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**CATALOGUE OF THE COINS FROM THE SHARJAH
MUSEUM (UNITED ARAB EMIRATES)**

Essai sur les monnayages arabes préislamiques de la péninsule d'Oman

Essay on the Pre-Islamic Arabian Coinages of the Oman Peninsula

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MISSION ARCHÉOLOGIQUE FRANÇAISE DE SHARJAH

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NOTICE

Among the pre-Islamic coins from the Sharjah Museum that Olivier Callot examines here, less than half of them come from the 1986 and 1999 archaeological excavations of Mleiha. The rest of these coins, with the exception of a few of them that were seized by the Sharjah Police, has been acquired from the antiquities market by the Sharjah Emirate, since these coins are believed to come from Mleiha, one of the two big pre-Islamic sites in the UAE. The joint study of these different lots of coins in the series of the *Travaux de la mission archéologique française à Sharjah (Works of the French archaeological mission in Sharjah)* needs an explanation.

As from 1960s, for some foreign residents in the UAE, just like in some other countries, unfortunately one of the week-end amusements consisted in collecting objects from the archaeological sites. This “harvest”, especially for the coins, was manifestly fruitful.

A small part of these non-scientific collections – but not illegal until the carrying out of a UAE reinforced legislation about antiquities – has remained in the country. When the archaeological researches started in Mleiha and ed-Dour and when the museums were organized, some collectors have spontaneously delivered to the archaeologists their discoveries and the related information, and then they have offered these objects to the museums of the country. We must pay tribute to them. But the immense majority of the coins have been exported, in order to build private collections. These coins could then have been sold, complete or by lots, to antiquities dealers. Few collectors and dealers have accepted to show them to some specialists or to give them photographic documentation of the coins. Concerning the coins bought by the Sharjah Museum, the announced provenience is exclusively Mleiha that, like ed-Dour, had become at that very moment well known. Therefore, through the acquisition of few dozen of these coins, the Emirate of Sharjah could recover a little portion of its patrimony.

The numismatist working at the Sharjah Museum is then faced to two incomparable sources; some coins come from archaeological excavations, some other from the antiquities market. Was it better to eliminate these “orphan antiquities”, quoting P. Amiet expression? Probably not, since the coins, even though with no sure provenance, maintain a great documentary value (date, belonging to a series), whereas, in the same circumstances, the other objects lose a considerable part of their archaeological value.

Anyway, the “orphan” coins must be handled in a different way than the objects coming from the archaeological excavations, and with other precautions. It is not possible to compare the information provided by a collector or a dealer with the information of the archaeological reports, with all their imperfections. Could we accept without discussing the words of first ones, who are rarely disinterested, when we meticulously analyse the second ones? About this issue, I believe it is dangerous mentioning as first information, and without showing any doubt, the site indicated by the collector, no matter how probable may it be, like for instance does D.T. Potts in his important: *The pre-Islamic Coinage of Eastern Arabia*, 1991.

We must be clear: either an object has a proven origin, or it does not. Accepting the indications of non-archaeologist intermediaries, and not always disinterested, falsifies the research, like for example shows the extreme variability of the Ziwiyeh hoard (O.W.M. Muscarella, “Ziwiyeh and Ziwiyeh: the Forgery of a Provenience”, *JFA* 4, 2, 1977), or else the fluctuating production of the Achaemenian movables art that, again Muscarella examines in “Excavated and Unexcavated Achaemenian Art”.

Was it better presenting each group in two separates parts? This is an option rarely adopted and it is difficult to do it for those coins that must be presented by series. This is why O. Callot has clearly differentiated the two origins in his catalogue. If, for some acquisitions, he has indicated, *in second place and with the conditional*, a provenance from Mleiha, it is because he wanted to mention all the data provided by the Museum cards. Undoubtedly, the solution he has opted for has a danger that is the abusive use of some indications. The reader must trust the first one of each entry: “Mleiha archaeological excavations” or “acquisition”.

This choice illustrates the qualities of the strictness and of the clarity of this catalogue, which allows then O. Callot to propose a precise and stimulating essay about the Eastern Arabia coinage.

Rémy BOUCHARLAT
Ancient director of the French Archaeological Mission of Sharjah

THANKS

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to H.H. Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed al-Qassimi, Emir of Sharjah, for the liberality he granted to me in studying and publishing the coins from the Sharjah museum collection.

My personal thanks also go to the responsible of the Sharjah Museum, Mr. Nasser al-Aboodi who was the director when I first came in 1994 and to Mr. Sabah Jasim, who succeeded him.

I will not forget to thank the French Archaeological Mission in Mleiha and his director Michel Mouton for the warm welcome I received from them and for the facilities for working they allowed me.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1994, at the request of the Directorate of Antiquities of the Sharjah Emirate, I started studying the collection of the coins belonging to the museum of this Country. At that time, it consisted of 122 specimens. A first group of coins comes from the site of Mleiha, where they were found during the archaeological excavations carried out by R. Boucharlat from 1986 and by M. Mouton from 1993 on. Some coins are fortuitous surface finds and others, found in lesser quantity in the stratigraphy of the excavation, will enable a preliminary chronology of the coinages of this area of the Oman Peninsula to be made. Two more coins were found during the excavation carried out by the Sharjah Museum at Mleiha in 1994. I have also included in this catalogue ten coins found by the excavators at Mleiha between 1994 and 1999. However, I could only examine the latter through photographs and impressions supplied by M. Mouton. At that time, they were not registered yet in the Sharjah Museum. Therefore, they do not have a SM number in the catalogue.

A second lot consists of coins bought on the British market by the Emir of Sharjah, Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammad al-Qassimi. The majority of these coins are presumed to have been found on the sites of Mleiha and ed-Dour (Umm al-Qaywain Emirate). The others had no indication of provenance. Nevertheless, we will see that most of them belong to the coinages of the Oman Peninsula. Finally, a third lot of some ten coins was seized by the Police of Sharjah in 1994; apparently they have been found in Mleiha.

Some of the coins that appeared on the British market and bought by the Sharjah Emirate have already been the subject of few publications. First, there is an abstract by Senior (1994) where he proposes a tentative classification of the "Arabian" series and a partial list of the coins from outside the Gulf. In 1998 Herinck, who had access to the photographic documentation on some of the coins from the British market, has published three articles. The first one (1998) is dedicated to the "Arabian" series, while the other two are dedicated to the coins that are foreign to the Gulf and that were apparently found in Mleiha (1998a) and ed-Dour (1998b). This important group of coins coming from the market raises several questions. Actually, the fact that they were collected on the surface by

non specialized persons does not allow to know their archaeological context and, what is even worse, their place of origin. As a result, it could be assumed that they were in fact groups of coins from different origins put together in order to produce a sort of scientific intoxication; some have thought so. Personally I would be more trustful, or naïf, and admit the proposed provenances. In fact, concerning the pre-Islamic Arabian coins, we will see that most of them belong to the coinages of Mleiha and ed-Dour in the Peninsula of Oman and that there are even some die connections between the coins of doubtful origin and the coins coming from regular archaeological excavations. Regarding the coins that are foreign to the region, they present a geographic and chronological homogeneity that is adequate enough for us to accept the proposed finding origins, a point that is also confirmed by some of the findings issued of regular excavations. In conclusion, I will simply remind that the only purpose of this work consists in presenting a practical catalogue of all the coins collected in the Museum of Sharjah.

The whole collection can be divided into two groups. The first one consists of the so called “pre-Islamic Arabian” coins, which come exclusively from the Arabian-Persian Gulf and that are all inspired by the coin types of Alexander the Great. Concerning the second group, it is made up of coins that are almost all foreign to this region and that show extremely varied types and origins.

The “Arabian” coins of the first group are far more numerous, 95 exactly, and we will see that two main origins can be referred to them. Few of them belong to the coinage of the area that we call “North-East Arabia” (the coast of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait). But the majority, even though their place of origin is not always sure, belong to the coinage of the Oman Peninsula (Mleiha and ed-Dour). Therefore, it will be possible to sketch a preliminary classification of the coin issues in this region and to propose a chronology for some of them.

The second group, smaller in number (26 coins) is made of coins from very different origins, such as the Roman Empire, the Kingdom of Characen, some countries under Parthian domination and even India. Although none of them come from regular excavations, we will see that it is certainly possible that they circulated in this part of Arabia where they illustrate the travellers’ movements and the commercial exchanges. Finally, two coins coming from South Arabia (present day, Yemen) will be examined together with the coins that are foreign to the Gulf area.

Even though this work aims at bringing some new evidence about the pre-Islamic Arabian coinages, it is not a pioneer work. In fact, since several years now, scholars have started being seriously interested in these coinages. I will only mention

few works, such as those by Robin (1974) on the ancient coinages of North-East Arabia, or those by Mørkholm on the coins found in Falaika, Kuwait (1960 and 1979) and at Qal'at al Bahrain (1972). Some coins found at Susa had also allowed Le Rider (1965) to approach this question. Sometime later (Callot 1990 and 1994), I have personally proposed some new hypotheses. However, most of these works exclusively deal with the ancient coinages from the end of the 3rd century and of the 2nd century B.C. Finally, we should not forget the publication of Arnold-Biucchi (1991) who, with reference to the "Arabian" acquisitions (with extension to all the chronologically periods) by the American Numismatic Society, takes up, shortly and yet effectively, the subject as a whole.

Above all, we owe the first attempt at a general investigation of the whole Gulf coinage to Potts. In 1991, he published a first volume called *The pre-Islamic coinage of eastern Arabia*, which was followed by an important supplement in 1994. In these two publications, he offered a wide panorama about the numismatic finds in eastern Arabia, with reference to both its northern part, on the islands – Failaka (Ikaros) or Bahrain (Tylos) – and on the eastern coasts of Saudi Arabia, and even farther south, in the United Arab Emirates. The large number of coins that he presents represents a wide documentation. And yet, we must note that most of these coins come from surface findings, and not from regular archaeological excavations, which means they have no archaeological context. The classifications he proposes are often difficult to follow and the numismatic study shows some weakness (Arnold-Biucchi 1993-1994). Thus, it is regrettable that he does not discuss some purely technical issues like, for instance, the very crucial question of the dies connections, which might have avoided some mistakes. Nevertheless, his rich catalogue and the many maps with the geographical distribution of the finds will long remain an essential tool for those who will approach the study of these still little-known coins.

The catalogue and the commentaries that will be presented here have absolutely no ambition of replacing Potts' work or of studying again the whole coinage from eastern Arabia: this catalogue exclusively concerns the coins collected at the Museum of Sharjah. Nevertheless, as an introduction, it seems to be useful to remind about the origin of this "pre-Islamic Arabian" numismatics.

The first "pre-Islamic Arabian" coins appear in north-eastern Arabia during the second half of the 3rd century B.C. , at a time when the Seleucid domination had become weaker in this region. The coinages essentially consist of good quality silver tetradrachms, drachms and obols, which all are more or less skilful imitations of

coins of Alexander the Great. On the obverse we always see Heracles' head wearing the lion pelt and, on the reverse, a beardless figure holding an eagle replacing the traditional bearded Zeus Aetophorus. Robin (1974) has rightfully identified this figure as Shams or Shamash, the solar deity worshipped by the inhabitants of these regions; moreover, this is clearly indicated by the legend on some of these coins, such as those of the Bahrain hoard (Mørkholm 1972). We will also emphasize the fact that all these coins not only are faithful to the Alexandrine types, but they still respect the Attic standard, according to which the tetradrachm must weigh a little more than 17 g. Some of these coins show legends in south-Arabian letters, which associate the name of Shamash with Alexander, the latter name being written in Greek. Other coins show the names of local rulers, either in south-Arabian or in Aramaic (Arnold-Biucchi 1991). The exact origin of the different series is still far from being known; and yet, we have good reason to believe that some mints might have worked in Ikaros-Failaka, in Tylos-Bahrain and along the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, where was situated the famous trading city of Gerrha (Callot 1990 and 1994; Arnold-Biucchi 1991). But, as we will see, certain regions, like the Oman Peninsula, since that time had their own mints.

Another question concerns the very reason for the existence of these different coinages. It is possible that the temporary weakening of the Seleucid kingdom in the middle of the 3rd century B.C. had encouraged some cities or small local kings to produce their own currency, while simply imitating the most diffused coins at that time in the region: those of the Alexander type (on this subject, see Le Rider 1986). These coins, just like the Seleucid ones, were probably used for paying the troops or for commercial transactions.

The production of these first silver coinages seems to stop rather abruptly at the end of the 3rd or perhaps at the beginning of the 2nd c. B.C. I have suggested (1990 and 1994) to relate this phenomenon with the passage of Antiochos III through the Gulf region, upon his return from his *Anabasis* in 205. In fact, he stopped in Gerrha, where he forced the city to pay tribute, and then he went to Tylos-Bahrain where he probably did the same. Finally, he certainly took back by force Ikaros-Failaka, where he installed a Greek colony (Callot 1993). Therefore, it seems reasonable that this victorious king wanted to control again the trading routes in the gulf area and that consequently, among other measures, he might have forced the cities and the Arab rulers to stop striking their own coins, which could have competed with his one. Nevertheless, the Seleucid domination on the Arabian coast of the Gulf was not long-lasting since they definitely abandoned this region little after the death of Antiochos IV, around 160-150 B.C. As for the Oman Peninsula, farther south and therefore not affected by these problems, it continued to strike its own coins.

The disappearance of the Seleucids marks a renewal for the “Arabian” coinages in some regions of the Gulf. In fact, the findings of coins during the last fifteen years are extremely frequent in north-eastern Saudi Arabia, and especially in Thaj, Hofuf and Jabal Kenzan (Potts 1991 and 1994) as well as in the Oman Peninsula, mainly in Mleiha and ed-Dour. Finally, we will just mention that other coinages existed farther south, in Yemen, but these have no connection with those discussed here; anyway, we will have occasion to make reference to them later.

These coinages from eastern Arabia minted after the Seleucid period are particularly interesting because, with very little exception, they all present the same Alexander types. Although they degenerated with time, they persisted for at least four centuries (2nd B.C.-2nd A.D.). The metals used are generally billon, copper and far more rarely good quality silver. From the metrological point of view, we notice that they conformed to the Attic standard until their disappearance. The heaviest specimens vary between 14 and 16 g., the medium ones about 4 g. and the small ones have an average weight of less than one gram. To make it easier, in classifying them we will stick to the denomination of their Greek prototypes: tetradrachms, drachms, and obols.

In conclusion, like I already emphasized before, this work is simply a catalogue of the coins collected in the Museum of Sharjah and it is not an exhaustive study. It is absolutely not comparable to Potts work, which presents a considerable number of coins. Nevertheless, most of the main types that he has observed are here present. As a result, the present collection, no matter how modest might it be, allows to propose the following classification and moreover the chronological conclusions that will be presented in the second part.

CATALOGUE

The following catalogue of the coins collected at the Archaeological Museum of Sharjah consists of two parts: the first one groups together the 95 Pre-Islamic Arab coins; the second one all the “foreign” coins (Roman, Characenean...), which reach the total number of 26.

THE PRE-ISLAMIC COINS FROM EAST ARABIA

The descriptions will begin with the coins of bigger diameter, called “tetradrachms”, followed by the “drachms” and last by the “obols”. Inside each and every chapter, the coins will be collected in *groups* and then in *types*, more often following stylistic criteria. The detailed description of the coins will be immediately followed by a commentary, those remarks concerning especially their geographic origin, in order to try to determine the difference between the two regions that are known for their coinage: on one side, North-East Arabia (the regions of Thaj, Jabal Kenzan etc.), and on the other side the Peninsula of Oman (Mleiha, ed-Dour). In order to make this first classification we will extensively use the works of Potts (1991 and 1994). Potts has as well tried to proceed to a grouping – tetradrachms, drachms and obols – which sometimes does seem insufficiently reliable. This is the reason why I adopted a classification slightly different, separately dealing with the three denominations. Only in the conclusions these groups issued of different series of types – tetradrachms, drachms and obols – will be resumed and proposed. On the contrary, the maps of geographic distribution of the findings, given by Potts in his “*Supplement*” (1994) will be highly useful for a certain number of attributions.

Finally, for each and every piece we will indicate, unless it is unknown, the inventory number at the Sharjah Museum (SM...). In the eventuality the coin was found during an archaeological excavation, we will as well indicate the site number given by the excavators, with a short description concerning the context. For the coins issued from the market, we will give, with due reservation, their origin, if known.

The tetradrachms

This first category named “the tetradrachms” consists of 47 coins, which have been divided into 14 groups.

GROUP I

1 – Obverse: smooth and lightly rounded side.

– **Reverse:** extremely schematic representation of Shamash sitting on the left on a stool, with paralleled legs. In his left hand he holds a long sceptre and in his right hand an eagle (?). On the right side, vertically few spears and a ring recalling a (Greek?) inscription. Behind the head of the character, a ring. In front of him, on the left side, a big south-Arabic *shin*.

SM 3528; excavation of Mleiha, 1992 (m. 1565, surface)
 Æ ; gr. 15,16; mm 24; impossible adjustment.

2 – Obverse: smooth and lightly rounded side.

– **Reverse:** almost the same type like the previous coin, but from a different coinage.

SM 3082; acquisition
 Æ ; gr. 16; mm 24,5; impossible adjustment.

These two pieces belong to a very important series that Potts (1991 and 1994) tried to classify in a certain number of sub-groups, which are, according to my opinion, somehow too complicated (*class* XX and XLI). Although coming from different coinages, these two coins (n. **1** and **2**) belong to Potts (1994) *class* XXI and XXII, with no possibility of establishing any real difference. Concerning the *class* XXI, Potts notes that Shamash holds an eagle and that still it's about a horse or a horse protome (rython?) for the *class* XXXII. After a direct examination of the pieces, both those of the Sharjah Museum (here referred to as n. **1** and **2**) and those published by Potts, the presence of an animal is sure, but it is difficult to be more precise than that. On the right side of the sceptre held by Shamash there are some signs that, according to Potts, could correspond to part, completely disfigured, of the name ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ. In fact, there is only a ring that could correspond to an *omicron* and that could lead us on this track. The only indication that should be taken into consideration is the frequent presence of a south-Arabic *shin* in the left field, and this can be noticed also on the most schematic types. This mark, which is well known, characterizes most issues from North-East Arabia since the III century B.C.; it must correspond to the initial of the name Shamash (Shams). The provenances of these different types allow little doubts about their region of origin. Indeed, if we go back to the distribution maps by Potts (1994), we can count 56 coins belonging to these types

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in the region of Mleiha and ed-Dour against the 281 found in North-East Arabia, and mainly at Jabal Kenzan (212 samples).

Anyway we must record that the site of ed-Dour has delivered 51 pieces from this type, to which we should add some more recent findings¹. On the contrary, there are less coins from this type found in Mleiha.

GROUP II

3 – This coin has been cut and thus we approximately have the quarter or the third part of it. Anyway it belongs to a known type, which allows us to give the following description.

- **Obverse:** smooth.
- **Reverse:** Shamash half draped and crossed legs is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left hand he is holding a long sceptre, while with the right one he holds an eagle. On the right, vertically, few letters seem to be Greek types. In the left field, the monogram **b** [*please refer to letter print in the corresponding position, n.o.t.*] and, underside, a vertical south-Arabic *shin*. In the exergue, two Greek letters that here are not visible.

SM 4234; acquisition

AR; gr. 4 (originally about 16); original diameter, about mm 25; impossible adjustment.

Apparently this is a “tetradrachm” that has been intentionally cut in order to give this fragment the value of a “drachm” (see catalogue of the “drachms” later on).

This type is mentioned by Potts (1991, *class* L) who refers to 4 specimens (n. 485-488) with no information related to their origin; and to another 24 coming from a hoard found in ed-Dour (1991, hoard n. 1, n. 504-527). He mentions another 4 coins (1994, n. 173-176) that come from Mleiha and ed-Dour; Haerinck (1998) mentions two coins (n. 35-36) attributed to ed-Dour.

Potts refers to 8 different monograms on the reverse side; the one we have here seems to be of a different kind. Underside, the south-Arabic *shin* probably corresponds to the first letter of the word Shams or Shamash. As for the coins belonging to previous group (n. **1** and **2**), we will not expatiate about the presence of this letter that is one of the main peculiarity of the north-eastern Arabian coinage. The inscription on the right (not visible on our specimen) is simply a transcription of a part of the name ΑΛΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ copied by an engraver who did not know any Greek language and who most probably got his inspiration from an imitation and not from the original prototype. Finally, the two letters of the exergue, ΖΑ on the readable specimens, might correspond to the number 37, in case it is about

¹ Belgian (Haerinck 1998) and French (unpublished) excavations.

numerals. Potts explains why it is difficult to see here a date from the Seleucid or the Parthian period, a circumstance that would make these coins dating back to the first half of the III century BC (275-274 for the Seleucid period or 247 for the Parthian one). Besides, the other coins that are with these ones in the hoard from ed-Dour are certainly much later (see here the group VIII n. **10** to **16**). But let's not forget that most of the coins here under study are imitations, which means that this "date", just like the monograms, are imitations and that consequently they have perhaps no meaning.

Finally, there is the question of the origin of this issue. Potts has no hesitation to attribute it to the ed-Dour or the Mleiha region. Personally I prefer to be far more discreet. In fact, the presence of the name Alexander in Greek even though deformed and the south-Arabic *shin* are two typical elements referring to the North-East Arabian coinages, a fact that does not contradict the presence of the eagle (here not visible) held by Shamash. Concerning the other 24 specimens belonging to this same type in the hoard n. 1 from ed-Dour, they can be easily explained while supposing that these coins might have come from a different region and then been hoarded in ed-Dour. Still we need to give interpretation to the dozen isolated specimens that seem to come from Mleiha and ed-Dour. We will also see, later in this catalogue, that the presence of foreign coins, both Arabic and from other regions has been rather frequent in the Oman Peninsula, at certain periods. Similarly, we will underline the fact that the arguments supporting an origin from north-Eastern Arabia are at the present moment the most reliable ones.

4 – Obverse: smooth and lightly rounded side.

Reverse: Shamash half draped and crossed legs is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left hand he is holding a long sceptre, while with the right one he holds an eagle. On the right, vertically: ...NΔIO...? In the upper part of the field, between the eagle and the head of the figure, a ring (?). In the left field, a monogram (?) in front of the vertical *shin*. In the exergue: ΛΛ.

SM 4234; 1993 excavations in Mleiha (m. 1963, surface).
AR; gr. 16; mm 25; impossible adjustment.

The manufacture of this coin is extremely awkward, even though we can find all the elements characterizing the previous type (n. **3**). Other than the smooth side of the obverse, the reverse – no matter how coarsely treated – is the same. On the right, vertically, we find few elements belonging to the name (ΑΛΕΞΑ)ΝΔΡΟ(Υ), coarsely copied. The ring, which has place between the eagle and the head of the figure appears on several specimens mentioned by Potts (1991). On the left, even though they have a different place, we do find the monogram and the vertical *shin*. Finally, in the exergue, the two kinds of Λ are nothing but a deformation of the cipher (?)ΖΛ seen on the specimens from ed-Dour. Therefore, there is no doubt that this coin is an imitation

- no matter how slavish and awkward – of our n. 3 and of the *class L* by Potts, these two then representing the regular issue.

This monetary type (n. 3 and *class L*), which is originally coming from north-eastern Arabia, was it imitated in the Oman Peninsula? Such an idea could be suggested by this coin, as well as the imitations mentioned by Potts (*class LI*) and Haerinck (1998, n. 40) and which seem to come from the same area of Mleiha and ed-Dour. We must then remember that the coin n. 3 is a tetradrachm intentionally cut in order to give it less value, probably the value of a drachm. In case this parcelling has been made in Mleiha or ed-Dour, we must then suppose that the official coins of this type, even though foreign to the Oman Peninsula, were there frequent, since they have been used, imitated, hoarded and even fractioned. We will see later that they might correspond to a “transitional” period when the lack of currency could have forced to use coins foreign to the region.

GROUP III

5 – Obverse: on the left, Heracles’ head wearing the pelt of a lion. The pelt is represented with certain realism and the lion’s nostril is well visible. Only the throat, which is strongly marked, tends to resemble a horn.

Reverse: Shamash half draped and paralleled legs is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left hand he is holding a long sceptre, made with a vertical line, while with the right one he holds an eagle. Aramaic legend in three parts that turns around the coin.

SM 3085; acquisition; this coin is probably coming from Mleiha.
AR weakened; gr. 14,99; mm 26; 9 h.

This coin has a close style to that of an alexandrine prototype. Potts (1994) mentions four of them, which seem to come – all of them – from Mleiha (*class S2*, n. 181-184). Our specimen could come from the same minting die as some of these coins. Finally, Haerinck (1999) mentions 5 of them (n. 1-5, among which this very same specimen) that are as well supposed to come from Mleiha.

The Aramaic inscription on the reverse has been studied by M. Maraqtan (1996, p. 304 f. and fig. 1) who gives the following transcription: *’by’l br tbgl’n*, “Abi’el son of...” at the beginning, but the name of the father is difficult to interpret.

We will still record one detail, at first sight minor, and yet maybe important: Shamash on the reverse clearly has paralleled legs, the way we see it only on the ancient series of Alexander’s tetradrachms.

It might then be the case of a rather faithful imitation of an Alexander of the ancient type and the coins from this issue could be easily have been engraved during a period when

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prototypes were still known, just like it happened with the ancient coinages from North-East Arabia. The name "Abi'el" that appears on this coin is known in North-Eastern Arabia, especially on some specimens from the hoard of Bahrain (Mørholm 1972; Callot 1994), even though the inscription is different. Likewise, both because of its inspiration and of the style of its representations, this series is very different from the Bahrain's one, as we will see analysing the following coin (n. 6).

All the tetradrachms mentioned by Potts and Haerinck seem to come from Mleiha, and this seems to apply to our specimen as well. Besides, at the present moment, the attribution to this site seems to be the most reliable one.

GROUP IV

6 – Obverse: beaded line. Head of Heracles, on the right, wearing the pelt of a lion. The nose is right, the jaw is very strongly marked and the ear is edged. The pelt of the lion, realized with small dotted locks, is represented with certain realism. His open throat definitely takes the shape of a big horn that surrounds the ear.

