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A FIND OF AN ISTRIAN CAST
'WHEEL COIN' AT KOSHARY (UKRAINE)

Abstract: *This article's aim is to publish a cast Istrian 'wheel coin' found at the Koshary site. The site is located on the northern shore of the Black Sea on the right bank of the Tiligulskii Liman and consists of a settlement, a sacral zone around an open air altar (eschara) and a necropolis. The settlement existed between the end of the 5th and the middle of the 3rd centuries BC. Among other artifacts, 55 coins have been found at the site during regular archaeological excavations. Apart from a bronze coin of Tyras and the discussed Istrian piece, all the other coins found at Koshary are Olbian. The 'wheel coin' was discovered in a dugout located in the southern part of the sacral area around the eschara. The cast 'wheel coins' were produced in the 5th-4th centuries BC in Istros and were in circulation in a wide area covering a great part of the western and northwestern Black Sea shore. The find at Koshary, when combined with other finds in Luzanivka and Ochakov, marks a trade route between Istros, Nikonion and Olbia. As it was found in the eschara area, one can suppose that the Istrian coin was not used as currency, but possessed a sacral nature instead.*

Keywords: *'The wheel coin'; cast; find; Koshary; Istros; Olbia; the Black Sea; 'eschara'*

Professor Ewdoksia Papuci-Władyka has dedicated almost 30 years of her professional activity to researching the Paphos antiquities, initially as a member of an expedition of the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archae-

ology of the University of Warsaw and then as the head of the Jagiellonian University's Paphos Agora Project. There is no doubt, however, that the Northern Black Sea Region and especially the Koshary site also occupies a prominent place in her heart. We would like to commemorate ten years of collaboration with Ewdoksia at the Koshary project with this short communication.

The complex of archaeological sites located near the modern village of Koshary has been the subject of archaeological research since the 1950s (Pl. 1: 1). Between 1998 and 2008, the site was excavated by a united Polish-Ukrainian expedition, with members from both the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and the Odessa Archaeological Museum of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (Redina *et al.* 2007; Papuci-Władyka and Redina 2011). The expedition, led by Evgenia Fedorovna Redina and Ewdoksia Papuci-Władyka, explored a small settlement, necropolis and sacral zone located around an open-air altar (*eschara*) (Pl. 1: 2). According to archaeological evidence, the chronological limits of the settlement are from the end of the 5th century/turn of the 4th century BC until the middle of the 3rd century BC.

Among other artifacts, 55 coins have been discovered thus far during regular archaeological research (Bodzek 2011a). The discovered coins are exclusively bronzes and almost all from the Olbian mint. The only exception is a small bronze coin of Tyras dated to the turn of the 3rd century BC (Bodzek 2004-2007; Bodzek 2011b, 7). Aside from these two coins, it is said that other non-Olbian coins have been found either accidentally or during illicit excavations at the site. However, their connection with the ancient Greek settlement is at best uncertain and their credibility, at least in some cases, is also doubtful (Bodzek 2011b, 7-11).

However, conservation work carried out systematically on excavation material has enabled us to discern another non-Olbian piece among the coins found at Koshary. This is the so-called Istrian cast 'wheel coin'.

Istros (Pl. 2: 1-2)

c. 480-380 BC

AE 12. 0.79g. Obv. Four-spoke wheel. Rev. ΙΣΤ.

The cast 'wheel coins' used to be commonly but incorrectly attributed to Olbia Pontica (cf. von Sallet 1883, 147; Burachkov 1884, 42; Bert'e Delagarde 1911, 76; Oreshnikov 1915, 25-26; Zograf 1951, 122-124).

Another supposition, made by B. Pick (1898, 181) and according to which the place of production of 'wheel coins' was *Ἰστριανῶν λιμῆν* (a site located somewhere on the coast, west of Olbia), was also wrong, although it was based on the correct interpretation of the legend ΙΣΤ as an ethnikon. The correct and now commonly accepted site of provenance of 'wheel coins' is the West Pontic Istros, based mainly on finds evidence and proved independently by C. Preda (1960) and P. O. Karyshkovskii (1957). They both supported the earlier statements of scholars such as I. P. Blaramberg (1822, 59, note 1) and primarily N. N. Murzakewicz (1841, 24) and P. Becker (1881, 17). One should, however, remember that A. G. Zaginailo (1966, 109; 1991, 98) was able to identify some locally produced imitations among the 'wheel coins' found at Nikonion (cf. Mielczarek 1999, 13-14; Mielczarek 2005, 274; Sekerskaya and Bulatovich 2010, 27) and V. A. Anohin (1989, 78) similarly supposed that such imitations were produced in Olbia as well.

The cast 'wheel coins' of Istria were probably produced in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, most likely in the years *c.* 480-380 BC (Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 30-31, note 19). Some researchers, however, place the beginning of their production to as early as the 6th century BC (Conovici and Avram 1996; cf. Talmaçhi 2006, 37; Talmaçhi 2011, 340, 342), while some others extend the time of their production until the mid-4th century BC (Preda 1998, 63-64; cf. Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 31).

