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## Plotinopolis: A Provincial Mint in Thrace



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### Abstract

In the Roman province of Thrace twenty-two mints were gradually established, issuing bronze coins that featured either the emperor's portrait or the head of a god/goddess. Among these, Plotinopolis began its monetary production under the reign of Antoninus Pius and ceased operations in the early 3rd century AD, shortly after the assassination of Caracalla. The primary objective of this paper is to provide a concise overview of the classification of Plotinopolis' coinage, with particular attention given to its metrology and die production. Moreover, a comparison of its metrological standards with those of contemporary mints in Thrace aims to shed light on the potential existence of a unified metrological system across the province.

### Keywords

Plotinopolis · Roman provincial coins · Roman Thrace · metrology · common dies · monetary network



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## Introduction

Plotinopolis, named after Pompeia Plotina, the wife of Emperor Trajan, was one of several cities founded by the Roman emperor in the early 2nd century AD during his military campaigns in the region north of the Istros River.<sup>1</sup> According to Roman itineraries, the city was situated between two other imperial foundations, 22 Roman miles north of Traianopolis and 21 miles south of Hadrianopolis.<sup>2</sup> Although not located directly on the routes of either the Via Egnatia or the Via Diagonalis,<sup>3</sup> its proximity—47 kilometers from Traianopolis and 42 kilometers from Hadrianopolis—did not hinder communication. This is particularly evident when considering Plotinopolis' position on the vertical road along the Hebros River, which links the two above-mentioned cities.

The city's proximity to Hadrianopolis and, more importantly, to the Hebros River provided strategic access to Philippopolis's plain and Thrace's broader province.<sup>4</sup> In any case, whether Plotinopolis served as a destination or an intermediate station for travelers, its location allowed control over the navigable Hebros and the adjacent riverside roads, particularly the military routes. This positioning ensured stability and facilitated the political and commercial oversight of the wider Thracian hinterland.

The city was established on the rocky hill of Ayia Petra, near the modern town of Didymoteicho in the Hebros Prefecture, covering an area of approximately 200–240 hectares. It was fortified with robust walls, underscoring its strategic importance. Excavations conducted on the site have revealed architectural remains that, although fragmented, provide a valuable glimpse into the city's evolution over time. These findings suggest continuous habitation of the site dating back to the prehistoric era.<sup>5</sup> The key aspects of the city's urban development can be summarized as follows:

- The summit of the hill was reserved for prominent public buildings, including a structure with an imposing *κρηπίδωμα* (stepped platform) and a monumental gate or triumphal arch dating to the Severan era, which was uncovered during excavations in 1988. This gate is likely the same triumphal arch depicted on the city's contemporary coinage (**Fig. 1; Fig. 3**).<sup>6</sup> These architectural elements highlight the city's ceremonial and administrative significance during the Roman period.
- On the eastern side of the hill, overlooking the Hebros River, lies a complex that includes a richly adorned triclinium (dining hall). This space featured elaborate mosaic floors and frescoes, demonstrating the wealth and artistic sophistication of the city. Additionally, a monumental underground well was discovered within the same area. While

<sup>1</sup>No other city of the Roman world is known under this name. Trajan after his successful campaigns in Dacia and in order to ensure on the one hand the province of Thrace and on the other the unhindered movement of soldiers between the limes implemented an urbanization project which included the foundation of new cities and the re-foundation of old ones (Watkins 2002, 89-100). The aftermath apart from the activation of each city's coinage can be seen on a series of other actions that took place, such as the expansion of the road network. For Aegean Thrace, namely the area between Nestos and Hebros River and the Rhodope Mountain on the north, these changes led to the establishment of three new cities on sites where Thracian settlements existed: Plotinopolis, on the west bank of the Hebros River, and two along Via Egnatia on the meeting point with the above mentioned rivers, Topeiros on the West bank of Nestos River and Traianopolis on the west bank of Hebros. For the impact of the construction of Via Egnatia in Aegean Thrace, see Adams 1997; Tasaklaki 2018 and Evangelidis 2021 and Evangelidis forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup>Antonine Itinerary: 322 *Plotinopolim* 24 (Miller 1916, 592).

<sup>3</sup>According to the Antonine itinerary (175.7) from Plotinopolis there was a road to Herakleia Perinthos. In Tabula Peutingeriana (VII 3.4) the city is depicted on the right bank of River Hebros on the same side as Hadrianopolis on the vertical road to Via Egnatia. For road networks in Roman Thrace, see Lolos 2007; Madzarov 2009; particular for Aegean Thrace see, Adams 1986; Loukopoulou 1987; Adams 1997; Xeidakis 1997; *IThrAeg* 262-265; Tsatsopoulou 2015; During the Principate Via Militaris/Diagonalis leading from Perinthos through Serdica to Naissus is preferred by military troops and the emperors. On the other hand, Via Egnatia remained the main road connecting West and East, and Roman authorities always took care of its good shape as the milestones from Komotini, Aetolofos (*IThrAeg* E395) and Feres reveal (*IThrAeg* E453; *IThrAeg* E454). However, it was not used for moving troops at least during the centuries that interest us. The few denarii and the absence of coin hoards in Aegean Thrace which are in sharp contrast with the situation in modern Bulgaria, indicate that the use of Via Egnatia was limited probably to the return of the veterans or redeployment of public servants. This might be seen in the light of Hadrian's edict found in Maroneia (*IThrAeg* E185), which deals with the use of Roman road network and the non-payment of the official fees. Imperial coins found in Aegean Thrace are occasional, remnants of passersby's (Tasaklaki 2018).

<sup>4</sup>The River Evros provided perhaps the only accessible and safest access. In ancient times it was navigable along almost its entire length. In fact, until a century and a half ago, when the Alexandroupolis-Hadrianopolis railway line was built, riverboats reached from its estuary to Hadrianopolis (Samothrakis 1940, 41 n. 1).

<sup>5</sup>The excavation of the site from 1996 and on is limited to the east side of the hill in the complex of the *triclinium* and the monumental well, for a detailed presentation of the excavations, see Koutsoumanis 2007; Koutsoumanis et al. 2013; Koutsoumanis – Tsoka (forthcoming); Tasaklaki 2020. For the history of Didymoteicho in Byzantine era, see Asdracha 1976, 130-137; Soustal 1991, sv. Didymoteichon, 240-244; Tsouris 1995; Tsouris 2015.

