ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THIRD-CENTURY BC ATHENIAN SILVER COINAGE

Abstract – This paper draws attention to evidence that was overlooked in Christophe Flament’s recently proposed revisions for the chronology and interpretation of Athenian silver coinage of the 3rd century BC. This evidence supports the prior dating of the quadridigité silver to the 280s and of all three known issues of silver pentobols to the years of the Chremonidean War (268–262 BC). In addition, the paper contends that the heterogeneous tetradrachms and fractions should be accepted as genuine Athenian emissions, and that the 3rd-century tetrobols are still best interpreted as specie minted for compensating garrison troops in Attica.

Built upon inference and incomplete evidence, Greek numismatic chronologies are by nature subject to improvement as further information comes to light. Thus, with the publication of Agora 26 in 1992, it was only a matter of time before new data and new observations would require adjustments in the chronological framework it presented for Athenian coinage. One such adjustment has emerged from a recent correction in the chronology of 2nd-century BC stamped Rhodian amphora handles: by lowering the date of the Middle Stoa construction deposit in the Athenian Agora from ca 183 to 170/168 BC, the correction has eliminated a formerly inexplicable gap of about twenty years in the absolute dating of Athenian bronze coins between ca 200 and 167 BC.

This adjustment, however, is but a minor refinement when placed next to the bold revisions in the chronology of Athenian 3rd-century silver coinage that Christophe Flament proposed in a recent volume of this journal.

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If correct, these would rewrite most of a century of Athenian numismatic history as it had come to be reconstructed. All tetradrachms previously dated between the early 3rd century and the last quarter are removed. Instead, the only Athenian issues in silver during that time would have been tetrobols and pentobols, belonging to the 287–262 period of independence from Macedon, and later revived when absolute independence was achieved in 229. In presenting these revisions, however, F. failed to take into account some published evidence that stands in their way.

I.

The most radical of F.’s proposals concerns the pi [Π]-style owl silver of the second half of the 4th century and the quadrigidité owls that followed it. It is now known that the pi coinage began with the massive restriking of all Athenian tetradrachms in Attica in the year 353 BC [4]. As for its end, for more than a half century scholars have assumed that the pi coinage continued down through Demetrius Poliorcetes’ siege of Athens in the mid 290s on the grounds that the extant pi-V staters and fractions in gold are to be identified with the coins that the Athenian general Lachares minted from gold dedications on the Acropolis to pay his mercenaries in defense of the city [5]. Accordingly, the quadrigidité tetradrachms, with their altered helmet ornament and advanced letter forms, must date after 295. Since they were minted from non-Attic silver, Hélène Nicolet-Pierre and Kroll dated them from 286 into the 270s, a time of Athenian independence when the city had obtained some 200 talents from Lysimachus, Ptolemy I, and Antipater, the nephew of Cassander, to rid Attica of several remaining Macedonian garrisons [6].

According to F., this chronology is much too low for several reasons [7]. He noted that on the evidence of the Myonia hoard (IGCH 66) the latest and most prolific stage in the evolution of the pi-style tetradrachms, the pi-V stage, seems to have emerged early rather than later in the second half of the 4th century [8]. Since the number of annual mine leases peaked in ca 342 and then fell to a moderate to low level for the rest of the 4th century, F.

[8] In support of this observation, Flament (2010, p. 36, fig. 1) illustrates a tetradrachm from a sales catalogue with a pi-V obverse (which cannot be earlier than 353) and an owl reverse that cannot be any later than 390 (see Kroll 2011b, pp. 11, 15-16, with pls. IV·3 and V·1-3). The impossibility of this typological mismatch leaves no doubt that the coin is a forgery, as its perfectly centered dies and nearly perfect round flan imply as well.
concluded that Athens’ mining industry went into decline after the 340s and finally gave out around 310, the earliest possible date for the large Thorkos hoard (IGCH 134) with its sizeable component of fresh pi-V tetradrachms. Another hoard that figures prominently in F.’s reconstruction is the Siphnos hoard (IGCH 91), which in 1934 E.T. Newell dated from its latest pieces, some five fresh Rhodian hemidrachms, to 320-304 BC, a dating that is repeated in IGCH. Since this small hoard contained a quadridigité tetradrachm showing signs of wear, F. felt justified in assigning the quadridigité coinage to the last decade of the 4th century, suggesting that the silver from which it was struck was received from Antigonus I and his son Demetrius in 307/6, and not from the royal subventions solicited by the Athenians in the 280s [9].

