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The Last Roman Colonies Elevated under Philip I: Numismatic Perspective¹

Szymon Jellonek

Abstract: Philippopolis in Arabia, Damascus and Neapolis in Samaria were, besides Thessalonica, the last colonies founded by the Romans. They were established under Philip I, who originally came from the region where they were located, thus they had a reason for being grateful. On the one hand, the authorities of Damascus and Neapolis decided to implement patterns of colonial coinage and to integrate with the local tradition. On the other hand, ephemeral coinage of Philippopolis highlighted the bonds with the imperial family.

This paper reconsiders the coinage of the latest Roman colonies.

Key Words: Roman Provincial coins (http://nomisma.org/id/roman_provincial_numismatics), Roman Colonies (<https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q117025396>); Philip I (<https://d-nb.info/gnd/11874223X>); Roman identity

Zusammenfassung: Philippopolis in Arabien, Damaskus und Neapolis in Samarien waren neben Thessalonika die letzten von den Römern gegründeten Kolonien. Sie erhielten den neuen Status unter Philipp I., der ursprünglich aus dieser Region stammte, in der sie sich befanden, und hatten daher Grund zur Dankbarkeit. Einerseits beschlossen die verantwortlichen Autoritäten von Damaskus und Neapolis, gängige Muster kolonialer Münzprägung zu implementieren und sie in lokale Traditionen zu integrieren. Andererseits betonte die ephemere Prägung von Philippopolis die Verbundenheit mit der kaiserlichen Familie.

Dieser Aufsatz betrachtet die Münzprägung der jüngsten römischen Kolonien neu.

Schlagwörter: Römische Provinzialmünzen, Römische Kolonien, Philip I., Römische Identität

Introduction

Five years of Philip's reign were a very dynamic period. First, he decided to establish peace with Shapur I². Then, the new emperor moved in a hurry to Rome to consolidate his power. Meanwhile, his son Philip II became a Caesar. Once their status was secured, the emperor marched against the Carpi³. He defeated them and returned to Rome as *Carpicus Maximus* to celebrate the triumph. In April 248, the unprecedented event of the thousandth anniversary of Rome's foundation was commemorated⁴. Philip Junior, at the age of ten, became a consul and Augustus⁵. Soon, a few usurpers appeared (Pacatianus in Moesia, Jotapianus in Syria and Decius in Moesia). The last one eventually overthrew Phillip and his son⁶.

Aside from Philip's military action, he also contributed to the development of his native

land (Arabia). His home village (today's Chahba in the Djebel Druse, Jordan) became a Roman colony called Philippopolis⁷. Two other neighbouring cities of Damascus and Neapolis also became Roman colonies under Philip⁸. It was a swan song of Roman colonisation⁹. The ci-

¹ The presented research is financed by the National Science Centre of Poland, project 2018/29/N/ HS3/01502 »The Roman Colonial Coins as a Manifest of Cultural Identity 235–275 AD«.

² Zosim. 1,19.

³ Zosim. 1,20.

⁴ Kluczek 2019, pp. 226–234.

⁵ Hekster 2008, p. 4.

⁶ Zosim. 1,22.

⁷ Butcher 2003, p. 223. Millar 2006, p. 168.

⁸ Millar 2006, p. 216, Sandberg 2019, p. 141.

⁹ The last city that gained the status of Roman colonia was Thessalonica under Trajan Decius. Burrell 2004, pp. 198–203; Millar 2006, pp. 216–217.

ties celebrated the new status with a series of coins highlighting the relations with the emperor and Rome. The paper analyses the Roman colonies' coinage between 244–249 CE. The significance of the last Roman colonies and their coins has not yet been expressed. Therefore, the following questions are to be answered. Was colonial title itself really that significant since citizenship grants were no longer a concern following the *Constitutio Antoniniana*? Were the coins of the last colonies used to manifest the colonial rank? Did the new colonies follow the patterns of colonial coinage? Did they introduce imperial ideas into civic coinages?

Patterns of Colonial Coinage

Before moving to the analysis of coinages the latest Roman colonies, it is worth explaining the patterns of colonial coinage. Among the numerous coins belonging to the Roman provincial coinage, there is one specific group of colonial issues. The coins struck in colonial mints had a few distinctive features. This resulted from the extraordinary status of the Roman colonies. They were modelled on Rome itself. Aulus Gellius called them *Coloniae quasi effigies parvae simulacraque (Romae)*¹⁰. The scholars often divided the Roman colonies into two groups; ›Veteran‹ which were established until Hadrian¹¹ and ›titular‹ founded mostly under the Severi¹². However, both types of colonies generally followed Roman institutions, law, urban design, tradition and religion. Therefore, colonial coinage was to a greater extent related to the Roman tradition than other provincial civic issues. Unfortunately, the mechanisms implemented are elusive to us; all we know is the final product – Roman colonial coins.

The particular coinage developed from the first century BCE up to the second century CE in colonies inhabited by the veterans and their descendants. First of all, the coins were inscribed in Latin. No matter where they were located, Latin remained as the sole language

from the first century BCE up to the second century CE. In the third century CE, most of the colonies continued to use Latin; however, ten of the new established colonies decided to strike bilingual or Greek coins¹³. Nevertheless, the status of the colony was almost always highlighted on the coins, sometimes as a full name (COLONIA, ΚΟΛΩΝΙΑ) but more often as abbreviations (C, COL, ΚΟΛ)¹⁴. In general, the colonial title typically appears first, followed by the founder's gens (Iulia, Augusta, Flavia, Aelia), next the *ethnikon*, and then other titles (NEOKORATE, METROPOLIS)¹⁵.

