

DILYANA BOTEVA

ON THE *CURSUS HONORUM* OF P. FU... PONTIANUS (PIR² F 496),
PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR OF LOWER MOESIA

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Although Lower Moesia and Thrace under Macrinus have attracted little historical investigation to date, a recent analysis of available sources suggests conclusions of impact to the entire Roman Empire.¹

First, most Lower Moesian and Thracian mints struck no coins with images of Macrinus and/or his son Diadumenianus, whether in the provincial capitals of Tomis and Perinthos or elsewhere in either province. This contrasts with Thessaloniki and other Macedonian mints where the assassination of Caracalla did not disrupt coinage production.²

Second, Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis were the only mints in Lower Moesia that continued to operate after that assassination, yet their output under the 14-month reign of Macrinus was probably as prolific as the entire output of the 18-year reign of Septimius Severus.

Third, the names of three different provincial governors appear on the reverses of coins minted in Lower Moesia, i.e. M. Staius Longinus, P. Fu... Pontianus and Marcius Claudius Agrippa. The names are given here in the chronological order reasoned out and proposed by Arthur Stein. It has been accepted by Jenö Fitz and Bengt Thomasson³ and is now confirmed by recent numismatic evidence.⁴

Fourth, the first coins issued in Lower Moesia under Macrinus and Diadumenianus bear the name of M. Staius Longinus.⁵ These coins were struck in Nicopolis ad Istrum shortly

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¹ D. Boteva, *Thrace and Lower Moesia During the Reign of Macrinus (217–218 A.D.)*. Paper presented at the Second International Symposium on Ancient Thrace in Komotini, Greece, September 1992; publication pending in: *Studia in honorem Prof. Al. Fol (Sofia)*. In addition, a broad historical survey on the subject will appear in D. Boteva, *Lower Moesia and Thrace in the Roman Imperial System, A.D. 193–217/218* (Dissertation 1993), Sofia (in press).

² B. Pick and K. Regling, *Die antiken Münzen Nord-Griechenlands*. Bd 1. Dacien und Moesien. Zweiter Halbband, Berlin 1910; E. Schönert, *Die Münzprägung von Perinthos*, Berlin 1965; I. Touratsoglou, *Die Münzstätte von Thessaloniki in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Berlin–New York 1988, 55–57.

³ A. Stein, *Die Legaten von Moesien*, Budapest 1940, 90–92; B. Thomasson, *Laterculi Praesidum*, Vol. I, Göteborg 1984, col. 140–141, nos. 113–115; J. Fitz, *Die Laufbahn der Statthalter in der römischen Provinz Moesia Inferior*, Weimar 1966, 50.

⁴ I have applied Clay's conclusions to Lower Moesian and Thracian issues in the article cited in footnote no. 1 above. See C. L. Clay, *The Roman Coinage of Macrinus and Diadumenianus*, *NZ* 93, 1979, 21–40; D. Salzmann, *Die Bildnisse des Macrinus*, *JDAI* 98, 1983, 352–381. These two articles argue a new chronology for Macrinus coinage.

⁵ PIR S 631 sq.; Stein 90–91; Fitz 50; Thomasson, col. 140, no. 113; P. M. M. Leunissen, *Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander (180–235 n. Chr.)*, Amsterdam 1989, 171, 252, 366.

after Caracalla's assassination but Longinus did not last long as provincial governor. In an earlier article, I attempted to show that Longinus had already been appointed governor of Lower Moesia under Caracalla⁶ and may well have figured among the officials distrusted by Macrinus because of 'their proud spirit and friendship' for the murdered emperor (Cass. Dio 78,13,2).⁷ The subsequent career of Longinus remains unknown. All we know for certain is that his name appears alongside that of his son in the *Album decurionum* from Canusium dated to A.D. 223: *c(larissimi) v(iri) M. Staius Longinus* and *M. Staius Longinus iun(ior)*.⁸

