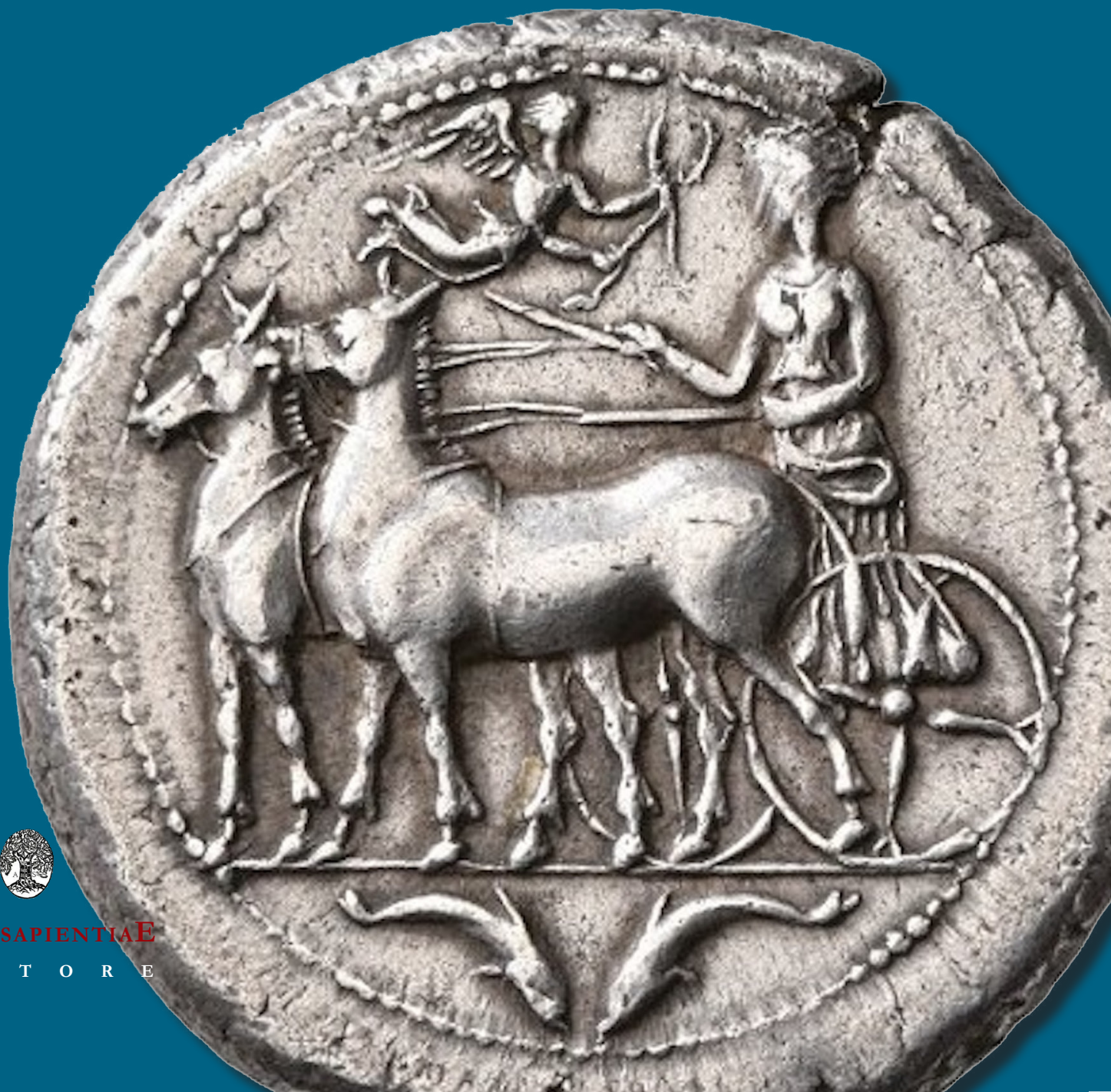


# MAGISTRA OPTIMA

SCRITTI IN ONORE DI MARIA CALTABIANO  
PER I SUOI 50 ANNI DI STUDI NUMISMATICI



ARBOR SAPIENTIAE  
EDITORE

# MAGISTRA OPTIMA

SCRITTI IN ONORE DI MARIA CALTABIANO  
PER I SUOI 50 ANNI DI STUDI NUMISMATICI

a cura di

MARIANGELA PUGLISI, KATIA MANNINO  
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Messina-Roma

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Tetradrammo di Messana. D/ Nike in volo incorona la ninfa Messana alla guida di una biga di mule; in esergo, due delfini (M. Caccamo Caltabiano, *La monetazione di Messana. Con le emissioni di Rhegion dell'età della tirannide*, Antike Münzen und geschnittene Steine XIII, Berlin-New York 1993, 613). Immagine tratta da CoinArchives.com: Leu Numismatik AG > Auction 6: 23 October 2020, Lot number: 67.

