

ABOUT A SMALL HOARD INCLUDING HISTRIAN SILVER COINS OF APOLLON TYPE DISCOVERED IN DOBRUJA

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Cuvinte cheie: Dobrogea, tezaur, atelier histrian, perioadă preromană.

Keywords: Dobruja, hoard, the Histrian mint, the pre-Roman period.

Abstract: *The careful investigation of newer or older collections in the inventories of prestigious public museums can still provide many pleasant surprises for the research field. It is the situation of this small hoard collection which appeared in the numismatic cabinet, after the serious analysis and reorganization proposed by the administration of Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu¹. Data on this discovery are extremely incomplete, only its possible source from Dobruja being mentioned. Accordingly, we will integrate it to the category of hoards having no specific place of discovery, Dobruja-passim. Generally, the few Dobrujan discoveries to be found in the numismatic collection of the museum in Sibiu do not specify the place of discovery, not to mention the possible complete contexts. We do not have any information on the presence of a vessel or the total number of pieces in this hoard. It is possible that it was fully recovered when purchased. Further on we present the catalogue of the pieces included to the numismatic collection of Brukenthal National Museum.*

CATALOGUE

1. AR (drachma); 10; 5.28 g; 18.5 mm.

Av: The two adolescent heads reversed (the left one reversed), the two faces seem prosperous, rounded with a neutral expression, the hair is richly illustrated, particularly by upward and downward strands; all the anatomical details of the face are clearly represented.

Rv: the legend $\text{I}\Sigma\text{TPIH}$; eagle on dolphin oriented to left, the dolphin has a slightly curved shape suggesting the action under development (the movement in a static context); does not have any logo or monogram in the monetary field; inv. no. T. 1285, 1916; Fig. 1, no. 1; very good preserving condition.

2. AR (drachma); 10; 4.86 g; 17 x 18,5 mm.

¹ This way I express my gratitude to my friend and colleague Claudiu Munteanu for the special generosity to place at our disposal the present hoard to be published.

Av: The two adolescent heads reversed (the right one reversed), the two faces seem prosperous, rounded with a neutral expression, the hair is richly illustrated, in particular the upward and downward strands, all the anatomical details of the face are clearly represented.

Rv: the legend (I) ΣΤΡΠΗ; under the dolphin, inside the monetary field, the letters ΦΥ, eagle on dolphin oriented to the left; the dolphin has a slightly curved shape to suggest the action under development (movement in a static context); the eagle is represented in rich plumage, as well as the tail; inv. no. T. 1285, 1917; Fig. 1, no. 2; good conservation.

PICK 1898, p. 162, no. 425.

3. AR (drachma); 12; 4.23 g; 18 x 19 mm.

Av: The two adolescent heads reversed (the right one reversed), the two faces are slender with a neutral expression, the hair is richly represented, combed and parted in the centre and set on the left and right side of the head, in the front with two large horizontal strands; all the anatomical details of the face are clearly represented.

Rv: the legend ΙΣΤΡΠΗ; under the dolphin, inside the monetary field, the letter Α; eagle on dolphin, oriented to the left, the dolphin has a slightly curved shape to suggest the action under development (movement in a static context); the eagle is represented in a rich plumage, as well as the tail; inv. no. T. 1285, 1921; Fig. 1, no. 3; relatively good preservation; punched on purpose.

PICK 1898, p. 161, no. 416.

4. AR (drachma); 6; 4.71 g; 16.5 mm.

Av: The two adolescent heads reversed (the left one is reversed), the two faces slender, with a neutral expression, the hair is richly illustrated, combed and parted in the centre (set on the left and on the top of the head), in front with two large horizontal strands; all the anatomical details of the face are clearly represented.

Rv: the legend ΙΣΤΡΠΗ; under the dolphin, inside the monetary field, the letter Α; eagle on dolphin, oriented to the left; the dolphin is represented almost linearly; the eagle is represented in a rich plumage, as well as the tail; inv. no. T. 1285, 1920; Fig. 1, no. 4; good conservation.

5. AR (drachma); 1; 4.76 g; 18 x 18.5 mm.

Av: The two adolescent heads are reversed (the left one reversed), the two faces are slender (but larger in size compared with the rest of the monetary field) with a neutral expression, the hair is richly illustrated, combed and parted in the middle (set on the left and right of the head top), in front with two large horizontal strands, all anatomical details of the face are clearly represented.

Rv: the legend ΙΣΤΡΠΗ; under the dolphin, inside the monetary field, the letter Α; the eagle on dolphin oriented to the left, the dolphin is represented almost linearly; the eagle is represented in a rich plumage, as well as the tail; inv. no. T. 1285, 1919; Fig. 1, no. 5; good conservation.

PICK 1898, p. 161, no. 416.

6. AR (drachma); 6; 4.86 g; 17 mm.

Av: The two adolescent heads are reversed (the left one reversed), the two faces are slender (prolonged face but with round chin) having a neutral expression, one of the heads illustrates a certain amazement, the hair is richly illustrated, combed and parted on the central part (set on the left and right of the head top),

in front with two horizontal strands; all the anatomical details of the face are clear represented.

