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Monetary series “PROVINCIA DACIA” in the Roman coinage¹

PROVINCIA DACIA was a local coinage in the middle and lower Danube area during the 3rd century AD. It mainly circulated in the provinces of Dacia and Pannonia, as suggested by site finds. A close analogy can be established with another roughly contemporary bronze coinage P M S COL VIM (Provinciae Moesiae Superioris Colonia Viminacium), which was issued at Viminacium in Moesia Superior between AD 239 and 257. The research of C. Găzdac suggests that the main role of these coins was to supply the army². The PROVINCIA DACIA coin series can therefore be closely linked with the military and their need for bronze coinage in Dacia. This hypothesis is supported by site finds from the territory of this province. For example, at the militarised site of Porolissum, 64% of the PROVINCIA DACIA coins minted during the reign of Philip I were retrieved from the territory of the fort³.

The legend is inscribed with the emperor's name: IMP(erator) M(arcus) IVL(ius) PHILIPPVS AVG(ustus). The military theme of the reverse is in line with the intended audience for this coinage. It depicts the province of Dacia standing left, between an eagle and a lion. The eagle with a wreath in its beak and the lion are symbols of the legions permanently garrisoned in Dacia, the legio V Macedonica from Potaissa, and the legio XIII Gemina from Apulum. Moreover, the olive branch, the curved Dacian sword (phlax), and the standard inscribed D(acia)

¹ This article is the effect of the realization of the research project no. 2016/B/HS3/02923 financed by the National Science Centre, Poland.

² Cristian Găzdac, “Centre and periphery: The Roman monetary policy regarding the Lower Danube provinces at the mid 3rd century AD”, *Centru Si Periferie: Lucrarile Colocviului National, Bistria 23–25 Aprilie 2004* (2004): 71–73.

³ Cristian Găzdac, Agnes Alföldy-Găzdac, “The coinage «PROVINCIA DACIA» – a coinage for one Province only (AD. 246–257)?”, *Acta Musei Napocensis* 39 (2002–2003): 247–258.

F(elix) are also of a military character. Finally, the legend on the reverse is inscribed *PROVINCIA DACIA* (figure 1).



Figure 1. Valerianus, AE 28, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, Dacia, av. *IMP VALERIANVS P P AVG*, rv. *PROVINCIA DACIA*. Photo from the author's archive

The importance of this coin, struck in the first year of the local era, is suggested by the high volume of this coinage in Dacia during the reign of Philip I (estimated by C. Găzdac at almost 40%⁴), and by its intended audience.

The mint in the Roman province of Dacia struck coins very similar to those issued at Viminacium. Through this similarity some scholars think that coins bearing the legend *PROVINCIA DACIA* were struck in the mint of Viminacium. Because of the variations of style, the spreading pattern as well as the differences in the local dating in accordance to the well-known imperial chronology, the coins are recently assumed to have been minted somewhere in the province of Dacia itself. This mint was probably erected with the help from personnel from the Viminacium mint. The most logical choice for its location seems to be the town of Sarmizegetusa. The Roman colony Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa was built during the reign of Traian about 40 km far from the old Dacian capital called Sarmizegetusa. It has grown into very important Roman center and become the headquarters of the *concilium Daciarum trium*, the government of the three parts of Roman Dacia (Dacia Porolissenis, Dacia Superior and Dacia Malvensis). Another place that could have been probable location of the mint is the colony Aurelia Apulensis (Apulum – Alba Iulia). Apulum was one of the biggest Roman towns in Dacia and also the place where the *legio XIII Gemina* stationed. Today the remnants of these places are located in modern Romania.

⁴ Cristian Găzdac, *Monetary circulation in Dacia and the provinces from the Middle and Lower Danube from Trajan to Constantine I (AD 106–337)* (Cluj-Napoca: Nereamia Napoca, 2002), 431.

