

DAMASTION - ITS FOUNDATION AND THE BEGINNING OF ITS COINAGE*

The existence of a city called Damastion, situated near notable silver mines deep in the Balkan hinterlands, has been known from a passage in Strabo's Geography (7.7.8) and from its abundant silver coinage spread over the central and western Balkan regions. However, the scarceness of information kept many features of this city enigmatic. This paper explores an augmentation of Strabo's passage 8.6.16 on Aegina, which shows that Damastion was a Greek foundation, and examines the historical setting of its founding and the beginning of its coinage. The results suggest that the foundation of Damastion occurred during the Peloponnesian War, most probably shortly after the Peace of Nicias (421 B.C.), and that the beginning of the coinage of Damastion may be dated ca. 395 B.C.

Key words: Greek coinage, Damastion, Peloponnesian War, Aegina, Olynthus, ancient silver mines



Ancient Greek cities mentioned in the text. The area of probable location of Damastion is darkened.

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The evidence about Damastion

Strabo 7.7.8

A passage in the description of Illyria in Strabo's *Geography* (7.7.8) was long the only reference to a city called Damastion, situated near abundant silver mines.¹ After mentioning the tribes of Epirus who lived intermingled with the Illyrian tribes, Strabo stated (*Fig. 1*):²

τῆς γὰρ Ἐπιδάμνου καὶ τῆς Ἀπολλωνίας μέχρι τῶν
 Κεραυνίων ὑπεροικοῦσι Βυλλιόνες τε καὶ Ταυλάντιοι
 5 καὶ Παρθῖνοι καὶ Βρῦγοι· πλησίον δέ που καὶ τὰ ἀργυρεῖα
 τὰ ἐν Δαμαστίῳ, <ὦν> Περισάδυές τε συνεστήσαντο τὴν
 δυναστείαν καὶ Ἐγχελέ<ων> οὖς καὶ Δασαρητίους
 καλοῦσι· πρὸς δὲ τούτοις Λυγκησταὶ τε καὶ ἡ Δευρίοπος
 καὶ ἡ τριπολίτις Πελαγονία καὶ Ἔορδοι καὶ Ἐλίμεια
 10 καὶ Ἐράτυρα.

Fig. 1

The coinage

Damastion has also long been known for its abundant silver coinage inscribed ΔΑΜΑΣΤΙΝΩΝ and issued in three denominations (*Fig. 2*). The main denomination, the tetradrachm, shows a standard combination of Apollo's head on the obverse and on the reverse his tripod. The two smaller denominations clearly illustrate this city's mining activity:

- On the reverse of drachms, there is a square ingot of silver; on the obverse there is a female head.

- On the reverse of tetrobols, there is a miner's pick; on the obverse there is Apollo's head.³

¹ The precise location of the city remains unknown, yet it should be sought somewhere in the area of circulation and hoarding of smaller denominations of its coins (because such denominations normally stay in the area in which they were issued, due to their low intrinsic value) somewhere in Southern Kosovo, where there are also abundant silver mines, and where dwelled the Dardanians, a tribe of mixed Illyrian and Thracian origins. See *Ujes/Romić*, 1996, p. 93, *Ujes* 2002, p. 123, *Ujes Morgan* 2011, p. 495.

² The edition by *Baladié* 1989 is used for this quotation of Strabo's text.

³ A detailed study of the coinage of Damastion is provided by *May* 1939, who sequenced the coin dies and defined the groups of issues and their relative chronology, dating the activity of the mint approximately to the 4th century B.C.



Fig. 2: The coinage of Damastion

The founders of Damastion

The hypotheses

The scant literary information, which was susceptible to different readings and interpretations, and the scattered pattern of findspots of its coins rendered many questions about Damastion hard to answer. Thus it was unknown which people founded, inhabited and governed this city, and issued this coinage. Based on Strabo's passage 7.7.8, two historical-linguistic constructs were introduced: the Dyestae and the Damastini. For, besides: "Περυσάδου ἐς τε"⁴, there was also a rendition: "περὶ ἃ Δυέσται"⁵. The latter reading was accepted by some historians and numismatists, who considered the Dyestae as the masters of the Damastian mines.⁶ The tribe of Damastini supposedly inhabited the area of the mines and issued coins with their name.⁷ Both names were otherwise unknown, yet became considered purely Illyrian and, as such, likely to be located in the central Illyrian territories, where there are, though, no silver mines because of the

⁴ See Gaebler 1927, pp. 247-248, especially n. 1, discussing Meineke 1852, p. 88; see also Ujes 2002, pp. 106-107, n. 11-12.

⁵ Meineke 1852, p. 88 and 1907, Vol. II, p. iv and p. 449.

⁶ Imhoof-Blumer 1874, p. 101; Mayer 1936, pp. 17-23, Mayer 1957, pp. 130-131; May 1939, p. 22, esp. n. 3.

