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A SHORT NOTE ON A CERTAIN SAMARIAN COIN TYPE

ABSTRACT: This article focuses on a Samaritan coin issue that portrays a biga carrying people clad in Iranian apparel on the obverse and an Iranian horseman on the reverse. It was struck in the name of BDYHBL and the forerunners of the type can be traced to Sidonian coinage and Achaemenid-influenced minor arts. It is possible that the issuer of the coin held a military or an administrative post in the Achaemenid realm, which could explain why this and other issues bearing his name contained motifs drawn from its iconography.

The most striking feature of Samaritan coinage during the Achaemenid Period is the variety of iconographic types. The Samaritan engravers drew inspiration for monetary images from varied sources.¹ At least some of them can be found in the general iconographic Achaemenid-Iranian tradition.² Amongst these numerous iconographic types, there is a particular group of images of Iranian horsemen.³ All such examples are listed in the classic work by Y. Meshorer and Sh. Qedar⁴ and these researchers have correctly indicated iconographic prototypes for most Samaritan coin images containing Iranian cavalrymen.⁵ I have discussed the iconographic background of two of these issues.⁶

¹ Mildenberg 1996, pp. 129–130, 134–135; Meshorer and Qedar 1999, pp. 32–68; Mildenberg 2000, pp. 378–379.

² Cf. Bodzek 1999; 2000; 2007; 2011b.

³ I am aware that attribution to the Samaritan mint of all the coins gathered under the label “Samaritan coinage” is questionable and that some of the coins are currently labeled with the term “Middle Levantine” (see Fischer-Bossert 2013, p. 205). However, I will retain with the traditional nomenclature.

⁴ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, nos 15, 40, 123–125, 197.

⁵ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, p. 54.

⁶ Bodzek 1999; 2000; 2007.

As I briefly stated in my review of Meshorer and Qedar's work, Samarian engravers employed two basic image types to depict Iranian riders.⁷ The first type, which is far more numerous, presents a galloping horse with the horseman brandishing a javelin (Fig. 2). We know of five Samarian issues which bear this type of image. The horseman is depicted both alone⁸ and in more complex battle or hunting scenes.⁹ The second iconographic type is known only from one issue.¹⁰ This rider is also depicted in a flying gallop, but his sword or short staff is held vertically (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Samaria, Bedyehibel, AR obol, c. 355/346–333 BC. © Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XVIII, Lot: 214- <http://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=272229>. Scale 5:1.

The iconographic background of the first type is relatively well established. The image of a horseman brandishing a javelin is one of various interregional

⁷ Bodzek 2005, p. 180. In the general classification of Iranian-clad horsemen depictions on Achaemenid satrapal coins I have identified three main types: Type I represents a horseman holding reins, a flower or a whip or, in some cases, transversally situated spears; his horse is walking or, in some cases, depicted in short gallop (cf. Bodzek 2011a, pp. 243ff, Pl. II, 4; XII, 1–2, 4, 6, 8, 12–14 (a horseman with a flower), 15–16 (whip), 10–11 (spear); Type II is a horseman brandishing a javelin and the horse is shown in a short or elongated gallop (cf. Bodzek 2011a: p. 248f., Pl. II, 2–2b, II 15–15b, IX, 9–12–14–14b, XII, 17–21; Type III shows the horseman in elongated gallop, holding a short staff or a sword vertically (cf. Bodzek 2011a, p. 253, Pl. XI, 22). In the present paper I focus on the last type.

⁸ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, nos 40, 125 and 197.

⁹ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, nos 123, 124 respectively.

¹⁰ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, no. 15; Schultz and Zahle 2002, no. 1224; Fischer-Bossert 2013, p. 211, no. 93. In the latter publication, the coin is included in the so-called “Middle Levantine” group.



Fig. 2. Samaria, AR tetartemorion, c. 360-333 BC. © Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 251, Lot: 94 – <http://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=181169>. Scale 7:1.

coin types used by satraps and other officials of the Achaemenid administration. It is labelled “type II” in the classification of monetary depictions of Iranian horsemen and was used by various people striking coins in different regions of the Achaemenid state, from Mysia to Transeuphratene and perhaps even Egypt.¹¹ The precise numismatic inspiration for the depiction of a lone horseman on Samarian coins is undoubtedly the well-known issue of the “Great King with bow/Iranian horseman” type, as has been indicated by Y. Meshorer and Sh. Qedar.¹² In the case of the battle and hunting scenes, forerunners can be sought in ‘Greco-Persian’ glyptics and, more broadly, in Achaemenid-inspired monumental art.¹³

