

RELIGIOUS POLICY OF THE END OF PRINCIPATUS

The period of the last soldier emperors' reigns,¹ and its ruling ideology,² that was closely connected to religious policy, are historically important antecedents of the development of the Late Roman Empire. As the literary and epigraphic sources — concerning this period — are quite incomplete,³ it is worthwhile examining the evidence rendered by coinage as a significant means of political and ideological propaganda at that time.⁴ In order to use coinage as a source to religious policy, it must be systemized methodically, and

ABBREVIATIONS

Diss Arch	Dissertationes Archaeologicae (Budapest)
NC	Numismatical Chronicle
NZ	Numismatische Zeitschrift
PWRE	Pauly-Wissowa Realencyclopädie
RIC	Roman Imperial Coinage (ed. MATTINGLY, H. and SYDENHAM, E. A. London)
RN	Revue Numismatique
SHA	Scriptores Historiae Augustae

¹ We are dealing with the religious policy from Claudius Gothicus to the Carus-family (268—284).

² See summarized in NILSSON M. P., *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*, p. 555—673.

³ The *Historia Augusta* is the richest source, but since Dessau started the debates on its documentary value have been going on, see e. g. the volumes of *Historia Augusta Colloquium* (Bonn), HARTKE, W. *Römische Kinderkaiser* (Berlin 1951), SYME, R. *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971), and *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1968). Only fragment remained of the oeuvre of Dexippos a contemporary (JACOBY 2, p. 456). Aurelianus is mentioned by Eusebius, but with reference to the Antiochia Bishopric, and as a persecutor of Christianity, see EUSEBIUS *Ecclesiastical History* (Loeb Cl. Lib.) VII. 18—22. Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and the *Epitome de Caesaribus* refer but very shortly to the age of the relevant emperors. Zosimos deals with it longer than the rest of the historians, looking back into the past after 160—170 years, in *ZOSIMI Comitis et Exadvocati Fisci Historia Nova* (editit L. Mendelssohn, repr. of the Teubner edition 1887, Hildesheim, 1963). A(41—A)71, p. 29—53. The works of Orosius, Zonaras, Malalas and Syncellos include informations on the subject.

⁴ See eg. A. Alföldi's collected articles: ALFOLDI, A. *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise des 3. Jahrhunderts nach Christus* (Darmstadt, 1967).

the evidence analysed from quantitative as well as qualitative points of view. Having accomplished this work, I published the result in my recent essay: „Numismatical sources of the Illyrian soldier emperors' religious policy”,⁵ and now, I am going to talk about the religious policy of the last soldier emperors, as reflected in their coinage.

Religious policy formed a significant part of the propaganda in all these emperors' coinage. More than half of the variants⁶ were dealing with religious policy.

Cca. 40% of Claudius Gothicus's coins fitted into the theme of our investigation. During the very short reign of this emperor,⁷ it is very difficult to explore a definite religious political tendency in the coinage propaganda. A relative lack of organization is characteristic of the coinage. The output of the central mint, Rome, is so much higher than that of the rest,⁸ that it determines the picture of the religious propaganda as a whole. Just because of this, the propaganda-work of the rest of the mints is more occasional, and at places (eg. Antiochia) it is quite individual.⁹

The Gallienus inheritance,¹⁰ and the backing of the traditional Roman cult is characteristic of the religious policy, at the beginning of Claudius's reign. Later, this developed into a traditional emperor cult of lesser intensity, the main purport of which was to put the emperor's *salus* under divine protection.¹¹ Accordingly, Claudius's conservators are chosen from the circle of deities, determined by Apollo and *Salus*.¹² Maybe that is why, we may give a credit to Malalas, who mentions Claudius with the adjective „Apollianus”, not mentioned anywhere else.¹³ However the numismatical data

⁵ REDŐ, F. Numismatical sources of the Illyrian soldier emperor's religious policy *Diss. Arch. Ser. II. № 2.* (Budapest, 1973).

