

# NOTAE NUMISMATICAE

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# ZAPISKI NUMIZMATYCZNE



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## Byzantion over Mithradates Eupator. How the Pontic King Paid His Thracian Mercenaries after the Treaty of Dardanos (85 BC)

In May 2013, the firm Classical Numismatic Group sold a late posthumous tetradrachm of Lysimachus struck at the mint of Byzantion (Pl. 1, Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

This tetradrachm belongs to the last group of my classification: Group 4, dated “ca 80–76 BC.” As for Groups 2 and 3, Group 4 testifies to an abundant and tight production with an estimate of more than 100 obverse dies engraved in less than a decade. Put in perspective (with Athens for example), this clearly supersedes by a considerable margin the needs of a city such as Byzantion and I have linked the bulk of this production of late Byzantine Lysimachi (Group 3 and 4) with the first Mithradatic war (89–85 BC): “From the above chronology, it also appears that the strike of the numerous Lysimachi of Group 3 seems to coincide with the first Mithradatic War (or just after?) while Groups 2A and 2B would have been struck some years before. It is less easy to connect Group 4 with a precise event. It seems to have started too soon to be linked with preparations for the third war which, from the exceptionally well dated testimony of Pontic coins, were launched in February 75 BC. This stop, just before the third and last conflict, is also remarkable. It reinforces the presumption that late posthumous Lysimachi were used to pay the (Thracian) mercenaries in the service of Eupator, since Plutarch precisely tells us that the king of Pontus dismissed these barbarian hordes before launching his last war.”<sup>2</sup>

The end of the First Mithradatic War was concluded by a treaty signed in late 85 BC by Sulla and Eupator in Dardanos (between Abydos and Sestos). Having

<sup>1</sup> Classical Numismatic Group, sale 83, 22 May 2013, no. 101 (16.26 g – 36 mm – 12 h).

<sup>2</sup> F. DE CALLATAÏ, *L'histoire des guerres mithridatiques vue par les monnaies*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1997, p. 137 (my translation) with reference to Plutarch, *Lucullus*, 7.5.

no fleet and himself in a difficult position towards Rome, Sulla allowed Eupator a none too dishonorable exit. Eupator was condemned to pay a fine of 2,000–3,000 talents and to hand over to the Romans his military fleet (70 to 80 ships, depending of the sources) but he retained his kingdom. As a consequence, there was no reason why Eupator would have been discharged from paying arrears to his mercenary troops, among whom the Thracians were the most numerous. The late posthumous tetradrachms in the name of Lysimachus struck at Byzantion are suspected to have played that role, in a dynamic very close to that argued by Margaret Thompson for Alexander the Great: disbanded troops were paid in a harbour on their way back, as an incentive to return home without delay.<sup>3</sup> Byzantion is perfectly located for that.

Traces of overstriking have been detected for this late Byzantine tetradrachm by the authors of the recent CNG catalogue who conclude: “overstruck on uncertain type” (p. 26). These traces are in fact clear enough to state with certainty that the overstruck coin is a tetradrachm of Mithradates Eupator (Pl. 1, Fig. 2).

On the reverse, we can distinguish the typical pattern of the ivy wreath made of flowers and leaves, disposed with their edge turned alternatively to the inner or outer side of the circle (Pl. 2, Fig. 4). Particularly visible are the flowers in the upper left field: the one to the right of the crown held by the Nike and the one above the same crown. But the vague remains of three other flowers are still visible, as well as lines in between which curve systematically in the way opposite to the preceding.

The ivy wreath is a very rare motif. The only other coinage of a similar denomination to display such a device is the cistophoric coinage. But cistophoric tetradrachms have a different weight, meaning that before being restruck, it would have been necessary to add ca 33% of silver (to pass from ca 12.60 g to 16.80 g). In addition, the shapes of the wreath always differ from the traces of the pattern seen on the discussed late posthumous tetradrachm of Lysimachus (Pl. 1, Fig. 3).

Moreover, the case in favour of Eupator is definitely settled by what remains of the legend, still visible in the area above the Nike. Not only the last ‘sigma’ of the word ΕΥΠΙΑΤΟΠΟΣ can be read above the wings of the Nike, but the last three letters ‘tau’ – ‘omikron’ – ‘upsilon’ of the word ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ can also be reconstructed, even if not too visible at first sight (see Fig. 4). Furthermore, now that we know how to look and what to search for, we are even encouraged to recognise an ‘epsilon’ as the first letter of the word ΕΥΠΙΑΤΟΠΟΣ in the upper right field with the start of a vertical hasta above as part of the letter ‘mu’ for ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ. It seems even that we have a single vertical hasta in the exergue of the Mithradatic tetradrachm, where the engraver placed the indication of the month, in that case thus 10 (‘iota’).

