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Die Sharing in Asia Minor: A Phantom Link

Kevin Butcher

What does the phenomenon of die sharing between cities in Asia Minor during the second and third centuries tell us about the organisation of production of Roman provincial coinages? Konrad Kraft argued that it was the product of local enterprise, with workshops producing coins for client city states to order¹. This seemed to make sense when the die sharing occurred on a regional scale, but there are a few instances where dies appear to be shared between cities that are far apart². For example, the same obverse die of Philip I seems to have been used to strike coins of Blaundus, Laodicea, Saitta, Sardis, Tripolis (all in Lydia) and Carallia (in Cilicia)³. The distance between the Lydian cities and Carallia is considerable, and in her perceptive study of the activities of the «Sardis» workshop, Ann Johnston questioned Kraft's proposition by drawing attention to this particular link and its implications: «These long-distance links pose other problems for the private enterprise explanation, problems relating to levels of information and speed of coordination over long distances. Why, for example, should a city in Cilicia (Carallia), which was provided adequately with coins from a more local source before and afterwards, order a single die pair from a Lydian mint? [...] It is hard to see how a private system would have brought together customer and supplier [...] whereas the necessary linkages could have been provided through a system under overall state control»⁴.

Kraft suggested that the quality of the Lydian die-engraving explained the link: the Carallians were impressed by the style⁵. But there is nothing especially remarkable about the style of the die, and other cities nearer to Carallia were striking coins using dies of comparably fine execution. Kraft's explanation does not convince but, curiously enough, no explanation is required. The link does not exist.

The Carallia coin of Philip appears to be unique, and is in the British Museum collection. A close examination of the coin (fig. 1) suggests that something is wrong. The lettering on the reverse looks peculiar, and indeed Johnston astutely noticed a difference between obverse and reverse in her review of Kraft's study of the die-sharing phenomenon: «[...] sometimes the reverses are of a completely different style and execution, suggesting that the obverses had been sent to a customer who supplied his own reverses. The large Philip [...] is a clear example: the reverse dies for Blaundus, Laodicea, Saitta, Sardis, and Tripolis are quite unlike that for Carallia which must have been cut in Cilicia»⁶.

1 K. KRAFT, *Das System der kaiserzeitlichen Münzprägung in Kleinasien. Materialien und Entwürfe* (Berlin 1972).
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the British Museum, London, for providing illustrations of the coins in their respective collections.

2 There are not very many cases of long-distance links. Apart from the one discussed here, the other notable examples

are: Nicaea (Bithynia)-Sagalassus (Pisidia); Amastris (Paphlagonia)-Neocaesarea (Pontus), both KRAFT (n. 1), Karte 15; Perge (Pamphylia)-Laranda (Lycaonia), KRAFT (n. 1), Karte 23.

3 KRAFT (n. 1), pl. 35, no. 49a-f.

4 A. JOHNSTON, *Die Sharing in Asia Minor: The View from Sardis*, INJ 6-7 (1982-1983), pp. 59-78, at pp. 69-70.

5 KRAFT (n. 1), p. 92.

6 A. JOHNSTON, *New Problems for Old: Konrad Kraft on Die-sharing in Asia Minor*, NC 14, 1974, pp. 203-207, at p. 205.



Fig. 1: «Carallia».



Fig. 2: Laodicea.

In my opinion the reverse legend ΚΑΡΑΛΛΙΩΤΩΝ is not original, and has been tooled by a forger from something else. The most likely candidate is a coin of Laodicea, Kraft 49b. A specimen is illustrated here (fig. 2), and from the position of the figure of Tyche on the reverse it seems that this coin was struck from the same pair of dies as the «Carallia» piece. One might wonder why a forger would spend time converting a coin of Laodicea into one of Carallia. The probable answer is that Carallia, being a fairly rare mint city, was much more desirable to a collector than Laodicea.

The Sardis-Carallia link is therefore false, leaving the activities of the «Sardis» workshop confined to a more parochial world. It cannot be used to tell us anything about the organisation of civic coin production in third-century Asia Minor.

Photographic credits:

Fig. 1: British Museum, London.

Fig. 2: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

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