⁶ I relied on the data of RIC V/1. and 2.

⁷ JONES-MARTINDALE-MORRIS *Prosopography*, p. 209, and JESSOP-PRICE, M. Greek light on a problem of roman chronology (*NC 1873* p. 85).

⁸ See the diagram in REDŐ, F. Numismatical sources. . . p. 18.

⁹ REDŐ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 62.

¹⁰ ALFÖLDI, A. Das Problem des „verweiblichten“ Kaisers Gallienus in ALFÖLDI, A. *Studien zur Geschichte*. . . p. 52—54.

¹¹ REDŐ, F. Numismatical sources . . . 1973. p. 54—55.

¹² RIC V/1. Claudius 7. 68. 165. 216. 219.

¹³ See in MALALAS *Chronographia* (ed. Niebuht 1831.) p. 298. 17. ALFÖLDI A. (*Studien zur Geschichte* . . . p. 169.) accepts the „Apollianus“ adjective and refers to Stauffenberg's edition: SCHENK von STAUFFENBERG, *Die Römische Kaiser-geschichte bei Malalas* (1931.) p. 381. Stauffenberg does not confirm this part of Malalas saying: „ . . . Woher der angebliche Name Apollianus stammen möge, ist unerfindlich.“ CHILMEADUS Ed. (*Annotationes ad Malalas* p. 298. 18). no further reference „ . . . quomodo cognominatum eum alibi non invenio“.

do not furnish proof that this name was really borne by the emperor, neither is it found in the epigraphs. Nevertheless, it may indicate a tradition, comprising other evidence of Claudius's Apolloworship, and based on which, Malalas or another unknown source might have attached the divine adjective to the emperor's name. Pax-propaganda is also figuring in the Claudius's coinage too, but not Redemption and Golden Age cult are added. It proceeds from the same concrete reality, as the cult of Apollo, protecting the emperor's salus the permanent feeling of menace.

In spite of his short reign,¹⁴ Quintillus's religious political propaganda gives the impression of being an established and uniform program, which can be explained by the fact, that this coinage is the continuation of Claudius's last emission. Apollo, the conservator protects the emperor,¹⁵ who creates a disguised but definite emperor cult. Beside the protecting deity, Mars turns up as an emperor-symbol,¹⁶ Sol as an „aeternitas' illustration,¹⁷ and Fortuna as Fortuna Redux.

Aurelianus was a much more efficient and successful ruler than his predecessors in every field. His active religious policy is documented by cca. 72% of his coins.

Traditions inherited from Claudius and Quintillus are characteristic of his propaganda in the first year only.¹⁸ In the second year he carried out the total centralization of the policy. He strengthened his farreaching influence on the propaganda, by temporarily closing down the revolting mint of Rome,¹⁹ and setting up other, necessarily loyal mints.²⁰ By this the imperial coinage underwent an essential transformation, as instead of a single central mint, several provincial mints were functioning in a more balanced distribution. This did not change with the rehabilitation of the Rome mint, later.

The financial instructions were followed by religious political ones. In the 2nd period, Aurelianus introduced a very active, radical emperor cult, based on the classic Roman religiosity. The emperor was in the centre, protected by

¹⁴ JESSOP PRICE, M. Greek light. . . (NC 1973. p. 85).

¹⁵ See in the RIC V/I. Quintillus 9. 44.

¹⁶ See in the RIC V/I. Quintillus, 24. 25. 58. 59.

¹⁷ See in the RIC V/I. Quintillus, 7. 40.

¹⁸ REDŮ, F. Numismatical sources. . . p. 64—65.

¹⁹ SHA Aurelianus 38., Aurelius VICTOR 35. EURTOPIUS IX. 14. HOMO, L. Essai sur le r gne de l'empereur Aur lien (Paris, 1904.) p. 80. note 1.

²⁰ First of all Serdica and the Unknown Mint (see the RIC V/I. Aurelianus 258. and 261.).

