NINE. FINAL EVIDENCE

Up to this point, our attention has been of necessity focused primarily on the coinages of classical Greece and the historical evidence which bears on the chronologies of these coinages. In this final chapter, we will look at some further documentary and literary evidence which might be thought to support the idea that a close connection was recognized in the classical period between sovereignty and coinage. The unifying thread of the argument in this chapter, as throughout this study, is the demonstration that the evidence in question can be explained without reference to the usual assumption about sovereignty and coinage. Since the documentary evidence to be discussed is earlier in date, it will be treated first.

1
Documents of Classical Greek Cities Concerning Coinage

The famous fifth-century "Athenian Coinage Decree" remains the single most important piece of evidence for the view that a close connection existed in classical Greece between the outright assertion of political sovereignty on an international scale and a monopoly of the right of coinage. The best and most decisive statement of this interpretation of the decree comes in Moses Finley's standard work on economics in classical antiquity:

Equally political was the fifth-century B.C. Athenian decree which laid down the rule that Athenian coins alone were to be current for all purposes within the Athenian empire. . . . The political element is unmistakable: the unprecedented volume of Athenian military and administrative payments, at a time when foreign tribute was the largest source of public revenue, was much facilitated by a uniform coinage, and Athens was now able and willing to demonstrate who was master within
the empire by denying the subject-states the traditional symbol of autonomy, their own coins. The Athenians may also have aimed at mint profits, but we shall not know until the missing bit of the text stating the mint charge for re-coining is found.

It is also held that there was a commercial motive, a desire to give Athenian merchants the advantage over others. The logic escapes me. Everyone had been equally the victim of a profusion of mints; had the Athenians been able to enforce their decree for a sufficient number of years, everyone within the empire would have benefited slightly but equally, the Athenians no more than the others, questions of pride and patriotism apart. Only the money-changers would have been the losers, and no one has yet suggested that such a powerful decree was passed just to hurt them.¹

In a later work, Finley summarizes his view: whatever its precise date, the Coinage Decree was a "political act without any commercial or financial advantage to the Athenians."²

The situation is not as straightforward as this interpretation suggests. The decree involves more than just coins. When we can begin to follow its sense, the incomplete text which is preserved concerns provisions for the punishment of those officials throughout the empire who fail to act in accord with what has been decreed. There follows a provision, whose full sense is unrecoverable because of the damaged state of the text, about the minting of silver which has been received. The fee to be charged for minting was specified, but the amount is not preserved. A charge of three percent is usually restored.³ Next, there is a reference to a surplus of silver (assumed to be the silver which is being minted); in some (unrecoverable) circumstances,

³ ML, no. 45, pp. 111–117. Another fifth-century Athenian text concerned with coinage (IG I 3 90) is too poorly preserved to allow speculation on its possible relevance here. For a conservative translation of the decree, see C. W. Forsnara, Translated Documents of Greece and Rome 1. Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War ² (Cambridge, 1983), no. 97.
it is to be given to the Athenian generals. There follows an obscure provision apparently dealing with a special fund, which is protected by the death penalty. Death is specified as the punishment for proposing that foreign money (if this is the correct restoration) be used or be involved in loans. The election of heralds to announce the decree to the cities throughout the empire is then ordered, with provisions for setting up copies of the decree itself in the marketplaces of the cities and in front of the mint at Athens. Next, an addition is given to the oath to be sworn by members of the Athenian council which pledges them to punish anyone who coins money of silver in the cities of the empire and does not use Athenian coins or weights or measures but instead uses foreign coins and weights and measures. The broken text is then restored to say that anyone may bring money to the mint in Athens to be reminted, and that a list is to be set up at the mint for anyone to see which will record the total of foreign coinage (both silver and electrum, according to a restoration for which there is no text surviving) turned in.

The problems of historical interpretation which this fragmentary document creates are many and mostly insurmountable. The only comfort is that for present purposes the vexed question of the precise date of the decree in the fifth century does not matter. Enough of the text does survive, however, to show that Finley's interpretation is unsatisfactory. This text does not just concern coinage. The requirement that all the Athenian allies use Athenian weights and measures must also be explained. It hardly seems possible to identify local weights and measures as


“traditional symbols of autonomy,” especially since this designation for coinage depends on the idea that the use of local types on local coins makes them symbols of autonomy because the Greek “passion for coins, and for beautiful coins at that” was “essentially a political phenomenon.” But the ban on minting coinage seems to apply only to silver coins, not to coins in other metals, electrum in particular. Yet electrum issues were the standard coinages of several mints in the Athenian Empire. Electrum coinage, in fact, could be used by Athenian allies to make tribute payments. If this decree is meant to be an assertion of sovereignty as a political act, the production of “symbols of autonomy” in other metals should have been banned as well as the production of such symbols in silver.

