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VENVS GENETRIX IN THE ISSUES OF THE SEVERAN DYNASTY WOMEN

Summary: The following considerations concern the coins of of women from the Severan dynasty, on the reverse of which the goddess Venus *Genetrix* is depicted. The analysis of the issue in terms of iconography and ideology aims to determine the role of this Roman goddess in the self-presentation of women of the Severan dynasty.

The seizure of power by the Julian-Claudian dynasty, who derived their lineage from Venus, led to the goddess being linked to the imperial dynastic line and, in time, to her maternal aspects being emphasised through the epithet *Genetrix*. The goddess was attributed maternal qualities linked to the legitimacy of power and, above all, to the need to have a descendant to inherit the throne. The idea of fertility ensuring continuity of power was taken up in their minting by the later imperial dynasties¹.

The following discussion is an attempt to analyse, from an iconographic and ideological point of view, the issues of coins dedicated to the women of the Severan dynasty², on the reverse of which the image of the goddess is accompanied by a legend identifying Venus as *Genetrix*.

¹ Morelli, A.L. (2009). *Madre di uomini e di dèi. La rappresentazione della maternità attraversata da documentazione numismatica di epoca romana*. Bologna: Ante Quem; Langford, J. (2013). *Maternal Megalomania. Julia Domna and the Imperial Politics of Motherhood*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Bertolazzi, R. (2019). Julia Domna and her Divine Motherhood: A Re-examination of the Evidence from Imperial Coins. *The Classical Journal*, 114(4), 464–486. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tcj.2018.0015>; Conesa Navarro, P. D., & Smyk, A. (2022). Goddess Venus on Julia Domna's coins. The Political Use of the Coinage of an Augusta of the Severan Dynasty. *Historia i Świat*, 11, 175–200. <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2022.11.11> (with literature).

² Kettenhofen, E. (1979). *Die syrischen Augustae in der historischen Überlieferung. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Orientalisierung*. Bonn: Habelt; Lusnia, S. (1995). Julia Domna's Coinage and Severan Dynastic Propaganda. *Latomus*, 54(1), 119–140. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41537210>; Rowan, C. (2012). *Under Divine Auspices. Divine Ideology and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severan Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nadolny, S. (2016). *Die severischen Kaiserfrauen*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag;

While the goddess Venus appeared on the coins of emperors as early as the reign of Octavian³, it should be noted that his issues are the only coins struck by members of the Julian-Claudian dynasty with the image of this goddess⁴. It should also be noted that, based on numismatic sources, Livia (*Livia Drusilla*) can only be indirectly associated with the goddess Venus⁵. This association is based on dupondius minted in Colonia Romula (province Hispania Baetica) by Tiberius (r. 14-37) commemorating Octavian and Livia. The reverse depicts the head of Livia with globe and crescent, accompanied by the legend: IVLIA AVGVSTA GENETRIX ORBIS (Julia Augusta,

³ See RIC I *Augustus*, no 250A, no 250B, no 251 [Rev.: CAESAR DIVI F], no 367-368 [Obv.: C ANTISTVS VETVS IIIVIR, Rev.: COS IMP CAESAR AVGV XI]; Kousser, R. (2010). Augustan Aphrodites: The allure of Greek art in Roman visual culture. in A.C. Smith, S. Pickup (Eds.), *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite* (pp. 287-306). Boston & Leiden: Brill.

⁴ Other issues with the goddess Venus before Hadrian's reign are scarce: RIC II/1 *Vespasian*, no 1077-1078 [Obv.: T CAESAR IMP VESPASIANVS, Rev.: TR POT VIII COS VII], RIC II/1 *Titus*, no 13-16 [Obv.: IMP TITVS CAES VESPASIAN AVGV P M, Rev.: TR P VIII IMP XIII COS VII], no 32-35, no 51-54 [Obv.: IMP TITVS CAES VESPASIAN AVGV P M, Rev.: TR P VIII IMP XIII COS VII P P], RIC II/1 *Julia Titi*, no 386-388 [Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA TITI AVGVSTI F, Rev.: VENVS AVGV], RIC II/1 *Domitia*, no 847 [Obv.: DOMITIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS AVGV], RIC II/2 Trajan, no 782 [Obv.: C NORBANVS CC III, Rev.: IMP CAES TRAIAN AVGV GER DAC P P REST], no 801 [Rev.: IMP CAES TRAIAN AVGV GER DAC P P REST CAESAR], no 806 [Obv.: C IVLIVS CAES IMP COS III, Rev.: IMP CAES TRAIAN AVGV GER DAC P P REST].

