

‘Measuring’ the Chronology of the So-called Moesian Countermarks

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Abstract. *The study discusses the so-called Moesian countermarks. They are stamped in rectangular fields with the letters “TI CA” and “TICAE”. The current text discusses two sites: the first is a military camp (ancient Almus), and the second (near modern Rasovo) is a civic settlement of the local inhabitants. Single coins from the time of the Flavians have been found at Almus, while at Rasovo such are totally lacking. The available data provided by the two sites demonstrates weak coin circulation during the time of Nero and of the Flavian dynasty. The authors believe this is the most likely time of circulation of the discussed countermarked coins.*

Key words. Countermarks, Lower Danube limes, Roman coins

Ключови думи: контрамарки, Долнодунавски лимес, римски монети



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The Early Imperial period (1st – beginning of the 2nd century AD) witnessed the total conquest of the Lower Danube area, its gradual return to peaceful life and adjustment of the provincial structure of the Roman Empire. The process took more than a hundred years and ended with the establishment of urban settlements (*coloniae* and *municipia*) during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian. One of the most important innovations of the Romans in that period was the introduction of the ‘monetary’ economy. During the 2nd – 1st centuries BC, only large denominations (tetradrachms, drachms, and denarii) circulated in the area. Small coins (asses) were introduced as early as the reign of Augustus. During that period (1st century AD), it seems that countermarked coins were circulating intensively in the province of Moesia (divided into Upper and Lower after AD 86). R. Martini established a typology of those countermarks. They are classified into three groups: (A) Pannonian types; (B) as-

sociated Pannonian and Moesian types; and (C) Moesian types. The last group is divided into three further subgroups and a relative chronology is proposed¹. Their recorded number exceeds 3,500, although more such coins presented in private collections, with almost no information about their archaeological context, should be calculated to this number. The current article is devoted to the so-called “Moesian” countermarks, typical of the province of Moesia². Scholars have expressed different opinions about their dating: as early as Tiberius³, or Claudius/Nero⁴. Most recent suggestion is that the production of such countermarks “must have continued, if not begun, under the Flavii, peaking between the reign of Titus and that of Domitianus”⁵.

Explanations about countermarking during the early imperial period differ. Some scholars argue that countermarks meant *donativa* (a gift to the soldiers by the emperor) from the private treasuries. Others assert that countermarks were denominated as property of the legions and to ensure that a minimum supply of coins remain at the military fortifications⁶. In any case, the distribution of the countermarked coins suggests that they were in use in the local “limes” market⁷.

Until recently, the coins with Moesian countermarks lacked proper archaeological context. Attempts to clarify their date are based almost on the deciphering of the abbreviation (TI CA; TI CAE and TI CAE + AVG), or on general observations on the chronology of the Roman expansion on the Lower Danube. The present article is an attempt to present the monetary circulation from 1st century AD sites and to correlate the coins with other well-dated

finds, particularly fibulae. In this regard, two sites can be examined. One of them is an auxiliary fort and the other is a local civic settlement. The two sites are situated about 10 km apart and provide well-datable archaeological material that can be used to correlate the date of the countermarks.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS ALMUS, MODERN LOM, MONTANA REGION

The site is well-known in academic literature. It is multi-layered site of successive settlements, starting from the middle of the 1st century AD⁸. The countermarked coins (**Fig. 1**) were found in the deepest layer, which corresponds to an Early Imperial Roman auxiliary fort⁹. This layer (labeled ALM I) lies beneath a Roman street with a portico (labeled ALM II). Two coins provide *terminus post quem* for the construction of the street: one of Trajan and one of Hadrian. The building and the street correspond to a Roman *vicus* that was established with the supposed adjustment of the provincial border in the late years of the reign of Hadrian, thus providing *terminus ante quem* for the auxiliary camp beneath. All archaeological features from the camp are heavily burned and its end is marked by a large fire. Surprisingly, *via sagularis* is disturbed by a pit with a horse burial inside. Most probably, this extraordinary situation attests to a siege; during such an event permission was granted to bury the dead animal inside the military infrastructure of the fort. One of the coins of interest was found next to the horse's skeleton. A hoard of bronze vessels, dated to AD 80s, was also found during construction works between 1970–1980. In an upcoming publica-

¹ Martini 2003: 7-8, 10-11, 19-24.

