

EDITED BY

WILLIAM E.
METCALF



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
**GREEK AND ROMAN
COINAGE**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

GREEK AND
ROMAN COINAGE

Edited by
WILLIAM E. METCALF

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PART II

THE HELLENISTIC
WORLD

ROYAL HELLENISTIC
COINAGES: FROM
ALEXANDER
TO MITHRADATES

FRANÇOIS DE CALLATAÿ

FROM a political point of view, the Hellenistic world cannot fail to appear as one of gigantic turmoil. Invented in the 1830s by the German historian Gustav Droysen (1808–1884), the Hellenistic period conventionally starts in June 323 B.C., when Alexander died in Babylon, after a decade of an unprecedented military adventure, and ends with the defeat of Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt, at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. These three centuries are usually divided into two periods of approximately similar lengths: the balance of power between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies (c. 301–189 B.C.) and the rise of Roman power (c. 189–31 B.C.).

This essay, which focuses on Asia Minor, considers the Hellenistic royal coinages in the long term, including the essential developments preceding the death of Alexander—the monetary policies of Philip II of Macedon and of Alexander himself—but amputated from the two major Hellenistic kingdoms, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, which have been left for specialized discussion (see below).

As is often the case with monetary matters, the ability to control sources of precious metals—gold and silver—proved to be decisive on the eve of the Hellenistic period. Philip II of Macedon succeeded in seizing the Pangean mines located in Macedon, while Alexander the Great captured the Persian treasuries accumulated by the Achaemenids in their palaces in what is now Iran. By domino effect, these two events—and the uses made of them—had dramatic consequences, shaping the

world for centuries (wherever we draw the limit: Mediterranean, Eurasian) and even, as some have argued, for millennia.

PHILIP OF MACEDON AND THE PANGEAN MINES

Philip II (382–336 B.C.), a most determined character, acceded to power in 360 B.C. and immediately embarked on an expansionist policy. In 356 B.C., he took the control of the Pangean district, rich in silver and gold. Diodorus (16.8.6–7) says that after the refoundation of Crenides under the name Philippi, Philip enhanced the revenues of these gold mines, up to 1,000 talents a year. As a consequence, he issued a gold coinage and was able to recruit many mercenaries and corrupt many Greeks.

Numismatic evidence confirms this statement. With these metallic resources, Philip started first to issue a rich coinage in silver, mostly of heavy tetradrachms (fig. 10.1). With some 544 obverse dies attributed to the period around 356–328 B.C. (an average of more than 20 per year), the pace of these strikings exceeded those of any preceding Macedonian king (see table 10.1 for a conspectus of yearly averages of obverse dies for tetradrachms used by different rulers or cities). But the true innovation for the Greek world—the one that promised to have a deep impact not only on its time—was the gold coinage (fig. 10.2). In 348/347 B.C. (Le Rider 1996: 72), or possibly even before, in 352 B.C. or even in 355 B.C., Philip II inaugurated an ample coinage of gold staters and its subdivisions. The numbers look quite impressive: for staters only, some 300 obverse dies were engraved and used in a short span of time (c. 348–328 B.C., the maximal chronology allowed by Le Rider). Other significant issues were struck posthumously, chiefly during the brief reign of Philip III Arrhidaeus (323–317 B.C.). Moreover, these staters immediately circulated outside Macedonia. In continental Greece as well as in the Balkans, they were predominant in the 320s B.C.



Fig. 10.1



Fig. 10.2

Table 10.1 Summary of yearly averages for issues of tetradrachms (in extrapolated number of obverse dies)

