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A Small Hoard of Nicaean Coins discovered in Moesia Inferior*

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Abstract: Our work presents a hoard of Roman coins discovered in the early 2000s with the help of a metal detector, approximately 3.5 km northeast of the village of Ostrov (Constanța County, Romania), where a part of the site from Durostorum is located. The small hoard contains ten bronze coins minted in Nicaea (Bithynia) by Severus Alexander (nine pcs.) and Gordianus III (one pc.). All issues feature 'military' designs (three and four standards) on the reverse. Among these, we managed to identify four new reverse motifs (var. 3b; var. 7b; var. 18d; var. 23f). The analysis of coin discoveries from Nicaea, both isolated and in hoards, revealed that these bronze issues did not play a significant role in the monetary circulation in Moesia Inferior. Exceptionally, only at the site of Durostorum were discovered 65 coins from Nicaea (51 genuine issues and 14 cast imitations) bearing the effigies of the emperors Severus Alexander and Gordianus III and featuring 'military' standards on the reverse. The hoard may have represented the 'pocket money' of a person who lived in the hypothetical villa rustica near Ostrov and who was closely connected to the centre of Durostorum.

Keywords: Hoard, Nicaean coins, 'military' design, Moesia Inferior, Durostorum.



1. Discovery of the Hoard

The following hoard was discovered at the beginning of the 2000s with the help of a metal detector, in a location above the Constanța-Ostrov/Silistra highway (DN 3). Close to the Danube, the point is called 'Regie', near the spring known as 'Mama apelor' or 'Stutina Vodă'. The discov-

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ery site is supposed to correspond to a plateau, locally known as ‘*La parapet*’, from which funerary discoveries specific to the second half of the 2nd century are also known (Chera-Mărgineanu 1978, 140). Additionally, with the publication of the funerary discoveries, it was suggested that they could belong to a larger complex, presumably a *villa rustica*, with such constructions being considered ‘frequent in this suburban area of Durostorum’ (Chera-Mărgineanu 1978, 140).

The discovery point is near the town of Silistra (Silistra District, Bulgaria) and the village of Ostrov (Constanța County, Romania), about 3.5 km in the northeast direction from the latter (**Fig. 1**). The southeast area of Silistra city is correlated with the positioning of the *legio XI Claudia* fortress (brought here by Traianus probably in the context of the second Dacian war, in AD 105–106), based on archaeological discoveries such as the fortress walls, internal towers, *tegulae* with the legion’s stamp, epigraphic monuments, coins, etc. (Иванов et al. 2006, 166–180). Besides the military camp itself, we also note the existence of two civilian settlements, found in its immediate vicinity (*canabae Aeliae legionis XI Claudiae*) and 3 km towards the east in the locality of Ostrov, at the point “Farm 4 Regie” (Damian, Bâltac 2007, 61–70). The city and the *canabae* would obtain the title *Municipium Aurelium Durostorum*, experiencing significant development in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, based on numerous public and private buildings discovered through archaeological excavations (Atanasov 2007, 447; Damian, Bâltac 2007, 62).

In addition to the major archaeological sites mentioned, the entire area between the current localities of Ostrov and Silistra bear lots of ancient discoveries (specifically from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD), such as jewellery pieces, accessories, ceramics, lamps, coins, glass vessels, statuettes, etc. (Mușețeanu, Elefterescu 1978, 105–111; Mușețeanu, Elefterescu 2004, 95–142; Elefterescu 2004–2005, 221–238; Dima, Elefterescu 2009; Arbunescu 2017, 191–208; Elefterescu 2017, 79–116; Boțan, Elefterescu 2018; Nuțu, Elefterescu 2018 etc.).

Due to the unclear conditions in which it was found (by metal detector) and given the long time that has elapsed since its discovery, we do not know the original size and composition of the hoard. According to the statements of the detectorists, recorded by the authorities, the deposit contained only ten bronze coins. Unfortunately, this is no longer verifiable today.



Fig. 1. The hypothetical area of discovery of the monetary hoard.

2. Catalogue of the Coins

The ten coins of the hoard were minted in Nicaea (Bithynia) by Severus Alexander (nine pcs.) and Gordianus III (one pc.). All of them feature 'military' designs (three and four standards) on the reverse. This particular category of issues is well known in the specialised literature, mainly thanks to the detailed research of numismatists from Serbia conducted over the last few decades. Thus, for the identification of the coins we used, besides the classic catalogues (BMC Bithynia, WBR, and SNG Copenhagen) and the more recent ones (Weiser 1983) – all quite general – the works of Serbian specialists. Therefore, we referred to the typology made by N. Crnobraja, who identified 28 different reverse types (Црнобраја 1981). Over time, this classification was enriched and detailed by introducing five new types and 52 variants of the basic types (in total, 89 different designs) (Vojvoda 2023, 107 and note 13, 117). As M. Vojvoda noted, this system of organising the images on the reverse is quite complex and has some deficiencies, proving its limits when new series of variants were added (Vojvoda 2023, 107).

