

THE COINAGE OF THE LAST KING OF THRACE – RHOEMETALCES III: types, nominals, and iconographic characteristics



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***Abstract.** From about 12/11 BC to 45/46 AD the Thracian Kingdom existed as a politically unified organization due to Roman assistance. All the rulers had their own coinages issued in various quantities: from the varied bimetallic coinage of King Rhoemetalces I, including nine types of bronze coins struck in large volumes, and silver issues in two or three denominations; through the rare coins of Cotys and Rhaescuporis and the smaller volumes of bronze coins of King Rhoemetalces II, to the commemorative issues of King Rhoemetalces III, who had five types of bronze coins struck in four denominations. The different iconography of the coins of Rhoemetalces III and the engraving skills invested in the making of the dies and inscriptions distinguish the final issues of Rhoemetalces III from those of his predecessors.*

***Keywords:** Rhoemetalces III; Thracian coinages; Thracian kingdom; Thrace; Roman provinces*

The reign of the first Thracian king with the name Rhoemetalces began *c.* 12/11 BC when, with the help of Rome, a kingdom with a large territory was established. This kingdom included Chalhodon in Asia Minor. The fate of the kingdom was closely linked to the relationship between the successors of Rhoemetalces, who fought for supremacy and sole rule. This was achieved by the last two kings of Thrace, Rhoemetalces II and Rhoemetalces III.

The Thracian line of rulers from King Rhoemetalces I to King Rhoemetalces III

When Rhoemetalces I became king of Thrace in 12/11 BC he controlled significant territories that included lands between the Danube and the

Propontis, including Chalhodon and its adjacent lands in Asia Minor. After the death of the Thracian king in 11/12 AD, the Roman Emperor Augustus divided the Thracian lands between Rhaescuporis II, brother of Rhoemetalces I, and Cotys VII, son of Rhoemetalces I. Whether the partition was dictated by purely administrative and hereditary considerations such as the experience of the elder Rhaescuporis in military and managerial terms (and at the same time enshrined the hereditary right of Cotys), or whether the Romans – knowing the character of Rhaescuporis from the military campaigns – thought that a partition which deliberately set up contradictions and enmity would ultimately help keep Thrace in line, we can only guess.

It is known from the ancient sources that Cotys, the son of Rhoemetals I, received from Emperor Augustus a part of the Thracian kingdom which was divided in two after the death of his father in 11/12 AD. His co-ruler was Rhaescuporis, brother of Rhoemetals I, with whom he had a brief joint reign (Tac. Ann. II. 64). It was brief because Rhaescuporis killed Cotys during a feast in 17/18 AD (Todorov, 1998, p. 122) (Tac. Ann. II.65). Tiberius sent Pomponius Flacius to Thrace with the task of persuading Rhaescuporis to go to Rome, and delivering him there – which he did. In the capital of the Roman Empire, before the Senate, he was accused of murder by the widow of Cotys and sent into exile in Alexandria (Tac. Ann. II. 67).

After the removal of Rhaescuporis II to Rome, and his subsequent exile in Egypt and assassination in 19 AD, Rhoemetals II and the minor children of Cotys VII by his marriage to Antonia Tryphaena became governors of Thrace. Rhoemetals assumed sole rule of the Thracian kingdom. He had the title of dynast until 25/6 AD, after which he was given the title of king and was known as Rhoemetals II. Until his death in 37/8 AD, he ruled the Thracian kingdom single-handedly, while the children of Cotys VII - Polemon, Rhoemetals and Cotys – under the guardianship of Trebellenus Rufus (T. Trebellenus Rvfvs, PIR I, pars III (230), 334), were educated in Rome (Tacheva, 1997, p. 92).

Coin issues of the last Thracian kings

Significant in volume and variety of denominations, bimetallic coinage including silver and bronze issues was implemented by Rhoemetals I. This began immediately after he took the helm of the Thracian kingdom. After King Mostis, coinage of silver issues which included drachms and didrachms was resumed in limited volumes under Rhoemetals I (Paunov, 2018, pp. 233–235). A rare issue of tetradrachms is known, with a three-line inscription on the obverse, with the name of Rhoemetals. This minting, according to S. Topalov, who first promulgated the issue, was probably under King Rhoemetals II, and less probably under King Rhoemetals I (Topalov, 1996, pp. 161–164, p. 182; Topalov, 2009, pp. 264–265, p. 359), or

attributed to the production of Rhoemetals II (Paunov, 2021, pp. 244–245). The lack of large coin production and the absence of silver types under Rhoemetals II, are the reasons to believe that the rare tetradrachms were minted during the reign of King Rhoemetals I. The bronze issues of King Rhoemetals I have been well studied and are either systematized into two groups and 16 types (Paunov, 2018, p. 223), or nine types of several denominations, with Type I – which comprises the ruler's lowest denomination coins - having eight known subtypes (Yordanov, 2020, p. 28).

