

A Newly Identified Mint Control Link in the Coinage of Andragoras and Sophytes

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An extensive array of the once rare silver coinage of Andragoras and Sophytes has appeared recently in numismatic trade. This has more than tripled the corpus of known specimens compared to that documented in the typology of the coinage struck by these two rulers in Parthia in the period c. 250s-238 BC.¹ For the most part, new types identified among the coins in commerce served to extend previously identified suites of mint controls to different denominations in each series, or more rarely and significantly to other series in the coinage.² A notable example of the latter is a newly identified anepigraphic Andragoras Series 4 (laureate head of Zeus r./eagle standing l., head reverted) diobol on the reverse of which is found the *kerykeion* symbol above a grape vine branch (Figure 1B).³ Previously, the latter was the only known symbol on Series 4 (Figure 1A). The addition of the *kerykeion* symbol to the repertoire of Series 4 mint controls characterizes this new type as an example of the previously unknown Series 4.3.

The *kerykeion* was the heraldic staff carried by the god Hermes, a son of Zeus and the herald of the gods. Its appearance on this and subsequent issues in the name of Andragoras (Series 6) and



A. Series 4.2

Roma Numismatics E-Live 4, 444.
10mm, 1.17g, 6h.



B. Series 4.3

Roma Numismatics XIV, 339.
11mm, 1.49g, 6h.



Detail

Figure 1. Obverse die linked Series 4-2 and 4-3 diobols. (Enlarged images)

¹ Taylor (2019): 49-51, table 1a, based on a corpus of the coinage compiled in 2017.

² Taylor (2020). Refer also the accompanying Catalogue of New Varieties.

³ Unworn, in an excellent state of preservation, the weight of the coin suggests that this is a heavy diobol, rather than a hemidrachm (1.80 grams). Taylor (2022) for the metrology of the coinage system.

Sophytes (Series 7 and 8) appears to have served both as a mint control and perhaps as a symbolic message, a portent of the arrival of news in the conflict with the invading Parni under Arsaces.⁴ Its presence serves to unify the emissions of the Athena/owl (Series 2), Athena/eagle (Series 3), Zeus/eagle (Series 4), Andragoras (Series 6) and those of Sophytes (Series 7 and 8) in a chronological progression of mint control links (Figure 2 and Table 1).



Series 2.18



Series 3.6 - 3.7



Series 4.3



Series 6.6



Series 7.1



Series 7.1



Series 8.1 - 8.3

Figure 2. Kerykeion control linked issues.⁵ (Not to scale)

⁴ Taylor (2021a) and Taylor (2019) for the symbolic narrative carried in the iconography of the coinage.

⁵ Images reproduced courtesy of Roma Numismatics (www.romanumismatics.com):

Series 2: Didrachm - Roma Numismatics XIV, 363.

Series 3: Drachm - Roma Numismatics XX, 328.

Series 4: Diobol - Roma Numismatics XIV, 339.

Series 6: Tetradrachm - Roma Numismatics XIV, 327.




Series 7: Tetradrachm - Roma Numismatics XIV, 364.

Series 7: Diobol - Noble Numismatics 127, 4336.

Series 8: Tetradrachm - Roma Numismatics XV, 348.

The newly identified Series 4.3 is obverse die linked to the example of Series 4.2 illustrated in Figure 1A. At the time it was struck the obverse die was in a later state of wear. In addition to worn detail on the primary devices of the die, it exhibits the effects of surface corrosion of the die, particularly evident in the ear, hair, and beard of Zeus. The relative chronology of the striking of these two coins carried in this die link validates the inference that the *kerykeion* symbol was introduced on the coinage after the grape vine branch. Following the introduction of the *kerykeion* symbol, the two symbols were used in combination for a brief sequence of issues (Series 2.18,⁶ Series 3.6-3.7⁷ and Series 4.3) after which the vine branch was dropped from the repertoire of mint controls so that the *kerykeion* alone is present on the later Series 6.6 (Andragoras)⁸ and Series 7 and 8 (Sophytes)⁹ issues (Figure 2 and Table 1).

