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Atti del XIII Convegno romeno-italiano *Tradizione e innovazione tra antichità classica e medioevo: forme, strumenti e modelli di comunicazione letteraria e artistica*
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SUMAR / INDICE / CONTENTS

SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI – SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI / 361

Atti del XIII Convegno romeno-italiano *Tradizione e innovazione tra antichità classica e medioevo: forme, strumenti e modelli di comunicazione letteraria e artistica*

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Programma del Convegno / 363

Maria AMBROSETTI, Forme della narrazione drammatica in Ammiano Marcellino [Forms of dramatic narrative in Ammianus Marcellinus] / 369

Florica BOHÎLȚEA-MIHUȚ, Classical authors in Sidonius Apollinaris' letters / 387

Antonella BRUZZONE, Paradosso, metamorfosi, spettacolo. Suggestioni ovidiane nella *Gigantomachia* latina di Claudiano [Paradox, metamorphosis, spectacle. Ovidian suggestions in Claudian's Latin *Gigantomachy*] / 401

Federica CALABRESE, San Barbato di Benevento, "l'apostolo del Sannio", uccisore di vipere d'oro ed estirpatore di alberi sacri [St. Barbato of Benevento, "the Apostle of Sannio", golden snakes' killer and holy trees eradicator] / 431

Emanuel GROȘU, Da *refrigerium* al suo contrario. Alcune sfumature del concetto nelle *visiones animarum* medievali [From *refrigerium* to its opposite. Some nuances of the concept in occidental *visiones animarum*] / 447

Simona NICOLAE, Quand l'amour chrétien revêt le péplos d'Aphrodite (*Anthologia Palatina, liber V*) [When Christian love puts on the peplos of Aphrodite (*Palatine Anthology, Book V*)] / 463

Daniel NIȚĂ-DANIELESCU, The *Prefaces* of Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi – role and significance in the age of “national regeneration” and “European sentiment” / 477

Dan RUSCU, The Paternus Plate and its Symbolism / 495

Nelu ZUGRAVU, Continuità lessicali, continuità e discontinuità semantiche e simboliche nelle *Historiae abbreviatae* di Aurelio Vittore [Lexical continuities, semantic and symbolic continuities and discontinuities in the *Historiae abbreviatae* of Aurelius Victor] / 511

STUDII – STUDI / 531

Maria Carolina CAMPONE, *Aeternitas imperii*. L’Arco di Costantino, la *mens imperiale* e l’*evocatio* cristiana [Aeternitas imperii. *The Arch of Constantine, the imperial mens and the Cristian evocatio*] / 531

Juan Ramón CARBÓ GARCÍA, The Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Elagabalus and the triad of Emesa: Azizos and Monimos, companions of Sol Invictus Elagabal / 565

Elisa DELLA CALCE, Defending Sulla... to condemn the Catilinarians once again? Some moral and political concepts from Cicero’s *Pro Sulla* / 581

Valentino D’URSO, *Fabula mendax*. Religiosità e concezione del mito nel *Bellum civile* di Lucano [Fabula mendax. *Myth and religiosity in Lucan’s Bellum civile*] / 609

M.^a Pilar GONZÁLEZ-CONDE PUENTE, La présence épigraphique d’*Elagabalus* en Hispanie [Epigraphic evidences from the reign of *Elagabalus* in Hispania] / 639

Martijn ICKS, The crimes and vices of Elagabalus. Building blocks for a character assassination / 659

Carmela LAUDANI, La tomba di Decio Magio (Sil. 11, 377-384) [The tomb of Decius Magius (Sil. 11, 377-384)] / 677

- Marcello MARIN, Leggere i testi cristiani oggi: ragioni, metodi e finalità [Reading Christian texts today: reasons, methods and purposes] / 693
- Lucrețiu MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA, Le dossier épigraphique du règne d'Héliogabale en Mésie Inférieure [The epigraphic file of Heliogabalus' reign in Moesia Inferior] / 707
- Eleonora S. MURONI, Persistenze e suggestioni: *Sol Invictus* nell'età di Costantino [Persistence and suggestions: *Sol Invictus* in the Constantinian age] / 713
- Eduard NEMETH, Dacia during the reign of emperor Elagabalus / 753
- Miguel P. SANCHO GÓMEZ, Los *primani* y la batalla de Estrasburgo (357): algunas consideraciones sobre la infantería pesada tardía y el generalato del César Juliano [The *Primani* and the battle of Strasbourg (357): some considerations on the Late Roman heavy infantry and the generalship of the Caesar Julian] / 757
- Semíramis Corsi SILVA, The emperor and the historian: an analysis of Elagabalus' image considering Cassius Dio's trajectory and point of view / 789
- Francesca SIVO, Donne fragili come brocche. Lezioni di didattica spirituale e sociale nel Medioevo [Fragile women as pitchers. Lessons of spiritual and social didactics in the Middle Ages] / 813

SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI / SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI*

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i> , ed. E. Schwartz, Berlin, 1914 sqq.
ANRW	<i>Ausstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , II, <i>Prinzipat</i> , Berlin-New York.
BOR	<i>Biserica Ortodoxă Română</i> , București.
CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> , Turnhout, 1953 sqq.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna-Leipzig, 1860 sqq.
EAC	A. Di Berardino (ed.), <i>Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity</i> , vols. 1-3, Downers Grove, 2014.
LCI	E. Kirschbaum (ed.), <i>Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie</i> , vols. 1-4, Rome-Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 1994.
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , I-VIII, Zürich-München-Düsseldorf, 1981-1997.
MMS	<i>Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei</i> , Iași.
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca</i> , Paris.
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , Paris.
PLRE, I	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , I, A. D. 260-395, by A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, Cambridge, 1981.
RIC	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i> .
RE	<i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll), Stuttgart-München.
RGZM	<i>Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums</i> , Mainz.
RLBK	K. Wessel (ed.), <i>Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst</i> , Bd. I, Stuttgart, 1966 sqq.
SC	<i>Sources Chrésiennes</i> , Paris-Lyon.
ThLL (ThLL)	<i>Thesaurus linguae Latinae</i> .

