

# **Studies in Ancient Coinage from Turkey**

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## KOMMENTARE ZUR LITERATUR ÜBER ANTIKE NUMISMATIK

*Studies in Ancient Coinage from Turkey. Richard Ashton, editor.*

Royal Numismatic Society (Special Publication No. 29 / British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph No. 17). London, 1996.  
viii + 160 pp., 69 plates. Cloth bound with dust jacket. 22 x 30.5 cm. £ 45.  
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In 1991 C.S. Lightfoot edited BIAA Monograph 12, *Recent Turkish Coin Hoards and Numismatic Studies* (Oxford, 1991), a pioneering attempt at making a wider audience aware of Turkish numismatic research, usually only found in Turkish language journals. It contained 12 articles, including studies on the coinages of Ancyra, Rhodes and Ephesos, a number of hoard reports, and surveys of coins found at specific sites, or from specific areas (as reflected by local museum collections). All were well-written, some were really very well done, and all were carefully and economically presented (though at £ 34 for a softbound volume it can not be said to be cheap). There were, of course, a number of minor faults concerning the photographs (though there were 81 quite decent plates and a number of useful maps), one might have wished that the editor had changed some of his authors' texts to reflect recent research, rather than just mentioning that fact in footnotes, and some of the articles could have had some unnecessary details edited out, but the book really was an excellent first step, and all its contributors deserved congratulations.

This new volume, a joint publication of the RNS and the BIAA edited by Richard Ashton, a retired foreign service officer well known for his research on the coinage of Rhodes (and the writer of a major article in the 1991 work), is much more luxuriously and professionally produced than BIAA 12, but, unfortunately, despite the editor's Herculean efforts, most of the 20 articles by 16 contributors (9 British and 7 Turkish) presented are of limited interest. Additionally, most numismatists will find that a great number of the coins illustrated serve no purpose since they are worn and corroded, and examples in better condition can be found in any of the standard numismatic reference works. Yet many Turkish scholars have little or no experience with preparing publications on an international standard, and allowing them the chance to present their work here will surely encourage them to be more confident and publish more important things in the future; a welcome event. However, this should have been done with more care and with better supervision. For example, considering that of the 20 articles in this book, 17 primarily deal with hoards and excavation or survey finds, one would have expected a map of Turkey to show us the sites from which they come!

In addition, the title is also rather misleading, since few of the articles within it can possibly be described as being 'studies'. Most simply present raw data without

analysis, on the probably correct assumption that they will be of use for other researchers. Nevertheless, using the same title as BIAA 12 would have been more appropriate.

What few studies there are in this volume makes one wish there were more of them. 'Anatolian War-Sickles and the Coinage of Etenna', by *N. V. Sekunda*, is a first rate, splendid and fascinating essay on a sickle-like weapon (the *drepanon*) which appears on the coinage of Etenna in Pisidia. S. provides numerous sculptural parallels, identifies similar implements used in agriculture with which this should not be confused, and, finally, discusses the war-sickle's mythological implications in conjunction with Etenna's figural types. This is virtually a model of how numismatic and archaeological evidence can be combined, and it deserves a much wider audience than this volume will receive (S. should consider reprinting it elsewhere). *K. Butcher's* short note, 'Evidence for Ancient Repairs to Dies', describes obverse dies from Antioch and Gabala which were repaired in antiquity. *R. Ashton* publishes two hoards, one of late Hellenistic silver coins from Tabai and Adramytion (buried ca. 30–20 B.C.) and the other of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman provincial issues from Rhodes, which he uses to help fix the chronologies of their respective coinages. The final "study", and the longest in this volume, is *R. Bland's* 'The Bronze Coinage of Gordian III from Caesarea in Cappadocia', the pendant to his earlier study of the silver that appeared in Glauk 7 (1991). This is a complete corpus of the material (profusely illustrated), and it also provides cogent discussions on the reverse types and their order of issue, the obverse busts, the legends, the weights, die axes, denominations, dies, countermarks and, finally, on the circulation pattern of the coinage of Caesarea. This last is most interesting since it explodes the notion that Caesarean silver circulated over a very wide area (one might add the drachm of Septimius Severus from the Sulakyurt hoard, BIAA 12, p. 224, 203; there is an AE of Gordian III found in Ankara, in this volume, p. 113, 76; also in this volume, p. 122, 100–104, are three drachms, Vespasian, Hadrian and Gordian III, and two AE, both of Severus Alexander, in the Amasra museum, but the findspots of some are quite uncertain). Yet another model article, and one of real importance (and the only article which might attract *collectors* to buy this book, though that is something many of its contributors might not wish!).

