

A new Fraction from Mysia and the coinage of Parion

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Abstract: A hitherto apparently unpublished silver fraction raises again the question of identification of Fifth Century Parion issues, and the origin of the “calf licking his back” type. While most references attribute the silver coins of this type with an incuse square reverse to Macedonian mints, we suggest here that some of these coins, including this apparently unpublished specimen, might be identified as the earliest, mid-fifth Century BC issues of Parion in Mysia.

Keywords: Archaic / Classical Greek Coinage, Mysia, Parium / Parion, Priapos, Thrace, Odrysae, Macedon, Ainaia, Bovine, Bull, Cow, Calf, Triobol, Trihemiobol, Obol.

Resumen : Una fracción de plata hasta hoy aparentemente inédita reintroduce el problema de la identificación de las emisiones de Parion durante el siglo V AC, y el origen del tipo del “ternero lamiéndose”. Mientras que la mayor parte de las referencias atribuyen las monedas de plata de este tipo con reversos incusos a cecas en Macedonia, aquí propondremos que algunas de estas monedas, incluyendo el espécimen aparentemente inédito que presentamos, podrían ser identificadas como las pimeras emisiones de Parion en Misia, a mediados del siglo V AC.

Palabras Clave : Moneda arcaica / Clásica griega, Misia, Parion, Príapo, Tracia, Odrisios, Macedonia, Enea, Bóvido, Toro, Vaca, Ternero, Trióbolo, Trihemióbolo, Óbolo.

Introduction

Recently, I have acquired an unusual silver fraction which seems to be hitherto unpublished. The photograph and description of the coin in question are the following (Figure 1):



Fig. 1:

Obverse: Calf or cow walking left, turning its head to lick its back, over exergual line.

Reverse: Quadripartite incuse square, with two raised and two incuse sections.

Silver, wt. 0.96 g, Ø 9.25 mm.

The coin is still covered with a thick layer of dark horn silver, a feature frequent on recent finds in Western Anatolia. AMNG¹, however, lists a similar coin but of earlier style, and weighing only 0.62 g, labelled therefore, as an obol (of Euboic-Attic standard, we should add). This coin, according to Gaebler, was assigned “since the times of Imhoof-Blumer”, to Aineia in Macedon; but he would prefer an “uncertain Macedonian mint”. However, the same author notes another coin, weighing 1.29 g and preserved in the Berlin Cabinet, with a bovine in the same attitude but facing to the right, and the letters **EN**: he believes this coin to be not of Macedonian, but most likely of Minor Asiatic origin.² As for the obol, he thinks that the coin originates in the same mint as the larger denominations with a cow suckling a calf, described by Svoronos in 1919.³ K. Regling⁴ attributed these coins also to Aineia, an attribution that Gaebler finds “unquestionable”. Another example of the same type of the Berlin example is published in the Pozzi Catalogue (nr. 2082), with exactly the same weight⁵. This coin seems to me of unquestionable Macedonian workmanship, with spread flan, a well defined border of dots and an incuse quadripartite square containing four irregular dots, these last two features being almost exclusively found on fifth century Macedonian coins.



- **Fig. 2:** *Obverse:* Bull advancing left, turning head back. *Reverse:* Quadripartite incuse square. Silver, wt. 0.64 g, Ø c. 8 mm. (Dix Noon and Webb, Sale A12, Mar./12, lot 1305).
- **Fig. 3:** *Obverse:* Bull standing right, head turned back. *Reverse:* As previous. Silver, wt. 1.86 g, Ø c. 12 mm. (CNG Mail Bid Sale 82, Sept./09, lot 392).
- **Fig. 4:** Same types as previous, but of a well defined “Minor Asiatic” style. Silver, wt. 1.90 g, Ø c. 11 mm. (Busso Peus Nfg. Auktion 376, Oct./03, lot 405).

However, a few other examples with a bovine (presumably a bull or ox) turning its head to lick its back are known. On one example (figure 2), the bull is advancing to the left; the incuse square on the reverse is quadripartite, but rather irregular. This coin, an obol, is probably the same issue described by Gaebler in AMNG. On the other, larger coin, the bull is standing to the right: this coin is perhaps a triobol (figure 3). Both coins are of rather simple design, and although the style is good and allows a quite firm dating in the first decades of the fifth century (c. 500-480 BC), it does not permit precise mint attribution. Finally, on a coin of very similar weight and type, the obverse style, incuse square on reverse, and flan manufacture, is strikingly similar to some electrum fractions struck in Western Asia Minor. Although the other two coins are consistently assigned to Macedonian tribes, the first example of this last variety, sold in 2003, was described by the auctioneer (Busso Peus Nachfolger) as “Ionien – Unbestimmte Münzstätte” (Ionia: uncertain mint). Another example of this same coin (1.94 g) *from the same pair of dies*, was offered by Lanz in 2011⁶. This cataloguer also described it as minted in “Ionien – Unbestimmte Münzstätte”.

¹ Cf. AMNG III.2 (1935), p. 139, 32 and Taf. V, 1.

² AMNG, *ibid.*: “Zweifellos nicht makedonisch, sondern vermutlich kleinasiatischen Ursprungs ist dagegen die jetzt ebenfalls in Berlin befindliche, 1,29 g weigende Silbermünze mit EN und einem rechtshin stehenden, zurückblickenden Rind (Kat. Naville 1, 2082).”

³ J. Svoronos, « L'hellénisme primitif de la Macédonie... », in *Journal international d'Archeologie Numismatique* 19 (1919), p. 140, c, y pág. 151, 5, a-d; *Planche XVIII*, 21-24).

