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FINDS OF PROVINCIAL ROMAN COINAGE IN NOVAE¹

Abstract: The article concerns finds of Roman provincial coins from the excavations of a legionary army camp carried out in Novae (Bulgaria) by the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Center of the University of Warsaw. Current research is based on a set of close to 200 provincial coins from 60 years of excavations (between 1960 and 2022) in two areas of the site, the army hospital (so-called Sector IV) and the barracks of the first cohorts in Sector XII. The results have by and large confirmed findings made earlier, concerning monetary circulation in the army camps on the Lower Danube, but have added information about the proportions of coinage coming from the two main minting centers from this period, Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis, which were working from the early third century CE through the reign of Gordian III. It turns out that there is much less quantitative difference between them (a tabular presentation of the finds is included to underscore the results) and that the role of the Marcianopolis mint was greater than previously thought, a fact that was not so clear before. The growing importance of Marcianopolis coinage is attested by their number matching that of strictly Roman coins. Moreover, a coin from Ephesus proved very interesting and rare in this Danubian assemblage.

Keywords: Novae, provincial minting, Moesia, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Marcianopolis, Roman minting

The administrative incorporation of the territories of Moesia and Thrace (modern Bulgaria, eastern Greece and northwestern Turkey) into the Roman Empire² made the region part of the huge and complex economic machinery of the Roman state, including a developed monetary system. The process was not hurried, with the Romans gradually integrating all the territories also economically. Even so, from an economic point of view the large and highly differentiated entity that was the Empire was governed throughout by a single economic factor, namely coinage issued according to the same strict standards enforced all over the Roman world. Over the years various more or less revolutionary transformations, both official and “behind the scenes”, were introduced gradually and in more or less the same form in all the territories throughout the Empire, but one aspect never changed: the monetary economy remained, intrinsically and consistently, in Rome’s hands.³

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² GEROV 1983.

³ See BOTEVA-BOJANOVA 1997, *passim*.

Moesia was a strategic region for Rome.⁴ From four to five Roman legions were stationed in this short section of the Danubian limes.⁵ One of them, the legio VIII Augusta, put up the first fortifications at Novae more or less in the mid-first century CE,⁶ and in 69 CE was replaced there by legio I Italica.⁷ Coinage then in circulation flooded into the region which had only recently been included in the fold, in the times of the emperor Claudius.⁸ The system at the time was not quite unified yet, with each province showing individual characteristics. The pool of coins found at Novae during 63 years of excavations reveals many regularities that are an indication of how the region of Moesia was treated from the time of its integration into the complex Roman economic system.⁹ Demand for “Roman” coinage snowballed at the time, triggered by the intensive building programs initiated in the new provinces, in Moesia and elsewhere, including, for example, road-building, that have had an impact on this territory ever since.

In 86, Moesia was divided into two provinces.¹⁰ Novae found itself in Moesia Inferior (Lower) and from this time until the end of the second century CE the monetary circulation system in this territory closely reflected the Roman system. After that there was more diversification in different parts of the Roman state. Central-issue “bronze” coinage (from the mint of Rome) continued to dominate for a long time still, but started to be supplemented with coins struck locally ever since the reign of Septimius Severus. The snowballing production of “bronzes” in local minting centers swamped the market practically everywhere where supplies from the central mint in Rome did not meet the demand in the first half of the third century CE.¹¹ It was a period of general unrest, both internally and externally, with an economic crisis undercutting the stability of the Empire as a whole and barbarian raids crossing the border at will.¹² One effect was hoarding property on a mass scale, which is manifested in the archaeological record mainly by hoards of coins and valuables, for which those hiding them never returned for a variety of reasons.¹³ These hoards have greatly contributed to a reconstruction of the monetary circulation system in Moesia. The provincial coinage, specific to each province in the Roman Empire, played a crucial role in the imperial monetary system, filling the local market demand for coins and covering soldierly payments. Provincial mints were very sensitive to political and military events. They were part of the imperial monetary system but at the same time reflected the identities of the local peoples living in the provinces.

Provincial coinage is clearly distinguished in the pool of coins coming from the excavated parts of the Novae fortress.¹⁴ It is a veritable “brand” in Moesian territory.¹⁵ In statistical terms, this coinage supersedes in importance central Roman issues from the time of Commodus, reaching an absolute superiority in numbers in the 210s and 220s (see Table 1).

