

Where does the money come from?

Being elected into a public office meant losing a lot of money. Only when the official was sent to conduct business or war abroad, was he able to make profits – legally or illegally.

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Where does the money come from?

Rome's thirst for money

The Romans' greed for money often led to veritable wars of extinction. The politicians of the Roman Republic needed money galore – first for their candidature for political offices and then again once they held these offices.



Gun and coins. Photo: Wikicommons / Daniel D'Auria / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

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Where does the money come from?

Introducing: Gaius Verres, art thief

That the governors who had moved out from Rome to their respective provinces led a dissolute life in every sense of the word quickly became common practice. Gaius Verres, governor of Sicily from 73 to 71 BC, was infamous and later tried for his corruptibility, money-hungry politics and large-scale blackmailing for artworks.



Map showing Gaius Verres's 'hauls'. Source: Wikicommons / mario / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/de/legalcode>

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Where does the money come from?

Greed goes before a fall

Brought to trial by Cicero, Verres had to account for his doings in court. He lost the trial, was fined 3 million sesterces and retreated to exile in Massila (today's Marseille).



Bust of Cicero. Photo: Freud / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by->

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Where does the money come from?

As avaricious as greedy

His greed was eventually his downfall: As the story goes, Marc Antony proscribed him because Verres allegedly refused to give up a handsome Corinthian vase.



Corinthian oinochoe, Amsterdam painter. Photo: Wikicommons / sailko / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

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Where does the money come from?

Rome taps into new sources of revenue

Rome's provinces, having to pay dues and taxes, were a more than lucrative source of money, while the citizens of Rome had been exempt from direct taxation since 167 BC. According to Plutarch, tax revenue from the provinces, before Pompey's conquering expeditions to the east, amounted to no less than 200 million sestertii. So Rome was evidently very interested in annexing further territories and turning them into provinces.



The Roman Empire in AD 117 reached its largest expansion around the time of Emperor Trajan's death. Source: Wikicommons / furfur / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

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Where does the money come from?

The winner takes it all

But the available booty that a commander could make in a nice war was not to be scoffed at either. He alone decided how much of it would be given to his soldiers, how much saved for the triumphal procession and thus for the state treasury and how much would end up in his own pockets.



Booty from the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Section from the Arch of Titus in Rome.

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Where does the money come from?

Doomed to failure

Perseus of Macedon, who is depicted on this coin, did not stand a chance of averting war with Rome by negotiating. Macedonia was too rich. The Roman military commanders were after the money and the senate supported their actions. After the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC, Macedonia was first divided into four republics and later made a province of Rome.



Denarius of L. Aemilius Lepidus Paullus, 62. Obverse: Concordia. Reverse: Aemilius Paullus next to Macedonian trophy.

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Where does the money come from?

The goddess of love as lucky charm

Many Roman coins evidence that military victories were often due to large cash flow. One example is this representation of the Temple of Venus on the cliff of Eryx, symbolic of Rome's first province Sicily. Rome did not only lay claim to Sicily's taxes and corn reserves but also to Sicilian gods. When Hannibal invaded Italy, the Romans dedicated a temple in Rome to the Venus Erycina in order to hold off the enemy.



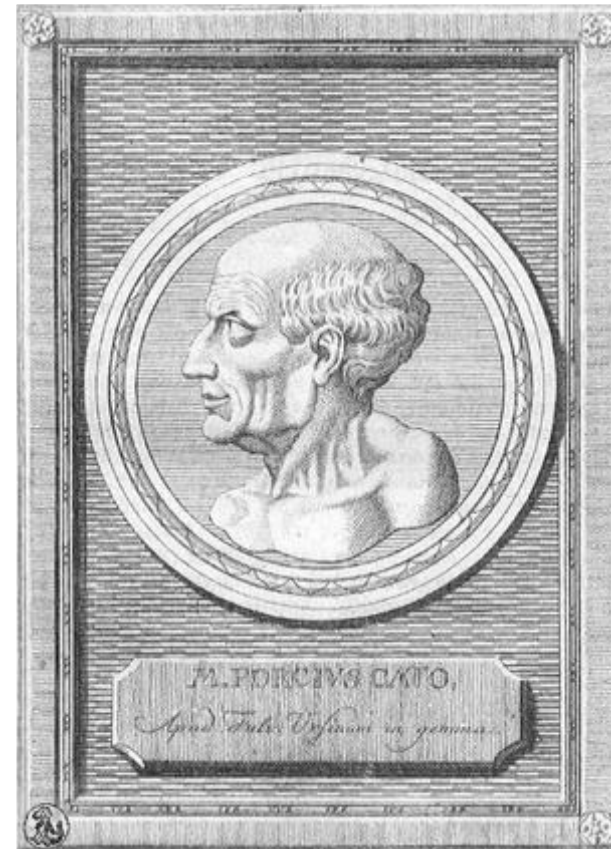
Denarius of C. Considius Nonianus, 57. Obverse: Venus. Reverse: Temple of Venus in Eryx and wall.

