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ОТНОВО ПО ВЪПРОСА ЗА ОТНОШЕНИЯТА
МЕЖДУ БИЗАНТИОН И МИТРИДАТ VI

ИВАЙЛО ЛОЗАНОВ

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Byzantion and Mithridates VI Eupator Revisited *

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Отново по въпроса за отношенията между Бизантион и Митридат VI *

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Abstract: In a recent evaluation of the numismatic evidence Francois de Callataÿ re-established Byzantion as an important mint that has actively served Mithridates VI to pay the arrears of disbanded Thracian mercenaries on the eve of the Treaty of Dardanos (early autumn of 85 BC). A closer study of the extant textual and numismatic sources might prove unfavourable to this view. Late in 86 BC the Thracian Aegean coast as far as Byzantion has been won over by the troops of the consul Flaccus, and since then was firmly under Roman control. Subsequently Mithradates was cornered by Flaccus' successor Fimbria in Aeolis and could hardly have been in position to order and transfer large sums of coined money even from its nearest mint in Pergamon. Notably, Byzantine overstrikes are issued only *after* Sulla and Eupator met at Dardanos. Alternatively, Byzantion is introduced here as a Roman agent (probably operating along Maroneia and other Thracian mints?) to convert some quantity of Pontic silver into "pro-Roman" currency as part of the indemnity (between 2000 and 3000 talents) that Sulla exacted from the Pontic king in return of his friendship and peace.

Keywords: Mithridatic wars, Byzantion, coinage, political relations



Our understanding on how the political network during the lasting wars of Mithridates VI with Rome (89–63 BC) left its mark on the major outcomes in the conflict is often anchored in dubious reconstructions over scattered and fragmented evidence. Detailed knowledge on the individual behaviour of important economic and strategic partners of the major protagonists is only wishful and it is rarely when fresh glimpses are provided. In most cases the situation gets changed by new epigraphic documents or coins as is the case discussed here.

In fact, we are in almost complete darkness about the extent of the so called "Mithridates' Black Sea Empire" established after his general Diophantus' successful Crimean campaigns in

* I am much grateful for the criticisms, dissent, and (occasional) agreement expressed by Prof. François de Callataÿ on a draft version of this text. All flaws and errors remain but my own.

110–107 BC. The exact order of military campaigns and diplomatic negotiations, as well as details about them, are pretty much unknown to us, though there is general consensus that by the beginning of the 80s BC the entire Euxine was brought under Mithridates' sway or at least under his influence. A burdensome question, both chronologically and as political consequences, is the king's ostensible suzerainty over the tribes on the Lower Danube and the Greek cities on West Pontic coast. Since the capital study of Th. Reinach these relations have been understood as a kind of dichotomy – the Greek cities from Tyras down to Apollonia accepted Mithridates' protectorate and the barbarian tribes from the hinterland his alliance (Reinach 1890, 71 svv.; Rostovtzeff [in Rostovtzeff, Ormerod 1932], 232–233; Magie 1950, 195, 1092, n. 53; Pippidi 1960, 46; Olshausen 1978, 421–422; Gaggero 1980, 296–299; McGing 1986, 51–58; Hind 1994, 137–140; Ballesteros-Pastor 1996, 52–53; Callataÿ 1997, 255–257; Nawotka 1997, 42–43; Блаватская 1952, 160–165; Молев 1995, 48–49; Сапрыкин 1996, 152–158). The rest of the littoral south to the Bosphorus and the adjacent hinterland of Southeastern Thrace, dominated by the Odrysae and the Astae which admittedly never came under Eupator's sway, has been vaguely defined as an area of more pronounced Roman interests (Danov 1979, 110 ff; Тачева 1997, 66–67; Delev 2015, 69).

