

## Circulation of Coins and Economic History in Hellenistic Syria 6<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>1</sup>

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The invention of coinage dates back to the end of the 7th century according to the last studies of our best archaeological source : the foundations of the temple of Artemis in Ephesos. From the very beginning of the 5th century, more than hundred mints are known in the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup>. The wide circulation of the Athenian owl coinage since the mid-5th century till the end of the 4th century is followed by the wider success of the tetradrachms and gold staters of Alexander the Great struck by the conqueror and his successors almost everywhere in the empire<sup>3</sup>. During that time, hundreds of mints were opened in the Greek world, for huge outputs or tiny ones.

The role of money is crucial in every economy, but money is not necessarily coined. This is the first point to remember: studying coinage is not studying money ; the economy can use other means of payment than coins. The production of coinage during Greek times never covered the whole economic activity. F. de Callataÿ gave a clear demonstration of that phenomenon in his study of the Mithridatic wars. In spite of the large output of many mints in the name of Mithridates VI or his allies and enemies during the wars against Rome, the coins issued couldn't cover even the expenses of Mithridates' armies alone. A large part remained paid in kind<sup>4</sup>. It leads to the conclusion that coinage attests only a part of the economic activities, others, quite hard to evaluate, being covered by other means of exchange.

The second point to remember is that our knowledge of ancient coinage is partial : coins are scattered in museums, archaeological depositories and on the market of antiquities. These impediments explain why corpora are so rare compared with the number and variety of mints and coinages to be studied.

Can numismatic studies improve our knowledge of the integration of the market ? of the general frame of the economy ? To answer such questions, we need to give a view as complete as possible of our source. It is not an easy task and a complete overview can't be done. This is the reason why it is an absolute necessity to consider the whole material available if we want to shed light on the role of struck money in ancient economies. For now, a complete view on that subject remains a *pium desiderium*. But it is possible to propose a case study for one region. It will allow us to build a method and emphasize the limits of such a study. I tried it on Syria, in the most general sense : from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and from the southern limit of the Taurus mountains to Gaza. This area is a margin of Mesopotamia which is the theme of the conference, but it is also an interface with the

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted toward Cathy Lorber who kindly agreed to read an earlier version of this text and toward Thomas Faucher who drew the maps. All conclusions are my sole responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> See the maps in Price, Waggoner 1975 and Kim 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Price 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Callataÿ 1997.

Mediterranean world and one of the cores of the polycentric empires of the Achaemenids and the Seleucids.

The period I will consider in this paper is a bit longer than the one defined by R.J. van der Spek for the symposium : I start my enquiry at the very end of the 6th century<sup>5</sup> and go on till the last years of the 1st century BC. Such an enlargement is due to the material I study : the coin hoards and the excavation coins found in Syria. To have a complete view of those specific sources, we must consider their whole evolution, from the very beginning till the end of the Hellenistic period.

During these five centuries, Syria was ruled by the Achaemenids and the Seleucids, with several usurpations and invasions (Armenian, Parthian, Roman) at the end of the period. The sources for economic history in Syria during this period are rather scarce compared with Babylonia<sup>6</sup>.

There is no hope to have a view, even partial, on prices. But our knowledge of the monetary situation of the area is better than ever and allows us to have a long-term overview of monetary supplies. It cannot be complete and we have to take precautions in our interpretations but the role of coinage in ancient economies cannot be ignored. Therefore, the aim of this article is to propose a case-study on coinage in Syria, its circulation and some conclusions on the information it gives us on the regional economy and its integration.

The first part of this paper details the features of the 356 hoards and 58 publications of coins from legal excavations I gathered. It is far from complete, especially because to go through the Israeli archaeological data is an endless work. The following sections will propose some interpretations of the data.

## **Numismatic sources**

The provenance of coins is of two kinds : hoards and excavations. Both sources are not regular in time and space. The archaeological activity is not the same in all the countries of the Near East. Israel developed a remarkably active service and has a large staff of numismatists of international rank. Thus our archaeological information is denser in the southern Levant. I selected 58 sites in the whole area, some giving large amounts of coins, others being only small towns or villages and having provided less than ten bronzes.

Hoards give a different view : most are found in an illegal context and their distribution is closely linked with the ancient history of the area. I tried to gather all the hoards attributed to the Syrian area in the available literature.

### *Hoards*

The complete catalogue of the 356 Syrian hoards is beyond the scope of this article and should be published soon with the attached bibliography. Most of the data are conveniently found in the *Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards (IGCH)*<sup>7</sup> and the *Coin Hoards* series (*CH*). The aim of these inventories is « to record new hoards as they enter museums or as they pass through the coin trade » and « to compile a bibliography on hoards published or discussed during the previous year »<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ras Shamra hoard, IGCH 1478.

<sup>6</sup> Some scattered lists of prices are known in the Zenon papyri devoted to his journey in Palestine. See Durand 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Mapped on nomisma.org.

<sup>8</sup> R.A.G. Carson, *CH* 1, p. 1.

These series only give short descriptions of the lots and bibliographical references when they exist. Most of them have been published in scientific articles and books whose conclusions are integrated in my commentary. The data are growing quickly and it is now extremely difficult to give an accurate catalogue since new hoards regularly appear on the market of antiquities. Unfortunately, most of the hoards have been discovered in illegal conditions. Only 12 % of the 356 in our catalogue come from legal excavations. But the comparison between these data from scientific provenance and these from trade hoards show that, most of the time, results of both sources are consistent<sup>9</sup>.

### *Excavations*

There is a contrast between the origin of silver and bronze coins. Silver coins are almost never found isolated in excavations. Of the 58 excavations I gathered, 20 had 1 to 6 silver coins. A more striking example is the agora of Athens : of the 14 600 coins dated from the 6th to the 1st century BC, less than 1 % were made of precious metal, that is electrum<sup>10</sup>, gold and silver<sup>11</sup>.

