

# A note on the later republican cistophori

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WILLIAM E. METCALF

A NOTE ON THE LATER REPUBLICAN CISTOPHORI

PLATE 15

Silvia Hurter can hardly be said to have regarded the Roman “proconsular” cistophori very highly. She never wrote a word about them, and during her entire tenure at Bank Leu no more than ten of all varieties passed to auction. As a lover of numismatic beauty, she may have been put off by their derivative and unprepossessing character; but I can hope that as a lover of numismatics she would have appreciated the treatment of a minor but interesting problem.

Among the later cistophori is a pair of the following description:

Obv. Cista mystica, from which a snake emerges, surrounded by ivy wreath.

Rev. Bow case entwined by snakes; above, monogram (see *Pl. 15, 1–9*); to l., Q; to r., torch or thyrsus<sup>1</sup>.

From the time of Pinder attempts have been made to discover the mint of these coins and the identity of the individual who struck them<sup>2</sup>. Pinder quite reasonably took the symbols torch and thyrsus to indicate separate mints in Ephesus and Pergamum, as they do in the main series of proconsular and proprætorian cistophori as well as their unsigned antecedents. He has been followed by subsequent scholars<sup>3</sup>. In fact the coins bearing the two symbols look much more like one another than they look like the products of any other cistophoric mint, and they differ from others in the late proconsular series by having unfixed dies: elsewhere the die axis is regularly 12.

The coins in fact share a common origin, as is now assured by the discovery of three shared obverse dies:

Die A:

1. London 1979-1-1-218 = SNG von Aulock 1867 (rev. torch) (*Pl. 15, 1*)
2. Berlin (rev. torch) (*Pl. 15, 2*)
3. Platt, 27 Mar. 1922 (Luneau coll.), 962 (rev. thyrsus) (*Pl. 15, 3*)

Die B:

1. ANS 1944.100.37542 (rev. torch) (*Pl. 15, 4*)
2. Witschonke coll. (rev. thyrsus)
3. Paris (Seyrig = SNG 1766) (rev. thyrsus)
4. Witschonke coll. = Emporion Hamburg 10, 11 Oct. 1986, 63 (rev. thyrsus) (*Pl. 15, 5*)

<sup>1</sup> See G. STUMPF, *Numismatische Studien zur Chronologie der römischen Statthalter in Kleinasien (122 v. Chr.-163 n. Chr.)*. Saarbrücker Studien zur Archäologie und Alten Geschichte 4 (Saarbrücken, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> M. PINDER, *Über die Cistophoren und über die kaiserlichen Silbermedaillons der römischen Provinz Asia*, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 1855, pp. 534–635 at p. 573.

<sup>3</sup> STUMPF (above, n. 1), p. 15.

## Die C:

1. Paris 2727 (rev. torch)
2. Witschonke = Müller 47, 28 Sept. 1984, 95 = Kress 137, 21 Nov. 1966, 547 (rev. torch) (*Pl. 15, 6*)
3. Munich 20955 (rev. torch) (*Pl. 15, 7*)
4. London (Hersh) (rev. torch) (*Pl. 15, 8*)
5. St. Petersburg 14368 (rev. thyrsus) (*Pl. 15, 9*)

Altogether it is possible to assemble at least 18 coins from 14 obv. dies and 16 rev. dies with torch, and 41 coins from 23 obv. dies with thyrsus (in each case counting the three dies enumerated above). Though the coins with thyrsus are more numerous, whether dies or surviving specimens are counted, this is not a reliable clue to the locus of the mint.

Pinder was content to note that the monogram could be resolved in various ways: one of his suggestions was Pinarius Natta, a view that has not found favor. In fact scholarly consensus has fallen on L. Antonius, largely because the Q in left field points to a quaestor (as Pinder saw) and L. Antonius was quaestor in Asia after the departure of Q. Minucius Thermus, the only late governor of Asia who does not have cistophori struck in his name<sup>4</sup>. But Stumpf offered an analysis of the components of the monogram, which lacks an “L” (if read in Latin). Viewing the letter “M” as the principal character in the monogram, he settled on M. Antonius, who was on his way to becoming Quaestor in Asia in 113 BC. when summoned in the trial of the Vestals during that year<sup>5</sup>.

Against this there are two arguments of unequal weight. First, on Stumpf’s view, some of these coins at least were struck in Ephesus, and if struck so early would be expected to bear a date. For any cistophor struck at Ephesus from 133 on to the end of the proconsular series bears the date of the era of Ephesus. This is true even of Atinius’ issues of Year 13 (121/0). The argument vanishes, of course, if the coins with torch are no longer attributed to Ephesus or are struck after 48 BC, the last issues to bear this kind of date.

The second argument is weightier. It is hard to compare styles, particularly when the types are so regimented and the elements of the reverse differ; but the construction of the reverse has a certain looseness to it, with a generally broad and sometimes splayed bow-case. It is more than usually difficult to trace the bodies of the snakes, particularly as they coil together underneath the bow-case; and the snake’s head on the left is often detached from its body. That is, its coil has been severed after the first large “S” so that the large part of the body stands in isolation (R10, RB1-3 for example). These are not features found elsewhere, and they suggest separation in space or time or both from the main sequences at both Ephesus and Pergamum.