Iupiter, propagated by the coinage in the least concealed form, which his own face on the coin-reverses.²¹

After the relatively long 2nd period, a 3rd one followed.²² The two separated from each other by several events: finally Aurelianus defeated Palmyra in two battles and captured Zenobia. Tetricus, the Gallian counter-emperor also surrendered. The stability ensured by the military success, and last but not least, the rich booty made it possible for him to consolidate the internal political and eco-financial difficulties temporarily. He carried out a currency reform,²³ restoring the antoninianus, having been totally devaluated by the time of Claudius's reign, had the Rome mint opened once again, and most likely extended various privileges to the Romans.²⁴

Aurelianus executed his religious reform in this most favourable atmosphere: he made the Eastern Sol cult the state religion.²⁵ He had a temple built, appointed a pontifex body for promoting the cult, and founded certain festivities too.²⁶ His activity had its affect on the coinage as well. All the signs of the introduction of Sol cult were manifested in the 3rd period.²⁷ The spreading of Sol cult did not undermine Aurelianus's previous alignment concerning the emperor cult, but infiltrated into it, and modified it so far as to replace the classic Roman Iupiter as the emperor's conservator. At the same time this meant that the Sol cult did not get to Rome in its Eastern feature, but in a Roman form, according to the requirements of the emperor cult.²⁸

Aurelianus acted with extraordinary vigour in the propaganda campaign of the new religion,²⁹ while his goldmint-

²¹ REDÓ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 118.

²² That was in 274, cf. CARSON, R. A. G. The reform of Aurelian (RN 1965).

²³ Cf. MISSONG, Al. Zur Münzreform unter den römischen Kaisern Aurelian und Diokletian (NZ I. 1869. p. 105—134.), SYDENHAM, E. A. The Roman Monetary System (NC 1919. — this outside study has been published in two parts) WEBB, P. H. The reform of Aurelianus (NC 1927.) in the same volume MATTINGLY, H. Sestertius and denarius under Aurelian, CARSON, R. A. G. The reform of Aurelian (RN 1965.) See also in HOMO, L. Essai sur le règne . . . p. 169—172. and in PWRE V/1. 1363—1364. and 1394—1396.

²⁴ SHA Aurelianus 35.

²⁵ NILSSON, M. P. Geschichte der Gr. Religion p. 492. LATTE, K. Römische Religionsgeschichte p. 350. HOMO, L. Essai sur le règne . . . ch. V. „La réforme religieuse“. HALSBERGHE, G. H. The Cult of Sol Invictus (Leiden, 1972.) p. 130—171.

²⁶ SHA Aurelianus 35. A. VICTOR 35, 7. EUTROPIUS IX. 15. ZOSIMOS A./61. SYNCCELLOS (ed. Dindorf) p. 721. and HALSBERGHE, G. H. The Cult of Sol Invictus p. 142—143.

²⁷ REDÓ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 75.

²⁸ NILSSON, M. P. Geschichte der Gr. Religion II. p. 511. HALSBERGHE, G. H. The Cult of Sol Invictus p. 151—162.

²⁹ REDÓ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 76. (the diagram).

ing, and some transitional types show cautious prudence.³⁰ The greatest opposition was the strict traditional tendency represented by the aristocracy in Senate.³¹

His total coinage propaganda is characterised by a strict central control. In spite of the fact, that his most active mints were working in the provinces, no local characteristics are to be found in their output. In this respect the only Serdica Aesculapius-conservator type is an exceptional rarity,³² indicating that these mints also disposed of the ability and inclination for producing in an original style, in case the emperor had given a possibility for doing so.

