

Chapter Title: Alexander the Great on Lead: Notes on Some Tokens from Roman Imperial Athens

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Book Title: Tokens in Classical Athens and Beyond

Book Editor(s): M.E. GKIKAKI

Published by: Liverpool University Press. (2023)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv33b9q4s.15>

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## Chapter 9

# Alexander the Great on Lead: Notes on Some Tokens from Roman Imperial Athens

Cristian Mondello

The deeds and legend of Alexander the Great have notoriously had a strong attraction for both ancient and modern scholarship up to the present day. However, while the representation of the Macedonian king on coins and in literary sources has been the focus of a number of studies, the evidence from ancient tokens has yet to be properly addressed.

This paper focuses on a small group of Athenian tokens (*symbola*) from the Roman Imperial period depicting a male head with windblown hair which will be interpreted as Alexander the Great. The purpose of this contribution is to explore the meaning of these special ‘Alexanders’, whose previously neglected iconography highlights unseen components and intersections in the development of the Alexander’s imagery in the Graeco-Roman world. Also, these coin-like objects offer a first-hand insight into the appreciation of Alexander’s legend in Athenian society of the Roman Imperial period and encourage us to investigate the motivations of the contemporary authorities that were responsible for their production.

This contribution arises from ‘The Creation of Tokens in Late Antiquity: Religious “Tolerance” and “Intolerance” in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries AD’ project, which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 840737. I wish to thank Mairi Gkikaki for strongly recommending the topic of this paper and for giving me useful suggestions that have greatly facilitated the advancement of my research. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Clare Rowan (Warwick University), whose constant support represents to me an inexhaustible source of advice and ideas for exploring the mysterious world of ancient tokens. Other thanks are due to Karsten Dahmen (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) for reading a draft of this contribution and giving suggestions. I also wish to thank the Ephorate of the Antiquities of the city of Athens for providing me with access to the material. Finally, special thanks to Sylvie Dumont and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA) for their kind availability and care in assisting me during my research visit at the Agora of Athens Museum housed in the Stoa of Attalos. All errors and conclusions in this paper remain mine. All dates are CE unless otherwise specified.

In the following pages, I will give an overview of the specimens belonging to this series (I.1) and a summary focusing on the find-spots of these pieces as well as the chronology proposed to date in modern scholarship (I.2). I will then conduct an iconographic and stylistic analysis of the development of Alexander-related coin iconography over the imperial period (II.1) in order to determine the prototypes used for the creation of the tokens in question (II.2). The typological connections allow new thoughts on the chronology of these pieces (III). Finally, a discussion of the potential purpose of these ‘Alexander’ *symbola* within Athenian society of the high empire will be addressed (IV) in light of the examined evidence.<sup>1</sup>

### I.1 The ‘Alexander’ Series on the Athenian Tokens

The Athenian Agora excavations have notoriously provided a large number of tokens from both the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and they have revealed Athens as the first city in the ancient Mediterranean to have minted, circulated and used tokens on a scale without precedent. Employed for a variety of purposes, these coin-like objects were continuously in use in Athens from the middle of the fourth century BCE up to the sack of the city by the Heruli in 267. After this date, neither tokens nor many other Athenian public institutions apparently survived.<sup>2</sup> Given the frequent absence of inscriptions, as well as the use of a common iconographic repertoire (including deities, heroes, animals, objects and various symbols), great efforts were made by modern scholarship in dating and providing an interpretation of these artefacts, which do not otherwise offer any certain clue to their specific use. It is well known that Margaret Crosby’s publication *The Athenian Agora*, vol. 10 (1964) remains the primary reference text for examining these objects. This study has provided a typological classification of tokens, sorted in chronological order (from the Classical period up to the Herulian destruction of Athens), addressing questions of authority, chronology and purpose.<sup>3</sup>

Among the subjects depicted on imperial Athenian *symbola* is a youthful male head, which occurs on a small but significant group of specimens. Currently part of the Museum collection of the Agora of Athens, this series

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the ‘Alexander’ token specimens are indicated by their relevant catalogue number which is provided at the end of the contribution. Any other token specimens mentioned in this contribution are indicated by their relevant inventory number (Agora II). Reference to types is given by M. Crosby’s (1964) catalogue number (L).

<sup>2</sup> Crosby 1964, 76–85; Gkikaki 2019, 127. For Athenian public institutions, cf. Thompson 1959, 62–67.

<sup>3</sup> Crosby 1964, 69–138. A new and complete study on the tokens of Hellenistic and Roman Athens is currently being undertaken by Mairi Gkikaki, University of Warwick.

includes nineteen pieces, all of small size, whose diameters vary between 17 and 20 mm, while their weight ranges from 4.04 to 7.80 g.

Three of the pieces (**cat. nos. 1–3, Pl. I, 1–2**) bear a male, mature and bearded bust right on one side, and a youthful head left on the other, which exhibits short flowing curls and head turned upwards.<sup>4</sup> A very similar youthful head, facing left and looking upwards, is depicted on fifteen examples, whose reverses show a full-length draped female figure standing left, a rudder on her right, and often a crescent above her outstretched right hand at her left (**cat. nos. 4–18, Pl. I, 3–14**);<sup>5</sup> in at least eight cases (**cat. nos. 5, 9–15, Pl. I, 4 and 8–14**), the female figure holds a cornucopia in her left hand and can be identified as Tyche. All the eighteen specimens considered so far share the same male youthful head facing left (Type 1). Although not accompanied by any legend, this type was identified by Crosby and Gkikaki as a portrait of Alexander the Great (hereafter this type will be labelled as ‘Alexander’).<sup>6</sup> The absence of any attribute or inscription makes it necessary to demonstrate the correctness of this identification.

Finally, another type (Type 2) carrying a youthful head with short curls, but smaller in size and facing right, is depicted on a single lead token (**cat. no. 19, Pl. I, 15**), which is plain on the other side. Although considered as similar to some of the aforementioned youthful heads by Crosby and Gkikaki, the physiognomic and stylistic features of this second obverse type are slightly different compared to those of Type 1.<sup>7</sup>

## I.2 The Find-Spots and Proposed Chronology

As with the other Athenian tokens excavated in the Agora, some of the considered specimens can be loosely dated through the excavation

<sup>4</sup> As for the male, mature and bearded bust shown on one side of these token specimens, some details might suggest that they are two different figures: one (cat. no. 1) might represent Poseidon, according to Crosby 1964, L266; the other (cat. no. 3), which is wreathed or with hair gathered in a bun, could be identified as Dionysos or Zeus (Crosby 1964, L272), or as the personification of the *Demos* (Gkikaki 2019, 132, and cat. no. 88).

<sup>5</sup> Of these, a specimen found on the Stoa of Attalos shop floors was published by Mylonas (1901, 119–22, pl. 7). The other fourteen pieces were published by Crosby 1964, 121, under the same catalogue number (L322) as they were either arranged by type or considered duplicates from the same dies.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Crosby 1964, 113 L266 (‘the head . . . is not unlike some Alexander heads’); Gkikaki, 2019, 130, 132, and cat. nos. 58 (Figure 16) and 88 (Figure 27).

<sup>7</sup> Crosby 1964, 114 L275; Gkikaki 2019, 139 cat. no. 58. According to the relevant Agora card published in the ASCS Digital Collection, the portrait on this specimen represents Hermes or a female head, <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/card/il-244-1>.

evidence, which provided the attack of the Heruli on Athens in 267 as a certain *terminus ante quem*.<sup>8</sup> Three pieces were found on Kolonos Agoraios and its slopes (**Figure 9.1**). An example (**cat. no. 1**) was located while cleaning the bedrock at the lower slope of Kolonos Agoraios (**E 12**), near the Great Drain South. The other two pieces are from the area of the so-called ‘Roman House’: one (**cat. no. 19**) was found together with fifty-nine tokens in a small pit dug into the bedrock at the north-east corner of what has been named as Room II (**D11:6**);<sup>9</sup> the other (**cat. no. 3**) was contained together with twenty-one tokens and nineteen coins inside a cistern 12 metres north-west of the house (**D10:1**). The cistern’s fill was the result of the Herulian destruction.<sup>10</sup> Six specimens were excavated in the Stoa of Attalos and its immediate vicinity. Four of them (**cat. nos. 5, 10, 16–17**) are from the front of the Stoa (**N–P 7–13**), one (**cat. no. 6**) from the west of Stoa,<sup>11</sup> and another (**cat. no. 18**) was found along with about 150 tokens in piles resting on the floors of the fourth and fifth rooms of the Stoa in 1898 during the excavations of the Greek Archaeological Society.<sup>12</sup> As for the remaining tokens, an uninventoried specimen (**cat. no. 2**) is said to have been found in the south-western part of the Agora (**H–K 13–15**), a specimen (**cat. no. 15**) was picked up in an unspecified area of the Panathenaic Way,<sup>13</sup> while a further eight pieces (**cat. nos. 4, 7–9, 11–14**) were located within different Late Roman fill contexts.<sup>14</sup> Evidence shows that these pieces are rare and occasional finds, which were found scattered in Late Roman levels from different areas of

<sup>8</sup> For the date of the Herulian destruction (267) as a *terminus ante quem*, see Crosby 1964, 115–16. In this paper, find-spots and deposits are indicated by the squares of the Agora grid. A reproduction of the Agora grid after Kroll 1993, pl. 36 is given here with the addition of the find-spots of the tokens discussed in Figure 9.1.

