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AND ART HISTORY OF ROMANIAN
ACADEMY CLUJ-NAPOCA



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No. 12-2/2025

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ISSN 2360 266x
ISSN-L 2360 266x

Design & layout: Francisc Baja



EDITURA MEGA | www.edituramega.ro
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THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ROMAN REPUBLICAN COINS WITHIN THE PRUT-DNISTER AREA. THE CASE OF THE DENARIUS RECENT DISCOVERY IN CAJBA*

Abstract: The number of Roman Republican coins discovered in the Prut-Nistru area is extremely small, and the recorded items are mostly uncertain as regards the discovery site and conditions. Museums in the Republic of Moldova do not currently have any Roman Republican coins found in the Prut-Nistru interfluvium. In this context, the recent discovery in Cajba (Glodeni district) of a Roman denarius issued under L. Plautius Plancus in 47 BC is of a particular value. This article proposes a catalogue of both certain and uncertain Roman Republican items discovered in the Prut-Nistru area, followed by an analysis of coins similar to the coin discovered in Cajba to the north of the Lower Danube, and the XRF analysis confirms the authenticity of the item concerned in the context of the historiographical discussions regarding the large number of Dacian imitations of the Roman Republican denarii. Thus, the coin from Cajba completes the batch of items of Roman origin, called ‘relics’ or ‘anachronistic items’.

Keywords: Roman coin, Republican era, L. Plautius Plancus, Cajba, Prut-Nistru area.

Roman Republican coins are very rare finds in the Prut-Nistru area. The first, albeit uncertain, information about such items comes from the undertakings involving collection of materials for the Zemstvo Museum from Chişinău, as the list of purchased items mentions ‘three Roman silver denarii, one bearing the inscription ‘ROME’ from the Roman Republic period (264 – 214)’.¹ Also, from the 19th century, more precisely from 1886, dates the discovery of a denarius issued under Caesar in 49 – 48 BC in Dumitreşti (Tatarbuniar district).² A. Nudelman estimates the late appearance of Roman coins in the Prut-Nistru area around the beginning of the 1st century AD.³ According to this numismatist, a gold Republican coin was reportedly discovered in 1970 in the city of Chişinău; although, no additional information about the item is available⁴. The bibliographic reference in this context

* “Ion Niculiţă” Center for Archaeology, Moldova State University. 01.15.01. “Prehistoric and Ancient Archaeological Heritage in the Forest-Steppe of the Republic of Moldova: interdisciplinary research and scientific development”.

¹ MATVEEV/ARCUS-JANTOVAN 2022, 25.

² KROPOTKIN 1961, 70.

³ NUDELMAN 1976, 13.

⁴ NUDELMAN 1976, 67.

to the manuscript of V.G. Lyaskoronskiy (1860 – 1928) ‘Rimskaya moneta v Yuzhnoy Rossii i sopredel’nykh strakhakh, kak istoricheskiy istochnik’ only underscores the uncertainty surrounding this item. Al. Popa and L. Ciobanu mention nine Roman Republican coins that were allegedly discovered in the Prut-Nistru area, three of which were found in the area called *barbaricum*, situated north of the Lower Trajan’s Wave (LTW), and other six items – in the ‘Roman region’, situated south of the LTW and in the *Tyras* city area. The three coins in the first area are as follows – a denarius with unknown discovery site and conditions issued under Marcus Antonius, a Republican denarius issued under C. Mamilius Limetanus in 82 BC, discovered in the 1980s in Lipcani and remaining in a private collection (information provided by Prof. Gh. Postică)⁵ and the uncertain *aureus* from Chişinău, launched in scientific circulation by A. Nudelman⁶. The six coins from the ‘Roman region’ include two denarii issued by Marcus Antonius that come from a hoard discovered in *Tyras* in 1958⁷; four other coins discovered in Cartal, including three denarii (two issued under Caesar and one undetermined) and a bronze coin from Agrippa⁸. We have to exclude the latter from the inventory of Republican coin, although it is attributed to the early Imperial period⁹. The phenomenon of uncontrolled metal detecting that especially engulfed the post-Soviet area led to the discovery of several Republican denarii in the Cartal village microregion (Reni district), recently published by K. Myzgin¹⁰. Among the 17 items recorded, seven coins from the 137 – 82/80 BC period were declared to be a part of a hoard, and the other ten dating between 130 – 70 BC, were classified as singular finds on the territory of the locality and its surrounding areas¹¹. It is certain, however, that the number of such discoveries, which remain outside the inventory, is much higher. Likewise, from the treasure-hunting environment, K. Myzgin presents another three Roman denarii, declared to have been discovered on the Secureni district territory (Chernivtsi region), one of which being within the Vascăuţi commune, and the other two – without a certain location¹².

