

# Defence and Coinage in Late Classical and Hellenistic Crete

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## Abstract

Recent research has demonstrated the link between coinage and public expenditure, especially military. Crete was famous for the incessant wars between its cities. However, even if the precious metal for minting coinage came mainly from the military activities of the Cretans, as mercenaries *par excellence* in the armies of the Hellenistic powers, and also as pirates, the link between war and coinage is not always obvious. This is especially the case for a local currency that did not circulate outside the island. However, there are periods of minting activity related to military causes, either internal or external. Thus, the goal of this study is to investigate if during these periods a relation could be established between minting and the building of defence infrastructures.

The purpose of this paper is to combine our respective knowledge on the defences of the Cretan cities and their coinage in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods to see if there is a relation between public expenditure for urban and extra-urban fortifications and patterns of coin production on the island.

## The Fortifications: Methodological Problems

### *City Walls and Coinage as Markers of City Status?*

Although the existence of a city wall and the activity of minting coins generally indicate city status, they are not necessarily essential elements. In Crete ca. 43 cities or communities minted silver or bronze coinage in the Classical and Hellenistic periods (fig. 1). We know that coinage is dissociated from the concept of sovereignty and independence of a city-state.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, even if the city walls, if they exist, are indeed the mark of the status of city, the cities which do not have any, are nonetheless cities. Thus, according to the study carried out on the urban fortifications in Crete, of the 56 Cretan sites considered as cities (fig. 2),<sup>2</sup> more than half are not fortified (fig. 3). Of the 29 fortified cities,<sup>3</sup> whether minor or important, whether on the coast or inland, only 18 have coinage (fig. 4).<sup>4</sup> Thus, it seems that neither geographical location nor political importance is a sufficient criterion for the construction of a city wall.

### *The Reasons for Building: Differences between Eastern and Western Crete*

During the Hellenistic period, internal conflicts multiplied for hegemonic, territorial, socio-economic, and ideological reasons. In eastern Crete, the building of urban fortifications is often related to a specific danger, particularly under the pressure of Praisos

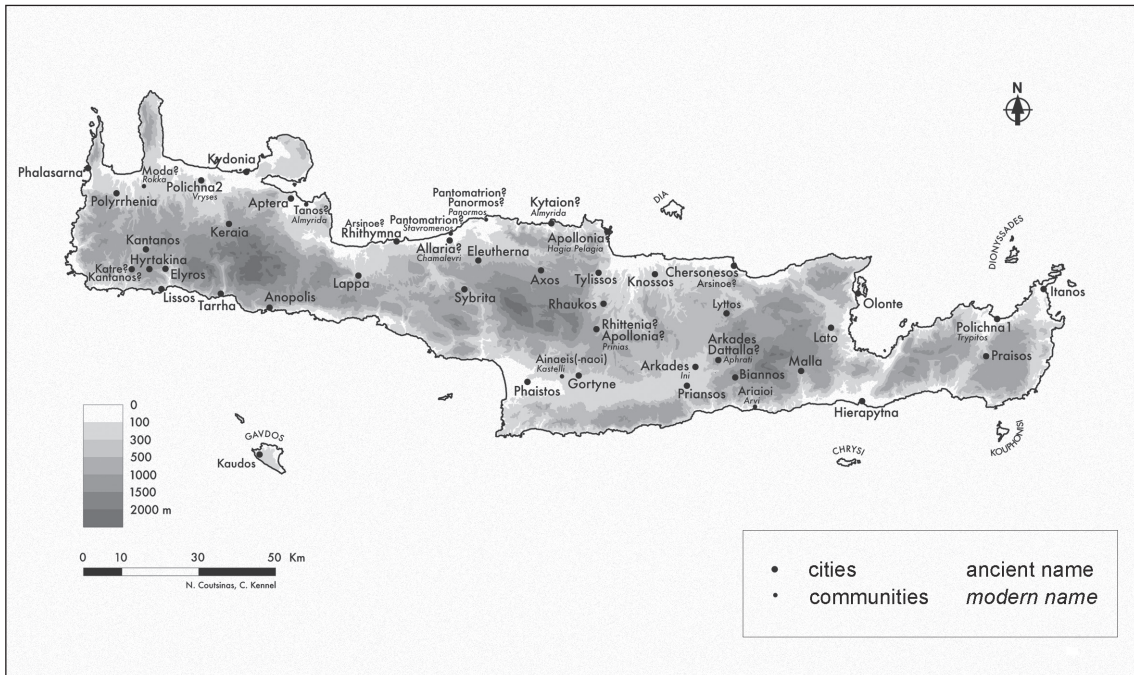


Fig. 1: Cities and communities minting coins.

