La Grande Nation and Its Coinage

The history of France's coinage is as varied and colourful as the peoples who inhabit La Grande Nation. Not only that; a whole range of French coins – denier, gros, écu, franc, Louis d'or, Napoleon – once circulated all over Europe, and bear eloquent witness to the former extent of French influence. They all tell us a good deal about France's history, especially the series of coins minted by the kings called "Louis," the most famous of whom was of course Louis XIV, the Sun King. In their choice of symbolism, they document the French monarch's idea of self-manifestation – "L'Etat, c'est moi" – and the victory of the centralistic state over the regional feudal overlords.

Kingdom of France, County of Provence, Alfonso II of Aragon (1191-1209), Denier

Denomination:	**Denier (Pfennig)**
Mint Authority:	**Count Alfonso II of Aragon**
Mint:	**Aix en Provence (?)**
Year of Issue:	**1196**
Weight (g):	**0.94**
Diameter (mm):	**18.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

The history of the kingdom of France began with Hugh Capet, who was elected king in 987. Capet and his successors were recognized as legitimate rulers in the whole of France; documents were dated after their reign. For a long time, however, the crown did not have much actual power. Its authority was limited to a small royal demesne, while diverse seigneurs ruled over the rest of France.

The French coinage reflected the political situation. The royal coins were only a few among many. Moreover, the feudal issues were often much more popular than those of the kings. This denier was an issue of Alfonso II of Aragon, the Count of the Provence. Supposedly, the mint was in Aix-en-Provence, where the counts of the Provence habitually resided since the mid-12th century.

Kingdom of France, Philip IV the Fair (1285-1314), Maille blanche à l'O long, Tours

Denomination:	**Maille blanche à l'O long**
Mint Authority:	**King Philip IV the Fair of France**
Mint:	**Tours**
Year of Issue:	**1285**
Weight (g):	**2.11**
Diameter (mm):	**23.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

In the course of diverse coin devaluations, the French king Philip the Fair introduced new coins; in 1296 he issued the maille blanche. In the Middle Ages "blanc," "white," was the name given to coins that stood out by a particularly pale, silvery color. The whiteness either stemmed from a very high percentage of silver – which was certainly not the case with the coins of Philip the Fair. Or the light color came from a chemical treatment by which inferior, dark coins were pickled until they became white.

The outer inscription on the obverse of our coin reads BNDICTV SIT NOME DNI NRI DEI – Blessed be the Name of our Lord. The inner inscription designates the king, PHILIPPVS REX. The reverse gives the name of the place where the coin was minted within a wreath of twelve lilies: TVRONVS CIVIS, the town of Tours.

Kingdom of France, Louis IX (1226-1270), Gros tournois, 1266-1270

Denomination:	**Gros Tournois**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis IX of France**
Mint:	**Tours**
Year of Issue:	**1266**
Weight (g):	**4.22**
Diameter (mm):	**26.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

In 1266, the French King Louis IX also introduced a new coin: The gros tournois worth 12 deniers. The new silver coin was an instant success. Under the name "tournose" it spread beyond the borders of France, and was soon copied all over Europe.

The gros tournois was minted in the town of Tours. The building on the reverse is a mixture between the city gates of Tours, and the town's abbey church. Twelve lilies form the outer border, which is not only decorative, but also helped to prevent the frequently committed crime of filing off the silver of the coins edge.

Kingdom of France, John II the Good (1350-1364), Franc à cheval, 1360

Denomination:	**1 Franc à cheval**
Mint Authority:	**King John II of France**
Mint:	**Undefined**
Year of Issue:	**1360**
Weight (g):	**3.51**
Diameter (mm):	**30.0**
Material:	**Gold**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

Three million écus d'or or 500,000 pound sterling – what an inconceivable sum of money! This was what King Edward III of England demanded as a ransom for the French King John the Good, who had been made prisoner at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356.

To pay for the ransom, France in 1360 started to mint the franc à cheval. The coin was called "franc" because it was to bring freedom to the king (franc = French for free). "À cheval" derived from the coins image, which showed the king on a richly caparisoned horse, charging into freedom with his sword raised.

