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ЗЛАТНИТЕ СТАТЕРИ НА ЦАРИЦА ДИНАМИС И НЕЙНОТО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ В БОСПОРСКОТО ЦАРСТВО

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Golden Staters of Queen Dynamis and Her Rule over the Bosporan Kingdom[1]

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Abstract: This article discusses the significance of two gold staters issued by Queen Dynamis of the Bosporan Kingdom in 21/20 and 17/16 BC in the context of her potential independent rule. An analysis of the available source material, along with a comparison of the circumstances of their minting with similar coinage issued by Hellenistic queens, suggests that these coins do not demonstrate Dynamis' sole rule but rather served as propaganda supporting the legitimacy of King Asander. Numerous inscriptions bearing pro-Roman titulature, as well as gold staters featuring the DYM monogram, should be dated to the period after 14 BC, when Dynamis, as the wife of Polemon I, effectively ruled the Bosporus independently. Moreover, an examination of the self-presentation and political strategies of Pharnaces II, Asander, Dynamis, and Aspurgus shows that these rulers deliberately crafted their public image by combining elements of local dynastic tradition with efforts to gain recognition from Rome.

Keywords: Basilissa Dynamis, Mithridatic tradition, Golden Bosporan coinage, Royal self-representation, Roman client kings.

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1. Introduction

This article examines the reign of Queen Dynamis of the Bosporan Kingdom and her status in

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the last quarter of the 1st century BC. Special emphasis is placed on the significance of two gold staters from 21/20 and 17/16 BC (*RPC* I 1864, 1864B; Anokhin 2011, nos. 1343, 1344) and their importance for the discussion concerning potential periods during which Dynamis may have ruled independently. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation, it is essential to consider the events that took place on the northern shores of the Black Sea from around the mid-1st century BC to the early 1st century AD, when the Bosporan Kingdom was ruled by Pharnaces II, Asander, Polemon I, — possibly for a brief time — by a certain Scribonius. This will be achieved by analysing relevant numismatic and epigraphic evidence, as well as the testimony of ancient authors. The interpretation of this material will also take into account potential differences in the attitudes of the aforementioned rulers toward the distant Roman Empire, and the extent to which they considered the consequences of opposing Roman interests.

Dynamis was the daughter of King Pharnaces II and the granddaughter of Mithridates VI Eupator. She was married to Asander, a trusted commander of Pharnaces II, who assumed the Bosporan throne when the king departed for Asia Minor in an attempt to restore his father's kingdom around 48 BC (Cass. Dio 42.45; App. *Mith*. 120; *Bell. Alex*. 34–41). Later, around 16 BC, she likely married Scribonius, who claimed the throne after Asander's death, presenting himself as a grandson of Mithridates Eupator. Finally, in 14 BC, she became the wife of Polemon I, King of Pontus, who had been appointed by Augustus to rule the northern shores of the Black Sea (Cass. Dio 54.24.4–6).

Around 12 BC, however, Polemon married Pythodoris, which some scholars interpret as evidence that Dynamis had died or had been divorced and removed from power. Yet this need not have been the case. As Primo argues, it is entirely plausible that Polemon I married Pythodoris while still remaining the husband of Dynamis. This arrangement, sanctioned by Augustus, would have allowed the Bosporan Kingdom to remain under Roman control, while direct authority continued to be exercised by Eupator's granddaughter, and Polemon, together with Pythodoris, administered their domains in Asia Minor (Primo 2010, 159–169).[2]

Thus, it is evident that Dynamis, as the heir to the Pontic dynasty, played a crucial role in legitimizing power in the Bosporan Kingdom. She mantained the Mithridatic tradition – a form of Persianism invoking Achaemenid roots – which had been carefully cultivated by her father, Pharnaces II, who bore the title "Great King of Kings" (*CIRB* 28) (Ballesteros Pastor 2021). Additionally, like many Hellenistic *basilissai* before her, she functioned — as Strootman has described — as a power broker, whose prestigious lineage made her a key figure in the architecture of rule (Strootman 2021, 338–340).

According to the still widely accepted theory of Rostovtzeff (1919), there was a second independent period of Dynamis's rule, which supposedly lasted from the death of Polemon I at the hands of the Aspurgians (Strab. 11.2.11) around 9 BC to about AD 7/8, or possibly even longer.[3] This theory is based on the attribution to Dynamis of a series of gold staters minted during this period in the Bosporan Kingdom bearing the so-called monogram DYM,[4] thought to

[2] An earlier hypothesis suggesting that the kingdom was divided between Polemon and Dynamis was proposed by Anokhin (1999, 124–133).

[3] Primo (2010) rightly points out that the events described by Strabo may have taken place around AD 8 rather than 8 BC.

