Série *Histoire*

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ΤΥΠΟΙ

Greek and Roman Coins Seen Through Their Images
Noble Issuers, *Humble* Users?

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In God We Trust

Gods and God-like Entities on Ancient Greek Coins

(Plate XII)

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INTRODUCING THE QUESTION

To deal with the representation of gods on ancient Greek coins is not an easy task, especially if we want to go beyond the common sense which informs us that any coin is an official document and as such is subjected to the rules of emblematic images connected with the issuing authority.

As it is known, the great variety of Greek coin types has challenged specialists since the beginning of scientific numismatics. It has been almost impossible to build up interpretative models that could account for the explanation of the many images that appear on Greek coins or even to establish firm criteria for their interpretation. Although coins are special emblematic objects and have usually the same format, the rules used by the Ancients when choosing one or the other image are not clear to us. Political, religious, artistic or conventional reasons have all been considered, depending on each case and following an intuitive, non-systematic methodology. This has often taken numismatists to certain relativism in interpretation, muddling up the historical use of the evidence as well as creating great scepticism toward numismatic methodology. Robin Osborne expresses thus his mistrust towards coins as valid evidence: "Although many mainland and western Greek cities rapidly began to mint silver coins, not all cities did, and the distribution of minting cities suggests that coinage was seen as serving different purposes in different places".[1] This is exactly the kind of assertion that implies complete resignation in dealing with the evidence and confirms the relativism just mentioned.

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1. OSBORNE (1996), p. 256.

Moreover, most specialists when dealing with coin types do not seem to be sure what their main interests are: understanding coinage as a global socio-cultural phenomenon? Establishing the reasons for the presence of a certain type on a certain coinage? Identifying religious cults through coin types? It is not uncommon to see explanations of coin types based on the presence of specific cults, which in their turn are deduced from the presence of the same coin type. Dealing with coin iconography has laid such traps and has taken some numismatists to circular reasoning of the kind. No wonder, many serious scholars have taken refuge in statistical and metrological methods, which for their precision are much more reliable.

I believe that the path the numismatic research tradition has followed since its beginnings back in the 1400s and 1500s has to do with the focus that was given at that time to Ancient History in general. I believe that since the 16th century, when modern Europe experienced the rise of Modern National States, the study of Greek History has focused on the "State". The search for a model of State has been a main concern since those times; the comparison between different types of States a subject of reflection in Renaissance, as it had been for the Greeks throughout the Classical period. Hence, the Greek polis—as a State—appeared as the main unit of study, and the study of coins and coin types has followed this predominant trend.

Numismatists (not excluding myself) have been approaching the interpretation of Greek coin types in light of the polis, the Greek State *par excellence*. Therefore, it is a consensus among us that through the "stamping of a sign strictly related with the issuing authority, coins reveal their provenance, express a value and guarantee their buying power".[2] Moreover, the choice of images of gods and goddesses as the emblem of a polis has been interpreted as a sign of political legitimacy and affirmation. As coins were made to circulate among other poleis (point that has been questioned depending on the period, region, and so forth, but anyhow is a general assumption) it has been assumed that deities were chosen as emblems of a specific polis because their cult was well established there and maybe the issuing authority wanted to compare its political power with the deities' power or even to make known the importance of the cult in that polis. The typical case is the representation of Athena on the coinage of Athens or that of Zeus and Hera and their attributes in the coinages of Elis.[3] These conceptions or trends of research, assumed by numismatists, lead naturally to an institutional interpretation in which coin types were approached as emblems of issuing authorities, and gods and goddesses were to be understood as tutelary deities of the State, representatives of the State, because they were chosen expressly by

2. CACCAMO CALTABIANO (1998), p. 57.

3. On attributes on coins, see IOSSIF, p. 269-295 in this volume.

those who were responsible for issuing coins: the State. This model of interpretation has proven to be very useful. I followed this line of thinking when I studied Pyrrhos' coinages or those of Agathocles' in Sicily. But, I do recognize that as useful as this model may be, it cannot explain a great number of images used as coin types in Ancient Greece.

