

Roger Bland: *The Coinage of Gordian III from the Mints of Antioch and Caesarea*. London: Spink 2023 (Royal Numismatic Society, Special Publication 60). XII, 528 p., 100 plates. £ 80.00. ISBN: 978-0-901405-39-6.

Why did Antioch during Gordian III's reign (238–244 CE) start minting series of Roman imperial denominations, such as *radiates* (or *antoniniani*)¹ with Latin legends, while producing traditional Roman provincial denominations, such as *tetradrachms* with Greek legends? This research question forms the basis for “The Coinage of Gordian III from the Mints of Antioch and Caesarea” by Roger Bland. The question is relevant because the change in coin production under Gordian III represents an intriguing and not fully understood development in Roman history. This change meant that imperial coin production was no longer limited to Rome, and mints such as Antioch could simultaneously strike increasing numbers of gold and silver Roman imperial coinages, which could circulate throughout the empire as legal tender. Remarkably, Antioch simultaneously struck provincial coinage, such as silver *tetradrachms* and bronze coinages with local value and significance. Bland's research sheds new light on Roman coinage of the third century, the reign of Gordian and the imperial administration in general, which makes this highly relevant work an important contribution to Roman history and coin studies.

Bland's specialist numismatic approach (cataloguing, die-studies, quantification, hoard studies) in this extensive 528-page study might seem overwhelming at first, especially to readers unfamiliar with numismatic research tools. But this scholarly work has much more to offer than numismatic analysis. Bland employs a wide variety of disciplines to tackle his research question, including epigraphy, papyrology, manuscripts, metallurgy and archaeology. The cogent conclusions are clearly presented in chapters 9 (“The Historical Events of Gordian's Reign”, pp. 489–506) and 10 (“The Significance of Gordian's Coinage from Antioch and Caesarea”, pp. 507–512) and demonstrate the importance of an interdisciplinary approach, making this seminal work

1 Bland uses the term *radiates* instead of *antoniniani*, but does not explain why, which might confuse some readers. Although the *radiates* have traditionally been interpreted as having the value of two *denarii*, Bland's study points out that it had the value of one and a half *denarii* (pp. 431–432).

relevant for numismatists, ancient historians, economic historians and archaeologists.

This book is an updated and revised version of Bland's unpublished 1991 PhD thesis.² It represents a significant improvement as the incorporated available material (known coins) has tripled and because much scholarly work on Antioch and Roman Syria has been published over the past thirty years, which Bland incorporates in his study.³ These improvements make the book up-to-date and more complete.

To tackle the main question Bland distinguishes four clearly and convincingly presented problems that he addresses throughout this study. I will summarise and evaluate Bland's approaches below. First, what is the relationship between *radiates* and *tetradrachms*? The *radiates* (Latin legend, Roman imperial coinage) and *tetradrachms* (Greek legend, Roman provincial coinage) minted at Antioch under Gordian III have traditionally been studied, described, catalogued and collected separately.⁴ As Bland stresses, this separation hampers an adequate analysis of the relationship between the series and obstructs our understanding of the complete production of Antioch, and therefore its po-

- 2 R. F. Bland: The Coinage of Gordian III from the Mints of Antioch and Caesarea. PhD thesis London 1991 (unpublished PhD thesis, Institute of Archaeology, University College). The thesis can be accessed online (URL: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10116536/>) and has for many years been a standard reference work and incorporated in relevant studies and catalogues (see note 3).
- 3 In his original thesis, Bland examined 1,618 coins, but now he had access to 5,395 coins, thanks to the increasing availability of detailed images of coins in online auctions. Important numismatic publications on Antioch and Roman Syria: M. Prieur/K. Prieur: A Type Corpus of the Syro-Phoenician Tetradrachms and their Fractions from 57 BC to AD 253. Lancaster, PA/London 2000; K. Butcher: Coinage in Roman Syria. Northern Syria, 64 BC–AD 253. London 2004 (Royal Numismatic Society, Special Publication 34); R. McAlee: The Coins of Roman Antioch. Lancaster, PA/London 2007; J. Nurpetlian: Coinage in the Orontes Valley of Syria (1st c. BC–3rd c. AD). London 2020 (Royal Numismatic Society, Special Publication 59); B. Michaux: Le monnayage impérial de Gordien III (238–244 après J.-C.). Corpus des émissions monétaires de Rome et d'Antioche. Brussels 2020 (Dossiers du Cercle d'études numismatiques 5); J. Mairat/M. Spoerri Butcher: Roman Provincial Coinage. Vol. VII.2: From Gordian I to Gordian III (AD 238–244): All Provinces Except Asia. With Contributions by M. Amandry, R. Bland, K. Butcher, J. Nurpetlian, and U. Peter. London/Paris 2022.
- 4 The *radiates* are catalogued in Roman Imperial Coinage (RIC) IV.3 (1949) and the *tetradrachms* in Roman Provincial Coinage (RPC) VII.2 (2022).