² Most of the countermarked coins were found in North Central and Northwestern Bulgaria (see Banov 2012; Martini 2002; 2003; Paunov 2021: 435-438). There are a few exceptions, coming from other places (Gerasimov 1946: fig. 26.14; Vladimirova-Aladjova 1999 published such coins from Appiaria).

³ Kabakchieva 2000: 34.

⁴ Martini 2002; Martini, Paunov 2004: 169-170.

⁵ Martini 2003: 11.

⁶ Miškec 2005: with discussion and literature quoted.

⁷ Paunov 2021: 438-439.

⁸ Material from the Late Bronze age is present in the deepest layers. However, no archaeological features from this early period have been preserved.

⁹ Still unidentified cavalry unit (*ala milliaria* or *quingenaria*). Two upper ranks of a *turma* are attested epigraphically.



Figure 1. Coins from Almus.

tion, the chronological frame of layer ALM I is established between the middle of the 1st century and the 80s AD¹⁰. These roughly outlined arguments give ground to assume that the fort was taken in an enemy attack. To date, 14 coins (**Fig. 1**) have been found in layer ALM I. Seven of them bear countermarks of isolated TI CA or TI CA + AVG; in one case TI CA was placed later and disturbed AVG. The earliest coins were minted under Augustus. Four coins were minted during the reigns of Caligula and Claudius, around the time when the fort was erected. Besides the countermarked coins, the reign of Caligula-Claudius provides most of the coins. The latest coins (single issues) belong to the three Flavian emperors¹¹.

RASOVO

The site was partly explored through rescue excavation during the construction works of the South Stream Gas Pipeline Project. It consists of semi-sunken houses and numerous pits. Twelve coins from the 1st century AD were found on this site. The earliest belongs to Augustus, the latest – to Claudius (**Fig. 2**). Based on the coins, the chronological boundary of the site can be placed in the first half of the 1st century AD. However, a relatively large number of fibulae (**Fig. 3**) speak for a broader chronological range. The basic types, attested at the site, are presented below:

- Spoon-shaped fibulae are the earliest type (**Fig. 3.1**). They are dated from the end of the 1st century BC to the beginning of the 1st century AD¹². The dating of the earliest fibu-

¹⁰ Zhivkov 2023.

¹¹ The latest coin was minted in the time of Domitian. However, it was found on the edge of a Late Antique pit and its attribution to the ALM I layer is uncertain.

¹² Type 16a after Rustoiu 1997: 49, fig. 51-55; type LT III.4 after Stamberova 2023: 343-344.



Figure 2. Coins from Rasovo.

lae coincides with the earliest Augustan coins from the site (see below).

- Arched fibulae¹³ are present with several variants. The earliest variant has rectangular excisions (Fig. 3.2). Similar fibulae have been dated to the late 1st century BC and the first half of 1st century AD¹⁴. The variant with circle incisions (Fig. 3.3) is dated between the reigns of Tiberius and that of the Flavii¹⁵. The variants with solid foot (Fig. 3.4)¹⁶ are dated

throughout the entire 1st century, however, they seem more typical for the second half of the century¹⁷.

- The Aucissa fibulae (Fig. 3.5) is the most well-known type¹⁸. Their dating falls mostly in the first half of 1st century, although examples originating from up to the early 2nd century are also known.

- One of the fibulae belongs to the so-called “disc type”, with a rhomboid plate (Fig.

¹³ Group 4 after *Almgren* 1923.

¹⁴ Type 8a1a after *Cociş* 2004: 47, dated to the first decades of the 1st century; type 9.a after *Gencheva* 2004: 28-29; type 19.a after *Rustoiu* 1997: 53.

