

PORTRAITS OF IMPERIAL WOMEN ON PROVINCIAL COINAGE: THE FLAVIAN-TRAJANIC PERIOD

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ABSTRACT · The article focuses on the comparison between portrait types of imperial women of the Flavian-Trajanic period depicted on provincial and metropolitan coins. A detailed analysis of case studies allows us to observe how the images of the *Augustae* were received in the cities of the Roman East. The study identifies some characteristic phenomena of Roman provincial coinage, particularly the apparent lack of attention to distinctive physiognomic features, also through a focussed comparison with extant contemporary sculpture, mainly statue bases. By offering new insights into the process of reproduction and reception of imperial images outside the Italian peninsula, this study ultimately discusses how imperial women were perceived in the provincial cities.

KEYWORDS · Portraits of Imperial Women, Roman Provincial Coinage, Roman Provinces, Julia Titi, Domitia, Plotina, Marciana, Matidia.

THE study of Roman imperial portraiture has always been a subject of great historical and iconographic interest, and the numismatic evidence is a crucial documentary source on this matter because it presents the advantage of associating images with inscriptions that allow to safely identify the portrayed ruler.

Since the first half of the 20th century, the ‘German school’ of specialists in Roman portraiture developed a methodology for distinguishing and dating the different types of imperial portraits for each emperor/empress.¹ These studies have established that the production of portraits started with common models, which were replicated throughout the empire on different media. Rome, as the central authority, oversaw this process, supplying accurate and

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Part of these data were presented together with Julia Lenaghan at the 15th *Roman Archaeology Conference/32nd Theoretical Roman Archaeology - RAC/TRAC*, London, University College, 11-14 April 2024.

¹ FITTSCHEN, ZANKER 1983; 1985; for a general overview see: FITTSCHEN 2010; ZANKER 2010, pp. 74-80; FITTSCHEN 2015.

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up-to-date images designed to represent the emperor and his family in the imperial propaganda.

The images of imperial women were also designed as one or more official portraits replicated in different media, reflecting the values and ideology of the central authority.

In Republican Rome, women did not appear on coins, and still, in the early Empire, Julia Augusta was the first living woman actually named on a coin, while Agrippina the Younger was the first living woman clearly portrayed and identified on an issue. Even in the 2nd century women were rarely portrayed on coins: under Titus began a regular minting for imperial women, but they became more prominent on coins struck by state mints only from the reign of Hadrian through the Severans.¹

Nevertheless, literary sources suggest that imperial portraits in the provinces may have varied in appearance, and scholars are still investigating the genesis and nature of non-standardised portraiture in the provinces,² whether sculptural or numismatic.

The RESP Project is studying this phenomenon by directly comparing imperial local coinage and local sculpted portraits, which present undoubted peculiarities and (partial) detachment from the metropolitan model. The research involves a new methodology, which uses 3D imaging to compare the data provided by coinage and sculpture to trace and reconstruct models used in the provinces for imperial representation.³ Provincial coinage, published in the Roman Provincial Coinage corpora or available on the online database of the RPC collaborative Project, is used as a primary source and a point of departure among material evidence.

The analysis of provincial portraits, particularly those depicted on coins, allows us to better understand the interaction between imperial propaganda and local agency. The resulting data highlight some of the characteristics of provincial visual culture in comparison to the central model of Rome.

This article presents a case study developed within the author's research in the RESP Project, which focuses on the reception of imperial portraiture in the provinces in sculpture and coinage from the Flavian age to Hadrian.⁴

An in-depth investigation of the depiction of imperial women on provincial coins from the Flavians to the time of Trajan provides valuable insights into the reception of portrait models. These women held influential positions as

¹ BOATWRIGHT 2021, pp. 129–139, with previous literature.

² ZANKER 1983; FITTSCHEN 2010, pp. 232–234. For a general analysis of the issue and a specific case study, see: RICCARDI 2000.

³ RESP is an ERC project (GA:101002763) funded by the Horizon 2020 programme and is based at the University of Verona in partnership with King's College London and the Warwick University Manufacturing Group; <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101002763>.

⁴ Sabina's numismatic and sculptural portraits are not considered in this paper since Fae Amiro has already analysed and extensively treated the data in her work: AMIRO 2021.

daughters, sisters, and nieces of the imperial household and played a crucial role in promoting the dynasty, as evidenced by their numismatic images.¹

Some of these women, such as Diva Domitilla, probably to be identified with Vespasian's wife, were exclusively depicted on Roman imperial coinage.² Therefore, the first woman to be considered in the provincial context is Flavia Julia (c. AD 61-89?), daughter of the emperor Titus, who was married to her second cousin Flavius Sabinus.³

Annetta Alexandridis has identified six different portrait types on Julia's metropolitan coinage. Four were minted under Titus and two under Domitian.⁴ This typological division, based not on facial features but entirely on the complex arrangement of her coiffure, provides insights into the evolution of Julia's representation on coinage. Her hairstyle was characterized by a *toupet* of curls of varying heights and thickness, with braids wound into buns of different sizes, gathered into a ponytail or looped into a queue.⁵ Alexandridis suggests that most portrait types were used simultaneously: the portrait types on different issues had no significant relationship to official or biographical events.⁶

Eve D'Ambra rightly adds that Julia was depicted on coins without individualised features, observing a similar pattern between coinage and sculpture. Her image could be assimilated to those of other imperial women, even from the past, through variations in her hairstyle.⁷

