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# THE ROMAN HOARD FROM TURDA (POTAISSA III)

**Abstract:** A new Roman coin hoard has been discovered during the archaeological surveys undergone in 2015 circa 250 m from the North-West bastion pertaining of the legionary fortress of Potaissa (Roman province of Dacia) (today, Turda, Romania). It comprises of 543 imperial denarii (conventionally named Potaissa III). The earthen pot containing these coins had been hidden inside a Roman building, most likely underneath a wooden floor. The denarii are preserved in good condition, and were carefully selected for hoarding. The 543 coins' cache starts with two denarii dating back to emperor Nero and ends with two denarii of emperor Macrinus. The hoard contains issues from almost all emperors and members of the imperial families, with the exception of Galba. The denarii issued under the Severan dynasty represent 62% of the total, which indicates a quick accumulation during the time of emperor Caracalla.

**Keywords:** *hoard, military environment, imperial denarii, rapid accumulation, earthen pot with coins.*

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From many points of view, Potaissa has become one of the most significant sites from the province of Roman Dacia (Pl. 2), and the numerous monetary discoveries made throughout the years in this ancient Roman city, as well as the fortress of Legio 5th Macedonica, are surely at the top of the list for reasons that contribute to its importance.<sup>1</sup> In the urgent context of the Marcomannic Wars, the legion was transferred from Troesmis (province of Lower Moesia; today, Iglița, Romania) to its new garrison in the province of Dacia (Pl. 1). The main purpose of this move was the reinforcement of the northern limes. Naturally, the arrival of the legion at Potaissa in the years AD 168-169 was followed by a successful and rapid development of the

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<sup>1</sup> To this date, a number of 3,220 coins have been analyzed, from both the Roman fortress, as well as the Roman city (see PÎSLARU 2009); the most recent additions to this number come in the form of 49 Roman coins discovered in the barracks pertaining to *praetentura sinistra* (see ANDONE-ROTARU/MUNTEANU 2017, 47-53, and 21 coins discovered and recently published from the fortress' Roman baths (see MUNTEANU/ANDONE-ROTARU, 302-312).

settlement.<sup>2</sup> From this year on, for a period equivalent to a century, the military presence will considerably influence the economic, social and cultural life of the city which was situated along the main imperial road that traversed the Roman province of Dacia. Due to its quick development, more and more citizens were attracted to this area and their numbers grew in a spectacular manner. At the same time, the high income of the legionaries stationed at Potaissa turned the new location into a wealthy city that was now only surpassed in richness by Apulum, where Legio 13th Gemina was stationed. Potaissa reached its developmental peak during the reign of emperor Septimius Severus. An important factor that has contributed to this situation was also the economic „boom” that the whole province was experiencing at that time. During this period the city receives the title of municipium and most likely colonia as well, as Ulpian’s text seems to suggest (Digesta, 50,15,1). The maximum flourishing period of the city can be placed at the end of the 2nd century AD, and it will last until the middle of the 3rd century AD. During this time, the inhabitants of Potaissa together with the soldiers of the Legio 5th Macedonica amount to a total of 20,000 – 25,000 citizens.<sup>3</sup>

The archaeological discoveries made throughout the years and especially in the last two decades, reveal largely inhabited territory. This hypothesis is underlined by the numerous foundations, architectonic elements, pottery, coins, epigraphical and sculptural monuments that keep surfacing more and more often during rescue or systematic archaeological campaigns.

Until recently, the existence of only one hoard at Potaissa seemed unusual,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> BĂRBULESCU 1987, 34-48.

<sup>3</sup> BĂRBULESCU 1994, 57-58.

<sup>4</sup> A Roman hoard discovered by chance (Potaissa I) in 1932, comprises 211 coins (106 *denarii* and 105 *antoniniani*, with issues from Septimius Severus (19 *denarii*), Severus Alexander (82 *denarii*) and Gordian III (5 *denarii* and 105 *antoniniani*), see WINKLER/HOPARTEAN 1973, 91-101; PETAC 1998, annex 2; SUCIU 2000, 92-96; GĂZDAC 2010, 137-142; PÎSLARU 2009, 117-119. The presumptive hoard (Potaissa II)

keeping in mind that from Apulum we know of seven hoards so far, comprised of thousands of coins.<sup>5</sup> Noteworthy examples from the Empire, such as the eleven hoards discovered at Carnuntum,<sup>6</sup> or the six hoards from Vindobona<sup>7</sup> suggest that the situation encountered at Potaissa/Turda has to be a result of hazard.<sup>8</sup> This supposition seems to be strengthened by the discovery of a coin hoard comprised of 543 imperial *denarii* on the hilltop „Dealul Cetății”. The intensified continuous growth of domestic activities and constructions in this area might reveal more historical aspects brought to light by accident.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The Roman hoard Potaissa III<sup>9</sup> was discovered in the autumn of 2015 in the close proximity of the legionary fortress during archaeological surveys (str. I. I. Russu, nr. 66), circa 250 m from the north-western tower (Pl. 3).<sup>10</sup> During the mechanical excavation of the ditch that was needed to build the foundation of the fence, the excavator’s scoop broke an earthen pot and several oxidized coins popped out of it. The vessel was identified in the northern profile of the 0.40 m wide ditch, right underneath the vegetation layer, at circa – 0.35 m depth (Pl. 4). A slight deviation from this spot would have left the hoard unearthed most likely for years to come. The entire contents of

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comprised of 45 coins (Vespasian – Severus Alexander) was discovered during the archaeological researches conducted between the years 1981-1982 in the headquarters of the legionary fortress, room 4, see SUCIU/HOPARTEA 1995, 257-268 (only 43 coins were published). Regarding the uncertain aspect of the hoard see PÎSLARU 2004, 676-686; PÎSLARU 2009, 119-125.

