

---

Szymon Jellonek 

Warszawa

---

## THE FOUNDATION SCENE ON ROMAN COLONIAL COINS FROM THE NEAR EAST IN THE 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY CE\*

---

**Abstract:** One of the most common iconographic motifs of Roman colonial coinage is the ‘foundation scene’. Colonies modelled on Rome were established according to the aratrum ritual, in imitation of the manner in which, according to myths, Romulus founded Rome. Veteran colonies, established between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, gladly exploited that motif to commemorate the colonial foundation and to manifest their bond with Rome. However, colonies set up under Septimius Severus and later were considered as purely titular foundations. Nevertheless, they also occasionally presented the foundation scene on civic coins. If they were not colonists, the question arises as to the message that such coins conveyed.

In this paper, the author makes an attempt to examine the foundation scene on Roman colonial coins from the Near East in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. The concepts of veteran and titular colonies are contrasted. It is noteworthy that while the colonies in northern Syria and Mesopotamia (except Rhesaena) never introduced the foundation scene on their coinages, the southern colonies (except Philippopolis) proudly manifested their connections with Rome. Eventually, the foundation scene disappeared from colonial coins of the Near East in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Roman Colonies; Provincial Coins; Near East

---

\* The presented research is financed by the National Science Centre of Poland, project 2018/29/N/ HS3/01502 “The Roman Colonial Coins as a Manifest of Cultural Identity 235–275 AD”.

## Introduction

The two predominant iconographic motifs of colonial coins are undoubtedly military insignia and the so-called foundation scene. *Aquilae*, *vexilla* and *signa* were presented on coins struck by thirty-seven Roman colonial mints between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.<sup>1</sup> However, military standards were also depicted on non-colonial coins from Asia Minor (Rebuffat 1997, 412). Conversely, the other motif, i.e. the foundation scene, was almost exclusively used by the colonies.<sup>2</sup> In fact, 34 colonial mints that struck coins between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE exploited that motif.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the design barely changed over 300 years. The composition featuring a priest/founder ploughing a furrow with a yoke of oxen usually occupied the entire space of the coin reverse. Sometimes, the military standards were presented in the background (e.g. Ptolemais – RPC I 4749–4750, etc.). However, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, some colonies located in the Near East started to combine the foundation scene with local motifs. The blend of typically Roman colonial myths with the local ones introduces a new syncretic attitude. In fact, sixteen out of twenty-six colonies in the Near East in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD struck coins featuring the foundation scene.<sup>4</sup> The geographical distinction is striking. The colonies of northern Syria and Mesopotamia (except Rhaesena) did not introduce the foundation scene on their coins, while those in Phoenicia and Judea (except Philippopolis) presented this motif (Pl. 1: 1). Despite the fact that the foundation scene is the most obvious motif of colonial coinage, it has not been hitherto fully examined. Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to reconsider its significance for Near Eastern coins of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

<sup>1</sup> Military signs on coins of the following colonies: Emerita, Colonia Patricia, Acci, Kartago Nova, Ilici, Caesaraugusta, Viminacium, Deultum, Patras, Cassandrea, Philippi, Apamea, Parium, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Cremna, Comama, Olbasa, Parlais, Germa, Alexandria Troas, Ninica, Mallus, Berytus, Heliopolis, Sidon, Tyre, Akko-Ptolemais, Caesarea Maritima, Neapolis, Aelia Capitolina, Damascus, Singara, Nisibis, Carrhae, Rhesaena, Tyana.

<sup>2</sup> The exceptions come from provincial issues of Assorus (RPC I 666) Tralles (RPC I 2649) and Alabanda (RPC IV.2 807 temp.).

<sup>3</sup> The foundation scene on colonial coins: Emerita, Lepida-Celsa, Caesaraugusta, Consabrum, Deultum, Patras, Sinope, Lampsakos, Parium, Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Cremna, Comama, Olbasa, Alexandria Troas, Ninica, Mallus, Berytus, Heliopolis, Sidon, Tyre, Caesarea ad Libanum, Ptolemais, Caesarea Maritima, Neapolis, Sebaste, Aelia Capitolina, Sebaste, Bostra, Petra, Rhesaena, Tyana, *Princeps Felix*.

<sup>4</sup> Mallus, Tyre, Sidon, Berytus, Heliopolis, Ptolemais, Tyana, Caesarea ad Libanum, Caesarea Maritima, Neapolis, Sebaste, Aelia Capitolina, Damascus, Bostra, Petra, Rhesaena.

The Roman colonies in the Near East constitute a puzzling phenomenon of Roman colonization. Apart from Berytus, Akko-Ptolemais, Caesarea Maritima and Aelia Capitolina, which had been established earlier, twenty-one colonies were founded in that part of the world starting from the Severan period. Generally, such late establishments are considered by the scholars as titular foundations (Watkins 1983, 321; Butcher 2003, 232; Millar 2006, 165; Andrade 2013, 319–321). The question of real or superficial colonization in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century is outside the scope of this paper. However, specific coin types (featuring military standards, a she-wolf, the foundation scene) seem to prove that some veterans could have settled in the late colonies, as E. Dąbrowa argues (2004a, 394–405; 2004b, 211–231; 2012, 31–42). Therefore, the iconographic motif commemorating the colonial foundation should be perceived at least as evidence of legal and cultural colonization.

Since the true nature of the late Roman colonies is hard to establish, Lasswell's communication model (Lasswell 1948: 37–51; Kopij 2017, 183–187) can be utilised here to present the relationship between the local authority and the colony's citizens. In such a model, the coins are the *medium*, while the inscription and the iconographic motif (in this case, the foundation scene) are the transmitted *message*. The local authority responsible for coinage is the *communicator*. Since the colonial coins circulated in a rather narrow area, the *receivers* are limited to the inhabitants of the colony. Because the veterans and their descendants resided in regular colonies, while it is believed that titular ones were predominantly inhabited by indigenous peoples, the *effect* for both of them is assumed to be divergent. Therefore, the regular and titular colonies shall be examined separately.