Domitia Longina (c. AD 50-55-126-130s), Domitian's wife, had a significant presence in the public sphere for a long period; she was about ten years older than Julia Titi.⁸ Domitia is described as an arrogant adulteress whose biography is full of scandalous stories, mainly derived from biased literary sources.⁹ Although only these negative views have survived, more favourable descriptions of the empress once existed. Domitia benefited from the prestige of her noble family and from being the daughter of the famous general Gnaeus Domitio Corbulo.¹⁰

Both women, Julia and Domitia, held the title of *Augusta* simultaneously, which may have been a sign of honour and an indication of the balance between the two in Domitian's political plans.¹¹

¹ HEUCHERT 2005, pp. 45-47; BOATWRIGHT 2021, pp. 124-127. Specifically, about Flavian and Trajanic imperial women on provincial coinage, see AMIRO (forthcoming).

² ALEXANDRIDIS 2010, pp. 196-197; WOOD 2010; KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, pp. 103-104.

³ ROSSO 2009; KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, pp. 107-108; BOATWRIGHT 2021, pp. 42-44; BALIELO 2023, p. 108.

⁴ ALEXANDRIDIS 2010, pp. 206-208; 223-227.

⁵ On the official iconography of Julia Titi and further subdivisions of the types, see DALTROP, HAUSMANN, WEGNER 1966, pp. 49-54, 115-119; HAUSMANN 1975; ALEXANDRIDIS 2004, pp. 173-175; ROSSO 2009, pp. 212-219, 223; GREGORI, ROSSO 2010; RAEDER 2010, pp. 138-139; MICHELI 2011, pp. 66-70; FITTSCHEN 2012a, p. 104; IDEM 2012b, pp. 70-74.

⁶ ALEXANDRIDIS 2010, p. 223.

⁷ ROSSO 2009, p. 215; D'AMBRA 2013, pp. 512-514.

⁸ KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, p. 112.

⁹ VARNER 1995, pp. 202-203; HEMELRIJK 1999, p. 116; BOATWRIGHT 2021, pp. 47-51.

¹⁰ CHAUSSON 2003, pp. 102-105, 122-129; BALIELO 2023.

¹¹ Julia Titi received the title of *Augusta* around AD 79, and Domitia Longina in AD 81: ALEXANDRIDIS 2004, pp. 20-21; DEPPMEYER 2008, 1, pp. 213-214; KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, pp. 107-108, 112; FOUBERT 2021, pp. 97-100. According to PISTELLATO 2015, pp. 403-404: the rule seems to



FIG. 1. O: Julia Titi, Thracian Latin Mint. Brass; 26 mm; 13.23 g (Gemini IX, 9 Jan. 2012, lot 454).

Alexandridis divides Domitia's metropolitan coins into two main portrait types, again according to hairstyle rather than physiognomy. One type features a higher crown of ringlets and a looped queue of braids at the back of the head, while the other type has braids that are wound into a large bun.¹

The *toupet* coiffure is dominant in these portraits, as it was a distinctive feature for immediate recognition.² Julia and Domitia were leading representatives of this hairstyle trend, which remained in fashion until the first years of Hadrian's reign. Numerous sculptural portraits of aristocratic

women from the era show how this imperial fashion trend left a mark, even in subtle ways.³

The resemblance between the numismatic representations of Julia and Domitia is truly striking: their portraits are so similar that they are almost interchangeable, especially in the provinces.

It is worth noting, however, that Julia's image appears on coins much less frequently than Domitia's, only on issues from six mints in the eastern part of the empire. Between AD 81 and 89, her image appears on three coin types from two cities, probably indicating a decline in visibility after the accession of her uncle Domitian.⁴

Julia's presence is documented on the reverse in Crete⁵ and on the obverse in the province of Thrace⁶ and in Asia at Assus, Thyatira, Temnus, and Smyrna.⁷

Again, her hairstyle is as the main distinguishing feature. Julia's profile is youthful and graceful in coins from Thyatira, Temnus, and Smyrna.⁸ At Assus, she is portrayed with a long, pointed nose, while at Crete and especially in Thrace, her face is squared and resembles that of Titus (FIG. 1).

give priority to the *princeps'* bride, as seems to be documented in the *Commenarii fratrum Arualium* where Julia's name appears after Domitia.

¹ ALEXANDRIDIS 2010, pp. 206-207, 223-224, 227. On Domitia Longina's iconography: DALTRÖP, HAUSMANN, WEGNER 1966, pp. 63-71, 122-125; P. ZANKER, in FITTSCHEN, ZANKER 1983, p. 50 ad n. 63, p. 51 ad n. 65; VARNER 1995; ALEXANDRIDIS 2004, pp. 175-176; BUCCINO 2011, pp. 371-372; FRASER 2015.

³ D'AMBRA 2013; BUCCINO 2017, pp. 13-30.

⁵ Koinon of Crete: RPC II, 25-26.

⁶ Flavian Latin Mint in Thrace: RPC II, 509.

⁷ Assus (Troas): RPC II, 899; Thyatira (Lydia): RPC II, 941; Temnus (Aeolis): RPC II, 981; Smyrna (Ionia): RPC II, 1021.

⁸ Types no. 1, 4, 6, according to the classification put forward by Alexandridis.

These last cases are among the many examples of images of imperial women being deliberately masculinised to look like their male counterparts.¹

The provinces minted more coins of Domitia than of Julia.