Another aspect of colonial coinage is the iconographic programme. There are three motifs that were predominant for colonies.

1. The ›foundation scene‹ presents a priest/founder ploughing a sacred furrow (*sulcus primigenius*) with a yoke of oxen¹⁶. Romulus performed the *aratrum* (plow) rite when he first established Rome, and it was afterwards repeated in the case of new colonies. Therefore the coins with the foundation scene commemorate the colonial birthday¹⁷.
2. Military standards (*aquilae, vexilla, signa*) indicating the legions that the colonists came from. The *aratrum* ritual highlights the civic origins of the colony, while the le-

¹⁰ Gell. NA 16,13,9.

¹¹ Sherwin-White 1973, p. 351; Boatwright 2000, p. 36; Butcher 2003, p. 230; Andrade 2013, pp. 319–323; Coles 2020, p. 77.

¹² Dąbrowa 2004a, pp. 394–405; Millar 2006, p. 165; Katsari, Mitchell 2008, p. 242; Dąbrowa 2020, pp. 97–104.

¹³ Thessalonika, Tyana, Antioch ad Orontem, Emesa, Philippiopolis, Carrhae, Edessa, Nisibis, Rhessaena and Singara.

¹⁴ Katsari – Mitchell 2008, p. 221.

¹⁵ There are situations in which colonial status is removed, though. For instance, Corinth hardly ever depicted its colonial status on coins. Furthermore, there are series of coins of Neapolis with legends: NEAPOLI NEOCORO, COL in exergue (e.g. [RPC VIII unassigned 2340](#))

¹⁶ Jellonek 2018, pp. 104–107.

¹⁷ Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, pp. 35–36; Filges 2015, pp. 243–249.



gionary emblems indicate the military past of the colonists¹⁸.

3. The figure of Marsyas appeared on the coins of the Roman colonies for the first time under Domitian in Sinope¹⁹ and became a common motif on colonial coins in the third century CE. It is perceived by scholars as the symbol of colonial liberty (*signum libertatis*)²⁰. It seems that these three motifs were to some point reserved exclusively for the Roman colonies.

The aforementioned patterns were developed in the veteran colonies in the first-second century CE. However, the late colonies, which were established in the early third century CE, often defined as ›titular‹, followed the patterns that originated from the ›regular‹ ones. A total number of 24 Roman colonies struck coins under Philip I²¹. They were spread from Thrace (Deultum) to Mesopotamia (Nisibis). Despite geographical differences, colonial coins had the aforementioned features. In spite of domination of the local motives in the third century, Roman identity was manifested to some extent in the colonies.

Finally, three cities that gained the colonial status under Philip I immediately released initial colonial issues²². Did Damascus, Neapolis and Philippopolis also reorganize civic coinage after colonial grants?

Colonies founded by Philip I

Philippopolis

As was said before, Philippopolis (Chahba) was a supposed place of Philip's birth²³. After taking the throne, the new emperor decided to elevate his home village to the rank of a colony. Judging by the remnants, Philippopolis was rebuilt as an ideal Graeco-Roman city, yet there is no evidence of Roman settlers²⁴. Obviously, no coins were minted there before the elevation. Furthermore, after the assassination of the imperial family, Philippopolis did not continue coin production.

An elevation of a new Roman colony was manifested by a few issues struck in the name

of ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΠΟΛΙΤΩΝ ΚΟΛΩΝΙΑC²⁵. No colonial motifs were introduced and the Latin was not in use there (excluding the S C mark). The iconographic repertoire was limited to three reverse types bearing Roma. On the large issues (12–18 g), Roma was sitting (**fig. 1**)²⁶. On the medium units (7–8 g), the goddess was standing²⁷. On the small issues (4 g), only the bust of Roma was depicted²⁸. The design of the sitting helmeted Roma holding a sceptre could be copied from imperial issues²⁹. However, an almost identical depiction of Roma is presented on colonial issues of Laodicea Maritima³⁰. In the case of Philippopolis, the design was altered. Roma is not holding a victory but two small figures mounted on an eagle. The presentation of Roma was an evident manifestation of loyalty and gratitude towards Rome. The small town, or a village even was converted into a Roman imperial city. Due to the fact that there was no tradition of local coinage, the issues in the time of Philipp I could have been produced elsewhere or by minters from another city. Laodicea is an obvious candidate; however, there are confirmed die-links between

¹⁸ Dąbrowa 2004a, p. 399.

¹⁹ [RPC II 723A](#).

²⁰ Klimowsky 1989, pp. 93–94; Basso, Buonopane 2008, pp. 139–160.

²¹ Deultum, Viminacium, Dium, Cassandrea, Pella, Parium, Apamea, Sinope, Pisidian Antioch, Cremna, Comama, Alexandria Troas, Mallus, Antioch ad Orontem, Tyre, Heliopolis, Laodicea Maritima, Ptolemais, Caesarea Maritima, Bostra, Nisibis, Damascus, Neapolis and Philippopolis.

