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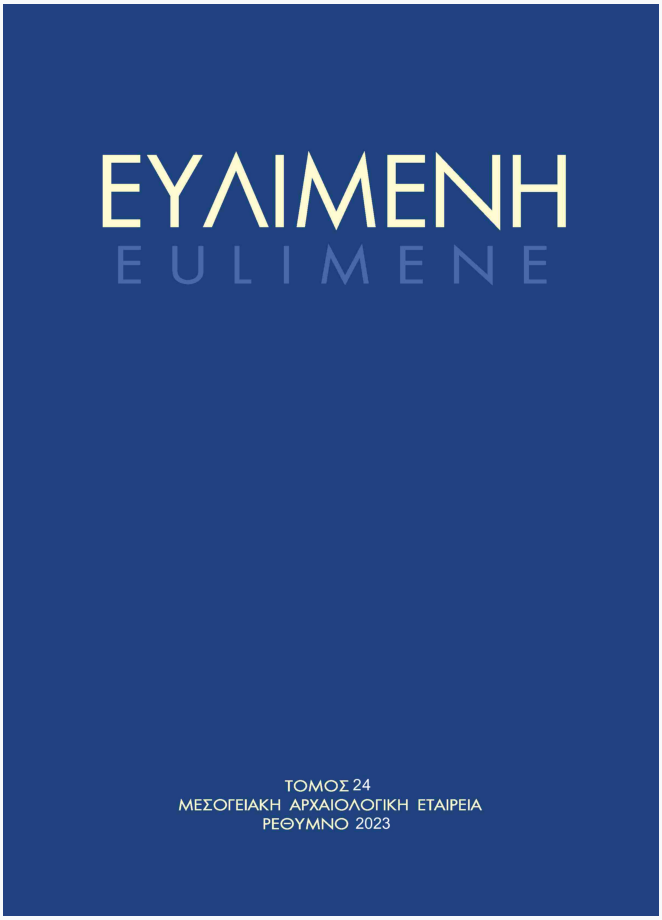

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Manolis I. Stefanakis

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ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ 24 (2023)

List of Contents
EULIMENE 24 (2023)

Περιλήψεις / Summaries / Zusammenfassungen / Sommaires / Riassunti vi

Αγγελική Λεμπέση, Ο γλυπτός διάκοσμος του Ναού Α στον Πρινιά. Μία ερμηνευτική πρόταση 1

Konstantinos Kalogeropoulos – Manolis I. Stefanakis, Natural and anthropogenic damage in the archaeological sites of Kymissala, Rhodes 13

Anagnostis Agelarakis, In defence of the *Aeneid* physician *Iapyx Iasides* in honour and *pietas* 43

Βασιλική Ζαπατίνα, Κλεοπάτρα Ζ' – Venus Genetrix 57

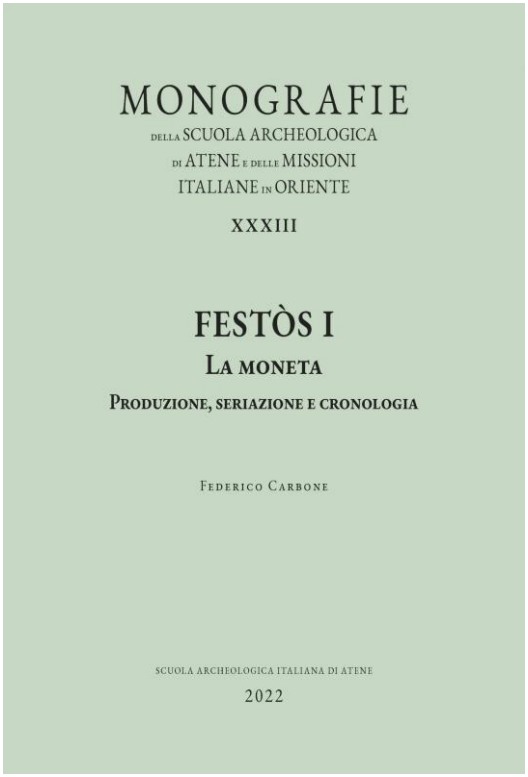
Βιβλιοκρισίες – Book Reviews

F. Carbone, Festòs I. La moneta. Produzione, seriazione e cronologia, Monografie della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente, XXXIII, Atene, 2022, 242 pp., 14 b/w pls (ISBN 978-960-9559-28-7) (**Manolis I. Stefanakis**) 81

