

A NUMISMATIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF NORTH AND WEST PONTIC CITIES IN THE 1ST-3RD CENTURIES AD. DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS

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Keywords: Ancient architecture, defensive systems, numismatics, the north and west Pontic area.

Abstract: The coins of the Greek cities of the Roman era (the so-called “provincial coins”) become an important source of information about the issuing ancient city through the historical and architectural themes illustrated on their reverse. They allow not only the detection or nuancing of some events, which the passage of time has largely made forgotten, but also show the ancient monuments to the current researcher, unspoiled by the passage of time, in the splendour of the era of their construction.

In this work, part of a wider project, we want to address a category of monuments illustrated by provincial coins from the north and west Pontic area, respectively that of defensive constructions, which were included in the composition of the fortified enclosures of the cities from this area. City gates (often monumental or triumphal), portions of walls, and even entire urban enclosures are themes frequently illustrated by the coin engravers in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.

In the following, the monetary issues, which illustrate defensive edifices of the cities of Thrace (Anchialos, Augusta Traiana, Byzie, Hadrianopolis) and Moesia Inferior (Callatis, Marcianopolis, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Tomis) or those of the Bosporan Kingdom, will be analysed from a constructive point of view, as well as from a broader historico-geographical perspective.

Rezumat: Monedele oraşelor antice greceşti ale epocii romane (aşa numitele „monede provinciale”) sunt, prin temele istorice și arhitecturale ilustrate pe reversul lor, o importantă sursă de cunoaștere a oraşului emitent. Ele permit nu numai depistarea sau nuanțarea unor evenimente, pe care trecerea timpului le-a făcut în bună parte uitate, dar arată cercetătorului actual și monumente antice, neștirbite de trecerea timpului, în splendoarea epocii construcției lor.

În această lucrare, parte a unui proiect mai larg, dorim să abordăm o categorie de monumente ilustrate de monedele provinciale din zona nord și vest pontică, respectiv cea a construcțiilor cu caracter defensiv, construcții ce intrau în compunerea incintelor fortificate ale oraşelor de aici. Porți (adesea monumentale sau triumfale), porțiuni de ziduri și chiar întregi incinte urbane sunt teme frecvent ilustrate de către artiștii gravori în sec II-III d. Chr pe monedele din zona amintită

În rândurile ce urmează vor fi analizate emisiunile monetare, ce ilustrează edificii defensive ale oraşelor din Tracia (Anchialos, Augusta Traiana, Byzie, Hadrianopolis) și Moesia Inferior (Callatis, Marcianopolis, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Tomis) sau cele ale Regatului Bosporan, din punct de vedere constructiv, dar și dintr-o mai largă perspectivă istorico-geografică.

The preoccupation with the study of ancient architecture through the lens of Roman monetary issues has a long history. Even since the 17th century, architectural monetary illustrations have been the basis of graphic reconstructions for some monuments.¹ The first major work was published in 1859 by T. L. Donaldson² and the most recent belongs to Nathan T. Elkins³. These reference works mostly study the official Roman monetary issues that illustrate on their reverse the edifices located in the capital of the empire, Rome. However, the provincial monetary issues, i.e. those issued by the eastern cities of the Roman Empire, also illustrate edifices representative of the issuing cities. Numerous articles have discussed some of the monuments illustrated by provincial mints over time, but substantial work devoted to them is still awaited, although the formation of a database of architecturally themed provincial monetary issues seems to herald such a work in the near future.⁴

In the following pages, we intend to address the subject of the architecture of the north and west Pontic cities in the Roman era, from a numismatic perspective, limiting this article to the monetary illustration of defensive architecture such as city gates and walls.

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¹ A good example of this is the work of Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Veteres Arcus Augustorum Triumphis Insignes: ex reliquiis quae Romae adhuc supersunt cum imaginibus triumphalibus restituti*, Rome, 1690.

² (*Architectura Numismatica*; or, *Architectural Medals of Classic Antiquity (...)*, London 1859)

³ (*Monuments in Miniature: Architecture on Roman Coinage*. Numismatic studies, 29. New York: American Numismatic Society, 2015)

⁴ See in this regard: “citygate.ancient.info”, direct link: <http://citygate.ancients.info/>.