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Cover: head of a statue in the Neo-Cypriot Style (ca 560–520 BC) from Ayia Irini. Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, A.I. 0915. Water colour by Miriam Johannesson

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Incorporating numismatics into historical studies: the case of Cyprus

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Introduction

The numismatist's job is to understand the process of the archaeological discovery of a coin, the context in which it was discovered—in cases where the provenance is known; then consider all technical details that describe the coin, proceed with the attribution, then with the dating and finally examine the object in its historical context, based on primary and secondary sources (Kraay 1976; Nicolet-Pierre 2002).

This process is standard for all archaeological discoveries, but the particularities of coins should be underlined: they bear the mark of the issuing authority—which is the very definition of the object itself—and, although the same combinations of coin dies were potentially used for striking coins in great numbers, all coins surviving today are unique.

The coin is a piece of metal weighted and controlled on which the mark of the king or city that has issued it is imprinted, as an indication of origin and as a guarantee of a certified value—and thus of its quality. The word *νόμισμα* itself derives from the word *νόμος* (the law) and the law is the authority that guarantees the value of the coin, as mentioned by Aristotle; this is why money is *nomisma*, because it does not exist by nature but by the law (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.5; Picard 1980, 2001b: 98–99).

Coins were issued in numbers in antiquity: an issuing authority would not have gone to the trouble of engraving coin dies just to issue a single coin, but it might have had problems in producing the coins initially intended. Problems such as a lack of metal—not all cities were as lucky as Athens to have Laurion mints under their control (Gale *et al*. 1980: 4; Picard 2001a)—or technical difficulties—the breaking of a die because of a bad striking of the coin—or even a sudden change of plans—a war or an attack—might have altered the initial intentions of the issuers at any time. So a mint might have produced more or usually less than the 10,000–15,000 coins that could

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have been issued by a single pair of dies, according to modern estimations (Faucher *et al*. 2012). Statistics applied to numismatics, which have been much discussed (De Callataÿ 1987, 1995, 2006; Buttrey 1993, 1994), allow a better understanding of coin production and help suggest the volume of coins issued at a specific time. This is very interesting if, for example, we wish to compare the volume of gold coins issued by Evagoras I, king of Salamis, and his contemporary, Milkyaton, king of Kition, during the Cypriot war at the beginning of the 4th century BC. During this war, the two kings of the two most important kingdoms on the island were fighting each other with the help of other Cypriot kings or with external support. The production of gold coins during the war allows us to start a discussion on the volume and quality of the coinage, on metal supplies etc (Markou 2011b: 260–263, 266–268).

Before exploring such details, one should get back to the initial question: why are coins unique? The answer is that, contrary to modern minting techniques, in antiquity coins were issued by hand one by one. This means that, although coin flans were weighed and had the same circular shape (the discovery of a coin mint in Paphos is still a main reference point regarding the fabrication of flans in Hellenistic Cyprus, see Nicolaou 1972), the sudden hitting of their surface with the hammer was rarely centered. The different dies, the pressure, the state of preservation—because of a coin's use due to its circulation and other factors—explain why coins of the same type look different (Markou 2011b: 150, fig. 127). Each surviving coin holds valuable and unique information, but the more coins that survive, the better the sample and the richer our knowledge of a specific series, and collectively of coin production at a specific time and under a specific ruler. Through examples deriving from Cypriot numismatics of the Archaic and Classical periods, I will try to demonstrate how we can make the most out of this extremely precious primary source and how we can avoid misusing it (for recent general overviews see Destrooper-Georgiades 2007; Amandry 2015; Markou 2015).

Using and misusing the testimony of coins

My first argument relates to a general tendency to link what is known through the ancient texts to what has been brought to light with the help of archaeology—systematically or fortuitously—and I will try to explain why it is essential for us to be cautious in general. The best example can be found in the early coinages of Salamis. The earliest coins of the kings of Salamis are silver *sigloi* following the local weight standard that appears to be based on a heavier unit of ca 11g (Markou 2011a: 280–281), with a recumbent ram on the obverse accompanied by the name Evelthon in the nominative in Cypriot-syllabic script (*e-u-we-le-to-ne*), and a smooth reverse. Evelthon was the king of Salamis, also mentioned in literary sources, such as Herodotus, as being active in various episodes of the end of the 6th century BC (Chatziioannou 1971; Chavane & Yon 1978). The following coin series, the dating of which is based on the evidence of hoards buried after 480 BC (Price & Waggoner 1975: 109; Kagan 1994: 31), maintains the same obverse type, accompanied this time by the king's name in the genitive (*e-u-we-le-to-to-se*). In addition, the reverse has a developed design depicting an *ankh* (**Fig. 1**), the Egyptian symbol of life, within an incuse square, with a variety of Cypriot-syllabic signs around, or inside the circle of the *ankh* (McGregor 1998: lxxii–liv, nos 49–64 and 179–334).

