



Bulletin on Counterfeits

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The Bulletin on Counterfeits is produced by the IBSCC, an organ of the IAPN. It is designed to warn of recent forgeries and of earlier forgeries recently identified, as well as reminding the present generation of dealers, collectors and scholars of old forgeries, published long ago, which have now become unfamiliar. All the material published herein is presented in good faith as a service to the numismatic community as a whole, in the belief that the publication of forgeries both aids numismatics as a science, and helps to prevent, or lessen, financial losses for collectors, dealers and institutions.

Contents

Forgeries and Inventions of Parthian Coins

Introduction	2- 9
Catalogue	10-29
Summary and Note	30-31
Synopsis of the Forgeries	32-33
Appendix by J. F. Elmen	34-35

FORGERIES AND INVENTIONS OF PARTHIAN COINS

Gold Coins of Vonones I and Silver Drachms of Osroes I, Vologases V and VI, Artabanus IV, and of Artabanus IV with the name Tiridates

INTRODUCTION

Between 1988 and 1990 numerous attractive and rare Parthian silver drachms of the 2nd and early 3rd century A.D. began to appear on the London market. At roughly the same time, word began to spread that an incredible hoard of hitherto unknown Parthian gold coins of the early 1st century had also reached London, and was being studied. Both occurrences were thought to be among the few good consequences of the Iran-Iraq war. While there was some controversy over the gold coins, at that time almost everyone accepted the silver as genuine.

Yet there were some misgivings, because even though there were many examples of each variety of these rare, or even unknown, drachms, all the examples of each variety were struck by only one or two die pairs; and because the style and fabric of all the drachms in question seemed both unusual and curious.

Personally, I was convinced that the unusual fabric was due solely to the vagaries of cleaning, and that the appearance of several examples of a rare coin, all from the same die pair, was not in itself grounds for concern. After all, look how many archaic Naxos tetradrachms there are. I just naturally assumed that the reason for the rarity of certain Parthian coins was that very few of them had originally been struck, *ipso facto* from a limited number of die pairs; and that a search through museum and auction catalogues for illustrations of these very rare pieces would turn up a considerable number of die identities among those coins previously known. Thus, there would be perfect parallels for the new ones.

What I found was not what I had expected: aside from the suspect pieces virtually every specimen I could find of the very scarce drachms of

Osroes I (Sellwood 80.1/Shore 422) and the very rare drachms of **Vologases V** (Sellwood 86.3/Shore 448, Sellwood 86.4/Shore 449, Sellwood 86.5/Shore-) was struck by a **different die pair**. I found 41 illustrated examples of **Osroes I**, struck by 32 obverse and 38 reverse dies (including one obverse which is paired with two reverses, one of which links to another obverse, and one obverse paired with four reverses); turning to **Vologases V**, for Sellwood 86.3 (comprising three subvarieties) I also had 41 coins, though struck by 35 obverse and 39+ reverse dies (including two coins struck from the same pair of dies, and one of which only the obverse was illustrated); for the rare Sellwood 86.4 and the even rarer 86.5, I could only find 5 and 3 coins respectively, all apparently from differing dies pairs (though for 86.4 one obverse was used with two reverse dies, and one piece only had its obverse illustrated).

These figures are based, with some later additions, on a privately circulated preliminary study I made of these coins in 1992; it included coins found going through auction catalogues and price lists, as well as the catalogues of all major public collections available to me. It should be noted that while the basic conclusion of that study remains the same today, a few of the many details which were used to reach have proved, upon further research, to lack relevancy.

Unlike the issues of **Osroes I** and **Vologases V**, the coinages of **Vologases VI** and **Artabanus IV** proved to have been struck in such massive numbers that any attempt at even a tentative die study of their main issues had to be abandoned. I was, however, able to get a very clear picture of how their coinage was organized in general, and which specific issues were especially uncommon or unusual.

For comparison I turned to the coins of **Pacorus I** and **Parthamaspatēs**, and to the hoards published by G. Le Rider from the French excavations at Susa in Iran. **Pacorus I's** drachms are excessively rare: I only found four (London = *Traité* = Sear GCTV II 7462, Petrowicz, Shore and Simonetta's piece illustrated in NC 1978) which, nevertheless, were struck from two obverse and four reverse dies. By chance, I had a group of 78 drachms of **Parthamaspatēs**: now fairly common thanks to a vast hoard found in the 1960s, they used to be considered quite scarce (as shown by the values ascribed to them in Sellwood, Mitchiner and Sear),

and are closely related to the issues of **Osroes I**. These 78 coins were struck by 37 obverse and 64 reverse dies (obverses can be paired with as many as eight reverses, though most utilize far fewer; and no more than three coins were found struck by a single die pair).