* Cu excepția celor din *L'Année Philologique* și *L'Année Épigraphique* / Escluse quelle segnalate da *L'Année Philologique* e *L'Année Épigraphique*.

THE EMPEROR MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS ELAGABALUS AND THE TRIAD OF EMESA: AZIZOS AND MONIMOS, COMPANIONS OF SOL INVICTUS ELAGABAL*

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Keywords: *Elagabalus, Azizos, Monimos, Emesa, coinage, star.*

Abstract: *Through the analysis of the structure of the religious pantheon of the city of Emesa and of several coins specific to the emperor Elagabalus, in this paper we shall try to check whether the individual stars present in these coins could be identified as concrete astronomical facts with a religious significance, applying the parameters established for these studies. In Roman coins, the presence of symbols of an astronomical nature is very common and has received different interpretations. More precisely, the symbol of the star appears in the coins of different emperors, individually or in greater or lesser numbers. In light of the religious policy of Elagabalus, we might conclude that these stars, depending on their position on the reverses of the studied coins, could be identified with the god Azizos – the morning star – or with the god Monimos – the evening star –, gods accompanying the Sun Invictus Elagabal in the triad of Emesa.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *Elagabal, Azizos, Monimos, Emesa, monedă, stea.*

Rezumat: *Prin analiza structurii panteonului religios al orașului Emesa și a mai multor monede specifice împăratului Elagabal, în această lucrare vom încerca să verificăm dacă stelele individuale prezente în aceste monede ar putea fi identificate ca fapte astronomice concrete cu semnificație religioasă, aplicând parametrii stabiliți pentru aceste tipuri de studii. În monedele romane, prezența simbolurilor de natură astronomică este foarte comună și a primit diferite interpretări. Mai exact, simbolul stelei apare în monedele diferiților împărați, individual sau în număr mai mare sau mai mic. În lumina politicii religioase a lui Elagabal, am putea concluziona că aceste stele, în funcție de poziția lor pe reversurile monedelor*

* This article represents a paper presented at the *Symposium Internationale «Varius Antoninus Tiberinus»*. *Millesimo octingentesimo anno a nece Marci Aurelii Antonini (Heliogabali) (in civitate Iassiensis, IV Kal. Decembris A.D. MMXXII). International Symposium «Varius Antoninus Tiberinus». 1800 years since the murder of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (Elagabalus) (Iași, November 28th, 2022).*

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studiate, ar putea fi identificate cu zeul Azizos – steaua dimineții – sau cu zeul Monimos – steaua serii –, zei care însoțesc Sol Invictus Elagabalus în triada Emesa.

The title of this chapter, traditional in its approach, could lead us to think that we intend a mere exposition of the much-studied religious aspects, around the gods present in the pantheon of Emesa. Martin Frey already exposed these aspects in his classic study of 1989, including what he already called the triad of the main gods of Emesa from an inscription found in Cordoba, Spain, which mentioned Aphrodite of Cypros Charinazaia and an Athena Allath next to the central god Elagabal¹. But the triad that we are dealing with here is not the one mentioned by Frey from that inscription, but a different one: the one formed by Elagabal and his two usual companions: Azizos and Monimos. Our objective is not the study of the cults of these divinities, already profusely carried out at the time by Drijvers in 1972 and 1980, in different Syrian cities², but to propose a new hypothesis of interpretation about their representation on the numismatic record. Of course, we should ask ourselves where this interpretation could lead us, if accepted, when it comes to a better understanding of religion at the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus “Elagabalus” and even in later times.

As appointed by Noreña³, the designs on coins, which were usually some combination of type and legend, identified the issuing authority and could also be employed to convey a wide range of messages. In coins, the economic and the symbolic values converged and reinforced one another. In addition, coins were official documents, so we could say that state control over the production of coins invested the messages they conveyed with a high degree of formal authority, although many details of mint operations are obscure to us. And there was a constant circulation in both the public and private spheres, so in no other medium were simple messages transmitted under state au-

¹ Martin Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989.

² Hendrik Jan Willem Drijvers, *The cult of Azizos and Monimos at Edessa*, in *Ex orbe religionum. Studia Geo Widengren oblata*, I, ed. C. J. Bleeker, S. G. F. Brandon and M. Simon, Leiden, Brill, 1972, 355-371; *Idem, The cult of Azizos and Monimos and other Arab deities*, in *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, by H. J. W. Drijvers, Leiden, Brill, 1980 (*EPRO* N° 83), 146-174.

³ Carlos F. Noreña, *Coins and communication*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 248-249.

thority so regularly, and so extensively communicated to so many individuals in the Empire.