I do not intend to deny the importance of detailed studies trying to determine the reasons why a tiny symbol was chosen by an authority to be depicted on a coin of a specific polis. Works by Léon Lacroix, Georges Le Rider, Olivier Picard and many others of the Italian and British schools who dealt with monetary iconography are all very elucidating and have opened many reliable possibilities of interpretation. But we have to admit that in over five hundred years of numismatic studies, we cannot asseverate many of the mechanisms which guided the choice of images to be engraved on ancient Greek coins. Therefore, many of them remain with no plausible explanation.

Constantly in pursuit of understanding the meaning of many "obscure" coin types, I have tried in the past years to escape the traditional way of interpreting monetary iconography and the one-sided view that coin types specifically represent the issuing authority in order to legitimize its power. I have flirted with anthropological approaches to coin types, inspired by Jean Bayet and Louis Gernet; I have gone through the interpretation of images proposed for Attic black and red figured vases by Claude Berard, J.-L. Durand and Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux; I have used with advantage some of Maria Caccamo Caltabiano's propositions for understanding coin types;[4] I have even used the peer polity interaction methodology as proposed by archaeologists Colin Renfrew and John Cherry to try to understand the variety of coin types in the Greek world. More recently, studies on identity (very much in vogue) and, on ancient Mediterranean networks have been an important source of inspiration, and here I can cite the English archaeologist Anthony Snodgrass and the scholars he formed such as Catherine Morgan, Jonathan Hall among many others, and also the Israeli historian Irad Malkin.[5] As it becomes obvious from the above, my approach to coin types is an interdisciplinary one, a characteristic needed in order to better understand the ways a coin type is produced with the intention of spreading a determined idea, but acquires many other meanings during its circulation, as the title of this volume may infer: *Noble Issuers, Humble Users*.[6] The opportunity of this volume promises advances in this field.

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4. See, for instance, FLORENZANO (1999); FLORENZANO (2007).

5. See, for instance, MALKIN (2011).

6. In recent years, the idea of *agency* have been insistently applied to the study of material culture and I believe we can understand the title of this conference through this lens. Starting with APPADURAI (1986).

In this article, I take the liberty to present an exercise of interpretation. I will focus on the representation of gods and god-like entities on coins, more specifically representations of *monsters*. My ambition is that what can be told on the presence of images of monsters on coins will help us drawing some conclusions about the use of images of gods and god-like beings as coin types in general.[7] I intend to make use of the methodology Anthropology offers us and go a little beyond the strictly institutional interpretation of Greek coin types. I want to cross the limits of the Greek State (the polis), to show that we are able to recognize in monetary iconography networks of meaning which correspond to identities in the Greek world which go much beyond the city-state and much beyond their issuing authorities.

First, there are some departing points I need to make clear in order to develop my arguments. I understand that the spread of coinage throughout the Greek world, the acceptance of its use in large scale by the Greeks is an answer to a need to express *Greekness*, *Hellenicity*; hence, the importance of coin types in the construction of this general identity. I assume that coinage in ancient Greece was not a specifically "economic" phenomenon and also that economy was not an autonomous sphere with its own rules.[8] The role of superstition and religion in all spheres of life including "economic" activities has long been pointed out by scholars, and the reciprocity background in which coinage was introduced during the seventh/sixth centuries; all made coinage a social-cultural phenomenon in which economic, political, juridical, religious aspects interplayed and coalesced.[9] I then assume that even though coin types can be determined by a specific issuing authority there is a repertoire of common representations shared by those who decide and create the image and their clientele[10] or, as Maria Caltabiano puts it: "distinctive messages on coin types are expressed through imagetic codes of ancient formation, consolidated through time, codes that can be very simple but of which the comprehension is attainable only if the rules are understood".[11] Determining the rules underlying the choice of images to create coin types is our main task.

Another point of departure implies defining coins as emblematic objects, as they were during all the history of coinage in the Western world and as they still are nowadays. Objects are emblematic when they bear images standing for or suggesting something different than what is represented in concrete visual terms– abstractions such as divinities, people, nations, moral virtues or sins. Moreover,

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7. I take the opportunity to thank Thomas Martin from the Holy Cross College (Worcester, MA) who first called my attention to the representation of monsters as coin types; some of the ideas here presented were published FLORENZANO (1995).

8. POLANYI (1968).

9. FLORENZANO (2000a).

10. FRONTISI-DUCROUX (1995).

11. CACCAMO CALTABIANO (1998), p. 57.

what they represent is indirect and calls for being analyzed and deciphered. Let us now turn to the interpretation of monsters on coins, which I believe can enlighten part of the mechanisms underlying the choice of coin types in general.