<sup>6</sup>Bakalakis – Triandaphyllos 1978.



its practical use cannot be entirely discounted, its construction suggests a ritual or symbolic purpose, potentially related to religious or ceremonial activities.

- The existence of an amphitheater or arena, as well as the celebration of gladiatorial games in honor of the emperor, has been inferred from the discovery of two gravestones belonging to gladiators (**Fig. 2**).<sup>7</sup> Further supporting this hypothesis is the discovery of a golden bust of Septimius Severus at the top of the hill.<sup>8</sup> This extraordinary and unique find suggests the presence of an imperial cult, indicating that the city actively participated in the religious and political practices of emperor worship, which were prominent in the Roman provinces.
- Beyond the city walls, portions of which have been unearthed on the northern and southern sides, the city's two cemeteries extended into the surrounding landscape. These burial grounds offer valuable insight into the funerary practices and demographic composition of the population.

The legal status of Plotinopolis, recognized as a peregrine city, is inferred indirectly due to the lack of Roman-style political institutions and the brevity of epigraphic references, such as the laconic phrase: *Πλωτινοπολιτών πόλις* ("City of the Plotinopolitans").<sup>9</sup> However, the very name of the city, coupled with the evident efforts of the local Boule and Demos to secure imperial favor, suggests a distinct and close relationship with the Roman Empire.

### Plotinopolis coinage

The first coin issues of Plotinopolis featuring imperial portraits can be dated to the reign of Antoninus Pius. Over a span of approximately sixty years, from the mid-2nd century AD until the death of Caracalla, the city periodically minted bronze coins, including those bearing imperial portraits and pseudo-autonomous types (**Fig. 4, Tab. 1**).<sup>10</sup> Of the 403 coins collected, 223 belong to the initial period under Antoninus Pius, 13 to the second period under Marcus Aurelius, 19 to the third period under Septimius Severus, and 146 to the final period during the sole reign of Caracalla (**Tab. 2**). Additionally, two coins of Plotinopolis are attributed to the reign of Elagabalus, marking the end of the city's minting activities.

The inscriptions on both the obverse and reverse of the coins, as expected, are in Greek, reflecting the cultural and linguistic traditions of the region. Notably, the presence of the Legatus' name on the reverse of the larger denominations provides a valuable chronological anchor, allowing the coins to be dated more precisely to the tenure of the Legatus rather than the broader reign of the emperor.

In terms of iconographic themes, the reverse designs demonstrate a clear osmosis between provincial and imperial elements, as well as locally significant motifs. Thirty-six distinct reverse types have been identified, drawing inspiration from the Greco-Roman pantheon, Roman personifications, heroic figures, and elements of Roman architecture.<sup>11</sup> This rich and diverse repertoire reflects both the city's integration within the province of Thrace and furthermore the Roman Empire and its efforts to maintain a distinct local identity through its coinage.

The geographical dispersion of Plotinopolis' coinage remains limited in scope and largely anecdotal. Coins attributed to the city have been discovered at Viminacium, the Roman military camp on the River Istros; in the sanctuary of Achilles in Crimea; and in the renowned thermal baths of *Aquae Calidae* near Anchialos. However, the majority of these coins have been unearthed in cities along the *Via Diagonalis/Militaris*, such as Hadrianopolis, Philippopolis, and Augusta Traiana. This suggests that the city's coinage primarily circulated within a defined regional network of Roman Thrace.

<sup>7</sup>Tsoka 2015; *IThrAeg* E466 (today in Hermitage); Andrianou 2017, 228-229, nr. 51.

<sup>8</sup>de Pury-Gysel 2017; de Pury-Gysel 2019; Tasaklaki 2020, 65.

<sup>9</sup>To date, three statue bases bearing votive inscriptions dedicated to Lucius Verus, Philip the Arab, and Valerian have been discovered on the hilltop and in its vicinity. Additionally, the extraordinary find of the golden bust of Septimius Severus further underscores the city's emphasis on honoring the emperors and aligning itself with Roman imperial ideology. For the bases, see *IThrAeg* E462 (Lucius Verus), 463 (Philip Arab), 464 (Valerian).

<sup>10</sup>The numismatic corpus of Plotinopolis is part of my doctoral thesis that has been submitted to the History Department of Ionian University, see Tasaklaki 2020.

<sup>11</sup>Tasaklaki 2020, 185-187.



The assassination of Caracalla marked a pivotal turning point for most Thracian mints, including Plotinopolis. Coin production ceased, though an isolated issue under Elagabalus in 219 AD suggests brief continuity. Despite the halt in minting activities, evidence points to continued prosperity on the hill of Ayia Petra. Nearly three decades later, the local *Βουλή* (council) dedicated two statues, as attested by inscribed bases, to honor Philip the Arab (AD 244–249) and Valerian, son of Gallienus (AD 255–259). This indicates that the city retained its political and cultural prominence despite the cessation of coin production.

It is plausible that neighboring Hadrianopolis, whose mint remained active until the reign of Philip the Arab, supplied the necessary coinage for everyday transactions in Plotinopolis. This reliance on external minting underscores the interconnected economic and administrative structures within the Roman province of Thrace.

Turning to the metrological system of Plotinopolis, its organization is based on the issuing periods rather than strictly on the obverse portrait. This is because coins depicting members of the imperial family can span multiple periods; for example, coins of Marcus Aurelius as Caesar are included in the first issuing period. To categorize the coins of Plotinopolis into denominations, we employed a combination of weight and die diameter, as the coins lack explicit denomination marks. In the context of the Roman province of Thrace, it is noteworthy that only a few mints, such as Byzantium and Imbros during the reign of Augustus and Anchialos under Caracalla, included value indications on the reverse of their issues.<sup>12</sup>

The coinage of Plotinopolis, however, conforms to the four primary denominations typically observed in provincial coinage: the unit and its multiples or submultiples. If we assume the unit to be the As,<sup>13</sup> the denominations can be understood as half-asses (semises), asses, double-asses (dupondii), and four-asses (sestertii). According to the authors of the Roman Provincial Coinage (RPC), provincial issues of the Eastern Empire with weights of 3–4 grams and diameters of approximately 16–17 mm are classified as semises. Coins weighing between 5–7 grams, with diameters of about 19–20 mm, are identified as asses. This classification aligns with the standard practice of provincial mints, allowing us to interpret the metrological system of Plotinopolis within the broader framework of Roman provincial coinage. **1<sup>st</sup> period: the reign of Antoninus Pius (Tab. 3, Fig. 3.1-5)**

