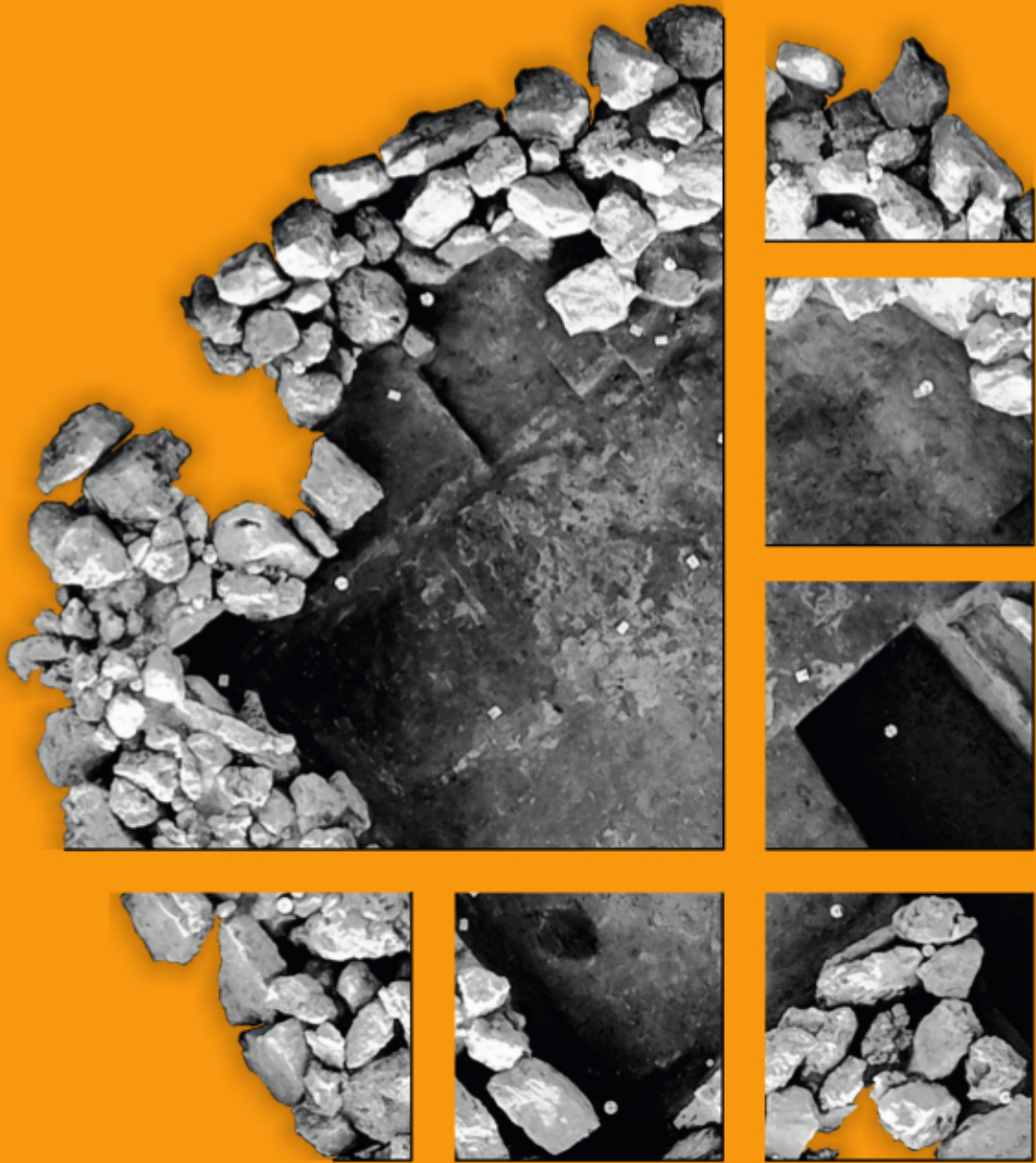


# DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 4. | 2016

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Budapest 2016

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Contact: [dissarch@btk.elte.hu](mailto:dissarch@btk.elte.hu)

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# Britannia on Roman coins

LAJOS JUHÁSZ

*Institute of Archaeological Sciences  
Eötvös Loránd University  
jlajos3@gmail.com*

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## **Abstract**

*Britannia's image on Roman coins expresses the island's special role in the Empire, which even today has on influence on how Britain is personified. The various representations reflect historical events of conquest, rebellion, peace and sometimes even the special relation with the emperor, all bearing witness to her peculiar importance.*

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## **Introduction**

Britain had a long and rich history as part of the Roman Empire that has fascinated historians, archaeologists and laics alike for centuries. Luckily with the ever changing interpretations, new theories and materials at hand, interest in it does not seem to fade. This passion and influence of Antiquity can still be seen and felt today, for example on the British coins (*Fig. 1*), which are still based on these Roman forerunners.<sup>1</sup> But how did the Romans themselves perceive this peculiar island? What can be gathered from the existing representations? The most extensive source available today are the personifications of Britain, mostly found on coins.<sup>2</sup>

The British Isles known as *Κασσιτερίδες* that is, Tin Islands appeared in the Greek literary sources as early as the classical times.<sup>3</sup> The Mediterranean world maintained commercial contact with the islands to secure the supply of its denominating raw material. Rome came into direct contact with Britain in 55–54 BC. when Caesar led two expeditions during his Gallic wars.<sup>4</sup> Augustus intended several campaigns against the island, but postponed them all.<sup>5</sup> Caligula was the next to try to invade Britain, which however ended in a fiasco.<sup>6</sup> In any case the preparations were made enabling Claudius to subdue Britain in 43 AD.<sup>7</sup>

1 Britannia first appeared on the reverses of Charles II.

2 The personification of Britannia is also found on a 1st century relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias and a 3rd century mosaic from Zeugma (Belkis). These are however of completely different character so they will not be discussed in this article. More on the relief see ERIM 1982, 164–165; SMITH 1987, 115–117; LIMC Britannia 3; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 11; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 1. For the mosaic see PARLASCA 1983, 294/5; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 15; IGLS I 80/115 (erroneously with double T); LIMC Britannia 1; KRISELEIT 1985, 26–29; KRISELEIT 2000, 45–51; TOYNBEE 1934, 64, note 5.