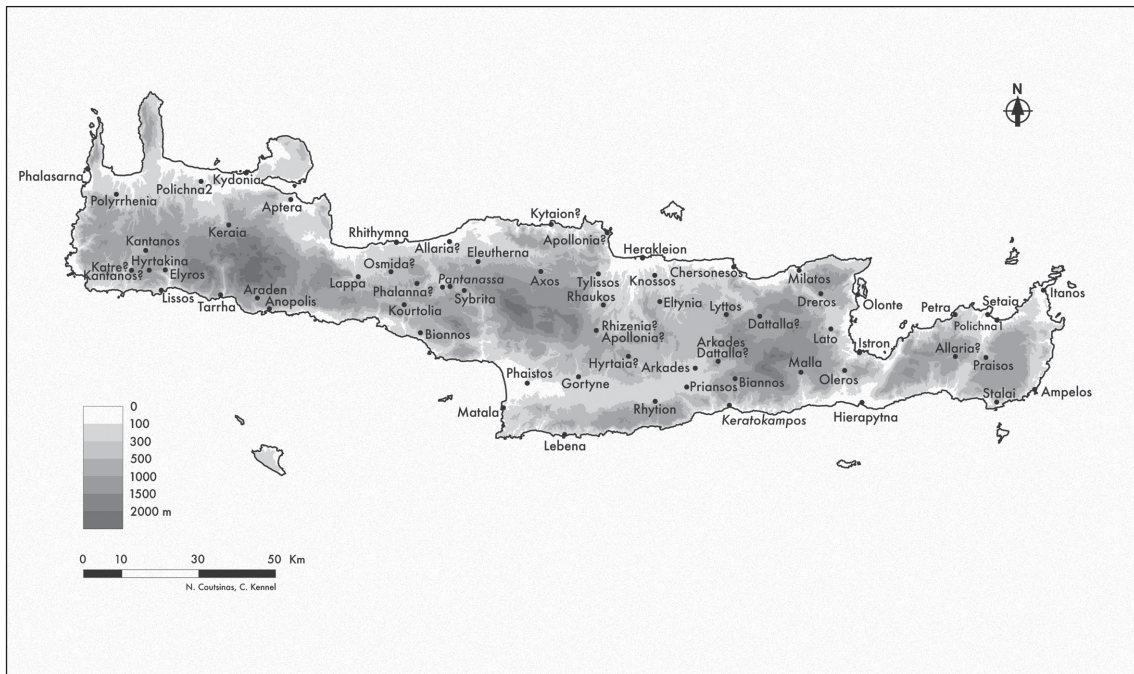


Fig. 2: The cities of Crete.