Various details in the decree strongly suggest a financial motivation for it. Above all, there is the fee to be charged for recomining non-Athenian currency. Even a nominal fee would bring in a gigantic sum to the state treasury if successfully levied on the entire amount of non-Athenian coinage in circulation in the Athenian Empire. Since the plural “drachmas” is preserved on

7 Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, p. 166, quoting J. M. Keynes, *A Treatise on Money*, vol. 1. *The Pure Theory of Money* (London, 1930), p. 12. In fact, Keynes (who is referring to the kings of Lydia and not to the Greeks) is only arguing that the essential duty of the state is to establish the standard for coinage. Keynes explicitly says that it is not necessarily the duty of the state to produce this coinage. This is a very different point from the one Finley wishes to make.

As for weights and measures, the orator Gorgias in his late fifth-century *Defense of Palamedes* has Palamedes, who claims to have invented such things, call them “the convenient standards of commercial exchange” (section 30). The significance of the mention of weights and measures in the decree has tended to be slighted, as A. Giovannini remarks in *Rome et la circulation monétaire en Grèce au IIe siècle avant Jésus-Christ* (Basel, 1968), pp. 75–76. His view is that “l’association, dans la loi, de l’unification de la monnaie avec celle des poids et des mesures montre que les Athéniens ont voulu d’abord faciliter les échanges et les transactions commerciales à l’intérieur de la ligue.”


the stone to indicate the fee charged for each *mina* (one hundred drachmas) recoined, the smallest possible fee is two drachmas, i.e., two percent. This is an important point. Two percent of the value of the non-Athenian coinage in the empire was a great sum of money. Moreover, it is likely that the fee was meant to be exacted after the recoining, not before.\(^{10}\) In this way, the owners of the money bore any losses incurred in the melting down and restriking of their precious metal. Even if the Athenian mint bore these losses, the revenue to be expected from a successful program of this type was very large. But given the history of the Athenian Empire (one thinks of the mines of Thasos), it is unlikely that the Athenians intended to absorb a financial loss in the interest of an abstract idea of sovereignty.

As small a net gain as a fraction of a percent of the total of non-Athenian coinage in the empire was a delightful prospect for the Athenian public treasury. With the benefit of hindsight we may think that it was obvious for practical reasons that the Athenians were unlikely to be able to get their hands on all the foreign currency in the cities under their rule, but the decree clearly implies that they were eager to try.\(^{11}\) This would not be the only example of inflated expectations about the amount of

\(^{10}\) The minting charge is mentioned after the instructions for reminting (section 5). This order implies that the charge came after the reminting. With the text as commonly restored, however, the possibility remains that the charge was to be taken out before the reminting. It is perfectly conceivable that a formal ambiguity on this particular point may have been allowed to stand in the text, as often in Athenian decrees, because the Athenians knew what they meant to say.

\(^{11}\) The enigmatic phrase in section 5 of the decree restored as "[to coin not] less than half" could make sense if it referred to the total of money somehow determined to be in the official possession of each city in the Empire rather than to the amount of currency presented to the mint by an individual. That is, the decree would have required each city to present not less than half its money for immediate recoining. This would have allowed each city to keep some funds on hand to pay expenses until the reminted coins came back from Athens and the remaining non-Athenian currency was sent to Athens for recoining. It would have been unrealistic even for the imperious Athenians to require allied cities to send all their funds to Athens at one time for recoining and thus to be completely without funds while their coins were shipped to Athens, recoined, and then shipped back again.
revenue the Athenians hoped to extract from their allies. The mention of a surplus of some sort also implies that the Athenians intended to make a profit. The list of money turned in at Athens which was ordered to be erected at the mint makes sense as an indirect record of revenue analogous to the Tribute Quota Lists, to be kept in typical Athenian fashion as a guard against embezzlement on the part of those officials who would (the Athenians hoped) be handling tremendous sums of cash, and as a defense against any false accusations of peculation raised by suspicious fellow citizens. We really should not be surprised that the Athenians expected to be able to impose such a measure to their own profit. By comparison with the seigniorage charged in minting coins in the Middle Ages, for example, the Athenian fee may have been moderate.

The explicit concern of the decree with silver coinage also suggests a direct connection with the assessment and the collection of the tribute owed to Athens from the cities of the empire (as Finley points out). This tribute was reckoned exclusively in terms of Athenian silver coinage, as the inscriptive records show, but it was (before the passage of this decree, anyway) not always paid in Athenian silver coinage. Some allied states appear to have paid with local silver coinage, with Persian silver coinage, or with electrum coinage. At the very least this mixture of coinages was highly inconvenient because it required the

12 Compare the reassessment decree of 425 (ML, no. 69), which set the extraordinary (and unfulfilled) goal of collecting approximately 1,500 talents as the annual tribute of the Empire.

