

CONSTANTINA KATSARI

OPRAMOAS AND THE IMPORTATION OF BRONZE COINS IN ROMAN LYCIA

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A well-known honorary inscription referring to the donations of Opramoas from Rhodiapolis to the Lycian League and its cities was found in the nineteenth century. Since the time of its discovery, there have been several attempts to restore and translate the inscription and comment on the several issues raised in it¹. Building upon these studies, my contribution addresses one such issue. In lines VE 7–8² we read δωρησάμενος αὐτῷ δηνάρια πεντάκις μύρια πρὸς οἷς πέρυσι ὑπέσχετο εἰς τὴν καταλλαγὴν τοῦ νομίσματος δηναρίοις πεντάκις χειλίοις. According to the latest interpretation of the passage, Opramoas intended to fund the reopening of the Lycian League's mints, which had been inactive for more than a generation. He would probably pay the cost of withdrawing old money from circulation and the subsequent issue of new currency³. Christina Kokkinia⁴, who has just published a commentary on the inscription, refrains from offering a new interpretation and follows earlier translations⁵ of the phrase καταλλαγή τοῦ νομίσματος, which should be rendered as the 'exchange of coins' (der Tausch von Münzen). According to Kokkinia, initially, Opramoas gave 5000 *denarii* to the League for the purpose of exchange; later, he added 50,000 *denarii* more to this sum. We may assume that the latter sum was eventually distributed to the population (Geldverteilung)⁶, while we cannot be certain about the recipient of the former⁷.

¹ Text: Petersen, E. – v. Luschan, F. (eds.), *Reisen im südwestlichen Kleinasien II: Reisen in Lykien*, Wien 1889, pp. 76–81; Heberdey, R. – Kalinka, E., *Opramoas, Inschriften vom Heroon zu Rhodiapolis*, Wien 1897; IGR, III, 739; TAM, II, 905. The latest study on the inscription has recently been published: Kokkinia, Chr., *Die Opramoas-Inschrift von Rhodiapolis*, Bonn 2000.

Discussion (select.): Coulton, J. J., *Opramoas and the anonymous benefactor*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987) pp. 171–178; Frézouls, E., *Les ressources de l'évergétisme. Le cas d'Opramoas de Rhodiapolis*, in: Ph. Leveau (ed.), *L'origine des richesses dépensées dans la ville antique: Actes du Colloque organisé à Aix-en-Provence, 1984, Aix-en-Provence 1985*, pp. 1–18; Letta, C., *Il dossier di Opramoas e la serie dei legati e degli Archiereis di Licia*, in: V. Biango (ed.), *Aspetti e problemi dell'Ellenismo: Atti del Convegno di Studi Pisa 6–7 novembre 1992, Pisa 1994*, pp. 203–245; Wörrle, M., *Zum Wiederaufbau von Myra mit Hilfe des Lykiarchen Opramoas nach dem Erdbeben von 141 n. Chr.*, in: J. Borchhardt (ed.), *Myra. Eine lykische Metropole in antiker und byzantinischer Zeit*, Berlin 1975, p. 159; Wörrle, M., *Zwei neue griechische Inschriften aus Myra zur Verwaltung Lykiens in der Kaiserzeit*, in: J. Borchhardt (ed.), *Myra*, pp. 254–300.

² As numbers appear the numbers in the publication of the text by Chr. Kokkinia.

³ Harl, K. W., *Civic Coins and Civic Politics in the Roman East, 180–275*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1987, p. 29. He also discards as nonsensical the earlier view that the *euergesia* covered the loss in the exchange from converting local into Roman currency in Abbott, F. F. and A. C. Johnson, *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire*, Princeton 1926, no. 87. However, in this paper I intend to show that there are elements of truth in the view presented by Abbott and Johnson.

⁴ For a translation of the phrase see Kokkinia, *Die Opramoas-Inschrift*, p. 138.