Most recently, M. Vojvoda proposed a new typology for the coins from Nicaea featuring 'military' designs, which we also used in our catalogue. She divided the 89 known types and reverse variants (referred to as 'motifs') into two main groups based on the number of standards. Within the groups, the motifs were arranged according to different iconographic elements associated with the standards (*phalerae*, *aquillae*, capricorns, or wreaths). It is worth noting that all motifs were redrawn and graphically presented in a uniform manner (Vojvoda 2023, 108–117). Although it is considered a 'working draft,' the typology proposed by the Serbian researcher is organised according to clear criteria and is highly flexible, allowing for the addition of new motifs.

At the same time, we used the RPC catalogue for identifying our coins. Volume VI, which contains the issues of Severus Alexander, is available only online, so the numbers are provisional. Although the arrangement of the coins by number and, respectively, within each number is not definitive and presents some deficiencies, we constantly referred to this extremely generous numismatic database.

The state of conservation of the coins in the hoard appears to be varied. Some of them are in good condition, and even have a patina; in certain cases, the reliefs of letters and images are visible. In contrast, other pieces seem to be in poor condition, making them difficult to identify. We believe their deterioration is not due to circulation, but rather to corrosion in the soil and improper storage conditions after they were unearthed. Unfortunately, until their legal status was clarified, the coins could not be cleaned and restored by specialists.

Nicaea (Bithynia)

Severus Alexander (AD 222–235)

Obv. M AVP CEVH AΛEΞANΔPOC AVΓ (var. AV and AΓ)

Obv. [...]P CEVH AΛEΞANΔPOC; [...] Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rev. NI – K – AI – E / QN; Three military standards, with two *phalerae* on each standard (type 1 / motif I.1/1).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 100 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/9 var.; Црнобраја 1981, 11, no. 30 var.; 12, nos. 35–41, 44–48 var.; Weiser 1983, 213, no. 030 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 108, no. I.1/1; RPC VI 3202 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3202>); for the rev. only see: 3202/15, 18, 37, 41.

1. AE; 5 g; 19x20 mm; 12 h; badly preserved; struck off-centre on the obv. and rev. (**Fig. 2/1**).

Obv. [...]CEVH AΛEΞANΔPOC [AVΓ]; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rev. N – IK – AI – E / ΩN; Three military standards, with three *phalerae* on the middle standard and with two *phalerae* on the lateral standards (type 3 / motif I.1/3).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 103 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/9 var.; SNG Copenhagen 520 var.; Црнобрња 1981, 11, nos. 21–25; Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/3; RPC VI 3202/42 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/441813>); 3248/18 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/258491>).

2. AE; 4 g; 19 mm; 1 h; very badly preserved; struck off-centre on the obv. and rev. (**Fig. 2/2**).

Obv. [...]EVH AΛEΞANΔPOC AΓ; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rv. N – IK – AI – E / ΩN; Three military standards, with three *phalerae* on the middle standard and with two *phalerae* on the lateral standards (var. 3b / motif I.1/3 - **Fig. 3/1**).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 103 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/9 var.; SNG Copenhagen 520 var.; Црнобрња 1981, 12, no. 42 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/3; RPC VI 3248 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3248>), 3249 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3249>); for the rev. only see: 3261/15 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/256116>).

3. AE; 4.257 g; 18x19 mm; 12 h; well preserved; struck off-center on the obv. and rev. (**Fig. 2/3**).

Obv. [...]VP CEVH AΛEΞANΔPOC AV; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rev. NI – KA – IE – ΩN (ΩN in ligat.); Three military standards, with four *phalerae* (three of normal size, one of small size) on the middle standard and with three *phalerae* on the lateral standards (var. 9c / motif I.1/7).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 100; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/10 var.; Vojvoda 2011, 246, Fig. 2, no. 9c; Vojvoda 2023, 110, no. I.1/7; RPC VI 3195 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3195>).

4. AE; 5.603 g; 19x20 mm; 1 h; badly preserved; struck slightly off-centre on the rev. (**Fig. 2/4**).

Obv. M AVP CEVH AΛEΞANΔPOC AVΓ; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rv. NI – K – AI – E / ΩN; Three military standards; *aquila* on the middle standard with two *phalerae* and lateral standards with three *phalerae* on each; eagle head left (var. 18d / motif I.2/5 - **Fig. 3/3**).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 104 var.; WBR, 477, no. 616 var.; SNG Copenhagen 520 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 111, no. I.2/5; RPC VI 3198 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3198>) (3198/2 - <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/320380> - probably the same pair of dies).