⁷ Mayer 1936, p. 2 and 1957, pp. 105-106. May 1939, pp. 17, 34 and 43; also Schwabacher 1943, pp. 85-86.

geological structure of those regions.⁸ The proposal to interpret the toponym Damastion as coming from the Greek language⁹ was rejected because it was regarded as unlikely that the name of such a distant place in the hinterland was given by Greek speakers.¹⁰

Additional piece of literary evidence from Vat. Gr. 2306

An additional piece of literary information about Damastion was discovered around 1930 in the palimpsest “Greek 2306” of the Vatican library, which provides an augmentation of the text of Strabo’s description of Aegina (8.6.16) revealing that Damastion was founded by fugitives from Aegina and Mende (*Fig. 3*):¹¹

176

... οἱ δὲ φυγάδες μετὰ
Μενδαίων Δαμά(στ)ειον ᾠκισαν τῆ(ς) Ἰλλυρίδος περὶ
τὰ ἀργύρ(ε)ια ὧν ἐμνήσθημεν ἐν τοῖς Ἰλλυρικοῖς.

Fig. 3

This precious piece of information shows that Damastion was a Greek foundation established in the interior of the Balkans, and not an indigenous Illyrian town.¹² The name of the town is hence almost certainly of Greek origin.¹³

The Aeginetans

The Aeginetans until 431 B.C.

The augmentation of Strabo’s text has placed the foundation of Damastion in the historical context of the Peloponnesian war. The Aeginetans became fugitives in 431 B.C. after the Athenians evicted them from their island and installed their own settlers there (Thuc. 2.27, Paus. 2.29.5, Hdt. 6.91.1). The eviction occurred as the definitive

⁸ For the position of silver mines in the interior of the western Balkans see *Ujes/Romić*, 1996, p. 91-91, *Ujes* 2002, p. 122-123, *Ujes Morgan* 2011, p. 492-493.

⁹ *Krahe* 1925, p. 128, taking into consideration the stems “da-” and “ma-s-t”.

¹⁰ *Fraser* 1926, p. 88.

¹¹ *Aly* 1932, pp. 8-9; *Aly/Sbordone* 1956, pp. 16 and 212. This passage was not used by *May* 1939. The edition by *Baladié* 1989 used for this quotation is the only edition of Strabo’s text which includes *Aly*’s reading.

¹² *Ujes* 2002, pp. 103-104, *Ujes Morgan* 2011, pp. 490-491, and *Figueira* 2004, p. 622. *Papazoglu* 1967, p. 17, was the first to briefly mention *Aly*’s reading of the passage 8.6.16 in connection with Damastion as a Greek foundation.

¹³ Since Damastes or Damastas is an attested Greek personal name, Damastion might have been named after its founder, as it was the case with Apollonia in Illyria, which was first named Gylakeia after its founder Gylax (Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. Apollonia and Gylakeia), see *Ujes* 2002, p. 107 and *Ujes Morgan* 2011, 490.

incident after lasting contention and recurrent hostilities between the Aeginetans and the Athenians had already built up a bitter mutual hatred and involved other Greeks in their neighborhood and beyond.¹⁴

Until the 480's B.C. the Aeginetans had a prosperous city harboring a major commercial and military fleet deemed stronger than that of the Athenians (Paus. 2.29.5), but the Athenians kept strengthening their military capacities, especially their fleet, and expanding the realm of the Delian League (Paus. 2.29.5, Thuc. 1.14).¹⁵ After winning a large naval battle off the coast of Aegina, the Athenians took the city of Aegina after a siege and forced the Aeginetans to join the Delian League in 457/456 B.C. under harsh and humiliating conditions: the Aeginetans had to demolish their city walls, surrender their fleet and pay a high annual tribute (Thuc. 1.105.2, 1.108.4, Diod. 11.78.4). In 432 B.C. the Aeginetans turned to the Spartans to help them restore their independence, but the Spartan embassies, pledging also for other Greeks oppressed by the Athenians, were unsuccessful (Thuc. 1.67 and 139). In 431 B.C. the Athenians expelled the Aeginetans accusing them to be the main cause for the war (Thuc. 2.27).

The Aeginetans after 431 B.C.

The Spartans settled a major group of the Aeginetan refugees in the town of Thyrea and its territory, in Cynouria, a coastal area in the eastern Peloponnesus on the borders of Argolis and Laconia, and others were scattered throughout Greece (Thuc. 2.27.3, Diod. 12.44.3, Paus. 2.29.5 and 2.38.5). In 424 B.C. the Athenian fleet attacked the Aeginetans at Thyrea, burnt and plundered the town, killed many and took the rest to Athens intending to execute them (Thuc. 4.56-57). The Athenians might have done so, but not necessarily, because Diodorus (12.65.9) reports that the Aeginetans from Thyrea were carried off to Athens and kept as prisoners.¹⁶

The clauses of the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C. do not specifically mention any Aeginetans to be released. Some might have still been in the Athenian prisons or other prisons in the cities and places under Athenian control. If so, they could have been released under the clause of Nicias' Peace specifying the liberation of captives on both sides (Thuc. 5.18.7). Some of the released Aeginetans could have participated in the foundation of Damastion.

It has been suggested that some Aeginetans were not taken away by the Athenians in 424 B.C., but remained in locations in Thyreatis, such as A(n)thene and Eua (as implied in Paus. 2.38.6), until their repatriation in 405 B.C.¹⁷ If so, these Aeginetans did not take part in the founding contingent. It has been suggested that the ravaging of the Cydonian territory by the Athenians in 429 B.C. (Thuc. 2.85.5-6) was prompted by the

¹⁴ For the hostilities between the Aeginetans and Athenians from ca. 506 to 458 B.C. see *Podlecki* 1976, throughout; for the account in Herodotus' Book 6 about the aggravation of hostilities, see *Figueira* 1988, throughout.

