

THE *FELICITAS* AND THE *CONCORDIA* OF THE SEVERAN HOUSE

Towards the beginning of 204 Severus' position as Emperor was well established.* His rivals and opponents had been eliminated and despite some unhappy friction with his soldiers during the second siege of Hatra, the Parthian campaigns appear to have achieved one of their main objects.¹ Severus was recognized by the provincial armies as the legitimate Emperor, an offshoot of a dynasty now over a century in power², and a father of two sons, who would in time succeed him and continue this dynasty. Severus may not have been a great general, but like Augustus he knew how to make up for his deficiency as a military leader by making friends with men of talent³, and by gaining the devotion of the *miles gregarius*, not only by means of generous donatives, but also by means of the right sort of propaganda, which

* The following are cited by author: M. Amit, Propagande de succès et d'euphorie dans l'empire romain, *Iura* 15 (1965) 65-71; R. Bartoccini, L'arco quadrifronte dei Severi a Lepcis, *Africa Italiana* 4 (1931) 114-129; Anthony Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African Emperor* (London, 1971); J. Gagé, Les jeux séculaires de 204 ap. J.-C. et la dynastie des Sévères, *MEFR* 51 (1934) 33-78; Gnechi, *Medaglioni*; J. Guey, Lepcitana Septimiana IV, *Revue Africaine* 94 (1950) 51-84; J. Hasebröck, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Kaisers Septimius Severus* (Heidelberg, 1921); Ch. Hülsen, Neue Fragmente der Acta ludorum saecularium von 204 n. Chr., *RhM* 81 (1932) 366ff.; I. Mundle, *Untersuchungen zur Religionspolitik des Septimius Severus* (diss. Freiburg, 1957); G (J). B. Pighi, *De ludis saecularibus populi romani quirritium* (Milan, 1941); Z. Rubin, Dio, Herodian and Severus' Second Parthian War, *Chiron* 5 (1975) 419-441; Ruggiero, *Dizionario epigraphico di antichità romane* (Rome, 1886 ff.); P.W. Townsend, The Significance of the Arch of the Severi at Lepcis, *AJA* 42 (1938) 512 ff.; E. Vergara Caffarelli & G. Caputo, *The Buried City, Excavation at Lepcis Magna* (London, 1966); J.B. Ward-Perkins, The Arch of Septimius Severus at Lepcis Magna, *Archaeology* 4 (1951) 226-231.

¹ For the incident and for its implications see Z. Rubin, *Chiron* 419-441.

² See J. Hasebröck, 86-95, and more recently Birley 184-185, for Septimius Severus' fictitious adoption into the *Antonine dynasty*. See further p. 166, and n. 73 below.

³ On this aspect of Severus' policy, see J. Fitz, "The Policy of Septimius Severus in the Direction of the Civil War between 193-197", *Acta of the Vth International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy* (Oxford, 1971) 425-429.

would leave the soldiers in no doubt as to what they were given the money for⁴.

There were however some disquieting signs. Plautianus, the omnipotent favourite of Septimius Severus had his daughter, Plautilla, married to Caracalla, but the marriage was a blatant failure. The mounting tension between the young Augustus and his influential father-in-law could hardly be kept secret⁵. Nor, it seems, could the petulant rivalry between the two imperial princes, Caracalla and Geta, be contained in the palace⁶. All the devices of imperial propaganda had to be mobilized, in order to veil this uneasy complex of human relations which boded ill for the peace of the empire, procured at the cost of so much human blood ruthlessly shed in civil war.

Severus was now in a position to activate the state religion. The *Ludi Saeculares* were celebrated in great and sumptuous pomp. The decision upon the year of their celebration was much more a matter of political convenience than of any strict formal considerations. According to the system of reckoning whereby these games were decided upon they should strictly speaking have been celebrated in 198, a hundred and ten years after the *Ludi Saeculares* of Domitian.⁷ This mattered very little. In 198 Severus felt that he had more pressing business in the East. Upon his return to Rome in 202 the celebration of the *decennalia* had a much more immediate relevance for an emperor who had not only survived a decade in power, contending against odds, but succeeded in demonstrating the divine grace bestowed on him by crushing the power of the enemies of Rome⁸. In all likelihood the visit to Africa followed⁹. The *Ludi Saeculares* were therefore put off to the next convenient opportuni-

⁴ When the anonymous panegyrist of Constantine (*Paneg.*, 6 (7), 18, 7) declares: "Dona tua, Constantine, manifeste sunt grata militibus, sed hoc gratiore quod tua sunt", he undoubtedly discloses a great truth about how donatives were apt to influence soldiers. The same donative would have had a totally different effect if given by a Trajan or by a Didius Julianus. The soldiers, not unlike the masses of Rome (cf. Yavetz, *Plebs and Princes* [Oxford, 1969] 118), responded not only to the fact that largesse was given, but also to the manner in which it was given. See further Z. Rubin 425 ff.

⁵ Dio, 77(76), 2, 5-3, 1; Herod. 3, 10, 8-11, 1 ff.

⁶ Dio, 77(76), 7, 1-2; 11, 1; cf. Herod. 3, 13, 1-14, 1.

⁷ On the delay see J. Gagé 5; cf. Mattingly, *BMC.*, V, cxlix f.

⁸ See further, Z. Rubin 431 ff.

⁹ See pp. 169 ff. and nn. 93-95 below.

ty. In the summer of 204 two complete *Saecula*, two hundred and twenty years had elapsed since the celebration of the Augustan games in 17 B.C. In celebrating his own games in 204 Severus could claim that he was faithful to the true Augustan sequence¹⁰.

