

Persian Achaemenid Empire, One-Fourth Silver Siglos

Time of Darius I the Great – Xerxes I, Late 6th – Early 5th Century B.C.



Persia, Achaemenid Kings, Darius I to Xerxes I

Silver, one-fourth Persian Siglos, fractional coinage, circa 505 – 480 B.C.

Obverse: Persian king, facing right, kneeling or running stance, drawing bow

Reverse: No design; single oblong incuse punch indentation only

Weight: 1.45 grams. Diameter: 10 mm x 9.5 mm.

Attribution: Ian Carradice Type II (pl. XI, 12). SNG Klein 756.

Darius I the Great was the third Persian King after Cyrus the Great. From 522–486 B.C. Darius reigned over the vast and expanding Persian Empire, which under his leadership attained its geographical zenith – including the Holy Land. He is mentioned by name in Scripture several times, appearing in Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel.¹ It is widely accepted that the type of coin shown here was issued under his reign.

Darius revised the monetary system by changing the weight structure and introducing new designs on coinage. Rather than the bull and lion depictions commonly used on Lydian coinage under Croesus, Darius' new Persian types featured a human figure holding a military archer bow. On this coin the figure appears kneeling on his right knee, drawing a bow as though in preparation for shooting an arrow. The inclusion of military-related designs was likely an intentional effort to in some way communicate Persia's strength.

Whether or not this human figure was intended to represent any one person is uncertain, but the idea of it as a depiction of King Darius is conceivable. Reasons in favor of this include that these types commenced under Darius, several examples of these types show the figure wearing a crown as would a royal personage, these same design types when stamped on gold pieces were termed "Darics" even as far back as the time in which they were produced, the figure always holds a weapon and Darius proudly claimed to be an excellent bowman and spearman, and on "both the famous rock relief at Bisitun and on his tomb in Nashq-i Rostam, Darius holds a bow".²

The coin's weight reveals it to be a one-fourth silver siglos, a small unit which at the widest point measures just 10 millimeters. (By comparison the diameter of a U.S. dime, the smallest of U.S. modern coins, is a full 80% larger at 18 millimeters.) Although this quarter-siglos is still a one-sided design as was the Croeseid types, this new Persian type reveals a change in production method in that the side opposite the design has just a single punch rather than two.

This coin's likely production *circa* 505–480 B.C., would have meant that it circulated not only under the reign of Darius I but also under that of his son Xerxes I, whose mother was a daughter of Cyrus II the Great. During Darius' reign the Jews remained in subjugation to Persia, but the Jews "enjoyed much peace and prosperity".³

Under the early regnal years of Darius, the prophecies contained in the books of Haggai and Zechariah were given. In Darius' second regnal year the Persian designated governor of the province of Judah, Zerubbabel, received a divine message of direction through the prophet Haggai (Haggai 1:1-11). This message moved Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest to raise an altar for sacrificial offerings, lead observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, begin reconstructive work on the Temple, and lay the Temple's foundation (Haggai 1:13-15; Ezra 3:2-13).

In Scripture Darius is perhaps most well-known for his decree that reconstructive work on the Jerusalem Temple should resume after having ceased due to a cunning plot by adversaries to Zerubbabel and Joshua (Ezra 6:1-12). Because of Darius' strong royal decree being carried out, and because of the obedience of the Jews to the prophecies and direction of Haggai and Zechariah, the Temple was completed under Darius' reign (Ezra 6:13-15).⁴

A significant and famous event which involved Darius' powerful Persian military was the Battle at Marathon, 490 B.C., in which the Athenian Greeks defeated the Persians and thereby prolonged a degree of Greek independence by having prevented control of Attica falling to the Persians.⁵ This decisive battle is the origin of the 26.2 mile "marathon race". After this humiliating defeat Darius began to amass another military attack on the Greek mainland, but due to poor health he died with this aim still in a planning process. However, his son Xerxes I, would pick up his father's mantle in this regard, and commence what is today termed as the second Persian invasion of Greece.

ENDNOTES

¹ Scripture refers to more than one personage by the name “Darius”. The Darius in focus here was the fourth king of Persia, and one of three men named Darius in the Bible. A different Darius is referred to as Darius the Mede in Daniel 6:1 and 11:1, and yet another is Darius is named in Nehemiah 12:22 as Darius the Persian. [ISBE Bible Dictionary, Darius, #2527]

² The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage. Edited by William E. Metcalf. Oxford University Press. 2012. ISBN 978-0-19-937218-8. “The Coinage of the Persian Empire”. Michael Alram. Page 61

³ Easton Bible Dictionary, Darius, #975

⁴ Despite the finished Temple construction, the city of Jerusalem remained only partially populated and the city walls and gates was still in serious disrepair from the Babylonian siege some 70 years prior.

⁵ “The Battle of Marathon was a watershed in the Greco-Persian wars, showing the Greeks that the Persians could be beaten; the eventual Greek triumph in these wars can be seen to begin at Marathon. Since the following two hundred years saw the rise of the Classical Greek civilization, which has been enduringly influential in western society, the Battle of Marathon is often seen as a pivotal moment in European history.”

http://military.wikia.com/wiki/Battle_of_Marathon