

Ancient History, Numismatics and Epigraphy in the Mediterranean World

Studies in memory of Clemens E. Bosch and Sabahat Atlan
and in honour of Nezahat Baydur

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in collaboration with Aliye Erol

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THE EUPHRATES FRONTIER AND THE CIVIC ERA OF ZEUGMA

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This note discusses some coins that belong to a rare series of small, crudely-produced ‘pseudo-autonomous’ coins issued at Zeugma at some point in the second century.¹ These coins have legends with numerous defects (particularly retrograde or missing letters) making them very difficult to read, but they are of some interest because they bear dates, and are the only issues of this city to do so. They are also of some importance for historians because they would appear to constitute the only tangible evidence for the proposition that Octavian removed the city of Zeugma from the kingdom of Commagene and transferred it to the province of Syria in c. 31 BC.²

There are two types, both imitating the coinage of Antioch. The larger denomination bears the head of a city goddess on the obverse and an altar on the reverse; the smaller a head of Apollo on the obverse and a lyre on the reverse.

A specimen of the smaller denomination was published by George MacDonald and is the Hunterian collection in Glasgow.³ While the obverse legend ZEYΓMATEΩN is not in doubt, the reverse legend SPAHTE⁴ proposed by MacDonald is quite unclear,

and even with the aid of a cast and photograph I was unable to verify for certain his reading.

A specimen of the larger denomination is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and is presumably the one published by T. E. Mionnet in the early nineteenth century.⁵ To the right of the altar we find the letters TE, and beneath the altar H and another uncertain letter. Mionnet gave it as a date, HK (28).

More recently, another example of the larger denomination appeared in a sales catalogue of the J. P. Righetti collection (fig. 1).⁶ It is struck from different dies, but again we find TE to the left of the altar and to the right an uncertain character which might be E. There are three letters beneath the altar. The first is clearly H, the second indistinct, and the third is clearly P. The cataloguers proposed the date HQP, year 198.

A third specimen in a private collection would appear to resolve the matter (fig. 2).⁷ This one has ET to the left (any character on the right hand side would be off the flan), and HAP (year 138) beneath. Though poorly formed, the Λ is clear (see enlargement, fig. 3). When compared to the Righetti specimen one can see that the date on the latter is HAP also. The date on the

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¹ *CRS*: 463-464, nos 27-28.

² Wagner 1976: 64; Sullivan 1990: 198; Millar 1993: 29; *CRS*: 460. Note that some clay seals retrieved from Zeugma during recent excavations have the head of a city goddess and a date, year 85 ‘of freedom’ (ETOYC ΠE EAEYΘEΠIAC), but these are not certainly seals of Zeugma: M. Önal, *Inventory of Zeugma Clay Seal Impressions Project*, free booklet, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Gaziantep Museum, c. 2008.

³ MacDonald 1903: 105-110. For an illustration, see *CRS*: plate 29, no. 28. Weight: 2.72g.

⁴ S being a numeral of the sort commonly found on second-century coins of northern Syria, PAH being the date 138, and TE being ET, the abbreviation for *etous* or ‘of the year’, written retrograde.

⁵ Mionnet vol. IV: 124, no. 77. For an illustration, see *CRS*: plate 29, no. 27. Weight: 3.16g.

⁶ *Münzen und Medaillen Deutschland Auction 19* (2006), lot 327, AE 16 mm, 2.80g.

⁷ AE 16 mm, 3.21g. On this specimen the obverse legend is retrograde.



Fig. 1

Fig. 2



Fig. 3 (x 3)

Paris coin is not so certain; only two letters are apparent and it is possible that another date such as HQ (98) or HP (108) is represented.⁸ However, the fact that it too begins with H and otherwise exhibits the same characteristic TE (rather than ET) just like the Righetti and Hunterian coins suggests it could well belong to the same issue and that the third letter in the date was not properly struck up, so that 138 is in fact the correct reading. In order to be certain we must await clearer specimens from the same reverse die.

The new specimens vindicate MacDonald's reading of the date as PAH on the smaller denomination. It is therefore possible that all of the 'pseudo-autonomous' issues of Zeugma may be confined to this single year. But what to which era does year 138 belong? MacDonald suggested that it was a date according to the Actian era; hence the suggestion that Octavian removed Zeugma from the kingdom of Commagene and added it to Syria. MacDonald's proposal therefore has considerable implications for the history of the Roman presence on the upper Euphrates, but there is no

evidence to support it. If the era is indeed Actian, the coins would belong to c. AD 107, during the reign of Trajan. They would be the earliest known issue of Zeugma, which otherwise did not begin coining until the reign of Antoninus Pius. But no other Syrian civic coins bearing an Actian era are known later than the reign of Tiberius. Moreover, the types imitate the 'pseudo-autonomous' coins of Antioch, and Antioch produced no such coins during Trajan's reign. More significantly, the idea that Zeugma was taken from the kingdom of Commagene and annexed to the Roman empire after Actium is not supported by recent archaeological work at Zeugma, where a date following the Roman annexation of Commagene in AD 17 seems more likely.⁹

If the civic era of Zeugma was initiated c. AD 17, the coins would belong to the reign of Antoninus Pius, c. AD 155-156. Antioch produced substantial quantities of 'pseudo-autonomous' coins in AD 145-147 (*CRS* pp. 369-371, nos 343-386) that could have provided the models for the types employed at Zeugma, and minted another issue in AD 158-159 (*CRS* p. 371, nos 387-390). A date in the reign of Antoninus Pius would fit better with the known history of minting at Zeugma, which struck an abundant undated coinage under this emperor. None of this proves for certain that the issues of year 138 belong to Antoninus Pius' reign, but similar 'pseudo-autonomous' coins imitating the same Antiochene types were produced under Antoninus Pius c. AD 145-146 at nearby Hierapolis in Syria (*CRS* p. 448, nos 25-30). An Antonine date for the Zeugma issues, and a Tiberian one for the initiation of the era, seem preferable to Trajanic and Actian ones. The notion of an Actian era at Zeugma, following a reorganization of the Euphrates frontier by Octavian in favour of Rome, might have to be abandoned.

The description of the types given in *CRS* may therefore be revised as follows:

⁸ HQ was the reading tentatively suggested in *CRS*: 463.

⁹ The evidence for this, derived from excavations funded by the Packard Humanities Center, is forthcoming.

CRS 27:

AE 16 mm, 3.06g (3 specimens)

Obverse: ZEYΓMATEΩN (sometimes retrograde). Bust of city goddess right.

Reverse: Altar, between legs, HΛP (P sometimes retrograde); to left, ET or TE; to right, uncertain character.

CRS 28:

AE 12 mm, 2.72g (1 specimen)

Obverse: ZEYΓMATEΩN. Laureate head of Apollo right.

Reverse: Lyre; to left, TE; to right, uncertain character (B retrograde?); below, ΠΑΗ.

TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Fırat Sınırı ve Zeugma Kent Era'sı

Kısa makalede Zeugma'da basılan nadir bir "pseudo-otonom" sikke grubu ele alınmaktadır. Sikkelerin ilginç yanı, üzerlerinde tarih bulunmasıdır. Antiokheia sikkelerini taklit eden sikkelerde iki tip altında toplanmaktadır: a) Kent Tanrıçası / sunak, b) Apollon başı / lir. Sikkeler, kent erası tarihinin hesaplanmasından hareketle Antoninus Pius dönemine tarihlendirilmektedir.

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