

Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica, X-XI, Iași, 2004-2005

**ASPECTS OF THE CIRCULATION OF THE GREEK COIN  
(OTHER THAN THE WEST-PONTIC DOBRUDJAN ONES)  
BETWEEN THE DANUBE AND THE EUXINE SEA, DURING THE  
AUTONOMOUS PERIOD**

GABRIEL TALMAȚCHI

**Key words:** Dobrudja, Greek colonies, autonomous Greek coins and of Macedonian model, 5<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.

**Abstract.** *The monetary circulation in Dobrudja (5<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.) is presented in the article. With the exception of the coins of the Dobrudjan West-Pontic colonies, the author deals with the presence of some monetary emissions of certain Greek centres that of Black Sea basin, in the Thracian area and to the West of Asia Minor, and with their effect on the local or regional economic and commercial relations.*

**Rezumat.** *În acest articol este prezentată circulația monetară din Dobrogea (sec. V-I a.Chr.). Cu excepția monedelor din coloniile dobrogene vest-pontice, autorul se ocupă de prezența unor emisiuni monetare ale unor centre grecești din bazinul Mării Negre, din arealul tracic și din vestul Asiei Mici, precum și cu efectele acestor emisiuni asupra dinamicii relațiilor economice și comerciale locale și regionale.*

In the evolution of the autochthonous society from the second half of the first millennium BC, one can observe the transformations occurring in different stage of development of its material and spiritual culture, the forms of organization and manifestation in each of the past stages and the distinctions existing from one microzone to another. The alterations happening over time in their social and economic structure have allowed a significant development of the autochthonous society, thus creating, on the basis of the Greek influence, the possibility of using the coins that came from the colonial monetary workshops.

The problem of the relations appearing between the various Greek cities, both during the classical period and during the Hellenistic one is complex, but the coin can elucidate, in certain conditions, various aspects that are of interest. We do not analyse differentiated economic universes, but, maybe, some differences appearing in the mechanisms of the exchange, on the basis of an initial archaic infrastructure, as the foreign currency appeared

as a result of the development of production and exchange, with parallel and continuous evolutions. Commerce constitutes the perfect binder for various geographical areas, creating spaces of resonance in simple and robust economic systems.

For the Greek coins issued by different centres, situated closer to or farther from the analysed geographical space, there have been listed 48 discovery points, 15 of which having hoards and the rest being isolated.

The Greek urban centre of Histria has played a major role, as intermediary, for the foreign coins, starting with the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (ALEXANDRESCU 1974, 215), but especially in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (AVRAM 1989, 83), manifesting itself through an expanding economy, due to a penetration with a strong commercial character, first and foremost in the Pontic area.

The Cyzician stater established itself as a concentrated value, at the mouth of the Danube and in the Balkan Peninsula, as in the north-west of the Euxine Sea, the hoards constituting deposits of the Hellenic merchants (MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1990, 43) and the coins being involved more rarely in a proper circulation. Its appearance at the mouth of the Danube and, from here, into the autochthonous environment, originated from the Hellespont, especially by sea (PREDA 1966, 369; 1974, 143; CONDURACHI 1988, 95-103; TALMAȚCHI 2003, 347), and, from here, through Histria (PREDA, NUBAR 1973, 50; OBERLÄNDER-TÎRNOVEANU 1978, 68), interested in adopting a currency that was appreciated and imposed on the Pontic market during the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, more certain in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (DIMITRIU 1957, 110; POENARU-BORDEA 1975, 26). It is worth mentioning three isolated discoveries, along the seacoast (an electrum hecta, a silver diobol and a bronze piece) and two hoards located along the banks of the Danube, which contained even more electrum coins, together with Histrian drachms, and issues from Apollonia, Mesembria and Histria respectively.

The monetary emissions from Olbia have had, as intermediary, the same prosperous centre – Histria (PREDA, NUBAR 1973, 49; TALMAȚCHI 2001a, 136) – probably joined by a direct penetration, through traders (PREDA 1980, 40; MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1990, 53-54), and, in this respect, note the constitutive material, i.e. bronze. The situation is well individualized in Dobrudja, where the northern half seems supplied by Histria, and the southern half (the limits of the discoveries being at Viile, Constanta county, in the south-west, and Mangalia, in the south-east) through traders who were

eager for profit in the autochthonous environment. They undoubtedly entered an economic area that was dominated by the Histrian coin, both at the Danube and on the seacoast, standing out, on the one hand, through two issues of the type "aes grave", on the other hand, through numerous coins of the type Borysthenes (more than half of the discoveries, dated to 330-300 BC, therefore, at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC). In other words, the Olbian monetary presence exhibits a visible acceleration during the Hellenistic period, with a particular documentary importance (TALMAȚCHI 2001b, 45; OBERLÄNDER-TÎRNOVEANU 1978, 68).