<sup>5</sup> PÎSLARU 2009, 117.

<sup>6</sup> GĂZDAC *et alii* 2016, 63.

<sup>7</sup> HAHN 1976, 206; see also <http://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/hoard/>

<sup>8</sup> PÎSLARU 2009, 394.

<sup>9</sup> ANDONE-ROTARU/MATEI 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Before the construction of a new house could commence, several stratigraphical sections had been undertaken (Dan Matei, Turda History Museum) in the orchard located at the address mentioned above. With the exception of a few pottery shards and *tegulae* fragments, nothing else seemed to indicate the presence of any other ancient human activities.

the earthen pot have been recovered.

To understand the context of this discovery, additional archaeological research followed in the area between the newly built construction and the foundation of the fence. The research was extended in the year 2018, as well, when a new home was built in the near vicinity<sup>11</sup>. The earthen pot had been hidden in the interior of a Roman building. The building has only been partially unearthed and researched, without the possibility of knowing the exact dimensions of the structures. The earthen pot was most likely hidden beneath the wooden floor of the building - as no lid or other materials were used to cover the contents - which were discovered intact.

### THE EARTHEN POT

Even though the earthen pot had been damaged in the moment of discovery, an attempt was made to recover as much as possible from the initial product, with the intent of restoring it.<sup>12</sup> However, a part of the neck and mouth of the vessel are still missing to this day and it looks like it had been already broken in antiquity. The pitcher (*urceus*) had been manufactured out of a semifine, yellow-beige paste and traces of engobe can still be seen on the outer surface. The pitcher had a hemispherical body, and a handle attached to the shoulder and neck. It is most likely one of the products manufactured in the pottery workshops identified on „Dealul Zânelor”.<sup>13</sup> On the inner walls of the pitcher, strong traces of corrosion can be observed, indicating the volume of coins that were deposited inside. The shape of the pitcher was perfect to store the owner's savings, the narrow neck (large enough to fit the coins) and wide basin allowing for a large amount to be fitted inside. It was filled with coins up to the level where it had been broken in antiquity. Being already

<sup>11</sup> Ioana Marincean, Turda History Museum.

<sup>12</sup> The pitcher has been restored by expert Doina Boros from Cluj-Napoca to whom we wish to thank for the outstanding accuracy of restauration.

<sup>13</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the pottery workshops from Potaissa see ANDONE-ROTARU/ NEDELEA 2018, 69-90.

damaged, it is very possible that it was selected for this purpose as it was no longer of use in household activities.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE HOARD

If in most cases coin hoards are discovered or recovered only partially, the entirely recovered Potaissa III hoard allow us to make some important remarks.

As it can be noted, the coins were corroded at the moment of discovery (Pl. 5), which initially lead to the belief that bronze coins must be present as well. However, after all the coins had been cleaned, it was noticed that all the artifacts are exclusively *denarii*. The coins were preserved in a very good condition, indicating that they had been carefully selected.<sup>14</sup> Still, among the high quality *denarii*, five plated ones were identified as well (Septimius Severus 1, Julia Domna 1, Caracalla 2, Geta 1). Most likely, they were not identified as such when the hoard was deposited. It is not excluded that the number of coins with copper core could be higher, but because they were not in use for too long, the silver foliage is still intact. Therefore, the strong corrosion noticed on the coins and inside the earthen pot can be attributed to the copper core of the plated *denarii*.

