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## A Special Tetradrachm Series of Euthydemos I

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# A Special Tetradrachm Series of Euthydemos I

Julian Wünsch and Klaus Grigo

**Abstract:** In this paper, tetradrachms of Euthydemos I of Bactria are discussed that differ from the regular coinage of the king: The most striking difference is the frontal glance of the seated Herakles depicted on the reverse. While other scholars have regarded these tetradrachms as posthumous, it is proposed that they were minted during Euthydemos' lifetime, possibly during the war with the Seleukid king Antiochos III.

**Keywords:** Bactria (<http://nomisma.org/id/bactria>), Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom ([http://nomisma.org/id/bactrian\\_kingdom](http://nomisma.org/id/bactrian_kingdom)), Euthydemos I ([http://nomisma.org/id/euthydemus\\_i\\_bactria](http://nomisma.org/id/euthydemus_i_bactria)), Antiochos III ([http://nomisma.org/id/antiochos\\_iii](http://nomisma.org/id/antiochos_iii)), Herakles (<https://d-nb.info/gnd/118639552>)

**Zusammenfassung:** In diesem Beitrag werden Tetradrachmen des Euthydemos I. von Baktrien behandelt, die sich von den regulären Münzen des Königs unterscheiden: Der auffälligste Unterschied ist der frontale Blick des auf dem Revers abgebildeten Herakles. Obwohl andere Forscher diese Tetradrachmen als posthum bezeichnet haben, wird vorgeschlagen, dass sie zu Euthydemos' Lebzeiten geprägt wurden, möglicherweise während des Krieges mit dem Seleukidenkönig Antiochos III.

**Schlagwörter:** Baktrien, Graeco-Baktrisches Reich, Euthydemos I., Antiochos III., Herakles

The Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom, covering the northern parts of present-day Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, was founded by Diodotos I. The satrap of Bactria and Margiana gradually increased the independence of his rule and when his Seleukid overlords were weakened by the Third Syrian War (246–241 BC), he assumed the royal title<sup>1</sup>. The Diodotid dynasty came to an end around 225 BC, when the founder's son, Diodotos II, was overthrown by Euthydemos I. Euthydemos was one of the most important Graeco-Bactrian kings: His greatest achievement, as narrated by Polybios<sup>2</sup>, was the repelling of Antiochos III's invasion (208–206 BC) – this led to the recognition of his status by the Seleukid monarch and paved the way for the subsequent expansion of the kingdom south of the Hindukush<sup>3</sup>. During his long rule, which lasted until c. 200 BC, Euthydemos I produced an abundant silver coinage: All of his tetradrachms depict Herakles, the main god of the Euthydemid dynasty, seated left on a rock. This image could have been influenced by tetradrachms of the Seleukid kings Antiochos I and II, which display a largely identical motive and were, inter alia, minted in Magnesia on the Sipylos, Euthydemos' possible

hometown<sup>4</sup>. There is, however, a series of tetradrachms that differs from the regular silver coins of Euthydemos I in some aspects. Only few coins of this type have survived: Four specimens – in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France ([no. R 3681.30](#)), the American Numismatic Society ([SNG ANS, no. 180](#)), Aman ur Rahman (Bopearachchi – Rahman 1995, no. 117) and Klaus Grigo ([fig. 1](#)) – have the monograms  $\Delta$  and  $\Delta$ I in the exergue, another example – sold by Classical Numismatic Group ([fig. 2](#)) – has  $\Delta$  and  $\Delta$ V<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For the history of the Diodotids see Holt 1999 and Wünsch 2022, pp. 287–293.

<sup>2</sup> Polybios 10,49; 11,34.

<sup>3</sup> An overview of the history of the successors of Euthydemos I is given by Wünsch 2022, pp. 296–305.

<sup>4</sup> [SCI, no. 318](#). Polybios 11,34,1 states that Euthydemos was a native of Magnesia, but gives no further details. On the basis of the Seleukid tetradrachms, Newell 1941, p. 275 assumes that Euthydemos I hailed from Magnesia on the Sipylos. This matter is, however, still disputed as Bernard 1985, pp. 131–133 argues for Magnesia on the Meander as Euthydemos' hometown, while Lerner 1999, p. 54 considers Magnesia in Thessaly.