⁵ In the idea of Octavian, Venus together with Mars formed a pair of gods, ideologically connecting within the same cult both the Trojan origins of the Romans, through Aeneas, and the legendary founding of the city by Romulus, as the son of Mars (Kuttner, A.L. (1995). *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus: The Case of the Boscoreale Cups*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 23-25). A visual representation of this concept can be seen on the Ravenna Relief (Museo Nazionale, inv. no. 5), where Octavian was portrayed as Mars, and Livia as Venus (Pollini, J. (1981). Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus and the Ravenna Relief. *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung*, 88, 117-140). It also seems that the reference of Livia to the goddess may be observed in sculptures, for example the marble portrait of Livia in Hermitage of St.-Petersburg (inv. A 116), on which the empress has on her head the laurel crown identical to that of Venus on republican coins (see RRC, 430/1); Bartman, E. (1999). *Portraits of Livia. Imaging the Imperial Woman in Augustan Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 83-84; Lindner, M. (2006/2007). The Woman from Frosinone: Honorific Portrait Statues of Roman Imperial Women. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 51/52, 43-85; This idea of Octavian was not returned to until the Antonine period, as can be seen in the issues of Trajan showing on the obverse a bust of Venus and on the reverse Aeneas carrying Anchises holding *palladium* (RIC II/2 Trajan, no. 801) and especially in the issues of Marcus Aurelius dedicated to Faustina the Younger showing on the reverse a standing pair of the gods Venus and Mars (RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 1680).

Mother of the World)⁶. Furthermore, in the issues of Claudius (r. 41-54) the reverse legend DIVA AVGVSTA is accompanied by the depiction of the empress with the attributes belonging not to Venus, but Ceres (the torch and ears of grain)⁷.

The first recorded issues where the emperor is depicted on the obverse and the legend on the reverse reading VENERI GENETRICI are the issues minted only by Hadrian (r. 117-138). The goddess on the coins of the emperor is accompanied by the military attributes (Victory, spear and shield⁸ or Victory, shield, cuirass and helmet⁹). Interestingly, in Hadrian's issues with identical reverse legends, but dedicated to Sabina (*Vibia Sabina*)¹⁰, the only attribute of the goddess is the apple/globe held by her [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. RIC II/3 *Sabina*, no 2576, Denarius Rome, Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI [BM inv. R.12358] © The Trustees of the British Museum

In the issues of Faustina the Younger (*Annia Galeria Faustina Minor*) minted by Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161) with a reverse legend reading VENERI GENETRICI an apple was added to a sceptre in [Fig. 2]¹¹ or child in swaddling

⁶ RPC1, no 73 [Obv.: PERM DIVI AVG COL ROM, Rev.: IVLIA AVGVSTA GENETRIX ORBIS]; discussion in Brännstedt, L. (2010). Hela världens moder. Om Livia som genetrix orbis. In F. Faegersten, J. Wallensten, & I. Östenberg (Eds.), *Tankemönster: en festskrift till Eva Rystedt* (pp. 21–27). Lund: Fanni Faegersten; Discussion of this issue in the context of provincial inscriptions of *Venus Genetrix Augusta* see Oya García, G. (2019). *Genetrix Orbis*. Madre de la dinastía Julio-Claudia, madre del Imperio, madre del orbe. La imagen de Livia Drusila en el territorio de la Bética. *Habis*, 50, 147–166 (with literature).

⁷ RIC I *Claudius*, no 101 [Obv.: DIVVS AVGVSTVS S C, Rev.: DIVA AVGVSTA]. Livia, draped, wearing a wreath of corn-ears, seated left on an ornamented throne, holding corn-ears in right hand and long torch in left.

⁸ RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 1432 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVG COS III P P, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI], RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 1433 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS P P, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI].

⁹ RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 2900-2901 (Medallion) [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVG COS III P P, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI].

¹⁰ E.g. RIC II/3 *Sabina*, no 2576-2577 [Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI], no 2596-2598 [Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG P P, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI S C].

¹¹ RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 511a-511b [Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI]; in sub-type only with the sceptre, see Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, inv. 18273316 [https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?lang=en&id=18273316&view=rs].

clothes¹². It seems significant that the goddess holds in her hands the symbol of power, which was the sceptre, and not the spear which was a military attribute that appeared, among others, on coins of Hadrian¹³. The sceptre as an attribute of Venus appears on the coins of Sabina, but these are issues without a reverse legend¹⁴, replicating the iconographic patterns of early imperial coins¹⁵.



