

# Military and government

The administration of the Roman Republic relied on the organisation of the army. That means the structure of the most important people's assembly mirrored that of the army. The century assembly elected the highest state officials, who held power to decide over both civil and military matters.

## 01

Military and government

# Money makes the world go round

Roman society was based on a strict hierarchy: the individual's place within this hierarchy depended on his social status, wealth and authority. More money meant more political influence.



Replica of a Roman purse, Museum Lauracium, Austria. Photo: Wikicommons / Wolfgang Sauber / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## 02

Military and government

## Riches make the man

The Roman administration was based on the Republic's military organisation. After an official estimation by the censor, each citizen was assigned a specific military rank. His fortune determined which military equipment he could afford, i.e. which military rank he was given.



View of the Roman Forum, Rome. Photo: Wikicommons / BeBo86 / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## 03

Military and government

## Military and power

The symbol of the Roman legions the “aquila”, the eagle, became the epitome of Roman power with good reason. You can see it on this Roman denarius between two standards.



Denarius Serratus of C. Valerius Flaccus. Massalia, 82. Obverse: Victoria.  
Reverse: Aquila between standards.

## 04

Military and government

## Roman military units: The centuria

Legions were subdivided into centuriae. Each centuria consisted of 80 fully equipped soldiers.



Historical re-enactment of the 'Legio XV' in Pram, Austria. Roman soldiers around AD 70. Photo: Wikicommons / MatthiasKabel / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>



## 05

Military and government

## Roman soldiers and their equipment

This coin shows how a legionary was equipped. A Roman soldier (on the left) is fighting a Macedonian enemy to save his Roman comrade lying on the ground.



Denarius of Q. Minutius Thermus(?), 103. Obverse: Mars. Reverse: Legionary (left) fighting a Macedonian to save his comrade.

## 06

Military and government

## Offence and defence

Legionaries protected themselves from attacks with a large wooden shield, carried on the left. With their right, they carried the gladius, a shortsword with an approx. 50 cm long blade. The original Roman gladius depicted here is in possession of the British Museum in London today.



Gladius, Mainz type, British Museum, London. Photo: Wikicommons / Jononmac46 / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## 07

Military and government

## No spear, no army

Vital part of the increasingly standardised legionary equipment were the pila. Those pila were heavy spears used to break the shield-protected enemy lines.



Replica of a Roman pila, from the 'Legio XV' in Pram, Austria. Photo: Wikicommons / MatthiasKabel / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>



## 08

Military and government

# Give: Money in exchange for power

Only wealthy Romans could afford such a sophisticated equipment. And those who spent a lot of money to protect their country also demanded greater influence in the election of military officials.



