

## The Denarius – the Main Currency of Roman Times

The denarius was the most important silver coin in ancient Rome for almost 500 years. In the border territories of the realm it was later often copied by tribes of the Migration Period. Originally, one denarius equaled the 72nd part of a Roman pound. After the introduction of regular gold coinage under Julius Caesar, the silver content of the denarius gradually depreciated, however, until the Roman silver currency finally collapsed. With the introduction of the antoninian and later of the argenteus, the imperial silver currency was to be resurrected, yet in vain. What remained of the proud traditional silver denarius in the end, was a copper coin of minor value.

## Roman Republic, Denarius, c. 211 BC



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius</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>4.45</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

The silver denarius was introduced shortly before 211 BC. The coin was needed to pay the mercenaries in the Roman armies for their services, because these foreigners had no use for the traditional Roman bronze coins. The denarius was to become the major silver coin of the Roman Empire for the next 400 years.

Significant is that the denarius was related to Rome's long-established bronze coin system: the X on the left of Roma's head on the obverse indicates "10 asses." The Latin term "denarius" literally means "tenner." The reverse depicts the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux and the inscription ROMA.

**Roman Republic, L. Licinius Crassus, Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, C. Malleolus, Denarius Serratus, 118 BC, Narbo**



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius Serratus</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Moneyer L. Licinius Crassus and Others</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Narbo (Narbonne)</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>-118</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>3.82</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

A denarius serratus, one of the serrated denarii of the Roman Republic. Such serrati were minted over about 100 years parallel to the normal denarii. The edges of the coin blanks were cut before the pieces were struck.

The obverse of our serratus shows the head of Roma, the goddess and personification of Rome, wearing a winged Attic helmet; behind her is the mark X for the value of 10 asses. The inscription around her denotes the abbreviated names of several moneyers responsible for the issue of this coin.

The reverse of our denarius depicts a naked Gaul warrior in a two-horse chariot. The warrior is equipped with a shield, a spear and a carnyx, a Celtic wind instrument. Below the horses is L. LIC. for the moneyer Lucius Licinius Crassus and CN. DOM. for his colleague Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus.

## Iberian Peninsula, Sekobirikes, Denarius, c.100 BC



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Tribe of the Sekobirikes</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>-100</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>4.04</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>19.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Hispania with his abundance of silver and other metals played an important role in Antiquity. The Iberian and Celt Iberian coinage in Hispania began in the time after the Roman occupation. From about 170 BC to 100 BC, Celt Iberian coinage reached a high point.

The Celt Iberian mint foot complied with the Roman denarius. The coin images were Iberian, however. On bronze and on silver coins equestrians with lances were common, as can be seen on the coin shown here.

## Danube Region, Pannonia, Eravisci, Denarius, after 76 BC, Buda



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Tribe of the Eravisci</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Buda (Budapest)</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>-76</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>3.33</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>18.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

This silver denarius is an issue of the Eravisci, a Celtic people that had its seat on Gellért Hill in the Budapest of today. The coin copies a Roman denarius of the years 76 or 75 BC. The Roman original bore the head of the Genius Populi Romani on the obverse, while the reverse depicted a scepter with wreath, globe and rudder. Those instruments were kept on the copies, yet the legend RAVIS was added, a short form of the name Eravisci.

Roman money began to enjoy wide circulation in Pannonia since about 35 BC. It can therefore be assumed that the imitations were minted after that time.

## Roman Republic, L. Hostilius Saserna, Denarius, 48 BC



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Moneyer L. Hostilius Saserna</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Rome</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>-48</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>3.97</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

"Victory! Victory over the Gauls!" This is the apparent message on this denarius. The obverse represents the disheveled head of a Gallic warrior with a Celtic shield behind him. The Gaul has a rope around his neck, is thus a captive. The reverse depicts a vehicle called a biga, driven by a charioteer and bearing a warrior holding a shield and hurling a spear. The legend L. HOSTILIVS refers to the moneyer Lucius Hostilius Saserna, a political supporter of Julius Caesar.

