Diadumenian’s ‘pennies’ of Marcianopolis

The output of Provincial issues bearing the image of Diadumenian is phenomenal, both in range and volume, considering he was only around 9 years old during the 14 months his father was in power and would have exercised no power in his own right. Mints in Moesia Inferior and Thrace were among the most prolific to issue in his name and examples currently abound in great quantities compared to the more obscure issues from mints in Asia Minor.

Marcianopolis issued a wide variety of examples or types and in a range of sizes or denominations. There are 4 denominations which bear his portrait with about 90% of the weights and sizes falling into the following categories. The 3 assaria example seems to be the output of few types and usually have the Γ denomination marked on them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Diameter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 assarion</td>
<td>2.2-3.6g</td>
<td>16-18 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 assaria</td>
<td>4.6-6.7g</td>
<td>21-22 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 assaria</td>
<td>7.8g</td>
<td>23 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 assaria (with Macrinus)</td>
<td>11.0-14.0g</td>
<td>26-28mm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This classification is not entirely satisfactory as it leaves a lot of scope for confusion amongst the population; say between one and two assaria coins, as there is not much difference between them – particularly if the flans are a bit large or a bit small respectively. It is possible that some other distinguishing device was used in differentiating the denominations beyond that of diameter or weight. As a mass of different designs were issued in a short space of time, it must have been quite a bewildering array of coins that confronted the population. Added to that would have been the coins from previous emperors that would still have circulated.

The output of the 5 assaria pieces is the most complex and varied and though the position of the heads (facing right or left) of the two rulers, seems interchangeable this does not seem to be related to any promotion of Diadumenian to Augustus during the last weeks of his life. The senior ruler seems to be usually placed on the left, facing right.

The one assarion coins from this mint and ruler show a wide variety of types, reflecting local interests and it is testament to the skill of the local die engravers that so much detail has been captured on such small flans. The mint also only produced this denomination for Diadumenian, not Macrinus.
Example 1.

Obv. M ΟΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.20.1 (r.5); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1315
2.18g, 17mm

The first example shows the Aesklepios standing facing, looking right, with serpent entwined staff. This reverse type is common throughout the area and is indicative of the importance of this healing god in the devotions of the people.

The obverse legend translates to Marcus Opellius Antonius, the Antonius being his adopted name, chosen by Macrinus to suggest a ‘proper’ transition from Caracalla’s reign to his own. On the actual coin the two letters N and E have been run together to create one character, the two letters being termed ‘ligate’. This too is a common practice in the region and while it certainly can be seen as a space saving exercise it does not always appear to have been necessary so it may just be a general accepted form of lettering – or the affection of a particular engraver.

Example 2

Obv. M ΟΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.20.3 (r5); AMNG 1/804; Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1354
2.26g, 17mm

Example 2 is a variation on the theme of the healing god Aesklepios, here just his staff and the serpent is shown. Like Example 1 the obverse shows a bust of Diadumenian ‘shown from behind’. For this denomination and mint, three distinct types of obverse can be seen; this type, a similar but cuirassed bust type and a head type (with no drapery) were all used.

Example 3

Obv. M ΟΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.52.1 (r.6); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1317
3.32g, 16mm
The above coin is one that can be seen issued at Marcianopolis by other rulers but in general it seems to be one of the lesser used types. Described as an ornate basket of fruits (with what are probably three bunches of grapes protruding from the top) it is suggestive of a good harvest for the wine industry. Certainly examples 4a and 4b reinforce the importance of that crop to the region.

**Example 4a**

Ob. Μ ὈΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov (V2) 6.25.8.3 (r5), p.124; Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1318
2.90g, 18mm

**Example 4b**

Ob. Μ ὈΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov (V2) 6.25.8.2 (r5), p.124
Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1318
2.37g, 17mm

Example 4a shows a simple bunch of grapes on the reverse – though the top has two curling stems as a nice design feature. The obverse die shows a cuirassed bust, depicted by the square hatching design on his back. Again the N and E on the obverse legend are ligate. Example 4b uses two different dies than Example 4a though the motif is the same. It is interesting that the spur of metal on Example 4a passed through whatever quality control was present at the mint. Both the obverse and reverse engravings and letterings are of excellent quality indicating that there was, in general, a high degree of pride in the mints outputs.

