

An Eye for Details! [PAGE ONE]  
*an exercise in observing unfamiliar artifacts*

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

{Have you already swapped contact details? Comparing notes outside of class has its advantages...}

**You need:**

- a) This worksheet, one for each of you!
- b) one supplies envelop to share:
  - a. Two or more numismatic objects (mostly modern coins)\*
  - b. Two crayons
  - c. aluminum foil

\* -The goal is for it to be a type of coin or object you've never seen before. If it feels too familiar, swap with a classmate or come forward and I'll swap it for one of my extras.

**You do NOT need:** the internet. Yes, you could probably find all the answers quickly, but you'd defeat the purpose of the exercise. You can fact-check yourself afterwards, if you feel a burning desire to do so. But really the answers don't matter, just the experience.

Step (1). Take your coin out from its plastic sleeve. Decide which side is "heads". Place it on the desk face up. Put this worksheet over it. Peel the paper off the crayon to reveal a side. Now rub over the coin to create an impression of the coin on the paper. Don't worry if you don't like how it looks. Try a few times until you are satisfied you can see the general features on the coin.

Step (2). Repeat for the other side of the coin.

Step (3). Annotation. Now you need to look carefully at your coin. Hold it up and change your viewing angle. each part of your rubbings based on what you see. Try to sketch or describe any symbols or features. Transcribe any writing you see. Get as detailed as you can with these observations. If you take out your phone to magnify it or to shine a racking light on it. Not which details this helped you see. Try without your phone first!

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An Eye for Details! [PAGE TWO]

*an exercise in observing unfamiliar artifacts AND applying your lived experience*

Step (4). Describe to your partner what you see on your coin and listen to their own narration. You are looking for similarities and differences between your two objects.

Step (5). What are common features? Do they remind you of features of coins you handle regularly in your day to day life? Are they heavier or lighter in your hand?

Step (6). What features seemed unusual based on your own life experience? Is there anything you couldn't understand or make an educated guess about? How are the two objects different from each other. Be sure to consider to consider not just the images but physical characteristics, like size, weight, color.

Step (7). Time to extrapolate. What do you think influenced the choices in the design and manufacture of this object? Why did someone put time and energy into making it? What was its function (before becoming a historical artifact for the purposes of this class!)? Do you think those logics are similar or different over different times and place?

(No, I'm not going to collect these pieces of paper, but I'd love to see your work. You can snap a picture and email me those images: [yarrow@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:yarrow@brooklyn.cuny.edu))

## Key Terms

Look out for the following in our discussions and the lecture component of today's class.

Obverse	Medal
Reverse	Denomination
Die	Serration (not to be confused with seriation or milling)
Strike	Mint
Numismatic	Clipping and Shaving
Money	Intrinsic Value
Coin	Fiat Currency
Token	

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From Sima Qian's *Shiji* 123, written c. 94 BCE, quoting from Zhang Qian's account of his travels West, c. 130 BCE: "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)."

Mark 20:15-17: "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"

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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

Dio 73.7: 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.