<sup>9</sup> Gkikaki (2019, 130) has regarded Room II of the ‘Roman House’ as a ‘space providing controlled access’, as it is accessible through an antechamber (Room I) unlike the adjacent Room III. No pottery and no datable finds were recorded in the fill where the hoard of sixty tokens was uncovered. On the debated nature of the structure labelled as ‘Roman House’, see Crosby 1964, 137; Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 228; Gkikaki 2019, 129–30.

<sup>10</sup> The latest coins found in the filled dump were two of Gallienus (253–68) and one of Posthumus (258–67). Another filled dump related to the Herulian destruction (**D11:7**), which contained eight tokens and twenty-two coins that run down into the reign of Probus (AD 276–82), was spotted in the stratum over the northern side of the house at Room I: Crosby 1964, 137.

<sup>11</sup> Agora IL528, <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/object/il%20528>.

<sup>12</sup> On the tokens assemblage from the Stoa of Attalos, cf. also Gkikaki 2023, 95–136.

<sup>13</sup> Agora IL1421, <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/object/il%201421>.

<sup>14</sup> Of these, Agora IL1096 (**cat. no. 14**) was contained in a deep gravel fill, west of Byzantine wall AB (fifth–sixth centuries), <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/object/il%201096>.

the Athenian Agora. A *terminus ante quem* of 267 is possible for the eight tokens from the deposits of the ‘Roman House’ on Kolonos Agoraios and from the Stoa of Attalos, which were filled with the debris of the Herulian sack.

As for the chronology, Crosby placed the ‘Alexander’ tokens from Kolonos Agoraios and the uninventoried specimen from the south-western part of the Agora (i.e. *cat. nos.* 1–3, and 19) in ‘Section IV’ of her catalogue, which includes the tokens believed to belong to the broad period between Augustus and the sack of Athens by the Heruli (31 BCE–267).<sup>15</sup> A more precise dating was proposed for the tokens found in and around the Stoa of Attalos (‘Section V’). Since they are from a context that is dated to the third century by coin and other artefact finds, Crosby regarded them as a special group of the third century, in current use when the Heruli sacked Athens in 267.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the ‘Alexander’ tokens are connected to other groups of Athenian lead *symbola*, which have been found in different deposits from both the Agora and Kolonos Agoraios. Indeed, the ‘Alexander’ pieces share common types and countermarks with other series, and all the groups in question include examples that are similar in terms of weight and diameter. The type of the bearded male head facing right, which occurs on one of the considered pieces (*cat. no.* 1), also appears on the ‘Poseidon bust’ series,<sup>17</sup> the ‘Poseidon bust/Prow (?)’ series (Figure 9.2)<sup>18</sup> and the ‘Athena/Poseidon’ series.<sup>19</sup> The draped female figure standing left (‘Tyche’ type), which is attested on the majority of the ‘Alexander’ tokens (*cat. nos.* 4–18), is also attested on the ‘Athena head/Tyche’ series, two examples of which were found in the area of the Attalos Stoa (Figure 9.3).<sup>20</sup> According to Crosby, some of the pieces of the ‘Alexander/Tyche’ and ‘Athena head/Tyche’ groups may have been produced with the same stamps.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In a note on the catalogue arrangement, Crosby herself warned that some Athenian tokens may have been misplaced because of the uncertainties in dating, especially those that may belong to the Augustan period: Crosby 1964, 85–86.

<sup>16</sup> Crosby 1964, 115–17. However, not all the specimens included in the catalogue number L322 are from the area of the Stoa of Attalos, but the chronology of every single piece and its context were not discussed by Crosby case by case.

<sup>17</sup> Agora IL257 (= Crosby 1964, 113 L265), from deposit D10:1.

<sup>18</sup> Agora IL261 (= Crosby 1964, 113 L267), from deposit D11:6.

<sup>19</sup> Thirteen examples are known of this type, ten of which are from in front of the Stoa (O–P 7–10) and three from deposit Q7:3. On these pieces, see Crosby 1964, 118, L309.

<sup>20</sup> Agora IL554, IL1088 (= Crosby 1964, 118 L308 a–b) respectively from in front of the Stoa (P 9–10) and from south of the Stoa (Q–R 12–15).

<sup>21</sup> See Crosby 1964, 121 L322: ‘Note that stamp A (*sc.* that of L322) is also used as



ATHENIAN AGORA (CENTER) PLAN 2nd century A.D.  
 DRAWN FOR a KROLL NUMISMATIC VOLUME (BASED ON I.F.O. 2557 (EXPANDED AND UPDATED) JANUARY 1992 R.C.ANDERSON  
 DRAWN SCALE 1/500 PUBLISHED SCALE 1/2000 (F.R.+0.250)

Figure 9.1 Plan of the Athenian Agora showing the find-spots of the tokens discussed in the text. After a plan of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations

Furthermore, at least three specimens belonging to the ‘Alexander’ series are countermarked. The countermark of a dolphin swimming right on one of the pieces (*cat. no. 19, Pl. I, 15*) is also attested on a number

reverse on L308. The impressions of stamp A are all much worn and the attributes far from certain’.



Figure 9.2 Lead token, Athens, Museum of the Ancient Agora, IL261 (20 mm, 5.33 g). Published in Crosby 1964, L308a. Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens City, Ancient Agora, ASCSA: Agora Excavations. Photo: Giannis Tzitzas © Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.)



Figure 9.3 Lead token, Athens, Museum of the Ancient Agora, IL554 (28 mm, 9.6 g). Published in Crosby 1964, L308a. Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens City, Ancient Agora, ASCSA: Agora Excavations. Photo: Giannis Tzitzas © Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.)



Figure 9.4 Lead token, Athens, Museum of the Ancient Agora, IL1086 (24 mm, 8.05 g). Published in Crosby 1964, L248. Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens City, Ancient Agora, ASCSA: Agora Excavations. Photo: Giannis Tzitzas © Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.)

of specimens that belong to the ‘Poseidon bust’ series,<sup>22</sup> the ‘Hermes bust’ series,<sup>23</sup> the ‘Athena bust’ series (Figure 9.4),<sup>24</sup> the ‘Athena head/ *Boukranion*’ series<sup>25</sup> and the ‘Athena on ship’ series,<sup>26</sup> on which the dolphin

<sup>22</sup> Agora IL257 (= Crosby, 1964, 113 L265).

<sup>23</sup> See the fifty examples that are from deposits D11:6, D11:7, and F12:4, from Kolonos Agoraios (A–F 9–15) and from the Southwest Area (B–C 16–17), of which only one may not have been countermarked: Crosby 1964, 112, L264.

<sup>24</sup> Agora IL1086 (= Crosby 1964, 110 L248), from Panathenaic Way (Q14).

<sup>25</sup> Crosby 1964, 110 L251a–e, including five examples from deposits D11:6, D10:1, and from Kolonos Agoraios (A–F 9–15).

<sup>26</sup> Crosby 1964, 111 L256a–b, whose two specimens are from D11:6.



is placed either at right or at left of the main design.<sup>27</sup> The countermark of snail and rabbit, which was added on two of the discussed pieces (**cat. nos. 5 and 10, Pl. I, 4 and 9**), is also found on some of the specimens of the ‘Athena/Theseus and the Minotaur’ series,<sup>28</sup> the ‘Athena/Tyche’ series (see **Figure 9.3**)<sup>29</sup> and the ‘Herakles and tripod’ series,<sup>30</sup> all from in front of Stoa and from deposit Q7:3. Given the sharing of common types and countermarks, it is necessary to investigate the background as well as the *real* nature of the relation between the ‘Alexander’ series and the associated other groups.

