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Expansion, bribery and an unpublished tetradrachm of Alexander I

Talia Knowles

The Persian Wars resulted in a redistribution of power in the Aegean. In northern Greece, King Alexander I expanded the borders of Macedon and produced the first regal Macedonian coinage. This paper examines an unpublished tetradrachm of Alexander I held by the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS 06A13). By die-linking the ACANS coin to CH IX.9.4 and Raymond 112a, this paper proposes a date for the ACANS coin and discusses its historical significance.

Introduction

A tetradrachm of King Alexander I of Macedon has recently been acquired for the ACANS collection (Tetradrachm Ag. 12.77g ACANS 06A13).\(^{1}\) It is an important addition to the Centre’s growing assemblage of 5th century B.C. Greek coins. The minting of Alexander’s coinage is estimated to have commenced between c.480/79 B.C. and 465 B.C. and ended upon his death c.451 B.C.\(^{2}\) His coinage corresponds to a period of great turbulence in northern Greece. As Persian forces began to withdraw from Thrace c.479, Alexander I set about expanding his kingdom.\(^{3}\) Around this time, the Delian League had been formed to drive the remaining Persian garrisons out of Eion and Doriskos, and to punish Medising cities of the north (which had supported the Persians). From 465 B.C. Athens’ economic aspirations in the Strymon gulf began to threaten local networks of

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1 Many thanks to Dr. Gil Davis and Dr. Ken Sheedy for providing feedback on earlier drafts of this article.
2 All dates hereafter are B.C. except where stated. Doris Raymond proposed a commencement date of 480 for the inscribed issues. See Raymond (1953): 73-135. In his analysis of the Decadrachm Hoard, Kagan noted that the coins of the Edoni, Bisaltai, Orescii, Ichnai, Tuntenii tribes and the coins of the North Aegean cities, appeared to be at the same stage of stylistic development. Thus he judged them to be contemporary. He noted that the prolonged minting of un-inscribed Bisaltai coins supported Raymond’s typology and order of issues. The presence of inscribed Bisaltai coins, however, suggested a much later commencement for Alexander’s inscribed coinage. He cautioned that dating Alexander’s inaugural coins beyond 460 would only leave ten years for his mint to develop the more superior Group III style. Based on Kagan’s analysis, Hatzopoulos, Loukopoulou, Liampi and Psoma have accepted a revised dating of the late Bisaltic coins to 465/0. Consequently, an alternative date of 465/0 has been proposed for the start of Alexander’s inscribed coinage. See CH 8.48 (Emali); Psoma (2006): 78; Liampi (2005): 141; Hatzopoulos & Loukopoulou (1992): 17-25; Kagan (1987): 21-29; Fried (1987): 1-20; Price (1987): 43-47.
3 Thuc.2.99.3-6.
Expansion, bribery and an unpublished tetradrachm of Alexander I

By conducting a stylistic analysis, this paper proposes that ACANS 06A13 be dated to c.460 B.C., placing it within Raymond’s chronological Group III. Coins of this group have traditionally been contextualised by Macedonian expansion, Athenian military activity in the Strymon Gulf and allegations of bribery.

Historical Background

Alexander’s family reportedly possessed strong ties to Persia. According to Herodotus (5.2.2), the Persian king Darius dispatched envoys to request earth and water from the King of Macedon, Amyntas I (5.17.1). Amyntas received the envoys and obliged (5.18.1). The alliance between Macedon and Persia soon resulted in kinship ties. Herodotus (5.21) noted that Amyntas’ daughter, Gygea, was married to the Persian general Bubares. Once Gygea had produced a son, the Temenid house of Macedon was bound to Persia by blood (8.136). Alexander I played a preeminent role in the second Persian invasion of Greece, under the generalship of Mardonius. This indicates that he continued to foster relations with Persia after his accession to the throne.

According to Herodotus (5.22.1-8.143), it appears that Alexander had cultivated a relationship with the Greek states during the early years of his reign. He asserted his Argive heritage before the Hellenodikai (Greek judges at the ancient Olympics) in Olympia c.496, in order to compete in the stade race (5.22.1-2). The King is also reported to have dedicated a golden statue at Delphi (7.121.2). It appears that around this time, Alexander had been designated proxenos (8.136, 8.143.3) by the Athenians. This diplomatic title recognised his economic value to the Athenian state. In (8.136.1), Mardonius sent Alexander to persuade the Athenians to abandon the war against Persia. Alexander was specifically assigned the mission in view of his historic loyalties to both sides. At the Battle of Plataea, however, Alexander could no longer maintain his political duality. He had to pick a side. A Macedonian contingent of the Persian army was expected to marshal opposite the Athenian troops on the battlefield (Hdt.9.31.5). Unable to procure a prophecy of Persian victory, Mardonius delayed the battle (9.43-44.1). Perhaps motivated by the oracle’s grim pronouncements, Alexander seized the opportunity for a tactical betrayal. He approached the Athenians in secret and advised them to abstain from battle another day to increase the likelihood of a Greek victory (9.44.1).