[4] Anokhin (2011) presents two coins — one dated to 12/11 BC and the other to 10/9 BC — both bearing the DYM monogram (nos. 1360, 1361). MacDonald (2005) also refers to these specimens (nos. 249, 250), suggesting the possibility of a parallel rule by Pythodoris and Dynamis. Frolova and Ireland (2002, 62) point out that the coin dated to 12/11 BC may be a forgery. Bjerg (2013, 180) likewise mentions this specimen, but relies exclusively on Frolova. Anokhin (1999, 127–128) includes the coin dated to 12/11 BC, citing the article by Pokrass (1997), from which the specimen originates. In view of the limited amountof further research on these coins and the doubts expressed by the aforementioned scholars, I have chosen not to include them in this article. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that, if authentic, these staters would demonstrate that issues with the DYM monogram began already during the lifetime of Polemon I, and that the date of his death in 9/8 BC — established specifically on the basis of the appearance of these coins — may need to be reconsidered. Consequently, the hypotheses of those scholars

be an abbreviation of her name (Frolova 1997, 26–9; Frolova, Ireland 2002, 6–7).[5] Most scholars accepted this possibility because the earliest inscription of the next ruler, Aspurgus, is dated to c. AD 15, (Blavatskaya 1965; Saprykin 1996; Heinen 2001; 2006), while gold coins marked with the monogram associated with him (BAP) were issued from AD 13/14 onward (Anokhin 1986, 94–95; Frolova 1997, 64–69). This allowed the assumption that most inscriptions mentioning only Dynamis originated from a period during which she exercised full authority.

It is worth mentioning here the recent attempts to revise the interpretation of the political situation on the Bosporus during this period by attributing coins bearing the monogram DYM to the reign of Aspurgus. This theory is based on a new inscription of King Aspurgus from Gorgippia, discovered in 2013 and published in 2018 (Zavoykina et al. 2018). The text, which Zavoykina dates to AD 6/7 and which was found on the base of a statue funded by the king for a local gymnasium, Aspurgus refers to himself as king and *philoromaios*. The text is well preserved and states that King Aspurgus dedicated statues of Hermes and Heracles and placed them in the local gymnasium. The inscription reads as follows:

1 βασιλεὺς Ἀσποῦργο[ς],
φιλορώμαιος, ὁ ἐκ βασιλέ[ως]
μεγάλου Ἀσανδρόχου,
ἀνέθηκεν Ἑρμῆι καὶ Ἡρακ[λεῖ]
5 γυμνασιαρχοῦντος
Δάσει Γρείπου ἐν τῶι ΓΤ΄ ἔ[τει]

Translation: King Aspurgus, friend of Romans, descending from Great King Asandrochos, dedicated to Hermes and Heracles, during the tenure of gymnasiarch Dasios son of Greipos, in year 303(?). (Trans. M. Halamus).

The year 303 of the Bosporan era, that is 6/7 AD, together with the title *philoromaios* used by Aspurgus, would indeed suggest that the coins bearing the monogram DYM, minted between 9/8 BC and AD 7/8, should be attributed to his reign – thus casting serious doubt on the possibility of Dynamis ruling during this time. However, it must be emphasized that the lower right corner of the inscription is somewhat distorted due to later reuse. Although Zavoykina, in her recent work, confirms her interpretation regarding the date (Zavoykina 2023), Makarov's doubts about the validity of this interpretation appear to be justified (*AE* 2018, 1412; *SEG* 68: 493). Based on the available photographs of the stone, a precise dating of the inscription cannot be established. Therefore, relying on this inscription to challenge the theory of a second period of Dynamis's reign remains premature and continues to be controversial.[6]

With this in mind, how should we interpret other evidence related to her rule such as inscriptions where Dynamis appears as queen alongside Asander (*CIRB* 30), texts where she is mentioned as the sole ruler (*CIRB* 31; 38; 978; 979; 1046; *IOSPE* I^2 354; *SEG* 45: 1018; *SEG* 45: 1025), her gold coins, and the mention by Cassius Dio of her co-regency with Asander during his last few years (Cass. Dio 54.24.4)? Recognizing that after 14 BC Dynamis ruled the Bosporan Kingdom either as a widow (after 9/8 BC) or as the official wife of Polemon I allows us to attribute the majority of inscriptions mentioning the queen to this period. Therefore, it is worth analyzing the significance of the two earlier gold staters bearing her image in the context of the final stage of Asander's reign and the potential first period of the *basilissa's* independent rule.

who argue for a longer reign of this ruler gain plausibility.

[5] The DYM monogram was attributed to Dynamis by Mommsen (1860). Opponents of this theory associate it, along with other monograms of the period (BAE, BAM, ΠΑΡ), with Aspurgus or unidentified members of the Mithridatid dynasty thought to have ruled the kingdom during this turbulent period (see Zavoykina 2023, 149–151).