The new pool of provincial coins from sector XII at Novae has shed even more light on monetary circulation of the first half of the third century CE.¹⁶ These changes are subtle and yet significant. Together with finds from the previously excavated sector IV of the army camp at Novae, it clearly illustrates the production peak of the Moesian and Thracian mints supplying Novae with “bronze” coinage at this time.¹⁷ To date, 197 provincial coins have been recorded

⁴ POPOVIĆ 1995; MIRKOVIC 2008, with further references.

⁵ WHATELY 2016, *passim*.

⁶ MIRKOVIĆ 1998, pp. 89–98; DYCZEK 2019a, pp. 55–64.

⁷ WHATELY 2016, pp. 12–19.

⁸ CIOŁEK 2020 [2023].

⁹ DIMITROV 2011; CIOŁEK, DYCZEK 2011.

¹⁰ POPOVIĆ 1995.

¹¹ GUSHTERAKLIEV 2002, pp. 123–25.

¹² See GEROV 1952/53, pp. 26–29.

¹³ BOLIN 1958, pp. 52–65, 178, 179.

¹⁴ P. DYCZEK, “Forty Years of Excavations at Novae”, *Novensia* 14, 2003, pp. 7–20; P. DYCZEK (ed.), *Novae. Legionary Fortress and Late Antique Town*, vol. I, Warszawa 2008; P. DYCZEK, *The Lower Danube Limes in Bulgaria*, Warszawa–Vienna 2008, pp. 65–78; DYCZEK 2015, pp. 169–177; DYCZEK 2018, pp. 39–80; LEMKE 2018, pp. 74–82; DYCZEK 2019b, pp. 115–126.

¹⁵ CIOŁEK 2022, pp. 51–84.

¹⁶ CIOŁEK 2019, pp. 79–99.

¹⁷ CIOŁEK 2022, pp. 51–84.

Table 1. Provincial minting: finds of coins from Novae sectors IV and XII (left and right side of the column, respectively) presented by mints¹⁸

Emitent	MINTS													Total										
	Viminacium	Nikopolis	Hadrianopolis	Anchialos	Martianopolis	Perinthos	Dionysopolis	Tomis	Pergamon	Nicaea/Deultum	Amastris/Laodicea/Ephesus	Unidentified												
Domitian						1							1											
Marcus Aurelius			2										2											
Commodus									1	1			2											
Amastris											1		1											
Septimius S.	6	15		1	2	21						3	1	49										
Geta		3					1						1	5										
Caracalla	3	10	1	4	2	4						1	1	2	28									
Macrinus	2	4												6										
Elagabal	2	6			2	7						1E	1	2	21									
Diadumenian		6				2					1			9										
Alexander S.		1				5		1		1			1	9										
Maximinus Thrax											1		1	2										
Gordian III	2	4	2	3	1	2	4			1			1	21										
Phillip I														0										
Herenia Et.	1													1										
Trebonian Gallus	1													1										
Trajan Decius														0										
Volusianus	1													1										
Unidentified													25	13	38									
SUM	3	2	13	49	2	6	2	6	6	43	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	2	34	18	68	127

¹⁸ Only coins discovered at Novae by the expedition from the Antiquities of Southeastern Europe Research Center of the University of Warsaw in 1960–2022.

from the site, with the new sector yielding 100% more provincial coins compared to the number of finds from the army hospital (*valetudinarium*).¹⁹ After ten years of research in the new sector, this coinage group constitutes 65% of all of the coin finds from the two sectors taken together (sectors IV and XII). Intensive minting of provincial “bronzes” started in the times of Septimius Severus and lasted through the end of the reign of Gordian III. The coins of Septimius Severus are the most numerous, but those of other rulers are not significantly less in number. Coins of short-lived emperors like Macrinus (217–218)²⁰ or Diadumenianos²¹ are just as numerous.

The Nikopolis ad Istrum mint is the most extensively represented provincial mint among the finds from Novae.²² This situation appears to be constant and there is no indication that things will change with the coming of new finds, considering that sector XII has added a huge number of coins from this mint. At present there are 62 coins constituting 32% of the total of 197 recorded provincial “bronzes”. One is also entitled to assume that most of the unidentified provincial coins (see Table 1) also came from this mint. Thus, it is reasonable to say that at least half of the coins in circulation in the army camps on the Lower Danube came from Nicopolis ad Istrum.

