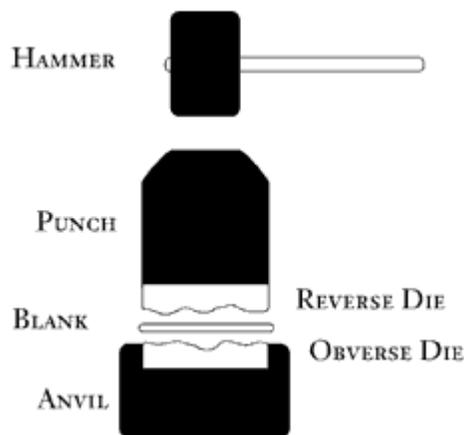


GREEK AND ROMAN COINS

GREEK COINS

Technique

Ancient Greek coins were struck from blank pieces of metal first prepared by heating and casting in molds of suitable size. At the same time, the weight was adjusted. Next, the blanks were stamped with devices which had been prepared on the dies. The lower die, for the obverse, was fixed in the anvil; the reverse was attached to a punch. The metal blank, heated to soften it, was placed on the anvil and struck with the punch, thus producing a design on both sides of the blank.



Weights and Values

The values of Greek coins were strictly related to the weights of the coins, since the coins were struck in intrinsically valuable metals. All Greek coins were issued according to the particular weight system adopted by the issuing city-state. Each system was based on the weight of the principal coin; the weights of all other coins of that system were multiples or sub-divisions of this major denomination. There were a number of weight standards in use in the Greek world, but the basic unit of weight was the drachm (handful) which was divided into six obols (spits). The drachm, however, varied in weight. At Aigina it weighed over six grammes, at Corinth less than three. In the 6th century B.C. many cities used the standard of the island of Aegina. In the 5th century, however, the Attic standard, based on the Athenian tetradrachm of 17 grammes, prevailed in many areas of Greece, and this was the system adopted in the 4th century by Alexander the Great. Bronze coins, of smaller value than the silver and of use for daily transactions, began in the late 5th century B.C.

A silver drachm was worth a considerable amount. In the sixth century B.C., in Athens one sheep could be bought for a drachm. In the late fifth century, the architect of the Erechtheum on the Acropolis of Athens was paid one drachm a day, while an

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unskilled labourer working on the project was paid one third of a drachm (two silver obols) for a day's work. A juryman during Pericles' time was paid one obol a day; this was raised to two in about 425 B.C. Silver coinage could not, therefore, be used for small transactions, and it was not until the introduction of bronze coinage, first in South Italy in the mid-fifth century and later in the Aegean area, that coins could be used for daily needs.

Early Greek Coinage

The earliest Greek coins--small globular pieces of electrum--seem to have been produced in Lydia or Ionia, probably in the last quarter of the 7th century B.C. This early electrum coinage was based on a stater weighing 14-16 grammes, which probably equalled one month's wages for a soldier. Small divisions--one-third staters as well as sixth, twelfth, twenty-fourth, forty-eighth, and ninety-sixth fractions--were, however, soon produced and could be used for smaller transactions, although still of too great a value for daily use.

In the mid-6th century King Kroisos (Croesus) of Lydia issued gold and silver coins abandoning electrum coinage. Based on a weight system where one gold piece equaled twenty silver, his coinage was continued by the Persians after their conquest of Lydia in 546 B.C., but ca. 515 B.C. the Persians issued new types which remained in use until the end of the Achaemenid empire in 330 B.C.

Ionia

In Ionia silver coinage began among the eastern Greeks in the 6th century B.C., and very small silver coins were issued quite early. These silver coins often showed the official civic emblem of the issuing city, such as the sphinx of Chios. Many of these devices continued to be used in later times.

Aigina

In Greece silver coinage began in the mid-6th century on the island of Aigina, traditionally associated with the earliest Greek coinage. The early coins bore on the obverse the civic emblem of a sea-turtle and punched incuse on the reverse imitating the early Ionian coins. On later coins a land tortoise replaced the sea-turtle. Aiginetan coins were known as "turtles." The Aiginetan weight standard, with a didrachm-stater of 12 grammes, was used by many other cities of Greece, Crete and Asia Minor.

