

2.2 Roman Imperial Coins



Roman imperial coins evolved during the reign of Augustus into a regular design that was used for hundreds of years. The emperor's portrait graced the obverse with his name and titles surrounding him in a circular legend around the outside. The reverse usually featured a god or personification of a virtue that the empire wished to promote, with an explanatory legend around the outside. In later years the mint name and

mint workshop number appeared in the exergue (the part under the ground-line on the reverse). The standard collector's catalogue for Roman imperial coins is David Sear's *Roman Coins and Their Values*.

Collecting Roman Imperial Coins

A good coin collection often has a theme, and luckily there are plenty to choose from amongst Roman imperial coins. Here are a few examples:

1. **Collect Everyone** – collect a representative portrait coin of each emperor, Caesar, empress and usurper. This may take some time and a great deal of money as many are very rare and much sought after.
2. **Emperors** – collect only a portrait coin of each emperor. This is the most common theme in Roman coin collections, but there still are quite a few very rare coins that could set you back thousands. A good idea is to limit yourself to a time period (the very last emperors are really only collectible in gold and are very expensive), say from Augustus to Constantine. If you have a tight budget you can also avoid the very early emperors who are also scarce. Portrait coins of emperors in the second, third and fourth centuries are mostly quite reasonable.
3. **Empresses** – the Romans issued coins for most of the imperial wives so gather a collection of portrait coins of each empress for something different.
4. **A Dynasty** – concentrate on one dynasty, say the Julio-Claudians (expensive and popular) or the Severans (much more reasonable) and collect a portrait coin of each family member – the emperors, sons, empresses, even grandmothers or uncles had coins issued in their name.
5. **Geographical Coins** – the Romans depicted Cities, Provinces and Rivers on the reverses of coins as female figures with various attributes. Hadrian's "travel series", featuring each of the provinces he visited, is a popular subset of this category.
6. **Animals** – animals also feature on the reverses of Roman coins, both mythological (Pegasus, Capricorn etc) and real (elephants, panthers, lions etc).
7. **Military** – victories over certain wars were celebrated on the reverses of coins, such as Vespasian's *Judaea Capta* and Trajan's *Dacia Capta*. Individual legions were also honoured on reverses under Septimius Severus and Gallienus.
8. **Architectural** – buildings, some famous and no longer standing, were also captured on reverses – Camp gates, the Temple of Janus, the Port at Ostia, the Colosseum and the Mausoleum of Romulus to name just a few.
9. **Gods and Virtues** – another interesting collection would be representative of gods (Jupiter, Mars, Venus etc) and the personification of virtues (such as Pax, Libertas, Liberalitas, Victory etc).

The Emperor's Titles

A number of standard abbreviations were used in the format of the emperor's title on the obverse. Here are some:

AVG = *Augustus*, originally the title awarded to Octavian in 27 BC, it became a title used by all succeeding emperors.

C = *Caesar*, originally part of Julius Caesar's name, it was the family name of the Julio-Claudians and used by succeeding emperors as a title.

COS = *Consul*, usually enumerated each time the emperor was consul for the year, e.g. COS V.

DN = *Dominus Noster*, 'Our Lord' an honorific used in the 4th century and afterwards.

IMP = *Imperator*, originally a title given by soldiers to a victorious general, it became the sole use of the emperor.

P F = *Pius Felix*, usually together meant the emperor was 'dutiful to the state' and 'happy in luck'.

TR P = *Tribunicia Potestas*, the power of the tribune - usually enumerated as it was granted each year.



*Herennia Etruscilla,
wife of Decius and
empress 249-251 AD*



*Asia on one of
Hadrian's 'Travel
Series'*



*A dolphin
entwined around
an anchor*



*Dacia seated
above DAC CAP
legend*



*Campgate reverse
of Crispus,
c320 AD*



*Pax holding olive
branch
and sceptre*

List of Roman Emperors

Julio-Claudian	<input type="checkbox"/> Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Carus (282-283)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tiberius (14-37)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Numerian (283-284)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Caligula (37-41)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Carinus (283-285)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Claudius (41-54)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Diocletian (284-305)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Nero (54-68)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Maximianus (286-305, 305-6, 310)	\$	
Galba	<input type="checkbox"/> Galba (68-69)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantius I (305-306)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Otho (69)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Galerius (305-311)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Vitellius (69)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Severus II (306-307)	\$\$	
	Flavian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vespasian (69-79)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Maximinus (309-313)	\$
		<input type="checkbox"/> Titus (79-81)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Maxentius (306-312)	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> Domitian (81-96)		\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Licinius I (308-324)	\$	
Adoptive & Antonine		<input type="checkbox"/> Nerva (96-98)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine I (307-337)	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Trajan (98-117)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine II (337-340)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Hadrian (117-138)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Constans (337-350)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Antoninus Pius (138-161)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantius II (337-361)	\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Marcus Aurelius (161-180)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Julian (360-363)	\$\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Lucius Verus (161-169)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Jovian (363-364)	\$\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Commodus (177-192)	\$\$	Family of Valentinian & Theodosius	<input type="checkbox"/> Valentinian I (364-375)	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Pertinax (193)	\$\$\$		<input type="checkbox"/> Valens (364-378)	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> Didius Julianus (193)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Gratian (367-383)		\$	
Severan	<input type="checkbox"/> Septimius Severus (193-211)	\$		<input type="checkbox"/> Valentinian II (375-392)	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Caracalla (198-217)	\$		<input type="checkbox"/> Theodosius I (379-395)	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Geta (209-212)	\$\$		<input type="checkbox"/> Arcadius (393-402) W	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Macrinus (217-218)	\$\$		<input type="checkbox"/> Honorius (393-423) W	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Elagabalus (218-222)	\$		<input type="checkbox"/> Theodosius II (402-450) E	\$\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Severus Alexander (222-235)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantius III (421) W	\$\$\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Maximinus (235-238)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Johannes (423-425) W	\$\$\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Gordian I (238)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Valentinian III (425-455) W	\$\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Gordian II (238)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Marcian (450-457) E	\$\$	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Pupienus (238)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Petronius Maximus (455) W	\$\$\$	
<input type="checkbox"/> Balbinus (238)	\$\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Avitus (455-456) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Gordian III (238-244)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Leo I (457-474) E	\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Philip I (244-249)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Majorian (457-461) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Trajan Decius (249-251)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Libius Severus (461-465) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Trebonianus Gallus (251-253)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Anthemius (467-472) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Aemilian (253)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Olybrius (472) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Valerian (253-260)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Glycerius (473-474) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Gallienus (253-268)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Leo II (474) E	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Claudius Gothicus (268-270)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Zeno (474-491) E	\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Quintillus (270)	\$\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Julius Nepos (474-475) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Aurelian (270-275)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Romulus Augustulus (475-476) W	\$\$\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Tacitus (275-276)	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> Anastasius (491-518) E	\$		
<input type="checkbox"/> Florian (276)	\$\$				
<input type="checkbox"/> Probus (276-282)	\$				

\$ = relatively inexpensive, \$\$ = expensive, \$\$\$ = very expensive and probably rare