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# Two Recent Hoards of Cistophori

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For two hundred and seventy years the coins known as ‘cistophori’ have been discussed by numismatists and historians without a clear consensus on the date of their first issue being achieved. It is clear, however, that these unique coins were issued at Pergamum and a number of its dependencies in western Asia Minor by the ruling dynasty, the Attalids, and that when Pergamum was acquired by the Romans after the death of Attalus III in 133 BC they continued to be issued under Roman supervision with the same obverse and reverse types until the first century BC. Coins of the same weight standard then continued to be issued until the second century AD, although these were issued in the names of the reigning emperors. The ‘cistophoric’ issues were therefore a very important currency in the area in which they were issued.

Modern scholarly study of this coinage began in 1734 when AX Panel published his work *De Cistophoris*. Panel took the typical approach of the time, starting from the literary evidence and seeking to interpret it with minimal use of other material. Panel correctly identified the coin bearing the name of ‘cistophorus’, mentioned by the Roman writers Cicero, Livy and Festus, as the one which we know today by this name. It was so called because of its obverse type (*Fig 1*), a *cista mystica* (a basket from which a snake is emerging, alluding to the use of snakes in the mystery



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

cult associated with the god Dionysus) surrounded by an ivy wreath. The reverse type (*Fig 2*), a bow-case surrounded by two serpents, also has a religious significance, being perhaps in this case an allusion to the cult of Hercules at Pergamum.

Panel’s view, that the coinage was issued in connection with religious festivals and that the numbers shown on some of them were dates according to some religious era, was rejected later in the same century by Josef Eckhel in a chapter ‘De Numis Cistophoris’ in the fourth volume of his *Doctrina Numorum Veterum* (1792–8). Like all scholars of his period, Eckhel was ready to accept the evidence of ancient authors without question and therefore took as fact the report by the historian Livy (XXXVII, 46), that in a triumphal procession at Rome following a victory in Asia which took place in 190 BC, coinage denominated in terms of the cistophorus was among the booty carried by the victors. He therefore regarded 190 BC as a firmly fixed *terminus ante quem* for the first appearance of the cistophorus coinage. Some later scholars have, however,



Map. Showing the locations of cistophoric mints.

favoured later dates (for a synopsis of their opinions, see Mørkholm<sup>3</sup>, pp.172–3).

If the date of the introduction of this coinage remains uncertain, there is general agreement about its nature. The weight standard of the major coins of the series, which seem to have aimed at a theoretical weight of 12.6 gm, suggests that each was intended to contain an amount of silver equal to three contemporary drachmas of full Attic weight. But we have evidence from inscriptions found on the island of Delos, which preserve accounts of the second century BC, that the cistophori were called tetradrachms. This, and the fact that they did not circulate outside the area under the political control of Pergamum, suggests that they were overvalued. They might have been issued as tetradrachms in their own area of circulation but would have been worth no more than three drachmas outside this. The same system seems to have continued after Pergamum and its associated territories were annexed by the Romans in 133 BC

(explaining why the orator Marcus Tullius Cicero tried to have the allowance due to his brother Quintus as governor of Asia paid in Roman coinage rather than cistophori; see his *Letters to Atticus* II, 6, 2).

There is also general agreement about the date of the end of the Greek cistophori before the beginning of the Roman imperial series of what we call ‘cistophoric tetradrachms’ on the same weight standard, showing the head of the reigning emperor. This may be placed in 68/7 BC, because some of the later issues of the mint of Ephesus bear dates, and the latest recorded is in this year (Year 68 of the Roman Province of Asia).

Two major publications in recent times have provided information and statistics about this coinage based on hoard evidence. Kleiner and Noe noted six hoards containing about 450 cistophori which can be dated before 123 BC, and Kleiner<sup>3</sup> listed another nine hoards containing about 660 of these coins which can be placed after this date.

The two recently discovered hoards which are discussed here have greatly expanded the number of coins available for study, since they contain 1071 and about 1300 coins respectively. They tell us nothing about the date of commencement of the cistophorus coinage, since the coins in them are not the earliest ones to be issued, but provide some interesting statistics relating to the middle and later stages of the series.

The first hoard of 1071 coins, found in the year 2000, contains dated coins issued by the mint of Ephesus, the latest of which belongs to 132/1 BC. The breakdown of issues of different cities is shown in the Table.

