

Elaiussa Sebaste: Monetization

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The term “economy” normally means production, circulation and consumption of goods and services.¹ Coins generally play a marginal role in the studies on ancient economies, and this can easily be explained by the fact that coins were not the only medium of exchange in archaic economies, and by the limited range of transactions that were operated through struck coins, whose function has long been intended only for state and military expenses, taxes, and long distance trade, and that is hardly used, at its beginnings, in exchanges of a lesser value.²



Figs. 1–2: Mallos stater (ANS 1969.66.2).

However, the more archaeological research becomes refined, the more numismatic data from excavations become an important testimony of economic activities. And intensive studies on coin production in antiquity have shown, long since, that ancient monetary systems had complex structures, often comprising plentiful series of small fractions in precious metals, joined, at the end of the 5th century BCE, by bronze coins that widened the range of operations that could be achieved through coins.³ The examples of developed monetary systems in classical times’ Cilicia are numerous, and one good example can be the output of the mint of Mallos (fig. 1–4), displaying fractions up to the tetartemorion (i.e. 1/4 obol).⁴ The importance of small change has been a matter of great importance in the last decades:⁵ thus state expenses, military pay, long distance trade above mentioned must be considered together with the presence of civic institutions, spectacle buildings, local and regional festivals and games: all these elements can involve circulation, especially of low value coins, whose role raises when small silver denominations are joined by bronze of lesser value, as stated above, allowing coined money to be useful for a wider range of transactions.

We must certainly be aware that coins were, as well, a political phenomenon:⁶ at Elaiussa, the clearest example is testified by the issue, in the name of Seleucus VI (96–94 BCE), of silver tetradrachms bearing on the reverse the type of the autonomous silver coins of the city (fig. 5, 6).⁷ This issue cannot be seen as justified by economic needs,



Figs. 3–4: Mallos hemiobol (ANS 1983.51.677).

as in the region the prolific mint of Tarsus was operating at that time, and, what is more significant, the neighboring mint of Seleukeia on the Kalykadnos (less than thirty kilometers far from Elaiussa), had as well a very large output of coins in precious metal.⁸ Seleucus' tetradrachms (of which, till now, only one specimen is known), must have been struck with the aim of giving Elaiussa political importance, in a period when Seleucid rule was weakening⁹ and a port city could play a strategic role, probably for military rather than commercial activities. A political claim for control can also be seen in the decision, by Antiochus IV of Commagene, who ruled in Cilicia from 38 to 72 AD, to mint coins in his name and in the name of his wife Iotape in different cities of the region, including Elaiussa.

An economic purpose of the civic coinage can be seen when one looks at the autonomous issues of Elaiussa. Besides the occasional silver series above mentioned, the local mint produced bronze coins, cut according to three different denominations. This can only mean that they were intended for commercial functions, and not merely as a mean to claim to autonomy or self pride. Another feature that seems to show that coins were intended for economic reasons is the sharing of types between many Cilician cities, thus allowing a wider circulation area for small change.

The role of coins in the economic life of Elaiussa can then be illustrated by combining numismatic data, namely production and circulation, with archaeological and epigraphic records.¹⁰

One of the contexts that can be used as an indicator of a moneyed economy is the funerary one. First, the use of "Charon's obol" in Elaiussa's burials, that is widespread from the beginnings of Roman imperial times until the 7th century AD, as is testified by finds in one of the earliest rock-cut tombs in the area of the Roman agora, by several finds in the necropolis, and by a late burial in the central nave of one of Elaiussa's churches. Of course Charon's fee in the form of struck coins is a feature that was much diffused in the Greek world already from the classical times on,¹¹ and is hardly exclusive of Elaiussa. But, the availability of small change to be destined to funerary habits must mean that coins were, from the end of the Hellenistic period on, easily obtained by private individuals.

