

# The "damnatio memoriae" of Elagabal on city-coins of the Near East

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von ihrem Metallwert ausgegeben und gehandelt wurden. Auch Thompson<sup>8</sup> wertet allgemein die Bronzemünzen Athens, beginnend unter dem Archon Kallias um 406/405 als Notwährung, die unabhängig von dem Metallwert mit dem Wert der entsprechenden Silbermünzen im Umlauf waren.

In dieser Bronzeprägung Athens können wir also nach dem Stand der Forschung das wohl älteste Notgeld der Münzprägung überhaupt erblicken<sup>9</sup>. Es ist das erste Mal, daß ein Stadtstaat durch eine wirtschaftliche Notlage sich gezwungen sah, für den internen Gebrauch Münzen zu prägen, deren Metallwert dem nominellen Wert nicht entsprach<sup>10</sup>. Mit der Wiederaufnahme der Silberförderung in Laurion und mit der finanziellen Hilfe der Perser konnten dann diese Bronzemünzen nach Beendigung der Notlage aus dem Verkehr gezogen werden. So ist wohl auch die große Seltenheit dieser Stücke zu erklären.

Die hier abgebildete Münze ist eine Drachme der Notprägung. Diese Drachmen waren offiziell parallel mit den früheren Silbermünzen sowie mit den plattierten Drachmen gleichzeitig als Notgeld in Athen bis 393<sup>11</sup> v. Chr. als gültiges Zahlungsmittel im Umlauf.

<sup>8</sup> W. E. Thompson, The Emergency Coinages of the Peloponnesian War, *Mnemosyne* 19, 1966, 337 ff.

<sup>9</sup> In Theben waren um etwa 150 v. Chr. parallel zum Silber auch Bronzedrachmen im Umlauf, deren Wert mit dem Silber gleichgestellt war, s. M. N. Tod, *Epigraphical Notes on Greek Coinage*, NC 1960, 3; s. auch Gardner a. O. und W. E. Thompson a. O. In der römischen Kaiserzeit, in der in Athen nur noch Bronzedrachmen geprägt wurden, waren sie mit dem Denar gleichwertig, s. J. H. Kroll, *Revisions in Early Hellenistic Chronology*, *Athenische Mitteilungen* 89, 1974, 202 f.

<sup>10</sup> Eine Ausprägung von Bronzemünzen im Metallwert wäre schon aus rein technischen Gründen nicht möglich gewesen. Nach dem ungefähren Wertverhältnis Silber : Bronze hätten die Bronzebole etwa 100 g schwer sein müssen. Um 420 v. Chr. lag die Wertrelation beider Metalle in Athen bei 1 : 171, s. IG I, 2, 371, Zeilen 2–4.

<sup>11</sup> Erst nach 393 v. Chr. erscheint auf den Drachmen die Mondsichel neben der Eule, wie Robinson festgestellt hat, s. E. S. G. Robinson, *Coins from the Excavations at Al-Mina*, NC 1937, 182 ff.

## THE «DAMNATIO MEMORIAE» OF ELAGABAL ON CITY-COINS OF THE NEAR EAST

Arie Kindler

Two overstruck coins of the city of Neapolis described below drew the author's attention to the act of *damnatio memoriae* inflicted upon the emperor Varius Avitus Elagabal (218–222 AD).

The *damnatio memoriae* was an act decided upon by the Roman Senate to obliterate the memory of an emperor who was condemned by the people on account of his disgraceful behaviour<sup>1</sup>. This act resulted in erasing the image and the name of the condemned emperor from monuments and occasionally from coins. F. Vittinghoff has dealt with the general aspects of the *damnatio*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The *damnatio memoriae* was not only inflicted on disgraced emperors, but also on other persons convicted of major crimes.

<sup>2</sup> Vittinghoff, F., *Der Staatsfeind in der römischen Kaiserzeit, Untersuchungen zur «damnatio memoriae»* (1936).

Two such erasures of names on inscriptions found in Israel were published during the last decade. A. Rabinowitz<sup>3</sup> refers to an inscription, found 1900 near the German settlement of Wilhelma, on which the name of Geta had been erased under Caracalla who declared the *damnatio memoriae* on his younger brother after having murdered him just before his accession to the throne. B. Mazar<sup>4</sup> published a milestone found during the excavations near the Temple Mount of Jerusalem on which the name of Lucius Flavius Silva, Roman governor of the *provincia Iudaea* for the years 73–79/80 AD, had been erased.

