

## ARTICLES

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## THE ROLE OF IMPERIAL WOMEN IN THE MONETARY DISTRIBUTIONS (*LIBERALITAS*) IN ROME IN THE LIGHT OF NUMISMATIC SOURCES

**Abstract:** *Liberalitas* was one of the most important forms of social activities of the Roman emperors. In quantitative terms, it is also one of the five most important imperial virtues. It appeared on coins as *Liberalitas Augusti*, which gave this virtue an additional, divine dimension. The first Empress to depict the idea of imperial generosity on the coins issued on her behalf was Julia Domna. In this respect, her *liberalitas* coins mark a breakthrough in the exposition of this imperial virtue. The well-known female *liberalitas* coin issues, or imperial issues with empresses' portraits, date back to the third century and clearly articulate the *liberalitas*, both iconographically and literally, through the legend on the reverse of the coin. Other coins, issued on behalf of the emperors (mainly medallions), accentuate in some cases (Julia Mamaea, Salonina) the personal and active participation of women from the imperial house in *congiarium*-type activities. The issues discussed and analysed, which appeared on behalf of the emperors or the imperial women – with a clear emphasis on the role of women – undoubtedly demonstrate the feminine support for the emperor's social policy towards the people of Rome, including the various social undertakings of incumbent emperors, to whom they were related. They prove their active involvement and support for the image of the princeps created by the emperors through the propaganda of virtues (such as *liberalitas*). The dynastic policy of the emperors, in which the empresses played a key role, was also of considerable importance.

**Key words:** *Roman coins, liberalitas, third century crisis, Severians, Roman imperial ideology.*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Liberalitas* – generosity – is a noun derived from the adjective *liberalis/liber*, which in turn can be translated as “free”.<sup>1</sup> The link between generosity and freedom was evident. This can be seen particularly in the second century,<sup>2</sup> when generosity was seen as a request to the emperor to take action to meet social expectations and thus provide concrete financial assistance. It was believed that this would ensure freedom for the society. As Seneca wrote: “*Liberalitatem (...) quae non quia liberis debetur, sed quia a libero animo profiscitur, ita nominata est*”.<sup>3</sup> In the era of the empire, the term *liberalitas* meant many different social initiatives through which the emperors manifested their generosity. The distribution of money to various groups of Roman citizens (*donativa* for soldiers, *congiaria* for the people) was one of the most important activities. Although it should be noted that the *liberalitas* also took other forms, such as maintenance foundations, i.e. special cash benefits for families with children or farmers in Italian cities (*alimenta*), any other short-term financial aid for senators, debt cancellation, grain distribution (*frumentationes*), public construction in Rome, and the organization of public shows.<sup>4</sup> *Liberalitas* was also a moral virtue of the emperor, i.e. one that immanently belonged to him. The epithet *augusti*, which accompanies the *liberalitas* on coins, clearly specifies and illustrates the semantics of this imperial virtue. It emphasizes its connection with the Roman emperor, his generosity, which has a divine nature and comes from the gods. In the last, but not least, of its meanings, it meant generosity and imperial benevolence. *Liberalitas* was one of the most popular and desirable imperial virtues of the emperors’ (*virtutes Augusti*).<sup>5</sup> Its nature

<sup>1</sup> Etymology of *liberalitas* and relationship with *libertas*: Ernout A., Meillet A. [1959]: s.v. “*liberalitas*”; Stylow A. U. [1972]: *passim*. See also Corbier M. [1999: 140-4].

<sup>2</sup> Dating in this article is after Kienast D. [2011] (unless stated otherwise). All dates refer to post-Christian times.

<sup>3</sup> Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 24.3. Por. Suet., *Aug.* 42, 2. Meaning and symbolism of a noun *liberalitas*: Noreña C. F. [2011: 82, fn. 161 with reference to literature].

<sup>4</sup> About the form of imperial *liberalitas* Kloft H. [1970: 95-104, 110-25]; Veyne P. [1990: 292-419]; Simon I. [2008: 763-88]; Noreña C. F. [2011: 85-6].

<sup>5</sup> See Wallace-Hadrill A. [1981: 305-7, 310] who includes the following virtues into *virtutes Augusti*: *aequitas, clementia, constantia, indulgentia, iustitia, liberalitas, munificentia, patientia, pietas, providentia, pudicitia, virtus*. Differently in Vermeule C. [1959: 11]: *caritas, clementia, concordia, honos, nobilitas, pietas, victoria, virtus, indulgentia*. On the subject of *virtutes Augusti* with reference to the discussion and literature on the subject see e.g. Noreña C. F. [2001: 146-68; 2011: 37-100]. About *liberalitas* as the virtue of the emperor see also, a.o.: Kloft H. [1970]; Millar F. [1977]; Veyne P. [1990: 292-419]. *Liberalitas* should not be, according to Wallace-

and significance in the imperial ideology of victory is best reflected in the numismatic material. Thanks to the coins, the programme of imperial ideology, or the created ideological image of the emperor, reached the farthest corners of the empire and the representatives of all social strata without any disruption and at a rapid pace.<sup>6</sup> Quantitatively speaking, *liberalitas* is one of the five most common imperial virtues on coins.<sup>7</sup> Its ideological potential was appreciated by the emperors of the second to fourth centuries, who also tried to prove their generosity in practice [Noreña C. F. 2001: 160-4; 2011: 82-92; Mancini L. 2011: 11-33; Manders E. 2012: 165-9]. In this way the image of an ideal princeps was created, one who cares about Roman society and meets its expectations.