The piece found at Koshary is not too well preserved. The reverse inscription is almost illegible and one eighth of the coin is broken off. This latter fact means that the original weight of the specimen was higher than the present 0.79g, and should probably be re-estimated to around 0.9g. This would correspond better with its diameter of 12mm.

Most of the Istrian 'wheel coins' were cast, but there is also a group of struck coins of this type (cf. Talmaçhi 2011, 258-259). The cast 'wheel coins' were classified by C. Preda (1960, 27), who distinguished five groups according to weight and diameter (cf. Fig. 1). The classification was then corrected by A. Zaginailo (1966, 105) and this scholar, based on finds from Nikonion, limited the number of groups to four by removing Preda's group 1, which only contained a single piece (cf. Fig. 1). G. Talmaçhi (2011, 240-258), however, after examining a great deal more material, returned to Preda's original division of cast 'wheel coins' into five groups. He recognized the diameter as the main criterion of the division and, according to this arrangement, the piece found at Koshary should be classified as belonging to Talmaçhi's group three. The positioning

| Preda 1960 | Weight | Diameter | Zaginailo 1966 |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Group 1 | 0.3g | 9mm | |
| Group 2 | 0.55-0.9g | 10-11mm | Group 1 |
| Group 3 | 1-1.5g | 12-13mm | Group 2 |
| Group 4 | 1.7-2.5g | 15-18mm | Group 3 |
| Group 5 | 3.3-3.73g | 17-18mm | Group 4 |

| Talmaçhi 2011 | Diameter | Weight |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Group 1 | 6-9.9mm | 0.18-1.42g |
| Group 2 | 10-11.9mm | 0.4-2.14g |
| Group 3 | 12-14.9mm | 0.38-3.17g |
| Group 4 | 15-16.9mm | 0.75-5.13g |
| Group 5 | 17-18.5mm | 2.39-3.37g |

Fig. 1. Classification of Istrian cast 'wheel coins' according to Preda 1960, Zaginailo 1966 and Talmaçhi 2011

of the coin in the classifications of Preda and Zaginailo is, however, less clear. It could be included either in the group two or three of Preda or in the group one or two of Zaginailo.

The Koshary piece was found during the 2006 season in the *eschara* area. It was discovered in a mixed layer in a fill of devastated dugout no. 4. Some clay bread, a fragment of a terracotta figurine (Demeter?), a bone suspension and potsherds were also found in the layer. Dugout no. 4 is located close to dugout no. 3, which was discovered under a clay altar excavated in seasons 2004-2005 (Redina *et al.* 2007; Papuci-Władyka and Redina 2011, 287). Both dugouts probably formed a part of cult structures located in the south of the *zol'nik* area and probably belonged to the earliest phase of the *eschara*'s existence dating to the first quarter of the 4th century BC. It should be noted here that the second non-Olbian coin (a bronze coin of Tyras) was also excavated in the *eschara* zone (Bodzek 2004-2007).

Finds of Istrian 'wheel coins' have been registered across a wide area between Athens, Tauric Chersonesos (Kerkinitis) and even Gallia (Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 31-32; cf. Talmaçhi 2006, 129, no. 15, 148, no. 1, 151, no. 20, 154, no. 58). However, most of the finds are concentrated between the Danube and Dniester regions, especially in ancient Istros (Preda 1960; Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 45, no. 9; Talmaçhi 2006, 103-105, no. 41), but also in the territories of the ancient cities of Orgame (Poenaru-Bordea

2004, 46, no. 20), Tyras (Samoilova 1988, 61; Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 47, no. 32; Talmaçhi 2006, 143, no. 76) and Nikonion in particular (Zaginailo 1966, 104-111; Mielczarek 1999, 9-11; Mielczarek 2005; Sekerskaya and Bulatovich 2010, 27). The especially frequent finds of Istrian 'wheel coins' in Nikonion reflect its close political and economic relationship with Istros (Ochotnikov 2006, 82).

Numerous finds of Istrian 'wheel coins' have also been registered in Olbia (Karyshkovskii 2003, 303; Talmaçhi 2006, 124, 16), which can be taken as evidence of strong economic contact with Istros. In contrast to the situation in the metropolis, finds of such coins on sites located in the Olbian *chora* are much less common, with the only find of a cast 'wheel coin' registered being at the Didova Chata I settlement (Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 45, no. 8; Talmaçhi 2006, 131, no. 24). Surprisingly, finds of the discussed coin are similarly scarce at sites located on the sea shore between the Dniester and the Dnieper, i.e. between Nikonion and Olbia. As of today, one find has been registered in Luzanivka (today part of Odessa) at Odessa Bay (Zaginailo 1976, 76; Poenaru-Bordea 2004, 46, no. 15; Talmaçhi 2006, 135, no. 42) and one in Ochakov (Zaginailo 1976, 76; Talmaçhi 2006, 137, no. 49). The Luzanivka, Ochakov and Koshary finds clearly mark the trade route connecting Nikonion and Olbia, which were two big centres of 'wheel coin' circulation.