## Background

The so-called foundation type commemorates the ritual of ploughing the first furrow (*sulcus primigenius*) to mark the boundaries of the colony. According to ancient sources, the original *sulcus primigenius* was ploughed by Romulus on April 21, 753 BCE (Ovid. Fast. 4.806.; Plut. Rom. 11.1–3). The founder of Rome followed an Etruscan ritual (*ritus Etruscus*) by using a yoke of oxen and a bronze blade (*aratrum*) (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.88; Plut. Rom. 11; Tac. Ann. 12.24). Hence, the ceremony is also referred to by scholars as the *aratrum* ritual (Eckstein 1979, 85–97). Later, Roman colonies were founded in the same way (Varro. Ling. 5.143).

As it was mentioned before, the depiction of the *aratrum* ritual is commonly associated with colonial coins; however, for the first time,

such a motif appeared on the Republican *denarius serratus* in 83 BC (RRC 378/1c). Later, the same motif was occasionally presented on imperial coins (August – RIC<sup>2</sup> 272; 402; Vespasianus – RIC II 943–945; Trajan – RIC II 781; 567–568). Extraordinary *aurei* (RIC III 247), *sestertii* (RIC III 560, 616), *dupondii* (RIC III 629) and *assēs* (RIC III: 570) depicting a foundation scene were struck under Commodus. The megalomaniac emperor decided to re-establish Rome as his own colony named *Colonia Lucia Annia Commodiana* (Grant 1996, 74). The coins were struck to commemorate this resolute move. On some bronze imperial issues (RIC III 560, 570), the abbreviation COL L AN COM was added. On aurei, Commodus is presented as the Hercules, the Founder of Rome (HER ROM COND), driving a yoke of oxen. After Commodus' reign, the foundation scene disappeared from imperial coins, and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the *aratum* ritual was presented exclusively on colonial issues.

In the introduction, the existence of two universal types of colonial coinage was emphasized. Both were in use from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE until the end of colonial coinage in the third quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. It is important to highlight that the colonies constituted newly formed communities which had been transferred to distant lands already inhabited by local societies with long histories, traditions, rituals, myths, heroes, etc (Belayche 2009, 168). In response to that, the colonies acted as miniatures of Rome (Gell.NA 16. 13. 9; Howgego 2005, 15). Thus, in contrast to local *poleis*, which highlighted local sanctuaries, foundation myths and heroes on their coins, the colonial mints accentuated the bond with Rome to manifest their separate identity. Apart from the *aratum* ritual, which could be perceived as the foundation myth, and military symbols emphasizing the power of the Roman army, other popular motifs used by the colonies were the she-wolf (Dąbrowa 2004a, 479–483; Rissanen 2014, 338–340) and Marsyas, the symbol of liberty (Klimowsky 1982, 88–101; Butcher 2003, 232–233; Basso and Buonopane 2008, 139–159).

Furthermore, there are other aspects of the two predominant iconographic types used by the colonies. The military standards alluded to veterans who had settled in the colonies (Dąbrowa 2004a, 399; Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, 36), whereas the foundation scene commemorated the birth of the colony (Eckstein 1979, 90). Furthermore, scholars are eager to correlate foundation type emissions with *decennalia* or *centennalia* (Grant 1946, 291; Levick 1967, 36). While this indeed seems to be a very tempting explanation of the recurring motif, it may occasionally be misleading (e.g. Antioch – Jellonek 2018a, 106). Nonetheless, coins depicting the *aratum* ritual along

with military standards were the most common types of colonial coinage, albeit still struck occasionally (Filges 2015, 243–250).

First emissions depicting the *aratrum* ritual were struck in the 40s BCE by three colonies (Celsa – RPC I 261; Dium/Cassandrea – RPC I 1509; Lampsacus – RPC I 2268–2269), later followed by another nine, which thus commemorated their foundation by Emperor Augustus (Emerita – RPC I 5–7, 11, 13; Caesaraugusta – RPC I 304–310, 314, 317–318, 320, 322, 325–326; Consabrum – RPC I 477A; Patras – RPC I 1252; Pisidian Antioch – RPC I 3529; Parium – RPC I 2261; Lystra – RPC I 3538; Berytus – RPC I 4540; an undefined colony of *Princeps Felix* – RPC I 4083). Leaving aside the puzzling coin from the *Princeps Felix* colony, where a bird's-eye view of a yoke of oxen is presented, the remaining issues contain a standard sideview depiction of a priest-founder driving a yoke of oxen. Such a composition remained almost unaltered until the end of colonial coinage in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. Sporadically, the figure of the founder could bear other attributes. On a coin of Caesarea Maritima, *Divus Vespasianus* holds a palm branch (RPC II 2300). On another issue from Ikonium, the priest holds a cornucopia (RPC II 1609). The only attribute that emerged more often in the background was the *vexillum*. This innovation was introduced on the aforementioned coin from Patras (RPC I 1252). Later coinages could feature up to four military standards, cf. the issues from Akko-Ptolemais (RPC I 4749). However until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, a combination of the foundation type with the military standard type was rather rare. Furthermore, until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the representation of the *aratrum* ritual was not juxtaposed with local symbols. Therefore, it seems that initially the patterns of colonial coinage came directly from the central government.

### The foundation type in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the foundation scene was present on coins of twenty-five Roman colonies.<sup>5</sup> Sixteen of these were located in the examined region (Pl. 1: 1). They are here divided into two groups. On the one hand, there are the veteran colonies established in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century. These are perceived by scholars as centres of *Romanization* (MacMullen 2000, 13; Millar 2006, 175, 221; Isaac 2009, 49). As demonstrated by Butcher

---

<sup>5</sup> Deultum, Parium, Apamea, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Cremna, Comama, Olbasa, Ninica, Mallus, Tyre, Sidon, Berytus, Heliopolis, Ptolemais, Tyana, Caesarea ad Libanum, Caesarea Maritima, Neapolis, Sebaste, Aelia Capitolina, Damascus, Bostra, Petra, Rhaesaena.