Fig. 2. RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 511a, Aureus Rome, Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI [<https://ikmk-win.ch/object?lang=en&id=ID1698&view=vs>]

Venus with the epithet *Genetrix* in association with the military attribution can be observed in some issues of Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180) dedicated both Faustina the Younger (Victory and shield¹⁶, also in the variant where the foot of the goddess was added a figure of a seated captive) [Fig. 3]¹⁷, as well as the daughter of the imperial couple Lucilla (Victory and shield set on helmet)¹⁸. The employment of military attributes in the iconography of these coins can be explained by the actions of the emperor to associate the imperial family ideologically with the army. One of the manifestations of such actions was the granting of the title MATER CASTRORVM (mother of the military camps) to Faustina¹⁹.

¹² E.g. RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 512Aa [Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI], no 512Ab [Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG ANTONINI AVG PII FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI], no 512Ac [Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA PII AVG FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI], no 512Ba [Obv.: FAVSTINA AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI], no 1386A-1386B [Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI S C].

¹³ RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 1432, no 1433.

¹⁴ RIC II/3 *Sabina*, no 2492 [Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG P P].

¹⁵ See also RIC II/1 *Julia Titi*, no 386 [Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA TITI AVGVSTI F, Rev.: VENVS AVG].

¹⁶ RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 734 [Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX], no 1679 [Obv. FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI S C], see also with identical image RIC III/3 *Marcus Aurelius*, no 1258 [Obv. M AVREL ANTONINVS AVG P M, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI S C] and RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 1678 in a variant with a shield set on helmet.

¹⁷ RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 733 [Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

¹⁸ RIC III/3 *Lucilla*, no 1762 [Obv.: LVCILLAE AVG ANTONINI AVG F, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI S C].

¹⁹ Conesa Navarro P.D. (2019). Faustina la Menor y Julia Domna como matres castrorum. Dos mujeres al servicio de la propaganda imperial de las dinastías Antonina y Severa. *Lucentum*, 38, 281–299. <https://doi.org/10.14198/LVCENTVM2019.38.13>.



Fig. 3. RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 733, Aureus Rome, Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX [BM inv. R.12602] © The Trustees of the British Museum

In part of the issues of Marcus Aurelius a subtle change in the perception of the Venus *Genetrix* can be observed. The goddess on the coins of Faustina the Younger is symbolically still the guarantor of victories as shown by the Victory goddess figure held by her, however, more emphasis has been placed on her aspects of authority not only through the vertical sceptre held in her left hand, but she is depicted seated on a throne [Fig. 4]²⁰.



Fig. 4. RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 735, Denarius Rome, Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX [BM inv. 1937,0607.26] © The Trustees of the British Museum

Enthroned Venus (holding Cupid and sceptre) was shown for the first time on the coins of Hadrian²¹, however, what is significant, the reverse legend attributes Venus as *Felix* and not *Genetrix* [Fig. 5]²².



Fig. 5. RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 2368, Denarius Rome, Obv.: HADRIVS AVG COS III P P, Rev.: VENERIS FELICIS [BM inv. 1934,0715.14] © The Trustees of the British Museum

Marcus Aurelius amplified the maternal aspect of the enthroned goddess as guarantor of the continuation of the dynasty in issues of Lucilla with the legend VENVS GENETRIX S C, where a standing Cupid was placed in front of Venus seated on the throne holding an apple and sceptre [Fig. 6]²³.

²⁰ RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 735 [Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

²¹ RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 2367-2369 [Obv.: HADRIVS AVG COS III P P, Rev.: VENERIS FELICIS].

²² Smyk, A. (2024). Wykorzystanie wizerunku bogini Wenus Felix w autoprezentacji kobiet z dynastii Sewerów. *Radzyński Rocznik Humanistyczny*, 22, 7–45. <https://doi.org/10.36121/RRH.22.2024.4>

²³ RIC III/3 *Lucilla*, no 1778 [Obv.: LVCILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].



Fig. 6. RIC III/3 *Lucilla*, no 1778, Sestertius Rome, Obv.: LVCILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C [BM inv. 1872,0709.727] © The Trustees of the British Museum

It might be found surprising that among the issues of Commodus (r. 180-192) dedicated to Crispina (*Bruttia Crispina*), Venus did not appear with the epithet *Genetrix*, however the coins defining the goddess as *Felix* and *Victrix* were struck for her²⁴.

²⁴ RIC III/3 *Crispina*, no 286A-286B [Obv.: CRISPINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS], no 287-289 [Obv. CRISPINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS FELIX], no 290 [Obv.: CRISPINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS VICTRIX].