The coinage of PROVINCIA DACIA started during the reign of the emperor Philip I (244–249). The formation of the Roman colony Viminacium along with its right to strike coins was actually the reason for the introduction of coinage at Viminacium. However Sarmizegetusa as well as Apulum had already the status of colony, namely the motive for striking this type of coins in Dacia must have been a different one.

The reasons for minting were connected with the military actions against the Carpi⁵. The mint of Dacia as well as the one at Viminacium must have been a military one, responsible for the production of small change made of copper and brass. The mint of Dacia probably did not issued silver antoniniani as it was at Viminacium but only copper and brass asses, dupondii and sestertii. The coins minted there are easy to recognise. On the reverse appears, a woman, probably the personification of the province of Dacia. She is usually holding 1 or 2 army standards and sometimes a typical Dacian sword, the phalx. On her left side stands an eagle with spread wings and a wreath in his beak. The eagle was the emblem of the legio V Macedonica which garrisoned at Potaissa (today Turda, Romania) approximately from 166 until 274⁶. On her right side stands a lion which was the emblem of the legio XIII Gemina which stationed at Apulum (today Alba Iulia). On the reverse always appears the legend PROVINCIA DACIA. In exergue is inscribed the year of minting under the formula AN (ANNO) I–XI. The year I stands for the first year after the introduction of coinage and covered the period of the first day of the beginning of the coinage until the same date in the following year. The year I can thus be indicated as 246/247. The year II as 247/248 and so on. Also in the case of Dacia the precise date of the beginning of the local year is unknown⁷. Setting the 1st of January as the starting date of the local year gives many problems with the known chronology of the emperors. Also April the 1st, the date of the founding of the city of Rome, gives to many problems with this chronology. It seems likely that the beginning of the local year in Dacia also started somewhere between July the 1st and August the 1st as it did at Viminacium. It is highly possible that also this mint did not hold strict control over this date. The new local year on the coins could have been used a little bit later or a little sooner. It is also highly probable that old reverse dies could have been used in combination with newer obverse dies of successive emperors.

⁵ Cristian Găzdac, "Aspects of coin circulation in Roman Dacia", in *Roman Coins outsider the Empire. Ways and Phases, Contexts and Functions*, eds. A. Bursche, R. Ciołek, R. Wolters, *Proceedings of the ESF/SCH Exploratory Workshop Radziwiłł Palace, Nieborów (Poland) 3–6 September 2005* (Wetteren: Moneta, 2008a): 288.

⁶ Mariana Pişlaru, *The Roman Coins from Potaissa legionary fortress and ancient town* (Publicațiile Institutului de Studii Clasice 11), (Cluj-Napoca: Mega Publishing House, 2009).

⁷ Ferenc Martin, *Kolonialprägungen aus Moesia Superior und Dacia* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992): 7–9; Găzdac, Alföldy-Găzdac, "The coinage «PROVINCIA DACIA»", 248–249.

According to the Roman numerals of the local year the mint of Dacia produced coins made of copper and brass until the local year XI (256/257)⁸.

ANNO	Period
I	july 246–july 247
II	july 247–july 248
III	july 248–july 249
IIII	july 249–july 250
V	july 250–july 251
VI	july 251–july 252
VII	july 252–july 253
VIII	july 253–july 254
VIIII	july 254–july 255
X	july 255–july 256
XI	july 256–july 257

In 246 actions commenced against the Carpi who had invaded the province of Dacia from the east. Because of these operations the province was filled with soldiers. To provide them enough of small change a mint was erected under the emperor Philip; this coinage was destined to the army. The above – mentioned actions were terminated in 248 but probably not to the satisfaction of the army. Philip did strike coins with the inscription VICTORIA CARPICA⁹ however the reality was that under Philip substantial parts of Dacia were lost. Around this time the eastern limes Transalutanus was given up and large parts of today Transylvania were abandoned by the Romans. In a small Roman auxiliary camp with vicus in today Ilisua, northern Transylvania, the coin finds end abruptly with coins of the emperor Philip¹⁰. The unsatisfying situation in Dacia and along the Danube limes were the reason for the rise of usurpers as Pacatian and maybe Silbannacus¹¹. When Decius was sent there to restore the order he was proclaimed emperor by the army. These events were the end of the reign of Philip.

