

School 41
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Age 12

The World of the Roman Provinces

Pautalia in Thracia

Aaahhh, I guess it's time to get up and go to work at the mint. Oh yes, Caracalla is emperor. Boy, it sure is taking a long time to get used to Caracalla being the emperor now. We were all so used to Severus as emperor that it's taking a long time to get used to Caracalla.¹ After Caracalla was proclaimed emperor in year 211, just a few weeks ago, everyone still felt like calling our emperor Severus.

All I can think of is coins, coins, coins. Caracalla has hired the mint of Pautalia, located in Thrace, which I work for to design a coin for his rule. We are getting extra pay for our designs for the coin. Then again, my mind has been on family issues, also. They live in Epidarus near the temple of the renowned Asklepios, the great healer. It is ironic that my mother is sick in the home of the great healer. Many have tried to cure her, but none have succeeded. Our family is fairly rich, and we can afford to hire learned doctors for healing. Oh, I must not think about that now; I must design the coin that Caracalla will choose for his coin. The mint owner has warned us that Caracalla's treasury official will be visiting our mint these next few days, and we must have a coin ready to present to Caracalla.

I got out of bed and wrapped on my toga, for being a native Roman, I dressed in the Roman garb and called things by their Roman name. I slipped on my sandals and walked out of my atrium. On my way to the mint, I stopped by the bakery for a quick meal. I sat down at a table with another one of the artisans that worked at the mint with me. We had our rolls, paid, and headed towards the mint.

"Have any ideas for a coin design, Constantinus?" my friend Felicianus Faustus asked. My full name was Constantinus Honoratus, but we were friendly enough to call each other by our first names.

"No, and if I did, I wouldn't tell you. You'd steal them from me." We both laughed at this although it was a serious answer, for everyone knows a Roman will swindle money from anyone. We both were friendly enough to take both the question and answer lightly. We strode into the Temple of Juno and stepped into the basement of the temple where the mint is located. We sat at our stations, luckily next to each other, and started on our designs for the coin. I sat down and stared at my tablet. I could think of nothing to carve for the design of the coin. I sighed and set my chin on my hands.

"What does Caracalla represent?" I mumbled to myself. I pounded my palm on my head.

¹The emperor Septimus Severus ruled in the years 193-211 CE, and his heir Caracalla ruled in the years 211-217 CE

“Argh!” I couldn’t think of anything. I spent the day lightly carving Caracalla’s face on the tablet, for I knew he would want his face on it. I walked back to my house, disappointed after the day was over. I lay down on my bed, but I didn’t eat. I wasn’t hungry. A messenger arrived and dropped a parcel off at my door. The parcel contained a message from my brother, telling me that my mother had been improving greatly. It turns out that she was helped by a descendent of Asklepios.

“Thank Jupiter. She’s finally cured,” I said gleefully. “In gratitude, I will carve Asklepios on the coin.” I smiled at how I would carve it. “Caracalla will be like Asklepios, for as Asklepios healed people, Caracalla will heal the land. And as Python protected the Oracle of Delphi until he was killed by the father of Asklepios, Apollo, Caracalla will protect the land!” It was ingenious! I couldn’t go to the mint now, for it was closed. Anyway, it was late, and I needed my sleep because Caracalla’s treasury official could be visiting our mint soon to look at the coin designs. As I lay on my bed, I drifted into a deep sleep. All I dreamed about that whole night was the design for the coin that I would be carving today. It seemed like the coin developed in my head for days before I woke up. The sun was still low in the sky so I knew I hadn’t overslept. I whipped on my toga and stretched my legs, for they were stiff from sleeping awkwardly on my bed last night. I walked to the bakery where I met with Felicianus, and we took the loaves on the road.

“I have heard that Caracalla’s treasury official is coming to see the coin design today!” Felicianus exclaimed excitedly. I choked on part of my roll and tripped in a chariot rut. I hadn’t expected him to come today.

