

The City and the Coin in the Ancient and Early Medieval Worlds

Edited by

Fernando López Sánchez

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Cover coin: RPC1 172, Obv: AVGVSTVS DIVI F, bare head, r.; Rev: C LAETILIVS APALVS II V Q, diadem (with crescent and lotus above) enclosing REX PTOL. The Trustees of the British Museum.

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ACTIA NICOPOLIS. COINAGE, CURRENCY AND CIVIC IDENTITY (27 BC-AD 268)

Dario Calomino

ABSTRACT

Nicopolis of Epirus (north-western Greece), founded by Octavian to commemorate the *Actium* victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC, was also known as “*Actia Nicopolis*”. Ancient authors’ reports suggest that the city profited from very special imperial benefits: a privileged administrative statute (as *civitas libera* and probably *foederata*), a pre-eminent political position in the Delphic Amphictiony and in the province (as capital of Epirus), a leading ethnic-cultural role in western Greece (being populated through interregional *synoecism*), a strong symbolic meaning for the Roman policy in Greece (as the only proper Greek foundation of Augustus). Due to the strategic location, the city secured military control and provided economic support to the western coast of Roman Greece and subsisted on commerce, fishing, farming and stock-raising. The coinage is still probably the best archaeological evidence of the city’s economic and cultural life, spanning from Augustus to Gallien with a large production of bronze issues and exceptional silver series under the Antonines. Further special features of the mint’s production are, above all, a large “pseudo-autonomous” coinage and remarkable commemorative series in memory of the founder Augustus, which continued in production during the 2nd and the 3rd centuries.

THE CITY

The ancient city of *Nicopolis* lies towards the western coast of Epirus (north-western Greece) on the far southern tip which divides the Gulf of Ambracia from the Ionian Sea, north to Cape Actium and close to the modern harbour town of Prebeza (Fig. 1). It was founded by Octavian in order to commemorate his victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra in the 2nd September 31 BC naval battle of Actium; becoming a model for several “cities of Victory” later founded all over the Roman world,⁽¹⁾ it was also known as “*Actia Nicopolis*” to be distinguished from the other ones (Tab. Peut., 6.3-4).

A memorial monument of the victory was erected on the Michalitsi hill that dominates the *Nicopolis* plain, exactly where Octavian had set his military camp, and it was decorated with the bronze *rostra* taken from the ships of Antony’s fleet. According to Suetonius and Dio Cassius (Suet. *Aug.*, 18; Dio, 51.1.1-3), the monument was part of an open-air sanctuary dedicated to the gods who had granted Octavian the final victory: Mars, Neptune and Apollo. Moreover Octavian restored the IV century BC traditional sacred festivals of Acarnania, the Actian Games, and renovated the ancient sanctuary of Apollo at Cape Actium, where they

used to take place.⁽²⁾ People from all over the Roman world used to visit *Nicopolis* every four years to attend or simply to watch the competitions, which enjoyed a status equal to that of the Olympics (Sarikakis 1966; Lämmer 1986-1987).

The city was populated through an emblematic process of *synoikismos*, gathering inhabitants from Epirus, Acarnania and Aetolia. The whole region had suffered destruction and deportation long since the battle of Pidna (168 BC) and then again during the *Triumviri* Civil Wars that led to the defeat of Pompey at *Pharsalus* (48 BC) and of *Cassius* and *Brutus* at *Philippi* (42 BC); so the purpose of the Actian foundation was to offer many people coming from abandoned towns and villages in the surrounding areas a brand new centre of attraction and reception (Purcell 1987).

Nevertheless, far from being conceived as a mere commemorative foundation and a shelter for displaced people, *Actia Nicopolis* profited by its strategic localition which allowed it to secure military control and provide economic support to the western coast of Roman Greece. It was built on a narrow plain between the Gulf of Ambracia and the Ionian Sea; two or three harbours, one at Komaros, another probably at Vathy and a third possibly on the Eastern Mazoma Lagoon (Fig. 1), assured easy communications with the Italian peninsula, on the route from *Brundisium* and *Corcyra* to the major urban centres of Macedonia and Peloponnesus; the city was also linked by landlines to the

(1) The first one was *Nicopolis-Iuliopolis*, founded by Octavian in Egypt after the capture of Alexandria (30 BC); Dio, 51.18. About the cities of Victory in the Greek and Roman world, see Ellis Jones 1987, pp. 104-107.

(2) See also Strab., 7.7.6.

Via Egnatia in the north and to Patras and Corinth in the south. Commerce, fishing, farming and stock-raising contributed to the economic prosperity of the Epirotan community (Samsari 1994, pp. 45-46; Chrysostomou, Kefallonitou 2001, pp. 10-16).

Therefore Octavian secured an outstanding economic and socio-cultural role in Roman Greece for *Nicopolis*, besides a remarkable prestige and political influence in Pan-Hellenic business, through the assignation of the highest number of voting members in the Delphic Amphictiony (Paus., 10.8.3-5; Bowersock 1965, p. 98; Ellis Jones 1987, pp. 101-108; Sartre 1991, pp. 208-209). The city also enjoyed a privileged administrative status being a *civitas libera*, probably exempted from paying taxes, although Tacitus refers to the city calling it either *urbs* or *colonia* and Pliny obscurely mentions a *colonia Augusti Actium cum templo Apollinis nobili ac civitate libera Nicopolitana* (Plin. Nat., IV.5). In recent years some scholars have more carefully reconsidered literary and epigraphic sources about this problem and pointed out that *Nicopolis* probably was a “double” community, namely a free Greek city coupled with a settlement of Roman veterans who had taken part in the Actium battle (Purcell 1987, pp. 87-90; Ruscu 2006). This does not necessarily imply that there were two separated settlements, but two communities cohabitating under the rules of a special *foedus* (“treaty”), as Servius’ commentary attests (Serv. Aen., III.50); this would make a *civitas libera et foederata* out of *Nicopolis*.

The city enjoyed safety and prosperity, even becoming the capital of the autonomous province of Epirus (probably under Trajan), up to the Gothic and Herulian invasions of Greece and Macedonia in AD 254-268 (Karatzeni 2001, pp. 164, 171; Chrysostomou and Kefallonitou 2001, p. 14). Despite the general economic and political decline of the Empire, earthquakes and Barbarian raids, *Nicopolis* continued to be inhabited and enjoyed further flowering under Christianity (4th-6th century), as Byzantine fortifications and six surviving basilicas testify (Chrysostomou and Kefallonitou 2001, pp. 15-16).

