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THE HOARD OF IMITATIONS OF THE DRACHMS OF APOLLONIA AND DYRRHACHIUM ALLEGEDLY FROM Odra SISAČKA (SOUTH-WESTERN PANNONIA): ADDENDUM

Following the publication of the hoard of imitations or counterfeits of the drachms of two Illyrian mints, Apollonia and Dyrrhachium, allegedly found in the modern village of Odra Sisačka and kept in the City Museum Sisak, four more coins, apparently belonging to the same hoard and kept in a private collection, were brought to the attention of professional numismatists. The analysis of these four coins has undoubtedly proved that they belong to the same assemblage. However, although the new coins are die-linked to the bulk of the hoard, they appear to be decidedly more distinctive or eccentric when compared with the 69 pieces kept in the City Museum Sisak, suggesting they were handpicked as curiosities. It is to be hoped that more coins from the Odra Sisačka hoard kept in private collections will surface in the wake of this brief addendum to the already published bulk of the hoard.

Key Words: Apollonia, Dyrrhachium, imitations, counterfeits, Odra Sisačka, south-western Pannonia

In the early 1980s, the City Museum Sisak has procured an unusual coin hoard allegedly found in the nearby village of Odra Sisačka. The hoard consisted exclusively of imitations or counterfeits of the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium.¹ The circumstances of the recovery of the hoard are not particularly illuminating: it was apparently found during the construction of a shed in Odra, more precisely, in the part of the village nearest to Sisak, i.e., at its easternmost part.² The modern village of Odra Sisačka is located on the right bank of the Odra, ca. 1800 m as the crow flies from the north-western corner of ancient Siscia. At a position immediately next to the right bank of the Odra, i.e., at the easternmost part of the modern village, some Roman structures and small finds (1st-2nd c. ware, coins from the 1st c. onwards) were excavated.³ At the same time, the remains of a 1st-2nd c. necropolis were found on the left bank of the Odra.⁴ However, no pre-Roman material was found at either of these positions, so the hoard remains completely decontextualized even in terms of its wider setting.

The City Museum Sisak at present keeps 69 coins from this hoard. These were recently published and what follows is a brief – albeit somewhat updated – summary of the results of this study.⁵ It was thus argued that all coins appear to have been made from

¹ According to the typology offered in *Sășianu* 1987, 209-219, these imitations should be indeed classified as 'counterfeits'.

² *Burkowsky* 2008, 15; pers. comm., 2019. Zdenko Burkowsky was at the time a curator at the Museum.

³ *Baćani* 2010, 313-314.

⁴ *Baćani* 2009, 291-292.

⁵ *Bilić* 2021.

adulterated silver or a copper-silver alloy.⁶ Furthermore, they were produced by three obverse dies (with one of these appearing in two variants) and four reverse dies. Two die combinations share a single obverse die, with or without the (nonsensical) inscription ΣΤΙΠ, while their reverse dies are different (die combinations 1-1 and 1-2).⁷ The reverses of these coins imitate Dyrrhachian drachms, which also applies to another die combination represented by 23 pieces (2-3). All three combinations bear an inscription DYP on the reverse and depict a cow on the obverse turned left. This particular orientation of the cow is characteristic of late Apollonian drachms, which opens the possibility that the coins are actually hybrids; that is, it is possible that the obverses were imitating precisely the late Apollonian drachms. The reverse of the last of these three combinations displays some symbols in the field to the left and right of the central motif. These symbols are reminiscent of similar symbols (club, spear tip, bow, lizard) appearing on Dyrrhachian (and Apollonian) staters of Corcyraean type issued much earlier than the drachms.⁸ The flans on which this combination was struck are somewhat larger (range 18.5-23 mm, average diameter ca. 20 mm, median diameter 20.75 mm) in comparison with the flans of the remaining combinations. With these only two flans approximate 20 mm, while all are in the range of 16-20 mm with an average diameter of ca. 17.5 mm and a median diameter of 18 mm. The last die combination of imitations or counterfeits (5-6) emulates an Apollonian drachm bearing the name of the mint magistrate ΝΙΚΩΝ and a symbol in the exergue perhaps imitating *caduceus* – a symbol appearing on the original drachm of this type – on the obverse together with a cow turned right (on original drachms it is actually turned left), dating from the 60s BC or somewhat earlier.⁹ The reverse depiction on this combination (rv. die no. 6) is rotated 90° in comparison with the reverse die of the preceding combination (rv. die no. 3), with highly stylized symbols to the left and right of the central motif.