The verdict of condemnation has obviously been inflicted upon Elagabal after his assassination by his body-guard, the Pretorians, on March 10th, 222 AD; his mutilated corpse was thrown into the Tiber.

Elagabalus' name Antoninus has been erased from many inscriptions, but appears, on the other hand, on inscriptions after his death<sup>5</sup>. H. Dessau<sup>6</sup> lists at least seven inscriptions on which Elagabalus' name has been erased, e. g. from a list of a collegium of priests in Rome<sup>7</sup>. Such an erasure occurs also on a diploma published by Dušanič and Petrovič<sup>8</sup>: «The diploma is dated 7th January 222 and belongs to the short period of the joined rule of Elagabalus and Alexander Severus. One diploma (the first plate) of the same date is already known (CIL XVI 140), but it is heavily damaged in the part containing the names of the emperor and of the caesar. The mutilation was intentional and certainly it was the consequence of the *damnatio memoriae* which had befallen the emperor-priest (cf. Nesselhauf ad CIL XVI 139 sq.).»

The only written source mentioning the *damnatio memoriae* of Elagabalus is the *Historia Augusta*<sup>9</sup>, a document generally believed to be unreliable.

It was Severus Alexander (222–235 AD), Elagabal's immediate successor, who, raised to that status by Elagabal, but later suspected and pursued by him, undertook to carry out the senate's decision of the *damnatio memoriae*.

The issue of city-coins in the East and especially in Phoenicia and Palestine during the reign of Elagabal was abundant. For practical reasons it was almost impossible for the authorities to obey the senate's decree of condemnation by instantly cashing in all Elagabalian coins in circulation and replacing them by such issued in the name of Severus Alexander. Therefore the act of the *damnatio memoriae* cannot be traced on a great number of city-coins, such as those of Aelia Capitolina, Acco-Ptolemais, Caesarea Maritima and other cities on the coins of which we find neither obliterations nor countermarks.

Occasionally, however, coins struck in the name of Elagabal or of ladies of his family were countermarked, such as coins of Tyre<sup>10</sup> (fig. 7 and 8), and Sebaste<sup>11</sup> (fig. 9 and 10). These countermarks, whether square or rectangular, round or oval,

<sup>3</sup> Rabinowitz, A., «*Damnatio memoriae*» on inscriptions found in Israel, *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, Reader A, Jerusalem 1965, 211–215 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> Mazar, B., *Excavations near the Temple Mount* (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot*, V, 3–4, 1972, 83–84.

<sup>5</sup> Hay, J. S., *The amazing Emperor Elagabalus* (1911), 198–199.

<sup>6</sup> Dessau, H., *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, nos. 466, 468, 470–472, 479, 480.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* no. 466.

<sup>8</sup> Dušanič, S. and Petrovič, P., *Ziva Antika* 12, 1962–1963, 384.

<sup>9</sup> *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Elagabal, 17, 4.

<sup>10</sup> BMC (Phoenicia), p. 275, 396, 398 and 400, Pl. 33, 2. In the collection of the Kadman Numismatic Museum there is also a countermarked coin of Tyre struck in the name of Aquilia Severa (fig. 8).

<sup>11</sup> In the collection of the Kadman Numismatic Museum there are coins of Sebaste struck in the name of Elagabal, Julia Maesa, Julia Soemias and Aquilia Severa which bear rectangular countermarks with a male head.

bear in most cases a head, too small to be identified with certainty, but most likely representing Severus Alexander. Other countermarks are, however, by their municipal character, related directly to the cities, such as the car of Astarte on a coin from Sidon <sup>12</sup> (fig. 11), or the initials CEΛ (εὐχεῖα) on a coin from Seleucia Pieria <sup>13</sup> (fig. 12).

The coins of Elagabal, of his grandmother Julia Maesa, his mother Julia Soemias and his second wife Aquilia Severa, struck by the city of Neapolis, were issued in a great quantity and variety of types. The most common type is the one with the Mount Gerizim surrounded by the legend ΦΛ ΝΕΑΠΟΛΙΟ CVP ΠΙΑΛ (the legend occurs in numerous varieties). With the accession to the throne by Severus Alexander, the city of Neapolis continued to strike this type in the name of the latter. But as the quantity of these coins of Severus Alexander preserved, compared with Elagabal is rather small, we believe that, for reasons of public interest, the authorities of the city of Neapolis were unable to withdraw all the Elagabalian coins. In order to proclaim their support of Severus Alexander and in same time to obey the edict of the *damnatio memoriae*, the city of Neapolis marked quite a number of Elagabalian coins with a small square countermark placed in general on the neck of Elagabal's bust (fig. 13) or on the neck of the busts of the ladies of his family (fig. 14) similar to the countermarks found on the coins of Sebaste <sup>14</sup>. This countermark contains one letter in three varieties: Α, Δ, Λ. I believe that all three varieties stand for Α(λ᾽ἕξανδροϛ). The countermark on the emperor's bust is always neatly applied. Thus it seems that the authorities intended to revalue the demonetized issues of Elagabal instead of effacing the imperial effigy. Therefore we can distinguish between coins revalued in the name of the emperor, countermarked either with his initials (Neapolis) or with an imperial head (Tyre and Sebaste), and those revalued in the name of the municipal authorities (Sidon and Seleucia Pieria).