These figures show clearly that up to the time when the hoard was closed, the mint of Pergamum outproduced all the other mints

<b>First hoard found in 2000</b>						
	Coins	Approx. % of Total				
Pergamum	341	31.8%				
Ephesus	327	30.5%				
Sardis	24	2.25%				
Tralles		252	23.5%			
Apameia	114	10.6%				
Laodiceia	13	1.2%				
<b>Total</b>	<b>1071</b>					
<b>Late cistophori Coin hoards</b>						
Kleiner (MN 23) lists 9 cistophori hoards as follows:						
	Pergamum	Ephesus	Tralles	Apameia	Laodiceia	Coins
1. Asia Minor (1955)	15	15	7	5	1	43
2. Asia Minor (1971)	4	4	1	–	–	9
3. Asia Minor (1935)	196	35	–	–	1(Smyrna)	232
4. Asia Minor (1970)	5	7	16	2	–	30
5. Asia Minor (1966)	20	3	2	–	–	25
6. Asia Minor (1961)	24	1	–	–	–	25
7. Asia Minor (1971)	22	8	–	1	1 (Laodiceia)	32
8. Karacebey (1929)	114	17	90	47	1 (Laodiceia) 2 (Nysa)	269 2
9. Hierapytna (1933)	11	uncertain numbers for other mints				11
					<b>Total</b>	<b>678</b>
<b>The numbers above include a proportion of pre 123 BC issues</b>						
Excluding hoard 9 above, there are:						
	Coins	Approx. % of Total				
Pergamum	400	60.6%				
Ephesus	90	13.6%				
Tralles		116	17.6%			
Apameia	55	8.3%				
Others	6	0.75%				
<b>Total</b>	<b>667</b>					

Table.

in its production of this coinage, which is not surprising, since Pergamum was the centre of political power and was probably responsible for distributing the greater part of any payments made to soldiers and for public works.

The second hoard, found in 2002, contained between 1,200 and 1,300 coins. It also contained dated coins from the mint of Ephesus, the latest of 90/89 BC. Included in

this hoard was a total of 459 Ephesus minted coins produced from 190 obverse and 351 reverse dies. The remaining coins include several hundred issued by the Pergamum mint (the latest dated by Kleiner<sup>3</sup> to the period 92–88 BC), several hundred of the Tralles mint, the latest bearing the mint mark *TRAL* (in Greek letters) and kithara (*Fig 3*), about six of the Laodiceia mint (*Fig 4*) and two or three of the Apameia mint with the



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

legend *KELAI* which Kleiner dates after 88 BC, but which, by comparison with the dated coins of Ephesus, should more probably be placed before 90, as Ashton and Kinns (footnote p 106) have shown. These hoards are of great significance because of their size, since they contain many more coins than are known from any other surviving hoard. Between them they contain about 2,400 coins, a number which surpasses the number recorded from all mints in scholarly literature up to the present time. Another reason for the importance of these hoards is that they contain some previously unknown coins, some of these filling gaps in the known annual series issued by the mint of Ephesus, others with new names of magistrates, or previously unrecorded letters indicating the month of issue.

The following list presents the new types that are known to have occurred in the first of these hoards, which was discovered in 2000:

#### **Ephesus mint**

AK, star and double cornucopiae (Classical Numismatic Group [CNG] sale 57, 415; *Fig 5*).

A [K erased], bee and double cornucopiae.

Aplustre and plow (CNG 57, 411).

Rudder.

Nike walking right on prow (CNG 57, 412; 58, 572; *Fig 6*).

Nike walking right on prow, ear above.

#### **Pergamum mint**

Dolphin and ME

Thyrsos M – A (CNG 57, 394; *Fig 7*).

Eagle on grapes (CNG 57, 390).

Owl on grapes (CNG 58, 544).

Prow.

Aplustre.

Winged lion (CNG 57, 383).

Aplustre with fillet (CNG 57, 389).

Hound (CNG 57, 388; *Fig 8*).

Thyrsos M / A (CNG 57, 393; *Fig 9*).

Palm.

#### **Sardes mint**

Eagle (CNG 57, 431).

BA-ΣY-AP, star (CNG 57, 425; *Fig 10*).

ΘE, M Φ monograms and sword? (CNG 57, 426).

ΘE, M Φ, BA monograms and sword? (CNG 57, 427).

#### **Tralles mint**

Artemis with bow (CNG 57, 444; 58, 590).

Star and double cornucopiae.

Spear point (CNG 60, 762, probably from this hoard).

#### **Apameia mint**

Eagle on thunderbolt (CNG 57, 458).

Head of Silenus (CNG 57, 455, 58, 626).

Serpent (CNG 57, 459, 58, 628).

