


FAN EARLY ISSUE OF LYSIMACHUS TYPE DRACHM FROM MESAMBRIA? GENUINE OR FAKE?

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

Abstract. *An intriguing coin from the commerce – apparently Lysimachus type drachm from Mesambria having the controls Helmet /  (one of the earliest monograms from the Mesambrian tetradrachms) in the reverse left field – suggests significant commentaries. Even if the bad condition and especially very poor style of the coin suggest a forgery, the iconographic details reflect the existence of a very significant possible prototype that deserves a special discussion. We notice the absence of the goddess' spear on the reverse, horse leg of the throne, the lower part of the drapery of Athena, suggesting that the prototype could be a unique Lysimachus type stater with Helmet / AA (until recently unknown), the single presenting the same features. The situation is a good opportunity to discuss again the beginnings of the Lysimachus type coinage in Mesambria.*

Keywords: *Lysimachus, drachm, Mesembria.*

I recently published a Mesambrian Lysimachus type stater acquired few years ago for the collection of the Romanian Academy¹. Apparently unique, presenting on the left field of the reverse a helmet to right and monogram AA below, it have also few distinctive iconographic details that make it even more interesting. So, we notice for the first time the absence of Athena's spear, the horse legs from the basis of the throne and the specific aspect of the lower part of goddess' drapery². Also, the portrait from the obverse is a specific one, having no die-link with the effigies from any of the other few known Mesambrian Lysimachus type staters. The particular situation of this very special coin suggests that this is the first Mesambrian Lysimachus type stater from this exceptionally rare series. Excepting it, all the others present obverse die-links or identical monograms from one to another, so it was possible to set out a continuous and stylistically homogenous series³.

Because of their exceptional rarity, any new apparition of a Lysimachus type coin from Mesambria it is an event itself. It is even more so when we announce an apparently unique and very intriguing Lysimachus type drachm from Mesambria. Despite its bad preservation and poor style – suggesting a forgery – the iconographic details suggest also a possible prototype very closed to the Mesambrian Lysimachus type stater from the Romanian Academy collection.

Obv. Head of Alexander the Great to right.


Rv. BA  / ; Athena Nikephoros seated right, wearing long chiton, on a throne having one horse leg, leaning on shield but without spear on shoulder; <LF> helmet right, monogram  below.

Drachm; 12 h; 4,01 g; 19,5 mm (Pl. I, 1).

Müller 1858, - .

Price, - ; see no. 985. (Alexander type tetradrachm), 250-175 BC.

Karayotov 1994, - ; see Karayotov 1994: 83, nos. 8-11 (Alexander type tetradrachms), years 275-225 BC (M 2, soon after 275, cf. 43).

It was an unbelievable chance to recover from commerce, only by fortune⁴, a very important coin, an apparently unique “drachm” belonging to the first or second issues of posthumous Lysimachus type from Mesambria – the monogram (), even not well preserved, being “among the earliest Mesambrian monogram”⁵. Karayotov's monogram 2 series is in fact the first presenting a monogram on the reverse, his

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¹ Emanuel Petac. *From the Types of Alexander to Lysimachus: The Chronology of Some Mesembrian and Other West Pontic Staters*. in: “The American Numismatic Society”. Second Series, 23, 2011, pp. 7-14.

² *Ibidem*, p. 8.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 10-11.

⁴ The coin was found on eBay by Philip Kinns. I am very grateful to Philip Kinns and Richard Ashton for their help.

⁵ Ivan Karayotov. *The coinage of Mesambria. I. Silver and gold coins of Mesambria*. Sozopol. Centre of Underwater Archaeology, 1994, p. 43.

first series being without monogram⁶. Also, it is not clear now which was the first Mesambrian issue with monogram on the reverse, the ΛΑ series – the stater from the Romanian Academy collection (Pl. I, 2) or this possible Μ series (Pl. I, 1). Even with a different monogram and denomination, forgery or genuine, this drachm is the “pair” of the Mesambrian stater from the Romanian Academy collection (inv. M. 73/1). Both of them presents the same stylistically features and the same iconographic details (for the reverse at least): the same position of the helmet and the same place of the monogram in the reverse left field, the same absence of Athena’s spear. The type of the shield is absolutely the same also and we saw an identical drapery in the lower part of the goddess chiton. Finally, even the throne has a horse leg – even a single one, not two as we saw on the stater with monogram ΛΑ. We must notice too the poor condition and style of this drachm. The error of the obverse legend and especially the very rude execution of the reverse suggest a possible forgery. Even so, the previous elements, too many and too special to be there only by fortune make a simple coincidence impossible, suggesting the existence of a prototype. We cannot ignore that the eventual reverse “prototype” seems to be the first, rarest and spectacular Lysimachus type stater from the entire series and not other. These elements appear only on the Mesambrian Lysimachus type stater with controls Helmet / ΛΑ on the reverse. Genuine or forgery, the situation is interesting because of the similarities with the “prototype” which must be included in the same first Mesambrian series with the unique and until very recently unknown stater from the Romanian Academy collection⁷. The situation is a very intriguing and peculiar one, deserving anyway a serious discussion.