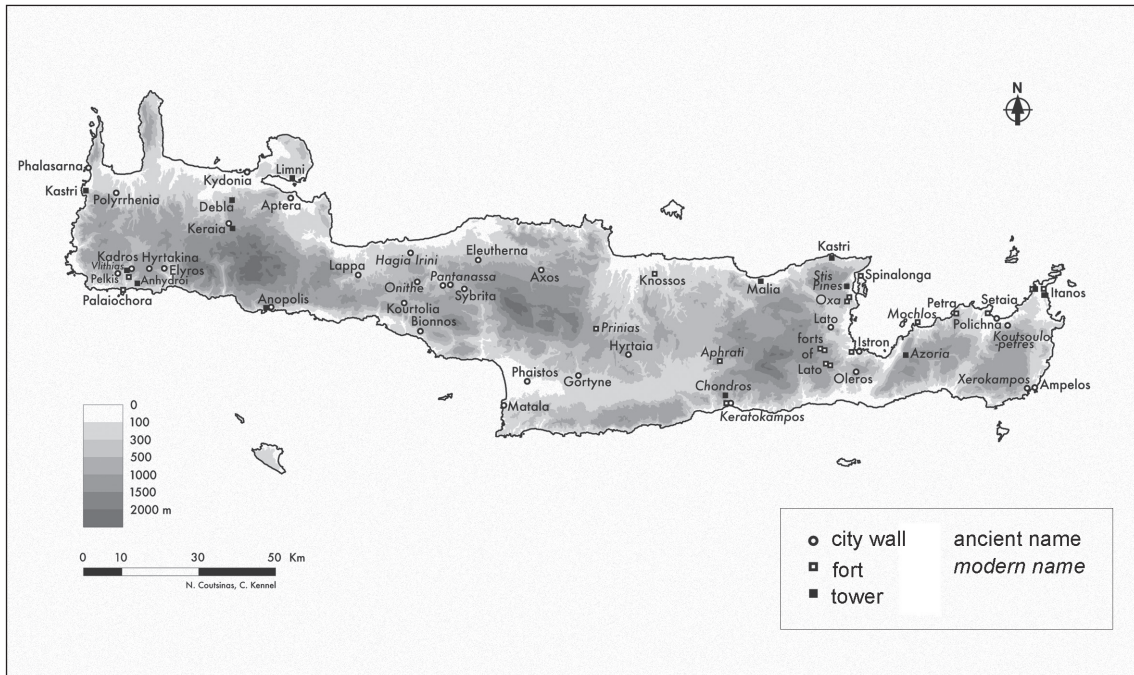


Fig. 3: Cretan fortifications.

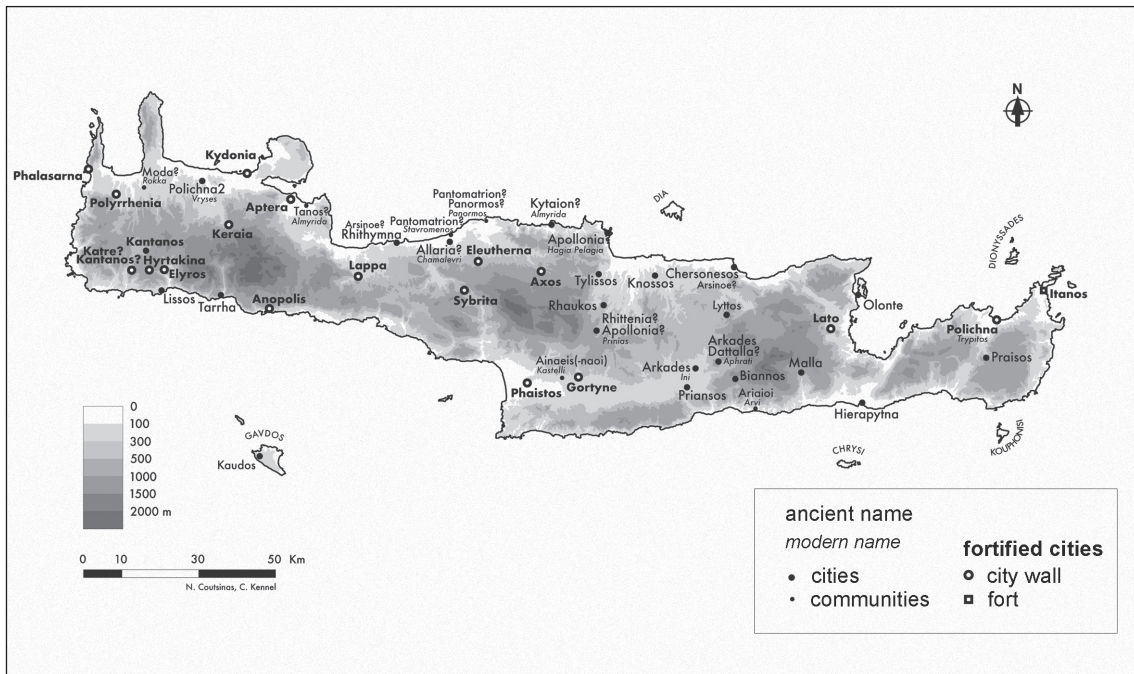


Fig. 4: The fortified cities amongst the cities and communities minting coins.