⁸ Cristian Găzdac, Agnes Alföldy-Găzdac, “The management of a monetary crisis? The “P M S COL VIM” and “PROVINCIA DACIA” coinages in the Roman monetary policy of the 3rd century AD”, *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 116/117 (2008): 139.

⁹ Harold Mattingly, Edward Sydenham, Carol Sutherland, Vivian Humphrey, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. IV (London: Spink and son ltd, 1949), 65.

¹⁰ Cristian Găzdac, Agnes Alföldy-Găzdac, “The Roman law against counterfeiting between theory and practice: the case of Roman Dacia”, *Acta Musei Napocensis* 38 (2001): 140.

¹¹ Marcus Peter, “Ein Antoninian des Pacatianus aus Kaiseraugst”, *Schweizer Münzblätter* 45, no. 179/180 (1995): 33–35.

The dupondii bear a portrait with the emperor wearing a radiate crown¹². The sestertii in their turn are bigger and heavier and the emperor is portrayed with laurel wreath.

Used notations of the local year:

AN I, used from July 246 until July 247.

AN II, used from July 247 until July 248.

AN III, used from July 248 until July 249.

Obverse variations used:

A: IMP M IVL PHILIPPVS AVG

Reverse variations used:

a: PROV – INCIA DACIA

b: PROVINCIA DACIA

c: PROVI – NCIA DA – CIA

d: PROVI – NCI – A – DACIA

e: PRO – VINCIA DACIA

f: PROV – INCI – A DACIA

g: PROV – INCIA DA – CIA

h: PROVINCI – A D – ACIA

i: PROV – INC – IA D – ACIA

The coins of Otacilia Severa issued in Dacia were sestertii¹³. They depict a bust with a diadem.

Used notations of the local year:

AN I, used from July 246 until July 247.

AN II, used from July 247 until July 248.

AN III, used from July 248 until July 249.

Obverse variations used:

A: MARCIA OTACI – LIA SEVERA AVG

B: MARCIA OTACIL – IA SEVERA AVG

Reverse variations used:

a: PROV – INCIA DACIA

b: PROVI – NCIA DA – CIA

c: PROVINCIA DACIA

¹² Dupondius ANNO I – 246/247 vide Friedrich Imhoof-Blumer, Behrendt Pick, Kurt Regling, Friedrich Münzer, Max Lebrecht Strack, Die Antiken münzen Nord-Griechenlands, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1898), 5; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 2.55.1; Ivan Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins And Their Values, Volume I: Dacia, Moesia Superior, Moesia Inferior (Burgas : Adicom, 2005), 8.

¹³ Sestertius ANNO I – 246/247 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 2.69.2.

At the time when Dacian mint began to strike coins Philip II was still a Caesar. So on the coins struck in the local year I and II he is still named Caesar. It is generally accepted that he was elevated to the rank of Augustus by his father around August 247 so the coins from the local year II which show him as Caesar, must have been struck around the end of July or the beginning of August 247. After that the mint must have seized striking coins in his name. No specimens exist with the local year II showing him as Augustus. So the first coinage in his name showing him as Augustus must have commenced in the local year III, that is as late as July 248.

The asses¹⁴ have a portrait with a laurel wreath while the dupondii have a portrait with the emperor wearing a radiate crown. The difference in weight between asses and dupondii is sometimes very small. Their difference in value probably came forth from the materials used. The sestertii are bigger and heavier and the emperor is portrayed with laurel wreath.

Used notations of the local year:

AN I, used from July 246 until July 247.

AN II, used from July 247 until July 248.

AN III, used from July 248 until July 249.

