

# ИМПЕРИИ И ПЕРИФЕРИИ

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### **Barbarian Imitations of Bosporan Staters and Roman Denarii from Phanagoria**

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**Abstract.** Two groups of barbarian imitations circulated together with the original Bosporan staters and a small number of Roman coins in the currency of Phanagoria, as well as the Bosporan Kingdom as a whole. The first group consists of imitations of Thothorses and Rhescuporis VI, which were presumably produced by tribes in the Western Kuban region. The second group is composed of the North Caucasian imitations of Roman denarii of the walking Mars type. In the mid-3rd to first half 4th century AD, such coins arrived from the southeastern periphery of the Bosporan Kingdom, where they were minted by the Sarmatian-Alans. The paper deals with new finds of imitations from 2008–2018 excavations at Phanagoria.

**Keywords:** coin finds, coin hoards, barbarian imitations, Roman denarii, Roman Period, Phanagoria, Bosporan Kingdom, currency, Bosporan coinage.

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## **Варварские имитации боспорских статеров и римских денариев из Фанагории**

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**Аннотация.** Вместе с оригинальными боспорскими статерами и небольшим количеством римских монет в денежном обращении Фанагории, а также Боспорского царства в целом, циркулировали две группы варварских имитаций. Первая группа состоит из имитаций Фофорса и Рескупорида VI, предположительно изготовленных племенами Западной Кубани. Вторая группа состоит из северокавказских имитаций римских денариев типа "идуший Марс". В середине III — первой половине IV века н.э. такие монеты поступали с юго-восточной периферии Боспорского царства, где их чеканили сарматы-аланы. В статье рассматриваются новые находки имитаций, обнаруженных во время раскопок в Фанагории в 2008-2018 годах.

**Ключевые слова:** находки монет, клады монет, варварские имитации, римские денарии, римский период, Фанагория, Боспорское царство, денежное обращение, Боспорская чеканка.

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### **Introduction**

In 1928, an article by W. Terlecki was published in *Zapiski Numizmatyczne*, concerning the barbarian coins which in the author's opinion had been issued by the Goths in the Cimmerian Bosphorus after

Rhescuporises.<sup>1</sup> While the present-day understanding of the nature and dating of this coinage is completely different, Terlecki's paper remains interesting and, in the light of recent discoveries of such coins in Phanagoria, it has inspired me to return to this topic.<sup>2</sup>

### Material and Methods of Research

Apart from the original Bosporan staters and a small number of Roman coins, two tiny groups of local imitations participated in the currency of Phanagoria in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, as well as in the Bosporus in whole. The first group consists of imitations of the Late Bosporan staters. For the first time, crude illiterate imitations of Rhescuporis VI were attributed among the pre-war excavation numismatic materials from Tyritace and Myrmecium.<sup>3</sup> Such imitations were also revealed later in the hoards from Tyritace (1946) and Cepoi (1962),<sup>4</sup> but the issue of the nature of their minting and distribution was unclear. According to K.V. Golenko, in Panticapaeum, Cepoi, Tyritace and other cities, Thothorses and Rhescuporis VI staters and imitations of those, issued soon after the cessation of the Bosporan coinage in AD 336, circulated in parallel.<sup>5</sup> L.N. Kazamanova and V.V. Kropotkin, who published on imitations of Thothorses and Rhescuporis VI, also believed that these local "Bosporan" imitations, quite successfully copying the staters of these kings, apparently appeared soon after their reign.<sup>6</sup> K.V. Golenko rejected his earlier assumption about the minting of imitations by the tribes surrounding the Bosporus, and recognized them as Bosporan issues after the cessation of regular coinage.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, finds of imitations of Bosporan staters *in situ* in the Late Roman layers of settlements, as well as in the hoards with reliably established dating, provide evidence for their production during the period of regular coinage. For example, the Phanagorian 2011 hoard, concealed in AD 307/308, contained imitations of Thothorses' staters of AD 290/291 and 301/302 (Fig. 1, 2).<sup>8</sup> The Gai-Kodzor1986 hoard deposited in AD 341/342 included the imitations of Rhescuporis VI's staters of 617, 620 and 623 years of the Bosporan era (BE) (Fig. 14–16) and no imitations of Thothorses.<sup>9</sup> The concentration of finds of imitations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Terlecki 1928a; 1928b. Apart from the imitations attributed by him to the Goths, W. Terlecki unknowingly published a type of imitations of Rhescuporis VI (Terlecki 1928b, Fig. 2), which will be considered in this article.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Professor Jaroslaw Bodzek for kindly sharing Terlecki's article with me.

