

"Glocalisation" of weight standards: The adoption of the Roman libra in the Eastern Mediterranean (1st c. BCE – 3rd c. CE)

Standardisation and Localism
in the Legal and Economic World of the Romans

Brussels and Ghent, June 8–10, 2023

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FNRS / UCLouvain

An understudied material





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ΔΙΗΤΟΕΜΙΣΕΙΡΑΙΡΙΗΠΟ...
 ΝΑΧΟΗΙΟΚΕΚΤΗΜΕΝΟΣΤΟΜΕΤΡΟΝ...
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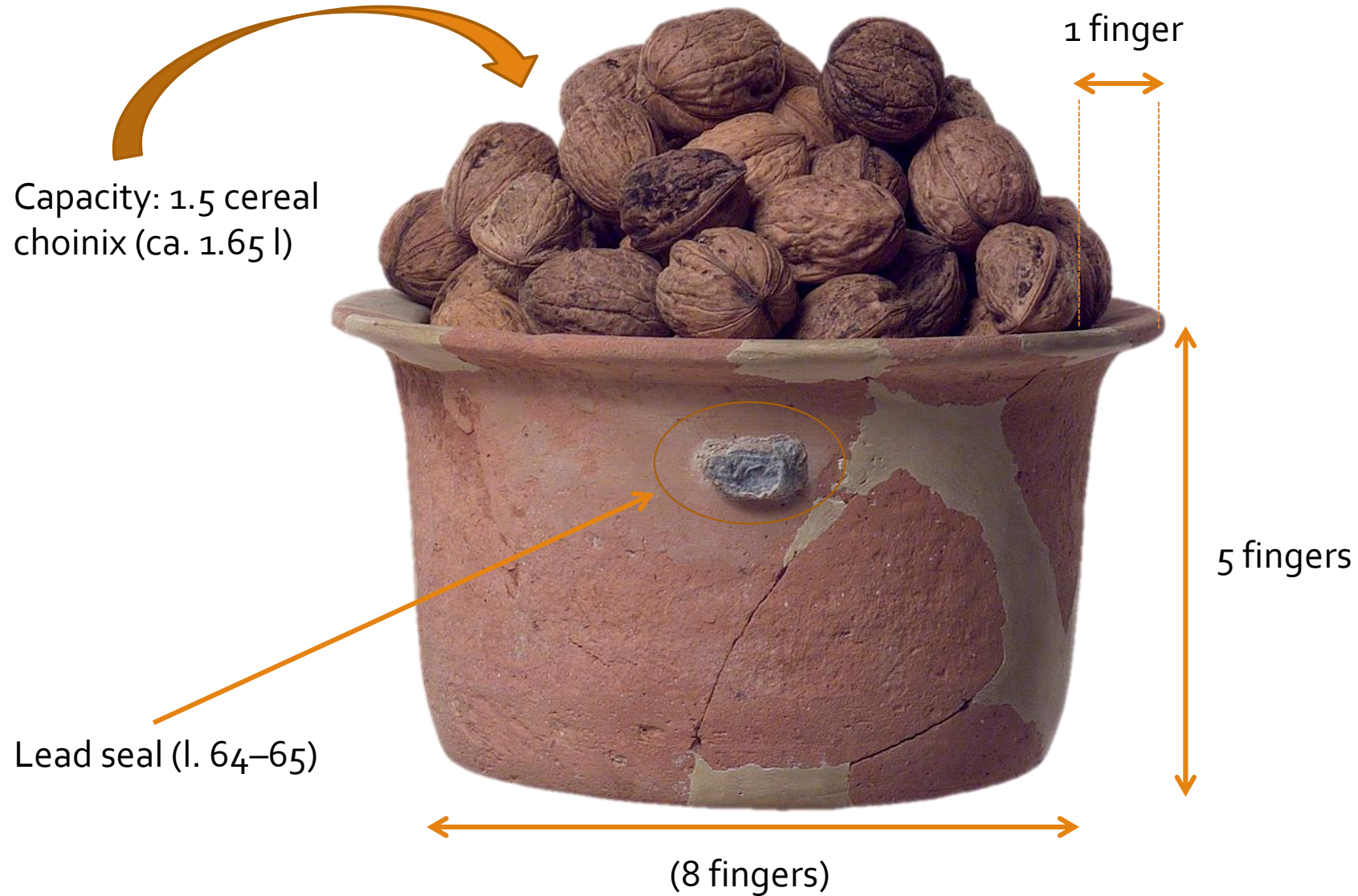
Athenis in domo Abbatis
 Rasthenij

