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Pankaj TANDON*

Are These the Earliest Greek Coins of Bactria?

Summary - Numismatists have long been interested in the question of whether any Greek coins had been issued in Bactria prior to the arrival there in 329 BCE of Alexander the Great. Various scholars have attempted to assign coins to this period, including the Bactrian imitations of Athenian owls, the so-called “Eagle” series, and the coins of Sophytes. However, modern scholarship generally rejects these attempts, and the prevailing view is that all of these coins were issued in either the late 4th or the 3rd century, after the time of Alexander. Recently, however, a number of small obol sized silver coins have been emerging from the area of Balkh that call for a re-opening of this question. This paper argues that there is at least a possibility, and maybe even a probability, that these coins were issued in the late 5th and 4th centuries, and that the likely issuers were the Branchidae, the priestly clan who administered the temple of Apollo in Didyma. Thus the coins not only suggest an answer to the question first posed here, but also may provide physical evidence of the presence in Bactria of the Branchidae.

Keywords - Early Bactrian Coins, Alexander the Great, Boar, Lion, Branchidae.

Résumé - Les numismates se sont intéressés depuis longtemps à la question de savoir si des monnaies grecques avaient été émises en Bactriane avant l'arrivée d'Alexandre le Grand en 329 av. n. è. Plusieurs chercheurs se sont efforcés d'attribuer des monnaies à cette période, notamment les imitations bactriennes des chouettes d'Athènes, la série dite « à l'aigle » et les pièces de Sophytes. Comme les études modernes ont en général réfuté ces efforts, l'opinion dominante est maintenant que toutes ces pièces ont été émises à la fin du IV^e siècle ou au III^e siècle av. n. è., après l'époque d'Alexandre. La découverte récente de petites pièces d'argent de la taille d'une obole dans la région de Balkh engage à rouvrir ce débat. Cet article montre qu'il existe au moins une possibilité et peut-être même une probabilité, pour que ces pièces aient été émises à la fin du V^e et au IV^e siècle av. n. è., probablement par les Branchides, le clan sacerdotal qui a administré le temple d'Apollon à Didymes. Ainsi, ces monnaies suggèrent non seulement une réponse à la question ci-dessus, mais pourraient aussi fournir des preuves matérielles de la présence en Bactriane des Branchides.

Mots clés - Premières monnaies de Bactriane, Alexandre le Grand, sanglier, lion, Branchides.

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Had Greek coins been issued in Bactria prior to the arrival there in 329 BCE of Alexander the Great? Numismatists have puzzled over this question for well over a century. Most authors have generally rejected the many attempts to assign Greek style coins to this period, such as by Head¹ and Narain.² Recent scholarship³ has concluded that the coins these authors were assigning to the pre-Alexandrine period were in fact issued no earlier than the late 4th century BCE and perhaps as late as well into the 3rd century. In particular, Duyrat,⁴ through an analysis of coin hoards from the area, showed that all the pre-Alexandrine hoards she knew of contained only imported coins such as Achaemenid darics or coins from Greek cities. She concluded that the Bactrian economy had a very low level of monetization. Not only were no coins produced there, but even imported coins were weighed as bullion. This conclusion is supported by others, such as Bopearachchi, Le Rider, and Bernard.⁵ Thus the prevailing view at this time is that there were no Greek style coins in Bactria prior to the time of Alexander.

The candidate coins that various authors had tried to assign to the pre-Alexandrine period included the Bactrian imitations of Athenian “owls”, the so-called “Eagle” series, and the coins of Sophytes.⁶ In recent years, however, a series of small obol-sized silver coins have been appearing in the trade market that call for a re-opening of this question. The purpose of this paper is to look carefully at these coins, to argue that they were probably issued prior to the time of Alexander, and then to discuss the question of who might have issued them.

The New Boar/Lion Coins



Figure 1 - Example of the new coin type
(Classical Numismatic Group, Sale 87, lot 604, 1.18 g, 11 mm, × 3).

1. HEAD 1906.
2. NARAIN 1957.
3. See for example, BOPEARACHCHI 1996; TAYLOR 2019.
4. DUYRAT 2004.
5. BOPEARACHCHI 1999; LE RIDER 2003; BERNARD et alii 2004.
6. See coin types 1-27 in BOPEARACHCHI 1998.

Figure 1 shows a typical example of the new coin type I am considering, and Appendix I displays images of all 46 examples of the type that I have been able to gather as of the drafting of this paper.⁷ The basic design of the coin features on the obverse the forepart of a boar facing right and on the reverse the head of a roaring lion right.⁸ The type was first noted in 1947 when an example was found in the Mir Zakah hoard and published by Curiel and Schlumberger.⁹ The image of that coin is reproduced in the Appendix as coin number 31. Nicolet-Pierre published another example in 1973 as part of a “hoard” of eight coins of unknown Afghan provenance (Appendix coin number 44).¹⁰ I myself had acquired an example of the type in the trade market in 2001 (coin 32 in the Appendix). Thus at least a few specimens were known prior to the recent influx of coins into trade. The coins started appearing in the auction sales of the Classical Numismatic Group (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) in 2006 and in those of Roma Numismatics (London) in 2019. A few have also appeared in other auctions or at dealers’ tables, some of which I have acquired. Collectively, as I mentioned, I have been able to trace 46 examples, of four distinct types, so it is safe to say that the coins constitute a reasonably sized issue, produced over a considerable period of time.

