

MARIANA PÎSLARU, *The Roman Coins from Potaissa. Legionary Fortress and Ancient Town*, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, 402 p., 38 fig., XXXV pl., ISBN 978-606-543-021-1.

Lavinia GRUMEZA

Caransebeș County Museum of
Ethnography and Border Regiment

The study of the monetary circulation in Potaissa is made on 3220 items (211 in a hoard, 3009 single finds in the fortress and in the town). The significant number of coins is due especially to 19th century collectors and to archaeological researches of the legionary fortress.

The book is structured into eight chapters and several subchapters. The first two chapters are a short presentation of the evolution of the Roman town of Potaissa and a history of the numismatic research and collections of Turda (the collection of the Unitarian Gymnasium, the private collections of the pioneers in the study of antiquities discovered in Turda area, as well as the collection held within the History Museum of Turda, Library of the Romanian Academy, National History Museum of Transylvania and the Museum of Fine Arts of Budapest).

The third chapter is dedicated to the coin finds in Dacian Patavissa, based on old publications and the few samples of the Turda History Museum numismatic collection, completed with new data from Téglás's diaries. The number of the coin finds for this period (pre-Roman) is rather insignificant (28 coins). The author notices that, before the Roman conquest, specific intra-Carpathian denominations circulated on the money market of Patavissa: local issues, Greek coins and Republican denarii (Preda 1998, 221).

Chapter IV was dedicated to the study of the Roman coins from Potaissa, according to the production technique. The plated denarii and antoninianii appear in large number in numerous sites from Dacia, especially during the Antonine and Severan period (Găzdac, Alföldy-Găzdac 2001, 140-142; Găzdac 2007, 596-597). In the case of Potaissa, alike other Roman centers from Dacia, the plated coins, the hybrid issues and the cast pieces represent an important part of discoveries. Mariana Pîslaru concluded that the plated coins arrived in the fortress in the same way as the "high quality" ones. They had been produced with the permission of the authorities, as a result of the insufficient cash supply for the troops, as well as of attempting to avoid huge transportation costs (p. 60). The frequency and variety of "barbarized" cast and plated coins coming from Potaissa compelled the author to inquire on the existence of a military mint within the fortress that functioned during the first decades of the 3rd century AD, although no moulds or dies were found. At this moment, no moulds to cast bronze or silver coins were found in Roman Dacia, only spoilt bronze casts ore large quantities of imitations. On the basis of these criteria, the presence of "semi-official" mints has been suggested at Hoghiz, Ilișua, Porolissum or Apulum (Găzdac, Alföldy-Găzdac 2001, 145 with bibliography).

The conclusions regarding the technique used for the production of plated and cast coins are supported by the results of interdisciplinary research carried out by N. Jumate, I. Petean (*Plating techniques. Metallographic analyses*), E. Stoicovici (*The Refractory Melting Pot with Copper Grain from Potaissa (Turda). Mineralogical analysis*), G. Niculescu, M. Georgescu (Compositional

analyses of several Roman coins from Potaissa) and C. Popa (*Engineering analysis of selected coins. Solid evidence of cast copies?*). These studies are a novelty in the Romanian numismatic literature.

The fifth chapter of the book is dedicated to the monetary circulation in Potaissa, during three distinct periods: Potaissa before the arrival of the legion (A. D. 106–168/169), Potaissa from AD 169, to 275 and Potaissa after the withdrawal under Aurelian – the 4th century AD. The first period rises to a quarter of the total amount of coins (22.12 %), while the second is represented by 72.58 % (p. 78). The last chronological sequence witnesses a downsize: only 16 coins were discovered (2.12 %). In the same chapter, the author makes remarks regarding the structure of the currency circulation in Potaissa, the value of the HS/year index, the imperial mints, the coins of PMS Col Vim, Provincia Dacia Type and the civic coins.

Mariana Pîslaru also revised the coins of the “Potaissa I” hoard and the presumptive hoard of “Potaissa II”. The author asserted that the coins of “Potaissa I” may have belonged to a legionnaire, perhaps returned from eastern campaigns of Gordianus III against the Persians, from AD 242, until AD 244 (p. 118). In the second case (“Potaissa II pocket hoard?”), the author concluded that we are not dealing with a hoard, because 45 coins had been found scattered on a range of a few meters and at different depths (p. 125).

By correlating the discovered coins with the stratigraphy and with other artifacts, certain conclusions were drawn concerning the circulation period of the coins, the phases of rebuilding/ transforming certain spaces and the functionality of specific rooms. Mariana Pîslaru makes remarks on the chronological value of individual coin finds when dating Roman habitation at Potaissa. She observes that coins had “long life” in Antiquity, given certain cases of coins surviving for many decades after being issued. Over 60 coins (“Charon’s obol”), mostly old and of low value, for example, have been found in Potaissa graves. We believe that a more detailed discussion with reference to the subject (the number of coins put inside the graves, types of the coins, the place inside the grave, etc.) had been useful.

The coin lot from Potaissa is wholly comparable with the size order of the coin finds from other important military or civilian sites of Dacia and provinces of the Empire. The author presents some values, but without other analytical discussions, evaluations or comparisons. She concludes that a strictly numerical comparison to other similar fortresses or towns is not relevant (for example Novaesium, Carnuntum, Apulum or Berzobis), except, in some circumstances, to Lauriacum or Albing (p. 137–138). So is also considered the irrelevance of a comparison to other sites within Dacia.

The Catalogue covers over 3000 pieces (Roman imperial coins of the 1st – 4th centuries AD, Greek Imperial coins of the 2nd – 3rd centuries AD, and a Byzantine coin of the 6th century AD) discovered within the fortress, the settlement and the necropolises of Potaissa. The catalogue is divided in eight segments: coins coming from the fortress of Legio V Macedonica, the ancient town, the modern town precincts, the necropolises and isolated graves of Turda (without further specification), and from the Kemény and Botár collection. The Potaissa I hoard is also described separately, in chronological order and on denomination. The catalogue benefits of high quality descriptions and a number of 35 plates, featuring images of the coins.

The book “The Roman coins from Potaissa. Legionary Fortress and Ancient Town” offers a complete catalogue of the coin finds from the Potaissa area. The author describes the old collections (from published and unpublished manuscripts), but also approximately 700 unpublished coins from excavations. Furthermore, in some cases, the old material published by I. Winkler and A. Hopârtean has been reanalyzed and rectified. Mariana Pîslaru’s book completes the list

of essential numismatic monographs dedicated to military and civilian towns of Dacia (Colonia Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, Porolissum, Apulum, Samum).

Bibliography

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Găzdac 2007 | = | C. Găzdac, Descoperiri de monedă de argint contrafăcută în castre din Dacia romană. Fraudă sau politică monetară romană?, în <i>Dacia Felix. Studia Michaeli Bărbulescu Oblata</i> , Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 597–605. |
| Găzdac,
Alföldy-Găzdac
2001 | = | C. Găzdac, A. Alföldy-Găzdac, Managementul crizei monetare? Monedele “P M S COL VIM” și “PROVINCIA DACIA” în politica monetară romană a secolului III p. Chr., în <i>EphNap</i> , XVIII, 2008, p. 93–130. |
| Preda 1998 | = | C. Preda, <i>Istoria monedei în Dacia preromană</i> , București, 1998. |