From the point of view of a broad interpretative scheme concerning ancient Greek monetary iconography in which coin types refer to some virtue, advantage, or intrinsic characteristic of an issuing power, how are we to understand the representation of monsters, deities not in the least benign? How can we interpret on coins issued by the polis of Knossos, the presence of Minotaur, a monster born out of Poseidon and Pasifae, Minos' wife, who was imprisoned in the labyrinth and amused himself by devouring young boys and girls every year? (Pl. XII, 1) Which interpretation can we give to the Chimera on Sikyon coins, a fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail who used to devastate crops? (Pl. XII, 2) And why does the gorgoneion appear on coins from Neapolis or the Pegasus on coins from Corinth or the winged panther on coins from Panticapaeion (Pl. XII, 3), the griffin on coins of Abdera and Teos, the hippocampus on those from Syracuse or the man-headed bull on coins from Gela, Neapolis in Campania and still on those of Acarnania or of the Seleucids?

It is evident that all these representations have to do with some legendary episode in the issuing polis: the Pegasus, after all, was tamed by the hero Bellerophon on the founding site of Corinth; the winged panther was the guardian of the northern gold mines, the man-headed bull was a concrete form given to the fertilizing power of rivers, and so forth. But why were monsters, specifically, chosen to symbolize a city-state, and not heroes or other protective deities?

We believe that the answer to this question can only be found through an analysis considering the Greek religious practice and experience as a whole; through the definition of points of comparison between monetary images and other images created by the Greeks and through the understanding of coins as objects which not only express a measure of value or which perform the duty of an instrument of exchange, but which are also a very special support for religious imagery.

HOW TO DEFINE MONSTERS

In English the meaning of the word monster is: "1. any plant or animal of abnormal shape or structure, as one greatly malformed or lacking some parts; 2. any imaginary creature part human and part animal in form, or made up from the parts of two different animals; 3. in pathology, a malformed foetus, especially one with a deficiency of limbs or parts".[12] This is also the definition given by Festus: "we call monsters the being which exceeds the natural ways; for instance a

12. *Webster Dictionary*, (1968), p. 1165.

snake with feet, a bird with four wings, a man with two heads, a liver that melts at boiling".[13] Furthermore, Lucretius explains that "monsters are at the same time recombinant organs that having been born from the earth are faded to perish immediately, not corresponding to *foedera naturai*, on the other side, they are purely onirical mental images that by the union of heterogenic elements make us believe in the reality of beings such as centaurs".[14] We may also consider that in Latin the word *monstra* (neuter, plural) usually indicates prodigious facts, messages or warnings from the gods which take advantage of an abnormality to manifest themselves.[15] That is why Festus makes reference to the liver that melts when boiled. This use of the word *monstra* sends us directly to the religious origin of the word (as *monere* means to warn) and to the involvement of these abnormal beings with some type of divine power.[16]

Among the Greeks, with their literature and mythology abounding with monstrous beings, there is not a unique term representing all fantastic beings; *teras*, used by Aristotle in the *Generation of animals* maybe the closest we can get.[17] Anyhow, each monster with its own peculiar physical deformity generally appears in ancient Greek texts with a specific name: the Medusa, the Hippocamp, the Minotaur, the Chimera and so forth. They may be named also by a simple adjective, as the Echidna, which in Hesiod goes by *Péloron*, of an exaggerated size and thus monstrous (*Teog*, 297).

Moreover, we can classify "monsters" in four categories:

1. human beings of an exaggerated height;
2. human beings with some extraordinary characteristic such as the excess or the lack of limbs or normal organs;
3. creatures that combine two or more animals;
4. creatures that combine human and animal forms[18].