Modern excavations at the archaeological site (Fig. 2) have been carried out from the beginning of the 20th century, bringing to light a circuit of over 5 km city walls (including at least five main gates), the necropolis, the private residence of a rich citizen called *Manius Antoninus* and many remarkable public buildings, such as the baths, the aqueduct, the cisterns, the *nymphaeum*, the Forum and the *odeion*. Outside the urban perimeter, north to the centre, a separate district has been brought to light, the so-called *proasteion*, where the New Actian Games took place; it actually includes the main spectacle buildings, namely the *stadion*, the *gymnasion* and the theatre.⁽³⁾

(3) For an exhaustive picture of excavations at the site and researches over *Nicopolis* of Epirus, see: *Nicopolis 1: Foundation and Destruction*; Chrysostomou and Kefallonitou 2001; *Nicopolis 2*.

During the last thirty years, further excavations and researches have been undertaken on the Michalitsi hill, where the memorial monument lies. An impressive series of sockets which pocks the façade of the upper terrace retaining wall has then been identified as the anchor-shaped cuttings to hold Antony’s fleet bronze rams; several carved limestone blocks have been gathered allowing restoration of the Latin inscription that celebrated Octavian’s victory; hundreds of fragments of the decorative relief celebrating the Actian triumph have also been discovered and are waiting to be entirely restored after conservation (Fig. 3).⁽⁴⁾

THE MINT AND THE COINAGE

The mint of *Nicopolis* of Epirus struck coins from 27 BC to AD 268; coinage spanned almost three centuries more or less regularly under every emperor, apart from a considerable period of interruption during the 1st century AD. Two important studies have been published about this coinage in the Seventies: a catalogue of specimens from the main numismatic collections by M. Oikonomidou and an accurate review by C. M. Kraay (Oikonomidou 1975; Kraay 1976). Further investigations about mint production in the Julio-Claudian Age have also been made by the authors of *Roman Provincial Coinage* (*RPC1*, nos 1363-77, pp. 272-74, pl. 69-70). The present contribution aims to present a global (and, possibly, more exhaustive) picture of the civic coinage by adding new data collected in my Ph.D. thesis to the previous researches.⁽⁵⁾

Little is known about the mint organisation; the excavations have not provided yet any information about the possible location of the workshop at the site. The coins themselves tell us nothing about who, among the civic authorities, was in charge of undertaking the coinage. Nevertheless the epigraphic evidence can offer some assistance, as the civic prosopography reports names and titles of the main magistrates (Samsari 1994, pp. 50-53, 149). Other provincial mints’ legends sometimes indicate who was most likely to have taken care of the minting process;⁽⁶⁾ for comparison with such cases, it is possible to search for potential moneyers in *Nicopolis* among the archon, the *grammateus* *thes* boules and similar members of the local government

(4) Murray and Petsas 1989; Zachos 2003.

(5) For permission to publish the coins from collections, I should like to thank Federico Barello and Alessandra Guerrini (Medagliere dell’Armeria Reale, Turin), Maria Cristina Dossi (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Venice), Dimitri Doukas (Athens), Paola Giovetti (Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna), Vania Gransinigh (Musei Civici, Udine), Paola Marini (Musei Civici, Verona), Rodolfo Martini (Raccolte Artistiche e Gabinetto Numismatico - Medagliere, Milan), Dimitra Tsangari (Alpha Bank Collection, Athens). For permission to study the coin finds, I express my deepest gratitude to Despina Eugenidou (Numismatic Museum, Athens), Georgios Riginos (33rd Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Preveza) and the members of the Local Epirotan Council of Monuments, especially Konstantinos Zachos (12nd Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Ioannina).

(6) See *RPC1*, pp. 3-4, 787. However there is no certainty about the possibility that these magistrates were mentioned on coin legends because they were involved in the mint activity; as they probably were eponymous magistrates, their name could be engraved on coins just to indicate the year of minting; see Butcher 1988, pp. 25-26.

like the *agonothetes*, who superintended the Actian Games quadrennial organisation, for which many coins were actually issued. Also private citizens could have chosen to incur coinage expenses, such as eminent *amphiktiones* (the members of the *Nicopolis* delegation to the Amphictiony Council), who were frequently celebrated on inscriptions (and elsewhere also on coins) with honorific titles such as *philokaisar* and *philopatris*, that acknowledged their devotion to the emperor and the community (Calomino 2011b, pp. 32, 330).

Above all we can try to reconstruct the mint history. There are three main phases of the coinage of *Nicopolis*: Augustus to the Flavians, Trajan to Commodus and Septimius Severus to Gallienus. The first obviously coincides with the opening of the mint, which surely dates soon after 27 BC, because the obverse legend ΚΤΙΣΜΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΥ (“Augustus’ foundation”) reports the Greek version (*Sebastos*) of the name that was assumed by Octavian from then on. As this was probably also the date of inauguration of the new Actian Games,⁽⁷⁾ one can likely reckon that a direct link existed between rate and scale production of the civic coinage and the quadrennial celebration of the local Festivals; in fact they surely attracted an exceptional influx of visitors and increased local market place activity, thus requiring local small-change supply.

The Augustan coinage presents quite peculiar features: style and fabric are surely local, very plain and constant; the monetary system has three denominations, but in fact the middle one, the local *assarion*, definitely dominates the whole production; it bears a fixed-reverse type, the so-called “type parlant” (i.e. the one that recalls the city name) of Nike with wreath and palm branch, combined to the legend ΙΕΡΑ ΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΙΣ, “sacred *Nicopolis*” (RPC1 1364; Fig. 4); nevertheless it conveys a very direct ideological message, since the legend ΚΤΙΣΜΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΥ is a *unicum* (not elsewhere attested) in the provincial repertory, which celebrates the most important Augustan foundation in Greece, surely one of the most symbolic of the whole Roman Empire.

Though the early mint output cannot be compared in scale to that of the major mints of Roman Greece, such as Corinth, Thessalonica and the Thessalian League, the Augustan *assarion* of *Nicopolis* was struck in several issues and certainly secured a satisfying supply of bronze currency to the civic and local circulation in the following decades. It is anyway surprising that the mint stopped producing new coins under the Julio-Claudian (except Nero) and the Flavian dynasty, hence this interruption was possibly caused by special Imperial measures: firstly, as Caligula forbade celebrating the Actium victory (to safeguard the memory of his ancestor Antony), the Games were likely suppressed under his reign and the mint could have already stopped striking for the same reason (Suet., Cal., XXIII. Sarikakis 1966, p. 155); and most of all, as Vespasian

revoked the right to strike coins by the provincial mints of *Achaea*, *Nicopolis* could not resume the civic coinage even under Titus and Domitian (RPC1, p. 21; RPC2, pp. 1, 70).