¹⁵ See *Figueira* 2004, pp. 620-623 for an outline of the Aeginetan history.

¹⁶ *Figueira* 1988-a, pp. 529-533. See also the discussion by *Panagopoulos* 1989, pp. 87-89, who rejected (p. 88) the account by Diodorus (12.65.9).

¹⁷ *Figueira* 1988-a, pp. 536-538.

presence of a newly arrived group of Aeginetans in this city, their only colony.¹⁸ It has also been suggested that another group possibly reached Naucratis, where the Aeginetans had long been practicing commerce besides other Greek long-distance traders (Hdt. 2.178 mentioned an Aeginetan sanctuary to Zeus).¹⁹

It remains unknown in which directions other groups of Aeginetans could have sailed away, and where and with which citizenship status they could have briefly settled, except that such places of temporary abode must have been members or friends of the Peloponnesian League. The traditional strong ties with their polis of origin and difficulties of integration into a different community, customary in Greece, kept the fugitives as distinct groups with separate identity up until their repatriation.

Repatriation of the Aeginetans in 405 B.C.

In 405 B.C. the Spartan admiral Lysander gathered together the surviving Aeginetans, presumably only a fraction of the former population, and restored the island to them (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.9). However, Aegina never regained its former power (Paus. 2.29.5). It would be impractical to speculate whether the Aeginetans of Damastion would have left their rewarding new home-city to return to their regained homeland, disadvantaged as it had become, but, even so, their *patris*.²⁰

The Mendaeans

The Mendaeans were members of the Delian League.²¹ In 423 B.C., just days after an armistice had been agreed, the oligarchic faction instigated a revolt and joined the Spartan general Brasidas, who had already been supporting an anti-Athenian revolt in Scione (Thuc. 4.123.1-2). The Athenians dispatched a strong fleet under Nicias' command against the revolted cities (Thuc. 129.2). Under Brasidas' command, a Spartan garrison was placed in the city and the women and children of Mende, together with those from Scione, were sent to Olynthus, where they were given refuge ahead of the arrival of the Athenian forces (Thuc. 4.123.4; Diod.12.72.7 mentions that all the most valuable property was also sent to Olynthus). However, the pro-Athenian faction in Mende was strong and, after the Athenians took the lower parts of the city and ravaged the territory, it let them into the city (Thuc. 4.129-130, Diod.12.72.9). The Spartan garrison and the Mendaeans oligarchs were blockaded in the acropolis but managed to escape by night and enter Scione, which was under the Athenian siege (Thuc. 4.131). The victorious Athenians placed their garrison in Mende, requested that the Mendaeans restore the kind of government they had before the revolt and prosecute those among themselves whom they found responsible for the revolt, and left to besiege Scione (Thuc. 4.130.7).

In 421 B.C. a clause of the Peace of Nicias specifically stated that the Spartans, their allies besieged in Scione and all whom Brasidas brought to that city, were to be released (Thuc. 5.18.8). Thus it appears probable that the fugitive Mendaeans oligarchs were sa-

¹⁸ Robinson E. S. G. 1928, p. 194, on the possibility of reinforcements to Cydonia by settlers from Aegina in 458 and 431 B.C.; *Figueira* 1988-a, pp. 538-542; see also *Perlman* 2004, pp. 1170-1172

¹⁹ *Figueira* 1988-a, pp. 543-549.

²⁰ *Hansen* 2004, pp. 49-52 for the current opinions about the concept of *patris*.

²¹ *Zahrnt* 1971, pp. 200-202; *Flensted-Jensen* 2004, pp. 831-833.

ved.²² It is unlikely that they could have returned in 421 B.C. or any time before 405 B.C. to their native city held by the pro-Athenian faction that would have them prosecuted in accordance with Nicias' orders and, most probably, put them to death. It seems more likely that, having been released from Scione, the Mendaeans oligarchs went to Olynthus, where there already were their families and, possibly, also their most valuable possessions.²³

The date of the foundation of Damastion

The Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C. appears to have been the pivotal point for the foundation of Damastion. The Peace, although fragile, could have provided the circumstances for both groups of the founders to convene, join the efforts and set off to a distant land with promising resources. Thus the foundation of Damastion is likely to have ensued without much delay after the Peace, ca. 420 B.C. or several years later, before the hostilities resumed.²⁴

It seems much less likely that the two groups of the colonists would have found themselves in favorable enough political circumstances allowing them to join their efforts before the Peace and, hence, that the foundation could have taken place between 431 B.C. and 421 B.C. It also appears that there would not have been much incentive or reason for any Mendaeans for joining the founding venture with the Aeginetans before the oligarchs had been driven out of their city by the pro-Athenian faction. It is unlikely that the foundation occurred after the repatriation of the survived Aeginetans in 405 B.C., because they would not have been referred to as fugitives by Strabo. It also appears that Olynthus could have had an involvement in the foundation enterprise.