<sup>4</sup> On the chronological problem see B. WOYTEK, *Arma et Nummi. Forschungen zur römischen Finanzgeschichte und Münzprägung der Jahre 49 bis 42 v. Chr.* Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Phil.-Hist. Klasse 312 = Veröffentlichungen der numismatischen Kommission 40 (Vienna, 2003), p. 111 with n. 423. He records there Stefan Karwiese’s suggestion that the monogram on these coins is to be resolved ARAT, pointing to a magistrate of that name who struck for Fannius at Ephesus. But Aratos is clearly a local magistrate, not a Roman official (STUMPF [above, n. 1], p. 58).

<sup>5</sup> STUMPF (above, n. 1) nos. 2–3, pp. 14–17.



A third argument is conclusive. Of all the hoards of first-century cistophori, not one contains the issue, which is apparently the second largest (after Metellus Scipio) of all the later Republican strikings. This is truly remarkable given the small size of many late annual strikings, and indeed the strikings of the period around 113 BC as enumerated by Kleiner. A date as early as 113 BC is therefore unacceptable, and the search must begin anew.

To turn again to the hoards. Halicarnassus – a hoard in which the issues of Metellus Scipio (last in the series, and last from Pergamum, struck in 48 BC) are abundant, and which runs on other evidence down to the early 30s, completely lacks the ATRA issue<sup>6</sup>. Again this is surprising, in view of its size, if it had been struck long before the hoard was closed. On the other hand the Latin-legend cistophori of M. Antonius, whose place of origin is quite uncertain but whose date, it seems agreed, is 39/8 BC, would seem to provide a *terminus ante quem*. It is here, in the period 47–39, or more narrowly c. 42–39, that we must begin to look for a quaestor whose name can be resolved into something like the monogram on the coins.

Perhaps one is to be found in L. Sempronius Atratinus. The monogram contains all the elements of ATPATIN in Greek, and this explanation has the advantage of explaining the presence of the letter A twice. Atratinus is of course better known as the praetor who struck on behalf of M. Antonius, but prior to that he must have been a quaestor. As for his striking in Asia (most of his other coinages belong to the mainland, part of Antony's "fleet" series), there is a series of coins first attributed to Asia by de Salis<sup>7</sup> which describe Atratinus as an augur. These all seem to be dated 40–39 BC, consistent with the termini of our coin.

In any case the identity of the magistrate is unlikely to advance our knowledge of the chronology or attribution, and we should be content with the direction in which the coins themselves lead us: to a single mint that may or may not be Ephesus or Pergamum.

<sup>6</sup> B. OVERBECK, Ein Schatzfund der späten Republik von Halikarnassos, SNR 57, 1978, pp. 45–51.

<sup>7</sup> The Count de Salis is quoted by Grueber at BMCRR II 501 n. 1 for his attribution; the coin had already been known (see M. BAHRFELDT, Die letzten Kupferprägungen unter der römischen Republik, NZ N.F. 2, 1909, pp. 66–86 at 84–85 no. 10, 40=39 BC), and is since discussed by M. GRANT, *From Imperium to Auctoritas* (Cambridge, 1946) pp. 37–39 (40–39 BC, with an attribution to Brundisium); M. H. CRAWFORD, *Roman Republican Coinage I* (London, 1974) no. 530 with p. 101 (following Grant's date but rejecting his attribution); M. AMANDRY, *Le monnayage en bronze de Bibulus, Atratinus et Capito*, SNR 65, 1986, pp. 73–103 at p. 85.

*Abstract*

The final issue of traditional cistophori bears on its reverse a monogram that may be resolved ATRA and the letter Q, together with a torch or a thyrsus in the right field. These symbols have always been taken to point to two mints, Ephesus (torch) and Pergamum (thyrsus). Die links, taken together with the irregular die axes that are never observed elsewhere in the series, point to a single discrete mint. The group is probably to be placed immediately prior to the cistophoric issues of M. Antonius in 39 BC.

*Zusammenfassung*

Die letzte Emission traditioneller Cistophoren trägt auf dem Revers ein Monogramm, das als ATRA aufgelöst werden kann, sowie den Buchstaben Q, zusammen mit einer Fackel oder einem Thyrsos im rechten Feld. Diese Symbole wurden immer als Hinweise auf die Münzstätten Ephesos (Fackel) bzw. Pergamon (Thyrsos) interpretiert. Stempelverbindungen sowie die sonst innerhalb der Cistophorenprägung nie zu beobachtende unregelmässige Stempelorientierung lassen nun aber auf eine andere, noch nicht identifizierte Prägestätte schliessen. Die Emission ist wahrscheinlich unmittelbar vor der Cistophorenprägung des M. Antonius im Jahre 39 v. Chr. anzusetzen.

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