The final work ‘Denezhnoe obrashchenie v mezhdurech’e Nizhnego Dunaya – Nizhnego Dnestra v antichnoe vremya’, which includes discoveries of Roman coin in the Prut-Nistru area was authored by Svetlana Bulatovich, being published in the compilation volume ‘Drevnie kul’tury Severo-Zapadnogo Prichernomor’ya’, edited in Odessa in 2013. This study provides certain clarifications regarding the coins from the southern part of the Prut-Nistru area, namely: the two coins from *Tyras* are dated 32 – 31 BC, and the given hoard confines are extended in the 3rd century AD and three silver items discovered in Cartal in the last century¹³ are mentioned (Fig. 1). Another Roman Republican coin discovered in Stroieşti/Stroency (Ribnita district), is mistakenly

located in the Prut-Nistru area in one of the latest studies on Republican coin finds in southern Eastern Europe, in reality, it originates from the area on the left bank of the Nistru in the Republic of Moldova¹⁴.



Fig. 1. Distribution of Roman Republican coins in the Prut-Nistru area.

Thus, the analysis of the published materials made it possible to document information on 30 Roman Republican coins, of which the most reliable finds are those from Cartal (20 items), *Tyras* (two items), Dumitreşti (1 item) and Lipcani (1 item), which are supplemented by two items with missing information on their discovery site and four with a conventional location in Secureni (2 items), Vascăuţi (1 item) and Chişinău (1 item) (Table 1).

The list of Roman Republican coin finds has recently been supplemented with a silver coin discovered in 2023 by Mr. Marcin Bruck, on the outskirts of the Cajba village (Glodeni district), in an area that had not been previously explored. Following the notification of the find to the National Archaeological Agency by the discoverer, Vlad Vornic, together with archaeologists Sergiu Popovici and Adrian Iorga, went to the site in order to carry out a periegetic survey of the area. As a result of this surface survey, a significant quantity of pottery and various artifacts made of fired clay, stone and metal were collected, thus proving that a Sântana de Mureş-Černjachov type settlement from the period of the Goth migration existed on that site. The new archaeological site, designated by us *Cajba II*, is located on the western and southern slopes of a small promontory on the right side of the *Viilor Valley*, about 1.2 km north-north-west of the village of Cajba, occupying an area of approx.

⁵ POPA/CIOBANU 2003, 54.

⁶ POPA/CIOBANU 2003, 27.

⁷ POPA/CIOBANU 2003, 85–86.

⁸ POPA/CIOBANU 2003, 33.

⁹ BONDAR’/BULATOVICH 1982, 159; BONDAR’/BULATOVICH 2001–2002, 171–182.

¹⁰ MYZGIN 2018, 87–94.

¹¹ MYZGIN 2018, 87–88.

¹² MYZGIN 2016, 119–121.

¹³ DKSZP 2013, 743.

¹⁴ MYZGIN 2012, 21–22.

