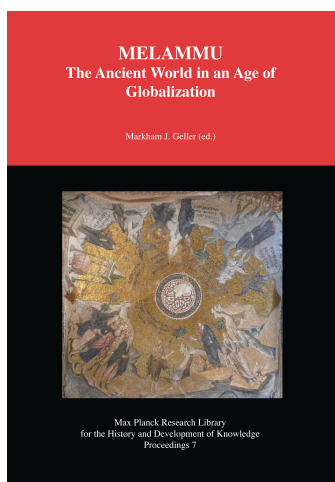


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Chapter 13

Elements of “Globalization” in Ancient Iranian Numismatics

Andrea Gariboldi

13.1 The Exchange of Numismatic Patterns between East and West

In a recent contribution Joe Cribb has shown the importance of Greek culture as a source of coinage tradition in Central Asia (Cribb 2007). The distinctive nature of such a long monetary history originates from the Greek world that facing the nomadic and the Iranian cultures, slowly modified itself, still maintaining after many imitative issues its primitive marker of Greek continuity for over a thousand years.

The soldiers who followed Alexander carried with them many Greek coins (Rtveladze 2007, 195–198), and the subsequent foundation of Greek colonies in Central Asia also facilitated the diffusion of Greek monetary types, although Greek coins were mostly minted in the East after Alexander’s death, by his successors. Such posthumous issues continued for a long time some typical iconographic models, such as the portrait of the deified Alexander wearing a lion scalp, in the guise of a young Heracles, soon adopted by Seleucus I. These coins usually represent the king’s bust with divine attributes, on the obverse, and, on the reverse, a full-figure deity closely associated with the ruler or his dynasty, like Zeus, Athena, Heracles or Apollo. Heracles, in particular, was considered to be an ancestor of the Argead dynasty, but he was also an ideal protector of the king, since Heracles was first human and later an immortal god, thus forming a perfect link between man and god. On some Hellenistic coins of Bukhara and southern Sogdiana we find Heracles as well as Heracles and Zeus (Zejmal 1983, 244–246; Cribb 2007, 363–364, respectively).

The debated problem of the ontological status of the Hellenistic rulers, whether they were considered or considered themselves divine beings, at first arose with Alexander, and later it also deeply influenced the Iranian conception of kingship. Alexander, to tell the truth, was well conscious of his human nature and, according to Plutarch, he used to say that in his veins ran blood, not ichor (that is, the gods’ fluid, in *Alex.* 28, 2–3). However, with the Barbarians, he behaved as if he really were “of divine descent” (*ek theou geneseōs*). It is

important to stress that this formula is closely echoed in the well known (but still puzzling) *ek genous theōn* of the Greek version of the famous Šābuhr's royal inscription, that clearly was a sentence of Hellenistic derivation, targeting the Greek people living in the Persian empire (Panaino 2009, 209–256). Alexander's propaganda, in fact, was so rooted in Iran that it never disappeared (Gnoli 1995, 175; Gignoux 2007; Di Branco 2011). The myth of Alexander was resumed again during the Roman campaigns in the Near East in the third century CE, even affecting the self-representation of the Sassanians, who chose to use Dārā (Darius) to counter the incessant Roman propaganda focusing on Alexander. In the *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis*, for instance, we may note the curious epithet of *Dariardaxar* referred to Ardašīr I (Daryaei 2007, 91–92; Gnoli 2003, 46–47). The emperor Caracalla considered himself a descendant of Alexander and openly imitated him during his Parthian campaigns,¹ as well as the first Sasanian monarch could claim that Dārā was his ancestor. This pseudo-historical tradition was probably contained in the lost *Xwadāy-nāmag*, "The Book of the Lords," that seems to be the source of Ardašīr's genealogy as stated by the Pahlavi text *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*, "The Deeds of Ardašīr son of Pābag," where Ardašīr I said to stem from the parentage of Sāsān and "from the lineage of king Darius" (*nāf ī dārāy šāh*) (Huyse 2003, 68; KAP III 19; Daryaei 2002, 4–5).

