

ROMAN COINS IN SARMATIAN GRAVES FROM THE TERRITORY OF BANAT (2ND – 4TH CENTURIES AD)*

Lavinia Grumeza**

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(Abstract)

Coins are to be found in graves from the Tisa river basin, starting with the end of the 2nd century – beginning of the 3rd century AD. Currently 20 necropolises or places with funerary remains are known in the historical territory of Banat.

We notice that coins appear mostly in rich, male graves, where the deceased enjoyed a special funerary treatment; sometimes rites that belong to the eastern Sarmatian world were practiced. Thus, the presence of the coin is closely connected to the status and importance of the deceased inside his group of origin.

As for the practice of putting “Charon’s obolus” it is impossible to state with certainty if the Sarmatians knew and practiced this custom. It is possible that some groups of Sarmatians knew the symbolical “payment” for passage in the after-world and to fulfill the necessary rituals by offering a coin. We especially refer here to necropolises from the end of the 2nd century – 3rd century AD, where we have the majority of Roman imports, graves with coffins and where we often find a coin. Starting with the 2nd century in the Roman Empire the cults of different gods and spirits intertwine resulting an inhomogeneous syncretic amalgam. It is on this background that we register a major increase of superstitions inside different layers of the society and a spread of popular beliefs. For sure part of these beliefs and superstitions from the boundaries of the Empire, along with exported goods and ended up in the Sarmatian Barbaricum, a territory in between Roman provinces.

Coins appear in Sarmatian funerary complexes due to Roman influence¹. They are to be found in graves from the Tisa river basin, starting with the end of the 2nd century – beginning of the 3rd century AD, being extremely rare in eastern areas².

Graves with coins have been documented in areas where there are concentrations of Roman

monetary finds, treasure hoards but also other imported goods³. At this time there have been 20 documented necropolises or spots, with such funerary discoveries in the historical territory of Banat⁴:

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** Museum of Ethnography and Border Regiment, Caransebeș, e-mail: lavinia_grumeza@yahoo.com.

¹ Kulcsár 1998, 114.

² In the paper written by A. V. Simonenko, I. I. Marčenko and N. Ju. Limbesesis dedicated to Roman imports from the lower Danube area – the region of Kuban only three coins are identified in this vast area. A *denarius* issued for Faustina Minor has been found in grave G 8, Majaki (Beljaevka) and two bronze coins have been found in grave 121, Voronežskaja (Ust’-Labinsk); Simonenko *et alii* 2008, 82, 358, Taf. 146/1,b.

³ Kulcsár 1998, 114.

⁴ The historical borders of Banat are: the river Mureș (north), the river Tisza (west), the Danube (south), the river Cerna and the Carpathian Mountains between the gorge from Zam and the beginning of the river Cerna (east).

Grave	Orientation	Coin type	Position	Dating ⁵	Bibliography
Banatski Despotovac – <i>Kollinger kertek</i> , M 4 (1) ⁶	S–N	<i>antoninianus</i> issued by Probus, Obv: IMP C M AVR PROBUS P F AVG, Rv: SOLI INVICTO	to the right of the pelvis	3 rd century – 4 th century	Párducz 1940, 262
Banatski Despotovac – <i>Kollinger kertek</i> , M 6 (1)	S–N	<i>antoninianus</i> issued by Claudius II; Obv: IMP C CLAUDIVS P F AVG, Rv: FELICITAS AVG	in the right hand	3 rd century – 4 th century	Párducz 1940, 262
Crvena Crkva – <i>Zoltán-téglavető</i> , M 1 (2)	S–N	bronze coin issued by Gallienus	in a pot	3 rd century – 4 th century	Milleker 1906, 266; Párducz 1931, 81
Kiszombor – <i>B</i> , M 92 (3)	S–N	<i>denarius</i> issued by Trajan <i>denarius</i> fragment	next to the pelvis	end of the 2 nd century – 3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 141
Kiszombor – <i>B</i> , M 103 (3)	S–N	<i>denarius</i> (2 nd century, Antoninus Pius ?)	next to the left hand	end of the 2 nd century – 3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 141
Kiszombor – <i>B</i> , M 112 (3)	S–N	<i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius	on the thorax	3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 142
Kiszombor – <i>B</i> , M 119 (3)	S–N	<i>denarius</i> issued by Hadrian	to the right of the pelvis	3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 142
Kiszombor – <i>B</i> , M 209 (3)	SE–NW	<i>denarius</i> issued by Commodus	–	3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 142
Kiszombor – <i>B</i> , M 213 (3)	S–N	<i>Denarius</i>	next to the left hand	end of the 2 nd century – 3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 143
Klárafalva – <i>B</i> , M 12 (4)	NE–SW	<i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius	next to the right thigh	3 rd century	Párducz 1931, 84; Párducz 1950, 143
Klárafalva – <i>B</i> , M 23 (4)	S–N	bronze coin (Marcus Aurelius ?)	–	3 rd century	Párducz 1931, 85; Párducz 1950, 143
Klárafalva – <i>Köszégháza</i> , M 2 (5)	S–N	<i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius	–	3 rd century	Párducz 1951, 24
Klárafalva – <i>Vasútállomás</i> , M 1 (6)	SSE–NW	<i>denarius</i> de issued by Trajan	next to the skull	3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 159
Klárafalva – <i>Vasútállomás</i> , M 3 (6)	SSE–NW	<i>denarius</i> issued by Lucius Verus for Lucilla	–	3 rd century	Párducz 1950, 159
Kovácska – <i>Cigleria Stavilej</i> , M 1 (7)	–	coin issued by Severus Alexander	–	3 rd century – 4 th century	Dordević 1994, 43
Pančevo – <i>Naj</i> , M 4 (8)	SE–NW	bronze coin issued by Galba; more likely it is one of the first tetrarchs who resembles Galba ⁷	on the chest	second half 3 rd century – middle 4 th century	Dordević 1994, 44
Pančevo – <i>Naj</i> , M 8 (8)	SE–NW	silver coin issued by Macrinus for Diadumenian	in the right hand	3 rd century	Dordević 1994, 44

