

A SMALL PURSE FIND FROM THE LEGIONARY FORTRESS OF BRIGETIO

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Abstract: In recent years, the legionary fortress of Brigetio has been the focus of systematic excavations that have uncovered numerous building complexes and many finds. This paper focuses on a small assemblage of only six late Roman copper coins that most likely formed the content of a modest purse. Unfortunately, the find context is not secure, since it came from the cleaning layer of the big apsidal building in the eastern part of the fortress. The coins can be dated between 355 and 367 and were minted in the Pannonian mints of Siscia and Sirmium. Valentinianic hoards usually consist of copper issues and are much larger, so this new small find adds to the handful of late assemblages low in number.

In the past almost ten years, excavations have been carried out in the legionary fortress of Brigetio, greatly contributing to our knowledge of the ancient military camp. This is not only true of the impressive and large-scale buildings uncovered, but also of the plethora of finds.¹ In 2017–2018 the investigations focused on an apsidal building of appr. 600 m² on the eastern side of the *praetentura*, near the *porta principalis dextra* (Fig. 1). Based on the Terentius dux brick stamp found in a pit under a wall and further ones discovered elsewhere in the building by Frigeridus dux, the construction was carried out at the beginning of the 370s (Bartus *et al.* 2018, 542, 543). Here, six coins (No. 1–6) were found in trench 4, 5 (Fig. 2), on the southern side of the building, but unfortunately in the upper cleaning, thus not intact ancient layer, at the top level of the still standing walls in a corner.²

THE HOARD

Coins No. 1, 2 and 6, 7 were found stuck together, with the imprints of more coins in the earth on the uncleaned finds (Fig. 3: 1, 2; 5: 1, 2). This can only happen if these were deposited tightly next to each other that point to that the assemblage is, in fact, a small hoard or a purse find. This is further strengthened by the very good condition of the specimens that, apart from the reactions caused by the harmful chemicals in the soil, only show minor wear. Usually, the late Roman coins found at the excavation are quite worn, very unlike the crisp images and legends of the six presented here.

The assemblage can be narrowly dated between 355 and 367 and shows a nice sequence (Fig. 4) that also includes a coin of Jovian (No. 3; Fig. 5: 3), who only reigned for eight months, hence his issues are rare. Only the smallest AE4 SPES REIPVBLICE from 357–363 are missing from within this period, therefore it is possible that this type was omitted because of its smaller size, since all six coins are the somewhat larger AE3. Interestingly, the three coins from the Valentinianic period (No. 4–6; Fig. 5: 4–6) all fall in the earliest period, i.e. the first three years of their reign. The very narrow date of only twelve years for these late Roman coins also point to that the assemblage is likely a purse find.

The good state of preservation also makes it possible to identify the mints, which in every case was Siscia except for No. 3 that was issued in Sirmium. This is not surprising, since these were the local mints of Pannonia, and especially the first one had a huge output that supplied the region, and most importantly the military with money. Nonetheless, other mints e.g. Thessalonica or Aquileia are common in this region as

¹ The excavations uncovered the *porta praetoria* as well as the *thermae* (Bartus *et al.* 2022).

² The hoard was brought to my attention by Tibor Négycrű, who wrote his BA thesis on the finds from the apsidal building, to whom I owe my gratitude (Négycrű 2024).



Fig. 1. The apsidal building in the legionary fortress of Brigetio (author D. Bartus–L. Rupnik).

well, so their occurrence would also have fitted the generally tendencies.

The hoards ending under the Valentinianic dynasty are usually much larger, containing only bronze pieces (*Vida 2020*, 62, 63).³ Nevertheless, there are some smaller ones as well that will be listed here. The closest parallel to the Brigetio hoard are the 11 coins (355–378 AD) from the Late Roman fort of Iovia that was dug into the burnt floor of a building (*Prohászka/Torbágyi 2017*, 29; *Soproni 1975*, 175, 176). Very similar are the 12 coins found at Döbrököz, where most of the specimens were minted between 358 and 375, although starting with a single coin of Helena (337–340; *Prohászka/Torbágyi 2017*, 135, 136). Also, a small assemblage is the 13 aes dated between 351 and 378, found scattered at building XV in the northern part of the *area sacra* at Gorsium (*FMRU 1* 359). Similar in size, although from a broader time frame is the hoard from Baracska containing 15 bronze coins from 335 to 378 (*FMRU 1* 28, 29).