13 For example, a rate of 4.5 percent is attested in the early Carolingian period, and a rate of 8.5 percent is attested in A.D. 1174. See Thomas N. Bisson, Conservation of Coinage (Oxford, 1979), p. 5. For the rate of “agio” among the Greeks, see Raymond Bogaert, Banques et banquiers dans les cités grecques (Leiden, 1968), pp. 323–331. T. V. Buttrey, “The Athenian Currency Law of 375/4 B.C.,” in Greek Numismatics and Archaeology. Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson, ed. O. Mørkholm and N. M. Waggoner (Wetteren, Belgium, 1979), pp. 44–45, comments on the “considerable profit in seigniorage from the recoinage of the issues which had been decried [i.e., of other states]” implied by the fifth-century Coinage Decree.

annually changing officials in charge of the tribute to check constantly on the fineness, the weight, and the authenticity of unfamiliar coinages and to calculate their value in Athenian coinage to see if each city was paying its assessed tribute in full. Moreover, other inscriptive evidence shows how complicated and cumbersome the Athenian procedure was for assessing tribute and verifying its proper level. Besides the relevant annual officials directly concerned, other citizens serving in official capacities were also supposed to check on the status of individual states and their payments. This was no simple matter. The Athenian council and courts of the fifth century, moreover, were overloaded with other public business. Hearing arguments about just how many foreign silver coins of a certain type equaled the amount of tribute owed in Athenian coinage and checking the reliability of these pieces was bound to become an unwelcome chore simply because the number of coins involved was so large.

The annual revenue from allied tribute payments was in the neighborhood of four hundred talents, an amount equal to 2,400,000 drachms or 600,000 tetradrachms. Those totals meant that for purely practical reasons it would be much easier for the Athenians to get their revenue and to keep tabs on payment if at least most of the allies paid in Athenian coins in the first place. An additional benefit would be that the state would no longer be burdened with odd amounts of foreign silver coinages which no one at Athens wanted to accept. As Xenophon says, non-Athenian silver coinages were often not welcome outside their local area. The official financial records of Athens in this period show that funds in electrum tended not to be dispersed but kept in storage year after year, presumably because people demanded Athenian coins in payment from the city for services rendered or

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15 See ML, nos. 46, 68, 69, 77.
16 Ps.-Xenophon, Constitution of the Athenians 3.1–9.
17 See ML, pp. 87–88, for a discussion of this problematical figure.
18 It would have been bothersome to count out a large sum even in Athenian tetradrachms, let alone in foreign coinages. See Demosthenes 27.58 for the counting out in public of an amount something over six talents.
19 Poroï 3.2.
materials delivered. Foreign silver accepted as payment of tribute would have to be melted down and then reminted as Athenian coinage before it could be used by the city to pay its bills. That process cost money and inevitably involved loss of silver in the manufacturing of new coinage from old. The Athenians could most easily verify that they were getting the full tribute if the silver they received was exclusively Athenian. That would leave only the relatively limited payments in familiar electrum coinages (which counted as gold) to be tallied in a separate fashion. Of course, this goal could have been achieved by a measure which merely stipulated that all tribute payments (except those in electrum, i.e., in gold) would have to be made in Athenian coinage and did not ban the production of foreign silver coinage or the use of non-Athenian silver coinage, weights, and measures. This is another reason to believe that the Athenians had in mind to charge the allies for recoining their money in order to earn a large profit for the city (even from a small fee) over and above the costs of the procedure.

This concern with revenue can also explain the inclusion of weights and measures in the decree (apart from the direct link between coins and weights as units of weight). The Athenians levied taxes on goods in order to raise revenue from import/export traffic, and these taxes were set at a certain percentage of the value of the goods involved. It was obviously necessary to know the exact weight (for objects of precious metal, for example) or volume (for bulk items such as grain) of the goods in a shipment if the tax was to be levied and collected accurately. Collecting these taxes was a complicated business so long as it was necessary to contend with shipments of goods

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20 For example, ML, no. 59. See Bodenstedt, Elektron-Geld, pp. 83–84, who perhaps goes too far in arguing that electrum served as a "Reservewährung" for the Delian League.


22 For the link, see Kraay's discussion in ACGC, pp. 313–317, on the origins of Greek coinage.

whose quantities were determined and recorded according to foreign weights and measures. As an example, let us suppose that a ship arrived in the Piraeus from the island of Thasos with a shipment of wine contained in amphoras made to conform to Thasian standards of measure rather than to Athenian. First, the number of amphoras in the shipment would have to be determined in order to levy the import tax. Next, the proper ratio between Thasian and Athenian liquid measures would have to be determined and the size of the shipment calculated on Athenian standards. Finally, to be absolutely certain of the accuracy of the calculations, an empirical test would have to be performed for each such shipment because the person doing all this could never be sure that the measures in question had not changed, or even been fraudulently altered, since the last time he had seen this particular standard. It would be far easier to check this sort of detail if one had to deal with only one kind of measure, the kind for which official Athenian standards were at hand as an easy and sure guide. 24 Many more shipments of foreign goods could be processed in the same amount of time and with far greater accuracy (i.e., full collection of the duty owed) if it was necessary to refer only to one universal set of weights and measures. Since the Athenians in the later fifth century enjoyed the benefits of a very large foreign trade in all sorts of goods in great quantities, these practical considerations were far from minor. 25 The amount of revenue involved was significant. We do not have the information to break down the revenues of Athens into precise categories, but at the start of the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C. the Athenians took in about four hundred talents of their annual