5. AE; 4.075 g; 20 mm; 6 h; well preserved; struck slightly off-centre on the rev. (**Fig. 2/5**).

Obv. M AVP CEV AΛEΞANΔPOC AVΓ (var. VΓ in ligat., AV and A)

Obv. M AVP CEV AΛEΞANΔPOC AVΓ (VΓ in ligat.); Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rv. NI – KA – IE – ΩN (ΩN in ligat.); Three military standards, with two *phalerae* on each

standard (type 1 / motif I.1/1).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 102 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/9 var.; Црнобрња 1981, 14, nos. 84–85; Weiser 1983, 213, no. 030 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 108, no. I.1/1; RPC VI 3202/32 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/258646> - probably the same pair of dies).

6. AE; 4.121 g; 19x22 mm; 1 h; well preserved; struck off-centre on the obv. and rev. (**Fig. 2/6**).

Obv. M AVP CEV AΛEΞANΔPOC AV; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rv. [N]I – K – A – IE / [QN]; Three military standards, with three *phalerae* on the middle standard and with two *phalerae* on the lateral standards (type 2 / motif I.1/3).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 102 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/9 var.; Црнобрња 1981, 15, nos. 100–102 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/3; RPC VI 3248 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3248>); for the rev. only see: 3201/15 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/245538>).

7. AE; 5.896 g; 20 mm; 7 h; well preserved; struck off-centre; on the obv. and rev. (**Fig. 2/7**).

Obv. M [AVP] CEV AΛEΞANΔP[OC] A; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rv. NI – K – AI – E / QN; Three military standards, with three *phalerae* on the middle standard and with two *phalerae* on the lateral standards (type 2 / motif I.1/3).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 102 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/9 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/3; RPC VI 3202/5 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/247370>); 3248 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3248>).

8. AE; 4.160 g; 19 mm; 1 h; badly preserved; struck off-centre on the obv. (**Fig. 2/8**).

Obv. M AVP CEV AΛEΞANΔPOC AVΓ; Laureate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Severus Alexander, right, seen from rear.

Rv. [N]I – KA – IE – QN (QN in ligat.); Three military standards, with three *phalerae* on each standard; the middle *phalerae* of the lateral standards are small in size (var. 7b / motif I.1/5 - **Fig. 3/2**).

BMC Bithynia, 168, no. 102 var.; WBR, 477, no. 617, Pl. LXXXIII/10 var.; Црнобрња 1981, 15, nos. 100–102 var.; Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/5; RPC VI 3202 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3202>); 3248 var. (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3248>).

9. AE; 3.960 g; 19x20 mm; 6 h; well preserved; struck lightly off-centre on the obv and rev. (**Fig. 2/9**).

Gordianus III (AD 238–244)

Obv. M ANT ΓOPΔIAN[OC AVΓ]; Radiate, draped, and cuirassed bust of Gordian III, right, seen from front.

Rv. N – I – K – A – I / EQN; Four military standards; two *aquillae* on the middle standards with three *phalerae* and lateral standards with two *phalerae*; eagles' heads facing centre (var. 23f / motif II.2/2 - **Fig. 3/4**).

BMC Bithynia, 171, no. 119 var.; WBR, 489, no. 711 var.; Vojvoda, Бранковић 2016, 107, Fig. 1/var. 23c; 128, no. 168; Vojvoda 2023, 115, no. II.2/2; RPC VII.2 1966/3 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/107332>).

10. AE; 2.453 g; 19x20 mm; 1 h; badly preserved; struck lightly off-centre on the rev. (**Fig. 2/10**).



Fig. 2. Coins from the hoard discovered in the vicinity of Durostorum.

3. Numismatic Comments

Although the hoard is modest in size, it contains some remarkable coins, which we will briefly present. One issue from Severus Alexander (Cat. no. 3), which is preserved in relatively good condition, features an unusual obverse legend that ends in ΑΓ. This legend variant is probably different from the one identified in A. Crnobjrња's study, taken as representing the letters AVΓ in ligature (Црнобрња 1981, 12, nos. 35–43). Additionally, the reverse image of this issue was not found among the motifs identified by Serbian researchers. We believe it could be a variant of type 3, slightly different from variant 3a, identified by A. Crnobjrња and J. Vasić Derimanović (Црнобрња, Васић Деримановић 2017, p. 36, Fig. 1; 46, no. 15). We have named this new variant 3b (**Fig. 3/1**), and it would belong to the category with three insignia, with three *phalerae* on the middle standard and two *phalerae* on the lateral standards (Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/3). In the RPC online database, we managed to identify a coin from online trade, where the emperor's head is radiate, and the reverse seems similar to ours.¹

