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KOMMENTARE ZUR LITERATUR ÜBER ANTIKE NUMISMATIK

E. Levante

*Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. France 5. Département des Monnaies,
Médailles et Antiques. Mysie.*

Bibliothèque Nationale de France/Numismatica Ars Classica.
Paris/Zürich, 2001. xl pp., 136 pls. with descriptions. ISBN 3-9520369-4-3.

The first SNG appeared over 70 years ago:¹ its preface, by E.S.G. Robinson, gives a concise explanation of what the sylloge format is:

«The object of the publication ... is to reproduce by photography Greek coins contained in collections which have not been already published with adequate illustrations; to do, in fact, *mutatis mutandis*, what is being done for Greek Vases by the *Corpus Vasorum*. The British Academy is making a beginning with English collections: and it is hoped that the example may be followed in other countries.

The study of ancient, and particularly Greek, coins is now entering upon a new phase and must employ new methods. Most extant coins of outstanding importance, historically or otherwise, have been adequately published and discussed; and the general outlines have been laid down once for all. It remains to fill in the detail with the greatest richness possible. This can only be done through intensive work upon special periods and issues, in which large numbers of similar coins, common as well as scarce, are studied for minor varieties, and rigid chronological sequences are established on the evidence of die identities.

A few monographs on these lines have already been prepared, and the results obtained from them indicate how fruitful the new method of approach may prove. But before rapid progress can be made it is necessary to increase the amount of material easily available for study. At present the new method is only possible for one who has access to private collections and can visit foreign museums and amass a large apparatus of plaster casts. For it is essential that he should be able to study as many specimens as possible *at the same time*.

As a preliminary, photographic illustrations, of the kind here provided, will tell him where his material is to be found, and greatly diminish the number of plaster casts which he would otherwise require for examination. There are many collections in English universities and museums, not to speak of those in private hands, which can provide just the material required.»

These words are still relevant today. The intent was, and is, to have publications which are relatively inexpensive so that they could reach a wide scholarly audience (the first was priced at only 7/6),² and to provide illustrations of coins which are

¹ Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. Volume I, Part I. The Collection of Capt. E.G. Spencer-Churchill, M.C. of Northwick Park. The Salting Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum (London 1931).

² See J. ALLEN's review, NC 1931, p. 248.

truly useful for study. For example, coins in poor condition were specifically excluded (in the Copenhagen sylloge, which served as a complete catalogue of the collection, inferior pieces were recorded but not illustrated). Since then Greek sylloges have been produced covering public and private collections from Austria, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, and the only real change that has taken place is that the format has been reduced from folio to A4. While all the early sylloges illustrated the coins from casts, some of the newer ones have used direct photography in an attempt, often unsuccessful alas, to give the coins a more 'life-like' appearance. With a few unfortunate exceptions, what most of these sylloges also have in common is that they publish and illustrate coins from collections which were built up, sometimes over generations, by numismatists who were either private collectors or scholarly curators, and who chose the coins for their rarity, for their beauty, for their historical interest, or for their particularly fine condition (but usually for a combination of all those factors). This means that the coins within them are 'pre-selected' for their numismatic interest and importance (unlike the recent tendency of publishing excavation material in sylloge form, which results in the illustration of large numbers of coins of possible archaeological significance but usually of no numismatic importance).³

There are a number of reasons why this new volume from Paris is a perfect example of the classic sylloge. Firstly, the remarkable total of 2566 coins of Mysia it contains are mostly well-preserved (to put that in perspective, there are only 1126 in BMC Mysia, 728 in von Aulock, and 558 in Copenhagen). Secondly, to ensure that the 136 plates would be uniformly clear and usable almost all of the coins were illustrated from casts (one of the few which is photographed directly, 124A, a bronze of Astyra with the portrait of Tissaphernes, is illustrated with its obverse nearly upside down). Thirdly, there is a high proportion of numismatically interesting coins, in part because the collection began over 300 years ago and curators from Vaillant on carefully sought out pieces which they thought were truly important.

