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# Images in the Roman world

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The role of the visual in establishing, reinforcing and transforming Roman culture is sometimes overlooked in traditional historical accounts. It is perhaps no surprise that the visual receives more attention in art history. Thus, art historian Jas Elsner, in *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, wrote ‘In several significant ways the Roman world was a visual culture’ and ‘With the vast majority of the empire’s inhabitants illiterate and often unable to speak the dominant languages of the elite, which were Greek in the East and Latin in the West, the most direct way of communicating was through images.’<sup>1,2</sup>

The Roman state was immense and lasted for centuries. It comprised a host of different ethnic groups and geophysical environments. Figure 1 shows the Empire at its greatest extent. A lot of work has gone into analysing the decline and fall of the Empire. I have always thought this approach has focused on the wrong question. People with a science background are trained to believe that, in non-reversible systems, entropy (that is disorder) will tend to increase.<sup>3</sup> So I think the question to be asked is ‘why did the Roman Empire last so long?’

The reasons for this are complex and related to such factors as trade, governance, and military organization. But there was a further underlying unifying theme. The different groups were interconnected through images that helped them identify

themselves as Roman. The use of imagery seems to have created a significant degree of cohesion, and that surely was one of the reasons that the Empire lasted for centuries.

Images reinforced cultural and political identity. The same or similar images were used across the Empire and were reused over hundreds of years, although the use of imagery became more sophisticated with time as its propaganda value was increasingly appreciated.

The vast visual heritage left by the Romans is an important source of information to complement the written word, and to illuminate the vision we have of their world. While it is important to recognize visual and pictorial imagery as legitimate sources of historical information, care should be taken not to rely exclusively on the interpretation of these.

In this paper, I will first present an overview of images of all sizes of the Roman world, and follow that with a discussion of imagery on coins, how it evolved and how it related to Roman visual imagery in general. Finally, I will comment on the image record as an information source, what it seems to tell us and what it does not, or at least what we should treat as speculation.

## **The images that permeated Roman life**

Roman images came in a great variety of forms including: art in many media, buildings and other public works, and of



Figure 1. Theatres and amphitheatres in the Roman Empire.

course coins. Coins are not the most powerful images. They don't have the huge visual impact of the Sydney Opera House, or the Statue of Liberty or the Colosseum, or even the impact of classical statuary or larger two-dimensional art works. They do have a special advantage for scholarship and understanding; the images are often labelled and dateable. This is often not so with artwork, statuary and architecture. So coins are an important part, indeed a critical part, of the image story, and most of this paper will focus on them. But first they need to be put in the larger context of visual imagery throughout the extensive Roman territories.

### Large structures

A first-time visitor to any part of what was the Roman Empire—Europe, Asia Minor and North Africa—would have been struck by the extent of Roman public works. As Rome expanded, and colonies were set up, roads and other infrastructure

were built. Aqueducts, that were visually similar, interlaced the Roman world from Volubilis to Byzantium. Towns were built to a set formula and included similar decorative structures, arches and columns. Another aspect of Rome as a visual culture was the mounting of public rituals, religious and intellectual debates, and mass entertainment, the last including gladiatorial displays, chariot races and animal fights, and the entertainment venues in which all of these took place.

Many dramatic events and games took place in circuses, theatres and amphitheatres, which followed similar patterns throughout the Empire, with most towns having such facilities. The remains of at least 220 amphitheatres have been located in widely scattered areas of the Roman Empire, and these seem to have been remarkably similar, with a consistent visual impact (Fig. 1).

Many large functional structures and buildings were often enhanced with relief sculpture; indeed triumphal arches were

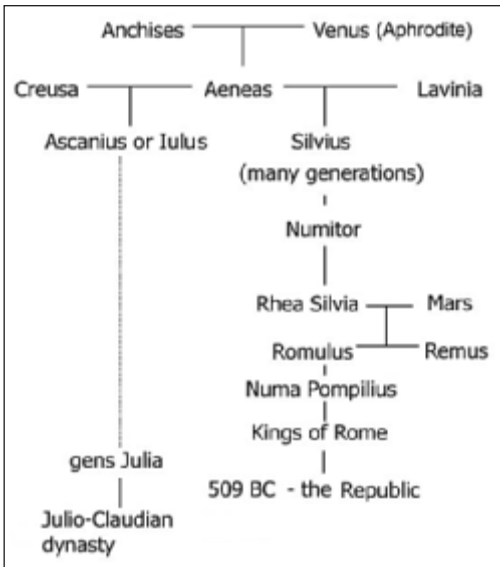


Figure 2. Schematic chart of Rome's mythological origin and foundation relationships.

created for the sole purpose of displaying glorious achievements. By the end of the Republic, mosaics, some of them with elaborate decorative designs as well as copies of paintings, were commonly used as a floor covering throughout the Empire, not only in the great public buildings and villas but in more modest private houses as well.

### Pictorial images

Roman pictorial imagery had two major uses, as decoration and for communication. A great variety of media were used, including: sculpture in the round and relief in bronze, marble, fired clay, decorative metal work, mosaics, paintings as frescoes or on wood<sup>4</sup>, and engraved gems and coins.

The subject matter of Roman art, both public and private, ranged across a large variety of themes. Some of the most important were: daily life, historical

events, military campaigns, buildings and religious topics, virtues, mythological subjects, and portraits of individuals and family groups. Images of the imperial family were particularly important in public art, as here they were designed to promote the imperial regime.