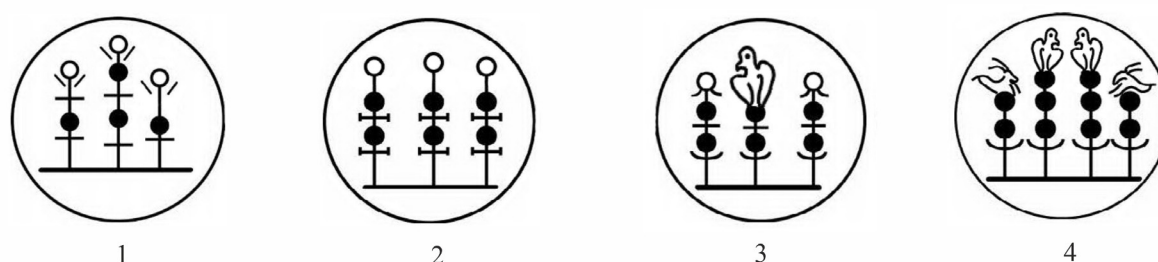


Fig. 3. New variants of obverses (1 - var. 3b; 2 - var. 7b; 3 - var. 18d; 4 - var. 23f).

Another coin from the same emperor (Cat. no. 4) has a relatively rare reverse variant (9c). In the literature consulted, we have encountered this motif only in the case of two coins from Severus Alexander, one from the Vise Grobalja necropolis in Viminacium (Војвода 2013, 181, no. 192) and the other, discovered in the territory of the city of Belgrade (Pustara, Batajnica) (Црнобрња, Васић Деримановић 2017, 46, no. 17). The obverse legend of both pieces ends in ΑΓ. We managed to identify a coin in RPC,² from the online trade, which, like our issue, has the obverse legend ending in AV, but contains CEV at the beginning of the same legend. Additionally, a specimen with similar reverse iconography (var. 9c), but from Julia Mamaea, is located at the National Museum in Šabac and comes from the village of Banovo Polje (Municipality of Bogatić, Serbia) (Војвода, Петровић 2011, 293, no. 16).

The only issue from the hoard featuring an *aquila* between standards (Cat. no. 5), from Severus Alexander, also presents a new reverse motif. The image resembles both types 17 and 18 from N. Crnobjrња's typology, making its precise classification difficult. We chose to consider it as a variant of type 18, which we named var. 18d (**Fig. 3/3**); it belongs to the class with three insignia, with the *aquila* (two *phalerae*) between two standards with three *phalerae* on each (Vojvoda 2023, 111, no. I.2/5). This new motif is the second in the group, where the eagle appears with its head to the left, the first being recently identified on a coin from Gordianus III (Vojvoda et al. 2021, 69, no. 72; Vojvoda 2023, 111, no. I.2/5). In the RPC, we identified two coins similar to ours, which, unfortunately, are very worn. One of them³ appears to have been struck with the same pair of dies, and the second,⁴ with a similar pair of dies.

¹ <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/256116>

² <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3195>

³ <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/320380>

⁴ <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/262148>

The last coin from Severus Alexander (Cat. no. 9) also presents a distinctive reverse variant, where the middle *phalerae* of the two lateral standards are very small. This motif shows similarities with both types 5 and 7. It might be a new variant of type 7, which we named var. 7b (**Fig. 3/2**) and belongs to the category with three insignia with three *phalerae* on each standard (Vojvoda 2023, 109, no. I.1/5). Unfortunately, we were unable to identify a coin in the RPC catalogue with a reverse design similar to ours.

The only issue from Gordianus III in the hoard (Cat. no. 10) has a reverse motif similar to var. 23c, identified on a Nicaean bronze in the numismatic collection of the National Museum in Požarevac (Вojвода, Бранковић 2016, 128, no. 168). The difference is that on our coin, the eagles' heads are obviously facing the centre, while in the drawing of var. 23c, the birds' heads are oriented outwards. The illustration of that coin shows it was struck off-centre on the reverse (Вojвода, Бранковић 2016, 107, Fig. 1/var. 23c, 142, Tab. II, no. 168; Vojvoda 2023, 115, no. II.2/2). In this case, it could be a new variant (var. 23f.) (**Fig. 3/4**) attested for the first time in our hoard.

If our identifications are correct, then it is remarkable that in such a small group of coins one can find so many new reverse motifs. We have attempted to illustrate them accordingly, and for this, we used the model proposed by M. Vojvoda (Vojvoda 2023).

