

**The theses of the doctoral dissertation**

**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*

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## Theme and aim

The aim of my thesis is the iconographical analysis of the Roman coinage of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. I focus on a group of the reverses on which one of the Olympian goddesses (Diana, Iuno, Minerva, Venus, Vesta) is depicted. I examine the image types they used to depict the goddesses, what kind of attributes can be noticed in connection with these types. Furthermore I deal with the legends and the names of goddesses. I follow the temporal changes of these factors: under which emperors can these changes be traced and how certain image types transformed.

The Roman coinage was an important medium of the propaganda, a well-tried tool of transmitting the imperial messages, propagating current successes and catchwords, and influencing the subjects of the Empire. In the previous decades several studies dealt with the coin propaganda and with the roles of certain gods in it. Numerous studies discussed the 3<sup>rd</sup> century as well (or some of its stages or characteristics). However, thus far less attention was paid to how various themes and messages could be propagated with a god.

Since the same god can be presented on different reverse types with various images and legends, with different attributes and clothes, these reverse types show other aspects and duties, they represent different messages.

For example Diana can be seen as the Moon goddess and as the guardian of hunters, and Venus is depicted once with an apple and a small Cupido, at other times with weapons, a helmet, a shield and a spear as *Venus Victrix* who helps imperators to victory. The detailed analysis of the reverses lets us identify the different aspects and functions of a god. One can also define the related and sometimes variant themes and messages. The iconographical examination could help with the interpretation of propaganda messages transmitted by the coins, and it could help us in later studies which, by the examination of various image types in coinage can lead us to the direct analysis of the coin propaganda.

Moreover, we can also observe which variation of the possible depictions was used, on which basis they were chosen and how they are connected to other branches of art. We can survey how the depictions on the reverses relate to a god's whole iconographical scale.

The choice of the goddesses in the thesis is justified by the fact that even if they had lesser role in the coinage of the period they appear quite regularly on the reverses. The images have several layers; their iconography is complex and heterogeneous. The messages transmitted by them are not as obvious and direct as in some other cases (e.g. Victoria, Mars and Fides), and they are not limited to military and victory themes.

The diversity of image types made it possible to change the emphases of the certain aspects of the goddesses', thus enabling to transform over time what themes and messages they can be in connection with.

With the review of the images we can take a look at some specific tendencies and characteristics of the period.

The time frame of the analysis is the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, by which I mean the Severan age and the following decades, the time of the soldier emperors. The beginning of the presented era is 193 (Septimius Severus accession to the throne) and the end is 284/285 (the appearance of Diocletian and the death of Carinus), so the borders of the study are set by political history and dynastical changes. Although from a numismatic viewpoint the closing date could be 294, when the currency reform of Diocletian, took place considering the changes in the imperial ideology and propaganda the earlier closure is justified; because during the first decade of Diocletian's and Maximian's rule most of the examined goddesses are absent from coinage. The images of the goddesses in question were usually connected to the representation of the empresses, but during Diocletian's rule the female members of the imperial family did not get a role in the propaganda. It was even more complicated to define the starting date, because the period and the coinage of Septimius Severus are connected to the

traditions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in many ways. The division here comes from the fact that the analysis must be limited in time, in my thesis I often refer to the continuity, the usage of earlier patterns and elements.

Thematically my study focuses on the coins of imperial mintages only. I do not try to cover all the image types and variations that portrayed these goddesses on the colonial coins of the Greek cities. These reverses were usually more connected to the local traditions, cults and identity than to the current tendencies of the imperial propaganda. Moreover, the used image types show such an immense variability that a systematic analysis would highly exceed the length of my paper. This does not mean that I will totally ignore this material: among the parallels of the imperial coinage's image types I will give high priority to examples from colonial coins. In their overview I do not aim at completeness, I will just mention some examples to verify the presence of certain representational forms.

### **The methods and structure of the thesis**

My analysis is based on the catalogues of the period's imperial coinage: I overview and systematize the types of coins and their reverses which are defined by the catalogues (the related volumes of *The Roman Imperial Coinage*: RIC IV/1-3 and RIC V/1-2), then I make conclusions based on this material. However, where I had the possibility I used other catalogues as well.