3 Herod. 3, 115; FRERE 1967, 16; DNP Britannia 783.

4 Caes., *de bell.* 5, 8–23; cf. Strab. 4, 5, 3; FRERE 1967, 29–38.

5 Instead he was satisfied with having commercial and diplomatic relations that generated more income than the conquest. Cass. Dio 49, 38; 53, 22; 53, 25; Strab. 4, 5, 3; FRERE 1967, 42–44.

6 Suet., *Caligula* 44–46; Cass. Dio 59, 25; FRERE 1967, 57–58; DNP Britannia 783.

7 The *Catuvellauni* served as the *casus belli*, who by attacking the neighbouring tribes forced Verica, the *Atrebat* chief to flee and seek military assistance from the Romans. OSTROWSKI 1990, 117; KIEDORF 2005, 71–72; HOUGHTALIN 1996, 151; FRERE 1967, 61–66.



Fig. 1. Reverse of the 2 pound coin minted since 2015.

The emperor's intention was probably to gain military recognition, thus securing his position on the throne. This is also why he personally led the attack on Camulodunum.<sup>8</sup> His successes were remembered with great celebrations for years to which the coin reverses depicting a triumphal arch with the DE BRITANN inscription also reflect.<sup>9</sup> In the following period the Romans conquered the island as far as today's Southern Scotland. Instead of new conquests, Hadrian has put the emphasis on defending the northern border that was also justified by the revolts in the early years of his reign.<sup>10</sup> During his imperial visit in 122 AD. he implemented a number of new measures, the most important of which was the erection of a 120 km long wall between Tyne and Solway.<sup>11</sup> His example was followed by Antoninus Pius,

who had built the Antonine Wall 160 km further north, but was forced to abandon it already in 165 AD.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Britain broke away for 10 years from the Roman Empire and gained temporary independence. In 285 AD Maximian appointed Carausius, after distinguishing himself in the conflict with the *Bagaudae*, to lead the northern fleet and protect the Empire against the Frank and Saxon invasions.<sup>13</sup> However the newly installed leader soon fled to Britain to escape his death penalty and built a steady regime lasting until 293 AD. By this date the newly appointed *Caesar*, Constantius Chlorus captured Bononia (Boulogne-sur-Mer), which led to the assassination of Carausius by Allectus. Britain lost her independence after the invasion of Constantius in 296 AD.

## Literary sources

The figure of Britannia also appears in the epigraphic records.<sup>14</sup> A statue base from Eburacum was decorated with the *Britanniae | sanctae | P(ublius) Nikomedes | Augg(ustorum) nn(ostorum) | libertus* inscription.<sup>15</sup> At Castle Hill by the Antonine Wall, Q. Pisentius, *praefectus cohortis III Gallorum* set up an altar to the *Campestris* and Britannia.<sup>16</sup> L. Septimius Tertinus, the centurion of the *legio II Italica* dedicated an altar to Noreia and Britannia near Slovenska Bistrica in Noricum.<sup>17</sup> The find suggests that a part of this military unit participated in Septimius Severus' campaign in Britain.<sup>18</sup>

8 The Latin name of the city, Colonia Claudia Victricensis also refers to the emperor's personal achievement.

9 RIC I 8–15. See also Cass. Dio 60, 22, 1. In 47 AD. Aulus Plautius, the actual leader of the offensive was only granted an ovation, where he was personally accompanied by Claudius. Suet., *Claudius* 24, 3.

10 SHA Hadrian 5, 2; Fronto *de bello Parthico* 2; FREIRE 1967, 125–129.

11 HALFMANN 1986, 190; BIRLEY 1997, 123–141; ZÄHRNT 2005, 129; TOYNBEE 1934, 53–54.

12 FREIRE 1967, 141–150; DNP Britannia 783.

13 Maximian accused Carausius of withholding a part of the booty retaken from the Germanic invaders, therefore sentenced him to death. FREIRE 1967, 335–340; KIENAST 2004, 278.

14 RE Britannia 879; BIRLEY 1986, 66–67.

15 CIL VII 232; RIB I 643.

16 CIL VII 1129 – RIB I 2195.

17 CIL III/2 5300; EDH HD057855.

18 Winkler 1977, 232–233.



The centurion of the *legio II Augusta*, M. Cocceius Firmus dedicated an altar not for the province, but for its Genius by the Antonine Wall.<sup>19</sup> The GENIO BRITANNI also appears on Carausius' coins in the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> The *provincia Britannia* set up an inscription to the *Numini Caesaris Augusti* in London, which reflects provincial consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

The evidence point out that the cult of Britannia was mostly practised among the troops.<sup>22</sup> Two inscriptions were found at the Antonine Wall, when the personification of the province also flourished on coin reverses (BRI-1/2-6). The efficiency of the imperial propaganda is reflected by the fact that her cult was mostly practised by soldiers, that is, those to whom the military achievements were owed to. It can also be deduced that the phenomenon was spread from the central government, since the dedications were made by officers and an imperial *libertus*. The efficiency of the propaganda is reflected by the inscription from Noricum mentioning Britannia in the time of Septimius Severus, that is, 70 years after the reign of Antoninus Pius in a remote province.