The Odra Sisačka imitations can be most profitably compared with the hoard of 417 *subaerati* of Dyrrhachian drachms, as well as Apollonia/Dyrrhachium hybrids

⁶ This inference is now corroborated by a metal analysis of a hitherto unpublished coin from the Odra Sisačka hoard (see below no. 2). Using the scanning electron microscope with the accompanying spectrometer of characteristic X-rays (SEM-EDS), it was established that the imitation was made from adulterated silver (90.52 % Ag, 5.75 % Cu, 2.91 & Pb). The coin was analysed by *Damir Doračić* of the analytical laboratory of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb.

⁷ In *Bilić* 2021, the die combinations were somewhat inappropriately referred to as ‘types’, but in the present study the focus will be on the actual dies. For the die links see Diagram 1.

⁸ Thus the Dyrrhachian staters were issued ca. 375-280 BC (*Meta* 2015, 27, 141-143, 147, 153, 156-158) or 330-290/280 BC (*Gjongecaj-Vangjeli* 2019, 322-323). The Apollonian staters of the same type were struck in the wake of the comparable Dyrrhachian issues (*Gjongecaj-Vangjeli* 2019, 323-324)

⁹ For the date see *Petrányi* 1995-1996, 6 (series -18, 66/65 BC). *Picard*, *Gjongecaj* 2000, 159 (no. 60), date this emission to the third phase of Apollonian drachms (120/100-80/70 BC). The original drachms of this type are rather rare; a total of 17 pieces are known from the hoards of Dieci 1, Dieci 2, Bobaia and Taşad in Romania and Rupci, Sadovec and ‘NW Bulgaria’ in Bulgaria, nowhere exceeding five pieces (*Petrányi* 1995-1996, 6; *Picard*, *Gjongecaj* 2000, 159).

(Dyrrhachian obverse / Apollonian reverse), from Troianul in Muntenia.¹⁰ Along with the Odra hoard, the Troianul hoard is the only find of this type that consists solely of imitations/counterfeits. The two hoards also share the characteristic of being of a very poor quality, both in terms of the quality of metal used for their production and the (un)faithfulness of die displays to the originals, especially the reverse dies. The Troianul hoard was found during ploughing in a ceramic vessel; soon afterwards a trial trench was excavated at the find site, which yielded a small number of additional coins.¹¹ In this way, the authenticity of this find seems undisputable. All coins in this hoard were struck by ten obverse and four reverse dies, but as much as 401 coins were struck by only two reverse dies.¹² The legends on the obverse and, especially, reverse are full of mistakes and often nonsensical, but the depictions – especially reverse – are more faithful to the originals in comparison with the Odra pieces (the reverses of the Odra drachms, except for the legend DYP, do not show any ambition to reproduce the original legends). Furthermore, the comparison of the hoards from Odra and Troianul reveals significant dissimilarities between the weight structures of these two hoards of Apollonian and Dyrrhachian imitations/counterfeits. The average weight of the coins in these two hoards is significantly different (Odra 3.00 g : Troianul 2.59 g), which also applies to their respective median weights (Odra 3.02 or 3.05 g : Troianul ca. 2.50 g). At the same time, the weight range of the coins from the Troianul hoard – excluding the outliers – is significantly lower in comparison with the weight range of the coins from the Odra hoard (Troianul 2.16-3.00 g : Odra 2.45-3.60 g). The weights of the Odra coins are thus significantly larger and therefore closer to the original drachms.