[6] Some researchers propose alternative dates; for example, Saprykin (2019, 492–493) argues that the inscription dates to AD 19/20.

2. Problems Related to the Interpretation of Sources on Asander and Dynamis

The chronology of Asander's and Dynamis' reign remains one of the most problematic aspects of Bosporan history. The numismatic evidence from this period includes bronze coins and more than 70 gold staters attributed to Asander. However, the bronze coinage bears no chronological references, whilst the gold staters are marked with the regnal year in which they were produced and do not refer to the Bosporan era,[7] unlike those of his predecessor. Moreover, each stater bore a number from A=1 to ΘK=29, which led to the general assumption that Asander ruled for 29 years (Anokhin 1986, 77–80; Nawotka 1991-2, 29; Frolova, Ireland 2002, 5–6; Bjerg 2013, 177–178).

Interestingly, the golden coinage of Asander shows that he initially referred to himself as archon and it was not until the fourth year of his rule that he assumed the title of king. Coins marked with regnal years from one to four bear legends containing the title of archon "ΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣ ΑΣΑΝΔΡΟΥ (ΒΟΣΠΟΡΟΥ)", whereas later coins (from years four to 29 include the title of king "ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΣΑΝΔΡΟΥ". Thus, year four (Δ) saw a significant change in titulature (Anokhin 2011, nos. 1319; 1320) as only one coin from this time bears the title "ΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣ" while five contain the title "ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ" (Frolova, Ireland 2002, 34–35).

There are several hypotheses concerning the duration of Asander's rule. To determine when it started and ended, one must rely on the scarce coinage of Queen Dynamis and two passages from Lukian and Cassius Dio. For a long time, the only datable coin of Dynamis was a gold stater dated to 17/16 BC, featuring her diademed bust on the obverse and the Pontic star and crescent accompanied by the legend "ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΔΥΝΑΜΕΩΣ" (Frolova 1997, 197; Anokhin 2011, no. 1343). Additionally, the coin is annotated with year 281 of the Bosporan era, which suggests that she used the same dating system for her coinage as her father, Pharnaces. The coin also contains no references to Asander, which led most scholars to claim that he died around 17 BC. This would therefore indicate that Asander (if he indeed did rule for 29 years), after rebelling against Pharnaces, began minting his own coinage around 47/46 BC and was acknowledged as king a few years later (between 43 and 41 BC). However, the situation became more complicated in 1983 when another stater of Dynamis was found in Yalta. This newly found coin, dated to 21/20 BC, is almost identical to the 17/16 BC stater, and presents Dynamis as the sole ruler of the Bosporus (Frolova 1997, 197; Anokhin 2011, no. 1344; Frolowa, Ireland 2002, 5; Ivantchik, Tokhtas'ev 2011, 165).

Fig. 1. Golden stater of Dynamis, 17/16 BC. Obv.: diademed and draped bust of Dynamis, right. Rev.: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗ[Σ] ΔΥΝΑΜΕΩΣ, Star in crescent, date according to the Bosporan era (ΑΠΣ = 281). https://bosporan-kingdom.com/254-5133/, no. 254-5133.

Fig. 2. Golden stater of Dynamis, 21/20 BC. (ΖΟΣ = 277). https://bosporan-kingdom.com/253-5240/1.html, no. 253-5240.

Besides the numismatic evidence, there are two narrative sources concerning the end of Asander's rule, which must be considered when discussing the events of the second half of the 1st century BC. The first concerns a brief passage from Lukian's *Makrobioi*, in which the writer mentions that after serving as *ethnarch*, Asander was proclaimed king of Bosporus by *Sebastos*

[7] The Bosporan Era was in fact a Pontic-Bithynian Era, introduced by Mithridates VI Eupator. A year was starting in October and ending in September.

(Augustus). However, when he saw that his troops had deserted him in favour of a certain Scribonius, he reportedly starve himself to death at the age of 93 (Luc. *Macrob*. 17).

The second source, provided by Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, is much more helpful as it sets 14 BC as the *terminus ante quem*. According to the passage in question, when Marcus Crassus and Gnaeus Cornelius were consuls in 14 BC, a revolt broke out among the tribes of the Cimmerian Bosporus, led by Scribonius, who claimed to be a grandson of Mithridates and asserted that Augustus had given him the kingdom after Asander's death. Scribonius married Asander's widow, Dynamis; however, the Romans disapproved of him, and Agrippa sent Polemon to quell the revolt. When the Bosporans learned that Polemon had been sent and that Scribonius was a fraud, they killed him. Initially, Polemon encountered resistance, but faced with the impending expedition led by Agrippa himself, the Bosporans surrendered. Subsequently, Dynamis became Polemon's wife with Augustus's approval (Cass. Dio 54.24.4–6)