5 Borza (1990): 130.
6 Borza (1990): 130.
9 Hdt.9.44-5.
Macedon after the Persian Wars

Persian forces began their withdrawal from Northern Greece around 479 B.C. Tribal coin production appears to have begun tapering off a few years later, c.475. This cessation was accompanied by a decline in coinages of coastal Greek cities such as Abdera, Akanthos, Berge and Mende. While the cause of declining tribal coin production is difficult to determine, the decline in production of coastal Greek coinages has been attributed to the rise of the Delian League.

The Athenians seized control of Eion in 476/5, attempting to establish military and economic dominance in the region. This inevitably brought them into conflict with Thasos, who attempted to revolt from the League in 465. After a siege lasting three years the Thasians were finally subdued. Thasos was made a tributary of the Delian League and Athens took possession of their mines. As Athens increased its presence in the Strymon Gulf, Alexander I expanded his kingdom in the North. Between 479 and 465 the king is reported to have conquered the Bisaltai tribe and annexed a large silver mine at Lake Prasias. According to Herodotus (5.17.2), it was from this mine that Alexander I “later drew a daily revenue of a talent of silver.” Shortly after making this acquisition, it appears that Alexander I produced the first regal Macedonian coinage.

The Coinage of Alexander I

The study of Alexander’s coinage has been shaped by two chronologies. The first was proposed by Barclay V. Head in 1887 and placed the minting of Alexander’s coinage between 480 and 451 B.C. In 1953, Doris Raymond divided this chronology into three Groups, in order to ascribe a temporal significance to certain typological and metrological characteristics of the coinage. She proposed a date of 480/79 for the commencement of Group I, 476/5 for Group II and 460 for Group III. It wasn’t until the discovery of the Decadrachm Hoard in 1984, that sufficient evidence for a reduced

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10 For Ichnae, Derrone, Orescii coins, see ICGH 355, 690, 1644, 1645, 8.48, 1646, 1482, 365, 1790 and CH 9.9. For Bisaltai coinage see IGCH 1645, 8.48, 1646, 1482, 365, 1790 and CH 9.9.
16 Head (1887): 218.
date was provided. Kagan's analysis of the Decadrachm hoard resulted in an alternative commencement of 465 B.C. for Alexander's coinage. Both chronologies are based on the assumption that Alexander had access to a single source of silver. As few northern Greek coinages of the early fifth century can be dated with much precision, Alexander's coinage effectively calibrates the chronology of minting in northern Greece. Thus, how we interpret Alexander's coinage heavily influences our understanding of political economy in this region in the first half of the fifth century BC.

The tetradrachms of Alexander I depict a rider carrying two traditional Macedonian hunting spears in his left hand and the reins in his right. He sports the iconic petaso—a hat that curves up at each end and particularly identifies the peoples of Thrace and Macedonia. Persian documents, for example, refer to the Macedonians as “Petasus-wearing Yauna” (Ionians) across the sea. The rider's body is draped with a chlamys (cloak), typical of the Macedonian region, often with an additional tunic. The horse is always bridled and walking, proudly, with its foreleg raised. This design constitutes the main tetradrachm obverse type. Minor stylistic flourishes distinguish different series or issues. These include a dotted or linear border, or the inscription ‘A’ on or above the exergual line. By comparison, the main reverse type employed to mint the tetradrachms varies greatly. According to Raymond's order of issues, Alexander's reverse type progresses from the four-part incuse square, to the goat head, to the crested helmet, to the goat forepart, to the goat forepart with the inscription ΑΛΕ, to the goat forepart with its head reverted.

The recurring symbol of the goat is believed to reference the city of Aigai, the seat of regal Macedonian power until the fourth century BC. Aigai derives its name from the Greek word for goat. It is therefore believed that the capital was named in honour of its founder, Perdiccas, the first Temenid king of Macedon. According to Herodotus (8.137-139), Perdiccas had tended a herd of goats for an Illyrian tribal king prior to establishing the Macedonian capital. Alexander had employed variations of the goat symbol to mint his tetradrachms. It identified the royal Macedonian house as the issuing authority and Aigai as the location of the mint.

20 Archibald (1998): 83. This is generally accepted to mean the Macedonians.
The ACANS Coin

Tetradrachm Ag. 12.77 g. Provenance: a) ACANS Collection inv. no. 06A13; b) Numismatica Ars Classica, NAC AG, lot 1295. Reference: SNG Alpha Bank 45.

