

A Note on a Samarian Coin Type. A Royal Horseman?

Jarosław BODZEK*

Some new, unlisted types of Samarian coins have appeared recently on the antiquities market. They significantly increase the repertoire of monetary types used in the region.

Thanks to this, the expansion of the iconography of the Samarian coinage allows for a better understanding of its ideological message. One of the coins seems to be of special interest because of its iconography.

Samaria, 375-330 BCE (Fig. 1.)

AR, obol / *ma'eh*,


0.77g; 0.9mm; iii

Gorgoneion en face / Horseman with spear r.

Lit: Roma Numismatics Ltd, Auction XXII, 7 October 2021, lot 521.

The coin appeared on the market in 2021. It is interesting for two reasons. As the auctioneer rightly pointed out, the coin belongs to a type not listed in the basic catalogs of Samarian coins. It represents an unknown combination of the obverse and reverse types. The reverse type is not recorded at all. The obverse shows the head of a Gorgon, and the reverse an image of a rider attacking with a spear or a javelin. As an analogy for the obverse type, the auctioneer claims the reverse picture of the coin No 17 in the classic Y. Meshorer and Sh. Qedar catalog (hereafter M&Q 1999). It should be emphasized, however, that in fact M&Q no. 17 represents a different type of female head, designated by the authors of the catalog as “Head of Arethusa” and known from other Samarian coins.¹ Even if it is considered to be the head of a Gorgon, it still represents a different type of it. The new coin’s obverse definitely shows a “Classical” Gorgon’s head, characterized by distinctive features such as forehead curls, an open mouth and a protruding tongue. A much closer analogy in this case are the images of the Gorgon head on unpublished Samarian obols and hemiobols known from the market² and on the reverse of hemiobols listed in the M&Q 1999 catalog under number 46. The latter image is described as “Grotesque head facing”, but a better-preserved exemplar known from the antiquities market confirms its identification as a Gorgon head.³

The analogy indicated by the auctioneer for the reverse is even less accurate. He cites here the reverse picture of another Samarian issue struck in the name of certain BDYḤB (Bedyehibel) and

* Prof. Dr. Jarosław Bodzek, Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland (jaroslaw.bodzek@uj.edu.pl;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4272-4117>).

I would like to express my deepest thanks to Johannes Nollé for his valuable comments on my text. All errors and omissions remain my own.

¹ M&Q 1999, nos 71-73, 80-82; cf. Wyssmann 2019, 179-181. However, Wyssmann 2019, 181-182 recognized M&Q 1999, Nos 17 and 18 obverse types as a Gorgon head.

² CNG E-Auction 174, Lot 69; Leu E-Auction 11, lot 1144.

³ CNG E-Auction 513, lot 197.

included in the *Sunrise* collection catalog under no 138.⁴ The image shows indeed a person on horseback clad in Iranian riding attire (Fig. 3). However, according to my classification of the images of the Iranian horsemen on coins, the Sunrise 138 coin represents the Type H3, that is, the rider holding an upright sword or short scepter.⁵ The image on the newly published coin is closer to the H2 type.⁶ The latter type depicts an Iranian rider in an attacking pose with a spear in his raised right hand (Fig. 4-6). This type is known from three Samarian issues.⁷ Among them, the coin M&Q no 197 is particularly important, because it is most likely a prototype for the others. It imitates itself the well-known “Great King / Iranian horseman” issue.⁸ The prototypes were probably minted in Caria over a quite long period of time and circulated widely in the western provinces of the Achaemenid realm.⁹ In addition, the type of rider attacking with the spear appears in the case of two more Samarian issues.¹⁰ The horseman’s attitude, i.e. the position of the hand holding the spear, is somewhat different in these cases. Moreover, the rider is here just an element of more complex combat (no 123; Fig. 8) and hunting (no 124, Fig 7) scenes probably inspired by prototypes from the glyptics.¹¹

