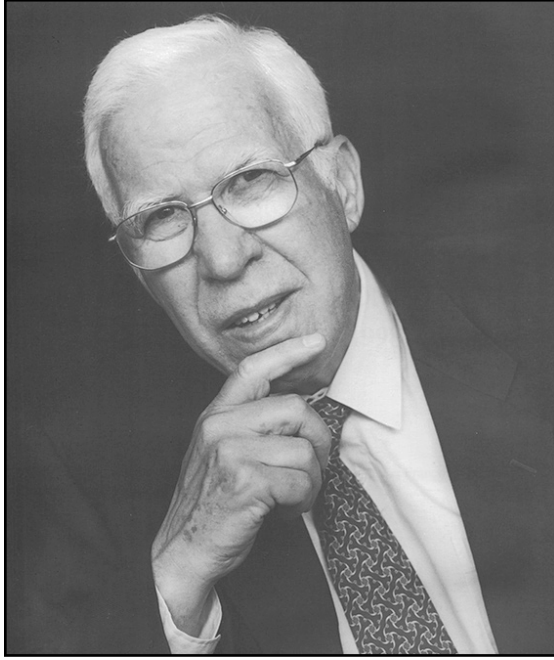


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GEORGES LE RIDER



27 JANUARY 1928 · 3 JULY 2014

Georges Le Rider passed away on July 3, 2014 in Givors, near Lyon, where he decided to spend the last years of his life. Darkened by tragedies at the beginning and the end, his life was mostly luminous and glorious. Le Rider's life can be described as a parabolic path, during which this "pupille de la nation" (an orphan who lost both mother and father) climbed one by one all of the steps of the educational and academic French system. He left a body of work built around the monetary finances of the Greek world, which deeply marked his time.<sup>1</sup>

Le Rider was born on January 27, 1928 in French Britain from parents who were both teachers. Director of the village's school, his father died one and a half months after Le Rider's birth from complications of injuries contracted during World War I. His mother, who established herself with her children in the hamlet of Meneham, didn't survive very long after her husband. Left without parents in 1937 at the age of nine, Le Rider was placed under the protection of an uncle and aunt who enrolled him at the Lycée of La Tour d'Auvergne in Quimper. The start of World War II and the German occupation of France proved to have for Le Rider an unexpected and not unhappy consequence. German authorities, having closed all of the schools in Brest to create a strategic base for the navy, grouped all of the "agrégés" teachers (the elite in the French system) in Quimper, precisely at the Lycée la Tour d'Auvergne. Among these exceptional teachers was Auguste-Pierre Segalen, who proved to play a decisive role in Le Rider's life. It was he who, noticing Le Rider's extraordinary gifts particularly for Greek and Latin themes, told him about the French School in Athens and helped him get admitted.

Le Rider is an incarnation of the French meritocratic ideal of the Republican School. He passed with success all of the exams of a demanding and highly structured academic system. Arriving in October 1945 in a freshly liberated Paris, he was accepted at the prestigious Lycée Louis-le-Grand, sleeping with 64 roommates in the same dormitory and waking up at 6 a.m. There, he followed the way indicated by his mentor, Segalen. The best of his class in Greek theme, he entered the École Normale Supérieure in 1948. Among the many courses, he joined the class of Charles Picard, who that year taught a course on numismatics, commenting on the recent book by Oscar Ravel on Corinthian coins. And this is how Le Rider became a numismatist, announcing his

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1 Un important florilège de ses articles a été réédité en 1999: Georges Le Rider, *Études d'histoire monétaire et financière du monde grec. Écrits 1958-1998*, Athènes, 3 vol., 1443 p. (éd. par E. Papaefthymiou, Fr. de Callataÿ et Fr. Queyrel), avec une bibliographie établie jusqu'en 1999 (p. 15–23). On trouvera une bibliographie thématique, allant elle aussi jusqu'en 1999, dans M. Amandry, "Travaux de numismatique de Georges Le Rider (1956–1999)," in M. Amandry et S. Hurter (ed.), *Travaux de numismatique grecque offerts à Georges Le Rider*, Londres, 1999, p. 441–7.

wish to devote himself to the study of ancient Greek coins. Through the intermediary of Fernand Chapouthier, then adjunct-director of the École Normale Supérieure, he soon got an appointment with Henry Seyrig, by far the most influential meeting of his life. Seyrig proposed to him a very clear roadmap: first, he had to pass the exam of “agrégé des lettres classiques” and present the *concours* for the French School in Athens, which he did successfully in 1952; then he had to enjoy as much as he could all of the sites and masterpieces of ancient Greece that he studied during his time at the French School. After that, he was then expected to join Seyrig at the Institut français d’Archéologie de Beyrouth.

Le Rider arrived at Athens in March 1953 after three enchanting months spent visiting Italy, as it was then the custom. Welcomed by Georges Daux, he first focused on the coinage of Thasos and then—at the instigation of Louis Robert—on Cretan series, which would be the topic of his complementary thesis, *Monnaies crétoises du Ve au Ier siècle av. J.-C.* (Paris, 1966). He also frequently studied at the Numismatic Museum where he met Mando Oikonomidou, who would soon become director and with whom he enjoyed a long-lasting friendship. Fulfilling the wish of Seyrig, Le Rider left Greece to rejoin in autumn 1955 the French Institute of Archaeology at Beirut. There, as he was pleased to say, he spent possibly the best years of his life. In true complicity with his mentor, he worked on his PhD about *Suse sous les Séleucides et les Parthes, les trouvailles monétaires et l’histoire de la ville* (Paris, 1965) and delineated the general frame of his future works: the history of the Hellenistic kingdoms as explained by their coinages.

