

Divine Iconography on Lead Tokens

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Introduction

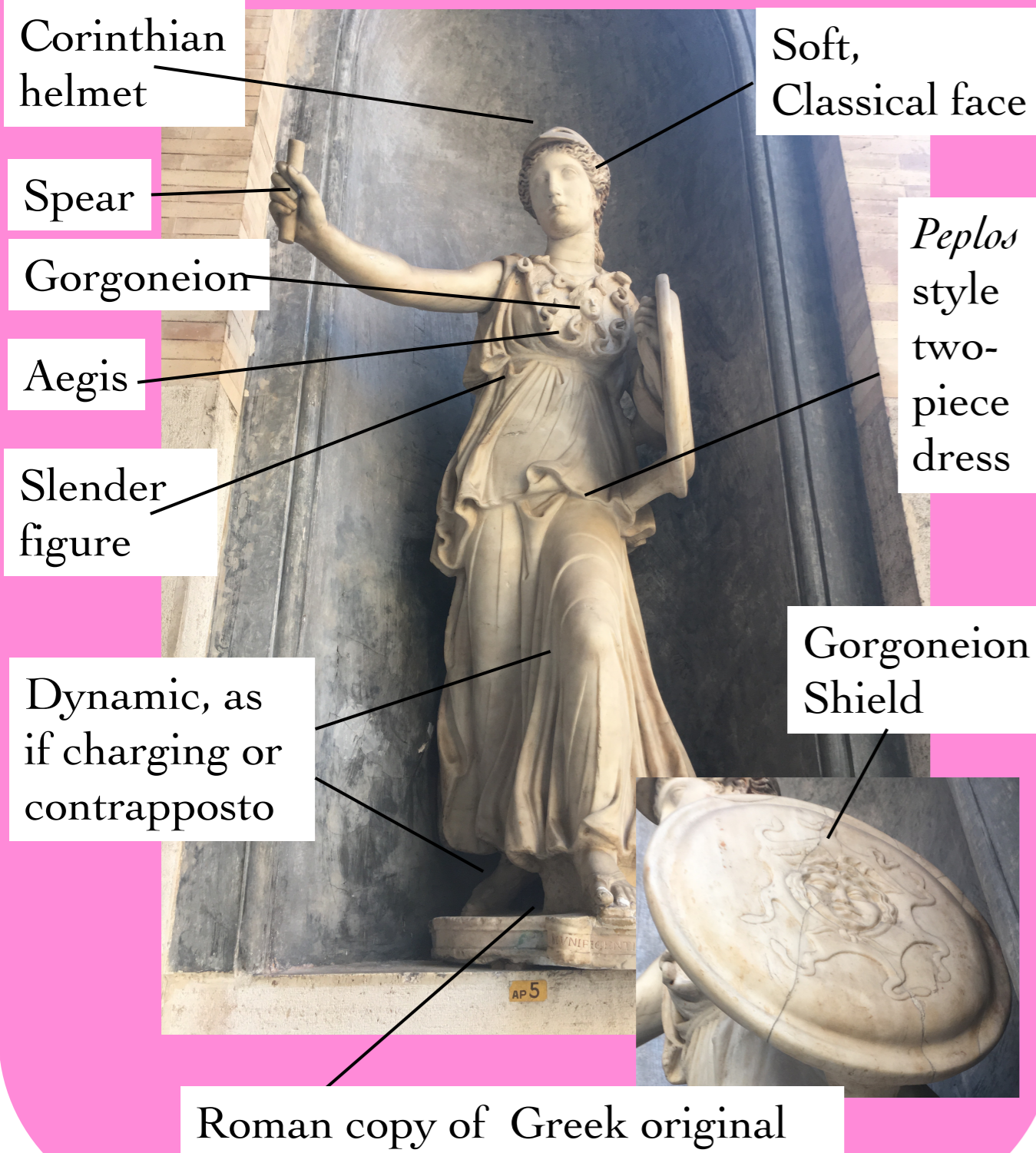


Tokens are monetiform objects, the uses of which scholars are uncertain; in the 1800s thousands were discovered in the Tiber in Rome, and Rostovtzeff's 1903 publication of these artefacts, composed in Latin, is the first and only published token catalogue.

