

Units of Currency

1. The Rise of the **As**
 - 1.1. The Roman **as** was, at first, a specific weight: one pound of bronze
 - 1.2. This pound was divided into twelve **unicae** (ounces)
 - 1.3. Please note, the noun (3rd / m.) declines as follows:
 - 1.3.1. **as, assis, assī, assem, asse**
 - 1.3.2. **assēs, assium, assibus, assēs, assibus**
2. Introduction of Silver Coinage
 - 2.1. During the Republic (late third century BCE), two new coins were introduced: the **dēnārius** and the **sēstertius**, these made of silver
 - 2.1.1. One **sēstertius** was valued at 2.5 **assēs**, and one **dēnārius** at 10 **assēs**
 - 2.2. “The **sēstertius** was probably introduced at a time when the **as** had been so far reduced that the value of the new coin was equivalent to the original value of the **as**.” (AG, 633)
 - 2.2.1. Debasement was a persistent threat to Roman coinage
 - 2.3. During the early Empire, a gold coin, the **aureus**, was introduced, at the value of 100 **sēstertii**
3. Height of the **Sēstertius**
 - 3.1. The **sēstertius** became the common coin of the Roman Republic and Empire
 - 3.2. Where Roman authors say **nummus**, coin, they typically mean **sēstertius**
 - 3.3. The word, **sēstertius**, is an elision of **sēmīis-tertius**, ‘the third a half’
 - 3.3.1. Picture the Romans counting three **assēs**, the third of which is at half value, for a total value of two and a half
4. **Sēstertius** vs. **Sēstertium**
 - 4.1. The **sēstertium** was a unit of value, **not a coin**, equivalent to 1m000 **sestertii**
 - 4.1.1. It likely derived from the genitive plural in the phrase **mille sēstertium**
 - 4.2. When combined with a numeral adverb (semel, bis, ter, quater, etc.) what is really implied is **x centēna mīlia sēstertia**, or *x* hundred thousand **sēstertia**, or *x* hundred million **sēstertii**
5. Abbreviations
 - 5.1. The **sēstertius** could be cataloged as HS or **HS**, a confusing symbol until one considers its evolution
 - 5.1.1. The symbol began as IIS (viz. 2S), or **duo et sēmīis**, two and a half, and the H became standard somewhere along the way
 - 5.2. Where a **line** appears **above** an abbreviated sum, it indicated **thousands**
 - 5.2.1. The sum HS CC = 200 **sēstertii**, but the sum HS $\overline{\text{CC}}$ = 200,000 **sēstertii**, or 200 **sēstertia**
6. Roman Wages
 - 6.1. Sampled from the end of the Republic, consider and compare these wages
 - 6.1.1. A typical legionary was paid 900 **sēstertii per annum**
 - 6.1.2. A day-laborer might make 3 **sēstertii per diem**

Review of Values

aureus = 25 **dēnārii** = 100 **sēstertii** = 250 **assēs**

dēnārii = 4 **sēstertii** = 10 **assēs**

sēstertius = 2.5 **assēs**

as = an ever-decreasing weight of bronze (or, later, of copper)

sēstertium = 1 **mille sēstertium** = 1,000 **sēstertii**

Famous Phrase: **crescit amor nummī quantum ipsa pecūnia crēvit**

(love of money grows as much as money itself is known)

-Juvenal, *Satires*, 14.139