<sup>5</sup> The tetradrachm sold by Classical Numismatic Group was part of the Kuliab hoard and has been published by Bopearachchi 1999, p. 41 no. 61.



Fig. 1: The unusual tetradrachm series, first variant



Fig. 2: The unusual tetradrachm series, second variant

Osmund Bopearachchi regards these tetradrachms as Sogdian imitations, noting the unusually large diameters of their flans (ranging from 31 to 34 mm)<sup>6</sup>. While it is true that such sizes are first attested under Demetrios I (c. 200–190 BC), the temporal distance should not be problematic if the tetradrachms were minted in the latter half of Euthydemos' reign. Olivier Bordeaux suggests that the series might have been issued by Eukratides I (c. 170–145 BC) because two of the monograms also appear on his coinage<sup>7</sup>. But against this speak the legend conventions on other Bactrian commemorative coins, which are discussed in more detail below. As the artistic quality, weight and fixed die axis (6 or 12 o'clock) are all compatible with official issues of Euthydemos I, the following contribution will further investigate the idea that the tetradrachms were minted during his lifetime.

### Comparison with Euthydemos' coinage

First, we shall take a closer look at the iconographic details of the unusual tetradrachm series. As Bordeaux has observed, the diademed head on the obverse strongly resembles the portraits on some of Euthydemos' tetradrachms which he classified as Group I (**fig. 3**)<sup>8</sup>. The heads are nearly identical, except that the left diadem end is arranged differently. The reverse shows the bearded Herakles seated

<sup>6</sup> Bopearachchi 1991, p. 163 Series 25; SNG ANS, no. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Bordeaux 2018, p. 104. The monograms appear on two tetradrachm series, on which Eukratides I wears the Boeotian helmet adorned with bull's horn and ear (minted after his Indian campaign of 163/62 BC): Bopearachchi 1991, pp. 202–205 Series 6C (ΔΙ), 6Q (Α).

<sup>8</sup> Bordeaux 2018, p. 104.





Fig. 3: Tetradrachm of Euthydemos I, Bordeaux Group I1

left on a rock with the skin of the Nemean lion draped on it, resting the club in his right hand on a pile of stones. This motive is very similar to the standard reverse design of Euthydemos' precious metal coins. Yet there are some differences. The most notable is the placement of the hero's head: It looks directly at the user of the coin, whereas on the rest of Euthydemos' coinage it is turned to the left. This is not the first case of a god on a Bactrian issue being depicted with a frontal glance. That would be the Athena on the bronze coins of Diodotos I/II, but note that the goddess is standing frontally<sup>9</sup>. A frontal glance combined with a body partially or entirely turned in profile is an unusual sight. Apart from the tetradrachm series in discussion, it only occurs with the king on horseback, depicted on the drachms of Antimachos II (c. 168–165 BC)<sup>10</sup>, and with the second mounted Dioskour on Eukratides I's coinage<sup>11</sup>.

Our group of tetradrachms depicts Herakles setting his club on a pile of five round rocks. On the precious metal coins that Euthydemos I struck between c. 225 and 208 BC, the club is also set on a pile of stones (Bordeaux Groups A1–H2); this was removed on the later series, where the hero rests his club on his right knee or thigh (Bordeaux Groups I1–K6). On the majority of the coins, the pile is formed by three larger rectangular rocks. There are, however, two series of tetradrachms which display several small round rocks (Bordeaux Groups E3, H2; **figs. 4–5**), resembling the depiction on the un-

usual tetradrachm series. The latter presents the rock on which Herakles is sitting as a throne-like structure, corresponding to the designs on Bordeaux Groups I1–K6; these coins also have the lion skin draped on the rock, which is absent on the earlier groups. On the regular series, Herakles rests his left hand on a ledge that is distinctly developed on the upper right corner of the block; this detail goes back to Groups H1–2 (**fig. 5**), the last to feature a naturally formed rock without lion skin. It is visible on all coins of Groups H to K – albeit less pronounced on the gold octadrachm (Group J1) –, but missing on the unusual tetradrachm series.