## II.1 Alexander’s Iconography between Tokens, Coins, and Medallions during the Imperial Period

The identification of the youthful male head is not provided by a legend in either Type 1 or Type 2. As is well known, this issue not only applies to Athenian tokens, but also to many other similar male portraits that are found in ancient material culture, particularly in sculpture. A large number of individual heads, statues and busts, whose names were lost alongside the inscribed base they once stood on, share those physiognomic characteristics (i.e. beardless youthful head with flowing hair and front locks forming an *anastolé*) that scholars generally associate with Alexander, although they do not offer secure evidence for a positive identification.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, one should be cautious in identifying these anonymous male heads, since the physiognomic features are not restricted to Alexander alone but are also applied to eponymous heroes of Greek cities (e.g. the eponymous hero of Kyzikos) and some personifications.<sup>32</sup>

Recently, K. Martin has asserted that the personification of the *Demos* (‘people’ of a Greek *polis*) as it appears on bronze coins struck over the imperial period by Greek cities of Asia Minor (Lydia, Phrygia and Caria) was inspired by eponymous heroes, already well established on Attic reliefs

<sup>27</sup> A quite different dolphin countermark, 8 mm long and stamped in outline only, occurs on other three types; see Crosby 1964, 110 L252 (Athena head right/Three Graces), 114–15 L289 (Helmet?), 115 L291a–f (Lion’s head with tenon).

<sup>28</sup> Crosby 1964, 118 L306.

<sup>29</sup> Crosby 1964, 118 L308a–b.

<sup>30</sup> See Crosby’s catalogue number L317a–i, which includes nine examples showing three countermarks (a stork and a lizard, and a plump pitcher or an owl, in addition to that of snail and a rabbit): Crosby 1964, 120.

<sup>31</sup> Dahmen 2007, 2. In sculpture, only the so-called ‘Azara herm’ can be safely identified as a portrait of Alexander thanks to the inscription engraved on its shaft (ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ ΜΑΚΕΔ: ‘Alexander, son of Philip, the Macedonian’); see Smith 1988, 60 and 155 no. 1, pl. 1; Stewart 1993, 42 and 423, Figures 45–46.

<sup>32</sup> See von Fritze 1917, 15–18; *SNG* Glasgow no. 2009, pl. 141; Dahmen 2007, 2.



Figure 9.5 AE, Nikaia (181–84). 17 mm, 2.85 g (Berlin: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, inv. no. 18214440) © Münzkabinett der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

of the late Classical age, and heroic portraits of Alexander the Great.<sup>33</sup> According to this view, some of the anonymous beardless youthful heads that are depicted on these civic coinages, which sport a diadem, laurel wreath or long flowing locks, should be interpreted as personifications of the *Demos*. However, similar portrait-types are conveniently identified by the legend as Alexander on a larger sample of civic coins struck by different mints of Asia Minor, Syria Palaestina and Arabia (Nikaia, Apollonia Mordiaion, Abila, Kapitolias and Gerasa) from the first to the third centuries. These issues were a product of self-representation and identity of eastern Greek cities that proclaimed themselves as ‘Macedonian’ settlements, and they met the need to create a noble past (*eugeneia*) as part of the city’s present identity by including Alexander’s images in their iconographic propaganda.<sup>34</sup> Particularly, the type of Alexander diademed, which is often accompanied by the legend *ktistes* (‘founder’), is popular on provincial civic coinages throughout the Roman period, and is prominent compared to the type of Alexander wearing a *leonte* or an elephant’s scalp (Figure 9.5).<sup>35</sup>

The close resemblance between these Alexander busts and those lacking any legend on imperial civic coinages of the Greek cities of the eastern provinces should bring into question any systematic interpretation of the anonymous male heads as the *Demos*, except for the issues of Blaundos, Dokimeion and Peltae, whose obverse portrait-type is identified as the *Demos* by the legend.<sup>36</sup> Even though the considered physiognomic features are quite common and applied to various subjects, neither the portraits

<sup>33</sup> Martin 2013, 10–61. Martin claims that the sex of the two personifications, the *Demos* and the *Boule*, whose iconography differed from city to city, was determined by grammar, so that the *Demos* was invariably male, and the *Boule* was feminine, while the two coin portraits taken together were the visual rendition of prescripts of public decrees of Greek cities (ὁ δῆμος καὶ ἡ βουλή followed by the city ethnic in the genitive): Martin 2013, 13–14.

<sup>34</sup> Dahmen 2007, 2–5 and 20.

<sup>35</sup> On the above-mentioned coins from the cities of Asia Minor, Syria Palaestina and Arabia, see Dahmen 2007, 24–25, 28–31, 126–27, 130–34.

<sup>36</sup> The legend reading ‘*Demos*’ accompanies a beardless youthful head with laurel wreath or long flowing locks on the imperial civic coinages of Blaundus in Lydia and Dokimeion in Phrygia, as well as the portrait of Alexander as Herakles wearing a lion’s scalp on the imperial civic issue of Peltae in Phrygia: Martin 2013, 59–60.

of heroes and *basileis*, nor any of the types of Alexander used on the civic coinages of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, is comparable with Type 1 attested on the Athenian tokens. Moreover, it is unlikely that the portrait of Type 1 is to be identified as the *Demos*. The personification of this civic institution occurs on the Athenian tokens only during the Hellenistic period, and the surviving *Demos* images are quite different from Type 1. On tokens, the *Demos* is evoked only by an inscription, or is depicted in the guise of a diademed, bearded, mature head to right – that is, one of the two guises with which *Demos* is generally represented on Roman provincial coinages – or as a male figure standing left crowning the personification of the *Boule* on his right.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the *Demos* image constitutes a rare type, which apparently was not included in the iconographic repertoire of the tokens issued in the Roman period.<sup>38</sup>

Although the youthful male head on Athenian tokens has been related to the busts of Alexander adopted on the civic issues of Asia Minor,<sup>39</sup> the anonymous portrait of Type 1 is closer to some of the types utilised over the third century on the provincial coinage of the *Koinon* of Macedonia. Inaugurated in the first century, this pseudo-autonomous bronze coinage almost totally replaced the emperor's bust with a variety of Alexander-related images from 218 to 246, according to Gaebler's sequence.<sup>40</sup>

On the coins in question, obverses exclusively feature a large number of head and bust-types of Alexander (A–K, according to Gaebler's sequence) together with a legend giving Alexander's name (generally in the genitive form ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ), including among others the type of Alexander as Herakles wearing a lion's scalp (D and J), Alexander with a ram's horn

<sup>37</sup> For the *Demos* tokens, cf. Svoronos 1900, 326–27 (nos. 90–99, pl. II, 39–42); Martin 2013, 15–16. Also, the legend Ο ΔΕΜΟΣ following the name of a magistrate together with the depiction of an unclothed warrior (variously interpreted as Theseus, Perseus, Harmodios or even *Demos* himself) appear on the *stephanephoric* tetradrachms that were issued by Athens in 164–163 BCE, which are usually regarded as an 'exile mission' of Athenian citizens and an expression of protest against political conditions in the city: Martin 2013, 20–22.

<sup>38</sup> Even if one considers the mature and bearded bust shown on one side of piece Agora IL240 (cat. no. 3) as a depiction of the *Demos*, as proposed by Gkikaki 2019, 132, and cat. no. 88, it is difficult to believe that two images depicting the same figure – the *Demos* – were represented on both sides of the token.

<sup>39</sup> So Gkikaki 2019, 132 with n. 40.

<sup>40</sup> Gaebler's chronological sequence is based on die-links and the number of temple wardenships recorded on the coins of the *Koinon* of Macedonia (once or twice neocorate); see Gaebler 1906, and further additions in Gaebler 1935; Dahmen 2005. A parallel small civic coinage with dates of the Actian era and identical images was also struck by the provincial administrative capital of Beroia, where the assembly of the Macedonian League took place: Dahmen 2007, 31.

(G) and the king wearing an Attic helmet (E).<sup>41</sup> Very similar to the Type 1 depicted on Athenian tokens is Alexander's beardless, youthful bust wearing a royal diadem, characterised by long hair and an expressive physiognomy (Types B-C) (Figures 9.6–9.7).<sup>42</sup> In particular, both tokens and coins share the prominent feature of the windblown hair of the king, which appears to move in a breeze as the king rushes forward.<sup>43</sup> Similar expressive coiffures are only found in late Hellenistic ruler portraiture, as they occur on the portraits of Seleucid rulers (Alexander IV and Tryphon) and Mithradates VI of Pontus.<sup>44</sup> The feature of flame-like locks was applied to Alexander's iconography only from the third century onwards, as it appears for the first time on the Macedonian Koinon's coins; indeed, there are no earlier examples in existence.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Also the reverses, among agonistic and national Macedonian types, are related to Alexander and interestingly even to his mother Olympias, whose elaborated scenes are otherwise known from contemporary gold medallions and later Roman *contorniates*: Dahmen 2007, 31 and 138–41.

<sup>42</sup> Types B and C featuring Alexander diademed with hair waving in the wind are quite common on the provincial coinage of the Macedonian Koinon. According to Gaebler's chronological sequence, Type B, showing Alexander's head facing right, occurs on all six series dating from 218 to 246, that is from the time of Elagabalus (218–22) to that of Philip the Arab (244–49). Less frequent is Type C showing a similar head of Alexander's facing left, which is attested on series III a (during the time of Elagabalus) and on series II (under the late reign of Severus Alexander: ca. 231–35).

