

## Gold Coins

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The following coins are unusual in that they are made of gold, but the authenticity of these coins is seriously doubted. It was thought until recently that all Parthian coins were silver or base metal; in 1980, Sellwood held that gold coins might have been struck as ceremonial medallions, not coinage. But, in 1982, the archaeological dig at Tillya-tepe yielded an unquestionably authentic coin, but which may have been a contemporary gold imitation of a Parthian coin. In 1991, David Sellwood determined several gold coins of Vonones I which appeared on the market were authentic. While Sellwood is universally respected, his opinion on authenticity of these gold coins has not yet been accepted by most scholars and the coins [were condemned in 1995 by the IBSCC](#), and withdrawn from the market.

The concept that the Parthians never minted gold coins and had no use for such a coinage is based only on the absence of examples to conclusively prove that the Arsacid rulers did strike such coins. We have a tablet dated 219 SE (= 94/3 B.C., from the reign of Mithradates II), in which the scribe gives an account of re-smelting gold. This is found in tablet AB 245 (ex Bodleian Library, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK) which has been edited and published by G. J. P McEwan, "Arsacid Temple Records", *Iraq*, vol. 43 (1981), pp. 131-143. McEwan comments that "gold is not attested in the economic texts of the Seleucid period, but to judge from the fact that it is mentioned here in relatively small quantities as gifts to the temple, it would seem that it was again in general circulation during the Arsacid period...."

Adding to the difficulty is the absence of Parthian gold coins in any public collection; the Tillya-tepe gold coin in the Kabul museum may be a gold Fourrée (plated), but the coin has not been available for inspection, and once thought lost to museum looting during fighting in Afghanistan. [BBC News reported in August 2003](#) that the hoard has been found safe in the presidential palace vault, and a June 2004 [PakTribune news article](#) reported that the entire hoard is safe and has been inventoried and photographed by *National Geographic*.

What we need, of course, are finds of Parthian gold coins in archaeological context. Until that time, the below examples are presented to help you understand the nature of these interesting coins, and make you aware of the controversy. Please leave your comments on the [feedback page](#) where you can post a public message or send private e-mail on this topic. If you are a collector possessing gold Parthian coins, please contact me so I can publish your examples.

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**Click on coin images to enlarge:**

### Gold Coin #1



### **Gotarzes I**

Click on the coin image at left to see the gold coin from Tillya-tepe (Afghanistan) that is similar to a Sellwood type 33.7 drachm. This is the only gold Parthian coin found in archaeological context, and thus genuine.

### **Gold Coins #2**



### **Vonones I** Modern Forgery

Type 1 gold aureus. These coins are not accepted as authentic by most scholars and have been condemned by the IBSCC. Click on the coin image at left to see the Type 1 coins of Vonones I described by Sellwood in "Parthian Gold Coins" (1991).

### **Gold Coins #3**



### **Vonones I** Modern Forgery

Type 2 gold aureus, 1/3 aureus and 1/6 aureus coins. These coins are not accepted as authentic by most scholars and have been condemned by the IBSCC. Click on the coin image at left to see the Type 2 coins of Vonones I described by Sellwood in "Parthian Gold Coins" (1991).

### **Gold Coins #4**



### **Mithradates II** Modern Forgery

These gold forgeries are copies of Sellwood type 27.1 silver drachms, being seen more frequently and probably originating in Pakistan. Click on the coin image at left to see information on three examples of this forgery ([Forgeries 2](#), [3](#) and [6](#)).

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