Ancient sources preserved to us fragmented story about the role and position of Byzantion in the Mithridatic wars. In contrast, numismatic evidence, and in particular the observations on the tetradrachms in the name of Lysimachus from the end of the 2nd and the first quarter of the 1st century BC, have long been central in introducing Byzantion into the circle of Mithridates' allies along with the Greek poleis on the West Pontic coast from Istria down to Apollonia (Price 1968, 9–10, n. 3; Price 1991, 173–174; McGing 1986, 58 and Ballesteros-Pastor 1996, 53, n. 77 with some doubts). Much consistency on this point one can find in the studies of François de Callataÿ. Distinguished by his thorough approach, de Callataÿ not only provided numismatic apparatus of the late Byzantine posthumous Lysimachi, but also offered a detailed reading of individual historical events (Callataÿ 1997, 120–33, 148–50). In a recent evaluation of the coin production of Byzantion at the end of the First Mithridatic War, the eminent scholar dwells upon an issue of Byzantine overstrikes on original Pontic tetradrachms. A similar case has been readily identified on a tetradrachm of Maroneia. The Pontic prototypes overstruck by Byzantion and Maroneia were issued only in the summer of 85 (July and August respectively, identified by the restored numerals on the reverses), from where it has been argued that the overstriking took place soon after. Byzantine overstrikes were predated by intensive coinage of regular civic issues struck in a relatively short period with more than 100 obverse dies, thus exceeding even the standards of an extraordinary wartime production. In search of a reasonable historical context de Callataÿ tried to identify this remarkable coinage with the last pay of Mithridates to his Thracian mercenaries shortly after the treaty with Sulla in Dardanos (in the early autumn of 85 BC), for which Byzantion would have been perfectly located. Though not explicitly said, it comes to mind that beside the overstruck money the rest of the exceptional Byzantine issues were minted from a bouillon provided again by the king. The latter served to continued payments for several years (80–76 BC) when eventually Mithridates decided to disband the untrustworthy barbarian troops at the eve of the Third War with Rome (Callataÿ 2013, 95–98).¹

¹ For this interpretation de Callataÿ heavily relies on a passage in Plutarch, *Lucullus*, 7.3–4., describing Mithridates' preparations for the Third War (Second in Plutarch as the conflict with L. Murena in 83–81 BC has never been sanctioned in Rome), when the king allegedly decided to reorganize the formation and armaments of his troops in Roman fashion, abandoning the vain pomp and barbarian taste for luxury: “ἀφελὼν γὰρ τὰ παντοδαπὰ πλήθη καὶ τὰς πολυγλῶσσους ἀπειλὰς τῶν βαρβάρων, ὅπλων τε διαχρύσων καὶ διαλίθων κατασκευάς, ὥς λάφυρα τῶν κρατούντων, οὐκ ἀλκὴν τινα τῶν κεκτημένων ὄντα,...; *He did away with Barbarous hordes from every clime, and all their discordant and threatening cries; he provided more armour inlaid with gold and set with precious stones, for he saw that these made rich booty for the victors, but gave no strength whatever to their wearers...*” (Plutarch's Lives. with an English Translation by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. London. William Heinemann Ltd. 1914²). The passage, cited here *in extenso*, is too vague in its rhetorical phrasing and tells nothing conclusive as to draw particular interest to Thrace. Moreover, there is not a hint (as argued by Callataÿ 2013, 96) about any obligation of Mithridates in paying arrears to his (Thracian) mercenaries.

As it happens, this reconstruction depends upon certain synchronisms and the relative order of events, for which the only surviving continuous narrative is that of Appian, supplemented by important fragments by the Livian epitomators, Memnon and Plutarch. Even with missing details it is still possible to ask questions that might essentially change the present line of enquiry: 1) It would indeed be surprising if Mithridates were even in position to organise a transfer of coins and force on their overstriking to Byzantion following the treaty of Dardanos (autumn 85 BC), since by the end of the previous year the pro-Cinnan army commanded by the consul Flaccus having advanced freely through Thrace and Propontis eventually took control over both sides of the Bosphorus (with Byzantion and Kalchedon) well *before* the peace conference; 2) Assuming the king was able to make the arrangements, there is still a question what would be the purpose to overstrike a certain amount of Pontic coins, which otherwise must have been an accepted currency to pay Mithridates' mercenaries?; 3) Were there any Thracian allies next to Byzantion (and Maroneia) throughout the whole period of conflicts with Rome that would provide regular mercenary contingents to Eupator?