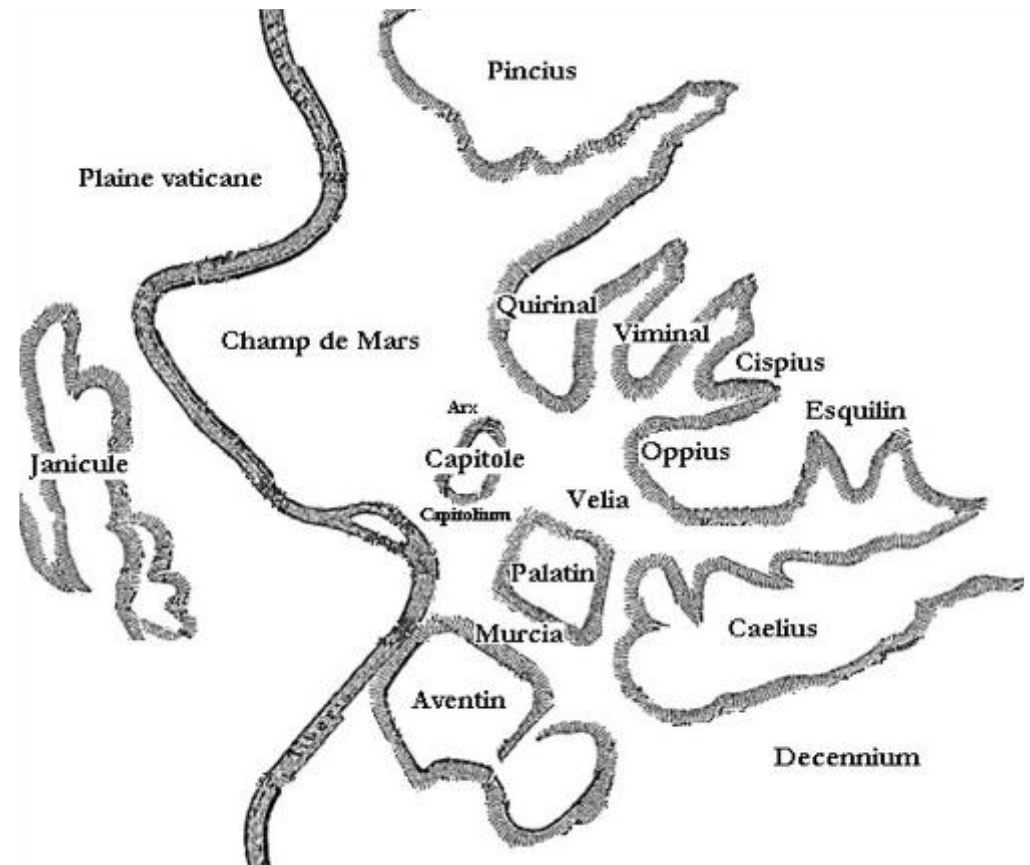
Historical re-enactment of the 'Legio XV' in Pram, Austria. Roman soldiers around AD 70. Photo: Wikicommons / MatthiasKabel / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## 09

Military and government

## The Roman people votes

So, the century assembly elected their consuls and praetors on the Campus Martius.



Map of Rome's hills. Source: Wikicommons / Coldeel / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## 10

Military and government

## Highest-ranking officials

The highest-ranking representatives of the executive branch were consuls and praetors. They held both military and civil power, as this coin clearly indicates. The consul greets the aquila to emphasise his military function. Behind him, you can make out fasces. Those bundles of wooden rods were carried by lictors before the higher-ranking officials and expressed the power of consuls and praetors to pronounce judgements.



Denarius of A. Postumius Albinus. 81. Obverse: Hispania. Reverse: Consul greeting aquila, fasces in the background.

## 11

Military and government

## Organising the people

Legend has it that Servius Tullius, sixth king of Rome, divided the Roman people into 193 centuriae, according to economic fortune. Whether or not the opinion of an individual would be taken into consideration at the century assembly entirely depended on the centuria this person belonged to.



Servius Tullius, fantasy portrait by Frans Huys, 1522–62. Source: Wikicommons / Deutsche Fotothek, Nr. 70231735/  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## 12

Military and government

## Money equals power

The centuria assembly reflected the distribution of wealth in Rome. Each centuria had only one vote, no matter how many members eligible to vote it had. The cavalry, from whose ranks the senators were chosen, encompassed 18 centuriae. They cast their vote first. The infantry made up the next class of still rather few, but very wealthy, Romans. This class had 80 votes. If cavalry and first class foot soldiers agreed on a majority, votes of the other centuriae were not even taken into consideration.

Reiter		18 Centurien
Fußsoldaten	1. Klasse	80 Centurien
	2. Klasse	20 Centurien
	3. Klasse	20 Centurien
	4. Klasse	20 Centurien
	5. Klasse	30 Centurien
Handwerker		2 Centurien
Musiker		2 Centurien
Nicht wehrpflichtige Männer		1 Centurie

Hierarchy of the 'comitia centuriata', the centuria assembly.