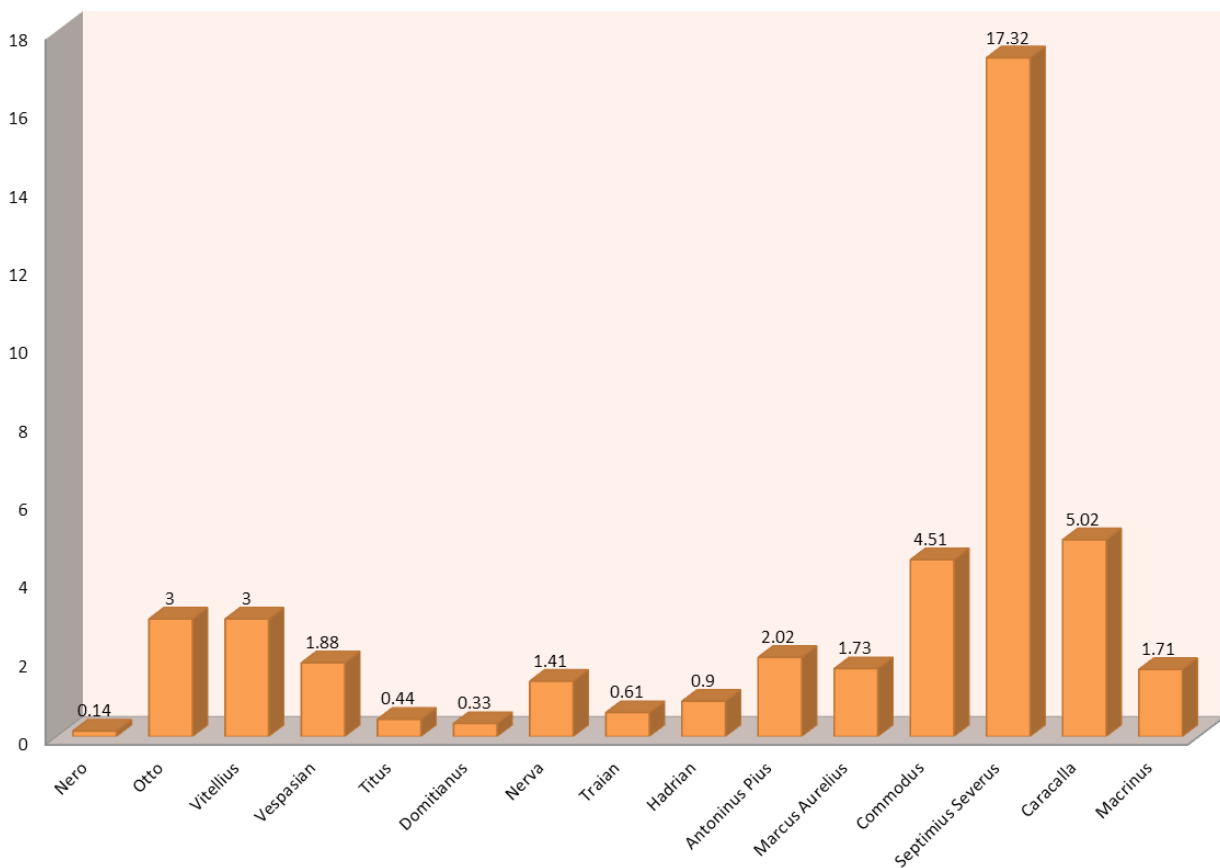
The coin cache of 543 pieces is dated earliest to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (two coins from Nero) and latest to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (two *denarii* from Macrinus). The monetary series seems continuous, except for the reign of emperor Galba. At the same time, it is impossible not to notice the rather strange fact that the hoard contains *denarii* issued for members of the imperial families, as if the owner of the hoard had the intention of “collecting” coins from all the emperors (Table 1).

Hoarding does not record an ascendant trend, being marked by fluctuations of coin number decrease and growth for different

<sup>14</sup> ROBERSTON 1956, 273-275. While studying the hoards from Britannia, A. S. Robertson noticed that the hoarding was carried out by selecting the coins according to the quality, monetary types and issues(?) of the various emperors.

**Table 1.** The structure of the Potaissa III hoard

<b>Issuer</b>	<b>No. of coins</b>	<b>Coins /main issuer</b>	<b>% of the total</b>	<b>Months of reign</b>	<b>Coeff./year of reign</b>
<b>Nero</b>	2	2	0,37	163	0,14
<b>Otho</b>	1	1	0,18	4	3
<b>Vitellius</b>	3	3	0,55	12	3
<b>Vespasian</b>	17				
Titus	1	19	3,50	121	1,88
Domitian	1				
<b>Titus: Divus Vespasianus</b>	1	1	0,18	27	0,44
<b>Domitianus</b>	5	5	0,92	181	0,33
<b>Nerva</b>	2	2	0,37	17	1,41
<b>Traian</b>	12	12	2,21	235	0,61
<b>Hadraian</b>	19	19	3,50	251	0,90
<b>Antoninus Pius</b>	24				
Faustina I	2				
Diva Faustina	9	46	8,47	273	2,02
Aurelius Caesar	7				
Faustina II	4				
<b>Marcus Aurelius</b>	13				
Divus Antoninus	2				
Lucius Verus	5				
Faustina II	6	33	6,08	228	1,73
Diva Faustina II	1				
Lucilla	5				
Commodus	1				
<b>Commodus</b>	55				
Divus Aurelius	1	58	10,68	154	4,51
Crispina	2				
<b>Septimius Severus</b>	131				
Pertinax	1				
Clodius Albinus	4				
Didius Iulianus	1				
Iulia Domna	44	309	56,91	214	17,32
Caracalla (Caesar)	13				
Caracalla (Augustus)	56				
Geta (Caesar)	47				
Geta (Augustus)	3				
Plautilla	9				
<b>Caracalla</b>	24				
Iulia Domna	3	31	5,71	74	5,02
Divus Severus	1				
Geta	3				
<b>Macrinus</b>	2	2	0,37	14	1,71
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>543</b>	543	100%		