Only under Nero we find evidence of new coinage, but it is an exceptional and very scarce copper production. Most of the Neronian issues bear the bust of the city instead of the imperial portrait and celebrate his triumphal arrival to the city with the imperial galley reverse type and the legend ΝΕΡΩΝΟΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΙΣ (RPC1 1368-1370; Fig. 5), which still represents the only epigraphic evidence of an actual renaming of *Nicopolis*. The aim was probably to commemorate his victory at the Actian Games (AD 66-67) by giving his own name to the most popular Augustan city of victory for self-celebration and self-legitimation. Other even rarer Neronian issues don't give the city name at all, but bear the emperor's head and the usual Nike reverse type, or the emperor's full-length portrait on the obverse and goddess *Eleutheria* (Freedom) on the reverse (RPC1 1371-1377); the latter category represents Nero playing lyre as Apollo *Ktistes* (“Apollo the founder”, still drawing on the ideology of the Augustan foundation), or standing within a two column shrine as Patron of Greece (recalling his emphatic announcement of liberation of *Achaea* at the Isthmian Games). The attribution of these coins (previously assigned to Apollonia in Illyria) has been much debated, as Levy argued that they could have been struck by a “confederation” of Achaean mints under the supervision of *Nicopolis*, but Burnett's die study has demonstrated that they all were more likely issued by the Epirotan workshop.⁽⁸⁾

The second phase includes the 2nd century AD coinage. This crucial period saw the resuming of civic coinage under Trajan (AD 98-117), who likely promoted a new flowering of the city and the mint itself, since Epirus became an autonomous province and *Nicopolis* the capital; probably as sign of gratitude, many civic issues bear the obverse legend ΑΥΤ(Ο) ΤΡΑΙΑΝΟC CΩΤΗΡ (THC) ΠΟΛΕΩC, namely “emperor Trajan saviour of the city” (Calomino 2011b, nos 17-28; pp. 234-235; Figs 7, 16). *Nicopolis* also enjoyed special imperial favour by Hadrian. He visited the city at least three times during his journeys to Greece, probably in order to meet the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who had moved there and established his own school after being banned from Rome by Domitian; the emperor made a gift of new or restored monuments (probably those depicted on his coins, i.e. a gate, a round temple and a fountain)⁽⁹⁾ to the community and was worshipped in reward as *Zeus Olympios Dodonaïos* on local inscriptions (Cabanes 1987). The scale of production definitely increased and the coins began to spread beyond the civic territory; in the Augustan age they actually circulated only in southern Epirus (mainly within the district of modern Arta, i.e. the territory of ancient Ambracia), whereas in the 2nd century AD the small bronzes of Trajan and Hadrian circulated all over

(8) See RPC1, pp. 273-74, with earlier bibliography.

(9) Calomino 2011b, nos 69-70, 72, 75, 85; 107-108; 117-129. See also Kraay 1976, p. 241.

(7) Moretti 1953, pp. 205-206; Sarikakis 1966, pp. 146-156; Lämmer 1986-1987, pp. 29-30.

northern Epirus, as coin finds in Dodona, *Corcyra*, *Phoinice* and Butrint (whose mint was closed after the Neronian age) attest (Calomino 2011b, pp. 312-313, 331-333).

In the age of the Antonines (AD 161-192) the coin production gradually decreased (probably also due to the earlier small change still in circulation) and one should reckon that civic issues were strictly linked to the Actian Games, as the most common and representative reverse type is a prize, the peculiar wreath of reeds, in which the legend AKTIA or simply the initial letter A is inscribed. This type also occurred on the exceptional *quinari-hemidrachmae* pure silver series struck in AD 141-144 for Antoninus Pius and Diva Faustina (*RPC4* 4177, 4184; Fig. 8); many clues suggest that their production somehow involved the mint of Rome (die-engravers or even the workshop, where the dies could have been made and then used or rather shipped to Epirus),⁽¹⁰⁾ since typically Roman are style and fabric, and Roman is the imperial title in the Antoninus obverse legend, the 3rd consulship (ΥΙΙ[ΑΤΟC/ΑΤΕΙΑ] Γ),⁽¹¹⁾ which is here mentioned for the first and last time in the whole civic coinage (Calomino 2011b, pp. 250-251).

The last phase of the mint history includes 3rd century production. Some features indicate that a remarkable change occurred, since the mint no longer struck coins mainly (or even exclusively) in connection with the Games or with other special events (such as imperial visits to the city), but also for other needs and under more direct influence (or even control) of the central authority.

The best evidence is offered by the volume scale growth in two specific periods of this phase, under Caracalla and under Gallienus as sole emperors. During the reign of Caracalla (AD 211-217) the mint reached the highest peak of scale output ever, whereas almost all the mints of Peloponnesus (including Corinth, the capital of *Achaea* and by far the most productive workshop in Greece) definitely ceased striking bronze provincial coins (Grunauer-Von Hoerschelmann 1983, p. 46). The same occurred in the Epirotan island of *Corcyra*, where its local mint issued non-stop (even under Pescennius Niger) at least from Antoninus Pius to Septimius Severus (possible earlier coins lack the obverse imperial portrait).⁽¹²⁾ Some remarkable die analogies (and type resemblances, as for large bronzes depicting two very similar Corinthian Temples)⁽¹³⁾ suggest that *Corcyra* struck in close relationship with *Nicopolis* itself, probably sharing workshops and/or die-engravers at least for a short period (ca. AD 202/5-211), in the name of Septimius Caracalla, Plautilla and Geta (Figs 9-11); then, quite abrupt-

ly, it ceased any further activity.⁽¹⁴⁾ It follows that *Nicopolis* became the only northern-central Greece mint still working, along with Larissa (for the Thessalian League), from Caracalla on; this probably means that it became involved in a different and wider area of coin distribution and circulation, gravitating towards Macedonia and the northern Balkans, where all major mints kept producing up to the age of Gallienus (Calomino 2011b, pp. 333-334).

A further peak of scale production is attested under Valerian and Gallienus, but the final coinage of the mint in the name of Gallienus as sole emperor and Salonina (AD 260-268) deserves special attention. It is conspicuous and very poor in fabric and die-cut, so it was likely issued in a short time because of a pressing need for further bronze supply; though the weight of both denominations is substantially equal to that of previous emperors (Philip and Trebonianus Gallus), these coins were overvalued by marks, i.e. the Greek numerals Δ (four assaria; Fig. 12) and Η (8 assaria; Fig. 13).⁽¹⁵⁾ A similar figure is to be recognised in the contemporary coinage of *Aegium*, Sparta, the Thessalian League and Argos, the only other mints still operating in *Achaea* (along with Athens), and in the coinage of *Thessalonica*, the most important mint of Macedonia (Johnston 2007, pp. 220-221). Since all of these urban centres were more or less directly affected by the invasion of the Goths and the Herulians between AD 250 and 268 and tried to prevent the risk of a siege by erecting new fortifications or restoring the old ones (Touratsoglou 2006, pp. 138-154), one should reckon that these were “emergency issues”, probably coordinated and subsidized by the Imperial authority in order to face an imminent crisis (Calomino 2011b, pp. 282-284, 334); so these bronzes could also serve as funds for enrolling troops and providing military equipment, as stated by Kroll even for 3rd century coinage of Athens, although the mint did not mark any value on these bronzes (Kroll 1997, pp. 61-63). As a result, the marked *Nicopolis* coinage of Gallienus and Salonina was massively hoarded for its overestimated value and in fear of a sudden invasion, as the three main hoards of civic coins so far discovered clearly demonstrate.⁽¹⁶⁾

COIN USE AND CIRCULATION

No report of coin finds at the site of *Nicopolis* have so far been published, so we can offer a picture of the coin circulation based on the first systematic processing of exca-

(10) See Kraay 1976, p. 238; Walker 1977, p. 65; Butcher 1988, p. 15.

