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ACHAEMENID THRACE IN THE COINAGE OF THE CIMMERIAN BOSPORUS[1]

Abstract. – The article examines the influence of the Achaemenid pictorial tradition on the coin typology of the Cimmerian Bosporus. Special attention is paid to the appearance of the image of the lion-headed horned griffin on Panticapaeum gold staters of the 4th century BC. Becouse it belongs to the sphere of court art of the Persian empire, the authors of the article propose the concept according to which this image was used on the Bosporus by Leucon I (389—349 BC) after the annexation of Syndica and his acceptance of the royal title in relation to the subordinate barbarian tribes about 379/378 BC. The original composition, where the griffin is represented on a spike with an arrow in his mouth, undoubtedly developed by Panticapaeum monetaries. Apparently the Bosporan Kingdom later acted as a translator of this image to the neighboring barbarian environment, where it proved to be in demand among the local elite. In addition, certainly, the image of the Panticapaeum lion-headed horned griffin was reproduced on one of the types of silver hemiobols of Cilicia in the third quarter of the 4th century BC.

Key words. – Achaemenids, Cimmerian Bosporus, Syndica, lion-headed horned griffin, Panticapaeum gold staters, antique coins.

Introduction

At the recent exhibition "The Achaemenid Trace in the Northern Black Sea Region" at the State Museum of Oriental Art (Moscow, April 2 – June 2, 2024), numismatic materials were unfairly overlooked, although the influence of the greatest monarchy in Asia on the development of the coin typology of the ancient states in the Northern Black Sea region is

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hardly possible to deny. This article is an attempt to partially remedy this negligence, at least for the coinage of the Bosporan Kingdom.

Coins with a profile image of a lion's head

First of all, we should pay attention to the appearance of coins with a profile image of a lion's head with a full mane. In the 6th–4th centuries BC the lion's mane looks like it's cut off and it is the dominant interpretation in the entire *oecumene* for this time (Fig. 1, *1-6*). Such interpretation was followed by Panticapaeum's closest neighbor, Nymphaeum, which placed the lion's head on the reverse of its second coin series (Fig. 1, *7*), which dates around 405-403 BC.[2] It is worth noting that the full uncut lion's mane is primarily found on coins from Lycia and the unidentified mints of Asia Minor in the 5th–4th centuries BC (Fig. 1, *8-10*). The unidentified Asia Minor's obolus with both versions of the lion's head, is particularly intriguing (see Fig. 1, *11*). It is likely that this is a case of free copying of official Achaemenid art in the coin types.

If we talk about the Panticapaeum minting, the lion's head with a "full" mane, which interpreted in a rather decorative manner as a series of pointed strands, first appears on silver tetartemorions (Fig. 1, *12*) during the co-regency of Seleucos and Satyrus I, specifically in 432/431-429/428 BC.[3] Moreover, the nature of this image significantly deviates from the overall style of the local coin typology, and it did not receive further development for some time. It is worth noting that as early as the beginning of the 4th century BC, this decorative motif was present among the finds from the Baksinsky barrow. Recently, this archaeological site has been interpreted as the burial place of Satyrus,[4] who pursued monarchical tendencies in his politics after capturing Nymphaeum and subjugating the polis on the Asian shore of the Cimmerian Bosporus. It appears that he used some elements of the extensive Achaemenid experience in state structure.[5] At least in the conquered territories, Satyrus I behaved like a Persian king, granting the city of Kepoi to the Athenian Gylon.[6]

It is no coincidence that, alongside with a wooden sarcophagus decorated with an image of the winged sun disc of the supreme Iranian deity Ahura Mazda, Baksinsky barrow contained gold plaques in the Achaemenid style, depicting a 12-petaled rosette[7] and a lion's head with a snarling mouth in profile (see (Fig. 1, *13,14*). V. I. Pruglo used a very similar piece from the collection of the Museum in Karlsruhe as a close analogy for the

[2] Mel'nikov 2007, 33; Tereshchenko 2021, 15.
[3] Tereshchenko 2017, 342.
[4] Vinogradov 2014, 519.
[5] Vinogradov 2014, 521.
[6] Aesch. 3.171-172; Plut. *Dem.* 4.
[7] Cf. Pichikyan 1998, 176, fig. 14.