The rest of the discoveries of Greek coins take their well-deserved place in the analysed monetary landscape, though it is hard to establish certain correspondences with and certain ways of penetration through the west-Pontic boroughs of Histria (we also remark the ones of Perinth, Heraclea Pontica, Mesembria, Amissos, Maroneia), Tomis and Callatis. In general, one can also enumerate other discoveries originating from monetary workshops such as Gorgyppia, Panticapeum, the Tauric Chersonese, Fanagoria, Tyras, Dionysopolis, Odessos, Mesembria, the Pontic Apollonia, Byzantion, Sinope, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Abydos, Aegina, Histiaia, Miletus etc. The coins belonging to the west-Pontic and to the north-Pontic workshops have circulated even up to the time of the occupation of the territory situated between the Danube and the sea by the romans.

Among the most frequent monetary emissions are the ones from Dionysopolis and Mesembria. With the exception of a few discoveries at the Danube, the coins from Dionysopolis have been found on the seacoast, especially in the south or in the immediate vicinity, being bronze ones, dated back to the 4<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. Its monetary workshop is well-known for the fact that it emitted numerous and various coins, during the autonomous era (CANARACHE 1957, 62).

Mesembria, with its monetary workshop, active from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, has supplied the areas situated to the north and to the south of the Danube in a greater quantity than it was thought until recently, deserving an important role among the most prolific Dobrudjan presences, both regarding hoards and isolated discoveries, 84 silver and bronze pieces, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. A very important role in its spreading has been played by the traders from Mesembria and not only from there, who have used chiefly the bronze coin, in their commercial relations with the Greek and the

autochthonous environment (PAVEL 2003, 43). Most of the coins belong to the type Athena-Alkis, which was generally wide-spread, in this kind of discoveries (DRAGANOV 1985, 15; KARAYOTOV 1992, 119; 1995, 24-38).

The emission of the coin has represented an evolved stage of the Greek polis's development and it corresponds to an increasing necessity to facilitate the forms of coloboration between the natives and the Greeks and between various Greek communities, and thus, genuine lines of exchange have been created, modified, starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, owing to the dynamics of the local or zonal political relations. We should note that, within the framework of the isolated discoveries, the presence of the north-western Pontic mints adds up to approximately 29 %, the one of the western and south-western Pontic mints adds up to approximately 54 %, the one of the southern Pontic mints adds up to only 8 %, and the rest adds up to 10 %. Also, these discoveries have been made, in an overwhelming proportion, in Getic settlements and in Dobrudjan Greek boroughs from the seacoast, then in the centre of the region or near the Danube, but the identifications that have been made can offer us, out of caution, only a geographic direction.

When they talked about the existence of economic and commercial relations between various Greek centres, in the bibliography of speciality, the authors called our attention to the difficulty of establishing what their nature is, being classified as direct or intermediate penetrations, with economic and political affairs or human displacement (POENARU-BORDEA 1970, 133). A significant quantity of these discoveries from Dobrudja are passims, having to be, nevertheless, taken into consideration, if they are part of an accepted monetary phenomenon, hoping that, with the passing of time, their number and weight would diminish. In the last years, monetary pieces of real importance have appeared, following systematic research and some agricultural labour, to which we add the information that we owe to private collectors, amateur archaeology and numismatics enthusiasts.

A monetary category of little significance, from the viewpoint of its presence in Pontic Dacia, is made up by the emissions of the Hellenistic kings of Syria and Egypt. The ones belonging to Seleucus I have entered Dobrudja (ILIESCU 1965, 277; 1979, 8) at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, while the Egyptian ones have entered at the middle or the end of the same century. Their emergence is accidental, as the coins have been carried away in a

monetary flow by other emissions, especially Macedonian ones, and their association is frequent in hoards. Relating to the Egyptian ones, with two exceptions in the form of Danubian locations, the rest of the discoveries are concentrated on Tomis, and are bronze pieces with a low penetration power, reflecting human displacement (OCHEȘEANU 1974, 202).

