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The Greek Far West: an exceptional adaptation of a design from Asia Minor with bull and lion foreparts

Jean-Albert Chevillon and Pere Pau Ripollès

Abstract:

Our recent research on the coinages of Emporion has enabled us to collect six new post-archaic specimens, probably all minted in the north east of the Iberian Peninsula, which depict the joined foreparts of lion (right) and bull (left) on the obverse. This design, initiated in Sardis (Asia Minor) in the middle of the 6th century B.C., is not known to have been used elsewhere.

New post-archaic obols with joined foreparts of lion and bull:

Coin 1 (Fig. 1): AR, 0.92 g, 7.5-10 mm, private coll. (Spain). Provenance: between Fortià and Arenys d'Empordà (near to Roses and Empúries).

Coin 2 (Fig. 2): AR, 0.79 g, 8.7-9.8 mm, private coll. (France).

Coin 3 (Fig. 3): AR, 0.75 g, 8.3-8.7 mm, private coll. (France).

Coin 4 (Fig. 4): AR, 0.60 g, 8-8.7 mm, private coll. (France).

Coin 5 (Fig. 5): AR, 0.87 g, 8.5 mm, coll. S. Vela, Sagonte. Provenance: Sagonte (Valence, Spain).

Coin 6 (Fig. 6).¹ AR, 1.136 g, 9 mm. private coll. (Spain). Provenance: Vilamalla in Alt Empordà near Emporion (Spain).



Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

(not to scale)

1 M. García Garrido, 2013, Sobre unos divisores inéditos de Emporion, *Acta Numismatica* n° 43, pp. 30-32, n° 2 (= *Áureo & Calicó* 24/4/2014, lot 6).

These specimens can be described as follows: on the obverse, joined foreparts of lion (right) and bull (left), connected below by fusing bodies (Fig. 7). The heads are facing each other. The legs are placed in front of the animals. On the reverse, an owl looking to left or right, in an incuse square with rounded corners and flat surface, with perhaps two letters on each side of the figure. Rendered in weak style and medium relief.



Fig. 7: Drawing of coin number 1.

This design is drawn from the imagery of the Lydian world. The design of the joined foreparts of lion and bull is mainly known from the archaic coinages known as Croeseids.² The definitive attribution and interpretation of the design ‘in confrontation’ or ‘face to face’ (Fig. 8) remain under discussion, as G. Le Rider has pointed out.³ A. Ramage and P. Craddock stated that the design appeared in Lydia under the reign of Croesus (561-547/6), and so one is able to call them Croeseids,⁴ but R. Descat has proposed that they appeared immediately after the annexation of Sardis, the capital of the Mermnad dynasty, by the Great Persian King Cyrus II.⁵

N. Cahill and J. H. Kroll have recently put forward arguments which tend to shift the balance in favour of Croesus as the instigator of the first gold and silver issues.⁶ These are based on the discovery of three fractions with the lion-bull design, one struck in gold and two in silver, in Sardis, in archaeological layers dated before 540 B.C. No less important has been the discovery of a workshop in the same city,⁷ dedicated to refining electrum to obtain gold and pure silver, datable to the second quarter of the 6th century B.C.

- 2 On the sequence of these Lydian issues, see I. Carradice, *The ‘Regal’ Coinage of the Persian Empire*, in I Carradice (ed.), *Coinage and Administration in the Athenian and Persian Empires*, The Ninth Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History, Oxford (BAR International Series 343), 1987, pp. 73-75.
- 3 G. Le Rider, *La naissance de la monnaie: pratiques monétaires de l’Orient ancien*, Paris, 2001, p. 101-121.
- 4 A. Ramage, P. Craddock, *King Croesus’ Gold, Excavations at Sardis and the History of Gold Refining*. Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, Monograph 11, Cambridge, 2000; see also W. Müseler, *Coinage in the Achaemenid Empire*, in *Numismatic Art of Persia, The Sunrise Collection, part I: Ancient – 650 BC to AD 650*, Lancaster / London, 2013, pp. 43-49.
- 5 R. Descat, *Remarques sur les origines du monnayage achéménide, Mécanismes et innovations monétaires dans l’Anatolie achéménide*, éditions O. Casabonne, 2000, p. 1-8, following previous points of view published by M Vickers, ‘Early Greek coinage, a reassessment’, *NC* 1986, pp. 1-44 or M. J. Price, ‘Croesus or Pseudo-Croesus? Hoard or Hoax’, in *Studies in Honour of Leo Mildenberg*, Wetteren, 1984, p. 221.
- 6 N. Cahill and J. H. Kroll, *New Archaic Coin Finds at Sardis*, *AJA* 109/4, 2005, pp. 589-617, followed by K. Konuk, *Asia Minor to the Ionian Revolt*, in W.E. Metcalf (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 50.
- 7 A. Ramage, P. Craddock, 2000, pp. 81-96.