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## SEVERAN EUSEBEIA

DARIO CALOMINO

<sup>1</sup> The coinage minted by the provincial cities of the Roman Empire up until the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD provides an extraordinarily rich variety of reverse designs that have never been comprehensively catalogued<sup>1</sup>. The ongoing publication of the *Roman Provincial Coinage* volumes, both in print and online<sup>2</sup>, is increasingly filling this gap and unveiling the great potential of these materials for our understanding of local visual culture and for the comparative study of coin iconography in the Roman world. Civic coin types were designed primarily to celebrate the political and cultural life of these communities, so

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<sup>1</sup> I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to the *Festschrift* of Prof. Maria Caltabiano with this small study on the numismatic iconography of the Severan period, which rests within my broader research project on the imperial representation on Roman provincial coinage funded by the ERC as part of the Horizon 2020 Programme: ERC CoG RESP (*The Roman Emperor Seen from the Provinces*) GA no. 101002763. Photo credits: Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum (BM) – Amelia Dowler; Médailles et Antiques, Bibliothèque nationale de France Paris (BNF) – Frederique Duyrat and Julien Olivier; Münzkabinett, Wien Kunsthistorisches Museum (KHM) – Klaus Vondrovec. The images from auctions credited in the captions are taken from the <https://coinarchives.com> database: Classical Numismatic Group (CNG); Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung GmbH Gorny&Mosch; Fritz Rudolf Künker GmbH & Co. KG (Künker); Numismatica Ars Classica (NAC); Roma Numismatics Limited (Roma Numismatics).

<sup>2</sup> See the project's overview at <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk> (database curated by Jerome Mairat, Ashmolean Museum).

their imagery was dominated by themes inspired by local institutions, traditions and myths<sup>3</sup>. In this context, the narratives of imperial policy played a minor role and, while the majority of reverse designs followed Greek iconographic traditions, issues depicting the emperor and the members of his family, often inspired by imperial propaganda, were arguably more exposed to the influence of iconographic models from Rome<sup>4</sup>. Still, even when the subject was the Roman emperor, it seems that the genesis of local coin types was more a process of negotiation, adaptation and even reinvention of metropolitan models, than one of passive reception from the centre to the periphery<sup>5</sup>. In this paper I will discuss an example of coin iconography associated with the Severan visual propaganda, which featured on issues produced by Asia Minor cities, to demonstrate that the imagery centred upon the representation of members of the imperial family could result in large part from local creation.

This is a bronze issue of medallion size struck at Sardis for Septimius Severus under the archon G. Iulius Crispus. Currently known in a single specimen of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, it features an unusual reverse design: a female figure, wearing a long chiton, stands between two children, each wearing a long tunic too and holding a patera in one hand. The woman is looking left, gently placing one hand

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<sup>3</sup> Heuchert 2005 gives a narrative of the development of the designs on civic issues under the Empire.

<sup>4</sup> See a preliminary discussion in Harl 1987, 38-51 Heuchert 2005, 52-55 and Burnett 2024, 209-217.

<sup>5</sup> See Calomino 2020a for a recent case study on the coinage of Caracalla.

over a child's head and holding a long sceptre in the other. The scene is unanimously interpreted as an allegorical representation of Julia Domna's maternal role as the carer of future emperors Caracalla and Geta. There is an element of uncertainty in this picture, though, the reading of the reverse legend, which is fragmentary: ΕΠΙ Γ Ι ΚΡΙCΠΙΟΥ ΑΡΧ CΑΡΔΙΑΝΩΝ ΔΙC ΝΕΩΚΟΡΩΝ [...]ΕΙΑ (fig. 1). While the names of the archon and of the city survive in their entirety, the word in the exergue, which refers to the reverse scene, is mostly incomplete. The initial reading proposed by Mionnet as [ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦ]ΕΙΑ has been generally accepted and followed in all later works<sup>6</sup>. As I shall discuss below, *Philadelphieia* was mentioned in Severan coin legends of other Asia Minor cities to advertise the agonistic festivals that celebrated the brotherhood of Caracalla and Geta; this is probably why it seemed plausible to link the games to the imagery adopted on the Sardis issue in the first place, where the Severan siblings are portrayed with their mother. However, in my opinion this explanation does not fit here, because the reverse legend should be integrated as [ΕΥCΕΒ]ΕΙΑ.

