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Alamannia and Francia – the 4th c. rebirth of Armenia

Lajos Juhász

The personifications of lands and rivers were an integral part of ancient Greek and Roman art and were employed masterfully in the official propaganda throughout antiquity. There were ones that reflected the greatness of the fatherland or the own empire, while others glorified victories over foreign territories. Through the centuries new ones constantly appeared and transformed, often taking elements from one another, and eventually disappeared forever in accordance with historical changes. The fascinating history of these images would exceed the length of any paper, so here only an interesting connection between Alamannia, Francia and Armenia will be discussed.

Alamannia and Francia appeared on gold coins in the beginning of the 4th c. Both follow the same iconography depicting the female personification seated left below a trophy in attitude of mourning, wearing tunic, trousers and hat, leaning on left hand, behind bow and quiver (*Fig. 1–2*)¹.



Fig. 1: A solidus of Constantine the Great with Alamannia reverse.



Fig. 2: A solidus of Constantine the Great with Francia reverse.

The reverse legend GAVDIVM ROMANORVM is common for both, with only the exergue legend ALAMANNIA or FRANCIA specifying the personified territory². These gold coins in various denominations were first minted by Constantine I in Trier and Siscia in several series. The dating of the first series is disputed, the RIC puts it at c. 310 and 313, G. Depeyrot between 312–313, while M. Alföldi gives a wider period between 307 and 315³. The emperor repeatedly fought with the Germanic tribes with success, but without more precise dating of the coins, it is not easy to pinpoint a specific victory for the occasion of the new reverse types⁴. Nonetheless, K. Christ's remarks are still valid that Constantine needed proclaiming his military achievements to legitimise his rightful claim to the throne⁵. By defeating an arch-enemy of the Empire he not just defended its inhabitants, but also led his troops to victory. This was the young emperor's most important military achievement until the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. Thus, these coins could also have been minted without a recent Germanic victory but could have served as a general reminder of Constantine's military virtue. Also, the foreign threat was a great way of diverging the attention from the internal problems of the civil war to external ones, even though these might not even have been so dangerous⁶. In 319–320 and 322–323 these coin reverses were also issued for Crispus beside his father (*Fig. 3*)⁷.

- 1 RIC VI Trier 823–824; RIC VII Siscia 23, Trier 238–239, 241, 365; ALFÖLDI 1963, no. 149–151, 155–156. There can be slight variations in the cap, which are insignificant.
- 2 On the distinction between a vanquished enemy and a personification see HOUGHTALIN 1996, pp. 7–8.
- 3 RIC VI Trier 823–824; DEPEYROT 1995, p. 56, no. 18; cf. ALFÖLDI 1963, no. 149–151, 155–156.
- 4 BARNES 1976, pp. 150–151, 153; CHRIST 1988, pp. 732–734; KIENAST 2004, pp. 298–302; cf. DRINKWATER 2007, pp. 191–196.
- 5 CHRIST 1988, p. 733.
- 6 A victorious campaign was also a good way for Constantine I to integrate Maxentius' troops into his own. DRINKWATER 2007, pp. 193–194.
- 7 RIC VII Trier 237, 240, 243, 362–363, 366; ALFÖLDI 1963, no. 152–153, 157–158. These victories and commemorative coins were again used to show himself as an apt military commander and to secure his place as the heir to the throne. The 322–323 ones seem odd to J. F. Drinkwater, since he concludes from the panegyrics that “there had been little or no trouble between Rome and the Alamanni for almost a generation.” DRINKWATER 2007, p. 195.

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Fig. 3: A solidus of Crispus with Alamannia reverse.

Slight changes occur in that the personification sometimes wearing Phrygian cap or none at all, turns its head back towards the trophy, a shield appears instead of the quiver and the left hand is sometimes placed in her lap. Later, these were only minted for Constantine II in 328–329 and 332–333, but only with the ALAMANNIA legend⁸.

The defeated Alamanni and Franci also appear together on a coin reverse minted in Ticinum in the autumn of 315 by Constantine I. This depicts two female captives seated under a trophy. Here we encounter an iconographic anomaly, since the one on the left has her hands tied behind her back, which is typical for male captives who are situated on this side of the trophy, when depicted with a female counterpart⁹. However, her long tunic and chignon identifies her as a woman. The one on the right wears a tall and decorated hat and rests her head in her hand in a mournful attitude (*Fig. 4*)¹⁰.



