

**AGAIN ABOUT MITHRIDATES VI EUPATOR AND THE WESTERN
COAST OF THE BLACK SEA. ABOUT ISTRIAN LYSIMACHUS TYPE
STATERS WITH MONOGRAMS \mathcal{HP} AND \mathcal{ME}**

*Emanuel Petac**

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Cuvinte cheie: *stater, Istros, Diogenes, Meniskos, Mithridates VI, Byzantion.*

Abstract: *The author publishes two Istrian, late Lysimachus type, staters with the monograms \mathcal{HP} and \mathcal{ME} on the reverse, both of them were struck using the same obverse die and even the reverse one, except for the monogram, probably added later. Both coins were sold in public auctions held by the same house, at a distance of almost 20 years between them. This is significant news as until now all the late Lysimachus type staters from Istros had on only the monogram ΔI on the reverse, struck with the same pair of dies. The situation becomes much more interesting relating these two coins with the information from the Istros decree honoring Diogenes, son of Diogenes (ISM I 45) from Amastris or Amphisos, commander in chief of the Mithridatic garrison from Istros and also strategist of the city. The decree reveals how Diogenes paid to a certain creditor from Byzantium a debt of 100 staters owed by the Istros city, helping in this way to the release of a deputation led by a certain Meniskos send by Istros to Mithridates VI never arriving there and kept long time in Byzantium (92-91 BC). We notice the existence of few rare series of Istros staters from the Mithridatic period struck to the end of the 90's from the 1st c. B.C., but also that Meniskos must have been a notorious person before he was send to Mithridates VI and Diogenes was not only the commander of the Mithridatic garrison but also the strategist of Istros. So, patting all the necessary caution, we wonder if they are not the owners of the monograms (\mathcal{ME} and ΔI) from the reverse of Istros staters. Anyway, it seems that we have a prove of a restraint series of Istros staters struck at the end of the 90's from the 1st c. B.C. related to the beginning of the Mithridatic authority on the Western side of the Black Sea.*

Rezumat: *Autorul publică doi stateri histrieni, de tip Lysimach, având pe revers monogramele \mathcal{HP} respectiv \mathcal{ME} , cele două piese fiind realizate cu aceeași pereche de ștanțe. Ambele provin din licitații ale aceleiași case, apariția lor pe piață fiind separată de două decenii. Noutatea este relevantă, singurele piese de epocă mithridatică de la Istros având monograma ΔI și fiind realizate toate cu o singură pereche de ștanțe, acestea fiind atribuite perioadei primului război mithridatic. Situația devine și mai interesantă dacă asociem cele două piese cu informațiile date de decretul histrian ISM I 45, care relatează cum un anume Diogenes, fiul lui Diogenes, din Amastris sau Amphisos, comandant al garnizoanei mithridatice de la Istros, dar și*

* Numismatics Cabinet of the Romanian Academy Library.

strateg al cetății, plătește unui creditor din Byzantion datoria de 100 stateri pe care cetatea istrieană o asumase și nu o mai putea returna, ceea ce condusese la arestarea la Byzantion a unei solii histriene către Mithridates VI, în fruntea acesteia aflându-se un anume Meniskos, data propusă pentru acest decret fiind 92-91 a.Chr. Constatăm astfel existența unor serii restrânse de stateri probabil emise la finalul anilor 90 din sec. I a.Chr. la Istros, ușor anterioare seriilor emise în vremea primului război mithridatic. Ținând seama de faptul că Meniskos, pentru a conduce o solie a cetății la cel ce avea să fie garantul securității acesteia, Mithridates VI, trebuie să fi fost un personaj cu o anumite notorietate publică, și constatând că Diogenes, comandant al garnizoanei mithridatice, este totodată și strateg al cetății Istros, păstrând toate rezervele necesare legate de posibilitatea unei coincidențe, se ridică întrebarea dacă siglele de pe staterii istrieni din această perioadă (ME respectiv AI) nu ar putea aparține lui Meniskos respectiv Diogenes, fiul lui Diogenes. Oricum ar fi, avem dovada certă a existenței unor serii restrânse de stateri datate cam în aceeași perioadă cu decretul histrian onorând pe Diogenes, și care se leagă de începuturile autorității mithridatice pe coasta vestică a Mării Negre, în ultima parte a anilor 90 din sec. I a.Chr.

Observing again the growing importance of the on-line resources, we publish now two Istros late Lysimachus type stateri coming from the commerce but having a significant importance for the understanding of the very first moments of the rise of Mithridatic hegemony on the Western border of the Black Sea.