⁵ According to the brooches.

⁶ The number between brackets from the table coincides with the number from the map (Pl. II).

⁷ Information C. Găzdac.

⁸ Information C. Găzdac; initially, the coin has been published as being made from bronze; see Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 59–60.

Grave	Orientation	Coin type	Position	Dating	Bibliography
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 5 (9)	SE-NW	silver coin, <i>denarius</i> ⁹ plated <i>denarius</i> ⁸ , issued by Elagabalus Obv: IMP ANTONINVS PIVS AVG, Rv: P M TR P II COS III P P	–	second half 3 rd century – first half 4 th century	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 59–60
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 6 (9)	SE-NW	3 rd century coin	–	second half 3 rd century – first half 4 th century	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 60
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 16 (9)	SE-NW	coin issued by Constantius I Chlorus for Fl. Valerius Severus Obv: SEVERVS NOB CAES, Rv: VIRTU-S AV-GG ET CAES NN	–	first half 4 th century ⁹	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 61
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 21 (9)	SE-NW	two coins, 2 nd and 3 rd centuries; Obv (second coin): L SEPT SEV AV-G IMP XI PART MAX; Rv: MONETA AVGG	–	second half 3 rd century	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 62
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 30 (9)	SE-NW	three bronze coins, 4 th century	next to the hip	4 th century	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 63
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 34 (9)	SE-NW	3 rd century bronze coin	–	second half 3 rd century – first half 4 th century	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 64
Pančevo – Vojlovica, M 52 (9)	SE-NW	a <i>denarius</i> possibly issued by Marcus Aurelius, also used as a pendant	–	second half 3 rd century – first half 4 th century	Batistić Popadić 1984–1985, 67
Vršac – Crvenka, M 4 (10)	N-S	bronze coin issued by Claudius II	right next to the left shoulder	end of the 3 rd century – beginning of the 4 th century	Simovlević 1957, 57
Vršac – Crvenka, M 8 (10)	N-S	bronze coin issued by Gallienus	to the right of the pelvis	end of the 3 rd century	Simovlević 1957, 58
Vizejdia, T 4 (11)	N-S	<i>denarius</i> issued by Antoninus Pius; Rv: COS IIII <i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius for Divus Antoninus Pius; Rv: DIVO PIO ¹⁰ <i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius for Divus Antoninus Pius; Rv: CONSECRATIO ¹¹ <i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius; Rv: COS II <i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius; Rv: RELIG AVG IMP VI COS III	–	end of the 2 nd century – beginning of the 3 rd century	Vaday 1986, 207

⁹ The issue of the coin changes the dating of the grave to the first half of the 4th century AD (Severus II rules between 306–307 AD).

¹⁰ The coin is wrongly mentioned as issued by Antoninus Pius; Vaday 1986, 207.

¹¹ The coin is wrongly mentioned as issued by Antoninus Pius; Vaday 1986, 207.

¹² Roman numbers have been used to count monetary finds from uncertain or poorly documented funerary contexts, see Pl. II.