Fifth, Marcus Claudius Agrippa was the last of the three to govern Lower Moesia and Nicopolis ad Istrum was already striking coins in his name by the end of A.D. 217.⁹ As a rule, reverse only give his *cognomen*; a *nomen gentile* is very rare. But his *cognomen* does appear with two different *nomina gentilia*: Marc(ius) Agrippa¹⁰ and C(laudius) or Clau(dius) Agrippa.¹¹ While the name Claudius Agrippa is more frequently encountered alone on the coins, it is generally agreed that he is the same person referred to as Marcus Agrippa, sent out by Macrinus 'as governor, first of Pannonia, and then to Dacia' (Cass. Dio 78,13,2).

Sixth, Agrippa's immediate predecessor Pontianus¹² is styled as ΥΠ.Π.ΦΟΥ.ΠΟΝΤΙΑΝΟΣ only on coins struck in Nicopolis ad Istrum, while the alternate form ΥΠ.ΠΟΝΤΙΑΝΟΣ was commonly used by both Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis.¹³ His governorship was short-lived, spanning from June/August to November/December A.D. 217. At all events, it is safe to say that he no longer governed Lower Moesia at the close of the year.

1. Types of Reverses

The most remarkable reverses from the Marcianopolis mint in the name of Pontianus show the emperor on horseback with a fallen enemy underfoot;¹⁴ the emperor holding a *patera* and spear before an altar;¹⁵ or the emperor in military dress holding a spear and a small figure of Nike atop a globe.¹⁶ All three depictions were familiar to the coinage of Nicopolis ad Istrum bearing the name of Longinus but without ever including Nike atop the

⁶ Boteva, Thrace.

⁷ All Cassius Dio quotations are from the Loeb edition: Dio's Roman History, transl. by E. Cary, vol. IX, Cambridge, Mass./London 1955.

⁸ CIL IX 338 = Dessau 6121; see also H.-G. Pflaum, *Le marbre de Thorigny*, Paris 1948, 45.

⁹ PIR² M 224; Stein 91–92; Fitz 50; Thomasson, col. 141, no. 115; Leunissen 29–30, 239, 252, 257.

¹⁰ B. Pick, *Die antiken Münzen Nord-Griechenlands*, Bd. 1, *Dacien und Moesien. Erster Halbband*, Berlin 1898, nos. 1688, 1691.

¹¹ Pick, nos. 1695–1696, 1709, 1803–1804, 1819.

¹² PIR² F 496; Stein 91; Fitz 50; Thomasson, col. 141, no. 114; Leunissen 14–15, 170–171, 252.

¹³ Pick, nos. 1679–1682 and 708–784 respectively.

¹⁴ L. Ruzicka, *Inedita aus Moesia Inferior*, NZ 50, 1917, 123, no. 779a.

¹⁵ Pick, no. 778.

¹⁶ Pick, no. 779.

globe in the imperial hand.¹⁷ A second original feature of the Pontianus coinage is a triumphal arch topped off with four statues as seen on certain coins struck in Marcianopolis.¹⁸

Coins minted under the governorship of Agrippa also bore images of the emperor but the theme shifts from warfare to victory, as shown on coins where the emperor and Nike are flanking a *tropaion* and two captives, or where the emperor sits in a quadriga with a *tropaion* in the background.¹⁹ Furthermore, the last coins issued in the name of Agrippa were actually the last ever struck in Lower Moesia under Macrinus and marked a return to traditional imagery.²⁰

It is fair to assume that the coinage commemorated major events in Lower Moesia which occurred in the first seven or eight months of Macrinus' reign. This numismatic evidence suggests that the new emperor and his *Caesar* inherited and overcame armed conflict with Trans-Danubian tribes. These events are compatible with Cassius Dio's statement (78,27,5) that the Dacians ravaged portions of Dacia.

