

Traditionally, scholars who have studied architectural representations on Roman coins have used them as evidence to reconstruct monuments. In recent years there has been an increased sensitivity to ask social and political questions of representations of monuments on coins. The Romans were the first civilization that consistently deployed images of monuments on their coins. The *lex Gabinia* of 139 BC, credited with broader changes in the character of Roman coin designs, must have played some part in the emergence of architectural reverses from c. 135 BC onwards, but the *lex Gabinia* alone does not explain why the built environment was first deemed appropriate to be displayed on coin reverses at this point in time.

The appearance of the first architectural coin types coincided with a period of population growth, monumentalization, and public building in the city of Rome. Remarkably, architectural coin types were produced with more regularity after c. 80 BC when second style wall painting, itself distinguishable by the use of architectural designs, came into fashion. There are, in fact, several technical similarities between the treatment of architecture on later Republican coin types and second style wall paintings that suggest a dialogue between painting and coins. I argue that the emergence of architectural images on coins and second style wall painting – the first two media that commonly featured architectural designs in Roman art – should be viewed in the context of widespread public building and urbanization in the city of Rome in the second and first centuries BC.