RARE AND UNPUBLISHED SISCIAN ANTONINIANI OF EMPEROR PROBUS WITH HORSE HEAD ON THE OBVERSE

The authors in details describe very rare obverse bust type of emperor Probus found on antoniniani from Siscia mint, where the horse head is depicted. Authors give a full catalogue of all known specimens and new unpublished variants. Further the issues of other rulers with this obverse type are described.

Introduction

During the military reforms of emperor Gallienus, to cavalry was assigned an important role, whereas the cavalry troops called *Dalmatae* have an increased importance. In the time of Aurelianus, cavalry troops are known as *equites Dalmatae*, *Mauri*, *Scutarii* and *Promoti*. Also they are known as *Illyriciani*, getting a name on the basis of their place of deployment. Central cavalry was important for military successes of emperors of illyrian origin (Claudius, Aurelian, Probus, Carus and Diocletian) in the second part of the 3rd century. However, in the time of relative stability during the rule of Diocletan, the earlier defensive strategy along the borders was partially returned. Diocletian kept a small central army, while the majority of *equites illyriciani* was deployed alongside the eastern borders and since then never regained its former status. Constantine continues the policy which started Gallienus in the middle of the 3rd century by increase of importance of their role, and cavalry is ranked as senior to legions and *auxilia*.

During the emperor Probus (276-282)³ number of obverse types on coins become large, and ceremonial bust types which were earlier reserved only for special issues, medallions and aurei found their way to the ordinary coins (antoniniani). While in the early emissions one may find ordinary obverse bust types, in the course of time officinae in Lugdunum and Siscia mints produce new bust types of emperor, depicting Probus as invicible glorifying his military successes. A nice illustration is a rare obverse depiction which comes from Siscia mint, showing the artistic genius of siscian die-cutters: emperor in military attire with spear and shield holds a head of horse by reins. The placement of head of horse on this militaristic obverse illustrates the importance of cavalry in emperors victories. This obverse depiction was explained differently in numismatic literature: it emphasizes the fact that Probus has went up through a cavalry ranks, while the other authors thinks that this bust type aludes on the fact that Probus was a member of order of equities, from which the army choosed him as new emperor in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.⁴ Namely, the horse protome is the sign of the aristocratic order of equites, which is just below the senatorial rank.^A Probus AEQVITIVS is the nickname which Danhäuser⁵ and Pink (Eqvitivm Probvm, militiae peritvm...)⁶ link with his military experience in cavalry, or with the word AEQVITI, horseman, which is in the late empire an aristocratic order. Also, the presence of horse head aludes on adventys, arrival of emperor.

Rare depiction with horse head was minted in Siscia for short time, which was soon abandoned and replaced with other types in the same 6th emission. Pink in his important work on Probus numismatics (der Aufbau, p. 18) lists "Die Pferdbüste" as special bust type "Spezialbüsten". Delbrueck 26/7⁸, states that obverse type is very rare and

it was used for the first time on the antoniniani of Claudius II in Cyzicus mint in the 2nd emission (mid 269), with reverses VIRTVTI AVGVSTI (RIC 255var, Mairat 41°, Bastien¹⁰ 1992, pl. 112.7, Alföldi 1938, XXIX.7, **no. 14**), SECVRITAS PERPETVA (RIC 244var) and LAETITIA AVG N (RIC 235var). Delbrueck is describing this type as 'emperor afer a victorius battle is dismounting a horse'. Pink for this bust for Probus states that it appears only in Siscia in 277, and then again after the return from Gallia in the late Autumn of 278 as Festprägung on aurei and medallions in the 5th emission. Some of these issues are dated, having the shield decorated with the battle scene (Siegerdarstellung). Pink does not mention this bust type for the other mints, which, as we will see later in text exist (Roma and Serdica). Later, this type was used only for prestigious issues (gold and silver multiples, bronze medallions) and for commemorative strikes for *quinquennalia* and second consulate of Crispus and Constantine II in mints of Treveri and Lyon.¹²

Different descriptions of this obverse type are present in the numismatic literature and sale catalogues. Numismatic literature: RIC V/I, bust type H9¹¹, CHRB 5 bust type H9l¹², Bastien bust type E6¹³, RIC V-temp bust type J6l¹⁴, Mairat¹: "Bust with a spear on the right shoulder, a shield on the left shoulder, taking a horse by the flange. A scene of Virtus graces the representative on a shield ranging from to the left and a gorgoneion on the plastron of the cuirass."

