

The Silver Coinage of Caesarea in Cappadocia, Vespasian-Commodus [William E. Metcalf]

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The Silver Coinage of Caesarea in Cappadocia, Vespasian-Commodus.

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In 1980, at or near the Turkish city of Kayseri, the ancient Caesarea in Cappadocia, a hoard of about 2500 silver coins was found, reputedly contained in four bronze jars. Most of the coins were from Caesarea itself, but the hoard also contained denarii and two Lycian drachms.¹ The latest coins were issues of Commodus dated to his fourth consulship, AD 183–185. The earliest coin is said to have been a denarius of Tiberius, although this is clearly an outlier (albeit a curious one for a hoard of such a late date). The remainder of the hoard began with Caesarean coins of Vespasian. Julio-Claudian silver issues of Caesarea appear to have been absent.

The hoard was broken up and part, if not all, of it disposed of on the German market. Of these, 258 were published by Wolfram Weiser,² 140 were seen by Michel Amandry at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris,³ and 932 were recorded by William E. Metcalf at the American Numismatic Society in New York: a total of 1330 coins which can be traced with confidence to this hoard, of which a record of about 1190 exists. Nothing appears to be known about the fate of the rest of the hoard, although a list of coins seen in trade and possibly from the hoard is presented in the work reviewed here.⁴

Of all those interested in the coinage of Caesarea in Cappadocia (one of the major issuers of silver coinage in the first and second centuries), Metcalf is certainly the most qualified to write on the subject, having devoted many years to the study of this important material. Most welcome, then, is his book reviewed here, which focusses on the Caesarean coinage produced between the reigns of Vespasian and Commodus, when the bulk of Caesarean silver was issued. A replacement for E.A. Sydenham's hopelessly outdated *The Coinage of Caesarea in Cappadocia* is sorely needed, and M.'s work goes some way towards performing this function. As its author all too readily concedes, the book has been a long time in the making, and consequently there is a feeling at times that the subject has already moved on beyond some of the discussions presented.

¹ *Coin Hoards* 7 (1985), no. 156.

² W. Weiser, "Ein Teil eines umfangreichen Fundes kappadokischer Silbermünzen der römischen Kaiserzeit", *Epigraphica Anatolica* 3 (1984), 109–132.

³ M. Amandry, "Rome et Césarée: didrachme et drachme de Trajan à légende de droit latine", *BSFN* 41.4 (April 1986), 36–9.

⁴ Pp. 3–4. An Italian colleague told me of a "mucchio" of Caesarean hemidrachms seen in trade not long ago, but this seems a little late to be included as part of the above hoard. It is more probably part of yet another unrecorded hoard of Caesarean coins.

M.'s book uses the hoard material as a starting-point for more wide-ranging discussions about the nature of Cappadocian silver coinage from Vespasian to Commodus, and provides the reviewer with an opportunity for some reflections on these issues. The first concerns metrology and the relationship of the Caesarean coinage to the denarius. A few years ago I suggested that from Vespasian to Aurelius and Verus, and perhaps to Commodus, the Caesarean drachm was issued on the so-called "Rhodian" standard, where a drachm is equivalent to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a denarius, rather than being the equivalent of one denarius as previously supposed.⁵ Recent analyses of denarii and Caesarean silver by the reviewer and M. Ponting suggest to me that it is even less likely that the Cappadocian drachm was equal to one denarius.⁶ The picture which is now emerging (albeit very tentative and fragmentary) is one in which the eastern silver coinages are remarkably stable, compared to the declining weight and silver content of the denarius. In spite of all that has been written about overvaluation of provincial silver coinages against the denarius, I am not wholly convinced that the issuers of the coinages saw a close connection between the two. It really is time to rethink the relationship between them, although little can be achieved without comprehensive metallurgical analyses.

