

# Nero's visit to Greece : two numismatic notes

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## NERO'S VISIT TO GREECE: TWO NUMISMATIC NOTES \*

Andrew Burnett

### *1. Did Nero strike aurei in Greece?*

In the British Museum Catalogue of coins of Nero, H. Mattingly included an aureus with a seated figure of Jupiter and the legend IVPPITER LIBERATOR<sup>1</sup>. Because of its unusual style he attributed it to a mint in Greece, during Nero's visit in A.D. 66-67. On the face of it this attribution is reasonable enough, given the same inscriptions, NE KAI ZEYΣ EΛEYΘEPIOΣ and IVPPITER LIBERATOR, on Neronian

\* I am very grateful to Brooks Levy for discussion and disagreement.

<sup>1</sup> BMC 110 and p. cxxxiii-iv. Cf. RIC 48. D. W. MacDowall, *The Western Coinages of Nero* 223.

coins of Sicyon<sup>2</sup> and Patras<sup>3</sup>, which reflect Nero's proclamation of the Freedom of Greece at the nearby Isthmian<sup>4</sup> and presumably also the Olympic Games<sup>5</sup>.

As long ago as 1921, however, Laffranchi proposed an alternative view, that the coin was a modern forgery<sup>6</sup>. Laffranchi's view has not won general acceptance, but is certainly correct. This can be proved by the following chain of die links, which make impossible combinations of (sometimes invented) types, and which display a complete ignorance of the metrology of the period<sup>7</sup>.

1. Obv. NERO CAESAR AVG IMP. Bare head, right.  
Rev. SA-LVS. Salus seated left.
  - a. 7.45 Mazzini, 156, 319, pl. 55 (fig. 1)
  
2. Same obverse die as 1.  
Rev. VESTA. Temple of Vesta.
  - a. 7.47 ↑ Soc. Num. It. (RIN 1964, pl. 1.6)
  - b. 7.49 Seen at BM (fig. 2)
  
3. Obv. IMP NERO CAESAR AVGVSTVS. Laureate head, right.  
Same reverse die as 2.
  - a. 7.38 Seen at BM
  - b. 7.42 Mazzini, 157, 334, pl. 55
  
4. Same obverse die as 3.  
Rev. \_\_\_\_\_  
SALVS. Salus seated right.
  - a. 7.25 ↓ Soc. Num. It. (RIN 1962, pl. 1.7) (fig. 4)
  
5. Same obverse die as 3 and 4.  
Rev. IVPITER CVSTOS. Jupiter seated left.
  - a. 7.56 ↓ BM (1964) (fig. 5)
  - b. 7.48 Mazzini, 142, 120, pl. 47
  - c. 7.55 MMAG 12 (1953), 800
  - d. 7.15 Cahn 71 (1931), 1485
  - e. 7.25 G. Hirsch 1955, 505 = MMAG 35 (1967), 31
  
6. Obverse as 3–5, but different die.  
Same reverse die as 5.
  - a. 7.52 ↓ Seen at BM (1979) (fig. 6)
  
7. Same obverse die as 6.  
Rev. IVPITER LIBERATOR. Jupiter seated left.
  - a. 7.28 ↓ BMC 110 (ex Traynel Sale, 1914) (fig. 7)
  - b. Rome ex Gnechi (RIN 1910, pl. VII.2)
  - c. Hague

<sup>2</sup> F. Imhoof-Blumer, RSN VI (1896), 239, J. E. Fisher, *Hesperia* 1980, 6–8.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. BM 1913-6-4-95, Paris 1249–1250.

<sup>4</sup> Suetonius, Nero 24.

<sup>5</sup> I infer a proclamation at the Olympic Games from the coins of nearby Patras: see note 20.

<sup>6</sup> AIN 1921, 61.

