

Cessation of Bosporan coinage in the context of interrelations between Constant and Constantius II

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Abstract. The article is devoted to complicated issue of sudden and complete cessation of coinage in Bosphorus in 344 A.D. This event is the most prominent in post-Antique history of the Bosporan Kingdom and the whole Northern Black Sea Region. The author believes that the issue should be considered in the context of interrelations between Constant and Constantius II. Answering to Constant's support of Bosporan King defending the Nicea Symbol of Faith strong Arian Constantius II took a squad of Chersonites and brought them in Bosphorus to suppress the riot. The territory of the latter was included into Chersonese state as autonomous part which initiated full cessation of coinage own money in Bosphorus.

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Introduction

Full abortion of coinage in Bosphorus was one of the most prominent events in post-Antique history of the Bosporan Kingdom and the whole Northern Black Sea Region. In 341 Bosphorus performed legal coinage but in the next year suddenly ceased it all together [1]. And intensity of the work of the mint place just before the cessation was very high. This contradicts to suggestions about natural stoppage of monetary emission by reasons of economic decline and naturalization of trade operations. [2]. Most probably the cessation was triggered by some unknown for us external factors [3].

With the purpose of solution of this problem we decided to analyze all known written documents exposing the particularities of external policy the Roman Empire in regard to the Bosporan Kingdom in times of Reign of the sons of Constantine I Serious attention should be paid to interrelations between Constant and Constantius II because it was the conflict between these two brothers which coincides strangely with cessation of money emission in Bosphorus. The methods: principles of historicism and objectivity. Main methods are chronological, synchronic method and method of comparative-historical analysis.

Constantine I died on the 22th of May of 337 at age of 60, he was baptized soon before that. [4, 5]. Soon after his death fierce battle for power took place in the Empire. Having known about his father's death Constantius II immediately returned from Persian border to Constantinople where he initiated riot using rumors about poisoning of Constantine by his brothers [6,7]. The bloody massacre (which took place before declaring of 3 sons of Constant in September 9, 337 [8]) resulted in killing of 2 brothers of Constantine and all off-spring line of Constantius I and Feodora. In fact 3 sons of Constantine physically eliminated all their competitors leaving alive only 2 cousins of infant

age. The nephew of Constantine – noblissim - died as well, the King of the kings and Pontus tribes – Ganniballian were also killed [9, 10]. The army has declared that will listen only Constantine successors' orders, 3 remaining brothers took title of august [11].

While dividing Roman provinces elder Constantine took Gallia, Spain and Britain. Constant got North Africa, Italy and most part of the Balkans, Cesar of the East, Constantius II took Thrace and eastern provinces, he became the august of the East and Egypt [12]. Therefore if Bosphorus, like Chersonese was under jurisdiction of the East prefecture [13], and all power belonged to Prefect [14, 15] this factor would have never influenced Bosphorus-Roman relations. However we observe quite different picture here. Bosphorus which just re-started coinage in the last year of reign of Constantine the Great suddenly aborted it in 337 once again [16]. Indirectly this confirms the hypothesis that Bosphorus became a part of Gannibalian "kingdom" in the end of Constantine' reign. [3]. Indeed, it seems that death of the King of Pontus and Bosphorus and liquidation of his kingdom triggered cessation of subsidies without which Bosphorus could not continue emission of money. But the help was not provided for Bosphorus by august of the East and Egypt as well which proves appearance of problems in relations with Constantius II.