Greco-Roman mythology is important for the understanding of Roman imagery because much of it dealt with mythological subjects and, particularly, with the mythology of the foundation of Rome (outlined in Fig. 2) in its various versions.

Often these images of myth seem to be allegorical and so, to make sense of the implied message, we need to know the version extant at the time the image was produced. This is an area where any attempt at interpretation requires extreme care because, even with most expert knowledge of foundation mythology, it is not possible to know precisely, some 2000 years later, what allegorical message was intended.

Figure 3 illustrates the use of different media to depict an important element of Rome's foundation mythology in which Mars comes to Rhea Silvia, as a lover or seducer (or worse) in a scene depicting the conception of Romulus and Remus. The objects, including the coin (*as* of Antoninus Pius, RIC 694a), are dated to the second century AD.

The importance of this theme is demonstrated by its ubiquity. It has been found executed in a large number of different media<sup>5</sup>, each in numerous examples, including wall paintings, reliefs, sarcophagi, metal ornaments and clay. The earliest images are gem intaglios from the first century BC, while the latest securely datable images are coins, the Gallienus issues *c.* AD 260 (RIC 67 and 345).

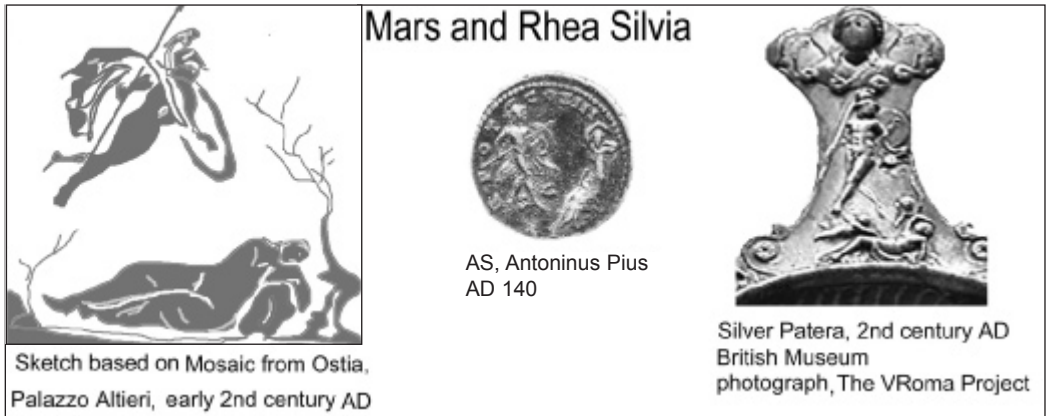


Figure 3. Mars and Rhea Silvia in various media.



Figure 4. Images of wolf and twins.

Figure 4 shows the 'wolf and twins' foundation theme that was depicted virtually unchanged for hundreds of years. The coins range from the silver *didrachm*

struck *c.* 265 BC, just before the First Punic War, to the Constantine commemorative VRBS ROMA issue *c.* AD 335; a span of six hundred years.

One of the early images of the wolf is the fifth century BC Capitoline wolf, which is thought to be an Etruscan creation and is regarded as one of the best examples of Etruscan bronze sculpture. The twins were added to this sculpture by Antonio del Pollaiuolo *c.* 1509 although it has been argued that they replaced earlier versions.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the Republican *denarius* of 77 BC which shows a she-wolf without the twins (Satriena 1 in Fig. 4) is of some interest.<sup>7</sup>

These images were used or at least reused sporadically over a very long time. Just as there was a consistent use of visual images across the Empire, so there was a periodic reinforcing of Rome's cultural memory, often perhaps in the context of change. This leads to further questions, such as the ethnic origins of the 'wolf and twins' story in remote antiquity, the extent to which it was shaped for political purposes, and why certain Roman politicians and administrations chose to reuse the image.

It is sometimes useful for historians to speculate on the reappearance at particular times of certain motifs, such as the wolf and twins. Nevertheless, it is also important, particularly for numismatists making use of academic explanations, to recognize such speculation for what it is and not treat it as fact. William Metcalf<sup>8</sup> has discussed this point in the context of Michael Crawford's suggestion<sup>9</sup> that the reverse of the Pompeia 1 *denarius* (Fig. 4, RRC 235/1) alludes indirectly to the repudiation of the Treaty of Numantia.

### **Coin imagery; development and relationship to other Roman imagery**

So far, I have been stressing conservatism in the context of the unchanging

nature of some images, but that is only part of the story. In some periods there was a profusion of imagery, much of it new. In fact, the reuse of some traditional images, together with images that had contemporary themes, seems to have assisted some Roman administrations to promote specific aims and policies, and initiate changes, while still giving the appearance of harmony with traditional values.

Changes in imagery and the appearance of new images are easier to document in the coin record, because dating and sequencing are easier. So, it is useful at this point to move to the second part of this paper, the development of imagery in Roman coinage and its relationship to visual imagery in other media. This is a huge subject, and I will approach it through examples taken from two periods, the Republic around 140–130 BC, and portraiture and reverse images of the Antonine period.

