

FREN3080 : History of France through coins

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Dr. Debbie Bell

Coin: a small, flat (usually) round piece of metal with an official stamp, (usually) issued by a government to serve as money and to facilitate trade.

At least until recently, most of us handled and used coins on a regular basis. We used them in vending machines, at the car wash, to do laundry, to pay for purchases, etc. They were a part of our everyday lives.

But did we ever stop to examine them more closely?

Coins are much more than the definition accorded them by dictionaries. They are authentic witnesses to history, visitors to our time that offer a privileged access to the past. And many of them do so in stunningly beautiful fashion.

Over the course of the semester we will look at a number of French (or « pre-French ») coins, examining them in order to glean what we can about the time period that they represent, about the artistic movements that they embody, about the social and historical details that they carry with them from their own time period to our own.

There is, obviously, no conventional textbook to guide us through this exploration. Each student will receive a number of authentic, historical coins to keep, though it is impossible to distribute examples of all those that will figure into our study. It's important to feel the metal, to see the scars, to examine closely these artifacts that are deeply charged with value that surpasses the monetary. Students will research the coins we'll discuss. There will occasionally be traditional readings to do, as well. Our journey will take us across multiple disciplines and subject matters, as we attempt to trace the story of "la belle et douce France" through more than a thousand years of fascinating numismatic history. It promises to be a rollicking good time and a classroom experience unlike any other!

