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Roman Provincial Coinage – a mirror of the urban landscape. The case of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*

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Abstract: The Roman Provincial Coinage provides one of the most complex sources of information regarding ancient cities. In conjunction with archaeological surveys and epigraphic data, it can offer essential insights into the reconstruction of the landscape of the minting city. This is also the case of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, founded by Trajan to commemorate his victory over the Dacians. It exhibited a complex urban organization that is primarily reflected in the archaeological discoveries. Numerous architectural elements (gates, temples) are present in the local coin emissions, particularly from the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211 AD) when *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and other cities of *Moesia Inferior* experienced an explosion of monetary types. There are also several examples of buildings, such as the *nymphaeum*, that have yet to be discovered but appear on the coins of the city. This presentation will offer a virtual visit to *Nikopolis ad Istrum* through the lens of its provincial coinage from the end of the 2nd century to the 3rd century AD.

Key-words: coinage, architecture, *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, archaeology.

Introduction

The Roman Provincial Coinage represents an essential source in the study of the urban landscape of ancient cities. This category consists of 5 typologies as following: the issues of “client kings” (for example, the rulers of the Bosphoran Kingdom), the provincial ones (*Dacia*), “koinon” coins, the civic coinages, and alliance coins. They usually have the emperor’s image on the obverse, but also depictions of other members of the imperial family. The reverse is characterized by the illustration of elements which are linked to the local identity such as: deities that are worshipped in the city, personifications of different elements of its’ landscape (mountains, rivers, etc.), but also architectural monuments.¹

The reverse of these coins holds considerable significance in our current discussion. The provincial coinages portrayed various depictions of city gates, and other architectural features. The studies of Price and Trell,² A. Burnett³ and C. Howgego,⁴ raise several vital queries: 1. To what extent do these representations correspond to the reality as unearthed by archaeological

¹ Description and typologies presented on the Roman Provincial Coinage platform accessed at <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/introduction/whatisrpc> on 13.07.2024.

² Price and Trell 1977.

³ Burnett 2002.

⁴ Howgego 2005.

excavations?; 2. Could they be considered a reliable source for a possible reconstruction of the image and urban landscape of an ancient city?

Andrew Burnett brings into light an important aspect presented by T. Drew-Bear in his work *Representations of Temples on the Greek Imperial Coinage* and which would be the methodological basis of the current study. Both authors consider that numismatic sources should be ‘treated in this respect with great caution, for clearly such depictions attain their full value as evidence only when they can be compared with the results of actual excavation of the monuments they portray.’⁵

The present research focuses on the case of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, which had a various production of monetary types depicting monumental structures in the period under discussion – mainly from the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211 AD) until the one of Gordian III (238-244 AD).

Jordanes and Ammianus Marcellinus bring into discussion the foundation of the city. The first one states that *Nikopolis* was inaugurated as a result of the victory of Trajan over the Sarmatians: *[Nikopolis] quae iuxta Istrum fluvium est constituta notissima quam devictis Sarmatis Traianus et fabricavit et appellavit Victoriae civitatem*.⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus presents the foundation of *Nikopolis* as an event commemorating Trajan’s victory over the Dacians: *Nicopolis quam indicium victoriae contra Dacos Traianus condidit imperator*.⁷ *Nikopolis ad Istrum* was, in the first place, part of the province of *Thrace*.

The destiny and appearance of the city was powerfully affected by the attacks of Costoboci (starting from 170 AD).⁸ After these events, *Nikopolis* entered a new phase of its’ development: the construction of defences and new public buildings. As Andrew Poulter mentions, the fortifications including city gates and curtain walls were built during the 170s, in the forthcoming period after the invasions and destructions.⁹ In the last decade of the 3rd century AD, it was transferred to the territory of *Moesia Inferior*.¹⁰ During the Severan period, the city had a powerful development from many points of view, including the monetary production.¹¹

⁵ Drew-Bear 1974, 63; Burnett 2002, 148.

⁶ Jordanes, *Getica* 18.101.

⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum libri qui supersunt*, XXXI, 5. 16.

⁸ Bowman, Garnsey, Rathbone 2008, 171.

⁹ Poulter 1992, 74.

¹⁰ Boteva 1996, 174.

¹¹ Poulter 1995, 13.

A brief presentation of the archaeological excavations included in the present study

Considering the intricacy of the research questions, it is also necessary to consider the archaeological surveys and excavations conducted in the city. These have a crucial role in identifying the elements depicted on coins and in reconstructing the urban landscape.

The ruins of *Nikopolis ad Istrum* were identified by Felix Kanitz in 1871. This event led to the beginning of several actions of research in the region starting from 1899 and continuing during the first part of the 20th century under the surveillance of G. Seure¹² and T.V. Dobrouski.¹³ In 1945, T. Ivanov began an excavation programme that was later transformed into a regular one. The most substantial part of this analysis is based on the results and studies published by Andrew Poulter after the British research programme on the site of *Nikopolis* between 1985-1992.¹⁴ During this period, the excavation team examined several key elements in the current discussion, including the city's defences.¹⁵ The resistivity measurements carried out as part of the named project had an essential role in determining the structure of the roads of the city, but also of its overall composition.¹⁶

The importance of this specific study would be more detailed in the presentation of the studied monetary types and their correlation with the archaeological reality, which will depict a virtual visit to *Nikopolis ad Istrum* (end of the 2nd century – 3rd century AD).

The city gates of *Nikopolis ad Istrum* through the lens of its' provincial coinage

Regarding the numismatic evidence, it is essential in portraying and illustrating various aspects of ancient cities. M. Rostovtzeff highlighted this fact by stating that: 'Hundreds of thousands of coins [...] have revealed to us not only the external appearance of many ancient cities but also the main feature of every aspect of their life — walls, streets, gates, and public and private buildings.'¹⁷

This was also the case for *Nikopolis ad Istrum*. Its' monetary production illustrates diverse types of city gates, starting with the reign of Septimius Severus. The first one is AMNG I 1331,

¹² Seure 1907, 257-276.

¹³ Poulter 1999, 8.

¹⁴ See Poulter 1995, Poulter 1999, Poulter 2007.

¹⁵ Poulter 1999, 11-12.

¹⁶ Poulter 1992, 74.

¹⁷ Price and Trell 1977, 15.

which was minted during the magistrature of L. Aurelius Gallus (201-204 AD) (Figure 1).¹⁸ The obverse of the coin shows a laureate bust of Septimius Severus. The reverse is quite unique and portrays a city gate flanked by towers, with a doorway, through which a small tetrastyle temple can be seen. Above, there is another building visible.¹⁹ One interesting study from *Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române (Romanian Numismatic Society Newsletter)*, intitledated *Les villes fortifiées de la Péninsule Balkanique, d'après les monnaies de l'époque romaine*, also describes the depiction of the city gate, and describes it as follows: '[avec] une porte, entre des tours, qui est surmontée d'un fronton a trois corps.'²⁰ The same category of reverse could be observed again on the coin types AMNG I 1339 (Figure 2²¹), and AMNG I 1585 (Figure 3²²), the latter of which was minted during Caracalla's reign.

The second type is identified in the time of Macrinus (the magistrature of M. Claudius Agrippa – 217-218 AD) (Figure 4).²³ Here, the reverse depicts a closed city gate, flanked by two-battlemented towers with a third tower rising from the center (Varbanov no. 3345).²⁴ The description of the reverse is completed by the next fragment: '[la porte] est flanquée de deux tours, de diamètre relativement petit, munies de créneaux ; au centre du système défensif, au-dessus de l'entrée, s'élèvent une galerie basse et une troisième tour dont la base, se confond avec la courtine.'²⁵ Based on both descriptions, we observe the complexity of this coin type, which does not only depict the gate, but also the curtain that is continuing the defences of the city.