The mentions of coins in funerary fines, a feature that is widespread throughout the Roman empire and that is witnessed by many examples in Elaiussa necropolises, is, it too, a testimony of the familiarity with coined money: the amounts are registered both



Figs. 5–6: Seleukos VI tetradrachm, mint of Elaiussa (ANS 1944.100.78106).

in drachms and *denarii*, two terms that could be interchangeable after the unification of Greek and Roman monetary systems under Augustus, who established the equivalence between the Attic drachm and the Roman *denarius*, and that reflects a general circulation pattern, in which Roman imperial issues were as familiar as the traditional Greek units of reckoning and the civic silver coinages struck in different cities of Cilicia in early imperial times.¹²

Talking about coin production, it has already been said that Elaiussa is responsible for issues in precious metals only occasionally, and has, on the other hand, a quite plentiful history for bronze series, starting at least at the beginnings of the 1st century BCE and ending, as most provincial mints, in the second half of the 3rd century AD, under Gallienus. The mint's output was not substantial, to judge from specimens surviving in main museums' collections and sales catalogues, and issues were not continuous during imperial times. But the periods when Roman emperors struck coins at Elaiussa correspond to the main phases of the city's urban development (fig. 7): the period of Archelaos of Cappadocia's and Antiochos IV of Commagene's rules, between the age of Augustus and 72 AD, and then the 2nd and first half of the 3rd century AD.

Besides production, the role of coins in Elaiussa's economy can also, of course, be inferred by circulation data. Around 3.000 coins have been recovered during more than 20 years of research, coming from the excavated areas of the city (fig. 8).¹³

Coin finds, as usual, are almost all bronzes, with the exception of one denarius of M. Aurelius and some *antoniniani*; but this is the normal pattern in stray finds, where a quantity of silver rarely exceeding 1% is the feature of excavations even in contexts, like Athenian agora, for instance, that we should expect as fully monetized and attended because of its role as a marketplace, as stated by F. de Callataÿ in his essay of 2006 on coins from archaeological excavations.¹⁴

civic bronze issues	II–I cent. BCE
Seleukos VI	96–94 BCE
autonomous silver issues	I cent. BCE
Antiochos IV of Commagene	38–72 CE
pseudo-autonomous issues	I cent. CE
Antoninus Pius	138–171 CE
Marcus Aurelius and L. Verus	161–169 CE
Marcus Aurelius	161–180 CE
Crispina	178–191 CE
Iulia Domna	187–211 CE
Septimius Severus	193–211 CE
Severus Alexander	222–235 CE
Iulia Mamaea	222–235 CE
Gordian III	238–244 CE
Tranquillina	241–244 CE
Valerian I	253–260 CE
Gallienus	260–268 CE

Fig. 7: The chronology of coin issues of Elaiussa – Sebaste.

Coin finds of the Hellenistic period, the earliest ones dating to the 3rd century BCE, show a circulation pattern that is not confined to local issues: coins from many mints in the region seem so suggest that, besides the fact that a city equipped with an important harbor could be a center for distribution and circulation of goods, thus being attended by people coming from abroad, the homogeneity of coins produced locally by almost every city in Cilicia made them an useful mean of exchange on a regional net. The interchangeability of civic coins is confirmed by the presence of coins of different mints of Cilicia in the funerary contexts above mentioned, where it was normal to bury coins, generally of small value, available at the moment.

Roman coinage soon joins Greek imperial series, already by the 2nd century BCE, with significant increases under Probus (thus after the end of local issues) and in the age of Constantine, along the entire 4th century. In this regard, it must be stressed that late Roman small denominations had a very long life throughout the first centuries of the Byzantine empire: the equivalence between AE4 struck in the 4th and 5th centuries BCE and the *nummus* introduced by Anastasius and produced until Justinian I allowed these small coins to live together in later archaeological contexts at Elaiussa and elsewhere.¹⁵

The exact provenance of coin finds is of course of primary importance in order to reconstitute the degree of monetization at Elaiussa. It is obvious to expect large numbers of coin finds in areas with commercial destination, agoras, for instance. In Elaiussa, however, coin finds are