Πολύτροπος. Τιμητικός τόμος για τον Καθηγητή Νικόλαο Χρ. Σταμπολίδη. Επιμ. Μανώλης Ι. Στεφανάκης, Μιμίκα Γιαννοπούλου και Μαρία Αχιολά. Μεσογειακή Αρχαιολογική Εταιρεία, Ρέθυμνο 2023, 2 τόμοι, σσ. 1242 (ISBN: τόμος Ι 978-618-86730-0-7, τόμος ΙΙ 978-618-86730-4-5) (**Μελίνα Φιλήμονος**) 87

ΒΙΒΛΙΟΚΡΙΣΙΑ / BOOK REVIEW

F. Carbone, *Festòs I. La moneta. Produzione, seriazione e cronologia*, Monografie della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente, XXXIII, Atene, 2022, 242 pp., 14 b/w pls (ISBN 978-960-9559-28-7).



There are still considerable difficulties in interpreting the economic and monetary patterns on the island of Crete, and it is from this need that the research presented in the book by F. Carbone began, with the analysis of the monetary production of ancient Phaistos, of which minor only aspects have been studied so far[1], intending to analyse its coinage and propose more reliable chronological concepts and new quantitative data.

An early classification of coin types was proposed by I.N. Svoronos, who was the first to set chronological criteria based on a stylistic and comparative analysis of the coins[2]. A different approach was taken by G. Le Rider who was also able to reconstruct a first relative chronology, based on the analysis of overstruck coins[3]. Since then, a handful of Cretan mints have been thoroughly studied in the form of corpora, namely: Knossos, Hierapytna, Gortyna, Polyrrhenia and Kydonia[4]. A few other analyses have looked at individual aspects, mostly focusing on the period between the Late Classical and Roman periods[5].

Considering the high value of these two prime sources in relation to the amount of later research, the interest in F. Carbone's volume stems from the strong need today for more detailed corpora that deepen the articulation of the production of the Cretan mints, updating the philological approach of Svoronos (1890), which, although more

[1] For example, Carbone 2017; 2020a; 2020b; Στεφανάκη 2019.

[2] Svoronos 1890, 253-265, pls XXII, 34-XXV, 3.

[3] Le Rider 1966, *passim.*

[4] Knossos (Devoto 2022; Carrier 2018); Hierapytna (Stefanaki 2021); Gortyna and Phaistos (Carbone 2014-15); Polyrrhenia (Στεφανάκης 2013); Kydonia (Stefanakis 1997).

[5] For example, Stefanaki 2007-2008; 2023; Stefanakis and Konstantinidi 2020; Στεφανάκης και Στεφανάκη 2019; Carrier and Stefanaki 2017; Stefanakis 1999; 2000; Τουράτσογλου 1995.

than 130 years later, is still a reference for historians, archaeologists, and numismatists.

The mint of Phaistos presents peculiarities regarding the types and characteristics of coinage, as well as the forms of hoarding and circulation, and represents an illustrative context of the social, political, and monetary events that affected the island. The study aims, therefore, to interpret the information provided by the numismatic material concerning the historical, archaeological, and epigraphic information of the contexts of the area or related to them.

The available documentation has been restructured by systematising the most relevant information to define a diachronic reading of the economic phenomena. In this sense, Carbone also tried to consider the fragmentary nature of new data in general, elements that in the past led to the assimilation of certain concepts, partly due to misinterpretations of numismatic data. For this reason, the author has devoted considerable attention to the study of the material, which he analysed without considering the superstructures that have been superimposed in the literature, but by questioning it in order to extract new data from its specificities. It is very important that the author had earlier studied thoroughly the mint of Gortyna too[6], something that allows him to move easily in most helpful comparisons between the two major mints of south-central Crete.

