

THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE SEVERAN WOMEN*

by Clare Rowan

Coinage remains one of the best resources from which to gain an insight into the public image of empresses in the Roman Empire. This article employs a quantitative approach to the coinage of the Severan women, utilizing coin hoards to gain an idea of the frequency of particular coin types. The result offers a nuanced and contextual assessment of the differing public images of the Severan empresses and their role within wider Severan ideology. Evidence is presented to suggest that in this period there was one workshop at the mint dedicated to striking coins for the empresses. The Severan women played a key connective role in the dynasty, a position communicated publicly through their respective numismatic images. By examining the dynasty as a whole, subtle changes in image from empress to empress and from reign to reign can be identified. During the reign of Elagabalus, the divergence in imagery between Julia Soaemias and Julia Maesa is so great that we can perhaps see the influence of these women on their own numismatic image.

La monetazione rimane una delle migliori fonti dalla quale ricavare un punto di vista per l'immagine pubblica delle imperatrici dell'impero romano. Nell'articolo si usa un approccio quantitativo alla monetazione delle donne di epoca severiana a partire da gruzzoli di monete, con lo scopo di fornire un'idea della frequenza di un particolare tipo di moneta. I risultati offrono una valutazione sfumata e contestuale delle varie immagini pubbliche delle imperatrici severiane e del loro ruolo all'interno della più ampia ideologia severiana. Vengono presentate evidenze per suggerire che in questo periodo esisteva un laboratorio presso la zecca dedicato all'emissione delle monete delle imperatrici. Le donne di epoca severiana giocarono un ruolo connettivo chiave nella dinastia, una posizione comunicata pubblicamente attraverso le loro rispettive immagini numismatiche. Esaminando globalmente la dinastia, possono essere identificati sottili cambiamenti nell'immagine da imperatrice a imperatrice e da regno a regno. Durante l'impero di Elagabalo, la divergenza nell'immagine di Giulia Soaemias e Giulia Maesa è così grande che possiamo forse cogliere l'influenza di queste donne nella realizzazione della propria immagine numismatica.

Modern studies of the Severan emperors often have placed a significant focus on the role played by women within the dynasty.¹ Unmitigated acceptance of ancient literary constructions of these women, in conjunction with a belief (from isolated epigraphic evidence) that this period saw an 'orientalization' of Roman religion

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¹ R.L. Cleves, *Severus Alexander and the Severan Women* (California, 1982); G. Turton, *The Syrian Princesses: the Women Who Ruled Rome, AD 193–235* (London, 1974); B. Levick, *Julia Domna Syrian Empress* (London, 2007); A. Magnani, *Giulia Domna. Imperatrice filosofa* (Milan, 2007).

and culture, often resulted in the belief that the Empress Julia Domna heralded the beginning of a dynasty of powerful eastern women who corrupted the essence of 'Roman' culture.² Von Domaszewski's condemnation of Domna was particularly influential in this respect,³ but more recent works have come to a better understanding of the public role of these women,⁴ demonstrating that the Severan empresses were not an 'eastern', corrupting force, but formed an important connective role. Initially the women of the Severan house created a sense of continuity with the Antonines, going on to form the connective basis for the Severan dynasty itself.⁵ Central to this scholarly development in studies of the Severan women has been the separation of material authored by the regime from the representation of the Severan women in private and provincial contexts.⁶

One of the best-preserved sources from which to gain a better idea of the image of the Severan women is the official coinage released by the imperial mints. The chief imperial mint was located in Rome, though in the Severan period smaller mints were also in sporadic operation in the Roman East, most notably at Antioch.⁷ The large bulk of Severan imperial coinage, however, was struck at

² For a discussion of this tendency, see Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 1–2.

³ A. von Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen zur Römischen Religion* (Leipzig, 1909), 148; E. Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae in der Historischen Überlieferung* (Bonn, 1979), 173.

⁴ M.G. Williams, 'Studies in the lives of Roman empresses part 1', *American Journal of Archaeology* 6 (1902), 259–305; M.G. Williams, 'Studies in the lives of Roman empresses part 2', in H. Sanders (ed.), *Roman Historical Sources and Institutions* (New York, 1904), 67–100; H.U. Instinsky, 'Studien zur Geschichte des Septimius Severus', *Klio* 35 (1942), 200–19; H.W. Benario, 'Julia Domna: Mater Senatus et Patriae', *Phoenix* 12 (1958), 67–70; H.W. Benario, 'The titulature of Julia Soemias and Julia Mamaea: two notes', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 90 (1959), 9–14; E. Nau, 'Julia Domna als Olympias', *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 18 (1968), 49–66; Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3); F. Ghedini, *Giulia Domna. Tra oriente e occidente* (Rome, 1984); S.S. Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage and Severan dynastic propaganda', *Latomus* 54 (1995), 119–39; E. Kosmetatou, 'The public image of Julia Mamaea. An epigraphic and numismatic inquiry', *Latomus* 61 (2002), 398–414; A. Lichtenberger, *Severus Pius Augustus. Studien zur Sakralen Repräsentation und Rezeption der Herrschaft des Septimius Severus und seiner Familie (193–211 n.Chr.)* (Habilitationsschrift, Wilhelms-Universität, 2007), 297–350.

⁵ D. Baharal, 'The portraits of Julia Domna from the years 193–211 A.D. and the dynastic propaganda of L. Septimius Severus', *Latomus* 51 (1992), 110–18; C. Gorrie, 'Julia Domna's building patronage, imperial family roles and the Severan revival of moral legislation', *Historia* 53 (2004), 61–72; J. Langford-Johnson, *Mater Augustorum, Mater Senatus, Mater Patriae: Succession and Consensus in Severan Ideology* (Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 2005), as well as those listed above.

⁶ Prior to this it was believed the Severan women, particularly Domna, were 'officially' aligned to a number of deities, particularly Dea Caelestis. For example: Z. Kādār, 'Julia Domna comme Assyrié Kythereia et Seléné', *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 2 (1966), 101–8; T. Mikocki, *Sub Specie Deae: les impératrices et princesses romaines assimilées à des déesses* (Rome, 1995), 69–81. For a more balanced view, see I. Mundle, 'Dea Caelestis in der Religionspolitik des Septimius Severus und der Julia Domna', *Historia* 10 (1961), 228–37.

⁷ The 'eastern' mints of Septimius Severus have been the subject of some debate, but current consensus holds that Severus utilized Pescennius Niger's mint at Antioch, as well as using a mint at Alexandria (see R.F. Bland, A.M. Burnett and S. Bendall, 'The mints of Pescennius Niger in the

Rome. Imperial coins were designed and struck under the authority of the emperor as a monument of his regime, and should be differentiated from provincial coins, which were struck by local cities with imagery that reflected local culture and concerns.⁸ A theme of provincial coinage was the relationship of the city and its inhabitants with the ruling power, entailing the representation of the emperor and his family. Though these representations were no doubt created within a framework acceptable to the emperor, they are best viewed as local monuments, akin to the arches, reliefs, inscriptions and other media erected by the cities and citizens of the empire. Since the purpose of this study is to focus on material authored by the regime in order to gain a better understanding of the public image of the empresses, provincial coin types are not considered here.

An examination of the numismatic representation of imperial women invites a consideration of who was responsible for the designs and motifs that graced their coinage. This is connected to the on-going discussion of the extent to which the emperor was responsible for the selection of his coin types. The bibliography on this subject is large, but in the study of the public image of the emperor somewhat irrelevant: as Metcalf has observed, it is obvious that the coin designs were flattering to the emperor and subject to his approval, and were considered by the inhabitants of the empire to be the product and responsibility of the emperor himself.⁹ The potential role of the imperial women in the selection of coin types is trickier still, given the absence of evidence. But this very absence may be significant: although there are numerous instances of ancient authors connecting an emperor and his coin imagery, to my knowledge none connect the empress and her coin types, suggesting that the women concerned had little or no role in type selection (at least in the public mind-set). That the public images of empresses generated by their coinage largely conforms to and enhances the public ideology of the emperor supports this hypothesis (see the example of the changing numismatic image of Julia Domna under Severus and Caracalla, below, pp. 249–56).

light of some new *aurei*', *Numismatic Chronicle* 147 (1987), 70; T.V. Buttrey, 'The denarii of Pescennius Niger', *Numismatic Chronicle* 152 (1992), xx; and K. Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria* (London, 2004), 98–108). Some of Elagabalus's coins originally attributed to Antioch are now believed to have been struck at Nicomedia. This was not a regular mint, but likely a travelling, mobile mint that followed the emperor as he headed towards Rome (K. Butcher, 'The colonial coinage of Antioch-on-the-Orontes c. AD 218–53', *Numismatic Chronicle* 148 (1988), 68–9).

⁸ On provincial coinage, see K.W. Harl, *Civic Coins and Civic Politics in the Roman East AD 180–275* (Berkeley, 1987); and C. Howgego, V. Heuchert and A. Burnett (eds), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces* (Oxford, 2005).

⁹ W.E. Metcalf, 'Roman imperial numismatics', in D.S. Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2006), 42. For recent discussions of this problem, see A. Chueng, 'The political significance of Roman imperial coin types', *Schweizer Münzblätter* 191 (1998), 59; R. Wolters, *Nummi Signati* (Munich, 1999), 292; C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2000), 216; and R.P. Duncan-Jones, 'Implications of Roman coinage: debates and differences', *Klio* 87 (2005), 462–3.

However, to envisage a uniform situation is dangerous. Different emperors may have had different levels of involvement in their numismatic image, and likewise differing situations in the imperial family may have resulted in some imperial women being able to influence their numismatic image in a way others could not. Here the age of the ruling emperor may be significant: a young emperor likely meant that a greater influence was granted to the imperial women or to the *consilium*. In the Severan period, it is precisely at the moment when a young emperor (Elagabalus) assumes the throne that the numismatic images of the imperial women give the suggestion of individuality. Thus, although in general it is unlikely that imperial women had any significant influence on their numismatic image, we cannot exclude the possibility that some individuals did not conform to the general norm.

Though the coin types of the Severan women have been subjected to a type-by-type analysis, the numismatic images of the empresses have not been examined yet from a quantitative perspective. The results of such a study are revealing, and allow us to form a more accurate idea of the public image of each empress. A quantitative numismatic analysis reveals continuity between the imagery of the Severan women, but also highlights points of difference, particularly during the rule of Elagabalus.

The validity of using coin hoards to establish the relative frequency of different reverse types has been demonstrated elsewhere.¹⁰ Though every coin type struck for a ruler was significant, since it consciously joined the portrait of an emperor or empress with a particular idea, deity or event, different coin types were struck in different quantities. Identifying which images formed ‘significant’ issues (commonly associated with a ruler) and which images formed ‘commemorative’ or small issues enables us to understand the overall associations and communicative messages of a ruler’s coinage. In this endeavour coin hoards are a valuable tool, since they largely represent a sample of the currency in use at a particular period in time.