The popularity of the idea of *liberalitas* in Roman numismatic material is not surprising. Emperors featured both their generosity and personal virtue, which was one of the most popular themes of Roman imperial ideology, and one of the most politically lucrative forms of activity aimed towards individual groups of citizens. The occurrence of this virtue in the Roman coinage issued on behalf of the emperors was, therefore, quite frequent and the iconographic type itself – standard and rather not very diverse.<sup>8</sup>

The situation is different in the case of coins issued on behalf of imperial women who are related to the emperors and belong to Augustus' households (*domus Augusta*). Only to a small extent did the ideas disseminated through the coins minted for them oscillate around the issue of monetary distributions or other forms of imperial social activity.

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Hadrill A. [1981: 310, fn. 56] and Noreña C. F. [2001: 153; 2011: 37-100, especially 82-92], understood in a different way as the emperor's personal moral virtue (*virtus*) (according to the words of Cicero: "Virtus est animi habitus" [Cic. *Inv. Rhet.* 2.53]). Thus, it differed from the customary personification of abstract notions or values found on imperial coins. On the definition of the term "personification", see Toynbee J. C. M. [1956: 216].

<sup>6</sup> On the importance of coins in political communication, in the expression of Roman ideology and imperial propaganda recently, see a.o., Noreña C. F. [2011: 82]; Manders E. [2012: 11-62]. See also Brilliant R. [2007: 8-9]: "Numismatic imagery, being a prime medium of communication in the Roman world because of its wide diffusion, is an excellent example of efficient packaging, of putting multum in parvo like the modern 'sound bite', which, however concentrated, is never taken by itself but, necessarily, implies an expansive context familiar to the recipient. Furthermore, reduction without the loss of legibility – a fundamental principle of Roman numismatic design – proves the importance of the coinage as a purveyor of messages". For more information on the imperial self-presentation in the light of coins, see Noreña C. F. [2011]; Manders E. [2012]; Balbuza K. [2014a]; on *liberalitas* in the Roman art: Volkommer R. [1992: 274-8].

<sup>7</sup> Noreña C. F. [2011: 62-100]. Apart from *liberalitas* and *aequitas* the following virtues belong to these "core virtues": *pietas*, *virtus* and *providentia*.

<sup>8</sup> On typology of *liberalitas* in the Roman coinage: see Schmidt-Dick F. [2002: 68-70].



Figure 1: Nero's sesterce with *congiarium* (mint: Rome, 64 AD). RIC [I, Nero 153]

Source: Classical Numismatic Group

The presence of *liberalitas* in the Roman coinage can only be seen from the second century, when this term replaced the previously used concept of *congiarium* (from the Latin *congius* – the measure of liquids – about 3.5 litres), referring to the act of wine and oil distribution to the inhabitants of Rome.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the principate (from Augustus), the concept of *congiarium* began to describe the distribution of money on the occasion of important events or celebrations (e.g. the taking over of power, office, anniversaries of government or celebrations of triumph). Although money distributions themselves had a tradition dating back to the last centuries of the republic, their visualization on coins would occur only under Nero. On the sesterces signed with the name of the last representative of the Julio-Claudian family, there is a *congiarium* scene: it is presided over by the emperor sitting on *sella curulis*, placed on a high platform. Next to him is an official giving a certain amount of money to a citizen (citizens) of Rome climbing up the stairs. The background depicts Minerva and the personification of *liberalitas* holding an accounting board on a long handle. The scene is complemented by a legend containing information about a specific (first or second) *congiarium* undertaken on behalf of this emperor (Fig. 1).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Example of the use of both terms: Quint. [*Inst.* 6, 3, 52]: „Nam congiarium commune liberalitatis atque mensurae”. An iconographic representation of a *congiarium* appears on Roman coins during Nero's reign and depicts a female figure holding a rectangular object with a long handle, known as an *abacus* or *tessera*. Both terms used to describe the rectangular plaque held by the personification of *liberalitas* have become established in historiography. More on the subject: Schmidt-Dick F. [2008: 103-13]; Beckmann M. [2015: 190-1].

<sup>10</sup> *Congiarium* I: RIC [I, Nero 151-7, 394, 434-5, 501-4]. *Congiarium* II: RIC [I, Nero 100-1, 576]. The first distribution during Nero's reign took place in 51, the second one in 57 (dating according to Kienast Dietmar <sup>5</sup>2011: 98).



Figure 2: Denarius of Hadrian. Reverse: personification of *Liberalitas* with *cornucopiae* and *abacus* (mint: Rome, 134–138 AD). RIC [II, *Hadrian* 253].

Source: Classical Numismatic Group



Figure 3: Denarius of Hadrian. Reverse: *Liberalitas* with an empty *cornucopiae* (mint: Rome, 132–134 AD). RIC [II, *Hadrian* 216 *var.*].

Source: Classical Numismatic Group

Later on, the *congiarium*'s iconographic pattern evolved and the personified *liberalitas* in the main role (i.e. personification) will appear on the coins only during Hadrian's reign. Interestingly, it would not replace the figural scenes of the *congiarium*, which were still placed on coins. The personification of the imperial generosity takes the form of a woman dressed in a long robe. Her attributes, *cornucopiae* and the *abacus* or *tessera*, clearly referred to the imperial monetary distributions among the citizens of Rome (Fig. 2–3).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> On Hadrian's coins (various denominations), the female personification of *liberalitas* appears in various configurations – both in figural scenes (*congiarium* scenes – with *cornucopiae*: RIC [II, *Hadr.* 585, 648–49, 766 or with an accounting plate: 131–32, 552, 567]), as well as individually (with *cornucopiae* held in both hands: RIC [II, *Hadr.* 216–7, 363–4, 382, 712–3, 729]; with *cornucopiae* and an accounting plate: RIC [II, *Hadr.* 253–4, 765, 817]). The function of the main and most unambiguous attribute of *liberalitas* – the rectangular plaque