Roman coinage changed significantly in the late 140s BC. The innovations of this period led to a redefinition of the use of Roman coinage and set a pattern for hundreds of years. From the third century to the mid second century BC, Roman coin types had changed only slowly as did the coinage of the Greek city states and the Hellenistic nations.

Nevertheless, from its introduction about 211 BC the *denarius* evolved at first gradually. There were small obverse changes such as variations to the helmet of Roma, and two new reverse types: Luna in *biga* and Victory in *biga*. From the 140s BC there were one or even more types per year, and among them a rapid proliferation of new reverses.





Figure 5. The evolving *denarius* – types, obverse and reverse legends<sup>10</sup> and moneysers’ names<sup>11</sup>.

Reverse changes began in 143 BC with Diana in a *biga* of stags. Over the next ten years we see *bigas* of stags, goats, and centaurs, an oath-taking scene, the wolf and twins and the *Columna Minucia* (Fig. 5).

So why did the imagery change at this time? The problem is that many of these types cannot be understood with certainty—there is no ancient source material explaining them, and symbolism that was obvious at the time is no longer clear to us. Consequently, interpretations are necessarily speculative and need to be approached with caution.

A change that occurred with, or slightly before, this sudden proliferation of types was that moneysers’ names, absent or given only as monograms on most early

*denarii*, were (generally) more clearly identified—as in the legend of the *denarius* of C. Renius in Figure 5 (Juno in biga of goats). Since the office of moneyer was a step in a career progression via elective offices, the right to have one’s name on circulating currency and bring it to public attention was clearly valuable to both the moneyer and his/her family. Reference to past deeds, offices, ancestry (sometimes from the gods) and places of origin was also politically useful. The proliferation of types might have begun haphazardly, but the potential of the coinage as an advertising tool for the moneyer would have been readily apparent.

Some scholars believe that the introduction, via the *Lex Gabinia* in 139 BC, of the secret ballot for Roman

elections was very important. In the days before secret ballots it was much easier to ensure that one's constituents remained loyal. Once the secret ballot came into use, the nobility seeking election had to advertise themselves and what they stood for. In the words of Andrew Burnett 'The moneyership suddenly became more popular among Roman nobles, since coins provided an opportunity for the self-advertisement which now became necessary to launch a successful political career'.<sup>12</sup> On the same point Crawford notes that from 137 to 127 BC the moneyers' names form a virtual roll-call of the *nobilitas*.<sup>13</sup>

The moneyers had the right to choose designs, and used them to make a variety of references, some quite subtle. Even the choice of an old traditional type might well have been an indication that the moneyer adhered to traditional values.

The use of the coinage of Rome as a means of political advertising of people and policies and of propaganda had begun. It was to become increasingly sophisticated over the centuries, because the coinage was the closest approximation to a mass medium of the time.

### **Portraiture**

Portraiture was a major theme of Roman art, primarily as statuary adorning the piazzas, on sarcophagi, as frescoes, and on coins. Traditionally, the evolution of Roman portrait imagery is discussed in terms of two influences, one drawn from the Greek classical concept of the ideal human form, and a second from the Republican practice of keeping ancestral funerary masks.

The Republican images of deceased family members were realistic and showed all blemishes with no concessions, and this practice is thought to have led to a style of portraiture known as late Republican verism, which portrays the actual features of the subject in a manner that ranges from hard objectivity to caricature. Veristic portraiture was no doubt also influenced by Etruscan sepulchral portraiture. This was produced in quantity, and large numbers of Etruscan sarcophagi with lifelike portrait busts (Fig. 6 top left) are to be seen in museums in Tuscany and Umbria today.

*Early Roman Portraits:* The combination of the Hellenistic Greek approaches to portraiture and Etrusco-Roman funerary practices led to the evolution of the Roman portraiture that we see in stone and bronze in the museums of Europe, and of course on the coins. Nevertheless the interplay between the veristic and the idealistic styles was to continue over the entire imperial period.

The neoclassical images of Augustus (Fig. 6) that appeared on coins and statues helped to create the myth of him as the almost divine ruler of a Rome now entering a golden age. On the other hand, the rugged first images of the Flavians helped to convey a no-nonsense image of a new pragmatic leadership which would re-establish Rome after the excesses of Nero.

*Identification of portraits:* As Roman portraiture evolved, the alterations or improvements were not necessarily aimed at producing a more accurate representation, rather they seem to have



