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THE ELUSIVE KING
IN SEARCH OF THE PORTRAITS
OF MITHRIDATES VI EUPATOR

SUMMARY: The paper discusses monetary and sculptural portraits, either attributed or tentatively identified as representations of Mithridates VI Eupator. The object of analysis are their iconographical features as well as their dependence on Hellenistic royal portraitures as well as the issue of *imitatio Alexandri*.

> *The portrait of Mithridates which appears on his coins is remarkable for the fire and energy of his countenance, which accords well with all we know of his character; while the beautiful execution of the coins themselves, both in gold and silver, bears testimony to his patronage of the arts.*

> W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek
> and Roman Biography and Mythology*

The ancient writers were very often quite economical with their descriptions of both people and works of art. Even such a prominent figure as Alexander the Great remains a mystery as far as his real looks are concerned: the ancient historians and biographers limit their information to hints at his height and stature, as well as fairness of hair

and skin and lack of beard[1]. The various versions of the Romance of Alexander add more or less fantastic elements to these descriptions, but these are most likely fabrications of the mythographers. Moreover, some of the statements in the historians' accounts can be based on the preserved portraits, which not necessarily were reflections of the actual physiognomy of the sitter, since Greek portraiture, even in the Hellenistic times, was very much dependent on the Classical notion of *ethos* superimposed over individual traits.

Therefore, knowing from Appian (*Mith*. 112) that Mithridates VI of Pontus 'had a large frame, as his armor, which he sent to Nemea and to Delphi, shows', we may consider ourselves lucky, even though this piece of information hardly helps to identify portraits according to facial features, and is the only piece of textual testimony that we have. Actually, the knowledge of such detail might be useful for the identification of preserved full (or even headless) statues, since the remark would probably point at massive built rather than a slender figure, especially that Mithridates was supposedly educated in the Greek manner and paid a lot of attention to physical exercise; it is also mentioned in the same passage of Appian that he was very fit even at old age. His activity in the last years of his long life would corroborate this testimony, especially that it is given by Roman historians who were not well-disposed towards the indomitable enemy of Rome.

As in the case of most of the Hellenistic rulers, our main source for the approximation of facial features are coin portraits, we must, however, bear in mind, that even these can be influenced by various aspects of idealization or heroization: it was more important how the rulers wanted to be perceived than what they actually looked like, since their faces would not be recognizable by everyone in their vast kingdoms. In the case of Mithridates Eupator, the most important factor that obscures the image is the apparent imitation of Alexander, which formed one of the most prominent features of the king's official propaganda (see e.g. App. *Mith*. 20, 89 and 116; Strab. 14, 1, 23 and 12, 8, 18; cf. Ballesteros Pastor 1996: 402-405). This, in turn, raises the question to what extent this emulative mode belonged to the auto-creation of Mithridates himself, and to what extent it was developed or furthered – together

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[1] See e.g. Diod. 17, 66, 3; Curt. 5, 2, 13-15; Plut. *Alex*. 4, 1-2; Athen. 13, 565a.

with the opinion of lifelong fitness – by the Roman authors in order to justify the defeats of Sulla and Lucullus on one hand, and magnify Pompey's eventual victory on the other.

The kings of Pontus began to strike their own money only in the time of Mithridates III, and what draws the attention of scholars is the realism of the representations ('brutal realism' as Green 1993: 350, put it[2]). These portraits have raised a discussion about ethnicity and 'non-hellenism' of the Pontic dynasts (see e.g. Smith 1988: 113); one of the main arguments, however, that their beards are 'non-hellene', must be rejected in the light of a number or likenesses of other Hellenistic rulers of the same time (e.g. Seleucus II of the Seleucid dynasty, Philip V and Perseus of Macedonia, Prusias II of Bithynia).

Whether such attitude towards realism is indeed unique or at least rare among the official portraits of the Hellenistic kings is also dubious, if several other non-flattering representations are considered (the Ptolemies, the Bactrian kings). It may be, however, suspected that at least at the beginning of his rule Mithridates VI minted coins that continued the style of his predecessors, and the so-called Type 1, nicknamed 're-alistic' by de Callataÿ (1997: 8-16, Pls. I-VI) and 'veristic' by Højte (2009: 148), is indeed very much in the line.