Athens

The earliest coinage of Athens is the 6th century series known as "Wappenmünzen" (heraldic coins), based on the Euboic standard with didrachms of 8.5 grammes. Smaller denominations were also minted. Sometime in the 6th century a new type was issued with tetradrachms showing the head of Athena in very high relief on the obverse and Athen's owl on the reverse, from which the coins of Athens were often referred to as

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"owls." Smaller denominations in silver were also issued, some of them very small indeed. Aristophanes, the Athenian comic poet of the late 5th to 4th century B.C., tells us in his play *The Wasps* that the Athenians often carried their small coins in their mouths. Bronze coins of smaller value than the silver began to be issued in Athens in the last decades of the 5th century and became common in the 4th. In the 4th century the traditional silver types continued except that the eye of the Athena is now correctly drawn in profile, but soon after 196 B.C. the so-called "New Style" coins appeared. The head of Athena now wears an elaborate helmet, and the owl on the reverse bears names and letters denoting a system of control. Bronze coins also continued to be issued.

Corinth

Corinth, one of the richest and most important cities of ancient Greece, produced coins based on a stater of 8.6 grammes, divided into 6 drachms. Her silver coins bear Pegasos on the obverse (which gave them their ancient name of "colts") and usually the head of Athena on the reverse, but Aphrodite is also common. Silver coins ceased soon after 306 B.C.

South Italy

When coinage began here in the latter part of the 6th century, the Greek colonists used a flat, fairly thin blank, with an obverse in relief and the reverse in the same form, but concave, an "incuse" technique. Although not certain, it is likely that Sybaris, Metapontion, or Kroton began this form of coinage. After ca. 510 B.C., however, the coins became smaller and thicker, and the "incuse" style was gradually abandoned in favor of coinage with reliefs on both sides. A bronze coin from Metapontion is one of the few Greek coins to indicate its denomination. It bears the word obelos on the reverse.

Sicily, Syracuse

Sicily, and in particular Syracuse, produced a magnificent series of coins in the 5th century B.C., coins that were imitated by mints in Greece and Asia Minor. The 5th century Syracusan coins with the head of Arethusa are considered some of the most beautiful coins ever produced. After the invasion of Sicily by Carthage (410-400 B.C.), only Syracuse continued to mint in gold and silver, but this ended ca. 375 B.C., and not until the liberation of Sicily in 344 B.C., could minting in precious metals be resumed. Agathokles, tyrant of Syracuse (317-289 B.C.), took up the struggle against Carthage and reintroduced silver tetradrachms. A rare gold obol of Agathokles is on display.

Greek Coin Types

Coin devices, or types, identified both mint and denomination and occurred in great variety: for example, figures or heads of the principal gods and heroes; animals; products typical of the city-state; or subjects related to local myth.

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Greek Coin Types--Mythological Subjects

Well-known mythological subjects were common coin types: the Gorgon, who could turn people to stone; the winged horse Pegasus, who, tamed by the hero Bellerophon, helped to capture the monster, the Chimaera; and the Sphinx, a monster with lion body, woman's head, and wings, adopted by the Greeks from the Near East. Followers of Dionysos, the god of wine, were also popular. Nymphs also appear. Arethusa, the nymph of a spring at Syracuse, inspired a series of beautiful coins. Many cities used an image of a river-god, shown as a man-headed bull. Chiron, the good Centaur, sometimes appears. Tarentum showed the hero Taras, mythical founder of the city, and the Aetolian League depicted the Calydonian boar that had ravaged the country of the Caledonians in mythical times.

Greek Coin Types--Animals and Punning Allusions

Animals served as the emblems, or "badges," of numerous city-states. In many cases a religious connection is intended. The bee, emblem of Ephesos, was sacred to the goddess Artemis, for example. Other types embody a punning allusion to the name of the city, as the rose (*rodon*) of Rhodes and the goat (*aigos*) of Aigai.

Greek Coin Types-The Gods

Religious subjects were predominant, as exemplified by representations of the gods. Aphrodite, goddess of love; Athena, goddess of wisdom, war, victory, and the city; Zeus, the father of the gods; his brother Poseidon, god of the sea; Apollo, god of the sun, and his sister Artemis, goddess of the hunt; Demeter, goddess of grain and agriculture; Dionysos, god of wine; and Pan, protector of shepherds occur on coins in the exhibit.