Duncan-Jones’s analysis of coin hoards has revealed that before the reign of Hadrian, only small amounts of coinage were struck with the portrait of the empresses.¹¹ Livia, for example, has no presence on Augustus’s coinage: her

¹⁰ E. Christiansen, *The Roman Coins of Alexandria: Quantitative Studies: Nero, Trajan, Septimius Severus* (Aarhus, 1988); I. Carradice, ‘Towards a new introduction to the Flavian coinage’, in M. Austin, J. Harries and C. Smith (eds), *Modus Operandi. Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman* (London, 1998), 96–112; C.F. Noreña, ‘The communication of the Emperor’s virtues’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001), 146–8; C.F. Noreña, ‘Medium and message in Vespasian’s *Templum Pacis*’, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 48 (2003), 25–43; O. Hekster and E. Manders, ‘Kaiser gegen Kaiser: Bilder der Macht im. 3. Jahrhundert’, in K.-P. Johne, T. Gerhardt and U. Hartmann (eds), *Transformationsprozesse des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert und ihre Rezeption in der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2006), 135–44; C. Rowan, ‘Becoming Jupiter: Severus Alexander, the Temple of Jupiter Ultor and Jovian iconography on Roman imperial coinage’, *American Journal of Numismatics* 21 (2009), 123–50.

¹¹ R.P. Duncan-Jones, ‘Crispina and the coinage of the empresses’, *Numismatic Chronicle* 166 (2006), 223–8.

name first appears on two *sestertii* issues struck under Tiberius in AD 22–3, and her portrait first appears on a *dupondius* with the legend SALVS AVGVSTA around the same period.¹² The first imperial woman to appear on the obverse of an imperial coin, with an identifying legend, is Agrippina I, on an issue struck after her death (*RIC* 1² 55).¹³ Agrippina II continued the growth in the visibility of imperial women on coinage, but coinage struck for the empresses did not reach significant numbers in terms of quantity before the rule of Hadrian.¹⁴

From Hadrian's *decennalia*, however, an increased quantity of coinage was struck for the emperor's wife Sabina, and from this point female coinage became a regular occurrence. This new production template at the mint, at a time when imperial succession occurred through adoption, communicated the idea of continuity within the imperial *domus*. Sabina also appears in public reliefs, the first empress to do so since the Augustan age.¹⁵ The proportion of coinage struck for imperial women rises again under Antoninus Pius, who struck an extraordinary number of coins for his deified wife Faustina I. This increased visibility of imperial women continues under Marcus Aurelius and Faustina II.¹⁶ An analysis of Severan coinage reveals that the proportion of coinage struck for the empresses remains constant, at least on silver, in the period AD 193–235. After the dramatic increases of Hadrian and the Antonines, the presence of the empresses on coinage had been established.

Ideally, a quantitative analysis of coin types would examine coins struck in gold, silver and *aes* metals. However, the paucity of well-recorded gold finds from the Severan period and the small amount of *aes* types struck by these

¹² *RIC* 1² 50–1 and 47 (described in *Roman Imperial Coinage* as a bust of Salus, but the features and the legend suggest the portrait is of Livia). All these issues are recorded as scarce or rare by *RIC*. We might see Livia in a seated female figure on the coinage of Augustus, but, without an identifying legend or characteristic features, it is difficult to make a precise identification (perhaps a problem also confronted by ancient viewers of these types). For a discussion, see C.H.V. Sutherland and R. Carson, *The Roman Imperial Coinage I: from 31 BC to AD 69* (London, 1984), 87; and S.E. Wood, *Imperial Women. A Study in Public Images* (Leiden, 1999), 82, 89.

¹³ Wood, *Imperial Women* (above, n. 12), 208. Though the Neronian reform of the currency makes estimating relative frequencies of Julio-Claudian coinage difficult, the famous issue released by Caligula showing his three sisters (*RIC* 1² 33, 41) is listed in *RIC* as rare. According to the frequency estimations in *RIC*, less than five examples of the *dupondius* are known, and only about twenty of the *sestertius* issue. In spite of the honours recorded for Drusilla, she did not appear on Caligula's coinage except for this rare issue.

¹⁴ Duncan-Jones, 'Crispina and the coinage of the empresses' (above, n. 11), 223 n. 5, has observed that Plotina, Marciana and Matidia only constitute about 4% of Trajan's gold coinage, with a vestigial presence on silver and *aes* coins.

¹⁵ M. Keltanen, 'The public image of the four empresses — ideal wives, mothers and regents?', in P. Setälä, R. Berg, R. Hälikkää, M. Keltanen, J. Pölönen and V. Vuolanto (eds), *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Empire* (Rome, 2002), 124.

¹⁶ H. Mattingly, 'The consecration of Faustina the Elder and her daughter', *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948), 147–51; C. Rowan, 'Communicating a *consecratio*: the deification coinage of Faustina I', in *Proceedings of the XIV International Numismatic Congress, Glasgow* (Glasgow, forthcoming).

emperors means that an analysis can be performed only on silver coinage.¹⁷ None the less, the results of a sample of 56 hoards from diverse geographical areas, containing 67,151 coins struck in the Severan period, are revealing.¹⁸ The results show a significant presence of coins struck in the names of Julia Domna, Julia Maesa and Julia Mamaea (Table 1), and, to a lesser extent, Julia Soaemias. Plautilla, Julia Paula, Aquilia Severa, Annia Faustina and Orbiana constitute a significantly smaller percentage. The proportions given in Table 1 are for the entire silver monetary output of each reign; a year-by-year analysis would also be revealing, but, since many Severan coins have not been dated to a specific year, such an analysis proves impossible when examining the dynasty as a whole. Consequently, the smaller percentages present for Plautilla, the wives of Elagabalus and for Orbiana are at first glance somewhat misleading: coinage was only struck for these individuals for a very short period. During the years these coins were struck they might have formed a far more significant proportion of the currency, but without more specific dating for Severan coinage we cannot estimate what this percentage might have been. None the less, from this larger perspective we are able to gauge what image was conveyed by an emperor's coinage in its entirety.

The surprisingly similar proportions of silver coinage struck for Julia Domna under Septimius Severus (17%), Domna under Caracalla (18%), Julia Maesa (18%) and Julia Mamaea (17%) is suggestive of a workshop or *officina* within the imperial mint that was responsible for producing types for these women. This hypothesis has existed for some time; it is suggested that each of the *officinae* within the mint was given a particular reverse type to strike. This acted as an identifier of the workshop, and thus formed a mechanism of quality control.¹⁹ Though it is not known for certain, six workshops have been suggested for the mint in Rome in this period. From AD 248 the workshops within the mint began to sign their products with Greek numerals. From this we can deduce that there were six workshops at this time, one striking coinage exclusively for Philip's wife, Octacilia.²⁰ The model has been a guide to

¹⁷ T.V. Buttrey, 'A hoard of *sestertii* from Bordeaux and the problem of bronze circulation in the third century A.D.', *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 18 (1972), 45–55; R. Carson, 'Coin hoards and Roman coinage of the third century AD', in C.N.L. Brooke, B.H.I. Stewart, J.G. Pollard and T.R. Volk (eds), *Studies in Numismatic Method Presented to Philip Grierson* (Cambridge, 1983), 66; R. Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1994), 70.

¹⁸ For a full listing of the hoards used, see Rowan, 'Becoming Jupiter' (above, n. 10), 144–9. Fourteen of the hoards were found in Britain, four in France, two in Belgium, two in Italy, thirteen in Germany, five in Romania, three in Hungary, three in Slovenia, four in Bulgaria, one in Macedonia, one in Serbia, two in Turkey and two in Syria.

¹⁹ P.V. Hill, 'Notes on coinage of Septimius Severus and his family AD 193–217', *Numismatic Chronicle* 4 (1964), 169; Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage' (above, n. 4), 121; Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 140.

²⁰ R. Carson, 'System and product in the Roman mint', in R.A.G. Carson and C.H.V. Sutherland (eds), *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly* (London, 1956), 238. The number of workshops might have increased or decreased in different periods, but six workshops appear to

Table 1. Relative quantities of Severan silver portrait types as suggested by the hoard evidence.

Obverse portrait	Percentage of AR types in the hoards*
<i>Reign of Septimius Severus</i>	
Septimius Severus	47%
Caracalla	20%
Julia Domna	17%
Geta	13%
Plautilla	3%
<i>Sole Reign of Caracalla</i>	
Caracalla	82%
Julia Domna	18%
<i>Reign of Elagabalus</i>	
Elagabalus	71%
Julia Maesa	18%
Julia Soaemias	7%
Julia Paula	3%
Aquilia Severa	1%
Annia Faustina	0%
Severus Alexander as Caesar	<1%
<i>Reign of Severus Alexander</i>	
Severus Alexander	82%
Julia Mamaea	17%
Orbiana	1%
Diva Julia Maesa	<1%

* percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number

understanding the operation of the mint in earlier periods. If one workshop was dedicated to striking coins for the empresses in the Severan period, then one would expect that a sixth of silver coinage, or 16–17%, would bear the empress's portrait, as is the case here. The quantitative evidence seems to

have been in operation for the Severan period. P.V. Hill, 'The issues of Severus and his sons in AD 211', *Numismatic Chronicle* 138 (1978), 33, suggested that briefly in AD 210 the number increased to eight.

demonstrate the fact that at least one of the six workshops was dedicated to striking coinage for the empresses.

The hoards contained far less coinage struck in the name of the later imperial wives, and only 7% of Elagabalus's silver coinage was struck in the name of Elagabalus's mother, Julia Soaemias. No coins at all were found for Elagabalus's third wife, Annia Faustina. The problem of Soaemias's coinage will be returned to below (pp. 261–5). For Annia Faustina and the other imperial wives, their small numismatic presence likely reflects the fact that their marriages only lasted for a short period of time, in the case of Annia Faustina just a few months.

The very brief marriages of the later Severan emperors, in addition to the fact that no direct imperial heir was produced after Caracalla and Geta, resulted in a significant visual presence of the mothers and grandmothers of the Severan emperors: Julia Domna and her female relatives came to form the blood lineage of the dynasty. Domna lived into the rule of her son Caracalla, forming a living link between one ruler and the next. After the death of Caracalla, it was Domna's sister, Julia Maesa, who could claim a direct blood link. Caracalla's praetorian prefect Macrinus ruled for a brief period before being overthrown in favour of Julia Maesa's grandson Elagabalus. In fact, Elagabalus was touted as the biological son of Caracalla.²¹ The claim was undoubtedly false, but the story, in addition to Elagabalus's early portraiture (which consciously recalled Caracalla) underscores the importance of a blood link in the accessions of this period. The youth of the emperors involved (Elagabalus was only fourteen when he came to power, as was Severus Alexander) would only have strengthened the importance of the dynastic connection.²² After Elagabalus's overthrow, his cousin, Severus Alexander, replaced him. Maesa survived into Alexander's reign for a short period, and her daughter, Julia Mamaea (Alexander's mother), appears on the imperial coinage.