A comprehensive and penetrating analysis of these games has recently been offered in an unpublished dissertation by I. Mundle¹¹. On the basis of a comparison between the Augustan and the Severan *Acta Ludorum Saecularium* she arrives at the conclusion that the religious ritual connected with these games comprised a number of obligatory traditional ceremonies, which had to be observed in strict accordance with ancient practices, as well as a more flexible and discretionary part, in which the Emperor celebrating the games could experiment with his own ideas and honour his own favourite gods. Mundle shows quite convincingly that whereas in the former part Severus' *Acta Ludorum* show merely a shift of interest and stress which does not affect the core of the rites, in the latter part there is a manifest change. This part is embodied in the coinage as well as in the *Carmen Saeculare*, fragments of which were recovered by P. Romanelli in 1930, together with some other fragments of the *Acta* of 204, not yet known until then¹². The name of Bacchus, i.e. Liber Pater, one of Severus' two *di patrii* is mentioned on one of these fragments, whereas in the *Carmen Saeculare* of Horace there is no mention of him¹³. A mystery is thus resolved. It was noticed long ago that Hercules and Bacchus figured on Severus' Saecular coins¹⁴, whereas from the *Acta*, as preserved until the discovery

¹⁰ See G(J).B. Pighi 102 and 224. From *CIL*, VI, 32326, 11.14-15 (= Pighi 141), it is evident only that the Severan calculation goes back to celebrations assigned to 456 B.C., 660 years before. Yet the record of any Saecular games before 249 B.C. is more than doubtful (cf. F. Blumenthal, *Ludi Saeculares*, *Klio*, 15 (1918) 217 ff., and the one certain fact that remains is that all calculations of this kind in the Imperial period were motivated by political considerations.

¹¹ I. Mundle 147 ff. This work does not seem to have been consulted by Birley 124 ff, who still considers Pighi the standard work (124, n. 2). Consequently his discussion of some points (e.g. the role of Liber Pater and of Hercules in the Games) is somewhat unsatisfactory.

¹² For the publication see P. Romanelli, "Nuovi frammenti degli atti dei ludi secolari di Settimio Severo (a 204)", *Notizie degli Scavi*,⁶ vii (1931), 313 ff; cf. Ch. Hülsen 366 ff. The new fragments should be added to *CIL*, VI, 32330. For the fragments of the *carmen* see Hülsen 379-380, and Pighi 158 ff, esp. 165 f., and 224-226 for the division into verses.

¹³ Hülsen 379 (1.29), Pighi 165, cf. 225.

¹⁴ Nilsson, *P-W*, IA, 1718.

of Romanelli, they were conspicuous by their absence. Thus, Mundle concludes, even when giving the gods of his *patria* a place of honour in the Roman pantheon, Severus was careful not to disturb any time-hallowed tradition in a highly conservative state-religion¹⁵.

There is however one point in which Severus' *Acta Ludorum* are markedly different from those of Augustus — though the difference is not in any essential part of the ritual. Severus' *Acta* have a strong dynastic overtone which would have been quite alien to the spirit of the nascent principate. Julia Domna was allowed to preside over the *supplicatio* before the temple of Juno Regina and to set the *sellisternia* to Juno and Diana, together with a hundred and nine other matrons, whereas in Augustus' games Livia had no religious part to play¹⁶. Even more significant is the insistence on the *Felicitas* theme in a purely dynastic context¹⁷. In the surviving *Acta Ludorum* of Augustus this theme does not occur even once, and in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* it crops up only once, towards the end, and even then it has no dynastic connotation¹⁸.

¹⁵ Mundle 175, cf. Birley 228, who is undecided about the role of these two deities in the celebrations. At one point he goes so far as to assert that the coins issued in commemoration of these games convey the impression that the two gods of Lepcis were the presiding deities of the occasion. Mundle 165 f. points out the significance of the legend SACRA SAECULARIA (an innovation of Severus' coinage) as distinct from COS III LUDOS SAECULARES FECIT (the coins of Severus) and COS LUDOS SAECULARES FECIT (the coins of Caracalla). The *Di Patrii* are excluded from coins bearing the first legend which refers to the actual sacrifices, and occur only on the two last-named where the stress is on the games. This explains quite satisfactorily why in the relatively well preserved *acta* of Severus' Saecular Games no fragment has yet turned up testifying to any religious rite connected with either Liber Pater or Hercules (cf. also *ibid.*, 164). It was as accessory by-standers that these two gods participated in the game, and hence, whatever prominence they were given in informal pronouncements during the game, in the *Carmen Saeculare*, and on the coins, they cannot have been 'the presiding deities of the occasion'.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion see Mundle 157-160.

¹⁷ Further and more generally about the dynastic significance of *felicitas*, see p. 159 ff. and nn. 39-68 below. This particular sense of *felicitas* and its concomitant epithet *felix* is neglected by the otherwise sound and comprehensive numismatical study of M. Amit 65-71. In the present study only those places where *Felicitas* and cognate epithets (*felix*, *felicissimus*) occur in the Severan *acta* in purely dynastic contexts are dwelt upon, and not the many other places where they serve other purposes.

¹⁸ 1.66: "remque Romanum Latiumque felix".

Thus for example in the *senatus consultum* of 203, calling for the celebration of the games, reference is made to those “[...qu]os d[ii volent] adder[e f]elici numero rectoru[m nn.]”¹⁹. The context is not entirely clear, but already Mommsen inferred from the fact that Juno Lucina²⁰ is mentioned one line above that that reference is in all likelihood to the marriage of Caracalla and Plautilla²¹. The passage that concerns us has also a reference to a prayer to be made, in all likelihood by members of the senate, (“[...suo preca]tu advocabunt piis vocib[us]”)²², and to a *supplication* to be made by Severus himself (“imperator sup[plicabit]”)²³. The rough meaning which emerges from these rather incoherent phrases is that the gods in general, and Juno Lucina in particular, are interceded with to bless the young imperial couple with issue. The words which bring this sentence to its close, “[culmen a]ugebit [publicae fel]icitatis”²⁴, are clearly an implication of the consequences which the augmentation of the *felix numerus*, namely the Severan dynasty, will have for the *Res Publica*.

In these opaque lines, as well as in a statement which appears to be made two lines below, Gagé wanted to see a proof that Plautilla was actually pregnant in 203²⁵. In a coin of Plautilla bearing the reverse legend PIETAS AVGG, and showing *Pietas* holding an infant²⁶, and in an equally opaque passage in the *Carmen Saeculare* of 204²⁷, he believed himself to have found a proof that she gave birth to a child before the actual celebrations of the *Ludi Saeculares* started. Yet even if it is assumed that his reading of the line in question in the *senatus consultum* of 203 is right, and that it really says “na[sc]etur ergo Antonino fili[us...]”²⁸, there is no reason to believe that this is more than wishful

¹⁹ *CIL*, VI, 32326, 1.19 (= Pighi 142).

