The Roman Lysimachi

As early as 95 BCE, moneyers of the Roman Republic occasionally minted coins bearing reverse designs with Roma or Minerva seated facing left upon a pile of shields, throne, or curule chair, holding or being crowned by Victory. These coins imitate the tetradrachms of Lysimachos minted ca. 300-280 BCE and extensively perpetuated as posthumous issues by Byzantion and other Pontic *poleis* from ca. 270 BCE to ca. 30 BCE. The posthumous Lysimachi played an important economic and military role in the Pontic and Propontic regions before and throughout the Mithridatic Wars (Marinescu 1996; de Callataÿ 1997, pp.120-150). This paper will argue that the Roman coins imitating these Lysimachi achieve a dual purpose: for the Romans, the coins represent a direct competition with the enemy *poleis* of the Propontis. In a wider context, however, these "Roman Lysimachi" are another instance of Roman co-option and exploitation of local motifs and identities for their own purposes, resulting in art with radically divergent meanings for Roman and local viewers.

A survey of similar images of Athena, Minerva, and Roma will establish a baseline cultural context. The prevalent Lysimachi informed numerous depictions of a seated Athena Parthenos in gems, pottery, and lapidary (*LIMC II.1*, 1019-1020). Few scholars, however, have discussed the Roman coins bearing these images; the most recent scholar to connect these coins with the posthumous Lysimachi was Middleton in 1891 (p.XV).

The first Roman Lysimachi were not minted by Roman moneyers. During or after the Pyrrhic Wars (ca. 275-270), Locris in Bruttium minted staters bearing the earliest known numismatic personification of Roma—and she is seated on a throne, resting her arm on a shield in the same position as the Lysimachian Athena, crowned not by Victory/Nike but by Pistis. But

this design apparently did not stick. The imitative types appear almost two hundred years later in at least four issues of the Roman mint from ca.95 BCE to 46 BCE. Two of these emissions, *RRC* 421/1 (59 BCE) and *RRC* 449/4 (48 BCE), appear frequently in hoards spanning Spain, Italy, and penetrating deep into the Danube. At least one other Greek city, Amisus in Pontus, minted a similar design at the behest of the Roman magistrate C Crecilius Cornut in 56 BCE. This hoard data, in combination with previous arguments about the posthumous Lysimachi advanced by Marinescu and de Callataÿ, overwhelmingly indicate that these coins were minted as military (possibly naval) pay.

What themes, ideas, or meanings did Roman moneyers wish to convey by copying and altering this design? The Greeks, Galatians, and other peoples of the Pontus and Propontis accepted the Roman Lysimachi as a familiar image denoting naval and economic power. In a Roman context, however, the image of a martial goddess on a pile of arms, a throne, or a curule chair takes on new and exciting meanings. Some of these meanings stuck: long after the Republican moneyers first adopted these images, the Lysimachian Minerva/Roma continues to appear in coins of Nero, Vespasian, and Domitian.

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