(2002, 149–151), the civic coins in Syria had a very limited circulation, and therefore the *receivers* of colonial coins were mostly the inhabitants of the colonies, i.e. veterans and their descendants. Berytus, Akko, Aelia Capitolina and Caesarea Maritima had frequently struck coins depicting the *aratrum* ritual before. In fact, they had avoided local themes until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. On the other hand, there were the aforementioned titular colonies established in the times of Septimius Severus and later. Regardless of their true nature, they also struck coins with typical colonial features. The status of a *colonia* was always indicated on them and often followed by other titles (*Metropolia*, *Julia*, *Aurelia*, *Felix* etc.). In general, the coins were inscribed in Latin, although there were ten colonies that continued to use Greek.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the aforementioned colonial motifs (the *aratrum* ritual, military standards, Marsyas) appeared on coins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, although not as frequently as before.

### Pre-Severan Colonies

In Berytus, the foundation scene was the most popular iconographic motif in the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. These coins weighed generally between 10–16 g; therefore, R. Sawaya regards most of them as equivalents of *dupondii* (2009, 142–144). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, only two issues depicting the *aratrum* ritual were emitted under Caracalla and Julia Domna in 215 CE. The foundation scene lost its position in favour of local motifs. Actually, the latter began to be introduced by the mint of Berytus at the time of Trajan, when the temple of Astarte was presented on coinage for the first time (RPC III 3840). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, local heroes such as Eshmun and Beroe became the founding figures depicted on coinage.

Akko-Ptolemais became a colony under Claudius (*Nat. Hist.* 5. 75) and the first colonial issues were emitted there in the times of Nero (RPC I 4749–4751). Undoubtedly, these coins which depict the *aratrum* ritual, performed a commemorative role. Furthermore, this was the first colony that juxtaposed the foundation scene with four *vexilla* (RPC I 4749–4750). The standards are inscribed as III, VI, X, and XI in reference to the legions from which the veterans came. Another inscription, DIVOS CLAVD (RPC I 4749), indicates Claudius as the founder of the colony. A similar issue was later struck under Hadrian (RPC III 3912). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE,

<sup>6</sup> Carrhae, Nisibis, Rhaesaena, Singara, Tyana, Antioch ad Orontem, Emesa, Philippopolis and Thessalonica. Edessa briefly switched to Latin under Caracalla and then returned to Greek (Dandrow 2016, 183–205).



the foundation scene in combination with *vexilla* appeared on coins struck in the times of Geta (Rouvier 1025) and Elagabalus (Rouvier 1032). (It is important to highlight that the next issue of Philip I was deprived of military standards.) One could try to correlate the issue with the foundation scene with the bicentenary of the colony in Akko-Ptolemais, yet it seems to be far-fetched since Claudius established it in his final years (Kindler 1978, 54). Similarly to Berytus, Akko-Ptolemais gradually introduced local motifs. At this stage, it is important to signal that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the figure of Marsyas became more popular as an addition to Astarte (eg. RPC VIII 26665 temp.).

Caesarea Maritima was proclaimed a Roman colony by Vespasianus after the Great Jewish War. Similarly to Ptolemais, the mint of Caesarea Maritima was not active from the very beginning and the first issues were struck only under Domitian. Another similarity is that the first colonial issue contained a foundation scene with the emperor-founder (in this case DIVOS VESPASIANVS (RPC II 2300)). In the times of Hadrian, a small flying Victory was added above the yoke of oxen (RPC III 3958). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the *aratum* ritual was depicted several times. The last emission seems to be the most interesting, since the regular design was altered by providing the founder with a long sceptre with an eagle. Therefore, the figure should be interpreted as Philip I. In contrast to Ptolemais and Berytus, there were numerous references to imperial propaganda in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. An eagle supporting the letters SPQR in a wreath, the emperor riding on horseback or offering sacrifices at an altar, or Roma Nikephora were popular themes up until the end of civic coinage under Trebonian Gallus. This could be related to the fact that Caesarea Maritima, as the *Metropolis provinciae Syriae Palaestinae*, was the residence of the provincial governor (Patrich 2011, 74).

Aelia Capitolina was another colony connected with the Jewish rebellion. It is a matter of discussion if its foundation was the reason or the result of the Bar Kokhba revolt (Weksler-Bdolah 2019, 51). Again, on coins depicting the foundation scene, Hadrian is supposed to be presented as the founder-priest (Belayche 2009, 173–174). The motifs featured on coins of Aelia Capitolina were continuously and firmly connected with the Roman tradition (the Capitoline Triad, the she-wolf, members of the imperial dynasty). Representations of the *aratum* ritual re-appeared in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century twice, under Elagabal (Meshorer 113) (Pl. 1: 4) and under Trajan Decius (RPC IX 2195).

To sum up, the motif of the foundation scene is found relatively sporadically in Berytus, Ptolemais, Caesarea Maritima and Aelia in the 3<sup>rd</sup>

century. This fact should be considered in the context of the considerable variety of motifs that distinguished the colonial iconography of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in general. Furthermore, in the case of the aforementioned veteran colonies, two attitudes may be identified in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. On the one hand, Berytus and Ptolemais introduced a significant number of local themes. In other words, the *receivers* seem to have become integrated with the local tradition, and the *aratum* ritual became just another foundation myth. On the other hand, Caesarea Maritima and Aelia Capitolina highlighted their relations with Rome and the imperial court, an attitude which remained in counterpoint to the local tradition. The *receivers* were constantly reminded of the Roman domination. Furthermore, the foundation scene was never juxtaposed with local motifs on coins of settler colonies.