The coins in the Appendix table can be divided into four groups. The first group (coins 1-12) have a very crude style and several of the coins show that the reverse is clearly incuse. Coin 2 perhaps carries a tunny fish behind the boar, but the other coins seem not to have any ancillary symbols. The five coins in the second group (13-17) feature scorpions on both sides of the coin, behind the boar and under the lion. The third group of 24 coins (coins 18-41) have a bunch of grapes on both sides of the coin. Finally, the fourth group of five coins feature a monogram below the boar on the obverse and a bunch of grapes below the head of the lion on the reverse. I have organized the coins in what I believe is their likely chronological order. The crude style coins are the earliest, because of their incuse reverses. The scorpion types come second, because they also show some signs that the reverses might have been incuse.

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7. That is, as of June 24 2020. I would expect more coins to appear in the trade market; indeed, six coins (all included here) appeared at auction since my first draft of this paper. I do not include among the number the gold coin illustrated at the very end of the Appendix Table (coin 47). I find it difficult to believe that this coin is genuine, with its anomalous weight and size, and crude execution, and have therefore elected to exclude it from my analysis.
 8. After I circulated a draft of this paper in April 2020, Gunnar Dumke informed me that he is jointly working with Klaus Grigo on a die study of these coins. Gunnar did not share a draft of their paper with me, but informed me that their work has indicated that the lion side of the coin is the obverse. While this might be true for some of the coin types, it seems it could not be true of the crude style types, since the lion side is frequently incuse on those coins.
 9. CURIEL, SCHLUMBERGER 1953, p. 85 and pl. VIII.12.
 10. NICOLET-PIERRE 1973, p. 36, coin 7.

The monogram coins come last because of their affinity with later Bactrian coins, as we will see. The unifying feature among the four groups is the basic design of the forepart of a boar and a roaring lion's head on the two sides of the coin. I discuss the order of the coins again in some detail, and consider alternatives, in the section following the next one.

Comparing the Coins to Coins of Lycia and Cyzicus

From their style, we can see right away that these coins are Greek. When Curiel and Schlumberger published their example as part of the Mir Zakah hoard (see coin 31 in Appendix I), they speculated that it was perhaps a coin of Lycia. They pointed to two coins mentioned (although not illustrated) in a paper by Hill.¹¹ The first was a silver tetrobol, featuring the forepart of a boar right on the obverse and a facing lion head on the reverse; the second was a silver stater, featuring the forepart of a boar left and a roaring lion's head left. Hill dated both coins to ca. 500-460 BCE. In figure 2, I have shown coins similar to the ones Hill mentioned and to which Curiel and Schlumberger were referring. They further compared the style of the boar on the Mir Zakah coin to four coins from Hill's British Museum catalogue.¹² The first three of these were silver staters, dated to ca. 520-480 BCE, which showed the forepart of a boar and a rude incuse square; the fourth was a tetrobol, dated to ca. 500-460, which featured the forepart of a boar and a triskeles. Despite all the comparators being early 5th century coins, Curiel and Schlumberger ultimately concluded that (p. 85) "notre monnaie paraît inédite. L'absence d'incus ne permet guère de la dater plus haut que le début du iv^e siècle".



Figure 2 - Lycian coins featuring a boar and a lion. a: AR stater (CNG e459.282, ca. 500-460 BCE, 9.18 g, 21 mm); b: AR stater (CNG e294.352, ca. 500-460 BCE, 9.44 g, 22 mm).

The second known example of the Bactrian boar / lion type was published by Nicolet-Pierre in 1973 (coin 44 in Appendix I, see footnote 11 above). The coin was part of a group of eight silver coins of Afghan provenance acquired

11. HILL 1895.

12. HILL 1897, pl. I, coins 6, 7 and pl. II, coin 10.

by the Cabinet des Médailles in 1972. Of the remaining seven coins in the group, three belonged to the series of Bactrian imitations of Athenian owls (a didrachm and two hemidrachms), three to the so-called Eagle series (two drachms and a hemidrachm) and the last was an obol featuring a two-bodied owl and a *kalathos* or basket.¹³ From the appearance of the coins, Nicolet-Pierre concluded that they all belonged to the same hoard. Further, she noted that the boar / lion coin featured a monogram on the obverse, which she rendered as the monogram number 1 in figure 3. She remarked on the similarity of this monogram with monogram number 2, which is found on coins of the Athenian owl imitations from Bactria. Implicitly, she took this to suggest that the coins were roughly contemporary. In fact, the monogram on Nicolet-Pierre's coin is not entirely clear; another coin of the monogram type in the boar / lion series (coin 43 in Appendix I) has a clearer monogram. We see that this resembles monogram number 2 quite closely, although the outer verticals actually spread out, as in monogram number 3. Perhaps the monogram on Nicolet-Pierre's coin looked like this also. Images 4 and 5 show actual monograms from coin images; number 4 is from an Athenian imitation¹⁴ and number 5 is the detail from Appendix coin 43.



