

A 'Quotation' from the Aeneid on the coinage of Carausius

Sir George MacDonald¹ observed that the earliest known 'clear example of a metrical inscription on coins' occurs thus on certain rare eleventh century Byzantine pieces: Παρθένε σοι πολύλαυε δε ἤλπικε πάντα κατορθοί. He also observed, as many others have done, that the legend EXPECTATE VENI used on certain coins issued by Carausius, usurper in Britain 286-293, is an unmistakable reminiscence of 'Quibus Hector ab oris *expectate venis?*' from the *Aeneid*.² As far as I am aware every commentator³ on the coinage of this usurper sees this legend as a direct derivative from the *Aeneid* passage. Carausius' personal background, such as we can infer from hostile sources⁴, in no way suggests that he was himself a man versed in Roman literature. The area of his usurpation at its greatest extent was still very much on the fringe of the Empire. Whence the Vergilian influence?

Within Carausius coinage this legend occurs on a special group of silver pieces and as such must be seen in the context of other pieces in that group. ADVENTVS AUG also occurs and many scholars have seen in these two legends together a reason for dating the issue to the very beginning of the reign. Webb⁵ rightly argues against this view, but no one seems to have considered the more likely occasion of such an issue in the middle of the reign. It is clear by inference from a contemporary source⁶ and other evidence, that Carausius gained a significant maritime advantage over Maximian in 289 which led to the strengthening of his influence along the Gallic coast.

There is thus a historical context for these legends, ADVENTVS AUG; CONCORDIA MILITVM; FELICITAS AUG (with type of warship) ROMANO RENOVA and EXPECTATE VENI, as propaganda. How does Vergil fit into this? All the other legends had been used by various previous emperors in appropriate contexts. Where has Carausius found this new legend if not indeed in the *Aeneid*? The Vergilian context, however, hardly fits with the image Carausius was concerned to promote. Hector appears to Aeneas in a dream. He is 'maestissimus'; he weeps copiously; he bears all the marks of his suffering at the hands of Achilles. This is not the Hector of old, and when Aeneas asks him what all this means his answer bodes doom from the start, 'Heu fuge ... hostis habet muros.' Carausius' self assertive propaganda cannot have been designed to associate his ADVENTVS with that of Hector.

A consideration of various other occurrences of one or other of the forms of 'expectatus'⁷ in classical literature shows that it is often found in association with some part of *venio* or *advenio*. I give some such passages with the relevant words underlined.

- (a) Plautus. Mostellaria 440 sq.
Theop. Triennio post Aegypto *advenio* domum.
Credo *expectatus* *veniam* familiaribus.
Tran. Nimio edepol ille potuit *expectatio*
venire, qui te nuntiaret mortuom.

- (b) Cicero. Ad Fam. IV. 10.
Cura igitur, ut quam primum *venias*. *Venies*, enim, mihi, crede, *expectatus*, neque solum nobis, id est, tuis, sed prorsus omnibus.
- (c) *ibid.* X. 5.
... ut ad me mihi *expectatissimae* literae preferrentur.
- (d) *ibid.* XVI. 7.
... ad nos amantissimos tui *veni*. Nemo nos amat qui te non diligit. Carus omnibus, *expectatusque venies*.
- (e) *id.* ad AH. IV. 4.
... sed ut hoc ipsum significarem, mihi tuum *adventum* suavissimum, *expectatissimumque* esse.
- (f) Hirtius. D.B.G. VIII. 51.
Exceptus est Caesaris *adventus* ab omnibus municipiis et coloniis incredibili honore atque amore. Tum primum enim *veniebat* ab illo universae Galliae bello. Nihil relinquebatur, quod ad ornatum portarum, itinerum, locorumque omnium qua Caesar iturus erat excogitari poterat. Cum liberis omnis multitudo obviam procedebat, hostiae omnibus locis immolabantur, tricliniis stratis fora templaque occupabantur, ut vel *expectatissimi* triumphii laetitia praecipere posset.

To find ‘adventus’, ‘expectatus’ and *venire* together might, thus, seem more natural, less outstanding, and prompted by nothing more than normal Latin word association. If so why had none of Carausius’ predecessors had the same idea? Britain was far from the cultural centre of the empire but there is archaeological evidence that some of her inhabitants, at least in the fourth century, were well acquainted with the *Aeneid*. The Low Ham⁸ mosaic illustrates a variety of scenes from the earlier books but has no inscription. A villa at Otford, in Kent has a wall painting depicting part of a scene from the *Aeneid* together with a fragmentary inscription: BINA MANV L[ATO CRISPANUS HASTILIA FERRO].⁹ It is thought¹⁰ ‘that one room at least of this villa was adorned with wall paintings illustrating the story of Aeneas, accompanied by inscribed quotations from Vergil’s text.’ There is also the mosaic in the villa at Lullingstone, in Kent, which, although it does not depict a scene from the *Aeneid*, carries an unmistakably Vergilian allusion in its inscription.¹¹ Mosaics came into fashion again quite suddenly not long after Carausius’ time: there is no reason to suppose that the *Aeneid* did likewise and indeed it seems certain that there must have been a certain British familiarity with the work long before Carausius’ usurpation.

As there seems undoubtedly to have been a third century Vergilian 'presence' in Britain, the *Aeneid* passage must have had some influence on this choice of words. On the coins it has a thoroughly unVergilian context, as Carausius' purpose was not to publicise his knowledge of Vergil but to publicise his latest success. Seen in this light it falls in with the rest of the issue.

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NOTES

1. G. Macdonald, 'Coin Types: Their Origin and Development BC 700-1604 AD.', P.243.
2. *Aeneid* II lines 282-283.
3. e.g. H. Mattingly *C.A.H.* Vol. XII p.333, "It is a notable fact that the only quotation from Vergil on a Roman coin occurs on the coinage of this low born Menapian rebel".
4. He is "Menapiae civis", A. Vict. Caes. XXXIX and "vilissime natus" Eutr. *Brev. Hist.* IX 21.
5. 'Roman Imperial Coinage', Mattingly and Sydenham eds., Vol. V pt. 2 pp.439-440 which also gives his ingenious but, I think, unconvincing explanation.
6. *Pan. Max. Dict.* cap. XI sq. delivered at Trèves in 289.
7. For the spelling of this word on the coins see my forthcoming article on 'The Coinage of Carausius as a Source for Vulgar Latin Forms in Britain' in *Britannia*.
8. *JRS.* XXXVI 1946 p.142 pl. 11 and J.M.C. Toynbee. "Art in Britain Under The Romans" pp.241-246: pl. LVIII.
9. *Aeneid* I 313 and XII 165.
10. cf Toynbee op. cit. p.220.
11. *ibid.* pp.263-264: pl. LXa.