All the coins discussed above were struck in Ecbatana, the most important drachm mint in the Parthian Empire. Ecbatana minted for the Parthians over a span of four centuries, and, in general, its output dwarfed that of all the other mints put together.

The Susa excavation coins are a welcome check on these results, especially because Susa was itself a mint; albeit on a far smaller scale than Ecbatana since its production was primarily destined for its own region. For example, 87 studiable coins of Sellwood's 47.22 (a drachm of **Orodes II** minted in Susa) came from 32 obverse dies; numerous other large groups of Susa issues show the same pattern (i.e., a considerable number of obverses were used for each issue: reverses were not identified by Le Rider but whenever two coins from the same obverse die are illustrated on his plates they are struck by different reverse dies). The only exception consists of the 58 examples of Sellwood 53.15 (a Susa drachm of **Phraates IV**), nearly all coming from a single huge hoard containing 1427 Parthian drachms of various types. These were struck by a single obverse die (albeit recut during its period of use), though paired with at least 2 reverses.

Obviously, if a local mint like Susa needed large numbers of obverse and reverse dies, how many dies must have been used by Ecbatana which provided drachms for the whole empire? Could it be that the rarity of some Parthian issues is not to be explained by their having been originally struck in small numbers with one or two die pairs, but rather because issues of much larger size were recalled or restruck, or simply have not been found in large hoards (like that of Parthamaspatēs)? I am quite certain that this is the case for Ecbatana issues in the 1st-early 3rd centuries A.D.: how else are we to explain the existence of *42 obverse and 46 (+2?) reverse dies* used to strike the 49 drachms I was able to record for **Vologases V**? Or the *32 obverses and 38 reverses* used for the 41 drachms of **Osroes I**?

The "new" drachms show a totally different pattern.

Osroes I: Two die pairs (F1/A and F2/B). I recorded nine examples of the first and five of the second, all from illustrated lists and sales catalogues.

Vologases V: Sellwood 86.3 (two of the three varieties, previously known from 17 obverses and 20 reverses). Variety I: One obverse paired with two reverses (FI 1/A and B). Variety II: One die pair (FII 1/A). I recorded seven examples of each, twentyone coins in all.

Sellwood 86.4. One die pair (FIV 1/A). Five recorded examples.

Sellwood 86.5. One die pair (FV 1/A). Four recorded examples.

It should be noted that the number of coins I recorded in 1992 as representatives of each of the suspect die pairs is only a mere fraction of the number which I now know to exist.

This situation, which is exactly duplicated for the other issues of **Vologases V**, **Vologases VI** and **Artabanus IV** under suspicion, is totally unparalleled in the Parthian series (the great hoard of the 1960's which produced so many examples of Sellwood 1-6 shows a completely different pattern). While a new hoard can easily increase the known examples of a rare issue, it is unlikely to do so *selectively* by providing us with numerous specimens from only one or two pairs of dies.

The suspect coins have other things in common: the metal appears to be the same for all of them; the obverses are beautifully and sharply engraved; the reverse legends are of admirable regularity with no sign of hesitation in the lettering nor with any problem of spacing vis-à-vis the reverse types; all the coins can be described as being virtually uncirculated without any serious defects, or wear, or die rust; when compared to normal Parthian silver coins these pieces show no apparent signs of having been hand struck, but rather give the impression of being manufactured using modern machinery. In Appendix I Mr. J. Elmen, of the Anti-Forgery Committee of the IBSCC, has supplied a number of valuable observations on the metal, the striking technique and the dies used for the drachms.

When they first appeared, the gold coins of **Vonones I** (staters, thirds and sixths, all apparently minted at Rhagae) caused sensation and controversy: they were welcomed by some as a marvelous addition to Parthian numismatics, while a majority dismissed them as outright fakes (this "hoard" has recently been noted in *Coin Hoards VIII*, London 1994, p. 70, 604, in a section with the revealing title, "Hoards containing coins which are believed by a substantial number of people to be modern forgeries").

After hearing about them for so long, I first saw them while standing in the bright sunshine outside the lecture hall at the XIth International Numismatic Congress in Brussels in September 1991. I thought them beautiful, but that they certainly weren't ancient. In fact, when carefully examined, these coins show too many anomalies of style, type, epigraphy, fabric and metal content for them to be genuine.