All are beings which possess special powers that differ greatly from purely human capacities. Some authors have tried to search the origins of monsters in classical art—Greek and Roman—in the so called "hunting civilizations" of the Upper Paleolithic.[19] In an economy totally based on the destruction of animals for food and at the same time on the preservation and conservation of animals, some procedures were necessary in order to guarantee the survival of the group. One of

13. Festus 146, 32.
14. Lucretius v. 837-854 and 878-924.
15. Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1, 93.
16. BAYET (1974), p. 687: "Propos sur les monstres".
17. GILMORE (2003), p. 9.
18. HARVEY, P., *Dicionário Oxford de literatura clássica grega e latina* (1987), *s.v.* "Monstros", p. 346.
19. BAYET (1974), p. 687-705.

these procedures was painting cave walls with the images of animals. As a matter of fact, parietal rock paintings have usually been interpreted as devices for hunting efficacy: just as if the realistic representation of dead animals created the necessary conditions of their indispensable resurrection for the continuity of the group. By representing the victimized animal, men tried to capture its energy in a drawing, making thus possible to keep it alive.

Moreover, archaeological excavations in Upper Paleolithic sites and the ethnographical comparison with recent hunting communities of northern Europe have shown that this type of society used to preserve some bones (the skull and the long bones), the skin or the muzzle of hunted animals which were all integrated in propitiatory rituals for the sake of the preservation of the species.[20]

In the same way, rituals would be made by the shaman who would dress up with masks or even with the animal skin in order to mimic the prey, get nearer to it, impregnating himself and the group with its higher qualities *i.e.* hearing better, seeing better, being swifter. Besides, we may retain that rock paintings dated to the Upper Paleolithic—like those in the "Trois Frères" cave in France—also depict strange figures, men probably disguised as animals. Maybe we can identify in these pictures shamans, half men-half animal, representing what one would call monsters. According to Bayet these are the first monsters created voluntarily and artificially by men.[21]

In any case, either if we consider these paintings as realistic ones or if we interpret them as ritualistic performances in which the shaman comes into possession of the qualities and energies of an animal, the main goal is that of efficiency in hunting and of constant reproduction of game.

Still according to Bayet, the monster of the classic age descends from this valorization of animal powers so specific to the hunting cultures, exactly because the formula of the representation of fantastic beings in Greek and Roman art and literature relies on the emphasis of the powers of one or another animal.[22] Following D. Gilmore, even though the depiction of monsters was common from the Upper Paleolithic period, their pictorial and literary representation was to reach its apex in classical age, mainly among the Greeks.[23] Monsters of classical age can be defined as "imaginary forms made of pseudo-organic wholes which reminds of beings with multiple powers, powers not produced or added by attributes but that are concentrated in a unique unnatural body".[24] Although in later periods—in Greek and Roman times—these fantastic beings had their function limited and

20. BAYET (1974), p. 694.
21. BAYET (1974), p. 710.
22. BAYET (1974), p. 722.
23. GILMORE (2003), p. 37.
24. BAYET (1974), p. 722.

modified, and the survival of the group did not depended anymore on their power, they still concentrate an extraordinary force, more than what nature can give to normal beings; a force that could eventually be controlled and put at one's disposal.

Thus, the monster is a being which adds the qualities of the man or of an animal to those of another being and because of this, it possesses uncommon powers. What is a Pegasus if not a horse with wings that adds swiftness to the movement? What is the Minotaur if not a man with a bull head which gives more intensity to his brutal strength or to his fertility? Or, what is the Chimera if not a weird recombinant of three different animal qualities in the same organism? As Mary Douglas puts it: "Transcending normal limits and domains, the monster figure appears to be invincible or unstoppable".[25]

THE "EFFICACY" OF IMAGES

Another feature that interests us in the realistic paintings made in the interior of pre-historic caves concerns the efficacy of the depiction of a figure. Ancient people assigned certain powers to images; they expected some kind of action from them in the same way that they expected efficiency from the rituals they performed to the gods. Among these images, those depicting monsters were supposed to have a specific efficiency.

But what kind of efficiency was expected from images in classical times? In the context of pre-classic Greek religion, the efficiency of images was much connected to the principle of the *do ut abeas* or "I give to you so that you may go away and remain far" and not of the principle of the *do ut des* or "I give to you so that you can give to me" which predominated later on in Classical and Hellenistic Greece.[26] So, I would propose—in a simplified manner—that rituals, sacrifices, libations were all connected to the will of averting possible evils provoked by strange energies such as spirits, phantoms, demons (*daimonia* as the Greeks would call them). The protective nature of Greek religion in this period, if not predominant, was responsible for a great deal of rituals and, no doubt, for a great many images created in art and literature.[27]

But, by which mechanisms protective efficacy was ascribed to images? In the caves of the Upper Paleolithic it is supposed that the realism of representations would guarantee the reproduction of the dead animals, therefore protecting the group from the lack or scantiness of prey. The faithful representation of a living animal seemed to show that it would always remain alive, at the disposal of the hunter. Its energy would be, therefore, preserved through the painting.