Rulers or cities	Obverses	Years	Yearly average
Alexander the Great (c. 332–317 B.C.)	c. 1,800 ?	16	c. 113
Alexander the Great including posthumous (c. 332–290 B.C.)	c. 3,000	42	c. 71
Lysimachus (c. 297–281 B.C.)	c. 450	16	c. 28
Laurel-wreath coinages (c. 155–140 B.C.)	c. 300	15	c. 20
Philip II (c. 356–328 B.C.)	c. 544	28	c. 19
Demetrius Poliorcetes (c. 306–287 B.C.)	c. 230	19	c. 12
“Cistophoroi” (c. 180–130 B.C.)	c. 520	50	c. 10
Athens (c. 180–45 B.C.)	c. 1,290	135	c. 10
Nicomedes III and IV (128/127–74/73 B.C.)	c. 450	54	c. 8.3
Mithradates Eupator (c. 97–66 B.C.)	c. 190	31	c. 6.1
Rhodus (c. 340–190 B.C.)*	c. 388	150	c. 2.6
Attalids (c. 263–185 B.C.)	c. 206	79	c. 2.6
Cappadocian kings (c. 130–78/77 B.C.)*	c. 95	52	c. 1.8
Phaselis (c. 250–130 B.C.)*	c. 96	120	c. 0.8
First Pontic kings (c. 220–150 B.C.)	c. 30	70	c. 0.4

Note: An asterisk means that these averages are not (or not only) for tetradrachms. Numbers have been adapted to the weight of Attic tetradrachms.

These gold coins made such an impression in the Aegean world and beyond that people—and consequently ancient authors—started to call *philippeioi* any kind of heavy gold coins. This was a rare privilege for a king, only shared by Darius and his “darics.” In the comedies of Plautus (see *Rudens*, *Trinummus*, or *Truculentus*) or in the amounts of coins reported by Livy and Plutarch for some Roman triumphs (see Flamininus over Perseus in 194 B.C., Scipio Asiaticus over Antiochus III in 189 B.C., Marcus Fulvius over the Aetolians in 187 B.C., etc.), it is pretty clear that the coins called *philippeioi* or *philippeii* (or a variant) describe gold staters in the name of Alexander the Great—which by that time had been issued and were circulating in vastly larger numbers than the original staters of Philip.

In addition, the coinages of Philip II, both in silver and gold, met with remarkable iconographic success among Celtic tribes. The silver types (head of Zeus/horseman) were copied all along the Danube, while the gold types (head of Apollo/biga with charioteer) became the main source of inspiration for the staters struck in the Gauls as late as Caesar’s Gallic Wars (58–51 B.C.).

The biga and its charioteer on the gold coins are clearly agonistic. Indeed, we are informed that Philip boasted on his coins of his victory at Olympia (Plutarch, *Alex.* 4). It is likely that, as for other rulers located on the fringes of the Greek world (in Sicily or in Cyrenaica), his aim in putting these types on his coinages was not only to commemorate his victories but also to advertise what these victories implied: as a participant in the games, he was accepted as a recognized member of the Greek *koinè* (community).

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE PERSIAN TREASURIES

In many ways, Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.), son of Philip II, changed the face of the ancient world. But from a numismatic point of view, he was chiefly pragmatic, which—most of the time—means conservative.

He did not strike his own currencies before advancing far into Asia, after the victory of Issus (autumn 333 B.C.). His silver coinage, possibly struck with the booty taken there from the Persians, shows, on the obverse, the head of a young Heracles covered with the lion-skin—a type already used by many preceding Macedonian kings—and on the reverse Zeus enthroned holding an eagle in his extended right arm (*aetophoros* = eagle-holder; fig. 10.3). This last type was without doubt invented in Cilicia: it is a clear imitation of the Baal of Tarsus figured on the staters of the last Persian satrap of Cilicia, Mazaïos (Mazday in Persian) at the mint of Tarsus. The engravers, too, who produced dies for Mazaïos remained at work under Alexander.

This silver coinage soon became, for about a century and a half, the most accepted international currency of the Greek world, replacing in that role the Athenian owls. But Alexander himself can hardly be credited with this success. A typical case is provided by Mazaïos/Mazday, who was wise enough to submit to him: not only did Alexander appoint him satrap of Babylonia (end of 331 B.C.), but he allowed Mazaïos to start a new coinage with his name and “his” types (Baal-tars/lion). Similarly, Alexander permitted the issue of gold darics, from now on with Greek letters, and even Athenian owls.

To be sure, finances were crucial all the way along for Alexander. But, absorbed by his conquests, the throbbing question he constantly faced was how to obtain silver, not how to promote his monetary types. And gold and silver cash he rapidly found in unprecedented quantity. The booty he took, mainly in the great treasuries of

Susa (c. 40,000/50,000 Attic talents) and Persepolis (c. 120,000), amounted to some 180,000 Attic talents (Diod. 17.80.3; Strabo 15.3.9). With an Attic talent weighing 2.6 kg of gold or 26 kg of silver, this booty represented the equivalent of 468 tons of gold or 4,680 tons of silver—more likely a combination of these two metals, for example 235 tons of gold (c. 90,000 talents) and 2,350 tons of silver (c. 90,000 talents).

