

# Coin Evidence for the Integration of the Cities of Bithynia and Pontus during the Reign of Trajan?\*

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## Abstract

There are nine iconographic types reproduced on the coins of individual centers of Bithynia and Pontus during the reign of Trajan. These originate from Roman Imperial coins struck between 80–82 AD, in the Imperial branch mint located in Thrace or Bithynia. It could indicate a certain degree of integration or co-operation between cities. Is this a true thesis? In this period in Bithynia and Pontus, monetary policy may have depended on central intervention central intervention, rivalry between cities, trade, army, and cult.

## Monetary Policy during the Reign of Trajan

Financial policy in the Roman Empire during the reign of Trajan had a centralizing tendency, just as in the period of Domitian.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the monetary policy in this period we can consider some type of coordination across the large territory of Roman Empire. The research of Kevin Butcher has addressed the stylistic similarities in silver provincial coinage that was struck in this period. He suggested that the production of these coins was carried out only in three main mints such as Rome, Alexandria and Antioch and were distributed to other regions.<sup>2</sup> The main provincial economy was focused on the bronze currency struck mostly in the local cities, but some of them were issued in Rome and distributed for the local needs to Syria, Cyprus, Cyrenaica and Cappadocia.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in the provinces the Roman Imperial coins also circulated.<sup>4</sup>

## Central Intervention in Bithynia and Pontus

Giovanni Salmeri in his article about centralized intervention and case of Bithynia and Pontus, based on the letters Pliny the Younger<sup>5</sup> wrote about two tends between centre and provinces. Rome's provincial administration was rigid, and had precise rules to be followed. In matters of policy, he also assumed that individual Emperors had the capacity to shape large-scale economic and social processes on a major level. Based on the letters between the Emperor and Pliny the Younger we can see some elasticity and adaptability in the final decisions, and sometimes these decisions were undertaken by only the *legatus*. Pliny gives attention to many issues, such as the administration of

justice, as well as the control of expenditure and public works.<sup>6</sup> He also gives us some examples, such as the millions of sesterces of public funding for an aqueduct in Nicomedia,<sup>7</sup> or the 10 million sesterces used for the theater in Nicaea.<sup>8</sup> Pliny solved financial difficulties by the system of collective euergetism.

In this context, one should consider the impact of central intervention on monetary policy. Central intervention, according to the correspondence with the Emperor, was more a political and ideological action, rather than a strictly economic one. The city's money was not the priority of the Emperor, and he was worried more about some interests of local notables.<sup>9</sup> According to Michael Rostovtzeff, 'the emperors of the first two centuries were upholders of economic liberalism, whose behavior left the way open to the development of a market economy in the Mediterranean area'.<sup>10</sup> Moses Finley claimed that 'economic elements were inextricably joined to political and religious factors'.<sup>11</sup> In this case, there was no decision in Bithynia and Pontus that was purely economic in nature. Trajan's intervention had more of a political impact, but with economic consequences.<sup>12</sup>

How is this related to the monetary policy? The intervention of the center could have had some impact on monetary production, namely in terms of the amount of funds needed for some building works. For the provincial economy, this could have impacted the relationship of certain cities within a regional hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Following this approach, the funding was a matter of pride for local people, with which they could emphasize their position (such as through a *neokoros* title).<sup>14</sup> The status of the city provoked rivalry between cities because they had more benefits and economic advantages. During this period there were conflicts between Nicomedia and Nicaea, and between Apamea and Prusa. Some denominations could be dependent from the status of the city. Dio of Prusa claimed an assize-district for his hometown. Stephen Mitchell stated that the presence and passage of the army to be a significant stimulus for the local economy.<sup>15</sup> Gren focused on contacts between Bithynia and Thrace that lasted for many centuries and emphasized the relevant position of the Byzantium.<sup>16</sup> Other factors that could influence economic and monetary policy could be trade and cult.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, based on modern research, some Roman Imperial coins are visible in provincial material, which forces us to consider the importance this currency had in the provincial economy.

### **Are Coins the Determinant Factor of Local Integration?**

The minting activity in Bithynia and Pontus was conducted by 14 cities, which struck bronze coinage. Among these centers are important harbors (Byzantium or Heraclea), metropolises (Nicomedia, Heraclea, Amastris), or autonomous cities (Calchedon). Two colonies (Apamea and Sinop) were located in the region, and their coins differ from the provincial ones due to the Roman citizens, who placed characteristic images and Latin legends.<sup>18</sup>

Coins of individual centers struck during the Trajanic period may indicate a certain degree of integration or co-operation. Kraay<sup>19</sup> suggested the presence of a centralized system in the province, which could be reflected in the similar denomination, material, images, legends, and die-links of coins as well as the occurrence of a particular currency in circulation. Individual emissions in Bithynia and Pontus show some similarities, but not in all aspects, thus denying a strict centralization system; perhaps this points to a certain type of integration between centers.<sup>20</sup> Some centers had a similar monetary pattern, such as Heraclea and Tium, or Byzantium and Calchedon. However, cities often had rivalries with each other for status, and would benefit from this (in Bithynia and Pontus there was rivalry between Apamea and Prusa, and between Nicaea and Nicomedia).<sup>21</sup> Why then was there integration in this period? Some effigies were placed on coins and reproduced in different centers, which reflect more Roman traditions than that of the local culture. One example is the type of Ares (RPC III Nicaea 1061, Juliopolis 1098, Amastris 1198), or other personifications (RPC III Apamea 1029–1030, Juliopolis 1099). They do not repeat images from coins issued locally in earlier periods (only single emissions), or Roman Imperial coins from the Trajanic period (only single emissions), which were also present in the province's circulation.

