

Coins of the unknown mint of Apros in Thrace

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to study a rare bronze coin in the possession of a private collector¹.

Obv. Apollo laur., r.

Rev. Oval Celtic shield with central rib. ΑΠΡΗ-ΝΩΝ reading inwards; at the end of the inscription, a lyre, r. 17 mm, 4.30 g; findspot, eastern Thrace (fig. 1).

The inscription indicates without a doubt that the coin is autonomous, i.e. struck by the civic authorities. But no other coins with the legend ΑΠΡΗΝΩΝ are to be found in the literature of Greek numismatics and no city of that name is included in the list of known mints. Subsequently, two other examples have come to light (figs 2 and 3). So, which city produced these coins?

The city of Apros is in fact known, its name spelled in sources and inscriptions in various ways: ΑΠΡΟ (on two vessels in the Rogozen treasure), ΑΠΡΟΣ (Theopompus / Stephanus of Byzantium), ΑΠΡΩC (Constantine Porphyrogenitus), ΑΠΡΟΙ (Cl. Ptolemy), ΑΠΡΩΝ (Procopius), ΑΠΡΟΣ (Pliny the Elder), ΑΠΡΙ (inscription from Rome), Colonia Claudia Aprensis (inscription from Troas)².

The site is located in south-eastern Thrace, either at present-day Kestridge or further west, near present-day Kermian, both in European Turkey, above the Thracian Chersonese, and on the route of the later *Via Egnatia*³ (Map 1). Apros was also linked with Thracian Chersonese and Ainos by two other important roads.

During the time of the Thracian king Cotys I (ca. 383-359), Apros was a royal residence and ΑΠΡΟ appears punched in dotted letters on two shallow fialai in the Rogozen treasure (nos. 30 and 31)⁴.

In a preserved fragment of 26th book of "History of Philip" [Philip II], Theopompus mentions that Antipater, (Philip II's general and later Alexander's strategos of Europe) was campaigning in the region of Apros against the Thracian ruler Cersobleptes in 347/6⁵.

Nothing further is known in the Hellenistic age but in the Ist-IInd century AD, Apros became a Roman colony and station on the *Via Egnatia*⁶ and is shown in almost all Roman itineraries⁷.

If, as seems probable, coins with the legend ΑΠΡΗΝΩΝ were struck at Apros, a new page of history for both Apros and Hellenistic Thrace has been opened.

On the two further specimens mentioned above, one (15 mm; 4.58 g; in a private collection) has been wrongly attributed to the last Celtic ruler of Thrace, Cavarus⁸ (fig.