⁵ Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the Third Century after Christ*, Princeton 1950, p. 533, n. 56.

⁶ *Opramoas-Inschrift*, VH 6–12.

⁷ On the diversion of the gift of Opramoas to other purposes see Kokkinia, *Die Opramoas-Inschrift*, p. 138; IGRom iv.739, c. 20, 11.108–9; Oliver, J. H., *The ruling power: A study of the Roman Empire in the second century after Christ through the Roman oration of Aelius Aristides*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 42 (1952) pp. 872–1002, esp. pp. 962–4.

Although the above hypothesis concerning the final destination of the money seems plausible, no adequate explanation exists regarding the initial purpose of the donation of these coins. In order to find out, we should proceed through different stages of analysis. First of all, we should explore the meaning of the phrase *καταλλαγή τοῦ νομίσματος* in order to understand the function of the money mentioned in the inscription. As we have already seen, it is usually translated as ‘the exchange of coins’. This translation is based on a passage written by Aristoteles: *τῶν τε νομισμάτων τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἀπέδοντο μιᾷ τραπέζῃ, ἐτέρω δὲ οὐκ ἦν οὐθενὶ οὔτε ἀποδόσθαι ἐτέρω, οὔτε πρίασθαι παρ’ ἐτέρου: εἰ δὲ μή, στέρησις ἦν*⁸. Although in this passage the word *καταλλαγή* seems to refer to the exchange, in other texts it could be translated differently. For example, Demosthenes writes: *οὕτω γὰρ μοι ἀκριβῶς ἐγγράπτο, ὥστ’ οὐ μόνον αὐτά μοι τὰναλώματα ἐγγράπτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅποι ἀνηλώθη καὶ ὅτι ποιούντων, καὶ ἡ τιμὴ τις ἦν καὶ νόμισμα ποδαπόν, καὶ ὅποσου ἡ καταλλαγή ἦν τῷ ἀργυρίω, ἴν’ εἴη ἀκριβῶς ἐξελέγξαι με τῷ διαδόχῳ*⁹. In this case, it is clear that *καταλλαγή* does not refer to the exchange of coins but to the commission received by the banker from the exchange of coins. The same translation applies to the text by Athenaeus: *ἔπειτ’ ἐὰν τὰργύριον αὐτῷ καταβάλης, ἐπράξαιτ’ Αἰγιναιῖον: ἂν δ’ αὐτὸν δέηι κέρματ’ ἀποδοῦναι, προσαπέδωκεν Ἀττικά. κατ’ ἀμφοτέρα δὲ τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἔχει*¹⁰. The editor of SEG also speculates on the interpretation of the noun *καταλλαγή* on the basis of an early fourth-century BC treaty between Mitylene and Phocaea on the coinage of electron. Here *καταλλαγή* appears similar to words such as *ἐπικαταλλαγή* and *κόλλυβος*, all of which refer to the banker’s commission¹¹. Other inscriptions which mention the same noun do not actually clarify its exact meaning, although they always relate it to specific denominations of coins¹². There is a possibility that initially *καταλλαγή* referred to the exchange of coins, while later it acquired a different meaning that referred specifically to the commission that the banker received when he exchanged different denominations. Unfortunately, all the information in our possession comes from the Classical or the Hellenistic period rather than the second century AD, when the Opramoas inscription was written. Although it is unlikely that the meaning of the word changed radically, the usage of the word is attested only rarely in written sources from this period.

Another question regards the nature of the coins mentioned in the inscription. As far as we know, one of the main duties of the bankers was to exchange coins of different denominations. Specifically, bankers exchanged Roman denarii or aurei issued in Rome with civic bronze coins minted either locally, or in neighbouring mints, or in Rome. The importance of the bankers’ function becomes clear when we consider that the soldiers paid in gold or silver coins needed to exchange their money with lower denominations in order to participate to the market transactions in the cities. In turn, the merchants and the rest of the population used the silver coins to pay for goods in the local markets. The use of silver coins in most transactions was connected with the use of bronze coins, since the two currencies together facilitated

⁸ Aristot., *Oecon.* 1346b.