Fig. 4: A solidus of Constantine the Great with FRAN ET ALAM reverse.

8 The victory over the Alamanni was most likely only nominally led by the prince. RIC VII pp. 147–148, Trier 516, 535; ALFOLDI 1963, no. 154.

9 Bound female captives rarely appear on Roman coins and art in general, since they were not fighting and only represent the complete defeat of the enemy nation alongside her male counterpart. E.g. the frieze of the Apollo Sosianus temple and the personification of Judaea. RIC II/1 Vespasian 3–4, 59, 1117–1120.

10 RIC VII Ticinum 28, 37; ALFOLDI 1963, no. 159–161; LIMC Armenia 3.

11 The exception to the rule being the coins of Trajan depicting Armenia and Mesopotamia, although the latter were personified by two male river gods. RIC II 642. See more below. Several personifications of lands and provinces do appear jointly on mosaics e.g. Zeugma, El Djem, Ostia. PALLASCA 1983; SLIM 1999; BECATTI 1961, pp. 46–47. No. 68.

12 ALFOLDI 1963, p. 42.

13 RIC III 86, 498–500, 502–504, 1364–1368; OSTROWSKI 1990, Armenia 6a; LIMC Armenia 5; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Armenia, 8.

They both wear a cloak but the left figure does not appear in the coinage of the previously minted ALAMANNIA or FRAN(C)IA coins. The iconographic innovations do not end here, since two personifications of defeated lands were not depicted on Roman coins¹¹. The exergue legend FRAN(C) ET ALAM informs us that now these two tribes are defeated jointly. According to M. Alföldi the reverse was most likely emitted following the great victory over the two Germanic tribes at the Rhine in 313 i. e. 2 years earlier than the RIC puts it¹².

The ALAMANNIA and FRAN(C)IA reverse depictions immediately recall the image of Armenia on the coins of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The personification is again seated left below a trophy in attitude of mourning, wearing long garment and tiara, leaning on the left hand, behind her bow and quiver (*Fig. 5*)¹³.



Fig. 5: An aureus of Marcus Aurelius with Armenia reverse.

These were minted abundantly to celebrate the victories in the name of Lucius Verus in the East. Several types are known without trophy or with standard,

some of them were also minted outside Rome e. g., in Alexandria and Osrhoene by Ma'nu VIII for Lucius Verus¹⁴. The gold, silver and aes denominations reflect the importance of this coin type. The message of the victories over the archenemies in the east was conveyed through the personification of the defeated territory. These coins described above are exact predecessors of Constantine's Alamannia and Francia reverses. Therefore, and because of the great similarity between the depictions, it is not unreasonable to interpret the unusual hat on these coins as the Armenian tiara. The tall and decorative headgear on the FRAN(C) ET ALAM reverse also strengthen this identification. These are the closest parallels in time for the late Roman coins however far that may seem. This raises an important question: why did Constantine decide to employ the personification of Armenia to depict his victories on the Rhine? We will get back to this but let us first briefly look at the history of Armenia in Roman era.

Armenia's iconography was not an Antonine innovation but had its forerunners under Trajan. It was the *optimus princeps*, who on his way to conquer the east successfully fought against the Armenians and Parthians and was of course not shy about it. His coin type is somewhat different than the Antonine ones and emphasizes his own *virtus* that conquered Armenia and Mesopotamia. The reverse depicts Trajan in the middle holding *parazonium* and sceptre, at his feet Armenia seated left in attitude of mourning, flanked by two river gods reclining on amphorae, wearing *himation* and holding reed (*Fig. 6*)¹⁵.



Fig. 6: A sestertertius of Trajan with Armenia and Mesopotamia reverse.

The ARMENIA ET MESOPOTAMIA IN POTESSTATEM P R REDACTAE legend identifies the figures beyond doubt. It is interesting to note that while Armenia was personified by a female figure, Mesopotamia was represented by two men, the river gods of Tigris and Euphrates. Another version shows Trajan's foot on Armenia emphasizing her submission even further¹⁶. Interestingly enough, this slight change to the full *Virtus* scheme also affected Armenia's head, which now had to be turned backwards, because there was no more space left for her by the emperor's knee¹⁷. This coin reverse was repeated with minor modifications by Lucius Verus on a bronze medallion minted in 169¹⁸. This shows the two emperors in military dress holding spears, crowned by *Virtus* from behind, between them a kneeling Armenia and the two river gods below.