(11) As Antoninus Pius 3rd consulship spans from AD 140 to 144 and Faustina was deified after death in AD 141 (see: <http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/imperial/faustina-i/>), silver issues in their honour date in AD 141-144.

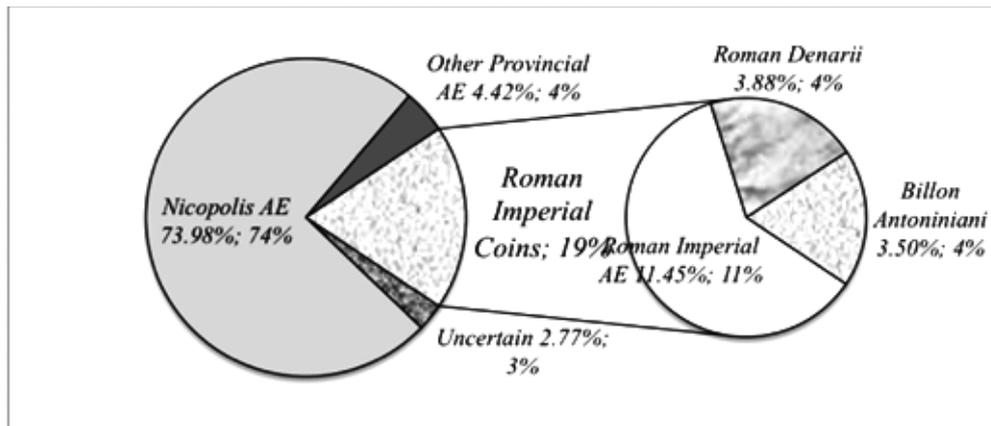
(12) For the most updated catalogue of coins issued by Roman *Corcyra*, see Moucharte 2007.

(13) See Moucharte 2007, pp. 292-293.

(14) Calomino 2011b, pp. 270-271, 276. I suggest dating the coins of Caracalla not much later than AD 211-212, after Geta's death, since their coinages look very similar to each other for the obverse portraits style and the imperial name legends.

(15) Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 157-62, 164-66, 173-76, pl. 59-69; see also Kraay 1976, pp. 245-47.

(16) The marked bronzes make up over 30% of the contents of the hoards and represent the majority of the coins of Gallienus known at present time. Three hoards have been published so far, namely the Athens-Beyrut hoard, the Plakanida hoard and an Epirotan hoard of unknown provenance: Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 169-78, pl. 64-71, with earlier bibliography. A fourth unpublished small treasure was found in 2007 in Vathy (Preveza); it contains 31 bronze coins of *Nicopolis* dated from Septimius Severus to Trebonianus Gallus.



Graph 1: Coin finds of *Nicopolis* by different categories of currency

vation data, though the most part of the ancient city still waits to be brought to light and this can only be a provisional assessment.⁽¹⁷⁾ From a total of 542 coins that I had the possibility to study, 401 specimens belong to the issues of the civic mint. The remaining 141 pieces consist approximately of 102 Roman imperial coins and 24 Roman provincial coins struck by other mints (besides 15 uncertain). The silver coins make up a very small part of the surviving local currency (21 *denarii* and 19 *antoniniani* of Gordian III, Trajan Decius and Gallienus), whereas the bronze coins consist of 62 imperial and 24 provincial specimens (Graph 1; Calomino 2011b, pp. 295-306).

These figures show the striking prevalence of bronze currency for everyday local transactions, in which coinage from the local mint plays a leading role, making up 74% of the total amount of finds; the Roman imperial coins account for 19% (of which 11.5% are bronzes) and provincial specimens of other mints for almost 4.5%. On the other hand, *Nicopolis* coinage is rarely found outside Epirus, as I recorded 77-79 specimens found within the provincial boundaries (besides Arta, Dodona, and Ioannina, also in Corcyra, Leukas, *Buthrotum* and *Phoinice*), but not more than 31-33 in the rest of Greece (namely in Olympia, *Pagae*, *Kabeiros*, Corinth, Patras and Athens).⁽¹⁸⁾ This picture confirms the general rule of Roman provincial coin production: civic bronzes were struck almost exclusively for the local and regional circulation, whereas foreign coins had to be converted into the official currency of the community without substantially circulating within the urban centre (Burnett 1993, pp. 146-48).

Most of the coins found at the site date back either to the age of Trajan and Hadrian (more than 36% of the total) or to the age of Septimius Severus and Caracalla (about 22% of the total, but many more specimens are included in hoards). These output rates attest that the mint reached the largest volume production during the first half of the 2nd century AD and the first Severan age (thus confirming

the numismatic collections data), but they also reveal two crucial periods which are hardly attested by coin finds (less than 1% of the total), the ages of Augustus and of Gallienus; such lack of evidence prompts problems of interpretation, especially because it clashes with the large number of specimens in the main numismatic collections. The rarity of Gallienus's coin finds can be explained by the intensive process of hoarding at the end of his reign, as I have already mentioned. Once again the hoards evidence attests that civic coinage was the exclusive currency circulating in the region, as only a single coin of the Thessalian League for Gallienus against 423 *Nicopolis* specimens have been found in the four roman provincial hoards so far known.⁽¹⁹⁾

It is far more surprising to find such scanty evidence of Augustan issues among the coins discovered at the site, since only four specimens (all of the Nike-type one-*assarion* denomination - *RPC1* 1364) out of the total of over 400 coming from about ten different sites of the ancient town can be catalogued. This is an extremely low percentage compared to the evidence of the numismatic collections, where more than 100 coins are known at the present time (4% of the entire coinage produced by the mint in its history) and at least 17 obverse dies and 19 reverse dies of the same unique Augustan issue can be identified, unlike any other *Nicopolis* series.

Since the mint ceased striking new coins from Augustus' death to the accession of Trajan (except for the time of Nero), the Augustan *assarion* and probably the small bronze Greek currency which survived from the Hellenistic-Republican period remained in circulation for over a century.⁽²⁰⁾ As a consequence, the very few surviving Augustan

(17) For specific reports of the coin finds of *Nicopolis*, see Calomino 2011a; 2011b, pp. 295-327.

