



## Denarius depicting the head of Faustina Maior and the ceremony for the awarding of charity funds to orphaned girls (141-146 CE)

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[1]

**Denomination:**

Denarius

**Date:** 141 CE to 146 CE

**Material:**

Silver

**Mint:**

Rome

**Name of Ruler:**

Antoninus Pius

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Draped bust of Faustina looking right

Inscription: DIVA FAUSTINA AUG

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):** Image: Antoninus Pius seated on the left side of a platform, leaning forward to hand a rolled document to young girl being held up to him by man standing in front of the platform. A woman stands to the right of the seated emperor, gesturing at the document. Directly below the officials, a second citizen is bending to lift up a second girl in order to present her to them.

Inscription: PVELLAE FAVSTINIANAE

**Diameter (mm):** 18.00mm

**Weight (g):** 3.38g

**Commentary:** (RIC III, Antoninus Pius, no. 399a, p. 75, C 261; RSC 262).

This denarius, minted between the years 141 and 146 CE, depicts on the obverse the head of the empress Faustina the Elder, and on the reverse the ceremony for the awarding of charity funds to orphaned girls, the *puellae faustinae*. The inscription on the reverse refers to the empress as Faustina, *diva* – “deified”, and Augusta, indicating that it was minted following her death and deification in 140 CE.

Annia Galeria Faustina was born in 100 CE to a Senatorial family; her father, Marcus Annius Verus, had been prefect of Rome, and consul in 121 and 126 CE and her mother, Rupilia Faustina, was closely related to the family of the emperor Trajan, who was her mother maternal uncle. She was also the half-sister of Vibia Sabina, Hadrian's wife. Faustina married Titus Aurelius Fulvus Boionius Arrius Antoninus, the future Antoninus Pius, between the years 110 and 115, the exact date is unknown; they had four children, two sons and two daughters, of which only the younger daughter?, Annia Galeria Faustina Minor survived, going on to marry the same Marcus Aurelius that her father would later name as his heir in 145 CE.

The inscription on the reverse of this coin, *puellae faustinianae* (“the girls of Faustina”), refers to a charity foundation initiated by Antoninus Pius in 141 CE, to honour his wife. According to the *Historia Augusta*, Antoninus Pius “founded an order of destitute girls, called *faustinianae* in honour of Faustina” (SHA, *Life of Antoninus Pius* 8). The *puellae faustinianae* was an extension of the *alimenta*, which had already received significant development



under the reign of Trajan; although private sponsorship of poor children was already established by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, it was not until Trajan's reign that it became a programme of the state, offering loans to farmers across Italy, the interest from which was available to support girls and boys in each local area (Rawson, "Iconography of Roman childhood," p. 224; see also "Trajan and the alimenta system"). A diverse range of coins celebrated the growth of the *alimenta*, through which the scheme evolved from that of a simple imperial handout, which emphasised the liberality and generosity of the emperor, to one that celebrated the "connection between children and the good of the country, especially *fecunditas*, agricultural prosperity, and *pietas*" (Rawson, "Iconography of childhood," p. 224). The institution of the *puellae Faustinianae* was a further step in this development, assisting daughters of the poor with grain allowance as well as with a dowry.

This charitable program was continued by Marcus Aurelius, some years afterwards, and also named in honour of his wife, Faustina the Younger, as the *novae puellae Faustinianae*, the "new girls of Faustina" (SHA, *Life of Marcus Aurelius* 26). Indeed, two reliefs, today standing in the Villa Albani Museum, depict a procession of the *puellae faustinianae* instituted by Marcus Aurelius. The girls form a procession, which includes in both reliefs thirteen girls, and parade in front of two women of the imperial family, possibly Faustina the Younger and her daughter Lucilla, who supervise the distribution of the fund (Rawson, "Iconography of childhood," p. 225). Once again, this coin celebrates the primacy of Italy, as the center of the *oikoumenè*, but above all it celebrates imperial benevolence and providential care; the role of the emperor as civic benefactor was by now a traditional feature of the values promoted by the imperial house, but the evolution of the programme to include reference to the empress was a new development, and one that highlighted parental aspect of the entire imperial household. By inaugurating a charitable programme in his wife's name, Antoninus Pius ensured that the memory of her maternal interest in Rome's subjects endured, which by extension served to emphasise his continuing role as the father of the empire.

Keywords in the original language:

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- [Augusta](#) [3]
- [puellae faustinianae](#) [4]

Thematic keywords:

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- [Imperial family](#) [12]
- [imperial virtues](#) [13]
- [orphan](#) [14]

**Bibliographical references:** Birley, Anthony R., [Marcus Aurelius: A Biography](#) [15] (Roman Imperial Biographies; London : Routledge, 2000)

Foss, Clive, [Roman Historical Coins](#) [16] (London: Seaby, 1990)

Rémy, Bernard, [Antonin le Pieux. 138-161 : Le siècle d'or de Rome](#) [17] (Paris: Fayard, 2005)

Rawson, Beryl, [Iconography of Roman Childhood](#) [18], in *The Roman family in Italy: status, sentiment, space* (ed. B. Rawson, P. Weaver; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 204-232

**Other sources connected with this document:** Numismatic item

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