There are nine iconographic types reproduced on the coins of individual centers of Bithynia and Pontus during the reign of Trajan (Table 1). These originate from Roman Imperial coins struck between 80–82 AD, from the Imperial branch mint located in Thrace or Bithynia.<sup>22</sup> If we take into account the denominations of particular types, they do not completely correspond to their prototypes. Coins with effigies of Pax/Eirene (RPC III Apamea 1029; Juliopolis 1099, Prusias ad Hypium 1101, Uncertain mint 1125–1126, 1131), Ares (RPC III Nicaea 1059, Juliopolis 1098, Amastris 1198) and Elpis (RPC III Amastris 1199, Abonoteichos 1211, Uncertain mint 1127) were minted. This is based on sestertii with these representations and represents larger denominations with a diameter of 30–35 mm and a weight between 20–26 g. In this case, some copies have a slightly smaller diameter and a lower weight when compared to the Roman sestertius, however none of these types were placed on smaller denominations. Coins with the image of Pax/Eirene were also issued during the Domitianic period in Nicaea (RPC II 633), and Prusias (RPC II 672). This indicates the popularity of this motif in this part of the province as well as the possible integration between individual centers.<sup>23</sup> The image of Victoria was placed only on the Imperial dupondius (RPC II 512). The same denomination and type was struck by Amisus (RPC III 1237), although this image also appeared on other units in other cities. Most of the denominations of Imperial coins issued between 80–82 AD are asses. Only some types have a similar denomination as the Roman as. These are coins with the effigy of Demeter from Juliopolis (RPC III 1100) and Amastris (RPC III 1200–1202), Poseidon from Tium (RPC III 1180) and Athena from Prusa (RPC III 1040). Perhaps some types were supposed to reproduce the same denomination, however, the value corresponded to the local assarion (18–20 mm, 4–6 g). If we look at all copied types, the least diverse denomination are coins that had a similar

Latin Coins from Thrace (80–82 AD)		Provincial Bronze Coins from Bithynia and Pontus (98–117 AD)		
Type	Denomination	Type	Mint	Denomination
Pax	Sestertius	Pax	Apamea	33 mm, 21 g
		Eirene	Juliopolis	32–33 mm, 25 g
			Prusias and Hypium	31 mm, 20 g
			Uncertain mint	30–34 mm, 22–35 g
Mars	Sestertius	Ares	Nicaea	35 mm, 21–22 g
			Juliopolis	31–32 mm, 25–26 g
			Amastris	30–31 mm, 22 g
Spes	Sestertius	Elpis	Uncertain mint	30–31 mm, 21–22 g
			Amastris	30 mm, 24 g
			Abonoteichos	31–32 mm, 20 g
Ceres	As	Demeter	Prusa	32 mm, 23–24 g
			Juliopolis	25–26 mm, 13 g
			Uncertain mint	21–22 mm, 6–7 g (Bassus) 24–27 mm, 11–12 g 24–25 mm, 9 g 20–22 mm, 6–7 g
			Amastris	25–27 mm, 10–12 g
			Abonoteichos	21 mm, 6 g
Victory	Dupondius	Nike	Uncertain mint	31–32 mm, 22–24 g 25–27 mm, 11–13 g
			Amastris	23–24 mm, 9 g
			Amisus	27–28 mm, 13 g 22–23 mm, 8 g

Table 1: Iconographic Types and Denominations of Latin Coins from Thrace (80–82 AD), and Provincial Bronze Coins from Bithynia and Pontus (98–117 AD).

