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NUMISMATICS

AGAIN ABOUT THE COINS OF MOSKON – AN ENIGMATIC RULER FROM DOBRUDJA IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Abstract: In the lands of today's Northern Dobrudja in Romania – south of the Danube River around the Delta, several single silver coins have been found, as well as three coins found as included in a mixed coin hoard – all of the coins with the title *basileus* and the name Moskon on the reverse. After all such finds, discussions about the dating of these coins, as well as about the ethnic identification of this ruler, have not subsided. Moskon has been identified as the ruler of the Getae from the lands of Dobrudja, but his identification is still disputed. The date of these coins has so far varied widely from ca. the middle of the 4th century BC until the end of the 2nd century BC/beginning of the 1st century BC.

Here are presented completely new observations on the silver coins of the ruler Moskon. The two known denominations of this ruler's coins have been previously defined as follows – the larger denomination – didrachm, the smaller denomination – hemidrachm. It was found that the denomination presented as a hemidrachm was incorrect, as it was a drachm in weight. It has been established that there is a third denomination of coins of this ruler, previously unknown, which is represented here as a tetrobol, minted by different pair of dies. Moskon was probably a ruler of the Bastarnae around the middle of the 2nd century BC.

Keywords: *silver coins, Moskon, ruler, Getae, Dobrudja, Bastarnae.*

In the lands of present-day Northern Dobrudja in Romania, in various years of the 20th and 21st centuries, several single silver coins were found, as well as a mixed coin hoard that also contained such coins – all with the title “*basileus*” and with the name Moskon – of two different denominations. The finds of silver coins bearing the name Moskon have provoked a number of discussions in the scholarly literature both regarding their dating and the ethnic identification of this ruler.

Most authors who have written on this topic have identified Moskon as a Getic ruler from the lands of Dobrudja, but his identification is still controversial and is the subject of different opinions. Publications on this topic are mainly in Romanian historiography¹. Recently, however, in two

¹ PREDĂ 1964; OCHEȘEANU 1970; PREDĂ 1973, 180-182; OBERLÄNDER-TÂRNOVEANU 1980, 147-148; TALMAȚCHI 2008, 477-478; CUSTUREA/TALMAȚCHI 2011, 402; MIHĂILESCU-BIRLIBA 2018, 24-29, with fig. 9/1-3.

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other publications², a new attempt has been made to seek solutions to the two main questions – the dating of these coin issues and the ethnic identification of Moskon. One of these publications presents a map with the locations of finds, as well as information about the storage location of various coins of the ruler Moskon³, but for the sake of clarity, a map of the so far known finds of such coins is also presented here (1).



Fig. 1. Map of finds of Moskon's coins: 1: Mihai Viteazu (region of Constanta); 2: Revarsarea – Isaccea (region of Tulcea); 3: Somova (region of Tulcea) – a mixed coin hoard; 4: Tulcea; 5: Oltenitsa (region of Calarash) (image: the basis of the map from: <https://maps-for-free.com/>; the additional elements – by the author of the article).

The dating of these coins has so far varied widely from ca. mid-4th century BC to the late 2nd century BC/early 1st century BC, and a detailed review of the different opinions has already been made⁴. After a general review of all the opinions in the two new publications cited here, one of the dating assumptions was proposed again – that probably the coins of Moskon should be dated generally to the second half of the 2nd century BC and at the latest to the beginning of the 1st century BC, and Moskon was again categorically presented as the ruler of the Getae⁵.

I also perceive this dating as the most likely in general terms, but my observations on the two denominations of coins with the name Moskon, known so far, as well as with regard to the ethnic identification of this ruler, have led me to other, more different conclusions. Here, completely new observations about the silver coins of this ruler, discovered primarily in present-day Northern Dobrudja in Romania, will be presented. The coins of this ruler will be presented

in a comparative context with some other numismatic materials and an attempt will be made for his more accurate ethnic identification.

Ever since the discovery of the first specimens of such coins and their publication, the etymology of the name in a Greek or Thracian context has been sought. So far, the proximity of the name Moskon to the Greek names Moschos or Moschion has been pointed out⁶, as well as in some unpublished dissertations, a connection has been sought with the definitely Thracian name of the ruler Mostis. Therefore, most authors who have written on this topic have concluded that Moskon is most likely a Thracian name and that is why he was a Getic ruler in the lands of present-day Dobrudja in an unspecified period of Hellenism⁷.