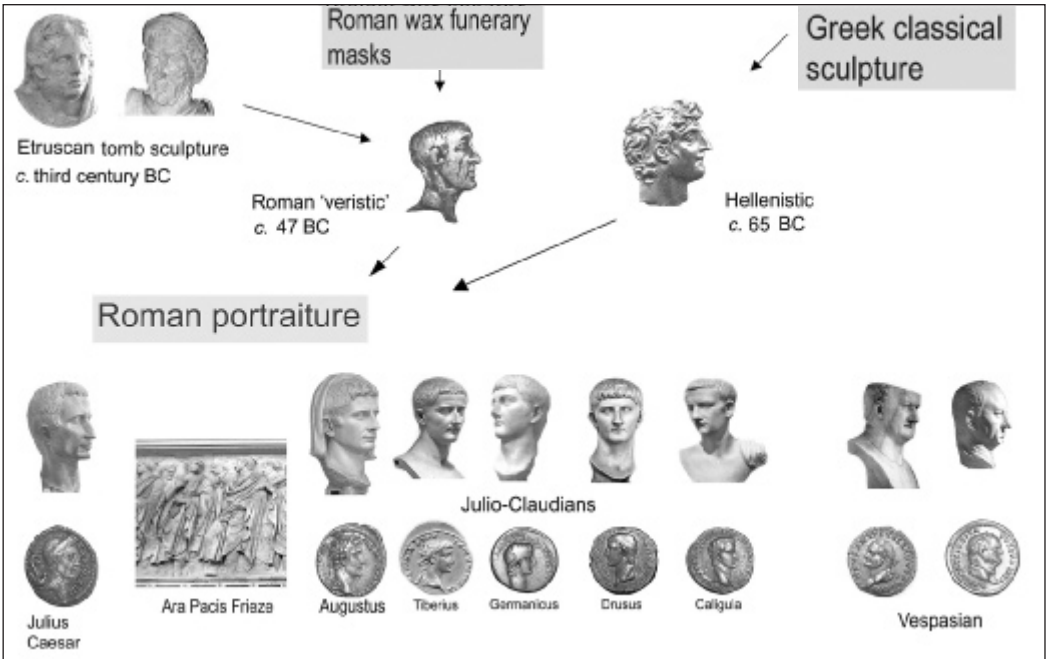


Figure 6. Early Roman portraiture.

been aimed at creating images that were politically evocative. Coin portraits, which were seen in all corners of the Empire, were relatively standardized, varying of course with particular dies, depending on the current fashion at the time. There was much more variability in sculptured portraits, many of which appear to have been produced for particular viewing audiences or private use. This practice makes the identification today of statues and reliefs difficult. An additional complication for those now identifying statues is that private citizens commissioned statues of themselves that copied the fashions and styles of the ruling family.

Clearly identified sculptured images provide greater detail than coin images. However, unlike coins, most sculptures are not found labelled. That is why in major Italian museums, such as the Palazzo

Massimo, one finds attributions like 'Poppea Claudia Ottavia? / Agrippina Minore?' The sculptured head of Vespasian on the right of Figure 6 would have needed some supporting evidence for attribution because it is more finely featured than is usual for that emperor.

There have been some spectacular misattributions. The statue of Marcus Aurelius on horseback now (actually a copy) in the Piazza Campidoglio was thought for a time to be that of Constantine. It probably owes its survival to that misconception. The true identity was recognized in the fifteenth century from portraits on coins.<sup>14</sup> The confusion might seem surprising because the image of Marcus Aurelius is quite distinctive, and is found on many statues and coins; one would not think it could be easily confused with Constantine (Fig. 7). Presumably these images were not

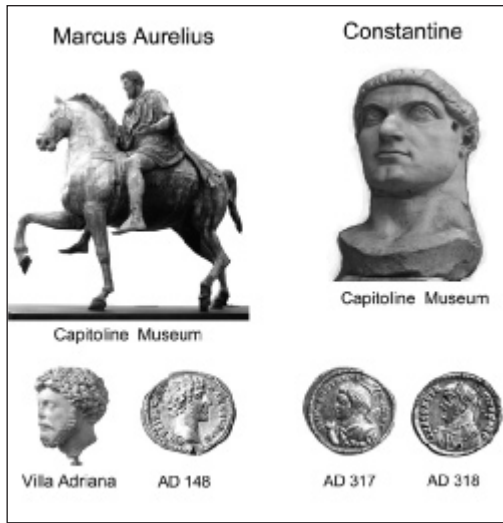


Figure 7. Marcus and Constantine.

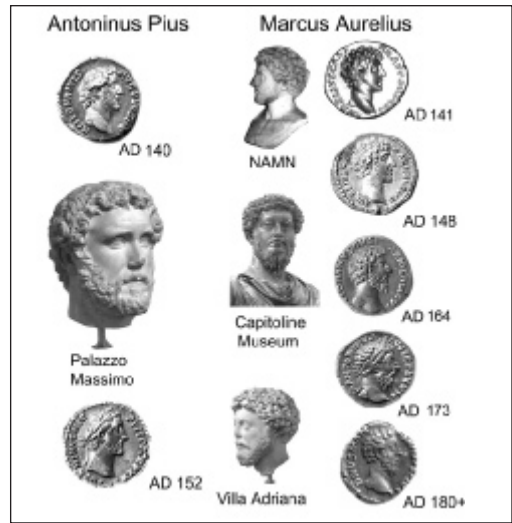


Figure 8. Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.

identified in the pre-Renaissance times when the mistake occurred.

The process of identifying ancient images goes back to the beginnings of art history in the sixteenth century. One of the key figures in this was Fulvio Orsini, secretary and librarian to Cardinal Ranuccio Farnese. In 1570, Orsini published *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium* (Portraits and sayings of famous men) in which he compared coins, sculpture and gems in a quest for reliable identification of images. Orsini laid the groundwork<sup>15</sup> for identifying major Roman figures on the basis of detailed comparison, but the process is one of continual refinement.

*Antonine portraits:* The Antonine era (AD 138–192) produced some superb portraits. There is less softening of the images than for previous generations, and more vitality in some of the best work. Michael Grant commented that ‘The art of making portrait busts attained remarkable heights under the Antonines, especially in

relation to the emperors themselves and their wives’.<sup>16</sup> The images of Antoninus convey a sense of dignity and gravity as well as humanity, suggesting a trusted leader.