The fact that the Severan dynasty was connected through the female line meant a significant presence of empresses on the imperial coinage, underscoring the *domus divina* and the continuity of the regime. But what images and associations did this coinage convey? An analysis of the particular types, and their relative frequencies, reveals that the Severan imperial women extended imperial ideology in a manner that underscored continuity with the past. But there are also significant differences between the numismatic image of the different empresses, reflecting the fact that their public associations and their

²¹ Dio 79.31.3, 79.72.2–3; Herodian 5.3.10–12.

²² K.W. Harl, 'Caracalla or Elagabalus? The Imperial *imago* at the Greek mint of Magnesia ad Meandrum', *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 26 (1981), 163–84; A. Johnston, 'Caracalla or Elagabalus? A case of unnecessary mistaken identity', *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 27 (1982), 97–147; R. Turcan, 'Les premières effigies monétaires d'Elagabal: problèmes politiques et dynastiques', in *Ritratto ufficiale e ritratto privato: atti della II conferenza internazionale sul ritratto romano* (Rome, 1984), 535–9.

public role subtly changed from emperor to emperor, in keeping with the shifting ideology of the Severan period.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF JULIA DOMNA DURING THE REIGN OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS (AD 193–211)

Julia Domna appears in a large number of inscriptions and dedications, and received many honorary titles in her lifetime and after.²³ The significant amount of surviving material relating to her no doubt reflects the length of time she was associated with the imperial house (some 24 years), but perhaps also the increased output of inscriptions and provincial coinage in the Severan period.²⁴ Remarkably, Domna's name appears on milestones, an honour never before given to an imperial woman.²⁵ She also had a role in the rites associated with the celebration of the saecular games in AD 204, and is shown with the rest of the imperial family on the reliefs of the gate of the *argentarii*, and on the arch in Lepcis Magna.²⁶ Dio records that Caracalla trusted her with the imperial correspondence.²⁷ An inscription in Ephesus preserves the empress's response to a petition by the city, recording her pledge that she would work on behalf of the city with her 'sweetest son'.²⁸ The textual evidence of the period casts her as a patroness of philosophers and rhetors. This is most notable in the works of Philostratus, who states that Domna commissioned the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, and who wrote a letter addressed to her concerning Plutarch.²⁹ Dio records that Domna turned to philosophy as a consolation for her treatment by Severus's praetorian prefect Plautianus, but her continued patronage of philosophers after Plautianus's fall from power suggests a real and

²³ Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3), 79–143; Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage' (above, n. 4), 119; Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 137.

²⁴ On the large number of active provincial mints under Septimius Severus, see Harl, *Civic Coins* (above, n. 8), 107. A. Wilson, 'Urban development in the Severan empire', in S. Swain, S. Harrison and J. Elsner (eds), *Severan Culture* (Cambridge, 2007), 290–326, has provided a good overview of the numerous arches, statue groups and other inscriptions erected to the imperial family.

²⁵ *CIL* III 482 (Lagina in Asia Minor) is the first of these milestones, erected in AD 196. See the discussion in Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 68.

²⁶ Ghedini, *Giulia Domna* (above, n. 4), 25–110; Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 53–4.

²⁷ Dio 78.18.2–3, 79.4.2–4.

²⁸ *AE* 1966, 430 = I Ephesos 2, 212 (I.11), with discussion in Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 96.

²⁹ Philostratus, *Vitae Apollonii* 1.3.1 and *Epistulae* 73. On the circle of philosophers, see G.W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1969), 101–9; E.A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta. Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London, 1999), 122–6; and T. Whitmarsh, 'Prose literature and the Severan dynasty', in Swain, Harrison and Elsner (eds), *Severan Culture* (above, n. 24), 32–5. For the letter of Philostratus to Domna see G. Anderson, 'Putting pressure on Plutarch: Philostratus epistle 73', *Classical Philology* 72 (1977), 43–5; R.J. Penella, 'Philostratus' letter to Julia Domna', *Hermes* 107 (1979), 161–8; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta* (above), 124; and Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 111.

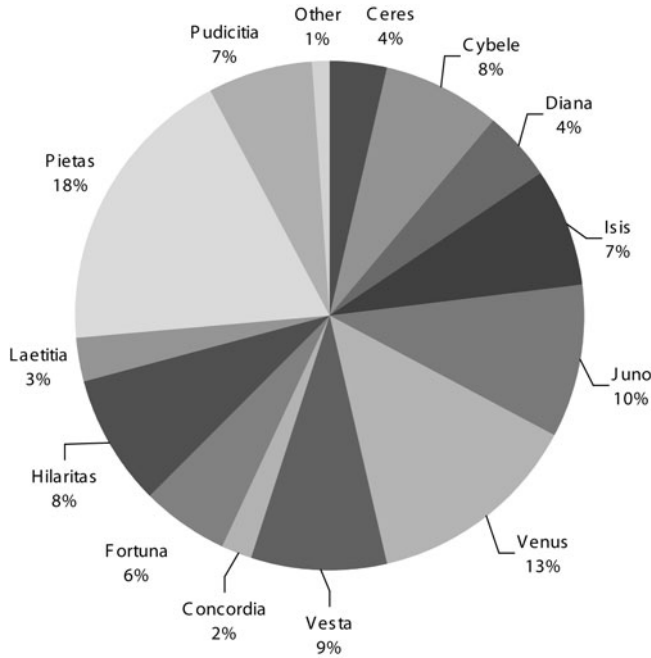


Fig. 1. Reverse silver types of Julia Domna during the reign of Severus (no. = 5,525).

abiding interest.³⁰ Philostratus records an example of the empress acting as a patroness, securing the chair of rhetoric at Athens for Philiscus.³¹ From this array of evidence one can begin to gauge the varying roles and associations the empress had in the Severan dynasty.

An analysis of Domna's coin types provides another perspective on her role in the dynasty, and highlights her changing public image from Severus to Caracalla. In the hoard sample 5,525 identifiable coins were found struck with Domna's portrait during Septimius's reign (AD 193–211). The breakdown of the reverse types on this coinage can be seen in Figure 1.

The overall impression given by the coinage is one of diversity. Domna is associated with a variety of goddesses, but also with the felicity of Severus's rule, communicated through types of Fortuna, Hilaritas and Laetitia. The largest proportion of Domna's silver coinage is made up of Pietas types (18%). This is the result of a single type struck in extremely large quantities (*RIC* 574; with 618 examples in the hoard sample). The type has the legend *PIETAS PVBLICA* and an image of Pietas with both arms raised in front of an altar (Fig. 2). Hill dated this coin type to the period of Plautianus's ascendancy, AD 204. Few other coin types were struck for Domna in this period, and this has been interpreted as a loss of status for Domna as a result of Plautianus's

³⁰ Dio 76.15.6–7.

³¹ Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum* 622.



Fig. 2. Denarius of Julia Domna showing Pietas with raised arms (RIC 574). (Reproduced courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.; <http://www.cngcoins.com>.)

intrigues.³² Yet the quantitative perspective demonstrates that although only a few *types* were being struck for Domna, this does not necessarily mean that fewer *coins* were being struck for her, or that she suffered a drop in status.

A similar Pietas type, showing Pietas dropping incense onto an altar and holding a box with the legend PIETAS AVGG (RIC 572), was struck in significant quantities also for Domna (390 examples). The epithet AVGG likely refers to Caracalla and Severus, and Domna's role as the wife and mother of the ruling emperors. This connection between the concept of Pietas and Domna's role in the imperial family is visualized on an *aes* type struck for Domna, which portrays Julia Domna standing frontally, with Severus and Caracalla on either side, accompanied by the legend PIETATI AVGVSTAE (RIC 864, 866).

Other significant coin types associated with Domna (with more than 200 occurrences) are Diana Lucifera (RIC 548 — 231 examples), Hilaritas with two small figures (likely representing Caracalla and Geta, RIC 557 — 242 examples), Juno (RIC 559 and 560 — 267 and 261 examples respectively), a coin type showing Cybele on a throne with the legend MATER DEVM (RIC 564 — 382 examples), Pudicitia (RIC 576 — 263 examples), an image identified by Mattingly as Isis and Horus with the legend SAECVLI FELICITAS (RIC 577 — 401 examples), a Venus Felix type (RIC 580 — 437 examples) and an image of Vesta with the legend VESTAE SANCTAE (RIC 587 — 326 examples). This last type probably commemorates Domna's patronage of the restoration of the sanctuary of the Vestals after fire severely damaged the structure under Commodus.³³

Domna's coinage visualizes her role as a traditional Roman empress. She is associated with the traditional Roman goddesses Juno, Venus and Diana, is seen as an embodiment of sexual virtue, and is shown contributing to the joy of the age through her role as mother to the heirs apparent. The Cybele type may seem unusual at first glance, but it had been struck for empresses since the time

³² P.V. Hill, *The Coinage of Septimius Severus and his Family of the Mint of Rome* (London, 1964), 28–31; Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage' (above, n. 4), 130.

³³ Herodian 1.14.4–6; Gorrie, 'Julia Domna's building patronage' (above, n. 5), 65–8.



Fig. 3. Denarius of Julia Domna showing a female goddess breastfeeding a child (RIC 577). (Reproduced courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.; <http://www.cngcoins.com>.)

of Faustina I, and its appearance here underlined the connection between the Severan and Antonine dynasties.³⁴

The Isis type is more unusual and warrants closer investigation (Fig. 3).³⁵ Apart from the fact that the female figure is offering her breast to a young child, there is nothing to indicate to the viewer that the figures are Isis and Horus. The legend on this coin, SAECVLI FELICITAS, had been used under Marcus Aurelius to communicate the continuation of the dynasty, an idea also communicated by this image. Coins struck for Faustina II with the legend SAECVLI FELICITAS show two children seated on a throne, presumably meant to represent Commodus and Antoninus (RIC 509, 709–12, 1665–6). On coins struck for Septimius Severus, the legend was employed with a crescent and seven stars (associated with eternity), and with the portraits of Domna, Geta and Caracalla (RIC 159, 175, 181, 360, 416–18B, 513). On Severus's *aes* coinage the legend SAECVLI FELICITAS is accompanied by an image of Felicitas with her foot on a prow, holding a caduceus and cornucopiae (RIC 692, 698, 710–11). The imagery on Domna's coin does not show the typical Isis *lactans* seated with Horus; rather, a female figure stands holding a child with her foot on a prow, with an altar and rudder behind her.³⁶ The image may have been meant as an allusion to Fortuna (who is commonly portrayed with a rudder), or some sort of Isis-Fortuna.³⁷ This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that one of Domna's other coin types shows a seated Fortuna holding a cornucopia and rudder with a child at her feet, accompanied by the legend FORTVNAE FELICI (RIC 552–4, 854, 875–6). The common attributes between Domna's 'Isis' type, the coins of Severus showing Felicitas with a

³⁴ Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage' (above, n. 4), 123–6.