The style and workmanship are, in general, of a sharpness and neatness which are simply too good to be true: the lines forming the portrait busts on the obverse are perfectly regular, unlike those used for the same busts on **Vonones I's** well known, and genuine, silver drachms; and the various figures on the reverses more recall drawings of Parthian coins than they do actual pieces.

There are two similar obverse dies for the staters, each used interchangeably with two different reverse dies, one dated to March 9/10 A.D. and the other dated to April of the same year (321 of the Seleucid era). Oddly enough, the styles of the obverses are those of two different mints, Ecbatana and Rhagae; and while the reverses are dated to two successive months of use, the obverse dies show no sign of wear between the coins struck in March and those made in April. Another factor is even more curious: on the obverses the cheeks of **Vonones** appear quite rounded, even protuberant. This style of cheek is found on other Parthian coins, though not so emphatically. However, there is a very close parallel, so close, in fact, that we might conclude that the same die cutter was responsible for them both, in the obverse portraits on the suspect silver drachms of **Artabanus IV** illustrated below. Yet these coins were supposedly struck over 200 years apart!

On all the dies the obverse and reverse inscriptions are extremely well cut with very carefully formed lettering. Yet on the first stater reverse die the legend contains an incorrect combination of cases: *King Vonones* is in the nominative and his titles, *Great* and *Victorious*, are in the genitive. ~~Even more astoundingly, this mistake only appears on a small number of the staters, with the die then being recut and corrected prior to striking the rest!~~ It is true that Parthian drachms of this period have long been notorious for their garbled legends, but they usually combine a wide variety of mistakes: the words are gibberish, and the letters can be upside-down or retrograde. Obviously, the mint workers had no knowledge of Greek at all. Yet the grammatical mistakes found here would be inconceivable for an ancient die cutter who could produce such perfect legends. And if they went to the trouble of correcting the die, why did they allow the faulty coins to circulate? After all, recalling and restriking unwanted coins was a common Parthian practise (for example, Sellwood 41.1, a tetradrachm of Mithradates III, is only known as an *undertype*), and none of these gold coins look like they even left the mint itself, much less circulated over such a wide area that a recall would be unfeasible.

However, a modern forger could have created a new legend very easily taking the words *King Vonones* from one of **Vonones I's** usual coins and by adding *Great* and *Victorious* from other well-known Parthian issues, without realizing that the words were in different cases.

However, the second gold issue (which also includes the fractions) bears the same reverse legends as **Vonones I's** normal silver drachms, thus resulting in the disappearance of the epithet *Great*. Oddly enough, its very presence is somewhat inexplicable: this epithet was introduced under Mithradates I and remained as a standard part of every Parthian king's titlature, on both tetradrachms and drachms, until a special issue early in the reign of Orodes II (Sellwood 44.1), after which it dropped out of use completely. Its reappearance for *one month* in A.D. 9/10 followed by its immediate suppression argues a degree of chaos which is belied by the perfection of the gold's striking (while there was considerable experimentation in Parthian coinage in the period 1 B.C./1 A.D.-26/7, including unusual types and shortened legends, the dropping of a title in a way which could imply a *demotion* is not found).

The lettering of the inscription on all the obverse and reverse dies is the same, and the inscriptions themselves are perfectly intergrated with the portraits and reverse types, thus making it clear that a single artist designed and cut all the dies: there is no question of the types having been cut into the dies first, by one or two master engravers, with the legends filled in later (a practice clearly observable on other ancient coins, including Parthian and Roman issues). This unity of conception makes the types themselves most curious: while the obverse heads are the same as those used on the silver drachms of **Vonones I**, the reverses are similar to, but not the same as, the various standard tetradrachm reverse types struck in Seleucia. Is it rational that the same die cutter would have combined a completely linear and stylized portrait, normally found in the central and eastern mints of Ecbatana and Rhagae in conjunction with a relatively schematic reverse, with reverse figures, as used in the western mint of Seleucia, which are carefully drawn, realistically designed, and normally combined with a portrait of a totally different style?

The fabric of the Parthian gold coins is unlike any other supposedly contemporary or near contemporary ancient gold piece, such as Republican or early Imperial aurei, or Greek staters of the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., or even Kushan issues. This is best seen in the blow-up photographs below. Analyses of the gold reveals a significant amount of copper in the alloy: this is not normally found in ancient gold coins.

The photographs of all the suspect coins which follow clearly show the numerous parallels which exist between the gold staters and their fractions and all the suspect silver drachms. All these coins are to be condemned as **modern forgeries** coming from a single, **modern** workshop.