²² Philippopolis, Damascus, Neapolis.

²³ Spijkerman 1978, p. 258; Ball 2000, p. 204; Butcher 2003, p. 232; Millar 2006, p. 217; Oenbrink 2006, p. 243.

²⁴ Ball 2000, p. 204; Butcher 2003, p. 233; Darrous – Rohmer 2004, pp. 5–41; Oenbrink 2006, pp. 253–260.

²⁵ [RPC VIII 2196](#), [2210](#), [2243](#), [2269](#), [2279](#), [2286](#), [2375](#), [2409](#), [2417](#), [2439](#), [2449](#), [6067](#) (unassigned).

²⁶ [RPC VIII 2269](#), [2279](#), [2286](#), [2375](#), [2409](#), [2417](#), [2439](#), [2449](#), [6067](#) (unassigned).

²⁷ [RPC VIII 2196](#), [2243](#) (unassigned).

²⁸ [RPC VIII 2210](#) (unassigned).

²⁹ E.g. [RIC IV Philip I 44](#), [45](#); Balbuza 2013, p. 413; Balbuza 2014, pp. 189–190.

³⁰ [RPC VIII 8024](#) (unassigned).





Fig. 1: Philippopolis, 247–249 AD: Obv. Divus Marinus / Rev. Roma seated holding two small figures of Philip's parents on an eagle (RPC VIII no. 2417 [unassigned]), © CNG, Triton XVI (2013-01-08) no. 743

Philippopolis and Antioch³¹. The die-network in the Levant requires further research, yet the connections between Philippopolis and other Roman colonies are striking. Was it a conscious decision to follow colonies in minting? or it was just a coincidence? It is impossible to solve.

It must be highlighted that the local authorities wanted to emphasise the emperor's origins. Besides members of the ruling imperial family (Philip I, Philip II and Otacilia Severa), coins also bear the depiction of the emperor's father on an eagle—Julius Marinus³², who had been a regional elite's member of an equestrian rank³³. After Philip's ascension, Marinus was deified by his son and worshiped in Philippopolis³⁴. A bust of Marinus (ΘΕΩ ΜΑΡΙΝΩ) is supported by an eagle (**fig. 1**)³⁵. The presence of Philip's father on coins was exclusively restricted to Philippopolis. He was never depicted on either imperial or provincial issues. Therefore, the figure of Marinus performed the role of the local benefactor (just like Pythagoras on Samos coins³⁶) while his son became the founder of a newly established city.

Furthermore, on another issue an enthroned Roma is holding two figures also supported by an eagle³⁷. Since Jupiter's bird supporting deceased emperors and empress symbolised their apotheosis³⁸, the figures can be identified as deified Philip's parents. However, Achim Lichtenberger argues that Philip I and perhaps his brother Iulius Priscus are pre-

sented on that issue³⁹. Nevertheless, the authorities of the new colony chose not to use a local hero or to refer to coinage tradition, so they availed popularity of the imperial family members, descendants of their own land.

As it was mentioned above, the legends on Philippopolis coins are inscribed in Greek. The mother city of Philip I was among the ten Roman colonies that never converted to Latin⁴⁰. Yet, two Latin letters (S C) appeared on almost all coins issued in the name of the Philippopolis colony. *Senatus Consulto* (S C) suggests that minting rights came from the central government. The scholars describe Greek coins with a conventional mark of authority in Latin (S C / S P Q R) as pseudo-bilingual⁴¹. It is important

³¹ Butcher 1988, pp. 70–71.

³² RPC VIII 2243, 2417, 2449 (unassigned).

³³ Darrous – Rohmer 2004, pp. 23–24; Millar 2006, p. 217.

³⁴ BMC Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia, p. XLI; Butcher 2003, pp. 233–234; Darrous – Rohmer 2004, p. 14; Millar 2006, p. 217.

³⁵ RPC VIII 2243 (unassigned).

³⁶ RPC VII.1 593.

³⁷ RPC VIII 2243, 2269, 2279, 2286, 2375, 2409, 2417, 2439, 2449, 6067 (unassigned).

³⁸ Spijkerman 1978, p. 259; e.g. Diva Sabina RIC II.3 2603; Diva Faustina RIC III 1133; Divus Marcus Aurelius RIC III 660.

³⁹ Lichtenberger 2006, pp. 188–189.

⁴⁰ Thessalonika, Tyana, Antioch ad Orontem, Emesa, Philippopolis, Carrhae, Edessa, Nisibis, Rhaesaena and Singara.

⁴¹ Calomino 2014, p. 200; Awianowicz 2021, p. 7.





Fig. 2: Damascus, 247–249 AD: Obv. Philip I / Rev. She-wolf suckling twins (RPC VIII no 26812 [unassigned]), © CNG, Auction 85 (2010-09-15) no. 656

to highlight that only two other centres used S C on coins under Philip I: Antioch ad Orontem⁴² and Mallus⁴³. Both cities were also colonies established in the third century. Mallus introduced the abbreviation after its transformation into a Roman colony, while Antioch ad Orontem used it for much longer, from Augustus till 253 AD. It is another connection between Antioch and Philippopolis (mutual use of S C abbreviation and die-links). This seems to support the theory that coins in the name of Philippopolis were actually produced in Antioch or executed by Antiochene minters. In conclusion, the colonial authorities attempted to manifest Philippopolis as an imperial city through the employment of the S C formula, the introduction of Roma, and members of the imperial family.

