REVUE BELGE DE NUMISMATIQUE ET DE SIGILLOGRAPHIE

IN MEMORIAM TONY HACKENS

BELGISCH TIJDSCHRIFT VOOR NUMISMATIEK EN ZEGELKUNDE

PUBLIÉE SOUS LE HAUT PATRONAGE DE S. M. LE ROI PAR LA SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE DE NUMISMATIQUE DE BELGIQUE

UITGEGEVEN ONDER DE HOGE BESCHERMING VAN Z. M. DE KONING DOOR HET KONINKLIJK BELGISCH GENOOTSCHAP VOOR NUMISMATIEK

ÉDITEURS
Ghislaine MOUCHARTE et François de CALLATAÝ,

AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE
Pierre COCKSHAW et Johan van HEESCH

CXLV - 1999

BRUXELLES BRUSSEL
R. Ross HOLLOWAY (*)

THE EARLY OWLS OF ATHENS AND
THE PERSIANS
(Pl. 1)

Tony Hackens deserved the title ὑπέρήπατος as much as any other man to whom this epithet of honor has been applied. In 1965 it was my good fortune to pass some months in Athens, often in his company, when he was a member of the École Française and when we were both fresh from our years in Rome. The article I offer in his memory is about coins, our common field of research (1).

For more than forty years the history of the archaic owls of Athens has rested on a foundation of solid numismatic scholarship. The paper published by Colin M. Kraay in 1956 seemed to settle the matter (2). The first owls were issued at the beginning of the last quarter of the sixth century B.C. and the archaic series ended in the shadow of the Persian threat of the 480's with a group of coins struck from hastily produced dies. Following Kraay's study there was some discussion whether the date for the beginning of the owls might be lowered from about 525 to about 510, but otherwise only one voice, that of Herbert A. Cahn, has been raised to defend an earlier date (3).

Even the most distinguished numismatic scholarship, however, rests on assumptions. The following paragraphs will review the assumptions un-

(*) R. Ross HOLLOWAY, 185 Elmgrove Avenue, USA-02906 Providence RI.
email: r_holloway@brown.edu

(1) This paper was given originally at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Department of Archaeology and Art History of the Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, April 1997. It is a comfort for the author to know that Tony Hackens heard the argument before he died.

(2) C.M. KRAAY, The Archaic Owls of Athens; Classification and Chronology, in NC, s. 6, 16, 1956, p. 43-68. The archaic issues of the owls are those made before the appearance of the olive wreath on the helmet of the Athena head of the obverse. I gratefully acknowledge the good judgement and careful reading given to the text by my good friends Christof Boehringer and Keith Rutter. Mr. Harald Salvesen has kindly permitted me to illustrate three early owls from his important collection.

derlying Kraay's study and by playing the *advocatus diaboli* suggest the way to a revision of his chronology and a reconsideration of the series which he assigned to the time just before the Persian invasion of 480 (').

**The Groups of the Owls**

Charles Seltman, who made the fundamental study of the archaic owls, divided them into several series ('). The main groups are G (i and ii), H, L, M. Groups C, E, F stand apart from these (representative coins of each group are illustrated on pl. I). The dies of Group F can only be described as barbarous. The artistic level of groups C and E is nearer to that of F than to that of the other groups. We shall reserve consideration of these three groups of inferior style (C, E, F) to the end of this paper.

Seltman’s system also assigned letter groups to the Wappenmünzen, so-called because of their changing types ('). These coins circulated together with early Euboean coins in Attica and that nearby island, being found in the only six archaic hoards known in this area. In three of these hoards the Euboean coins and Wappenmünzen are the only series represented. In two others they are joined by early owls ('). The final hoard is made up of Wappenmünzen and owls ('). The Wappenmünzen, drachms (with fractions) and one series of tetradrachms, are generally considered to be Attic and are held to be the forerunners of the owls (')

**Hoard**

Hoard evidence was crucial to Kraay's argument. He contended that hoards buried before 500 do not contain owls. Then after 500 owls are

4) I came to doubt Kraay's reconstruction of the early coinage of Athens in 1996 when studying the collection of Greek coins at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design (my catalogue was then published as *Ancient Greek Coins, Catalogue of the Classical Collection, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design* (Archaeologia Transatlantica, XV), Providence and Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998). Close examination of two early owls (cat. nos. 233 and 234) made me doubt that these small masterpieces of miniature art, of the style of the third quarter of the sixth century, could belong to the end of that same century.