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Where does the money come from?

He did not practise what he preached

Marcus Porcius Cato the Elder was widely known as the most dedicated moraliser in Rome and the unassailable moral authority representing the Roman aristocracy. However, even he, while at the same time promoting a return to more traditional values such as frugality and moderation, captured a lot of booty on his military expeditions abroad.



Cato the Elder, post-ancient engraving by an unknown engraver.
Source: Wikicommons / Dr. Manuel.

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Where does the money come from?

Investing the war booty

This motif alludes to the consecration of a temple dedicated to Victoria Virgo by Cato the Elder in 193 BC. Cato had financed the construction with the war booty made on his campaign in Spain.



Quinarus of Marcus Porcius Cato, 89. Obverse: Liber. Reverse: Victoria with palm branch.

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Where does the money come from?

Rich booty

There was a reason why Cyprus, Aphrodite's island, was believed to be particularly fertile and rich in natural resources due to its vast copper mines. The dissolution of the Kingdom of Cyprus generated no less than 168 million sesterces, which Cato brought back to Rome.



Copper nugget. Photo: Wikicommons / Ikiwaner / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

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Where does the money come from?

When allies become enemies

The Aetolians experienced first-hand that breaking with Rome could be an expensive affair: After they had been loyal allies of Rome in the First and Second Macedonian War, they were merely treated as tedious supplicants after Flamininus's victory over Philip. When, in view of Rome's presumptuousness, they fought on the side of the Seleucidian king Antiochos in a consecutive war, Rome was affronted.



Map of Ancient Greece at the beginning of the Second Macedonian War, 200 BC. Source: Wikicommons / Marsyas/Lokiseinchef / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

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Where does the money come from?

Renegades do not get away unscathed

The consequent defeat of the Aetolians in 189 BC by Rome is remembered on this coin in the form of these muse statues that were captured as war booty from the Temple of Hercules Musarum (the mythical ancestor of this moneyer) in Ambracia.



Denarius of Q. Pomponius Musa, 66. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: Hercules Musagetes.

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Where does the money come from?

Nine abducted muses

This particular representation of Hercules was considered the leader of the muses, whose famous statues had once been in the possession of the Aetolians and which were now transferred to Rome. On this coin you can see the statue of Urania, the muse of astronomy.



Denarius of Q. Pomponius Musa, 66. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: The muse Urania.

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Where does the money come from?

Plus interest and compound interest

The case of the Roman province of Asia illustrates just how much of a financial burden a Roman victory could be for the defeated party. After Mithridates's defeat, Sulla imposed reparation payments in the amount of 20,000 talents, the equivalent of 120 million denarii. Of course this demand exceeded the financial reserves of the concerned cities. They had to borrow money. Roman bankers were more than happy to help out and, only 14 years later, the province's debt, including interest and compound interest, had risen and sextupled to 120,000 talents.



Being the residence of his enemy Mithridates, Pergamon suffered even more than the other cities from Sulla's repressions. But, just like the rest of the province, it would thrive again later and, in the 2nd century AD, it had grown into an impressive sight. Photo: Wladyslaw Sojka / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

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Where does the money come from?

A merciful victor

Roman general Lucullus had mercy and wiped out the debt, which resulted in a petition by Roman money lenders to withdraw Lucullus from Asia. The bankers convinced the senate and Lucullus returned to Rome, the Eternal City, in 66 BC. Even though he was never again trusted with a military campaign due to his foreigner-friendly attitude, he had made enough money on his expeditions to erect several sumptuous villas and turn his name into a synonym for an epicurean lifestyle.



Christmas version (with speculoos instead of normal biscuits) of the German dessert 'Kalter Hund', also known as Lukullus. Even today, a gourmet meal is still referred to as a 'Lucullan meal'. Photo: Politikaner / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>