4. Finds of Nicaean Coins in Dacia and Moesia Inferior: The Site of Durostorum

In a recent study, D. Calomino conducted a thorough analysis of the bronze coins from Nicaea of Severus Alexander and Gordianus III featuring 'military' designs (standards), which circulated in the 'Balkan' or 'Danube' provinces (Calomino 2019). The most numerous findings of this kind (approx. 2,500 pcs., of which over 1,200 have been published) come from northern Serbia, which belonged to the province of Moesia Superior and the southeastern part of Pannonia Inferior. Here, the Nicaean bronzes are concentrated in three areas: the territory of Viminacium, the Morava land road, and the lower Sava Valley. As we move away from these regions, the number of discoveries in the Balkan area significantly decreases (Vojvoda, Crnobrnja 2018; Vojvoda 2023, 104–105; Calomino 2019, 141–147). It is assumed that these coins minted in Nicaea were intentionally directed (shipped in stocks or carried along by the troops) towards the territory of Viminacium, as part of a provincial and/or imperial decision (the so-called Bithynian solution). Through their particular military design, they were meant for the army, not as wages, but as a small change supply for daily usage, to enter the market thus. Their purpose was to temporarily supplement the shortage of small change in circulation, caused by the decrease in production of imperial bronze denominations and the absence of local coinage. From the territory of Viminacium, the Nicaean bronzes with standards on the reverse spread to neighbouring regions through normal monetary circulation and the movement of people coming from Moesia Superior (Calomino 2019, 148–156).

We will focus our attention on the finds of Nicaean coins in two areas of the empire – the provinces of Dacia and Moesia Inferior, which, to some extent, are related to our hoard. In the case of Dacia, some synthesis studies have recorded almost 300 single finds of Nicaean coins (Calomino 2019, 143–144, using data from Găzdac 2010 and Petac 2011). A more detailed analysis reveals that these issues (291 pcs.) account for 45% of the total provincial coins from the lists of Dacian sites. Most of them are dated during the reign of Severus Alexander (188 pcs.), when the majority of the bronze issues occurred in the province, and Gordianus III (42 pcs.), when they are only surpassed by the coins from Viminacium (Munteanu 2017 CD-ROM, Tabs. 29–32, Graphs 64–66). We note that over three-quarters of the coins from Nicaea were discovered in civilian settlements in Dacia, with most such pieces coming from sites in the southern part of the province, near the Danube (Munteanu 2017, 108–111, 141–142). Regarding Dacia, it's worth mentioning the less plausible hypothesis of D. Benea, who considered that such coins, along with others, could have reached the province through the payments to soldiers who participated in the eastern campaigns of Severus Alexander and Gordianus III (Benea 2006a; Benea 2006b, 105–106).

The single finds of Nicaean coins in the second area, the province of Moesia Inferior, are less

documented than in Dacia. In general, specialists have paid special attention to the Romanian Dobruja, representing the northeastern part of the province of Moesia Inferior. In the only synthesis work on the monetary circulation in the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea, a mere 22 single finds from Nicaea were listed (Vertan 2002, 304, 312, 375, 394–395, 410, 464, 473, 481, 487; similar data, see at Poenaru Bordea 2000, 190), more than half belonging to the period of Septimus Severus to Caracalla. In another study, only general data about 85 such issues, which would date between AD 193–235 and were mostly discovered in the Danubian area, are presented (Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2000, 407, Tab. 1, 410–411, 414, Map 4, 415, 417). Unfortunately, for the rest of the province of Moesia Inferior, the information about the isolated discoveries of Nicaean bronzes is much scarcer and scattered in various local publications, which are less accessible. Only a relatively small number of such pieces are recorded in recent works, such as site monographs and museum numismatic collection catalogues (Calomino 2009, 145–146 and note 53).

The discovery site of the hoard is in the immediate vicinity of the Roman settlement at Ostrov: “Farm 4”, which belongs to the site of Durostorum. At this moment, from a numismatic point of view, this is probably one of the best-documented sites in Moesia Inferior, thanks to the research of M. Dima (Dima, Elefterescu 2009; Dima 2010; Dima 2023). His most recent work examines 2,954 coins from the period of Augustus to Diocletianus, which were discovered in different parts of the Durostorum site (Ostrov – 807 pcs. and Silistra – 2,147 pcs.) and are located in various collections in Romania and Bulgaria (Dima 2023, 11–15, 281–301). In total, in this important site, 78 bronze coins minted in Nicaea were recorded, as well as another 24 cast imitations based on original issues from Nicaea. The brief chronological analysis of this unexpectedly large sample reveals interesting information.

The oldest coins minted in Nicaea from that batch bear the effigies of the emperors Domitianus (one pc.) (Dima, Elefterescu 2009, 127, no. 540), Antoninus Pius (two pcs.) (Dima 2023, 80), and Commodus (three pcs.) (Dima, Elefterescu 2009, 127, nos. 541–542; Dima 2023, 119). The piece from Domitianus was countermarked in Tonzos, probably in the middle of the 2nd century AD (Dima 2023, 80).