²⁰ *CIL*, *ibid.*, 1.18 (= Pighi 141).

²¹ *Ephem. Epig.*, 8 (279 n.)

²² *CIL*, *ibid.*, 11.18-19 (= Pighi 141-142).

²³ *CIL*, *ibid.*, 1.19 (= Pighi 142).

²⁴ *CIL*, *ibid.*, 1.20 (= Pighi *ibid.*)

²⁵ Gagé 49 ff.

²⁶ Gagé 41 ff.; Cf. *BMC*, V, 237-238, nos. 422-426; 323, nos. 804-806. The type occurs also on a reverse of Julia Domna, of an uncertain Eastern mint; *BMC*, V, 278, no. 612.

²⁷ Gagé 35 ff, analysing 11, 15-17 of the *carmen*.

²⁸ *CIL*, *ibid.*, 1.21 (= Pighi 142); the original reading was “ergo Antonio fili(o...)”. Gagé’s reading is contested by Weinstock, *Gnomon*, 12 (1936) 66, and by Mundle 147.

thinking. In the *Carmen Saeculare* he follows a suggestion made by E. Diehl²⁹, and develops it. The passage on which he attempts to base his argument appears to be an imitation of a passage in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*³⁰ and according to Gag e's reconstruction it should read:

tuque Latin [e
se]u Lucin[a vocaris Juno seu Genitalis
quae nuper caelo [...

This implication that Lucina performed some act of divine grace "nuper", Gag e argues, can have only one meaning: Plautilla had recently born a child. The information we can glean from this fragmentary passage is however very slender: far too slender to obviate the complete silence of the literary sources, and Dio and Herodian's explicit information about the profound hatred between Caracalla and his wife³¹. For all we know "quae nuper" may be the beginning of a new sentence³², even if Gag e's completion of the previous line is correct. In this case for example it would be hardly possible to read into this passage what Gag e reads into it.

The fact that the inscriptional evidence adduced by Gag e proves so inconclusive leaves him only with the *Pietas* coin to go by. Mundle, who has doubted the validity of Gag e's interpretation of the *Acta Ludorum* is willing to accept his suggestion on the force of this piece of evidence alone³³. But is it so conclusive? True, Gag e does prove that in the second century this legend, accompanied by similar types, is frequently associated with happy family life in the Emperor's house, one of whose aspects is the loving care for the children of the imperial couple³⁴. Yet,

²⁹ E. Diehl, "Zu den neuen Acta ludorum saecularium septimorum des Jahres 204 n. Chr.," *Sitzungsber. d. Preuss. Akad.*, 1932, 779, cf. 782.

³⁰ 11.13-16:
"rite maturos aperite partus
lenis Ilithyia, tuere matres,
sive tu Lucina probas vocari
seu Genitalis."

³¹ Thus also Birley, 232 n. 1.

³² This possibility is implied by Hilsen 380 (11.9-16 "das Gebet an Ilithyia, die Besch tzerin des Kindersegens", and from line 17 onwards a series of new themes).

³³ Mundle 147.

³⁴ Gag e 43 ff.

as will be shown immediately below, there are two other themes which are much more closely associated on imperial coinage with child-birth in the imperial house than *Pietas*: these are *Fecunditas* and *Felicitas*. Their absence from coins of Plautilla with a type implying child-birth would have been odd had Plautilla really born a child³⁵. It would appear that the birth of an imperial prince who managed to survive throughout the Saecular games would have been celebrated in a much more emphatic manner. Hence the *Pietas* on Plautilla's coins is probably just another expression of the pious expectations, given an articulate expression in prayers uttered *piis vocibus* in 203³⁶.

Gagé's suggestion that the Saecular games were celebrated in connection with the birth of an imperial prince on whom hopes for a renewed *Saeculi Felicitas* were pinned³⁷ appears to be exaggerated also because of another fact. Even Gagé in his completion of the line in the *senatus consultum* seemingly referring to childbirth is able to show only that Plautilla was possibly pregnant ("*nascetur*" is the verb reconstructed by him on the basis of a new examination of the inscription made on his behalf by Romanelli, in whose reading the N and the E appear to be the only absolutely certain characters)³⁸. Now even if Plautilla were pregnant, a very unlikely proposition in itself, no sensible government would have made too much of the connection between the expected birth and the new *saeculum* until it was absolutely sure that the child born was a boy; and the fact the delivery in the period with which we are concerned was involved in many dangers ought to be brought into consideration³⁹.

³⁵ Cf. pp. 161–2 ff.; and nn. 45–51 below.

³⁶ No more need be true of coins showing Diana Lucifera; e.g. *BMC.*, V, 237, nos. 420–421.

³⁷ Gagé 65: "Aux jeux de Septime Sévère, un jeune enfant impérial était présent dans son berceau, et c'est un peu en son honneur que l'empereur et les quindécemvirs déroulaient tant de conscience le ritual archaïque de jeux séculaires".

³⁸ Gagé 54.

³⁹ Hence the parallels cited by Gagé 55, do not quite prove his point. There is not very much of immediate relevant in Virgil's *4th Eclogue*, whereas Martial, 6, 3, 11.2–4, Gagé is forced to ascribe to "une grossesse déclarée de Domitia en 90, sans d'ailleurs que nous entendions parler ensuite d'aucune naissance" (*ibid.*, n. 2), and, at any rate, the poem was written two years *after* Domitian's Saecular Games. Poets, (and senators like Manlius Fuscus, reading a speech in the senate, or Calpurnius Maximus, moving a *Senatus Consultum*) could be quite sanguine in their references to the imperial family, but this

The insistence of the *Acta Ludorum* on the *Felicitas* of Severus' house does however throw into relief one of the major purposes of the games, to use a medium of religious sanction in order to cloak brewing trouble within the imperial house, and to depict the members of the Severan house as divine agents, sent by heaven to inaugurate a new *saeculum* of happiness. This use of the *Felicitas*-theme is strongly connected with its habitual use in contexts which deal with the birth of an Emperor and with dynastic succession to the Emperor's throne. A few words must be said about this theme in general before further details about its use in Severus' propaganda may be added.

