

READING LEGENDS ON ROMAN COINS

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1.1 NUMISMATIC TERMINOLOGY

Numismatics: the study of coins

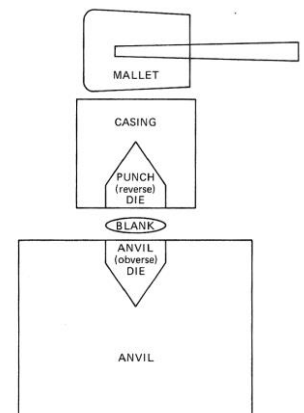
Numismatist: a person who studies coins

Obverse: the front side of a coin (e.g. the head of a deity or the head of an emperor)

Reverse: the back side of a coin (e.g. a full-length figure of a deity, a full-length figure of an emperor, a depiction of an arch or a temple)

Type: the image on a coin (e.g. heads or figures of deities or emperors, architectural depictions)

Attribute: a symbol on a coin placed to the side of the type (e.g. a trident placed next to a head of Neptune)



Mint: workshop that produces coins (e.g. the mint of Rome)

Moneyer: person who produces coins (e.g. moneyers of the Roman mint – a Roman collegium of monetales was made up of 3 men called the Illviri aere argento auro flando feriundo (three men striking [and] casting bronze, silver, [and] gold)

LEGEND: the inscription on a coin (from the Latin *legendum*: something to be read)

1.



2.



3.



What are the legends on these coins?

4.



5.



1.2 COIN DENOMINATIONS

Greek – stater (gold and silver)

drachm (silver)

didrachm (silver – 2 drachmas)

tetradrachm (silver – 4 drachmas)

dekadrachm (silver – 10 drachmas)

cistophorus (silver tetradrachm that derived its name under the Attalids in Pergamum – Hellenistic period)

main Roman denominations under Augustus

Roman – aureus (gold=25 denarii, 100 sestertii, 400 asses)

denarius (silver=16 asses, but in the early Republic 10 asses)

sestertius (bronze=4 asses)

as (bronze)

1.3 LEGENDS ON GREEK COINS

- Most Ancient Greek coins used the genitive (possessive) case
- Some legends bear city ethnics, such as the Athena/owl tetradrachms minted in Athens (the standard Athenian coin type from the late 6th century BC to the mid 1st century BC)
- Some legends bear the name of rulers (e.g. Hellenistic monarchs like Alexander the Great)



Obverse: head of Athena
Reverse: ΑΘΕ [of the Athenians]
-Owl, olive branch
and crescent moon above
Tetradrachm, Athens
c. 5th century BC



Alexander the Great,
Obverse: head of Herakles
wearing lion's scalp
Reverse: ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ
[of Alexander]
-Zeus enthroned, holding
eagle and sceptre
Tetradrachm, Memphis
c. 332-323 BC

1.4 LEGENDS ON ROMAN REPUBLICAN COINS

-Coins began to be produced at the mint of Rome in the 3rd century BC. Coin types of the 3rd century BC are called “public” types because they were depictions related to the city of Rome. They were standardized and unchanging in the fashion of Greek coins, such as the Athena/owl tetradrachms of Athens. They also all bear the legend ROMA in the manner of the city ethnics found on Greek coins, such as on the the Athena/owl coins.



Obverse: head of Janus
Reverse: ROMA – Jupiter riding in a quadriga driven by Victory – Jupiter holds a sceptre and a thunderbolt
Didrachm, Rome after 225 BC



Obverse: head of Janus
Reverse: ROMA – prow
As, Rome after 225 BC



Obverse: X – head of Roma
Reverse: ROMA - Dioscuri galloping
Denarius, Rome
after 211 BC



Obverse: X – head of Roma
Reverse: ROMA – Luna in a biga
Denarius, Rome
179-170 BC



Obverse: X – head of Roma
Reverse: ROMA – Victory in a biga
Denarius, Rome
157-156 BC

- Coins produced in Rome in the late 2nd and early 1st centuries BC are known as “familial” types because coin types commemorating the deeds of the ancestors of Roman moneyers began to be depicted. There was a so-called “typological liberation” through which deities other than Roma began to be portrayed and types began to represent moneyers’ familial origins and glory (e.g. martial, political, or religious). The legends on these coins bore the name (and sometimes office, e.g. quaestor) of the moneyer or the name (and sometimes office) of a moneyer’s ancestor (all in the nominative case). Some legends bearing the names of personifications or deities were also used.