<sup>3</sup> Zograf 1941: 172, No. 295.

<sup>4</sup> Golenko, Sokolskij 1968: 81, No. 743.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, 82. The actual date of cessation of the Bosporan coinage is AD 341/342 – M.A.

<sup>6</sup> However, these so-called "imitations" of Thothorses actually belong to the official coinage.

<sup>7</sup> Golenko 1959, 190; Golenko, Sokolskij 1968, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Abramzon, Kuznetsov 2017, Nos. 2482, 3466.

<sup>9</sup> Abramzon, Novichikhin et al. 2019, 25, Fig. 7, 1–3.

centuries AD stater allows one to assume the area of their production was the Western Kuban region.<sup>10</sup>

The second group is composed of North Caucasian imitations of Roman denarii of the walking Mars type. The distribution of their finds generally refers to the territory between present-day Novorossiysk and Anapa in the south and the area of the village of Natukhaevskaya in the north, suggesting the likely location of the mint. The duration of coinage covers the late 2<sup>nd</sup> to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>11</sup>

The numismatic material which has accumulated in recent years allows one to make certain changes in the study of the imitations of the Bosporan (and adjacent area?) provenance. In particular, two significant corpuses of imitations of Roman denarii have been published,<sup>12</sup> unfortunately without serious scientific commentary and reasoned dating. The corpus of imitations of Bosporan coins<sup>13</sup> is significantly smaller, hence the record of new finds is very important. Recent excavations at Phanagoria (2008–2018) have yielded six new imitations of Thothorses and Rhescuporis VI (Fig. 1–6) and five imitations of Roman denarii of the walking Mars type (Fig. 7–11).

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Imitations of Thothorses and Rhescuporis VI**

Two imitations of Thothorses (AD 285/286–308/309) were found in the Phanagorian 2011 hoard. The first type copied a stater of AD 290/291 (Fig. 1). At present, three specimens struck by this dies link are recorded.<sup>14</sup> The second type is a cast imitation of a stater of AD 301/302 (Fig. 2). Two such pieces are known.<sup>15</sup>

Among the isolated coin finds, there are four imitations of Rhescuporis VI (AD 318/319–341/342), of which three are already known, the other being a new type. Coins with the date AIX (Fig. 3, 12, 14) were accepted by N.A. Frolova for the official issue AIX – 611 BE = AD 314/315.<sup>16</sup> An analysis of such imitations requires a brief reference to the controversial issue on the initial date of Rhescuporis VI's reign. Staters of this king marked with the year AIX are known. Apart from single pieces, they have been found in the hoards from Patraeus (1951), Cepoi (1962), Gai-Kodzor (1982), Taman 16 (2016). Referring to the mentioned coins with the date AIX, N.A. Frolova believed that Rhescuporis VI began his coinage in AD 314, and he was co-ruler of Rhadamsades in AD 314–322,

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<sup>10</sup> Zavyalov 2007, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Kleshchinov 2016, 5–6.

<sup>12</sup> Sergeev 2012, Nos. 280–533; Kleshchinov 2016.