The coinages of Aegina and Mende

The Aeginetans were among the first mainland Greeks to issue coinage struck on their own weight standard with an emblematic obverse type, the turtle (*Fig. 4*).²⁵ From ca. mid-6th century B.C., in connection with the intensification of the Aeginetan long-distance trade, the "turtles" became copiously issued, wide-spread and essential for the process of monetizing in the Peloponnesus and further (Pollux 9.74-76) and valued in markets outside Greece. The mint stopped its operations in 431 B.C. when the Aeginetans were evicted from their island, but the issuing was revived after their repatriation.

²² The assumption by *Panagopoulos* 1989, p. 106, that the women and children from Mende "must have returned [from Olynthus] back home unharmed after the restoration of the Mendaeans autonomy" does not seem fully justifiable.

²³ Mende founded only two minor poleis, which could not provide any help to its exiled citizens: Neapolis in Pallene, and Eion, still unlocated (Thuc. 4.7), see *Zahrnt* 1971, p. 200; *Flensted-Jensen* 2004, p. 827 and 833.

²⁴ Previously proposed chronology of the foundation: *Nicolet-Pierre/Gjongecaj* 1995, p. 330: "after 431 B.C."; *Ujes/Romić* 1996, p. 79 and also *Ujes* 2002, p. 104: "shortly after the Athenian intervention against Mende"; *Figueira* 2004, p. 622: "after 431 B.C."

²⁵ For various aspects of the Aeginetan coinage see: *Ross Holloway* 1971, throughout and esp. pp. 13-16, *Nicolet-Pierre/Gjongecaj* 1995, pp. 283-306, *Figueira* 1998, pp. 36-41 and 116-127; an overview: *Sheedy* 2012, pp. 106-109.



Fig. 4: The coinage of Aegina, 1st half of the 5th c. B.C.



Fig. 5: The coinage of Mende, 1st half of the 5th c. B.C.

The coinage of Mende, struck on the Euboic standard from ca. 500 B.C., displays a specific iconography with Dionysus on the obverse, possibly referring to its main export product, wine (Fig. 5).²⁶ Its wide range of spread and hoarding reflects the city's dynamic long-distance commerce in the early 5th century B.C. In the last quarter of the 5th century B.C. there are signs of disruption of the mint activity, such as a smaller number or absence of larger silver denominations, attributable to the city's return to the Delian League.

Colonies frequently used elements of their metropolis' coinage such as its weight system or iconography. Thus from ca. 475 to ca. 300 B.C. Cydonia issued "pseudo-Aeginetan" coinage struck on the Aeginetan standard and displaying the same iconography as the coins of Aegina except for a distinct detail of a crescent on the reverse.²⁷ Yet, Damastian coins are distinctly different from both the Aeginetan and the Mendaean coins.

The Chalcidian mint of Olynthus

Comparison of the tetradrachms

The tetradrachms of Damastion display remarkable similarities in type, style and weight standard with the tetradrachms of the Chalcidian state, inscribed ΧΑΛΚΙΔΕΩΝ and struck in the mint of Olynthus, especially with the older series without the magis-

²⁶ For the Mendaean coinage see: *Regling* 1923, pp. 18-32 for the Period II, ca. 450-405 B.C.; *Gaebler* 1935, 72-78; *Noe* 1926, p. 53; the hoard deposition datable to ca. 423 B.C. and for Mende also *Zahrnt* 1971, pp. 200-203, *Flensted-Jensen* 2004, pp. 831-833.

²⁷ *Robinson* 1928, pp. 172-198; *Nicolet-Pierre/Gjongecaj* 1995, p. 309; *Figueira* 1998, p. 122.

trate's name (*Fig. 6*).²⁸ Many of the obverses of the initial Damastian series display a rather fine style and clearly are intentional copies of the Chalcidian tetradrachms. Previously, they were deemed the work of very skilled die-cutters, presumably Greek artists from Olynthus hired by the barbarian Damastini, or Greek-trained local artists.²⁹ Significantly, the weight standards of the Chalcidian and Damastian coinages are distinctive yet appear related: the Chalcidian tetradrachms were struck on the standard of ca. 14.50 g and Damastian on that of ca. 13.60 g.³⁰ The origin of these standards remains obscure.³¹



Fig. 6: An early tetradrachm of the Chalcidian mint of Olynthus.

The beginning of issuance of tetradrachms by the Chalcidian mint of Olynthus

It has long been noted that the dominance by the Chalcidian coinage regarding the quality of execution and weight standard implies that the beginning of issuance of the Damastian tetradrachms followed the beginning of issuance of this denomination by

²⁸ For analysis and sequencing of the tetradrachms of the Chalcidian state struck in Olynthus see *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 112-161, esp. p. 152 for the Group E with the earliest tetradrachms, and p. 153, n. 149 with a comment about the remarkable similarity of the tetradrachms of Damastion and Olynthus.

²⁹ *May* 1939, p. 17, 31, 54-56, 62-63, for his Groups I-V; hiring of Greek artists has also been supposed for the later revival of the fine style in Group VIII, p. 111, 130.

³⁰ *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 207-209. *May* 1939, pp. 12-13 and the frequency table in the back-end paper. See also the paragraph on the weight standards below.

