

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

# Reading & Understanding Roman Imperial Coins

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Instructor Notes

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**From Stone to Screen**  
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# Numismatics: The Study of Coins

## **Introduction:**

The O. J. Todd Collection is a collection of seventy-three coins spanning from 350 BC to 350 CE, with examples from Classical Greece to the end of the Roman Empire. The coin collection is housed in the Classical, Near Eastern and Religious studies teaching collections at the University of British Columbia. Coins provide a rich source of information for understanding the economy and society of the ancient world, but are sometimes avoided by historians because of the difficulties associated with their interpretation.

This teaching module is designed to help instructors teach their students about the value of ancient coins in Roman society in three sections:

- A) Reading & Understanding Images
- B) Legends, Titles & Dating
- C) Mint Marks.

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## **Anatomy of a Coin:**

**Obverse** – the “heads” of a coin. The obverse side of imperial Roman coins usually features the head of an emperor or member of the imperial family.

**Reverse**—the “tails” of a coin. The reverse side of imperial Roman coins usually features the design which the emperor would like to associate himself with. Deities are often featured on the reverse of Roman coins, but the types can vary widely according to the ‘message’ that the emperor wanted to circulate throughout the Roman world.

**Type** – the central device or motif (“dominant design”) on either face of a coin

**Legend** – the written content of a coin, usually encircling the type or flanking it (sometimes continues into exergue). The legend is significant because it can describe the issuing authority, the image on the face of the coin, and may specify the event that a coin commemorates.

**Field** – the undecorated background on face of the coin. The field is often divided into left and right when describing coin type. (i.e. ‘Jupiter standing, left – means that he is facing left).

**Exergue** – literally means “outwork” (Greek = ex and ergon). The exergue refers to portion of type beneath the ground line, left blank in this example, but usually used to display mintmarks.

**Attributes** – the object(s) attached or held by portrayed figure. (i.e. Jupiter holds thunderbolt in left hand, sceptre in right hand; Caracalla wears laureate).

### **Coins & Propaganda:**

How often did people notice the designs on coins? The significance of the images placed on Roman coinage offers a wide variety of points of views. The extremes of these arguments may be distilled into two points of view:

- 1) **Economic** – views coins as purely economic objects whose designs were incidental to their main function. Those who argue this perspective believe that coin designs were chosen by minor governmental departments, and that the symbolism of coin designs was not noticed or understood by the largely illiterate population of the Roman Empire.
- 2) **Propaganda** – views coins as objects whose designs helped to promote the features of an emperor's reign. Those who argue this perspective believe that the emperor himself was interested in choosing the designs on Roman coinage. These images would be circulated throughout the Roman Empire, and were meant to enhance the emperor's public image. In this case, it is likely that the public would have noticed the symbolism on their coinage and would have associated these images with the emperor's image on the coin.

It is likely that Roman coins functioned on a level somewhere between economic and propagandistic purposes, but it is impossible to know the exact extent to which the population paid attention to the symbolism on the coinage they used every day. There is evidence that Roman people looked at their coinage and made moral judgments about their content, but the evidence varies widely across social classes. Just because coins were designed with the intention that their symbolism would be noticed, does not demonstrate that people did so.<sup>1</sup>

Think of our modern coinage: We tend to notice the images on our own coinage (i.e. the loon on a Canadian loonie), but how often do we think about the symbolism of these images? In addition to this, we tend to notice coins more often when they are different from the usual (i.e. commemorative quarters which feature different reverses, or the entirely different coinage used in another country while we are travelling). To what extent do we notice these changes? What do they mean? When do we interpret the significance of images on modern coins? Have a discussion with your class.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full argument, along with evidence from ancient sources see A. Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman World* (London: Seaby, 1987), pp. 66-85 and C. Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 70-77.

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\*Note: Especially helpful resources have been bolded.

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# Section A: Reading & Understanding Images

## Deification of Faustina I

### **Coin 30: Sestertius commemorating Faustina I (after 141 CE)**

**Obverse:** DIVA AVGVSTA FAVSTINA. Bust of deified Faustina I, hair elaborately waved in coiled bands across head and piled in round coil on top.

**Reverse:** PIET. AVG. Garlanded altar of Pietas with closed doors, horns in top corners.

Annia Galeria Faustina (Faustina I) was the wife of emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE). Faustina's relation to the powerful Anni family caused Antoninus to be adopted into the imperial succession by Hadrian. The couple enjoyed a remarkably happy marriage until Faustina died of unknown causes in late 140 CE or early 141 CE.