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25. DOUGLAS (1965), *apud* GILMORE (2003), p. 19.
26. HARRISON (1907), p. 7.
27. FARAONE (1992), p. 10.

I would advance that among the Greeks, as with the pre-historic men, the image had the power to fix certain energies; to put them under control and at the same time to propitiate them. This character of images was based in a typical belief of pre-industrial societies—and the Greeks were no exception—that some objects such as stones, plants, animals or even man-made objects could have, due to special circumstances, an inner power or energy, called *mana* by anthropologists. According to this same belief, an image could replace in a certain measure the *energy* of the real object. The representation of a spear, for instance, of a thunder, of an ear of grain, of an animal and, why not, of a god would be thus impregnated by this energy. In other words, through the representation of an object or of a deity, man performed a ritual recharge of its inner energy. It is the same principle that underlies the sacrifice or the libation as ritual repetition of a mythic episode in order to renovate its efficiency and strength.[28]

Many other rituals had, indeed, this same function of fixing and controlling dangerous energies. For Greeks (and even for many modern people) it was necessary, for instance, to bury the dead according to special rituals in order to fix their spirits so that they would not wander around harming the living.[29] The same belief underlies the custom—well documented in Greece since the archaic period—of erecting trophies with the armors of the defeated after battle. In this way their spirits would be fixed, put under control, and would not be able to come back to take revenge on the victors.[30]

In his study on the magical power of statues in archaic and classical Greece, C. Faraone demonstrates how Greeks believed in the power and strength of sculptures. According to this scholar, in classical Greece, god's and other deities' statues could appear damaged on purpose, so as to eliminate their power. At other times, statues were sited at the limits of cities with the specific purpose of averting enemies. Many of them were put at doors or at crossroads; still others were locked inside temples so that their evil energy would not be able to disperse.[31]

Moreover, when an image is conceived, the artist traces every detail, he measures and calculates each proportion; he therefore starts by learning the qualities of what he is representing and putting it under his control. The monster construction encourages creativity, synthesis and art as well as analysis.[32] An image loaded with controlled energy should be efficient. When depicting an object, (such as an arm, a shield, an ear of grain or a deity) the sensation must have been of control over those energies represented, of ordering them on one's behalf.

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28. ELIADE (1954), p. 31-35.

29. KURTZ, BOARDMAN (1971), *passim*.

30. PICARD (1957), p. 25-26; FLORENZANO (2000b); IOSSIF (2004) for the use and significance of trophies in the Hellenistic period.

31. FARAONE (1992), p. 7, 61-62 and 74.

32. GILMORE (2003), p. 21.

Still another principle typical of ancient religion in general can help us fully understand the efficiency of images. It concerns the belief in the power to fight equal with equal. *Similia similibus curantur* or as in English "like banning like".[33] Greeks were not strange to this principle. "Like banning like" means that we can avert an undesired energy with a similar energy. We could, for instance, combat fire with fire. There is much evidence dating to Archaic, Classic and Hellenistic Greece that demonstrates how Greeks used this procedure to avert problems and evil. The representation of the gorgoneion in many media is a most cunning example: Perseus carries the damaged head of Medusa as proof of his deed but also in order to protect himself and avert those who harassed him. Later on, he gives it to Athena, his guardian, who puts it on her armor transforming it in the mythical example that is going to be repeated each time the gorgoneion is placed on a shield, a defensive military equipment *par excellence*. The same principle underlies the protective nature of the mirror in ancient Greek and Roman world and in many other societies. A mirror set on a door is supposed to ward off all evil coming into view by reflecting its image.[34]

Though I cannot go through all the arguments here concerning coin types, I am convinced that Greeks considered indeed the principle of the protective efficacy of an image when choosing it for a coin type. Coins could not only work out the identification of a political power with a specific deity, a god, a goddess, a *daimon* (we can say energy—because what is, for instance, Athena but an energy?), but also could invoke an uncommon force, an energy, fix it, and make it work on behalf of the issuers and most certainly of the users.

