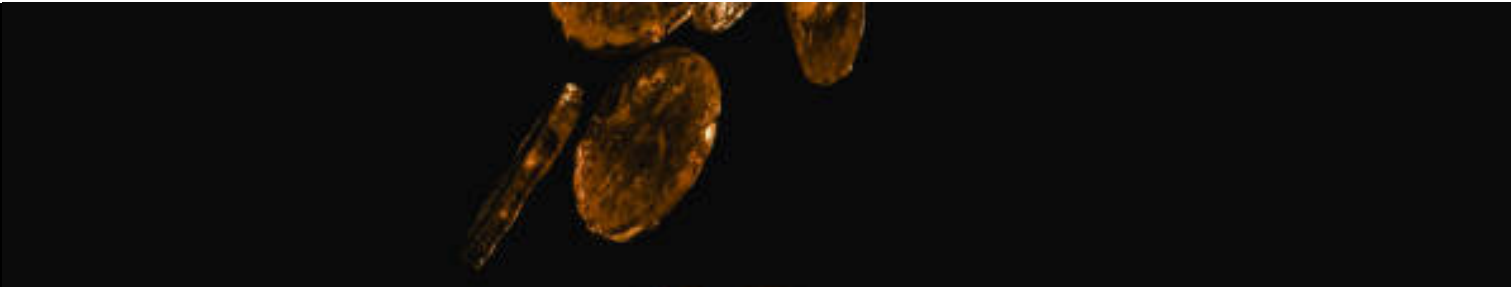




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ARCHAEO PILLS



INTERACTIVE TEACHING GUIDE

NUMISMATICS



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GUIDE INSTRUCTIONS

This interactive teaching guide is part of Archaeopills project, an educational initiative developed by several universities to promote the teaching of archaeology through innovate and engaging resources.

Designed for Primary Education, the guide introduces students to the past through numismatics, the study of ancient coins. These objects provide valuable evidence about trade, power, beliefs and everyday life in ancient societies.

The structure of the guide combines clear theoretical explanations with gamified learning activities that encourage observation, interpretation and collaborative work.

Throughout the document, a  marks the moments when students are invited to participate in an interactive challenge or task. This symbol represents learning through exploration and active involvement.

Students are encourage to think and act as young archaeologists, discovering history through material evidence.

The guide aims to foster curiosity about cultural heritage and develop key competences through meaningful and motivating learning experiences.

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INTRODUCTION TO NUMISMATICS

What is Numismatics?

Numismatics is the science that studies ancient coins and medals, from their economic value to their historical, artistic, and social significance. Through it, we can learn much more than just the value of an object: coins tell us stories about ancient people, kings, wars, religions, and trade exchanges.

Why are coins important for archaeologist?

Coins are one of the most useful finds for archaeologists because they:

- Help date the sites and layers in which they are found.
- Show who was in power at the time: Kings, emperors, and other rulers.
- Bear inscriptions, symbols, and portraits that make it possible to identify periods, historical figures, or events.
- Provide information about trade and commercial exchanges.
- Sometimes, they may appear in the form of hidden hoards, which can indicate conflicts, flight or insecurity.

Unlike other objects, coins are much easier to interpret. For this reason, numismatics is a fundamental tool for reconstructing history and understanding how societies of the past lived and thought.



Image 1. Numismatic cabinet with trays of ancient coins

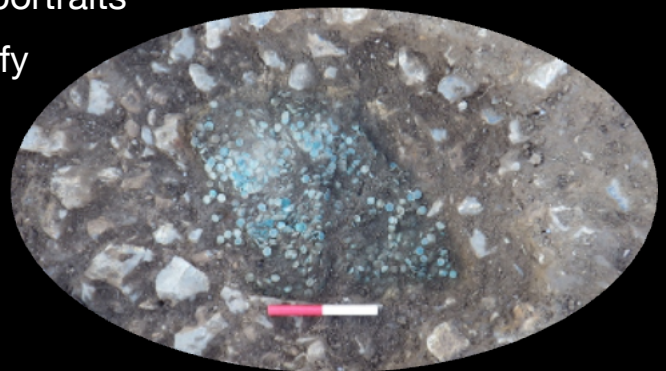


Image 2. Excavation of a coin hoard in a archaeological context

COINAGE IN ATINQUITY

The origin of coinage (Lydia, Phocaea, Ephesus)

The earliest known coins appeared in the region of Lydia, in present-day Turkey, around 650 BC. These coins were made of electrum, a natural alloy of gold and silver.