## Depictions

The personifications of Britannia on coins can be sorted into five different groups. The personification of the island does not possess a unique attribute by which she can be identified beyond doubts. Apart from the BRI-2-3 she is holding a spear on the coins and on BRI-1 and BRI-5 an additional shield. Britannia was depicted in the greatest numbers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> century coins. Thanks to Carausius' British Empire she also appeared several times at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> This is indeed noteworthy, because in this period the province personifications were rarely employed.

### **BRI-1**<sup>24</sup>

The most important depiction of Britannia is the seated type found only on *aes* coins. Out of the six variations the first one made its appearance under Hadrian, but was most extensively in use under Antoninus Pius and last employed by Commodus. The female figure is always identified by the BRITANNIA or sometimes the shorter BRITAN legend that can be supplemented by

19 CIL VII 1113 – RIB I 2175.

20 The reverse depicts a young Genius holding cornucopia, sacrificing with a patera over an altar. RIC V/2 240.

21 CIL VII 22 – RIB I 5.

22 Or at least they were also eager to honour her with inscriptions.

23 It was suggested that the standing female figure with hands bound behind her back next to a seated, bound captive and Victory erecting a trophy would represent the personification of Britannia on the coins of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta. The interpretation can however not be supported, since under the *tropaeum* a male captive is found, so it would be illogical to see the female figure as the personification of the province, while the male counterpart only as an average captive. It is more probable that they represent the usual male-female pair of a vanquished nation, visually enhancing the victory over the Roman enemies on the island. The layout is truly unusual, but it would equally be exceptional for the personification of Britain. In connection with Commodus' reverse, which the Severan coins were clearly based on, it was not suggested that it should represent the personification of a province. MIR 18, 1017, 1026, 1029; TOYNBEE 1934, 64; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 7–8; RIC IV/1 Caracalla 451, 464, 483, Geta 186; COHEN IV Septimius Severus 733; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 10–11.

24 This reference system was used in my doctoral dissertation on *The Roman province personifications and their role in the imperial propaganda* consisting of the first three letters of the name of the province followed by the number and eventual variations of the representation type.

the current titles of the emperor. An interesting diversion is found on the Comodian pieces, where she is constantly referred to as BRITTANIA.

Interestingly, Britannia coins were issued twice under the reign of Hadrian (BRI-1/1).<sup>25</sup> First they were minted in 119–120, secondly in the province series in 134–138, but the appearance of the personification was left unchanged. The seated female figure rests her head in her right hand, holding a spear in her left, leaning on a large round shield with spiky *umbo* (Fig. 2).<sup>26</sup> At her feet is a pile of stones probably indicating that she is seated on a rock, which could represent the whole island.<sup>27</sup> The only difference is in the denomination: in 119–120 it was minted as *as*, in 134–138 as *sestertius* and *dupondius*. Interestingly enough the earlier coins are mostly found in Britain and the continental parts close to it. This proves that the reverse was produced intentionally for the island itself.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 2. Personification of Britannia on Hadrian's coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=379250> (Classical Numismatic Group – Triton XIII (5. Jan. 2010) – Lot 317).



Fig. 3. Personification of Dacia on Trajan's coin (Photo: <https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=2664007> (Numismatica Ars Classica – Auction 87 (8. Oct. 2005.) – Lot 223).

Holding her head in her hand cannot be interpreted as a grieving pose, since she is not holding her forehead, but her face, and because she is not the personification of a newly subdued

25 RIC II Hadrian 577, 845–846; TOYNBEE 1924, 146, TOYNBEE 1934, 55–56; OSTROWSKI 1990 Britannia 1; LIMC Britannia 7; GARZÓN BLANCO 1991, 259–260; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 2, STRACK 1933, 523, 712–713; MÉTHY 1995, 279, SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, V.3.1.3.03.

26 For more on the *braccae* see HOUGHTALIN 1996, 153. The *birrus Britannicus* was a rather expensive hooded woollen cloak suitable for the rainy weather of the island. BENNETT 2001, 42. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/cm/c/coin\\_of\\_hadrian\\_with\\_britannia.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/c/coin_of_hadrian_with_britannia.aspx)

27 It was previously suggested that the stones could represent Hadrian's Wall, but its erection was not begun at the time of the emission of these coins. TOYNBEE 1934, 56. cf. GARZÓN BLANCO 1991, 260.

28 The theory that the reverses were merely intended to replace the small change can only partially be supported, because the province personifications usually appear on coins in connection with military events. On the other hand it is also probable that the shortage of small denominations was relieved by several special emissions not depicting the personification of the province. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/cm/c/coin\\_of\\_hadrian\\_with\\_britannia.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/c/coin_of_hadrian_with_britannia.aspx)

territory.<sup>29</sup> The spear and the shield reflect Britannia's defensive role and also refer to military events at the time. The large shield with spiky *umbo* is completely unique and could depict a typical weapon of the island, otherwise not known from literary sources.<sup>30</sup> The military significance of the province is also supported by the *exercitus Britannicus* coins of Hadrian.<sup>31</sup>

The sitting pose of Britannia was taken from the Dacia personification of Trajan from 112–114.<sup>32</sup> It is on these coins that for the first time a province is seated on a pile of rocks, holding an *aquila* in her left (Fig. 3). This is a result of the more pacified depiction of the previous one, depicting Dacia seated on shields<sup>33</sup>, with a round shield at her side, similarly to Britannia. Earlier this was only used for the depiction of Athena/Minerva and Roma.<sup>34</sup> Hadrian draws a parallel between the largest conquest of Trajan and his own military actions. The previous one was in need of military achievements, because upon his accession to the throne he quickly had to end the eastern campaign.<sup>35</sup> With his British success he further secured his power, which at the time he was in dire need of.<sup>36</sup> The Britannia coins emitted in 119–120 were probably celebrating the successful reactions to the revolts, which the literary sources only laconically mention.<sup>37</sup> The question arises why exactly the island was paid special attention to by the emperor, since at the accession of Hadrian there were Moorish and Sarmatian invasions as well as revolts in Aegyptos, Libya and Palestina. Most likely Britain caused the most serious concerns, which is also reflected by the erection of Hadrian's Wall in 122.<sup>38</sup> The Britannia appearing in the province series of Hadrian in 134–138 is merely a repetition of the previously designed image.

