

REFLECTIONS ON A ROMAN IMPERIAL TYPE COIN DIE DISCOVERED AT DOLJEȘTI VILLAGE (NEAMȚ COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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Abstract: *A Roman imperial type fragmentary coin die was recently discovered on the territory of Doljești village. Consisting only of part of the reverse, representing probably Providentia, it also preserves a part of the legend (TRP XXI IMP...) suggesting the period of Marcus Aurelius' reign (RIC 170, years 166-167 A.D.). Until now, the single coins die of Roman imperial type discovered in pre Roman Dacia was discovered at Sarmizegetusa Regia, from Tiberius' period for Divus Augustus. From the area we know of several archaeological sites – the necropolis from Moldoveni (2nd-4th c. A.D.) or Podoleni-La Ruine (Carpic settlement 2nd-3rd c. A.D.) and many others. This is the latest coins-die known until now beyond the Roman frontier from Dacia, extending late in the 2nd c. A.D. the process of local denarii production. It could be related to the need of currency in a period of deflation specific for the monetary politics of Marcus Aurelius or even from Septimius Severus' time, after the monetary reform of the emperor.*

Rezumat: *Pe teritoriul satului Doljești a fost descoperit recent un fragment de ștanță monetară de tip roman imperial. Deși a fost descoperită doar ștanța de revers, aflată în stare fragmentară și având ca reprezentare o divinitate feminină, foarte probabil Providentia, matrița păstrează și o parte esențială a legendei reversului (TRP XXI IMP...), sugerând perioada de domnie a lui Marcus Aurelius respectiv anii 166-167 p.Chr. Până acum, singura matriță de tip roman imperial descoperită în Dacia preromană data din vremea lui Tiberius (pentru Divus Augustus) și provenea de la Sarmizegetusa Regia. Pentru prima dată avem atestată o descoperire de ștanță monetară de factură locală datând din a doua jumătate a sec. II p.Chr., provenind din Barbaricum și atestând un proces de emitere locală a unor denari de tip roman imperial. Cunoaștem în zonă mai multe situri arheologice, ca necropola de la Moldoveni, punctul Dealul Gabăra (sec. II-IV p.Chr.) respectiv așezarea de la Podoleni, punctul La Ruine, unde avem atestată o așezare carpică din sec. II-III p.Chr. și multe altele. E posibil ca apariția unei ștanțe locale de tip roman imperial să fie legată de nevoia de numerar într-o perioadă în care politica deflaționistă reduce*

* Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy.

** Police Department of the Neamț County.

*** Discoverer of the matrix; Police Department of the Neamț County.

intrările de numerar nou, dar nu putem exclude nici plasarea ei după reforma monetară a lui Septimius Severus.

Recently, in May 2020, a significant discovery was made with a metal detector nearby the village of Doljești, Neamț county. Somewhere to the South-Eastern part of the village, crossing a local forest road, after few hundred meters, in an area with many red and grey ceramic fragments were found two different halves of Roman denarii. At a certain distance, in a meadow, was found at 15 cm depth a Roman type coin die. Only the reverse was recovered by the discoverer, despite the fact that realizing the importance of the discovery, the man tried to find the obverse too, but the latter one was never found¹ (Pl. I). The reverse matrix (the mobile die), made apparently out of bronze, was in a fragmentary state of preservation, only a part (essential) of the legend and the iconography being preserved from the original. The letters and the figure too are both incuse as follows:

Reverse matrix (mobile die)

Rv. TRP XXI IMP... (circular, from right to left).

Providentia standing right, draped, keeping in her left hand a over a globe; chlamys over her right hand keeping a long scepter only partially visible.

AE 22.35 g; 30×25 mm (pl. I, 2-4; for the “mirror” image, see pl. II, 1).

Diameter of the monetary imprint: 20 mm.

Height: 6-11 mm.

Depth of the incuse letters and figure: 1 mm.

RIC 170, Rome, years 166-167 A.D. (prototype).

It seems to be obvious that due to the diameter of the monetary imprint this coin-die was made intending to strike silver denarii. Despite the absence of the fix die (the obverse), we have enough significant elements on the reverse to identify the prototype. The only Roman emperor having the title TRP XXI was Marcus Aurelius. So, the prototype seems to be a silver denar (RIC 170) struck in Rome, years 166-167 A.D. as follows:

Marcus Aurelius

Obv. M ANTONINVS AVG – ARM PARTH MAX

Bust of Marcus Aurelius, laureate, to right.

Rv. TRP XXI IMP IIII COS III

Providentia standing left, scepter in the left hand

Denar; 3.21 g; 19 mm (pl. II, 2).

RIC, III, p. 227, nr. 170, Rome, years 166-167 A.D.

