

Architecture on Coins

By Carol Schwyzer, MoneyMuseum

"Show me how you build and I will tell you who you are," said the poet Christian Morgenstern (*1871, †1914).

The building activity of mankind is as old as the hills. Depending on the available material and the prevailing developments of technology, practically all cultures have created buildings which are still admired today. Famous buildings are part of a country's or a town's identity. Anyone who sees the Colosseum thinks of Rome. The Eiffel Tower is equated with Paris.

Architecture first and foremost originated from the human need for protection and security. Then people built dwellings for their gods, so that the latter could stay among them and have their effect on them. Buildings have also long served to represent power and the need to overcome the passing of time. And not least, good architecture satisfies man's desire for beauty and harmony.

Prestigious buildings also represent the ideas and the political and economic system of their times. And many owners were so proud of their works that they placed them on their coins, as this picture tour shows.

A house for the diety



Denarius, minted under the Roman mint master Marcus Volteius, Rome, 78 BC

By means of sacred buildings mankind reveals its relation to a transcendental power. It builds "houses of God" in which the divine among them linger and can protect them.

This denarius from the year 78 BC shows the oldest depiction of a building on a coin. The Jupiter Temple is enthroned on the Capitoline Hill and accommodated the statue of the chief of the Roman gods. He was the focus of the Roman world and symbolised Rome's significance as the capital of a powerful empire.

In Roman sacred building Greek and Etruscan influences are combined. The austere frontal alignment as well as the high pedestal, only to be reached over steps from the front through which the holy building stands out from the surroundings, are Etruscan. The lightning on the pediment is probably not a real sculpture, but indicates who owns the temple.

At the time when this denarius was minted the Jupiter Temple, which burnt down in the year 83 BC, was a building site. Its reconstruction was an important concern of the dictator Lucius Sulla (around *138/34 BC, †78 BC), as all the major ceremonies took place in front of this temple, for example, the inauguration of the consuls on 1st January or the thanksgiving sacrifices to Jupiter for the victorious generals.

Built in honour of the ancestress



Denarius, minted under the Roman mint master Gaius Considius Nonianus, Rome, 57 BC

The Temple of Venus Erycina in Sicily, not far from present-day Erice, was at the same time a house of god and a brothel. It was famous for its wealth and temple prostitution in honour of the goddess of love. Sicily, the former Greek colony, was Rome's granary. For that reason Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus travelled over the island when he was entrusted with the supervision of Rome's grain supplies in 57 BC. It is assumed that the senate instructed the mint master Considius Nonianus to strike this coin in order to provide money for grain.

The same Venus Erycina, to whom the Roman magistrates sent tributes and sacrifices on their visits to Sicily, was also worshiped in Rome. After all, the divine mother of Aeneas was regarded by the Romans as the progenitor. Thus in the capital in 118 BC they built the Venus Temple which appears on this coin and which is said to have been an exact copy of the Temple of Eryx (Erice).

The gate and wall, which demarcate the temples and the holy precinct and thus indicate that whoever was allowed to enter here leaves the profane earthly reality behind.

The significance of the infrastructure



Denarius, minted under the Roman mint master Lucius Marcius Philippus, Rome, 56 BC

So that an expanding empire such as the Roman one functioned it required not only temples for protection by the gods, but also a sound infrastructure. Like today, for large cities at that time the provision of food and water as well as the disposal of the remains was important.

When the local wells and fountains could no longer satisfy the constantly increasing water requirements of the city's population, the Romans built aqueducts, water channels, most of which ran along arched bridges. On this coin the Aqua Marcia (recognisable by the letters: "AQVAM[A]R") is depicted. This aqueduct built by Ancius Marcius, the legendary 4th king of Rome, was the longest aqueduct to supply the city. In 144 BC the aqueduct was renovated by the praetor Quintus Marcius Rex, an ancestor of the mint master who was honoured for his achievement with an equestrian statue.