¹⁵ Type 9.2 after *Bojović* 1983: 33-34; type 19.b after *Rustoiu* 1997: 53, who dates them in the first three-quarters of the 1st century. It is close to the variants 8a1b after *Cociş* 2004: 46; type 9.b after *Gencheva* 2004: 30-31.

¹⁶ Type 9.3 after *Bojović* 1983; type 19.c after *Rustoiu* 1997: 53.

¹⁷ *Cociş* 2004: 49; *Gencheva* 2004: 31.

¹⁸ Type 2 after *Bojović* 1983: 21; type 13 after *Gencheva* 2004: 37-39; type 29 after *Rustoiu* 1997: 60; type 5.5 after *Riha* 1979: 123.

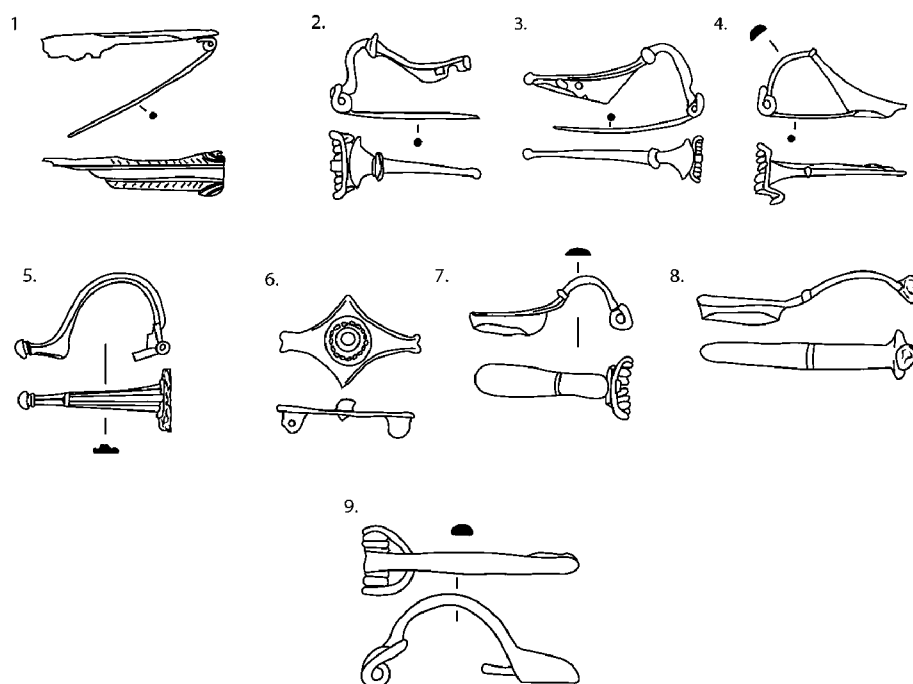


Figure 3. Fibulae from Rasovo.

3.6). Similar fibulae were found in archaeological contexts from the time of Claudius and were in use during the reign of the Flavii¹⁹.

- Fibulae with “eyes” (Fig. 3.7–8) have a wide chronology. Their date is between the second decade of 1st century up to the third quarter of the same century²⁰. The specimens from Rasovo lack incised circles (“eyes”) and in one case the bow is less curved (Fig. 3.8) which probably indicates their later dating, after the middle of the 1st century.

- The latest type of fibulae belongs to the so-called “Soldaten” type (Fig. 3.9). They are typical for the time of Domitian, with the latest specimens belonging to the beginning of the 2nd century²¹.

Based on the types of the discovered fibulae, the existence of settlement near Rasovo should be placed between the end of the 1st century BC until the last decades of the 1st century AD. One should note the even distribution of different types of fibulae typical of the entire period.

All twelve discovered coins²² cover partly this period. The earliest coins date from the reign of Augustus (Fig. 2.1–5), followed by those of Caligula (Fig. 2.10) and of Claudius (Fig. 2.11–12). Four coins are countermarked with a “TI CA/CAE” (Fig. 2.3, 2.7–2.9). The coins provide *terminus post quem* for the demise of the settlement during the reign of Claudius, as no later coins have been found.