In the case of this type, launched in 106 BCE and continued until the outbreak of the Mithridatic wars, the facial features do not seem idealized: characteristic traits such as the heavy brow, traces of prognatism, so characteristic for his ancestors, prominent nose, fleshy lips, deep set eyes and lined face, are rendered with detail that might even justify the epithet 'brutal' given to the Pontic realism. It is first and foremost the hairstyle that makes the main difference between this image and the portraits of Mithridates' ancestors: all earlier kings of Pontus had their hair short cropped and sticking to their heads, which is a hairstyle not absent in Hellenistic iconography, even if not very popular (cf. e.g. the sculpted and coin portraits of the Seleucid Antioch III, including the famous head in the Louvre, inv. No. Ma 1204). Mithridates VI is shown with his hair much longer, hanging loosely over the neck, and

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[2] Green's opinion is to some extent compromised by the unscholarly adornment in the shape of such description (Green 1993: 350): 'The early kings of Pontus resemble nothing so much as a family of escaped convicts: Pharnaces I (r. 185/3-170) has the profile of a Neanderthaler, and Mithridates IV (r. 170-150) that of a skid-row alcoholic'.

moreover featuring the characteristic parting over the brow (reminding us of the *anastole* of the Lysippean Alexander). Also the headband – the royal diadema of the Hellenistic rulers, which was the most important and most commonly used attribute of royalty in the period – is much more elaborate and ornate than these of his predecessor.

Type 1, therefore, seems to preserve the general ethnic and possibly family look of the Pontic dynasty in Mithridates' likeness, at the same time adding to it a trace of 'Alexandrine' flavour: the longish hair flowing loosely around the head is one of the most frequent features of the portraits of Alexander, and it was also imitated by many rulers on coins and to some extent also in the sculpture in the round, to the extent allowed by the material and technique.

In fact, the arrangement of hair on Type 1 is almost identical as on most of the renditions of the alleged physiognomic portrait of Alexander as it appears on lifetime issues of Lysimachus silver coins (the famous 'horn of Ammon' type, struck between ca. 297-281 BCE; see Brown 1981), and on their close continuations or imitations down the 3rd century BCE. This image became more and more barbarized on later mints, but even the coins of this type struck in the times of Mithridates himself preserved the arrangement of the hair versus the diadema: the fillet being clearly visible over the hair, which flows freely beyond it. This leaves us with the question to what extent we can treat Type 1 as a physiognomic portrait of Mithridates VI: on one hand we can place its style within the 'realistic' tradition of Pontic monetary portraiture, on the other hand a look at barbarized, late 2nd and early 1st century BCE continuations of the Lysimachus Alexander type allows for a certain amount of doubt. I would, however, support the notion that despite of the new hairstyle type and some features that may intentionally remind the viewer of Alexander's known portraiture, some other traits, especially the heavy chin and brow are more likely characteristic for Mithridates himself.

Type 2, struck after 85 BCE and continued to ca. 67, i.e. short before Mithridates' defeat and demise, and nicknamed 'idealised' by de Callataÿ (1997: 16-24, Pl. VII-XIII), changed not only the treatment of the facial features, which became softer (the eyebrow keeps its line but the skin is much smoother, the lines on the face disappear, the nose is still prominent but straighter, the lips are much smaller, and the chin

less pronounced), giving the impression of eternal youth, but also of the hair, which now is fully blown behind the head instead of just falling over the neck, and the headband of the diadema can be seen only at the top of the head and below the neckline where its decorated ends float among the loose locks of hair. It resembles, if anything, the Roman 'Aesillas quaestor' type, minted between ca. 90 and ca. 70, that is since the initial phase of Rome's conflict with Mithridates (in the year 90 Rome intervened openly for the first time in the affairs of Asia Minor, following Mithridates' involvement in the succession controversies in Bithynia and Cappadocia) and until the first serious Roman successes in the wars with Mithridates. The launch of both types is almost simultaneous and it would be extremely interesting to investigate the possible influences of the images and their (common?) sources, especially their relation to Alexander's iconography (the identity of the person on the Aesillas coins is disputed, even though most scholars agree that the figure represents idealized Alexander, because of the ram horn), but such task falls beyond the scope of this paper.

The hairstyle of Type 2 is unique among the coin portraits of Hellenistic rulers; even in the case of the most exuberant Seleucids (Antiochus IV and Diodotus Tryphon, both first half and mid-2nd century) the diadema is never covered by the 'streaming locks' as Norman Davis and Colin M. Kraay put it (1973: note to Figs. 207-209). These scholars attribute the peculiarity of looks to the adoption of the second dynastic name by Mithridates – Dionysus, dated according to epigraphic sources to the late 90s BCE (IDelos 2039 and 2040; Homolle 1884: 103; Kotsidu 2000: No. 335), which only by some 5 years at most precedes the launching of Type 2 (the first occurrence of the 'idealized' likeness appears on a gold stater of 89 BCE, even though the type is generally associated with the Pergamon mint since the conquest of the city in 88; see de Callataÿ 1997: 33). What, however, weakens this hypothesis, is little resemblance of this hairstyle to the representations of Dionysos on coins, or, in fact, in sculpture, therefore much as the rest of the description by Davis and Kraay ('forward thrust of the head, snaky ties of the diadem') might indeed point as the god of wine, there is no direct iconographic link between the two images.