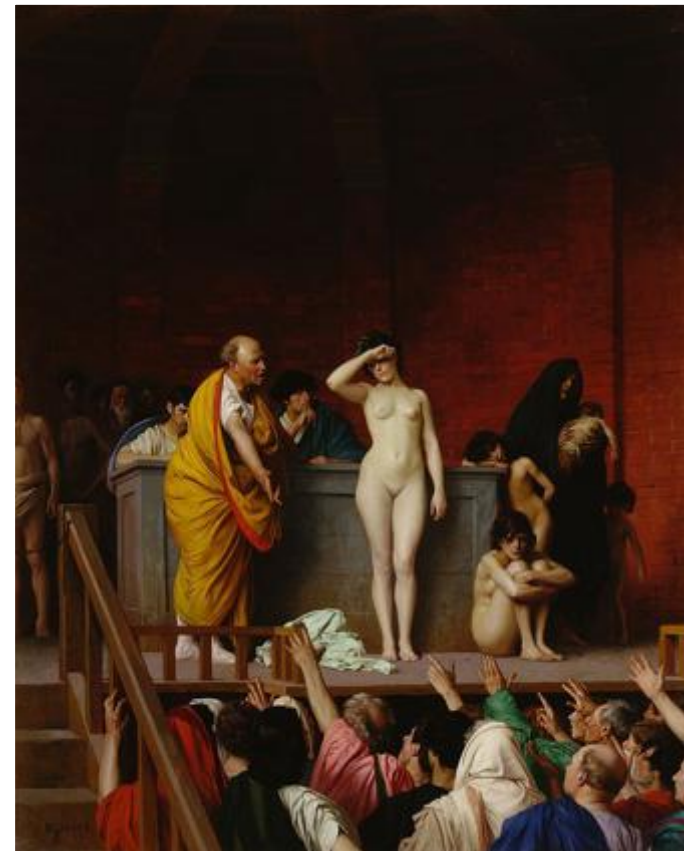


## 13

Military and government

## Democracy, Roman style

A significant part of the population did not have any say in political affairs: slaves, children and women.



Slave market, painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1884. State Hermitage, St Petersburg. Source: Wikicommons / Hermitage Torrent.



## 14

Military and government

## Military policy becomes state policy

Due to the close connection between military and political institutions, the needs of the military became the needs of Rome.



Standard (vexillum) of the Roman army. Source: Wikicommons / Ssolbergj / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

## Gods of War

A large part of the Roman pantheon is dedicated to warfare, despite the fact that the Romans did not have any brutal war god like Ares. Deities were exclusively responsible for protection and defence. Mars for instance was the protector of the peasants' fields, cattle and family. The bloody sacrifice of the October Horse must be seen as a ritual linked to harvest. However, the Romans believed that the gods would only grant them victories if they behaved in accordance with the concept of pietas. Pietas was more than just piety. It was the commitment to follow all old traditions in every detail.

# 01

Gods of War

## Gods grant victories

Many central Roman gods were directly linked to warfare.



Rotunda in the Altes Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo:  
Wikicommons / Manfred Heyde /  
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## 02

Gods of War

## Mars – a multifaceted god of war

One of the most central and also one of the oldest Roman gods is Mars. On coins, he is always represented with helmet and weapons. This is despite the fact that he is not actually a god of battle like his Greek counterpart Ares, who drove the Greeks into a blood frenzy.



Didrachm, around 235. Obverse: Mars. Reverse: Horse head.

# 03

Gods of War

## Rome wages war only to protect the people

He only provided protection for those who defended their own land, family, cattle and fields.



Statue of Mars in the Forum of Nerva, Rome. Photo: Wikipedia / Jean Pol GRANDMONT / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

## 04

Gods of War

## Give the god of war a horse!

The October Horse depicted on this coin references an age-old tradition: Every year on the 15th of October, a horse race took place on Campus Martius. The horse on the right of the victorious team was then chosen as sacrificial victim and killed with a spear by the responsible priest, the flamen martialis, following precisely specified rules.



Litra, around 235. Obverse: Mars. Reverse: October Horse.



