

## The Aureus – A Golden Newspaper

By Aila de la Rive, © MoneyMuseum 2010

A portrait on the obverse and political programs on the reverse – that was what the gold coins of the Roman emperors usually looked like. The gold pieces of the Roman Empire were called aurei and not only used for payments, but also to spread news: the introduction of a new emperor as well as the presentation of political activities, important construction projects or welfare services in Rome and its provinces – all those things were illustrated on the aurei.

## Roman Republic, 60 Asses (Anonymous Issue), after 211 BC, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>60 Asses</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Roman Republic</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Rome</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>-211</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>3.37</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>15.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Gold</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

The first Roman gold coins were issued towards the end of the 3rd century BC. In those years Rome waged an embittered war against Carthage. At the same time the senate issued the first denarii then, the first silver coins struck according to a pure Roman standard.

The images on those coins reflected the prevailing state of war. The gold pieces depict Mars, the god of war, and an eagle sitting on a thunderbolt – both emblems of the highest Roman god Jupiter. The silver coins show a female goddess in full armament, which is – without good reason – identified as Roma by most numismatists. On the reverse there are the demigods Castor and Pollux, who were considered as auxiliaries of the Romans in battle. All these gods were thus invoked to ensure the victory of the Roman arms.

**Roman Republic, Gaius Julius Caesar (\*100, †44 BC)  
and Aulus Hirtius, Aureus (Imperial Issue), 46 BC,  
Rome**



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Imperator C. Julius Caesar and Moneyer Aulus Hirtius
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	-46
<b>Weight (g):</b>	8.08
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	20.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Aulus Hirtius was a brother-in-arms of Julius Caesar during the civil war against Pompeius (49- 45 BC). In 46 BC, Hirtius issued a series of gold coins that was used for the pay of Caesar's legions as well as for his many other expenses – Caesar celebrated four triumphs that year, allocated money to his legionnaires and to the people, and had a temple for Venus Genetrix built.

The obverse of these aurei depicted Pietas, the goddess of respect concerning sacred traditions; in this way Caesar announced that he did by no means wage his war out of personal interests, but merely for the good of the Republic. The inscription C CAESAR COS TER reminded that Caesar held the office of a consul for the third time in 46 BC. The reverse illustrates priestly instruments – a lituus, the curved augurial staff, a pitcher, and an axe – which alluded to Caesar's function as pontifex maximus, as the highest priest of Rome.

## Roman Empire, Octavian Augustus (27 BC-14 AD), Aureus, c. 2 BC-1 AD, Lyon



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Augustus
<b>Mint:</b>	Lyon
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	-2
<b>Weight (g):</b>	7.91
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	20.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

The youthful looking man on the obverse of this aureus was the most powerful man of his time: Augustus, sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Officially however, the power in the state lay with the senate; Augustus himself only held the position of a consul – even though one with a wide scope of authority.

The Romans deeply mistrusted any dictatorial ambitions, a fact that had already cost the life of Augustus' adoptive father Julius Caesar. On the other hand, people in the provinces desired to bestow the strong man in Rome with divine honors. They became used to it during the hellenistic age. In 2 BC, Augustus adopted the title of "pater patriae" (father of the fatherland). At that time, he was already 60 years old and far from being the youth as which he was portrayed on the coins minted to celebrate the occasion. "DIVI F[ilius] PATER PATRIAE CAESAR AVGSTVS" (Son of the divine Caesar, father of the fatherland, Caesar Augustus) reads the legend. The reverse shows the emperor's two grandsons Gaius and Lucius Caesar, thus introducing them as his heirs and successors.

## Roman Empire, Vespasian (69-79 AD), Aureus, 77-78 AD, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Vespasian
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	77
<b>Weight (g):</b>	7.35
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	24.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

This aureus shows a fine portrait of Emperor Vespasian, who ascended to the Roman throne after years of civil war. The bull-necked Vespasian managed to hold his grounds for over ten years, and during this time stabilized his realm both politically and financially.

The reverse depicts Vespasian in a military outfit as Victory is crowning him with a laurel wreath. The emperor holds a spear in his right hand and a parazonium in his left. The parazonium was a long triangular dagger which in Roman mythology was often carried by Virtus, the personification of virtues. A Roman man (lat. vir) was thought to dispose of. In the hand of the emperor it is symbolizing exactly these virtues.