Alexander’s principal achievement was to put into circulation these gigantic masses of precious metal that were kept immobilized for generations, in part by the Achaemenid tributary system. In Cilicia first, then in Macedonia, Cyprus, and Phoenicia, he used the facilities of existing mints to issue his own coinages. Macedonian issues were massive, with 740



Fig. 10.3

attested obverse dies for the main mint of Amphipolis in around 15 years (c. 332–318/317 B.C.—a yearly average of c. 50). Elsewhere, mints were created in areas that had never really known coinage before: Damascus, Babylon, and Alexandria. Babylon quickly became the chief mint in the east, but for several years no minting activity was observed in Alexandria.

As recent studies have emphasized, it took some decades to convert the huge mass of precious metals found in the Achaemenid palaces. This phenomenon was not pushed artificially. Certainly military circumstances played a major role. An attractive theory places a peak in the production in the years 325/324 and 324/323 B.C., with the return to their homes of large bands of mercenaries. Soldiers would have been paid not in Babylon, where Alexander disbanded them, but in the harbors on their way back (in order to hurry up the return to their homelands). A slightly later chronology might alter this scenario, but not the idea that the bulk of the lifetime coinage of Alexander was struck late in his short reign.

Even if Alexander coins struck during his lifetime largely superseded all contemporary issues, the bulk of these “Alexanders” was struck posthumously, to pay for the many wars that occurred in the decades following his death. From 332 B.C. to the end of the century, around 1,200 obverse dies were required to strike the gold staters in his name, 3,000 for the silver tetradrachms and 3,300 for the drachms. If we accept an average productivity of 20,000 coins per die (which means around 350 kg of monetized silver per obverse die), no less than 131,000 Attic talents were thereby monetized (80,000 + 40,000 + 11,000). It seems plausible that around 300 B.C., in terms of value, the “Alexanders” represented half (or more) of all the circulating Greek coinages. For a century at least, coins in the name of Alexander largely dominated the content of international hoards, as exemplified by the Meydancikkale hoard, buried around 235 B.C. in Cilicia. Of a total content of 3,057 Attic silver coins, 2,554 were “Alexanders” (74%), most of them struck before 290 B.C.

THE DIADOCHI: THE FIRST GENERATION OF HELLENISTIC KINGS

After the death of Alexander, some of those who had been his closest friends, and often his best generals, desperately fought over the empire. It is not an exaggeration to write that between June 323 B.C. and the death of Antigonus Monophtalmus (the “One-Eyed”) at the battle of Ipsus in 301 B.C., the Aegean world and beyond was a restless battlefield for the ambitions of these “diadochs” (successors). Some disappeared quickly, such as Perdiccas, for a while the most legitimate of all, or Eumenes of Cardia. It turned out that in the end, the two most successful were Seleucus and Ptolemy, who both founded large kingdoms that survived them for two centuries (see below).



Fig. 10.4

Over decades, the pace of royal monetary striking was virtually uninterrupted. Dozens of tons of gold, and hundreds of silver, were minted, mostly prolonging existing monetary types in the name of Philip (especially during the intermezzo of Philip III Arrhidaeus) and Alexander (from now on preceded by the title “Basileōs,” “of the king” (fig. 10.4). There can be little doubt that this peak is to be related to military expenditures. At the same time, a general increase of prices, as attested in Delos and Babylon, comes as no surprise. It is a rare circumstance when we may postulate an effective case for the quantitative theory of money in the classical world (the other example being the Egyptian treasuries taken by Augustus from Cleopatra). We should notice, however, that this peak did not last: prices came back to their original level around the beginning of the third century and remained remarkably stable until around 150 B.C. One probable reason for this may have been the rather quick and significant removal of the gold coins from circulation in Asia Minor and the Aegean world. (Although no quantity has been calculated, it is likely that large numbers of these gold coins moved north, to Thrace and further.)

