

Hadrianic Novelties

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Ben Lee Damsky initiated the eventual partial gift and partial purchase of his collection of more than eight hundred Roman and Roman provincial coins with a series of sales, at prices very advantageous to the Yale University Art Gallery, in 2007. The Gallery made further purchases in 2008 and 2009, and the balance of the collection will come by outright gift. Like most collectors, Damsky has areas of special interest, and one of them is the *cistophori* of Hadrian. He has succeeded in assembling a considerable collection of these coins and many important comparable pieces; the group is interesting not only for its numbers but also for the fact that many of these coins were unpublished.¹

The *cistophorus* (“basket-bearer”) is a silver coin, about 12.5 grams in weight, named after its original content — its obverse had a *cista mystica*, “a magic basket,” from which a snake emerged, surrounded by an ivy wreath; the reverse showed two snakes entwined around a bow case. The coinage was introduced in the 160s B.C. by the Attalid kings of Pergamon, and both its types, or main images, make reference to Dionysos and Herakles, deities prominent there. When the kingdom was bequeathed to the Romans in A.D. 133, the denomination — about equal to three of the standard Roman silver coin, the denarius — was simply taken over, and con-

tinued to be struck with these types or their variants into the 40s B.C.

When Antony went east, he Latinized the coinage, placing his own image in an ivy wreath on the obverse; on the reverse, above a *cista* flanked by two snakes, appeared an image of his wife, Octavia, or a standing figure of Dionysos. The language became Latin, and it would remain so through the coinage’s subsequent history. The coins were produced in large numbers by Augustus, then sporadically through the first and early second centuries.² But they are stripped of their Greek character, often looking like no more than big denarii.

Here we will consider the *cistophoric* coinage of Hadrian. Most of this, perhaps all of it, was produced during or after his second trip to the province of Asia, in A.D. 128/29–130. The obverses are fairly standard throughout, but the reverses show the greatest variety of any coinage in the imperial series. They display provincial gods and goddesses, personifications, and monuments, in addition to more standard Roman types. But the salient fact about Hadrian’s *cistophori* from the province of Asia is that they are all overstruck — that is, they use earlier coins for blanks. These are almost always coins of Antony and Augustus, which by the time they were overstruck must have been very worn and would have lost considerable

weight. The intent seems to have been to revalidate this currency for circulation, as provincial bankers were in the habit of discounting worn coins.

The first modern discussion of the Hadrianic cistophori appeared in 1936, and it incorporated limited study of the dies. Because ancient dies were engraved by hand, surviving coins provide evidence of their appearance. When two or more coins share a die, it is the firmest possible evidence of their common origin in space and time. On the basis of die sharing, stylistic connection, and type references, Hubert Herzfelder was able to show that the coinage was produced at many mints simultaneously.³

More than thirty years ago I undertook a more ambitious approach, studying the entire coinage by die.⁴ About fifteen named mints and five others whose identities are obscure were counted; other coins remained unattributed. The infrastructure was firm, but the details were subject to refinement. For example, a unique coin I assigned to Nysa in Lydia on the basis of its reverse type, the Rape of Persephone, proved, on discovery of a second example, to share a die with the large mint of Sardis, and “Nysa” became a phantom. Conversely, recent discoveries have firmed up the structure of the mint of Pergamon and led to the identification of a mint at Halicarnassus.⁵

Damsky’s coins add significantly to the corpus. Five examples are chosen here, each of them unique.



I.

Cistophorus of Hadrian from Miletus

Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS P(ater) P(atriciae)
Head to r.

Rev.: COS III Apollo seated l. on a pile of rocks, holding a bow in his l. hand and raising his r. arm over his head; behind, an omphalos

Silver, 10.6 g, 6:00, 28 mm

Struck at Miletus in Ionia, A.D. 128–30. Traces of overstriking

Ruth Elizabeth White Fund, with the assistance of Ben Lee Damsky, 2009.110.12

The type is unique in Roman coinage. The piece cannot be linked to others by its obverse die, but its style as a whole closely resembles that of other Milesian cistophori: the emperor’s “curiously long throat” observed by Herzfelder on other pieces, as well as the renderings of letter forms such as S and the strictly parallel compression of the consular iteration on the reverse. The reverse type also points to Miletus: it has an almost exact parallel in a bronze of Nero and Commodus (fig. 1).⁶ The cistophorus must have been produced after A.D. 128, when Hadrian adopted the title *Pater Patriae*, and presumably within the term of his visit to Asia, which began in winter A.D. 128/129 and concluded in A.D. 130.