A significant advance in the context of its presence on coins was achieved by *liberalitas* in the third century. It was a topical and catchy issue, considering the difficult circumstances, i.e. the political situation in Rome – the so-called crisis of the third century. The emperors who at that time organized *congiaria/liberalitates* and immortalized them (often numbering them) in the coinage, and sometimes on medallions, were Septimius Severus (6),<sup>12</sup> Caracalla (9), Geta (5), Macrinus (1), Elagabalus (4), Severus Alexander (5), Maximinus Thrax (1), Pupienus, Balbinus, Gordian III (1), Gordian III (5), Philip the Arab and Philip II (3), Decius (1), Trebonianus Gallus and Volusianus (1), Valerian I and Gallienus (3), Gallienus (1), Claudius II Gothicus (1), Quintillus (promise of *congiarium*), Aurelian (1) and Carinus (2). Among the so-called usurpers, two rulers of the *Imperium Galliarum*: Postumus (1) and Tetricus I (1) organized *congiaria*. The comparison shows that starting with Decius, the frequency of *liberalitates* decreases significantly, while their largest number is found during the rule of the Severan dynasty. And it was at this time that the *liberalitas* also appeared on the coins struck on behalf of some imperial women. This is surprising, because this rare phenomenon is very interesting from the point of view of the imperial ideology and propaganda in antiquity.

In the Roman coinage the first woman to refer to the subject of imperial *liberalitates* was Julia Domna (Iulia Domna) – the second wife of Septimius Severus (from 185 or 187), the mother of Caracalla ((L.) Septimius Bassianus, following adoption to *gens Aurelia* – M. Aurelius Antoninus) and Geta (P. Septimius Geta)) [PIR<sup>2</sup>: I 663; Herzog G. 1917: 926-35; Hanslik R. 1979a: 1541-2; Kienast D. <sup>5</sup>2011: 167-8].<sup>13</sup> In the eastern mint in Emesa (Homs, presently Syria), where she came from [Hdn. V 3, 2; *Epit. De Caes.* 21, 1; 23, 2], denarii appeared in the early 90s of the 2nd century, which are considered to be the earliest known examples of the presence of *liberalitas* on coins minted on behalf of women. They provided information about the imperial generosity through legends and iconography (in the case of Julia Domna, we distinguish two iconographic types – the personification

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on the long handle – was recently considered by Beckmann M. [2015: 189-98], who claims that its purpose was to accelerate the distribution of money by helping in counting and publicly guaranteeing the integrity and completeness of the *congiarium*.

<sup>12</sup> The numbers in brackets indicate the number of *liberalitates*.

<sup>13</sup> Literature on Julia Domna is very vast. I shall confine myself to some of the work here: Kettenhofen E. [1979: 76-143]; Wallinger E. [1990: 82-90]; Hemelrijk E. A. [1999]; Levick B. [2007]; Langford J. [2013]. For an image of the Empress in the sources from the period, see: Nadolny S. [2016: *passim* (here also newer literature on the subject)].



Figure 4: Denarius of Julia Domna. Reverse: personification of *Liberalitas* with *cornucopiae* i *abacus* (mint: Emesa, 193–196 AD). RIC [IV, 1, *Sept. Sev.* 627 (*Iulia Domna*)].

Source: Wildwins.com

of *liberalitas* in a standing or sitting pose, always with identical attributes – an accounting board and *cornucopiae* (Fig. 4)) [RIC IV, 1: *Sept. Sev.* 627–627a (*Iulia Domna*)]. It seems that in this way, Julia Domna could symbolically (perhaps actively) participate in the act of distribution, most probably directed at soldiers [cf. Nadolny S. 2016: 34]. Although the legend on the reverse lacks the numbering that often appears in the so-called “male” issues with *liberalitas* at the time (although not always),<sup>14</sup> it can be assumed from the date of the coin’s minting that the *liberalitas* in Domna’s issues expressed not only the imperial idea or virtue, but also a specific distribution. The date of emission is between 193 and 196. It can therefore be assumed that they could theoretically refer to the first or second *liberalitas* of Septimius Severus from the period of the power struggle and civil war in Rome. The first *liberalitas* took place in June 193, after the entry of Lucius Septimius Severus into the capital city. This happened following the victory over M. Didius Severus Iulianus. This wealthy Roman senator was proclaimed emperor (after promising to pay 25,000 sesterces to the Praetorian Guard<sup>15</sup>) after both L. Aurelius Commodus,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. emissions of Septimius Severus with numbered *liberalitates*: RIC [IV, 1, *Sept. Sev.* 81a–b (*liberalitas Augusti II*), 182 (*liberalitas Augusti III*), 276, 767 (*liberalitas Augustorum IIII*), 277 (*liberalitas Augustorum V*), 278a–b, 279 (*liberalitas Augustorum VI*)]. Non-numbered coins of Septimius Severus: RIC [IV, 1, *Sept. Sev.* 653–4, 662]. It is worth noticing the fact that, in the same period (i.e. in years 194–197) in the same mint at Emesa, aurei and denarii of Septimius Severus from *liberalitas* appeared. Similarly, like the denarii of Julia Domna, these coins were also minted without the numbering: RIC [IV, 1, *Sept. Sev.* 398–403a, 442, 455a–b, 481–2].