If anything, this hairstyle might be reminiscent of some of the Hellenistic renditions of Helios on the coins of Rhodos, which may have

been influenced by the image of Alexander (see Hölscher 1971: 37; Stewart 1993: 180). The Hellenistic age saw a development of syncretic cults and divinities, in which the deified Alexander as well as his deified successors partook, therefore the superficial similarity to Helios does not exclude other associations, but a clear and certain identification is not possible in the case of many syncretic images. Unlike Dionysos, Helios does not appear in the official epithets of the rulers, but the god's most important attribute, the *corona radiata* is present in the portraiture of both the Ptolemies (deified Ptolemy III Euergetes on the coins of Ptolemy IV Philopator) and Seleucids (Antioch IV Epiphanes); also Alexander was represented with this headdress (e.g. the 'Capitoline Alexander', Rome, Musei Capitolini, inv. No. 723). Explicit solar symbolism is, however, strongly present in the Pontic royal iconography (the alleged 'dynastic badge', consisting of the moon crescent and stellar sun symbol), together with very complex examples of syncretic deities, combining the aspects of the Phrygian Men, the Iranian Mithra and the Greek Dionysos/Apollo/Helios[3].

To conclude with the royal mints, it may be said that much as they present what certainly was intended as the official images of the king, the ones that would circulate among his subjects first in Pontus (hence, according to some scholars, the traditionally 'realistic' image of Type 1, despite some 'Alexandrine' traits), and then in the subjugated states (hence the 'idealized', even more Alexander-like and more 'divine' image of Type 2). It may also be assumed that the facial features of Type 1 are probably close to the actual looks of Mithridates, and since the facial features of Type 2, idealization removed, do not differ very much from the earlier rendition (we must also bear in mind that there was a large number of dies for both types and the details differ among them), they seem to agree in both cases with the actual looks.

Less reliable are city coppers and bronzes, even if we have certainty that they were minted under the rule of Mithridates. These coins, due to the physicochemical characteristics of the alloys as well as to the fact that unlike gold and silver they were in everyday use, are usually found in much worse state of preservation, therefore iconographic

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[3] For the long standing debate on this figure see e.g. Reinach 1890: 473; Newell 1937: 47; Price 1968: 3; McGing 1986: 33; Summerer 1995: 311; Mattingly 2004; Erciyas 2006: 126; de Callataÿ 2009: 66.

details are frequently less clear (the images being often generic, to begin with), and the legends barely legible or even completely illegible, if present at all.

Several of these issues have, however, attracted scholarly attention as possible representations of Mithridates. Among these, the Amisos bronze dated to the turn of the 2nd and 1st century, and an anonymous copper issue dated to the same period (unique: Petersburg, The State Hermitage, inv. No. 12447, see Pfeiler 1968: 79, No. 5; Smekalova 2009: 231, Fig. 1)[4], both of them showing a youngish head in profile, clad in the Persian style *kyrbasia* with a flat top and longish flaps falling over the shoulders, without decoration. The facial features of the portrayed person are rather generic, but in the anonymous issue the protruding chin can be compared to the same characteristic of Mithridates on Type 1 coins, and some specimens of Type 2. However, such rendition of the chin is also found on a disputable silver from Odessos, dated roughly to the time of Mithridates VI (Price 1991: No. 1192), which primarily is an imitation of the aforementioned Lysimachus issue with the portrait of Alexander, but in a very strongly barbarized style, possibly resembling or inspired by the facial features of Mithridates.

The identification of the person represented on the bronzes and copper in question is dubious as well; even if we assume that it is indeed the young king Mithridates, they only attest that in the early years of his reign he was portrayed on official issues in the Persian headdress, which was abandoned in the royal mints. Another coin, however, the Panticapaeum silver obol (Summerer 1995: No. 5; Smekalova 2009: 239-240, Fig. 10d; Saprykin 2009: 256) presents a far more interesting case, because of the obvious identification of the head on the obverse with Men Pharnakou, possibly syncretised with other deities (Phrygian cap with the star and crescent moon symbol over it, laurel wreath with tainiai characteristic for the royal diadem), as well as of the reverse,

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[4] Some other contemporary coins from Amisos have attracted scholarly attention in relation to possible portraits of Mithridates Eupator, but since the representations on their obverses can be easily identified with a number of deities (Dionysos: bronze, Price 1968: Pl. I, 9; Ares: bronze, Price 1968: Pl. I, 8; Perseus: coppers, Smekalova 2009: 232, Fig. 2a, Pfeiler 1968: 79, No. 6), while the facial features (especially in the case of Ares and Dionysos) are too generic to compare them with the more likely portraits of Mithridates, I will not discuss them in detail here.

which shows a complex deity consistent with other such representations on the coins of earlier Pontic rulers, and because the circumstances and time of its minting (since the establishment of the Pontic rule in Bosporus until the break of the 1st Mithridatic war: 96/95-89/88 BCE) makes it more likely that they show the king in the costume of the dynastic deity (Strab. 12, 3, 31; cf. Summerer 1995: 311).