Grave	Orientation	Coin type	Position	Dating	Bibliography
Beba Veche (I) ¹²	–	<i>denarius</i> issued by Trajan Obv: IMP. CAES. NERVA. TRAIAN. AVG. GERM.; Rv: P. M. TR. P. COS. III. P. P.	–	end of the 3 rd century	Milleker 1906, 207; Dörner 1971, 689
Glogonj – <i>Pik Tamiš</i> (II)	–	coins issued by Aurelian and Diocletian	–	4 th century	Dorđević 1994, 42
Jasenovo – <i>Čigłana</i> (III)	–	bronze coin from Constantine I	–	4 th century	Barački 1975, 32–33
Nagy Szredistye (IV)	–	coin issued by Marcus Aurelius for Faustina Junior	–	middle 2 nd century – first third 3 rd century	Reizner 1899, 64; Milleker 1906, 252–253
Sănpetru German – <i>Rech</i> (V)	–	six Roman bronze coins (<i>folles</i>), stuck to each other, issued by: Constantine I (1) (type RIC VII 222); Constans (3 pieces) (type RIC VIII 100 minted at Thessalonica), Constantius II (2 pieces) (type RIC VIII 102, minted at Thessalonica),	next to the skeleton; all coins come from a single grave	4 th century	Mitrea 1963, 471; Dörner 1970, 455–56
Srpski Krstur (VI)	–	<i>denarius</i> issued by Hadrian	–	–	Párducz 1942, 326
Stracevo – <i>Livezi</i> (VII)	–	Coins	–	4 th century	Dorđević 1994, 46
Novi Kneževac (VIII)	S–N	<i>denarius</i> issued by Lucius Verus for Lucilla <i>denarius</i> issued by Hadrian <i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius for Faustina Junior	–	3 rd century–4 th century	Párducz 1957, 98
Zádăreni (IX)	–	<i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius: Obv: IMP M ANTONINVS AVG TR P XXV; Rv: VOTA SOL DECENN COS III <i>denarius</i> issued by Marcus Aurelius for Divus Antoninus Pius: Obv: DIVVS ANTONINVS, Rv: CONSECRATIO	in the pot	2 nd century–4 th century	Barbu – Hügel 1993, 71; Hügel – Barbu 1997, 563, 589.
Vršac – <i>Vélikí Rit</i> (X)	–	Coins dated in the 4 th century	–	–	Barački 1961, 117–118

At the present state of research there is no general study concerning monetary presence in Sarmatian graves. By comparison of our data with certain monographs of some micro-regions or Sarmatian sites from the Great Hungarian Plain we notice that the tradition of depositing monetary offerings represents a funerary characteristic of Sarmatian communities from Banat. The following necropolises stand out: Kiszombor – *B*, where coins are found in 6 of the 29 attested graves (20%) and Pančevo – *Vojlovica*, where they are found in 7 of the 54 graves (13%)¹³. Monetary funerary finds are concentrated in the north and south of Banat¹⁴ (Pl. II), being found in only 5% of presently documented Sarmatian graves from Banat.

In two cases – Crvena Crkva – *Zoltán-téglavető*, M 1 and Zădăreni – coins were found inside a pot, probably as an offering. For the rest of the analyzed situations the coins were placed in the right hand of the deceased, but probably also in a pouch, with other objects (the pieces are found to the right of the pelvis, next to the right thigh, next to the hip, etc.). Rarely (in one occasion) they were identified on the thorax and next to the skull (Kiszombor – *B*, M 112 and Klárafalva – *Vasútállomás*, M 1)¹⁵. Such positions of coins are also found in Sarmatian necropolises from Szolnok County¹⁶, but also in Roman necropolises from Dacia¹⁷. In the north-European *Barbaricum* coins appear in graves, in different places: close to the hand, in the deceased's mouth, but also inside some pots¹⁸.

In Sarmatian graves found in the territory of Banat silver coins are the most numerous (up to approximately 54%)¹⁹, especially *denarii* issued

by Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. These pieces are found in necropolises dated 2nd–3rd centuries AD, but also later on.

The situation is similar for the rest of Sarmatian graves from the Great Hungarian Plain: coins from the Antonine period predominate²⁰, but also coins from the 3rd century AD²¹.

These data are normal, because the Roman *denarius* represents the most frequent type found in the *Barbaricum*, especially during the period between the Marcomannic Wars and the rule of Septimius Severus²². *Denarii* issued during the period of the Antonine dynasty predominate in all types of discoveries from the territories outside the Roman Empire: treasure hoards, graves, offerings and settlements²³. Tacitus even mentions that the Germans east of the Rhine selected good quality *denarii*²⁴. This passage is considered in historiography as a *topos*: barbarians next to the *limes* adopted Roman habits and goods, while barbarians living to the east (*superiores barbari*) did not treasure gold and silver²⁵.

Bronze coins are found in much smaller numbers (26%), being documented especially in graves from the 3rd century (the second half) and 4th century AD, from the territory of Banat²⁶. By comparison with the *denarius*, of which only one is found (except the case of the barrow grave from Vizejdia), bronze coins appear in number of three (Pančevo – *Vojlovica*, M 30) or even six (Sânpetru German – *Rech*), in the same grave.

In Greek and Latin mythologies the ferryman was paid a symbolic tax – one *obolus* (the passage to the other side had to be affordable for everyone). Thus a funerary rite was accomplished, a habit,

medallions. They arrive in great numbers in the center and eastern parts of barbarian central Europe towards the end of the 3rd century AD, Bursche 2006, 225.

²⁰ Vaday 1989, 186.

²¹ Kőhegyi 1966–1967, 111.