It is a fact that hardly requires any further demonstration that *Felicitas* is frequently used to describe the element of divine grace which blesses an Emperor's reign with victory, bliss, and prosperity⁴⁰. One special nuance of this theme is however of special significance for the purpose of the present discussion — i.e. one of its particular connotations implying the divine grace immanent in the Emperor's own person *by virtue of his special birth*. This close association between *Felicitas* and birth may not be unconnected with its etymological affinity with *Fecunditas*, still felt in contemporary Latin⁴¹. Thus, for instance, we find *Felicitas* as early as Augustus as the divine power responsible for his birth in an inscription relative to the institution of the imperial cult at Narbo ('*qua die eum saeculi felicitas orbi terrarum rectorem edidit*') and a statue of *Felicitas* dedicated to the mater Augustae et Fundi⁴² leads a panegyrist to associate an Emperor's birth with his father's *Felicitas*: Pacatus says of Theodosius' father 'scire obvium est qua praeditus fuerit felicitate te genuit'⁴³.

Only one step separates between this *Felicitas* and its exploitation in

does not mean that their words have to be taken at their face value, or that any concrete measure of the government can be understood on the basis of their extravagant statements.

⁴⁰ Cf. Amit.

⁴¹ See Ernout-Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (Paris⁴, 1959-60) s.vv. *fecundus* and *felix*; cf. Walde-Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg³, 1938-56) s.vv. For a list of references to places where *felix* is still used of human beings in this original sense, see *TLL* s.v. *felix* I.A.3.

⁴² Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reign of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford, 1955) 100 A, 11.4.-16; Suet. *Tib.* 5.

⁴³ *Paneg.* 2(12), 6, 1.

purely dynastic contexts. In literary sources we find it most explicitly in a relatively late period. An anonymous panegyrist asserts in a speech where the fiction of Constantine's descent from Claudius Gothicus is developed: "*Quod quidem mihi deorum immortalium munus et primum videtur et maximum, in lucem statim venire felicem et ea quae alii vix totius vitae laboribus conferuntur iam domi parta suscipere*"⁴⁴. The same idea recurs in a much disputed passage of the *HA*, this time with reference to Constantine's father, Constantius Chlorus⁴⁵: a series of bogus oracles is adduced to prove that '*genus Claudii ad felicitatem rei publicae divinitus constitutum*', and hence '*Constantium, divini generis virum... et Augustae ipsum familiae esse et Augustos multos de se daturum*'.

The coinage of the Antonine dynasty proves that this dynastic function of *Felicitas* was not merely a figure of speech used by encomiasts in the 4th century, but a favored theme of imperial propaganda as early as in the 2nd century. TEMPORUM FELICITAS occurs on a fine *aureus* of Antoninus Pius with a reverse type of two crossed cornucopiae surmounted each by the head of a child⁴⁶. This type is a clear imitation of an uninscribed reverse of Drusus⁴⁷. Mattingly relates this coin to the birth of Lucilla and a twin brother⁴⁸. Even more explicit is a reverse type of Faustina, inscribed *SAECULI FELICI(TAS)* which depicts a throne on which two infants are playing, each crowned by a star⁴⁹. Under Marcus Aurelius similar reverses commemorate the birth of Commodus and his twin brother⁵⁰. There seems to be very little doubt about the interpretation of this type: *Saeculi Felicitas* is the supernatural entity that guarantees bliss to the empire by blessing the emperor with progeny to inherit the throne after his death. A conscious play on the *Felicitas-Fecunditas* imagery is revealed by another series of

⁴⁴ *Paneg.* 6(7), 3.2.

⁴⁵ *HA, Claud.* 10, 1-7. It would be superfluous and futile to list all the places where this idea is expressed, and to enlarge on all the forms and nuances which it assumes. Suffice it to say that cognate concepts such as *Fortuna, Providentia Deorum, Fatum (or Fata)* etc., may appear in a capacity similar to that of *Felicitas*.

⁴⁶ *BMC.*, IV, 97, nos. 678-679.

⁴⁷ *BMC.*, I, 133, nos. 95-97.

⁴⁸ *BMC.*, IV, lxxvii, n. 5.

⁴⁹ *BMC.*, IV, 161'.

⁵⁰ *BMC.*, IV, 403, nos. 136-140; 534-535, nos. 936-941; 543, no. 991.

coin-types, this time inscribed *TEMPOR(UM) FELICIT(AS)*. Felicitas appears as a woman holding a child on each arm with two others standing on her right and on her left⁵¹. This group of types is a repetition of the representation of *FECUNDITAS AUGUSTA* on another series of coins⁵².

Commodus, the first porphyrogenitus in imperial history, was also the first emperor to assume the title *Felix* in his official titulature. True, this title was assumed by Commodus not immediately after his accession to the throne but in 185⁵³, and since a fragment of the Arab translation of Galen's Περὶ Ἡθῶν dates the fall of Perennis in the same year⁵⁴, there ought to be little doubt about the immediate occasion of its assumption. Furthermore one cannot help the impression that despite the chronological discrepancy, Herodian's fantastic story about the miraculous intervention of a δαιμόνιος τις τύχη during the Capitolia of A.D. 182 to save Commodus from the hands of his Praetorian prefect is connected with this title, and that it therefore derives from Commodus' propaganda⁵⁵. Yet, there is sufficient evidence to show that Commodus himself viewed his *Felicitas* in a much wider context than just his successful escape from Perennis' plot. And the very fact that he was accused of imitating Sulla⁵⁶ indicates both why his predecessors studiously avoided this title, and why he himself took it only when the fall of Perennis helped him to emancipate himself completely from Senatorial influence⁵⁷. For the

⁵¹ *BMC.*, IV, 536 nos. 949-955; 542-543, nos. 996-998.

⁵² *BMC.*, IV, 398, nos. 89-90, 95'; 399'.

⁵³ *BMC.*, IV, clix; cf. Ruggiero, III, 44 (s.v. *felix*).

⁵⁴ See Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1905-13) IV, 514-515, for text and interpretation.