Figure 3 - Monograms (see text).

If we take monograms 2 and 3 (or 4 and 5) as belonging to the same mint, we can perhaps conclude, as Nicolet-Pierre did, that the coins bearing them are roughly contemporary. As it happens, Nicolet-Pierre initially subscribed to Narain's view that the Bactrian imitations of Athenian owls were pre-Alexandrine issues, remarking that (p. 41) "le choix des types athéniens ne se comprendrait pas si ce monnayage était tout entier postérieur à Alexandre". She therefore implicitly concluded that the boar / lion coins were pre-Alexandrine also. By 1994, however, although she was silent on the question of the date for the boar / lion coin, she had come to the conclusion that the imitation Athenian owls, the "Eagles" and the Sophytes coins in fact post-dated Alexander.¹⁵ This is indeed the prevailing view today, namely that these coins probably date to the late 4th or early 3rd century BCE. Does this imply that the boar / lion coins must also belong to that timeframe? I think not.

13. See coin 11 in BOPEARACHCHI 1998; more coins of this type have appeared subsequently, e.g., CNG auction 108 lot 412.

14. See the second coin on <http://coinindia.com/galleries-greek-preSeleucid.html>.

15. See NICOLET-PIERRE, AMANDRY 1994.

In particular, Nicolet-Pierre noted that the type of the boar/lion coins “sont ceux d’oboles de Cyzique : mais le sanglier et le lion y sont traités avec un style bien éloigné de celui-ci.”¹⁶ The obols to which she refers were issued in the early part of the 5th century, over a century before the time of Alexander! Figure 4 illustrates two coins of this type, the second of which was found in the same area where the boar/lion coins have been found today. On the Cyzicus coins, the animals face left and the boar has a tunny fish (the symbol of Cyzicus) behind it. On the Bactrian coins, the animals generally face right and the ancillary symbols are different, with perhaps the one exception of coin 2, but it seems reasonable to propose that the Cyzicus coins might well have served as the inspiration for the Bactrian ones. Thus, although Nicolet-Pierre suggested a prototype for the boar/lion coins different than the ones proposed by Curiel and Schlumberger, her suggestion also belonged to the 5th century. The Lycian coins suggested by Curiel and Schlumberger as the prototype might also have served this role, but, although they are stylistically similar to the coins from Cyzicus (and hence not very similar to the Bactrian coins), they were never made in the obol denomination (ca. 1 g) of the Bactrian coins. Thus it does appear that the Cyzicus coins would be a more probable inspiration for the Bactrian issues.



Figure 4 - Silver obols of Cyzicus (a: CNG Triton XV, lot 1201, 0.90 g, 10 mm; b: Tandon collection #673.04, 1.05 g, 11 mm, × 2).

Curiel and Schlumberger’s boar/lion coin was found at Mir Zakah, some 50 miles south of Kabul. The find spot of Nicolet-Pierre’s coin is unknown. The new influx of these coins since 2006 seems to stem from a find or finds of coins reportedly in the small town of Chahar Bolak, a short distance west of Balkh (figure 5). Information for the find spot comes from two different sources, and is probably reliable, although of course a discovery in an archaeological context would have been far more reliable and preferable. Balkh, of course, is the ancient city of Bactra, and the area around it would have been highly prosperous, perhaps the most prosperous part of Bactria in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. The area around Balkh consisted of the inland delta of the

16. NICOLET-PIERRE 1973, p. 40, n. 13.

Balkhab river, which emerged from the highlands further south and emptied into the plain south of the Oxus river. The natural water supply had been enhanced by an elaborate system of canals that had been constructed prior to the Achaemenid period.¹⁷ The land must have been highly fertile agriculturally and this would account at least partially for the prosperity of the area. In addition, Balkh lay on an important route of the Silk Road. The boar / lion coins might well have been issued in this milieu of a prosperous local community. Of course, the fact that these coins are emerging from the area is no guarantee that they were produced there, but their production in the Balkh area would be perfectly logical. When they were made and by whom will be considered in the following sections.



Figure 5 - Map of Balkh area, showing relevant sites (map adapted by the author from the original on Google Earth).

Comparing the Boar /lion Coins to the Coins of Miletus

Both Curiel and Schlumberger and Nicolet-Pierre suggested as prototypes for the boar / lion coins coin types that had been issued in what is now western Turkey (Lycia and Mysia respectively) in the early part of the 5th century BCE, although these prototypes were stylistically different from the Bactrian issues.

17. This was discussed in detail by BRIANT 1996.

I would like to propose consideration of one other coin type, from Miletus in Ionia.¹⁸ Figure 6 illustrates two silver obols from Miletus, found, like the boar/lion coins, in Chahar Bolak near Balkh. Indeed, it is the fact that these Milesian coins were found in the same area as the boar/lion coins that was the initial inspiration for considering them as possible prototypes for the latter. The type consists of a roaring lion facing left or right, with a stellate design on the reverse, and was issued in Miletus in the early part of the 5th century.¹⁹ Although there is no boar on this coin type, the style of the lion, particularly the rendition of the mane, more closely resembles that on the Bactrian coins than do the coins of Lycia or Cyzicus. It might therefore receive some consideration as the inspiration for at least the lion side of the boar/lion coins. Once again, we have an early 5th century candidate for prototype for our coins. There are simply no 4th century coins that can serve this function.