²² For example in the center and southern parts of present-day Poland, nine out of ten Roman coins are represented by *denarii*. Exceptions to the rule (*denarii* are found in smaller numbers) are certain territories close to the *limes*, north-eastern present-day Poland, Lithuania and Königsberg, see Bursche 1992, 2; Bursche 1994, 472; Bursche 2002, 121; Bursche 2008, 53; with the bibliography.

²³ Bursche 2008, 53.

²⁴ Tacitus, *Germ.*, 5, 3 (*Pecuniam probant veterem et diu notam, serratos bigatosquae*).

²⁵ Tacitus, *Germ.*, 5, 3 (*Possessione et usu haud perinde adficiuntur. Est videre apud illos argentea vasa legatis et principibus eorum muneri data, non in alia vilitate quam quae humo finguntur*); for a critical discussion see also Bursche 2008, 55–56.

²⁶ These data are normal given the monetary economic situation in the Roman Empire at that time.

¹³ Coins are not present in all Sarmatian necropolises and neither are they present in all tombs from such a necropolis, from the Great Hungarian Plain. For example in the necropolis from Csongrád – Kenderföldek there are 115 graves, but coins are found in just 7 funerary contexts, at Madaras Halmok there are 72 coins in over 600 graves and in the whole county Szolnok there are coins in only 11 funerary contexts; Kőhegyi 1966–1967, 113; Vaday 1989, 186; Kőhegyi – Vörös 1996, 183–198; Farkas – Torbágyi 2008, 255.

¹⁴ Pl. II; this map reflects to a high degree the level of archaeological research but also that of published information.

¹⁵ No coins were documented to be found in the deceased's mouth. In the Roman Empire there existed the eschatological belief stating that the soul of the dead leaves the body through the mouth, thus a definite break with the world of the living and the soul begins its journey to the kingdom of Orcus/ Dis Pater/ Pluto, see Alföldy-Găzdac 2009, 63.

¹⁶ Vaday 1989, 187.

¹⁷ Pislaru 2003, 80.

¹⁸ Bursche 2002, 126.

¹⁹ Bronze coins occupy a secondary position with 26%, and for 20% of the coins we do not know the metal they were struck of. We have no finds of gold coins (*aurei*) or of

in the ritual of passing – incorporation²⁷. For the 1st–3rd centuries AD in Roman graves from Pannonia but also from other areas of the Empire we find that one coin is placed²⁸. In the case of the analyzed Sarmatian graves the situation is similar: in the graves dated in the 2nd (the second half) and 3rd centuries AD, most often a single coin is put.

In necropolises from Dacia, but also in other provincial necropolises, the depositing of several coins was a usual practice, especially in the 4th century AD. “Spending” in the after-world could still be numerous in the Roman funerary mentality. A. Alföldy – Găzdac mentions the customs officer Aecus, Hermes or Dis Pater, characters from the Roman funerary tradition that might be angered for not receiving their *obolus*²⁹. Placing several silver coins (possibly in a pouch) might have other symbolic values: money for “spending” in the after-world, or, in the case of bronze coins – a symbolic part of the deceased fortune (*pars pro toto*)³⁰. We cannot ignore personal beliefs: certain individuals might consider that a larger sum of money meant sure passage in the nether world³¹.

Several coins, up to 20 pieces, are also found in funerary sites from the central-north European *Barbaricum*³². In the Przeworsk culture coins have been documented in graves ranging from the 1st until the 4th centuries AD, *denarii* from the Antonine period and those from the 3rd century AD predominating³³. In the Wielbark culture and in Debczyno Group coins appear in graves, especially in the periods C1b – C2 as pendants or amulets places in pouches, next to the deceased³⁴.

As far as Sarmatian graves from the Great Hungarian Plain are concerned, it is considered that the coins cannot be relied on as criterion for absolute dating, the *denarii* from the 2nd century AD still being in use and deposited in graves 150–200 years after they were issued. Only monetary pieces from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD can offer more exact dating³⁵. The same situation

can be found in the central and north-eastern European *Barbaricum*: 2nd century AD *denarii* are still used in the “living culture”, that is in the daily life of the barbarians until the 5th and even the 6th centuries AD³⁶.

When it comes to Roman necropolises, information regarding the tradition of depositing coins (“Charon’s *obolus*”) is numerous, but the same cannot be stated with regards to the Sarmatian world. For now it is difficult to state what were the beliefs and customs of these communities regarding the “after life”. Did the coin represent the pay for the ferryman? Was it a customs, taken as such, from the Romans or a simple superstition? A. H. Vaday considers that the coins are rather an element of the costume, suggesting the “profession” or the status of the deceased (*In diesen Fällen wurde der „Beruf“ des Verstorbenen durch die Bekleidung und sonstige Beigaben betont*)³⁷.

In order to come closer to an answer we have compared our data with similar funerary situations from the central-north-European *Barbaricum*, but also from the Roman Empire. I considered it necessary to discuss the status and meaning of the coin in the barbarian world. The way in which an object is gained, its importance in the society of “the living”, can be clues in establishing its funerary use.

