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Cristian Găzdac, Ovidiu Oargă, Ágnes Alföldy-Găzdac, *It was supposed to be Silver! The Scrap Coin 'Hoard' Apulum VI* [Coins from Roman Sites and Collections of Roman Coins from Romania, V/2, Mega Publishing House], Cluj-Napoca, 2015. 110 A4 pages, coloured illustrations. ISBN: 978-606-543-555-1¹

The present work represents the last volume appeared in the prestigious numismatic publication series - *Coins from Roman Sites and Collections of Roman Coins from Romania* - edited by and on the initiative of Cristian Găzdac. Started several years ago (see volume V/2009), the systematic and detailed presentation of monetary discoveries from the site of Apulum is continued by the publication in a monograph form of a new hoard, conventionally called Apulum VI. The deposit was discovered in 1997 during the municipal administration activities in Alba Iulia city, consisting of 232 coins, recovered in five consecutive batches. Unfortunately, although the discovery is relatively recent, as in many similar situations, the essential information about it (the exact place of discovery, the archaeological context or the initial amount of coins) were lost.

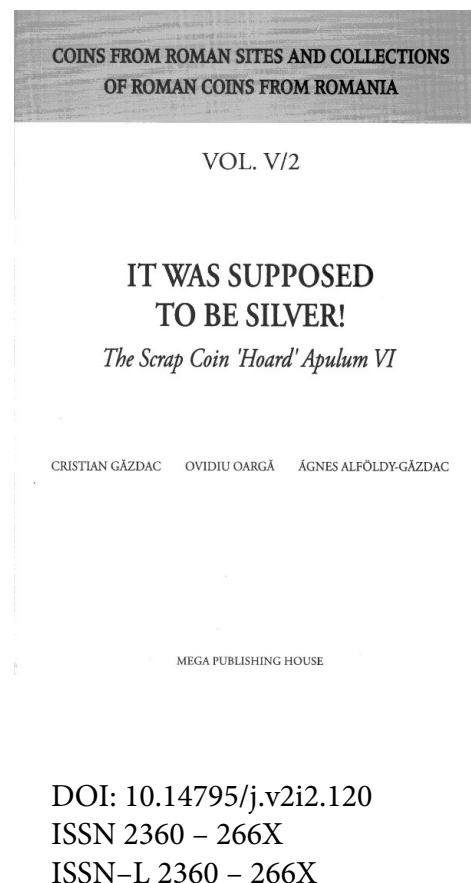
The book is divided in two parts, namely an extensive numismatic study, followed by images, tables and graphs (p. 7-51) and a detailed and illustrated catalogue of the coins, whose images are also shown separately (p. 55-110). In the first part is analysed the chronological structure and composition of the hoard, which is made exclusively from imperial *denarii*, dated from Vespasianus to Elagabalus. The majority of the coins are issued after Septimius Severus' reform, most of them bearing the effigy of this emperor and his family members. The authors demonstrate that the structure of the hoard Apulum VI is not a random one, but follows a certain pattern, specific to the hoards concluded with coins from Elagabalus - Severus Alexander, found in different parts of the Roman world. The terms chosen for comparison are very relevant - 20 hoards coming from a vast area, from Dacia to Britannia. In addition, the method used is an ingenious one - calculating the coin index, in each case, using Casey's extension to the Ravetz formula (where the "total for site" was substituted with the "total coins hoard"). The transposition of the results to a comparative chart, although quite difficult to follow due to congestion, is extremely useful (p. 51, Graph 3). It would have been interesting to calculate the average values of the coin index, for each emperor, of all the hoards and their comparison with the similar values of the hoard from Apulum.