The 356 hoards found in Syria between the 6th and the 1st centuries BC give a total of c. 60 000 coins, mostly in silver : 313 hoards of 356 contain silver (87,9 %). The silver coins isolated in excavations are about 120. Clearly, excavations are our best source on bronze coins, but we need the hoards to know the silver.

### *Corpora*

The best medium to pinpoint ancient coin production is to publish die corpora of mints or rulers. The dies are the two tools used to punch a plain metal blank with the obverse and reverse types carved on it. A large series of coins giving a good sample allows the numismatist to recognise the original dies. Then a statistical study can say if the sample is representative of the original production and what extent it had.

To gather a corpus means visiting public coin collections, going through numismatic auctions (today mostly electronic), and as far as possible knowing the results of the excavations lying on the territory of the city or kingdom studied. Once the coins are gathered, the die study allows the numismatist to calculate how many dies were used and evaluate the original output. Each corpus is a huge work and very few are available for ancient Syria.

During the Achaemenid period, the mints are concentrated on the Mediterranean shore. Only two have received a complete die study by J. and A.G. Elayi : Sidon and Tyre. Arwad and Byblos are in progress by the same authors<sup>12</sup>. The Hellenistic period is not better known and the main publications also focus on the Phoenician shore : Arados (Arwad)<sup>13</sup> and Berytos<sup>14</sup> are now published, and G. Le Rider wrote the catalogue of the Seleucid mint of Antioch on the Orontes, but excluding the bronze coinage<sup>15</sup>. Some die studies of isolated series exist for other mints, but they are quite hard to compare without the background of the whole output.

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<sup>9</sup> I give a complete analysis of the differences of information given by hoards from excavations and from the market in the book in progress.

<sup>10</sup> An alloy of gold and silver.

<sup>11</sup> Kroll 1993, p. xvii-xxvi ; Callataÿ 2006, p. 180 gives similar figures for other excavations in the Greek world.

<sup>12</sup> Elayi, Elayi 2004 ; 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Duyrat 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Sawaya 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Le Rider 1999.

The scholarship is far from illustrating the variety and rich output of the Syrian mints during the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. So, no synthesis of the whole production exists. To publish the studies of mints remains the principal task to improve our knowledge of the role of coinage in ancient economies. For instance, during the sole reign of Antiochos III (223-187 BC), one of the most powerful Seleucid kings whose empire extended from the Hellespont to India, 21 royal mints are firmly identified and several others are suspected<sup>16</sup>. A complete study of their output would be a remarkable improvement of our knowledge of the economic frame of his reign.

Coins were produced by royal mints but also by civic ones during the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. An interesting study by L. Miltenberg gives an overview of the origin of coins in the Persian empire ; synthesis for the Achaemenid and Hellenistic times by G. Le Rider and C. Augé are also available<sup>17</sup>. During the Hellenistic period, dozens of mints were operating.

### *Conclusion*

Coins are an archaeological source, as incomplete as are all the data we obtain from earth. But excavations inform us on bronze, and hoards on silver, gold remaining scarce in both cases. Moreover, a large majority of our silver coins come from the black market of art : they have been unearthed illegally and we are totally incapable of giving them an archaeological context. To add to this disappointing conclusion, our knowledge of ancient coinages is weakened by the lack of corpora.

But despite these faults, coins shed some light on ancient economies. At this point, it is only a partial drawing of what they were, a basic information that can only be improved as soon as corpora, publications of excavations and other numismatic studies will be published.

### **Geography of circulation**

Coins are not everywhere in ancient Syria. For instance maps of eastern hoards allowed me to show, several years ago, that silver coins were hoarded only along the Mediterranean shore (broadly conceived) including the Beqa Valley and the West bank of the Tiberiad lake and the Dead Sea. East of this area, hoards are well represented along the road leading from Aleppo/Beroia to the foot of the Taurus range, then running southward along the Tigris River to Babylon, crossing Babylonia to the Euphrates River and following its bank to Elam and the Persian Gulf. Eastward, hoards are scarce and only found in the « silk road » oases<sup>18</sup>. The excavations confirm the geography of coin finds : they are scarce or nonexistent in excavations eastward of the Antilebanon, the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea<sup>19</sup>.

The concentration of hoards and archaeological coins in the Mediterranean area and their scarcity in the hinterland lead to a first conclusion : the role of coinage in the economy is limited to this area. Eastward, exchanges and accumulation of wealth are done in kind : crops, raw metal, etc. But the use of coinage is a subtle matter. In the eastern zone, some places deliver many coins. For instance, Jebel Khalid, a fortress on the Euphrates in an area without a mint, delivered 267 coins dated from Alexander the Great to the 1st century B.C. C.E.V. Nixon, the editor of the coins, linked this particularity with the important Seleucid garrison

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<sup>16</sup> SC 1, 1, p. 362 (map)-364.

<sup>17</sup> Miltenberg 1995 ; Le Rider 1961 ; Augé 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Duyrat 2004 with maps.

<sup>19</sup> Lemaire 1995.

that occupied the fortress during the whole period. Coins disappear from the site at the same time as the royal soldiers. During their presence, the fortress had a monetary economy in an area without coins. In these desert regions, only cities and some military camps used coins, creating coinage zones in non-coinage ones. The Seleucid administration centres and the garrisons probably increased the coin needs for they were paid and met their own expenses rather in coins than in kind.

The contrasts between the east and west areas of Syria are probably not only regional. N. Cahill's careful study of Olynthus emphasized strong differences of means of payments inside a single city. Olynthus, in the Chalcidic peninsula, in Northern Greece, is a most interesting site : the settlement is narrowly dated between 432 and 348 BC. In 348 Philip II, king of Macedonia, captured the city and sold its inhabitants as slaves. The city was abandoned till the 20th century. Large excavations between 1928 and 1938 revealed over 100 houses and provided much information on daily life and economic activities of the city. It also shed light on the use of coinage :

It is immediately clear from the distribution plan that coins are particularly concentrated in the area around the agora at the south end of the North Hill. On average, the houses at Olynthus contain about 20 coins per house. The houses within a block or so of the agora, however, average more than four times as many coins. Considered another way, ten of the fifteen houses at Olynthus with the greatest number of coins adjoin the square, and two more are a block away<sup>20</sup>.

