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The Faces of Money: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly Explores 2,400 Years of Portraits on Money

What did Cleopatra really look like? Probably more like Julius Caesar than Elizabeth Taylor, based on her image as portrayed on ancient Egyptian coins.

Stylized images of Cleopatra are not uncommon, but her true likeness is preserved in very few places, including on coinage.

Visitors to the American Numismatic Association's Money Museum can see Cleopatra, legendary rulers and explorers, conquerors, tyrants, English queens, American political icons, those who fought for a cause, inventors and entertainers at a new exhibit, "The Faces of Money: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly," beginning May 25.

"From the fourth century B.C. through the 21st century, individuals have been memorialized, celebrated and portrayed on money and medals," said Doug Mudd, Money Museum curator of exhibitions. "Some were great leaders and political icons. Others were tyrants and dictators out to soothe their own egos. In either case, their images have been preserved, and those images provide a great opportunity for us to look at the reputations behind the faces."

Famous faces that appear on coins, medals and paper at the Money Museum include Genghis Kahn, Hannibal, Nero, Jesus Christ, Leonardo Da Vinci, Mother Teresa, Mozart, Hitler, Stalin, Winston Churchill, Jackie Robinson, Joan of Arc, Princess Diana, Pocahontas, Woodrow Wilson, Amelia Earhart, Daniel Boone, Peter the Great, Harry Potter and 75 other well-known figures.

"Some, including Cleopatra, Nero, Tiberius, Caligula and Julius Caesar, were accurately portrayed on coins, and their likenesses on objects in the exhibit may be the most precise representation most people will ever see," Mudd said.

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The exhibit will feature displays in which museum visitors can vote for the "Best of the Best" and "Baddest of the Bad," or choose whether certain historic figures such as Christopher Columbus and Alexander the Great were "Good or Bad."

The exhibit also will include a "Famous Quotes" panel where visitors can record their thoughts on whether any of 10 historic figures were respectable or despicable. Was Alexander the Great a mass-murdering drunkard, or was he a great visionary who spread a message of cultural tolerance and laid the foundation for Western civilization? Was Robert E. Lee a great man because of his courage, integrity and patriotism to his native Virginia, or should he be remembered for fighting for a cause that supported slavery?

"This exhibit, perhaps more than any we've ever developed at the museum, takes a historic look at how and why famous and infamous people were immortalized on money," said ANA Executive Director Chris Cipoletti. "The fact that visitors can express their opinions just makes the exhibit that much more interesting."

The Faces of Money: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly opens with a free public reception from 5 to 7 p.m. May 25 at the Money Museum, 818 N. Cascade Ave. The exhibit will close in Sept. 2007.

The museum is open Tuesdays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. Admission is free. For more information about the exhibit or to arrange group tours, call 632-2646.

The American Numismatic Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating and encouraging people to study and collect money and related items. With nearly 33,000 members, the Association serves the collecting and academic communities and the general public with an interest in numismatics. The ANA helps people discover and explore the world of money through its vast array of programs including its education and outreach, museum, library, publications, conventions and seminars.

For more information, visit www.money.org, or call 719-632-COIN.