<sup>7</sup> The forgeries may well be by the notorious Tardani (RIN 1924, 36). The similar denarius (RIC 49) is known only from Cohen, drawing on Vaillant and ultimately Mediobarbus. I suspect that it may not exist, or be a confusion with BMC, Civil Wars 19–20.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



## 2. Nero at the Actian Games

A group of interesting bronze coins was minted in Greece during Nero's visit of A.D. 66/67. The most common varieties are:

- (1)<sup>8</sup> Obv. ΝΕΡΩΝΙ ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙ ΚΤΙΣΤΗ. Nero, as Apollo, playing a lyre, r.  
Rev. ΝΕΡΩ-ΝΟΣ Victory, left.
- (2)<sup>9</sup> Obv. as (1)  
Rev. ΝΕΡΩΝΙ ΔΗΜΟCΙΩ ΠΑΤΡΩΝΙ ΕΛΛΑΔΟC. Libertas stg. holding a cap of liberty and?
- (3)<sup>10</sup> Obv. ΝΕΡΩΝΙ ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙ ΚΤΙΣΤΗ. Laureate head of Nero, r.  
Rev. as (1).

The interest of the coins lies in the fact that they describe and show Nero as Apollo (Suetonius<sup>11</sup> records that he had coins struck showing him as such), and as the public patron of Greece in bestowing its liberty (like Flamininus in 196 B.C., he declared the Freedom of the Greeks at the Isthmian Games at Corinth<sup>12</sup>). In view of the interest of these pieces it is naturally important to know where they were minted.

Traditionally they have been attributed to Apollonia in Illyria<sup>13</sup>, presumably because of the word ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙ in the legend. This is, however, not a curious (and even more curiously placed) abbreviation for ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙΑΤΑΝ, the normal legend of earlier and later Apollonian coins, but the dative of ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ, agreeing with the words which come before and after it in a descriptive sense - «To Nero Apollo, the Founder».

As the coins have no ethnic, there is no reason for their attribution to Apollonia. They can, however, be attributed with certainty to Nikopolis in Epirus, the city founded by Augustus to commemorate his nearby victory at Actium, since a reverse die of (1)<sup>14</sup> is the same as that of a unique but certainly Nikopolitan coin of Nero<sup>15</sup> (fig. 8 + 9). Our group of coins, moreover, fits very well at Nikopolis<sup>16</sup>. We know that, when he went there<sup>17</sup>, Nero changed the name of the city to ΝΕΡΩΝΟΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΙC<sup>18</sup>, and the implied new foundation explains the use of the otherwise enigmatic ΚΤΙΣΤΗ: Nero is the founder of the new city of Nerononikopolis, just as Augustus had been of Nikopolis. The reverse type of (1) and (3), Victory (Nike), is obviously

BMC, Apollonia Illyriae 84, SNG Tübingen 1328; Mionnet, Suppl. 3, 322, nos. 67-68 (misdescribed).

<sup>9</sup> BMC 85.

<sup>10</sup> ANS; Mionnet, op. cit. no. 68 (misdescribed).

<sup>11</sup> Nero 25.

<sup>12</sup> Suetonius, Nero 24.

<sup>13</sup> See note 8, Head, HN 314.

<sup>14</sup> BMC 84.

<sup>15</sup> M. Karamesini-Oikonomidou, Η Νομισματοκοπία της Νικοπόλεως, Nero no. 5. This coin is somewhat enigmatically cited from «Seaby XII/57», which refers to Seaby's Coin and Medal Bulletin for December 1957 no. AG 1036, where, however, the coin is not illustrated.

<sup>16</sup> The absence of an ethnic is no objection to the attribution: other Greek imperials lack ethnics (e.g., early imperial Pergamum).

<sup>17</sup> Karamesini Nero, nos. 1-4: ΝΕΡΩΝΟΣ (ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑ ΣΕΒΑ) ΕΠΙΦΑΝΕΙΑ. The design is the galley in which he travelled. Note that the only other Neronian coins attributed by Karamesini to Nikopolis are, in fact, of Smyrna (C.M. Kraay, NC 1976, 236).