The Romans, by the way, were provided with an elaborate waste water disposal system ever since Etruscan times (including the cloaca maxima). They were the first in the Western world to give priority to functional building over sacred architecture.

A house for public purposes



Denarius, minted under the Roman mint master Publius Fonteius Capito, Rome, 55 BC

A city like Rome also required not only buildings for popular amusements but also public buildings for the administration and its image in the service of the population. The Villa Publica (literally: the people's house) stood outside the city on the field of Mars, where the army exercised and troops were conscripted.

The villa, erected as early as the 5th century BC, served various purposes. The censors used it as fixed quarters to determine taxable income. In the villa, however, foreign ambassadors were also accommodated and now and then prisoners were held there. Not least the general would wait with representatives of his army while the senators negotiated whether they wanted to grant him a triumph.

Under the Romans architecture developed enormously. New building materials, such as cast concrete and walls made of fired bricks made new architectonic forms possible, for example, multistorey buildings. In the first century BC the Roman architect and engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio described the characteristics of Roman architecture, including arches, in his *Ten Books on Architecture*, the only surviving ancient work on the subject.

A castle at the intersection of the Orient and the Occident



Gros, minted under Bohemond IV, count of Tripoli and, as Bohemond VII, also nominal prince of Antioch (1275-1287), Tripoli

The castle that can be seen on this gros is to be found in present-day Syria, an area that the Crusaders crossed on their way to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages. There they founded the county of Tripolis, one of the four Crusaders' states.

The Krak des Chavaliers, originally a Muslim fortress, was captured by the Crusaders in 1099. In 1144 it was taken over by the Order of the Knights of St. John and turned into a huge fortress. The two-storey façade with the three slightly protruding towers which strengthened the construction can be seen on the coin.

The Krak des Chevaliers was, as it should be for a proper castle, built on a geographically suitable location and offered protection for some 2,000 men. It stands over the west bank of the Nahr al-Asi (the ancient river of Orontes), from where you could overlook the important north-south route from Syria into the Holy Land. The castle can only be approached from one side, which makes it practically impregnable. The two concentric walls of the castle consist of two huge towers connected to one another and withstood every siege. The weak point of the construction was the supply of water over an aqueduct from the surrounding mountains that could be blocked.

Not until 1271 did the Egyptian army under Sultan Baybars (1260-1277) succeed in storming the Krak after a long siege. The Krak des Chevaliers is – from the view of the Occident as well as the Orient – the outstanding symbol of the time of the Crusades. Since 2006 it has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Titel fehlt !!!!!!!!!!!



Taler, minted under Moritz, duke of Saxony-Zeitz (1656-1681), 1667

What Versailles was for Louis XIV (1643-1715), was for Moritz, the fledgling duke of Saxony-Zeitz, his "Moritzburg Castle" on the Elster. In 1652 his father, Prince Elector Johann Georg I of Saxony, had distributed his land by will among his four sons and thus created three secundogeniture dukedoms. Moritz thus became the sovereign of Saxony-Zeitz.

As an expression of his new power and dignity, in 1657 he had a new palace erected on the site of the bishop' palace destroyed in the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). The early Baroque palace grounds comprise a main building with three wings, the middle wing culminating in a tower, a baroque gatehouse and diverse annexes. The former "cathedral" was integrated into the building as the castle church of St. Peter and Paul.

The baroque falls into the time of the Counter-Reformation and of absolutism, which heightened the power of the princes. Like Louis XIV, though to a lesser extent, Moritz of Saxony-Zeitz used the baroque art to show his power and wealth, and also the fitness to fight, which his dukedom needed as it was always raked by war.

In honour to God, glory to his representative



Scudo, minted under Pope Innocent XI (1676-1689), Rome, 1677

The church, which is proudly emblazoned on this coin, is regarded as the greatest Christian building and as the principal place of Christianity. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome symbolises the greatness of God, but also reflects the spiritual and worldly power of the church state.