While the portraits of Antoninus changed only a little over his lifetime (mainly in the hairstyle) those of Marcus Aurelius carefully report his ageing of nearly forty years (Fig. 8). Some of the portrait heads, particularly those in marble, capture the melancholy, contemplative disposition of the philosopher emperor. The coins from his young manhood period tend to show more strength and vigour. The portraits on these coins show the head of the future leader, to be seen in all parts of the Empire.

The previously mentioned bronze mounted statue of Marcus is one of the most powerful images we have of the Roman world. Possibly produced after his death (the Italians date it to AD 170–180) it seems to depict him at an age of around 40.

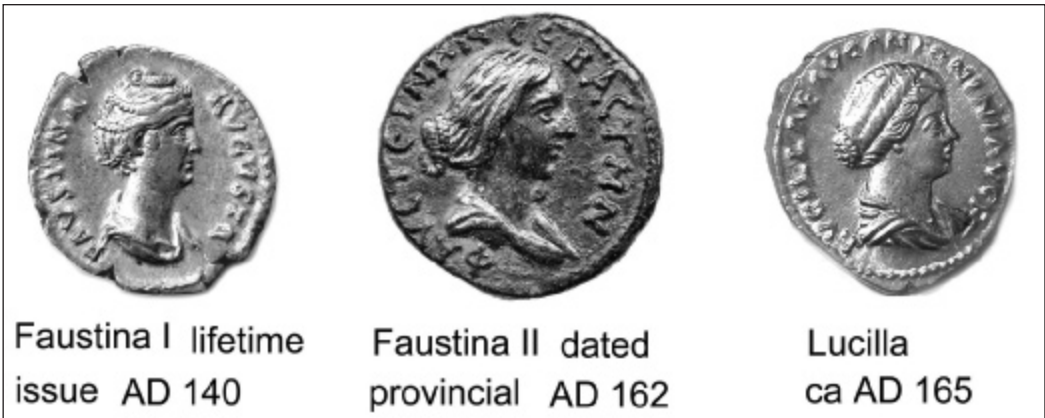


Figure 9. Antonine women.

There is a profusion of images of the Antonine women. Large quantities of coins were struck in the names of the two Faustinas and Lucilla (Fig. 9), even though those of Faustina I were mainly posthumous and Lucius Verus died after a marriage of about five years. The coinage of Faustina the Elder is extensive (though mainly posthumous). Women were explicitly honoured for the first time, with coin legends like *Puellae Faustinianae* (daughters of Faustina I), *Matri Castrorum* (mother of the camp) and *Fortunae Muliebri* (having womanly fortune), both Faustina II.

The crown princess, Faustina II, reputedly beautiful and sophisticated, was promoted as a Princess Diana-like figure. She remained popular, though controversial<sup>17</sup>, as a matron. Her coinage, spanning over more than 30 years, is the most extensive of any Roman woman. There is a large quantity of provincial coinage, as in the example in Figure 9, in addition to the imperial. As with Marcus Aurelius, her portraits show the ageing process up to a point, after which the

images seem to have been rendered more attractive (Fig. 10).

It has been suggested by Gabucci<sup>18</sup> and others that the coins helped to transmit the fashionable hairstyles of the princesses across the Empire. Faustina II with her extensive coinage showing many hairstyles provides the best example. There have been many attempts to classify her hairstyles, as they seem to provide clues not only for dating her coinage, but also dating female statuary with similar coiffure.

Building on work by Strack and Wegner, Klaus Fittschen<sup>19</sup> for example divided her hairstyles into nine groups.<sup>20</sup> The problem is that specific details seem to vary with individual dies. Styles seem to change slowly in some periods and some styles re-appear. Nevertheless there is a clear gradual trend.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Reverse types of the Antonines.**

During the Antonine age images on the coin obverse and reverse, and in other media such as sculpture, were used extensively over a sustained period



Figure 10. Coinage of Faustina II over thirty years.

to transmit the messages of the administration. Taken as a whole, these images make a particularly important contribution to our understanding of the period, as there is a gap in the major literary sources for the second century. Cassius Dio's account of the reign of Antoninus Pius is missing and in fact was already lost when the Byzantine summaries were written.<sup>22</sup>

The Antonine period had an interesting variety of reverse types. Four broad themes are apparent in the first twenty years: religion and heritage, morality and desirable virtues, prosperity delivered, and the imperial family. For the reign of Marcus a fifth must be added: Victory in war. This was to become a dominant theme of the later Roman Empire.

*Religion and heritage:* A considerable proportion of Antonine coinage was devoted to reinforcing Roman belief and traditions, and to emphasizing the eternal nature of the city. The gods are often featured, and perhaps because of the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city of Rome in AD 147, a number of coin issues recalled the foundation myths. Other issues honoured more concrete and recent figures from the past such as Augustus and Livia.