The royal issues allow for identification of a number of engraved gems, which repeat the monetary type (e.g. London, British Museum, reg. No. 1923.4-1.148; Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco, inv. No. 14948), but also another corpus of glyptic representations was proposed as portraits of Mithridates[5]. Out of the latter group some have to be discarded due to doubtful stylistic features, often combined with unknown provenience[6], while the most interesting and convincing cases originate from the documented excavations in the north Pontic area, and out of these the most interesting gem is the Petersburg (The State Hermitage, inv. No. ZH 4625; Neverov 1973; Neverov 1976: cat. No. 62) intaglio from the northern coast of the Black Sea, dated to late Hellenism, and showing Dionysus with an ivy and grapevine wreath, and with facial features that could be interpreted as resembling those of Mithridates, with some amount of idealization. If the interpretation is correct, and the context of finding works in its favour, this gem, together with three other, from the Cabinet de Medailles in Paris (Vollenweider 1995: No. 208, 217, 221) would make the only examples of Mithridates portrayed in the guise of Dionysus. Out of the Paris collection one gem stands out: No. 221 presents a relatively aged man with a stylized vine and ivy wreath on his head, and with longish hair bound in a feminine way, like numerous representations of Dionysos in Late Classical and Hellenistic sculpture. The facial features, idealised to some extent, and the profile in particular, do resemble the coin portraits of Mithridates,

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[5] Ancient sources attest the existence of such objects, see e.g. Athen. 5, 212d-e. Neverov (1969) published a golden ring with alleged portrait of Mithridates (Petersburg, The State Hermitage, inv. No. ZH 464), but the facial features of the engraving in question are too generic to allow for certainty.

[6] E.g. Furtwängler 1900: Tab. XXXII, 17, in Petersburg (cf. Richter 1968: No. 652; Erciyas 2006: 161); Furtwängler 1900: Tab. XXXII, 13, ex Collection Nott, Rome, now probably lost (cf. Svenson 1995: Tab. 12, 2.24); the latter is clearly reminiscent of the idealised monetary portraits of Antiochus IV.

but not enough to allow certain identification, which has been observed by the author of the catalogue (Vollenweider 1995: 200-201).

What should, however, make the corpus of certain portraits apart from coins, is the sculpture in the round, since we know from historical and epigraphic sources that dedications of the cities to the kings, as well as the rulers' own foundations, were numerous. As far as testimonies for the statues of Mithridates go (apart from the necessary models for coin representations), we do possess the descriptions of Roman triumphal processions: Plutarch (*Luc.* 37) mentions a 'a golden statue of Mithridates himself, six feet in height [αὐτοῦ τε Μιθριδάτου χρύσεος ἐξάπους κολοσσός]', among the spoils, and Appian (*Mith.* 116) lists 'the throne and sceptre of Mithridates Eupator himself, and his image, eight cubits high, made of solid gold [εἰκόνα ὀκτάπεχυν ἀπὸ στερεοῦ χρυσίου]'. When Pliny (*HN* 33, 54) remarks on the falsity of the notion that silver statues were invented in the age of Augustus, he comments: 'I find it stated, that in the triumph celebrated by Pompeius Magnus there was a silver statue exhibited of Pharnaces, the first king of Pontus, as also one of Mithridates Eupator'. As has been mentioned before, the authors are economical with details, except for the material, and it is therefore unclear what they mean by statues made of solid silver or gold: rare examples of Hellenistic gilded bronzes are attested, such as the Forum Boarium Heracles, dated to the 2nd century BCE (Musei Capitolini, reg. No. MC 1265), but no solid precious metal colossal sculptures were preserved for obvious reasons.

We can imagine that Mithridates was presented in sculpture according to the Hellenistic models, for which again the lifetime and posthumous portraiture of Alexander formed the paradigm. Smith (1988: 32) lists three main types of dedicatory statues for kings: naked (i.e. deified) athletic figures with more or less specific attributes, cuirassed statues, and monuments showing the rulers on horseback. One should add to this typology a general category of rulers in the costumes of various deities (or rather: associated with deities) because the kind of attributes employed here does not necessarily fall into any of the aforementioned categories[7].