⁹ Demosth., *Contra Polyclem.*, 30–31.

¹⁰ Athen., *Deipnosophistai*, 6.6.

¹¹ SEG 33 (1983) 665.

¹² *Καταλλαγή*: Att., IG II (2) 1634. *Ἐπικαταλλαγή*: Pelop., IG IV (2), 1 103; Delphi, FD III 5.25; Delphi, FD III 5.59. *Κόλλυβος*: SEG 42 (1992) 205.

commercial activities. According to the existing Roman law, one silver *denarius* was exchanged by the appointed banker for 16–18 bronze *asses*¹³. The banker kept one *as*, possibly a certain amount of *asses* went to the city in the form of taxes, while the rest belonged to the person who bought the bronze coins. In fact, an inscription from Pergamon¹⁴ dated to the second century AD attests that moneychangers were to sell *denarii* for 18 *asses* and buy them for 17 *asses*. Only moneychangers that were hired by the city were allowed to exact an *agio* of one *as* per *denarius*.

Οἱ οὖν τῆς ἀμειπτικῆς ἐργασίας μισθωταὶ πο]λ(λ)ὰ παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ παρὰ τὴν συναλλαγὴν [πράττειν αὐτοῖς ἐ]πέτρεπον. παρὰ γὰρ τῶν ἐργαστῶν καὶ καπήλων καὶ τῶν ὀψαριοπωλῶν εἰς τὸν λεπτὸν ἐμπολῶν εἰθότων χαλκὸν δέκα ὀκτὼ ἀσσάρια [τὸ δη]νάριον λαμβάνειν ὀφείλοντες καὶ τοῖς τὸ δηνάριον διαλλάσσειν βου[λο]μένοις [πρὸς] [δέ]κα ἐπτὰ διδόναι οὐκ ἤρκοῦντο τὴν τῶν ἀσσαρίων ἄμειψιν, ἀλλ[ὰ] καὶ ἐὰν δηναρίων ἀργυρῶν τις ἀγοράσῃ τὸ ὀψάριον, καθ' ἕκαστον δηνάριον εἰσέπρασσον ἀσσάριον ἓν.

The same procedure in the exchange of coins probably also occurred in the province of Lycia. However, a particular characteristic distinguished this region from other provinces. The cities of Lycia did not issue bronze coins from the reign of Claudian to the reign of Gordian III. Surprisingly, unlike the rest of the cities in Roman Asia Minor¹⁵, the Lycian cities did not undertake intense minting activities not even during the early Severan period. Only during the reign of Gordian III twenty cities of Lycia – some of which had never before produced coins – decided to issue their own bronze coins¹⁶. Furthermore, the last issues by the Lycian League probably belonged to the period before AD 43 and the types were a reflection of Roman power¹⁷, a fact that may indicate the existence of direct imperial control. Since the production of civic bronze currency was either limited or non-existent, the local authorities probably sought other means to supply the markets with smaller denominations.

¹³ Other rates have also been suggested. See: Melville Jones, J. R., *Asses and Assaria in the Early Roman Empire*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 18 (1971) pp. 99–105.

¹⁴ Fragments and photographs by Fraenkel, M., *Alterthümer von Pergamon VIII 2*, Berlin 1895, 216 no. 279; *The editio princeps* by von Prott, H., *Roemischer Erlass betreffend die oeffentliche Bank von Pergamon*, *Athenische Mitteilungen* 27 (1902), pp. 78–89, no. 72; standard edition by Dittenberger, OGIS 484, pp. 105–112 and 552; reproduced by Abbot, F. F. and Johnson, A. C., *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire*, Princeton 1926, pp. 401–403, no. 81.