On 4 638 coins found at Olynthus, 4 237 were of bronze. They were lost by their owners and never recovered. Their concentration in the agora area emphasizes a larger use of coins in daily transactions. Many other shops and workshops are well attested in the city, but nowhere is there such a concentration of small change. Coins are especially scarce in the « villa area », in the South-East borough of Olynthus. From these data we may conclude that the use of coins is not the same in the different areas of a city, even when there are shops everywhere. The agora is the principal place where coins are needed in daily transactions.

We have no comparable studies in Syria : no large city has been totally excavated, none has been abandoned without being settled again later. Antioch, Seleucia, Apamea, Jerusalem and the Phoenician cities are still inhabited or only partially excavated. But it is highly probable that in the same town, some exchanges demanded coins and others not.

### **History of circulation**

The first hoards in Syria are exclusively made of foreign coinages since *c.* 625 till the mid-5th century. The Athenian owls enjoyed an obvious popularity : they are found in 63,2 % of the hoards dated to the 5th century. The Phoenician mints started issuing around the 450s. The increase of their output during the 4th century gives them a leading place in the hoards : they are represented in 71,8 % of the hoards.

The big change dates back to the Macedonian conquest. In 333, Alexander the Great enters Phoenicia with his armies. They camp in the Aradian *peraia* during the winter 333-332. But deep monetary modifications can be noticed only after 325, when the Asia Minor mints begin

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<sup>20</sup> Cahill N., *Household and City Organization at Olynthus*, New Haven / London, 2002, p. 266. See the map p. 267 and the tables 10 and 11.

a coin production with Alexander types and the output of the Eastern mints increases<sup>21</sup>. The real increase of the output of Alexander tetradrachms in Syria and drachms in Western Asia Minor is due to the Diadochi after the death of Alexander, around 320. These noticeable changes are visible in hoarding : between 333 and 325, only 3 hoards contain Alexander's tetradrachms. The first hoard exclusively made of Alexander coins dates back to 325/4<sup>22</sup>. After 325, and during the next twenty years, Alexander tetradrachms are virtually the only currency in Syrian hoards.

From Alexander to the Roman conquest, during the 1st century, the monetary history of Syria is particularly rich. To give a detailed overview of the output and rulers is beyond the scope of this article, but a general frame is necessary. Political changes have obviously a strong influence on coinage. From 301 to 200, Syria is separated between the Seleucid kingdom, North of the Eleutheros River, and the Ptolemaic possessions to the South. Ptolemy I conquered Koile Syria in 301, restoring the traditional glacis that protected Egypt against Asian invasions during the Pharaonic period. At the same time he imposed his own currency with a light standard and a limited circulation : Ptolemaic coins were not supposed to be in use out of the Ptolemaic possessions and implied a coin change at the border, especially in the harbours (Alexandria and the harbours of Phoenicia and Cyprus). In contrast, the Seleucid accepted every silver coinage of the Attic standard, having their possessions largely provided by foreign currencies.

The main changes happened during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. First of all, Antiochos III drove the Ptolemies out of Koile Syria during the Fifth Syrian War (202-198). But he maintained his predecessors' monetary system : light silver standard and Ptolemaic coin types continued to be in use in this special area of the Seleucid kingdom (Figure 1)<sup>23</sup>. It means that Ptolemaic tetradrachms were authorised to cross the border between the two kingdoms and that economic transactions were not cancelled by the new political situation. But during Alexander I Balas' reign (150-145), a new disruption occurred. The royal mints of Southern Syria started minting coins of the Ptolemaic standard but with the Seleucid king's portrait (Figure 1) and the Ptolemaic silver issues quickly disappeared from the area. The 140s mark an important turning point in coin circulation : Ptolemaic coins are not the only ones to vanish ; foreign tetradrachms that were so frequently found in hoards become scarce. It is particularly noticeable because since the 150s, civic tetradrachms issued by cities of Asia Minor were the principal currency buried in Syria<sup>24</sup>, when they were scarce everywhere else, even in Asia Minor. They were easily identified because most of them were adorned with a wreath around the reverse type (Figures 3 and 4)<sup>25</sup>.



**Figure 1 : Tetradrachm, Ptolemy II**



**Figure 2 : Tetradrachm, Alexander I Balas**

<sup>21</sup> Le Rider 2003, p. 124-127 ; p. 130-131 ; Hersh, Troxell 1993-1994.

<sup>22</sup> Lebanon hoard, *CH* 8.172.

<sup>23</sup> Le Rider 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Lorber 2010.

<sup>25</sup> A useful synthesis in Le Rider 1999.



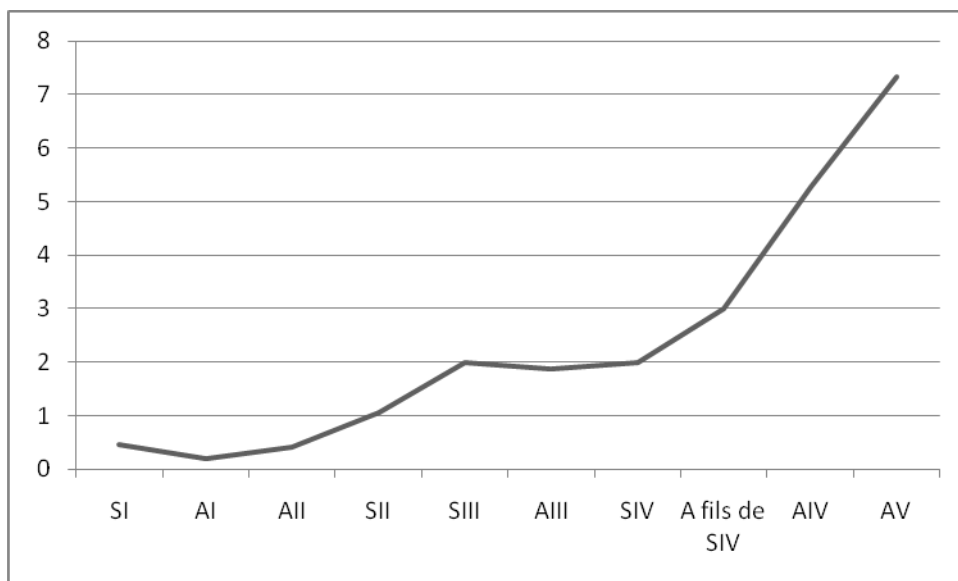
Figure 3 : Tetradrachm, Lebedos (Aeolis)



