

The Armenian Triumph in Actian Nicopolis

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The city of Nicopolis was founded by Octavian near Cape Actium, in Epirus, to mark his victory over Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC. A mint was established in *c.*27 BC to provide the community with a regular bronze coin supply. This was produced initially only under Augustus and Nero, and then continuously for another century and a half, from Trajan to Gallienus, becoming one of the largest civic coinages in Roman Greece.¹

The city's currency hosted a wide range of designs celebrating the community's gods and institutions, as well as some of its most prominent monuments. The main reverse type was a Nike, personification of the city's name, which perpetuated the memory of the Augustan victory. The mint also showed a unique connection between the city and its founder through a series of posthumous issues that brought back Augustus' portrait and name to keep his memory alive well into the third century. Otherwise only on very few other occasions did the mint produce issues referring to the imperial family and her achievements.

This contribution focuses on a very small group of bronze issues which fall into this category, as they commemorated the capture of Armenia during the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. I will present a catalogue of all the known specimens, including new finds from excavations carried out at Nicopolis' theatre in 2020–21, and some hitherto unidentified coins held in public collections.² I will then discuss how I believe that their designs and legends can be interpreted as part of a thematically coherent series of issues.

Catalogue

The issues presented here are divided in four groups on the basis of their reverse designs and legends. They all have two distinct features in common:

1. their reverse types draw upon the imagery traditionally designed to celebrate a military victory;
2. they do not feature the city's name in their legends.

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² I first approached the study of these issues alongside other previously unidentified coins of Nicopolis in Calomino 2010.

The second aspect is what truly sets them apart from almost the entire coin production of Nicopolis, which is characterised by an extremely narrow range of reverse legends naming mainly the city (IEPA NIKOΠIOAIK), or alternatively the Actian Games (AKTIA) and the founder Augustus (KTICMA CEBACTOY, in various forms).³ The lack of a mint's indication is also the reason why most of these coins have been traditionally misread or shelved among issues of uncertain identification in museum collections. This is no longer an issue, though: their attribution to Nicopolis is proved by obverse die-links with other issues featuring the city's name on the reverse and by the fact that ten out of the twenty specimens catalogued here come from excavations at the site.

Like most of the coins struck during the Antonine age and the reign of Marcus Aurelius in particular, these issues belong to the smallest denominations of Nicopolis' coinage (around 16–17mm in diameter, with an average weight of 3.60g) and they are very poor in fabric and style. This prevents a reading of the complete imperial name on most specimens, so the coins have been assigned either to Marcus Aurelius or to Lucius Verus primarily on the basis of portrait features and their attribution remains problematic at times. The reverse legends are also so hard to decipher (on issue no. 2 the presence of letters in the field cannot be definitely ascertained) that some of the interpretations proposed here can only be tentative.

1. Nike advancing, r., holding a wreath and a palm branch; APM[...]

Obv: laureate bust of Marcus Aurelius, r., with drapery (?); [.] AYP [...] ANTΩNIN[...] (Calomino 2011, no. 207)

- a. ANM (Nicopolis' Odeion 1971), no. 203 (15mm, 3.25g): Calomino 207.1 (**Pl. X, 1**)
- b. NM (Aqueduct Mpouphi 1975), no. 580/22 (16mm, 3.80g): Calomino 2011, no. 207.2 (**Pl. X, 2**)
- c. NM (Theatre 2020), no. N02171 (17mm, 4.43g) (**Pl. X, 3**)

Obv: bare head of Marcus Aurelius, r.; MAP AYP ANTΩNIN[...] (Calomino 2011, no. 199)

- d. BNF (unidentified, no inventory number) = *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 9092: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/207873> (18mm, 3.75g): Calomino 2011, no. 199 (**Pl. X, 4**)
- e. MCVR (uncertain mint), no. 75354 (18mm, 4.20g): *SNG Verona* 2948 (**Pl. X, 5**)

2. Nike standing, l., holding a wreath to crown a military trophy, one captive seated at its feet with his hands tied behind the back (legend illegible or absent)

Obv: laureate bust of Marcus Aurelius, r., with drapery (?); [.] AYP [...] ANTΩNIN[...] (Calomino 2011, no. 208)

- a. BM (unidentified) = *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 3987: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/42614> (17mm, 3.01g): Calomino 2011, no. 208.1 (**Pl. X, 6**)
- b. ANM (Nicopolis' Odeion 1971), no. 204 (16mm, 3.79g): Calomino 2011, no. 208.2 (**Pl. X, 7**)
- c. ANM (Nicopolis' Odeion 1971), no. 211 (15.5mm, 3.45g). Calomino 2011, no. 208.3 (**Pl. X, 8**)

³ Oikonomidou 1975, pp. 26-32.

