

Coins

a practical introduction

Liv Mariah Yarrow, CUNY



What's the plan for today?

Goals

- Practice looking at very small three-dimensional objects
- Connect our experiences with historical experiences
- Learn some fundamentals about Coins vs. Money, esp. in the pre-modern context
- Consider Commodus as Hercules through coin evidence

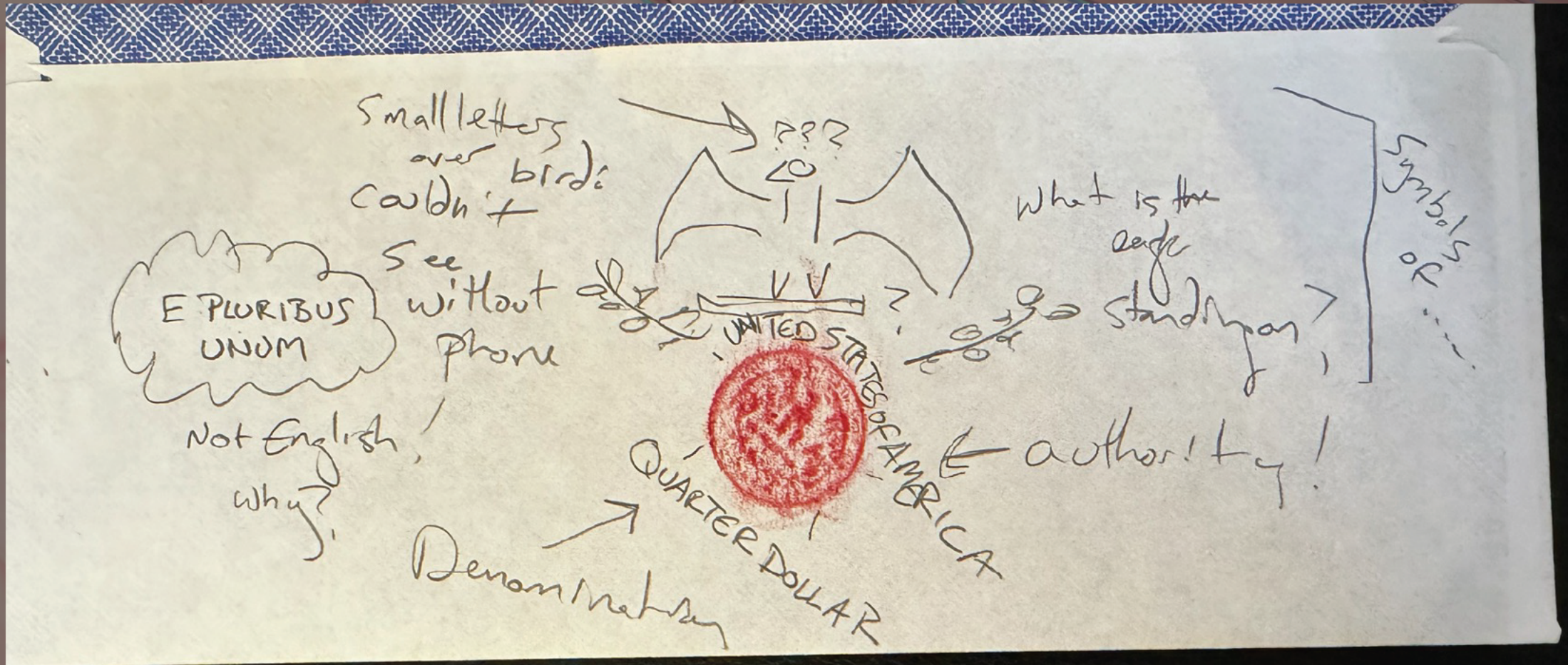
Structure

- a long-ish paired hands-on exercise (perhaps you've already started?!)
- A debrief where we'll pool our knowledge
- A short final experiment
- Review of key terms
- Lecture and Q. and A.
- **Return the coins!**

An Example

Handout Page One, Step (2)-(3)

Be Brave:
Let your work be 'back
of the envelop' messy



--DEBRIEF--

Show of Hands

- Two sides?
- Perfectly Round?
- Texture on the edge?
- Writing?
- A Name of a Community?
- A Name of a Person?
- Date?
- A Head?
- Money? Or something else?