6) It was Seltman who established reverse die linkages among the Wappenmünzen. In addition to the silver there are two related issues of electrum, Seltman Groups Ji and Jii.

7) *IGCH* nos. 2, 3, 5, 9, 10.

8) *IGCH* no. 12. This hoard, from the Acropolis, contains one later (wreathed) owl tetradrachm which has frequently been consider intrusive.

9) Seltman also included a series of Æginetan weight staters with amphorae type as Group A. These have now been separated from the Athenian coinage and returned to the Aegean islands.
found in hoards. This evidence would suggest that the Athenian owl coinage could hardly have existed for more than a decade or two before the turn of the century.

The evidence, of course, is not as compelling as it seems. With one exception, the hoards from Attica and Euboea are difficult to date. Early owls occur in three such hoards ("1"). One of them, the hoard from the Acropolis, IGCH no. 12, can be associated with the Persian sack of Athens and for this reason will have been buried in or slightly after 480. But none of the other deposits can be associated with an historically dated context and none of them contains any coin that in itself establishes chronological limits for the hoard as a whole. Such firmly dated issues are the coins of Sybaris which came to an end with the destruction of that city by Croton in 509 B.C. or the issues of the Samian exiles at Messina that were struck during a five-year period following 494/3 B.C. With the exception of the Acropolis find Kraay's "datable hoards" were, in fact, all mixed hoards found, with one exception (the Taranto Hoard IGCH no. 1874), in the lands of the Persian Empire.

How valuable are such hoards as dating evidence? The problem is to what degree these hoards reflect normal circulation, that is to what degree the coins found in them were circulating together at one and the same time and stopped circulating at one and the same time. If one is seeking a single moment in the history of coinage, the ideal hoard is made up of coins that were taken directly from the mint at the moment of issue. But such a hoard would be of little chronological use because it would contain only a single issue. A savings hoard, if accumulated over any length of time, is not reliable in dating any one of its elements. Only if it can be assumed that a hoard is made up of coins taken from circulation at one moment (or over a short period of time) does the hoard become a valuable chronological tool, and such factors as relative wear and greater relative frequency of new issues can be invoked in discussing chronology.

The Taranto Hoard from southern Italy needs to be considered separately from the Egyptian and oriental hoards. But as indicators of the chronology of the early owls, all these hoards fail the test. Let us consider first the four hoards from the Persian Empire cited by Kraay and cited to show that Athenian owls were not in circulation — or not widely in circulation — before ca. 500. The Ras Shamra Hoard of 1936 (IGCH no. 1478) comes from controlled excavations. It consists of 39 silver coins found in a container with "partially melted coins and AR lumps" ("11). This was a collection of raw silver rather than money. Furthermore, its

(10) IGCH nos. 9, 10, 12.
representation of Greek coinage and therefore its usefulness as negative evidence in regard to mints whose coins are not present in it is severely limited because the coins were all from northern Greece and Cyprus.

The Persepolis foundation deposit found in 1933 is also from controlled excavations (IGCH no. 1789). There were only four silver coins in the deposit, 2 Cypriote, one north Greek, one Aigina (found together with 8 gold Croeseids). The number of coins is so small that this material also has no significance for our discussion (12).

In Egypt the hoard from Mit Rahineh (IGCH no. 1636) contained 23 (and possibly a few more) silver coins and 73 kilograms of scrap silver. The representation of Greek mints is wide including northern Greece, the Aegean, Asia Minor and Cyrene, but not Athens. Similar in composition is the Demanhur Hoard (IGCH no. 1637) which counted 165 Greek silver coins and 2 ingots. Once again Athenian owls are not present.