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[7] Certain amount of scholarly dispute has been devoted to the alleged difference between 'ruler in the guise of a deity' and 'deity with the characteristic features of a ruler' (for recent discussion see e.g. Carney 2000: 34), but unless the context of placement

If we consider now the extant sculptural works which have been identified with Mithridates in the scholarship, we may extract a small number that allows for a serious consideration, according to their provenance[8]. We do not possess reliable material from the Pontic kingdom itself, due to the scarcity of excavations[9], but there is a number of finds from the areas known for Mithridates' activity – that require our attention. We will focus now on a selected small number of examples only in order to show what kind of problems they present; the total number of sculpted works proposed by scholars reaches 27 (some of them

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of an object indicates otherwise (in particular pointing at the casual character of the resemblance, as the effect of the popularity of a type), the present author believes such distinctions vague and of little value for the discussion of royal portraiture. The assimilation of rulers with deities was so deeply ingrained in the frame of mind that it seems hardly possible that such distinctions would be of any consequence in the time when the likenesses functioned.

[8] Out of the proposed identifications which will not be discussed, several deserve some explanation for their rejection. Two of these: the so-called 'San Theodoro Mithridates' from the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (in situ as part of a later sculptural group, see Smith 1988: cat. No. 86) and the head from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (inv. No. 3556; Kaltsas 2002: 287; identification with Mithridates proposed by Neverov 1972, tentatively accepted by Smith 1988: 172 and cat. No. 85), are in my opinion more likely to be associated with Ariarathes IX of Cappadocia, the son of Mithridates, introduced to the throne of Cappadocia by his father in 101 BCE (ruled until 86 BCE with short breaks). Contrariwise to Højte's (2009: 152) view, the profile shown on the coins of Ariarates is quite characteristic and differs enough from that of his father, to observe resemblance between these portraits and the monetary portraits, therefore the identification with Mithridates should be discarded. Smith (1988: cat. No. 84) and Højte (2009) favour the Ostia head (Frascati, Villa Aldobrandini, first published by Calza 1964: No. 12) but its uncertain provenience, together with the features much heavier than those of Mithridates, even on the 'realistic' portraits of the coin Type 1, allow for a degree of uncertainty.

[9] The only object from Sinope that has been associated with Mithridates is a late Hellenistic head of a middle-sized terracotta figure of Heracles (Sinope, Archaeological Museum, inv. No. 9-10-54; see Akurgal Budde 1956: 30 and Pl. XIV; Summerer 1999: 131-132, K II 8, Pl. 59), whose facial features are quite generic; the tilt of the head might suggest Alexander as well, but the profile indeed resembles Mithridates more than Alexander. Unfortunately, this artefact has never been properly published with good quality photographs that would allow for a substantiated opinion without autopsy. However, even those scholars who do identify it with Mithridates, do so with a considerable amount of doubt.

making very poor or controversial cases[10]), among which are 15 marble heads (or busts) of various scale, two headless marble torsos, two marble figures forming part of sculptural groups, and six bronze figurines; the remaining two cases are fragmentary finds tentatively associated with possible portraits of Mithridates (Stewart 1993: 337 and Summerer 1999: 132 resp.).

The most widely accepted identification is that of the Heracles-type in the Louvre (inv. No. MA 2321; Winter 1894; Laurenzi 1941: No. 102; Bieber 1961: 122; Richter 1965: No. 1930, 1933; Richter 1984: 246-247; Smith 1988: cat. No. 83; Højte 2009: 150) provenance unknown, Roman copy of the Hellenistic original), which has been also interpreted as Alexander, because of his main monetary type, and alleged portrait features of the Alexandria 325 mint (Pollitt 1986: 25-26). Much as this particular notion is contested in scholarship, it is tentatively agreed that posthumous mints may present facial features of Alexander, and I would argue that it ought to have been intended to represent Alexander as Heracles both on coins and in sculpture, facial features irrespective. However, the Louvre head shows much more affinity to monetary likenesses of Mithridates than Alexander, especially when the characteristic heavy brow is concerned, as well as what we may guess about

[10] The most controversial case is Telephos in the Heracles Chiaramonti group (Musei Vaticani: Museo Chiaramonti; see Andreae 1994-1995; Andreae 1997; for discussion see Højte 2009: 146-147), a far-fetched hypothesis, based on the Pergamum origin of the sculpture and on the analogy with dubious identification of another Heracles from Pergamum, see below. The least probable identifications are three marble heads: Helios (Venice, Museo Archeologico, inv. No. 245; Krug 1969), which is a classicizing sculpture of unknown provenance and provenience, with very generic facial features; the so-called 'Alexander Schwarzenberg' (Munich, Glyptotek, inv. No. GL 559; on the sculpture and discussion see Schwarzenberg 1968; Lorenz 2001; Højte 2009); the so-called 'Pyrrhus' (Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. No. I.N. 578; McGing 1986: 186); one bronze figure of Heracles (London, British Museum, reg. No. 1895,0408.1; identification proposed by Oikonomides 1962; on the artefact and discussion see Walters 1915: Pl. LI; Richter 1965: Fig. 1931-1932; Treister et al. 1999: 498; Erciyas 2006: 158), which is a very unlikely candidate, first and foremost because of its dating to the 2nd century CE and finding place, the Hadrian Wall. Also dubious are two bronze figures from auctions (Sotheby's New York, 17.12.1992, cat. No. 85; Sotheby's New York, 5.06.2008, cat. No. N08452/22), both of unknown provenance and unpublished. The Melos fragments (Melos Archaeological Museum, inv. Nos. 127: torso, 61: leg, 14: foot; Trianti 1998) render too scarce information about the figure to decide its identity, the most probable being Dionysos.