Designs to convey messages on coins normally comprised both text and image, legend and type. They were deployed on both faces of the coin. The minting authority was usually identified in the obverse, while the reverse usually communicated an additional message under that authority or about itself. We can find that, in different periods and contexts, most of the discursive force of the coin's message, with most of the expressive work done either by the type or the legend, rest either in the obverse or in the reverse. But given that the full message of the coin depended on the image and text on both faces, it is therefore vital to take in account the entire coin as a single, composite whole⁴.

The presence of astronomical symbols on Roman coins has been interpreted from different points of view. Specifically, it has been considered that the figure of the star would be a reference to astrology, or a symbol alluding to eternity or consecration, and used very frequently as a mint mark, too⁵. Some more recent studies, from the field of Astronomy, have raised the thesis that rulers had astronomical symbols on their coins to commemorate celestial events that validated their claims regarding the legitimacy of their governments, by mandate of the gods⁶. On the other hand, the permanence of these symbols on the coins of successive emperors and dynasties has also been considered as a way of maintaining the tradition, with a fixation and immobilization of the design⁷.

⁴ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus*, *JRS*, 76, 1986, 67-70.

⁵ Seth Williams Stevenson, Frederic W. Madden and C. Roach Smith, *A Dictionary of Roman Coins. Republican and Imperial*, London, London Seaby, 1964: Star.

⁶ Robert S. McIvor, *The Star on Roman Coins*, *Journal of the Royal Astronomic Society of Canada*, 98, 2005, 87-91; Marshall Faintich, *Astronomical Symbols on Ancient and Medieval Coins*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 2008.

⁷ Marshall Faintich, *op. cit.*, 5; Eleni Rovithis-Livaniou and Flora Rovithis, *Stellar Symbols on ancient coins of the Roman Empire – Part III: 193-235 AD*, *RAJ*, 27/1, 2017, 58. See also *Eaedem*, *Stellar Symbols in Ancient Greek Coins I*, *RAJ*, 21, 2011, 165-176; *Eaedem*, *Stellar Symbols in Ancient Greek Coins II*, *RAJ*, 22, 2012, 77-92; *Eaedem*, *Astronomical Symbols on Coins of the Roman Republic*, *RAJ*, 24, 2014, 169-184; *Eaedem*, *Astronomical Symbols on coins of the Roman Empire – Part I: 27 BC to 96 AD*, *RAJ*, 25, 2015, 129-147; *Eaedem*, *Astronomical Symbols on coins of the Roman Empire – Part II: 96 to 192*, *RAJ*, 25, 2015, 197-209; *Eaedem*, *Stellar Symbols on ancient coins of the Roman Empire – Part IV: 235-285 AD*, *RAJ*,

Certainly, we can find stars on coins of virtually every emperor, from Augustus to Justinian, and even later. Sometimes, they served to distinguish some characters, such as the children of the reigning emperors, or they could refer to how the deceased descendants had joined the ranks of the gods and were placed among the stars⁸.

As far as the Severan dynasty is concerned, its emperors issued a large number of coins with astronomical symbols. Among them, we find many with figures of stars, in varying number, from one to seven, alone or accompanied by other astronomical symbols, such as the globe or the crescent moon. It may be argued that they really are only following previous tradition, since different previous emperors had acted in a similar way; however, it has been pointed out that, in the case of the Severan emperors, the numerous presences of coins with stars and other astronomical symbols would have to do with a particular obsession of this dynasty with astrology, apart from being very superstitious and believing in the power of different talismans⁹. On the other hand, we can see that they followed a previously established tradition by issuing coins in which the emperor appeared presented as the god Helios, the Sun, while the empress did so as the goddess Selene, the Moon¹⁰.

Of course, all this acquires special relevance when we focus on the more specific case of the coins issued by the emperor to whom we refer on these pages¹¹. His representation as Helios and, above all, the very frequent appearance of the symbol of the star on coins on which he appears offering a sacrifice have been associated with his presumed birth in Syria and his position as supreme priest of the sun god *El*

28/3, 2018, 189-212. About the designs, topics and communication in Roman coins, see Carlos F. Noreña, *op. cit.*, 256.

⁸ Seth Williams Stevenson, Frederic W. Madden and C. Roach Smith, *op. cit.*: Star.

⁹ Lellia Cracco Ruggini, *Elagabalo, Costantino ei culti siriaci nella Historia Augusta*, in *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Parisinum*, ed. G. Bonamente and N. Duval, Paris, De Boccard, 1991, 123-146; Jean-Pierre Martin, *Sol Invictus: des Sévères à la tétrarchie d'après les monnaies*, *CCGG*, 11, 2000, 297-307.

¹⁰ Eleni Rovithis-Livaniou and Flora Rovithis, *Stellar Symbols on ancient coins of the Roman Empire – Part III: 193-235 AD*, *RAJ*, 27/1, 2017, 58.

¹¹ See Marcel Thirion, *Le monnayage d'Elagabal (218-222)*, Brussels, J. de Mey, 1968; Jean-Pierre Martin, *op. cit.*, 297-307; Erika Manders, *Coining images of power: patterns in the representation of Roman emperors on imperial coinage, AD 193-284*, Leiden, Brill, 2012.

Gabal in the city of Emesa¹². At any rate, the star has presumably some connection to Elagabalus' religious reforms and thus with his special status; the appearance of the star on coins runs parallel to coins from 220-222 on which Elagabalus and the Emperor as supreme priest loom large¹³. But to what extent can some of these representations be the result of the immobilization of the design, inheritances of those used by previous emperors in their coins? Do we simply explain their presence by this supposed obsession with astrology of the emperors of this dynasty? Could we not try to identify the stars represented on Elagabalus' coins with some specific star, then accepting an astronomical value? And more importantly, could we make from it a religious interpretation of these symbols?