### Comparison with later coins

Let us also consider the later iterations of Euthydemos' seated Herakles. On the commemorative tetradrachms issued by the Bactrian kings Agathokles (c. 185–178 BC) and Antimachos I (c. 178–170 BC), Herakles sits on a naturally formed rock without the lion skin draped on it, his left resting on a more or less pronounced ledge, the club set on a single rock behind his

<sup>9</sup> Bopearachchi 1991, p. 152 [Series 12](#), [Series 13](#), and [Series 14](#) = Holt 1999, pp. 165–167 Series H.

<sup>10</sup> Bopearachchi 1991, pp. 196 f. [Series 1](#). For the dating of Antimachos II see Wünsch 2021, p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Bopearachchi 1991, pp. 199–214 [Series 1](#); [Series 2](#); [Series 4](#); [Series 5](#); [Series 6](#); [Series 7](#); [Series 8](#); [Series 11](#); [Series 12](#); [Series 19](#); [Series 20](#).





Fig. 4: Tetradrachm of Euthydemos I, Bordeaux Group E3



Fig. 5: Tetradrachm of Euthydemos I, Bordeaux Group H2

right knee (**fig. 6**)<sup>12</sup>. A tetradrachm with the reverse legend ΕΥΘΥΔΗΜΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ («of Euthydemos, the Great») follows the same iconography, only the club is set on the hero's right knee. This issue could be an early prototype for Agathokles' commemorative series<sup>13</sup>. The motive is also repeated on square bronze coins, struck in the late second century BC by the Indo-Greek queen Agathokleia and her son or husband Strato I. They show Herakles sitting on a big rock without lion skin, resting his club on his right knee (**fig. 7**)<sup>14</sup>. On the coins of the Indo-Scythian rulers Azes, Azilises, Spalahores and Spalagadames (mid first century BC), the diademed Herakles sits emphatically on a small rectangular rock and holds the club closely to his face<sup>15</sup>.

The iconographic analysis has shown that the unusual tetradrachm series fits quite well into the regular coinage of Euthydemos I: The

stone pile is reminiscent of Bordeaux Groups E3 and H2, the lion skin finds parallels in Groups I to K and is notably absent from the posthumous utilizations of the type. Moreover, the commemorative coins repeating the types of Euthydemos I display different legends than our tetradrachm series: They always name Euthydemos with his epitheton *Theos* (or *Megas* on the prototype issue), but without the royal title (**fig. 6**); the commemorative tetradrachms also give the name of the issuing king, introduced with ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΝΤΟΣ («during the kingship of»). The fact that the unusual tetradrachms do not name any other minting authority except

<sup>12</sup> Glenn 2020, pp. 323–325, 337 f.

<sup>13</sup> Bordeaux 2018, p. 103; Glenn 2020, pp. 140–143.

<sup>14</sup> Bopearachchi 1991, pp. 251 f. [Series 3](#), and [Series 4](#).

<sup>15</sup> Senior 2001, Types 59, 69, 83.





Fig. 6: Commemorative tetradrachm of Antimachos I, [Bopearachchi Series 10A](#)



Fig. 7: Bronze coin of Agathokleia and Strato I, [Bopearachchi Series 3A](#)

Euthydemos I, who is referred to as ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΕΥΘΥΔΗΜΟΥ like on his regular coinage, strongly suggests that they were minted during the king's lifetime. An important indication for dating the series is the close similarity to the portraits of Group I. Group I is a substantial coinage (Bordeaux records 147 examples) and was probably minted in the years before the war against Antiochos III (208–206 BC). In our opinion, the tetradrachm series could have been minted around the same time as Group I or, perhaps more likely, shortly after it.

### The monograms

This proposed dating is further strengthened by the monograms. The significance of the monograms on Bactrian coins is still debated – while they could be representative of the officials responsible for the minting<sup>16</sup>, it is also plausible to interpret them as mint marks. All

known specimens of the unusual tetradrachm series have the monogram  $\Delta\uparrow$ , accompanied by  $\Delta\uparrow$  (fig. 1b) or  $\Delta\uparrow$  (fig. 2b).  $\Delta\uparrow$  is, to our knowledge, not attested elsewhere. It resembles the monogram  $\Delta\uparrow$  from the gold and silver coins of Antiochos I and II, which Brian Krittr attributes to Ai Khanoum<sup>17</sup>.  $\Delta\uparrow$  appears on other tetradrachms of Euthydemos I (Bordeaux Group B5), accompanied by the letters **AI** or **TI**<sup>18</sup>. The

<sup>16</sup> Bordeaux 2018, pp. 137–139; Glenn 2020, pp. 173–178.