<sup>15</sup> Cass. Dio [LXXIV 11]; Hdn. [II 6, 4–14]; see HA [*Did. Iul.* 2, 7; 3, 2]; HA [*Pesc. Nig.* 2, 1]. More on Didius Iulianus: PIR<sup>2</sup> [D 77]; Kienast D. [52011: 154–5].

the last member of the Antonine dynasty, and his successor, P. Helvius Pertinax, were murdered.<sup>16</sup> Following the news of this event, the legions stationed in Pannonia and Syria reacted by proclaiming their candidates emperors, Lucius Septimius Severus, who was performing, at that time, the function of *legatus pro praetore provinciae Pannoniae Superioris*, [Cass. Dio LXXIV 14, 3; Hdn. II 9, 2; HA, Sev. 4, 2] on 9th April 193 in Carnuntum, the capital of the Province of Upper Pannonia (*Pannonia Superior*),<sup>17</sup> and the governor of Syria, Gaius Pescennius Niger (C. Pescennius Niger).<sup>18</sup> The newly acclaimed Septimius Severus began organizing an armed march on Rome in order to dethrone Didius Julian. It is worth noting that among the measures and undertakings within the framework of this campaign in 193 was a substantial *donativum* for soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Severus entered Rome on 9th June 193 and barely a month later he set off on an expedition against the Nigrinians (9th July 193).<sup>20</sup> The aforementioned first *liberalitas* occurred during the one-month stay of the imperial couple in the capital, which preceded the expedition (9th June–9th July 193). It was the distribution of money to civilians and soldiers.<sup>21</sup> The second distribution must have taken place around 196, which is confirmed by the denarii and aurei of Septimius Severus, minted in Rome and marked with the number “II” (LIBERALITAS AVG II).<sup>22</sup> It coincided with the granting of the status

<sup>16</sup> Commodus: Cass. Dio [LXXIII 22, 1-6]; Hdn. [I 17, 8-12]; HA [Comm. Ant. 17, 1-2]. Pertynaks: Cass. Dio [LXXIV 9-10]; Hdn. [II 5, 1-9]; HA [Pert. 11, 9-13]; HA [Clod. Alb. 1, 1]. More on Pertinax cf. PIR<sup>2</sup> [H 73]; Kienast D. [52011: 152-3].

<sup>17</sup> P. Dur. 54 II, v. 3; Hdn. [II 9]; HA [Sev. 5, 1]; HA [Did. Iul. 5, 2]; HA [Pesc. Nig. 8, 1]; HA [Clod. Alb. 1, 1]; HA [Alex. Sev. 1, 7]; Aur. Vict. [Caes. XIX 4, Epit. de Caes. XIX 2]; Zosim. [I 8, 1].

<sup>18</sup> Cass. Dio [LXXIV 14, 3-4]; Hdn. [II 8, 6]; HA [Pesc. Nig. 2, 1 i 8, 1]; HA [Did. Iul. 5, 2]; HA [Clod. Alb. 1, 1]; HA [Alex. Sev. 1, 7]. About Pescennius Niger: PIR<sup>2</sup> [P 183]; Kienast D. [52011: 159-160].

<sup>19</sup> Cass. Dio [LXXIV, 1, 1-2]; Hdn. [II 11, 1]; HA [Sev. 5, 2: „Qui etiam --- sestertia, quod nemo umquam principum, militibus dedit”].

<sup>20</sup> Cass. Dio [LXXV 6, 1]; Hdn. [II 14, 5]; Kienast D. [52011: 156].

<sup>21</sup> Hdn. [II 14, 5]: νομάς σπιδοῦς τῷ δήμῳ μεγαλοφρόνως, <θεάς> τε ἐπιτελέσας, τοῖς τε στρατιώταις πολλὰ δωρησάμενος]. Cf. HA [Sev. 7.7]: “et cum eos voluisset comprimere Severus nec potuisset, tamen mitigatos addita liberalitate dimisit.”

<sup>22</sup> On second distribution: Hdn. [III 8, 4]: ὁ δ' οὖν Σεβήρος ἐς τὸ τοῦ Διὸς τέμενος ἀνελθὼν καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς τελέσας ἱερουργίας ἐπανήλθεν ἐς τὰ βασιλεία, καὶ τῷ δήμῳ προύθηκεν ἐπὶ ταῖς νικαῖς μεγίστας νομάς; HA [Sev. 14, 11]: *profectus dehinc ad bellum Parthicum est edito gladiatorio munere et congiario populo dato*. RIC [IV, 1, Sept. Sev. 81a-b (obverse: L SEPT SEV PERT AVG IMP VIII; reverse: LIBERALITAS AVG II)]. See RIC [IV, 1, Sept. Sev. s. 60]. Their dating is quite accurate, thanks to the dating element in the emperor's titlature on the obverse of the coins, in the form of the eighth imperial acclamation (the



of *caesar* (*caesar*; since then, henceforth, he ruled under the name of M. Aurelius Antoninus Caesar) to his elder son, L. Septimius Bassianus, which took place at Viminacium, most likely on 4th April 196 (?) or earlier, that is in mid-195 [HA: *Sev.* 10, 3; 16, 3]. Perhaps this event, so significant in the context of Septimius Severus' dynastic policy, was an opportunity for a second *liberalitas*.<sup>23</sup> The older son of Julia Domna and Severus was promoted significantly at that time, receiving numerous honourable titles and dignities (*imperator designatus*,<sup>24</sup> *princeps iuventutis*,<sup>25</sup> *pontifex*,<sup>26</sup> *sodalis Augustalis*, *particeps imperii*<sup>27</sup>). It is difficult to state, unequivocally, which of Septimius Severus' two *liberalitates* was referred to on coins minted for Julia Domna in Emesa, and which forms of *liberalitas* were, in this case, to be displayed.