The subjugation of Gaul was a milestone in the political and military career of Caesar's ambitions. It granted him the backing of the army, prestige and, above all, huge amounts of valuable booty like gold, slaves, and livestock. All this would be useful for Caesar's future, and could easily be transformed into chinking coins so convenient for bribing people.

## Roman Republic, Imperial Issue, Gaius Julius Caesar (\*100, † 44 BC) and P. Sepulius Macer, Denarius, 44 BC



<b>Denomination:</b>	Denarius
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Imperator C. Julius Caesar and Moneyer P. Sepulius Macer
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined (Traveling Military Mint)
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	-44
<b>Weight (g):</b>	3.97
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	20.0
<b>Material:</b>	Silver
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

In 44 BC, a political drama came to an end that had begun five years earlier on a small Italian border river called Rubicon: Then, against the explicit orders of the Senate in Rome, Gaius Julius Caesar and his troops had crossed the Rubicon, thus starting the Roman Civil War. Caesar won the war, and was made dictator for life (dictator perpetuo) in January 44 BC. A couple of months later, he was assassinated.

All denarii issued that year bore Caesar's portrait on the obverse, while the reverse depicted Venus genetrix, his divine ancestor. It was the first time ever that a Roman coin bore the image of a living Roman. This denarius shows Caesar with a laurel wreath. In front of him is the inscription CAESAR. IMP for "Caesar Imperator." Behind him is the star of Venus, pointing out Caesar's divine origin. The reverse depicts the goddess herself. On her hand she carries – unfortunately no longer visible on this coin – a small winged goddess of Victory. The legend P. SEPVLLIVS refers to the moneyer Publius Sepulius Macer.

## Roman Republic, Imperial Issue, Marcus Antonius (\*c. 82, †30 BC) and Vibius Varus, Denarius, 42 BC



Denomination:	Denarius
Mint Authority:	Imperator Marcus Antonius and Moneyer Vibius Varus
Mint:	Undefined
Year of Issue:	-42
Weight (g):	3.97
Diameter (mm):	19.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Mark Antony was one of the main figures in the struggle for power after the murder of Julius Caesar. Together with Octavian (the later Emperor Augustus) he established the Second Triumvirate, and later divided the empire with him. Octavian resided in Rome and reigned over the West, Mark Antony lived in Alexandria and was responsible for the East.

Mark Antony became famous for his love for the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, with whom he shared the last seven years of his life. Octavian accused Mark Antony to have betrayed the Roman Republic to the Egyptian queen. When the tensions between the two Triumviri grew, open war broke out. Antony was defeated in the Battle of Actium, and had to escape to Egypt. Octavian followed him, and with no other refuge to go to, Antony committed suicide on August 1, 30 BC.

This coin shows Fortuna with her cornucopia. She holds Victoria in her hand, the goddess of victory, who proffers her a laurel wreath. Here the moody goddess is still on the side of Mark Antony who is beautifully portrayed on the obverse.

## Roman Empire, Octavian Augustus (27 BC-14 AD), Denarius, c. 13 BC



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Emperor Augustus</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Rome</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>-13</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>3.9</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>18.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus pushed his luck when he offered to the Roman senate to resign from all his political offices in 27 BC. But the bluff was worth it: the senate denied his request for resignation, and bestowed Octavian with comprehensive powers and many honorary titles. Among other things, Octavian now held the right to call himself Augustus ("the venerable"), a title of religious rather than political authority. The later Roman emperors all adopted the title Augustus.

The obverse of this denarius portrays the powerful man together with his name CAESAR AVGVSTVS. The reverse depicts the symbols of the four priestly corporations of ancient Rome, of which Augustus was a member: a ladle (simpvium) for the pontifices; a staff (lituus) for the augurs; a tripod for the quindecimviri, and a sacrificial dish (patera) for the epulones.