<sup>13</sup> See Catalogue-Archive “Coins of the Bosporus”, <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/podrazhaniya/>.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/736-5137/1.html>, etc.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/730-5141/2.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Frolova 1997, 118. Pl. LXXXVI, 23–26.

then his sole reign lasted from AD 323 to 341/342 or 342/343.<sup>17</sup> However, K.V. Golenko has argued that the joint rule of these kings on the Bosphorus did not take place.<sup>18</sup> Following Golenko, other scholars rightly saw in AIX the distorted date of the AKX, a result of an engraver's mistake, and they attributed these coins to 621 BE = AD 324/325. The group of coins with the date AIX bearing a pair of symbols "wreath/bident" and struck by same obverse die with the legend OYCIICKOY, can certainly be regarded as barbarian imitations.<sup>19</sup> The Gai-Kodzor 1986 hoard yielded a specimen struck by same obverse die<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 14), while the 2008 excavations at Phanagoria gave a coin struck by another reverse die<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 3) Our study of these coins shows that they copied the staters with the date ΣIX – 617 BE (AD 320/321), and the date does not contain an Λ (taken as a paleographic variant of A), but a retrograde Z.<sup>22</sup> Since the same obverse die was also used for minting imitations of coins with the year AKX – AD 324/325,<sup>23</sup> both imitations with years ΣIX and AKX, struck by common obverse die, were minted, therefore, already after AD 324/325. Thus, Rhescuporis VI did not mint coins with a wreath and bident in AD 314/315. His first issue should traditionally be considered to only be staters with the year EIX – 615 BE = AD 318/319.

The type of cast imitation of a stater with the year K–X – 620 BE = AD 323/324 (Fig. 4) is also known,<sup>24</sup> as well as the imitation No. 5 struck by the same obverse die with No. 3 (Fig. 3, 5).<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the presence of imitations of Thothorses in the Phanagorian 2011 hoard and isolated imitations of Rhescuporis VI in the Late Roman layer in Phanagoria shows that original and imitative staters of the same weight circulated in the Phanagorian money market synchronously. Imitations were invisible in the money supply, consisting of degraded staters, which changed from coins of full metal value to coins of notional metal value, while maintaining the typology and weight of earlier types. It should also be mentioned that questions regarding the area of minting imitations and the ethnicity of the people who produced them remain open. I believe that in terms of manufacturing technique, style, and

<sup>17</sup> See *Ibidem*, 134–136.

<sup>18</sup> Golenko 1956, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Anokhin 1986, 131; Yushkov 2010, No. 255; Catalogue-Archive "Coins of the Bosphorus", <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/000-4838/1.html>. Imitations of staters with year AIX are also known. See Golenko 1960, Fig. 5; Catalogue-Archive "Coins of the Bosphorus" records five more specimens of this type, <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/000-5142/1.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Abramzon, Novichikhin et al. 2019, No. 461.

<sup>21</sup> Yushkov 2010, No. 255.

<sup>22</sup> Abramzon, Novichikhin et al. 2019, 25, Fig. 7, a–b.

<sup>23</sup> Frolova 1997, 23–26; Yushkov 2010, No. 256; Catalogue-Archive "Coins of the Bosphorus", <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/770-5140/1.html>.

<sup>24</sup> For another specimen see Kazamanova, Kropotkin 1961, Pl. II, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Yushkov 2010, No. 256; Catalogue-Archive "Coins of the Bosphorus", <https://bosporan-kingdom.com/770-5140/3.html>

texture, these coins are close to the bronze imitations of Bosporan electrum staters, which became widespread in the territory of the Western Kuban region, in the present-day Ust-Labinsk District of the Krasnodar Territory.<sup>26</sup>

### **North Caucasian Imitations of Roman Denarii of the Walking Mars Type**

The North Caucasian imitations of Roman denarii of the walking Mars type<sup>27</sup> form a more prominent group in the currency of Phanagoria. At the moment, more than 30 such coins have been recorded at the site, mostly copper, less often billon.<sup>28</sup> Excavations 2010–2018 yielded five more specimens (Fig. 7–11) which were published in our special paper.<sup>29</sup> Finds of the North Caucasian imitations are recorded in neighboring Cepoi,<sup>30</sup> as well as at many other sites on the Taman Peninsula.

The growing number of finds of imitations of Roman denarii in Phanagoria gives support to the claim that they circulated in the money market of the city in parallel with the staters of Rhescuporis V, Thothorses, Rhadamsades, and Rhescuporis VI. At the same time, they did not play a significant role in the currency of the Bosphorus.