Figure 4 : Tetradrachm, Myrina (Aeolis)

The removal of such common issues is contemporary with a significant increase of the royal Seleucid output. We lack die and mint studies, but the development of royal coinage is indubitable from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. The tetradrachm issues of Antioch are a good example of this phenomenon, although our figures run only to Antiochus V<sup>26</sup>.

Figure 5 : Tetradrachms Obverse Dies per Year at Antioch



And the increase goes on during the following reigns. A. Houghton's preliminary study gives 10 obverse dies a year under Demetrius I's rule in Antioch<sup>27</sup>. *Seleucid Coins* identifies a probable 37 mints in activity in the reign of Antiochus IV<sup>28</sup>. The growth of the royal output is illuminated by the change in the hoards' composition. From the 140s, the share of Seleucid royal coinage is increasing. They are found in more hoards and their share is now dominating everywhere (compare Map 1, Map 2, Map 3).

Alexander I Balas' reign seems to have been a turning point in Seleucid monetary policy : the removal of the Ptolemaic currency from Koile-Syria, the increase of a large output of Ptolemaic weight but with Alexander I's portrait in the southern mints, the decrease of the Asia Minor tetradrachms in hoards and the growth of the Attic standard royal output point to a big change in monetary matters during his reign. With Demetrius I, who issued a large range of gold denominations – a metal rarely struck by the Seleucids –, Alexander I Balas is probably one of the most innovating kings in the dynasty. The choices of these two rulers

<sup>26</sup> Le Rider 1999 ; tables of the die study in Duyrat 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Houghton 1991, p. 80, Antioch after Antiochus III ; Houghton 2002, p. 14-15, charts 4A et 4B for « the Seleucid Core ».

<sup>28</sup> SC 2, 1, p. 51-52.

were certainly guided by needs : after the death of Antiochus IV in 168, the Seleucid dynasty started a century of fratricidal wars between two rival branches. Their military needs led to an increasing demand for coined money.

This paper is too short to allow a more detailed account of the monetary history of the period. However, it is important to underline the contemporary development of the bronze coinage. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, all the Eastern mints' output in this alloy grew significantly. The mint of Aradus, which enjoyed a favorable situation in the Seleucid empire, is a good example of the increasing role of bronze.

**Figure 6 : The bronze issues of Aradus during the Hellenistic period<sup>29</sup>**

	3 <sup>rd</sup> cent. BC	2 <sup>nd</sup> cent. BC	1 <sup>st</sup> cent. BC
Bronze series	5	10	13
Total of obverse dies	75	506	89

The number of series struck in bronze increases regularly, but the number of obverse dies in use reaches a peak during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It is also the apogee of the city that declines during the 1st century. Other examples would give different figures. For instance, the Hasmonean kingdom reaches its maximum bronze output – which is considerable – during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76)<sup>30</sup>.

### Nature of circulation

The nature of circulation is very different according to the period and the area considered. It is absolutely not a regular phenomenon that would lead from times with few denominations, and consequently a low degree of monetization, to more « modern » times with a lot of fractions and a higher monetization. It is crucial to remember that coins are not everywhere and that the capability of ancient people to have a developed economy without coins is very high and always true during the period studied in this paper.

It is particularly striking to observe that the end of the 4th century, before Alexander's conquest, is characterised by hoards of small change : one third are made of small silver coins frequently struck by the Phoenician and Philistian mints. The following tables give an overview of the most recent corpora.

**Figure 7 : Share of the fractions in the Sidonian Corpus (after 450-333 BC)<sup>31</sup>**

<b>Double shekels</b> c. 25,67 g	<b>Shekels</b>	<b>Halves</b> c. 6,94 g	<b>Quarters</b>	<b>1/16</b> 0,76 – 0,55 g	<b>1/32</b>
978	1	237	73	882	89

Total : 2 260 of 2 614 in the corpus.

<sup>29</sup> Duyrat 2005, p. 293.

<sup>30</sup> Meshorer 2001

<sup>31</sup> Elayi, Elayi 2004.



**Figure 8 : Share of the fractions in the Tyrian Corpus (c. 450-333 BC)<sup>32</sup>**

Shekels	Quarters	1/16	1/32	1/160
13,56 g then 8,77 g	3,16 g	0,57 g	0,32 g	
1160	76	285	13	3

Total : 1 537 of 1 814 in the corpus.

194 silver fractions (around 0,70 g) and the whole bronze series (81 coins in 5 groups) are excluded from this table : J. and A.G. could not manage to classify it.

**Figure 9 : Denominations in use in the Philistian Mints<sup>33</sup>**

Tetradrachms	Didrachms	Drachms	Obols	Hemiobols	Fractions
			0,92-0,40 g	0,32-0,17 g	0,15-0,04 g

The number of fractions gathered in these corpora and catalogues is striking, especially if we remember that the smaller the coins are, the more they disappear, being worn more quickly than big denominations and being less easily found by archaeologists, except when the earth is sieved, which does not occur so often<sup>34</sup>. So the figures given in these tables emphasize impressive productions of fractions. These are sometimes tiny. The smallest denominations of the Philistian mints are c. 0,15 – 0,04 g. The Phoenician mint of Arwad (Arados in Greek) gives the same range of tiny coins. The best example of the ordinary use of this very small change is one of the Al Mina hoards.