25 On the volume of trade, see Ps.-Xenophon, Constitution of the Athenians 2.7. The practical considerations were important even if these taxes were being collected by tax-farmers because the price for the tax contract to be paid to the state would be higher if it was expected that collection would be more efficient. On tax-farming, see, for example, Andocides 1.133–134; Demosthenes 24.122; Lycurgus, Vs. Leocr. 19, 58; Aristotle, Ath. Pol. 47.2–3; Plutarch, Alcibiades 5.
income of one thousand talents from "overseas revenue."²⁶ Although there is no way to determine how much of this total came precisely from taxes on trade, the figure gives some idea of the importance of the revenues which Athens derived from sources other than the tribute paid by the members of her empire. Measures to protect and to enhance that "overseas revenue" were important.

Analogous to the tax on goods was the requirement that Athenian allies as well as Athenian farmers send contributions in kind ("first fruits") to Eleusis each year in honor of the goddess Demeter.²⁷ These contributions were set at 1/600 of all barley and 1/1200 of all wheat. This was obviously a large amount when collected empirewide and was a form of imperial revenue. Uniform weights and measures would again have facilitated the assessment and collection of "first fruits" in the requisite quantities. The same was true in the case of Athenian regulation of the export of grain from the Black Sea region. From two inscriptions we learn that the Athenians set a limit to the number of measures of grain that certain cities could get from Black Sea sources. There were Athenian officials known as "guards of the Hellespont" whose job it was to see that these limits, defined by Athenian measures, were respected.²⁸ Again, their task was going to be much easier if they only had to deal with shipments in Athenian measures.

It is certainly not my intent to deny that the Athenian Coinage Decree was an expression of the power of an imperial state over subordinate states. Thucydides' account of Athenian action against the allied states of Naxos and Thasos in the 460s is more than enough to show the imperial attitude of Athens toward her

²⁷ ML, no. 73.
“free allies.” Ordering their allies to use Athenian coins, weights, and measures was entirely consistent with the attitude of the Athenians throughout this period of their history. But why was the order given? It seems reasonable to suggest that the Athenians wanted to improve the collection of revenue in the empire and to facilitate the regulation of the grain trade, so crucial to an Athens dependent on imported food. In other words, the Coinage Decree was not a “political act without any commercial or financial advantage to the Athenians.” In contemporary American political jargon, it was a radical attempt to implement a “revenue enhancement act,” which, as Finley says, also ensured Athenian imports of food. When the Athenians in 425 greatly increased the amount of tribute owed by their allies, and in 413 abandoned the system of tribute in favor of a harbor tax, their principal motive was the same: an eminently practical concern to increase revenue.

That the Coinage Decree was not long remembered as a special outrage against the sovereignty of other states is suggested by the failure of fourth-century sources to mention it in references to the repressive measures of the Athenian Empire in the fifth century. For example, Isocrates fails to mention it both in

\[29\] 1.98, 1.100–101.

\[30\] Economy and Society, pp. 56–57. Cf. Will, “Les sources des métaux,” Numismatique antique, p. 101, who argues that the Athenians by the mid-fifth century needed to melt down allied issues in order to produce more Athenian issues to pay their higher expenses. On his view, the Coinage Decree was intended to alleviate this shortage.

\[31\] See ML, no. 69; Finley, Economy and Society, p. 57. A similar concern with the practical advantages of eliminating diverse monetary and measuring systems can be seen in the Roman requirement that local systems in the provinces be compatible with the Roman system. On this requirement, see M. Crawford, “Finance, Coinage and Money from the Severans to Constantine,” in Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, vol. II, part 2, ed. H. Temporini (Berlin, 1975), p. 561.

\[32\] The one possible reference to the decree is, of course, in Aristophanes, Birds, lines 1040–1041 (414 B.C.), if one accepts Bergk’s emendation. On later views of the Empire, see R. Meiggs, The Athenian Empire (Oxford, 1972), pp. 397–403; J. T. Chambers, “The IV Century Athenians’ View of Their Fifth-Century Empire,” Parola del passato 162 (1975), pp. 177–191. It was perhaps easier for the decree to fade from memory because it never seems to have been successfully implemented (so far as one can judge from the numismatic evidence).
his discussion of the harsh side of Athenian rule in *Panegyricus* 100–119 (380 B.C.) and in his report in *Panathenaicus* 53–73 (342 B.C.) of the criticisms leveled by others against the empire of the fifth century. Particularly significant is the lack of any explicit reference to the type of provisions included in the Coinage Decree in the inscribed list of practices which the Athenians swore not to inflict on their allies in their fourth-century league.\(^{33}\) There is no mention in this inscription from 378/7 of coins or of weights or of measures in the list of “rights” which the Athenians guarantee to their new allies under the category of “freedom and autonomy.” We can draw two conclusions from this evidence. First, neither the Athenians nor their allies in the fourth century had given any thought to the status of local coinage as an important component of “freedom and autonomy” which had to be guaranteed under the new arrangement. Second, the allies did not recall the Coinage Decree as derogating from their autonomy, as other practices named were remembered to have done.