Damascus

Damascus did not issue coins after the death of Elagabalus. Local mint was reopened under Philip I, the initial issues bore the universal colonial features for the first time. Therefore, it can be assumed that Damascus became a Roman colony under Philip I⁴⁴ and not earlier in the times of Septimius Severus⁴⁵.

In contrast to Philippopolis, the government of the new colony actually decided to follow universal colonial patterns. Latin was accepted as the main language of legends, yet

not as a sole one. All typical colonial motifs appeared on coins. The difference in attitude to the colony of Philippopolis located 85 km to the southwest of Damascus is striking. In contrast to Philippopolis, there is numismatic evidence that actual settlers were located in the city, since military standards were depicted on Damascene coins under Philip I⁴⁶. *Vexillum* of *Legio VI Ferrata* (inscribed LEG VI FER) is juxtaposed with the *aratrum* ritual⁴⁷ and she-wolf nursing twins (**fig. 2**)⁴⁸. It is important to highlight that *Lupa Romana* was an emblem of *Legio VI Ferrata*; therefore, the composition indicates a military tradition. Furthermore, an almost identical depiction appeared on the one known specimen of Philip I in Tyre⁴⁹. Edward Dąbrowa argues that the veterans of *Legio VI Ferrata* could have settled under Philip I in both Damascus and Tyre⁵⁰.

⁴² E.g. [RPC VIII 7492](#), [7504](#), [7505](#), [7506](#), [7514](#), [7547](#), [27942](#), [69845](#) (unassigned).

⁴³ [RPC VIII 2193](#), [2201](#) (unassigned).

⁴⁴ Harl 1984, p. 62; Burns 2005, p. 85; Dąbrowa 2012, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Ball 2000, p. 184.

⁴⁶ Burns 2005, p. 85; Dąbrowa 2012, p. 33.

⁴⁷ [RPC VIII 26792](#), [26960](#) (unassigned).

⁴⁸ [RPC VIII 26612](#), [26789](#), [26812](#), [26840](#), [26842](#), [26620](#), [69783](#) (unassigned).

⁴⁹ [RPC VIII 26725](#) (unassigned).

⁵⁰ Dąbrowa 2004b, pp. 217–218.





Fig. 3: Damascus, 247–249 AD: Obv. Philip I and Philip II / Rev. CEBACMIA in wreath ([RPC VIII no. 15987](#) [unassigned]), © [CNG, eAuction 264 \(2011-09-21\) no. 316](#)

The iconographic programme introduced after the transformation into a colony was unprecedentedly versatile in the case of Damascus. There was a wide range of typical colonial motifs such as the aforementioned *vexilla* set up with *Lupa Romana*⁵¹, foundation type⁵² and Marsyas⁵³. However, the local tradition remained strong. Damascene games – Sebasmia – were also held after the elevation⁵⁴. It is important to highlight that agonistic crowns⁵⁵ and wreaths⁵⁶ had been earlier presented on coins⁵⁷. After colonial grant agonistic crowns depicted on coins were actually inscribed in Greek (ΑΓΙΑ ΙΕΡΑ CEBACMIA), while the surrounding legend remained Latin (e.g. COL DAMA(S) METROP) (**fig. 3**). In contrast to Philippopolis in which pseudo-bilingual coins were struck, Damascene issues are truly bilingual. Other Greek words that appeared on coins under Philip I are ΠΗΓΑΙ (stream / water source) and ΧΡΥCΟΡΑ (Chrysoroas = river-god). The inscriptions are used to identify certain contexts or figures (explained below), that engravers presumed to be unclear. Since they used the Greek language to do that and the fact that Damascus is often written with Δ instead of D, it seems obvious that the local community primarily used Greek.

A Sanctuary consecrated to river-god Barada (Chrysoroas) is another sign of local patriotism on Damascene colonial coins⁵⁸. The

sanctuary (nowadays Ayn al-Fijeh), located north-east of Damascus, was famous for a stream spring coming out of a grotto⁵⁹. The composition presenting the sanctuary on coins consists of two registers. A grotto with a cult statue of Chrysoroas is depicted on the lower one. A tetrastyle temple with a statue of the unidentified figure (Marsyas? Female figure?) is presented above⁶⁰. The scene is completed by Greek inscription ΠΗΓΑΙ, which means streams or a water source⁶¹. A composition

⁵¹ [RPC VIII 69783, 26789, 26840](#) (unassigned)

⁵² [RPC VIII 26792, 26960, 26614](#) (unassigned).

⁵³ [RPC VIII 26615, 26851](#) (unassigned).

⁵⁴ Butcher 2003, p. 229; Palistrant Shaick 2021, p. 189.

⁵⁵ [RPC VIII 15989, 26782, 26791](#) (unassigned).

⁵⁶ [RPC VIII 15981, 26790, 26850](#) (unassigned).

⁵⁷ [RPC VI 8591, 8593, 8594, 8595, 8596, 8597](#) (temporary).

⁵⁸ [RPC VIII 15976 \(unassigned\)](#); Price – Trell 1977, p. 206 fig. 413; Butcher 2020, p. 355.

⁵⁹ Aliquot – Piraud-Fournet 2008, pp. 87–98.