During Elagabalus' reign, the representation of city gates on the coins of *Nikopolis* underwent a change, and there are two different types of depictions. One of them shows the

¹⁸ Coin type AMNG I 1331 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=68536|73|739|ce0bfeac9b95c758c90f35f28995614d> on 4.07.2024.

¹⁹ Pick 1898, no. 1331.

²⁰ Blanchet 1923, 5.

²¹ Coin type AMNG I 1339 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=1540622|3212|168|979044d29af1538117364d1eba54facc> on 4.07.2024.

²² Coin type AMNG I 1585 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=272308|424|47|581a592151b92f4683cf7468b7200f41> on 4.07.2024.

²³ Coin type Varbanov 3345 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=219213|309|235|6bda6c96c4571d9e4ba5e6f2cd65ac08> on 4.07.2024.

²⁴ Varbanov 2005, 282.

²⁵ Blanchet 1923, 5.

monumental structure under discussion with two flat towers (Figure 5 – Varbanov 3827²⁶), which is distinct from the previous designs. The second type of depiction from the mentioned rule puts into spotlight the gate with two battlement towers, but we also observe a *quadriga* between them and two horses, one on each tower (Figure 6 – Varbanov 3986,²⁷ AMNG I 2003²⁸).

The rule of Gordian III marked the appearance of a new representation of the city gate (Figure 7 - AMNG I 2107²⁹). This architectural element is characterized by two round towers, one door, and four pinnacles in the center. By examining the chronological sequence of these coin types, a noticeable diversity of city gates becomes apparent. Nonetheless, it remains uncertain whether equivalent structures existed in the field.

Another question that could be addressed is if each type corresponds to a different gate of the city or represents depictions of the evolution of a certain gate during various reigns.

Fortunately, a useful point of reference for reconstruction purposes is the southern gate and curtain of *Nikopolis*, which was uncovered in a good condition during the British archaeological excavation programme conducted between 1985 and 1992. Andrew Poulter describes its' principal characteristics:

‘a single chamber, built from large ashlar blocks of limestone, not bonded with mortar but joined by iron clamps. [The] inner entrance was 2.75 m wide, its southern portal 2.65 m in width. One pair of responds, on the southern, outer side of the gate, protected the settings for a two-winged door and the inner faces of the northern responds were cut by vertical grooves to retain a portcullis (Figure 8).’³⁰

Based on the detailed description from the archaeological record, a possible comparison and analysis could be made with the above-mentioned monetary types. The aspect that is identified

²⁶ Coin type Varbanov 3827 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=1797304|4149|1059|2e5b70f1e5d8dd79ca5e6d47dff382ea> on 5.07.2024.

²⁷ Coin type Varbanov 3986 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=756300|1406|384|d40484e69ff9eec3b87e15727e979c54> on 5.07.2024.

²⁸ Coin type Varbanov 3986, AMNG I 2003 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=756300|1406|384|d40484e69ff9eec3b87e15727e979c54> on 5.07.2024.

²⁹ RPC VII. 2, 1263 accessed at <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/7.2/1263> on 14.07.2024.

³⁰ Poulter 1995, 85.

in the case of all reverse depictions is the illustration of the big rectangular limestone blocks that are considered the main construction material.

The coin types AMNG I 1331 (or AMNG I 1339, AMNG I 1585) – mirrors of the Western gate?

The city gate represented during the reign of Septimius Severus, and in the time of Caracalla is the one which has the most recognized features in the archaeological record and allows an accurate identification for the moment. The other coin types are still the subject of a complex ongoing analysis that could also allow the association with a possible equivalent on the field. The type AMNG I 1331 (together with AMNG I 1339, and AMNG I 1585 respectively) is characterized by an impressive structure, which could be the western gate of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*. But which elements illustrate this aspect?

One of them is the depiction of the towers. In the field, Andrew Poulter explains the differences between the structures of the city gates of *Nikopolis*. The ones that have been excavated were the Northern and Southern ones, but the Western entrance was also surveyed.