There are several hypotheses concerning the identity of Scribonius and the impact he had on the events presented by Cassius Dio. Due to the lack of any epigraphic and numismatic evidence regarding this individual, his potential rule over Bosporus appears to have been ephemeral and may have occurred around 16/15 BC.[8] What is important regarding to Asander's chronology and his relations with Rome, is the section concerning Dynamis being entrusted with the regency of the Bosporan Kingdom. This information is confirmed by the joint inscription of the royal couple (*CIRB* 30), and therefore it can be assumed that Asander, at some point, transferred part of his authority to his wife. Naturally, an exact chronology of these turbulent times is difficult to trace. However, most scholars agree that the year 14 BC marks the end of the above events. Another interesting aspect of the two passages is that unlike Lukian, Cassius Dio does not refer to any direct clashes between the usurper and the old king.

As we can see, the literary and numismatic evidence presented above must be interpreted cautiously when reconstructing Asander's regnal chronology, as the evidence remains imprecise and allows for multiple hypotheses. Besides the scholars who created their works before the discovery of the second stater of Dynamis in 1983, several others have tried to find a suitable solution by emphasizing various factors, such as attitudes towards Rome, the iconography of the coins, and the simple lack of other evidence that might shed new light on the matter. Therefore, we may distinguish two groups of scholars: those who believe that Asander did not mint his coins after 21/20 BC (e.g., Anokhin 1986, 78; Frolova et al. 1993; Parfenov 1996, 96; Frolova 1997; Frolova, Ireland 2002, 48; Bjerg 2013, 177–178; Ivantchik, Tokhtas'ev 2013, 165; Zavoykina 2023) – considering the gold staters of Dynamis as evidence of her independent rule – and those who think that he issued his gold staters simultaneously with Dynamis (Nawotka 1991–2; Saprykin 2002, 70–72; Primo 2010; Choref 2014; Coşkun 2019b), not attributing much significance to the rather unusual discrepancy in the parallel coinage of royal consorts.

3. Pharnaces II's Expedition: Interpretative Possibilities of the Sources

Due to the difficulty in dating Asander's reign, it is essential to determine when he assumed power in the Bosporus and began minting his coins. This requires an examination of Pharnaces II's expedition to Asia Minor and the circumstances leading to his loss of power. In the late 50s BC, Mithridates Eupator's son undertook several measures that suggested he was preparing for a confrontation with Rome. He strengthened his power by subjugating nearby tribes and forging military alliances (Strab. 11.2.8). Additionally, he brought the city of Phanagoria under his control, which had remained independent since ca. 63 BC per the agreement with Pompey (App. *Mith*. 113; 120).

Last but not least, Pharances started using the title "Great King of Kings" on coins minted just before his expedition (Anokhin 1986, 76–77; Frolova, Ireland 2002, 5; Anokhin 2011, nos. 1301–1311; Bjerg 2013, 9). While this was partly a reflection of the Persianism displayed by other rulers of the time, as Ballesteros Pastor notes, for Pharnaces it might have been more than just

[8] On the origin and role of Scribonius in the history of the Bosporan Kingdom, see Rostovtzeff 1919, 99; 1922, 151–152; Braund 2004; Saprykin 2004, 175; Parfenov 2007; Saprykin 2010.

an attempt to claim the former glory of the Achaemenids as he had specific expansionist plans, that he intended to execute at Rome's expense (Ballesteros Pastor 2021).

The ancient sources do not explicitly state when Pharnaces embarked on his expedition to Asia Minor. Cassius Dio writes that it occurred while Pompey and Caesar were engaged in their conflict, which must have been in 49 or 48 BC. Initially, the king achieved a number of successes. He subdued Colchis, Lesser Armenia, and other territories before finally defeating Calvinus at Nicopolis in December 48 BC (*Bell. Alex*. 34–41; Cass. Dio 42.45–7). After wintering, Pharnaces, aware that Asander had rebelled after being left in charge of his kingdom, decided to return. However, he turned back when he learned that Julius Caesar was approaching (Cass. Dio 42.46). Pharnaces was defeated at the Battle of Zela in August 47 BC (App. *BC*. 2.91; Plut. *Caes*. 50.2). He managed to escape the battlefield and, with Caesar's likely consent, returned to the northern shores of the Black Sea to reclaim his power, as Caesar did not accept Asander as the legitimate ruler of Bosporus. However, Pharnaces failed to regain control of the kingdom and was killed in battle (Cass. Dio 42.47; Strab. 13.4.3). Caesar, who still did not recognize Asander, hurried back to Rome and sent his client, Mithridates of Pergamon, to take control of Bosporus. Besides his loyalty to Caesar, Mithridates also had the advantage of being Eupator's grandson through one of his concubines (*Bell. Alex*. 78). However, Asander once again retained his power and defeated another Roman contender around 46 BC. He then continued to rule Bosporus and made Dynamis his wife at some point, however the exact date of their marriage is unclear as it might have occurred before the war with Mithridates of Pergamon (Coşkun 2019b, 127–128).

