2. Roman Coins

Roman coins cover the period from the mid-200s BC to the fifth century AD – over 700 years of coinage. Roman coins are divided between Roman Republican and Roman Imperial.

**Roman Republican
c240 BC to 27 BC**

From the beginning of Roman coinage to the accession of Augustus

- Helmeted Head of Roma and ROMA legend.
- Ancestral deeds of moneyers = "family" propaganda.
- Portraits of current leaders only at the very end of the Republic, the "Imperatorial" period: Julius Caesar, Pompey, Marcus Antonius etc.

Early Republican denarius, Baebia 12, 137 BC

"Imperatorial" denarius, Julius Caesar, c46 BC

**Roman Imperial
27 BC to 478 AD**

From Augustus to the fall of the Western Empire

- Standardised design of coins.
- Portraits of reigning emperors.
- Reverses reflecting current events, wars and imperial policies = imperial propaganda.
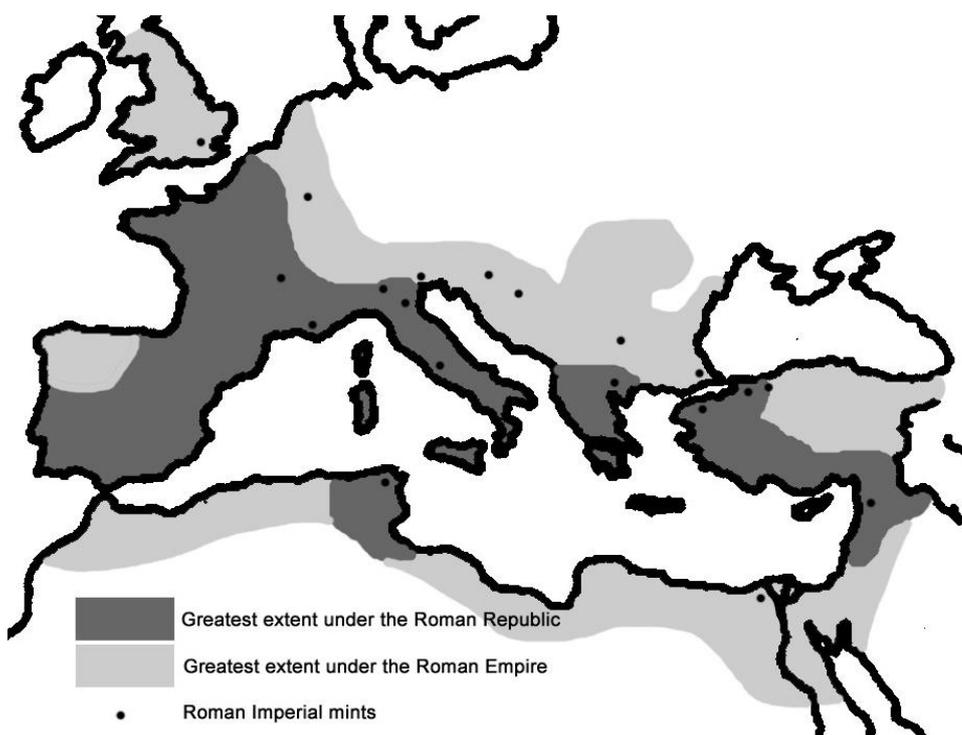- Decreasing silver content in later empire.

Tiberius denarius, c22 AD

Geta denarius, 211 AD

Spread of Roman Coinage

Greatest extent under the Roman Republic

Greatest extent under the Roman Empire

• Roman Imperial mints

Roman coins are the most common of all ancient coinage. Each year in Britain many hoards are discovered, some numbering in the hundreds or thousands of buried coins. Britain, however, was only one corner of a vast empire.

Most Roman coins were minted in Rome. During the later empire, the mints were decentralized out into the provinces.

Roman Gods and Goddesses

Ceres – goddess of agriculture, mostly depicted holding ears of corn, sometimes bearing a torch.

Concordia – personification of concord and harmony, holds patera and cornucopiae.

Dioscuri – twins Castor and Pollux, featured heavily on early republican denarii riding side by side.

Felicitas – personification of Happiness and Prosperity, holds a caduceus and cornucopiae.

Hercules – demi-god son of Jupiter, muscular figure holding club and lion's skin.

Janus – double-headed god of beginnings, looking to the future and the past.

Juno – consort of Jupiter, accompanied by peacock.

Jupiter – king of the gods, often depicted enthroned, holds a sceptre and thunderbolt.

Libertas – personification of freedom and liberty, holds a pileus (conical hat) and sceptre.

Mars – the god of War, usually holds a spear and shield or a trophy and spear, sometimes nude, wearing only helmet and cloak.

Minerva – goddess of Wisdom and the Roman counterpart to Athena, usually wears helmet and holds spear and shield

Roman Denominations

The silver denarius was the main roman denomination for over 400 years, particularly during the republican and early imperial period. During Augustus' reign the coinage was organised across three metals.

1 gold aureus = 25 denarii
1 gold quinarius = 12.5 denarii
1 silver denarius = 16 asses
1 silver quinarius = 8 asses
1 bronze sestertius = 4 asses
1 bronze dupondius = 2 asses
1 bronze as = 4 quadrantes
1 bronze semis = 2 quadrantes
1 bronze quadrans = 0.25 as

Of these, the gold *aureus*, silver *denarius* and bronze *sestertius*, *dupondius* and *as* were most common. The other main denomination was the silver *antoninianus* (double denarius) introduced by Caracalla in 217 AD. Under Diocletian's monetary reforms (c. 294 AD), most of these earlier denominations were replaced.

Moneta – personification of mint and money, holds scales and cornucopiae.

Pax – personification of peace, holds olive branch and sceptre.

Pietas – personification of piety and familial duty, often veiled, holds a patera and sceptre.

Pudicitia – personification of modesty and chastity, veiled and holds sceptre. Appears quite often on the reverses of Roman empresses.

Roma – the personification of the City, usually helmeted and holding Victory or a wreath.

Sol – the Sun God, features heavily in later Roman Imperial Coinage, wears radiate ("spikey") crown and holds globe or whip.

Venus – Goddess of beauty and love, depicted sometimes barely dressed and sometimes holds an apple.

Vesta – Goddess and protector of the family hearth, holds a patera and sceptre.

Victoria – personification of victory, winged and holds a wreath and palm.

Virtus – personification of valour and bravery, depicted armoured holding spear.