sition within the imperial framework.⁵ Bland individually studies the first *radiate* series (Chapter 3: “Antioch: the First Series of Radiates”, pp. 25–137), *tetradrachms* (Chapter 4: “Antioch: the Tetradrachms”, pp. 139–207), the second *radiate* series (Chapter 5: “Antioch: the Second Series of Radiates”, pp. 209–276) and then thoroughly investigates their mutual denominational relationship (Chapter 7: “Analyses and Metrology”, pp. 423–440) and their circulation (Chapter 8: “Coin Circulation”, pp. 441–488). A second problem is a question that has long hindered research on the *radiates* of Gordian III: how can the *radiates* of Rome and Antioch be distinguished? The *radiates* of Antioch and Rome are stylistically difficult to distinguish, which obscures our understanding of coin practices in Rome and the eastern empire. As already noted in the introduction of this review, much work has been done in the field of Roman Syrian numismatics. In 2020, Briac Michaux published a full list of types, and his work, to quote Bland, “provides the most useful resource for distinguishing between the products of Rome and Antioch” (p. 34). To distinguish the coins, Bland then offers more or less the same criteria that he presented in his 1991 thesis. This might feel like an underwhelming approach to one of the four problems this book addresses. But the gathering of images of *all known* Gordian III coins of Antioch and their inclusion (which is of particular importance) contributes greatly to the problem’s solution as it offers readers the tools to research the differences and compare stylistic features. This also allows Bland to tackle a third problem. In the past, some *radiates* and *tetradrachms* have been attributed on doubtful grounds to mints in the Balkans, Mesopotamia or Antioch. By examining all known coins, Bland is able to attribute them to Antioch based on stylistic features (Chapters 3, 5). Then, by comparing the Antiochene coin types and their stylistic features with the output of Caesarea, Bland solves the last problem: what is the relationship between coins of Antioch and Caesarea minted under Gordian III? Stylistic similarities between coins of these cities in the years 241–242 suggest a correlation. By examining all known coin types, Bland at-

5 Bland lists K. Pink: Antioch or Viminacium? A Contribution to the History of Gordian III and Philip I. In: NC 15, 1935, pp. 94–113; id.: Der Aufbau der römischen Münzprägung in der Kaiserzeit. III. Von Severus Alexander bis Philippus. In: NZ 68, 1935, pp. 12–34, and Butcher (note 3) as exceptions who did study them together. It is not immediately clear how these relate to Bland’s work, or whether their approach differs from Bland’s. Later on, it becomes clear where Bland improves on Karl Pink, as his die-studies do not use the number of groups of *radiates* that Pink suggests, for example on p. 32, but it is not always clear whether or how Bland differs or improves on Butcher.

tributes the Caesarean coins to Antiochene minting staff, temporarily located in Caesarea due to impending Persian threats (Chapter 6: “Caesarea in Cappadocia”, pp. 277–422). In sum, the threefold increase of available data and the inclusion of up-to-date publications do not radically alter Bland’s original conclusions, which only testifies to the quality of his original research.⁶