HELLENISTIC ROYAL PORTRAITURE

Not until after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. did it become the usual practice to put the portrait of a human being on Greek coins. Coin portraits, original works of art, are important evidence for Greek portraiture, which otherwise has survived mainly in Roman copies.

Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.E.) was the first Greek ruler whose portrait appears on coins. Although the celebrated conqueror never minted coins with his own likeness, his successors, wanting to associated themselves with the great Macedonian ruler, began issuing coins with Alexander's portrait soon after his death. The first to do so was Ptolemy I, who chose to represent Alexander wearing the elephant scalp (thought to refer to Africa or to Alexander's conquest of India) and the horn of Ammon (a Libyan desert god), an allusion to Alexander's purported divine parentage. The most famous

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of these is that issued by Lysimachus, King of Thrace. First minted in 297 B.C.E., it portrays an individualized yet highly idealized portrait of Alexander, with tousled hair and upturned gaze, and wearing the royal diadem and horn associating him with the Egyptian god Ammon. This and other early Hellenistic portraits of the great conqueror set the standard for depicting the divine Hellenistic king.

Seleucid Kings of Syria

Antiochos I Soter, son of the founder of the Seleucid empire, overcame the Gallic invasion of Asia Minor in ca. 275 B.C. He is depicted with deeply set eyes, heavy forehead, prominent nose, and firm mouth. Some scholars see in this portrait the wearying effects of a difficult reign spent in maintaining the vast Seleucid empire. He was succeeded by his son, Antiochos II, during whose reign both Bactria and Parthia broke away from Seleucid rule.

Antiochos VII was an important figure of his time. Through successful campaigns in Palestine and Babylonia he restored part of the Seleucid empire lost by his predecessors but could not regain the east. He was killed in battle fighting against the Parthians.

Antiochos VIII Grypos ruled with his mother Cleopatra from 125-121, then on her death through poisoning (poison she had intended for him!) reigned alone. His reign was inglorious; for much of it he was at war with his half-brother Antiochos IX. During his reign the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to a minor state. He was murdered in 96. Although portraits became increasingly formalized, there were still recognizable differences. One of the most recognizable features is his hooked-nose and self-satisfied appearance; the latter was a conscious attempt to bring to mind the idea of *Tryphe* (the good life), and thus distract the viewer from the constant civil and political strife that plagued the empire in its last years.

Ptolemaic Egypt

Ptolemy I, a Greek related to the Macedonian royal house, received Egypt as his share of Alexander's empire. At the time of Alexander's death he was about 40 years old, a mature and realistic man of great vitality. He made Alexandria a center of learning, with a great library, the first in the Western world, and a museum or kind of academy, where scholars of all kinds could live and work. The dynasty he founded endured the longest of all those established on the breakup of Alexander's Empire, ending only in 30 B.C., with the suicide of his famous descendant, Cleopatra. His portraits combine his own highly individualistic traits (deep-set eyes, beaked nose, and prominent chin) with some of the idealized traits of Alexander. Ptolemy I was so revered by his successors that they continued to use his portrait on their silver tetradrachms, although the portrait gradually became more idealized, with the individual features of Ptolemy I being toned down, as seen here on a coin issued by Ptolemy XIII.

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Pergamon

Philetairos, a eunuch who established himself as ruler of Pergamon and founder of the Attalid dynasty, appears on the coinage of his successors, the Attalids. His portrait with heavy neck and face, small sunken eyes, and tightly set mouth suggests a man of power and determination, an estimate born out from what is known of his life. By siding with Seleukos I of Syria, he became ruler of Pergamon and successfully withstood the Gallic attack on the city in ca. 275 B.C.

Parthian Kings

Parthia broke loose from the Seleucid kingdom in ca. 260 B.C. Although early portraits of the kings continued in the Hellenistic tradition, although they are more individualistic than their Greek predecessors. Mithradates II, who made an even sharper break with the Hellenistic tradition when he had himself portrayed in robes and tiara of a Near Eastern ruler rather than as the diademed Hellenistic divine king. This break was most likely done as a sign of independence.

Baktrian Kings

Baktria broke away from the Seleucid empire in 261-246 B.C., and for nearly two centuries after that continued to represent the furthest extent of the Greek world. The coins of the Baktrian kings are evidence for a long-lived and powerful dynasty, some of whose members are known only from the coins. Like the Parthians, they rejected the Hellenistic conventions for royal portraiture in favor of a more individual, and often more martial, style. **Menander** made the deepest impression on Indian tradition. His coins, which are mostly bi-lingual (Greek on one side and Kharoshti on the other), have been found over a wide area. During his reign Baktria controlled the northern Punjab, and Menander seems to have been sympathetic to Buddhists in India.