Reverse: beaded line. Shamash half draped and crossed legs is sitting on the left on a stool whose legs are turned and adorned, at their bases, by a sort of lions' legs. With his left bended arm, he is holding a long sceptre, made with a vertical line, while with the right one, slightly bended, he holds what seems to be a rhyton shaped as a horse protome. On the right, vertically, an inscription in Aramaic letters and, in the left side field, a small stylized palm tree.

SM; 1998 Mleiha excavation (m. 2315, surface).

AR; gr. ?; mm 28; h ?².

On the inscription we can clearly read: "Abi'el son of ...", but the name of the father is unfortunately off the flan. This tetradrachm, made with great skill, unquestionably belongs to a well known coinage out of which at least 77 specimens appear in the Bahrain's hoard (Mørholm 1972; Callot 1994). The name of the father of Abi'el could then be *Tlbs* or *Tlsll'* (Robin 1974; Arnold-Biucchi 1991). Two more coins of the same type appear in the hoard n. 5 from Susa (Le Rider 1965, n. 498, 1 and 2). In his *class II*, where do appear several coins (both drachms and obols) bearing the name Abi'el, Potts (1994, p. 53) mentions three drachms which are believed have being found in Mleiha and that certainly belong to the same coinage. We will see, in the analysis that follows this catalogue, that enough arguments exist in order to attribute this type to the Oman Peninsula coinages.

² This coin has been exclusively studied on photos.

GROUP V

7 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The contour line of the face is hardly legible: only the nose, the mouth, the eye – which is realised with a big spot surmounted by a thick eyebrow – and one small ear are stand out. The pelt of the lion is realized with small irregular strokes and, what actually corresponds to the lion's throat, looks like a horn surrounding Heracles' ear and ascending up until his eyebrow. In the lower part, a sort of a star corresponds to the knot that, in the prototypes, corresponds to the legs of the skin.

Reverse: in a beaded line. Shamash half draped and apparently having only one leg, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm, he is holding a long sceptre, while with the right one he holds what seems to be a rython shaped in a horse protome. Ground line. On the right side of the sceptre, few Aramaic or pseudo-Aramaic letters. In the left field, a stylized palm tree. Possible presence of letters in the exergue (?).

SM; Sharjah Museum excavations in Mleiha (1994).

AR; gr. 16; mm 25; edge pretty rounded.

According to Potts, the best comparison/parallel with this coin is n. 413 (1991, *class XLVI*, pp. 84-85). On the contrary, it does not look like any other coin present in the same group, whose classification should be definitely revised.

The inscription on the reverse is a gross deformation of the name Abi'el engraved by someone totally ignorant about Aramaic letters. Nevertheless, this coin shows many elements that characterize some of the coins with the name of this dynast (see here n. 6), such as the palm tree or the horse-shaped rython – here very clear – held by Shamash. On the contrary, the heavy drape and his slightly too strong pelvis might recall the coins showing a Greek inscription from the hoard of ed-Dour (Potts, *class L*, n. 504 to 527). There are as well the traces of letters in the exergue that could correspond to the "date" appearing on the coins of the *class L*.

This coin, at the moment unique, shows together elements belonging to different series from the Oman Peninsula; it could have been minted here.

GROUP VI

8 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The pelt is realized with small pointed locks, the nostril of the lion is not visible, but his throat has the shape of a big horn surrounding Heracles' ear and ascending up until his eyebrow.

Reverse: in a (double?) beaded line. Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm, he is holding a long sceptre, while with the right one he holds a horse-shaped rython. The representation is placed on a ground

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line made of a beaded line. On the right side, vertically, an inscription in Aramaic letters and, further on the right, a symbol like a trident placed pointing upward. On the left side, a small stylized palm tree.

SM 3093; acquisition.

AR (weakened); gr. 16,11; mm 27; h. 12.

Even though showing a slightly different style, this coin must be brought near to the specimens presented by Potts (1994) in the *classes* S4 and S5 (pp. 58-60). Logically speaking, we should put this coin in the *class* S5 since the symbol on the reverse is positioned pointing upward. Yet, stylistically, it is much closer to n. 279 from *class* S4 (pointing downward). Nevertheless we will see later that the position of this symbol, the "trident", must not have much importance and that its presence only counts.

The inscription on the reverse shows the name Abi'el alone (Maraqten 1996, n. 4-6). But we also find the usual elements appearing on some coins named after this dynast (see n. 6): the horse-shaped rython and the palm tree. Yet it also presents two differences. On one side, its style seems pretty close to the alexandrine prototypes, which is not the case for most of the Abi'el's coins. On the other side, and this is the most relevant point, the symbol of the trident constitutes, as we will see, a typical element for the coins from the Oman Peninsula from where this specimen certainly comes. Besides, all the coins belonging to *classes* S4 and S5 are believed to come from Meiha.

Another question to be raised is that about the identification of the symbol. Potts (1991, p. 80) thinks it might be a sort of trident, perhaps derived by the anchors, royal symbol for the Seleucids. The comparison with the Seleucid anchors seems difficult, since they are always provided with an anchor stock that is here missing (see for instance the coins of Seleucos I in Newell 1977). The hypothesis of the trident, close to those appearing in the coins of Elymaide (*BMC, Arabia*, p. clxxxii ff. and pl. XXXIX-XLI), seems far better. But maybe it is only about a monogram, HE, imitation of a Greek prototype and that, once copied and used by non-Greeks, has become a simple symbol (Arnold-Biucchi 1991, p. 110, refers to a monogram). Nevertheless, whatever might they be the origin and the interpretation of this symbol, we will simply note that it is absolutely typical of the Oman Peninsula coinages, that means those from Mleiha and ed-Dour where it can be found on many coins.

GROUP VII

9 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The contour line of the face is slightly indicated, only a big arcuated nose and a line meaning the mouth are visible. The eye is formed by concentric circles with, in the upper part, a sort of a small V. The quiffs/forelocks of the pelt of the lion's

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skin are indicated by disorderly traits and what is still visible from the throat consists in a sort of horn surrounding Heracles' ear.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and apparently having only one leg, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm, he is holding a long sceptre made of a vertical line. The object he is holding with his right hand is not visible on this specimen. Between the sceptre and the figure, a dot. On the right of the sceptre, few gross Aramaic letters. Under the right arm of the figure, the trident pointing right. In the left field, a stylized palm tree.

SM 3861; 1989 excavation in Mleiha (m. 1563, surface).
Billon; gr. 16; mm 23.5; h. 6; rounded edge.

This coin is thought to belong to the *class* XLVI in Potts classification (1991). But the coins that he presents there (pp. 84-85) are too different from each other and do not truly form a group. On the contrary, our specimen undoubtedly belongs to the same coinage like some pieces from the hoard n. 1 from ed-Dour (n. 490-503) that Potts (1991, p. 97 ff.) attributes to this same *class* XLVI (and not XLVII like it is indicated pp. 97-98). Besides, our n. 9 comes from the same obverse stamp just like some specimens from this hoard (n. 498, 502?). Concerning the reverse, slightly different, it is anyway very close to them. On the specimens from ed-Dour, Shamash holds a cut-off horse (n. 502), therefore a rython; or a small complete horse (n. 503), like on several issues from this region. The inscription on the reverse is simply composed by few letters awkwardly copied and which might have belonged to the name Abi'el. In the left field we find once again the symbol of the "trident" distinctive of the issues of the region of Mleiha and ed-Dour. The presence of coins of the same type, with die connections with both the hoard from ed-Dour and the Mleiha's one, authorizes then to consider them as belonging to the coinage of this region.

GROUP VIII

This group consists of four coins divided into two types. All of them correspond to the *class* XLVIIIa and b of Potts. See as well coins n. 168 to 179 mentioned by Haerinck (1998) which might come from Mleiha and ed-Dour, too.

TYPE 1

Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The face is well drawn with a big nose lightly arcuated and a pulpy lips' mouth. The eye, almond-shaped, is surmounted by a thick eyebrow. Several specimens show, on his cheek, a false centring point for the coinage. The pelt, here become a true hair, is consisting of a sequence of zigzag lines

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more or less parallel to each other. Finally what is left of the lion's throat has the shape of a big horn surrounding the ear. Several specimens have a beaded line.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm, he is holding a long vertical sceptre and on his right stretched one, a small horse going rightward. To the right of the sceptre, few Aramaic letters coarsely indicated. Between the figure and the sceptre, the "trident" is indicated pointing upward and is doubled far down by a small horizontal line (IHE?). Under the right arm, the mark: Λ. In the left field, a small stylized palm tree.

10 - SM; 1993 excavation in Mleiha (m. 1861, surface).

Æ; gr. 16; mm 24.5; h. 12.

Same obverse die like coin n. **13** and like Potts (1994) n. 403 and 404.

11 – SM 3008; acquisition.

Æ; gr. 14,55; mm 26.5; h. 10.

Same obverse and reverse die like Potts (1991) n. 453, 458, 459, 461 and (1994) n. 403 and 404.

TYPE 2

Obverse: same description like for TYPE 1.

Reverse: same description like for TYPE 1 but Shamash is sitting facing right instead of left.

12 – SM 3101; acquisition.

Æ; gr. 15,49; mm 26; h. 10-11.

Same reverse die like coin n. **13** and like Potts (1994) n. 466 and 467.

13 – SM; 1994 Sharjah Museum excavations in Mleiha.

Æ; gr. 16; mm 24.5; h. 10.

Same obverse die like coin n. **10** and like Potts (1994) n. 403 and 404. Same reverse die like coin n. **12** and like Potts (1991) n. 466 and 467.

These four coins are part of an abundant and rather homogeneous issue. The die connections, both for the obverse and for the reverse, are numerous and were not all of them noted here. We will also note that the same obverse die could be used for coins belonging to both types, 1 and 2.

Potts (1994) subdivides this type in two groups (*class XLVIII a and b*), based on the presence or the absence of the drape over Shamash' legs, on the reverse. In fact, it is better not to give too much importance to this detail and simply consider that, on certain coinage, the output of the drape is far more elaborate than on other ones; yet, as a whole, all the different engravers wanted to show the same figure in the same clothes. We also divided this group in two types, depending on the position of Shamash, whether he is on the left (type 1) or on the right side (type 2). Nevertheless, likewise, the difference must not be really important: it is only the case of coinages engraved the opposite way. Like usual, the reverse dies are more frequent and characterized by more diversified styles. On the contrary, the obverse dies, far less numerous, show a real unity in this issue.

This unity that we can see on the obverses exists also on the reverse, in spite of the differences that we have just mentioned. The symbol of the "trident" appears on all the specimens, where it is always represented in the same position (pointing upward). Besides, all these coins bear the mark Λ on the left side (or on the right one) of the figure and it this mark, which could have a real importance since it gives its identity to the whole issue³. We will also notice that there are some specimens bearing three small horizontal traits over Shamash' left (or right) arm or, alternatively, behind the stool [see Potts 1991, n. 468 and 476 (Shamash on the left), 479-480 (Shamash on the right) and 1994, n. 405-407 and 409 (Shamash on the right)] with numerous links between obverse and reverse dies. Do these marks correspond to a particular type or are they simply ornamental elements?

Most of the specimens mentioned by Potts (1991 and 1994) probably come from ed-Dour (31) whilst those supposed to come from Mleiha are less numerous (8 in Potts records and only 2 sure here); and the same proportion is also reported by Haerincq (1998). There is no doubt that the coins belonging to this type come from this region.

GROUP IX

TYPE 1

Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The face is schematically indicated by means of gross traits. The pelt is treated like a ruffled hair and what was the lion's throat has here the shape of a crescent surrounding Heracles' ear, with two globules at its ends.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm, he is holding a long vertical sceptre. On his right stretched one, a small horse facing right. To the right of the sceptre, few Aramaic letters

³ Potts (1991) records that on the specimen n. 407, the Λ has been omitted. As a matter of fact, it is just slightly erased and it is clearly readable in the photo page 93.

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coarsely indicated. Under Shamash' right arm, the "trident" pointing rightward. In the left field, to the left, a palm tree.

14 - SM; 1989 excavation in Mleiha (m. 1868, surface).

Æ with few silvering traces; gr. 14; mm 23; h. 2.

Same obverse die like Potts (1991) n. 410.

15 – SM; 1998 excavation in Mleiha (m. 2308, context PIR.D).

Æ; gr. ?; mm 23; h. ?.

Coin in very bad condition (reverse), which has been exclusively studied through photo and cast.

TYPE 2

Obverse: same description like for TYPE 1.

Reverse: same description like for TYPE 1 but Shamash is sitting on the right instead of on the left.

16 – SM; 1994 excavation in Mleiha (m. 1961, context PIR.D final).

Æ; gr. 12; mm 24; h. 12.

17 – SM; 1990 excavation in Mleiha (m. 1867, surface).

Æ with few silvering traces; gr. 14; mm 23; h. 12.

18 – SM; confiscated by the Sharjah Police in 1994: it probably comes from Mleiha.

Æ; gr. 14; mm 25,5; h. ?.

Same reverse die like Potts (1994) n. 332 and maybe same obverse die (?).

19 – SM; 1998 excavation in Mleiha (m. 2314, surface).

Æ; gr. ?; mm 24; h. ?.

This coin has been exclusively studied through photo and cast.

20 – 1995 excavation in Mleiha (m. 2195, context PIR.D).

Æ; gr. ?; mm 24; h. ?.

This coin has been exclusively studied through photo and cast. It seems to be stylistically rougher than precedents ones (?).

These coins correspond to Potts (1991, n. 395-410 and 1994, n. 327-337) *class XLV* and belong to the same type as n. 87 to 96 mentioned by Haerinck (1998). It is a very abundant and homogeneous series. The links between the coins are numerous and they haven't been all highlighted here. Potts (1994) registers 83 specimens that all come from ed-Dour and its region (72) or from Mleiha (11), without counting the 10 coins mentioned by Haerinck. Besides, these coins attribution to these sites is unquestionable.

The reverse inscription indicates the name Abi'el. But its awkwardness shows that it is simply a decoration. The symbol of the trident is still present and often doubled by a vertical trait (IHE).

Most of the specimens belonging to this issue show, on the reverse, Shamash sitting on the right and only exceptionally (here n. **14** and **15**) on the left, like in the Alexandrine prototypes. Therefore, the stamps have been engraved on the obverse with the figure sitting on the left and, once at the die, they obtained an opposite coin. This process most likely shows that the engraver did not attribute any more importance to the meaning of the representation, and especially to that of the inscriptions. As a matter of fact, the coins where the figure is sitting on the left are not aberrant at all, in spite of what Potts (1991, n. 410) underscores.

Likewise on some coins belonging to the previous group, we can discern a dot or globule on Heracles cheek on the obverse. Potts (1991) compares this detail to some Parthian coins (Orodes II or Phraates IV), where the royal effigy bears a similar mark, which has been explained as a kind of hereditary spot peculiar to these sovereigns, then to the guarantee of an authentically Arsacid blood (Kremer 1988; Invernizzi 1990). From this argument he infers that the head on the obverse of the coins belonging to this series could be a royal portrait. I think we should reject this hypothesis somehow imaginative and interpret this globule simply as a centring point for the coin, then become a decorative element. Several other types show a similar dot, on the obverse or on the reverse, where it is often decentralised.

Finally, we will point out the presence – on the reverse of some of the coins presented by Potts – of a mark made by three small superimposed traits, behind the sitting figure [see (1991) n. 395, 398, 403 (?), 405, 408 and (1994) n. 336 and 337]. This mark, which has already been seen in the group VIII, is also visible on the drachms belonging to the group III.

All the coins from the following four groups belong to the same *class* XLVII of Potts (1991 and 1994) classification. In his distribution map (1994, p. 68), he mentions 56 specimens from Mleiha and 39 from ed-Dour, as well as one coin found in South Yemen (p. 68). Haerincx (1998, n. 108 to 163) gives 56 additional coins that should also come from Mleiha and ed-Dour, among which there are some of the coins that have been bought by the Sharjah Museum. They correspond to a very abundant production whose quality is often poor. Even though they show a certain number of common characteristics, they still have very different if we look at the details; then, any attempt of classification turns out to be very difficult. In his *class* XLVII, Potts discusses three denominations – tetradrachms, drachms and obols – and he subdivides this class into 17 groups, which could have been further multiplied, considering all the different details that almost make each coin a different type. Therefore, we will not propose

any new classification, which would be vain. We will simply try to put in their proper place these coins according to a four groups division, which has been established because of the quality of the style and of the coinage or in relation with a particular detail.

GROUP X

In this first group the representation of Shamash on the reverse still implies the same elements appearing on the previous types; and yet, we will notice an accentuation in the schematization.

21 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is slightly arcuated and the lips are made of two traits. The eye is almond-shaped and surmounted by a thick eyebrow. The pelt is realized through a succession of scales and the lion's throat surrounds the ear like an hollow horn with some globules at the ends.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed (or paralleled?) legs, is sitting on the left on a straight-backed throne. He shows a flattened trunk and his hair is almost ruffled. With his left arm, he is holding a long vertical sceptre and on his right stretched one, a small horse going rightward. To the right, few gross Aramaic letters. Under Shamash' right arm, the "trident" pointing rightward. On the left, a palm tree.

SM 3563; acquisition.

Billon; gr. 16; mm 23; h. 6; thick edge.

It is difficult to define whether Shamash' legs are paralleled or if, because of a bad realization, they are crossed. The back of the throne is made of a straight line better than of a beaded one, as it is the case on several coins from this series. Potts qualifies Shamash' coiffure as "North America Indian's coiffure". Is it simply a ruffled hair or might it be an attempt to show a radiating headdress on the head of a solar divinity? It is difficult to say since this ornament does not appear on all the specimens. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is seductive. On the reverse inscription we find again few elements indicating the name Abi'el.

22 – Obverse: in a beaded line, head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is indicated through two traits that continue on the left in order to form the eyebrow. The eye is made of two parallel traits framing a dot. Also the lips are made of two parallel traits. On the cheek, a globule corresponds to a false centring point. The pelt is made of zigzagging lines parallel to each other and what is left out of the lion's throat has the shape of a hollow crescent ended by two globules and surrounding the ear. Over the ear and the eyebrow, a small beaded line.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a throne with a back made of a vertical line. On his flattened trunk there is a false centring point perhaps meaning the umbilicus and his coiffure is “radiating”. On his right, a long sceptre made of a vertical line that his left raised hand does not hold. On his right stretched arm, a small horse going rightward and surrounded by dots. To the right, few gross Aramaic letters. Under Shamash’ right arm, the “trident” symbol dot rightwards. In the left field, a palm tree.

SM 3100; acquisition.

Billon; gr. 15,93; mm 23; h. 7; thick edge (mm 4,5).

What is most remarkable about this coin is the accumulation of dots that the engraver has distributed all over the obverse (beaded line, over the eye, on the cheek) and the reverse (on the trunk, back of the throne, cross bar of the stool...). Besides, we can see similar dots, even though less numerous, on our specimen n. **23**. Potts (1991) has established part of his *class* XLVII classification based on the position of these dots. Probably we should not pay too much attention to them. It is probably simply the case of an easy ornamental technique, where the coins’ engravers wanted to fill up as much as possible the fields of their coins and, therefore, each and every coin represents a single variant.

The dots on Heracles’ cheek on the obverse and on Shamash trunk on the reverse might then correspond to centring points. Nevertheless, because of their position, we can wonder whether the engraver – being inspired by a model having true [centring] points – did not simply copy them, turning them into some ornamental elements.

Finally, on the pseudo-inscription of the reverse, we find few elements of the name Abi’el.

23 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The face is well sketched with a straight nose and lips little protruding made out of two traits. The eye is almond-shaped and surmounted by a large eyebrow. On the cheek, a false centring point. The lion’s pelt is treated as zigzagging lines more or less parallel to each other. What is still left of the lion’s throat has the shape of a hollow horn surrounding the ear.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a backed throne. His flattened trunk shows inside a false centring point. With his left arm, he is holding a long vertical sceptre and on his right stretched one, a small horse facing right. To the right, few gross Aramaic letters. Under his right arm, the “trident” pointing rightward. On the left field, a palm tree. Behind this figure, eight dots in a bunch shape constitute the back of the throne.

SM 3002; acquisition; this coin has been found in Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 15,07; mm 24; h. 11; thick edge (mm 4) with filing traces.

Same obverse coin or very similar one to Potts (1994) n. 389.

On the reverse inscription the name Abi'el is difficult to read. We will repeat here the same observation about the use of dots put forward for n. **22**.

24 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is pretty strong and the mouth is made out of two traits. Over a very marked cheekbone, the almond-shaped eye is surmounted by an eyebrow indicated by one trait only. The pelt is realized through a succession of scales surrounding the lion's throat. This last one has the same shape as a hollow horn with an interior twisted decoration; it surrounds an ear with globular ends.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a straight-backed throne. He shows a flattened trunk and his coiffure, pretty much erased, is "radiating". With his left arm, softly bended, he is holding a long vertical sceptre which lower part merges with the right foot of the stool. His right arm is stretched and the small horse which he should hold is erased. To the right, the inscription is off the flan. Under the right arm, the "trident" is indicated pointing rightward. On the left field, a palm tree.

SM 3650; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 373, surface "hoard" AI).

Billon; gr. 15; mm 22; h. 1; thick edge (mm 5).

The obverse is very close to those of the coins described a little further in the group XI. But this coin has been classified in this group because on the reverse Shamash still holds his sceptre in his left hand. On the contrary, it shows a higher schematization of the representation since the lower part of the sceptre merges with the right foot of the stool.

GROUP XI

The three coins belonging to this group have been associated with each other because they show very similar obverses. Besides, the schematization of the reverse is far more accentuated since Shamash does not hold his sceptre anymore in his hand and the lower part of it is always integrated to the throne or to the stool.

25 – Obverse: in a beaded line, head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The straight nose is strongly marked. The lips are made of two traits and the almond-shaped eye is surmounted by an eyebrow. The pelt is realized through a succession of irregular scales. The lion's throat looks like a pending hollow horn. The ear is formed by a small rounded line ended by two globules.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a back-throne. His head is “radiating” and his trunk is flattened with a false centring point. His two arms are treated as if they were a horizontal line crossing the whole field. On the right, he does not hold his sceptre anymore and the lower part of it merges with the right foot of the throne, thus making its back. On his horizontal right arm, a small horse facing right. To the right, few gross Aramaic letters. Under the right arm, the “trident” pointing rightward and, on the left, a palm tree. Between the throne and the figure, two vertical lines made of four dots each. Other dots are also visible on both sides of the transversal bar of the throne.

SM 3090; acquisition.

Billon; gr. 15,19; mm 23; h. 12; thick flong edge (mm 4).

Same obverse die (?) and reverse as Potts (1991) n. 422.

There are in Potts (1991 and 1994) several coins that have been minted with obverse and reverse dies, which are very close to those used for this specimen [see (1991) n. 421, 424, 431, 435 and (1994) n. 382, 385-388].

On the reverse the sceptre merges with the throne and becomes its back. But the double line of vertical dots on the right of the figure could as well correspond to a throne’s back. We can easily see here the evolution of the process of following copies from a same model, a process that has *in fine* led to a more and more schematized image.

The false centring point appears also here, but only on the reverse, a fact that clearly shows that it has no real meaning. Similarly, the inscription is here simply a motley collection of traits without meaning.

26 – Obverse: even though obtained from a different die, it is identical to n. **25**.

Reverse: it is almost the same type as the reverse of n. **25**. Here the coiffure of Shamash is made out of a small beaded line. Between the figure and the sceptre-back of the throne there is a vertical line made of four dots and almost corresponding to a second back for the throne.

SM 3086; acquisition.

Billon; gr. 15,43; mm 24; h. 4; thick edge.

Same reverse die as Potts (1991) n. 424 and (1994) n. 386.

27 – Obverse: used, but same description as for n. **25** and **26**.

Reverse: used, but same type like n. **25** and **26** with this only difference that we do not find the same decoration made of dots like on the previous specimens. There is only the false centring point on Shamash’ trunk. We will also notice that the sceptre, decorated by globules, just like the feet and the crossbars of the stool, becomes the back of the throne.

SM 3562; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m 375, surface «hoard» AI).

Billon; gr. 14,5; mm 21; h. 2; thick edge.

This coin has been used for long, but its obverse die must be the same as, or very close to, n. **21** and **22** and the specimens mentioned by Potts.

GROUP XII

It is a group much more homogeneous than the previous ones. The obverses are more or less all the same type and, even though there are variants in the reverse, it is mainly a matter of details.

Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is strong and snub. The lips, made of two traits, are thick. The cheekbone is high and well marked, and it is surmounted by an almond-shaped eye and a big eyebrow. On the cheek there is sometimes a false centring point. The pelt of the lion is realized through a succession of scales. Concerning the lion's throat, it looks like a hollow horn surrounding Heracles' ear, which consists in a rounded with globular ends.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool (or throne). His trunk is flattened with, sometimes, a false centring point and his coiffure is almost always "radiating". His arms are treated as if they were a horizontal line crossing the field of the coin. The long vertical sceptre cuts out the left arm and its lower part merges with the right foot of the stool. On his right arm, a small horse facing right. On the right side of the sceptre, few pseudo-Aramaic letters. Under the right arm, the "trident" pointing rightward. In the left field, a palm tree.

28 – SM 3003; acquisition.

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 12; mm 26,5; h. 1; thick edge.

Same obverse die as n. **30** and **31**. Same obverse die as Potts (1991) n. 423 and (1994) n. 380, 395 and probably several other specimens. It is difficult to give one's opinion concerning the reverse, but there are certainly some links.

29 – SM 3552; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 365, surface "hoard" AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 23; h. 12; thick edge (mm 6).

Perhaps same obverse die as n. **38** and **43** (?). Same obverse die as Potts (1991) n. 425. The reverse is used, but some links are probable.

On the obverse there is no false centring point and on the reverse Shamash' coiffure is not visible.

41

30 – SM 3089; acquisition.

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 22; h. 12; thick edge.

Same obverse die as n. **28** and **31**. Same obverse and reverse die as Potts (1991) n. 423 and same obverse die as Potts (1994) n. 380 and 395.

Shamash in the reverse is radiating.

31 – SM 3099; acquisition.

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 14; mm 22; h. 12; thick, filed edge.

Same obverse die as n. **28** and **30** and as Potts (1991) n. 423 and (1994) n. 380 and 395.

