



# Sphere's on Ancient Coins

An Attempt to Explore and Explain the Symbolism





# Uses of the Sphere

The Romans applied the sphere in many different aspects. As a stand alone central art element on the coinage of the Tetrarchy to astronomical elements to symbols of superiority to transfer of power. All images were meant to send a message or propaganda to the general populace.

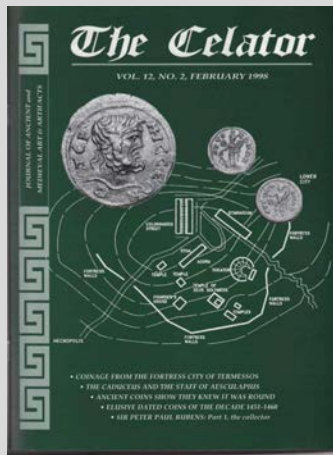


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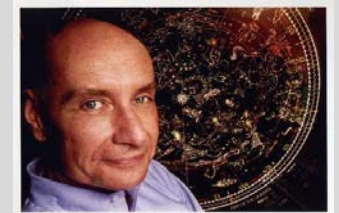
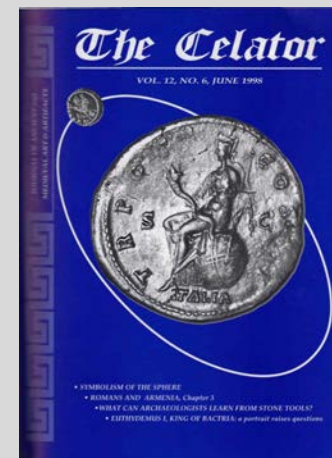
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Molnar, Michael R. "Symbolism of the Sphere", *The Celator*, June 1998: 1-2.



Michael R. Molnar is an astronomer, educator, and programmer with a long history in academe and industry. He received his Ph.D. in astronomy from the University of Wisconsin in 1971 and went on to do pioneering research in the field of magnetic stars using satellite observations.

His research into astronomical symbols on ancient Greek and Roman coins has received international attention with his explanation of the Christmas Star. Reviews of his scholarly book, "The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi" (Rutgers 1999) have been outstanding.

“Coinage serves many purposes. Seldom, if ever, is it intended to challenge the user’s assumptions about life...Ancient coins have globes. None shows Hipparchos measuring the precession of the equinox. Coinage carries popular images in preference to intellectual conundrums.”

(Marrota. Pg. 20.)

“The evidence that orbs depicting on so many coins was the cosmos and not the Earth is revealed first of all by the stars and astronomical markings...”

(Molnar. Pg. 1.)





# The Sphere Represents..

The Celestial Sphere...

The Heavens...

The Empire...

The Know World...

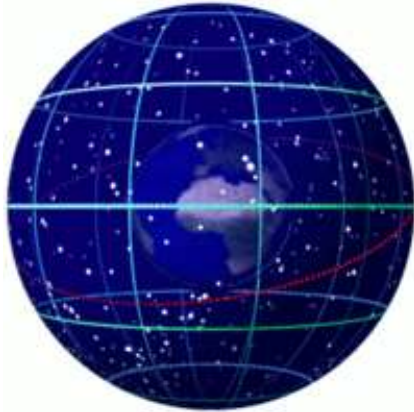
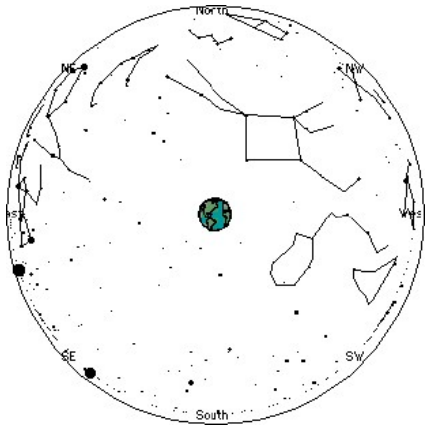
The Earth...

The Sun...

A Star...

A Center Pellet...

Naples Archaeological Museum Picture of Sculpture of Atlas with Farnese Globe on his shoulders. Roman Copy of Hellenistic original, 2nd Century AD.