The two denominations of silver coins of the ruler Moskon known so far have been determined in the following way: the larger denomination – on the obverse with a portrait image of the ruler with a diadem, and on the reverse with an image of a horseman with a beard, moving to the left, is rightly determined as a didrachm (2), because the weight of this denomination of silver coins generally varies between 7.28 g and 8.01 g, and they have a diameter of about 26 mm⁸. Until recently, other authors who have written on this topic have always defined the smaller denomination of silver coins of Moskon as hemidrachms. According to my new observations, however, these coins are of a different denomination. It should be noted that some of this ruler's coins of the second denomination have missing pieces of metal or have been burned. The weight of several measured specimens of the second denomination known so far ranges from ca. 2.35 g to 3.28 g, with these coins having a diameter of ca. 19 mm (3)⁹.

The new coin of the ruler Moskon of small denomination that recently appeared at auction has also been identified as a hemidrachm (there triobol)¹⁰, with a diameter of 17 mm, which in its current state weighs 1.78 g, but it is worn,



Fig. 2. Silver didrachm of Moskon; d. 26 mm (image: by Gabriel Talmatchi – Museum of National History and Archaeology – Constanta; inv. No. 6576).

⁶ PREDĂ 1964, 403; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 31 with footnote 54.

⁷ PREDĂ 1964, 402; OCHEȘEANU 1970, 126; PREDĂ 1973, 181-182; OBERLÄNDER-TÂRNOVEANU 1980, 147-148; TALMAȚCHI 2008, 477-478; DIMITROVA 2019-2020; DIMITROVA 2021.

⁸ PREDĂ 1964, 402; OCHEȘEANU 1970, 126; PREDĂ 1973, 181; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 25.

⁹ OCHEȘEANU 1970, 126; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 25; TALMAȚCHI 2008, 477-478; DIMITROVA 2021, 82.

¹⁰ Roma Numismatics Ltd, Auction XXVII, 22 March 2023, lot 209.

² DIMITROVA 2019-2020; DIMITROVA 2021.

³ DIMITROVA 2019-2020, 115 with footnotes 1-4; 116, fig. 1.

⁴ DIMITROVA 2021, 83-84 with ref.

⁵ DIMITROVA 2021, 86 with ref.



Fig. 3. Silver drachm of Moskon; d. 19 mm (image: by Gabriel Talmatchi – Museum of National History and Archaeology – Constanta; inv. No. 6575).

has a missing piece of the flan, and has clearly been burned (4). If we divide the theoretically ideal weight of didrachms – 8 grams, by 12, we will get an obol weighing 0.65 g. The heaviest coin of the smaller second denomination known so far has an established exact weight of 3.28 g¹¹, which would mean it is probably a pentobol, but it also has a missing piece of metal. The style of the coin issues presented here has been described as “barbaric” in all of the publications already cited, and the weight of the various denominations of such coins is usually always reduced. According to my new observations and in view of the facts presented, we can now believe with greater grounds that the coins of the smaller denomination known so far are not actually hemidrachms, but are drachms of slightly reduced weight. Therefore, these smaller silver coins of the ruler Moskon should be defined as half the denomination of the largest denomination – the didrachms.

However, some fluctuations in the weights of some silver coins, certainly identified as drachms, are observed even in one of the best-known Greek mints – that of Rhodes. There, at a certain period, small silver coins were minted according to a new reduced local Rhodian standard of ca. 3 g – the so-called *plinthophoroi* drachms, minted in the wide time range between the Peace of Apamea and the First Mithridatic War – from ca. 188 BC to ca. 84 BC – according to the research of G. Jenkins¹².

In fact, previous assumptions or opinions about Moskon’s Thracian ethnic origin are also refuted by the fact that no other ruler of the Getae is known to have allowed



Fig. 4. Silver tetrobol of Moskon; d. 17 mm (image: Roma Numismatics Ltd, Auction XXVII, 22 March 2023, lot 209).

¹¹ TALMAȚCHI 2008, 478.

¹² JENKINS 1989.

himself to mint his own coins. Those long ago identified by D. Tacchella as Getic rulers with different names, known from bronze coins from Dobrudja¹³, have now been identified with sufficient certainty as Scythian rulers¹⁴. There is even a suggestion that Moskon could also be of Scythian origin, which was made by Constantin Preda¹⁵, and recently the hypothesis of a possible Scythian origin of this ruler was again presented as another possibility in the search for his ethnic identification¹⁶. In fact, only Sariakes of the six known Scythian rulers of the Scythian Kingdom in Dobrudja has silver coins with an average weight of ca. 3.71 g, which were previously defined as pentobols on the Attic standard¹⁷, but have recently been defined as drachms on the Chian-Rhodian weight standard¹⁸.