Imitations of Roman denarii from the 1927–1939 and 1950–1970s excavations at Phanagoria.<sup>31</sup>

1. The city-site, 1927–1938. No information about the metal<sup>32</sup>
2. The city-site, 1936. Billon<sup>33</sup>
3. Site “Shore”, 1939. Copper<sup>34</sup>
4. Site “Northern”, 1955. Copper<sup>35</sup>
5. The city-site, 1955. Copper<sup>36</sup>
- 6–17. The city-site, 1959<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Zavyalov 2007, 31, Fig. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Sergeev 2012, 219–233, Nos. 281–283, 289–290, 296–533; Kleshchinov 2016. A.Ya. Sergeev’s term for these coins “the Taman denarius” is poor, their production is actually associated with another area of the Bosphorus. The same applies to the V.N. Kleshchinov’s term “the Roman-Sarmatian denarius”, whose fantastic hypothesis attributed this coinage to some Roman legionaries of the Raevskoe settlement, as if they later mixed with the Sarmatian population. See Kleshchinov 2016, 6–8.

<sup>28</sup> Abramzon 2013, 103–104, Nos. 160–185.

<sup>29</sup> Abramzon, Kuznetsov, Ostapenko 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Usacheva 1986, 199–201.

<sup>31</sup> The exact number of coins is unknown.

<sup>32</sup> Krushkol 1951, 257; Kazamanova, Kropotkin 1961, 136, No. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Zograf 1945, No. 169; Kazamanova, Kropotkin 1961, 136, No. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Kropotkin 1961, No. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, No. 20; Shelov 1962, No. 1018.

<sup>36</sup> Shelov 1962, No. 1132.

<sup>37</sup> Kropotkin 1961, No. 22.

18–25. Site “Central”, 1968 and 1972. Copper<sup>38</sup>

The numismatic material from 2017–2018 excavations at Phanagoria include two billon imitations, which, judging by the composition of metal and the stage of degradation of style, belong to the second and third groups, according to A.Ya. Sergeev’s classification,<sup>39</sup> and to V.N. Kleshchinov’s fourth group,<sup>40</sup> dated from ca. AD 240–300. This is the most numerous and widespread series, combining coins made of low-grade silver and copper. Their obverse depicts a pattern that slightly resembles a human head, sometimes turning into a rosette with rays radiating from it. The reverse bears a schematic figure of a warrior holding a spear. On all coins of this group, to the right and left of the figure of the warrior, there are symbols – dots, circles, arcs, crosses, etc., which play the role of certain control-marks that distinguish different series of these coins. The obverse die used for the coin No. 7 (Fig. 7) is recorded.<sup>41</sup> The dies-combination No. 8 (Fig. 8) is also known.<sup>42</sup> The rest of the imitations are made of copper, belonging to the fifth group according to the classification of V.N. Kleshchinov.

The concentration of such coin find spots covers mainly the southern and southeastern periphery of the Bosphorus from Anapa (ancient Gorgippia) and Novorossiysk (ancient Baty) to Krasnodar, as well as the adjacent western regions of the North Caucasus. All known hoards also provenanced from this territory, consist entirely of such imitations<sup>43</sup> or include a small number of them together with Bosporan staters (Gai-Kadzor 1972 and 1977 hoards<sup>44</sup>). Finds of imitations in Panticapaeum<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 23), Tyrıtace,<sup>46</sup> and Cytaeum<sup>47</sup> provide evidence for the circulation of this coinage in the European Bosphorus.

### Conclusion

While some scholars ascribed the minting of imitations of Roman denarii of the walking Mars type to the Goths, D.B. Shelov correctly connected this coinage with the Sarmatian-Alan tribes. Having defeated a number of ancient settlements of the Bosphorus and the eastern coast of Pontus, these tribes found degraded Bosporan staters in circulation here, which were used only in the domestic money market. Most likely, at this

<sup>38</sup> Frolova 1981, Nos. 156–161, 437.

<sup>39</sup> Sergeev 2012, No. 402–507.

<sup>40</sup> Kleshchinov 2016, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, Nos. 479, 480.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, No. 455.