and Hierapytna, and in western Messara under the pressure of Gortyn. On the contrary, in western Crete most of the city walls constructed in the Classical period (Aptera, Phalasarna, Keraia, and Kydonia), are mainly “prestige” walls that do not respond to a specific threat.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The Dating of Fortifications*

The dating of fortifications and their replacement in a specific historical context, especially in Crete, remains vague and approximate because of certain difficulties:

- a. the near absence of written historical sources and their problematic use for the dating of the fortifications. For the Hellenistic period, the cities for which we have both written sources and archaeological remains are: Kydonia, Anopolis, Gortyn, Itanos, and Eleutherna;<sup>6</sup>
- b. the study of the masonry type and the structural features that allow only a general dating to the Classical or Hellenistic period;
- c. the scarcity of stratigraphic excavations in order to identify the chronological phases of construction.<sup>7</sup> The only specific excavations in Crete concern the extra-urban fortifications, located in strategic points of the territory.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, among the urban and extra-urban fortifications in Crete, those more accurately dated are: the city walls of Cap Koutri – Phalasarna (335–325 BC), the fort of Erimoupolis-Itanos (350–250 BC); the watch tower of Azoria-Hierapytna (end of 3<sup>rd</sup> – beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC); the fort of Prinias, Patela – Rhizenia (?) (end of 3<sup>rd</sup> or beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), and the city walls of Hagioi Deká, Prophitis Ilias – Gortyn (221–219 BC and 80s or 70s BC).<sup>9</sup>

### **The Financing of Defence Infrastructures**

The protection and defence of the territory of the cities required expenses in three categories: 1) the building and restoration of urban and extra-urban fortifications; 2) the building and restoration of the fleet; 3) the equipment and manning of these defences and mainly the pay of men (citizens and mercenaries) engaged in the operations.<sup>10</sup>

Especially in Crete, the modes of financing and the cost of the defensive works are topics difficult to treat because of the scarcity of written texts. In the case of the Hellenistic cities, the purpose of a large number of public subscriptions and loans from the late Classical period were associated with war expenses, including the building and repair of fortifications and towers.<sup>11</sup> However, few documents mention the construction of fortifications, with the rare inscriptions instead mentioning repair works.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The Funding Sources*

The financing of defence works comes, on the one hand, from the income of the city and in some cases from special funds assigned to the building or restoration of city walls or

forts. On the other hand, it can come from citizens, wealthy individuals, kings, foreign cities and sanctuaries, through *eisphorai*, *epidoseis*, donations and loans.<sup>13</sup>

However, it is necessary to underscore the absence in Hellenistic Crete of subscriptions among citizens and other inhabitants and of loans contracted with private individuals or other cities. There is also the near absence (unlike the Roman period), of local *euergetai* or *choregoi* as evidenced by the small number of decrees and honorary inscriptions found on the island, dedicated mainly to kings, Roman magistrates and doctors. It is well known that in Crete, most of the projects for the construction and restoration of temples and statues were undertaken and supervised by the State and financed by public funds.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, there is one example of funding by foreign powers: Gortyn's city walls. According to Strabo's testimony (10.4.11), Gortyn's city wall was financed by Ptolemy IV Philopator (222–204 BC), but remained unfinished. The construction is certainly to be placed in the years of the war against Lyttos (221–219 BC). In the 80's or 70's,<sup>15</sup> the city tried again to protect itself, probably because of a serious political and military crisis.<sup>16</sup> It was then necessary to build new city walls, the first ones being probably too ruined to be repaired.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, according to a recent hypothesis, the fortified harbour of Phalasarna, built between 335–325 BC and then rebuilt in the Hellenistic period,<sup>18</sup> was financed by Persian money that arrived in Crete in 333 BC through the king of Sparta, Agis III. This was for the recruitment of the mercenaries on the island.<sup>19</sup> Its construction was probably related to the war with Polyrrhenia, its neighbour to the east. However, it is unclear whether the 30 silver talents of Agis III, according to the testimony of Arrian (*Anab.* 2.13.6), were intended for Phalasarna or other Cretan cities which joined the anti-Macedonian side. Moreover, although the amount in question is very small for financing the fortifications of Phalasarna, N. Sekunda mentions that further money could have been contributed later to the city directly by the commanders of the Persian fleet.<sup>20</sup> Similar arguments were put forward for financing the fortifications of Polyrrhenia,<sup>21</sup> even if the current remains of the city walls are later than the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>22</sup> as well as for that of the fortification of Aigli (Kastro) on the island of Aigila (modern Antikythira) – which was under the control of Phalasarna – built in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and abandoned in 69 BC.<sup>23</sup>