<sup>17</sup> Krittr 2016, p. 106 no. 21 (stater of Antiochos I), pp. 149–153 (staters and drachms of Antiochos II).

<sup>18</sup> Bordeaux 2018, p. 178 no. 154 (**AI**), nos. 155–157 (**TI**).  $\Delta\uparrow$  is furthermore present on the silver coinage of Euthydemos II (Bopearachchi 1991, p. 168 [Series 4C](#)), Eukratides I (Bopearachchi 1991, p. 205 [Series 6Q](#)), Demetrios II (Bopearachchi 1991, p. 195 [Series 1F](#), [Series 1G](#), [Series 2A](#)) and Heliokles I (Bopearachchi 1991, p. 223 [Series 1M](#), p. 224 [Series 2F](#)).





Fig. 8: Bronze coin of Euthydemos I, Bordeaux Group N1

first combination is of particular importance since the additional letters are the same that form  $\Delta$  – in the monogram they are placed on top of, not next to each other. It therefore seems possible that  $\Delta$  evolved from the letters on the Group B5 tetradrachm rather than the Seleukid monogram from Aī Khanoum.  $\Delta$ I is also found on Bactrian gold staters and tetradrachms of Antiochos I<sup>19</sup>, but more important is its appearance on a bronze series of Euthydemos I (Bordeaux Group N1; **fig. 8**). These coins have even more in common with the unusual tetradrachms: Both have the monograms placed in the exergue, which is only rarely the case in the coinage of Euthydemos I<sup>20</sup>, and they share a pelleted border on the obverse as well as the reverse. The bronzes with the  $\Delta$ I monogram can be precisely dated: The two known examples are marked with a Seleukid anchor, which was applied in the immediate aftermath of the war with Antiochos III, i.e. in 206 BC<sup>21</sup>. The above described similarities make it plausible that the unusual tetradrachm series was minted prior to the  $\Delta$ I bronze coins in the same mint (or under the same minting official).

### An experiment in times of war?

With all this taken into account, the tetradrachm series seems to have been created between 210 and 206 BC. If this dating is accepted, there could be a connection to the war against Antiochos III: The Seleukid mon-

arch invaded Bactria in 208 BC in order to re-integrate it into his Empire, but this plan failed since he was unable to capture Euthydemos' capital. After a two-year siege of Baktra, Antiochos III had to agree to a peace treaty. He accepted the kingship of his adversary and even promised to marry one of his daughters to Euthydemos' son Demetrios I<sup>22</sup>. The gold octadrachm (Group J1) was likely struck on this occasion<sup>23</sup>. If the unusual tetradrachms were minted during the conflict, this might give an explanation for their iconography: In times of war it was possibly considered necessary to address the users of the coins more directly – this could have been attempted by turning Herakles' head from his usual profile to a frontal position. This change must have been immediately noticeable to the ancient viewer and by glancing at Herakles looking directly at them,

<sup>19</sup> Kritt 2016, p. 102 nos. 2–3, p. 108 no. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Apart from the bronzes, the monograms are placed in the exergue only on the silver coins of Bordeaux Groups B5, C2, F2/4.

<sup>21</sup> Dumke 2017 argues that the anchor mark could have been applied to make the bronzes an acceptable currency for the Seleukid soldiers, after their king had concluded peace with Euthydemos I. Interestingly,  $\Delta$ I also appears on tetradrachms of Antiochos III and Seleukos IV ([SC I, nos. 1109–1113](#) [» $\Delta$ I Mint«]; SC II, nos. [1326](#), [1327](#), [1328](#), and [1329](#) [»Formerly the  $\Delta$ I Mint«]): As their production began c. 202 BC, the usage of the monogram was possibly inspired by the Bactrian bronze coins.

<sup>22</sup> Wünsch 2022, pp. 293–296.

<sup>23</sup> Bordeaux 2018, pp. 108 f.



they could have felt a stronger connection to the hero and the royal dynasty he embodied. In any case, the tetradrachm series is best understood as an experimental issue intended to test changes to the established iconography of the reverse. Ultimately, however, Herakles' frontal glance did not find enough approval and was therefore not adopted for the following silver coinage of Euthydemos I.

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