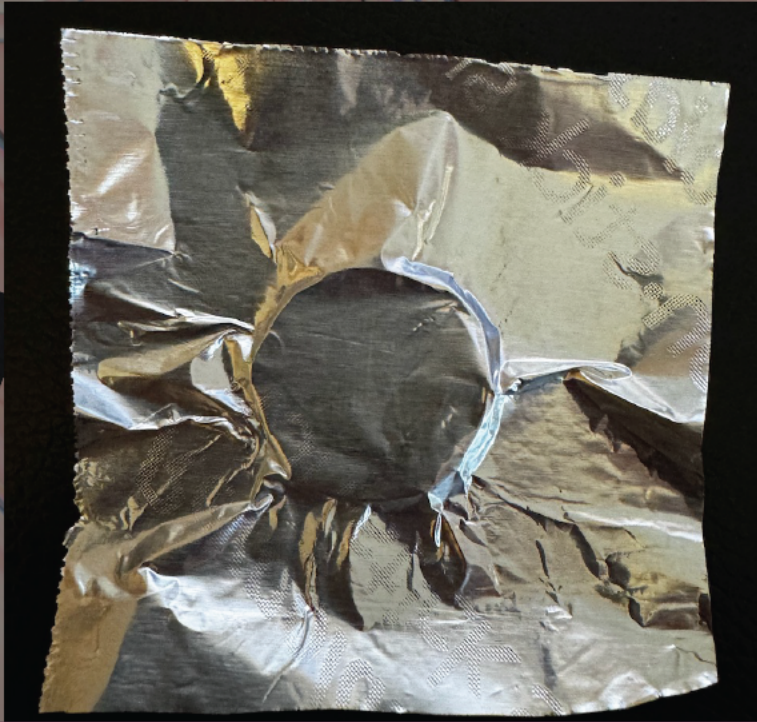
Volunteers to Answer

- Can you tell what your coin is made of?
- Do you have the oldest coin?
- Do you have the youngest coin?
- A particularly unusual feature?

Collaborative Google Earth Map. Try to add the location your coin was made.



One More Exercise



Carefully rub with back of your thumb nail!

What is Money?

“

Often, different forms of money, each with distinct functions, have coexisted within the same monetary system.

”

- Hollander 2007: 2

medium of exchange

measure of value

unit of account

store of wealth

AND means of

payment

What is a Coin?

“ a piece of money made of metal
which conforms to a standard and
bears a design ”

- Howgego 1995: 1



MONEY, not Coins

Parallel Evolutions

A satellite-style map of the supercontinent Pangaea, showing the combined landmasses of the world. The map is color-coded by elevation and vegetation, with green for low-lying areas and brown/tan for higher, more arid regions. Two yellow location pins are placed on the map: one in the western part of the supercontinent (near modern-day North America) and another on the far right edge (near modern-day China). The text 'Parallel Evolutions' is overlaid in the upper left, and '4,500+ miles apart!' is overlaid in the lower right.

4,500+ miles apart!