**Fig. 1.** Chart with the coeff./year of reign of the coins from the Potaissa III hoard.

chronological sequences.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Potaissa III, the percentage of coins for each emperor (fig. 2), indicates that the Flavian dynasty, with the exception of Vespasian (3.50% of the hoard) record less than 1% of the total. Starting with Trajan's issues, a gradual growth can be observed for the Antoninian dynasty, from 2.21 %, to 3.50 % (Hadrian), then 8.47 % under Antoninus Pius, reaching 10.68 % under Commodus, an exception being the coins of the Marcus Aurelius' reign, with a slightly decrease to 6,08%. The coinage entry per year of reign (fig. 1) reflects the same ascendant trajectory curve recorded for the reign of Trajan, from 0.61 coins/year to 2.02 under Antoninus Pius and 4.51 for the time of Commodus, followed by a small decline for the reign of Marcus Aurelius, with 1.73 coins/year of reign. The monetary reform undergone at the beginning of Septimius Severus' reign through the increase of denarii issued between

<sup>15</sup> The fluctuations in these monetary accumulations are determined by different economical and political issues.

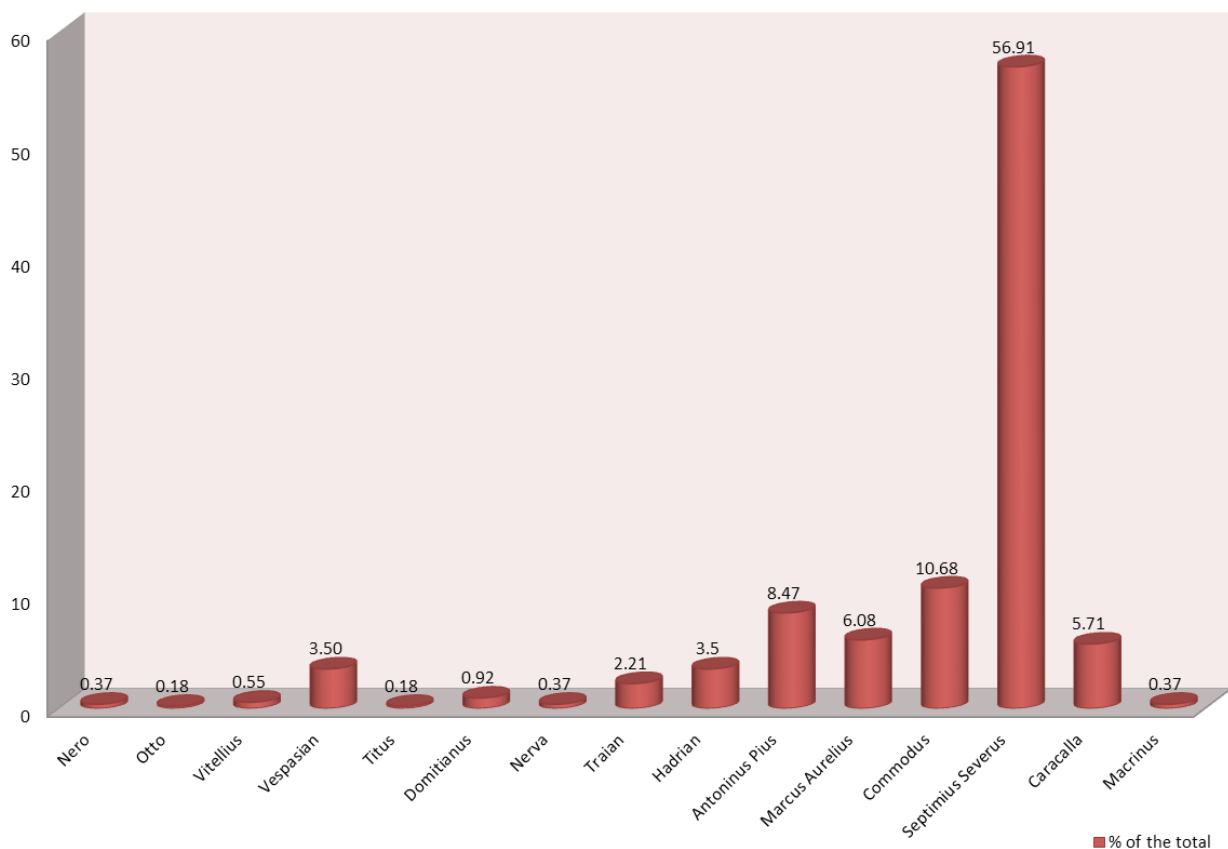
AD 197 and 198 AD<sup>16</sup> is reflected by the hoard's structure for the reign of this emperor (fig. 3). The explanation comes from both the penetration value of new coinage, with 17.32 coins/year of reign, as well as, the overall percentage of the whole hoard, represented by 56.91 % (309 coins). Coins issued after AD 211 under emperor Caracalla seem to record a drawback in value with 5.02 entries of new coinage per year of reign and 5.71 % of the total number of coins.

### METROLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

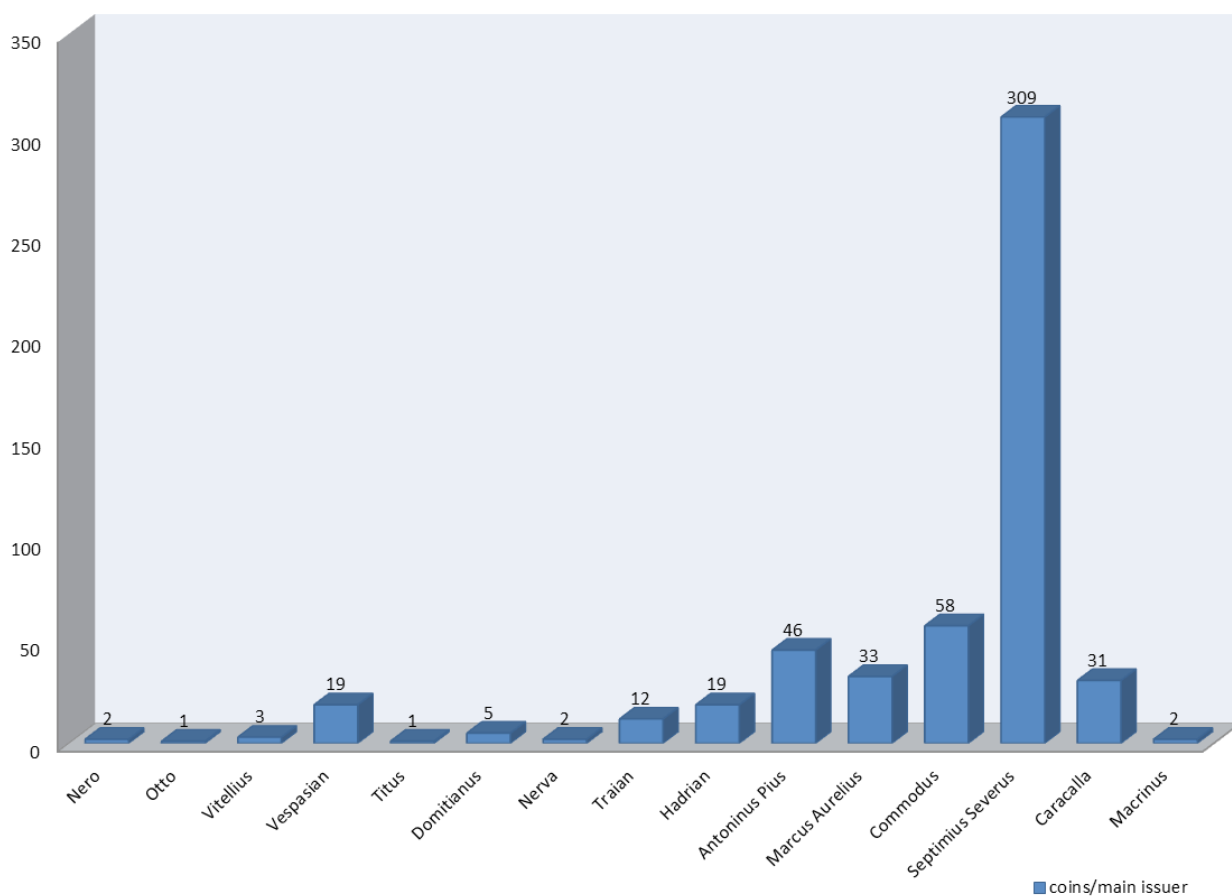
Even the weight of the coins seems to indicate the fact that they have been carefully selected for hoarding. While the vast majority of monetary discoveries, recorded both from the ancient city, as well as the legionary fortress<sup>17</sup>, provide plated denarii,

<sup>16</sup> In this period, the value of silver recorded a depreciation in value, from 78% in AD 193, to 62% in AD 196, and lastly ending up to 50%. See CARSON 1990, 61.

<sup>17</sup> PÎSLARU 2009, 165-277 catalogue.



**Fig. 2.** Percentage chart of the coins/issuer from the total of the Potaissa III hoard.



**Fig 3.** The number of coins/issuer from the Potaissa III hoard.

badly preserved coins with a lower silver composition, or low quality alloy, in the case of the Potaissa III hoard, the majority of coins are very close to the monetary standard set through Nero's reform, close to 3.41 g, some of the examples in this hoard even exceeding this standard. Most of the coins that weigh under 3 g were issued during the reign of Commodus.

The total weight of the hoard comes up to circa 1,768 g, which is very close to the equivalent of two *pondera* discovered in the legionary fortress – 1,792 g (896 g/*pondus*).<sup>18</sup> Even if this is just purely a speculation for now, it should be noted that the owner of the hoard seemed to be more interested in collecting coins with a higher weight, avoiding plated denarii: 11 denarii are close to 4 g each, and 3 denarii even exceed 4 g in weight.