³⁵ Ghedini, *Giulia Domna* (above, n. 4), 155–6; Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 125.

³⁶ No comparable image of Isis could be found in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.

³⁷ Z. Rubin, *Supernatural and Religious Sanction of the Emperors' Rule under the Severi*, 193–217 (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1971), 380.

prow, and Domna's types showing Fortuna with a rudder and child, suggest that an identification of the image as Isis may be too simplistic.

Coin types that have formed the focus of modern discussions on the public image of Julia Domna have little or no representation in the hoard sample. The reverse types highlighting Domna's position as *mater castrorum*, for example, have only a small presence.³⁸ Thus, while Domna's assumption of this title has attracted considerable modern focus, and it was commonly given to the empress in Greek and Latin inscriptions, the official silver coinage of the Empire did not emphasize the position.³⁹ A coin type showing Cybele in a chariot with the legend MATER AVGG had only nineteen occurrences (*RIC* 562). Though this image closely associates Domna with Cybele, the small number of examples found in the archaeological record argues for caution in interpretation of the type: these coins may have been struck with specific recipients in mind, or on a specific occasion.⁴⁰ The series of coins highlighting the imperial family with Domna on the obverse and Severus, Caracalla and Geta on the reverse in a variety of combinations, had only two occurrences (*RIC* 539–45).⁴¹ Again, the coins may have been struck for a specific occasion.

Domna's varied numismatic image during the reign of Septimius Severus reflects the fact that Severus himself utilized an array of ideologies to justify and sanction his new dynasty. Underscoring the connection to Severus's adopted family, the Antonines, Domna is connected with deities and ideals that already had been motifs on the coinage of Faustina the Elder and Faustina the Younger. That Domna's image was defined largely by Severus's own ideologies becomes apparent when we consider the transformation of her coin types under the sole rule of her son Caracalla.

JULIA DOMNA'S NUMISMATIC IMAGE UNDER THE SOLE REIGN OF CARACALLA (AD 211–17)

Severus died in AD 211 in York and was succeeded by his sons, Caracalla and Geta. Caracalla killed his brother by December of this year, and from that point ruled alone.⁴² The accession of a new emperor resulted in a change in the official image of the *princeps*. Severus had utilized an array of different imagery

³⁸ There were single examples of *RIC* 563 and 569; sixteen examples of 567, and thirteen of 568.

³⁹ For modern scholarship discussing the title, see Benario, 'Julia Domna' (above, n. 4); Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3), 79–81; and M. Heil, 'Clodius Albinus und der Bürgerkrieg von 197', in H.-U. Wiemer (ed.), *Staatlichkeit und Politisches Handeln in der Römischen Kaiserzeit* (Berlin, 2006), 73–4.

⁴⁰ On this coin type, see Ghedini, *Giulia Domna* (above, n. 4), 136–9; Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage' (above, n. 4), 132; and Mikocki, *Sub Specie Deae* (above, n. 6), 74.

⁴¹ There was a single example of *RIC* 540, and one example of *RIC* 544. *RIC* 571 had two examples.

⁴² On the date of the death of Geta, see T. Barnes, 'Pre-Dacian acta martyrum', *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), 523–35.

on his coin types, above all the idea of military victory. Victory types form 21% of Severus's silver coin types according to the data gathered from the hoard sample.⁴³ During Caracalla's sole rule, however, military types form a mere 2% of the emperor's silver coinage, and instead deities come to have an increasing association with the emperor.⁴⁴ The hoard evidence suggests that 21% of Severus's silver coinage displayed deities, whereas under Caracalla's sole rule this proportion rises to 59%. During Caracalla's co-rule with his father the divine types on his coinage included Mars, Minerva and Sol, but during his sole rule the divine repertoire expanded, constituting Venus, Sol, Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, Aesculapius, Sarapis and Hercules.⁴⁵ Thus in terms of sheer quantity, and in variety, deities gained a greater presence on the emperor's coinage under Caracalla.

This change in the imperial image is reflected also in the coinage of Julia Domna: her coin types come to have an almost exclusive focus on the divine (Fig. 4).

Under Severus, Domna's coinage had a variety of types struck in significant quantities. During the rule of her son, however, Domna's silver coinage focuses on Vesta, Venus and Diana. The single largest type struck for Domna in this period was an issue showing Diana holding a torch with the legend *DIANA LVCIFERA* (RIC 373A — 353 examples) (Fig. 5). The same type had been struck for Domna under Septimius Severus (RIC 548, 851, 871). The image thus communicated continuity with the previous regime. The connection of Domna with the virgin goddesses Diana and Vesta also may have been a conscious decision after the death of Geta. The portrayal of the empress as a mother may have been thought too awkward after the death of one of her sons.

After the death of Severus, Domna's obverse titlature changes from *Iulia Augusta* to *Iulia Pia Felix Augusta*. Domna appears on coinage as *mater augusti*, *mater senatus* and *mater patriae*, the latter being an innovation on the traditional imperial title *pater patriae*. The date of these titles is debated; they may have been bestowed after the death of Plautianus, but they only appear on coinage after the death of Severus and before the death of Geta (the double 'G' of the AVGG legend indicating that both of Domna's sons were alive).⁴⁶ The abandonment of the *mater augusti* type after Geta's death (suggested by the fact that no issues survive that give the title MAT. AVG), again suggests that the public image of Domna as a mother may have become too loaded in Caracalla's sole rule. The MATER AVGG coin types appear to have been

⁴³ C. Rowan, 'Under Divine Auspices'. *Patron Deities and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severan Period* (Ph.D. thesis, Macquarie University Sydney, 2009), 140. A full discussion of the changing numismatic representations of the Severan emperors is forthcoming as a monograph.

⁴⁴ Rowan, 'Under Divine Auspices' (above, n. 43), 140.

⁴⁵ Rowan, 'Under Divine Auspices' (above, n. 43), 140.

⁴⁶ On the date of the titles, see Williams, 'Studies in the lives of Roman empresses part 1' (above, n. 4); Benario, 'Julia Domna' (above, n. 4); Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3), 86; Ghedini, *Giulia Domna* (above, n. 4), 13–14; W. Kuhoff, 'Julia Aug. mater Aug. n. et castrorum et senatus et patriae', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 97 (1993), 259–71; Lusnia, 'Julia Domna's coinage' (above, n. 4), 133–4; and Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 93–4.

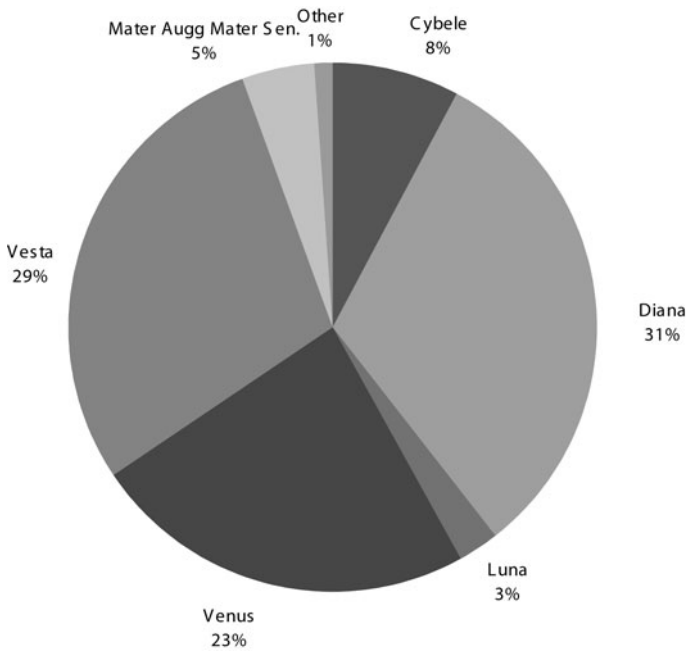


Fig. 4. Reverse silver types of Julia Domna during the reign of Caracalla (no. = 1,110).



Fig. 5. Denarius of Julia Domna showing Diana holding a torch (RIC 373A). (Reproduced courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.; <http://www.cngcoins.com>.)

struck in small, but none the less significant, quantities. Twenty-four examples of this type (RIC 380) were found in the hoard sample, with a reverse type showing Domna standing, holding branch and sceptre, and 28 examples of RIC 381 were uncovered, a variety in type that shows Domna seated. These numbers become more impressive when one considers they all must have been struck in the first few months after Severus's death, while Geta was alive.

The Vesta types (RIC 390–1), which constitute about 29% of Domna's silver coins under Caracalla, continue the close association of Domna to the Vestals seen

under Severus. Unlike Severus, Caracalla also associated himself with the restoration of the temple: two gold coins were struck for the emperor showing him sacrificing in front of the structure (*RIC* 249–50). Venus Genetrix types continue from the rule of Severus.⁴⁷ Venus Victrix types, however, do not continue under Caracalla.⁴⁸ This again might be attributed to the shift in imperial ideology from an emphasis on military prowess to one that highlighted divine support. The Cybele type, with the legend *MATRI DEVM*, can be seen also as a continuation from Severus's principate, though these types constitute only 8% of Domna's coinage. The image of the emperor changed significantly under Caracalla, and Domna's types were able to communicate continuity with the previous ruler while enhancing and supporting the new ideology of power.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF PLAUTILLA (AD 202–5)

In AD 202, Caracalla married Plautilla, the daughter of Severus's praetorian prefect Plautianus.⁴⁹ After the downfall of her father in AD 205, Plautilla was sent into exile; Dio records that she was put to death when Caracalla became sole ruler.⁵⁰

Plautilla's coin types have an emphasis on Venus and Pietas, similar to the coins of Julia Domna, but also underscore the idea of Concordia and the continuation of the dynasty (Fig. 6). The Pietas type of Plautilla is subtly different from that of her mother-in-law. Though the legend on the coin, *PIETAS AVGG*, is also seen on the coinage of Domna, it is accompanied by an image of Pietas holding a sceptre and child, a reference to Plautilla's role as the mother of future emperors, and perhaps a reference to a daughter she may have borne to Caracalla (*RIC* 367).⁵¹ The Venus types of Plautilla in the hoard analysis are all of the Venus Victrix type (*RIC* 369), similar to the type seen for Domna under Severus and part of the military ideology that characterized Severus's principate (Fig. 7). With 311 examples in the hoard sample, this type was the largest struck for Plautilla.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the idea of Concordia constitutes the majority of Plautilla's silver types (37%). This idea was expressed with several images and legends. Two issues were released with the legend *CONCORDIA AVGG* and an image of Concordia standing, holding a patera and sceptre (*RIC* 359 — 31 examples; *RIC* 363 — 156 examples). A variation showed Concordia seated

⁴⁷ Under Caracalla: *RIC* 387–9, 591–2A, 604–5B. Under Severus: *RIC* 537, 578.

