



Journal
of Danubian
Studies
and Research

Finds of Coins of the Pontic State of the Mithridates Eupator on the Territory of the Northern and North-Eastern Part of Ukraine

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Abstract: The findings of Pontic coins on the territory of the Northern and North-Eastern part of Ukraine are analysed. The purpose of the research is to study and systematize the findings of coins of the Mithridates Eupator Pontic state in the Northern and North-Eastern part of Ukraine. For the first time in historiography, a study of coin finds of the cities of Pontus and Paphlagonia during the time of Mithridates Eupator was carried out on the territory of the Northern and North-Eastern part of Ukraine.

Keywords: Pontic state; Northern and North-Eastern part of Ukraine; coin finds; numismatics; trade; monetary circulation; Olbia; the Northern Black Sea Region

Introduction

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of the state of Mithridates Eupator on the life of Greek cities of the Northern Black Sea region, which became a part of the Kingdom of Pontus at the end of the 2nd - the beginning of the 1st centuries BC. Among the positive aspects of this consolidation, it should be noticed the increasing of trade turnover between cities of the Southern and Northern Black Sea Region. One of the consequences of the trade development was the raise of coins share from the state of Mithridates Eupator in monetary circulation of the cities of the Northern Black Sea Region. In addition, there was a significant deficit of local coins in the cities of the Northern Black Sea Region, especially in the North-Western Black Sea region in the end of the 2nd - at the beginning of the 1st century BC. This is the reason why the copper coins of Pontus and Paphlagonia are gaining importance in the money market of the region. The entry of Greek cities of the Northern Black Sea

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Region into the state of Mithridates Eupator has also affected the coinage of these cities. The issues of this period are characterized by the unification of the coin's typology, which indicates the accountability of the coinage to kingdom administration. Obols and Tetrachalkons become the leading nominal of copper. It should be noted that coinage in the cities of the Northern Black Sea region in the end of the 2nd -at the beginning of the 1st centuries BC was carried out not on behalf of King Mithridates or his ethnarchs, but on behalf of cities (Tyras, Panticapaeum, Phanagoria, Gorgippia, Chersonesus, Olbia). These coins usually had images of deities on the obverse and bore mint mark and monograms on the reverse. The only known coin from the Northern Black Sea region of so-called pre-Getae period on the reverse of which near the image of the deity is also additional image of one letter monogram was coined in Olbia in the time of Mithridates Eupator¹. The practice of applying monograms on the field of coin near the image of deity appeared on the coins of Chersonesus in the second half of the 1st century BC², and it emerges in Panticapaeum only in the beginning of the 1st century BC³.

It was at the time of Mithridates Eupator when the restoration and expansion of trade relations of the Hellenes of the Northern Black Sea region with the inhabitants of neighbouring lands, primarily the Dnieper Forest-Steppe, took place. The analysis of the coins finds in this region evidence the numerous finds of ancient Greek, mainly Olbian coins of 5th-3rd centuries BC and almost complete absence of coin finds of 2nd century BC⁴. However, the coins from the period of Mithridates Eupator spread on the large territory of modern Ukraine from city Kerch to Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. And such finds are quite numerous. It was singled out three points of the coin finds accumulation the times of Mithridates Eupator on the area of Dnieper Right-Bank Forest-Steppe, particularly located near city Kaniv, villages Moshny and Kumeiky⁵.

In the recent years, there have been appeared publications which introduces the numerous finds of antique coins in the different regions of Ukraine, including coins from the Mithridates Eupator times⁶. Although information about the finds of coins of Mithridates Eupator state on the territory of the Northern and North-Eastern parts

¹ Orlyk (2021 b).

² Anokhin (2011). # 832, 835, 836

³ Ibid. #1418

⁴ Orlyk (2021 c).

⁵ Orlyk(2020 a).

⁶ Mielczarek (1989); Mielczarek & Orlyk(2019); Shostopal (2007); Shostopal (2016); Kotsur (2017); Orlyk, Kotsur & Tsyganenko (2019); Nikolaev (2020); Orlyk(2020 a); Orlyk (2021 c).

of Ukraine was not reflected in the works of researchers and is published by us for the first time in this article.

At the time of writing the article, the author is aware of the discovery of three coins of the state of Mithridates Eupator in the territory of the Northern and North-Eastern parts of Ukraine. Let us dwell in more detail on these finds.

The first known to us coin of Mithridates Eupator state was found in the Northern part of Ukraine is Bronze AE coin minted in Paphlagonia, Sinope Time of Mithridates VI Eupator circa 85-65 BC (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

Obv: Bearded and laureate head of Zeus right, obscure round countermark¹ можливо facing gorgoneion in circular incuse.

Rev: ΣΙΝΩΠΙΩΝ beneath eagle standing left on thunderbolt, head right, EA monogram to left, double blow.

Diam. 20 mm.



Figure 2

¹ “Countermarks -i.e. the stamps applied to coins by means of engraved punches... The function of countermarks was to revalidate and provide earlier coins with the status of a legal tender. In practice, countermarking was a quick method of restriking coins and putting them afresh into circulation... In the Hellenistic world official countermarks were placed on both silver and bronze coins”. (Tselekas & Papageorgiadou-Banis (2008).158.)

