

Les Messéniens de 370/369 au 1er siècle de notre ère : monnayages et histoire [Catherine Grandjean]

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Catherine Grandjean

Les Messéniens de 370/369 au 1^{er} siècle de notre ère. Monnayages et histoire

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The southwest sector of the Peloponnese, blessed (or perhaps cursed?) with abundant fertile land, had a variegated political history. In the Bronze Age the palace of Pylos flourished. For a long stretch of the Archaic and Classical periods with the inhabitants of Messenia subordinated to the Spartans, she functioned as Laconia's bread basket. Liberated by the Theban Epaminondas in 370/69 BC Messenia became a city-state, but in the precarious Hellenistic world at times subject to Macedon. In 191 BC Messene joined the Achaian Confederacy (but was in revolt 183/2 BC). After the Achaian War of 146 BC Messenia was eventually to be exploited by the Roman settlers.

It is a pleasure to welcome this meticulously researched book by a scholar who is a professional ancient historian as well as a numismatist, a combination which, regrettably, is not always found together. Roebuck, originally, was criticised for limiting his history of Messenia to political history;¹ since then the rich epigraphic record has received attention; now Grandjean (p. 2) uses the numismatic evidence to widen the focus.

The first coins of Messene, staters from only one obverse die and one reverse, backed by a tiny issue of triobols (only two obverse and two reverse dies recorded), are an astonishingly potent assertion of the new city-state, in or soon after 370/69 BC, visually as powerful as the new city's spectacular walls. The dating bracket '370/369 – 330 BC' given on pp. 21, 22, 271 is obviously too extensive for such minimal issues.² Throughout the book Grandjean's policy of prudent caution in dating issues, especially on historical probabilities, leads her to give far wider dating brackets than the numismatist reader might expect. As has long been noted staters issues at this time of the Achaian Confederacy, Arkadian Confederacy, Tegea, Pheneos and Stymphalos were equally small.³

The history of the Messenians before the liberation of 370/69 BC, based largely, but not altogether, on the second century AD account of Pausanias, is complex and controversial and has been much discussed by historians.⁴ Grandjean asserts the relevance of the coin types chosen to this debate. The choices of the Demeter head for obverse type and standing Zeus for the reverse are well argued; these remain

¹ C.A. ROEBUCK, *A History of Messenia from 369-146 BC* (Chicago 1941).

² But p. 99: «Le témoignage des premières monnaies a l'ethnique des Messéniens (du Péloponnèse), que je date des années 365-361»

³ Achaian Confederacy: 1 obv. die (NC 1902, pp. 324-327, pl. XVI.4); Arkadian Confederacy: 3 obv. dies (D. GERIN, SNR 65, 1986, pp.13-31); Tegea: 1 obv. die (W. SCHWABACHER, NC 1939, pp. 15-19); Pheneos: 3 obv. dies (S. SCHULTZ, SNR 71, 1992, pp. 47-74).

⁴ Pp. 49-59. See e.g. N. LURAGHI, *Becoming Messenian*, JHS 122, 2002, pp. 45-69.

the standard types throughout most of the coinage except when replaced by other specific types, e.g. those of the Alexanders or of the Achaian Confederacy.

For the rest of the fourth century Messene produced obols and bronze coins; it may be suspected that as bronze coinage became more familiar in the Peloponnese it supplanted the obols, so that Grandjean's dating bracket for the bronzes, 370/69-330 BC (p. 33) again may perhaps be too generous. Her identification of the bronzes of *Série IV* as 'chalques' rather than as hemiobols may at first sight seem implausible, since at other mints – Athens, Corinth, Sikyon – the chalcous was of smaller module (c. 2gm). However, as she rightly noted (p. 46): «le mot chalque, qui signifie simplement «bronze», a dû logiquement avoir au début de l'histoire des monnayages de bronze un sens simplement générique.»

The early second century saw a very small issue (*Série VIII*: only one obverse die) of Messenian Attic weight tetradrachms with Alexander types, which are plausibly attributed to the war against Antiochus III (c. 191-188 BC: pp. 109, 226). Next, a smallish issue of Attic weight tetradrachms with Messenian types (*Série IX*) can convincingly be attributed to the Messenian revolt from the Achaian Confederacy of 183/2 (pp. 227, 271).