Tab. 1. The issues of women of the imperial family with the reverse legend VENVS GENETRIX (the Author based on the *R/C*)

No	Denomination	Mint / Dates	Ruler	Obverse	Reverse	References
1	Aureus	Rome 193-1	Septimius Se	IVLIA DOMNA AVG Julia Domna, hair and coiled at back right	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, seated left, holding apple extended right hand and transverse sceptre in left feet, before her, Cupid, st right	RIC IV/1 537; B
2	Aureus Denarius	Rome 196-2	Septimius Se	IVLIA AVGVSTA – B Julia Domna, hair and coiled at back right	VENERI GENETRICI – Venu standing left, holding pat extended right hand and transverse sceptre in left	RIC IV/1 578; B
3	Antoninianus	Rome 211-2	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AV of Julia Domna, ha elaborately waved and turned up low back, diademed, c crescent, right	VENERI GENETRICI – Venu standing left, extending r and holding long transve sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/1 387 ²⁵ ; BMC V 20
4	Antoninianus Aureus Denarius	Rome 211-2	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AV of Julia Domna, ha elaborately waved and turned up low back, diademed, c crescent, right	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, seated left, extending rig and holding long transve sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/1 388A, 388C ²⁷ ; BMC V 22, 23A
5	Antoninianus Aureus Denarius	Rome 211-2	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AV of Julia Domna, ha elaborately waved and turned up low back, diademed, c crescent, right	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, seated left, holding apple extended right hand and transverse sceptre in left feet, before her, Cupid, st right	RIC IV/1 389A, BMC V 27, 28
6	Sestertius	Rome 211-217	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG – Bust of Julia Domna, hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up	VENERI GENETRICI S C – Venus, draped, standing left, holding patera in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/1 591

²⁵ Also in sub-type, on the obverse there is a bust without the crescent [BM inv. R.15475]. In the description on the British Museum website [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_R-15475], it is mentioned that Venus holding patera in extended right hand, but in the photo of the object it is visible that Venus' hand is empty.

²⁶ Also in sub-type, on the obverse there is a bust without the crescent.

²⁷ Also Aureus in sub-type, on the obverse there is a bust without the crescent, and Denarius in sub-type, on the obverse there is a bust without the crescent and diadem, see American Numismatic Society 1935.117.503 [<https://numismatics.org/collection/1935.117.503>].

²⁸ Also Denarius in sub-type, on the obverse there is a bust without the crescent and diadem, see American Numismatic Society 1935.117.503 [<https://numismatics.org/collection/1935.117.503>]

²⁹ Also Aureus and Denarius in sub-type, on the obverse there is a bust without the crescent and diadem.

				low at the back, diademed, draped, right		
7	Sestertius As Dupondius	Rome 211-217	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG – Bust of Julia Domna, hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX S C – Venus, draped, seated left, extending right hand to child and holding long transverse sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/1 592a, 592b ³⁰ , 605Ba, 605Bb; BMC V 216
8	Sestertius As Dupondius	Rome 211-217	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG – Bust of Julia Domna, hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX S C – Venus, draped, seated left, extending right hand and holding long transverse sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/1 592A, 605a, 605b; BMC V 216, 229
9	As Dupondius	Rome 211-217	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG – Bust of Julia Domna, hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX S C – Venus, draped, seated left, holding apple in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand; at feet, before her, Cupid, standing right	RIC IV/1 604
10	Dupondius	Rome 211-217	Caracalla	IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG – Bust of Julia Domna, hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX S C – Venus, draped, seated left, holding patera in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/1 605A
11	Denarius	Rome and Antioch 219-220	Elagabalus	IVLIA PAVLA AVG – Bust of Julia Paula, hair waved and fastened in plait, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, draped, seated left, holding apple in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/2 222; BMC V 177, 323, 324, 325
12	Denarius	Rome 225-227	Severus Alexander	SALL BARBIA ORBIANA AVG – Bust of Orbiana, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, draped, seated left, holding patera in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand	RIC IV/2 326
13	Denarius	Rome 225-227	Severus Alexander	SALL BARBIA ORBIANA AVG – Bust of Orbiana,	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, draped standing left, holding apple in	RIC IV/2 327

³⁰ Bust of Julia Domna, left.

