

Digital Resources Schools & Learning

Coins (Roman)



*Peterborough Museum
& Art Gallery*

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Coins then & now

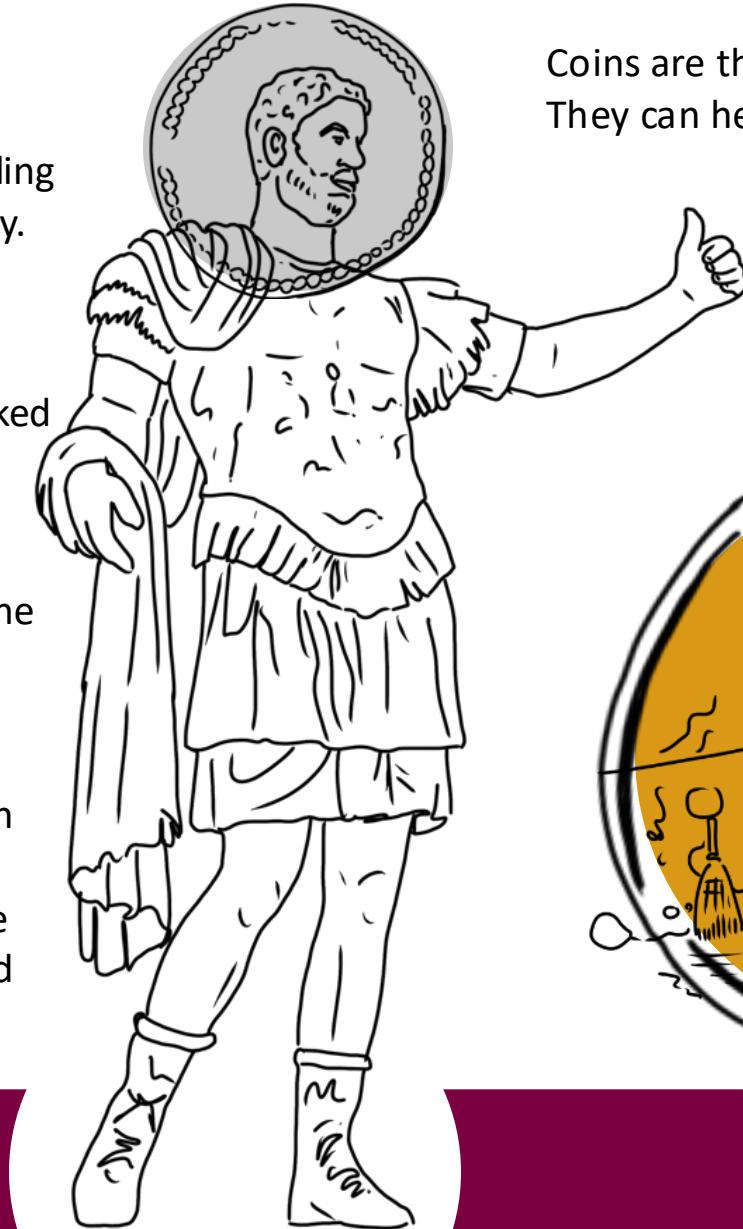
Why did the Romans have coins?

The Romans used coins for buying, selling and paying wages, just like we do today.

Coins were also an important publicity tool for the emperor. They showed people what the emperor looked like and often celebrated important victories or other achievements.

The portraits also showed authority. The inclusion of a crown was used to show recognition from battle.

During the Roman Republic and Roman Empire, the money system changed many times: some coins changed value or went out of use, and they even used coins from other countries.



Why are Roman coins important now?

Coins are the most common metal object we find of the Roman period. They can help archaeologists find new sites, like forts, villas and towns.

Coins can be closely dated and can give an idea of where people were living or when a settlement was destroyed. They are really helpful for working out the 'chronology' or timeline of an area.



The Romans had mints (where coins were made) spread across the Empire. This gives clues about how coins were traded and where more trade and wealth may have been, by the number of coins discovered.

