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New *nummi* of Aelia Flaccilla with symbols from Antiochia and Nicomedia (c. 383 AD)

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A medium sized bronze coin has recently come to our attention, which we think is worthy of publication. It is a Late Roman *Æ* 2 (*maiorina*, *pecunia* or, just, a *nummus*; 21.5 mm, 5.63 g, 11) in the name of *Aelia Flaccilla Augusta*, the wife of Theodosius I (383–386) and the mother of Arcadius and Honorius. The obverse shows a bust of the empress wearing an elaborate headdress, a pearl necklace, and drapery; surrounding her is the legend AEL FLAC-CILLA AVG. The reverse legend is SALVS REI-PVBLICAE, with ANTE in the exergue. The type is the empress, standing, facing, with her arms crossed before her breast and her head to right. Ostensibly, this is a normal issue of Antioch, as RIC IX, p. 291, 62.

However, there is something unexpected on the reverse: in the left field there is a barely visible letter T, presumably an emission mark. To our knowledge, the coin is unpublished with this emission mark; though it is, of course, a variant of LRBC 2170¹ and RIC IX 62.



Fig. 1: New *Æ* 2 of Aelia Flaccilla (Private Spanish collection).

The refined oriental style of the coin is entirely typical of the mint of Antioch, and the Greek letter *epsilon* also refers to the *officina* that struck coins for Aelia Flaccilla (though not exclusively so). The coinage of Aelia Flaccilla is considered not to have appeared prior to 19 January 383, when her elder son Arcadius was created Augustus. The presence of the T to the left of the field in our coin is an issue or series mark that appears to be exclusively Eastern and from the period 383–388: it is found on coins of Valentinian II, Theodosius I, Arcadius and Aelia Flaccilla struck at Constantinople (RIC 79, V&T; 80, A; 81 [Victory], AF), Cyzicus (RIC 23, T), Nicomedia (RIC 40, V&T; 41, A; 42 [Victory], AF), Antioch (RIC 59, V&T; 60, A; 61 [Victory], AF), and Alexandria (RIC 15, V&T; 16, A).

The T does appear on coins of Flaccilla from Antioch, but only in the right reverse field and only on those issues with the legend SALVS REI-PVBLICAE and a seated Victory, as Antioch, RIC IX 61. It is highly likely that the engraver may have begun a T series, only to be informed that it was not necessary: he would then have erased the T in order to enable the die to be used.

This coin seems, indeed, to provide important evidence that the ancient capital of the East might have been using a series of combinations with letters and symbols on the reverse, which was richer than originally thought. The appearance of this coin is also complemented by another unpublished piece that recently appeared at auction (fig. 2): this is of the same type, but is from Nicomedia and

1 R.A.G. CARSON – P. V. HILL
– J.P.C. KENT. Late Roman
Bronze Coinage AD 324–498.
(London 1978).

is a variant of RIC IX p. 461, 43. On the reverse of this coin Flaccilla has a palm branch in the field to her left. This coin, too, is very interesting, given that the T and the palm marks to the left are rare in such types SALVS REI-PVBLICAE. Since the palm branch is known as a reverse field symbol at Nicomedia, we have a choice of assuming a) that an issue was actually planned for Flaccilla with a palm branch, but was cancelled for some reason, or, b) that the engraver simply made a mistake! Could it be that the T series was issued first, soon after Arcadius' elevation to the throne 383, and that the issue lacking the T was struck subsequently; in any case prior to Flaccilla's death in early 386? This intriguing period in Roman monetary history deserves a more detailed and careful analysis than it has had.



Fig. 2: Æ 2 Aelia Flaccilla (4.74 g), Nicomedia. (Ex Numismatica Ars Classica 42, 20 November 2007, lot. 439)

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