Backed by an impressive array of interdisciplinary methods, Bland approaches these problems with a vast arsenal of numismatic tools: cataloguing, die-studies and quantification, hoard data and metallurgy. He presents images and information on all coins of Gordian III which he attributes to the mints of Antioch and Caesarea, listing them in the catalogues that accompany each chapter. Bland’s catalogues of the *radiates* (Chapter 3, 5) now overrule the 1949 Roman Imperial Coinage (RIC) IV.3 and must be considered as the most reliable and up-to-date. Incorrect attributions are rectified and comprehensively presented, allowing researchers and numismatic professionals to update their research or collection references to this new standard. The *tetradrachms* (Chapter 4) and the Cappadocia catalogue (Chapter 6) include references to the 2022 Roman Provincial Coinage (RPC) VII.2, for which Bland contributed to the Antioch section (p. 142). The RPC only refers to the original Bland 1991 catalogue numbers. These numbers do not correspond to the 2023 catalogue, which means RPC readers run the risk of being referred to the old work. This is an unfortunate but no doubt unavoidable consequence of the RPC having been published just one year earlier.

With the increased amount of data Bland performs new die-studies, which represent the principal numismatic method employed in this book, and uses them to estimate the total number of dies used for a series. Each chapter that discusses a coin series (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6) includes a new die-study.⁷ Bland explains his approach very clearly (devoting half of the introductory chapter 1 [pp. 1–18] to this topic), which will especially benefit readers that have no numismatic background. Bland emphasises the sometimes subjective nature of die-studies, especially noting how challenging large coinages

6 At times, earlier work is discarded “[...] attributions were only made on very tenuous grounds [...]” (p. 4); “This suggestion can hardly be taken seriously” (p. 5, n. 25)] without explanation. Experts familiar with the bibliography may understand why, but it may raise questions for a general readership unable to follow Bland’s reasoning.

7 Because of their sheer size the 1991 samples from die-studies for reverses of Antioch *tetradrachms* and issue II of the second series of *radiates* have been used (p. 7).

with few-die links can be, stressing that “[...] it is perfectly possible to change one’s mind about a given die-identity when one re-examines the image” (p. 7). While Bland deserves credit for this candid remark on subjectivity, the implied ambiguity of die-identification might unsettle readers who are unfamiliar with the frequency or impact of such subjectivity, and thereby the reliability of the method. An explanation of how he deals with this issue would have been a welcome addition, for example by stressing the need for a cautious approach when die-identifications are uncertain. Bland’s explanation is thorough and realistic when he discusses how die-studies can be used for quantification (i. e. to calculate an estimated number of coins produced per die). He clearly explains the uncertainties and nuances involved: “It should be stressed that these figures are illustrative; nonetheless I think the attempt is still worth making” (p. 508). He prudently warns about the controversial limitations of the methods, but his nuanced message allows readers to form their own opinion. For readers that have no numismatic background, the die-studies may initially seem difficult to understand, but Bland offers concise and readable conclusions in chapters 8 and 9.⁸

Bland then connects his die-studies to hoard data. By examining this data, he draws conclusions about circulation patterns, which provide insights into the nature and purpose of coin series. The find and hoard evidence demonstrates the local nature of *tetradrachms*, whose circulation was confined to Syria. In contrast, *radiates* are found throughout the empire, demonstrating the growing importance of Antioch as a mint for Roman denominations. Whereas the *radiates* found in the first half of the third century were still mainly from Rome, the situation is reversed in the second half, when these coins were gradually and predominantly minted at Antioch and other eastern mints, in contrast, for example, to western and central Turkey, where *radiates* and *denarii* were still provided by the mint in Rome (pp.477–479).

Bland uses an interdisciplinary approach to examine all the numismatic data (coins gathered, die studies, hoards). He uses metallurgy to investigate the silver content of the coins, which is a useful method, as this can indicate the level of political and economic stress on the empire. Compared to 1991,

8 Fortunately, Bland offers a thorough explanation of the process in the excellent and enjoyable online Long Table lecture 133. The Joy of Die-Studies: Cataloguing the Coinage of Gordian III, hosted by the American Numismatic Society (April 14, 2023); URL: <https://numismatics.org/pocketchange/long-table-133-the-joy-of-die-studies-cataloguing-the-coinage-of-gordian-iii/>.