It is far harder to discover a direct prototype for the second Samarian type. No other coin is known depicting an Iranian rider in this manner. As a result, the Samarian issue seems to be unique and would therefore be the sole representative of ‘type III’.¹⁴ At first glance, it appears to be a combination of types I and II. Type I is found mostly on Cilician coinage (Fig. 3), although one issue bearing this type was struck in the name of Tissaphernes in Xanthus in Lycia.¹⁵ On this type, horses are depicted either walking or in a short gallop, while the riders either hold the reins in both hands or a flower or a whip.¹⁶ The posture of the horseman depicted on Cilician and Lycian coinages could perhaps have influenced the Samarian issue under discussion. However, the depiction of a horse in a flying gallop could

¹¹ Cf. Bodzek 2011a, pp. 241ff, Pl. II, 2–2b, II 15–15b, IX, 9–12–14–14b, XII, 17–21; Idem 2014. See above note 10.

¹² Meshorer and Qedar 1999, p. 54.

¹³ Cf. Bodzek 1999; 2007 respectively.

¹⁴ Bodzek 2011a, p. 253; Pl. XII, 22).

¹⁵ Cf. Bodzek 2011a, pp. 241ff, Pl. II, 4.

¹⁶ Cf. Casabonne 2004, Pl. 2, 9–13 and 20–27 – Cilicia; Hurter 1979, Pl. 8, no. 6 – Lycia.

also be influenced by the horses on Samarian coins with type II images, which are presented in a similar fashion.¹⁷ It should be indicated at this point that such details as the horse's body proportions (especially the head, decoration of the mane, horsetail and bridle), the reins and the saddle cloth are depicted in exactly the same manner as on other Samarian coins with Iranian horseman imagery (i.e. type II). However, is this combination theory a satisfactory explanation?



Fig. 3. Tarsos, Syennesis?, AR stater, c. 410 BC. © Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XVIII, Lot: 59 – <http://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=272074>. Scale 3:1.

Although the image under discussion is unknown from Achaemenid coinage, this does not mean that it is not present in the body of Achaemenid art in general. Amongst the items discovered in the famous treasury of Oxus was a golden disc with the image of an Iranian horseman depicted in a similar posture as on our coin.¹⁸ (Fig. 4) Therefore, the inspiration for the horseman image on Samarian coinage should most probably be sought in Achaemenid minor arts.

The obverse of the discussed Samarian issue bears the image of a biga moving at a gallop left with two figures: a charioteer and a passenger. Both are wearing Iranian costumes. The driver is wearing a sleeved shirt (sarapis) and tiara and is holding the reins with his left hand whilst raising a whip with his right one. The passenger is standing in a rigid posture and is probably also wearing a tiara and most probably a coat (candys?). He probably holds an unidentified object in his right hand. His left hand is visible behind him. Unlike certain Greek mints (particularly those in Sicily), the image of a chariot does not occur very often in Achaemenid or Achaemenid-influenced coinage. Interestingly, one other example of a chariot exists in Samarian coinage.¹⁹ In this case, however, the chariot is fac-

¹⁷ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, Pl. 7, 40; 18, 125 and Pl. 27, 197.

¹⁸ Dalton 1905, p. 91, no. 36, fig. 53.

¹⁹ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, no. 74.



Fig. 4. Gold disc with Iranian Horseman depiction. © Dalton 1905: 91, no 36, Fig. 59.

ing right and the horses are walking, but the driver is depicted in exactly the same posture (Fig. 6). The passenger on this issue is holding an unidentified object. This coin is attributed to Mazday due to the MZ characters which appear on the reverse.²⁰ Both Samarian issues probably borrowed their images from the coins of Sidon, as has been indicated by Y. Meshorer and Sh. Qedar.²¹ However, it should be stressed that such images also occur in both Greco-Persian and court-Persian glyptics.²² Especially noteworthy are images on some Daskyleion bullae depicting a four-horses chariot.²³ The chariot is facing left, the horses are in a gallop and the charioteer is depicted in a very similar posture as the one on the discussed Samarian coin (Fig. 5). These similarities may indicate that although the images on the Sidonian coins should be treated as the most probable prototypes for the Samarian coin, one should bear in mind that the theme discussed here could have spread through other categories of works of craft, for example, glyptics.

The coin bears the legend BDYHBL.²⁴ This personal name is not attested except on coins. This Bedyehibel was probably a military or administrative official. Achaemenid (or Achaemenid-influenced) types dominate on the five issues struck in the BDYHBL name.²⁵ The same applies to another issue that bears the

²⁰ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, pp. 25–26.

²¹ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, pp. 53–54. There were also other Sidonian coin types imitated in Samaria, cf. Mildenberg 2000, p. 379; Wyssmann 2014, p. 228.

