

## Money and Empire, c. 200-800 with Rebecca Darley

What is money for? Modern money keeps economies moving but did governments in the medieval world think about making shopping easier for their subjects? Did states issue money to pay for armies or to raise taxes? What can their coins tell us about political ambitions, artistic preferences and administrative structures? Coins are sometimes our only record of the names of powerful rulers in their day. In other cases they provide an alternative perspective to narrative or archaeological sources. This course uses money as a focal point for exploring the ways in which Late Antique and medieval societies of the Mediterranean and North Sea managed their economies. It also examines what happens when money is not money. Coins spread far beyond their economic zones and became objects of ritual, desire and imitation. Money was perhaps the single most direct material connection that most people c. 200-800 had with large systems of government and faraway places. 'Money and Empire' asks how this relationship affected lives and how it survives in written and archaeological records. It opens up through ancient and medieval coins ordinary lives, political intrigues and important questions about our own world, the ways we imagine government and the choices we make about how we use our money.



### Seminar themes

1. Introduction: what is money for? Examination of different theories of economic exchange and market systems.
2. The Roman monetary system – a normative model or a strange exception?
3. Byzantium: revision or revolution? Assessing the early Byzantine monetary system.
4. Style and substance in Merovingian coinage: what did 'imitating Rome' mean?
5. Continuity and change - reconstructing Sasanian history from numismatic evidence.
6. Anarchy coinage in the Levant c. 570-690: local and state responses to crisis.
7. Why did Abd al-Malik create a 'Muslim' currency?
8. When are coins money? Foreign and local coinage in India.
9. Doing it for themselves? New silver currencies in the North Sea
10. Conclusion – a comparative evaluation of money and empire in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

### Field Trip

This course will involve use of the collections at the British Museum, involving a handling session and gallery tour.

### Starter readings

Graeber, D. (2011) *Debt: the first 5000 years*, New York: Melville Press.

Grierson, P. (1992) 'Numismatics' in Powell, J. (ed.) *Medieval studies: an introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Syracuse University Press, 114-61.

Menger, C. (1892) 'On the origins of money', *Economic Journal* 2, 239-55, trans. C. Foley. Available online: [https://mises.org/sites/default/files/On%20the%20Origins%20of%20Money\\_5.pdf](https://mises.org/sites/default/files/On%20the%20Origins%20of%20Money_5.pdf)