During the short joint reign of the successors of King Rhoemetals I – Cotys and Rhaescuporis II - only one rare issue of bronze coins with the portraits of the two co-emperors was minted in Thrace (Mouchmov, 1927, p. 245; Dzanev, 2008, pp. 305–313). In the second decade of the 1st century AD, the series of bronze coins of Rhoemetals I circulated in Thrace. These were significant in terms of volume, minted in large quantities during the reign of King Rhoemetals I, and continued in use after his death.

Rhoemetals II reigned as a dynast from 18/19 AD and as king of Thrace from 25 AD when, according to the epigraphic data of the second inscription from Anchialos, he was awarded a royal title (Karayotov, 2007, 291–303). Two types of bronze coins of two denominations are associated with King Rhoemetals II (Yordanov, 2017, p. 50).

The Coinage of the King Rhoemetals III (37/8 – 45/6)

Rhoemetals III and his brothers - the children of his father's marriage to Antonia Tryphaena and groomed by the Romans to be administrators and governors of kingdoms and provinces – lived in Rome until the death of King Rhoemetals II. Because of their minority, Trebellinus Rufus, a former praetor, was appointed as their guardian (Tac. Ann. II. 67).

The reign of the son of Cotys (that is, Cotys VII), which preceded the actual end of the Thracian kingdom, was brief but interesting from a numismatic perspective. The coin types differ considerably from those of his predecessors, they are carefully and skilfully made, no countermarks

are to be found on them, and they present us with new and different images and inscriptions. As has already been established, the coin issues of King Rhoemetalces III were of a propagandistic and commemorative nature (Yorukova, 1992, p. 204).

The coinage of King Rhoemetalces III includes the following types of coins:

I Type. Av. ΓΑΙΩ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙ ΓΕΡΜΑΝΙΚΩ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩ. Bust of Emperor Gaius with laurel wreath, to the left.

Rv. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΡΟΙΜΗΤΑΛΚΑΣ ΚΟΤΥΩΣ. Emperor Gaius seated on a throne without a backrest on the left, hands a diadem to Rhoemetalces III standing in front of him. With his right hand the Thracian ruler accepted the diadem. He holds a staff (or a spear?) with his left hand.

Ref.: Mouchmov, 1927, № 211; Youroukova, 1976, № 213 (= Yurukova, 1992 – № 177); RPC I – № 1722; Paunov, 2021, p. 246, Fig. 6.42; [Fig. 1](#).

II Type. Av. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΡΟΙΜΗΤΑΛΚΑΣ. Bust of King Rhoemetalces III, diademed and mantled, to the left.

Rv. ΓΑΙΩ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩ. Bust of Emperor Gaius, with laurel wreath, to the left.

Ref.: Mouchmov, 1927, № 212; Yurukova, 1992, № 174, 175; RPC I – № 1723; Paunov, 2021, p. 247, Fig. 6.43; [Fig. 2](#).

III Type. Av. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΡΟΙΜΗΤΑΛΚΑΣ. Bust of King Rhoemetalces III, diademed and mantled to the right.

Rv. ΓΑΙΩ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩ. Bust of Emperor Gaius, with laurel wreath, to the left.

Ref.: Mouchmov, 1927, № 213; Yurukova, 1992, № 176; RPC I – № 1724; [Fig. 3](#).

IV Type. Av. ΓΑΙΩ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙ. Emperor Gaius' head with a laurel wreath, to the left.

Rv. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ. Victoria, holding a palm branch and a wreath, to the right.

Ref.: Mouchmov, 1927, № 214; RPC I – № 1725; Paunov, 2021, p. 249, Fig. 6.44; [Fig. 4](#).

V Type. Av. ΓΑΙΩ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙ. Emperor Gaius' head with a laurel wreath, to the left.

Rv. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ. Eagle standing right with wings spread, looking left. Holds a wreath in his beak. Retrograde inscription, counter-clockwise.

Ref.: Mouchmov, 1927, № 215; RPC I – № 1726; Paunov, 2021, p. 250, Fig. 6.45; [Fig. 5](#).

All the five types of bronze coins are known from the publication of N. Mouchmov, 1927, p. 248). Some of the types are also found in Yorukova's publication (Yorukova, 1992, pp. 297–298, nos. 174–177). The latter are discussed by E. Paunov, who distinguishes four types of bronze coins of King Rhoemetalces III (Paunov, 2021, pp. 246–250, Fig. 6.42-6.45). He unites into one type the coins described here as Types II and III.