Throughout the paper I differentiate between certain coin types with a fixed combination of an obverse and a reverse, with a given legend marked with a catalogue number, and the image types, the groups made out of them by the analysis and systematizing of the reverse pictures of these coin types. While the coin types marked with a catalogue number are helpful categories mostly in connection with numismatic analysis, the image types are iconographical units. An image type consists of those coins on which the certain god or goddess is presented in a specified form (identical pose, clothing and attributes). An image

type covers more than one coin types, which are often made in different mintages and time, with different obverses. Certain image types remained popular for decades or even for centuries, and they can be found on dozens of coin types which were minted in the name of different rulers over time.

I categorize the reverses into image types, and present their details and occurrence in the period's coinage. For systematizing the image forms of certain goddesses many solutions were made. From these results the overviews of the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* and the typology of Fr. Schmidt-Dick were the most helpful for me, but in my study none of them seemed to be applicable without changes – so I made my own typology. The definition of the image types happened on the basis of the special features of the pose and setting (*Is the goddess standing, sitting, stepping or driving a biga? Can she be seen from the front or from behind? Is she looking to the right or to the left?*), and the altered forms of the clothing, attributes and gestures (especially hand positions). I paid special attention to the attributes and legends, because they indicate the best in which aspect and role the goddess is depicted, what theme or message the image represents.

The definition of the types was followed by their systematizing. I formed a multilevel, articulated structure, I categorized the images into it and I described them with the help of this structure. With this solution I could treat the forms that are close variations of one another, so I could easily define the main emphases of a certain goddess's depiction.

I analyse the images, the attributes seen on them and the legends, the different related names of goddesses in this so formed typological system. I focus on the antecedents of the image types, I wanted to know whether that exact type had been a new form in the Roman coinage or in the goddess's iconographical traditions in general. I also tried to find out if they had been observable in other branches of art. I examine the relation between the images and the certain aspect of propaganda, how did they represent the traditions and

continuity of the Roman State or the divine support of the emperor. Were they connected to the military/victory themes? The latter question is especially interesting, because in connection with most of these goddesses the roles of the war/military themed aspects are traditionally quite unnoticeable.

The first chapter of my thesis consists of a methodological introduction, and then I briefly describe the most important specificities of the period's coinage. Then I present the goddesses: I take a look at the image types of Diana, Iuno, Minerva, Venus and Vesta. After that there is a conclusion, the list of used literature, some overview tables, and the appendix of images.

### **The results of the thesis**

By analysing the five goddesses' image types a quite various and versatile overall picture emerges, in which some common points and matching tendencies can also be discovered.

The most uniform and traditional picture is shown by the images of Vesta. We always see the goddess with her traditional attributes: with a sceptre in her left hand, and with a *Palladium* or *patera* in her right, or while holding a *simpulum*. The legends usually use the label Vesta. On the reverses – opposing to some statements of the earlier literature – we cannot find elements that refer to military theme. The goddess is nearly always presented on those coins whose obverse depict the empresses. It had its greatest role in the Severan age – possibly not unattached to the reconstruction of the *aedes Vestae* under Septimius Severus. Later it can be found on the coins of Cornelia Supera and Salonina, but from the last third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century it disappeared from the coins.

In the case of Iuno it is also (nearly completely) useless to look for traces of military theme. The goddess is connected nearly exclusively to the representation of the empresses. The most common image is the type where the goddess is standing, looking to the left, holding a *patera* and a sceptre, and the variation where this is amended with a peacock standing at the feet of the

goddess. Both forms had been known for long in coinage, as well as the *Iuno Regina* name next to them. Both the image types and the *Iuno Regina* name accompany the period: their usage is verifiable until the coins of Magnia Urbica. Other types of forms were not used for such a long time – the picture of the sitting goddess, who is holding a flower and a baby disappeared in the last third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, so did the *Iuno Lucina* name that was connected to it. The new images that appeared in the period did not remain for long, either: the variation holding a *Palladium* can be recorded only on the coins of Iulia Soaemias, and new types in the propaganda of Trebonianus Gallus also disappeared after the death of the emperor. For the last third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the number of image types of Iuno narrowed, the visualization of the goddess became totally one-sided.

The coinage of Trebonianus Gallus (and his son, Volusianus) meant a particular intermezzo, where Iuno is presented with the *Martialis* attributive, which was unknown earlier. Not only the name is unique, but there are new image forms, and it is also exceptional that we see all of this minted in the name of the emperor (and his son, the heir) – because Iuno was usually depicted on the coins of the empresses. Maybe it was a local cult which was included in the propaganda by the emperor. His attempt was not successful for long, because after his death *Iuno Martialis* disappeared from coinage. The *Martialis* attributive connected Iuno to her son, Mars, the god of war, but there is no other sign of the war theme: in the pictures the goddess is holding ears of grain, not weapons.

