

Opinion Article

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# Epigraphic First!

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## Epigraphic\_Coinage, a 2607 Years old Power Game!

Undoubtedly, money has been the vehicle for spreading *alphanumerical* languages, as well as dominant ideologies [1] and their calendars [2].

The Miletian astronomer and trader Thales, offspring of a Phoenician family, sought the protection of the Lydian king Alyattes, in order to get rid of the yearly plundering by the king's armed gangs. In counterpart, he offered a prediction [3]: the date of occurrence of the forthcoming solar eclipse: -584.05.28 [4]. This decisive strategic data allowed Alyattes to stage the end of his war with the Medes. In the evening following the « double sunset », even

the Leo constellation was visible from the battlefield along the river Halas. Back to his capital city Sardis, Alyattes had let two sets of punch-dies engraved, with epigraphic-iconic patterns. As the size of those dies exceeded that of the available flans (the commonly certified weight of 4.76 g Electrum Trite also called Third Stater), the strike of two EL Trite was necessary, though often only one of the pair of coins has been found.

In the first kind of dies, KYKALIM, the name in Lydian of the king's ancestor Gygès, see Figure 1, conferred legitimacy to the king. The legend should be read bottom-up and right to left. The disc over the eye may represent the eclipsed sun.



Figure 1: Right KYKALIM EL Trite [5] with legend inserted between two lion heads, and “double sunset dot” on the eye.

The second kind referred to the absolute power of the king. Its legend WALWET meant lion in Lydian. Again the legend appeared between two opposed protomes of lions exhibiting a dot over the eye

To reveal the complete mirror-image of the design engraved on the die, we overlapped with 76% opacity, the pictures of the two trites, see Fig. 2. The legend should be read top-down and right to left.



**Figure 2:** The pair of WALWET EL Trites overlapping with 76% opacity: Right Lion [6] & Left Lion [7], both with the “double sunset dot” on the eye.

The exact use of those early coins remains unknown, possibly as visiting cards, prestige pieces, or order of merit. Because they were carrying a nominal message, those proto-coins had to be epigraphic!

In contrast, Croesus, the son of Alyattes minted only anepigraphic coins. The symbolism of the solar eclipse as well as ancestors' names faded out. Besides, the flan technology allowed by then to strike the complete design at once, such as the 8.00 g Gold Stater, see Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Anepigraphic Gold Stater bull & lion [8].

With the Electrum Trite, the sun now appears radiant on the eye of the lion, see Figure 4, as if the meaning of the double sunset's symbol got lost.

Finally, the Miletian standard, 14.09g EL stater, swapped the

symbolic value of the early proto-coins for the emerging trade paradigm, best illustrated, in our opinion, by a Janus-like lion, lotus flower above, see Figure 5.



**Figure 4:** Anepigraphic EL Trite: lion with a radiant sun on the eye [9].



**Figure 5:** Janus-like Miletian EL Stater [10]

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### Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest

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