Constantius II after establishing his power returned to the East where at that time Sapor II intervened in Mesopotamia and besieged Nisibinus. Roman-Iran war of 338-342 continued for long time and distracted Constantius II from affairs in the West [17, 18, 19]. In O. Sharov's opinion, in order to neutralize the ally of Rome - Bosphorus - which was obliged to support the Empire in this war Sasanian Iran used North-Caucasian tribes and the Bosporan kingdom entered a period of permanent war with

barbarians [20]. On the one hand, it explains re-start of Rome's support for Bosphorus. Only thanks to it in such difficult times Rescuporide VI could restart coinage in 341/342. There are about 10 starters with this date by now, and that is why they are reasonably considered the last full-value money emission in Bosphorus [16]. However, on the other hand, it is not quite clear why Rome's support was provided not in the beginning of military operations but at the moment of rather serious crisis in the Empire. It was the time when rivalry for North Africa and Italy was restarted with full force between Constant and Constantine II. In 340 Constantine II was trapped and killed by his brother near Aquileia. The 3rd brother - Constantius II did not intervene into conflict principally and stayed at his territory. As popularity of the sons of Constantine I was still very high, 17-years old Constant in his struggle for power could easily defeat his competitors [14, 21, 22, 23]. But when Constant took all western territory of the Roman Empire [24-30] the situation deteriorated and did not exclude the battle for power between Constant and Constantius II.

Let us specify one more time: Bosphorus got support not during the war between Constantine II and Constant but after its finishing, when Roman Empire was under the reign of Constant and Constantius II. In other words, subsidies went into Bosphorus during sudden deterioration of relations between two augusts. Suspicious and revengeful Constantius II always wanted to control officials and cruelly suppressed aristocratic opposition [31]. This was directly related to the particularities of political-administrative concept of Constantius II in which Constantinople was not paid appropriate attention. Constantius II, in spite of the fact that Western part of the Empire was not under his reign, persistently went on with doing Rome affairs [32, 33].

Besides that serious stumbling block were religious disputes between 2 augusts. Constantius II not only sympathized with Arianism and the Arians but practically supported the latter using levers of state power for victimization of their enemies.

It is interesting, that apart from Rufin [34] and Theodorite [35] who justified the august's actions by influence of Arian bishops Socrates impose all responsibility directly on the Emperor [36]. But such position of the author can only partially be explained by complex compiled character of his *Church history* [37, 38, 39]. Apart from Constantius II Constant was an active supporter of decisions of the 1st Oecumenical Council in Nicea which as early as in 325 condemned Arius and supported Athanasius, adopted Nicea Faith Symbol. Constant even threatened Constantius II to initiate war if he would not restore Alexandria bishop Athanasius on his throne [40, 41]. Decision of Nicea Council was signed by Bosphoran bishop Kadma as

well. In spite of the fact that this name in different lists is written in different ways the experts do not dispute the fact of presence of this bishop at Nicea Council [42, 43]. Probably protection by Bosphoran ruling class of Nicea Faith Symbol was the reason for refusal from relation with Constantius II. In this situation Constant who provided generous support of church could easily provide subsidies for Bosphorus which were used by Rescuporide VI for re-starting of coinage in 341/342. If it was so then the Emperor's image on the coins was the face of Constant.

This fact make immediate and complete cessation of money emission in Bosphorus look even more enigmatic. We have already mentioned above that general opinion that economic decline and naturalization of Bosphorus economy can not explain this fact of Bosphoran history. In this connection the attempts to use numerous Bosphoran treasures are not valid, as an important historical source, either. Cessation of state money emission after 341/342 complicated identification of the date of hoarding of treasures which included coins of the last year of coinage That is why such buried treasures can not say about de-stabilization of Bosphorus in early 40s of IV A.D. as it is argued by some scientists [44]. Of course the reason of crisis is some extraordinary event, because after such event Bosphorus entered its 20-year "dark" period of history completely disappearing from all written sources. We recall the phrase "the kingdom of Savromats in Bosphorus was destroyed" [45] with which the 4th plot of Chersonese tales of Constantine Porphyrogenitus. In spite of the fact that scientists are still not quite sure of what was described in the tales [46-50], it is obvious that the final stage of fight between Bosphorus and Chersonese is most suitable as the reason for mentioned catastrophe.