Al Mina is an ancient town situated at the mouth of the Orontes River. It was abandoned c. 300, probably as a result of the Macedonian conquest and the foundation of new powerful cities in its neighbourhood. 55 tiny coins were gathered in a very small cylindrical silver purse closed by a silver lid<sup>35</sup>. This purse had a diameter of 2,5 cm. This means that it was not intended to contain double shekels, shekels or tetradrachms whose diameter is always larger<sup>36</sup>. It was a small change purse. The coins are 51 fractions from the mint of Arwad and 4 others from Sidon. The weight range runs from 0,04 g to 0,59 g, the last weight being the giant of the lot (Figures 10 and 11) ! The whole hoard is around 6 grams<sup>37</sup> !



**Figure 10 : Arwad, fraction**



**Figure 11 : Enlargement**

<sup>32</sup> Elayi, Elayi 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Gitler, Tal 2006, p. 73-75 and p. 319-320.

<sup>34</sup> Butcher 2001-2002, p. 25 notices that, « The small coins are difficult to spot, but recovery is greatly improved if the spoil from each context is sieved ». In the Beirut souks excavations, « about 48 % of the coins found on BEY 006 and 045 were 12 mm or less in diameter [...]. A large proportion of these were recorded during sieving ».

<sup>35</sup> Woolley 1938, p. 166.

<sup>36</sup> Elayi, Elayi 1993, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson 1937 ; Elayi, Elayi 1993, n° 6, p. 62-67.

The particular demand for fractions during the 4th century BC is also noticeable in hoards.

**Figure 12 : Percentage of hoards containing each type of denomination**<sup>38</sup>

Period	Denominations over the drachm	Drachms	Fractions
Persian period	76,47 %	10,29 %	44,12 %
Alexander and the Diadochi (333-280)	76,67 %	11,67 %	25 %
3 <sup>rd</sup> cent. BC (280-200)	77,78 %	13,89 %	5,56 %
2 <sup>nd</sup> cent. BC (199-100)	84,92 %	13,49 %	1,59 %
1 <sup>st</sup> cent. BC (100-1 av. J.-C.)	66,67 %	4,55 %	1,52 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>78,81 %</b>	<b>10,96 %</b>	<b>13,2 %</b>

Large denominations remain the favorite currency buried (generally over the two thirds of the lot), drachms are most of the time around 10 % of the hoards, but there is a clear evolution in the fractions. They are frequently hoarded during the Persian period, in fact mostly during the 4th century. That proportion remains high till the 320s and drops after this date : from the 320s, they are noticed only marginally in hoards. Such a change could be easily explained by the development of bronze issues, more convenient for daily transactions than tiny silver coins of the same value. Except that from the 320s till the very end of the 3rd century, the bronze output is scanty in Syria. That means that during one century, this region mainly used Alexander tetradrachms as coinage, and something else, but no coins, for daily transactions.

Even after the increase of the bronze output, Syria never issued many drachms and bigger silver fractions. Coinage was principally composed of large silver coins (double shekels, shekels and tetradrachms) and very small silver during the Persian period or bronze since the end of the 3rd century.

Therefore, we must conclude that the development of coinage is not such a regular process : more small silver change was available before Alexander than during the 3rd century. The large increase of bronze small change dates back not earlier than to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century

Another phenomenon must be noticed : during the 4th century, hoards show different contents according to the area where they are buried. Of 14 hoards containing fractions, 11 are located South of Saida (Map 4). It is rather astonishing because we observed that the Phoenician mints, including the Northern one, Arwad, struck a large range of small denominations. Thus we can conclude that hoarding emphasized the Southern users' partiality to fractions while the Northern ones preferred large denominations. Large denominations are also found in Southern hoards, but fractions are scarce in the North.

This observation must be compared to a later one : after 320, two bronze hoards of three are found in the Southern area, and the Hasmonean kings increasing their possessions from Jerusalem started an overwhelming output of bronze at the very beginning of the 1st century<sup>39</sup>. Samaria, Judea and Philistia seem to have been distinguished during the last four centuries BC by a marked predilection for small silver change and bronze coins, one of the standards for the definition of a high degree of monetization.

<sup>38</sup> Some hoards contain each type of denomination, so the total of each line can be over 100 %.

<sup>39</sup> Meshorer 1967 and 2001.

## Conclusion

Although we lack die studies and need special precautions to study the ancient coinages, we can safely conclude that the use of coinage is characterized by heterogeneity. Its increase and its features greatly vary from the 5th to the 1st century as much geographically as in time. These variations are probably also strong inside the areas, and even inside the cities if we follow the example of Olynth.

Therefore, it seems extremely tentative and not relevant to give large general and totally theoretical views on the coinage and the Seleucid policy in that matter. There were strong regional and even micro-regional features, with varying adaptations in the long trend, not necessarily in the sense of what we consider to be progress. The choice of one area such as Judea to build a model to be extended to the whole empire is not appropriate : according to numismatics, Judea's features makes it a very special region, certainly not comparable with others, and it is most probable that each area had strong features that made it different from its neighbours.

The evolution of the use of coinage is not steady and seems to be narrowly linked to the political and military needs for silver. Bronze is less influenced by these events and played probably a role greater than usually thought : this alloy is less studied than silver, quite ill represented in public collections if compared with silver, yet it seems to have been common, and even abundant, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1st centuries BC. Some scholars used to consider that it was so plentiful that large payments could be made in bronze. It could be an explanation for the scarcity of silver small change during the Hellenistic period : payments below the tetradrachm being done in bronze, as suggested by O. Picard for Thasos (North Aegean).