ROME AND CHINA

*Comparative
Perspectives on
Ancient World
Empires*



EDITED BY
WALTER SCHEIDEL

OXFORD

CONCEIVING THE EMPIRE

China and Rome Compared

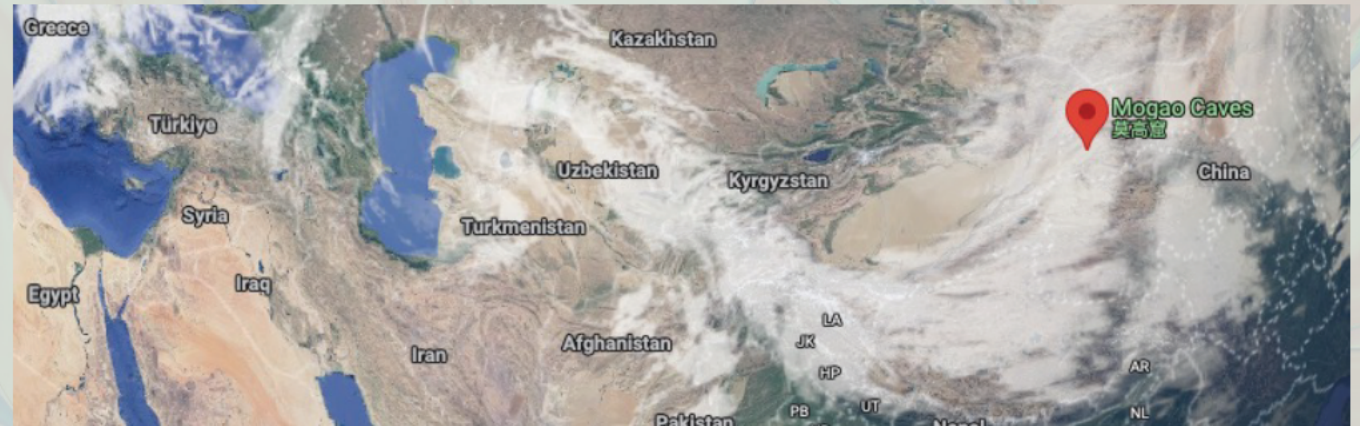


EDITED BY
FRITZ-HEINER MUTSCHLER
& ACHIM MITTAG

*“ The people (of Anxi, i.e. Parthia, mod. Iran) are settled on the land, cultivating the fields and growing rice and wheat. They also make wine out of grapes. They have walled cities like the people of Dayuan (Bactria), the region containing several hundred cities of various sizes. The kingdom, which borders the Gui River, is very large, measuring several thousand li square. Some of the inhabitants are merchants who travel by carts or boats to neighbouring countries, sometimes journeying several thousand li. **The coins of the country are made of silver and bear the face of the king. When the king dies, the currency is immediately changed and new coins issued with the face of his successor.** The people keep records by writing horizontally on strips of leather. To the west lies Tiaozhi (Mesopotamia) and to the north Yancai and Lixuan (Hyrcania). ”*



Zhang Qian c. 130 BCE leaving emperor Han Wudi, for his expedition to Central Asia. Mural in Cave 323, Mogao Caves, high Tang Dynasty, c. 8th century CE.





ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΥ

Of Great King Arsaces, Bearer of Victory

But what about ROME!?!



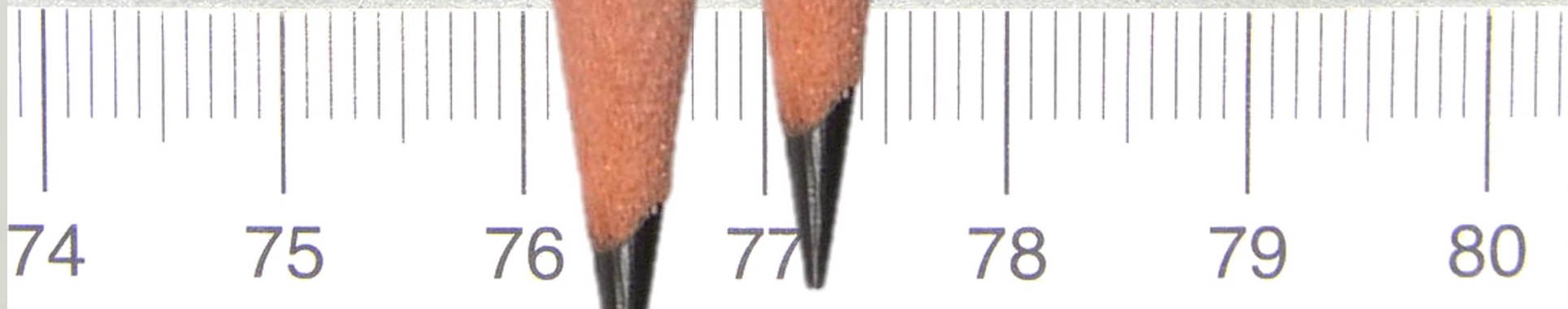
Surely this is more like what Prof. Ramgopal
thought I'd be showing you!?