When in the middle of the 15th century the popes returned from their exile in Avignon, the basilica that Constantine the Great had built over the grave of the first apostle Peter in 324 was in a desolate state. It was the plan of God's representative on earth to turn Rome again into the most important city in the world, and the new building was part of this plan. In 1506 the ambitious and energetic Julius II (1503-1513) began the building with the Renaissance architect Bramante. After more than 100 years of effort and work Urban VIII (1623-1644) was able to consecrate the new Peter's Cathedral in 1626.

The building reveals that eleven different architects (including Michelangelo, Raffael, Sangallo, Maderno and Bernini) supervised the building in the course of time. Thus Michelangelo's monumentality sets the tone of the central building and dome, while Carlo Maderno's façade shows his fondness for decorative, manneristic elements. Despite all the heterogeneousness, a magnificent overall picture, a lasting testimony to Christ's words: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

The self-confidence of a city



Taler, minted by the Republic of Zurich, Zurich, 1726

Views of towns on coins were and are always publicity for a town. Thus the view of Zurich on this taler could be rewritten in a tourist prospectus as follows: "This town with its unique location at the intersection of the lake and river is worth a visit. Here trade and affluence prosper. You will find much beauty and culture in our town's numerous churches. Safety is also provided, as all rogues end up in the middle of the river, in the Wellenberg Tower."

In the Middle Ages the former Roman settlement, Turicum, rose into the ranks of the larger Swiss towns because the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire chose the town as the site for two religious foundations: the Frauenmünster on the left side of the Limmat and the Grossmünster on the right side of the Limmat. During the Reformation the Zwingli town became the retreat of religious refugees from the canton of Tessin and France.

The Huguenots brought with them knowledge, new branches of economics and prosperity. In the 18th century the town with such intellectual giants as Johann Jakob Bodmer, Johann Kaspar Lavater and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi became an outstanding cultural centre in Europe.

So Zurich was absolutely justified in presenting itself as self-assured. The free town republic also attached importance to good and beautiful money. For over 30 years its coin minting was entrusted to an artist, the famous engraver Hans Jakob Gessner I.

Deprived of its function



5 marks, minted by the German Democratic Republic, Berlin, 1971

This coin of the German Democratic Republic with the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin's landmark, on the reverse stands for a time in which the gate was deprived of its function. When in 1962 the Wall between East and West Berlin was built that was meant to stop the stream of refugees from East Berlin into the West, the Brandenburg Gate stood directly in the course of the Wall which separated East from West.

Around 1800 the Brandenburg Gate, which was built from 1788 to 1791 on the orders of the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm II (1756-1797), was still a genuine town gate at which the police and customs guards checked who entered and left the city. The wide passage in the middle was reserved for the king's carriages, other vehicles and riders on horseback had to pass through the narrower side passages. Pedestrians could choose where they went through.

In 1989 the border, which ran right through Berlin and Germany, opened up. After the fall of the Wall, the Brandenburg Gate was again a passageway – and remained a national symbol. The early classicistic building is associated with many important events in the history of Berlin, Germany, Europe and the 20th century. Today it adorns the reverse of the German 50-cent euro coin.

An entire country as a fortress



1 yuan, minted by the People's Republic of China, Beijing, 1980

The walls of fortresses protect and demarcate. Generally a fortress consists of several buildings that are surrounded by a high wall. But over 2,000 years ago the Chinese decided that their country was not adequately protected by individual fortresses against the invasions of the nomadic nations of horsemen. Around 400 BC they therefore began building the Great Wall, which turned the whole country into a fortress. In the course of history various rulers expanded the frontier wall: China's first emperor Qin Shih Huangdi (259-210 BC) and the Ming emperors (1368-1644) among others.

Through its route – clinging to the terrain – as well as through the material used for its construction the Great Wall is linked to the local conditions. In the desert-like West it consists of layers of sand and pebbles, which are held together by brushwood. In mountainous Hebei, on the other hand, a plinth of large stones lies over the stamped filling material. According to the measuring carried out by the Chinese authorities in 2009 the Wall measures 8,831 kilometres (5,500 miles) in length. It is strengthened by the roughly 40,000 peel and signal towers.