Figure 11 shows some examples. From the left: Mars comes to Rhea Silvia, who then gives birth to Romulus (founder of Rome) and his twin Remus, both nursed by a she-wolf. The shields shown on the next reverse are the *ancilia*, the sacred shields of Numa Pompilius, Rome's second king. Many coin issues show the



Figure 11. Heritage—foundation, religion, the eternal city.

long worshipped divinities of Rome: Venus, Mars, Minerva, and Ceres, together with somewhat newer divinities, for example Cybele as Magna Mater. The statue of Venus and Cupid (second row of Fig. 11) is sometimes thought to have the

head of Faustina II. Other images hint at Rome as an eternal city, for example, the personification of Aeternitas (on posthumous issues), the river god Tiberis (River Tiber), and Italia sitting on a globe as befits the queen of the earth. The



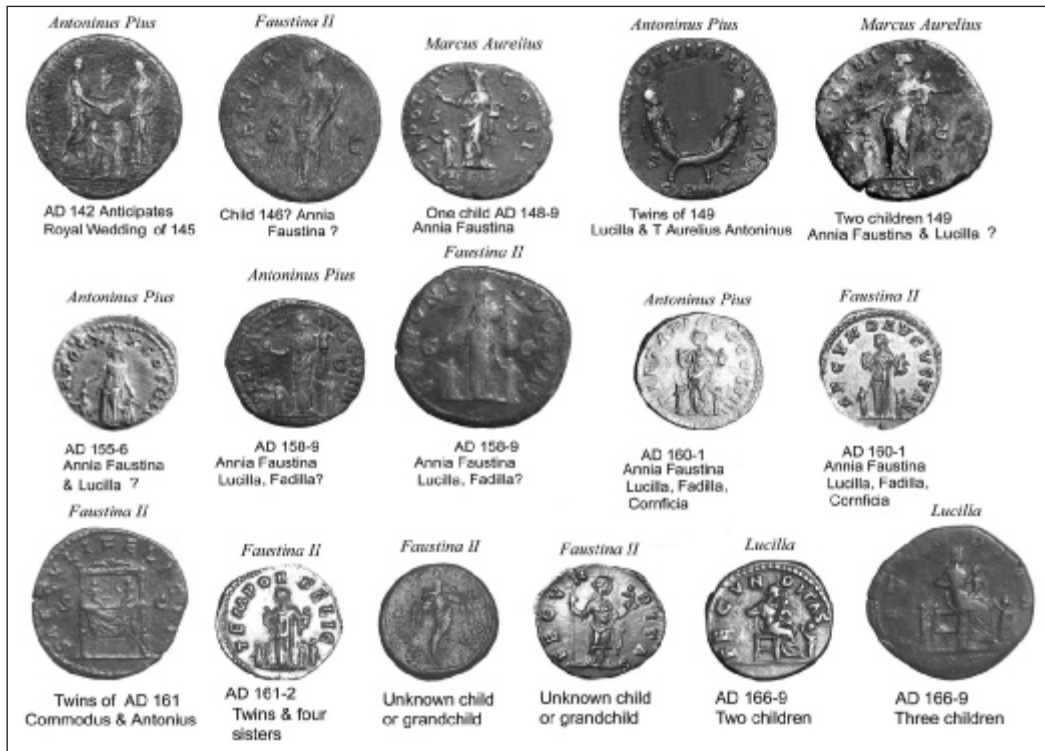


Figure 12. Children of the Antonines.

*consecratio* issue and the bas-relief sculpture beside it show deification of members of the imperial family.

*Dynasty:* The concept of an imperial family was strongly promoted by the Antonines. Some of the children of Faustina II were featured not only on her own coinage, but also on those of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. Faustina gave birth to thirteen children, many of whom died in infancy, and there were no sons surviving infancy until the arrival of the twins Commodus and Antoninus in AD 161.

Faustina's own coins are undated and the children appearing on them are not identified; details of who and when would,

of course, have been clearer at the time. Thus there are two tasks for the historian: to establish a chronology for the coins and to identify the children. A broad outline that fits the coins to epigraphic evidence is fairly obvious<sup>23</sup>, as shown in Figure 12, but there has been some controversy over the detail. The reverses depicting children, sometimes corresponding with similar reverses on dated coins of Antoninus and Marcus, provide clues to the unravelling of the sequence of these coins (as do the hairstyles mentioned earlier). The identification of the children is more difficult. There is plenty of opportunity for circular reasoning here because in some cases neither the coin evidence, which does not identify the children, nor the



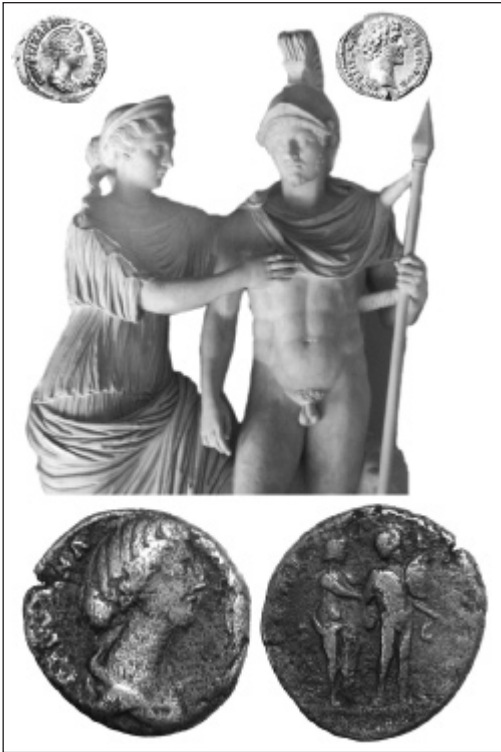


Figure 13. Faustina II and Marcus Aurelius as Venus and Mars.

epigraphic evidence, which sometimes gives names but not dates, suffice on their own.