Kingdom of the Bosphorus

The kingdom of the Bosphorus existed in what is now Ukraine from the 5th century B.C. to the middle of the 4th century. Though allied clients of Rome from the late 1st century B.C., the later kings, including **Sauromates**, continued to mint coins on Greek weight standards, and with local artistic styles. The reverses always carried a portrait of the reigning emperor, in the local style, along with the date according to the Pontic era (which began in Oct. 297 B.C.).

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ROMAN COINS

Republican Period

The earliest coins of Rome and Central Italy were cast, not struck, and were of bronze. When, however, the Romans began trading with the Greeks of South Italy, the need for silver coinage was realized, and ca. 290-280 B.C., silver didrachms were introduced. These coins were struck and were Greek in style with the word ROMANO on the reverse. Circa 220 B.C., the didrachm was replaced by the quadrigatus with a Janus head on the obverse. In approximately 211 B.C., a new series of bronze coins was introduced. The largest denomination, the as, was divided into fractions: semis, triens, quadrans, sextans, and uncia, and both cast (aes grave) and struck coins were produced. A great quantity of these bronze coins were issued in the first half of the 2nd century B.C., but after 150 B.C., production substantially ceased until after the civil wars of 49 to ca. 29 B.C. The coins remained in circulation, however, as shown by the worn appearance of many of them. Probably at the same time as the introduction of the new bronze coinage, in ca. 211 B.C., new silver coins were introduced: denarii, victoriati, quinarii, and sestertii. The denarius superseded the victoriatu from the middle of the 2nd century.

The mints in this early period were located in Rome, Sicily (?), Sardinia, and southeast Italy, but after the end of the Hannibalic War in 206 B.C., silver coins were minted only at Rome, except for those minted in Iberia. The Senate controlled the coinage through three annually elected moneyers (a *quaestor*, or senior financial magistrate, and two *tresviri monetales*, the junior magistrates), who guaranteed the coinage by putting their own names and, in a later period, references to the achievements of their families on the coins. For example, a denarius issued by Sulla's son Faustus shows the surrender of the Numidian king Jugurtha to Sulla. A great variety of types occurs on the denarii.

Silver was used to pay the army (a legion cost 1.5 million denarii a year), for public works, and for distribution of free or subsidized corn in Rome. Under Caesar a soldier's pay was doubled to 225 denarii a year. In the east, the Romans adopted the local coinage of cistophori, which was used to pay for military campaigns. Legionary denarii (for the payment of navy and army) were also struck. Mark Anthony issued coins on the eve of the battle of Actium at which he was defeated by Octavian, later Augustus. Funds were low and Anthony had to debase the coins to 85% silver.

Imperial Period

Coinage was reorganized by Augustus, and henceforth the emperor issued gold and silver coins; the Senate, beginning ca. 23 B.C., was nominally responsible for bronze (inscribed S C, Senatus consulto, "by decree of the Senate,") but it seems likely that the emperor held ultimate authority over bronze coinage also. The denominations were reorganized, and although Nero, and successive emperors, lowered the weights of gold

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and silver (by the time of Caracalla, 211-217, the denarius was only 40 per cent silver), no new denominations were introduced until the reign of Caracalla. The denominations of the 1st and 2nd centuries are represented in the exhibit by coins of Nero, Trajan, and Hadrian: gold aureus and quinarius, silver denarius and quinarius, orichalcum (brass) sestertius and dupondius, copper as, orichalcum semis, and copper quadrans. The bronze coins were important for small transactions. For example, in the 1st century after Christ a liter of ordinary wine sold for one or two asses, and a modius (1 peck, or 1/4 bushel) of wheat cost thirty. The military continued to be paid in silver. A soldier's annual salary of 225 denarii was raised to 300 by Domitian (81-96) where it stayed until the reign of Commodus (180-92).