Série X, however, Zeus head triobols of reduced aiginetic weight (symmachic standard), dated by Grandjean broadly to the second half of the second century – the end of the second third of the first century, is more open to controversy. These civic triobols – most at least, certainly *émissions* δ – μ are part of a large group of federal and concomitant civic Peloponnesian triobols which traditionally were dated to immediately before the Achaian War of 146 BC, but which on account of Christof Boehringer's scrutiny of the Poggio Picenze hoard have been downdated to the first if not to the end of the second century BC.⁵ Grandjean discusses this massive shift of coinage and is broadly comfortable with it, if not with all of the historical questions it raises and specifically a Laconian drachm mentioned in a Delian inscription of 162/1 BC.⁶

But what of *Série X émission α*? *Série X émissions* β – λ differ noticeably from *émission a*: whereas on *émission a* Zeus is laureate and the eye is cut realistically, on *émissions b-l* Zeus is diademed and his eye is a mere blob. *Émission α*, as Grandjean notes, shares an obverse die with a Messenian Achaian federal triobol in the Agrinion hoard, whose burial can be dated c. 129 BC.⁷ The present reviewer believes that the 'Late' silver coinage of the Achaian Confederacy may not have been struck after the Third Macedonian War, and was subsequently followed by the federal

⁵ CHR. BOEHRINGER, Zur Geschichte der Achäischen Liga im 2. und 1. Jh. v. Chr. im Lichte des Münzfundes von Poggio Picenze (Abruzzen), in: A.D. RIZAKIS (ed.) *Achaia und Elis in der Antike*, MEAETHMATA 13 (Athens 1991), pp. 163-169; J. WARREN, The Achaian League Silver Coinage Controversy Resolved: a summary, NC 159, 1999, pp. 99-109.

⁶ P. 142. Professor H. Mattingly and the present reviewer both feel, however, that a federal triobol of Sparta could be intended (see M. THOMPSON, The Agrinion Hoard, NNM 159 (New York 1968), p. 48, 468); human beings are not always consistent in naming, and anyway the inscription was Delian, not Laconian.

⁷ See M. THOMPSON, (*op. cit.* n. 6), p. 68-70.

bronze coinage⁸ (Messene of course struck both federal silver and federal bronze.) What then of Grandjean's *émission* α, which certainly was struck before 129 BC, since there were two specimens in the Agrinion hoard? Were they perhaps struck at the time of the Third Macedonian War, with Messene, a reluctant member of the Confederacy abandoning the federal monogram, or was the obverse die held over and reused, as it is known that Messene did not take part in the Achaian War (Polybios XXXVIII. 16)?

What then of the considerable *émission* β (22 obverse dies)? Was there a possible chronological gap between *émissions* α and β?

The considerable volume of triobols in the Achaian federal format were struck at the time of Sulla, as it is now generally believed, largely by *poleis* on the coast of the Corinthian Gulf: Patrai, Dyme, Aigion, Aigeira, (also very small issues of Kleitor, Sikyon, and probably Elis),⁹ but also astonishingly, Sparta, whose dies were cut by the same engraver who worked at Patrai. There was also a substantial volume of civic issues struck by Sparta, Messene, Korone, Megalopolis, Argos and Sikyon.¹⁰ Of the civic triobols of Sparta,¹¹ it would appear that substantially fewer were struck before Sparta's triobols in the federal format (i.e. between c. 129 BC, the burial of the Agrinion hoard, and c. 83/2 BC, the Poggio Picenze hoard), than were struck afterwards. To infer, therefore, from the coinage of Sparta between 146 BC, and c. 48 BC, there appears to have been a gap in the production of coins in the second half of the second century BC. May we not suspect that the other quite substantial issues of civic triobols (Messene, Korone, Megalopolis, Argos and Sikyon) may similarly have started towards the beginning of the first century, rather than soon after 146 BC and the dissolution of the Achaian confederacy in its original form, and indeed after 129 BC, as they are not in the Agrinion hoard? Certainly there was no call for coinage for military purposes as there had been in the first half of the second century (until and excepting the triobols in the federal format – Patrai, Sparta, Dyme, etc), and as I have argued elsewhere,¹² the new feature of life in the Peloponnese in the first half of the first century approximately was the arrival of the Roman and Italian *negotiatores*. Yet Price and Crawford have noted the late appearance of denarii in the Peloponnese.¹³ That denarii brought by the *negotiatores*

⁸ J. WARREN, *The Bronze Coinage of the Achaian Koinon. The Currency of a Federal Ideal* (London 2007), pp. 145-149, 165-169, 174-179.