Obverse variations used:

A: M IVL PHILIPPVS CAES

Reverse variations used:

a: PROV – INCIA DA – CIA

b: PROVINCIA DACIA

c: PROV – INCIA DACIA

The end of the reign of Philip was very problematic. In the east Iotapian revolted against Philip's brother, Julius Priscus and in Moesia Superior and probably in Dacia Severianus, his brother in law also revolted against him. In Moesia Superior the usurper Pacatian held the power for a short while. When Decius was sent over there to restore the discipline the area turned out to be a wasps nest. Soon after he arrived on the Danube frontier the soldiers proclaimed him emperor. However it looks like his elevation was not approved by all the legions stationed at the Danube frontier. When Decius went on his way to Rome to confront Philip a certain Censorinus had to strike down a revolt at Viminacium. A part of the army over there refused to strip the ornaments of the *hostes publici*, public enemies, from their legionary standards. These *hostes publici* must have been Philip and his son Philip II. After the victory over Philip, Decius must have fought a war in Dacia and along the Danube. He clearly understood that this region was a breeding ground of disgruntled legions and had to satisfy and calm down the soldiers by means of

¹⁴ As ANNO I – 246/247 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen, 28; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 2.82.1; Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins, 29.

military successes and attention for the region. On an inscription found at Apulum (Dacia) Decius is called restitutor Daciarum, restorer of Dacia, and he accepted the title Dacicus Maximus, the greatest conqueror of the Dacians. On his coins he paid homage to the provinces of Pannonia and Dacia and to the genius of the legions of Ilyricum. In a battle against the Goths near Abritus he eventually lost his life together with his son Herennius Etruscus. The mint of Dacia did not strike as many coins in the name of Decius and his family as did the mint of Viminacium. The peak of the coinage in the province of Dacia lay in the reign of the emperor Philip.

The coins of Traian Decius from Dacia were sestertii¹⁵. On the sestertii the emperor is depicted with laurel wreath. Used notations of the local year: AN IIII, used from august/september 249 until july 250. AN V, used from july 250 until may/june 251. Obverse variations used: A: IMP TRAIANVS DECIVS AVG B: IMP TRAIANVS DECIOS AVG Reverse variations used: a: PROVINC – IAD – ACIA b: PROVIN – C – IA DACIA c: PROVI – NC – IAD – ACIA

The coins of Herennia Etruscilla from Dacia were sestertii¹⁶. The sestertii in the name of Herennia Etruscilla show a bust wearing a diadem.

Used notations of the local year:

AN IIII, used from august/september 249 until july 250.

AN V, used from july 250 until may/june 251.

Obverse variations used:

A: HER ETRVSCILLA AVG

Reverse variations used:

a: PROV – INC – IADACIA

b: PROVIN – C – IA DACIA

The coins of Herennius Etruscus from Dacia were sestertii¹⁷. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath.

Used notations of the local year:

AN V, used from july 250 until may/june 251.

Obverse variations used:

A: Q H ETR MES DEC CAES

¹⁵ Sestertius ANNO IIII – 249/250 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen, 36; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 3.51.2; Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins, 39.

¹⁶ Sestertius ANNO IIII – 249/250 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen, 42; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 3.58.3; Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins, 49.

¹⁷ Sestertius ANNO V – 250/251 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen, 46; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 3.63.3; Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins, 56.

Reverse variations used:

a: PROVI – N – CIA DACIA

b: PROVIN – CIA DACIA

The coins of Hostilian from Dacia were sestertii¹⁸. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath.

Used notations of the local year:

AN V, used from July 250 until May/June 251.