				diademed, draped, right	extended right hand and spear/sceptr (?) ³¹ in left hand	
14	Aureus Denarius	Rome 225-235	Severus Alexander	IVLIA MAMAEA AVG – Bust of Julia Mamaea, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX – Venus, draped standing left, holding apple in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand; at feet, before her, Cupid, standing right	RIC IV/2 354, 355, 356; BMC VI 152, 153
15	Sestertius	Rome 222-235	Severus Alexander	IVLIA MAMAEA AVGVSTA – Bust of Julia Mamaea, diademed, draped, right	VENVS GENETRIX S C – Venus, draped standing left, holding apple in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand; at feet, before her, child, standing right	RIC IV/2 704; BMC VI 154, 155

Septimius Severus minted at the Roman mint a series of aureus for Julia Domna, on the reverse of which the legend VENVS GENETRIX was accompanied by a representation of the goddess seated on a throne [Fig. 7]³², whose attributes are identical as on the issues dedicated to Lucilla³³.



Fig. 7. RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 537, Aureus. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA DOMNA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX [BM inv. 1864,1128.284] © The Trustees of the British Museum

In the second type minted by Severus with reverse legend VENERI GENETRICI, standing Venus holding patera in extended right hand and long transverse sceptre in left hand [Fig. 8]³⁴.



Fig. 8. RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 578, Denarius. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI

³¹ According to the description of *RIC* (p. 97: „Venus stg., holding apple and spear”), however, there was no photo of the coin in the catalogue.

³² RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 537.

³³ RIC III/3 *Lucilla*, no 1778; Also worth mentioning is the Sever issue, whose only difference from the Lucilla and Julia Domna issue is the placement of a child in front of the throne of the goddess instead of Cupid, see RIC IV/1 *Septimius Severus*, no 328 [Obv.: SEVERVS PIVS AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

³⁴ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 578.

Patera is an absolute *novum* among the attributes of Venus introduced by Julia Domna³⁵. There seems to be an obvious visual link between this iconography and the issues of Galba (r. 68-69), the reverse of which depicts Livia holding a patera and sceptre [Fig. 9].



Fig. 9. RIC I *Livia*, no 189, Denarius. Rome, Obv.: IMP SER GALBA CAESAR AVG, Rev.: DIVA AVGVSTA [BM inv. 1867,0101.1607] © The Trustees of the British Museum

On this basis, one would have to interpret the emissions of Julia Domna as a deliberate reference to Octavian's wife, but this is not so obvious.

The image of a standing goddess holding a sceptre and patera in Hadrian's issues is accompanied by the legend of the reverse CLEMENTIA AVG[usti]³⁶ or PIETAS AVG[usti]³⁷. What is particularly significant is that an identical attribution has been attributed to the goddess Juno (the difference being the veil on the head of the goddess) in the Sabine issues with the IVNONI reverse legend REGINAE³⁸ (also with an abbreviation S C³⁹) [Fig. 10].

³⁵ The only issues are the Octavian coins, where the obverse depicts the head of Venus, while the reverse features priestly objects: Simpulum, lituus, tripod and patera. See RIC I *Augustus*, no 367-368 [Obv.: C ANTISTVS VETVS IIIVIR, Rev.: COS IMP CAESAR AVGV XI].

³⁶ E.g. RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 948-950 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS P P, Rev.: CLEMENTIA AVG // COS III (in exergue)], no 1009-1012 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS, Rev.: CLEMENTIA AVG P P // COS III (in exergue)], no 1065-1071 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS, Rev.: CLEMENTIA AVG COS III P P]. See also RIC III/3 *Antoninus Pius*, no 64a [Obv.: ANTONINVS AVG PIVS P P TR P COS III, Rev.: CLEMENTIA AVG], RIC III/3 *Marcus Aurelius*, no 1158 [Obv.: M ANTONINVS AVG GERM SARMATICVS, Rev.: CLEMENTIA AVG TR P XXX IMP VIII COS III S C]. Repeated also by Clodius Albinus, see RIC IV/1 *Clodius Albinus*, no 14 [Obv.: IMP CAE D CLO SEP ALB AVG, Rev.: CLEMENTIA AVG COS II].

³⁷ E.g. RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 2030 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVG COS III P P, Rev.: PIETAS AVG], see also RIC III/3 *Marcus Aurelius*, no 380 [Obv.: M ANTONINVS AVG GERM SARM, Rev.: TR P XXXI IMP VIII COS III P P PIET AVG].

³⁸ RIC II/3 *Sabina*, no 2539-2541 [Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG P P, Rev.: IVNONI REGINAE], no 2550-2551 [Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: IVNONI REGINAE]; see also RIC II/3 *Hadrian*, no 3177 [Obv.: HADRIANVS AVG COS III P P, Rev.: IVNONI REGINAE].