In some cases the attributive *conservatrix* is connected to the name of Iuno. This is a typical element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century propaganda: it connects the goddess to the ruling family, presenting her as the celestial protector of the dynasty. In the case of Iuno it gets only a limited role: the *Iuno Conservatrix* name is verifiable only in the second half of the Severan age, but it disappears from the coinage in the middle of the century. The *Iuno Victrix* legend on the

coins of Salonina is more exceptional. The *victrix* attributive refers to the victory theme, but the connected image does not reinforce this: we see Iuno with her traditional attributes. In addition, this version is present only once, so it can be evaluated as a single variant.

Minerva represents the other side. She is always depicted with weapons (wearing a helmet with a shield and a haste) on coins which are related to the male members of the imperial family. The list of attributes is relatively limited. Besides weapons sometimes an owl, a snake, an olive branch appears, in other cases Victoria is standing in Minerva's hand. With the combination of symbols a diversified iconographic structure came into being, in which the military theme was in the centre. This is strengthened by the legends where not only the names of *Minerva Victrix* and *Minerva Pacifera* are readable but also the identification of *conservator* and *comes*.

There are a lot of different versions of Minerva's images both from the era of the civil war which took place after the death of Commodus and from Septimius Severus' reign. However, after the just mentioned period the goddess disappeared from the coinage. She reappears only in the middle of the 3rd century on the coins of Gallienus, Postumus, Claudius II, Aurelian and Probus. Later Minerva also can be noticed related to Diocletian and his co-emperors, furthermore in connection with the rebellious usurpers. Moreover, in the first decade of Diocletian's reign one can find various image types, so I decided to widen the time frames of my study. In this way I follow the goddess' representations until the monetary reform which took place in the 290s.

The image types of Diana are much more varied. Sometimes she is represented as the guardian of hunting (with hunting weapons, occasionally next to a dog or a stag), other times we see her as the goddess of the Moon, at times completely identified with Luna. In the first half of the Severan age she is seen only in her Moon goddess function, and except some coin types of Caracalla she is present only on the coins of the empresses. In the coinage of Elagabalus and



Severus Alexander we cannot find Diana, but in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century she appears again. Moreover, previously unknown versions and tendencies can be seen. While earlier the picture of the torch-holding goddess was present (nearly) only on the coins of the empresses, now the image of the Moon goddess appears with the obverse of the ruler. Variations with the goddess looking to the right, in standing or in stepping position can be found in the coinage of Gordian III, Valerian, Gallienus, Claudius II and Quintillus, and also in the case of Postumus. Opposing to the previous ones, it is nearly totally missing from the coins of the empresses, we can only verify it minted with the name of Salonina.

At the same time the hunting, bow- and arrow-, and sometimes spear-holding images of Diana also reappear in the imperial coinage. After about a hundred years cease it first showed up on the coins of Aemilian, then in the following decades we can find many of its variations: often depicted in a similar pose as the sculpture in Versailles, with a bow in one hand, putting her other hand on the quiver on her shoulder. Different versions can be found on the coins of Valerian and his son, Gallienus, and also at Macrian Iunior, in the name of Claudius II, and among the coins of Postumus. These images are always noticeable on the coins where the ruler emperor is depicted on the obverse, the goddess of hunting did not get a role in the empressess representation. In the last third of the century the image of Diana disappeared completely, from Aurelian's rule we cannot find her on the reverses.

Beside the standing forms we can see some other variants. Some image types of the Severan age portrayed the biga-driving goddess, and at the emperors of the Gallic usurpation sometimes a bust of Diana is present. However, the number of these variations is much lower than the image types with a torch or hunting weapons: they were made in limited time and space, and their role and influence is also smaller.

Considering the legends, the form *Diana Lucifera* is the usual name for the Moon goddess, and the *conservatrix* attributive (which has examples from

the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century) propagated her as the protector of the emperor. Also from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, in the case of Aemilian and Claudius II we can verify the name *Diana Victrix*. The name is without any example in the coinage, but we can find some parallels in the epigraphic sources. At first glance it may connect Diana to the military theme, but the inscriptions warn us to be cautious. Moreover, during the reign of Claudius II on the reverses we see the goddess next to a small stag, so here the name refers to the helping goddess who ensures the success of the hunting. Of course, the usage of the *victrix* attributive strengthened the victory theme. The types which portrayed Diana with weapons increased the number of the variations which depicted martial gods and goddesses with weapons the same way – even if the weapons here are not for war, but for hunting.