This slight change of Armenia turning her head back was not just noticed, but also copied by contemporaries and by the 4th c. die-engravers. The reverse design did not only affect coins, but also other materials¹⁹. The seated Armenia with bow and quiver turning her head back is seen on a *terra sigillata chiara B* ware produced in Arles in the 2–3rd c.²⁰. The AR/ME/NIA legend puts her iden-

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- 14 RIC III 78–85, 121–122, 501, 505–509, 526; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Armenia, 6–7, 9–12.
- 15 RIC II 642; OSTROWSKI 1990, Armenia 12; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Armenia 3–4.
- 16 For another Armenia type under Trajan copying the iconography of Dacia on a bronze coin but minted in Armenia Minor see SNG Aulock 145–146.
- 17 *Virtus* holding *parazonium* and spear/sceptre usually setting one foot on helmet was often used to depict the emperors themselves from the time of Vespasian. LIMC *Virtus* 279–280.
- 18 GNECCHI II 47–49/23–24, 34.
- 19 In case of a 3D model e. g. a sculpture it would have been possible to render the emperor in *Virtus* pose without turning Armenia's head.
- 20 OSTROWSKI 1990, Armenia 10; LIMC Armenia 6; WULLEUMIER-AUDIN 1952, 98/158; DESBAT 2011, 21/30.

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tification beyond doubt²¹. The Alexandrian coins of Lucius Verus also depict Armenia with turned head and Phrygian cap but tied to the foot of a trophy²².

Armenia was in the repertoire of Roman art from republican times, but these images are quite different. The significance of this eastern territory was owed to its importance as a buffer state between the Roman and the Parthian Empire. Following the Mithridatic wars Armenia became a client kingdom of Rome. Subsequently, Marc Antony fought in the east against the Parthians celebrating his victories by coins depicting the tiara, an originally Armenian royal insignia that was later also used by the Parthians²³. These were soon followed by Augustus' ARMENIA CAPTA and RECEPTA coins in 19–18 B. C. depicting tiara, quiver and bow or Victory holding bull by its horns or a sphinx²⁴. The reverses of P. Petronius Turpilianus also depict the kneeling Armenia or its king with extended hands²⁵. Thanks to the victorious campaigns of Cn. Domitius Corbulo under Nero, the Parthians acknowledged the Roman privilege to approve the Armenian king²⁶. This triumph was depicted in a Greek environment on a relief in the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, where Armenia is held by Nero in an Achilles and Penthesilea like manner²⁷. The emperor depicted as a Greek hero and Armenia as an amazon symbolizes the clash between the Hellenistic and the barbarian world.

The Armenia coins of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus were also copied by Septimius Severus during his Parthian campaign early in his reign. We see a similar, but not nearly as well executed depiction of a small captive seated under trophy in mourning attitude, wearing Phrygian cap with bow and quiver before. These were only minted briefly in 193 in Laodicea ad Mare²⁸. The denarii produced in Emesa in 195 show a captive seated on the ground, occasionally under trophy, with Phrygian cap in attitude of mourning or with hands tied behind the back, quiver, bow and shield in front²⁹. Here the same iconographic propaganda was used by the Antonine and Severan emperors campaigning in the east to visually glorify their victories³⁰. Apparently these images were effective and formed a part of the Roman notion of conveying the message of Roman military successes in the east. Severus therefore simply reused the depictions that were employed during the previous eastern campaign. This is not contradicted by the coins of 193, the time of Septimius' profectio to the East, depicting an eastern captive, since fighting against a foreign enemy was always more favourable than a civil war. In this case the difference between Armenia and Parthia is not that important, in Rome's view it was still the same region and therefore in close iconographic affinity. This is not contradicted by the headgear, which can change from the usual tiara to the Phrygian cap even on securely identified depictions³¹. Despite that the coins of Septimius Severus were later than those of the Antonines, the Alamannia and Francia reverse show greater and even exact similarities with those of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.