Shield (CNG 57, 450).

Lyre (CNG 57, 451).

Dioscuri, cap and palm (CNG 57, 460; 58, 629).

Grasshopper (CNG 57, 454).

Δ-ΘI (CNG 57, 461).

Eagle head AP & MH (CNG 57, 462).

Eagle head A–A (CNG 57, 463).

MI, DH.

Medussa (CNG 57, 453).

#### **Laodiceia mint**

Lyre.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

Grape cluster (CNG 57, 466).

Γ and panther (CNG 57, 467; *Fig 11*).

The following list presents the new types that are known to have occurred in the second of these hoards, which was discovered in 2002.

#### **Ephesus mint**

Γ over B (year 3 over 2; unique? Private collection).

IE, cornucopiae (year 15, var. K 21).

K, cornucopiae (year 20; only 2 known. Private collection).

AK ball or globe (year 21; unique; believed

from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

BK winged caduceus (year 22; unique; believed from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

KA/AK, corn ear (year 21, var. K 25/6).

ZK, pilos (year 27).

Λ, rose (year 30. Private collection).

ΛE, chelys (year 35, var. K 39; unique. Private collection).

ΛE, helmet (year 35, var. K 39; believed from hoard, not listed).

MB, stag (year 42).

MB, eagle with palm (year 42; believed



Figure 11.

from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

MB, bull standing r (year 42; believed from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

MB, cock (year 42).

#### **Pergamum mint**

ΠΑΥ monogram – thyrsos (CNG 63, 421).

Bow and cicada (Private collection).

Thyrsos M/A (in 2000 hoard. Private collection).

EI (Private collection).

Serpent entwined cornucopiae – Y – A, monogram (cf. K&N Series 34. Private collection).

#### **Apameia mint**

Medusa head (cf. K&N 8–9 for period; one example in 2000 hoard and it was in CNG 57, 453. Private collection).

#### **Nysa mint**

A-MO jugate busts (Triton VI, 396).

#### **Tralles mint**

APTE – Athena helmeted bust r (Triton VI, 397, CNG 63, 527; noted in Waddington. Private collection).

ΑΠΟΑ– eagle to r (believed from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

ΔΑΠΑ – winged caduceus (believed from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

ΕΠΙΑΙ – Artemis head r (believed from hoard, not listed. Private collection).

MENA – diademed bust r (Triton VI, 398. Private collection).

ΔΙΟΝ – club (CNG 63, 528. Private collection).

MHTP – zebu bull r on meander pattern (CNG 63, 531. Private collection).

MENA – palm tied with wreath (CNG 63, 530; 64, 277; noted by Mionnet. Private collection).

ΦΙΛΑ – bee (CNG 63, 532. Private collection).

#### **Laodiceia mint**

ATI mono – winged caduceus (Triton VI, 425. Private collection).

The coins discovered in these hoards have allowed Ashton<sup>2</sup> to prove that for one or two years the mint of Tralles in Lydia placed the names of the Macedonian months on its coinage. This conclusion is confirmed by overstrikes on coins issued in previous months which were found in the first hoard (CNG 57, lots 445 (*Fig 12*), 448 and 449). Ashton was also able to identify what must be dates on the coinage of Apameia, an identification which replaces the earlier suggestion of Kleiner and Noe that these letters represent the abbreviated names of magistrates. Ashton also refined the chronology of the known issues of Apameia and noted a number of new issues from this mint.

The 2002 hoard also contained two specimens of a very interesting and rare cistophoric tetradrachm of Ephesus, the earliest which can be certainly identified as having been issued by a Roman magistrate, C Atinius Labeo, identified by Stumpf as the man who is perhaps best known in literature for attempting to have the censor Q Caecilius Metellus, a hero of the Fourth Macedonian War, thrown off the Tarpeian Rock at Rome for expelling him from the Senate when he was performing the duty of checking the membership of that body. The coin bears



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

the year date 13 of the Province of Asia, and was therefore issued in 122/1 BC (*Fig 13*). It is extremely rare, fewer than ten specimens being known (a nearly very fine example was sold recently, CNG 69, 396).

These hoards provide much more material for study and reinforce the established opinion that the cistophoric coinage was issued in large quantities. The general picture of minting is, however, far from clear. The total number of dies which may be identified as being produced from each mint varies considerably, to judge from the available evidence. If we consider the statistics provided by the 2002 hoard, together with those which are collected in an unpublished paper containing a die analysis for the mint of Ephesus for the period 134/3–90/89 BC, which was kindly made available to me by Philip Kinns, it seems that some 443 coins issued at Ephesus utilised 179 obverse dies. We would of course expect the output to vary from year to year: for example in the year 45, which was a busy year, the 62 coins recorded in this sample were struck from 13 different obverse dies.