⁶⁰ The figure bears a strong resemblance to the figure of Marsyas. It has a raised hand, and it is holding an uncertain object (a wine skin?). The thickening around the ankles can be interpreted as chains (another feature of Marsyas). However, on a few issues, the back of the figure is not bent. It is described as an idol by Aliquot (2009, p. 329) and as a female figure by Butcher (2012, p. 480). The identification as Marsyas is not certain for Palistrant Shaick (2021, p. 189 n. 32). As a result, final identification is not possible.

⁶¹ Πηγῆ; plural πηγᾶί; Diggle 2021, 1129.





Fig. 4: Damascus, 244–249 AD: Obv. Otacilia Severa / Rev. River-god Chrysoroas (RPC VIII no. 15978 [unassigned]), © CNG, eAuction 208 (2009-04-08) no. 225



Fig. 5: Damascus, 244–247 AD: Obv. Philip I / Rev. Fortuna seated on rock, before Marsyas, in lower register, four Tychai (RPC VIII no. 26811 [unassigned]), © CNG, eAuction 261 (2011-08-03) no. 223

seems to be another manifestation of the integration between the colonial and the local tradition. Furthermore, the sitting figure of Chrysoroas, inscribed in Greek – ΧΡΥΣΟΡΟΑΣ, is also the main theme of a few issues' reverse (fig. 4)⁶², what makes river-god another example of continuity of local coinage⁶³. The life-giving waters of Chrysoroas irrigated the gardens and plantations of Damascus. The region was famous for local fruits such as plums and figs, but also pistachios and olives⁶⁴; therefore, a well-organized irrigation system was essential for the local economy.

One of the most important figures in civic coinage was a city goddess (Tyche-Fortuna-Astarte) presented in various configurations⁶⁵. On a multifigured scene, the sitting Tyche is

juxtaposed with a statue of Marsyas on the upper register (fig. 5)⁶⁶. On the lower register, two central Tychai are raising an object which

⁶² RPC VIII 15978, 15990, 26784 (unassigned).

⁶³ Chrysoroas appeared earlier on coins of Marcus Aurelius as Caesar: RPC IV.3 6967 (temporary) and Elagabalus: RPC VI 8592 (temporary).

⁶⁴ Burns 2005, p. 76.

⁶⁵ Tyche of Damascus & 4 Tychai RPC VIII 15974, 26775, 26811, 26818, 72720 (unassigned); Tyche on rock: RPC VIII 8426, 15985, 26618 (unassigned); Shrine with a bust of Tyche: RPC VIII 15979, 15986, 26619, 26773, 26777, 26779, 26827 (unassigned); sitting Tyche in temple: RPC VIII 26841 (unassigned); bust of Tyche & Marsyas: RPC VIII 26825 (unassigned); Tyche & Emperor: RPC VIII 26849 (unassigned).

⁶⁶ RPC VIII 26811, 26818, 26775, 15974, 72720 (unassigned).





Fig. 6: Damascus, 244–249 AD: Obv. Philip I / Rev. Naked Ambrosia standing facing (RPC VIII no. 26786 [unassigned]), © CNG, eAuction 291 (2012-11-21) no. 252

seems to be a fruit basket (perhaps containing damascene plums and figs). On another issue, an emperor is accepting a diadem from a thankful Tyche⁶⁷. Damascus is flourishing after the elevation into a Roman colony.

Other gods and heroes depicted on Damascene coins were Hercules⁶⁸, his son Telephos⁶⁹, Ambrosia (fig. 6)⁷⁰ and Lycurgus⁷¹. Especially the presence of the last two heroes is uncommon. The depiction of the naked female figure tangled with vine tendrils was primarily identified with Daphne⁷². However, Kevin Butcher has argued that such a configuration matches with Ambrosia⁷³. According to Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, Ambrosia saved Dionysus by strangling his rival Lycurgus in a battle fought somewhere in Syria⁷⁴. Furthermore, this act seems to be presented on another coin⁷⁵. Ambrosia is spreading vine tendrils to prevent the advancing of Lycurgus. The scene was shown on a famous Rothschild's Lycurgus Cup from the fourth century AD⁷⁶. There are other figures on the Damascene colonial coinage yet to be identified⁷⁷. Syrian mythology may have been preserved in certain ways through Nonnus story, which could lead to the hybridity of figures like Ambrosia and unidentified heroes.

Nevertheless, the mintmark of Damascus was a ram's head⁷⁸ or a leaping ram⁷⁹, which was also presented as a solo theme on the reverse⁸⁰. Altogether, the reorganised mint of colonial Damascus introduced an unprecedented

abundant iconographic repertoire. Both local and colonial. In contrast, the last pre-colonial issues struck under Elagabalus presented only five themes⁸¹. It simultaneously demonstrates how Damascus and Philippopolis take different approaches.

In short, Damascene coinage after the transformation into a Roman colony is a manifestation of syncretism; in other words, by combining aspects of two traditions, a new cultural expression was created. Traditional motifs were implemented with predominant

⁶⁷ [RPC VIII 26849 \(unassigned\)](#).

⁶⁸ [RPC VIII 15982](#), [15983](#), [15984](#), [26892](#), [59216](#) (unassigned).

⁶⁹ [RPC VIII 15980](#), [15991](#) (unassigned).

⁷⁰ [RPC VIII 26786 \(unassigned\)](#).