Reading a coin

A coin has two sides...

Obverse

and

Reverse

Obverse = 'Heads'

This side usually had the **portrait** of the **emperor** and helped make the piece a trusted unit of currency, backed by the Roman state.



Legend

The writing on the coin, usually on the edge & often with the name of the Emperor.

Bust

Head and shoulders of a person.

Field

The flat areas of the coin that are undecorated.

Exergue

The space at the bottom of the coin – sometimes a line is drawn here.

Mint mark

Sometimes letters or symbols are at the bottom of the coin to show where it was made.

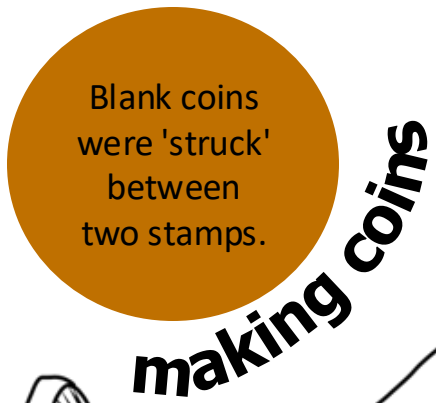
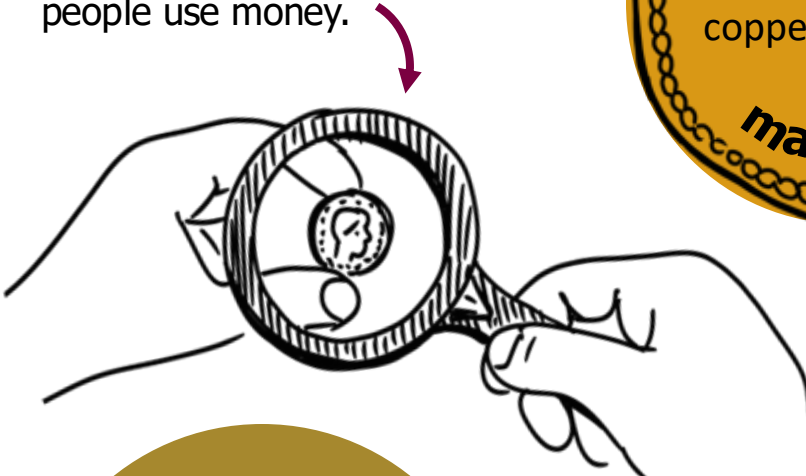
Beading

Dotted border around outside

Reverse = 'Tails'
This side had **symbols**, often showing a **god** or **animal**. They represented a certain 'virtue' - such as peace or protection. This side might also have military or religious symbols.

Coin Facts

Numismatics is the collection, study and analysis of how people use money.



Blank coins were 'struck' between two stamps.

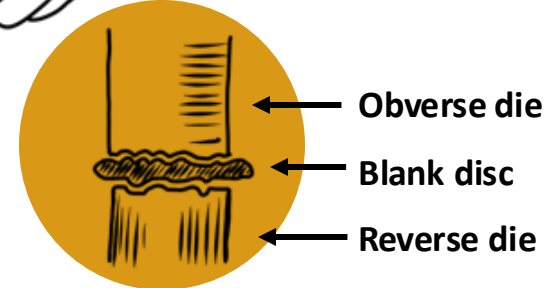
How were coins made?

A design would be cut into a **die** (like a stamp) using engraving tools by a 'celator'.

One die was needed for the obverse 'head' side and another for the reverse 'tails' side.

The **blank coin**, called a 'flan', was then heated. It was placed between the two dies and then laid on an anvil (a block of metal or stone).

The die on top would then be hit with a heavy hammer.



A mule is a coin with the obverse of one type and the reverse of another. These coins are mistakes caused by using the wrong dies.



Where were coins made?

A **mint** was the place coins were made. A coin might have a 'mint mark' consisting of two parts: the name of the city and the letter of the 'officina' (workshop) that made the specific coin. Recognising these can help date coins.