Increasing inflation and economic problems are reflected in several coinage reforms of the 3rd and 4th centuries. In 215, Caracalla introduced a new silver coin, the antoninianus, equal to two denarii and showing the emperor with radiate crown. During the 3rd century the antoninianus became the chief currency of the empire, driving out the denarius, which was withdrawn from circulation in the mid-3rd century, but the antoninianus became more and more debased until it was copper or bronze with a silvery wash. Diocletian reformed the coinage in 295, by issuing silver coins equal in weight to denarii struck under Nero, and by introducing a new coin, the follis, a large bronze coin with a thin silver wash. The size and weight of the follis, however, soon declined. In about 308, Constantine reformed the coinage with the introduction of a new system based on the gold solidus and the silver siliqua. Small bronze denominations were also issued, but little is known of their relative values or relationship to the gold and silver. In about 348, Constantius II introduced a new three-denomination scheme of base metal coinage, two in base billon and one in bronze. All three denominations bore the legend FEL TEMP REPARATIO (The Golden Age Restored). During the last years of the empire, the coinage consisted mainly of the gold solidus, a small quantity of silver, and many bronze coins. The reforms of Anastasius I in 498, made a complete break, and a discussion of coinage after this date more properly belongs with the history of the Byzantine period.

Roman Coin Types

The Romans adopted the Hellenistic Greek practice of putting portraits on their coins. For the reverse types, representations of the major gods formed an important category. The reverses also recorded the personal qualities and achievements of the emperor. Imperial events were recorded, such as the departure or arrival of the emperor in Rome, or his distribution of largesse. Illustrations or allusions to actual historical events were also depicted. Other reverse types show monuments in Rome, or refer to the important role of the army.

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Roman Coin Types – Architecture

Common reverse types were architectural monuments, showing buildings in Rome and elsewhere in the Empire. Coins issued by Greek cities (Roman Provincial coins) often showed a local monument. In some cases the coins provide major, or the sole, evidence for the appearance of a building. Despite the small scale, important details are often given, such as Ionic column capitals, Corinthian capitals, and pedimental sculpture. Some of the evidence must, however, be treated with caution. The die cutter may have eliminated some of the columns of a temple in order to show the cult statue inside, and an arcuated lintel may similarly be intended to show the statue rather than representing the actual architecture. Bird's eye perspective shows interior and outside together as seen on a coin commemorating the rebuilding of the walls of Nicaea after their destruction by Gothic tribes in A.D. 256.

Roman Coin Types--Imperial Events

Coins were a means of propaganda through commemoration of important events and services to the populace. Thus, the distribution of corn was recorded and the return to Rome after the battle of Abrittus against the Goths in 251.

Roman Coin Types--Historical Events

Specific references to historical events were used as coin types: the capture or recapture of provinces such as Armenia or Dacia with the provinces personified or a captured Dacian represented, or a trophy to represent victory.

Roman Coin Types--Personifications

Personifications of abstract ideals that indicated the emperors' care for the State was an effective form of propaganda. Examples of Pax (Peace), Virtus (Virtue), Fides (Faith), Felicitas (Blessedness), Aequitas (Justice), Spes (Hope), Fortuna (Good Fortune), and Liberalitas (Generosity) are included here.

Roman Coin Types--The Gods

The major gods continued to appear on the reverses of Roman coins. Eastern religions were also represented, particularly on Greek Imperial coins.

Roman Coin Types--Imperial Portraits

Posthumous representations of famous Romans first appeared on the coinage of the Roman republic in the early 1st century B.C.E. Their purpose was to draw attention to the lineage of the magistrate issuing the coins. This trend continued until 44 B.C.E., when Julius Caesar became the first living Roman to place his own portrait on his coins. This practice was to continue down throughout the whole of the Imperial period and into the Byzantine period. In a time before photography, coin portraits, usually found on the obverse, allowed the emperor to present his image to people living anywhere within the bounds of the Empire. In doing so he could choose to present himself in a variety of styles, from the idealized to the harshly realistic, and in a variety of guises,

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from the heroic military leader, to the tactful statesman, and even to the living incarnation of a god. His name and official titles are listed in the space that surrounds the portrait. These images are invaluable, as coins sometimes present the only known portraits of certain imperial personages. In addition, these portraits provide evidence of changes in aesthetic tastes such as hairstyles and modes of dress. Changes in the imagery and quality of the portraits reflect the evolving social, political, and economical state of the Empire.