This interpretation is based on both comparative evidence of contemporary issues from Rome and the provinces and on more general thoughts about the scope and impact of the Severan propaganda. A convincing parallel in support of the new reading comes from an issue of Septimius Severus struck at Pergamum under the Strategos Iulius Pollio, which features exactly the same reverse design and the legend: ΕΠΙ CΤΡΑ ΙΟΥ ΠΟΛΛΙΩΝΟC ΠΕΡΓΑΜΗΝ Β ΝΕΩΚΟ ΕΥCΕΒΕΙΑ (fig. 2)<sup>7</sup>. The Pergamum bronze shows unmistakably what message this iconography was meant to convey: *Ensebeia* was the Greek *Pietas*, a crucial theme in the Severan ideology that played a prominent role in state visual art. On the one hand, the imagery of imperial *pietas* relied on traditional visual tropes

designed to express devotion to the gods, like the scenes of sacrifice and libation on the Severan arch of Leptis Magna and on the *Argentarii's* arch in Rome<sup>8</sup>. The only other attestation of the legend ΕΥCΕΒΕΙΑ on provincial coinage is indeed a bronze issue of Julia Domna at Anazarbus, in Cilicia, where she is depicted standing and holding a patera before an altar (fig. 3)<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, *pietas* acquired special significance in the narrative of Julia Domna's public image as the manifestation of filial piety. In the complex dynamics of the Severan family, this sentiment was intertwined with the ideal of harmony between Caracalla and Geta that the emperor was most anxious to cement and publicize<sup>10</sup>. As the guardian of the future Augusti and the grantor of the dynasty's fate, Domna was the natural incarnation of *Pietas'* divine nature, the goddess described in Statius' *Thebaid* (XI, 458-62) who 'bewailed the fraternal strife, as though a hapless sister or anxious mother of the fighters'<sup>11</sup>. Motherhood was probably the most prominent feature of Domna's public profile rather than her role as wife of Septimius<sup>12</sup>. Well before becoming the fully-empowered Augusta who acted on behalf of her son Caracalla as the sole emperor<sup>13</sup>, she had been universally presented as *Mater Castrorum* (AD 195) and as *Mater Augustorum* (AD 209)<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> *Description* vol. IV, 128, no. 729; Karl 1975, 131-132; *LGCI*, 304; Hochard 2020, no. 1968; Kurth 2020, no. 469.

<sup>7</sup> *SNG von Aulock* 7510.

<sup>8</sup> For a comparative analysis of the reliefs on the two monuments with a focus on Julia Domna's role, see Ghedini 1984, 27-90 and Ghedini 2020, 190-209. For further examples in Severan provincial art, see Newby 2007, 211-222.

<sup>9</sup> On the imagery of Domna performing a sacrifice on imperial coinage, see Lusnia 1995, 137-138.

<sup>10</sup> On the role of *concordia* and *pietas* as pillars of the Severan propaganda, see Ghedini 1984, 78-80.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by John Henry Mozley, from the Loeb Classical Library edition of 1928.

<sup>12</sup> See especially Langford 2013 and Bertolazzi 2019, with a focus on coinage.

<sup>13</sup> Abdy 2012, 508.

<sup>14</sup> Kienast, Eck, Heil 2017, 152. However, issues featuring Cybele and the legend MATER AVGG, which alluded to Domna's role, were already struck in AD 198 (*RIC* IV/1, 562). Cf. Levick 2007, 42-45 and 140-141; Ghedini 1984, 136-139; Ghedini 2020, 166-169. At the beginning of Septimius' reign (AD 193-196) Domna's maternal role was also prompted

Therefore the imagery of Greek *Eusebeia* had a clear ideological meaning that stemmed directly from imperial propaganda. The analogies between the issues of Sardis and Pergamum also attest that this iconography was adopted by more than one community at the same time in association with the notion of *εὐσέβεια*, clearly as part of a shared visual pattern. So it is possible that the iconography of *Eusebeia* derived from a Roman model that became fashionable in Asia Minor in this period. However, if we look at the designs that furthered the same message on imperial coinage, there does not seem to be an exact reference for the iconography introduced in the provincial cities.