Sale catalogues: A) almost half-length cuirassed bust left, seen from front, wearing radiate helmet, holding spear over right shoulder and shield by left shoulder, horse's head facing left above right hand, Medusa head on cuirass, horseman galloping left and raising right hand on shield (**no. 8**); B) Büste nach links, gepanzert, mit Helm und Strahlenkrone, mit der rechten ein Pferd am Zügel führend, dessen Kopf links erscheint, in der rechten Hand geschulterter Speer, in der linken Schild, darauf galoppierender Reiter nach links über fünf Soldaten mit Schild (**no. 6**); C) am Panzer Gorgoneion, in der Rechten geschulterter Speer und Zügel eines Pferdes, dessen Kopf nach links zu sehen ist; D) Auf dem Schild Reiterkampf, Schild mit Adventusszene; E) Sur le bouclier, l'empereur a cheval entre cinq soldats et un ennemi^B (**no. 3**).

In Siscia mint a small number of these pieces was struck, of which the authors of this text describe nine variants (I-IX, see catalogue), amongst them there are many unique pieces. With this manuscript, a number of known types is greatly enlarged the list published by Alföldi, who does know the existence of types IV, V, VII and VIII. On the majority of specimens the obverse legend reads IMP C PROBVS PF AVG and VIRTVS PROBI AVG, while only one specimen has the legend IMP PROBVS P F AVG (no. 5). The small number of minted specimens is evidenced by high frequency of the obverse die-links (for instance, obverse die share no. 3 and 4, while no. 7, 8 and 12 share another die). All busts of emperor Probus are of the same type, with radiate helmet, spear and shield. Differences exist only for decoration on the shield and the depiction of Medusa on the emperors cuirass, therefore the busts could be grouped in five variants (A-E). According to Pink (*Aufbau...*) horse head issues belong to 3rd - 7th emission: 3rd (277) types III, VII; 4th (277) types V, VIII; 5th (278) types I, II, IX; 6th (279) type VI; and 7th (280) type IV. Therefore, specimens **no. 3**, **4** and **11** are the first appearance of horse on the coin obverses in the mint of Siscia. Datation of specimen no. 2 is somehow more complex. According to Pink, the -S//XXI mintmark should belong to the 7th emission,

however, this could be dismissed since this emission does not have this reverse type. Mintmark of workshop S should be placed in the exergue (--//XXIS), therefore, it has to be a mint-error and specimen should be assigned to the 5th emission (AD 278), similarly to the antoninianus **no. 1**, which belongs to this emission. This datation is supported by the specimen illustrated on the *Probvs* website^c as RIC 624 (Alföldi type 5/92, AD-VENTVS AVG -S//XXI), where Martin Griffiths proposes that this is die-engraver's error and dates specimen to the 5th emission of siscian mint. Detailed analysis of reverse indicates that this coin has the same reverse die as antoninianus **no. 2**.

Depictions on reverse are more diverse: ADVENTVS AVG / ADVENTVS PROBI AVG (emperor riding horse to the left), CONCORDIA AVG (Concordia standing), SAL-VS AVG (Salus sitting), SOLI INVICTO (quadriga on the left or frontal), VICTORIAE AVG (Victoria in biga to the left) and VIRTVS PROBI AVG (Mars walking).

In the second workshop with the S mark antoniniani **no. 1**, **2**, **5-10**, **12** and **13** were produced, the only one specimen bears the mark B of the second officinae (**no. 11**), while specimens **no. 3** and **4** coming from the sixth officinae bear the mark ς (*cursive digamma*, *stigma*).