Rv: the legend *ΙΣΤΡΙΑ*; under the dolphin, inside the monetary field, the letter A; eagle on dolphin, oriented to the left; the dolphin is represented almost linearly; the eagle is represented in a rich plumage, as well as the tail; inv. no. T. 1285, 1918; Fig. 1, no. 6; good preservation; punched on purpose.

PICK 1898, p. 161, no. 416.

7. AR (drachma); 11; 5.54 g; 19 mm.

Av: The two adolescent heads are reversed (the right one reversed), the two faces are slender (prolonged face but with round chin) having a neutral expression, one of the heads illustrates a certain amazement, the hair is richly illustrated, combed and parted on the central part (set on the left and right of the head top), in front with two horizontal strands; all the anatomical details of the face are clearly represented.

Rv: the legend *ΙΣΤΡΙΑ*; under the dolphin, inside the monetary field, the letter A; eagle on dolphin, oriented to the left; the dolphin is represented almost linearly; the eagle is represented in a rich plumage, as well as the tail; inv. no. T. 1285, 1922; Fig. 1, no. 7; rather good preservation.

PICK 1898, p. 161, no. 416.

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It is beyond question that the small hoard may be incomplete, taking into account the lacks regarding the discovery context, the number of pieces etc. Precisely for these reasons a large discussion on this discovery can not be contemplated. And so it is included into a long series of Histrian hoards (from several copies to thousands of pieces) which can not provide data of numismatic and much less archeological and even historical interest, regarding the trade and economic connections of the Milesian colony with other centres of the Greek world (particularly Olbia) or with local communities, Gethian or of other origin.

As mentioned above, in the absence of exact locations, we prefer to integrate this hoard to the category *Dobruja-passim*. At this stage of numismatic investigation we believe that we can integrate it to those already considered as having seemingly obscure destination². Equally obscure is its provenance. Its possible economic implications remain almost unknown forever. The only option that we have is to speculate on issues we have already met for other similar discoveries. Generally, these coins appearing in hoards or isolated, express the presence of Greek merchants (the Histrian kind) in the autochthonous environment, due to strict economic and trade interests. And here we refer to the situation in Dobruja, because otherwise we believe that their emergence is strictly an expression of persons' circulation or an exchange of "gifts" having a symbolic, magical-religious aspect (e.g. their ritual disposing in pits as an offering for a sacred place or destined to a sacred thing³). These deductions are valid for the

² MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1993, p. 57.

³ CONOVICI 1983, p. 43; a silver coin of Apollon type set ritually in a pit was discovered last year in an archaeological excavation, on the route of the future highway

Pontic Dobrujan region, the true meaning of coins being to be accepted in light of local realities near the sea coast and exceptionally in locations near the banks of the Danube, and then ultimately in Moldavia and Wallachia. The discovery of an Apollon type silver coins hoard in a necropolis at Argamum was explained by those who have published it as a result of an emergency burial, not being interpreted as having a ritual function⁴. Two of the coins (pieces three and six) were punched, being most likely worn as amulets or, anyway, as beneficial talismans. At this stage of research we cannot know if they were discovered as such or if they suffered in time a drastic process of diminishing their financial value and implicitly of proper silver, being „loaded” instead with power and magical beneficial qualities.

The difficulty of correct interpretation of these numismatic data has to be explained by striking chronological, economic differences, but also regarding learning skills specific capabilities for this activity and the gradual change in natives' perception regarding coin usage for the role destined by the issuing authority.

Such silver pieces have been discovered in the area of the Histrian *polis* only absolutely accidentally, but their emergence in the *chora*, meaning at hundreds of kilometers distance, does not represent a novelty for the numismatic field research. It may be also the situation of the hoard under discussion. But, taking into consideration its small structure (maybe complete, maybe incomplete), we can continue with our arguments. The pieces are certainly part of the last so-called series of issues, which in our opinion knew at its turn many structural weight strata, as well as iconographical ones, mostly during the entire period of the 3rd century B.C. Excepting two pieces (one having no logo, the second one with the letter **A**), the rest of them (four with the letter **A** and one with the letters **ΦΥ**) are rarely present in the latest archaeological contexts among the silver coins of this well-known Apollon type. This aspect is valid both for the Pontic territory, as well as in Moldavia and Wallachia. For example, in Moldavia, at Bunești (Bunești-Averești commune, Vaslui County) we find a silver Histrian coin (drachma) in an archaeological context clearly dated to the beginning of the 2nd century B.C.⁵ These pieces with **A** on the reverse represent around 40 % of all the isolated monetary discoveries from local settlements⁶. Then, in Wallachia at Pietroasele (Pietroasele commune, Buzău County) emerges a silver coin from the last series in the last inhabitation level of a settlement, dated to the end of the 2nd century B.C. Initially, the presence of these discoveries was considered to be much later than the issuing date of those pieces, either as inheritance from generation to generation, or as expression of a later circulation. In our view, the dating of their presence in the context of the final 2nd century does not express a

around Constanța, a situation very similar to the previously mentioned one, in an autochthonous environment as well.