# Celestial Sphere

...the celestial sphere is an imaginary sphere of arbitrarily large radius, concentric with Earth. All objects in the observer's sky can be thought of as **projected upon the inside surface** of the celestial sphere, as if it were the underside of a dome or a hemispherical screen. The celestial sphere is a practical tool for spherical astronomy, allowing observers to plot positions of objects in the sky when their distances are unknown or unimportant..

... The celestial sphere can be considered to be infinite in radius. This means any point within it, including that occupied by **the observer, can be considered the center**.

("Celestial Sphere." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 03 Jan. 2016. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial\\_sphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial_sphere)>. )





Domitian, AR denarius, ca 88-96 AD, 3.51 g. IMP CAES DOMITIANVS AVG P M, laureate head right / DIVVS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F, Domitian's infant son shown as a young Jupiter seated left on a globe with his hands raised toward seven stars. RIC 154; Vagi 1162



Domitia AR Denarius. Rome, AD 82-3. DOMITIA AVGVSTA IMP DOMIT, draped bust right, with hair massed in front and in long plait behind / DIVVS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F, Domitian's son as naked infant boy seated on a globe surrounded by seven stars. RIC 153. 3.49g, 19mm, 5h.

## Apotheosis (Deification)

Herodian of Syria composed an account of the ritual ceremony of the apotheosis of Septimius Severus. The story mentions a funeral pyre and, at the climax of the ceremony, the releasing of an eagle to symbolize the emperor's ascent into heaven.



MAURETANIA, Kingdom of, Juba II, 25 B.C. - A.D. 23  
 Silver denarius (19mm, 2.71 gm., 4h) Dated RY 41 = A.D. 16.  
 Head of Juba II to right wearing lion skin, club to left, to right REX IVBA.  
 Capricorn to right, with rudder, cornucopiae and globe, below R XXXXI.  
 Reference: cf. SNG Cop. 587, Mazard 212, MAA 171.

# Capricornus

Capricorn's ruling planet is Saturn; the slow-moving, elegant giant that has been observed by astronomers for quite sometime. Naturally, since Saturn is the ruling planet of Capricorn, the Titan Saturnus is automatically associated. Capricorn's are known for their tenacity, hard work, value of tradition, love of the arts, and for their disrespect for authority (while paying respect where respect is due). These are all traits of Saturnus; the Romans flourished under him in terms of the Economy, Art, Education, Societal Practices, and Philosophy. These are the virtues of the sign of Capricorn. Capricorn's ruling house is over dignity, respect, reputation, and work. These ideals and beliefs are reflected by Saturnus and his endeavors.





Hadrian Æ Dupondius. IMP CAESAR TRAIANVS HADRIANVS AVG P M TR P COS III, radiate bust right, drapery on far shoulder / SALVS PVBLICA S-C, Salus standing left with foot on globe, patera & rudder, foot on globe. Cohen 1358.

# Universality

Here we see Salus in a rare pose holding an oar. This indicates her role in guiding the emperor through a healthy life. Here with addition of PVBLICA this may signify how Hadrian has provided safety and welfare for the Roman Empire. Her foot on the globe may represent universal (as in the entire empire).

*Salus* in Latin means “safety”, “salvation”, “welfare”. She was the goddess of safety and well-being of both the individual and the state.

(“Salus.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 03 Jan. 2016. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial\\_sphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial_sphere)>. )



Trajan Denarius. IMP CAES NER TRAIAN OPTIM AVG GERM DAC, laureate draped bust right / PARTHICO P M TR P COS VI P P S P Q R, PRO-VID across fields, Providentia standing left, holding sceptre, resting left arm on column, pointing with a baton at a globe at feet.. RSC 313.



Trajan Æ Sestertius. IMP CAES NER TRAIANO OPTIMO AVG GER DAC PARTHICO P M TR P COS VI P P, laureate draped bust right / PROVIDENTIA AVGVSTI SPQR S-C, Providence standing left. RIC 663, Cohen 320.

# Universality

Providentia is a divine personification of the ability to foresee and make provision. She was among the embodiments of virtues that were part of the Imperial cult of ancient Rome.