The habit to assume some divine characteristics was maintained by Alexander's followers. Ptolemy I, for instance, as Alexander's successor in Egypt, wears the goatskin mantle of Zeus, and his coins in name of Alexander show the bold Macedonian ruler with an elephant scalp, adorned with the horn of Zeus Ammon, to celebrate his conquest of India. Seleucus I and Demetrius Poliorcetes bear the bull's horns, whilst Lysimachus carries the ram's horns of Zeus Ammon. All these attributes clearly evoke Alexander's visit to the temple of Zeus in Egypt (331 BCE), where he was recognised as son of this god.²

Actually, the exchange of communications between East and West was not restricted to royal ideology and iconography. In fact, we could say that the ancient economy also tended to a sort of "globalization". Thus the weight-system of the Hellenistic coins was the Athenian one, and it was maintained and locally adapted both by Alexander and by the Seleucids. It was even used as weight standard by the Parthians. Another important borrowing from the Seleucids was the adoption on Parthian coins of the Greek legend (in vertical lines), in order to identify the issuing authority, although on the first coins of Arsaces Aramaic inscriptions also

¹See (Espinosa 1990, 45–46). The *Historia Augusta*, for example, clearly states that Caracalla *Alexandro Magno Macedoni aequandum putabat... eiusque gesta in ore semper habuit* (HA Car. II 1–2).

²See (Fleischer 2002, 59–61; Bosworth 2004, 383–385 Strab. 814 = FGRII, F 14).

appear. Furthermore, coins became an important means of transmission for the kings propagandistic messages (Dąbrowa 2008, 29–30). In occasion of the fifth Melammu Symposium held in Innsbruck (October 2002), I focused on the case of the royal title *Theopator* on Seleucid and Parthian coins, as a significant example of ideology of sacral kingship and as political propaganda message. The title *Theopator*, “one who has a father who is a god,” was specifically invented to legitimate Alexander Balas (150–145 BCE) as Seleucid king and son of the great Antiochus IV, hence this name probably inspired the titling of Phraates II, as son of Mithradates I *Theos*³ and Artabanos I. This supervised use of the power of the images and of the words, was a basic innovation of Hellenistic politics reflected on coinage. Each monetary system, in fact, is merely a convention and there is no compelling reason that a coin should be a round metal object, showing designs on both faces. In Mesopotamia, for example, before the Achaemenid time, people adopted silver bracelets as coins, bars or plain globules of metal; in Afghanistan circulated silver bent bar-shaped coins with non pictorial impressions, these latter coins were also employed in the Gandhāra region. These bars inspired the beginning of the Indian currency (Bopearachchi 1999, 83–85).

Thus, we may say that the importance of Alexander’s legacy is great also in the field of Iranian coinage. In relation to the monetary system of Central Asia can we talk about a “Greek globalization,” which started with Alexander? This question is only apparently modern, for we use the word “globalization,” a word invented by social science that was later misused by economists, from the 1980s onwards. But Plutarch, in his *de Alexandri fortuna* (*Moralia* 331E–332D), attributes to Alexander the noble wish of unifying the world of the Barbarians with the Greek one, following the Greek model of peace and justice, and the Macedonian also expresses the will to spread Greek philosophy as far as India. Alexander, according to Plutarch, even felt the need to “strike new coins and to forge (*paracharattein*) the pieces of the Barbarians with the mark of the Greek government.”⁴ So the biographer of Cheronea seems sure that Alexander intended to “globalize” the world through Greek culture. This pattern of historiography became a *topos* starting from Droysen (1877), who stressed Alexander’s supposed *Verschmelzungspolitik*, “policy of fusion.”⁵ This idea persists until modern times:

³ See (Assar 2004, 88; Fig. 3: 18 = S 10.17), considers the first Parthian coins with the inscription *Theopator*, as a special issue of Mithradates I to honour his deified father, Phriapatius. Cf. (Gariboldi 2004b, 374–377).