## 05

Gods of War

## The gods love pietas

Strict adherence to the rules of the ritual was important to the gods, or so the Romans believed. And priestly accuracy was an indicator of pietas.



Ara Pacis Augustae, 13–9 BC. Rome. Photo: Wikipedia / Wolfgang Rieger / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

## 06

Gods of War

## Pietas secures victories

Pietas, the goddess you can see here, does not represent what we understand as piety. Rather, she symbolises the willingness to observe the sacred rituals and traditions of the Roman ancestors with great care. Only if people acted according to the will of pietas, the Romans believed, would the gods be willing to grant their people victories.



Denarius, Northern Italy, 81. Obverse: Pietas. Reverse: Priestly utensils.

## 07

Gods of War

## Dutiful at all times

The place in which the Temple of Pietas once stood became home to the Theatre of Marcellus under Augustus. The temple's founding myth tells the legend of exemplary conscientiousness in the family household: According to this legend, the temple was erected in the spot where a dutiful daughter had once kept her imprisoned father alive by feeding him milk from her own breasts.



Theatre of Marcellus, 13 BC. Rome. Photo: Wikipedia / Alexander Z. / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

## 08

Gods of War

## War and its goddess

Bellona, the female counterpart of Mars, was equally able to bring victories. The columna bellica stood in front of her temple on the Campus Martius: The column served as prop in a ritual in which priests declared wars outside Italy by symbolically throwing a blood-soaked spear onto the ground which had been marked enemy zone before.



Bellona. Painting by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, 1633. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Foto: Wikipedia / [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org) / Jan Arkestijn / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>



## 09

Gods of War

## Bellona or Roma?

Until today, scholars disagree about the question whether this coin depicts Bellona or the goddess Roma. Although it is more likely Bellona, numismatists have grown used to calling the goddess Roma over many centuries.



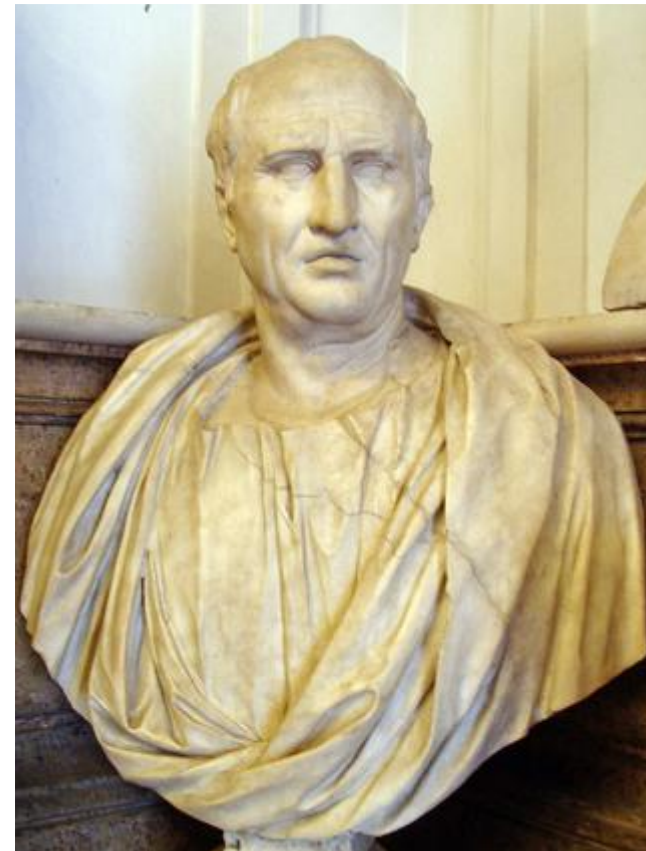
Uncia, around 215. Obverse: Bellona or Roma(?). Reverse: Ship's prow.

