

NOVEL COIN FINDS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF OLTENIA IN CRAIOVA¹

Abstract: This paper follows six Roman coins, discovered at Oltina (Constanța county) and Oancea (Galați county). They entered the possession of a school teacher who taught in the two places. He attempted to sell them through his son, a student with the University of Craiova. The police, however, rendered such action futile and, although the coins were delivered by the end of the investigation (during the 80'ies) to the Museum of Oltenia.

Keywords: Roman coins, Oltina, Oancea, Museum of Oltenia

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Six Roman coins, novel up to this moment, were included in the collections of the Museum of Oltenia in Craiova by accident. Discovered at Oltina (Constanța county) and Oancea² (Galați county), under unknown circumstances, they entered the possession of a school teacher who taught in the two places. He attempted to sell them through his son, a student with the University of Craiova. The police, however, rendered such action futile and, although the coins were delivered by the end of the investigation (during the 80'ies) to the Museum of Oltenia, they remained, as noted above, unknown to the numismatic historiography, reason for which we shall discuss them below.

The coins are as follow:

1. (Museum of Oltenia, inv. no. 13668, origin Oltina). *Antoninian*. Obverse *IMP GORDIANVS PIUS FEL. AVG.* Draped, radiate and cuirassed bust right of emperor Gordianus III. C.p.e. Reverse *PM TR [P] III COS II P P.* A standing right Gordianus III in military attire, holding in the right hand the spear set across and a globe in the left. C.p.e. Axis 12; 4.32 grams; diameter. 21.6 x 23 mm. Well preserved. RIC IV/III, p. 25, no. 91. Rome, AD 241- 243.

2. (Museum of Oltenia, inv. no. 13667, origin Oltina). *Aes II*. Obverse *DN ARCADIVS PF AVGVSTVS.* Pearl diademed, draped and cuirassed bust right of the emperor. C.p.e. Rv. *VIRTVS E-XERCITI.* Emperor standing right, holding a standard in the right hand and a globe in the left; foot captive, \perp \perp C.p.e. CONSI Axis 12; 4.61 grams; diameter 22.12 x 23.28 mm. Well preserved. RIC IX, p. 233, no. 83(c), mark of the first mint of Constantinople, second period: the 25th of August 383 - 28th of August 388 AD.

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² CROITORU 2015.

3. (Museum of Oltenia, inv. no. 13671, origin Oltina). *Aes II*. Obverse *DN THEODO-SIVS PF AVG*. Pearl diademed, draped and cuirassed bust right of the emperor. C.p.e. Reverse *VIRTUS E-XERCITI*. Emperor standing right, holding a standard in the right hand and a globe in the left; at foot captive, coinage mark, spray left _____ C.p.e. SMNA' Axis 12; 5.64 grams; diameter 22.28 x 21.21 mm. Well preserved. RIC IX, p. 261, no. 44(b), mark of the fourth mint of Nicomedia, the second period: the 25th of August 383 - the 28th of August 388 AD.

4. (Museum of Oltenia, inv. no. 13.670, origin Oancea); *AE Quadrans*, issue of emperor Claudius to Tiberius. Obverse *TI CLAVDIVS CAESAR AVG* circular. Effigy of emperor Tiberius left. Rv. *PON M TR P IMP COS DES IT* circular, S C. Tiberius standing left Axis 5, 9.36 g. Diam. 28.72 x 28.51 mm. RIC I, p. 126, no. 84, III. *Lugdunum*, (a) the 25th of January 41 - 3rd of December 41 AD.

5. (Museum of Oltenia, inv. no. 13.665, origin Oancea); *AE Dupondius*, issue of emperor Nero. Av. *NERO CLAVDIVS CAESAR AVG GERM P M TR P IMP P*. Effigy of the laureate emperor left. Rv. [*PORT AVG*] circular from right to left, S C. Poseidon standing, glancing left. Axis 5, 11.98 g. diam. 24.89 x 26.35 mm. Legend rv. erased. RIC I, p. 177, no. 441, rv. type 19 (Ostia), *Lugdunum*, series III-IV, year ca. AD 65.