*Liberalitas* can also be found on coins issued in the name of another woman from the Severus family, Julia Avita Mamaea, the mother of Emperor Severus Alexander ((M. Iulius Gessius?) Bassianus Alexianus) – the last representative of the Severan family (222–235).<sup>28</sup> As early as 225, the emperor's mother was included in the issues of Severus Alexander by placing her name and portrait on the obverses of the bronze medallions and aces next to the emperor's name and portrait (mother and son facing each other) [cf. RIC IV, 2: *Sev. Alex.* 316-17, 659-67]. The context for these,

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next, ninth acclamation takes place only on 19th February, 197). The coins, thus marked could, therefore, have been minted from the end of 195 to the 19th February 197. Therefore, the eighth acclamation would correspond to the fourth *tribunicia potestas*, which expired in December 196.

<sup>23</sup> Herodian, on the other hand, mentions the distribution only after Severus's victory over Clodius Albinus at the Lugdunum [Hdn. III 8, 4] on 19th February, 197. The commentator of this *passus* took this at face value and stated that the distribution could have been connected with the fifth anniversary of Severus' entry into Rome (here is a mistake, because the event took place in 193, thus, in 197 it was the fourth anniversary) or with the Senate awarding Severus's older son the title of *imperator destinatus*, which took place in the spring of 197. On the Severan dynastic policy, e.g. Langford J. [2013: 14-22]; Balbuza K. [2015: 61-83].

<sup>24</sup> E.g. CIL [III 12120]. In the inscriptions, there is also a form of *imperator destinatus* (a.o. CIL [III 243]). Cf. coins with the legend DESTINATO IMPERAT (a.o. RIC [IV, 1, *Caracalla* 6]).

<sup>25</sup> See also: RIC [IV, 1, *Caracalla* 329].

<sup>26</sup> See also: RIC [IV, 1, *Caracalla* 6-16].

<sup>27</sup> CIL [VIII 12211].

<sup>28</sup> Herzog G. [1918: 916-23]; Kettenhofen E. [1979: 156-72]; Cleve R. L. [1982]; Wallinger E. [1990: 105-10]; Kosmetatou E. [2002: 398-414]; Bleckmann B. [2002: 265-339]. On the picture of Julia Mamaea in source materials from the epoch, see Nadolny S. [2016: *passim* (here also is new literature on the subject)].

undoubtedly dynastic-oriented coin issues, was marked by important events, such as the third *liberalitas*,<sup>29</sup> in 226 [RIC IV, 2: *Sev. Alex.* 664-5]. The aforementioned medallion was also issued in connection with the third *liberalitas* of the Emperor. Iconography of the reverse suggests that the emperor's mother actively participated in the distribution of money by personally taking part in the event. The emperor and Julia Mamaea preside over the ceremony in the company of the *Liberalitas*. One should also mention the denarii from the *liberalitas* of the unknown mint, signed exclusively with the name of Julia Mamaea.<sup>30</sup> The legend of the reverses states that they were created in connection with the fourth *liberalitas* (LIBERALITAS AVG IIII). The numbering in the legend of the reverse sets the *terminus post quem* for these coins at the year 229, when the fourth distribution of Severus Alexander took place. It happened just before the *decennalia*, which took place in June 230. The final date for these coins minting was 233, when the fifth and last *congiarium* took place [RIC IV, 2: *Sev. Alex.* 242b, 242d, 243 (two series of aurei and one series of denarii)]. Denarii, therefore, had to have been issued over a period of four years, between 229 and 233. The *liberalitas* iconography on the denarii minted for Julia Mamaea is standard – the standing personification of *liberalitas*, dressed in a long robe, is holding the horn of plenty and an accounting board. The difference between the issues of Julia Mamaea and Severus Alexander lies in the type of ore from which they were produced. The emperor's series, commemorating the fourth *liberalitas*, appeared in gold [RIC IV, 2: *Sev. Alex.* 204], while Mamaea's coins were struck in silver. Medallions and aces with portraits of the mother and son were struck in bronze. In addition to aurei and denarii, Severus Alexander's *liberalitas* coins were also silver quinarii [RIC IV, 2: *Sev. Alex.* 206; denarii: RIC IV, 2: *Sev. Alex.* 205].

In the first half of the third century, information about *liberalitas*, in the context of women from the imperial house, appeared on medallions issued by Philip the Arab (M. Iulius Philippus). There is, in this case, a delicate reference to Marcia Otacilia Severa, the wife of Philip the Arab [PIR<sup>2</sup>: M 266; Stein A. 1930: 1607-8; Hanslik R. 1979: 1005-6; Klein B. 1998: 69-141; Körner Christian 2002: 33-42]. The medallion depicting the busts of Philip the Arab and Otacilia Severa on the obverse, in the context of the empress's

<sup>29</sup> RIC [IV, 2, *Sev. Alex.* 663]. Obverse: IMP SEV ALEXAND AVG IVLIA MAMAEA AVG MATER AVG; reverse: LIBERALITAS AVGVSTI III S C.

<sup>30</sup> RIC [IV, 2, *Sev. Alex.* 372]. Reverse: LIBERALITAS AVG(usti) IIII.



Figure 5: Bronze medallion. Depiction of *liberalitas* of Gallienus with personal participation of Salonina. On obverse busts of Gallienus and Salonina.

Source: Gnechi [II, *Gallieno e Salonina*, 3, 110].

consent (CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM), highlights the empress's status and her role in securing consent within the imperial family. At the same time, however, the reverse presents the scene of *liberalitas Augustorum* (LIBERALITAS AVGG), which depicts the two co-ruling emperors, son and father, Philip the Arab and Philip II (M. Iulius Philippus Iunior), sitting on a platform while distributing money to the people of Rome. They are accompanied by a personified *liberalitas*. The scene depicted on the medallion, probably refers to the first *liberalitas* that took place in 244,<sup>31</sup> which is immediately after Philip the Arab's taking over power in Rome and before he set out for the campaign against the Carps.

