

REINTERPRETING THE NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE. A METHODOLOGICAL CASE STUDY: THE AUXILIARY FORT FROM GHERLA (CLUJ COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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The recent analyse of the numismatic material from some of the Roman forts – *Porolissum* (Găzdac and Gudea 2006), Ilișua (Protase and Gaiu 1997) (see Map no 1) – in the former province of Dacia has revealed that the plated silver coins were quite an important part of the coin circulation at a certain moment. This chronological segment is usually AD 193-218 – the reigns of Septimius Severus and Caracalla.

Unlike the civilian sites, the military ones seem to have been the target of a supply with this counterfeited coinage (Găzdac 2007).

In the case of the auxiliary fort on the Pomet Hill and the customhouse¹ at *Porolissum* from 64 silver coin finds bearing the portraits of the emperors of the period AD 193-218, 40 are plated (see Fig. no 1).

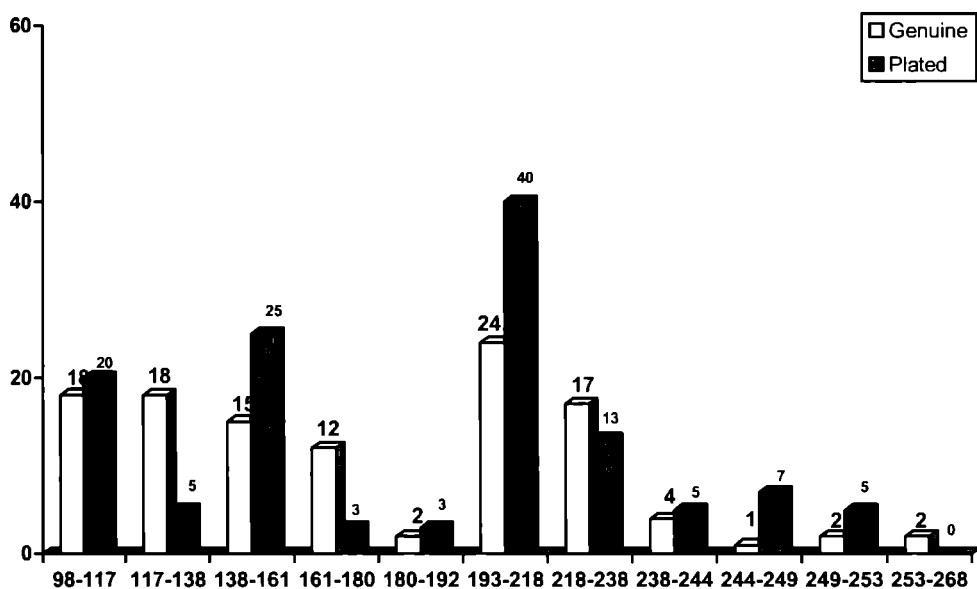


Fig. no 1. Graph of the silver coin finds from Porolissum (the fort on “Pomet Hill” and the customhouse) (after Găzdac 2007)

At Ilișua, a Roman cavalry fort, for the same chronological sequence 15 out of 22 denarii are plated (see Fig. no 2).

¹ The customhouse from *Porolissum* is also taken into account as many military personnel were on duty at this place (Gudea 1997 76).

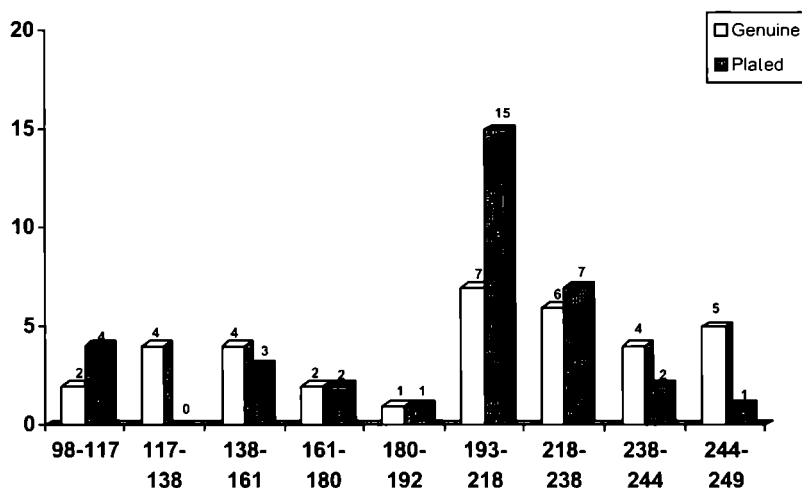


Fig. no 2. Graph of the silver coin finds from Ilișua - cavalry fort (after Găzdac 2007)

On the other hand, none of the urban sites of the province that provided us with relevant numismatic evidence shows such a similar situation for any of the chronological frames of the Roman administration in Dacia (Găzdac 2007).

At this point, we would like to bring to your attention the situation of numismatic evidence from the site of today city of Gherla (Cluj County).

During the last 40 years, a number of Roman coin finds were recorded as coming from the area of the city of Gherla. As it is known, here was located the Roman auxiliary fort of the cavalry unit *ala II Gallorum et Pannoniorum*, together with its adjacent settlement – *vicus* (see **Map no 2**).

Until now, it has been presumed that there was no possibility to separate the coin finds according to their findspot. Therefore, the numismatic material has been published so far like a picture at glance. At the same time, no detail and accurate analyses of these coins have been carried out. As a result, the coin statistics for the site of Gherla showed till this study that the inhabitants of this Roman site, soldiers and civilians, received mainly genuine silver coin (see **Fig. no 3**).