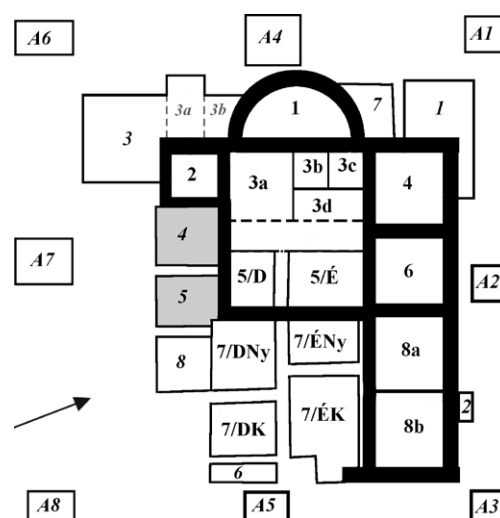


Fig. 2. The trench 4, 5 where the coins were discovered in the cleaning layer (author D. Bartus).

³ The exception to the rule is the one from Mursella (222–378) with more than 4872 coins that also contained a denarius of Severus Alexander and two antoniniani of Salonina and Claudius Gothicus, the rest being Late Roman aes coins (*Jónás 1933–1934*, 3).



Fig. 3. Coins No. 1 and 2 stuck together with the imprint of further coins in the earth (photo L. Juhász).

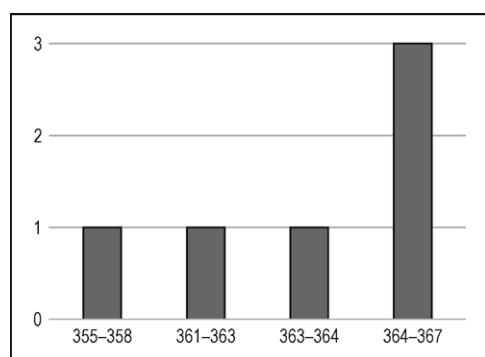


Fig. 4. The chronological distribution of the six coins (author L. Juhász).

led to the death of Valentinian I in the legionary fortress of Brigetio (Mócsy 1974, 126–129). The coin influx to this region dries up after 378 and comes to a halt at the end of the century.⁵ This seems somewhat surprising, since the *ripa* itself must surely have still been active following the death of Valens and Gratian at Adrianople. However, those coins are usually missing from military sites or are only present in very small numbers compared to the abundance of the *GLORIA ROMANORVM* and *SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE* types. Evidently this was a turbulent and unstable period, which only makes the exact dating and the reasons behind the concealment of the coins more problematic. In Brigetio the most recent coin of Valentinian III, dated to 425–435, was found in the *canabae* and only recently did we discover another one of the same type in the legionary fortress.⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Unfortunately, the small purse find does not provide any information on the erection or destruction of the apsidal building, since it came from the cleaning layer. The closing date of 367 and the minor wear of the coins would point to a date in the middle of the 370s. This would then roughly coincide with the building period confirmed by the Terentius dux brick stamp. However, the unclear context in the upper part layers does not make this probable. The most likely scenario is that it was an accidental loss of not great value, thus the owner did not make much of an effort to recover them. Hopefully, the processing of all the find material and the examination of the stratigraphic evidence can help to place this small purse in its historical context.

⁴ The closing coin was a Byzantine issue that was surely a later and accidental addition by the collector (Bíró-Sey 1974, 147–150; 1977, 142–149).

⁵ For Brigetio this is 3 coins per year average (Bíró-Sey 1977, 16).

⁶ There is of course a chance that there are some similarly recent pieces among the over 2000 coins, mostly uncleaned, from the recent excavations from the legionary fort, which were overlooked (Juhász 2024, 17).



Fig. 5. Coins, AE3. 1 – Constantius II. (355–358); 2 – Julian (361–363); 3 – Jovian (363–364); 4 – Valentinian I. (364–367); 5, 6 – Valens (364–367; photo L. Juhász).