### THE MONETARY WORKSHOPS

It is well-known that, in the first three centuries of the Empire, Rome will hold the supremacy when it came to imperial monetary issues.<sup>19</sup> As single coin finds seem to indicate, in this period, Rome was the main source of supply for the troops stationed in Roman Dacia. An overwhelming 83.42% of the coins discovered in the legionary fortress come from the mint of Rome.<sup>20</sup> The *denarii* of the newly discovered hoard were minted 97.23% in Rome. The mints of Alexandria, Antioch and Emesa are represented by one copy each, while the one from Laodicea by a total of 12 coins.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the bronze *pondera examinata* from Potaissa, with intaglio silver letter and a lead core see BĂRBULESCU 2015, 150-151. The silver text confirms that the weight had been verified as a result of an imperial order under the three emperors Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, and it can be therefore dated in AD 209-211 (or, eventually, AD 198-211).

<sup>19</sup> The civil wars and the oriental campaigns at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD led to the opening of new mints with a short period of production. PICOZZI 1966, 45; CARSON 1990, 247.

<sup>20</sup> PÎSLARU 2009, 95.

<sup>21</sup> In the legionary fortress, issues from these mints appear in insignificant quantities starting with the reign of Septimius Severus (Emesa 5, Laodicea 10, Alexandria 1), which could be tied to the participation

### ICONOGRAPHIC TYPES

The fact that the coins from this hoard were clearly carefully selected, is not only suggested by their good condition and weight, but also through the preference for certain iconographic types. The presence of the same monetary type in more than one copy<sup>22</sup> is due to the fact that the coins were hoarded immediately or soon after receiving sums of money either as salaries or *donativa* coming from the state's treasury, before they could be dispersed on the monetary market. Although, it may be a difficult task to exemplify the owner's preferences for certain monetary types, the selection can certainly point out the *dextrarum iunctio* type which appears on four denarii issued for Plautilla. This iconographic type is absent from all the single coin finds provided so far by both the legionary fortress and the city. On the reverse of the coins, the empress is shaking the right hand of Caracalla, in a pose similar to that identified on the gold engagement ring discovered in the Roman fortress.<sup>23</sup>

### PERIOD OF ACCUMULATION

The analysis of the hoard reveals the fact that the coins were accumulated in a very short period of time, most likely, a few years, and that they represent savings of coins already in circulation at that time. The coins bearing the effigy of Caracalla, dating prior to AD 212 are predominant, as the salaries of the soldiers grew after the death of Geta.<sup>24</sup>

of Legio 5<sup>th</sup> Macedonica to the Parthian war (AD 196-197), see PÎSLARU 2009, 97 with bibliography connected to this subject.

<sup>22</sup> Septimius Severus: 4 coins - RIC 120c; 6 - RIC 122c; 4 - RIC 166; 5 - 167 a; 5 - RIC 176; 4 - RIC 189b; 5 - RIC 265; 5 - RIC 295; Septimius Severus: Caracalla 6 coins - RIC 83; 5 - RIC 88; 4 - RIC 144b; Septimius Severus: Geta 5 coins - RIC 13a; 11 - RIC 18; 5 - RIC 20; 5 - RIC 34b.

<sup>23</sup> BĂRBULESCU 2015, 153. Starting with Septimius Severus, all soldiers will receive the right to wear a golden ring.

<sup>24</sup> For the pay rises or the granting of *donativa* see: DEVELIN 1971, 688-695; SMITH 1972, 489, n. 42 with older bibliography related to the military payments; SPIEDEL 1973, 141-147; BOREN 1983, 427-460; CORBIER 1986, 497-498; BASTIEN 1988,

The hoard's structure (Table 1, fig. 1) shows that the accumulation took place during the time of Caracalla, through the selection of *denarii* from bigger coin caches, and as a result of significative payments with coins minted under Septimius Severus<sup>25</sup>. The payment was received in three annual instalments, *stipendia*, and the Potaissa III hoard comes to illustrate the denominations in which the payments were made at that time. It also proves that the coins of the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians were still in circulation in the 3rd century AD, but in a low quantity, as they were only preferred for their weight in silver. One cannot exclude the hypothesis that this hoard may represent the entire valuable possession of the owner.

### THE DATE OF CONCEALMENT

From what is available to this date for Dacia, we only know of one hoard that ends with coins dated under the reign of Caracalla (Enoșești – Olt County), while for Macrinus no hoard is known so far.<sup>26</sup> The information regarding the hoard discovered in 1913 in the Roman fort from Acidava (Enoșești) is very scarce, the only certain data available is the fact that the cache was composed of 152 *denarii* deposited in an earthen pot, containing issues from Domitian to Caracalla (Domitian, Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Crispina, Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, Plautilla, Geta and Caracalla).<sup>27</sup>

The reasons to conceal the hoard from Turda (Potaissa III) were not related to any imminent danger. They represented the owner's savings, with carefully selected coins from larger sums of money (given the quality of the hoarded coins). The hoard is comprised of coins which were already in use at the time and they had been accumulated in a rather

short period of time. The reasons to why the owner left this precious possession behind is unknown, and it could have been related to his death. Even though in many cases there is a gap between the year of the last coin added to a hoard and the date when this was hidden<sup>28</sup>, the last two coins dating back to Macrinus, little worn out, may suggest that the hoard was hidden immediately after the reign of Caracalla. Furthermore, the *denarii* from Septimius Severus, especially those of Geta and Caracalla, present a reduced level of being worn out, some coins still show the crisp outline of the letters on the items.