A specific measure for certain fruits

“The sellers of walnuts (i.e. Persian nuts), almonds, hazelnuts (i.e. nuts of Heraclea), pine nuts, chestnuts, lotus seeds (i.e. Egyptian beans), dates, and any other delicacies which are sold with these, lupines, olives, and kernels, shall sell with a measure (μέτρον) having a capacity of three cereal half-choinikes filled to the brim, selling with this increased *choinix* having a depth of five fingers and a width of the rim of one finger. [...]”



A specific measure for certain fruits



Specific standards for certain commodities

“And the market mina (μνᾶ ἐμπορική) shall weigh one hundred thirty-eight drachmas of the *stephanephoros* (silver), in accordance with the weights (στάθμια) which are at the mint, and shall have a makeweight of twelve drachmas of the *stephanephoros* (silver), and everyone shall sell everything else with this mina, **except for what should expressly be sold in accordance with the silver (standard)**, balancing the beam of the scales at the weight of one hundred fifty drachmas of the *stephanephoros* (silver).”



Former commercial mina
(ἐμπορική μνᾶ)
(138 drachmas)



Makeweight of
12 drachmas



New commercial mina
(ἐμπορική μνᾶ)
(150 drachmas)

Athenian weight system (5th–4th cent. BCE)



1 stater (224 drachmas)



$\frac{1}{3}$ stater
(74.67 drachmas)



$\frac{1}{6}$ stater
(37.33 drachmas)



$\frac{1}{12}$ stater
(18.67 drachmas)



1 mina
(112 drachmas)



$\frac{1}{4}$ stater
(56 drachmas)



$\frac{1}{8}$ stater
(28 drachmas)