<sup>18</sup> Karamesini, nos. 1-4.

suitable for Nikopolis, and indeed was common there under Augustus<sup>19</sup>. Combined with the legend ΝΕΡΩΝΟΣ, it expresses in another way the city's new name.

Nero's victory was his artistic success at the Greek games, as the obverse of (1) and (2) implies, presumably at the Actian Games which Augustus had established at Nikopolis on a par with the four great games of Greece. The reverse type of (2) seems to imply that Nero also declared the Freedom of Greece there, as well as at the Isthmian and Olympic Games<sup>20</sup>. Subsequently, however, no doubt after Nero's *damnatio memoriae*, the comparison of Nero's victory with Octavian's at Actium was found absurd, and the city's name reverted to Nikopolis. Coins were again minted for Augustus, and declaring the city to be his foundation, ΚΤΙCΜΑ CΕΒΑCΤΟΥ<sup>21</sup>. Nero's visit to the Actian Games was an episode to be forgotten.

<sup>19</sup> Karamesini Augustus 1-40.

<sup>20</sup> For the Isthmian Games, see Suetonius Nero 24, together with the coins of Corinth (which have the galley with ADVE[NTVS] AVG and the proclamation, ADLO[CVTIO] AVG: BMC 567-571) and nearby Sicyon (see note 2). The coinage of Patras attests a similar proclamation at the nearby Olympic Games: we have Nero's galley with ADVENTVS AVGVSTI, and the implied proclamation of Freedom (IVPPITER LIBERATOR). As well as his refoundation of the Augustan town of Nikopolis, Nero similarly refounded the Augustan colony of Patras (COLNER PAT). The coinage of Patras therefore provides a very close parallel for that of Nikopolis.

<sup>21</sup> Karamesini Autonomous 46-48, 58-60 and 67-70: for the Trajanic date of these issues, see C. M. Kraay, NC 1976, 240.

## INFLUENCES ICONOGRAPHIQUES ORIENTALISANTES DANS LE MONNAYAGE DE TRÉBONIEN GALLE

Jean-Luc Desnier

Les émissions monétaires de l'Empereur Trébonien Galle offrent quelques particularités qui ont depuis longtemps intrigué numismates et historiens des religions. C'est ainsi que les monnaies qu'il frappa au type de Junon Martialis constituent l'unique témoignage d'hommages rendus à cette déesse. Celle-ci n'apparaît que lors du règne conjoint de Trébonien Galle et de Volusien<sup>1</sup>. Son champ fonctionnel ne connaît d'autres développements que ceux qu'attestent ces monnaies, en l'occurrence un type assis de la déesse qui tient deux épis de blé et un sceptre ou un globe<sup>2</sup>, et un type architectural qui présente un temple rond, couvert d'une coupole, abritant la statue de la divinité trônant de face, parfois accostée d'enfants<sup>3</sup>.

En 1956, J. Heurgon a parfaitement mis en évidence le fait que la déesse honorée devait être replacée dans le groupe des vieilles divinités italiennes<sup>4</sup>. En effet, l'appella-

<sup>1</sup> RIC IV, Londres, 1949, p. 153-154.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 162, n° 35 (sceptre); p. 171, n° 109 (globe).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 171, n° 110-112; le temple ne reprend-il pas le type du temple augustéen de Mars Ultor, cf. J.-B. Giard, *Auguste* (BNC I), Paris, 1976, p. 154, n° 989? Sur l'identification du temple, voir l'hypothèse de G. Marchetti-Longhi, *La «Juno Martialis» nelle monete di Treboniano Gallo e di Volusiano*, AIN 1956, p. 65-82 (le temple du Largo Argentina).

<sup>4</sup> J. Heurgon, *Traditions étrusco-italiques dans le monnayage de Trébonien Galle*, Studi Etruschi, XXIV (1955-1956), p. 94-98.