Münzen und Medaillen Deutschland GmbH, Auction 46, February 15th 2018, lot nr. 758.

¹ Informations Andrei George Prichici.

We have enough data about the discoveries of Roman coins-die in pre-Roman Dacia. Until now, with a single significant exception, all of them consist of dies designed to strike Roman Republican denarii, as we saw at Braşov (Braşov county), if it is real², Ludeştii de Jos (Orăştioara de Sus, Hunedoara county)³, Poiana (Galaţi county)⁴, Tilişca (Sibiu county)⁵. There is a single exception: the matrix discovered in 1995 at Sarmizegetusa Regia⁶ (pl. II, 3⁷). This was until now the only local coin-die of Roman imperial type discovered in pre-Roman Dacia (exactly in the most important political and religious center of the Dacians), designed to strike imitations of silver imperial denarii (having as prototype Tiberius for Divus Augustus; RIC, I², p. 93, nrs. 2, 4, Lugdunum, years 15-16 A.D.; pl. II, 4)⁸, corresponding to a period with only very few data about the history of the region. In fact, after the death of Burebista at the middle of the 40's from the 1st century BC, we know only that the political authority of the Dacian king from Sarmizegetusa Regia as *primus inter pares* disappeared and four Dacian kingdoms were born. Later, during the reign of Augustus, a fifth kingdom raised⁹, probably not without struggle, because we have from Dacia an entire horizon of coin hoards from Augustan time, when Rome sent an army against them. Somehow, the coin-die from Sarmizegetusa is located below the precedent dies from Roman Republican period, reflecting the continuity of the phenomenon of local currency of Roman type. It corresponds also to the moment in which we notice that the new entries of Roman imperial denarii in Dacia become very rare until the end of the 1st century A.D. – especially in its first half¹⁰.

We now have from Doljeşti a much more recent coin-die, dating from Marcus Aurelius' period (earliest possible moment), reflecting for the first time the existence of a local Roman imperial coin-die and currency in Dacia beyond the Roman frontiers and also after the conquest of Dacia by Trajan at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. As we already saw on the coin-die from Sarmizegetusa Regia, there are several iconographic details suggesting that the matrix is undoubtedly a local production: the chiton and especially the long scepter, are unfinished and crude. This is an unusual situation, reflecting the interest of local production of Roman imperial silver coins in Barbaricum – Eastern Dacia, in a region where several archaeological sites are known. So, we have from Moldoveni-Dealul Gabăra a necropolis from the 2nd to the 4th centuries A.D.¹¹ and from Podoleni-La Ruine¹² a “Carpic” settlement from 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.,

² Glodariu *et alii* 1992, p. 63, but the note 4 refers in fact to the Ludeştii de Jos matrix (Macrea 1933-1935, p. 162); it is much more prudent to avoid the mention of the so-called Braşov coins-die.

³ Macrea 1933-1935, p. 162; Glodariu *et alii*, p. 63, note 4; Glodariu *et alii*, p. 63; Luca 2008, p. 106-107, no. 230.

⁴ Vulpe 1950, p. 48, 50.

⁵ Lupu 1967, p. 102-121; Lupu 1989, p. 86-94.

⁶ Glodariu *et alii* 1992, p. 57-68.

⁷ Preluare de la Glodariu *et alii* 1992, pl. 5.

⁸ Glodariu *et alii*, p. 62, no. 3.

⁹ Strabo, VII, 3.11.

¹⁰ Rodewald 1976, p. 8, 10, 16; Petac 2010, p. 14.

¹¹ Cod Repertoriul Arheologic Naţional 123237.01, cf. <http://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=moldoveni-moldoveni-neamt-situl-arheologic-de-la-moldoveni-dealul-gabara-cod-sit-ran-123237.01>.

¹² Cod Repertoriul Arheologic Naţional 123683.01; cf. <http://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=podoleni-podoleni-neamt-situl-arheologic-de-la-podoleni-la-ruine-cod-sit-ran-123683.01>.

both in Neamț county and many others. Unfortunately, the reduced number of archaeological researches in the area of Oriental Sub-Carpathians is not able to offer the necessary importance to the observations concerning the settlements from the 2nd-4th century in the region. Although, we must notice that in Neamț county the number the archaeological sites recorded by the National Archaeological Repertory is only 214 sites, but a fortunate situation by comparison to the situation from Bacău county, from where we know only 88 sites. Because of this situation we are far from having a relevant and complete map of the settlements from the 2nd-4th centuries A.D.

