

Introduction

Coins have been understood as an important source for ancient history for centuries. As scholarly interests have shifted, new questions have emerged. For example, Guillaume Budé (1467–1540) wrote *De Asse et Partibus Eius* (1514) on Roman coins and measures. The first printed book dealing with numismatics, divided coins on their weights, and attempted to define the ancient value of ancient Greek and Roman coins as they circulated in antiquity. This enormously influential book was translated into French in 1541, and was reprinted many times. This era also spawned some coin collections that survive to the present. For example, Joachim II Hector, Elector of Brandenburg (1505–1571) established the Berlin Coin Cabinet, Andrew Perne (1519–1589) bequeathed his collection to the Fitzwilliam Museum, and Albert V, Duke of Bavaria (1528–1579) formed the early core of the Bavarian State Coin Collection.

There still are many cases where refinements in the period of rule can be teased out of careful art historical analysis. At the same time studies involving metal sources and the purity of silver and gold issues can give new insights into wider social networks in antiquity. However, it should be recognised that the study of economics, today regarded with some trepidation, was not well developed in antiquity. This is the subject of Chapter 2, which forms the first part of the section devoted to method. The ancient Greeks and Romans differed greatly from each other in the way their economies were structured. While both cultures used coins, various regions may have been more or less monetised. As a rule, the Greeks relied upon sea trade, coins provided a medium of exchange, and could be used by city-states to hire mercenaries and compensate citizens. They were also a source of revenue as foreigners had to change their money into the local currency at an exchange rate favourable to the State. Direct taxation was not well-developed in ancient Greece. The Romans could transport goods across a vast network of roads as well as by seaborne commerce, and the Roman economy was essentially different from that of the Greeks. Taxation was far more extensive, especially in the Imperial period. Following the Punic Wars, during the late Republic and the early Roman Empire, the economy became more monetised and a more sophisticated financial system emerged. Imperial taxation amounted to about five per cent of the Empire's gross product. The typical tax rate paid by individuals ranged from two to five per cent. The Roman Imperial monetary economy often suffered bouts of inflation in part by emperors who issued money to fund high-profile imperial projects such as public building works or costly wars. This could lead to debasement, which required the power and prestige of the state to counteract particular crises. It is often overlooked that the Roman state expressed itself using a complex system

of symbols that conveyed meaning to citizens. Chapter 3 covers the field of semiotics, which is the study of sign processes (semiosis), which are any activity, conduct, or process that involves signs. Signs can also communicate feelings (which are usually not considered meanings). This is where non-coin sources like contemporary literature and other arts are useful. These sources can be trawled to reveal the engraver's intent when creating the images used on coins. In a real sense Chapter 2 forms the theoretical underpinnings of this book.

Chapter 4, the first dedicated to mythology and society, considers how coins are used to portray the founding of Rome. While the myths of Romulus and Remus take place before around the mid-eighth century BCE, the earliest known written account is from the late third century BCE. During the gap, Rome conceptualised its founding, as well as a detailed relationship to many deities. Alongside these religious developments, Roman society established a class system that shaped politics as well as religion, as covered in Chapter 5. The plebeians constituted the majority of Roman citizens, while patricians are often represented as rich and powerful families. In fact, plebeians and patricians among the senatorial class were often equally wealthy. In the middle was an elite class, the equites. Ancient writers often suggest that Roman emperors trusted equestrians more than men of senatorial rank. The senate was limited to 600 members, while equites could number several thousand. They took many roles in the military and government, and, not surprisingly, the images on many coins seemed focused on their roles.

Chapter 6, the first on metaphysics, deals with the astrological images on coins. The Classical world handed down a wealth of astrological knowledge that would form the basis of the science of astronomy. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) pioneered the experimental scientific method and is often referred to as the 'father of modern astronomy and modern physics', but Astrology, as it is practised today, owes much to the classical world. Chapter 7 deals with some images of philosophers on coins. Here special attention is paid to the stoic school, which has as one of its most important tenets is that perception is the basis of true knowledge. Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180) was its greatest practitioner, and his Hellenised portraits on coins show his clear cultural leanings. The Neo Platonic tendencies of Gallienus (r. 260–268) and Julian (r. 361–363) are less often discussed and are also considered in this chapter, although by Julian's reign philosophy was becoming increasingly suppressed by the Christian authorities, as evidence by the brutal murder of Hypatia in 415, although its teachings continued, influencing Byzantine and Islamic thought in the medieval period.