It must be emphasized that these are all brilliantly made forgeries, with some being exceptionally so. If the way they are presented here makes their falsity seem obvious, this is by no means a correct impression, since forgeries only become obvious when they are finally unmasked. The fact that so many dealers and collectors were fooled by them testifies to how well made they were. Yet, at the same time, the fact that they were fooled should not be taken as criticism of those dealers or collectors since all of them were acting in good faith, and at the time of the

appearance of the coins virtually everyone, including myself, believed them to be genuine. To be fair, there are a small number of people who are convinced that these coins are genuine, and I fully respect and understand their position, since the sheer beauty of the coins themselves has always made me want to share their opinion. However, with all due respect to their knowledge, honor and probity, I have to disagree with them.

Finally, I would like to thank a considerable number of people who provided advice and help with this project.

Members of the Anti-Forgery Committee of the IAPN, especially J. Elmen, S. Hurter, F. Kovacs and H.-J. Schramm, have always been fully supportive. In addition, J. Elmen undertook a microscopic study of these coins: his conclusions appear below in the **Appendix**. W. Müseler has constantly provided important information, as well as masses of useful advice; as has J. Pett who saved me from a number of avoidable errors. Many other IAPN members, among whom being H. J. Berk, B. T. Curtis, P.-F. Jacquier, H. Voegtli and E. J. Waddell, provided help, support and some stimulating and enlightening discussions.

Other members of the numismatic trade, including S. Album, T. Eden, V. England, R. Freeman, D. Kroh, D. Louloulakis, W. Sayles, and A. Winzer were always ready with comments. I would especially like to thank Fred Shore for the Herculean efforts he went through over this controversy, and A. Tkalec for giving me far more advice than I could possibly absorb.

I have had a number of interesting discussions with staff at the British Museum Coin Room for which I am most grateful.

Last but not least, collectors in continental Europe, Great Britain and in the United States have provided immense amounts of information concerning these coins. Without their often confidential support I would never have been able to obtain the knowledge I now possess, and I owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Note: All the die identification numbers and letters given above, and below in the catalogue, are those used in the reference plates I prepared for my preliminary study and then expanded.

CATALOGUE

All the counterfeits except Fig. 16 are illustrated twice the actual size,
most genuine coins in actual size.

Vonones I

Gold Staters

Obv. Diademed bust of **Vonones I** l.

Rev. Tyche, standing l., presenting seated king with palm branch.
Dated March, A.S. 321. Rhagae mint.

FIG. 1. FALSE. SI/S1.

FIG. 2. FALSE. SII/S1.



1

false



2

Obv. As last.

Rev. King seated r., holding Nike. Dated April, A.S. 321.
Rhagae mint.

FIG. 3. FALSE. SI/S2.

FIG. 4. FALSE. SII/S2.



3



false



4



Both stater varieties, 1-2 and 3-4, utilize the same two obverse dies (SI and SII). In each case they are paired with a single reverse die (S1 and S2). The style of SI is that of the silver drachms from Rhagae, while SII is closer to that of Ecbatana.



A

genuine



A 1



A 2



FIG. A. GENUINE. Silver Drachm, Ecbatana. Sellwood 60.5/Shore 329.

Ex AC XII, 1926 (Petrowicz), 2365.

FIG. A1. GENUINE. Silver Drachm, Ecbatana. Sellwood 60.5/Shore 329.

Ex Naville I, 1921 (Pozzi), 3120.

FIG. A2. GENUINE. Silver Drachm, Rhagae. Sellwood 60.6/Shore -.

Ex Mitchiner, *The Ancient & Classical World*, 613.

Gold Third Stater

Obv. and Rev. As 3-4.

FIG. 5. FALSE.



5

false



Gold Sixth Stater

Obv. and Rev. As 3-4.

FIG. 6. FALSE.



The way the cheeks of **Vonones I** are represented should be compared with those on the false issues of **Vologases V** (Figs. 14a and 14b), **Vologases VI** (Figs. 15-18) and **Artabanus IV** (Figs. 19-22, 23) below.

Osroes I

The Osroes I drachms are by far the most successful and well made of all the forgeries presented here. They were struck using two separate die pairs which do not link with each other. Their fabric is unlike that of genuine pieces (their edges often contain large numbers of tiny cracks, a characteristic found on other drachm forgeries) and they are invariably unworn. Below the seated archer on reverse die A there is a cross-like object composed of four distinct dots (actually the archer's l. foot). On all other reverse dies of **Osroes I** seen by the writer, as well as on all those of **Parthamaspates** (whose die cutter also ostensibly made those of **Osroes I**) these dots are connected: they often nearly disappear and give the impression of being a solid cross. The reverse inscriptions are admirably regular. Other comments can be found in the introduction, above.