⁹ See J. WARREN in M. AMANDRY / S. HURTER (eds), *Travaux de numismatique greque offerts à George Le Rider* (London 1999), pp. 376-377.

¹⁰ Art. cit. (n. 9), p. 377.

¹¹ S. GRUNAUER-VON HOERSCHELMANN, *Die Münzprägung der Lakedaimonier*, AMuGS VII (Berlin 1978). *Groupe VIII*: triobols (not c. 219-196 BC as there dated) *Séries* 1-8 (excluding *Série* 3 which has only one coin) have triobols from the Olympia hoard, but *Séries* 9-25 do not. *Séries* 9-25 can often be seen to have a snake wound round the amphora.

¹² Art. cit. (n. 9), p. 382.

¹³ M. PRICE, *Southern Greece*, in: A.M. BURNETT / M.H. CRAWFORD (eds), *The Coinage of the Roman World in the Late Republic*. BAR Int. Series 326 (Oxford 1987), p. 99. M.H. CRAWFORD, *The Coinage of the Roman World under the Roman Republic. Italy and the Mediterranean Economy* (London 1985), p. 116: «Roman coinage hardly circulated in Greece before Sulla...».

(for land purchase, and other financial transactions) were *restruck* as the local coinages, is, certainly, a hypothesis, (and rejected by such as Grandjean, p. 148) but it does go some way to explain the facts. Of the civic triobol issues of Messene two of ΠΟΛΩΝ (*Series X émission ε*) were in the Poggio Picenze hoard (burial 86 BC); the other 7 issues as indeed Grandjean arranges them, follow, terminating in that of ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΣ; for that rare issue (*Série X émission μ*) the obverse Zeus head is replaced by a female one (Artemis?), whose elongated neck is characteristic of coins of the time of Actium.¹⁴

The relations of Messene with the small towns of Messenia are interesting, complex, and analysed by Grandjean in detail (pp. 99-105). Korone struck Achaian federal silver triobols (p. 231), and probably much later, in the first century, produced a series of some sixteen numbered triobols (and a very rare bronze hemiobol) (pp. 153-155). Thouria produced three quite rare bronze issues, also probably first century (pp. 222-224) but no Achaian silver or bronze coins. Achaian federal bronze hemiobols were struck by Asine (p. 231), but also by Korone and Kolonides (c. 167 BC?).¹⁵ Mothone, of whom two third century (?) bronze coins are known has not been included in the study.¹⁶

The study ends with *Série XVI*, hemiobols (/) of the Julio-Claudian period, whose distinctive reverses have a bust of Messene wearing a turreted crown. It is to be regretted that the Severan issues of Messenia, with their wealth of reverse types, and with issues attributed to Messene, Thouria, Asine, Kolone, Mothone, Pylos and Kyparissia, could not be included, as S. Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann's study is not yet completed.¹⁷

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¹⁴ J. WARREN, Towards a Resolution of the Achaian League Silver Coinage Controversy: some observations on methodology, in: M. PRICE *et al.* (eds), *Essays in Honour of Robert Carson and Kenneth Jenkins* (London 1993), p. 96. (Note also the late form of sigma.)

¹⁵ J. WARREN, *op.cit.* (n. 8), p. 25. Only three and two specimens respectively are known, but it is unlikely that further Messenian mints striking this coinage will appear.

¹⁶ P. 222: SNG Cop. 537, and now also 'Coins of Peloponnesos', The BCD Collection. Auction LHS Numismatics 96, 8-9 May 2006, p. 203, 803.

¹⁷ 'The Severan Emissions of the Peloponnesus, Proceedings of the International Numismatic Convention on Greek Imperials, INJ 6-7, 1982-83, pp. 39-46, pls. 8-9. But see now The BCD Collection (*op. cit.* n. 16), 765, 766 (Messene); 768-774 (Asine); 766, 767 (Kolonides); 791-802 (Kyparissia); 804-813 (Mothone); 814-822 (Pylos); 828-838 (Thouria).