

THE BRONZE COINAGE OF THE ACHAIA LEAGUE: THE MINTS OF ACHAIA AND ELIS

The intention of this paper is to summarize the results of a study of the later bronze coinage of the Achaian League, and against that background to comment on the issues of the mints of Achaia and Elis. The coins are all of one denomination, 16-22 mm in diameter. They show on the obverse Zeus Nikephoros standing left, resting his left hand on a sceptre; on the reverse is a female seated left, similarly resting her left hand on a sceptre, but holding a wreath in her extended right. The legend has invariably three elements, (1) AXAIΩN (of the Achaians), (2) the ethnic, in the genitive plural, of the city striking the coin, and (3) the names of one, two, or exceptionally three, mint officials. The standard disposition has, on the reverse, AXAIΩN on the left upwards and the ethnic such as ΔΥΜΑΙΩΝ on the right downwards, but there are a number of variations that are to be noted.

Since the early 19th century this coinage has attracted the interest of numismatists as illustrating the statement of Polybius II.37 that the Achaians all used the same coins. With the number of minting cities now standing at 45, possibly 47, this is a remarkable coinage, and we are bound to ask not only when it was struck, but how it was organised.

Hitherto the issues of each mint had simply been assigned to the period between the year in which the city joined the League, and 146 B.C. I start by making the assumption, that I shall attempt to justify later, that this bronze coinage represents a single episode of minting; it must, in fact, postdate the entry of Elis and Messene into the League in 191 B.C., and also, as I shall argue, 188 B.C. As for a *terminus ante quem*, in view of Boehringer's recent proposal to date some of the Achaian League silver coinage to the first century B.C.¹, it is of interest to note that the bronze coinage is securely dated to before 146 B.C. by archaeological contexts. I mention here only the coin found in a closed context under the foundations of the Stoa of Attalos at Athens, the building of which

Virginia Grace now suggests could have started as early as 159 B.C.²

When the material extant was assembled, less than 800 coins being available, it became evident that three major mints, Megara, Argos and Megalopolis — and possibly Tegea may be a fourth such — struck coins with no legend on the obverse of some, but not all of their varieties. At Aigion and perhaps also Gortys only one coin out of several recorded has an anepigraphic obverse; and for Patrai, and for Teuthis, the obverse of the only coin known has no legend. No die link between the coins of these eight cities has yet appeared, so it is in the highest degree improbable that they were struck at a central mint (which is interesting in view of Margaret Thompson's hypothesis of centralised minting of the silver coinage³). The obverse of every other coin recorded bears an inscription.

Since this was to be a federal coinage, and of a new type at that, a coinage decree, including specifications for the issue, must have been passed at a meeting of the Synodos of the League. It was no doubt specified that both AXAIΩN and the genitive plural form of the ethnic of the minting city should be placed on the reverse, since the federation and the individual city were jointly responsible for the issue. Moreover it was natural and indeed a well established convention that the name of the mint official should be placed on the reverse also (given that mint officials change and punch dies normally wear out faster than anvil dies). But even on a coin of about 20 mm space was limited, and the official's name had therefore to be abbreviated, and squeezed into the exergue, or elsewhere. On a coin of the Megara mint in Berlin, providentially one of the few f.d.c. coins of the whole

1. See pp. 163-170.

2. Information generously sent by letter, 21 June 1989; see also V. R. Grace, *Hesperia* 1985, 14-15, 24, 32.

3. The Agrinion Hoard, *NNM* 159 (1968) 100-102.

series, on the reverse vertically downwards between the sceptre and ethnic are traces of a name that had been erased from the die, $\Delta\text{HM}[\text{H}]$, the name that in the fuller form ΔHMHTPI appears clearly on the obverse. Thus it would appear that at Megara, after three varieties with abbreviated names cramped into various corners of the reverse, the die cutters decided to transfer the official's name to the obverse, where there was plenty of space. A similar transition can be shown to have occurred at Megalopolis, Aigion, and (with the ethnic displaced to the obverse) Argos.

A decision to give up trying to squeeze too much lettering on to the reverse might have been taken after informal discussion between the cities concerned, or after referral to the *Damiourgoi*, or, less probably, I think, at the next quarterly meeting of the *Synodos*. At any rate I would suggest that the lead in striking the new bronze coinage was taken by the major mints Megara, Argos and Megalopolis (and possibly Tegea) with issues that lack a name on the obverse; Aigion (and Gortys?) may not have started minting until just before the common adoption of obverse legends; the engravers at Patrai and Teuthis possibly had not received news of the change in format when they started work. This priority in striking by the major mints just mentioned perhaps may be associated with a second noteworthy feature: Megara and Argos are 2 of only 6 mints out of the 45 that struck with regularly aligned dies. (The dies must have been adjusted manually, not mechanically: for Megara, for example, 28 coins have dies aligned at 11, 12 or 1 o'clock, as against one coin with unaligned dies.) This refinement of minting practice, designed, it would seem, simply to give aesthetic satisfaction, is not found in the silver series. In fact, so far as I have been able to discover, it appears, with the exception of a very few issues of Alexander tetradrachms and certain bronze coins of Messene, to be alien to the Peloponnese (though to be categorical about this it would of course be necessary to check sufficient specimens of every variety of Peloponnesian coinage). I wonder therefore whether in the specifications for the bronze coinage, alignment of dies was recommended, that two of the first mints to strike the coins aligned their dies, but that thereafter the recommendation was generally ignored?