When defending his thesis of the value of astronomical symbols on coins as commemorative elements of celestial events, Marshall Faintich established parameters within which all valid data should be found: to begin with, the dating of the coin with astronomical symbol; second, to discard the aspect of repetition by tradition and immobilization of the design, checking that the astronomical symbol is presented for the first time for that coinage design or at least, that it is a reintroduction after a significant period of time; third, it must be established that the astronomical event has occurred; and finally, historical evidence that supports the observation and importance of the specific phenomenon must be presented. Faintich considers that, without the fulfillment of that last parameter, any correlation between a symbol in a coin and an astronomical fact would be mere speculation¹⁴.

There are three types in coins that appear on different reverses and that we can fit within the framework of these parameters. They can help us try to answer those questions that we arise: first, the star that accompanies the personification of the Sun, the god Helios; on the other hand, the star that appears next to the emperor, as an officiating priest of sacrifice, before a shrine; and finally, the star located on the chariot that bears the betyl – *baitylos* – of the god *El Gabal*.

¹² Seth Williams Stevenson, Frederic W. Madden and C. Roach Smith, *op. cit.*: Star. Against the birth of Varius Avitus Bassianus in Emesa, see Leonardo Arrizabala y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹³ Erika Manders, *Religion and coinage. Heliogabalus and Alexander Severus: two extremes?*, *Talanta*, 36-37, 2004-2005, 135.

¹⁴ Marshall Faintich, *op. cit.*

That a star appears next to the personification of the Sun is not an exclusive motif of this emperor. We can observe it before, on different coins of Septimius Severus, and later, on others, of Gallienus, Maximinus Daya, Licinius and Constantine. If this type appears on the coins of Septimius Severus for the first time, due to the influence of the Empress Julia Domna, its reintroduction after the years of the reigns of Caracalla and Macrinus has an obvious historical explanation, given that Varius Avitus Bassianus was a priest of the god *El Gabal* from Emesa and, in this case, it would not be an immobilization of the design¹⁵.

Precisely, the type in which the emperor appears as a priest, officiating a sacrifice before a shrine, accompanied by a star¹⁶, is extremely frequent in the coinage of Elagabalus¹⁷ and, as we have already mentioned, has been explained by being the high priest of the Sun – *El Gabal*. As for the type in which the transfer of the betyl of the god can be seen, the star makes its appearance on the quadriga and to the left of the sacred stone. The known coins date from the year 222.¹⁸ They refer to a very specific event: the celebration of the summer festival in Rome in honor of the god, in which the betyl was moved from his temple in the city – the *Elagabaliun* – to another temple that must have existed on the outskirts. Herodian notes that the event took place on

¹⁵ A star on the left of the personification of the Sun on *RIC IV*, 28 (Denarius, Rome); 37 (Aureus, Rome); 38 (Aureus, Rome); 39 (Aureus, Rome); 40 (Denarius, Rome); 63 (Denarius, Rome), 301 (Dupondius, Rome). A star on the left or the right of the personification of the Sun on *RIC IV*, 300 (Sestertius, Rome).

¹⁶ It was precisely coins of this particular type that drew our attention to the interpretation of the star symbol, in a paper presented by my fellow colleague, Semiramis Corsí, at the XVII International Colloquium of the ARYS Association. Antiquity: Religions and Societies, which had as its theme “Dressing Divinely: Deities and Cultists Clothed or Naked”, in Jarandilla de la Vera, December 2018. Semiramis Corsí Silva, *Heliogábalo vestido divinamente: a indumentária religiosa do imperador sacerdote de Elagabal*, *ARYS. Antigüedad: Religiones y Sociedades*, 17, 2019, 273, fig. 2: She mistakenly identifies the star as Sol Invictus Elagabal Itself.

¹⁷ A star on the left of the emperor as an officiating priest before a shrine on *RIC IV* 46 (Denarius, Rome); 49 (Denarius, Rome); 51 (Denarius, Rome); 52 (Denarius, Rome); 53 (Denarius, Rome); 88 (Denarius, Rome); 146 (Denarius, Rome); 147 (Denarius, Rome), 177 (Denarius, Antioch), 191 (Denarius, Antioch), 325 (As, Rome). A star on the right of the emperor as an officiating priest before a shrine on *RIC IV*, 132 (Quinarius, Rome). A star on the left or on the right of the emperor as an officiating priest before a shrine on *RIC IV*, 131 (Denarius, Rome).