6. (Museum of Oltenia, inv. no. 13.666, origin Oancea); *folles* from Galerius Maximianus. Av. *IMP C GAL VAL MAXIMIANVS P F AVG*. Laureate bust right of the emperor. C.p.e. Rv. *GENIO AV-GVSTI CMH* (*MH* in ligature). Genius standing left, bearing a *modius* on the head, nude, with chlamys on the left shoulder, holding in the right hand the patera (spreading flower perfume) and the *cornucopiae* in the left. C.p.e. SMNA. Axis 12; 6.25 g.; diam. 26.49 x 27.59 mm. Well preserved. RIC VI, p. 562, no. 54a. Group IV. *Nicomedia*, December 308 - May 310 AD.

The place Oltina in Constanța county is well known to the Romanian historiography, a station of the military fleet of *Moesia Secunda* being located there by *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Oriens*, XL, 28: *Milites naulcarii Altinenses, Altino*³). Furthermore, Procopius (*De Aedificiis*, IV, 7, 9: *Altina*⁴) lists it among the fortifications rebuilt under emperor Justinian. The name of the settlement associated with emperor Anastasius I also appears on stamped bricks found at *Dinogetia* (*PIUS IMPE(ra)TOR ANASTASIUS* +, framed above and below the cartridge by toponym *AITINA*)⁵. The discovery of certain kilns at Oltina, dated to the chronological interval comprised between the end of the 5th century and early 6th century⁶ suggests that the tile material was produced there and later carried downstream the Danube. The late Roman fortification (*TIR*, L, 35, 22) of the 4th - 6th centuries AD is rectangular (sizes: 190 x 80 m) with rounded corners and provided with a defensive ditch⁷. Its presence there explains the find of the coins which reached the collections of the Museum of Oltenia,

³ ILIESCU 1970, 211.

⁴ MIHĂESCU 1970, 468-469.

⁵ BARNEA 1967.

⁶ IRIMIA 1968.

⁷ ZAHARIADE/GUDEA 1997, 78.

to our knowledge, the first of the kind identified in the area⁸. For the subsequent Roman-Byzantine level the evidence, even though the result of chance finds - including numismatic⁹, is numerous.

Interestingly, the 2nd - 3rd centuries AD *Itineraries* make no mention for this chronological "level" of an extant fortification, which, it was suggested to have suffered the specific changes by mid Christian millennium¹⁰, while instead, a military diploma of the 14th of August 99 AD records a soldier from *cohors II Gallorum* (*CIL*, XVI, 44)¹¹, thus equally implying the presence of a civil settlement as early as the end of the 1st c. AD. There is no much chronological indication on other archaeological materials found by chance there and mentioned under general title¹², so that the coin from Gordianus III is all the more important.

Oancea commune is located in the east of Galați county, on the right bank of river Prut, at 57 kilometres north the county residential city. Given the highly favouring natural conditions, the area was inhabited as early as the Bronze Age¹³, the place being firstly referenced in documents in only 1521, during the regency of Ștefăniță Vodă, becoming famous during the Middle Ages due to the road and crossing point of Prut river, which followed an older route marked, among other, also by coin finds.

Obviously, the coins in the collections of the Museum of Oltenia are no exception for the area between the Carpathians and Prut river, analogies, more or less numerous, being generally known. Interestingly, imperial coins, issued from under Claudius (AD 41-54), were identified isolate, as far as we know, exclusively in *dava*-type settlements, which is valid for the entire Dacian space, which may yet also be related to the state of research or the random the chance finds, missing in this case. Such coins were discovered at Barboși (Galați county)¹⁴, Poiana (Galați county)¹⁵, Răcățau (Bačău county)¹⁶, Costești-Grădiștea Muncelului (Hunedoara county)¹⁷, Ocnița (Vâlcea county)¹⁸, Divici (Caraș Severin county)¹⁹ and Tinosu (Prahova county)²⁰. The sesterce in the collection of the "Ioan Raica" Museum of Sebeș has no known find place²¹.

The coinage issued under emperor Nero is well represented by both chance finds and pieces composing hoards identified all over Dacia. Unfortunately, there is absolutely no evidence on the find conditions of the three coins at Oancea, especially of the first two - were they associated or not? - information which would suggest an extant hoard - if

⁸ POENARU BORDEA/MITREA 1991, 218, no. 9 (coin from Constantine the Great issued at Heraclea in 313 and other issued in 342-348).

