

# L'histoire des guerres mithridatiques vue par les monnaies [François de Callataÿ]

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François de Callataÿ

*L'histoire des guerres mithridatiques vue par les monnaies*

Numismatica Lovaniensia 18

Département d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de L'Art Séminaire de Numismatique

Marcel Hoc, Louvain-la-Neuve 1997. 480 Pages,

with 6 Indices, 5 Maps, 54 Plates.

Dépot légal/1997/1900/04. Fr.B.

François de Callataÿ is a numismatic scholar of immense energy and keen fascination with statistical evidence. These attributes are everywhere apparent in his ambitious *L'histoire des guerres mithridatiques vue par les monnaies*, which undertakes the complex task of assembling detailed die studies of some thirteen roughly contemporary monetary series and interpreting them in the context of surviving historical evidence for the reign and military activities of Mithridates VI Eupator. By seeking to relate the individual coinages to one another and the historical events of the Mithridatic wars, de Callataÿ creates an evidential fusion in which the carefully integrated whole is truly greater, historically richer, and logically more compelling than the simple sum of the individual studies included.

It seems fair to say at the outset that this type of regional rather than individual study has tremendous potential to engage the more arcane, technical, and often seemingly disconnected numismatic information gained from individual die studies into the broader historical and economic framework responsible for the original production of the coinages studied. The question that the reader needs to have answered, however, is just how far de Callataÿ's study succeeds in its engagement of precise numismatic evidence into the economically vague and highly subjective (i.e. pro-Roman) historical sources. But to answer this question, we first have to determine whether or not the selected numismatic evidence gathered by de Callataÿ is comprehensive enough to provide valid economic insights into the reconstruction of contemporary events and thereby support the conclusions offered in the book's one-hundred and eighty-four page «Essai de synthèse historique.»

L'Histoire is a revised and somewhat expanded version of de Callataÿ's 1988 doctoral thesis, *Histoire économique et monétaire des guerres mithridatiques*, written at the Université Catholique de Louvain for the doctorate degree in Archéologie et Histoire de l'Art. The research for the study was originally done between 1985 and 1987 under the direction of Professor Toni Hackens. Interestingly - and readers may want to take note of this - between 1987, when de Callataÿ first offered the results of his investigation, and 1993, when the numismatic research of the present study was concluded, very little new material was added. In his Preface, de Callataÿ states that 2,910 examples are included in the study; and he provides totals for each of the thirteen coinages catalogued in detail. The largest single study, including a reported total of 54 staters, 549 tetradrachms, and 10 drachms, is that of Mithridates VI Eupator himself. But compared to these totals, the dissertation lists some 51 staters, 510 tetradrachms, and 11 drachms. If we take just the tetradrachms, it seems noteworthy

that among the 39 new examples included in the book, there are 4 new obverse dies and 21 new reverse dies. To put it differently, we can say that a mere 7% increase in the number of examples has resulted in a 2.5% increase in the number of different obverse dies; and this suggests that there is still a significant percentage of the original number of obverse dies unrecorded in de Callataÿ's catalogue.

The same conclusion can be reached by looking at the statistical summaries which de Callataÿ has very helpfully provided for each coin type catalogued in the study. In the case of the tetradrachms of Mithridates, the crucial table is the «Estimation du nombre original de coins» (pp. 26-27). This table shows that 62, or 39%, of the 157 obverse dies of Mithridates' tetradrachm issues are known from single examples and furthermore that the survival ratio (i.e. the total of known examples divided by the number of different obverse dies) is overall a rather suspect 3.5.

The importance of these statistics for properly evaluating the reliability of de Callataÿ's reconstructions of the thirteen coinages catalogued in his study can perhaps be best understood from a comparison of recent die studies of the silver coin types of Aesillas the Quaestor (ca.90-70 B.C.). In 1985, Roger Fisher published a limited die study of the Aesillas issues (ANSMN 30, pp. 69-87) that identified 76 obverse dies from 321 examples. In 1996, de Callataÿ produced a more thorough die study of the Aesillas types (Studies in Honour of Vladimir and Elvira Eliza Clain-Stefanelli [Louvain-la-Neuve], pp. 113-151) that identified 84 obverse dies from some 550 examples. What this means is that de Callataÿ increased the number of known obverse dies by 8 from the examination of 229 more examples than Fisher. A 72% increase in the number of examples studied thus yielded about 10% more of the original obverse dies. De Callataÿ likewise increased the survival ratio from Fisher's 4.2 to 6.6; and these improvements in the overall body of evidence permitted de Callataÿ to rearrange the order of the whole Aesillas coinage in a way that is far closer to the truth than any previous study.

There is, however, another dimension to this particular example. In a forthcoming study of the Aesillas coinage (Silver Coinage with the Types of Aesillas the Quaestor, ANS Numismatic Studies 22, 1998), this reviewer has gathered together 1001 tetradrachms in the types of Aesillas. This has produced 102 obverse dies and an overall survival ratio of 9.6. Here again, however, the increased yield in terms of new obverse dies has been modest. From an 82% increase or nearly double the number of examples in de Callataÿ's study, the number of obverse dies has increased only 21%. And while it might seem that an exhaustive collection is unnecessary given the relatively small number of new obverse dies uncovered, in fact, this is not the case. The latest study's inclusion of over 450 more examples than de Callataÿ and about 700 more than Fisher has produced far more information than previously available about the internal organization of the coinage. Perhaps most important are 33 new reverse die links that provide critical evidence about the relative chronology of the obverse dies and their correct sequence of issue. This outcome should serve as a warning that survival ratios lower than 8 or 9 to 1 may not be sufficient, even when the order and internal arrangement of issues is not seriously in doubt, to establish beyond question the original rhythm and volume of a given coinage; and this should be kept in mind when evaluating the relative certainty and reliability of de Callataÿ's historical conclusions.

