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Goddess Venus on Julia Domna's coins. The Political Use of the Coinage of an Augusta of the Severan Dynasty

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Abstract: *In this paper we aim to study the monetary examples of Venus dedicated to Julia Domna. The goddess appears in the numismatic records with a series of epithets and although they were initially created with specific connotations, they evolved and were widely employed on the coins of imperial women. The social and political context encouraged some types to be produced more than others at certain times. This is precisely one of the most important aspects that will be reflected upon in this study. Beyond responding to virtues related to the conjugal or maternal sphere, the policy developed by Septimius Severus and continued by his son Caracalla may have been decisive in encouraging the creation of certain coin types in order to transmit a message that was convenient for the state apparatus.*

Key words: Imperial Policy, Julia Domna, Venus, Religion, Numismatic

Introduction

In the imperial Roman period, in line with specific religious precepts and political practices, the coinage, as well as most of the statues and inscriptions, reflected the leading role of the *princeps* and, to a lesser extent, his relatives. The message and iconography presented on coins were more important than ‘communication’ by

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other ancient mass media, at least for two compelling reasons. Firstly, illiteracy of the vast majority of the Empire's population meant that legends on coins were more accessible and comprehensible to an average person than text in inscriptions. Secondly, in contrast to communication of certain ideas via portraits and reliefs, the availability and high circulation of coins made it possible to bring the established imperial symbols to a wider range of recipients. This meant that the messages and symbols on coins were always tailor-made to meet specific political needs and aspirations at the moment, despite the fact that provincial mints also used to employ specific iconographic motifs related to a particular issuance centre.¹

The *princeps*, acting as a real intermediary between gods and mortals, would create a series of symbols to legitimize and strengthen his authority and become guarantor of *Roma aeterna* and stability of the whole Roman ecumene.² Emperor's wives and women also gained a significant role as messengers and legitimizers of imperial family's interests. Such a step was to *a priori* get rid of stereotypes of a woman confined solely to the domestic sphere.³ Taking the above considerations into account, it becomes apparent that the depictions and legends presented on coins were consistent with contemporary Roman politics and were supervised, either directly or indirectly, by the emperor himself.⁴ They constituted one of the most effective instruments of exerting influence on people, especially on the Senate and the army.⁵ In parallel to the iconographic evolution of emperors' depictions on coins, their meanings also underwent some mutations. Instead of concrete and personal motivation for the choice of symbolic language, more global concepts started to gain popularity later.⁶ The scope of the present paper is a case study of Julia Domna's coins with a view to analyzing the reference to Venus in terms of an array of epithets related to this goddess and the evolution of their meanings.

Venus and her multifaceted meanings

When Speidel⁷ wrote his chapter to *ANRW* edited by Haase, Venus was celebrated classical poets as the goddess of love. In the literature of the late Roman Republic and in the first years of the Principate the goddess was portrayed as guarantor

¹ Rowan, 2011: 243; Ghedini, 2020: 163-164; Ruíz Vivas, 2021: 192.

² Noreña, 2001: 146.

³ Morelli, 2010: 459; Domínguez Arranz, 2013: 254; 2017: 100-101.

⁴ However, as pointed out by Rowan (2011: 243-244), an assumption that there was a uniform policy may be questionable. Various emperors could exhibit various levels of personal engagement in controlling their own numismatic images. Moreover, due to different family situations some of the imperial women could, but some could not, exert influence on their own coin depictions. A similar situation may have referred to the selection of concrete images or allegories thanks to which particular *Augustae* were portrayed on the coin reverse.

⁵ De Santiago Fernández, 1999: 147-148.

⁶ Morelli, 2009: 24.

⁷ Speidel, 1984: 2225.

of marriage and the patroness of such virtues as chastity, modesty and harmony.⁸ However, her Roman genesis was generally connected with plant growth, and gardens in particular. Only in the second century BC did she assimilate to Aphrodite.⁹ At the fall of the Republic she was recognized as a goddess deciding about military triumphs of generals and dictators. The practice of ascribing personal triumphs of certain individuals to the workings of Venus stems from the Hellenic concept of the “victorious king”, dominating in the Republican and Imperial period.¹⁰ In reality, at the twilight of the Republic various members of aristocratic and senatorial families started to adopt certain ethical and moral virtues with which they wanted to identify. For instance, Q. Cecilius Metellus gave himself the epithet *Pius*, identifying himself with *Pietas*, the virtue which until then had belonged to *populus romanus*. The same may be said about Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey) who in 79 BC adopted the epithet *Magnus*.¹¹ Exactly in such a context goddess Venus gained her epithets of *Felix*, *Victrix* and *Genetrix*, which started to have both political and religious connotations.¹²

In order to understand the origin of *Venus Felix* one must move back to the triumphs gained by Lucius Cornelius Sulla in the East. In 82 BC Sulla offered the temple in Aphrodisias a golden crown and a double axe as *ex-voto* to goddess Aphrodite, after, as he claimed, he had seen her with Mars’s weapons in his dream. After his return to Rome, Sulla marched in triumph to commemorate his victories, and, more importantly, he then adopted the epithet *Felix* to show that he had been supported by the goddess.¹³ It is likely that Sulla dedicated a temple to *Venus Felix* (before Pompey did so later for *Venus Victrix* and Julius Caesar for *Venus Genetrix*), yet such a fact was not noted down in any literary or epigraphic sources.¹⁴ What has been preserved from that time, however, are the coins whose obverse carries a portrait of Venus accompanied by Cupid and the legend L. SVLLA. The first numismatic records related directly to *Venus Felix* date back to 54 BC and are in the form of coinage issued by Faustus Cornelius Sulla, who was Pompey’s son-in-law.¹⁵ After defeating the ruler of the Kingdom of Pontus, Mithridates VI Eupator, Pompey promoted the cult of

⁸ Ponessa Salathé, 2000: 877.

⁹ Rodríguez Cortés, 1986 -1987: 137; Zedelius, 1989: 57; Conesa Navarro, 2021: 49.

¹⁰ Seelentag, 2017: 183.

¹¹ Balsdon, 1951: 1; Noreña, 2011: 47-48.

¹² Jeličić-Radonić, 2011: 385. It was in this period (i.e. at the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Imperial Epoch) that the apogee of various depictions of Venus took place. Cf. Schmidt, 1997: 228.

¹³ Plut. *Sulla*, XXXIV 1-3; Schiling, 1982: 277; Zedelius, 1989: 57; Rowan, 2012: 12; Orlin, 2007: 67; del Prete Mainer, 2017: 38; Steel, 2019: 29.