(18) See also Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 16-17.

(19) See Kraay 1976, p. 238; Calomino 2011b, pp. 314-327. A unique Roman imperial coin hoard comes from Epirus, a small mixed *sestertii*, *denarii* and *antoniniani* treasure of Gordian III found in Anthochori (Ioannina); Touratsoglou 2006, n. 94, p. 181, with previous bibliography.

(20) See the coin finds in Epirus reported by Hammond 1967, pp. 717-25, and Rodevald 1976, p. 61, note 493; see also Abdy's contribution in this volume. On the topic of old coinage recirculation instead of new coins being supplied, see Burnett 1987, pp. 92-93 and Howgego 1990, pp. 11-15; on the survival of bronze Greek coins in Roman provincial currency, see Harl 1996, pp. 106-117.

pieces look very worn and under-weight and probably all the other specimens which one would expect to gather from excavations were withdrawn by the civic authorities after long-lasting circulation, perhaps in order to recast them and recycle the metal alloy; this could possibly have occurred when the mint resumed striking coins under Trajan. If this assumption is correct, then we should argue that most of the coins circulating within *Nicopolis* territory were called in, whereas those already taken out of the city could hardly be entirely recollected; in fact it can be observed that more Augustan coins, though still in very small quantities, come from outer archaeological sites than from *Nicopolis* itself (where the withdrawal measure might have enjoyed more efficacy), as 10 more specimens are known from excavations in the Arta and in the Ioannina Districts, especially from ancient Dodona,⁽²¹⁾ against only 4 bronzes from the city.⁽²²⁾

As I have already pointed out, the Augustan *assaria* remained in circulation for such long time because the mint was no longer allowed to strike brand new coins under the Flavians; it follows that there likely was a shortage of local small change supply during the second half of the 1st century AD and people needed to replace it with other currencies. This figure would explain the surprising high percentage of halved bronze coins found at the site. There are 29 of them (mostly very worn and not clearly identifiable), probably 22 Roman imperial and 7 Roman provincial coins; this phenomenon is actually attested by 33% of the whole bronze currency not minted by the city, whereas not one intentionally broken *Nicopolis* coin is known yet. Among the cut specimens almost exclusively Augustan and Julio-Claudian *asses* can be identified,⁽²³⁾ and among the Roman provincial halved specimens it is possible to recognize two Augustan bronzes, one from Thessalonica (*RPC*1, 1557-1561) and the other of the so-called CA Coinage of Asia (*RPC*1, 1138-1144), and a Claudius coin of Patras (*RPC*1, 1256; Fig. 6). Overall one can state that the halved bronze coins of the site belong mostly to the first half of the 1st century AD and that they were possibly cut soon after that date. Therefore, as well as the halved Tiberian *asses* were reutilised as small denominations along the northern Rhine border to provide new small change (and consequently Nero resumed striking *semisses*),⁽²⁴⁾ bronze coins in *Nicopolis* could be cut to produce new smaller denomination pieces (*assaria* or their fractions) and satisfy the everyday need for fractions sup-

ply. This actually looks like a local need, because it is not attested elsewhere and, for instance, in the excavations of the Roman colony of Butrint in Epirus only very few halved specimens have been recovered in a much more abundant sample of coins;⁽²⁵⁾ only further coin finds in the region could offer a clearer figure about this topic. So we can state that people in *Nicopolis* used to halve bronze coins of other mints in order to adapt them to the civic monetary system or to the local pattern of currency.

This prompts two kinds of possible conclusions: firstly, even coins of other provincial mints could be reused and spent within the city for everyday transactions in case of actual necessity;⁽²⁶⁾ secondly, as far as can be argued from the sample of finds we are able to consider, no more coins were cut in the 2nd century, so this custom was abandoned as soon as the mint restarted to strike. Further thoughts are also possible on this topic. Only bronzes not issued in *Nicopolis* were halved in order to make fresh small change out of other currencies and plug a gap in local circulation. But was such choice based only on economical or also on cultural reasons? Why were local large or medium bronzes not halved to produce new *assaria* or fractions as well? It is well-known that Greek and Asia Minor cities used to compete between each other to gain prestige through civic coinage, but recent studies have also demonstrated that in the Eastern provinces inscriptions and coin legends could refer to western Roman denominations as if they were products of a foreign power (Burnett 2005, pp. 173-78); perhaps a similar claim to cultural identity could lead people in *Nicopolis* to preserve the integrity of their own coins.

DENOMINATIONS

But how much was a *Nicopolis* bronze actually worth? There is very little evidence to answer this question. Even if the city was composed of a mixed community of Greek and Roman people, the institutions and both the spoken and written official language (on inscriptions as well as on coins) were definitely Greek; it follows that the monetary and metrological system should be Greek too. This assumption would suggest to think that Greek rather than Roman denominations were used (i.e. *assaria* instead of *asses*), but does not help understand which kind of system was adopted, whether based on a division by Roman units ($\frac{1}{2}$ =*semis*, 1=*as*, 2=*dupondius* and 4=*sestertius*) or even “ir-

(21) Two coins come from Megalo Gardiki (Ioannina), nos 28-29; I thank Georgia Pliakou for giving me this information taken from her unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Thessaloniki). Four more unpublished specimens are in the collections in the Archaeological Museums of Arta and Ioannina. On the other Augustan coins found in Dodona and in Arta, see Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 68-69, nos 10γ, 26δ, 27στ, 32.

(22) See Calomino 2011b, pp. 307-309. I found one from the *odeion*, one from the *stadium* and one in the old *Nicopolis* Museum exhibition; a fourth one coming from the Memorial monument of Octavian will be published by K. Zachos in the archaeological reports (I thank Yannis Stoyas - Numismatic Museum of Athens - for this information).

(23) It is possible to identify *asses* by the Augustan triumviri, Tiberius (*RIC* 81), Caligula (*RIC* 58) and Claudius.

(24) Buttrey 1972, pp. 42-47.

(25) For this information I warmly thank Richard Abdy and Sam Moorhead, who are studying and publishing the whole numismatic material found in Butrint on behalf of the British Museum and the Butrint Foundation; see again Abdy's contribution in this volume and Moorhead, Gjonecaj, Abdy 2007. Some other cases of cut bronze provincial coins in the East were reported in Leonard 1993, pp. 364-70.