## 10

Gods of War

## A chosen people

It was Cicero who found the perfect words to express the nature of the Romans' religious self-understanding: '(...) it is in and by means of piety and religion, and this especial wisdom of perceiving that all things are governed and managed by the divine power of the immortal gods, that we have been and are superior to all other countries and nations.' (*De haruspicem responso* 19).



Bust of Cicero, Capitoline Museums, Rome. Photo: Wikipedia / Glauco92 / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>



## 11

Gods of War

## Divine twins

This coin shows the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux. They owe their prominent role in Roman worship to their intervention in the Latin War in 499 BC.



Denarius, 207. Obverse: Roma. Reverse: Dioscuri.

## 12

Gods of War

## Cultic worship of the helpers in need

Of course, the Dioskouri had their own temple in Rome: It was situated on the Roman Forum and, like of so many other temples, there are only ruins of it left today.



Ruins of the Temple of Castor and Pollux, Roman Forum, Rome. Photo: Wikipedia / MM / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

## 13

Gods of War

## Victory's Laurels from Victoria herself

Victoria was worshipped as the divine bringer of victory. On this coin, she puts down Victory's Laurels on a trophy. In ancient Rome, trophies were heaps of weapons, often artificially arranged, that had been taken from the enemy in battle. Numismatists call coins such as the one depicted here, after their name giver, victoriati.



Victoriatus, 211–208. Obverse: Jupiter. Reverse: Victoria crowns trophy with a garland.

## 14

Gods of War

## Victoria today

The goddess Victoria survived the centuries, all trough to modernity. Representations of the ancient goddess are still common today. Every Berlin tourist for instance has come across the 'Golden Lizzy', the Victoria statue on top of the Berlin Victory Column.



Bronze sculpture of Victoria on top of the Berlin Victory Column. Friederich Drake, 1873, Berlin. Photo: Wikipedia / Eisenacher / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

## Of coins and wars

All major changes in the Roman coinage system can be accounted for by the demands of war time. During the Samnite Wars, Rome adapted its own system to the Greek coinage system and commissioned Greek artisans with the production of Greek-style coins. The war against Hannibal brought about the most comprehensive coin reform of Antiquity. It also gave birth to the denarius, which would be in circulation for almost 500 years.



## Of coins and wars

# Cause and effect

War and crisis always had an impact on the Roman coinage system. Practically all changes in Rome's monetary system were either temporally or causally linked to military conflicts. Thus, the monetary system was closely tied to success and failure of the Roman military.



Roman Empire under Emperor Hadrian (AD 125). Source:  
Wikicommons / Andrei nacu/Furfur /  
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## 02

Of coins and wars

## Rome expanding

In the course of the Roman expansion to Central Italy between 338 and 275 BC, booty in the form of gold, silver and bronze travelled to Rome, providing the first prerequisite to mint own coins. The trade relations with Greek cities in Campania enabled by the construction of the Via Appia did the rest.



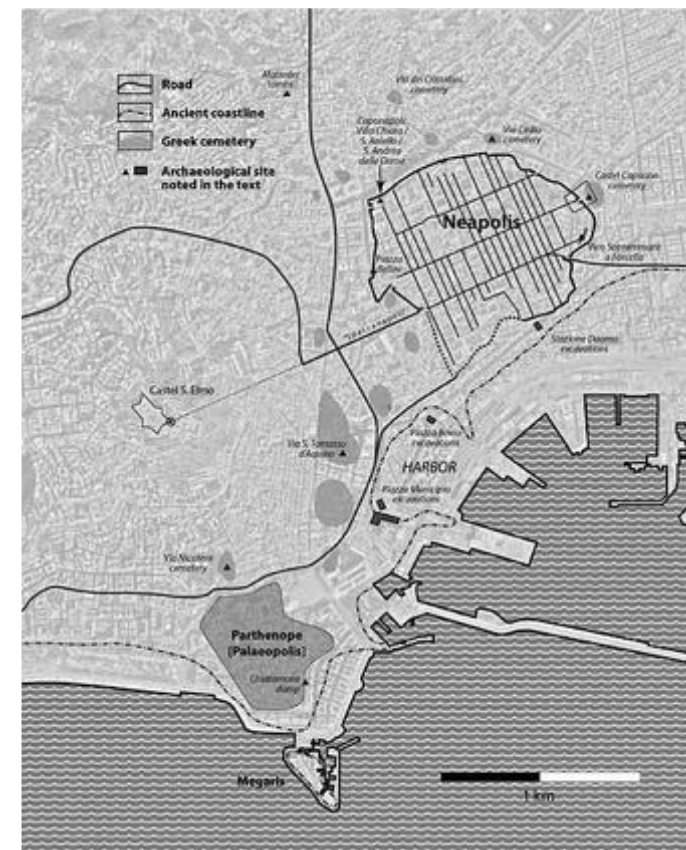
Map showing the Via Appia and the Via Appia Traiana. Source: Wikicommons.