⁴ LUNGU, POENARU BORDEA 2000, p. 294; theory improvable in our view, upon which we are going to discuss further on in an ample study regarding this type of discoveries in Dobruja under the circumstances of those known in the Greek world.

⁵ MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1990, p. 48-49, 129, no. 34.

⁶ TALMAȚCHI 2004, p. 179.

long period from the moment when they were issued, remembering the inheritance from generation to generation (absolutely). The only piece not in accordance with our view (which taking into consideration its singleness we consider it as such) is the presence in a deposit (considered unsecured) discovered in 1913 at Dăeni (Dăeni commune, Tulcea county) of an Apollon type silver coin (with the logo **A** under the dolphin) in association with 14 Roman bronze coins issued in Rome for Trajan and Hadrian⁷. This example may be considered as an exception (if it is true) and may be explained indeed as a result of the maintenance of the silver coin as „valuable good” in time, much later than its issuing and circulation period.

The iconographical details of the representation of the two adolescent faces are unmistakable, sometimes offering the possibility to identify common moulds discovered at dozens or almost hundreds of kilometers distance from the issuing place (the autonomous period Histrian mint). And the almost „obsessive” presence on such pieces, of the logo **A** on the reverse, under the dolphin and the legend *ΙΕΤΡΗ*, epigraphically also complete the picture offered by these coins.

The period of the 4th-3rd century B.C. seem to have been characterized, from the perspective of the local mint activity, as one with regular issues, represented by a significant abundance of the silver and bronze coin types, accompanied by an economic and trade spread, mostly inside the autochthonous Dobrujan environment and in the North Danube area⁸. Towards the end of the period, on mints issued there a pronounced decline of the representation style could be noticed, tendencies to „barbarization”, maybe sometimes a negligence in the iconographical representation, as well as an important decrease of the coin number for each type.

We have to mention that issuing silver coins ceasing in 313 B.C. (late Gh. Poenaru Bordea’s opinion) seems not to be veridical, even if this way very durable arguments at first sight were offered as regarding the metrological aspects, according to which, beginning with 280 B.C., the Greek poleis on the Western shore of Pontus Euxinus adopted or reconsidered the Attic etalon system, in order to issue pseudo-Alexander and pseudo-Lysimach coins, as staters, or, less, as tetradrachmas⁹. We believe that in the 2nd century B.C., the city continued to issue „the two callow heads or Apollon” type coins, but few are of pure silver (maybe a great part of those with the logo **A**, with a definitely lower weight than the theoretically pretended standard); many of the *fouillée* coins known until now could have been issued at that time. Precisely because the city monetary effort seemed to be aimed towards the known pseudo-issues in gold and silver, the metal necessary was probably less and less, some improper technologies being preferred, incorrectly for their receipt, but valid for the polis, the city not giving up so easily a monetary type with a symbol value for it and very clearly maintained in the memory of the autochthonous populations from the areas where Histrian merchants penetrated. The issuing of the coins with

⁷ MOISIL 1914, p. 23, no. 29; TALMAȚCHI 2006, p. 90.

⁸ TALMAȚCHI 2006, p. 37-39 and p. 43-47.

⁹ PRICE 1991, p. 180, no. 970; POENARU BORDEA 1997, p. 59; POENARU BORDEA 2001, p. 16.

the two heads continued to the 2nd century B.C., under the circumstances of an accentuated and probably successive regress of the pieces weight in silver. The diminished weight of the silver pieces may also be explained as well by the reversed direction of coins penetration, from outside the city and *chora* to the inner market of the polis (the same process can also be seen at Olbia¹⁰). Or a smaller coin (as module and pond) was required by everyday life. The diminished silver quality used in issuing coins as well as the preparation of the *billon* pills may also be included to the area of the same phenomenon.

On the other hand, the organized transition from a monetary system to another seems to have had a consequence at Histria in the continuous reduction of the coin weight standard (fact noticed at the pieces in the catalogue as well). This is not a random fact, being a constitutive part of a monetary phenomenon used and developed in the entire Greek world. And not last, each of the metrological systems created in the Greek world had ideal standards which were not followed in most of the situations, not even in the mints of the originary centres (if a simple examination of the average weight of the „real” coins is to be done).

As a conclusion, the hoard including Histrian silver pieces of Apollon type from the numismatic collection of the Museum in Sibiu contributes to a more profound knowledge of the local mint activity during the autonomous period, more exactly during the 3rd-2nd century B.C. Though „forgotten” for a long time among other discoveries, it is destined to the specialty research, enriching the list of hoards of this type discovered in the western area of Pontus Euxinus. Not being impressive by the number of pieces, the latter, due to the iconographic, epigraphic and weight features can make out a small „transit” deposit, accompanying the trade activity; it probably appeared either in *chora*, or outside it, in a Gethian environment.

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¹⁰ KARYŠKOVSKIJ 1999, p. 21.

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Figure 1: Apollon type Histrian silver coins from the hoard discovered in Dobruja.