*Liberalitas* was also the theme of imperial coins minted in the second half of the third century for Iulia Cornelia Salonina, wife of Gallienus (from the year 254?) [PIR<sup>2</sup>: C 1499; Stein A. 1920: 2006; Wallinger E. 1990: 129; Klein B. 1998: 178-250; Kienast D. 2011: 222-3; Geiger M. 2013: 75-7]. The antoniniani were struck during Gallienus's independent rule (in an unknown year between 260 and 268) and come from the mint of Siscia (presently Sisak, Croatia).<sup>32</sup> The initial moment of their minting can be cautiously set at the year 262, when the only known *liberalitas*

<sup>31</sup> Gnechi [II, *Filippo Padre e Otacilla*, 1, 95 (obverse: CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM; reverse: LIBERALITAS AVGG)]. Dated for the year 244 (according to Gnechi II, 95) Philip the Arab has organized three *liberalitates* (I: 244; II: 245; III: 248).

<sup>32</sup> RIC [V, 1, *Gallien*. 77 (Salonina (2))]. Reverse: LIBERAL(itas) AVG(usti). On emissions from the mint of Siscia, cf. Göbl R. [2000: 118-22] (here, however, there is the lack of the aforementioned emission with *liberalitas*). Salonina in numismatic sources: Klein B. 1998: 193-32; Geiger M. 2013: 291-98.

took place, which Gallienus undertook during his independent reign.<sup>33</sup> This was held in the year of the celebration of *decennalia* [HA: *Gall.* 7-9; Kienast D. <sup>5</sup>2011: 219]. Information about *liberalitas* was disseminated on the imperial aurei, golden quinarii, antoniniani and sestertii struck at Roman mint under Gallienus's independent rule.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the aforementioned antoniniani of Salonina must have appeared at the mint of Siscia.<sup>35</sup> They contain the same iconography as the one that adorned the Gallienus coins at that time.<sup>36</sup> Other very suggestive confirmations of Salonina's participation in the *liberalitas* programme are the undated bronze medallions with the slogan CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM and the representation of the imperial couple's busts on the obverses. The most important, from the point of view of the issues discussed here, are the medallions with Gallienus and Salonina on the reverse, sitting on a curule chair in the company of a soldier. Next to it is the standing *Liberalitas*. This scene is commented on by legends of LIBERALITAS AVGG (Fig. 5).<sup>37</sup> Other medallions with similar iconography and legendary CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM on the obverses, but with different legends and iconographic motifs on the reverses, also have themes revolving around imperial generosity and distribution. All of them, however, in some way refer to the imperial generosity. They contain the subject of imperial justice (AEQVITAS PVBLICA) [Gnecchi II, *Gallieno e Salonina*, 1, 110], probably in relation to the supervision of mints and coin mintage. This is suggested

<sup>33</sup> The question about the sums that were distributed during the *liberalitas* cannot be answered (cf. Kloft H. [1970: 95, note 49] "Wenn auch die Summe selbst zweifelhaft bleiben muss, so vermag sie doch einen Hinweis auf die Praxis des Gallienus zu geben"). Historiographical sources only note the mere fact of organising distributions for the people. In addition, *Historia Augusta* tells us about other examples of imperial generosity, such as public feasts, performances, money distribution to senators and matrons, and those who kissed his hand. In the latter case, it is known that these donations amounted to four aurei [HA: *Gall. Duo* 16, 5-6: "Convivatus in publico est. Congiariis populum mollivit. Senatui sportulam sedens erogavit. Matronas ad consilium suum rogavit isdemque manum sibi osculantibus quaternos aureos sui nominis dedit."]. On Gallienus's *liberalitas* see De Blois L. [1976: 141].

<sup>34</sup> RIC [V, 1, *Gallien.* 55, 60, 61 (aurei from the mint of Rome), 111 (quinarius aureus), 227-8 (antoniniani), 369 (quinarius), 387 (sestertius)].

<sup>35</sup> On the activity of the mint of Siscia see: Göbl R. 2000: 118-22.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. RIC [V, 1, *Gallien.* 55, 111, 227, 228, 369]. On Gallienus's coinage see: Geiger M. [2013: 200-247].

<sup>37</sup> Gnecchi [II, *Gallieno e Salonina*, 3, 110 (obverse: CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM; the busts of an imperial couple confronted with each other; reverse: LIBERALITAS AVGG)]. An analogous medallion was minted with a legend LIBERALITAS AVGVSTORVM (*ibidem*). Medallions of Salonina: Klein B. [1998: 202-9].

by the medallions with three *Monetae*, symbolizing three types of ore from which coins were minted: gold, silver and bronze (MONETA AVGGG) [Gnecchi II, *Gallieno e Salonina*, 4, 110; Klein B. 1998: 203-4].

## CONCLUSION

The monetary, so-called, “female” series of *liberalitas* as well as the coin issues of Roman emperors with the accentuated role of women in the distribution, brought with them, on the one hand, a message about the *liberalitates* organised by the emperors, specific acts of distribution, and on the other hand, the very idea of distribution or the imperial virtue itself<sup>38</sup>. They were usually issued in parallel with similar series of emperor’s coins. Their iconography depicts the personification of *liberalitas* with customary attributes – *cornucopiae* and an accounting board. The medallions show more extensive iconography – scenes of distributions, sometimes with the participation of the Empress.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes, however, the image

