



Denarius depicting Septimius Severus and the goddess Iustitia, holding a patera and sceptre (198-202 CE)

Denarius depicting Septimius Severus and the goddess Iustitia, holding a patera and sceptre (198-202 CE) - Obverse



[1]

[Denarius depicting Septimius Severus and the goddess Iustitia, holding a patera and sceptre \(198-202 CE\) - Reverse](#) [2]



[3]

Denomination: Denarius

Date: 198 CE to 202 CE

Material: Silver

Mint:

Laodicea ad Mare

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): British Museum Collection 660

American Numismatic Society: 1944.100.50262

<http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.50262?lang=en>

Name of Ruler: Septimius Severus

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Inscription: L SEPT SEV AVG IMP XI PART MAX

Image: Laureate head of Septimius Severus, looking right

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Inscription: IVSTITIA

Image: Iustitia seated, left, holding a patera and sceptre

Diameter (mm): 19.20mm

Weight (g): 3.21g



Commentary:

(RIC IV/I, Septimius Severus no. 505, p. 160)

This denarius, minted at Laodicea ad Mare between 198 and 202 CE depicts on the obverse the emperor Septimius Severus (reigned 193-211 CE) wearing a laurel crown (which symbolised honour and victory in general, but particularly military victory on the part of Roman emperors), and on the reverse the goddess Iustitia, who sits holding a patera (a bowl used in sacrificial rituals) and sceptre, two of her identifying attributes on imperial coinage (see Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 67 n. 104). The inscription on the obverse refers to the emperor as L(UCIUS) SEPT(IMIUS) SEV(ERUS) AVG(USTUS) IMP(ERATOR) XI PART(HICUS) MAX(IMUS), which translates as “Lucius Septimius Severus Augustus, acclaimed emperor for the eleventh time, great victor in Parthia.” Parthicus Maximus refers to the emperor’s victory against the Parthians in 197-198 CE, after which he took the title Parthicus, which had previously only been assumed by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus after the victorious conclusion of the Parthian War of 161-166 CE (see [Aureus depicting the head of Septimius Severus and Victoria, the goddess of victory \(198-200 CE\)](#) [4]).

The personification of the virtue *iustitia* was introduced by Augustus, with justice being one of the most prominent features of his reign, and was followed by emperors after him (such as Vespasian, on which see below). *Iustitia* was one of the four virtues carved onto the honorific shield set up in the Curia Julia in 27 CE in the emperor’s honour (see *Res Gestae* XXXIV; [Aureus depicting the head of Augustus and the Clipeus Virtutis \(19-18 BCE\)](#) [5]; on the relationship between Augustus and justice see also, for example, [Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV.832-833](#) [6] and [Horace, *Odes* IV.5.1-40](#) [7]). A temple to the goddess Iustitia was then established in Rome at the beginning of 13 CE by Tiberius. Iustitia was therefore still a relatively young deity compared to many others in the Roman pantheon when this coin was minted in Septimius Severus’s day. As Erika Manders has noted, while the five imperial virtues *providentia*, *liberalitas*, *virtus*, *pietas*, and *aequitas* were often associated with the emperor in the period 193-284 CE, the other virtues, *indulgentia*, *pudicitia*, *munificentia*, *patientia*, *clementia*, and *iustitia* were less common. It seems, therefore, that the former five virtues were considered the most crucial for the emperor to possess in this period. In this sense, the present coin is somewhat rare. Indeed, Carlos Noreña has argued that *iustitia* appears on only two percent of denarii found and dated to the period between Augustus and Septimius Severus (see also the tables in Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 60, which account for the period 69-325 CE; however, he does note that scholars rely on the evidence of catalogues, which do not necessarily accurately reflect the reality; “The Communication,” p. 156 n. 52).

