Denarius of Hadrian

The style of Hadrian's *denarius* was distinctive in the early 120s CE, as it is today- Hadrian was recognizable as one of the only emperors regularly depicted with his beard(Speller, 46). He was a ruler shrouded in rumor, omnipresent through his unique physical depictions and his mobility around the empire. He was considered to be an "absent emperor"(he spent significantly less time in Rome than was common for an a ruler), but his constant travels and continued position on coinage made him knowable to his citizens; he consolidated his imperial position through the ubiquity of exchange(Speller, 48). Hadrian addressed challenges to his succession by sponsoring public imagery of himself with the previous emperor Trajan. He encouraged change in the religious understandings and practices of the empire by incorporating new deities or deity representations into his coinage(Speller, 161). He was an emperor who understood the importance of appearances, and the cultural components of coinage.

The physical changes necessary to render this coin, the *Denarius of Hadrian*, into a piece of jewelry separated it from the market. Although the materials used for coins retained their economic value, the coin itself was transmuted through a simple alteration into an object purely of aesthetic value. Arguably, all coins represent some form of artistic merit; to only recognize the artistic influences on coinage once they cease to carry pecuniary value would be to erase their cultural importance as circulating currency (Martin, 94). Hadrian used the distinctive coin style to enforce his imperial rule(Speller, 163). However, the value of the altered coin reflects an (albeit detached) appreciation for represented ideals, as well as a rejection of it as a form of money. A small slice had been taken out of the coin's reverse side, but it seemingly still operated as currency– likely its authenticity was called into question, leading one of its possessors to affirm the quality of its silver. The worn nature of this small slice implies that the coin continued circulating after it lost some of its material value. This reflects the interests of citizens in the legitimacy of their money, and the shift to different forms of value once the coin was no longer accepted as legal tender (Martin, 89). The wearable coin can no longer be circulated, and loses its role as a sacred extension of imperial sovereignty, in that it has been physically manipulated *into a new value context* (one of purely aesthetic value).

The buildup of silver surrounding the hole implies that it was punched through with some thin, sharp object (Markowitz). Drilled holes usually had smoother edges and showcased finer craftsmanship than punched coins.This *denarius*, therefore, was likely not the work of an experienced craftsman– the placement and shape of the hole reflect some amount of forethought, but not as much skill as might be expected from a jeweler (Markowitz). This implies an almost purely aesthetic appreciation of the part of the alterer, but not the means of inlaying the coin in silver or gold jewelry metalwork (Kushwaha). While upper class economic superiority could be consolidated through contemporary coin jewelry, it appears as though the *denarius* was worn by someone not of supreme economic or social advantage– appreciation for it as an aesthetic artifact did not have to directly coincide with a display of wealth. The denarius carries with it a complex interplay of coin visibility and class distinctions.

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