<sup>43</sup> Unlike the types depicted on the provincial coinage of the Macedonian Koinon, the youthful male head represented on the Athenian *symbola* (Type 1) is bare and does not wear any diadem. The latter feature emphasises Alexander's royal rank on coin types. A youthful portrait of Alexander not diademed, which has been recognised as the first Alexander portrait on coins, is attested on a small issue of bronze units assigned to the city of Naukratis in Egypt (ca. 330 BCE), whose obverse shows the bare head of a young and beardless male with tousled hair accompanied by the Greek letters AAE below, while on the reverse is a head of a woman (presumably the city's main goddess) accompanied by the legend NAY, that is the abbreviated identification of the issuing city: Price 1981, 33 and 35 Figure 7; Stewart 1993, 166, 173, 433 no. 2 Figure 51. However, the rarity of this bronze series (currently documented by a single specimen) and the geographical and chronological gap make any direct connection between the portrait attested on the Naukratis issue and that of Type 1 occurring on Athenian tokens improbable.

<sup>44</sup> Smith 1988, 99, pl. 77.14; Fleischer 1991, 68–69; Dahmen 2007, 43; Martin 2013, 62.

<sup>45</sup> So Dahmen 2007, 43. An exception is represented by the tetradrachms issued in the name of Aesillas, the Roman *quaestor* of Macedonia (ca. 90–70 BCE), which combine the feature of the windblown hair with a 'baroque' bust of Alexander wearing a ram's horn that was inspired by late Hellenistic art: Callataÿ 1996; Callataÿ 1998, 113–17; Bauslaugh 2000. But only the tips of Alexander's hair are actually flying in the wind, while the strands on his neck and below his ears are rendered in natural waves



Figure 9.6 AE, Koinon of Macedonia, Time of Gordian (238–44) (Type B). 27 mm, 13.34 g. Image courtesy: Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., Electronic Auction 158, 14 February 2007, lot 176 © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. ([www.cngcoins.com/](http://www.cngcoins.com/))



Figure 9.7 AE, Koinon of Macedonia, Time of Gordian (238–44) (Type C). 25 mm, 13.79 g. Image courtesy: Numismatik Naumann (formerly Gitbud & Naumann), Auction 36, 4 October 2015, lot 327 © Numismatik Naumann (<https://numismatik-naumann.com/>)

Interestingly, the feature of windblown hair applied to Alexander's iconography appears also on one of the three gold medallions from a hoard that surfaced in 1863 near Tarsos in ancient Cilicia.<sup>46</sup> In addition to the type of Alexander as Herakles with a lion's scalp and that of a bearded mature man with a diadem (probably to be identified as Alexander's father Philip II), the portrait on the third medallion (labelled 'Tarsos III')<sup>47</sup> shows Alexander wearing a diadem in his hair, which moves romantically in the wind. This type is similar to Types B and C adopted on the Koinon's coins,

and remain motionless. On this point, see Dahmen 2007, 98 n. 21: 'The portrait of Alexander on the coins of Aesillas differs in its flame-like locks and the fact that the hair at his temples does not follow this direction, but simply falls vertically'. The fluttering effect now performed by the lion's skin is very rarely found on some posthumous Alexanders of the Herakles type: Martin 2013, 62.

<sup>46</sup> The hoard from Tarsos was assembled during the third century and buried late in the reign of Gordian III or in that of Philip the Arab around 244. This chronology is suggested by the materials included inside the hoard, especially the coins: twenty-three Roman *aurei*, the majority of which come from the period 198–217. It was claimed that the hoard came from the superstructures of an ancient building in the plains around Tarsos, but actually very little is known about the find-spot or the archaeological context: De Longpérier 1868, 309; Noe 1937, 279 no. 1064; Dahmen 2008, 494–95 and *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> The gold medallion labelled as 'Tarsos III' is held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), inv. F 1672.



Figure 9.8 Gold medallion from the Aboukir hoard, Beroia (?), First half of the third century (Dressel A). 54 mm, 112.66 g (Berlin: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, inv. no. 18200006) © Münzkabinett der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



which has led to a typological connection between these two groups, while Alexander's hair usually falls down along his neck on earlier numismatic representations.

Furthermore, the stylistic rendering of Alexander's physiognomy in 'pathetic' style,<sup>48</sup> as shown on Type 1 of the Athenian tokens – that is, with a head turned upward, gazing to heaven – occurs on both the *Koinon*'s coins and the Tarsos medallion. These same facial features are otherwise only known from a number of gold medallions from the hoard of Aboukir (Abu Qir).<sup>49</sup> Particularly, the diademed head of Alexander with ram's horn

<sup>48</sup> For this expression, cf. Dahmen 2008, 504 and 506.

<sup>49</sup> The hoard of Aboukir was probably buried at the beginning of the fourth century and then discovered in 1902. The assemblage of ancient gold from this hoard, which was quickly dispersed in trade, is believed to have included six hundred or more Roman *aurei* dating between the reigns of Severus Alexander (222–35) and Constantius I

facing left (Dressel A, F, G, from the same die), whose type is modelled on the famous portrait of Alexander introduced by Lysimachos for his royal coinage, share with the Tarsos medallion ('Tarsos III') and some of the Koinon's bronzes the same physiognomic features and drawing of the facial lines, including the area around the eyes and nose (Figure 9.8). The portrait on the Aboukir medallions also possesses exactly the same pose with a slightly tilted neck and elaborate front, although the windblown hair is not reproduced here.<sup>50</sup>

The adoption of such facial features on Athenian tokens deserves attention. The stylistic rendering of the youthful male head of Type 1 not only identifies the subject as Alexander, but reflects some of the iconographic conventions (windblown hair, facial features in 'pathetic' style) applied to Alexander's physiognomy in the first half of the third century.

It is remarkable that the feature of Alexander's windblown hair occurs afterwards on the so-called '*contorniates*', namely bronze medallions with incised rims that were issued in the city of Rome from the mid-fourth to the fifth century AD, maybe to be distributed as gifts on New Year's Day. In particular, some of the obverse dies carrying the type of Alexander as *basileus* (i.e. Alexander, XIV–XVIII, XX, in Alföldi's catalogue) represent careful reproductions of the designs depicted on the third-century gold medallions and the Koinon's coins (Figure 9.9). On the other hand, die XIX features a much more static version with smooth but long hair, and a diadem positioned high on Alexander's head.<sup>51</sup>

(293–306), eighteen to twenty bars, and twenty Alexander medallions. No information is available on the character of its hiding place, and this has led some scholars to question its authenticity: e.g. Toynbee 1944, 69, n. 43. Against this view, see Dressel 1906, 72–85; Dressel 1909, 137–57; Dahmen 2008. On the hoard from Aboukir, see Eddé 1905; Dressel 1906; Vermeule 1982; Dahmen 2008, 494–97.

<sup>50</sup> On the Aboukir medallions, these facial features are also applied to the representation of Alexander with an Attic helmet combined with various bust types (Dressel B, H, I, from same die, and Dressel M, N), whose designs derive from late Hellenistic or early imperial prototypes: Dahmen 2008, 501–02. Scholars have generally assumed a close relationship between the bronze coinage of the Macedonian Koinon and the gold medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir in terms of place production and authority, since each of the aforementioned features are only found on these three groups. Such a relationship between the coin and medallic groups in question is also suggested by other similar obverse and reverse types and further details: Dressel 1906; Dahmen 2008, 505–09 and *passim*.

<sup>51</sup> See Alföldi and Alföldi 1976, 13–18 and 168–69; Mittag 1999, 164–66, 277–78, pls. 1–3. In light of the numismatic materials in existence, K. Dahmen has regarded the feature of the windblown hair applied to Alexander's physiognomy as an invention of the early third century, which modernised already existing representations of the Macedonian king, and was still utilised on '*contorniate*' medallions in late antiquity: Dahmen 2007, 32 and 43. The windblown hair combined with the diademed head of



Figure 9.9 AE, Contorniate, Alexander, XIV (= Alföldi and Alföldi 1976, Kat.Nr. 538, Taf. 22, 5), 36 mm, 25.93 g (Madrid: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, MAN 2011/101/54) © Museo Arqueológico Nacional de Madrid

In addition to the bronze coins of the Macedonian Koinon, the medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir and the ‘*contorniate*’ medallions, the youthful head (Type 1) depicted on Athenian tokens thus provides a further precious piece of evidence illustrating the development of the portrait-type of Alexander, with hair flying in the wind on coins and coin-like objects.<sup>52</sup> As will be explained below, the above identified typological and stylistic parallels provide a clue to determine the chronology as well as the models used for producing the ‘Alexander’ series.