But civil war exploded at the end of March 1958. A position was vacant at the coin cabinet of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and Le Rider got it, beginning a 23-year career serving what is the biggest cultural vessel of the State. In 1961, at age 33, he succeeded Jean Babelon as director of the coin cabinet and spent 14 years in that role. He spent six more years (from 1975 to 1981) leading the entire institution as general administrator. At the coin cabinet, he greatly enriched the collections but above all the Greek series with the acquisition of the Delepierre and Seyrig collections. He also completed his major study on Philip II coinage (*Le monnayage d’argent et d’or de Philippe II frappé en Macédoine de 359 à 294* [Paris, 1977]) and renovated the museum. Once at the head of the Bibliothèque nationale, he introduced private sponsoring and launched a platform that curators and searchers from abroad could use to meet and study the heritage collection of the Library. He also created a scientific council, which had been strangely missing up to that point.

In parallel, from 1964 onward, he taught Greek numismatics at the 4th section (Historical and Philological Sciences) of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris/Sorbonne), where he partly succeeded Louis Robert, on the friendly advice of Seyrig. The summaries of his yearly teachings can be found in the *Annuaire* of the E.P.H.E. It is an essential source for the coinage of Alexander the Great, which was the topic of his lessons during several years. Some have described how each Monday, Le Rider took his audience into the forges of his own creation (as professed by the statutes of the E.P.H.E.) and illustrated this characteristic mixture of requirement, simplicity, and courtesy. As expressed by Pierre Ducrey, his charm was in the modesty and simplicity of his proposed solutions. For his readers, Le Rider constantly serves as the example of the best possible historian who, considering all of the available evidence, goes to the highest degree of reasonable interpretation, without doing violence or losing the spirit of prudence that characterizes all of his work.

After the heavy years spent at the head of the French National Library, Le Rider returned to his studies, offering the rejoicing example of a scholar whose best scientific output was written when he was over 60. Appointed director of the French Institute of Anatolian Studies in Istanbul (1981), he reached Turkey just in time to be involved in the publication of the great Hellenistic hoard found in 1980 at Meydancıkke Kale, near Gülnar, which he published with Alain Davesne. With the end of his mandate in 1984 as director in Istanbul, he came back to Paris and ended his academic career as a professor at Paris IV (Sorbonne). Then he began a flow of publications, ever more turned toward synthesis. To consider only the books, he returns to what can be said about the coinage in the name of Philip II (*Monnayages et finances de Philippe II, un état de la question* [1996]). Then he made an incursion into Ptolemaic Egypt (*Prix du blé et numéraire en Egypte lagide de 305 à 173* [1997]) and focuses especially on his beloved Seleucids, producing master studies for two of the biggest mints of the empire: Seleucia on the Tigris (*Séleucie du Tigre, les monnaies séleucides et parthes* [1998]) and Antioch (*Antioche de Syrie sous les Séleucides: Corpus des monnaies d'or et d'argent. I, De Séleucos à Antiochos V, c. 300-161* [1999]). These publications (and many others as articles) established Le Rider as the undisputed master of the royal Hellenistic coinages.

Le Rider was elected a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1989, and in 1993, he was appointed professor at the Collège de France (with an inaugural lesson given on March 9, 1994) in a chair devoted to the economic and monetary history of the Hellenistic East. It was the culmination of the most brilliant academic career the

French educational system could offer. The years at the Collège gave him the opportunity to sum up his ideas and produce a trilogy embracing the full phenomenon of money in ancient Greece, from its beginnings to the end of the great Hellenistic monarchies. With great punctuality, he published the following books: *La naissance de la monnaie: Pratiques monétaires de l'Orient ancien* (2001); *Alexandre Le Grand: Monnaie, finances et politique* (2003); and *Les Séleucides et les Ptolémées: L'héritage monétaire et financier d'Alexandre le Grand* (2006).

Distinguished in France by ultimate marks of academic esteem, Le Rider also accumulated honors abroad. Still in his 40s, he was made a laureate of the two awards considered the most prestigious in the field of numismatics, namely the Archer M. Huntington Medal of the American Numismatic Society (1968) and the Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society (England, 1974). He was also elected president of the International Numismatic Commission, which he directed from 1973 to 1979. Beyond numismatics, many academies and societies elected him as a member, among others the American Philosophical Society in 1996.

The work of Georges Le Rider has deeply reshaped our knowledge of monetary matters in ancient Greece. In particular, he has demonstrated how pragmatism is a key concept. Far from (over) subtle constructions based on remarkable iconographic or metrological coincidences, the world he describes is a world of cities and kings who struck coinages to meet public expenses, making a profit in passing.

In the hot debate (contemporary of his work) about the nature of the ancient economy, Le Rider was a modernist who demonstrated the importance of rational economic choices. Paying great attention to the level of fiduciarity and the various systems of taxations, he professed in private a preference for the open and flexible system of the Seleucids in comparison with the heavy constraints imposed by the Ptolemies.

What Henry Seyrig was for Georges Le Rider—a demanding master and an affectionate father—so Georges Le Rider was for me. For those who had the chance to know him well, he will remain an example of combined excellence, wisdom, and gentleness, a beautiful soul according to the double Apollinian ideal of γνῶθι σεαυτόν and μηδέν ἄγαν.

Elected 1996

FRANÇOIS DE CALLATAÿ

Faculty Member

Curatorial Department

Royal Library of Belgium