

A NEW DISCOVERY OF THASIAN TETRADRACHMS FROM TRANSYLVANIA

Viorica Suciu, Silviu I. Purece (Alba-Iulia/Sibiu)

After the actions launched by the Prosecuting magistracy of Alba Iulia and the Police Department for Heritage Protection, 91 coins¹ were recovered from Sturdza Sergiu, who lives in Sarmizegetusa, Hunedoara county. The locality is situated near Colonia Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa², which was the capital of Roman Dacia. These coins can be grouped into three different categories: 72 Imperial denars, 13 Roman Republican denars and six Thasian tetradrachms. As far as the Police Department states, these coins are considered to come from a hoard³. We can claim that the most recent coin was struck in Antoninus Pius' time.

Taking into consideration this group of coins we think we aren't dealing with a hoard containing all the coins. This is a rather rare case for Roman Dacia, because until this moment we have met a single case in which Thasian tetradrachms are associated with Roman Imperial denars⁴. We need to mention that in general, Thasian tetradrachms are not found with Roman Imperial denars. Actually, in most of the cases, the only Roman coin with which Thasian tetradrachms have been discovered within the hoards are Roman Republican denars⁵. Till this moment, we know only one hoard from Tisa (Hunedoara county)⁶, which is representative for this situation.

We think that the Roman Republican denars, as well as the Imperial denars belong to a common hoard because:

¹ *Proces verbal de predare primire*, no. 153 from 09.02.2006, Arhiva Muzeului Național al Unirii from Alba Iulia.

² *Rezoluția Parchetului de pe lângă Curtea de Apel Alba Iulia* from 09.02.2006, file no. 172/P/2005.

³ *Proces verbal de predare primire*, no. 153 from 09.02.2006, Arhiva Muzeului Național al Unirii from Alba Iulia.

⁴ V. Suciu, *Tezaure monetare din Dacia romană și postromană* (Cluj-Napoca 2000), p. 19–63.

⁵ C. Preda, *Istoria monedei în Dacia preromană* (București 1998), p. 250.

⁶ I. Winkler, *Tezaurul de monede grecești și romane descoperit la Tisa (județul Hunedoara) în 1872*, in *Sargetia* 7 (1970), p. 27–42; C. Preda didn't mention the Roman Imperial coins (*op. cit.*, p. 260).

– we have noticed that the Roman Republican denars are relatively few and they are overused compared with the Thasian tetradrachms⁷;

– most of the Roman Republican denars are concentrated towards the second half of the 1st century BC; among them we can find Marc Antonius' emissions for the legions;

– the structure of the lot is quite different from that of the hoard discovered at Tisa, because the group of coins we are speaking about is much more compact and has a much larger number of Roman Imperial pieces⁸; —

– in opposition with the Thasian tetradrachms, the Roman Republican denars are frequently associated with Roman Imperial ones in the hoards ending with Antoninus Pius' coins discovered on the territory of Roman Dacia⁹.

Actually, we cannot exclude the possibility of the association of the coins of the lot within a single hoard. We may also deal with a random discovery of Thasian tetradrachms from the Roman period which were later put together, due to the quality of the silver incorporated, with the other coins when the hoard was hidden¹⁰. To conclude, we considered that it is more appropriate to separate the Thasian tetradrachms from the Roman ones, by analyzing them in a different study¹¹.

1. ↓; 16.35 g; 34×33 mm;

Ob. Dionysos' head is turned right, with a vine branch chaplet, having three leaves upward and two of them down; above the forehead there are two rosaces, each of them made of six points; the hair is gathered in a thick band on the forehead, and at the back it is arranged in a bun. From the bun, three long curls go towards the shoulders;

Rv. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΘΑΣΙΩΝ; Herakles is naked, standing with his head turned left, supporting himself with his right hand on a bludgeon; on his chest, the shoulder and the left arm on his hip he is wearing a skin of lion from Nemeea. The line of the ground has undulations; the upper part of Herakles' body is evidently beveled towards right and his head is quite beveled on left; the skin of the lion has one crinkle near the god's knee; sigle **M**.