“Are you okay?” Felicianus asked concernedly.

“What time?!” I asked in a raspy voice.

“Sometime after midday. Why?” he questioned.

“Sorry, I have to finish my coin before he comes!” I raced off in the direction of the mint. I ran down the stairs into the mint, skipping a few at a time. I slid on my sandals into my workstation. I started sketching the design I had dreamed up. Asclepius rode on the back of the dragon Python while the dragon was in flight. I carved quickly but neatly. It seemed I had just finished the carving of my coin when the treasury official arrived. We all lined up at the edge of the mint, and the treasury official inspected each one of our coins. As he went down the line, he told certain people to step forward. Felicianus was standing right next to me. The treasury official took the coin from Felicianus’s hand and inspected it carefully.

“Please step forward,” the treasury official said calmly. Felicianus smiled at me as he stepped forward into the small group of those chosen to be taken to Rome so Caracalla could choose the coin he liked most.

“Hand me your coin please,” the treasury official commanded me. I handed him the coin hopefully. He inspected it carefully and looked up at me.

“You designed this?” he asked in a hushed tone.

“Yes?” I asked questioningly, for I didn’t know whether he was accusing me of something.

“Very impressive.” He winked at me.

“Step forward please,” he said with a slight smile on his face. I looked at Felicianus and saw the joy on his face that both of us would be traveling to Rome to meet

the emperor, Caracalla. We would both get rewards for being chosen as designer of one of the final coins that Caracalla would choose from.

“Keep good hold of your coins because you are responsible for bringing them on the caravan,” the treasury official told us as if scolding us. Felicianus and I walked back to our houses. We happened to be neighbors so we could walk back from the mint together most days. I showed him the design on my coin, and he on his. He complimented me on the preciseness of my carving. His showed Caracalla’s face on the front, and Mars, the god of war on the back. It was very neatly done, but he confessed that the design on the coin signified nothing in particular. We waved to each other as I went into the butcher shop to buy some meat. We were going to have a supper at my house in celebration of our selection to be taken to Rome. We had to meet in the morning of the next day. I purchased cow meat for our supper, and the butcher threw in some meat scraps for my dog as a congratulatory gift. I brought it to my house and gave it to my slaves to prepare for us. I put on a clean toga and met Felicianus in my tablinium. We ate our meat joyously and talked over supper. After dinner, we took a relaxing dip in the public baths. I said good bye to Felicianus and said a silent prayer of thanks for my coin being chosen. I walked into my cubiculum and fell asleep.

I woke up the next morning, and it seemed later than usual. I looked outside, and the sun was higher in the sky than I thought it was. I quickly wrapped on my toga, slipped into my sandals, grabbed my coin, and rushed out my door. I ran to the town center to see the caravan leaving. I whistled and ran for the back of the caravan. Felicianus looked out the back of the carriage to see me running for the back. He reached out his hand and pulled me into the carriage.

“Whew, that was close,” I sighed. I collapsed from exhaustion in the back of the carriage. I slept the whole way to Rome. I was woken up when the carriage bounced to a halt. We were walked into the imperial palace so that Caracalla could see us all. Caracalla walked in royally, guards following a respectful pace behind him. We all bowed our heads in respect.

“I thank you for coming to Rome.” His voiced boomed like a lion’s roar. He inspected each of our coins, not showing favoritism in any one. He stepped back and took a look at all of us.

“I have almost verified my choice for the coin for the province of Thracia!” We were all nervous and fidgety.

“You, and you, step forward.” He pointed at Felicianus and me. We looked at each other, took a deep breath, and stepped forward.

“Show me your coin designs again,” he commanded. We both gave them to him willingly.

“Very good workmanship on both of these coins,” he muttered under his breath.

“This coin will be the coin produced for the province of Thracia!” He proclaimed as he held up my coin into the air. I smiled.

“Oh, thank the gods.”