A key role in the dating and especially in establishing the origin of Moskon probably has the mixed coin hoard, found in 2006 near the village of Somova not far from the town of Tulcea on the Danube River in Romania in present-day Northern Dobrudja, which is presented as a list of coins and dated between the middle and the end of the 2nd century BC, and probably to the beginning of the 1st century BC¹⁹. In this hoard, along with coins of the “Machin” type, there are also coins of the types defined by C. Preda as “Vartezhu-Bucureshti” and “Inoteshti-Rakoasa”, as well as three different coins of Moskon – two didrachms and one of the smaller denomination, previously defined as a hemidrachm²⁰. Regardless of the new dating of the coins proposed in the above-cited publication about the coin hoard from Somova – between the middle and the end of the 2nd century BC, or at the latest by the beginning of the 1st century BC²¹, in another even more recent publication, after the opinion given for an earlier dating presented in the publications of C. Preda from 1964 and 1973, other assumptions have again been made for the dating of these coins based on their iconographic characteristics and the peculiarities of their minting. It has been suggested that the coins of Moskon were probably minted as early as the second half of the 3rd century BC²².

Following the already well-presented opinion that the coins of Moskon probably preceded the coins of the “Machin” type in time²³, another author also shares the assumption that if the “Machin” type didrachm coins circulated in the same region around the Danube Delta, then the coins of Moskon probably also have some connection with the “Machin/Niculitsel-Parchesh” type coins²⁴. Furthermore, some connection of the coins of this enigmatic ruler with the Celts has been suggested by the presence of several

¹³ TACCHELLA 1903.

¹⁴ See CANARACHE 1950; YOUROUKOVA 1992, 159-165 with ref.; MANOV 2006; DRAGANOV 2015.

¹⁵ PEDA 1964, 406-407, 409.

¹⁶ TALMAȚCHI 2008, 479; see also DIMITROVA 2021, 86 with ref.

¹⁷ CANARACHE 1950, 251.

¹⁸ LAZARENKO 2001, 1028; DRAGANOV 2015, 113.

¹⁹ CUSTUREA/TALMAȚCHI 2011, 402.

²⁰ TALMAȚCHI 2008, 476-479; CUSTUREA/TALMAȚCHI 2011, 402.

²¹ TALMAȚCHI 2008, 476-479.

²² MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 29; 31.

²³ OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1980, 147-148; 149, note 11; TALMAȚCHI 2008, 482; 509.

²⁴ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 30-32.

preserved Celtic toponyms around the Danube Delta – such as Noviodunum, Aegyssus, Arrubium, Aliobrix – in the same area where Moskon's coins were found²⁵. In my opinion, however, these toponyms date back to the establishment of the Galatian state in Thrace in 279 BC. Moskon's coins can be compared with any other type imitating the tetradrachms of Philip II – with a horseman on the reverse, and in addition to the “Machin” type, they can also be compared with many other similar types of imitative coins, also found in the lands of present-day Romania, published in detail in the great work of C. Preda²⁶.

In the opinion of the authoritative Romanian numismatist C. Preda, most of the silver coin imitation types minted north of the Danube should be called “Geto-Dacian”, but these coins, according to his observations, have significant Celtic iconographic elements or symbols, and he himself sometimes comments on terms from older literature such as Celtic-Dacian coins or Celtic coins minted in Dacia²⁷. Recently, in the newer literature, there have been other opinions regarding the identification of certain types of imitative silver coins minted north of the Danube²⁸. However, in Western literature, all imitative coins of the type of tetradrachms of Philip II are identified as coins of Celtic tribes minted along the Eastern Danube²⁹.

It is worth noting a silver coin illustrated by the Bulgarian numismatist Nikola Mushmov in a 1927 publication. According to his information, it is kept in the Museum in Berlin, most likely in the Numismatic Cabinet of the Berlin State Museums. In this case, however, it is presented by him as a bronze coin of the Thracian ruler Mostis, but it is actually a silver coin of Moskon³⁰. Later, the error in the presentation of this coin was repeated by another author, although it was noted that it was of a barbaric style³¹.