- d. NM (Roman walls, South gate 2001), no. 5/111 (17mm, 2.13g). Calomino 2011, no. 208.4 (**Pl. X, 9**)
- e. CCMi (Laffranchi), no. 12030 (15mm, 3.37g) (**Pl. X, 10**)

Obv: laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Lucius Verus, r.; [...] (Calomino 2011, no. 214)

- f. NM (Roman walls, North sector 2000), no. 45/79 (15mm, 3.58g). Calomino 2011, no. 214 (**Pl. X, 11**)

3. Military trophy, one captive seated at its feet with his hands tied behind the back; APMENIA

Captive to the l. / Obv: laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Marcus Aurelius (?), r.; [...] AYP ANTΩNIN[...] (Calomino 2011, no. 209)

- a. MSMB (1875/19) = *RPC* IV.1, temp. no. 10157: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/42615> (17mm, 3.95g) (**Pl. X, 12**)
- b. NM (Theatre 2021), no N02200 (18mm, 3.40g) (**Pl. X, 13**)

Captive to the r. / Obv: laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Marcus Aurelius, r.; [...] AYP ANTΩNIN[...]

- c. NM (Aqueduct Mpouphi 1975), no. 54a/26 (15.5mm, 3.50g): Calomino 2011, no. 209 (**Pl. X, 14**)

Captive to the r. / Obv: laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Lucius Verus, r.; ΛΟΥΥ AYP BHPOC

- d. MSMB (Löbb under 'Hermocapelia') = *RPC* IV.1, temp. no. 9926: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/31574> (17mm, 4.83g). Löbbecke 1885, p. 336, no. 17, under 'Hermocapelia' = Kurth 2020, 'Hermocapelia' no. 44 = Hochard 2020, no. 581a, pl. 29, under 'Hermocapelia' (**Pl. X, 15**)

4. Nike standing, l., on a platform, between two captives; TP Ιω

Obv: laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Marcus Aurelius, r.; ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ ΑΝΤΩ (Calomino 2011, no. 203)

- a. BNF (436) = *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 7952.1: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/186247> = <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8559987h> (20mm, 5.97g): Calomino 2011, no. 203.1 (**Pl. X, 16**)
- b. KHM (GR.27335/132) = *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 7952.2: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/183624> (20mm, 5.45g): Calomino 2011, no. 203.2 (**Pl. X, 17**)
- c. MSMB (18221164) = *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 7952.3: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/207396> = <https://ikmk.smb.museum/object?lang=en&id=18221164> (23mm, 10.71g): Calomino 2011, no. 203.3 (**Pl. X, 18**)

Obv: laureate head of Marcus Aurelius, r.; ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ ΑΝΤΩ (?) (Calomino 2011, no. 204)

- d. BNF (435) = *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 7951: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/42533> = <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85599863> (20mm, 4.82g): Calomino 2011, no. 204.1 (**Pl. X, 19**)

- e. ANM (Nicopolis' Odeion 1971), no. 80 (18.5mm, 3.30g): Calomino 2011, no. 204.2
(Pl. X, 20)

Issue no. 1. This reverse type is very much in line with the city's iconographic tradition and would have easily blended in among the mainstream series featuring a Nike holding a wreath and a palm branch. The only difference lies in the reverse legend, which is formed by an undefined number of letters. Only three can be seen on all the surviving specimens, featuring 'APM', but they cluster on the right side of the flan, so it is possible that we are only reading the initial part of a longer word running clockwise from before the face of Nike to her back. The comparison with issue no. 3 suggests that the word might be APMENIA or an abbreviated form of it. These specimens originate from at least two pairs of dies (1a and 1b have probably the same obverse, 1b and 1c have the same reverse). Specimens 1d and 1e (from the same pair of dies) prompt some more problems: the portrait looks different, almost like a younger Marcus Aurelius, but any reference to the Armenian annexation in the reverse legend would not make sense prior to the period of joint reign with Lucius Verus, so one must conclude that it is simply a matter of different portrait styles.