The other virtue which was associated with imperial fairness and justice was *aequitas*, and this was much more widely represented on the imperial coinage (for examples, see [As depicting Titus and Aequitas holding scales and a rod \(80-81 CE\)](#) [8] and [Aureus depicting the head of Hadrian and Aequitas, the goddess of justice \(119-122 CE\)](#) [9]). However, Noreña has argued that the *aequitas* iconography was primarily associated with fairness in the imperial mint, rather than distributing a broader message of imperial justice (*Imperial Ideals*, p. 66-71). It seems puzzling that *iustitia*, recognised as one of the cardinal virtues, was not more common on numismatic representations of the emperor’s virtues. It has been suggested by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill that there were so many other avenues of expression of imperial justice, such as published edicts, imperial tribunals, and imperial *rescripta*, for instance, that coinage was not seen as necessary for the communication of this particular message (“Galba’s Aequitas,” p. 37; for this argument, see also Noreña, “The Communication,” p. 157 and n. 58, where it is discussed in relation specifically to Augustus, but suggested on later emperors also). Noreña also theorises that perhaps it is not the case that justice was underrepresented on the coinage, but overrepresented in literary sources written by Roman aristocrats who emphasised its importance in order to encourage emperors to submit to law (*Imperial Ideals*, p. 62). Whatever the case, *iustitia* took a secondary position to other imperial virtues on imperial coins.

Despite being much rarer than other virtue depictions, *iustitia* and its personification does appear on some coinage of the first and early-second century. For example, Vespasian minted coins depicting Iustitia on a throne accompanied by the legend IVSTITIA AVGVSTA, or standing (e.g. RIC II/I², Vespasian no. 1532, dated to 70 CE), and was followed by other emperors (very similar to the present denarius is one minted under Hadrian in Rome, AD 134 - AD 138 (RIC II Hadrian 362e: <http://numismatics.org/collection/0000.999.18584?lang=en> [10])). Fears points out that during the late-second and early-third centuries, the period to which this issue of Septimius Severus is dated, commemoration of imperial virtues including *iustitia* saw a revival on coinage (“The Cult of Virtues,” p. 903). Anthony Birley has argued that the interpretation of the law and administration of justice was one of the major features of Septimius Severus’s reign (*Septimius Severus*, p. 106, 164). This could explain why issues featuring *iustitia* were minted during his reign. Birley cites Cassius Dio, a senator during Severus’s time, who describes both the emperor’s enacting of adultery laws (*Roman History* 77.16.4) and his praiseworthy behaviour in court: “he



would hold court, unless there were some great festival. Moreover, he used to do this most excellently; for he allowed the litigants plenty of time and he gave us, his advisers, full liberty to speak" (*Roman History* 77.17.1 according to the numbering in the Loeb edition of Earnest Cary, 1914-1927, which is the translation used here). Birley also cites Aurelius Victor's *De Caesaribus* 20.34, which describes Severus as "establishing extremely impartial laws" (translation by H. W. Bird, *Aurelius Victor*, p. 23). However, as Bird argues, Victor's mention of Severus's attitude to laws is very superficial, and suggestive of a lack of detailed information on this matter in his source (*Aurelius Victor*, p. 109). Aurelius Victor wrote in the fourth century, and so his account must be used with great caution in any case.

Despite the notion of Roman justice being something which is heavily emphasised in other evidence as one of the major benefits of the empire (for discussions of the theme of Roman justice, see, for example, the commentaries on [Horace, Odes I.12.49-60](#) [11]; [Dio Chrysostom, Speeches XLI.8-10](#) [12]; [Claudian, On the Consulship of Stilicho III.130-161](#) [13]; [Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae XIV.6.3-6](#) [14]; [Augustine, City of God XIX.24](#) [15]), the imperial coinage gives it relatively little attention. However, issues such as the present denarius evidence some desire, even if it was relatively limited, to emphasise through the monetary system the emperor's role in the maintenance of justice and fairness in the empire.

Keywords in the original language:

- [iustitia](#) [16]
- [Augustus](#) [17]
- [imperator](#) [18]
- [Parthicus Maximus](#) [19]

Thematic keywords:

- [Septimius Severus](#) [20]
- [Roman justice](#) [21]
- [Roman law](#) [22]
- [Iustitia](#) [23]
- [imperial virtues](#) [24]
- [sceptre](#) [25]
- [patera](#) [26]

Bibliographical references:

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[Septimius Severus: The African Emperor](#) [28]

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["The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology"](#) [29]

Fears, J. R. article-in-a-journal 827-948 17.2 "The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology" *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II* 1981

[Iustitia sur les monnaies impériales romaines](#) [30]



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[Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284 \[31\]](#)

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[Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power \[32\]](#)

Noreña, Carlos F.book*Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power*CambridgeCambridge University Press2011

["The Communication of the Emperor's Virtues" \[33\]](#)

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["Galba's Aequitas" \[34\]](#)

Wallace-Hadrill, Andrewarticle-in-a-journal20-39141"Galba's Aequitas" The Numismatic Chronicle 1981