It should be stressed, that in the case of the discussed new coin, the image of the rider differs from the others known from Samarian coins. Generally, the features characterizing the image of the type H2 of the Iranian rider are: a stretched out, sometimes flying gallop of the horse, “Iranian” cavalry attire of the horseman consisting of tiara / *kyrbasia*, *sarapis* and *anaxyrides*, and his relatively stiff pose, with one arm raised with the spear, the other holding the reins, straight leg and slightly tilted backwards torso.¹² The steed usually has a saddle-cloth, and a braided tail as well as mane. These elements are visible in the case of almost all the above-mentioned Samarian issues. The image of the rider on the new coin does not quite follow this pattern. The reverse of the coin is worn, so some details are not clearly visible. However, there do seem to be noticed some differences in compare to the common “Iranian horseman” type. First, the headgear and the details of the rider’s head and face appear to be significantly different. Coin wear makes it hard to be sure, but it looks like the rider is wearing a tall cylindrical crown, which is possibly a *kidaris*.¹³ His long hair fall down his neck in the form of an ostrich feather. He also seems to have a long beard. All these features taken together are characteristic for the “Great King like figures” well known from royal darics and sigloi, satrapal and other Achaemenid coins, including some Samarian issues.¹⁴ Less can be said about the rider’s attire. Due to the wear and tear of the coin, it is difficult to decide if the rider wears the so-called “Persian robe”, typical for the “Great King like

⁴ Müseler 2011, no 138; cf. M&Q 1991, no 35, pl. 5; M&Q 1999, no 15, pl. 2.

⁵ Bodzek 2004, 180; Bodzek 2011, 253, pl. XII, 22; Bodzek 2015, 2 note 7.

⁶ Bodzek 2011, 248-253, pl. IX, 9-13, XII, 18-21; cf. Bodzek 2004, 180; Bodzek 2015, 2, note 7.

⁷ M&Q 1999, nos 40, 125, 197; Wyssmann 2019, 124-125, 133-134.

⁸ M&Q 1999, p. 54.

⁹ Konuk 2000, pl. XXX, 8-21; Meadows 2002, 210-212, pl. 30-31; Bodzek 2011, pl. IX, 9-12.

¹⁰ M&Q 1999, nos 123 and 124; cf. Wyssmann 2019, 133-134.

¹¹ Bodzek 1999; Bodzek 2000; Bodzek 2007.

¹² Cf. Bodzek 2011, 248-251.

¹³ Cf. Mildenberg 1994-1999; Tuplin 2007; Gitler 2011, 107.

¹⁴ Cf. Gitler 2011; Wyssmann 2019, 137-152; cf. Bodzek 2011, 196-199.

person”, or just the *sarapis* and *anaxyrides* typical for the “Iranian” horsemen’s attire. The rider’s stance also does not match most other pictures of “Iranian” horsemen on Samarian coins. His leg is bent at the knee, not straightened as in the case of M&Q no. 40, 125 and 197. The closest parallel among the depictions on Samarian coins is the rider on the reverse of M&Q no. 123. Here, too, the leg is bent at the knee at an angle of 90 degrees. On the other hand, the horse on the new coin is shown in a conventional way, i.e. in a flying canter, probably in a saddle-cloth, with a braided tail and a mane. The steed has a strong build and large head and probably belongs to the Nisean breed.¹⁵ On the basis of the observations, it can be concluded that on the reverse of the coin there is a “Great King like figure” and not a so-called “satrap”. In a sense, this has already been noticed by the auctioneer, who in the reverse description marked the term “satrap” with a question mark.

As for coins, the only analogy for such a “Great King like figure” on horseback can be found among Philistian or using more precise term Philistian styled coins.¹⁶ On the obverse of a Philistian didrachm/half-*şqln* there is an image of a horseman wearing *kidaris* and probably the so-called Persian robe (Fig. 2, details are not clear), holding a spear with an apple-shaped rest.¹⁷ It is also not clear whether the rider is holding a spear in his left hand, as Gitler and Tal suggest. According to E.S.G. Robinson, the rider wears kandys, what is unconvincing to me.¹⁸ The same author stated that the horse “appears to have elaborate head-trappings with a strip of stuff hanging from it between his forelegs(?)”. The unique didrachm was part of the Delta Hoard (IGCH 1650) and was published first by Robinson, who timidly associated it with the mint of Hierapolis-Bambyce.¹⁹ However, Gitler and Tal attribute it to Philistia, and more precisely to Philistian styled coins.²⁰ In the case, the outfit and weapons suggest associations with the figure of the Great King, what was correctly noted by Robinson and also by Gitler and Tal.²¹