Issue no. 2. All specimens except one (2f), which can be assigned to Lucius Verus exclusively on the basis of the portrait features, appear to feature Marcus Aurelius on the obverse.⁴ Even though the initial letter in the obverse legend looks like a Λ, which would be part of Lucius' name, it is more probably the final back fold of the drapery (as in the obverse dies of specimens 3a and 3b). The attribution of this group to Nicopolis is proved by obverse die-links between nos. 2a–2b and issues celebrating the Actian games (reverse featuring the letter A within a wreath of reeds).⁵ This is the only occurrence of an image of Nike crowning a trophy in the whole city's coinage: rather than a mere variation of the main civic coin type, the scene was meant to allude to a certain military victory and followed a different iconographic pattern. A captive seated to the right can be seen clearly only on specimen 2e, but there is no doubt that he was part of the design on the other specimens too. Unfortunately, not one of the six specimens attested so far has preserved letters of the reverse legend: though we cannot even be sure whether there was one, it is possible that the legend runs entirely off-flan, since the design is partly cropped too. The comparison with issue no. 3 is indispensable to validate the inclusion of issue no. 2 among the series discussed here.

Issue no. 3. The image of a trophy of arms adopted on the reverse of these coins is another unicum in the city's production, so a connection with the imagery of issue no. 2 seems inevitable. It comes in two variants, having a captive seated either to the right or to the left. Luckily, the reverse legend is better preserved than on the other four issues: by combining the letters on specimens 3a and 3b (arguably from the same pair of dies) one can almost definitely read APMENIA. Most of the letters can also be seen on the other two specimens of this group, and no. 3d is the only coin on which the name of Lucius Verus is legible on the obverse. For all these reasons (links to the legend of no. 1 and to the design of no. 2), issue no. 3 is crucial for our understanding of the meaning of all the series dedicated by the mint of Nicopolis to the capture of Armenia.

Issue no. 4. This is the most puzzling issue of the four. The five specimens listed in the catalogue seem to belong to a slightly different denomination, heavier and especially larger in

⁴ Nos. 2a and 2b probably come from the same pair of dies and they share their obverse die with no. 2c; nos. 2d and 2e seem to share the same obverse die too.

⁵ Calomino 2010, p. 80, pl. 4, fig. 13.

diameter than all the other coins (around 20mm, with an average weight of 5.40g).⁶ That they were struck at Nicopolis is proven by two pieces of evidence: one of them was found in the Odeion of Nicopolis and at least one obverse die used in this group (4b) was shared with an issue featuring the city's name on the reverse.⁷

Typologically, this issue shares the victory theme with issues 1 and 2, but rather than the goddess Nike herself, the design appears to depict a colossal statue of Victory on a platform. The presence of two smaller human figures, who must be captives kneeling at her feet, suggests that the whole scene may actually show a triumphal procession carrying the statue along with the rest of the war booty. This subject ties in well with the imagery of the trophy of arms with a captive, so all four issues can be seen as parts of the same visual programme that commemorated a military victory.

The main problem rests with the legend, which is not only different to those used on the other issues (it does not refer to Armenia), but is also very hard to interpret, due to the complete lack of parallels in Roman provincial coinage. My initial attempts to understand the meaning of the letters ΤΠΙΩ as part of a longer word were unsuccessful.⁸ Given the context provided by this imagery, it seemed logical to think of the initials of a word associated with the notion of 'triumph',⁹ but it was also clear that the two vowels (ι and ω) could neither be part of the same word, nor could they possibly work as the initials of a second word.

In fact, the two vowels form an interjection: comparisons with both literary and material evidence suggest that the 'Ιω' in the legend is the transliteration of a cry, part of the popular chant that used to be sung at triumphal processions by soldiers and the crowd. Varro's *De Lingua Latina* (VI, 68) is our main testimony of this habit, recalling that 'soldiers shout "*Io triumphe*" as they come back with the general through the city and he is going up to the Capitol': the legend on the coins of Nicopolis must be featuring a Greek version of that chant. In this respect, Varro also points out that the etymology of the verb *triumphare* could be *θριάμβω*, which he describes as a Greek epiclesis of Liber.¹⁰ This has generated a debate on the etymology of the Latin verb itself and its possible derivations from rituals associated with the cult of Dionysus, including the hymn known as *διθύραμβος*, described by Aristotle as the origin of the Athenian tragedy.¹¹ As a result, it appears that the word *θριάμβε* was neither a transliteration nor a translation from the Latin *triumphe*, which is in fact a loanword from Greek,¹² but a ritual exclamation meant to celebrate the triumphal entrance of Dionysus from at least the fifth century BC¹³ – just like *triumpe* was used in the *Carmen Fratrum Arvalium* to invite gods to reveal themselves (*CIL* VI, no. 2104).¹⁴ However, in the sphere of military language, which is relevant here, it probably became the equivalent to *triumphare* among the Greek speaking communities in the eastern Mediterranean (*θριάμβεύειν*) from the Republican period: the use of the interjection 'ιω' in association with the initials 'θρ' in the legend of the Nicopolis issues looks like a literal conversion from the Latin *Io triumphe*.