Based on literary sources, A. Bursche notices that coins appear in the barbarian environment (in the Przeworsk, Wielbark, Luboszyce cultures, the area of Elba and the western-Baltic area) through several sources: subsidies or tributes paid by the Romans (*annua munera*), as payment for releasing Roman captives (usually with gold coins), *stipendia* (*antoniniani* or *folles*), *donativa* (silver and gold coins received by those serving as auxiliaries in the Roman army), *annonae foederaticiae* (money for those serving as allies of the Romans), diplomatic gifts (gold coins and medallions) or through robbery³⁸. The same sources can be invoked for the Sarmatian world, adding Roman-Sarmatian commerce as source of coins in the plains between Tisa and the Danube³⁹.

²⁷ Alföldy-Găzdac 2009, 53, 54; Pîslaru 2003, 78.

²⁸ In the necropolises from Pannonia (Brigetio, Carnuntum, Aquincum, Matrica) a single coin is deposited in 94,2% (of the cases of tombs with coins), Găzdac 2014 (to be published).

²⁹ Alföldy-Găzdac 2009, 68.

³⁰ Alföldy-Găzdac – Găzdac 2010, 164.

³¹ Găzdac 2014 (to be published).

³² Bursche 2002, 126.

³³ Ciolek 2008, 157.

³⁴ Bursche – Okulicz-Kozaryn 1999, 154.

³⁵ In the necropolis from Madaras Halmok (the only Sarmatian necropolis completely researched), out of the 72 coins that were found, 34 were 1st – 2nd century AD *denarii*, that sometimes appear with 4th century AD coins or Hunnic ceramic; Köhegyi 1966–1967, 113; Vaday 1989, 186–187;

Köhegyi – Vörös 1996, 183–198; Farkas – Torbágy 2008, 255.

³⁶ Bursche 2008, 56. Eggers distinguishes between „living culture” (“die lebende Kultur”), “dead culture” (“die tote Kultur”) and „retrieved culture” (“die wiederentdeckte Kultur”), Eggers 1951, 23–24.

³⁷ Coins are especially present in the graves of male warriors, alongside weapons, parts from the harness or bracelets, Vaday 1989, 187.

³⁸ Bursche 1986, 284; Pl. I, 1.

³⁹ Köhegyi 1992, 441–445; Vaday 2005, 15–24.

The functionality of coins differs in the Roman Empire and the *Barbaricum*. A. Bursche distinguishes between “*all-purpose money*” in the Empire (as means of payment and exchange, value standard and guaranteed value) and “*limited purpose money*” (with a specific destination)⁴⁰. In this last case, when dealing with pre-state societies, without strong politic elites to guarantee the value, the coin very rarely had economic value.

It is because of this that we encounter significant differences between funerary coin offerings from the *Barbaricum* and the Roman Empire. Generally, coins deposited in Roman necropolises have little value, usually being made from bronze. According to the tradition the ferryman needed to be paid only a symbolic tax, which is attested mostly in the graves of women and children, more vulnerable but also more faithful preservers of the traditions⁴¹. In the Sarmatian environment from Banat the situation is different: coins are predominant in rich male graves, there are silver pieces (it indicates the social status of the deceased?), often they are old pieces that probably had a symbolic meaning, hard to decipher today.

In the Roman necropolises from Brigetio coins have distinct functions: tax for crossing over the Styx, *pars pro toto* or pendants⁴². Coins can also be offerings for the gods, money for other expenditures in the after-life (the deceased needs to have what he needs so that he does not return to the world of the living)⁴³. Thus, the presence of monetary pieces on tombs in the Roman world does not necessarily indicate the belief/ customs of “Charon’s *obolus*”.

Beyond their symbolic value the representations on the obverse were also important in choosing coins. In the necropolises from Brigetio a significant group of “religious” coins stands out. The representations on the obverse with Aeternitas, Felicitas, Fortuna, Salus, Providentia, Spes, Tranquillitas transmit the desire for kindness, piety or messages concerning the after-world that might have an eschatological significance for the survivors⁴⁴. Unfortunately this secondary symbolism, relevant from the personal point of view, can be traced on only several coins discovered in funerary contexts in Banat, the description of the pieces being very summary. Still, in cases

where these descriptions are present, we notice the preference for funerary subjects, on the *denarii* from graves dating from the 2nd – 3rd centuries AD. At Zădăreni, on the reverse of a silver coin, Marcus Aurelius is presented veiled, standing left, sacrificing at a tripod, at his feet a bull (RIC 3, 247), and at Vizejdia, on the reverse of a coin issued by the same Marcus Aurelius we find Mercury standing, holding a patera and caduceus (RIC III, 298). Also the many coins issued for Antoninus Pius, with the legend CONSECRATIO or DIVO PIO, have represented on the reverse (for the barbarians the image was more important than the writing) most often funerary pyres, funerary eagles or altars (RIC III, 429–442).