A brief historical sketch would help to highlight important episodes and their sequence. At the beginning of the war in the summer of 89 BC (for the revisions of chronology see Sherwin-White 1984, 121-126; Ballesteros-Pastor 1996, 109-116; Callataÿ 1997, 281 svv.) while fighting still took place in Bithynia, a naval squadron guarded the Straits next to the city. Soon after, following the defeat of the allied armies of Manius Aquilius and king Nicomedes IV, the Roman admirals ordered withdrawal that turned pretty much into complete surrender of all their ships to the enemy (App. *Mithr.* 17,19). No other source checks this story, though to a mindful observer abandoning advantageous position that could effectively bar Mithridates' ships from entering the Propontis is hard to explain. It looks like hasty miscalculation by the commanding staff, as if there was no more room for action, but the epitomised account of Appian puts too much stress on the dramatic contrast between the raging panic within the Roman camp as opposed to the formidable Pontic offensive. Fears not to be cut short of supplies and communication with the scattered forces in Asia naturally might have been reckoned by the Roman commanders, but there were also other options at hand to organise strongholds on the Thracian European shore where the allied kingdom of the Astae could have provided sufficient resources. The whole episode could prove more intelligible if we assume that the naval forces guarding the mouth of Euxine consisted almost entirely of ships provided by the cities in the Propontis plus the Bithynian squadron that had been sent there earlier with the opening campaign of Nicomedes IV in Paphlagonia (App., *Mithr.* 12). The Roman officers, and among them capable men like Minucius, whom we find in 86 BC engaged in a successful naval battle against Archelaus' brother Neoptolemus near Chalkis on the Euboean shore (App., *Mithr.* 34), were probably called back by strategic necessities requiring their presence in Macedonia, and simply allowed the Propontic escadra to disperse.

In this situation, Byzantion was either able to withstand the invasion of Mithridatic forces and endure massive oppression by land and sea with minor or practically no foreign aid relying on its own flotilla, as was the case some sixteen years later during the Pontic blockade of the Bosphorus in the Third war (see below), or to capitulate and fall into the hands of the king for the next two and a half years. Lack of evidence makes much room for speculative reasoning. For example, A.N. Sherwin-White (1984, 125) and Ballesteros-Pastor (1996, 53, n. 77) insist on the second variant pointing out Mithridates' great naval supremacy, his preparations for the siege of Rhodes (summer of 88 BC) and the planned descent in Greece that could have hardly left an unsubdued enemy in his rear at the entrance of the Black Sea.

On the other hand, Eupator's success in gaining control over the maritime communications from the Euxine through the Propontis and the Hellespont does not necessarily imply that all coastal cities there opened their gates to him. Elsewhere in the Aegean and on the West coast of Asia Minor, the Pontic advance was checked by individual cities or larger naval powers, as we are reminded by Mithridates' eventual failure to take Rhodes, Thasos, and even Patara in Lycia (McGing 1986, 124-125 with the sources). Seen from that perspective, Byzantion had every chance to survive as rallying point of resistance against Mithridates in Southeastern Thrace until the tide of the war decisively turned two years later.

After the victorious battle at Chaeronea (summer of 86 BC), Sulla was ravaging Boeotia and then headed south to crush down what was left of the rebellious faction at Athens and to punish their leaders. Meanwhile, in the same summer another Roman army arrived on the Balkans. Lucius Valerius Flaccus, who had been elected consul in place of Marius for the remainder of the year, was instructed to wrest the outlaw Sulla of the supreme command by force and to continue the war against Mithradates in his place. Initially, Flaccus advanced through Thessaly with intention to meet Sulla in Boeotia, however, with the approaching enemy who swiftly moved back north from Attica, the consul decided to avoid further entanglements. Conscious of Sulla's military superiority and to prevent dissolution of his own army by desertions he turned round back to north. Abandoning the original plan, Flaccus then followed the main road through Macedonia and Thrace in pursuit to take the glory of subduing the king in Asia (detailed account and chronology in Reinach 1890, 186, 191 svv. with the main sources; see also Ormerod [in Rostovtzeff, Ormerod 1932, 255-256] and Hind 1994, 154 f. 160). He seems to have met little (if any?) Pontic resistance,² and the quick march of the Romans would suggest that the route lay open. Late in 86 BC Flaccus reached Byzantion, notably without any sign of enemy's garrison there, and then crossed to Kalchedon on the Asiatic shore (App. *Mithr.* 52-53; Diod. 38.8; Memnon 24; Dio frag. 104; Reinach 1890, 191-193; Sherwin-White 1984, 141 with refined chronology). The record allows to assume that the Roman commander set a more permanent base at the mouth of the Euxine. Having no fleet of his own the obvious purpose was to prepare his advance with the help of the Byzantines in Bithynia where Mithridates generals already gathered their forces in anticipation of decisive battle(s). Having been won back by the Romans the two Bosphoran cities stayed firmly in the pro-Roman orbit until the beginning of the Third Mithridatic War. The story how Flaccus lost his command to his legate Fimbria and eventually was murdered in Nicomedeia (or Nicaea), does not affect the victorious outcome of the Roman campaign. It resulted in an utter destruction of the Pontic armies in Bithynia, and by the summer Fimbria has already been pushing Mithridates and his own son as far as Pergamum (Reinach 1890, 200-202; Rostovtzeff, Ormerod 1932, 257-258; Callataj 1997, 320-322).