The personifications of Britannia next appear on the aes coins of Antoninus Pius in two periods. First in 143–144, that is, not in the *aurum coronarium* series.<sup>39</sup> The four different variants (BRI-1/2-5) all celebrate the sole conquest of the emperor. In 154–155 only the BRI-1/6 appears, which is a slightly modified version of the previous ones in *dupondius* and as denominations.

The 143–144 emission can be connected to the military campaign of Antoninus Pius led by Lollius Urbicus.<sup>40</sup> To enforce the newly conquered territories the Antonine Wall was built. The emperor accepted his second imperial acclamation after the victories in Britain, which is

29 TOYNBEE 1934, 55.

30 TOYNBEE 1934, 56; BMC IV LXXXV.

31 For the other coins connected with Hadrian's war in Britain see STRACK 1933, 70–71.

32 STRACK 1933, 70; RIC II Trajan 621–623a; OSTROWSKI 1990, Dacia 11; IMC Dacia 11; TOYNBEE 1934, 76–77; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Dacia 2; STRACK 1931, 435; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, V.2.02–03; MIR 14, 467–469; SEELENTAG 2004, 385–386.

33 RIC II 78, 560–566; OSTROWSKI 1990, Dacia 4d–e, 13; SVORONOS 1890, 348/83; LIMC Dacia 9a, 12; TOYNBEE 1934, 72; STRACK 1931, 156, 365; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Dacia 34–35; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, V.3.1.1.04, V.3.1.3.01; MIR 14, 243–245, 283, 326–328.

34 SCHMIDT-DICK 2002, Minerva fA5/01-02; f5B/02-03; Roma f5A/-04-07; f5A/08-14; f5A/17-23.

35 ZHRNT 2005, 126.

36 At the time of the accession of Hadrian several rumours were spreading that he was not the one chosen by Trajan as his successor. SHA Hadrian 4, 8–10.

37 ZHRNT 2005, 126; SHA Hadrian 5, 2; 6, 6; Fronto, de bell. Parth. 2.

38 According to some speculations this was the time, when the *legio IX Hispana* vanished, but it is more probable that it was previously relocated from Britain. DNP Legio 18; FRERE 1967, 139–140. cf. STRACK 1933, 70–71; GARZÓN BLANCO 1991, 259.

39 More on the *aurum coronarium* see TOYNBEE 1934, 144–152; STRACK 1937, 39–43; MÉTHY 1992, 285–286; RE Aurum coronarium 2552–2553; DNP Aurum coronarium 327; RIC III p. 6.

40 SHA Pius 5, 4.

also reflected in the coin legends.<sup>41</sup> The campaign was most likely motivated by Antoninus Pius' desire to prove his military aptitude just like his predecessors. His successes were propagated with several Victoria depictions on coins.<sup>42</sup>

The four variants of Britannia which basically follow the Hadrianic iconography are linked to the first emission of Antoninus Pius (BRI-1/2-5).<sup>43</sup> The BRI-1/2 variant is the most strongly connected to the previous BRI-1/1, the only difference being that the personification is holding the spear in her right hand (Fig. 4).<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, the head is not depicted frontally, but in profile, the change is also followed by the rest of the body slightly turning towards the spear.



Fig. 4. Personification of Britannia on Antoninus Pius' coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=399979> Gorny & Mosch – Auction 185 (8. Mar. 2010) – Lot 258).



Fig. 5. Britannia with signum on Antoninus Pius' coin (Photo: <http://www.predecimal.com/p2roman.htm>).

Far more interesting is the iconography of the variant BRI-1/3.<sup>45</sup> The province is seated on rocks, holding a spear in her left hand and a *signum* in her right, with a large round shield with pointy *umbo* at her side (Fig. 5). This too originates from the Hadrianic Britannia, but is mixed with his Dacia.<sup>46</sup> The influence of the latter is the whole posture, the vertically stacked stones and the tilted military standard in the right hand.<sup>47</sup> The only difference compared to Dacia is the *sica* and the shield, so the Dacian weapons were exchanged with presumably local ones. Interestingly enough Britannia is again connected with Dacia just as in Hadrianic times. Hadrian copied Trajan, and Antoninus Pius also based his Britannia on the latest, Hadrianic depiction of Dacia. The personification of the island appeared at the beginning of the reign

41 TOYNBEE 1934, 59–60; STRACK 1937, 50–51; KIENAST 2004, 135.

42 STRACK 1937, 54. RIC III p.7–8.

43 GARZÓN BLANCO 1991, 260.

44 RIC III 743; TOYNBEE 1934, 57–58; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 3a; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 4.

45 RIC III 645, LIMC Britannia 9b; TOYNBEE 1934, 59; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 3b; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 5; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, V.2.04.

46 RIC II Hadrian 829, 849–850.

47 According to P. STRACK the stones refer to the Antonine Wall. STRACK 1937, 54.

of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius to prove their military aptitude that was iconographically compared to the Dacian victories of the great conqueror and predecessor, Trajan. On the coins of Pius, despite the barbarian clothing, the *signum* unambiguously refers to the Roman troops, thanks to whom the territory of the province was amplified.