Obverse variations used:

A: C VAI HOST M QVINTVS C

Reverse variations used:

a: PROVIN – C – IA DACIA

Trebonianus Gallus came to power after Traian Decius and his son Herennius Etruscus were killed in the war against the Goths near Abritus. The events surrounding their deaths are not exactly known but there are two versions. One version is that Gallus had set a trap and betrayed Decius to the Goths in order to take over the power. Another version is that Gallus saved as much as he could after the battle with the Goths as a result of which he was proclaimed emperor by the military troops. Gallus wanted to depart for Rome as soon as possible to legitimize his position by the Senate. A quick peace was concluded with the Goths in which Gallus promised them large sums of money if they gave up their raids into Roman territory. This peace must have been unsatisfactory in the eyes of some of the legions, especially those in Dacia. The Dacian mint struck only coins in the name of Gallus in the local year V. Coins from the local year VI and VII are not known in his name. The mint of Viminacium struck more coins in his name but here the soldiers must have also become more and more disgruntled. When Aemilian seized the power in the Balkan area he must have had little difficulty to win the legions over to his cause. Soon the mints of Dacia and the mint at Viminacium started to strike coins in his name.

The coins of Trebonianus Gallus from Dacia were sestertii¹⁹. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath. Used notations of the local year: AN V, used from June/July 251 until July 251. Obverse variations used: A: IMP C VIBIO TREBON GALLO AVG B: IMP CAE C VIB TREB GALLVS AVG Reverse variations used: a: PROVI – N – CIA DACIA b: PROVI – NCIA DACIA

¹⁸ Sestertius ANNO V – 250/251 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen, 48; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 4.52 var.; Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins, 58.

¹⁹ Sestertius ANNO V – 250/251 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, Die Antiken münzen, 50; Martin, Kolonialprägungen, 5.53.1; Varbanov, Greek Imperial Coins, 68.

The coins of Volusian from Dacia were sestertii²⁰. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath. Used notations of the local year: AN V, used from July 251 until August 251. Obverse text variations used: A: IMP C C VIB VOLVSIANVS AVG Reverse text variations used: a: PROVINCIA DACIA b: PROVIN – CIA DACIA

Only coins struck in the Dacian local year V are known in the name of Trebonianus Gallus and his son Volusian. One should notice that Martin does mention a sestertius in the name of Volusian struck in the year VI. Supposedly coins in the name of Aemilian exist from the local year VII. Coins in the name of Aemilian with the local year VIII from the mint of Dacia are not that rare. His grasp for power must have had the approval of the legions in Dacia and after his successes against the Goths there must have been renewed necessity for money.

The coins of Aemilian from Dacia were sestertii²¹. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath. Used notations of the local year: AN VIII, used from July 253 until August/September 253. Obverse variations used: A: IMP C M AEMIL AEMILIANVS AVG Reverse variations used: a: PROVI – N – CIA DACIA b: PROVI – N – CIA DACI

After being proclaimed by the army Valerian must have won over the troops at Viminacium a bit sooner than the troops left in Dacia by Aemilian. These troops probably remained loyal to Aemilian but could do nothing against Valerian because Aemilian had taken the majority of the army with him on his march against Gallus and Volusian. The only thing they could do was continuing the coinage in Aemilian's name until the news of his defeat became known. During the local year VIII a coinage in the name of Valerian started which lasted until the local year XI. F. Martin²² mentions a sestertius in the name of Valerian struck in the year VII.

The coins of Valerian from Dacia were sestertii²³. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath. Used notations of the local year: AN VIII, used from July 253 until July 254. AN VIII, used from July 254 until July 255. AN X, used from July 255 until July 256. AN XI, used from July 256 until July 257. Obverse text variations used: A: IMP P LICI VALERIANVS AVG B: IMP VALERIANVS PF AVG C: IMP P L VALERIANVS AVG D: IMP P LIC VALERIANO AVG Reverse variations used: a: PROVI – N – CIA DACIA b: PROVIN – CIA DACIA

The Dacian coins of Gallienus were sestertii²⁴. The sestertii depict a bust with a laurel wreath. Used notations of the local year: AN VIII, used from July

²⁰ Sestertius ANNO V – 250/251 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, *Die Antiken münzen*, 53; Martin, *Kolonialprägungen*, 5.55 var.; Varbanov, *Greek Imperial Coins*, 70.

²¹ Sestertius ANNO VIII – 252/253 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, *Die Antiken münzen*, 57; Martin, *Kolonialprägungen*, 6.53.1; Varbanov, *Greek Imperial Coins*, 77.