### Severan and Later Colonies

The establishment of colonies in the times of Septimius Severus and later (i.e. from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE onwards) was limited to the Near East, which was connected with the imperial military activity in the region caused by the Parthian/Persian threat (Millar 2006, 200) (Pl. 1: 1). As it was mentioned, in general, those colonies are considered as purely titular. Keeping that in mind, one could say that the presence of the foundation scene on coinage could be perceived as another aspect of Roman influence. However, since the *receiver* of the coins remained the same, what was the purpose of introducing a new *message* by switching to Latin and depicting new iconographic motifs? Therefore, specific coin motifs such as the foundation scene and *vexilla* could be seen as evidence of the veteran presence in the late colonies (Dąbrowa 2004a, 394–405; 2004b, 211–231; 2012, 31–42). These motifs along with the adoption of Latin were introduced in most of the established colonies (Mallus, Caesarea ad Libanum, Laodicea Maritima, Tyre, Sidon, Heliopolis, Neapolis, Sebaste, Bostra, Petra, Damascus). Even though Rhaesaena and Tyana continued to use Greek, the foundation scene and *vexilla* were also presented. In fact, all of the aforementioned colonies included the *aratum* ritual among their foundation myths. The absence of the foundation scene in coinage from the colonies of northern Syria and Mesopotamia should be emphasized (Pl. 1: 1). Similarly, among them only Edessa introduced the statue of Marsyas as an iconographic motif (Le Blanc 2020: 156–176). These colonies never adopted Latin.<sup>7</sup> It seems

<sup>7</sup> Carrhae, Nisibis, Singara, Antiochia ad Orontem and Emesa. Edessa briefly switched to Latin under Caracalla and then returned to Greek (Dandrow 2016: 183–205).



that they gained *colonial* rank as a reward, becoming typical titular colonies with no actual settlement from Rome. Therefore, the local authorities, i.e. the *communicators*, decided not to follow the more common patterns of colonial coinage.

It should be noted that a significant number of new colonies founded under the Severan dynasty celebrated the new status by emitting coinage with the foundation scene (Tyre (Rouvier 2300), Sidon (Rouvier 1508) (Pl. 2: 4), Caesarea ad Libanum (Rouvier 734), Sebaste (Rosenberger 20) (Pl. 1: 5), Petra (Spijkerman 56), Bostra (Spijkerman 51) (Pl. 2: 7) and Tyana (SNG von Aulock 8732) (Pl. 2: 1)). The colonies of Damascus (RPC VIII 26792, 26614, 26960 temp.) and Neapolis (RPC VIII 2312, 2364, 77193, 2483 temp.) (Pl. 2: 6) which were established later, under Philip I, also put depictions of the *aratrum* ritual on their coins soon after their foundation. Elevation to the status of a Roman colony was a memorable event, and therefore the successful authorities, the *communicators*, who managed to obtain the title for their settlement, proudly manifested it on coins, the *medium*. The *receivers* certainly noticed that change.

The Bekaa valley and Heliopolis were a dependent territory of the colony of Berytus and were inhabited by the descendants of veterans from the *V Macedonica* and *VIII Augusta* legions (Pautrel 2019, 74). Heliopolis, known as *Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolitana*, gained independence from Berytus as a result of a war between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger, but it remained under its numismatic influence to some extent, repeating issues such as the *aquilae* of the fifth and eight legions. However, the most common motif of Heliopolitan colonial coinage was the famous sanctuary of Iupiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus (Sawaya 2009, 246–249). The foundation scene was presented only once, in the times of Philip II (Sawaya serie 54) (Pl. 2: 2). The founder with a yoke of oxen is juxtaposed with two legionary standards. There is an inscription indicating the legions: VIII AVG LEG V MACED. The founder is not holding the reins, but rather raising them pointing at the standards. In this case, at least some *receivers* of the message encoded on the coins were descendants of colonists originating from the two aforementioned legions. Furthermore, R. Sawaya (2009, 284) correlates the issue with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Heliopolitan emancipation.

Similarly, Tyre became a Roman colony under Septimius Severus. Soon after that, the Tyrian mint issued a coin featuring a representation of the *aratrum* ritual. The background features a *vexillum* inscribed LEG III GAL. A new element introduced under Elagabalus was the murex shell (Rouvier 2392) (Pl. 2: 3), which served as the Tyrian mintmark (Bijovsky

2005, 829). For this reason, it seems that the veterans of the *Legio III Gallica* settled in Tyre (Hirt 2015, 196). Furthermore, because of the rebellion led by those veterans, Tyre lost its colonial status under Elagabalus (Dąbrowa 2005, 42–43). Undoubtedly, the fact that the local rival, Sidon, was promoted to a Roman colony under Elagabalus is correlated with the withdrawal of the colonial grant from Tyre. Immediately after acquiring the colonial title, the Sidonian mint released a similar issue to those of Tyre presenting the foundation scene (Rouvier 1508) (Pl. 2: 5). It was undoubtedly another episode in the long-standing rivalry between Tyre and Sidon. The Sidonian issue is very similar to the earlier Tyrian types. The founder-priest is following a yoke of oxen. In the background, there appears a *vexillum* inscribed LEG III GAL. However, the legend on the specimen in the collection of Münzkabinett in Berlin reads LEG III PAR (Berlin Cat. No. 18242053). The emblems of the *Legio III Parthica* were also presented on coins from the colonies of Rhessaena (RPC IX 1601) and Nisibis (RPC VII.2 72543 temp.), which were occupied by that *vexillatio* (Castelin 1946, 23–27; Pollard 2000, 273–274; Dąbrowa 2004b, 217–218). Therefore, the specimen from Berlin is a testimony to the presence of the *Legio III Parthica* veterans in Sidon (Jellonek 2020, 65–66).