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<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that the imperial *liberalitas* could also be expressed through other virtues, such as imperial generosity (*Munificentia*), grace (*Indulgentia*), and justice in the act of distribution to the people (*Aequitas*, *Moneta*). Some of these virtues also appear on the coins of the discussed imperial women who participated in the imperial *liberalitas* programme. See e.g. JULIA DOMNA – *Aequitas*: RIC [IV, 1, *Sept. Sev.* 588-90, 607a, 635]; *Moneta*: RIC [IV, 1, *Sept. Sev.* 609-11, 628, 383b]. JULIA MAMAEA – *Aequitas*: RIC [IV, 2, *Sev. Alex.* 328, 368, 369a]; Gnecchi [II, *A. Severo e Mammaea*, 1, 84]; *Moneta*: RIC [IV, 2, *Sev. Alex.* 374a]; SALONINA – *Indulgentia*: RIC [V, 1, *Gallien.* 10 (Salonina, sole reign of Gallienus)]; *Aequitas*: RIC [V, 1, *Gallien.* 16-18; 44 (Salonina, joint reign), 70, 87 (Salonina, sole reign of Gallienus), Gnecchi [II, *Salonina*, 3-6, 110-1]; together with Gallienus: Gnecchi [II, *Gallieno e Salonina*, 1, 110]. *Moneta* – RIC [V, 1, *Gallien.* 22 (Salonina, joint reign)].

<sup>39</sup> Gnecchi [III, *A. Severo e Giulia Mammea*, 19, 45] (obverse: IMP SEV ALEXAND AVG IVLIA MAMAEA AVG MAT AVG; busts opposite each other); reverse: LIB AVG III PONTIF MAX TR P V COS IIII PP). Another example would be the medallion with Sabina and Hadrian in the *Liberalitas* scene, but this has the status of an uncertain copy in terms of credibility. The reverse of this undoubtedly intriguing numismatic coin depicts an imperial couple – Hadrian and Sabina – sitting on a special platform accompanied by a toga character and *Liberalitas* herself. Interestingly, the obverse shows the busts of the imperial couple facing each other and signed CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM, thus, expressing the idea of imperial consent. The medallion was struck in bronze, most likely in connection with the second *liberalitas* of Hadrian from the year 118 [Gnecchi II, *Adriano*, 36, 6] (obverse: IMP CAESAR TRAIANVS HADRIANVS AVG; reverse: PONT MAX TRIB POT II LIBERALITAS AVG). Cohen H. [207, 1197], as well as Gnecchi [II, 6] date the medallion from the year 119; however, *tribunicia potestas II*, the information on which is contained in the legend of the reverse, covers the period from 10th December, 117, to 10th December, 118. In this situation, the scene on the medallion could commemorate the

of the emperor's wife can be seen on the obverses of the medallions commemorating the *liberalitas*, but only confronted with the portrait of the emperor [Gnecchi II, *Filippo Padre e Otacilla*, 1, 95]. In the context of *liberalitas*, the coins on which the empress' physical presence is marked are, particularly, as important as those in the act of distributing money. The coins discussed here and the portraits of women in the context of *liberalitas* are rather rare, but they have one thing in common: these women were extremely strong personalities of their time and had a great influence on the emperors, with whom they were linked by family ties. The high and stable position held at the imperial court was often testified to by their titulature. For example, Septimius Severus, immediately after gaining power, took care, among others, to ensure the appropriate position of his wife, Julia Domna. She was granted the title of *augusta*,<sup>40</sup> and in the years following she received further honourable titles such as *mater castrorum* (14th April 195),<sup>41</sup> *mater Caesaris* (4th April? 196) or *mater Augusti et Caesaris* (autumn 197?).<sup>42</sup> Julia Domna was widely respected, as evidenced by the numerous cult honours she received, as well as iconographic (and not only) allusions to the identification of her person with deities (Hera, Victoria,

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second *liberalitas* of Hadrian, dated 118. The Emperor organized seven *liberalitas* during his reign. (I: 117, II: 118; III: 119?; IV: 125?; V: 128 or 132, or maybe 134?; VI: mid. 136; VII: February 138). The information about the medallion comes from Henry Cohen's catalogue [Cohen H. 1882: 207, 1197]; then the medallion was included in the catalogue of Francesco Gnecchiogio [Gnecchi II, *Adriano*, 36, 6]. The existence of the medallion was doubted by Strack P. L. [1933: Anhang IV, 39]. He was puzzled by several issues, such as the lack of consulate numbering or information about a particular *tribunicia potestas*, surprising features for Hadrian's coinage, as well as the iconography itself. In the latest catalogue of Hadrian's medallions, Franz Mittag shares the opinion of Paul Strack and considers this medallion to be one of several "in ihrer Existenz nicht nachweisbare, höchst zweifelhafte Stücke". The medallion can be found in the catalogue section called "Nicht in den Katalog aufgenommene Exemplare". Cf. Mittag P. F. [2012: 210, 4a].

<sup>40</sup> On the role of *augustae* in third century politics, see Frézouls E. [1994: 121-36]; Martin J.-P. [2006: 267-79].

<sup>41</sup> The exact date of April 14<sup>th</sup>, according to the Arsinoe papyrus: BGU II [362, 13<sup>th</sup>]. The title was awarded following the participation of the Empress in a military expedition to the East (from the point of view of the *Liberalitas* emission date), which was a result of an expedition forced by the political situation after the occupation of Rome by Septimius Severus.

<sup>42</sup> In later years, she was awarded the titles of *mater Augustorum* (September/October 209), *mater castrorum et senatus et patriae* (February 4, 211?) or *pia felix*. Titles by Julia Domna (with quotations of sources and literature on the subject), cf. most recently Langford J. [2013: *passim*]; Okoń D. 2018. See also Kettenhofen E. [1979: 76-97]; Wallinger E. [1990: 82-90]; Kuhoff W. [1993: 259-71].