During his short six-month-rule,³³ Tacitus did away with all the important points of Aurelianus's religious political program. It is characteristic, that the production in Aurelianus's most important mints drops back to a medium level, while Lugdunum and Ticinum come to the fore.³⁴ The vivid religious propaganda is followed by a relatively moderate counter campaign in which there is only an insignificant conservator-coinage,³⁵ and no Sol cult at all. On the other hand, Tacitus maintained the emperor cult, although he did it on a smaller scale and much less directly. The employment of the SALVS AVG type hints at the indirect form of this emperor cult, too.³⁶

A new program was also introduced, that of a merry Golden Age period, proclaiming happiness and wealth to the West, and offering peace and mercy to the East. Its most important new types are not fully developed yet, its „clementia" may be illustrated by Iupiter, Mars or Roma, but never Sol.³⁷

During the few weeks of his short reign, Florianus did not quite know, how to continue Tacitus's program. He followed his predecessor in reducing the Sol cult and concealing the emperor cult, but on the other hand he did not follow Tacitus in anything that was new. The Golden Age propaganda can hardly be felt in his program.

Taking power, Probus successfully protected the integrity of the Empire, achieved by Aurelianus, and tried to

³⁰ REDŮ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 65.

³¹ HALSBERGHE, G. H. The Cult . . . p. 135—136.

³² RIC V/1. Aurelianus 258.

³³ JESSOP PRICE, M. Greek light . . . (NC 1973.) p. 85.

³⁴ 61,7% of types (in RIC) came from Ticinum and Lugdunum.

³⁵ RIC V/1. Tacitus 111.

³⁶ REDŮ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 54—57.

³⁷ RIC V/1. Tacitus 83—85, 126—128. 190. 260. 210. 211. 213. 214.

achieve economic stability.³⁸ His mints are the same, seen under Tacitus.

Probus's intentions to stabilize the economy were expressed in supporting the Golden Age propaganda of his predecessor, Tacitus.³⁹ This program was utilized in the coinage by Probus at the very beginning of his reign. However, in the second and third years, when Siscia was the most active mint, a tendency arose in Probus's coinage, that was typical of the last, fully developed phase of Aurelianus' religious policy — the Sol cult re-appeared. But, by the fourth year of his reign, this cult declined again, and the slogans of the first year came back. The place of the Sol conservator is taken again by the traditional Iupiter, and the propaganda of eternal peace and Golden Age is flourishing.⁴⁰

In approaching the importance of the emperor cult, Probus followed the line taken by Tacitus. His methods were more moderate than those of Aurelianus. The SALVS AVGV type was very frequent. Probus kept to the title „dominus et deus”, but the legends on the special obverses were put in a more modest way.⁴¹

The most characteristic feature of his religious policy, an effort radiating to all areas, was to strengthen the position of Hercules.

Yet, in the first year he introduces the new god, as Hercules Pacifer,⁴² into the propaganda of coinage. The parallelism of the type with Mars Pacifer⁴³ indicates, from which point Probus wanted to direct attention. In addition to the virtues associated with Mars, Hercules represents a further steady endurance expressed also in the mythological gold coins of Siscia.⁴⁴ The energetic strategy of Aurelianus apparently was not sufficient for a true Golden Age. Accordingly, Probus had his soldiers drain marches, they planted vineyards in the provinces to make them as independent as possible. The peace, Hercules promises the Empire is to be borne harder, than the victory gained over the enemy.

³⁸ EUTROPIUS, IX. 17., A. VICTOR, 37., SHA Probus, 18.20., EPITOME, 37. VITUCCI, L'imperatore Probo (1950.) ch. IV. „Attività amministrativa ed economica“ p. 103—114. PWRE II/2. 2521.

³⁹ See the CLEMENTIA TEMP and FELICIT TEMP types in RIC V/1. Tacitus, and REDÓ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 143—151.

⁴⁰ REDÓ, F. Numismatical sources . . . p. 147. see the diagram.

⁴¹ RIC V/2. p. 19.

⁴² RIC V/2. Probus 373—383.

⁴³ See in the coinage of Claudius and Aurelianus.

⁴⁴ RIC V/2. Probus 585—588.