⁴ In: *ZfN* 37 (1905), p. 45, note 2.

⁵ Pozzi (1920: 1966).

⁶ Numismatik Lanz, Auktion 151, Jun./11, lot 454.

Furthermore, the type of the bovine licking its back, facing both to the left or right, appears in electrum fractions of an uncertain mint in Western Asia Minor.⁷ Although the auctioneers described these coins as of Ionian origin, the weight of these, related electrum issues, is Phokaic, a standard more frequently found in Phokaia and further North, in Lesbos and in Kyzikos, Mysia. This brings the model of our silver issue, and perhaps also these electrum fractions, to the North-western Asia Minor area, and most probably to Mysia.

The coinage of Parion in the early Fifth Century BC



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

- **Fig. 5:** “Drachm”. Obverse: Gorgoneion. Reverse: Cross-segmented incuse square. About 480-450 BC. Silver, 2.97 g, Ø 13 mm. (Author’s Collection).
- **Fig. 6:** “Hemidrachm”. Obverse: Bovine standing left, turning its head to lick its back; **IIA - PI**. Reverse: Gorgoneion. About 350-300 BC. Silver, 2.45 g, Ø 14 mm. (Author’s Collection).

The early coinage of Parion is still clouded in mystery. To the mint of Parion in the Classical period, two main types are attributed. A series of “drachms” (weight spread 3 – 3.9 g, figure 5)⁸, usually of rather crude style (often indeed very crude, these probably best understood as tribal imitations originating in Thrace) with a Gorgoneion obverse and an unusual cross-segmented incuse square on reverse, frequently dated in the early-mid fifth century; and a series of much later “hemidrachms” (c. 2.45 g, figure 6)⁹ with a calf standing left and turning its head back on obverse and a Gorgoneion on reverse. While this last type (with many issues marked by different symbols on the exergal line), is definitively attributable to the fourth century and to the mint of Parion thanks to the findspots and the ethnic **IIA – PI** on the obverse, the earlier “drachms” have been given to Parion only because of their obverse type (Gorgoneion) which is the same subject as these last coins. We believe that the abundance of these early “drachms”, matched with their rather crude style and variable weight, points to a mint closer to the mining districts, most likely in Thrace rather than in Mysia. Their findspots do not necessarily mark where the circulation of a coin started, but where it ended – this is particularly true with the Thraco-Macedonian silver issues, struck mainly for export. Actually, Topalov attributes both the “regular” and “irregular” drachms to the Odrysae confederation / kingdom in Thrace, and he is very probably right.¹⁰

The type – a proposed explanation

The type of the bovine turning its head back to lick itself may be a “talking design”, its meaning having been lost in time. But the type has also been explained in an early philological work as a reference to the itiphallic god Priapos. In the view of Richard Payne Knight, the animal, perhaps an ox or bull, licking itself represents “the strenght of the deity (Priapos) refreshed and invigorated by

⁷ Cf. Waggoner: Rosen (1983), 325-327 (all 1/24th stater, Phokaic standard), and also SNG Von Aulock, 7794.

⁸ SNG Cop. 256; BMC Mysia 1-13; Waggoner (1984), Rosen Coll. 525; Von Aulock 1318; SNG BN 1342-52. An early variety of this type is represented in the Asyut Hoard (Price and Waggoner, 1975, nr. 612), deposited in Egypt, ca. 475 BC.

⁹ SNG Cop. 262ff; BMC Mysia 14ff; Von Aulock 1319ff; SNG BN 1356ff; SNG Winterthur 2596ff.

¹⁰ Topalov (2005). For “regular style” see p. 68, nr. 55; for “irregular”, see pp. 68-69, nr. 56-58. We must add the fact that early “Parion drachms” have been found in Thrace (see, for instance, IGCH 697).

the exertion of its own nutritive and plastic power upon its own being.”¹¹If such identification is true, the type might have originated in, or be a reference to, the city of Priapos, a few miles to the East of Parion. The better location of Parion’s harbour was the cause of the rapid decay of Priapos, whose population is said to have mostly emigrated to Parion.¹²As in other cases in the history of Greek coinage, the expatriate Priapians living in Parion may have had an influence in the choice of the types of Parian coinage, just as the expatriate Sybaritans did on the coinage of Poseidonia, where the mass of them emigrated after the destruction of their home city for the second time, in 470 BC.¹³ If that was the case, the coin we are discussing here (figure 1), and related diobols (figures 2-4), may represent either the first issues of Priapos or the earliest coinage of Parion. But their Mysian origin should not be entirely ruled out.

Conclusion

While the “Gorgoneion drachm” coinage seems to be originated in some mining district in Thrace, we believe that the silver coins with a bovine licking itself, struck on compact flans and having incuse squares with irregular or raised segments as reverse, are indeed of North-western Asia Minor mintage, being perhaps the earliest coinage of Parion. In the frame of this interpretation, the coin we presented for the first time in this note, a trihemiobol, makes a convenient link, both as denomination and chronologically, as a mid-fifth century issue, bringing together those earlier, archaic fractions struck ca. 500-480 BC, and (after a period with no minting activity, probably due in part to the Athenian decree forbidding the silver coinage of other states in the Delian League) the much more abundant “hemidrachms” with calf licking / Gorgoneion. As our unpublished coin lacks an ethnic, the question of its precise attribution may remain still open for quite a long time; but in our views, its general attribution to Mysia seems in my view quite probable.

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¹¹Knight (1786), pp. 89-90. The author illustrates this with a Parion hemidrachm from his own collection.

¹² Cf. *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* (1845), *Volume XXII, Mysia*, p. 386.

¹³N. K. Rutter (1997), p. 57.