⁵⁵ Herod., 1, 9, 5.

⁵⁶ *HA, Comm.*, 8, 1.

⁵⁷ Perennis' distinct anti-Senatorial policy is more than probably a myth based on the inadequate evidence of Herodian and of the *HA*, which cannot prevail against the testimony of a senatorial eye-witness, Cassius Dio; see G.M. Bersanetti, "Perenne e Commodo," *Athenaeum*, N.S. 29 (1951) 151-170, defending Dio 73(72), 9, 1-2;10.1. A full discussion of this problem lies beyond the confines of the present study, but it seems that Bersanetti's view should be preferred to that of E. Grosso, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo* (Turin, 1964) 164 ff. (cf. also F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964) 128, who is undecided on this problem). If Dio's evidence is accepted the not unlikely conclusion will follow that Perennis was a moderating influence on Commodus, and that the young Emperor could emancipate himself completely from the impact of the Senatorial ideology only after his removal.

Senate the title Felix was full of ill-boding associations,⁵⁸ whatever the circumstances of its assumption and the explicit motives for assuming it⁵⁹.

Commodus' coinage reveals this Emperor's true notion of the title *Felix* with which he allowed himself to be honoured. For him it was the very supernatural principle to which he owed his imperial power. A number of reverses inscribed *FELIC(ITATI) PERPETUAE AUG(USTI)* depict the emperor holding the cornucopiae in his left hand, clasping his right hand with Felicitas, who holds a sceptre in her left hand⁶⁰. Like other deities, *Felicitas* becomes very closely associated with Commodus when she is introduced on his coinage as *FELIC(ITAS) COMM(ODIANA)*⁶¹. And a new figure makes its appearance, that of *FORTUNA FELIX*, a fusion of *Fortuna* and *Felicitas*⁶². The degree of fusion between *Felicitas* and Commodus' own personality is demonstrable especially in the fact that Rome, which became in A.D. 190 Col(onia) L(ucia) An(toniniana) Com(modiana) was styled by him also, according to Dio, ἀθάνατος εὐτυχῆς κολωνία τῆς οἰκουμένης.⁶³ In other words, Rome and through her the entire οἰκουμένη was made *Felix* by the fact that it belonged to him⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ See *TLL* s.v. *felix*, IIIA1, vol.VI, col.440, ll. 33-41, for the evil associations of this title since Sulla.

⁵⁹ It is therefore obvious that when J. Beaujeu, *La religion romaine à l'apogée de l'Empire I: la politique religieuse des Antonins* (Paris, 1955) 395, asserts that Commodus became *Felix* "à l'instar de Sylla", he does not distinguish properly between real and imputed motives.

⁶⁰ *BMC.*, IV, 752, no. 337.

⁶¹ *BMC.*, IV, 746+.

⁶² *BMC.*, IV, 735, no. 252; 738, no. 262; 821‡; 823*.

⁶³ *HA, Comm.*, 8, 6; cf. *BMC.*, IV, 825, nos. 643-644; 827-828, nos. 658-659; cf. Dio, 73(72), 15, 2.

⁶⁴ The possibility cannot be entirely excluded that precisely the instance on the *Felicitas* of Commodus as an element of divine grace which he had inherited from his father led Dio, 72(71), 36, 4, to the remark "ἔν δ'οὖν τοῦτο ἐς τὴν οὐκ εὐδαιμονίαν αὐτοῦ (sc. τοῦ Μάρκου) συνηρέχθη ὅτι υἱὸν καὶ θρέψας καὶ παιδεύσας ὡς οἷόν τε ἦν ἄριστα, πλεῖστον αὐτοῦ ὄσον διήμαρτε" cf. *HA, Sev.*, 21, 5-6: "quid Marco felicius fuisset, si Commodum non reliquisset heredem? quid Severo Septimio si Bassianum nec genuisset?" In other words, only a worthy emperor who had bequeathed his throne to a worthy son can be regarded as *Felix* in the true sense of this word; cf. *Paneg.*, 6(7), 8, 2: "Di boni, quanta Constantium Pium etiam in excessu suo felicitate donastis! Imperator transitum facturus in caelum vidit quem reliquerat heredem."

The idea that the *Felicitas* of the imperial house is the best guarantee of the *Felicitas* of the Empire, and is therefore the supreme justification of dynastic succession, is preeminent on the coinage of Septimius Severus. Julia Domna, the mother of Severus' two prospective heirs, emerges as a major representative of the *Felicitas* of his family. On the reverses of her coins she is associated with *Felicitas*⁶⁵, *Fortuna Felix*⁶⁶, and *Venus Felix*⁶⁷. A series of coins inscribed SAECULI FELICITAS are of special interest, since they relate the idea of a new, happy *saeculum* to the *Felicitas* of the imperial dynasty, and thus help to understand the role of this theme in the *acta* of the Saecular games: they show Isis wearing a *polos* and holding the baby Hermes in her arms, with her foot on a prow, and with a rudder behind her⁶⁸. Isis is not an altogether new figure on the imperial coinage, but the coupling of this fertility goddess with the notion of *Felicitas* is a new feature. Even more explicit are other coins, bearing the reverse legend FELICITAS SAECULI, the type being a bust of Domna between the busts of Caracalla and Geta⁶⁹.

Caution is however requisite in the use of numismatic evidence for establishing how the Emperor wanted to be regarded by his subjects. The question of who gave detailed instructions for the execution of each singular coin-type, or for the wording of each singular legend, remains to be answered. It is highly doubtful whether serious Emperors could find time for such trifles. A stern warning of the late A.H.M. Jones⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *BMC.*, V, 160, nos. 22-23; 367†; 311‡.

⁶⁶ *BMC.*, V, 160, nos. 25-29 (especially 29, which shows a small naked figure standing to the left of *Fortuna*, a clear implication of her function). See also Gnechi II, 76 no. 6, which shows on its obverse Domna, holding a statuette of *Concordia* in her right (see further below on the rôle of this divine personification in the Severan propaganda, especially after 202) and the *cornucopiae* in her left; the reverse shows *Fortuna*, resting her rudder on a globe, a statue of *Salus* behind her and a boy playing at her feet. The reverse legend is FORTUNAE FELICI.