Silver Drachms

Obv. Diademed bust of **Osroes II**, his hair gathered up into one bunch at the top of his head and one over his ear.

Rev. Archer seated r., holding bow; all within square inscription. Ecbatana.

Sellwood 80.1. Shore 422.

FIG. 7. FALSE. F1/A.

FIG. 8. FALSE. F2/B.

FIG. B. GENUINE. 8/K. Ex NFA Winter 1989 MBS, 735.

FIG. C. GENUINE. 8/IIa. Ex Leu 57, 1993, 169.



7



false



8



B



genuine



C



Vologases V

Silver Drachms

Series I

Obv. Diademed, facing bust of **Vologases V** with a pointed beard made of straight lines and a moustache with upwardly curving ends. His hair is arranged in three bunches, one over each ear and one, tied with a ribbon, at the top of his head. The ribbon ties flutter in the air at either side of the topknot.

Rev. Archer seated r. within square inscription. Ecbatana. Sellwood 86.3 var. Shore – (cf. 448).

FIG. 9. FALSE. F I 1/A.

FIG. 10. FALSE. F I 1/B.

FIG. D. GENUINE. I 3/Cb. Ex NFA XXII, 1989, 356.



9

false



D

genuine





10



The false pieces share the characteristic fabric of the **Osroes I's**, including odd edge breaks and perfect preservation. More specifically, the topknot is much broader and flatter than real examples and, unusually, is composed of only a double row of dots; the ribbon ties are curved rather than having a distinct angle; the face and beard taken together form what looks like a shield, unlike real examples which are less regular; the workmanship is "too perfect"; the archer holds his bow with two "fingers" on the curved section only, on all genuine examples he appears to have one finger on the curve and the other either at the end of the bow where the string is attached or raised in the air, with its tip far from the bow end.

Series II

Obv. As *Series I*, but the ribbon ties are found within the topknot and not at the sides.

Rev. A last. Ecbatana.

Sellwood 86.3 var. Shore - (448 var.).

FIG. 11. FALSE. F II 1/A.

FIG. E. GENUINE. II 9/I. Ex Leu 57, 1993, 173.

Characteristics as last.



11
false



E
genuine



Series III

Obv. As *Series II*, with ribbon ties in the topknot, but the moustache is relatively flat and not upwardly curved.

Rev. As last. Ecbatana.

Sellwood 86.3 var. Shore 448.

No forgeries are known of this variety.

FIG. F. GENUINE. III 6/Fa. Ex NFA Winter 1989 MBS, 738.



F
genuine



Series IV

Obv. As *Series III*, but the beard, while still pointed in outline, is filled in with dashes rather than straight lines.

Rev. As last. Ecbatana.

Sellwood 86.4. Shore 449.

FIG. 12. FALSE. F IV 1/A.

FIG. G. GENUINE. IV 4/D. Ex Peus 323, 1988, 963.

FIG. H. GENUINE. IV 1/E. Ex Peus 338, 1994, 242.



12
false



G



genuine



H



Same general characteristics as the previous pieces. The forgeries of this variety introduce a number of anomalies. On the real pieces **Vologases V** is portrayed wearing a circular torc going beneath his beard, on the fakes this is misunderstood. Also misunderstood is the beard itself: on the real coins there is a triangular space filled with dashes, while the forgeries display a triangular space filled with cross-hatched lines. The bunches of

hair to each side of the king's head are hemicircles which curve downwards from their point of juncture at the top of the diadem (like ear muffs); on all genuine examples of *Series I-IV*, these side bunches either have relatively flat tops or curve upward and then downwards, thus making the side tufts look more like balls with a portion removed.

Series V

Obv. Diademed, facing bust of **Vologases V** with pointed beard, flat moustache and elaborate robes. He has a bunch of hair over each ear but no topknot.

Rev. As above. Ecbatana.

Sellwood 86.5. Shore -.

FIG. 13. FALSE. F V 1/A.

FIG. I. GENUINE. V 2/B. Ex AC XII, 1926 (Petrowicz), 2506.

FIG. J. GENUINE. V 3/C. Ex CNG XXIV, 1992, 364.



13
false



I



genuine



J



One of the great rarities of the Parthian series, this sub-type is only known from a very few genuine examples. The forgery differs from them in many ways: the general workmanship is infinitely more careful; the moustache curves upward rather than being flat; all the general characteristics as enumerated under **Osroes I** are present; the archers's hand grasps the bow curve, not the curve and the end (as noted under *Series I* above).