Table 1. Catalogue of Romanian Republican Coin Finds in the Prut-Nistru Area

Place of discovery	Nominal	Issuer	Dating	Notes
Cajba	Denarius	L. Plautus Plancus	47	Unpublished
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	Caesar	?	Popa, Ciobanu 2003
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	Caesar	47/46	Popa, Ciobanu 2003
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	?	?	Popa, Ciobanu 2003
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	Sex. Pompeius Fostlus	137	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	P. Maenius Antiaticus	132	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	M. Servilius	100	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi	90	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	L. Manlius Torquatus	83	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	Q. Antoninus Balbus	83–82	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka, depot (?)	Denarius	M. Caecilius Metellus	82–80	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	P. Aelius Paetus	138	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	T. Veturius	137	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	Anonymous	115–114	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	C. Claudius Pulcher	110–109	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	Q. Minucius Thermus M.f.	103	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	L. Julius Bursio	85	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	L. Julius Bursio	85	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	L. Lucretius Trio	74	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	?	end of the 2nd century – first half of the 1st century BC	Myzgin 2018
Cartal/Orlivka	Denarius	?	end of the 2nd century – first half of the 1st century BC	Myzgin 2018
Chişinău (?)	Aureus	?	?	Нудельман 1976; Popa, Ciobanu 2003
Dumitreşti/Dmitrivka	Denarius	Caesar	49–48	Kropotkin 1961
Lipcani	Denarius	C. Mamilius Limetanus	82	Popa, Ciobanu 2003, 33
rayon Securenii/ Sokiryany (?)	Denarius	L. Saufeius	152	Myzgin 2016
rayon Securenii/ Sokiryany (?)	Denarius	P. Clodius Turrinus	42	Myzgin 2016
Tyras	Denarius	Marcus Antonius	32–31	Popa, Ciobanu 2003
Tyras	Denarius	Marcus Antonius	32–31	Popa, Ciobanu 2003
Vaşcăuţi/Vashkivcy (?)	Denarius	M. Cippius M.f.	115–114	Myzgin 2016
?	Denarius	?	264–214	Matveev, Arcuş-Jantovan 2022
?	Denarius	Marcus Antonius	?	Popa, Ciobanu 2003

150×200 m. The closest sites relatively synchronous with the Cajba discoveries are: the Sarmatian necropolis of Viişoara (Glodeni district), situated about 15 km north-northwest, and the Dacian settlement of Pruteni (Făleşti district), situated approx. 30 km north-northwest. For further details on the *Cajba II* site and another unique artifact discovered within the boundaries of that site, and namely an enameled Roman fibula, see our recent study published in the Iaşi journal ‘Arheologia Moldovei’.¹⁵

The coin discovered in Cajba is a Roman Republican denarius, weighing 3.24 g, with a diameter of 17 – 18 mm and an orientation of 9 h. On the obverse, in a beaded circle, is a frontal depiction of the head of Medusa the Gorgon, with a serpent coiled on each sides; below is a partially preserved name of the moneyer [L•PLAVTIVS]. On the reverse, also in a beaded circle, is the image of the winged goddess Victoria (Aurora?), holding a palm branch in her left hand and driving a quadriga (four-horse chariot) in her right hand; beneath is a part of the moneyer’s name

[PLANCVS]. Such items belong to the Crawford type 453/1, dated the year 47 BC (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Roman coin from Cajba.

Comment: Lucius Plautius Plancus (ca 87 BC – 15 BC) Roman senator, consul in 42 BC and censor in 22 BC. Born under the name Gaius Munatius Plancus and adopted by Lucius Plautius. In 47 BC, as praetor (?), he participated in Caesar’s campaign in Egypt. In 44 BC, he was appointed as governor of Transalpine Gaul with the rank of proconsul.

¹⁵ VORNIC/MATVEEV/DERMENJI 2024, 163–182.



Fig. 3. Spread of the Crawford type coin, 453/1a (according to: <http://numismatics.org/crro/id/rrc-453.1a>, accessed on 10.03.2025).

Amidst the events of 15 March 44 BC, he was captured in the Roman camp of the moderate Caesarians, where he successfully negotiated between the two warring factions. His governorship was particularly notable for the founding of the cities of Augusta Raurica (44 BC) and Lugdunum (modern-day Lyon) (43 BC), both established under his order. He conducted several successful campaigns in Raetia against the Gauls, for which he was proclaimed emperor and achieved triumph on 29 December 43 BC. Later, in 42 BC, he managed to obtain the position of consul, which had been promised to him by Caesar, having Lepidus as his partner. In the conflict between Octavianus and Marcus Antonius, he took the side of the latter, whom he abandoned in 32 BC. In January 27 BC, he was among the senators who proposed that Octavianus be granted the title of Augustus. His final political office was held in 22 BC, when Augustus' appointed him and Aemilius Lepidus Paullus as censors. Plancus died in Gaeta and is one of the few prominent Roman historical figures whose tomb has survived and is identifiable, although his skeleton has long since disappeared. The Mausoleum of Plancus, a massive cylindrical tomb, now restored to a great extent, is located in Gaeta, on a hill overlooking the sea: it houses a small permanent exhibition in his honor¹⁶.

