

The Coins of Ephesus

Part 1 by Peter E. Lewis



The road to the harbour at Ephesus. (Wikimedia Commons: detail of a photograph taken by Ad Meskens)

EPHESUS is an ancient ruined city in Turkey. It is a few miles from the shore of the Aegean Sea. (Figure 1) It was probably founded by Greeks in about 1000 BC and according to a legend the founder was Androklos, the son of the king of Athens. He wanted to migrate to the coast of Asia Minor and he consulted an oracle about where he should settle.

He was told that a fish and a wild boar would show him the place. After landing on the coast he fried some fish that he caught, but one of the fish jumped out of the pan and started a fire in the dry grass. A boar in the bushes nearby ran from the fire, but Androklos chased it and killed it near mount Koressos, which is where he built the city. On a coin of the

Roman Emperor Macrinus minted at Ephesus in 217 AD we see Androklos pointing his spear at a very nasty-looking boar. (Figure 2) Originally Ephesus had



Figure 1 – Map of the Aegean Sea showing Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 2 – Bronze coin of Macrinus (217-218) showing Androklos and a boar. On the reverse the words mean "[a coin] of the Ephesians. Androklos." (Helios Numismatik GmbH, Auction 5, Lot 710)



Figure 3 – The Temple of Artemis as St Paul would have seen it in the 1st century AD. (Wikimedia Commons: image created by Cafeennui)

a harbour, but with the passage of time the harbour silted up and by about 500 AD the city could no longer function as a seaport and trading centre. In ancient times it was an important city, not only because of trade but because of its great Temple of Artemis, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. (Figure 3) Ephesus, which in Greek is

ΕΦΕΣΟΣ, is of particular importance to Christians because Saint Paul lived there for two years (53 and 54 AD) and what happened to him in Ephesus is recorded in Chapter 19 of The Acts of the Apostles. He subsequently wrote a letter to the Ephesians which is also part of the New Testament in the Bible. Ephesus is a popular destination for

tourists, especially Christians, and it is amazing that many of the coins that circulated there still exist and can be handled and studied by coin collectors. Some of these coins might even have been handled by Saint Paul himself. But before we look at the coins, let's go on a brief tour of Ephesus as it is today. In Figure 4 there are four viewing points marked on a map of the city. If you stand at number 1 you will be looking down Curetes Street as seen in Figure 5. If you stand at number 2 you will see the library as seen in Figure 6. If you stand at number 3 you will be near the top seats in the theatre and you will have a view of the colonnaded street that led down to the harbour as seen in Figure 7, and if you stand at number 4 you will see all that remains of the Temple of Artemis, as shown in Figure 8. What was once one of the wonders of the world is now just a single reconstructed column and some odd stones.

For centuries nobody knew where the temple was, until 1869 when a corner of the temple was discovered by J.T. Wood who was digging at Ephesus for the British Museum. Further excavations revealed the platform of an earlier temple dating from the 6th century BC. In 1904 D.G. Hogarth, again for the British Museum, discovered beneath the centre the remains of three older structures,