ISTROS

Lysimachus type stateri

- Obv. Diademed head of the deified Alexander the Great, to right, wearing horn of Ammon.
- Rv. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (right) ΛΥΣΙΜΑΧΟΥ (left). Athena seated left on throne, left elbow resting on shield, spear on the right shoulder, holding Nike in extended right hand; ΗΡ above knee, in the inner left field; ΙΣ on throne; trident in exergue.
1. Stater; 8,38 g; 18 mm. Pl. I, 1 (1,5×).
Pick, AMNG, - .
Callataj 1997, - .
Classical Numismatic Group, Numismatica Ars Classica, Freeman and Sear, Triton III, 30 November 1999, no. 471, 88-86 BC.
- Obv. Diademed head of the deified Alexander the Great, to right, wearing horn of Ammon.
- Rv. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (right) ΛΥΣΙΜΑΧΟΥ (left). Athena seated left on throne, left elbow resting on shield, spear on the right shoulder, holding Nike in extended right hand; ΜΕ above knee, in the inner left field; ΙΣ on throne; trident in exergue.

2. Stater 12 h; 8,42 g; 18 mm. Pl. I, 2.
 Pick, AMNG, - .
 Callataÿ 1997, - .
 Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 418, 11 April 2018,
 no. 21.

The two coins were sold in two public sales of the same auction house (Classical Numismatic Group) separated by almost 20 years. First of them was sold in September 15th, 1999 and it was considered then as an issue from the years 88-86 BC apparently belonging to „an extraordinary trove of Greek gold staters from the time of the First Mithridatic War”¹, „a large group of Lysimachus style gold staters (struck at the mints of Kallatis, Tomis and Istros) have come on the market”². The second one was sold in April 11th, 2018 considered to belong to the period of the 2nd century BC. Nobody noticed the strong connection between the two samples, both of them unique and struck with the same obverse die. Moreover, the reverse die seems to be the same except the monogram. Apparently, the same reverse die was reused by re-engraving another monogram (in this case, ME instead HP). It was not the single situation like this. In the second half of the 3rd c. B.C. We know from Istros several Lysimachus type staters struck with the same pair of dies having or not monogram MY on reverse³. In fact, the two reverse dies are basically speaking one and the same; the difference was made by an intervention of the engraver on this particular reverse die obliterating the monogram without engraving (in this case) a new one (pl. I, 3-4; 1,5×). This “new” reverse die without monogram was used (by mistake or not) to struck at least one stater.

The monograms on the reverse (HP , ME) are for the first time saw on Istros staters. Until now, all known late Lysimachus type staters from Istros were struck using a single pair of dies, having on the reverse monogram ΔI^4 (pl. I, 5; 1,5×). We have no historical connection for the monogram HP , so we will insist on the other one. Although new in the numismatic repertory of Istros, the monogram on the reverse of the second stater (ME) suggests a possible connection with a significant historical context. We have from Istros three fragments of the same decree (ISM I 45), one of them found long time ago and two others discovered during the archaeological excavations from 1990 and 1995 in the so-called “Domus” area (late Roman residential quarter from the South-

¹ Classical Numismatic Group, Numismatica Ars Classica, Freeman and Sear, Triton III, 30 November 1999, on the front cover.

² Berk, MacDonald 1999.

³ Petac 2010, p. 570-571, O2/R3 (Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung, Auction 122, 10 March 2003, no. 1182 – pl. I, 3 (1,5×); La Galerie Numismatique Bogdan Stambuliu, Vente aux enchères IV, Geneva, 26-28 November 2004, no. 83; Classical Numismatic Group, Triton VIII, 11 January 2005, no. 263; Ira and Larry Goldberg, Auction 28, 20 February 2005, no. 637 and Auction 36, 28 May 2006, no. 3496, same coin; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 339, 19 November 2014, no. 19) and O2/R4 (Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung, Auction 138, 7 March 2005, no. 1181 – pl. I, 4 (1,5×) – and Auction 151, 9 October 2006, no. 127, same coin), without monogram.

⁴ Callataÿ 1997, p. 139, D1-R1; Classical Numismatic Group, Mail Bid Sale 63, 21 May 2003, no. 385 – pl. I, 5 (1,5×).