Antoninus was devastated by the death of his wife, and after Faustina was deified by the Senate in 141 CE, he honoured her by constructing an expensive temple (complete with an altar and priesthood) at the entrance to the Roman Forum. The emperor also issued thousands of coins in commemoration of *Diva Faustina*, spreading the knowledge of her deification throughout the empire. Statues in Faustina's image were erected in circuses throughout Rome, a charity for orphaned girls was established in her honour, and her imperial cult flourished throughout the empire.<sup>2</sup>

Coinage commemorating Faustina's deification was widely circulated around the Roman Empire. The obverse of this coin features the portrait of the deified Faustina, with her hair parted in the centre and combed in waves to the sides, the longer strands plaited and wound into an elaborate bun to crown the top of her head.<sup>3</sup> This distinctive portrait was circulated on much of Antoninus' coinage, and seems to have influenced the fashion and hairstyle of private citizens throughout the empire.<sup>4</sup> The reverse of the coin depicts the altar of Pietas, which was built on the Via Flaminia by Claudius in 43 CE. The altar features a panelled front, and is both garlanded and lighted. The coin may have been part of a special issue celebrating the dedication of Faustina's temple in 142 CE.<sup>5</sup> By issuing a coin featuring the portrait of Faustina and the altar of Pietas, Antoninus

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<sup>2</sup> H. Mattingly, "The Consecration of Faustina the Elder and Her Daughter," *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948): 147.

<sup>3</sup> M. Keltanen, "The Public Image of the Four Empresses: Ideal Wives, Mothers and Regents?" *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 25 (2002): 125.

<sup>4</sup> Keltanen, "The Public Image of the Four Empresses," 109.

<sup>5</sup> P. H. Hill, *The Monuments of Ancient Rome as Coin Types*. (Seaby: London, 1989): 62.

emphasized his deified wife's connection to the attributes of a goddess, demonstrating the emperor's devoutness towards the ritual aspects of *consecratio* and the imperial cult.<sup>6</sup>

The act of deification developed over the course of the Principate, serving to legitimize the position of an emperor's successor through the creation of a divine imperial lineage. The act of deification was used by emperors as a means to promote their position through their special connections with divine members of the imperial family.<sup>7</sup> Although Antoninus mourned the loss of Faustina, her deification was advantageous to his position as emperor, as it gave him a direct link to the divine. The construction of an expensive temple located within the Roman Forum promoted the status of the imperial family, as everyone who passed would be reminded that the emperor was directly related to the divine empress. Finally, the circulation of coins spread knowledge of Faustina's deification throughout the empire, further spreading her imperial cult and the reminder of Antoninus' status as husband of a divine imperial family member.

### **Images on Roman Coins:**

Images on coins were meant to be viewed by the public whenever a transaction took place. If people noticed these designs, they would inherently acknowledge the supreme status of the emperor every time money was exchanged, as his portrait confirmed the value of a coin. The images on coins are therefore significant to the study of Roman history because they were meant to be public expressions of an emperor's regime and the achievements he wanted to emphasize to his people.

The **obverse** ('heads') of a coin usually portrays a portrait of the emperor or an imperial family member. The portrait was a symbol of the emperor's sovereignty, as images of other individuals could not be minted on Roman coins during the Principate. The emperor's image tended to be an idealistic portrayal that embodied the political ideals and aspirations of the regime. Augustus' portrait hardly changed at all, maturing gradually but remaining youthful over the course of his 44 year reign. After the prolonged crisis of the Civil Wars, Augustus' unchanging portrait became a symbol of the stability and peace that was enjoyed when he was emperor.<sup>8</sup> Imperial portraits also tended to confirm the legitimacy of a dynasty through continuity in portraiture, rather

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<sup>6</sup> J. Williams, "Religion and Roman Coins." *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007): 143-163.

<sup>7</sup> G. McIntyre, "Deification as Consolation: The Divine Children of the Roman Imperial Family," *Historia* 62 (2013), p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman World*, 73; see also Suetonius' description of Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 79).

than realistically portraying an emperor's identity. Tiberius' portrait, for example, is strikingly similar to that of Augustus. Flavian portraiture, on the other hand, is significantly different from that of the Julio-Claudian family, differentiating their dynasty from that of their predecessors.