Some military legions had travelling mints so they could pay their soldiers as they moved around.

Roman Legends

The writing or 'legend' on a Roman coin named the emperor, their titles and some of their attributes.

The letter U was written as a V

little fact



Legend	Full word	Meaning
IMP	Imperator	General/Commander;
CAES	Caesar	A title taken by emperors demonstrating their descent (whether directly by blood or not) from Julius Caesar
AVG	Augustus	A title taken by Emperors meaning 'majestic' or venerable'
PP	Pater Patriae	The father of the country – this was an honorary title, given by the Senate to the emperor
S.P.Q.R	Senatus Populusque Romanus	A phrase meaning the government of the Roman Republic - the Senate and People of Rome
PF or PIUS	Pius Felix	Meaning dutiful and wise
SC	Senatus Consulto	The Senate has given its permission and approves this coin
COS	Consul	The consul was the chief magistrate of the Roman government. The number following this shows how many times the emperor held this position.

Coin Symbols

These are some 'types' or images you might see on Roman coins.

They are symbols that mean different things.

What do you think they might mean?



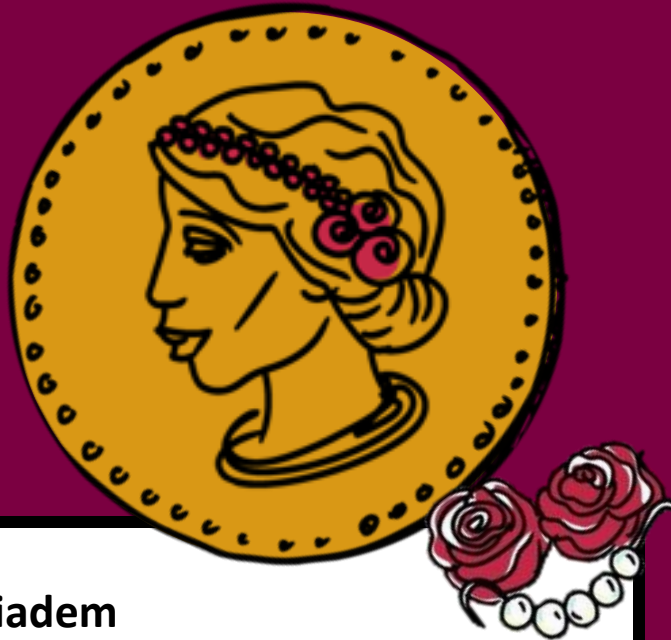
Coin Symbols

The **obverse** or **heads** side of a coin, might show the person wearing something on their head.



Radiate

Wearing a crown of spiky triangles, representing the rays of the sun. The Roman sun-god Sol is always shown wearing a radiate.



Diadem

An ornate headband, tied at back. It could have pearls, rosettes or laurel leaves. Symbolises dignity and someone of high status.



Laureate

Wearing a laurel wreath. Adopted as an icon of the Roman Emperor. A symbol of triumph and kingship.

Coin Symbols

The reverse or tails side of a coin, might show one or many symbols.

Chlamys

A simple cloak. Often worn by a heroic figure or linked to gods Hermes & Mercury as travellers.



Hippocamp

Mythical sea creature with a fishy rear and head and forelimbs of horse.

Palladium

A statue said to have been brought to Rome by the Trojan prince. A symbol of good luck.



Parazonium

A short triangular sword or long dagger, often in its sheath. Held by an emperor or deity Virtus.



Cornucopia

Horn overflowing with foods. Symbol of richness and plenty.



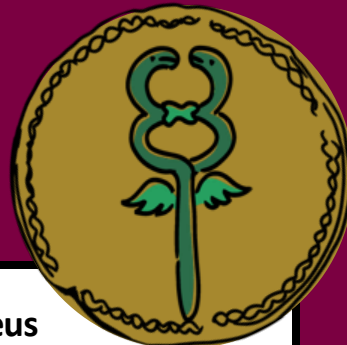
Thyrsus

A staff made with a giant fennel stem, carried by Dionysus and representing his spirit. It was wound with ivy, ribbon, and topped with a pine cone.