CATALOGUE

1. Constantius II 355–358 (Fig. 5: 1)

Mint: Siscia
Weight: 2.33 g
Die-axis: 6 h
Obverse legend: D N CONSTAN – TIVS P F AVG
Reverse legend: FEL TEMP – REPARATIO // ASIS (retro-grade)Z
Reference: *RIC* 8 361
Inv. No. 2018.2.725.34

2. Julian II 361–363 (Fig. 5: 2)

Mint: Siscia
Weight: 3.12 g
Die-axis: 12 h
Obverse legend: D N FL CL IVLI – ANVS P F AVG
Reverse legend: VOT X MVLT XX // ☸ (branch)BSICS•
Reference: *RIC* 8 421
Inv. No. 2018.2.725.34

3. Jovian 363–364 (Fig. 5: 3)

Mint: Sirmium
Obverse legend: [D N IO]VIA – NVS P F A[VG]
Reverse legend: VOT / V / MVLT / X // ASIRM
Weight: 2.86 g
Die-axis: 12 h
Reference: *RIC* 8 118
Inv. No. 2018.2.725.31

4. Valentinian I 364–367 (Fig. 5: 4)

Mint: Siscia
Weight: 2.55 g
Die-axis: 6 h
Obverse legend: D N VALENTINI – ANVS P F AVG
Reverse legend: SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE // ASISC
Reference: *RIC* 9 7a i
Inv. No. 2018.2.725.32

5. Valens 364–367 (Fig. 5: 5)

Mint: Siscia
Weight: 2.35 g
Die-axis: 6 h
Obverse legend: D N VALEN – S P F AVG
Reverse legend: SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE // BSISC
Reference: *RIC* 9 7b i
Inv. No. 2018.2.725.33

6. Valens 364–367 (Fig. 5: 6)

Mint: Siscia
Weight: 2.24 g
Die-axis: 6 h
Obverse legend: D N VALEN – S P F AVG
Reverse legend: GLORIA ROMANORVM // ☸ (branch) BSISC
Reference: *RIC* 9 5b iii
Inv. No. 2018.2.725.33

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Nález malej „peňaženky“ z legionárskeho tábora v Brigetiu

L a j o s J u h á s z

Súhrn

V posledných rokoch sa legionársky tábor Brigetio stal predmetom systematických archeologických výskumov, ktoré odhalili početné komplexy budov a množstvo nálezov. Vo veľkej budove s apsidou v blízkosti *porta principalis dextra*, ktorá sa skúmala v rokoch 2017–2018, sa podarilo objaviť šesť mincí. Štyri z nich boli zlepené, takže sa môžeme domnievať, že pôvodne boli uložené spolu v malom mešci alebo peňaženke. Žiaľ, stratigrafické okolnosti nálezu neboli dostatočné, pretože sa našli vo vrchnej vrstve počas začistenia, v rohu ešte stojacich múrov. Stav zachovania nájdených mincí bol veľmi dobrý, na rozdiel od bežných emisií z týchto vykopávok. Jednotlivé exempláre môžeme datovať medzi roky 355 a 367 a boli vyrazené v panónskych mincovniach Siscia a Sirmium. Všetky sú veľkosti AE3, chýba jedna menšia séria z tohto obdobia, pravdepodobne kvôli špecifickému výberu. Valentiniánske depoty zvyčajne pozostávajú z emisií medených mincí a sú oveľa väčšie, takže

tento nový malý depot sa dá priradiť k malej skupine nálezov charakteristických nízkym počtom kusov. Dôvody uloženia mešca nepoznáme. Valentiniánske medené mince sú najmladšie, s akými sa v Panónii masovo stretávame. Neskoršie razby sú v podobných depotoch prekvapivo zriedkavé, hoci *ripa* musela fungovať až do konca 4. storočia. Interpretácia týchto depotov, roztrúsených po celom Zadunajsku, je problematická a nedá sa jednoducho vysvetliť konkrétnou politickou alebo vojenskou udalosťou z tohto búrlivého obdobia. V našom prípade však s najväčšou pravdepodobnosťou ide o stratový nález, ktorý mal nízku hodnotu a majiteľ sa nesnažil dohľadať svoj majetok.

Obr. 1. Budova s apsidou v legionárskom tábore Brigetio (autor D. Bartus, L. Rupnik).

Obr. 2. Sonda 4, 5, kde boli objavené mince v začistenej vrstve (autor D. Bartus).

Obr. 3. Dohromady zlepené mince 1 a 2; v zemi medzi nimi sa zachovali odtlačky ďalších mincí (foto L. Juhász).

Obr. 4. Chronologická klasifikácia šiestich mincí (autor L. Juhász).

Obr. 5. Mince, AE3. 1 – Constantius II. (355–358); 2 – Julian (361–363); 3 – Jovian (363–364); 4 – Valentinian I. (364–367); 5, 6 – Valens (364–367; foto L. Juhász).

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