

## Read This First!

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It can be so tempting to skip the first section of a book, the one that doesn't *look* like it has any 'content'. You might even be considering skipping the first chapter on 'Money' because it sounds a little dry and not the sort of thing that interests you.

Go ahead: skip this for now.

Flip through the whole book and enjoy the pictures. Read a few captions. Skim one of the short boxes or two. Dive into the text wherever an image or section heading grabs you. Or, look for a surprising entry in the Index. I, the author of this volume, do just this with most books on Roman history and related fields. Why read a book that is of no interest?

BUT before you go, make yourself a promise. If you find yourself flagging or confused or just ready for a more serious read, come back here to the beginning and start again reading this introduction and each chapter in order.

## What This Book Is About

Coins. (But you knew that already! It says so on the cover, after all.)

This is a book about how coins produced during the Roman Republic can tell us more about that period of history. It is part of a series of similar books, and those who are interested in the Roman Republic will also want to read the preceding volume on the Hellenistic World and the following volume on Rome between 49 BCE and 14 CE. Some numismatists (coin scholars) may enjoy this book, but it is intended for those who want to understand how coins work as historical evidence and where coins intersect with major historical themes of the Roman Republic. This book contains 220 images, with most coins illustrated at greater than life-size to help make the details more readily visible. The hope is that these images can serve as sources for students and scholars in their own work, and that the captions and text will enable the images to be used with confidence. At the end of this book, you'll find a guide for how to find more images and further scholarship using current online resources.

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### Hasn't This Been Done Before?

Yes and no. Each generation creates its own literature and tools to meet its historical needs, but this doesn't mean that we should toss out the work of previous generations. Michael Crawford revisited the whole Roman Republican Coin series. To do this, in 1969 he first wrote *Roman Republican Coin Hoards* (RRCH). As we'll discuss more in Chapter 1, a hoard is a group of coins found all together, sometimes many thousands of coins in a buried pot, sometimes only a few coins from some ancient person's lost purse. Numismatists use hoards for many purposes (cf. Section 1.3.2), but perhaps most importantly they compare different hoards to establish the relative sequence in which coins were made. RRCH thus provided the data for Crawford's seminal work, a full typology and new chronology of the whole Republican coin series down to 31 BCE, *Roman Republican Coinage* (RRC). Types in this context are coins that look very much the same and are believed by modern scholars to be issued at the same time.

In this book, the focus is on the period prior to Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon in 49 BCE, with the period from 49 BCE to 14 CE covered by Clare Rowan's book in this same series. In 1985, Crawford wrote a sweeping narrative that contextualized his earlier work from the viewpoint of an economic historian, *Coinage and Money under the Roman Republic*. Over the last forty years, other scholars have been building on Crawford's work, and in many cases improving on it. One of the major ways the present volume reflects such newer work is in the updating of Crawford's chronology where better information is now available. Dates that differ from those assigned by Crawford are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

Yet, Crawford himself did not start with a blank slate. Among others, he built upon the work of Grueber, who wrote the British Museum's *Catalogue of the Coinage of the Roman Republic* (1910) and Babelon, *Monnaies de la République Romaine* (1885), who, of course, themselves built on the work of earlier scholars.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, our knowledge of the dates of the coins has improved with each new generation, and likewise our methods for quantification and consequently using coins for economic history are steadily improving, but for the interpretation of the iconography, we ought still to consider seriously the suggestions of Grueber, Babelon, and the many other scholars who came before.

In the present generation, there are many good introductions to Republican numismatics in the various handbooks and companion volumes which are currently so popular. Those treatments by necessity are shorter and less fully illustrated than this volume. They offer good overviews rather than a guide to how to begin to use the coins as historical evidence in one's own research.<sup>2</sup> This book is a start, not an end. It does not replace Crawford but rather eases the uninitiated into his work as well as the present state of scholarship as it has reacted to his great accomplishments.

### Why So Many 'M's?

Coins are used in very different ways by numismatists, archaeologists, economic historians, and sociopolitical historians. Sometimes these different types of scholars are distrustful of the approaches of the others, as if there was one 'right' way to use coins as evidence. This book takes as its premise that there are no wrong questions to ask of the coinage. The more creative we are in our formulation of questions, the more answers we may be able to deduce about the history of the Republic. That said, if we ignore any one aspect of the coins in favor of another aspect – say, their function as currency or their ability to disseminate images and ideas – we are liable to get some of the picture wrong.

The chapter structure of this book reflects major ways that coins are discussed in contemporary scholarship, namely as Money and as Monuments, and themes that dominate historical analysis of the Roman Republic, namely the attempts by those both inside and outside the Roman state to gain or regain power ('Mutinies') and how the needs and concerns of soldiers, veterans, and the common citizens changed Republican politics ('Mobilization'). Within most sections, chronology provides a basic ordering principle, but if you wish to know what coins can say about a particular event in Roman history, both the Chronological Table and the Index can help you better use this book as a reference work.<sup>3</sup>

### If You Learn Anything from This Book

The following numismatic principles will be reiterated and further nuanced throughout, but it may be useful to have them stated clearly and precisely from the onset:

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- Coinage is a type of money but is not the same as money. Money is any store of value or unit of exchange. There were many forms of money other than coinage in the ancient world.
- For coinage to function it must be recognizable as coinage, and to that end must conform to some standard.
- The worth of a coin need not be determined by the intrinsic value of its metal content, but equally may be related to that metal content, and often was.
- Coinage was primarily produced by states to make payments, occasionally for prestige, occasionally to exert control over financial transactions, and rarely, if ever, to provide a service to the community.
- The images on coins connected with other visual images from the ancient world, many of which are now lost.
- Coins were the only mass-produced visual medium in antiquity.
- Different specimens of coin types will look different: to know what a coin was intended to look like it is important to look at multiple specimens.
- Dates assigned to Republican coins are rarely certain but are instead a relatively accurate interpretation of the available evidence.