This has been explained as a way of showing appreciation towards Domitia or gaining her favour. Minting authorities recognised the advantages of depicting her on coins, as honouring the First Lady could help to win the emperor's favour. In addition, Domitia's generous patronage of these various cities significantly increased her public visibility.²

This evidence reinforces the idea that Domitia was not perceived as a negative figure before and after her husband's fall. Rather than suffering from *damnatio memoriae*, she served as a model for later empresses and was remembered as a benefactress and educated woman.³

On the coin obverse of 43 mints, she appears alone, while in 16, she faces the bust of her consort, Domitian. Her bust alone also features on the reverse of 10 cities.⁴

After Domitia's death, metropolitan coins do not portray her as *diva*, whereas in the East, during her lifetime, she was celebrated not only as *Sebaste* (*Augusta*) but also as *Thea* (goddess).⁵ This can be easily interpreted as further evidence of the devotion of the cities of Asia Minor.

In AD 91-92, in Alexandria in Egypt, Domitia is also depicted in full figure as *Euthenia*, the personification of prosperity (*Abundantia/Annona*), enthroned, holding corn ears and a sceptre (FIG. 2).⁶ Reflecting local culture, *Euthenia* appears frequently and exclusively on coins minted in Alexandria from the reign of Augustus to that of Aurelian, often together with a sphinx or a personification of the Nile.⁷ Interestingly, Domitia is the only *Augusta* who had the privilege of being assimilated to this deity, very representative of the province of Egypt.

Domitia's hairstyles defined her identity, while her facial features, especially her hooked or aquiline nose, are only occasionally visible.⁸

In some cases, Domitia Longina is depicted with one of Julia's exclusive signature hairstyles – a bigger upper bun or smaller lower bun – (Metropolitan

¹ VARNER 2008, pp. 189-193; PERASSI 2014, p. 180. For Domitia, see *RPC* II, 1072.

² WOOD 2010, p. 114.

³ FRASER 2015; BALIELO 2023, pp. 106-108.

⁴ Koinon of Thessaly (Thessaly): *RPC* II, 277-279; Cyzicus, Adramyteum (Mysia): *RPC* II, 880, 910; Casaerea (Cappadocia): *RPC* II, 1665; Celenderis, Mopsus, Anazarbus, Aegeae, Epiphanea (Cilicia): *RPC* II, 1715, 1743, 1749, 1771, 1788; Alexandria (Egypt): *RPC* II, 2507, 2517.

⁵ On the obverse in Amastris (Paphlagonia): *RPC* II, 713; Smyrna (Ionia; c. 94-95 AD): *RPC* II, 1025 on the reverse where Domitia veiled stands holding a sceptre and cornucopia.

⁶ *RPC* II, 2602-2604. The portrait shows Domitia's recognisable type 2 hairstyle according to the classification proposed by Alexandridis.

⁷ SKOWRONEK 1967, p. 28; M.-O. JENTEL, s.v. *Euthenia*, in *LIMC* IV (1988), pp. 120-124. For the phenomenon of the assimilation with gods and goddesses, PERASSI 2014, pp. 170-174.

⁸ Philadelphia (Lydia): *RPC* II, 1336, 1340; Caesarea (Cappadocia): *RPC* II, 1665.



FIG. 2. R: Domitia as Euthenia; Alexandria-AD 91/92.

Copper alloy; 30 mm; 16.35 g (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1950,1006.22.

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types 2 and 4)¹ and can, therefore, only be identified by the accompanying legend. This can be seen on the coins from Amphipolis,² Calchedon,³ Nacrassa,⁴ Cos,⁵ Cotiaenum,⁶ and Gaba.⁷

Especially on coins from Ionia, Julia and Domitia appear almost identical, with their shared hairstyle characterised by a high *toupet* and a ponytail falling behind the shoulders.⁸ It is possible to state that in this region, die-cutters in different cities used the same model for both.

Another rather emblematic case is a portrait repeated on two different coin types from Smyrna (AD 94-95), representing a young woman with long, straight hair. The girl can be recognised as Domitia only thanks to the legend⁹ (FIG. 3). The portrait clearly does not pertain to Domitia or Julia; rather, her peculiar hairstyle reminds us of an unknown Julio-Claudian girl.¹⁰

Surprisingly, an earlier coin type from Smyrna (AD 90) clearly shows a correct depiction of the empress facing her husband Domitian, proving that, at least in this case, a metropolitan portrait model was available at the mint¹¹ (FIG. 4).

¹ ALEXANDRIDIS 2010, pp. 206-208; 223-227.

² *RPC* II, 342.

³ *RPC* II, 370.

⁴ *RPC* II, 936.

⁵ *RPC* II, 1171.

⁶ *RPC* II, 1411.

⁷ *RPC* II, 2239.

⁸ *RPC* II, 1201; 1041; 1053; 1076, 1083-1084; 1091-1093; 1137.

⁹ Smyrna (Ionia): *RPC* II, 1026-1027.

¹⁰ The bust bears a resemblance to the marble portraits ascribed to Octavia Claudia: see AMEDICK 1991, pp. 378-380; DE LUCA 2017, p. 92. It can not be completely ruled out that the bust depicted a notable private woman instead. I want to thank Julia Lenaghan for sharing her thoughts with me on this matter.

¹¹ Smyrna (Ionia): *RPC* II, 1021A, 1022.



FIG. 3. O: Domitia; Smyrna-AD 94/95.
Copper alloy; 16 mm; 2.89 g
(Hauck & Aufhäuser 18, 5 Oct. 2004, lot 451).



