

4.1 SOCIETY – GENDER



Type: silver denarius emitted by Lucius Hostilius Saserna
Chronology: 48 BC

On the left, female head with loose hair. Better preserved coins also show a *carnyx* (a Gaulish war trumped with the head of a dragon) to the left of the head.

On the right: image of Artemis holding a sceptre and a deer, and inscription HOSTILIVS (on the right) and SASERNA (barely visible on the left).

The coin was emitted by Lucius Hostilius Saserna, a political friend of Julius Caesar. It refers to Caesar's military victories in Gaul, by presenting the image of a woman with a Gaulish attribute such as the *carnyx* on the left and the siege and capture of the Greek city of Massalia (ancient Marseille), in 49 BC during Caesar's Civil War. The victory over Massalia is symbolized by the image of Artemis, as an important sanctuary to the goddess (Artemis Ephesia) was present in the city (Strabo, *Geography* 4. 1. 4).

The same coin offers two contrasting images of female figures: defeated "barbarian" people (as the Celts were reputed by the Romans) are represented by a woman in emotional distress (hairs were kept loose when women were mourning the death of a family member) with the visual attributes of a non-civilized (in Roman eyes) ethnic group (hairstyle played a role in defining a woman's status in Roman society). On the obverse of the coin, where instead military defeat refers to a civilized, urban society (Massalia had been founded by the Greeks in around 600 BC), the choice falls on the cult statue of a goddess represented with her full attributes that make her a perfect member of the Graeco-Roman, urban and civilized (in Roman eyes) world.

MY RESEARCH

How was gender visually defined in the Roman period? And how were physical characteristics and attributes deployed to convey ideas about status and identity?