Ceres) or female mythological or historical figure-symbols (Aphrodite, Omphale, Tanit, Olympias).<sup>43</sup> In this respect, she surpassed all previous Roman empresses. An important element of the empress' strong position was to give Severus a successor on the throne. In the year 188, Lucius Septimius Bassianus was born and, contrary to tradition, was nicknamed after his grandfather by his mother (Iulius Bassianus), which may testify to Julia Domna's significant influence on Severus and his attentiveness towards the Domna's family. A year later, the couple had a second son, Publius Septimius Geta. Julia Domna was actively involved in both the internal and external policies of her spouse. Coins minted on her behalf with *liberalitas* on the reverse are another proof of her active participation in shaping the public image of Septimius Severus. Julia Domna's support for Severus' social initiatives at the beginning of his reign, especially at such a crucial time as the attempt to establish a successor in the form of the appointment of Caracalla as *caesar* in 196, could have been crucial to his position as ruler. Nor can it be ruled out that if the Domna's coins did not bear the numbering of the distributions, they could have referred to the very general idea of imperial social activity or the virtue of imperial generosity. However, we may interpret these issues, it should be noted that their ambiguity alone strengthened the general meaning of the presented idea, which must have been of no small importance for the image of the ruler still struggling to maintain power in Rome and the support of the capital's inhabitants. The denarii of Julia Domna were, undoubtedly, part of Septimius Severus's ideological programme. A similar position was held, at the side of Alexander Severus's, Julia Mamaea, the Emperor's mother. Shortly after March 14, 222, she was elevated to the rank of *augusta* (*Iulia Mamaea Augusta, Mater Augusti*), two years later (from 224?) she received the title of *mater castrorum*, and after another two years (from 226?) – *mater senatus*.<sup>44</sup> Her active role in her son's undertakings, including those of an internal nature, as well in the context of *liberalitas*, was clearly highlighted on Severus Alexander's coins<sup>45</sup> and in the bronze medallion

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<sup>43</sup> List of honours and examples of Julia Domna's identification with female characters (with references to sources): Kettenhofen E. [1979: 98-128].

<sup>44</sup> For titles and cult honours of Julia Mamaea, see e.g. Kettenhofen E. [1979: 156-66 (reference to sources)].

<sup>45</sup> Recently on this subject, Nadolny S. [2016: 58-9]. RIC [IV, 2, *Sev. Alex.* 316-17; 659-67].

from Rome.<sup>46</sup> They record Mamaea's support for his son's activity as early as 225 in connection with the third *liberalitas*, which took place in the year 226, and even her participation in the distribution. On the coins for Mamaea herself, the fourth *liberalitas* was carefully noted.<sup>47</sup> Otacilia Severa is another woman from the imperial house who, like her predecessors, had many titles. She received the title of *augusta* and other titles immediately after her spouse took power in early 244 (her full titulature was Marcia Otacilia Severa Augusta, *mater castrorum et senatus et patriae*, and from July/August 244 she was entitled *mater Caesaris*). In addition, like Julia Mamaea, she received the title of *mater exercitus*.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, it is difficult to guess, from the available epigraphic and numismatic source materials, the empress' real influence on contemporary politics [Körner C. 2002: 35], including social politics.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, her presence on the obverse of the medallion commemorating the *liberalitas* of both emperors – son and father – cannot simply be reduced to the sphere and idea of imperial consent. The importance of the empress in the dynastic policy of the time was undeniable, so the empress probably favoured various initiatives that served the good image of the members of the dynasty. In the case of Cornelia Salonina, with the title of *mater castrorum*,<sup>50</sup> it is noteworthy that, like Julia Mamaea, she was, probably, able to take part in *liberalitates* herself. This is evidenced by the bronze medallion bearing the legend CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM on the obverse, commenting on the portraits of the imperial couple. The reverse of the coin depicts Salonina herself, who, together with her imperial spouse, presides over the act of the distribution in the company of *Liberalitas* [Gnechi II, *Gallieno e Salonina*, 110]. In addition, the other coins, minted in the name of Salonina and Gallienus, bear standard memorials to the imperial *liberalitas* as evidence of the women's support for the emperor's policy of distributions.

<sup>46</sup> Gnechi [III, *A. Severo e GiuliaMammaea*, 19] (obverse: IMP SEV ALEXAND AVGVSTIA MAMAEAE AVGVSTAE MAT AVGVSTAE; busts opposite each other; reverse: LIB AVGVSTI III PONTIF MAX TR P V COS IIII PP).

<sup>47</sup> RIC [IV, 2, *Sev. Alex.* 372]. Reverse: LIBERALITAS AVGVSTI IIII.

<sup>48</sup> On the titles and honors of Otacilia Severa after 244, see Klein B. [1998: 69-80]; Körner C. [2002: 33-8]. On the values promoted in the coinage, which appeared in the name of empress: Balbuza K. [2014b: 185-96].

<sup>49</sup> The emissions of the two Philips at the time accentuate the various *liberalitates*, but without any reference to Otacilia Severa. See RIC [IV, 3, *Philip I* 37a, 38, 56, 95, 177, 178, 180-1]; RIC [IV, 3, *Philip II* 230, 245, 266, 267a-b]. On the subject of the coinage of Philip the Arab, see Körner C. [2002: 99-119]. The coinage of Philip II: Körner C. [2002: 43-49].

<sup>50</sup> The exact date on which Salonina received the title of *augusta* is under discussion. See Klein B. [1998: 180, fn. 22]. Salonina's titulature: Klein B. [1998: 178ff].



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Quint., *Inst.* – Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*

Hdn. – Herodianus

*Epit. De Caes.* – *Epitome de Caesaribus*

Cass. Dio – Cassius Dio

HA – *Historia Augusta*

Aur. Vict., *Caes.* – Aurelius Victor, *Caesares*

Zosim. – Zosimus, *Historia Nova*

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