⁶⁷ *BMC.*, V, 167-168, nos. 85-89; 279, nos. 619-621; 310, nos. 775-777; 313, no. 794.

⁶⁸ *BMC.*, V, 166-167, nos. 72-82; 279 nos. 617-618; 310+.

⁶⁹ *BMC.*, V, 192; 203, no. 255; 231, nos. 379-380. Of great interest is 279, a medallion with the reverse legend FELICITATI PE(RPETUAE) VOTA SUSC(EPTA), which shows Domna surrounded by three female figures, one of whom offers her a globe (Gnechi II, 76, no. 5).

⁷⁰ A.H.M. Jones, "Numismatics and History", in *Essays in Roman Coinage presented to Harold Mattingly* (Oxford, 1956), 3 ff. esp. 15-16. This article is a useful reminder against the prevalent tendency to treat coinage not merely as a reflection of imperial propaganda but as the most important vehicle for its conveyance (e.g. Amit 3-4). The question of how

must be taken into account if overhasty conclusions about imperial policy on the basis of coins only are to be avoided. In so far as coins reflect themes of imperial propaganda, they do so only after those themes have filtered through the channels of mint-routine in the more usual cases or through the personal prism of mint-officials and mint-artists. The novel and the exceptional on coins should capture the scholar's attention only if he realizes that propaganda on coinage is in this respect not fundamentally different from propaganda in literature and historiography, where beside what the Emperor wanted to be propounded in his interests there is always the personality of the author to be reckoned with. The same amount of carefulness is advisable in the use of both types of evidence.

Since imperial coinage is therefore only one of the secondary reflections of imperial propaganda it may be interesting to observe how this same propaganda was reflected in public acts and monuments of the provincials — in other words, how those to whom this propaganda was directed responded to it. A public thanksgiving to Julia Domna in Athens was to be closely associated with the cult of Athene Polias, and, more important, with that of Agathe Tyche⁷¹, and the close affinity between this divine personification and *Felicitas* can hardly be missed. Furthermore, the coins of Laodicea and Gabala reveal that in both places Domna was identified with the Tyche of the city — a measure closely akin to that of the Athenians but not entirely identical with it. A dated coin of Gabala reveals that the theme belongs to 194⁷². Was this a reaction to the propaganda campaign which was to culminate in Severus'

imperial propaganda was disseminated in the first place, when it was most urgently needed, in order to respond to situations in which there was no time to wait for its appearance on coins, is highly intricate, and cannot be dealt with here in detail. The *hypomnemata* which were distributed (according to Dio, 80(79), 2, 1) by Macrinus among his soldiers are undoubtedly a useful indication of how the first and direct appeal of imperial propaganda was made. Such *hypomnemata* were used when the Emperor was not on the spot to address his soldiers personally in an *adlocutio* (written versions of such adlocutiones were occasionally appended to letters to the Senate, which were themselves a means of conveying official propaganda; see Dio, 79(78), 38, 2).

⁷¹ *IG*, ed. min., II, 1076.

⁷² *BM, Gr., Galatia, etc.*, 258, nos. 81-82. Cf. Hunter, *Coll. III*, 200, no. 6.

fictitious adoption into the Antonine dynasty in the following year⁷³? At any rate, it reveals that the tendency to associate Domna with *Felicitas* and with cognate concepts (such as *Fortuna*) was present already at the beginning of Severus' reign.

Other examples where this theme is closely associated not with Domna, but with other members of the imperial family, may be added. Thus for example reverses of both Severus and Caracalla show Severus and his two sons seated on a platform extending a gift to a citizen standing in front of them, whereas a figure, in all likelihood that of *Libertas* is standing beside them. The legend is FELICITAS SAECULI⁷⁴. Two *Dupondii* of Caracalla bearing the same reverse legend show much more elaborate types with the same import. On one Severus and his sons are sitting on a platform extending their right hands to four other figures: nine figures are depicted on a frieze on the front of the platform⁷⁵. On the other they are depicted in the same position, extending their right hands towards a large urn into which a citizen dips his right hand. Three rows of studs are shown in front of the platform⁷⁶. This list could be expanded still further, but this is in fact needless. Some time after 198 Caracalla assumed the titles *Pius Felix*, a combination introduced into

⁷³ See no. 2 above. A full discussion of this fictitious adoption lies outside the scope of the present study. It is however important to point out that already Hasebröck, *loc. cit.*, observed that it was not based merely on a legal formula but also on intimations of divine favour such as the omen related by Dio 75(74), 3.1 - Severus' dream on the eve of his wedding with Domna about Faustina, preparing his *lectus genialis*. Omens of this kind might signify that the *Felicitas* of the Antonine house was now extended to Severus' family. I intend a more detailed examination of this question elsewhere. For the time being suffice it to observe that on Severus' dated coins of the Roman mint (such coins of Eastern mints which only copy similar types and legends of Pescennius Niger are immaterial for the purposes of the present discussion) *Felicitas* occurs for the first time in 195, together with the fifth imperial acclamation (*BMC.*, V, 138, nos. 560-561), during the first Parthian War, when growing tension between Severus and his Caesar, Clodius Albinus, was accompanied by Severus' growing insistence on the right of his own son, Caracalla, to succeed him (in more detail Z. Rubin, *Supernatural and Religious Sanction of the Emperor's Rule under the Severi* unpublished diss. Oxford, 1971, 255-276). The theme is resumed together with the sixth imperial acclamation (*BMC.*, V, 140 $\frac{1}{2}$) and then together with the seventh (*BMC.*, V, 140-141). Of special significance are the *sestertii* of the seventh acclamation, bearing the legend DIVI M PII F(ilius) etc.

⁷⁴ *BMC.*, V, 208, 217 no. 326.

⁷⁵ *BMC.*, V, 332, no. 824.

⁷⁶ *BMC.*, V, 332, no. 825.

the official imperial titulature by his deified “uncle”, Commodus⁷⁷. On his coins this title was to be officially endorsed in 213⁷⁸. About the same time Domna herself was to become *Pia Felix*⁷⁹.