Figure 6 - Two Obols of Miletus, found in Chahar Bolak, near Balkh
(Tandon collection, a: #697.86, 0.98 g, 9 mm; b: #698.01, 1.10 g, 8-9 mm, × 3).

Given that all the candidate prototypes for the boar/lion coins are from the 5th century, it would seem logical to conclude that these coins are also from that same time period. There are two factors that could be used to argue against this. First, Curiel and Schlumberger pointed out that the lack of an incuse on the reverse of their coin would push it into the 4th century. However, we now know of several coins that do have incuse reverses, notably all the coins 1-12 in the first group. There are also several coins in the other groups that show signs of incuse reverses. Among the Scorpion type, we see such signs on coins 13, 14 and 16. And, among the Grape type, coins 29 and 32 also show similar signs. Second, the presence of the monogram on Nicolet-Pierre's coin, and on four others illustrated in the Appendix, resembling the monogram on the imitations of Athenian owls (and later coins), would argue for a date no earlier than the 4th century, at least for the monogram type coins. Again,

18. CAHN 1970 did not reveal any other type that might have served as the inspiration for the coins.

19. Sear dates these coins to the late 6th century; see SEAR 1979, type 3532.

however, we saw in figure 3 that the form of the monogram on the boar / lion coins, while certainly similar, was subtly different from the one on the Athenian coins. Thus it seems likely that they were not exactly contemporary, although they may well have been somewhat close in time. I would argue that it is quite plausible to think that the crude style coins were issued in the 5th century and that the other types were issued over a long period stretching well into the 4th century. The monogram types might have been the last ones in the sequence and may have been issued in the years prior to Alexander's arrival.

Allowing for the issuance of the coins over a lengthy period allows us to resolve the tension between two competing forces. The first force is for a very early date in the early 5th century, because of the various prototypes that must have served as inspiration for these coins. The second force is for a later date because of the absence of an incuse reverse and the presence of the "M" monogram on some of the coins. The incuse coins of crude style could be early and then the finer style coins could be late. In any case, it seems quite plausible that all the coins were issued prior to the time of Alexander and would therefore qualify these coins as the earliest Greek coins of Bactria.

At this point, I would like to address the question of the order in which I presented the coins. At first, I naturally thought that the crude style coins (coins 1-12) must have been the last coins in the series. We frequently observe the degradation of style and weight in the waning years of a coinage. Indeed, in the first draft of this paper, I had presented them in the opposite order to the order presented here: I had the monogram types first, followed by the grape type, followed in turn by the scorpion type and with the crude style coins at the end. However, on further consideration, I decided that the evidence of the incuse reverses suggested the order in which I present the coins here. Rather than a degradation of style, we see an improvement, as the die cutters become more accomplished in what was initially a new art for them. Although this is my preferred ordering of the coins, I cannot rule out the possibility that the opposite order was the actual one. Either way, the multiple types and styles do suggest a relatively long period of issue.

One other argument in favor of my ordering of the coins has to do with which side of the coin is the obverse and which the reverse. As I mentioned in footnote 9 above, I am told that Gunnar Dumke and Klaus Grigo are working on a die study of these coins and have concluded that the lion side of the coin is the obverse. Now this seems impossible for the crude style coins, all of which have incuse reverses. Some of the Scorpion type and even a couple of the Grape type also show signs of incuse reverses. The monogram type coins, however, do not show any sign of an incuse reverse. If a switch between obverse and reverse was made, it seems much more likely that the earlier coins had the boar obverse / lion reverse, to conform with the Cyzicus prototypes, and only later did the boar side become the reverse. It is worth noting, however, that the Bactrian imitations of the Athenian Athena / owl coins, which used the monogram similar to the one on the boar / lion coins, placed the monogram

on the obverse. Thus, if the two series of coins are related, we might expect that the boar side of the boar / lion series would have been the obverse, because that is the side featuring the monogram.²⁰

Having said all this, I must acknowledge that the chronological order of the coins may have been the opposite of what I have proposed, or even some other order. If the monogram coins were first, and were related to the Athenian imitations of Bactria that used a similar monogram, it might be reasonable to suppose that the boar / lion series was issued from the late 4th to the middle of the 3rd century BCE. The question that would then arise is: why were these coins being issued in parallel to the well-established and well-studied series (the Athenian imitation owls, the Eagle series and the coins of Sophytes)? Each of those series had lower denomination coins that clearly mesh with the rest of the series; there seems to be no place for this boar / lion series of only low weight coins in that monetary context.²¹ Thus I am led back to considering it more likely that the boar / lion series *ended* somewhere in the same time period as when the imitation owls were issued. That would imply that they were issued prior to Alexander's arrival, starting perhaps in the late 5th century and terminating sometime late in the 4th century.

Who might have struck the Boar / lion Coins?

Since the coins are Greek in style and were struck before the time of Alexander, it seems reasonable to suppose that they must have been struck by a Greek community that had established itself in Bactria sometime in the 5th century. There are two primary stories in the literature that suggest that Greeks may have lived in Bactria before Alexander's time: the story in Herodotus about the resettlement of the rebels of Barca, and the story in Strabo and other sources about the Branchidae.²² As both of these stories are well known, I offer here only a very brief summary of each.