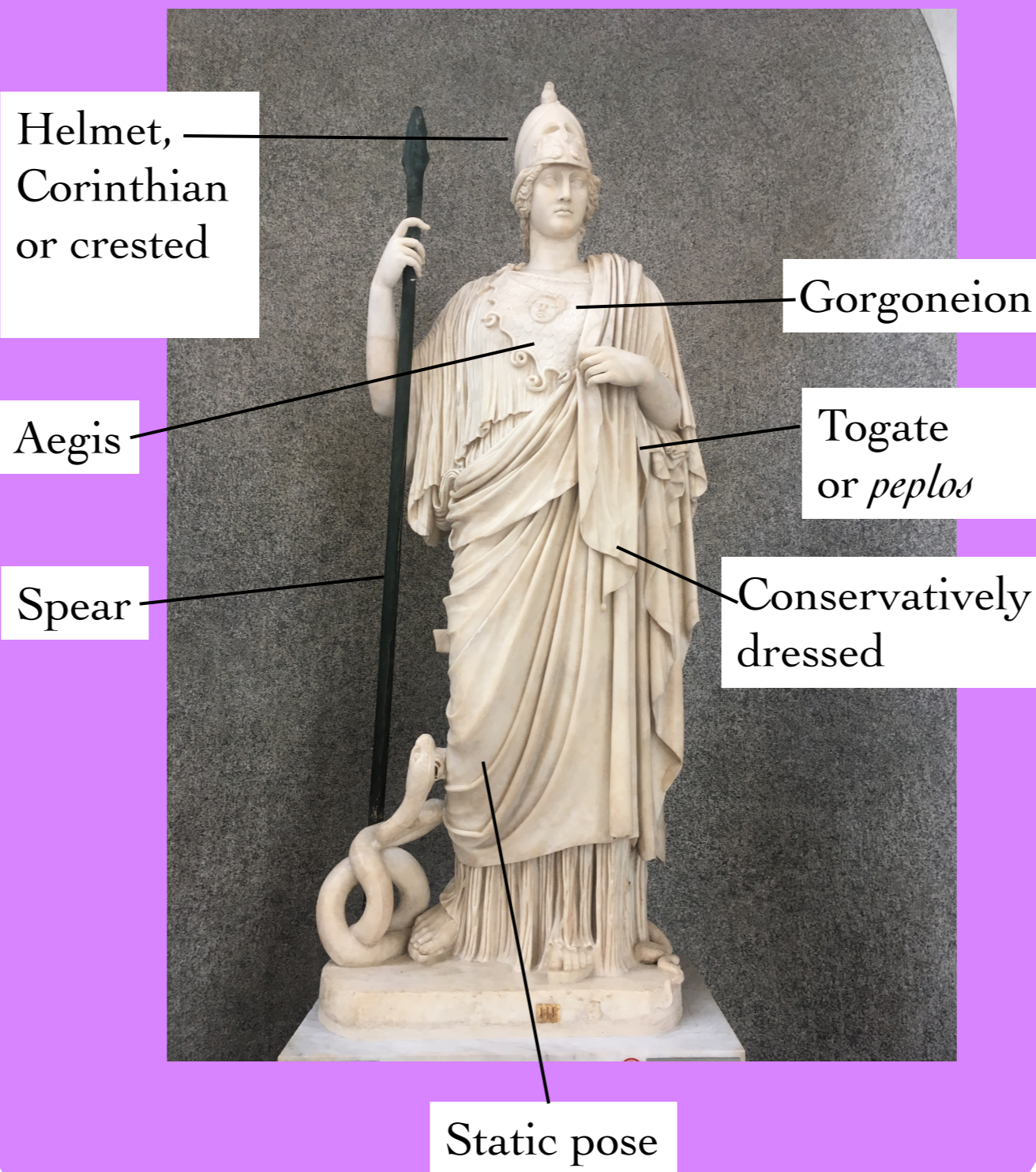
My research objectives were to identify divine depictions on lead tokens in the British Museum, translate the relevant entries in Rostovtzeff's catalogue from Latin into English, and to determine whether there was a formulaic structure to iconographic depictions of Athena/Minerva/Roma. Due to the lack of writing on tokens it is difficult to distinguish between the goddesses Athena, Minerva and Roma, but my research demonstrated that Roma is generally shown as seated and Minerva is generally shown as standing.