The large quantity of coins examined in M.'s hoard means that something can be said about the weights of the coins from Vespasian to the joint reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. These are remarkably stable, with a didrachm of about 6.6 or 6.7 grammes (p. 81–2; perhaps a little heavier at the beginning, under Vespasian). The silver standard may have remained the same throughout. The denarius, on the other hand, steadily lost weight and fineness during the same period. Even if the Caesarean coins were heavily overvalued against the denarius, as many have supposed, it is a little surprising to me that no effort was made to adjust the Caesarean coinage accordingly as the denarius declined, especially as it is now clear that much of the Caesarean silver of the period under discussion was produced in the same mint as the denarii – Rome (see below).

After Aurelius and Verus there was a dramatic change in metrology. During the sole reign of Commodus there was a very large issue of a single silver denomination, usually called a "didrachm". M. follows D.R. Walker⁷ in considering these coins to be didrachms, and considers it "a less attractive alternative" (p. 74) to view these coins as one-and-a-half drachm pieces. But why is it less attractive? Their weight, his analyses suggest, is a third less than the didrachms of Aurelius and Verus (mean weight of the former 4.389g; of the latter 6.669g), which admittedly does not support the one-and-a-half drachm alternative. But how closely are the weight standards of Aurelius and Verus and those of Commodus connected? We could

⁵ K. Butcher, "Rhodian drachms at Caesarea in Cappadocia", *NC* 152 (1992), 41–48.

⁶ K. Butcher, M. Ponting, "Rome and the East: Production of Roman Provincial Silver for Caesarea in Cappadocia under Vespasian, AD 69–79", *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 14.1 (March 1995), 63–77.

⁷ D.R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage II* (1977), 84–5.

instead seek a link between the weight standards of Commodus and those of his successor Septimius Severus. The theoretical weight of a drachm under Aurelius and Verus would be about 3.33g, but by the reign of Septimius Severus the weight had declined to just over 3.00g. There is some indication that the standard had been lowered before the Commodus “didrachms” were issued: the rare tridrachms and didrachms of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus are struck to a lower standard than those of Aurelius and Verus – if indeed these tridrachms were intended to circulate in Cappadocia, since no findspots are known (see below). The mean weight of the Aurelius/Commodus tridrachms is 9.151g (14 specimens); the didrachms 5.906g (5 specimens). This standard seems to be maintained by the subsequent coinage of Septimius Severus.⁸ This would make the Commodus “didrachms” approximately half the weight of the tridrachms, i.e. one-and-a-half drachm coins (this assumes, of course, that the silver contents of the Commodus coins and those of the other periods are the same). We can hardly press the issue further without reliable analyses of the Commodan and Severan coins, but one can see how easily a case can be made for precisely what Walker and M. attempt to deny.

A second consideration is the production of the “Rome” style issues. That a number of eastern issues were probably struck at Rome for issue in the east is now generally accepted. M. provides a chapter on the subject (pp. 83–90), but underplays the role of Rome in the production of provincial silver coinage, perhaps because at the time of writing the subject was still fairly new and controversial: “There are other cases of Roman involvement in the provinces – all temporary, isolated, and so far lacking any convincing explanation, whether taken individually or collectively” (p. 85). The picture now is one where large numbers of provincial silver and bronze coins of Roman style were produced between the reigns of Vespasian and Marcus Aurelius, and there are rarer examples in later reigns. M. notes Caesarean silver of various reigns, Cyrenaican silver of Trajan, Alexandrian tetradrachms of Severus Alexander and Syrian tetradrachms of Philip (p. 5–6). To this can be added Cypriot bronze of Vespasian and Trajan, Syrian bronze of Vespasian, Trajan, and Hadrian, Cyrenaican bronze of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, Arabian silver of Trajan, Syrian silver of Trajan, Tarsus silver of Trajan, Lycian silver of Domitian and Trajan (and perhaps Nerva), cistophori of Titus, Domitian and Trajan (and perhaps Nerva), to name some of the more prominent examples. Some sort of pattern, with the greatest activity falling in Trajan’s reign, would seem to emerge, even if a convincing explanation cannot yet be provided.