Bland has more data to investigate, but his metallurgical analysis does not yield any new conclusions, again testifying to the quality of his original work.⁹

Furthermore, Bland thoroughly analyses classical and Byzantine literary sources and includes an epigraphical investigation of Latin, Greek and Iranian inscriptions. By connecting these to the numismatic evidence, he investigates the chronology of Gordian's reign and his activities in the Roman east. This interdisciplinary approach culminates in the concluding chapters 8 and 9, thereby demonstrating the great importance of relating numismatic materials to other historical and archaeological contexts, which will be of great interest to numismatists, ancient historians and archaeologists.¹⁰ The expert numismatic material, primarily the die-studies, form the backbone of this book and may well be too detailed for non-specialists, but the translation and explanation which Bland offers, especially in the concluding chapters 8 and 9, significantly add to the book's readability for readers in a wide range of disciplines.

Editorial remarks by the reviewer can be kept to a minimum for this well-presented publication. In some places letters are missing from sentences or punctuation errors occur. Occasionally, a footnote is not listed in the bibliography (pp. 519–528). Unfortunately, the quality of the graphics is inadequate, which makes it difficult to distinguish the axis data. Finally, including a map would have made it easier for readers to visualise the book's contents geographically.¹¹

- 9 Bland concludes that the silver ratio of Caesarean coins was at par with that of Rome, yet the silver minted at Antioch was of a higher quality than in contemporary Rome, a precedent set during Gordian III's reign and continued in the second half of the third century. Bland explains (by repeating the conclusions of P. Le Gentilhomme: *La trouvaille de Nanterre*. In: *RN sér. 5, 9, 1946*, pp. 15–114) that the higher silver content was needed because of the importance of military pay in the region (p. 434).
- 10 The importance of collaborating with other disciplines in numismatic research is emphasized by J. van Heesch: *Quantifying Roman Imperial Coinage*. In: F. de Callataÿ (ed.): *Quantifying Monetary Supplies in Greco-Roman Times*. Bari 2011 (*Pragmateiai 19*), pp. 311–328, p. 325 (van Heesch on p. 324 includes Bland's 1991 conclusions) and F. Kemmers: *The Functions and Use of Roman Coinage. An Overview of 21st Century Scholarship*. Leiden/Boston 2019 (*Brill Research Perspectives in Ancient History*), p. 4.
- 11 Examples are missing letters (“n this chapter” on p. 443; “making it easy for Sapor to step in a defeat the whole Roman force” on p. 506); interpunction errors (sentence break on p. 5: “[...] Nicomedia. In Bithynia [...]”; no spacing on p. 9: “wasthe”);

Bland's "The Coinage of Gordian III from the Mints of Antioch and Caesarea" demonstrates how the coin system of the Roman empire transformed throughout the third century. Local mints, such as Antioch, gradually took over the role of prominent supplier of uniform silver coins from the mint of Rome. Bland presents the chronology, the dynamics and the key role of Gordian's reign in this major change using thorough numismatic research and interdisciplinary methods. He demonstrates how the long misunderstood Roman and Greek coinages of Antioch and Caesarea were imperial and provincial at the same time, blurring the line between the numismatic frames suggested in RIC and RPC. In his 1991 conclusion, Bland emphasises that his use of the die-study was "the first time that it has been applied to major coinage of the third century"¹². Thirty years on, Bland can still say the same in his 2023 publication, demonstrating the colossal amount of work he put into it and the continuing need for further research of this remarkable period in Roman history. This work is now the standard reference work for Antioch and Caesarea under Gordian III and will likely remain so for a long time.

bibliography references missing in n. 17, Chapter 1; n. 33, 34, Chapter 1; low-resolution graphics (fig. 16a–j, pp. 297–298; fig. 21–24, pp. 306–307). There was an illustrative map in the 1991 thesis, allowing readers to understand the subject matter geographically. It also contained a useful depiction of the route Gordian III supposedly took in the Roman east.

12 Bland (note 2), p. 518.

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Pim Möhring: Rezension zu: Roger Bland: The Coinage of Gordian III from the Mints of Antioch and Caesarea. London: Spink 2023 (Royal Numismatic Society, Special Publication 60). In: Plekos 26, 2024, S. 651–657 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2024/r-bland.pdf>).

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