At the time of Antoninus Pius two editions of four denominations the first and one denomination the second are recorded for the mint of Plotinopolis. The lower denomination is asses and the higher the four asses. As I have already mentioned, a total of 223 coins that belong to this period depict on the obverse both imperial portraits and pseudo-autonomous ones. In addition to different sizes (diameter and weight), the distinction of denominations is, at first glance, expressed visually with the use of different obverse portraits. Asses carry the portrait of the emperor himself and have a diameter of 17-19 mm and a weight of about 4 g. In this group also belong the pseudo-autonomous issues with the depiction of Dionysus on the obverse and Cantharus and Silenus on the reverse (**Fig. 3.5**). A total of 110 coins are double asses with a diameter ranging between 22 and 24mm and weigh of about 7 g. They carry the bust of the emperor's daughter, Faustina Junior, who after the birth of her first child acquired the title of Augusta. Three asses bearing the bust of Marcus Aurelius, 34 in number, range from 25 to 26 mm in diameter and weigh approximately 9 g. Finally, the

<sup>12</sup>Tasaklaki 2020. In addition to diameter and weight, there are mints that visualize the differentiation of denominations through the use of different iconographic types, as in the case of Amphipolis, see Papaevangelou 2009. For earlier issues in late classical or Hellenistic period see Galani-Krikou *et al.* 2015, 20 (Zone in Aegean Thrace); Psoma *et al.* 2008, 150-151 (Maroneia) and 79-86, 194 (Orthogoreia); Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 162-163 (Abdera).

<sup>13</sup>The parity of provincial issues with the imperial issues, and especially with the asses, is derived from fact that apart from that was struck after the emperor's permission there are inscriptions or other indications of their economic or nominal value, like those on coins of Chios, Thessaloniki, Sides, Tomis. The use of the term ἄσσάριον is attested in Macedonia as early as the 1st century AD according to the inscriptions of Derriopus (CRAI [1939] 221-30) and Veroia (Gounaropoulou – Chatzopoulos 1998, 101-109 nr. 7), also see Howgego 1985, 54-60. The editors of the RPC (I 311-312) concluded that in the eastern part of the Roman Empire a coin weighing 3-4 grams with a diameter of 16-17 mm was considered a half-ass, while a coin weighing 5-7 grams with a diameter of 19-20 mm was considered an ass. Katerina Chryssanthaki-Nagle (2007, 361) suggests that a coin weighing 7.9 grams with a diameter of 18 mm should be considered an ass, while she classifies coins with an average weight of 9.12 grams and a diameter of 19 mm as double asses. The use of the term assarion, its multiples or submultiples for provincial issues is documented not only by numismatic evidence, but also by inscriptions, which mention half-asses, assarion, double-asses, etc. For the debasement see, Butcher 2015 and 2020.

largest denomination, with the bust of Antoninus Pius and the Legatus name on the reverse,<sup>14</sup> is the four-asses with a diameter ranging from 30 to 33 mm and a weight of about 19.88 g. Although a weight variation of about 6 g. has been recorded in each denomination, their inclusion in the same group is indicated by other factors like the employment of a common die. The iconography of the reverse is so rich that hardly can be connected either to a person of the obverse or to a denomination, apart from perhaps Hera, who is depicted only in Faustina's coins.<sup>15</sup>

During the same period, four denominations are observed across the eleven active mints in the Province of Thrace, with weights comparable to those of the coins from Plotinopolis. Exceptions to this pattern are found in the mints of Topeiros and Abdera, where a smaller denomination, the semi-asses (equivalent to the Roman *quadrans*), is issued. Interestingly, these smaller coins also bear the imperial portrait, underscoring their official and propagandistic significance.

For the first issuing period of Plotinopolis, it is worth noting the detection of a shared die between the double-asses bearing the head of Faustina Junior and coins from the mint of Hadrianopolis.<sup>16</sup> This finding highlights possible coordination or influence between these two mints. Additionally, there are notable iconographic similarities between the coins of Plotinopolis and those from other prominent mints in Thrace, including Bizye, Perinthos, Philippopolis, and Anchialos. These similarities suggest not only a certain degree of regional cohesion in coin design and the widespread dissemination of artistic and cultural motifs across the province but, more importantly, the possible presence of mobile mints or the utilization of shared workshops for die production. **2<sup>nd</sup> period: the co-reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (Tab. 4, Fig. 3.6-8)**

At the time when Marcus Aurelius ruled jointly with Lucius Verus, the mint of Plotinopolis issued another series of coins with the busts of Lucius Verus, Marcus Aurelius and Faustina Junior. The name of governor Claudius Martialis written of the reverse means that the Plotinopolis' mint was reactivated between 166 and 169 AD.<sup>17</sup> The 13 currently available for study coins are indeed a small sample, and therefore allow only tentative conclusions. However, the six obverse dies, reinforced by the reverse iconography, are indicative of a festive character.

Many cities in Thrace struck coins featuring victorious iconographic types during the above period. These coins were designed to commemorate the joint administration of the Empire by the two emperors, often symbolized by the *Homonia* coin type, which depicts the two emperors engaged in a reception/*Dexiosis* gesture. Additionally, they celebrated the Parthian Wars led by Lucius Verus.<sup>18</sup> This theme is explicitly reflected in the reverse iconography, where the emperor is portrayed with his foot placed on a captive, symbolizing military victory.

Three denominations are attested in this series, with no significant difference in weight or diameter compared to the preceding period, given the relatively short interval between the two. Only one coin, featuring the portrait of Lucius Verus, the central figure of the Parthian Wars, belongs to the largest denomination, the four asses. Meanwhile, the double-asses denomination features the bust of Faustina Junior, and the asses depicts Marcus Aurelius.