The forts and watchtowers were also constructed with public funds. However, it should be noted that the impressive fort of Prinias Patela, dating to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century,<sup>24</sup> was probably built with financial aid from the Ptolemies, like the city walls of Gortyn, to which it certainly belonged.

In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, their regular maintenance was entrusted to the men who occupied them, and their restoration or reconstruction could also be handled by the officers assigned to them. The treaty concluded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century between the Ionian cities of Teos and Kyrbissos provides the richest documentation for the forts, their garrisons, and their administration by the city. The annual expenses of

Teos for the fort of Kyrbissos corresponded to the considerable amount of 8,640 drachms, to which the purchase of dogs and the supply of weapons were added.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, as the Cretan inscriptions reveal, *phrouria* or *oureia*, established in the mountains or in border areas (*eschatiai*), were a more common reality than the few towers and forts that have been found on the island.<sup>26</sup> For example, the small number of urban and extra-urban fortifications likely indicates that many of the fortified posts in the territory<sup>27</sup> were only temporary installations that have since disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

So, even if the epigraphic documentation testifies that the fortifications and the garrisons were among the main defensive priorities of the Greek cities,<sup>29</sup> it appears that in Crete the latter are few. This is the case despite the ongoing wars between the Cretan cities and their territorial conflicts. Thus, without the deterrent role of these urban and extra-urban fortifications being ignored by the Cretan cities (as seen mainly in western Crete), it seems that on the island, the protection of the city does not necessarily rest on defensive works. Rather it depended on the organisation of territorial patrols, for reasons of territorial security (economic and administrative), as evidenced by the epigraphic sources.<sup>30</sup>

### *Building Costs*

Due to the absence of written sources and archaeological data, the costs of building defensive structures cannot be estimated in most cases.<sup>31</sup> The cost of a fortification includes: 1) the building materials, whose transport increases their price. However, in Crete, the stone was generally extracted on the site itself and therefore in the immediate vicinity of the fortification; 2) the labour force of varied legal statuses: free, local or foreign (entrepreneurs, craftsmen and workers), but also servile, qualified and paid. In the case of Crete, it seems that the state was the main contractor and used chiefly public slaves, which were easy to acquire, lacked rights, and constituted cheap labour, as well as prisoners of war, free non-citizens (*apeleutheroi*), and foreigners.<sup>32</sup>

To give a scale of prices, we can mention some examples:<sup>33</sup>

- At Kyzikos, in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the building or rebuilding of a tower and its staircase were awarded for 440 staters (evaluated by F. G. Maier at 9,200 Attic drachms).<sup>34</sup> Following P. Ducrey, who estimates the daily wage of a worker at 6 obols, it corresponds to about a month's work for fifty men. Following the same estimation, the tower built at Eleusis in 329/328, which cost 1,686 drachms, corresponds to about a month's work for ten men.<sup>35</sup>
- In Thasos, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the amount for the restoration of a tower was drawn from the surpluses of the city and was of the order of 7,000 drachms.<sup>36</sup>

Recent research on the cost of urban and extra-urban fortifications has clearly demonstrated that the cost, which was generally high for medium-sized cities,<sup>37</sup> remained relatively modest, compared with the cost of war itself in pay and maintenance of troops and the fleet.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, most of the coins probably served to pay the armies.<sup>39</sup>

### Cretan Coinage and War

From the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Cretan cities followed a common weight standard, which is referred to as “Cretan” in the epigraphic sources of the Hellenistic period.<sup>40</sup> Between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the first quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, this local monetary system was adapted on a reduced Aeginetan standard and in the first third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century on a reduced Attic.