For a while, the diadochs were reluctant to place their own images on their coins. They generally preferred to pursue the strikes of “Alexanders,” by now the most familiar type to every soldier, adding the word “basileōs” (“of the king” [Alexander]). As a consequence, we do not have any coin with their own types for several rulers, including the major figure of Antigonos Monophtalmus (c. 382–301 B.C.). Ptolemy Sôter in Egypt was the most innovative, introducing first the portrait of Alexander with an elephant headdress and the ram’s horn of Zeus Ammon (c. 321 B.C.) and then his own portrait (c. 304 B.C.). Others had to follow his example. Demetrius



Fig. 10.5

Poliorcetes (337–283 B.C.), the son of Monophtalmus, who survived the battle of Ipsus in which his father was killed, decided soon afterward to replace the name of Alexander with his own (c. 300 B.C.). At the mint of Tyre, we can even observe the very moment of the change, since we have on record a reverse die whose legend “Alexandrou” has been modified into “Demetriou” (Newell 1927: 45). The head of Demetrius himself appeared slightly later on the obverse, but this really became systematic only after the retreat of Demetrius to continental Greece (292/291 B.C.; fig. 10.5).

With around 30 obverse dies for gold staters (fig. 10.6) and around 230 for silver tetradrachms, the monetary strikes of Demetrius (c. 306–287 B.C.) were plentiful. The yearly average for his



Fig. 10.6



Fig. 10.7

tetradrachms (c. 12 dies) represents more than a half of what we got for Philip II and about 1/5 of what we may deduce for the biggest mint during the lifetime of Alexander (Amphipolis), which means about 1/10 of all his tetradrachms.

After the battle of Ipsus, the dominions of Antigonos Monophthalmus were divided. Lysimachus (c. 360–281 B.C.), another diadoch and a past bodyguard of Alexander, received the greater part of Asia Minor. Lysimachus, even if he never put his portrait on his coin, provides another example of the kind of gradual typological changes that occurred during the diadochs' reigns. Although his reign started in 306 B.C., it was not before Ipsus that he added his badge, a minute lion's forepart, in the field of the reverse, and not before around 299/298 B.C. that he replaced the name "Alexandrou" with his own, "Lysimachou." At last, in around 297/296 B.C., he invented a new coinage with a magnificent head of Alexander wearing the horns of Ammon on the obverse and a seated Athena Nikephoros (Victory-bearer) on the reverse. It promised a glorious destiny, part of which was to serve as the model, two millennia later, for the allegory of Britannia (fig. 10.7).

Largely exported to the north, these types, identical for the gold staters and the silver tetradrachms, had quick success along the shores of the Black Sea: they were copied in different places by many dynasts or rulers and were still produced two centuries after the death of Lysimachus on the battlefield of Corupedium in 281 B.C. At least 400 obverse dies (450?) were engraved and used for his lifetime tetradrachms (c. 297–281), a huge mass indeed, considerably larger in terms of yearly production than what Philip II issued during his reign.

It is likely that the royal issues put into circulation during the first two decades of the 3rd century B.C. are still to be considered as part of the conversion into coin of the precious metals taken, a long time ago now, from the Persian treasuries. There is no reason to qualify these issues with the modern concept of "replacement issues." That does not preclude another reality: the quick recycling of recent coins as the "Alexanders" into more new coinages.

THE ATTALIDS, THE MONETARY CLOSED ECONOMIES, AND THEIR RELATIONS TO CIVIC MINTS

Philetairus (c. 343–263 B.C.) long served Lysimachus as his treasurer, with the task of protecting his 9,000 talents (c. 230 tons of silver), kept on the acropolis of Sardis, but betrayed him some time before Corupedium. He managed to create a kingdom for himself in Asia Minor (although he never proclaimed himself king), arousing growing difficulties with the Seleucids.

Several monetary issues may be attributed to him, reflecting his allegiances. He first struck coins of Lysimachus (c. 287–282 B.C.). Then (c. 281–279 B.C.) he put into circulation splendid tetradrachms (head of horned horse/elephant) in honor of and with the name of Seleucus I Nicator (c. 358–281 B.C.), who was assassinated shortly after Corupedium. For a while (c. 279–274 B.C.) he thought it wiser to strike “Alexanders” either with the legend “Alexandrou” or “Seleukou.” At last, he decided to issue coins with a magnificent portrait of Seleucus on the obverse and a seated Athena Nikephoros (the type created under Lysimachus) on the reverse, with his own name appearing for the first time, “Philetairou,” an astonishing mix that reveals from where he came as well as how confident he felt from then on (fig. 10.8).