As it was once mentioned, an innovation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century was the juxtaposition of the foundation scene with local motifs. The aforementioned issue from Tyre bears a murex shell in a field (Rouvier 2392). Another local mintmark, a ram's head, was presented on coins from Damascus (RPC VIII 26614, 26792 temp.) (Pl. 2: 5). A figure of Chaboras was added in the exergue on issues of Rhessaena (RPC IX 1581). Despite the fact that in the case of Neapolis, Mt. Gerizim also served as a mintmark on local coins, the significance of the Samaritans' holy mountain was far greater than just a simple stamp to indicate the mint of origin. The depiction of Mt. Gerizim was juxtaposed with the representation of the *aratrum* ritual several times under Philip I (RPC VIII 2202, 2261, 2364, 2404 temp.) (Pl. 2: 6). The issues probably commemorated the colonial rank that was granted between 247–249 CE (Sandberg 2019: 141). Other Roman themes depicted on coins were Roma (e.g. RPC VIII 2350 temp.), the she-wolf (e.g. RPC VIII 2204 temp.), and Marsyas (e.g. RPC VIII 2194 temp.). Furthermore, all of them were combined with Mt. Gerizim (Harl 1984, 67). The government of Neapolis emphasized the imperial favour by juxtaposing Roman motifs with the symbol of the city (Evans 2014, 178–179).

On coins from Bostra, the *aratrum* ritual is performed under the shrine of the Nabatean god Dusares (Spijkerman 51) (Pl. 2: 7). Kindler rightly

remarks on the similarity of the *aratrum* ritual presented in Neapolis and in Bostra (1983, 64). Dusares' High Place is also featured as the symbol of the city. Again, the holy place is juxtaposed with a depiction of the Roman ritual. Another aspect is the well-known rivalry between Petra and Bostra (Kindler 1983, 12). The *aratrum* ritual had been presented on coins of Petra under Elagabalus (Spijkerman 56) (Pl. 2: 8); therefore, the foundation scene combined with a Nabatean god under Alexander Severus could be interpreted as Bostra's blunt answer to local rival.

A completely unique composition was presented on a medallion from Mallus under Alexander Severus and Trajan Decius (RPC IX 1431–1433). The colony was probably set up under Alexander Severus (Ziegler 1992, 181–183); therefore, the first issues were struck to commemorate the new rank of Mallus (Calomino 2014, 204). On the reverse of these coins, there is a multifigural scene. In the middle, the emperor is shown offering a small figure of Marsyas to Tyche on the left. He is also holding reins strapped to an undersized yoke of oxen. On the right, there is a naked hero, Amphilochus, who is crowning the emperor. In the exergue, there is a small boar added (an attribute of Amphilochus). The scene can be read as a symbolic refoundation of Mallus as a Roman colony. Amphilochus, who was one of the mythical founders of Mallus and used to be frequently presented on pre-colonial (e.g. RPC III 3325) and colonial coins (e.g. RPC VI 7156 temp.), is honouring the emperor as the new founder. The central figure of the emperor is granting a colonial status by performing the *aratrum* ritual and offering the figure of Marsyas to the city-goddess of Mallus. In short, the figure of Marsyas is a metaphor of political freedom (*libertas*) obtained by the colonies (Klimowsky 1982, 95; Katsari and Mitchell 2008, 231; Basso and Buonapane 2018, 151–152; Le Blanc 2020, 163). The juxtaposition of the *aratrum* ritual, Marsyas, an emperor, Tyche and the mythical founder – Amphilochus should be perceived as a bold manifestation of the integration between colonial patterns and local tradition (Jellonek 2018b, 33–41).

The last colony that introduced the foundation scene into coinage was Rhesaena under Trajan Decius (Pl. 2: 10), despite the fact that it became a Roman colony much earlier, under Septimius Severus (Millar 2006, 200). Actually, the indication of the colonial status, albeit inscribed in Greek (ΚΟΛ), appeared for the first time under Trajan Decius, too. The depiction of the foundation scene is also a bit altered. The founder is holding a long staff, the imperial eagle is added above, and in the exergue, the river god, Chaboras, is shown swimming. Rhesaena is the only colony in Mesopotamia that introduced depictions of the *aratrum* ritual on coins. Furthermore,

among colonies that never adopted Latin for coin legends, only Rhessaena and Tyana emitted coins with the foundation scene. Evidently, the Rhessaenan mint came under a stronger Roman influence at the time of Decius Trajan (Castelin 1946, 70–71).

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that the *aratum* ritual was only occasionally depicted on colonial coins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, some general observations will be made. First of all, the foundation scene remained a distinctive feature of colonial coinage. Next, the intention behind the coins bearing the motif was to celebrate the colonial foundation; therefore, it was relatively often presented on early emissions (Table 1) (Tyana, Petra, Bostra, Caesarea ad Libanum, Mallus, Sidon, Tyre, Neapolis, Damascus). Another aspect is the juxtaposition of the *aratum* ritual with legionary standards, which appeared on coins from Tyre, Sidon, Ptolemais, Heliopolis, Damascus and Neapolis. The fusion of both of these colonial themes indicates military and civic origins of the colonies. Alternatively, the introduction of a composition combining typical Roman motifs (Marsyas, *vexilla*, the *aratum* ritual) with local myths indicates a syncretic approach to iconography. The best example of such syncretism is the aforementioned issue from Mallus, on which the mythical founder is crowning a new founder, the Roman emperor, who is performing the *aratum* ritual and offering Marsyas, a symbol of liberty to the city-goddess of Mallus. The foundation scene and other colonial themes were no longer exclusively perceived as the Roman answer to local tradition. They became another aspect of civic identity. The only colonies that clearly preserved the Roman character of civic coinage were Caesarea Maritima and Aelia Capitolina.

Most colonies striking coins depicting the foundation scene were located in the southern part of the examined region. Actually, the only colony in this area that never introduced coins depicting the *aratum* ritual was Philippopolis, which was a village elevated to the colonial rank by Philip I, who had been born there (Butcher 2003, 232; Millar 2006, 217). This ephemeral colony continued to emphasize its bond with Philip I and the imperial family. Philippopolis and northern colonies alike seem to have obtained the rank of *colonia* despite refusal to follow the patterns of colonial coinage.