The town of Nicopolis ad Istrum, established by Trajan,²³ also abounded in provincial coinage,²⁴ although the coin pool from the site demonstrates considerable variety:²⁵ not only coins from the local mint, which is to be expected considering the extent of this mint’s production, but also other mints, e.g., Marcianopolis, Phillipopolis, Anchialos, Hadrianopolis, Deultum, all of which are represented in the hoards discovered at Hotnitsa, Phelishite, Rodina, Suhindol, Gorna Rositsa and Lyaskovets. The hoards also show that the mints of Tomis, Odessus, Mesembria and Bizye, none of which have yet appeared among the finds from Novae, were also represented in Nicopolis.

What then are the “subtle” changes hinted at earlier? The new finds suggest that Marcianopolis was just as active in supplying the army camps on the Lower Danube with coins from its mint (see Table 1)²⁶ The city, which peaked in prosperity in the times of the Severan emperors (clearly indicated in Table 1), was very important for the province. Two hoards from this time were discovered within the city and six more outside of it.²⁷ Of the pool of coins found at Novae to date, 49 (that is, 25%) were issued by the Marcianopolis mint and 88% of this number come from the recent excavations. In other words, the results from Sector XII show a rising trend for the coinage of Marcianopolis (see Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

The ratio of coins from the two mints is currently 32% to 25%, highlighting the substantial position of the second of the two mints in the Lower Danubian economy of the first half of the third century CE. The same statistic for the finds from the army hospital was 20% to 9% in favor of the Nicopolis ad Istrum mint. In light of the new finds, the position of Marcianopolis has started to look better. The number of coins from this mint has grown by 88%.

The Hadrianopolis mint²⁸ is represented by eight coins (4%) and it appears that it was not very common on the Lower Danube. The other mints are present in either one or two examples with the exception of Viminacium,²⁹ which is represented by five coins (see Fig. 3), dating from Gordian III to Volusian,³⁰ making the latter the youngest provincial coins discovered at Novae. When Viminacium was producing its coins for circulation on the Lower Danube, the other provincial mints were no longer operational. As a matter of fact, when the Viminacium mint

¹⁹ CIOLEK, DYCZEK 2011.

²⁰ BOTEVA 1995, *passim*.

²¹ Cf. BOTEVA-BOJANOVA 1997, *passim*.

²² IVANOV 1983; POULTNER 1995; IVANOV 2012; TOPALILOV 2005, pp. 251–262.

²³ See TOPALILOV 2005, with further references.

²⁴ VLADKOVA 2020.

²⁵ MINKOVA 2002, pp. 128–131.

²⁶ GEROV 1975, pp. 49–72.

²⁷ KOWALCZYK-MIZERAKOWSKA (2025, in print).

²⁸ JURUKOVA 1987; VARBANOV 2002

²⁹ KOS 1992.

³⁰ AMNG, vol. I, pp. 21–80.

³¹ SPASIĆ-ĐURIĆ 2002 (with further references).



Fig. 1. Bronze coin of Caracalla from Martianopolis (Inv. no. 22/22) discovered at Novae, reference: *AMNG* I 688–689, see VARBANOV 1050 (photo: Krzysztof Narloch).



Fig. 2. Bronze coin of Gordian III from Viminacium, Upper Moesia (Inv. no. 67/22) discovered at Novae, reference: VARBANOV 115 (photo: Krzysztof Narloch).

started making coins, which was in 239–255 CE,³¹ the Thracian and Moesian operations had already ceased.³²

Other mints that issued their coins for circulation in Lower Moesia in the first half of the third century CE included Anchialos (8 coins, 4%), Dionysopolis and Deultum (two coins each)

³² See G. ORLOV, *Viminacijum: Emisije lokalnog novaca*, Belgrade–Požarevac 1970; F. MARTIN, “A viminaciumi tartományi verotoveinek pozicioja”, *Numizmatikai*

Közlöny 1991–1992, pp. 214–217; P. Kos, “The Provincia Moesia Superior in Viminacium”, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (Bonn) 1992, pp. 209–214.