Determining when Pharnaces set out for Asia Minor and when Asander rebelled will help identify the year Asander minted his first coin with the title "ΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣ" and, consequently, when he assumed the title of king and when the last coin marked with the number 29 was issued. This, in turn, will help to place the queen's gold staters in the context of the co-rule mentioned by Cassius Dio, or, as some scholars suggest, in the context of her independent reign.

Fig. 3. Golden stater of Asander, year 1 = ET A (48/47 BC?). Obv.: head of Asander, right. Rev.: ΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣ ΑΣΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΒΟΣΠΟΡΟΥ, Nike on the prow. https://bosporan-kingdom.com/221-4454/, no. 221-4454.

One of the significant theories is that proposed by Frolova and Karyshkovskii, which presupposes that Asander rebelled shortly after Pharnaces' departure in 49/48 BC and issued his first stater immediately (Frolova *et al*. 1993). This would imply that the coin of the 29th regnal year was issued in 21/20 BC, the same year as the first stater of Dynamis. This idea was followed by Parfenov, Ivantchik, Tokhtas'ev, and Bjerg, although not without some reservations (see section 2). According to Frolova's calculations, Asander changed his title from archon to king in 46/45 BC and was recognized by Caesar, though this is improbable given Caesar's hostility toward the usurper.

Scholars wishing to argue for an earlier departure of Pharnaces and his army from the Bosporus – prior to the second half of 48 BC – could rely on several premises.[9] Firstly, we do not know Pharnaces' attitude towards his alliance with Pompey or whether he genuinely feared the great general until the end. His previous actions, as well as his evident plan to restore his father's kingdom, indicate that Pharnaces at least partially stopped worrying about maintaining loyalty. This situation was reinforced by the awareness of the Bosporus' distance and inaccessibility

[9] Some, like Saprykin (2002, 39–40), place the beginning of Pharnaces' expedition as early as 50/49 BC.

to Roman generals in the 50s BC,[10] as well as by events on the western shore of the Black Sea during this period, when King Burebista conquered and destroyed many Greek cities in the region. Some of these settlements, like Callatis, were Roman *foederata*, however these actions did not elicit a decisive response from Rome and Burebista was assassinated due to internal conflicts in the mid-40s BC.[11]

Pharnaces recognized Rome's power, but it can be inferred from the ancient narrative sources that he had altered his sense of acceptable political risk. He seemed to have stopped worrying about other Roman allies occupying their territories and was ready to retreat and negotiate only under direct intervention by a Roman general.

This approach has recently been criticized by Coşkun, who, in a series of works, proposes a slightly different version of events (Coşkun 2019a; 2019b; Coşkun and Stern 2021; Coşkun 2022). Based on Heinen's reflections and an analysis of several passages written by ancient authors, he argues that Asander rebelled against Pharnaces a few months before the Battle of Zela (August 2, 47 BC) and then issued his first coin marked with the number 1, which can be attributed to 48/47 BC. Thus, his last gold stater marked with 29 would date to 20/19 BC.

Coşkun's argumentation is based on several assumptions. Firstly, he assumes that although Cassius Dio does not specify at which stage of the civil war Pharnaces decided to campaign in Asia Minor, the actual date of the Bosporan ruler's expedition must have been immediately after the Battle of Pharsalus (August 9, 48 BC). One of the main arguments supporting this is a mention in *Bellum Alexandrinum* that during negotiations, Caesar accused Pharnaces of not helping his patron, Pompey (*Bell. Alex*. 69). This could mean that Pharnaces refrained from taking any action until the decisive battle to maintain neutrality. Secondly, the son of Mithridates Eupator feared Pompey and did not want to engage in conflict with Rome without being confident that his father's conqueror had been defeated, as he was wary of breaking their *amicitia*.[12]

This implies that the entire sequence of events described by the ancient authors, from Pharnaces' army departing from Bosporus at the end of August to the battle with Calvinus in December 48 BC, occurred within four months or even less (Coşkun 2019a, 107–109). It must therefore be assumed that the entire army was ready and merely awaited the order to march. Otherwise, this timeframe would be even shorter. This may thus be considered additional evidence that Pharnakes had planned the expedition in advance.

The approach to the events of 49–47 BC remains problematic, often relying on general accounts provided by the sources. Coşkun emphasizes that his reading of the ancient narrative sources offers a more cautious and plausible hypothesis (Coşkun 2019a, 107–109; 2019b, 137–139; 2022, 135–137). His interpretation is undoubtedly convenient, as it avoids raising questions about any potential strain in the *amicitia* between Pharnaces and Pompey. Importantly, it also allows for a rapid sequence of events within a matter of months, without assuming periods of inactivity on either side. This version is further supported by the fact that the resignation of the archonship in favour of the royal title took place in 45/44 BC – that is, after the death of Caesar, who had been hostile to Asander.