Another feature of the bronze coinage that is remarkable is that there are 9 distinctive hands that cut dies for two or more cities; in each case this may range from all the dies recorded for a mint down to

only one of its dies. For our purposes this may be exemplified by four of the groups of mints which lie outside the area of Achaia and Elis. 1. Pheneos and Stymphalos: both obverse and reverse dies show a heavily dotted style; on the obverses both feet of Zeus are close to the base of the sceptre. 2. Tegea / Asea / Pallantion / Kaphyai / Antigoneia / Elisphasioi / Dipaia: a group of dies most of which were cut by the same hand or otherwise are close copies, and which are characterized by the triangular treatment of the Nike; note the short bars on the legs of the seat, the identical form of wreath, and the utilization of the ground line for the horizontal stroke of the omega. Obverses of Asea and Pallantion are certainly by the same engraver, so also the reverses of Tegea and Asea, copied at Pallantion and Elisphasioi; Dipaia shows a rather crude copy. 3. Pallantion and Kleonai each have a reverse die clearly by the same hand, with identical form of seat, and legend in a symmetrical circle. 4. Phigalia and Asine show clearly the same hand. Then there are a number of cases where one mint copies either the style of another or the disposition of its legend; other mints again have a consistent mint style. There remains a small residue of mints whose coins are of indeterminate style. It should also be noted that at least 37 of the 45 cities, including even major ones like Argos and Megalopolis, the minting appears to have been limited to a single episode, because either all varieties are in the name of one man, or they are linked by a common hand or hands. It may therefore be justifiable to suppose that the minting by every city was limited to a single episode.

When this evidence is combined, the picture that emerges, I suggest, is of the coinage spreading from the initiating mints across the Peloponnese; sometimes itinerant engravers would move from city to city, and in other cases the coin of a neighbouring city would be used as a model by the local craftsman. One would imagine that at the *Synodos* at which the decision was taken to launch the coinage someone from Aigion did sketches from memory on papyrus, for example, of the two statues at Aigion (the administrative centre of the League) of Zeus Homagryios and Demeter Panachaia, and handed them to representatives of the cities that were going to start the coinage.

I turn now to the cities of Achaia and Elis at which the coinage was struck. The coins of Aigion have an idiosyncratic disposition of the reverse le-

gend, with AXAIΩN *downwards* on the left and AΓIEΩN *upwards* on the right; also, after the first coin with TE⁴ they show a unique individualistic style. Had the entire coinage started at Aigion, one would expect other mints to have copied this disposition and probably also the style. With the possible exception of stylistic copying at Lousoi in Arcadia they do not, and this would accord not only with the view that the bulk of the coinage started elsewhere, but that it started after 188 B.C. when Aigion ceased to be the regular meeting place of the Synodos.

At three Achaian cities, Patrai, Dyme and Kallistai, the same hand can be seen to have cut dies. We may note the disproportionately small seat, whose back is as high as its legs; Zeus with legs astride; and an almost bell-shaped Nike. Although Patrai struck a considerable number of Achaian League coins in silver, what would appear to be its first known federal bronze issue has recently come to light. Acquired by the British Museum in 1920 and tentatively attributed to Epidauros, it reads on the reverse AXAIΩN on the left upwards, ΠΑΤΡΕΩΝ on the right downwards, and ΣΙΜΟΣ in the exergue. In the ethnic the tau was misread as upsilon; the third from last letter is certainly epsilon, which precludes the reading ΕΠΙΔΑΥΡΙΩΝ, nor is there room for a legend of that length. The obverse is in such poor condition that it is not possible to be sure if it bore an inscription; however the fact that there is a personal name in the reverse exergue strongly suggests that it did not and that like Megara, Argos and Megalopolis, Patrai was one of the early mints striking the federal bronze coins, though in a far more limited way. The engraver would seem then to have moved west to Dyme, where the record again is modest: 8 coins recorded from 7 obverse and 8 reverse dies. Finally he moved on to Kallistai. In Pauly-Wissowa⁵ this small community was located by von Geisau in the vicinity of the grave of Kallisto described by Pausanias (8.35.8) as being near Tricoloni in the centre of the Peloponnese, and indeed Errington lists Kallista[i] as one of the Arcadian demes detached from Megalopolis by Philopoimen⁶. But using the Delphic thearodokoi inscription of 175 B.C.⁷ Meyer has since demonstrated that Kallistai is to be located near the north coast of the Peloponnese, and he sited it at Gardena, south of Rizomylo⁸. A north Peloponnesian location for Kallistai is additionally supported by the fact that the engraver of its Achaian League bronze coins had also worked at Patrai and Dyme. Although it is true that

there are two instances of engravers being seen to have worked at quite distant towns⁹, the natural supposition is that this engraver continued working in the same area, in Achaia.