The integrated analysis of the documentation, with the application of the numismatic methods of investigation, has thus made it possible to frame in detail the phenomena of the monetary economy in a chronological span between the second quarter of the 5th c. BC and the middle of the 2nd c. BC.

In this context, after the first chapter (I) in which the archaeological and literary evidence is brought together to illustrate the context of the research, the *status quaestionis* of Cretan numismatics in relation to Phaistos is presented (chapter II): it is an overview of the numismatic research carried out to date and of the issues of Cretan numismatics most studied in recent decades. Considering the new findings on the geomorphology of the island and the techniques of metal mining and processing in ancient times, the hypothesis that the alleged delay in the beginning of local coinage was due to the lack of metal to mint[7] seems highly questionable. According to Carbone, this hypothesis should certainly be rejected, since the lack of availability of local metal, especially when compared to other realities, cannot be the sole cause of the absence of coinage.

Based on what has been described, chapter III outlines the data on the coin finds concerning their dispersion as far as coin hoards and early numismatic collections are concerned. The detailed chronological catalogue of the phaistian coins follows (chapter IV), putting together a total of about a thousand specimens, distributed among museum collections and auction sales worldwide. It is surprising to consider how extremely rare the finds of individual coins from archaeological investigations are: only one bronze specimen found in over a hundred years of research at Phaistos and equally one specimen from the agora of Gortyna, which reflects the quality of the contexts and settings of past field research.

Five groups are distinguished comprising a total of 44 issues and 102 series,

[6] Carbone 2014-15; 2020.

[7] Stefanakis 1999.

forming not only a major corpus of the coinage of Phaistos, but also providing a clear typological classification of the material able to propose a more adequate articulation and to extrapolate qualitative and quantitative data for understanding the activity of the mint.

These are thoroughly discussed in the last chapter (V) to elaborate matters of iconography, die sequences and relative chronology of the series, metrological data of silver and bronze series and monetary standards, as well as other aspects of the phaistian coinage, namely overstriking, countermarking and graffiti. The data derived from the analysis of the material, often compared with the characteristics of the coinage of Gortyna, reveal many useful elements for delineating the uses and chronologies of the production of the Phaistos' mint.

The corpus of coins examined by the author confirms a high date for the beginning of the production of coins in Phaistos –and thus in Crete– from the second quarter of the 5th c. BC, by which time the adoption of a specific weight standard, common to the island's mints had already been decided. The weight standard most likely resulted from a convergence of choices rather than a deliberate monetary agreement between the few early minting centres of the island.

In the initial phase of coinage, at least until the first quarter of the 5th c. BC, the use of similar, but not identical, types between Phaistos and Gortyna is a sign of a certain affinity, which may or may not be linked to a close political and economic relationship between the two centres, which, in any case, did not last long. A sudden change of direction is attested by the abrupt transformation of the types, inspired by the local identity traditions of the city, and by the adoption of a different choice of weight standard, in use locally, which shows slight differences, notable enough, though, to exhibit the differentiation of the two monetary systems. This variation remains unchanged in the later phases, albeit with some points of convergence.

From the middle of the 4th c. BC and for a few decades afterwards, a radical change in the rhythm of production took place. During this period, both in Phaistos and in Gortyna, the production of silver staters reached its peak, marked by a weight standard common for all Cretan mints[8]. The minting comes to an end in Phaistos, by 280/70 BC and in Gortyna by around 260-250 BC.

The next phase is characterised by the minting of bronze coins, the starting date of which can be defined by comparison with the bronze issues of Gortyna. In Phaistos, small denominations began to be struck at a date after the introduction of the so-called "decree on the introduction of bronze" (250-220 BC)[9]. It was a tiny production that followed the reorganisation of the minting of the base metal in the neighbouring city by a few decades. Considering the exuberance of the Phaistos issues and the overstriking on specimens from Gortyna dating back to the 2nd c. BC, it can be concluded that they were produced not long before the destruction of the city in about 150 BC. The minting of bronze was introduced late in comparison with other Cretan centres and did not concern the production of a good-weight denomination introduced to nominally replace the fractions in silver, but rather coins of small value.