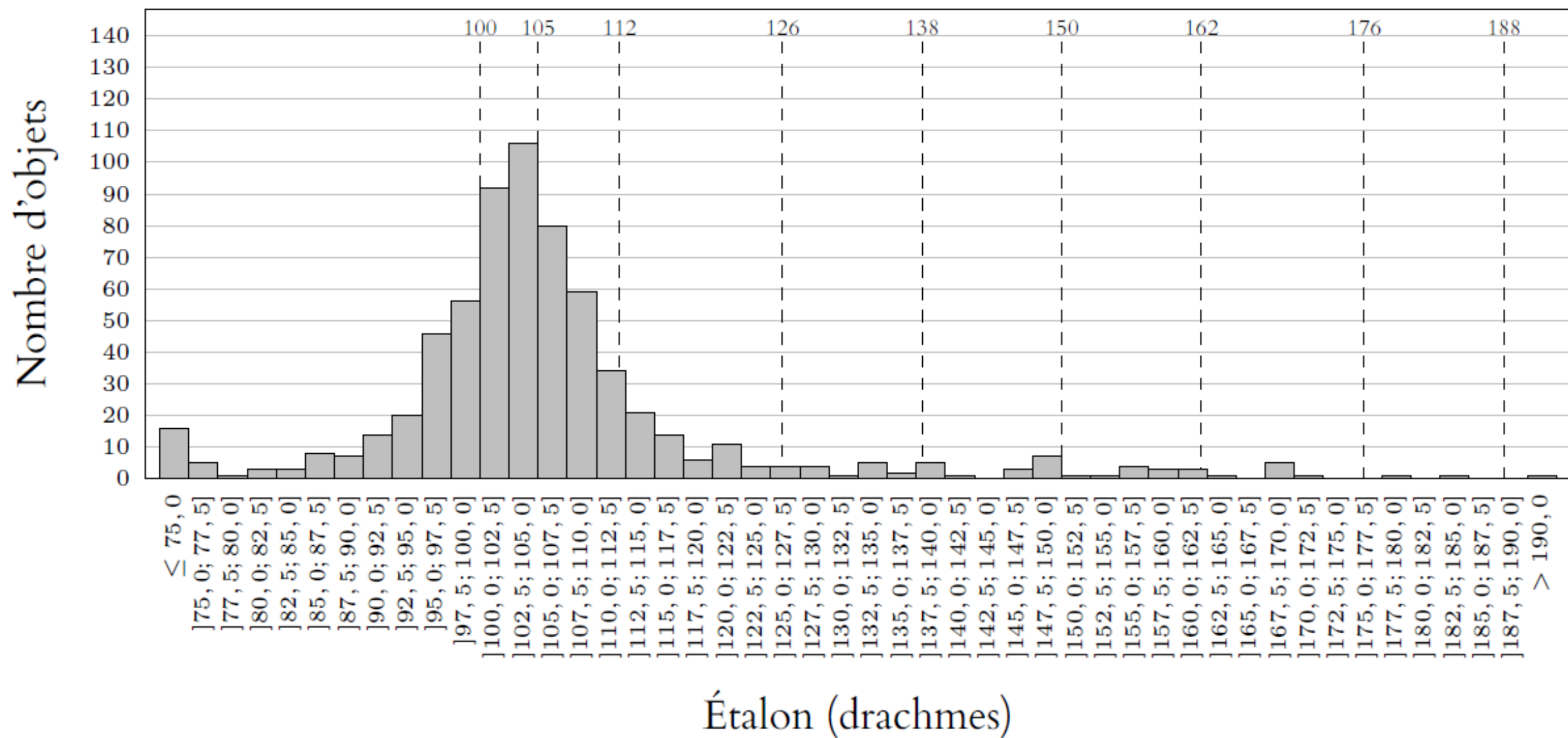


$\frac{1}{16}$ stater
(14 drachmas)

Athenian weight system (2nd – 1st c. BCE)

Denominations	Ratio 138	Ratio 150	Ratio 162?	Ratio 175?
1 stater (2 minas)	276 drachmas	300 drachmas	324 drachmas	350 drachmas
½ stater = 1 mina	138 drachmas	150 drachmas	162 drachmas	175 drachmas
⅓ stater (⅔ mina)	92 drachmas	—	—	—
¼ stater (½ mina)	69 drachmas	75 drachmas	81 drachmas	87.5 drachmas
⅙ stater (⅓ mina)	46 drachmas	—	—	—
⅛ stater (¼ mina)	34.5 drachmas	37.5 drachmas	40.5 drachmas	43.75 drachmas
⅟ ₁₂ stater (⅙ mina)	23 drachmas	—	—	—
⅟ ₁₆ stater (⅙ th mina)	17.25 drachmas	18.75 drachmas	20.25 drachmas	21.87 drachmas

Poids du statère et de la mine



(See Willocx 2022)



“In the archonship of Pammenes, Aischylos son of Aischylos of Hermos, having served as market inspector, dedicated the stones and the stand for the scales (ζυγόσταις).

In accordance with the order of the board (?) according to the law:

Pork: for two feet: 7 chalkoi; for tripe: 1 obol, 7 chalkoi; for womb, **per mina**: 2 obols, 6 chalkoi; for liver, **per mina**: same price as meat; for lung, **per mina**: half the price (of meat); for bones of the head: a third (of the price for meat); for brain: [...] chalkoi

Goat or sheep: for four feet: 4 chalkoi; for brain: 3 chalkoi; for head: 2 obols 3 chalkoi; for womb, **per mina**: [...]; for liver, **per mina**: same price as meat; for udder, **per mina**: same price as meat; for lung, **per mina**: half the price (of meat)

Beef: for a foot [...]; for liver and spleen, **per mina**: same price as meat; for lung, **per mina**: half the price (of meat); for brain [...]

[*For all intestines*, **per mina**: ... and a quarter ...]