Denarius

= 10 Asses = ten
pounds of bronze



Yale 2001.87.1568



211 BCE

Denarius introduced

146 BCE

Denarius designs becomes more flexible

Romans control most silver production

130 BCE

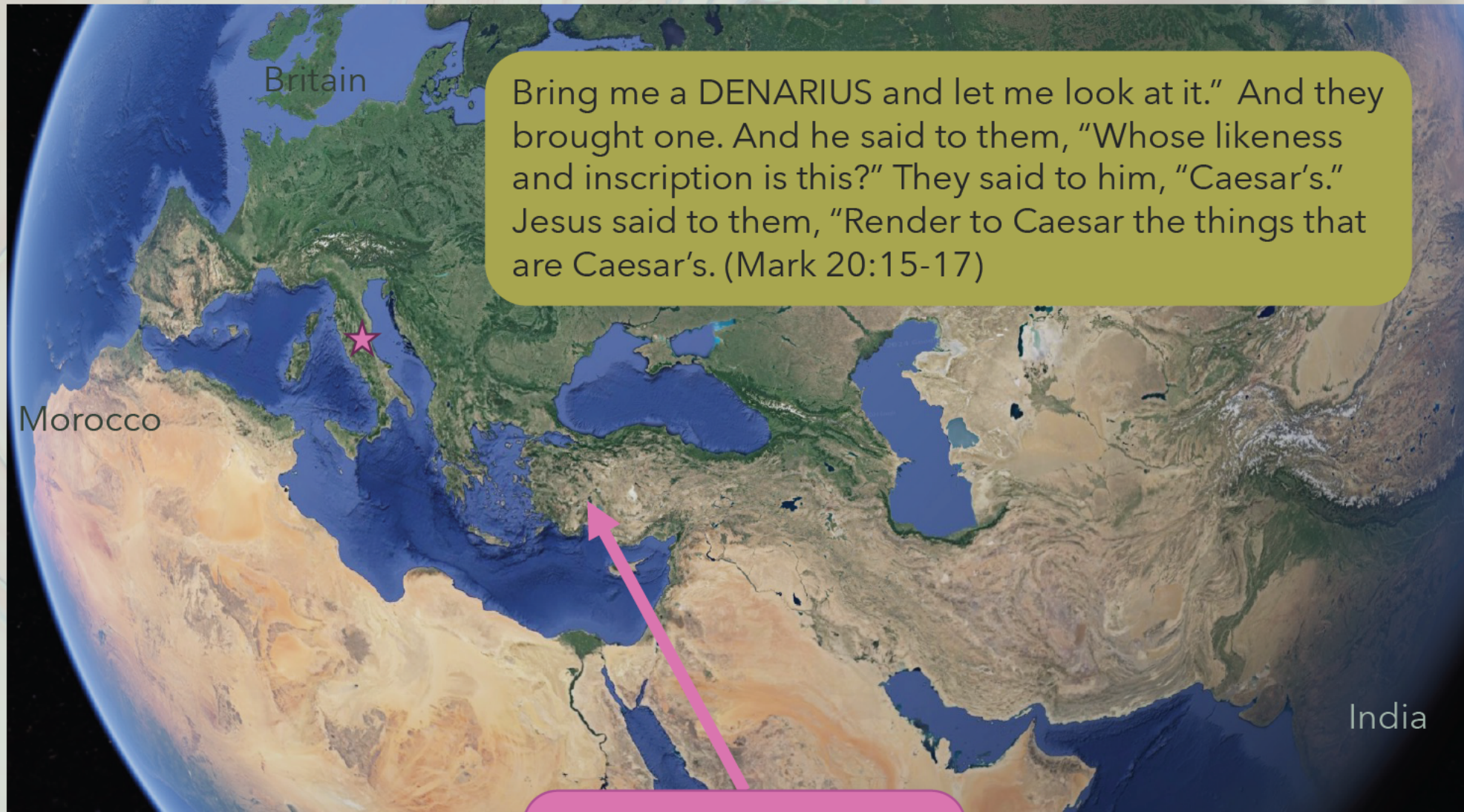
Continued threats to Republic and to Roman Hegemony

44 BCE

Caesar's head appears on a denarius

238 CE!

Denarius begins to lose importance



Bring me a DENARIUS and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. (Mark 20:15-17)

Coinage invented in Lydia mid seventh century BCE



Only Mass Produced
Media in Antiquity!

*Two (questionable)
reconstructions*



Can any one coin really tell us anything?!





Dio 73.20: For among other things that we did, we would shout out whatever we were commanded, and especially these words continually: "Thou art lord and thou art first, of all men most fortunate. Victor thou art, and victor thou shalt be; from everlasting, Amazonian, thou art victor." But of the populace in general, many did not enter the amphitheatre at all, and others departed after merely glancing inside, partly from shame at what was going on, partly also from fear, inasmuch as a report spread abroad that he would want to shoot a few of the spectators in imitation of Hercules and the Stymphalian birds. 3 And this story was believed, too, because he had once got together all the men in the city who had lost their feet as the result of disease or some accident, and then, after fastening about their knees some likenesses of serpents' bodies, and giving them sponges to throw instead of stones, had killed them with blows of a club, pretending that they were giants.



OCRE: Online Coins of the Roman Empire

Filters [Map Results](#)

Fulltext: Commodus, wearing lion-skin

Displaying records 1 to 12 of 12 total results.