Modius

Basket or container used as a measure of corn. Shows there was a good supply.



Caduceus

A rod twined with 2 snakes facing each other. It symbolises trade and prosperity.

Patera

A shallow dish which a sacrifice was poured from. Some coins had creatures being fed from them, which symbolises piety.



Wreath

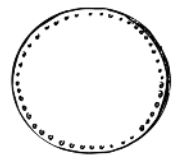
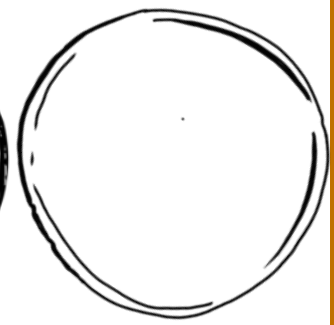
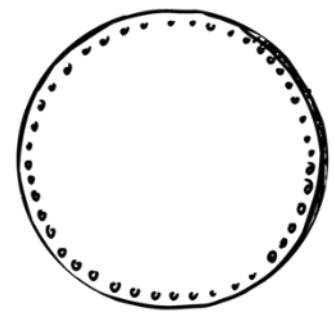
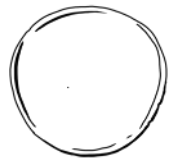
A circle of laurel leaves. A Roman symbol of victory and celebration.

Coin Values



Highest
value

Lowest
value



Aureus	Denarius	Quinarius	Sestertius	Dupondius	As	Semis	Quadrans
gold	silver	silver	copper alloy	copper alloy	copper	copper	copper alloy
400 Asses	16 Asses	8 Asses	4 Asses	2 Asses	base unit	½ As	¼ As



These are all coins
from our
collection.

What things can
you spot?

Coins up close

People



Remembering People

The word *DIVA* here shows us that Faustina has died and this coin is to commemorate her life.



A Deity

This coin has a personification of a deity – this is person that represents something else. The coin reads *Libertas* - this goddess, Libertas, stands for liberty and freedom.



Roma

This coin shows 'Roma' the embodiment of Rome. She is illustrated wearing a winged helmet as the goddess and protector of Rome.

99 Day Emperor

The year 238AD was a time of crisis and infighting in the Roman Empire. It became known as 'The Year of the 6 Emperors.' Emperor Pupenus, shown on this coin, ruled for only 99 days!



Coins up close

Events & Stories



Caesar's Comet

This coin shows a shield on top of a sword and spear. In the middle, is an 8-pointed star. Shortly after Caesar's was killed in 44BCE, a comet was seen in the sky. Romans believed it was a sign, showing Caesar's 'deification' - his rising to become a god.

Generous Emperors

On a platform, left to right, sit: Goddess Liberlitas, Emperors Balbinus, Pupienus, and Gordian III, and a small soldier. In front of them, is a Roman citizen, mounting from below. The legend says *Liberalitas Augustorum* – translating to the generosity of the emperors.



Battle Wins

This coin shows Victory, the winged goddess who personified victory, driving a biga, a two-horsed chariot. She is also holding reins and a whip. It is said to commemorate Rome's dominance following the Battle of Pydna.



Caesar's Ancestry

This is one of the legendary founders of Rome, Aeneas. He carries a palladium statue and Anchises, his father, on his shoulder. Aeneas' mother was said to be the goddess Venus. The coin was issued by Julius Caesar. He claimed to be descended from Aeneas and the coin was probably made to promote Caesar as a true Roman, worthy of honour.



Coins up close

Damages & Errors



Pendant

The obverse here depicts the god Mars. This coin was created during the rule of the first emperor Octavian (Augustus). There is a circular dent that could have been to make this coin into a necklace.