⁶ I am not considering specimen no. 4e, because it is fragmentary, and no. 4c, which is clearly out of the average, perhaps because it was struck on a bigger flan.

⁷ Calomino 2010, p. 82, pl. 5, fig. 21 (the figures on the reverse are described as Hygieia and Hephaestus, but the latter is actually Asclepius; cf. Calomino 2011, no. 200).

⁸ The only options would be as initials of ΤΠΙΩΒΟΛΟΝ (triobol) or ΤΠΙΩΝ (genitive plural of ΤΠΙΑ), but neither seem to make sense here; Calomino 2010, p. 82.

⁹ My initial thought was ΤΡΟΠΙΑΙΟΝ; Calomino 2010, p. 83 and Calomino 2011, p. 257.

¹⁰ '*sic triumphare appellatum, quod cum imperatore milites redeuntes clamitant per urbem in Capitolium eunti* <i>triumphe</i>; *id a θριάμβω ac graeco Liberi cognomento potest dictum*'.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449a, 10–15. See Cipolla 2003, p. 60, for a short summary of the debate.

¹² Ernout and Meillet 2001, pp. 703–4.

¹³ Versnel 1970, p. 34. I am grateful to my colleagues A. Rodighiero and P. Scattolin at Verona University for helping me with this interpretation.

¹⁴ Cf. Ferri 1954.

Above all, this is confirmed by numismatic evidence. A group of bronze Roman *tesserae*, dated to approximately AD 81–161, bear the legend IO IO TRI / VMP associated with the image of laurel branch on the obverse, and of a torque and two *armillae* on the reverse (Pl. X, 21).¹⁵ This imagery combining mainstream symbols of military victory and military decorations conveys the same message as the image of a trophy of arms on our coins. This seems to be a compelling parallel for the case presented here: the coins evoked a triumphal parade celebrating the capture of Armenia in which a statue of Nike was towed across the streets while people were singing acclamations and hymns.¹⁶

Discussion

To get a better understanding of the meaning of these issues, they must be contextualised within the wider picture of how the Armenian triumph and its aftermath were communicated on coinage in Rome and in the East. The capture of Armenia was the initial outcome of the expedition carried out by Lucius Verus from AD 162 to 165 in response to the aggressive policy of Vologaeses IV of Parthia, who had installed King Pacorus on the Armenian throne in AD 161.¹⁷ The conflict ended with the capture of Ctesiphon in AD 165, after which both emperors celebrated a triumph for the eastern victories in Rome on 12th October 166.¹⁸ Almost fifty years after the latest major military campaign on the eastern front of the empire, the war was extensively celebrated by the contemporary literary elite and had great resonance among the Roman public and provincial audiences.¹⁹

In Rome the subjugation of Armenian territory began to be advertised in AD 163, when Lucius Verus imposed King Sohaemus on the throne and acquired the *Armeniacus* title.²⁰ Roman aurei, denarii and sestertii issued under his third tribunician power featured the mourning personification of Armenia seated on the ground next to a trophy of arms, and the legend ARMEN in the exergue (Pl. X, 22): this became the reference image around which the whole imperial propaganda revolved.²¹ Between AD 163 and 164, under Lucius' fourth tribunician power, another group of sestertii and dupondii was released, which featured a Victory standing right holding a trophy, with Armenia seated at her feet:²² this reverse type combined all the symbols of triumph that formed the imagery of the bronze issues struck at Nicopolis. The final victory over King Vologaeses was communicated with less emphasis on coinage: issues released from AD 165 featured either the same mourning female personification or a captive with a Phrygian cap seated under a trophy of arms; the only allusion to Parthia was in the obverse legend spelling out the new imperial title *Parthicus Maximus*.²³

¹⁵ Woytek 2015, pp. 481–5.

¹⁶ Some lead tokens showing a palm tree on a two-wheeled platform may also depict a similar scene in which symbols of triumph were carried around in a *pompa triumphalis*, perhaps in commemoration of the capture of Judaea (Vespasian is portrayed on the obverse). Rowan 2023, pp. 42–3, figs 2.7 and 2.8.

¹⁷ Millar 1993, pp. 112–13; Strobel 1994, pp. 1315–24.