The average and median weight, as well as the weight structure, of the Odra hoard is, at the same time, similar to several Romanian and eastern Hungarian hoards that consist of original drachms produced in the latest phases of the two Adriatic mints. These hoards, although dominated by Apollonian and/or Dyrrhachian drachms, also contained a smaller number of imitations (Čelopek 2, <0.5%, with 4 *subaerati* total of 1.26%; Doboz 5, ca. 3.5%; Drăgești 6, 4.4%; Tașad 1, <1.5%).¹³ Alongside Troianul and Odra, the only hoard that contained a large number and proportion of imitations is the somewhat earlier Dieci 2 hoard with 46 *subaerati* and imitations, ca. 15% of the total number of coins. However, all imitations from these hoards, including those from the Troianul hoard, attempt, however incompetently, to reproduce the legends from the original drachms.¹⁴ The lack of any ambition to this effect makes the counterfeiter of the coins from the Odra hoard a unique forger of Apollonian and Dyrrhachian coins.

¹⁰ Mitrea 1981-1982, 32-33 recognizes the categories of *subaerati*, bronze pieces without a visible silver coating and pieces that appear to have been made of silver; Sășianu 1987, 217-218 treats them all as *subaerati*. Following metallurgical analyses of the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium found in the territory of modern Romania, it was possible to differentiate the original coins (including the adulterated pieces) from bronze imitations with a large share of tin – an alloy resulting in silverish ‘white bronze’ – and from silver-plated bronze counterfeits (Bugoi et al. 1999, 780; Uzonyi et al. 2000; Constantinescu et al. 2003, 761, 763-765; Constantinescu et al. 2009).

¹¹ Mitrea 1981-1982, 31.

¹² Mitrea 1981-1982, 35-36.

¹³ The comparative analysis in Bilić 2021, 301-306.

¹⁴ Troianul: Mitrea 1981-1982, 45-46, T. I-II; Čelopek: Popović 1976, T. IV, 28-29; Doboz: Biró Sey, Goldman 1978, 229, Fig. 7, 136-139, 144; Dieci 2: Sășianu 1980, T. XX-XXI.

Analytical comparisons with other, partially comparable hoards composed of the original drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium together with their imitations have yielded some, however tentative, results that can offer certain indications for the dating of the Odra imitations/counterfeits. Thus, the metrological analyses suggest that the Odra hoard can be dated to a period similar to the one to which the hoards from Doboz, Drăgești, Tașad and Pećinci belong, that is, after 48 BC.¹⁵ However, it is important to emphasize that this method of determining chronological position is very insecure and must be understood only as a tentative suggestion.



Figure 1 – Odra Sisačka coins. 1 – GMS inv. no. 1202 (die combination 1-1). 2 – GMS inv. no. 1200 (die combination 1var-2). 3 – GMS inv. no. 1252 (die combination 2-3). 4 – GMS inv. no. 1241 (die combination 5-6). 5 – Kovač coll. no. 1 (die combination 3-4). 6 – Kovač coll. no. 2 (die combination 2-4). 7 – Kovač coll. no. 3 (die combination 1-1). 8 – Kovač coll. no. 4 (die combination 4-5). All coins were photographed by Igor Krajcar (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb).

Since the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium were almost completely replaced in the early second half of the 1st c. BC in Pannonia by the Roman Republican *denarii*, it can be presumed that their imitations or counterfeits appeared at least shortly prior to this event. This replacement could hardly had taken place much earlier, since the drachms of these two mints themselves arrived in greater numbers in this region only

¹⁵ The comparative analysis in Bilić 2021, 301-306.

during the preceding several decades of the 1st c. BC.¹⁶ In this sense, if the find-site of the 'Odra' hoard were authentic, it would belong to the margins of coin circulation in ancient Segest(ic)a/Siscia in the period not long prior to the Roman conquest of the Late Iron Age settlement. However, it seems more probable that these imitations or counterfeits were produced in the regions further to the east, i.e., in the territory of modern Romania, northern Serbia, eastern Hungary or northern Bulgaria, which is further supported by the distribution of the emission of the Apollonian drachms bearing the name of the mint magistrate ΝΙΚΩΝ on the obverse, as well as the distribution of imitations and counterfeits of the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium.¹⁷ Thus, taking into account the metrological and stylistic analysis, the most likely scenario is that the imitations were produced somewhere in the central or eastern Balkans area, probably in the 40s BC. All things considered, the immediate surroundings of modern Sisak cannot be completely discarded as the location of the deposition of the hoard, although it seems more likely that it was deposited and eventually recovered in the areas further to the east and that it only arrived to Sisak in the period immediately prior to its acquisition by the City Museum.