## South Arabia, Himyarite Kingdom, Hadhur in the Name of Shahar Hilal, Reduced Denarius, 1st c. AD



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Reduced Denarius</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>King Hadhur of Himyar</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>1.1</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>15.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Who would not know the Tales from 1001 Nights? Stories of enormous treasures: of gold and diamonds, of frankincense and myrrh, of cinnamon, pepper, silk and perfumes. But who would have guessed that treasuries such as these were paid with coins like the one shown here – with denarii, minted somewhere along the route, on which all these goods were transported.

This denarius was struck in Himyar, a place where the legendary treasures of the Oriental tales were real. In Himyar's port Aden, spices from India, slaves, gemstones and draperies were unloaded. And here, frankincense and myrrh were shipped – two herbs, which grew in Himyar itself and which made its population immensely rich.

Affluence rouses enviousness, and soon foreign potentates leered at Himyar. The neighboring Arab kingdoms fought for the possession of these lands. Even the first emperor of Rome, Augustus (31 BC-14 AD), tried to exercise control over the harbors of Himyar and the frankincense trade on the Arab Peninsula. But the Arab rulers managed to navigate cleverly between different powers. The obverse of this denarius shows the head of the Roman Emperor Augustus. The reverse, on the other hand, shows the owl – an image known for centuries from Attic coins. The tetradrachms of Athens were the antique currency par excellence. The indications next to the owl are of Arabic origin and appear on many Arab tetradrachms.

## Roman Empire, Trajan (96-117), Denarius, 103-107 AD



Denomination:	Denarius
Mint Authority:	Emperor Trajan
Mint:	Rome?
Year of Issue:	103
Weight (g):	3.12
Diameter (mm):	20.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The Roman Emperor Trajan had himself represented in a new way on the reverse of his coins: In his constitutional position as *optimus princeps*, as successful commander (*SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI*), crossing the Danube River to conquer Dacia or to annex territories in the East, as sponsor who was able to afford prestigious buildings in Rome with the booty made in Dacia, and to complete the construction of the Via Trajana from Beneventum to Brindisi.

## Israel, Jewish Coins of the Bar Kokhba War, Year 2 (133/134), Denar or Zuz



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius or Zuz</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Rebel Simon bar Kokhba</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Jerusalem</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>2.81</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>18.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

When the Jews rose against Roman rule under the leadership of Shimon Bar Kokhba in 132 AD, the upset population overstruck the circulating Roman denarii with the motto "Freedom for Israel:" In a time without mass media, coins were the only common means of propaganda.

This denarius – or zuz, as the Roman denarius was called in the Talmud – documented the Jewish will to live in freedom in a freed Jerusalem. The obverse of the coin bears the Palaeo-Hebrew legend SM' Shim(on), the reverse shows the inscription SB LHR YSRL ("Year Two of the Freedom of Israel"). The depicted pitcher and frond were ritual objects used in the water procession on the last day of Sukkot (the Feast of Booths).

## Roman Empire, Aurelian (270-275), Denarius



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Denarius</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Emperor Aurelian</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Rome</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>2.48</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Emperor Aurelian spent a lot of energy attempting to pull the Roman Empire out of its deep crisis in the 3rd century. This involved coinage. Aurelianus' coins were still of bad content, but at the same time carefully minted from cleanly cut dies. They introduced a new, hard and clear style of portrait with stylized facial features; obviously it was not intended to depict the emperor as an individual. This new style of portrait was maintained for about 30 years.

Rome's major silver coin, the denarius, had undergone its first significant depreciation under Nero (54-68 AD). At that time, its silver content had been reduced from 96 to 88 percent. Under Septimius Severus (193-211) the fineness lay around 50 percent, and by the middle of the 3rd century it was devaluated even more.

But neither the reforms of Aurelian nor the later ones by Diocletian (284-305) had any effect. Only Constantine the Great would eventually create a new currency, which would be significant until the fall of the Roman Empire.