1. With gratitude to N. Voinski (Jambol), who made the coin available for study as long ago as 1998, and subsequently for publication. Thanks also to D. Boreva, I. Lozanov (Sofia University) and W. M. Stancomb (RNS) for valuable information. For the time being, two of the specimens are part of the Bobokov Bros. numismatic collection.
2. Tomaschek, W.: *Die alten Thraker*. Wien, 1980², S. 53; Detshev, D.: *Die thrakischen Sprachreste*. Wien, 1976², S. 20; Mashov, S.: Nadpisite varhu sadovete ot Rogozenskoto sakrovishhte., *Izkustvo*, 6, 1986, p. 41-45 (Nos. 30, 31); Mihailov, G.: Nadpisite na Rogozenskoto sakrovishhte, *Archeologia*, 3, 1987, p. 33, who cites all occurrences of the name of Apros.
3. Eck, W. Die Claudische Kolonie Apri in Thrakien., *ZPE*, 16, 1975; Fol, Al.: Opit za lokalizaciata na selishtata ot rogozenskite nadpisi, *Archeologia*, 3, 1987, p. 1; Mashov, S.: Op.cit., p. 29; *Kratka enciklopedia trakiiska drevnost*, Sofia., 1993, p. 21. The localization of Apros at the present-day village of Kermian made by Λαμπουσιαδης, Κ.: *Οδοιπορικόν: Απρως-Κερμίν, Θρακικά*, 2, 1929, p. 323-324, has been supported recently by Πολυχρονιδου-Λουκοπουλου, Λ.: *Colonia Claudia Aprensis: Μία ρωμαϊκή αποικία στη νοτιοανατολική Θράκη, Μνήμη Δ. Λαζαρίη, Θεσσαλονίκη*, 1990, p. 703-715; Adams, J. P.: Communications in Southeastern Thrace in the Roman period, *Actes 2^e Symposium International des Etudes Thraciennes, Thrace Ancienne*, Vol. I, Komotini, 1997, p. 140-145.
4. *Frakiiskii klad iz Rogozena*, Sofia., 1986, p. 38 (Nos. 30, 31); Boshnakov, K.: *Trakiiska drevnost. Istoricheski ocherci*, Sofia., 2000, p. 228.
5. Fol, Al.: Prouchvania varhu grackite izvori za drevna Trakia. IV. Theopompos: "Gracka istoria" i "Istoria na Philip [II Makedonski]", *Godishnik na Sofiiskia Universitet, Istoricheski fakultet*, 69, 1975, Sofia, 1980, p. 22.
6. Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, IV 11, 40-50; Cl. Ptolemy, *Geogr.*, III 11, 5.
7. See: *Kratka enciklopedia trakiiska drevnost*, p. 21, where more information is given for Apros in Late Antiquity.
8. Manov, M.: Nov tip bronzova moneta na Kavar, In: *Problemi na monetosecheneto v Thrakia 281-218*, Sofia., 1999, p. 41-57. In this publication not only are the images totally misinterpreted (head of Zeus for the correct head of Apollo), but also the inscriptions (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩC ΚΑΥΑΡΟΥ instead of the correct ΑΠΡΗΝΩΝ). This, of course, entirely invalidates all of the conclusions.

2). The other (15/16 mm; 2.92 g) is in the Sozopol Archaeological Museum and was found during excavations at Apollonia Pontica⁹. On this coin a lyre countermark was applied on the obverse (fig. 3).

The existence of three specimens of this rare coin type now permits much more secure iconographic observations and comparisons to be made. There is no doubt, that the obverse of all three coins shows Apollo laureate, r. A few locks of hair are seen falling on the back of his neck, similar in style to the head of Apollo on the second series of the coins of Antiochus II, struck at Sardes¹⁰. Two of the three coins were struck with the same dies but for the Apollonia specimen new dies were used.

The Apollonia specimen (fig. 3) is engraved in a different style and is clearly the work of another hand. A round countermark with a lyre is placed on the head of Apollo. Let us bear in mind that on the reverses of figs. 1 and 2, there is a lyre symbol. It might be assumed that the round lyre countermark was applied in the mint that struck the coins (Apros), but it is more likely, that it was applied, perhaps at Apollonia itself. Up until now, the lyre is not among the countermarks known for Apollonia such as anchor, crayfish, Apollo head, star, etc.¹¹ of Apollonia.

It should be mentioned that lyre countermarks of different types are found on some of the bronze coins of Antiochus discovered at Cabyle and elsewhere in east Thrace¹². In our opinion, however, these countermarks were struck mainly in Asia Minor and are unlikely to be connected with Apollonia, though such a possibility should not be excluded.

The fact that the dies of the three Apros specimens were made by two engravers shows, that the series was probably not a limited one. The presence of the lyre symbol suggests a well established mint where different series were marked with different symbols. It would not be surprising if coins with other symbols (or monograms) and even further types of Apros are found.

It must be mentioned that the legend ΑΠΡΗΝΩΝ is presented in a quite unusual way. The first part (ΑΠΡΗ) is found on the long side of the shield, while the remainder (ΝΩΝ) and the lyre symbol are situated on the other long side. In order for the legend to be read completely, the coin has to be rotated 180° to the right. Normally, the two parts of the inscription are placed one

under the other in such way that the inscription can be read without rotating the coin (e. g. ΚΑΒΥ-ΑΗΝΩΝ, ΜΕΤΑΜ-ΒΡΙΑΝΩΝ, ΚΑΛΛΑ-ΤΙΑΝΩΝ, etc.).