Finally, a unique Athenian token (Type 2) (cat. no. 19, Pl. I, 15) shows a male head slightly turned upward to right, gazing to heaven, with short curls, which was interpreted as Alexander the Great.<sup>53</sup> A male head similar to Type 2 is found on some of the lead tokens issued at Ephesos during the imperial period, perhaps over the second and third centuries AD.<sup>54</sup> The Ephesian male head, usually wearing a ram’s horn, has been identified as Lysimachos

Alexander is depicted also on at least three other smaller medallions in gold and silver that were perhaps used as talismans, and whose production perhaps followed the example of the medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir; see Dahmen 2008, 496, 519 cat. nos. 5, 15, 16. On the meaning of the Alexander images on *contorniates*, see Sánchez Vendramini 2022.

<sup>52</sup> A similar portrait-type showing the head of Alexander with a ram’s horn and flame-like hair is also attested on the obverse of a lead *tessera* that recently appeared in an auction sale, whose reverse bears the group of a lion and a human figure accompanied by the Greek legend ΑΛ[ΕΞΑΝ]-ΔΡΟΥ: Freeman & Sear, Mail Bid Sale 13, 25 August 2006, lot 526.

<sup>53</sup> Crosby 1964, 114 L275; Gkikaki 2019, 139 cat. no. 58.

<sup>54</sup> Gülbay and Kireç 2008. The portrait-type in question appears on five one-sided specimens (nos. 195, 197–200) and two double-sided pieces, whose reverses respectively carry the head of the type introduced by Lysimachos in incuse (no. 188) and the figure of Artemis Ephesia, that is the symbol of Ephesos itself (no. 196).



of Thrace, probably because of his resemblance to the types depicted on Lysimachos' coins.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the absence of Ammon's horn on the Athenian token makes it uncertain whether Type 2 should be regarded as an image of Alexander or even Lysimachos as Alexander. Furthermore, the end of the diadem on the back of his neck was misinterpreted by Crosby as a small snake or another lock of hair;<sup>56</sup> it instead reveals the royal rank of the subject. Since this iconographic detail is known from a number of portraits of Hellenistic rulers and *diadochoi* (e.g. Mithradates III, Mithradates VI of Pontus, Ariarathes IX of Cappadocia), it is not possible safely to identify the portrait of Type 2, although its proportions and facial structure are close to those of the male head on the Ephesian tokens.

## II.2 Connecting Types and Patterns: A Macedonian Prototype?

The remarkable parallels between the 'Alexander' tokens and the groups including the bronze coinage of the Macedonian Koinon and the gold medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir raise the issue of the relationship between coins and medallions.

As seen above, the Koinon's coins date from 218 (the first year of the reign of Elagabalus) to 246 (the rule of Philip the Arab, 244–49), based on die combinations and the numbering of the neocorate (temple warden) title on the reverse. With regards to the gold medallions, the chronological information provided by analysing the Aboukir medallions on iconographic grounds suggests the period between 211–12 and 244–47 as their date of production, thus preceding the coins by about seven years.<sup>57</sup> The dating of the Tarsos pieces, whose imagery lacks any chronological reference, is less

<sup>55</sup> For this (not discussed) identification, see Gülbay and Kireç 2008, 35–36. However, the diademed male head with a ram's horn that was introduced without any legend on Lysimachos' tetradrachms in 297–281 BCE should be interpreted as a portrait of Alexander himself since it recalls Alexander's visit to the oracle at Siwah in 331 BCE, although it is tempting to see this image as Lysimachos' portrait and his own urgent need for legitimacy: Dahmen 2007, 119. Moreover, this same type-portrait with a ram's horn was reused even later by Ptolemaios, one of Lysimachos' sons, on bronze coins issued around 240 BCE: Hill 1923, 207–12 no. 3, pl. 9.4. The aforementioned Ephesian type is instead interpreted as Alexander the Great by Gkikaki 2019, 132. In general, the type of Alexander with a ram's horn is well documented after Lysimachos on coins and even on a few rare tokens: in addition to the specimen mentioned at footnote 52; see the lead *tessera* described by Rostovtzeff and Prou 1900, no. 664, pl. II.14.

<sup>56</sup> Crosby 1964, 114.

<sup>57</sup> Dahmen 2008, 497–99, 520 and *passim*. The start date of the production of the Aboukir medallions is indicated by the portrait of Caracalla depicted on three pieces (Dressel E, S and T), although a posthumous resurrection of this type after the reign of this emperor is possible as well.

certain; however, technical and iconographic similarities support the view that the medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir were produced over the same time frame, although it is unclear whether they are to be considered as a single series or two distinctive issues.<sup>58</sup> As for the historical background, both coins and medallions have been related to the agonistic festivals, games and competitions in honour of Alexander the Great (called 'Alexandreia'), which took place on an annual basis together with the imperial cult in Beroia, the provincial capital of the Macedonian Koinon.<sup>59</sup>

In order to identify the relation between the 'Alexander' tokens and these objects, it is necessary to take into consideration the iconographic dependence between the Macedonian Koinon's coinage and the Tarsos and Aboukir medallions. While previous scholars assumed that the Aboukir medallions were the source for the Koinon's bronzes,<sup>60</sup> K. Dahmen has recently asserted that both coins and medallions were dependent on now lost prototypes from Macedonia: statue groups or paintings probably formed a common source of inspiration for both groups.<sup>61</sup> Similar images

<sup>58</sup> Dressel 1906, 57–59 and 73 recognised the medallions from Tarsos and those from Aboukir as two major groups, which were produced in different times and by different engravers, but all within a single workshop – contra Dahmen (2008, 511–13), who argued that the Aboukir and Tarsos medallions should be considered as a single series struck at the same place and time, given their technical similarities and the close relationship between the reverse designs of Tarsos II and Dressel A. Nevertheless, the differences in diameter, weight and fineness between these gold medallions (see Peixoto Cabral, Alves and Hipólito 2000, 401–14; Dahmen 2008, 509–10) support the hypothesis that the medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir were produced as two distinct issues.

<sup>59</sup> Epigraphic evidence on these Alexander festivals of Beroia, especially from honorary and sepulchral inscriptions naming athletes and magistrates involved, is available from AD 229 onwards: Leschhorn 1998, 400–05; Burrell 2004, 195–96; Dahmen 2007, 33–34 and 136. Afterwards, these Alexander games were made 'isolympic' and took place every four years starting in AD 242–43, and a second time in AD 246–47: Gaebler 1906, 13, 22 nos. 795–801, 856, 871. Because of their close iconographic parallels with the Koinon's coinage, the gold medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir have also been related to Macedonia: Arnold-Biucchi 2006, 79; Dahmen 2008, 519–20. About their purpose, it has been generally argued that the gold medallions were distributed as prize money (the so-called *Niketeria*) to the victorious athletes in agonistic competitions; see e.g. Dressel 1906, 56; Leschhorn 1998, 405. Recently, Dahmen 2008, 517–22 has interpreted these gold medallions as gifts presented by the Agonothetes and Makedoniarchos to high-ranking visitors and officials.

<sup>60</sup> Dressel (1906, 60) considered the Koinon's coins as 'Volksausgaben' ('popular issues') of the rarer gold medallions, while Toynbee (1944, 71–73) interpreted them as copies after the design of the medallions. See also the less drastic position of Vermeule (1982, 70).

<sup>61</sup> Dahmen 2008, 515–17, in particular 515: 'The representations of Alexander and the known veneration of a cult to Alexander the Great suggest that statues and paintings in existence at Beroia inspired the types of both medallions and coins'. This would not

of Alexander, as well as scenes related to his legend, appear again on Late Roman *contorniates*, including not only Alexander's bust with windblown hair but also other reverse scenes showing, for instance, Olympias on a kline or the king sitting on a chair and holding a shield decorated with the depiction of Achilles and Penthesileia.<sup>62</sup> These similarities make it probable that some of the images put on *contorniates* had their origins in the same designs as the Koinon's bronzes and the gold medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir.<sup>63</sup>

How should one assess the origin of the iconography of 'Alexander' on Athenian tokens in light of the third century coins and medallic imagery? Given the chronological distribution of both coins and medallions and their high quality, it is likely that the portrait-type on the Athenian tokens may originate from either the Koinon's bronzes or the gold medallion types. However, a dependence on both groups of materials as patterns might also be possible. Vice versa, it is unlikely that the Koinon's bronzes or the gold medallions were inspired by the Athenian tokens, due to the poor quality and workmanship of the latter – as usual for such class of objects – and their limited circulation. Also, it cannot be said with certainty that the designs on the tokens were inspired by now lost prototypes in sculpture, since there are no extant examples which depict Alexander's windblown hair apart from those found on coins.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the typological and stylistic similarities of token specimens with the Koinon's bronzes and gold medallions are too tight to consider Type 1 depicted on the Athenian *symbola* as an original, autonomous or even earlier iconographic model.