It is important to highlight that numerous mints issued foundation type coins twice in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. This happened for the first time under

Elagabalus, when such issues were struck in Tyre, Sidon, Ptolemais, Caesarea ad Libanum, Aelia Capitolina and Petra. Three of these colonies were established under Elagabalus (Petra, Caesarea ad Libanum and Sidon). It was under this emperor that mints in the Levant showed increased activity (Sawaya 2009, 253–257). Later, under Philip I, five colonies released coins depicting the *aratrum* ritual (Damascus (RPC VIII 26960 temp.), Neapolis (RPC VIII 2364 temp.) (Pl 2: 6), Caesarea Maritima (RPC VIII 2143 temp.), Ptolemais (RPC VIII 6490 temp.), Heliopolis (RPC VIII 6466 temp.). The popularity of the motif under Philip I might seem surprising, but it needs to be remembered that the connection between Rome and the colonies that were modelled on it were strong (Gell.NA 16. 13. 9; Howgego 2005, 15). Therefore, since in 247 CE the Empire celebrated Rome's millennial year, the colonies readily joined the celebration by accentuating their Roman origins, as recently shown by L. Sandberg (2019, 141–152) in the case of Neapolis. Finally, a twofold *message* was transmitted to the colonial citizens. The *aratrum* ritual commemorates the foundation of Rome as the Empire and the colonies as miniatures of Rome. Despite the fact that some colonies continued to strike coins until Gallienus (Damascus, Berytus, Heliopolis, Tyre, Ptolemais), after Philip I only three colonies repeated the foundation scene (Aelia and Rhessaena under Trajan Decius, Mallus under Valerian). The abandonment of the most crucial colonial motif briefly preceded the end of coinage in the Near East colonies.

### Abbreviations:

- Kadman = Kadman L. 1956. The Coins of Aelia Capitolina, Michigan  
 Meshorer = Meshorer Y. 1989. The Coinage of Aelia Capitolina. Jerusalem  
 RIC = Mattingly H. 1967–1994 The Roman Imperial Coinage  
 Rosenberger = Rosenberger M. 1977. The Rosenberger Israel Collection  
     Volume III: City-Coins of Palestine: Hippos-Sussita, Neapolis, Nicopolis,  
     Nysa-Scythopolis, Caesarea Panias, Pelusium, Raphia, Sebaste, Sepphoris-  
     Diocaesarea, Tiberias, Tiberias. Jerusalem  
 Rouvier = Rouvier J. 1896–1903. Numismatique des villes de la Phénicie  
     (extraits de la Revue numismatique, du Journal asiatique, de la Revue des  
     Études grecques, du Journal international d'archéologie numismatique)

- RPC I = Amandry M., Burnett, A. and Ripollés P. 1992. The Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. I: From the death of Caesar to the death of Vitellius (44 BC–AD 69), London, Paris. [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC II = Amandry M., Burnett and A., Carradice, I., 1999. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. II: From Vespasian to Domitian (AD 69–96). London, Paris [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC III = Amandry M. and Burnett A. 2015. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. III: Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian (AD 96–138). London, Paris [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC IV.3 = Howgego C. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. IV.3 The Antonines: Lycia – Pamphylia to Arabia. Online with temporary numbers. [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC VI = Calomino D. and Burnett, A. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. VI Asia Minor and Egypt. Online with temporary numbers. [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC VII.1 = Spoerri Butcher M. 2006. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. VII.1 Gordian I–Gordian III (Asia) London, Paris [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC VII.2 = Mairat, J. and Spoerri Butcher M. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. VII.2 Gordian I–Gordian III (All provinces except Asia). Online with temporary numbers. [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC VIII = Mairat, J. and Spoerri Butcher M. Roman Provincial Coinage, vol. VIII Philip. Online with temporary numbers. [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RPC IX = Holstein, A., Mairat, J., 2016 Roman Provincial Coinage IX, London, Paris [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>]
- RRC = Crawford M. 1974. Roman Republican Coinage, Cambridge
- Sawaya = Sawaya Z. 2009 Histoire de Bérytos et Héliopolis d'après leurs monnaies (Ier siècle av. J.-C.–IIIe siècle apr. J.-C.). Beyrouth
- SNG Von Aulock = Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Deutschland, Sammlung Hans Von Aulock. Berlin 1957–1967)
- Spijkerman = Spijkerman A. 1978. The coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia, Jerusalem



## References

- Andrade N. 2013.** *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World*. Cambridge, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511997808>.
- Basso P. and Buonapane A. 2008.** Marsia nelle Città del Mondo Romano. *Mediterraneo Antico: Economie Società Culture* 11, 139–159.
- Belayche N. 2009.** Foundation Myths in Roman Palestine: Traditions and Reworking. In: N. Roymans and T. Derks (eds) *The Role of Power and Tradition: Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity* (Amsterdam Archeological Studies 13), 167–188.
- Bijovsky G. 2005.** The Ambrosial Rocks and the Sacred Precinct of Melqart in Tyre. In: C. Asins, C. Alonso and P. Morán (eds), *Actas de XIII Congreso Internacional de Numismática*. 829–834. Madrid.
- Butcher K. 2002.** Circulation of Bronze Coinage in the Orontes Valley in the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods. In: C. Auge and F. Duyrat (eds), *Les monnayages syriens. Quel apport pour l'histoire du Proche-Orient hellénistique et romain ? Actes de la table ronde de Damas 10–12 novembre 1999*, 145–151. Beyrouth.
- Butcher K. 2003.** *Roman Syria and the Near East*. London.
- Calomino D. 2014.** Bilingual Coins of Severus Alexander in the Eastern Provinces. *AJN* 26, 199–222.
- Castelin K. 1946.** *The Coinage of Rhessaena in Mesopotamia*. New York.
- Dąbrowa E. 2004a.** Le vexillum sur les monnaies coloniales (IIe– IIIe s. après J.-C.). *Latomus* 63/2, 394–405.
- Dąbrowa E. 2004b.** Roman Military Colonization in Anatolia and the Near East (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD – The Numismatic Evidence. In: G. Salimieri, A. Raggi and A. Baroni (eds), *Colonie Romane Nel Mondo Greco*, 211–231. Roma.
- Dąbrowa E. 2005.** La Legio III Gallica, La Colonisation Militaire Et Les Sévères. *Althistorisch-Epigraphische Studien* 5, 35–44.
- Dąbrowa E. 2012.** Military Colonisation in the Near East and Mesopotamia under the Severi. *Acta Classica* 55, 31–42.
- Dandrow E. 2016.** The Latin Coins of Caracalla from Edessa in Osrhoene. *The Numismatic Chronicle* 176, 183–205.
- Eckstein, M. 1979.** The Foundation Day of Roman “Coloniae”. *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 12: 85–97.
- Evans J. 2014.** From Mountain to Icon: Mount Gerizim on Roman Provincial Coins from Neapolis, Samaria. *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74, 170–182, <https://doi.org/10.5615/neareastarch.74.3.0170>.