¹⁴ Balson (1951: 5-6) suggested that epigraphic sources should play a decisive role in confirmation of this proposal, enumerating 3 examples from Rome. The first one was the inscription found near *Horti Sallustiani*, founded by *Fadia Rhodope*, (*CIL* VI, 781). The second one was the inscription at the base of a statue of Venus and Cupid, founded by *Sallustia Helpidus* (*CIL* VI, 782 = *D* 3166) and the third example was connected with “*aeditiuus Veneris*” (*CIL* VI, 8710). Although these inscriptions could provide some support for the existence of a certain cult, they are not crucial for our argumentation because they come from a much later period, namely from about the second or the third century AD. Moreover, they are not helpful for a proposal of building a sacral enclosure.

¹⁵ Rowan, 2012: 12; Conesa Navarro, 2021a: 50.

Venus Victrix.¹⁶ In contrast to the earlier mentioned uncertainty concerning erection of a temple by Sulla, the erection of a temple for Venus by Pompey is recorded in the historical sources. In 55 BC he had a temple to *Venus Victrix* built near the top of the theatre's seating, which was located on the Campus Martius in Rome. The main iconography corresponds to *Venus* holding a palm branch and an apple accompanied by a figure of a child at the bottom plane.¹⁷ According to Alexandridis,¹⁸ only in iconography of *Venus Victrix* the goddess is depicted with armour (helmet, shield and/or spear). However, any precise specification of her attributes is very complicated, as pointed out by Jeličić-Radonić, saying that "the types of Venus shown on coins were not specific iconographies for each of the epithets that marked one or other functions of the goddess".¹⁹

Finally, let us turn to probably the best known epithet of the goddess, namely *Venus Genetrix*. The goddess was associated with Aeneas, the mythical founder of Rome and the forefather of *gens Iulia* from which Caesar came, and hence the whole Julio-Claudian dynasty. This genealogical concept was made use of on September 26, 46 BC, when the temple in the Forum of Caesar in Rome was dedicated to *Venus Genetrix*.²⁰ In contrast to his predecessors, at the time of Caesar an important quality step occurred. The cult of *Venus Genetrix* did not longer correspond to a single event or personal ambition of a victorious leader but went beyond that to elevate the concept of maternity of the whole dynastic line.²¹ In this way, starting from Caesar's adopted son, Gaius Augustus Octavius, the person of the *princeps* acquired new quality due to making the goddess his personal ancestress. Thus, from then on the divine lineage constituted the foundation of the ruler's authority. Venus was ascribed certain maternal features connected with power, which was reflected on coins, especially on the ones of Roman emperors who were responsible for generating heirs predestined to rule the Roman state.

In short, two conclusions may be drawn from the above line of reasoning. On the one hand, the role of the epithets *Felix* and *Victrix* was to commemorate military victories which ensured peace and security of *Imperium*. On the other hand, the epithet *Genetrix*, was more related to a personal concept confined only to

¹⁶ Schilling, 1982: 296; Levick, 2007: 66.

¹⁷ Schmidt, 1997: 211, 228; Temelini, 2006: 7; Orlin, 2007: 68. What is interesting here is a dream Pompey had and which was reported by Plutarch (*Pomp.* LVIII 2-4). The general visited the temple which he had erected himself for the goddess. On the one hand, this comforted him but, on the other hand, he also experienced the feeling of fear as he realized that Caesar's lineage originated directly from Venus.

¹⁸ Alexandridis, 2004: 280.

¹⁹ Jeličić-Radonić, 2011: 385. This situation was pointed out earlier by Schmidt, 1997: 228.

²⁰ App. *Bell. Civ.* 2.68; Schilling, 1982: 271, 301-302; Speidel, 1984: 2225; Rives, 1994: 294; Levick, 2007: 66; Beard, 2007: 22-23; Orlin, 2007: 68; Domínguez Arranz, 2009: 229; Rowan, 2012: 12; Amela Valverde, 2014: 73; Vilogorac Brčić, 2018: 385-386; Oya García, 2019: 151; Conesa Navarro, 2021a: 49.

²¹ Rives, 1994: 294; Morelli, 2009: 26. In our opinion what is particularly revealing is Suetonius's testimony (*Caes.* 6.2-3), in which he makes reference to the Julio-Claudian dynasty who ruled over and subjugated to themselves even kings: "the divine majesty of Gods, to whom kings themselves are subject".

the emperor's family. Continuity of the dynasty was important, hence the reference to the maternal aspect of the goddess, even though this was initially limited only to the Julio-Claudian dynasty.²² Furthermore, this idea of fertility and imperial well-being was eagerly adopted by the following dynasties.

Since the subject matter of the current study is examination of Empress Julia Domna's coins, it seems logical to assume that the primary focus will be on female and maternal aspects of *Venus* rather than some other ones. Although indeed so, the goal of the present study is to verify this view and to show that the actual situation was much more complex, namely that various types of coins were created to meet the needs of actual social and political circumstances. At a certain point this led to some curious instances in which *Venus* started to be associated with military aspects, which seems to be somehow incongruous with her female nature.

Julia Domna and Venus coin emissions: between tradition and a current political situation

Julia Domna's Venus coins under the rule of Septimius Severus

When Septimius Severus became emperor in 193 AD,²³ there appeared coins in honour of Julia Domna.²⁴ The number of different types was substantial but one must take into account the fact that until the end of her son Caracalla's reign, i.e. until 217 AD, she was the only woman who held the important role of *Augusta*.²⁵ According to Lusnia²⁶ 25 reverses were differentiated in total, while a quantitative analysis of Nadolny²⁷ stresses that among 280 types ascribed in *RIC* to Julia Domna 209 correspond to the reign of Septimius Severus and only 65 to the rule of Caracalla. Among the earliest allegories the following ones may be distinguished: *Fecunditas*, *Iuno Regina*, *Iuno Lucina*, *Vesta*, *Venus Victrix* and *Venus Genetrix*.

In general, they are related to protective deities dedicated to marriage and family bonds, and were meant in some sense to evoke the Roman origin and the continuity with the first imperial dynasty, i.e. *gens Iulia*. One can also discern here the references to Caesar's politics (*Venus Victrix*) and the Antonines, by following the patterns of two Faustinas, especially that of Faustina the Younger, the wife of

²² We refer here to the conclusion of Mikocki (1995: 48), that iconography of *Venus Genetrix* as "mère de la famille julienne" was widespread.

²³ He was proclaimed emperor by his troops on 9 April, 193 AD in *Carnuntum*. Cf. Kienast, Eck & Heil, 2017: 149.

²⁴ Although in some other catalogued numismatic collections one can find coins with the legend *AVGVSTA* dated as early as 193 AD, according to Lusnia (1995: 122), they were struck in the Roman mint no earlier than in 194 AD.

