

Depicted Figures of Gods in the Roman Imperial Coinage in the 3rd Century A. D.

Representational Types of the Olympian Goddesses in the Roman Imperial Coinage

/abstract/

The theme of my dissertation is provided by an iconographic survey. I examine the minting of Roman coins in the 3rd century A.D., to research which type of graphic forms were used to portray each god/goddess on the reverse of the coins. For this examination I chose five goddesses from the Olympian divinities: Diana, Juno, Minerva, Venus and Vesta. I study and identify the types of coin which are related to these five goddesses. I categorise the illustrations appearing on these coins, and catalogue their attributes and the inscriptions which accompany them on the edges. I examine in which cases, in connection with which ruler and which members of the imperial family the graphic types were used on the minted coins.

This allows us to gain an insight into the extent to which different graphic forms in the coin stock of that period can be linked to each goddess, which attributes and edge inscriptions accompanied different depictions, and how all of these communicated the aspects and range of tasks of a given goddess. Since, if a god(dess) is pictured with other attributes, different edge inscriptions and different names, then, by communicating a different range of tasks different messages are conveyed by the coin propaganda. This remains to this day a little explored field of coin minting, a fuller understanding of which can lead to a more effective comprehension of the coin propaganda of the period.

I have given special emphasis to the military/victory theme. The strengthening of the military theme in the coin minting of the 3rd century is a well-known tendency; the majority of the goddesses I have focused on, however, were less associated with this area. For this reason, it was interesting to investigate whether a change occurred in this sense, and whether we would find military themes in the portrayal of, for example, Juno or Diana.

A common feature of the goddesses examined is that their depictions are almost always made up of well-known elements. There are very few new variants emerging and when they do, the majority of them are new combinations of old attributes. We can only observe genuinely new developments in a few cases (e.g. the way *Iuno Martilis* is depicted in the coins of Trebonianus Gallus), and these do not prove long-lasting, disappearing quickly from the mint.

From another perspective, however, there are very great differences in the ways the five goddesses are portrayed. Juno and Vesta appear almost exclusively on the coins of the female members of the imperial family, linked to representations of the emperor's wife; their

portrayals are one-dimensional, the number of the graphic types used is limited, they follow typical models, and they feature no weapons among their attributes. With Vesta, we find no trace at all of the military/victory theme, and Juno is also referred to in isolated elements (the name *Iuno Martialis* during the reign of Trebonianus Gallus and the use of the *victrix* symbol on the Salonna coins).

The depictions of Diana and Venus are much more varied. Here, they appear not only as wives of emperors, but we also find examples of them on coins where the ruling emperor himself is named on the face. The different styles of illustration announce the different aspects of the goddess: we see Diana as the moon goddess and the protector of the hunt, while Venus is depicted both as the mythical matriarch of the Roman people (*Venus Genetrix*), and as the divine patron helping the emperor to victory (*Venus Victrix*). Both goddesses have depictions in which they appear with weapons: with Diana they are above all hunting weapons, whereas with *Venus Victrix* we find variants in which the goddess is associated only with weapons (shield, dart, helmet) and symbols of victory (Victoriola, palm frond) – here the realisation of the military/victory theme is clearly intended.

At the other end of the scale is Minerva: her attributes are always dominated by weapons and we always see her on the front of the coins of the male members of the imperial family.

Whether an image of the goddess appears on the front of the ruler's coin, or we only find her on examples bearing the name of the emperor's wife, also determines the type of image and the lifespan. Depictions of Vesta and Juno are relatively uniform, the number of types of image are fairly limited, and they disappear from the coin stock after the age of Vesta Gallienus. Depictions of Diana and Venus feature in far more varied images and their role is more significant. Although Diana is missing from minted coins of the last third of the century, depictions of Venus can be found right up to the beginning of the Tetrarchy. Minerva's image, indeed, is found even later, lasting until the 290s.