Metal Test

This obverse side is of the goddess Venus. She has two gouges taken out from the side of her cheek. This was done to see if the coin was a fake.

These cuts show if the "heart metal" is pure and the same as the outside - fake coins had a base metal core like copper.



Making Mistakes

The design on this coin is an error. There are two overlapping faces - a second face can be seen on the back of the main head. Not all coins were mistakes however: some old coins were recycled, with new designs struck over the top of them and traces of the old image are sometimes still visible.

Crack!

This coin of Constantius II, has a crack at the top of it, caused by the minting process. The metal broke under the stress of hammering.



Gallery Replicas

At Peterborough Museum, we use replica coins for students to handle...



These three coins say 'COPY' or 'F' to show they are not real Roman coins!

little fact

DENARIUS

Made from silver in 205 AD

Obverse: Emperor Septimus Severus, wearing a laureate.

Reverse: Jupiter, King of the gods: holding a thunderbolt and sceptre.



SESTERTIUS

Made from bronze in 222 – 231 AD

Obverse: Emperor Severus Alexander, wearing a laureate.

Reverse: Justitia, goddess of justice, holding a patera and sceptre.



AS

Made from bronze in 50-54 AD

Obverse: Emperor Claudius.

Reverse: Minerva, goddess of war, wisdom and the arts, with a javelin and shield.



Number Activities

Activity 1

Answer maths problems using Roman Numerals to add and subtract.

Examples

- How many coins do you have in your Roman purse? *VII*
- If you have *V* coins and then another *III* coins, how many coins do you have?

Activity 2

Convert coins to other denominations.

Examples

- How many *asses* are in 1 *denarius*?
- *2 denarius* are worth how many *sestertii*?

Activity 3

Sorting coins

Create or print some Roman coins and arrange the coins largest to smallest in value.

Roman Numerals	
1	I
2	II
3	III
4	IV
5	V
6	VI
7	VII
8	VIII
9	IX
10	X
15	XV
20	XX
50	L
100	C
200	CC
500	D
1000	M
2000	MM

Replica Coins



Picture Activities

The worksheets follow this page >

Activity 1

Using the images of our coins, can you find a coin that shows:

- A famous Emperor
- A women
- A deity
- An event
- Are damaged (accidental or deliberate)

Activity 2

Coin Types

Look back at the photos of our coin collection - can you find any of these 'types'? You could also look up other coins online with these symbols.

Activity 3

Design your own coins

- Include your portrait and a symbol for the reverse.
- You could create your own god to symbolise war, love, beauty, fairness, health or happiness.
- Use the reverse types in this resource as inspiration.