### LOCATION AND OWNERSHIP

Who did this hoard belong to? The Potaissa III hoard can be categorized as a medium hoard given its dimensions and components.<sup>29</sup> The number of coins represents the equivalent of less than the annual wage of a soldier in the time of Caracalla.

Throughout the years, numerous Roman artifacts have come to light during agricultural activities, such as coins, small bronze and bone finds, pottery shards etc. The Roman road that lead out of the legionary fortress through the western gate (*porta decumana*) has been identified as a compact layer of gravel at the intersection of the streets Aleea Corbului and I. I. Russu. Systematic archaeological investigations undergone between 2017-2019,<sup>30</sup> as well as the archaeological surveys related to construction work needed in regards to the water supply of the Săndulești commune in 2006 have led to the conclusion that this area was well inhabited during the Roman administration. Therefore, it is our belief that the Potaissa III hoard has been discovered in the *canabae* of the legionary fortress and it most likely belonged to a Roman soldier of the Legio 5th Macedonica.

7-37; LO CASCIO 1989, 101- 120; SPEIDEL 1992, 106: A legionary soldier could receive around 900 *denarii*/year; LE BOHEC 1993, 280-290; ALSTON 1994, 113-123, with a vast bibliography, n. 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> REECE 2008, 190: the hoards with more new coins are clearly close to some point of supply of new coins.

<sup>26</sup> SUCIU 2000, 70-71; GĂZDAC 2010,134-135.

<sup>27</sup> SUCIU, 2000, 37 with older bibliography.

<sup>28</sup> ARDEVAN 2003, 42.

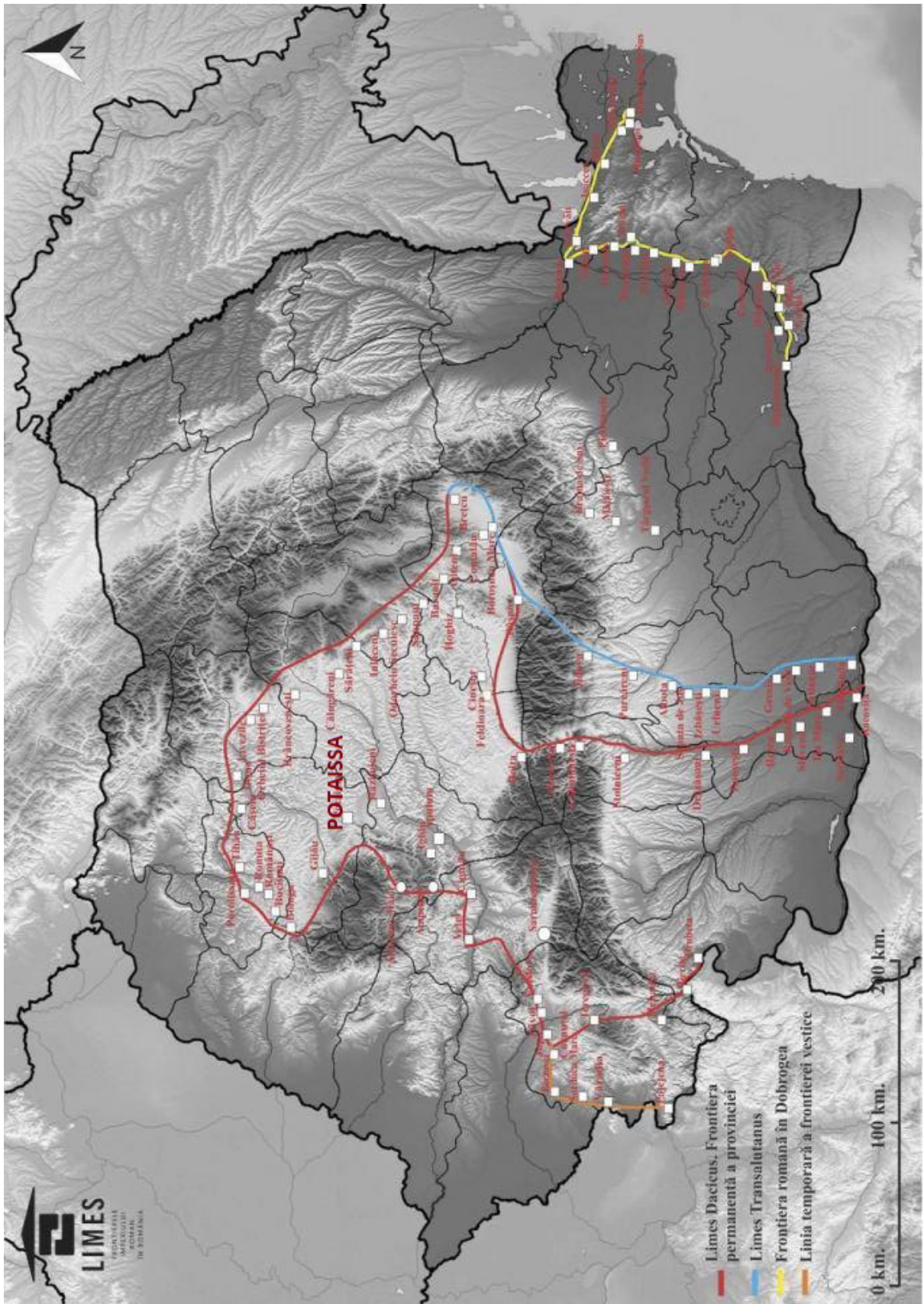
<sup>29</sup> SUCIU 2000, 65: from the 135 hoards analyzed for Roman Dacia, 11 of them have over 500 coins.

