

# AN ALLEGED HOARD OF THIRD CENTURY ALEXANDRIAN TETRADRACHMS

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In the 1920s an Italian diplomat and spare-time collector of ancient coins bought a lot of third century Alexandrian tetradrachms in the Great Bazaar of Istanbul. He was told that it was an Egyptian find. This so-called discovery was forgotten for 50 years after the death of the diplomat until the last owner put it up for sale. Nevertheless, before selling it for good, he got in touch with us in order to be aware of its real value. Thus we had the chance to examine, weigh and take pictures of those coins, and it was immediately clear to us that we were dealing with a true hoard.

In fact all the coins show the same patina in spite of different degrees of corrosion, and their quantitative analysis is more or less equivalent to the conjectural reconstruction which was made by Milne in 1933 in the introduction to his famous catalogue of the Ashmolean collection<sup>1</sup> and which was later confirmed by Erik Christiansen in his work about *The Hoard Evidence* in 2004.<sup>2</sup> For obvious reasons we cannot exclude that some coins too worn or completely illegible were discarded by the seller or by the collector, nor can we exclude the possibility that our supposed hoard may actually be only a part of a larger treasure.

Nevertheless we are dealing with 214 specimens spanning the period between 272/273 AD, year 4 of Aurelianus's principate, and 295/296 AD, year 12 of Diocletianus's reign and virtually the last year of the autonomous Alexandrian mint that afterwards struck only the odd coins of the usurper Domitius Domitianus and perhaps some rare specimens of Maximianus and Constantius.<sup>3</sup>

These coins were clearly hoarded as soon as the Diocletianic reform came into force, or together with the coming into force of the Diocletianic reform when the tetradrachms were expelled from monetary circulation. According to Christiansen, 'hoards... deposited after Diocletian's currency reform rarely contain any coinage from the previous period,<sup>4</sup> and the composition pattern of our supposed find corroborates his observation. A total of 213 specimens were coined after the Aurelianic reform of the Alexandrian currency argued by Metcalf<sup>5</sup> and accepted by Estiot<sup>6</sup> and Christiansen,<sup>7</sup> according to whom the weight of the tetradrachm was cut within year 5. The whole lot contains 214 clearly legible and easily datable<sup>8</sup> specimens characterized by a brownish surface: 3 belong to Aurelianus, 1 to Probus, 3 to Carinus Caesar, 3 to Carinus, 6 to Numerianus, 107 to Diocletianus, 87 to Maximianus and 5 to Galerius Caesar.

Between Aurelianus and Numerianus the weight is reduced from 10.6 g to 7.7 g; later, with Diocletian's first year, the average weight is reduced to *c.* 7.50 g, a stable standard more or less until year 9 of the Dalmatian emperor (Table 1<sup>9</sup>); in fact with year 10 the average seems to be replaced by a lighter standard of *c.* 7 g, perhaps in connection with the lower weight of Galienus's tetradrachms.

<sup>1</sup> Milne 1933, p. XXV.

<sup>2</sup> Christiansen 2004, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Geissen 1976, p. 282, note 10.

<sup>4</sup> Christiansen 2004, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> Metcalf 1998, p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> Estiot 1995, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> Christiansen 2004, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> With the exception of two coins of Diocletianus (nos. 63-64) and two of Maximianus (nos. 74 and 79) with the date off the flan.

<sup>9</sup> See the distribution by year and the comparison with the collections of Köln, Oxford and Osnabrück.

TABLE 1. Average weights of Diocletianic tetradrachms from the collections of Köln, Oxford and Osnabrück, and from the hoard under discussion.