During this period, only 10 mints in the province were active. Apart from Pautalia, Anchialos, and Apollonia Pontica, the remaining mints produced three denominations each. Notably, there is a slight reduction in the weight of the asses, a trend that appears consistent across the region. What all the Thracian mints have in common, however, is that they ceased to strike coins for more than a decade around 170 AD -many mints show issues under Commodus as Caesar. Scholars associate this disruption with the Costobocian invasions and the calamities they caused in Thrace.<sup>19</sup> Such a

<sup>14</sup>Under Antoninus Pius Plotinopolis struck coins bearing the name of the Legatus Pompeius Vopiscus (AD 155-158; Thomasson 1984, 165, nr. 27; Tasaklaki 2020, 76) and Gargilius Antiquus (AD 160-163; Tasaklaki 2020, 77).

<sup>15</sup>Tasaklaki 2020, 186.

<sup>16</sup>Schultz 1999.

<sup>17</sup>Thomasson 1984; Tasaklaki 2020.

<sup>18</sup>Tasaklaki 2020, 95-98.

<sup>19</sup>Tasaklaki 2020, 100-101; Tasaklaki 2024.

destruction layer was found in Plotinopolis, on the top of the hill where the triumphal gate was excavated. The honorary base of Marcus Aurelius was embedded in it as a *spolia*. **3<sup>rd</sup> period under Septimius Severus (Tab. 5, Fig. 3.9-12)**

After a hiatus of at least thirty years, the mint of Plotinopolis was re-activated during the reign of Septimius Severus, when Gaius Caecina Largus was Legatus of the Province.<sup>20</sup> This is also a short edition, as only 19 coins are known, again classified into three denominations: the four asses, with a maximum diameter of 28 mm and an average weight of 10.41 gr., displaying either the bust of Septimius Severus or the bust of his co-emperor Caracalla. The next category, the double asses, has a diameter of 22 mm and carries the bust of Julia Domna. However, we have no information on the weight of the only coin we have. Finally, the busts of Septimius Severus and Geta as Caesar occur on asses. They have a diameter of between 17 and 19 mm and a weight of between 2.44 and 3.65 gr., considerably less than in previous years. The four asses are quite lighter than the corresponding denominations of the first two periods, as their weight dropped to half, from 19.88 gr. now are weighing between 8 and 11 gr.

During the reign of Septimius Severus, significant developments in coin production occurred in Thrace. Thirteen mints were active striking coins in all four denominations. Notable, a weight reduction is recorded in all of them, a trend that often reflected broader economic adjustment in the Roman Empire.<sup>21</sup> A particularly notable change was the introduction of a larger denomination, the eight asses. The new denomination had a diameter of approximately 35 mm and a weight four times greater than the asses issued during the first two periods. Such large denomination is on the one hand the result of a large scale debasement, on the other hand its iconography likely served ceremonial or prestige purposes, emphasizing perhaps the attempt of each city to gain emperors good will. Many cities in Thrace, particularly the provincial capital Perinthos, also issued medals featuring portraits of the emperor and his family.<sup>22</sup> These medals often celebrated Homonoia and Philadelpheia, values that were symbolically reinforced through public events such as athletic games. These themes underscored the region's loyalty to the emperor and the unity of the empire.

In contrast, the city of Plotinopolis issued coins only in the four asses denomination during this period. It did not adopt the larger eight asses denomination or the ceremonial medals, at least not until the subsequent period. This distinction could reflect differences in the city's economic status or local minting policies compared to other cities in Thrace. In general, the introduction of larger denominations and celebratory medals highlights the region's integration into the broader imperial system and its active participation in Roman imperial propaganda. **4<sup>th</sup> period under Caracalla (Tab. 6, Fig. 3.13-18)**

The last actual period of issue is associated to the sole reign of Caracalla that is, after December 26, 211, or according to other scholars January 26, 212. During this same period, coins from Plotinopolis also bear the bust of his mother Julia Domna. The total of 146 coins can be classified into two editions and five denominations. Eight asses is the new entry for the Plotinopolis mint. Only four specimens are known weighing almost 18 gr. The four asses bear the head or the bust of Caracalla and have an average diameter of 27 mm and weight 12 gr. There are two medium denominations, the three asses and the double asses carrying the busts of Caracalla and his mother. The asses are 16-17 mm in diameter and weigh 3.32 gr.

The frequent visits of Caracalla to the region, of which at least two are certainly mentioned, and the intense warfare in the northern and eastern parts of the Empire, i.e. with the Parthian Wars, led to the activation of a total of eleven (11) mints for the province of Thrace.<sup>23</sup> The majority of the cities struck asses weighing 3.68 g and seven of the eleven (11) mints struck five asses weighing approximately 16.50 g. Only Perinthos and Plotinopolis struck eight asses with a diameter of 32-36 mm. The number of surviving pieces of the last denomination, together with the iconography on the reverse, shows that, although they may have been part of the metrology of the period, they were not issued *en masse*.

<sup>20</sup>About Caecina Largus (AD 198-201), see Thomasson 1984, 169 nr. 211; Tasaklaki 2020, 102.

<sup>21</sup>Abdy 2012; Tasaklaki 2020, 102-103.

<sup>22</sup>Boteva 2013.

<sup>23</sup>Tasaklaki 2019.



Similarly, the intermediate denominations, the double asses and the three asses, were not used to the same extent as the four asses and the five asses, presumably because of their devaluation, according to the number of surviving pieces.

### **5th period under Elagabalus (Tab. 7)**

Two coins of different denominations date from the reign of Elagabalus. For the four asses, we only know the diameter of 27.00 mm, while no information on their weight has been found. The three asses have a diameter of 24 mm and weigh 7.15 g, which is about the same as their counterparts from the previous period. In order to reconstruct the metrological system of the period, data from three cities have been used: Philippopolis and Perinthos in the province of Thrace, as they are the only cities to have issued coins in this period, and Nikopolis in Istrus, which belonged to the province of Moesia from the beginning of 190 AD. The latter is related to Plotinopolis, as there is a similarity between the imperial portraits of their four asses. During this period, Nikopolis issued four asses with a diameter of 27 mm and a weight of 12 gr., and asses with a diameter of 18 mm and a weight of about 3.20 gr. At Philippopolis and Perinthos, more denominations and medals are found, which is reasonable considering that both acquired the title of neokoros.<sup>24</sup> As for the four asses, the only denomination that was common to all the cities, the weight and diameter are the same and do not differ from the previous period during the reign of Caracalla.