²⁵ In the years 201-205 AD apart from Julia Domna there was another Augusta - Fulvia Plautilla, the wife of Caracalla who was murdered in 211 AD. Cf. Conesa Navarro and González Fernández, 2016.

²⁶ Lusnia, 1995: 120.

²⁷ Nadolny, 2016: 26-27.

Emperor Marcus Aurelius.²⁸ Venus, together with Juno are the two most frequently presented goddesses on coins not only in the case of Septimius Severus's wife, but also in the case of majority of the imperial women representing the Severan family.²⁹

Material sources referring to Julia Domna were very numerous and scattered all over the various parts of the Imperium.³⁰ This vast quantity of available materials was one of the key arguments for many historians to advocate the thesis that political decisions could have impact on coinage.³¹ This assumption, however, must be nuanced because literary sources demonstrate that with the exception of specific moments, such as confrontation with C. Fulvius Plautianus or running official imperial correspondence in the final period of her son's rule,³² Julia Domna did not go beyond the confines of her role as Augusta, all the time supporting Septimius Severus and Caracalla but remaining always in their background.³³ Even in the case of correspondence this information must be accurately verified. Apart from the fact that it was not an isolated case of such practice, as Livia acted in the same way under rule of Tiberius,³⁴ one must remember that this information comes from Cassius Dio, whose aim was to discredit Caracalla.

All this leads us to assume that to a large extent the presence of Julia Domna in the inscriptions, sculptures and coins was merely a consequence of her husband's policy of showing himself as a continuator of the Antonine dynasty and demonstrating through it that had a united and strong *domus*, which was to guarantee stability and continuity of the Empire.³⁵ Therefore it seems far from being surprising that the material related to Julia Domna was so large. In sum, she was the most important Augusta that Rome had within 24 years,³⁶ and her portrayal was also used by her son

²⁸ Williams, 1902: 303-303; Kettenhofen, 1979: 122; Morelli, 2009: 129; Claes, 2013: 104.

²⁹ Günter, 2016: 138.

³⁰ Lusnia, 1995: 119: "She was perhaps the most celebrated of all Roman Imperial women, appearing in both Greek and Latin dedicatory inscriptions and receiving more honorific titles than any preceding female of the Imperial court".

³¹ Conesa Navarro & González Fernández, 2021: 190.

³² Cass. Dio 77(78), 18.2-3; Ghedini, 2020: 139-140. It seems that literary sources can be helpful here, however, it still remains a problematic issue. As Bertolazzi (2015: 419-423, 431-432) remarks, apart from classical authors' intentions and manner in which they tended to describe such actions, what could have been decisive here were also specific circumstances and the socio-political context in which some women would take over specific duties. Cf. Conesa Navarro, 2021b: 31-34.

³³ It seems, if we adopt Cassius Dio's narration, that on receiving the news of Caracalla's death in 217 AD, Julia Domna attempted to make some maneuvers to defeat Macrinus in order to restore the rule of the Severan dynasty by taking over herself the helm of the empire. Cf. Cass. Dio 78(79), 23.1-3; Conesa Navarro, 2019b: 78-79. When it comes to literary sources, we agree with Kettenhofen's (1979: 75) statement that even though they can sometimes provide data which allows us to sense the political role played by *Augustae* from the Severan dynasty, they still remain mere hypotheses.

³⁴ Cass. Dio 57, 12.2-3. According to this text, apart from running correspondence she also gave audiences, a similar case to Julia Domna. This issue is also mentioned in Bertolazzi, 2019: 480.

³⁵ Rowan, 2011: 253; Langford, 2013: 16.

³⁶ Rowan, 2011: 249.

to legitimize his position as a new emperor after the death of his father and the murder of his brother.³⁷

Septimius Severus was always accompanied by his family. This is known on the basis of the locations visited by the *princeps* in which he struck coins. For example, in the East during his struggle for emperor's position with Pescennius Niger (193-194 AD).³⁸ Exactly from this time comes the emission of Julia Domna's³⁹ coins whose reverses referred to military confrontations. One cannot but mention here some legionary *denarii* with the legend *Venus Victrix* which were of the similar types as the ones issued in honour of her husband and were clearly created with the purpose of gaining the legions' loyalty and thanking them for their support.⁴⁰ As far as examples of *Venus Victrix* dating back to 193-195/196 AD are concerned, apart from these from the eastern part, there is evidence for other coins produced in Rome carrying the same depictions. The difference between these minting centres lies in the fact that while in the provincial mints the legend on the reverse was given either in Nominative or Dative,⁴¹ the legend of the coins struck in the capital of the empire appeared only in the Dative case.

With regard to the obverse, apart from a similar portrayal showing a bust of the Augusta draped and turned right, it is worthy of note that the obverse legend was always in the same grammatical case (IVLIA DOMNA AVG.).⁴² On the reverse of coins with the legend in Dative there is Venus standing with her back turned, with drapery falling below her hips and the head facing right. She is holding an apple in her extended right hand and a palm branch sloped to the left in her left hand while her left elbow is resting on a column.⁴³ [Fig. 1] In some of the instances of provincial coins

³⁷ About death Geta, cf. Cass. Dio 77(78), 2.1-6; Hdn. IV 4.2-4; SHA *Car.* 3.3-4; *Geta* 7.3-4.

³⁸ It is not easy to indicate the exact number of provincial mints. Mattingly and Sydelnham estimated the number of them to be three across all Syria but it is likely that there were even more. The problem results from the fact that often provincial centres used patterns emanating directly from Rome. Possibly one of them was situated in Laodycea ad Mare, which remained loyal to Septimius Severus, and another one in Antiochia, supporting Pescennius Niger. The third could be in Emesa cf. RIC IV/1, 56-58. Recently Brenot (2000: 339) has claimed that these three eastern mints are Emesa, Laodycea ad Mare and Aleksandria. Gitler and Potting (2007: 376) maintain that these eastern mints were Emesa and Laodycea ad Mare, but they do not determine the specific number of them.

³⁹ Nadolny, 2016: 32. The latest resume of Julia Domna's biography, cf. Gordón Zan, 2022: 242-243.

⁴⁰ Lusnia, 1995: 121-122; Brenot, 2000: 339; Royo Martínez, 2017: 199-300; 2019: 118. On Septimius Severus's legionary issuances, cf. RIC IV/1, 92-94 n. ° 1-24; BMC V, lxxxii-lxxxiv; 20-23 n. ° 5-25.

⁴¹ A) in Nominative: RIC IV/1, 176 n. ° 630-631A; 177 n. ° 633; BMC V, 104 n. ° 422, 105 n. ° 423-424. B) in Dative: RIC IV/1, 177 n. ° 632, n. ° 633A.