⁹ CUSTUREA 2001, 583-594.

¹⁰ ZAHARIADE/GUDEA 1997, 78.

¹¹ On the troop and mentioned soldier see MATEI-POPESCU 2001-2002, 205-206; MATEI-POPESCU 2010, 208-209.

¹² CHIRIAC/CUSTUREA 2002, 222, no. 155 (*terra sigillata*, the 1st - 2nd centuries AD); CHIRIAC 2003, 222, no. 132 (bronze coin from Trajan). See also OCHEȘEANU/LICULESCU 1971, 269-272 (Republican Roman denarius).

¹³ CROITORU 2013, 122.

¹⁴ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 253, I, no. 12; SANIE/SANIE 1991, 53-54, no. 7-10.

¹⁵ More recently MITREA 2011, 196, no. 1.

¹⁶ CĂPITANU/URSACHI 1975, 50, no. 77.

¹⁷ DAICOVICIU 1959, 341.

¹⁸ BERCIU 1981, 134.

¹⁹ Poenaru-Bordea/Mitrea 1995, 466, no. 39.

²⁰ VULPE 1966, 49.

²¹ MUNTEAN 2009, 101, no. 1.

yes (!?) – were they the only coins found or were there others, “valued” by other means or “hoarded” by the local school teacher?

For instance, a hoard of imperial coins associating also pieces from Claudius and Nero was discovered at Fedeleșeni (Iași county)²² near a Carpic settlement. Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that the great majority of the hoards containing coins from Nero start to accumulate precisely with these issues, like the case of the hoards identified within the territory of Moldova, at Bârgăoani²³, Costișa²⁴ and Davideni²⁵ (Neamț county), Buhoci²⁶, Ciușași²⁷, Gura Văii²⁸, Sascut²⁹ and Parava³⁰ (Bacău county), Bacău³¹ surroundings, Oboroceni³², Strunga³³ and Costești³⁴ (Iași county).

An as struck under Nero was discovered in the Dacian settlement at Brad³⁵, another in that at Răcătău³⁶, while for the sesterce in the collection of “Ștefan cel Mare” Museum of Vaslui the find place is unknown³⁷.

Coins minted during the reign of emperor Galerius Maximianus (305-311) are very rare in the east-Carpathian area, confirming to a great extent the liquidity crisis that the empire was confronted with during the entire 4th century AD. Only a *folis* of the same emperor is known, found isolate at Vulturești (Vaslui county)³⁸.

These are the few notes one can make at this time, the random chance finds leaving no space for interpretation. There are no well grounded reasons to doubt the mention of the accurate find place of the coins, all the more in the case of Oltina, where coins are associated with what was known or believed on the Roman features. In the second case, at Oancea, we believe that although the coins could not be related to other archaeological find – which may yet be due to the state of research – might have something to do with the old access road following the Prut river ford.

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²² MITREA 1956, 161; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 264, no. 98.

²³ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 255, no. 30.

²⁴ MATASĂ/MITREA 1957, 475, no. 7.

²⁵ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 262, NO. 75.

²⁶ CHIȚESCU/ȚARĂLUNGĂ 1969, 195-198.

²⁷ TUDOR 1954, 386.

²⁸ MITREA 1956, 161; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 266-267, no. 118.

²⁹ MITREA 1956, 161, 167; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 282, no. 223.

³⁰ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 274, no. 172.

³¹ MITREA 1956, 161; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 252, no. 8.

³² MITREA/ZAHARIA 1967, 81-131; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 273, no. 166.

³³ MITREA 1972, 145-146, no. 85; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 284, no. 239.

³⁴ TUDOR 1966, 386; MITREA 1956, 161; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980, 260, no. 69.

³⁵ URSACHI, MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1992, 104, no. 25.

³⁶ CĂPITANU/URSACHI 1975, 50, no. 78.

³⁷ BUTNARU 2007, 123, no. 3.

³⁸ BUTNARU 2007, 108, no. 12.

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Fig. 1. Discussed coins (catalogue numbers preserved).