At Aigira the style of a very prolific engraver who worked first at Corinth and then at Sikyon may well have been copied on two or more of the reverse dies. At Pellene one die would seem to be actually by his hand, but all other dies of Pellene show a perceptible, if not pronounced, mint style and were surely by local engravers. Remarkably the output of that city is larger than that of any other of the 45 that struck the coinage, with 59 obverse dies and 75 reverse dies; this compares with 46 obverse dies for Tegea, 38 each for Sikyon and Argos, and so on. From these figures for Pellene, the use of Lyon's tables for estimating the total number of dies¹⁰ produces 119 obverse dies and a barely credible 512 reverse dies. Possible explanations for this curious phenomenon will present themselves, though they cannot be discussed here; for example, could Pellene have been designated a military rallying post? In contrast, why is only one Achaian League bronze coin of Patrai known, though that city produced a sizable output of federal silver coinage?

Turning to Elis, we note that on their Achaian League bronze coins the Eleans wrote the ethnic without the traditional initial digamma¹¹: ΑΛΕΙΩΝ. (This confused 19th century numismatists, who attributed these coins to Alea¹².) If there is any significance in this, is it possible that unlike their autonomous coinage which was struck at Olympia and was intended to be used by visitors from all over the Greek world, this federal bronze coinage (which I suspect may have been put into circulation locally)

4. With TE on the reverse, Athens Π 254; coins with TEA (*BMC* 138) and TEAE (Split) on the obverse presumably refer to the same mint official and follow the TE issue directly.

5. *RE* 10.2, 1673.

6. R. M. Errington, *Philopoemen* (Oxford 1969) 91.

7. *BCH* 1921, 11f., II, 57ff.

8. *Neue peloponnesische Wanderungen* (Bern 1957), 80 ff.; *RE* Suppl. IX. 379.

9. At Phigalia and Asine in Messenia, and at Pallantion and Kleonai.

10. See G. F. Carter in *Scientific Studies in Numismatics, BM Occasional Paper No. 18*, ed. W. A. Oddy (1980) 17ff.

11. To be discussed in my study of the Achaian League bronze coinage.

12. The attribution to Elis was first proposed by the Rev. Churchill Babington; see J. Leicester Warren, *NC* 1864, 86-87.

will have been struck for use, in the first instance, by the Eleans themselves? Was it even possibly struck at Elis rather than Olympia?

The engravers of the 7 Elis varieties appear to be locals, not itinerants from elsewhere, though the horizontal disposition of the legend on one issue suggests the influence of the cluster of mints in SW Arcadia of which that disposition is characteristic (incidentally in legend disposition the coins of Hypana, the only other Elean mint, are similar to those). The countermarking by Elis of a number of Achaian League bronze coins is being studied by Professor P. R. Franke; here it may be noted merely that so far as can be surmised from our record of the coinage, the countermarking appears to be concentrated on some magistrate-varieties rather than others, and that the same fulminating Zeus countermark was used on one federal bronze coin of Aigion.

Only 9 cities of Achaia and Elis are known to have struck the Achaian League bronze coinage, the 8 mentioned above together with Keryneia. Though there is also one coin which may possibly belong to Leontion, as yet no coins are known for Tritaia,

Rhypes, Pharai, or Boura. But as the present record stands there are 7 of the 45 mints for which there are only 1 or 2 coins extant, so there is a strong possibility that there are further mints as yet unknown. However the distribution of the mints on the map of the Peloponnese shows in addition to a certain concentration in the NE of the peninsula also a concentration round the periphery of Lakonia, with Sparta herself missing; the question therefore arises whether the coinage, which I believe represents a single episode, belongs to a time when Sparta was having one of her periodic border disputes with her neighbours, or even had withdrawn from the League. Conversely there may have been little military action in the NW Peloponnese at this time. *Pace Chantraine*¹³, I would argue that a military purpose is the most plausible explanation for this coinage.

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13. *Chiron* 2, 1972, 188.

SUMMARY

THE BRONZE COINAGE OF THE ACHAIAN LEAGUE: THE MINTS OF ACHAIA AND ELIS

First, the results of a study of the later bronze coinage of the Achaian League are summarized. The coinage presents several interesting features. 9 different-hands can be seen to have cut dies for two or more mints; several cities copy the legend disposition or style of their neighbours; and some cities have individual mint styles. Evidently at 37 of the 45 minting cities, and arguably at all, the coinage represents a single episode. It is suggested that the coinage was launched concurrently at three major mints and spread thence across the Peloponnese.

Secondly, the mints of Achaia and Elis are consid-

ered. The individual style and idiosyncratic legend disposition of the issues of Aigion lend support to the view that the coinage started elsewhere. The same hand can be seen to have cut dies at Patrai (the first known Achaian league bronze coin of that mint?), Dyme, and Kallistai. That Meyer's locating of Kallistai in the north Peloponnese is correct is thus additionally indicated by the coins. Pellene, surprisingly, is the most prolific mint in the entire series. At Elis the absence of the traditional digamma in the legend of this coinage invites comment.