The Celtic shield is shown in high relief with a prominent central rib and a raised comb-like protuberance in the middle. In fact, the shield resembles the bottom of a shallow boat, viewed from the outside. We can see that numismatic data complements archaeological by providing a fuller picture of the oval shields used in various modifications by Celts, Greeks and Thracians.

Some words about the dating. It is clear at first glance, that the coins are Hellenistic. The Celtic shield used as a design on the reverse, invites a comparison with coins, which bear the same image. A similar shield is found on bronzes of Cavarus¹³. It has the same typical oval shape but lacks the central rib. However the central rib is present on the oval shield shown on a tetradrachm of Cersibaulus¹⁴. It has recently been suggested that the same type of Celtic shield is shown on a Mesambrian bronze, but viewed from the inside¹⁵.

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9. *My very grateful thanks to At. Koichev and V. Mutafov who provided me with a photograph of the coin.*
 10. Newell, E. T.: *The coinage of the Western Seleucid mints from Seleucus I to Antiochus III*, New York, 1977, nos. 1407-1415, pl. LVII, 9-22.
 11. Gerassimov, T.: Antichni moneti s kontramarki ot Dolna Mizia i Thrakia, *Izvestia na balgarskija arheologicheski institut*, XV, Sofia, 1946, p. 63-64; Topalov, S.: Izobrazenia i nadpisi varhu monetite na Apollonia Pontika, *Anali*, 1-4, Sofia, 1998, p. 23-35; Topalov, S.: *Prinos kam prouchvane kontramarkite na zapadnopontiiskite gradove Apollonia, Mesambria i Odesos III - I v. pr. n. e.*, Sofia, 1997, p. 33 ff. and 105 ff.
 12. Draganov, D.: *The Coinage of Cabyle*, Sofia, 1993, p. 137, No. 618; p. 138, No. 638; p. 140, Nos. 709, 721; p. 141, No. 762.
 13. SNG IX. *The British Museum, Part I: The Black Sea*, London, 1993, No. 197; SNG XI. *The William Stancomb collection of coins of the Black Sea region*, London, 2000, No. 303. Both of the specimens are countermarked with a corn ear, applied on the Celtic shield.
 14. Price, M.: *The coinage in the name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaios*, Zurich/ London, 1991, p. 173; SNG IX, No. 308.
 15. SNG IX, No. 276; SNG XI, Nos. 229-230; Karayotov, I.: *Monetosecheneto na Mesambria*, Bourgas, 1992, p. 37-38, Fig. 16 a; Karayotov, I.: *The coinage of Mesambria, vol. I: Silver and gold coins of Mesambria*, Sozopol, 1994, p. 19, pl. I, 7-8. There are also some barbarous imitations of this type of Mesambria with retrograde inscriptions ΜΕΤΑΜ/ΒΡΙΑΝΩΝ and ΒΑΣΙΑ... see: Dimitrov, K.: Sakrovishte s elinisticheski bronzovi moneti na Mesambria Pontica vav fonda na Nationalen arheologicheski muzei-Sofia (IGCH 884), *Godishnik na Nationalnia arheologicheski muzei*, IX, 1993, p. 212, Fig. 2 (3, 4); Topalov, S.: *Mesambria Pontica. Prinosi kam prouchvane monetosecheneto na grada V-I v. pr. n. e.*, Sofia, 1995, p. 132 ff, Fig. 63, 64. There is also a unique (?) silver coin of this type of Mesambria (weight—4.4 g.; diameter 17/19 mm) with a retrograde spelling of the first part of the city's name (ΜΕΤΑΜ), see: Lazarov, L.: Unikalna (?) moneta na Mesambria, *Numizmatichni izsledvania*, 3-4, Sofia, 1999, p. 7-12.

This has been dated by its latest researcher in different articles to different periods of the IIIrd century, ranging from 250 to 210 BC, i.e. in the same broad general dating (second half of the IIIrd century BC) as the coinage of Cavarus¹⁶. Logically, therefore, the newly described type of Apros can be dated to a similar period.