Unlike the hoard structure, which may be considered an almost typical one, the hoard composition is very particular: all the coins are cast *denarii* of a bronze core. It was estimated that 112 genuine coins had been used to produce the clay moulds for the cast pieces. Obviously, the most common prototypes are those from the time of the Severan dynasty. It is interesting to note that two of these prototypes, although with a good quality design, contain obvious engraving errors (Cat. no. 106-114 and 213-219). Only three coins are hybrid (Cat. 87-88, 204), the last of them showing clear signs of

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“barbarization”, both in legend and iconography. By drawing a comparison with other similar findings, the authors noted “the care of the counterfeiter(s) for the right combination between the obverse and the reverse of prototypes” (p. 11). Also, it is estimated that most cast coins from the hoard Apulum have a quite good quality design, and some of them passed the silvering process probably using an Ag-Hg amalgam, in order to appear as genuine silver *denarii*. However, the authors’ careful analysis has revealed numerous indications of the casting technique, such as the smooth design, the presence of air bubbles on the surface, breakings on the edges, caused by the careless removal of the “tails” or signs of imprint errors. On the other hand, a brief weight analysis has indicated a high variability of the coins weights, their producer not being interested, it seems, in respecting the official weight standards. It would have been useful to supplement these data with those obtained from the study of the coins axes and diameters. The results of the metallurgic examination of the coins (unfortunately, we have not seen any specification of the method used) are very interesting. Only a small fraction of them has silver in their composition, on the surface. Most were made of copper, alloyed with various elements, especially tin, lead and zinc.

At the end of the numismatic study, the authors try to explain the origin, presence and purpose of the hoard. The extremely low number of cast coins deriving from the isolated discoveries and the hoards of Dacia (published so far) is explained, quite plausibly, by their erroneous confusion with genuine coins or plated silver ones. One may note that, especially in the recent studies, the latter were reported in huge amounts, in both the civilian and military environment. Counterfeiting the official currency, by both striking and casting, was a generalised phenomenon in the Roman world (including Dacia) in the context of the coin shortage from the 3rd century AD. It is assumed that the cast coins from the hoard Apulum VI likely originated in a workshop from the vicinity of the place where this was found - *municipium Septimium*, without knowing for sure if it belonged to *intra-* or *extra-muros* area. As the author has stated the private or official character of this workshop cannot be established. The opinions of the authors on the “functionality” of this hoard are reliable and base on a convincing argument. This monetary assembly does not meet the usual criteria in order to be considered a hoard (in this way is justified the use of quotation marks throughout the book, starting even from around the title). In terms of composition, the coins have a very poor quality and “could have hardly deceived and passed

as genuine *denarii*”; most probably, they might be considered as “recycling material for the cast coins or metal artefacts” or “simple disposal of scrap metal with no use anymore” (p. 15).

The bibliography contains the most relevant numismatic studies in the field of this particular subject, some of them very recent, proving a rigorous and updated documentation on behalf of the authors. The study is supplemented by maps, figures, tables and graphs that support the comprehension of the text. Very useful are especially the tables containing the occurrence of the most frequent coin types (from the hoard Apulum VI) in the composition of the most important hoards ending with coins of Elagabalus (Tab. 2, p. 38) and the results of the metallographic examination of the coins, carried out at the Research Institute for Analytical Instrumentation from Cluj-Napoca (Tab. 3, p. 39-45).

The catalogue of coins is conceived in a very detailed manner and contains all available data for each piece: nominal, diameter, weight, axis, inventory number, identification, description of iconography and legend, mentions about the state of conservation and high quality images, based on increased resolution. For identification, the authors have sufficiently considered the catalogues from *The Roman Imperial Coinage* series (although there were other options too) and, only in the case of the coins issued under Trajan, they have referred to the catalogue of the *Moneta Imperii Romani* series. Very useful are the remarks on the state of conservation of the coins and the various visible traces of the casting process. The coins are again illustrated, this time by their normal size, within the illustrations from the end of the work (Pl. I-VIII, p. 103-110).

The work may not impress by size, still, it is distinguished by several remarkable qualities. It introduces into the scientific circuit, in a very professional manner, a category of exceptional artefacts (the most important hoard of cast coins from the Empire), and offers a modern numismatic research, based on a rigorous and disciplinary documentation, with reliable and valid results throughout the Roman world. We note the high quality printing, which has already become a brand of Mega Publishing House. We also welcome the regularity of the *Coins from Roman Sites and Collections of Roman Coins from Romania*, a collection that, through the outstanding efforts of Cristian Găzdac, the one who took care of this book and also one of its authors, has won a deserved place among the main series of numismatic publications in Europe.