⁷¹ [RPC VIII 26800 \(unassigned\)](#).

⁷² Bijovsky 2003, pp. 53–58.

⁷³ Butcher 2010, pp. 85–91.

⁷⁴ Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 20–21.

⁷⁵ [RPC VIII 26800 \(unassigned\)](#)

⁷⁶ Miziur-Możdżioch 2017, pp. 99–111; British Museum, number: 1958,1202.1.

⁷⁷ [RPC VIII 16012](#), [26890](#), [26804](#), [26810](#) (unassigned).

⁷⁸ E.g. [RPC VIII 15991](#) (unassigned).

⁷⁹ E.g. [RPC VIII 15979](#), [26934](#) (unassigned).

⁸⁰ [RPC VIII 59217](#) (unassigned).

⁸¹ Shrine with a bust of Tyche: [RPC VI 30434](#) (temporary); CEBACMIA in wreath: [RPC VI 8588](#), [8589](#), [8590](#) (temporary); prize crown: [RPC VI 8591](#) (temporary); reclining Chryso-roas: [RPC VI 8592](#), [8599](#) (temporary); male figure + cypress tree: [RPC VI 8598](#) (temporary).





Fig. 7: Damascus, 244–247 AD: Obv. Philip II / Rev. Marsyas and cypress tree (RPC VIII no. 26615 [unassigned]), © CNG, eAuction 341 (2014-12-17) no. 60

colonial motifs. This phenomenon is illustrated by the statue of Marsyas rising a hand towards a cypress tree (another symbol of Damascus) (fig. 7)⁸².

Neapolis

The third city that was elevated to the status of a colony was Samarian Neapolis. The transformation took place in the second period of Philip's reign (247–249 AD), since his son was being recognised by inscriptions as Augustus⁸³. We learn from the coins that the city gained also neokorate under Philip I⁸⁴. Coinage of Flavia Neapolis under Philip I has been recently carefully investigated by Lior Sandberg⁸⁵. Therefore, in this paper, a few aspects of the Neapolis' coinage connected with the colonial and local identity are emphasised.

Similar to Damascus, the mint of Neapolis was closed for some time before reorganisation as a colonial mint. The last issues before the break were released under Severus Alexander⁸⁶. Only four themes were presented in the times of the last member of the Severan dynasty⁸⁷. By contrast, after the colonial grant, a wide range of colonial, imperial and local motifs were introduced under Philip I. Most of them were signed by a depiction of Mt. Gerizim. The holy Samarian mountain symbolised the city itself⁸⁸. The depiction was presented in two versions. A relatively large mintmark with a detailed staircase and two peaks with

a temple and shrine of Zeus Hypsistos⁸⁹ were often juxtaposed with an eagle (fig. 8)⁹⁰ and Lupa Romana⁹¹. In the smaller version, it was put in the background of e.g. the foundation scene⁹².

There are two colonial motifs presented on coins of Neapolis: a relatively large figure of Marsyas was juxtaposed with Mt. Gerizim supported by an eagle⁹³/ Nike⁹⁴ and the foundation scene⁹⁵. One could be surprised that military emblems were omitted. According to Kenneth Harl, the lack of *vexilla* on Neapolis coins in the times of Philip's reign suggests

⁸² Palistrant Shaick 2021, pp. 188–189; RPC VIII 26615 (unassigned).

⁸³ Sandberg 2019, p. 141.

⁸⁴ Burrell 2004, pp. 261–263.

⁸⁵ Sandberg, 2019, pp. 141–152.

⁸⁶ Harl 1984, p. 61.

⁸⁷ Mt. Gerizim: RPC VI 8973 (temporary); Tyche: RPC VI 8976 (temporary); standing Serapis: RPC VI 8975 (temporary); head of Serapis: RPC VI 8977 (temporary); standing Artemis: RPC VI 8978 (temporary).

⁸⁸ Evans 2014, p. 178; Belayche 2009, p. 173; Lichtenberger 2017, pp. 207–208.

⁸⁹ Price – Trell 1977, p.173.

⁹⁰ RPC VIII 2422, 70246 (unassigned).

⁹¹ RPC VIII 2204, 2289, 2351, 2489 (unassigned).

⁹² RPC VIII 2202, 2312, 2364, 2483 (unassigned).

⁹³ RPC VIII 2442, 2476 (unassigned).

⁹⁴ RPC VIII 2194 (unassigned).

⁹⁵ RPC VIII 2202, 2261, 2312, 2364, 2404, 2483, 77193 (unassigned).

⁹⁶ Harl 1984, p. 66.





Fig. 8: Neapolis, 247–249 AD: Obv. Philip II / Rev. Mount Gerizim with temple in perspective ([RPC VIII no. 2361](#) [unassigned]), © CNG, eAuction 410 (2017-11-29) no. 199



Fig. 9: Neapolis, 247–249 AD: Obv. Philip II / Rev. *sulcus primigenius*, above Mount Gerizim ([RPC VIII no. 2261](#) [unassigned]), © Münzkabinett Berlin, [Objektnummer 18275110](#)

the titular nature of *Colonia Sergia Neapolis*⁹⁶. However, behind oxen heads there is an uncertain object (barely visibly) that could be *vexillum*. In fact, there are coins from the Trebonian Gallus times, struck in Neapolis and feature images of Mount Gerizim, Neptune, and a military sign with a boar⁹⁷. The animal served as a symbol of *Legio X Fretensis*, whose veterans had been settled in another colony, Aelia Capitolina⁹⁸. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that some veterans / legionaries may have participated in Neapolis' colonial history.