Coin image history. During the Greek campaign against Mithridates, Sulla's legate L. Munatius Plancus distinguished himself. During the siege of Athens by the Romans, Munatius managed to prevent a breakthrough in the besieged city of the army, which was led by Neoptolemus, a relative and strategist of the Pontic king. Later, he held administrative positions and was honored by Romans and Greeks, receiving an honorary statue in the agora of Delos. L. Munatius Plancus also stood out for robbery. Among other war booty, a painting by the prominent Greek artist Nikomachus of Thebes, depicting the goddess of victory Nike, leading four horses to heaven, entered his Roman house. After the death of Munatius, the painting was

inherited by his son, who was a close friend of Cicero, himself a great art connoisseur. The younger Munatius had three sons, among whom he divided his estate. The painting by Nikomachus was bequeathed to the youngest – Gaius, who was adopted into the Plautius family and took the name L. Plautius Plancus. In 48 BC, L. Plautius participated in the battle of Pharsala and was wounded at the Apsus River. A year later, he became a moneyer and minted his grandfather's trophy on denarii. On the reverse of the coins minted by him, Nike turned into the Roman goddess Victoria, driving a quadriga ascending to the heavens. Like the reverse, the obverse of the coin takes us back to the time of the moneyer's grandfather – an officer in Sulla's army. The image of Medusa the Gorgon on the denarii replicates the face of Medusa from Sulla's triumphal relief, found on the Via del Mare¹⁷. There is also an interpretation that Medusa depicted on the obverse of the coin is associated with the eulogy of a great-grandfather of L. Plautius, who is believed to have revived the tradition of masked flute players in Rome, a narrative recounted by Ovid in a passage on the *idylls* of June from the *Fasti* (*Fasti*, VI, 649 – 710).

The Crawford, 453/1 coin type is known in several variants as Crawford, 453/1a-e. Variants 1a and 1b are almost identical, both featuring on the obverse a front-facing head of Medusa with snakes coiled on both sides of her head; the distinguishing feature the missing final letter S in the magistrate's name on the reverse in variant 1b. On the obverse of variants 1c, 1d and 1e, the snakes are missing, the reverse 1c is identical to 1a, the reverse of variant 1d is identical to that of variant 1b, and variant 1e is distinguished by the missing letter S at the end of the magistrate's name d on the obverse, and its reverse is similar to that of variant 1a¹⁸. The item has an extensive dissemination area, from the territory of Spain to the Caucasus (Fig. 3).

In the area north of the Lower Danube, the Crawford item, 453/1a is also renowned, being found in several hoards, two

¹⁶ ECR 1982, 527; OCD, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.4279>.

¹⁷ CRAWFORD 2008, 468; RYAZANOV 2010–2011.

¹⁸ CRAWFORD 2008, 468.