The key moment is that cessation of coinage in Bosphorus coincides in time with the peak of conflict between Constant and Constantius II. It was the time when the riot in Constantinople in 341 and Constant's demand to restore Athanasius and Paul on the chairs resulted in calling for Church Council in Serdic in 342/343 which deteriorated already deep dissidence in the state. In the course of its work responding to Rome authoritarianism Eastern bishops went to Philipople city where organized there own Council at which they dismissed 9 Romans including Pope Julius. After finishing of work of two parallel Councils the riots and dissidence broke out all over the country. For example, Constantius II managed to suppress riot in Andrianopole, but he had to kill 9 organizers of it [51]. Our suggestion that at that time Constantius II with a squad of Chersonites and ally tribes suppressed Bosphorus as well suits nicely into general picture of riots and disturbances in Roman provinces.

N. Blogov believes that soon after beginning or immediately after cessation of coinage in Bosporus Rescuporide VI who ruled the country for more than 30 years [3] died. But even in this case any new King either had no reasons to conflict with Constantius II if the aid for Bosporus state depended on it. Everything will look in different way if we admit that this aid came to Bosporus not from Constantius II but from Constant who decided in such a way to help his brothers in faith. Try of Bosporus king to subordinate himself completely to Constant was an obvious threat for Constantius II. It destroyed monopoly power of august of the East in rather instable region - North Pontus - source of constant danger for the Empire.

In our opinion such course of events explains best of all the reason of cruel counter-measures of Constantius II in regard to client state under riot. The matter is that only direct subordination of Bosporus to Chersonese and accordingly to the Prefect of the East did not allow Constant to continue relations with Bosporus because it could be considered as intervention into internal affairs of the Empire of Constantius II. Disappearance of the Bosporus kingdom from written sources for 20 years and evident prohibition to coinage in Bosporus directly points out that from that moment the state was in the hands of Constantinople. This idea is proved by unusual request of the Bosporians to Emperor Julian in 362, news about which was kept in Roman history of Ammian Marcellian: "the embassies of Bosporians and other unknown earlier nations were begging to allow them live peacefully on their own land for annual rent" [52]. Of course this text does not contain any references to full loss of contact with the Empire during "dark" years [44] and to the Bosporians' fears that the Emperor, because of oncoming war with Persia, would bring troops in Bosporus [53]. The context of the request shows full control of the Empire over native lands of the Bosporians, that is why they hardly could choose between Julian and Ermanarich. [20]. The text proves that the Bosporians wanted to return client status to their lands (promising to pay regular tribute) or were ready to become a part of the Empire as a province. In such a case provincial land left by its former owner was must be taxed in favour of the Empire.

All this allows to specify the status of Bosporus in "dark" period. So, the absence in given text of the signs of client state (such as getting regular Rome's subsidies, Emperor's protectorate) and provinces and even internal self-government which is proved by the request "to allow them to live independently in the boundaries of native land" [54], can testify that Bosporus in 342-362 was somewhere between mentioned forms of political evolution of dependent on Rome state. In our opinion it points out

to direct reference in Chersonese tales that in this period the Bosporan kingdom was autonomous part of Chersonese state. This can be concluded from the addressing of the supreme administrative person of Chersonese to Bosporan army: "and if I, with God's help, will beat Bosporus king he and his people will be ruled by me" [55]. Thus, it was not hypothetical external threat by utter reluctance to stay in autonomy status was the reason of unusual request of Bosporan embassy to a new Emperor.

Conclusion

Summarizing all above we point out that the issue of complete abortion of coinage in Bosporus is closely connected with conflict between Constant and Constantius II which resulted in annexation of the territory of Bosporus kingdom. In response to Constant's request to establish protectorate over Bosporus Constantius II with the aid of a squad of Chersonites defeated Bosporan troops and subdued former kingdom to Chersonese state. In spite of many disputes between 2 augusts, first of all, religious, it is obvious that the main reason of opposition of opposition was geopolitical importance of this region - source of constant danger to Danube and eastern borders of the Empire.

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