## Roman Empire, Hadrian (117-138), Aureus, 128, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Hadrian
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	128
<b>Weight (g):</b>	7.41
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	20.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Hadrian was the first Roman emperor who had himself portrayed bearded on his coins. He was a follower of Stoic philosophy, which he probably demonstrated by wearing a beard: in antiquity only philosophers and intellectuals were bearded. Other sources have it, however, that Hadrian wore a beard to hide some ugly scars from his army days.

The reverse of this aureus depicts the emperor with a flying cape on horseback, hurling a lance. This was to show that Hadrian was also a successful military commander. Indeed he pursued a defensive foreign policy, but at the same time was interested in the state of his legions and the fortification systems along the borders like no other Roman emperor. This was why Hadrian spent almost half of his 21 years in office traveling his realm.

**Roman Empire, Antoninus Pius (138-161) for his Wife Faustina Major (\*c. 100, †140), Aureus, c. 150, Rome**



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Antoninus Pius
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	150
<b>Weight (g):</b>	7.25
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	21.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Faustina was the wife of Antoninus Pius. The two led a very happy marriage. Faustina died early, however, leaving her husband in deep mourning. As tokens of his esteem, Antoninus Pius consecrated Faustina and thus made her a diva, a divine patroness. In addition he had gold coins issued for her; that they were minted after Faustina's death is shown by the legend "DIVA."

The obverse of our aureus bears a portrait of Faustina. On the reverse is Ceres, an old Italic deity whom the Romans worshiped as goddess of earth, growth and maturation, and who had, as goddess of the earth, also connections to the deceased.

## Roman Empire, Marcus Aurelius as Caesar (152-153), Aureus, 152, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Caesar Marcus Aurelius
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	152
<b>Weight (g):</b>	7.3
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	20.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Since his early youth Marcus Aurelius knew that he would once become emperor of Rome. He ascended to the throne through the succession plan of Emperor Hadrian, who prompted his own successor Antoninus Pius to adopt the then 17-year-old Marcus. After Antoninus Pius' death, Marcus Aurelius ascended to the throne. However, hoping to get help in the imperial office, which he perceived as an utter burden, he appointed his adoptive brother Lucius Verus as coregent and joint partner in all titles and offices.

This aureus was minted before Marcus Aurelius inauguration, when he was still Caesar, the designated heir to the throne thus. The coin depicts him without any imperial insignia. The reverse shows Fides, the personification of subservience and fidelity towards the state. She holds two ears and a fruit basket, the symbols of fruitfulness and abundance.

## Roman Empire, Septimius Severus (193-211) for his Wife Julia Domna (\*c. 170, †217), Aureus, c. 196, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Septimius Severus
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	196
<b>Weight (g):</b>	7.18
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	21.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

At the end of the second century women started to get more influence in Rome. One of the reasons was Julia Domna originating from an old and important family from the east. She had married a relatively unimportant general and helped him to acquire the empire. Septimius Severus was grateful and granted her a position at his court no other woman had had before. We have a lot of pictures of her and coins. And she even accompanied her husband on his campaigns, which was uncommon for Roman standards.

Our gold coin represents Julia Domna as a young woman. The inscription is "IVLIA AVGSTA" (Empress Julia). The empress is thus called by her own name and title, and not, as had been the custom until then, shown as the personification of a deity. The reverse depicts Juno Regina, the highest goddess of Rome and the patron of birth and marriage. She is holding a scepter and a patera, a sacrificial dish; at her feet is a peacock, Juno's sacred bird. Her epithet *regina* (= the reigning Juno) connects her to the empress on the obverse.

## Roman Empire, Caracalla (198-217), Aureus, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Caracalla
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	216
<b>Weight (g):</b>	6.8
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	21.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

This magnificent aureus bears an image of Caracalla on the obverse and of the god Serapis on the reverse. Caracalla was the first Roman emperor who had the Hellenistic-Egyptian Serapis depicted on coins. He promoted cults from the east and from North Africa consciously because of his own origin: Caracalla's father Septimius Severus had been born in what is Libya today and his mother Julia Domna in Syria.

The Egyptians connected Serapis with the fertility of the Nile, and as such always wore a kalathos, a basket-like hat enwound with ears. Otherwise he resembled Zeus.