The significant number and the importance of the coin hoards discovered in the region apparently in “desert areas”, free of recorded archaeological sites, show that the archaeological researches are not able to offer relevant data for an accurate image in these cases. We must add also that one third of coin hoards buried in the East Carpathian Dacia territory during Marcus Aurelius’ reign (more than 30, the first significant horizon of coin hoards in the area) is directly connected to some settlements belonging to the Poieniști-Vârteșcoiu culture¹³.

It is impossible to say if this coin-die was indeed used, the samples of imitations of Roman imperial denarii (local or not) being rare: 1 AR Marcus Antonius, 1 AR Trajan, 1 AR Hadrian, 1 AR Antoninus Pius¹⁴. Recently, a much more appropriate image of the presence of barbarized silver Roman coins in the monetary hoards from Eastern Dacia in the second half of the 2nd century A.D. was made¹⁵. Thus, we know today that there is 1 AR from Bârgăuani, Neamț county (prototype Antoninus Pius¹⁶), another one from Hertioana de Jos, Bacău county, having also as prototype a denarius from Antoninus Pius¹⁷, 1 AR Marcus Antonius and 2 AR Faustina II from Muncelu de Sus, Neamț county¹⁸, 1 AR 2nd century A.D. from Ocheni, Neamț county¹⁹, 2 AR Antoninus Pius and 1 AR 2nd century A.D. from Târpești, Neamț county²⁰, 1 AR from Gârcina, Neamț county (obv. Marcus Aurelius, rv. Faustina II)²¹. In this context, it appears not so unexpectedly that few of these samples are exactly from the time of Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius. Moreover, it seems obvious that these coin hoards, closed all of them during Marcus Aurelius reign, especially in his first decade and rarely in the second part, include the most part of the barbarized denarii from Moldavia (9 ex.)²². It seems somehow normal now to have a coins-die exactly from this period. It is unlikely that we will find a coin struck with this die. It is necessary to add that there is indeed an obvious relation between these coin hoards, the phenomenon of local imitations and the settlements belonging to Poieniști-Vârteșcoiu culture²³. Now, a new

¹³ Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 222.

¹⁴ Mihăilescu Bîrlița 1980, p. 218.

¹⁵ Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 213-258.

¹⁶ Mihăilescu Bîrlița 1969, p. 178, no. 256; Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 225.

¹⁷ Mihăilescu Bîrlița, Mitrea 1975, p. 28, no. 76; Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 225.

¹⁸ Sanie, Sanie, Cojocaru 1980, p. 262, nrs. 608-609 and p. 263; Ungureanu, Nicolae 2001, p. 17, nrs. 667-669; Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 225.

¹⁹ Vilcu, Istina 2016, p. 35-36, no. 53; Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 225.

²⁰ Marinescu-Bîlcu, Chițescu, Mihăilescu-Bîrlița 1989, p. 51, nr. 135-137; Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 225.

²¹ Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 235, no. 84.

²² Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 224 and p. 224, note 98.

²³ Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 224.

document (our local coins-die from Marcus Aurelius) seems to confirm this situation. It is possible that the burial of this series of hoards during Marcus Aurelius time to be related to the end of the Poienești-Vârteșcoiu cultural group²⁴.

We can't ignore the strange coincidence consisting in this association between a local imitation coin-die and a moment when the Roman currency was affected by the deflationary policy of Marcus Aurelius²⁵. So, the local need of currency of Roman type could be a reasonable explanation for such a discovery. Observing the reduced percentage of the imitations of Roman coins in the Eastern Dacia hoards, we consider that the political prestige given by the capacity to have a local imitative coinage is probably the most important reason for this "currency". There are in fact more questions than answers keeping permanently in mind that the archaeological investigations of the area are far away from satisfactory.

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²⁴ Mihăilescu Bîrlița 1980, p. 204; see also Munteanu, Mihăilescu 2018, p. 224.

²⁵ Petac 2010, p. 33 and p. 66.

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Indicator plasat

× 1

47°01'27"N 26°59'14"E • 190 m



2



3



4

Pl. I. Geographical coordinates of the discovery, near Doljești, Neamț county (1) and the matrix discovered (2-4).



1



2 obv.



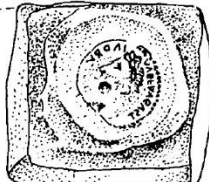
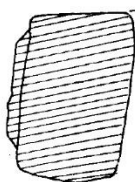
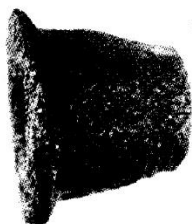
2 rv. (1.5:1)



2 rv.



4



3

3



4 a



4 b

Pl. II. 1. Doljești matrix “in the mirror”; 2. Denarius prototype from Marcus Aurelius; 3. Roman imperial type matrix from Sarmizegetusa Regia, 1995; 4. Sarmizegetusa matrix “in the mirror” (4 a) and denarius prototype from Tiberius (4 b).