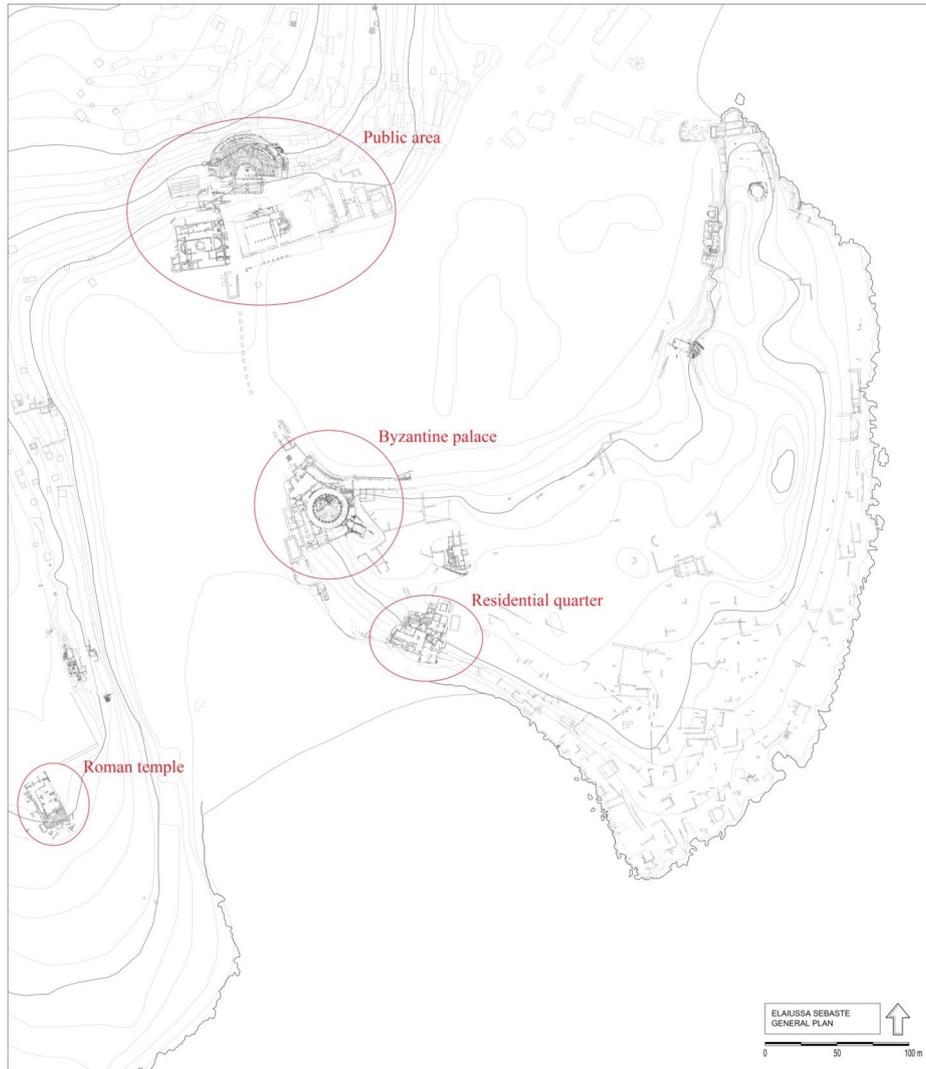


Fig. 8: Main excavated areas.

well represented also in sectors of the city with different functions. What must be taken into account is the fact that, with few exceptions, there was virtually no continuity in the use of space in the ancient town, which underwent substantial transformations during its lifespan. On the mainland, the public area (theater and agora) had previously been occupied by at least one private residence; the agora later became a sacred space when a two-apses basilica was built there. The nearby great three-apses basilica was erected over a huge thermal building of Roman times.

On the promontory, significant changes took place when the Byzantine palace has been put in place, incorporating both sections of the city walls and the colonnaded street that was facing the northern harbor. And in late Roman times many spaces of the residential quarter

and the thermal buildings have been occupied by productive plants (of lesser importance compared to the huge ceramic kiln for the manufacture of LR1 amphorae brought to light face to the southern harbor).

Only the Roman temple, on a promontory south of the city, maintained its features of sacred area when a small church was built in its central sector; productive plants have been found in the surrounding area, probably linked to the church's activities in Byzantine times.

Changes in destination are obviously significant when examining coin finds, reflecting different situations in a diachronic perspective: so after having considered their distribution, their pertaining to the phases of the city's development must be taken into account.

So, while it is obvious that the coins of the public area are numerous and only range from Roman to Byzantine times, thus suggesting that we have no records for the period when this sector of the city was occupied by private buildings, the interest of the results of excavations in the Byzantine palace is the huge quantity of coins distributed along a period starting well before the building of the complex, when the function of the area was probably linked to its position between the two harbors of the city and may have had an economic or commercial vocation. The same feature, that of coin finds distributed along a period ranging from middle Hellenistic to Late Roman and early Byzantine times, can be observed in the residential area and the Baths' buildings on the promontory.

