

## Numismatics and Narratives: How a Classicist Can Read Coins

Coinage is a source of evidence with great potential for the study of antiquity but one which Classicists often overlook. Whether it is due to unfamiliarity with numismatic resources or concerns about interpreting material evidence, many have missed how coins can clarify or challenge narratives drawn from literary texts. Recently, numismatists have tried to bridge the divide between the two source materials and make coinage more accessible to philologically trained scholars (Manders 2012; von Reden 2012; Hall 2014; Thonemann 2016; Rowan 2018). This panel builds on these works and demonstrates the ways in which Classicists can integrate numismatic evidence into their scholarship.

The intersection of textual and numismatic evidence in the study of antiquity engages with fundamental interpretive matters of epistemology and authority. Treating material and literary evidence together compels the scholar to acknowledge which testimony should frame the narrative, especially if the evidence contradicts one another. This kind of study raises the questions of which testimony is more reliable and conducive to a deeper understanding of the subject, and how a Classicist should “read” coins alongside texts. This panel addresses such issues through a number of case studies, drawn from a variety of ancient contexts, from archaic Ionia to late imperial Rome. The papers explore various forms of coinage – federal (paper #1), civic (#2), foreign (paper #4), and an individual’s (papers #3 and #5) – and how they relate to the established narratives formulated in the ancient authors. As a result, this interdisciplinary panel demonstrates that by integrating numismatic material, Classicists can gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the ancient world.

Our first paper, “Coins and Interstate Cooperation in Archaic Ionia,” examines the first issues of silver coinage among the Ionian city-states, and how the choice of metal, weight

standard, and typology can elucidate the economic, political, and military situations facing the Ionians in the sixth century BCE, as related in Herodotus, Pausanias, and Strabo.

Our second paper, “Coinage and Literature: Two Complementary Approaches to Roman Civilization,” looks at the contemporaneous rise of Roman literature and the emergence of Italian and Roman coinage in the third century BCE. The coinage, like Latin literature, was heavily influenced by Greek precedents, reflecting a middle ground between Greek and Roman traditions of this period. As the paper argues, both coinage and literature can be used as heuristic tools to better understand Roman civilization, especially for a view of the privileged vectors of the self-representations of elites.

Our third paper, “From Octavian to Augustus: Numismatics and Augustan Propaganda,” analyzes coins minted under Augustus and compares these images to contemporary literature like the *Res Gestae* and others. It addresses why one deity, Diana, is prominent in Augustan coinage, like her brother and Augustus’ patron Apollo, but absent from the *Res Gestae*. The paper argues that while Apollo represented a more vengeful Octavian, Diana was used to present a peaceful Augustus.

Our fourth paper, “To Crown and Not to Crown: Trajanic Representations of Roman-Eastern Relations,” turns to Rome’s foreign policy under Trajan’s Parthian War. While much scholarship contends that Parthia was geopolitically bipolar, numismatic evidence, supported by Cassius Dio, challenges this notion. This evidence intimates instead that the subjugation of Parthia, Armenia, and Mesopotamia was achieved through a combination of crowning client kings and military conquest. Trajan used these relationships to show the progress of the war and the various ways that these regions could become part of Rome’s empire.

Our final paper, “Return to Rome: The Numismatic Fight between Maxentius and Constantine,” focuses on Rome’s urban capital and the numismatic projection of imperial power. Looking first at Tetrarchic imagery, then Maxentius’ Rome-focused coinage, illustrates Constantine’s own project and challenges the main literary narratives of Eusebius and Lactantius. The coins suggest that Constantine perceived Maxentius’ numismatic efforts as so effective that he retained Tetrarchic and Maxentian imagery well after his alleged conversion to Christianity.

As our papers hope to show, numismatic evidence can, when fully utilized as more than an accessory to the literary texts, elucidate the society, politics, economics, foreign relations, and other aspects of the ancient world. With its interdisciplinary focus, this panel has the potential to generate constructive discussions amongst classicists, numismatists, and ancient historians, and to stimulate future research.

### Bibliography

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