Other sources connected with this document: Numismatic item

[Aureus depicting the head of Septimius Severus and Victoria, the goddess of victory \(198-200 CE\) \[35\]](#)

- [Read more about Aureus depicting the head of Septimius Severus and Victoria, the goddess of victory \(198-200 CE\) \[35\]](#)

Text

[Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV.745-759; 803-851 \[36\]](#)

Julius Caesar is transformed into a star

- [Read more about Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV.745-759; 803-851 \[36\]](#)

Text

[Horace, *Odes* IV.5.1-40 \[37\]](#)

Plea to Augustus to return



- [Read more about Horace, Odes IV.5.1-40](#) [37]

Text

[Horace, Odes I.12.49-60](#) [38]

Augustus and Jupiter

- [Read more about Horace, Odes I.12.49-60](#) [38]

Text

[Dio Chrysostom, Speeches XLI.8-10](#) [39]

Praise of Rome's generosity regarding the grant of its citizenship and its sense of justice.

- [Read more about Dio Chrysostom, Speeches XLI.8-10](#) [39]

Text

[Claudian, On the Consulship of Stilicho III.130-161](#) [40]

Praise of Rome

- [Read more about Claudian, On the Consulship of Stilicho III.130-161](#) [40]

Text

[Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae XIV.6.3-6](#) [41]

Praise of Rome and reflection about the old age of the Roman people.

- [Read more about Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae XIV.6.3-6](#) [41]

Text

[Augustine, City of God XIX.24](#) [42]

What constitutes a "people," and how the Roman people are understood by Augustine

- [Read more about Augustine, City of God XIX.24](#) [42]

Numismatic item



[As depicting Titus and Aequitas holding scales and rod \(80-81 CE\)](#) [43]

- [Read more about As depicting Titus and Aequitas holding scales and rod \(80-81 CE\)](#) [43]

Numismatic item

[Aureus depicting the head of Hadrian and Aequitas, the goddess of justice \(119-122 CE\)](#) [44]

- [Read more about Aureus depicting the head of Hadrian and Aequitas, the goddess of justice \(119-122 CE\)](#) [44]

Realized by:

[Kimberley Fowler](#) [45]



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Links

- [1] https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/obverse_0.jpg?itok=zDYmuqEr
- [2] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/denarius-depicting-septimius-severus-and-goddess-iustitia-holding-patera-and-sceptre-198-202-ce>
- [3] https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/reverse_0.jpg?itok=5FyaOTIC
- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aureus-depicting-head-septimius-severus-and-victoria-goddess-victory-198-200-ce>
- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aureus-depicting-head-augustus-and-clipeus-virtutis-19%C2%A0bce>
- [6] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/ovid-metamorphoses-xv745-759-803-851>
- [7] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/horace-odes-iv51-40>
- [8] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/depicting-titus-and-aequitas-holding-scales-and-rod-80-81-ce>
- [9] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/aureus-depicting-head-hadrian-and-aequitas-goddess-justice-119-122-ce>
- [10] <http://numismatics.org/collection/0000.999.18584?lang=en>
- [11] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/horace-odes-i1249-60>
- [12] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/dio-chrysostom-speeches%C2%A0xli8-10>
- [13] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/claudian-consulship-stilicho%C2%A0iii130-161>
- [14] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/ammianus-marcellinus-res-gestae%C2%A0xiv63-6>
- [15] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/augustine-city-god-xix24>
- [16] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/iustitia>
- [17] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/augustus>
- [18] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/imperator>
- [19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/parthicus-maximus>
- [20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/septimius-severus>
- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-justice>
- [22] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-law>
- [23] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/iustitia>
- [24] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/imperial-virtues>



- [25] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/sceptre>
- [26] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/patera>
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- [29] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Ccult-virtues-and-roman-imperial-ideology%E2%80%9D>
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- [31] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/coining-images-power-patterns-representation-roman-emperors-imperial-coinage-ad-193-284>
- [32] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/imperial-ideals-roman-west-representation-circulation-power>
- [33] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/communication-emperors-virtues>
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- [41] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/ammianus-marcellinus-res-gestae%C2%A0xiv63-6>
- [42] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/augustine-city-god-xix24>
- [43] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/depicting-titus-and-aequitas-holding-scales-and-rod-80-81-ce>
- [44] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/aureus-depicting-head-hadrian-and-aequitas-goddess-justice-119-122-ce>
- [45] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/kimberley-fowler>