With this broad dating, the hitherto unknown bronze type of Apros is bound to provoke speculation on the reasons for its issue. Inevitably, the two big political themes of Thrace at this period will be exploited again: the Celtic (the state of Cavarus) and the Seleucid (the military campaign of Antiochus II). Although in this paper I simply seek to present a new Thracian mint, nevertheless I would like to put forward a few cautionary observations, and think it useful to address in particular the use made of Celtic shield representations on coinage to promote arguments about a wider Celtic state.

The presence of Celtic shields on autonomous or regal issues does not by any means necessarily imply coins issued by Celts, nor does it necessarily mean that the Celts exercised a strong political and cultural influence over certain Thracian cities, as has lately been suggested in some publications¹⁷. These authors have even seen a direct connection between Mesambrian bronzes mentioned above (which have on the obverse a Thracian helmet and on the reverse a Celtic shield viewed from the inside, and are termed by the authors a "Cavarus" type) and the Cavarus bronzes themselves which have an Apollo head on the obverse and a Celtic shield on the rever-

se. The conclusion was drawn that the circulation area of the Mesambrian bronzes matched that of the original Cavarus bronzes¹⁸.

If this were indeed so, the Apros coins must be considered as struck under the influence of Cavarus' Celts and their appearance would be considered as struck under the influence of Cavarus' Celts and their appearance would be directly related to the Celtic presence in that region, i. e. south-eastern Thrace. But a conclusion of this kind can too easily lead to unfounded speculation on the Celtic state whose capital was Tylis. Such speculation is mainly based on the image of the Celtic shield which is assumed to be of indisputably Celtic character. However, if the basis for this assumption is questioned, the arguments are bound to fall apart.

It is simply not true that the Celtic shield was used only by Celts. It was almost certainly just as popular among Greeks and Thracians; furthermore, such shields were painted on the dromos walls of the Kazanluk Thracian tomb¹⁹. An oval shield with a central rib is shown on the obverse of bronze coins of the Bosphoros king Leucon II (the beginning of the second half of IIIrd century BC), struck in Panticapaion.²⁰ In fact, in the third century BC the Celtic shield became an entirely conventional image used on both autonomous and regal coinages, just as Corinthian and Attic helmets had earlier become a universal decorative element on many coinages including ones from Thrace. It is misleading to use the image of the Celtic shield as a crucial proof for arguments about the Celtic state in Thrace.