Emperors

Augustus (Octavian) (27 B.C. - A.D. 14), born in Rome in 63 B.C., was a grand-nephew of Julius Caesar who adopted him as his heir. After the defeat of Mark Anthony at Actium in 31 B.C., Octavian became sole master of the Roman world. In 27 B.C., he was given the title of "Augustus" by which he is popularly known.

Tiberius (14-37), born in 42 B.C., was Augustus' stepson and successor. Jesus Christ was crucified during his reign.

Caligula (Caius Caesar) (37-41), was born in A.D. 12, and named by Tiberius as his heir. He was murdered in 41, after a reign of only four years. He received his nickname from the soldiers when as a child he wore the miniature uniform of a soldier, including the "caligula" a sort of half-boot.

Claudius (41-54), born in 10 B.C., married his niece Agrippina the younger and named her son Nero his heir. He died in 54, perhaps poisoned by his wife.

Nero (54-68), committed suicide in 68, on the eve of his arrest, after a reign of extravagance. He was a lover of the arts and it is said of him that he played the fiddle while Rome burned in A.D. 64.

Galba (68-69), born in 3 B.C., was governor of Spain when his troops proclaimed him emperor. He was murdered in Rome in 69, as a result of a conspiracy led by Otho.

Vespasian (69-79), born to a humble family in A.D. 9, was proclaimed emperor by the legions at Alexandria. He is known as a just and industrious ruler.

Titus (79-81), Vespasian's eldest son, was born in 41. He is remembered chiefly for his capture of Jerusalem in 70.

Domitian (81-96), younger son of Vespasian, was born in 51. He was murdered in 96, after a cruel and tyrannical rule.

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Nerva (96-98), born in 32, was consul with Domitian when the latter was assassinated. His short rule was marked by justice and careful administration. He adopted Trajan as his successor.

Trajan (98-117), born in Spain in 52, is well known for his victories over the Dacians (commemorated on the famous column that still stands in Rome) and the Parthians, which extended the eastern boundaries of the empire.

Hadrian (117-138), adopted by Trajan as his heir, spent much of his reign in visiting the provinces of the empire and greatly improved the defenses of the frontiers. Much of Hadrian's wall in England, built against invasions from the north, still stands. He thoroughly reorganized the government of the empire, and his rule was just and humane.

Antoninus Pius (138-161), born in 86, provided the empire with patient, judicious and impartial rule. Throughout his reign the empire was prosperous and peaceful.

Marcus Aurelius (161-180), born in Rome in 121, was adopted by Antoninus Pius, whose daughter Faustina the younger he married. During his reign, constant attacks on the frontiers threatened the empire. While commanding the army in Pannonia during one of these attacks the emperor died. He was a philosopher and writer, but his only surviving work is his *Meditations*.

Lucius Verus, born in 130, was adopted by Antoninus Pius together with Marcus Aurelius, with whom he served as co-emperor from 161-169. He died during a campaign against the Germans.

Commodus (177-192), son of Marcus Aurelius, accompanied his father on his campaigns, and was made co-emperor in 177. His reign was cruel and bloodthirsty, and he was murdered in 192, after displaying a megalomania that caused him to believe he was a reincarnation of Hercules and to demand that he be worshipped as such.

Septimius Severus (117-138), was born in Africa in 146, and was proclaimed emperor by his troops in 193. He was a highly capable general and as governor of the provinces of Pannonia and Illyria under previous emperors was honored and respected. He died in Britain on a campaign against the Scots.

Caracalla (211-217), elder son of Septimius Severus, succeeded to the empire with his brother Geta in 211, but became sole emperor in 212, after murdering his brother. He was assassinated in 217, by one of his own bodyguards while on campaign against the Parthians.

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Empresses

Agrippina the younger, wife of Claudius and mother of Nero, was murdered at her son's orders in 59.

Sabina married Hadrian in 100, but she bore no children. She accompanied Hadrian on his travels and was honored with the title of Augusta on coinage in 128. She was consecrated by Hadrian after her death in 136 or 137.

Faustina I, wife of Antoninus Pius, bore four children, one of whom was Faustina II. Faustina I died in 141, and was consecrated.

Faustina II, born ca. A.D. 125-130, married Marcus Aurelius in 145. She was apparently a lively personality. When she died in 175, while accompanying Marcus Aurelius to the East, he consecrated her.

