

## CONSERVATOR IMPERII



This image of a so far unique specimen of a Roman Imperial coin was kindly sent to me by Mr Curtis Clay, of Harlan Berk, Inc., an American coin merchants' firm. It will form part of the documentation for a forthcoming book on Varius, here seen in his imperial role as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

The obverse shows the emperor facing an unidentified woman. Most of the legend 'ANTONINUS' can be read behind the emperor's head. The woman is most probably one of his three wives, possibly the second, Aquilia Severa, divorced and remarried as the fourth. The probability derives from the fact that similar depictions of this emperor and any one of his three consorts are to be found in his coinage. The possibility derives from the image depicted on the reverse.

The reverse shows a group of four people in the foreground, two to either side, clad in togas draped over their heads, signifying participation in religious sacrifice. There seems to be an object in the foreground between the two pairs of people, which may be an altar. In the background, seen in perspective at the top of the visual field, is an object which, on close inspection, turns out to be the baetyl of Elagabal, fronted by an eagle, and flanked by standards. Part of the legend '...OR IMPERII' can be read to the right. This can be reconstructed as Conservator Imperii, which is found on others of this emperor's coins.

The scene on the reverse seems to be worship of Elagabal, the Syrian sun god whose high priest Varius was, at the same time as emperor. The possibility that the wife depicted on the obverse is Aquilia Severa derives from the fact that this kind of obverse, explicitly depicting the worship of Elagabal, tends to belong to the last months of this emperor's reign, when he had remarried her.