The BRI-1/4 only differs from the previous one by the fact that the shield is placed on a helmet (*Fig. 6*).<sup>48</sup> This was previously applied in the depictions of Roma and is a result of a gradual process. Under Nero Roma appeared seated on pile of weapons, here on a cuirass with other parts of the panoply beside her.<sup>49</sup> Gradually the helmet moved next to, then under the shield, where it also stayed.<sup>50</sup> In Hadrianic times this depiction was used for Roma, but interestingly enough Antoninus Pius only employs this for Britannia and not Roma. The emperor draws inspiration from the iconography of Roma, Dacia and Britannia to portray the Roman character of a peripheral region and his victory over the barbarians. The BRI-1/4 variant was copied by Commodus on his medallion minted in 185, probably due to a cruelly retaliated revolt.<sup>51</sup> Despite this, Britannia appears in a peaceful manner, not as on the BRI-1/6 variant in a sorrow pose.



*Fig. 6.* Britannia with helmet under the shield on Antoninus Pius' coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=458121> Classical Numismatic Group – Electronic Auction 243 (27. Oct. 2010) - Lot 352).



*Fig. 7.* Britannia reclining on rock on Antoninus Pius' coin (Photo: <https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=39062> Classical Numismatic Group Inc. - <http://www.cngcoins.com>).

Unique is the BRI-1/5 variant on which Britannia sits on a globe with waves at her feet, but otherwise identical with BRI-1/3.<sup>52</sup> The only known example of this reverse is in the British Museum.<sup>53</sup> The depiction is most likely an accidental combination of the personifications of

48 RIC III 742; LIMC Britannia 10b; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 3c.

49 SCHMIDT-DICK 2002, Roma f5A/04, f5A/12.

50 Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles Auction 74 (04.06.2013) Lot 3577.

51 TOYNBEE 1934, 62–63; MIR 18, 1109; GNECCHI II, 51/2. See in detail below.

52 RIC III 744; TOYNBEE 1934, 58; LIMC Britannia 9a; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 6; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, V.2.05. The globe surrounded by waves is not a logical image, since the world cannot float in its own water. P. STRACK and H. Mattingly on the other hand interpreted it as the accentuation of the island nature of Britannia. STRACK 1937, 54–55; BMC IV LXXXV.

53 STRACK 1937, 54–55; BMC IV 1640.

Britannia and Italia. Coins showing Italia seated on a globe, holding a sceptre and cornucopia was also minted at the same time.<sup>54</sup>

The coins minted in 154–155 bring change into the iconography of Britannia (BRI-1/6).<sup>55</sup> The seated province is reclining with her left hand on the rock, with a *vexillum* and a large round shield with spiky *umbo* in the back (Fig. 7). The pile of weapons behind the personification could previously be seen by Judaea<sup>56</sup> and later at Armenia.<sup>57</sup> The BRI-2/6 is the first example, where the flag is placed behind the personification, which was later used for Armenia. It is noteworthy that on the later coins of Antoninus Pius Britannia is shown as a subdued figure in a sorrow pose without weapons.<sup>58</sup> According to J. M. C. Toynbee Britannia is disarmed because she used them in an uprising against Rome.<sup>59</sup> The reverse probably refers to the campaigns against the *Brigantes*, from whom the Romans conquered considerable territories according to the literary sources. Interestingly enough the tribe or at least a part of it has already been living on Roman territory, which makes a counterinsurgency more likely than the conquering of new lands.<sup>60</sup>

### **BRI-2**

The BRI-2 is the *adventus* type<sup>61</sup> coin of Hadrian showing Britannia on the right side sacrificing over an altar in the middle and the emperor on the left side. It is completely different from the other Britannia (BRI-1/1) coin of Hadrian most likely commemorating the imperial visit of 122.<sup>62</sup> The most striking difference is the lack of attributes and the non-barbarian clothing of the female figure consisting of a chiton and himation.<sup>63</sup> Gallia<sup>64</sup> and Thracia<sup>65</sup> was also depicted similarly.

### **BRI-3**

A quite interesting new Britannia type appeared on the sesterces of Commodus between September and December 184.<sup>66</sup> The reverse shows a female figure standing in chiton, holding

54 RIC III Antoninus Pius 73, 85, 98, 594, 746–747, 789. The mixing is further supported by that Italia can also be seen sitting on a shield-like globe or in a reclining position as if she would be supporting herself with her left hand. Gorny & Mosch Münzhandlung Auction 126 (14.10.2003) Lot 2487; Numismatica Ars Classica AG Auction 51 (05.03.2009) Lot 1060.

55 RIC III 930, 934; LIMC Britannia 10; TOYNBEE 1934, 60–63; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 7; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, V.3.2.1.07.

56 RIC II Vespasian 489–491, 595–596, 762, 784, 812.

57 RIC III Marcus Aurelius 78–86, 121–122, 498–500, 502–509, 526, 1364–1368; OSTROWSKI 1990, Armenia 6a; LIMC Armenia 5; HOUGHTALIN 1996, 109–111/6–10; MIR 18, Belebtes 1, 4.

58 HOUGHTALIN 1996, 154.

59 TOYNBEE 1934, 62. cf. MÉTHY 1992, 286–287, who rather sees the insufficient defensive abilities of the borders as the reason for the visual alteration. This is contradicted by the fact that the emperors did not spread bad news about their own realm, since it would have indirectly implied their personal incapability.

60 For the problem see FRERE 1967, 149–150, according to whom Pausanias does not use the name of the *Brigantes* correctly. TOYNBEE 1934, 60–61; STRACK 1937, 62; Paus. 8, 43, 4.