³¹ *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 209-210, compared the Olynthian standard with a number of other standards yet remained inconclusive about its origin. *Raymond* 1953, p. 23-27 and 166, considered that the standard used by the Olynthians and the Chalcidian League i.e. state was the heavy variant of the Thraco-Macedonian standard with the tetradrachm of 14.73 g. However, the Olynthian frequency norm (14.40 g) and its most likely standard (14.50 g) are considerably lighter, see *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 207-208. *Westermark* 1988, p. 95, and *Psoma* 2001, p. 169 and 174, accepted Raymond's definition of the Olynthian/Chalcidian standard.

May 1939, pp. 12-17, discussed the 6th-5th century B.C. Northern Greek standards as possible precursors and concluded (p. 15 and p. 32) that the mint of Damastion initially used a variety of the old Abderite standard of 14.90 g. For further discussion on the Abderite standard see *May* 1966, pp. 16-18: ca. 14.90 g was used during the Periods I-IV (ca. 540/535 - ca. 449/448 B.C.) for large denominations intended for the trade with the East under the Persian rule; pp. 19-20: the Abderite standard changed to ca. 14.00 - 13.90 g in Period V (ca. 439/437 - 411/410 B.C.) due to changed commercial and political circumstances. *May's* definition of the Abderite standard in Periods I-V and his explanation of its origin and purpose remained unchallenged in *Chryssanthaki - Nagle* 2007, p. 89-90.

the Chalcidian state in the mint of Olynthus. However, the historical evidence has allowed for different interpretations of the kind of the state of the Chalcidians and of the dates when this state underwent its internal reorganizations which had an effect on the Chalcidian coinage, including the issuance of the tetradrachms. In brief, the historical background for the beginning of the Chalcidian coinage struck in the mint of Olynthus is the following:³²

The city of Olynthus, which the Persians took away from the Bottiaeans and gave to the Chalcidians in the winter of 480/479 B.C. (Hdt. 8.127), was a member of the Delian League recorded in the Athenian tribute lists from 454/453 to 433/432 B.C. The Athenian policies in the 430's B.C. generated dissatisfaction in the Thracian district and the Kingdom of Macedonia, so when King Perdiccas II (reigned ca. 454/448 - 413 B.C.) proposed an alliance with the Chalcidians and Bottiaeans, they joined him and in 432 B.C. revolted, together with the Potidaeans (Thuc. 1.56-58, Diod. 12.34.2).³³ The Chalcidians also accepted King Perdiccas' proposal to abandon several lesser coastal towns and resettle their inhabitants in Olynthus, making it a stronger center ahead of the Athenian attack (Thuc. 1.58.2). After its secession from the Delian League, Olynthus continued aggregating the inhabitants of the neighboring cities. In 429 B.C. it most probably received some of the expelled Potidaeans (Thuc. 2.70, Diod. 12.46) and in 423 B.C. the women and children from Mende and Scione sent by Brasidas during his campaign in this area (Thuc. 4.123). The Peace of Nicias (Thuc. 5.18) in 421 B.C. brought a wave of changes affecting both the external and internal policies of the city of Olynthus, or, if the Chalcidian state was in existence, the policies of that state. After 415 B.C. there is no mention of the Chalcidians until the early 4th century B.C.

The synoecism in 432 B.C. and the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C. have been considered defining moments for the city and for the Chalcidian state (federal or unified), with an impact on their monetary policy. It is certain that the coinage of the city preceded by at least a decade the coinage of the state and was replaced by it, and that the Chalcidian coinage was initially and at least for a decade comprised of only small denominations (tetrobols, diobols and hemiobols) before the tetradrachms were introduced, but it proved challenging to connect the numismatic evidence with information from literary sources, mainly Thucydides's account, into a sustainable framework.

There is a considerable bibliography on the chronology of formation and development of the Chalcidian state and the beginning and phases of its coinage, because numerous authors proposed different interpretations.³⁴ The beginning of issuance of the Chalcidian

³² For Olynthus see the series Excavations at Olynthus vol. 1-39 (1929-1952), also Zahrnt 1971, p. 74-79 and 209, and an overview in Flensted-Jensen 2004, 834-836.

³³ The relationship with Perdiccas throughout his reign was of prime importance for the Chalcidians and especially for the Olynthians, see *Psoma* 2011, 113-119, *Roisman* 2010, 147-154, *Borza* 1992, 148-160. For the influence of his coinage on the Chalcidian coinage see *Raymond* 1953, 158-165. Damastion was most probably founded about the end of his reign, see further in the text.

³⁴ For previous interpretations and proposals for the chronology of the Chalcidian coinage by different scholars from the 19th century onward, see *Psoma* 2001, pp. 189-221, and also *Westermark* 1988, pp. 91-97. My personal preference remain the fundamental work by *Gaebler* 1925, throughout, especially for the numismatic aspects and chronology, and *Zahrnt* 1971, throughout, for the historical analysis, except for his acceptance of the high chronology of the Chalcidian coinage proposed by *Robinson/Clement* (see further).

tetradrachms had mostly been placed ca. 400 B.C. This chronology is primarily based on the literary information about the political conditions in the region, which was recovering after the Athenian pressure and the Peloponnesian War, and the policies of the Macedonian Kings Archelaus and Amyntas, and less on the intrinsic numismatic information, while some scholars considered the overall style as closer to the 5th than to the 4th century B.C. design and the weight standard as adopted under influence of King Perdiccas' coinage.³⁵

The excavations in the 1930's at the site of Olynthus provided numerous single coins of the Chalcidian state and several circulation coin hoards with such and other coins. The examination of these finds, together with the material from their archaeological context, led the excavators Robinson and Clement to propose a higher chronology of the beginning of the Chalcidian coinage - ca. 432 B.C.,³⁶ and of the introduction of the Chalcidian tetradrachms - between 420 and 417 B.C.³⁷ However, the higher chronology did not stand the revision of the hoard evidence, analysis of additional coin hoards containing the Chalcidian coinage, revision of the comparison with the coinages of the Macedonian kings and the reexamination of the historical setting.³⁸ Thus it appears sensible to adhere to the lower date of the beginning of the Chalcidian tetradrachms: ca. 400 BC.