From the middle of the 3rd century AD, the setting changed. Constant invasions by the northern tribes of Heruli, Goths and Germans plagued the empire and led to a comprehensive reform of the monetary system by Aurelian in 274 AD and later by Diocletian in 294-295 AD.<sup>25</sup> The small denominations of the imperial mint ceased to exist, as did the provincial issues.<sup>26</sup> The last examples come from Maroneia during the reigns of Trebonianus Gallus and Volousianus.<sup>27</sup> The imperial coins of Gallienus, Claudius Gothicus and Aurelian have been found all over Thrace and in places where coins have never been found before. We have 20 specimens of Diocletian and 16 of Maximian. At the same time, in the cities abandoned at the end of the 4th century BC, such as Molyvoti, Zone, Dikaia, a resettlement is detected. The presence of late Roman coins of the 3rd century is linked to the presence of Gallienus. The danger from the north prompted people to move to the coastal area in search of a safe place to live.

### **Plotinopolis and beyond**

Although the number of Plotinopolis coins available is limited, they provide an important insight into both the city's metrological system and how it fitted into the wider coinage practices of the Roman province of Thrace. The city's coinage followed a denominational system that was consistent with the general pattern of all active mints in Thrace, i.e. from the beginning coins were struck in four main denominations, with both the weight and diameter gradually decreasing over time. Thus, during the reign of Antoninus Pius, the asses weighed around 4 gr. By the reign of Caracalla, the weight of the same denomination had been reduced to about 3.32 gr. The gradual reduction in weight was not limited to Plotinopolis, but occurred simultaneously in all the active mints of Thrace. At the same time, the weight reduction was accompanied by the introduction of new, higher-value denominations, which had an inflationary effect on the coinage system. Similar trends have been observed in the neighboring Province of Macedonia, where Sofia Kremydi has demonstrated that nearly all cities followed the same denominational system, with coin weights gradually decreasing over time, irrespective of the ruling political regime.<sup>28</sup>

The simultaneous development in different cities reinforces the notion that mints in Thrace operated within a standardized framework dictated by the province. This suggests a centralized and coordinated economic adjustment, likely reflecting broader imperial monetary policy or economic pressures.

<sup>24</sup>Burell 2004, 239-240 (Perinthos), 243-245 (Philippopolis).

<sup>25</sup>Estiot 2012; Tasaklaki 2024.

<sup>26</sup>Schönert-Geiss 1968.

<sup>27</sup>Schönert-Geiss 1987, 218-219.

<sup>28</sup>Kremydi 1996, 119-120.



The distinction between denominations in the coinage of Plotinopolis is at first sight visually expressed by the choice of different obverse portraits. This visual hierarchy aligns the portraits with the importance of the denomination: Larger and smaller denominations usually feature the emperor, or occasionally the co-emperor. Other denominations bear the portraits of members of the imperial family, such as empresses or heirs. This system of assigning specific portraits to different coin values extends beyond Plotinopolis and reflects a wider context within the Roman provincial coinage system. A comparative study of other mints in Thrace and neighboring provinces shows that this practice was common, indicating a standardized approach to emphasizing the authority of the emperor and his family.<sup>29</sup> The use of the emperor's portrait on higher denominations served to underline his supreme authority, while the inclusion of members of the imperial family on other coins reinforced the legitimacy and continuity of the ruling dynasty. This differentiation of portraits functioned not only as a denominational indicator but also as a form of imperial propaganda, subtly reminding users of the ties between the members of the imperial family. It served as a visual representation of imperial authority and familial legitimacy, deeply embedded in the provincial coinage systems of the Roman Empire.

### **Preliminary Conclusions on the Establishment of a Monetary Network (Tab. ##)**

Evidence from iconographic and metrological analyses has shown that mints such as Hadrianopolis and Plotinopolis shared common obverse dies, especially during the reign of Antoninus Pius. Common dies, together with stylistic similarities observed in coins from contemporary mints, suggest the existence of workshops (or a network of workshops) specializing in the production of dies and a coordinated production process. These workshops may have been stationary or itinerant, supplied several cities within Thrace and perhaps even neighboring provinces, as in the case of Thracian and Bithynian cities in the time of Gordian III.<sup>30</sup> The practice ensured consistency not only in the depiction of imperial portraits but more generally in the specifications of the coins issued by several mints, an element that was vital to maintaining confidence in the monetary system throughout the province.

The introduction of new iconographic types at roughly the same time across multiple mints further supports the idea of a connected network. Examples of such iconographic types include:

- The heroic bust of Caracalla turned to the left.<sup>31</sup>
- Depictions of Egyptian deities during the Severan era.<sup>32</sup>
- The busts of Tyche, which appeared in several cities such as Pautalia, Serdica, and Philippopolis.<sup>33</sup>

These iconographic choices, regardless of whether they are influenced by specific individuals or events that resonated throughout the region, suggest centralized control or at least common cultural and political motivations within the province. This interconnected system not only ensured uniformity, but also reduced the logistical and financial burden on individual mints by centralizing the production of seals. The exact nature of these workshops - whether they were run by imperial authorities, private craftsmen or provincial administrations - remains a matter of scholarly research, but their role in the unification of the iconography and technical standards of coinage throughout Thrace is obvious.

In summary, the use of common dies and the simultaneous adoption of iconographic types underscore the existence of a well-organized and interconnected coinage production system in Thrace, one that reflected both the administrative efficiency and cultural cohesion of the Roman Empire. Considering the metrological study of Plotinopolis alongside other cities in the Province of Thrace, we can attempt to draw preliminary conclusions about the establishment of a common monetary policy.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. the coinage of Amphipolis in Roman times, see Papaevangelou 2009.

<sup>30</sup>Calomino 2015.

<sup>31</sup>Eight cities struck coins with similar heroic busts, see for Hadrianopolis: CN 7195· Ainos: CNG, e-A88, 14.09.2011, 279· Augusta Traiana: CN 3768· Deultum: CN 6699· Pautalia: CN 9738· Serdica: CN 5059· Philippopolis: CN 6303· Plotinopolis CN 27385.

<sup>32</sup>Tasaklaki 2021.

<sup>33</sup>For Pautalia, see CNG, e-A 276, 21.03.2012, 269 (obverse: Julia Domna). For Serdica: ###. For Philippopolis: Solidus A27, 17.03.2018, 346 (Septimius Severus).