However, thanks to Richard Ashton’s research into the chronology of 4th- and 3rd-century Rhodian silver, it has been known for some time now that the Siphnos hoard actually supports the later dating of the quadridigité owls. In publishing his revised Rhodian chronology in 1988, Ashton wrote that “IGCH 91 [Newell’s Siphnian hoard], hitherto dated 320-300, must, on the basis of the series 3 hemidrachms which it contained, belong around 50 or more years later” [10]. No less damaging to F.’s revision was his identification of the pi-style gold as an occasional Panathenaic festival coinage that had nothing to do with Lachares and the siege of Athens in 295. The gold coinage minted by Lachares, he argued, must have been an unidentified coinage imitating the gold staters of Philip II or Alexander, while the pi-V gold of Athens was connected to the Panathenaia through its reverse symbol that in old numismatic descriptions was called a kalathos (wool basket) [11]. But this description, too, has long been out of date. Correcting it in the Numismatic Chronicle for 1941, J.D. Beazley explained that the symbol depicted a ‘bakchos-ring’, a clasp that bound together the branches of the wand carried by initiates at the Eleusinian Mysteries [12], and this is the way the symbol has been described in the numismatic literature pertaining to Athens for several decades now [13]. Several pages devoted to this and other weaknesses in F.’s reinterpretation of the pi-style gold coinage have been published elsewhere...

[13] Kroll 1979, pp. 141, 148, 149; Agora, pp. 28, 41-42, 47, 61, 62, where the term ‘Eleusis-ring’ is preferred – because it is doubtful whether βάκχος is the correct term for the wand carried by Eleusinian initiates; see Clinton 1992, p. 49, n. 102.
Here it will be enough to say that, insofar as I am able to judge, his reinterpretation is indefensible.

Nevertheless, even if F.’s views on the end of the pi-style and the dating of the quadridigité silver must be rejected, his observation that the mining of Attic silver declined over the course of the pi-style era is probably sound. The developed pi-V phase of the coinage did emerge early on. Not only did it probably begin during the mass reminting of 353, within weeks or months after the pi-style coinage was inaugurated\[^{15}\], but it is conceivable that a substantial part of the pi-V coinage in toto may have been produced from the reminting of existing Athenian coinage in this initial year. If so, we have probably greatly overestimated the amount of Attic coinage minted over the second half of the 4\textsuperscript{th} century from newly extracted silver. True, the Poletai inscriptions show that the number of leased mining concessions did climb and peak in the 340s, presumably in response to a program of state encouragement and financial incentives. But this should not be taken as evidence that all of this intensified mining activity was successful. That much of it was not is reflected in the reduced numbers of leases in the decades that followed. Leases nevertheless continued to be sold by the Poletai down through the administration of Demetrius of Phaleron (317–307) and to the end of the century\[^{16}\]. As Lachares’ gold of 295 appears to be the latest coinage of pi-style design, the end of the pi-style was apparently connected in one way or another with the siege and capture of Athens by Poliorcetes in that year.

II.

Besides the quadridigité owls, two further groups of traditional Athenian owl silver were minted in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century. About the dating of the latest, the drachms and tetrodrachms with symbols, there has never been any disagreement. Hoards make it clear that these emissions began in the last quarter of the century, following upon the departure of the last Macedonian garrisons from Attica in 229\[^{17}\]. The penultimate group consists of the problematic, so-called ‘heterogeneous’ tetrodrachms, which are found along with pi-style and quadridigité tetrodrachms in hoards of ca 260–215. The question remains whether they were of bona fide Athenian mintage or should be identified as non-Athenian imitations. F. firmly maintains that they are


\[^{15}\] Kroll 2011A, p. 243, where, however, the possibility of pi-V beginning already in 353 is raised only tentatively. I now believe that it did indeed begin that early, as implied by the pi-V specimens that share their elongated oval shape and technique with pi coins having earlier forms of the helmet ornament.

\[^{16}\] Hopper 1953, pp. 216, 252.

imitations, a position originally advanced by Nicolet-Pierre & Kroll in the initial study of this coinage [18]. But the problem is not simple. Graham Oliver has argued on the contrary that, although some of the heterogeneous specimens might be imitations, for the most part “there can be little doubt now that this type of silver tetradrachm was in some form an Athenian-produced civic coinage” [19]. This is a stance that I, too, have found increasingly attractive, particularly because of the drachms and triobols that were minted along with some of the tetradrachms in the large heterogeneous Group F (see Fig. 1), a good indication that the coinage of this group was struck at least in part for domestic use in Attica [20].