Although M. Statius Longinus was the first provincial governor under Macrinus to wage war against the Trans-Danubians in Lower Moesia, P. Fu...Pontianus is most probably the architect of their defeat. For some strong and still unknown reason, Pontianus left before he even had time to celebrate his victory, a task that fell to Agrippa, his successor. In my opinion, at some point after his appointment as *legatus Augusti* of Dacia, Agrippa temporarily governed both Dacia and Lower Moesia because Macrinus may have been short of trusted lieutenants. All these events took place no later than December A.D. 217 when peace again prevailed in Lower Moesia.

One inscription from Histria supports this hypothesis. Dated to A.D. 217, it honours Macrinus as ἀνεΐκτητος.²¹

2. Full Style of P. Fu... Pontianus

As noted, reverses of coins struck in Marcianopolis under Pontianus never bore his *nomen gentile*.²² This is significant because the mints of Marcianopolis and Nicopolis ad Istrum usually represented provincial governors with both the *nomen gentile* and *cog-*

¹⁷ Pick, nos. 1783–1784, 1870.

¹⁸ Ruzicka 124, nos. 789b–d.

¹⁹ Pick, nos. 1711–1713, 1822.

²⁰ Pick, nos. 1695, 1696, 1705, 1716–1718. Coins portraying Macrinus with a medium-length beard are die-linked with others showing a short-bearded emperor. See Clay 23, 34.

²¹ ISM I, 92. It should be noted that this is the only known Greek inscription to honour Macrinus with this epithet and only three Latin inscriptions styling him as *invictus* are known: CIL II 4789, CIL III 14155¹⁵ and AÉ 1969/70, 630. The first two examples are given in P. Salama, L'empereur Macrin Parthicus Maximus, REA 66, 1964, nos. 15, 48.

²² Pick, nos. 708–784.

nomen.²³ After the Thracian border was moved south,²⁴ the first governor of Lower Moesia to appear on coins with only a *cognomen* was Quintilianus under Caracalla.²⁵

As suggested long ago, one possible reading of Π.ΦΟΥ.ΠONTIANOΣ is P(ublius) Fu... Pontianus.²⁶ However, the key to an alternative interpretation lies in Lower Pannonia, another Danubian province where numerous milestones from the reign of Macrinus and his son have been found.²⁷ All were set up during the first tribunician power of the emperor, i.e. no later than 10th December A.D. 217, and all name Aelius Triccianus as provincial governor.²⁸ It is generally accepted that his successor was Pontius Pontianus,²⁹ whose name figures on two milestones from the beginning of Elagabalus' reign.³⁰

We are unable to pinpoint when Triccianus vacated his high office, one way or another, for Pontius Pontianus. It was originally argued that he had already lost power in Lower Pannonia under Macrinus³¹, but it has also been suggested that he suffered the same fate as Macrinus and was dismissed only after the assassination of this emperor.³²

My solution to these problems assumes that the two Pontiani, i.e. the governor of Lower Pannonia on the milestones from the last half of A.D. 218 and the governor of Lower Moesia on the coinage dated to between June/August and November/December A.D. 217, were one and the same person. There is no clash of timeframes and we have documented evidence of very few Roman *consulares* bearing the *cognomen* Pontianus.³³ This leads to the conclusion that, like his contemporary Marcius Claudius Agrippa, Pontianus had two *nomina gentilia*: Pontius and Fu(rius). In this case, he may be related to the Furii and Pontii families prominent in Dardania in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries.³⁴

²³ Pick 186, 331.

²⁴ B. Gerov, *Die Grenzen der römischen Provinz Thracia bis zur Gründung des Aurelianischen Dakien*, ANRW II, 7 (1), 1979, 212–214; D. Boteva, *The Province of Macedonia and the Civil War, A.D. 193–197*, Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium on Ancient Macedonia, Thessaloniki 1993, Vol. I, 246–247.

²⁵ PIR Q 13; Stein 90; Fitz 50; Thomasson, col. 140, no. 112; Leunissen 252.

²⁶ Stein 91.