FIG. 4. O: Domitia facing Domitian;
Smyrna-c. AD 90? Copper alloy; 23 mm;
8.54 g (CNG 93, 22 May 2013, lot 793).

Apart from this specific case, the examples presented so far suggest that the two Flavian women may have been interchangeable, possibly due to a lack of knowledge or delayed access to current models in provincial cities.¹

Whatever the reason, it is clear that a perfect reproduction of the likeness of *Augusta* was less desirable than the representation of a woman with a fashionable hairstyle. Her identity was not only interchangeable but almost irrelevant; the main focus was on conveying her imperial *status* through hairstyle and jewellery.

Flavian sculpture perfectly reflects this scenario, making it difficult to determine the subject's identity as either Titus' daughter or Domitian's wife. This is further complicated by the possibility that some of these portraits may actually represent private women with the same fashionable hairstyle.

In the provinces, there is no marble portrait that can be clearly attributed to Julia or Domitia. For instance, the so-called head of Julia Titi from Athens could easily depict a private citizen.²

More likely, a portrait of a woman from Utica in the Bardo Museum has been tentatively attributed to Domitia due to the presence of a diadem and traces of polychromy resembling gold or gilded bronze.³

At Pinara, however, an interesting base for statues of both has been preserved. Dedicated between AD 81 and 89 by the *Boule* and *Demos*, it seems unusual due to the absence of a statue of the ruling emperor.⁴

¹ On a coin from Crete, Julia's name was altered to Domitia, leaving the previous portrait: *RPC* II, 25. Likely this alteration is modern. I want to thank Klaus Vondrovec and Andrew Burnett for helping me on this matter.

² ZORIDIS 1984, pp. 592-593, who identifies the portrait as Julia Titi.

³ Tunis, Musée National du Bardo, inv. no. 3156; S. ANDRÈS, in BARATTE, AL-BAGAWI, CHAISE-MARTIN, NAÏT-YGHIL 2023, pp. 151-152.

⁴ DEPPMEYER 2008, pp. 45, 59, n. 19.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that, as with the coins, very few statues were dedicated to Julia in the provinces. Domitia, in contrast, was more widely represented, and her statues survived in dynastic groups even after her husband's damnation.¹

A similar trend can be seen during Trajan's reign: imperial women began to receive greater recognition during the era of the adoptive emperors, and female family roles expanded.² Plotina, Marciana, and Matidia, Trajan's wife, sister, and niece respectively, appeared on both imperial and provincial coins, albeit in small numbers.

Pompeia Plotina (c. AD 70?-c. 123)³ was, of course, the most widely represented, albeit in only 25 cities across the empire, less than half compared to Domitia.⁴

Plotina was regarded as a role model of virtue and dignity.⁵ Only in c. AD 105, did she consider herself worthy of the title of *Augusta*, which she shared with her sister-in-law, Ulpia Marciana.⁶

Plotina's numismatic and marble portraits show her as a mature woman, more natural and modest than her Flavian predecessors. Her hair was styled in a diadem-like manner at the front, while at the back, it was braided and allowed to flow down behind her neck.⁷

¹ HØJTE 2005, p. 116; DEPPMEYER 2008, I, pp. 44-46.

Brykos (Greece): statues bases for Domitian and Domitia (DEPPMEYER 2008, II, p. 35, n. 9); Lindos (Rhodes): statues bases for Domitia (?) and Nerva (DEPPMEYER 2008, II, pp. 38-39, n. 11); Thysanous (Rhodes): statues bases for Domitian and Domitia (DEPPMEYER 2008, II, pp. 46, n. 14); Pinara (Lycia): statues bases for Julia and Domitia (DEPPMEYER 2008, II, p. 59, n. 19); Stratonicea (Caria): statues bases for Titus and Domitia (HØJTE 2005, p. 352, n. Titus 57; DEPPMEYER 2008, II, pp. 63-65, n. 22); Lyktos (Crete): statues bases for Domitia, probably with no more preserved of Domitian's, and the dedications continue into the reign of Hadrian (HØJTE 2005, p. 180); Larissa (Thessaly): statues bases for Domitian and Domitia (HØJTE 2005, p. 357, n. Domitian 28).

² TEMPORINI 1978; REGGIANI 2007, pp. 23-29; BOATWRIGHT 2021, pp. 106-107.

³ HIDALGO DE LA VEGA 2000, pp. 195-201; KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, pp. 120-121.

⁴ On the obverse in Cassandrea, Amphipolis (Macedonia): *RPC* III, 638, 645; Byzantium (Thrace): *RPC* III, 1070; Amastris (Paphlagonia): *RPC* III, 1208; Assus (Troas): *RPC* III, 1579; Thyatira, Hermocapelia (Lydia): *RPC* III, 1828-1830, 1872; Aegae (Aeolis): *RPC* III, 1920; Hyrcanis, Philadelphia, Sardis, Iulia Gordus (Lydia): *RPC* III, 1953-1954, 2384, 2397, 2549-2550; Tebae (Caria): *RPC* III, 2292-2293; Laodicea ad Lycum, Ancyra, Cotiaeum (Phrygia): *RPC* III, 2320-2321, 2535-2536, 2634; Gaba (Syria): *RPC* III, 3943-3944.

On the reverse in Perinthus (Thrace): *RPC* III, 706-709; Lampsacus (Mysia): *RPC* III, 1550; Anazarbus, Epiphanea, Alexandria ad Issum (Cilicia): *RPC* III, 3363, 3369, 3392, 3397.