The last mentioned one was subject to continuous robbery of material, an activity that created the so-called “robber-trenches” around it. The archaeologists studied these structures and concluded that their form and composition indicate the fact that the Western gate was flanked by towers, a feature that was not present in the case of the other entrances.³¹

The posed question refers to the possibility of depicting the Eastern gate. Based on the archaeological plan of *Nikopolis* (Figure 9³²), it is highly unlikely that this is the case. One argument is given by the fact that the Western part of *decumanus maximus* had a width of 7.80 m and is also strongly elevated and decorated (for example, with a *propyleion*). The Eastern road to the city had a width of 6.15 m and it was constructed in a much more simpler manner.³³

As a result, the eastern gate could not have a complex depiction comparable to the one present on the discussed coin types. Also, it is usually widely considered that the coins depict the most important elements of the city, and in the case of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, the western gate seems to be the most significant entrance, being accompanied by a *peristylum*, and an impressive *propyleion*.

³¹ Poulter 1995, 95.

³² Poulter 1995, 3.

³³ Poulter 1992, 72.

On the reverse of the discussed coin types, a small tetrastyle temple could be observed. Regarding this matter, the research is still in an incipient phase. However, Andrew Poulter mentions that L. Slokoska discovered an inscription that commemorates the construction of a temple in the agora during Hadrian's reign.³⁴ It is difficult to state that the temple on the coin could be the one which was commemorated in the mentioned inscription, considering the powerful destruction of the city during the attacks from 170s AD. However, we could consider the mentioned hypothesis as a possible one, but with a reserve because of the lack of supplementary details.

The coin type depicts above the gate a complex structure which could be interpreted in diverse ways. As the city plan (Figure 9) shows, the Western entrance to the *agora* is enhanced by the construction of a *propyleion*.³⁵ The structure is dated between 145 and 161 AD, during the reign of Antoninus Pius, based on the inscription from the architrave.³⁶ Its appearance is reconstructed by Ivan Tsarov (Figure 10) and we could identify common elements with the building from the discussed types, such as the triangular front and columns.³⁷

The next possible equivalent in the field could be the *peristylum* that is represented on the city plan after the *propyleion*. For it, we don't have a visual reconstruction, but Ivan Tsarov describes it: 'A high single-sashed door led to a small peristyle with a water mirror – a pool (*piscina*). It was encircled by six columns joined by decorative railings.'³⁸ Again, the columns could be identified in both the description and the reverse type, and we could also propose the idea that the middle component could depict a part of the *peristylum* especially through the 3 illustrated arches.

On the eastern side from the *agora*, the plan shows a considerable building named *thermoperipatos*. The construction is dated in 184/5 AD, during the reign of Commodus.³⁹ In its case, we also have pictures that constitute an important contribution in the possible identification of the discussed coin types. From the one included by Ivan Tsarov in his book (Figure 11⁴⁰), it could be distinguished that the pediment in the photo is striking similar with the typology depicted on the coins. The *thermoperipatos* also has on the pediment the symbol of a shield with a spear, as

³⁴ Ivanov et al. 1986, 86; Sharankov 2014, 28-9.

³⁵ Poulter 1992, 72.

³⁶ IGBulg. II 604 accessed at <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/168660?&bookid=186&location=1687> on 16.07.2024.

³⁷ Tsarov 2009, 20.

³⁸ Tsarov 2009, 19.

³⁹ IGBulg. II 615.

⁴⁰ Tsarov 2009, 26.

visible on the photo from the archaeological site (Figure 12⁴¹). The same pattern is clearly visible on the reverse of the types AMNG I 1331, 1339 and 1585. This observation is also made by Andrew Poulter based on the elements discovered on site.⁴²

The mentioned and detailed aspects show a high possibility that the coin types under discussion could represent depictions of the Western gate of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, which was also considered the most important entrance in the city. As far as the other entrances are concerned, there are still multiple elements that must be studied and analysed before any attempt of identification could be made.

Later city-gate monetary types: expressions of local identity or standardized motives?

This part of the current study is in a preliminary phase, considering the complexity of the subject. As a result, the details that were observed until the present moment will be included to assure the most accurate disponible at the moment.