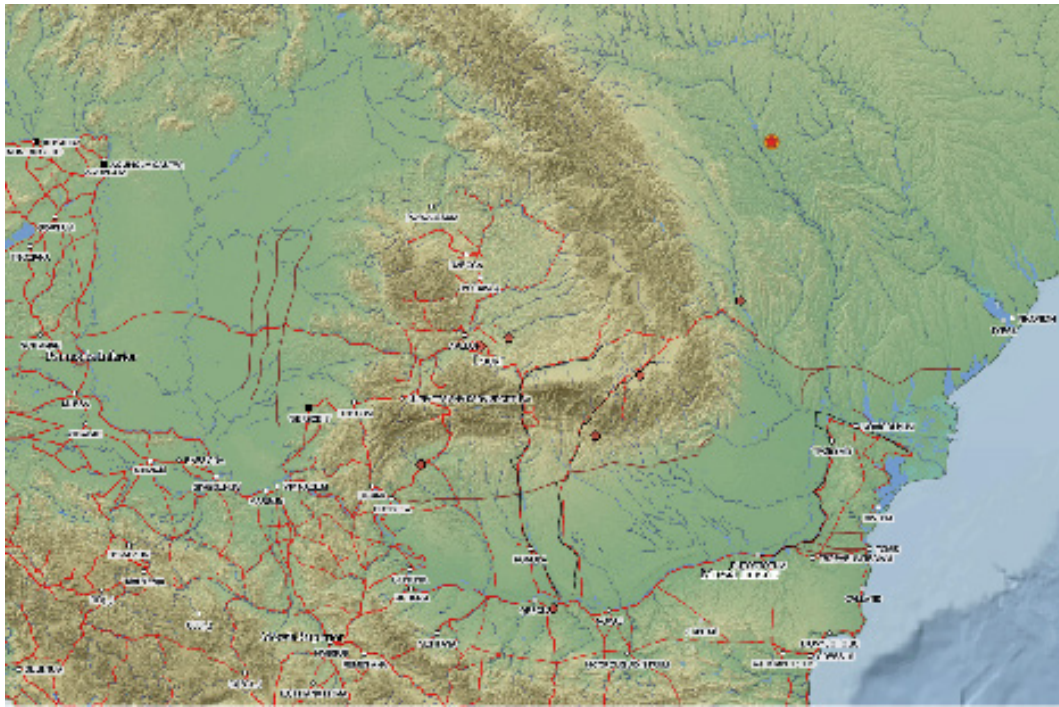


Fig. 4. Spread of the Crawford type coin, 453/1a in the intra-Carpathian and East-Carpathian area (according to: <http://numismatics.org/crro/id/rrc-453.1a>, accessed on 10.03.2025).

of which being found on the sites situated east of the Carpathians (Poiana and Răcătău de Jos I). Without aiming for a complete catalogue of this coin type for the territory of Romania, we mention only several discoveries: Cetățeni (Argeș county),¹⁹

county)²⁵ (Fig. 4). An item is known in Poiana (Galați county), also corresponding to the Crawford variant, 453/1a²⁶, even if on <http://numismatics.org>, with a reference to the 1981 study of M. Chițescu, we find it ascribed to the Crawford

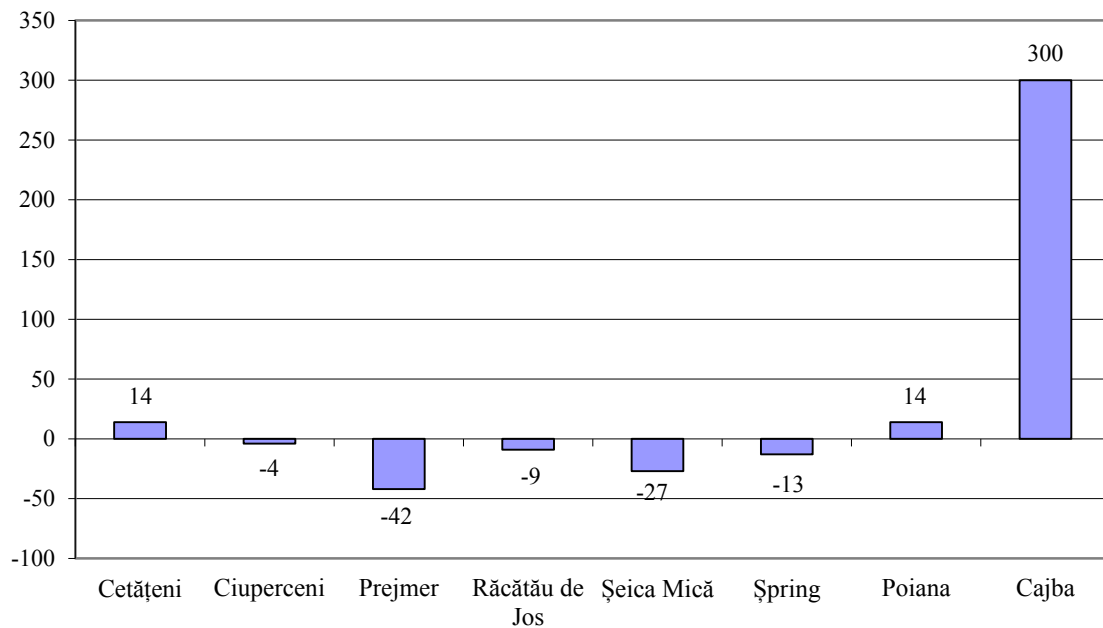


Diagram 1. The upper confines of hoards on the territory of Romania, including the Cajba discovery

Ciuperceni (Gorj county),²⁰ Ibida (Slava Rusă commune, Tulcea county),²¹ Prejmer (Brașov county)²², Răcătău de Jos I (Bacău county),²³ Șeica Mică (Sibiu county),²⁴ Șpring (Alba

variant, 453/1c²⁷. Another *subaeratus* type denarius, with a bronze core and silver coating, attributed to the Crawford variant, 453/1c is known in Movilița (Topraisar commune, Constanța county)²⁸. And in the latter case, the image on

¹⁹ MITREA, ROSETTI 1974, 19–33; MITREA, ROSETTI 1972, 221–228.