THE APOTROPAIC NATURE OF MONETARY IMAGES

The efficacy of images in general in art and in literature has to do with 'apotropaism', another concept borrowed from Anthropology.[35] Taken from the Greek *apotropaios*, this term has been in use for many decades by anthropologists and historians on the ancient religions in a general way, to designate the capacity of certain objects, rituals or deities to avert evil, to protect, to bring luck and to attack evil. The term *apotropaios* and the verb *apotrepo* among the Greeks were mainly used from the fourth century on with these meanings. Ancient Greeks had, in effect, many other terms to convey this belief in the power of objects, as for instance the verbs *alexo* and *eirgo*, *pempo* and *apopempo*, and in later times, *baskaino*, of which the root may be related to the latim *fascinum*.[36] In this article,

33. SIEBERS (1983), p. 1-3; FARAONE (1992), p. 36-38.

34. WALLIS BUDGE (1978), p. 489.

35. "Apotropaism is a term rarely used in English. The same concept is also expressed by "belief in the evil eye".

36. *LSJ*, *s.v.* "baskaino".

we define apotropaic objects as artefacts able to act as devices to avert evil, to protect (and not to attack or to bring luck). In this sense, an apotropaic object could also be called an amulet, in the way T.H. Gaster defines it in *Encyclopedia of Religion*: "An amulet is an object, supposedly charged with magical power, that is carried on the person or displayed in a house, barn, or place of business in order to ward off misadventure, disease, or the assaults of malign beings, demonic or human. A talisman is an object similarly used to enhance a person's potentialities and fortunes. Amulets and talismans are two sides of the same coin. The former are designed to repel what is baneful; the latter, to impel what is beneficial".[37]

If we try to understand monetary images in the light of the broad context of Greek religion and magic just mentioned, we may be able to best interpret the mechanisms that guided the choice of Olympic gods, heroes, deities of all sorts, including monsters, as coin types. We might consider that the Olympic gods and goddesses, generous and beneficent as they were considered to be, invariably had a terrifying side. When enraged, they could whip up a colossal disgrace such as hunger, epidemics and plagues, onto a city. Needless to discuss here the numerous examples of gods who, being upset by some human action revealed their mean vein. Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Athena, Artemis, all the gods in the Greek pantheon, had powers that could be directed to either side. All of them could be invoked, propitiated and all of them had to have their powers and energies tapped to one's favor, just like with the monsters. On coins, the emblematic image of a community or of an established power, acquired a twofold function: not only could it compare the issuing authority to an extraordinary divine strength, but could as well invoke this force's protection.

Many monetary types produced in Archaic and Classical Greece—including those depicting monsters—can be placed in this same context of fixation and propitiation of extraordinary powers. By depicting Athena on its coinage, wasn't Athens summoning and propitiating the goddess, while appropriating some of her powers as its own? What was the expectation of Akragas in Sicily by depicting Zeus' eagle in the act of tearing up a prey? (Pl. XII, 4) Is this not a way of propitiating this powerful god and invoking his protection? Another cunning example from Metapont in Magna Grecia can confirm this apotropaic mechanism: this town chose to represent a huge grasshopper seated on a beautiful ear of grain on some of its coins. (Pl. XII, 5) It is well known that Metapont had one of the most fertile territories in Magna Grecia disputed by several other poleis. We also know that the grasshopper is a plague that drives any farmer to terror. In what other way can we understand this coin type if not by approaching it as an apotropaic device?

37. GASTER, T.H., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* I (1987), *s.v.* "Amulets and Talismans", p. 243-246.

I believe that the principles of protective efficiency and of "like banning like" can also be applied to the interpretation of monetary types that depict the image of monsters. The representation of the Minotaur on coins of Knossos could have meant the fixation of energy much more strongly than the mere 'emblem' of the city? Could the Chimaera on Sikyon's coins not be interpreted in the same way? And the man-headed bull of so many coins issued by Sikeliot and Italiot poleis, could they not be identified to local rivers not as a mere symbol of the town but as a mechanism to summon the fertilizing potential of the bull to the water courses, thus protecting the population from draughts and scarceness of food? In fact, we are able to exploit this type of explanation to all representations of monsters on coin types.