In the case of Venus we can also find a large scale of image types. A part of them shows attributes only that are easily connected to the goddess of love: apple and sceptre, sometimes a small Cupido. At other variations we can see some victory symbols (Victoriola, palm branch) and weapons (helmet, shield and spear). Their appearance can be surprising first, but Venus' connection to the victory theme in the Roman coinage is verifiable from the republican period. This connection was further strengthened when in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the *Venus Victrix* name appeared in the legends.

In the described period both of the image types were represented by many variations. The images of the goddess of love with her traditional, civil attributes and the variants of the armed Venus can both be seen in the Severan age and the period of the soldier emperors. These two periods cannot be separated sharply. Obviously, there are differences and shifts of emphasis. While the image forms that depict Venus with the civil attributes can be mostly seen on the coins of empresses, the armed variations are more often present on coins with the own obverse of the emperor. The latter types show significant concentration in the

middle decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century – there are some reverses where among the attributes of the goddess only weapons are present.

Among the legends we can find the same duality: the names of *Venus Genetrix* and the *Venus Victrix* both were used throughout the whole analysed era. However, in the last phase of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century we can read the name of the victorious Venus more often. Both versions interpreted the goddess of love in an exclusively Roman context. If the legends named her *Venus Genetrix*, they advertised the mythical progenitrix of the Roman people, and when the *Venus Victrix* name was present, we see the goddess who helped Caesar, then Augustus and his imperial successors to victory. Names related to the roman state are very well-marked in the case of the other goddesses. This can be noticed not only in connection with the *conservatrix* attributive but also with *Iuno Regina*'s name, which advertised Iuno as the celestial queen who protects the Roman state. The role of these variations is noticeable especially in the middle/second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, while other variations (e.g. the *Iuno Lucina* name) slowly disappeared from coinage.

In the propaganda of the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the continuation of the Severan dynasty's model can be seen. The tendency can be verified in connection with most of the Valerians family. Most of the examples related to the examined goddesses can be found among the coins of Salonina. The phenomenon can easily be explained: at this time the Severan dynasty was the last one which could rule the empire for a long time, therefore a new dynasty could gain legitimacy by following and copying their examples. Taking a look at the Severan age from the confused middle of the 3rd century could make for the contemporaries feel that the Severan years were more stable; and the fact that elements from this age were used again suggested that a more peaceful and more successful period was about to come.

That how many different image types we see and how diverse they are largely depend on whether the goddess got a role on the coins with the ruler's

own obverse, or her appearance was limited to the representation of the empresses. The two goddesses who generally appeared on only the coins of the empresses, Vesta and Iuno are represented by fewer image types than Diana and Venus, those goddesses who were present on the coins with the name of the emperor himself. In the case of Minerva, who was present only on the coins of the emperors, we can verify several different image types even if they are built from a closed, thematically integrated iconography.

If we take a look at the emergence of the military propaganda, we can find large differences between the goddesses. While weapons were inseparable from Minerva's image, the armed variations got a significant role related to Venus. In the case of Diana we have to be cautious about assuming a military theme. At Iuno only a very few seldom appearing items imply it, and in connection with Vesta it is not verifiable at all. None of these are independent from the change of the goddesses' role in coinage: while the image of Minerva and Venus was an important, living and various part of the propaganda until the Tetrarchic period, Iuno can be seen as a pale, empty and conventional tool of the empresses' representation. Diana and Vesta completely disappeared from the reverses by the last third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Except Minerva and Venus at these goddesses we cannot see the appearance of the military theme, instead of this we notice that with the emerging of new emphases and new needs they were gradually disappeared out from coinage by images that were able to express the messages that were important for the emperor.

By examining the various images of the goddesses and the occurrence of certain image types we can study the coinage of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the propaganda of the period and its changes. The coinage of the Severan age is connected to the traditions of the Antonine dynasty in many ways, as the Severan dynasty was an example to be followed in the first half of the soldier emperors' period. The successful rulers of the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Aurelian, Probus and later Diocletian changed this. They introduced reforms that affected several areas of

the empire, which reshaped the coinage – and the goddesses, who are the subject of my thesis, disappeared from it one after another.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapter(s) (1)

1. **Barna F.:** Ősi erények - új hangsúlyok a birodalmi pénzverésben Kr. u. 260-282 között.  
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Foreign language scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (1)

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