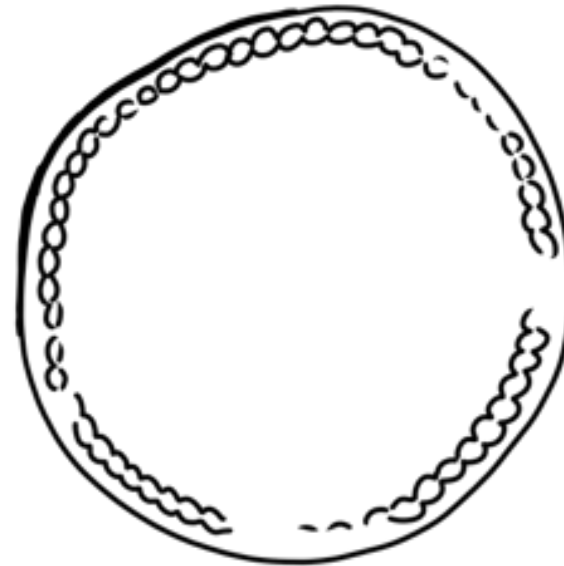
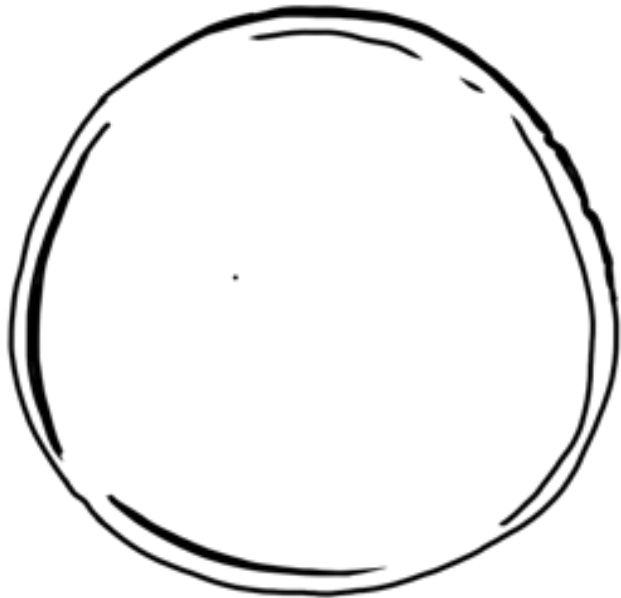
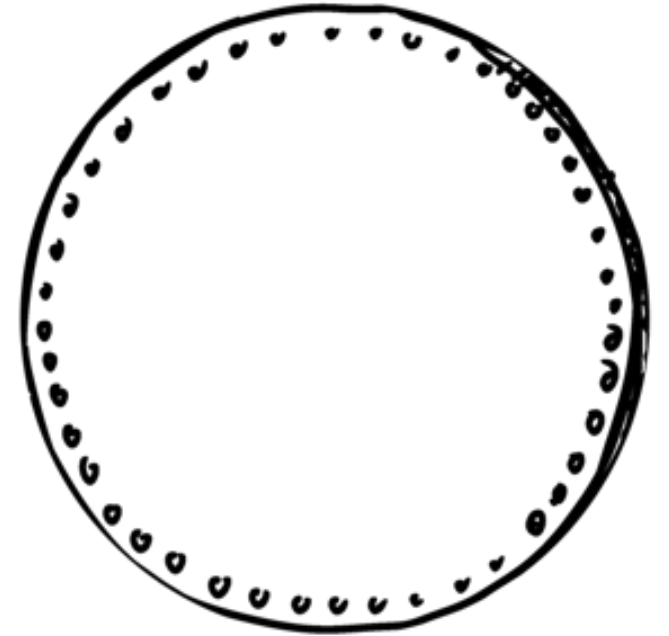
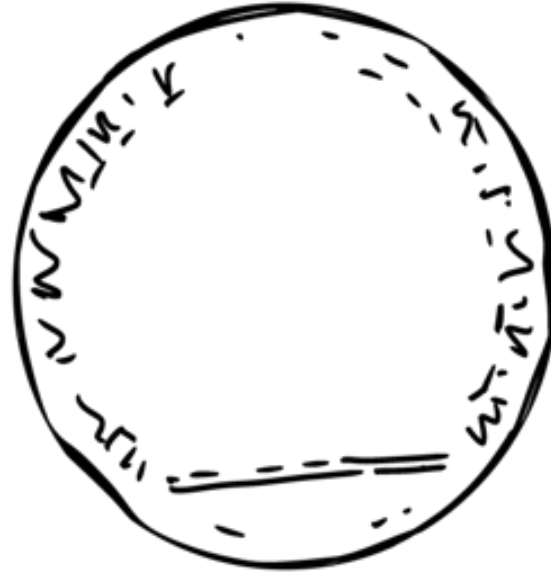
Activity 4