Evidently, it cannot be ignored that each monetary image has a specific rationale. Nothing more natural than having Athena represented on Athens's coins, or Zeus on coins issued in Olympia or Taras on coins from Tarentum. The choice of monsters as coin types must obey to precise reasons in each mint. Thus, the Minotaur appears on Knossos' coins and not on those of other mints; the Pegasus is typical on Corinthian coinage and to a much lesser extent in other mints; the winged panther said to protect northern mines is depicted on Panticapaeion coins, and so forth.

Even so, we believe that there is a global explanation that makes the representation of monsters so 'normal' on coins as the representation of any other god or deity. And that explanation is to be found in Greek religion, in the belief that an image could be loaded with the energy of objects, gods or deities depicted. In the specific case of coins and considering their emblematic nature, the expected efficacy had a protective character, be it from a monster or from an Olympian deity. I would propose that this is a network of meaning, which underlies the choice of many coin types in Ancient Greece.

THE APOTROPAIC NATURE OF COINS AS OBJECTS

We still have a word or two on coins as objects impregnated of magic in order to complete our remarks on the representation of gods and of monsters on ancient Greek coins. It is my belief that since its origin back in the seventh century, the coin—as object—had a twofold function. On the one hand, it had very well defined economic functions as an instrument of exchange and measure of value, functions which are not topics in this text. On the other, we have to consider that the Greeks adopted coins in a context much enmeshed with magic and religion. It is a matter of fact that in many ancient societies (and, perhaps, in our own modern society) any object that mediates exchange (shells, plumes, seeds, stones, metal objects), meaning an object holding the capacity of becoming another object, was seen as a manifestation of a special power or strength, different from all other common objects or things. As early as in the beginning of the 20th

century, Marcel Mauss pointed out to the inherent magic in objects considered economically precious.[38]

Firstly, let us consider the raw material: coins were made of metal. In ancient Mediterranean specifically, metal had substantial value much before the advent of coinage. The rarity of this material in the area, the specialization required manipulating it and furthermore, its malleability, durability and the technical efficiency of objects produced with metal made it very valuable as raw material. Louis Gernet, analyzing the origin of the mythical notion of value in ancient Greece, demonstrated how metal objects were in the centre of important myths such as Eriphile's necklace, Polycrates' ring or the Seven Sages tripod.[39] Another point to be considered regards the huge quantities of worked or raw metal deposited in temples and sanctuaries throughout the Greek world, from the Archaic period onwards. For security or religious reasons, the fact is that this metal, deriving from tax-collecting or dedications and offerings, was taken in as property of the gods. Temples and sanctuaries served as deposits for the town's wealth, offered loans and oftentimes acted as veritable banks.[40]

As many other rulers before and after them, Hellenistic monarchs did not hesitate to assault sanctuaries when in need of resources to pursue their military enterprises. Divine punishment used to come along too: their fleets were destroyed, their armies affected by epidemics and so forth.[41] There was, undoubtedly, something sacred regarding wealth represented by metal objects in Greek antiquity.

In respect to coins specifically—those tiny metal discs with imprints on both sides—there is something more than just the metal and the images. Going a little bit farther on the uses ancient Greeks made of coins, we shall find that besides being an instrument of exchange and measure of value, the coin was used many times as an amulet and as a talisman. As stated above, amulets and talismans are two sides of the same belief. The amulet is supposed to avert evil and the purpose of talismans is to propitiate what is beneficial. The employment of both (which is universal) rests on the belief that the inherent quality of a thing can be transmitted to human beings by contact.[42] There is ubiquitous evidence of this use for coins, in Antiquity. In the first place, we can point out to regularly perforated coins found in dated archaeological contexts. Albeit these perforations have been interpreted as the need to test the quality of the metal, I believe it is much more probable that these coins were perforated in order to be fastened close to the neck, ankle or wrist.[43] According to G. Gorini, who recuperated passages from

38. MAUSS (1923/24).

39. GERNET (1948).

40. BOGAERT (1968), p. 279-280.

41. *E.g.*, Diod. 27.4.3, on Pyrrhos' attack on the temple of Persephone in Lokris.

