

Royal Coin for Gareth Kincaid and Juliana de la Mer 41st King and Queen of Æthelmearc



I. Introduction

Roman coins were distributed throughout the Roman empire, and there are numerous surviving examples, making them a favorite of coin collectors. In some ways, they are more predictable than medieval coins, but in other ways, more varied. Our goal was to create a replica of a first-century Roman Imperial coin.

The most common denominations of Roman coins were the denarius and the sestertius (see Appendix I). The denarius was made of silver, and was thus a small coin (dime to nickel in diameter). This size is too small for the degree of detail we hoped to include on the coin. The sestertius was made of copper, and was larger than modern American coins at 3-4cm in diameter. Its size renders it somewhat unwieldy. Thus, we decided upon a less common denomination, the as, which was made of copper and was about 2cm in diameter (after striking, our replica is 2.3cm). This allows us to create a coin that is of comfortable size and roughly equates to a Roman penny.



II. Obverse (“heads”)

The vast majority of first-century Roman coins depict the head of the Emperor, as seen from the side, on the obverse. Occasionally, the emperor is depicted as Victory enthroned or depicted returning from battle victorious. Rarely, an inscription will be surrounded by a crown of laurel leaves without an image of the emperor. We opted for the usual half face. Unlike many medieval coins, Roman coins do not use iconography to represent the face of the emperor – it was supposed to be a true likeness. Beards were commonly depicted.

The emperor could be shown bare-headed, or helmeted, or crowned, or radiate (with holy rays of light emerging), or laureated. On most asses, the emperor is bare-headed or laureated. We opted for the laureated head, as it is a familiar SCA icon.

The emperor could be facing in either direction on the coin.

We have chosen as exemplars the bronze sestertius of Nero (AD54-68) and the gold aureus of Hadrian (AD 117-138) because they depict the emperors’ faces in remarkable detail.⁷





III. Reverse (“tails”)

The image on the reverse is the most varied aspect of Roman coins. Types of images include deities, architecture, warriors, armour, Victory, and animals. Often, the image was used as propaganda to depict a recent military victory, or to make the emperor appear more successful.²

Animals that are frequently depicted include the Roman eagle (often astride a globe), a mother wolf (feeding the twins Romulus and Remus), lions, horses, elephants, rhinoceroses and bulls. We chose to use the eagle (usually displayed with wings spread), but modify it to appear like a raven as a reference to Juliana’s heraldry.

Exemplars included the copper as of Tiberius (AD 34-37) and the copper as of Vespasian (AD 72-73).



IV. Inscriptions

A. Latinizing the Name “Gareth Kincaid”

1st-century Roman names consist of praenomen (personal name), nomen (clan name), and cognomen (family name).⁵

1. Praenomen

We searched a list of emperor’s praenomina that appeared on Roman coins⁵ to find the closest match to “Gareth”. The closest praenomen is “Galenius”, which requires only two consonant substitutions to become “Garetius”.

2. Nomen

Gareth’s household is Sable Maul, which translates to “Nigrum Malleo”, so we chose “Nigromalleus” as the nomen. Although the two terms could appear in either order, we felt that this order rolled off the tongue better.

3. Cognomen

Latin lacks a “K”, but “C” is always pronounced as “K”. The first syllable “Con-“ is frequent among Roman emperors, and the word “Concad” translates to “lower”. On the other hand, the first syllable “Cin-“ is a closer match to Gareth’s SCA name, and it is certainly common enough among Roman cognomina. So, we decided to use “Cincadius”, despite the lack of a direct translation for that word.

B. Obverse

The inscription on the obverse of a Roman coin is a series of abbreviations with no demarcation of where one ends and another begins. You have to know what you’re looking for to parse it. Common abbreviations are listed in Appendix II. Due to space considerations, some words might be dropped, including some of the emperor’s names. Alternatively, the number of characters in the abbreviation might be increased or decreased. If there is a break in the inscription to make space for an image, the break does not necessarily occur between words, but we chose to use the break to indicate the start of the inscription.

The inscription on Gareth’s coin can be broken down as follows:

IMP = IMPERATOR

G = GARETIUS

NM = NIGROMALLEUS

CIN = CINCADIUS

AUG = AUGUSTUS

PP = PATER PATRIAE

COS I = FIRST CONSULATE

C. Reverse

The inscription on the reverse of a Roman coin was often an opportunity for propaganda.

Celebrations of military victory were common, but sometimes a feel-good phrase was used. The possibilities are myriad. We considered several phrases from actual Roman coins that we felt suited our Queen's personality, and settled upon *Claritas Reipub*, which means "Light of the Republic".

D. Senatus Consulto

The letters "SC" appear on the reverse of most 1st-century Roman coins. This indicates that the Emperor received permission from the Senate before striking the coins.

V. Miscellaneous Decisions

- a. Mint Marks appear on Roman coins only in later centuries, so we avoided using a Maker's Mark on this coin.
- b. About half of Roman coins from this century have buttoning (a ring of small dots) around the edge of the coin. We opted not to utilize this.
- c. When you spin a coin from front to back, trying to make both faces appear upright, that is the axis of rotation. Modern coins have a 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock axis, but Roman coins are haphazard. We strove for a 12-6 axis, but we were intentionally not careful.
- d. As with all Roman script, "U" is depicted as "V", and "J" is depicted as "I".

Appendices

I. First-century Roman coin denominations⁵

Coin values are relative to the Denarius, which was the standard Roman silver coin.

All values are estimates, as relative coin values fluctuated throughout the Imperial era.

| Name | Material | Value | Comment |
|------------|------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Binio | Gold | 40 | |
| Aureus | Gold | 20 | standard Roman gold coin |
| Semissus | Bronze + Silver | 10 | Fixed at half an aureus |
| Denarius | Silver | 1 | |
| Quinarius | Silver | 1/2 | Intermittently coined |
| Sestertius | Silver or bronze | 1/4 | Called “the grand bronze” |
| Dupondius | Brass | 1/8 | |
| As | Bronze or Copper | 1/16 | |
| Quadrans | Copper | 1/64 | |

II. Common abbreviations for obverse inscriptions⁵

- a. IMP = Imperator (translates as Emperor, but others may receive this title)
- b. CAES (C) = Caesar (this term transitions from a cognomen to a title over time, and the meaning changes after the Diocletian divide)
- c. AUG = Augustus (this term is exclusive to the Emperor)
- d. GERM (GER) = Germanicus (an honorific)
- e. COS = Consulate. The Emperor often became one of the two Consuls of Rome. The number following COS is the consulate number. Because each consulate lasts one year, this is also the year of the Emperor’s reign. For SCA purposes, we propose that this number reflect the number of times on the throne.
- f. PONMAX (PM) = Pontifus Maximus (head priest). We avoided this for SCA purposes.
- g. TRIBPOT (TRP) = Tribunica Potestate (supreme representative of the people)
- h. PP = Pater Patriae. Father of the country.
- i. CENSPER (CP) = Censor Perpetuus (chief magistrate for life). Not appropriate for SCA.

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