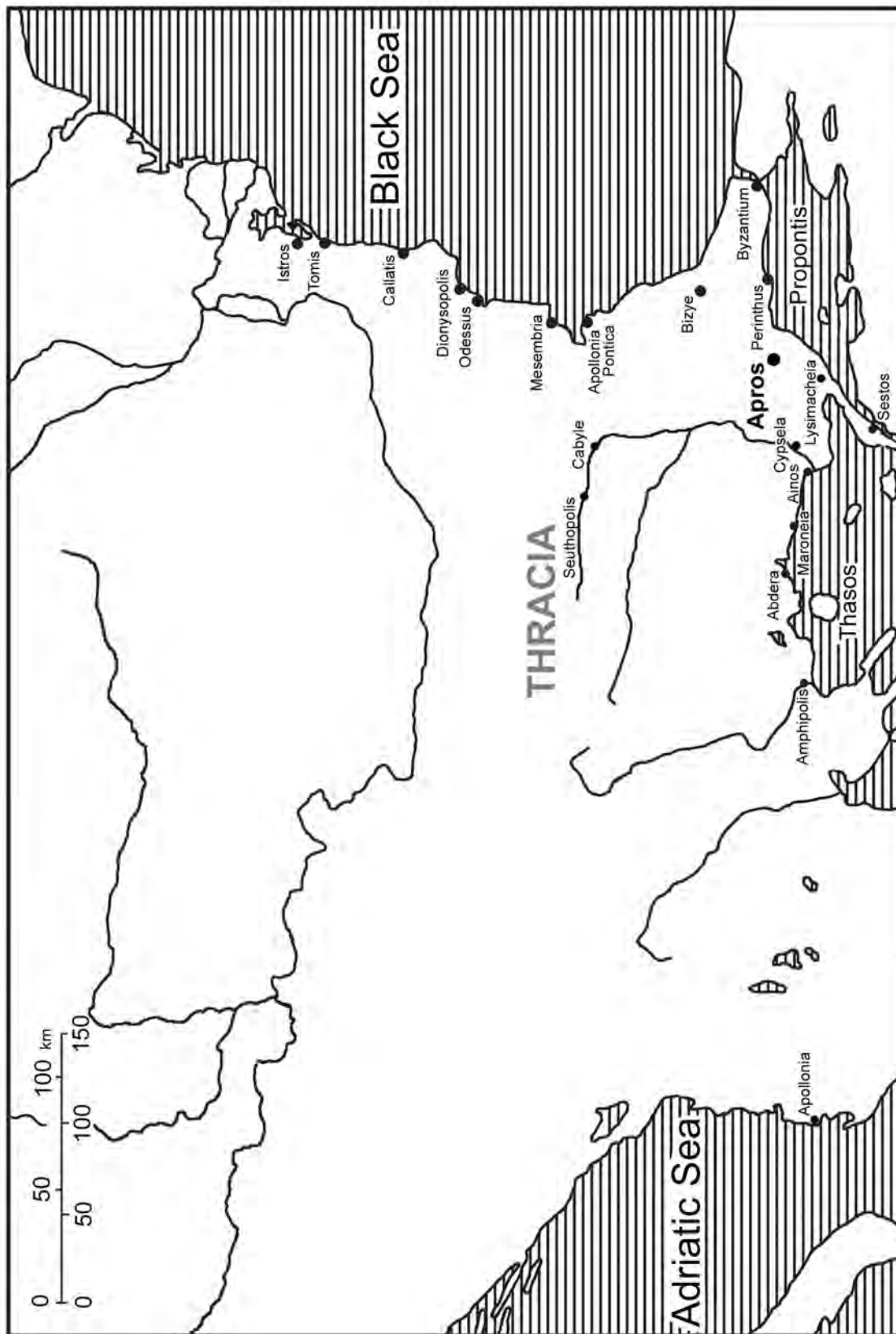
16. Karayotov, I.: Op. cit., p. 37; Mesambria i vladetelice na kraibrejna Thrakia., *Izvestia na Narodnia muzei Bourgas*, 3, 2000, p. 72; *Bronzovoto monetosechene na Mesambria. Thesis for Dr.babil. degree.*, Sofia., 2001, p. 12-13. In the chronological table included, this type is dated generally to 250 – 200 BC (see: p. 52).

17. The hypothesis of strong political and cultural influence of the Celtic state of Cavarus in Thrace has recently been supported by the following authors: Lazarov, L.: The problem of the Celtic state in Thrace (on the basis of Kavar's coins from peak Arkovna), *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 2-3, 1993, p. 3-22; Lazarov, L.: Otnosno keltskata darjava s centar Tile v Thrakia pri Kavar, *Numismatichni Izsledvania*, 2, Sofia, 1996, p. 73-87; Karayotov, I.: Mesambria i keltskia tsar Kavar, *More*, 9-10, Bourgas, 1996, p. 10-14; Mesambria i vladetelice..., p. 66-82; Manov, M.: Op.cit., p. 41-60.

18. Karayotov, I.: Mesambria i keltskia..., p. 11-14; Mesambria i vladetelice..., p. 72-73; *Bronzovoto monetosechene...*, p. 13.

19. Domaradski, M.: *Keltite na Balkanskia poluostrov*, Sofia, 1984, p. 143.

20. Zograf, A .N.: *Antichnie monetai (MIA / USSR, 16)*, Moscow/Leningrad, 1951, Pl. XLII, 17. Thanks to I. Karayotov for the information about this coin.



Map I. Thracia (Hellenistic Age)



1:1



2:1

Fig. 1



1:1



2:1

Fig. 2



1:1



2:1

Fig. 3