<sup>43</sup> Zakharov 1937; Pakhomov 1949, No. 1056; Kazamanova, Kropotkin 1961, 128–135; Kleshchinov 2016, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Abramzon, Novichikhin et al. 2019, Pl. 89, 259, 260; 97, 114–116.

<sup>45</sup> Anisimov 1992, Nos. 144, 221; Abramzon, Ivanina 2010, No. 552.

<sup>46</sup> Abramzon, Ivanina 2010, No. 566.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, No. 553.





historical moment the imitations of Roman denarii appeared on the Asian Bosphorus and in the adjacent western regions of the North Caucasus. Since Shelov was unaware of hoards in which such imitations met the Bosporan staters, the scholar concluded that this is natural because both coinages had their own exchange rate and should be considered to have been a special type of coins, while circulating simultaneously on the same market.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, the Gai-Kodzor 1972 and 1977 hoards included such imitations (Fig. 17–21), proving their circulation in the Bosporan money market, as well as isolated finds of imitations in the layers of Bosporan sites (especially numerous in Phanagoria and other sites on the Taman Peninsula). Thus, new finds of North Caucasian imitations in the Late Roman layers of Phanagoria and other Bosporan sites, as well as in the hoards from Gai-Kodzor, confirm the dating of the time of their circulation in the city from the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### Catalogue of Imitations from 2008–2018 Excavations at Phanagoria

#### Group 1. Imitations of Bosporan staters

##### a. Imitations of Thothorses

**AE.** Obv. Bust of Thothorses. Dot frame. *Rev.* Bust of Emperor. Dot frame.

- |    |               |          |           |                                  |   |
|----|---------------|----------|-----------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. | F-11-<br>2686 | 19m<br>m | 7.87<br>g | The<br>Phanagorian<br>2011 hoard | Obv. Bust r.<br> r.<br><i>Rev.</i> Bust r. To r.,  ;<br>below, ΣΠΦ<br>(AD 290/291).<br>Abramzon, Kuznetsov<br>2017, No. 2482.                                       |
| 2. | F-11-<br>3670 | 19m<br>m | 8.73<br>g | The<br>Phanagorian<br>2011 hoard | Obv....  —<br>ΘΟΘ.... Bust l.<br>O.c. Bust l. To l.,  ;<br>below, ΦΡΗ.<br>(AD 301/302).<br>Abramzon, Kuznetsov<br>2017, No. 3466. Cf.<br>Yushkov 2010: No. 54. |

##### b. Imitations of Rhescuporis VI

<sup>48</sup> Shelov 1973, 194.



**AE.** Obv. Bust of Rhescuporis VI r. Dot frame. Rev. Bust of Emperor r. Dot frame.

3.	F-08-39	17m m	3.62 g	Site "Upper City", square 74, basket 5	Obv. OYCHCKOY. To r., wreath. Rev. To r., bident; below, ΛIX (ΣIX). After AD 324/325. Cf. Yushkov 2010, No. 255; Catalogue-Archive "Coins of the Bosporus.
4.	F-11-74	19m m	6.17 g	Site "Upper City", square 80, basket 9	Obv. To r., wreath. Legend illegible. Rev. K-X - 620 BE (AD 323/324). Cf. Kazamanova, Kropotkin 1961, Fig. II, 1.
5.	F-08-164	18m m	4.56 g	Site "Upper City", square 78, basket 6	Obv. As No. 3. Rev. AK-X = 621 BE (AD 324/325). Cf. Yushkov 2010, No. 256.
6.	F-10-110	19m m	7.68 g	Site "Upper City", square 55, basket 13	Obv. BACI.....KOYΠIOPIC. Rev. AK-X = 621 BE (AD 324/325).

Group 2. Imitations of Roman denarii of the walking Mars type

ca. AD 240–300

**Bi1.** Obv. Schematic head of Emperor r.; around rays radiating. Rev. Crude figure of warrior r., holding spear. Two circles in the field.