<sup>3</sup> M. THOMPSON, “Paying the Mercenaries,” [in:] A. HOUGHTON et al. (eds.), *Studies in Honor of Leo Mildenberg. Numismatics, Art History, Archaeology*, Wetteren 1984, pp. 241–247, pl. 38–39.

All these combined elements would normally be enough to identify precisely the original overstruck reverse die. And indeed, a careful search of my database for this coinage turns up only one reverse that fits all the criteria,<sup>4</sup> one that was issued in the tenth month of the year 211, which corresponds to July 86 BCE (Pl. 2, Figs. 6-7).<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that: 1) despite the closeness, it does not seem to be exactly the same reverse; 2) even not taking into account the indication of month, this is the closest found parallel, and that 3) the other close parallels all belong to the style,<sup>6</sup> with no possibility for any reverse linked to the idealised style to match this closeness. In any case, the overstruck coin was issued before the Dardanos treaty and the change of monetary type that happened in July 85 BC.

We may now invoke another overstrike on a tetradrachm of Eupator, the only one noticed so far (the natural fate of an overstruck coin, of course, is to disappear entirely under the new type): here a tetradrachm of an idealised style of Eupator has been overstruck by a late Hellenistic tetradrachm of Maroneia (Pl. 2, Fig. 7).<sup>7</sup>

Here we not only see the flowers of the ivy wreath on the obverse but also the nearly full profile of Eupator on the reverse. When publishing this amazing coin in 1991, I was mainly interested in the dramatic change it creates for the chronology proposed for Maroneia by Edith Schönert-Geiss.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it lowers the full chronology by at least half a century (in the case of the overstrike, from ca 140 BC to [at least] after 88 BC).<sup>9</sup>

Trying to find the best *comparandum* for Eupator, I noted: “As a matter of fact, the die which appears to be the closest parallel for this overstruck coin belongs to the 11<sup>th</sup> month of year 212 (ΒΙΣ), that is August 85,”<sup>10</sup> concluding: “If, as we believe, the overstruck tetradrachm of the Pontic king was issued in August 85, that is at the time when Mithradates is likely to have disbanded his

<sup>4</sup> These criteria imply both the absolute shape and the relative position of each element. For example, entire subgroups of Mithradatic tetradrachms are disqualified because the pattern of flowers and leaves of the ivy wreath is too tight or because the final ‘sigma’ extends further than the final ‘upsilon’ above it.

<sup>5</sup> See DE CALLATAÿ, *L’histoire...*, p. 15: D65-R1a (ΑΙΣ – Ι = Spink, NumCirc, list Nov. 1978, no. 12662 [16.75 g]).

<sup>6</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 13: D50-R2a (ΘΣ – Ε = Schweizerische Bankverein, 5, 16 Oct. 1979, no. 222 [16.58 g]).

<sup>7</sup> F. DE CALLATAÿ, “Un tétradrachme de Mithridate surfrappé à Maronée,” *Numismatica e Antichità Classiche* 20, 1991, pp. 213–226.

<sup>8</sup> E. SCHÖNERT-GEISS, *Griechisches Münzwerk. Die Münzprägung von Maroneia*, Berlin 1987.

<sup>9</sup> This low chronology has been accepted all the more since the chronology of the late Hellenistic Thasian tetradrachms has also been substantially lowered, due to other decisive overstrikes, with the bulk of the coinage now placed in ca 90–75 BC. On this see F. DE CALLATAÿ, “A tetradrachm with the legend ΘΠΑΚΩΝ overstruck on an Athenian stephanephoros tetradrachm of ΑΠΕΛΛΙΚΩΝ–ΓΟΡΓΙΑΣ (88/87 BC) and its consequence for the Thasian type coinage,” [in:] E. PAUNOV and S. FILIPOVA (eds.), *ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΣΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ ΘΑΣΙΩΝ. Studia in honorem Iliae Prokopov sexagenario ab amicis et discipulis dedicata*, Tirnovo, 2012, pp. 307–321 (with reference to the rich literature on the topic). The consensus is also that these late Hellenistic tetradrachms struck in the name of the Thasians and the Maroneians were in reality issued for the profit of the Romans.