(26) It follows that, even if foreign coins were supposed to be changed into the local currency, some pieces could anyway escape moneychangers' control and be currently accepted in everyday transactions. This figure was already shown by the study of countermarks on roman provincial coins, especially in Asia Minor; see Howgego 1985, pp. 32-37; Howgego 1990, p. 12.

regular” units (for instance 1 and $\frac{1}{2}$, 3 or 6 *assarìa*), like in other provincial mints of the Greek world.⁽²⁷⁾

The only possible starting point on which we could base our thoughts is to be found at the very end of the civic coinage, as the marked Gallienus’ issues offer a certain reference, even if too late. One should logically reckon that marks were adopted in order to change (i.e. to increase) the earlier value of the coins, otherwise such measures would not have been required;⁽²⁸⁾ so they were likely supposed to double in value the current 3rd century denominations by converting 2 and 4 *assarìa* bronzes (in use at least from Septimius Severus to Valerianus and Gallienus) into 4 and 8 *assarìa* pieces respectively (Figs 12-13). These already represent “anomalous” denominations, since the former correspond to the Roman *sestertius*, whereas the latter only finds reference in double *sestertii*, which were struck in Rome by Trajan Decius for a very short time and then partly resumed by Postumus and by very rare Gallienus issues.⁽²⁹⁾ The inaugural Augustan monetary system was nevertheless based on a completely different pattern, as no fewer than three denominations existed, namely the very frequent *assarion* and extremely rare fractions and multiples, possibly $\frac{1}{2}$ *assarion* and 4 *assarìa* (or also $\frac{1}{3}$ *assarion* and 3 *assarìa*); every possible assumption about the evolution of the system from Augustus to Gallienus is merely hypothetical.

The 2nd century AD production still included very rare multiples, but the scale of the lower denominations remarkably increased, probably in order to deal with the lack of loose change that had already caused troubles in earlier times. This figure still persisted under the Antonines, but the system became much more complex after the introduction of two more denominations, a smaller fraction and an intermediate multiple (maybe a 2 *assarìa* bronze), besides the extraordinary silver issues. The evolution of the system between the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd entailed the end of small fractions output and a remarkable decrease of the one *assarion* coinage (Calomino 2011b, pp. 288-293); this change was definitely due to inflation, that made smaller denominations valueless and forced the mint to increase the medium and large denominations supply in order to raise the actual purchasing power of local bronze currency.⁽³⁰⁾

COINAGE AND CIVIC IDENTITY: NICOPOLIS AS A GRECO-ROMAN COMMUNITY

If reconsidering literary and epigraphic sources has led scholars to give more and more credit to the theory that *Nicopolis* was a *civitas foederata* and a “double” community, new thoughts on the coinage cannot but confirm such a view. Many features actually display the growing impor-

tance not only of the Greek, but also of the Roman instances on the civic coins (Calomino 2011b, pp. 335-342).

The Hellenic nature of the coinage is surely more relevant. First and foremost, the legends are exclusively Greek, as are the great majority of the inscriptions found at the site; this obviously confirms that the ethnic core of the population was local and the synoecism process had achieved the Augustan goal.

The coin type repertory also offers one of the richest displays of Greek divinities of the whole provincial production. Not only the Olympic pantheon is fully represented (not a single god is neglected, from Zeus to Poseidon and from Dionysus to Hercules; Figs 14-15), but “minor” variants of a single cult are also attested (such as Artemis *Laphria*, *Ephesia* and probably *Kelkaia*), besides exceptional local variants of Asclepius as *Phinaios* and of Apollo as *Leukates* (Fig. 16) and *Aktios* (Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 46-50).

Greek institutions are hardly ever attested, but a single exception is really remarkable; the *Hestia Boule* type actually is a *unicum* which depicts on 3rd century coins (under Trebonianus Gallus and Valerian) the personification (a female goddess on throne, guardian of the public hearth; Fig. 17) of the local council, the logical equivalent of the Roman senate (Oikonomidou 1976).

Even more representative of the Hellenic civic identity is the personification of the city itself, which appears both on “pseudo-autonomous” (i.e. without imperial portrait, Figs 18-19) and on regular issues (Figs 24-25). The bust of *Nicopolis* is a *unicum* type as well, which originally combines the “type parlant” Nike with the traditional “town type”, adding the wings to the turreted bust of Tyche. This type is equally important as it occurs on the whole three centuries production and more and more frequently in several issues and different denominations.⁽³¹⁾

Not surprisingly, the most frequent reverse type of “pseudo-autonomous” issues is another local patron goddess, whose origins are to be found in the IV century BC silver coins of *Anaktorion*, in Acarnania, where the original Actian Games took place (*BMC Corinth*, n. 6, tav XXXI. See also Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 26, 41). On *Nicopolis* coins she is the personification of the new games, as she sits on throne with a long sceptre and a prize-vase (Fig. 18).

The last (but not certainly least) Greek feature of the coinage lies in the most representative and frequent agonistic type, the wreath of reeds, that was awarded to the winners of the festivals competitions. The shape is really distinctive, as it cannot be confused with laurel, olive and oak wreaths, thus becoming a symbol of immediate recognition of the city (Fig. 20). Even without the inscribed letter A, it offers definite reference to *Nicopolis*, as much as it also appears very under-sized in the field of some Severan issues and

(27) See for instance *Aegium*, Thessaly, Argos and the Magnetes coinage in Roman Greece; Johnston 2007, pp. 220-221.

(28) About this topic see Johnston 2007, p. 232.

(29) See Yonge 1979, p. 50, against *RIC* 5.1, pp. 35, 164, note 2.

(30) About this topic see Calomino 2008.

(31) See also Calomino 2010a.

actually works as a mint mark (Figs 11, 21); since the mark occurred when *Nicopolis* probably struck in cooperation with Corcyra, one could even argue that it was conceived in order to distinguish each mint's issue from one another or rather to emphasise the civic pride of the Epirotan capital against its ally cum rival workshop.

On the other hand, the Roman cultural contribution to the *Nicopolis* civic identity on coins is less pre-eminent but not less significant.

Possible reference to the imperial rule and its ideological baggage are extremely rare. Military types are obviously more connected to the central mint model than the others, so marine or naval symbols such as the dolphin on trident (*RPC1*, 1367), the aplustre (*RPC1*, 1366) and the galley ram (Calomino 2011b, pp. 25, 27-28, 31, 47, 65, 79, 99, 103) obviously referred to the Actium victory and to the memorial monument on the Michalitsi hill. Echoes of imperial policy only exceptionally occur on coinage, as on the very "personalised" Neronian issues. Some Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus coins offer the best (and by far only) evidence of the celebration of Roman Imperial military events, apart from Actium. Very scanty, small size and poor quality bronzes actually commemorated the capture of Armenia,⁽³²⁾ both with legends (of which only [...]PM can be surely read) and with types (captive under trophy, Nike standing and Nike crowning a trophy; Fig. 22), which resemble the model of contemporary *denarii* struck at Rome and in Mesopotamia (*RIC3*, nos 78-86 (Marcus Aurelius) and 498-506 (Lucius Verus); *RPC4*, nos 6495, 8031, 8035, 8360), besides some *tetradrachmae* struck by Alexandria of Egypt (*RPC4*, nos 14116, 14177, 14501-3, 16199).