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20. It is worth noting that the fractional silvers of Cyzicus are known with monograms on the obverse and others with monograms on the reverse, so they don't help us to settle this question.
 21. One other novel type of obol apparently from Bactria has also been appearing recently; for example, CNG Auction 66, lot 928. The type features a bust of Tyche wearing a mural crown on the obverse and an eagle with outstretched wing on the reverse. The weight of these coins is much lower, around 0.6 g, which would be consistent with the local standard coinage of the 3rd century. The Tyche obverse suggests a relationship to the coins of Andragoras. Thus these coins seem to fit quite neatly into a 3rd century niche. In any case, according to my sources, these coins are found not in Balkh but in Maymana, some 275 km to the south-west.
 22. I ignore the story told by Arrian (*Anabasis* v.ii.i) about the Greek followers of Dionysus who settled in Nysa. Not only do many regard this story as legend rather than history, but also Nysa was stated to be located between the rivers Cophen (modern Kabul) and Indus; thus nowhere near Bactria. These Greeks, therefore, even if they existed, could not have been the first to issue Greek coins in Bactria.

The Barcaeans

Herodotus (*Histories* IV.200-204) recounts an incident during the reign of the Achaemenid king Darius I (ruled 522-486 BCE) during which the Persian army laid siege to the city of Barca in Cyrenaica in order to avenge the murder by the Barcaeans of the Cyrene king Arcesilaus. When the Persians finally won the city, they enslaved many of the Barcaeans and “Darius gave them a town of Bactria to live in. They gave this town the name Barce, and it remained an inhabited place in Bactria until my [*i.e.*, Herodotus’s] own lifetime.”²³ Now *The Histories* was written ca. 440 BCE, so it seems reasonable to suppose that the descendants of Greeks from Barca (and maybe even some of the original settlers if they lived long enough) were living somewhere in Bactria at that time.²⁴

The Branchidae

Strabo (*Geography* XI.11.4) reports that, somewhere near the border between Bactria and Sogdiana, “Alexander destroyed [...] the city of the Branchidae, whom Xerxes had settled there [...] because of the fact that they had betrayed to him the riches and treasures of the god at Didyma.”²⁵ The Branchidae were the priestly clan in charge of the Apollo temple at Didyma, near the city of Miletus in Ionia. The temple was extremely rich from offerings made to its famous oracle, including by the Lydian king Croesus, and, during the suppression by Darius of the Ionian revolt of 499-493 BCE, the Branchidae served up the temple’s treasure to the Persians in exchange for having their lives spared. Herodotus (*Histories* VI.20-1) tells us that Darius resettled the captured Milesians in the city of Ampe, where the river Tigris drained into the sea; whether this included the Branchidae is not specified. Whether or not it did, as long as Strabo is to be believed, Darius’s son Xerxes (ruled 486-465 BCE) subsequently resettled them in Bactria.

Some authors discount the story of Alexander meeting the Branchidae in Bactria because Arrian does not mention the episode at all in his *Anabasis*. Hammond, in his masterly review of this topic, including all the literary sources,²⁶ points to the evidence of Pliny (*Natural History* 6.XVIII), who records that “Demodamas, the general of King Seleucus and King Antiochus, [...] set up altars to Apollo Didymaeus” upon crossing the Syr Darya river. Further, Hammond mentions amphorae discovered at a place called Dilbergin and published by I.R. Pichikyan, which carried inscriptions reading βρολαγγιδ.

23. Herodotus: *Histories* IV.204 (accessed online at perseus.tufts.edu).

24. This story and the next are discussed in detail by BRIANT 1996.

25. Accessed at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/11K*.html.

26. HAMMOND 1998.

Dilbergin (or Dilberjin) is a place in the Balkhab delta, some 25 miles northwest of Balkh (figure 5). The discovery of these amphorae surely points to the presence of the Branchidae in the area of the Balkhab delta. After carefully considering all the many sources of information, Hammond concludes that:

1. the sacking and burning of the temple at Didyma did indeed take place during the reign of Xerxes;
2. the Branchidae did have a city in the region, and Alexander did indeed destroy it, and;
3. the reason for Alexander's action was to "exact retribution" for the sins against Apollo and the Greeks committed by the past generation of the Branchidae. "All adult males were executed and the rest of the population was enslaved. The city was looted by the army, the buildings were razed, and the trees were torn up by the roots (Curt. 7.5.32-4)."²⁷

The Barcaeans are unlikely to have issued the boar/lion coins. There is nothing really to connect them to those coins, other than a general notion that they were Greeks in Bactria and the coins are Greek and were issued in Bactria. It is conceivable that obols from Mysia and Miletus were circulating in Bactria and that the Greek colony took their inspiration from those coins in issuing their own. But there is no specific evidence to buttress this argument.²⁸

The Branchidae, on the other hand, seem like quite promising candidates. They had settled in the area and survived to the time of Alexander, at which time they were still identified in the same way. Amphorae referencing them were found in the same general area as the place where the boar/lion coins were found. As Greeks used to the highly monetized economies of the Ionian coast, they may well have felt the need for coined money, even if only for transactions amongst themselves, in an environment where no mint was operating and the economy was relatively unmonetized.²⁹ The coins themselves closely relate to coins with which the Branchidae would have been familiar from their original home. There are several points worth making.