Series VI

Obv. Diademed bust of **Vologases V** in profile to l., circular bunch of hair over the ear.

Rev. As last. Ecbatana.

Sellwood -. Shore -.

FIG. 14a. FALSE.

FIG. 14b. FALSE.



14a



14b

false



This coin is a modern invention (of which thirty examples are known, *all from the same pair of dies*, see G. R. Assar, “Some New Coins of Vologases V”, NCirc XCVIII/10, Dec. 1990, p. 348). Everything about the coin, fabric, style, workmanship, etc., recalls all the general characteristics of the forgeries under discussion, and it is very similar to the gold of **Vonones I** (!) as well as to the false drachms of **Vologases VI** and **Artabanus IV** (see below). The compact bust with its exceptionally neat beard differs remarkably from those on the presumably nearly contemporary coinage of **Osroes II** (Figs. K-L, below): its only real parallels can be found on some of the forgeries of **Vologases VI** (Fig. 15) and **Artabanus IV** (Figs. 19, 23). Note, as well, the typical archer’s hand as found on all the forgeries of **Vologases V**.



K

genuine



L



FIG. K. GENUINE. **Osroes II**. Swiss Market, 1990.

FIG. L. GENUINE. **Osroes II**. Ex MzK 27, 1976, 631. 1.5:1

Vologases VI

Silver Drachms

The drachm coinage of **Vologases VI** can be conveniently divided into a massive “main-stream” issue characterized by the presence of the Parthian letters *w/* behind the king’s head on the obverse (Sellwood 88.18–21. Shore 455–461), and a much more limited series which lacks those letters and sometimes shows the king wearing a tiara ornamented with a crescent (Sellwood 88.22–23. Shore 462).

The main series has three major sub-groups which can be identified by the number of feather-like ornaments (termed “pellets on stalks” by Sellwood) which appear on the side of the king’s tiara: there can be three, four or five. There are a great number of stylistic links between these groups (as well as with the main coinage of **Vologases VI**’s brother and rival **Artabanus IV**) and the types probably were used interchangeably. Whether significant or not, the minor issues without *w/* seem always to have four feathers and to have busts which are rather tall and rounded. This bust type also appears in the main issues with both three and four feathers.

I was unable to find a single die link in over 80 illustrated drachms of **Vologases VI**, nor could I find more than one example struck from the same die pair.

Main issues:

FIG. M. GENUINE. Three feathers with *w/*. Ex MzK 59, 1986, 1276.

FIG. N. GENUINE. Four feathers with *w/*. Ex MzK 27, 1976, 634.



M



genuine



N



Minor issues:

FIG. O. GENUINE. Four feathers without w/. Ex CNG X, 1990, 163.

FIG. P. GENUINE. Four feathers without w/ but with crescent. Ex Peus 315, 1986, 277.



genuine

In 1990 dozens of drachms of **Vologases VI** of four distinct varieties, struck by four different die pairs with no interlinking, suddenly appeared. They share the same fabric and lack of any sign of wear as all the other forgeries presented here; they are made with a neatness and precision which is incredible, especially in the case of the reverse legends which are of an unheard – of regularity (compare them with Figs. M–P above); their style is only paralleled by the gold of **Vonones I**, the profile **Vologases V**'s and the equally false **Artabanus IV**'s.

FIG. 15. FALSE. F4. Four feathers and crescent, no w/.

FIG. 16. FALSE. F5. Four feathers, star and crescent, no w/.



false



17

false



18



FIG. 17. FALSE. F6. Four feathers, star, crescent and *wl*.

FIG. 18. FALSE. F7. Four feathers, crescent and *wl*.

Figs. 15-18 are varieties which were hitherto unknown, and are simply clever inventions.

Artabanus IV

Silver Drachms

Artabanus IV's coinage can be divided in the same way as that of his brother **Vologases VI**. His "main-stream" issues have the Parthian letters 'r behind his head and either three, four, five or six feathers on his tiara (Sellwood 89.1-3. Shore 464-465). A much rarer minor issue lacks the 'r behind the head and has a much more elaborate tiara ornamented with pearls and a central star (Sellwood 90.1. Shore 467).

Artabanus IV's coinage is much scarcer than **Vologases VI's**, and I was only able to find 40–50 illustrated examples: there were neither die links between any of them nor was there more than one coin struck from the same die pair.