DISCUSSION

The lack of publications of sites from the period of the Early Roman Empire hinders at the moment the chronological positioning of the countermarked coins. Possibly, one coin of interest was found in Ratiaria²³. According to this publication, there is a TI CLA ... PIMP (?) countermark, placed on a coin of Agrippina the Elder. The only site with a monographically study of the discovered coins is Novae²⁴. In the publication are shown 58 coins until the reign of Antoninus Pius, and only one of these bears a countermark²⁵. The original coin was

¹⁹ Type 25, variant a after Gencheva 2004: 66; type 31, variant b after Rustoiu 1997: 61; type 7.4 after Riha 1979: 182.

²⁰ Type 39 after Gencheva 2004: 80; type 2.3 after Riha 1979: 68; Rustoiu 1997: 57, fig. 67.

²¹ Type 1.4 after Bojović 1983: 22; type 4.b after Gencheva 2004: 19-20; type 9 after Rustoiu 1997: 42, fig. 36-37.

²² The coins were identified by Varbin Varbanov.

²³ Boškova 1987, cat. 2, Tabl. XXIII.2.

²⁴ Ciolek, Dyczek 2011.

²⁵ Ciolek, Dyczek 2011: cat. 10. Only CA preserved. Most probably this is another type of countermark.

minted during the reign of Claudius.

An obvious gap in the monetary circulation can be observed in both examined cases (Almus and Rasovo), and it covers the time after the reign of Claudius I. The general absence of Flavian coins makes the withdrawal of countermarked coins after the Civil War and under Vespasian²⁶ an unlikely scenario. It seems that the main period of their circulation, at least based on the two sites examined, was during the reign of Nero and the Flavians. In our opinion, the suggested reconstruction of *Titvs Caesar Avgvstvs*²⁷ seems most likely. This might refer to Vespasian (more likely²⁸) or his first-born son – Titus (less likely). However, the problem with the eastern distributions of the countermarked coins remains. The logical conclusion from previous research is that the absence of those coins is based on the annexation of this territory (east of the Yantra/Iatrus River) after the reign of Nero. The latest moment for circulation of countermarked coins is placed up to his reign, or shortly after²⁹. However, the coins from Ryahovo (anc. *Appiaria*)³⁰ – and most recently from Shirokovo³¹ – might indicate that future excavations of archaeological features from the second half of the 1st century AD could shed light on the distribution of such coins in the eastern part of the Lower Danube.

Based on the data presented, we consider the period of the Flavian dynasty the most likely time for the circulation of countermarked coins of the TI CA / TI CAE type. The intensive countermarking attests to insufficient monetary mass in the hinterland during that period. A possible explanation of this phenomena could be found in the expansion of the Roman *limes* up to the Danube delta, and the extensive construction of new forts in this area. Some

scholars place the renovations of older forts (replacement of the old earth and timber fortifications with stone walls) in the same time³². However, more stratified finds should be published. Until then, the current view should be considered only as a hypothetical.

The place of production and countermarking is still to be localized. The already suggested sites – Ratiaria and Oescus³³ seem unlikely options, as only single countermarked coins are known from them. As presented here, the coins circulated both in the military sites and the nearby local settlements. This might suggest that the nearby settlements were indeed included in the so-called *limes* market.

CATALOGUE OF THE COINS

1. ALMUS³⁴

1.1. Augustus, as, 7 BC.

Obv. ...[A]VG ..., head facing left.

Rev. MSA[LVIVSOTHIOIV]IRAAFF, around SC.

5.96 g; 25.3 x 25.7 mm. RIC I, 432

1.2. Unreadable, as.

Two worn countermarks, rectangular.

5.82 g; 26.7 x 23.4 mm.

1.3. Unreadable, as.

Worn countermark [TIC]·A. 4.16 g; 21.3 x 23.4 mm.