Fig. 1

lion-headed plaques, noting the similarity in the style of depiction to objects of art from the Achaemenid epoch at the turn of the 5th–4th centuries BC to the first half of the 4th century BC[8] (see Fig. 1, *15*). Currently, her findings can be further supported by comparing the Baksinsky plaques with the depictions of lion heads with horns on glazed tiles from the palace in Susa (Fig. 1, *16*).

[8] Pruglo 1963, 77, fig. 1, *1*; Gajdukevič 1971, 141, abb. 25; Vinogradov 2014, 528, fig. 6.



Fig. 2

Later, the image of the king of beasts' head with lush mane was reproduced on the triobols and diobols minted by Leucon I (389-349 BC), which are likely to have been issued during the first decade of his reign (Fig. 1, *17,18*). Therefore, it is possible that this ruler chose to use the image because it had attracted his father's attention as a symbol of royal power in the Achaemenid Empire.

Panticapaeum gold staters with a lion-headed horned griffin

Of particular interest is the fact that around 379/378 BC, Panticapaeum began minting gold staters[9] with a lion-headed horned griffin with sickle-shaped wings on the reverse. This image is clearly associated with ancient Iran and is therefore referred to as the "Persian lion-griffin"[10] or the "Achaemenid-type griffin".[11] In the past, the Persians borrowed this image from the rich artistic tradition of Assyria and Babylon, where it appeared as a lion-like winged monster with eagle-like hind legs (Fig. 2, *1,2*),[12] but they added it by horns, an ancient symbol of power and authority. The earliest example of this image can be found in the late 6th century BC reliefs made of glazed bricks from the palace of Darius I (522-486 BC) in Susa (Fig. 2, *3*), where Babylonian craftsmen are known to have worked with this material.[13] In the reliefs of Persepolis, a lion-headed horned monster with wings appears in a scene where a heroic king strikes it with a sword (Fig. 2, *4*). These scenes, which corresponded to ancient Iranian religious beliefs, were directly linked to the politics and ideology of the Achaemenid Empire and were intended to demonstrate the greatness and superhuman nature of the king's power to the subject peoples. The lion-headed horned griffin became a symbol of the king's charisma and sacred authority in the Achaemenid court art.[14] It appeared on prestigious gold objects, such as the Amu Darya Treasure and the collections of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (Fig. 2, *5*) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 2, *6*).

On the western edge of the Achaemenid Empire, this fantastic monster became popular since beginning of the 5th century BC, as evidenced by the coinage of Lycia (Fig. 3, *1*), Cilicia (Fig. 3, *2,3*), and Israel (Fig. 3, *4*),[15] as well as in Ionian glyptic art (Fig. 3, *5-7*).[16] In the latter case, there is a close resemblance to the early Achaemenid iconographic scheme, including the eagle-like hind legs of the griffin. The artisans who used this image were likely familiar with the official art of the Persians and sought to emulate it, that was a common practice in the local artistic traditions of many Achaemenid satrapies.

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[9] Anohin 1986, 43, 140, № 91; Tereshchenko 2013, 111; Tereshchenko 2017a, 158.

[10] Hill 1923, 158.

[11] Azarpay 1959, 326.

[12] See, e.g.: Black, Green 2004, 142. Fig. 117; Chang 2021, 52, fig. 8.

[13] Kent 1953, 144; Harper et al. 1993, 271–272.

[14] Lukonin 1977, 65.

[15] Photos of coins from Eastern Mediterranean are taken from the website www.acsearch.info/home.html, and photos of coins from Pantikapaeum are taken from the website "Coins of the Bosporan Kingdom. Catalog-Archive" (bosporan-kingdom.com).

[16] Nikulina 1994, 42, ill. 293, 295, 296.