[10] This aspect of the geopolitical situation of the Bosporan Kingdom was also noted by Coşkun (2019b, 140–141) in the context of the civil war following Caesar's death.
[11] The actions of Burebista and their possible impact on the region were noted by Gajdukevič (1971, 324); however, Coşkun (2019a, 92–94) does not attach much importance to this. For more on the Greek cities of the Western Pontic region and their conflict with Burebista, see also: Crişan 1978, 122–130; Nawotka 1997, 49–55; Dimitrova 2007, 165–167.
[12] Coşkun 2019b, 132–133. For Coşkun's ideas on the phenomenon of *amicitia*, see also Coşkun 2005, 4–8.

Fig. 4. Golden stater of Asander, year 4 = Δ (45/44 BC?). Obv.: diademed head of Asander, right. Rev.: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΣΑΝΔΡΟΥ, Nike on the prow. https://bosporan-kingdom.com/228-4345/1.html, no. 228-4345.

Some scholars have argued that the main obstacle preventing Asander from issuing gold coinage was the lack of Caesar's approval (e.g. Nawotka 1991-2 followed by Primo 2010; Saprykin 2002, 62). However, considering such factors as the Bosporus' peripheral position in relation to Rome in the mid-1st century BC and the circumstances under which Asander came to power – by successively eliminating Pharnaces, who had been dismissed by Caesar, and then Mithridates – one may agree with Dahmen's view that the decision to mint gold coinage likely depended largely on the local ruler (Dahmen 2010, 100).

Given the dynamics and decisiveness of Asander's subsequent actions, his immediate decision to strike coins should not be surprising. Since he assumed power in 48/47 BC and changed his titulature from *archon* to king in 45/44 BC, that is, in the fourth year of his rule, this adoption of the royal title may have been linked to Caesar's death and may also be interpreted as a symbolic culmination of his earlier victory over Mithridates of Pergamon.

4. Dynamis and her sole rule

As mentioned in the previous section, establishing the beginning of Asander's reign and the issuance of his coins is challenging. However, it is necessary to determine the date of Queen Dynamis's independent rule. To do this, it is necessary to examine the end of Asander's reign and the connections between the sources referring to him and those mentioning the queen. First, let us once again turn to the coins.

An important detail to remember in this regard is that the staters of Asander and Dynamis had nothing in common. Both consorts presented themselves as independent rulers without referring to one another. Additionally, Dynamis did not date her coins according to the reign of the (allegedly) still ruling Asander; instead, she adopted the method practised by her father Pharnaces, i.e. the coins were dated according to the Bosporan calendar. Given these rather unusual circumstances, one must consider their implications for the status of Dynamis and reflect on the motivations behind the issuance of these coins.

Fig. 5. Golden stater of Asander, year 28 = ΗΚ (21/20 BC?). https://bosporan-kingdom.com/244-4621/, no. 244-4621.

Most scholars who argue that Asander's reign and coin issuance lasted beyond 21/20 BC ignore this problem, and only a few address it. Coşkun, for example, seems to downplay the significance of the two gold staters of Dynamis, pointing to their randomness and the alleged risk

of drawing conclusions based on them. He also suggests that these could have been occasional coins minted to honour the queen (Coşkun 2019b, 139–140). While this is possible and consistent with similar cases in the Hellenistic world, one must ask who would have done this and why? The gold stater from 21/20 BC could have been minted on Asander's initiative. However, assuming the king died the following year, the stater from 17/16 BC must have been issued by someone else, such as Scribonius, who left no other numismatic or epigraphic evidence. This version must be ruled out, and it should be assumed that Asander must have been alive at least until 17/16 BC – the date of the second known coin issue. Viewing Dynamis's gold coins as an attempt to strengthen Asander's position makes it easier to assume that the second period of the queen's reign from 9/8 BC to AD 7/8 is possible and that her inscriptions should be placed within that timeframe (cf. Coşkun, Stern 2021, 202).

Fig. 6. Golden stater with DYM (ΔΥΜ) monogram, 9/8 BC. Obv.: head of Augustus (?), left. Rev.: head of Agrippa (?), right. Monogram ΔΥΜ. Date according to the Bosporan era (ΘΠΣ = 289). https://bosporan-kingdom.com/259-4412/3.html, no. 259-4412.