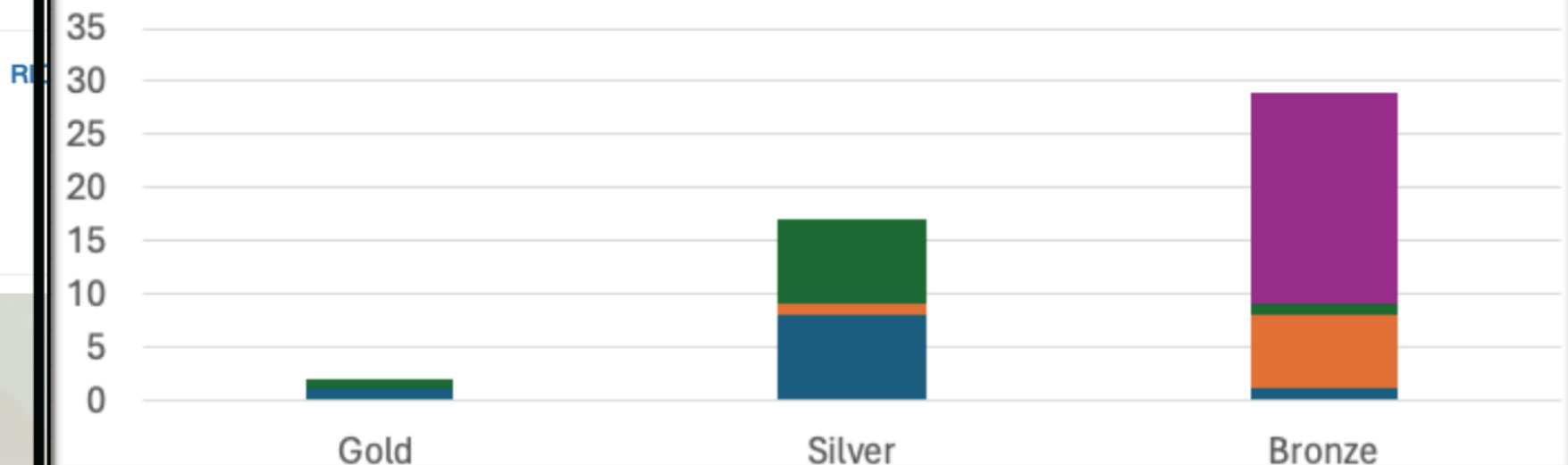
Select from List

Ascending

Sort Results

[RIC III Commodus 247](#)

Specimens in Participating Museum Collections with
Commodus wearing Lion-Skin Headress



OCRE: Online Coins of the Roman Empire

Fulltext: commodus, laureate

Year: [191 TO 192]

Displaying records 21 to 40 of 113 total results.