Fig. 3

In general, it is possible to assume, that the development of trade and cultural relations between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Bosporus, played a significant role in the spread of the Achaemenid interpretation of certain images in this region. The extremely high concentration of Achaemenid-style seals in the Bosporan Kingdom may indicate official visits by representatives of the Persian kings and the intensity of such contacts.[17]

If we talk about images of a lion-headed horned griffin, the earliest of them on the shores of the Cimmerian Bosporus comes from a female burial of the turn of the 5th and 4th centuries BC in the necropolis of Nymphaeum, where a winged monster with eagle hind legs, standing to the right, is carved on a chalcedony scaraboid [18] (see Fig. 3, *7*). A noble Persian Seisam fights a horned monster with a lion's head and body with straight wings (see Fig. 3, *8*) on a great lekythos of the Athenian artisan Xenophantos from the necropolis of Panticapaeum, which dating around 380 BC.[19] As already mentioned it is likely that at the same time the minting of gold staters was started in Panticapaeum by the Bosporan king Leucon I. It is noteworthy that the content of precious metal in these staters is approximately 95%.[20] This phenomenon can be considered unique for the

[17] Treister 2011, 117, 119.
[18] Vickers 2002, 9, 42–43.
[19] Vinogradov 2007, 15, 24.
[20] Smekalova, Dyukov 2001, 46.

late first quarter of the 4th century BC, as previously, coins made of almost pure gold (with a maximum impurity content of 3%) were minted only by Persian kings and in states that were vassals of the Achaemenid Empire.[21] The similarity in the percentage of precious metal is not the only factor. The use of the Achaemenid royal symbolism, such as the lion-headed horned griffin with sickle-shaped wings, on the reverse of the Bosporan coins is much more significant. M. I. Rostovtzeff believed that the Panticapaeum gold staters depicted an "Iranian, Persian griffin"[22] on their reverse. For him the Assyrian-Persian prototypes were "the immediate sources from which the Panticapaeum metalworkers derived their inspiration".[23] Anyway, there is a significant difference from the Persian examples. In the first series of Panticapaeum staters, the griffin's head is turned at a 3/4 angle (Fig. 4, *1*), while in the second series, it is depicted in full view (Fig. 4, *2,3*). Additionally, the griffin holds an arrow in its mouth, indicating a creative interpretation of the Achaemenid theme by the minting artists.



Fig. 4

[21] In addition to Persia, Salamis' gold coins from Cyprus are known from this period (e. g. Hill 1904, 56, № 51–54) and Lampsakos (e. g. Aulock, Franke 1967, №7394).

[22] Rostovtzeff 1918, 117.

[23] Rostovtzeff 1922, 11.

What could have caused such a phenomenon in the Bosporan coinage as the beginning of the minting of gold staters that were equal in value to the gold Kyzikos coins and had access to foreign markets? Considering the proclamative function of coin types, it must have been related to some major historical event. The most likely explanation is the annexation of Sindica to the Bosporus after the death of Sindian king Hecataeus and the assumption of the royal title by Leucon I in relation to the barbarian tribes under his control. According to epigraphic evidence, it occurred at the turn of the first and second quarter of the 4th century BC,[24] that corresponds to the estimated date of the beginning of the minting of gold Bosporan staters proposed by numismatists. It is possible that the influx of wealth accumulated by several generations of Sindian rulers into the Bosporan treasury played a significant role in this process. If this point of view is correct, the use of gold and the recognizable royal symbols borrowed from the Achaemenids, combined with the attributes of the cult of Apollo,[25] who was revered in Sindica (the arrow and the wheat spike), clearly emphasized the changed status of the ruler of the Bosporan state, as coin symbols have always been a reflection of official ideology.

The image of the "Bosporan griffin" beyond Cimmerian Bosporus

Apparently, it was the Bosporus acted as a transmitter of visual motif of lion-headed horned griffin with sickle-shaped wings for its eastern neighbors, the Maeotians. For example, a carefully carved gold appliqué in the form of an Achaemenid lion-headed horned griffin was found in one of the Elizavetinskie barrows, which dates by the beginning of the 4th century BC (Fig. 5, *1*). An almost identical piece, with the griffin facing in the opposite direction, was acquired as an accidental find in the Labinskaya village[26]. The same can be said about Scythia, where the works of Bosporan toreutes arrived. The silver and gilded bowl with a figure of fantastic horned lioness from the side burial of the Solokha barrow[27] (see Fig. 5, *2*) and the rings made from Panticapaeum staters of the third series in the Ryzhanovsky barrow can be considered as diplomatic gifts to the Scythian chiefs. The popularity of the image of the Bosporan griffin among the Scythian elite is confirmed by the such finds, as a gold plaque from the Berdyansk barrow (see Fig. 5, *3*) and also Oguz[28] and

[24] Sokolova, Pavlichenko 2002, 103; see also: Goroncharovsky 2011, 134.
[25] In detail, see: Goroncharovsky, Tereshchenko 2024, 321–326.
[26] Otchet… 1913, 214. Fig. 245.
[27] Alekseev 2012, 150, 157.
[28] Dating: 350–340 BC (Polin 2014, 476).