²⁰ CHIȚESCU 1981.

²¹ EC RPSpP 2012, 233.

²² CHIȚESCU 1976, 1–13.

²³ CAPITANU, URSACHI 1971, 167–195.

²⁴ FLOCA 1956.

²⁵ PAVEL 1978, 91–101.

²⁶ DUNAREANU-VULPE 1934, 126–133; MITREA 2011, 187–219.

²⁷ <http://numismatics.org/crro/id/rrc-453.1c> Accessed 10.03.2025.

²⁸ TALMATCHI 2010, 27.

Plate I/14 convinces us that this item is more likely to belong to the Crawford variant 453/1a.

The review of the specialized literature referenced for the discoveries on the territory of Romania enabled our to identify the period of hoarding in this region of Roman-Barbarian connections for the Crawford 453/1 type coins. The hoarding of the items concerned occurred in the period between 42 BC and 14 AD, possibly in connection with the military events in this region (Diagram 1).²⁹ Against this chronological background, the item from Cajba represents a clear anachronism. In this context, K. Myzgin, aware of the scarcity of arguments, proposed two hypotheses, and namely, either the coins arrived in the barbarian environment shortly after issuance thereof and were kept for a long period, or they were brought to the Pontic region by Germanic tribes in the 3rd century AD during their migration from Central European territories³⁰.

In recent decades, an older debate has been revived³¹ regarding the issue of Dacian/Barbarian imitations of Roman Republican denarii³². Based on these circumstances and considering the very rare nature of the Roman Republican coin discoveries on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, we decided to perform an X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy analysis at the Institute of Applied Physics of the State University of Moldova. The XRF analysis was conducted using an X-Calibur device manufactured by Xenometrix (Israel). The measurements were carried out at an acceleration voltage of 45 kV, without using a filter, with a rhodium cathode. The detector used was an SDD sensor. The gas composition of the sample volume was atmospheric. The chemical composition was determined using the XRS-FP program (developed by Crossroads Scientific). Since the analyzed items did not have quality standards, the Fundamental Parameters algorithm was used to spectrum composition analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the composition analysis of the Roman denarius from Cajba

Ag	Sn	Cu	Pb	Zn	Rh
98.116	1.473	0.205	0.195	0.002	0.01

The analysis results demonstrate a high quality of the metal used to mint the coin, typical for the period concerned. For the late Republican period, Michael H. Crawford emphasizes the high quality of silver denarii, with the precious metal content ranging between 92 – 99%, which later fell below 90% in the 'legionary' series issued by M. Antonius³³. In the imitation context, K. Lockyear rated items with a silver amount below 94% as liable of being copies; copper in the Roman items ranges between 0 – 2.5%, the higher its value in the stated percentage tends towards the upper limit, the higher the level of suspicion that we are dealing with an imitation, especially when the copper level exceeds 4%; for lead the suspicion threshold is >0.82%; for zinc the median

suspicion would be 0.035%³⁴. Correlating these data with the XRF analysis results of the Cajba coin, it is clearly noted that the percentage of none of the elements identified as a result of the XRF analysis exceeds the thresholds proposed by K. Lockyear for the item from Cajba to be susceptible to being included in the group of *barbarian imitations*.

As for the coin under discussion, as well as the enameled fibula from Cajba mentioned earlier – both were found within the settlement of the Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov type, situated at a distance of over 250 km from the Roman *limes*, these items of Roman origin arrived in the *barbaricum* either through migrations, trade or other means (gift, war booty, etc.) that are more difficult to determine today. The Roman denarius from Cajba completes the list of approx. 0.2% of Republican coins from the total number of Roman coins known in Southeastern Europe³⁵ or about 1% of Roman Republican coins discovered in the Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov culture area³⁶. Having been in circulation or in use for centuries prior to the emergence of the Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov culture settlement, this coin was likely preserved as a relic rather than a medium of exchange. As early as 1976, A. Nudelman pointed out to the Roman coin anachronism phenomenon in the Prut-Nistru area, items from the 1st century AD, early Roman coins being present both in hoards or contexts from the 2nd century AD, as well as in those of the following century³⁷. Thus, the coin from Cajba completes the batch of Roman origin items, called 'relics' or 'anachronistic items'.

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- ²⁹ BÂRCĂ 2006, 3–28; BÂRCĂ 2013, 99–125.
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