³⁹ RIC II/3 *Sabina*, no 2554no 2555-2557 [Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG P P, Rev.: IVNONI REGINAE S C], see also RIC II/3 *Faustina the Elder*, no 391 [Obv.: DIVA FAVSTINA, Rev.: IVNO]



Fig. 10. RIC II/3 *Sabina*, no 2541, Denarius. Rome, Obv.: SABINA AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG P P, Rev.: IVNONI REGINAE [BM inv. BNK,R.436] © The Trustees of the British Museum

Identical attributes can be found on the issues of Faustina the Younger with the legend IVNONI LVCINAE⁴⁰ [Fig. 11], significantly, Juno on the reverse is diademed but not veiled.



Fig. 11. RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 505B, Aureus. Rome, Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: IVNONI LVCINAE [BM inv. G3,RUnc.4] © The Trustees of the British Museum

The same representation of the female figure was placed in the Lucilla issues with the legend FECVNDITAS AVGVSTA⁴¹. In issues of Commodus, Felicitas was depicted in this iconographic manner⁴², Concordia [Fig. 12]⁴³, or Salus⁴⁴, and on the issues of Crispina the goddess Juno⁴⁵, also with the epithets *Lucina*⁴⁶ and *Regina*⁴⁷, however in the latter two cases the goddess is portrayed in veil.



Fig. 12. RIC III/3 *Commodus*, no 219A, Aureus. Rome, Obv.: M COMM ANT P FEL AVG BRIT P P, Rev.: CONC COM P M TR P XVI COS VI [BM inv. 1864,1128.86] © The Trustees of the British Museum

⁴⁰ RIC III/3 *Faustina the Younger*, no 505B [Obv.: FAVSTINAE AVG PII AVG FIL, Rev.: IVNONI LVCINAE], no 691 [Obv.: FAVSTINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: IVNONI LVCINAE].

⁴¹ RIC III/3 *Lucilla*, no 768 [Obv.: LVCILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: FECVNDITAS AVGVSTA].

⁴² RIC III/3 *Commodus*, no 159 [Obv.: M COMM ANT P FEL AVG BRIT, Rev.: PVBLIC FEL P M TR P XII IMP VIII COS V P P].

⁴³ RIC III/3 *Commodus*, no 198A-198B [Obv.: M COMM ANT P FEL AVG BRIT P P, Rev.: CONCORDIAE COMMODI AVG], no 219-219A [Obv.: M COMM ANT P FEL AVG BRIT P P, Rev.: CONC COM P M TR P XVI COS VI].

⁴⁴ RIC III/3 *Commodus*, no 642 [Obv.: L AEL AVREL COMM AVG P FEL, Rev.: SALVS AVG S C].

⁴⁵ RIC III/3 *Crispina*, no 284 [Obv.: CRISPINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: IVNO].

⁴⁶ RIC III/3 *Crispina*, no 680 [Obv.: CRISPINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: IVNO LVCINA S C].

⁴⁷ RIC III/3 *Crispina*, no 682 [Obv.: CRISPINA AVGVSTA, Rev.: IVNO REGINA S C].

Caracalla (r. 211-217), in issues dedicated to Julia Domna, repeated the iconography of the reverse of a seated Venus holding an apple and sceptre, in front of which Cupid stands [Fig. 13]⁴⁸ known from the coins minted by Severus [Fig. 7].



Fig. 13. RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 389A, Antoninianus. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX

[<https://www.ikmk.at/object?id=ID66973>]

What seems significant is that after the death of Severus, on the part of the Caracalla emissions dedicated to Julia Domna, Venus *Genetrix* no longer holds an apple in her right hand. The empty hand is extended towards the child standing in front of the goddess, replacing Cupid from earlier emissions⁴⁹. Moreover, Caracalla also minted coins of a type in which not only an apple but even a child was not placed on the reverse side [Fig. 14]⁵⁰.



Fig. 14. RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 388A, Antoninianus. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX

[<https://archaeologie.uni-muenster.de/ikmk/object?lang=en&id=ID973&view=rs>]

Another variant of the reverse with the legend VENVS GENETRIX S C minted by Caracalla is a depiction of enthroned Venus holding a patera and sceptre⁵¹.