²² Cf. Kaptan 2002, Vol. II, DS 66–67, Pls. 199–203; Pope and Ackerman 1938, Vol. IV, Pl. 123A; Zazoff 1983, Pl. 38, 1; Curtis and Tallis 2005, p. 221, no. 398.

²³ Kaptan 2002, Vol. II, DS 67, Pl. 202–203.

²⁴ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, pp. 21–22.

²⁵ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, nos 13–17; cf. Fischer-Bossert 2013, p. 211 and nos 89–95.



Fig. 5. Persian chariot. Impression of an Achaemenid period seal – drawing by Anna Bochnak after Kaptan 2002: 198, Fig. 202.



Fig. 6. Samaria, AR, obol, c. 360-333 BC. © Classical Numismatic Group, Mail Bid Sale 64, Lot: 418. Scale 5:1.

abbreviated legend BOD, which could perhaps also be linked to BDYḤBL.²⁶ All together, the motifs used in the Bedyehibel coinage form the whole that reflects the ethos of the Achaemenid nobility and other members of the Achaemenid military and administrative class. In the case of the coin under discussion, the motifs of Iranian horseman and the chariot belong to battle and hunting themes. Both reflect the important components of the royal Achaemenid ideology,²⁷ which was followed by satraps, junior officials and local nobility.

All specimens of the issue, known to me and with an established origin, came from the Nablus hoard that was hidden c. 333 BC.²⁸ On the other hand, the dis-

²⁶ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, p. 21.

²⁷ Cf. Briant 2002, pp. 225 ff.

²⁸ Thompson, Mørkholm and Kraay 1973, no. 1504; Meshorer and Qedar 1999, p. 71; Elayi and Elayi 1993, p. 239. The pieces are listed in Meshorer

cussed coins, similarly to the other issues inscribed with BDYHBL, are absent in the Samaria Hoard hidden about 355 or 346 BC.²⁹ This allows us to date the general minting activity of BDYHBL between 350/340 and 333 BC. The seven specimens of the discussed issue known to me were struck with two obverse and three reverse dies.³⁰ This has led to the additional conclusion that the issue was comparatively short-termed, similar to the other struck in Bedyehibel's name.

Perhaps the five different types of the BDYHBL coins should be treated as annual issues.

In summary, the Samarian coin under discussion demonstrates the iconographic motifs employed by local engravers in the area. It is also the further evidence of the habit of drawing inspiration for monetary images from varied sources which was fairly common in Samarian coinage production.³¹

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and Qedar 1991, p. 51, no. 35. These are: a specimen in Copenhagen (Schultz and Zahle 2002, no. 1224); a specimen in Paris (Meshorer and Qedar 1991, no. 35) and a specimen published in Meshorer and Qedar (1999, pl. 2, no. 15).

²⁹ Meshorer and Qedar 1999, p. 71; Elayi and Elayi 1993, p. 230. The only exception is the mentioned above hemiobol issue with legend BOD present in the Samaria Hoard (Meshorer and Qedar 1999, p. 21). The different legend form could indicate the other issuer or the other stage of minting as well as the administrative or military activity of Bedyehibel.

³⁰ Additionally to the exemplars listed in note 4 one can add a specimen from UBS Gold & Numismatics, Auction 52, 11.09.2001, Lot: 124; a piece from Numismatica Ars Classica, Auktion 64, 17 May 2012, Lot: 1608; a coin from Heritage World Coin Auction March 2012 Signature Sale, 8 March 2012, Lot: 20053 and one from Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XVIII, 6 January 2015 Lot: 214.

³¹ Cf. Gitler 2011, p. 105; Fischer-Bossert 2013, p. 205.

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KRÓTKA NOTATKA O PEWNYM SAMARYJSKIM TYPIE MONETARNYM

(Streszczenie)

Artykuł dotyczy samaryjskiej emisji z wizerunkiem bigi z postaciami w irańskich strojach na awersie oraz przedstawieniem „irańskiego jeźdźca” na rewersie (Meshorer i Qedar 1999: nr 15). Pierwowzorów dla opisywanej emisji należy szukać w mennictwie Sydonu (awers) oraz drobnej plastyce z kręgu achemenidzkiego (rewers). Moneta nosi inskrypcję BDYḤBL (Bedyehibel) interpretowaną jako imię własne emitenta, którego osoba nie jest znana poza mennictwem. Dotychczas zostało zarejestrowanych pięć emisji bitych w jego imieniu. Wszystkie nawiązują do repertuaru ikonograficznego sztuki Achemenidów. Przypuszczalnie Bedyehibel pełnił funkcję wojskową lub administracyjną na obszarze państwa Achemenidów, prawdopodobnie w Samarii.

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