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February 10, 2019
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Online Coins of the Roman Empire

INTRODUCTION

The [Online Coins of the Roman Empire](#) (OCRE) is an online database that provides a comprehensive collection of coins and tools that are designed to help in the “identification, cataloguing, and research of the rich and varied coinage of the Roman Empire.”¹ At first glance, the site allows users to search for coins through a list view, identify coins based on their visual traits, locate a coin’s origination, and an API with a more thorough access into the database.

This database seems to be extremely robust. However, OCRE is still forming partnerships with many institutes for more data on different coins and identification traits, so the database is expected to increase in size. The OCRE project is led by the [American Numismatic Society](#) (ANS) and the [Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University](#). Currently, the ANS and the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World provides a record of 43,000 Roman Imperial Coinage from Augustus in 31 BC to the death of Zeno in AD 491.² Additionally, OCRE also incorporates links to data from nearly 20 American and European databases, including the ANS collection, the Münzkabinett of the State Museum of Berlin, and the British Museum. These databases add another 100,000 coins to OCRE’s extensive database, making this site one of the main resources for numismatic research.

¹ Meadows, Andrew, and Roger Bagnall. “Online Coins of the Roman Empire.” *American Numismatic Society*, 2017, numismatics.org/ocre/.

² *Ibid.*

HOMEPAGE



Figure 1. Online Coins of the Roman Empire Homepage

The homepage contains a large graphic with a description of the site, including relevant organizations and a brief introduction of what the database contains. The navigation bar provides a range of options: Browse, Search, Maps, Symbols, Identify a Coin, Contributors, Visualize Queries, APIs, About, and Language. These options suggest that this site was built with a focus on assisting numismatists conduct research or to help people to get interested. The design allows those who are curious to browse through the different coins and learn about them in many different ways. The most basic features of the website, such as the map and browse tabs, are very user friendly and functional. This helps beginners to the subject easily navigate from page to page and using each page's functions properly. The layout of the website is vertical, so the difference between browser and phone display is reactive and works extremely well. Since there is little difference between phone and computer browser display, the site does not cause confusion for users when switching between devices and browsers.

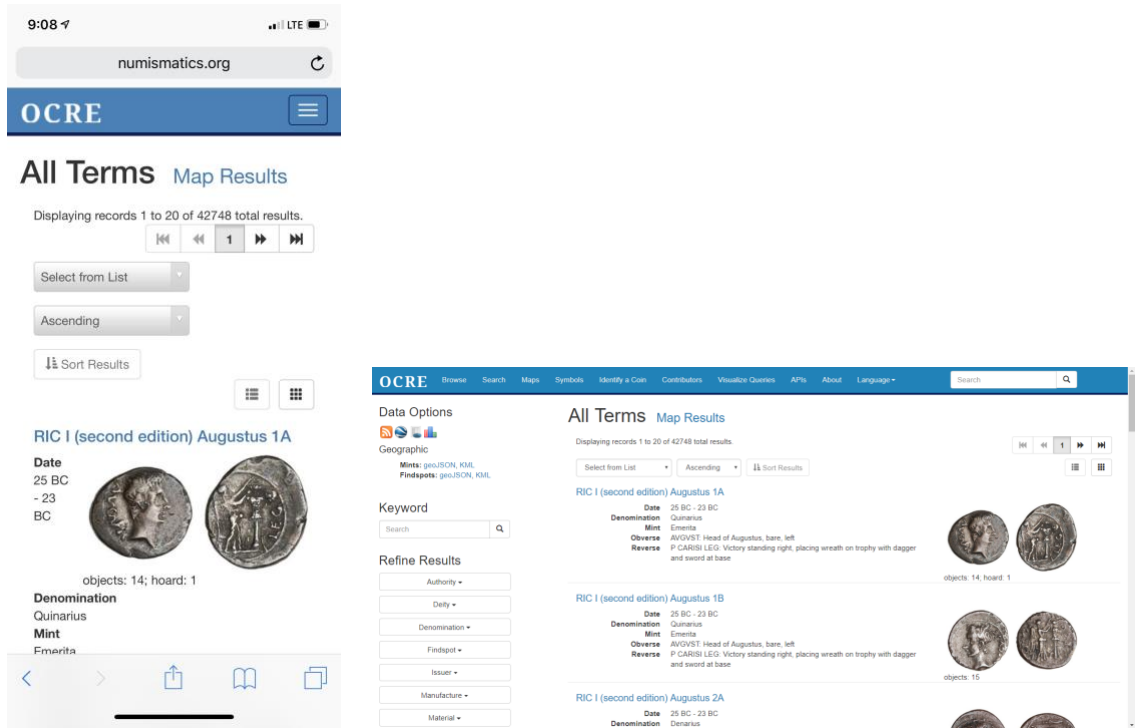


Figure 2. Comparison of View from iPhone X Safari Browser to MacBook Chrome Browser