Table 1. Mint control links.¹⁰

Mint Control	Series							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No mint control	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Grape bunch	x	x	x					
MNA	x	x						x
		x	x					
Vine branch		x	x	x	x			
		x	x			x		
			x			x		
<i>Kerykeion</i>		x	x	x		x	x	x

The Series 4.3 diobol joins the Series 2.18 didrachm and Series 6.6 tetradrachm among the recently identified issues bearing the *kerykeion* mint control,¹¹ all of which derive from the Andragoras-Sophytes Group of coins in commerce.¹² These newly identified types extend the *kerykeion* mint control linkage across all but two of the primary series in the coinage of Andragoras and Sophytes (Table 1). They serve to confirm the relative chronology of the issues (Table 2) during the period immediately preceding the conquest of Parthia by Arsaces in 238 BC.¹³

⁶ Taylor (2020): 54-55 and 62-63 for a summary of the development and progression in the application of mint controls to the coinage. In this progression we see a trend to increasing complexity, followed by a reversal. The former culminates in the recently identified Series 2.18 bearing three symbols on the reverse; the galley prow, the grape vine branch and the *kerykeion* mint controls. This corresponds closely to the peak of output from the mint, after which the control process was simplified resulting in a reduction of the number of reverse mint marks. The galley prow was the first to be dropped, followed by the grape vine branch, leaving the *kerykeion* as the sole mint mark on the reverse of the coinage of later series.

⁷ Taylor (2019): 50, 54.

⁸ Taylor (2020): 56.

⁹ Taylor (2019): 62-63.

¹⁰ Updated from Taylor (2019): table 2 to include newly identified control links between series.

¹¹ Taylor (2020) for the details of newly identified Series 2.18 and 6.6 coins.

¹² Termed the Andragoras-Sophytes Group in the *Roma Numismatics XIV 21 (September 2017) Catalogue*: 106 (lot 325) for an outline of this group of coins and its significance.

¹³ Lerner (1999): 13-32.

Table 2. Chronology of the primary series (Mint A).¹⁴

Date	Mint A						
BC	4Drachm	2Drachm	Drachm	½ Drachm	2Obol	1.5Obol	Obol
250s	Series 1						
	Series 2						
	Series 3						
c. 240	Series 6				Series 4		Series 5
	Series 7				Series 7		
239/8	Series 8						Series 8

The presence die corrosion in the devices defining the ear, hair, and beard of Zeus on the newly identified coin is indirectly of chronological significance. Evidence for the use of ferrous metal dies is undocumented on coinage struck east of the Tigris before the middle of the 3rd century BC.¹⁵ This provides further support for a downdated chronology applicable to the *kerykeion* control linked issues relative to the late 4th to earliest 3rd century origin postulated in prior scholarship.


Prototype Andragoras Series 4.2 diobol

1.17g, 10mm, 6h


Imitative drachm (Persic standard)

2.55g, 14mm, 7h

Roma Numismatics E-Sale 63 (7 Nov. 2019), lot 364.


Imitative diobol (Persic standard)

0.97g, 11mm, 7h

Roma Numismatics E-Sale 78 (17 Dec. 2020), lot 679.

Figure 3. Series 4 prototype and imitations. (Enlarged images)

¹⁴ Updated from Taylor (2019): table 3 to reflect newly identified control links between series, in particular the extension of the grape bunch mint control to the Series 3 drachms (Roma Numismatics e-Sale 95, lots 439–440), which establishes an earlier start to the mintage of Series 3 drachms than previously inferred.

¹⁵ Taylor (2021b) for the details and chronology of the transition from bronze to ferrous metal dies in the imitative victory coinage struck by the Ariaspi in the Sistan Basin (Drangiana) from the mid third century BC.



Figure 4. The Seleukid realm c. 300 BC.¹⁶

Another important aspect of the Series 4 diobol emission is revealed by some other coins in recent numismatic trade. It was the prototype for an imitative emission, examples of which are illustrated on Figure 3.¹⁷ Indisputably, the crude iconography of the imitative emission attempts to replicate that of the prototype. However, the imitative type was issued in two denominations, a drachm (2.55 g) and a diobol (0.97 g), apparently struck on the Persic weight standard based on a siglos of c. 5.6 grams.¹⁸ The Persic weight standard was used in Sogdiana from the reign of Euthydemus I of Baktria,¹⁹ and possibly earlier for an imitative coinage based on an Antiochos I prototype (male head / bridled horned horse head) struck in the name of Euthydemus(?), possibly when the latter governed the province in the period of Diodotos I and II of Baktria.²⁰ The Persic standard was also the standard of local civic coinage in western Asia Minor in the first half of the 3rd century BC²¹ from which some of the Greek settlers in Baktria and

¹⁶ Including the regions of Arachosia and Gedrosia that were subject to an administrative treaty with Chandragupta Maurya. Open Sourced from Forum Ancient Coins - Maps of the Ancient World www.forumancientcoins.com/ancient-maps/

¹⁷ Taylor (2021c): 223-224, catalogue nos. 3-4.

¹⁸ Thonemann (2016): 55; Hoover (2013): 11-12.