2. ↑; 16.79 g; 32.5×30.5 mm;

Ob. Like no. 1, but the two rosaces have each seven points; both the vine branch leaves placed downward and the rosaces have larger dimensions;

Rv. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥ[Σ] ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΘΑΣΙΩΝ; like no. 1, but Dionysos is represented in a more straight position, more rigid, the skin of the lion was drawn almost straight, with no crinkle; sigle **M**.

3. ↑; 16.81 g; 30×29.2 mm;

Ob. Like no. 1, but the god's head is much bigger, and it would have occupied almost the entire surface of the coin field, if the image had been made in the centre of the coin; the vine branch

⁷ Maybe we can deal with used dies (C. Beldiman, *Un tezaur de monede thasiene descoperit la Țigănești, jud. Teleorman*, in *BSNR* 80-85 (1986-1991[1992]) 134-139, p. 72.


⁸ In the hoard discovered at Tisa we have 13 Roman Imperial coins, which represent 1,37%. In our case the Roman Imperial coins represent 79,12%.

⁹ V. Suciu, *op. cit.*, p. 19-63; C. Găzduc, *Circulația monetară în Dacia și provinciile învecinate de la Traian la Constantin I, I* (Cluj-Napoca 2002), p. 137.

¹⁰ We think that this situation can be the same in the case of the hoard found at Tisa (I. Winkler, *op. cit.*, p. 27-42).


¹¹ The Roman Imperial coins are in study.

does not follow the shape of the head, the head being represented through a perfect straight line; the vine branch leaves are similar to the shape of the letter "V"; the rosace on the left is made of six points, and the right one is made of eight points; there is a tendency of replacing the curly hair by straight lines, as we may see under the rosaces and in the ear area; the nose loses its elegance, being represented in a more artless manner;

Rv. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΘΑΣΙΩΝ; like no. 1, but the skin of the lion gets close to the ground line and the crinkle is less obvious; sigle .


4. ↑; 16.77 g; 30.5×29 mm;

Ob. Like no. 2;

Rv. [H]ΡΑΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΘΑΣΙΩΝ; like no. 1, but the god's body is made more beveled and his face is not situated anymore on the same pendimental line as the right shoulder; the lion's fur has two crinkles and touches the ground line; the bludgeon has an oblique position; sigle .


5. ↖; 16.72 g; 30.4×31 mm;

Ob. The same as no. 1, but the rosace from left was made by seven points, the nose is long and aquiline; the curl of the bun is not continuous, its grip being represented by a point;

Rv. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΘΑΣΙΩΝ; like no. 1; unlike the other coins, in this case, the grip of the bludgeon held by the god is on the right side of the letter "P"; between the lion's skin and the ground we can observe a straight line; sigle .

6. ↑; 16.79 g; 32 mm;

Ob. The same as no. 1, but the god's image is quite humped; the rosaces are made of seven points, the curl of the bun is similar to that of no. 5;

Rv. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΘΑΣΙΩΝ; like no. 1, but the lion's skin is perfectly pendimental and it is not placed above the god's shoulder; down, on the left, a globule appears next to the bludgeon; sigle .

We won't bring into discussion chronological problems related to Thasian tetradrachms, because these issues have already been analyzed before¹².