²⁷ Salama, nos. 30–42; E. Weber, *Die römischen Inschriften der Steiermark*, Graz 1969, 83–84; H. v. Petrikovits, *M. Opellius Macrinus*, RE XVIII-1, col. 552.

²⁸ PIR² A 271; E. Groag, *Aelius Decius Triccianus*, RE IV, col. 2286–2287, no. 21; F. Fülep, *Epigraphie, Intercisa. I. Geschichte der Stadt in der Römerzeit*, Budapest 1954, 259–260; J. Fitz, *Legati Augusti pro praetore Pannoniae inferioris*, A.Ant.Hung. XI, 1963, 289–291; J. Fitz, *Die Laufbahn des Aelius Triccianus*, A.Ant.Hung. XXVI, 1978, 21–27; Thomasson, col. 116, no. 33; M. Šašel-Kos, *A Historical Outline of the Region Between Aquileia, the Adriatic and Sirmium in Cassius Dio and Herodianus*, Ljubljana 1986, 266–268; J. Šašel, *Senatori ed appartenenti all'ordine senatorio provenienti dalle province romane di Dacia, Thracia, Mesia, Dalmazia e Pannonia*, Tituli 5, 1982, 566.

²⁹ Fitz, *Legati* 290–291; Thomasson, col. 116, no. 34; Leunissen 175, 257.

³⁰ CIL III 3707 (Aquincum); Fülep 260; 314, no. 321.

³¹ Groag, col. 2286–2287; Fitz, *Legati* 291.

³² Fitz, *Triccianus* 27.

³³ Thomasson, *Laterculi*, vol. III, col. 123.

³⁴ J. Šašel, *Dardania, Furii e Pontii*, *Scritti sul mondo antico in memoria di Fulvio Grosso*. Pubblicazioni della facoltà di lettere e di filosofia 9, Macerata 1981, 587–594 (= Šašel, *Opera selecta*, Ljubljana 1992, 152–159).

If this is correct, it leads to two more conclusions. First, if, as I maintain, Pontianus was indeed transferred out of Lower Moesia to Lower Pannonia, it means that Aelius Triccianus was out of office no later than November/December A.D. 217. His subsequent fate remains unknown³⁵ – the milestones reveal that he suffered *damnatio memoriae*. Second, the very fact that Pontianus was transferred to Lower Pannonia so hastily indicates a critical military situation in that province late in A.D. 217, something not explicitly mentioned in any other contemporary source.

Conclusion

Pontius Fu(rius) Pontianus may have been of senatorial origin and related to the Dardanian families of Furi and Pontii. After Caracalla was assassinated and Macrinus rose to power in April, A.D. 217, Pontianus earned the trust of his new emperor. Under the circumstances, Macrinus put him in Lower Moesia to replace M. Staius Longinus, whose personal ties to the assassinated emperor may well have made him unreliable.

In Lower Moesia, Pontianus waged a successful military campaign against the Trans-Danubians.

As soon as he had stabilised the situation in Lower Moesia, he was transferred to Lower Pannonia, another trouble spot where he replaced Aelius Triccianus as provincial governor before the close of A.D. 217. It would also appear that these successes helped him survive the demise of Macrinus and thus we later find him as provincial governor under Elagabalus.

His fate thereafter remains unknown, but it is even possible that Pontius Proculus Pontianus, *cos.ord.* 238,³⁶ was the son of Pontius Fu(rius) Pontianus, the victorious provincial governor of Lower Moesia and Lower Pannonia.

University of Sofia

Dilyana Boteva

³⁵ According to Cassius Dio, he 'lost his life because of the Alban legion, which he had commanded with a firm hand during Macrinus' reign' (Cass. Dio 80,4,3).

³⁶ PIR P 610; Thomasson, col. 53, no. 47; A. Degrassi, *I fasti consolari dell'impero romano 30 avant Cristo al 613 dopo Cristo*, Roma 1952, 66. Here, I must thank Prof. Eck again who first called my attention to the possibility of kinship between Pontius Fu(rius) Pontianus and Pontius Proculus Pontianus.