

Ancient Roman Coins Contain a Wealth of Knowledge

Instead of a penny for your thoughts, how about one Roman denarius for your thoughts? I was inspired in the fall of 2021 to start collecting Ancient Roman coins by looking at my father's Chinese coin collection. Throughout my childhood, he shared his collection, teaching me that the coins were a window into ancient cultures. Analyzing the Chinese inscriptions that are read from the top, bottom, right, and left on the coins makes it possible to gain some insights into the time periods from which they came. When I got older, I began to appreciate how a little coin could tell so much. Being especially interested in Ancient Rome, I began to explore Roman coins.

Roman coins are a wealth of information because they were the main source of breaking news for everyday citizens. For example, the first coin I collected has an imprint of the emperor Antoninus Pius who was more commonly known by his nickname Caracalla on one side. He was born with the name Lucius Septimius Bassianus. Then, at the age of seven, his father changed his name to Antoninus Pius to try to unite his family with the family of the former emperor, Antoninus Pius. The letters AVG are printed across from his nose, indicating he is an Augustus.

The reigning emperor could only use this title at the time. AVG is followed by the letters BRIT - Britannicus to explain that he was campaigning in Britain with his father, Emperor Septimius Severus (212 AD). All this information is revealed on this silver coin.



On the flip side of the coin are the letters PM stands for Pontifex Maximus, which means Head Priest, the highest position in Ancient Roman religion. However, it had become more of a title of the emperor instead of an actual role. Next, it has the letters TRP XV, which was short for Tribunicia Potestate. This inscription meant that he had been a Tribune for 15 years. Then, the letters COS III indicate that he had been the Consul or the chief magistrate of the Roman state, along with the number of times he had been in this position. Finally, the PP stood for Pater Patriae. It meant Father of the Country, and the title was given to emperors after many years of rule.

Collectors have to take into consideration the quality and rarity of the coin. The coin above is worth about \$100. However, the Ides of March, which commemorates the assassination of Julius Caesar, coin sold for \$4.2 million at a London coin auction in



2020. It is one of the rarest Ancient Roman coins ever to exist, with only 100 known silver versions of the coin and three gold versions. The head on the front is of Brutus, one of the assassins who killed Julius Caesar. The back had a Pileus cap as well as two daggers. A Pileus cap was what enslaved people wore when granted freedom. The symbolism behind the cap meant that Brutus and the other conspirators were liberating Rome from the tyranny of Julius Caesar. The daggers were the weapons used to assassinate Caesar. The “EID MAR” stood for Eidibus Martiis, which meant “On the Ides of March.” Being a historically significant event, this coin catches the attention of collectors.

It may be overwhelming to think about how to start collecting coins, but take small step to build a collection. To begin, focus on a certain time period to start a more complete collection that tells a story. By having coins that are more related to each other, conclusions can be drawn about the time period. After collecting various coins of the time period, it will be possible to compare and contrast them to be like a detective to find out information they reveal about the time period. For example, I focused on the Severan Dynasty, initially, by collecting Caracalla, Septimus Severus, and Geta, who was Caracalla’s younger brother that was assassinated. For this period, coins can be bought starting around \$100 and up.

There is an in-depth grading system that helps with determining the value of the coin. There are 16 different grades, from Poor to Gem Mint State. If a coin is in mint state, that would mean that there are only minor marks on the coin and that it is almost in perfect condition. A poor graded coin would mean that it is virtually unrecognizable, with only a few details remaining to show what coin it is.

Comparison of yesterday's US coins to today's coins tell unique stories. For example, examine a Lincoln penny. There is still a lot of symbolism involved with modern-day coins. Lincoln was well-known as an influential figure who helped end slavery in the US and was a symbol of liberty and freedom. It is possible to gather stories and information from coins today, as well as from the different iterations of the coins. During WWII, copper

was scarce, so pennies were minted from bronze planchets to zinc-coated steel because copper was needed for the war effort in 1943. By mistake, some bronze planchets were used to strike pennies at the time, and these coins are very valuable today. In fact, in 2012, one sold for \$1 million. It's interesting how minting mistakes often create rarer and more expensive coins.

The next time you pick up a coin, stop and examine the story it tells. You may be surprised to see how much you can learn and how much the coin is worth. Even a penny could end up being a very valuable coin.

GRADE ABBREVIATION	GRADE	SHELDON SCALE EQUIVALENT
PR	Poor	1
FA	Fair	2
AG	About Good	3
G	Good	4-6
VG	Very Good	8-10
F	Fine	12
Ch F	Choice Fine	15
VF	Very Fine	20-25
Ch VF	Choice Very Fine	30-35
XF	Extremely Fine	40
Ch XF	Choice Extremely Fine	45
AU	About Uncirculated	50-53
Ch AU	Choice About Uncirculated	55-58
MS	Mint State	60-62
Ch MS	Choice Mint State	63-64
Gem MS	Gem Mint State	65-70