The two Egyptian hoards (that is Mit Rahineh and Demanhur) must bear the weight of Kraay’s argument that the archaic owls of Athens were a new coinage and not circulating, at least internationally, before the end of the sixth century. The evidence of the hoards cannot be trusted for two reasons. First, they are not a mirror of circulation but bullion hoards from the Persian Empire. The fashion in which Greek coins may have circulated as money in the Persian Empire is not the issue here. The problem is that bullion hoards are accumulations, and such accumulations may be made up of different parcels of silver acquired at different times and with different histories of circulation in their places of origin (13). In the case of the coins this means that no one issue has any necessary chronological connection with any other save for an unknown date when the last item was added to the stock. One cannot assume, as numismatists so often do, that such deposits are made up of coins that would normally have circulated together in the Greek world.

A second factor also weakens Kraay’s chronological argument. His is an argument ex silenlio and one that not even he could have accepted if it were pursued to its logical extreme in regard to the Wappenmünzen. Kraay dated the first Wappenmünzen issue to 575. The distribution of Wappenmünzen in archaic hoards is the same as that of the owls. They too are absent from what Kraay considered to be the earlier Egyptian and Oriental hoards but are found in hoards generally considered to be-

(12) The find, of course, is of enormous historical significance. The date of the deposit, before 511 B.C. has been questioned. For a recent discussion see J.H. KAGAN, An Archaic Greek Coin Hoard, in NC. 154, 1994, p. 36-43.

(13) Thus even if the silversmith transforms his supply of raw metal into new objects with little delay, this circumstance does not automatically guarantee that the coins involved were issued contemporaneously.
long after 500, the Sakha find (IGCH no. 1639) and the Taranto Hoard (IGCH no. 1874) (14).

The large archaic hoard from Asyut was found after the publication of Kraay's study. Because of the presence of coins of the Samians at Messina the hoard must have closed after 490 (it contained four Samian Messina pieces of year 4, 491/0) (15). Together with a large group of early owls the hoard contained 2 Wappenmünzen.

If, following Kraay's assumptions, one were to reason from this hoard evidence, the Wappenmünzen can be no older than the oldest owls. But the argument holds neither for owls nor for Wappenmünzen. And extenuating circumstances, the small size of issues of Wappenmünzen or their concentration in Attic and Euboean finds (IGCH nos, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 12) cannot change the logical flaw in this reasoning (16).

The Asyut Hoard, containing 873 coins in the catalogue of Price and Waggoner, had 166 early owls (17). Seltman’s Groups L (7 coins), M and G (grouped together by the authors, 155 coins), C (1 coin), F (1 coin), and E (2 coins) were present. Group G clearly predominates in this hoard that was put together as we have it in the early fifth century.

There are three other eastern hoards also found after the publication of Kraay’s study to consider. The Anatolian Hoard published by Robinson in 1961 is dated by a coin of the Samians at Zankle (year 5) to after 490/89 B.C. (18). Of the 38 coins known from the hoard, 19 are early owls, none showing any considerable degree of wear. Robinson could only find one die known to Seltman among this material, but with the exception of four coins from Group M (including the die identity between no. 9 of the hoard and Seltman’s P 320), the remainder can be associated with Groups G i and ii. This evidence would be consistent with a date of Group G in the early fifth century and Group M before that time. A similar hoard, though with greater variety of mints, comes from Syria or Lebanon (19). There were 70 silver coins and 20 kilograms of raw silver. The 17 Athenian tetradrachms can be associated with Seltman’s Groups L, M, G and E. Finally, of the 187 Athenian coins in the «Decadrachm Hoard» of the

(14) Sakha, see also Seltman, p. 147. Three Wappenmünzen were also part of the Asia Minor find of about the year 500 reconstructed by O. Morkholm, Une trouvaille de monnaies grecques archaïques, in SNR, 50, 1971, p. 79-91, IGCH no. 1165.
(15) For Asyut see M. Price and N. Waggoner, Archaic Greek Coinage: the Asyut Hoard, London, 1975. Its date of deposition is given by these authors as ca. 480.
(16) The weakness of relying on the negative evidence of hoards was already emphasized by H.A. Cahn, 1975, although without reference to the problem posed by the Wappenmünzen.
(18) E.S.G. Robinson, A Hoard of Archaic Greek Coins from Anatolia, in NC, s. 7, 1, 1961, p. 107-117.
mid fifth century, 175 are wreathed owls. Of the 12 early owls, 2 belong to Seltman Group G, 2 to Seltman Group C, and 8 to Seltman Group E (20).