Dès lors que pour effectuer un paiement, le payeur pouvait utiliser soit des espèces en bronze inutilisables hors de la cité, soit des espèces en argent qui avaient partout une certaine valeur, il était assurément plus avisé de choisir la première solution, ce qui devait amener logiquement une rétention des pièces en argent, et donc une dépréciation des pièces en bronze. [...] Que le bronze ait chassé l'argent se constate, à Thasos et dans bien des cités, mais pas dans toutes, par l'élimination progressive des espèces d'argent inférieures au tétradrachme<sup>40</sup>.

Coinage can hardly inform us on commercial intercourse : we have no means to distinguish a payment to the state from a soldier's pay or an inheritance. We have no way to know which part of the exchanges was paid in coins and which part in crops or other commodities. But the range of denominations, the abundance of small change or bronze, the geography of hoards and excavation finds, the output studies give a frame that we will improve progressively. Moreover, if an integrated market is supposed to be an interdependant and unified whole, it is noticeable that Syria, since the end of the 5th century, used common coinages (Athenian owls and their Eastern imitations, alexanders) or local coinages circulating in the whole area (Phoenician silver during the 4th century, Attic standard silver during the Seleucid empire). No unification can be observed, but an adaptation to the most abundant silver coinage allowed to circulate widely. The 140's mark a turn since the Attic standard is no more the only criterion to allow a silver coinage to be accepted in Syria. From these years, foreign silver coinage decreases in the hoards, progressively replaced by Seleucid silver, in the Attic as in the Ptolemaic zones. Aradus, a powerful Northern Phoenician city traditionally allied to the

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<sup>40</sup> Picard 1994, p. 41.

Seleucids, adopts a new light standard unique to itself<sup>41</sup>. At the very end of the century, the development of the young Jewish state leads to the development of the huge bronze issues of the Hasmonean dynasty<sup>42</sup>. The Near East goes from an empire-wide open circulation to a more fragmented one.

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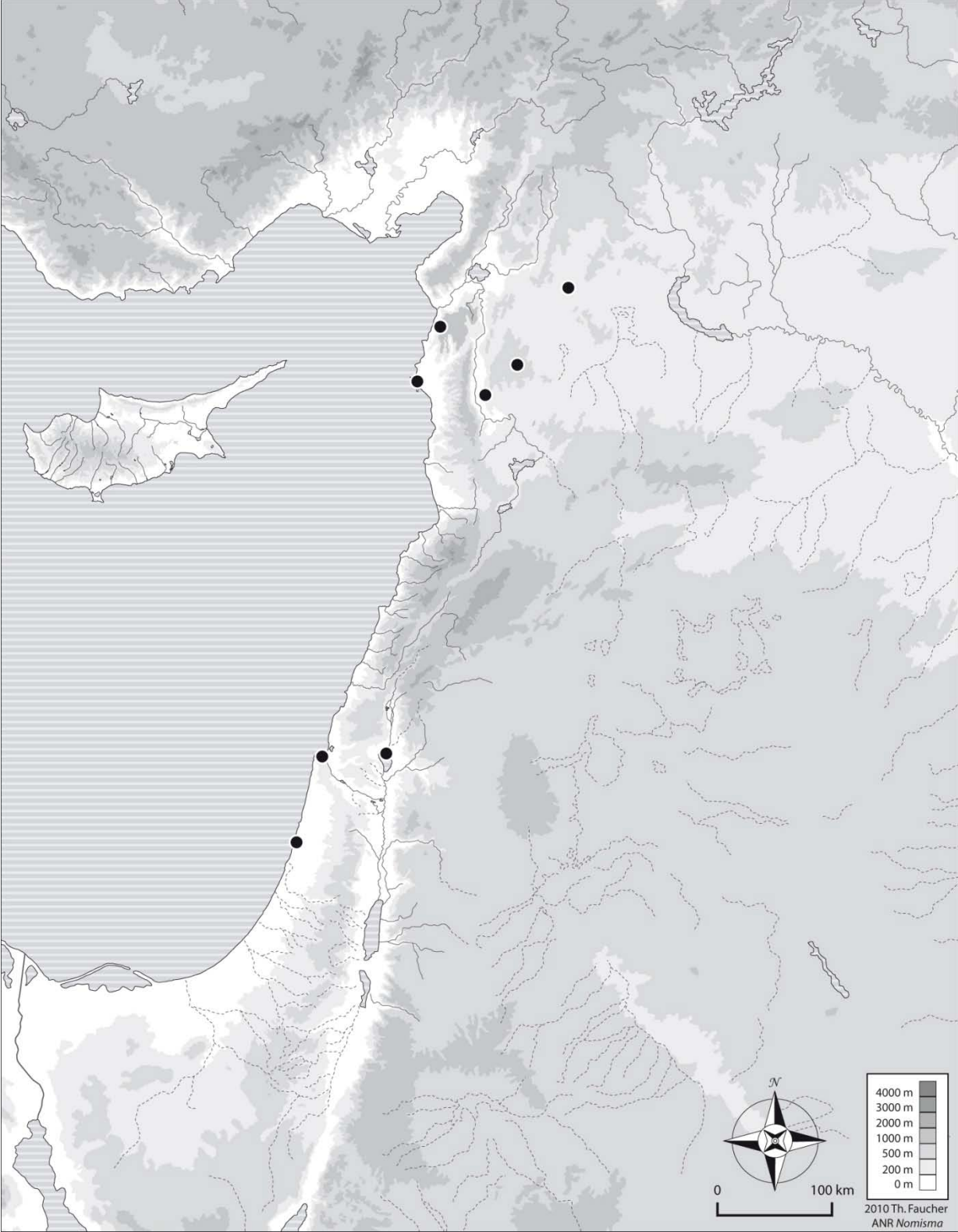
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<sup>41</sup> Duyrat 2005.