The information from the studies in recent years, as well as the new observations made on the silver coins of this ruler, presented here, point more in favour of the assumption that the name Moskon is more likely Celtic, rather than Thracian/Getic. It could be assumed that he was the ruler of the Bastarnae in the period between the second half and the end of the 2nd century BC. The anthroponym Moskon is reminiscent of the Bastarnian noble Cotton (given in Latin as Cotto), mentioned by the ancient writer Livy, who was an intermediary in communication between one of the Macedonian aristocrats named Antigonus, an envoy of the Macedonian king Philip V, and the Bastarnae³². The latter were hired by the Macedonian ruler in his campaign against the Dardanians and the Romans. In addition, Livy mentions that the Bastarnae spoke the same language as the Scordisci, and in the following chapters of his work, where it is already told that the new ruler of Macedonia – Perseus,

also requested that the Bastarnae be brought to his aid, led by their leader named Clondicus, the Bastarnae are called Gauls several times³³, which undoubtedly proves the Celtic origin of the Bastarnae³⁴. However, describing the same events, Appian³⁵ mistakenly refers to the Bastarnae as Getae and their leader as Cloelius³⁶.

In conclusion – in terms of style, Moskon's coins can rather be defined as Celtic, and the name Moskon is most likely of Celtic origin. The ruler named Moskon was most likely the ruler of the Bastarnae, whose settlements were north of the Danube Delta. Some authors, even with the discovery of the first coins of Moskon, due to the presence on the reverse of the letters read as AV, have assumed that his coins were probably minted in Histria³⁷. However, later this possibility of these coins being minted in the mint of Histria or some other city on the western shore of the Black Sea was rejected by another author, based on the more schematic style of these coins, and the possibility was admitted that these coins were minted in a workshop that was not in some Hellenic *polis* on the western shores of the Black Sea, but elsewhere in the lands of today's Northern Dobrudja³⁸, with the dies for these coins being made more likely by two local engravers, rather than by a Greek one³⁹. Later, probably influenced by the new observations and conclusions of Radu Ocheșeanu, in his voluminous work from 1973, C. Preda changed his opinion, also making the assumption that it is more likely that these coins were not minted in Histria, but rather in some local workshop in the lands of present-day Northern Dobrudja⁴⁰. In addition, the assumption has also been made that the didrachms and the coins of the smaller denomination, previously defined as hemidrachms, were probably not minted at the same time, with those of the smaller denomination being minted later⁴¹.

Again, based on what has been said here, as well as by the other authors mentioned, it can be assumed that the ruler Moskon probably seized at some point some parts of the lands of present-day Dobrudja – perhaps in the period between 150 and 120 BC, and he also adopted the title of “*basileus*”.

After the new observations presented here, the safe conclusion can now be made that Moskon's coins were minted not in two, but in three different denominations – didrachms (2), reduced drachms (3) and tetrobols (4). If we judge only from the seemingly time-limited issues of Moskon's silver coins, which, as it turned out, were minted not in two, but in three different denominations, with three different pairs of coin dies being used for the respective issues, it can be assumed that his rule as ruler of the Bastarnae was short-lived, probably more likely in the years around 150 – 140 BC. Such a dating would correspond better with the recently proposed dates of the inscriptions for the Getic rulers Zalmodegikos and Zoltes, generally between

²⁵ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 31.

²⁶ See PREDA 1973 passim.

²⁷ See PREDA 1973, 379 with ref.; 384 with ref.; 388-392 with ref.; 416 with ref.; 418 with ref.

²⁸ See BABEȘ 2010; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1990, 70-74; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018, 31.

²⁹ See KOSTIAL 2003 with references in the older literature.

³⁰ MUSHMOV 1927, 238, No. 173; Plate VII, No. 173.

³¹ KOYCHEV 2003, 47, No. 83.

³² Liv. 40. 57. 3; 40. 58. 1.

³³ Liv. 44. 26-27.

³⁴ PETKOV 2012, 69 with ref.

³⁵ App. Mac. 18. 2.

³⁶ PETKOV 2012, 79 with note 244.

³⁷ PREDA 1964, 406.

³⁸ OCHEȘEANU 1970, 126 with footnote 9.

³⁹ OCHEȘEANU 1970, 126 with footnote 9; 128-129.

⁴⁰ PREDA 1973, 182.

⁴¹ OCHEȘEANU 1970, 128 with footnote 18.

160/150 and 120/110 BC⁴², as the other persons mentioned in the second inscription – that for Zoltes – Rhemaxos and his son named Frad(mon?), have recently been identified as rulers of the Bastarnae⁴³. Nothing more can be said for now, because the ruler named Moskon is not mentioned by any ancient author and he apparently escaped the attention of Livy in his history of the Balkans for the 2nd century BC.

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⁴² MANOV 2003, 193 with ref.

⁴³ LAZARENKO 2015, 201-203 with ref.