Shamash in the reverse is radiating and there are two dots in the flattened trunk of the reverse.

32 – SM 3558; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 371, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 20; h. 10; thick edge (mm 7).

This coin has been used but its dies must be the same as, or otherwise very close to, those of the specimens here described or described by Potts (1991 and 1994).

There is a false centring point on the obverse and on the reverse Shamash is radiating.

33 – SM 3555; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 369, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 15; mm 21; h. 12; thick edge (mm 5).

Same observations as for n. **32**.

34 – SM 3557; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 370, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (with original silvering preserved); gr. 14; mm 21; h. 12; thick edge (mm 5,5).

Same observations as for n. **32**.

35 – SM 3550; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 298, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (with original silvering preserved); gr. 15; mm 19; h. 10; thick edge (mm 6).

Same observations as for n. **32**.

36 – SM 3553; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 366, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 12; mm 22,5; h. 2; thick and corroded edge.

Same observations as for n. **32**.

37 – SM 3554; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 367, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 20; h. 12; thick edge (mm 6,5).

Same observations as for n. **32**.

38 – SM 3559; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 372, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 23; h. 12; thick edge (mm 6).

42

Same obverse minting die as n. **29** and **43**. Probably same obverse minting die as Potts (1991) n. 425. Otherwise, same observations as for n. **32**.

39 – SM 3546; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 96, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 21; adjustment impossible; thick edge (mm 7).

Coin used for long time, but same observations as for n. **32**.

40 – SM 3561; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 374, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 14; mm 21; h 4; thick edge (mm 4).

Coin used for long time, but same observations as for n. **32**.

41 – SM 3556; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 369, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. 16; mm 21; h 12; thick edge (mm 6).

Coin used for long time, but same observations as for n. **32**.

42 – SM 3551; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 364, surface “hoard” AI).

Æ (with traces of original silvering on the reverse); gr. 16; mm 21; h 11-12; thick edge (mm 6).

Coin used for long time, but same observations as for n. **32**. On the reverse little silvering is preserved and it is only on this specimen that we can recognize part of the representation.

43 – SM; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 2279, surface).

Æ (originally silvered); gr. ?; mm 22; h ?; thick edge (mm 6).

Coin used for long time, but same observations as for n. **32**.





This coin has been exclusively studied through photos and stamp. The obverse shows a false centring point. On the reverse Shamash is radiating and he has no dots in his flattened trunk. It seems that the stool has no crossbars. This coin probably comes from the same obverse minting die as n. **29** and **38** described here, and as Potts (1991) n. 425.

One of the common points for all the coins belonging to this group is certainly the head of Heracles on the obverse. In fact, the *facies* almost negroid of the profile is particularly characteristic. Nevertheless, here we should not look for any kind of realism, but simply impute this accidental resemblance to the coinage engrave roughness. Besides, this same roughness is also recognisable in the reverse schematization. We will note as well that there are coinages engraved in the opposite direction, where Shamash on the reverse is sitting on the right (Potts 1991, n. 437).

GROUP XIII

The three coins belonging to this group have common characteristics with most of the coins belonging to the previous three groups. Nevertheless, there is here in addition a same monogram that allows making a different group for them.

44 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is straight and slightly flattened. The mouth is made of two traits. Over a well-marked cheekbone, the almond-shaped eye is surmounted by an eyebrow. The cheek shows a false centring point. The pelt is realized through a succession of scales and it is extended on the left through a series of paralleled traits. The lion's throat has the shape of a hollow horn ended by two globules.


Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a throne. His flattened trunk bears a false centring point and his coiffure is "radiating". His different articulations – shoulders, elbows, wrists – are underlined by a globule. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre. The upper part of this sceptre merges with his forearm and the lower part with the right foot of the stool [it was a throne!]. Above his right outstretched arm, appears a small horse facing right. To the right, an Aramaic pseudo-inscription recalling the name Abi'el. Under the right arm, the "trident" pointing rightward. In the left field, a palm tree. In various places of the field there are four monograms that are very close to each other. Behind the head of the figure:  [the symbols here are not the exact ones drawn in the Catalogue: please see correspondant page in Callot], between his back and the sceptre: . Under the stool  and behind the legs:  (?).

SM 3095; acquisition; Senior (1994) 16.4; this same specimen?

Billon; gr. 15,59; mm 24; h. 12; thick, filed edge (mm 5).


Without being issued of the same minting die, this coin is very close to Potts (1994) specimens, n. 396 to 399.

45 – Obverse: although from a different minting die, this obverse is just the same as the previous coin (n. 44).



Reverse: in an irregular (and incomplete?) beaded line, which is visible on the upper and right side, the figure of Shamash, the horse, the palm tree and the pseudo-inscription are almost the same like those on the previous coin. The head of the figure is not "radiating"; no centring point on the trunk. The "trident", pointing rightward, is hardly visible, but it is there. Behind the head of the figure and under the stool, appear the monograms  [the symbols here are not the exact ones drawn in the Catalogue: please see correspondant page in Callot]. On his back we can recognise a sort of λ (?).

SM 4232; acquisition; this coin was probably found in Sialkot, Pakistan; Senior (1994) 16.4; this same specimen.

Billon; gr. 15; mm 23; h. 12; thick, filed edge (mm 5).

Although with a slightly more refined style, this coin is still of the same type like the previous one. The monogram in the centre that we read as a λ must in fact be the same as the others  [the symbols here are not the exact ones drawn in the Catalogue: please see correspondent page in Callot], but badly come out of the mintage (like the “trident” on the left). Potts (1991) makes the same mistake for the “drachm” n. 441 (page 89). If we accept the attribution to the place where these coins are supposed to have been found, it would be one of the very few specimens from this coinage found outside the Oman peninsula.

46 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right: the head is of the “negroid” type and it is very close to the representations of the group XI, with a false centring point on the cheek.

Reverse: although issued from a different minting die, the representation is more or less the same one like that one of the previous coins (n. **44** and **45**). Shamash’ coiffure is not visible (it should be “radiating”); a false centring point on the trunk. Behind the trunk and under the stool we can see again the monograms  [the symbols here are not the exact ones drawn in the Catalogue: please see correspondent page in Callot] and . Apparently there are no monograms behind the head.

SM 3547; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 259, surface “hoard” AI)
Billon; gr. 14; mm 21; h. 3; thick edge (mm 5).

What is characterizing this group is of course the presence of the monogram on the reverse. This monogram is composed of a sort of Greek A with the horizontal bar broken and surmounted by a ring. On some specimens, it also has one or two lateral staffs. It seems to characterise a certain number of particular issues since we also find some “drachms” with the same monogram (see n. **64-66**; Potts 1991, n. 441 and 1994, page 73). Haerinck (1998) mentions six specimens (tetradrachms and drachms). Besides, he presents two objects – a potsherd and a lead bar (?) – coming from ed-Dour displaying a very similar monogram: a *alpha* surmounted by a ring with a staff on the left. Should it be interpreted, like he proposes, as a symbol peculiar to ed-Dour? We can doubt it, since these issues belong to both Mleiha and ed-Dour. Moreover, we can notice that the engravers took great freedom in the drawing of these monograms that are represented either as a simple *alpha* either with one or two staffs. There are also other monograms on some Characenic coins showing a composition very close to these ones (Le Rider 1959, page 253, n. 28, 31, 35). We will come back later to this issue.

GROUP XIV

47 – Obverse: in a very bad condition, illegible (head of Heracles?).

Reverse: in a very bad condition. Yet, we can recognise Shamash sitting on the left on a stool. He holds a sceptre and a small horse. Behind him, the symbol of the “trident”, pointing upward.

45

SM; 1995 Mleiha excavation (m. 2196, context PIR.D).
Æ (?); gr. ? ; mm 28; adjustment impossible).

This coin is in a far too bad condition for being integrated into any of our groups. Besides, it has been exclusively studied through a slide. The composition of its reverse, with the “trident” behind the figure, somehow recalls the coins belonging to group IX. But its style would better correspond to group XII. Nevertheless, in this group, the “trident” is always in front of Shamash.

The drachms

The 21 coins that will be described can be considered as drachms, because of their module and, above all, their weight (average, about 4 gr.). They have been divided into five groups, each of them involving a certain number of variants that we have called “types”. It was intentional the fact of not studying these drachms at the same time with the tetradrachms, like Potts (1991 and 1994) did. Even though some resemblances can and must be identified, there are far too many variants for arriving to an acceptable unique classification. This same observation must be extended to the “obols” of a smaller module. In fact, the far too subtle classification proposed by Potts often becomes incomprehensible, not only for the reader but, unfortunately, also for the author himself, since sometimes some coins issued of a same coinage are placed in two different categories. We will remember as well the tetradrachm n. 3, which has been intentionally in order to make a drachm out of it.

GROUP I

48 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The profile is delicately reproduced and the head of the lion has all the details that appear on the Alexandrine prototypes: throat, nostril, teeth, eye orbit and ear. On the contrary, the knot formed by the legs of the lion’s skin is absent under the neck.

Reverse: beardless figure, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre and with the right one an eagle. On the right, vertically: ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟ(Υ). In the left field, an Aramaic *aleph*.

SM 4050; unknown provenance (acquisition?)
AR ; gr. 4; mm 17; h 12.

Either on the obverse or on the reverse, this coin is issued of an excellent style that, from many points of view, is almost better than the one displayed on certain original

Alexandrine models. Only two details turn us away from the Macedonian numismatics. On the reverse, the figure is beardless. Therefore, it is not anymore the effigies of Zeus, but probably of Shamash in the Arab imitations. Besides, on the same reverse, the Aramaic letter brings us closer to the East Arabian coinages, too. In fact, we will see that there are other coins with a different *aleph*; and yet, none of them shows, like in this case, the name of Alexander written in Greek, capital letters and, above all, without any errors. If we follow Potts theories, this *aleph* could correspond to the first letter of the name Aibi'el. But this coin cannot absolutely be compared to those of the ruler(s) named Abi'el, whom we know through different issues. In fact, this coin has been made by a capable engraver who has directly copied a Greek original prototype and not an imitation, like it happened for most the East Arabia issues.

49 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The profile is relatively delicate and the details of the lion's skin are still well readable.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre, made of a vertical line, and with his outstretched right one an eagle. In the left field, the Aramaic letter *aleph*.

SM 3094; acquisition; Haerinck (1999) n. 9; this specimen.
AR ; gr. 4; mm 14,5; h 9; slightly rounded edge.

The obverse is still close to the original prototypes. On the contrary, the reverse is rougher as a whole, and this circumstance could indicate a copied type from the direct imitation of an Alexandrine original of the ancient type where the legs of the figure on the reverse are not crossed. This can be noticed in the silhouette somehow curled up of the figure and, above all, in the eagle's shape that is almost indefinable.

In his *class S II* ("Eagle Classes"), Potts (1994, page 43 ff.) presents two drachms of a pretty close type (n. 185-186) whose only difference is to have an Aramaic inscription mentioning the complete name Abi'el, here summarized by a simple *aleph*. These two drachms are believed to come from Mleiha. Finally, we will see later some obols of a very close style (n. **76** and **77**), which both come from the excavations in Mleiha.

This coin has been published by Haerinck (1999, n. 9) who mentions a countermark trident-shaped put above Heracles head, on the obverse (see photo, page 125 of his article). This "countermark" is simply an illusion due to the lightning on a photograph, which was the only available document for the author. It is simply the strongly marked nostril of the extremity of the throat of the lion's skin adorning Heracles' head. Concerning

47

The origin of this coin – ed-Dour – it is subject to some cautiousness as well since it is a coin that has been issued of an illegal trade (found during an illegal collection)⁴.

50 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The profile is pretty delicate and the throat of the lion has been realistically treated, almost like in the prototypes.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and paralleled legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre indicated by a vertical beaded line. With his right straight arm, he holds an eagle. On both left and right sides, Aramaic letters.

SM; 1999 Mleiha excavations (m. 2341, surface)

AR ; gr. ?; mm 18; h ?.

This coin has been exclusively studied through a photograph. It has a style very close to the previous one and certainly belongs to the same group.

51 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The representation is pretty much erased.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped, is sitting on the left on a stool. Only one leg is recognizable, but the line over the leg might belong to the second one. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre indicated by a vertical beaded line. With his right straight arm, he holds an eagle. On the right, under the stool and on the left, an Aramaic inscription.

SM 3005; acquisition; apparently this coin was found in Mleiha; Haerinck (1999) no. 7; this same specimen.

AR ; gr. 3,21; mm 17; h 9.

The obverse is very much used, but the reverse allows reconnecting also this coin to the very well known series from which Potts mentions two specimens, very close to this coin (1994, *class S2*, no. 185 and 186) that seem to come from Mleiha. There also the previous coins (no. **49** and **50**, the last one being found in Mleiha) and some specimens mentioned by Haerinck (1999, no. 6-9).

This series is homogeneous and includes tetradrachms (here, no. **5**), drachms and obols (here no. **76** and **77**). The main style of the coins is still strongly related to the Alexandrine prototypes, especially about the obverse and we have

⁴ If, by accident, this countermark really exists, it could be explained with the circumstance that ancient coins were put into circulation again at the beginning of the PIR. C period, after they were countermarked with the “trident” sign, which appears on all the coins from this period. Therefore, it could have been found in ed-Dour.

already noticed (see no. 5) that on the reverse Shamash is represented with paralleled legs, just like on the Alexandrine ones of the ancient type.

On the tetradrachms, we can read "Abi'el son of *tbgl'n*". On the contrary, on some of the drachms, the inscription has been shortened and only the name of the character 'by'l (Abi'el) appears. Concerning the obols, we will see that we do find only one or two letters belonging to the name Abi'el.

Apparently, all the coins from this series would come from Mleiha and we should probably attribute them to this site.

GROUP II

52 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. Regardless a certain wear and tear, the profile looks pretty well drawn, with a long and pointed nose. The pelt of the lion is made of a sequence of small parallel curves. Its throat has the shape of a horn surrounding Heracles ear.

Reverse: Shamash, half draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre and with the right one a rython horse-shaped. Earth line. In the right field, the symbol of the "trident" indicated downward pointed and, down, two pseudo-Aramaic letters (?). In the left field, a small stylized palm tree.

SM 3004; acquisition; this coin was apparently found in Mleiha; Haerinck (1998) no. 70; this same specimen.

Billon; gr. 3,86; mm 16,5; h 7.

This coin belongs to Potts (1994, page 58 f.) type S4, which includes drachms belonging to different issues (no. 282-286). All these coins are supposed to come from Mleiha, including this one where, by the way, we can find the symbol of the "trident" so typical of the coins from this region.

We have seen, with the tetradrachm no. 8 that Potts (1994) *classes* S4 and S5 present specimens from very different types, which at first sight might let us think of two distinct series. We will discuss this issue later. Anyway, the point is that all these coins must originally come from Mleiha.

53 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The face is well marked with an arcuated nose and a long chin. Down, the neck is well visible. The pelt of the lion looks more like a hair made of parallel curves and the throat of the lion like a small horn closing Heracles ear.

Reverse: Shamash is sitting on the left on a stool. He seems to have only one leg and the drape is not visible. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre

49

and on his right outstretched arm, a rython horse-shaped. In the right field, the “trident” pointing downward and, on the left, a very stylized palm tree. Apparently there is no inscription.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; it probably comes from Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 4,5; mm 15,5; h 6.

Same obverse die like Haerinck (1998) no. 72 (?).

This coin is a pretty rough schematization of the previous one (no. 52), but it shows more or less the same elements. Then it belongs to Potts (1994, page 58 f.) type S4, even though it is among the obols (no. 288-293) that we can find the best parallels. We will observe here, like we did before for drachm no. 52 about Potts (1994) *classes* S4 and S5. We will also underline the absence of any inscription or fragments of inscription on the reverse; it is also the case on most the specimens mentioned by Potts (1994, page 59). This could indicate that at the moment of the mintage of this type of drachms, the inscription with the name Abi’el did not have any more any real importance and that, if it still subsists on certain coins, it has a purely decorative function. Finally, this drachm has been certainly minted in Mleiha.

GROUP III

Coins belonging to this group correspond to Potts (1994, page 62) *class* XLIV: he publishes 12 drachms from this type (no. 310-311 and 317-326). Haerinck (1998) publishes another 9 coins from the same type (no. 77-85).

TYPE 1

Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is straight and the lips fleshy. The almond-shaped eye is surmounted by an eyebrow that is connected to the upper nose. The pelt is made of parallel zigzagging lines. Under the chin, a sort of Λ corresponds to the knot of the Alexandrine prototypes. Finally, the lion’s throat surrounding Heracles ear looks like a horn with globular ends.

Reverse: Shamash, crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre and on his right straight one carries a small horse facing right. In the right field, a pseudo-Aramaic inscription recalling the name Abi’el. Between Shamash’ back and his sceptre, there are two small horizontal and parallel traits. Under the right arm, the symbol of the “trident”, rightward pointed and, in the left field, a palm tree.

54 – SM 3009; acquisition; this coin was apparently found in Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 4; mm 15; h 10.

50

Same obverse minting die as no. **55** here and as several Potts (1994, XLIV) specimens: no. 319, 320, 321, 324, 325... Same reverse minting die as no. **55** here and Potts no. 319, 321, 324, 325...

55 – SM 3083; acquisition; this coin was apparently found in Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 3,65; mm 15; h 11.

Same minting dies as no. **54**.

TYPE 2

Obverse: traces of a beaded line. Heracles' head is almost the same like in type 1. We will only remark the presence of a false centring point on his cheek, two dots behind the ear and the absence of the knot Λ shaped under his chin.

Reverse: Same as type 1 with, in addition, a dot behind Shamash' head.

56 – SM 3104; acquisition.

Billon; gr. 3,97; mm 14,5; h 12.

Same obverse and reverse minting die as Potts (1994, XLIV) no. 318 and same reverse minting die as no. 320 and 323.

57 – **Obverse:** head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The pelt is treated like a sequence of scales and the lion's throat has the shape of a large horn surrounding Heracles' ear.

Reverse: Shamash, crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre whilst his right one is not visible. On the right, traces of an inscription. Nothing is visible anymore on the left. Behind the figure, there are two small horizontal and parallel traits (?).

SM; 1999 Mleiha excavation (m. 2382, surface).

Æ (?); gr. ?; mm 16,5; h 1.

Even though in a very bad condition, this drachm, which has been exclusively studied through a photo, undoubtedly belongs to this group. Its style and the presence of two horizontal traits allow attributing it to type 2.

TYPE 3

Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. Even though in a style pretty close to the one shown by previous coins, this type is treated with far more roughness: the pelt, for instance, is simply represented by a sequence of scales.

51

Reverse: same as the previous types, but the back of the stool is simply represented by four vertical dots displayed behind Shamash back: one single dot under the stool.

58 – SM; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m 1891, surface).

Billon; gr. 4; mm 15; h 6.

Same obverse and reverse minting die as no. **59** here. Same or a very similar obverse minting die as Potts (1994) no. 310-311.

59 – SM; 1998 Mleiha excavation (m 2313, surface).

Billon; gr. ?; mm 15; h ?.

This coin has been exclusively studied through photographs and impressions. Same obverse and reverse minting die as no. **58**. Same or a very similar obverse minting die as Potts (1994) no. 310-311.

These five coins (types 1 to 3) belong to a same series, very homogeneous with apparently few minting dies only. And yet, we must mention another variant: on the reverse of Potts (1994) no. 326, we find, behind Shamash, two superposed letters: XΛ. In this same *class* XLIV, Potts (1994) mentions a drachm (no. 312) and several obols (no. 313-316), which, because of their style, have no relation with the series of drachms that we have just seen. Only the tetradrachm no. 309 shows the same style and must belong to the same series of issues. We will as well remember the tetradrachms with the Λ mark (Potts *class* XLVIIa and b and here group IX, no. **17** to **20**), which are also stylistically very close to each other.

Most of these coins come or supposedly come from Mleiha and few of them from ed-Dour; they have been certainly minted in this region.

GROUP IV

Coins included in this group correspond to Potts (1994, page 681) *class* XLVII: he publishes 17 drachms from related types. We can also find them among the coins published by Haerinck (1998) no. 117-120.

TYPE 1

60 – **Obverse:** head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is slightly arcuated and the mouth is made of two traits. Almond-shaped eye. The pelt is suggested by two superposed rows of small circle arches. The horn surrounding the ear turns upward thus making the eyebrow over the eye.

52	<p>Reverse: Shamash, crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre and on his right straight one carries a small horse facing right. To the right, a pseudo-Aramaic inscription recalling the name Abi'el. Under the right arm, the "trident", leftward pointed. In the left field, a palm tree.</p> <p>SM 3009; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; this coin apparently comes from Mleiha. Billon; gr. 4; mm 13,5; h 3. Same reverse minting die, or a very similar one, as Potts (1994, XLVI) no. 340⁵</p> <p>61 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The face looks like the one of no. 60, but the pelt here is treated like a sequence of scales.</p> <p>Reverse: Shamash, half-draped (?) and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. His trunk is flattened and his coiffure, probably radiating, is not visible anymore. His arms are treated like a horizontal line crossing the whole field. The left arm intersects the vertical sceptre that, in its lower part, merges with the right foot of the stool. On the right arm, a small horse facing right. On the right, pseudo-Aramaic inscription. Between Shamash back and the sceptre, vertical line [made] of four dots, forming a sort of back to the stool. Under the right arm, the "trident", rightward pointed. On the left, a palm tree.</p> <p>SM 3565; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m 378, surface "hoard" AI). Billon; gr. 4; mm 14,5; h 3; thick edge (mm 3). Probably same obverse minting die as Potts (1994, XLVII) no. 384 and 390.</p> <p>62 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. Same description as no. 61.</p> <p>Reverse: Same description as no. 61; but the representation is even more schematized. A five dots/dots line in the back of Shamash.</p> <p>SM 3564; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m 377, surface "hoard" AI). Billon; gr. 4; mm 14; h 3. Probably same obverse minting die as no. 61 and as Potts (1994, <i>class</i> XLVII) no. 384 and same obverse and reverse minting die as no. 390.</p>
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⁵ This *class* XLVI is worth a revision. In fact, other than our specimen (no. **60**), which should certainly be brought near to those belonging to this *class*, in here we find coins like no. 341 whose obverse minting die is the same like the one of no. 368, in *class* XLVII.

TYPE 2

63 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The right part of the face is partially off flan but the long almond-shaped eye surmounted by an eyebrow can be recognized. The ear is almost glued on the eye. The pelt is made of two parallel rows of small tufts. The throat of the lion is made of a big elongate horn ended by two globules.

Reverse: Shamash, half-draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre and on his right straight one carries a small horse facing right. To the right, a pseudo-Aramaic inscription. Under the right arm, the “trident”, rightward pointed and in the right field, a palm tree.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; this coin apparently comes from Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 4; mm 14; h 6.

Same obverse minting die, or a very similar one, as Potts (1994) no. 377 and 393.

64 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. It is absolutely the same type as no. **63** with, in addition, a false centring point on the cheek.

Reverse: Shamash, half-draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. His trunk is flattened with a false centring point. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre. The forearm merges with the upper part of the sceptre and the lower part of this one serves as right foot for the stool. A dot on each side of the transversal bar of the stool. On the right straight arm, a small horse facing right. On the right, the pseudo-Aramaic inscription is hardly visible. Under the right arm, the “trident”, rightward pointed and, on the left, a palm tree.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; this coin apparently comes from Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 4; mm 14; h 12.

Probably same obverse minting die as Potts (1994, XLVII) no. 392.

TYPE 3

65 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The representation is pretty much used, but we can still recognize the flattened nose, the fleshy lips and the throat of the lion shaped as a big horn.

Reverse: rough representation of Shamash half-draped with, apparently, one leg only, sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre and on his right straight one carries a small horse going rightwards. On the right, pseudo-Aramaic inscription. Under the right arm, the “trident”, rightward pointed and, on the left, a palm tree.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; this coin apparently comes from Mleiha.


Billon; gr. 4; mm 14; h 1.

Obverse minting die of the same type as Potts (1994, XLVII) no. 361.

These six drachms, in spite of a certain number of different details, are all rather close to each other. They neatly recall a certain number of tetradrachms here described (see groups X to XII, no. **21** to **43**). They all belong to Potts (1994) *class* XLVI and, above all, XLVII, where there are numerous links of minting dies, especially for the obverses.

GROUP V

66 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right. The nose is straight and the mouth is made of two traits. The eye is represented by two lines framing a dot/dot. The ear, made of a curve ended by two globules, is almost connected to the eye. On the cheek, a false centring point. The pelt is treated like a sequence of untidy crosses and the throat of the lion like a long hollow horn, which continues upwards in order to form the eyebrow over Heracles' eye.


Reverse: Shamash, half-draped and crossed legs, is sitting on the left on a stool. He has a flattened trunk with a false centring point and his head is "radiated". With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre and on his right straight one a small horse rightwards. On the right of the sceptre, a pseudo-Aramaic inscription. Behind the trunk, an indistinct monogram. Under the stool: . Under the right arm, the "trident", if it is a trident, seems to have only one dot on the right. On the left, a palm tree.

SM 3105; acquisition; it might come from Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 4; mm 14,5; h 12.

Haerinck (1998) no. 158; this same specimen, and same obverse minting die as no. 159.

67 – Obverse: head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, very close to the previous one (no. **66**). Only the pelt, more regular and made of a sequence of scales, is slightly different.

Reverse: same type like the previous coin (no. **66**), but without dot in the flattened trunk and the "trident", rightward pointed, is clearer. Behind the trunk, the mark λ must certainly be a deformation of  and under the stool only a simple ring belonging to this same symbol is still visible, here off flan.

SM 3011; acquisition; this coin was apparently found in ed-Dour.

Billon; gr. 4,43; mm 14; h 12.

Haerinck (1998) no. 160; this same specimen.

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68 – Obverse: pretty close to the previous two coins (no. **66** and **67**). The ear, circular, is smaller. The pelt is made of a sequence of scales in its upper part and of parallel traits in its lower one.

Reverse: the representation is approximately the same as the one of the previous coin (no. **67**). A light, double mintage is the reason why the symbols and the monograms, even though still present/there, are less visible.

SM 3548; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 296, “hoard” AI).

Billon; gr. 4; mm 14; h 12.