The **reverse** ('tails') of a coin tended to showcase the achievements and values which justified the emperor's position. These images supported the emperor as the subject of focus on the obverse of his coinage.<sup>9</sup> Specific achievements like military victories (i.e. Actium), the celebration of games or festivals (i.e. celebrations of Rome's foundation), political programs (i.e. the proclamation of a grain dole), and building programs (i.e. construction of the Temple of Faustina) could all be referred to on the reverse of a coin. Gods and goddesses were also minted on coins as convenient expressions and justifications of imperial sovereignty. An emperor could emphasize his close relationship to a deity: Julius Caesar, for example, emphasized that he was descended from the goddess Venus by issuing coins with her image on the reverse. Emperors also commemorated deities to whose favour they owed their successes: Augustus owed honoured Apollo's intervention at Actium by issuing many coins with the god's image on them. In order to emphasize their position, emperors sometimes adopted divine attributes on their coins: Nero issued coins of himself wearing the aegis on his coins.<sup>10</sup> Personifications are also celebrated on imperial coins, though they often have unknown or complicated personal connections with the emperor. Emperors would emphasize personifications who had qualities with which the emperor wanted to be associated. Personifications like Pietas ('virtue'), Fides ('loyalty'), or Spes ('hope'), and many others alluded to aspects, acts or policies that an emperor wanted to emphasize about his reign.<sup>11</sup>

### **Did the emperor have control over his public image on coinage?**

There is little evidence for instances of imperial control over the images minted on Roman coins. Emperors occasionally directed their images: Suetonius writes that Nero set up statues of himself playing the lyre, and had coins struck with the same design (*Nero* 25), and Eusebius recorded that Constantine "directed his likeness to be stamped on a gold coin with his eyes uplifted in the posture of prayer to God" (*Constantine* 4.15). It is difficult to tell how literally to take these statements, however. Under any regime, all actions are often attributed to the leader of the state, whether or not he was closely

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<sup>9</sup> Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman World*, 75

<sup>10</sup> Taking on divine attributes did not end very well for Nero, however, considering that he was deposed shortly after adopting the *aegis* on his coinage.

<sup>11</sup> Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman World*, 73-75



involved.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that some emperors took an interest in the way that they were portrayed on coinage, but it is unlikely that they had time to choose the designs on every coin minted in the empire.

Even if the emperor did not participate directly in choosing coin designs, imperial approval would have still been required before coins were minted. In most cases, it is likely that government officials would submit designs to a representative of the emperor, who would reject or accept the coin based on the emperor's known preferences. Geography would have also played a role in imperial control over coin design, as the emperor could not oversee coin production in every provincial city. It is likely that in cities far from Rome, an official would choose the designs on coinage in accordance with themes of the emperor's reign. Coins were therefore designed with the emperor in mind, creating a programme that showcased his achievements and qualities in a public medium.

### **Terms:**

**Consecratio** – the ritual act of making someone a god, occurring through decree of the senate and involving the introduction of a new cult. The apotheosis or deification of a deceased member of the imperial family became an object of cult to be worshipped with the other gods of the state.<sup>13</sup>

**Deification** – the change of status from mortal to divine. In the Roman world, deification would normally only occur after an individual's death. Following the act of *consecratio*, the title *divus/diva* would be added to the individual's name. The deified individual's soul would then rise to take its place among the gods in the act of *apotheosis*.

**Pax** –the goddess of peace, who appears frequently on Roman coins from the reign of Augustus to that of Constantine the Great. The concept of peace through victory is frequently depicted on Roman coins, represented by the wreath, palm branch, sceptre, cornucopia and olive branch.

**Pietas** – the personification of virtue, covering one's duty towards the gods, towards the state, and towards one's family. Pietas may appear on Roman Imperial coins to advertise the virtue and piety of the imperial family.

### **Coin 17: Denarius of Tiberius** (c. 15 CE)

**Obverse:** TI. CAESAR DIVI F. AVGVSTVS. Head of Tiberius, wearing laureate.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 70

<sup>13</sup> For a fantastic definition of *consecratio*, see G. McIntyre, "Deification as Consolation: The Divine Children of the Roman Imperial Family," *Historia* 62 (2013), especially pp. 224-225.

**Reverse:** MAXIM. PONTIF. Livia seated on throne as Pax, holding olive branch and inverted spear. Feet resting on footstool.

Livia Drusilla (58 BC – 29 CE) was one of the most powerful women in Roman history. Considered the genealogical founder of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, Livia was the wife of Augustus, the mother of Tiberius, the great-grandmother of Caligula, the grandmother of Claudius, and the great-grandmother of Nero.<sup>14</sup> During Augustus' lifetime, Livia played a conspicuous role as the first lady of Rome. She was portrayed as an ideal wife and mother, setting examples of proper female behaviour in public contexts. Livia was also openly involved in political matters, acting as Augustus' advisor and confidante.<sup>15</sup> When Augustus died in 14 CE, he adopted Livia in his will and granted her the title *Augusta*, making her equal to Tiberius as *Augustus*. Augustus was deified and a cult was established in his honour, with Livia serving as its priestess. Livia was voted numerous honours and titles by the senate, though Tiberius vetoed a number of them, cautious to avoid the appearance of monarchical ambitions by accepting honours that seemed too extravagant.<sup>16</sup> Livia's influential role is regarded with suspicion in the primary sources, especially by Tacitus, but it is clear from her portraiture and honours that she enjoyed popularity in the Roman provinces.<sup>17</sup> Livia died in 29 CE, but she was not deified until 42 CE during the reign of Claudius, who needed to claim his legitimacy as emperor by emphasizing his link to Augustus through Livia, his maternal grandmother.<sup>18</sup>