Fig. 1. Uncertain denomination of Commodus from Miletus, Ionia (obverse and reverse), A.D. 180–92. Bronze, 23.08 g, 6:00, 37 mm. Promised gift of Ben Lee Damsky

The piece shows that there was more than one cult of Apollo in the environs of Miletus. The most famous was that of Apollo Didymeus, whose statue had been produced by the sculptor Canachus; both it and his temple are reproduced on cistophori. Our Apollo, whose function as an oracle is indicated by the omphalos, may perhaps be paired with the Artemis who also appears on the cistophori of Miletus.⁷ Apollo was allegedly the father of the founder of Miletus.



2.

Cistophorus of Hadrian from Kolophon

Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS P P Head to r.

Rev.: COS III Apollo seated l. on a throne with back holding a lyre in his l. arm and extending an olive branch over a tripod with his r.

Silver, 11.31 g, 5:00, 27 mm

Struck at Kolophon in Ionia, A.D. 128–30. Overstruck obverse on obverse of a cistophorus of Augustus (note the outline of his head at the base of Hadrian's neck and the wreath showing through around the reverse)

Promised gift of Ben Lee Damsky

The deity portrayed is Apollo Klarios, who was worshipped, apparently exclusively, at Kolophon. The identity is secured by a coin of Trajan (fig. 2) and a larger one in Munich, which bear the legend ΚΟΛΟΦΩΝΙ ΚΛΑΡΙΟΣ



Fig. 2. *Uncertain denomination of Trajan from Kolophon* (obverse and reverse), A.D. 98–117. Bronze, 9.05 g, 2:00, 24 mm. Yale University Art Gallery, Ruth Elizabeth White Fund, 2004.6.2773

(“Klarios at Kolophon”), but the god also appears on many other later issues.⁸

The condition of the piece is outstanding, though it has been somewhat obscured by the ineptitude of the strike.



3.

Cistophorus of Hadrian from Knidos

Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS Bust facing r. in cuirass and paludamentum seen from behind

Rev.: COS III Aphrodite of Knidos standing l. looking back to r., holding her r. hand in front of her and in her l. holding drapery over an amphora or urn

Silver, 10.54 g, 6:00, 28 mm

Struck at Knidos in Caria, before A.D. 128(?).

Overstruck obverse on obverse of a cistophorus of Augustus, reverse hexastyle temple (note the outline of his head showing through at 11:00 on obverse and the shadow of a temple with its podium at 1:00)

Ruth Elizabeth White Fund, with the assistance of Ben Lee Damsky, 2009.110.24

The statue of Aphrodite by Praxiteles was one of antiquity's most famous. It is known in many reproductions, but curiously the only other coin from Knidos to show the statue alone is a rare bronze of Caracalla and Plautilla struck A.D. 202–205 (fig. 3).⁹ These bronze coins show more clearly than the



Fig. 3. *Uncertain denomination of Caracalla from Knidos, Caria* (obverse and reverse), A.D. 202–11. Bronze, 11.18 g, 12:00, 28.9 mm. Yale University Art Gallery, Ruth Elizabeth White Fund with the assistance of Ben Lee Damsky, 2009.110.125

cistophorus that the object beneath Aphrodite's drapery is an amphora.

The identification of the mint may eventually allow the association of other pieces that share this style of bust and, like this coin, lack "P P" in the obverse legend. These were grouped together under the rubric "Mint A," but further study may eventually lead to the discovery of die linkage that would tie the whole series to Knidos. It is uncertain whether the omission of "P P" implies that the coin was struck before assumption of the title in A.D. 128; most provincial bronzes lacked any but the most basic titularies.