Despite the bad preservation of the monogram on the reverse, it seems to be clear that the letter is Μ. The catalogues seem to have some problems regarding the correctness of the monograms. The monogram 2 (M 2) from Karayotov⁸ and also Price 985 it is almost correct, but it is in fact Μ and not Μ (Pl. I, 3) – as we can see quite clear on the reverse of a very well preserved tetradrachm recently sold at Classical Numismatic Group⁹ (Pl. I, 4). Also, we have serious doubts concerning the tetradrachm Price 987¹⁰. The situation of this coin deserves a special attention. Considered as monogram 13 in Karayotov’s catalogue, it has “in the exergue” (Price 987, without photo) but “under the throne”¹¹ the letters Μ. However, Karayotov series with monogram 13 includes a coin¹² having the same monogram in the exergue and not under the throne – Price 987, considered to be in London (probably British Museum, as Price 985 too, although M. Price said nothing about their presence in London). About the same coin (987) Price catalogue says that it is in Sofia. In fact, there are only few possibilities. Maybe M. Price describes by error in his catalogue the unique and not illustrated tetradrachm 987 as having the monogram in the exergue – and it is only under the throne, as Karayotov says and illustrates several tetradrachms or Price saw a bad preserved 985 tetradrachm and he make a mistake describing Price 985’s monogram as 987. Karayotov himself, probably intrigued by this strange Price 987, included it in the same series having the monogram 13 under the throne, declaring in the same time that he never saw this coin, supposed to be in London, not in Sofia¹³. The objective conclusion seems to be that in fact nobody saw Price 987 – probably a mistake of the author – and this coin never exists.

Anyway, the Mesambrian Lysimachus type stater with ΛΑ in the reverse left field and this let us say “first Mesambrian Lysimachus type drachm” from the same typological series (if not a complete invention), having on the reverse monogram Μ – the same as that present on the reverse of several Alexander type tetradrachms from Mesambria (Karayotov M 2, considered to be among the earliest tetradrachms issues of the city¹⁴) – suggest a much more complicated situation, confirming in the same time Karayotov’s opinions. The coins suggest that somewhere after the Alexander type gold issues present in Anadol hoard¹⁵ the city struck Lysimachus type staters, extremely rare but (strange) using several almost unique dies¹⁶ and in the same time Mesambria struck Alexander type tetradrachms. The possibility of the existence of some Lysimachus type drachms – apparently following the style of the Mesambrian Lysimachus type staters – although still doubtful, is also opened now.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 83, nos. 1-7.

⁷ Emanuel Petac, *art. cit.* in *loc. cit.*, pp. 7-14.

⁸ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 83, nos. 8-11.

⁹ Triton XVI, Sessions 1 and 2, January 8, 2013, lot 254.

¹⁰ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 85, M 13, nos. 78-84.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 85, M 13, no. 82, *non vidi*.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 85, M 13, no. 82.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹⁵ E. M. Pridik, *Anadol'skii klad zolotykh staterov 1895 goda*. Im peratorskoi Akademii, St Petersburg, 1902, p. 12, nos. 123-187.

¹⁶ Emanuel Petac, *art. cit.* in *loc. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