Another important category of Greek coins is composed of late issues, specific to the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC (PREDA 1998, 241; POENARU-BORDEA 1975, 29-30; 1983, 221-237; CONOVICI 1983, 67; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1990, 83-84, 88), from Macedonia Prima, Thasos and Dyrrachium, appearing from the south and south-west and oriented towards the shops of good custom at the Danube, with a favourable circulation in both directions. In Dobrudja, 11 discovery points have been listed, 7 of which are hoards, and the rest are isolated finds. Compared to what was known until now, the number of isolated discoveries has risen (TALMAȚCHI 2001b, 46), especially Thasian ones (17), in the north of Dobrudja (11,7 %), in the “Cadrlater” (17,6 %) and passims (70,7 %). Altogether, concerning these pieces that are specific to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, their vast majority have been discovered at the Danube (80 %) and 20 % towards the interior of the province. At one time, it was considered, and with good reason, that their absence from Dobrudja was normal and that it was within the limits of the historical data of the moment (GRĂMĂȚICU 1996, 26), considering the political and military context, defined by the conflict between Rome and Mithridates VI Eupator (the king of Pontus), in which the Greek colonies had been allies of the latter. The rest of the discoveries were even considered more or less doubtful (GRĂMĂȚICU 1996, 25). But what seems to be true for the seacoast and for the area in its immediate vicinity does not seem to be true also for the rest of the territory and especially towards the Danube. Their presence can be attributed to the significant increase in the Roman state's presence, as they were used for commercial transactions, too, utilized as current silver coin (MITREA 1978, 95; OBERLÄNDER-TÎRNOVEANU 1978, 72).

We cannot conclude our exposition without mentioning the few golden and silver Greek emissions of a Macedonian model from the posthumous types Alexander III and Lysimachus, present in Dobrudja, issued by Byzantion, Chalcedon, Dionysopolis, Mesembria and Odessos. They appear both isolated and in hoards, being, however, numerically limited, but also important for understanding the realities of the Dobrudjan monetary life in

the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC  
(PREDA 1998, 102-103, 112-113).

The numismatic material that is at the basis of our research, be it older or newer, through discoveries, allows us to prudently discern some directions for the investigation of the problem, directions that are oriented along the Danube, along the Euxine Sea's coastline and towards the centre or the south-west of the region. The Danube continues to be, due to its banks, the main economic and commercial means of communication for the Getic population and the Greek elements, in their orientation towards the north. The Greek coin, especially during the Hellenistic period, probably saw a current use, and met the various commercial demands that the Greek city of that era developed, transformed into a complex organism, but never as brilliant and powerful as in the archaic period (like in Histria's case). As a result of the strong presence of the Histrian and then of the Tomitan and Callatian currency in the territory, issues of some cities of the Pontic Basin appear (cities that were economic rivals), but not to such a degree that they would be countered and excluded. What is more, some centres become intermediaries for others, in an economic "game", more or less coordinated, but with a probable prosperity. The period comprising the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC is the most difficult for the Dobrudjan economic markets, as the coins of the west-Pontic colonies reveal the crisis that manifests itself deeply in society, first of all politically, and then commercially, since silver coins from Thasos, Macedonia Prima, Dyrrachium and republican Roman denars also appear.

For the 5<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, we can also discern some hypothetical commercial strategies, as the safety of the traders and the possibility of guaranteeing and securing their occupation is uncovered by their particular "use" of the right Danubian bank and of the seacoast from the Dobrudjan space, the discoveries in the centre of the region being rare. Through their economic policy, they have managed to bring a superior civilization, from the Euxine Sea's shores to the autochthonous environment, imposed through incipient monetary mechanisms, too, the influences being irrefutable, assimilated by the local communities in a complex process that has left deep marks, underlined also through various specific types of the Greek-autochthonous symbiosis.

Lastly, the discovery of all these coins in the Danubian-Pontic territory proves the active participation of Dobrudja in the exchanges of

material and spiritual goods that have taken place in the Black Sea's basin, offering, with an acceptable probability index, some suggestions regarding the zones towards which these exchanges were headed and the political relations (their extent and their dynamics) or, sometimes, only geographical directions.