## 03

Of coins and wars

## Rome's first own currency

In 300 BC, the Romans issued their first own currency. The coins, called didrachms, were made of silver and circulated in Lower Italy. The region had been a site of war, where Romans, alongside the Greek city of Naples, had been fighting the Samnites and their allies since 326 BC.



Map showing the Greek settlements Parthenope (modern-day San Ferdinando) and Neapolis (today part of the old town of Naples).

Source: Wikicommons / Mischa 004 /

<http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en>

## 04

Of coins and wars

# The Greek influence on Roman coinage

The first Roman silver coin was heavily influenced by the Greek example. Weight, fineness and motifs are borrowed from Greek models and the high quality of the coin dies indicates that Greek artisans were involved in the production of this early Roman silver currency.



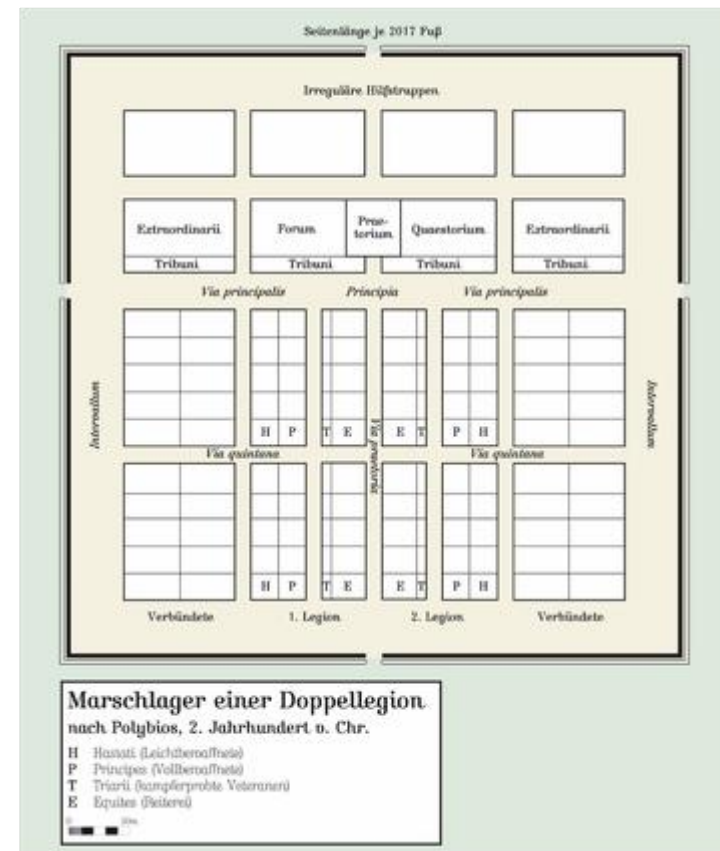
Greek model: Metaponto, didrachm. 340–330. From Gorny & Mosch auction sale 190 (2010), 22.

## 05

Of coins and wars

## Where were the new coins minted?

Whether these early coins were minted in a makeshift mint in Naples – possibly a Roman camp – or in the capital Rome itself remains unknown to researchers until this day.



