



## As depicting Titus and Aequitas holding scales and rod (80-81 CE)

### obverse.jpg



[1]

### [reverse.jpg](#) [2]



[3]

**Denomination:** As

**Date:** 80 CE to 81 CE

**Material:** Bronze

**Mint:** Rome

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** British Museum Collection 204

American Numismatic Society: 1944.100.41803

**Name of Ruler:** Titus

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Inscription: IMP T CAES VESP AVG P M TR P COS VIII

Image: Laureate head of Titus, looking left

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):**

Inscription: AEQVITAS AVGVST S C

Image: Aequitas standing to the left, holding scales and a rod

**Diameter (mm):** 27.00mm

**Weight (g):** 10.54g

**Commentary:**

(RIC II/1<sup>2</sup>, Titus no. 215, p. 211)

This As, minted in Rome between 80 and 81 CE depicts on the obverse the emperor Titus (reigned 79-81 CE) wearing a laurel crown (a general symbol of honour and victory), and on the reverse the personification of *aequitas*, or equity/fairness. On imperial coinage *Aequitas* is generally depicted either standing (as in the present issue) or seated, holding in her left hand a rod, cornucopia (a symbol of wealth and abundance), or palm, and in her right hand a pair of balancing scales. In this coin of Titus she holds the rod, a ceremonial item which signified authority, in addition to the traditional scales (for examples of the various types, see Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 66 n. 103).



The inscription on the obverse, IMP(ERATOR) T(ITUS) CAES(AR) VESP(ASIANUS) AVG(USTUS) P(ONTIFEX) M(AXIMUS) TR(IBUNICIA) P(OTESTAS) COS VIII, translates as “imperator Titus Caesar Vespasian Augustus, pontifex maximus (chief priest), with tribunician power, consul for the eighth time”. The main inscription on the reverse, AEQUITAS AUGUST(I), translates roughly as “the fairness of the emperor,” specifically emphasising this virtue of the imperial ruler. The letters SC stand for *Senatus Consulto*, and indicate that the senate had decreed the issuing of the coin. In addition to “fairness” *aequitas* also communicates the notions of evenness and symmetry, hence the symbol of the balance scale. Numerous coin types were minted under various emperors from the first century CE with similar imagery of Aequitas as we find on this As of Titus (see Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 335), and as Erika Manders notes (drawing on the evidence presented by Carlos Noreña), the frequency of the theme of *aequitas* (along with *providentia*, *liberalitas*, *virtus*, and *pietas*) on coins during the period 69-235 CE suggests that these years saw a particular importance placed upon the emperor possessing it as a virtue (Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, p. 162; see, for instance, [Aureus depicting the head of Hadrian and Aequitas, the goddess of justice \(119-122 CE\)](#) [4]).

The personification of Aequitas referred to either the legal concept of equity or fairness between individuals. In Roman jurisprudence, *aequitas* was considered as one of the three main elements which contributed to the concept of *ius* (law), together with *leges* (statutes, laws) and *mores* (customs). For the Roman philosopher Cicero, who drew upon the scheme already outlined in Plato’s *Republic* IV.426-435, the concept of *aequitas*, which mirrored the Greek concept of ?????????? (*dikaïosun?*, justice or righteousness), was one of the four philosophical cardinal virtues, together with *temperantia* (moderation, temperance), *fortitudo* (bravery), and *prudencia* (wisdom) (Cicero, *On Invention* II.159). Cicero defined *aequitas* as tripartite in form: the first part pertained to the gods above, and was equivalent to *pietas*, religious obligation; the second part referred to the Manes, the underworld spirits or spirits of the dead, and was equivalent to *sanctitas*, that which is sacred; and the third part pertained to human beings, and was equivalent to *iustitia*, justice (Cicero, *Topica* 90). However, as we shall see, the representation of Aequitas on coins such as the present example may not be directly related to the judicial system, but rather to the notion of fairness in the monetary realm instead.