⁴⁸ Types struck under Severus: *RIC* 535–6, 579, 581, 630–3A, 645A, 647. These types total 270 examples in the hoard analysis, constituting about 5% of Domna's types struck under Severus.

⁴⁹ Dio 76.1.2; Herodian 3.10.5–8.

⁵⁰ Dio 77.6.3; Herodian 3.13.3.

⁵¹ On the possibility that Plautilla gave birth to a daughter, see J. Gagé, *Recherches sur les jeux séculaires* (Paris, 1934), 33–78; with refutation by Z. Rubin, 'The *felicitas* and the *concordia* of the Severan house', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 3 (1976–7), 158.

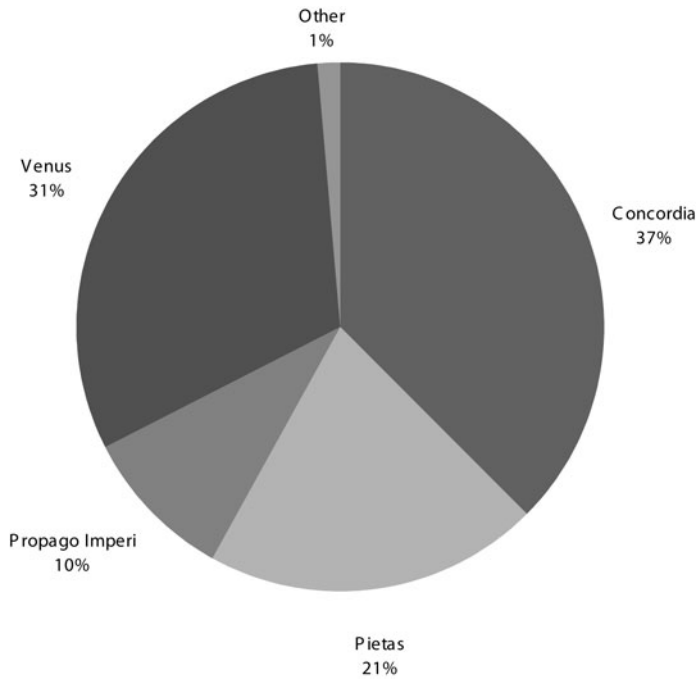


Fig. 6. Reverse silver types of Plautilla (no. = 1,006).



Fig. 7. Denarius of Plautilla showing Venus Victrix (RIC 369). (Reproduced courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.; <http://www.cngcoins.com>.)

with a patera and cornucopiae.⁵² That these Concordia types were to celebrate the marriage of Plautilla and Caracalla is evident from the third type, which showed Caracalla and Plautilla grasping hands with the legends *CONCORDIAE AETERNAE* (RIC 361 — 94 examples), and *CONCORDIA FELIX* (RIC 365 — 35 examples). This same image was accompanied by the legend *PROPAGO IMPERI*, an issue that constituted 10% of Plautilla's silver types (RIC 362 — 96 examples). The image of Plautilla and Caracalla shaking hands was

⁵² Of RIC 360 there were 28 examples; of RIC 370, two; and 31 of RIC 372.

displayed also on several provincial coin types.⁵³ One imagines that if Plautilla had remained married for longer, her image might have become more diverse. But Caracalla's marriage, and those of the remaining Severan emperors, was short. Consequently Plautilla's coinage, along with that of her successors, has an overwhelming emphasis on Concordia.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF JULIA PAULA (AD 219–20)

Julia Paula, of the Cornelian gens, was married to the Emperor Elagabalus in AD 219. Her marriage was short-lived, ending in AD 220 so that Elagabalus could marry the Vestal Virgin Aquilia Severa.⁵⁴ The small amount of coinage that was struck for Paula in this period understandably emphasizes the imperial marriage (Fig. 8).

More so than for Plautilla, Concordia forms a focus, but Paula's marriage was even shorter than Plautilla's three years. The gold types of Julia Paula also focus on the theme of Concordia, and were likely struck on the occasion of the emperor's marriage.⁵⁵ The largest silver type of Paula in the hoard sample was *RIC* 211 (323 examples), with a reverse type showing a seated Concordia holding a patera, with a star in the field (Fig. 9). Coin types showing Elagabalus and Julia Paula clasping hands with the legend *CONCORDIA* were also present in the hoard sample (*RIC* 214 — fifteen examples), as was a type showing a seated Concordia holding patera and double cornucopiae with the legend *CONCORDIA AVGG* (*RIC* 216 — 24 examples). The Venus examples of Paula were all of the same type, Venus seated holding a globe and sceptre with the accompanying legend *VENVS GENETRIX* (*RIC* 222). Venus Genetrix had also appeared on the coinage of Domna and Plautilla. No other types were found for the empress in the silver hoard sample.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF AQUILIA SEVERA (AD 220–2)

Elagabalus married the Vestal Virgin Aquilia Severa in AD 220, divorced her in favour of Annia Faustina in AD 221, and then remarried her later that

⁵³ Our knowledge of provincial coin types will be enhanced greatly by the completion of the *Roman Provincial Coinage Project* for this period. I have been able to locate the following examples (by no means exhaustive): *SNG Levante* 1229 (Adana in Cilicia); *ANMG* I, 369, 1329 (Nicopolis in Moesia Inferior); LHS Numismatik AG Auction 96 (8 May 2006) 1657 (Phigaleia); *SNG France* 819 (Side in Pamphylia); *SNG Levante* 1032 and 1071 (Tarsos in Cilicia, struck in AD 202).

⁵⁴ Dio 80.9.1–4; Herodian 5.6.1–2.

⁵⁵ G. Gautier, 'Le monnayage en or émis à Rome en 219 ap. J.-C. au nom de Julia Paula: une enquête au sein des sources', *Revue Numismatique* 165 (2009), 153–62.

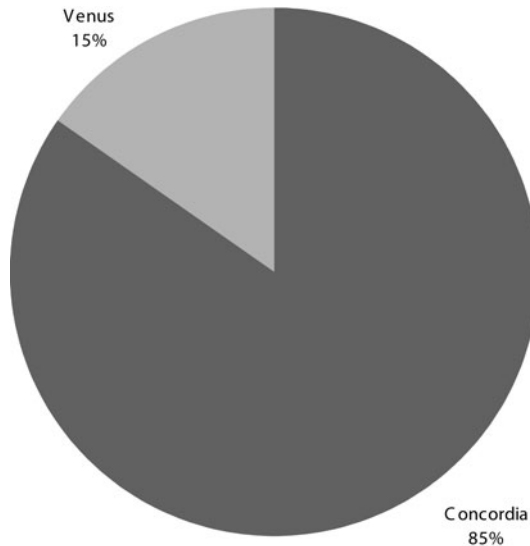


Fig. 8. Reverse silver types of Julia Paula (no. = 427).



Fig. 9. Denarius of Julia Paula showing Concordia (RIC 211). (Reproduced courtesy of Numismatik Lanz, Munich/Dr Hubert Lanz.)

year.⁵⁶ The empress's silver coinage in the hoard sample has an almost exclusive focus on the idea of Concordia (Fig. 10).

The large proportion of Concordia types is largely the result of a single issue showing Concordia seated, holding a patera and double cornucopiae with the legend CONCORDIA and a star in the field (Fig. 11).⁵⁷ A Concordia type also was released showing Elagabalus and Aquilia Severa with clasped hands (RIC

⁵⁶ Dio 80.9.1–4; Herodian 5.6.1–2; M. Thirion, *Le monnayage d'Élagabale (218–222)* (Amsterdam, 1968), 8, 16–17; M. Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal* (Stuttgart, 1989), 87–92; R. Turcan, *Héliogabale et le sacre du soleil* (Paris, 1997), 142–5.

⁵⁷ There are several variations on this type, depending on the placement of the star in the field. RIC 225 (star left, 114 examples), RIC 226 (star right, seventeen examples), RIC 227 (no star, four examples).

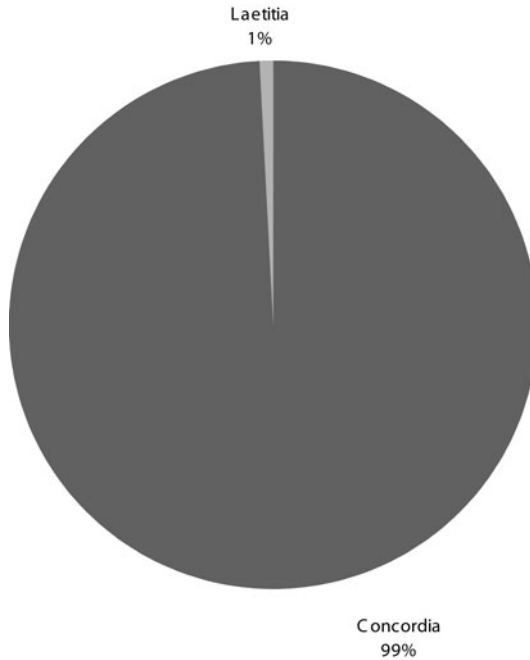


Fig. 10. Reverse silver types of Aquilia Severa (no. = 141).



Fig. 11. Denarius of Aquilia Severa showing Concordia (RIC 225). NAC Auction 42 (20 November 2007) lot 149. (Reproduced courtesy of Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG.)

228), but this had only five examples in the sample. Only one other type of Severa was uncovered, a coin showing Laetitia holding a wreath and a rudder resting on a globe with the legend LAETITIA (RIC 229 — one example).

Dio and Herodian record that Elagabalus justified his marriage to the Vestal Aquilia by stating that a union between a priest and priestess was sacred, and would result in ‘godlike’ children.⁵⁸ From this statement some have postulated

⁵⁸ Dio 80.9.3–4; Herodian 5.6.2.

that Elagabalus was attempting to alter the nature of the Roman principate, instituting the rule of a high priest and high priestess, who would give birth to the next generation of priest rulers.⁵⁹ One must remain cautious of this interpretation in view of Aquilia's coin types. If the emperor or his advisers intended to alter the Roman principate by instituting a new priestly government, this was not communicated actively on the imperial coinage. Instead, in terms of numismatic iconography, Aquilia looks remarkably similar to her predecessor.