At the death of Philetairus in 263 B.C., his brother Eumenes I refused to give up the treasury claimed by the Seleucids, prompting an immediate war with Antiochus I Soter, who was defeated, rather unexpectedly, and lost his life in 261 B.C. The reign of Eumenes I (263–241 B.C.) proved to be very fruitful for the young kingdom of Pergamum. The city of Pergamum itself quickly became a leading cultural center for the Hellenistic world. From a numismatic point of view, Eumenes initiated a coinage of tetradrachms with the head of Philetairus, the founder, on the obverse and a seated Athena on the reverse, with the single word “Philetairou” (“[coin] of Philetairus”; fig. 10.9). It will be noticed that the highly realistic, fat, and unflattering portrait of Philetairus is typical of the third-century rulers, who no longer needed to be legitimated by reference to Alexander. They could present themselves as they were or wished to be seen.



Fig. 10.8

These types would be struck as an immobilized type for a century, since Eumenes's successors adopted it without major changes. The long reigns of Eumenes I (263–241 B.C.), Attalus I (241–197 B.C.), and Eumenes II (197–160 B.C.) required the use of about 200 obverses,



Fig. 10.9



Fig. 10.10

which means a yearly average slightly above two, a meager output compared with earlier ones.

In 189 B.C., Antiochos III the Great, the powerful Seleucid king, was defeated by the Romans in Magnesia ad Sipylum (in Lydia, close to Ionia), with the assistance of the Attalid Eumenes II. As a reward, the territory of the Attalid Kingdom was enlarged by the Peace of Apamea in 188 B.C. Soon afterward, it seems (the date is still the matter of debate), Eumenes made the decision to close his kingdom to foreign currencies. He created and imposed what ancient sources call “cistophoroi” since these new coins represent a mystical cista on the obverse (and a bow-case between serpents on the reverse—fig. 10.10). These “cistophoroi” weighed only three-quarters of the Attic tetradrachm (c. 12.6 g in place of c. 16.8 g) but had to be changed and accepted by foreigners at the border for the same value. Production was huge and pursued by different mints, among which Pergamum, Ephesus, and Tralles were the most prolific. For around 180–130 B.C., some 520 obverse dies were engraved, meaning a yearly average of about 10—much more than for the royal Attalid tetradrachms of the third century.

The introduction of such a “closed monetary economy” inside the kingdom of Pergamum was not a novelty for the Greek world. Very advantageous for the issuing power, it had a long history (see the Achaean cities of Magna Graecia and their incuse coinages during the second half of the sixth century or, closer in time and space, Egypt under Ptolemy I Soter from c. 300 B.C.). The introduction of the “cistophoroi” took its place in a general context that favored that type of hard decision. Approximately at the same time, Rhodes did the same with its “plinthophoroi,” as did Antiochos IV in Antioch around 173/172 B.C.



Fig. 10.11

The kingdom of Pergamum, or the Attalid Kingdom, as it was renamed when Attalus assumed the royal title shortly after his resounding victory over the Celts in 240 B.C. (Polyb. 18.41.7–8), was a highly urbanized area with a long tradition of civic mints, including the places—Lydia and Ionia—where coinage, *stricto sensu*, was born around 600 B.C. As the “cistophoroi” do bear the initials of several cities, the question arises of the autonomy of these cities. Was it a privilege or a burden for them to issue these silver coins? As advocated by Le Rider, it is likely that these strikes were negotiated by the king, not without advantages for the cities.

So far, nothing has been said about the many civic issues that continued to be struck under Hellenistic times. Dozens of cities produced hundreds of coinages. However, in terms of value, these civic issues were far from approaching those of the Hellenistic rulers. With a yearly monetary production equivalent to around two and a half obverses for Attic tetradrachms in Rhodes (c. 340–190 B.C.) or around one for Phaselis (c. 250–130 B.C.), even the biggest cities could hardly compete with Hellenistic kings (with the sole exception of Athens: c. 10 for the period c. 185–45 B.C.). Indeed, many civic mints remained active, although sporadically, but as a rule they concentrated their activities producing small silver or bronze coins. Rare were the cities that continued the striking of civic tetradrachms (we naturally leave aside here the abundant issues of “Alexanders,” which were mainly struck to finance the so-called three Macedonian wars).