Roman marching camp, recorded by Polybius, 2nd century BC. Source: Wikicommons / Mediatus.

## 06

Of coins and wars

## A Roman interpretation

The depiction on this coin obverse looks like the hero Leucippus on the coins of Metaponto and the horse is reminiscent of Carthaginian coinage. But despite the fact that both style and motif are Greek, the interpretation is typically Roman: The Greek hero is re-interpreted as Mars and the Carthaginian horse becomes the October Horse which the Romans traditionally sacrificed to honour Mars. Considering the historical circumstances of its production, the coin's war theme does not come as a surprise.



Didrachm, Metaponto, around 300. Obverse: Mars. Reverse: Horse's head.



## 07

Of coins and wars

## A little more Roman still

Next after the Mars-themed didrachms are coins whose obverse shows Hercules's head while the reverse depicts the Capitoline Wolf with the twins Romulus and Remus. Again, while the style remains Greek, the coin reverse's motif and statement are exclusively Roman.



Didrachm, around 265. Obverse: Hercules. Reverse: Capitoline Wolf with Romulus and Remus.

## 08

Of coins and wars

# A currency system crashes

Rome's war against Carthaginian military commander Hannibal led to the most comprehensive coin reform in Roman history and the creation of the denarius. According to legend, Hannibal had been forced to swear eternal enmity to the Romans as a 9-year-old boy. In the Second Punic War (218–201 BC), he managed to press the technically superior Romans so hard that it came not only to a military, but also to an economic collapse.



Hannibal crossing the Alps. Painting by Nicolas Poussin (around 1625). Private collection. Source: Wikicommons.

## 09

Of coins and wars

# The Siege of Syracuse marks a turning point

Rome was forced to reduce the original silver content of its currency from 90% to as little as 36%. Bronze currencies were also subject to devaluation. The turning point was the successful siege of Syracuse. The Roman conquerors made a big haul and brought home the resources to implement a comprehensive reform of their entire monetary system.



Thomas Ralph Spence, Archimedes directing the defences of Syracuse, 1895.

## 10

Of coins and wars

## Starting over

The new currency system was based on the as, a bronze coin of around 40.5 g. All denominations were based on this unit: The denarius derived its name ('containing ten') because its weight of 4.55 g silver corresponded to 10 as. Early denarii depicted a goddess on their obverse, possibly Bellona. Later scholarship, however, interpreted the depiction as a representation of Roma. The reverse presents the dioskouri, whose cultic worship could be traced back to their intervention during the Battle of Lake Regillus in 499 BC.



Denarius, 209. Obverse: Roma. Reverse: Dioscuri.



## 11

Of coins and wars

# Dating the first denarius

For a long time, the question when exactly the Roman denarius was first introduced was a controversial issue in numismatic scholarship. Today, archaeological finds provide clear evidence: During excavations of the ancient city of Morgantina on Sicily, which was destroyed in 214 and 211 BC, quadrigati, victoriati, a denarius, quinarii and a sestertius were discovered in the 211 stratum. This proves that the denarius and its fractions were already in circulation in 211.



Excavation site of Morgantina/Sicily. Photo: Wikicommons / Clemensfrans / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>



## 12

Of coins and wars

# The success story of the denarius

Due to the Roman expansion, the denarius spread to the entire Mediterranean. With the war against Hannibal, the denarius became the key currency of the Roman provinces and their bordering territories for the next 500 years.



Denarius, around 211. Obverse: Roma. Reverse: Dioscuri.

## 13

Of coins and wars

## Time to pay back debts

To finance the war against Hannibal, the government had been forced to take out loans from rich Roman citizens. Now it was time to pay back the debt, plus interest. Only the booty from the Peace of Apamea in 188 BC could settle the high government debt: The Romans had imposed a fine of 12,000 talents on the Seleucidian king Antiochus III.



Map of Asia Minor after the Peace of Apamea, 188 BC. Source: Wikicommons / Kryston.