Eastern part of the city)⁵. It is an honorary decree of the city dedicated to a certain Diogenes, son of Diogenes, from Amastris or Amphisos, by virtue of his merits on the release of some prisoners. It seems that he was sent by Mithridates VI as a commander of the Pontic kingdom garrison from Istros, becoming also strategist of the city – usually this magistracy being reserved for their own citizens. In this context, we find that the city of Istros had borrowed money, in an unspecified moment, from a certain Menios from Byzantion, never returning the sum; so, after the death of the lender, the claim was inherited by his son, Menon. When the city of Istros send an embassy led by a certain Meniskos to the king of Pontus (Mithridates VI), Meniskos and all the others companions were arrested and imprisoned for a long time at Byzantion. In this context, the strategist Diogenes went to Byzantion, paying the 100 stater debt of the city (partially from his own revenues) and thus obtaining the release of the prisoners. The editor of the decree suppose (and we are absolutely agree) that we can hardly imagine that Byzantion could have dared to arrests certain officials of a city allied with Mithridates VI after 89 BC – meaning after the crossing of the king of Pontus army to Greece⁶. So, the earliest date of this decree seems to be around 90-89 BC – if not few years before. We can easily suppose that the embassy send by Istros to the most important leader of the moment (Mithridates VI) could only be led by one of the most significant person of the city, having probably an impressive public career. The presence of the monogram $\overline{\text{ME}}$ on the reverse of one of our staters could only suggest that the monneyer could be the same person with Meniskos, leading the embassy to Mithridates VI and arrest to Byzantion. He could manage the monetary activity to Istros somewhere in the 90's from the 1st century BC. The relative chronology of the coin supports this idea. As I said, we know from the time of the First Mithridatic War (89-86 BC) a single series of staters from Istros (Pick, AMNG 482), all of these samples struck using a single pair of dies⁷, having on the reverse the monogram ΔI , the metrological mode around 8,20-8,24 g, the medium weight ± 8.18 g⁸ and a very specific trident in exergue. On-line resources of the last 20 years shows few different samples having the same medium weight and the same monogram ΔI on the reverse⁹ (pl. I, 6; 1,5 \times), completely different from the usual pair D1-R1 and having a different style trident in exergue (but the same as on the earlier issues with $\overline{\text{HP}}$ or $\overline{\text{ME}}$). It looks that this rare issue with ΔI is a little earlier than the classical Pick, AMNG 482, making the transition from the even earlier issues with monograms $\overline{\text{HP}}$ or $\overline{\text{ME}}$ on the reverse to those with ΔI struck with D1-R1 dies. If we accept that the usual and common issue Pick, AMNG 482 must be placed during the First Mithridatic War (89-86 BC), this one becomes *terminus ante quem* for the

⁵ Avram, Bounegru 1997, p. 157.

⁶ Avram, Bounegru 1997, p. 163.

⁷ Callataý 1997, p. 139, D1-R1

⁸ Callataý 1997, p. 143.

⁹ Classical Numismatic Group, Numismatica Ars Classica, Freeman and Sear, Triton III, 30 November 1999, no. 469; Classical Numismatic Group, Numismatica Ars Classica, Freeman and Sear, Triton IV, 5 December 2000, no. 221; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 72, 3 September 2003, no. 20 – pl. I, 6 (1,5 \times); Heritage World Coin Auctions, Long Beach Signature Sale 3785 June 2005, no. 12026; UBS Gold and Numismatics, Auction 63, 6 September 2005, no. 125; UBS Gold and Numismatics, Auction 63, 6 September 2005, no. 157; UBS Gold and Numismatics, Auction 67, 5 September 2006, no. 5477.

transitional and rare issue having also monogram ΔI on reverse (having no die-linkage with Pick, AMNG 482 and a style also completely different but having more common elements with the earlier series with \mathcal{HP} or \mathcal{ME} , meaning that it is closer to the latter than to Pick, AMNG 482). Consequently, this transitional issue could be placed around 91-89 BC, so that even earlier issues with monograms \mathcal{HP} or \mathcal{ME} could be placed in the second half of the 90's from the 1st c. BC. This is only a veridical hypothesis not excluding the possibility of an earlier chronology, but no more than the last part of the 2nd c. BC. We can suppose therefore that a medium weight around 8.40 g for the West Pontic staters could be in use until the second half, if not the last part, of the 2nd century BC or even a little later and not only to 150 BC¹⁰.

Keeping in mind the situation concerning the reverse dies and the hypothesis referring to the owner of the monogram \mathcal{ME} , we can suggest that the first struck was the stater having monogram \mathcal{HP} on reverse, followed by that having monogram \mathcal{ME} and finally by the two series with ΔI.

It seems that we have for the first time two rare issues from Istros belonging to the last part of the 90's from the 1st century BC, speaking about the discontinuous aspect and precarity of the output of gold issues of the city – having no resources to pay its debt of 100 staters to Menios or later to his son Menon from Byzantion. So, the abundance of gold only few years later, during the period of the First Mithridatic War, become even more significant¹¹.

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¹⁰ Callataÿ 1997, p. 150.

¹¹ Poenaru Bordea 1974, p. 124; Callataÿ 1997, p. 150.

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Planșa I. Stateri histrieni de tip Lysimach. 1-2: din ultima parte a sec. I a.Chr. bătuți cu aceeași pereche de ștanțe cu excepția monogramei de pe revers (ștanța reversului regravată cu o monogramă nouă); 3-4: din a doua parte a sec. III a.Chr. bătuți cu aceeași pereche de ștanțe, monograma de pe revers eliminată în vederea regravării; 5: din timpul Primului Război Mithridatic, cu monograma ΔI; 6: emisiune imediat anterioară marilor serii din timpul Primului Război Mithridatic, cu aceeași monogramă ΔI.



Plate I. Lysimachus type staters from Istros. 1-2: from the 90's of the 1st century B.C. struck with the same pair of dies except reverse monogram (reverse die re-engraved); 3-4: from the second part of the 3rd century B.C. struck with the same pair of dies, reverse monogram obliterated; 5: from the time of the First Mithradatic War, with monogram ΔI; 6: probably just before the large series from the First Mithradatic War, with the same monogram ΔI.