First, the style of the lion on the boar/lion coins closely matches the style of the lion on coins of Miletus, which would have been the coinage most familiar to the Branchidae.

27. HAMMOND 1998, p. 344. The same conclusion is reached by BRIANT 1996.

28. Some might argue that Bactrian recruits who served in Achaemenid armies (see BRIANT 1996) may have become accustomed to coinage and therefore might have issued coins upon their return. This seems unlikely, however.

29. BOPEARACHCHI 1999; DUYRAT 2004. LE RIDER 2003 makes the point that Alexander's troops would have felt the need for coinage when they arrived in Bactria; the Branchidae may have felt quite the same way upon *their* arrival.

Second, although the coins seem to imitate the obols of Cyzicus, they pointedly do not include the tunny fish seen on Cyzicean coins, except perhaps on one coin. Instead, one symbol we do see is a scorpion (see coins 13-17 in the Appendix). The scorpion was a rarely used symbol on coinage at the time, but one place where it was used was Miletus. The first coin in figure 7 is an electrum 1/48th stater of Miletus, dating from the 6th century, which features the facing head of a lion on the obverse and a scorpion on the reverse. The second coin is a hemiobol of the 5th century, attributed by some to Miletus and by others to Mylasa in Caria. This coin carries on the obverse the forepart of a lion, seen from above, and on the reverse a scorpion. Although we do not know its significance, clearly the scorpion was a meaningful symbol to the Milesians. Its appearance on some of the boar / lion coins therefore strengthens a possible connection to the Branchidae.



Figure 7 - Coins featuring scorpions. a: electrum 1/48th stater of Miletus (CNG #751433, ca. 550 BC, 0.29 g, 5 mm, × 4); b: silver hemiobol of Miletus (Gorny sale 269, lot 406, ca. 5th century BC, 0.57 g, × 4).

Third, the choice of a coin type from Cyzicus can also be related to Miletus. Cyzicus was one of the cities founded by colonizers from Miletus in the 8th century. Alexander Herda has pointed to the fact that Miletus retained close communication with its colonies, as evidenced by the mission in the 6th century of the Milesian philosopher Anaximander to Apollonia Pontika, a city founded by Milesian colonists in the 7th century.³⁰

Fourth, nevertheless, the weight standard used for the boar / lion coins more closely approximates the coins of Miletus than of Cyzicus. Figure 8 shows in a scatter diagram the weights of the 44 boar / lion coins for which I have weights (I do not have weights for two of the coins in the database). The weights are depicted in the same order in which the coins are listed in the Appendix. We see that the coins that are of fine style and carry ancillary symbols, whether the scorpions, bunches of grapes, or monogram, are all of roughly the same weight standard. The crude style coins seem to be generally quite a bit lighter.

30. HERDA 2019.

suppose that only rather high quality coins are chosen for auction and so the average weight could be expected to be closer to the standard. Indeed, the high quality of the coins is visible in their photographs. This might account for some of the discrepancy between the weights of the Bactrian and Milesian coins, given the hypothesis that they were struck to the same standard.

Turning to the coins of Cyzicus, I found 69 examples, but there was a complication. The weights of these coins, all described as “obols,” actually fell into three quite distinct weight levels, at roughly 0.4 g, 0.8 g, and 1.2 g (details are in Appendix II). Thus it was quite clear that the coins actually belonged to three denominations: hemiobols, obols, and trihemiobols. Focusing only on the obols, I found the average weight to be 0.83 g. This weight is nowhere near the average weight of the Bactrian boar/lion coins. The average weight of the trihemiobols was closer, at 1.18 g, but it seems hardly reasonable that the Bactrian coins would be issued only in a trihemiobol denomination. In any case, the fact that they were issued in only one denomination again suggests a closer relationship to the 1/12th staters (also known as “obols”) of Miletus than to the coins of Cyzicus.

Figure 9 shows histograms of the three coin series – the Bactrian boar/lion coins of fine style, the Miletus lion/stellate pattern obols or one-twelfth staters, and the Cyzicus boar/lion obols. It is quite clear from these graphs that (a) the Bactrian series was not struck very precisely to a weight standard, but (b) the weight of the Bactrian coins is more similar to the Miletus coins than to the Cyzicus ones.

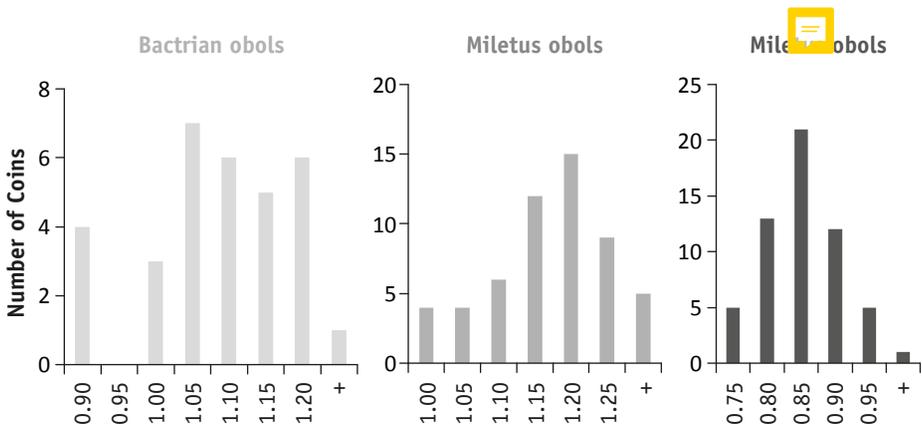


Figure 9 - Histograms of obol weights (in g) from the three series.