No coins struck for Elagabalus's third wife, Annia Faustina, were found in the hoard sample. Considering that only one silver type is known for her (*RIC* 232), this result is not surprising. Still, this small number suggests that this particular marriage was not marked or celebrated by a large emission of coinage. Since this was the third marriage of the emperor in as many years, the celebration of the event may have been circumspect.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF JULIA SOAEMIAS (AD 218–22)

The numismatic images of Julia Paula and Aquilia Severa might be understood by their very brief association with the imperial family. The same cannot be said for the coinage of Elagabalus's mother, Julia Soaemias. Both Julia Soaemias and her mother, Julia Maesa, had been in Rome during the rule of Septimius Severus, and thus both had first-hand experience of court life.⁶⁰ Soaemias had participated in the saecular games celebrated in AD 204 with other wives of equestrian rank.⁶¹ Quantitative analysis of Soemias's silver types reveals an almost exclusive focus on Venus *Caelestis*, an incarnation of Venus never seen before on Roman imperial coinage (Fig. 12).

The Venus *Caelestis* types have two differing iconographies. One portrays Venus standing, holding an apple and sceptre (sometimes with a star in the field), with the legend *VENVS CAELESTIS* (*RIC* 241 — 357 examples). The other type also has the legend *VENVS CAELESTIS*, but here Venus is seated holding an apple and sceptre with a child at her feet (*RIC* 243 — 442 examples) (Fig. 13). The latter image may have been intended to communicate Soaemias's role as the mother of the Augustus. The Juno types that constitute

⁵⁹ Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion* (above, n. 56), 92; G.H. Halsberghe, 'Le culte de deus Sol Invictus à Rome au 3e siècle après J.C', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.17.4 (Berlin, 1984), 2,189–91; M. Icks, 'Priesthood and imperial power: the religious reforms of Heliogabalus, 220–222 AD', in L. de Blois, P. Funke and J. Hahn (eds), *The Impact of Imperial Rome on Religions, Ritual and Religious Life in the Roman Empire* (Leiden, 2006), 175; Turcan, *Héliogabale* (above, n. 56), 143–5.

⁶⁰ Dio 79.30.3; Herodian 5.3.2, 5.3.10, 5.5.1, 5.8.3; Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 93.

⁶¹ *AE* 1932, 70 = I. Pighi, *De Ludibus Saecularibus Populi Romani Quiritum* (Amsterdam, 1965), 158, V^a 26.4; M. Icks, *Images of Elagabalus* (Ph.D. thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2008), 45.

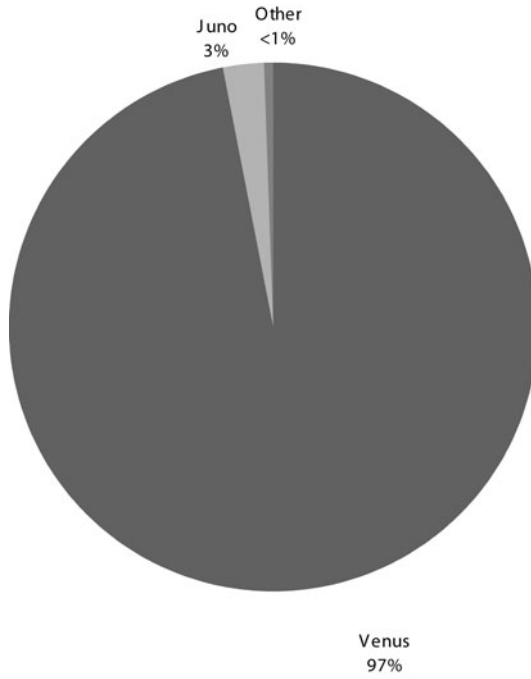


Fig. 12. Reverse silver types of Julia Soemias (no. = 619).



Fig. 13. Denarius of Julia Soemias showing Venus (RIC 243). NAC Auction 39 (16 May 2007) lot 144. (Reproduced courtesy of Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG.)

3% of Soemias’s silver coinage are all of the IVNO REGINA type (RIC 237 — sixteen examples).

‘Caelestis’ or ‘heavenly’ is a known, if uncommon, epithet of Venus in inscriptions, but is not otherwise known on Roman imperial coinage.⁶² Venus

⁶² AE 1932, 77 (Baiae), AE 1985, 278 (Puteoli), CIL V 8137–8 (Pola), CIL VI 780 (Rome), CIL IX 2562 (Bovianum). The inscription from Puteoli mentions a Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and a Julia Augusta, meaning that the inscription either refers to Caracalla and Domna, or to Elagabalus and Soemias. Benario believed, in the light of the numismatic evidence, that Soemias

standing with an apple and sceptre is a common image on imperial coinage, as is a seated Venus (Fig. 13). Seated Venus types with Cupid in front, for example, had been struck for Julia Domna, with the legend *VENVS GENETRIX*, and seated Venus *Gentrix* types had been issued for Plautilla and Julia Paula (see above, pp. 256–8, 259).⁶³ The innovation of this type, then, is in the legend. Indeed, if the seated Venus *Caelestis* types were being struck for Soaemias at the same time as Julia Paula's seated Venus *Genetrix* types, then the viewer would have been presented with almost identical images that could be differentiated only through the legend. The viewer might have blurred different female figures. Indeed, that the only alteration is in the legend suggests that this coin type (and others) were intended to be viewed in a precise and technical manner. The introduction of this new legend, and the fact that Venus *Caelestis* forms almost the entire numismatic image of Soaemias, calls for explanation.

In the *British Museum Catalogue*, Mattingly suggested that what is shown on Soaemias's coinage is the Carthaginian goddess Ourania, whom Dio and Herodian record was married to the cultic stone Elagabal.⁶⁴ Since the image forms such a large proportion of Soaemias's silver types, one imagines that it was struck for the empress from the beginning of Elagabalus's reign, before the marriage of the god took place. However, the smaller than usual proportion of silver types struck for Soaemias during Elagabalus's reign (only 7% compared to the normal 16–17% for other imperial woman) (Table 1), may mean that coinage was struck for Soaemias only for part of her son's rule, perhaps after the marriage of the god Elagabal to Ourania.⁶⁵ An alternative avenue of interpretation is to see the Venus *Caelestis* type as an *interpretatio romana* of an Emesene goddess, an idea also suggested by Mattingly.⁶⁶ An Aphrodite figure did exist in the Emesene pantheon, though given the paucity of material evidence from the city it is difficult to reconstruct Emesa and its culture with any certainty.⁶⁷

was more likely (Benario, 'The titulature of Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea' (above, n. 4), 11–13). This idea was refuted by J.F. Gilliam, 'Severan titles and an inscription from Puteoli', *Classical Philology* 58 (1963), 26–9.

⁶³ Domna's type (released under Caracalla's sole rule): *RIC* 389.

⁶⁴ H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum V: Pertinax to Elagabalus* (London, 1950), ccxxxiii; Dio 80.12.1–2; Herodian 5.6.4.

⁶⁵ Unfortunately the hoard evidence can provide little assistance here. Given the uncertainty surrounding the precise dates for many coins in this period, hoards containing material from the reign of Elagabalus are often dated to the end of his reign, AD 222. The Frâncești hoard in Romania has a *terminus post quem* of AD 219, but only contains a single coin from the reign of Elagabalus, hardly enough to establish that the mint was not striking for Soaemias in this period. For the hoard, see G. Depeyrot and D. Moïsil, *The trésor Frâncești (Roumanie)* (Wetteren, 2004).

⁶⁶ Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire* (above, n. 64), ccxlv.

⁶⁷ Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion* (above, n. 56), 50; Icks, *Images of Elagabalus* (above, n. 61), 40; M. Pietrzykowski, 'Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.16.3 (Berlin, 1986), 1,823.

The Venus Caelestis type only occurs on the coins of Soemias, and not on the coinage of other imperial women during Elagabalus's rule.⁶⁸ Since Dio and Herodian draw explicit parallels between the marriages of the emperor and the marriages of his cultic stone, some have suggested that the marriage of the god Elagabal was mirrored in the emperor's own marriages, a *hieros gamos*.⁶⁹ However, we should not accept the literary tradition surrounding the emperor at face value. The same hostile tradition that gave the emperor the nickname Elagabalus, closely aligning the emperor and his god, no doubt also resulted in an alignment between the marriages of the emperor and the marriages of the god, reflected in Herodian's erroneous tale that the god Elagabal also married the Roman *palladium* (no doubt invented from the fact that the emperor had married a Vestal Virgin).⁷⁰ The fact that the new goddess Venus Caelestis only appears on the coins of Elagabalus's mother also should suggest caution before any interpretation of *hieros gamos*. Even here, the numismatic imagery does not confirm an identification of the goddess as Ourania/Dea Caelestis. Given the new epithet of Venus, a connection with the cultic practices of the god Elagabal is likely, but what precise connection with the cult Soemias's coinage communicated remains uncertain.

Another peculiarity is that though Soemias's silver coinage has an almost exclusive focus, this was not the case for the emperor himself. Though a significant proportion of the emperor's coinage showed the emperor as high priest of the god Elagabal, very few coins were found in the hoard sample that displayed the Emesene stone itself, and overall the emperor's types had a variety of images and themes.⁷¹ While Domna is given the title 'mother of the emperors', and later in the Severan dynasty Mamaea appears on medallions alongside her son as *mater augusti*, Soemias's coinage neglects this maternal role, except for (perhaps) the addition of the child to the image of the seated Venus Caelestis.⁷²

The precise connotations intended by the Venus Caelestis coin type, and Soemias's entire numismatic image, then, remain elusive. Apart from the epithet

⁶⁸ One silver Venus Caelestis type is known for Aquilia Severa (*RIC* 230), but no examples were found in the hoard sample, confirming Mattingly's suspicion that the type strictly belongs to Julia Soemias (Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire* (above, n. 64), ccxxxvii).

⁶⁹ Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion* (above, n. 56), 92; Icks, 'Priesthood and imperial power' (above, n. 59), 175; Turcan, *Héliogabale* (above, n. 56), 143–7.

⁷⁰ Rowan, 'Under Divine Auspices' (above, n. 43), 265.

⁷¹ Rowan, 'Under Divine Auspices' (above, n. 43), 223–4, pl. 41. The large number of surviving dies for the type showing the Emesene stone in a *quadriga* suggests that these coins may have been recalled and melted down after Elagabalus's overthrow.

⁷² The types of Mamaea and Severus Alexander, with facing busts on the obverse (*RIC* 316–17; F. Gnechi, *I medaglioni romani*, 3 vols (Milan, 1912), II, 84, nos. 1–11, and III, 44, nos. 13–21) and other issues with the bust of Alexander on the obverse and a bust of Mamaea on the reverse (*RIC* 314–15) recall the coins issued for Nero and Agrippina. Under Nero, Agrippina's position was communicated on coinage largely through confronting and jugate busts and titles of the empress and her son. Notably, the types of Mamaea and Severus Alexander with facing busts occur on medallion pieces, intended to be given to high officials in a ceremony, and not for circulation.

of *Caelestis*, the association of the empress with Venus can be seen as a continuation of the coinage of the earlier Severan empresses. But the legend *VENVS CAELESTIS* is not seen before or after Elagabalus's reign on imperial coinage,⁷³ and one must then conclude that it likely had some connection with the Emesene cult that rose to prominence during these years. If so, Soemias was connected very publicly with the cultic activities of Elagabalus, an idea that is confirmed when one examines the coinage of Soemias's mother, Julia Maesa.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF JULIA MAESA (AD 218–22)

In epigraphic evidence Julia Maesa is represented in a similar manner to Julia Domna, described as *mater castrorum* and *mater senatus*, though it is not known whether these titles were official.⁷⁴ Her numismatic image differs significantly from that of her daughter, and possesses no hint of the Emesene cult that defined the principate in this period (Fig. 14).