The remaining articles, while of some use for the data they present, are of little general interest, and include descriptions of hoards, reports on coins from excavations and site surveys, and catalogues of public and private collections containing coins from specific areas.

*P. Aydemir* presents a pot hoard from Old Smyrna containing 10 sigloi, which she dates to ca. 400–375. Unfortunately the coins are clearly rather more worn than she believes (and could well have been buried rather later), and are in themselves fairly undatable except in broad terms. These are precisely the kind of coins for which archaeological context is vital. If the pot in which they were found and the level in which they were buried can be dated within a narrow range of time, the coins can also be dated precisely. A. was not allowed to publish the contextual material (that will be done in the *future* by someone else, doubtless in a publication not normally available to numismatists), and one fears that the archaeologists will use the date suggested for this hoard as the date for the level in which it was found;

a serious methodological error! In conjunction with the late Martin Price A. records a hoard of 58 Athenian New Style coins, 44 tetradrachms and 14 drachms, buried ca. 95 B.C. at ancient Pitane in Aeolis. *M. T. Göktürk* lists a hoard which was found somewhere in Caria before 1934 that contains 274 silver coins of Myndos, Halikarnassos and Knidos. Unusually, G. gives no date for its deposit (though in its previous appearance as CH VIII, 485, it was dated to ca. 100 B.C.).

*M. Arslan* is a prolific contributor to this volume. He first presents 208 denarii and 2 drachms (out of an original hoard said to have contained precisely 2,469 coins!) found in the area of Manyas in ancient Bithynia. The latest datable coin was struck ca. 145 (every coin is given its BMCRE reference, and while there are a few minor bust or legend varieties, most are already noted in the BMCRE's footnotes). Then come two fragmentary hoards of Roman provincial material (one primarily of issues of Alexandria Troas dating to the 260s and surely a parcel from the very large hoard of such material which appeared in Europe during the 1980s; the other of Zeugma and Antioch of the period of Philip I), both purchased by private collectors. His last hoard looks complete and consists of 21 Antiochene solidi of Valentinian I (1), Valens (16 – excitingly, many of these are die-linked), Gratian (3) and Valentinian II (1 – a unique new type of great interest).

*A. Ergeç* publishes 29 gold aurei, now in the museum of Gaziantep, where they were acquired in 1985 and 1986 from a hoard found at the village of Kuşakkaya (she also lists, but is not allowed to illustrate, a further 15 aurei and a denarius from the same hoard in another museum; mentions that there are another 5 aurei, undescribed, in a third museum; and that there are some, how many?, what types?, in a private collection in Ankara). She then tells us that the original hoard may have contained as many as 1400 coins of which only about 85 supposedly remained in Turkey! However, no observer of the international coin market can recall such a huge number of Roman gold coins coming out of Turkey, and one wonders whether they really existed; or if they did, whether the finders, in fear of the authorities, simply had the coins melted down into anonymous and untraceable gold bars. E. provides no date for the hoard: while the earliest coins illustrated are very worn post-reform aurei of Nero, and the latest is a somewhat worn aureus of Hadrian of 122, there is an aureus of Antoninus Pius of 143 among the unillustrated pieces. One could envision a date of deposition of ca. 150. However, the amount of wear of the Trajans and the Hadrian is closely paralleled by examples in late 2<sup>nd</sup> century hoards buried under Commodus or early in the reign of Septimius Severus. Sadly, as they are, the coins presented tell us virtually nothing.

*I. Temizsoy* presents a hoard of antoniniani found at the village of Ihsaniye (now in the Karaman museum), most from the reigns of Valerian through Claudius II but also including one of Probus and another of Diocletian. Oddly enough, both late coins seem rather more worn than most of the earlier pieces and one would normally assume that they are intrusions, tossed in by the finders to make the hoard more valuable. It should be noted that in the illustrations coin 82's obverse has also been given to 77 in error, and that the coins numbered 68, 69 and 70 are actually 70, 68 and 69).

Certainly more important than these hoards are the six articles on coins from specific sites or areas: three present excavation or site-survey material, and three concern museum or private collections coming from a restricted area.