Very close type to no. 158 and 159 in Haerinck (1998). Perhaps, same reverse minting die as Potts no. 400.

As we just saw, these coins are issued of minting dies pretty much closer to each other, just like the specimens placed into order by Potts in *class* XLVII and mentioned by Haerinck (1998). These drachms are also of the same style like the tetradrachms no. 396-399 in Potts (1994) and no. 155-157 in Haerinck, 15-157 and here no. **44-46** from the group XII. The coins from this series very homogeneous mostly come from Mleiha and ed-Dour and it was certainly in this region that they were minted.

The obols

This third category includes 27 coins. They are all of a very small module and of feeble weight: we will then consider them as obols. They have been divided into 9 groups. We will also notice that, because of their small size, many of them are often badly preserved, which obviously implies a certain difficulty in their classification.

GROUP I

The coins belonging to this group are characterized by the representation of an eagle on the reverse.

TYPE 1

69 – Obverse: in a beaded line, head for three quarters frontal. Apparently curly coiffure with long pending quiffs on the sides.

Reverse: eagle on the left, in front of which a vertical south Arabian *shin* [like a W, 90°rotated towards left: see symbol at corresponding page]. Up, to the right, an irregular line corresponding to an accidental fissure in the minting die.

SM 3084; acquisition; apparently this coin comes from Mleiha; Haerinck (1988)no. 31; this same specimen.

AR; gr. 0,46; mm 9; h 1; slightly rounded edge.

Same obverse and reverse coins as Potts (1991) no. 388 and perhaps (1994) no. 170 (with the same fissure in the reverse minting die) and as Callot (1990) in Failaka, Kuwait, no. 71 (broken flan) and same obverse minting die as Potts (1991) no. 387 (photo given the opposite way) and (1994) no. 169, 170, 172 (?).

70 – Obverse: kind of a circle surrounded by a series of big dots.

Reverse: in a beaded line made of big dots/dots rather spaced, an eagle on the left represented in a pretty naïf way. On the left, a mark looking like an E turned leftward.

SM 3088; acquisition; apparently this coin comes from Mleiha; Haerinck (1988) no. 32; this same specimen.

AR; gr. 0,39; mm 8; h 6.

Same obverse and reverse coins as Potts (1991) no. 386 and (1994) no. 171.

For no. **69**, the very few known specimens and the numerous correspondences of the minting dies show that it was a limited issue. Most of these coins come from Jabal Kenzan (Potts 1994, page 38) and only two specimens were apparently found in Mleiha and one in Falaika (Ikaros), Kuwait. The south Arabic *shin* that appears on the reverse is characteristic of the north-East Arabia coinages and it is certainly from this region that this issue must be original. Our specimen, even though pretty much used, is the better preserved and we can still see that the face on the obverse is delicately and realistically treated.

Concerning no. **70**, we also know another two specimens, in Jabal kenzan (Potts 1991, no. 386) and in Hofuf (Potts 1994, no. 171). This type, far more rough, must have been inspired by the previous one (no. **69**). The face on the obverse is simply a circle and the coiffure becomes a sequence of big dots. The eagle on the reverse looks like a sort of big pigeon. As for the vertical *shin*, misinterpreted by the engraver, has been disfigured. However, an attentive observation of all the specimens belonging to this first type presented by Potts (1991 and 1994) shows a neat degradation in the representations between no. **69** and **70**. Like the other two specimens, this coin no. **70** must come from the North-East Arabia.

Contrary to what Potts proposes (1994, page 38), the Lagyd Egypt cannot be regarded as the inspirational source for this monetary type. In fact, all these coins come from a region that was (or has been) controlled or in close relationship with the Seleucids Empire and then totally outside the Ptolemaic kingdom. The presence of the eagle on the reverse is not a strong enough topic for interpreting it as a sign of an Egyptian influence. We should remember that, in the Seleucid Kingdom, a currency with the types of Alexander had a wide circulation, and that it is

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this last one that has been the source of inspiration for the coins of the Eastern Arabia. Besides, the issues bearing an eagle on the reverse are well documented in Alexander's numismatics and, later, in the coinages of the Seleucids. As for the frontal or three quarters' heads, they are inexistent in the Ptolemaic coins but, on the contrary, they are current on the Seleucids ones. Here it might be the imitation of a portrait of Apollo (?). These two coins no. **69** and **70** are supposed to come from Mleiha, just like a third coin presented by Potts (1994, no. 172). Like some other coins from the North-East Arabia, which have been here described, they have arrived in the Oman peninsula through exchanges carried out by the communities of these two regions of the Arab-Persian Gulf.

TYPE 2

71 – Obverse: beaded line, helmeted head on the right.

Reverse: eagle with open wings, on the left.

SM 3102; acquisition; Haerinck (1988)no. 34; this same specimen, which was apparently found in ed-Dour.

AR; gr. 0,68; mm 10; h 11.

This type is only known through this specimen, which makes it very uncertain its attribution to the Arabic coinages.

There are some bronze coins from Susa under the kingdom of the Parthian king Tigris (ca 138/7-133/2) that present on the obverse a helmeted head and, on the reverse, an eagle on the right (Le Rider 1965, no. 101). Nevertheless the differences are numerous enough – metal, absence of the crest on the helmet, eagle on the right and not on the left – for making the hypothesis of the imitation of this Parthian coinage rather fragile.

We will see later (no. **115-116**) that the sites of Mleiha and ed-Dour have delivered few coins from the Hadramaut kingdom. But there were there some coins with on the obverse a head on the right side and, on the reverse, an eagle (Sedov 1995, type 3, page 19 f.). We will also see later that at different periods some links have existed between these two regions of Arabia. Is it then on this side that we should look for the source of inspiration for this coin? It is still difficult to answer.

GROUP II

The coins belonging to this group, even though rather different from each other, are characterized by the presence of a south-Arabic, vertical *shin* [like a W, 90°rotated towards left: see symbol at corresponding page] on the reverse.

TYPE 1

72 – Obverse: juvenile head, naked and beardless. The coiffure is made of big quiffs.

Reverse: Shamash, half-draped and crossed-legs, is sitting on the left on a stool placed on an earth-line. In his left hand, he is holding a long vertical sceptre and with his right, straight arm he carries an eagle. In the left field, in front of the figure, a south Arabian *shin* is vertically arranged.

SM 3087; acquisition; apparently this coin comes from Mleiha; Haerinck (1988) no. 5; this same specimen.

AR; about gr. 1; mm 9,5; h 12.

73 – Obverse: even though more used, it is the same head like on the previous coin, but from a different minting die.

Reverse: same representation as on the previous coin, perhaps in a slightly rougher style.

SM; seized by Sharjah Police in 1994; apparently this coin comes from Mleiha.

AR; gr. ?; mm 9,5; h 2.

TYPE 2

74 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: Shamash, half-draped, is sitting on the left on a stool; only one of his legs is visible. In his left hand, he is holding a long vertical sceptre and with his right, straight arm, an eagle. On the left side of the sceptre, few traits that might correspond to an inscription. On the right, in front of the figure, a south Arabian vertical *shin*.

SM; seized by Sharjah Police in 1994; apparently it comes from Mleiha.

AR; less than 1 gr.; mm 10,5; adjustment impossible.

75 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: Shamash sitting on the right, very schematically and coarsely represented: the legs of the figure merge with the feet of the stool. In his left hand, reduced to a dot, he holds a vertical sceptre and on his right, straight arm, another dot might correspond to the eagle (?). The head of the figure is crossed by a trait, so that he seems to wear a wide-brimmed hat. On the right side of the sceptre, few small traits remind of an inscription and, in the left field, there is a south-Arabian vertical *shin*.

SM 3097; acquisition; Haerinck (1988) no. 27; this same specimen; apparently it comes from Mleiha.

AR; gr. 0,80; mm 9; adjustment impossible.

The first two coins from this group (no. **72** and **73**) belong to Potts (1994) *class* XIVb, called "obols, with vertical *shin* of Seleucid inspiration".

In fact, there is in Potts classification a type (*class XIVa*) where the obverse portrait is a head on the right, whose hair is kept by a diadem or *tenia*, which can be found on several royal Seleucid portraits; but, we also have to note, some coins from other kingdoms like, for instance, the Characian kingdom, might have been as well a source of inspiration for these portraits. In his *class XIVb*, the diadem has disappeared, but the head would be still inspired by Seleucid types. And yet, it must be recorded that the hair of the figure is made of big quiffs and that the ear is quite strong. Later we will see that some obols, which can be attributed to the Oman Peninsula, might have been inspired by coins of this type, which seem to have frequently circulated in this region. Besides, Potts curiously arranges in his *class II* (1994, page 53 f.) six obols (nos. 234-239) that are clearly of this type and that, in addition, all seem to come from North-East Arabia (Jabal Kenzan, Hofuf).

Our coins no. **72** and **73** should have been found in Mleiha, but their foreign origin seems to be sure. In fact, Shamash on the reverse holding an eagle and, most of all, the presence of the vertical *shin* clearly show that they have been minted in North-Eastern Arabia. Besides, Potts specimens (1994, p. 17) also come from this region.

Coin no. **74** has a blank obverse and the reverse shows a Shamash absolutely of the same type as the previous ones. It belongs to the Potts *class XIVc*, for which he gives several samples very close to each other. On the reverse, the inscription might be a deformation for the name ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ, like it has been proved to be for some coins of Potts previous type (1994, *class XIVb*). This is why we have classified this obol in the same group, while attributing to it the same origin in North-Eastern Arabia. This interpretation seems as well confirmed by Potts map (1994, p. 18), where 29 specimens come from this region against the only 19 [found] in the Oman Peninsula. We must also remember that some obols very close to those of this group have been found in Failaka, Kuwait (Callot 1990). The distribution of these coins does simply illustrate the numerous relations that must have existed between all these regions of Arabia.

Concerning no. **75**, realized in a much rougher style, it corresponds to a degradation (?) of the same type. Potts presents a specimen (1994, *class XIVc*, no. 47) very close to it, which seems to come as well from Mleiha. But the vertical *shin* on the reverse always refers back North-Eastern Arabia.

GROUP III

76 – Obverse: Heracles head, wearing the pelt of a lion, on the right.

Reverse: Shamash, half-draped, is sitting on the left on a stool, the two legs paralleled. In his left hand, he is holding a long sceptre, indicated as a vertical line.

With his right, straight arm he carries an eagle. On the right, two Aramaic letters.

SM 3275; 1990 Mleiha excavation (m. 1474, context PIR.A).
AR; about gr. 0,50; mm 10; h 9.

77 – Obverse: same minting die as no. **76**.

Reverse: same minting die as no. **76**.

SM; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 1980, surface).
AR; about gr. 0,50; mm 10; h 9.

These two obols, issued from the same obverse and reverse minting dies, belong to the Potts (1994, p. 43 f.) *class* S2, here represented by a tetradrachm (no. **5**) and three drachms (no. **49-51**). Potts obol no. 188 (p. 45, 0,47 g.) is issued from the same obverse minting die as our two specimens and from a reverse one that is very close to our one. These coins, which show a very good style, are still very close to the alexandrine prototypes, and especially the alexandrines of the ancient type. But the other two obols mentioned by Potts in the same *class* (no. 187 and 189) are completely different and certainly they do not belong to a same series. On the contrary, Potts presents another obol (no. 273) which is certainly from the same series, even though issued from a different minting die, and that he curiously arrange in his *class* II (1994, p. 53 f., “with horse protome”). We have seen that the tetradrachms and the drachms bore the name Abi’el written in capital letters. Here the two Aramaic letters on the reverse, an *aleph* and a *beth*, might correspond to the first two letters of the name of this dynast. All the coins of this series, those mentioned by Potts as well as our ones, come or are believed to come from Mleiha; therefore, it is most probably to this site that we should refer these issues.

GROUP IV

78 – Obverse: Heracles head on the right, wearing the pelt of a lion. The pelt is reproduced as a sequence of more or less concentric traits, surrounding the horn and the ear, which are here merged into one element only.

Reverse: Shamash, half-draped, sitting on the left on a stool. In his left hand, he holds a long vertical sceptre and with his right arm, a rython horse-head shaped. Behind the sceptre a vertical inscription, probably Aramaic. In the left field, a stylised palm tree.

SM; 1998 Mleiha excavation (m.2280).
AR; gr. ?; mm 10; h ?.

61	<p>Same obverse and reverse minting dies as Potts (1994) no. 321-324 or very close minting dies.</p> <p>79 – Obverse: same description as above, but the style is rougher. Reverse: same description as above, but the style is rougher.</p> <p>SM 3010; acquisition; this coin seems to have been found in Mleiha. AR (weakened); gr. 0,95; mm 10; h 5.</p> <p>Perhaps, same obverse minting dies as Potts (1994) no. 226 and 230. Same reverse minting die as Potts (1994) no. 230-233 or very close minting die.</p> <p>These two coins belong to the Potts (1994, p. 53 f.) <i>class</i> II, which is well known through several specimens like these ones. Nevertheless, we have seen that this <i>class</i> is somehow disparate and that some specimens must have a different origin⁶. Several obols of this type are also published by Haerinck (1998) no. 42-66. All these coins belong to a series to which belong here a tetradrachm (group IV, no. 6) and at least three Potts drachms (no. 217-219) and numerous obols. The inscription, where it is visible, mentions the name Abi’el son of ... (illegible). It is, as we saw before, a well known type, and especially for the tetradrachms of the Bahrain hoard (Mørkholm 1972; Callot 1994); we will see this series again and at length in the final analysis.</p> <p>GROUP V</p> <p>The coins belonging to this group correspond to Potts <i>class</i> S4 and S5 (1994, p. 58-60). Haerinck (1998) also mentions few specimens out of this group (no. 67-69 and 73-74). These obols come from a very close type to the previous ones (group IV). The only difference is the appearance of the symbol “trident” on the reverse. Potts makes two groups, according to the position of the “trident”: <i>class</i> S4 = “trident” down-pointed and <i>class</i> S5 = “trident” up-pointed. We have seen (tetradrachm no. 8, group VI) that we should not give too much importance to the position of this symbol and that only its presence must have a real meaning.</p> <p>80 – Obverse: Heracles head on the right. The lion’s skin pelt is reproduced as a sequence of concentric traits, surrounding the ear and the horn, which are confused. The nose is rather arcuated, the mouth has thick lips and the globular eye is surmounted by a big eyebrow.</p>
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⁶ Like nos. 234-239, which must certainly be attributed to North-Eastern Arabia (*class* XIVb, p. 17 and here, group II) or no. 273 that belongs to *class* S2 (here group III).

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Reverse: beaded line. Shamash, half-draped, sitting on the left on a stool. In his left hand, he holds a vertical sceptre. On his right straight arm, a rython horse-head shaped. On the right the symbol of the "trident", reproduced up-pointed. On the left side, in front of the figure, a palm tree or a palm leaf.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; it seems to come from Mleiha.
AR (weakened); less than 1 gr.; mm 10; h 9.

81 – Obverse: same type as no. **80**, but from a different minting die.

Reverse: same type as no. **80**, but the "trident" is reproduced down-pointed.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; it seems to come from Mleiha.
AR (weakened); less than 1 gr.; mm 10; h 4.

82 – Obverse: same description as no. **80** and **81**.

Reverse: same description as no. **80**; the "trident" is reproduced down-pointed.

SM 3007; acquisition; seemingly this coin was found in Mleiha; it is probably the same specimen as Haerinck's no. 69 (1998), where it is mentioned to come from ed-Dour.

AR (weakened); gr. 0,99; mm 10; h 4.

These three obols belong to a very homogeneous series, whose types are very close to each other and where there are numerous correspondences of minting dies. They all come from Mleiha and ed-Dour; also an attribution to the Oman Peninsula seems to be evident.

83 – Obverse: same type of representation as no. **80-82**, but in a little rougher making.

Reverse: same representation and rougher making. Shamash sitting on the left is placed over a ground-line and the "trident" is reproduced up-pointed.

SM 3567 (?); 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 380, surface "hoard" AI).
AR (weakened); less than 1 gr.; mm 9,5; h 12.

Regardless of its little rougher style, this obol still belongs to this same group.

The classification proposed by Potts (1994) in his *class* S4 and S5 is rather complicated. On the one side, he wants to be rigorous since we can find there a complete coinage constituted of tetradrachms, drachms and obols. On the other side, it seems to be confused concerning the style of the different coins that, as a whole, have nothing in common. Only the symbol of the "trident" gives them a certain unity.

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While looking at the obols that are included in this group, as well as at those of the group V, we are surprised by the composition of Heracles head, on the obverse, which does not show the usual "horn" surrounding the figure's ear. The Heracles of the group IV (no. **78-79** and Potts 1994, *class S II*, p. 53 f.) are very close to each other; perhaps we should look for a different source of inspiration for these specimens...

We have seen that some obols that are certainly original of North-Eastern Arabia (here group II, no. **72-73**) show on the obverse a head that might be inspired by a Hellenistic royal portrait, either Seleucid or Characanian. Obols of this type have circulated in the Oman Peninsula and they might have been the model for the coinages named after Abi'el where Shamash on the reverse holds a rython (Potts 1994, *class S II*, see especially no. 220 and here group IV). This type would have been later perpetuated by the obols of group V, where we ascertain a progressive schematization of the portrait. Finally, some later series would have re-adopted the usual head of Heracles. We will see later, in the final analysis, how is it chronologically possible to explain it.

GROUP VI

84 – Obverse: Heracles head on the right. The pelt is made of small quiffs, the "horn" is well marked and the ear is missing. The eye, which is pretty big, is surmounted by a big eyebrow, independent from the "horn".

Reverse: Shamash sitting on the left on a stool. The representation is rough and it is difficult to distinguish his legs from the legs of the stool. In his left hand, he holds a long sceptre and we cannot see what he is holding in his right one. On the right, the "trident" is reproduced up-pointed and the palm tree on the left is hardly visible. No trace of inscription is visible.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; it seems to come from Mleiha.

AR; less than 1 gr.; mm 9,5; h 12.

The reverse, where the "trident" up-pointed is placed in the right field recalls the previous group (group V and Potts 1994, *class S5*, p. 60). On the contrary, on the obverse, we find again Heracles head adorned with the lion's skin with the usual "horn". This representation, even though quite rough, is pretty close to the one of the obols' that will be described after this one (no. **85** and **86**; see also Potts 1994, *class XLVII*, p. 70-71). Is it the illustration of the problem arose in the conclusion of the previous group? It is not possible, and yet the rough style of this obol must invite to caution.

85 – Obverse: Heracles head on the right. The pelt is made of a sequence of irregular traits and scales. The “horn” is a long curved trait ended by two globules. The eye is almond-shaped and the ear, parallel to the “horn”, is placed under the eye, almost in the middle of the cheek. The nose is well marked and the mouth made of two parallel traits.

Reverse: Shamash, having only one leg, is sitting on the left on a stool. His head is “radiating” and his trunk is flattened. In his left hand, he holds a long vertical sceptre and on his right straight arm there is a small horse. On the right, an Aramaic pseudo-inscription and on the left the “trident” is reproduced right-pointed. On the extreme left side, we can guess the presence of a palm tree.

SM 3091; acquisition.

Billon; gr. 1,5; mm 9; h 2.

Probably same obverse minting die as Potts (1991) no. 450 and (1994) no. 364-366. Same obverse minting die as Haerinck (1998) no. 123.

This obol belongs to Potts *class* XLVII. It belongs to the big series where Heracles on the obverse often has a negroid *facies* and which is here well represented by several tetradrachms (see group XII). The coins mentioned by Potts and Haerinck seemingly come from Mleiha and ed-Dour.

86 – Obverse: Heracles head very schematised on the right. The pelt is made of a sequence of parallel traits around a “horn” ended by two globules. The ear and the eye are simply two dots and the nose is a broken line.

Reverse: Shamash sitting on the left on a stool. His trunk is flattened. His two arms form a horizontal line that, on the right, cuts the vertical sceptre and, on the left, bears a small horse. Under the left arm, a palm tree and three small traits that must correspond to a “trident”, right-pointed (?).

SM 3006; acquisition; this coin was probably found in Mleiha.

Billon; gr. 1 approximately; mm 9; h 6.

Probably same minting dies as Potts (1994) no. 369 and very close to Haerinck (1998) no. 129-130.

All the obols of this type mentioned by Potts (1994, p. 68 f.) and Haerinck (1998, p. 289) seemingly come from Mleiha and ed-Dour where they have been certainly minted. Potts (1994) still arranges this type in his wide *class* XLVII (p. 68 f.), probably because of its style, and especially the reverse one. But an important element makes this type different: on the reverse, the symbol of “trident” so characteristic is hardly sketched, as if it did not have any real meaning anymore.

GROUP VII

This group is formed of 6 obols slightly different from each other that, either because of their bad state or because of the particular fractures, are difficult to classify in precise series. They are thus described and commented one by one.

87 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: Shamash half-draped sitting on the left on a stool. His left arm is bended on the right and cut by sceptre made of a vertical line. We cannot see what he is holding with his right arm. On the right, vertically, a pseudo-inscription (?) and, on the left, an indistinct element (palm tree or palm leaf?).

SM 3057; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 894, context PIR.C).
AR; around 1 gr.; mm 10; adjustment impossible.

88 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: Shamash half-draped sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long sceptre made of a vertical line. We cannot see what he is holding with his right arm. In the left field, an indistinct element, perhaps a palm tree or palm leaf (?).

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; it seemingly comes from Mleiha.
AR; around 1 gr.; mm 11; adjustment impossible.

The reverse style of these two coins recalls the obols of group IV (no. **78-79** and Potts 1994, p. 54-55) where Shamash holds a rython, horse-shaped. On the contrary, the blank on the obverse, more characteristic of the North-Eastern Arabia coinages, is surprising. Nevertheless, we will attribute both these obols to the Oman Peninsula.

89 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: Shamash sitting on the left on a stool. With his left arm he holds a long vertical sceptre and with the right one, an eagle. On the left, a big palm tree. From the head of the figure two big horns seem to escape. In the lower part, a ground-line.

SM; seized by Sharjah police in 1994; it seemingly comes from Mleiha.
AR; around 1 gr.; mm 10,5; adjustment impossible.

This obol is issued from the same reverse minting die as Potts specimens no. 18 and 20 (1994, p. 24) and his no. 19 has a very close style to it. Potts specimens have been found in Ayn Jawan and Jabal Kenzan, in North-Eastern Arabia. The blank obverse and the eagle held by Shamash effectively approach to this region. Only the palm tree in front of Shamash recalls the Oman Peninsula. This region was often inspired by North-Eastern Arabia models

and, since exchanges seem to have been frequent, why shouldn't we imagine a contrary situation? Finally, what should we think of the two traits that come out of Shamash head? Are they "dots", as Potts think, or a minting accident?

90 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: very used. Shamash sitting on the right on a stool. He holds a sceptre of which we can only see the lower part and an eagle. Ground-line. In the front part, indistinct mark.

SM 3566; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 379, surface "hoard" AI).

AR; less than 1 gr.; mm 1,1; adjustment impossible.

This obol might be brought near to Potts no. 34 and 38 (1991, p. 27) both coming from Thaj. Even though this specimen has certainly been found in Mleiha, it must belong to the North-Eastern Arabia coinages.

91 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: very used. Shamash sitting on the right on a stool (?). The remaining representation is not clear.

SM 3568; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 381, surface "hoard" AI).

AR; less than 1 gr.; mm 10; adjustment impossible.

This obol is very badly preserved, the reverse representation seems rough and it is not even sure whether this is a sitting Shamash or not. We could also see an eagle on the left very coarsely represented. The attribution to North-Eastern Arabia is possible (?).

92 – Obverse: very used, few traits might let think of a Heracles head, on the right (?).

Reverse: very used. Shamash, whose one leg only is visible, is sitting on the right on a stool. The remaining representation is in a too bad condition or off of flan.

SM 3549; 1989 Mleiha excavation (m. 297, surface "hoard" AI).

AR; about 1 gr.; mm 10; h 2.

It is impossible to declare one's opinion about the origin of this obol.

GROUP VIII

93 – Obverse: smooth.

Reverse: Shamash (?) sitting on the left. With his left arm he holds something vertical, probably a sceptre. His right arm is directed to the left.

SM 4224; unknown provenance (acquisition ?).

Æ; gr. 1,11; mm 11; adjustment impossible; thick and chamfered edge; two big casting seams.

94 – Obverse: blank.

Reverse: same description as for the previous one but the representation is still more indistinct.

SM 4225; unknown provenance (acquisition?).

Æ; gr. 1,05; mm 10; adjustment impossible; thick and chamfered edge; two big casting seams.

These two coins, if they are coins, have been casted and not minted. They might have been manufactured in stone moulds of the same type like those that have been found in Mleiha excavations (see Boucharlat et Drieux *in* Potts 1991, p. 110 f.). But we will notice that they show a far rougher making than those from this mould.

The origin of these two coins is unknown but it is in Mleiha that we can find the only evidence of casted coins.

GROUP IX

95 – Obverse: smooth.

Reverse: smooth.

SM 4038; unknown provenance.

AR; about gr. 1; mm 9,5; flat edge.

This coin made of good silver has the module and the weight of an obol. Either it is a casted coin, which should have been minted later; or, for some reason, they put into circulation this additional small coin without taking the trouble to mint a representation on it. Potts (1994, no. 426) mentions another coin of this same type (0,84 gr.; 8 mm) that seemingly comes from Mleiha.

* * *

Before tackling the second part of this catalogue, we must complete the corpus of the coins from Eastern Arabia, with one curious imitation of an Athenian “owl” type, which seems to originally come from the Oman Peninsula.

96 – Obverse: Athena head on the right. Her helmet, which is not represented, is summarized by a sequence of small festoons/scallops forming a sort of crown. Low, other inverted festoons/scallops indicate the quiffs of the horse. Her nose is straight. The eye is indicated by two traits framing a dot and the mouth is made of two short traits. Finally, on the left, the ear is slightly sketched.

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Reverse: frontal owl. The eyes are circular with a big central dot. Low, the beak is indicated like a triangle with a central dot. On the head, the feathering is formed by vertical traits and on the body by some big dots. On the right, vertically, AΘE (the *aleph* looks like a sort of Δ). Finally, in the left field, two elongated lines correspond to the olive tree branch of the alexandrine prototypes.