1.4. Unreadable, as.

Worn countermark [TI]CA.

4.96 g; 24 x 23.5 mm

1.5. Unreadable, as.

Two countermarks TI CA and third AVG.

5.08 g; 26.6 x 25.5 mm.

1.6. Unreadable, as.

Obv. head facing left ? Countermark TI·C·A.

4.40 g; 22.7 x 21.9 mm.

²⁶ Martini, Paunov 2004: 170.

²⁷ by Martini 2003: 107.

²⁸ An important remark about the small number of coins of Vespasian has been pointed out for Novae – see Gencheva 2002: 69.

²⁹ Paunov 2021: 438.

³⁰ Published by Vladimirova-Aladjova 1999.

³¹ Single coin discovered during excavations by D. Dragoev (see Dragoev 2024).

³² For example: Gencheva 2002: 16-23, 60-69; Kabakchieva, Lazarova 2012: 12; also, Vagalinski 2011 publishes lime kilns, probably used in those constructions.

³³ Martini, Paunov 2004: 170.

³⁴ Catalogue numbers correspond to the numbers in Figure 1.

1.7. Unreadable, as.

Countermark TI C·A, placed upon older [AV]G.

8.78 g; 26.2 x 23.7 mm.

1.8. Agrippa (minted under Caligula), as, Roma, 37 – 41 AD.

Obv. M·AGRIPPA·L· F·COS·[III], head of Agrippa facing left.

Rev. Neptune, holding a dolphin and a trident. SC.

9.35 g; 27.7 x 28.3 mm. RIC I, 58

1.9. Agrippa (minted under Caligula), as, the same as the previous.

8.88 g; 27 x 27.7 mm. RIC I, 58.

1.10. Claudius, sestertius, Roma, 41 – 50 AD.

Obv. [TICLAVDIVS]CAESARA[VGPMT R PIMP], head of Claudius facing right.

Rev. [SPESAVGVSTA], Spes walking left, holding a flower.

18.33 g; 33.6 x 33.9 mm. RIC I, 99.

1.11. Claudius, as, Roma, 41 – 50 AD.

Obv. [TICLAVDIVS]CAESARAVGPMTRP IMP, head of Claudius facing left.

Rev. Minerva, walking left, holding a spear and a shield. S C on both sides.

9.72 g; 28.5 x 28.1 mm; RIC II/I², 442, Roma.

1.12. Vespasian, as, Roma, 71 AD.

Obv. [IMPCA]ES[VASPASIANVSAVG]CO SIII.

Rev. VICTO[RIA NA]V[A]LIS, Victoria, facing left upon a ship, holding a palm and a wreath, SC on both sides.

7.63 g; 23.1 x 24.9 mm; RIC II/I², 336, Roma.

1.13. Germanicus (minted under Titus), as, Roma, 80 – 81 AD.

Obv. [GERMANICV]SCAESARTIAVGFDI[VIAVGN], head of Germanicus facing left.

Rev. IMPTC[AESDI]VIVESPFAVGREST, S C in the middle; RIC II/I², 442, Roma.

1.14. Domitian, as, Roma, worn.

Obv. Head of Domitian with wreath facing right.

Rev. [...AVG]VST[.] Standing figure walking left.

9.47 g; 26.7 x 27 mm.

2. RASOVO³⁵**2.1. Augustus, as/dupondius. Roma, 18 BC.**

Obv. AVGVSTVS/TRIBVNIC/POTEST, in a wreath.

rev. [TCR]ISPINVSSVLL[PICIANIIIVIRA AAFF] with S C.

6.51 g; 23.1 x 23.3 mm. Possible RIC I 333.

2.2. Augustus, as, Roma, 18 – 15 BC.

Obv. AVGVSTVS/[TRI]BVNIC/[PO]TEST in a wreath.

Rev. worn, S C in the middle.

6.41 g; 22.4 x 23.2 mm.

2.3. Augustus, as, Roma, 18 – 15 BC.

Obv. [AVGVSTVS/TRIBVNIC/POTEST/ in a wreath.