61 RIC II 882; TOYNBEE 1924, 147; TOYNBEE 1934, 57; OSTROWSKI 1990 Britannia 2; LIMC Britannia 8; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 3.

62 HALFMANN 1986, 190; ZHRNT 2005, 129; TOYNBEE 1934, 53–54.

63 J. M. C. TOYNBEE explains this with the development of urbanization, which is unlikely. TOYNBEE 1934, 57.

64 RIC II 884–885; OSTROWSKI 1990, 15; LIMC Gallia 11; TOYNBEE 1934, 84–85; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Gallia 9; STRACK 1933, 749; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, IV.2.13.

65 RIC II 907; OSTROWSKI 1990, Thracia 1; LIMC Thracia 1; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Thracia 1; TOYNBEE 1934, 130, 152; JATTA 1908, Thracia 1; STRACK 1933, 766; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, IV.3.08.

66 RIC III 437; TOYNBEE 1925, 104–106; TOYNBEE 1934, 63; OSTROWSKI 1990, Britannia 5; LIMC Britannia 11; MIR 18, 648; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, IV.4.1.03.

a sword in her right and a helmet in her raised left hand (Fig. 8). The depiction is totally unique in connection with Britannia, but is well known for *Fides publica* holding a basket of fruits and corn ears in the same manner from the time of Domitian and onwards (Fig. 9).<sup>67</sup> The idea that the reverse of Commodus reverse depicts the personification of the island is supported by the change of attributes and the BRITT legend in the exergue.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore in this series the reverse exergue legend always refers to the depicted female figure.<sup>69</sup>



Fig. 8. Britannia on Commodus' coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=355552> CGB.fr Auction Monnaies 38 (30. Apr. 2009) – Lot 650).



Fig. 9. Fides publica on Hadrian's coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=334904> CGB.fr Auction Monnaies 27 (19. Oct. 2006) – Lot 541).

The question arises why Commodus employed the iconography of Fides, but shortly after he used the BRI-1/4 reverse of Antoninus Pius for his medallion. Furthermore the arming of the peaceful aspect of Fides seems like a contradiction in terms, while her *militum* version was far more common in the Roman coinage. The militant *Fides publica* implies that the emperor wished to value the loyalty of the population and not so much that of the soldiers.

To be able to explain this perplexing innovation it is worth examining the historical background of the coin. According to Cassius Dio the Britons crossing the border in 184 caused considerable damages to Britain.<sup>70</sup> Undoubtedly this was the greatest external threat the Roman Empire had to face during the sole rule of Commodus, also leading him to assume the Britannicus title.<sup>71</sup> These events explain copying the BRI-1/4 reverse of Antoninus Pius, but not the creation of the BRI-3.<sup>72</sup> The literary sources also refer to inner disturbances. According to Cassius Dio the plot of Sextus Tigidius Perennis *praefectus praetorio* was uncovered by 1500 soldiers sent

67 The legend on Plotina's coins is FIDES AVGVST. TOYNBEE 1925, 105–106; TOYNBEE 1934, 63; SCHMIDT-DICK 2002, Fides f1A/01, f1A/06, f1B/01.

68 Cf. J.M.C. TOYNBEE's theory, who sees only a variant of Fides in the female figure. TOYNBEE 1925, 106; TOYNBEE 1934, 63.

69 I am indebted to I. Vida for his help in interpreting this coin. MIR 18, p. 153. emission 51.

70 Cass. Dio 73, 8.

71 STAHL 2005, 162–163; KIENAST 2004, 149.

72 The most common coin reverse for the celebration of the victories in Britain was the Victoria seated on a pile of shields, which were minted for several years. RIC III 440, 451–452, 459e.

from Britain.<sup>73</sup> The *Historia Augusta* on the other hand reports that Commodus sent Pertinax to Britain, who „*militēs ab omni seditōne deterruit*”.<sup>74</sup> Presumably because of the barbarian invasion insurrection broke out amongst the Roman soldiers, who wanted to proclaim a new emperor.<sup>75</sup> In light of these events the significance of the fidelity of Britain becomes clear, which remained unquestioned primarily by the population. The *Fides militum* could not have been used because it was the military that was on the verge of committing treason. The reverse on the other hand expresses the imperial gratitude towards the population of the province, thanks to which the island remained part of the Roman Empire.



Fig. 10. Britannia with vexillum on Carausius' coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=442096> Classical Numismatic Group Electronic Auction 215 (29. July 2009) – Lot 481).



Fig. 11. Britannia with signum on Carausius' coin (Photo: <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=442102> Classical Numismatic Group Electronic Auction 215 (29. July 2009) – Lot 483).

#### **BRI-4**

The *dextrarum iunctio* type depictions of Britannia appear at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on the coins of Carausius.<sup>76</sup> The four variants all have in common that the personification is shaking hands with the emperor holding a spear. The sub-variants differ in the attribute held by Britannia. On BRI-4/1-3 she is either equipped with a spear or a standard, while on BRI-4/4 she is presenting a wreath to the emperor.

73 Cass. Dio 73, 9.

74 SHA Pertinax 3, 5–6.

75 This is also referred to by another part in the *Historia Augusta*: “*Appellatus est Commodus etiam Britannicus ab adulatoribus, cum Britanni etiam imperatorem contra eum deligere voluerint*” (SHA Commodus 8, 4). Perennis probably found his death trying to suppress this rebellion (Cass. Dio 73, 9, 1–3).