The emperor's love of the statue is indicated by the fact that her shrine was duplicated at Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli.¹⁰



4.

Cistophorus of Hadrian from Hypaepa

Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS P P Head to r.

Rev.: COS III Cult image of Artemis Anaitis facing, veiled, wearing kalathos on head and extending arms to l. and r.

Silver, 10.54 g, 6:00, 27 mm

Struck at Hypaepa in Lydia, A.D. 129. Overstruck obverse on reverse of a cistophorus of Antony (note traces of his encircling legend on reverse)

Ruth Elizabeth White Fund, with the assistance of Ben Lee Damsky, 2009.110.11

The cult image of Artemis Anaitis, of great antiquity, belongs to a substantial class of



Fig. 4. *Uncertain denomination of Germanicus from Hypaepa, Lydia* (obverse and reverse), A.D. 15–19(?). Bronze, 3.45 g, 12:00, 17 mm. Yale University Art Gallery, Ruth Elizabeth White Fund, 2004.6.258

archaic statues, particularly of Artemis, that are dispersed throughout Asia Minor.¹¹ This one occurs principally at Hypaepa, especially in the third century, but is known from a much earlier date, for example from a small bronze coin of Germanicus (fig. 4).¹²



5.

Cistophorus of Hadrian from Maeonia

Obv.: HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS P P Head laureate r.

Rev.: COS III Demeter, holding grain stalks downward in her r. hand and long torch in her l., in biga of snakes advancing l.

Silver, 10.27 g, 6:00, 30 mm

Struck at Maeonia in Lydia. Traces of overstriking (note the distortion of the flan)

Ruth Elizabeth White Fund, with the assistance of Ben Lee Damsky, 2009.110.13

The attribution to Maeonia derives from the similarity of this coin's reverse type to that of a bronze coin depicting Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus (ruled A.D. 193–211).¹³ The type also appears at Cyzicus and Smyrna, but in each case Demeter carries two torches.¹⁴ The detailed representation at Maeonia more closely resembles the cistophorus.

The type of Demeter/Ceres in a biga, or chariot, pulled by serpents seems to be Roman in origin, going back to a denarius of M. Volteius struck about 78 B.C. and later appearing on a denarius of C. Vibius Pansa.¹⁵ The motif also appears on sarcophagi. Hadrian's cistophori simultaneously testify to the well-attested philhellenism of the emperor and illustrate what was best about his reign. A practical problem (the heavy wear of earlier coins) was addressed in an

inexpensive way, and the solution had the virtue of involving many cities in the provincial silver coinage. The striking of silver was a closely guarded privilege otherwise confined, at this date, to Rome and major cities of the empire, such as Antioch and Caesarea in Cappadocia. What is more, the cities were able to take the opportunity to advertise their cultural and religious resources in a medium that was of more than purely local circulation. In a time of constant intercity bickering and a general sense of distance from Rome, this project—a cooperative effort to renew the coinage of the province—must have played a unifying role.

It is not known who selected the images to appear on the coins. It is axiomatic that, in Rome, the emperor or someone close to him governed the content of the mint's output, but there is no actual evidence on this point. In Hadrian's case, it is not hard to believe that an emperor who could design his own temple and tamper with the renovation of another might well have been involved with coinage. With regard to the cistophori, Hadrian's well-attested love of the Aphrodite of Knidos ought to be sufficient to indicate his personal interest in creating coinage bearing her image. These pieces would prove a lasting legacy to his voyage to the province of Asia, and they still draw our attention today.

1. For background on the acquisition of the Damsky Collection and an introduction to numismatic terminology, see William E. Metcalf, "The Ben Lee Damsky Collection," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (2008): 98–105.

2. The only pre-Hadrianic cistophori that have been studied in detail are those of Augustus and then of Nerva and Trajan. See C. H. V. Sutherland, *The Cistophori of Augustus*, RNS Special Publication 4 (London: Royal Numismatic Society, 1970); and Bernhard Woytek, "Die Cistophore der Kaiser Nerva und Traian," *Revue suisse de numismatique/Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau* 89 (2010): 69–125. The issues of Claudius and the Flavians await treatment.