A similar iconography to the one used at Sardis and Pergamum is that of *Fecunditas*, which featured on Julia Domna's Roman issues after AD 211: like *Eusebeia*, the female personification of fertility is accompanied by two smaller figures, but she is also holding an infant in her arms<sup>15</sup>. Compare also the reverse design of an earlier aureus of Geta struck during his second consulship (AD 205-209). This shows a female figure (that can be loosely interpreted as *Pietas*, but could be *Fecunditas* too)<sup>16</sup> standing in the presence of two children and holding a short sceptre, as on the civic issues of Septimius Severus; the main difference, though, is that both children stand together to her left rather than on either side (fig. 4)<sup>17</sup>. For the message of filial piety that it was probably meant to convey, this could be

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on coinage by issues in her name featuring *Venus Genetrix*; RIC IV/1, 537. Cf. Filippini 2008, 9-13 and Bertolazzi 2019, 465-466 (also on the *Fecunditas* issues). Note also the silver medallion of the Berlin's Münzkabinett collection on which she was associated with the imagery of *Vesta Mater*: <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?lang=en&id=18200788> (RIC IV/1, 587a); cf. Filippini 2008, 17-18 and Bertolazzi 2019, 475-476.

<sup>15</sup> Calicò 2003, Vol. II, no. 2613 (aureus); RIC IV/1, 374 (denarius). See also Domna's *Fecunditas* series on which the personification of fertility is seated and holds one child in her arms, while another one stands in front of her; RIC IV/1, 534.

<sup>16</sup> See *Typenatlas I*, taf. 16: f1B/04 (*Fecunditas*) = taf. 38: f1B/07 (*Pietas*).

<sup>17</sup> RIC IV/1, 60c.

the closest parallel in Severan coinage to the two Asia Minor issues. Also, the chronology of Geta's aurei is definitely nearer to that of the civic issues, which unfortunately cannot be narrowed down more precisely; for sure they can be dated after Caracalla's promotion as Augustus in AD 198 and well before that of his brother in AD 209 (see further below)<sup>18</sup>. Still, from an iconographic perspective, the most credible model in Roman coinage appears to be the traditional imagery of *Pietas Augusta* with children: the goddess stands between two smaller togate figures, each raising one hand, and places her hands on their heads<sup>19</sup>. This design, though, was adopted in Rome only on 2<sup>nd</sup> century coinage, for Matidia under Trajan (fig. 5) and for Sabina under Hadrian (and again on issues of Antoninus Pius), but it does not appear on the Severan coinage produced in Rome and in the eastern state mints. Moreover, even if the scheme is roughly the same as the one adopted in the provinces, there is one detail that marks a major divide between the provincial iconography and all its potential sources of inspiration: the personification of *Pietas* does not hold a sceptre, which is the most distinctive attribute of *Eusebeia* in the East. The fact that on the coins of Sardis and Pergamum the Augusta's alter-ego is holding a sceptre with one hand means that she is touching the head of only one child with the other<sup>20</sup>. This is the one standing to her right, who is also slightly taller than the other. The difference in height marks a hierarchy between them, the taller one being obviously the elder, Caracalla: in this case, Domna's gesture is arguably meant to point at the young Augustus, indicating that he is higher in rank too. This subtle variation of an established iconographic pattern adds nuances to the meaning of the message associated with the original model – whereby both children looked equally blessed under the

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<sup>18</sup> On this chronology see Mattingly 1932, 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Typenatlas I*, taf. 37: f1A/13 and f1A/19-20. Cf. Levick 2007, 95.

<sup>20</sup> The iconography of *Pietas* holding a sceptre on imperial coins, which was also introduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, shows either only one child or none: *Typenatlas I*, taf. 37: f1A/15-16 and f1A/18.

aegis of a maternal figure<sup>21</sup>, and generates a new visual message tailored for the Severan family.