The largest proportion of Maesa's coinage is made up of *Pudicitia* types, communicating sexual virtue.⁷⁵ This is the result of a single type struck in very large quantities, which shows *Pudicitia* seated, raising her veil and holding a sceptre, with the legend *PVDICITIA* (*RIC* 268 — 990 examples) (Fig. 15). Another large issue struck for Maesa emphasized the good fortune of the age, with *Felicitas* holding a caduceus and sacrificing over an altar with the legend *SAECVLI FELICITAS* (*RIC* 271 — 570 examples). *Pietas* forms another major theme, with one issue in particular struck in large numbers, showing *Pietas* sacrificing over an altar while holding an incense box (*RIC* 263 — 222 examples). *Juno* also has a significant showing on the empress's coinage, shown holding a patera and sceptre with the legend *IVNO* (*RIC* 254 — 143 examples). Another major issue carries the legend *FECVNDITAS AVG* and shows *Fecunditas* with a child and cornucopiae (*RIC* 249 — 137 examples).

The overall impression is of a virtuous, traditional empress. The radical difference between the coinage of Julia Maesa and that of her daughter Soemias is reminiscent of their differing portrayals in the account of Herodian, whose history gives Julia Maesa a significant role in the running of the Empire.⁷⁶ The author presents Maesa as the moderating influence on Elagabalus's excesses: she worries about his eastern dress (5.5.5), she is concerned about the soldiers' reaction to Elagabalus's activities and persuades him to adopt Alexander as Caesar (5.7.1–2); she prevents Elagabalus's plans to murder Alexander (5.8.3), and then survives to influence the reign of Alexander

⁷³ Kosmetatou, 'The public image of Julia Mamaea' (above, n. 4), 405.

⁷⁴ Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3), 144–50. These 'mother' titles are particularly conspicuous given the lack of emphasis on Soemias's role as mother of the emperor.

⁷⁵ On the associations of *Pudicitia*, see R. Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2006).

⁷⁶ Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3), 23–8.

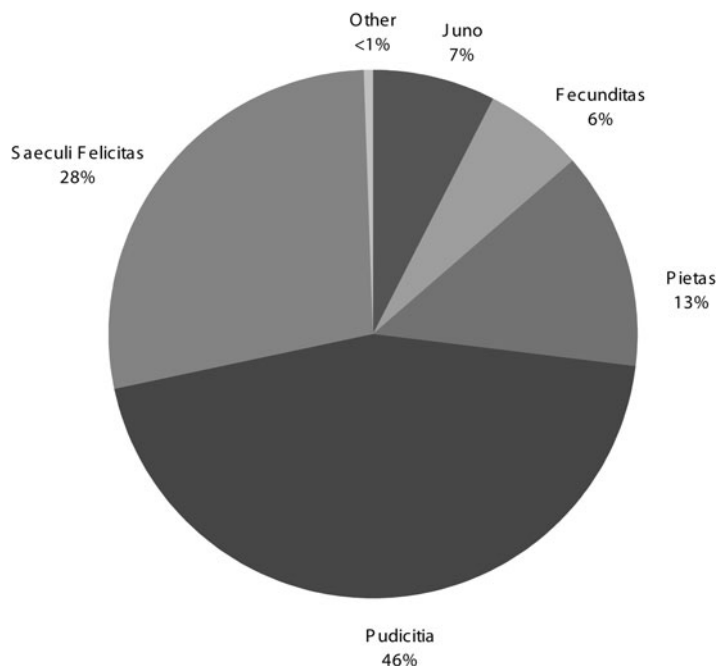


Fig. 14. Reverse silver types of Julia Maesa (no. = 2,220).



Fig. 15. Denarius of Julia Maesa showing Pudicitia (RIC 268). (Reproduced courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.; <http://www.cngcoins.com>.)

(5.8.10). Soaemias is mentioned rarely in Herodian's account, except at the end when she is killed with her son. Herodian records that both their bodies were mutilated and dragged through Rome before being thrown into the sewers (5.8.8–9). It may be that Herodian was inspired by the different public images of Maesa and Soaemias, demonstrated here in the numismatic evidence, to cast them in these roles in his account.

Whatever Herodian's portrayal of events, it is historical fact that Maesa survived into the reign of Severus Alexander, whereas Soaemias's body was dragged through the streets, the only empress to suffer this form of public

abuse.⁷⁷ Popular perception must have held that Soaemias was deeply involved in Elagabalus's outrages, whereas Maesa escaped reproach.⁷⁸ Did the differing public images of these women, suggested by the numismatic evidence, affect this perception? And do the differing numismatic images of Maesa and Soaemias reflect a real difference of ideology between the women? As discussed above, it seems unlikely that the imperial women had any direct voice in their numismatic image. Levick has observed that it is difficult to imagine anything beyond informal consultation.⁷⁹ We are left with two possible interpretations. Julia Maesa's image may have formed part of an overall imperial ideology that highlighted the continuation of Roman traditions alongside the introduction of the new Emesene cult (communicated on the coinage of Elagabalus and Soaemias). Or, the differing images of Maesa and Soaemias might reflect their different roles and ideas in the reign of Elagabalus. A difference of opinion between the empresses may have been communicated directly to the Roman mint, or the mint workers responded on their own initiative with a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the imperial family and its activities (*monetales*, after all, were appointed directly by the emperor himself).⁸⁰ The reign of Elagabalus in many ways is a break from the norms associated with the principate; we should not be surprised to find the public image of the imperial women is also different.

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF JULIA MAMAEA (AD 222–35)

Julia Maesa did not survive long into Severus Alexander's rule, and was deified.⁸¹ Alexander's reign emphasized restoration and renewal after

⁷⁷ E. Varner, 'Portraits, plots and politics: 'damnatio memoriae' and the images of imperial women', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001), 49.

⁷⁸ Some of the discourse surrounding Elagabalus's and Soaemias's death and *damnatio* may be preserved in the later account of Elagabalus provided in the *Historia Augusta*. The author records that Elagabalus was completely consigned to his mother (2.1), and then presents an extremely negative vision of the empress as a harlot who possessed all kinds of repulsive practices (17.2–3), entered the Senate chamber (4.1–2), and formed a women's senate (4.4). The *Historia Augusta* also hints at the 'powerful woman' topos present in Herodian by recording that Elagabalus took Maesa with him to the Senate House so that his *auctoritas* might be made more honourable (12.3). On the presentation of Soaemias in the *Historia Augusta*, see E. Frézouls, 'Le rôle politique des femmes dans l'*Histoire Auguste*', in G. Bonamente and F. Paschoud (eds), *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Genevense* (Bari, 1994), 130–2.

⁷⁹ Levick, *Julia Domna* (above, n. 1), 140. See also Keltanen, 'The public image of the four empresses' (above, n. 15), 106–9.

⁸⁰ On the appointment and careers of the *monetales* during the Principate, see K. Pink, 'Die Triumviri monetales unter Augustus', *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 71 (1946), 113–25; E. Birley, 'Senators in the emperor's service', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953), 197–214; and Chueng, 'The political significance' (above, n. 9), 59.

⁸¹ Herodian 6.1.4–5; *RIC* 377–80, 712–14. *Consecratio* issues for Julia Domna and Caracalla probably were struck also under Severus Alexander (*RIC* 715–20), though the date of these is less certain, and they might have been struck under Elagabalus. See J. Fejfer, 'Divus Caracalla and Julia Domna. A note', in T. Fischer-Hansen, J. Lund, M. Nielsen and A. Rathje (eds), *Ancient*

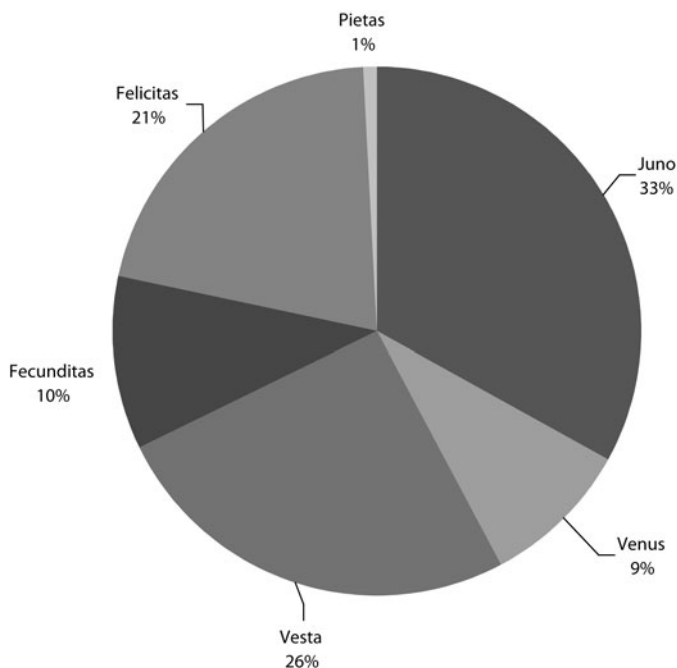


Fig. 16. Reverse silver types of Julia Mamaea (no. = 2,571).

Elagabalus.⁸² The emperor's mother, Julia Mamaea, is granted honours similar to Julia Domna. Mamaea appears on milestones, is associated with building projects in Rome, and receives the title *mater castrorum*.⁸³ Like Domna, it appears that Mamaea had contact with rhetors and philosophers. Eusebius records that the empress summoned the Christian author Origen to the court while she was at Antioch, and the empress was likely also addressed by Hippolytus.⁸⁴ A quantitative analysis of Mamaea's silver types also reveals a close association with Julia Domna (Fig. 16).

The largest proportion of Mamaea's silver coinage displays the goddess Juno. The vast majority of these types is of Juno Conservatrix, showing Juno holding a patera and sceptre with a peacock at her feet and the legend IVNO CONSERVATRIX (*RIC* 343 — 789 examples) (Fig. 17). Alexander Severus's own coin types have a significant emphasis on Jupiter Conservator at the

Portraiture: Image and Message (Copenhagen, 1992), 207–19; and G.F. Gilliam, 'On the *divi* under the Severi', *Latomus* 102 (1969), 284–9, for a discussion of the possible deification date.