Kingdom of France, Charles VI (1380-1422), Ecu d'or à la couronne undated (1388)

Denomination:	**Ecu d'or à la couronne**
Mint Authority:	**King Charles VI of France**
Mint:	**Undefined**
Year of Issue:	**1388**
Weight (g):	**3.97**
Diameter (mm):	**29.0**
Material:	**Gold**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

With the écu à la couronne, introduced in 1385, the French gold coins faded into insignificance. Those écus had about the same weight as their forerunners, the golden francs – and were all the same worth more: While a franc had held 20 sols tournois, the écu à la couronne equaled 22 sols and 6 deniers.

Our écu dates from the year 1388, when the 2nd emission of these coins was issued. Compared to the 1st emission, their weight was reduced from about 4 grams to 3.9 grams. Needless to say, that their value remained the same. Many more emissions were to follow – the coins of each being somewhat lighter than the ones before. Toward the end of Charles reign, in 1420, the 8th emission was issued; at that time, the weight of the écu à la couronne had dropped to about 3.7 grams.

Kingdoms of England and France, Henry VI (1422-1453), Salut d'or, c. 1423-1427, St Lô

Denomination:	**Salut d'or**
Mint Authority:	**King Henry VI. of England and France**
Mint:	**St Lô**
Year of Issue:	**1423**
Weight (g):	**3.12**
Diameter (mm):	**28.0**
Material:	**Gold**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

From 1422, the English and the French crown were united under Henry VI, the only child of the English king and the French princess. Upon his "accession to power," the young king was only one year old. The child was under the guardianship of its mother, and was crowned in 1429. Subsequently, little Henry went to France for two years, where he was crowned King of France in 1431.

Henry VI issued the salut d'or, a coin from pure gold that was to become one of the most highly esteemed coins of the 15th century. It owed its reputation at least in part to its convenience, for it was of the same weight and value as the gold florin and the English half-noble. At the same time, it was of great beauty and charm, having as obverse a representation of the Annunciation above the shields of France and England.

Kingdom of France, Louis XIII (1610-1643), milled Louis d'or 1641, Paris

Denomination:	**Louis d'or**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis XIII of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1641**
Weight (g):	**6.73**
Diameter (mm):	**25.0**
Material:	**Gold**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

In the year 1640, the engraver Jean Varin was appointed chief of the Paris mint. Varin was a supporter of mechanical coinage, a very controversial technique in France. He put the hardly used screw press of the Paris mint back into operation, and additionally introduced a new technique. Geometrical patterns were imprinted on the rims of the coins, so that the coins' edges could no longer be trimmed.

In the same year of 1640, a new gold coin was launched in France. It was called Louis d'or, after the image of the king on the coin's obverse. One Louis d'or weighed double as much as the traditional écu d'or that was still issued, and equaled 10 livres at 20 sols tournois each. The gold for the Louis d'or was melted out of old French and of foreign gold coins. And naturally, the Louis d'or as well as it's multiples and divisions, were minted mechanically.

Kingdom of France, Louis XIII (1610-1643), milled Ecu Blanc 1643, Paris

Denomination:	**Ecu blanc (Louis d'argent)**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis XIII of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1643**
Weight (g):	**27.2**
Diameter (mm):	**39.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

King Louis XIII sat on the French throne for 33 years. During that time, France was turned into an absolutistic monarchy, and into a leading European power. Just as policy and religion, art and economy were put in the service of the absolutistic state. The significance of the coin as a medium for propaganda was rediscovered and fully exploited.

The Louis d'argent or écu blanc with the image of the king on its obverse was to become of great significance for the development of French coinage. The last écus blancs were minted during the French Revolution, in 1795, and remained in circulation until 1834.

Kingdom of France, Louis XIV (1643-1715), 1/2 Ecu 1691, Dijon

Denomination:	**1/2 Ecu d'argent (1/2 Louis d'argent)**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis XIV of France**
Mint:	**Dijon**
Year of Issue:	**1691**
Weight (g):	**13.39**
Diameter (mm):	**34.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

Louis XIV is usually considered a master monarch, largely because people tend to accept a successfully dramatized self-estimation. In reality he exhausted France's economic and human resources by his ceaseless wars and their cost in national debt, causalities, famine and disease. Like this he propelled France toward the collapse that could only result, as it did two reigns later, in the overturn of absolute monarchy.