This is an example of how provincial administrations could show themselves not only sensitive to political messages emanating from the centre of power, but also keen to think of new ways to communicate these messages to the local audiences. The analysis of the *Eusebeia* type in particular demonstrates that iconographic models conceived for metropolitan media were not binding; the same concept could be expressed in the local visual language by adapting a long-standing Roman model to a certain context or for a specific occasion. In this case we can infer that the iconography of Severan *Eusebeia* was reminiscent of existing paradigms in metropolitan art, which had been reinvented in the Roman East. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that a very similar imagery was introduced in the coinage of Alexandria in Egypt for Septimius Severus. A billon tetradrachm dated to year 9 of his reign, which is AD 200/201, features a reverse type that leaves no room for interpretation: Julia Domna, wrapped in a long dress, stands between the two young princes while holding a wreath in one hand and a long sceptre in the other; Geta stands before her to the left, holding a spear and a globe; Caracalla, taller than him, stands behind her, placing one hand on her sceptre and holding a Nike in the other (fig. 6)<sup>22</sup>. The mismatch in height between them here is somehow balanced by the fact that Geta seems to hold a more prominent position than his brother<sup>23</sup>. What truly matters, though, is that Domna is clearly recognisable for her distinctive hairstyle, and so are, by extension, her children, both presented in a military attire. The fact that the iconographic structure of this design is almost identical to that of its allegorical version associated with the legend EYCEBEIA confirms, on the one hand, that

the *Eusebeia* reverse type alluded to the current political situation of the Severan dynasty, and, on the other, that the imagery specifically designed to further this message may have stemmed from the provincial cities rather than from Rome. Alexandria was largely controlled by the central administration and its coinage was, among those of the principal Roman provincial mints (including Caesarea in Cappadocia and Antioch on the Orontes), the one that more likely reflected the ideological choices of the imperial court. Still, the genesis of coin types was driven by local culture and visual language, so that mint creations may be interpreting imperial messages originally and even more explicitly than in Rome. This example also provides a potential clue for reconstructing the chronology of the genesis and spread of the provincial iconography, which may have been adopted by the Asia Minor cities roughly in the same years.

A similar example of Roman provincial iconography originating from the adaptation of Roman models to local needs can be seen on the above mentioned civic issues celebrating the Severan *Philadelphbeia*<sup>24</sup>. The festivals of Severan brotherhood were held in at least three cities in the eastern Roman provinces: Perinthus in Thrace, Nicaea in Bithynia and Caesarea in Cappadocia<sup>25</sup>. All their issues share one main visual pattern, the image of two prize-crowns on a table, which conforms to the mainstream imagery of agonistic festivals<sup>26</sup>. At Nicaea, though, some original designs were also introduced to promote the games and echo the Severan policy at the same time, merging local and imperial propaganda. One coin type in particular shows Caracalla and Geta standing together, wearing a toga and shaking their hands over a prize table (fig. 7). The image is borrowed from the *dextrarum iunctio* iconography, a most traditional symbol of political concord and loyalty that served well the purpose of

<sup>21</sup> On Matidia's issues the children are believed to represent young Sabina and Matidia junior; *RIC* II, 759; Woytek 2011, nos. 728-729.

<sup>22</sup> Staffieri 2017, no. 194.

<sup>23</sup> However, it is also possible that the arrangement of the three figures in the scene and the choice of their attributes are irrelevant to the way their status was to be interpreted.

<sup>24</sup> On the *Philadelphbeia* festivals as expression of imperial propaganda, see Mitchell 1993, 221.

<sup>25</sup> See Calomino 2023 for a deeper analysis of these issues.

<sup>26</sup> See Klose 2005 for an overview of the civic issues associated with agonistic festivals.

dynastic propaganda<sup>27</sup>. Here, again, the reference type came from Rome, where the earliest scenes of an emperor shaking the hand of an empress or of a co-emperor had been introduced under the Antonines (Pius and Faustina in one case, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in the other)<sup>28</sup>. The closest parallel to the Nicaean iconography in Severan state coinage is the depiction of Caracalla and Geta, both as Augusti, shaking their hands while being crowned by Hercules and Liber respectively, which featured on the sestertii struck in AD 210-211 (fig. 8). The *Philadelphieia* issues of Nicaea were definitely earlier (possibly AD 202-207)<sup>29</sup>, so, as noted above for the *Eusebeia* issues, the civic design did not copy a contemporary metropolitan issue but adapted an imperial iconography to the local context of the games<sup>30</sup>. For further comparison one can also look at the CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM aurei of Septimius Severus, loosely dated to AD 202-210: this time Caracalla and Geta are represented facing each other, togate, and holding together a Nike – still a variation of the same iconographic scheme, where the focal point at the centre of the scene is the small Victory instead of the prize-table (fig. 9). In this respect, another meaningful parallel can be drawn between the Nicaean iconography and the one adopted on Julia Domna's PIETATI AVGVSTAE issues in Rome (c. AD 196-211)<sup>31</sup>. The reverse design is emblematic of the ideological and visual connection between *pietas*

and *concordia*: once again, togate Caracalla and Geta stand facing each other, this time holding together a globe; the focal point is Domna herself, standing between them as the very incarnation of *Pietas* (fig. 10). Even though we cannot determine exactly whether the Nicaean agonistic version of this imagery came before or after the imperial designs, the Bithynian issues certainly attest that some Asia Minor cities were eager to show allegiance to the imperial policy and ideology by borrowing popular iconographic themes from Rome and reusing them in a new form tailored to fit into their own traditions and institutions.