During the 1st century AD and the early 2nd century, only Abdera and Perinthos systematically struck coins, making it difficult to trace a common monetary policy or determine whether the value of coins was recognizable across the wider province. However, from the reign of Antoninus Pius onward, the number of active mints increased significantly. This expansion provides more evidence suggesting that a common system began to emerge during this period—not toward the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century, as previously argued by Kraft.<sup>34</sup>

The first piece of evidence supporting a common monetary policy concerns the use of common dies. Research conducted in the 1990s demonstrated that, at least during the reign of Antoninus Pius, cities such as Hadrianopolis and Plotinopolis shared common obverse dies. This also implies that the coins had the same diameter and, as confirmed by metrological and statistical analysis, the same weight. Furthermore, studies of the iconography revealed the existence of workshops—either stationary or movable—that produced dies and supplied multiple cities.

The second key element is the simultaneous introduction of new denominations alongside a gradual reduction in weight. This trend is observed not only in Thrace but also in the neighboring Province of Macedonia. As Dr. Kremydi has demonstrated, nearly all cities in Macedonia struck the same denominations, with weights gradually decreasing over time, regardless of the prevailing political regime. Importantly, the introduction of new denominations and the weight reductions occurred simultaneously across all active mints.

The final element concerns the iconographic types on the reverse sides of coins, which often correspond to the obverse portraits. For instance, the personification of Homonoia appears alongside Julia Domna, and the goddess Hera is depicted with Faustina Junior. These new reverse types often appeared concurrently across the mints of Thrace.

## Epilogue

Metrological and iconographic evidence strongly supports the view that the changes observed in the coinage of Plotinopolis during the 2nd century AD and the early 3rd century are due to central administrative policies and not to decisions taken independently by individual cities. In fact, the variations in coinage weights and minting practices are mainly found in periods when the province was still non-urbanized (e.g. in the 1st century AD) or in the middle of the 3rd century AD, when mints began to close one after the other. And in the late 2nd and early 3rd century, a clear trend towards a standardized monetary system is evident, reflecting the attempt to implement centralized control of coin production. This centralized system was extended even to geographically remote cities, ensuring consistency and stability throughout the province.




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<sup>34</sup>Kraft 1972.



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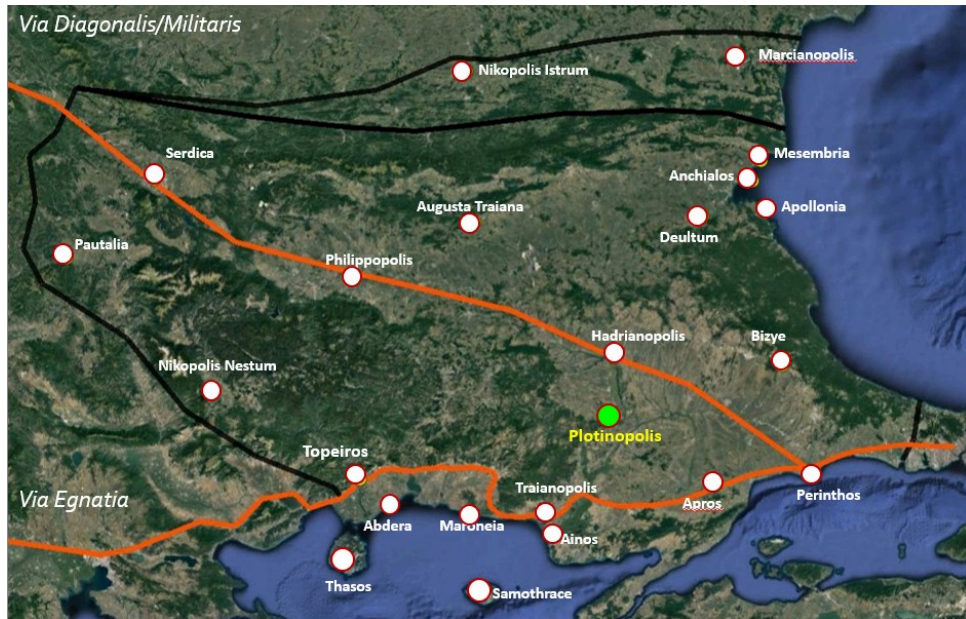
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- CN Corpus Nummorum online, Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Berlin Münzkabinett  
<https://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/coins.php>
- RPC online Roman Provincial Coinage online database, University of Oxford  
<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/>



## Appendix

**Figure 1**

*Plotinopolis within the main road network of the province of Thrace*



**Figure 2**

*Gladiators' gravestones (IThrAeg E466 and Tsoka 2015)*



**Figure 3***Gladiators' gravestones (IThrAeg E466 and Tsoka 2015)*

1. Antoninus Pius 158 B.C. 4 Asses, Head of AP to r. / Homonoia standing. Private collection, SHH 4828.
2. Marcus Aurelius Caesar, 158 BC. 3 Asses, Head of MA to r. / River God Hebros holding branch. *Munzen und Medallion* A15, 21.10.2004, 187.
3. Faustina Junior Augusta, under AP, 158 BC. Double Asses, Head of FII to r. / Hera standing. BMC 1844.0425.917.
4. Antoninus Pius 158 B.C. As, Head of AP to r. / Hygeia standing. Vienna V9060.
5. Pseudo-autonomous issue, As. Dionysos head to r. / Silenus holding vase with wine. Ashmolean Museum.
6. Lucius Verus, 166-169 AD. Martialis. 4 Asses. Head of LV to r. / Emperor spearing a captive. *Helios* A4, 14.10.2009, 500.
7. Faustina Junior Augusta, under MA, 166-169 AD. Double asses. Head of FII to r. / Hera standing. *Tantalus*, e-A 18.01.2014 (S/N 106358).
8. Marcus Aurelius Augustus, 166-169 AD. As. Head of MA to r. / Homonoia standing l. *Aste Catawiki* 127112721.
9. Septimius Severus, 198-201 AD. Four asses. Bust of Septimius Severus to r. / Triumphal Arch and statues on the top. *Citygat* A290, 08.12.2013, 296.
10. Caracalla, 198-201 AD. 4 asses. Bust of Caracalla to r. / Eagle to l. *Numismatic Naumann* A93, 06.09.2020, 280.
11. Julia Domna, 198-201 AD. Double asses. Bust of Julia Domna to r. / Homonoia standing. *ACCN*, e-A 07.07.2014.
12. Geta, 198-201 AD. As. Bust of young Geta to r. / Snake on an altar. *Numismatic Naumann* A46, 11.09.2016, 311.
13. Caracalla, 215-217 AD. 8 asses. Bust of Caracalla to r. / Abduction of Persephone. Courtesy of Ephorate of Antiquities of Rhodope.
14. Caracalla, 212-213 AD, 4 asses. Bust of Caracalla to l. / Apollo with lyre. *Classical Numismatic Group*, e-A 184, 19.03.2008, 97.
15. Caracalla, 215-217 AD, Double asses. Bust of Caracalla to r. / Three Nymphs. *Classical Numismatic Group*, e-A 300, 10.04.2013, 140.