In the case of representations of the standing Venus *Genetrix*, the reverse designs used by Septimius Severus, on which the attribution of the goddess was patera and sceptre, were repeated in the issues struck by

⁴⁸ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 389A, no 389B [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX], no 604 [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

⁴⁹ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 592a, 592b, 605Ba, 605Bb [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

⁵⁰ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 388A, no 388B, no 388C [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX], no 592A, no 605a, no 605b [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

⁵¹ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 605A [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

Caracalla his mother⁵². However, it seems significant that, as with the depictions of the enthroned Venus, Caracalla also minted coins on which the right, outstretched hand of the goddess is empty [Fig. 15]⁵³.



Fig. 15. RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 387, Antoninianus. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI [BM inv. R.15475] © The Trustees of the British Museum

It is interesting to note that no coins were minted of Plautilla, who was married to Caracalla, the potential mother of the heir, depicting Venus *Genetrix*, although issues dedicated to her contained the legend both VENVS FELIX⁵⁴ as well as VENVS VICTRIX⁵⁵. Maternal aspect of the goddess was only marked in the issues with Venus *Victrix*, by placing Cupid at her feet.

Elagabalus (r. 218-222) struck only one issue with the reverse legend VENVS GENETRIX, dedicated to Julia Paula. The iconography of the reverse repeated earlier designs showing a seated goddess holding an apple and a scepter [Fig. 16]⁵⁶. Mention should be made here of the 'religious policy' of the emperor, who promoted the Venus *Caelestis* above all in his actions⁵⁷, which must have had an impact on the lack of coins with the legend VENVS GENETRIX dedicated to the emperor's mother, Julia Soaemias.



Fig. 16. RIC IV/2 *Julia Paula*, no 222, Denarius. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA PAVLA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX

[<https://www.ikmk.at/object?lang=en&id=ID68361&view=vs>]

⁵² RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no RIC IV/1 591 [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI S C].

⁵³ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 387 [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENERI GENETRICI].

⁵⁴ RIC IV/1 *Plautilla*, no 368 [Obv.: PLAVTILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS FELIX].

⁵⁵ RIC IV/1 *Plautilla*, no 369 [Obv.: PLAVTILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS VICTRIX], no 579, no 582 [Obv.: PLAVTILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS VICTRIX S C].

⁵⁶ RIC IV/2 *Julia Paula*, no 222 [Obv.: IVLIA PAVLA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

⁵⁷ Smyk, A. (2024). *Venus Caelestis* na monetach Julii Soemias – problemy interpretacji w kontekście historycznym. *Studia Antiquitatis et Medii Aevi Incohantis*, 9. (in press); Smyk, A. (2024). Denar Julii Mezy z legendą VENVS VICTRIX ze zbiorów Muzeum Historii Sztuki w Wiedniu. *Wieki Stare i Nowe*, 19(24), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.31261/WSN.2024.24.01>.

In the issues minted by Severus Alexander (r. 222-218) for the mother of Julia Mamaea the reverse legend VENVS GENETRIX is accompanied by a standing Venus holding an apple and sceptre, just as on the issues of Julia Domna, minted by Caracalla, however the novelty is placing of Cupid with the raised hands in front of the goddess [Fig. 17]⁵⁸. The second type of reverse differing by the addition of S C abbreviation instead of Cupid stands child [Fig. 18]⁵⁹. However, it is important to emphasize that the attributes of the goddess (apple, sceptre and Cupid) are identical as on the reverses of Lucilla with a legend VENVS GENETRIX S C, on which Venus is portrayed enthroned⁶⁰.



Fig. 17. RIC IV/2 *Julia Mamaea*, no 355, Denarius. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA MAMAEA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX [BM inv. R.16144] © The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 18. RIC IV/2 *Julia Mamaea*, no 704, Sestertius. Rome, Obv.: IVLIA MAMAEA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C [BM inv. 1905,0512.8] © The Trustees of the British Museum

Severus Alexander also struck issues dedicated to the wife of Orbiana (*Gnaea Seia Herennia Sallustia Orba Barbia Orbiana*) with the reverse legend VENVS GENETRIX. The first type of reverse, on which the attribution of the throning Venus are patera and sceptre⁶¹ is based on the issues of Domna⁶². In the second type, according to the Editors of *RIC*⁶³ standing Venus is holding an apple in right hand and a spear in left⁶⁴. No photograph of the coin was included in the catalogue, which would have

⁵⁸ RIC IV/2 *Julia Mamaea*, no 354-356 [Obv.: IVLIA MAMAEA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

⁵⁹ RIC IV/2 *Julia Mamaea*, no 704 [Obv.: IVLIA MAMAEA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

⁶⁰ RIC III/3 *Lucilla*, no 1778 [Obv.: LVCILLA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

⁶¹ RIC IV/2 *Orbiana*, no 326 [Obv.: SALL BARBIA ORBIANA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

⁶² RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 605A [Obv.: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX S C].

