

# NOTAE NUMISMATICAE

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# ZAPISKI NUMIZMATYCZNE



Tom XV

MUZEUM NARODOWE W KRAKOWIE  
SEKCJA NUMIZMATYCZNA  
KOMISJI ARCHEOLOGICZNEJ PAN  
ODDZIAŁ W KRAKOWIE

Kraków 2020

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Redakcja

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present volume XV of *Notae Numismaticae – Zapiski Numizmatyczne* to you. In accordance with the principles that we have adopted, our texts are published in the conference languages with English and Polish abstracts. The whole of the present volume can be found as PDF's on the website of the National Museum in Krakow (<https://mnk.pl/notae-numismaticae-zapiski-numizmatyczne-1>), as are previously published volumes of the journal. The website also contains general information about the journal as well as information for prospective authors and reviewers.

The Editors

AGATA ALEKSANDRA KLUCZEK

*Primordia Romana. Mityczna przeszłość Rzymu i pamięć o niej w rzymskich numizmatach zakłeta*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2019, 564 pages, 166 illustrations, 2 maps, 21 tables, 3 charts; ISBN 978-83-226-3443-1

The topic of Rome's origins is one which continues to fascinate the public while any new archaeological discoveries of prehistoric artifacts from the Eternal City electrify enthusiasts of antiquity. The most recent example would be the sarcophagus and altar discovered in winter 2020 under the stairs of the Curia at the Roman Forum. Was it the tomb of Romulus, as some would like it to be? Or was it just the place of his cult, as others have cautiously indicated? Archaeological discoveries allow us to go beyond what the Romans themselves thought of the beginnings of their city-state. This does not mean, however, that the study of their imaginations is a song of the past. The latest book by Agata Aleksandra Kluczek, an ancient historian and numismatist from the University of Silesia in Katowice, entitled "Primordia Romana. The mythical past of Rome and the memory of it enchanted in Roman coinage", is the best proof of this fact. The Author decided to thoroughly study the image of the beginnings of the Eternal City and the evolution of thinking about them using Roman coinage as the object of research and implementing iconographical but more importantly iconological analysis.

The book is divided into four main parts, preceded by a Preface and an Introduction and summarized by short Conclusions. The first part: "The Progenitors of the Romans, the founders of Rome and the oldest Roman past in coin iconography", is something of a presentation of the source base. Here, the Author presents mythological themes related to the beginnings of Rome, with the main emphasis on their representations in material culture. Obviously, the most widely discussed are coins. Subsequently, the Author discusses the "History and deeds of Aeneas" in chapter one and the events leading to the foundation of Rome not directly related to the Trojan prince ("Mars and Rhea Silvia" and "*Lupa Romana*") in chapter two. Following the discussion of the she-wolf theme, the Author included side thoughts on other mythological motifs of feeding gods, heroes and humans by animals that could be confused with the *Lupa Romana*. Undoubtedly, this is for the benefit of the readers sensitising them to possible misinterpretations. However, in terms of composition, this material goes beyond the main subject of the book and, if it must have been included, it

would have perhaps been a better idea to place it at the very end so as not to disturb the narrative with digressions.

The third chapter is devoted to the mythical events linked to the creation of the city and its early history. The Author discusses coins related to Romulus, the *Abduction of the Sabine Women*, Tarpeia and the kings of Rome.

Once the reader has been familiarized with the source material, the Author goes on to Part II, entitled “The Mythical Origins of Rome in the Prism of the Empire’s History”. It is here that Kluczek analyses the meaning of references to the mythical history of the Eternal City in the context of the ideology of power and current politics. As the Author rightly points out: “In the space of the myths and legends regarding the origins of *Romae/Romanorum*, facts in principle lose their meaning. The aim of mythical and legendary stories is not to recall authentic events from the past”. Research in oral literature clearly shows that the purpose of such stories is to explain the existing circumstances rather than “historical facts”. Moreover, the stories themselves change along with shifts in the socio-political context. Sometimes these modifications involve only an interpretative shift or an increase in the popularity of one of the coexisting versions of a myth. In other cases, it is a much deeper interference with the very “facts” contained in it. Thanks to an in-depth analysis of coins and the socio-political context of their minting, the Author presents the most probable interpretation of the intentions of the senders of these messages. Kluczek makes it clear to the reader that in the official monetary messages of the Roman elite, it was not only the sets of myths themselves but also their symbolism and interpretations which changed over time. This obvious conclusion should be strongly stressed. It often happens that even eminent scholars look at Roman symbols as something static whilst in reality, as time passed, this was something which changed and sometimes dynamically. Not limiting herself to the times of the Empire, the Author presents the ancestral propaganda of the Republican period that sometimes referred to the beginnings of Rome. This is all the more important as it was after all the source of the symbolic language of the Imperial era. Subsequently, the Author presents connections between the Julian-Claudian family and Aeneas, followed by the attempt of the Flavians to draw from the origins of Rome. An important place in the book is occupied by the analysis of references to the origins of the Eternal City related to the anniversaries of its foundation, especially the *ludi saeculares* from Hadrian to Constantine.