¹⁸ *RIC IV*, 61 (Aureus, Rome); 62 (Denarius, Rome); 64 (Aureus, Rome); 65 (Medallion, Rome).

the summer solstice, like the apotheosis of the Sun and its triumph over the shadows¹⁹:

In the suburbs of Rome the emperor built a very large and magnificent temple to which every year in midsummer he brought his god. He staged lavish shows and built race tracks and theaters, believing that chariot races, shows, and countless recitals would please the people, who held night-long feasts and celebrations. He placed the sun god in a chariot adorned with gold and jewels and brought him out from the city to the suburbs. 7. A six-horse chariot bore the sun god, the horses huge and flawlessly white, with expensive gold fittings and rich ornaments. No one held the reins, and no one rode in the chariot; the vehicle was escorted as if the sun god himself were the charioteer. Elagabalus ran backward in front of the chariot, facing the god and holding the horses' reins. He made the whole journey in this reverse fashion, looking up into the face of his god. 8. Since he was unable to see where he was going, his route was paved with gold dust to keep him from stumbling and falling, and bodyguards supported him on each side to protect him from injury. The people ran parallel to him, carrying torches and tossing wreaths and flowers. The statues of all the gods, the costly or sacred offerings in the temples, the imperial ornaments, and valuable heirlooms were carried by the cavalry and the entire Praetorian Guard in honor of the sun god. 9. After thus bringing the god out and placing him in the temple, Elagabalus performed the rites and sacrifices described above; then, climbing to the huge, lofty towers which he had erected, he threw down, indiscriminately, cups of gold and silver, clothing, and cloth of every type to the mob below. He also distributed all kinds of tame animals except swine, which, in accordance with Phoenician custom, he shunned.

There is an extremely rare type that seems directly related to the information provided by Herodian. On the obverse, the emperor's head appears with the radiated crown, while on the reverse, the full-body Emperor appears in the foreground, looking to his right, and in the background, behind him, the chariot carrying the god's betyl appears coming towards him²⁰. Nevertheless, the star is lacking here.

¹⁹ Hdn., V, 6, 6-9.

²⁰ An Antoninianum from Rome (probably minted in 219-220 AD), which does not appear in *RIC*. One exemplar was sold during the auction *NAC* 29, n° 596 (11- 12 May 2005) and another exemplar is preserved in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna (Bundesslg. von Münzen, n° 43082). There are many differences with Herodian's text: four horses instead of six; the emperor is shown from the front and not from the back. But it's clear that the emperor could not be shown from the back, and there are many other examples of numerical simplification on coin designs.

Martijn Icks has recalled that the coin types bearing the legend CONSERVATOR AUGUSTI and representing the betyl on the Roman quadriga show that the Syrian emperor may have wanted, to incorporate his “exotic” god into a framework which was typically Roman²¹, from the moment of his arrival at Rome onwards. This is the case here, through the representation of the quadriga, the performance of the sacrifice and the title CONSERVATOR. In this phase of Elagabalus’ reign, around 220-222, in which the emperor operated openly as priest emperor, the deity Elagabal is portrayed as protector of the emperor. This could imply that other coins with the legend IOVI CONSERVATORI were produced earlier in the reign; a hypothesis confirmed by the dating of the coins ascribed to Jupiter Conservator to the years 219-220²².

At dusk of the summer solstice, as a culmination of these festivities, the Sun god was present in the *Elagabalium*, while he was offered the rites and sacrifices described by Herodian of Antioch. All of this happened following an astronomical theophany, possible thanks to the alignment of the atrial axis of the building, at 24° north of the west²³. It is likely that this festival also served to commemorate the transfer of the betyl from the East to Rome. Another very similar type, related to that one, shows us the emperor Elagabalus himself on the chariot, and the star in the same position exactly²⁴.

As we will see immediately with the interpretation that we will make of the star in these different coins, this astronomical symbol does not appear in them by simple tradition. According to the same interpretation, with which we intend to identify these stars with specific celestial bodies, present in the sky in a continuous and not extraordinary way – as would happen, for example, with the appearance of a comet – the astronomical fact would be proven. And not only then but even in our days, since these celestial bodies are still there. Finally, our interpretation in a religious key of these specific “stars” will provide the

I wish to express my gratitude to my colleague, Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, for letting me know this coin, collected in his book: Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *op. cit.*, fig. 68.

²¹ Martijn Icks, *The crimes of Elagabalus. The Life and Legacy of Rome’s Decadent Boy Emperor*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2012, 74.

²² Erika Manders, *Religion and coinage...*, 126.

²³ Leonardo Arrizabalaga y Prado, Raúl De la Fuente Marcos, *The site of the Varian Temple of Elagabal in Rome: topographical and astronomical approach to the question*, *Studies in language and literature. Language*, 47, 2005, 89-124.

²⁴ RIC IV 35 (Aureus, Rome); 308 (Sestertius, Rome).

historical evidence that supports the importance of the concrete phenomenon so that they were represented in those commented types of the coinage of the emperor. Therefore, if the star has been interpreted like a way of association of the emperor with the gods, we will follow this trend and try to identify those specific gods represented by the star.

Traditionally, the study of religious manifestations at the time of his reign (218-222 AD) has been limited to the promotion of *El Gabal* to the supreme position of the Roman pantheon, being the main god of the Syrian city of Emesa, of which he was already a priest. Consequently, it has covered moments and aspects of special relevance, such as the transfer of the god's betyl to Rome, the inclusion in his imperial titles of the denomination of *Sacerdos Amplissimus Dei Inuicti Solis Elagabali*, the celebration of hierogamies or the spread of the cult of the god in the provinces of the Empire, among others²⁵.