¹⁹ Hoover (2013): 11.

²⁰ Lerner (1996) for this interpretation. Newell (1938): 269, pl. LVI, 6, 10-12 for examples of the coinage.

²¹ Ellis-Evans (2019): 235-236; Thonemann (2015): 55 ... 'It is especially telling that many of the cities [of Asia Minor] took to minting two separate silver coinages alongside one another: local civic coins on the Persic weight-standard and international Attic-weight coinages with Macedonian royal types (Alexanders and Lysimachi). So the third-century silver issues of the small city of Magnesia on the Menander consisted of an attractive Persic-weight civic coinage ... alongside much larger issues of Attic-weight civic Alexanders... Apparently we are dealing with a pattern of twin-track minting, with Persic-weight civic coinages for 'horizontal' transactions within and between Greek cities of western Asia Minor, and Attic-weight Alexanders and Lysimachi being used for 'vertical' transactions with the great Hellenistic royal states (such as the payment of tribute).'

Sogdiana, notably Euthydemus,²² originated. This may explain the source for the introduction of this weight standard into formerly unmonetized regions along the north-eastern frontier of the Seleukid realm, regions without an official Seleukid mint. It provides a pointer to the chronology and origin of these imitative coins. They are attributed to an uncertain eastern mint, possibly in Sogdiana in the second half of the 3rd century BC. Plausibly, this imitative, anepigraphic, Zeus/eagle coinage had its origins with those who fled eastward from Parthia (Figure 4) to escape the invading Parni, eventually to settle in Margiana and/or Sogdiana, regions beyond the reach of an official Seleukid mint.

It is unusual to find a relatively minor epichoric issue providing the prototype for an imitative coinage. The latter provides an indirect pointer to the geographic origin of the Series 4 prototype (and the associated mint control linked coinage) in the region to north and west of the Hindu Kush. This must have occurred at a time when monetization of the economies of the region was spreading along the north-eastern frontier of the Seleukid empire, associated with changing demographics and an increasing Greek influence in the regional economies during the 3rd century BC. It joins a long list of circumstantial evidence²³ (Appendix) that points to a downdated mid-3rd century chronology for the *kerykeion* symbol linked issues of Andragoras and Sophytes.

APPENDIX

Factors bearing on chronology

1. Mint Controls

A progression of mint controls links the coinage to that bearing the legend ΑΝΔΡΑΓΟΡΟΥ (of Andragoras), a firm chronological peg, for Andragoras was the satrap who led Parthia to secession in the mid-3rd century BC.²⁴ By 238 BC Parthia fell to the invading Parni²⁵ under Arsaces I providing a *terminus ante quem* for Series 1-8.

2. Metrology

The coinage was based on a reduced Attic weight standard tetradrachm 17.00 grams which came into being in the east under Seleukid rule during the early 3rd century BC.²⁶ The system of weight adjustment involved increasing seigniorage reaching 15 percent in the small fractions, unknown in the Alexandrine or Seleukid coinage systems. It points to an epichoric coinage system of mid 3rd century origin.²⁷ A similar system of weight adjustment involving increasing seigniorage based on a tetradrachm of 16.6 grams was also used by Euthydemus of Baktria in the last quarter of the 3rd century BC.²⁸

3. Currency System

The prominence of the didrachm in a uniquely comprehensive range of silver denominations, and the complete absence of a token bronze component, is unique in the east. It represents an epichoric coinage system in a newly monetized economy, apparently unaccepting of token bronze denominations. This was atypical of the coinage of the Macedonian and subsequent Seleukid empires, while the didrachm was not a major component of Alexander's coinage and is absent in the Seleukid coinage system. Such a coinage system can only have come into being well after the collapse of the Macedonian empire²⁹ and is consistent with the 3rd century phenomenon outlined by Thonemann³⁰ whereby many cities and states implemented dual currency systems; one component based on the international Attic standard for 'vertical' transactions with other Hellenistic royal states, and another, the epichoric component on a lighter weight standard for 'horizontal' transactions within and between cities in an epichoric currency union.

²² Hoover (2013): 11; Holt (1999): 129, footnote 12. Reputedly, Euthydemus was a native of Magnesia in Asia Minor from where he migrated to Baktria.

²³ Taylor (2021a).

²⁴ Taylor (2019): 62-63; Taylor (2020); Taylor (2021a).

²⁵ Lerner (1999): 13-32.

²⁶ Taylor (2022); Taylor (2019): 66-75.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid based on data in Glenn (2020).

²⁹ Taylor (2019): 74-75; Taylor (2022): 54-75.