The recently discovered Athenian law on silver coinage of 375/4 is equally unenlightening on any connection between sovereignty and coinage.\(^{34}\) This law requires the acceptance of genuine Athenian silver coinage in financial transactions, specifies the duties of the public slaves whose job it is to verify the genuineness of silver coins, and lays down the penalties for failure to comply with its provisions. Whether the law also meant that foreign imitations of Athenian coinage in good silver had to be accepted is controversial.\(^{35}\) But this point does not affect the present argument because, whatever its positive requirements, the law did not explicitly forbid the use of non-

\(^{33}\) *IG* II\(^2\) 43, for which now see Jack Cargill, *The Second Athenian League* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 14–47.


Athenian coinage in financial transactions. The motive of this law was to ensure a smoothly functioning currency system in Athens when circumstances about which we are uninformed had disrupted that system. 36 This inscription reveals a clear concern of the lawmakers with finance in the circumstances at hand, but considerations of sovereignty seem distant and irrelevant. The same can be said of the early-fourth-century agreement between Mytilene and Phocaea on the production of electrum coinage. 37 In the text as we have it, the main concern of the agreement is to protect the integrity of this "gold" coinage by setting up mechanisms to punish those who would try to debase it. The two states involved also apparently agreed to mint coins in alternate years, but there is no indication that this arrangement had any motive beyond the equitable sharing in a cooperative way of the practical responsibilities and rewards of minting this extremely valuable coinage. As has been well said, this was a commercial agreement. To read it, however, also as a statement with important implications for considerations of sovereignty seems unwarranted. 38

The next document to be discussed is an incomplete inscription from the fourth century B.C. which refers to regulations


37 GHI, no. 112 = SVA II, no. 228.

38 See the comments of A. J. Graham, Colony and Mother City in Ancient Greece (Manchester, 1971), p. 123: "The issue of coins was a matter of political prestige, as may be seen from the agreement between Mytilene and Phocaea to issue coins in alternate years. . . . This is a commercial agreement, involving the use of the same coins by two cities, but it is necessary to establish strict equality in the issue of the coins: otherwise, it may be presumed, their status as independent cities was thought to be impugned." One might imagine that "strict equality" was important because significant amounts of money were involved in the production of electrum, and neither city wanted to suffer from the bargain. A. Giovannini, Rome et la circulation monétaire en Grèce au IIe siècle avant Jésus-Christ (Basel, 1978), pp. 75–76, agrees in emphasizing "le but économique ou financier" of this and other monetary measures known from Greece of the fifth to the second century B.C.
concerning coinage in the city of Olbia on the Black Sea. The text runs as follows:

There is to be access to Borysthenes [i.e., the territory of Olbia] on the following conditions. It was resolved by the council and the people; Kanobos son of Thrasydamas put forward the motion. There is to be import of all gold bearing a sign and silver bearing a sign [i.e., coinage] and export. The one wishing to sell or buy coined gold or silver, let him sell and buy at the stone in the assembly’s meeting place. Whoever sells or buys elsewhere, the seller will be fined the amount of the silver sold, the buyer the amount of the price of what he bought. Everything is to be sold and bought with the coinage of the city, with the bronze and the silver of the Olbiopolitans. Whoever sells or buys with another [i.e., coinage], the seller shall be deprived of what he sells, the buyer of the amount of what he buys. Whoever buys the contract for collecting fines from transgressors shall exact the fines from those who transgress against this decree, having convicted them in court. In the selling and buying of gold, the Cyzicene stater is to be worth [? —the number is uncertain because the text is damaged] staters [of Olbian silver coinage], neither more nor less. All other gold and silver coinage is to be sold and bought as the parties involved may agree. There is to be no tax exacted on the sale or the purchase of gold or silver coinage . . . [the rest of the text is too damaged to be read].