The coin type repertory is hardly influenced by the Roman iconographic tradition. A single exception, portraying the emperor on reverse, deserves some attention; it is an "ad-ventus type", depicting the emperor's triumphal arrival on horse with raised hand (Fig. 23). It occurred from the Severan to the Philip coinage (for instance, Calomino 2011b, nos 290, 338, 348, 429-431, 470, 487, 563), not very frequently but exclusively on the lower and smaller denominations (probably 3rd century one *assarion* bronzes). This figure is quite contradictory, because the introduction of such type in the mint repertory looks like a "sign of power", but relegating the emperor to the smallest fractions was not the best proof of devotion to the Roman rule. One can assume it was just a coincidence and likely served as a means of distinction among different denominations, but, recalling what was said about the possibility that Roman instances were perceived as signs of foreign power, we cannot help but think that such ambiguity reflected a mediation between opposite views.

Whether people in *Nicopolis* felt much devotion to the emperor or not, they surely worshipped the founder Augustus almost as a god. They never referred to him as a divinised emperor (and this should possibly be a Roman rather than

a Greek instance), but they systematically commemorated him during the 2nd and the 3rd centuries AD on posthumous issues bearing his portrait (without radiated crown) and the legends KTICMA CEBACTOY and KTICTHC AYTOYCTOC, again "Augustus' foundation" and "founder Augustus" (Figs 24-25).⁽³³⁾ This commemorative production finds no comparison in Roman Provincial coinage and represents the most original form of devotion to the official authority of the whole civic production; moreover, the Augustan posthumous portraits closely resemble those of the living emperors under which these coins were issued (Kraay 1976, p. 241), probably in order to implicitly associate them to the founder's image and legitimate their authority more as "natural heirs" than as mere successors (Calomino 2011b, pp. 339-342).

ABBREVIATIONS

BMC (1989)= Head B. V. (ed.). *Catalogue of Greek Coins. The British Museum Collection. Vol. 12, Corinth, Colonies of Corinth*. London.

Foundation and Destruction (2001)= Isager J. (ed.). *Nicopolis and Northwestern Greece. The Archaeological Evidence for the City Destructions, the Foundation of Nikopolis and the Synoecism (Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens 3)*. Athens.

Nicopolis 1 (1987)= Chrysos E. (ed.). *Proceedings of the First International Nicopolis Symposium (23-29 September 1984)*. Preveza.

Nicopolis 2 (2007)= Zachos K. L. (ed.). *Proceedings of the Second International Nicopolis Symposium (11-15 September 2002)*. Preveza.

RIC (1923-1994)= *The Roman Imperial Coinage*. Vols I-X. London.

RPC1 (1992)= Burnett A. M., Amandry M., Ripollès P. P. *Roman provincial coinage. Vol. 1. From the death of Caesar to the death of Vitellius (44 BC-AD 69)*. London-Paris.

RPC2 (1999)= Burnett A. M., Amandry M., Carradice I. *Roman provincial coinage. Vol. 2. From Vespasian to Domitian (AD 69-96)*. London-Paris.

RPC4 on-line= Howgego C., Heuchert V. *Roman Provincial Coinage. Vol. IV. The Antonines (AD 138-192)*. Oxford, <http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>

SNG (1943)= *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. The Royal Collection of coins and medals. Danish National Museum, vol. III, Greece: Thessaly to Aegean islands*. Copenhagen.

(32) See also Calomino 2010b.

(33) Kraay 1976, pp. 238-245.

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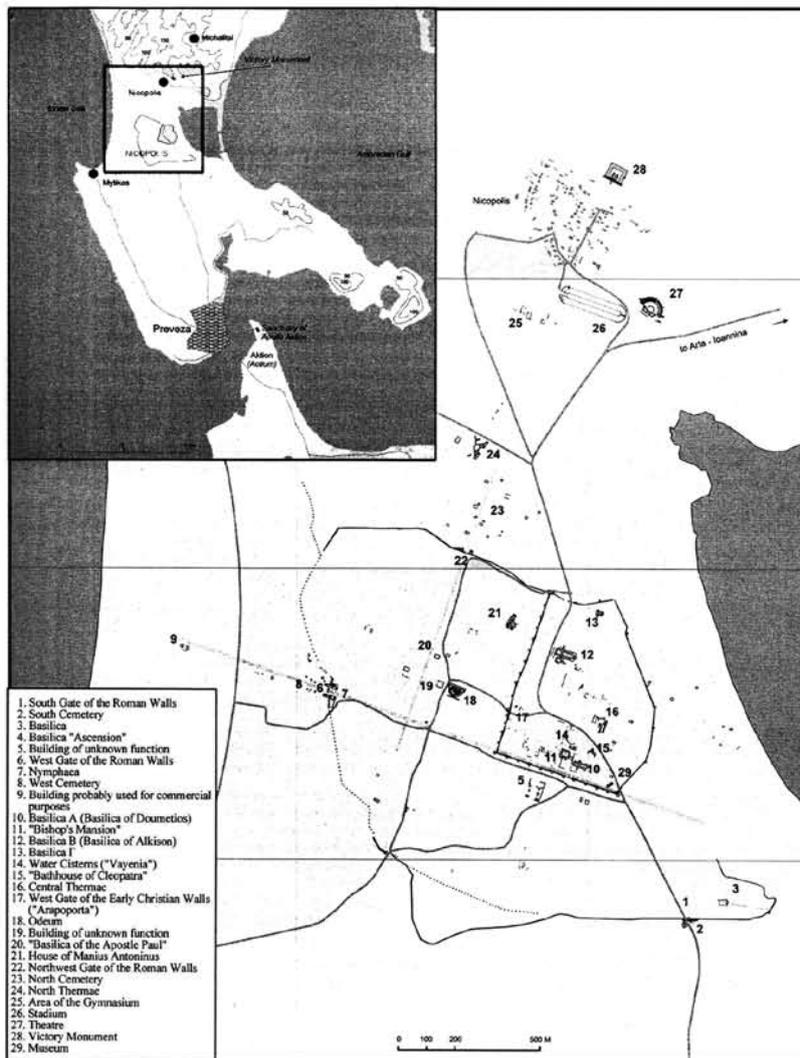
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- 11.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Septimius Severus (Calomino 2011b, n. 349), laureate and draped bust of Geta r. (ΑΥ ΚΑ CΕΠΤΙ ΓΕ[TAC]) / Tripod around which a snake is coiled up; in the field on the left, small wreath of reeds (ΙΕΡΑC ΝΕΙΚΟΠΟΛΕΩC); AD 193-211 (Milan - Raccolte Artistiche n. 6066, ae23, 6.24g, 3h)
- 12.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Gallienus as sole emperor (Calomino 2011b, n. 615), laureate head of Gallienus r. (ΠΟ ΛΙΚ ΓΑΛΛΙΗΝΟC CΕ) / Asclepius standing l., resting on rod, around which a snake is coiled up; in the field on the l., value mark Δ (ΙΕΡΑC ΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΙC-sic), AD 260-268 (Udine - Musei Civici n. 161-3, ae22.5, 9.69g, 1h)
- 13.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Gallienus as sole emperor, (Oikonomidou 1975, n. 41, pl. 60; Calomino 2011b, n. 611), laureate and draped bust of Gallienus r. (ΠΟΒ ΛΙΚ ΓΑΛΛΙΗΝΟC [ΑΥ?]) / Asclepius standing l., resting on rod, around which a snake is coiled up; in the field, value mark Η (ΙΕΡΑC ΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΙC-sic), AD 260-268 (Paris - Cabinet de Médailles, ae32, 18.15g, 10h)