Official list of meat prices (Piraeus), ca. 25 BCE (SEG XLVII, 196 = IG II³ 4 214)

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC c. 43–33 BC DURING THE SECOND TRIUMVIRATE



Seleucid kingdom

Province of Syria



Seleucid kingdom = Seleucid Era
(starting 312/311 BCE)

Antioch

Seleucia

Laodicea

Pompeian Era
(starting 66/65 BCE)

Caesarian Era
(starting 49/48 BCE)

Freedom of Seleucia
(starting 109/108 BCE)

Freedom of Laodicea
(starting 81/80 BCE)

Caesarian Era
(starting 48/47 BCE)

Actium Era (starting 31/30 BCE)

Metropolitan Era
(starting 193/194 CE)

Colonial Era
(starting 197/198 CE)

Seleucid kingdom



[Antioch], Pondera #14846
(SE 200 = 113/112 BCE)

Late 2nd c. – early 1st c. BCE
Mina = [c. 630–690 g]
Corpus: 12 weights



[Antioch], Pondera #3750
(SE 230 = 83/82 BCE)

First half of the 1st c. BCE
Mina = [c. 640–740 g]
Corpus: 25 weights

Province of Syria



Antioch, Pondera #3496
(Year 7 = 43/42 BCE?)

Mid 1st cent. BCE

Mina = [c. 1100–1300 g]

Corpus: 3 weights



Laodicea, Pondera #12843
(Year 176 = 128/129 CE)

Ἔτους | σορ'
τρι | ακοστό | δι
σύρροπο | ν.

= 1/32 mina (ca. 50g)



Laodicea, Pondera #12821
(Year 11 = 207/208 CE)

Ἔτους αἰ' | τῆ[ς]
κολω | νίας,
ἐ[κ]κε | δέκατον |
[σύρ]ρ[ο]π[ο] | ν.

= 1/16 mina (ca. 100g)

ca. 40 BCE – ca. 240 CE

Mina = [c. 1300–1800 g]

Corpus: 80 weights

Province of Syria



Seleucia, Pondera #3609
(2nd cent. CE)

→ Ἐσηκώ | Θη
ἡμει | λίτριν |
ὀνκίων | ← ἕξ

Seleucia, 2nd – early 3rd cent. CE
Monetary libra = 12 uncias [c. 326 g]
Corpus: 2 weights



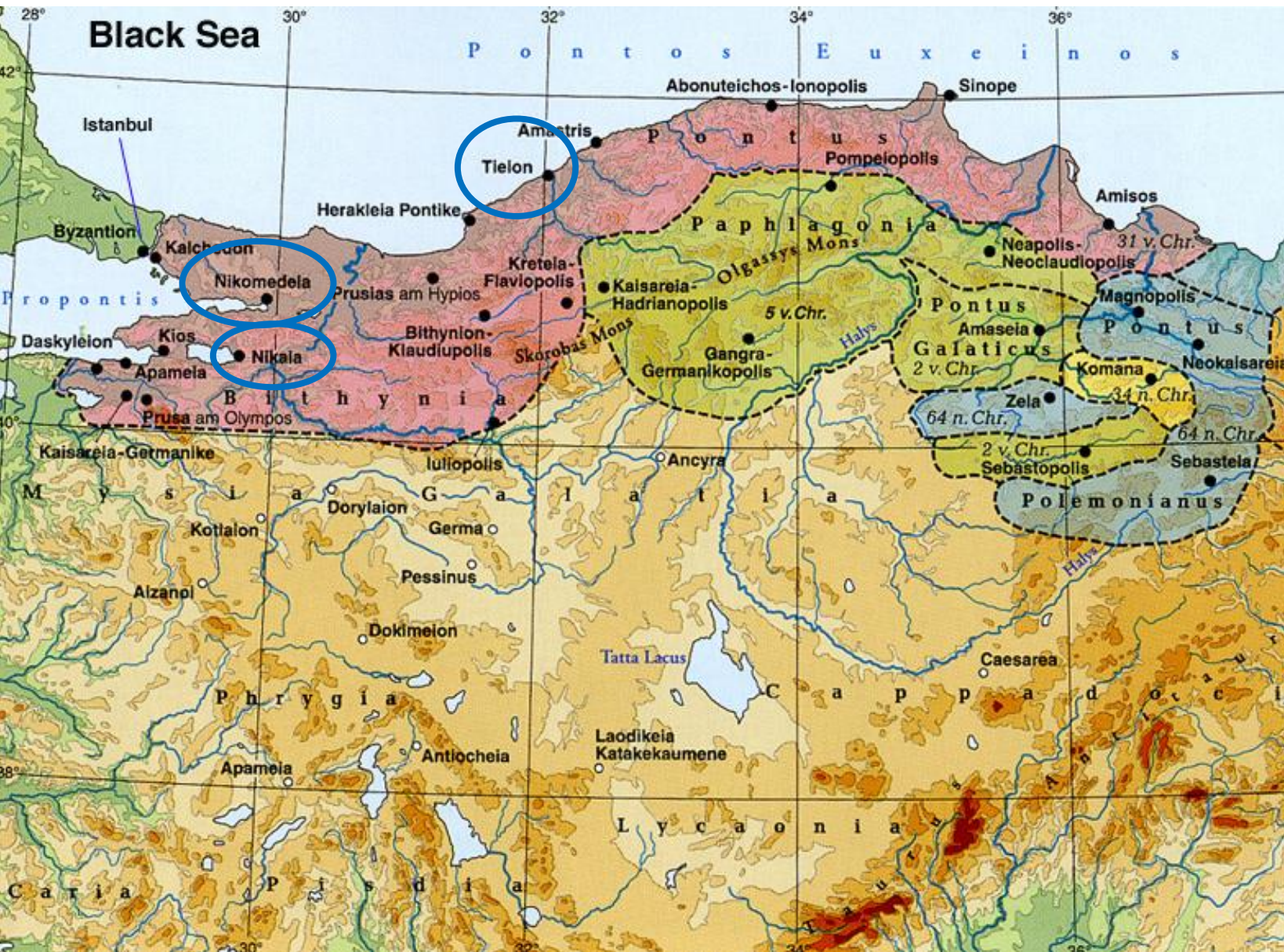
Seleucia, Pondera #3606
(Year 313 = 204/205 CE)

