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Not Created Equal: The Influence of Mass-Production on the  
Choice of Coin Types in the Roman Mint.

Roman coins bear an astonishing variety of images and inscriptions. The best modern approaches to their interpretation are thoughtful and nuanced, with consideration given not only to identifying the types and teasing out their historical, political or religious meaning, but also to the relationship between different types produced at the same time and to the varying distribution of types over the different coinage metals. But one important factor has been overlooked by most scholars. This is the effect of the practical demands that mass-production placed on the craftsmen working in the mint. In this paper I present evidence from die-study and type-distribution analysis of 2nd century AD Roman coinage. The results show that artistic complexity correlates neither with value nor size of coin but rather with scale of production; the more coins were made, the simpler their types tended to be. Similarly, the historical relevance or "newness" of types shows a negative correlation with volume. As a result, the types of silver coins tended to be much less complex and timely than those of the lower-value but also lower-volume bronze coins, which in turn share many typological characteristics with the much-more-valuable gold coinage. These results suggest that factors related to production had significant effects on coin-type creation, allocation, and longevity, and that numismatists and historians should take these factors into consideration when interpreting coin images.