In addition, all of the heterogeneous tetradrachms that I have examined in New York and London were struck on flans that had been flattened and folded over in the distinctively Athenian technique employed in the manufacture of all pi and quadridigité tetradrachms [21]. The technique adds a deeper level of continuity between the tetradrachms of all three groups and raises the possibility that the heterogeneous coins, like most of the pi-style and even perhaps the quadridigité tetradrachms, were struck over earlier Attic or Attic-weight tetradrachms [22].

The varied styles and details of the heterogeneous pieces suggest that they were struck in slight, occasional emissions; and there was certainly plenty of room in the middle quarters of the 3rd century when such sporadic minting

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[20] The fact that all but one of the extant heterogeneous tetradrachms have been found outside of Attica, is sometimes cited as evidence of non-Athenian manufacture (so Flament 2010, pp. 42, 54, who also dismisses the one found in the Agora as un faux « ordinaire »). But the argument is weak. It is salutary to recall that despite the very large number of tetradrachms minted in Athens during the first half of the 4th century (Kroll 2011b, p. 17-21), not a single one had been found in Attica prior to 1997 (Kroll 2011a, p. 240-241, n. 29, fig. 4:a).
[21] On the technique, its occasional use in late 5th-century Athens, its revival for the pi-style overstriking of 353, and its retention for use with the quadridigité and heterogeneous tetradrachms, see Kroll 2011a, pp. 234-236, 241-246, with fig. 10a (quadridigité) and b (heterogeneous).
[22] In ibid., I proposed that, as soon as the technique became a recognizable feature of genuine, standard Athenian owls, it was retained even for striking later pi-style coins produced from freshly minted silver. It is conceivable, however, that all quadridigité and heterogeneous tetradrachms are in fact overstrikes, like the re-struck pi-style owls of 353 BC. Since the quadridigité tetradrachms were apparently struck from silver provided by Hellenistic monarchs (above, n. 6), probably in the form of these kings’ Attic-weight tetradrachms, it would have been these royal coins that were flattened and folded for overstriking with quadridigité types. So too, the heterogeneous tetradrachms may very well have been struck on flattened and folded old Athenian owls and possibly old Macedonian tetradrachms of Attic weight.
– or reminting – might have taken place. If, for example, the quadridigité coinage was produced in a relatively compressed space upon Athens’ receipt of silver from royal benefactions in the mid 280s, some of the earlier heterogeneous strikings could have been readily undertaken between then and the onset or conclusion of the Chremonidean War in the 260s. As for the later, main body of heterogeneous owls, the twenty or thirty years after 255 provide a more than ample chronological and political context. As Christian Habicht has written in a reassessment of the Macedonian military presence in Attica at that time, “more weight can now be attached to Eusebius’ statement in his chronicle that the king [Antigonus Gonatas] in 256/5 gave Athens its freedom: Ἀθηναίοις Ἀντίγονος τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἐδώκεν” [23].

III.

The two remaining silver coinages of 3rd-century Athens (both conveniently illustrated in Flament 2010, Pls. iv and v) are the evidently special-purpose tetrobol and pentobol denominations that Athens minted in no other era. Their designing, moreover, was as distinctive as their values. Eschewing the types and style of traditional owl drachms and tetradrachms, the tetrobols with their two-owl reverses, and the pentobols with their obverse Athena wearing a Corinthian helmet, draw on the more varied designs developed for Athens’ bronze coinage in the late 4th and first half of the 3rd centuries. Like the bronze, these denominations in silver were almost certainly struck for domestic use in Attica.