Ἔτους γιτ', μη | νὸς
Ξανδικ | οὔ, ἐπὶ
Μάρκο | υ
Αὐρηλίου Ἰέ | ρακος
χειλιά | ρχου
ἔσηκώ | Θη
ἡμιλίτριν | ὀνκίων
ι' <.

Seleucia, 2nd c. – early 3rd cent. CE
Commercial libra = 21 uncias [c. 571 g]
Corpus: 2 weights

	-50	1	50	100	150	200	250
Commercial mina (Laodicea)	Gradual increase from 1,100g to 1,800g? or stabilisation, e.g. at 64 uncias?						
1/2 mina							
1/4 mina?							
1/8 mina							
1/16 mina							
1/32 mina							
Commercial libra (Laodicea)							
1 libra							16 uncias? (c. 435g)
1/2 libra							8 uncias? (c. 217g)
Commercial libra (Seleucia)							
1 libra					18 uncias?	21 uncias (c. 570g)	
1/2 libra						10.5 uncias (c. 285g)	
Monetary libra (Seleucia)							
1 libra					12 uncias (c. 326g)		
1/2 libra					6 uncias (c. 163g)		
(Uncias?)							

Province of Pontus et Bithynia



Nicomedia

Dating by emperor's regnal year, the governor and the agoranomos in every case

Nicaea

Dating by emperor's reign or regnal year

Tieion

Dating by emperor's reign (one case), otherwise undated

Province of Pontus et Bithynia



Nicomedia, Pondera #3722
(173–175 CE)

Nicomedia, 114–274 CE
Corpus: 33 weights



Nicomedia, Pondera #3714
(244–245 CE)

Province of Pontus et Bithynia



Nicaea, Pondera #13144
(141–142 CE)

Nicaea, 139–161 CE
Corpus: 2 weights

In the field: εἶτα(λικάϊ) || λί(τραι) – ε΄
Eight countermarks: Ἡ Νεικαίῃων πόλις.

Province of Pontus et Bithynia



Tieion, Pondera #13768
(198–209 CE)



Tieion, Pondera #15567
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Tieion, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 13 weights

	-50	1	50	100	150	200	250
Commercial libra = Λίτρα ἀγοραία (Nicomedia)							
6 libras							
2 libra							
1 libra					= 15–18 uncias?		= 18–20 uncias?
½ libra					= 7.5–9 uncias?		= 9–10 uncias?
¼ libra (?)							
Monetary libra = Λίτρα ἰταλική (Nicomedia)							
2 libras					24 uncias (c. 652g)		
Monetary libra = Λίτρα ἰταλική (Nicaea)							
5 libras (= mina?)					60 uncias (c. 1,630g)		
1 libra					12 uncias (c. 326g)		
Commercial libra (Tieion)							
(10 libras) = mina					= 180 uncias?		
(5 libras)					= 90 uncias?		
(2.5 libras)					= 45 uncias?		
(2 libras)					= 36 uncias?		
(1 libra)					= 18 uncias?		
(½ libra)					= 9 uncias?		