⁴ Plut. *Mor.* I 10, 332D. Briant 2003, 267 underlines that Alexander is presented in Plutarch as the unifier of a divided world, the inspiring principle of universal harmony, always moved by his virtue. See also (Le Rider 2003, 338–340).

⁵ Cf. (Bosworth 1980, 14), writes that the evidence of this policy of fusion, so far produced, is “little or nothing.” On the construction of the ethnic identity between Greeks and “Barbarians,” see (Sánchez

but does it really correspond to Alexander’s will? Or maybe the diffusion of Hellenism was a phenomenon on which Alexander himself had no control?

The analysis of the coins, as it has been underlined by Le Rider (2003), reveals that Alexander actually never imposed his coin types, which were created in the West, on the Barbarians. In fact, no new mint was opened in Babylon or East of the Tigris, and darics were still issued, in continuity with the local tradition. Moreover, Athenian or pseudo-Athenian coins amply circulated in the Eastern provinces of the Achaemenid empire, accepted by weight (Schlumberger 1953).

In this prudent monetary policy it is recognizable the same pragmatism that suggested to Alexander to behave in Persia as “friend” of Cyrus,⁶ and to promote the cult of the founder of the Achaemenid empire, after the restoration of his royal tomb in Persepolis.⁷ Alexander followed a political continuity that provided for the natural transmission of the power from the Achaemenids directly to the Greeks. As soon as he came to Babylon, even though he was preceded by very bad *omina* from the Chaldeans (they said that a criminal was sitting on the throne of Babylon (Panaino 2000, 42) he tried to substitute himself for Darius, assuming the late Achaemenid titling of “King of the Lands” (LUGAL KUR.KUR) and “King of the Universe” (LUGAL ŠÚ), according to some astronomic Babylonian tablets which refer to Alexander’s early achievements against Darius.⁸

13.2 Two International Coinages: “Owls” and “Archers”

Before Alexander only two coinages were diffused at an “international” level: on the one hand, the Athenian coins with the typical representation of Athena’s head, on the obverse, and the owl, on the reverse (Le Rider 2001, Pl. 8, 7); on the other hand, the darics carrying the image of the Great King as archer (Carradice 1987, Type IIIb; Le Rider 2001, Pl. 5, 13). Athens, following the creation of the first Delio-Attic league in 477 BCE, forced its allies to use the Athenian coinage, in order to increment its economic and fiscal revenues. But the diffusion of the “owls” (*glaukes*) implied also a strong assertion of self-identity.

2009, in part. 39). For a balanced opinion on Alexander’s universalism, see (Musti 1990, 739; Lane Fox 2007; Muccioli 2012, 193–209).

⁶Arr. *Anab.* III 27, 5.

⁷See (Bosworth 2004, 214). See also (Strab. 730; Arr. *Anab.* VI 28, 4–8).

⁸See (Monte 1997, 4–8), and note 24. The curious title of “King (coming) from West,” LUGAL šá TA KUR *ha-ni-i*, on a tablet dated to 329/8 BCE, literally “the King (coming) from the land of *hanû*” to indicate the lands to the West of the Euphrates, is very rare and it was likely intended to remark the extraneousness of Alexander to the local culture. Obviously, the nobles and the priests of Babylon, attached to the privileges depending from the Temple of Marduk, bestowed the titles of the former Babylonian kings to Alexander, on condition that he did not interfere too much with the Temple’s life. See also (Monte 2001, 140–148; Muccioli 2004, 111–113).

The Persians were the first ones to recognize the importance of the propagandistic significance of the coins, and soon introduced a monetary tradition which lasted for centuries. The idea was simple but effective: Darius I, around 510 BCE, ordered his form/image (*charakter*) be struck on lenticular globules of pure metal, in place of the zoomorphic figures of Ctesias' coins (560–546 BCE).⁹ There were no inscriptions on Achaemenid coins, but the mighty image of the Great King of the Persians circulated everywhere. The king was represented crowned, with the regal vest and carrying bow and arrows; he looked, therefore, quite menacing. The Greeks were afraid of these “archers” (*toxotai*), both on the battlefield and as economic rivals. The image of the royal archer is present also on provincial and dynastic coins of Asia Minor.