By weight, the pentobols are equivalent to Ptolemaic drachms and in Agora 26 are dated en bloc to the Chremonidean War (268-262), when for a time the coastline of Attica was guarded by the Egyptian fleet and by outposts manned by Egyptian troops [24]. The Ptolemaic silver tetradrachms and bronze currency excavated from these encampments reveal that the soldiers continued to use the Egyptian currency they brought with them, and explains why Athens would have minted this joint Attic/Egyptian coinage at a time when the coinages of both standards were circulating in Attica. Reverses of the major pentobol issue has a Panathenaic amphora to the right of the owl (Flament 2010, pl. iv·5-13). Other issues are known from one extant pentobol with an aplustre symbol, another with a bunch of grapes, and perhaps one or two other pentobols whose symbols were struck off flan (Fig. 2·1-4 = Flament 2010, pl. iv·1-4).

In a review of chronological data for the amphora-symbol issue (record of a lost hoard; comparanda for the Athena heads on Athenian Æ coins of

[24] Agora, p. 11-12, to which should be added CH IV (1978), no. 32, a hoard of nineteen tetradrachms of Ptolemy II, found at Sounion.
the late 4th and early 3rd centuries), F. concludes that this coinage does belong to the first half of the 3rd century. But he notes some differences in the designs of the few pentobols with other symbols (Fig. 2.1-4): the hair of Athena falls in a layered twist, and (unlike on the pentobols with amphora) the three-letter ethnic is disposed with the theta to the left of the owl and the epsilon on the right. Because F. is convinced that a detail or two in the formation of the owls’ heads relate them to some of the owls’ heads on the silver of the last quarter of the 3rd century, he dates this second group of pentobols to that time, i.e., about a half century later than the first group with the amphora symbol and concludes that this bifurcation of the pentobols implies that it was a coinage minted for payments or general monetary exchange between Athens and Ptolemaic Egypt in both periods\[25\].

What is missing here is any attention to the bronze coinage that provides comparanda for the Athena heads in the second group, although the comparanda are easily identified and could not be more decisive. They are the Athena heads of *Agora* varieties 57 and 58 (see Fig. 2), two of four varieties in a series of bronze coins with symbols (varieties 57-60), which are not only among the better dated Athenian bronzes, but are dated by *Agora* hoard A18:8 and related archaeological contexts to the time of the Chremonidean War\[26\]. The Corinthian-helmeted Athena heads of varieties 57 and 58, with their stacked twists of falling hair are identical to three of the heads in the second group of pentobols. (see Fig. 2.1-3)\[27\]. In addition, the ΘΑΕ ethnic of varieties 57-60 has the same arrangement as on these pentobols; and, as on the silver, *Agora* varieties 57-60 have changing symbols to the right of the owl. The case for dating the second group of pentobols to the Chremonidean War is therefore a good deal stronger than the case for assigning the pentobols with amphora symbol to the time of that conflict, and leads to the perfectly natural conclusion that all of the pentobol varieties must belong together. Minor variations of detail attest to the participation of two or more die-cutters (as also in the contemporaneous bronze), but die-cutters who were working within a space of a few years for a coinage that was minted for use in Attica during a unique episode in Athenian military history.

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\[25\] Flament 2010, pp. 49-51, 55.

\[26\] *Agora*, p. 34-35, item (vii). Flament (2010, n. 52) accepts the association of hoard A18:8 with the Chremonidean War as probable.

\[27\] I pass over the battered and anomalous Fig. 2.4, whose larger and indelicately-featured Athena head stands apart from all of the other pentobol Athenas. Flament (2010, p. 49) suggests the head was the work of an engraver who cut dies for some bronze and tetradrachms with symbols in the last quarter of the century. But even if it were so, that would be no reason for downdating Fig. 2.1-3 to the same period. Fig. 2.1-3 are so firmly anchored to the Chremonidean War through the bronze types *Agora* 57-60 that it is preferable to date Fig. 2.4 with and by them to the 260s.
IV.

In the case of the tetrobol chronology, F. and Agora 26 are essentially in agreement. As F. notes, most of the tetrabols have affinities with Athenian bronze coins of the late 4th and earlier 3rd centuries and were probably minted in two or more issues in the earlier part of the 3rd century. A smaller group, known from two extant coins, each with a different symbol, is later. In Agora 26, both groups are left undated. In F.’s schema, the larger, early 3rd-century group is assigned 287-262 and the later issues to the last quarter of the century after 229\[28\].