We may now turn our attention to hoards within the Greek world. Outside of Attica and Euboea early owls are known from the Taranto Hoard and also from the hoard discovered at Gela in 1956 (IGCH no. 2066). The Gela Hoard was very large. The number of coins is given as 1076, but the true total was probably larger. Among the 187 Athenian coins noted from it there were specimens of all the groups of the early owls with the notable exception of the "barbarous" groups E, F and C (21). The question immediately arises whether these coins are to be taken as an element of monetary circulation in Sicily in the first decades of the fifth century when the hoard was closed or whether they represent a parcel or parcels of coins that, together with two pieces from Akanthos in northern Greece, became part of a hoard otherwise composed of Sicilian coins. The findplace of the hoard in the Greek sanctuary at the railroad station of Gela seems to indicate that it is a banker's hoard, in the sense in which ancient sanctuaries were banks (22). Such hoards may be expected to contain not only coins that circulated in the immediate locality but also coins that did not circulate freely and thus found their way into the bank (23). The Gela hoard provides no evidence that the early Athenian owls belong to the same time span as that of the Geloan and Agrigentine coins that comprised the largest part of the hoard (24).

The Taranto Hoard is even less convincing as a chronological guide. It consists of some 600 coins supposedly found with 6 kilograms of ingots


(21) G.K. JENKINS, The Coinage of Gela (AMUGS, 2), Berlin, 1970, p. 151. Jenkins adds, « Coins of the very similar style of Seltman group C undoubtedly were present. » This statement seems to mean that he did not see coins of group C at the Gela Museum but relied on verbal description or possibly coins seen in trade. Neither source of information would be without its difficulties. The hoard is now reduced in size since, following Jenkins' inspection, it was stolen from the Museum and only partially recovered.


(23) There they might also join plated forgeries that were removed from circulation, as in the case of the coins kept in the Sanctuary of Poseidon at the Isthmus, O. BROWN, Excavations at Isthmia, 1954, in Hesperia, 24, 1955, p. 135-136 and Id., Excavations at Isthmia, Fourth Campaign, 1957-1958, in Hesperia, 28, 1959, p. 300-343.

and worked silver (25). There are coins from every part of the Greek world, especially Magna Graecia, but no coins of Tarentum. Is this because the hoard is earlier than the beginning of Tarentine coinage or is it because this too is a banker's hoard and is made up of coins that were removed from circulation over a period of time? The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the hoard, which appeared in commerce, are unclear, and there is even some question as to whether it is a single find. But one thing is sure: it cannot be taken as a chronological guide to coins in circulation at one and the same moment.

Newer hoard evidence, therefore, including that of the Asyut Hoard, does nothing to change the conclusions already reached above (26).

Epigraphy

The letter forms of the inscription ΑΘΕ on the reverse type of the archaic owls are not consistent, but in this respect they are typical of Athenian letter forms for over a century in the sixth and fifth centuries (27). Kraay argued that series in which the theta with cross rather than dot interior occurs would be earlier than those in which only the dot is found. This principle may be sound, but it is not absolute. If true, groups H and L become older than the rest. However, the representation of the Athena head in group M is so close to L that it would be a mistake to separate them. The early group (H, L, and M) would be followed, in our opinion, by numerically the largest group of the early owls, G1 and GII (the reader may recall that groups C, E and F will be considered separately).