References to Livia on coinage are subtle during the period that this coin was minted, reflecting Tiberius' hesitation to directly associate living members of the imperial family with representations of goddesses.<sup>19</sup> The reverse of this coin depicts a female figure sitting on an ornate low-backed chair. She has the attributes of the goddess Pax, holding an inverted spear in one hand and an olive branch in the other. The identity of the female figure has been disputed, however. The coin does not bear an inscription which identifies the figure as mortal or goddess, making it difficult to deduce the meaning of the portrayal. Later coinage issued by Claudius (after 42 CE) bears the same female figure seated on a throne, specifically honouring the deified Augustus and recently

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<sup>14</sup> For more on Livia's early life, see N. Purcell, "Livia (Livia Drusilla)," in *Who's Who in the Classical World*. Ed. S. Hornblower and T. Spawforth. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).  
S. E. Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images*. (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 74.

<sup>15</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 75-87.

<sup>16</sup> G. Grether, "Livia and the Roman Imperial Cult." *The American Journal of Philology* 67 (1948): 233-34.

<sup>17</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 87. See also Grether, "Livia and the Roman Imperial Cult," 222-252 for a full description of Livia's cult worship and honours in the provinces of the east.

<sup>18</sup> I. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002): 180

<sup>19</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 88.

deified Livia. It is possible that Claudius was issuing this coin to reflect the coinage of Tiberius, and was able to associate Livia with the attributes of Pax because she had already been deified.<sup>20</sup> It is worth pointing out that the figure on the coin wears the *nodus*, a hairstyle made fashionable by Livia in the early empire. Associations were also made between Livia and other goddesses in numerous statues and inscriptions, most notably with Pax on the *Ara Pacis*.<sup>21</sup> The imagery on this coin is likely to have been left purposely vague, as Livia could not be directly associated with goddesses and deification during her lifetime. Whether the figure of Pax was intended to represent Livia is uncertain, and this uncertainty makes it likely that ancient viewers would have had doubts about the identification of the coin, just as modern viewers do today.

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<sup>20</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> For a full discussion of this coin and the problems of its interpretation, see Wood, *Imperial Women*, 87-89.

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## B. Legends, Titles, and Dating

### Introduction:

Roman coins use a standard set of abbreviations and titles (e.g., AVG[VSTUS], COS (consul), etc.), which can be used to identify the ruler depicted on the coin as well as the coin's date. In instances where an emperor's titles and honors have been listed on the obverse or reverse legends of a coin, one can use them to date the coin more precisely. Scholars have determined the dates that an emperor's tribunician powers (TR. P.), imperial acclamations (IMP.), consulships (COS.), and other titles (CAESAR, AVGVSTVS, P.M) were granted by the Senate, and these can be used in reference to the coin to understand date of its issue. A number of resources may be helpful in determining this date.

For the obverse, we recommend starting with <http://www.jhecoins.com/obverselegends.htm>.

This website is especially useful for coins that have some part of the legend worn away, since it is possible to input part or all of the legend and receive a chart listing all possible legends of which that segment might be a part, as well as possible faces on the coin and probable date ranges. For example, a search for ARMENIACVS turned up:

Results for: **armeniacvs**

Legend	Emperor
ANTONINVSAVGARMENIACVS	Marcus Aurelius A.D. 161-180
LAVRELVERSAVGARMENIACVS	Lucius Verus A.D. 161-169
LVERVSAVGARMENIACVS	Lucius Verus A.D. 161-169
MANTONINVSAVGARMENIACVS	Marcus Aurelius A.D. 161-180
MANTONINVSAVGARMENIACVSPM	Marcus Aurelius A.D. 161-180
MAVRELANTONINVSAVGARMENIACVSPM	Marcus Aurelius A.D. 161-180

For more specific dating, it is helpful to consult Sear's *Roman Coins and their Values* (1988). Below is an example of a page from *Roman Coins and their Values*:

**CARACALLA**  
A.D. 198-217



1873

M. Aurelius Antoninus, originally named Bassianus, was born at Lugdunum on April 6th, A.D. 188, the elder son of Severus and Julia Domna. In 196 he was given the rank of Caesar and in 198 he was created Augustus, although only ten years of age. He accompanied his father and brother on the expedition to Britain in 208 and led the campaign of 210 in person. On the death of Severus in 211, Caracalla reigned jointly with his brother Geta, as Severus had arranged. In 212, however, Geta was assassinated by the orders of Caracalla who also caused many prominent and distinguished Romans to be put to death, so as to consolidate his position as sole ruler. His reign was marked by extravagance and cruelty and in his wars he achieved more by treachery than by force of arms. He was finally murdered by the orders of Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, on April 8th, 217, whilst he was travelling between Edessa and Carrhae.