39 SIG 3 218. The value of the Cyzicene stater is usually restored as 10 1/2, but 8 1/2 has been suggested by J. G. Vinogradov and P. O. Karyskowski, “The Canobus Decree on Money from Olbia and the Value of Precious Metals on the Black Sea in the Fourth Century,” VDI 4 (138) 1976, pp. 20–42 (in Russian with English summary). The latter restoration would yield the normal rate of exchange between silver and electrum for the period of Alexander rather than an inflated value for the electrum staters. These authors date the inscription to the third quarter of the fourth century. The reference to bronze coinage shows that the decree is more recent than the introduction at Olbia of coinage in this metal, which obviously came earlier than the decree dated to the 320s which mentions it as apparently a relatively recent event. See J. G. Vinogradov, Olbia. Geschichte einer altgriechischen Stadt am Schwarzen Meer (Constance, 1981, Xenia. Konstanzer althistorische Vorträge und Forschungen 1), p. 29.

The use of πρὸς τὸ νόμισμα to mean to buy and to sell “with the coinage” is perhaps awkward. πρὸς seems to mean “with reference to” the coinage indicated in SIG 3 495, line 16. Cf. πρὸς in IG II 2 1013, line 14 and Aristotle, Ath. Pol. 51.3. To buy “with” coinage would perhaps be better expressed by the dative case (cf. Thucydides 3.40.1), or by διά with the genitive (cf. Plato, Sophist 223e3). In other words, the expression used in the text could conceivably imply that the city’s coinage would be a kind of “money of account” to
It has recently been suggested that for reasons of civic pride Olibia imposed the use of her own coins "for no other reason than she imposes the use of her laws."\textsuperscript{40} In other words, the aim of the decree on this interpretation was to assert the sovereignty of the city by means of a uniform monetary circulation. Again, as in the case of the Athenian Coinage Decree, an explanation of this kind fails to take into account the text as a whole. It hardly seems possible to understand the situation at Olibia this decree was addressing without considering the issues of the right of access to the city and permission to import and export precious metal in the form of coinage. The first lines of the text make it clear that these are the issues of direct concern in this instance.

Another fourth-century inscription from Olibia shows the importance of these same issues and of the policy on trade in precious metals which this decree specified. This second text is a proxeny decree which grants special privileges to a man from the city of Mesembria and to his descendants and family. Two of the privileges listed are access to the city and permission to import and export without tax all the money they like.\textsuperscript{41} If these are special privileges granted in this case to special friends of the city, the implication is that at the time of this proxeny decree other foreigners (and perhaps Olbian citizens) did not ordinarily enjoy these rights. For example, there obviously was a regular tax on the import and export of gold and silver coins. Otherwise, the special exemption granted in the proxeny decree would

serve as a yardstick for fast and precise comparisons by traders and merchants of the prices being offered for precious metal coinage by different dealers operating in the Olbian market.


\textsuperscript{41} \textit{SIG} \textsuperscript{3} 219. For other comparable decrees, see \textit{Inscriptiones Olbiae 1917–1965} (Leningrad, 1968), nos. 3, 6–9, 14–15, 20.
be pointless. The decree on coinage gives the right of access and free importation and exportation of coinage to everyone, not just to special friends of the city. This proxeny decree and others like it presumably reflect the situation before the passage of the coinage decree (or after its failure and repeal?), a measure which in effect turned Olbia into a duty-free port open to all for the sale and purchase of gold and silver coinage. This measure would have facilitated trade in precious metals in the form of coinage and boosted trade in general by making it easy for traders to import and export the coinage used in financial transactions of all kinds.  

On this interpretation, the various provisions of the decree make sense as an ensemble intended to promote an effective, popular, and lucrative market. Anyone can bring in or take out as much gold and silver coinage as he likes, and he can sell it as he pleases, so long as he does it at the specified location. This specification may mean that there was an official monopoly on money-changing, as, for example, there was at Byzantium for a time at least during the fourth century. At the very least it suggests that there was some sort of official interest in the process of exchange. Since sales and purchases are to take place at a certain location, it was easy to enforce the sole price regulation of the decree (the value specified for Cyzicene staters) and to allow interested parties to get together to make mutually advantageous deals for their money. Just as in any concentrated, centralized market for one commodity which is peopled by various dealers trying to sell the same thing, the side-by-side competition was

42 The word “everything” or “all” (παντας) in line 14 of the Olbian coinage decree is usually taken to refer to all goods bought and sold in Olbia, but the decree otherwise mentions nothing except gold and silver coinage. It is not out of the question that the word means only “all gold and silver coinage.”

going to keep prices in line and promote a volume business. (One can compare, for example, the central market of modern Athens, where the location of many small butchers’ shops one next to another makes it convenient both for shoppers to look for the best meat at the best price and for the market police to enforce local regulations.) This arrangement of the market combined with the abolition of taxes on the importation of precious metals would have made Olbia an attractive port of call for foreign traders.