76 Similar could previously be seen in the time of Trajan Decius and the personifications of Pannonia (PAN-2), where two provinces, Superior and Inferior were clasping hands before a standard. RIC IV/3 26, 41; OSTROWSKI 1990, Pannonia 3; LIMC Pannonia 7; JATTA 1908, Pannonia 2; TOYNBEE 1934, 134; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Pannonia 5; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, IV.9.01. Before that only the handclasp of Hispania and Gallia was depicted on the coins of Galba. RIC I<sup>2</sup> 15–18, 109, 154; OSTROWSKI 1990, Gallia 11; LIMC Gallia 8, Hispania 14; BELTRÁN LLORIS 1975, 246; Arce 1980, 85/10. (incomplete inscription); SALCEDO 1995–1996, 189; TOYNBEE 1934, 83, 101–102; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Gallia 2, Hispania 7; SCHMIDT-DICK 2011, IV.8.01.



Britannia is holding a *vexillum* on the BRI-4/1 variant that alludes to the strength of the Roman army (Fig. 10).<sup>77</sup> A little more complex is the staff ending in a ring held by her on the BRI-4/2 variant, which can be interpreted as a very schematic *signum* (Fig. 11).<sup>78</sup> Britannia again is equipped with a spear on the BRI-4/3 reverses, reflecting on the military potential.<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 12. Britannia with altar on Carausius' coin (Photo: Slarke, D (2009) WMID-02BDE6: A ROMAN COIN Web page available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/254630> [Accessed: 2017 jan. 3 14:32:16] Portable Antiquities Scheme ID: WMID-02BDE6).



Fig. 13. Restitutor Galliarum on Gallienus' coin (Photo: <https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=124921> Gorny & Mosch Auction 122 (10. Mar. 2003) – Lot 2250).

The most interesting Britannia reverse (BRI-4/4) of Carausius depicts her clasping hands with the emperor holding a spear while presenting a wreath to him, and between them an altar can be seen (Fig. 12).<sup>80</sup> The scene is a combination of the *restitutor orbis* and *orientis* depictions from the time of Valerian and Gallienus onwards. On one of the reverses<sup>81</sup> the female figure presents a wreath to the emperor, while on the other the ruler holding a spear is sacrificing over an altar.<sup>82</sup> The great resemblance between the *restitutor Galliarum* (Fig. 13) and *orbis* (Fig. 14) could be noticed in the time of Gallienus, when the schematization of the images had already begun.<sup>83</sup> The BRI-4/4 scene is explained by the EXPETATE VENI legend, propagating the sanctity of the arrival of the new emperor, whom the island greets with an offering.<sup>84</sup> The

77 The archaeological literature mentions a variant where Britannia is holding a trident. I could not find a picture of this reverse even after considerable research, thus I find it more probable that it is purely a misinterpretation of the *vexillum*. In case this variant should exist, it should be viewed as a special standard with a trident end, which is supported by actual finds and the standards depicted on the BRI-4/1-2 reverses (TÖPFER 2011, 78).

78 RIC V/2 216–219, 554–558, 605, 771–772; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 15.

79 <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=125929> The New York Sale Auction XI (11. Jan. 2006) – Lot 351)

80 RIC V/2 774–776; HOUGHTALIN 1996, Britannia 16.

81 RIC V/1 Valerian 286, Gallienus 448; Aurelian 139–140, 287–306, 347–349, 368–369, 386, 389, 399–404. The reverse is the adaptation of the RESTITVTOR VRBIS coin of Septimius Severus. RIC IV/1 140–141.

82 RIC V/1 Salonina 83, Claudius Gothicus 188–189. Emperor sacrificing by an altar, holding a spear or a sceptre.

83 RIC V/1 Valerian 50, 116–118, 149, Gallienus 27–35, 91, 164, 234, Valerian II. 6.

84 There is a number of variations to the reverse legend due to incorrect spelling.

reverse combines the *restitutor* type images with the message of anticipation. The wreath held in the hand is a symbol of recognition, legitimacy and respect.<sup>85</sup> Moreover it is a vital accessory of a cult act and the triumph.<sup>86</sup> On the reverse Britannia pledges her support to the long awaited victorious leader and restorer, a vow also sanctified by a sacrifice.

The EXPECTATE VENI legend with minor deviations is found on all of the coins of Carausius depicting Britannia.<sup>87</sup> Thus they all greet the arrival of a long awaited person, a role now assumed by the emperor. Interestingly enough the phrasing is taken from the Aeneid, where it is a question addressed towards Hector („*quibus Hector ab oris expectate venis*”), which is extremely peculiar in Roman coinage.<sup>88</sup> The question arises whether it is truly an unconventional and purposeful reflection on the work of Vergil or simply a coincidence. The mentioning of the shores was particularly appropriate in the case of Carausius, as he came from the continent. The emperor paid great attention to his monetary system and the messages carried by the coins, thus using them as a targeted propaganda tool.<sup>89</sup> An important new measure was the reintroduction of the silver denomination, which had been out of use for nearly 50 years.<sup>90</sup>

The Vergilian connection is supported by the theory of G. de la Bédoyère that the RSR and I.N.P.C.D.A. legend in the exergue of the coins of Carausius would be the abbreviation of literary quotes.<sup>91</sup> Specifically the 6-7<sup>th</sup> lines of the fourth eclogue of Vergil: „*Redeunt Saturnia Regna, Iam Nova Progenies Caelo Demittitur Alto*”. The poet wrote his work after the treaty of Brundisium in 40 B.C., when Octavian, Marc Anthony and Lepidus made peace with each other. This is the allegory of the faith in the future, where the prosperity of peacetime is restored. Moreover Carausius minted coins where his bust is set beside those of Diocletian and Maximinus under the CARAVSIVS ET FRATRES SVI legend.<sup>92</sup> Here the usurper portrays himself as part of a new triumvirate. The *Expectate veni* quote fits perfectly into the intellectual cosmos of the previous interpretation.<sup>93</sup> The RSR mark is usually found on the precious metal coins of Carausius, supporting the peculiar status of the pieces.<sup>94</sup>

85 It can also be interpreted as an *aurum coronarium*, which was given to an emperor at his accession. RE *Aurum coronarium* 2552–2553; DNP *Aurum coronarium* 327.