On another coin, of Nicaea, in the collection of the Kadman Numismatic Museum, the head of Elagabal has been deliberately defaced by a number of chisel cuts (fig. 15).

Recently two coins of extraordinary interest in this respect have appeared. Both, originally issued during the reign of Elagabalus, were restruck for Neapolis in the name of Severus Alexander <sup>15</sup>. One, in the collection of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem <sup>16</sup>, is restruck on a coin of Elagabal of Caesarea Maritima; the other, in the collection of the Kadman Numismatic Museum, is restruck on a coin of Aquilia Severa originally struck for the city of Sebaste. This restriking of one city-coin upon another is per se extremely unusual and deserves our special attention and particularly if a *damnatio memoriae* is involved.

<sup>12</sup> BMC, p. 185, 248 and p. 186, 255, pl. 24, no. 8.

<sup>13</sup> SNG, Copenhagen, 408.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. supra, note 11.

<sup>15</sup> Under Severus Alexander the authorities of the city of Neapolis issued only one reverse type, the Mount Gerizim. There occur, however, varieties in the emperor's bust on the obverse. There is a «small head» to be distinguished from a «big head», and the bust is sometimes seen from the front, sometimes from the side and sometimes from the rear, whereas the profile is always turned to the right.

<sup>16</sup> My thanks are due to Prof. Y. Yadin for his kind permission to publish this coin and to Dr. D. Barag for his kindness to draw my attention to it.

Description:

1. AE, 7.30 g, 22–23 mm ↓ (fig. 1) <sup>17</sup>.

Obverse: Bust of Severus Alexander to right (small head), laureate, wearing cuirass and paludamentum (bust shown from the front). Legend, around from left below: AVT K M AV C AΛE = AVT(οζοράτωρ) Κ(αἷσαο) Μ(άροζος) AV(οῦλιος) C(εουῆρος) AΛE(ξανδορος). Overstruck on a coin from Caesarea Maritima struck in the name of Elagabal <sup>18</sup> (fig. 2). Features of the face of Elagabal as well as a portion of the legend: [IMP C A M AV ANT]ONINO are visible.

Reverse: Conventional representation of Mount Gerizim.

Legend, around from left below: [ΦΑΝ] EACΠIO [ΛEWC CYPIAC ΠAΛ]; in exergue, reading inwardly: [ETI].

Traces of the Caesarean coin (fig. 3):

lower part and back of head of Serapis as well as a portion of the legend: COL I F [AV F C CAESA] are visible.

Collection of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

2. AE, 6.35 g, 19 mm ↓ (fig. 4).

Obverse: Bust of Severus Alexander to right (big head), wearing cuirass and paludamentum.

Legend, around from left below: AVT ΚΛ.

Overstruck on a coin from Sebaste struck in the name of Aquilia Severa <sup>19</sup> (fig. 5). Traces of the hind-quarter of a winged female sphinx seated to left (hind foot, raised tail, wing) and portion of the legend: [COL L] SEP [SEBASTE] are visible.

Reverse: Conventional Mount Gerizim.

Legend, around from left below: [ΦΛ NE] ACΠ CVP II [AΛ]. Traces of the Sebastian coin (fig. 6): Face of Aquilia Severa to right, portion of the legend: SEVE [RA AVGVSTA] (in front of the face from right above), the border of dots as well as the outline of a rectangular countermark <sup>20</sup> are visible.

Kadman Numismatic Museum, Tel-Aviv.

The fact that Elagabalian coins were restruck with types of Severus Alexander, thereby obliterating the former emperor's types, confirm literally the enactment of the *damnatio memoriae* of Elagabal by his successor Severus Alexander.