The beginning of the coinage of Damastion

The issuance of the Chalcidian tetradrachms had to be sustained by a steady and sufficient supply of silver. It appears likely that Damastion was one of the sources of silver for Olynthus and, possibly, even the main source at the beginning of the Chalcidian tetradrachm series.³⁹ For, the tetradrachms of Damastion are considered to be an efficient medium for transporting the bullion silver to a variety of markets, because they do not

³⁵ *Gaebler* 1925, p. 202-212, dated the Olynthian coinage to 432-421 B.C. and the beginning of the coinage of Chalcidian League after 421 B.C., with the tetradrachms starting from ca. 410-400 B.C.; *Gaebler's* analysis provided a thorough discussion of previous scholarship, and more recent revisions of the high chronology of the Chalcidian coinage appear to complement his study.

³⁶ *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 121-128, and also Group A in pp. 1-3, 141. *Clement* 1964, throughout, esp. p. 33. For a preference for high chronology see also *West* 1914, pp. 28-32, and *West* 1919, pp. 69-80. This and the chronology of the introduction of the tetradrachms (see next note) were accepted by many authors, notably *Raymond* 1953, 162 and 165, *Schwabacher* 1943, throughout, and *Zahrnt* 1971, throughout, esp. p. 56. The relative chronology of the Chalcidian coinage, sequenced by *Robinson* and *Clement* into Groups A to X, remained unchallenged.

³⁷ *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 152-153 for the tetradrachms, which were introduced during the issuance of Group E; for the Group E see also pp. 12-15 and the chronological table in p. 141.

³⁸ For the critical analysis of the high chronology of the Chalcidian coinage based on historical analysis by *Zahrnt* 1971, Chapters II and III, esp. pp. 80-90, see *Westermarck* 1988, throughout, esp. pp. 92-95 and 100, who dated the Olynthian coinage to ca. 420-400 B.C., the Chalcidian League's small silver denominations ca. end of the 5th century B.C., and the introduction of the tetradrachms after ca. 400 B.C. More recently a detailed analysis of the Chalcidian coinage is offered by *Psoma* 2001, with the following conclusions about the chronology: pp. 193-195 for the beginning of the Chalcidian federal state in 432 BC., pp. 173-174 for the small denominations of the Chalcidian state issued from ca. 420's B.C. onwards (*Robinson/Clement's* Groups A to D), and pp. 172-173 for the introduction of the Chalcidian tetradrachms (*Robinson/Clement's* Group E) ca. 400 B.C.

³⁹ *May* 1939, pp. 42-43, suggested that for the early series of its tetradrachms Olynthus obtained much of its silver from Damastion, but also used other sources. The silver of Damastian coins still awaits to be analyzed for trace element contents.

seem to have ever been used as money in the proper sense.⁴⁰ The strong similarity of the two coinages suggests that Damastion started supplying the mint of Olynthus with silver bullion shortly after the Chalcidian tetradrachms were first introduced. Thus, the Damastian coinage probably began ca. 395 B.C.

Previously, May also dated the beginning of issuance by the Damastian mint ca. 395 B.C.⁴¹ Regarding the dependence upon the chronology of the Olynthian tetradrachms, he considered the introduction of the Chalcidian tetradrachms to have occurred ca. 410 B.C. and allowed an interval of about 15 years for the Chalcidian prototype-coins to travel to the area of the mines, become well-known there and thereafter instigate the emergence of an imitative local-barbarian coinage for which, nonetheless, the Greek artists would have been hired as die-cutters. However, May's thorough analysis of the historical background strongly suggested that Damastian coinage probably started after the reign of Archelaus (ca. 413 - 399 B.C.) and at the beginning of Amyntas' reign (393/392 - 370/369 B.C.), when the conditions for the intensification of the Chalcidian trade with the interior became favorable.⁴²

Based on the study by Robinson and Clement, Schwabacher proposed an adjustment to May's chronology and dated the beginning of Damastian coinage ca. 405/400 B.C., allowing 15 to 20 years of lagging after the introduction of the Chalcidian tetradrachms for the beginning of issuance of the barbarian imitations after the Chalcidian prototypes.⁴³

However, Damastion was a Greek foundation and its coinage was a product of a Greek enterprise. The issuance of its coinage with the city ethnic indicates the possibility that Damastion was organized as a polis.⁴⁴

The Chalcidians, Olynthus and Damastion

The relatedness of coinages normally signifies political ties between the two issuing authorities. Besides the two usual elements for identifying a political connection, the similarity of the weight standards and the similarity of the coin types, the Damastian and the Chalcidian coinages also share an almost coinciding date of the beginning of issuance of the tetradrachms of both cities. The connection of the two cities is thus undeniable, but remained ambiguous. There are several points that seem helpful for making it clearer.