⁴² Ghedini, 2020: 165. Mattingly and Sydelnham established chronology on the basis of how *Augusta* was represented in their legends which still hold 1) IVLIA DOMNA AVG. (193-196 d.C.); 2) IVLIA AVGVSTA (196-211 d.C.); 3) IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG. (211-218 d.C.) cf. RIC IV/1, 63.

⁴³ Roma: RIC IV/1, 165 n. ° 536; BMC V, 27 n. ° 47-50, 28 n. ° 51-53. Also in this group one should mention the cases in which the acronym SC (*senatus consulto*) with the identical depictions, being a variant of the reverse legend, is VENERI VICTR. SC. Cf. RIC IV/1, 207 n. ° 842, 846; BMC V, 123 n. ° 488-490, 124 n. ° 498.

the symbol of palm is replaced with the sceptre.⁴⁴ The palm branch symbolized victory⁴⁵ and was interpreted as a forerunner of victorious outcome of the battles in favour of Septimius Severus. The sceptre, however, referred to the goddess's domain and sovereignty.⁴⁶

Schmidt⁴⁷ explains that although the iconography of *Venus Victrix* had remained unchanged since the epoch of Augustus Octavius, its meaning mutated and became a widely reproduced epithet on female coins. On the basis of this reflection we can assume that *Venus Victrix* was found on Julia Domna's coins due to the fact that it simply imitated a widespread model. Moreover, as Rowan⁴⁸ remarks, one of the features that distinguished types of coins not only in the case of Julia Domna but all of the *Augustae* from the Severan dynasty, was the practice of repeating the patterns created by the predecessors, although also some new innovative elements appeared on their coins.⁴⁹ In the case under consideration the inscription *Venus Victrix* coincided with the war confrontation which Septimius Severus waged against Pescennius Niger, and the fact that in the same context 'Legionary denarii' with the depiction of Augusta on the obverse were issued. This leads us to the conclusion that the type of *Venus Victrix* coins rather than being just a reproduction of an earlier existing pattern used by imperial women, was a response to the current social context. It must be pointed out here that one possibility does not exclude the other and both of these interpretations may be right, though in this case the military aspect seems to dominate.

*Venus Genetrix*⁵⁰ examples also come from this early period. In this case one cannot deny the fact that apart from the associations with the Julio-Claudian dynasty (it must be borne in mind that until the times of Hadrian it had not been a common allegory on female coins) and apart from the inclusion of Septimius Severus as a relative to the Antonine dynasty, it is likely that *Venus Genetrix* was meant to constitute an allusion to Julia Domna's fertility.⁵¹ In reference to the former of these hypotheses, one may mention a similar case of Faustina the Younger when she gave birth to her first daughter, Domicia Faustina, on 30 November 147 AD. In order to commemorate the event Marcus Aurelius received the title of *tribunicia potestas*, whereas his wife that of Augusta. In addition, the event was also celebrated by minting

⁴⁴ Laodicea ad Mare: A) with a sceptre: *RIC* IV/1, 176 n. ° 630-631A; *BMC* V, 105 n. ° 423-424. B) with a palm branch: *RIC* IV /1, 177 n. ° 632-633A; *BMC* V, 105 n. ° 423-424.

⁴⁵ On a palm branch as a symbol of victory cf. Hünemörder, 2000: cols. 938-939.

⁴⁶ *BMC* V, lxxxvi; 27 n. ° 27-28 n. ° 47-54; Zedelius, 1989: 57; Filippini, 2010a: 478; Nadolny, 2016: 32-34.

⁴⁷ Schmidt, 1997: 228. The same can be said about *Venus Genetrix* coins, the allegory which had not developed in female coins until the times of Hadrian. Cf. Lusnia, 1995: 125.

⁴⁸ Rowan, 2011: 248-249.

⁴⁹ For instance the earlier coins of Julia Domna there are such virtues as *Venus*, *Diana* or *Iuno*. Cf. Gorrie, 2004: 66.

⁵⁰ *RIC* IV/1, 165 n. ° 537; *BMC* V, 28 n. ° 55.

⁵¹ Boatwright, 2021: 144.

coins with *Venus Genetrix* holding a child on her arm.⁵² In Julia Domna's issuance of *Venus Genetrix* the goddess is seated on the throne turning left, holding an apple in her right hand and a transverse sceptre in the left. To the left there is a small, winged, naked Cupid standing right and holding out both hands. [Fig. 2] In the case of Septimius Severus's wife the event of birth giving itself was not celebrated but Julia Domna was revered for the fact that she offered *Imperium* two male heirs, Caracalla and Geta.⁵³ As Morelli notes, thanks to it she gained special significance, because she assumed a role of the guardian of the whole state and the people constituting it, and by her offspring she also contributed to the wealth of *Imperium*.⁵⁴ This hypothesis becomes particularly meaningful when we scrutinize the depictions on the reverses of coins with the legend *Fecunditas*. The goddess on the throne is holding one child on her lap while the other one is in front of her. One may be struck by an irresistible impression that we have got here a straightforward allusion to the Augusta herself and her two sons, by still it remains just a hypothesis.⁵⁵ In the Roman world it was fertility that was viewed primarily as a guarantee of security and well-being of all its inhabitants. The motif of fertility also constituted the direct link with Faustina the Younger, as *Fecunditas* was one of the earliest virtues found on coins minted in honour of Marcus Aurelius's wife.⁵⁶

In short, one can conclude, in line with Ghedini⁵⁷ in his times, that in the case of the first emissions of coins devoted to *Venus Genetrix* and *Venus Victrix*, to which one should also add emissions of *Fecunditas*, there must have co-existed different reasons for their production. Apart from the clear allusion to Caesar's (*Venus Victrix*) or Augustus Octavius's (*Venus Genetrix*) policies, in our opinion there were three other aspects of paramount importance. First of all, the main goal of the coinage was to glorify the military victory thanks to which the *princeps* gave stability and wealth to the empire. Simultaneously, they manifested the relationship to the Antonine dynasty. Septimius Severus sought to show that though he was an 'African' emperor, his policy was the continuation of his predecessors. He proclaimed himself to be the son of Marcus Aurelius and the brother of Commodus, going in genealogy back to Nerva.⁵⁸ Moreover, Julia Domna assumed patterns created by previous Augustae, Faustina

⁵² Fittschen, 1982: 22-23.

⁵³ As Filippini (2010b: 84) observes, both allegories, *Fecunditas* and *Venus*, embodied conjugal and maternal roles. At the same time we agree with Morelli (2006: 69), stating that Julia Domna played an important role as Mother of the future emperors for the dynastic legitimization of Septimius Severus's sons as successors.