For all these reasons, it seems the Bactrian boar/lion coins have an affinity for the obols of Miletus and therefore could well have derived their inspiration largely from those coins. This would then support the idea that the coins were issued by the Branchidae, natives of Miletus, and their descendants.

Conclusion

Many authors, notably Narain, had argued that the Athenian style owl imitations and the coins of the Eagle series might have been issued by the Branchidae. In his critique of this proposal, Bernard described the Branchidae as:

“[...] une petite communauté de réfugiés politiques se maintenant tant bien que mal dans un pays étranger, coupée depuis longtemps de ses racines et dans une large mesure assimilée au milieu local, mais gardant l’usage de sa langue nationale dans ses activités domestiques et familiales. Nous voyons mal comment on pourrait comparer, à supposer qu’ils aient existé, des établissements aussi modestes, et dont l’hellénisme ne pouvait être que déclinant, aux cites florissantes de la côte anatolienne ou syro-phénicienne qui battaient alors monnaie, et la gravure en intaille à laquelle nous devons les trois groupes de monnaies dont nous venons de parler ici.”³²

While the magnificent Bactrian imitations of Athenian owls might indeed have been beyond the capabilities of the refugee community trying to maintain their Greek heritage, the boar / lion coins considered here are precisely the modest sort of coinage we might very well expect of them. They may well have begun issuing those coins as early as the middle of the 5th century soon after they first arrived in Bactria during the reign of Xerxes, or they may have struck them a little later when they felt the need for a currency for local trade or even for transactions within their own community. The fact that this coinage has no real successor could well be explained by the extermination of the tribe by Alexander. Thus, I would argue, there are enough reasons to at least consider the possibility that these coins were the product of, indeed perhaps the last vestige of, the Branchidae in Bactria.

32. BERNARD 1985, quoted by BOPEARACHCHI 1996, p. 22.

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APPENDIX I: CORPUS OF BOAR/LION COINS
(scale × 2)

- CNG: auctions of Classical Numismatic Group, Lancaster, PA; the identifying numbers are the Sale number (including electronic auctions denoted by the prefix “e”) followed by the Lot number.
- DK: David Kaplan, who kindly provided images of two coins from his collection.
- MZ stands for Mir Zakah (CURIEL, SCHLUMBERGER 1953).
- NP denotes NICOLET-PIERRE 1973; image from Gallica 1972.1048.
- Roma: auctions of Roma Numismatics, London, identified as the CNG coins are.
- T: coins from my own (“Tandon”) collection; the numbers following are the inventory numbers.
- Triskeles: Triskeles Auctions, Watkinsville, GA.
- Universal: Universal Numismatics, Sharjah, UAE, a dealer on VCoins.com.