Of the about 200 coins found in the agora, the most part pertain to the later phase of the area. But the small number of Hellenistic specimens, and the relatively low number of Roman coins, does not necessarily testify a low degree of monetization in the earlier periods, but rather the fact that, as the area was undergoing architectural changes, it was cleaned up; on the contrary, the high number of Byzantine coins, up to the reign of Constans II, may testify a quite rapid abandonment of this sector of the town, which could be confirmed by the absence of any other later class of materials and by traces of a violent destruction detected in other areas of the site. Anyway, coin finds, pertaining to the period when the agora and the Roman baths were transformed into a sacred complex, may suggest that, then too, some commercial activities took place there.

On the other end, the distribution by mints of Byzantine bronzes with peaks for Constantinople and Antiochia, seems to reflect circulation flows on relatively long distance routes, linking the capital of the empire with Syria.

Coin finds from the Roman temple, and a hoard recovered in the residential quarter, both comprising folles of Constans II, and the relatively high quantity of coins from the second period of Heraclius' reign, after the retreat of the Byzantine army from Syria, suggest that Elaiussa's region still survived as a place where coins played a role in the economy for some decennia, before being abandoned.

Later occasional attending of the site, in the period of the Crusades, testifies another frame of a totally moneyed economy that makes possible the loss of relatively large quantities of coins even in places, such as some areas of the city, only used for occasional stays, along the land route leading to the Holy Land.

Notes

- ¹ References for ancient economies, starting from Finley's fundamental book of 1973, up to recent times can be found in von Reden 2010.
- ² On the functions of early coinage, see Howgego 1990 and, among others, Schaps 2004; on the debate concerning coins and ancient economies, see de Callataÿ 2005.
- ³ And for this reason discussion on the role of coins is well represented in the analysis of Hellenistic economies: see, for instance, Archibald et al. 2011; Scheidel et al. 2008; Aperghis 2004; Cartledge et al. 2001; Archibald et al. 2001.
- ⁴ On the silver coins of Mallos, struck from the middle of the 4th century BCE, see Casabonne 2000. The structure of the monetary system, maybe of Cypriot origin, ranges from a stater of ca. 10.80 g to a 1/48 stater, corresponding to the tetartemorion (ca. 0.22 g) of the Greek monetary system; Davesne 2000.
- ⁵ On the role of small change see Kraay 1964 and more recently Kim 2002.
- ⁶ The best example of coins minted not only for economic reasons but also for a question of civic pride is the inscription OGIS 339 from Sestos, dating to the end of the 2nd century BCE, concerning the beginnings of bronze coinage; Robert 1973.
- ⁷ On the civic silver issues of Elaiussa see de Callataÿ 2002.
- ⁸ On Seleukeia on the Kalykadnos see Houghton 1989.
- ⁹ On the end of the Seleucids see Bellinger 1949.
- ¹⁰ The economy of eastern Rough Cilicia had been examined through archaeological indicators by Ferrazzoli 2010.
- ¹¹ On Charon's fee see Doyen 2002; Dubuis et al. 1999; Cantilena 1995; Grindler-Hansen 1991; Stevens 1991.
- ¹² On the testimonies of Elaiussa necropolises, Polosa 2018; on the coinages circulating in Asia Minor, Katsari 2005; on the local silver issues, Haymann 2014.
- ¹³ On coin finds from Elaiussa see Polosa 2003a, 2003b, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2017; Tekin 2003; Tekin 1999.
- ¹⁴ de Callataÿ 2006.
- ¹⁵ On the Late Roman and Byzantine currencies in Anatolia see Guest 2010 and Lightfoot 2002.

Image Credits

Fig. 1–2: ANS 1969.66.2. – Fig. 3–4: ANS 1983.51.677. – Fig. 5–6: ANS 1944.100.78106. – Fig. 7: by the author.
 Fig. 8: Elaiussa Sebaste Excavations Archive – N.B. the diameter of fig. 1–2 is 20 mm; fig. 3–4, 8 mm; fig. 5–6, 22 mm

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