16. Julia Domna, 215-217 AD. Double Asses. Bust of Julia Domna to r. / Apollo moving to r. Pecunem A15, 06.04.2014, 334.  
 17. Caracalla, 215-217 AD, As. Bust of Caracalla to r. / Snake in cista mystica. Pecunem A42, 03.04.2016, 407.  
 18. Pseudo-autonomous issue, As. Hermes head to r. / Caduceus. Private collection.

**Table 1***Plotinopolis mint from the reign of Antonius Pius till the reign to Caracalla*

Period	Obverse type	Total	Denomination
1 <sup>st</sup> Antoninus Pius 209 coins	Antoninus Pius	52	33 [4as]
			18 [2as]
			1 [semis]
	Marcus Aurelius	27	2 [4as]
			25 [2as]
Pseudo-autonomous	7	7 [semis]	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Marcus Aurelius 13 coins	Lucius Verus	1	1 [4as]
	Marcus Aurelius	2	2 [2as]
	Faustina II	10	10 [As]
3 <sup>rd</sup> Septimius Severus 19 coins	Septimius Severus	5	4 [4as]
			1 [semis]
	Julia Domna	1	1 [as]
	Caracalla	2	2 [4as]
	Geta	8	[semis]
4 <sup>th</sup> Caracalla 156 coins	Caracalla	112	5 M [34 mm]
			54 [4as]
			20 [2as]
			8 [as]
	Julia Domna	16	[as]
Pseudo-autonomous	12	semis	

**Table 2***Metrological analysis of Plotinopolis coinage.*

Emperor	Edition	Denominations				
		Asses	2 asses	3 asses	4 asses	8 asses
Antoninus Pius	1st edition	17-20 4,75 <sup>18</sup>	22-24 7,21 <sup>74</sup>	25-26 9,23 <sup>22</sup>	30-33 19,87 <sup>14</sup>	—
	2nd edition	—	—	—	28-30 18,88 <sup>5</sup>	—
Marcus Aurelius	1st edition	18-19 3,00 <sup>2</sup>	22-23 5,96 <sup>5</sup>	—	33 20,83 <sup>1</sup>	—
Septimius Severus	1st edition	17-19 2,94 <sup>9</sup>	22 — <sup>1</sup>	—	27-28 10,70 <sup>3</sup>	—
	1st edition	—	—	—	26-28 11,61 <sup>40</sup>	—
Caracalla	1st edition	—	—	—	26-28 11,61 <sup>40</sup>	—
	2nd edition	16-19 3,50 <sup>31</sup>	21-22 5,82 <sup>12</sup>	24 7,81 <sup>8</sup>	26-28 12,42 <sup>12</sup>	33-36 18,26 <sup>5</sup>

**Table 3***Comparative table of denominations during the time of Antoninus Pius*

Authority	Half Asses	Denominations			
		Asses	2 asses	3 asses	4 asses
Plotinopolis	—	17-20	22-24	25-26	30-33
		4,75 <sup>18</sup>	7,21 <sup>74</sup>	9,23 <sup>22</sup>	19,70 <sup>19</sup>
Hadrianopolis	—	17-18	23-24	25-26	30-31
		3,75 <sup>44</sup>	6,13 <sup>60</sup>	8,56 <sup>36</sup>	15,88 <sup>33</sup>
Bizye	—	18-20	23-24	25-26	30-33
		4,39 <sup>32</sup>	6,38 <sup>20</sup>	9,51 <sup>29</sup>	18,13 <sup>7</sup>
Topeiros	16	19-20	23-24	—	30-32
	2,17 <sup>4</sup>	3,91 <sup>42</sup>	7,23 <sup>181</sup>	—	16,33 <sup>7</sup>
Maroneia	—	—	24-25	—	—
		—	6,68 <sup>15</sup>	—	—
Abdera	13	15-21	—	—	—
	2,17 <sup>3</sup>	3,49 <sup>23</sup>	—	—	—
Philippopolis	14	18-20	—	25-26	30-32
	1,78 <sup>1</sup>	3,84 <sup>51</sup>	—	9,47 <sup>42</sup>	19,63 <sup>84</sup>
Pautalia	—	18-20	23-24	25-27	30-31
		4,58 <sup>14</sup>	6,24 <sup>93</sup>	9,34 <sup>33</sup>	19,87 <sup>34</sup>
Perinthos	—	18-20	22-23	25-26	30-31
		4,01 <sup>7</sup>	7,47 <sup>11</sup>	9,28 <sup>34</sup>	18,53 <sup>19</sup>
Anchialos	—	17-18	22-24	25-26	31-35
		3,36 <sup>2</sup>	6,90 <sup>24</sup>	9,15 <sup>15</sup>	21,60 <sup>17</sup>
Apollonia	—	18	22-24	27-29	—
		3,82 <sup>3</sup>	7,50 <sup>3</sup>	10,21 <sup>1</sup>	—
Thasos	—	17-19	—	—	—
		4,45 <sup>1</sup>	—	—	—