Tatiana's Grave[29] barrows (see Fig. 5, *4,5*) can be seen from the finds of rings made from Panticapaeum staters of the third series in the Ryzhanovsky barrow.[30]



Fig. 5

Recently the information has become available about the existence of Asian Minor's coins having an image on the reverse almost similar to the Panticapaeum staters (cf. Fig. 4, *4-6*). It is not surprising that the very first known coin of this type was even identified as the Bosporan coin[31] (see Fig. 4, *4*). Later two more similar copies appeared, which, probably due to some additional information, were attributed to the production of an unknown mint in Cilicia of the 4th century BC.[32] Does this material cast doubt on the primacy of Panticapaeum in creating the subject in question? It can definitely to say that the priority in this matter undoubtedly remains with the Bosporus. This is confirmed by the nature of the pattern on the coins of Cilicia. The fact is that only in the third series of Bosporan gold, dating from 355-350 BC,[33] the paw of the monster, depicted full-face, is stretched forward (Fig. 4, *3*). In the previous two series, the griffin is

[29] Dating: ca. middle of the 4th century BC (Murzin et al. 1993, 100; see also: Tereshchenko, Zhizhina-Gefter 2021, 31.

[30] Mielczarek 1986.

[31] Heritage auctions 232107 (17.02.2021), lot 63142 (www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=7811684).

[32] Leu Numismatik, web auction 19 (26.02.2022), lot 1530 (www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=9175042).

[33] Tereshchenko 2021, 116–117.

drawn with its right front paw raised up, as if warning the viewer (Fig. 4, *1,2*). It is precisely the "patronizing" pose and full-face head we see on the Cilician hemiobols. It means that their coinage began no earlier than the middle of the 4th century BC, since there are no other clear analogies other than the Panticapaeum one.

The next question: how could this subject get to a region that is quite remote and not very interesting (from the point of view of trade) for the Bosporan kingdom? The most extreme point of discovery of Panticapaeum gold coins is Prinkipo island in the Marmara Sea, not far from Istanbul,[34] while Cilicia is much further away. Here we have to tread a shaky path of assumptions. Nevertheless, we have at our disposal a rather significant fact – the discovery of silver staters and tetradrachms of the satrap of Cilicia Mazey (361-334 BC), as well as the stater of the Cilician city Nagida, (356-333 BC) on the island of Levka near the mouth of the Danube. However, perhaps these coins appeared on the island, apparently, after Alexander the Great captured the Achaemenid empire".[35]

On the other hand, the main attraction of the island is the famous sanctuary of Achilles, judging by the geography of coins found on the island and their number, was known in many corners of the Ancient World already from the turn of the 6th-5th centuries BC. Finds of Panticapaeum coins were also recorded there.[36] It is quite possible that navigators from Cilicia could have become familiar with the Bosporan gold staters or purchased these coins in some intermediate territory as early as the middle of the 4th century BC. Then they bring them to homeland, where the Bosporan version of the Persian lion-headed horned griffin was subsequently used.

Conclusion

Summing up the results of the study, it can be argued that the Bosporus, like other states and peoples, which found themselves in the sphere of influence of the great Achaemenid empire, undoubtedly experienced the influence of the ideologically saturated iconography, that associated with royal power. The Bosporan craftsmen under Leucon I, who assumed the royal title about 379/378 BC after the annexation of Syndica, not only used one of the recognizable themes of Achaemenid symbolism, but also made a definite contribution to the development of one of its images – the lion-headed horned griffin.

[34] Regling 1931.
[35] Abramzon and Tunkina 2018, 68.
[36] Ibid., 60.

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