Of all of the Rome style issues, the Cappadocian coinage is the most prominent, being issued more frequently and over a longer period than any other provincial coinages of Rome style. For Caesarea, M. recognises the following coins as “Roman”: issues of Vespasian with a 12.00 die axis; didrachms of Domitian; the coinage of Trajan dated to his sixth consulship; and the didrachm coinage of Aurelius and Verus. To this list I would certainly add the coins of Trajan with the

⁸ D.R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage III* (1978), 74–7.

reverse legend ΔΗΜ ΕΞ ΥΠΙΑΤ Β (their Roman origin seems likely in the light not only of style but of analyses undertaken by the reviewer in collaboration with M. Ponting⁹), and the issues of Antoninus Pius. The Antoninus Pius coins have not been analysed, but to me they look very Roman in style.

The existence of this Rome style coinage in the eastern provinces caused great confusion in the past, with a whole series of coins which we now know belong to Syria, Arabia and Cyrenaica being given to Caesarea by Sydenham. It is largely thanks to M.'s work on Caesarea and the Arabian coinage that most of the issues have been reattributed away from Caesarea.¹⁰ The source of confusion was the stylistic similarity of all of these groups, because they are all in the style of the Rome mint. The attributions of Sydenham, however, continue to cause confusion, mainly because numismatists have little else to consult when trying to identify eastern silver coins. M. helpfully provides a conspectus of silver coins which can be attributed to Caesarea between the reigns of Vespasian and Commodus. Of these, only one seems out of place: the didrachm of Trajan with the reverse "Female bust (Hera?)" (Conspectus 58). One of these was found in the hoard, and M. includes it as a Caesarean coin "with the greatest reluctance". The coin is clearly associated with Sydenham 173, a tridrachm of Trajan with the reverse "male bust... (Zeus?)". Analyses by the reviewer and M. Ponting show that the "Zeus" tridrachm and "Hera" didrachm have nearly identical trace element profiles, and clearly go together.¹¹ Furthermore, their silver contents far exceed those of normal Caesarean coinage. M. considers the provenance of the "Zeus" coins unknown (p. 105; listed as "uncertain", p. 148), and compares it to the "mysterious didrachm" (Sydenham 175) with the reverse bust of Tyrian Melqart, whose "origin ... is anybody's guess". In fact, the "Zeus" and "Hera" coins do occur in hoards of Syrian coins, as does the didrachm with the reverse bust of Melqart.¹² All three are Syrian types (I hope to publish a note on the identity of "Zeus" and "Hera" at a later date). The inclusion of the "Hera" didrachm in the hoard must be regarded as accidental, and M.'s reluctance to include it as a Caesarean coin is quite justified.

Another, relatively minor, point concerns the tridrachms of Commodus (Conspectus 140–141a), with an eagle on the reverse. The eagle is described standing on a club, but the object is not a club; it is the thigh of a sacrificial animal.

⁹ K. Butcher, M. Ponting, "Atomic Absorption Spectrometry and Roman Silver Coins", in *Metallurgy and Numismatics* 4 (forthcoming).

¹⁰ W.E. Metcalf, "The Tell Kalak Hoard and Trajan's Arabian Mint", *ANSMN* 20 (1975), 39–108.

¹¹ K. Butcher, M. Ponting, *loc. cit.* n. 9 above.

¹² The Eleutheropolis hoard contained 1 "Zeus" coin (Svoronos, *JIAN* 10, 1907); the Murabb'at hoard 2 "Hera" coins (Milik and Seyrig, *RN* 1958); a hoard from Hebron, 1990 contained 1 "Zeus" coin, 2 "Hera" coins and 1 Melqart coin (description by A. Spaer on file in the British Museum), a hoard from "near Jericho" contained 1 "Zeus" coin (*Coin Hoards* 7, no. 243), and a further "Hera" coin came from the so-called Antioch hoard (Metcalf, *ANSMN* 20, 1975, p. 92 n. 16).