The Wappenmünzen and the Owls

Are the Wappenmünzen really Athenian coins? Today, it is the general opinion of numismatic scholarship that they are. And scholarship has moved on to treating the Wappenmünzen as significant testimony to early Athenian history (28). The evidence from scientific analysis of the silver content of the coins is ambiguous, although it points toward the conclusion that some of the Wappenmünzen were struck from non-Attic silver (29). Recently, however, additional evidence has been published from

(25) IGCH 1874.
(28) As in the study of Kroll, 1981.
a votive deposit at Sounion which contained material of the seventh and sixth centuries. The object in question is a bronze rod shaped like a flattened anchor and chiseled at each end to make an incuse punch.

"A study of the impressions made by the ends of the tool indicate (sic) that they are identical with the emblematic-heraldic reverse of the earliest Athenian coins, known as the "Wappenmünzen". An inspection of the tool from Sounion enables its certain identification as a punch (anc. στρευδός) for the production of similar coins, probably drachmas, judging from the small dimensions of the engraved square." (30).

The find spot of the die is important. If the punch was dedicated where it was used (and why should it not have been?) then Wappenmünzen were minted in rural Attica. These were not coins of the city-state but coins of individual families, as the variety of their types suggests and as numismatists have believed since this view was put forward by Charles Seltman. Furthermore, if the argument for the dating of the earliest owls advanced below is to be accepted, then the Attic Wappenmünzen belong to the period before the introduction of the owls in the third quarter of the sixth century. Surely these issues reflect the weakness of central authority during the years of Peisistratos' two exiles before he returned and established a lasting regime in the 540's and, as it seems clear from what follows, inaugurated the state coinage of Athens with the striking of the first owls.

The Beginning of the Owls

In the absence of other evidence establishing the date of the early owls, it is perhaps time to inspect the coins themselves. This was done by Bernard Ashmole at the International Numismatic Congress of 1936 and then by Herbert Cahn (31). My position regarding the general period


to which the earliest owls should be attributed is more conservative than that of these two scholars and is based on the observation that the Athenas of Seltman’s groups L and M repeat the profile head types that were common around the middle and third quarter of the sixth century B.C. It is to vase painters such as Lydos and his circle and to sculptural reliefs such as the woman from the « Mother and Child Stele » in Athens that one must turn to find the elongated nose and almond eye of these coins (32). I choose to illustrate the « Mother and Child Stele » (pl. I fig. 1) in order to compare a woman’s profile in low relief with the Athena head of the coins, also a female profile in low relief. In this way any problem arising from the comparison of relief with sculpture in the round or with two dimensional graphic work can be avoided.

In handling owls of groups L and M one realizes that these are careful and elegant products of the engraver’s art. They are neither archaistic or provincial. It is difficult to believe that such dies were made after 525 rather than during the middle years and third quarter of the sixth century. Kraay’s dating of the beginning of group H, in which a more mature archaic style is visible, to about 525 is likely to be right (33).

The early series of the coinage are thus L/M and then H, all carefully done and relatively small issues. These are the coins of Peisistratid Athens and perhaps of the first years of the democracy as well. There follows a more abundant coinage, groups Gi and Gii. These are the coins, in my opinion, of the opening of the fifth century and if increased production of the Laurion mines and the naval building program to meet the Persian menace are reflected in Athenian coinage, it is here.

Groups C, E and F

Charles Seltman believed that his groups C, E and F were not minted at Athens but were issues of an « Imperial » Athenian mint located in northern Greece near the mines of the Pangaeon district. Colin Kraay brought these coins back to Athens but saw in them a rushed coinage on the eve of the Persian invasion of 480. The date is perhaps correct, but I wish to suggest another origin for these pieces. First of all, one