Chapter 8, the first dedicated to cult, examines the imperial cult, which lies at an intersection between politics and religion. With clear Greek antecedents from the cult of the hero, Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE) reformed the Roman Republic into a system where the princeps (emperor) was at the pinnacle of power and prestige, and emperors were not shy in expressing their rank using symbols such as parades. At the same time, the ruler offered respect for national gods. Subsequently, a deceased emperor held worthy of the honour could be voted as a state divinity, which would in turn link him to the first emperor, Augustus. Chapter 9 deals with the deities of Apollo and Sol. While neither deity was conflated with the other, they both had solar attributes. The arrival of a new cult from Syria, devoted to Sol Invictus, was to have a lasting impact on the Western world in terms of imagery. Chapter 10 deals with the intriguing cult based around a prophetic snake. Alexander of Abonoteichus (c. 105–170 CE) was the founder of the Glycon cult that briefly achieved wide popularity, and probably continued for some time after Alexander's death. The contemporary Syrian writer Lucian of Samosata (c. 125–after 180 CE) reports that Glycon consisted of a live snake with an artificial head. The narrative of his career given by Lucian might be taken as fictitious but for the corroboration of a surprising number of coins that bear the image of this creature.

In the final section, dedicated to religion, Chapter 11 discusses the Roman pantheon, which was far more than a simple adaptation of Greek deities, exemplified by two of the oldest Roman gods, Saturn and Janus. Saturn seems to have been an ancient Italic fertility god, possibly of Etruscan origin, presiding over agriculture. The feast of Saturnalia in Rome was held in his honour. The two-headed deity, Janus, occurs frequently on coins of the Roman Republic. The month of January is named for Janus, who has no Greek equivalent. Chapter 12 discusses the Aventine and Capitoline triads. The former was based on the agricultural deities Ceres, Liber, and Libera; the latter, Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, held a central place in the public religion of Rome. These three deities had their temples, or capitolia, built on hills and other prominent areas in many cities in Italy and the provinces, particularly during the Julio-Claudian period, and, naturally, images of these gods received pride of place on coins. Chapter 13 discusses the *pontifex maximus* and Vestal Virgins. The college of pontiffs were the highest-ranking priests of the state religion, comprising the *pontifex maximus* and the other pontifices, the *rex sacrorum*, the fifteen flamens, and the Vestals, who kept the sacred hearth. These ritual functions underpinned the religious order of the state, and frequently appear on coins. Chapter 14 discusses matriarchal religions, which have a history stretching back to encompass the first depictions of deities made by early humans. It is stressed that, although women had limited rights in ancient Rome, freeborn women were citizens, but they could not vote or hold public office. The role of female deities, however, was much wider. Chapter 15 discusses Juno Moneta, a deity of special interest to those with numismatic interests. Moneta was a title given to

two separate goddesses: it was the name of the goddess of memory (identified with the Greek goddess Mnemosyne), and it was an epithet of Juno, who was the protectress of funds, and, accordingly, money in ancient Rome was coined in her temple. Chapter 16 discusses *lares* and associated agricultural and household deities. Although archaeological evidence shows how popular they were in many Roman households, these figures are hardly ever depicted on coins, which present a very select view of Roman society and religion in the Republican period. The final chapter discusses the transition between pillars used to display statues of Jupiter to ascetic saints that isolated themselves atop pillars. Although there is no unequivocal connection between the two, it is possible that Roman practice influenced later Christian religion. Perhaps it was the coins per se that offered inspiration. Relatively small and easily transported, Roman coins could have been understood, and misunderstood, by later cultures for hundreds of years.