Although the Great Wall is for the most part a product of the 2,100-year-old Chinese empire, in 1949 the People's Republic of China, proclaimed in 1949 it is the best-known building in the Middle Kingdom and a symbol of its unity and strength, which today shows itself to especially in the economic field. Modern forms of states, too, like to refer to a successful tradition.

Like the house, so the mind



5 cents (Jefferson nickel), minted by the United States of America, Philadelphia, 2000

This nickel has a tradition. Since 1938 the American 5-cent coin – with an interruption from 2004 to 2005 – has been minted unchanged: with the portrait of the third US president, Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809) on the obverse side and his country house Monticello close to his birthplace Charlottesville, Virginia, on the reverse.

The plans for Monticello, which in Italian means "small hill," come from Jefferson himself. The fact that he was inspired by the building of his private house begun in 1768 and his retreat by Andrea Palladio's Villa La Rotonda close to Vicenza and the Pantheon in Rome is not surprising. The founding fathers of the USA were guided by the vision of a "New Rome" and Jefferson resembled a universal Renaissance genius in his versatility. He was not only a politician, philosopher and architect, but also an inventor, natural scientist, creator of the US American currency system and a competent author of the American Declaration of Independence (1776).

The Marquis de Chastellux (*1734, †1788), a French army officer in the American War of Independence, wrote in his book *Travels in North America* about his visit to Monticello: "(...) and it seemed as if from his youth he had placed his mind, as he has done his

The national aspect of Europe



2 euro cents, minted by the Republic of Italy, Rome, 2002

In 2002 the euro was introduced as the common currency of what at that time was the twelve EU countries. While the obverse side showing the value had to be identical for all, some individuality in the design of the reverse did remain for the member states.

For the 2-cent coin Italy chose the symbol of the town of Turin, the Mole Antonelliana. When the pavilion-like building, planned to be a synagogue, began according to plans of the architect Alessandro Antonelli (*1798, †1888) Turin was the first city of the united Italy in 1861. Because of the transfer of the capital to Florence and on account of the exploding costs the mole was not completed until 1888, however. When it was finished it was the highest building in the world that you could walk on, measuring 167.50 metres. Its gigantic dome is the limit that can be built in traditional building engineering (without reinforced concrete).

The Mole Antonelliana is the most modern of the three buildings that Italy has chosen for the reverse of its euro cents. Its location in Turin, an important traffic and industrial centre, symbolises a country which is opening up to the future. Its upward striving demonstrates the power and the technical ability of this culture. The Colosseum on the 5-cent coin and the octagonal Castel del Monte of the Hohenstaufen (*1194, †1250) on the 1-cent piece recall heydays of much earlier times., which, however are today still a part of the Italian identity.

Archetypical components



500 euros from the first banknote series (2002), issued by the European Central Bank

Whereas the euro coins are minted by the national central banks with a reverse side specific to a country, what is common to all the Europeans on the notes gets a chance. That is why the notes do not show real buildings that can be assigned to particular countries, but fictitious motives on the theme "Ages and Styles of Europe."

For the Austrian designer of the first series of notes, Robert Kalina (*1955), it was a matter of showing architectural styles that were common to the countries concerned from seven epochs of the Europe's cultural history. The windows and archways on the obverse may well represent the spirit of openness, the bridges on the reverse for the connection between the countries of Europe.

On the back of the 500-euro note a kind of archetype of a modern suspension bridge with supporting cables made of steel can be seen. It is based on the construction of the German-American engineer John A. Roebling (*1806, †1869), which allows large distances to be bridged. You feel vaguely reminded of real bridges, such as the Brooklyn Bridge (New York) or the Ponto Vasco da Gama (Lisbon). The original models are, however, so alienated that it is not possible to recognise a definite building. The principal according to which bridges are generally built is the focal point, and that not only in Europe but throughout the world.