Alexander's main obverse type was employed to mint ACANS 06A13. The head of both the rider and the horse have been obscured by damage to the upper right area of the obverse die. Despite the distortion, it is clear that the ACANS coin was minted from the same obverse die as coin number 4 of Coin Hoard IX.9. CH IX.9.4 was one of seven tetradrachms of Alexander I which surfaced together in 1999. The reverse of both coins can also be linked to the same die and depict the goat forepart, facing right, within a linear incuse border. This die was unknown to Raymond and thus, was not included in her original study.

Raymond had placed the uninscribed goat forepart Type within Group II and there is no reason to doubt this attribution. However, the design employed to mint ACANS 06A13 and CH IX.9.4 displays much more control, better proportionality and greater attention to detail when compared with the Group II Type. The style of the goat bears a strong resemblance to the Group III Type CC.II: the goat forepart with the inscription AΛE. To be exact, the ACANS reverse die very closely resembles die T21 in Raymond's original study.

Placing the ACANS reverse die within Group III would be consistent with the stylistic progression of Raymond's order of issues. It would also be consistent with Wartenberg's proposal that the CH IX.9.4 can be linked to obverse die T20 in Raymond's original study. This die was employed to mint coin 112a, which Raymond had placed in Group III.

According to Raymond’s order of issues, un-inscribed types always precede the inscribed versions. Therefore, the ACANS coin and CH IX.9.4 should be placed after Type CC.II. Damage to the obverse die has occurred prior to minting the ACANS coin, indicating that it was minted after CH IX.9.4 and 112a. Is it possible that the series, to which 06A13 and CH IX.9.4 belonged, was minted after Type CC.II? That is, towards the end of Group III?

To place this series after Type CC.II would mean reversing Raymond’s order of issues; an order which has consistently been proven accurate.\textsuperscript{26} Minting un-inscribed types before inscribed types seems to be a convention employed by Alexander’s mint. I believe it is more likely that the new reverse die and die T21 were used interchangeably to mint the earliest coins of Group III. I agree with Wartenberg’s die-link attribution and would like to propose that the ACANS coin was a part of the earliest Group III issues. According to both chronologies, this would give the coin an approximate date of 460 B.C.

With the exception of the die break, both coins appear to be in very similar physical condition. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the ACANS coin may have originally been a part of Coin Hoard IX.9 before it was broken up and sold on the numismatic market. CH IX.9.4 was shown to Wartenberg in 1999, who then published it and its six contemporaries in 2002. ACANS had purchased 06A13 in 2013. It has only one other known record of sale: 6 April 2006, in an auction held by Numismatica Ars Classica. The two coins surfaced seven years apart with no prior history of ownership.

By 460 B.C. Alexander I and Athens had emerged as key beneficiaries of the Persian Wars. Alexander had acquired a strategic silver source and extended his kingdom to the east bank of the Strymon River.\textsuperscript{27} In the Strymon Gulf, the Athenians had established an economic and military hegemony. It has been suggested that this mutual success was facilitated by a preferential commercial relationship between Alexander I and Athenian troops operating in the region.\textsuperscript{28} According to Plutarch, the Athenian general Kimon stood trial in Athens for accepting a bribe from Alexander I (\textit{Pericles} 10.5, \textit{Kimon} 14.2). He proposed that newly conquered Thasos had provided the Athenians with an appropriate base from which to invade Macedonia. His failure to do so provided his accusers (who were also his chief political rivals) with powerful ammunition (Plut.


\textsuperscript{27} Thuc.2.99.3-6; Hatzopoulos & Paschidis (2004): 794; Borza (1990): 123-124.

Kimon 14.2). It is tempting to consider that Macedonian coins made their way into Kimon’s hands between 465 and 460, but the historicity of Plutarch’s report is difficult to evaluate. Thucydides makes no mention of Kimon being put on trial for bribery. The only other direct reference to the trial is Demosthenes 23 205. In this passage, Demosthenes did not expound the nature of Kimon’s offence. He stated only that “Kimon had dislocated the ancestral constitution by his personal efforts” and was acquitted thereafter with a fine of fifty talents (Dem 23 205). He made no mention of Macedonia or Alexander I in relation to Kimon’s trial.

Raymond had suggested that the weight of Alexander’s tetradrachms contained an Athenian element. However, the number of coins available for study limited her analysis. To sufficiently evaluate the numismatic evidence for an alliance between Alexander I and Athenian troops in the north, Raymond’s original corpus must be expanded. A weight analysis of a larger corpus of coins will determine whether or not a significant shift in weight can be detected: a shift that may signal the introduction of a new weight system. The validity of Raymond’s theory is vital to interpreting political economy in northern Greece between 465 and 451 B.C.

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Bibliography