⁸² Rowan, 'Becoming Jupiter' (above, n. 10), 123.

⁸³ Williams, 'Studies in the lives of Roman empresses part 2' (above, n. 4), 76–93; Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3), 162; Kosmetatou, 'The public image of Julia Mamaea' (above, n. 4), 398–414; *RIC* 689–91.

⁸⁴ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.21; M. Richard, 'Quelques nouveaux fragments des pères Anténicéens et Nicéens', *Symbolae Osloenses* 34 (1958), 79–80; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta* (above, n. 29), 126.



Fig. 17. Denarius of Julia Mamaea showing Juno (RIC 343). © Lübke & Wiedemann KG, Stuttgart. (Reproduced courtesy of Lübke & Wiedemann KG, Stuttgart and Gorny & Mosch, Munich.)

beginning of his reign, and then again during the Persian Wars.⁸⁵ Carson placed Mamaea's Juno Conservatrix issues at the beginning of Alexander's reign, in AD 222.⁸⁶ Thus the emphasis on Juno would have occurred immediately after Elagabalus's downfall, with the epithet Conservatrix communicating Alexander's escape from his murderous cousin Elagabalus, and the restoration of traditional Roman cultic practices.⁸⁷ A smaller number of types were struck showing Juno seated holding a flower and swathed infant with the legend IVNO AVGVSTAE (RIC 341 — 58 examples).

A significant proportion of Mamaea's silver coinage also displayed Vesta types. Although Vesta types are known to exist for the imperial women under Elagabalus, and are listed in *Roman Imperial Coinage*, no examples of these types were found in the hoard sample, suggesting that any Vesta types under Elagabalus were struck in very small quantities.⁸⁸ Thus the return to a significant quantity of Vesta types under Severus Alexander makes a public statement: not only does it tie Mamaea to the patronage of the Vesta cult given by Julia Domna, but it underscores the return of the sacrosanct nature of the cult and its priestesses, which had been violated by Elagabalus. Two different types of Vesta imagery formed the bulk of the types in the hoard sample, both bearing the legend VESTA: Vesta veiled, holding the palladium and a sceptre (RIC 360 — 489 examples), and Vesta holding a patera and transverse sceptre (RIC 362 — 171 examples).

⁸⁵ Rowan, 'Becoming Jupiter' (above, n. 10), 135–40.

⁸⁶ *BMCRE* 42–52.

⁸⁷ Dio, Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* record that the event that sparked the overthrow of Elagabalus was that the emperor was seeking to remove Alexander (Dio 80.19.1–20.2; Herodian 5.8.3–9; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Severus Alexander* 2.4). The stories preserved in the textual tradition may have formed part of the rhetoric surrounding Alexander's ascension to the throne, and may explain the Juno and Jupiter Conservator types.

⁸⁸ Vesta types of Julia Paula: RIC 224; Aquilia Severa: RIC 231; Julia Soaemias: RIC 246–8; Julia Maesa: RIC 276.

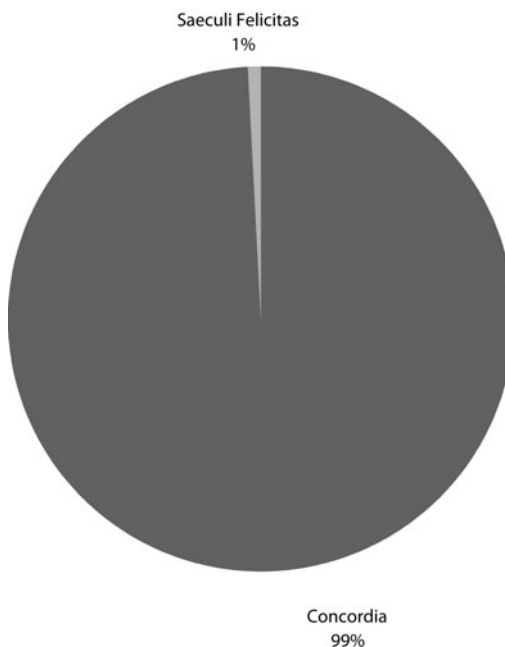


Fig. 18. Reverse silver types of Orbiana (no. = 125).

Venus Caelestis disappears from the imperial coinage, and instead Mamaea is associated with Venus Felix, Genetrix and Victrix, types seen on the coinage of Julia Domna (*RIC* 350–8, 694–707). All three incarnations of Venus feature on the examples found in the hoards.⁸⁹ Two Fecunditas types are also present in significant numbers: one with Fecunditas standing, holding a hand over a child with a patera and cornucopiae, and the other showing Fecunditas seated, holding the arm of a child.⁹⁰ Both types have the legend *FECVND AVGVSTAE*, and the imagery highlights Mamaea's role as the mother of the emperor. Felicitas also features. One type shows a standing Felicitas holding a caduceus and leaning on a column, the other a seated Felicitas holding a caduceus and cornucopiae. Both types have the reverse legend *FELICITAS PVBLICA*, and both feature significantly in the hoard sample.⁹¹ Thus the numismatic image of Julia Mamaea highlights the return to a felicitous and conservative government after the rule of Elagabalus.

⁸⁹ Venus Felix: *RIC* 351 — 61 examples; *RIC* 353 — two examples. Venus Genetrix: *RIC* 355 — 53 examples; *RIC* 356 — one example. Venus Victrix: *RIC* 358 — 115 examples.

⁹⁰ *RIC* 331 (standing Fecunditas) has 151 occurrences; *RIC* 332 (seated Fecunditas) has 111 examples.

⁹¹ *RIC* 335 (Felicitas standing) has 356 occurrences; *RIC* 338 (seated Felicitas) has 185 occurrences.



Fig. 19. Denarius of Orbiana showing Concordia (RIC 319). (Reproduced courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.; <http://www.cngcoins.com>.)

THE NUMISMATIC IMAGE OF ORBIANA (AD 225–7)

Orbiana married Alexander in AD 225, but when her father tried to rouse the Praetorian Guard to riot, Orbiana's father was executed and she was sent to Libya in exile.⁹² Orbiana's silver coinage was found in very small amounts in the hoard sample, and the examples uncovered have an overwhelming emphasis on Concordia (Fig. 18).

Nearly all the coins of Orbiana found in the hoard sample are of a single type, showing a seated Concordia with a patera and double cornucopiae, with the legend *CONCORDIA AVGG* (RIC 319 — 124 examples) (Fig. 19). The emphasis on Concordia recalls the numismatic images of the other imperial wives whose marriages remained brief.

Only one other coin type was uncovered in the hoard sample, a single specimen of RIC 325, which has a reverse type showing Felicitas holding a caduceus and a patera over a lighted altar with the legend *SAECLVI FELICITAS*.

CONCLUSIONS

The numismatic images of the Severan women have points of continuity and difference. It appears that a set proportion of silver coinage was struck for the empresses in this period, likely the work of a dedicated *officina*. The similarity in the proportion of silver coinage struck for the imperial women across the entire Severan dynasty is suggestive also of the central role the ideology of the *domus divina* played in this period. Comparison with the Flavian and Antonine periods highlights the fact that mint production templates could change. The fact that this did not occur in the Severan dynasty underscores the central role played by lineage in the transfer of power. The Severan women occupied a significant ideological place in this discourse, forming the blood connection

⁹² Herodian 6.1.9–10. On the date of the marriage, see C. Bertrand-Dagenbach, *Alexandre Sévère et l'Histoire Auguste* (Brussels, 1990), 17.

between one emperor and the next. This role is underscored by the continuity in the imagery associated with the empresses throughout the dynasty, with types of Venus Felix, Venus Genetrix, Venus Victrix, Vesta, Juno, Felicitas and Fecunditas appearing and reappearing, underscoring the connection to the past. Despite these points of similarity, however, the overall numismatic image of each empress is different, just as each emperor's image was different.

The imagery on the empress's coinage was utilized to extend the prevailing ideology of the emperor in power. Domna was granted a diverse numismatic image under Severus, reflecting his own array of ideological claims. Domna's types were simplified under the sole rule of Caracalla, a reflection of the fact that he emphasized one factor (divine support) as a supporting pillar of the regime. Julia Mamaea's coin types extend the dialogue of Roman restoration under the rule of Severus Alexander. The numismatic iconography of the imperial wives after Domna has a significant emphasis on Concordia, but this is no doubt due to the very short marriages of the later Severan emperors, meaning little more than the marriage itself could be communicated on coinage.

It is in the conflicting numismatic images of Julia Soaemias and Julia Maesa that we see the most radical points of difference. While Maesa's coinage as represented in the hoard sample proclaims values appropriate for a Roman matron, the coinage of her daughter Julia Soaemias has an almost exclusive focus on Venus Caelestis, a type never seen before or after on imperial coinage. The reasons behind these conflicting images may never be understood fully, but this, more than any other point in the Severan period, suggests the potential for some individuality in the numismatic representation of imperial women. Whether through official intention, or through a more organic knowledge of the activities and characters of these women, or for some other reason, Mamaea and her daughter present radically different public images, and one must imagine that this was a contributing factor in Soaemias's death and Maesa's survival.

By examining the coinage of the imperial women from a quantitative perspective we can understand better what each empress's coinage was communicating, and we can identify points of continuity and difference throughout the dynasty. Coinage, inscriptions and other official outputs of the regime remain our best way of reconstructing the public image of the women of the imperial house. Gauging the relative quantities of different coin types struck for the imperial women means we are able to move beyond a simple listing of all types to a better understanding of the context of each image; whether it was struck for a specific purpose, or for more general circulation. The reception of these images and ideas is more difficult to uncover. Though there is a variety of evidence speaking to the reception of the emperor's public image by local cities in the Severan period, the Severan empresses are often aligned with the Tyche of a city or other local cult.⁹³ It appears, then, that in these local negotiations

⁹³ See particularly Kettenhofen, *Die Syrischen Augustae* (above, n. 3); Ghedini, *Giulia Domna* (above, n. 4); Mikocki, *Sub Specie Deae* (above, n. 6); and A. Alexandridis, *Die Frauen des Römischen Kaiserhauses* (Mainz, 2004). The exceptions to this are the issues struck by provincial

of imperial power, the Severan women were integrated firmly into local culture. Consequently, their representation on provincial coinage (and provincial monuments more generally) is different from region to region, and different from the numismatic image released by the mint at Rome. A fuller study of these representations, aided by the work being performed on the *Roman Provincial Coinage* catalogues, will result in a better understanding of how the 'official' numismatic imagery of Rome intersected with civic ideologies. At the moment one can merely observe that the presence of many of the Severan imperial women in provincial and private contexts underscores a wider understanding of their central role in the continuation of the Severan dynasty.

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cities for the marriages of the Severan emperors, which show the emperor and his wife shaking hands.