

## On the Money: Bridge Imagery on Coins

**Damian J. Kulash**

**President and CEO, (retired) Eno Transportation Foundation**

**Former Executive Director, Strategic Highway Research Program**

### Abstract

Coins are an important tool for influencing public thought. Coins were mass produced long before the Internet, television, and daily newspapers. They were minted for centuries before the Guttenberg Bible and before widespread literacy, using imagery that was carefully crafted to deliver a message to the people using them.

The earliest coins were produced in Lydia around 640 BC. Within a century almost 1,000 Greek city states were producing coins, each using an emblem that symbolized the place. Many pictured mythological figures. As Rome grew in influence, it too produced coins, mostly with mythological or religious motifs. Julius Caesar broke with tradition and pictured himself on the coinage.

Coins not only underscore who is in charge: they also deliver messages about the nation's aspirations or accomplishments. At times this iconography features bridges: throughout history about 900 different coins picturing bridges have been minted, as have roughly 10,000 different bridge numismatic objects such as jetons, condors, notgeld, souvenir pieces, military orders, illustrated fare tokens, and commemorative pieces.

Although there are many bridge coins, they comprise only a miniscule proportion of the total coinage. Images of bridges on coins are used sparingly, purposefully, and for wide-ranging purposes: to celebrate military conquest, to stress political integration or national unity, to symbolize friendly relations with abutting countries, to celebrate historic events, to illustrate technological advance, to demonstrate economic development, or to honor cultural landmarks.

This paper discusses the nuanced imagery behind eleven illustrative bridge coins:

<b>Bridge</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Roman Antioch ad Meandrum	Turkey	Military might
Regensburg Stone Bridge	Germany	Economic power
Ironbridge	England	Engineering innovation
Victoria Falls	Zimbabwe	Economic development
Jamuna	Bangladesh	Economic development
Shahara	Yemen	National unity
Burnside	United States	Historic commemoration
Sydney Harbour	Australia	National landmark
25 <sup>th</sup> of April	Portugal	Modernization
Anji (Zhaozhuo)	China	Engineering innovation
Stari Most	Bosnia Herzegovina	National unity