



# MYSTERIES OF THE APADANA

An archaeological excavation illuminates—and confuses—the identification of ancient Croesids. Are they Lydian or Persian?

In the modern era, extraordinary architecture and numismatics are linked inextricably to the ruins of Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Uncovered in 1933 in the northeast and southeast foundation deposits of the Apadana (the great Persepolis audience hall [Figure 1]), were eight gold lion-and-

► **FIGURE 2:** *Croesus or Persian gold stater from Sardis.*

Actual Size: 16.5 x 12.9mm

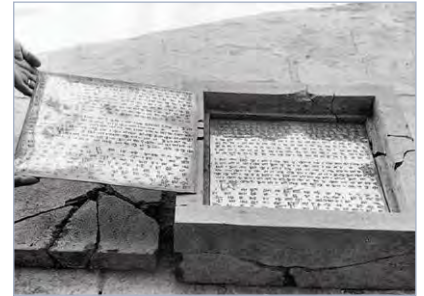


bull coins from Sardis, Lydia (Figure 2), and four Greek silver issues (one each from Aegina and Abdera and two from Cyprus). The four gold and two silver coins in each deposit were buried under carved stone boxes containing

trilingual inscriptions on rectangular gold and silver plates (Figure 3). A fifth Cypriot silver coin, numerically an oddity, was uncovered soon thereafter in the southeast deposit. It was thought to be part of the original burial, although not with complete certainty.

Going back to the time of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, Lydian lion-and-bull coins struck in silver and gold were presumed to be issues of King Croesus. “And of all men whom we know,” Herodotus wrote, “the Lydians were the first to mint and use coinage of gold and silver.”

Originally weighing 10.9g, the “heavy” gold and silver staters (or *Croesids*) also were produced in fractional weights. Concurrently (and later on), the weights were reduced to 8.2g “light” gold staters and 5.4g silver coins (*sigloi*), and fractional weights were discontinued. The recent consen-



▲ **FIGURE 3:** *The coins were buried under carved stone boxes containing trilingual inscriptions.*

sus, according to Ian Carradice in “The ‘Regal’ Coinage of the Persian Empire” is that the lighter coins continued beyond Croesus’ time into the Persian period; the Apadana Croesids were of the light variety.

By the 1980s, enough questions were raised about the Apadana foundation deposits that archaeologists might have wondered if they would be better off having never met a numismatist or seen a coin from the Persepolis ruins. The dating of the coins and the deposit appeared irreconcilable to some numismatists, while others agreed with the archaeologists. Overall, it was generally a messy and confusing situation. Nevertheless, the coins, once found, could not be ignored.

### **Challenging the Status Quo**

Written by Michael Vickers, the provocative, interesting and complex lead article in the 1985 *Numismatic Chronicle* brought the arguments into focus. Vickers recognized that modern numismatists since “E.M. Cousinéry in 1833 and H.P. Borrell in 1840” attributed



▲ **FIGURE 1:** *Detail of the great audience hall at Persepolis.*

PHOTOS: JOHN NEBEL (COIN), HISTORY OF ART IN PERSIA (AUDIENCE HALL) & WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



PHOTOS: JOHN NEBEL



▲ FIGURE 4: A post-Darius “Royal Archer” gold stater (Type III) resembles Type II, but the obverse includes a spear.

Actual Size: 14.7mm

the lion-and-bull staters to Croesus, but he believed this to be incorrect. “It makes for a far more satisfactory explanation of the evidence if we attribute all of the lion-bull coins to Darius,” who was the Great King of Persia.

Thus read Vickers’ opening salvo in his battle to redate the Apadana deposit, moving it from the 6th century B.C. to the 5th, contrary to accepted archaeological thought. In addition to clarifying the inception of the Croesids, Vickers opined that the buried Greek silver coins also were struck in the 5th century B.C., therefore making it wholly impossible that the Apadana deposit was made in the 6th century. Obviously, the coins could not have been buried before they were struck, thereby establishing a 5th-century terminus post quem. Further, Vickers thought all the coins must have celebrated Persian dominion. Since Abdera and Aegina did not come under Persian control until around 500 B.C. and 491 B.C., respectively, those two coins provided further evidence of 5th-century burial.

Vickers thought the absence of “Royal Archer” coins (or Darics) in the Apadana deposit was significant. Carradice divides Darics into four chronological categories: Type I is known only in silver, with a bow at the Great King’s torso; Type II shows the Great King running and kneeling, holding a bow; Type III resembles Type II, but with the addition of a spear (Figure 4); and Type IV returns to the Type II design without a spear. Numismatists thought Types I and II were minted under the Persian Great King Darius.

Not so, according to Vickers, who believes they were initiated by Xerxes, Darius’ 5th-century successor. In fact, Vickers thought that the true Daric was the Croesid, hence explaining the missing Archers from the Apadana deposit and the presence of the Croesids instead.

The Defense

In response to Vickers, Margaret Cool Root authored the lead article in the 1988 Numismatic Chronicle, clearly and convincingly refuting his dating. She contended that the trilingual inscriptions on the gold and silver plates in the stone foundation boxes state the geographic extent of Darius’ domain, which must be taken at face value, unlike Vickers, who thought them subject to interpretation. Root wrote, “It has generally been thought that this should be taken as an historically accurate, albeit summary statement of the north-south and east-west boundaries of the Achaemenid empire at the time of the text’s composition.”