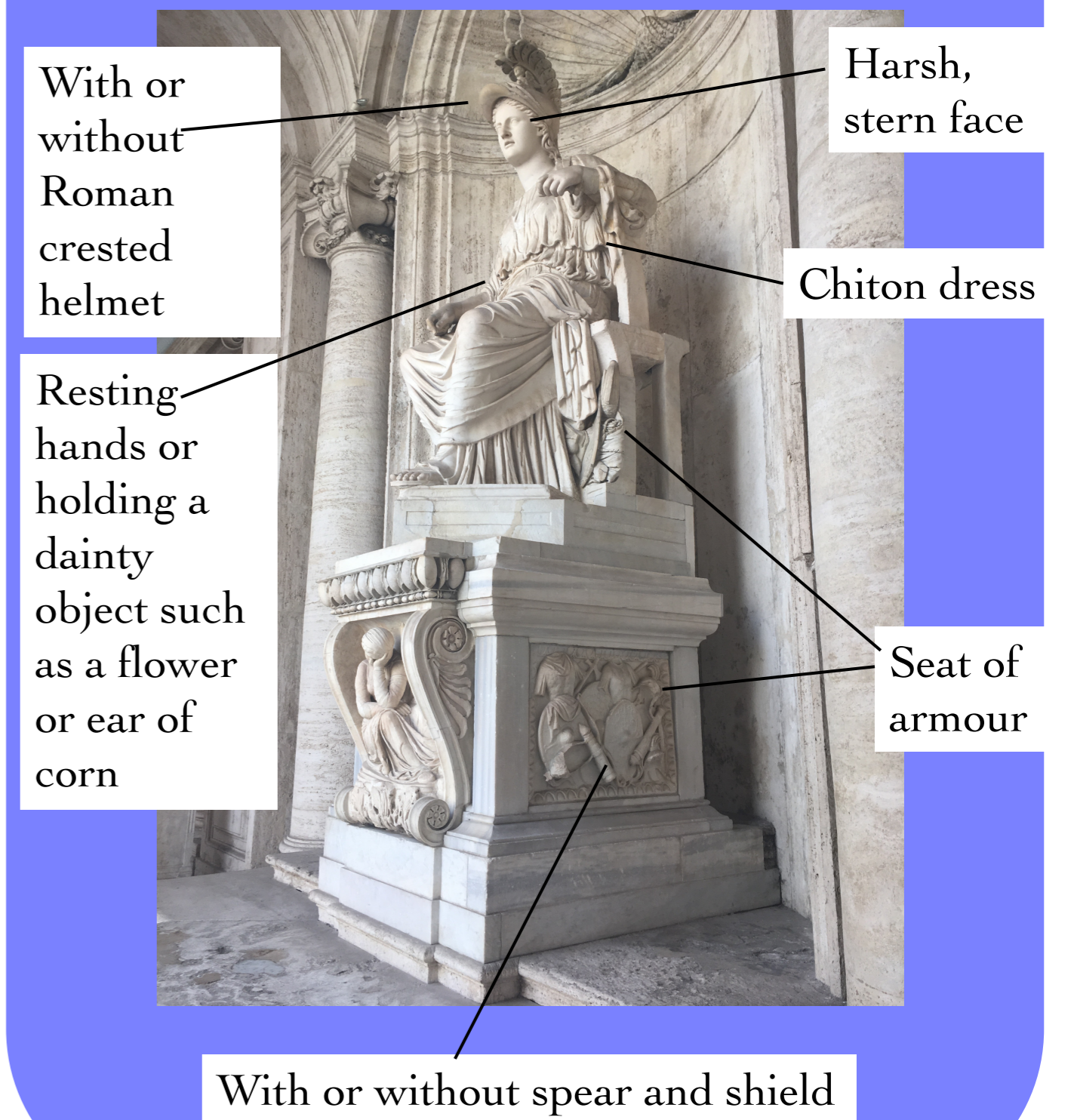
Athena's Iconography



Minerva's Iconography



Roma's Iconography



Minerva's Legacy



A conundrum for centuries – when this statue was discovered in the 16th century the only remnant was the porphyry drapery, with its seated regal position. Michelangelo interpreted this as Roma, and later the statue was restored with a head and limbs bearing the deity's iconographic features. It is now acknowledged to have originally been Minerva, due to the sacred spatial context of the Capitoline Hill where it was found and the aegis on the statue's chest. As the spear and crested helmet used to restore the image of 'Roma' was used, however, the only iconographic feature which is incongruent to Minerva's is the globe in her right hand.

Spatial Contexts

Spatial contexts: Athena's statuary in ancient Rome, due to its tendency to imitation rather than worship, was kept within private domestic spaces such as *horti* for ornamental purposes. Minerva on the other hand, as a member of the Roman pantheon and one of the oldest deities in Rome, was more often found in religious and worship contexts, whilst Roma as the personification of the city served a more public civic role in Roman material culture.

Roma's Legacy

From the 1st c. AD onwards, Britannia became the female personification of the British Isles. As a symbol of Britain and an inspiration for national pride, she has appeared on British currency since 1672 for over 300 years, and later in the 18th century with the development of the British Empire she was adopted as a protective national figure, with a trident or flag added to signify Britain's maritime prowess, liberty and fortitude. In times of international conflict she has been depicted in PUNCH cartoons during the 19th century through to WWII.



Athena's Legacy

The Medusa head or gorgoneion is a symbol which has been used on Roman material culture from statuary and relief sculpture to incised gems and funerary monuments. As the apotropaic symbol on Athena's and Minerva's shields, the gorgon's head has endured and been adapted within the modern period; in the 17th century Bernini sculpted the Head of Medusa to humanise the mythical monster, and later in the 20th century Gianni Versace employed the fatal fascination intrinsically linked to Medusa's petrifying power within his logo to embody the original femme fatale, whose visage would stop people dead in their tracks.



Acknowledgements

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