Obverse: L POMPON MOLO –
head of Apollo
Reverse: NVMA POMPIL-
Numa holding a lituus in front
of a lighted altar; *victimarius*
leading a goat
Denarius, Rome
97 BC, RRC 334/1



Obverse: VIRTVS III VIR-
head of Virtus
Reverse: MN AQVIL to r.,
MN(Manii) F(ilius) MN(Manii) N(epos) [nepos – grandson]
to l., SICIL in exergue –
warrior holding shield and
raising up the personification
of Sicily
Denarius, Rome
71 BC, RRC 401

-Coins produced in Rome in the 1st century BC from 83 BC (the time of Sulla: 138-78 BC) onwards are known as “personal” types because coin types commemorating the deeds of living, leading figures such as Pompey the Great, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Octavian, and so on began to be depicted. The images on these coins referred to the martial, political, or religious accomplishments of these leaders. The legends on these coins bore their names and offices (e.g. political or religious) all in the nominative case. Some of these coins were also minted outside of Rome (e.g. other parts of Italy, Gaul, and Sicily).



Obverse: CAESAR IM(perator) P(ontifex) M(aximus) – laureate head of Julius Caesar, crescent moon behind

Reverse: L AEMILIVS BVCA – Venus holding Victory in r. hand and a sceptre in l. hand
Denarius, Rome

January-February 44 BC, RRC 480/4



Obverse: M ANTON IMP III VIR R P C AVG
(II VIR R P C: Triumvir Reipublicae Constituendae, Augur) - head of Antony

Reverse: CAESAR IMP PONT(ificex) III VIR R P C – head of Octavian

Denarius, mint moving with Antony
39 BC, RRC 528/3

-To sum up before discussing Octavianic/Augustan coins, Republican legends were limited to ROMA, S C (Senatus Consulto), EX S C, names of deities and personifications, names and offices of Roman moneyers and their ancestors, and names and offices of the leading figures of Rome. Only a couple Republican reverse legends are finite sentences:



Obverse: P YPSAE S C – head of Neptune, dolphin behind
Reverse: C YPSAE COS PRIV in exergue, CEPIT upwards
(The consul Gaius Ypsaeus - actually C. Plautius Decianus - captured Privernum)
Jupiter in quadriga hurling a thunderbolt
Denarius, Rome
60 BC
RRC 420



Obverse: QVIRINVS C MEMMI C F – head of Quirinus
Reverse: MEMMIVS AED CERIALIA PREIMVS FECIT-
(The aedile Gaius Memmius staged the first Cerialia)
Ceres seated holding a torch in l. hand and corn-ears in r. hand
Denarius, Rome
56 BC, RRC 427

1.5 LEGENDS ON OCTAVIANIC/AUGUSTAN COINS

- Octavianic/Augustan coins present several new developments in the inventory of Roman coin legends and types. Among these, they introduce the concept of specificity. There is an increase in the employment of legends during the Augustan age, and coins begin to show a direct correspondence between types and legends. The Augustan use of explanatory legends is a significant step in Roman coinage. There is also an increase in the transposition of representations of various honours onto coins; that is, honours voted for or requests granted to Augustus by the Senate and the people of Rome. Senatorial honorific decrees are now seen in bulk on coinage through both images and texts.

- The dative case (to/for) for CAESAR AVGVSTVS and IMP CAESAR was used for the first time c. 19-16 BC at the mints of Rome and Spain for coins which show an honour voted for or granted to Augustus.
- The ablative absolute (noun and participle – with the NOUN having been-VERBed) also became predominant on Augustan legends c. 19-16 BC in Rome, Spain, and Pergamum (e.g. SIGNIS RECEPTIS – the (military) standards having been returned)
- For instance, the Senate and people of Rome voted for or granted Augustus honours for various reasons, and these reasons were then inscribed on coins. Thus, the quod-clause (denoting a reason for something: i.e. quod– because) is seen on some “epigraphic” types (coin types which have no images, but only legends).



Obverse: IMP CAESAR DIVI F COS VI
LIBERTATIS P R VINDEX (Vindicator of the liberty of the Roman people)
– laureate head of Octavian
Reverse: PAX standing on a parazonium,
holding a caduceus; snake emerging from
a cista mystica; all in a laurel wreath
Cistophorus, Ephesus
28 BC, RIC I (second edition – 1984) : 476



Obverse: IMP CAESAR DIVI F COS VI –
laureate head of Octavian
Reverse: LEGES ET IVRA P R RESTITVIT
(he (Octavian) restored (i.e. gave back) the statutes and
laws to the Roman people) -
Octavian togate and seated on a curule chair, l.,
holding out a scroll with a *scrinium* on the ground
Aureus, Ephesus
28 BC, British Museum accession no. CM 1995, 4-1.1.