Facing another Augusta of the imperial household in Parium (Mysia): *RPC* III, 1543 (with Marciana on the reverse); Mytilene (Lesbus): *RPC* III, 1683 (with Matidia on the obverse); Euromus (Caria): *RPC* III, 2214 (with Matidia? On the obverse).

⁵ Plin. *Paneg.* 84.4-5; HEMELRIJK 1999, pp. 116-118; ROCHE 2002, pp. 48-49; SANDE 2021, pp. 193-194, 205.

⁶ PISTELLATO 2015, p. 416; BOATWRIGHT 2021, pp. 35, 107-109.

⁷ On the official iconography of Plotina: FITTSCHEN, ZANKER 1983, pp. 8-9; MANNSPERGER 1998, pp. 62-65; ALEXANDRIDIS 2004, p. 177; S. GUGLIELMI, in LA ROCCA, PARISI PRESICCE, LO MONACO 2011, p. 398, n. 6.13; A. BALIELO, in PARISI PRESICCE, MILELLA, PASTOR 2017, pp. 440-441, n. 46; S. BOCCARDI, in PARISI PRESICCE, MILELLA, PASTOR 2017, pp. 424-426, n. 28d; SANDE 2021, pp. 197-199, 206-207.

Neither Plotina, Marciana, nor Matidia appeared on coins before AD 112, fourteen years into Trajan's reign.¹

His sister Marciana (c. AD 21, 26, 29?–112) was the first *diva* of the Ulpia dynasty.² She wore her hair in two rows of stiff curls, rising above a strip of short locks that framed her face. The hair at the back is gathered into a thick “nest” of braids.³

After Marciana's death in AD 112, her daughter Salonia Matidia (c. 68 AD–119)⁴ received the title of *Augusta*, the first woman to obtain such an honour without being closely related to the emperor. Until that moment, only the mothers, wives, and daughters of emperors had received the title of *Augusta*.

Like her mother, Matidia was portrayed with two high, stiff diadems made of elaborately pleated braids. At the back of her head, her hair forms a nest of several braids.⁵

Travels of imperial women helped to represent the entire imperial family in the provinces, and Plotina and Matidia travelled abroad with Trajan in the latter part of his reign.⁶

As anticipated, all three women of the imperial household appear on provincial coinage with several significant peculiarities.

Plotina's portrait was featured in several issues, but as already noted for the Flavian women, in most cases, only the legend allows a certain identification.

Once again, facial features seem entirely irrelevant, and the hairstyle is the most defining element. Plotina was depicted with her distinctive coiffure only on the coins minted in Anazarbus,⁷ Epiphanea,⁸ and Alexandria ad Issum.⁹

Like Domitia in Smyrna, Plotina in Byzantium is always identified by the legend, but has a completely different appearance. She wears a diadem on her long, straight hair, which is tied in a knot at the nape.¹⁰

The profile somewhat resembles that of a god (Apollo?) or, more likely, was supposed to recall that of Livia.¹¹ The coin type showing this pseudo-Plotina was minted during Trajan's third eponymous magistracy and was one of his earliest issues in the city. Plotina did not appear on Roman coinage until AD

¹ HIDALGO DE LA VEGA 2000, pp. 203–204; ROCHE 2002, p. 55; WOYTEK 2010, pp. 495–508; SANDE 2021, p. 197.

² BOATWRIGHT 1991, pp. 515–518; KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, pp. 119–120.

³ On the official iconography of Marciana: MANNSPERGER 1998, pp. 67–71; ALEXANDRIDIS 2004, pp. 21, 177–178, n. 163; L. BUCCINO, in LA ROCCA, PARISI PRESICCE, LO MONACO 2011, p. 276, n. 4.23; SANDE 2021, pp. 198–199.

⁴ HIDALGO DE LA VEGA 2000, p. 203; KIENAST, ECK, HEIL 2017, p. 121.

⁵ On the official iconography of Matidia: MANNSPERGER 1998, pp. 67–71; ALEXANDRIDIS 2004, p. 178; SANDE 2021, pp. 199–200.

⁶ When Trajan went east for the Parthian War (AD 113–117), Plotina and Matidia were with him, as can be seen from their presence in Selinus when he died. On the way to Syria, they travelled from Rome via Brundisium to Athens and then to Asia, to Antioch: BOATWRIGHT 2021, p. 264. The presence of their portraits on eastern coinage does not seem to find a certain analogy with their journey.

⁷ Anazarbus (Cilicia) AD 113–114: *RPC* III, 3369 (on reverse).

⁸ Epiphanea (Cilicia) AD 113–114: *RPC* III, 3392 (on reverse).

⁹ Alexandria ad Issum (Cilicia), AD 114–115: *RPC* III, 3397 (on reverse).

¹⁰ *RPC* III, 1070.

¹¹ *RPC* I, 1779.



FIG. 5. R: Plotina; Anazarbus-AD 107/108. Copper alloy; 33 mm; 25.28 g (CNG MBS 72, 14 June 2006, lot 1189).

112, so the lack of a metropolitan model is a plausible explanation for her singular appearance on coins from Byzantium.¹

We continue to find evidence of the interchangeability of imperial women's profiles and hairstyles during Trajan's reign.