The volume begins with a preface by M. Amandry, the Conservateur général, and an introduction by E. Levante, the author, who candidly admits that specialists may find errors (*and they will*), especially in chronology, and asks their understanding. This is followed by a short bibliography and various useful indices: geographical (accompanied by a map), cities in alphabetical order, kings and satraps, Roman emperors and their families, types, symbols, names of magistrates on autonomous issues, names of magistrates (in Greek and Latin) on Imperial issues, remarkable inscriptions (in Greek and Latin), monograms (arranged by city), and countermarks. These are all well laid out and are quite complete (I did notice that the Cyzicene magistrate ΚΑ. CεBHPOY is missing, however).

Each coin is succinctly described in the usual way, though without die axes: this seems to be a quirk of the author's. While unexplained, the curious number found within parentheses after the weight is apparently a collection number, but,

³ See the author's review of the Agrigento Sylloge, SM 201, March 2001, pp. 15-16.

and I find this somewhat unfortunate, we are given very little information on the provenance or the date of acquisition of the coins themselves (dates are given for some acquisitions, and some names or sources are also included, albeit not identified, like S. de Ricci – an annotated collector/dealer/donor list like that found in the MEC might be a very useful addition to future Paris sylloge volumes).⁴

A detailed review of all the coins presented is impossible, and it seems best to confine myself to a few observations on subjects of personal interest. In general, one fascinating aspect of the Roman Provincial coins in Paris is how many die links there are between them. For example, at the relatively minor mint of Adramyrium there are three early bronzes of Caracalla (52-54): the first two are struck from the same dies, and the last shares the obverse (though since it was tooled and gilt in modern times EL does not confirm the obverse link). At Cyzicus a magnificent obverse die portraying Kore Soteira is paired with no less than 8 equally splendid reverses (561-569), all of real iconographic importance (that of Kore in a biga of centaurs, 569, is an absolute tour de force). In addition, the remarkable number of die linked or die identical coins that came to rest in the Paris Cabinet helps to show how few dies were used to produce them, and, thus, how small the original issues must have been.

Some surprising discoveries can be made thanks to the careful arrangement of the plates. Again at Adramyrium we have two curious coins: 57 is attributed to Caracalla and bears a bearded portrait bust; 62 has virtually the same bust and obverse legend but is attributed to Elagabalus. They surely can not be both. For reasons which are unexplained a number of obols previously assigned to an uncertain mint in Cilicia (bearing a satrapal head on the obverse and a protome of Pegasus on the reverse) have been reattributed to Lampsacus (1165-1168). This seems very unlikely: while the city's symbol is the forepart of Pegasus every certain issue of Lampsacus shows him with two wings, one raised facing the viewer and the other behind the horse's body, with the wing tip coming out behind the truncation (in Roman times this figure almost turns into a Capricorn, as 1285, 1288-1289). The protome on these obols only has a *single wing* (and the fabric of the coins looks wrong for northwest Asia Minor as well).

Also intriguing are some of the very worn coins this collection includes. Some are of interest for the history of collecting, since they were probably considered very rare and precious, despite their condition, when they were acquired long ago (2219-2222, very worn large bronzes of Caracalla from Pergamum, all seem to have the same degree of wear: the first two came from Cousinéry in 1821, while the second two have no source, but all four surely came from the same find). Others, like 2264 and 2270-2273, have obverses which are either completely effaced or mostly so, but have clear reverses. This hints at some sort of deliberate act, and it is possible that coins may have been struck <one-sided> in times of political unrest. Another group of coins which are of historical interest for the way coins were

⁴ As P. GRIERSON, M. BLACKBURN, *Medieval European Coinage (MEC) I. The Early Middle Ages (5th-10th centuries)*. (Cambridge 1986) pp. 399-414.

treated in the past are those pieces which have been reworked or tooled in modern times.