³⁰ Thonemann (2015): 55 and 121-127.

4. Iconography

The development of the volute termination on the helmet visor depicted on Series 2 imitative Athenian owl parallels an identical development in the Athenian prototype that occurred early in the 2nd quarter of the 3rd century BC; Athenian Heterogeneous Groups B and C.³¹ This iconographic development occurred contemporaneously with the adoption of inverted adjustment of the die axes, identical to the same change in fabric that is observed on Athenian Heterogeneous Groups B and C, strengthening the argument for the association of the iconographic development on Series 2 with that of the Athenian prototype.

5. Sophytes' Helmet

Six fundamental differences of detail invalidate the previously proposed chronological nexus with the Susa victory coinage of the early 3rd century BC.³² The portrayal of Sophytes helmet is that of a fully developed Attic military helmet of the 3rd century BC, identical in form to that depicted on a piece of statuary found in the Arsacid royal palace at Nisa.³³ The latter is thought to portray a Greek soldier vanquished by Arsaces.³⁴ The appearance of the laurel wreath on the helmet of Sophytes signifies his apotheosis. Apotheosis in numismatic iconography was only developed as an acceptable practice in the course of the 3rd century BC.³⁵

6. Ferrous dies

The effects of die corrosion (rust) are observed on some examples of Series 2, 3 and 4 suggesting a date no earlier than around the mid-3rd century BC when ferrous dies were introduced in a number of mints in the east.³⁶ Corrosion effects, indicative of ferrous metal dies, commenced on the coins of Series 2 associated with the change in coin fabric and iconography noted under point 4 above. Evidence of die rust is also found on some of the gold staters of Andragoras.³⁷

7. Hoard Evidence

Four documented hoards, all reconstructed from material in commerce, contain components of the coinage (Series 1-3 and 6).³⁸ None derive from secure, controlled contexts. The earliest datable of these hoards were the Oxus Treasure³⁹ and the 1973/4 Ai Khanoum Hoard⁴⁰ that closed in the early and mid-second century BC respectively. These provide a vague *terminus ante quem*, for the coinage of Andragoras and Sophytes, but there is nothing in the formally documented hoard record to conclusively establish the attribution, or date of the coinage. However, from late 2017 the Andragoras-Sophytes Group entered the numismatic market, clearly a hoard in commerce.⁴¹ The composition of this hoard included all components of Series 1-8, in numbers previously unseen, with the later series in lightly worn, or unworn state. The hoard content suggests a close chronologic and geographic association between Series 1-8. It also included a worn example of a Seleukos I elephant chariot type tetradrachm from Susa (SC 177.5),⁴² the latest datable coin in the hoard, one that indicates a *terminus post quem* of 295-280 BC for the burial of hoard.⁴³ The worn example of SC 177.5 contrasts with the relatively large number of unworn components of the Andragoras and Sophytes coinage that suggest that the latter coins post-date SC 177.5.

8. Imitations

The Zeus / Eagle iconography of Series 4 served as the prototype for an imitative emission of drachms and diobols struck on the Persic weight standard, used in Sogdiana from the second half of the 3rd century BC.

³¹ Taylor (2019): 53; Taylor (2021a): 4-9.

³² Ibid: 9-11.

³³ Ibid: 11-13.

³⁴ Olbrycht (2017): 9.

³⁵ Taylor (2021a).

³⁶ Taylor (2021b).

³⁷ c.f. BM 1879,0401.2, and Roma Numismatics XXI, 307.

³⁸ Taylor (2019): 75-76, table 7.

³⁹ Bellinger (1962): 66, nos. I(26)-2(27), respectively a gold stater of Andragoras and a Series 6.1 tetradrachm.

⁴⁰ Holt (1981): 13, no 17 an Athena/eagle Series 3.3 drachm.

⁴¹ Roma Numismatics Auction XIV 21 September 2017 Catalogue, p. 106-122 ... 'The following 43 lots (325-367) represent a highly important group of coins which apparently came to light in the Oxus region in the 1960s, taken to Germany in 1975 when the owners emigrated there, and subsequently exported to the US. ...Consigned now after half a century of having remained in the possession of the same family, these coins have significant implications for the chronology and sequence of the coinage of Bactria and the surrounding satrapies.'

⁴² Roma Numismatics e-Sale 40, 262

⁴³ Roma e-Sale 40 (28 Oct. 2017), lot 262 ... 'This is a key coin in the exceptionally important group presented for the first time in Roma Numismatics XIV (lots 325-367) which helped to redate the coins of both Andragoras and Sophytes to the mid-third century BC.'

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