According to the discussion, Andrew Poulter's research suggests that after the Severan dynasty, *Nikopolis ad Istrum* still featured city-gate coin types, which were also common in other cities of the region. It is plausible that these coin types lacked any specific local significance.⁴³ For the moment, this sentence could not be completely accepted or, on the opposite, denied.

Still, one interesting example that could contribute to the current analysis regards the type of city-gate depicted during the reign of Gordian III (AMNG 2107 – Figure 7). This illustration is dated to the period of the magistrate Sabinius Modestus (241-242/3 AD).

Here, a similar depiction could be identified in *Markianopolis* during the magistrature of Tullius Menophilus (238-241 AD) (Figure 13⁴⁴). In both cases, are observed common features such as: two round towers, the 4 pinnacles, and the appearance of the entrance in the gate. Despite a clear resemblance of the two coin types, it is still difficult to explain the possible switch from the depictions illustrating a powerful local identity to several standard ones.

⁴¹ Photo accessed at <https://wikimapia.org/25248885/Thermoperipatos> on 16.07.2024.

⁴² Poulter 1995, 95.

⁴³ Poulter 1995, 95.

⁴⁴ Coin type AMNG 1170 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=502747|899|201|8bcadc24a38bbe22242a2672c2fae0e7> on 16.07.2024.

The *nymphaeum* of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*

The following case is complex and interesting, because here coins are the only sources that reflect the possible existence of a *nymphaeum* in *Nikopolis ad Istrum*. But, before discussing the mentioned idea, it is necessary to analyse the definition of this monumental structure in general.

Price and Trell (1977) describe it as a ‘temple of decorative type dedicated to the nymphs often including a watering place.’⁴⁵ Another definition is that detailed by J. E. Lendon who emphasises on the fact that for a long time there was no clear characterization for the building. He illustrates several elements that could be followed in the description: ‘a frontage of at least 15 meters, a main water-receptacle open to the sky, elaborate decoration, usually in the <<tabernacle>> or <<aedicular>> (columns and niches) style, adorned with statues and rare marbles.’⁴⁶

The difficulty that appears in our discussion is how we could consider that the representations on the coins are genuine and reflect the existence of a *nymphaeum* in *Nikopolis ad Istrum*. Price and Trell list the city among the places where this kind of building could be identified.⁴⁷ However, this could not be totally sure until it would not be discovered from an archaeological point of view, an aspect that was mentioned as a methodological part of the current research. Still, there are a few details that could bring to light high chances of the existence of a *nymphaeum*.

Generally, the presence of a complex water system is linked to it.⁴⁸ *Nikopolis ad Istrum* had an impressive circuit composed of aqueducts, public baths, etc. Ivan Tsarov describes it as follows:

‘The western aqueduct of *Nicopolis*, about 25 km long, collected water from the cave near today’s village of Musina, Pavlikeni municipality. Through its several branches, the underground river poured its water into the octagonal series stone catchment (*caput aquae*). Then it ran along a masoned, arched canal (*specus*) towards the city distribution reservoir (*castellum aquae*) which is the best-preserved ruin today, about 4 m high. The canal crossed the valley of the Rositsa River on a 17m high and about 3 km long arcade, specially constructed for the purpose. At the west end of Dichin village, the canal changed its direction and headed east. [...] After passing near the modern Malak Resen village and the western city necropolis, it supplied the water to the above-

⁴⁵ Price and Trell 1977, 44.

⁴⁶ Lendon 2015, 123.

⁴⁷ Price and Trell 1977, 44.