In Part III: “In the Circle of Virtues and Abstracts”, the Author analyses references to Roman mythology regarding the beginnings of the City as symbols of the virtues and ‘abstracts’ – or using the terminology of Cicero – “gifts of the gods”. In Chapter 1 the Author presents Aeneas as a symbol of *Pietas*. The evocation of Aeneas in such a context was already popular in the Republican period, but the real breakthrough

came with the rise of Caesar and then Octavian to the heights of power. Later this symbolism – at least as far as coins are concerned – disappeared and appeared again only during the reign of Antonin Pius. In Chapter 2 the Author presents the she-wolf as a symbol of the *Aeternitas* of Rome, which became particularly popular in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Chapter 3 is devoted to Romulus as the epitome of *Virtus*. I must admit that I am not convinced by the arrangement of chapters in this part. In my opinion, a better one would have been to present *Pietas* and *Virtus*, and only then *Aeternitas*. This is supported not only by terminological issues (both *Pietas* and *Virtus* are virtues, and *Aeternitas* is a Ciceronian “gift of the gods”), but also by chronological issues (the she-wolf as a symbol of *Aeternitas* appears on coins at the latest of all three ideas).

Part IV: “The Roman coinage as a space for exhibiting the beginnings of the Romans and their early history”, although it also presents material not previously discussed: medallions, provincial coins, “imitative” and restitution issues, can be treated as a very elaborate recapitulation of the undertaken subject. This is especially true since there is no real ending in the book, one which would summarize the most important conclusions. After all, the Summary is less than three pages long. With such a monumental work, it cannot be treated as a satisfactory ending. Returning to Part IV, however, its second chapter is a thorough qualitative and quantitative analysis of the motifs related to the beginning of Rome on coins. This part of the book is accompanied by numerous tables and charts that organize the material under examination and definitely make it easier for the reader to perceive it. The section devoted to the analysis of provincial coins needs, in my opinion, a more in-depth look at the possible correlation between the references to the legendary origins of Rome and the status of the colony than is presented.

Agata Kluczek’s book – as befits a decent work on numismatics – is richly illustrated. Admittedly, the vast majority of them are illustrations in shades of grey, but this in no way affects their readability. Most of the photographs of the coins are of good quality and whilst a few could have been of a slightly better resolution, I understand that the desire to illustrate the subject as widely as possible outweighed the aesthetic issues. After all, every numismatist knows that the availability of high-quality photographs is variable. It is particularly difficult to get good pictures of some provincial coins or medallions.

“Primordia Romana” is an insightful analysis of myths related to the origins of the Eternal City which appeared in Roman coinage. The vast amount of the analysed material and the Author’s interpretative ideas make the book seem at first glance to be composed of four largely independent parts. Perhaps for greater fluidity it could have been put together a little differently, especially Part III, devoted to *Pietas*, *Aeternitas* and *Virtus*. It seems to break up the narrative somewhat and the Author returns to

a more general considerations in Part IV after these detailed ones. However, this was the Author's choice and this should be respected, especially since reviewers often try to impose their own vision of a given topic on authors. Perhaps the greatest disadvantage of the book is that it was only published in Polish. Although it is firmly rooted in the German and, above all, French research tradition, its translation into English would be most beneficial. On the other hand, however, we should be glad that such an extensive and insightful work is available to the Polish reader.

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