Rev. worn, [S] C; two countermarks AV[G] and [TI·C]·A.

4.42 g; 25.8 x 23.8 mm.

2.4. Augustus, as, Roma, 18 – 15 BC.

Obv. [AVGVSTVS]/TRIB[VNIC]/[P]OT[EST] in a wreath.

Rev. []AAFF, S C in the middle.

7.87 g; 25.2 x 26.7 mm.

2.5. Augustus, as, Roma, 7 BC.

Obv. [CAESARAV]GVSTPONTMAX[TRIB VNICPOT], head of Augustus facing right.

Countermark AVG (in a ligature).

Rev. MMAECILIVSTVLL[VSIIIVIRAA]AFF. S C in the middle. Unreadable countermark.

11.11 g; 28 x 27.7 mm. RIC I 435.

2.6. Probably Augustus, heavily worn, as. S C on the rev.

5.86 g; 24.8 x 23 mm.

2.7. Unreadable, heavily worn, as.

Three rectangular countermarks: AVG, [AVG] and T[I]·C·A; one round countermark – helm?

4.89 g; 24.3 x 24.6 mm.

2.8. Unreadable, heavily worn, as.

Rectangular countermark TI·C·[A]. Unreadable second countermark.

7.27 g; 24.9 x 23 mm.

2.9. Unreadable, heavily worn, as.

Rectangular countermark [T]I·CAE.

4.42 g; 23.2 x 21.4 mm.

2.10. Agrippa (minted under Caligula), as,

³⁵ Catalogue numbers correspond to the numbers in **Figure 2.**

Roma, 37 – 41 AD.

Obv. MAGRIPPAL·F·COS·III, head of Agrippa facing left.

Rev. Neptune, holding a dolphin and a trident. S C.

10.64 g; 29.5 x 28.3 mm. RIC I, 58.

2.11. Claudius I, sestertius, Roma, 41 – 50 AD.

Obv. [TICLAVDIVSCA]ESARAVG[PMTR PIMP], head with a wreath, facing right.

Countermark D V, placed on the neck.

Rev. [SPESAVGVSTA], Spes, walking left, holding a flower.

17.87 g; 33.5 x 32.4 mm. RIC 99.

2.12. Agrippina the Elder (minted under Claudius I), sestertius, Roma, 50 – 54 AD.

Obv. AGRIPPINAMFGERMANICICAE·SARIS, bust of Agrippina facing right.

Rev. S C in the middle, around – TICLAVDIVSCAESARAVGGERPMPMPMP.

29.13 g; 35.6 x 35.4 mm. RIC I 102.

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„Измерване“ на хронологията на т.нар. мизийски контрамарки

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Статията разглежда така наречените мизийски контрамарки. Те са нанасяни в правоъгълни полета с надписи “TICA” и “TICAE”, понякога съчетани с други контрамарки – най-често “AVG”. Към момента са известни над 3500 монети. Всички те са дребни номинали (асове). Все още липсва публикация, която да е посветена на археологическия контекст на монетите с мизийски контрамарки. Тук авторите представят два обекта. Първият е военен лагер на анонимна към момента конна част (ала) под днешния град Лом (античния Алмус). Лагерът е възникнал около средата на I в. и е загинал през 80-те години на същия век. Вторият обект е селище на местно население, попадащо в землището на село Расово. То отстои на 10 километра от военния лагер при Лом. Селището също е загинало през втората половина на I в. Към момента от Алмус произхождат единични монети от времето на Флавиите, а при Расово те напълно липсват. Наличните данни, предоставени от двата обекта, демонстрират слаби постъпления на монетна маса от времето на Нерон и Флавиевата династия. Към настоящия етап на проучвания изглежда много вероятно този „хиатус“ в монетната циркулация да се запълни именно с контрамаркираните монети от типовете TICA и TICAE. Публикуване на други археологически контексти от I в. в бъдеще ще изясни тяхната хронология.