During the whole 3rd c., the captives were only depicted in a much inferior role, mostly under a trophy, or at the feet of Victory or the emperor. Their size decreased accordingly, so that they merely symbolize the defeat of a general enemy, not an exact foe³². In these images the emperor, Victory or a Roman god towering above them is more important. Another common depiction was the trophy with captives seated underneath, occasionally wearing Phrygian cap indi-

21 For the stunning Biesheim cameo with Armenia speared down by Lucius Verus see JUHÁSZ 2013, pp. 45–52.

22 DATTARI 1901, pp. 3691–3693; HOUGHTALIN 1996, 111/12.

23 RRC I 539, 543. The tiara was not only worn in Armenia, but Parthian kings as well as high ranking officials. DNP Tiara 528.

24 RIC I 41–45. For an Arretine terra sigillata depicting Armenia dated shortly after 3 A. D. see DRAGENDORFF 1935, p. 307; DRAGENDORFF-WATZINGER 1948, pp. 160–161, 227/506; OSTROWSKI 1990, Armenia 11; LIMC Armenia 9; STEWART 1993, p. 190; KUTTNER 1995, p. 85.

25 RIC I 290–292.

26 Schneider 2005, p. 83. The king was appointed by the Parthians, but invested by the Romans. Eck 2005, p. 123.

27 SMITH 1987, pp. 117–120; OSTROWSKI 1990, Armenia 9; LIMC Penthesilea 53a.

28 RIC IV/1 441.

29 RIC IV/1 432–434.

30 RIC III 539–542, 547–548, 1432–1435, 1440–1447.

31 Armenia wears a Phrygian cap on the Sebasteion relief from Aphrodisias and on Alexandrian coins of Lucius Verus. SMITH 1987, pp. 117–120; DATTARI 1901, pp. 3691–3693.

32 This was partly because the Roman Empire was constantly under attack from multiple enemies. Occasionally the defeated foes wear a Phrygian cap indicating their eastern origin but was not necessarily the case.

cating an eastern enemy. These did not celebrate a certain victorious event, but rather the most important virtue of every emperor i. e. to be successful in battles. Similar representations can also be found on 4th c. coins in abundance. This is also true of the emperors campaigning in the east e.g. Gordian III and Valerian, who did not reuse the 2nd c. images, but rather the standard ones emphasizing their personal role and virtue. So, the question is still left unanswered, why did Constantine the Great suddenly decide to revive them?

Constantine was not unfamiliar with reusing 2nd and 3rd c. coin images, especially ones under Probus, as M. Alföldi had pointed out³³. A prime example of this is the *Temporum* or *Saeculi Felicitas* reverse depicting the 4 season putti first appearing in Hadrianic times and lastly employed under Probus, before being repeated by Constantine. Probus even has some reverses showing the emperor crowning a trophy with a bound captive underneath looking backwards with a general *VIRTVS AVGVSTI* legend³⁴. Even if later emperors³⁵ would have reused the images of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus for their eastern campaigns, this would still not explain why Constantine the Great revived it for his wars against the Germanic tribes. This is especially odd considering that the image of Armenia was not employed during the 3rd c.

The most famous instance for the reuse of images by Constantine is his arch in Rome dedicated for his decennialia³⁶. The structure showcases reliefs from Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, i. e. the same as for the coins. If Constantine was fond of Marcus Aurelius as H. P. L'Orange and A. von Gerkan³⁷ suggested, then why did he not employ his Germania personification, celebrating the victories over the Marcomanni and Quadi with several different types³⁸? Or why not employ the image of the defeated Germanic prisoners instead of Armenia? This is even more surprising, if we consider that the bow and quiver was not a typical weapon of the Germanic tribes, but was a *topos* for every eastern foe just like the Phrygian cap. Furthermore, Constantine himself bore the title of *Armenicus maximus* before 318 but did not use the personification of Armenia to celebrate this³⁹.

The history of Armenia's iconography does not stop here. The image of Alamannia and Francia was reapplied with a slight modification to Sarmatia on the gold coins of Constantine II also minted in Trier 322–323 (*Fig. 7*)⁴⁰.



Fig. 7: A solidus of Crispus with Sarmatia reverse.

