

NUMISMATICS OF THE ROMAN ERA AND THE PLACE OF SOME SCULPTURAL WORKS IN ANTIQUITY

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Abstract: One of the great innovations of Roman monetary art was the introduction of the idea of “landscape”, of rendering buildings, public spaces or even complex scenes unfolded in a more or less elaborate setting. This innovation made some of the monetary issues of the Roman era veritable postcards of antiquity. Greco-Roman statues, lingeringly admired now in museum halls, were originally made to be placed in buildings and public spaces, as their integral parts. But rarely have ancient statues been discovered on their originally intended place (*in situ*). This short presentation aims to discuss the relationship between numismatics and the possibility of establishing the initial or conjunctural historical location of some sculptural works of antiquity.

Rezumat: Una din marile inovații ale artei monetare romane a fost introducerea ideii de „peisaj”, de redare a unor edificii, spații publice sau chiar scene complexe desfășurate într-un cadru mai mult sau mai puțin elaborat. Această inovație a făcut din unele emisiuni monetare ale epocii romane adevărate cărți poștale ale antichității.

Statuile greco-romane, îndelung admirate acum în sălile muzeelor, au fost realizate inițial pentru a fi amplasate în clădiri și spații publice, ca parte integrantă a acestora. Însă arareori statuile antice au fost descoperite pe locul destinat (*in situ*). Această scurtă prezentare dorește să aducă în discuție relația dintre numismatică și posibilitatea stabilirii amplasamentului inițial sau conjunctural istoric al unor opere sculpturale ale antichității.

The numismatics of the Roman era brings two new important innovations compared to the previous Greek-Hellenistic one: historical monetary types (the Greek-Hellenistic monetary typology is generally anhistorical, the same emblematic monetary types, for a city or kingdom, are reproduced for even centuries) and the idea of “landscape”. Historical monetary types, directly related to contemporary events, make the Roman coins an “official newspaper” of antiquity, while “landscape” monetary types become true “postcards” of antiquity, illustrating important places for the coin issuer.

The “landscape” reproduced on the coins of the Roman era is less often the natural “pictorial” (usually reduced to sacred mountains and caves, allegories of important waters, rarely smaller natural frameworks - trees, rocks, etc. - as part of a wider context)¹ and more often the anthropic, urban, architectural, which illustrates sanctuaries, buildings, building complexes, amphitheatres, port facilities, walls and fortress gates, enclosures as a whole and so on).² In the monetary reproductions of urban landscapes we often find rendered ancient sculptural works,³ meant to indicate the titular divinity (in the case of temples and shrines) or simply illustrated as important decorative elements (obviously not without vaster meanings) of an urban architectural framework. This fact can now help us make the connection between some ancient sculptural works, often discovered in secondary positions, and their urban context in Roman times.

Following we will discuss some situations in which the numismatic “binder” connects the sculptural works of art and the urban settings in which they were located in Roman times.

Colossus Neronis, a colossal (huge) statue of Emperor Nero (according to Pliny the Elder the statue would have had a height of 119.5 Roman feet - about 37 meters),⁴ was originally placed in the vestibule of the Domus Aurea Palace. Somewhere around 128 AD, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, the statue

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¹ See Cheilik 1965.

² The “architectural” monetary types of the Roman era began to be studied more than a century and a half ago (see Donaldson 1859).

³ F. Imhoof-Blumer and Percy Gardner were the first to establish the criteria by which a Roman-era monetary representation is likely to be an illustration of a work of sculptural art (Imhoof-Blumer; Gardner 1887, pp. 2-3). These criteria were later re-discussed by Leon Lacroix (Lacroix 1946, pp. 290-291).

⁴ Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXIV, 45, pp. 77 on ed. In the Romanian language.