The amazing richness of the Paris Cabinet is exemplified by its possession of no less than 729 coins from Cyzicus, ranging from the city's earliest electrum and silver issues to a remarkable variety of Roman Provincial bronzes, including many with reverses of iconographical and historical importance (the erection of two huge agonistic crowns by a team of workers, 561-562, is particularly intriguing). Many will be disappointed that no attempt was made to refine von Fritze's arrangement of the city's electrum issues,⁵ or to provide a more up-to-date chronology for them. Their beginning is placed c. 600 (surely a generation too early), and most will find it hard to believe that 211-288 were all struck, as stated in the text, from 500-450 (surely a heading has dropped out). Paris possesses three staters bearing types not in von Fritze. The first, from the Prinkipo find (but not mentioned) is 352 with the types of Akanthos,⁶ the other two, 353 and 354, with, respectively, a free horse and a female head left, seem more than problematic: in fact, they both look like modern forgeries (the horse with its three legs seems stylistically impossible and both incuse reverses are entirely unconvincing). Another probable modern forgery is 188.

Pergamum is represented by 763 coins (plus a few struck in the names of Alexander III and Lysimachus listed elsewhere), including an extensive series of the large and impressive <medallic> bronzes that the city issued from the mid 2nd century AD until the reign of Valerian. However, in a surprising lapse, the listing begins with an electrum hekte that is more commonly, and more correctly, ascribed to Mytilene.⁷ Truly spectacular, however, is the now cleaned tetradrachm with the Gorgoneion obverse from the Larissa Hoard (1698),⁸ one of the most extraordinary of all mid-Hellenistic large silver coins.

The volume ends (2432-2566) with a listing of all those coins in the names of Alexander III, Philip III and Lysimachus struck in Mysian mints (Cyzicus, Lampsacus, Parium and Pergamum). Somewhat surprisingly the Lysimachi from Pergamum lack a reference to Carmen Arnold-Biucchi's die study of that mint.⁹ Even more surprisingly, while most of the silver of Alexander type have a reference to Price,¹⁰ none of the gold does. The gold staters in Paris are: 2432 (ascribed here to Cyzicus, it is missing from Price, and it would be interesting to know the reason for the attribution as that mint's characteristic fish or long torch symbols are lacking); 2433-4 (Lampsacus, Price 1358); 2435 (Lampsacus, Price 1374); 2436 (Lampsacus,

⁵ H. v. FRITZE, *Die Elektronprägung von Kyzikos*, *Nomisma* 7, 1912, pp. 1-38.

⁶ J. DESNEUX, *Les tétradrachmes d'Akanthos* (Bruxelles 1949), p. 110 and pl. XXXVII, A.

⁷ F. BODENSTEDT, *Die Elektronmünzen von Phokaia und Mytilene* (Tübingen 1981), Emission 71, dies Vs. c and Rs. γ.

⁸ M.J. PRICE, *The Larissa, 1968 Hoard* (IGCH 237), *Kraay/Mørkholm Essays*, pp. 233-243, number 239.

⁹ C. ARNOLD-BIUCCHI, *The Pergamene Mint under Lysimachos*, *Studies Price*, pp. 5-16. The three coins listed here, 2564-2566, are, respectively, CAB 16b, 34a and 71b.

¹⁰ M.J. PRICE, *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus* (Zürich/London 1991).

Price 1368); 2437 (Lampsacus, Price 1357, *this coin*); 2438 (ascribed to Lampsacus but actually from Tarsos, Price 3041); 2500 and 2503 (Lampsacus, Price P 13A); 2501 (Lampsacus, Price P 13); 2502 (Lampsacus, Price P 11); and 2504 (ascribed to Lampsacus but listed by Price under Abydos, P 31).

No doubt other minor problems can be found if sought for, but none can in any way detract from the importance of this most admirable publication. We now have a new and convenient source for the study of the coinage of one of the major districts of western Asia Minor, and our thanks must go to the Bibliothèque Nationale, the author and the publisher for providing it.

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