⁶³ RIC IV/2, p. 97.

⁶⁴ RIC IV/2 *Orbiana*, no 327 [Obv.: SALL BARBIA ORBIANA AVG, Rev.: VENVS GENETRIX].

made it possible to verify the attributes of the goddess and determine whether it was a spear or a sceptre. If it was indeed a spear, the iconography would be unique, however, it seems that there was a mistake in the description of the coin and Venus on the reverse holds the apple and long transverse sceptre placed in the iconography of Venus on most coins of women of the imperial family. The closest analogy is the issue of Julia Mamaea with the reverse legend VENVS GENETRIX⁶⁵, where the only difference is the lack of a child at the feet of the goddess in the issues of Orbiana.

Conclusions

Venus, in her various aspects, is present in coinage throughout the Severian period. Above all, the goddess emphasized the role of empresses as mothers of future emperors. This was particularly important in the case of a dynasty whose rights to the throne were based on kinship in the female line. It was therefore natural to replicate the ideological patterns introduced by Septimius Severus in the minting of Julia Domna, modelled visually and ideologically on Faustina the Younger. In issues dedicated to the women of the Severian dynasty with the reverse legend VENVS GENETRIX, the visual reference to the minting of the Antonines shines through, an obvious fact due to the 'fictitious adoption' of the Severian emperors into the previous dynasty⁶⁶.

The iconographic analysis of the coins shows that there is no close connection between the attributes of Venus and the epithets of the goddess. An example would be the Julia Domna issues, the reverse of which shows a standing Venus holding an apple and a sceptre in her hands. This representation of the goddess is accompanied by legends both FELIX⁶⁷, VICTRIX⁶⁸ as well as CAELESTIS (a star was added in the field)⁶⁹.

Of particular note is the new attribute of Venus *Genetrix* introduced in minting by Julia Domna - the patera. The patera in combination with the sceptre appears in the iconography of the coins as an attribute of the goddesses Juno⁷⁰ and Vesta⁷¹. Importantly, the goddess was depicted identically in the issues of Faustina the Younger with the legend IVNONI LVCINAE. It is also

⁶⁵ RIC IV/2 *Julia Mamaea*, no 354, 355, 356.

⁶⁶ See E.g. CIL VIII, 9317.

⁶⁷ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 646 [Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS FELIX].

⁶⁸ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 630-631 (Obv.: IVLIA DOMNA AVG, Rev.: VENER VICT].

⁶⁹ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 605 (Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS CAELESTIS].

⁷⁰ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 559A [Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: IVNO], no 648A [Obv.: IVLIA PIA MATER CASTR, Rev.: IVNO].

⁷¹ RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 587, 648 [Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VESTAE SANCTAE].

important to mention the issue of Julia Domna with the reverse legend VENVS CAELESTIS, where the standing goddess holding a patera in extended right hand and sceptre in left hand (a star has been added to the field)⁷². What emerges from these issues of Domna is the 'assumption' by Venus of the attributes of Juno, the main goddess of the Roman pantheon.

An analogy can be drawn here with the 'appropriation' of the attributes of other goddesses by Venus, as was the case with the palm branch, an attribute of Victoria, which was introduced by Domna into the iconography of Venus *Victrix*⁷³.

It seems that above observations may support the hypothesis proposed by Patryk Skupniewicz regarding iconography of Venus in the discussed period. According to this idea Venus could be a goddess venerated by the women of the Severan family as the closest equivalent of the Syrian "great goddess" worshipped privately. This would make Venus a "kind of dynastic deity" associated with the female members of the dynasty. Appropriation of the attributes several Roman goddesses and iconographic originality could point at specific dynastic theology attempting to express oriental, syncretic female deity within the frames of the official Roman visual language.⁷⁴

⁷² RIC IV/1 *Julia Domna*, no 604 (Obv.: IVLIA AVGVSTA, Rev.: VENVS CAELESTIS).

⁷³ Smyk, A., & Filipova, S. (2024). Coins of the 'Syrian Empresses' with the legend VENVS VICTRIX from lost hoard of Roman coins from Bulgaria. *Historia i Świat*, 13, 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2024.13.13>

⁷⁴ Smyk, A., & Skupniewicz, P. (2024). A denarius of Julia Maesa with reverse legend VENVS VICTRIX from the collection of the British Museum. *Historia i Świat*, 13, 250–251. <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2024.13.14>