⁵⁴ Morelli, 2006: 70. On Julia Domna's maternity on coins, cf. Bertolazzi, 2019.

⁵⁵ *RIC* IV/1, 73; Morelli, 2009: 129-130; Bertolazzi, 2019: 466-467. Earlier he stated to Brenot (2000: 339): "L'allusion à ses deux fils dont l'un est né à Lyon en 189 et l'autre à Rome un an plus tard, n'est guère voilée".

⁵⁶ Lusnia, 1995: 122; Morelli, 2009: 129; Muñoz & Martínez López, 2014: 161; Bertolazzi, 2019: 466. On Julia Domna's coins bearing the legend *Fecunditas* on the reverse. cf. *RIC* IV/1, 165 n. ° 534; *BMC* V, 27 n. ° 46.

⁵⁷ Ghedini, 2020: 165

⁵⁸ González Fernández & Conesa Navarro, 2017: 137-138.

the Younger in particular, which is apparent when it comes to the hairstyle,⁵⁹ but also allegories carried on her coins. Finally, we would like to put emphasis on the idea of dynastic continuity, in which, as the mother of imperial heirs, the *Augusta* played a central role. This was naturally reflected by coinage. In this respect we follow an earlier statement by Morelli, saying that she assumed a very important symbolic role where one of the aspects through which this prestige manifested itself was honour of gaining the title of *mater castrorum*. In this way she embodied the symbolic and widely comprehended concept of maternity, which was not limited only to *domus divina* and the dynasty, but covered the whole Imperium.⁶⁰

The emissions of coins on the obverse of which Septimius Severus's wife is simply called IVLIA AVGVSTA,⁶¹ can be dated to the years from 195/196 AD to 211 AD. In other words, she used the same nomenclature as Livia, who was included to *gens Iulia* after the death of Augustus Octavius in 14 AD. This could have been a result of the fact that the *cognomen* Domna may have been considered foreign and omitting it could have been considered as a way of bringing her closer to the Roman tradition.⁶² According to Lusnia,⁶³ this period was characterized by stronger focus on Julia Domna's role in the imperial court through the reverses of her coins. Except female deities (*Juno, Vesta, Venus*), or personifications of appropriate Imperial virtues (*Fecunditas, Hilaritas, Pietas*), there also appeared values such as harmony or continuity of the dynasty (*Aeternitas Imperi* or *Concordia Aeterna*). Conversely to the situation of Septimius Severus, who came to power after a period of instability marked by domestic war, generally the *princeps* handed down Imperium to his sons in a peaceful manner. Therefore, so that the whole Roman society would have no doubt who was predestined to be his successor, Caracalla and Geta, apart from having their own coins, also appeared on their parents' coins.⁶⁴ Moreover, before the death of Septimius Severus they received the title of *Augusti*.⁶⁵

However, the above mentioned military elements of Julia Domna's coinage remained, especially when we take into account the fact that until February 197 AD the other of the pretenders to the emperor's throne, Clodius Albinus, was still not defeated.⁶⁶ Around 195/196 AD Julia Domna received the title of *Mater Castrorum*,

⁵⁹ Especially in the earliest examples, though some differences can also be noted. Cf. Baharal, 1992: 114-115.

⁶⁰ Saavedra-Guerrero, 2006: 721.

⁶¹ This significant change of *cognomen* in the legend resulted, as Lusnia (1995: 121) maintains, from the change in the status of *officina*.

⁶² Morelli, 2009: 142; Ghedini, 2020: 165-166.

⁶³ Lusnia, 1995: 120-121.

⁶⁴ *RIC* IV/1, 73. In this case the reference here is to these with Julia Domna.

⁶⁵ According to Kienast, Eck & Heil (2017: 156, 160) Caracalla was designated *Augustus* in 197 AD. and Geta in 209 AD. Earlier Rubin (1975: 432-435) and Mastino (1981: 15, 31, 37-38) maintained that Caracalla received the title of Augustus in 198 AD after the conquest of Ctesiphon, while Geta in 209 AD.

⁶⁶ Kienast, Eck & Heil, 2017: 155.

which was used not only on coins but also in inscriptions.⁶⁷ Once again such a manoeuvre must be interpreted as an element of policy of identification with the Antonine dynasty, although traditionally it was simply regarded to be a honorary title offered to Domna as a token of gratitude for the fact that she accompanied her husband on military campaigns.⁶⁸ Faustina the Younger⁶⁹ was the first woman who was given this title. When Septimius Severus's wife became 'mother of the camps', and by extension the whole army, the army was in a sense entrusted to her care. Thus, it was a strategy to guarantee the loyalty of legions since any attack on the emperor meant also an attack on his mother because the *princeps* was responsible for the protection of the Augusta.⁷⁰ Although it cannot be confirmed, it is likely that this symbolic military maternity was one of the reasons why Julia Domna's coins with the Roman military standards were issued. What can be observed in the first phase, and in the early instances of *Venus Victrix*, the appearance of the Augusta in the military context was seen in the light of her maternity and due to the fact that she was present in military camps, supporting her husband. In the second phase of issuance of coins as *IVLIA AVGVSTA* some changes can be observed. Three types of them have been documented for the Roman mint. The first type encompasses some examples where the legend on the reverse appears in Dative, i.e. *VENERI VICTR.*, and whose iconography corresponds to Venus standing with her back turned, with drapery falling below the hips, her head turned right, holding an apple in her extended right hand and a palm leaf sloped to the left in her left hand while resting her left elbow on a column.⁷¹ As far as the second type of coins is concerned, apart from the fact that the legend on the reverse is in Nominative, i.e. *VENVS VICTRIX*, there are certain other differences concerning the depiction of the goddess. Venus appears on them as standing half-naked, holding a helmet in the right hand and a palm branch in the left, and leaning on a column while at her feet there is a shield.⁷² [Fig. 3] The third corresponds to the series of the dupondius and the as with the identical depiction to the previous type

⁶⁷ According to Kienast, Eck & Heil (2017: 135) the conferral of the title *mater castrorum* to Julia Domna can be dated to 14 April 196 AD or even 195 AD. Brenot (2000: 340) and Ghedini (2020: 166) placed the event on 14 April 195 AD and this year was also accepted by Mañasa Romero (2021: 965). Other authors, such as Heil (2006: 64) or recently Bertolazzi (2015: 423) shift the even to one year later. There are even scholars who postulate 14 April 194 AD, cf. Hidalgo de la Vega, 2012: 140-141.

⁶⁸ Conesa Navarro, 2019a: 287-288.