The foundation scene was known from a few issues. A founder driving a yoke of oxen is acting the *aratrum* ritual at the foot of Mt. Gerizim (**fig. 9**). According to Sandberg, the depicted founder is actually the emperor⁹⁹. Ne-

vertheless, whether the priest was portrayed to be Philip or whether he was a default colonial founder, the scene commemorates the colonial foundation on a basic level and could be celebrating the millennium of Rome on a deeper level.

One could say that the introduction of *Lupa Romana* in newly established colonies like Neapolis¹⁰⁰ and Damascus¹⁰¹ is a direct link to the

⁹⁷ [RPC IX 2169](#).

⁹⁸ Keppie 1998, p. 121; Dąbrowa 2000, p. 324.

⁹⁹ Sandberg 2019, p. 143.

¹⁰⁰ [RPC VIII 2204](#), [2289](#), [2351](#), [2489](#) (unassigned).

¹⁰¹ [RPC VIII 26612](#), [26789](#), [26840](#), [26842](#), [69783](#) (unassigned).





Fig. 10: Neapolis, 247–249 AD: Obv. Philip I / Rev. Emperor Philipp I seated, crowned by Fortuna (?), Philip II standing, at l. local citizen, standing r.; above, Mount Gerizim (RPC VIII no. 2250 (unassigned)), © CNG, eAuction 253 (2011-04-06) no. 281

millennium of Rome celebrated in 248 AD¹⁰². Since the proof of *saeculum* celebration on imperial coinage are issues bearing *Lupa Romana* and the inscription SAECVLARES AVGG¹⁰³. The motif of a she-wolf nursing twins was absent from imperial coins from the times of Marcus Aurelius and re-appeared under Philip I to celebrate *ludi saeculares*¹⁰⁴. However, in the case of provincial coinage, the motif of *Lupa Romana* used to be frequently presented both in colonies¹⁰⁵ and *peregrine* cities¹⁰⁶. It was a way to manifest loyalty towards Rome. Furthermore, colonies could have been emphasising direct connections with Rome. In contrast to Damascus, there is no evidence of *Legio VI Ferrata* presence; therefore, the juxtaposition of *Lupa Romana* and the sacred mountain of Samaritan could be another expression of syncretism.

Sandberg connects the issues depicting Decanus¹⁰⁷, Demeter with Kore¹⁰⁸, the foundation scene¹⁰⁹ with the commemoration of the *saeculum* games held in the city¹¹⁰. The scholar makes an attempt to identify the star depicted on the coin with Decanus as *sidus Iulium*¹¹¹; however, the star of Julius was barely in use after Augustus death and shall be reserved for the Julio-Claudian dynasty¹¹².

The benefactors of Neapolis were also included on local coinage. Once, the sitting emperors were receiving Fortuna of Neapolis which was holding a wreath¹¹³. City-goddess

was going to honour the emperors in an act of gratitude for the colonial and neokorate titles, what actually happened on another issue where Fortuna was crowning the sitting Philip I, surrounded by Philip II and a grateful citizen (fig. 10)¹¹⁴. The emperors were also presented on other issues¹¹⁵.

¹⁰² Kluczek 2019, pp. 226–234.

¹⁰³ Balbuza 2013, p. 406; Kluczek 2019, pp. 226–234.

¹⁰⁴ Kluczek 2019, p. 231; [RPC IV Philip I 159](#) (temporary).

¹⁰⁵ Deultum, Bithynian Apamea, Parium, Alexandria Troas, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Cremna, Ninica.

¹⁰⁶ Thracian Philippopolis: [RPC IV.1 7475](#) (temporary); Nicopolis ad Istrum: [RPC IV.1 4351](#) (temporary); Nicomedia: [RPC IV.1 6112](#) (temporary); Apollonia ad Rhyndacum: [RPC III 1600](#); Cyzicus: [RPC IV.2 9164](#) (temporary); Ilium: [RPC IV.2 90](#) (temporary); Ephesus: [RPC IX 633](#); Tralles: [RPC VII.1 481](#); Hierapolis: [RPC VI 5452](#) (temporary); Ancyra: [RPC IV.3 10469](#) (temporary); Anazarbus: [RPC VI 7287](#) (temporary); Alexandria: [RPC IV.4 14280](#) (temporary).

¹⁰⁷ [RPC VIII 2278](#) (unassigned).

¹⁰⁸ [RPC VIII 2451](#) (unassigned).

¹⁰⁹ [RPC VIII 2202, 2261, 2312, 2364, 2404, 2483, 77193](#) (unassigned).

¹¹⁰ Sandberg 2019, pp. 143–145.

¹¹¹ Sandberg 2019, p. 144.

¹¹² Scott 1941, p. 272.

¹¹³ [RPC VIII 2415](#) (unassigned).

¹¹⁴ [RPC VIII 2250](#) (unassigned).

¹¹⁵ *Adventus* type: [RPC VIII 2455](#) (unassigned); Philip I and Philip II sacrificing over altar: [RPC VIII 2424](#) (unassigned); Philip I, Philip II and Otacillia on quadriga: [RPC VIII 2452](#) (unassigned).