The *Ludi Saeculares* were the most solemn occasions on which the *Felicitas* of the Severi could be displayed as part and parcel of the state-religion. The new *saeculum* was to be the age when the Empire would reach the apex of Felicity under the new dynasty. This type of propaganda should be understood, as mentioned above, in the framework of an attempt to conceal the growing discord within the imperial house. If it was to have any impact at all it was necessary to convince public opinion that not only *Felicitas* but also its indispensable concomitant, *Concordia*, was immanent in the family of L. Septimius Severus.

The *Felicitas*-theme is closely linked with another theme whose prominence on Severus' coins in the years of Caracalla's marriage with Plautilla is unprecedented — the theme of *Concordia Felix*⁸⁰. On an *aureus* and on three *denarii* the legend CONCORDIA FELIX (hitherto used only once on a medallion of Lucius Verus and Lucilla)⁸¹ is used as a caption for a picture of *dextrarum iunctio* between Caracalla, who holds a roll in his left hand, and Plautilla, whilst *Concordia* in the background is placing an arm on the shoulder of each of the pair⁸². The same legend recurs on two *denarii* of Plautilla⁸³. The type which it describes is simpler than that of Caracalla, and resembles more closely the type of Lucius' medallion which introduced this legend. Caracalla and Plautilla are clasping hands, but the figure of *Concordia* herself is missing.

⁷⁷ Ruggiero III, 45, (s.v. *Felix*), for a list of references to inscriptions.

⁷⁸ *BMC.*, V, cxcii — cxciv.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ In the study of M. Amit, “*Concordia* ideal politique et instrument de propagande,” *Iura* XIII (1962), 133 ff., there is only a general survey of the numismatic evidence concerning the use of this theme under the Empire, and, in so far as the reign of Septimius Severus is concerned (*ibid.*, 155-157), not enough stress is put on the special circumstances of its propaganda - circumstances which allow a clearer insight into the functioning of the imperial propaganda-machine than is normally given by the coins alone.

⁸¹ Gnechi II, 50, no. 2.

⁸² *BMC.*, V, 206-207, nos. 271-274.

⁸³ *BMC.*, V, 237, nos. 418-419.

Concordia Felix is closely associated with *CONCORDIA AETERNA*, a theme which makes its first appearance on the coinage of Septimius Severus, as the identity of the reverse type that goes with both clearly proves⁸⁴. Other coins with the same reverse legend show the busts of Domna and Severus on a crescent⁸⁵. The legend *CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM* is habitually coupled with types designed to show the harmonious relations between the two brothers, Caracalla and Geta⁸⁶.

The response to at least one facet of this extensive propaganda campaign is discernible on the arch of Septimius Severus in Lepcis Magna, and since the erection of this arch is a direct consequence of Severus' visit to his mother-town, it may be considered an even more direct response to imperial propaganda than the coins are in some cases. On a relief of the southern attic⁸⁷ Severus is represented clasping hands with one of his sons, and holding in his left an object which may be interpreted as either a *lituus* or a roll. The other son is watching between them. Above his head the Tyche of Lepcis is represented, with a mural crown on her head, the *cornucopiae* in her left hand and a *patera* in her right. Behind the son clasping hands with Severus, Hercules is shown, holding a club. Bartoccini identified the figure clasping hands with Severus as Geta, and the watching figure as Caracalla. The object in Severus' hand he regarded as a roll from which the Emperor had just read an important declaration. This declaration, he suggested, was the assumption of the *toga virilis* and the title *princeps iuventutis* by Geta.

Subsequently his interpretation was contested, and at least on one point he seems to have been convincingly refuted⁸⁸. The figure clasping hands with Severus is not Geta but Caracalla, whereas the watching

⁸⁴ cf. *BMC.*, V, 230, no. 390.

⁸⁵ E.g. *BMC.*, V, 185⁺.

⁸⁶ E.g. *BMC.*, V, 329*⁺; for other examples see *ibid.*, index V (legends). The legend is always the same, but there is a variation of types.

⁸⁷ R. Bartoccini, 114-129, figs. 80-94, esp. fig. 81, cf. E. Vergara Caffarelli & G. Caputo pl. 42-43. A long promised complete publication of the arch (see J.B. Ward-Perkins 231, cf. J. Guey 74 n. 2) does not seem to have appeared as yet.

⁸⁸ G. Guidi, "Il restauro del castello di Tripoli", *Africa Italiana* 5 (1933) 130, and in more detail, P.W. Townsend, 512 ff.

figure is that of Geta. Townsend⁸⁹ suggested that the divine figure behind Geta was that of Concordia, and that the whole scene depicts no concrete historical event, but the concord in the imperial house. This interpretation however has its flaws too. The *dextrarum iunctio* scene is the centre of a wider scene which does give the impression of a representation of a concrete event. The figure behind Geta is not *Concordia* but the Tyche of Lepcis, since Concordia is unimaginable with a mural crown⁹⁰. Both she and Hercules are elevated above the three figures at the centre of the scene, and they may be a realistic representation of statues which stood on the spot where the event in question took place.

The fact that the relief describes a concrete event is recognized by Mundle, though she accepts Townsend's interpretation in broad outline⁹¹. She suggests that the scene shown is that of Severus introducing his sons to the citizens of Lepcis by formally shaking hands with them in the Forum⁹². This interpretation fails to account for the object held by Severus in his left hand. According to Townsend, followed by Mundle, this is not a roll but a *lituus*. Judged merely by its form, it is not unlikely that the object is just that, but the way in which Severus rests it on his arm, rather than gripping it in his palm and holding it in an upright position, seems to rule out this interpretation. On the other hand the position of this object on Severus' open palm is characteristic of an open roll⁹³. It therefore appears that Bartoccini was after all right in suggesting that the scene on the relief captures Severus and his sons at the moment when he has finished reading something from a roll.

⁸⁹ Townsend, *ibid.*, followed by J.P. Ward-Perkins, "Severan Art and Architecture at Lepcis Magna", *JRS*, 38 (1948) 79, *id.* "The Arch of Septimius Severus etc." 228 f., and Guey n. 1. See also list of captions to the plates in Vergara Caffarelli etc. nos. 42-43. The caption to no. 42 mentions tutelary deities: does this imply a preference for the identification of the figure behind Geta as the Tyche of Lepcis?