However, the Baal of Emesa, *Ilāh hag-Gabal*, known as *El Gabal* and Latinized *Elagabalus*, was a part and the central and supreme

²⁵ The bibliography is very extensive, so we will cite only a few classic titles and other representative modern references focused on the specific issue: Alfred von Domaszewski, *Die politische Bedeutung der Religion von Emesa*, ARG, 11, 1908, 223-242; Theo Optendrenk, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal im Spiegel der Historia Augusta*, Bonn, 1968; Henri Seyrig, *Le culte du Soleil en Syrie à l'époque romaine*, Syria, 48, 1971, 337-373; Gaston H. Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, Leiden, Brill, 1972 (EPRO N° 23); *Idem*, *Le culte de Deus Sol Invictus à Rome au 3e siècle après J.C.*, in ANRW, II/17.4, 1984, 2181-2201; Robert Turcan, *Héliogabale et le sacré du soleil*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1985; Martin Frey, *op. cit.*; Lellia Cracco Ruggini, *op. cit.*, 123-146; Rosa Cid López, *Las emperatrices sirias y la religión solar. Una nueva aproximación*, in *Formas de difusión de las religiones antiguas, II Encuentro-Coloquio ARYS, en Jarandilla de la Vera, diciembre 1990*, ed. Jaime Alvar, Carmen Blánquez and Carlos G. Wagner, Madrid, Ediciones Clásicas, 1993, 245-268; Steven E. Hijmans, *The Sun which did not Rise in the East. The Cult of Sol Invictus in the Light of Non-Literary Evidence*, BABesch, 71, 1996, 115-150; Leonardo Arrizabalaga y Prado, Raúl De la Fuente Marcos, *op. cit.*, 89-124; Saverio Gualerzi, *Né uomo, né donna, né dio, né dea: ruolo sessuale e ruolo religioso dell'imperatore Elagabalo*, Bologna, Pàtron, 2005; Gottfried Mader, *History as Carnival, or Method and Madness in the Vita Heliogabali*, CLAnt, 24/1, 2005, 131-172; Leonardo Arrizabalaga y Prado, *op. cit.*; Juan Ramón Carbó García, *La problématique de Sol Invictus. Le cas de la Dacie Romaine*, Numen, 57, 2010, 583-618; Edgardo Badaracco, *Il Culto del Deus Elagabalus dal I al III secolo d. C. attraverso le testimonianze epigrafiche, letterarie e numismatiche*, Università degli Studi di Sassari, Dissertation, 2017; José Ignacio Sánchez Sánchez, *La introducción del culto de El Gabal en Roma*, Madrid-Salamanca, Signifer, 2017.

divinity of a triad of the style of those favored by the Phoenicians. We can see this kind of triads especially in coastal cities such as Byblos, Tyre, Sidon and Berytus, and in the inner regions of Syria, in cities such as Hatra, Palmyra or Baalbek-Heliopolis (which was suggested more recently as the true site of the temple of the Emessenes, by Warwick Ball²⁶). In the highest position of that triad was the Semitic, Arab and originally Babylonian deity El or Il. The accompanying Arab divinities were *Salman (Aziz)* and *Mun'im*, respectively the deities of the morning star and twilight, equivalent to the Greek Dioscuri and appreciated as protectors of the journey, of caravanners and shepherds²⁷. In Palmyra, *Aziz(os)* also personified the morning star, along with his twin brother, *Arsu*, who personified the evening star. As an astral tutelary god, *Azizos* is usually depicted riding a horse or dromedary, with *Arsu*. Drijvers, who studied his cult in the Syrian city of Edessa²⁸, mentions that, in Syria, *Azizos* was venerated separately, especially by the Emesenes, always as god of the morning star. In this case, he was usually but not always worshipped in the company of the astral god *Mun'im (Monimos)*²⁹. In fact, *Aziz(os)* is a theophoric name used in the dynasty of king-priests of Emesa, of great popularity and still surviving in the Arab Muslim world and even in non-Muslim peoples of the Near East³⁰. In the Arabic language, it has the meaning of “strong, powerful”, and it refers to the power and glory of deities and kings.

The character of *Azizos* was militarized when Syria became a Roman province. As a horseman god, protector of the steppe, represented in reliefs riding a camel and armed with spear and shield, he was identified with *Ares* or *Mars*. Then, his cult was even officially

²⁶ Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East. The Transformation of an Empire*, London-New York, Routledge, 2000, 37-47; see also Alberto González García, *¿Fue Baalbek el templo de Heliogábalo?: nuevas evidencias*, *El Futuro del Pasado*, 4, 2013, 315-338.

²⁷ Barbara Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress*, London, Routledge, 2007, 15.

²⁸ Hendrik Jan Willem Drijvers, *The cult of Azizos and Monimos at Edessa*, 355-371.

²⁹ *Idem*, *The cult of Azizos and Monimos and other Arab deities*, 147.

³⁰ Barbara Levick, *op. cit.*, 16. We should add that, in Islam, *Al-Aziz* is one of the appellations of Allah. In the Surah of Yusuf, in the Qur'an, the Prophet Joseph (Yusuf) holds that title, and so does Putiphar, who is referred to as *Aziz*, precisely.

introduced into the Roman army³¹, which can be seen in different inscriptions in military camps³². When it appears in Latin inscriptions, its name is usually followed or even replaced by different epithets, such as *bonus puer*, *puer inuictus*, *deus bonus puer*, *puer conservator* or is even substituted by the meaning, such as *deus fortis phoebus*³³. He was identified with the Greek *Phosphoros* and with the Roman *Lucifer*, in the sense of being a harbinger of the sun, bearer of light and life³⁴. Certainly, this aspect made him a companion of the Sun god.

As for the other member of this Emesa triad, *Monimos*, he appears as *Hesperos* in reliefs of Emesa, Palmyra and Baalbek-Heliopolis. Although *Azizos* appears as *Phosphoros*, these two gods were not always worshipped together, so they should not be regarded as inseparable twins³⁵.