SM 3081; acquisition; Senior (1994) 1.4 (referred to North-Eastern Arabia) and Huth (1998) no. 6; this same specimen.

AR ; gr. 16,27 ; mm 30; h 10 ; bended and minted flan.

This specimen, as well as some others recently published by Huth (1998, nos. 2-6) is believed to have been found in Mleiha. It is certainly a coin inspired by the famous Athenian "owl" tetradrachm for which we do know very numerous imitations in Palestine, Egypt and South Arabia (now Yemen). Nevertheless, this specimen shows a certain number of characters, which do exclude an attribution to these regions. Its extremely rough style and the apparent awkwardness clearly show that this coin was directly copied from an Athenian prototype, but that it is rather the copy of an imitation. We will notice, for instance, the absence of the helmet on Athena's head, which can be explained with the fact that this element, almost always off the flan in the traditional imitations, has not been understood by the engraver of the minting dies of this coin. Besides, the inscription and the olive tree branch on the reverse are as well deformed. Finally, the minting technique is absolutely curious on a silver bended flan, and it has very well analysed by Huth (1998).

Other "owl" coins of a different style have been found in Mleiha. One of them (Senior 1994, 1.1) has been studied by Sedov (1995) who attributes it to the Hadramawt kingdom and who dates it to the II century B.C. Therefore, since this period some contacts have existed between these two Arabian regions (Mouton 1997). Moreover, these contacts seem to have been maintained since the sites of Mleiha and ed-Dour have delivered some I century A.D. Hadramite coins (see here nos. **115** and **116** and Haerinck 1998a and b) and at least a coin from Mleiha with Alexander's types has been found in South Arabia (Potts 1994, p. 68).

And so, why shouldn't we suppose that very particular "owl" series originally came from Mleiha, considering that the only known specimens are believed to come from there? These coins with bended flans could have been minted there during a relatively short time that could be situated at the end of the II century B.C. finally, we will ascertain that its weight, gr. 16,27, is still very close to the Attic sample, that is about 17 gr.

There are other imitations of the "owl" type most probably coming from south Arabia, with no further specifications, until today. Three

specimens are mentioned by Nicolet-Pierre (1986, nos. 26-29). They can only have been minted by the obverse portraits where Athena has almost the same rough traits as the Heracles in some series to be referred to Mleiha and ed-Dour (see especially no. 28 in Nicolet-Pierre and the tetradrachms of the group XII in our catalogue or the *class* XLVII in Potts 1994). Without being able to say anything more at the present moment, we must anyway ascertain that this region's numismatics still saves many surprises for us.

THE FOREIGN COINS

This second part groups together 26 foreign coins from the North-East Arabia and the Oman Peninsula. We have assembled them by kingdoms and by regions and in some cases accompanied by a commentary. Just like for the Arabian coins, a certain number of coins here assembled have been already briefly described in Senior (1994) booklet. Besides, in two recent articles (1998 a and b) Haerinck presents some of them that he had the occasion of studying through photographs, before they were acquired by Sharjah Museum. These publications will be mentioned in our catalogue.

Roman Empire

AUGUSTUS (27 B.C. – 14 A.D.)

97 – Obverse: beaded line, Augustus naked head on the right. Low: AVGVSTVS.

Reverse: beaded line and on a ground-line. Standing Victory on the left pulling down a bull. In the upper part, on the left: ARMENIA, low: CAPTA.

Aureus minted in 19-18 B.C. in an eastern workshop (Pergamum? *BMC* I, no. 671 and *RIC* I, no. 2).

SM 4233; acquisition; Senior (1994) A13 and Haerinck (1998a) no. 1; this same specimen; this coin seemingly comes from Mleiha.

AV; gr. 7,80 ; mm 20; h 1.

The reverse alludes to Tiberius expedition to Armenia in order to put Tigrane II back to the throne. Apparently there are two issues for this rare coin. This one comes from the same obverse and reverse minting dies as Mazzini (1957) specimen no. 8 (= no. 256, in *Munzen und Medallien*, sell catalogue, 1964).

98 – Obverse: beaded line, CAESAR AVGVSTVS/DIVI PATER PATRIAE. Augustus Laureate head on the right.

Reverse: beaded line: C.L. CAESARES/AVGVSTI F COS (DESIG PRINC IVVEN) T, Caius and Lucius frontally standing and holding spears and bucklers.

Denarius minted in Lyon between 2 and 4 A.D. (*BMC I*, no. 519 f. and *RIC I*, no. 350).

SM 4230; acquisition; this coin was seemingly found in ed-Dour; Senior (1994) A14 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 15; this same specimen.

AR; gr. 3,84 ; mm 19; h 1.

TIBERIUS (14–37 A.D.)

99 – Obverse: beaded line, TI CAESAR DIVI/AVG F AVGVSTVS. Naked laureate head on the right.

Reverse: beaded line. PONTIF/MAXIM. The personification of Peace (Livia?) sitting on the right, carrying a sceptre and a palm tree.

Aureus minted in Lyon approximately 16 A.D. (*BMC I*, no. 30-31 and *RIC I*, no. 3).

SM 4229; acquisition; it might be Senior's specimen A15 (1994) given as a denarius (?); Haerinck (1998b) no. 16 publishes this same specimen as found in ed-Dour (?).

AV; gr. 7,56; mm 19,5; h 7.

100 – Obverse: beaded line, (TI CAE)SAR AVGVST.F.IMPERAT.IMP. Naked head on the right.

Reverse: beaded line. (PONT)IFEX.TRIBVN.POTESTATE X(II). In the field, S.C.

As minted under Augustus in Rome in 11-10 B.C. (*BMC I*, no. 271 and *RIC I*, no. 220).

SM 4228; acquisition; this coin was seemingly found in Sharjah; Senior (1994) A16 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 17 (ed-Dour ?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 10,42; mm 28; h 6.

The presence of four roman coins in this region might, at first sight, be explained with of the commerce between Rome, the Arab-Persian Gulf and, further, India. And yet, it seems now clear that the commercial circuits in this region were not in the hands of the Romans, but of different middlemen and, more particularly, of the Characenic kingdom, which owned its numery, several specimens of which by the way appear in this collection (see nos. **102** to **109**).

Among these four coins, two are particularly meaningful: Augustus denarius minted in Lyon with, on the reverse, Caius and Lucius Caesars (no. **98**) and Tiberius aureus, also this one minted in Lyon, with on the reverse, the personification of the Peace (Livia?)

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sitting (no. **99**). We will note *pro memoria* that another aureus of the same type was seemingly found in ed-Dour, as mentioned by Howgego and Potts (1992). Coins of these types were found in wide numbers in the hoards fled in India. Besides, the idea of coins that might have been used for commercial transactions all along the Arabian-Persian Gulf seems to be far more natural. This is Haerinck's hypothesis (1998a, p. 31) who proposes that these coins arrived in India through the Characian land. Nevertheless, we must recall two dots. On the one side, we only know a ridicule number of roman coins in the Gulf, in the north, that is Bahrain, as well as in Saudi Arabia and in the Emirates⁷. On the other side, recent researches about roman coins found in India (Mac Dowall 1990 and 1991) have clearly shown that the big quantities of currencies exported from Rome and to these regions passed through Egypt via Alexandria and harbours such as Myos Hormos and, from there, they directly reached India⁸. These coins were not meant to be used for commercial transactions, since they were simply sold as precious metal. The same way, our coins nos. **98** and **99** did not reach India during Augustus or Tiberius age, but only after 64 when the monetary reform of Nero demonetized them. Their metallic value became then more important than the nominal value of the new pieces minted in Rome; and also, they were casted or sold in big quantities in India simply as precious metal. The coins expedited with this purpose were mostly used and they were rapidly casted or hoarded up. Our two specimens are in a relatively good condition. Therefore, it is possible that an Arab or Indian trader used them for his transactions and spent them in ed-Dour or in his region, perhaps during a passage via Sohar (?), at the very end of the first century or, maybe, at the beginning of the second century⁹.

The coin no. **97** is a rare Augustus aureus perhaps coming from the workshop of Pergamum; nevertheless, its minting date, 19-18 B.C., shows that it belongs to the same series of coins demonetized under Nero, and it is almost sure that it followed the same itinerary followed by the other two.

Coin no. **100**, which is a Tiberius bronze as, is more interesting. In fact, these bronze coins with little value were not the object of

⁷ Other than the mentioned Tiberius aureus, Howgego and Potts (1992) simply indicate four small IV century bronze coins found in Saudi Arabia, and then unrelated to our purpose. Three small bronze coins from the Lower Empire (Constance II, Arcadius, and Honorius) were seemingly found in Bahrain and none in Kuwait.

⁸ A note of Portuguese Antonio Boccardo concerns a great number of Tiberius gold coins found in Sohar (Oman Sultanate) in 1601 (mentioned by Potts 1990, p. 292). We will talk later about this harbour situated on the route that linked the Red Sea to India.

⁹ Other objects found in the Gulf area, such as potteries and glasses, certainly followed the same path; about this subject, see Salles 1995.

trade. Nevertheless, it is probable that they passed through India as well, since several small unities of this type were found there under the form of isolated findings, along the principal commercial routes of the Country. It might then have belonged to an Arabian or Indian trader who might have lost it or spent it in the Oman Peninsula.

Nabataean Kingdom

ARETAS IV (9 B.C. – 40 A.D.)

101 – Obverse: beaded line, Aretas trunk draped and laureate on the right. Inscriptions on the left and on the right.

Reverse: beaded line, flanked trunks of Aretas and queen Shaqilat. Inscription on the left and on the right.

SM 4223; acquisition; Senior (1994) A8 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 12 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

AR; gr. 4,18 ; mm 13,5; h 12.

BMC, Arabia, no. 7 f.

This coin seemingly comes from ed-Dour where Haerinck (1998a) indicates other two specimens, both of Aretas IV. We know that an important commercial route existed connecting the Mediterranean (Gaza) and Arabia passing through Nabataea. Also the fact of finding few coins from this kingdom in the Gulf region is not surprising at all.

Kingdom of Characene

TIRAIOS II (ca 79/8-49-8 B.C.)?

102 – Obverse: traces of a bearded and diademed head, on the right.

Reverse: standing Victoria on the left. On the right, vertically: (BASILEOS). On the left, vertically: (TI)P(AIOY).

Unity, Spasinou Charax (?).

SM 4220; acquisition.

Æ; gr. 3,35 ; mm 17; h ?; chamfered edge; two casting seams .

Le Rider (1965) no. 420.

This coin is in bad condition; and also this attribution is not really sure.

ATTAMBELOS I (ca 46-27 B.C.)

103 – Obverse: bearded and diademed head, on the right. Undecipherable monogram in front of the head (?).

Reverse: Heracles sitting on the left. Above, undecipherable monogram. On the right, vertically: (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΟΣ)/(ΑΤ)ΤΑΜΒΗ(ΛΟΥ). On the left, vertically: (ΣΟΤ)ΗΡ(ΟΣ)/(ΚΑΙ)ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ). Exergue, unreadable date.

Tetradrachm, Spasinou Charax.

SM 4211; acquisition.

Æ; gr. 14; mm 27,5; h 12.

BMC, Arabia, p. 291; Le Rider (1959).

UNCERTAIN KINGS



104 – Obverse: traces of a bearded and diademed head, on the right.

Reverse: standing Victoria on the left, holding a crown. Over her arm, indistinct monogram triangularly shaped. On the left, vertically, the unreadable name of the king. On the right, vertically: (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΟΣ).

Unity, Spasinou Charax (?).

SM 4221; acquisition; Senior (1994) A5; this same specimen (attributed to Jordan) and Haerinck (1998a) no. 13 (attributed to South Arabia, Saba or Hadramawt); besides, he mentions that it seems to come from Mleiha.

Æ; gr. 3,24; mm 17; h 3; chamfered edge; two casting seams .

If the reverse monogram is  [like a N, where the left leg looks like having an A inserted in it: see symbol at corresponding page], then it is a coin of Tiraios II (ca 79/78-49/48 B.C.) of the same type as no. **102** (Le Rider 1965, no. 420). If the monogram is  [like a Δ, with a vertical central line and surmounted by a globule: see symbol at corresponding page], then it is a coin of Attambalos I (ca 46-27 B.C.; Le Rider 1965, p. 421).

105 – Obverse: diademed and bearded head, on the right.

Reverse: sitting Athena, on the left, leaning on a shield. On the right: ...)N(...?

Unity (?).

SM 4231; acquisition; Haerinck (1998a) no. 7 (Mleiha?); this same specimen.

Lead; gr. 2,46; mm 16; h ?.

According to Le Rider (1959, nos. 25-27) it might be Thionesios II (ca 46-47 A.D.). A label accompanying it, mentions that it come from ed-Dour (Mleiha according to Haerinck), that it is Abinerglos (ca. 13-21) and that the figure on the reverse should be Heracles.

ATTAMBELOS IV (ca 54/55-64/65)

106 – Obverse: beaded line. Diademed and beardless head, on the right.

Reverse: Heracles sitting on the left. Over his arm, the monogram: [see symbol at corresponding page]. Below: X. On the right, vertically: BAC(ILEOΣ)/ATTAMBH(ΛΟΥ). On the left, vertically: C W TH(POCKAI)/EY(EΠΓETOY). Exergue, date: ΤΞΖ.

Tetradrachm, Spasinou Charax.

SM 4210; acquisition ; Senior (1994) A10 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 2 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 15,31; mm 25; h 12.

BMC, Arabia, p. 296 f., nos. 1-4 (attributed to Attambelos III); Le Rider (1959, Attambelos IV).

The date 367 of the Seleucid age corresponds to 55/56 in our age.

107 – Obverse: beaded line. Diademed and bearded head, on the right. In front of the head, a palm tree.

Reverse: Heracles sitting on the left. Over his arm, the monogram: [see symbol at corresponding page]. Below: A. On the right, vertically: (B)AC(ILEOC)/ATTAMBH(ΛΟΥ). On the left, vertically: C W THP(OC)/KA(I EYEPΓETOY). Exergue, date: TO (?).

Tetradrachm, Spasinou Charax.

SM 4212; acquisition; Senior (1994) A11 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 3 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 17,74; mm 25; h 12.

BMC, Arabia, p. 297, no. 6 (Attambelos III, this type is missing). Le Rider (1959, Attambelos IV).

The date, partially preserved, is situated between 370 and 379 of the Seleucid age. But, considering the dates of his kingdom, it must be the period 58/59 to 63/64. Besides, the portrait with short beard seem to indicate a date closer to 58/59 than 63/64.

108 – Obverse: diademed and bearded head, on the right. In front of the head, indistinct symbol (star?).

Reverse: Heracles sitting on the left. Over his arm, the monogram: [see symbol at corresponding page]. Below: B. On the right, vertically: (B)AC(ILEOC)/ATTAMBH(ΛΟΥ). On the left, vertically: C W THP(O C)/ KA(I EYEPΓETOY). Exergue, date: TO(?).

Tetradrachm, Spasinou Charax.

SM 3103; acquisition; Haerinck (1998b) no. 4 (attributed to Attambelos VI, ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 16,07; mm 26; h 1.

BMC, Arabia, nos. 10-11 (Attambelos III); Le Rider (1965) no. 434 var. (Attambelos IV).

The attribution to Attambelos IV seems to be sure since the monogram on the reverse is the same as the one on the previous coins (nos. **106** and **107**). Nevertheless, the beard, here longer, might indicate a date closer to 63/64.

UNCERTAIN KING

109 – Obverse: traces of a diademed head, on the right.

Reverse: Athena sitting on the left, leaning on a shield.

Unity ?

SM 4227; acquisition; Haerinck (1998b, ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Lead; gr. 2,46; mm 16; h ?

According to Le Rider (1959, no. 21 f.), it is a coin of the I century A.D., perhaps of Attambalos IV.

Four Characean specimens are supposed to have been found in ed-Dour (nos. **106**, **107**, **108** and **109**), one in Mleiha (no. **104**) and a sixth one is referred to either site, according to the sources (no. **105**). Concerning the last two ones (nos. **102** and **103**), it is impossible to know where do they come from. Since ed-Dour archaeological excavations have delivered several other specimens and since only one was found in Mleiha, it is absolutely plausible that they all come from ed-Dour. Potts (1988) has published another six Characean coins coming from this site's excavations. Among them, five are readable and might belong to kings Attambelos III, IV and VI. All the coins of Characene attributable to ed-Dour would then cover a period of time starting with king Attambelos I (ca 46-27 B.C.) and ending with Attambelos VI (ca 104-106 A.D.) if we consider that the coin no. **102**, attributed to Tiraios II (ca 79-48 B.C.) is too uncertain.

We will not recall here the first plan role played by the Characean or Mesene kingdom as essential links in the trade between India and South Arabia on one side and the Seleucid kingdom, and later the Roman Empire on the other side. This role in the Gulf trade has gained in importance and, since its birth, we can ascertain a territorial growing of this kingdom. The island of Ikaros-Failaka (Kuwait) was under Characean domination since the kingdom of Hispaosines, its first king, because at the beginning he was satraps of the Eritrean sea, a satrapy from which Ikaros must have depended. On this island, like on the near islets of Akkaz and Umm el-Namel, few rare coins of Characea (among them, a bronze one of Hispaosines, Morkholm 1979, no. 9) have been found. Besides, in 131 A.D. a citizen of Palmyra named Yarhai is designated as satraps of Tylos-Bahrain under the reign of Meredate (Seyrig 1946, p. 197, no. 21 bis and Will 1992). But, it seems to be much earlier

that the kings of Mesene have taken control of the island, probably since the reign of Hyspaosines¹⁰. On the contrary, until now it does not exist any serious proof for assuring that this kingdom might have extended its authority beyond Bahrain, and the about fifteen coins found in ed-Dour or its neighbourhood can certainly not be considered as a proof.

The oldest coin unequivocally identified is the Attambelos I (no. **103**) one. The very numerous issues for this king show that his reign has been a period of great prosperity during which trade has certainly played a very relevant role. The most recent coins are those for Attambelos VI mentioned by Potts, which date back to 104-105 and to 105-106. Thionosios IV followed him, who submitted to Trajan during this latter expedition in Babylonia in 116. After the Romans retreat in 117, this Attambelos was replaced on the throne of Mesene by Meredate (Mithridate), who belongs to the Parthian royal family. This figure, identified since long time because of his coins, is now better known thanks to an inscription engraved on a Heracles bronze statue, discovered in Seleucia on the Tigris (Al-Salihi 1987 and Pennacchietti 1987).

Meredate's numismatics and this inscription from Seleucia have supported several hypotheses. The one asserted by Potts in 1988 seems to be particularly hazardous. On one side, he demonstrates that the site of ed-Dour might have been the harbour of Omana. On the other side, based on six Characean coins found on this site, on a rather uncertain reading of the legend of Meredate's coins and on the inscription from Seleucia, he has tried to show that this *emporion* was part of the Kingdom of Mesene.

In fact, as Bowersock (1989) and Bernard (1990) have very well demonstrated, in case Meredate was originally a member of the royal Parthian family, he did not reign as a Parthian sovereign and he was certainly not the kind of emperor of the Arab-Persian Gulf proposed by Potts: he was above all a Characean sovereign. Most of all this kingdom was a link in the trade between Rome and India and a too partho-philist politics would have swiftly ruined it. Like the inscription from Palmyra mentioning Yarhai – palmyrian and satraps of Tylos – shows, it is certain that Meredate had excellent relationships with this city. And, since Palmyra was totally depending on Rome, Meredate could only conduct a politics favourable to the Empire. Besides, these too friendly relations must have saddening the Parthian kings and caused Vologese I expedition in 152, followed by the disgrace of the king of Mesene.

¹⁰ An inscription of this sovereign has recently been found in Bahrain. It will be published by P.-L. Gatier, P. Lombard and al-Sindi in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 13, 1.

Back to the numismatics questions, we will first note that none of Meredate's coins was ever found in the Oman Peninsula: they all exclusively come from the region of Bassorah, which means from the immediate neighbourhood of Spasinou Carax and of Forat. About the very few Characean coins coming from ed-Dour or Mleiha, they integrate into a set of including numerous coins issued of the local coinage and many other foreign coins. Besides, the most recent Characean coins from ed-Dour are those of Attambelos VI who had ruled *ca* from 104 to 106, which means much before Trajan's expedition and the access of Meredate to the throne of Mesene. Therefore, nothing seems to indicate the submission of the Oman Peninsula and shows on the contrary that there was here an independent power. Finally, concerning the question ed-Dour/Omana, this is not the right moment to define it and we will examine it later.

Unknown Kingdom (Characene?)

BELLAIOS

110 – Obverse: heads jugate of the king and the queen.

Reverse: up and on two lines: (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ)/ΒΕΛΛΑΙ(ΟΥ). Below, prow of a vessel on the right. On the left, traces of a monogram. Below and on two lines: ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΙ(ΣΣΑ)/(...)ΠΑΤΡ(...)?

SM 4219; acquisition; Senior (1994) A3 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 5 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 3,72 ; h 10; bevelled edge, two casting seams .

Like some other coins from the Sharjah Museum, this one has been acquired from the English market where it has been identified by Senior (1994), as being an unpublished bronze coin of the I century B.C. from Sidon¹¹. Haerinck (1998b) proposes Characean origin. a second specimen, from a different minting die, is known since a long time and has been published by Hill (1928; p. 15 no. 41) who describes it as follows:

Bellaios and his Queen

Obv. – Heads jugate r. of a king, bearded (?), and a queen, both diademed.

Rev. – (Β)ΑΣΙΛΕ(ΩΣ)/ΒΕΛΛΑΙΟΥ above and ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣ.../... below the prow of a vessel to r. ; on l. uncertain symbol.

Æ; mm 16,5; gr. 3,89 ; h 5. Strongly bevelled edge.

¹¹ There are in Sidon some coins with jugate heads of towers-crowned Tyche and of Zeus with, on the reverse, a war vessel (*BMC, Phoenicia*, no. 137 f.). nevertheless, they have no relation with this specimen.

The following one is his commentary: "The strongly bevelled edge recalls Seleucid influence. A Mesopotamian source seems hardly likely in view of maritime type of the reverse. The coin is reproduced here in the hope that someone else may be able to throw light on it".

A third specimen, still unpublished, has been discovered in Failaka (Kuwait), the ancient Ikaros (inv. of the Kuwait Museum no. 1790). Its identification is certain, but its bad condition does not add any new element except for being, also this one, of different minting dies. Finally, Haerinck (1998b, no. 20) publishes a bronze found in ed-Dour on which reverse represents a vessel prow that is pretty close to the one of the Failaka specimen. This coin is in a very bad condition, but an attribution to Bellaios seems likely.

In his book *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Tarn (1985, p. 484), referring to the coin of the British Museum, proposes to place Bellaios on the throne of a small kingdom of Carmania on the river Amanis. Its capital city, a good harbour on the Ormuz Gulf, would have been Harmozia-Omana. We can note that Tarn locates Omana on the eastern side of the Arabo-Persian Gulf, whilst Potts (1988) identifies it with ed-Dour on the opposite shore. Bellaios may have reigned in this region after the death of Antiochos IV in 164 B.C. The only arguments put forward by Tarn in order to attribute this coin (that he qualifies as "lost coin") to the Carmania are, on the one hand, its Seleucid style and, on the other hand, the probable Macedonian origin of the king's name (see p. 484, note 3). These arguments seem too light for supporting a hypothesis that Altheim has already refused (1947-1948; p. 44, note 99).

In 1995, in an article about a hoard of Nisibe, Seyrig (p. 108) published an unknown coin bearing the legend BEAI or BEΛΛ. He noticed that this coin of Nisibe could not be ever compared to the British Museum one. Nevertheless, his commentary about the latter is worth being quoted: "This small bronze coin first seemed to be Mesopotamian to its editor, with good reason according to us, but he was afraid to follow this impression because of the vessel galley. What if it was for a king of the Persian Gulf?". I can only share this hypothesis.

It is perhaps still too early for answering Hill's wish while throwing light upon this coin. Nevertheless, the apparition of new specimens allows to partially complete Hill's description and to propose, even though with some more reservations, few research directions.

This coin's edge, thick, bevelled with two casting seams, is manifestly very close to the Seleucid coins of the II or I century B.C. and it is certainly in a close region or in a region influenced by this kingdom that we must search for its origin.

The galley prow appearing on the reverse manifestly alludes to the sea; therefore, it is from a region close to or on the seaside that this coin must

come. On the upper part of the prow we notice four small elements cross-shaped with two horizontal branches (there are only three on Hill's specimen and none on the coin from Ikaros?). Maybe they are rowlocks made for fixing the oars? Anyway they would be over-dimensioned compared to the prow ones. This detail does apparently never appear on the coins representing vessels prows. Nevertheless, there is one exception on a bronze from Apodakos of Characene, which shows on the reverse a prow absolutely of the same type and moreover with the same disproportioned "rowlocks" (Le Rider 1959, p. 233, no. 5 and 1965, no. 411).

Let's now go back the obverse. On our specimen the queen's head is hardly visible, as well as the king's beard; these elements are far clearer on the British Museum coin. On the contrary, the king's coiffure is well visible on our specimen. He wears the *taenia* and, from behind, his hair, pretty long, fall down on his nape as paralleled quiffs. Also here it is tempting to make a comparison with the Characean coins that show some bearded portraits with similar coiffures, referable to the I century B.C., for instance under Tiraios II or Attambelos I.

In order to finish, the queen's name appearing on the reverse is partially readable only on this specimen. Haerinck (1998b) reads, based on photos: ...)AMATP(... . Personally, I read: ...)ПАТР(... , therefore a name like Cleopatra (?)¹².

Haerinck (1998b) has proposed to see here a Characean issue. Without making a declaration, I would also be tempted, with some reservations of course, by such an attribution, at the same time underlining the fact that there are still many gaps in the chronology of the first Characean kings.

Parthia Kingdom

PHRAATES II (139/8-138/7 B.C.)

111 – Obverse: beaded line, diademed head on the right (partially off the flan).

Reverse: erased.

Unit (?), Susa.

SM 4222; acquisition; Haerinck (1998a) no. 14; this same specimen (Mleiha?);

Æ; gr. 4; mm 17; h ?; bevelled edge; big casting seam .

Le Rider (1965) nos. 98-100 (see also the hoard no. 7 p. 349-350).

¹² The few visible letters on the Failaka specimen seem to confirm this hypothesis.