The purpose of this site is largely academic, thus the quality of the contributors and information should be reliable and trustworthy. The Contributors page lists out the many institutes and organizations that have contributed to the database, establishing reliability and trust for the web page. The global aspect of this project is further reflected in the seventeen different languages this site has been translated into. Considering the institutes involved, it is no surprise that these languages are European or Mediterranean related. However, the site neglected to create this site in other languages from other continents, such as Chinese or Japanese. Countries like China, for example, have expansive historical records and databases on ancient coins and currency that could be used to compare to Roman coins. Comparing these different types of currency from ancient civilization could be extremely interesting.

BROWSE, SEARCH, & MAPS

The Browse, Search, and Maps tabs work in tandem. All three pages use the same keywords to categorize the different coins, this similarity helps the user to identify and search for their coins.

The Browse page (refer to Figure 1) shows the different coins in a certain order that the user designates. This order could depend on keyword search categories such as the portraits shown on the coins, mint, year, and so on. The page is designed so that the coins can be displayed in either a grid view or a list view, depending on your needs. This feature is extremely useful depending on if you just want to look at the coins faces (grid view) or if you want information to accompany the images. This page is especially useful if you are new to the subject and want to look at different types of coins.

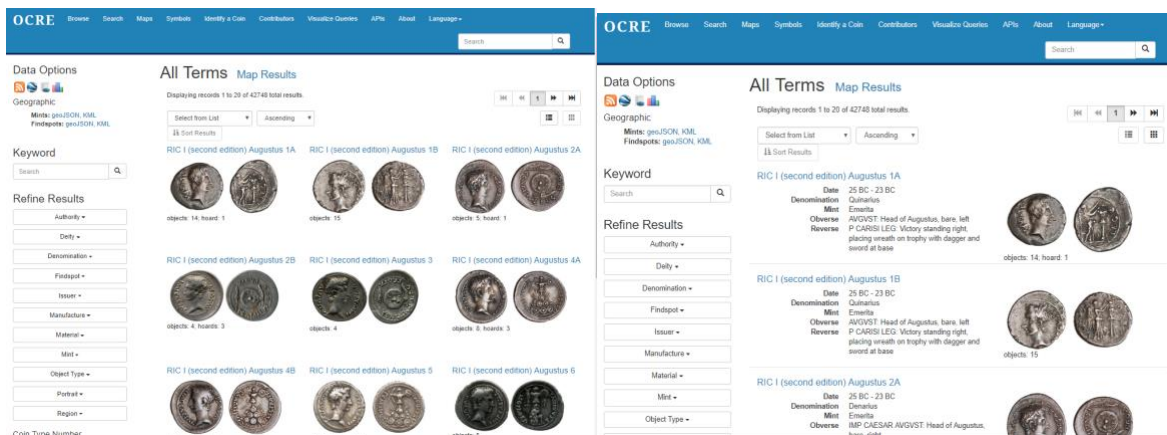


Figure 3. Comparison of Browse page from Grid to List View

The browse results also links your search results to the Map results page which displays your results on a map of the Roman Empire for you to see, much like the actual Maps page. The user then can zoom in and find the coin they want that corresponds to the region they are searching for. The Search page heavily contrasts the Browse page as it is very simplistic and only allows

the user to conduct keyword searches. This page does not seem to serve an alternate function to that of the Browse page, other than being

The Maps page utilizes the same keyword categories that the Browse and Search pages do. This page overlays the database of coins onto a visual map of the Roman Empire, with each coin represented as a singular dot or a cluster of dots on the map. The design of the page allows users to easily narrow down to smaller selections of coins relevant to their interests. The color coded legend helps to some degree, but it is difficult to comprehend what “Mint”, “Findspot”, and “Subject” means exactly.

Considering the nature of the site and the scholarly usage, the mapping function should be built to become more robust in terms of interactivensess. Users must click on the dots of their search results, which then shows a link, which then redirects the user to the respective coins page. While this is functional, this page could be better improved by having each coin’s information popup instead of the link. This change will allow the User to quickly navigate between coins.