OB CIVIS SERVATOS – on account of having saved the lives of citizens

Obverse: AVGVSTVS – head of Augustus
Reverse: OB CIVIS SERVATOS - shield inscribed
SPQR CL(ipeus) V(irtutis) in an oak wreath
Aureus, Spain – Colonia Caesaraugusta
c.19-16 BC, RIC 1 : 29a



Obverse: CAESARI AVGVSTO – laureate head of
Augustus
Reverse: MARS VLTOR (Mars Ultor)
– temple of Mars Ultor within
which are three battle standards
Denarius, Spain – Colonia Patricia
c.19-16 BC, RIC 1: 105a



CIVIB(us) ET SIGN(is) MILIT(aribus) A PART(his) RECV P(eratis) -
citizens and
standards having been returned by the Parthians

Obverse: SPQR IMP CAESARI AVGVSTO COS XI TR POT
VI – head of Augustus
Reverse: CIVIB ET SIGN MILIT A PART RECV P –
quadriga surmounted on a triumphal arch;
figure on l. holds a standard, on r., an aquila and bow
Denarius, Spain – Colonia Patricia
27 June 18-26 June 17 BC, RIC 1: 136



Obverse: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) S(enatus) P(opulus) Q(ue)
R(omanus) V(ota) S(uscepta) PR(o) S(alute) IMP(eratoris) CAE(saris) QVOD PER
EV(m) R(es) P(ublica) IN AMP(liore) ATQ(ue) TRAN(quilliore) S(tatu) E(st) - the
Senate and the Roman people [decree that] vows be undertaken to Jupiter Optimus
Maximus for the health of Emperor Caesar Augustus because through him the *res
publica* is in a better and more tranquil state - in an oak wreath

Reverse: L MESCINIVS RUFVS III VIR –
cippus inscribed IMP(erator) CAES(ar) AVGV(stus) COMM(uni)
CONS(ensu) [by common consent] S(enatus) C(onsulto) to l. and r.

Denarius, Rome

16 BC

RIC I (second edition – 1984): 358

*This is called an “epigraphic” coin type



Obverse: DIVI F PATER PATRIAE CAESAR AVGVSTVS – laureate head of Augustus

Reverse: C L CAESARES AVGVSTI F COS DESIG PRINC IVVENT –

Gaius and Lucius Caesar togate, each resting a hand on a shield, behind each shield, a spear; above, a simpulum to the l. and a lituus to the r.

Aureus, Lugdunum

2 BC – AD 9, RIC I (revised edition – 1984): 206

PRINC(eps) IVVENT(VTIS) – leader of the youth (Gaius and Lucius attained this title in 2 BC)

1.6 LEGENDS ON POST-AUGUSTAN COINS

-The increase in coin legends that was introduced during the reign of Augustus was carried on into the later Julio-Claudian dynasty, into the Flavian dynasty, and through to the Later Roman emperors, such as Constantine the Great.



Obverse: NERO CLAVD(ivs) CAESAR AVG GER(manicus) P M TR P IMP PP – laureate head of Nero

Reverse: PACE P R TERRA MARIQ PARTA IANVM CLVSIT - temple of Janus, S C to l. and r.
Sestertius, Rome

AD 65

PACE P R TERRA MARIQ PARTA IANVM CLVSIT - "The Peace of the Roman People having been established on Land and Sea [or Everywhere], he closed (the Temple of) Janus."

PARTA is not "doors", but the past participle of "pario", "bring forth, produce, acquire"



Obverse: IMP CAES VESPASIAN AVG P M TR P PP COS III –
laureate head of Vespasian

Reverse: JUDAEA CAPTA (Judaea having been captured),

S C in exergue - emperor standing right in armor,
holding spear and parazonium, foot on helmet; to right, palm tree with female Jewish
captive seated right in attitude of mourning

Sestertius, Rome

AD 71



Obverse: CONSTANTINVS MAX AVG – laureate head of Constantine the Great
Reverse: SPES PVBLICA (hope of the people),
CONS(Constantinople) in exergue – labarum, ornamented with three medallions
and surmounted by christogram, spearing serpent
Follis, Constantinople
AD 327-328