Nawotka also notes this problem and attempts to explain it by providing examples of royal women whose coinage may have set a precedent for Dynamis, namely Arsinoe II, Berenice II, and Philistis (Nawotka 1991-2, 30–31). Naturally, the obvious place to search for such examples is Ptolemaic Egypt because of its unique position of having a queen who was in a sacred incestuous marriage. However, the coins of Arsinoe II were issued posthumously by other Ptolemaic rulers and were strictly connected with her cult (Troxell 1983, 58–59; Fulińska 2010, 80–81; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2021, 73–75). An earlier example is the silver didrachms of Queen Amastris, who ruled over Heraclea and the newly founded Amastris (Erciyas 2006, 33–34; Van Oppen de Ruiter 2020, 23–31). The coins of Queen Philistis were likely dated according to her husband Hiero II's reign and related to the cult of Arsinoe II (Nawotka 1991-2, 30; Thonemann 2015, 163). There is also a single silver tetradrachm of Queen Laodice of Pontus, the wife of Mithridates IV of Pontus. However, this coin was probably issued after the king's death, during the queen's regency.[13] Additionally, there are numerous other queens from the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties whose portraits appear on coinage, namely Laodice IV, Cleopatra Thea, Cleopatra Syra, and, of course, Cleopatra VII. However, all these royal figures minted their coins as either sole rulers or as regents and guardians of their underage sons (Fulińska 2010, 86; Ager, Hardiman 2016, 167–170; Olbrycht 2021; Müller 2021a).

The coinage of Queen Berenice II (267/6–221 BC) seems to bear the strongest resemblance to Dynamis and Asander's staters. This Ptolemaic queen issued her coins without any references to her husband, Ptolemy III Euergetes, during his lifetime. This results from the distinct position of a Ptolemaic queen, which had been developed since Arsinoe II. Furthermore, some scholars attributed special significance to Berenice II due to her previous status as queen of Cyrenaica and her possible rule during the king's absence during the ongoing Third Syrian War (Troxell 1983, 65–66; Fulińska 2010, 85–86). This hypothesis is likely incorrect, as Sabine Müller notes that Berenice's image was created at the initiative of Ptolemy III, and that these coins were minted in her honour, not by her (Müller 2021b, 84–90).

[13] McGing 1986, 36; Callataÿ 2009, 83–84. Additionally, there is also a single gold stater of Leodike, which according to Callataÿ may not be authentic.

Another example is the gold stater of Cleopatra Thea, dated to around 150 BC. This coin was most likely struck to mark her coronation and marriage to Alexander Balas. Cleopatra Thea owed her position to her Ptolemaic heritage and the support of her father, Ptolemy VI. Her marriage to Alexander Balas strengthened his legitimacy as ruler of the Seleucid Kingdom (D'Agostini 2019, 47–49).

We can thus observe that the appearance of independent coinage bearing the image of a queen during the lifetime of a reigning king who issued his own coins was extremely rare. When it did occur, it did not necessarily indicate an increase in the queen's autonomy, but rather formed part of the construction of dynastic propaganda. The significance of the *basilissa* at Hellenistic courts stemmed from her lineage, and she served as a crucial instrument in royal propaganda and the struggle for power. As already noted in the introduction and following Strootman's interpretation, under favourable circumstances, the queen – as the bearer of dynastic glory – could become a "power broker".

The issuance of gold staters by Dynamis between 21/20 and 17/16 BC was therefore very likely initiated by Asander, or by Asander and Dynamis jointly, and aimed at consolidating power around what was probably an increasingly weakened king. The invocation of Dynamis' illustrious dynastic heritage was meant to support Asander in the face of growing internal opposition to his rule – opposition that would ultimately culminate in the rebellion of Scribonius. This is also attested by a dedication, in which the typical Bosporan eponymous formula lists Dynamis and Asander side by side: βα[σιλεύοντος βασιλέως βασιλέων] μεγάλου Ἀσάνδρου [φιλ]ορωμαίου σωτῆρος καὶ βασιλίσσης Δυνάμεως (*CIRB* 30).

We see that the aging Asander, by adopting the title "Great King of Kings", sought to present himself as the guardian of his wife's dynastic legacy. This inscription may coincide with the issue of the coins in question or may alternatively be dated to the late 20s BC. If we accept Coşkun's proposal that the last coin of Asander dates to 20/19 BC, it must be assumed either that the ruler remained alive at least until 17 BC, having ceased minting coins, or that later issues have simply not yet been discovered.

As previously mentioned, Dynamis is attested in nine inscriptions, all of which originate from Bosporan cities, except for one decree that honours her ambassador in Chersonesus. During her reign, Dynamis consistently referred to herself as *philoromaios*, indicating her favourable stance toward Rome. This title appears in seven texts, including three honorific inscriptions issued by the Queen in honour of Augustus and Livia, carved onto statue bases (*CIRB* 38; 978; 1046). Therefore, all of these inscriptions – except the one in which she is mentioned together with Asander – should be dated to the period after the king's death. Moreover, their references to alliance and friendship with Rome suggest that they were created following Agrippa's intervention and the installation of Polemon on the Bosporan throne. This was a significant moment in the kingdom's history, as – unlike earlier attempts – the power was this time successfully assumed by a ruler from outside the Bosporus, directly appointed by the Romans.