The problem of permanent indebtedness he solved by withdrawing circulating coins and revaluating them through counterstamping; "reformation," he called this procedure euphemistically. In reality, however, the recurring "reformations" were nothing else than a gradual devaluation of the currency, causing much dissatisfaction among the population. Measured in the silver value of the later franc, the silver value of the livre sank from 1.86 to 1 franc between 1641 and 1740. During that time the value of the ecu was raised from 3 to 6 livres.

The star in the legend on the reverse of this half ecu shows that the piece is such a "reformed," i.e. depreciated, coin.

Kingdom of France, Louis XVI (1774-1793), 1/5 Ecu 1788, La Rochelle

Denomination:	**1/5 Ecu**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis XVI of France**
Mint:	**La Rochelle**
Year of Issue:	**1788**
Weight (g):	**5.85**
Diameter (mm):	**27.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

This coin was minted in 1788, just before the outbreak of the French Revolution. The royal engraver Benjamin Duvivier succeeded in portraying the king very naturalistically. Louis was not depicted in the traditional antique style any more, but elegantly, in the spirit of rococo. A new era had begun indeed – in every respect.

Kingdom of France, Louis XVI (1774-1792), Ecu aux lauriers 1789, Paris

Denomination:	**Ecu aux lauriers**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis XVI of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1789**
Weight (g):	**29.35**
Diameter (mm):	**42.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

The écu aux lauriers was a very popular trade coin – not only in France, its country of origin, but also in Switzerland and Germany. The name derived from the two leaves of laurel surrounding the crest on the reverse.

This écu was minted in 1789 – the year of the French Revolution! Its minting authority, King Louis XVI, was the last king of France. He was swept off his throne in 1792 by the revolution, and executed in 1793.

Republic of France, 24 Livres 1793

Denomination:	**24 Livres**
Mint Authority:	**1st Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1793**
Weight (g):	**7.65**
Diameter (mm):	**23.799999237060547**
Material:	**Gold**
Owner:	**Deutsche Bundesbank**

The French Revolution entered a new phase when in August 1792 the mob stormed the home of the royal family, the Tuileries Palace. Two months later, the National Convention abolished monarchy and proclaimed the (First) Republic of France.

Some months later, the National Convention ordered a new type of coinage. The legend on the obverse named the new form of government in the national language, while the king's portrait was replaced by an indication of value expressed in livres. The new coins were dated on both faces, on the one side according to the Christian era, and on the other using the republican calendar introduced in 1793, which began with Year I in 22 September 1792. This issue was thus produced in the second year of the Republic.

Republic of France, Napoleon Bonaparte First Consul (1799-1804), 40 Francs An 12 (1803/04)

Denomination:	**40 Francs**
Mint Authority:	**1st Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1804**
Weight (g):	**12.87**
Diameter (mm):	**26.0**
Material:	**Gold**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

In the year 1799, the short Corsican corporal had made it: with the help of the military, Napoleon Bonaparte had dissolved the Directory and established a provisional government. As First Consul, Napoleon himself had appointed all officers, civil servants and judges, as well as the 80 members of the senate. Subsequently he had his military regime approved of by referendum.

Napoleon restored the royal appearance of the French coins. He had gold and silver coins minted with his portrait and thus prolonged the long series of coins of the French kings.

French Empire, Napoleon I (1804-1814), 1 Franc 1810

Denomination:	**1 Franc**
Mint Authority:	**Emperor Napoleon I of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1810**
Weight (g):	**4.95**
Diameter (mm):	**23.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

In 1794, the French government decided that the monetary system had to be reorganized. In 1795, the franc à pied, based on 5 grams of silver, was officially introduced. The funds that enabled this currency reformcame from Napoleon Bonaparte's victorious military campaigns. In 1797, the French treasury received over 50 million francs only from the booty of Napoleon's Italian campaign.