<sup>10</sup> DE CALLATAÿ, “Un tétradrachme...,” pp. 215–216 (my translation).

auxiliaries troops just before moving back to his kingdom (end of summer or beginning of fall 85), then it is tempting to attribute the presence of this tetradrachm on the Thracian seashore to the return of royal mercenaries whom we know to have come mostly from the Western areas of the Pontus-Euxinus.”<sup>11</sup> Thracian mercenaries are indeed often mentioned by literary sources and Appian places them first in a list that seems to classify contingents by order of importance.<sup>12</sup>

The new overstrike gives additional support to this view. After the Dardanos treaty, Eupator was forced to disband and to pay his numerous Thracian mercenaries. One likely scenario is that Eupator partly paid them in fresh coins, and that most of them were promptly restruck. However, turning to the Pontic tetradrachms struck in 85 BC, it should be noted that production was not pushed on a grand scale at that moment (Chart 1):

| Pontic era | Date     | Obverses     | Reverses | Specimens |
|------------|----------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| ΒΙΣ – Δ    | Jan. 85  | 1 (O66)      | 1        | 3         |
| ΒΙΣ – Ε    | Feb. 85  | 1 (O66)      | 2        | 3         |
| ΒΙΣ – C    | Mar. 85  | 1 (O66)      | 1        | 1         |
| ΒΙΣ – Ζ    | Apr. 85  | 2 (O67-O67’) | 2        | 4         |
| ΒΙΣ – Θ    | Jun. 85  | 1 (O68)      | 2        | 4         |
| ΒΙΣ – Ι    | Jul. 85  | 1 (O69)      | 2        | 2         |
| ΒΙΣ – Ι    | Jul. 85  | 1 (O2)       | 1        | 1         |
| ΒΙΣ – ΙΑ   | Aug. 85  | 2 (O2-O3)    | 6        | 15        |
| ΒΙΣ – ΙΒ   | Sept. 85 | 1 (O4)       | 4        | 5         |
| ΓΙΣ – Α    | Oct. 85  | 2 (O5-O6)    | 6        | 15        |
| ΓΙΣ – Β    | Nov. 85  | 2 (O7-O8)    | 2        | 2         |
| ΓΙΣ – Γ    | Dec. 85  | 1 (O8)       | 2        | 2         |

Chart 1. Production of tetradrachms in the name of Eupator in 85 BC (see De Callataï 1997 and 2014 – to appear)<sup>13</sup>

Not only did the same obverse die (O66) remain in use from August 86 to March 85, but there is no month with more than 2 recorded obverse dies. In other

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 225–226 (my translation).

<sup>12</sup> See Appian, XII.6.41 (see also Appian, XII.2.13, 3.15, 6.41, 8.57 and 10.69 and Cassius Dio, XXXVI, 9.3-4 and fgmt 101.2).

<sup>13</sup> F. DE CALLATAÏ, “Revisiting a numismatic corpus: the case of Eupator, last king of Pontus,” in O. TEKIN et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the First Anatolian Numismatic Conference*, Antalya 2014 (to appear).

words, it is unlikely that Eupator paid the arrears of his mercenaries in significant numbers of fresh coins, but that doesn't prevent the possibility that what was paid in fresh coins went to them and was soon restruck.

Does this imply that the bulk of Mithradatic coins, old or fresh, disappeared at that time as part of some *damnatio memoriae* as suggested, more broadly, by Otto Mørkholm, who wondered about “the very small number known at present”?<sup>14</sup> There is no firm answer for such a question but a negative one is likely to be preferable. First, it should be noted that the last statement of Otto Mørkholm is not very accurate since coins of Eupator are known in substantial number now: with 166 obverse dies for 648 tetradrachms, his main coinage is well documented with a rather high ratio of 3.9 for the average number of coins per obverse die. Second, hoard evidence also points in the opposite direction. The Bithynian hoard (IGCH 1384) contains 15 Pontic tetradrachms, among which 14 were issued between August 84 and August 75 BC, but – strangely enough – one exception supposed to have been issued before 96 BC, at the very start of the coinage.<sup>15</sup> The Giresun hoard (IGCH 1383) is more conclusive: out of the 22 Mithradatic tetradrachms, 11 are of the so-called ‘realistic style,’ thus struck before the Dardanos treaty, while 11 others are of the ‘idealised style,’ the last one having been issued in June 83 BC.<sup>16</sup> Despite its meagerness, this hoard evidence doesn't support the idea of a major recycling of Pontic silver coins after the end of the First Mithradatic War.

