



## Antoninianus depicting the head of Zenobia and Juno Regina (272 CE)

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[1]

**Denomination:**

Antoninianus

**Date:** 272 CE

**Material:**

Silver

**Mint:**

Emesa

**Name of Ruler:**

Zenobia

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Diademed and draped bust of Zenobia looking right on a crescent moon

Inscription: S ZENOBIA AVG

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Juno standing facing, head left, holding patera in right hand, sceptre in left, peacock at her feet; star in left field

Inscription: IVNO REGINA

**Diameter (mm):** 20.05mm

**Commentary:**

(RIC Va, Zenobia, no. 2 var)

This antoninianus, minted in 272 CE at Emesa in Syria, depicts on the obverse the head of Zenobia, the ruler of Palmyra, and on the reverse Juno Regina, who together with Jupiter and Minerva stood at the head of the Roman pantheon. First minted under the rule of Caracalla in 215 CE, the antoninianus was a double denarius, used to pay the army. From the reign of Caracalla onwards, as we see mirrored on this coin, the obverse of the antoninianus depicted the head of the emperor crowned by the radiate crown. The inscription on the obverse of this issue, "S ZENOBIA AVG," refers to the empress as Septimia Zenobia Augusta, the latter being a title which asserted her claim to the Roman imperial throne. Zenobia took this title quite late on in her reign, and as Patricia Southern argues, this may have been either a bid to retain control in the East or a response to the negative reception that she received from the emperor Aurelian (*Empress Zenobia*, p. 126). This coin essentially represents the Palmyran queen's attempts to portray herself as a legitimate Roman ruler, whose supremacy was iconised by the depiction of the important Roman goddess Juno Regina.

Zenobia ruled over Palmyra, a small principality located at the border between the Roman empire and the Parthian kingdom. She was the second wife of Odaenathus, who ruled the small city state between 240 and 267 CE. His family had been conferred Roman citizenship during the rule of the Severan emperors, and Odaenathus enjoyed the standing of *consularis*. He was thus a member of the senatorial class. The "S" at the start of the obverse inscription on this coin, which stands for "Septimia," derives from Odaenathus's *gentilicium*, Septimius, a name



which was taken as an expression of loyalty to the Severan emperors who had granted his family Roman citizenship. In 260 CE, Odaenathus supported the emperor Valerian as an ally during his unfortunate campaign against the Sassanian Persian king Shapur I, which ended with the humiliating capture of Valerian. Subsequently, Odaenathus declared his loyalty to Gallienus, the son of Valerian, who was also his co-ruler governing the West. In 262 CE, Odaenathus began a series of military campaigns waged in the name of Rome against the Sassanians, which resulted in the recovering of Carrhae, Nisibis, and the conquest of Ctesiphon. By the beginning of 263 CE, Odaenathus controlled most of the Near East, ruling in the name of Rome. In 267 CE, he was murdered, together with his son, and his wife Zenobia succeeded him (see Southern, *Empress Zenobia*, p. 33-82). Zenobia assumed the title Augusta, and bestowed the title of Augustus on her son Vaballathus.

Zenobia became more powerful in the proceeding years, conquering Egypt in 269 CE, before moving towards Asia Minor, conquering Syria-Palaestina, Syria, and parts of Asia. By 272 CE, she was ruling over most of the Roman East (Southern, *Empress Zenobia*, p. 83-118). However, Zenobia was an unwelcome usurper for the Roman rulers of the West. In an attempt show that she should be viewed as a Roman ruler, Zenobia minted a series of coins, of which the present coin is an example, which depicted the supreme Roman goddess Juno Regina (Juno the Queen), as well as a series of coins in the name of her son Vaballhatus, which depicted Jupiter Stator (Jupiter the Sustainer) on their reverse. Juno Regina and Jupiter Stator were two of the most important gods of Rome, and their use by Zenobia reflected an attempt to present her and her son as supreme heads of Rome.

On the reverse of this coin we see Juno dressed in a tunic, veiled, and draped in a stola, standing while holding a patera (a sacrificial bowl) in her right hand and a sceptre in her left hand (a symbol of sacred power). To her left is a peacock, an attribute strongly influenced by the depiction of Hera (Juno's Greek counterpart) in Greek-Hellenistic art. However, while in Greek religion Hera was the queen of the gods, in Roman religion, Juno, together with Jupiter and Minerva, was one of three deities who made up the Capitoline Triad. Moreover, while Hera was perceived as the goddess of marriage and family, Juno had a more 'political' character, and had the task of advising in matters of state. Juno was known through various epithets, however, such as Juno Sospita, the goddess who protected Rome, Juno Lucina, the goddess who safeguarded birth and infancy, and Juno Moneta, the goddess who protected the army, in addition to Juno Regina. Juno shared a cella in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the most important temple of Rome, but also possessed her own temple on the Capitol, the Temple of Juno Moneta. However, there were various temples to the goddess scattered throughout the city.

What is essential for interpreting this coin is that the iconography of the goddess, depicted as queen of the gods, mirrors the position of Zenobia, who presented herself as the de facto ruler of the Roman Empire. Thus, Zenobia on this issue wishes to address an audience, possibly the army, which thought of itself as Roman. This was, of course, made possible by the granting of Roman citizenship by Caracalla to most free provincials through the Constitutio Antoniniana in 212 CE. Moreover, Southern has argued that the style in which Zenobia depicts herself, which mirrors the way in which the empresses Julia Domna, Julia Mamaea, and Julia Soaemias were portrayed, may been an attempt to assure the loyalty of Roman commanders and troops in the face of war with the emperor Aurelian (*Empress Zenobia*, p. 126). Therefore, this issue is a claim of legitimacy by an eastern provincial to rule in Rome's name over the eastern part of the Empire. For Jørgen Meyer, issues such as the present coin were a direct challenge to Aurelian's rule as Roman emperor ("What have the Romans," p. 144). Zenobia's claim to legitimacy was soon challenged by the emperor Aurelian, however, who moved against her in 272 CE, capturing her and exiling her to Rome.

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords:

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- [Hera](#) [8]
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#### **Bibliographical references:**

### [Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen](#) [17]

Southern, Patricia *book Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen* London Continuum 2008

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