42. GASTER (1987), p. 243-246.

43. GORINI (1977), p. 83.

ancient texts, many were the uses of coins as amulets or talismans. Pausanias cites explicitly that persons cured by an oracular counsel had to deposit gold or silver coins in Amphiaraos' fountain in Oropos.[44] Another example cited by Pausanias regards the deposit of a bronze coin near the statue of Hermes in Pharai in order to get good advice from the oracle.[45] Also, many coins were found scattered in little rustic sanctuaries, springlets, sacred places, natural warm water fountains, small lakes or woods. Dispersed coins were also found in abundance inside the enclosure of big Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries such as Olympia, Delphi and Dodona. Many of these were in use at the moment of the offering, others were out of use and already damaged or obliterated. Still others were produced at the occasion of the festivities with the specific purpose of being offered.[46] Moreover, it is worth noting how coins could also belong in a set of objects produced specifically with the notion of serving as amulets. Let us consider gems, for instance, which were produced mainly to be mounted on jewelry, especially rings. C. Bonner was the first one to systematically classify rings that were used as amulets and talismans.[47] The comic poet Antiphanes (fourth century BC) mentions a ring with this function: "there's nothing wrong with me and I hope it won't be; but, if after all my stomach turns inside out, I have a ring bought from Fertato for a drachma" (frag 177 Kock).[48] Aristophanes also has a funny passage on the powers of rings, the Just Man who, when menaced by a blackmailer, answers: "I don't give a dam to you; I'm wearing this ring bought from Eudamos for a drachma".[49]

Comparison between engraved gems and coins begins with the technique of fabrication: gems and coin stamps are engraved by the same type of artist, probably with the same tools.[50] Figures are tiny, engraved in the negative and must fit in a circular or oval disc. A coin stamp is used to engrave the emblem of an issuing authority on a metallic disc. An engraved gem is used as a private signet; both are emblematic.

Engraved gems exist since the Bronze Age throughout the Mediterranean. Although they are attested as having a magical purpose only from the first century BC on, when they incorporate magical legends such as "make me victorious" or "give me a grace", Bonner believes that they had this same purpose well before. Images of Apollo, Hermes, and Herakles were engraved on gems and were probably used by athletes in order to be successful in their games, and

44. Paus. 1.34.3.

45. Paus. 7.2.2.

46. GORINI (1977), p. 89.

47. BONNER (1950).

48. BONNER (1950), p. 4.

49. Aristoph. *Pl.* v. 883.

50. BREGLIA, L., *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica* (1963), *s.v.* "Moneta" and *s.v.* "Glittica", p. 152-162; p. 956-964.

images of strong and swift animals were also popular for the same reasons. In Roman times, many gems had the representation of monsters which according to Bonner spoke for themselves.[51]

Considering conservatism in religious matters, Bonner is probably correct when he points out the conferment of magical power to gems that were produced before the first century BC. Furthermore, engraved metal rings with no gems but carrying images very similar to those stamped on coins can also be considered as amulets or talismans. M.-A. Zagdoun classified about 300 iron and bronze rings found in archaeological excavations in Delphi. She recorded the presence of images identical to coin types in great many of them. These rings were found in context dated to the fourth century BC at the entrance of a cave consecrated to Pan and to the Nymphs.[52] They were engraved with images of the bullhead that is typical of coin types of the same period from Phocis; of the bee, of Herakles with the cornucopia, of Nike crowning a trophy or of Thetis riding a hippocampus. For all the iconographical models the author was able to find plausible parallels in Western or Eastern Greek coinage of the period. We can thus assign an apotropaic character not only to coin types but also to coins as objects. It seems that coins participated in a wider set of objects that performed functions especially as amulets.

CONCLUSION

My conclusion is that if we are set on understanding the meaning of coin types and the mechanisms by which specific images are chosen as coin types in Greek antiquity, it is fundamental to consider coins beyond their strictly economic and political roles. We have to analyze them in the broader context of their being magical and religious objects. And this is a lesson Gernet has given us in as early as the 1940s and Bayet in the 1950s. Approaching coins mainly as economic or as political instruments has leaded us to leave aside the richness and the creativity of ancient Greeks. I am convinced that all these hidden meanings of Greek coin types can tell us much more about the society we are studying and draw a more complete picture of their ways. All these meanings are directly related to a very broad common referential repertoire—as stated by Françoise Frontisi Ducroux.[53] So, coinage issuers—*noble* as they might have been—had to consider this repertoire of shared beliefs if they wanted to have any success in reaching the *humble* users.

51. BONNER (1950), p. 6-7.

52. ZAGDOUN (1982).

53. See FRONTISI-DUCROUX (1995).

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