¹⁸ Kienast, Eck and Heil 2017, p. 131. Even though Lucius was the only one who campaigned with the troops in the Levant, both emperors celebrated the triumph and acquired the titles of *Armeniacus* and *Parthicus*; Birley 1987, pp. 123–45.

¹⁹ Strobel 1994, pp. 1324–34; Kemezis 2010. On the campaigns of Trajan in Armenia and Parthia in AD 113–17 and how they were communicated on coinage, see Burnett 2016b.

²⁰ Kienast, Eck and Heil 2017, p. 136. Cf. Birley 1987, p. 147.

²¹ *RIC* III, nos. 498–506 and 1360–1. The same type was adopted on the coins issued under Verus' fourth *tribunicia potestas*; *RIC* III, nos. 507–9 and 1364–9. See also the aurei showing Lucius Verus seated on a platform between two officers and appointing Sohaemus who is standing at his feet (legend REX ARMEN DAT): *RIC* III, nos. 511–13. For a recent overview of the imperial coinage dedicated to the subjugation of Armenia from Augustus to Lucius Verus, see Kéfélian 2021.

²² *RIC* III, nos. 1408–11.

²³ *RIC* III, nos. 1431–47.

The reception of this imagery and its underlying message in the eastern cities of the Empire can be assessed on the basis of three different classes of coin issues. The first is the exceptional production of silver drachms by the mint of Carrhae in Mesopotamia for Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus and Faustina II, which replicated the reverse types used on contemporary Roman coins, showing the same iconography of Armenia accompanied by the word *APMEN* in the exergue. The rest of the legend openly proclaimed the Roman victory: *ΥΠΕΡ ΝΙΚΗC ΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ* (**Pl. X, 23**) or *ΥΠΕΡ ΝΙΚΗC ΤΩΝ ΚΥΡΙΩΝ* *CEB*.²⁴ This was probably intended by the provincial administration as a subsidiary coinage for the troops stationed on the Parthian front.²⁵

The second category of issues are billon tetradrachms minted at Alexandria in Egypt in year five of the local era (AD 164/165): they too present the word *APMENIA* in the reverse legend, accompanied by the personification of Armenia seated with her hands tied behind her back under a trophy of arms (**Pl. X, 24**).²⁶ Though the type did not follow any specific metropolitan model, it was clearly designed to stress the alignment between the coinage of the main provincial mint in the eastern Mediterranean and the imperial propaganda. Issues struck in the following year, after the defeat of the Parthian king and the triumph, continued to depict a military trophy on the reverse, but without any additional legend,²⁷ just as on the contemporary coins minted in Rome.

Lastly, the third group is formed by bronze issues struck by provincial cities, including Nicopolis, as part of the ordinary currency intended for the local circulation. In this case the decision to adopt designs that recalled an imperial triumph in another provincial territory depended entirely on the choices of each administration, which managed their mints autonomously. Since civic coin types usually focussed on themes and subjects of local relevance, such as city's traditions, cults and institutions, the fact that communities in different parts of the empire chose to commemorate the victory of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus confirms how widely it was advertised across the empire, especially in the East, and it also poses the question whether the celebration of an imperial achievement could be somehow coordinated on a large scale by the provincial authorities.²⁸ This does not seem to be the case, though, because, unlike the coins from Carrhae and Alexandria, the designs of these bronze

²⁴ Cf. *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 6495 (uncertain mint in Mesopotamia). See also: *RPC* IV.3, temp. nos. 803–1, 8035. The same reverse legends were used on drachms struck for Lucilla and featuring other reverse types, including a Nike standing on a globe, which also appeared on contemporary issues in Rome (*RIC* III, no. 520); cf. *BMC* 1–10. These silver issues are closely connected also to those probably minted at Edessa in Mesopotamia (c. AD 167–9), which regarded King Mannos VII of Osroene as Philoromaïos in their reverse legends and showed clear dependence on Roman iconography in their designs; Günther 2021.

²⁵ Szaivert 1989, p. 90.

²⁶ *RPC* IV.4, temp. no. 14116 (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/24942>). Cf. *NAA* 3691–4. The mint of Alexandria actually adopted an entire visual repertoire centred on the imperial victory from year 2 (AD 161/162), featuring images of Nike alone (*RPC* IV.4, temp. nos. 14028, 16414 = *NAA* 3659–60) or crowning the emperor (*RPC* IV.4, temp. nos. 14432–3 and 14645–6 = *NAA* 3336–7 and 3425), and continued until year 7 (AD 166/167), when the Parthians were defeated, showing Nike on horseback carrying a trophy (*RPC* IV.4, temp. nos. 14132, 14619, 16677 = *NAA* 3741–2) and the two emperors driving a triumphal quadriga (*RPC* IV.4, temp. no. 14094 = *NAA* 3699–700).