Ease in comparative shopping in the interests of an effective market could conceivably explain the requirement that Olbian coinage be used in transactions (if this is what the decree required). Sellers and buyers of different foreign gold and silver coinages (and of other goods, for that matter) would find it much simpler to compare prices and to find the best deal for their money if only one standard was in use against which all coinages had to be tariffed. But a better explanation of the requirement could be that the Olbians planned to profit from it. That is, a trader who wanted to exchange, for example, Athenian coinage for Macedonian coinage after striking a deal with another trader or with a money-changer would be required to change his Athenian coins into Olbian ones and then change the Olbian coins into Macedonian ones. He would then pay the exchange fee twice, once when buying Olbian coins and once when selling them. This practice will be familiar to travelers in Europe who wish to exchange one foreign currency for another in a third country and are forced to buy and then immediately sell the currency of the host country in order to complete the transaction, paying a bank charge twice. This “nuisance” fee would have been a good source of revenue for the Olbians as a whole if there was an official monopoly of money-changing, or for those individuals involved in this business if there was no state monopoly. (In the latter case, individuals may have paid a fee for the privilege of conducting this business.) The important consideration was to make Olbia an attractive place for traders to do their business despite any such expenses as exchange fees. The removal of the tax on the import and export of precious metals would have provided the necessary attraction. The Olbians were
trying to become an international “free market” for currency, a phenomenon familiar from recent history at the time when the restrictions on European currencies made it profitable for distant places like Hong Kong and Singapore to turn themselves into such free markets for currency. If the variety of foreign coins found at Olbia is any indication, the Olbians had some success in attracting this kind of business.44

The one specified price in the decree illustrates how the standard was to work. By setting a price in Olbian money for Cyzicene staters (of electrum, which as usual passed as gold), the Olbians both made these staters serve in practice as the gold issue which the local coinage lacked and established a benchmark for the valuation of local coinage, the market standard. But the absence of taxes on the sale and purchase of gold and silver coinage in transactions which could be arranged without government interference confirmed the free nature of the market, a significant change from past practice when a tax had been imposed.

An interpretation which excludes commercial or financial motives for this decree in favor of political motives linked to the required use of local coinage misses the mark. Founded on a trade route with the interior, Olbia flourished in the sixth and fifth centuries. But by the fourth century, less happy times had perhaps begun, and the third century was a period of decline.45 The decree concerned with coinage would fit well in a period when the Olbians were trying to prevent or ameliorate deterioration in the local economy by creating a convenient, price-competitive, and untaxed market for gold and silver coinage from which they could profit both directly and indirectly.46 The Olbian monetary decree was a political decision in the sense that

44 For the range of foreign coinage found in Olbia, see W. Ziebell, Olbia. Eine griechische Stadt in Süd-Russland (Hamburg, 1937), p. 75.
46 For the sort of indirect benefits to be expected from more commercial traffic, see the tax attested at Cyzicus in the sixth century (SIG 3 4) and the remarks of Ps.-Xenophon, Constitution of the Athenians 1.17.
it was made by the citizens of a polis in their own interest, but it was not a decision to do with the assertion of political sovereignty through the imposition of a uniform monetary system.

2
Views on Coinage in Classical Literature

The second category of evidence which must be treated here consists of the relevant references to coinage in the literature of the classical period. First, there are the opinions offered about the origin of coinage. The stories current in the fifth and fourth centuries on this subject should reveal traces of any contemporary notion that sovereignty and coinage were closely connected, especially since by this period Greek coinages were normally issued by states, not by private individuals.47

The sixth-century thinker Xenophanes is said to have attributed the invention of coinage to the Lydians.48 No other details of his opinion are recorded, such as why it was invented or whether by a king (e.g., Croesus) or by private individuals. Herodotus in the fifth century held the same opinion, but he added another detail: "The first men we know to have coined money of gold and silver and used it were the Lydians; they were also the first retail merchants."49 The second fact is not explicitly given as an explanation of the first, but there is an implied


49 1.94.1.
connection. The Lydians, whether king or individuals, invented precious metal coinage in the interests of commerce. The same motive is spelled out more clearly by the fourth-century historian Ephorus, who reported that Pheidon, king and then tyrant of Argos, struck the first silver coins on the island of Aegina, "for the island became a place for foreign trade because the land was poor and the people engaged in trading by sea."50 In this case the invention of coinage is attributed to a king, but there is no indication that his invention had anything to do with the assertion of his own royal or tyrannical sovereignty. Rather, Pheidon invented coinage to facilitate commerce, in this instance foreign trade.

Commercial motives for the invention of coinage are explicitly recorded as part of the tradition by Plato very briefly in Republic 2.371b8–9 and by Demosthenes in a speech of 353/2 B.C. which contains remarks he attributes to Solon.51 According to Demosthenes, Solon argued that the counterfeiters of laws ought to be punished if, as was the case in all states, the counterfeiters of coinage were put to death; this argument was all the more compelling because the laws are the coinage of the state, so to speak, while silver coinage was invented by private individuals for private transactions and belonged to them. For our purposes, the important point is that Demosthenes in the mid-fourth century can attribute to Solon a view on the origin of coinage which is about as far as one can get from any tradition that coinage was invented by a sovereign as an assertion of sovereignty.