According to local historians, this coin was found near the village Lubske, Fastiv district, Kyiv region (Dnieper River basin). The presence of a countermark (Figure 2) on the coin indicates that it came on the territory of modern Ukraine not in the first years of minting 85-65 BC, but a little later. In fact, a “countermarked coins bear more than one date of issue. The first one is when the coins were initially made; the other(s) when the countermarks were applied”¹. It is quite possible that this coin could reach the Northern part of the Ukrainian Forest-Steppe before Getae invasion in Olbia, that resulted in the capture and destroy the city by the Getae led by their King Burebista in 48. After all, it was the Olbian merchants who had the most developed ties with the population of the Dnieper Right-Bank Forest-Steppe in 5-1 centuries BC. Unfortunately, exactly when and why this one countermark was applied is uncertain. In antiquity, countermarks were used for marking a new nominal on the coin or as a guarantee of the legality of this monetary unit within a determined area. Therefore, it is also quite possible, that this coin came to the Northern part of the Ukrainian Forest-Steppe in Roman times, however without recorded find with the same countermark in coin hoard with a clearly described of the youngest coin it is not possible to clearly establish the date of applying countermark. Consequently, we cannot determine the date of countermarking and find more accurate data of the entry of this coin into the Northern part of the Ukrainian Forest-Steppe.

Two other coins of Mithridates Eupator state (Figure 3-4) was found on the Left-Bank of Dnieper River in the Northern-South part of Ukraine in spring of 2021. They were discovered near settlement Kozelets in Chernihiv district, Chernihiv region (Dnieper River basin). Both coins were found in almost the same place, the distance between the finds is 1 meter.

¹ Tselekas & Papageorgiadou-Banis (2008).158.



Figure 3.

PAPHLAGONIA. Sinope. Time of Mithradates VI Eupator circa 85-65 BC. Bronze Æ

Obv: Bearded and laureate head of Zeus right.

Rev: ΣΙΝΩΠΙΗ beneath eagle standing left on thunderbolt, wings spread and head to right; to left, EA monogram to left

Diam. –19×20 mm.; Wt – 8.16 g.; Die axis – 1.

Similar coins are in the British Museum collection.¹



Figure 4.

PONTOS. Amisos. Time of Mithradates VI Eupator circa 100-85 B.C. Bronze Æ

Obv. Head of Ares right in crested helmet.

¹ SNG BM Black Sea ##1548-1549.

Rev. Star and crescent, sword in sheath; AMI-ΣΟΥ,

Diam. –19.8×20.2 mm.; Wt – 7.53 g.; Die axis – 1.

Similar coin is in the British Museum collection.¹

The coins of Mithridates Eupator times described by us are three of the four known cases of finds of ancient Greek coins recorded in the territory of the Northern and North-Eastern area of Ukraine (Figure 5).

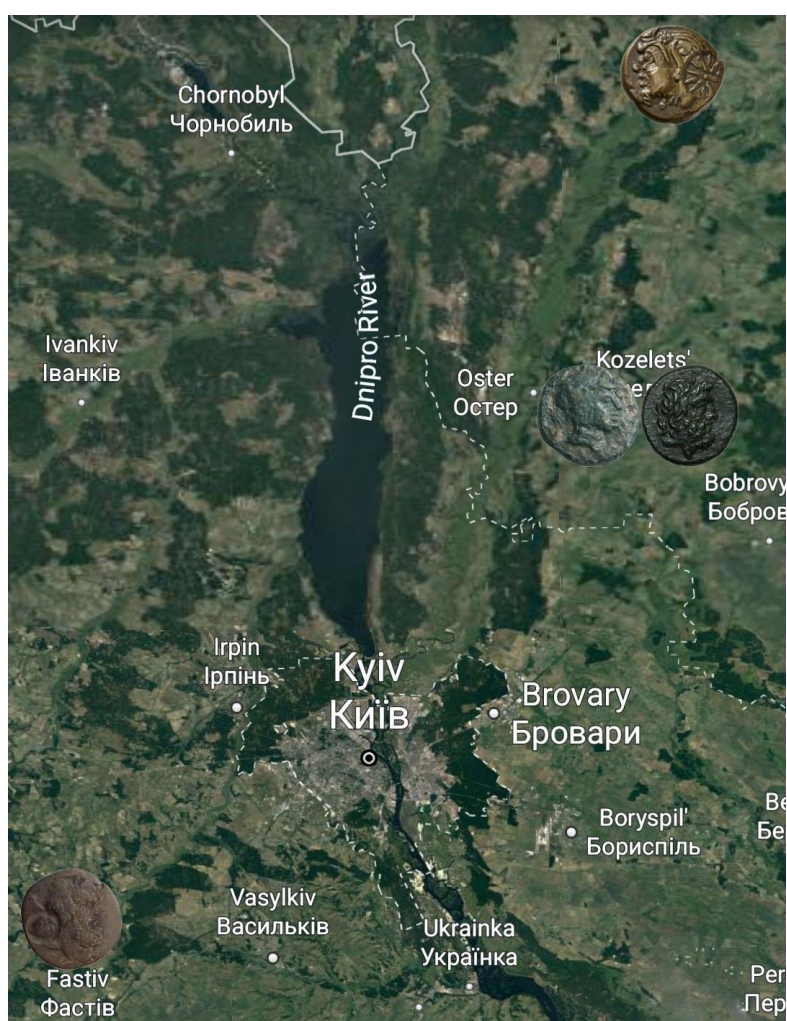


Figure 5.