Select from List

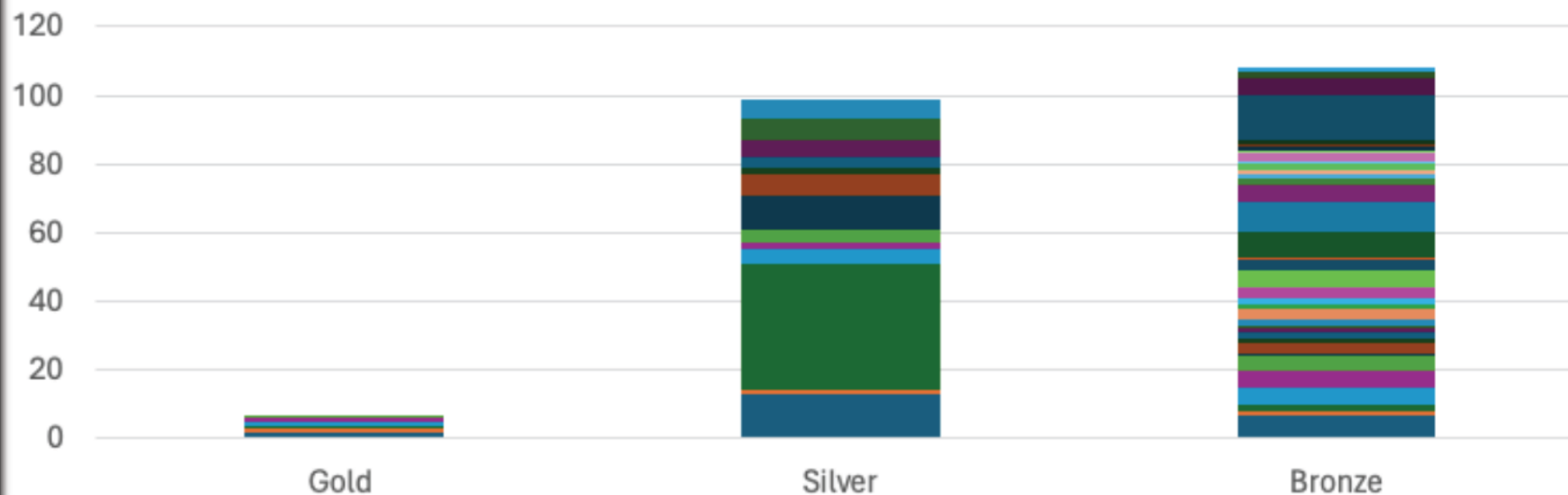
Ascending

Sort Results

113 types

[RIC III Commodus 239](#)

Specimens in Participating Museum Collections with
Commodus wearing a laurel wreath made 191-192 CE



objects: 13



objects: 2

Coin Hoards with RIC 251

A topographical map of the Roman Empire, showing the Mediterranean Sea, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Numerous small circular markers are placed across the map to indicate the locations of coin hoards. Most markers are teal, but one in central Europe is green and contains the number '3'. Other markers contain the number '1'.

COIN HOARDS
OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

A collection of Roman coins, including several aurei and denarii, shown in a close-up view.

Search results: 7 entries found.

Refine search

Abbreviated view | Tabulated view

View on a map



Volume: IV.2 №: 9440 (temporary)

Reign: Commodus Persons: Commodus (Augustus) Magistrate: Titus Aelius Eteoneus (archon)

City: Cyzicus Region: Mysia Province: Asia (conventus of Cyzicus)

Denomination: A (43 mm) Average weight: 41.04 g. Issue: c. 192

Obverse: AV KAI A [AI] AV KOMMOΔOC AVT CEB EVC EYT PΩMAIOC HPAKΛHC; laureate-headed bust of Commodus (long and wide beard) wearing lion skin, right, seen from front; to left, club
Reverse: EΠI APX T AI A ETEONEOC KYZIKHNΩN NEOK; Demeter advancing, right, holding torch in each hand; to right at her feet, lighted altar

Specimens: 2



Volume: IV.2 №: 10380 (temporary)

Reign: Commodus Persons: Commodus (Augustus)

City: Cyzicus Region: Mysia Province: Asia (conventus of Cyzicus)

Denomination: A (43 mm) Average weight: 36.29 g. Issue: c. 192

Obverse: [AV KAI A [AI] AV KOMMOΔOC AVT CEB EVC EYT PΩMAIOC HPAKΛHC; laureate-headed bust of Commodus (long and wide beard) wearing lion skin, right, seen from front; to left, club
Reverse: KYZIKHNΩN NEOK; Maenad advancing, right, Eros(?) advancing, right

Specimens: 1



Volume: IV.2 №: 11247 (temporary)

Reign: Commodus Persons: Commodus (Augustus)

City: Cyzicus Region: Mysia Province: Asia (conventus of Cyzicus)

Denomination: A (43 mm) Average weight: 36.29 g. Issue: c. 192

Obverse: AV KAI A [AI] AV KOMMOΔOC AVT CEB EVC EYT PΩMAIOC HPAKΛHC; laureate-headed bust of Commodus (long and wide beard) wearing lion skin, right, seen from front; to left, club
Reverse: PΩMAION HPAKΛHC; Commodus (Augustus) holding club and lion skin

Specimens: 1



Volume: IV.2 №: 8331 (temporary)

Reign: Commodus Persons: Commodus (Augustus)

City: Cyzicus Region: Mysia Province: Asia (conventus of Cyzicus)

Denomination: A (43 mm) Average weight: 36.29 g. Issue: c. 192

Obverse: AV KAI A AI AV [KOMMOΔOC AVT CEB] EVC EYT PΩMAIOC HPAKΛHC; laureate-headed bust of Commodus (long and wide beard) wearing lion skin, right, seen from front; to left, club



RPC: Roman Provincial Coinage

Portable Antiquities Scheme

Free text search: "wearing lion-skin" Commodus

Record ID: [SUR-5F7923](#)

Object type: COIN

Broad period: ROMAN

County: Surrey

Workflow stage: Awaiting validation

An incomplete silver Roman denarius of Commodus dating to AD191-192 (Reece period 9). HERCVLI ROMA[NO] AVG reverse depicting Hercules, wearing lion-skin, holding club in left hand and crowning with right hand a trophy. Mint of Rome. As [RIC III](#) Commodus 254.