In the meantime, during the spring and summer of 85 BC Sulla has been moving from Macedonia along the North Aegean coast, eventually to reach Kypsela on the left bank of Hebros (modern Maritsa). Here he set his camp waiting to get back from the envoys he had sent to finalize the agreement with Mithridates. Meanwhile, Sulla's naval commander L. Lucullus having declined a seductive offer from Fimbria to trap the Pontic king by land and sea near Pitane was heading to the Hellespont to assist the crossing of Sullan army in the Troad (Plut. *Lucull.* 3.4-4.1). There, in the small town of Dardanos next to Ilion, the peace conference with Mithridates took place in the early autumn (on the chronology Hind 1994, 161). Eupator's narrow escape from the hands of Fimbria put further pressure to accept Sulla's demands. The terms seem to evolve in time since they were first discussed at a meeting between Archelaus and Sulla, probably in the winter of 86/85 BC. Appian, and Plutarch in more detail, present the actual provisions: Sulla was to confirm Mithridates in his ancestral domain in Pontus and restore him as a Roman friend and ally; Eupator, in his turn, was to evacuate Asia and Paphlagonia, restore Bithynia and Cappadocia to their kings, pay down to the Romans 2000 talents, and give them 70 fully equipped ships (App. *Mithr.* 55; Plut. *Sulla* 22.5). Initially Mithridates tried to bargain for milder agreement (though it has already looked generous in the Roman eyes) hinting at possible negotiations with Flaccus (and Fimbria) (App. *Mithr.* 56). However, as we look through Memnon's account on the final terms

² For a brief period in 87 and the first half of 86 BC the troops of Archelaus and Taxiles held their main base at Amphipolis to keep the Pontic lines of communications and supply in Macedonia (Memnon 22.10). A small fragment in Granius Licinianus (35.26.70) gives a hint for other garrisons in Philippi and Abdera that hastily disappeared before the Romans. Being just a short sentence to follow closely his brief description of the battle between Sulla and Archelaus at Orchomenos, the information is much inconclusive to provide specific time and reason. Anyway, it might well have been the news for the disastrous outcome of the second battle in Boeotia that forced the Pontic contingents to withdraw from the Thracian-Macedonian border. H. A. Ormerod (in Rostovtzeff, Ormerod 1932, 255) is probably misplacing Licinianus's testimony in arguing for harder resistance against Flaccus's army along the Via Egnatia.

negotiated at Dardanos the king now was to pay *3000 talents to Sulla personally for his return in Rome* (italics mine - I.L.) and provide 80 triremes in addition to fulfil all previous provisions (Memnon 25). Obviously, the diplomatic gamble was paid off at a higher price.

Having been left no choice but to concur and sign the treaty Eupator safely withdrew through the Bosphorus to reach his core possessions in Pontus. Sulla had now his hands free to deal quickly with Fimbria and sheltered his own army in various cities of Western Asia Minor ahead of the coming winter (Liv. Per. 83; App. *Mithr.* 52, 55-56, 59; Plut. *Sulla* 23-25.1).

How the precise terms of the Dardanos treaty were observed remains uncertain. However, the relative sequence of events and the balance of power in 85 BC preclude any possibility of Mithridates' control over Byzantion, and even less after the treaty, in a way to order larger payments to his alleged Thracian allies.