There were numerous heroes and goddesses, some of them still require identification. The most important god worshipped in the city was Jupiter (Zeus Hysistos), depicted in a few ways¹¹⁶. His temple was erected on a peak of Mt. Gerizim under Hadrian¹¹⁷. Recently, Andreas Kropp identified the altar of the other peak with the one presented on Caracalla, suggesting that Fortuna, Artemis and Kore Persephone were worshipped there¹¹⁸. Other gods were Roma, Mars, Triptolemos, Serapis, Salus, Asclepius, Cybele, Capitoline triad. However, the most enigmatic one was linked to the Samaritan religion. According to tradition, on Mt. Gerizim Abraham was supposed to sacrifice his son – Isaac (*aketah*)¹¹⁹. Some scholars identify the scene of binding of Isaac with issues bearing four figures and a lamb¹²⁰. However, two known examples were in a too poor condition to make the final identification.

Bilingual coins also appeared in Neapolis under Philip I. The aforementioned Decanus is inscribed in Greek (ΔΕΚΑΝΟC)¹²¹. One should note that a similar pattern was introduced in Damascus. Furthermore, there are some errors in imperial names. Both emperors are inscribed as IIMM CC P FILIPPIS AVGG¹²², in another case Philip II as IMP C M IVL PHELIPPO P F AVG¹²³. Engravers executing the dies for Neapolis had evident spelling difficulties.

Conclusion

Thus to summarise, besides Thessalonica, three colonies established under Philip I are considered to be last Roman colonies. They were elevated in the final stage of Roman provincial mintage and simultaneously gained imperial grant to open or reopen local mints. At the time, colonial mints could be divided into two groups: mints which followed the patterns of colonial coinage (Latin inscriptions; universal motives), and those which introduced a new status of *colonia* among other titles in a legend. Coinage of Philippopolis is among the latter group. By contrast, the local authorities of Neapolis and Damascus decided to follow patterns of colonial coinage.

In fact, the coinages of Damascus and Neapolis share common features. First of all, reopened mints were significantly subsidized, and as a result, dozens of iconographic motives, both local and colonial were released. The statue of Marsyas symbolising a new colonial status, the ›foundation scene‹ emphasising the bonds with Rome, military standards and *Lupa Romana* were adopted into the iconographic programmes. The colonial motifs supplemented a long tradition of local coinages. They were not used to express the dominance of Rome, but rather to integrate two identities. Moreover, the existence of bilingual coins with Latin legends and Greek signatures of local heroes and games is another aspect of a syncretic culture. Although a familiarity of Latin was superficial, the colonial governments manifested a cultural and political affiliation to the Roman identity.

Furthermore, depictions of members of the imperial family performed an important role in both colonies. Tyche accepting a diadem from Philip I in Damascus¹²⁴ or Tyche crowning emperor in Neapolis¹²⁵ highlight that a new status of both cities came directly from the emperor and his family.

Compared with Damascus and Neapolis, a gratitude towards the emperor was far more emphasised in Philippopolis. An enormous construction project took place in the hometown of Philip, transforming it into a magnificent city. A short-lived mint of Philippopolis did

¹¹⁶ Enthroned Zeus: [RPC VIII 2274, 2497](#) (unassigned), enthroned sided by Athena and Hera: [RPC VIII 2408](#) (unassigned); bust of Zeus: [RPC VIII 2267, 2344](#) (unassigned).

¹¹⁷ Price – Trell 1977, pp. 173–175; Evans 2014, p. 171.

¹¹⁸ Kropp 2021, pp. 220–236; cf. Farhi – Bessarabov 2021, pp. 171–196.

¹¹⁹ Genesis 22.

¹²⁰ Harl 1984, no. 11; Sandberg 2019, no. 5; [CNG Coins 325, lot. 461](#).

¹²¹ [RPC VIII 2278](#) (unassigned).

¹²² [RPC VIII 2381](#) (unassigned).

¹²³ [RPC VIII 2306](#) (unassigned).

¹²⁴ [RPC VIII 26849](#) (unassigned).

¹²⁵ [RPC VIII 2250, 2453](#) (unassigned).



not have a tradition of coin production nor local heroes or sanctuaries, therefore, the imperial family, including the predecessors of Philip, were manifested there. In order to establish a local distinctive identity, members of the autochthonous elite who were successful in obtaining imperial authority were juxtaposed with Roma and a new colonial status.

Damascus and Neapolis were the last provincial mints that joined the family of Roman colonial coinage. They followed universal patterns developed hundreds of years earlier, and combined them with a local tradition. Why did Damascus and Neapolis accept colonial practices is the last outstanding question. In the text, there are two potential responses. On the one hand, the emergence of colonial motives (particularly the legionary standards of *Legio VI Ferrata* in Damascus and the ambiguous vexillum on the coins of Neapolis) raises the possibility that legionaries and veterans would settle in these colonies. On the other hand, becoming a member of the reputable group of Roman colonies was such a significant honour that the local government manifested it on local coins.

After the assassination of Philip, a syncretic approach in Damascus and Neapolis was continued but not for long. The last emissions from Neapolis were released under Trebonianus and from Damascus under Gallienus. It was a swan song of colonial coinage.

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