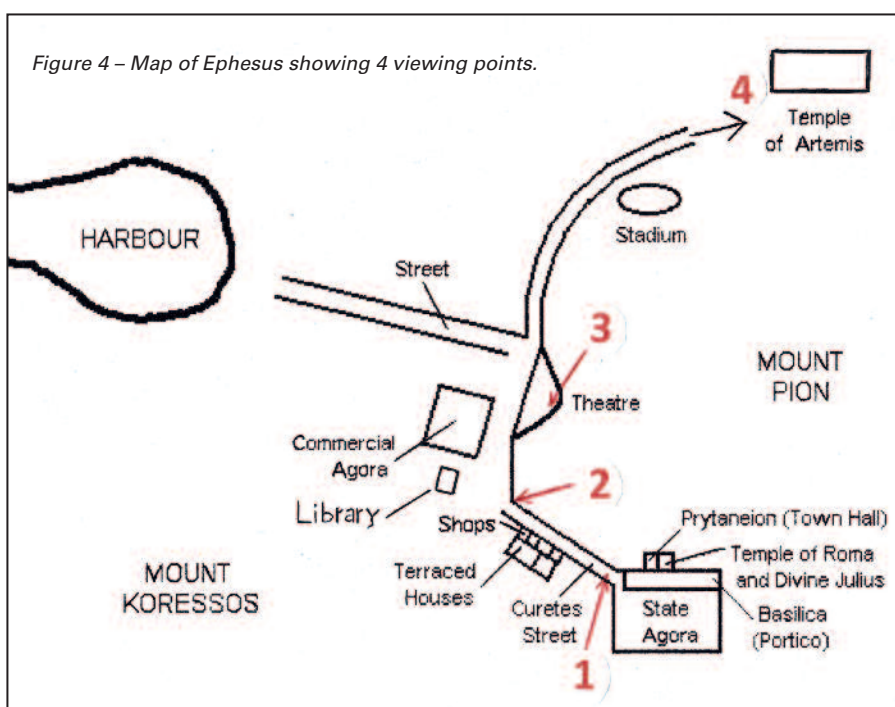




Figure 5 – View down Curetes Street. The Curetes were mythical warriors with priestly representatives in Ephesus. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 6 – View of the Library of Celsus. Celsus was a Roman senator and the library was built as his memorial by his son in the 2nd century AD. The façade was reconstructed in the 1970s. (Wikimedia Commons: photo by Bernard Gagnon)



Figure 7 – View from the theatre. (Wikimedia Commons)

the earliest dating from about 600 BC. What is of great significance for numismatics is that Hogarth discovered coins buried as a foundation deposit below the oldest structure. They were of a most primitive type: small lumps of metal stamped on the back with a punch mark. Some had striations (**Figure 9**) and some had a lion's head (**Figure 10**). As a lion's head was an emblem of the kings of Lydia, and as the metal was electrum, an alloy of silver and gold, which occurred naturally in Lydia, the invention of coinage has been credited to the people of Lydia and dated to about 650 BC, i.e. fifty years before the building of the first temple. Also the Greek historian, Herodotus, wrote in the 5th century BC that the Lydians were the first to use coins of silver and gold. But the excavations at Ephesus have shown that the first coins were of electrum, and modern scholars are tending to think that coinage developed over a wider area which included the Greek cities on the coast.

It is known that from 560 to 546 the king of Lydia was Croesus (Greek: Kroisos) and that he extended Lydian control over the Greek cities on the coast including Ephesus. He was responsible for one of the rebuildings of the Temple of Artemis. In the region other electrum coins have been found and dated to the period 650 to 550 BC, and they include coins with a bee on one side and a punch mark on the other. (**Figure 11**) The bee was a symbol of Artemis and hence these 'bee coins' have been attributed to Ephesus. Artemis was a goddess of the Greeks, and when they settled in the area they identified her with the nature-goddess worshipped by the local people. As bees were very much part of nature they



Figure 8 – View of the site of the Temple of Artemis. (Wikimedia Commons)

became symbols of Artemis, and the priestesses in the Temple of Artemis were known as 'melissae', which means 'honey bees'.

As well as coins with a bee there were some electrum coins with a stag. Some of these are unusual because they have

an inscription above the stag. On the largest of them (the stater) it says, "I am the badge of Phanes." (Figure 12) On the third size (trite) it says only, "Of Phanes." It is unknown who Phanes was, but because the stag was another symbol of Artemis he was probably from Ephesus.

On subsequent coins of Ephesus the bee and the stag frequently appear as symbols of Artemis.

In 546 Croesus was defeated by the Persian king, Cyrus I, and the whole region including Ephesus came under Persian control. The bee coins remained much the same although some coins showed a bee crawling and the incuse square roughly quartered. (Figure 13) One of the early Greek philosophers, Heraclitus, would have handled these coins because he lived in Ephesus from about 540 to 480 BC. He proposed that everything changes, but in a controlled way according to an unchanging law which he called the Logos. In Greek it means 'the Word'. The idea of the Logos entered Christian thought, and in John's gospel Christ is described as the Logos.

