

TRIUMPHAL ARCHES FROM LOWER MOESIA

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Abstract: The triumphal arches, a product of imperial propaganda, are the most famous and widespread Roman triumphal monuments. The official Roman coins illustrated on their reverse the triumphal arches located in the capital of the empire, Rome. Many of these monuments are still preserved, but some have disappeared in the tumult of history. Therefore, coins become “evidence” of the existence of these buildings when they have not survived over centuries or allow the reconstruction of parts that have disappeared from them.

The provincial coins of Lower Moesia also speak of the presence of such triumphal monuments (unknown now by of archaeological discoveries) from this border province. In this paper, some considerations are expressed regarding the numismatic evidence of the triumphal arches at Markianopolis and Tomis.

Rezumat: Arcurile de triumf, produs al propagandei imperiale, sunt cele mai cunoscute și răspândite monumente triumfale romane. Monedele romane oficiale au ilustrat pe reversul lor arcurile de triumf aflate în capitala imperiului, Roma. Multe din aceste monumente încă se păstrează, dar altele au dispărut în tumultul istoriei. Prin urmare monedele devin ”dovezi” ale existenței acestor edificii atunci când nu au supraviețuit peste secole sau permit reconstituirea unor părți dispărute ale celor păstrate.

Monedele provinciale din Moesia Inferior vorbesc și ele despre prezența unor astfel de monumente triumfale (negăsite încă de descoperirile arheologice) în această provincie de graniță. În rândurile următoare sunt exprimate câteva considerații în ceea ce privește dovezile numismatice ale arcurilor de triumf de la Markianopolis și Tomis.

In a recent work, dedicated to the mirroring of West Pontic architecture in numismatics,¹ we touched in passing on the subject of the triumphal arches in Lower Moesia. We want to resume and deepen here the discussion about these grandiose monuments, whose memory is preserved only by coins.

The triumphal arches are some of the most complex and well-known works of Roman imperial propaganda. Scattered throughout most of the empire, most of the triumphal arches have been satisfactorily preserved over the centuries, from some (few in number) only archaeological remains remained, and others (how many?) have disappeared altogether. Over time, there have been at least two major attempts to inventory the preserved or loss triumphal arches. German archaeologist Botho Graef has counted 125 preserved triumphal arches and about 30 missing,² while the much more generous American archaeologist Arthur Lincoln Frothingham Jr. finds no less than 466 triumphal arches still existing or disappeared.³

In this moment can be counted, for the 1st-3rd centuries AD (the period we are interested in), five triumphal arches preserved in Rome, the capital of the empire, about thirteen in cities from Italy, and about twenty-nine others are scattered through cities in the European, Asian or African provinces of the empire.

The arch of Septimius Severus and Caracalla from Rome

But can the “numismatic evidence” be useful in the reconstruction of ancient buildings that have disappeared? To answer this question we will take as examples the famous arch of Septimius Severus and Caracalla from Rome. The example is not chosen by chance, because the first arch in Lower Moesia, which we will deal with, dates back to the time of the first Severans, more precisely from the time when Caracalla was alone the ruler of the empire (211-217 AD). Built in 203 AD at the foot of the Capitoline Hill,⁴ the arch of Septimius Severus and Caracalla of Rome has been preserved for centuries in a more than satisfactory

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¹ Beldianu, Beldianu 2020, pp. 74-79.

² Frothingham 1904, pp. 5-14.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 17-33.

⁴ Brilliant 1967, pp. 91-92.