The one notable action which can be attributed to Caracalla was the giving to all free inhabitants of the Empire the name and privileges of Roman citizens. The name "Caracalla," by which this emperor is commonly known, was a nick-name derived from a long tunic of Gallic origin which he adopted as his favourite dress.

**Titles and Powers, A.D. 196-217**

A.D.	Tribunician Power	Imperial Acclamation	Consulship	Other Titles
196				CAESAR.
197		IMP.DESIG.		PONTIFEX.
198	TR.P.	IMP.		AVGVSTVS.
199	TR.P.II.			
200	TR.P.III.			
201	TR.P.III.			
202	TR.P.V.		COS.	
203	TR.P.VI.			
204	TR.P.VII.			
205	TR.P.VIII.		COS.II.	
206	TR.P.VIII.			
207	TR.P.X.			
208	TR.P.XI.		COS.III.	
209	TR.P.XII.			
210	TR.P.XIII.			BRIT.
211	TR.P.XIII.			P.M. P.P.
212	TR.P.XV.	IMP.II. (?)		
213	TR.P.XVI.		COS.III.	FELIX. GERM.
214	TR.P.XVII.	IMP.III.		
215	TR.P.XVIII.			
216	TR.P.XVIII.			
217	TR.P.XX.			

Caracalla became TR.P.II. on January 1st, A.D. 199, and his tribunician power was subsequently renewed each year on that date.

**Mint** (during sole reign): Rome.

The following are the commonest forms of obverse legend:

- A. ANTONINVS AVGVSTVS.
- B. ANTONINVS PIVS AVG.
- C. ANTONINVS PIVS AVG. BRIT.
- D. ANTONINVS PIVS AVG. GERM.
- E. M. AVR. ANTON. CAES. PONTIF.
- F. M. AVR. ANTONINVS CAES.
- G. M. AVREL. ANTONINVS PIVS AVG. BRIT.

Legends E and F belong to the period as Caesar, and the others to the period following his elevation to the rank of Augustus.

The portraiture of Caracalla on the coins closely follows his physical development from a boy of eight years to a man of twenty-nine, the age at which he was murdered.

As Caesar and in his early years as Augustus, he is depicted as a child, but in the latter half of his joint reign with Severus the portrait becomes that of an adolescent.

He is first shown with a beard in A.D. 209 and from then on the portrait steadily develops to the full maturity of his last years. Harold Mattingly, writing in the fifth volume of the British Museum Catalogue, states that "the mature portrait of Caracalla is rendered with a brutal realism that shocks the eye."

**As Caesar**

A.D. 196-198, under Septimius Severus

There are two varieties of obverse type:

- a. Bare-headed and draped bust, r.
- b. Bare-headed, draped and cuirassed bust, r.

All B.M.C. references are to the coinage of the Wars of Succession.

1789	A aureus.	Fb. B. SPEI PERPETVAE. Spes advancing l. C. 593. R.I.C. 5. B.M.C. 189	£ 3,000
1790	A denarius.	Eb. B. DESTINATO IMPERAT. Sacrificial implements. C. 53. R.I.C. 6. B.M.C. 193	45
1791	Ea. B. IMPERII FELICITAS. Felicity stg. l., holding caduceus and child. C. 95. R.I.C. 9. B.M.C. 199	35	
1792	Ea. B. MARTI VLTORI. Mars advancing r., carrying spear and trophy. C. 154. R.I.C. 11. B.M.C. 202	30	
1793	Eb. B. PRINCIPI IVVENTVTIS. Caracalla stg. l. beside trophy, holding rod and spear. C. 505. R.I.C. 13b. B.M.C. 208	30	
1794	Fb. B. SECVRTAS PERPETVA. Minerva stg. l., leaning on shield and holding spear. C. 562. R.I.C. 2. B.M.C. 181 note	35	
1795	Fb. B. SEVERI AVG. PII FIL. Sacrificial implements. C. 587. R.I.C. 4. B.M.C. 184	40	
1796	As 1789. C. 594. R.I.C. 5. B.M.C. 190	30	
1797	A sestertius. Eb. B. PRINCIPI IVVENTVTIS s. c. As 1793. C. 506. R.I.C. 398a. B.M.C. 618	65	
1798	Eb. B. SPEI PERPETVAE s. c. Spes advancing l. C. 595. R.I.C. 401. B.M.C. 613	55	
1799	A as. Fa. B. SEVERI AVG. PII FIL. s. c. Sacrificial implements. C. 586. R.I.C. 404. B.M.C. 615	30	

As you can see, the tables on page 186 will enable students to match the titles and powers from the legend (second through fifth columns) to a year (first column), and the following pages can be used to identify other common forms of the legend. We **highly recommend** getting your hands on a copy of Sear, both for lesson preparation and to show to the students if they have any questions about identifying coins.