In 499 the Greek cities in the region rebelled against Persian rule. It is called the Ionian Revolt (Ionia was the coastal area that included Ephesus and Miletus, which is 50 kms south of Ephesus) and it lasted till 494 when the Persians sacked Miletus. Persian control continued, but in 469 at the mouth of the Eurymedon River south of Miletus the Athenian general, Cimon, destroyed a large Persian force on land and sea that was heading for Ionia. Thereafter the Athenians became dominant in the region and in 454 the Ephesians began to pay tribute to Athens. To the period from 500 to 420 belong silver coins (tetradrachms, drachms and their fractions) with a bee on the obverse and a quartered punch mark on the reverse. They have the complete word ΕΦΕΣΙΩΝ (of the Ephesians) on the tetradrachm and Ε-Φ on the other denominations. (Figure 14)



Figure 9 – Electrum 1/24 stater with striations on the obverse and a square punch on reverse. Diameter 5 mms and weight 0.59 gram. Sear 3435: 650 – 625 BC. (Classical Numismatic Group, e-Auction 299, Lot 169)



Figure 10 – Electrum 1/12 stater with a lion's head on the obverse and a square punch on reverse. Diameter 7 mms and weight 1.16 gram. Sear 3402: 650 – 561 BC. (Triton IX, Lot 957)



Figure 11 – Electrum 1/12 stater with a bee on the obverse and a square punch on the reverse, c. 550 BC. Diameter 6 mms and weight 1.14 gram. (Triton VIII, Lot 407)



Figure 12 – Electrum stater with a grazing stag and inscription on the obverse and 3 punches on the reverse, 625 – 600 BC. Weight 14.10 grams. Only 3 of these staters are known, and only 4 trites (third staters). This stater sold for 382,511 US dollars. (Numismatik Lanz München, Auction 158, Lot 252)



Figure 13 – Silver drachm with a bee crawling on the obverse and a roughly quartered punch on the reverse. Sear 3514: mid-6th century. (Stack's, Stack and Kroisos Collection, Lot 2239)



Figure 14 – Silver hemidrachm with a bee and E Φ on the obverse and a punch divided into quarters on the reverse. 500 – 420 BC. Diameter 17 mms and weight 1.69 gram. (Roma Numismatics, e-Auction 4, Lot 246)



Figure 15 – Silver hemidrachm with a bee and E Φ on the obverse, and on the reverse a quartered punch with the magistrate's name on the horizontal band. Sear 4369: late 5th century BC. (Numismatik Naumann, Auction 41, Lot 279)

Athenian dominance in the region continued until 412 when the Ephesians sided with Sparta against Athens in the Peloponnesian War, known as the Ionian War in this region. It dragged on till 405. Sparta won the war and began to exert control over Ephesus. To the late 5th century David Sear (*Greek Coins and their Values*) has allocated coins similar to the previous ones but with the issuing magistrate's name on the obverse or on a dividing band on the reverse. (**Figure 15**)

In 394 Ephesus joined the Athenian general, Conon, and his anti-Spartan maritime league and threw off the Spartan yoke. Ephesus and other cities issued coins showing the infant Heracles (Hercules) strangling snakes (**Figure 16**) and this image probably refers to them freeing themselves from Spartan control. By 387, however, Ephesus was back under Spartan control and the city was then ceded to Persia. A pro-Persian tyrant ruled Ephesus until Alexander the Great arrived in 333. During this period (387 – 333) Ephesus issued coins with a bee on the obverse and the forepart of a stag with the magistrate's name on the reverse. The bee has either curved or straight wings. (**Figure 17**) Similar coins with straight wings on the bee were issued in about 300.



Figure 16 – Silver tridrachm with the infant Heracles strangling snakes on the obverse, and on the reverse a bee with curved wings and E Φ. Weight 10.88 grams. Sear 4370: 394 – 387 BC. (Alde, Public Auction, Oct. 2017, Lot 212)



Figure 17 – Silver tetradrachm with a bee and Ε Φ on the obverse, and on the reverse the forepart of a kneeling stag looking back, a palm tree and the magistrate's name. Weight 15.20 grams. Sear 4373: 390 – 330 BC. (Daniel Frank Sedwick, Auction 22, Lot 1198)

In 356 the Temple of Artemis was destroyed by fire. The name of the man who lit the fire was Herostratus. He did it because he wanted to be famous. He wanted his name mentioned throughout history. Should I have mentioned it?

Alexander the Great offered to pay all the expenses for the rebuilding of the temple, but the Ephesians refused his offer, probably because they wanted to be independent. So as not to upset the great man the Ephesians politely told him

that it would not be fitting for one god to give gifts to another god. As Alexander claimed to be descended from Heracles (Hercules) who was the son of Zeus, the chief of the gods, and already had an enormous ego, this explanation was quite acceptable. But it took a long time for the Ephesians to rebuild the temple.