Haerinck considers this coin as being a new type from south Arabia (sabean or hadramite). Even though it is in a bad condition, we believe this coin should be more likely attributed to the Parthia kingdom. In fact, the head on the obverse and moreover the shape of the edge and of the casting seams match better with this attribution.

UNCERTAIN KING (beginning of the I century A.D.)

112 – Obverse: bearded bust of the king, diademed and wearing a tiara, on the left. Before the forehead, a crescent.

Reverse: Arsace sitting on the right and holding a bow. Around him, an inscription like: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ/ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ/ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΟΣ/ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΟΣ/ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ/ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΟΣ/ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ.

Drachm, Susa.

SM 4216; acquisition; Senior (1994) A18 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 11 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ (probably originally silvered); gr. 3,61; mm 17; h 12.

Le Rider (1965) no. 219 f.

No. 219 of Le Rider is the closest specimen to this coin. it corresponds to a period dated between *ca* 4 to 22 A.D. and it might be ascribed to kings Orodes III, Vorones I or Artaban II.

Kingdoms or cities under Parthian domination

PERSIDE: AUTOPHRADATES I (*ca* 80 B.C.)

113 – Obverse: diademed bust on the right. Perhaps, a crescent in the right field.

Reverse: fire altar surmounted by winged Ahuramazda. On the left, the king standing and, on the right, insignia surmounted by a bird. Below, Aramaic inscription.

Obol.

SM 3098; acquisition; Haerinck (1998b) no. 8 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

AR (weakened); gr. 0,60; mm 9; h 12.

BMC, Arabia, pl. XXXII, 3-4. Mitchinier (1978), same type as drachm no. 741.

Haerinck (1998b, no. 9 and 10) also reports two obols of Artaxerxes II (second half of the I century A.D.), found in ed-Dour archaeological excavations.

SELEUCIA ON THE TIGRIS (municipal issue under the Parthians)

114 – Obverse: head of the Tyche of the city on the right.

Reverse: CEΛE(YKEIAΣTHC)ΠPOCTIΓPI. Tyche towers-crowned sitting on the right on a circular seat and holding a palm tree. At her feet, the Tigris half-length swimming on the right. In the field: OΣ.

SM 4214; acquisition; Senior (1994) A1 and Haerinck (1998a) no. 3 (Mleiha?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 2, 62; mm 19; h 3; bevelled edge.

Le Rider, *Suse*, no. 329.

The date OΣ corresponds to the year 270 of the Seleucid era, that is 42-41 B.C., which menas to the last years of Orodes II kingdom (ca 58-38 B.C.).

Kingdom of Hadramawt

115 – Obverse: radiating head on the right.

Reverse: winged caduceus. On the left, monogram (out of flong) and, on the left, three south-Arabic letters.

SM 4220; acquisition; Senior (1994) A7 (ascribed to Ascalon) and Haerinck (1998b) no. 7 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 3,35; mm 13; h 10.

Sedov and 'Aydarus (1995), type 2, p. 171.

Sedov and 'Aydarus (1995) have studied an important series of coins of this type found in Shabwa (Yemen). With reference to the stratigraphic data given by the archaeological excavation of Bi'r 'Ali/Qana, they are cautiously dated between beginning of I and end of IV centuries A.D. They rightly propose to see in these types some imitations of roman provincial coins of the beginning of the imperial period, still mentioning that it is difficult to find a precise parallel. Actually, there is an issue of bronzes minted under Augustus (27 B.C.-14 A.D.) in Ascalona, Palestine, which show on the obverse a head on the right and on the reverse a caduceus (*BMC, Palestine*, no. 39-40 and *RPC* no 4874). Without being able to assure that this is the prototype of the coins of Hadramawt, the parallel seems absolutely likely and would allow to better precise the date of these series: the I century A.D.

116 – Obverse: radiating head on the left or on the right (?).

Reverse: bull on the right, unreadable south-Arabic inscription.

SM 4213; acquisition; Senior (1994) A6; this same specimen (ascribed to Jordan) and Haerinck (1998) no. 11 (Mleiha?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 4,12; mm 18; h 3; broken edge.

Sedov and 'Aydarus (1995), type 5, p. 23 f.

The date of this coin must be the same like that of the previous one. Haerinck's nos. 9 and 10 (1998a) are of the same type and must come from Mleiha. We will also remember that Sedov (1995, no. 2) has published a bronze, which is also supposed to come from Mleiha, of a different type but still belonging to the same series, and presenting, on the obverse, a head, on the right, and on the reverse an eagle with open wings (see Sedov and 'Aydarus 1995, type 3, p. 19 f.). Finally, Haerinck (1998b, no. 6) reports a bronze of the same type as no. **116**, which was apparently found in ed-Dour excavations.

Indo-Greek Kingdoms

APOLLODOTOS II (ca 110-80 B.C.)

117 – Obverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΑΠΟΛΛΟΔΟΤΟΥ. Diademed head on the right.

Reverse: kharosti legend: "*Maharajasa Tratarasa apaladatusa*" (of king Apollodatos the Saver). Pallas standing on the left. In the field, monogram.

Drachm of Indian weight, Taxila.

SM 4235; acquisition; Senior (1994) A20 and Haerinck (1998a) no. 16 (Mleiha?); this same specimen.

AR; gr. 3; mm 16,5; h 12; pierced.

Bopearachchi (1991), Series 1, nos. 13-14, p. 347. Mitchinier (1978), no. 2050-2051.

The fact that this coin is pierced shows that tardily it has been used for adorning a set of jewellery.

India

Independent KINGS (or SATRAPS) KSHAHARATAS

ABHIRAKA (or AUBHIRAKA, end of I century B.C.)

118 – Obverse: Greek legend: ...)ΑΡΑΤΟΥΣΑΤΡΑ (ΠΟΥ... Standing Victory on the right, holding a palm tree and a crown.

Reverse: Brahman inscription like: "*Khaharatasa Khatrapasa Jayatasa (Abhira)kasa*". Two insignia (?), one surmounted by a lion (on the left), the other one by a wheel (on the right).

Coin minted in Saurashtra.

SM 4215; acquisition; Senior (1994) A21 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 23 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 6,6; mm 21; h 1.

Mitchinier (1978), no. 2681 (ascribed to Aghudaka ca 78-ca 90).

In his label, Senior (1994) corrects the name Aghudaka with Aubhiraka (or Abhiraka) who probably was the first satraps Kshaharata of Saurashtra. Haerinck (1998b, no. 23) mentions, about this specimen, a personal communication from Senior who announcing that, on another coin of the same type, he can read the Greek name: AYBIPAKIOY and in Brahman: "Abhirakasa".

BHUMAKA (beginning of I century A.D.)

119 – Obverse: arrow and lightning surrounded by a Brahman legend, here unreadable, like: "*Khshaharata Kshatarapasa Bhumaka*".

Reverse: insignia (?), representing a lion and a wheel, surrounded by a kharoshthi legend like: "*Charatasa Chatrapusa Bhumaka*".

Coin minted in Saurashtra.

SM 4217; acquisition; Senior (1994) A23 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 24 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 3,48; mm 19; h 1; broken edge.

Mitchinier (1975-76), no. 1250; Bopearachchi and Pieper (1998), no. 1, p. 139.

Bhumaka is the successor of the previous king, Abhiraka.

IMITATION OF THE MAURYA COINAGE

120 – Obverse: five countermarks.

Reverse: one countermark.

"Punchmark".

SM 4226; acquisition; Senior (1994) A19 and Haerinck (1998b) no. 21 (ed-Dour?); this same specimen.

Æ; gr. 3; rectangular edge 11 x 10 mm.

Hardaker (1974), p. 33, D2.

Others

121 – Obverse: the Caliph frontally standing, Arabic inscription.

Reverse: degenerate crown on three degrees, Arabic inscription.

Forgery minted in Amman, end of the VII century.

SM 3096; acquisition.

Æ; gr. 3; mm 17; h 3.

This Islamic coin is out of our research purpose.

84

122 – Bronze flan, irregularly shaped and apparently not bearing any representation. Is it a coin?

SM 3276; 1990 Mleiha archaeological excavations (m. 1515, PIR. A).
Æ; oval “coin”, max. mm 19; g. 7.

A CLASSIFICATION OF THE COINAGES OF THE OMAN PENINSULA (Mleiha and ed-Dour)

The catalogue of the pre-Islamic Arabian coins in the Sharjah collection consists of 95 entries. The largest group comprises the coins that we have attributed to the Peninsula of Oman: 80 specimens (44 tetradrachms out of 47, 21 drachms out of 21 and 15 obols out of 27). The remaining 12 coins probably come from neighbouring regions, particularly north-eastern Arabia. 43 coins were found during regular excavations in Mleiha by the French archaeological mission in Sharjah. However, although the find spots are certain, only 6 of them are from a real stratigraphic context. To these are added 2 more specimens found during the excavation carried out by the Museum of Sharjah in Mleiha. 13 coins were confiscated during a seizure by the Sharjah police in 1994; apparently they came from Mleiha. The remaining coins, as mentioned before, come from the market and although we have some information about them (Senior 1994; Haerinck 1998), exact provenance is not known.

A first attempt at a chronology of the Mleiha site has been proposed by M. Mouton in his thesis on the Peninsula of Oman. He dated it from 250 B.C. to 350 A.D. (see also Boucharlat and Mouton 1991). Later excavations enabled him to improve on this dating (Mouton 1999), separating the period that interests us into four main periods which he calls PIR ("Pre-Islamique Recent"):

- PIR. A (Mouton 1999, period II): second half of the 3rd c. B.C. to middle of 2nd c. B.C.
- PIR. B (Mouton 1999, period III A): middle of 2nd B.C. to 1st c. B.C.
- PIR. C (Mouton 1999, period III B): 1st c. to 2nd c. A.D.
- PIR. D (Mouton 1999, period IV): 3rd c. to 4th c. A.D.

As mentioned above, among the coins found during the excavations of Mleiha only 6 have an exact stratigraphic context. Period PIR. A is represented by obol no.**76** (m. 1474). For Period PIR. B no specimens were found. Obol no. **87** (m. 894) corresponds to Period PIR. C. Finally, for period PIR. D there are 4 tetradrachms: no. **11** (m.2308), no.**12** (m. 1961), no.**16** (m.2195) and no.**47** (m.2196).

Thus the information from the stratigraphy is very limited, based on only six specimens. Nevertheless, by taking these coins as a reference it will be possible to establish connections through which a preliminary classification can be proposed for a portion of the coins attributable to this region.

All the other finds at this site were surface finds. Such is the case for what the excavators called "hoard AI", which consists of several coins gathered over a few square meters in section AI. The homogeneity of this "collection" seems to suggest that it was in fact a hoard that was scattered afterwards.

This chronological classification proposed for the coins of the Oman Peninsula should be considered a tentative one. In fact, the lack of data from the excavations demands prudence, and the stylistic criteria, usually not sufficient in themselves, are perhaps used too often. Three large series are distinguished, which appear to correspond to three periods of the chronology established by the excavators:

- The "early series" = PIR. A
- The "middle series" = PIR. B
- The "late series" = PIR. C

We shall see that certain details seem to indicate that the "late series" continued for some time into Period PIR. D.

THE EARLY SERIES

The coin found in the earliest level (PIR. A), dated to the end of the 3rd c. B.C.-middle of the 2nd c. B.C., is a good-quality silver obol (catalogue no.76). The model copied to was still very close to the Alexander prototypes or even to the "Alexanders" of early type, because the legs of the figure on the reverse are parallel. Too much importance should not be given to such details because, as Le Rider (1986) has remarked, the Alexander-type coins circulated for a long time in the Seleucid Empire, as well as in neighbouring regions.

Still, it is interesting to see that this obol could have been copied directly from an original coin of Alexander type, or at least from an imitation of excellent quality, which is quite rare. In the Sharjah collection, there is a drachm (no. **48**) which seems to have been copied, with great skill, from an Alexander model. Like the above obol, this drachm has an Aramaic character (*aleph*) on the reverse, but it also has the Greek name ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ in full letters. Could this drachm indicate the source

of inspiration for these "early series"? It is difficult to say because this drachm, a unique specimen at the present time, is of unknown provenance.

Before dealing with the question of the Aramaic inscription on the reverse of coin no. **76**, an important question that involves nearly all the coins found in Mleiha, it seems advisable to re-examine the other coins that might belong to the same series. First, it should be noted that the specimens that we are going to group together have already been so classified by Potts (1994, *class S2*, p. 43-45), but we consider that some of the specimens he included in this group (nos. 187 and 189) probably do not belong to it. Next, we wish to recall that all these coins show, on the obverse, the head of Heracles facing right and wearing the lion pelt, and on the reverse, a seated human figure facing left, holding a sceptre and an eagle. The figure is beardless and probably represents the Arab deity, Shamash.

A second obol (no. **77**) found on the surface by the excavators in Mleiha (m. 1980) comes from the same obverse and reverse dies as no. **76**. To these can be added two obols mentioned by Potts (199) which also came from Mleiha. The first one (no. 188, p.44-45) comes from the same obverse die as ours. The second one (no. 273, p.57) is of a very similar style, but was surprisingly, included in another group¹³. The four examples of this type of obol all come from Mleiha (two were found during regular excavations), which seems to confirm that they belong to the coinage of this site.

Among the drachms, no. **49** has a skilfully executed obverse and a reverse of poorer quality, but still rather similar, showing Shamash with parallel legs and holding an eagle¹⁴. A second specimen from very similar dies, no. **50**, has been found in Mleiha. A third drachm, no. **51**, different in style but not too dissimilar from the above, should be included in this series. Besides these, there are five specimens, from the same or closely related dies, mentioned by Potts (1994, nos. 185 and 186) and by Haerinck (1998, nos. 6, 8 and 9) all of which, with one exception, are presumed to come from Mleiha.

Lastly, there are the tetradrachms: no. **5**, which has already been published by Haerinck (1999, no. 1), is presumed to come from Mleiha¹⁵, as well as the four other specimens whose photos he published (nos. 2-5). Potts (1994) mentions four (nos. 181-184), made from identical or closely related dies; these too apparently came

¹³ Potts places it in his *class II* in which the figure is supposed to be holding a horse protome. In the photo (p. 57) it is clearly an eagle which he is holding.

¹⁴ We have seen (p.46) that drachm no.49 presents, according to Haerinck (1999, no.9), a countermark in the form of a trident, which in our opinion never existed. It is uncertain that the find site of this coin was ed-Dur, as it was collected illegally. It could also have been found at Mleiha and brought to ed-Dur much later.

¹⁵ Some of these specimens have been registered in the collection of the American Numismatic Society at New York. I would like to again cordially thank C. Arnold-Biucchi for sending me casts.

from Mleiha. Here again, the reverse presents Shamash with parallel legs and holding an eagle.

Thus, for the "late series", which should be dated to the end of the 3rd c. B.C. or beginning of the 2nd c. B.C., we have examples of the three denominations. The tetradrachms, including those mentioned by Potts and Haerinck, have an average weight of 14.75 g, the drachms 4.25 g and the obols about 0.49 g. The Attic standard (ideal weight slightly above 17 g), adopted for the coinages under Alexander's name, was still more or less maintained in this region, in spite of the distance that separated it from the area where the prototypes circulated.

The adjustments of the dies in the five coins at the Sharjah Museum are all placed at 9 h. Concerning Potts' specimens, the four tetradrachms have orientations close to 9 h (200 to 270°), one of the drachms is just at 6 h (180°), but the other is at 9 h (250°). Obol nO.188 is at 9 h (250°). The only exception is Potts' obol no. 273 (1994) at 220°. Such regularity in the orientations of the dies is probably not fortuitous and should confirm the homogeneity of this series¹⁶.

Except for specimen no. 9 of Haerinck (1999), which was apparently found at ed-Dour (see note 13), all these coins come or are presumed to come from Mleiha. From a chronological point of view, this distribution confirms the early date attributed to this series, because during Period PIR. A (middle of the 3rd c. B.C.-middle of the 2nd c. B.C.) the site of ed-Dour was not yet occupied. It would only start developing in Period PIR. C, at the beginning of the Christian era.

All coins in this series have, on the reverse, either an Aramaic inscription or a few Aramaic characters. The most complete inscription is found on the tetradrachms (here no.5) where one can read: *'by'l br tbgl'n* or *bgl'n*: "Abi 'el son of *bgl'n*" (Maraqten 1996). The name of the father has been studied without any conclusive results so far. On the drachms only the name of Abi 'el shows (nos. **50** and **51**) or just an *aleph*, the first letter of his name (no. **49**). On the obols (nos. **76** and **77**), only the two first letters of the name appear. Maraqten (1996) considers it a mixture of cursive and lapidary characters; could it be a local form of writing? In any case, the undeniable homogeneity of this "early series" and the presence of the name or part of the name of Abi 'el point to the fact that a ruler with this name existed in Mleiha at the end of the 3rd c. or at the beginning of the 2nd c. B.C.

¹⁶ We do not know the adjustments of the coins cited by Haerinck (1999), who worked only from photographs.

Thus the "early series" of Mleiha could well be among the first pre-Islamic Arabian coinages in the Gulf which appear during the second half of the 3rd c. B.C. Brought to mind are those coinages which can be attributed to Ikaros-Failaka (Kuwait), Tylos-Bahrain or to the coast of present day Saudi Arabia where there was, in particular, the important trade city of Gerrha (Arnold-Biucchi ILJLI). These different coinages always imitated those of Alexander, which circulated throughout the Seleucid empire (Le Rider ILJX6). I have attempted elsewhere (Callot 1990 and 1994) to demonstrate that this flourishing of coinages corresponds to a period of decline of Seleucid power. Such a decline would have encouraged local rulers to mint their own currency, without abandoning the monetary types in use by the Seleucids, since these must have been the value of reference for them. Did the same thing happen in the Peninsula of Oman? Considering that most of the first Arabian coinages of the Gulf seem to be concentrated in its north-western regions, the evidence of similar coinages in a more distant region seems surprising. This fact, however, can be better understood if we consider that the sphere of influence of the Seleucids stretched over a larger area than appears to us now. Small local kingdoms, even distant ones like Mleiha, would be willing to strike their own coinages and try to be fully part of the exchange routes of eastern Arabia. However, as in northeast Arabia, this "early series" had a limited and much localised production, in view of the fact that all known specimens come exclusively from Mleiha. Thus, we would consider the striking of these coinages to be a show of prestige, an expression of independence and power by the local rulers, rather than as the production of a currency for international exchange. This coinage, strongly influenced by those of the Seleucids, would have been issued as of the middle of the 3rd c. B.C. and probably up to the beginning of the 2nd c. B.C. For this same period, the only foreign coins found in the Peninsula of Oman are a few "Arabian" specimens. There are in particular the silver obols showing the vertical *shin* on the reverse (group II. no. **72** sq.) or an eagle (group T, no. **69** sq.). All this seems to indicate that the commercial routes were essentially held by the Arabs, and that for foreign trade, seemingly more important than it appears, these coinages were not really necessary.

Many of these first "Arabian" coinages seem to vanish suddenly at the end of the 3rd c. B.C., when the Seleucids, especially Antiochos III, regained their power and attempted to again control the commercial routes of the Gulf. This could have been the case for the Mleiha coinage, although the Oman Peninsula appears more isolated to us. In fact, the coinages that appear after the "early series", which we are going to examine presently, do not seem to be a simple continuation of the first series,

but rather to come from a different source of inspiration, even though they are still imitations of Alexander prototypes.

* * *

However, before going on to the next series, we must mention certain coins of the "owl" type, struck on folded silver flans (see here nO.96). By comparing these with those of southern Arabia (Yemen), we had proposed dating them to the 2nd c. B.C., to a period when the minting of Alexander-type coins seems to have stopped in [his region. A still fragile hypothesis could explain these coin issues: during the 2nd c. B.C., a region such as the Peninsula of Oman, being relatively distant from the areas controlled or influenced by the Seleucids, could have had closer contact with the south Arabian kingdoms for a certain time and could have imitated their main currency, the "owl" currency, itself an imitation of the Athenian one that circulated in that region (Sedov 1995). Later, following the rise of the kingdom Characene under Hyspaosines, and the other "states" of NE Arabia, it reverted to the earlier currency and again imitated the Alexander types. But these new coinages are no longer faithful copies of "Alexanders", but rather much more freely inspired copies.

THE MIDDLE SERIES

We shall now examine several coins or groups of coins which, because of certain details in their representations, are forerunners of the later coinages that we call "late series", and which represent the majority of the coins in this collection, as well as of those published by Potts and Haerinck. These "middle series" present a number of consistent features that lend a true homogeneity and identity to the coinages of this region.

These elements are always found on the reverse of the coins. First of all, there is the representation of a rhyton shaped as a horse protome, held by a sitting figure. This rhyton will later become the image of a small horse. Next, there is the representation of a small palm tree on the field, which is gradually simplified to become a palm leaf. Finally, an Aramaic inscription is written behind the figure, always the name of Abi'el. On some series, this inscription is perfectly readable, on others it consists of a few characters that indicate the name, but in a degenerated form. The coins where these different features appear constitute what we call the "middle series".

The collection at the Sharjah Museum includes only a few coins attributable to these "middle series". It is thus necessary to seek other examples in the publications by Potts (1991 and 1994) which contain more examples. Moreover, very few coins were found in regular excavations, so that certain propositions will have only a conjectural value.

Tetradrachm no. **6** from the Mleiha excavation shows on the obverse the head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a lion, whose open jaw takes the shape of a large horn. This transformation results from the fact that the engraver did not copy directly from an Alexander model, but rather from imitations of it. On the reverse, the seated figure facing left, Shamash, is half-draped, with his legs crossed. He holds a vertical sceptre in his left hand and on his right a rhyton in the shape of a horse protome. A small stylized palm tree is on the field to the left. To the right of the figure, an Aramaic inscription presents the name of Abi'el son of... This tetradrachm can be compared to an obol (no. **78**) which also comes from the Mleiha excavations. In spite of the representations being sketchy because of the smaller unit, it shows all the features of tetradrachm no. **6**: rhyton, palm tree, inscription...

In his *class II*, Potts (1994. p. 53 sq.) examines 59 coins and in the enclosed map of spatial distribution they number 145. He calls this series "Abi'el coinage with horse protol11e". In fact, all the coins in his series show. on the reverse. a silting Shamash facing left and holding a rhyton in the shape of a horse protome on his outstretched right arm. Behind him, an Aramaic inscription, more or less complete and often clumsily engraved, presents the name of Abi'el. Finally, on all specimens there is a small stylized palm tree in front of the figure. Among the 59 coins that he describes, 51 were apparently found in Mleiha but none of them at ed-Dour. Even if the whole series presents undeniably common characteristics in regard to the representations featured on the coins, it also presents so many differences in execution that it is hard to see them as a homogeneous group. Some coins are skilfully made, such as those of group 1 (drachms nos. 217-219 and obol no. 220), even those of group 2 (obols nos. 220-229). Several others, although they present identical representations, are much coarser¹⁷.

We shall mainly examine the coins of Potts' group 1 and 2, which are technically and stylistically the same type as our two coins of the Sharjah collection (no. **6** and no. **78**). All these coins most certainly belong to the same issues as the 77 tetradrachms among the 310 that are part of

¹⁷ We also have reservations concerning obols no. 234-239 which all come from Jabal Kenzan or Hofuf in North-eastern Arabia. They constitute a distinct series foreign to the Oman Peninsula.

the Bahrain hoard (Mørkholm 1972; Callot 1994). These tetradrachms present on the obverse the same head of Heracles, and on the reverse, Shamash holding in his right hand, a rhyton in the shape of a horse protome. On the field, to the left, there is again the small stylized palm tree above marks such as Aramaic (*shin* or *alif*) or South-Arabic (*alif*) letters, or a small bull head. Finally, to the right of the figure, an Aramaic inscription presents the name of Abi 'el son of *Tlbs* or *Tlsll* (Unvala 1935; Dussaud 1936; Teixidor 1970). All these coins are made of good quality silver and their weight-between 16 and 17 g – shows that the Attic standard of the Alexander coins was still maintained. Besides the specimens in the Bahrain hoard, we know some other ten tetradrachms of this type¹⁸, of which two are datable from their archaeological context: hoard no. 5 of Susa, which was buried at the end of the 2nd c. B.C. (Le Rider 1965, no. 498, 1 and 2).

Like us, several researchers agree in attributing this coinage to north-eastern Arabia, particularly the coast of Saudi Arabia, opposite to the island of Bahrain¹⁹. On the other hand, Potts (1994, p. 53), followed by Haerinck (1999), attributes these coins to the Oman Peninsula²⁰.

In 1994, I proposed that the whole Bahrain hoard should be dated to the end of the 3rd c. B.C. This proposition was based on the most important of the two series of coins hoarded there, made up of about 230 tetradrachms, faithful copies of Alexander prototypes. These coins were struck about 220-215 on Seleucid flans dating from the beginning of the reign of Antiochos III. This series, often called "of the vertical *shill*", as well as that "of the horizontal *shin*", attributed to Ikaros-Failaka (Callot 1990 and 1994; Arnold-Biucchi 1991), belong to the first pre-Islamic Arabian coinages minted during the second half of the 3rd c. B.C., when the power of the Seleucids weakened in the Gulf. Thus these tetradrachms correspond to the "early series" that disappeared with the forceful return of Seleucid power at the end of the 3rd c. B.C.

Coming back to the second series of the Bahrain hoard, the one bearing the name of Abi 'el, if we consider that the whole of this find consists of coins issued at the end of the 3rd c. B.C., it would mean that at this point in time there were two separate coinages which imitated Alexander prototypes and were minted with the name of a certain Abi'el. The first one, in the Oman Peninsula, is still very close to the Greek prototypes and constitutes what we have called "the early series"

¹⁸ Some examples have appeared on the market in the recent years.

¹⁹ Recently even Arnold-Biucchi (1991) has proposed attributing them to Gerrha.