As Carlos Noreña explains, Aequitas represented fairness, which was the most important characteristic of ideal imperial justice. It was the “broad, central meaning of *aequitas* as justice or fairness and, in particular, the term’s semantic overlap between an abstract principle of jurisprudence and a personal quality of individuals...that makes *aequitas* so resonant as an imperial virtue” (*Imperial Ideals*, p. 64). The inhabitants of the Roman empire would have placed much value on *aequitas* due to its close association with the process of judicial inquiry, or *cognitio*. The *cognitio* was the final verdict given by the emperor as supreme judge, or a provincial governor, once he had supervised and concluded all the relevant investigations required by a particular case. However, there were no external laws binding the judges in this situation, and arbitrary judgement was a danger (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 65; for an example of such proceedings, see the [inscription recording Caracalla’s court minutes in Dmeir \(Syria\)](#) [5]). However, for Noreña, this interpretation broadens the message of this coin type excessively (*Imperial Ideals*, p. 66-67). He draws attention to the image of Aequitas on the reverse holding her iconic scales (which were symbolic of the economic sphere where things were weighed, and coins were valued), and argues that the context in which the Aequitas type was introduced, under the emperor Galba (reigned 68-69 CE; see Wallace-Hadrill, “Galba’s Aequitas”), militates against reading the message of such coins as one of judicial fairness. Noreña explains that this coin type responded to rebel mints which had promoted coins featuring Moneta, the personification of the monetary system, who was closely associated with Aequitas. Their symbolism and legends became almost identical. For this reason, it is argued by Noreña that coin types such as that in the present example forward a message of financial fairness, suggesting that the emperor oversaw an economy that was both fruitful and honest. The notion of *aequitas* as an imperial virtue is therefore important in relation to the fact that the emperor was at the head of the empire’s financial institutions and as such represented their “intrinsic value” even if he had little involvement in day-to-day business of mints etc. (*Imperial Ideals*, p. 67).

The fact that on the present issue the reverse inscription reads “AEQVITAS AVGVST(I)” more specifically ties the personified virtue to the emperor Titus himself. Therefore, this coin forwards the message that Titus was committed to promoting fairness within the empire, possibly (if the argument of Noreña outlined above is correct) directly in relation to the imperial monetary system. Indeed, Titus’s father Vespasian, the previous emperor (reigned 69-79 CE), very frequently utilised the symbolism of *aequitas* on his coinage in order to emphasise that he was rectifying the economic unrest caused by Nero’s excessive policies (on which see recently, for instance, the discussion in Butcher and Ponting, “The Reforms of Nero,” p. 230-234) and the civil war which came after his death. Titus subsequently followed in his father’s footsteps—continuing among other things the AEQVITAS AVGVST(I) reverse type that Vespasian had also minted (see Reece, *Roman Coins*, p. 82) (e.g. RIC II/1<sup>2</sup>, Vespasian, no. 893, p. 123) this bears the same reverse iconography as the present As of Titus, with Aequitas



holding a rod and sceptre). In this way, Titus could make clear on coins such as this example that under his rule fairness and equality would remain.

Keywords in the original language:

- [aequitas Augusti](#) [6]
- [senatus consultum](#) [7]
- [imperator](#) [8]
- [Augustus](#) [9]
- [Titus](#) [10]
- [Vespasianus](#) [11]
- [pontifex maximus](#) [12]
- [tribunicia potestas](#) [13]

Thematic keywords:

- [Titus](#) [14]
- [Aequitas](#) [15]
- [Roman justice](#) [16]
- [Moneta](#) [17]
- [scales](#) [18]
- [rod](#) [19]
- [fairness](#) [20]
- [equity](#) [21]
- [equality](#) [22]
- [monetary system](#) [23]
- [Roman economy](#) [24]

**Bibliographical references:**

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### [Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284 \[26\]](#)

Manders, Erik book *Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284* Leiden - New York Brill 2012

### [Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power \[27\]](#)

Noreña, Carlos F. book *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power* Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2011

### [Roman Coins \[28\]](#)

Reece, Richard book *Roman Coins* London Ernest Benn 1970



## [“Galba’s Aequitas” \[29\]](#)

Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew article-in-a-journal 20-39141 “Galba’s Aequitas” The Numismatic Chronicle 1981

**Other sources connected with this document:** Numismatic item

## [Aureus depicting the head of Hadrian and Aequitas, the goddess of justice \(119-122 CE\) \[30\]](#)

- [Read more about Aureus depicting the head of Hadrian and Aequitas, the goddess of justice \(119-122 CE\) \[30\]](#)

Inscription

## [Caracalla’s court minutes in Dmeir \(Syria\) \[31\]](#)

Bilingual minutes of a hearing in a tribunal presided by Caracalla in Antioch, with a case involving the piety of the emperor.

- [Read more about Caracalla’s court minutes in Dmeir \(Syria\) \[31\]](#)

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- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aureus-depicting-head-hadrian-and-aequitas-goddess-justice-119-122-ce>
- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/caracalla%E2%80%99s-court-minutes-dmeir-syria>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/aequitas-augusti>
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- [30] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/aureus-depicting-head-hadrian-and-aequitas-goddess-justice-119-122-ce>
- [31] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/caracalla%E2%80%99s-court-minutes-dmeir-syria>
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