the nose from what is left of the sculpture; also the general shape of the face is broader and heavier than in the representations of Alexander. Moreover, Alexander's Hellenistic portraits, even if they are reflections of the Lysippean lifetime types usually show some degree of idealization, which is hardly present in the portrait in question. Since we know that Mithridates emulated Alexander, literally following his footsteps and wearing his mantle, it is not surprising that he would portray himself in the guises known from Alexander's iconography[11].

The identification of this work of art with Mithridates (instead of a generic *roi grec en Hercule* was proposed as early as the end of the 19th century (Winter 1894: 246-247). The scholar based the identification on the similarities with the coin portraits, but his analysis was inaccurate due to the incomplete knowledge of the chronology of Mithridates' mints: he rightly described the statue as presenting a man in his forties, 'at the top of his power, which falls within the period of his residence in Pergamum', but clearly pointed at the pre-Pergamene coins as the stylistic analogies. In the sculpture itself Winter sees a Roman copy of the late Hellenistic original; this notion was put to doubt – without conclusive remarks – by Smith (1988: 99), who noted that it is extremely difficult to distinguish a well elaborated portrait head from ca. 90 BCE from a copy dated to ca. 50 BCE – 50 CE. The study on the preserved part of the sculpture suggests that originally it formed part of a full size statue, not a bust or herm, which would support Smith's intuition: we may either deal in this case with a fragment of preserved original or with an early copy which did not follow the Roman preference for busts and herms. Moreover, this suggestion may be also corroborated by the doubts raised concerning the style and chronology of the sculpture in question, in particular its affinity with the so-called 'Rhodian school'[12] and the style of the Laocoon Group (Winter 1894:

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[11] This notion has most likely encouraged several other identifications; apart from the Hadrian Wall figurine, which should be discarded for reasons already listed (see note 8), two more representations of Heracles should be mentioned: the aforementioned Sinope terracotta (see note 7), and the Myshako bronze (preliminary publication by Treister et al. 1999; the same authors suggest the identification with Mithridates of two bronzes from Naples: Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. No. 5163, and a figurine from the Palazzo Reale, but this proposal should be treated with caution).

[12] See, however, reservations concerning the very existence of such group: Polit 2001.

247; Højte 2009: 146; Laurenzi 1941: No. 102 is less specific, describing the sculpture simply as 'typical for late Hellenism').

Another Heracles candidate for the portrait of Mithridates is the hero in the Pergamum group of Prometheus (Berlin, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, inv. No. P 168). This sculpture poses more questions, and its known provenience actually adds to the problematic case, since together with the topic presented it allows for three identifications: Alexander, one of the Attalids, and Mithridates. In both cases of the Hellenistic associations political and symbolic interpretations are put forward: for the Attalids it would be another – with the famous Gauls groups – monument commemorating their victories over the Celts invading Asia Minor (see e.g. Brogan 1998; Gans 2006: 109-112), while for Mithridates – the defence and liberation of the Greek (or Graeco-Persian) East from the Romans. The latter interpretation seems more plausible: the ideas of liberation of Greek cities were present in the anti-Roman propaganda of Mithridates, and can be linked to his *imitatio Alexandri* stance (cf. Højte 2009: 149), while the Attalids waged their wars against barbarians, and commemorated them with suitable monuments featuring the conquered enemies. One must, however, admit that the stylistic analyses presented against the case require more detailed criticism, which falls beyond the scope of the present paper. The facial features of the Heracles in question are so generic that they hardly allow for comparison to other portraits; if anything of the physiognomy might point at Mithridates, it is the slant of the brow and the setting of the eyes, both features very different from what we see on the most widely accepted portrait of the Attalids, i.e. the head of Attalus I (?) in Berlin (Staatliche Antikensammlungen, inv. No. P 130), and the only coin tentatively believed to represent other ruler than the founder of the dynasty (Eumenes II, see Gans 2006: cat. No. 3, Pl. 1.2).

Portraits of Mithridates should naturally abound in the Pontic area, but as it has been mentioned before, the research in the is scarce. However, the excavations in the northern coast of the Black Sea yielded three marble heads which can be with relatively high degree of probability identified with Mithridates, due to their provenience and dating. Erciyas (2006: 158) suggests their honorific character, and links them with the victory over the Scythians and the subduing of the Bosporan Kingdom by Eupator, but Neverov (1971: 93) stresses their stylistic

traits that allow for their attribution to a workshop in Pergamum itself or remaining under Pergamum influence, which, together with the degree of idealization, suggests their later date.