Kingdom of France, Louis XVIII (2nd Reign 1815-1824), 5 Francs 1817, Paris

Denomination:	**5 Francs**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis XVIII of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1817**
Weight (g):	**24.94**
Diameter (mm):	**38.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

After the downthrow of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in the year 1814, time was turned back in France. The brother of King Louis XVI who had been executed in 1793, ascended to the French throne under the name of Louis XVIII. France became a monarchy again, and its coins bore the coats of arms of the Bourbon family.

On this piece of 5 francs, King Louis was depicted with a periwig like his ancestors. Some introductions from the time of the revolution remained, however – like the franc and its decimal division, and the coin legends in French.

Kingdom of France, Charles X (1824-1830), 1 Franc 1825, Paris

Denomination:	**1 Franc**
Mint Authority:	**King Charles X of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1825**
Weight (g):	**5**
Diameter (mm):	**24.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

After the collapse of the French Empire and the return of the Bourbon kings, the French coins once again depicted the royal portraits and the Bourbon lily banner.

Charles X was the youngest brother of King Louis XVI, who had been executed during the French Revolution of 1789. After the restoration of the Bourbons Charles returned to France from his exile in England, and ascended to the throne in 1824. He adhered to a conservative policy, and by favoring the church and the nobility provoked fierce opposition among the people. In 1830, the situation culminated in the July Revolution. At the beginning of August, Charles had to abdicate, and to return to his British exile.

Kingdom of France, Louis Philippe I (1830-1848), 1 Franc 1845, Rouen

Denomination:	**1 Franc**
Mint Authority:	**King Louis Philippe I of France**
Mint:	**Rouen**
Year of Issue:	**1845**
Weight (g):	**4.99**
Diameter (mm):	**24.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

Louis Philippe of Orléans stemmed from a sideline of the Bourbon family that had reigned France until 1830. After the revolution in July 1830, Louis Philippe was made king because he was met with broad approval for of his liberal sympathies. He ascended to the throne as the "Philippe Égalité" and tried to be as popular and progressive as possible.

The currency system, introduced after the French Revolution of 1789 – 1 franc at 100 centimes – had been kept. Our 1-franc-piece shows Louis Philippe portrayed by the royal engraver Joseph-François Domard.

Republic of France, 1 Franc 1852, Paris

Denomination:	**1 Franc**
Mint Authority:	**2nd Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1852**
Weight (g):	**4.97**
Diameter (mm):	**23.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

At the end of the year 1851, France changed its form of government once again. On December 2 Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, then president of the Second French Republic (1848-52), carried out a coup d'état. Military forces seized strategic points in Paris and arrested prominent members of the National Assembly. A state of emergency was declared for the capital; the parliament was dissolved, and a new constitution proclaimed: From now on, a president elected for ten years and vested with considerable power would govern the republic.

The design of the French coins was immediately modified according to the new political circumstances. The president elected for 10 years was Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte who is depicted on this coin in royalist manner. The inscription REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE was moved to the reverse of the coin.

Republic of France, 5 Francs 1873, Paris

Denomination:	**5 Francs**
Mint Authority:	**3rd Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1873**
Weight (g):	**24.98**
Diameter (mm):	**38.0**
Material:	**Silver**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

Desire for prestige and fear of Prussian-German hegemony were the reasons for the French declaration of war to Prussia in July 1870. Already in September, however, after the Battle of Sedan, the Prussians captured the French Emperor Napoleon III. The French republicans took advantage of the situation and proclaimed the Third Republic of France (1870-1940) some days later.

The German-French war continued. Paris was besieged and ultimately surrendered in January 1871. France had to yield its dominant position within Europe to Germany and besides, it had to pay reparations of 5 billion francs. With this money, the German Empire that was founded in the same year financed the introduction and coinage of its new imperial currency, the German Mark.

In France, republican coins replaced the imperial ones once again. 5-franc-coins did not longer depict the portrait of Emperor Napoleon III, but the so-called group of Heracles: The antique hero Hercules protects the personifications of Liberty and Equality.