86 DNP Kranz 806.

87 The message conveyed by *expectate* resembles the word 'adventus' which means waiting and arrival. HOUGHTALIN 1996, 155. Carausius also minted a reverse with the ADVENTVS AVGG legend, depicting the emperor on horseback raising his right hand, with a bound captive in front. RIC V/2 7, 190–191, 535–541, 598, 706–708, 732, 1067–1038. Despite the linguistic similarities the message was illustrated with a completely different iconography.

88 Verg., *Aen.* 2, 282–283; LIMC *Britannia* 13; RIC V/2 439; BÉDOYÈRE 1998, 79–80.

89 RIC V/2 p. 439.

90 With their fineness of around 3,75 g their quality was about the same as in Neronian times. RIC V/2 p. 434–437; BÉDOYÈRE 1998, 87.

91 BÉDOYÈRE 1998, 79–83.

92 RIC V/2 550/1.

93 The use of literary quotations were not unknown in Roman politics, since the emperors were generally brought in connection with the mythical foundation of Rome, of which Vergil, Ovid and other famous authors had written about. BÉDOYÈRE 1998, 83–85. A panegyric from the time of the tetrarchy is also concerned with the re-arrival of the time of Saturn, that is, in the same time as the rule of Carausius rule and also with the same topic.

94 It is also possible that the RSR coins were minted for a particular distribution. BÉDOYÈRE 1998, 87.

Although the precise dating of the previously mentioned coins is not possible, they were probably produced in the early years and their minting continued for some years afterwards.<sup>95</sup> With every one of the BRI-4 reverses Carausius tried to emphasise his peculiar personal skills. He portrays himself as a person whose arrival was greatly anticipated from old times, someone who brings a new age of prosperity and joy. The *dextrarum iunctio* and the peculiar legend reflect the close connection with Britannia, where the military also plays a significant role, to which the standards and the spear allude. The sacrifice performed upon his arrival further enhances the greatness of this act and his personality. Carausius shows himself as somebody whom the population of Britannia has long been waiting for, one whom they respected and accepted.



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Fig. 14. Restitutor Galliarum on Gallienus' coin (Photo: <https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=124921> Gorny & Mosch Auction 122 (10. Mar. 2003) – Lot 2250).

Fig. 15. Britannia on Constantius Chlorus' medallion (Photo: LIMC Britannia 14).

### BRI-5

The last personification of Britannia can be seen on the gold medallion of Constantius Chlorus, minted in Arras.<sup>96</sup> The *restitutor* type reverse depicts the emperor in military dress holding a spear, being crowned by Victory from behind, raising the female figure in front of him holding spear and shield (Fig. 15).<sup>97</sup> The same weapons are seen in the hands of Britannia as on the coins of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius (BRI-1/1–5). The shield is however no longer round with a spiky *umbo*, but rectangular with a round *umbo*. The spear also appears on one of the reverse variants (BRI-4/3) of Carausius, but without a shield. The reason for the minting of this medallion was the defeat of Allectus by Constantius Chlorus, who thus restored Britain to the

<sup>95</sup> RIC V/2 p. 439.

<sup>96</sup> RIC V/2 p. 429–430; TOYNBEE 1934, 64–65; OSTROWSKI 1990 Britannia 10; LIMC Britannia 14.

<sup>97</sup> According to previous theories Britannia is holding a palm branch in her right hand, which is probably only a misinterpretation of the left hand of the emperor holding a spear. This is furthermore supported by the fact that on other *restitutor* coins the raised female figure only holds an object in her left hand.

Roman Empire.<sup>98</sup> The emperor extends his hand in peace towards the strayed territory, leading it back to her old-new ruler. The PIETAS AVGG legend emphasises the emperors' sense of duty, being the driving force of his actions.

## Summary

The personification of Britannia was an important tool of Roman expansive and representative policy. It was primarily employed when the emperors needed to underline their military aptitude in time of expansive as well as defensive events. Therefore she was perceived and portrayed first as a fierce warrior, mostly in service of the Empire or the emperor, later rather as a territory needing specific military attention. The fidelity of the public was also an event important enough to be recorded by the means of an imperial coin reverse. The end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century brought a revival of the image of Britannia image in a completely new form. Her role has grown considerably, since she is always represented beside the emperor in a period when personification of provinces had almost disappeared from Roman art. In the eyes of Rome Britain was a unique and important island, worthy of special attention. The fact that the message carried by Britannia was still valid more than a thousand years later is reflected on the modern coins portraying her timeless and proud figure.

## Abbreviations

### *Ancient sources*

Caes.	Caesar, <i>De bello Gallico</i>
Cass. Dio	Cassius Dio, <i>Historia Romana</i>
Fronto	<i>De bello Parthico</i>
Herod.	Herodotos, <i>Historiae</i>
Paus.	Pausanias, <i>Graeciae descriptio</i>
SHA	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
Strab.	Strabón, <i>Geographica</i>
Suet.	Suetonius, <i>De vita Caesarum</i>
Verg.	Vergilius, <i>Aeneis</i>

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98 TOYNBEE 1934, 64–65; HOUGHTALIN 1996, 151. Previously he regained control over the continental territories of Carausius which led to his fall to his enemy. FRERE 1967, 335–340.

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