Coin Fact Sheet

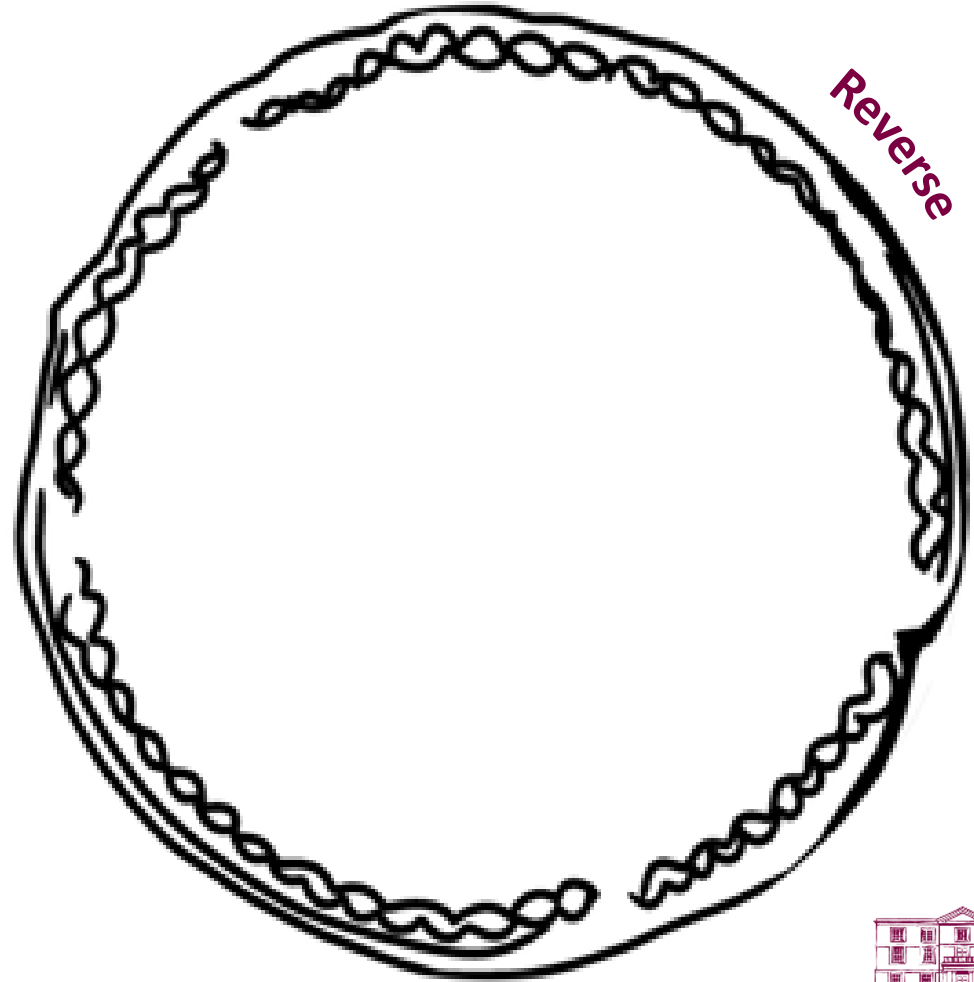
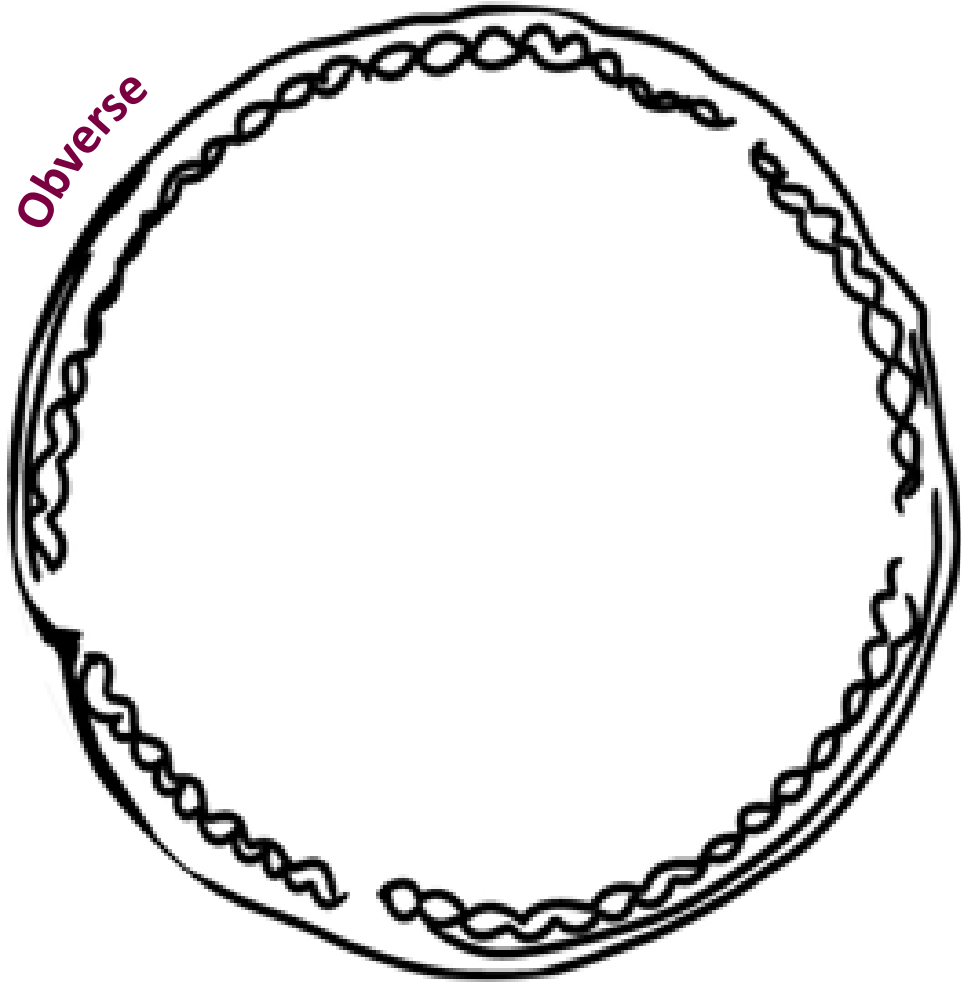
- Colour in a dupondius coin from our coin collection.
- Answer the questions on the sheet using the information in this resource to help. An answer sheet is provided.