A considerable number of issues from Nicaea (20 pcs.) belong to Septimius Severus and his family. Most of them (15 pcs.) come from the Ostrov area (Dima, Elefterescu 2009, 127–129, nos. 543–557), with the rest (five pcs.) having been found in the Silistra area (Dima 2023, 134). In this period (AD 193–211), they represent 4.6% of the total coins discovered at the site and, respectively, 5.8% of the total provincial issues, being surpassed in number only by the bronzes from Moesia Inferior and those from Thrace (Dima 2023, 129–133, 282, Tab. 4, 286, Tab. 11, 290, Tab. 18, 295, Tab. 25, 300, Tab. 33). A significant amount of coins minted by Septimus Severus *et sui* in Nicaea have been discovered in only two other sites in Dobruja: Noviodunum (11 pcs.) (Schultz 1978, 100–101, nos. 8–11; Popescu, Iacob 2016, 40–41, nos. 34–39; 42, no. 43) and Histria (14 pcs.) (Preda, Nubar 1973, 154, nos. 996–1003; Poenaru Bordea 1982, 150, nos. 18–20, Poenaru Bordea, Dima 2007, 161, no. 48). At the Danube site, they are the most numerous provincial bronzes, and at the coastal one, they are only surpassed by local issues (Dima 2023, 134). A possible explanation for the large number of coins from Nicaea discovered in Dobruja could be the ‘import’ of these small denominations from their area of origin. During this period, they would have had a favourable exchange rate compared to the Moesian currency (Dima 2023, 134–135 and note 1016).

From the time of Elagabalus, only a single issue from Nicaea was recorded at Durostorum (Dima 2023, 150).

The most substantial lot consists of bronzes minted by Severus Alexander at the Bithynian mint (38 pcs.). Most of them (36 pcs.) were discovered in the Silistra area (Dima 2023, 161 and note 1263), with only two pieces coming from the Ostrov site (Mihailescu-Bîrliiba, Chiriac 2000, 446, no. 2; Dima, Elefterescu 2009, 129, no. 558). Although most of the coins are not described or illustrated, the author states that nearly all belong to the type with three standards on the reverse and can be divided into ten variants (Dima 2023, 162). In this chronological sequence (AD 222–235), the bronzes from Nicaea constitute 28.4% of the total monetary discoveries and,

respectively, 80.9% of the provincial pieces from Durostorum (Dima 2023, 161–162, 282, Tab. 4, 286, Tab. 11, 290, Tab. 18, 295, Tab. 25, 300, Tab. 33).

The monetary pool of Moesia Inferior during the time of Severus Alexander is predominantly made up of imperial denominations and bronzes from local mints, which were still operational (Dima 2023, 153–162). Only in a small number of sites are a few Nicaean coins to be found. These centres are located both in the coastal area – Vadu (Constanța County, one pc.) (Munteanu, Ocheșeanu 1975, 206, no. 54/8) and Agigea (Constanța County, one pc.) (Mitrea 1972, 361, no. 1) – as well as near the Danube – Noviodunum (two pcs.) (Popescu, Iacob 2016, 41, nos. 40–41), Sucidava (one pc.) (Dima 2023, 162), or Novae (one pc.) (Ciolek, Dyczek 2011, 79, no. 112).

In the following period, a very similar situation is noted. At Durostorum, there is a relatively large batch of Nicaean coins with the effigy of Gordianus III and military standards (13 pcs.), which mainly were (nine pcs.) discovered in the Silistra area (Dima 2023, 178) and, to a lesser extent (four pcs.), at Ostrov (Poenaru Bordea et al. 1997, 86, no. 54; Dima, Elefterescu 2009, 129–130, nos. 559–561). They represent 13.7% of the total coins from this emperor and, respectively, 30.1% of his provincial issues (Dima, 2023, 180, 282, Tab. 4, 286, Tab. 11, 290, Tab. 18, 295, Tab. 25, 300, Tab. 33). By comparison, in the rest of the sites in the province, most of the bronze coins were minted at workshops in Moesia Inferior, Thrace, and, more recently, in Moesia Superior (Viminacium) (Dima 2023, 177–183). The Nicaean issues are recorded only in the following sites: Histria (one pc.) (Isvoranu, Dabîca 2014, 159–160, no. 17), Noviodunum (one pc.) (Popescu, Iacob 2016, 41, no. 42), Sucidava (two pcs.) (Dima 2023, 181 and note 1399), Novae (one pc.) (Ciolek, Dyczek 2011, 82, no. 123), and probably Nicopolis ad Istrum (one pc.) (Butcher 1995, 278, no. 74).