Latin Coins from Thrace (80–82 AD)		Provincial Bronze Coins from Bithynia and Pontus (98–117 AD)		
Type	Denomination	Type	Mint	Denomination
Altar	As	Altar	Prusias ad Hypium	18–19 mm, 6 g
			Uncertain mint	19–22 mm, 6–7 g (Bassus) 24 mm, 9 g 20–21 mm, 5–6 g
			Amisus	22–23 mm, 9 g
Eagle	As	Eagle	Prusa	16 mm, 4 g
			Prusias ad Hypium	18 mm, 5 g
			Uncertain mint	21 mm, 7–8 g (Bassus) 22 mm, 5 g
			Amastris	23 mm 32 mm, 24 g
Neptune	As	Poseidon	Heraclea	24 mm, 14–15 g 18–20 mm, 4–5 g
			Tium	25 mm, 10 g
Minerva	As	Athena	Prusa	25 mm, 12–13 g
			Uncertain mint	21–22 mm, 6–7 g
			Heraclea	22–23 mm, 5 g 18 mm, 5 g
			Amastris	23–24 mm, 8–9 g
			Amisus	17 mm, 3 g
Roma	Dupondius		–	
Poppy with corn-ears	17 mm, 5–6 g		–	

Table 1 (continued)

value to the Roman sestertius. The rest of the copied types were made following different units. Among the cities imitating these effigies, it seems that Juliopolis and Amas-tris tried to reproduce the same denominations.

Determining the more accurate dating of individual coins with copied types is quite problematic. Due to the titles received by the Emperor, their chronology can be determined mainly for the periods after 98 and 102 AD. This, in turn, does not allow us to state whether the reasons for copying images from Roman Imperial coins are related to the coming of the Imperial legate and an attempt to bring the monetary system in the province more in alignment with the Imperial one. During the Domitianic reign, some of these types were already placed on coins in Nicaea,<sup>24</sup> Nicomedia,<sup>25</sup> and Prusias ad Hypium.<sup>26</sup> The distribution of particular iconographic types is visible during the Trajanic period. Some of the portraits of the Emperor on the obverse of the bronze coins from Bithynia and Pontus could also be based on Imperial coins. It could be a very good method to take advantage of another one.

Returning to the 'prototypes' of coins, the Roman Imperial branch mint was proposed to be in the area of Thrace by modern researchers,<sup>27</sup> due to the presence of these coins in museums and collections in Sofia, Belgrade, and Istanbul. However, perhaps one should return to the view of one researcher,<sup>28</sup> which situated the mint in Bithynia and, consequently, the subsequent reproduction of locally known coins during the Trajanic period. Researchers rejected this thesis due to differences between the styles, denominations, ore, and the axis of Imperial coins struck at the same time and the bronze coins in Bithynia.<sup>29</sup> Another hypothesis is that Thrace was a possible place of production for the needs of Bithynia.

### Conclusion

During the reign of Trajan, does the copying of motifs similar to Roman Imperial coins struck between 80–82 AD indicate the integration of individual centers? Perhaps, but not necessarily for all of the province. Perhaps the integration of cities should be seen only in the centers of the western part of Bithynia. Despite similar effigies, there are many inaccuracies that may exclude integration. On their coins, cities placed only some of the above iconographic types, and they were still issuing coins with images related to local traditions. A large variation in denominations is visible. The rivalries of individual centers should be kept in mind. Maybe the phenomenon should be interpreted as an attempt to 'approximate' the provincial monetary system more to the Imperial one, which could also be related with the central intervention of the Emperor and the residence of his legate. Copying images from Roman Imperial coins from the period 80–82 AD would indicate that the reproduction of well-known motifs spread across Bithynia and Pontus.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett 2015, 203; Carradice 1983, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Amandry et al. 2015, 798.

<sup>3</sup> Amandry et al. 2015, 870.

<sup>4</sup> Butcher 1988, 9–13; Among the published finds from this region, the hoard of imperial coins from Koçoğlu, Manyas in Turkey should be highlighted. Here, a large part of the coins are denarii issued in Rome from the period of Trajan and Hadrian (Arslan 1996, 31).

<sup>5</sup> Plin., Ep. X; This is one of the few and very valuable relationships that is the basis for further research into the life and functioning of the region, and of Trajan’s policy itself.

<sup>6</sup> Salmeri 2005, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Plin., Ep. X, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Plin., Ep. X, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Salmeri 2005, 195

<sup>10</sup> Salmeri 2005, 190.

<sup>11</sup> Finley 1999, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Salmeri 2005, 191.

<sup>13</sup> Salmeri 2005, 196.

<sup>14</sup> Butcher 1988, 25 f.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell 1993, 134.

<sup>16</sup> Gren 1941.

<sup>17</sup> Salmeri 2005, 196–197.

<sup>18</sup> Amandry et al. 2015, 118–154; Butcher 1988, 47–50.

<sup>19</sup> Kraay 1953.

<sup>20</sup> Amandry, Burnett et al. 1999, 92.

<sup>21</sup> Winniczuk 2017, 79; Salmeri 2005, 196.

<sup>22</sup> Amandry et al. 1999, 87–91.

<sup>23</sup> Woytek 2011, 123.

<sup>24</sup> Amandry et al. 1999, 101–103.

<sup>25</sup> Amandry et al. 1999, 103–105.

<sup>26</sup> Amandry et al. 1999, 106–109.

<sup>27</sup> Carradice – Cowell 1987; Amandry, Burnett et al. 1999, 87–91; Burnett 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Cahn 1984.

<sup>29</sup> Amandry et al. 1999, 87.

## Image Credits

Table 1: by the author.

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