To make this point perfectly clear, we can summarize de Callataÿ's statistical findings:

Issuing Authority	Number	Obv. Dies	Survival Ratio
1. Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus	54 staters	12	4.5
«	549 tetradr.	157	3.5
«	10 dr.	3	3.3
2. Late Kings of Bithynia	435 tetradr.	243	1.8
3. Posthumous Alexanders : Odessos	226 tetradr.	36	6.3
4.    «    : Mesembria	490 tetradr.	52	9.4
5. Posthumous Lysimachus: Byzantium	315 tetradr.	177	1.8
6.    «    : Istros*	14 staters	1	14.0
7.    «    : Callatis	48 staters	6	8.0
8.    «    : Tomis	58 staters**	7	8.3
9.    «    : Byzantium	13 staters	8	1.6
10. Late Issues of Alexandria Troas	37 tetradr.	11	3.4
11. Late Cistophors of Ephesus	255 cistophori	141	1.8
12. Late Kings of Cappadocia	14 tetradr	1	14.0
«	159 dr.	40	4.0
13. Tigranes the Great of Armenia	241 tetradr.	49	4.9

\* On Preface p. x, de Callataÿ gives a total of 124 for the combined issues of posthumous Lysimachus staters from Istros, Callatis, Tomis, and Byzantium in his catalogue. However, on p. 144, he gives 132 for the total. Both totals are incorrect. The total for the staters examined from the four mints should be 133.

\*\* De Callataÿ's arithmetic is wrong on p. 144. The total for Tomis should be 58 not 57.

What de Callataÿ's catalogue and statistical analyses provide is thus both an intensive treatment of the available evidence and a clear signpost to anyone interested about exactly where further study is needed. The late posthumous Lysimachus issues of Byzantium, the late regal issues of Bithynia, and the Roman cistophoric issues of Ephesus all have survival ratios below 2.0. All are large and regionally important coinages about which de Callataÿ's study should be considered an important step forward but certainly not the last word.

The second half of de Callataÿ's work (pp. 235-419) offers an historical account of the kingdom of Pontus under Mithridates VI Eupator from his birth ca.133 to his death in 63 B.C. Much of the detailed and heavily footnoted historical discussion seems more appropriate to the original dissertation than an attempt at reconstructing the financial history of the Mithridatic wars; but lodged in the somewhat overloaded historical narrative are important numismatic discussions: Mithridates' efforts to standardize the coinages throughout his expanding empire (pp. 249-252); the enormous increase in the production of new coins by the belligerents between 93 and 88 (p. 283); the order of Athenian New Style coinage during the years 98 and 83 and comparison of Athenian, Bithynian, and Pontic production (pp. 303-312); comparison of the production of new coinage in the Eastern Mediterranean during

the first half of the first century (pp. 366-368). These discussions, along with a host of other specific reflections on individual numismatic issues connected with the historical events of the period, communicate a sensitive and intelligent command of both material and methodology.

The book concludes with a speculative attempt to reconstruct the numismatic investment required of the belligerents to fight the Mithridatic wars. Working back from the reported numbers of mercenary soldiers involved to the volume of new issues required to meet the payroll of the armies, de Callataÿ produces tentative estimates for volume of new coins required from the belligerents.

At the end, an extensive list of collections consulted, a bibliography, six indices, and five maps provide excellent reference material for the reader. As is the case with the material in the catalogue, the bibliography includes mostly works published before 1988; and de Callataÿ's exhaustive list of his own publications up to 1996 only makes this general cut off more obvious. One expects, for example, to see Christian Habicht's 'Zu den Münzmagistraten der Silberprägung des Neuen Stils', *Chiron* 21, 1991, pp. 1-23 in the bibliography; but it appears only in a footnote to the discussion of the Athenian New Style issues (p. 305, n.177). The fifty-four plates, on the other hand, are excellent not only in their ample coverage of the material in the catalogue but also in the use of enlargements to clarify critical points that would otherwise be difficult for the reader to see and appreciate. This is especially true in the enlargement of an overstrike of a posthumous Alexander of Odessos on Thasos (pl. xxvii, E; p. 117, with n. 55), an Ephesian cistophor (pl. xlii, E; p. 172, with n. 18), two Athenian New Style obverses from the same die (pl. lii, F, G; p. 304, with n. 173), and an autonomous Thasian reverse with a complex monogram that must belong to Q. Brettius Sura (pl. liii, B; p. 299, with n. 143).

Altogether this is a fine book that provides a wealth of important information about the numismatic and financial history of the Mithridatic wars. While ultimately based on a catalogue and die study of individual minting authorities, the study adds an incredibly wide range of statistical analyses, comparative graphics, tables, maps, etc. in support of the basic collection of examples and uses the resulting information to provoke the reader into asking serious questions about the nature of the evidence and its reliability. The outcome is that one cannot help but recognize the enormous contribution numismatic evidence can make in reconstructing a more complete and comprehensive picture of the ancient past.

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