

**Zeitschrift:** Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft  
**Band:** 78 (1999)

**Buchbesprechung:** Pontica II : les monnaies de l'atelier de Sebastopolis du pont : Varia Anatolica X [Michel Amandry & Bernard Bémy]

**Autor:** Walker, Alan

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Michel Amandry & Bernard Rémy

*Pontica II. Les monnaies de l'atelier de Sebastopolis du Pont. Varia Anatolica X.*

Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes d'Istanbul, Paris 1998.

63 pp., 3 maps, 7 Pls. Card covers. ISBN: 2-906053-49-X.

This very slim volume is a nearly perfect example of how the corpus of a city's coinage should be presented. In doing so it makes an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of how the sporadic issues of minor mints actually functioned.

Sebastopolis was in the highlands of Pontus, and was a city which came into being in the late 1st century BC; it was then probably refounded by Augustus (thus its name). The city used an era beginning in 3/2 BC, a date commemorating the official incorporation of the entire region into the Roman Empire (the district had formed part of a number of different provinces at varying times). The prominence of the cult of Herakles at Sebastopolis is the reason for the city's second name, Herakleopolis, and is the inspiration for the majority of the city's coin types. Archaeological finds prove the city was both important and prosperous in Roman and early Byzantine times. Its population was primarily composed of increasingly hellenized locals but also included immigrants from elsewhere in the Empire (there were Latin speakers, as well as a Jewish community). Despite the city's attachment to Herakles, in later times Sebastopolis could boast of a sizable and notable Christian church.

One of the most important aspects of the coinage of Sebastopolis for the modern study of ancient numismatics is that all the coins struck there were exactly dated by use of the city's era. Thus we know that Sebastopolis only issued coins at three widely separated intervals: under Trajan in 106/7 (year 109), under Septimius Severus in 205/6 (year 208), and, lastly, under Gallienus in 263/4 (year 266). This makes it clear that while Sebastopolis was a relatively important and prosperous town, it had no need to provide large numbers of its own coins for daily use, since its monetary needs could be satisfied by the use of coins issued by other cities in the area, such as those from the major mint of Neocaesarea to the north. Unfortunately, no systematic collection of numismatic material from the site of Sebastopolis exists (it would be particularly interesting to know if extremely worn coins of Sebastopolis were commonly found there, thus implying that the city's coinage remained in circulation there rather than being dispersed over a wider area); the best local information we do have is merely a survey of the coins kept at the museum in nearby Tokat. A&R are, in fact, somewhat unsure as to why Sebastopolis should have produced coins at all, and suggest that the three issues were struck in connection with festivals. Given the relatively low value for entire emission (struck from 25 obverse and 61 reverse dies, A&R propose that approximately 540,000 coins were originally struck), they might also have been produced as donatives on the occasion of the visit of a high ranking personality (as happened elsewhere this might have been done so that his entourage would have fresh, new coins of local interest to spend during their stay; or, conversely, the coins may have been financed by the visitor as a donation to the

city). The die linkages are clear and carefully listed (though a chart would have made them easier to visualize).

A&R conclude that the mint which produced these coins used a single anvil under Trajan and Gallienus but that four anvils operated in parallel for the Severans (one each for Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, Caracalla and Geta). This last seems unlikely to me: two reverses of Septimius are shared with Domna, Caracalla also shares one of those reverses as well as one of Domna's, and Geta only shares a single reverse with his brother. This makes me think that the coins were struck in series in a single workshop: all the coins designed for Septimius Severus would have been struck first, then a series honoring Julia Domna (in which two reverses made for Septimius Severus were reused), then those of Caracalla, and, finally, those for Geta. It seems very likely that the minting establishment which produced these coins would have only been in operation for a very limited length of time: once the dies were cut and the blanks made the actual striking would have been extremely rapid. This corpus is, thus, extremely helpful because it allows us to see exactly how a limited coinage might be produced within a restricted time span.

A&R have been able to discover 137 coins from Sebastopolis (in museums, private collections and sales catalogues), and in their catalogue they have divided them into 18 types (two were only used under Trajan, but all those appearing under Gallienus reprise those already used by the Severi) and 72 numbers (each the equivalent of a single die pair). Seven clear plates illustrate 105 of the coins, including all die pairs, and the authors are to be commended for the meticulous care they took in their search for material. They have rightly excluded (p. 36) two mysterious « pseudo-autonomous » coins which were once in the Rhousopoulos collection and which bear the head of the Senate on their obverses: both are actually misdescribed coins from Sebastopolis in Caria, one with Artemis and a stag on its reverse (as Weber 6550 and SNG Cop. 463 – bought in 1905 one wonders whether this might actually be the Rhousopoulos coin) and the other with Tyche (as BMC 4).

The only mistake that I have been able to find in this excellent small volume is the statement, on p. 51, that the two coins of Sebastopolis found in the excavations at Dura could not be included in the catalogue because they were unillustrated. While there really is no illustration of the Geta (Dura 2031), the Caracalla (Dura 2030) is actually illustrated twice (as A&R mention in their note, 109, citing this piece!). It is, however, merely another example of catalogue number 40 (D 14-R 20).

Alan Walker  
Leu Numismatics  
CH 8001 Zurich