3. Hubert Herzfelder, "The Cistophori of Hadrian," *Numismatic Chronicle*, ser. 5, no. 16 (1936): 1–29.

4. William E. Metcalf, *The Cistophori of Hadrian*, ANS Numismatic Studies 16 (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1980).

5. William E. Metcalf, "Telesphorus at Pergamum," *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 116/117 (2008): 133–34; and Wolfgang Fischer-Bossert, "Ein Kistophor von Halikarnassos," in *Ancient History, Numismatics, and Epigraphy in the Mediterranean World: Studies in Memory of Clemens E. Bosch and Sabahat Atlan, and in Honour of Nezahat Baydur*, ed. Oğuz Tekin (Istanbul: Ege, 2009), 157–59.

6. For the bronze of Nero, see *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, collection of Hans Silvius von Aulock (Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1957–68), 2103 (hereafter cited as *SNGvonAulock*).

7. The term *omphalos* (literally, "navel," figuratively marking the center of things) describes a navel-shaped or conical stone, associated with the rites of many deities, particularly oracular ones. The most famous of these was at the oracle of Delphi.

8. The Munich coin is illustrated in J. G. Milne, *Kolophon and Its Coinage: A Study* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1941), 83–94, no. 183. See also *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, collection of the Staatliche Münzsammlung München, vol. *Ionien* (Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1968–), 559. Milne notes the existence of a die-duplicate in Berlin. The Trajanic type substitutes a statuette of Artemis of Ephesus for the olive branch of the Hadrianic coin. For other instances of the type, see his nos. 190 (Antoninus Pius, no tripod), 194 (Commodus, facing Artemis), 199–201 (Caracalla), 212 (Severus Alexander), 220–22 (Gordian III), 226–28, 232–34, 241 (Philip I, Otacilia Severa, and Philip II), 246–52 (Trajan Decius and Herennius Etruscus), 259 (Volusian), and 264, 266–67, 274–75 (Valerian, Gallienus and family). All occurrences after Caracalla lack the tripod.

9. Another example of this coin is in the collection of the British Museum, London. See George F. Hill, "Greek Coins Acquired by the British Museum in 1929," *Numismatic Chronicle*, ser. 5, no. 10 (1930): 285–299; esp. 296, no. 27 (from different dies than the Yale piece). The fullest discussion in English of the statue of Aphrodite by Praxiteles and its reproductions is that of Andrew S. Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97–107.

10. For photographs of the remains of both the shrine on Knidos and its reproduction at Tivoli, see Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece*, pls. 5a–b.
11. The cult of Anaitis was of Iranian origin. Artaxerxes II (reigned 405/404–359/358 B.C.) is said to have brought the people of Sardis in Lydia to worship her. In early times she was conflated with Kybele or Aphrodite, but she later came to be associated with Artemis, and her cult in Roman Asia is attested by finds from various cities. On coins, however, Hypaepa represents her most frequently. See *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1981), 1:754–56, s.v. “Anaitis” (J. Teixidor); *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft: Neue Bearbeitung unter Mitwirkung zahlreicher Fachgenossen*, ed. Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1893–1997), 1:2030–31, s.v. “Anaitis” ([Franz] Cumont); and *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 9:195–96, s.v. “Hypaepa” (Bürchner), where reference is made to “das persische Artemis.”
12. For later occurrences see, e.g., *SNG von Aulock*, 2963–64, 2966 (Trajan-Septimius Severus), 2971 (Trajan Decius), and 2973 (Valerian).
13. See *SNG von Aulock*, 8237; Lanz auction 146, May 25, 2009, 496.
14. For Cyzicus, see *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum*, vol. *Mysia*, ed. Warwick Wroth (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1892), 47, no. 215; for Smyrna, see *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum*, vol. *Ionia*, ed. Barclay V. Head (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1892), 16, no. 2 (in the name of the Ionian Koinon).
15. For the denarius of M. Volteius, see Michael H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), no. 385/3. For the denarius of C. Vibius Pansa, see *ibid.*, no. 449/3a.