CRUDE STYLE TYPE



1. T #696.51 (0.95 g, 9 mm, 4 h)



2. T #696.53 (1.11 g, 9 mm, 6 h)



3. Roma e60.397 (0.82 g, 9 mm, 7 h)



4. T #696.54 (0.70 g, 9 mm, 6 h)



5. DK 1 (0.95 g, 10 mm)



6. DK 2 (0.66 g, 9.5 mm)



7. Roma e70.858 (0.91 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



8. Roma e57.576 (1.08 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



9. Roma e59.422 (0.87 g, 10 mm, 7 h)



10. Roma e63.361 (0.72 g, 9 mm, 3 h)





11. Roma e70.860 (0.69 g, 9 mm, 6 h)



12. T #696.55 (0.50 g, 9 mm, 6 h)

SCORPION TYPE



13. Roma e68.664 (1.06 g, 10 mm, 12 h)



14. Roma e70.859 (0.81 g, 9 mm, 6 h)



15. CNG e131.78 (1.15 g, 9 mm, 8 h)



16. CNG 73.420a (details unavailable)



17. T #696.52 (0.98 g, 9 mm, 12 h)

TWO-SIDED GRAPE BUNCH TYPE



18. Roma e68.662 (1.04 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



19. CNG 73.420b (details unavailable)



20. CNG e460.364 (1.03 g, 10 mm, 12 h)



21. Roma e57.574 (1.05 g, 10 mm, 9 h)



22. CNG e457.142 (0.86 g, 10 mm, 12 h)



23. CNG e461.238 (1.12 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



24. CNG e225.159 (1.00 g, 10 mm, 10 h)



25. Roma e68.663 (1.21 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



26. Universal (1.08 g)



27. Roma e57.575 (1.08 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



28. Roma e70.856 (1.14 g, 10 mm, 12 h)



29. Roma e70.857 (1.17 g, 10 mm, 9 h)



30. Roma e59.421 (1.01 g, 10 mm, 7 h)



31. Mir Zakah (1.01 g, 10 mm)



32. T #271.2 (0.98 g, 10 mm, 9 h)



33. T #698.03 (1.19 g, 10 mm, 3 h)



34. T #698.05 (1.10 g, 10 mm, 4 h)



35. T #700.44 (0.86 g, 10 mm, 2 h)



36. T #700.45 (1.12 g, 10 mm, 7 h)



37. T #698.04 (0.90 g, 10 mm, 3 h)



38. CNG e461.239 (1.17 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



39. CNG e462.201 (1.14 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



40. Roma e57.573 (1.08 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



41. CNG e465.208 (1.02 g, 10.5 mm, 6 h)

MONOGRAM TYPE



42. CNG 87.604 (1.18 g, 11 mm, 6 h)



43. Triskeles 22.132 (1.16 g, 9 mm, 6 h)



44. Nicolet-Pierre #7 (1.09 g)



45. T #698.02 (1.02 g, 10 mm, 6 h)



46. CNG e243.153 (1.19 g, 9 mm, 6 h)

AN ANOMALY



47. CNG 93.675 (AV, 3.44 g, 17 mm, 5 h)
- doubtful authenticity ; scale × 1

APPENDIX II: THE WEIGHTS OF CYZICUS "OBOLS"

There were 69 coins of the Cyzicus boar/lion type listed in the archives of the Classical Numismatic Group. Figure II.1 shows a scatter diagram and a histogram of the weights of these coins. Both charts tell the same story in different ways: the coins clearly belong to three different denominations. Separating the coins into these three distinct groups gave us average weights of 0.41 g, 0.83 g, and 1.18 g. Thus the coins divide quite neatly into three well-known denominations: hemiobols, obols, and trihemibols.

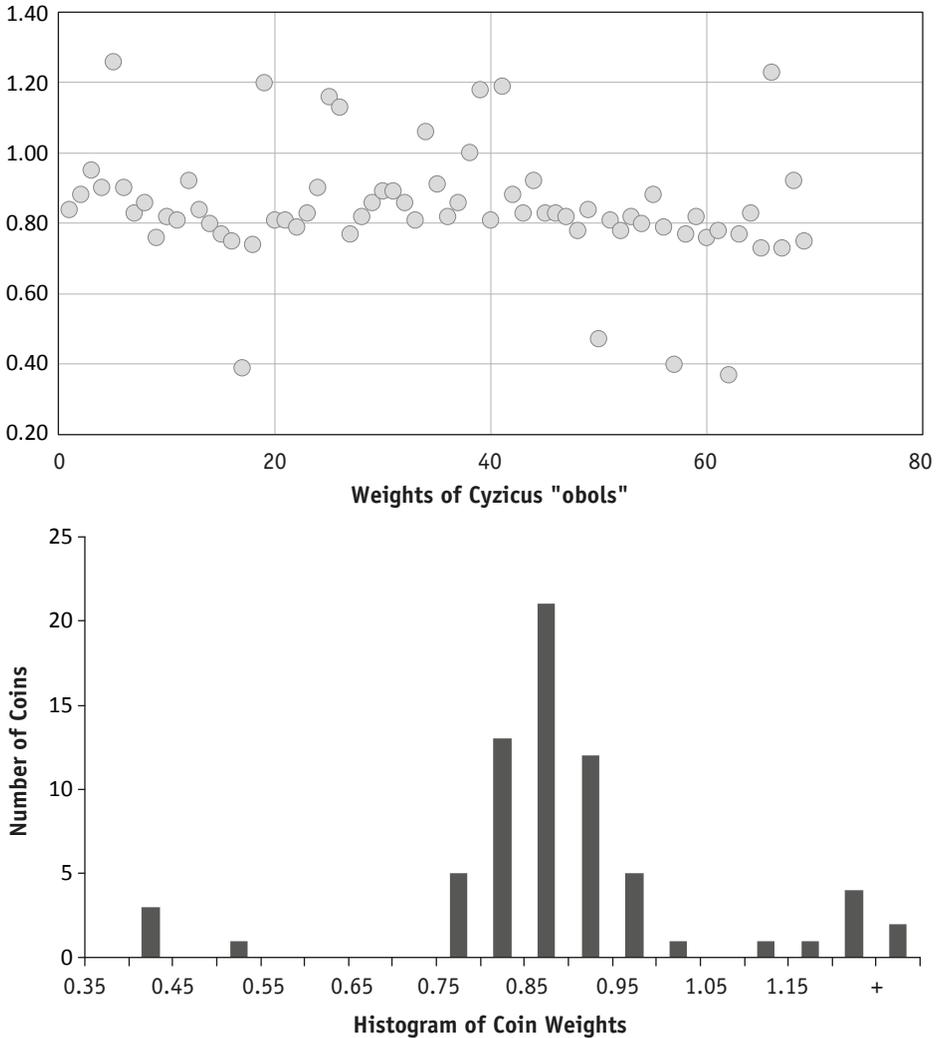


Figure 10 - Scatter Diagram and Histogram of "Obol" Weights (in g).