In conclusion, the Severan notions of *εὐσέβεια* and *φιλαδελφ(ε)ία* were interconnected and were bound together by the same principles that informed the dynastic propaganda of *pietas* and *concordia* in Rome. Accordingly, the civic issues that promoted these ideals in Asia Minor drew upon the same repertoire of shared values by which the works of metropolitan artists were inspired. To each theme corresponded a well-defined iconographic pattern: while both followed Roman traditions, they ultimately were original creations by local engravers that did not have an exact reference to copy in contemporary Roman coinage. This is an example of how provincial visual culture could develop independently from metropolitan models, and it shows the potential of Roman provincial coinage to expand the boundaries of research in numismatic iconography.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Townsend 1938, 518-519.

<sup>28</sup> *Typenatlas II*, taf. 49: D.V.7.1 and D.V.7.2. Many provincial cities acknowledged the significance of this message by adopting the same images on their issues; see Heuchert 2005, 53.

<sup>29</sup> See Calomino 2020b, 150-152, with further thoughts on the echoes of dynastic propaganda on the Severan coinage of Nicaea.

<sup>30</sup> Scenes of *dextrarum iunctio* between deities or cities personifications were widespread as reverse designs on the so-called “alliance issues” advertising *Homonoia* between two or more provincial communities; therefore this imagery could be part of local visual culture regardless of the iconographic influence from Rome; cf. Yarrow 2012, 438.

<sup>31</sup> *RIC IV/1*, 864 and 886, where the central figure is wrongly described as Septimius Severus.



Fig. 1. AE: Sardis (Lydia, province of Asia), Septimius Severus (c. AD 193-209). BNF inv. 1250 (41mm, 34.97g: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8555027w>). Hochard 2020, no. 1968; Kurth 2020, no. 469.



Fig. 2. AE: Pergamum (Mysia, province of Asia), Septimius Severus (c. AD 193-209). BM inv. 1979,0101.1606 (39mm, 28.46g). *SNG von Aulock* 7510.



Fig. 3. AE: Anazarbus (province of Cilicia), Julia Domna (c. AD 193-209). CNG EA 277, 11 April 2012, lot 130 (35mm, 21.16g). Cf. Ziegler 1993, no. 293.



Fig. 4. AV aureus: Rome, Geta caesar (AD 208-209). NAC Auction 114, 6 May 2019, lot 775 – ex Leu 10, 1974, lot 250 (20mm, 7.34g). Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 60c; Calicò 2003, Vol. II, no. 2899.



Fig. 5. AV aureus: Rome, Matidia (c. AD 115-117). CNG Triton XXV, 11 January 2022, lot 881 – ex Roma Numismatics Ltd. Auction XXI, 24 March 2021, lot 589 (19mm, 7.22g). Cf. *RIC* II, 759; Calicò 2003, Vol. I, no. 1157.



Fig. 6. Billon tetradrachm: Alexandria (Egypt) for Septimius Severus (AD 200/201). Künker Auktion 326, 7 October 2019, lot 1495 - ex Sternberg XII (1982), lot 659 (25mm, 11.25g). Cf. Staffieri 2017, no. 194.



Fig. 7. AE: Nicaea (Bithynia), Julia Domna (c. AD 202-207). Gorny&Mosch Auktion 236, 7 March 2016, lot 329 (35mm, 26.65g). Cf. Calomino 2020b, pl. 29, fig. 22.



Fig. 8. AE sestertius: Rome, Geta Augustus (AD 210). NAC 92/2, 24 May 2016, lot 2326 – ex Ex CGB sale 38, 2009, lot 708 (32mm, 25.61g). Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 155a.



Fig. 9. AV aureus: Rome, Septimius Severus (AD 202-210). Roma Numismatics Auction XX, 29 October 2020, lot 634 (20mm, 7.17g). Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 255; Calicò 2003, Vol. II, no. 2435.



Fig. 10. AE sestertius: Rome, Julia Domna (AD 196-211). KHM.RÖ.14918 (32mm, 23.98g: <https://www.ikmk.at/object?lang=en&id=ID67028>). Cf. *RIC* IV/1, 864.

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