It seems to me interesting to remark that the Persians learned to use coins from the Lydians, but they were soon able to invent the first imperial monetary system in history. Darius's reform was extremely important, because it was introduced a kind of bimetallism, based on a fixed ratio of exchange between gold and silver (1:13). In fact, one daric equals 20 shekels, and 6000 shekels make a talent. The division of the Persian talent into 6000 shekels was close to the Attic talent of 6000 drachms and this similarity caused a swift assimilation of the shekel to the drachm. The oldest mention of gold darics is an Athenian inscription, dated to 429/28 BCE, which contains the accounts of the temple-treasury of Athena Parthenos.¹⁰ In Athens one gold stater of Darius was exchanged for 20 silver drachms. The international fame of the daric survived till the IV century CE, as the Latin poet Ausonius testifies (*Ep.* V 23), who refers to Roman *solidi* as *darici*.

Alexander, during the pillage of the treasure of Susa, found as many as 9000 gold talents bearing the *charaktēra dareikon*, the “mark of Darius”¹¹, and he did not have any scruples to use these coins, even though they belonged to his worst enemy. Thus the daric was the principal coin adopted by Alexander soon after the death of Darius III, in 330. The Macedonian commander, under the fortified walls of a Sogdian citadel on the rock, where the sons of the king Oxyartes (among them there was also Roxane, his future wife) took refuge, promised 300 darics to the first gallant warrior who could cross the town walls.¹² The Greeks not only used Persian coins, but they even coined new darics and double-darics, after 323. This issue was again characterized by the running image of the Persian king, which was not modified with respect to the earlier pattern (Le Rider 2003, 357; Pl. 7,

⁹See (Carradice 1987, 73–78; Alram 1996; Le Rider 2001, 123–164; Gariboldi 2004a, 134–138).

¹⁰See (Carradice 1987, 75–76; Alram 1996, 36; Le Rider 2001, 145 (IG, I³, 383)).

¹¹Diod. XVII 66, 1–2.

¹²Arr. *Anab.* IV 18, 7; Strab. 517; (Le Rider 2003, 324–325).

11). Only the addition of some Greek letters on the obverse, and a different incuse wavy punch on the reverse, betrays its Greek fabrication.

In this variegated framework of cultural relations, it could also happen the opposite, in fact the Persians coined Athenian types, too. Many imitations of Athenian coins circulated in Bactria, Sogdiana and Afghanistan.¹³ Some pseudo-Athenian tetradrachms curiously bear the same control mark or signature (STA-MNA), which is present on some Eastern-mint double darics, perhaps coined by the satrap Stasanor.¹⁴ The phenomenon of the imitations is surprisingly widespread throughout the Near East, especially in Egypt, where the Athenian tetradrachms occupy a relevant place in coin hoards, between the fifth and the fourth century BCE. Modern numismatists generally believe that actually a lot of Athenian coins were locally imitated in Egypt during the fourth century, probably to pay Greek mercenaries, or simply because people were accustomed to conduct their business by means of Athenian tetradrachms.¹⁵ When Artaxerxes III Ochus conquered Egypt in 343, he struck a series of pseudo-Athenian tetradrachms substituting the normal ethnic ΑΘΕ with his name and title: "Artaxerxes Pharaoh" (*rthššš pr-c*), written in Demotic.¹⁶ These Athenian imitations continued, adopting the Aramaic language, under the local rule of Sabakes (*swyk*) and Mazakes (*mzdk*), the last two satraps in Egypt during the reign of Darius III.¹⁷

Accordingly, we may argue that there was a strict control of the Persian authorities over the empire-wide monetary policy. In Achaemenid Babylonia, for example, even small quantities of "silver" (*kaspu*) were checked on the basis of a predetermined standard, called *ginnu* in cuneiform texts, and this customary marked silver was protected by the king's law (Zournatzi 2000, 256–259; Vargyas 1999). Herodotus reports that Aryandes, the governor of Egypt under Darius I, wishing to emulate his monarch, ordered to strike pure silver coins and therefore Darius put him to death for being a rebel.¹⁸ Clearly it was considered a crime of *lèse-majesté* to mint coins without royal permission.