Municipium Aurelium Durostorum stands out from all other sites in Moesia Inferior due to the unusually large number of Nicaean coins of Severus Alexander and Gordianus III carrying military standards (51 pcs.). Attempts have been made to explain this situation through the military character of the site and/or the favourable exchange rate in the province for Nicaean bronzes, especially those from Severus Alexander (Dima 2023, 161–162). However, such explanations do not apply to the particular case of Durostorum, but rather have a general character for the entire region of the Lower Danube.

Starting with the reign of Philippus Arabs, the bronzes of the Bithynian city disappear from Durostorum and are very rare throughout the province.

Besides the original coins made by striking, cast imitations (24 pcs.) after prototypes from Nicaea were also discovered at Durostorum. The lot recovered from the Ostrov area is more numerous (15 pcs.) and more diverse chronologically, containing coins from Commodus (one pc.), Septimius Severus (eight pcs.), Severus Alexander (one pc.), Gordianus III (three pcs.), and unidentified emperors (two pcs., one with three standards on the reverse) (Dima, Elefterescu 2009, 184–186, nos. 953–966; Dima, Talmațchi 2002, 77, note 38). The imitations from the Silistra area exclusively use prototypes with military standards on the reverse, from Severus Alexander (four pcs.), Gordianus III (one pc.), and unidentified emperors (4 pcs.) (Dima 2023, 227). Recent studies have shown that these cast imitations, with a rather haphazard appearance, were likely produced exactly at Durostorum, within or near the Roman settlement at Ostrov – “Farm 4” in two stages over a relatively short period (AD 225–250). The purpose of these counterfeits was to temporarily compensate for the shortage of small change, which was no longer produced in the civic mints of Moesia Inferior since the time of Elagabalus (Dima, Talmațchi 2002, 72–75; Dima 2011, 34–36; Dima 2023, 225–233).

5. Hoards with Nicaean Coins in Dacia and Moesia Inferior

The discovery of a hoard composed exclusively of bronze coins from Nicaea is a noteworthy find. To date, in the specialised literature, only a single similar deposit is mentioned, located in Barbaricum, at Janapolė – Dargeliszkie (Telšiai County, Lithuania). It contained 2 kg of bronze coins, all from Nicaea (ca. 280–340 pcs.) and two locally made bronze bracelets, all housed in a ceramic pot. Only 17 coins from Caracalla (one pc.), Severus Alexander (three pcs.), Maximinus

Thrax (five pcs.), and Gordianus III (eight pcs.) were recovered. All these pieces, appropriately illustrated, have 'non-military' designs (Михельбертас 1968; Михельбертас 2010).

However, we have no other knowledge of similar discoveries within the Roman world. Up to now, the CHRE database has validated 25 hoards from the empire that include issues of the city from Bithynia and cast imitations thereof. Among these, the Archar 1953 hoard (Vidin District, Bulgaria) (*t.p.q.* AD 222–235), near the site at Ratiaria, contains the most Nicaean bronzes (29 pcs.).⁵ The majority of them bear the effigies of the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla (19 pcs.), and some of the later pieces that have been published feature military standards on the reverse (Божкова 1986, 46, nos. 19, 21–23).

In the territory of Dacia, five coin hoards that would include coins from Nicaea in their composition are recorded. The oldest among them – Jeledinți (Hunedoara County, Romania, *t.p.q.* AD 238–244) and Desa 2015 (Dolj County, Romania, *t.p.q.* AD 244) – are made up of imperial silver denominations, to which a Nicaean issue is associated in both cases (Petac 2011, 245, no. 88; Dumitrescu 2022, 108, no. 220). Whether these bronze coins belong to the respective hoards is debatable. A doubtful deposit, probably representing an assemblage of silver and bronze coins dated over half a millennium, was discovered at Hunedoara (Hunedoara County, Romania). It would have also included two issues from Nicaea, from Elagabalus or Severus Alexander.⁶ The last two hoards originate from the site of Dierna – Orșova 1934 and Orșova II (Mehedinți County, Romania). Both consist of a variety of Roman bronze and silver denominations and conclude in the second half of the 4th century. The first contains a Nicaean bronze coin from Severus Alexander (Chirilă et al. 1974, 18, no. 3) and the second, two similar issues of the same emperor and one of Gordianus III (Chirilă et al. 1974, 29–30, nos. 6–8), all with 'military' designs. Unlike the previous situations, their belonging to hoards is certain, probably representing residual pieces from the monetary circulation during the Principate period. Geographically, these hoards are more closely linked to Moesia Superior.

It is interesting to note that the majority of hoards containing coins from Nicaea and cast imitations come from the territory of the province of Moesia Inferior (14 hoards, of which 11 are registered in CHRE). Unfortunately, very few of them have been systematically studied and published. Most of these (nine hoards) conclude in the period AD 222–249, with only a few exceeding the reign of Philippus Arabs. Their composition includes imperial silver denominations and, more rarely, bronze provincial issues and cast imitations. In all hoards, the Nicaean bronzes and their imitations take a marginal stand, being of a limited number. They are dated over a wide period, from Marcus Aurelius to Trebonianus Gallus, most belonging to the reigns of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and, respectively, Severus Alexander and Gordianus III.