In light of this, it could be argued that the portrait of Alexander on the Athenian tokens (Type 1) derived from an earlier Macedonian pattern, which should be identified with either the bronze coins of the Macedonian Koinon or the gold medallions, or even with both groups of artefacts. In terms of relative chronology, this evidence gives a *terminus post quem* of AD

exclude a gradual process of adoption of the Koinon's coins from the gold medallions, as the chronological sequence of the appearance of the shared motifs within the two groups might indicate.

<sup>62</sup> Dahmen 2008, 514, Figures 7–10 and 523.

<sup>63</sup> See Toynbee 1944, 71–73; Dahmen 2007, 38 and 44. About the relationship between the medallions from Tarsos and Aboukir and the *contorniates*, see also Martin 2013, 65–66, who does not exclude the possibility that the *contorniates* served as a model for forging the Tarsos and Aboukir medallions, in case the hypothesis on the non-authenticity of the latter is accepted.

<sup>64</sup> On this point, see Dahmen (2007, 43), who supposed the feature of windblown hair found on coins was possibly added to Alexander's portrait during the Severan dynasty, when Alexander the Great formed a focus for rulers such as Caracalla, Elagabalus and Severus Alexander.

211–18 for the ‘Alexander’ tokens, whose production was probably later than that of the Koinon’s bronzes and the Aboukir and Tarsos medallions.<sup>65</sup>

### III Chronology and Archaeological Evidence

The evidence discussed above does not contradict the archaeological context data, which allows further considerations about the chronology of the ‘Alexander’ tokens (Type 1).

The sharing of certain common types and countermarks means that some of the ‘Alexander’ pieces found on Kolonos Agoraios and other deposits of the Agora are connected, *inter alia*, to the special group of tokens from the Stoa of Attalos and its vicinity, which have been dated by Crosby to the third century based on the excavation context, with 267 as a *terminus ante quem*. Indeed, the type of Poseidon on one ‘Alexander’ piece from Kolonos Agoraios (*cat. no. 1*) is also attested on thirteen *symbola* from in front of the Stoa (O–P 7–10) and three from deposit Q7:3;<sup>66</sup> the pieces of the Tyche/Alexander group (*cat. nos. 4–18*) share the Tyche type with two token specimens, both from in front of (P 9–10) and south of the Stoa (Q–R 12–15).<sup>67</sup> The countermark of snail and rabbit on two of the ‘Alexander’ specimens (*cat. nos. 5 and 10*), which were excavated in the area immediately in front of the Stoa (O–P 7–10), occurs also on some of the specimens belonging to three distinct series (‘Athena/Theseus and the Minotaur’, ‘Athena/Tyche’, and ‘Herakles and tripod’ series), all from in front of Stoa and from deposit Q7:3.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> However, given the uncertain dating of the Tarsos pieces as well as the controversy about the authenticity of both groups of gold medallions, the start date of the coinage of the Macedonian Koinon production (218) should be considered as a more reliable *terminus post quem* for the issue of ‘Alexander’ tokens. Should the authenticity of the gold medallions be confirmed, the *terminus post quem* to take into consideration for the start date of the ‘Alexander’ tokens issuing would more safely move to a slightly earlier date, that is 211–12.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Crosby 1964, 118 L309. The deposit Q7:3 is a trench dug below the floor level against the foundations of the piers for the interior columns, whose fill contained, in addition to 230 tokens, metal fittings and fragments from the marble façade of the Stoa itself, sherds dating from the middle of the third century and 105 coins which run down into the reign of Gallienus (255–68). On this point, see Crosby 1964, 116: ‘The trench was presumably dug shortly after the attack on Athens by the Heruli in 267, probably to investigate the strength of the foundation in the process of building the Late Roman Fortification Wall’.

<sup>67</sup> Crosby 1964, 118 L308a–b.

<sup>68</sup> The dolphin countermark is not attested on the tokens from the Stoa of Attalos but is consistently found on specimens of three closely related deposits on Kolonos Agoraios (i.e. D10:1, D11:6 and D11:7), as shown by Crosby 1964, 112. Cf. also Gkikaki 2019, 130 and 132–34.

These connections make it possible to apply the *terminus ante quem* of 267 to the ‘Alexander’ series as a whole, which was determined by Crosby for the tokens from the Stoa of Attalos and its vicinity via the archaeological evidence. Interestingly, the iconographic analysis provided in this study gives a close *terminus post quem* for the ‘Alexander’ tokens and allows us to place the production of the series within a shorter time frame. By cross-referencing archaeological evidence and iconographic analysis, it can be argued that the ‘Alexander’ series of the Athenian *symbola* were struck from ca. 211–18 (i.e. after the start date of the Aboukir medallions and the Koinon’s coins production) and continued up to 267, remaining in production at the time of the sack of Athens. This relative chronology is to be ascribed not only to the six ‘Alexander’ specimens found in the area of Stoa of Attalos,<sup>69</sup> but also to the examples bearing the same male portrait from Kolonos Agoraios and other deposits of the Agora, some of which – as seen above – have been generically assigned by Crosby to the period between 31 BCE and 267.<sup>70</sup>

#### IV Some Remarks about the Potential Function of the ‘Alexander’ Series

As for the purpose of the ‘Alexander’ tokens, all preserved examples are uninscribed and this makes it problematic to assign them to specific uses, as has often been noted regarding the majority of the Athenian *symbola*.<sup>71</sup>

The nature of the close relation between the ‘Alexander’ series and the series of tokens found in and around the Stoa of Attalos as well as on Kolonos Agoraios (including common morphological aspects as well as identical types and countermarks) needs a closer look. The countermarks hint that all closely interconnected tokens had a common background at least in terms of manufacture and distribution. As has already been stated,

<sup>69</sup> See above § I.2.

<sup>70</sup> One may wonder if this relative chronology can be also applied to the other token groups that are connected with the ‘Alexander’ series for sharing a few types (Poseidon bust, Tyche) and countermarks (the snail and rabbit countermarks as well as the dolphin one); see above, § I.2. Nevertheless, consideration should be given also to the possibility that common types and countermarks were adopted at different times on the various interconnected groups, thus revealing different dates for each series. However, a very long period does not appear very probable given the close typological and stylistic similarities between the groups in question. For instance, with regard to the Athenian tokens carrying the dolphin countermark, Gkikaki (2019, 132) has suggested a short period of time by considering how the countermark was applied to the token specimens, which is consistently placed to the right on the majority of the ‘Hermes bust’ pieces.

<sup>71</sup> On this point, see Crosby 1964, 76–78. On the differences between Greek and Roman tokens in terms of appearance and purpose, see also Callataÿ 2010.

countermarks helped regulate and bring order to a complex system of token distribution in Athens and were the medium by which the authority behind the production confirmed the validity of the tokens.<sup>72</sup> Special attention shall be paid to the fact that a second or more stamps and countermarks were commonly added on the Athenian tokens at different times. Traces of reuse, including a small, punched hole or a second stamp, are also found on some of the 'Alexander' pieces,<sup>73</sup> except for those bearing the dolphin countermark, as well as the snail and rabbit one (i.e. *cat. nos.* 5, 10, 19). This evidence of reuse might suggest a second or third use of the token, which probably returned to the source and was countermarked – after a first use and before the collection of the tokens back – in order to be distinguished from the original issue. The countermarking procedure would seem the natural one to follow for recurring events.<sup>74</sup>

Besides the countermarks, morphological similarities as well as the sharing of common types support the view that all interconnected groups were issued from a single workshop maybe at different times, and were part of a single major series, a fact which implies the same function for all pieces associated with one another. This excludes the idea that the 'Alexander' series was produced as an autonomous issue with its own function. Also, the use of common types by different groups suggests there is no semantic link between obverse and reverse types on a single token, a phenomenon that is often attested even on later *contorniates*.<sup>75</sup> There is thus no meaning in the connection between Alexander's head and the types of a male and bearded bust (Poseidon on *L 266*, *cat. no.* 1; Dionysos, Zeus or the *Demos* on *L 272*, *cat. no.* 3) and Tyche, which are also adopted by other groups of Athenian tokens.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the portrait of Alexander constitutes an innovation within the multifaceted iconographic repertoire of Athenian tokens. Indeed, it does not appear on the token issues during the Hellenistic period, nor during the first two centuries of the imperial period. This also

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Crosby 1964, 83; Gkikaki 2019, 132–34. Countermarks are also found on the Greek provincial coinages of the imperial period; see Howgego 1985, 7–11, and 13–14. On the countermark types occurring on the Athenian *symbola* see Crosby 1964, 83. On the dolphin countermark and its meaning, see Crosby 1964, 112; Gkikaki 2019, 132–34.

<sup>73</sup> A second stamp is visible on the reverse side of two specimens (*cat. nos.* 6–7); a small hole is punched through on two specimens (*cat. nos.* 12 and 14).