<i>YEAR</i>	<i>KÖLN</i>	<i>OXFORD</i>	<i>OSNABRÜCK</i>	<i>HOARD</i>
1	7.78	7.85	7.73	7.58
2	7.47	7.76	7.56	7.53
3	7.60	7.63	7.80	7.36
4	7.35	7.41	7.64	7.62
5	7.38	7.78	7.57	7.35
6	7.80	7.30	7.69	7.41
7	7.71	7.57	7.62	7.57
8	7.42	7.54	7.22	7.50
9	7.28	7.32	7.33	7.25
10	7.19	6.94	7.39	6.90
11	7.30	7.21	7.25	7.03
12	7.02	7.45	7.07	7.18

In substance the most represented emperors are Diocletianus and Maximianus, whose tetradrachms respectively make up 50% and 40.65%, with the addition of the 1.86% of Galerius. The most productive years are the first eight, taking as reference the years of Diocletianus, with the peaks of the production within years 3 and 4.

<i>Year 1</i>	<i>Year 2</i>	<i>Year 3</i>	<i>Year 4</i>	<i>Year 5</i>	<i>Year 6</i>	<i>Year 7</i>	<i>Year 8</i>
15 spec.	22 spec.	30 spec.	36 spec.	26 spec.	17 spec.	12 spec.	18 spec.

This is in line with Milne's<sup>10</sup> observation that the first three years were marked by a more plentiful output compared to the predecessors, less in line with his following observation that the output fell slightly in each of the years 4, 5 and 6, but in line with the fall of 7 and the recovery in 8 conjectured by him.

After the collapse, as argued by Milne and confirmed by Christiansen:<sup>11</sup>

<i>Year 9</i>	<i>Year 10</i>	<i>Year 11</i>	<i>Year 12</i>
7 specimens	4 specimens	3 specimens	5 specimens

Year 12 of Diocletianus is represented in our hoard only by two coins (Table 2<sup>12</sup>) and the Alexandrian year 295/296 is represented by a total of five tetradrachms, not in line with

<sup>10</sup>Milne 1933, p. XXV.

<sup>11</sup>Christiansen 2004, p. 129.

<sup>12</sup>See the the comparison with the collections of Köln, Oxford and Osnabrück.

Metcalf,<sup>13</sup> according to whom the output of tetradrachms in year 12 would be *substantial*, ‘in spite of the meagre representation in the hoards’.<sup>14</sup>

TABLE 2. Coins of Diocletian year 12 (AD 295/296) in the collections of Köln, Oxford and Osnabrück, and from the hoard under discussion.

	<i>KÖLN</i>	<i>OXFORD</i>	<i>OSNABRÜCK</i>	<i>HOARD</i>
<i>Total specimens</i>	15 (166)	49 (5244)	10 (149)	5 (198)
<i>DIOCLETIANVS</i>	2	12	-	2
<i>MAXIMIANVS</i>	4	14	4	2
<i>CONSTANTIVS</i>	4	13	3	-
<i>GALERIVS</i>	5	12	3	1

In spite of the the production in year 12 of 25 reverse types,<sup>15</sup> this confirms Christiansen’s rule of thumb that ‘high number of types will normally be an indication of a low production’.<sup>16</sup> This is illustrated also in Fig. 1, where the black line corresponds to the output according to our hoard, the dashed line to the quantitative conjecture of Milne and the numbers to the numbers of types. In fact the sharp decline in the output after year 9 corresponds to an evident increase in the number of types.