⁴⁰ May 1939, pp. vi-vii, 34-37; Damastian tetradrachms show hardly any trace of wear; those exported to the customers in Greece served as bullion silver; in barbarian regions they were used for storage of wealth in coin hoards; see also Ujes 2002, pp. 111-122 for the hoards containing Damastian tetradrachms.

⁴¹ May 1939, pp. 38-39, 45, also 63, n. 2, based on the chronology of the Chalcidian coinage proposed by Gaebler 1925, pp. 202-212; May did not use the study by Robinson/Clement 1938.

⁴² May 1939, pp. 38-45, discussion about the historical setting with an emphasis on the two trade treaties, for a defensive alliance and trade rights, between Amyntas and the Chalcidians, the first datable to 393 B.C. and the second before 382 B.C., SIG I3135, Rhodes/Osborne 2003, inscription no. 12, pp. 54-58; for this inscription see also Zahrnt 1971, pp. 122-124, Psoma 2001, pp. 221-225, and Psoma 2011, p. 121.

⁴³ Schwabacher 1943, pp. 86.

⁴⁴ Hansen 2004-a, p. 148, on the coin inscriptions with city-ethnics as a sign of polis status.

The weight standard

There is a slight but possibly meaningful difference between the weights of the Olynthian and Damastian tetradrachms. The standard weight of the former is ca. 14.50 g, and that of the latter ca. 13.60 g.⁴⁵ The tetradrachms of Damastion appear ca. 6.2 %, i.e., ca. 0.90 g lighter. The weights of the attested Chalcidian / Olynthian denominations are as follows: tetrobols ca. 2.40 g, diobols ca. 1.20 g and hemiobols 0.30 g. The difference of ca. 0.90 g approximately corresponds to the weight of three hemiobols (a τριημιόβολιον), i.e. a quarter of a Chalcidian / Olynthian drachm. In other words, the weight of a Damastian tetradrachm appears to be 3 drachms and 4 ½ obols on the Chalcidian / Olynthian standard. The exchange rate appears to have been sixteen Damastian tetradrachms for fifteen Chalcidian / Olynthian tetradrachms (ca. 217.50 - 217.60 g).

This kind of a rounded difference corresponding to an exact fraction of the standard unit seems to indicate neither two separate weight standards nor a reduction of the model-standard of the Olynthian mint due its “barbarization“ by a distant non-Greek issuing authority. It might rather reflect an agreement over the mint output, possibly a tax payable to the barbarian masters of the mines by the Greek colonists of Damastion. If so, then the Damastian standard is basically the same as the Chalcidian / Olynthian, but appears reduced because the tax charge had already been in-built into the final product of the Damastian mint, the ingots of silver bullion.⁴⁶ Consequently the involvement of the Olynthians or, rather, of the Chalcidian state, with the colonists of Damastion, emerges as highly significant.

The coin types

The similarity of a number of obverses of the early tetradrachms of both Damastian and Olynthian mints is so prominent that May was justified to consider the Olynthian specimens as prototypes and use them for the classification and dating of the Damastian coin series. Consequently May inferred that:

“The sudden appearance of this coinage in the silver market seems, indeed, to have been due chiefly to Chalcidian enterprise...” and that: *“...the Chalcidians played a great part in the early exploitation of these mines; at least, it [the Damastian coinage] shows them to have been Damastion’s best customers at that period [the beginning of issuance in Damastion]”*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ For the standard used by the mint of Olynthus of ca. 14.50 g: *Robinson/Clement* 1938, pp. 207-209, based on *Hill’s* (1924, throughout, esp. p. 82) frequency table method, by which to the most frequent value (14.40 g) a 1% troy allowance was added resulting in a standard of ca. 14.54 g; however, the frequency tables of fractional denominations point to the value of ca. 14.50 g (p. 208-209). *Kraay* 1976, p. 330, considered ca. 14.4 g as the standard of the Chalcidian League, possibly because it is the frequency norm (as shown in *Robinson/Clement’s* frequency table, p. 207). For Damastion: *May* 1939, p. 13 and the table in the back-end paper.

⁴⁶ The large coins were a convenient medium for the transport of the bullion to the Chalcidians or other Greeks, see also n. 40 above.

⁴⁷ *May* 1939, pp. 42-43.

Despite that, May rejected the possibility that Damastion was an Olynthian foundation.⁴⁸ In any case, the matching types and standard, together with the proximate dates of the beginning of the tetradrachms of both coinages definitely indicate a strong political and trade connection between the two cities. This connection might have originated from the time of the foundation of Damastion and probable involvement of the Olynthians in the founding enterprise. The differences, such as the quarter-drachm lighter weight of its tetradrachms and the lower-quality style (or less skillful die-cutting) suggest a subordinate position of Damastion in its partnership with Olynthus.

The metropolis of Damastion

The augmentation of Strabo's passage 8.6.16 by Vat. Gr. 2306 revealed that Damastion was founded by the Aeginetans and Mendaeans. Thus arises the question of the role the Chalcidians might have had in the founding enterprise.