- 14.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Septimius Severus (Oikonomidou 1975, n. 30, pl. 33; Calomino 2011b, n. 296), laureate and draped bust of Caracalla r. (M AY AN[TONINEIN]ON) / Zeus seated l. on throne with long sceptre; before, altar (NEIKOΠOΛEΩC); AD 193-211 (Berlin - Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett, ae25, 6.77g, 3h)
- 15.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Philip the Arab (Calomino 2011b, n. 491), radiate head of Philip r. (AYT M IOY ΦIAΠΠIOC CEB) / helmeted Athena standing l. with spear, resting on shield (IEPAC NEIKOΠOΛEΩC), AD 244-249 (Turin - Medagliere dell'Armeria Reale n. 20701, ae25, 6.89g, 8h)
- 16.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Trajan (Oikonomidou 1975, n. 21, pl. 13; Calomino 2011b, n. 21), laureate head of Trajan r. (AYTO TPAINOC CΩTHP ΠOΛEΩC) / Apollo *Leukates* standing l. with bow and arrow (AΠOΛΛΩN / ΛEYKATHC), AD 98-117 (Berlin - Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett, ae23, 7.45g, 6h)
- 17.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Trebonianus Gallus (Oikonomidou 1975, n. 13, pl. 55; Calomino 2011b, n. 550), laureate and draped bust of Volusianus r. ([AK?] BI AΦ ΓAΛΛOC BE BOΛOYC[IANOC]) / *Hestia Boule* seated facing on throne, looking r. ([ECTIA] BOYΛHC); AD 251-253 (Athens - Numismatic Museum, Plakanida Hoard n. 24, ae25, 6.60g, 3h)
- 18.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, 2nd century AD (Calomino 2011b, n. 230A), turreted and winged bust of *Nicopolis* r. (IEPA N[IKOΠOΛIC]) / *Aktia* seated l. on throne with long sceptre and prize-vase (CEBACTOY [KTICMA]) (Venice - Museo Archeologico Nazionale n. 6134, ae25, 8.43g, 3h)
- 19.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, 2nd century AD (Calomino 2011b, n. 122), turreted and winged bust of *Nicopolis* r. (NIKOΠOΛIC IEPA) / Tyche standing l. with rudder and cornucopia (CEBACTOY K TICMA) (Athens - Alpha Bank Collection n. 4207, ae15, 2.50g, 1h)
- 20.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Antoninus Pius (Calomino 2011b, n. 164), laureate head of Antoninus Pius r. (AIAIOC ANTΩNEINOC) / A within wreath of reeds, AD 138-161 (Turin - Medagliere dell'Armeria Reale n. 20491, ae16, 4.07g, 6h)
- 21.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Septimius Severus (Calomino 2011b, n. 246), laureate head of Septimius Severus r. ([...]) / wreath of reeds within laurel wreath (unreadable or missing), AD 193-211 (Verona - Musei Civici n. 72511, ae23, 5.64, 1h)
- 22.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Marcus Aurelius (Calomino 2011b, n. 208), laureate head of Marcus Aurelius r. (AYP[HA ANTΩNINOC?]) / Nike standing l. and crowning a military trophy (unreadable or missing), AD 163-166 (Preveza - Archaeological Museum, *odeion* excavations n. 204, ae16, 3.79g, 12h)
- 23.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Septimius Severus (Calomino 2011b, n. 290), laureate and draped bust of Caracalla r. (A K M AY ANTΩNEINOC) / emperor riding r. with raised hand (NEIKOΠOΛEΩC); AD 193-211 (Venice - Museo Archeologico Nazionale n. 4446, ae22.5, 6.45g, 7h)
- 24.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Trajan (Calomino 2011b, n. 49), bare head of Augustus r. (KTICMA CEBACTOY) / turreted and winged bust of *Nicopolis* r. (IEPA NEIKOΠOΛIC), AD 98-117 (Venice - Museo Archeologico Nazionale n. 3909, ae18, 3.94g, 6h)
- 25.- Bronze coin of *Nicopolis*, time of Antoninus Pius (Calomino 2011b, n. 171), laureate head of Augustus r. (KTICMA CEBACTOY) / turreted and winged bust of *Nicopolis* r. (IEPA NIKOΠOΛIC), AD 138-161 (Turin - Medagliere dell'Armeria Reale n. 20433, ae26.5, g11.68, 3h)

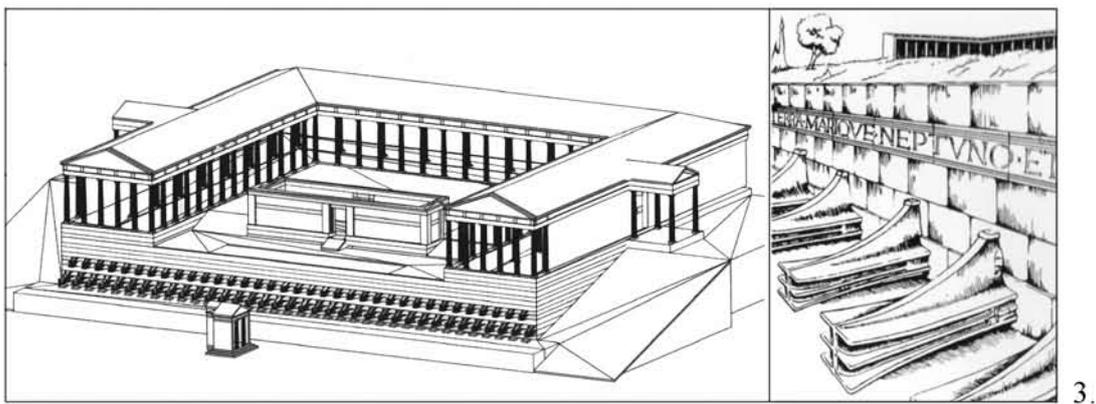
PLATES



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