- Isaac B. 2009.** Latin in Cities of the Roman Near East. In: H. Cotton *et al.* (eds), *From Hellenism to Islam. Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, 43–72. Cambridge, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511641992.004>.
- Harl W.K. 1984.** The Coinage of Neapolis in Samaria, 244–253 A.D. *MN* 29, 61–97.
- Hirt A. 2015.** Beyond Greece and Rome: Foundation Myths on Tyrian Coinage in the Third Century AD. In: M. Mac Sweeney (ed.) *Foundation Myths in Ancient Societies: Dialogues and Discourses*, 190–226. Philadelphia, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812290219.190>.
- Isaac B. 2009.** Latin in Cities of the Roman Near East. In: H. Cotton, R. Hoyland, J. Price and D. Wasserstein (eds), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, 43–72. Cambridge, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511641992.004>.
- Jellonek S. 2018a.** Roman Foundation Myths on Colonial Coinage, *Notae Numismaticae. Zapiski Numizmatyczne* 13, 101–126.
- Jellonek S. 2018b.** Foundation Scene on Coins of Mallus, *Maska* 40, 33–44.
- Jellonek S. 2020.** Numismatic Competition between Tyre and Sidon under Elagabalus. In: B. Zając and S. Jellonek (eds), *Pecunia Omnes Vincit. Conference Proceedings of the Fifth and Sixth International Numismatic and Economic Conference*. 62–83. Cracow.
- Kadman L. 1957.** *The Coins of Caesarea Maritima (Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium V.2)*. Tel Aviv–Jerusalem.
- Katsari C., Mitchell S. 2008.** The Roman Colonies of Greece and Asia Minor: Questions of State and Civic Identity. *Athenum* 96, 221–249.
- Kindler A. 1983.** *The Coinage of Bostra*. Warminster.
- Klimowsky E.W. 1982–1983.** The Origin and Meaning of Marsyas in the Greek Imperial Coinage. *INJ* 6–7, 88–101.
- Kopij K. 2017.** Coin Propaganda and Communication. In: M. Caltabiano (ed.), *XV International Numismatic Congress: Proceedings*, 182–187. Roma–Messina.
- Lasswell H.D. 1948.** The Structure and Function of Communication in Society. In: L. Bryson (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*, 37–51. New York.
- Le Blanc R. 2020.** The Marsyas of the Forum Motif on Coins from Roman Mesopotamia and Osroene, *The Numismatic Chronicle* 180, 156–176.
- MacMullen R. 2000.** *Romanization in the Time of Augustus*. Yale–New Heaven–London.
- Millar F. 1993.** *The Roman Near East, 31 BC–AD 337*. Cambridge–London.

- Millar F. 2006.** *The Greek World, the Jews & the East*. North Carolina, [https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807876657\\_millar](https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807876657_millar).
- Papageorgiadou-Bani H. 2004.** *The Numismatic Iconography of the Roman Colonies in Greece: Local Spirit and the Expression of Imperial Policy*. Athens.
- Patrich J. 2011.** *Studies in the Archaeology and History of Caesarea Maritima: Caput Judaeae, Metropolis Palaestinae (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 77)*. Leiden–Boston, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004175112.i-500>.
- Pautrel S. 2019.** *Baalbek-Heliopolis, the Beeka, and Berytus from 100 BCE–400 CE: A Landscape Transformed (Mnemosyne Supplements 426)*. Leiden–Boston, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004400733>.
- Pollard N. 2000.** *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria*. University of Michigan.
- Rebuffat F. 1997.** *Les Enseignes sur les monnaies d'Asie Mineure, des origines à Alexandre Sévère*. Athens.
- Rissanen M. 2014.** The Lupa Romana in the Roman Provinces. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 65/2, 335–360, <https://doi.org/10.1556/AArch.65.2014.2.4>.
- Sandberg L. 2019.** The Coinage of Flavia Neapolis under Philip I – the Roman Connection, *INR* 14, 141–152.
- Sartre M. 1997.** Le Haut-Empire romain les provinces de Méditerranée orientale d'Auguste aux Sévères, 31 av. J.-C.-235 apr. J.-C. (*Nouvelle histoire de l'Antiquité* 9).
- Sawaya Z. 2009.** *Histoire de Bérytos et Héliopolis d'après leurs monnaies (Ier siècle av. J.-C.–IIIe siècle apr. J.-C.)*. Beyrouth.
- Spijkerman A. 1978.** *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia*. Jerusalem.
- Weksler-Bdolah S. 2019.** *Aelia Capitolina – Jerusalem in the Roman Period: In Light of Archaeological Research (Mnemosyne Supplements 432)*. Leiden–Boston, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417076>.
- Ziegler R. 1992.** Wann wurde Mallos zur römischen Kolonie? *Studien zum Antiken Kleinasien* II, 181–183.