**Coin 38: Denarius of Caracalla (217 CE)**

**Obverse:** ANTONINVS PIVS AVG. GERM. Head of Caracalla, wearing laureate.

**Reverse:** P. M. TR. P. XX COS. IIII P. P. Jupiter standing naked except for cloak hanging from shoulder, holding thunderbolt and sceptre.

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, originally named Bassianus and nicknamed **Caracalla** (in reference to the Gallic style of cloak that he made fashionable in Rome), was the son of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna. In the year 211, Septimius Severus died, and his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, ruled jointly until Geta was assassinated at Caracalla's order in 212. In 213 he gained the title of Germanicus Maximus after fighting and

conquering the Alamanni. Caracalla is best known for extravagance and cruelty, but he is also notable for his edict giving Roman names and citizenship to all inhabitants of the Roman empire. He was murdered by the orders of the praetorian prefect Macrinus in 217.<sup>22</sup>

### Titles and Powers, A.D. 196-217

A.D.	<i>Tribunician Power</i>	<i>Imperial Acclamation</i>	<i>Consulship</i>	<i>Other Titles</i>
196				CAESAR.
197		IMP.DESIG.		PONTIFEX.
198	TR.P.	IMP.		AVGVSTVS.
199	TR.P.II.			
200	TR.P.III.			
201	TR.P.IIIII.			
202	TR.P.V.		COS.	
203	TR.P.VI.			
204	TR.P.VII.			
205	TR.P.VIII.		COS.II.	
206	TR.P.VIIII.			
207	TR.P.X.			
208	TR.P.XI.		COS.III.	
209	TR.P.XII.			
210	TR.P.XIII.			BRIT.
211	TR.P.XIIII.			P.M. P.P.
212	TR.P.XV.	IMP.II. (?)		
213	TR.P.XVI.		COS.IIIII.	FELIX. GERM.
214	TR.P.XVII.	IMP.III.		
215	TR.P.XVIII.			
216	TR.P.XVIIII.			
217	TR.P.XX.			

Sear, D. R. *Roman Coins and their Values*. (London: Seaby, 1988). p. 186

We can tell that this coin was issued in 217 CE because COS IIII (meaning that he was consul for the fourth time) is inscribed on the reverse, meaning that we can narrow down the date to sometime after 213, and along with it is inscribed TR. P. XX, which, according to the second column, indicates that the coin must have been minted in 217. Always date coins by the **latest** title in the legend.

### Coin 35: Silver Denarius of Marcus Aurelius (164 CE)

**Obverse:** ANTONINVS AVG. ARMENIACVS. Head of Marcus Aurelius, facing right; wearing laureate.

<sup>22</sup> David R. Sear, *Roman Coins and Their Values* (London: Seaby's Numismatic Publications Ltd., 1988), 186; Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, "Aurelius Antoninus (1), Marcus," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* ([New York]: Oxford University Press, 2003), <http://rave.ohiolink.edu/ebooks/ebc/t111>.

**Reverse:** P. M. TR. P. XVIII IMP. II COS. III. Mars standing holding reversed spear and leaning on shield.

Marcus Aurelius Verus, after being adopted in his youth by Antoninus on account of Hadrian's recognition of the boy's fine qualities, was given the title of Caesar (139 CE) and married to Faustina Junior, the daughter of Antoninus (145 CE). In 147 he was given the tribunician power, and he succeeded to the throne in March of 161 CE. His reign included several frontier wars, including the Parthian War, which occurred between 161 and 166 resulted in the transmission of a devastating plague throughout the Roman empire. He spent much of his career campaigning along the Danube, at which time he wrote his "Meditations." During this war, he obtained the title ARMENIACVS. Marcus Aurelius was actually persuaded to take the title as a shared honor with Lucius Attidius Cornelianus, a governor of Syria who held it originally during the war. In 164 CE, during a lull in the war when Rome had gained firm control over Armenia, Lucius gained the title and persuaded Marcus to share it through an official dispatch to the Senate. Upon his death in 180 CE, he was deified immediately and remembered as a kind, generous ruler devoted to Stoicism.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sear, *Roman Coins and Their Values*, 152.