The most reliable *terminus ante quem* of the first Mesambrian silver Alexanders and gold Lysimachus seems to be suggested by the presence of some Byzantion's and Chalcedon countermarks (with *prora* / ITY and K-Demeter and ear of wheat) on two Mesambrian tetradrachms belonging to Karayotov's M 5 group¹⁷. First of them came from Büyükçekmeçe hoard¹⁸ and the second one belongs to the ANS collection¹⁹. Despite the possible doubts generated by the illegible symbol and monogram from the reverse of the tetradrachm from the Büyükçekmeçe hoard²⁰, the attribution of the mint seems to be proved by the identity between its obverse die – Karayotov's O₇²¹ – and an obverse die of a certainly Mesambrian tetradrachm from the ANS collection²². Also, the exclusive use of the O₇ die for Karayotov's M 5 group²³ let us include the Mesambrian tetradrachm from the Büyükçekmeçe hoard into Karayotov's M 5 group²⁴. The chronology of the two countermarks – years 235-220 BC²⁵ – suggests also that Karayotov's chronology (before the Anadol hoard and probably somewhere around 250 BC) for the earliest Alexander type tetradrachms from Mesambria (before M 5) is correct²⁶. The high degree of wear of the most part of these countermarked coins suggests a long period of circulation²⁷ before 235-220 BC – and there are not the first issues. The Attic standard of this countermarked tetradrachms suggests a chronology before the "Phoenician" period from Byzantion²⁸. Another possibility seems to be opened now, because the presence in the Anadol hoard of more than 60 Alexander type Mesambrian staters²⁹ but not of a single Lysimachus type from Mesambria – and also for Istros, Tomis, Tyras³⁰ – suggests that the Anadol hoard, IGCH 866 (today Domanskoe, Ukraine) could be earlier than Seyrig proposed – 228-220 BC³¹ –, somewhere around the middle of the IIIrd century BC or immediately after, around 240 BC, as all the other scholars suggest³². The repeated presence of the Mesambrian tetradrachms with Karayotov's monogram M 5 (Α) or even earlier (Α, M 2 or EP, M 3) in several later hoards, buried around 200 BC or even a little after – Kosseir³³, Mektepinî³⁴, Propontis³⁵ – depends on the specific situation of the minting of the Mesambrian tetradrachms. The most extensive issue seems to be that struck with monogram Α (M 5). Karayotov registered 30 coins with the monogram Α³⁶ and 29 having all the others monograms from 1 to 10³⁷; from these 30 M 5 group tetradrachms, 24 coins were struck with the same obverse die O₇. So, if we find a Mesambrian tetradrachm in a hoard buried around 200 BC, earlier or later, the probability to have one struck with the O 7 die and having the monogram Α is around 50%. The possibility to use the chronology of a hoard for the relative chronology of some issues present in that hoard seems to be inversely proportional to the minted volume of that specific issue.

¹⁷ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 61. 83, no. 27; p. 84, no. 38.

¹⁸ Margaret Thompson, *A countermarked hoard from Büyükçekmeçe*, in *ANSMN*, 6, 1954, p. 17, no. 64; Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 61; 83, no. 27; pl. VI, no. 27.

¹⁹ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 61; 84, no. 38; pl. VII, no. 38.

²⁰ Margaret Thompson, *art. cit.* in *loc. cit.*, p. 17, no. 64.

²¹ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 83, no. 27.

²² Margaret Thompson, *art. cit.* in *loc. cit.*, p. 18.

²³ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 122, table I, nos. 10-26.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 83-84, nos. 18-51; pp. 122-129, table I.

²⁵ H. Seyrig, *Monnaies hellénistiques de Byzance et de Calcédoine*, in *Essays in Greek coinage presented to Stanley Robinson*, edited by C. M. Kraay and G. K. Jenkins, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 187.

²⁶ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

²⁷ H. Seyrig, *art. cit.* in *loc. cit.*, p. 186.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ E. M. Pridik, *op. cit.*, p. 12, nos. 123-187.

³⁰ Emanuel Petac, *Noi date privind tezaurile de monede de aur din perioada elenistică descoperite în Dobrogea: o nouă cronologie a tezaurului de la Dăeni, jud. Tulcea*, in *BSNR*, 98-103, 2009, p. 15.

³¹ H. Seyrig, *Monnaies hellénistiques. XII^e. Statères d'or pseudalexandrins. XI^e. Date et circonstances du trésor d'Anadol*, in *RN⁶*, 11, 1969, p. 44.

³² E. H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks: A Survey of Ancient History and Archaeology on the North Coast of the Euxine from the Danube to the Caucasus*, Cambridge, University Press, 1913, p. 459, 585; A. Baldwin Brett, *Lampsakos: the gold staters, silver and bronze coinages*, in „*American Journal of Numismatics*”, 53, 3, American Numismatic Society, New York, 1924, p. 69; N. Zograph, *The Tooqapso hoard. With some notes on Lysimachean staters struck at Byzantium*, in *NC⁵*, 17, 1925, p. 36, 46, 51; E. T. Newell, *The Coinage of the Western Seleucid Mints. From Seleucus I to Antiochus III*, American Numismatic Society, New York, 1941, p. 42, note 17; C. A. Marinescu, *Making and spending money along the Bosphorus: The Lysimachi coinages minted by Byzantium and Chalcedon and their socio-cultural context*, Columbia University PhD diss., New York, 1996, p. 259.

³³ H. Seyrig, *Trésors du Levant anciens et nouveaux*, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1973, p. 32, no. 6.

³⁴ N. Olcay, H. Seyrig, *Le trésor de Mektepinî en Phrygie*, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1965, p. 7, nos. 9-11.

³⁵ N. M. Waggoner, *The Propontis hoard (IGCH 888)*, in *RN⁶*, 21, 1979, p. 11, nos. 28-29.

³⁶ Ivan Karayotov, *op. cit.*, p. 122, table I, nos. 7-29.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 122, table I, nos. 1-6 and nos. 30-38.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Plate I.

Mesambrian Lysimachus drachm – genuine or forgery?

1. Lysimachus type drachm from Mesambria.
2. Lysimachus type stater from Mesambria.
- 3-4. Alexander type tetradrachms from Mesambria.

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