

THE COINAGE OF HISTRIA FOR SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AND HIS FAMILY

DILYANA BOTEVA

Sofia University, Bulgaria

The need of a new study on the Histrian coinage is out of discussion as the existing one is now almost a century old¹. This paper aims the presentation of some observations on the Histrian coinage for Septimius Severus and his family, viewed in the context of the Lower-Moesian coinage from the same period. Some remarks on the historical development of the province during the reign of the Early Severi will be presented as well.

*
* *
*

So far the following features of the Histrian coinage for Septimius Severus and his family can be pointed out :

Firstly : Up to the moment there are no indications that the mint of Histria struck coins for Albinus-caesar, Caracalla-caesar, Geta-caesar and Plautilla. This may be regarded as sure evidence for the lack of activity at the mint in question during a 16 years-long period : 194—210 A.D.²

On the other hand — the existence of coins for Geta-augustus³ dates the respective issue in the period 210 — beginning of 212 A.D. or even only 210 — February 4th, 211 (the date of Severus' death) as so far all the coins for Geta are of small denominations.

¹ B. Pick, *Die Antiken Münzen Nordgriechenlands. Dakien und Moesien*. Berlin 1898, pp. 139—182, NoNo 405—530.

² It should be pointed out that for the inauguration of Geta I accept the year 210 A.D., argued by G. Di Vita-Ervard and supported by A. Birley (see A. Birley, *The African Emperor Septimius Severus*. London 1988, p. 218, No 22).

³ B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, No 508 ; C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Histria. III : Descoperirile Monetare 1914—1970*. București 1973, NoNo 706—715.

⁴ B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 492—499 ; C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 685—691.

Secondly : Unlike the Histrian coinage for Commodus which already had on the reverse a value mark of their denomination, none of the coins for Septimius Severus had this sign⁴. The same is true for the coinage for Geta⁵, but not for the coinage for Caracalla and for Julia Domna. Concerning these two members of the Severus' family it should be noted the existence both of coins with⁶ and without⁷ value marks on their reverse. So it is plausible that the coins for Caracalla and for Julia Domna marked *with* the sign in question date from the period after Severus' death and even after Geta was killed in 212 A.D. Thus, they should be connected with the years when Caracalla was the sole augustus of the Roman empire, i.e. 212—217 A.D.

As to the Histrian coinage for Caracalla and for Domna which, similar to the one for Severus and for Geta, is *without* value mark on the reverse, some more details should be regarded in order to be surely dated.

Thirdly : Apart from Septimius Severus, whose name and portrait appeared on Histrian coins of a big denomination, Caracalla and Domna were the other members of the family, whose coinage included big denominations as well⁸. Those with value mark on the revers were already discussed and dated in the period 212—217. I am inclined to propose the same dating for these without value mark as well, because of the lack of big denominations for Geta-augustus. Unfortunately it is impossible to define the precise dating of these two issues of big denominations within the years 212—217. But it seems plausible that the coins of a big denomination *without* value mark on their reverse preceded those *with* such mark. Even more : having the same features as the coinage for Septimius Severus, they should have been issued very soon after Caracalla took the whole power in his hands in 212 A.D.

Fourthly : A theoretical possibility exist that some of the coins for Septimius Severus were struck in the very beginning of his reign, i.e. in the second half of 193 A.D. But, so far, this possibility cannot be proved with certainty, and I am not inclined to accept it without a proof.

The above said could be presented with the following chronological table :

⁵ See above n. 3.

⁶ *Caracalla* : B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 504—505 (E); L. Ruzicka, *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 10, 1917, p. 108, No 505 b (Δ); *Julia Domna* : L. Ruzicka, *Op. cit.*, No 500 a () ; C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. cit.*, p. 129, No 600 () ; *Caracalla and Domna* : B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, No 503 (E).

⁷ *Caracalla* : B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 506—507; C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 700—705; *Domna* : B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 500—502; C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. Cit.*, NoNo 692—698.

⁸ *Caracalla* : C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. cit.*, No 705; L. Ruzicka, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 505b—505c; *Julia Domna* : C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. cit.*, NoNo 694—695.

year A.D.	coinage
193	
194	
195	
196	
197	
198	
199	
200	
201	
202	
203	
204	
205	
206	
207	
208	
209	
210	coins for Severus, Domna, Caracalla and Geta-augustus, all of them <i>without</i> value marks of their denomination
211	
212	coins for Caracalla and Domna <i>without</i> value marks of their denomination
213	
214	coins for Caracalla and Domna <i>with</i> value marks of their denomination
215	
216	
217	

* * *

An attempt at arguing an explanation for the fact that the mint of Histria ceased declaring the denomination of its coins within a period of about 20 (or even more) years is surely necessary. It is still more important as, during my research work⁹ on the coinage of Lower Moesia and Thrace for Septimius Severus and his family, it came out that exactly in the year when Histria issued the coins without the explicit indication for their denomination, i.e. 210—Jan. 211, the mints of Marcianopolis in Lower Moesia and of Anchialo in Thrace began declaring the denomination of their coins. And, on the contrary, when some years later, during the reign of Caracalla, the mint of Histria revived the usage of value mark, the mint of Anchialo was not active any more.