Republic of France, 5 Centimes 1919

Denomination:	**5 Centimes**
Mint Authority:	**3rd Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1919**
Weight (g):	**3**
Diameter (mm):	**19.0**
Material:	**Nickel Alloy**
Owner:	

In April 1919, the exchange rate of the franc opposite the dollar started to drop, until it picked up at about 20 percent of its pre-war value in 1924. This was a deferred reaction to the inflation, from which France suffered since the First World War.

During these years, the French government did not mint any silver coins. The only national issues were small copper-nickel coins with a central hole. They bore a wreath of oak leaves on their obverse, surrounding the letters RF for République Française and a liberty cap. The reverse depicted a laurel wreath, the motto LIBERTÉ ÉGALITÉ FRATERNITÉ (liberty, equality, fraternity), the date, and the denomination of the coin: 5 centimes.

France, Etat Français, Philippe Pétain (1940-1944), 2 Francs 1943

Denomination:	**2 Francs**
Mint Authority:	**Etat Français**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1943**
Weight (g):	**2.2**
Diameter (mm):	**27.0**
Material:	**Aluminum**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

The defeat by Germany and the German invasion of France in June 1940 came as a shock to the French people. Premier Paul Reynaud resigned, and the popular, 84 year-old Vice Premier Philippe Pétain was appointed to institute a new government and to conduct truce negotiations.

To replace the Third Republic of France, Pétain established the much smaller État Français; the remains of France were under German authority. The État Français issued zinc coins of 10 and 20 centimes, along with aluminum coins of 50 centimes as well as 1, 2 and 5 francs.

The republican motto of liberty, equality, and fraternity on French coins was replaced by TRAVAIL, FAMILLE, PATRIE (Work, family, fatherland). On the obverse of this 2-franc-coin we also see a battle axe, the emblem of the État Français.

Republic of France, 10 Francs 1952

Denomination:	**10 Francs**
Mint Authority:	**4th Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1952**
Weight (g):	**3**
Diameter (mm):	**20.0**
Material:	**Aluminum-Bronze**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

The more recent history of the French franc is an awkward matter. After the liberation of France from the German occupation in 1944, the franc had to be devaluated. After 1948, several other devaluations followed. Until 1959, the value of French franc had been reduced to one fortieth of its value of 1934 altogether.

This 10-franc-coin is made from aluminum-bronze. Its obverse depicts the French Marianne wearing a laurel wreath. The reverse shows a Gallic cock, a branch of laurel, and the republican motto LIBERTE, EGALITE, FRATERNITE: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.Die neuere Geschichte des französischen Francs ist eine wenig erfreuliche Angelegenheit. Nach der Befreiung Frankreichs

Republic of France, 1 Franc 1988, Paris

Denomination:	**1 Franc**
Mint Authority:	**5th Republic of France**
Mint:	**Paris**
Year of Issue:	**1988**
Weight (g):	**6**
Diameter (mm):	**23.0**
Material:	**Nickel**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

Since her first appearance in1897, the sower was the most popular coin image of the French franc currency. Nevertheless in 1920, the minting of coins with her picture was ceased. France suffered from inflation, and the government only issued minor coins over the next few years. The franc currency quickly declined.

After a monetary reform in 1959 the sower reemerged. The old franc was devaluated and a new, heavier franc was instituted; 400 million new franc coins were put into circulation, all of them bearing the image of the sower. Since the new franc remained stable over the next decades, the French associated the motif of the sower with a strong and trustworthy currency again.

Republic of France, 20 Euro Cent 2001, Pessac

Denomination:	**20 Euro Cent**
Mint Authority:	**5th Republic of France**
Mint:	**Pessac**
Year of Issue:	**2001**
Weight (g):	**5.74**
Diameter (mm):	**22.25**
Material:	**Nordic Gold**
Owner:	**Sunflower Foundation**

France is one of the founder members of the euro currency. On January 1, 1999, the euro replaced the franc. The designs on the French euro coins are redolent of the old francs, however. The sower, the traditional image on the 1-franc-pieces, is also represented on the 10, 20 and 50 Euro Cent coins. She symbolizes hope, freedom and generosity.