In 1990, however, a remarkable number of coins suddenly appeared from the hitherto very rare minor issue of **Artabanus IV** with the tiara ornamented by a star: two die pairs of the previously known type without 'r and two die pairs presenting a new variety with 'r. They differ from genuine examples in many ways: their fabric is like all the previously discussed pieces; their style is far too precise and accurate, though the detailing of the bust is remarkably coarse, making the coins almost look like caricatures (especially the exaggeratedly pointed, W-shaped tip to Artabanus's beard); comparing the bulging cheeks of the portrait on these coins with those of **Vonones I** makes it very clear that the same die cutter was responsible for both, etc.

FIG. 19. FALSE. F5. No 'r.

FIG. 20. FALSE. F6. No 'r.



19



20

false



FIG. 21. FALSE. F7. With 'r.

FIG. 22. FALSE. F8. With 'r.



21

false



22



FIG. Q. GENUINE. No 'r. Ex AC XII, 1926 (Petrowicz), 2521.

FIG. R. GENUINE. No 'r. Ex Peus 333, 1992, 467.

FIG. S. GENUINE. No 'r. Shore 467.



Q

genuine



R



S



Artabanus IV with Tiridates

Silver Drachm

The reverse inscriptions on late Parthian drachms are basically barbarized corruptions of the original Greek legends formalized in the 1st century B.C. Beginning in the mid 2nd century A.D. the top line gives the ruler's name and title (*MLK'* = King) in Parthian. However, on an exceedingly rare issue of **Artabanus IV** the second line (directly above the seated archer) is also in Parthian. It was first translated to give **Artabanus IV** the legend, "Arthabanus King *of Kings*" (Sellwood 89.4). In 1990, a more careful study revealed it to be a name, *tr'dt* = Tiridates (D. Sellwood, "The End of the Parthian Dynasty", NCirc XCVIII/5, 1990, p. 157), and it was suggested that **Tiridates** was the last Parthian ruler, and that he reused some dies of **Artabanus IV** by adding his own name. It is equally likely to have been an emergency issue coined in haste (the second line appears to be squeezed into a space too small for it) during the final, doomed, Parthian resistance to the Sasanian onslaught.

FIG. 23a. FALSE. F10. With *tr'dt*.

FIG. T. GENUINE. With *tr'dt*. Ex NCirc XCVIII/5, 1990, p. 157.



23a

false



T

genuine



FIG. 23b. FALSE. F10. With *tr'dt*; same dies as FIG. 23a.
 FIG. U. GENUINE. With *tr'dt*. Ex Spink 106, 1994, 106.
 FIG. V. GENUINE. No *tr'dt*. Ex Peus 314, 1985, 271.
 FIG. W. GENUINE. No *tr'dt*. Shore 464.



23b

false



U

genuine



V



W



The genuine coins (Figs. T.–U.) show all the characteristics of the mainstream issues of **Artabanus IV**, of which they indubitably form part: they have tiaras with either four or three feathers; 'r' behind the head; a forked beard with braided points; and a messily arranged reverse inscription (compare with the drachms of **Artabanus IV** illustrated as Fig. V., with four feathers, and Fig. W., with five).

Prior to this study I had not realized quite how ludicrous the false coin of **Artabanus IV** with **Tiridates** actually is: it is by far the worst of all these fakes and, in retrospect, surely the most obvious. The obverse is taken from the same rare issue of **Artabanus IV**, with tiara ornamented with pearls and star, that provided the model for the “normal” **Artabanus IV** forgeries. In fact, it is nearly the same die as Fig. 19 (F5) and is equally false.

The reverse is even more impossible. As we have seen the genuine coins utilize dies prepared for **Artabanus IV**: his name still appears on both the obverse and the reverse though, presumably in great haste, the meaningless second line of **Artabanus IV**'s reverse was erased to provide space (insufficient) for the name *tr'dt* to be squeezed in above the archer. However, the false die shows no sign of haste in its manufacture and the name *tr'dt* appears as an integral part of the design. The reverse in general shows a regularity which is almost surreal in comparison with any genuine coin of the period (though it is exactly what one would expect from this group of forgeries).

Going further, this entire group, four varieties of **Vologases VI** (four die pairs), two of **Artabanus IV** (four die pairs) and one of **Artabanus IV** with **Tiridates** (one die pair), has an uncanny resemblance to a modern mint set, carefully struck with specially prepared dies and including varieties not intended for general circulation. It is, of course, my belief that this is exactly what that group is!



13 Volageses V. False

Summary

When examined carefully all the suspect coins presented here, the gold of **Vonones I** and the silver of **Osroes I**, **Vologases V**, **Vologases VI**, **Artabanus IV** and **Artabanus IV** with the name **Tiridates**, resemble each other so closely (in all ways) that they:

- a) have to have been minted in the same mint;
- b) have to have been minted contemporaneously;
- c) have to have dies which were all cut by the same die cutter or team of die cutters.