<sup>74</sup> So Crosby 1964, 116. One might assume that the addition of a small hole, generally punched in the centre or near the edge of the flan, was due to the need to authenticate the token within a short time frame, for example to allow admission or exit on the occasion of a single event. Traces of reuse are also attested on a number of *contorniates* in the shape of metal inserts as well as of graffiti, which were engraved at different times by different hands; cf. Mondello 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Alföldi 1943, *passim*; Mazzarino 1951, 126; Michelini Tocci 1965, 18–20.

applies to the Poseidon and Tyche types, which do not occur on tokens prior to the third century.<sup>76</sup> As outlined above, the Alexander's portrait of Type 1 was not invented by the token die-cutters, but it possibly derived from a Macedonian model. Interestingly, this portrait follows a long-standing iconographic tradition focusing on Alexander's royalty and his status as a great ruler and military leader, leaving only the subtle gaze to the sky as a symbol of divine inspiration. No images of Alexander as a divine figure and *theios aner* were selected for the production of the Athenian tokens, which was well-established and wide-ranging in the numismatic representations of the great conqueror since the Hellenistic period. The use of Alexander's image on tokens from the third century can partly be explained as adaptation of contemporary coin and medallion issues over the imperial period. But this choice may also have been connected to the very purpose of the tokens on which the Alexander image is displayed.

In terms of function, Crosby asserted that the third-century group of tokens found in and around the Stoa of Attalos ('Section V', L299–L331) – including six 'Alexander' pieces – served as entrance tickets to ephebic festivals, which were celebrated each year in Athens by the ephebes in honour of emperors, heroes and gods. Each of the types used would thus have alluded to a different event that took place within these festivities.<sup>77</sup> Given the archaeological context where tokens were found, Crosby also stated that the Stoa of Attalos was possibly the place where the tokens were distributed or brought back for re-stamping before another use.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, M. Gkikaki has recently connected the issuing of the tokens from the hoard on Kolonos Agoraios – including the two 'Alexander' specimens Agora IL240 and IL244 – with the distributions of money, foods and gifts in general as part of the politics of euergetism in Roman Imperial Athens. The types used, some of which commemorate divine forefathers

<sup>76</sup> However, an image of Tyche bearing attributes different from L322 might occur on a Hellenistic Athenian token, but the interpretation of the figure remains uncertain; cf. Crosby 1964, 92 L55.

<sup>77</sup> See Crosby 1964, 85–86, and 115–17, who regarded some of these types (Asklepios, Theseus and the Minotaur, Athena, Nike and Zeus) as directly referring to some of the ten games (i.e. Asklepeia, Theseia, Atheneia, Epinikia) mentioned in the latest known complete ephebic inscription of 262/3 or 266/7 (see *IG II<sup>2</sup>*, 2245); other depictions could instead be speaking symbols for the names of the *agonothetai*, who are considered as those responsible for the issue of the admission tickets; see Crosby 1964, 116–17.

<sup>78</sup> Although this hypothesis is tempting, there is no evidence to support the connection of the Stoa of Attalos with the organisation of the ephebic festivals, despite the fact that excavations in the area of the Stoa have brought to light numerous ephebic inscriptions; see Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 220. Also, the nature of the deposits in and around the Stoa, whose fillings are mostly debris of destruction, do not demonstrate that the Stoa was the place where the tokens were collected and distributed.

and historical ancestors (e.g. Hermes, Sarapis, poliade deity), would reflect the elite's concern to gain the praise of the citizenry and preserve their prestige.<sup>79</sup>

What role did the 'Alexander' tokens play within the social context of third-century Athens? Is it possible to infer the purpose of these objects through their imagery?

There is no doubt that Alexander the Great had great prominence in the Greek world since the Hellenistic period. A cultic veneration of Alexander (and Hephaestion, revered as *theos paredros*, 'assistant deity') existed in Athens before 322 BCE,<sup>80</sup> and 'divine honours' were granted to the Macedonian king by the Athenians during his lifetime (324–323 BCE), after a formal debate in the Assembly.<sup>81</sup> Afterwards, a divine cult to Alexander was also extensively consecrated by other Greek and Greek-Eastern communities over the imperial period, in particular under the Severans.

Given the parallels with the Macedonian Koinon's bronzes and the Tarsos and Aboukir medallions, both of which have been related to agonistic festivals of Beroia, it is tempting to suppose that the 'Alexander' tokens served as mementoes or admission tickets to festivals or *agones hieroi* that were held in Athens in honour of Alexander. However, no information is apparently available on the existence in Athens of such events for Alexander, although other 'Alexandria' and games were dedicated to the king in different areas of the Greek world besides Beroia. The small number of the 'Alexander' specimens<sup>82</sup> and their connection to other series make it more probable that these pieces were used in broader Attic festivals together with the other associated tokens: in addition to the ephebic festivals, one might contemplate the Panathenaea, which were held up to the third century and incorporated religious festival and ceremony, athletic competitions and cultural events.<sup>83</sup> In one of these contexts, the image of Alexander may have been used as a model of a great ruler, conqueror and athlete par excellence, in line with his posthumous fame and the

<sup>79</sup> Gkikaki 2019, 134–36.

<sup>80</sup> A fragment of a Hyperides' speech (322 BCE) records that Alexander's cult in Athens included statues, altars and a temple: Hyperides, *Against Demosthenes* 5.32. According to Dixon (2014, 33), these structures were abandoned in the immediate aftermath of the Lamian War (323–322/19 BCE). Later legends report that Alexander was worshipped as 'Neos Dionysos' or an additional god to the twelve traditional gods of Athens; see Dreyer 2009, 230 with n. 95.

<sup>81</sup> E.g. Habicht 1956, 28–36; Mikalson 1998, 46–47.

<sup>82</sup> However, it cannot be excluded that the scarcity of duplicates showing the Alexander type might be due to the fact that the tokens were re-melted once used in order to employed again the lead for next issues, as has been proposed with regard to the lead specimens of Hellenistic period; see Crosby 1964, 78.

<sup>83</sup> On the Panathenaia the bibliography is huge. Cf. e.g. Shear 2012; Shear 2021.



socio-cultural and political impact his legacy had upon the late Hellenistic reigns and, afterwards, even upon the Roman empire.

An alternative scenario is also possible. As seen above, civic coinages of the Greek cities of Asia Minor played a role in the competition for obtaining imperial privileges (such as maintaining temples for the imperial cult and honorary titles) during the second and third centuries. Through a variety of Alexander-related images and legends, these cities of the eastern Roman provinces exploited Alexander's name and person in order to build and emphasise the importance and noble descent of a city claiming to have been founded by the famous conqueror.<sup>84</sup> Just like the advertising propaganda of the contemporary civic coinages of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, the issuing of the 'Alexander' tokens could be related to the ambitions of the Athenian elites for promoting their distinguished status in middle imperial Athens through a policy of euergetism. As with the tokens of the hoard from Kolonos Agoraios, the specimens with the portrait of the Macedonian king, which should be 'linked to the self-consciousness and self-portrayal of the elite',<sup>85</sup> might be regarded as exchange tokens for *donativa* made by Athenian magistracies and offices, whose imagery alluded to Athen's civic history and its divine and historical 'ancestors'.<sup>86</sup> The portrait of Alexander on tokens might have had a remarkable meaning in an era that saw the Barbarian invasions running throughout the Eastern provinces of the Roman empire, which culminated among other things in the Herulian destruction of Athens (267). In these vacillating political and military circumstances, the Athenian elites may even have selected the Alexander image on tokens for the valiant ruling and military ability of the Macedonian king, the image of whom would have risen as a Greco-Roman icon of patriotism and power against the enemy.<sup>87</sup>

Unfortunately, although one or the other hypothesis is possible, there is insufficient evidence on which to base a choice. Also, the question of whether the 'Alexander' tokens were 'official' or private products, which is closely connected to their purpose as well as to those responsible for their manufacture, remains open.<sup>88</sup> Regardless, the addition of countermarks

<sup>84</sup> Dahmen 2007, 3–5.

<sup>85</sup> Gkikaki 2019, 136.

<sup>86</sup> The possibility that the images of Alexander the Great and Hermes on the tokens from Kolonos Agoraios may have constituted a reference to the divine ancestry of the *genos* of *Kerykes* (including the family of the *Claudii* of Melite), who managed the issue and distribution of the tokens of Kolonos Agoraios, is contemplated by Gkikaki 2019, 135–36. On the *genos* of *Kerykes*, cf. Clinton 2004.

<sup>87</sup> On the apotropaic meaning of Alexander and Trajan's images attested on later *contorniates* as icons of Greco-Roman patriotism against eastern barbarism, see Sánchez Vendramini 2022.