Our interest lies next in those details shared by Plutarch and Memnon that specify the sum of 2 000 or 3 000 talents as personal contribution to Sulla. A total estimate of ca. 56-78 tones silver, it would result in a huge quantity of coined money, or ca. 3-4.5 million tetradrachms! If we assume that 20 000 coins were struck off each obverse die (Callataj 2005), that would mean that the Byzantine mint with some 100 dies would have produced roughly between two-thirds and half of the amount. More than just to provide funds for his way back to Italy, which does not necessarily imply a quick and a single transfer since Sulla left Asia only in 84 BC, the initial instalments would have to cover mostly the pay of the Roman legionaries and the allies. After many months of dire financial situation (for this App. *Mithr.* 54) Sulla at last had a chance to boost his soldiers' spirit, especially after their hopes for plundering Mithridates' domain sunk with the treaty. As a first step re-coining certain amount of Pontic silver surrendered by Mithridates and handling it down to the troops would satisfy an immediate necessity with an overall favourable effect at the close of the campaigning season. Re-coining here would mean "legalizing" Mithridatic tetradrachms in acceptable currency by mints under Roman control. By its geographical location at the mouth of the Euxine and its rich monetary traditions Byzantion emerges as a perfect choice. In addition, securing payments for certain Thracian recipients in the city's hinterland is a very likely scenario, however these could hardly have been Mithridates' mercenaries, as has been suggested by de Callataj (2013).

It is not the right place here to discuss at length all problems concerning the political geography of Thrace before and during the Mithridatic wars. Suffice to say that our sources rarely provide much of details and modern scholarship most often tends to cite only vague fragments with no specific chronological or territorial reference. This, however, has led to larger reconstructions of Mithridatic alliances with the Thracians and their role as Pontic mercenaries (see Reinach 1890, 74-75, 264 sv.; Gaggero 1980, 301-303; McGing 1986, 62; Callataj 1997, 257-263 with extensive discussion on the numismatic data). G. Griffith's fortunate remarks that we are met with major difficulties and sometimes it is practically impossible to differentiate between subjects' levies, allies, and pure mercenaries in the armies of Mithridates (Griffith 1935, 188) are warning against putting much efforts in such preoccupations. Also, when the ancient authors describe Sulla's punitive campaigns against the Dardani and the Thracians (Maedi and Sinti) on the Macedonian border, there are no implications that those tribes have entered larger political network to operate as real Mithridatic allies. Their raids upon Macedonia fit into a well-known and recurring pattern that could have only benefitted from the general lack of response by the Roman armies who were engaged elsewhere.³ It should be noted that Appian (*Mithr.* 41) makes more specific

³ Dio (fr. 101.2) reports of a Thracian raid, instigated by Eupator, upon Epirus as far as Dodona, but again nothing here could point to more than a common plundering aiming at one of the richest sanctuaries of the Hellenic north. Furthermore, Livy (*Per.* 76) and Appian (*Mithr.* 17-18) relate certain Thracian attacks in Macedonia in 89-88 BC with the outbreak of the First War. Indicatively, the great invasion in Greece as far as Delphi of the Scordisci, Maedi, and Dardani (App., *Illyr.* 5), took place only after the passage of Sulla and his legate L. Hortensius in Asia in the winter of 85/84 or in the spring of 84 BC (cf. Reinach 1910, 307, n. 2).

reference on some Thracians led by Dromichaetes (from the Getae?) in the army of Archelaus.

On the opposite side, an allied operation is evidenced by the decree of Chaeronea honouring certain Amatocos who commanded a Thracian contingent of mounted corps and infantry sent by (king?) Sadalas to serve under Sulla (Holleaux 1921). This Sadalas was most probably a member of the court of king Mostis (ca. 126/125–89/88 BC) who ruled over a large part of Southeastern Thrace next to the Greek poleis of Propontis. Sadalas himself may well have been king's relative and heir (Лозанов 2017, 20-21 with discussion). Mostis' royal splendour and military potential are recognizable through his unique silver coins that were most likely minted in Byzantion (Paunov 2014, 469). Thus, we are in position to discuss with more confidence the existence of a network of Roman allies in Southeastern Thrace that were able not only to endure the Pontic offensive in the first two years of the war but to send a sizable reinforcement to Sulla in Boeotia.⁴ Nothing makes it more natural to see their services repaid at the end of the same war. Perhaps we could speak of other Roman allies further west above the military district *Caenica* as part of the Macedonian province established ca. 102–101 BC. Their existence is implied by the text of the Knidian copy of the so called "*Lex de provinciis praetoriis*" (ca. 101–99 BC, Crawford 1996, II. 21-24). The region is bound with the Lower Hebros Valley down to Aenus and the plain south of the eastern slopes of the Rhodope Mountain next to Maroneia. Consequently, our argument to identify this last city as the second larger mint overstriking Pontic silver to support paying more Thracian contingents allied to Rome. A proper reminder of the same role that both Byzantion and Maroneia (and here one must add Thasos as well) have played in striking large silver coinages for the Roman wars on the Balkans after the fall of the Macedonian monarchy adds additional backing to our case. Built on a lasting cooperation, the point of choosing precisely two of the most trusted mints emerges clearly. Also, one can presume certain difficulties of the most prolific Roman mint in Macedonia at Amphipolis after it has been temporarily taken by a Pontic garrison (summer of 87 – summer 86 BC, cf. also note 2) that could contribute further to Sulla's expedient.