The archaeological reports are straightforward. *M. Arslan* publishes the 11 Hellenistic and 78 Roman provincial coins found in the excavations of the Roman baths in Ankara in 1939 and 1940 (out of a total of some 2300 coins – it is a pity that he was unable, or was not allowed, to at least include a list of the excavated Roman imperial issues from Augustus through Gallienus as a comparison). The only surprise is an exceptionally rare coin of Septimius Severus from Psophis in Arcadia, about which the editor has added a useful note (a somewhat similar piece, as yet unpublished, was once in the Rhousopoulos collection). *C.S. Lightfoot* is responsible for the two remaining articles. The first catalogues 66 coins, ranging from a drachm of Alexander III (struck ca. 323–319) to a Venetian grosso of Antonio Venier (1382–1400), from the rescue excavations at Tille (the site is now flooded). Virtually none of the coins come from useful contexts and most are Roman and Byzantine. The only coins which are of any interest are 20, an *as* of Tiberius from Antioch which seems to have been deliberately cut in half to make a fraction (such cut coins are commonly found in the West – Switzerland, Germany, etc. – and finding one in the upper Euphrates valley is worthy of note), and 55, apparently a very rare copper issue of Levon II of Armenia (unidentified in the catalogue, but the text description is enough to identify the coin). His second article publishes 32 truly miserable coins found during the site survey of the Roman town of Satala, modern Sadak. Not only was L. not allowed to see any coins from the site now kept in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, but he also rather sadly recounts that while the villagers often do find coins, almost all are dispersed through antique dealers or by locals working in Europe (the nearest museum where the villagers could sell their finds officially is 250 km away in Erzurum, and they made it quite clear to L. that they totally distrusted the Turkish archaeologists). Two possibly plated denarii of Elagabalus testify to the ancient penchant for throwing away false coins when their falsity becomes apparent (plated coins often seem to turn up as chance finds – though I wonder whether these two pieces are merely corroded and uncleaned rather than really being the base metal cores of plated coins). Was the beautifully preserved and impeccably cleaned follis of Justinian I really found in Satala, or did a local take pity on L. and decide to show him something that was actually legible (could it also be from a hoard? – a goodly number of excellent mid 6<sup>th</sup> century folles have appeared on the world market since the late 1980s and can not all be single chance finds)?

The primary importance of collections formed locally is in the light they can throw on ancient circulation patterns as a whole, rather than on the individual coins themselves, especially since it is only when a great number of coins from very many sites are published that we can begin to understand the coin circulation of any given area, and recognize unusual occurrences for what they are. This makes it absolutely vital for the researcher to ensure that the coins published as coming from a specific area were actually found there, thus reflecting ancient losses, rather than being brought there in modern times. It is also important that the collection be a truly random sample of the coins found in the area, rather than being biased in some



way (i.e., if a museum only has a tiny purchasing budget – as is supposedly the case with many Turkish museums – poor quality, low value coins will be over represented in comparison to more attractive material, easily sold virtually anywhere else; a local collector whose coins went to a museum may have actively sought out coins from the immediate area to the exclusion of locally found foreign issues; etc.).

*R. Ashton* records a collection of 22 coins, all purchased in Gaziantep (plus a Byzantine seal described by C. and M.M. Mango which provides scholars with the name of a hitherto unknown governor of Edessa), which he somewhat hopefully suggests “...may make a minor contribution to the picture of coin circulation in the Gaziantep area”. It should be noted that coin 5, identified with the help of H. Brown as being a spectacular rarity, the small bronze of Mattathias Antigonos with the Menorah reverse, is, at best, merely a late lead seal, and not a coin.