**Titles and Powers, A.D. 139-180**

A.D.	<i>Tribunician Power</i>	<i>Imperial Acclamation</i>	<i>Consulship</i>	<i>Other Titles</i>
139			COS.DES.	CAESAR.
140			COS.	
141				
142				
143				
144			COS.DES.II.	
145			COS.II.	
146				
147	TR.P. – TR.P.II.			
148	TR.P.II. – III.			
149	TR.P.III. – IIII.			
150	TR.P.III. – V.			
151	TR.P.V. – VI.			
152	TR.P.VI. – VII.			
153	TR.P.VII. – VIII.			
154	TR.P.VIII. – IIIII.			
155	TR.P.VIII. – X.			
156	TR.P.X. – XI.			
157	TR.P.XI. – XII.			
158	TR.P.XII. – XIII.			
159	TR.P.XIII. – XIIIII.			
160	TR.P.XIII. – XV.			
161	TR.P.XV. – XVI.	IMP.	COS.III.	AVGVSTVS. P.M.
162	TR.P.XVI. – XVII.			
163	TR.P.XVII. – XVIII.	IMP.II.		
164	TR.P.XVIII. – XVIIIII.			ARMENIACVS.
165	TR.P.XVIII. – XX.	IMP.III.		
166	TR.P.XX. – XXI.	IMP.IIIII.		PARTH.MAX.MEDICVS. P.P.
167	TR.P.XXI. – XXII.			
168	TR.P.XXII. – XXIII.	IMP.V.		
169	TR.P.XXIII. – XXIIIII.			
170	TR.P.XXIII. – XXV.			
171	TR.P.XXV. – XXVI.	IMP.VI.		
172	TR.P.XXVI. – XXVII.			
173	TR.P.XXVII. – XXVIII.			
174	TR.P.XXVIII. – XXVIIIII.	IMP.VII.		
175	TR.P.XXVIII. – XXX.	IMP.VIII.		GERM. SARM.
176	TR.P.XXX. – XXXI.			
177	TR.P.XXXI. – XXXII.	IMP.VIII.		
178	TR.P.XXXII. – XXXIII.			
179	TR.P.XXXIII. – XXXIIIII.	IMP.X.		
180	TR.P.XXXIII.			

Aurelius became TR.P.II. on December 10th, A.D. 147, and his tribunician power was subsequently renewed each year on that date.

**Mint:** Rome.

From the legend (ob: ANTONINVS AVG. ARMENIACVS /re:P. M. TR. P. XVIII IMP. II COS. III), we can date this Denarius to 164 CE. First, by looking at “COS. III,” we can see that the coin dates to or after 161 CE. Then, we can tell from “IMP. II” that the coin must date before 165 (which narrows the dates down to 163 or 164 CE). Finally, we can tell that the coin must have been minted in 164 CE because it has the title “ARMENIACVS,” which Marcus Aurelius earned in 164.

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# Section C: Mint Marks

## **Introduction:**

Although mint marks existed prior to the fourth century CE, Diocletian's monetary reforms after the crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century made them a systematic feature of Roman coinage. The marks probably existed for the purpose of quality control so that the coins could be traced back to their origins in the event that something was wrong with them.

The main types of mint marks were as follows:

- 1) The **mintmark itself**, identifying the issuing mint, consisting usually of one to four letters. This was always present, and found in the exergue.
- 2) The **officina mark**, identifying the *officina* (or workshop), consisting usually of a Greek or Roman letter. This was nearly always present, and could be found in the exergue as an affix to the mint mark or in the field.
- 3) One or two letters, usually P (Pecunia), M (Moneta) or SM (Sacra Moneta), found in the exergue as a **prefix** to the mint mark.<sup>24</sup>

## **Terms:**

**Mint** – place where coins were produced – some were permanent (e.g., the one on the Capitoline in Rome, moved to the Domus Aurea in 80 CE), and others would have been temporary or even itinerant (moving with campaigns)

**Mint mark** – set of letters (Roman or Greek) that indicated the city and the workshop in which the coin was struck

**Officina** – specific workshop in which coins were produced (could be several in one city)

## **Coin 66: City Commemorative coin of Constantine (330-335 CE), Nicomedia**

**Obverse:** VRBS ROMA. Draped bust of Roma, wearing helmet.

**Reverse:** She-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, two stars above them bracketing 3 dots. Mint mark SMNT in exergue.

Constantine I (272-337 CE) was the Roman Emperor between 306 and 337 CE and was best known for being the first Christian emperor. He was raised to the office of Caesar in 305 CE, but after the death of his father, Flavius Valerius Constantius, in 306,

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<sup>24</sup> Definitions and following chart taken from <http://www.lateromanbronzecoins.com/>

Constantine was declared Emperor in Eboracum (York). After a series of wars with the emperors Licinius and Maxentius, Constantine became the sole emperor in 324 CE.