⁴⁸ Lendon 2015, 124.

mentioned reservoir, from where it was distributed and reached the city quarters and homes along clay water-mains.’⁴⁹

The detailed presentation of Ivan Tsarov also depicts the importance of the aqueducts in the functioning of the public baths, fountains, and of the highly possible *nymphaeum*.⁵⁰

Another aspect that could be taken into consideration is the presence of the nymph Pan in the coinage of the city (Figures 14 and 15 - coins from the reigns of Commodus⁵¹ and Elagabalus⁵²). He is usually connected to the nymphs, and, as a result, to the water sources.⁵³ Despite the absence of the archaeological discovery of the structure, its’ general aspect still can be detailed based on the coin types that depict it. One accurate description is presented through the online catalogue *Corpus Nummorum*, which also encompasses two different typologies of the building.

As far as the example from the reign of Septimius Severus is concerned (governor Lucius Aurelius Gallus) (Figure 16⁵⁴), the *nymphaeum* has:

‘a two-story semi-circular column façade on a three-tiered base, framed by rectangular *aediculae* on both floors. The first floor is marked by a row of columns, in the second the columns are arranged in pairs and crowned by a triangular pediment. The lateral *aediculae* are each formed by four columns with an architrave. The roof entablature extends over the entire building. Between the base of the columned façade and the steps, a series of smaller niches is visible, from which the water flowed.’⁵⁵

The reign of Macrinus is marked by a significant change in the appearance of the *nymphaeum* (Figure 17⁵⁶). Besides the old structure, we could see that an arch between the two rows of columns occurs. Based on the analysis conducted by Bluma L. Trell, is possible that the

⁴⁹ Tsarov 2009, 28-29.

⁵⁰ Tsarov 2009, 28.

⁵¹ Coin type AMNG I 1242 accessed at <https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/moesia/nikopolis/t.html>.

⁵² <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=340299|609|642|b6cfc20dd488724a0a2502ccc685f348>.

⁵³ Roman 2010, 384.

⁵⁴ CN Coin 54052 accessed at <https://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/coins/54052> on 16.07.2024.

⁵⁵ Description accessed at <https://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/coin-of-the-month/2023/8/?lg=en> on 16.07.2024.

⁵⁶ Coin type Varbanov 3382 accessed at <https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2168248|5211|218|5f3a97f814beaf18ee822dbe163ba6ff> on 16.07.2024.

new element was the result of several additions in the period between Septimius Severus (193-211 AD) and Elagabalus (218-222 AD). The case of *Nikopolis ad Istrum* would not represent the only one where changes appear from one period to another. For example, Perge registered a similar action during the Severan dynasty. The role of the arch could have been to allow the entrance to the semicircular colonnade space.⁵⁷

One of the questions that could be formulated regarding the general structure of the *nymphaeum* is linked to the absence of the water-basin from the numismatic depictions. Because of the lack of archaeological explanations, the different possibilities are detailed based on similar cases from other cities of the Roman Empire. Two scenarios could be distinguished in the case of the basin's depiction. The first one explains that the structure was localized between the spouts wall and the steps (as in Xanthos, for example), and, because of this it is not visible on the coin depiction. Another possibility could have been to situate the basin below the stairs. In this case, the water was poured over the steps (this hydraulic system was the one attested in Corinth).⁵⁸

As far as the local significance of the *nymphaeum* coin types is concerned, we could formulate several preliminary observations. One of them concerns the reason of constructing such a structure in *Nikopolis*. The city had a considerable population originating from *Asia Minor*, especially, *Nicaea* and *Nicomedia*.⁵⁹ On the territory of *Asia Minor*, the *nymphaeum* has developed starting with the Flavians,⁶⁰ and we could consider that the people who came to *Nikopolis* from this region implemented the idea of this kind of construction.

As it was explained for each component of the urban landscape of the city, we also must analyse whether the detailed representation of monumental *nymphaea* has or not any local significance. If we compare the types from *Nikopolis ad Istrum* with examples from other cities, all of them are different.

Basing the observations on the *nymphaeum* from *Hadrianopolis* (Thrace) (Figure 18⁶¹), the differences are clear. This one has a much more complex structure and is also represented together with diverse statues. The construction from *Neocaesarea* depicted on coins of Severus Alexander (Figure 19⁶²) is even more different than the one illustrated in *Nikopolis*. Here, the steps are not

⁵⁷ Trell 1978, 156.