⁶⁹ Aleandridis (2004: 91) points out that apart from the similarity of Faustina the Younger's coins to Julia Domna's ones consisting in both having the title *mater castrorum*, from the second century AD allegories related to the military world started to prevail. On emissions of Faustina the Younger's coins whose chronology may not be well established (171-174 AD). Cf. SHA. *Marc. Aur.* 26.4-9; Cenerini, 2016: 37; Kienast, Eck & Heil, 2017: 137; Smyk, 2019: 24; Conesa Navarro, 2019a: 284-285; Conesa Navarro, 2019b: 75 because the Julia Domna types carrying the legend *mater castrorum* have been recently re-analysed, see Morelli, 2009: 136-138; Conesa Navarro, 2019a, 289-290 together with the information on main *corpora* of coins.

⁷⁰ Kuhoff, 1993: 252-253; Morelli, 2006: 70; Langford, 2013: 32; Tuori, 2016: 184; Conesa Navarro, 2019a: 287-289; Martínez López & Oria Segura, 2021: 38-39.

⁷¹ *RIC* IV/1, 170 n. ° 579; *BMC* V, 167 n. ° *.

⁷² *RIC* IV/1, 171 n. ° 581; *BMC* V, 168 n. ° 90.

on the obverse and the reverse: Venus holding a helmet and a shield on the bottom margin. The legend on the reverse is changed due to the addition of the acronym SC, *senatus consulto*.⁷³ On the other hand, in RIC there have been some other variants distinguished with regard to the last of these types. Despite the fact that the legend on the reverse has also VENVS VICTRIX S. C., on one of them there is no shield and on some other there is a cuirass behind the column on which Venus is resting her left arm.⁷⁴

As far as provincial emissions from the mint in Laodicea ad Mare are concerned, similarly to the central mint, two variants with the obverse patterns from the capital have been documented. Their legend is IVLIA AVGVSTA and the depiction corresponds to Julia Domna's draped bust turned right.⁷⁵ These data are interesting for a proposal that although the provincial mints were independent and managed by local administrators, certain criteria coming directly from Rome were imposed on all the territories of the empire. These ideas and criteria, as we mentioned in the introduction to this paper, were supervised and controlled by the emperor yielding the ultimate authority. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the concept of victory bringing peace and stability thanks to Septimius Severus's actions aiming at elimination of his enemies was so widespread in various places of the empire, among other things, thanks to Julia Domna's coins. In *BMC* there have been two examples in the case of which the mint has not been specified. It has only been stated that they correspond to "*barbaourom*". In both of these instances the legend appears in Dative, VENERI VICTR., and the main differences correspond to the depiction on the obverse because the other side of the coins contains similar text and iconography. As far as the first of them is concerned, Venus is standing upright with her figure naked to the line of her hips and turned right. She is holding an apple in her right hand and a patera in the left one while her left arm is resting on a column on which some fragment of her robe is also placed.⁷⁶ The other example depicts her from behind. She is standing upright with the head turned right and, as in the previous instance, she appears naked from the top to the hips. Her right hand is holding a helmet and the left arm, as in the previous case, is resting on a column.⁷⁷ With regard to the *Venus Genetrix* coins from the Roman mint, the only example of the second phase contains the legend on the reverse in the Dative case, i.e. VENVS GENETRICI. Its iconography corresponds to Venus seen from front, draped and wearing *stephane*, with her head

⁷³ *RIC* IV/1, 211 n. ° 890; *BMC* V, 314 n. ° 795. With the legend VENVS VICTRIX S.C.

⁷⁴ *RIC* IV /1, 211 n. ° 888 (without a shield); *RIC* IV /1, 211 n. ° 889 (with a cuirass). In both cases the legend on the reverse is in Nominative: VENVS VICTRIX S.C.

⁷⁵ With the legend VENERI VICT. Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 178 n. ° 645A; *BMC* V, 279 n. ° *.With the legend VENVS VICTRIX. Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 178 n. ° 647; *BMC* V, 279 n. ° †.

⁷⁶ *BMC* V, 379 n. ° 123.

⁷⁷ *BMC* V, 383 n. ° 148.

facing left. She is holding a patera in her extended right hand and a vertical sceptre in the left one.⁷⁸ [Fig. 4]

Venus Felix and *Venus Caelestis* types are more interesting because they represent a considerable change in comparison to the previous period. These allegories were created during this phase and they did not reappear when Caracalla ruled as the only emperor. The examples of *Venus Caelestis*, struck in an unidentified mint, have been traditionally regarded as an allegory limited only to Julia Soemias.⁷⁹ Such a conclusion may have been drawn on the grounds that the deity was of eastern provenance, and this was associated with the Syrian origin of these *Augustae*. In contrast to his dynastic predecessors, Elagabal often promoted eastern, rather than Roman, customs. This, in turn, led to the rise of two factions. The one closest to proper Roman traditions was connected with Julia Maesa, and later with Julia Mamaea, Alexander Severus's mother. The other side was represented by Julia Soemias and her son, who without any scruples would introduce foreign cults to the heart of Rome.⁸⁰ However, the emission of coins with the same allegory for Julia Domna⁸¹ cannot go unnoticed. There are several variants of this emission with regard to different numismatic corpora. *RIC* distinguished two types depending on the reverse (as the obverse of both is similar: a draped bust of Julia Domna turned right accompanied by the legend *IVLIA AVGVSTA*). In both variants of the reverse draped standing Venus with a tiara is turning left, holding an apple in extended right hand and sceptre in left hand. Additionally, the field of the coin contains a star. The difference between them lies in attributes that the goddess is shown with. On one type of coins she is holding a patera and a sceptre, on the other a patera is replaced with an apple.⁸² The existence of the third variant is signalled in *BMC*. While the obverse repeats the conventional patterns (draped bust of the Augusta turned right), the reverse depicts draped standing Venus seen from front with her head turned left and holding an apple in her right hand and a sceptre in the left one. A star in the field on the right margin.⁸³ completes the composition. This could have been reference to a goddess originating from an ancient cult of Dea Caelestis in Emesa, which was reminiscent of goddess Tanit worshipped in Carthago, who apart from, fertility of women embodied fertility of any life and earth.⁸⁴

Among the *Venus Felix* coins struck for Julia Domna the following variants have been found. The first type includes coins with the legend *VENVS FELIX* bearing

⁷⁸ *RIC* IV/1, 170 n. ° 578; *BMC* V, 167 n. ° 83-84.

⁷⁹ Kosmetatou, 2002: 405; Rowan, 2011: 261; Claes, 2013: 106-107; Nadolny, 2016: 40; Conesa Navarro, 2019c: 210.

⁸⁰ Nadolny, 2016: 40-41.

⁸¹ On this issue see Günter, 2016: 140 note 171.

⁸² *RIC* IV/1, 173 n. ° 604-605.