Discussion: West, L. C., *Gold and Silver Coin Standards in the Roman Empire*, *American Numismatic Society, Numismatic Notes and Monographs* 94 (New York 1941) pp. 93–94; Bolin, S., *State and Currency in the Roman Empire to 300 AD*, Stockholm 1958, pp. 238–243; Macro, A. N., *Imperial Provisions for Pergamum*: OGIS 484, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 17 (1976) pp. 169–179; Oliver, J. H., *Greek Constitutions*, ed. by K. Clinton, Philadelphia 1989, pp. 208–215, no. 84.

¹⁵ Jones, T. B., *A numismatic riddle: The so-called Greek Imperials*, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* vol. 107, no. 4, pp. 308–347; Leschhorn, W., *Le monnayage impérial d'Asie Mineure et la statistique*, in: C. Carcassonne and T. Hackens (eds.), *Statistics and Numismatics*, PACT 5, Paris 17–19 Sept. 1979, Strasbourg 1981, pp. 252–266; Robert, L., *Villes et monnaies de Lycie*, *Hellenica* 10 (1955) pp. 188–222, esp. pp. 188–210.

¹⁶ Butcher, K., *Roman Provincial Coins*, London 1988, p. 89; Johnston, A., *Review Article. The intermittent Imperials: the coinages of Lycia, Lycaonia and Pisidia*, *Numismatic Chronicle* 140 (1980) pp. 205–211, esp. p. 208; von Aulock, H., *Die Münzprägung des Gordian III. und der Tranquillina in Lykien*, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 11 (1974), pp. 1 ff.

¹⁷ Travell, H. A., *The Coinages of the Lycian League*, New York 1982, pp. 224–225.

Numismatic finds from the area of Lycia indicate that a major source of the bronze coins circulating in the province was the distant mint of Rome, while smaller sources were probably located in the neighbouring regions. Specifically, a hoard buried in Telmessus during the third century AD did not contain any provincial coins, but only Roman *sestertii*. This hoard was accompanied by many stray finds of individual *aes* found throughout the surrounding area¹⁸. Another hoard of 134 ‘Roman 1st Brass’ coins, issued during the second and the third century AD, was found in Elmali, in central Lycia¹⁹. Furthermore, E. S. G. Robinson, who visited the area at the beginning of the twentieth century, purchased a series of Roman Imperial coins from the third century AD²⁰. The pattern of coins from nearby regions also demonstrates that an incredibly high number of Roman official bronze coins circulated there. Specifically, most of the coins located in Fethiye museum, which were issued during the second and third centuries, came from the mint of Rome²¹. Without excluding the possibility that neighbouring cities provided bronze coins for the Lycian League, I intend to suggest that official bronze coins were regularly shipped from Rome to Lycia in order to cover the needs of local markets for smaller denominations.

The League could have been responsible for the exchange of silver coins – usually collected in the form of taxes – with bronze coins. It seems, though, that the League would have lost money during this process, especially if it had to pay for both the shipping costs and the legal fee to the mint of Rome. A solution could have contemplated relying on the aid of benefactors who were willing to cover part or all of the expenses. During the Imperial period, it was customary that, when a city – or, in our case the Lycian Koinon – was short of funds, an *euergetes* would ‘offer’ his services²². The low volume of money in circulation and the relative poverty of some social classes induced benefactors to interfere in the monetary life of the cities. For example, in a few cases they underwrote the tax liability of their city, either by paying the entire bill or by establishing a foundation whose revenues could be used for paying the poll-tax²³. There are also examples of benefactors involved in the provision of coinage, although not in the exchange of coins. These deeds have been attested in the epigraphic sources and on the coins in the form of legends. The magistrates undertook the minting of coins in much the same way in which they undertook other tasks, such as the construction of public buildings. They probably paid for part of the production of civic coins, and specifically for the dies, the mint and its staff. Formulas that refer to the funding of an issue use the verb *ἀνέθηκε* together with the name of the magistrate, or the prepositions *διὰ* or *παρά* together

¹⁸ Lagos, C., *The Circulation of Coins in Lycia*, M.A. thesis, Durham 1993.

