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**BRIEF NOTES ON A FOLLIS MINTED
AT ANTIOCH (AS THEOUPOLIS) FROM
THE COLLECTION OF M. C. SUTZU
(NUMISMATIC DEPARTMENT, LIBRARY
OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMY)**

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КРАТКИ БЕЛЕЖКИ ЗА ЕДИН ФОЛИС СЕЧЕН В
АНТИОХИЯ (КАТО ТЕУПОЛИС) ОТ КОЛЕКЦИЯТА
НА М. С. SUTZU (НУМИЗМАТИЧЕН ОТДЕЛ,
БИБЛИОТЕКА НА РУМЪНСКАТА АКАДЕМИЯ)

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Brief notes on a follis minted at Antioch (as Theoupolis) from the collection of M. C. Sutzu (Numismatic Department, Library of the Romanian Academy)

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Кратки бележки за един фоллис сечен в Антиохия (като Теуполис) от колекцията на М. С. SUTZU (Нумизматичен отдел, Библиотека на Румънската Академия)

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Abstract: The present coin report puts into spotlight a notable piece from the Mihail C. Sutzu collection (Numismatic Department, Library of the Romanian Academy) – a follis minted at Antioch (as Theoupolis), under the reign of Phocas (AD 602–610). The analysis emphasises the potential of coinage to reflect significant tendencies, changes or events in the development of both central structures and various cities, in this case the city of Antioch, which acquired a new name during the reign of Justinian I (AD 527–565) as a consequence of the severe earthquakes affecting the city.

Keywords: Antioch, Theoupolis, Phocas, M. C. Sutzu collection, earthquake.



Mihail C. Sutzu (1841–1933) was a distinguished numismatist, the first curator of the Romanian Academy's coin collection, and also governor of the National Bank of Romania (1899–1904) (Petac 2005, 3). His influence in the field was notably demonstrated through the participation in the 2nd International Numismatic Congress held in Paris (14th–16th June 1900), marking a first for any Romanian numismatist. Subsequently, in 1903, the Romanian Numismatic Society was established, with M. C. Sutzu appointed as its first president (Petac 2023, 467–469). In 1910–1911, he became the first director of the newly founded Coin Cabinet of the Romanian Academy (Petac 2005, 3; Petac 2023, 472).

The M. C. Sutzu collection is recognised as one of the most significant in Romania, comprising over 6,000 coins. A substantial segment of it is dedicated to issues of the West Pontic cities, making it the largest known assemblage of this kind of coins to date (Petac 2005, 3). Still, the collection also has other types of coinage, as it would be observed in the current analysis. During his lifetime, M. C. Sutzu made numerous donations to the Coin Cabinet (Petac 2005, 3). The most significant for the institution's history was the one dated to the 29th of June 1911 when he donated 959 West Pontic coins (Histria, Tomis, Kallatis), marking the opening of the first inventory of

the newly founded institution (Petac 2023, 471–473).

Through one of his consistent and numerous donation acts, M. C. Sutzu also offered to the Coin Cabinet the piece under discussion, doing so on the 15th of December 1921 (Registrul Special al Colectiei M. C. Sutzu, Cabinetul Numismatic, Biblioteca Academiei Române, 147).¹ Other details concerning the coin except its entry date in the Cabinet's collection (15th December 1921) are not known (Petac 2024, 552–553).

As far as the access to this highly important collection from Romania is concerned, I address special thanks to Senior Researcher of the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy and President of the Romanian Numismatic Society, Dr. Emanuel Petac, who offers continuous support to my research and development as a scholar.

Fig. 1. Antioch (as Theoupolis), Phocas (AD 602–610, 2nd year of reign (AD 603–604)
Follis Class 1, 5h; 10.43 g; 28 mm (DOC II.1, no. 84.1-5);
Numismatic Department, Library of the Romanian Academy,
Inv. no. AV² 10703 (28/2541);
Entry no. 82 (15th December 1921) – coin no. 28/2541 (Registrul Special al Colectiei
M. C. Sutzu, Cabinetul Numismatic, Biblioteca Academiei Române, p. 147).³
Photo: Ana-Maria Baltă



Obverse: DNFOCA NEPEAV

On the left, crowned Phocas standing facing, holding globus cruciger in his right hand. Next to him, crowned Leontia standing facing, holding a cruciger sceptre in her right hand. Between their heads, cross.

Reverse: M in the centre. Above, cross. To the left, ANN •. To the right, regnal year, II. In exergue, THEUP'.

Coming back to the coin under analysis, this follis from the M. C. Sutzu collection (see **Fig. 1**) is dated to the reign of Phocas (AD 602–610), and more specifically to his second regnal year (AD 603/604) (DOC II.1, 187). The period under examination (AD 602–610) also represents the final era in which Antioch, not only as Theoupolis but in general, produced coins. The mint reached its end in AD 610 (DOC II.1, 40).