Nowadays, the areas in which the discoveries of Thasian tetradrachms concentrate are well known, as well: the Muntenia field, between the Vedea and the Ialomița rivers and Transylvania, in the valley of the middle and upper Mureș

¹² C. Moisil, *Les tetradrachmes de Thasos et de la Macedoine I-ere et leur circulation en Dacie*, in *Balcania* 7 (1944), p. 3–22; E. Chirilă, I. Pop, *Tezaurul monetar de la Sânpetru (or. Brașov)*, in *Apulum* 7 (1968) 1, p. 158; E. Chirilă, G. Mihăescu, *Der Münzhort von Căprioru. Beiträge zu Chronologie und Umlauf der Tetradrachmen von Macedonia Prima und der Insel Thasos* (Târgoviște 1969), p. 30–31; Gh. Poenaru-Bordea, C. Condrea, *Date noi privind tezaurul de la Adîncea, jud. Dîmbovița*, in *Acta Valahica* 3 (1972), p. 121; E. Chirilă, V. Lucăcel, *Tezaurul de la Petrindu*, in *ActaMP* 3 (1979), p. 93; C. Preda, *op. cit.*, p. 248; S. Grămăticu, *Două tezaure de tetradrahme ale provinciei Macedonia Prima și ale cetății Thasos descoperite în Muntenia*, in M. Iacob, E. Oberländer-Târnoveanu, F. Topoleanu (eds.), *Istro-Pontica. Muzeul Tulcean la a 50-a aniversare 1950-2000. Omagiu lui Gavriilă Simion la 45 de ani de activitate 1955-2000* (Tulcea 2000), p. 400; T. Isvoranu, *Monede thasiene din tezaurul descoperit la Fântânele, județul Teleorman*, in E. Nicolae (red. resp.), *Simpozion de numismatică dedicat împlinirii a patru secole de la prima unire a românilor sub Mihai Voievod Viteazul, Chișinău, 28-30 mai 2000* (București 2002), p. 48; T. Părpăuță, *Câteva considerente privind prezența monedei în Dacia nord-dunăreană*, in *CN* 9–11 (2003–2005 [2006]), p. 40.

river and the Târnave valleys. The northern border is the confluence of the two Someș rivers, and the south-eastern one is the superior basin of the Olt river¹³. In the Transylvanian area we can notice a quite compact territory as far as the isolated discoveries and the hoards containing Thasian tetradrachms are concerned. This surface is bordered to the north by the valley of the middle Mureș and to the south, by the upper Jiu river. If we take into account the locality where the ex-possessor lives there is a strong possibility that the coins could come from the region mentioned above. The closest discoveries of Thasian tetradrachms from Sarmizegetusa locality are those from: Deva¹⁴, Hațeg¹⁵ and Hunedoara¹⁶.

By analyzing the repertories of coin discoveries that contain Thasian tetradrachms, we can observe that the majority of these coins are found within hoards¹⁷. Thus, we think that it is less possible that the coin could come from isolated discoveries. The six coins were most probably part of a hoard. The lack of information makes our efforts to discover the exact structure of the hoard fruitless. It is possible that all the 91 coins, gathered till now, are part of the same group of coins.

Of the six Thasian tetradrachms, five have the symbol \mathbb{M} and only one has the symbol M. These symbols are frequently found in the North balcanic region, being extremely present in almost all the discoveries from the Dacian territory¹⁸. Thasian tetradrachms with this type of symbols had been issued between 88–80 BC¹⁹.

The coins from the lot were struck with different dies on the obverse, as well as on the reverse. Yet, we found coins struck with the same dies as the ones used for the issue of the same other coins belonging to hoards which were discovered in Dacia. Thus:

– the dies for the obverse and the reverse of the coin no. 1 are identical to the dies used for the obverse and the reverse of the coin no. 12, from the hoard discovered at Sânpetru²⁰.

– the dies for the obverse and the reverse of the coin no. 4 are identical to the dies used for the obverse and the reverse of the coin no. 172, from the hoard discovered at Șieu Odorhei²¹.

¹³ I. Bogdan Cătănicu, *Tezaurul monetar de la Poiana (jud. Teleorman). Unele aspecte ale circulației tetradrahmelor Macedoniei Prima și ale orașului Thasos în lumea traco-dacică*, in *SCN* 6 (1975), p. 162; C. Preda, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹⁴ I. Glodariu, *Relații comerciale ale Daciei cu lumea elenistică și romană* (Cluj 1974), p. 263.