## 14

Of coins and wars

## The quinarius

But let us return to the coin reform of 211 BC, in the course of which two further denominations were introduced. The quinarius, worth  $\frac{1}{2}$  denarius or 5 asses (therefore the numeral V).



Quinarius, around 211. Obverse: Roma. Reverse: Dioscuri.

## 15

Of coins and wars

## The sestertius

The next new domination was the sestertius, the smallest of the silver coins, featuring the same depiction as the quinarius and marked IIS. It is again based on the as, indicating that the sestertius corresponds to a value of 2 ½ asses, in Latin semis tertius, contracted to sestertius.



Sestertius, around 211. Obverse: Roma. Dioscuri.

## 16

Of coins and wars

## In a nutshell

This overview systematically summarises the newly introduced denominations of 212/211 BC.

Nominal	Wertzeichen	Wert in Assen	Bildmotiv
Denarius	X	10	Romakopf, Dioskuren
Quinarius	V	5	Romakopf, Dioskuren
Sestertius	IIS	2 1/2	Romakopf, Dioskuren
Victoriatus	–	(nicht auf As bezogen)	Juppiterkopf, Victoria und <i>tropaeum</i>



## 17

Of coins and wars

## The victoriatus

The victoriatus, containing c. 80% silver, followed a different standard than that of the denarius system. Its weight of 3.41 g corresponds roughly to that of a single drachm (=  $\frac{3}{4}$  denarius). It seems to have succeeded the quadrigatus, which had been dropped by then, and intended for long-distance trade with Sicily and Lower Italy. Being outside of the Roman system, it is not marked.



Victoriatus, around 211. Obverse: Jupiter. Reverse: Victoria.

## 18

Of coins and wars

## A coin becomes outdated

The new Roman victoriati received their name from the depiction of Victoria on their reverse, crowning a trophy (tropaeum), a symbol of victory built from the weapons of the defeated enemy. First issued as a Roman concession to Greek payment methods, the victoriatus did not survive longer than c. 170 BC, when it stopped being minted and even the Greek inhabitants of southern Italy completely switched to the denarius.



Victoriatus, Sicily, after 211. Obverse: Jupiter. Victoria.

## 19

Of coins and wars

# Roman gold coinage

Generally, gold is an unusual metal for coinage. The gold coinage of the Roman Republic must be seen as an exception to the rule, designed to cover the increased demand for money resulting from the war. When exactly the first Roman gold coins were issued is unclear. What we do know is that in the course of the coin reform gold coins were again minted at the value of 60, 40 and 20 asses. They all show the helmeted head of Mars on the obverse and an eagle on a thunderbolt (symbol of Jupiter) on the reverse. The inscription in the exergue reads ROMA.



60 asses, around 211. Obverse: Mars. Reverse: Eagle on a thunderbolt.

# 20

Of coins and wars

## The as

The coinage of bronze asses was continued even after 211 BC. That the as was the most important component of soldiers' pay may account for the fact that it was the most commonly minted denomination at the time. In 205, 187, 109 and 89 BC, the weight of the as was reduced from an original standard weight of 55 g to the final stage of 13.64 g, equal to 1/24 of the Roman pound. The depiction on this as features a war theme by showing Janus, the god who protected the army on the move and who was therefore the deity to thank for a victory with a sacrificial offering.



As, after 211. Obverse: Janus. Reverse: Ship's prow (prora).



## 21

Of coins and wars

## War as permanent condition

According to tradition, the doors of the Temple of Janus in Rome were closed only when Rome was not engaged in any kind of armed conflict. In his statements of accounts, Augustus reports that in the Roman Republic before his autocracy this was only three times the case. So Rome was basically continuously engaged in warfare and occupied with adapting its coinage to the respective circumstances.



Nero, 54–68. Sestertius, 66, Lugdunum. Reverse: Temple of Janus with closed doors. From Gorny & Mosch auction sale 219 (2014), 378.