Cretan coinage did not circulate outside the island. The monetary policy followed by the Cretan cities allowed silver coins of two types to circulate in their territory: local currencies and international ones (Aeginetan coins and Athenian *stephanephoroi* tetradrachms depending on the periods and the reference monetary system used on the island). Such international coinages were mainly used by cities for transactions outside the island but probably also for some internal transactions. However, cities (when they minted coins) had every incentive to use their own currency for transactions inside the island, where, being overvalued, they enjoyed a premium.<sup>41</sup>

The precious metal for the minting of Cretan coinage came mainly from the wages of Cretan mercenaries, booty (slaves and luxury goods) and the redemption of prisoners – procured by the military and piratical activities of the Cretans – as well as from the presence of foreign military troops on the island. Despite this, the relation between war and coinage in Crete, famous for the incessant internal conflicts, is not always obvious.

However, among the ca. 43 Cretan cities or communities that minted coinage in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, only a small number issue gold coins and have an abundant monetary production in silver and this in specific periods of warfare and for a limited time.

The first period of a visible increase in minting activity on the island, situated between 330/20 and 280/70 BC corresponds to a period of internal conflicts, as evidenced by the large number of hoards buried in 280/70 BC, especially in central Crete.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the minting by Phalasarna<sup>43</sup> and Polyrrhenia<sup>44</sup> of a silver coinage during this period has been associated to the construction of their impressive fortifications. However, due to the lack of a corpus and quantification for Phalasarna’s and Polyrrhenia’s monetary series of this period, one can only speculate. The minting of their coinage also could have been used to pay the wages or for the arming of their soldiers, or to finance other military expenditures not specifically related to the construction of their fortifications.

A little before or during the Lyttian war (221–219 BC), which involved the entire island, Cretan minting was resumed in three Gortynian issues: gold staters following the Attic weight standard,<sup>45</sup> and silver drachms and triobols of a reduced Cretan weight standard.<sup>46</sup> The gold Gortynian issue pertained probably to the pay of mercenaries.<sup>47</sup> Thus, despite the well-known Ptolemaic fund given to the city for the construction of its city walls, the Gortynian monetary production appears very limited. This period of war led however to the expansion of the minting in bronze on the island, which was prob-

ably due to Ptolemaic influence. This is attested by the ‘hoards’,<sup>48</sup> and especially by the large bronze denominations minted by Gortyn and Knossos.<sup>49</sup>

In western Crete, the minting of silver coinage (mostly in small denominations) in the first quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by the cities of Polyrrhenia, Kydonia, Tanos, Allaria, Keraia and Aptaera is also linked to the hegemonic expansionism of Kydonia, who managed to seize Phalasarna in 185/4 BC and Apollonia in 170 BC.<sup>50</sup> The testimonies of Diodorus (16.63.3) and Polybius (4.55.4) on the two sieges of the city of Kydonia attest to the existence of city walls at the end of the Classical and the Hellenistic periods. The construction of these could be traced back to the last third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Like Kydonia, Keraia, Aptaera and probably Polyrrhenia were fortified already since the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>51</sup>

The second broad period of minting occurred in the first third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and was connected with the Mithridatic and Civil Wars and thus to the establishment of Roman power on the island. The resumption of silver minting by probably twelve cities (Hierapytna, Lato, Priansos, Lyttos, Arkades, Gortyn, Knossos, Axos, Lappa, Aptaera, Kydonia and Polyrrhenia) during this period concerns the military and defensive needs of the cities and/or the financing of the needs of the Romans on the island.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, one could suppose that Gortyn’s large production of silver drachms<sup>53</sup> in the 80s or 70s is probably associated to the rebuilding of its defensive system.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the turreted head of Tyche on the obverse of the coinage of Hierapytna,<sup>55</sup> besides its symbolic meaning in representing the personification of the city,<sup>56</sup> could be related to the building of fortifications in the city. The amount of ca. 210 Attic talents produced by the Hierapytnian mint<sup>57</sup> during this period could be compared to: the 200 or 300 estimated as the cost for building the city walls of Syracuse, the 500 evaluated for the construction of the long walls of Athens by Conon between 391 and 395 BC, and the 1700 estimated for the construction of the walls of the Epipoles by Dionysius of Syracuse.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the only fortifications found so far in Hierapytna date to the late Roman and early Byzantine period.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, many Cretan cities resumed minting during this period, and had a predilection for specific denominations (tetradrachms in Knossos, didrachms in Hierapytna, drachms in Gortyn, hemidrachms in Polyrrhenia), as if they complemented each other. Together with these aspects, the absence of overstrikes and countermarks on these local coinages<sup>60</sup> points probably to other military needs and mainly to the pay of armies.