Design A Coin



Design A Coin



A Roman Coin

Dupondius 128-129AD



This side is called the obverse and often shows a person/emperor/face



This side is called the reverse and often has a symbol/deity



A dupondius is worth 2 asses.

This coin shows emperor Hadrian on the obverse/reverse. He is wearing a rosette/radiate crown.

The other side of the coin, called the obverse/reverse, has a woman fighting/sitting called Salus. She is the goddess of prosperity and wellbeing and she is feeding a snake from a modius/patera.

Can you spot these letters? HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS PP COS III SC



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Answers

A Roman Coin

Dupondius 128-129AD

Label or colour
the two sides of
this coin.



This side is called the _____
and often shows a _____

This side is called the _____
and often has a _____

Value: A dupondius is worth ___ asses.

Images:

This coin shows emperor Hadrian on the obverse/reverse. He is wearing a rosette/radiate crown. The other side of the coin, called the obverse/reverse, has a woman fighting/sitting called Salus. She is the goddess of prosperity and wellbeing, and she is feeding a snake from a modius/patera.

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Roman Coin Types



External Links

- <https://finds.org.uk/counties/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Design-a-Roman-coin.pdf>
- <https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/-/media/museums/downloads/learning/norwich-castle/ks2/ks2-romans-teachers-pack.pdf>
- <https://twotempleplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Year-4-The-Roman-Empire-Roman-Coins-CG.pdf>
- https://www.fulhampalace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Roman_coins.pdf
- <https://www.baldwin.co.uk/news/how-to-read-ancient-coins/>
- https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/research/dept_projects/beginningsofempire/glossary/

School Replica Coins – Real copies:

- <https://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.50086>
- <https://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.4.sa.563b>
- [https://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1\(2\).cl.116](https://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1(2).cl.116)

Find out more

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