(33) C.M. Kraay, 1956; P. Bicknell, The Dates of the Archaic Owls of Athens, in AC, 38, 1969, p. 175-180 dates group L after group H because of the triobol with negro head reverse, Seltman pl. XXII aa, which can be identified as Delphos, son of Melaina, founder of Delphi and which Bicknell feels commemorates the work of the Alkmeneidae on the temple in an issue made after the expulsion of the tyrants at Athens. Kraay believed that because of their wide flans the gorgon’s head Wappenmünzen tetradrachms were close in date to group H. There is no guarantee, however, that this particular series Wappenmünzen with gorgons’ heads is from Attica.
must recognize how improbable it is that Athens, a metropolitan and artistic center, would issue coins of this crudity even if the Persians were near. The Athenian gold of 404 B.C., for example, minted at a time of even greater desperation, does not descend to such a level of awkwardness and lack of sympathy with the style of Greek representation (34). This last statement may seem only personal and impressionistic, but the impression made by the owls of group E is exactly that of the Celtic gold which copied coins of Philip II and which are the work of die cutters who found it impossible to reproduce the organic forms of Greek art. The owls of group E, and groups C and F too, are barbarian. Coins of group E and F were also known at Athens where together with Wappenmünzen they appear in the Acropolis Hoard.

I would attribute the striking of the « barbarous » issues to foreigners, the foreigners who controlled Athens twice, once for a few weeks before the Battle of Salamis in 480 and again the following year for two or as much as three months before the Battle of Plataia. When the Persians overcame Lydia some sixty years earlier and established their rule at Sardis, they continued the striking of Croeseid coins, perhaps for convenience but also with a sense of triumph in appropriating the type (35). So in Athens, the Persians appropriated the owl. But the city they captured was empty, as was Attica (ἡ Ἀττική ...... ἐδόσα ἔημος Ἀθηναίοι) (36). The Athenian die cutters were with the fleet in 480 and the army in 479. So to issue his owls, and pay the army's ever present expenses, Mardonius had to do the best he could with artisans from his army. The result was barbarian coins in Athens.

It is a lucky happenstance that a group of these pieces was preserved on the Acropolis (IGCH no. 12) (37). The fact that this hoard was found there does not, of course, mean that this group of coins was on the Acropolis before the Persian invasion. There was much debris from the Persian sack on the Acropolis, but there is no stratum or deposit deriving directly from that event (38). What we know of archaic Athens comes from building fills made in the decades after 479. It is more likely, there-

(34) C.M. Kraay, Archaic and Classical Greek Coins, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pl. 11, nos. 202 and 203.
(36) Hdt, 8, 65.
(37) And published completely by J. Svoronos, Les monnaies d'Athènes, Munich, 1923, pl. 3.
(38) So much is clear from the evidence of notes, drawings and photographs made during the excavations of the Acropolis published by J.A. Bundgaard, The Excavation of the Athenian Acropolis, 2 vols, Copenhagen, 1974; see also R.R. Holloway, The Severe Style and the Severe Style Period, in N. Bonacasa (ed.), Lo Stile Severo in Grecia e in Occidente (Studi e Materiali dell' Istituto di Archeologia, Universita di Palermo), Rome, 1995, p. 43-47 with references to other discussions.
fore, that the Acropolis Hoard was formed in the aftermath of the Persian invasion and deposited in the sanctuary on the hill thus removing from circulation coins that were not acceptable currency (39). But these «barbarian» owls, I believe, are coins buried in the same city where they had been struck by the Persian invaders.

Plate I


Tetradrachms Groups G, H, L, Collection of Harald Salvesen (no. 503, Group G; no. 467, Group H; no. 374, Group L).


Fig. 1. Fragment of a Grave Stele, Athens, National Museum, no. 4472 (Photo Courtesy Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens, neg. no. 5308, copyright).

(39) This would include the long superseded Wappenmünzen in the hoard. As originally published, the hoard contained a post-archaic wreathed Athena head owl, which is generally considered to be an intrusion (originally so by Svoronos, Nomismatika Evrimata, in JIAN, 1, 1898, p. 367-378). For sanctuaries as banks where counterfeits and coins not acceptable as legal tender were deposited see note 23. There were two group G tetradrachms and «several» related fractions included in the hoard with the group E and F tetradrachms.
Early owls Seltmann’s groups

Fig. 1

The Early Owls of Athens and the Persians