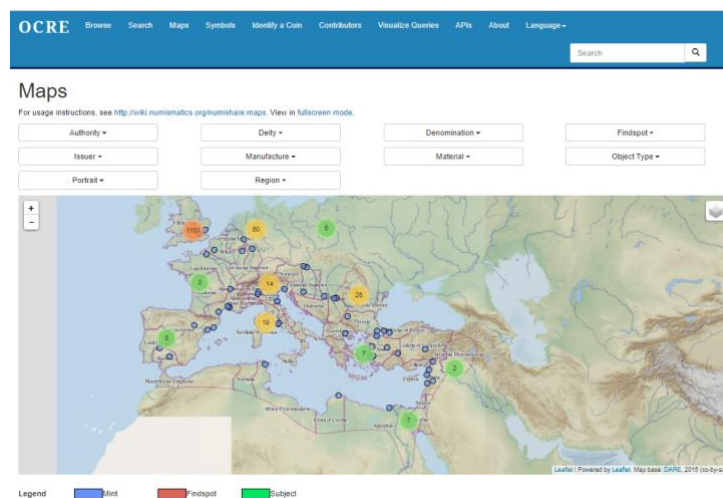


Figure 3. Maps Page

SYMBOLS & IDENTIFY A COIN

The function of these two pages are similar to that of Search and Browse. These pages were separated for their own distinct purposes to assist the user, especially those who are new to the page and subject. All of the images on the Symbols page are currently broken, however, the page does differentiate the different mint marks and monograms on the coins.

The Identify a Coin page is the most helpful page for those new to the subject. The page easily find a coin using visible and physical traits to identify. As seen in Figure 4, the page almost takes the user through a step by step process of narrowing down the parameters in identifying the coin. If the OCRE site also included a page with instructions in how to properly identify physical traits or care-maintenance of the coins, then it would greatly improve the experience for those new to numismatics.

OCRE Browse Search Maps Symbols Identify a Coin Contributors Visualize Queries APIs About Language- Search

Identify a Coin

This interface allows you to narrow down the most basic visible components of a coin in order to reveal a subset of possible matches in the search results page.

Search

Material

Select one or more types of metal. Note that, alongside gold and bronze, silver Roman coinage from the mid-3rd century onward uses various bronze-silver alloys, and are deemed 'silver', 'bilon', or not specified. From the mid-4th century onward, 'bilon' coins only contain trace elements of silver. It is recommended for these coins to search for silver and bilon, or bilon and bronze, if uncertain.

Bronze Silver Gold Bilon

Legend

Search for characters that appear on the front and back of the coin. Please enter legends without spaces or punctuation, using the wildcard asterisk character "*" to denote gaps in legibility, in the beginning, middle, or end of the legend.

Example: ***CARIS*LEG** will match "P CARISVS LEG"

Example: ***CAES*AVG*** will match "IMP CAESAR AVGVSST", "IMP CAESAR AVGVSSTVS", "CAESAR AVG TRIB POTEST", etc.

Obverse Legend

Reverse Legend

Portrait

Portrait comparison may aid in identification, especially for heavily worn coinage. Ideal portraits are presented in gold, silver, and bronze (when available), as well as a worn example. You can page forward and backward through examples by clicking the buttons. Hover over the image to read the name of the individual depicted on the coin.

Julio-Claudian

Figure 4. Identify a Coin Page

API & VISUALIZE QUERIES

The API and Visualize Queries pages are definitely designed for more experienced numismatists and researchers. The Visualize Queries page allows the user to create graphs and charts that relate to their searches either in typological analysis or measurement analysis. This is especially useful for those that are conducting research and need to display their data in this format. This also acts as an alternate to the APIs if the user does not know how to use APIs. The APIs page is for those that are more technologically savvy and gain access to more information and data regarding the coins. These two pages serve the academic purposes of this site and database.

OCRE Browse Search Maps Symbols Identify a Coin Contributors Visualize Queries APIs About Language -

Search

Visualize Queries

Use the data selection and visualization options below to generate a chart based on selected parameters. Instructions for using this feature can be found here: <http://wiki.numismatics.org/numishare:visualize>.