This is normally a Syrian type, referring to the foundation-legends of Antioch, Seleucia and Laodicea by Seleucus I, and it occurs on contemporary Syrian tetradrachms (e.g. *BMC* 343). However, I know of no specimens of these coins from Syria, and M.'s text shows that no finds are known at all. The type may occur at other cities in the Greek east. In the absence of find spots, it may be a clue to the intended area of circulation of these tridrachms.

The original intention of M.'s work was to publish a large assemblage of Caesarean coins, but as we have seen, the study goes far beyond that. It is, however, time to return to the hoard and its composition (such as can be determined). The absence of Julio-Claudian didrachms, drachms and hemidrachms is interesting and may prove significant, if further hoard evidence were forthcoming. From Vespasian to Hadrian (and quite possibly to Commodus) the silver content of the Caesarean coinage was remarkably stable, but the Julio-Claudian coinage may have been struck on a different standard and perhaps an attempt was made to remove it from circulation between the later first and mid second centuries AD – hence its total absence from the hoard.¹³ As usual with material from the eastern Mediterranean, the evidence eludes us.

M.'s work demonstrates how much can be gained from the study of part of a hoard which has largely been dispersed in trade, but it also demonstrates how much extremely important evidence has been lost. In its present state, the hoard cannot help to answer an important question: did denarii circulate alongside the Caesarean issues? M., noting one denarius in the ANS lot, and two (or four?) in the Weiser lot, believes that “the combination of Roman and provincial issues is significant” (p. 147). Is it? The 100+ denarii reported in the original hoard would certainly have been significant, but these coins have apparently vanished, and can the report be trusted? I do not think that four or five denarii out of a total of 1190 coins can be significant; like the Lycian drachms, which are found in hoards of denarii throughout the Roman world, these few denarii could have been circulating in Cappadocia because they were mistaken for Caesarean drachms. The presence of a denarius of Tiberius is certainly not typical of a late second century denarius hoard, and does not really help to prove a case for the circulation of denarii in Cappadocia. Something more secure is needed to support the claim.

One might hope that other, more complete, hoards will turn up to help clarify the picture, but as things stand at the moment I feel this is a somewhat vain hope. In the half century since Sydenham published his corpus, no significant hoards of

¹³ For the stability of the silver standard: K. Butcher, M. Ponting, “Silver Standards at Caesarea in Cappadocia”, in *Akten des Kolloquiums: Die kaiserzeitliche Münzprägung Kleinasien, München 27–30 April 1994* (forthcoming). Note also the composition of part of a large hoard of Caesarean coins which was published by A. Baldwin (*Arethuse* 4, 1927, 145–72). This ended with Hadrian (although the peak was under Vespasian), but it had a few coins of Archelaus and the Julio-Claudians, suggesting that if the Julio-Claudian coinage was indeed being removed from circulation, the process took some time to complete. In general, however, the hoard evidence is too poor to determine whether the “Baldwin” hoard is typical or atypical of second century hoards of Caesarean silver.

Caesarean silver from the region of ancient Cappadocia have been recorded in their entirety, with a reliable findspot and proper documentation of the individual pieces. The coins themselves, however, frequently appear on the market, and many must come from unrecorded hoards. If the present trend continues there is no reason to suppose that any hoard of Caesarean silver coins will ever be properly recorded. We may never know what Caesarean coins were really for, or how they were put into circulation, how they were used and where they circulated. I would be delighted to be proved wrong in holding this pessimistic view, but at the moment I believe this is extremely unlikely.¹⁴

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¹⁴ M. notes that in a similar manner no further information about the circulation of the cistophorus has emerged in the decade between the publication of his *Cistophori of Hadrian* (1980) and the completion of the typescript for the book reviewed here (1989: 87, n. 8).