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GOLD AND SILVER WEIGHT STANDARDS IN FOURTH-CENTURY CYPRUS: A RESUME

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Introduction

Ancient coins rarely bear their numerical value as modern coins do, their 'names' and denominations are not usually clear to us and their exchange value against coins from other areas or other, more or less precious, metals is even less evident.

The case of Cyprus is not an exception and its complexity is aggravated by the existence of various minting authorities in the island. The island's division into autonomous units is attested from the Iron Age, each one ruled by a king. The number of these kingdoms varied through the ages, and between the seventh and the fourth centuries there were important changes: island kingdoms such as Ledra, Chytroi, Idalion and Tamassos cease to exist as autonomous units and are absorbed by neighbouring kingdoms.¹ On the other hand, the kingdoms with easy access to the sea, such as Marion, Lapethos, Paphos, Kourion, Amathous, Kition, Salamis and Kyrenia, seem to develop and multiply.² Although we are still not able to attribute coins to all of the above kingdoms, the Cypriote coin issues are far from being homogenous, as the coins bear legends in different scripts and an innovative, and in most cases unique, iconography.³

The weight standard of the fifth-century silver issues

The fifth-century Cypriote coin issues are made exclusively of silver and seem to have a common weight standard. Although the epigraphic and literary documents do not preserve information on the names of the coins in use, information can be partly retrieved. For example, an inscribed lead weight of 42.20g bears in Cypriot syllabic script the signs: *pa – ni – IIII – si* that should be read '*pa(si-le-wo-se) Ni (-) IIII (4) si(ko-loi)*' and translated as 'of king Ni (-) four *sigloi*'.⁴ The name of the king cannot be completed, as there are several kings in Cyprus whose names begin with Ni(-),⁵ but two important elements come to light: first, the existence of royal weights, and second, their correspondence to a specific number of coins. Indeed, the division of the lead weight of 42.20g by the number four, inscribed on it, gives us the number 10.55g for the unit of the *siglos* ($10.55 \times 4 = 42.20$). This theoretical weight is confirmed by other inscribed weights,⁶ where the division of the weight of the object itself by the number inscribed on it leads us to a unit of *c.* 11g. The completion of the word 'siglos' can be confirmed by the clay tablet of Lefkoniko which mentions a payment

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¹ We know from numismatic, literary and epigraphic evidence that Kition annexed Idalion, which ceased to be an autonomous kingdom in the middle of the fifth century. We also know from Douris (Douris, cited by Athenaeus, IV, 167 c-d) that Alexander III gave the kingdom of Tamassos as a gift to the king of Salamis, Pnytagoras. The kingdom had previously been sold by its king Pasikypros to the king of Kition Pumayyaton. For an overview of this episode and a general presentation of the geopolitical changes of the Cypriot kingdoms during the archaic and classical periods see Iacovou 2002, pp. 73-87.

² Iacovou 2008, pp. 625-57.

³ See also in this volume: Zapiti / Markou, pp. ??

⁴ Seyrig 1932, pp. 189-90, fig. 1; Masson 1983², p. 351, n° 368; Picard

1994, p. 11; Iosephides 2002, p. 31.

⁵ See for example the kings Nikodamos (Masson 1983², p. 320, n° 323), Nikokles (appears in literary sources such as Isocrates but only the first Cypriot syllabic sign of his name (*ni*) appears on his coin issues, Masson 1983², p. 323, n° 326) and Nikokreon (known from literary sources and his coin issues where he adds the first two letters of his name ΝΙ in the Greek alphabet) in Salamis, and Nikokles (known from literary, epigraphic and numismatic evidence) in Paphos. The kingship of Nikodamos is dated to the middle of the fifth century but all the other kings mentioned above ruled during the fourth century.

⁶ Iosephides 1997-1999, pp. 25-30; Iosephides 2000-2001, pp. 17-23; Iosephides 2002, pp. 28-36; Iosephides 2008, pp. 3-11; Markou 2011, p. 67, fig. 2

and, although obscure, bears the four signs in Cypriot syllabic script *si-ko-lo-ne* that should be read as 'of sigloi'.⁷ *Siglos* is the transcription of the Semitic word *shekel* into Greek, through the medium of the local Cypriot syllabic script, and it is used to describe the heaviest coin of the local weight standard: the Cypriote *siglos*.

The Cypriote *siglos* of c. 11g is divided into thirds, sixths and twelfths, as can be shown by the studies produced for the coinages of specific kingdoms or kings.⁸ Although the heaviest unit is known, we do not possess any conclusive evidence for the names of its fractions,⁹ and it is therefore safer to describe them with their numerical values, as these are related to the siglos, the heaviest unit.¹⁰

No elements indicate, so far, that this local weight standard was not adopted by all the kings who minted coins in Cyprus during the fifth century. In a variable landscape of iconographic choices, the common weight standard would have been practical in order to allow the comfortable circulation of the local royal issues within the borders of the island.

The weight standard of gold Cypriote coins of the fourth century

Discussion of the weight standard of the fifth-century silver issues of the royal coinages of Cyprus seems fairly straightforward, if we compare it with the complexity of fourth-century Cypriote numismatics. The problem starts with the observation that, as well as silver, coins in gold and bronze are minted, and it becomes far more complex owing to the different practices of different rulers. Some kings issue silver coins on the local weight standard and no gold coins can be attached to their coin production; other kings issue silver coins on the local weight standard and at some point adopt a new weight standard for their silver issues; other kings issue silver coins on the local weight standard and gold coins; still other kings issue silver coins on the new weight standard and gold coins.