Out of these objects the Odessa head (Archaeological Museum; inv. No. 50221; cf. Neverov 1971, Smith 1988: cat. No. 87, Okhotnikov 2006: 378) bears the closest resemblance to the monetary portraits; close to them is also the Panticapaeum head (Neverov 1971; Smith 1988: cat. No. 88), found on the north-west slope of the mountain dominating the ancient city, and named after Mithridates. In both cases the fragmentary state of preservation seems to be due to the execution of the original sculptures: either in the *membra disiecta* technique, typical for late Hellenistic period, or in the acrolytic technique (Neverov 1971: 90), both of them combining full statues from separately elaborated parts.

In case of both heads, however, traits suggesting *imitatio Alexandri*, together with some characteristics of the facial features of Mithridates, can be observed: the tilt of the head (to the right in case of the Panticapaeum head and to the left and upwards in case of the Odessa one), the rendering of the eyes and slightly parted lips, but the features seem heavier than in case of most Alexanders, while more consistent with the official portraiture of Mithridates. The Odessa head is more dynamic in expression, and the face is better preserved, showing clearly the large, massive brows. The Panticapaeum head was probably adorned with some kind of cap or headdress, since it is preserved only slightly higher than the hairline; the Odessa head has the hair rendered in a style resembling the *anastole* of Alexander.

The third north Pontic head is a miniature one, discovered in the pronaos of a small temple on the Panticapaeum acropolis in 1992, and not yet properly published (Zin'ko 2004: 185, No. 119; see also Højte 2009: 150-151 and Fig. 13). The head was very carefully elaborated and is in a very good state of preservation. Photographs allow for its description as strongly idealised, with facial features more delicate than could be expected from the physiognomy of Mithridates, therefore we may deal in this case with a syncretic image of Mithridates-Alexander, most likely in the guise of a deity. The latter is suggested by the traces of attachments of a headdress, which most likely would have been the Phrygian cap, characteristic for the god Men (Summerer 1995;

cf. Lane 1997: 92 for the distinction with Attis). A Pontic-Bosporan analogy for such representation of a ruler can be found in the famous bronze head of queen Dynamis found in Novorosiisk (The State Hermitage, inv. No. PAN 1726), granddaughter of Mithridates who ruled and co-ruled the client state of Bosporus under Roman domination (47-14 BCE). The cap worn by Dynamis is decorated with stars; Julian (*Or.* V 165B) describes such headdress as *asterotos pilos*, linking it to the cult of Kybele and Attis, and in the Pontic context it is attested at least as early as the turn of the 4th/3rd century BCE, on the coins of queen Amastris of Heraclea (Rostovtzeff 1919: 90). Franz Cumont (1947) proposed similar reconstruction for a Mithraic monument found in Ostia, and identified it as Mithras-Alexander. If such reconstruction were to be accepted, the alleged portrait of Mithridates from Panticapaeum might be interpreted as a syncretic image of Mithridates-Alexander associated with Men-Mithra. Such interpretation might also shed new light on the aforementioned copper coins with possible portraits of young Mithridates.

Provenience seems to favour yet another group of portrait sculptures: the objects originating from Delos, where the Mithridatids in general, and Eupator in particular used to make huge offerings for the island's temples, and also founded new shrines (Kreuz 2009 with bibliography)[13]. Delos yielded a large corpus of inscriptions referring to the Pontic rulers, as well as four fragments of sculptures which are tentatively associated with Eupator. One of these inscriptions allowed to identify the only sculpted piece which certainly belonged to a statue of Mithridates Eupator, but ironically the preserved part is the torso with no matching head (published by Chapouthier 1935: 39-40). As for facial features and strictly portrait works, there are three in question, each of them posing the same set of problems: they bear as much similarity to Alexander's iconography as to what we may guess about the looks and ways of representing of Mithridates. All three have their analogies among sculptures associated with Alexander, therefore in every case only the fact that we know about large-scale activity

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[13] The propagandistic meaning of Eupator's most important foundation on Delos, the shrine which hosted the sculpted portraits of the king himself and his *filoi* as well as his allies (only one of these partly preserved), requires further study, which, however, falls beyond the scope of the present paper.

of the Pontic dynasty on the island prevails in the assessment of possible identifications.