Figure 1. Evelthon's Successors (480–450 BC), Salamis, silver siglos (11.11g; 12h; 25mm). Oxford, The Ashmolean Museum, Acc. no HCR6321 (http://kyprioscharacter.eie.gr/en/cyprus-coins/details/A1853). Image copyright: © University of Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

The reading of the Cypriot-syllabic signs has been debated. In the past, arguments for the conquest of the whole of Cyprus by Evelthon were based on the presence of the Cypriot-syllabic sign *ku* (Babelon 1907: 585–586). This is not enough to propose such a conquest, since we first have to understand what the rest of the Cypriot-syllabic signs surrounding the *ankh* mean. The readings have been many and often erroneous: for example the reading of the Cypriot-syllabic sign *ki* for Chersis (Hill 1904: 49, no. 22; Babelon 1910: no. 934ter; Masson 1983: 319, no. 320b), and *ky-po-ru*, for *Κύπρου* (Hill 1904: lxxxvii, no. 6, 49, no. 21; Babelon 1910: no. 934bis; Masson 1983: 319, no. 321); furthermore, in the past, the tendency was to relate the symbols to the list of Evelthon's successors as given by Herodotus (*Histories* V, 104, 1): Siromos, Chersis and Onesilos (Masson 1983: 318–321; Markou 2011b: 82–83). Yet, despite the efforts and the readings, we cannot fully understand these coin legends and they cannot be attached to the known names of Evelthon's successors, as Picard suggested more than 20 years ago (Picard 1994: 10).

This is also true for the coinage traditionally attributed to Golgoi because of a single Cypriot-syllabic sign *go* repeated on both sides of the coins that represent a lion advancing right on the obverse and a bull standing left on the reverse (**Fig. 2**). The tendency to attribute coins to all Cypriot kingdoms, together with the early dating of the series with the sign *go* that would explain the experimentations of the kingdoms at those early periods—at least as far as numismatic production is concerned—led to the attribution of this specific coinage to Golgoi or to Soloi (Babelon 1907: 607–619). Relating Golgoi with the sign *go* triggered another theory regarding Evagoras I of Salamis and his gold coinage: the presence of that same Cypriot-syllabic sign on the reverse of Evagoras I's gold tenths (Markou 2011b: 118, nos 181–182) led to the suggestion that Evagoras I conquered Golgoi, and that he marked the extension of his kingdom in other areas through his coinage. Two studies have proved these suggestions wrong: J. Kagan (1999: 38–41) has convincingly shown that the sign on the coins is a *ko* and not a *go* and thus the attribution of this coinage to Golgoi no longer holds ground; and I have demonstrated elsewhere that it is impossible that Evagoras I marked the conquest of another kingdom on his gold coinage (Markou 2011b: 259). The meaning of the Cypriot-syllabic sign *ko* on this gold coin series remains obscure.

Figure 2. Unknown king (first quarter of the 5th century BC), uncertain kingdom, silver siglos (10.60g; 4h; 24mm). Copenhagen, Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Acc. no FP 833.46 (http://kyprioscharacter.eie.gr/en/cyprus-coins/details/A1103). Image copyright: © Copenhagen, Royal Collection of Coins and Medals

Concluding remarks

Since the history of Cyprus is only partially mentioned in ancient literature and mostly in later sources, such as Diodorus, we have been constantly trying to produce a synthesis by combining fragments: through the study of the tablet of Idalion and other inscriptions found on the island, and the study of sculpture and ceramics and the remains of cities and palaces. The coins, however, have always been an excellent primary source: in contrast to other areas of the Greek world, where the cities were responsible for minting coins, and contrary to other kingdoms (for example the kingdom of Macedonia of the same period), Cyprus has too many parameters—and thus possible combinations—for us to consider in the equation: many kingdoms, many kings, far too many coinages, types and legends; additionally, most of the kings' names only survive through their coinage, which also holds priceless information on their economic policies. For example, in the case of Paphos, ten of the 18 known kings have been exclusively identified from the coins they produced; only two are mentioned in the literature and seven in the surviving inscriptions (Markou 2016: 234). Amazing as this may be, being able to link the known facts to recently discovered evidence without resorting to speculation is a constant challenge. And since coins do not come with a user's manual and complete legend tags, researchers (numismatists, ancient historians and archaeologists) have to do the job: they have to attribute the coins to the issuing authorities, they have to correctly link numismatic to other primary sources and they have to prepare for many developments in the near future. These may result from the discovery of previously unknown coin types or from better preserved coins that will allow a more accurate reading of coin legends.

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