The Nicaean issues of the last two emperors were recorded only in a few hoards: Northern Dobruja (*t.p.q.* AD 229; 1 AE Severus Alexander, cast imitation) (Dima 2011, p. 34, no. 52), Canlia (Constanța County, Romania; *t.p.q.* AD 247; 1 AE Severus Alexander, 2 AE Gordianus III) (Dima, Talmațchi 2002, 64, nos. 5–7), Malinovo (Lovech District, Bulgaria; *t.p.q.* AD 249–251; 7 AE Severus Alexander) (Гущераклиев 1993, 363, no. 21), Popovo 3 (Targovishte District, Bulgaria; *t.p.q.* AD 238–244; 1 AE Severus Alexander) (Драгоев 2012, 198, no. 58), Shumen County 2 (Bulgaria; *t.p.q.* AD 251–253; 2 AE Severus Alexander; 2 AE Gordianus III),⁷ and Northern Bulgaria (Vidin region?; *t.p.q.* AD 222–235; 5 AE Gordianus III, cast imitations) (Draganov, Varbanov 2021, 425). In all cases where the coins have been properly published, they bear 'military' designs on the reverse.

In general, hoards containing pieces from Nicaea seem to be quite uniformly distributed across the territory of Moesia Inferior, with no visible tendency for their concentration in any particular area of the province. Only two of such deposits are located in the vicinity of the site

⁵ <https://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/hoard/10066>

⁶ <https://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/hoard/3494>

⁷ <https://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/hoard/10441>

at Durostorum. The hoard from Canlia, already mentioned, was discovered approximately 20 km east of Ostrov and contains three pieces with military standards on the reverse. Another deposit from Rositsa (Dobrich District, Bulgaria; *t.p.q.* AD 253–260), about 50 km southeast of Silistra, has a Nicaean bronze from Septimius Severus (Tacchella 1893, 77, no. 47). Probably related to the site on the Danube could be another two hoards presumed to have been discovered in the southwest of Dobruja (*t.p.q.* AD 229) and in the north of this historic province. Both contain a cast imitation after genuine coins minted in Nicaea by Septimius Severus (for Geta) (Dima 2011, p. 17, no. 56) and Severus Alexander (Dima 2011, p. 34, no. 52). Quite likely, both coins were cast in a workshop at Durostorum.

6. Closing remarks

At first glance, the occurrence of a Nicaean coin hoard, although small in size, in the territory of Moesia Inferior may seem somewhat unexpected. These issues were recorded in small quantities in the province, both in single finds and in hoards, and they played only a peripheral role in the local monetary circulation, where small change was regularly provided by Moesian and Thracian civic mints. But the Durostorum site stands out from this provincial monetary background at a specific period and through a particular category of coinage. An abnormally large amount of genuine Nicaean bronzes (51 pcs.) and their cast imitations (14 pcs.), featuring 'military' designs from Severus Alexander and Gordianus III, have been discovered in this Danubian site.

We consider it necessary to examine the accuracy of the numismatic data used first. Most of the issues with standards on the reverse (54 pcs., i.e. 83% of the total) were recorded in the Silistra area. Almost all of them originate from the private Pericle Papahagi Collection, which contains over 12,000 coins (about 2,100 of which are from the Principate era), discovered at Silistra. It is possible that some of them may have belonged to hoards that could not be properly identified and separated. The collection may also have been further altered when it was successively the property of several institutions in Romania (Dima 2023, 12, 293–297). Early Roman coins in the collection have been thoroughly studied by M. Dima, who tried to prove, with reliable arguments, that they represent single finds from the site of Durostorum. We are therefore confident that the Nicaean issues with standards on the reverse from the Pericle Papahagi Collection also have the same origin.

In addition, the discovery at Durostorum of a relatively large number of cast imitations after these particular issues could support the fact that genuine Nicaean bronzes with 'military' designs were available at this site, and that the population was quite familiar with them. We can only assume that these coins were brought from Moesia Superior during the third and fourth decades of the 2nd century AD, and that their arrival is somehow linked to the army stationed in Silistra, without being able to specify the exact means by which they reached this location. Under these circumstances, the discovery of a hoard of Nicaean bronzes in the vicinity of a site where these coins may have been used in daily transactions does not seem that unusual. If it was recovered in full, the small hoard may have represented the 'pocket money' of a person who lived in the hypothetical *villa rustica* near Ostrov and who was closely connected to the centre of Durostorum.

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CHRE - Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire - <https://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>

RPC - Roman Provincial Coinage (online) - <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>