*Translated by Liviu David*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALEXANDRESCU Petre  
1974 *Însemnări arheologice. Arheologia spațiului carpato-balcanic în veacurile VI-V î.e.n.*, SCIVA, 25, 2, p. 209-216.
- AVRAM Alexandru  
1989 *Pentru o fenomenologie a raporturilor dintre geți și greci*, SympThrac, 7, Tulcea, p. 70-93.
- CANARACHE Vasile  
1957 *Monede autonome inedite din Dionysopolis și cronologia lor relativă*, SCN, 1, p. 61-78.
- CONDURACHI Emil  
1988 *Les statères de Cyzique et les routes commerciales du Hélespont au Danube*, in: *Daco-Romania Antiqua*, București, p. 95-103.
- CONOVICI Nicolae  
1983 *Contribuții privind cronologia drahmelor din Dyrrhachium și Apollonia și circulația lor în Dacia*, SympThrac, 1, Craiova, p. 66-67.
- DIMITRIU Suzana  
1957 *O monedă divizionară din Cyzic la Histria*, SCIV, 8, 1-4, p. 103-112.
- DRAGANOV Dimităr  
1985 *Monnaies autonomes de Messambria découvertes à Cabilé*, Bulletin des Muses de la Bulgarie du Sud-Est, Plovdiv, 8, p. 15-21.
- GRĂMĂTICU Steluța  
1996 *Un tezaur de tetradrahme ale cetății Thasos și ale provinciei Macedonia Prima descoperit la Silistra*, CercNum, 7, p. 23-26.
- ILIESCU Octavian  
1965 *Caiet selectiv de informare asupra creșterii colecțiilor Bibliotecii Academiei R.P.R.*, Cabinetul Numismatic, București, 12, aprilie-iunie, p. 277.  
1979 *Note de numismatică greacă antică*, CercNum, 2, p. 3-14.
- KARAYOTOV Ivan  
1992 *Le monnayage de Mesambria*, Burgas.  
1995 *La circulation des monnaies de Mésambria Pontica dans la région du Bas Danube*, in: *Numismatic and Sphragistic Contributions to*

*Medieval History of Dobroudja*, International Symposium, Dobrich, 1993 (= Dobroudja, 12), p. 24-38.

MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA Virgil

1990 *Dacia Răsăriteană în secolele VI-I î.e.n. Economie și monedă*, Iași.

MITREA Bucur

1978 *Monede pontice la daco-geții lui Burebista*, Pontica, 11, p. 89-96.

OBERLÄNDER-TÎRNOVEANU Ernest

1978 *Aspecte ale circulației monedei grecești în Dobrogea de Nord (sec. VI î.e.n.-I e.n.)*, Pontica, 11, p. 59-87.

OCHEȘEANU Radu

1974 *Câteva monede ptolemaice și alexandrine descoperite în Dobrogea*, Pontica, 7, p. 199-203.

PAVEL Viorica

2003 *Două monede autonome din Mesambria descoperite în jud. Alba*, BSNR, 92-97 (1998-2003), 146-151, p. 39-45.

POENARU-BORDEA Gheorghe

1970 *Discuții pe marginea câtorva monede străine din Dobrogea antică*, SCIV, 21, 1, p. 133-144.

1975 *Studii de numismatică greacă în România între 1947-1973*, BSNR, 67-69 (1973-1975), 121-123, p. 17-41.

1983 *Circulation des monnaies d'Apollonia et de Dyrrachion en Dacie preromaine et dans la région du Bas-Danube*, in: *L'Adriatica tra Mediterraneo e Penisola Balcanica nell' Antichità*, Istituto per la storia e l'archeologia della Magna Graecia, Taranto, p. 221-237.

PREDA Constantin

1966 *Câteva tezaure monetare descoperite în regiunea București*, SCIV, 17, 2, p. 363-374.

1974 *În legătură cu circulația staterilor din Cyzic la Dunărea de Jos*, Pontica, 7, p. 139-146.

1980 *Descoperirea de la Murighiol (jud. Tulcea) și unele aspecte ale circulației monedelor olbiene la Dunărea de Jos*, SCN, 7, p. 35-42.

1998 *Istoria monedei în Dacia preromană*, București.

PREDA C., NUBAR Hamparțuchian

1973 *Histria III. Descoperirile monetare 1914-1970*, București.

TALMAȚCHI Gabriel

2001a *Contribuții privind circulația monetară dobrogeană în secolele VI-I a.Chr.*, Analele Universității Creștine "Dimitrie Cantemir", Seria Istorie, 4, p. 120-145.



- 
- 2001b *Aspecte ale prezenței monedelor grecești, dacice și romane republicane în Dobrogea (secolele V-I a.Chr.)*, CCDJ, 18, p. 44-49.
- 2003 *Două monede de argint emise de Cyzic și Milet descoperite în Dobrogea*, BSNR, 92-97 (1998-2003), 146-151, p. 347-349.