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AN UNCOMMON ISSUE OF MARCUS AURELIUS FROM ASIA MINOR

Rezumat: Este prezentată o emisiune monetară rară, cu prezumtivă proveniență dobrogeană, bătută într-un oraș grecesc de pe coasta de vest a Asiei Mici, în timpul domniei lui Marcus Aurelius. Legenda reversului redă la genitiv numele orașului Elaea și al strategului Pellonios, iar iconografia se constituie într-o interesantă combinație de efigii și simboluri ale unor zeițăi diferite: Asklepios cu atributele sale sacre, Demetra reprezentată de capsula de mac și spicele de grâu și Athena simbolizată de măslin. Divinitățile feminine au dominat pantheonul local din perioada autonomiei (sec. V-III a.Chr.), cultul Athenei fiind legat de legenda, menționată de Strabon, a întemeierii cetății de către atenienii participanți la războiul Troiei. Asklepios a devenit protector al orașului în epoca regatului Attalizilor, în timpul căruia Elaea a constituit principala bază navală a Pergamului.

Keywords: Asia Minor, medallion, Elaea, Aeolis, monetary issue, Marcus Aurelius, pantheon, *strategos*, syncretism.

The authors present a quite rare roman provincial monetary piece from Asia Minor, belonging to the private coins collection of Mr. Antoniu Popescu. From the collector's information, this one would be found in Dobrudja (on the territory of Romania or Bulgaria), but we could not prove this assumption. It's a matter of a special iconographic type that was struck in a limited amount, so that only few exemplars in the numismatic collections are known. Actually we tend to consider it a medallion, because of the weight close by 22 grams, semblable of a Roman *sestertius* in the 2nd half of the 2nd Century A.D.

The piece was struck in bronze and shows as follows:



Fig. 1: The medallion of Marcus Aurelius struck at Elaea

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Elaea: Marcus Aurelius

Obv. AV K M AVPHAI – OC ANTΩNINO / C; bust of Marcus Aurelius, wearing cuirass and *paludamentum*, r.

Rv. ΕΙΙΙ CTP ΠΕ[Λ]ΛΩ – NIOV NEO; below, ΕΛΑΙΤΩΝ; Asklepios wearing himation, standing facing, looking l.; in r. hand, snake-encircled staff; on l., poppy-head placed between two corn-ears; on r., olive-tree.

AE № 21,79 g; 35 mm; green patina; good preservation.

BMC Greek, 130, nr. 45.

The archaeological investigations found the ruins of the Asiatic Elaea on the southern side of Caicus river, at about 2 km from the river mouth and about 22-23 km away from Pergamum, in the neighbourhood of the ancient Grynium (Paulys Real-Encyclopädie: 2222-2223; BMC Greek, lii-liiii).

About the Greek city of Elaea and his status under the Roman rule the data are very scarce. According to Strabo (XIII, 615) this one – placed into the western Asia Minor's region so-called Aeolis, to the south of the Lesbos Island – had been the main naval station and harbor of the Kingdom of Pergamum during the early rule of the Attalids. After 133 B.C., at the time of Aristonicus' revolt against bequeath of Pergamum to Romans by Attalus III, the city issued a decree of adherence to the alliance treaty with Rome (Rigsby 1988: 127-130).

In the imperial time the cities of Roman Asia continued to be administrated by their own councils and magistrates, under the authority of the governor. In our case, the authority attested as controlling the monetary issues is the *strategos*. Till now a few coins bearing in the reverse's legend the name of Pellonios, *strategos* of Elaea under Marcus Aurelius (BMC Greek: 128), are known and edited. An about identical exemplar with the now presented one, but worse preserved, was published by W. Wroth (BMC Greek: 130, nr. 45), but the author read the whole genitive form of the word *νέος* from the legend, ΝΕ[OV], which on our exemplar seems to be engraved only as ΝΕΟ. The same type of reverse appears on a piece struck in the name of Faustina the Younger (Mionnet: 18, nr. 105) and another one (Mionnet: 16, nr. 95) with the effigy of Menestheus, the mythical founder of the city (Strabo: XIII, 622), both with ΝΕ. The entitling of this magistrate is sometimes abbreviated as ΕΙΙΙ ΠΕΛΛΩΝΙΟΥ (BMC Greek: 128, nr. 38) or written in the nominative form: ΕΙΙΙ. CTP. ΠΕΛΛΩΝΙΟC. ΕΛΑΙΤ. and without *νέος*, as in the case of an issue dedicated to the goddess Rome (Mionnet: 16, nr. 93). The different method of shortening of *νέος* gave birth to some controversies among the numismatists: if ΝΕΟ is a part of the word *νεωκόρος* (title accorded to a community or an official person who devoted a temple to the officiation of the imperial cult) or if it indicates that the magistrate bore the same name as his father, thus ΝΕΟC meaning “junior”, “the younger” (BMC Greek: 130). The iconographical association of Asklepios with another two different symbols – the poppy-head surrounded by corn-ears and the olive-tree – shows a certain tendency of syncretism. In Elaea besides the traditional deities from the age of autonomy, Demeter and Athena (symbolized by the mentioned elements), the pergamene

Asklepios become of importance during the Attalids' rule (BMC Greek: liii). He was adopted in the local pantheon and represented – sometimes only his attributes – together with elder sacred symbols of the city, as in this special type of reverse.

It is difficult to establish if our piece, perhaps belonging to a limited issue assigned of a special event, could arrive or how has arrived so far away as the Lower Danube region, in which such attestations are purely casual. However, the discovery of a medallion in the name of Commodus, issued by the *Koinón* of Pergamum and Ephesus, in a great tomb at Tomis (Chiriac 1990:351-353), could make plausible even such hypothesis.

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