²² Martin, *Kolonialprägungen*, 21.

²³ Sestertius ANNO VIII – 253/254 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, *Die Antiken münzen*, 60; Martin, *Kolonialprägungen*, 7.53.1.

²⁴ Sestertius ANNO VIII – 253/254 vide Imhoof-Blumer, Pick, Regling, Münzer, Strack, *Die Antiken münzen*, 66; Martin, *Kolonialprägungen*, 7.62.1; Varbanov, *Greek Imperial Coins*, 93.

253 until July 254. AN VIII, used from July 254 until July 255. AN X, used from July 255 until July 256. AN XI, used from July 256 until July 257. Obverse variations used: A: IMP GALLIENVS PIV AVG Reverse text variations used: a: PROVIN – CI – A DACIA b: PROVI – N – CIA DACIA c: PROVINC – IA – DACIA d: PROVI – . – D – ACIA

The coinage of “PROVINCIA DACIA” is a phenomenon that gives wide conceptual perspective. Precise dating and concrete iconographic pattern dedicated to specific economic situation in a particular area lead to the conclusion that the monetary series “PROVINCIA DACIA” are in fact a testament to real monetization of Dacia. Coins that originate from the cultural context with well documented place of provenance are the subject of research going far beyond iconographic, inscriptional studies as well as the analysis of punch marks. Establishing what was the role of coins in Roman society is of significant importance, especially if coins are one of the unquestionable achievements of ancient civilization.

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Monetary series “PROVINCIA DACIA” in the Roman coinage

Summary

Words and images are indispensable elements of ancient numismatics. In this context, words were not merely an inscription, they designate signs, symbols, images, all stamped in metal. Numismatic studies undertaken recently focused on coin finds of Roman Dacia²⁵ allow us to multi-faceted insight into the Dacian provincial coinage. The status changes of the province of Dacia reflect both the introduction and the disappearance of the so called monetary series “PROVINCIA DACIA” in accordance with the transformation of the Roman Imperium in the IIIrd century A.D. The main purpose of this paper is to present one of the questions of this wide problematic, that is bronze coinage with the legend “PROVINCIA DACIA”. PROVINCIA DACIA was a local coinage in the middle and lower Danube area during the 3rd century AD. The reasons for minting were connected with

²⁵ Viorica Suci, “Quelques considerations sur les trésors monétaires de la Dacie romaine”, in *Army and Urban Development in the Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire*, eds. H. Ciugudean, V. Moga (Alba Iulia: Muzeul Național al Unirii Alba Iulia, 2000), 323–332; Găzdac, *Monetary circulation in Dacia and the provinces*; Cristian Găzdac, Sorin Cociș, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Cluj-Napoca: Royal Numismatic Society, Cristian Găzdac, 2004); Cristian Găzdac, “The coinage and the Roman conquest of Dacia: a comparative study of the sites: ‘Ulpia Traiana, Porolissum, Carnuntum, Ovilava, Poetovio’”, in *Miscellanea numismatica antiquitatis: in honorem septagenarii magistri Virgilii Mihailescu-Bîrliba oblate*, eds. V. Spinei, L. Manteanu (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2008b), 68–80; Cristian Găzdac, Dan Isac, *The Roman Auxiliary Forts of SAMVM (Cășeu) and Gilău, Seria COINS FROM ROMAN SITES AND COLLECTIONS OF ROMAN COINS FROM ROMANIA. VOL. IV*, ed. C. Găzdac (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2007); Găzdac, “Aspects of coin circulation in Roman Dacia”.

the military actions against the Carpi. Precise dating and concrete iconographic pattern dedicated to specific economic situation in a particular area lead to the conclusion that the monetary series "PROVINCIA DACIA" are in fact a testament of real monetization of Dacia. Coins that originate from the cultural context with well documented place of provenance are the subject of research going far beyond iconographic or inscriptional studies as well as the analysis of punch marks.

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