**Example 5a**

Ob. Μ ὈΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.5.2 (r.5); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1329
3.05g, 18mm

**Example 5b**

Ob. Μ ὈΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov (V2) 6.25.8.2 (r5), p.124
Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1318
2.87g, 18mm

**Example 5c**

Ob. Μ ὈΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1317; (courtesy of cngcoins)
3.15g, 17mm

**Example 5d**

Ob. Μ ὈΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ-ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Private collection, Germany
2.75g, 16mm
Examples 5a – 5d show the cista mystica (or just ‘cista’) as a reverse type. This object was a basket used to hold the sacred snakes used for the rites of Dionysus. The symbolism represents fertility. In all examples the lid is opening to the right (examples opening to the left are seen in coins from the neighbouring mint of Nicopolis ad Istrum). Also, the examples show the basket as being quite ornate – as might be expected from a sacred object – the main difference is that Examples 5b and 5d have a double banded design around the middle of the basket while the lid is relatively simple. Example’s 5a and 5c have a single band around the middle and a more substantial lid.

Examples 6a-6d show a crescent moon and three stars and 6e and 6f show the moon and 4 stars on the reverse. It is not fully clear what is meant by this reverse or the variations in the number of stars, but it is probable that it has a religious/astrological significance associated with one of the local cults or gods. Examples 6a and 6b share their obverse die with that of the more ornate bunch of grapes (Example 4a). An example showing only two stars is also reported. Example 6d shares an obverse die
with Example 5d. Example 6c shows the only instance of this obverse die. Example 6f shows the same reverse die as 6e but paired with a newly encountered obverse die.

Example 7

Ob. Κ Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟC ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟC  
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ–ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ  
Ref. Hristova/Jekov (V2) 6.25.8.1 (r6), p.123; Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1333  
3.23g, 16mm

This example shows the first coin of this study with a simple head as the obverse type. Unfortunately the strike was slightly off centre so it is not possible to read the legend however the reverse shows an excellent strike that has been well preserved. It is only the ‘head’ obverse type that includes the ‘K’ in the legend, standing for ‘Caesar’. The image shows Dionysus, naked, standing left, holding a bunch of grapes in right hand and a thyrsos in left hand. The thyrsos on this example appears turned or knurled and is quite ornate. Dionysus was the god of wine, agriculture, nature and the Greek theatre. He was also associated with spiritual wellbeing and ritual initiations – though given the importance of the grape harvest to the region; it is likely in that capacity that he is venerated here.

Example 8a

Ob. Κ Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟC  
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ–ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ  
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.1.2 (r.5); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1336  
2.61g, 17mm

Example 8b

Ob. Κ Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟC ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟC  
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ  
Ref. Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1337  
(courtesy of Wildwinds – e-bay sales 2006)  
3.15g, 18mm

The eagle has three main significances when depicted on coins of this era. It is an attribute of Zeus. It can be a sign of consecratio when the Emperor had deceased. It can also, as can probably be seen here, be considered as part of a legion’s standards. In these two examples it can be seen how the eagle faces both right and left – though always holding a wreath in its beak. Example 8a shares an obverse die with Example 7 (Dionysus), while Example 8b seems to share an obverse die with Example 4b (Bunch of grapes).
Example 9

Example 9 shows a disputed reverse type which can be seen on types of most of the young princes of the era (i.e. Geta, Caracalla). The image shows a cherub like figure, leaning cross legged on an inverted brand or torch. It has, through history, been universally recorded as Thanatos, the god of death; however it has been argued by Prof. Lawrence that this would be unlikely. Why should any ruler want to link his successor to any hint of death and the possibility that his dynasty may cease? The figure is more likely to be a representation of Eros – or perhaps some amalgam of the two. Eros was worshiped as a fertility god and associated with love and sexual desire. There may be some joining of the concept of Thanatos, ‘god of death’, due to his association with the symbolism of the extinguished torch (the concept of life after death), or it may represent joy after sexual conquest, again promoting the continuation of the dynasty.