The main ancient literary source is a text by emperor Julian, in which he reproduces the annotations of Iamblichus in a speech delivered by the emperor in December 362, in Antioch, in honor of Helios. According to the text, the inhabitants of Edessa worshipped the Sun, accompanied by *Azizos* and *Monimos*, whom Iamblichus identifies respectively with *Ares* and *Hermes*. *Azizos*, as forerunner of the Sun, the morning star, would precede Helios in the procession³⁶:

And yet, again, I wish to mete out a little more of the theology of the Phoenicians ---- whether to good purpose my argument will discover as it goes on. Those who inhabit Edessa, a place consecrated to the Sun, from time immemorial, place on the same throne with him two

³¹ Barbara Levick, *op. cit.*; Tünde Vágási, *Deus Azizos, the Lucifer from Hemesa in the Danubian Provinces*, in *Alia Miscellanea Antiquitatum. Proceedings of the 2nd Croatian-Hungarian PhD Conference on Ancient History and Archaeology*, ed. Dániel Bajnol, Budapest-Debrecen, 2017, 53-54.

³² Hendrik Jan Willem Drijvers, *The cult of Azizos and Monimos and other Arab deities*, 170.

³³ Juan Ramón Carbó García, *Los cultos orientales en la Dacia romana. Formas de difusión, integración y control social e ideológico*, Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2010, 192.

³⁴ Robert Turcan, *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1998, 211-212.

³⁵ Tünde Vágási, *op. cit.*, 54.

³⁶ Iul., *Orationes*, IV, 150 d, 154 b.; Hendrik Jan Willem Drijvers, *The cult of Azizos and Monimos and other Arab deities*, 147-148: he notes that in Loeb's edition, by W. C. Wright, he read Emesa instead of Edessa, and that many scholars, following Spanheim, considered these references to a cult of the sun more applicable to Emesa than to Edessa, although all manuscripts unanimously read Edessa.

gods called “Monimos” and “Azizos.” By these names are understood (as Iamblichus says, from whom I have borrowed these few things out of his abundance) by “Monimos” Mercury, by “Azizos” Mars, the assessor of the Sun, who also diffuses, as a channel, many blessings upon the region encompassing the earth (...) That Mars, called “Azizos” by the natives of Edessa in Syria, is the harbinger of the Sun...

As a solar and armed god, the cult of Azizos spread in the Danubian provinces thanks especially to the army, in such a way that it is present in Pannonia, in Dacia and in Dalmatia, apart from Rome. The inscriptions dedicated to this god are usually addressed only to him, although sometimes he appears associated with Apollo, as in several inscriptions of Dacia³⁷; but the fact is that, although his cult enjoyed some popularity and diffusion in the Danubian provinces, the same did not happen with Monimos, since his name has only been found in the onomastic record³⁸. Perhaps this can be explained by the character of the morning star as forerunner of the Sun, while the evening star announced its disappearance; and it could also have to do with the image of the emperor himself, a young man of sixteen years at the time of his arrival in Rome, easily identifiable himself with the *bonus puer* Azizos, forerunning *El Gabal*. Perhaps we now remember Herodian’s description of how the young emperor preceded the chariot with the god’s betyl, walking backwards so as not to take his eyes of it.

Well, the cult of Azizos reached the western provinces of the Roman Empire and Rome itself with that of the Sol Invictus Elagabal, as companion god and forerunner. The emperor introduced a large number of new rituals into the Sun cult in Rome, when he made official the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal and placed it at the top of the Roman pantheon. He mainly adopted Syrian customs and even Syrian servants for ceremonies, with him came other priests of the cult – including his cousin, Alexian, the future Alexander Severus – and developed great ceremonies³⁹. In this sense, we follow Levick’s acceptance of the thesis about the emperor taking this triad with him to Rome⁴⁰.

Therefore, our interpretation of the star symbol in the already commented monetary types of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus “Elagabal”:

³⁷ *CIL* III, 1133; 1138. *AE* 1972, 454; 1983, 841. About the cult in Dacia, see Juan Ramón Carbó García, *Los cultos orientales en la Dacia romana...*, 192.

³⁸ Tünde Vágási, *op. cit.*, 55, note 9.

³⁹ José Ignacio Sánchez Sánchez, *op. cit.*, 49-51.

⁴⁰ Barbara Levick, *op. cit.*, 15.

when, on these coins, the star accompanies the personification of the Sun or the Emperor himself, officiating as *Sacerdos Amplissimus Dei Inuicti Solis Elagabali*, or the chariot that transports the betyl from the *Elagabalium*, during the celebration of the summer solstice in Rome, that star would be Azizos, the morning star, the forerunner of the Sun, in the absolutely majority cases in which the star appears on the left. Or it would be Monimos, the twilight star, in the much less numerous examples in which the star appears on the right.

Certainly, other coins from the reign of Elagabalus also reflect the presence of a star located to the left or right of the central image, which is usually a personified abstraction, such as *Providentia*⁴¹, *Victoria*⁴², *Abundantia*⁴³, *Liberalitas*⁴⁴ or *Libertas*⁴⁵, or the aforementioned type of the emperor in a chariot, with the star centered, high, but to the left of the emperor, in any case, since it does not fit to the left of the chariot⁴⁶ and also the type of the emperor sitting in a curul seat, with a star to his left⁴⁷. Of course, the meaning of the stars in these coins may be the same as we have raised in our interpretation, but we cannot ignore the possibility of some immobilization of the design, especially in coins with the personified abstractions.