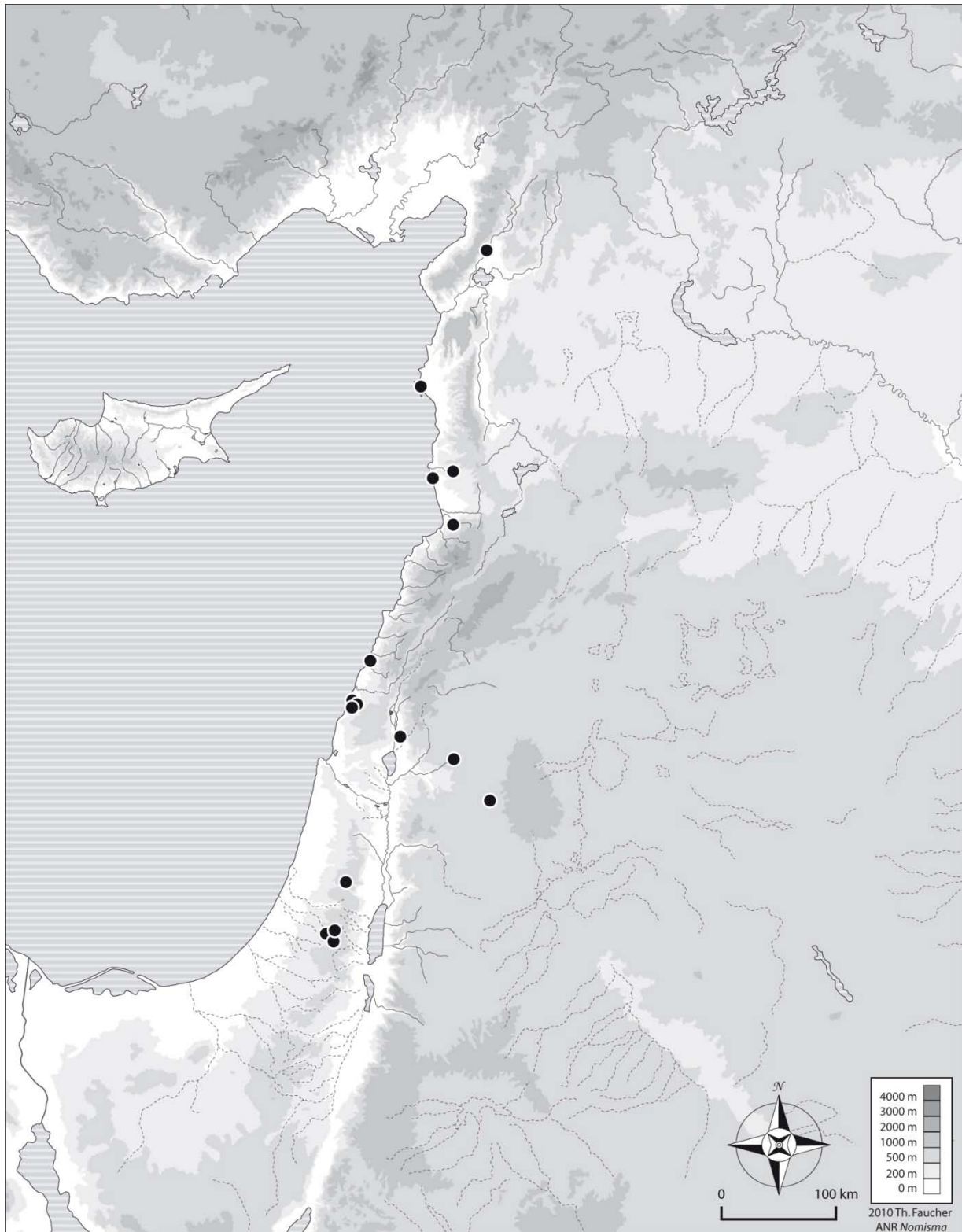
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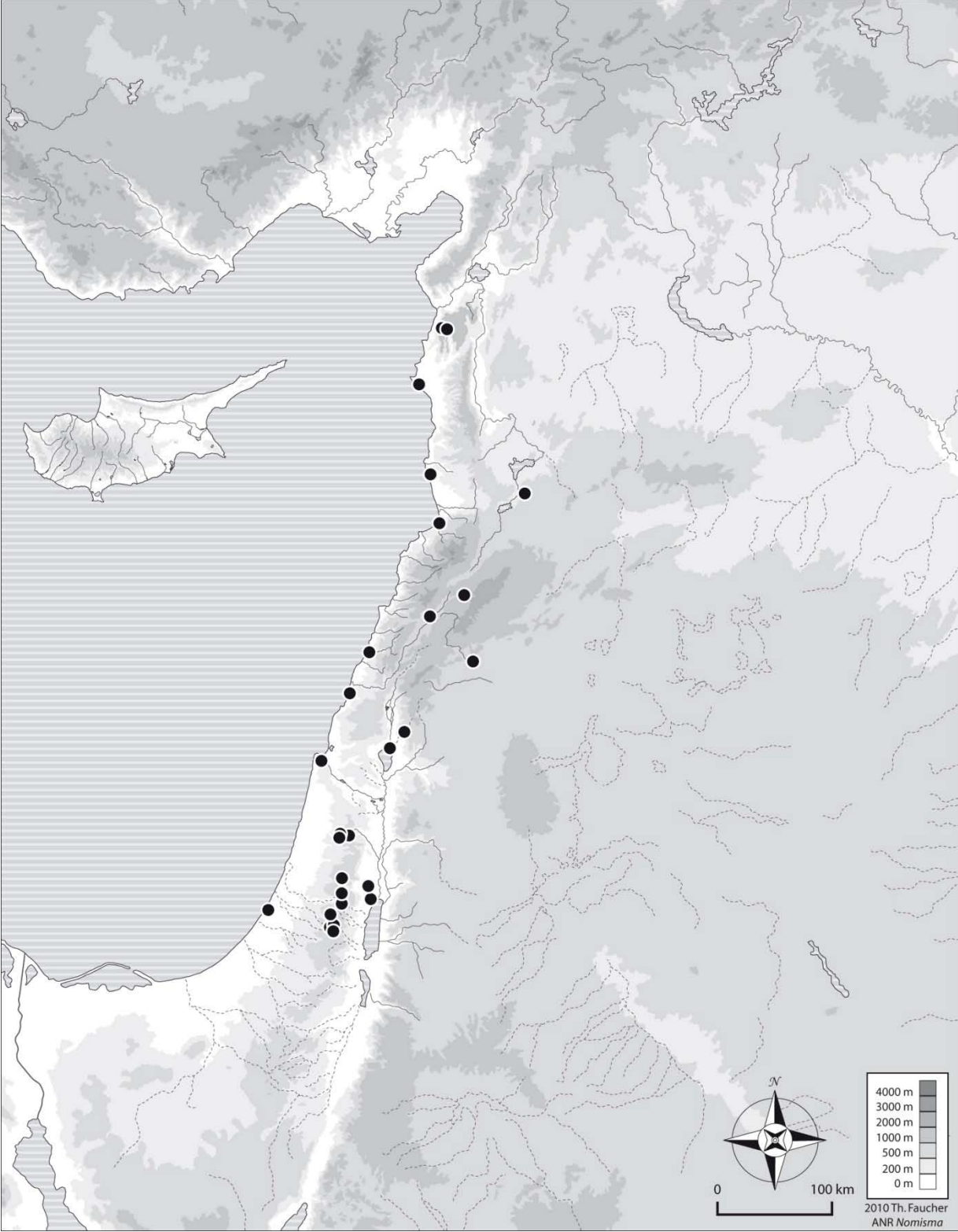