⁸³ *BMC* V, 383 n. ° 149. The legend on the obverse is similar to the previous examples: *IVLIA AVGVSTA*.

⁸⁴ Claes, 2013: 107-108; Conesa Navarro, 2019c: 210-211.

the picture of Venus standing and facing front, her head turned left, with an apple in her right hand and holding drapery of her attire, sliding from her left shoulder, in her left hand.⁸⁵ [Fig. 5] The second type contains a similar legend and the only difference in comparison to the previous type consists in modifications concerning attributes the goddess is displaying. Here Venus is holding an apple in her raised right hand and a vertical sceptre in the left one.⁸⁶ The remaining four variants correspond to the emissions containing the acronym SC *senatus consulto*: VENVS FELIX S.C. In the first of these standing Venus is seen from front, wearing draped attire, with her head to the left and holding an apple in her extended right hand and drapery from left shoulder in her left hand.⁸⁷ In the second type the goddess is standing naked to the hips with her head turned left and is holding a helmet in her right hand while her left hand, resting on some sort of a column, is shown with a palm branch.⁸⁸ The third variant is similar to the latter, the only difference being a cuirass⁸⁹ behind the column. In the fourth type there is additionally a shield⁹⁰ at the feet of the goddess. Even though the second phase is characterized by the appearance of various types of Venus on Julia Domna's coins, still the theme *par excellence* was maternity. According to Morelli, a more frequent use of Nominative could suggest an attempt to make the Augusta equal to the goddess. It is possible that the allegory of *Venus Felix*⁹¹ was connected with *ludi saeculares* taking place in Rome in 204 AD. *Felix* is an epithet closely related to *Felicitas*, and in this context it could be seen as expression of joy and fertility brought about by inauguration of *saeculum aureum*. If we adopt such an hypothesis, once again we have a type of coins, which, even though were reminiscent of coins of earlier *Augustae*, coincided with a specific socio-political context, in this case celebration of an event of great significance not only for Rome but also for all the other parts of the empire. Once again then, it may be assumed that the current social-political situation could constitute the main motivation for the issuance of such coins.

Julia Domna's coins with Venus Genetrix issued under Caracalla's rule. Glorification of maternity

The third modification of the legend on the obverse was the result of the inclusion of the epithets *Pia* and *Felix* to the titles possessed by Julia Domna. Some researchers have maintained that she received them after the death of Septimius

⁸⁵ RIC IV/1, 170 n. ° 580; BMC V, 167 n. ° 85-86, 168 n. ° 87-89.

⁸⁶ RIC IV/1, 178 n. ° 646; BMC V, 279 n. ° 619-621.

⁸⁷ RIC IV/1, 209 n. ° 866; BMC V, 310 n. ° 775-777, 313 n. ° 794.

⁸⁸ RIC IV/1, 211 n. ° 888.

⁸⁹ RIC IV/1, 211 n. ° 889.

⁹⁰ RIC IV/1, 211 n. ° 890; BMC V, 314 n. ° 795.

⁹¹ Morelli, 2009: 132.

Severus in 211 AD.⁹² However, some other scholars are inclined to shift this date by one year, namely to 210 AD.⁹³ It appears that under the rule of Caracalla there was a significant increase in the number of emissions devoted to his mother. Perhaps it was a new manoeuvre of the new *princeps* aiming at dispelling any doubts concerning his coming to power after the death of Septimius Severus.⁹⁴ The epithet *Pia*, which had been given earlier to two Faustinas after their deification, had connotations with loyalty, piety and dedication to gods while *Felix* could be associated with the Augusta's role as a caretaker of the state.⁹⁵

Proclaiming Caracalla new emperor after the death of his father and the murder of his brother Geta meant that *domus divina* consisted only of him and his mother. It seems to be a logical conclusion that the rise in the frequency of references to Julia Domna's maternity at that time was to guarantee the legitimization of Caracalla's succession to the throne. We are of an opinion that it was clearly expressed by creation of Julia Domna's coins with the allegory *Venus Genetrix*. In contrast to the analysis of the above examples, in which we did not pay so much attention to the way in which Julia Domna was represented on the obverse,⁹⁶ in this part of the article we will consider the main elements of her depiction, focusing on possible nuances they may be indicative of. The double-denarius coin carries the legend in Dative, i.e. VENERI GENETRICI, and the obverse depicts a draped bust of the Augusta looking right, wearing *stephane*, and her new title: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG. On the reverse one can see Venus draped and standing frontally, with her head turned left, holding a patera in her extended right hand and a vertical sceptre in the left one.⁹⁷ There also exists a type with the text on the reverse in Dative, and a similar depiction of the goddess, but the difference lies in the fact that it additionally contains the acronym S.C. (VENERI GENETRICI S.C.).⁹⁸

The remaining types from the Roman mint exhibit the legend on the reverse formulated in Nominative. In some cases they also include the reference to the senate, *senatus consulto*. As far as the examples with the legend VENVS GENETRIX are concerned, these are the aureus, the antoninianus and the dupondius. Here Venus is seated, her figure turning left, her right hand is extended and the left one is holding

⁹² On the death of Septimius Severus, cf. Kienast, Eck & Heil, 2017: 150. On dating *Pia* and *Felix* Julia Domna after the death of Septimius Severus in 211 AD cf. Williams, 1902: 284; Lusnia, 1995: 121, 133; Levick, 2007: XXX; Morelli, 2009: 132-133, 139, 143; Günter, 2016: 126; Bertolazzi, 2020: 136-137 note 232.

⁹³ Kolb, 2010: 28 n. ° 21; Kienast, Eck & Heil, 2017: 152.

⁹⁴ Nadolny, 2016: 56. What is of interest here are Mattingly and Sydenham's words: "The titles PIA FELIX were presumably conferred on the death of Severus; they have an imperial ring and mark the exceptional position of Julia as queen – mother. Even in the lifetime of Severus Julia had been more than an ordinary consort", cf. *RIC* IV/1, 63.

⁹⁵ Lusnia, 1995: 133; Bleckmann, 2002: 276; Bertolazzi, 2019: 477.

⁹⁶ On the evolution of the hairstyle and physiognomic features of Julia Domna, cf. *RIC* IV/1, 63.

⁹⁷ *BMC* V, 433 n. ° 20.