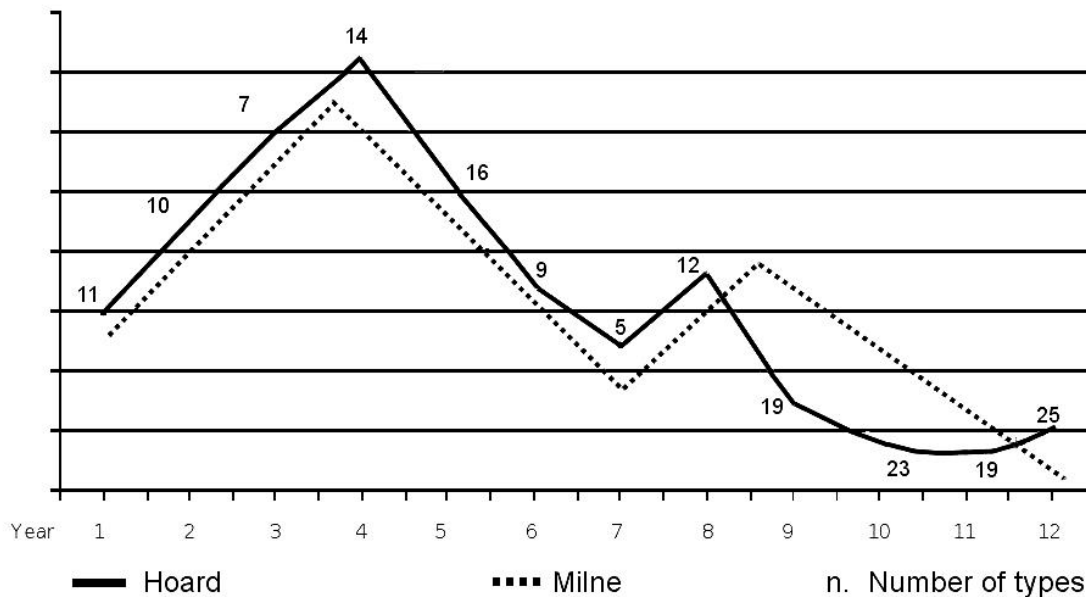


Fig. 1. Graph showing suggested output and number of reverse types for years 1-12 of Diocletianus.

<sup>13</sup> Metcalf 1987, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Christiansen 2004, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> According to Emmet 2001, pp. 208-209. According to Metcalf 1987, p. 160, the types would be 36 but the author reckons all the variants of the

Milne’s catalogue.

<sup>16</sup> Christiansen 2004, p. 129. Recently the rule has also been cited for the coinage of the mint of Rome, see Guillemain 2009, p. 92.

Some hoards deposited after the Diocletianic reform show a composition pattern (but a different size) similar to the alleged hoard. Among the others can be quoted the Karanis hoards numbered in Christiansen's work about the Alexandrian hoards<sup>17</sup> as A 146, A 147, A 148, A149 and A 150 (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Composition of the Karanis hoards and the hoard under discussion.

	<i>A 146</i> 617+145*	<i>A 147</i> 1010+476*	<i>A 148</i> 1021+468*	<i>A 149</i> 2728+162*	<i>A 150</i> 1418+98*	<i>HOARD</i> 214
<i>Aurelianus</i> <i>Pre-reform</i>	-	0.1	-	0.12	-	0.46
<i>Aurelianus</i> <i>Post-reform</i>	0.48	0.2	0.2	0.36	0.42	0.93
<i>Tacitus</i>	0.16	-	0.1	0.16	0.49	-
<i>Probus</i>	9.28	6.1	10.5	7.16	7.49	0.46
<i>Carus and</i> <i>sons</i>	12.64	13.1	14.7	14.04	10.36	5.60
<i>Tetrarchy</i>	76.16	81.5	76.6	89.44	80.50	92.52

\* Illegible coins.

Among the reverse personifications, Nike (designed in various types) appears 40 times, followed by the Eagle (also with different types), and by Elpis, each 24 times; after these three come Tyche standing (20), Eirene standing and Homonoia standing (14), Alexandria standing (12), and Eusebeia standing (10).

#### ABBREVIATIONS

KÖLN = Geissen A. / Weiser W. (1983), *Katalog alexandrinischer Kaisermünzen der Sammlung des Instituts für Altertumskunde der Universität zu Köln, Band 4, Claudius Gothicus – Bleimünzen (Nr. 3015-3627)*, Opladen.

OSNABRÜCK = Savio A. / Cubelli V. / Lucchelli T. (1997), *Katalog der alexandrinischen Münzen der Sammlung Dr. Christian Friedrich August Schleddehaus im Kulturgeschichtlichen Museum Osnabrück, III, Die Münzen des 3. Jahrhunderts (Septimius Severus-Domitius Domitianus)*, Bramsche.

OXFORD = Milne J.G. (1933), *Catalogue of Alexandrian Coins (Catalogue)*, Oxford.

<sup>17</sup> Christiansen 1985, pp. 172-76.

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