**Map 1 : Hoards of Coins of Antiochus IV**

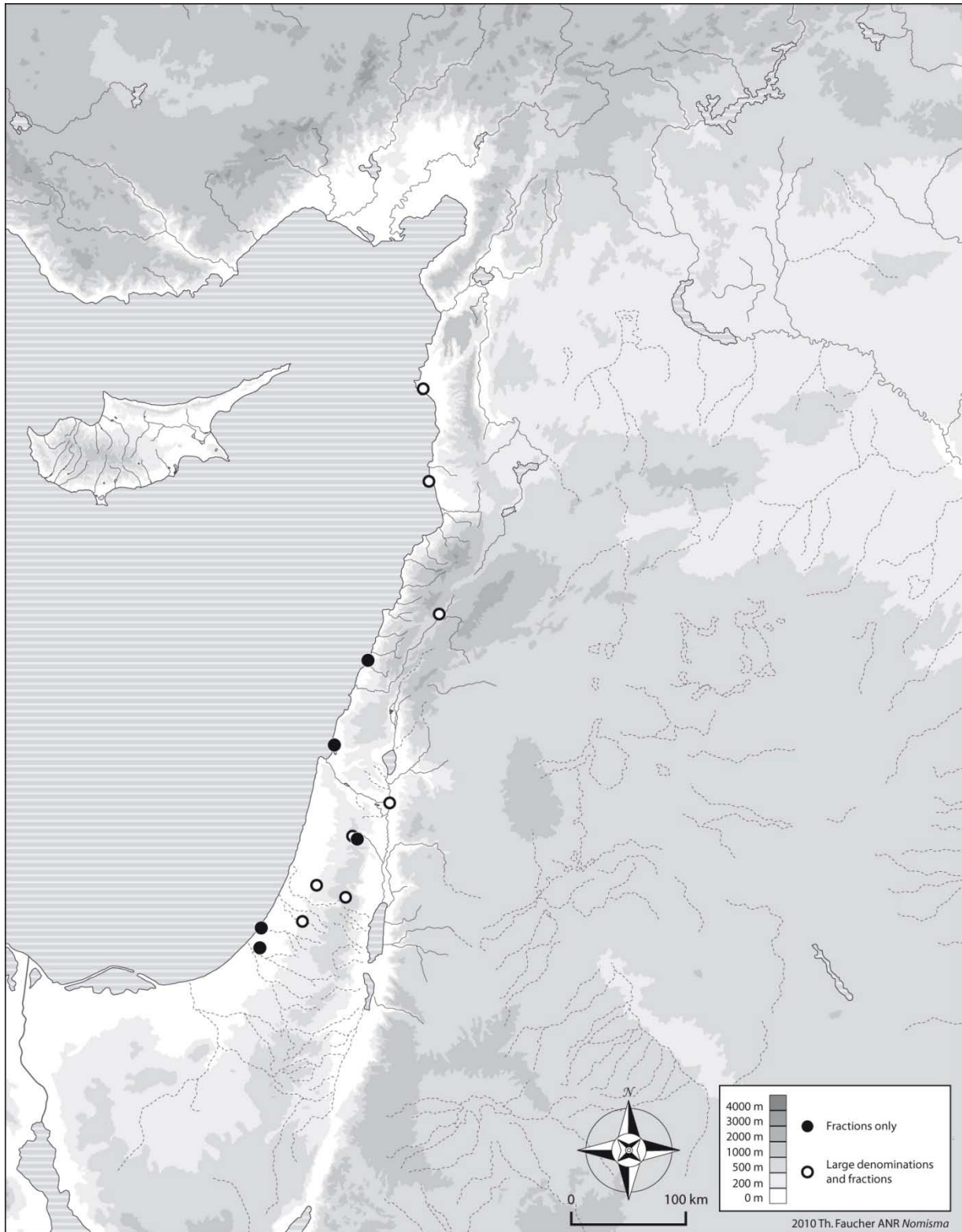


**Map 2 : Hoards of Coins of Alexander I Balas**





Map 3 : Hoards of Coins of Antiochus VII



**Map 4 : Hoards of Fractions during the Persian Period**