²⁷ Cf. *RPC* IV.4, temp. nos. 14682–3 = *NAA* 3571–4.

²⁸ This is how one could explain, for instance, the unique example of a reverse type being shared among over thirty cities in Asia Minor and the Levant to celebrate an imperial anniversary, which dates to the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus: it shows the two emperors standing in front of each other in a scene of *dextrarum iunctio* (clasping right hands), to advertise the elevation of Verus to the role of co-emperor with his brother in AD 161; Heuchert 2005, p. 53. Since they copied the *concordiae augustorum* iconography used extensively on Roman issues in AD 161–2, one could argue that the adoption of this design across the provinces was somehow prompted by the central administration. *RIC* III, nos. 8–9, 11, 44, 450 (aurei).

issues did not conform consistently to a certain iconographic model or visual programme.²⁹ Each city chose how and on what scale these events would be communicated on coinage. The mints of Cyzicus and Mytilene issued a series of bronze medallions on which a captive seated under a trophy is crowned by one or both emperors instead of a Nike.³⁰ Other cities commemorated the imperial victory with special reverse legends too. At Nicaea, in Bithynia, a design in which Nike is inscribing a shield placed on a column comes with the legend ΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ ΝΙΚΗΝ ΝΕΙΚΑΙΕΙC, which recalls that adopted on the drachms from Mesopotamia.³¹ The same iconography was adopted at Ephesus, where the shield is being inscribed by Nike with ΝΕΙΚ ΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ and the legend ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ ΝΕΙΚΗ documents that a cult of the Roman Victory was established by the community.³² At Aphrodisias, in Caria, coins depict a scene in which the emperor is being crowned by Nike while crowning a trophy: the legend ΕΠΙΝΙΚΙΟΝ ΑΦΡΟΔΙCΙΕΩΝ indicates that the city founded a special festival to celebrate a victory of the imperial army (see further below).³³ Still, what all these issues have in common is that none of the mints mentioned Armenia in their legends, as Rome did on the coins struck in AD 165–6, so it is possible that these provincial issues did not refer to the outcome of the Armenian campaign but of the whole Parthian expedition. The only exception is the coinage of Nicomedia, the provincial capital of Bithynia and Pontus, which mentioned the capture of Armenia in two issues of Lucius Verus. One depicts Marcus Aurelius riding a horse on the reverse: the legend addresses him as *Armeniacus* (ΑΥΤ ΜΑΡ ΑΥΡ ΑΝΤΩΝΙΝΟC CE ΑΡΜΕ ΝΙΚΟΜ).³⁴ The other follows the imperial iconography of the personification of Armenia seated on the ground, who is labelled ΑΡΜ in the legend (**Pl. X, 25**).

The picture outlined here shows that the issues minted at Nicopolis can be explained within the context of the wide appeal of the Parthian campaign and its reception on visual media in the East, even though these coins differ from those produced by the other provincial cities in two aspects: they refer explicitly to the capture of Armenia and they include the extraordinary series with the TP Ιω legend. The first aspect suggests that, like Alexandria and Nicomedia, Nicopolis was more receptive than other communities to the visual propaganda coming from Rome, which placed special emphasis on the Armenian victory. On the other hand, the group of coins (no. 4) that recalled a triumphal procession may actually refer to the celebrations held in Rome in AD 166, so they could have been issued later than the coins mentioning Armenia in the legends in AD 163; this might also explain why they were struck in a different denomination than the others and that they show a different portrait of Marcus Aurelius, accompanied by a completely different obverse legend.

If this interpretation is correct, one should also consider whether the coins with the TP Ιω legend were designed to recall the actual celebrations held in Rome or perhaps a smaller