The capacity to conform decisions to local situations is one of the most relevant qualities adopted by the Achaemenid policy. For instance, the above mentioned Mazakes, was even rewarded by Alexander for surrendering the province without fighting, by being appointed as the new governor of Babylon, where he

¹³See (Nicolet-Pierre and Amandry 1994; Bopearachchi 1999, 87). It is not always easy to determine if these imitations were coined before or after Alexander the Great.

¹⁴See (Nicolet-Pierre and Amandry 1994, 52–53; Le Rider 2003, 279–282).

¹⁵See (Buttrey 1982; Figueira 1998, 528–533; Le Rider 2003, 220–224, with further bibliography).

¹⁶See (Mørkholm 1974; Kraay 1976, 216; 294–295; Alram 1986, 117 n. 370 (Pl. 12)).

¹⁷See (Nicolet-Pierre 1979; Alram 1986, ns. 371; 372; 376 (Pl. 12), 117–118; Briant 2003, 76–77).

¹⁸Hdt. IV 166. About the fiscal implications of the silver of Aryandes, see Descat (1989, 85–87).

continued to coin pseudo-Athenian tetradrachms under his name.¹⁹ Tissaphernes (400–395 BCE), satrap of Sardis and Karanos under Artaxerxes II, also coined a series of imitative bronze and silver Athenian coins, but he placed on the obverse a male bearded head, wearing a soft hat with earflap and diadem above (probably his idealized portrait; Le Rider 2001, 182 Pl. 8, n. 9), instead of Athena’s head. The type of headdress is similar to the soft hats worn by the early Arsacids (Curtis 2007, 8–9). On the reverse of a bronze coin, we see the classic owl, with the abbreviated Greek legend BA(*sileōs*), “of the King,” in place of the ethnic.

13.3 Conclusions

In conclusion, Athenian coin types were present from the Mediterranean area to Central Asia, and the same was for the darics, which have been found especially in Asia Minor, Greece, Cyprus and even in Sicily, at Avola (Carradice 1987, 79). To conclude, a paradox is worthy of a mention: Alexander used darics in Babylon and Central Asia, and the Greeks coined new Persian-style coins after his death. The Achaemenid kings coined pseudo-Athenian coins from Egypt to Bactria. This sort of interplay or “globalization” of ancient monetary systems was an important medium for sharing goods, images and cultural identities. However, Alexander did not really try to substitute the Barbarian coins with the Greek ones, as one could think following Plutarch’s text,²⁰ but it was a spontaneous phenomenon, generated by pragmatic and time-serving acts of the rulers to manage economic problems. As a matter of fact, Alexander, as legitimate successor to Darius, also took possession of his coins. This event might have been less surprising for his contemporaries than it appears to us, living in the problematic globalization era, which nevertheless is still the result of business interests.

¹⁹See (Le Rider 2003, 284–290; Alram 1986, 119, n. 378 (Pl. 12)).

²⁰In Plutarch the “globalization” is presented as a socio-cultural *koinonia*, “community” (Plut. *Alex.* 47, 5).

Illustrations



Figure 13.1: Athenian Tetradrachm (c. 440–430 BCE)



Figure 13.2: Gold Daric (c. 480 BCE)



Figure 13.3: Gold Daric. Mint of Babylon (c. 331–311 BCE)



Figure 13.4: Pseudo-Athenian Tetradrachm of Artaxerxes III (343–338 BCE).

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