In our actual – improved but still poor – state of knowledge, I will argue for the following scenario. In 85 BC, having been defeated on the battlefield but allowed still to reign in Pontus, Eupator issued an unimpressive number of tetradrachms which may have been aimed at paying the arrears of his Thracian mercenaries. A significant part of these fresh coins were then quickly overstruck and transformed into new coins. The new overstrike of Byzantion discussed here neatly fits this reconstruction. It reinforces the already made presumption that the large Byzantion Group 4 (more than 100 obverses dies) was issued in a short period of time to pay the Thracian mercenaries at the end of the First Mithradatic War. It adds to our understanding in that such a purpose was partly achieved (a minor part, probably, considering the issued volume) by recycling Eupator's own tetradrachms.

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<sup>14</sup> O. MØRKHOLM, “The chronology of the New Style coinage of Athens,” *ANS Museum Notes* 29, 1984, p. 33: “The coins with the name of King Mithradates were presumably recalled as part of his *damnatio memoriae*, accounting for the very small number known at present.”

<sup>15</sup> P. POLLAK, “A Bithynian Hoard of the First Century B.C.,” *ANS Museum Notes* 16, 1970, pp. 45–56, Pl. VI–XV.

<sup>16</sup> F.S. KLEINER, “The Giresun hoard,” *ANS Museum Notes* 19, 1974, pp. 3–25, pl. I–IX.

## STRESZCZENIE

## Byzantion na Mitradatesie Eupatorze. Jak król Pontu płacił swoim trackim najemnikom po traktacie w Dardanos (85 p.n.e.)

Sprzedana ostatnio przez jeden z domów aukcyjnych późna, pośmiertna, bita w Byzantion tetradrachma Lizymacha nosi wyraźne ślady przybicia na tetradrachmie Mitradatesa Eupatora, króla Pontu. Widoczne pozostałości oryginalnego typu pozwalają uściślić, że ta ostatnia (prawdopodobnie wybita w lipcu 86 r. p.n.e.) należała do emisji wyprodukowanej przed końcem I wojny mitradatejskiej (95–89 p.n.e.). To nowo zarejestrowane przybicie bardzo dobrze komponuje się z już dawniej zaproponowaną rekonstrukcją wydarzeń historycznych: w 85 r. p.n.e. Eupator, po klęsce poniesionej w starciu militarnym, ale wciąż zachowujący dzięki pokojowi w Dardanos tron pontyjski, był nadal zobowiązany do zapłaty zobowiązań walczącym dla niego najemnikom. Pośród nich najbardziej liczną grupę stanowili Trakowie. Wysłunięto przypuszczenie, że ostatnia grupa monet w typie Lizymacha bita w Byzantion (grupa 4) jest emisją zbyt obfitą (znanych jest ponad sto stempli awersu użytych w krótkim okresie), aby wiązać ją z jakimikolwiek potrzebami tego ośrodka. Najbardziej przekonujące jest połączenie tej emisji z wypłatami dla trackich najemników pod koniec I wojny mitradatejskiej. Publikowane w niniejszym tekście nowe przybicie potwierdza tę hipotezę i dodatkowo informuje, że częściowo (sądząc po rozmiarach emisji reprezentowanej przez grupę 4, była to jednak mała część) monety, którymi płacono najemnikom, pozyskano, przybijając tetradrachmy emitowane przez samego Mitradatesa.

Tłumaczenie Jarosław Bodzek

- PLATE 1
- Fig. 1. Late posthumous tetradrachm in the name of Lysimachus struck at Byzantion (Classical Numismatic Group, sale 83, 22 May 2013, no. 101)
- Fig. 2. Detail of the reverse of Fig. 1
- Fig. 3. Cistophoric tetradrachm struck at Pergamum, ca 133–67 BC (Ira & Larry Goldberg, Auction 72, 5 Feb. 2013, 4361 – 12.61g)
- PLATE 2
- Fig. 4. As Fig. 2 with tentative reconstruction of the overstruck type
- Fig. 5. Reverse of a tetradrachm struck in July 86 BC (ΑΙΣ – Ι) = Spink, NumCirc, list Nov. 1978, no. 12662 (see DE CALLATAÿ, *L'histoire...*, p. 15: D65-R1a)
- Fig. 6. As Fig. 4 but oriented to match the Mithradatic prototype
- Fig. 7. Tetradrachm of Eupator dated of August 85 BC and tetradrachm of Maroneia overstruck on a tetradrachm of Eupator (DE CALLATAÿ, “Un tétradrachme...”, 1991, p. 215, nos. 1–2)



1



2



3



4



5



6



b



a



7