Matters are further confused by the way these practices varied not only in the coin production of various kingdoms, but also in that of successive kings of the same kingdom. And this observation brings me to the two main questions of this paper: what was the weight standard employed by the kings of Cyprus during the fourth century for their gold and silver issues? And what was the relation between the gold and silver issues of these kings?

Coins in three metals are minted in Cyprus during the fourth century: bronze, silver and gold. Although bronze and silver is minted in the majority of the kingdoms, not all the kings issue gold coins in Cyprus, and the gold coin production of some Cypriote kings seems more regular in contrast with other kingdoms where only few gold coins survive.¹¹

The gold issues in Cyprus are based on a unit of c. 8.44g. There is no doubt that the weight of this unit is inspired by the Persian gold coin par excellence, the *daric*, but since the ancient name of this heavier unit does not survive for the Cypriote gold issues, I employ the term 'stater' for convenience.¹²

The division of the gold stater is not homogeneous in the coin production of the various kingdoms and kings. This is far from being a matter of chance, since I have concluded that it is related to the local exchange of gold and silver issues depending on the different ratios attested in Cyprus

⁷ Masson 1983², pp. 311-12, n° 309.

⁸ For Amathous see the complete coin study in Amandry 1984, pp. 57-76 and Amandry 1997, pp. 35-44. For the coinage of Salamis in the fifth and fourth centuries see McGregor 1998.

⁹ D. Iosephides in Iosephides 2008, pp. 5-6, based on the study of inscribed weights, enquired on the existence of a second name for the unit

of c. 11g (starting with the Cypriot syllabic sign *ri*) and for a name for the fraction of c. 3.65 g (starting with the Cypriot syllabic sign *to*).

¹⁰ Picard 1994, pp. 9-12.

¹¹ Catalogue of the gold coin issues in Markou 2011, pp. 99-131.

¹² Markou 2011, pp. 135 and 202.

from the beginning of the fourth century down to the end of the kingdoms in 306.¹³

The weight standard of silver Cypriote coins of the fourth century

In fourth-century silver coin production in Cyprus, the local weight standard based on the Cypriote siglos of *c.* 11g. is still used in some kingdoms, and it appears that in some cases it could be preserved down to the end of the fourth century.¹⁴ However, at some point, and apparently at different periods in the various kingdoms, a new weight standard is adopted by the majority of the Cypriote kings. This new standard is described in modern accounts as ‘Rhodian’ or ‘Chian’¹⁵ and is mostly composed of *didrachms* of *c.* 7g and their fractions, as can be observed provisionally since no comprehensive metrological study has been carried out so far. Cyprus could be following the general fashion attested in the Hekatomnid mints and in other neighbouring areas in Asia Minor,¹⁶ maybe for coin circulation purposes.

The ratio between gold and silver Cypriote issues

The detailed study of the gold issues of the kings of Cyprus and their correspondence to their respective silver coins, either in the local (*sigloi*) or the new weight standard, has permitted the confirmation of the ratio between gold and silver in use in Cyprus during the fourth century (Table 1).¹⁷ Before the incorporation of Cyprus into Alexander III’s empire in 333/2 the gold local coins are divided mostly into halves, and the silver coins are in most cases based on the local weight standard, in a ratio between gold and silver of 1 to 13.33. During the wars of Alexander’s Successors, the reduced ratio of 1 to 10 attests a clear exchange between gold coins, mostly divided in thirds, and silver coins in the new weight standard.¹⁸

TABLE 1. Exchanges between gold and silver coins in Classical Cyprus.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Au:Ag ratio</i>	<i>Au</i>	<i>Equals</i>	<i>Ag</i>
Before 333/2	1:13.33	One 1/10 of a gold stater	=	One silver <i>siglos</i> of <i>c.</i> 11g (local weight standard)
After 333/2	1:10	One gold stater	=	Six silver <i>tetradrachms</i> of <i>c.</i> 14 g. or twelve <i>didrachms</i> of <i>c.</i> 7g. (new weight standard)

¹³Markou 2011, pp. 202-209, figs. 100-107.

¹⁴According to Destrooper-Georgiades 1995, p. 41, the kingdoms of Paphos, Marion and Soloi remained loyal to the local weight standard down to the end of the fourth century. Coin die studies of the above mints should be carried out in order to confirm the hypothesis.

¹⁵Ashton 2004, pp. 79 *ff.*

¹⁶For these purposes see Ashton *et al.* 2002, pp. 159-243 and the summary of the ‘Pixodaros Hoard’ in Hurter 1998, pp. 147-53.

¹⁷Markou 2011, pp. 205-209.

¹⁸See for example the case of Marion and Soloi in Markou 2011, pp. 208-209.

Conclusion

In fifth-century Cyprus only one metal is minted and one weight standard appears to be used for the coins of all kings in all kingdoms. The coins are silver and are minted on the local weight standard with a heavier unit of c. 11g, divided in thirds, sixths etc. This weight standard continues to be employed by some kingdoms during the fourth century, but it is no longer unique since a new standard coexists with the old standard. In the fourth century we also find the minting of gold and bronze.

The weight standard for the gold coins is aligned to that of the *daric*, with the 'stater' of c. 8.44g. In the period before Alexander III, the ratio between gold and silver is 1 to 13.33, which allows the exchange of gold coins with silver coins minted in the local weight standard. After the death of Alexander the ratio between gold and silver is reduced to 1 to 10, and the denominations of gold coins are adjusted to facilitate use alongside silver coins minted in the new weight standard.

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CCEC = *Cahier du Centre d'Études chypriotes.*

NRCyprus = *Cyprus Numismatic Report.*

RNS = Royal Numismatic Society.

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