The image of the “royal” rider on the Philistian and Samarian coins differ in style and details. One represents characteristic Philistian stylistic solutions, while the other, in turn, is close to the style of the other Samarian issues. Nevertheless, both of them testify to the very rare use of the motif of a “Great King like figure” on horseback in the coinages of the Achaemenid period. Common images of the Iranian horseman wearing a “flat” tiara, i.e. the so-called “satrap”, on coins, which have numerous analogies in other categories of items, refer to the ideology of the Achaemenid aristocracy and belong to the repertoire of satrapal coinage.²² As is testified by the Philistian and the new Samarian coins, this repertoire also includes equestrian images of the “Great King like person”. Interestingly, both mentioned coins were minted in the Levant, which may indicate the special importance of the image of the royal horseman in the area. It is all the more important since it is difficult to identify a prototype for such an image not only in coinage but also among other categories of objects. We have only one and very early image of the Achaemenid king on horseback

¹⁵ Cf. Gabrielli 2006, 22-34; Almagor 2021, 5.

¹⁶ Gitler – Tal 2006, 273, no. 25; Gitler 2011, 117, fig. 2.

¹⁷ Cf. Bodzek 2011, 256.

¹⁸ Robinson 1960, 35.

¹⁹ Robinson 1960, 35, no. 9, pl. II.

²⁰ Gitler – Tal 2006, p. 73.

²¹ Cf. Robinson 1960, 35; Gitler 2011, p. 109.

²² Bodzek 2011, pp. 241-254.

attacking with spear enemies. This is the picture representing Kurash the king of Anshan on a seal dated to ca 600 - 580 BCE.²³ Here, however, the king seems to wear the ordinary tiara, as in case of “Iranian horsemen” depicted on the coins mentioned above. Perhaps royal figures are depicted also in the scene of lion hunt on the scabbard gold sheath from Oxus Treasure dated to the 5th or 4th centuries BCE.²⁴ Here the headdress resembles the *kidaris*. Anyway, such images (The Great King on horseback) are rather seldom. On the other hand, the association of the Great King with horse and horseman abilities is well attested in the sources.²⁵ Especially in the famous inscription of Naqsh-e Rostam, Dariusz I boasts of his riding skills: “As a horseman, I am a good horseman. As a bowman, I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman both afoot and on horseback”.²⁶ The horseman abilities were thus connected with royalty. The discussed Samarian and Philistian coins enrich the repertoire of images of “the Great king like person” on horseback.

The enrichment could have had complex causes and could be interpreted in many ways.²⁷ One way or another, it testifies to a strong Achaemenid influence on the local visual language.

Bibliography

- Almagor 2021 E. Almagor, The Horse and the Lion in Achaemenid Persia: Representations of a Duality, *Arts* 10: 41, 2021, 1-33.
(<https://doi.org/10.3390/arts10030041>)
- Bodzek 1999 J. Bodzek, Zwycięski kawalerzysta z Samarii (The Victorious Cavalryman of Samaria), *Wiadomości Numizmatyczne* XLVIII/1-2, 1999, 21-30.
- Bodzek 2000 J. Bodzek, Cavalier vainqueur de Samarie. Remarques sur l’iconographie des monnaies de Samarie dans la période des Achéménides, *The Polish Journal of Biblical Research* 1/1, 2000, 109-116.
- Bodzek 2004 J. Bodzek, Review of: Meshorer and Qedar 1999, *Notae Numismaticae-Zapiski Numizmatyczne* V, 2004, 173-183.
- Bodzek 2007 J. Bodzek, Remarks on the Iconography of Samarian Coinage. Hunting in Paradeisos?, *INR* 2, 2007, 35-45.
- Bodzek 2011 J. Bodzek, ΤΑ ΣΑΤΡΑΠΙΚΑ ΝΟΜΙΣΜΑΤΑ. Mennictwo satrapów w okresie panowania Achemenidów (ok. 550-331 a. C.), Kraków 2011.
- Bodzek 2015 J. Bodzek, A Short Note on a Certain Samarian Coin Type, *Wiadomości Numizmatyczne* LIX/1-2 (199-200) = *Polish Numismatic News* IX, 2015, 1-10.