The Kovač collection coins

Following the publication of – as it turns out – the part of the Odra hoard kept in the City Museum Sisak, Dr Damir Kovač has brought to light four additional pieces, presumably from the Odra hoard, that he acquired precisely at the time of the appearance of the hoard on the numismatic market, i.e., in the early 1980s.¹⁸ The analysis of this batch of coins will support the accuracy of the provenance recorded by Dr Kovač.

Table 1 – Coins from the Odra hoard from the Kovač collection

Kovač coll. no.	die combination	weight (g)	diameter (mm)	axis	comment
1	3-4	10.73	21	20° cw	Au 91.74 %, Cu 3.94 %, Ag 4.22 % (SEM-EDS)
2	2-4	6.89	23	12	Ag 90.52 %, Cu 5.75 %, Pb 2.91 % (SEM-EDS)
3	1-1	3.14	15	10° ccw	
4	4-5	3.06	18	30° cw	

One of the coins (no. 3) was made by one of the die combinations (1-1) attested for the Odra hoard kept in the City Museum Sisak, and it thus undoubtedly comes from the same find. Its weight (3.14 g), furthermore, is consistent with the weight of the coins

¹⁶ For a review of opinions on this subject see Bilić 2014, 266-267, 273, 275-276; to the literature there cited one should add Meta 2012, 24-25, 29, 31; 2015, 223-225, 232-235, 260-267.

¹⁷ A distribution map of imitations and counterfeits of the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium is reproduced in Šašljanu 1987, 211, Fig. 2.

¹⁸ Kovač, pers. comm., 2023. I am grateful to Dr Kovač for offering me the possibility to study and publish the coins from his collection.

produced by the same die combination kept in the Sisak City Museum.¹⁹ Its die orientation is also consistent with the bulk of the hoard, while its diameter is somewhat smaller in comparison with the rest of the pieces.²⁰

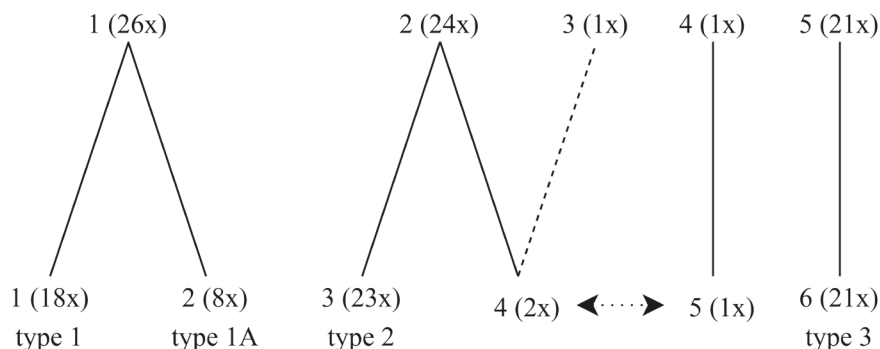


Figure 2 – Diagram of die relations between the coins from the Odra Sisačka hoard. Produced by diagrams.net.