⁹⁸ *RIC* IV/1, 311 n. ° 591; *BMC* V, 470 n. ° †.

a transverse sceptre. The difference in this case boils down to the depiction on the obverse because the legend on all of them is IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG. Whereas in some types of Julia Domna's busts her hair is elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back, her robe is draped and the head is turned right, which is in the style of most of the examined items [Fig. 6],⁹⁹ in some other instances the Augusta is wearing a tiara and she is accompanied by a crescent¹⁰⁰ or we can see her wearing *stephane*, but without a crescent.¹⁰¹ The same situation can be observed on coins with the legend VENVS GENETRIX S.C., on which the Augusta has *stephane*, but not a crescent.¹⁰²

Seated and turned left Venus holding an apple and a sceptre with the figure of Cupid in front of her is a depiction that can also be found on other coins. In the case of these coins whose legends on the obverse and the reverse appear in Nominative, the main difference refers to the depiction on the obverse. Next to the bust of the Augusta, who is turning right, draped and wearing a tiara, there may appear a crescent.¹⁰³ There are also some examples with the acronym S.C. without a crescent and a tiara¹⁰⁴ or the ones with *stephane* only.¹⁰⁵ A similar iconography on the reverse, with a small difference consisting in the fact that Venus is shown without an apple but with her arm stretching towards Cupid,¹⁰⁶ can be found on some of the sestertius coins. As the legend on the reverse of all coins is the same, i.e. VENVS GENETRIX S.C., the differences correspond to the depictions on the obverse. In one of the distinguished types the bust of Julia Domna is shown turned right in a draped robe with her hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back and topped with a tiara.¹⁰⁷ There is also a similar example but with the Augusta's head turned left.¹⁰⁸

As Bertolazzi states,¹⁰⁹ it is worth pointing out that although the theme of *Venus Victrix* had already been present on Julia Domna's coins under the rule of Septimius Severus, the symbolism it gained in the period of Caracalla was significant. For the first time this allegory is connected with the coins of the *princeps* exactly under the rule of Caracalla. Moreover, it is worth mentioning in this context a well-known relief from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, displaying Julia Domna as the goddess with a palm leaf in her left hand and placing a wreath on Caracalla's

⁹⁹ *RIC* IV /1, 274 n. ° 388c; *BMC* V, 434 n. ° 23B-26.

¹⁰⁰ *RIC* IV/1, 274 n. ° 388a; *BMC* V, 433 n. ° 21, 434 n. ° 22-23A.

¹⁰¹ *RIC* IV/1, 274 n. ° 388b.

¹⁰² *BMC* V, 470 n. ° 216, 472 n. ° 229, 473n. ° 230.

¹⁰³ *RIC* IV/1, 274 n. ° 389a; *BMC* V, 434 n. ° 27. The legend on the reverse: VENVS GENETRIX.

¹⁰⁴ *RIC* VI /1, 274 n. ° 389b; *BMC* V, 434 n. ° 28.

¹⁰⁵ *BMC* V, 473 n. ° *. The legend on the reverse: VENVS GENETRIX S.C.

¹⁰⁶ Only in one of them there is no Cupid. On the obverse the Augusta is wearing a tiara. Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 311 n. ° 592A.

¹⁰⁷ *RIC* IV/1, 311 n. ° 592a.

¹⁰⁸ *RIC* IV /1, 311 n. ° 592b.

¹⁰⁹ Bertolazzi, 2019: 480.

head with her right hand.¹¹⁰ [Fig. 7] Gathering all these elements together enabled the Italian scholar to determine the true significance of the Augusta for legitimacy of her son's rule. Therefore, we conclude that the proliferation of Julia Domna's coins devoted to *Venus Genetrix* struck in the Roman mint was far from being accidental. One can add here that at that time Julia Domna and her son Caracalla were the only representatives of *domus divina* because Caracalla had no offspring with Fulvia Plautilla. Therefore, he could not show political strength of the family in any other way but by emphasizing the figure of his mother.

Conclusiones

The epithets *Felix* and *Victrix* coined for Venus at the end of the Republic were associated with the victorious leaders who attempted to validate their triumphs by showing them as divine interventions. Caesar and his promotion of the cult of *Venus Genetrix* constitute a significant qualitative step forward and the beginning of marked intensity of such practice. Then the goddess became to be worshipped as the creator of the entire Julio-Claudian dynasty and thus the one who bestowed certain divine elements on the figure of the emperor. Exactly this aspect, strengthened by evolution of meanings of the remaining epithets, which started to have more global connotations, was the reason for its inclusion into the numismatic field of female coins.

The specificity of Septimius Severus's rule manifesting itself by the fact that he was the founder of the dynasty and, after the elimination of other pretenders, the sole emperor, lead to a situation where one of the main strategies was using *domus* as an element of unity and power. For this purpose, apart from highlighting the durability of the imperial dynasty, he also tried to demonstrate that his policies did not mean cessation of past traditions but, on the contrary, they were continuation of the golden era of Rome in the form of the Antonine dynasty. It should not be anything surprising then that such a large number of coins, somehow reminiscent of those devoted to Faustina the Younger, were struck in honour of Julia Domna. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that this significant number of coins must have been also motivated by the fact that during the reign of Caracalla Julia Domna was the most important Augusta of Imperium.

Traditional values widely associated with women such as maternity and marriage were embodied in the allegories of *Venus Genetrix* and *Venus Felix*, to which later on those of a more oriental character, i.e. *Venus Caelestis*, were also added. The meaning of the latter evolved in a similar direction and came to stand for glorification of fertility – the most important task women in Rome could aspire to. A more interesting case is that of *Venus Victrix* because the reason for its production lay in the contemporary political context, namely military confrontations of Septimius

¹¹⁰ National Museum in Warsaw, inv. n° 139678.

Severus with his rivals. However, the main motivation for the production of these coins was the Augusta's symbolic maternity and her protection over the military as otherwise it would have been difficult to explain their appearance in the military context. The allegories and associations used were not accidental but deliberately used to strengthen the imperial rule along the lines of the princeps's policy from Leptis Magna and later the policy continued by Julia Domna's son, who would use the figure of his mother in the public sphere without any scruples to his own advantage.

Figures



Fig. 1. Aureus of Julia Domna, Reverse: VENERI VICTR; BM inv. 1860,0326.15
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Fig. 2. Aureus of Julia Domna, Reverse: VENVS GENETRIX; BM inv. 1864,1128.284
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Fig. 3. Denarius of Julia Domna. Reverse: VENVS VICTRIX; BM inv.1844,0425.1398
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Fig. 4. Aureus of Julia Domna, Reverse: VENERI GENETRICI; BM inv. 1864,1128.100
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Fig. 5. Denarius of Julia Domna. Reverse: VENVS FELIX; BM inv. 1946,1004.833
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Fig. 6. Antoninianus of Julia Domna. Reverse: VENVS GENETRIX; BM inv. 1867,0101.1726
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Fig. 7. Relief with Caracalla and Julia Domna, National Museum in Warsaw inv. 139678;
© Z. Doliński, P. Ligier (after Żelazowski, 2019: 14, fig. 9).

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