Urania, Muse of astronomy. Marble, head and torso: Roman copies after Greek originals from the 4th century BC, rest of the body: modern restoration. **The head does not belong to the body.** Villa Adriana near Tivoli, 1786 (head)." Museo Pio-Clementino, Muses Hall

## Urania, Muse of Astronomy

Urania (/jʊˈreɪniə/; Ancient Greek: Οὐρανία; meaning 'heavenly' or 'of heaven') was, in Greek mythology, the muse of astronomy and a daughter of Zeus by Mnemosyne and also a great granddaughter of Uranus. Eldest of the divine sisters, Urania inherited Zeus' majesty and power and the beauty and grace of her mother Mnemosyne.

The most distinctively oriental title of the Greek Aphrodite is Urania, the Semitic “queen of the heavens”. It has been explained by reference to the lunar character of the goddess, but more probably signifies “she whose seat is in heaven,” whence she exercises her sway over the whole world — earth, sea, and air alike.



Macedon - Uranopolis. Circa 300 B.C. AE 16 mm. 3.50 grams. Obv. Star of eight rays. Rv. Aphrodite Urania seated on globe, holding sceptre. Sear 1475.



## Celestial Sphere

“she whose seat is in heaven”

Here we see the Muse Aphrodite Urania, the muse of astronomy, seated on a sphere that contains the celestial sphere. Here we can see the Celator took time and pains to ensure that these rings were carved deep enough so as not to disappear. Most description of this coin just simply say “seated on globe”.

The combination of the type of muse and globe can only lead to one identification of the globe as the celestial sphere.





Q Pomponius Musa. 56 BC. AR Denarius. Laureate head of Apollo right; six pointed star behind / Q POMPONI MVSA, Urania, the Muse of Astronomy, standing left, pointing with wand to globe on tripod. Cr410/8; Syd 823.

# Celestial Sphere

Propaganda: Association by name

Quintus Pomponius Musa was a magistrate, moneyer and banker during the Republican Period in Rome, around 66 BC. He commissioned designs, which often referred to famous ancestors, associations to favorite cults, or, as here, puns on their names. Musa created ten coin designs: one design for each of the nine Muses, a play on Musa's name



Probus Antoninianus. 276-282 AD. IMP CM AVR PROBVS PF AVG, radiate, draped bust right / CLEMENTIA TEMP dot, Emperor, standing right, holding sceptre, receiving globe from Jupiter, standing left, holding sceptre, wreath in upper field, mintmark XXI in ex. RIC V-2 Tripolis, 927

# The Cosmocrater

Rule or leader of the whole world



Maxentius (306-312 AD). AE Follis (24-27 mm, 5.30 g), Aquileia, 309-10.

Obv. IMP C MAXENTIVS P F AVG, laureate head right.

Rev. CONSERV VRBS SVAE, Roma seated left on shield in tetrastyle temple, handing globe to Maxentius and holding sceptre, seated captive between, Victories as acroteria, wolf and twins in Pediment.

Ex. AQS. RIC 113.

# The Globe and Altar



This coin provides two examples of the globe with one example on obverse and reverse.

The Obverse shows Victory standing on a globe crowing Constantine.

The reverse shows the globe on the altar with the vows inscribed on the altar.

The vow reads something like: "Our Lord Constantine Chief Priest Emperor offers vows so that he may have a prosperous twenty year reign."



#### CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AD 307 – 337

IMP CONSTANTINVS AVG Laureate, cuirassed bust of Constantine right. / SOLI INVICTO COMITI Sol standing left, right hand raised, left holding globe. London - S / F in field, PLN in exergue struck circa AD 313.



#### CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AD 307 – 337 Æ Follis (24mm, 5.95g).

Cyzicus mint, 2nd officina. Struck circa AD 311-313. Laureate head right / Jupiter standing facing, head left, holding globe and scepter; at feet to left, eagle standing left, head right, holding wreath in beak; MKVB. RIC VI 80.

## Sol & Globe

Sol and Sol Invictus are controversial gods. Both are sun gods but of what origin is difficult to determine.

The symbolism that I would offer is the sun god calling the rise of the sun in the east (left hand) and the night (celestial stars) descending in the west. There are also examples that have the globe under his arm.