The ‘union’ of these two animals has given rise to many hypotheses.⁸ In our opinion, it can evoke either ‘the confrontation’ of the Lydian lion with the powerful Persian world which coveted it, or the representation of an ‘alliance’ between the two states, which have just been integrated. We should also recall the attractive idea of E. S. G. Robinson who regarded the image of joined foreparts of lion and bull as symbolizing electrum alloy, the lion representing gold and the bull silver;⁹ the design was modified in the later issues with the separation of both foreparts which corresponded to the appearance of separate denominations struck in pure metals.

However, in relation to our coins a significant aspect is the positioning of the foreparts which, with their legs directed outwards, indicate that they are definitely joined. A more precise link can thus be made with rare electrum staters attributable to Croesus, with the joined foreparts of lion and bull (Fig. 9).¹⁰ With this issue, unlike with the Croeseids, we find the foreparts reversed: the bull on the left and the lion on the right. Nevertheless, in one important respect the detail on our coins is different: the heads of the two animals are turned inwards, facing each other.



Fig. 8: BMC Lydia 32



Fig. 9: definegizemi.com

This original aspect of the design leads us to make a typological parallel with the rare archaic issues minted by the city of Cherronesos / Cardia (Thracian Chersonese). They present on the obverse the forepart of a lion leaping to the right with its head turned back and raising its leg in front of the bust in a way which corresponds well with that on our coins (Figs. 10 and 11).¹¹



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

8 G. Le Rider, Le début du monnayage achéménide: continuation ou innovation? *Light on the Top of the Black Hill, Studies presented to Halet Çambel*, Arsebük, G., Mellink, M. J., Schirmer, W. (eds.), Istanbul, 1998, pp. 663-673.

9 E. S. G. Robinson, Some Electrum and Gold Greek Coins, in *Centennial Volume of the American Numismatic Society*. New York, 1958, p. 585-594.

10 G. Le Rider 2001, pp. 54, 112, pl. IV, 19 et V, 1; Konuk 2012, p. 46, Fig. 3.15; H. Gitler, Achaemenid Motifs in the Coinage of Ashdod, Ascalon and Gaza from the Fourth Century BC, *Transeuphratène* 20 (2000), p. 78, pl. VI, 26-27. The Fig. 9 coin was online (3/3/2014) at http://www.definegizemi.com/antik_para/greek-altin-ve-elektrum-paralari

11 Coin sold by CGB France (bgr_275502). Weight: 1.20 g, module: 9.5 mm. This specimen came from the Platt sale (Rouen) November 1992. Our thanks to the CGB for its kind authorization to reproduce this specimen. Very little known, this fraction with forepart uses for the reverse the design of the tetradrachm with Athena head and lion ascribed to Miltiades, tyrant of the Chersonese between the years 515 and 494 B.C.

The first coinages of this type are datable to the years 500/480 B.C., and they were struck in large numbers much later in the 4th century B.C. They could, in our opinion, have inspired the engravers of our issue. Taking into account that on coin 4 (Figs. 4 and 11) the head of the bull is definitely smaller than that of the lion, it seems that it was awkwardly positioned on its hindquarters. One can suggest that our design adapts the Cherronesian coin type (Fig. 10), and inserts elements from another prototype, the earlier image of the joined foreparts of the bull and lion of the Lydian world of Croesus which had never previously been copied.¹²

The reverses of our coins have the characteristics of the post-archaic phase of the colony of Emporion established in Iberia during the second quarter of the 6th century B.C. On Emporitian coins one can distinguish three reverse types: a very typical incuse circle containing a design (Fig. 12, left), an incuse square with an interior design in relief (Fig. 12, centre). In addition, we have an incuse square with irregular form which can be regarded as a last resurgence from the preceding archaic times (Fig. 12, right).



Fig. 12. Left to right: GNC 20532; Cores coll. (Madrid); Chevillon coll. (France).

Our new group, with type within the incuse square, forms a part of the second group of reverses. The features of the bird engraved inside the reverses—both its general form and broad head—allows us to identify it as an owl. This leads us in turn to believe that it is derived from the coins of Athens.

Another major characteristic of these coins is the style which is rough both in design and in implementation. The animal heads are treated schematically with simple juxtapositions of globular forms. On the reverses, one notes a strong disparity in the treatment of the owl, which takes a curious form on coin 2 with a head that seems to be partly outside the incuse square; nevertheless, this may be due to a damaged die or a defective minting. Although all are different in their treatment, the general silhouettes correspond to that of an owl.

It is worth pointing out that on coins 5 and 6 the design on the reverse is looking right, which leads us to consider it as a separate variety. Another important detail is the

¹² We cannot discard the idea of the existence of an exact model if we bear in mind the scarcity of Lydian coins with joined forepart of bull and lion: only two specimens were known by Le Rider 2001, pl. IV-19 and V-1, kept in Munich and Oxford respectively, while a third is reproduced in this paper (Fig. 8). It should be noted that on this coin as well as on the Munich specimen one finds the same position for the bull (left) and the lion (right), whereas on the Oxford piece they are reversed.

possible presence of a legend on certain specimens. We can just observe on coins 2 and 3 some possible letters surrounding the design, one positioned in front of the animal legs and the other in the back. We do not have an acceptable proposal for the reading and interpretation at the moment due to the poor preservation of the specimens, or even certainty they are letters.