Image 3. Electrum coin from Lydia (c. 650 BC)

Cities such as Phocaea and Ephesus, located on the Jonian coast of Asia Minor, also began minting their own coins shortly afterward. These early issues had no inscriptions or portraits, but they often displayed engraved symbols

Numismatic Map



and were distinguished by their weight and metal.

This invention revolutionized the way exchanges were made. Until then, people relied on direct barter or objects as a means of payment (ingots, grains, animals, etc.).

The inventions of coinage represented a major advancement because it:

- Allowed assigning a specific value to products.
- Facilitated trade between different peoples.
- Created trust, as coins were controlled by local or state authorities.



Image 4. Map of Asian Minor with ancient cities

The transition from barter to economic value

Before coins, societies used symbols objects with an agreed-upon value to exchange goods. These systems were very limited: What happened if you had a sack of corn and the other person only had sheep?

With the invention of coinage, society moved to a much more practical and efficient system: economic value was represented in a durable and easily transportable object.

Moreover, coins became an instrument of propaganda: they displayed images of gods or symbols of the city that minted them. This sent the message: “This is valid because a powerful authority stands behind it”.

Therefore, ancient coins were not just a means to buy and sell-they were also symbols of power, identity, and relationships between peoples.



Image 5. Market scene in the forum of Pompeii

The study of ancient coins not only help us to identify places or cultures, but also to place them chronologically. As time went by, coins changed in shape, metal, decoration and use. This allows us to build a timeline of ancient history through coins.



ELEMENTS OF AN ANCIENT COIN

Ancient coins may seem like simple metal discs, but when examined closely, they reveal a wealth of encoded information. Below, we explain the main elements they usually contain.

Obverse and reverse

Coins have two sides:



Obverse: This is the main side. It often shows the portrait of and authority (a god or hero) along with an inscription of their name or title.

Reverse: This is the opposite side. It may depict symbols, animals, buildings, ritual objects, or mythical scenes. It can also include the name of the city or the name of the magistrate who had the coin minted.



Inscriptions, symbols and materials

Inscriptions are texts engraved on the coin. They can include:

- The name of the city.
- Events: for example, *EID MAR* refers to the Ides of March, when Brutus assassinated Julius Caesar.



Image 6. Visual comparison of metals in coins

Symbols can be:

- Religious: Gods, temples, ritual objects.
- Political or historical: The cap of freed slaves and the daggers with which Rome freed itself from its tyrant.
- Animals: Represent powers, cities or deities. The owl represent wisdom, knowledge, and the divine protection of the city.



Materials:

Ancient coins were mainly made from:

- Electrum: A natural mixture of gold and silver (very ancient).
- Silver: Widely used in Greece and Rome.
- Bronze: High-value coin for important transactions or reserves.

The metals not only indicated value, but also the geographical origin and technological capabilities of each culture.

Suggested Activity



Give the students of an ancient coin and ask them to identify the obverse, the reverse, the legend, the symbols and the possible material.

COINS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Commercial use

Coins were used in markets, ports, shops or exchanges to acquire:

- Food (grain, oil, wine, fish).
- Materials (wood, metal, ceramics).
- Clothes or slaves.
- Animals or tools.

Depending on its value, it was used in small or large transactions.

Payment to soldiers and tribute

Ancient states used coins to pay their armies. They were also used to collect tribute from other peoples or conquered cities.

Coinage served to consolidate political power and to control territories, since circulating a king's coin meant recognising his authority.

Propaganda and identity

The images on the coins communicated very clear messages:

- A victorious emperor.
- A powerful city.
- A protective god.

Thus, the coins became mobile messages that reached every corner of the Empire.

Were coins used

Make a list of everyday situations and ask the students if they think coins were used in that situation.



ACTIVITIES

Pedagogical objectives

- Foster critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning.
- Develop historical empathy and an understanding of past societies through material culture.
- Foster collaborative learning and teamwork.

- Simulate creativity and narrative skills from archaeological remains.
- Introduce students to the basic methods of archaeological interpretation and the value of material sources.

Key Competence

- Linguistic competence.
- Digital competence.
- Personal, Social and Learning to Learning competence.
- Citizenship competence.
- Cultural awareness and Expression competence.

Methodological Approach

The activities are based on active and inquiry-based learning, within the framework of project-based learning and meaningful learning. Students assume the role of young archaeologists, observing, formulating hypotheses and collaboratively reconstructing stories of the past.

The use of real archaeological materials (in image or replica format) provides an authentic and motivating context.



Escape Room for Primary Education

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