¹ SNG BM Black Sea #№1 159

There is also known the find of earlier emission, except coins described in the article, it is the Obol from the Bosporan Kingdom, that was “minted in Panticapaeum during rule of Bosporan King Paerisades II, namely between 275- 245 BC”¹. This coin was found during archaeological exploration of the hillfort near village Shestovytsia, Chernihiv district, Chernihiv region. Archaeological material from this settlement is represented by various epochs, including the early Iron Age, particularly the Milograd culture. K. Myzghin, S. Stepanenko and Y. Sytyi, who published this find, points out that, this Bosporan coin is chronologically close to the Milograd culture. Nevertheless, the mentioned researchers rightly pointing out that this find is unlikely to indicate the connections of the Milograd culture representatives with Hellenic world, emphasizing that “imported items do not come directly from the ancient centres to the tribes of Milograd culture, but indirectly, as the result of trade exchanges with their southern neighbours”².

It should be noted that finds of ancient Greek coins, including the copper coin of Panticapaeum minted in 3rd century BC, were recorded more northward from to Kyiv and Chernihiv regions in the forest zone, particularly in Belarus³.

If the coins of Bosporan Kingdom can be linked with the tribes of the Milograd culture, then coins of Pontic state of Mithridates Eupator issued 100-85 BC and 85-65 BC found in the territory of the Northern and North-Eastern parts of Ukraine, most likely can be related to the tribes of Zarubintsy culture. This is evidenced by the finds of archaeological sites of the Zarubintsy culture in Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. Moreover, the coins of the Pontic state of the times of Mithridates Eupator were officially recorded during archaeological excavations on the sites of the Zarubintsy culture. However, it would be rather not possible to talk about direct contacts of the inhabitants of the Northern and North-Eastern parts of Ukraine during the period of the Zarubintsy culture. As in previous periods, ancient Greek coins the most likely came to these regions not directly but through neighbouring tribes that lived further south in the Middle Naddnieper region. This is indicated by a chronology of coin finds of the Mithridates Eupator times, there was only issues of 100-85 BC 85-65 BC. Because it is not known any of coin finds of the early issues of Mithridates Eupator on the territory of the Middle Naddnieper region, only coins minted after 100 BC⁴.

¹ Myzgin, Stepanenko & Sytyi (2018). 16.

² Ibid. 18.

³ Sidarovich (2014).

⁴ Orlyk (2020 a). 98.

Discovering the accumulation of 6 Pontic coins the Mithridates Eupator times in one place in Greek settlement Myrmekion (Kerch Peninsula) has allowed the scientists to suggest these coins have own rate for payments in Bosphorus¹. As we pointed out above, the discovery on the territory of the Dnieper Right-bank Forest-Steppe of three points with an accumulation of coins of the Pontic state of Mithridates Eupator, in our opinion, also allows us to make a similar assumption about the participation of these coins in the commodity-money relations of the local population with the Greeks. And spreading Pontus and Paphlagonia coins to more Northern areas of Dnieper Forest-Steppe may indicate “performing by coins core functions of money in the studied epoch on the territory of the Dnieper Right-bank Forest-Steppe”².

The coin finds of Pontic state of Mithridates Eupator on the area of the Northern and North-Western parts of the Dnieper Forest-Steppe is a small part of the entire corpus of similar finds in this region, information about which the author managed to discover from various sources. Since during the last decades in Ukraine as in the vast majority of countries of the world, instrumental metal detectors have become widespread and coin finds remain neglected by scientists. Today, in almost all countries of the world, even despite sometimes strict legislative warnings, such finds, with rare exceptions, do not enter the museum institutions. The realities of today are forcing numismatists to significantly expand the source base of research, especially in recording numismatic finds³, including usage materials from hoard hunter forums and private communication with enthusiasts of metal detecting⁴.

The problem raised by us is complex and multifaceted, it requires further research, first, the discovery of information about the finds of coins of the Pontic state of Mithridates Eupator throughout the entire territory of the Dnieper Forest- Steppe. Our article does not pretend to be a definitive solution to the complex problem of the existence of commodity-money relations between the inhabitants of the Ukrainian Forest Steppe and the Greek cities of the North-Western Black Sea Coast in the 1st century BC, but it is intended to complement existing and introduce into scientific circulation the new data on these complex, often debatable scientific issues.

¹ Maksimova, M.I. (1956). 228.

² Orlyk (2020 b).11.

³ Orlyk & Orlyk (2019).

⁴ Kotsur (2017).

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