The dispersed Aeginetans could have obtained a temporary refuge with the members or allies of the Peloponnesian League. The Chalcidians were normally on the side of the League, but there is no piece of extant historical information that associates them with the expelled Aeginetans. The Mendaeans oligarchs could have had connections with the Olynthians, who first accepted their families, sent in by Brasidas in 423 B.C. and, probably, them, too, when released from Scione in 421 B.C. and unable to return to their polis (Thuc. 4.123), but not much more could be inferred. The Mendaeans were of Eretrian descent, so those in Olynthus probably were not fully integrated as citizens, but more likely had the status of metics, which might have encouraged them to participate in the enterprise of founding Damastion and the trade of Damastian silver.⁴⁹

Importantly, both groups of the founders were refugees: the Aeginetans had lost their polis and institutions, and the Mendaeans had lost their status in the polis of their origin. Neither group had a metropolis with the usual authority to coordinate the selection of one or more oicists and the consulting of the Delphic oracle and, accordingly, organize, fund and send the colonists in a decided direction.⁵⁰ Yet, it appears plausible that the endorsement came from the Chalcidians of Olynthus. After the Peace of Nicias, they could have provided first the assembly point for both groups of founders and also the essential organizational assistance, and eventually the necessary logistics for effecting the long-distance enterprise, without directly joining the enterprise by engaging their own citizens. After he instigated their synoecism in 432 B.C., the Olynthians were intermittently on good terms with King Perdicas II of Macedonia, so that between 418 and 414 B.C., during his alliance with the Spartans and Argives which also involved the Olynthians (Thuc. 5.80 and 83, 6.7), he might have facilitated the transit of the founders through Macedonian territory on their journey northwards to the area of the mines. Thus it seems that, besides the recorded founders, the Olynthians, too, played an important although auxiliary role in the foundation of Damastion. It also appears that they had a

⁴⁸ May 1939, p. 38.

⁴⁹ See Sutherland, 1943, p. 146, about the role of metics and private initiative in Greek trade.

⁵⁰ Graham 1999, pp. 25-27, about the traditional practices. However, the destination and intention of this venture seem to have been elaborated in advance, for the mines have probably been known to the Greeks and Macedonians before the foundation of Damastion.

significant role in the early exploitation of the mines and, subsequently, in the organization of the mint of Damastion. Therefore, Olynthus appears as a proxy- or substitute-metropolis of Damastion and its main or, in effect, dominant partner and customer.⁵¹

Damastion was apparently founded with an intention to procure much-needed silver and the similarity of the coinages hints at the possibility that the Greeks of Damastion kept trade connections with the Chalcidians of Olynthus from the time of its foundation. However, the only allusion to a possibility that Damastion exported bulk silver before its coinage was introduced is provided by the representation of a “portable ingot” on the reverse of its drachms (*Fig. 2*). The decision to found Damastion might have been prompted by previous commercial contacts between the owners of the mines and the Greeks involved in long-distance silver trade, including the Aeginetans known for their ventures in distant lands and the Mendaeans whose early coinage was traded in the Near East, but there is no extant information indicative of such contacts.⁵²

Conclusion

Damastion was founded by the exiled Aeginetans and Mendaeans most probably shortly after ca. 420 B.C. The similarity of the tetradrachms of the Chalcidian state issued at Olynthus from ca. 400 B.C. with Damastian tetradrachms and the political conditions in Northern Greece and the Kingdom of Macedonia at that time indicate that the beginning of the coinage of Damastion, which supplied bullion silver to Olynthus, may be dated ca. 395 B.C. Damastion was probably dependent in some ways on the barbarian masters of the mines it exploited, the Illyrian Dassaretii - Encheleans and Thracian Perisadyes. This dependence probably has its reflection in the quarter-drachm lesser weight of the Damastian tetradrachms compared to the Chalcidian tetradrachms, which possibly was an effect of a tax payable to the native masters of the mines. The Chalcidians of Olynthus, who seem to have played an important auxiliary role in its foundation and instigated its coinage, appear to have been the true masters of Damastion.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: Strabo 7.7.8, edition by Baladié 1989.

Fig. 2: The coinage of Damastion: tetradrachm, drachm, tetrobol.

Fig. 3: Strabo 8.6.16, edition by Baladié 1978.

Fig. 4: An early 5th century B.C. stater of Aegina.

Fig. 5: An early 5th century B.C. tetradrachm of Mende.

Fig. 6: An early tetradrachm of Olynthus.

⁵¹ *Gude* 1933, p. 18, employed the term “foster-mother” for Olynthus in connection with the repatriation after 405 B.C. of the refugees and exiles who had long been accommodated in this city. The role of Olynthus in the foundation of Damastion appears substantially different and closer to that of a metropolis.

⁵² Similarly, *May* 1966, p. 2, n. 1, speculated that the remarkable expansion of the early Abderite coinage might have been preceded by “some form of commercial connection ... with the sources of silver before the actual foundation” of the city. For the Aeginetans in Egypt and the coinage of Mende see the text above.

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- Fig. 4-6: © The British Museum, Online Research Collection, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license. Museum numbers: Aegina HPB,p68.3; Mende 1940,1001.3; Olynthus 1924,0507.1.
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