⁹⁰ Mundle 136-137.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

⁹² "Severus stellt nun den Bürgern seiner Heimatstadt seine Söhne und Nachfolger vor. Dieses konkrete Ereignis wurde dann auf unserem Relief nach der Art der bekannten Darstellungen der Concordia Augustorum stilisiert und festgehalten" (*ibid.*).

⁹³ Bartoccini fig. 81, cf. Vergara Caffarelli etc. pl. 43. The famous bas-relief of an augur in the museum of Florence shows what should be regarded as the habitual way of holding a *lituus*.

Even Bartoccini's other suggestion concerning the nature of the event shown may be upheld, in spite of his confusion between Severus' sons. The question why Severus is clasping Caracalla's hand in a scene which describes the bestowal of an honour on Geta is likewise easily answered, if due attention is paid to an inscription from Athens describing Geta's promotion to the rank of Augustus⁹⁴, whose relevance to the discussion is unfortunately ignored by both Bartoccini and Mundle. The inscription speaks of the holy day on which the "ἁθάνατος ὁμόνοια"⁹⁵ (*Concordia Aeterna*) of the Augusti Severus and Caracalla was revealed to all mankind through a common edict of both; for on that day they elevated Geta τῇ οὐρανίᾳ ψήφῳ καὶ κρίσει⁹⁶ to an equal share in power. The *Concordia Aeterna* is so obviously a theme of Severus' propaganda that there can be hardly any doubt that the Athenian decree reflects in a somewhat embellished manner the official presentation of the measure. It would therefore appear that Severus' propaganda did tend to depict stages in the promotion of Geta as the expression of the combined will of the two Augusti acting in unison and in concord and what was true of a measure taken in 209, may be true of that taken six years earlier. The only question which remains to be asked is could the bestowal of the *toga virilis* and of the title *princeps iuventutis* take place in Lepcis? If the visit to Lepcis took place some time between the beginning of 203 and the first month of 204 — and it is probably then rather in 207 that it took place⁹⁷ — no chronological obstacle exists. A passage of the *Vita Severi* which seems to imply that Geta was invested with the *toga virilis* in Rome, during the *decennalia*, at about the time when Caracalla married Plautilla⁹⁸, betrays all the usual symptoms of the confusion caused by the late editing of the *HA*, and is therefore a very bad guide for chronology⁹⁹. On the other hand the bestowal of the *toga virilis* on

⁹⁴ *IG*, ed. min., II 1077.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 17, esp. 1, 19.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.24.

⁹⁷ Guey 55-67, cf. Birley 218 f ('the winter of 202-203'); *contra*, A.M. McCaann, "The Portraits of Septimius Severus", *MAAR* 30 (1968) 74 ff., criticized by L. Foucher, "Sur les portraits africains de Septime Sévère", *BCTH NS* 6 (1970) 199-212.

⁹⁸ *HA, Sev.*, 14, 7: "Getae minori filio togam virilem dedit, maiori Plautiani filiam uxorem".

⁹⁹ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Hasebröck 108-109. Mattingly, *BMC.*, V, clv, misdates Geta's first consulate in 203, and consequently those coins describing Geta as *princeps iuventutis* but not as yet consul, between 200-203 (*ibid.* cxliii).

Geta in Lepcis Magna, as a sign of special honour to his mother town, is just the type of action one might expect of Septimius Severus.

The close connection between Severus' building activity in Lepcis and the *Concordia*-theme seems to be borne out by a fragment of the architrave inscription of the temple in the Lepcitan Forum Severianum¹⁰⁰. The fragment shows very clearly the characters ONCO. J. Reynolds tentatively suggests that the reading should be "(C)onco(rdia)"¹⁰¹, and in fact it is hard to see what else it could have been. Severus' coins as well seem to indicate that Lepcis was the scene of a great demonstration of the *Concordia* of Severus' family. For a series of coins inscribed CONCORDIA AVGG shows Caracalla and Geta in a *dextrarum iunctio*, each of them crowned by one of the two patron deities of Lepcis, Liber and Hercules¹⁰².

A proof that this same building activity was likewise associated with the *Felicitas*-theme crops up in a late source. According to Procopius Justinian reconstructed the "βασίλεια" built by Severus in this city in commemoration of his "εὐδαίμονία"¹⁰³. Thus we have further proof of the close connection between the *Felicitas*-theme and the *Concordia*-theme in Septimius Severus' propaganda. The fusion of both these themes in the coin-legend of CONCORDIA FELIX¹⁰⁴, serving as a caption to a coin-type which publicizes the harmonious relationships between Caracalla and Plautilla, is perhaps symptomatic of the way in which imperial propaganda sometimes tended to function. Excessive stress on any theme ought to excite suspicion.

The points raised in the present study may be summarized as follows.

Severus' propaganda in the first decade of the third century exhibits a great insistence on themes of dynastic harmony. It has to be viewed in the context of concrete developments in the imperial family, and it is closely linked with concrete historical events.

The *Ludi Saeculares* offered the opportunity of propounding again the theme of dynastic *Felicitas* and tying it with the religious concept of *Saeculum*.

¹⁰⁰ IRT, 815.

¹⁰¹ J. Reynolds, "Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania. A supplement." *PBSR*, 23 (1955) 133.

¹⁰² See the reference in n. 82 above.

¹⁰³ Procop., *De Aedif.*, 6, 4, 5.

¹⁰⁴ See p.167, and nn. 81-83 above.

The visit of the Emperor's family to Lepcis Magna was in all likelihood the occasion of the assumption of the *toga virilis* and the title *princeps iuventutis* by Geta. This ceremony in turn offered the opportunity of propounding the theme of *Concordia* with an unprecedented stress, linking this theme to that of the Severan *Felicitas*. Lepcis was not the only place where the dissemination of such ideas was encouraged. The *Concordia Aeterna* of the imperial family, manifesting itself in concrete political measures, is expressed again in an Athenian monument celebrating the elevation of Caracalla to the rank of Augustus.

The word concrete is a key-word in this analysis — a reminder against attempts to view such themes as an expression of any consistent imperial ideology, any coherent political program, or any conscious, novel attitude towards the state religion.