⁵⁸ Trell 1978, 156.

⁵⁹ Aparaschivei 2010, 129.

⁶⁰ Lendon 2015, 126.

⁶¹ CN Coin 6750 accessed at <https://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/coins/6750> on 16.07.2024.

⁶² RPC VI, 6525 accessed at <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/6525> on 16.07.2024.

even included on the reverse, and, a statue is also identified in center of the monument, elements which are not observed in the image of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*.

Considering the presented types and comparisons, we could state that it is highly possible that a *nymphaeum* existed in the city, and, even more, its representations were linked to the reality. Still, the current observations must be treated carefully, because of the lack of sufficient archaeological evidence.

Conclusions

The current study represents an archaeological and numismatic overview of several key-elements of the urban landscape of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*. The main difficulty was to establish a clear methodology of analysis regarding the credibility of coin types depicting buildings, which was and still is an interesting and, at the same time, risky matter.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the present research confirms the idea that numismatic sources (in our case, the Roman Provincial Coinage) could signify an essential piece in terms of reconstructing ancient landscape. However, they have to be used with care and caution throughout the comparison and association of other categories of material such as the archaeological one. In the case of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, the described methodology unveiled interesting discussions and possible images of its landscape. The city-gates offer a complex set of questions and interpretations.

At this moment, at least one identification is relatively clear, even if some reserves have to be maintained. As we have seen, the elements of archaeological record (the succession of western entrance structures, widths, and position on the plan) show a strong probability that the reverse of the coin types AMNG I 1331, 1339, and 1585 has as an equivalent in the field - the Western city-gate. The strong association of the superstructure present in these coin types with the *thermoperipatos* is also a considerable argument in favour of the mentioned identification (see the archaeological plan – Figure 9; the *thermoperipatos* is the building that comes next to the *agora*). If this is the correct correlation, then it could be stated that the engravers represented almost the entire *decumanus maximus* on the coin with several of the most important buildings.

Coming to the case of the *nymphaeum*, the analysis is clearly more complicated because of the absence of its' archaeological discovery. For this building, the coins represent the most detailed category of source, but we couldn't consider that they depict the exact appearance. However, as it

was presented, there are several key-points that indicate a possible existence of this kind of building in *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, such as coins with the nymph Pan, and an impressive water structure archaeologically identified.

As far as the local character of this depiction, it could be considered that the image of *Nikopolis' nymphaeum* is clearly different in style, and composition compared to other cases such as *Hadrianopolis* or *Neocaesarea*. This could reflect a high grade of the city's identity, which is illustrated by the different types of the building that could be linked to possible additions over time.

Architectural elements of the landscape (for example, temples) still have to be analysed, and compared to a considerable range of other examples in order to arrive at a possible explanation. However, the presented monumental depictions show a complex organization of the city and allow a virtual tour through the lens of numismatic and archaeological sources.

List of abbreviations

AMNG I = Behrendt, Pick, *Die antiken Münzen von Dacien und Moesien, Die antiken Münzen Nord-Griechenlands Band 1. Dacien und Moesien* (1898)

CN = *Corpus Nummorum*

IGBulg II = Mihailov, G., *Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae. Vol. 2. Inscriptiones inter Danubium et Haemum repertae* (1958).

RPC = *Roman Provincial Coinage*

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Roman Provincial Coinage – a mirror of the urban landscape.
The case of Nikopolis ad Istrum

Fig. 7



Fig. 9



Fig. 11



Fig. 8

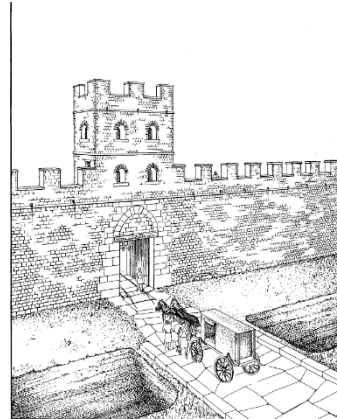


Fig. 10



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