That these phenomena were related is, in my opinion, beyond any doubt. It is clear as well, that their explanation should be searched in the historical development of the region in question.

It is well known that during the Marcomanic Wars the town of Histria suffered a grave destruction, which is dated in the period 170—180 A.D.¹⁰ But this was surely not the end of the military pro-

⁹ D. Boteva, *Lower Moesia and Thrace in the System of the Roman Empire during the Reign of the Early Severi*. Dissertation (in Bulg.) Sofia 1993.

¹⁰ Al. Suceveanu, *Das römische Histria*. — In: P. Alexandrescu, W. Schuller, *Histria. Sine Griechenstadt an der rumänischen Schwarzmeerküste*, Xenia, heft 25, 1990, 240.

blems for this part of the Empire¹¹. According to the ancient sources only some years later, about 184 A.D., the Roman army had difficulties with the Dacians / see Cass. Dio LXXIII 3,3 ; HA, v. Comm. 13,5—6. / It was exactly at that time when some kind of menace caused the hiding of some coins hoards¹². The same was true for the first about ten years of the reign of Septimius Severus. The evidences for this statement are to be found both in the coin hoards and in the epigraphic material¹³. And, what is even more important, it could be confirmed by the synchronous coinage of the Lower-Moesian-mints that were active during the period in question. It should be point out as well the presence of a military and victorious spirit in the Histrian issues for Septimius Severus and his family dated 210/211 A.D.¹⁴, giving an indication for some military operations of the Roman army at that moment in the region in question.

Here it should be pointed out another aspect of the problem viewed through the comparison to the other Pontic mints in Lower Moesia. I have already tried to argue that the first issue of Dionysopolis for Septimius Severus and his family was minted only in 210/211¹⁵, i.e. the minting activity during the reign of this emperor here was similar to the one stated for Histria. In Callatis¹⁶, as well as in Tomis¹⁷, such issues appeared some years earlier — respectively in ca. 202—203/4 and ca. 201/202. But even so, a certain delay of the minting activity in these two cities during the reign of Septimius Severus is to be noticed.

The above said about the military problems in the region, caused mainly by some transdanubian tribes, is one of the possible explanations for the observed situation. On the other side, one should not forget as well the war between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger, including the siege of Byzantion, as there are no sure evidences about the position of these cities in the Civil war (193—194/5).

In such a historical context it seems plausible that for some years the mint of Histria was not able to fulfil its duties as a member of the Pontic monetary league. Because of that in 210/211 the place of Histria in the league was taken by Marcianopolis and Anchialo, but this new situation was not of a long duration. Only some years later, during the reign of Caracalla, the mint of Histria restored its place

¹¹ B. Mitrea, *Dacia* 1, 1957, 230 f.; L. Barkóczi, *Die Grundzüge der Geschichte von Intercisa*. — In: *Intercisa*. II. (= *Archaeologica Hungarica*, 36), 516 ff.; see also A. I. Barnea, *SCN* VII, 1980, 95—98.

¹² B. Gerov, *Die Einfälle der Nordvolker in den Ostbalkanraum im Lichte der Münzschatzfunde*. I: Das 2; und 3. Jh. (101—284). — *ANRW* II, 6, (1977), 123.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 123 f.

¹⁴ C. Preda, H. Nubar, *Op. cit.*, No 691; L. Ruzicka, *Op. cit.*, No 494 b; B. Pick, *Op. cit.*, No 498.

¹⁵ D. Boteva, *The Coinage of Dionysopolis and Callatis for Septimius Severus and his Family. Notes on Its Chronology*. — In: *International Symposium „Numismatic and Sphragistic Contributions to Ancient and Medieval History of Dobroudja“*. Dobrich 1993 (forthcoming).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ The results of my research work on the coinage of Tomis in the time of the Severi are still not published.

as a member of the league. It should be pointed out that somewhere during this very period, i.e. 212—217 A.D., Histria received the title ἡ λαμπροτάτη πόλις, which continued appearing in the inscriptions only within a relatively short period — up to the reign of Severus Alexander¹⁸. It is clear that emperor Caracalla gave a new status to the city of Histria. Are we supposed to seek some special reasons for this attitude? It is really plausible, but because of the lack of any evidences, we are not able for the moment to define this (these) reason(s).

¹⁸ I express my deepest thanks to Mr. Al. Suceveanu, who drew my attention to this extremely important fact and for his general support in my interest for the history of Histria. For the inscriptions see ISM I, NoNo 89—93, 99, 141. Inscription No 94 is from the time of Maximinus Thrax and the title in question is not to be found.