¹⁵ I. Winkler, *Note despre colecția monetară a lui Daniel Lészay*, in *SCN* 3 (1960), p. 455.

¹⁶ E. Chirilă, G. Mihăescu, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁷ C. Preda, *op. cit.*, p. 253–260.

¹⁸ E. Chirilă, V. Lucăcel, *op. cit.*, p. 94; C. Preda, E. Țânțăreanu, *Tezaurul monetar cu emisiuni getice și grecești descoperit la Videle (jud. Teleorman)*, in *BSNR* 90–91 (1996–1997 [2002]) 144–145, p. 11; V. Suci, *Monede grecești din colecția Muzeului municipal „Ion Raica” Sebeș*, in *Apulum* 41 (2004), p. 192.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

²⁰ E. Chirilă, I. Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

²¹ C. Preda, Gh. Marinescu, *Contribuții la circulația monetară din Dacia în sec. I î.e.n. – tezaurul de la Șieu Odorhei, jud. Bistrița Năsăud*, in *BSNR* 77–79 (1983–1985 [1986]) 131–133, p. 45.



1



2



3

Fig. 1-3. Thasian Tetradrachms from Transylvania (2×).



4



5



6

Fig. 4-6. Thasian Tetradrachms from Transylvania (2×).

– the dies for the obverse and the reverse of the coin no. 5 are identical to the dies used for the obverse and the reverse of the coin no. 17, from the hoard discovered at Petrindu²².

– the dies for the obverse of the coin no. 5 is identical to the die for the obverse of the coin no. 19 from the hoard found at Sânpetru²³.

– the dies for the obverse of the coin no. 6 is identical to the die for the obverse of the coin no. 24 from the hoard found at Petrindu²⁴.

– the dies for the reverse of the coin no. 6 is identical to the die for the reverse of the coin no. 25 from the hoard found at Petrindu²⁵.

Imitation constitutes a frequent problem dealt with by scientific studies on the circulation of Thasian tetradrachms. In general, the stylistic criteria are used in order to distinguish original coins from imitations. Unfortunately, this criterion is too subjective²⁶ and it can vary from one researcher to another. A clear comparative system must be created in order to approach reality²⁷. It is usually considered that the presence of the globules in the legend is the indicator of an imitation²⁸. We believe that the stylistic observations are welcome, without certainly showing us which is the limit between the original piece and the imitation. In conclusion, we will resume observing the stylistic differences without being radical in the process of placing the coins within these two categories: original coins and imitated coins.

As the Thasian tetradrachms studies are concerned, we can remark the beauty with which Dionysos' image was represented on obverses of the coins: nos. 1, 2 and 4, in comparison with the obverses of the coins nos. 3, 5 and 6. The presence of the globules in the legends of the coins from this lot is obvious, but they are more or less evident. Very interesting is the fact that in the case of coin no. 1, the letters of the legend are globulated. Instead, the Herakles' image is extremely well represented, his muscles being made in detail and the lion's skin being elegantly drawn.

In the end, we can conclude that this discovery comes to complete the knowledge about the presence of the Thasian tetradrachms in the North of Danube. This discovery brings us a new argument for the existence of a special region with high density of discoveries. We mean the area between the middle Mureş and the upper Jiu rivers.

(Translated by Ramona Sbârcea)

²² E. Chirilă, V. Lucăcel, *op. cit.*, pl. IV.

²³ E. Chirilă, I. Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

²⁴ E. Chirilă, V. Lucăcel, *op. cit.*, pl. IV.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pl. V.

²⁶ S. I. Purece, *Prezența imitațiilor de tip Macedonia Prima pe teritoriul Daciei. Probleme metodologice*, in *ActaTS* 3 (2004), p. 159–164.

²⁷ E. Chirilă, V. Lucăcel, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁸ S. I. Purece, *op. cit.*, p. 159–160.