Aristotle echoes this idea that coinage was invented expressly to serve the needs of people in exchanges. In Ethics 5.1133a19–b28, he makes it clear that men invented coinage to facilitate the exchange of different kinds of goods. Money is therefore conventional rather than natural, as it functions among men "by agreement." Since this passage is concerned with the

51 24.212–214.
nature of exchange rather than with a historical description of the role of money in society, one might argue that the context explains Aristotle's failure here to assign any further significance to money, such as a connection with the assertion of political sovereignty. In *Politics* 1.1257a31–b7, however, Aristotle describes the historical development of money. At first, he says, men relied on barter to exchange goods. The invention and use of money came as natural developments from this more primitive system of exchange. The development of money spurred profit making in trade as a way of life.\(^{52}\) Aristotle states again in this second passage that coinage functioned as a medium of exchange "by agreement." If he meant by this any kind of literal agreement, the context indicates that it was an agreement among individuals for their individual convenience.\(^{53}\) If Aristotle perceived an important connection between coinage and sovereignty, this section of the *Politics* would have been a good place to make the point because he explicitly comments on the change from precious metal used as money by size and weight to the use of actual coins minted with a type (χαρακτήρ). All he says about this χαρακτήρ is that men put it on money to free themselves of the necessity of measuring, i.e., of the need to determine the value of money by weighing it in every transaction. The χαρακτήρ, Aristotle states, was put on as a sign of the amount. There is nothing here about the type as "the badge of the city" or coinage as a symbol of autonomy.

From even this brief summary it should be evident that the opinions current in the classical period on the origin of Greek coinage reveal no interest in any notions about a connection between sovereignty and coinage. Even when the invention of coinage is attributed to a sovereign such as Pheidon, the motive is to promote commerce, not to make a political statement.

A second body of evidence from literature to be scrutinized


\(^{53}\) For the view that it was a private international agreement, see J. Moreau, "Aristote et la monnaie," *REG* 82 (1969), p. 351.
for traces of a classical tradition on sovereignty and coinage is political philosophy. It is especially to be regretted that the once considerable classical and early Hellenistic literature on monarchy is for all practical purposes lost.  

For example, we cannot know whether Aristotle had anything to say about coinage in his treatise *On Kingship*, which he is traditionally believed to have written for Alexander's edification. From what was originally perhaps a much larger body of material, only one item in fourth-century political philosophy has survived which discusses the place of coinage in a well-run state. In *Laws* 5.741e-742c, Plato sets out the ideal practical arrangements for a small city-state. One of the things he believes this state should forbid is excessive moneymaking and piling up wealth. To that end, there must be a law forbidding private individuals to possess any gold and silver. They are allowed to have only coinage that is valid within the confines of the home state for the use of craftsmen and the necessary payment of wages but is unacceptable as currency in the outside world. For the payment of the state's expenses in dealing with the outside world, it should acquire “regular Hellenic coinage” (κοινὸν Ἑλληνικὸν νόμισμα) which can be used, for example, on visits abroad by officials of the state. If a private person goes abroad with official permission and returns home with “foreign coinage” (ξενικὸν νόμισμα) left over, he is to deposit it with the state and take in return a corresponding amount of “local” (ἐπιχώριον) coinage. Failure to do so is a serious crime. This section of the *Laws* ends with a prohibition of dowry and of lending money at interest.

54 On this genre of literature, see E. R. Goodenough, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship,” *YCS* 1 (1928), pp. 55–102; L. Delatte, *Les traités de la royauté d’Echhante, Diotogène et Sténidas* (Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l’Université de Liège 97, 1942), pp. 282–290; P. Hadot, “Fürstenspiegel,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart, 1972), cols. 555–632; Olaf Müller, *Antigonos Monophthalmos und "Das Jahr der Könige"* (Bonn, 1973), pp. 109–110. Kingship figures as a subject for discussion in the *Politicus* of Plato, but no substantive details are offered on mundane topics such as how to control the monetary system. When coinage is mentioned in 289b2–5, it is presented as of marginal importance for the subject at hand.

Such a system would naturally impose a uniform monetary circulation of only local coinage in the home state, but the goal is ethical, not political in the modern sense required if this uniform circulation was to be enforced in the interest of asserting the state’s sovereignty. Plato is trying to devise a system that will promote the ethical well-being of the citizens in clear imitation of the arrangements for coinage at Sparta in the classical period.\textsuperscript{56} His ethical goal requires the state to control the monetary system, and everything else for that matter, but this requirement is not imposed by the nature of coinage as, for example, a symbol of the state’s sovereignty, but by the nature of men as imperfect beings.

In sum, then, one sees that neither the documentary nor the literary evidence from the classical period supports the idea that any close connection was perceived between sovereignty and coinage which would have made coins into the symbols of autonomy or badges of independence of every sovereign state. The conclusion already suggested by the numismatic and historical evidence is confirmed.