However, in the years around 155–140 B.C., several cities located in Asia Minor under Attalid rule issued spectacular tetradrachms with a laurel wreath on the reverse (Cyme, Magnesia, Myrina [fig. 10.11], Heraclea, Smyrna, Lebedus, and Aegae). Struck in large quantities (c. 300 obverses in 15 years, a more prolific production at the time than the “cistophoroi” themselves), these tetradrachms have been massively found in the east (Cilicia and Syria), as in the very large hoard of Kirikhan (Cilicia, 1972). We may debate about their original goal (commercial or military), but it is beyond question that they were allowed or promoted by Attalus II (158–138 B.C.), especially since the volume of coins issued by each of these cities does not fit with their supposed economic or political importance. A tempting scenario assumes that the Attalid kings, like others before them, managed to have at their disposal two main currencies, one for their kingdom and another one for abroad.

THE LAST HELLENISTIC KINGS (BITHYNIA, CAPPADOCIA, PONTUS)

With the victory of the Roman legions on the Asian battlefield of Magnesia (189 B.C.) and the defeat of Antiochus III the Great, the most powerful Hellenistic king of the time, a new order was confirmed. It was already clear for any ruler that Rome was the leading military force of the Mediterranean world, but from now on, the political landscape in the east was more and more immobilized, with very few attempts to confront Rome directly. The last rulers to take the risk were the Seleucid Antiochus IV (who was driven to seize Alexandria in 168 B.C., although his army was already victorious in Egypt) and the Macedonian Perseus (who was defeated at Pydna in 168 B.C.).

Taking advantage of this general context and along with the Attalid power, several lesser kingdoms expanded in Asia Minor during the second part of the Hellenistic period. Three of them struck abundant coinages at some points of their history: Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Pontus. These well-studied coinages exemplify differences and similarities we might expect for royal issues. Bithynia, a more monetized area, allowed its kings, generally named Prusias or Nicomedes, to issue not only long and rather continuous series of silver tetradrachms but also bronze coins. Close to the Seleucid "empire," Cappadocian kings struck military issues, mostly silver drachms, a remarkable peculiarity they shared with the Parthians. Pontus—and nearby Paphlagonia, whose kings played a minor role and only struck some rare bronze issues—long remained a poorly monetized area, with kings, usually named Mithradates and Pharnaces, striking casual issues of valuable coins in order to match military expenditures. That royal coins were above all struck for the troops is best illustrated by the coinages of Mithradates Eupator, the last great figure of the Hellenistic world, who fought repeatedly against the Romans and whose coins are exceptionally well dated.

It has to be noticed that both royal Bithynian and Cappadocian coinages started with some minor series of bronze coins, whose purpose is debatable but cannot have been used to finance vast enterprises. For Bithynia, we do have a few tetradrachms for Nicomedes I (c. 280–250 B.C.). The first large issues have to be attributed to Prusias I (c. 230–182 B.C.), with his portrait slightly idealized (fig. 10.12).



Fig. 10.12



Fig. 10.13



Fig. 10.14

A die study for the tetradrachms of Prusias I and II (c. 230–149 B.C.) is much awaited, but it is clear that their issues were abundant. We do have numbers for Nicomedes III and IV: about 450 obverses were used between 128/127 and 74/73 B.C., that is, about eight per year (fig. 10.13). Moreover, as these tetradrachms are dated annually by a local era from 148/147 B.C., we may follow the rhythm of their production, which remained fairly stable up till 94 B.C. (with a number of observed obverses varying between 5 and 10). The peak reached for the years 93/92–89/88 B.C. has to be related to the trouble of these years, namely the activities of the usurper Socrates Chrestus, who was installed on the Bithynian throne and supported by Mithradates Eupator.