Of particular interest is the specimen **no. 5**, which stands out of the rest of antoniniani by its obverse details. Firstly, emperor's right hand which holds the spear and horse is not visible. More interesting is the inscription on the shield LEG II, which is unique and unknown for all coinage of Probus, not only on coins of Siscia mint and antonininiani. Therefore, one might doubt the authenticity of this specimen, which was supported by comparison of reverse with other specimens of CONCORDIA AVG type of officinae S from the same emission. The search of our reference photo database, revealed that the same reverse style is present on same specimens, which is additionally supported by the style of letters XXI of exergual mark (Hirsch 169 (1991), No. 1334). On this coin letters X were identically cut as on coin **no. 5**, they are slightly rotated and more resemble cross (+) than letter X. For the possibility of existence of inscription LEG II speak some historical facts. Of course, the final verification or decline of authenticity could be carried out ony by the direct examination of the coin, rather than its photo.

Another interesting type is IX (Mars walking right, holding spear and trophy). Alföldi in his corpus of coins of Probus states that this type does not have any decoration on shield, which makes it an exception or there could be an error in the catalogue, since the all other specimens illustrated in this paper have decorated shield. The single known specimen of type IX from Venèra hoard was not available to us for examination.

Catalogue

Obverse description: *Radiate, helmeted, cuirassed bust left, holding spear and horse bridle in right hand and shield in left hand, to left head of horse.*

variants:

- A) Shield decorated with rider left. Meduse on cuirass
- *B)* Shield decorated with rider right, soldiers carrying shields in foreground.
- *C) Shield decorated with rider left.*

- D) Shield inscribed with LEG II
- E) Shield without decoration

Besides thirteen specimens which are illustrated on tables, photographs of two additional specimens are given in **Figure 1**. By comparison with the antoniniani illustrated in tables it could be concluded that these are different specimens originating from Siscia mint. For instance coin 1a (Probvs internet site) has the same obverse die as **no. 4**. Their assignment to siscian mint is further supported by identical size and lettering, legend die-breaks, characteristic siscian letter G and decoration on shield. Photo 1b is given CHRB 5.

Besides the specimens of antoniniani minted in Siscia, which are known to Pink, there are several specimens produced in other mints: Roma^E: ROMAE AETERNAE (RIC 189, British Museum, **no. 15**), Serdica: VIRTVS PROBI AVG (RIC 879var., Coh 923var., Pink Aufbau S. 45 (4th emission 277, bearing the other obverse, **no. 16**) and CLEMENTIA TEMP (RIC 838var., 2nd emission 276, **no. 17**, Pink does know for obverse legend VIRTVS PROBI AVG for 2nd emission). Specimens **15-17** for shield decoration have a horseman (emperor) riding to right, in the front there is row of soldiers. An exeptional antoninianus was struck in Ticinum, VIRTVS AVG (RIC 437var., 2nd emission 276 AD, **no. 18**), on which emperor is depicted with the shield held in the right arm and reins in the left, however the horse is not visible. Mint of Ticinum also issued antoniniani with codewords which are related to the Probu's (*signum*) *Equitius*: in 7th -10th emissions (280-282) in the reverse field additional letter from the word AEQVIT/ EQVITI was added, and similarly it was found in the mint of Rome (in 7th emission 282) in the exergue one letter from word AEQVIT was added. ¹⁵

Datation of antoninianus **no. 17** of Serdica mint as the 2nd emission (AD 276) could be of crucial importance for establishing the sequence of minting of this interesting obverse type, which could be geographically traced from the eastern mints of the Roman Empire towards West. It is likely that the model for the siscian antoniniani of the 3rd emission (277) no. 3, 4 i 11 is coming from Serdica mint. By copying this model, as suggested in the earliest siscian emission with the horse head emperors portait has a very long neck, which is one of the stylistic characteristic of Serdica mint. In later emissions the portrait style becomes characteristically siscian, with much shorter emperor's neck, which is in good proportion with the body size. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that specimens from Serdica, as well as the earliest siscian emission have the same obverse inscription VIRTVS PROBI AVG, which is additional indication of use of Serdica model. In addition, there is a possiblity that the die-engravers from Serdica used for their model antoninianus of Claudius II (no. 14) minted in geographically neighbouring (eastern) mint of Cyzicus. By spreading this obverse type further to the West of the Empire, siscian specimens came to the central mint of Rome, where they were copied in AD 280/281 (no. 15).

