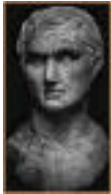


The Classical Elements of the One-Dollar Bill

The founding of the United States was heavily influenced by the literature and symbolism of Greco-Roman Antiquity. In seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the curricula of Colonial schools and universities were dominated by the study of Classical literature (what a time to be alive!). As a result, the Founding Fathers repeatedly engaged the wisdom of Classical authors to frame their discussions over the revolt from

England and the creation of the new Republic. When victory had been secured and the Founders sought to create representative symbols for our new nation, they again turned to the imagery and wisdom of Classical Antiquity – and in particular to the Roman poet Virgil (at left seen in an ancient mosaic). A brief glance at a one-dollar bill reveals numerous symbolic and textual allusions to Classical Antiquity.



All three Latin mottos on the reverse of the dollar bill are derived from works by Virgil (70 – 19 BCE) or from works once thought to be by Virgil. In selecting Virgil as their guide, the Founders followed a 2,000-year tradition that saw him as both the best of poets and as a quasi-prophet who possessed insight about the forces that create and destroy states and individuals.



ANNUIT COEPTIS:

“[God] favored our undertakings”, an allusion to Virgil *Georgics* 1.40-42: *adnue coeptis*

MDCCLXXVI: 1776, the date of the Declaration of Independence is inscribed in Roman Numerals on the base of the 13-rowed, unfinished pyramid capped by the **ALL SEEING EYE**, an ancient symbol for divinity.

NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM:

“new order of ages”, an allusion to

Virgil *Eclogue* 4.5, “*magnus saeculorum ordo*”. The Fourth Eclogue is known as the “Messianic Eclogue” because of its reference to a new Golden Age brought about by the birth of a boy. Like this event, the Founding of the United States is both unprecedented in human history, a return to a state of freedom from one of tyranny, and will be beneficial to all humanity.

THE EAGLE was the symbol of Roman state. Here it holds an olive branch and arrows, which are classical symbols of war and peace (towards which the eagle is turned), and a scroll with the Latin phrase...

E PLURIBUS UNUM:

“From many, one;” generally thought to be an allusion to [Virgil] *Moretum* 104 (“*e pluribus unus*”), where the phrase refers to the single color that emerges from the many components of a farmer’s salad.

Alternatively, it alludes to Cicero’s formulation of friendship in *De Officiis* I.XVII.56 (“*unus fiat ex pluribus*”). In the context of the United States, it refers both to the power of the Federal constitution and of the amalgamation of peoples that would comprise its citizenry.

