

Neronian Nicopolis: *Civitas Libera* and *Colonia Romana*

Augustus famously founded Nicopolis after his victory at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. Described by Bowersock (2002) as a city founded in the tradition of the Hellenistic kings, he denies anything Roman about Nicopolis. Nero's visit to Greece, and subsequently Nicopolis, in 66 and 67 CE to participate in the Panhellenic games did not bring any more noticeable *Romanitas* to the city, as is illustrated through their use of Greek language and iconography on their coinage. In this paper, I will explore the coinage of Neronian Nicopolis, and I will argue that not only is Nicopolis a Roman colony, but that the presence of a double community, both a Greek polis and a Roman veterans' *colonia*, makes it possible for this Greek coinage to exist.

Nicopolis is called a *colonia* in two ancient sources: Pliny says *...in ore ipso colonia Augusti Actium cum temple Apollinis nobili ac civitate libera Nicopolitana* (NH 4.1.5) and Tacitus *Nicopolim Romanam coloniam ingressus* (Ann. 5.10.4). However, many scholars such as Saricakis (1970) argue against these descriptions, the Greek coinage being one example of why it was not possible since Roman colonies were expected to use Latin legends. Recent arguments by Ruscu (2006) and Purcell (1987) have brought to light the possibility of a double community living within Nicopolis, which both explains why other ancient authors calls it an *urbs* and why it allowed the presence of this Greek coinage.

Minting their first coinage since Augustus under Nero, Nicopolis still used Greek language and iconography on their coins. Nicopolis commemorated Nero's presence through minting coinage representing his arrival in Greece, his victory in their Actian games, his liberation of Achaëa, and the refoundation of their city to Neronikopolis. Further controversial coinage may also be attributed to Nicopolis from Apollonia, which also use Greek legends.

While this coinage is decidedly Greek, it does not automatically disqualify Nicopolis from being considered a Roman colony. Unlike the case of Patras, another double community whose Roman presence became stronger than its Greek, Nicopolis kept a stronger tie to its Hellenic culture. The Greek population of Nicopolis most likely outnumbered the veteran settlement, leading to only one community, the stronger, Greek one, needing to mint coinage for the city. Although Latin legends were expected of Roman colonies, Nicopolis proves it was not always necessary. The city still commemorated Nero on their coinage, being the only city to celebrate his victory in their games, and not just his participation. Neronikopolis did not last long in name, but Nicopolis remained both a *civitas libera* towards its Greek population and a Roman *colonia* to its veteran settlers.

Bibliography

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