The first type of coins presents interesting iconography and inscriptions in the dative case on the obverse, while the name and title of the reverse are in the nominative case and only the name of his father – Cotys – is in the genitive case (Yurukova, 1992, p. 202). The iconography of the type is peculiar, the Roman emperor is seated on a low throne and the Thracian king is standing straight in front of the Emperor Gaius receiving the symbol of royal power – the diadem – are represented. The official ceremony of the transfer of royal power from the Emperor Gaius to Rhoemetalces is attested by Dio Cassius, from whom we understand that it took place at the Forum (Cass. Dio, Hist. Rom. LIX.12.2). Other coins with similar iconography – which unites them and makes them coronation coins – are also known, and form a small group of Roman imperial coins issued when a vassal king of Rome received royal power. Abramzon has collected six such examples attested in coinage between the 1st and 3rd centuries, struck mostly in silver and gold and occasionally in bronze (Abramzon, 2002, pp. 239–242). Images of commemorative issues issued for such purposes fall into two groups: 1) the emperor seated, sometimes surrounded by a group of military men, with the vassal king receiving the crown; and 2) figures of the emperor and the vassal king only (Abramzon, 2002, pp. 241–242); Type I coins of King Rhoemetalces III belong to the second group. The weights of the known specimens – some of them collected by E. Paunov (Paunov, 2021, pp. 246–247), link the denomination, and the iconography, to that

of the Roman sestertii - an opinion also expressed by Abramzon (2002, p. 241).

The coins of Types II and III, with average weights half those of Type I coins, form the second denomination of the coinage of King Rhoemetalces III. More specimens are known and their iconography, with one image on each side – of Emperor Gaius and of King Rhoemetalces – but of high artistic workmanship is executed with care, as noted Y. Yurukova (1992, p. 204). The iconography of the two types presents us with Emperor Gaius always in the left-hand position, but the Thracian king is also depicted on the left (Type II) and on the right (Type III). The description of the coins of both types in a number of publications is of Emperor Gaius on the obverse (RPC I, nos. 1723, 1724; Yurukova, 1992, nos. 174–176). But specimens are known in which it is clearly observed that the upper seal at the minting bears the image of Emperor Gaius (Numismatik Naumann, Auction 45, lot 364). For the specimens belonging to Type II, the author has found the use of 3 obverse and 3 reverse dies.

For Type III, there is no clear specimen to know definitively which is the obverse and reverse. But observations on the few coins the author knows of, and one auction coin in particular (Gorny & Mosch, Auction 241, lot 1766), allow the suggestion that the face of the Thracian king Rhoemetalces III is on the obverse. In the Type I, we find the use of two obverse and two reverse dies.

Coins of Type IV form the third denomination. Mouchmov includes them in the production of Rhoemetalces III (Mouchmov, 1927, no. 214), later, as writes E. Paunov, they were considered to be the issues of King Agrippa I and today are again considered to be the bronzes of Rhoemetalces III (RPC I, no. 1725; Paunov, 2021, p. 249).

The lowest denomination in the coinage of Rhoemetalces was formed by the Type V coins. In these, as in the coins of Type IV, we see again their designation by N. Mouchmov for the issues of Rhoemetalces III (Mouchmov, 1927, no. 215), and subsequently they are assigned to the issues of the last king of Judea. To be included in the Thracian coinage of Rhoemetalces III (RPC I, no. 1726; Paunov, 2021, p. 249). It should be noted that the author knows of no coins of Types IV and

V that have been found in Bulgaria. It is possible that they have not been recognized in view of the rarity of the issues.

After the death of King Rhoemetalces III, in either 45 or 46 AD, Emperor Claudius transformed part of the Thracian Kingdom into a senatorial province (Tacheva, 1997, p. 92). While the northern Thracian lands were included within the boundaries of the Roman province of Moesia (subsequently, in 86, divided by Emperor Domitian into Upper and Lower Moesia (Tacheva, 1997, p. 153)). In the urban centres of the Balkan provinces, the Romans organised provincial coinage, which was part of the imperial financial and monetary policy in line with Roman iconography, yet in separate series of urban issues we find the Thracian legacy.

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APPENDIX



Fig. 1. King Rhoemetalces III, Type I coin.
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Inv. № 1303.
Photography:
Krasimir Georgiev.



Fig. 2. King Rhoemetalces III, Type II.
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Inv. № 6463.
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Krasimir Georgiev.



Fig. 3. King Rhoemetalces III, Type III coin.
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Fig. 4. King Rhoemetalces III, Type IV coin.
© Gorny & Mosch
Giessener Auction 241,
lot 1768



Fig. 5. King Rhoemetalces III, Type V coin.
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