Tetradrachms were rarely issued by the Ariarathes, the Cappadocian kings, who always favored the use of drachms. *E contrario*, the sole issues of tetradrachms may be related with usurpers, as Orophernes or Ariarathes IX (a son of Mithradates—fig. 10.14), or with military action undertaken abroad, such as the campaign of Ariarathes V against Aristonicus in the late 130s. The Cappadocian royal coins are only dated by regnal years. Despite some uncertainties about the sequence, we do have an uninterrupted corpus of die studies from Ariarathes VI to the middle of the reign of Ariobarzanes (c. 130–78/77 B.C.). In some 52 years, no less than 375 obverses were used for these drachms. The royal coinage was not only less abundant in Cappadocia by four or five times than in Bithynia (yearly average of 1.8 to compare with 8.3); it was also more uneven. The perfect example is provided by Ariobarzanes I Philoromaios (“friend of the Romans”). Often expelled from the throne by Mithradates or his supporters and often reinstalled by the Romans, his mint must have been mounted on wheels. Indeed, his many drachms were mainly issued when

Roman troops wintered in his kingdom, for Murena in 83/81 B.C. and for Pompey the Great in 67/65 B.C., after his victory over the pirates (fig. 10.15).

The royal Pontic coinage issued before Mithradates Eupator looks scanty: 4 staters, 63 tetradrachms (23 obverses), and 18 drachms, a meager total amount indeed for more than half a century (c. 220–150 B.C.). Even more: no more than one single tetradrachm may be attributed for the second last of the 2nd century B.C. Beside their rarity, these coins have been highly praised for their portraits, since—not without some “brutality”—they range among the most accomplished forms of fine realism reached during Hellenistic times (fig. 10.16).

Mithradates Eupator (c. 132–63 B.C.) was the last Hellenistic ruler to oppose Rome. He fought for nearly 40 years and—quoting the words of Racine in the preface to his eponymous tragedy—his sole defeats made nearly all the glory of three among the most reputed captains of the Roman Republic (Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompey). From a numismatic point of view, too, Eupator is a fascinating character. Most of his coins are dated by years and months, an exceptional fact that allows a minute study of their rhythm. With around 190 obverses for his tetradrachms (fig. 10.17), he not only coined substantially more than his predecessors but eventually reached peaks with 8 obverses in two months (May–June 89 B.C.) or 30 obverses in one year at the same mint (in 75 and 74 B.C.). These peaks (and other minor ones) are quite systematically connected with wars but do not coincide with them: what we do observe is an increase of production immediately before (89 B.C. and 75–74 B.C.) or after (the end of 85 B.C.) the wars. Conversely, we have few or no coins to attribute to some important events reported by ancient authors, like the



1x2



1x2

Fig. 10.15



Fig. 10.16



Fig. 10.17

building of a fleet during the winter of 90/89 B.C. or the so-called second Mithradatic war (83–81 B.C.). Several hoards indicate that Pontic troops and mercenaries were paid not only with royal Pontic coins but also with late posthumous “Lysimachi” struck in Byzantium, royal Bithynian tetradrachms, even Athenian tetradrachms. Moreover, Eupator issued vast quantities of bronze coins, allegedly struck with the same types by a dozen Pontic cities but surely promoted by himself, in order, among other purposes, to pay garrisons around the Black Sea. Modern analyses have revealed that some of these bronzes are in fact brass coins, so Eupator may possibly be regarded as the first to make use of this new alloy.

As a general rule, the following asymmetrical proposition emerges from the Mithradatic coinages (and those struck at that time): gold and silver royal coins were struck first to pay troops, but troops were not fully paid by these coins. Further, a privileged use of these coins by mercenaries can be detected.

KEY TO ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 10.1. Du Chastel 197. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.2. Du Chastel 196. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.3. De Hirsch 1081. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.4. De Hirsch 1082. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.5. Du Chastel 207. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.6. Du Chastel 205. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.7. Du Chastel 187. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.8. De Hirsch 1459. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.9. Du Chastel 251. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.10. De Hirsch 1578. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.11. Du Chastel 255. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.12. De Hirsch 1436. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.13. De Hirsch 1440. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.14. De Hirsch 1627. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.15. Brussels acq. 1911. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.16. De Hirsch 1412. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.
 Fig. 10.17. Du Chastel 244. Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Brussels.

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