

The beginning of Serdica's coinage (Abstract)

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In the summer of 2013, during archaeological investigations in the centre of ancient Serdica, a bronze coin of the city was discovered – of type that was unknown so far in the literature. The coin is relatively well preserved, without accretions and the usual patina on the metal, probably because of its contact with mineral water that filtered in the layer, in which it was discovered.

The coin is of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) (Fig. 1), with the following description:

Obverse:I M AVP..... Bust of Emperor Marcus Aurelius with his typical hairstyle, rendered in large locks, to the right. Beaded circle around the image.

The preserved letters on the obverse belong to the inscription AV KAI M AVPH ANTΩNEINOC, inscribed on coins of Marcus Aurelius.

Reverse: The Three Nymphs in long chitons, with hairs tied up in buns, standing facing. The heads of the two on the sides are turned to the one in the middle and each one of them has its hand on one of the shoulders of the central figure (the left hand of the one on the left, and the right hand of the one on the right); in their other hands, each one holds a spindle. The central figure is facing, holding a spindle in her right hand, while the left one hangs at ease by her side. In the field beneath the figures, there is an inscription CEPAΩN. Beaded circle

around the image. The coin is made of bronze, 18 mm in diameter, weighing 3.30 g.

The coin from the excavations of Serdica differs from the specimens, published by Staal and Hristova/Zhekov.

The spindle is related to three other deities – the Parcae, worshiped as goddesses of destiny. Thus, the faith in the three health bearing nymphs is combined with the worship of other three female deities that spin the line of life and predefine its end. Probably, earlier or local beliefs influenced the emergence of the syncretized image of the nymphs on the coins of Serdica of the 170s. The monetary signs of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), minted in Serdica, and of Lucius Verus (160-169), minted in Augusta Traiana, depicting nymphs holding spindles, suggest a cult that was widespread in Thrace, with added new elements, illustrated in the iconography of the three goddesses. However, the coins with the depictions of nymphs are of the smallest bronze denomination and are only a few, which could indicate that these functions of the Three Graces were of limited popularity.

The newly-published coin of Marcus Aurelius from Serdica enriches our knowledge about the beginning of this city's coinage and expands the repertoire of the known depictions of the Three Nymphs in 2nd c. Thrace.