*A. T. Tek and M. Arslan* publish 178 Greek and Roman provincial coins from a collection, acquired in the area of the Hellespont and now in the museum of Sinop. Every coin is carefully described with its provenance, given a reference to examples published elsewhere (coins without references are not necessarily unpublished: 163, a Sinopean bronze of Geta as emperor – the obverse legend given by T&A is incomplete – is from the same dies as *Recueil* 141), and, as is typical in this volume, nearly every piece is illustrated (despite the fact that these are all corroded, and often badly worn, surface finds, and virtually all are known types – though, conversely, it is commendable that T&A have illustrated those coins which are legible but unidentified: 173 is from Prokonnesos, 175 is surely the result of mixing the casts of two different coins, and 178 is an Athenian obol of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). There is a useful map (the only one in this book) of the Dardanelles area, showing both ancient sites and a number of Turkish towns where coins were acquired. Rather surprisingly, however, there is no list of provenances (there are, in fact, 22 including “unknown”), nor any chart showing where coins from specific mints were found. For example, some coins were acquired at modern towns to which locally found coins must have been brought – like Biga, a modern commercial center, where the collector bought coins from 16 different mints, 2 each from Samothrace and Priapos, and 1 each from Macedonia (Demetrios Poliorketes), Abdera, Alopekonnessos, Sestos, Abydos, Achilleion, Kebren, Gargara, Skamandreia, Skepsis, Prokonnesos, Aigai, Amisos and Athens – but others at the ancient city site itself – as at Dardanos, a mint in antiquity, where he purchased 17 coins struck there and 1 coin of Abydos. Thus, while the whole point of publishing this collection is to document the monetary circulation around the Hellespont, the only way the reader can find out about it is to laboriously make a complete concordance – something the authors should have done.

All T&A can tell us about the coins is that they were bought in 1970 by the then director of the Sinop Museum, and that the owner was “...someone in the Turkish military”, who presumably acquired them in the 1960s while serving in the area of the Hellespont. While what information these coins do provide is valuable, it is probably slightly skewed, since to me the collection as a whole has a rather strange look. The collector clearly was only interested in coins from a very limited area of western Turkey, and of the early Hellenistic kings of Macedonia and Seleucid

Syria. Thus, the belief that this collection accurately reflects the coins in circulation in the Hellespontine area may only be partially correct: I would suggest that the collector was actually very knowledgeable, and instead of buying every coin offered to him found in that area (as might be assumed), only bought coins from the areas he collected. This is borne out by the few coins he purchased further afield: in Izmir he purchased a coin of Lampsakos and one of Parion; from Istanbul, an Ilion, an Adramytion and two coins from Parion (as well as the core of a plated denarius of Antony and Cleopatra which may have been bought for its historic value – though since T&A decided not to publish the 46 Roman, Byzantine and Islamic coins also included in this collection we lack clues to his collecting criteria; two coins from Sinope which were purchased there are suggested by T&A to have been added to the collection by the museum director); lastly, from Adana come coins of Alexander III, Demetrius Poliorcetes, an unidentified Seleucid ruler, and a tetradrachm of Antiochus Hierax *minted in Ilion*. The idea that the collector simply bought *that coin by chance* strikes me as being unlikely in the extreme. Thus, we can use this collection to tell us what relatively local coins circulated in the area of the Dardanelles, but not what foreign ones did, since our collector had no real interest in buying such pieces. Another bias comes from the fact that our collector apparently had limited financial resources, since, aside from that interesting tetradrachm he bought in Adana, there are no larger silver coins.

*S. Ireland and S. Atesogullari* catalogue 369 Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins in the museum of Amasra, ancient Sesamos/Amastris. They assume that all the coins were found locally and, thus, give us a good idea of local circulation patterns in antiquity. Findspots are only recorded for five pieces (31, 190, 229, 266, 354: the first minted in Amastris, the others Roman and Byzantine of no particular significance). I&A suggest that certain groups of coins which were acquired together (bought?, confiscated?, donated?) might have been found in one place, or are parcels from hoards. In a few cases this may be true. The coins are all carefully catalogued (29 has nothing to do with Pontos, it is surely from Gambrion and is unlikely to have a helmeted head on its obverse; 66, which I&A tentatively ascribe to Sinope seems unrelated to anything known to have been struck there – it actually looks somewhat Cilician, and should be relegated to the unidentified; I&A's identification of 94 as coming from Aigeai in Cilicia is correct, but it was struck by Valerian in 253/4, under the magistrate Asklepios, rather than the Olympios read by I&A – it is from the same dies as SNG Paris 2388; also from Aigeai, but of the early Hellenistic period, is 115 = Bloesch 1–7).