This coin bears the mint mark SMNT (Nicomedia, third *officina*). Nicomedia was the capital of the eastern Roman Empire between the time of Diocletian and 330 CE, when it was moved to Constantinople. Constantine lived there between his defeat of Licinius in 324 and 330. The area was also important because of a church council held there in 327-328, which followed a major one held in nearby Nicea in 325, at which the ideals of the Arian heresy were hammered out.

The images on this coin, although produced in a former capital of the eastern Empire, are obviously evocative of the city of Rome, suggesting that Nicomedia (and eventually Constantinople) ought to be considered equal in importance to Rome. On the obverse, we see an image of the goddess Roma, and on the reverse there is a picture of Romulus and Remus being suckled by the she-wolf from Rome's foundation myth. This is particularly interesting in light of Constantine's prohibition of pagan activities (e.g., banning ritual sacrifices, removing cult statues (sometimes even to melt them down and turn them into coins)), since both symbols hearken back to Rome's pagan origins. Despite the fact that Constantine opposed paganism, he used pagan symbolism in these coins, which can effectively be seen as propaganda glorifying the eastern capitals. One might also look at them as a way of comforting the people after the Crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century by suggesting that the new powers could return Rome to earlier days of happiness and prosperity.

#### **Coin 64: Coin of Crispus (c. 317 CE), Londinium**

**Obverse:** F. L. IVL. CRISPUS NOB. C. Draped bust of Crispus, wearing laureate.

**Reverse:** VICTORIAE LAETAE PRINC. PERP. Two Victories stand facing one another, holding shield between them, inscribed VOT PR. Shield rests on an altar decorated by a wreath with cross inside. Mint mark PLN in exergue.

Crispus (born 299-305, died 326) was the beloved first son of Constantine and his concubine Minervina, although some suggest that Minervina was actually Constantine's first wife. In the year 317, Constantine declared Crispus Caesar of the Roman Empire, along with his younger half-brother Constantine II and his first cousin Licinius Iunior. Crispus, being the only one old enough to take on any of the duties of Caesar, was given command of Gaul, where he led several victorious military campaigns. He then joined his father in the war against Licinius in 324 and made significant contributions to Constantine's victory.

Since Crispus was the oldest of the Caesars at that time, he was the most likely heir to Constantine's throne, until he was suddenly murdered in 326. There are several theories surrounding his mysterious death. One popular theory states that Constantine's wife, Fausta, fabricated a tale in which Crispus tried to seduce her, which was intended to enrage Constantine so that he would kill Crispus, leaving the throne open Fausta's sons. Fausta's death (by drowning in a tub of boiling water) shortly after Crispus' execution is often used to support this theory, perhaps because Constantine discovered her treachery. Another theory suggests that Constantine, in spite of his great love for Crispus, was concerned at the possibility of having an illegitimate heir (which would doubtless fuel the inevitable succession crisis that would arise upon Constantine's death), killed his illegitimate son out of expediency and for the good of Rome. After his death, Crispus was subjected to a *damnatio memoriae*.

This coin was probably minted in 317 AD, the year in which Crispus became Caesar. On the obverse, his position as Caesar is indicated by the laureate he wears. On the reverse of this coin, there are two Victories:

“Victoria is the winged being seated on the right hand side of the image. In ancient Roman religion, Victoria was the personified goddess of victory. In Roman society, she had a very important role. The triumphs of Emperors and Generals were supposedly determined by her and she was worshipped accordingly. Even as Christianity gained ground as the state religion, she remained popular, to the extent that there was much anger when Gratianus removed her statue from Rome in 382. This popularity possibly explains the persistence of Victoria in Roman iconography and the gradual transformation of winged Victories into angels as the Christianisation of Europe progressed.”<sup>25</sup>

The two Victories hold a shield that is inscribed “VOT PR,” which stands for *Vota Populi Romani* or “vows of/to/for the Roman people,” i.e., the vows which Crispus would take upon becoming Caesar in the year that this coin was minted. The legend reads: “VICTORIAE LAETAE PRINC. PERP.” (Victory to the Joyful Eternal Princeps), another indication that this coin was minted in the year that Crispus was raised to the office of Caesar.

That this coin was minted in Londinium could mean two things:

- 1) Constantine was declared emperor in Britain eleven years earlier (probably a few years after Crispus was born). Constantine is now declaring Crispus' power with this coin minted in the place where he himself was declared emperor.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.lateromanbronzecoins.com/old-symbols-new-symbols/>

OR

2) When Crispus was given a *damnatio memoriae*, he should theoretically have been removed from all coins minted in the Roman Empire; however, it seems that, since this coin was not re-struck with a different image, either the memo of the *damnatio memoriae* never made it to Britain or, perhaps more likely, that the coin was never returned in order to be re-struck.

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