Out of the Delos sculptures the head now in Athens (National Archaeological Museum, inv. No. 429) is the most probable candidate. It was found together with two other fragmentary sculptures: a female head with almost completely damaged face (possibly Laodice, sister and first wife of Eupator), and a very poorly preserved head of an unidentified deity, interpreted as Dionysos (Homolle 1885: 256). The male head in question does show some 'Alexandrine' traits, such as the tilt of the head and upward gaze; it seems, however, much more dynamic in its expression than the known sculpted portraits of Alexander (apart from the Capitoline 'Helios'/Florentine 'Dying' Alexander types, but these are quite different in the emotional expression), the face is more elongated, and the *anastole* only marked. The nose is not preserved, therefore the profile cannot be compared to the coin portraits, but the presence of the diadema points at a Hellenistic ruler rather than Alexander, since we do not know of a certain sculpted representation of the latter with this attribute of royal status, while it is omnipresent in the iconography of the Hellenistic kings. Also the furrow on the brow is more common in Mithridates' portraiture than that of Alexander. Michałowski (1932: 7-8) dates the sculpture to ca. 115-114 BCE, and interprets the traces of non-anatomically formed part of the preserved fragment of shoulder as armour, therefore an attribute that would be in accord with the typology of honorific statues proposed by Smith.

Another Delian sculpture that requires attention, even though it provoked several interpretations, is the so-called 'horned king', mostly because it presents the ruler with the goat horns, i.e. attributes of Pan, therefore relates to Dionysos, and we may expect such association in case of Mithridates. Its facial features are pretty damaged, and moreover, rather generic, and we do possess evidence that Alexander was represented in such guise (medium size marble figure in Pella, Archaeological Museum, inv. No. GL 43). Also the Antigonids were known for their associations with Pan, therefore this head was also interpreted as the portraits of Demetrius Poliorcetes (Will 1955: 172-176). However, close analysis of the facial features in comparison with extant portraits of Alexander, as well as the arrangement of horns on the head, is much closer to the Pella Alexander than to horned portraits of Demetrius,

therefore this interpretation can probably be discarded, unless more evidence is found that would corroborate Will's chronology of the sculpture. The main argument for Mithridates is the finding place: the only Delian monument connected with Alexander is an inscription dated to the 3rd century BCE (Michałowski 1932: 6-7), while the presence of Mithridates and his family is well attested epigraphically.

The third Delos sculpture (Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. No. MA 855) is the most problematic. The head is fragmentarily preserved, but a large portion of the torso allows for assessing that it belonged to an over life-size naked (or partly covered with a mantle on the missing side) statue, which was carefully elaborated only on the front, while the sides and the back remain hardly worked. Such execution might suggest that the sculpture was originally placed in a niche, and may have been a cult statue. The hair resembles the arrangement of the hair on the Aesillas quaestor coins, and may have been also arranged in the *anastole* over the brow (parts of the forehead and back of the head are missing), which led to the first and most commonly accepted identification of this sculpture as Alexander, or, more precisely: Alexandero-Inopos, associated with the local river god.

The long standing scholarly dispute over this sculpture's identification[14] has not yielded conclusive results; it seems, nonetheless, that the facial features are far more idealised and mild than in most of acceptable portraits of Mithridates, as well as the arrangement of hair seem to agree with Alexander rather than Eupator. However, we may

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[14] This identification goes back to the 19th century: the sculpture was described as Inopos in 1817, and as Alexander in 1876, when traces of the attachments of a head-dress were discovered, and interpreted as a royal diadem. A number of other interpretations were put forward in later scholarship: Michon (1911: 293-294, 297-299) favoured the Inopos hypothesis but also proposed another – as Asclepius (on the grounds of alleged traces of a mantle over the missing arm), quoting a the same time yet different views, seeing in the sculpture either Helios or Praxitelan Euboleus (Michon 1911: 300-301). Charbonneaux (1951) compared some physical and stylistic traits of this sculpture with the Aphrodite of Melos, and for the first time proposed to interpret the sculpture as a likeness of Mithridates. His hypothesis was accepted by a number of scholars writing on Mithridates (Neverov 1972: 111; Erciyas 2006: 155 accept the identification unconditionally due to its finding place, while Pasquier and Martinez 2007: 199 treat it with large amount of caution), but was rejected by Bieber (1964: 67), who for obvious reasons favoured the Alexander interpretation.

again deal in this case with complex syncretisation, which includes association of Mithridates with his role model.

Mithridates claimed to be a descendant of both Cyrus the Great by the Pontic satrapal line, and Alexander the Great (Just. *Epit.* 38, 7); he was indeed related to the Seleucids and Ptolemies by earlier interdynastic marriages, and he strove to become the embodiment of the union between the Hellenistic East and West. Such a well designed propagandistic programme should have found its reflection in art, and much as we may be never able to trace the real looks of Mithridates, just as the actual looks of Philip or Alexander will remain elusive because of the *ethos*, idealization and apotheosis-related elements that obscure realism, we may still look for him in these works of art that fall within the realm of syncretic representations of deities or heroes associated with Alexander and further – with the Hellenistic rulers who by emulation of their founding hero created their own legends and divinity.

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