**Table 4**  
Comparative table of denominations during the time of Marcus Aurelius

Authority	Denominations			
	Asses	2 asses	3 asses	4 asses
Plotinopolis	18-19	22-24	—	33
	3,00 <sup>2</sup>	5,96 <sup>5</sup>	—	20,83 <sup>1</sup>
Hadrianopolis	—	22-23	—	29-31
	—	5,80 <sup>40</sup>	—	20,62 <sup>16</sup>
Traianopolis	17-19	21-22	—	30-31
	4,44 <sup>3</sup>	6,15 <sup>39</sup>	—	19,41 <sup>4</sup>
Augusta Traiana	18-20	—	24-26	30-32
	3,95 <sup>59</sup>	—	9,45 <sup>68</sup>	19,21 <sup>54</sup>
Philippopolis	19-20	—	25-26	30-32
	4,07 <sup>32</sup>	—	10,11 <sup>56</sup>	20,32 <sup>15</sup>
Serdica	18-20	—	25	31-32
	4,06 <sup>19</sup>	—	9,59 <sup>23</sup>	18,92 <sup>15</sup>
Pautalia	18-20	22-23	26-27	30-32
	4,36 <sup>5</sup>	6,71 <sup>39</sup>	10,49 <sup>10</sup>	21,23 <sup>31</sup>
Perinthos	—	23	25-26	31-33
	—	7,31 <sup>14</sup>	9,53 <sup>5</sup>	20,26 <sup>4</sup>
Anchialos	19	24	25-27	32
	4,96 <sup>1</sup>	6,82 <sup>1</sup>	8,56 <sup>8</sup>	11,59 <sup>1</sup>
Apollonia	18-20	22-23	26-27	32
	3,29 <sup>4</sup>	6,18 <sup>2</sup>	9,85 <sup>9</sup>	18,07 <sup>1</sup>

**Table 5**  
Comparative table of denominations during the reign of Septimius Severus

Issuing Authority	Denominations					Medals
	Asses	2 asses	3 asses	4 asses	5 asses	
Plotinopolis	17-19	22	—	27-28	—	—
	2,94 <sup>9</sup>	-1	—	10,70 <sup>3</sup>	—	—
Hadrianopolis	17-18	23	24-26	26-28	—	—
	3,07 <sup>21</sup>	6,98 <sup>7</sup>	8,78 <sup>11</sup>	11,65 <sup>54</sup>	—	—
Bizye	18-20	22-23	25	25-27	29-31	—
	3,40 <sup>6</sup>	6,15 <sup>2</sup>	9,27 <sup>4</sup>	10,33 <sup>14</sup>	15,44 <sup>13</sup>	—
Traianopolis	17-18	23-24	26	27-28	28-30	—
	3,48 <sup>19</sup>	7,43 <sup>5</sup>	9,19 <sup>1</sup>	12,84 <sup>3</sup>	18,19 <sup>14</sup>	—
Maroneia	18-20	23-24	—	—	30-31	—
	3,89 <sup>7</sup>	7,21 <sup>6</sup>	—	—	17,93 <sup>3</sup>	—
Augusta Traiana	18-20	23-25	—	—	28-30	—
	3,90 <sup>40</sup>	7,32 <sup>29</sup>	—	—	14,41 <sup>72</sup>	—
Philippopolis	18-20	22-24	—	—	27-29	—
	4,20 <sup>103</sup>	7,45 <sup>5</sup>	—	—	15,89 <sup>57</sup>	—
Pautalia	18-20	22-24	—	—	29-31	—
	4,22 <sup>76</sup>	7,14 <sup>41</sup>	—	—	15,27 <sup>142</sup>	—

Denominations						
Serdica	18-20	24	—	—	30-33	
	3,79 <sup>31</sup>	7,12 <sup>3</sup>			15,36 <sup>23</sup>	
Perinthos	18-20	23-24	26-27	27-29	30-33	40-41
	3,36 <sup>34</sup>	6,24 <sup>24</sup>	8,75 <sup>18</sup>	11,73 <sup>16</sup>	14,90 <sup>47</sup>	35,06 <sup>25</sup>
Anchialos	18-20	22-24	—	26-28	—	
	3,87 <sup>54</sup>	7,08 <sup>27</sup>		12,29 <sup>126</sup>		
Mesembria	18-20	24	—	26-28	—	
	—	5,15 <sup>1</sup>		11,93 <sup>10</sup>		
Apollonia	18-20	22	24-26	27-30	—	
	—	5,13 <sup>1</sup>	—	10,80 <sup>8</sup>		
Sestos			24-26			
			7,44 <sup>1</sup>			
Thasos	18-20					
	3,92 <sup>1</sup>					

**Table 6**  
Comparative table of denominations during the sole reign of Caracalla

Denominations							
Issuing authority	As	2 asses	3 asses	4 asses	5 asses	8 asses	Medals
Plotinopolis	16-19	21-22	24	26-28	—	33-36	
	3,32 <sup>27</sup>	6,18 <sup>11</sup>	8,07 <sup>8</sup>	12,01 <sup>52</sup>		18,46 <sup>5</sup>	
Hadrianopolis	17-19	22-24	24-25	26-27	—	—	—
	3,24 <sup>39</sup>	6,01 <sup>3</sup>	8,45 <sup>13</sup>	11,68 <sup>170</sup>			
Traianopolis	17-20	22-24	—	25	28-30	—	—
	3,13 <sup>95</sup>	6,15 <sup>31</sup>		11,26 <sup>1</sup>	15,95 <sup>30</sup>		
Augusta Traiana	18-20	—	—	—	28-30	—	—
	3,93 <sup>18</sup>				16,46 <sup>70</sup>		
Pautalia	18-19	—	—	—	28-30	—	—
	4,13 <sup>2</sup>				16,37 <sup>39</sup>		
Philippopolis	18-20	—	24-25	—	28-30	—	36-40
	4,27 <sup>2</sup>		9,36 <sup>10</sup>		16,85 <sup>52</sup>		30,17 <sup>84</sup>
Serdica	18-20	—	24-25	—	28-30	—	—
	3,79 <sup>28</sup>		8,02 <sup>4</sup>		17,15 <sup>202</sup>		
Perinthos	—	22-24	—	27-28	28-30	32-35	40-41
		5,05 <sup>3</sup>		11,64 <sup>3</sup>	16,39 <sup>5</sup>	22,53 <sup>33</sup>	37,31 <sup>95</sup>
Maroneia	18-20	—	23-25	—	28-30	—	—
	3,63 <sup>11</sup>		7,40 <sup>6</sup>		16,79 <sup>5</sup>		