The religion of the invincible Sol in power, was not sufficient for Probus, and his contemporaries as all the wealth. The glamour and gold, of the time Sol marched to Rome, got exhausted and diminished, following a plundering and looting of Palmyra. The remaining shaky security, in which Probus raises the symbol of Hercules, includes a perspective, the promise of Redemption, the realization of which is far away, however offering confidence, as the belief, that the little child of the IV. ecloga will grow up.⁴⁵ Hercules is also a Redeemer,⁴⁶ whose image is linked with the coming of the Golden Age by his deeds, while also being the redeemed one, who had seen Hades, returned alive, and ascended to Heaven as a reward for his toiling life on earth. Consolation and stimulating paragon for all who worship him.

The influence of the anthropomorph heros is felt in the milder forms of Probus' emperor cult, mentioned above. This time I would like to point to the Hercules Comes⁴⁷ type as one, closely linked with the emperor cult, underlining the outstanding importance of this deity as well as the fact, that the emperor cult hall-marked with his name was more heroic than divine, namely of immortal character.

Accordingly, Hercules was an excellent symbol for an honest but naive program, Probus failed in carrying it out, as he had not the support of the due authority and the gigantic financial funds Aurelianus had disposed of, at the time following the victorious campaign. Following Probus, the stability he was aiming at, could be established temporarily by Diocletianus, by setting up a wide-ranging official network and issuing strict tax and price regulations.

As Carus made his sons co-regents in his lifetime, and they continued reigning together after his death, it is possible for us to examine the division and uniformity of the propaganda in their coinage.

Their Eastern propaganda policy is uniform. It is characteristic that the CLEMENTIA TEMP type is only secondary, compared to the VIRTUS AVG types, and both are illustrated by Jupiter and the emperor.⁴⁸ There are two common types in the European coinage: VIRTUS AVG and IOVI VICTORI, which ultimately replaced Sol Invictus. Beside

⁴⁵ TRENCSENYI-W. I. Vergilius pásztori muzsája (Vallástörténeti tanulmányok) p. 374—375. studying IV. ecloga discusses the significance of Theokritos's idyll XXIV. (Heracliscos) in connection with the redeeming child bringing the Golden Age (p. 372. notes 27. 28. 29).

⁴⁶ FITZ, J. Hercules-kultusz eraviszkus területen (István Király Múzeum közleményei, A. sorozat 4. sz., Székesfehérvár 1957. p. 6).

⁴⁷ RIC V/2. Probus 70—72.

⁴⁸ eg. RIC V/2. Probus 838—843, and many others.

these AETERNIT IMPERI (with Sol), issued by Carus,⁴⁹ and MARS VICTOR, minted by Numerianus,⁵⁰ can be found as deity representations. The two sons both contributed the Golden Age — and peace — propaganda (SAECVLI FELICITAS in Carinus's coinage,⁵¹ and PAX AVG in Numerianus'.⁵²) The emperor cult propaganda was a common effort.

To sum up the above, their propaganda shows Jupiter's priority, and the survival of Probus's programs. Hercules was propagated only in golden coins. Carus and his sons, the commanders of the Rhenish legions deprived the religious political propaganda of all the Eastern characteristics left.

The religious political efforts of the last soldier emperors proved to be the least stable, although they were of sweeping success in their time, namely during the Aurelianus Sol cult. The tradition worship of Probus, to be traced back to Tacitus, Claudius Gothicus and Gallienus, by which he tried to harmonize the different redemption faiths whose main character Jupiter Conservator and Hercules Comes had been, got entwined with the uninhibited emperor cult, introduced by Aurelianus and resulted in the dominatus of Iovii and Herculii.

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⁴⁹ RIC V/2. Carus 35—36.

⁵⁰ RIC V/2. Numerianus 386—389.

⁵¹ RIC V/2. Carinus 214—215.

⁵² RIC V/2. Numerianus 391—395.