Province of Thracia



Perinthus

Undated

Province of Thracia



Perinthus, Pondera #13581
(219–282 CE)

Μνᾶ δικάια
ἀγο—ρα—νο—
μοῦν—τος
Φι—λο—
μήτορος
Τρύφωνος

Περιν—
θίων
Δὺς νε—
οκόρων



Perinthus, Pondera #14282
(2nd – 3rd cent. CE)

Perinthus, 2nd – 3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 16 weights

	-50	1	50	100	150	200	250
Monetary pentalitron (Perinthus)	= 5 monetary libras = 60 uncias (c. 1,600g)						
1 mina = 5 libras	1 mina = 5 libras = 60 uncias						
Commercial libra (Perinthus)							
2 libras				30 uncias? (c. 810g)			
1 libra				15 uncias? (c. 405g)			
½ libra				7.5 uncias? (c. 202g)			

Province of Asia



Smyrna

Dated by local *hipparchos*

Colophon

Dated by local *eirenarchos*

Ephesus

Dated by local *agoranomos*

Magnesia

Dated by local *agoranomos*

Priene

Dated by local *agoranomos*

Miletus

Dated by local *panegyriarchos*

Province of Asia



Smyrna, Pondera #11542
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Smyrna, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 27 weights



Colophon, Pondera #13436
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Colophon, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 3 weights



Magnesia, [Pondera #xxxxx]
(3rd cent. CE)

Magnesia, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 5 weights

Province of Asia



Ephesus, Pondera #12111
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Ephesus, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 14 weights



Priene, Pondera #13436
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Priene, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 2 weights



Miletus, Pondera #13935
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Miletus, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 1 weight

Province of Asia



West Asian mint, Pondera #14424
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



West Asian mint, Pondera #12102
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



West Asian mint, Pondera #14289
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



West Asian mint, Pondera #16877
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



West Asian mint, Pondera #16720
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

West Asian mint, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 80+ weights

Province of Moesia inferior



Tomis (?)

Undated

Moesian mint (?)

Undated

Province of Moesia inferior



Moesian mint, Pondera #13771
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #14277
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #14278
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #13140
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #14275
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Moesian mint, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 150+ weights

Province of Moesia inferior



Moesian mint, Pondera #15694
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #14274
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #13132
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #13777
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)



Moesian mint, Pondera #15671
(2nd–3rd cent. CE)

Moesian mint, 2nd–3rd cent. CE
Corpus: 150+ weights

Early Imperial standardisation (1st–3rd cent. CE)

- **Globalisation of the monetary standard**
 - Diffusion of *aurei*, *denarii* and *antoniniani* (from 214 onwards): count per libra
 - Diffusion of the Roman uncia, its multiples and fractions
 - Monetary libra used for specific commodities (gold, silver, pearls, ivory, spices)
 - Monetary libra used in certain regions (Moesia inferior?)
- **Development of local commercial standards**
 - Survival of the heavy commercial mina (60 uncias = *pentalitron*; 64 uncias?)
 - Development of a commercial libra (from 13 to 21 uncias per libra)
- **Supra-regional standardisation of the commercial weights**
 - No more civic *parasema* and ethnics on weights
 - Same shapes and features shared by different city-states
- **A step towards “universal” standardisation (4th cent. CE)**

4th-century CE standardisation



Julian, *solidus*



1 libra (4th cent. CE)



6 uncias (4th cent. CE)



Julian, *exagium solidi*



1 uncias (4th cent. CE)



1 uncia (4th cent. CE)

"Glocalisation" of weight standards: The adoption of the Roman libra in the Eastern Mediterranean (1st c. BCE – 3rd c. CE)

Standardisation and Localism
in the Legal and Economic World of the Romans

Brussels and Ghent, June 8–10, 2023

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