If we apply the mathematical formula devised by Giles Carter to this hoard (see *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 28, 1983, pp. 195-206),  $2, n = 2$  to  $3d$  we reach the conclusion that the total of obverse dies used in that year was 14.6

(which in practice means 14 or 15 dies). Alternatively, if we apply the same formula to the figures given by Francois de Callataÿ for the obverse dies from Ephesus from the same year that were known to him (7 obverse dies for 11 coins), we would conclude that 15.5 dies were used in that year (in practice 15 or 16 dies). The figures show a good correlation with each other. Because of the greater number of coins involved, the 2002 hoard gives even better support for the general reliability of this formula.

To make another comparison, de Callataÿ recorded a total of 255 cistophori issued by the mint of Ephesus during the period 105/4–68/7 BC, compiling his list from published hoards and finds, auction sales, dealers' lists and catalogues of collections. He noted that these coins were struck from 141 obverse dies and calculated, using the same formula, that the total number of obverse dies used during this period of 38 years was  $255 \pm 16$ . This produces a hypothetical average of 6.7 dies a year, showing that the production for year 45 exceeded twice the norm.

Moving from the number of dies to estimated total production, the average number of coins that might be produced from a single obverse die has been variously calculated, but for a large silver coin of tetradrachm size, a figure of 10,000 may be regarded as not unreasonable (and higher figures have been suggested). If we use this

as a basis then at least 150,000 coins might have been produced at Ephesus in 90/89 BC, and that total production over the period 134/3 to 90/89 BC might have exceeded 2.5 million coins. The hoard evidence also shows that these coins remained in circulation for many years. Half of the dated coins in the 2002 hoard were at least twenty years old, and sixteen of them were at least forty-five years old. Some will have been hoarded or kept in city or regal treasuries, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that at least during the later part of this period the total number of cistophoric tetradrachms of Ephesus in circulation might have approached two million. Extending this argument further, the 2002 hoard contained up to 1,300 coins, of which 459 were minted at Ephesus. If the representation of different mints in this hoard is not markedly different from the general pattern of cistophori in circulation at the time that it was closed, the total number of all cistophori circulating in the early first century BC might have approached seven million (or more, if a greater number of coins per die was produced).

It is possible that both these hoards were buried for reasons connected with the activities of the Romans in the new province of Asia. The 2000 hoard (closed 132/1 BC) may be linked to the time of uncertainty and unrest in the Attalid kingdom that followed the death of Attalus III in 133 BC. Dying childless, he bequeathed his kingdom to Rome. His half-brother Andronicus contested this decision, and held out until 130 BC, taking the royal title of Eumenes III, but was captured, taken to Rome and put to death. Although some rebels continued to hold out until 126 BC, Rome was now effectively in control of the area. It seems highly likely that this hoard was buried at

this time, when Aristonicus was attempting to prevent the Romans from taking control of the territory that had been bequeathed to them.

The second hoard was again closed, and presumably buried, at a time of strife, when the king of the neighbouring territory of Pontus, Mithridates VI, had annexed Bithynia and Cappadocia and had then taken advantage of the fact that the Romans were heavily occupied with a war in their own Italian territory to begin a full scale attack on them in Asia (the so-called First Mithridatic War, which began in 89 BC). A Roman envoy who had earlier been sent to negotiate with him, Manius Aquillius, was captured and killed by having molten gold poured down his throat (a story which may give collectors of Roman gold coins minted after this period food for thought). At this time it is highly likely that Roman private citizens or officials in Asia would have taken the precaution of burying their private or public assets, and this gives a possible occasion for the deposition of this hoard, and the fact that it was not recovered.

There is one further point of interest which the new material provided by this second hoard reveals. As has been said previously, it may be calculated that a greater number of dies than usual were used to strike the coinage of 90/89 BC. There is no reason to suppose that the number of public servants was increased at this time and, at this time when the First Mithridatic War was beginning, it is most unlikely that any major public works were being undertaken. It seems therefore that the increase of the money supply to about two and a half times what was normal in that area must have been for military purposes—pay, equipment and supplies for

soldiers. It may well indicate that the size of the Roman armed forces stationed in Western Asia Minor during the time when Mithridates attempted to seize power in the region was more than doubled.

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