The seashore between the Dniester and the Dnieper-Boh estuary is recognized as a border territory between Nikonion and Olbia. However, the exact boundary is still a matter of debate. The Koshary settlement, located on the right side of the Tiligulskii Liman (the ancient River Axiakos), is usually considered a part of the Olbian *chora* (Ruban 1985, 30; cf. Bujskich 2006, 135) and this is confirmed by the predominance of Olbian coins among the coin finds at the site (cf. Diamant 1978). The find of one cast Istrian 'wheel coin' cannot alter this view. Additionally, as was stated above, 'wheel coins' are well represented in the finds from Olbia itself and it has been shown that they also circulated in the Olbian *chora*, albeit in smaller amounts. It seems that the piece could have entered the Koshary settlement together with Olbian coins. In addition, it must be remembered that the piece, similarly to the aforementioned Tyras bronze coin, was found in the *eschara* zone. One can assume, therefore, that in both cases the foreign coins were not used as currency, but were instead given a sacred role.

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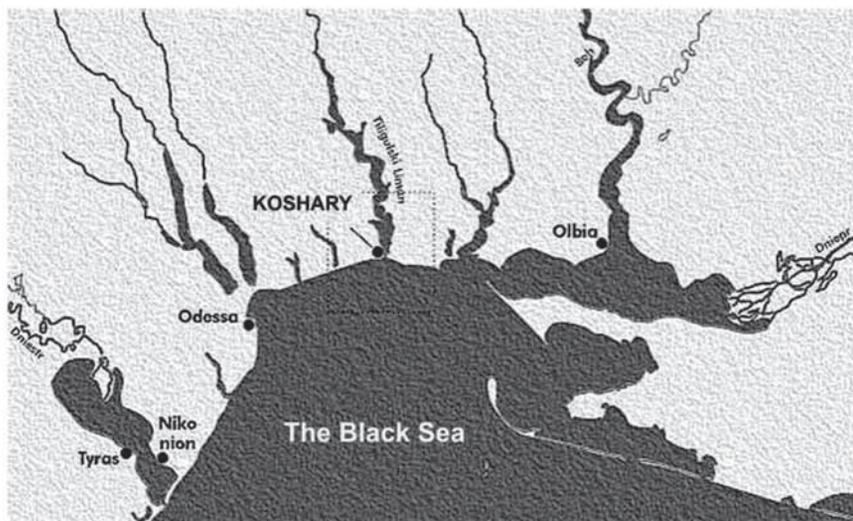
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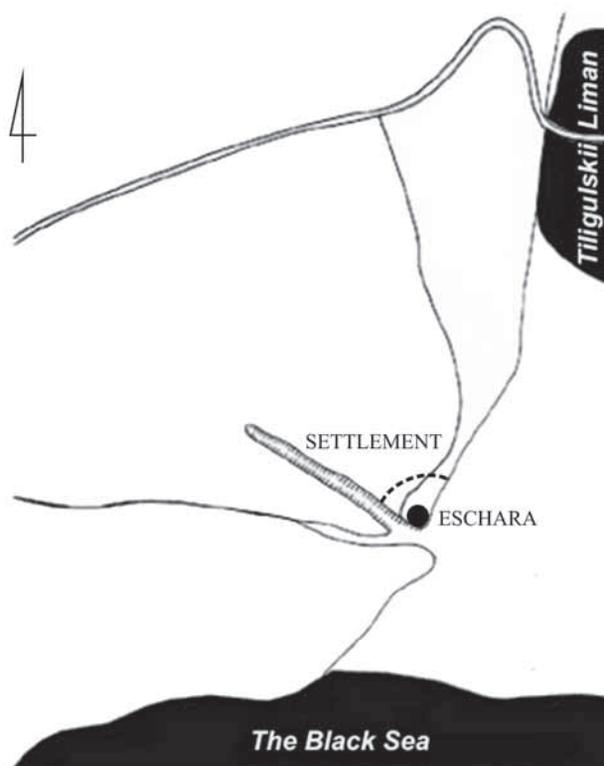
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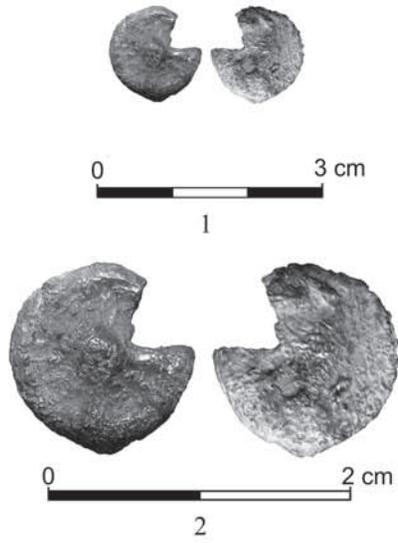


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Pl. 1. 1 – Localization of the Koshary site at the northern shore of the Black Sea. Courtesy of the Koshary project Archive
2 – Koshary site. Courtesy of the Koshary project Archive



Pl. 2. 1 – Cast Istrian ‘wheel coin’ found at Koshary. Scale 1:1. Photo by E. F. Redina
2 – As above. Scale 2:1. Photo by E. F. Redina