The obverses of the six known coins were all struck from different dies. For the reverses, we have noted only one link between two specimens presenting the owl looking right. That indicates that this issue was substantial. Its issue can be added to many other currently identified post-archaic issues at Emporion, known sometimes by only one obverse and reverse die. However, all these coinages highlight the great diversity of types used by Emporion where a significant number of coins were struck during this period.

The average weight is slightly above 0.84 g and, taking into account the considerable wear shown on some of them, it is certain that this group can be aligned with the post-archaic obol series struck in Emporion of similar weight.¹³ We have recorded an average of 0.83 g for the group with facing bull head / feminine head,¹⁴ and 0.90 g for that with the Dionysus head / incuse square.¹⁵

The distribution area of find spots of this group seems to be the north-east of the Iberian Peninsula. In view of that, and based on our current state of knowledge, we may assign this new group with joined foreparts of bull and lion to the post-archaic group production of the Greek city of Emporion. We propose a date between the years 480–440 B.C.

The discovery of this new group of Emporitan post-archaic obols issued during the second quarter of the 5th century B.C., serves to underline even more the great diversity of the iconographic repertory used by Emporion during this period. It confirms that the choice of the designs used in the years after 480 B.C. looks clearly towards the Greek world as a whole. We point out, *inter alia*, the copying of Greek-Sicilian issues with the man headed bull of Gela or the Dionysus head of Naxos; but also the use of designs coming from Magna Graecia with the Thourion bull and the Taras rider,¹⁶ and

13 L. Villaronga, La troballa de l'Empordà, *Acta Numismàtica* 33, 2003, pp. 15-46, coins 4-13, 156-168.

14 J.-A. Chevillon, P. P. Ripollès & C. López, Les têtes de taureau dans le monnayage postarchaïque empuritaïn du V^e s. av. J.-C., *OMNI* 6, 2013, pp. 10-14.

15 J.-A. Chevillon, Emporion: un groupe inédit à la tête de Dionysos, Barter, Money and Coinage in the Ancient Mediterranean (10th-1st centuries BC), *Actas del IV Encuentro Peninsular de Numismática Antigua (EPNA)*, Madrid, 2010, pp. 185-187.

16 L. Villaronga, *Monedes de plata emporitanes dels segles V-IV aC*, Barcelona, 1997, groups 5-5 and 5-6, n^o 266-267 and 268-277, p. 122, pl. XXIII; group 5-1, n^o 191-205, p. 120, pl. XVIII.

from continental Greece, the facing bull head of Phocis and the owl of Athens.¹⁷ This issue fits in well, since it mixes the principal design of the Athenian reverses, the owl, with an image confined until now to Lydia, with the joined foreparts of bull and lion. So this design, created in Sardis in the middle of the 6th century B.C., was adopted by the city of Emporion, which paradoxically is geographically located at the other end of the archaic Greek world. This suggests, somewhat surprisingly, that Emporion had a need to demonstrate its membership of the Greek cultural world by adopting monetary images that could be easily recognized by the users; but Emporion, originally a Phocaeen foundation also wished to evoke more precisely its origin in, and its iconographic heritage from Asia Minor.

Biography of the authors:

Jean-Albert Chevillon is a French independent researcher in numismatics specializing in the currencies of the Greek Extreme-Occident and Gallic coins of southeast Gaul. He is President of the Group Numismatics of Comtat and Provence, and a member of the French Society of Numismatics, the Society of Studies Numismatics and Archaeological, and the Hellenic Society of Numismatics.

Pere Pau Ripollès is Professor of Archaeology at the Universitat de València, Spain. His research has been mainly focused on Ancient Numismatics of the Iberian Peninsula. He has conducted numismatic research in the main coin cabinets. Among the most relevant studies published (alone or with colleagues) the following stand out: *La circulación monetaria en la Tarraconense Mediterránea* (Valencia, 1983); *Le monete ispaniche nelle collezioni italiane* (Rome, 1986); *The Roman Provincial Coinage* (London-Paris, 1992); *La ceca de Arse-Saguntum* (Sagunto, 2002), *Monedas Hispánicas de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (Madrid, 2005). He is currently Corresponding Member of the Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid).

17 M. Campo, Les primeres imatges gregues: l'inici de les fraccionàries d'Emporion, VII *Curs d'Història monetaria d'Hispania. Les imatges monetàries: llenguatge i significat*, Barcelona, 2003, pp. 25-45, Fig. 1, n° 6. Villaronga 1997, group 4-2, n° 141-176, pp. 117-118, pl. XIV, XV and XVI.