Unfortunately, what little evidence this collection can provide for monetary circulation in the region of Amastris is compromised, and can only be used with great care. I&A make much of the coins from accession group S/82 1.1–66 (only 65 pieces, 82 1.63 is not catalogued), because it includes seven coins minted in Cilicia (catalogue numbers 94–99, three from Mopsos and one each from Aigeai, Epiphaneia and King Philopator [RPC 3872] – to which should be added 115, the Aigeai from this accession group already noted above), and a tight series of 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman (though, curiously, nothing even remotely local). Going into greater detail, of the Greek or Roman provincial we have seven from Cilicia, and one each from Mytilene, Thessaly (!), Edessa in Mesopotamia, Nikopolis in Syria,

Caesarea, and the enigmatic unidentified piece, 66, noted above. The 52 Roman coins extend from Septimius Severus through Arcadius (no Byzantine coins were acquired as part of S/82 1), and can instructively be compared with those of the same period from the collection as a whole. In the list of mints which follows the first number in parentheses refers to the number of coins in S/82 1, the second is the number of other pieces in the collection: Antioch (24 – 13), Asia (5 – 2), Siscia (5 – 2), Cyzicus (4 – 9), Rome (3 – 3), Milan (2 – 2), Viminacium (2 – 0), Heraclea (1 – 5), Nikomedia (1 – 11), Alexandria (1 – 0) and uncertain (4 – 15). No coins from Constantinople appeared in S/82 1 (7 in the collection). The marked under-representation of the nearby mints of Constantinople, Heraclea, Cyzicus and Nikomedia stands in stark contrast to the figure for Antioch. It seems to me that most of this group was obviously brought from southwest Turkey by someone working or visiting there in modern times, and then sold to the Amasra museum (all we can be reasonably sure of about the Thessalian League coin is that it was found in Asia Minor). Is the presence of a single coin of Sesamos (45) in 69 3.3–35 (only 28 coins described) enough to give us confidence that two tetra-drachms of Caracalla from Carrhae and a drachm of Mithridates II of Parthia really come from the Amastris area? Accession group 72 2.1–63 (only 57 coins noted) is far more believable. This is not to denigrate the great amount of effort I&A have gone through to present this, the first known publication of the holdings of a Turkish provincial museum, but it does illustrate the pitfalls that can occur.

My one real complaint about this volume concerns the illustrations. Most numismatists used to working in even the most rudimentary reference library will wonder why so many utterly unimportant coins were illustrated here, especially since the editor has ensured that the coins were recorded with such meticulous care. Coins should be illustrated, regardless of condition, if they are new types or hitherto unknown varieties; or if they are actually in nice condition; or even if they are uncertain but legible since this can facilitate their identification. But most numismatists would be happy to know why 58 often atrociously corroded and illegible Athenian New Style silver coins, of which only one provides us with a new variety, deserve photographs. Or 210 perfectly ordinary Roman denari, all of known types. Or 83 banal antoniniani of the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century. And it is a real mystery why the masses of corroded and heavily worn Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins without significant archaeological contexts from the Hellespontine collection, Amasra, Gaziantep, Tille or Satala, all of known types, and all published and illustrated elsewhere from better examples, deserve illustration. Is there some hitherto unrecognized archaeological, numismatic or iconographic value in illustrating a Byzantine follis which is so worn and corroded it is impossible to tell whether it is of Justin I or Justinian I (Tille 45)? Or Satala 7, a nearly totally illegible 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman provincial bronze? Die studies can not be made from coins the details of which are excessively obscure. Illustrating such coins does not even provide protection from theft, since the overall quality of the coins is so low and their commercial value so marginal, that it would be highly unlikely that any would appear in an illustrated list or catalogue from which they could be identified.

The only conceivable justification for these lavish illustrations is that they may help Turkish archaeologists, whose libraries are apparently very poor in numisma-



tic references, to identify the coins they find (though if this is the case it would have made far more sense, and would have been far more useful for workers in the field, for the RNS and the BIAA to have financed the printing of an illustrated list of representative bronze coins taken from the collection of the British Museum: i.e., a few characteristic *and legible* coins from every mint in Asia Minor, illustrated on 50–100 plates with an accompanying text).

Coin hoards, excavation coins, site survey material, local museum collections, and studies of the organization, iconography and circulation areas of the coins themselves all provide vital information on the ancient coinages which were made and used in Asia Minor. Perhaps, if the RNS and the BIAA were to get further contributions from their Turkish colleagues, they might think of producing a joint series in the style of Coin Hoards devoted solely to the ancient numismatics of Asia Minor. If that were to happen it would justify this volume's publication far more than its present contents do, and would allow a growing number of Turkish scholars, now little known outside of Turkey, to make a real impact on the international numismatic research.

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