²⁹ See a list of cities that adopted victory-related types in this period, based on <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>, in Blanco-Pérez 2018, p. 19 (note 60). Not all of them, though, can be definitely connected to the celebration of the Parthian campaigns. The coinage of Corinth had several designs alluding to the imperial victory in this period (see especially Nike crowning the emperor on horseback: *RPC* IV.1, temp. no. 9631; Nike crowning a trophy: *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 10109). Some cities introduced new types in their repertoire to celebrate the imperial victories, for instance Byzantium (Nike: *RPC* IV.1, temp. no. 8700), Megalopolis-Sebaste (Nike: *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 6215); Tralles (Nike: *RPC* IV.2, temp. no. 2889), Pessinus (Nike: *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 4121); Aelia Capitolina (Nike: *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 6414); Mopsus (Nike on globe: *RPC* IV.3, temp. no. 5820); Thyatira (trophy between two captives: *RPC* IV.2, temp. no. 9873), Nysa (emperor crowning a trophy: *RPC* IV.2, temp. no. 1460 and 1476); Amastris (captive seated between two trophies: *RPC* IV.1, temp. no. 5407; emperor on a triumphal quadriga: *RPC* IV.1, temp. no. 17548). Others, though, like Thessalonica and Pautalia, continued to use coin designs featuring Nike which were already part of their iconographic repertoire.

³⁰ Cyzicus: *RPC* IV.2, temp. nos. 2327 and 11211; Mytilene: *RPC* IV.2, temp. nos. 2634 and 7131.

³¹ *RGMG*, no. 232.

³² Karwiese 2012, nos. 310b and 325. Cf. Nollé 2003.

³³ MacDonal 1992, no. 61.

³⁴ *RGMG*, no. 114.

ceremony that took place at Nicopolis to evoke them. This could be an *epinikion*, a festival celebrating an imperial victory. *Ἐπινίκια* were the local response to Roman triumphal ceremonies in the absence of the emperor:³⁵ cities would send embassies to Rome to greet the victor announcing the foundation of an *epinikion* in his honour, which became embedded into the local religious calendar.³⁶ The example from Aphrodisias mentioned above documents that this practice begins to feature on local coinage in the Antonine age, especially when the echoes of the Parthian campaigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus spread from Rome across the East.³⁷ There is no epigraphical record mentioning the introduction of an *epinikion* at Nicopolis, but this is the kind of public event that could potentially be commemorated on coins of such unusual nature.

What makes the combination of the triumph's representation with the TP Ιω inscription on these coins so unique is the fact that they do not simply commemorate an imperial victory and the triumph that followed it, but they also re-enact what the crowd experienced at the event. For this reason, they fall into a very a distinct typology of coins whose legends provide examples of what Angelo Chaniotis regarded as 'performative speech': ancient inscriptions that interacted with the public by either directly addressing them or reviving speeches actually performed in public.³⁸ As the only known example of a popular chant being used as a coin legend, they did not only convey an ideological message, but also its underlying emotional significance. The majority of examples of this kind are actually issues recording imperial acclamations, the ritual formulas of popular approbation by which the emperor was addressed by the crowd with wishes of wellbeing for the imperial house and the empire itself.³⁹ This happened regularly in public ceremonies such as festivals and triumphs.⁴⁰ Some acclamations in particular described the world rejoicing in the emperor's victories (ΝΙΚΩCΙΝ ΟΙ ΚΥΠΙΟΙ, ΕΥΤΥΧΕΙ Ο ΚΟCΜΟC), a suitable scenario for the *epinikia* festivals mentioned above, which may also support the assumption that the Nicopolis coins referred to a similar context.

This prompts some final thoughts on the significance of these atypical issues and their possible connection to the very triumph that they evoked. Unlike the metal tokens featuring the IO IO TRIVMP legend, which might not have necessarily been produced for one specific triumph, the Nicopolis coins presented here were struck to celebrate the Roman victories in Armenia and Parthia in AD 163–5. Tokens that carried inscriptions and designs referring to public events such as festivals and triumphs were actually distributed on those occasions; at the Saturnalia, tokens recording acclamations could be thrown as gifts to the crowd.⁴¹ Similarly, scholars have proposed that some Roman provincial coins were distributed to the community at religious festivals and other public events.⁴² Others believe that the so-called *homonoia* issues, which celebrated friendship or reconciliation between cities, were special mintage intended as commemorative coinage to be handed out to the representatives of city delegations at great religious festivals.⁴³ Because these are the only coins of Nicopolis that lack

³⁵ Cf. Blanco-Pérez 2018.

³⁶ Cf. Harl 1987, pp. 45–6 and 67.

³⁷ Cf. Blanco-Pérez 2018, pp. 36–7.

³⁸ Chaniotis 2012, pp. 307–9. Cf. Burnett 2016a, pp. 76–9.

³⁹ Formulas normally wished good fortune to the emperors (ΕΥΤΥΧΩC ΤΟΙC ΚΥΠΙΟΙC) or could be hailing them as saviours of the world (ΤΩΙ CΩΤΗΠΙ ΤΗC ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΗC). For a discussion of the numismatic evidence, see Nollé 1998 and especially Burnett 2016a.