Julia Domna, born at Emesa (modern Homs) in Syria, was an intelligent and learned woman, who was married to Septimius Severus in 173, as his second wife. She bore him two future emperors, Caracalla and Geta. She died or committed suicide in 217, after the murder of Caracalla.

Plautilla, was married to Caracalla in 202 and murdered by him in 211.

For expanded biographies of these and other imperial personages the following website is very good: <http://www.roman-emperors.org/>

ROMAN PROVINCIAL COINS

Introduction

By the turn of the millennium, Rome controlled most of the lands about the Mediterranean Sea. Although Roman mints produced most of the gold and silver coinage for the empire, Greek cities continued to issue their own bronze and copper coins, and some silver, which gradually disintegrated into billon. What distinguishes these coins from the usual Roman coins is that their inscriptions remain in Greek, from which they are known as "Greek Imperials" and are classed with Greek coinage. These coins usually bore a portrait of the emperor or empress on the obverse, but on the reverse a local type was used, often representing important monuments, cults, or myths of the issuing city. Some of the cults had originated in Egypt and Asia Minor, were adopted by the Greeks of the mainland, and were widely practiced in the Roman world. Such coins are sometimes our only surviving evidence for the appearance of certain monuments and often provide cult information not known from other sources.

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Traditionally, these coins were classified as 'Greek imperial' coins and considered poor versions of Greek coinage. In recent years, however, a growing appreciation has developed of their importance as documents of political, economic and cultural life in the Roman Empire.

Monuments

Some 800 different buildings represented on the reverses of Greek Imperial coins are important evidence for our knowledge of ancient architecture; for some buildings they constitute our only evidence for their appearance. Despite the small scale, important details are often given, such as Ionic column capitals, Corinthian capitals, and pedimental sculpture. Some of the evidence must, however, be treated with caution. The die cutter may have eliminated some of the columns of a temple in order to show the cult statue inside, and an arcuated lintel may similarly be intended to show the statue rather than representing the actual architecture. Bird's eye perspective shows interior and outside together as seen on a coin commemorating the rebuilding of the walls of Nicaea after their destruction by Gothic tribes in 256. The temple of Zeus on the acropolis at Zeugma is also shown from above with temple, forecourt, mountain, and portico combined into a single design.

Deities

The major gods continued to appear on the reverses of Roman coins. Eastern religions were also represented, particularly on Roman Provincial coins.

Sarapis, Egyptian god of healing, ruler of the visible world and the underworld, and god of the sun, is represented bearded and with a modius (corn measure) on his head.

Isis, an Egyptian goddess, was the wife of Osiris and mother of Horus. In the Hellenistic period she became a major deity throughout the Mediterranean and her cult was adopted by the Romans.

Melqarth, a Phoenician deity and probably originally a marine god, later became identified with Herakles.

Cybele, the great fertility goddess of Anatolia, was worshipped with Attis, god of vegetation. Her cult spread to Greece in the fifth century B.C. and was brought to Rome in 205-204 B.C.

Apollo Lairbenos, a local god of Hierapolis in Phrygia with a rural sanctuary that has been excavated, is usually shown with radiate crown. He was assimilated to Apollo.

Mên, a moon-god of Asia Minor, wears the horns of the moon on his shoulders and is nearly always shown standing or riding. The greatest center of his cult was at Antioch

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in Pisidia, and his cult statue appears on coins of that city. Mên was worshipped throughout Asia Minor and also in Greece where the earliest evidence of his cult, dating to the Hellenistic period, has been found.

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Abbreviations

AE	bronze	l.	left
AR	silver	r.	right
AV	gold	Obv.	obverse
Bil.	billon	Rev.	reverse
EL	electrum		

Glossary of Terms

As: a bronze coin valued at 1/16 of a denarius

Aes: bronze

Aureus: a gold coin

Billon: an alloy of less than 25% silver with copper and/or tin

Cista Mystica: a sacred basket used in Dionysiac rites, always shown with the sacred serpent

Cistophoros: bearing the Cista Mystica

Quadriga: four-horse chariot

Denarius: a silver coin, equal to ten asses at first, and then sixteen

Didrachm: the two-drachma coin

Die: metal piece for striking coins, engraved with the design in negative

Diobol: the two-obol coin

Drachm(a): the basic denomination for most Greek coins, usually divided into six obols. The name is thought to be derived from a "handful" (drax) of six iron cooking-spits (obeloi). Spits were used as currency in early times.