As previously mentioned, this phenomenon can also be observed during the Flavian period. However, during Trajan's reign, it was more complex, since images of Julia Titi and Domitia continued to be used: the two Flavian women remained popular and served as models for depicting the imperial women of the Ulpian family.

Thus, Plotina is portrayed like Domitia at Cassandrea,² while she wears the tall curly *toupet* shared by Julia Titi and Domitia – who are indistinguishable in these cases – at Amphipolis, Amastris, Lampsacus, Thyatira, Hermocapelia, Tabae, Laodicea ad Lycum, Philadelphia, Sardis, Ancyra, Iulia Gordus, and Cotiaeum.³

The example of Anazarbus perfectly illustrates the use of Domitia's profile to represent Plotina in AD 107-108 and the subsequent appearance of the actual portrait in AD 113-114 (FIGG. 5-6).⁴

A comparison shows that Phrygia and Lydia used the same Flavian model for the coinage of Plotina, changing only the name in the legend (FIGG. 7-8).⁵

¹ AMIRO 2021, p. 113.

² Likely, the hairstyle corresponds to the type 2 of Domitia; *RPC* III, 638.

³ *RPC* III, 645; 1208; 1550; 1828-1830; 1872; 2292; 2320-2321; 2397; 2335-2336; 2549-2550; 2634.

⁴ *RPC* III, 3363; 3369.

⁵ See the coinage from the cities of Ancyra, Iulia Gordus, and Sardis.



FIG. 6. R: Plotina; Anazarbus-AD 112/113. Copper alloy; 29 mm; 17.33 g (CNG EA 153, 29 Nov. 2006, lot 164).



FIG. 7. O: Domitia; Sardis.
Brass; 21 mm; 5.67 g
(Peus 403, 27 Apr. 2011, lot 685).



FIG. 8. O: Plotina; Sardis.
Copper alloy; 20 mm; 6.42 g
(Künker 318, 11 Mar. 2019, lot 1210).

At Perinthus, the profile does not represent Plotina, but is similar to Julia Titi (type 2).¹ In Thrace, Julia's portrait continued to be used as a model even after it became outdated, likely due to the lack of new portraits and was used for a longer period until Sabina.²

At Tabae, Plotina is also represented in a style that seems to be derived from that of Marciana. She wears her typical hairstyle with a twisted, thick nest of braids at the back.³

¹ *RPC* III, 707-709. Also, in Assus (Troas), the referring model could be Julia Titi, even if it is less evident: *RPC* III, 1579.

² AMIRO 2021, p. 196.

³ *RPC* III, 2293; similarly in Aegae (Aeolis): *RPC* III, 1920; Hyrcanis (Lydia), *RPC* III, 1953-1954; Gaba (Syria), *RPC* III, 3943-3944.



FIG. 9. R: Matidia; Anazarbus-AD 113/114.
Copper alloy; 27 mm; 25.28 g
(CNG MBS 72, 14 June 2006, lot 1190).

The conclusions we can draw from observing the portraits of Matidia and Marciana on provincial coinage are very similar.

The image of Marciana is rare, appearing in only four cities.¹ Her only type can be identified in Sardis and Anazarbus.² A portrait model derived from Flavian female portraiture is also used at Thyatira.³

At Anazarbus, the same phenomenon observed for Plotina occurs. Marciana is depicted with the hairstyle of Julia/Domitia in AD 107-108, while her actual portrait, as *diva*, appears on coins from AD 113-114. The city likely updated its coinage after the creation of the new metropolitan

model in AD 112, using the correct image at that point.⁴

Matidia appears in seven cities, and her portrait type is used at Thyatira, and Laodicea ad Lycum.⁵ A Flavian model is repeated at Mytilene,⁶ Cotiaeum,⁷ and Thyatira.⁸

On the reverse of a coin dated to AD 113-114 at Anazarbus, Matidia is represented as a woman with wavy hair, parted and tied in a knot at the nape (FIG. 9). Again, the lack of a model could explain this peculiar image, especially if we consider the resemblance to Livia's hairstyle, which could have been used as a reference.⁹

As already noticed, a few coins also featured facing female profiles as a symbol of family harmony: Plotina with Matidia¹⁰ and Plotina with Marciana.¹¹

Interestingly, at Mytilene, Matidia and Plotina are depicted with the typical Flavian-era hairstyles despite the date of AD 112-114.

Several bases found in the eastern provinces document the existence of statues and dedications commemorating the three women. They were usually together

¹ On the obverse in Thyatira and Sardis (Lydia): *RPC* III, 1829; 2398; on the reverse in Anazarbus (Cilicia): *RPC* III, 3364, 3371. Facing Plotina in Parium (Mysia): *RPC* III, 1543 (on the reverse).

² *RPC* III, 2398; 3371.

⁴ *RPC* III, 3366; 3371.

⁶ *RPC* III, 1685.

⁸ *RPC* III, 1831. Two different types of portraits appear on the same coin type.

⁹ See, as an example, the portrait from the same region, in Augusta (Cilicia): *RPC* I, 4014.

¹⁰ On the obverse in Mytilene (Lesbus): *RPC* III, 1683; Euromus (Caria): *RPC* III, 2214 (with Matidia? On the obverse).

¹¹ On the reverse in Parium (Mysia): *RPC* III, 1543.

and alongside Trajan, with the exception of Apameia, where only the *Augustae* were honoured with statues by the *Boule* and *Demos*.¹

Only a limited number of identifiable sculptures have survived: an over-life-size portrait head from the cisterns of the Odeon in Carthage has recently been tentatively identified as Matidia.²

In the light of all of the examples presented here, we can come to some final observations.