With regards to the graves containing coins from the northern *Barbaricum*, A. Bursche speaks about an ideological function: monetary imagery (the imperial portrait) played a special role in the Germanic symbolism⁴⁵. The same A. Bursche considers that we cannot discuss the classical tradition (“Charon’s *obolus*”), but rather other rites of passage (*rites de passage*) and anthropological roots⁴⁶. R. Ciolek also proposes other explanations for the coin offerings found in the Przeworsk graves: magic role, part of spoils, costume elements and in the royal graves they also serve as ornaments⁴⁷.

There is a single case (M 52, Pančevo – *Vojlovica*) where in the Sarmatian funerary discoveries from Banat a silver coin (a *denarius* issued by Marcus Aurelius) is used as a pendant. Such jewelries have been found in other Sarmatian graves from the Tisa basin, being a characteristic of female funerary costume⁴⁸. There was a preference for silver coins, as their used in necklaces made from beads, simple necklaces or *torques*⁴⁹. Coins used as amulets/ perforated pendants are found both in the Roman Empire⁵⁰, as well as in the *Barbaricum* – in the graves belonging to the Sântana de Mureș – Cernjachov culture or in northern Europe⁵¹. In the *Barbaricum* all types of coins could practically be transformed in jewelry, including *denarii* or gold coins⁵².

In the case of perforated coins we can establish their primary function but we cannot say the same thing about other situations encountered in

⁴⁰ Bursche 2008, 57.

⁴¹ Alföldy-Găzdac – Găzdac 2010, 165, further information A. Alföldy-Găzdac.

⁴² Alföldy-Găzdac – Găzdac 2010, 166–167

⁴³ Alföldy-Găzdac 2007, 17.

⁴⁴ Alföldy-Găzdac – Găzdac 2010, 170.

⁴⁵ Bursche 2002, 125.

⁴⁶ Bursche 2002, 126.

⁴⁷ Ciolek 2008, 170.

⁴⁸ Vaday 1989, 60.

⁴⁹ Vaday 1989, 60.

⁵⁰ Bursche 2008, 57; Alföldy-Găzdac – Găzdac 2010, 155; Perassi 2011.

⁵¹ Bursche – Okulicz-Kozaryn 1999; Bursche 2002, 125.

⁵² Bursche 2008, 57.

Sarmatian graves from the territory of Banat. The absence of written sources and of an analysis of the whole monetary material found in the graves from the Great Hungarian Plain makes it difficult to offer a precise explanation.

Still, some observations regarding funerary contexts where the coins appear in the Sarmatian environment from Banat can be drawn. We mention here three distinct cases⁵³:

A very large group of unmarked graves (23), oriented south-north, dated in the middle and late Sarmatian period (end of the 2nd century AD – 4th century AD), where we find graves with wooden coffins, funerary arrangements with vegetal materials (mats), “purifications” of the pits (the skeleton is deposited on a bed made of limestone, on ash or on stone slabs). These types of arrangements are very rare in all Sarmatian graves from Banat (in just 5% of the cases) but predominate in the cases of graves containing coins. These graves, mostly of males, have a very rich funerary inventory.

A second group is represented by a few late unmarked Sarmatian graves (end of the 3rd century – 4th century AD), oriented north-south. These funerary complexes also had a specific character: inside grave 4 from Vršac – *Crvenka* there are three pots at the feet of the deceased (one of them contains an animal offering), in the case of grave 8 from the same necropolis there are two gold earrings and at Klárafalva -B, M 12 is the grave of male with a very rich funerary inventory.

The third category is made up of barrow 4 from Vizejdia, dated at the end of the 2nd century – beginning of the 3rd century AD. Here were found five *denarii* probably from the same grave (funerary deposit). Inside the barrow grave were found coffins, defensive and offensive weapons, harness pieces.

We notice that coins appear mostly in rich, male graves (with full inventories, weapons), where the deceased enjoyed a special funerary treatment, sometimes rites that belong to the eastern Sarmatian world were practiced. Thus, the presence of the coin is closely connected to the status and importance of the deceased inside his group of origin. We do not exclude the possibility, in the case of the barrow-grave from Vizejdia, that coins also

represented part of a capture or payment, interpretations also considered for funerary contexts from the Przeworsk culture.

Thus, we are dealing with separate cases and not with a single, unitary background of a certain belief. Even when it comes to the “living” barbarian culture, A. Busche concludes that “There was no uniform function of Roman coinage in Northern Europe. Its role was that of symbol or sign in social communication of a heterogeneous meaning. The Barbarian societies of Late Antiquity lacked clear dividing lines separating the economic from the social, political or symbolic function of coins, between *profanum et sacrum*”⁵⁴.