⁴⁰ Harl 1987, p. 66.

⁴¹ See Rowan 2020, p. 101 with literary references.

⁴² The distribution of civic issues at festival has been suggested whenever it is documented that private donors who signed civic coinage were also financing festivals for the same community. See the example of the coins signed by Claudius Tiberius Aristeas for the festival of Hecate Lagina at Stratonicea in Caria; Harl 1987, p. 28.

⁴³ Nollé and Nollé 1994, p. 257.

the city's name in their legends,⁴⁴ and because the TP Iω inscription in group no. 4 is otherwise only attested on tokens, it could be assumed that they were special issues meant to be used at festivals in which the military victory of the emperor was celebrated. However, they belong to a very low denomination and their fabric is extremely poor, so they seem unsuitable as possible gifts for the crowd, for which much finer issues of medallion size might have been preferred. They look more like tokens, which could perhaps serve for admission to public banquets and ceremonies organised on those occasions,⁴⁵ although there is no evidence of civic coins being used specifically for that purpose. Overall, as I have stressed in the first part of this study, despite all the peculiarities for which they have been discussed here, the 'Armenian' issues of Nicopolis fit well into the rest of the civic coinage produced under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, with which they shared some obverse dies, and which were equally of very low quality.

Key to Plates (images not included in catalogue)

21. Rome, AE *tessera* (c. AD 81–161): CNG Auction Triton XVI, 9 January 2013, lot 1075: 16mm, 2.04g (<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=547602|978|1075|bb2f6dd171a3d05479faf94626937d2a>). Woytek 2015, p. 497, figs 2–2a.
22. Rome, AR denarius of Lucius Verus (AD 163): Leu Numismatik AG web Auction 20, 16 July 2022, lot 2500 (ex Gorny & Mosch 229, 10 March 2015, 1739): 18mm, 3.67g (<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2034067|4840|2500|28a446c52086c6d3818e3e454dc09cdf>). Cf. *RIC* III, no. 501.
23. Carrhae, AR drachm of Lucius Verus (c.AD 163–4): BNF 1821 (under Carrhae): 18mm, 2.10g (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85566152>). *RPC* IV.3, temp. no 8035: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/41200>
24. Alexandria, billon tetradrachm of Lucius Verus (AD 164/165): BNF 2649: 24mm, 10.81g (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84846774>). *RPC* IV.4, temp. no 14116: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/24942>.
25. Nicomedia, AE of Lucius Verus (c.AD 163–5): CNG Electronic Auction 210, 13 May 2009, lot 92: 23mm, 8.15g (<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=311885|559|92|fc7a943d8396ed345ddf bfe6084d860e>). *RPC* IV.1, temp. no 11786: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/71646>.

Abbreviations

BMC = Gardner, P., Head, B.V., Hill, G.F., Poole, R.S., and Wroth, W., (eds) 1873–1927. *Catalogue of Greek Coins. The British Museum Collection* (London).
CFA = Scheid, J., Tassini, P., and Rüpke, J., (eds) 1998. *Recherches archéologiques à la Magliana. Commentarii Fratrum Arvalium qui supersunt* (Rome).
NAA = Dattari, G., 1901. *Numi Augg. Alexandrini. Catalogo della collezione Dattari compilato dal proprietario* (Cairo).
RGMG = Babelon, E., Reinach, T., Waddington, W.H., 1908–1925. *Recueil Général des monnaies grecques d'Asie Mineure* (Paris).
RPC IV = Howgego, C.J. and Heuchert, V., *Roman Provincial Coinage IV. The Antonines*, online catalogue, <http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>

⁴⁴ See also the issues of Antoninus Pius featuring young Marcus Aurelius on the reverse found at Nicopolis: Calomino 2010, pp. 78–80, pl. 4, figs 1–4.

⁴⁵ Six out of the ten specimens found at Nicopolis were discovered inside spectacle buildings (four in the Odeion, two in the theatre), which usually served as venues for public ceremonies at festivals and community gatherings. On the use of tokens as admission tickets to public banquets see the case of Palmyra: Raja 2015.

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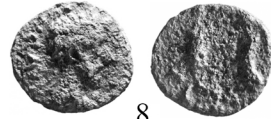
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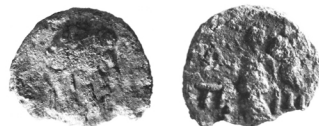
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