For the comparison of style imporant are other issues of Probus from Siscia. In the 5th emission of Siscia mint Pink lists as a special series, so-called Festprägung, whereas amongst the other medallions there are several with the horse head on the obverse: with reverse legend IMP PROBVS CONS AVG II (emperor in quadriga, Pink p. 52/1 = Gnec-

chi bronzo III, p. 67, 50 from *coll*. Evans^F, **no. 19**)^G, and another specimen (Gnecchi vol 3, Tav 156, 21, **no. 20**) as well as the bronze medallion VICTORIA AVG (trophy and two captives, Pink p. 52, Nr. 12, **no. 21**). An aureus of Probus SOLI INVICTO COMITI AVG (RIC 138, Rome mint **no. 26**), in an illustative example of this bust type, although without the horse, in excellent state of preservation where all details are nicely visible: in particular head of Medusa on cuirass, and depiction of the horse rider on the shield going to the left (expanded detail, **Figure 2**).

After the rule of Probus obverse type with horse was rarely used only for special issues in important occassions, especially on rare medallions and aurei. Die engravers of Siscia, who might be still the same staff active in the mint during the Probus rule could be aware of the issues of Probus (or even have the models of obverse) and used it for the dies of gold medallion VIRTVS AVGVSTORVM of Numerian augustus (RIC 401corr.-Roma, Gnecchi I, Tav 4,7, **no. 22**, old copper engraving **Figure 3**). Production of this medallion Pink in VAHD¹⁶ dates to the 5th emission (Autumn 283/Autumn 284) of Siscia mint on the basis of stylistic analysis, while in Aufbau⁶ dates this issue in the 4th emission from the first part of November 283 (Nr. 14). There are some obvious differences in the type - emperor has a laureate wreath, there is no shield, spear is in the right hand.

During Carus and his family this special bust type is again used on the rare bronze quinarii depicting the portraits of Carinus and Magnia Urbica (**no. 23**). These are struck in Ticinum mint in the late Summer of 283. Here emperor has a helmet and shield, but in comparison with Probus type, does not have a spear.

On tetrarchic issues horse head is depicted on coinage only on special ocassions. Nice example is the bronze medallion of emperor Maximian minted in Rome, with usual reverse MONETA AVGG (RIC-H, Gn. Tav. 127, 6, H 7, AD 294, **no. 24**), where the shield is decorated with lupa Romana, Romulus and Remus. This specimen is nicely illustrated by Grueber¹⁹ (No. 4, Pl LVI, 3, copper engraving **Figure 4**). Gnecchi knows for another medallion of Maximian with the same obverse, but with different reverse: SALVIS AVGG ET CAESS FEL ORBIS TERR (Gn. Vol 2 Bronzo gran modvlo no. 10, Tav 127,10, RIC-). Furthermore, RIC does not list a rare nummus which was minted in Ostia for Maxentius of type VICTORIAE AETERNAE AVG N (RIC VI-, AD 309-312, **no. 25**). This specimen belongs to the famous Evans collection, but not included in the auction catalogue of his collection (Ars Classica 1934). On this coin emperor is depicted in cuirass, holding horse by reins, shield is decorated with rider going left.

Extremely rare are the examples of the late roman coinage from the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th century which depict cavalryman holding a horse by reins, such is nicely visible on the maxentian folles minted in Ostia AETERNITAS AVG N (1st emission AD 309²¹, RIC 16, Cohen 10, Hunter 26, **no. 27**). On enlarged detail it is easy to see dioscures Castor and Polux, holding reins, while behind them are visible the horse heads, front part of the animals and front legs (**Figure 5**).