### Conclusion

Even though the chronology of Cretan fortifications is generally approximate, some periods of convergence have been noted between the construction or maintenance of the city walls and the minting of silver or bronze coinage by some cities. Some examples of this are Phalasarna at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and Gortyn in the years 220–210 and



80s or 70s. However, it is unclear whether the coins in question were specifically used to finance the construction, maintenance, and equipment of fortifications, forts and watch towers, as well as the wages of the workmen and the pay of the garrisons. Moreover, the expansion of minting activity at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century – beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and in the first third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC strengthens the hypothesis of a common need to produce coinage for military causes, either internal or external (with the involvement of foreign powers in the island).

To sum up, there are rough correspondences between periods of minting and periods of defensive constructions in late Classical and Hellenistic Crete. While it seems reasonable that some of the new coinages may have been used for defensive structures, most of the money that was earmarked for military preparation would have been allocated for the payment of manpower.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Martin 1985; Will 1988, 417–420; Hansen 2004, 147–149; De Callataÿ 2011, 77 f.

<sup>2</sup> On the “one hundred cities” of Crete, see Coutsinas 2013, 34 f.

<sup>3</sup> We consider here only the cities with city walls. Some rare urban centres are protected by a fort (like Itanos) or a series of forts (like Olous; nevertheless, see Coutsinas 2020).

<sup>4</sup> For the link between fortifications and coinage, see Coutsinas 2013, 301 f. Table 17 indicates only 16 fortified cities minted coins: Kantanos is not considered as a city and Eleutherna has been omitted.

<sup>5</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 397 f.

<sup>6</sup> For the literary and epigraphical sources, see Coutsinas 2013, 134 f.

<sup>7</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 394 f.

<sup>8</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 399.

<sup>9</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 180–185. 214–220. 250–254. 341–343. 359–364.

<sup>10</sup> Migeotte 2000, 146 f.

<sup>11</sup> De Callataÿ 2000, 353 f.

<sup>12</sup> Baker 2000, 183.

<sup>13</sup> Migeotte 2000, 147–150; Chaniotis 2005a, 116–118; Migeotte 2014, 381–388.

<sup>14</sup> Chaniotis 2004, 79–83 and 2005b, 95.

<sup>15</sup> N. Allegro, in: Gortina IV, 285 f. Nevertheless, we should note the uncertain date (85–82 BC) of the bronze Gortynian coin (Hermes/Butting bull, see Jackson 1971a, 49) used for the chronology of this reconstruction.

<sup>16</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 220. 274.

<sup>17</sup> See Coutsinas 2013, 220.

<sup>18</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 250–254.

<sup>19</sup> Sekunda 2004–2009, 595–600; Stefanakis 2006, 55, n. 109 and 2013, 59; Tsaravopoulos et al. 2012, 557 f; Johnston et al. 2012, 253; Hadjidaki 2015, 132 f. See also Coutsinas 2013, 254.