Additionally, they differ from undoubtedly genuine coins in:

- a) fabric;
- b) general appearance;
- c) style.

These coins are all false.

In conclusion I would once again like to point out how brilliant these forgeries are, and in view of this brilliance once again reiterate that this article neither makes nor implies any criticism of the dealers or collectors who were innocently fooled by them. Not only were they so attractive that no one dreamt of challenging them, but also no in depth study of the series involved existed to show how anomalous they were.

A. Walker

All the counterfeits dealt with in this Bulletin are illustrated in actual size on pp. 32-33.

Note

When this article was in press an important new study devoted to Parthian coinage appeared: F. de Callataÿ, *Les tétradrachmes d'Orodès II et de Phraate IV. Étude du rythme de leur production monétaire à la lumière d'une grande trouvaille*. Studia Iranica Cahier 14 (Paris 1994). It provides a great deal of information which is highly relevant to the Parthian forgeries discussed above.

- 1) As statistically reconstructed, an immense number of dies were originally used by the Parthians for some of their tetradrachm issues. Some obverses were paired with several reverses. We have seen this was the normal practise for drachms as well.
- 2) In a hoard of 430 coins 1 die pair is known from 6 coins, 1 from 5 coins, 8 die pairs are known from 3 coins each, and 47 die pairs are known from two coins each. The remaining 301 coins are each struck from a different die pair (though some are linked). We do not have dozens of coins from the same pair of dies.
- 3) Dated issues were very carefully controlled: dies intended to be used within a specific month were only used during that month. We have seen this was the normal ancient practise.
- 4) Tetradrachms of Tiridates II were originally produced in large numbers, but after his defeat they were specifically and efficiently taken out of circulation and restruck; thus they are extremely rare today (only six coins are known and each is struck by a different die pair). In the hoard, 22 tetradrachms of Phraates IV were found to be clearly overstruck on earlier coins: of the undertypes, at least 11, if not 21, were issues of Tiridates II. This lends considerable support to the theory that certain Parthian drachm types, now extremely rare, were also originally produced as large issues utilizing numerous die pairs, but were subsequently recalled and reminted.

A. Walker

All Counterfeit



1 A



2 A



3 A



4 A



5 A



6 A



7



8



9



10



11



12



All Counterfeit



13



14



15



16



17



18



19



20



21



22



23a



23b



Appendix

Some Observations on the Planchets, Striking Technique and Dies of the Parthian Drachm Forgeries

On October 24, 1994 I viewed a representative group of the suspect Parthian drachms described above, as well as a number of undoubtedly genuine Parthian coins of the same or contemporary issues. All my observations were obtained using a high power binocular microscope and my conclusions can be duplicated by anyone using similar equipment to examine comparable coins.

- 1) *The Planchets.* The metal of the suspect pieces is obviously a different alloy, or is more thoroughly annealed, than that of genuine coins. The texture of the edges of the genuine examples is granular and has microscopic fissures. On the suspect coins the edges are smooth and reflective (when viewed under a microscope), despite the occasional presence of large edge cracks. This treatment of the edges can be seen on all the suspect coins and readily sets them apart from all genuine examples.
- 2) *Striking Technique.* The originals display strong signs of metal flow, especially in the fields which tend to be uneven. The suspect coins, while struck, exhibit minimal flow in the fields and show various degrees of finishing marks (random direction) which seem never to be evident on the originals.

A possible explanation for the minimal flow marks is that the suspect planchets are actually harder than the originals, and thus, to achieve a similar quality of relief, had to be struck with more force by a press, rather than by hand as was normal in ancient times.

- 3) *The Dies*. The suspect coins are very good imitations of the style of originals but are, in fact, too good. The dots of the pearl borders on the suspect coins are sharp and individual, on the originals they are soft and tend to flow together. In one instance this flow was mimicked on a suspect piece but the tool marks designed to make the dots appear to run together were visible.
- 4) *Conclusion*. While I have no expertise *per se* in the field of Parthian numismatics, I have had over thirty years experience with ancient, medieval and modern coins. I am also fully familiar with how both hand struck coins, produced in ancient, medieval and early modern times, and modern coins, struck by machines, ought to appear microscopically. In my considered opinion the suspect coins show all the signs of having been **recently manufactured**, and are, thus, exceptionally well-made **modern forgeries**.

J. F. Elmen