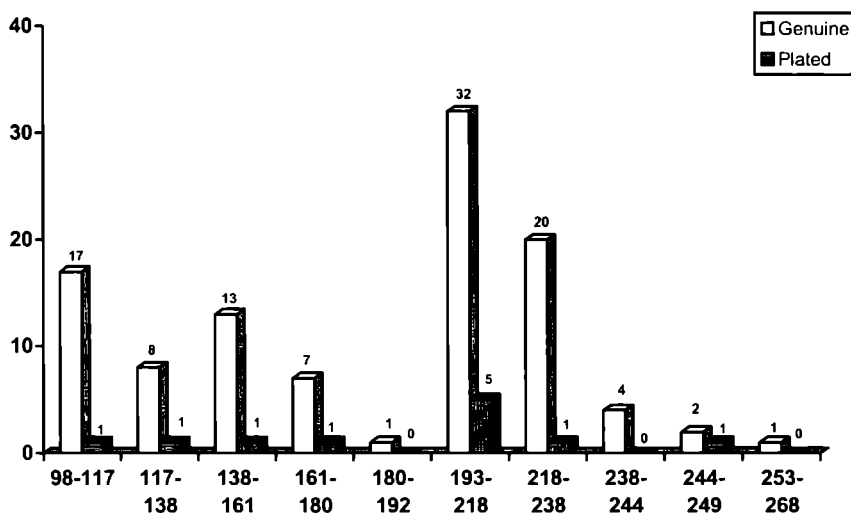


Fig. no 3. Graph of the silver coin finds from Gherla - situation at glance (after Găzdac 2007, including previous bibliography)

Therefore, one may ask: it was the Roman site of Gherla a subject of a particular monetary phenomenon compares to other auxiliary forts from Roman Dacia or it is just a matter of a methodological approach?

To solve this matter we followed two steps.

The first one was to identify on the field the topographical findspots in order to see if the coins were found within the area of the auxiliary fort or very close to it, or on the area of the Roman civilian settlement – the *vicus*.

The second step was to re-analyse the coins in detail and properly identify them.

Then what we got was a new graph (see Fig. no 4) of the silver coin finds retrieved only from the area of the cavalry fort and its close vicinity. As one can see this graph is entirely different from what we knew before about the Roman coin finds from the site of Gherla.

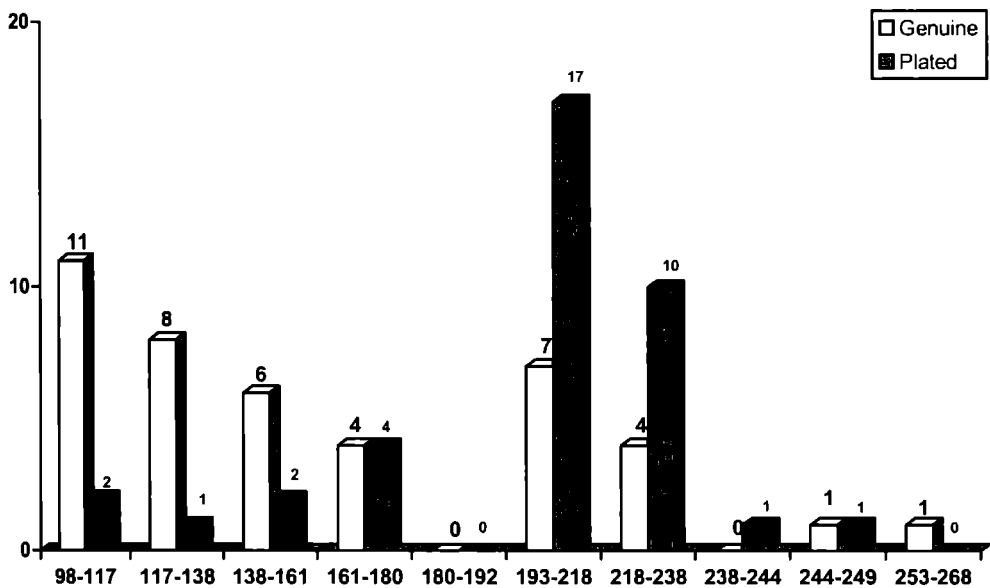


Fig. no 4. Graph of the silver coin finds from Gherla – the cavalry fort

It can be seen that the picture of silver coin finds from the auxiliary fort from Gherla is similar now with those from the other auxiliary forts of Dacia already mentioned here – *Porolissum* and *Ilişua*. The number of plated coins overwhelmed the genuine pieces for the period of AD 193-218. Even more, the situation applies also for the next period of AD 218-238.

On conclusion, it can be affirmed that the fact that until now there were mentioned mainly genuine silver coins coming from the site of Gherla was a matter of the methodological approach of the topic. In fact, the real situation proves that also the cavalry fort from Gherla was part of an epidemic phenomenon of counterfeiting the silver coin – more or less officially – characteristic not only for the auxiliary forts from Dacia, but also for military sites from other provinces of the Roman Empire.

It is clear now that we must return to many collections of coins coming from Roman sites and re-analyse them. We will have some surprises, for certain! Only in this way, we can get closer to a more accurate image on what kind of coin circulated in the time of a crisis and its backstage policy of counterfeiting.

Abbreviations and bibliography

Găzdac 2007 – C. Găzdac, *The distribution of silver counterfeited coins in the forts from Roman Dacia. Fraud or monetary policy?*, in *Proceedings of the 20th Congress on Roman Frontiers (Leon, 4-11 September 2006)*, 2007 (forthcoming).

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Protase and Gaiu 2007 – D. Protase and C. Gaiu, *Castrul roman de la Ilișua*, Bistrița, 2007.