Where F. and I differ is with respect to the tetrabols’ purpose. I suggested that they were probably struck for paying troops in the border forts of Attica, inasmuch as by the Early Hellenistic era the Attic tetrobol had become synonymous with a soldier’s daily wage, very much as the triobol had become synonymous with a dikast’s stipend in later 5th- and 4th-century Athens\[29\]. Throughout most of the 3rd century, Athens’ paramount military commitment was to protect the countryside of Attica by maintaining fortified garrisons at Eleusis and Rhamnous and the secondary forts at Phyle and Panacton \[30\]. These garrisons were manned by Athenian soldiers along with foreign mercenaries, and were supplied with rations and equipment by the state \[31\], meaning that cash payments to the soldiers would have been for their service alone (misthos, opsonion) and would not have included additional ration-money (trophe) \[32\].

F. proposes an external and more general use, noting that the tetrabols’ weight (theoretically 2.88 g; in fact ca 2.50-2.60 g) is the same as that of a Corinthian drachm and the triobols of the Hellenistic Leagues of Central and Southern Greece that were coined on a standard that came to be known by the 2nd-century as the Symmachic standard \[33\]. On analogy with the Attic pentobols, which were devised to be used with Ptolemaic silver (but according to F. in two different periods), the Attic tetrabols, which did belong to two different periods, were, on F.’s view, minted « pour disposer de moyens

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\[28\] *Agora*, pp. 11, 22, no. 29; Flament 2010, pp. 51-53, 55.

\[29\] *Agora*, p. 11, citing LSJ, s.v. τετρωβόλον, to which should be added Tod 1947, p. 15-19; and Pritchett 1972, p. 19.

\[30\] Now see Oliver 2007, p. 113-189.

\[31\] Griffith 1935, p. 84-86.

\[32\] On these distinctions, see Griffith 1935, p. 264-276; and Pritchett 1972, p. 1-6.

\[33\] Flament 2010, p. 55, citing Doyen 2005, p. 39-48. As explained by Giovannini 1978, p. 48-51, the Late Hellenistic Symmachic standard was an umbrella standard that embraced both the League coinages of NW Greece that had emerged out of the Corinthian/Corcyrean weight system and the Central and Southern Greek League and civic coinages of reduced Aeginetan weight.
de paiement et d’échange » with these Leagues[^34]. But the problem with this suggestion is that in the first third of the 3rd century – the time of the first and only substantial minting of the tetrobols – these League coinages had either not yet materialized or were still in their infancy. The Symmachic League coinages date entirely to the late 3rd and to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. The Aetolian koinon alone had struck some silver of reduced Aeginetan weight in the late 4th and early 3rd centuries[^35], while the Achaian League, not refounded till ca 280, did not begin to coin till the middle of the century and not in quantity till after 195[^36]. In sum, it is highly doubtful that the international monetary environment of the first third of the 3rd century was compatible with F.’s conjecture.

The early 3rd-century Athenian tetrobols were arguably one of the forerunners of the most common Hellenistic coinages of Central and Southern Greece, no doubt because of the association of this Attic denomination or weight with the conventional unit of daily military pay across all major Greek weight standards for the rest of the Hellenistic era. Like the Chremonidean War pentobols, the tetrobols are therefore best understood as essentially a military coinage. But, on analogy with the pentobols (and the bronze coins which the tetrobols imitate), they were in all probability struck for use in Attica.

V.

In conclusion, F.’s proposed revisions in the dating and/or interpretation of three silver coinages of 3rd-century Athens – quadridigité tetradrachms and drachms, the pentobols, and the tetrobols – do not stand up to the test of fuller evidence. And while the dating and Attic or non-Attic origin of the heterogeneous tetradrachms, drachms, and hemidrachms may still remain under discussion, the case for accepting them as another bona fide coinage of 3rd century Athens is far stronger than F. allows.

[^34]: Flament 2010, p. 55.
[^36]: On the earlier Achaean League silver most recently, see Walker 2006, p. 107-109.
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