### The image record as an information source

At the beginning of this paper we stated that images reinforced cultural and political identity in the Roman World. The same or similar images were used across the Empire, and were reused over hundreds of years in a blended form to promote or support newer ideas. There are numerous examples—images of Roma, Hercules and the wolf and twins appear throughout Roman coinage, sometimes standing alone and sometimes as elements of a more complex composition.<sup>24</sup>

Each layer of interpretation presents problems, however, and we will conclude this paper with three references to the Antonine period. The first problem relates to identifying the image and recognising its significance; the second relates to incompleteness of available data; and the third to evaluating the message. The Roman use of images can tell us a great deal if we know what we are looking at, if we can fill in the primary data like dates and if we know the motive for the implicit message.

*Identifying the image and recognising its significance:* Many coin reverse types are puzzling in terms of the image and its significance. The *as* in Figure 13 (RIC 1680) is an example. The legend reads *FAVSTINA AVGVSTA / VENERI VICTRICI S C*, and the obverse hairstyle suggests that it was struck around AD 165 or later. The reverse shows Venus, naked to the waist, holding the arm of Mars. There is also a statue in the Musei Capitolini in Rome, dated to AD 148–9, of Venus and Mars where the heads are clearly those of a much younger Marcus and Faustina, as may be seen on the *denarii* of similar vintage. This sculpture, made some twenty years or so earlier than the coin, does not of course explain the issue, but it does underscore its importance as an Antonine theme rather than a one-off.

So what is the coin image telling us? One possibility is that it refers to the adultery of Mars and Venus, which was a popular theme of Renaissance painting (Botticelli, Veronese, Tintoretto and Rubens etc). The *Historia Augusta* contains a number of references (now largely discounted) to misbehaviour by Faustina,

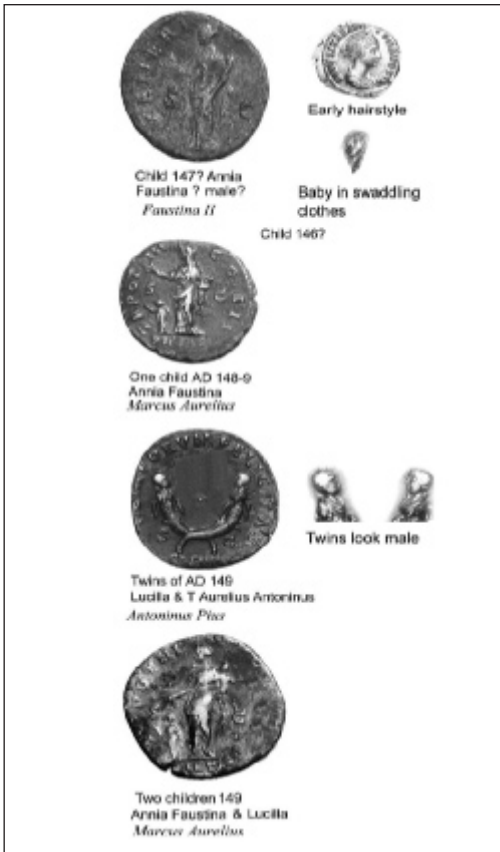


Figure 14. The twins of AD 149 and other children.

but it seems unlikely that the image infers any adultery on her part—especially given that the sculpture with the same theme dates back to a period when she and Marcus were newly married, and were promoted extensively in the coinage. An alternative possibility is that the purpose of the image was to once again associate Marcus Aurelius and Faustina II with Mars and Venus, two divine ancestors of the Roman people. Perhaps it even signalled official rejection of the rumours that seem to have circulated after the death of Verus (that he had had relations with Faustina and

that he had been poisoned<sup>25</sup>). Given the gap in the sources for the second century mentioned earlier, however, there may well be other plausible explanations of the type.

*Incompleteness of available data:* A good example of the problems that arise when primary data is deficient is shown in the identification of the twins of AD 149, and consequently fixing the date of birth of Lucilla. Leaving the coins aside for a moment, other evidence includes:

- sources from the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* tell us the names of some of Faustina’s children (the first, possibly Annia Faustina, Lucilla, Domitia and two boys who died as babies)
- the *Fasti Ostienses*<sup>26</sup> gives the birth of a child on 30 November 147, a date which coincides with the bestowing of honours for the parents (*tribunicia potestas* for Marcus, Augusta for Faustina), and
- Marcus’s letter to the people of Smyrna mentions the birth of a male child who dies soon afterwards on 28 March, year uncertain.

Now, if we look at the coins in Figure 14, we see a baby in swaddling clothes on an early *sestertius* of Faustina (not conclusively dated), a daughter on a second brass of Marcus (dated to AD 148–9), and twins on a *sestertius* of Antoninus (dated to AD 149). Later coins dated to the AD mid 150s show two girls.

Garzetti infers from this evidence that the child of AD 147 was Annia Faustina and that Lucilla was one of the twins.<sup>27</sup> This gives a date of birth for Lucilla of March

AD 149, which is generally accepted; this is the date of birth in Sear, for example.<sup>28</sup>

However, if you look at RIC or BMCRE (which predate the *Fasti Ostienses* evidence), Mattingly describes the twins of AD 149 as boys, and the images show little gender differentiation. Fittschen argues for a different interpretation, with Lucilla as the first surviving girl; otherwise why was Verus not betrothed to Annia Faustina if she was the elder?