²³ Cf. Garrison – Root 1996, 6-7, fig. 2a; Bodzek 2000, 112; Almagor 2021, 5, fig. 1.

²⁴ Dalton 1964, 9-11, no 22, pl. 9; Stronach 1998; Curtis – Tallis 2005, 233, no 431; Almagor 2021, fig. 29a-b.

²⁵ Cf. Almagor 2021, 5-6.

²⁶ DNB 40-46; cf. Gabrielli 2006, 23, note 77; Almagor 2021, 6.

²⁷ Cf. Gitler 2011, 106-113; Wyssmann 2019, 152.

- Curtis – Tallis 2005 J. E. Curtis – N. Tallis (eds), *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, London 2005.
- Dalton 1964 O. M. Dalton, *Treasure of the Oxus with Other Examples of Early Oriental Metal-Work*, London 1964³.
- Gabrielli 2006 M. Gabrielli, *Le cheval dans l'empire achéménide - Horse in the Achaemenid Empire* [Studia ad Orientem Antiquum Pertinentia 1], Istanbul 2006.
- Garrison – Root 1996 M. B. Garrison– M. C. Root, *Persepolis Seal Studies. An Introduction with Provisional Concordances of Seal Numbers and Associated Documents on Fortification Tablets 1-2087*, Leiden 1996.
- Gitler 2011 H. Gitler, *Identities of the Indigenous Coinages of Palestine under Achaemenid Rule. The Dissemination of the Image of the Great King*, in: P. P. Iossif – A. D. Chankowski – C. C. Lorber (eds.), *More than Men, Less than Gods. Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organized by the Belgian School at Athens (1-2 November 2007)* [Studia Hellenistica 51], Leuven-Paris-Walpole MA 2011, 105-119.
- Gitler – Tal 2006 H. Gitler – O. Tal, *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.: A Study of the Earliest Coins of Palestine* [Collezioni Numismatiche 6], Milano 2006.
- Konuk 2000 K. Konuk, *Influences et éléments achéménides dans le monnayage de la Carie*, in: O. Casabonne (ed.), *Mécanismes et innovations monétaires dans l'Anatolie achéménide. Numismatique et histoire (Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale d'Istanbul, 22–23 mai 1997)*, Paris 2000, 171-183.
- Meadows 2002 A. R. Meadows, *Royal Achaemenid Issues(?)*. Part of: R. H. J. Ashton – N. Hardwick – P. Kinns – K. Konuk – A. R. Meadows, *The Pixodarus Hoard (CH 9. 421)*, in: A. Meadows – U. Wartenberg (ed.), *Coin Hoards 9*, London 2002, 210-212.
- M&Q 1991 Y. Meshorer – Sh. Qedar, *The Coinage of Samaria in the Fourth Century BCE*, Yerusalem 1991.
- M&Q 1999 Y. Meshorer – Sh. Qedar, *Samarian coins*, Yerusalem 1999.
- Mildenberg 1994-1999 L. Mildenberg, *A Note on the Persian Great King Wearing the Jagged Crown*, *INJ* 13, 1994-1999, 15-24.
- Müseler 2011 W. Müseler, *Coinage in the Achaemenid Empire*, in: B. Nelson (ed.), *Numismatic Art of Persia: The Sunrise Collection. Part I: Ancient – 650 BC to AD 650*, Lancaster 2011, 43-46.
- Robinson 1960 E. S. G. Robinson, *Two Greek Coin Hoards*, *Numismatic Chronicle* 20, 1960, 31-36.
- Stronach 1998 D. Stronach, *On the Date of the Oxus Gold Scabbard and Other Achaemenid Matters*, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 12, 1998, 231-248.

- Tuplin 2007 Chr. Tuplin, Treacherous Hearts and Upright Tiaras: Achaemenid King's Head Dress, in: Chr. Tuplin (ed.), *Persian Responses. Political and Cultural Interaction with(in) Achaemenid Empire*, Swansea 2007, 69-78.
- Wyssmann 2019 P. Wyssmann, *Vielfältig geprägt. Das spätperserzeitliche Samaria und seine Münzbilder [Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 288]*, Leuven-Paris-Bristol, CT, 2019.