The only difference is that the personification wears no hat. The legend is also the same *GAVDIVM ROMANORVM*, but for *SARMATIA* in the exergue. The image and the date correspond to the Alamannia and Francia coins. This means that the image of Armenia, originally reused for the Germanic tribes by Constantine I, was taken a step further and modified to glorify the victories of the second son over another non-eastern, but Middle-European enemy. In this case at least the bow was depicted appropriately as an important weapon of the Sar-

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- 33 M. Alföldi connects these images with the so called first die-engraver from Rome, where he also probably spent his apprentice years. His career can be traced from 306/307 to the 320's. ALFÖLDI 1963, pp. 48–52.
- 34 RIC V/2 243, 803–805.
- 35 The only one this author could find was Septimius Severus. For his coin see above.
- 36 ORANGE-GERKAN 1939, p. 33.
- 37 ORANGE-GERKAN 1939, p. 191.
- 38 RIC III 277–280, 289–293, 306, 1021–1027, 1049–1057, 1094–1095.
- 39 KIENAST 2004, p. 302.
- 40 ALFÖLDI 1963, no. 162–164. RIC VII Trier 364, 367. Silver coins were minted with the legend *VICTORIA SARMATICA* during the first tetrarchy but show the four emperors sacrificing over tripod before a camp gate. RIC VI Alexandria 8, Antiochia 32–33, Cyzicus 5, Heraclea 2–3, 6–7, 10, Nicomedia 19, 22, 25, Rome 14–26, 36–39, 43, Siscia 34–42, 58, Ticinum 12–13, 16–17, Thessalonica 10, Treveri 104–108, 114–115, 119–120.

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matians. The Sarmatia coins were only issued for Constantine II even though the title Sarmaticus maximus was also borne by Constantine I and Crispus⁴¹. This suggests that the Armenia image was modified for Constantine II, because it was successfully employed by the father and brother, but reflected the division of responsibilities within the family. Constantine the Great could have used the reverses of the Marcomannic wars depicting Sarmatian prisoners, but the already employed images reflected dynastic policies more effectively⁴². On the other hand, aes coins with the legend SARMATIA DEVICTA were minted for Constantine the Great between 322 and 325, and for his two sons in Trier⁴³. The depiction shows no resemblance to the previous ones portraying Victory with trophy and palm-branch advancing right, setting foot on a bound captive on the ground. This same reverse was also employed with the ALAMANNIA DEVICTA legend for the coins of Crispus and Constantine II minted in Sirmium in 324–325⁴⁴. One also must mention the PRINCIPIA IVVENTVTIS gold coins with SARMATIA sometimes in the exergue minted for Constantine II Caesar in Trier in 322–324 and 332–333 (*Fig. 8*)⁴⁵.



Fig. 8: A multiple of a solidus of Constantine II Caesar with Sarmatia reverse.

These show the heir in military dress standing left, holding globe and reversed spear, setting one foot on the kneeling personification with raised hands towards him. This reverse recalls the coins of Marcus Aurelius, but Germania pleading for clementia by offering her shield⁴⁶. These coins were all meant to glorify the prince's military successes and to show his excellent capability as an emperor. These images were also used by his father to legitimize his own claim to the throne and were handed down to his sons as well.

The reverses celebrating the first victories of Constantine the Great over the Alamanni and Franci were in fact an exact copy of the Armenia types of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. These were of outmost importance to Constantine, since these successes were the military legitimization of his power. Why he employed the personification of an eastern foe has to be left unanswered at this point. This is especially perplexing, since he could just as easily had copied the Germania personifications of Marcus, if his figure was truly the motivating factor behind this. The success of these reverses is signified by that these were also minted for Crispus and Constantine II and were also modified to celebrate the Sarmatian victories. Thus, the 2nd c. personification of Armenia was transformed into a victorious family image of the Constantine dynasty.

41 Constantine I bore it thrice, while for his children this title is only mentioned in a fragmentary papyrus. KIENAST 2004, pp. 302, 306, 310.

42 RIC III 340–342; 364–365.

43 RIC VII London 289–290; Lyons 209, 2121, 214, 219, 222; Trier 429, 435–438, Arles 257–258; Sirmium 48.

44 RIC VII Sirmium 49–51.

45 RIC VII Trier 358–361, 446, 532–533, 536.

46 The original reverse was employed by Domitian for his victories over the Chatti and was reused by Marcus during the Marcomannic wars. RIC II/1 279, 357, 401, 469; RIC III 1019.

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- Fig. 1: British Museum 1865,0814.1
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Figure board (illustrations enlarged):



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8