

OVERVIEW

The “clasped hands” Dextrarum Uinctio is a symbolic motif used in ancient art to represent a sacred bond and came to be a frequent, if intermittent depiction on ancient Roman coins. The motif first appears in Babylonian sculpture in which the priest-king and chief god are shown shaking hands confirming his kingship, which occurred as an annual rite. Later, Zoroastrian ceremonies included the “Hamazor”, a ritual act of shaking hands. Persian influences on Roman culture involving the sacred handshake include the cult of Mithras, which was popular among the soldiery. In Roman culture the Dextrarum Uinctio came to be associated with honor, contracts and the associated notion of *VIRTUS*, or manliness. On the coins, the two underlying concepts the sacred handshake are meant to affirm and demonstrate are *FIDES* (faithfulness), and *CONCORDIA*, (agreement and harmony). And sometimes in combination.

In its simplest depiction, two standing figures are shown shaking hands. The more abstract and interesting depiction is of just the two hands, rendered as a disembodied handshake. Hands are understood to represent actions or promises of actions. The nature of the action or its intended results were often described by combining other Roman symbols in semiotic fashion with the disembodied hands, or by the use of written legends to add clarification.

For the Roman ruling classes issuing a coin depicting the sacred handshake was meant to assure the populace, or a portion of it, that an important and solemn vow involving duty, honor, fidelity or agreement had occurred, or was hoped for or intended to occur. Coins of this nature inform us of specific events involving marriages, power sharing agreements, imperial promises and civil and military reconciliations.

The timeline indicates when the abstracted Dextrarum Uinctio coins with the disembodied handshake motif were issued and the governing authority under which they were minted.

THE DEXTRARVM IVNCTIO ON ROMAN COINS: SYMBOLS OF CONCORD AND FIDELITY

Earliest Examples



68 or 70 B.C. Denarius. Jugate busts of Honos and Virtus on obverse. On the reverse, Italia stands right, holding cornucopia, in Dextrarum Uinctio with Roma who stands left, holding scepter. Issued in commemoration the end of the Social War of 91-88 B.C.



48 B.C. Denarius. D. Junius Brutus



44 B.C. Denarius. Julius Caesar



42 B.C. Denarius. L. Mussidus Longus



39 B.C. Quinarius. Antony & Octavian

FIDES

Legends and Examples

FIDES EXERCIT(VM)
FIDES PRAETORIANORVM
FIDES PVBLICA
FIDES MILIT(VM)
FIDES LEGION
FIDES MVTVA AVGG
AMOR MVTVA AVGG



69 A.D. Forces of Vetellius, Gaulish mint



73 A.D. Denarius, Vespasian



193 A.D. Clodius Albinus



238 A.D. Antoninianus, Balbinus

CONCORDIA

Legends and Examples

CONCORDIA EXERCIT(VM)
CONCORDIA FELIX
CONCORDIAE AETERNVM
CONDCORD(IA) MILIT(VM)
CONCORDIA
CONCORD(IA) AVGVSTOR(VM)
CONCORDIA AVGG



97 A.D. Denarius, Nerva



180-182 A.D. Denarius, Crispina

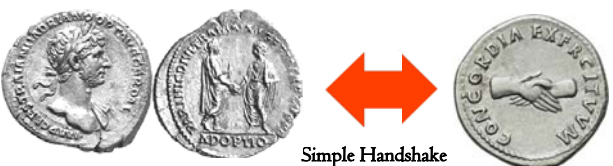


269 A.D. Antoninianus, Marius



287-291 A.D. Denarius, Carausius

Combination and abstractions



117 A.D. Denarius, Hadrian
ADOPTIO reverse



Simple Handshake



134 A.D. Denarius, Hadrian
Felicitas reverse



Added Caduceus



191-192 A.D. Denarius, Commodus
Africa-Hercules reverse



Caduceus & grain ears



134 A.D. Denarius, Hadrian
Fortuna reverse



Caduceus & Cornucopiae



193 A.D. Denarius, Didus Julianus
Fides reverse



Added Legionary Eagle on prow