- <sup>20</sup> Diodorus Siculus (17.48.1–2). Sekunda 2004–2009, 599. We have to mention a probable second influx of money in Crete in the same year, this time through Alexander III, who sent funds to Amphoteris for bringing Crete over to the Macedonian side (Curtius, 4.8.15). See Stefanakis 1997, 132.
- <sup>21</sup> Stefanakis 2013, 59; Coutsinas 2013, 250.
- <sup>22</sup> See Markoulaki – Goula, 2015, 135–145.
- <sup>23</sup> Tsaravopoulos 2009, 588–590; Coutsinas 2013, 254 n. 361.
- <sup>24</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 219 n. 230. 363.
- <sup>25</sup> Migeotte 2000, 150 f. and 2014, 384; Baker 2000, 185 f.; Chaniotis 2005a, 116.
- <sup>26</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 373–375.
- <sup>27</sup> In Crete, the guards of these “border posts”, *oroi* or *orophylakai*, probably had military and/or administrative duties. For details, see the treaty between Gortyn and the dependant community of Kaudos of the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (*IC*, IV Gortyne, 184, l. 11–18; Chaniotis 1996, 407–420, n° 69) and the obituary of Vasiliki in the region of Hierapytna of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (*SEG* XXXIX 967). See also Coutsinas 2013, 317.
- <sup>28</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 391 f. 400.
- <sup>29</sup> Baker 2000, 189.
- <sup>30</sup> Chaniotis 2008.
- <sup>31</sup> Baker 2000, 179.
- <sup>32</sup> Chaniotis 1987, 263. 269.
- <sup>33</sup> Maier 1959, II, 55–68.
- <sup>34</sup> Migeotte 2014, 384.
- <sup>35</sup> Ducrey 1986, 134 f.
- <sup>36</sup> Tréziny 2001, 371; Coutsinas 2013, 272 f.
- <sup>37</sup> Migeotte 2014, 387. See also the calculation of the cost of the Eleutherai fortress in Fachard et al. 2020.
- <sup>38</sup> Tréziny 2001, 377 f.
- <sup>39</sup> Migeotte 2000; Couvenhes 2006, 411. 434, n. 35; Picard 2010, 171; De Callataj 2000 and 2016, 14–17. However, see Howgego 1990 and Bresson 2008, 59 f.
- <sup>40</sup> Stefanaki 2007–2008, 60–64.
- <sup>41</sup> Stefanaki 2007–2008.
- <sup>42</sup> Stefanakis 1997, 126–130.
- <sup>43</sup> Svoronos 1890, nos. 4–11 pl. 25.
- <sup>44</sup> Stefanakis 2013, 9–19.
- <sup>45</sup> Svoronos 1890, 172 no. 113 pl. 15; no. 21.
- <sup>46</sup> Stefanaki – Stefanakis 2013, 148, 166 (Series I).
- <sup>47</sup> Stefanaki 2007–2008, 55; Stefanaki – Stefanakis 2013, 149, n. 12. In general, the Cretan cities did not employ mercenaries, but they often invited allied troops (Chaniotis 2005a, 21). See however the case of Phalaikos and his mercenaries employed by Knossos (Coutsinas 2013, 246). On the right of *xenologeia* of the Cretan cities, mentioned in their treaties of alliances with the Hellenistic powers, see Couvenhes 2016, 184.
- <sup>48</sup> Stefanakis 1997, 156 and 2000, 203.
- <sup>49</sup> Jackson 1971a, 45 f. and 1971b, 290.

<sup>50</sup> Stefanakis 1997, 210–212. 237–241.

<sup>51</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 247–250.

<sup>52</sup> Stefanaki – Carrier 2020. Apart from the Cretan coinage with local types, pseudo-Athenian tetradrachms were issued between 86 and 83 BC by seven Cretan cities (Le Rider 1968), probably under the authority of the Romans for their needs on the island (De Callataj 2011, 65f.), as well as Gortynian tetradrachms with the symbols of the family of Q. Caecilius Metellus were minted a little before or after the Roman conquest (Stefanaki – Carrier 2020, 253). In this category of “special purpose money” mainly related to military needs also belong the gold half-staters of an Attic weight standard (CNG, Triton XIX, 5 January 2016, lot. 2042), and the didrachms of a Phoenician or Ptolemaic weight standard minted by Gortyn around 270/60 BC (Stefanaki 2007–2008, 55). To this list should also be added the minting of pseudo-Rhodian didrachms and drachms (semi-official Rhodian issues and local imitations), issued at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by Rhodian authorities on the island or by some Cretan cities under Rhodian influence or control (Stefanakis – Stefanaki 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Stefanaki – Stefanakis 2013, 167 f., Series IV and V.

<sup>54</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 220. 274. See also N. Allegro, in: Gortina IV, 285 f.

<sup>55</sup> Svoronos 1890, nos. 11–20 pl. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 272.

<sup>57</sup> Stefanaki 2021, 296. 324.

<sup>58</sup> Coutsinas 2013, 273.

<sup>59</sup> Mari 2010, 200–210.

<sup>60</sup> Stefanaki 2006, 308; Stefanaki – Carrier 2020, 254.

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