First, it is clear that it was common practice to reuse portrait models on coins. If an image was not (yet) available, previous models were used, and in the provinces, the image of the empress might arrive late or not at all.

The figure of Domitia clearly stands out in this context, mainly because of her greater importance and visibility compared to contemporary and later imperial women. Domitia played a prominent role in the provinces, also independently from her husband, and the devotion to her did not diminish with Domitian's damnation (CHART 1).

The metropolitan context clearly shows a more distinct categorisation of portrait types on coins, richness, and variety of hairstyles. However, especially during the Flavian period, it is difficult to distinguish between the two *Augustae* in sculptured portraits; this phenomenon is even more evident in the provinces.

During the Trajanic period, Ulpian women exhibited a singular type, characterised by a more modest appearance and occurrence than the Flavian women. This has been interpreted as a functional element of Trajan's visual propaganda through metropolitan sculpture and coinage.³

¹ BOATWRIGHT 1991, pp. 526-527; ROCHE 2002, pp. 58-59; DEPPMEYER 2008, I, pp. 86-87.

Lyktos (Crete): statue bases for Trajan, Plotina, Matidia Maior, Marciana (HØJTE 2005, p. 180; DEPPMEYER 2008, II, pp. 114-121, n. 49); Heraclea-Perinthos (Thrace): statue base for Matidia in AD 112-119 by *Boule* and *Demos* (BOATWRIGHT 1991, p. 527); Pergamum (Mysia): statue base for Plotina in Trajaneum (BOATWRIGHT 1991, p. 527); Apamea (Phrygia): statue bases for Plotina, Marciana and Matidia dedicated in AD 112 by the *Boule* and *Demos* (DEPPMEYER 2008, II, pp. 124-125, n. 53); Ephesus (Ionia): Plotina, Trajan and 27 other gold and silver statues (BOATWRIGHT 1991, pp. 526-527); Xanthos (Lycia): statue bases also for Marciana and Trajan (BOATWRIGHT 1991, p. 526); Sydmis (Lycia): statue base for *diva* Plotina dedicated by the *Boule* and *Demos* (BOATWRIGHT 1991, p. 526); Perge (Pamphylia): statue bases also for *divus* Trajan, *diva* Marciana, *diva* Matidia and Plotina dedicated by Plancia Magna in AD 121-122 (HØJTE 2005, pp. 178, 262, n. Augustus 192; DEPPMEYER 2008, II, pp. 141-146, n. 63); Lindos (Rhodes): statue bases for Plotina, Trajan or Hadrian (BOATWRIGHT 1991, p. 526).

² Tunis, Musée National du Bardo, inv. no. C936; CHAISEMARTIN 2023, p. 201; N. DE CHAISEMARTIN, in BARATTE, AL-BAGAWI, CHAISEMARTIN, NAÏT-YGHIL 2023, pp. 157-158, n. 124. The original identification of two portrait heads as Plotina (WEGNER 1956, p. 118), one in Athens, probably from Crete (Athens, Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 357) and one in Heraklion (Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, no. 189), as well as a statue in Heraklion (Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, no. Γ334) as Plotina or Matidia, are not supported anymore: KALTSAS 2002, p. 338, no. 714; KARANASTASI 2016, pp. 103-104, 110-112. Similarly, the identification of the statue from Khanguet-el Kedim (Tunis, Musée National du Bardo, inv. no. 621) as Plotina, proposed in DEPPMEYER 2008, II, p. 155 no. 71, has been rejected in FITTSCHEN 2009, p. 1128.

³ ROCHE 2002, pp. 58-59.

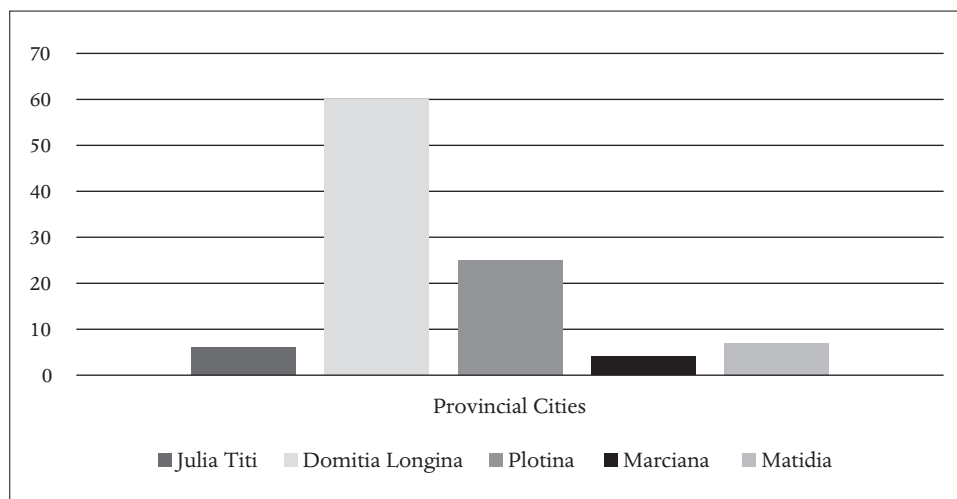


CHART 1. Imperial Women on Provincial Coins: the Flavian-Trajanic period.

The guidelines established by the metropolitan models and their meaning are received in the provinces, which, in any case, had some peculiarities that distinguished them from Rome.