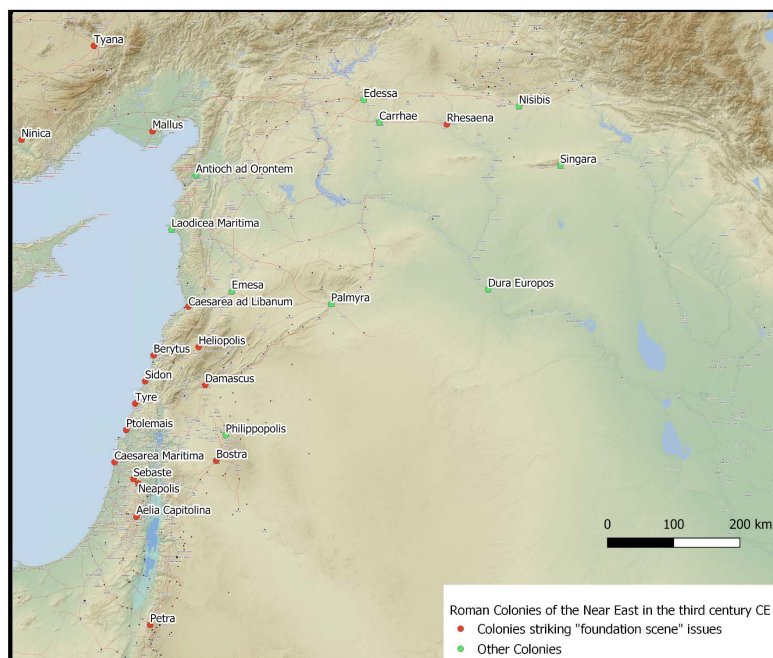
Szymon Jellonek  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków  
[sjellonek@gmail.com](mailto:sjellonek@gmail.com)

TABLE 1

S. Jellonek

		Septimius Severus (193–211)	Caeracalla–Macrinus (211–218)	Elagabalus (218–222)	Alexander (222–235)	Maximinus–Gordian III (235–244)	Philip I (244–249)	Decius–Gallus (249–253)	Valerianus (253–260)	Galienus (260–267)	Claudius II–Aurelianus (268–275)
1	Tyana		☐	-							
2	Mallus				●+	-	-	●+	●+	-	
3	Antiochia ad Orontem			-	-		-	-	-		
4	Berytus	-	●	-		-			-	-	
5	Heliopolis	-	-	-			☐		-	-	
6	Sidon			☐	-						
7	Tyre	☐	☐	☐+	-	-	-	-	-	-	
8	Laodicea Maritima	-	-	-			-	-			
9	Caesarea ad Libanum			●	●						
10	Ptolemais	-	☐	☐	-		☐		-	-	
11	Caesarea Maritima	●	●	-	-		●	-			
12	Neapolis						☐+	-			
13	Sebaste	-	●	-							
14	Aelia Capitolina	-	-	☐	-			●			
15	Bostra				●+		-	-			
16	Petra			●							
17	Damascus						☐+	-	-	-	
18	Philippopolis						-				
19	Emesa		-	-				-			
20	Singara				-	-					
21	Nisibis		-		-	-	-				
22	Carrhae	-	-		-	-					
23	Edessa		-	-	-	-		-			
24	Rhesaena		-	-	-			●+			
●	foundation scene										
☐	foundation scene+ vexillum										
●+	foundation scene+ local motif										
-	active years of colonial mints										

Table 1. The foundation scene on coins of Roman colonies in the Near East in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD



1



2

3



4

5

Pl. 1: 1 – Map of Roman colonies in the Near East

Pl. 1: 2 – Ptolemais, Philip II, Ptolemais, 244–249 CE, 30 mm, 15.43 g, RPC VIII 66933 temp.  
[<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/313442>]

Pl. 1: 3 – Caesarea Maritima, Philip I, 244–249 CE, 33 mm, 27.20 g, RPC VIII 2143 temp.  
[<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/7364>]

Pl. 1: 4 – Aelia, Elagabal, 218–222 CE, 23 mm, 10.40 g, Meshorer, Aelia 113a  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=270449>]

Pl. 1: 5 – Sebaste, Caracalla, 198–217 CE, 27 mm, 15.18 g, Rosenberger 20.  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=167097>]





Pl. 2: 1 – Tyana, Caracalla, 212–213, 27 mm, 15.70 g, SNG von Aulock 6550  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=286248>]

Pl. 2: 2 – Heliopolis, Philip II, 244–249 CE, 22 mm, 7.11 g, RPC VIII 6466 temp.,  
Sawaya serie 54 [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/108146>]

Pl. 2: 3 – Tyre, Elagabalus, 218–222 CE, 28 mm, 18.45 g, Rouvier 2392v,  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=179614>]

Pl. 2: 4 – Sidon, Elagabalus, 218–222 CE, 30 mm, 17.73 g, Rouvier 1508,  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=111847>]

Pl. 2: 5 – Damascus, Otacilia Severa, 244–249 CE, 30 mm, 20.84 g, RPC VIII 26960 temp.  
[<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/281238>]

Pl. 2: 6 – Neapolis, Philip I, Neapolis, 247–249 CE, 27 mm, 13.63 g, RPC VIII 2312 temp.  
[<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/11741>]

Pl. 2: 7 – Bostra, Severus Alexander, 222–235 CE, 30 mm, 18.80 g, Spijkerman 51  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=274258>]

Pl. 2: 8 – Petra, Elagabalus, 218–222 CE, 22 mm, 9.57 g, Spijkerman 56  
[<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=204375>]

Pl. 2: 9 – Mallus, Severus Alexander, 222–235 CE, 41 mm, 29.19 g, RPC VI 7157 temp.  
[<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/264014>]

Pl. 2: 10 – Rhesaena, Trajan Decius, 249–251 CE, 26 mm, 12.12 g, RPC IX 1576 [<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/18860>]