²⁰ The hypotheses which follow partly disrupt the classifications which I had previously proposed (Callot 1990 and 1994). I am grateful to Potts who had already suggested most of them.

of Mleiha. The second one, whose origin seems to be northeast Arabia (Gerrha?), exclusively consists of much more freely inspired imitations, probably copied from other pseudo-Alexanders. There are too many differences, both in their execution and in their representations, between these two coinages, to attribute them to the same ruler. There is also the name of the father, presented in the inscription on the reverse, which is different in the two series. We could then suppose that two Abi'els existed, ruling two separate regions: the one of the "early series" in the Oman Peninsula, and that of the Bahrain hoard ruling in north-eastern Arabia. Such a proposition is not satisfactory either. In fact, the coins of the Bahrain hoard have too many features that link them with issues whose origin is undeniably the region of Mleiha.

Consequently, we propose a second hypothesis, which is supported by several points: the tetradrachms with the name of Abi 'el son of *Tlbs* or *Tlsll'* in the Bahrain hoard could also belong to a coinage of a ruler of Mleiha, but are of a later date than the "early series", issued by Abi'el son of *Tbgl'n*²¹. This raises the question of the date when the Bahrain hoard was buried. It is difficult to change the date of the issues with the "vertical *shin*", which appear to date from the end of the 3rd c. B.C. On the other hand, nothing prevents the attribution of the coins with the Abi'el name to a later date. In hoard no. 5 of Susa, buried in the second half of the 2nd c. B.C. (Le Rider 1965) there are also coins of these two types (nos. 495 and 498). The Bahrain hoard could have been buried at about the same time, which would bring the date of the issues with the name of Abi'el son of *Tlbs* or *Tlsll'* to the middle of the 2nd c. B.C.²²

After the above digression, we shall now see how these series fit in with the coinages of the Peninsula of Oman.

We have seen how the issues of the "early series", probably prestige coinages issued in limited numbers, were minted with the name of a first ruler called Abi 'el who, in order to introduce his currency into the monetary system in use in the Gulf at the time, imitated rather closely the Alexander prototypes, replacing just the name of the Macedonian with his own. Though we cannot state it as a fact, it seems that this first minting of Alexander types stopped at the end of the 3rd c. B.C., as occurred in other parts of

²¹ Potts' study (1990 and 1994) certainly suggests this, but his catalogue barely touches on questions of chronology. Haerinck (1999) also proposes this but he does not differentiate between the coins of the "early series" and those of Bahrain, which according to their style and inspiration are certainly later.

²² This is the date already proposed by Robin (1974).

the Gulf. This is how we interpret the sudden appearance of the "owl" coins, which were imitations of south Arabian coinages and could have been in use for only a few decades. The same fact would explain the Abi 'el coins identical to the ones in the Bahrain hoard, which, although they still are imitations of Alexander types, are rather free copies of other imitations. Some of the features that now appear on these coins—rhyton, palm tree, inscription—are completely foreign to the Alexander types and give this new coinage its own identity.

We know nothing about this second Abi 'el. Was he a ruler who actually existed or is this a symbolic name, such as the ones found in the Arsacids, for example! The mention of two different fathers – the names for the father are different in the two series – could indicate that there were in fact two different rulers with the same name, possibly related. The second Abi'el would have reigned sometime during the second half of the 2nd c. B.C. (Period PIR. B) and his coinages have provided us with examples of tetradrachms, drachms and obols, all in silver and conforming to the Attic standard. Apart from the tetradrachms hoarded at Tylos-Bahrain, the coins of this ruler which were found or presumed to have been found in Mleiha consist of barely twenty specimens. Like the "early series", this was probably a currency minted in small quantities, more as a local prestige coinage than for purposes of foreign trade. However, this is an assumption made with certain reservations, because tetradrachms of this type were hoarded in distant places, such as Bahrain and Susa.

We now return to *class II* of Potts (p. 53 sq.). After the coins discussed above, there is a long series of obols with the same features, but of mediocre quality (no. 230 sq.); they are all presumed to come from Mleiha²³. The main difference with the Abi'el coins described above is the inscription on the reverse, which is written in illegible characters or is just a row or strokes and dots.

The Sharjah collection has also an obol of this type (no. **79**), whose exact provenance is unfortunately unknown. It could, however, come from the same obverse and reverse dies as some of Potts' specimens (nos. 230-233). Tetradrachm no. **7**, found at Mleiha during the excavation by the Museum of Sharjah in 1994, is for the moment a unique specimen, and like the above obol could be the result of a certain barbarization of the coinages of our second Abi'el.

²³ Except for nos. 234-239 which have another origin (see note 17).

These issues of mediocre quality no longer correspond to the second Abi'el's coinage, but rather to a prolongation after his time. The coins, always showing the same features – rhyton and palm tree – had become a fixed type and the name of Abi 'el a symbolic name. These coinages, apparently not abundant and of mediocre quality, were minted throughout the 1st c. B.C.

The very end of the 1st c. B.C. marked the beginning of a new period characterized, from the point of view of the monetary finds, by the foreign coins that appear not only in Mleiha, but now also in ed-Dour. However, the largest number of finds on both sites remains on the whole local issues which belong to a new and very abundant coinage. This period, named PIR. C by the archaeologists, dates to the 1st and 2nd c. A.D. and to it belong the "late series" that we shall examine next.

THE LATE SERIES

Period PIR. C., to which the "late series" are attributed, is marked by the appearance of a new feature that will appear on all coins from now on: it is a symbol, that we have called "the trident". As we have stated in the catalogue (see tetradrachm no. 5), the meaning of this symbol remains hypothetical. We have refuted the interpretation of Potts, who considers it as a barbarization of the Seleucid anchor. Other comparisons can be made with representations seen on coins such as, for example, the contemporary coins of Elymais, or the monogram of Greek origin HE or IHE, with the H joined to the E. Whatever the meaning of this symbol or monogram, which we call a "trident", it apparently becomes a sort of emblem of Mleiha and ed-Dour. In fact, it appears not only on all the coins, but also on other objects, such as the stone found in Mleiha in 1999, where it is skillfully carved.

The sudden appearance of this "trident" mark, which might be the sign of a political and economic change in the Oman Peninsula, is illustrated by numerous coin series. In the collection of the Sharjah Museum, of the 80 coins attributable to coinages of the Oman Peninsula, 67 coins belong to the "late series". The same proportion exists, or is even higher, in the work of Potts (1991 and 1994) and of Haerinck (1998). Simultaneously, something new happens: a large number of the coins of these series come from ed-Dour,

which proves that, as from the end of the 1st c. B.C. (Period PIR. C), this site begins developing and its position becomes increasingly important in the history of this region²⁴. This is illustrated by the monetary finds of the Belgian archaeological mission in ed-Dour, and by the illegal collections from the site (Potts 1994; Haerincx 1998). Moreover, an important number of coins, foreign to this region, have been found on these two sites. First, there are pre-Islamic Arabian coins of the Alexander type, attributable to northeast Arabia, especially obols. But mainly there are dated and datable coins, contemporary with Period PIR. C (1st and 2nd c. A.D.), and coming from distant regions. The origins of these coins correspond to a route which runs from the Characene in the north, to the Hadramawt and India in the south, via the Oman Peninsula. Therefore, there is no doubt that this sudden increase in the volume of money at Mleiha and ed-Dour during Period PIR. C is related to commercial growth in the Gulf, in which the Oman Peninsula must have played an important part.

We shall now examine these "late series" in more detail. As a whole, they retain the same types as the "early" and the "middle" series, that is, the Alexander types with all sorts of variations due to the fact that they are no longer direct copies. The result is that the representations become increasingly stylized after so much copying, one after the other, plus the fabrication techniques were possibly different. The Attic standard, adopted by Alexander, continues to be more or less maintained, as the tetradrachms, often quite worn, seldom weigh less than 14 to 15 g. However, there is a marked debasement of the metal employed, particularly the silver content which decreases rapidly.

The data supplied by the archaeological research are not yet sufficient to allow an accurate classification of these "late series". Nevertheless, it IS possible to group them, based essentially on stylistic criteria. In the catalogue, these coins have already been divided into different groups, often according to their style. These groups form four separate categories (A, B, C and D) which correspond to a sequence in time. With the material and the data available, it is possible to put forward some propositions which must, however, be verified, confirmed or corrected by future archaeological discoveries.

²⁴ There exist other chronological elements which confirm this, such as glass objects.

Category A

This first category includes coins on which, In spite of the presence of the "trident" symbol, the sitting figure on the reverse still holds a rhyton shaped as a horse proto me, of the same type as that of the "middle series"; this must be the oldest category. It is illustrated here by the following examples: one tetradrachm (no. **8**), two drachms (nos. **52** and **53**) and four obols (nos. **80**, **81**, **82** and **83**). These coins correspond to *class* S4 and S5 of Potts (1994) which includes several specimens of a style very close to ours. Potts' specimens, except for one, are all presumed to have come from Mleiha²⁵. Among the seven specimens at the Sharjah Museum, four apparently came from this site too (drachm no. **52**, obols nos. **80**, **81** and **83**).

The single tetradrachm (no. **8**) has a rather curious reverse. The figure on the reverse is of good quality and style, quite close to the Greek prototypes, which sets it apart from the other products of this period. Among the specimens presented by Potts (1994), some are of comparable quality (no. 279) and others are of much coarser execution. However, apart from the question of style, all tetradrachms have the same representations: rhyton, palm tree and from now on, the "trident" symbol. The name of Abi 'el, in Aramaic characters, also appears on them, without the name of his father. On the specimens of good craftsmanship (here no. **8** and Potts' no. 279) the name is perfectly legible (Maraqten 1996, p. 305), but on the others it is already much altered. As regards the drachms and the obols, they are all of rather mediocre style and the inscription is either incomplete (no. **52**) or simply absent (no. **53**). Finally, on the obols, the head of Heracles on the obverse is exactly the same as that of the "middle series" (see Potts 1994, p.54-55) and the reverse is not different, except for the added "trident" symbol.

Do these stylistic differences indicate that there were two separate coinages, one of them having a new source of inspiration? Or could they simply be the result of a development in the coinages, where the name of Abi'el had become eponymous, a relic? The coins of category A would then be a more or less hybrid transition series, issued at the end of Period PIR. B (?) or at the beginning of Period PIR. C, when, accompanied by a certain stylistic degeneration, the types were gradually fixed, until they become set features in the categories which followed.

As far as the "trident" symbol is concerned, Potts (1994) proposes two series (S4 and S5), divided according to the trident's position: pointing upward or pointing downward. No particular importance should be attached to this detail;

²⁵ No. 304, an obol of the same type found at Jabal kenzan (?).

since it appears in so many different positions, only its presence seems to have a real significance.

In addition, none of the coins in this category comes or is thought to come from ed-Dour, which would mean that this site had not yet attained the place it would later have in the economy of this region. This seems to be further evidence that these types should be attributed to the end of Period PIR. B (end of the 1st c. B.C.) or, at the latest, to the beginning of Period PIR. C (beginning of the 1st c. A.D.). This conclusion contradicts the hypothesis proposed by Haerinck (1998, p. 288) that the "trident" could be a mark or symbol of ed-Dour, while the palm tree would be that of Mleiha.

Category B

This second category is characterized by the small horse that appears on the outstretched arm of the figure on the reverse, which apparently corresponds to a new interpretation of the rhyton shaped as a horse protome that appeared in the previous series.

This transformation is illustrated here by only one tetradrachm (no. **9**), found during an excavation of Mleiha (m. 1563). On the reverse of this coin the arm of Shamash is unfortunately off the flan. However, specimens which are clearly of the same type, even from the same dies, are part of hoard I from ed-Dour (Potts 1991, p.97 sq. nos. 490-503). Seen distinctly on these is the gradual lengthening of the rhyton until little hind legs are represented (see, particularly, nos. 494, 495 and 503). Apart from this novelty, this type presents the characteristic features of the "late series": the stylized palm tree to the left, the "trident" symbol, placed here beneath the arm of the figure, and to the right, the name or Abi 'el, which has become no more than a pseudo-inscription²⁶. The weight, over 16 g (the same in Potts' specimens) is still quite close to the Attic standard. With regard to the quality of the metal, the silver content is much reduced. This type, with its tentative representations, could like the previous type (category A) mark the transition between the "middle series" and the "late series". We have seen that, besides our specimen (no. **9**), this type is included in Hoard I from ed-Dour (Potts 1991, p. 97 f.). The other coins in this hoard all belong to the same series, of which we have here an example: tetradrachm no.**3**, which was cut intentionally, probably to make one drachm. We have seen that these coins, blank on the obverse, have several features on the reverse

²⁶ On two examples of categories B and C, Puech (1998) was able to read *lby*, Labî (= lion). Even if this reading is possible, I remain convinced that this is only the corrupted name of Abi'el.

- eagle, monogram, Greek inscription²⁷ – and, above all, the South-Arabic vertical *shin* – which connect them with coinages of north-eastern Arabia. Other coins of this type were apparently found in Mleiha and ed-Dour (Potts 1991, p. 94 f.; Haerinck 1998, nos. 35-36). Besides, we know imitations of this type (here no. **4**; Potts 1991 no. 489; Haerinck 1998 no. 40) that were probably minted in the Oman Peninsula (?). These coins, both prototypes and imitations, probably circulated at the beginning of Period PIR. C. They could have made up for a certain lack of currency between the disappearance of the coinages of the second Abi'el (end of the "middle series" and of category A), and the appearance of the first issues belonging completely to the "late series".

It is worth noting that coins of this category B, as well as north-eastern coins and their imitations, were found on the site of ed-Dour. From this time onward ed-Dour seems to have assumed its own place in the economy of the region, and this could explain the need for an increase in currency.

* * *

The two following categories, C and D, pose some serious classification problems and illustrate the uncertain results so far obtained from the study of these coinages. If we follow stylistic criteria only, the order to be adopted is the one we shall propose. On the other hand, some questions concerning fabrication techniques as well as stratigraphic data supplied by the excavations²⁸ could reverse this order. Consequently, in the following description the order in which these two categories are examined has, for the moment, little chronological value. Nevertheless, we are reasonably certain that all monetary types discussed date from Period PIR. C (1st – 2nd c. A.D.).

Category C

This third category has been sub-divided into three types consisting of tetradrachms (groups VIII and IX of the catalogue) and drachms (group III) that present many common features, both from the point of view of their representations and of the style of the coins in general.

The first type is illustrated here by 4 tetradrachms (group VIII. Nos. **10-13**) of which 2 examples (no. **10** and no. **13**) undoubtedly come from Mleiha. They correspond to *class* XLVIII a and b of Potts (1991 and 1994). This series seems

²⁷ Something like ...ΝΔΙΟΥΣ... could be read. It is, as Potts presumes (1991, p. 95), a deformation of ΑΛΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ?

²⁸ Not to mention the physical and chemical analyses or the coins themselves which would have been worthwhile to have carried out.

to be particularly homogeneous and die connections are frequent between coins. It contains several issues and so must have been rather abundant. Potts (1994 p.74) mentions 31 examples at ed-Dour and 8 examples at Mleiha²⁹ in his spatial distribution maps.

It is strange that these coins, although their representations have already become rather stylized, are stylistically and technically of higher quality than many of the previous ones. Were there intermediate varieties or did the die engraving and the striking techniques improve? It is difficult to answer this question for the moment.

This series presents some new details that are worth mentioning. First, although the head of Heracles on the obverse, is still facing right as in the Alexander prototypes, the figure on the reverse often faces right (see here nos. **12** and **13**). Perhaps it is simply a problem in the engraving of the dies, to which we should not attach too much importance, as certain die connections would suggest³⁰. This indicates, however, that fidelity to the Alexander types, although still present, was not completely respected, for the simple reason that the original models had disappeared by this time. Apart from the question of the representations, this series has a homogeneity that can only be related to a real organization of monetary production. In fact, the representations on the reverse are systematically positioned in the same way, whether the figure faces left or right: stylized palm tree to the left (or to the right), horse right (or left) on the outstretched arm of Shamash, "trident" symbol pointing upward and placed behind the figure; and the pseudo-inscription of Abi 'el's name vertically on the right (or left) side. To the above was added a sign in the shape of a Greek Λ , always placed under the right (or left) arm of the figure. Several examples mentioned by Potts (1994, *class XLVIII b*, p. 75) show that some of these issues with the Λ mark also have another mark, made of three parallel strokes behind the head of the figure or behind the stool. It seems that this second sign only appears on the coins where the seated figure is facing right. Does this imply a deliberate intention to characterize a particular group? It is not certain, because there are issues with the figure facing right, where this sign does not appear (see here nos. **12** and **13**). It is still difficult to propose an explanation of the different signs, except that they are a marked characteristic of the issues of this type, thus proving that in Mleiha and ed-Dour

²⁹ See also Haerinck (1998), no. 164-179. Several coins of this type have also appeared on the market in recent years.

³⁰ The no. **10** on which Shamash is seated to the left is from the same obverse die as no. **13** where he is seated to the right.

there was certainly an administrative structure to control monetary production. The average weight of the coins of this type (Sharjah Museum and Potts) is 15.39 g. which remains close to the Attic standard. With regard to the metal, we should speak of bronze rather than billon (Potts)³¹.

Before we proceed to the next type, we must briefly mention a small series of coins that is not represented in the collection of Sharjah. Potts mentions six specimens, tetradrachms and drachms, that seem to have come from Mleiha and ed-Dour (1994, p. 76). To these Haerinck adds ten more that were found during the Belgian excavation of ed-Dour (1998, p. 298-299). Although they are somewhat coarser technically, these coins present the same sort of features as the above type: - Heracles facing right, Shamash facing left or right, the horse, the palm tree, the "trident" behind Shamash and the deformed name of *Abi el*. On some specimens the three strokes behind the head of the figure can also be seen. However, an object of conical shape replaces the sign Λ ; neither Potts, nor Haerinck nor we could find an explanation for it.

The second type consists of drachms only, of which the Museum of Sharjah owns five specimens (group III, nos. **54** to **59**); two of these specimens come from the excavations of Mleiha (m. 1891 and m. 2313). They correspond to *class* XLIV of Potts (1994, p.62 f.)³², made up of coins apparently coming from Mleiha (19 specimens) and from ed-Dour (6 specimens). Haerinck (1998) also mentions several examples (nos. 77-85) with the same provenance.

As we have seen in the catalogue, notwithstanding some variations, this is a homogeneous series with numerous die connections. On the reverse, the coins present certain common features: Shamash is always seated facing left and the "trident" is systematically in front of him. On the majority of the specimens one can see, behind Shamash two small parallel strokes (see here nos. **54-56**) which could be a distinct mark. However there are some variations; on some coins, instead of the small strokes there is a vertical line of four dots (here nos. **58** and **59**) and on one of Potts' specimens (1994, no. 326) $\chi\Lambda$ vertically inscribed can be seen.

In their style, these coins are quite close to the previous type (tetradrachms with an Λ), without being in any way replicas of smaller size. This is also true in the case of two tetradrachms (Potts 1994, no. 309; Haerinck 1998, no.86) which are even closer in style because the "trident" symbol

³¹ Potts (1991, no. 478) also mentions a drachm (2.99 g) belonging to the series with the Λ on which Shamash on the reverse is seated facing right. It appears to be unique at the present time.

³² Drachms no. 308 and 312 and obols nos. 313-316, which Potts places in his group are more likely to belong to later series (see below category D).

appears, as it does here, in front of Shamash on the reverse. The average weight (Sharjah and Potts) is 3.60 g, below the Attic standard but still acceptable. As regards the quality of the metal, the silver content is clearly higher than in the tetradrachms of the first type.

The excavations of Mleiha have brought to light three stone moulds (Boucharlat and Drieux 1991) for making coins or at least coin-shaped objects. Potts states (1994, p. 163) that two drachms of this type (nos. 322 and 323) both come from the same obverse mould (!)³³. However, he is sure that all the other coins of this type have been struck with dies, as shown by the cracks due to splits caused by faulty striking or by coins struck off centre but coming from the same die.

Thus, even if these drachms and the two apparently related tetradrachms are not part of the same issues as the coins of the previous type, they appear to be contemporary, both stylistically technically, but so far it has not been possible to classify them more precisely.

The third type is represented here by 7 tetradrachms (group IX, nos. **14** to **20**), 6 being from the excavations of Mleiha. They correspond to Potts' *class* XLVII b (1991, no. **14** seems to come from the same obverse die as his no. 410) and XV (1994, no. **18** comes from the same reverse die as his no. 332). As demonstrated by the many die connections and numerous issues, this series is homogeneous and minted in large quantity. On his spatial distribution map, Potts (1994, p. 65) presents 72 specimens at ed-Dour and surrounding area (small neighbouring islands) and 11 specimens at Mleiha. Haerinck (1998) presents 10 more³⁴.

The coins of this type undoubtedly recall those of the two previous types. However, both stylistically and technically, they show a certain weakness that could be a sign of debased coinage. On the obverse, the head of Heracles has lost the strength it has in the previous types and some of his depictions (here no. **18**) are forerunners of the representations in category D. The reverse, however, retains the same design: Shamash seated facing left (nos. **14** and **15**) or right (nos. **16** to **20**), the horse, the palm tree, the "trident" symbol in front of the figure and a very deformed name of Abi'el. On some of the specimens presented by Potts, the three small parallel strokes can also be seen, behind Shamash; do they still have a real meaning? All features become increasingly stylized: the palm tree becomes

³³ Potts probably meant to refer to a die. The off-centring of the representation could not occur in the case of a mould. Also, the reverse sides of these two coins come from the same die and are off-centred.

³⁴ Not to mention those found in the Belgian excavation.

a palm frond, and the arms of the figure lengthen out of proportion, particularly the arm holding the horse, which is clearly perpendicular to the body, as it appears in the next category.

The weight decreases (average weight slightly over 14 g) and is now farther from the reference, the Attic standard. As for the metal, we should call it bronze rather than billon (Potts). But one of our specimens (no. **14**), which seems to be bronze, still shows some traces of silver coating.

In conclusion, the coins of this third type seem to be clearly inspired by the previous types, but they are certainly of later date and form the transition between categories C and D.

For this type the question of moulding becomes more apparent than for the previous type. A mould fragment was found in the excavation of the fort at Mleiha, apparently designed for the production of coin-shaped objects. This mould corresponds to two reverse sides of a similar type, whose diameters (24 to 25 mm) and representations are nearly identical to the reverse sides of the coins in this series. Thus it should be asked whether coins were fabricated by mould casting in the Oman Peninsula. In his 1994 publication, Senior states categorically that all the coins in this area were struck³⁵. It is true that in this series there are coins that have clearly been hammer struck. That is the case for Potts' specimens (1991) no. 399 or (1994) nos. 329 and 335, where the edge has a kind of ridge, proof that a die has been pressed into the flan. The obverse of these coins bears a head of Heracles stylistically close to the first type (group VIII, nos. 10 to 13), particularly in the depiction of the lion pelt, rendered in several parallel zigzag lines (Potts 1994, nos. 327, 329 etc. and here no. **18**, a very worn specimen). But other coins show, on the obverse, a rather different head: the modeling is poor, the profile awkward and the lion pelt consists of messy undulating lines (here nos. **14** to **17**). All this could suggest mould-cast coins. However, on a large number of the coins presented by Potts certain obverse-reverse relations make such an assumption improbable, because we would have to accept that the same obverse mould was used with several reverse moulds. Moreover, we have found no traces of any casting seams that could be seen on the moulds found in Mleiha. Thus the technique here is striking. This leads us to consider that all the coins of this series have been struck. Even so, we cannot exclude the possibility of the use of moulds, or an attempt at using them, until the necessary analyses have been carried out.

³⁵ He wrote this very clearly: "**ALL** these coins are STRUCK and not cast".

Category D

This last category includes a large number of coins which are quite varied in type and thus difficult to classify. In the Sharjah collection, 26 tetradrachms (out of 44), 9 drachms (out of 21) and 2 obols (out of 15) belong to this category. Potts also put them together into a single category (1994, *class XLVII*, p. 68 f.) and presents 95 specimens that apparently came from Mleiha (56) and ed-Dour (39). Haerinck adds 56 coins (1998) which seem to have come from the same sites³⁶.

In his publication in 1994, Potts attempted to propose a classification of all these coin issues, based mainly on the many dots that appear on the reverse of the coins. On many of these there are dots behind the figure, under the stool, on Shamash himself and on other spots on the field. As stated in the catalogue, it is difficult to follow such a classification, because the dots are merely decorative elements. Thus the groups we have designated here should not be considered a classification, considering the number of variations in these series. They simply allow us to demonstrate, in each group, the gradual stylization of the representations.

Whatever their types and variations, all these coins carry the representations that characterize the "late series".

On the obverse, the head of Heracles wearing the lion pelt always faces right. The pelt is treated in various ways, from parallel zigzag lines to chevrons and, in some specimens, consists simply of irregular strokes. The jaw of the lion, which much earlier had already become a sort of horn, now takes the shape of an empty crescent that frames the ear of Heracles, often bearing a globule at each end. The face is depicted in so many different ways that it is not possible to describe all the variations. We shall only mention the series corresponding to our group XII (nos. **28** to **43**) where Heracles has a straight but flattened nose that gives him a somewhat negroid face, typical of this category. In many specimens, there is a dot on the cheek, which has already been noted (see p. 35).

On the reverse, the sitting Shamash effigy always faces left³⁷. His face, shaped like a beak, is made with two strokes, one for the nose and one for the chin. His headdress often takes the shape that Potts (1994, p. 68)

³⁶ Certain examples or Haerinck are today in the Sharjah collection. Several other coins belonging to this category have appeared on the market in recent years.

³⁷ On an obol mentioned by Haerinck (1998, no. 131) Shamash is seated facing right.

compares to that of North American Indians; it may be an attempt to depict a radiating headdress, which would be suitable for this solar deity. The left arm, holding a long vertical sceptre, becomes increasingly stylized. On three tetradrachms of group X (nos. **21-24**), Shamash has a bent left arm and holds the sceptre. On no. **22** of the same group, the arm is bent at a right angle but does not hold the sceptre. In the next groups (XI and XII), this arm has become just a line perpendicular to the trunk of the figure, and the sceptre another line, this one vertical, which on its lower part becomes one with the right leg of the stool. The right arm is also perpendicular to the body and is an extension of the left arm. The trunk of Shamash is systematically made of two parallel lines, often with one or two dots on the flattened part. The drape, when it is there at all, is made of small lines under the thighs of the figure. The legs are simple lines and are always crossed. The cross-bar stool is decorated with globules which suggest decorated wood and the vertical sceptre going down into the right leg of the stool makes it look like a straight-backed throne. The little horse on the right arm of Shamash is also stylized. On the coins of group X, particularly on nos. **21** to **23**, the horse representation is still clear, but on the following groups it is just a rather shapeless quadruped that could be taken for any other animal (gazelle, dog, etc.)³⁸. The "trident" symbol is always there, under the right arm of Shamash, pointing right. In the previous categories, this symbol is preceded by a vertical line (IHE) which no longer exists here, being probably forgotten. In front of the figure, the palm tree now resembles a simple palm frond. On many tetradrachms some Aramaic characters of Abi'el's name can be recognized on the right (Potts 1994, p. 68), but it appears obvious that it is no longer a real inscription. In any case, in the majority of the drachms and obols, this "inscription" is no more than a few confused lines. Finally we must note the numerous dots, the purpose of which is apparently to nil in the rather empty field of the reverse sides.