Samaria Sikke Tipi Üzerine Bir Not. Bir Kraliyet Atlısı mı?

Özet

Son zamanlarda eski eser piyasasında bazı yeni, listelenmemiş Samaria sikke tipleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu makalede ikonografisi nedeniyle özellikle ilginç olan bir tanesiyle ilgili bazı noktalar tartışılmıştır. Sikke 2021 sonbaharında piyasaya çıktı. Arka yüzünde mızraklı ya da ciritli bir süvari resmi yer almaktadır. Samaria sikkelerinde tasvir edilen diğer Persli süvari imgelerinden farklı olarak, bu örnek muhtemelen uzun sakallı ve *kidaris* giyen “Büyük Kral benzeri bir figürü” göstermektedir. Şimdiye kadar böyle bir görüntü sadece Samaria sikkelerinde benzersiz olmakla kalmayıp, genel olarak Akhamenid Dönemi sikkelerinde sadece bir benzerini bulmuştur. At sırtındaki “Büyük Kral benzeri figür” imgesi, bir yandan Samaria sikkelerinin ikonografik repertuarının ilginç bir uzantısıdır, diğer yandan da Samaria sikkelerindeki ve genel olarak satraplık sikkelerindeki Persli atlı imgelerine ilişkin daha önceki bulgularımı tamamlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Samaria, sikke, Pers atlısı, kraliyet atlısı, Akhamenid Dönemi.

A Note on a Samarian Coin Type. A Royal Horseman?

Abstract

Some new, unlisted types of Samarian coins have appeared recently on the antiquities market. In the present paper, I would like to discuss some points concerning one of them, which is especially interesting because of its iconography. The coin appeared on the market in Autumn 2021. Its reverse shows an image of a cavalryman with a spear or a javelin. Unlike the other images of the Iranian cavalrymen depicted on Samarian coins, the exemplar probably shows “the Great King like figure” having long beard and wearing a *kidaris*. So far, such an image is not only unique in Samarian coinage, but finds only one analogy in the coinages of the Achaemenid period in general. The image of “the Great King like figure” on horseback is, on the one hand, an interesting extension of the iconographic repertoire of Samarian coins, and on the other hand, it complements my earlier findings concerning the images of the Iranian horseman on Samarian, but also broadly speaking, on satrapal coins.

Keywords: Samaria, coinage, Iranian horseman, Royal Horseman, Achaemenid period.

FIGURES:



Fig. 1(size 3:1)



Fig. 2



Fig. 3 (size 3:1)



Fig. 4 (size 3:1)

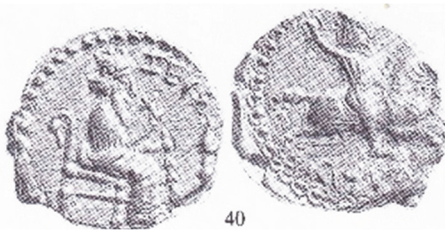


Fig. 5 (size 3:1)



Fig. 6 (size 3:1)



Fig. 7 (size 3:1)



Fig. 8 (size 3:1)

Fig. 1. Samaria, unknown mint, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © Roma Numismatics ltd, Auction XXII, 7 October 2021, lot 521

Fig. 2. Philistia, unknown mint, ca 450-400 BCE (?), AR, didrachm/half-*šqln* © Gitler and Tal 2006, Pl. XXV.IDD

Fig. 3. Samaria, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © CNG Auction 118, lot 429

Fig. 4. Samaria, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © Leu Numismatik, Web-Auction 10, lot 633

Fig. 5. Samaria, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © M&Q 1999, Pl. 7, 40.

Fig. 6. Samaria, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © CNG Mail Bid Sale 64, lot 422

Fig. 7. Samaria, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © CNG Mail Bid Sale 82, lot 731

Fig. 8. Samaria, ca 375-330 BCE, AR, obol / *ma'eh* © Baldwin's Auctions Ltd/M&M Numismatics Ltd, The New York Sale III, lot 177