over. In answer to that, in 49 BCE, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with only one legion. This act resulted in a civil war between Caesar and the *optimates*, who chose Pompey as their leader. Afterwards Caesar defeated Pompey's allies in Spain and returned to the East, to confront the latter in Illyria. Later on, Caesar defeated Pompey at Pharsalus, in Greece, and pursued him to Egypt, arriving soon after the murder of the general. There, he supported Cleopatra VII against her younger brother Ptolemy XIV. Caesar decided to bestow the pharaoh's crown on the head of Cleopatra in 47 BCE, after having successfully defeated her opponents. After the defeat of the King of Pontus, who had sided with Pompey, by 46 BCE, Caesar advanced to Africa to deal with Cato, and others supporters of the *optimates'* rule. Possibly the coin was minted on the spot to pay the soldiers who fought on African soil. At that time Julius Caesar had witnessed in person all the pageantry of the Hellenistic monarchy in Ptolemaic Egypt, as well as the



Ptolemies' claim to divinity. Contrary to the previous warlords such as Sulla, who claimed a close bond with *Venus Felix*, and to his rival Pompey, who claimed a close bond with *Venus Victrix*, but without pretending to descend from the goddess, Julius Caesar claimed much more. Perhaps drawing on the example of the Hellenistic monarchies of the Greek East, Caesar emphasized the divine ancestry of his family, the *gens Iulia*. They claimed descent from the goddess Venus and her son, the Trojan hero Aeneas, who saved his father from the fall of Troy and, according to the legend, fled to Italy. The Romans traced their history back to him. Caesar's claim was accepted by his adopted son Octavian and it became one of the main vehicles of imperial propaganda. The *Aeneid*, written by Virgil, as well as various coins minted by Octavian/Augustus, and his well-known portrait, the statue of Augustus of Prima Porta, convey the idea of a close relationship between the *gens Iulia* and Venus. This denarius suggests that the Roman Republic had to be identified with the personal power of Julius Caesar, by then also *dictator*, or supreme magistrate of the Roman Republic.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that this coin also forwards an ideal of *pietas*, by referring to the *pietas* of Aeneas towards his father, as well as to the *pietas* of Julius Caesar towards his ancestors, the goddess Venus and Aeneas himself. The idea of *pietas* consisted in "fulfilling one's responsibilities to anyone or anything to whom one was bound in any way. The fulfillment of these responsibilities could be motivated by the requirements of duty or obligations, in which case *pietas* was often overlapped with the notion of *officium*, *fides*, or *religio*, or by the deeper sentiments of love and affection" (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West*, p. 71). Later on, in the early imperial period, according to Carlos Noreña, *pietas* was one of the most important virtues displayed on Roman imperial coinage.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Caesar](#) [3]

Thematic keywords:

- [Julius Caesar](#) [4]
- [Roman constitution](#) [5]
- [dictator](#) [6]
- [Venus](#) [7]
- [Aeneas](#) [8]
- [Anchises](#) [9]
- [Roman piety](#) [10]
- [genealogy](#) [11]
- [lineage](#) [12]
- [Roman destiny](#) [13]
- [palladium](#) [14]

**Bibliographical references:** Foss, Clive, [Roman Historical Coins](#) [15] (London: Seaby, 1990)  
Crawford, Michael, [Roman Republican Coinage](#) [16] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974)  
Gruen, Erich S., [The Last Generation of the Roman Republic](#) [17] (Oakland (Ca.) : University of California Press, 1995)  
Goldsworthy, Adrian, [Caesar: Life of a Colossus](#) [18] (New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 2008)  
Noreña, Carlos F., [Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power](#) [19] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

**Realized by:**

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- [3] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/caesar>
- [4] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/julius-caesar>
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