The trilingual inscription plates in the foundation deposit were translated by Roland G. Kent as follows:

Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries, son of Hystapes, an Achaemenian.

Saith Darius the King: this is the kingdom

Which I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, thence unto Ethiopia;

from Sind, thence unto Sardis— which Ahuramazda the greatest of the gods bestowed upon me.

[May] Ahuramazda protect [me], and my royal house.

Since these geographic boundaries did not include Abdera and Aegina, Vickers’ use of Abdera and Aegina coins to date the Apadana deposit was incorrect according to a reliable ancient source, the Great King Darius.

Persepolis had an organized collection of documents, the “Fortification Archive,” with accurately datable records in tablet form. Vickers treated

these lightly, but Root did not: “To me it seems more solid than most evidence we have been left by the ancient world,” she wrote. Therefore, a Type II Archer coin would prove fatal to Vickers’ 5th-century dating. As Root explained, “The Archer coin used as Seal 1393 on Persepolis Fortification Tablet 1495 proves that by 500 B.C. at the latest (by the 22nd year of Darius I) the shooting Archer type had been minted and put into circulation.” With the exception of the seal evidence, questions still remained as to why Darius did not use his own coinage in the foundation, and why the Greek coins were included. Margaret Root’s answer to this was that the foundation deposit was political. For Darius, coinage production was not a great accomplishment; however, his acquisition of all the great Lydian wealth signified by the lion-and-bull pieces was worth celebrating. In Root’s view, the Greek silver coins represented a different form of proclamation by Darius, as



▲ FIGURE 5: Pictured (top, from left) are three coins of Sardis—a gold twelfth stater, a silver twelfth stater and a silver twenty-fourth stater. The latter was found under a skeleton in the rubble of the fortification (bottom).

PHOTOS: SARDISEXPEDITION.ORG



▲ **FIGURE 6:** *Pre-Croesus electrum third stater from Sardis.* Actual Size: 13.5 x 10.4mm

these cities inevitably would become part of the Persian Empire.

### **The Evidence Mounts**

In a 1994 *Numismatic Chronicle* article about a hoard discovered in 1990 that contained Cypriot coins, Jonathan Kagan further supported the 6th century B.C. date for the Apadana deposit. “The hoard evidence as it now stands leaves us with no basis for placing any of the Cypriot coins after 500 and reasonable grounds for dating them all before that.”

A Summer 2002 discovery published in 2005 by Nicholas Cahill and John Kroll apparently settled the Croesid argument. Two coins, one silver twelfth stater and one gold twelfth stater were uncovered, having been effectively sealed in the debris from the 546 B.C.

sack of Sardis by the Persian army commanded by Cyrus. The discovery of the two pieces led to the careful cleaning of an unknown metal disk excavated in 1988, which proved to be

a twenty-fourth stater. The latter was found beneath the skeleton of a soldier, whose corpse had been tossed aside and buried under the rubble of the Sardis fortification (Figure 5). As such, these three coins were struck before Sardis fell to the Persians, and thus were Croesus’ coinage.

The soldier might have been carrying the tiny coin in his mouth, as was the custom, or it might have been missed when his corpse was looted and tossed into the dump. As described by Cahill and Kroll, the skeleton offered insight into the travails of ancient warfare and presented a poignant story. The young soldier had “died violently with broken forearms, probably from warding off blows (‘parry fractures’), and wounds in the back inflicted at the time of death.”

### **The Discussion Continues**

In a 2012 article in the journal *Iran*, Abolala Soudavar takes Cahill and Kroll to task. Comparing Croesids with earlier Lydian coins, Soudavar thinks the abrupt iconographic shift between the electrum (gold-and-silver alloy) Lydian lion head third stater, or *trite* (Figure 6), and the pure-gold lion-and-bull staters (Figure 2) is not believable, therefore Croesids must be Persian, not Lydian. However, Soudavar missed the three intervening types coined by Croesus that illustrated a gradual progression of design. Electrum Croesus staters

with counterpoised bull and lion (Figure 7) and lion and bull provide the first step. Following the two electrum types, a 10.8g gold prototype (Figure 8) was made, keeping the lion-and-



▲ **FIGURE 7:** *Croesus electrum stater prototype from Sardis.* Actual Size: 21.1 x 11.1mm

bull theme, but with the animals in opposition. The latter’s design was continued with a flatter flan (metal disc) for the regular pure-gold and pure-silver coinage as described by Herodotus. Figure 9 is a silver example, in-



◀ **FIGURE 8:** *Croesus gold stater prototype featuring confrontational images.*

Actual Size: 6.2 x 13.9mm

dicating the dies for both gold and silver issues were interchangeable.

### **Conclusion**

The matter probably will never be settled completely. Meanwhile, the traditional ideas appear to be safe for the moment: The Apadana deposit



▲ **FIGURE 9:** *Croesus silver stater.*

Actual Size: 20.8 x 15.2mm



occurred in the 6th century, and the lion-and-bull coins first appeared during Croesus' reign, although the later, lighter issues likely are a Persian continuation minted in Sardis. Royal Archer coins originally were issued by Darius, and later by his successors. Finally, archaeologists and numismatists have much to offer one another, including more thought-provoking analyses.

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