A series of coins of this category deserves to be considered separately. It is illustrated by tetradrachms (group XIII, nos. **44-46**) and by drachms (group V, nos. **66-68**) in the Sharjah collection, and by the lots published by Potts (1994, nos. 396-402) and Haerinck (1998, nos. 155-163). Besides all the features that characterize this category, the coins of this series bear a new symbol that does not exist in previous coinages. This new symbol is always on the reverse, above the left arm of Shamash, on his back and under the stool³⁹. It has the shape of an A with its horizontal line

³⁸ Salles (1980) refers to a gazelle or an ibex, rather than a horse.

³⁹ On one of the examples of Haerinck (1998, no 163) it is placed between the legs of Shamash and the left leg of the stool.

broken, surmounted by a loop. On several specimens, this symbol is flanked by a shaft, either on its left Or on its right side; on one specimen it is flanked by two shafts. Haerinck (1998, fig. 1 and 2) published two objects round in ed-Dour – a potsherd and a lead bar (ingot?) – with very similar monograms and rightly raises the question as to whether this could be a symbol of ed-Dour. Several hypotheses can be put forward. This symbol, which is round on other objects, may have been used to identify the mints of one of the two sites, more probably ed-Dour, as Haerinck suggests. If so, why does it appear in so few specimens? It may also correspond to the mark of some local monetary or political authority, such as a ruler wishing to identify himself with this symbol. Here too the number of coins seems rather small, compared to the amount of coins of the same type that do not bear such a symbol. Finally, could it be a whim of the engravers, who "borrowed" an existing monogram and used it as an element of decoration? This last assumption is supported by the varied forms of this monogram on the different coins⁴⁰.

In conclusion, as far as the "late series" are concerned, we have seen that categories A and B. of which there are only a few specimens, represent in fact a transition between the "middle series" and the "late" ones. The large quantity of coins in categories C and D show that these series constitute the bulk of the coinages in the "late series". The "early series" correspond to Period PIR. A and the "middle series" to Period PIR, B. Consequently, the "late series" should be attributed to the periods which follow, Periods PIR. C and PIR. D.

The archaeological levels of Period PIR. C. have produced a quantity of imported objects and numerous coins foreign to the Oman Peninsula. The Sharjah collection contains 24 specimens (nos. **97** to **120**) from various origins, and Haerinck published other examples (1998 a and b); they all date to a period running from the end of the 1st c. B.C. to the 2nd c. A.D. The majority of these foreign coins apparently comes from ed-Dour, which was not occupied until Period PIR. C. It is also from this site that the greater part of the "late series" apparently came (categories C and D), found either during the excavations or in the market. In our opinion, this confirms the dating of these coin groups to Period PIR. C., that is, the 1st and 2nd c. A.D.

We shall now propose a possible chronological order for the different types of categories C and D.

⁴⁰ We have seen (p. 44) that it exists some similar monograms on the Characenic coinage.

In category C, the first type (C 1, tetradrachms of group VIII, nos. **10** to **13**), as well as the second type (C2, drachms of group III, nos. **54** to **59**), are both evidence, stylistically and technically, of a prosperous period, during which the monetary production was of good quality and was perhaps centrally organized, as some marks on the reverse sides seem to indicate. The third type (C3) comes from a very large production of tetradrachms (group IX, nos. **14** to **20**) of clearly inferior quality, even if the silver coating somewhat concealed it; they were certainly inspired by the previous types (C 1, C2).

We have seen that the coins of this third type (C1) raised a problem concerning fabrication, as the excavations of Mleiha produced a fragment of the mould 01' a reverse side, stylistically very close to this type. This mould was found in the fort of Mleiha, and dated by the excavators to Period PIR. D (2nd to 4th c. A.D.). Moreover, three coins of this series were also found during the excavation in a PIR. D level (nos. **15**, **16** and **20**). This would mean that the coins of category C, which are definitely related stylistically, were of a later date than those of category D. Such a premise seems difficult to accept and is contradicted by the archaeology. In fact, several tetradrachms of this third type (C3) have been found at ed-Dour during regular excavations, together with coins of category D and mainly with coins foreign to the peninsula. What can we conclude from these facts? The three tetradrachms found in a PIR. D level could certainly have circulated for a long time after they were minted. To be noted in this context are the coins corresponding to what the excavators called "hoard A1" which could well be a deposit from Period PIR. D. However, this hoard consists only of category D coins, dating from Period PIR. C. As to the mould, several questions may be asked: was there a late attempt (PIR. D) to cast coins inspired by earlier models (PIR. C, category 3)? Was the purpose of this attempt to cast coins or to make coin-shaped objects? And lastly, were these moulds made during Period PIR.D or were they moulds from an earlier period which were kept in the fort of Mleiha?

The last category of these "late series", category D, corresponds to the largest monetary production in this region. Considering the increasing stylization of the representations, it was evident that the coins of this category had to come after category C. This is also confirmed by the archaeological context, particularly at ed-Dour where they were found in large quantities. This confirms the dating of all the coins of category D to Period PIR. C., and probably even to the beginning of Period PIR. D.

There are in fact some coins where the stylization goes farther than even in those of category D. On obol

no. **86** the head of Heracles is represented by just a few lines and, on the reverse, Shamash has a nearly geometrical shape. On this obol, and on others of the same type (Potts 1994, no. 376; Haerinck 1998, nos. 128-131), the "trident" symbol consists of a few strokes, as if it had lost any real meaning. These coins are perhaps examples of the last coinages of this region and their date could be as late as the beginning of Period PIR. D. However, the representations never become as abstract as those on the coins of northeast Arabia, first issued at the beginning of the Christian era (here tetradrachms of group I, nos. **1** and **2**; Potts 1994, p.21 f.; Haerinck 1998, nos. 28-30).

CONCLUSIONS

Mouton (1999) describes Mleiha at the time of Period PIR. A (3rd c.–middle of 2nd c. B.C.) as a large site occupied by dwellings made of light materials, covering an area of about a square mile. The population, of nomad origin, rapidly became sedentary, as demonstrated by the sometimes monumental tombs found in the cemeteries. The archaeological finds, particularly in these tombs, show clearly that the population already played a role in the trans-Arabian commercial routes connecting the Seleucid Empire with southern and eastern Arabia: Rhodian amphoras, Mesopotamian pottery, eastern Mediterranean glass, south-Arabian alabaster. The trade by caravan naturally established contacts between the population of the Oman Peninsula and other communities or states who used coins in commerce; these contacts would have led the leaders in Mleiha to mint their own currency. Generally the coinages called "Pre-Islamic Arabian" consisted of silver coins inspired by the currency of Alexander the Great, which was accepted and circulated throughout the Seleucid kingdom (Le Rider 1986). Linked as it was to the legend of the Macedonian conqueror, such currency had become a reference in all eastern Arabia. These Arabian coinages included three denominations: tetradrachm, drachm and obol, and always respected the Attic standard adopted by Alexander, according to which the tetradrachm weighed slightly more than 17 g.

Towards the middle of the 3rd c. B.C., the power of the Seleucids over the regions they controlled in the north or the Gulf became weak. The local rulers or powers took advantage of this situation and started minting their own currencies, imitating the Alexander prototypes (Ikaros–Failaka, Tylos–Bahrain, Thaj–Gerrha, etc.). This was also the case in areas farther away, such as Mleiha, which had regular contacts with the northern regions. Thus, the first coins attributable to the Peninsula of Oman were Alexander types,

minted by a certain Abi'e'l, who could well have been the local ruler at the time. This is the coinage – consisting of tetradrachms, drachms and obols of Attic standard– that we have classified as the "early series".

We only know a few coins belonging to this series⁴¹, 1 and all the known examples come exclusively from the site of Mleiha. This coinage was minted in small quantities, for purposes of local exchange. Among the obols that were found or presumed to have been found in Mleiha, some bear a vertical *shin* on the reverse; these are attributed to northeast Arabia and could be contemporary with the local coinage of the "early" type⁴². These are only small units, probably brought there by caravan merchants, but they are not in themselves a proof of commercial exchange, even if there was already active trading along the main routes. This is supported by the fact that no contemporary coin foreign to Arabia has been found on the site. The "early series" of Mleiha could well be a prestige coinage, minted by a ruler who wanted to assert his power and independence. Before it had any commercial use, this currency was mainly a political tool, and possibly a military tool used, for instance, to pay mercenaries, as often happened in the Hellenistic world. The same was probably true of the other pre-Islamic Arabian coinages of the same period.

At the end of the 3rd c. B.C., the Seleucid king, Antiochos III, returning from his *Anabasis*, travelled through NE Arabia –Gerrha, Tylos and probably Ikaros– where he put an end to a number of local coinages, which competed with his own currency. It is still impossible to say what happened at that time to the coinage of a much more distant region such as the Oman Peninsula. Perhaps minting went on sporadically, as we may assume from several coins that, although of the same type as those of the "early series", are much coarser and technically inferior to them.

During Period PIR. B (middle of the 2nd to 1st c. B.C.), the settlement of Mleiha consisted of several quarters of small mud-brick houses. As the nomad-type habitations were gradually abandoned, the occupied surface was reduced. Cemeteries spread on the periphery of the site, around the monumental tombs of the ancestors, which indicates that the site had been occupied for more than a century. There were many craftsmen living in what was undoubtedly an important trading centre in the Oman Peninsula. The excavations have brought to light several workshops for the production of copper,

⁴¹ Five at the Museum of Sharjah, 8 in Potts, 6 in Haerinck (1998) and a few very rare examples on the market in recent years.

⁴² Group I, no.69 (eagle on the reverse) and group II, nos. 72-74 (Shamash on the reverse).

stone and bone objects. Mleiha was a small settlement with specific characteristics, part of a string of similar settlements established along the Arabian coast of the Gulf.

This period also corresponds to the time when Seleucid power ceased to exist in the Gulf, after the death of Antiochos IV in 164 B.C. It was replaced in the north by the small Characanian kingdom, which soon became an essential link in the trade between the Mediterranean countries and Persia in the north and west, and southern Arabia and India. During this transition period, the major commercial routes did not disappear, but they seem to have given way to a different exchange network, in which the communities of eastern Arabia participated more actively, leading some of them to mint their own currency.

The "owl" coinage, inspired by south Arabian (Yemen) coinages, should be attributed to this period. Commercial contacts certainly existed, between the Peninsula of Oman and the Hadramawt (Mouton 1997), indicated by the "owl" coins found in Mleiha (Senior 1994; Sedov 1995). But the probability of a local coinage of this type is not yet confirmed. It is based on the "owl" coins found in Mleiha, struck on folded flans (here no. 96; Huth 1998)⁴³, which could correspond to very limited issues, minted to replace the "early series" at the beginning of the 2nd c. B.C. This coinage indicates that there were close contacts with southern Arabia during a brief period of time, the "middle series" appearing shortly afterwards. The coins in this series, although they are still inspired by the Alexander types, do not show a direct relationship with them. They are still imitations, but rather freely copied from other copies so that, as new details appear, they become increasingly distant from the prototypes. Thus on the obverse, the open jaw of the lion pelt that Hercules wears gradually becomes a sort of large horn. On the reverse, the eagle held by Shamash is replaced by a rhyton in the shape of a horse protome, and on the field appears a small stylized palm tree that then becomes a sort of mark or symbol, characteristic of the Mleiha coinages. The coins of these "middle series", like those of the "early series", were minted with the name of Abi'el, but it certainly cannot be the same person. Was the second Abi'el a relative of the first one? Was he a successor who took the name to legitimise his position? Or is it just a symbolic name? We still have no answer to these questions.

⁴³ These coins are very rare, probably less than ten known examples at this time, of which six come from Mleiha. An example (Huth 1998, no. 1) with a different style, but with the same type of flan, was found at Jabal Kenzan (Howgego and Potts 1992, fig. 15-16).

In these "middle series", the specimens of good quality and style are few in Mleiha; they might correspond, like the "early series", to a prestige coinage, minted for political and possibly military purposes. However, this should be taken with certain reservations, because most of the known specimens of this second Abi 'el were found in the Bahrain hoard, in which more than 77 tetradrachms were found with earlier tetradrachms, probably from Tylos itself (Mørkholm 1972; Callot 1994) LJ4). Other specimens are known from Susa, where they were also part of a hoard buried at the end of the 2nd c. B.C. (hoard no. 5, Le Rider 1965). These finds could correspond to the payment of mercenary troops foreign to the Oman Peninsula. The circulation of these coins might also be explained by commercial exchange, but this raises several problems. At that time, the commercial routes were somewhat fragmented between the various settlements of the Arabian Peninsula and goods were probably transported just from one settlement to the next. At Mleiha, it has so far been difficult to identify any other Arabian coins that could correspond to Period PIR. B., even more difficult than for Period PIR. A, and coins foreign to Arabia are practically non-existent⁴⁴. Mleiha was apparently a small autonomous settlement with its own specific characteristics, as described by Mouton (1999), and even if open to trade, it certainly did not have an important place on the trade routes.

We have seen that some coins of the second Abi'el type are clearly of poorer quality. They must be the product of a prolongation of the first "middle series", dating probably to the 1st c. B.C. The name of Abi'el persists, but is often incomplete or incorrect. It becomes symbolic from this time onward, and is found on all the coinages of the later periods ("late series", Periods PIR. C and D).

At the beginning of Period PIR. C (1st and 2nd c. A.D.), the occupied area of Mleiha appears reduced in size. Many cultural characteristics change, without any major break with the previous periods (Mouton 1999, p.24). The trade network seems to have remained as before, indicated by the Mesopotamian and Iranian pottery, glassware from Syria and Palestine and a few rare objects from southern Arabia found in the archaeological levels of this period.

⁴⁴ The only coin which can be attributed to the 2nd c. or beginning of the 1st c. A.D. is the bronze one struck with the name of Belaios, an unknown dynast, perhaps Characanian (catalogue no. **117**). There is also the Indo-Greek drachm of Apollodoros II (no. **117**). However, the fact that it is pierced shows that it was used later as a decorative element.

But the most striking fact is the development of the site of ed-Dour, about 75 km northeast of Mleiha, on the coastal lagoon of present day Umm al-Qaywain Emirate. Mleiha and ed-Dour belong to the same culture and most certainly to the same political entity. This premise is clearly indicated by the coins. The coins attributable to the Oman Peninsula are exactly the same on both sites: they belong to the same issues, confirmed by the many die connections. However, the site of ed-Dour poses some problems of interpretation. The excavators have found mainly tombs there –two to three hundred tombs have been excavated– as well as a sanctuary, probably dedicated to Shamash, and some stone habitations among the rare dwellings on the site⁴⁵. Those few "solid" buildings are not, in themselves, evidence of a large sedentary population. But the archaeological zone, which covers over a square kilometre, shows traces of continuous occupation, with habitations probably made of light materials, like Mleiha at its beginning, ed-Dour gives the impression of a large meeting place, undoubtedly connected with the sanctuary and its cult, which is also confirmed by the number of cemeteries.

On this site hundreds of coins attributable to the Peninsula of Oman have been collected, belonging to what we have called the "late series"⁴⁶, as well as coins from north-eastern Arabia. But above all, many coins foreign to Arabia were found here which were unknown in this region during previous periods. These coins have various origins, such as the Parthian kingdom in the north, and particularly the Characene, for which we have 15 specimens. There are also Roman coins, some of which are gold, and coins from the Hadramawt and India. However, these coins are few and nearly all of small value⁴⁷. These coins were not then intended for trade, but they do indicate that international exchange took place; although this trade had existed before, it takes on a new dimension during Period PIR. C. It would seem that the major caravan routes of the 3rd c. B.C. (PIR. A), which had more or less fallen into disuse during the following century (PIR. B), had renewed their activity, and that a place such as ed-Dour had become a favoured stopover.

⁴⁵ For the bibliography concerning these excavations, see Mouton 1999. p. 18, note 13.

⁴⁶ The great majority of the coins presumed to have come from ed-Dour are the result of looting. These coins have been studied by Potts (1991 and 1994) and Haerinck (1998) in private collections, and many had circulated on the antiquities market.

⁴⁷ Except for the Roman aurei, which, as we have seen (p. 69 sq.), had perhaps followed a circuit quite different from the assumed one.

Thus this large meeting place for the local populations probably had a religious as well as a commercial character, stimulating trade and becoming both a regular destination in the trans-Arabian itineraries, from the north or the south, and an occasional stop for ships circulating in the Gulf. Such a situation brings to mind the famous fairs that took place in medieval Europe at regular times during the year, and which always attracted large crowds. Some excavators of ed-Dour have seen this site as a main destination of sea trade, an assumption refuted by Mouton (1999, p. 25). As he demonstrates, the excavation has revealed nothing that could prove ed-Dour to be a seaport, a port-of-call on the large maritime trade routes. Even if some boats stopped there occasionally, it was apparently not the large *emporion* some have believed it to be⁴⁸.

Finally, one should not forget Mleiha, where a large number of local coins were found, as well as coins from north-eastern Arabia and several foreign coins. It is possible that the seat of power moved to ed-Dour at the times of meetings, but Mleiha was the capital of this region and most probably the seat of government.

Returning to the coinages of Period PIR. C, we shall try to ascertain the part they played in the economy of this region.

The local coins of Period PIR. C ("late series") have been classified into several categories, according to their style and diverse types, which demonstrate the development of this currency over at least two centuries.

To begin with, all the coinages of this period have retained the Alexander types, the three denominations (tetradrachms, drachms and obols) and a relative fidelity to the Attic standard. The name of Abi 'el is always present, although often incorrectly written and hardly legible.

The first two categories (A and B) are not well represented. They correspond to the establishment, at the end of the 1st c. B.C. or at the beginning of the 1st c. A.D., of a monetary system that was not completely new but presents several innovations. The "trident" symbol appears first, and becomes the mark of the local power which thus individualizes changes in the representations, such as the rhyton that are merely the result of stylistic development.

Then comes the category C series, whose first issues (tetradrachms of group VIII, nos. **10-13**, and drachms of group III, nos. **54-59**) are undeniably of good quality and bear certain marks, such as

⁴⁸ For the Omana – ed-Dour identification, see Potts (1998) and our commentary in the catalogue, p.76.

the Λ of group VIII tetradrachms, which could be evidence of organized production. The last type in this category C (tetradrachms of group IX, nos. **14-20**) retains the same characteristics but shows carelessness in the fabrication, unless these coins are the products of different techniques. In fact the coins of this group raise the question of whether they were cast in moulds, about which we reserve our opinion. This category C as a whole shows a gradual decrease in weight and a strong reduction of the silver content of the coins. The majority of the coins, particularly the tetradrachms, seem to be made of bronze only, but certain types were originally silver plated.

The largest quantity of coins found on both sites belongs to category D. The gradual stylization of the representations, already apparent in the previous categories, becomes rapidly more accentuated. Nevertheless, none of these coins will ever reach the same degree of abstraction in their representations as the contemporary issues from northeastern Arabia (see here tetradrachms of group I, nos. **1-2**); many examples of these were found on the sites of Mleiha and ed-Dour. The silver content, which had already been considerably reduced, becomes practically non-existent. However, some of these coins were coated to make them look like silver. The weight also decreases, the tetradrachms having an average weight of only 14 to 15 g. A few series still have a relative homogeneity, like those that bear, on the obverse, the head of Heracles with a "negroid" face. Generally, however, the series in this category appear disordered because of the large variety of their types. Do certain monograms have any significance, such as the monogram in the shape of an A with a loop at the top (tetradrachms of group XIII, nos. **44-46** and drachms of group V, nos. **66-68**)? This monogram certainly had some meaning, as its presence on other objects (Potsherd, lead bar) noted by Haerinck (1998) appears to indicate. But when it takes different forms on the same coin, it would seem to be a simple decorative element, nothing more. In any case, several constant features link these issues with the traditional coinages of the Oman Peninsula: the Alexander types, the small horse on the reverse, the hardly legible name of Abi'el and, above all, the "trident" symbol which appears in absolutely all the coins. These numerous issues of category D, probably the result of a weakened political power, would be the last coinages of this region, at the end of Period PIR. C (2nd c. A.D.).

At the end of Period PIR. C and beginning of Period PIR. D (end of 2nd c. A.D. – beginning of 3rd c. A.D.), Mleiha had become a large village, with dwellings clustered around a large fortified residence, which was probably the seal of power and could also serve as a refuge for the population (Mouton 1999, p. 26 f.). On the Gulf coast, ed-Dour was almost abandoned. But Mleiha still imported pottery, glassware and various objects from the north

from Mesopotamia and from the east coast of the Mediterranean, as well as from the Persian coast and India, the African coast on the Red Sea and even from Egypt. All these archaeological finds indicate that it was open to the sea trade routes of the Indian Ocean, which connected Egypt with India via the Red Sea. This opening to sea trade coincides with the foundation of the sea port of Sohar on the eastern coast of the Sultanate of Oman, probably under the stimulating influence of the Sassanians, who sought to control the navigation routes from land. This foundation was followed shortly afterwards by that of Kush, a sea-port on the Gulf, in the north of the peninsula. These two ports were to remain the two openings to sea trade for the communities living in the Peninsula of Oman (Sohar and Julfar) throughout the Middle Ages and into modern times. It should be added that the Characene kingdom to the north of the Gulf, which had become a very important trading post by the middle of the 2nd c. A.D., lost its importance and became totally controlled by the Parthian kingdom and later by the Sassanians.

Such conditions had an adverse influence on this small state in the Oman Peninsula which, not being situated on the new trade routes, rapidly declined. The large central meeting place of ed-Dour was the first to disappear; the capital, Mleiha, living off the surrounding land, survived around its fort.

The changes in the trade routes naturally had a direct effect on monetary production. This production was related to participation of the region in the trade systems with the communities of the Arabian interior, particularly northeast Arabia. It lost its purpose once the trade routes ceased to exist or lost their importance.

We have found a few rare COIT1S of much debased types, where certain features, such as the "trident" symbol, have almost vanished (group IX, no. 6?). Could these be the last coins produced by the mint of Mleiha at the beginning of Period PIR. D? The scarcity of specimens prevents an answer at this time.

Several coins have been found by the excavators in well-dated levels of Period PIR. D. In particular three tetradrachms of the same type (group [X, nos. 15, 16 and 20), which we have included in the "late series", possibly correspond to a transition between our categories C and D; they can be dated to the end of the 1st c. or beginning of the 2nd c. A.D. There is also, as discussed above, the group of coins called "hoard AI" which, although found on the surface, could well come from Period PIR. D. The coins all belong to the last "late" issues of category D. This indicates that, even if coins were no longer minted, they were probably in use and hoarded in Mleiha during Period PIR. D.

It is also for this period that the question of cast coins has arisen. Found in the fort of Period PIR. D at Mleiha were three fragments of moulds which were apparently designed for casting coins (Boucharlat and Drieux 1991). Because of the reverse types presented in one of these moulds, we have proposed, with certain reservations (p. 103), the hypothesis that an attempt to cast coins was made during Period PIR. C. If this is the case, the moulds may have been kept in the fort, the seat of power, as a kind of souvenir. We could also consider that such an attempt was made during Period PIR, D, when an earlier type (Period PIR. C) was imitated in a mould. The sole evidence in favour of such hypothesis are two obols (group VIII, nos. **93-94**) of unknown provenance, which have clearly been cast. However, considering that not a single coin made in the known moulds has been found, either during the excavations of Mleiha or in clandestine collections, and that the provenance of the two obols of the Sharjah Museum is unknown, such a hypothesis remains fragile.

The Arabian coinage of Mleiha disappears when that region opens up to sea trade. As it was a place of regional exchanges with the interior of Arabia, it loses its purpose when the external trade concentrates on the sea ports under Sassanian influence.

* * *

It is the disappearance of the Mleiha coinages which clarifies the reason it appeared and existed: this small state was for more than four centuries (end of the 3rd c. B.C.–beginning of the 3rd c. A.D.) one of the links of the caravan route network of pre-Islamic Arabia. In order to be part of that trade network, the local rulers minted their own currency, which they modeled on the reference coinage, that of Alexander the Great, also adopted by the Seleucids. Later (Period PIR. A), they copied directly from the coinages of their neighbours of north-eastern Arabia, but the source of inspiration was the same. During the 3rd and 2nd c. B.C. (PIR. A, "early series" and PIR. B. "middle series") the minted issues were limited and their purpose was to illustrate the power and independence of the local rulers. However, we should keep in mind that these coins, particularly the tetradrachms, may have been used to pay mercenary troops, a common practice at that time⁴⁹.

In Period PIR. B. the position of Mleiha weakens in the exchange network. This situation changes, however, and during the 1st and 2nd c. A.D. –Period PIR. C– both sites flourish, as indicated by the abundant monetary production, which also demonstrates the important place Mleiha and ed-Dour had on the

⁴⁹ This could be indicated by the tetradrachms of the "middle series" of the Bahrain and Susa hoards.

caravan routes. Nevertheless, these coins cannot be found outside the Oman Peninsula⁵⁰. This is important, because it is a clear sign that these coinages were not intended for international trade, but rather for local or regional commerce. This regional character partly explains why the coins were minted only in metals of low value-billon or bronze-since this currency was intended to circulate only within a limited region (or a small state?).

Finally, when this region became distanced from the trade engendered by the main caravan routes, its coinage was no longer justified and simply disappeared.

⁵⁰ At this time we know only two coins of the "late series", which have been found outside the Oman Peninsula. One is from southern Yemen (Potts 1994, p. 68) and the other one is from Sialkot in northern Pakistan (here no. **45**): they both belong to our category C (2nd c. A.D.?).