Typological Analysis Measurement Analysis

- Select Numeric Response Type
 - Percentage
 - Count
- Select Chart Type
 - column
 - bar
- Select Categories for Analysis
 - Authority
 - Deity
 - Denomination
 - Findspot
 - Issuer
 - Material
 - Mint
 - Object Type
 - Portrait
 - Region
 - Manufacture
- Compare Queries [+Add Query](#)

Custom Queries [+Add Query](#)

Optional Settings [Hide/Show Options](#)

Generate Chart

Figure 4. Visualize Queries page

CONCLUSION

Overall, this site works well for its purpose of assisting its users in conducting research into numismatics for those new and old to the subject. The site is easy to navigate and has a nice interface when dealing with the massive amounts of data the site hosts. Compared to other websites like [Wildwinds](http://www.wildwinds.com) (Ancient & Medieval Coins Canada)³ and [Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins](http://www.vrcr.org),⁴ OCRE has much better visuals and allows users to access and utilize its databases more effectively. OCRE is also much more scholarly in nature and seems to be much more of a reliable source compared to these websites.

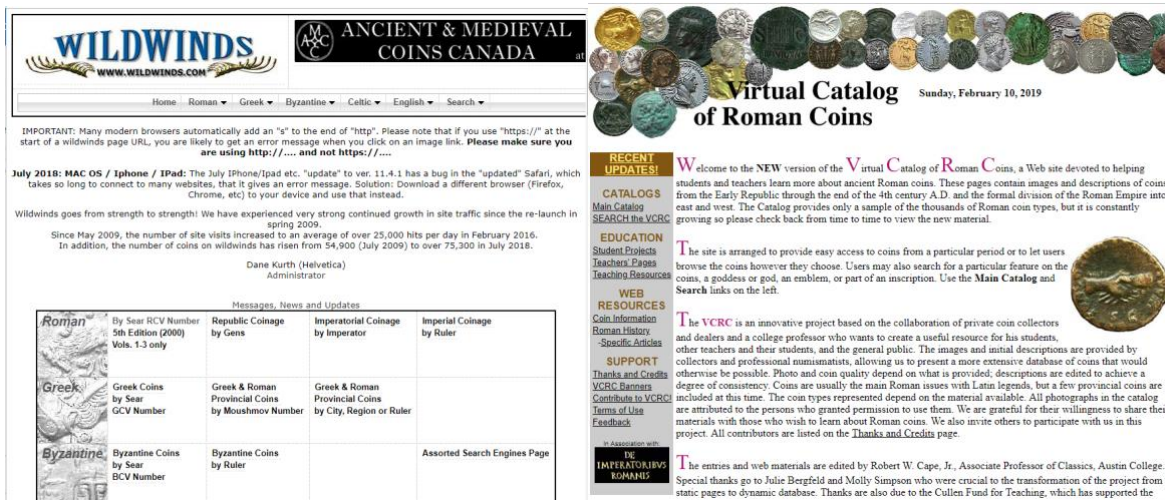


Figure 4. Alternate Coinage Websites

³ “Ancient Coins: Roman, Greek, Byzantine and Celtic Numismatic Reference for Attribution and Values.” Thebes, Boeotia - Ancient Greek Coins - WildWinds.com, Wildwinds, www.wildwinds.com/coins/.

⁴ “Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins Homepage.” *Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins Homepage*, vrcr.austincollege.edu/.

Metadata:

- **Title:** Online Coins of the Roman Empire
- **Description:** Online database of coins, mapping capabilities, identification of coins, and APIs
- **URL:** <http://numismatics.org/ocre/>
- **Author(s):** Dr. Andrew Meadows and Professor Roger Bagnall, Dr Gilles Bransbourg, Ethan Gruber
- **Relevant Institutes:** American Numismatic Society, Institute for the study of the Ancient World, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Münzkabinett Online Catalogue
- **Place:** American Numismatic Society and the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University
- **Date Created:** 2014 - 2017 (?)
- **Date Accessed:** February 2019
- **Availability:** Free

Bibliography:

1. Meadows, Andrew, and Roger Bagnall. "Online Coins of the Roman Empire." *American Numismatic Society*, 2017, numismatics.org/ocre/.
2. "Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins Homepage." *Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins Homepage*, vcrc.austincollege.edu/.
3. "Ancient Coins: Roman, Greek, Byzantine and Celtic Numismatic Reference for Attribution and Values." *Thebes, Boeotia - Ancient Greek Coins - WildWinds.com*, Wildwinds, www.wildwinds.com/coins/.