<sup>30</sup> NEMETI *et alii* 2019, 234-237.

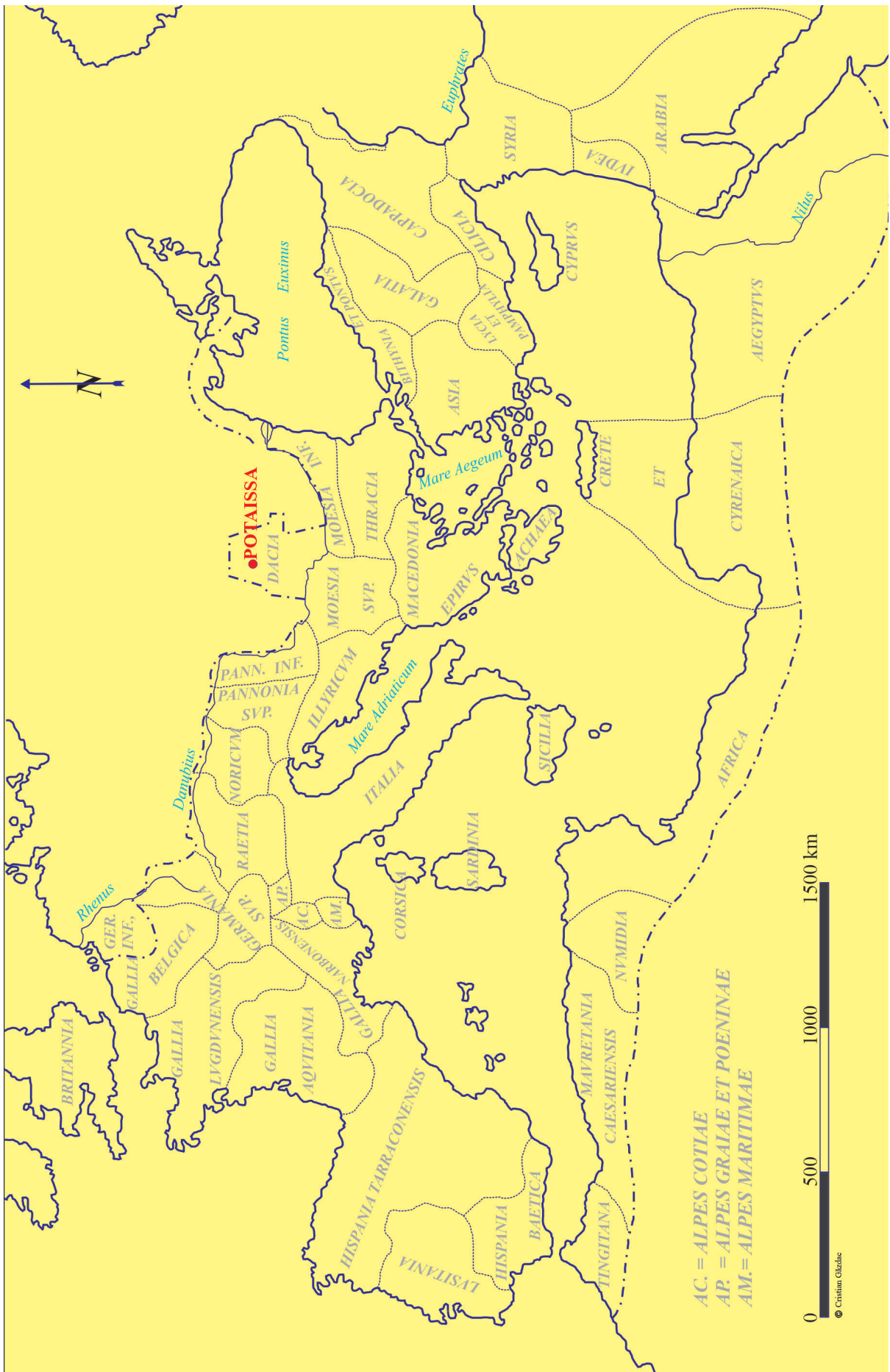
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**Plate 1.** Map of Roman Dacia.



**Plate 2.** Map of the Roman Empire.



**Plate 3.** The legionary fortress of Potaissa and the findspot of the Potaissa III hoard (Aerial photography).



**Plate 4.** The context of discovery for the Potaiassa III hoard.



**Plate. 5.** Coins from the Potaissa III hoard, before and after restoration.