Dupondius: a bronze coin equal to half a sestertius, or one eighth of a denarius

Electrum: an alloy of gold and silver, either natural or artificial

Exergue: the separate area of a coin below the ground-line of the main decoration

Hemidrachm: the half-drachma coin

Hemiobol: the half-obol coin

Incuse: concave design or impression

Obol: see drachm(a)

Obverse: the front and principal side of a coin (i.e. that on which the main design is placed), struck from the anvil die

Orichalcum: brass, an alloy of copper and zinc. The term aes is commonly used to cover both orichalcum and copper

Quadrans: one quarter of an as

Quinarius: a silver coin equal to five asses, or half a denarius

Reverse: the back side of a coin, struck from the punch die

Semis: one half of an as

Sestertius: (1) a silver coin originally equal to two-and-a-half asses; one quarter of a denarius. (2) a brass coin introduced by Augustus, equal to four asses, or one quarter of a denarius

GREEK AND ROMAN COINS

Siglos: Greek word for shekel, usually used as the name of the standard Persian silver coin

Stater: a Greek gold, silver, or electrum coin, the principal denomination of a coinage

Tetartemorion: a quarter-obol coin

Tetradrachm: a four-drachma coin

Triens: one third of an as

Trihemitartemorion: a one-and-a-half tetartemorion, i.e. a three-eighth obol

Tripod: bronze three-legged stand supporting a bowl

Type: the design or device on a coin

Wappenmünzen: literally "heraldic coins," used of the early Athenian coinage

Greek Coinage Denominations

The denominations below were produced under the Attic weight system. Not all of these would have been in regular issue – the dekadrachma, for example, was only struck on special occasions – and some mints never produced the tiny fractions of the obol.

Dekadrachma = 10 drachmas

Tetradrachma = 4 drachmas

Didrachma = 2 drachmas

Drachma = 6 obols

Tetrobol = 4 obols

Triobol or hemidrachma = 3 obols/ $\frac{1}{2}$ drachma

Diobol = 2 obols

Obol = $\frac{1}{6}$ drachma

Tritartemorion = $\frac{3}{4}$ obol

Hemiobol = $\frac{1}{2}$ obol

Trihemitartemorion = $\frac{3}{8}$ obol

Tetartemorion = $\frac{1}{4}$ obol

Hemitartemorion = $\frac{1}{8}$ obol

Some examples of purchasing power:

*In the 6th century BCE, in Athens, one sheep could be purchased for one silver drachma.

*In the late 5th century, one silver drachma per day was paid to architects working on the Athenian Acropolis; unskilled workman were paid 2 obols.

*In the late 5th century, jurors were paid one silver obol per day but, by ca. 425BCE, the pay was raised to two obols a day.

*Note that when the Greek drachma was replaced by the Euro in 2002, one US dollar was equal to about 400dr. Thus one drachma equaled $\frac{1}{4}$ penny.

GREEK AND ROMAN COINS

Roman Coinage Denominations

The denominations below represent the Roman Imperial period beginning with the reign of Augustus (27BCE) and continuing to the mid 3rd century CE.

AV Aureus		
AV Quinarius	½ aureus	
AR Denarius	16 asses; 25 denarii = 1 aureus	
AE Sestertius	4 asses; 4 sestertii = 1 denarius	AV=gold (Latin: aurum)
AE Dupondius	½ sestertius or 1/8 denarius	AR=silver (Latin: argentum)
AE As	¼ sestertius; 4 asses = 1 sestertius	AE=bronze (Latin: aes)
AE Semis	½ as; 8 semisses = 1 sestertius	
AE Quadrans	¼ as; 16 quadrans = 1 sestertius	

Some examples of purchasing power:

*In the second century, a Roman legionary earned 225 denarii a year; an unskilled laborer in Rome earned the same.

*In 50 CE, a loaf of bread in Rome cost about 2 asses.

*In 50 CE, a sextarius (about ½ liter) of wine in Rome cost between 5 and 30 asses, depending on the quality. In Pompeii, the price was between 1 and 4 asses.

*In the first century, the price for olive oil (probably a standard size amphora's worth) was between 27 and 36 denarii.

*In Rome, the cost of living for food (including wheat, wine, and oil) for a family of 4 was about 200 denarii; in the provinces, the price would be considerably less.