Example 10

Example 10 shows another use of the obverse die showing a cuirassed bust (along with Examples 4a, 6a and 6b). The reverse is a rare type for a coin this size. Although commonly seen in 5 assaria pieces from this mint and 4 assaria pieces from Nicopolis ad Istrum, it is much rarer on these smaller coins. The image is that of Glykon, a serpent cult in the region at the time, said to have been originally introduced by the Greek prophet Alexander of Abonutichus, and which seems to be either related to, or sympathetic to, that of Aesklepios.'
Example 11

Ob. Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.22.1 (r.6); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1350
3.69g, 18mm

This reverse type (Example 11) is one of the more unusual to be seen on Roman coins, deriving from the Egyptian god Horus. The representation is that of Harpokrates (Greek for ‘Horus the child’) where he is shown as a god-child with his hand raised to his lips, indicating a child like nature. He usually has a side lock of hair indicating a prince, an affectation derived from Egyptian sources. Harpokrates represented not only the royal heir, but also the newborn sun. Interestingly it was only when the Romans misinterpreted the hand raising gesture that they adopted him as the god of silence.

Example 12a

Ob. Κ Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.53.1 (r.6)
Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1348
2.78g, 16mm

Example 12b

Ob. Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.53.1 (r.6)
Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1349
3.60g, 16mm

Two different obverse dies were used to create Examples 12a and 12b which share the same reverse die of a lion walking left. The lion was symbolic of strength, possibly a dynastic emblem. Examples 11 and 12a also share the same obverse die and Example 2 and Example 12b share the same obverse die.

Example 13

Ob. Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟ
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. -
3.11g, 17mm

This reverse shows a serpent climbing up the leg of a tripod. The tripod being used for religious observances – though it is unclear if it is associated with a particular cult
or religion. Though the condition of the obverse makes comparisons difficult – it appears that this is a die match with that of Example 5a.

**Example 14**

![Image of Example 14](image)

Obv. Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟC
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.47.1 (r6); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1356
2.88g, 18mm
(courtesy of Wildwinds 2003)

Example 14 shows yet another variation of the tripod and bowl, this time with no serpent present. The bowl in particular is well engraved. Also, the obverse shows yet another use of the cuirassed obverse die.

**Example 15**

![Image of Example 15](image)

Obv. Μ ΟΠΕΛΛΙΟ ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟC
Rev. ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΟ−ΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ
Ref. Hristova/Jekov 6.25.38.2 (r.6); Varbanov (Eng.) Vol.1. No. 1358
2.87g, 16mm

This final example shows the same obverse die as that seen in Examples 11 and 12a. The reverse shows Tyche, or city goddess standing left with rudder in right hand and cornucopia in left arm. Here Tyche is representing good fortune to the rulers. A coin where Tyche is seated is also reported (Varbanov Eng. Vol.1 1362-3)

**Other coins**

An example of Hygieia standing right, holding a snake in her right hand and patera in her left hand and with the head right obverse type is also reliably reported but unfortunately I do not possess an example nor have access to an image.

Also, an AE17 showing Homonia seated left holding patera and cornucopia (Varbanov Eng. Vol.1 1347) is recorded.

This list of the types of the smallest coins from Marcianopolis issued under Diadumenian is fairly exhaustive and it can be seen how diverse a range of topics have been covered. Most the main aspects of Roman life have been touched on, religion, cults, agriculture, security and dynastic stability are all represented here. The most obvious omission it that of the military which (eagle reverse aside) seems to be absent from most of the coinage of the mint at this time.

It is unknown what one of these small coins would have actually purchased, however as the denomination was produced in quantity and indeed continued to be minted until
the rule of Severus Alexander it must have been a reasonably useful coin for commerce. Certainly some of these coins are to be encountered more often that others – though that is not fully indicative of the intentions of the mint when they were produced. A better indication is the number of reverse dies that were prepared, the reverse die being usually the first one to break. Here, in this series, the reverse types showing grapes, the cista and the eagle have more than one die – though an argument could be made that the two ‘tripod’ types are similar and the crescent moon and stars types are also similar in nature. As stated earlier, the difference between the likely 1 assarion coin and the 2 assaria coins is not profound. It is difficult to see how the public (particularly the elderly or short sighted) in the course of their daily transactions would not be confused by the wealth of design types and minimal differences in sizes or weights at this lower end of the coin system.

Malcolm Megaw
July 2007

References
Varbanov I., Greek Imperial Coins And Their Values; Volume I Dacia, Moesia Superior, Moesia Inferior; (English Edition) 2005; Adicom Publications


Prof. Patricia Lawrence – Private correspondence.