Created on: Tuesday 29th November 2022

Last updated: Tuesday 29th November 2022

Spatial data recorded. 9



Record ID: [LEIC-B7D050](#)

Object type: COIN

Broad period: ROMAN

County: Leicestershire

Workflow stage: Awaiting validation

A Roman copper-alloy sestertertius of Commodus, dating to c.AD 192. Reece Period 9. HERCVLI ROMANO AVG S C, reverse type shows Hercules, nude, wearing lion skin draped over left arm, standing right, resting right hand on trophy and holdind club in left hand. Mint of Rome. [RIC III](#) Commodus 640 Diameter: 30.7 mm Weight: 25.3 g

Created on: Wednesday 9th November 2022

Last updated: Wednesday 9th November 2022

Spatial data recorded. 9



Record ID: [FASAM-1C2AB3](#)

Object type: MEDALLION

Broad period: ROMAN

County: Lincolnshire

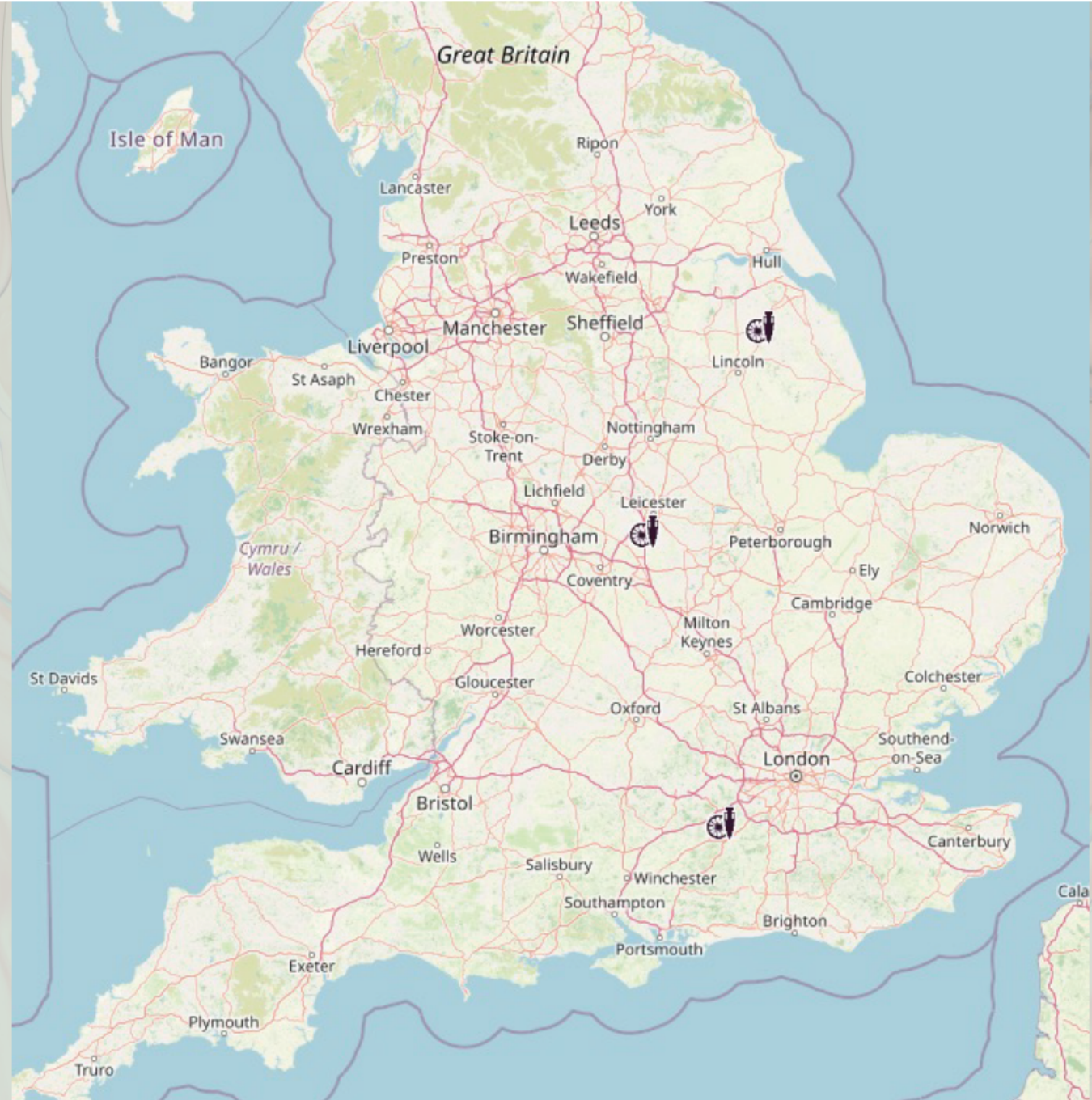
Workflow stage: Published

Bimetallic - brass and copper - medallion of Commodus (AD 180-92), Rome, 10th-31st December 192. Obv. L AELIVS.AVRELIVS.COMMODVS AVG PIVS FELIX; head of Commodus left, wearing lion-skin, tied at neck. Rev. HERCVLI ROMANO AVG P M TR P XVIII COS VII P P; Hercules standing facing, head left, resting on club and holding dead Nemean lion by rear paw. Die axis - 12 References: Gnechi Medaglioni Romani, nos 33/32 - obv and rev dies Gobl, Moneta Imperii Romani 18, 1165-1/73 Bantil, I grandi bronzi imperiali 112/107 - obv and rev dies Triton XIII Sale (Classica...

Created on: Thursday 29th July 2010

Last updated: Thursday 20th January 2011

Spatial data recorded. 9



260-269 CE



307-312 CE



A Senator from Bithynia's Testimony

There is in the city of Mallus, in Cilicia, an oracle of Amphilochus that gives responses by means of dreams. Now it had given a response also to Sextus [an enemy of Commodus], that he had indicated by means of a drawing; the picture which he had put on the tablet represented a boy strangling two serpents and a lion pursuing a fawn. I was with my father, who was governor of Cilicia at the time, and could not