After having verified the much higher number of times in which the star appears on the left and after also noting the diffusion and popularity of the cult of Azizos in Rome and the Danubian provinces in the face of the total absence of Monimos, the importance of the character of the first of these deities as a forerunner of the Sun would seem evident in the coins.

With this interpretation, we comply with the four parameters established by Faintich: 1-the mentioned coins can be dated; 2-we discard repetition by tradition and immobilization of design; 3-we know astronomically the morning star – the planet Venus, the morning star – and the evening star – again the planet Venus, visible at twilight; 4-we have presented the historical evidence that indicates the religious importance of these stars as the gods Azizos and Monimos,

⁴¹ *RIC IV*, 31; 42.

⁴² *RIC IV*, 45; 161.

⁴³ *RIC IV*, 56.

⁴⁴ *RIC IV*, 103.

⁴⁵ *RIC IV*, 107; 109; 112.

⁴⁶ *RIC IV*, 308.

⁴⁷ *RIC IV*, 304.

companions of the Sol Invictus Elagabal in Emesa and in other Syrian cities, in the transfer of the betyl to Rome by the hand of the Emperor, and in the ceremony that he arranged in Rome on the summer solstice.

Following this line, the presence of the morning star – Azizos – or the evening star – Monimos – on coins with the type of transport of the betyl in the chariot or with the type of the emperor as officiant could even transmit more information. They could be interpreted as an indication of the hours of the day at which certain ceremonies of the solar cult could have taken place in Rome, either at dawn or dusk, although we have no more information about it than that provided by Herodian.

Considering the few years of reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus “Elagabal”, an approach to undertake quantitative analysis of the relative frequencies of the different designs is not interesting, because we don’t need to appreciate a long-term diffusion. So, it has been not necessary to focus on a great variety of standard and repetitive designs in circulation at any moment, but on these few topics we have been referring to. The question of the audience of the message is, however, more interesting. In the Roman world, anyone who handled coins was a potential recipient of the messages they conveyed⁴⁸. The patterning in the representations we have discussed above may point to an effort to pitch the same message to different social classes. In our case of study, the designs on imperial coins were chosen with a view to pleasing a single person, the emperor himself⁴⁹. Regarding the impact of designs on coins, were the messages intelligible? Did anyone even notice them? As Noreña pointed out, instead of declaring that these designs either were or were not intelligible, we should think in terms of a spectrum of intelligibility. From a general perspective, what was necessary to understand the designs on coins was a basic level of visual and cultural literacy. This must have been very high in the Roman world, characterized, as it was, by the omnipresence of public images

⁴⁸ Olivier Hekster, *Coins and Messages. Audience Targeting on Coins of Different Denominations?*, in *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power. Proceedings of the Third Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire c. 200 BC – AD 476)*, Netherlands Institute in Rome, March 20-23, 2002, ed. Paul Erdkamp, G. de Kleijn, Stephan T. A. M. Mols, Lukas de Blois *et al.*, Amsterdam, Brill, 2003, 20-35; Carlos F. Noreña, *op. cit.*, 262.

⁴⁹ Barbara Levick, *Propaganda and the Imperial Coinage*, *Antichthon*, 16, 1982, 104-116.

in everyday life. But the intelligibility of individual coins should be assessed on a case-by-case basis⁵⁰: it seems safe to say that most users of coins understood most of the messages conveyed by their designs, but the identification of these specific stars as Azizos or Monimos, companions of the sun god? And even if most of the designs on coins were broadly intelligible to most of the users, it is nevertheless very difficult to demonstrate their specific effects, if they existed at all.

As we said at the beginning, if our hypothesis is accepted, some interesting questions would be opened. And they could also affect the knowledge of the diffusion of the cult of Azizos in the Roman Empire, notably about its origin, the forms of diffusion, the ethnic origin and social status of the dedicants, as well as the dating for inscriptions. But other questions would be opened on the relationship between the practice of the cult of Azizos and the practice of the cult of the Sol Invictus Elagabal, too: could the practice of the cult of Azizos be in some cases an indication of the possible survival of the cult of the Sun Invictus Elagabal after the *damnatio memoriae* from the time of Severus Alexander on his predecessor and the religious turn effected afterwards? Only as an example: the cult of the Roman Sol Invictus remained after Elagabalus's death, but could inscriptions dedicated to Sol Invictus and dated to the third or fourth decade of the third century, without a clearly Mithraic context or identification, refer to Sol Invictus Elagabal if they are in an archaeological context close to an attested sanctuary of Azizos?

Undoubtedly, these and many other questions are suggestive, but they obviously require further research that delves into them properly. For the time being, the probable representation of Azizos and, on less occasions, of Monimos, as stars on these coins of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus "Elagabal" had not been considered until now and, at the very least, should be taken into account as a possibility from this moment on, with its implications for the religious history of the boy Emperor's reign.

⁵⁰ Carlos F. Noreña, *op. cit.*, 263.



Fig. 1: RIC IV, 39 (reverse)



Fig. 2: RIC IV, 49 (reverse)



Fig. 3: RIC IV, 61 (reverse)



Fig. 4: RIC IV, 35 (reverse)



Fig. 5: NAC 29, 596 (reverse)

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