[8] On the Cretan weight standard, also Stefanakis 1999, 260-264; Stefanaki 2007-2008, 50-51.

[9] Stefanakis 2000, 202-203.

In most cases, the relative chronological arrangement of the various groups of Phaistos' issues depends on the identification of the under-types of the overstruck specimens. The overstriking mainly concerned the large denominations, presumably because they were more functional for those economic practices, involving high-value transactions. However, it becomes clearer that the processing of drachmas, triobols and obols was also closely linked to the recycling and hoarding of coins from other workshops.

The analysis of the material has also shed light on important questions concerning the use of overstriking and countermarking. So far, the overstriking of coins has received enough attention, raising expectations about the punctuality of chronological data, especially following the important study of G. Le Rider (1966), who has put forward new proposals through his study of the politics of overstriking. Based on this work, the author has carried out a detailed study of the documentation, distinguishing between the phases and the provenance of the flans.

The use of coins already in circulation and the adoption of imprecise minting techniques are concentrated in two distinct periods when there was a need to put new coins into circulation quickly. The phenomenon mainly affected the production of staters, although it is the lower denominations that provide information about the large amounts of foreign coins that were rapidly converted into local currency. The same observation can be made for the bronze production: there are indeed few, but chronologically significant, overstruck bronzes.

Because of this evidence, Carbone proposes a new interpretive model: at certain times, the primary need seems to have been not so much to remove foreign currency from circulation, but rather to proceed with the production of new currency –and to do so extremely quickly– apparently for some particularly important contingency. The coinage in circulation was therefore overstruck and the flans sheared to fit the weight standard in use. The phenomenon affected the main centres of the island, as evidenced not only by the production of Phaistos but also by other towns such as Knossos, Gortyna, Lyttos and Sybritos. It is no coincidence that the earliest issues used as flans coins produced by the island's mints.

A final consideration concerns the definition of the weight standards used, which can now be deduced from the data derived from the calculation of the densification points. Throughout the production, different weight ranges can be distinguished: at first sight, they appear to be insignificant and in line with what is known from other coins of the ancient world, but in other cases they help to identify a change in the fiscal organisation of the city.

Although the Cretan cities adopted a common weight standard in the first place, this did not lead to a homogenisation of weights, but the significant differences were probably due to the local calibration of weights according to the needs for which the coin was intended: internal exchange, payment for services, commercial purposes, transactions with other entities, etc. The weighting standard of Phaistos was based on a stater weighing 11.80 gr, later reduced to 11.30 gr, with a gradual decrease attested by the end of production. It is only at this point that the weight of the Phaistos coins coincides with that of the Gortynian coins, an element which, once again, helps to disprove the common management of monetary policy in earlier phases.

The final chapter (no numbering) is the closing chapter of the research where the author sums up his conclusions and attempts further interpretations on the chronology of the coinage, the articulation and rhythm of production, and the phenomena of countermarking, overstriking and hoarding.

A bulk of details of the technical data of the research are then given in five thematic appendices in the form of tables, which are very useful for a better understanding of the synthesis of all the information gathered. Finally, twelve tables of figures, depicting representative specimens of the series, illustrate the catalogue of coins.

The book, in general, is carefully written and nicely edited, with various detailed, well-cared and friendly to the reader, charts and tables (esp. chap. III and chap. V) that revise the bulk of data presented.

Carbone's work comes to add to the list of the few die-studies done so far on the major mints of Late Classical and Hellenistic Crete, enriching our knowledge of the coin production of the Cretan city-states. It is yet a valuable tool in the hands of archaeologists, historians and classists who study Classical and Hellenistic Cretan civilization, art, economy and economic history. For the specialists on numismatics, the author offers in this volume a rich panorama of new information, data and considerations, which will trigger future research, re-assessments of numismatic history and new in-depth studies –let alone compilation of further corpora– in the field of Cretan numismatics.

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