Figure 18 – Bronze coin with a bee and Ε Φ on the obverse, and on the reverse a kneeling stag looking back, an astragalos above and the magistrate's name to the left. Diameter 14 mms and weight 2.07 grams. Sear 4402: 350 – 288 BC. (Solidus Numismatik, Auction 14, Lot 156)



Figure 20 – Silver octobol with the head of Artemis on the obverse, and on the reverse a bow and quiver with the magistrate's name and ΕΦΕ with a tiny bee. Sear 4378: 295 – 288 BC. (Classical Numismatic Group, Mail Bid Sale 79, Lot 333)



Figure 19 – Silver drachm with Heracles wearing a lion's head headdress on the obverse, and on the reverse Zeus sits with an eagle on his hand, and on the right the Greek word means 'of Alexander'. On the left there is a tiny bee between Ε and Φ. Price 1877: c. 300 BC. (Author's collection)

From about 350 Ephesus began to issue bronze coins. In the first series which lasted till 288 there were three sizes: 10, 14 and 19 mms. There was a bee on the obverse and a stag kneeling and looking back on the reverse. Above the stag was an astragalos (a knuckle bone used in games and divination) and to his left was the magistrate's name which was different for each size. (**Figure 18**)

With the coming of Alexander the Great the influence of Greek culture extended

over the whole Middle East. At Ephesus, apart from the issue about 300, the bee ceases to be the main type and the typical coins of Alexander appear. They have the head of Heracles on the obverse and Zeus enthroned on the reverse with a tiny bee as the mint symbol of Ephesus. (**Figure 19**) Sear allocated these Alexander coins to a period about 200 BC but Martin Price in *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus* has shown that although

some of them date to a restoration of the type in about 200 others were issued in about 300 or earlier. The date of Sear 4384 and 4386 should therefore be changed.

In 306 Lysimachus, who had been one of Alexander's companions, became king of Thrace, and from 295 to 281 his rule included Ephesus. He took a particular interest in the city and built an extensive city wall, parts of which can still be seen on Mount Koressos. He constructed a new harbour and moved parts of the city to higher ground to prevent flooding. He issued coins with Artemis on the obverse and a bow and quiver (symbols of Artemis) on the reverse. (**Figure 20**) His wife was Arsinoë, the daughter of Ptolemy I, the king of Egypt, and Lysimachus named the city Arsinoeia after her. She was only 17 when she married Lysimachus who was about 60. He issued coins with her veiled head on the obverse and her name on the reverse. On the reverse of her silver coins there is a bow and quiver as on the previous coin, but with the letters AP ΣΙ (AR SI) below them. (**Figure 21**) On the reverse of the bronze coins there is a stag with the same letters. (**Figure 22**) Lysimachus might have been using these coins to identify his wife with the goddess.

In several cities Lysimachus minted tetradrachms with the deified Alexander on the obverse and Athena seated on the reverse, and some of these coins bear the bee mintmark of Ephesus. (**Figure 23**) But in 281 Lysimachus was killed in battle by Seleucus I, another of Alexander's generals and the founder of the Seleucid dynasty based at Antioch in Syria. The beautiful Arsinoë became a widow. What happened to her? You will find out in Part 2.

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Figure 21 – Silver octobol with the veiled head of Arsinoë on the obverse. On the reverse there are a bow and quiver with the magistrate's name and APΣΙ (for Arsinoeia) with a tiny bee. Sear 4379: 288 – 280 BC. (Classical Numismatic Group, Mail Bid Sale 60, Lot 724)



Figure 22 – Bronze coin with the veiled head of Arsinoë on the obverse, and on the reverse a stag kneeling and looking back, with the letters APΣΙ. There is an astragalos above and the magistrate's name to the left. Diameter 18 mms. Sear 4401: 350 – 288 BC. (Auctiones GmbH e-Auction 3, Lot 57)



Figure 23 – Silver tetradrachm of Lysimachus with the head of Alexander on the obverse. He has the horn of Ammon (an Egyptian god) indicating his deification. On the reverse Athena holds the goddess Nike (Victory) on her hand. The bee below her hand is the mint mark of Ephesus. The Greek words mean 'of King Lysimachus'. Weight 17.11 grams. 294 – 287 BC. (Sincona AG Auction 1, Lot 11)

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