Among the remaining three coins, two are especially interesting. Uniquely, one of the coins is a rather poor hybrid imitation/counterfeit of a gold Dyrrhachian stater (*sic*) with a clumsy depiction of Pegasus to the left, accompanied by the legend Δ -Y- Γ (*sic*) on the obverse and the double stellate / floral pattern on the reverse. This coin is very strange, for a number of reasons. First, the Dyrrhachium mint has never struck gold coins. Second, it apparently combines (hence my use of the term ‘hybrid’) the Pegasus from the Corinthian-type silver staters on the obverse with the double stellate / floral pattern from the Corcyraean-type silver staters on the reverse, issued by the Dyrrhachium mint after 350 BC to ‘well before’ 308/306 BC and ca. 375-280 BC, respectively.²¹ Its weight (10.73 g) corresponds to the average weight of Dyrrhachian silver staters of the Corcyraean type, with the depiction of a cow with calf on the obverse (ca. 10.60-10.70 g),²² which offered the model for the reverse of the counterfeit gold stater (double stellate / floral pattern). At the same time, the obverse depiction of Pegasus was modelled upon the silver staters of the Corinthian type, with an average weight of 8.40-8.60 g,²³ which is clearly not the weight standard on which the gold counterfeit was based. For what it’s worth, almost all Corinthian staters struck in Dyrrhachium mint depict Pegasus to the right, with only a few exceptions (Meta’s dies D37, 42, 44, Pl. VI-VII), but it is not plausible to assume that these particular issues were the actual inspiration for the counterfeiter. In addition, instead of the Pegasus on the Corinthian-type silver staters, the Pegasus on the gold stater might have been modelled upon the Corcyraean-type quarter

¹⁹ Av. weight 3.18 g, range 3.94-2.65 g (Bilić 2021, 299).

²⁰ On the die axes orientations in the bulk of the hoard see Bilić 2021, 297-298.

²¹ Meta 2015, 27, 141-143, 147, 153, 156-158. For a somewhat later starting date for the Corcyraean-type staters see Gjongecaj-Vangjeli 2019, 322-323 (330-290/280 BC) and Kremydi 2022, 421. Gjongecaj-Vangjeli 2019, 322 dates the Corinthian-type staters to 344-330 BC.

²² Meta 2015, 6, 156; Gjongecaj-Vangjeli 2019, 329-330.

²³ Meta 2015, 6.

stater, which displayed the mythical winged horse on their reverse and were struck ca. 315-270 BC.²⁴ Here the depiction of Pegasus to the right also dominates, but there are more exceptions in comparison with the Corinthian-type staters (Meta's dies R7, 13, 64-67, 76-77, 79-81, 84, 103, 128, 144-145, 164, 198-199, Pl. XXI-XXVII). However, in terms of counterfeiter's inspiration, the same observation also applies to this type of coin.

The presence of this gold stater, struck on the standard of Corcyraean-Dyrrhachian silver staters of the cow and calf / double stellate / floral pattern type, with the obverse depiction modelled upon the Corinthian-Dyrrhachian silver staters or the Corcyraean-Dyrrhachian silver quarter staters, in the Odra hoard is clearly problematic. The circulation of Dyrrhachian Pegasi was limited almost exclusively to Sicily and Magna Graecia, with little or no traces of their presence even in the immediate territory of the city itself.²⁵ Also, the circulation of the Corcyraean-Dyrrhachian silver staters of the cow and calf / double stellate / floral pattern type was apparently limited to modern Albania, corresponding to ancient southern Illyria, and western Greece.²⁶ Similarly, the circulation of the Corcyraean-type quarter staters with Pegasus on the reverse was limited to Illyria.²⁷ In no way are these coin-types associated with the massive expansion of the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium into the Danube region and the western Balkans during the later first half of the 1st c. BC, to which the bulk of the coins from the Odra Sisačka hoard should be related.

At the same time, the results of an SEM-EDS surface analysis have shown that the coin was made of an alloy of gold (91.74 %) adulterated by lesser quantities of copper (3.94 %) and silver (4.22 %).²⁸ This suggests that the flan was cast in a pre-modern period, since a modern counterfeiter would more likely use gold of a higher purity. However, it cannot be excluded that the coin nonetheless is a modern counterfeit.