*Evaluating the message:* Given that these coin images were created nearly 2000 years ago, there will always be dangers in attempting to interpret the implicit messages. Much will depend on the availability of other sources and on whether the allusion is to a short term matter, important at the time but long forgotten, or has an on-going context, in which case we might expect related images in other media.

In the case of the Antonines we have a period rich in imagery, but perhaps not so rich in written source material. We can use the images from the coins and the bas-reliefs to form an impression of the age and its culture. For example, through the expressive portraits and the emphasis on virtue, prosperity, heritage and family, we are given a picture of a caring and responsible regime. But we are looking at the official line and there are few putting a counter case. History has judged Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius well, and they probably were among the best of the Emperors, but this is not conclusively supported by the evidence.

To summarize, images usually require several levels of interpretation: the first is to recognize the particular message being

propagated, the second is to recognize why, and the third is to recognize what it meant to convey to the common people at the time.

### Acknowledgements

The images of coins shown here are from the Preston collection, with the exception of the wolf and twins *didrachm* downloaded from Wikimedia Commons. Other images are the authors own photographs and drawings, or Wikimedia Commons, with the exception of (i) the image of Mars and Rhea Silvia in Figure 3, left, and the silver patera handle from the British Museum (inventory number 1902, 0116.1), photograph 'The V Roma project', (ii) the image of Faustina II in Figure 10, top left, which is from the University of Goettingen, Archaeological Institute, Collection of Plaster Casts, photo Stephan Eckardt.

### Notes

1. Jas Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian triumph*, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 11–12.
2. Other writers on this subject include the German archaeologist and art historian Paul Zanker, for example in his essay, 'Il mondo delle immagine e la comunicazione', a cura di Andrea Giardina, *Roma Antica*, Editori Lateranza, 2005.
3. This is the essence of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, see for example Steven S Zumdahl, *Chemistry*, D C Heath and Company, 1993, p. 774.
4. Some of the best Roman period portraiture was produced by a technique which used pigments mixed into hot beeswax and applied to wood. See for example Eve D'Ambra, *Roman art*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 119.
5. Numerous examples have been listed by Sonia Gersht and Rivká Mucznik, *Gerion*, No. 6, 1988, pp. 115–168 (posted on the internet).

6. Amanda Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford archaeological guide*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 384.
7. Perhaps images without the twins refer to Luperca, an ancient Italian divinity identified with the deified she-wolf. See William Smith, *Classical dictionary of biography, mythology and geography*, B. A. Seaby reprint, 1972.
8. William Metcalf, in *Roman coins and public life under the Empire*, Salmon Papers II, University of Michigan Press, 1999.
9. M H Crawford, *Roman Republican coinage*, Cambridge, 1976, pp. 267–8. Crawford suggests that the choice of this motif may have had a political purpose, emphasizing the divine descent of the rulers of Rome in early times.
10. Many of the coin legends use monograms to save space—for example in number 4 the P SVLA has the VL in monogram and is indicated with underlining in the figure.
11. The names of moneyers given here (and the catalogue references) are from Crawford. Given the abbreviated rendition in coin titles and the reuse of the same names over several generations, some have been the subject of debate.
12. Andrew Burnett, *Coinage in the Roman world*, Seaby, 1987, p. 22.
13. Crawford, p.728.
14. Claridge p. 236.
15. See for example Beard and Henderson, *Classical art from Greece to Rome*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 210.
16. Michael Grant, *The Antonines*, Routledge, 1994, p. 136.
17. She receives a bad press in the Augustan History, see. Anthony Birley, *Lives of the later Caesars*, Penguin, 1976.
18. Ada Gabucci, *Roma*, Electa, 2005, p. 181.
19. Klaus Fittschen, *Die Bildnistypen der Faustina Minor und die Fecunditas Augustae*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982, pp. 34–37.
20. See also, for the reign of Marcus, Wolfgang Szaivert, *Die Münzprägung der Kaiser Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus und Commodus*, pp. 161–192, Wien, 1986.
21. The arrangement and dating of hairstyles is not, of course, based solely on appearance—evidence such as legends, hoard evidence, the appearance of new reverse types, and dated provincial coinage is also important.
22. Anthony Birley, *Lives of the later Caesars*, Penguin, 1976, p. 8.
23. The illustrative outline shown here follows that given by Clive Foss, *Roman historical coins*, Seaby, 1990, p. 143.
24. Roma, for instance, had her head on many Republican coins as the personification of the city of Rome; she appeared from the earliest time together with Victory to promote the idea of military success; she appears clasping hands with Italia on a *denarius* of 70 BC (RRC 403), which presumably alludes to the reconciliation of Rome and Italy after the Social War; and she is seated (leaning on a shield showing the wolf and twins) at the bottom right of the bas relief (Vatican Museum) of the apotheosis of Antoninus and Faustina I shown in Figure 11.
25. Grant p. 37.
26. Albino Garzetti, *From Tiberius to the Antonines*, Methuen, 1974, p. 710.
27. Garzetti, p. 470, p. 710.
28. David R Sear, *Roman coins and their values II*, Spink, 2002, p. 367.

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