If we follow closely de Callataÿ's thesis, the initial payments started with overstriking of Pontic silver, perhaps accompanied by unknown amount of regular civic coinage, which finally resulted in Byzantion's prolific production (Group 4, 80–76 BC). The common practice speaks very likely for annual instalments that might become more regular after Mithridates' conflict with Sulla's legate Murena (the so called Second War) was over (81 BC) and the dictator saw to it the terms of Dardanos were observed (for the latter cf. Kallet-Marx 1995, 263-264).

That said, one can reasonably exclude Byzantion from the Pontic orbit. Similar conclusion has already been reached by B. McGing (2000, 378-379), referring to a provision of the so-called "Customs Law of Asia" (75 BC), where Byzantion and Kalchedon are listed among those customs stations controlled by the Romans. McGing tends to see here an echo of an earlier situation.

Further arguments that could strengthen our understanding of Byzantion as a pro-Roman agent even at the eve of the First Mithridatic War, stem from an inscription found in Histria. The extant text speaks of a Mithridates' military commander (*strategos*), who ransomed envoys of the city (probably to the king himself), after they have been detained on their way by a certain Byzantine. Dating the document to the beginning of the 1st century BC, along with other important commentaries on the relations between the western Pontic cities, Rome and Mithridates VI, the editors argued for Byzantion's place in the pro-Roman group of coastal poleis in the Propontis (Avram, Bounegru 2006).

Significantly, Cicero and Tacitus emphasised the merits of Byzantion's inhabitants in the wars with Mithridates. Eventually, Byzantion's loyal behaviour was rewarded by the grant of *civitas libera* (Cic. *Prov.* 3.3-4.1 and 4.6; Tac. *Ann.* 12.62). Cicero's speech was delivered in 56 BC, so the modern debate is usually focused upon the most recent conflict, i.e., the Third War of 73–63 BC. Again, it is speculated that the Byzantines survived a siege during the Mithridatic offensive in

⁴ Holleaux (1921, 329-333) puts forward convincing arguments that Amatocos was despatched to join the Roman camp in 87 and stayed in Boeotia throughout the whole 86 BC, while de Callataÿ (1997, 318, n. 272) tends to see here a diplomatic move by Sadalas to secure the goodwill of Sulla only after the news of the second victory at Orchomenos (late summer of 86 BC) reached Thrace.

Propontis in 73 BC.⁵ In contrast to the short-lived threat posed by the Pontic king at that time, it should be noted that both references may well correspond to a different context, such as Mithridates' opening campaign in the Straits in the late 89 BC and the next two years of the war. This is exactly when Byzantine resilience would have made greater impression in Rome at the face of Eupator's total expansion in Asia Minor and the Aegean. It must not have been an isolated and vain effort since we are already reminded that next to Byzantion lay the territory of other Roman ally, the kingdom of Mostis, with its military and economic resources that would allow lasting and effective resistance on the European shore of the Propontis.

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⁵ Ballesteros-Pastor (1996, 53, n. 77) refers to Eutropius (*Brev.* 6.6.3) in assuming that Mithridates, after having escaped from Kyzikos, made an abortive attempt to take Byzantion. Orosius (6.2.24), however, is plain in telling that the Royal fleet was simply driven away by a storm and in result suffered great losses near the city.

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