Finally, the gold stater shares the reverse die with an unusually heavy (6.89 g) adulterated silver imitation (no. 2), which, in its turn shares the obverse die with 23 coins from the bulk of the Odra hoard kept in the City Museum Sisak (die combination 2-3). This undoubtedly proves that both this silver coin and the gold stater originally belonged to the Odra Sisačka assemblage. It is unclear why the counterfeiter prepared such a heavy flan for this particular 'drachm', well outside the weight range of the coins in the Odra hoard (2.45-3.60 g). Perhaps a didrachm was intended? In addition, the flan is clearly too large for the reverse die used in the striking. As noted earlier, the flans on which the die combination 2-3 was struck are somewhat larger (range 18.5-23 mm, average diameter ca. 20 mm, median diameter 20.75 mm) in comparison with the flans of the other combinations, but the dies used in their production are of the right size for these flans, which cannot be said for the rv. die no. 4. This coin, together with the gold stater, gives the impression of being an experimental piece, in which the counterfeiter attempted to

²⁴ Meta 2015, 44, 174. *Gjongecaj-Vangjeli* 2019, 322, 324, 326 dates the quarter staters to 330/312-270 BC.

²⁵ Meta 2015, 249-250.

²⁶ Meta 2015, 250-253.

²⁷ Meta 2015, 174; *Kremydi* 2022, 421.

²⁸ The coin was analysed by *Damir Doračić* of the analytical laboratory of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb using a scanning electron microscope with the accompanying spectrometer of characteristic X-rays (SEM-EDS).

create novel combinations, denominations or types, with little or no basis in the actual coinage of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium. The metal content of this imitation (Ag 90.52 %, Cu 5.75 %, Pb 2.91 %) is consistent with that of adulterated Dyrrhachian drachms issued by the magistrates Xenon and Meniskos from the territory of Romania (Ag 78-92 %, Cu 4-20 %),²⁹ as well as with the similarly adulterated Dyrrhachian drachms issued by the same magistrates from the Hungarian National Museum, presumably found in the Carpathian Basin (Ag ca. 90-92 %, Cu ca. 6-8 %).³⁰ These comparisons suggest, although they do not prove, the pre-modern origin of the Odra Sisačka imitations/counterfeits.

The final, fourth coin (no. 4), is a singleton, produced by an otherwise unattested pair of dies. However, its reverse die is closely related to the rv. die no. 4, which, as demonstrated immediately above, is die-linked to the bulk of the hoard. Its weight (3.06 g) is perfectly consistent with the average (3.00 g) and median (3.02 or 3.05 g) weight of the coins from the Odra hoard, and falls securely within its weight range (2.45-3.60 g).

Thus, the four new coins from the Kovač collection undoubtedly belong to the Odra Sisačka hoard. One (no. 1), shares a pair of dies with 17 coins from the hoard kept in the City Museum Sisak. Another (no. 2), shares an obverse die with 23 coins from the bulk of the hoard. In its turn, this coin shares the reverse die with the third coin from the Kovač collection (no. 1). Finally, the reverse die of the fourth coin (no. 4) is closely related to the reverse die shared by coins nos. 1 and 2. The Kovač collection pieces are, however, more idiosyncratic in comparison with the bulk of the hoard. One (no. 3) was struck on a smaller flan, another was struck on a heavier flan, perhaps representing a double-unit (no. 2), one is a unique gold hybrid of two different silver stater (or a silver stater and quarter stater), which belong to a much earlier period in comparison with the models for the imitations that comprise the rest of the hoard (no. 1), while even the fourth piece shows a slight deviation in terms of die alignment in comparison with the rest of the assemblage,³¹ in addition to being a singleton (no. 4). It appears that these four pieces were not assembled haphazardly, but were picked out as curiosities from the bulk of the rather monotonous material.

It seems highly probable that the Odra Sisačka hoard originally contained more coins than the presently recorded 73 pieces. Perhaps this publication of a small segment of the hoard from a private collection will motivate other local and/or regional collectors to skim through their collections and locate – and, ideally, report or publish – some of these remaining coins.

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²⁹ Bugoi et al. 1999, 780; Constantinescu et al. 2003, 761, 763-765; Constantinescu et al. 2009.

³⁰ Uzonyi et al. 2000.

³¹ Although it is still within the tolerated deviation of ca. 1h (30°) in either direction (*De Callatay* 1996, 93; *Haymann, Hollstein* 2016, 391).

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