Funerary furniture from inside the graves, funerary offerings (parts of sacrificed animals, food and liquid from ceramic pots) are proof of the Sarmatian beliefs in the after-world. If these goods from the world of the living were necessary in the nether-world, surely money (pieces with a confirmed value) could also be useful. We cannot guarantee with certainty an intentional selection of “religious” coins, still we notice some preferences for funerary themes on some *denarii* from Sarmatian graves from the 2nd – 3rd centuries AD.

As for the practice of putting “Charon’s *obolus*” it is impossible to state with certainty if the Sarmatians knew and practiced this custom. It is possible that some groups of Sarmatians knew the symbolical “payment” for passage in the after-world and fulfill the necessary rituals by offering a coin. We especially refer here to necropolises from the end of the 2nd century – 3rd century AD (see group 1 from the diagram), where we have the majority of Roman imports (coins, *terra sigillata* vessels, brooches), graves with coffins and where we find very often a coin. Starting with the 2nd century in the Roman Empire the cults of different gods and spirits intertwine resulting an inhomogeneous syncretic amalgam. It is on this background that we register a major increase of superstitions inside different layers of the society and a spread of popular beliefs⁵⁵. For sure, part of these beliefs and superstitions left the boundaries of the Empire, along with exported goods and ended up in the Sarmatian *Barbaricum*, a territory in between Roman provinces (Pannonia Inferior, Dacia and Moesia Superior).

⁵³ Pl. I, 2. Correspondence analyses were done with the program CAPCA – *Correspondence Analysis and Principal Components Analysis* (downloaded from the site <http://www.archaeoinfo.dk/>, 20th December 2012). In this program we introduced all funerary features with coins (“objects”) and aspects concerning funerary rites, rituals and furniture (“variables”). We excluded from these analyses coin findings from stray funerary features.

⁵⁴ Bursche 2002, 127.

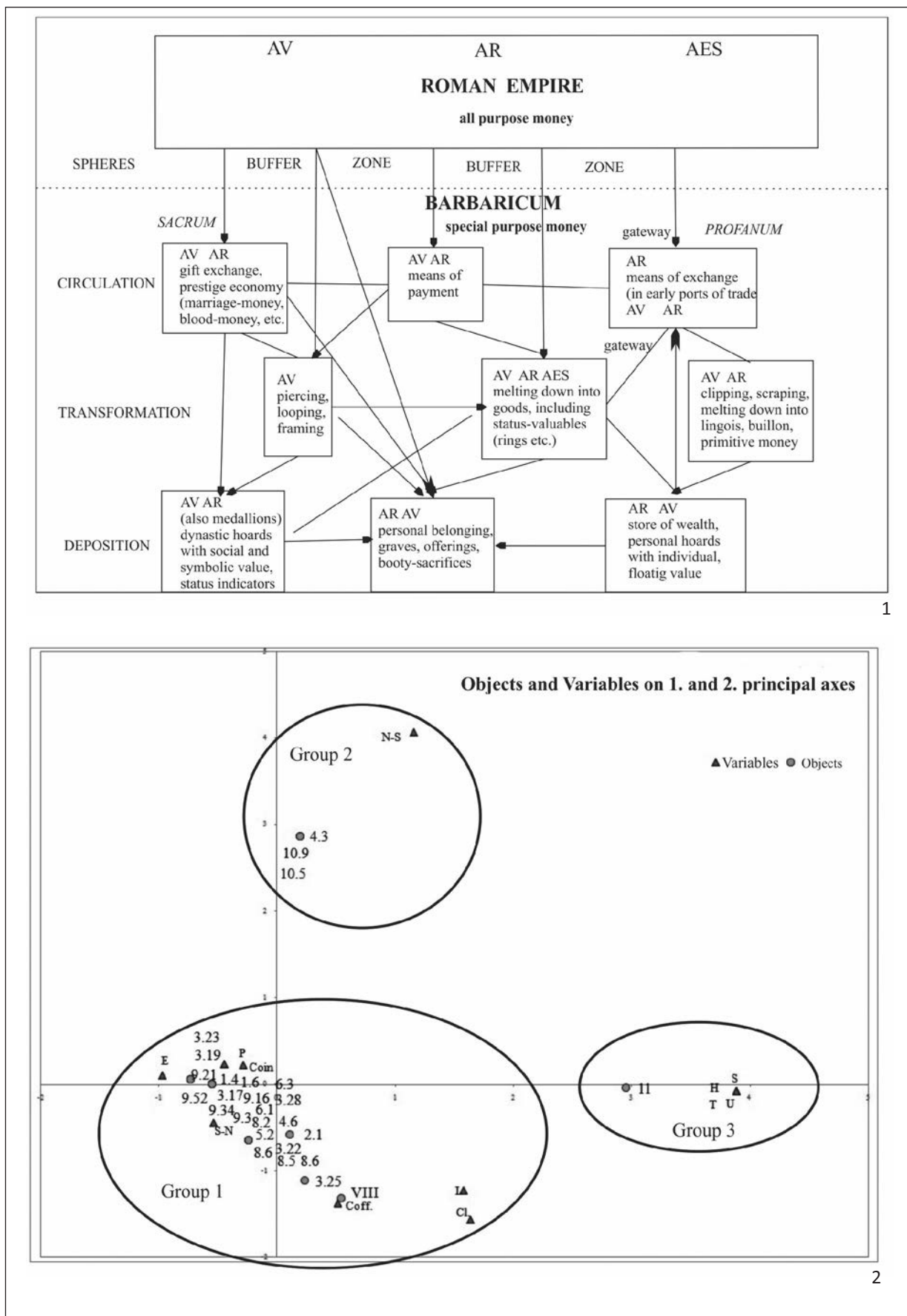
⁵⁵ Alföldy-Gázdac 2009, 73.