As can be observed from the charts relating to the coin types on provincial coinage, the image of Flavian women with their distinctive hairstyles disseminated far from Rome, despite the confusion that can arise between Julia and Domitia. In 40% of the cases, the portraits of the two women are interchangeable, as they were depicted with shared hairstyles. In 14% of the cases, they were mistaken, coiffeured with an exclusive signature hairstyle, specifically that of Julia, characterised by a greater number of metropolitan portrait types than Domitia. Thus, in 54% of the cases, a Flavian imperial woman was depicted but could be identified only by her name on the legend (CHART 2).

The results of the data from the age of Trajan are even more remarkable. In 67% of the cases, a Flavian portrait model persists on coins, and the *Augusta* can be identified only by the legend (CHART 3).

The presence of women from Trajan's family is numerically less significant than that of Domitia, whose portrait model reached many cities of the eastern part of the empire and evidently remained in use in the following decades. Probably as a result of its widespread circulation, the portrait of this empress continued to be used to shape the image of the other *Augustae*, even in the Trajanic period.

Although the presence of imperial women (wives, daughters, sisters, nieces) is well documented on coinage during the first half of the 2nd century AD, of course, their depictions appear subordinate and not comparable to those of their male counterparts in terms of scale and accuracy of facial features.

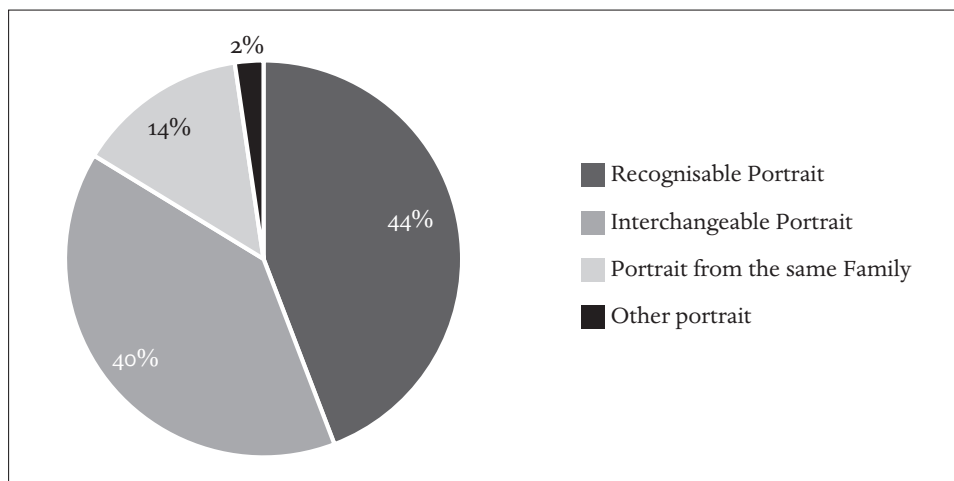


CHART 2. Portrait Types of Imperial Women on Provincial Coins: Flavian period.

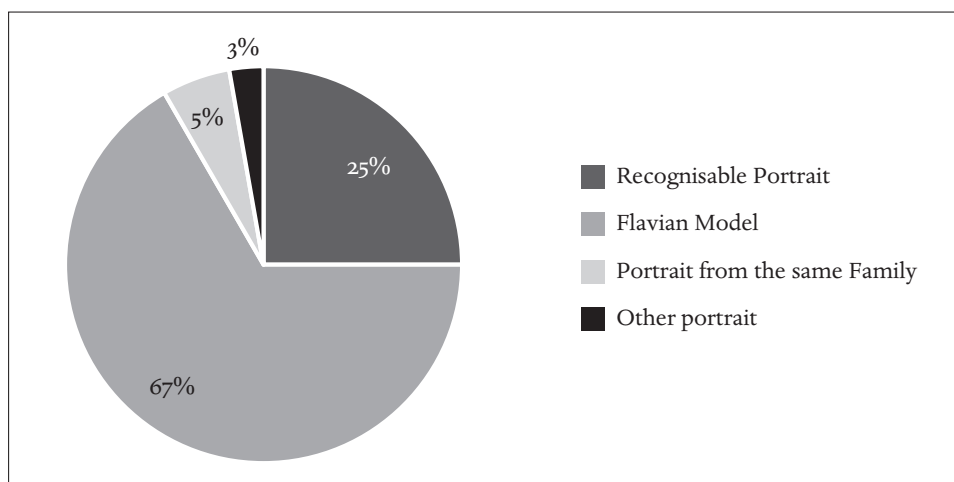


CHART 3. Portrait Types of Imperial Women on Provincial Coins: Trajanic period.

This phenomenon is evident in the provinces, where the portraits of imperial women on coins appear to have been intended as a generic representation of an ideal female figure incorporated into the *Domus Augusta*.¹

The delay in receiving metropolitan models or their complete absence, combined with the differing skills of the die-cutters, are important factors that influenced the emergence and spread of these portraits throughout the empire. However, numismatic evidence, especially in the provinces, suggests that it was

¹ KAMPEN 1994, pp. 120-121.

not considered necessary to create exact copies of the physical features of imperial women. As long as a woman was depicted with a fashionable hairstyle and her exact name engraved, it sufficed.

Coinage was the most effective means of disseminating the images of *Augustae* throughout the empire, spatially and temporally. Admired and therefore imitated, imperial women were seen as guarantors of social order, embodying moral and behavioural models rather than being recognised as real people.

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