Moreover, the inscriptions and coins reveal that the names of two Bosporan cities were changed: Panticapaeum to Caesarea and Phanagoria to Agrippia. Both the issuing of these inscriptions and the renaming of major Bosporan cities can be placed after 14 BC (CIRB 979; Frolova 1997, 178–180). This apparent pro-Roman behaviour was likely an attempt to convince the Romans that leaving power in the hands of Dynamis was the right decision, as she was eager to fulfil the requirements attributed to *reges amici et socii*. However, in two other inscriptions, her official titulature refers to a theoretically anti-Roman tradition. Thus, she is presented as a descendant of the great kings Pharnaces and Mithridates Eupator: ἐκ βασιλέωςμεγάλου Φαρνάκου, τοῦἐκ βασιλέως Μιθραδάτου Εὐπάτορος Διονύσου (*CIRB* 979). Nevertheless, as in the case of Pharnaces and Asander, these references are not anti-Roman. The simultaneous implementation of the title *philoromaios* and references to Achaemenid/Pontic tradition served to associate Dynamis with her powerful ancestors and thus build her prestige (Heinen 2001, 367–370; Braund 2005, 253–254).

This form of self-presentation fits into a broader pattern that emerged among Rome's *reg-*

es amici et socii as a result of Octavian Augustus' reorganization of the East around 20 BC. As Ish-Shalom (2021) suggests, two groups of rulers can be distinguished following of these reforms: provincial monarchs and external kings. The former owed their power to Roman appointment and were often tied by marriage and kinship networks to other client rulers. The latter possessed strong dynastic legitimacy and typically ruled domains located on the fringes of the Roman sphere of influence. When Polemon I was installed on the Bosporan throne, Dynamis – as his wife – in effect combined features of both groups, a duality that is reflected in the sources dating from after 14 BC.[14] The pro-Roman titulature seen in the inscriptions mentioned above, the dedications to the imperial family, the renaming of cities, and the coinage issued between 9/8 BC and AD 7/8 depicting imperial portraits on both obverses and reverses – all of these elements conform to the model of a Roman-subordinate provincial monarch. At the same time, the concurrent references to the Achaemenid/Pontic dynastic tradition enriched this image, enhancing its prestige and strengthening its legitimacy, while aligning with the ideal of the friendly king promoted under the Julio-Claudian dynasty (Ish-Shalom 2021, 162–165).

5. Conclusions

According to the most plausible reconstruction of events, the issuance of Dynamis' gold staters in 21/20 and 17/16 BC coincided with a parallel emission of gold staters by Asander. The small number of coins struck in the queen's name aligns with both the account of Cassius Dio and the inscription indicating a co-regency. What remains puzzling, however, is the complete absence of shared iconographic elements on the royal coins of the two spouses. This may be explained by a deliberate effort on the part of Dynamis and Asander to emphasize her dynastic heritage and to use it as a means of consolidating power amid growing internal tensions in the kingdom. Such a strategy finds few but meaningful analogies in the Hellenistic world.

After the brief reign of Scribonius, Polemon I was installed on the Bosporan throne, marking one of the key moments in the kingdom's relationship with Rome. Several hypotheses have been advanced concerning the course of Polemon's rule on the Bosporus and its end in conflict with the Aspurgians. The version proposed by Primo – placing Polemon's death around AD 8, coinciding with the disappearance of coinage bearing the DYM monogram, and interpreting his authority over the Bosporus as largely formal while Dynamis exercised real power – is particularly intriguing, as it highlights several gaps in earlier arguments. Nevertheless, one must remember that this remains only a hypothesis, and alternative scenarios in which Polemon continued to reign beyond 8 BC are also possible.

The primary aim of this article is to present the first gold issues of Dynamis as part of the dynastic policy pursued jointly with Asander during the final years of his reign. Accordingly, the numerous inscriptions of the queen, which portray her as a sovereign ruler, should be placed in the period following her marriage to Polemon.

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[14] There exist gold staters with imperial heads on both obverse and reverse, bearing the monogram BAE and marked with the letter A as a dating sign indicating the first regnal year (Anokhin 2011, no. 1345). Anokhin (1986, 81–82) attributes these coins to Polemon and dates them to 14/13 BC. This relates to the disputed gold staters with the DYM monogram dated to 12/11 BC, discussed in note 3. In addition, there are several examples of bronze coins with the BAE monogram, which Anokhin (2011, nos. 1346–1359) dates between 10 and 1 BC. If the gold stater with the BAE monogram indeed belong to Polemon, then the appearance of the DYM staters dated according to the Bosporan era must reflect a change of rule in the kingdom.

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