comprehend what the figures meant, until I learned that two brothers had been strangled, so to speak, by Commodus (who later emulated Hercules), just as Hercules, when an infant, is related to have strangled the serpents sent against him by Juno (for the Quintilii, too, had been strangled), and until I learned also that Sextus was a fugitive and was being pursued by a more powerful adversary. I should render my narrative very tedious were I to give a detailed report of all the persons put to death by Commodus, of all those whom he made away with as the result of false accusations or unjustified suspicions or because of their conspicuous wealth, distinguished family, unusual learning, or some other point of excellence. (Dio 73.7)

Amphilochus?!

RPC

[Introduction](#)

[Search](#)

[Volumes](#)

[Map](#)

[About](#)

[Donate](#)



Search results: 16 entries found.

[Refine search](#)

[Abbreviated view](#) | [Tabulated view](#)



Volume: III **Nº:** 3325

Reign: Hadrian **Persons:** Hadrian (Augustus)

City: Mallus **Region:** Cilicia (Cilicia Pedias) **Province:** Cilicia

Denomination: Æ (30 mm) **Average weight:** 16.06 g.

Obverse: ΑΥΤ ΚΑΙ ΤΡΑΙ ΑΔΡΙΑΝΟΝ ΣΕΒΑΚΤΟΝ; laureate head of

Reverse: ΜΑΛΛΩΤΩΝ; Amphilochus standing, left, holding bran

Reference: Levante 1273 **Specimens:** 10



Volume: IV.3 **Nº:** 11738 (temporary)

Reign: Marcus Aurelius **Persons:** Commodus (Caesar)

City: Mallus **Region:** Cilicia (Cilicia Pedias) **Province:** Cilicia

Denomination: Æ

Obverse: ΚΑΙ ΑΥΡ[Η]Λ[Ι]ΟΥ ΚΟ[ΜΟΔΟΥ]Σ; bare head of Commo

Reverse: ΜΑΛΛΩΤΩΝ; founder Amphilochus (youthful) in guis-

branch over boar

Specimens: 1



Volume: IV.3 **Nº:** 6897 (temporary)

Reign: Commodus **Persons:** Commodus (Augustus)

City: Mallus **Region:** Cilicia (Cilicia Pedias) **Province:** Cilicia

Denomination: Æ **Average weight:** 6.35 g.

Obverse: ΑΥΤ ΚΑΙ ΚΟΜΟΔΟΥΣ; laureate-headed bust of Commo

Reverse: ΜΑΛΛΩΤΩΝ; founder Amphilochus (youthful) in guis-

branch over boar

Specimens: 2