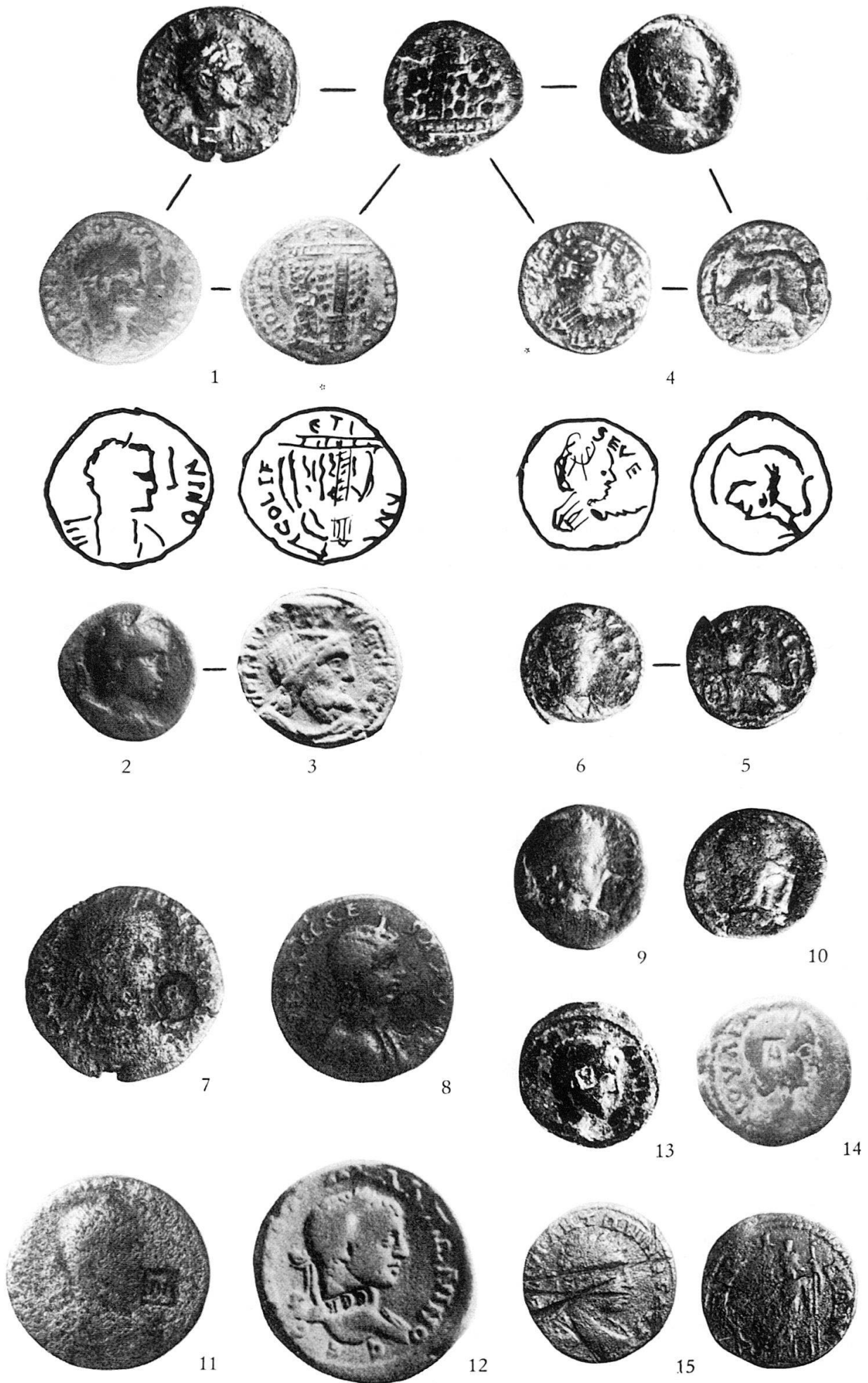
<sup>17</sup> BMC (Palestine), 63, 112–115. The legend of the Neapolis coin struck in the name of Severus Alexander starts with AVT K. This is unusual for his coins in Neapolis, but common for the coins of his predecessor Elagabal. It seems therefore likely that this coin was struck at the very beginning of Severus Alexander's reign, probably as early as 222/223 AD.

<sup>18</sup> BMC 27, 116–117.

<sup>19</sup> BMC, p. xl; p. 81, 19; pl. 40, 9. My thanks are due to Mr. N. Shahaf, Haifa, for his permission to reproduce here the Sebaste coin from his collection.

<sup>20</sup> This countermark may point to the fact that the coin was revalued by the authorities of the city of Sebaste in the name of Severus Alexander before it was overstruck by the authorities of the city of Neapolis.





\* = top of the reverse of the Neapolis coin