An explicit reference for the connection of roman emperors with *Equis* (*eques*) *Romanus*, "roman knight" one could find on rare gold medallion of 1 and 1/2 aurei of emperor Constantine from Nicomedia (RIC 100, Depeyrot p. 154, cf. Bastien pl. IV, 16, Gnecchi 9, Coh 139, AD 325), with reverse legend EQVIS ROMANVS, Con-

stantine rides the horse to the left with raised hand (**no. 28**).^{22,23,J} This issue is a part of *donativum* for his *vicennalia* in AD 325 (Bastien Donativa, 79). Hess²⁴ thinks that by using this obverse Constantine gives a special tribute to politically important knightly order (*ordo equester*). Reverse type symbolises and attempt of emperor to establish a good relations with the conservative circles in Rome, to which he had an animosity, by glorification of this old influental order.^{25,26} There is also a specimen with the legend variant EQVES ROMANVS (Gnecchi, No. 8, Cohen, 138).

For the last time in the roman imperial numismatics the obverse with the horse head appears (in several variants) during the reigns of Constantine and the members of his family. For this period RIC lists several variants of busts with the horse: types with the laurel wreath: G11, G12 i G13, and helmet: H10 i H13. EDistinctive is the silver multiple of Constantine SALVS REIPVBLICAE from Trier mint (AD 315, RIC VII p. 364, No. 36, Pl. 9) with christian symbolism. Here emperor instead of spear holds a cross-shaped sceptre, and there is lupa romana on shield (no. 29). In addition, folles of Constantine I bearing the reverse legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI of Lugdunum (Lyons) mint from AD 316 (no. 30) is unknown in numismatic literature (cf. RIC VII pg. 125, note 51, Bastien-).^L On this piece is emperor's portrait with horse holding by reins, laurel wreath and imperial mantle. Due to its poor state of preservation, other details are not clearly visible (it is possible that emperor holds an eagle tipped scepter in left hand). Another unpublished specimen for emperor Constantine with horse head on obverse was minted in Arelate mint in AD 315-316 (no. 31). Emperor is shown in cuiras, with laurel wreath, holds a horse with right hand and shield with left hand, while the reverse legend is SOLI INVICTO COMITI.

Also the product of Trier mint is the series of small folles BEATA TRANQVILLITAS produced for Constantine sons Constantine II and Crispus in AD 322-323.²⁷ Reduced folles from 322 struck for Constantine II does not have spear on obverse, while the shield is decorated with Constantine standing and greeting the other caesar, three soldiers in the background (Alten p. 10, 18, Tf. III, 18, 1-2, **no. 32**). On the other hand, on the specimen **no. 33** (RIC 388, Trier AD 322-323) spear is clearly visible.^{28,M} In Trier emission BEATA TRANQVILLITAS for Crispus caesar there is a larger number of obverse variants, such as specimens with undecorated shield (**no. 34**, RIC 373), while on the other specimen²⁹ spear is depicted in the front of shield (RIC 397var, Coh 20var, Bastien vol II, p. 547-553, p. 551, pl. 183, n°6, **no. 35**). RIC does not list a variant with bust of Crispus facing right, while the horse bust is left and spear is hold by right hand (RIC-, Coh 20var, **no. 36**). This issue for Crispus is connected with his *quinquennalia* celebrations in Sirmium on 1st March 321.

Reduced folleses with obverse horse head were minted for Crispus in Ticinum, Aquileia and Lugdunum (Lyon) mints (**no. 37-39**). Specimens from Ticinum and Aquileia have laurel wreath/cuirass/shield, while shield is omitted on the specimen from Lyons, while Crispus most likely holds a sceptre in left hand (details are not clear from photo). The fist example from Ticinum is DOMINOR NOSTROR CAESS/VOT X type, minted in AD 320-321 (RIC 155var, Tkalec 22.4.2007, No. 351, Bikić-Do hoard³⁰ Pl. XII, No. 959, **no. 37**). Reduced folles from Aquileia minted in 321 (**no. 38**) has reverse type CAESARVM NOSTRORVM/VOT X (RIC 98, identical type appeared on the auction Gorny 60 (1992), No. 583). Specimen of reverse type VICTORIAE LAETAE PRINC

PERP from Lyon minted in 318-319 (**no. 39**) is entirely unpublished in numismatic literature for horse head obverse type (RIC VII-, Bastien-) and represents the earliest issue for Crispus with this bust type.

Translated by the authors.

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Siscia







Siscia, medaljoni