The coin under consideration bears on the obverse the image of crowned Phocas standing facing with globus cruciger in his right hand. Next to him, crowned empress Leontia stands facing, holding a cruciger sceptre in her right hand. Between their heads, a cross is depicted (DOC

¹ Special Register of the M. C. Sutzu Collection (Numismatic Department, Library of the Romanian Academy) – Entry no. 82 (15th December 1921), coin no. 28/2541.

² AV = Actual Value.

³ Special Register of the M. C. Sutzu Collection (Numismatic Department, Library of the Romanian Academy).

II.1, 186-188, e.g. no. 84.1). During the reign of Phocas, the minting of coins with the imperial couple is present in all mints of the Eastern Empire (Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 585). This was not something arbitrary, as numerous studies link this aspect to the way Phocas came to power – the usurpation of AD 602 (Kazhdan et al. 1991, 1666).

Regarding the iconography, Phocas' coin type has a tradition since the time of Justin II (AD 565–578), who appears on coins next to his wife Sophia, although they are depicted enthroned, and not standing.⁴ This style of representation marks the re-emergence of coins depicting empresses (after a break between AD 518–565), but with a considerable change: they are only shown together with the emperor as a couple, and their names are not mentioned (Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 583). The new iconography was in fact a way of association of Justin II and Sophia with the well-known couple of Constantine and Helena (Cameron 1976, 57–59; Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 583).

This pattern was maintained under the succeeding emperors – Tiberius Constantine (AD 578–582) and Maurice (AD 582–602), but with different frequency as it only appeared at the beginning of the reigns of these two emperors (Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 584). During this period the portrayals of the empresses played an essential role in expressing legitimacy and imperial unity (Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 586).

The same tendency can be identified during the reign of Phocas (AD 602–610), when coin obverses showing him standing together with his wife Leontia were issued in high frequency in the mints of the Eastern Empire (see DOC II.1, 151–191; Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 585). This was clearly deliberate as the main purpose was the illustration of imperial authority, unity, and continuity under difficult circumstances (Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 586).

Regarding the reverse, the element which attracts attention is the abbreviated form of Theoupolis (THEUP'). This aspect could provoke confusion as the mint is mostly known as Antioch. Still, two significant events led to the transformation of the city's name. First, on the 29th of May, AD 526, during the reign of Justin I (AD 518–527), a severe earthquake powerfully affected Antioch (Ambraseys 2009, 184). The event is described by several important authors, one of the most significant testimonies being that of John Malalas (The Chronicle of John Malalas, 418–422).

But this was not the end, as, while the reconstruction was still ongoing, another earthquake struck on the 29th of November, AD 528, during the reign of Justinian I (AD 527–565) (Ambraseys 2009, 189). In this case, Theophanes Confessor describes the event: "Great Antioch again suffered from divine anger, two years after its first disaster [...] All the buildings fell to the ground, even the walls as well; and those old buildings that had not fallen in the first earthquake now collapsed" (Theophanes Confessor, Chronographia, year 6021, English translation by Mango, C., Scott R., Greatrex, G., in Mango, Scott 1997, 270).

The same author brings into light the change of Antioch's name as follows: "the emperor [Justinian I] and the Augusta provided much money towards restoration and rebuilding in the city of Antioch. He changed its name to Theoupolis" (Theophanes Confessor, Chronographia, year 6021, AD 528/9, English translation by Mango, C., Scott R., Greatrex, G., in Mango, Scott 1997, 270).

The new name (translated "City of God") was a propitiatory measure and gesture meant to reduce divine anger and to protect Antioch from further destructions (Pickett 2024, 446). As a result, it was fast integrated in the coin production (DOC I, nos. 206, 208, 209 – Justinian I). From then on, until Antioch ceased to mint coins in AD 610, the name of Theoupolis continued to be used, as can be seen on the coins of the successors of Justinian I: Justin II (AD 565–578) (DOC I, nos. 143, 144, 150–160), Tiberius II Constantinus (AD 578–582) (DOC I, nos. 39–45), Maurice (AD 582–602) (DOC I, nos. 152–173), and Phocas (AD 602–610) (DOC II.1, nos. 83–90).

The coin under analysis and discussion brings into spotlight several significant details of Antioch's history, but also of the Byzantine's empire evolution. The obverse illustrates the symbolism of the imperial couple seen as a factor of stability and unity of the state in various contexts.

⁴ See https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1904-0604-18.

Moreover, the presented follis is part of a new stage in the Byzantine monetary iconography (which starts from AD 565, where empresses did not appear alone on coins anymore, but only together with the emperors) (Brubaker, Tobler 2000, 583). As far as the reverse is concerned, the abbreviation of Antioch's new name, Theoupolis, puts into spotlight significant events for its history, which powerfully affected the city (the earthquakes from AD 526 and 528).

Based on the detailed aspects, it could be stated that the analysed piece from the M.C. Sutzu collection shows a high level of complexity and reflects both the local history of Antioch and the development of the monetary history of the Byzantine Empire.

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