

4.2 SOCIETY – CULTURAL IDENTITY



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

On the left: male head with long hair, beard and mustachos, wearing a military mantle. Better preserved coins also show an elongated Celtic shield on the left.

On the right: image of two Celtic warriors fighting from a two horses chariot: one is driving the chariot, while the other, naked and pointing backwards, holds a spear and bears an elongated shield. The inscription mentions Lucius Hostilius Saserna.

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 Gaul (it has been suggested Vercingetorix but the interpretation is debated) on the right and of a Gaulish warrior fighting from a chariot on the obverse.

The coin offers a typical Roman representation of non-Roman barbaric people. The Gauls were widely portrayed as lacking some of the visual characteristics that made people respectful citizen of a Mediterranean urban society. Nakedness was one of these attributes, as in the Graeco-Roman world it generally referred either to an idealized, heroized status (for example when portraying a god, a hero or a king with semi-divine attributes) or to the "barbarian" Celtic tribes of Europe (often their nakedness during combat is mentioned by the sources). It made a stark contrast to the role of a Roman citizen as a member of society (a *togatus*, i.e. wearing a toga). The second attribute is hairstyle (long, scruffy hair) and the presence of moustaches and beard, in contrast to the short haircut and shaved face bore by Roman citizens. The other attributes used to define the Celts are the "ethnic" ones, such as the characteristic elongated shield, the torque and the fighting style (on a chariot, with an auriga).

Please also check 4.1, Coins of Lucius Hostilius Saserna with the representation of Gallia.

MY RESEARCH

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