Translated by Cosmin Mihail Coatu

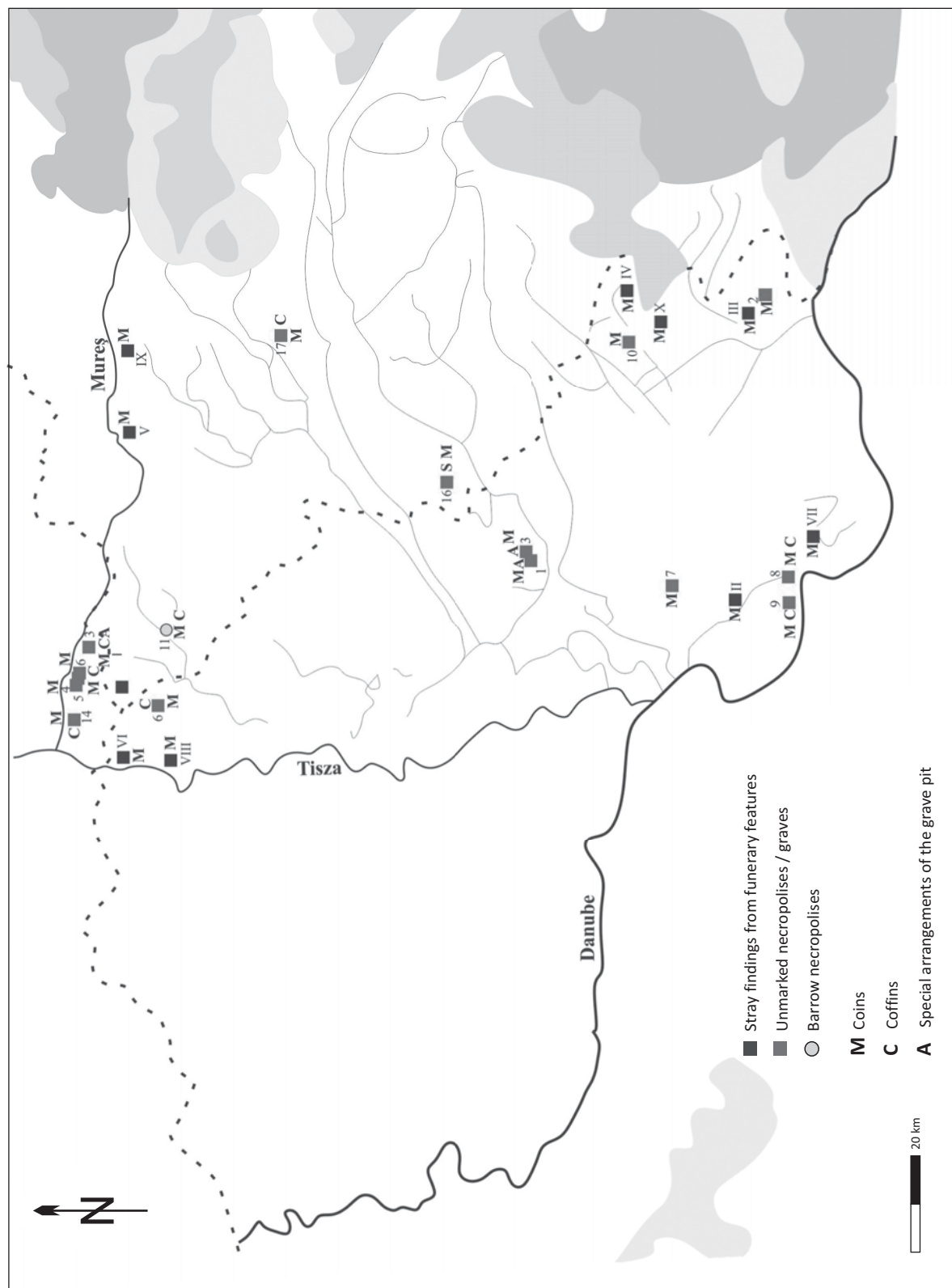
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Pl. I. 1. Function of Roman coins in German societies in third to fifth centuries AD (Bursche 1996); 2. Correspondence analyses (graves with coins and other funerary rituals).



Pl. II.