7.	F-17-37 <sup>49</sup>	18m m	1.46 g	Site "Low City", square I2, basket 18	Rev. Halfmoons to r. and l. of warriors' head; above, four? dots. Cf. Kleshchinov 2016, No. 479 - obverse, 481(var.) - reverse.
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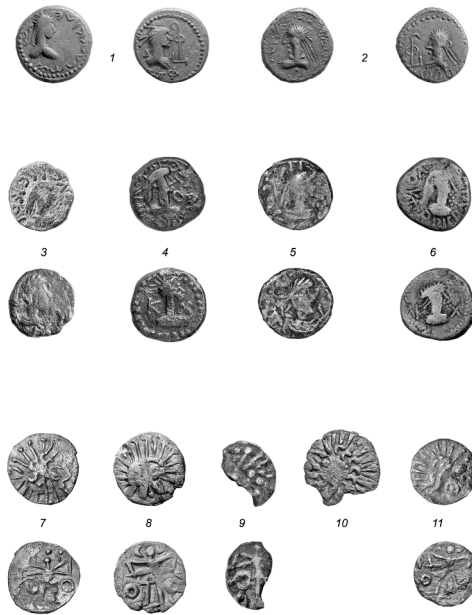
<sup>49</sup> Chemical composition of the alloy: Ag – 23.7%, Cu – 62.28 %, Zn – 11.18%, Sn – 1.85%, Pb – 0.26%. I would like to thank Mrs Olga Gunchina, Head of the Restoration Department of the Museum of Phanagoria, for this research.

					Abramzon, Kuznetsov, Ostapenko 2019, 405, Fig. 1, 1.
8.	F-18-18	18m m	2.44 g	Site "Upper City", square 118, basket 10	Obv. Rosette with rays radiating. Rev. Halfmoons to r. and l. of warriors' head; no dots. Cf. Kleshchinov 2016, No. 455; Abramzon, Kuznetsov, Ostapenko 2019, 405, Fig. 1, 2.

ca. AD 300–350

**AE.** Crude style.

9.	F-10-119	17m m	0.89 g	Site "Upper City", square 78, basket 8	Broken. Cf. Sergeev 2012, No. 504(var.); Kleshchinov 2016, No. 368. Abramzon 2013: Fig. 5, 185.
10.	F-13-4	19m m	1.38 g	Site "Upper City", square 75, basket 9	Broken. Cf. Kleshchinov 2016, No. 399(var.). Abramzon, Kuznetsov, Ostapenko 2019, 405, Fig. 1, 3.
11.	F-13-11	18m m	2.08 g	Underwater site	Rev. Halfmoons to r. and l. of warriors' head. Cf. Sergeev 2012, No. 399(var); Kleshchinov 2016, No. 402. Abramzon, Kuznetsov, Ostapenko 2019, 405, Fig. 1, 4.



- PLATE 1. Fig. 1. Imitative stater of Thothorses  $\Sigma\Pi\Phi$  from the Phanagorian 2011 hoard. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-11-2686.  
Fig. 2. Imitative stater of Thothorses  $\Phi\Pi\text{H}$  from the Phanagorian 2011 hoard. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-11-3570.  
Fig. 3. Imitative stater of Rhescuporis VI  $\Sigma$ IX from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-08-39.  
Fig. 4. Imitative stater of Rhescuporis VI K-X from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-11-74.  
Fig. 5. Imitative stater of Rhescuporis VI AK-X from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-08-164.  
Fig. 6. Imitative stater of Rhescuporis VI AK-X from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-10-110.  
Fig. 7. Imitation of Roman denarius from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-17-37, photo.  
Fig. 8. Imitation of Roman denarius from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-18-18.  
Fig. 9. Imitation of Roman denarius from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-10-119.  
Fig. 10. Imitation of Roman denarius from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. Inv. F-13-4.  
Fig. 11. Imitation of Roman denarius from Phanagoria. Phanagoria Museum. F-13-11.



- PLATE 2. Fig. 12. Imitative stater of Rhescuporis VI  $\Sigma$ IX. Kerch Museum. Inv. KP-178379, KN-7520.
- Fig. 13. Imitative stater of Rhescuporis VI AKX. Kerch Museum. Inv. KP-178418, KN-7559.
- Fig. 14. As Fig. 12. Gai-Kodzor 1986 hoard. Anapa Museum. Inv. KM 7894/626.
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