## Roman Empire, Severus Alexander (222-235), Aureus, 230, Rome



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Severus Alexander
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	230
<b>Weight (g):</b>	5.85
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	21.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Severus Alexander was only thirteen years of age when he ascended to the Roman throne. The imperial propaganda stylized the young ruler as the embodiment of Roman virtues. Among those qualities were military bravery as well as dignity, modesty and dutifulness – characteristics that one willingly awards to the youngster represented on this coin.

The reverse shows Severus Alexander again, this time in the guise of Romulus, the legendary founder and first king of Rome. He carries a trophy and a spear over his shoulder. Romulus was not only regarded as the founder of the city of Rome, but also of the Roman state. With this depiction, Severus Alexander thus made it clear that he saw himself as renovator of the Roman state.

## Roman Empire, Diocletian (284-305), Aureus, Cyzicus



<b>Denomination:</b>	Aureus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Diocletian
<b>Mint:</b>	Cyzicus
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	286
<b>Weight (g):</b>	4.62
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	21.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

This aureus shows a portrait of Emperor Diocletian, a man of remarkable qualities. He was as able a soldier as a politician, and managed during his long reign to stabilize the weakened Roman Empire once again. Diocletian realized that his huge realm had grown to big to be reigned by a single person alone. One year after his ascension to the throne he therefore appointed Maximian, a friend from his army days, as Caesar. For himself he chose the title of Jovius (Jupiter), for Maximian the title of Herculius (Hercules). The choice of these tutelary gods made the correlation of the two rulers clear – after all, Jupiter was the highest Roman god, whereas Hercules was only a demigod.

The reverse of our aureus depicts Diocletian's patron Jupiter with a scepter and a statuette of Victory.

## Roman Empire, Constantine I the Great (307-337), Solidus, 314, Treverorum



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Solidus</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Emperor Constantine I</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Treverorum (Trier)</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>314</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>4.45</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>24.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Gold</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

The obverse of this aureus shows a highly stylized portrait of Emperor Constantine the Great, while the reverse depicts the goddess Roma handing over a globe to Constantine, the ruler of Constantinople.

This solidus was minted in the Roman town of Augusta Treverorum (today's Trier). Even though the invading Franks and Alemanni had demolished the town, it regained importance as an architectural, cultural and economical center under Constantine's rule. During that time Treverorum, situated in a very favorable cross point of old trading routes, saw an important boom as center of supply for the Roman legions in Germany.

## Roman Empire, Julian II the Apostate (360-363), Solidus, 361, Antioch



<b>Denomination:</b>	Solidus
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Julian II Apostata
<b>Mint:</b>	Antioch
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	361
<b>Weight (g):</b>	4.4
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	23.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Julian II was a successful military commander who waged one of the largest campaigns of Roman history against the Sassanid Empire. In order to prepare the army for this expedition, he spent the winter of 361/62 in Syria, where this aureus was struck. The coin anticipates future victories, the obverse bearing Julian's portrait, and the reverse depicting the emperor wearing a helmet, a tunic and carrying a trophy, whilst dragging a prisoner behind him by his hair. Nevertheless, the campaign became a disaster, which cost Julian his life.

**Roman Empire, Valentinian III (425-455) for his Mother Galla Placidia (\*392, †450), Tremissis, c. 425, Rome or Ravenna**



<b>Denomination:</b>	Tremissis (1/3 Solidus)
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Emperor Valentinian III
<b>Mint:</b>	Rome or Ravenna
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	425
<b>Weight (g):</b>	1.38
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	13.0
<b>Material:</b>	Gold
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

The life of Galla Placidia was so adventurous that it is quite surprising that nobody has made a movie out of it yet. Placidia was the granddaughter of the Roman emperor Valentinian I, the daughter of his successor Theodosius I, the half sister of emperor Honorius and the mother of the later emperor Valentinian III. She was held hostage at the court of the Visigoths and married their ruler Athaulf. After the murder of his husband she was exchanged by his successors against a peace with her brother Honorius. She returned and married a powerful general who was appointed co-ruler of Honorius. Her second husband died within the same year and left her a little boy, for which she acted as regent of the Western Roman Empire from 425 to 437.

Here, we see Galla Placidia on a tremissis issued by her son Valentinian III. The reverse depicts a cross, then typical picture for a tremissis.