¹⁹ Woodward, A. M., *A journey in South-Western Asia Minor*, British School at Athens 16 (1909–1910) pp. 76–137, esp. pp. 130–137.

²⁰ Robinson, E. S. G., *Coins from Lycia and Pamphylia*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 34 (1914) pp. 36–46.

²¹ I am in debt for this information to Prof. J. P. Casey, who also allowed me to use this data in my Ph.D. thesis, *The Monetary Economy of the Eastern Mediterranean from Trajan to Gallienus*, vol. II, University College London 2001, chart 8.

²² Eck, W., *Der Euergetismus im Funktionszusammenhang der kaiserzeitlichen Städte*, in: M. Christol and O. Masson, *Actes du X^e Congrès International d’Épigraphie Grecque et Latine*, Nîmes 4–9 Oct. 1992, Paris 1997, pp. 305–331, esp. pp. 309–310.

²³ The phenomenon is noted by Mitchell, S., *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor*, I, Oxford 1993, p. 256. Relevant inscriptions were found in Tenus: IG, xii.5.946; Ibiza: ILS 6960; Macedonian League: Arch. Epigr. 2 (1916) 148; *Leagues of Asia Minor*, I, 6–10; *Asians*, I, 4–28.

with the name of the magistrate²⁴. Another inscription mentions an individual named Apollodotos (στρατηγός), who struck (κόψαζ) coins and was also a magistrate at the time of the issue²⁵.

Opramoas, one of the wealthiest men in Lycia, was an obvious choice as the individual to fund the exchange of coinage. After all, he was responsible for a variety of other *euergesiai* including some uncommon ones, such as the *κηδευτικὸν τοῖς βιώσασιν*²⁶. The number of coins donated in the first instance (5000 *denarii*) was probably spent for the commission of the mint of Rome, *τὴν καταλλαγήν*. It is unlikely that the 5000 *denarii* would have been exchanged for Roman *asses*, because the low number of bronze coins brought back to Lycia would not have been enough to facilitate daily transactions. Nevertheless, the text does not clarify whether the money was actually employed in the exchange of coinages or whether it was distributed to the population.

The lack of other inscriptions with the word *καταλλαγή* could indicate that either the League or the individual *poleis* were mainly responsible for the supply of smaller denominations to the local markets. Since the need for bronze issues was continuous, the civic authorities probably arranged the regular shipment of Roman Imperial *asses*. They made use of the *denarii* and the *aurei* gathered from the taxation of both merchants and landowners. The intervention of Opramoas as a benefactor was probably unusual and it seems that it was not repeated later. In fact, we cannot even be sure if the donated money was finally used in the payment of the *κόλλυβος* or *καταλλαγή* or *ἐπικαταλλαγή* to the mint of Rome. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that Opramoas' intentions as to the exchange of coinage were clear, even if the magistrates of the League might have changed their mind in the process.

University of Exeter

Constantina Katsari

²⁴ Robert, L., *Monnaies antiques en Troade*, Génève/Paris 1966, p. 86, n. 3 mentions a coin of Mylasa with the inscription 'ψηφισάμενος Κλαύδιος Μέλας ἀνέθηκε'. See also: Burnett, A., Amandry, M., Carradice, I., *Roman Provincial Coinage*, II, Part I, London/Paris 1999, p. 3. For the formula *διὰ* and *παρά* + name of magistrate see also Head, B. V., *Historia Nummorum: A Manual of Greek Numismatics*, 2nd edition, Oxford 1911, p. 679.

²⁵ IGR 4, 769.

²⁶ Ballard, A., *Fouilles de Xanthos. Inscriptions d'époque impériale du Létōon*, vol. VII, Paris 1981, pp. 202-204.