<sup>88</sup> On the matter of the 'official' or private nature of the Athenian tokens, see Crosby 1964, 77; Bubelis 2010.

and further stamps on these specimens suggest, in either of the hypotheses considered above, a complex system of token distribution and reuse in Roman Athens. In order to solve the mystery behind the production of these special 'Alexander's', there certainly is need for further discussion. In this author's opinion, the relative chronology for the 'Alexander' series (ca. 211/18–267) determined in this study can help to rearrange the different series connected by common types and countermarks as well as to clarify the chronological sequence of the issue. Furthermore, although they have often been regarded as two different groups, the tokens from the Stoa of Attalos and its vicinity and those from Kolonos Agoraios should be considered as a whole, since the sharing of similar or even identical types and countermarks hint that they were part of a major issue of lead *symbola*. Based on these considerations, future research might be able to determine a more detailed dating to be applied to this issue of tokens as well as to shed light on the function as well as the authority behind their production.

## Conclusions

The Athenian lead tokens carrying the portrait of Alexander the Great, which are part of the Museum collection of the Agora of Athens, constitute a small but remarkable series of coin-like objects that provide new evidence about the development of the Macedonian king's iconography during the Roman Imperial period. No connection of these pieces with contexts or buildings is shown by the excavation contexts, since these artefacts are rare and occasional findings that were located together with other tokens and coins on Kolonos Agoraios, the Stoa of Attalos, as well as in Late Roman fill contexts excavated in other areas of Athens. Also, these specimens are connected to other series of lead tokens (e.g. the 'Poseidon bust', the 'Athena/Poseidon' and the 'Athena head/Tyche' series) in that they share common types and countermarks. The close morphological and typological parallels between different groups, which implies at least the same background of production, makes it probable that the 'Alexander' tokens were part of a larger issue of lead tokens which were issued for the same purpose.

In light of the evidence discussed above, the following points can be made:

- (1) Although all examples lack inscriptions identifying the depicted subject, the iconography employed on the 'Alexander' series (Type I) runs parallel to the diademed portrait of Alexander represented on the provincial coinage of the Macedonian Koinon (Types B and C) and on one of the three gold medallions from Tarsos ('Tarsos III'). All these artefacts share the special characteristic of windblown hair of the king, which is not attested on any of Alexander's earlier images

and can reasonably be considered as an invention of the early third century. Also, physiognomic features in ‘pathetic’ style provide links to the contemporary gold medallions from Aboukir and point out a close relationship with some of the conventions utilised in Macedonia for Alexander’s iconography over the third century.

- (2) The portrait of Type 2 attested on a single Athenian token features proportions and facial features that are close to the diademed male head with a ram’s horn (probably to be interpreted as Alexander) on some of the Ephesian lead tokens struck over the imperial period. However, the absence of the ram’s horn on the type of the Athenian piece makes any identification of Type 2 uncertain.
- (3) By cross-referencing archaeological context data and typological connections, it is likely that the ‘Alexander’ tokens (Type 1) were produced in period between ca. 211/18 and 267, that is after the start date of the gold medallions and the Koinon’s coins production and before the Herulian destruction of Athens (267).
- (4) While the Koinon’s bronzes and the Tarsos and Aboukir gold medallions were conceived in the context of the agonistic festivals for Alexander that were held in Beroia, the ‘Alexander’ tokens from Athens possibly served as mementoes or admission tickets on the occasion of one of the Attic festivals (such as the ephebic festivals, the Panathenaia etc.). Alternatively, they could be related to the *donativa* and the euergetic propaganda of the Athenian elites, as has been proposed for the tokens from the hoards found on Kolonos Agoraios.

Although further research is needed in order to clarify the authority behind the production as well as the exact sequence of the various interconnected series, Alexander’s images on Athenian lead tokens bear witness to the influence and appreciation of the legend of the Macedonian conqueror in third-century Athens. The ‘manipulation’ of Alexander’s images on the contemporary coins of the Greek cities of the eastern Roman provinces constitutes only part of a more general interest in the Macedonian king during the third century, especially under the reign of the Severan dynasty. Besides the numismatic sources, the figure of Alexander was at the heart of a flourishing literature focusing on the life and exploits of the Macedonian conqueror, which was inaugurated by the so-called *Alexander Romance* (whose original version in Greek dates back to the third century) and continued with a number of writings and translations in Latin over the fourth and fifth centuries AD (e.g. *Commonitorium Palladii*, *Collatio Alexandri et Dindimi*).<sup>89</sup> Devotion to Alexander, embodied by the agonistic festivals

<sup>89</sup> See e.g. Cracco Ruggini 1965; Boyle 1977; Stoneman 1991; Stoneman 2008.

at Beroia, was also expressed by the politics and personal choices of the Severan emperors who also partook in ‘Alexander-mania’.<sup>90</sup>

The ‘Alexander’ tokens thus provide an unexpected glimpse into the reception of the Macedonian king into third century Athenian society. As coin-like objects, these artefacts precede by at least a century the Alexander-related images on *contorniates* and rare Roman bronze *tesserae* (the so-called ‘Asina’ tokens) originating from the fourth and fifth centuries CE in Rome.<sup>91</sup> From a cultural perspective, these artefacts bear witness to the posthumous appreciation of Alexander as a symbol of a shared Greek cultural identity, which is still attested by the fashion of using *Alexandri effigies* as good luck symbols on everyday objects in the late antique East and West.<sup>92</sup> The Athenian tokens thus enable us to trace not only a specific representation of the Macedonian king but also an unseen development of his cultural legend during the high Empire.

## Catalogue

- 1 **Agora IL121** (= Crosby 1964, L266). Lead, Ø 20 mm, 7.46 g (Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10, no. 1.**
- 2 **Uninventoried** (= Crosby 1964, L266). Lead, no recorded data (Athens: Museum of Ancient Agora).
- 3 **Agora IL240** (= Crosby 1964, L272). Lead, Ø 17 mm, 5.34 g (Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 2.**

<sup>90</sup> On the importance of Alexander as a model for the Severan dynasty, with particular reference to Caracalla who was curiously defined as *philalexandrotatos* (‘lover of Alexander’) by Dio Cassius (78.9.1), see Zecchini 1984; Espinosa 1990; Bancalari 2000. According to the *Historia Augusta*, Severus Alexander placed an image of Alexander the Great in his private *lararium maius* with those of Apollonius of Tyana, Christ, Abraham, Orpheus and others: *Historia Augusta, Vita Alexandri Severi* 29.2; 31.4–5. On the value of this tradition, see Settis 1972; Blázquez Martínez 1990; Mondello 2017.

<sup>91</sup> As for the so-called ‘Asina’ tokens, some of the specimens in existence connect a portrait of Alexander as Herakles shown on the obverse to a reverse type carrying a donkey suckling a foal, which is sometimes accompanied by the legend *Asina* (‘she-donkey’); cf. Alföldi 1951a; Alföldi 1951b; Mondello 2020.

<sup>92</sup> See *Historia Augusta, Tyranni Triginta* 14.2, with reference to the Macriani family in the fourth century Roman West. On this passage, see Mondello 2016, 129; Perassi 2017, 239–41. With regard to late antique Greek East, compare also a John Chrysostom passage, who condemns those Christians that ‘tie bronze coins of Alexander the Great around their head and feet’: John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos catechesis* 2, 5 (= *Patrologia Graeca*, 49, 240).

- 4 **Agora IL410** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 18 mm, 4.04 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 3.**
- 5 **Agora IL478** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 19 mm  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 4.**
- 6 **Agora IL528** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 19 mm, 4.85 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 5.**
- 7 **Agora IL538** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 20 mm, 6.32 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 6.**
- 8 **Agora IL539** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 17 mm, 4.62 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 7.**
- 9 **Agora IL543** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 17 mm, 5.36 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 8.**
- 10 **Agora IL576** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 19 mm (Athens:  
Museum of the the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 9.**
- 11 **Agora IL592** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 18 mm, 4.32 g  
(Athens: Museum of Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 10.**
- 12 **Agora IL629** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 19 mm, 5.51 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 11.**
- 13 **Agora IL1095** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 20 mm, 7.80 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 12.**
- 14 **Agora IL1096** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 18 mm, 6.19 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 13.**
- 15 **Agora IL1421** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, Ø 17 mm, 4.84 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 14.**
- 16 **Uninventoried** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, no recorded data  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora).
- 17 **Uninventoried** (= Crosby 1964, L322). Lead, no recorded data  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora).
- 18 **Uninventoried** (= Mylonas 1901, 119–22, pl. 7 = Crosby 1964,  
L322). Lead, no recorded data (Athens: Numismatic Museum).
- 19 **Agora IL 244** (= Crosby 1964, L275). Lead, Ø 20 mm, 5.80 g  
(Athens: Museum of the Ancient Agora). **Figure 9.10 no. 15.**

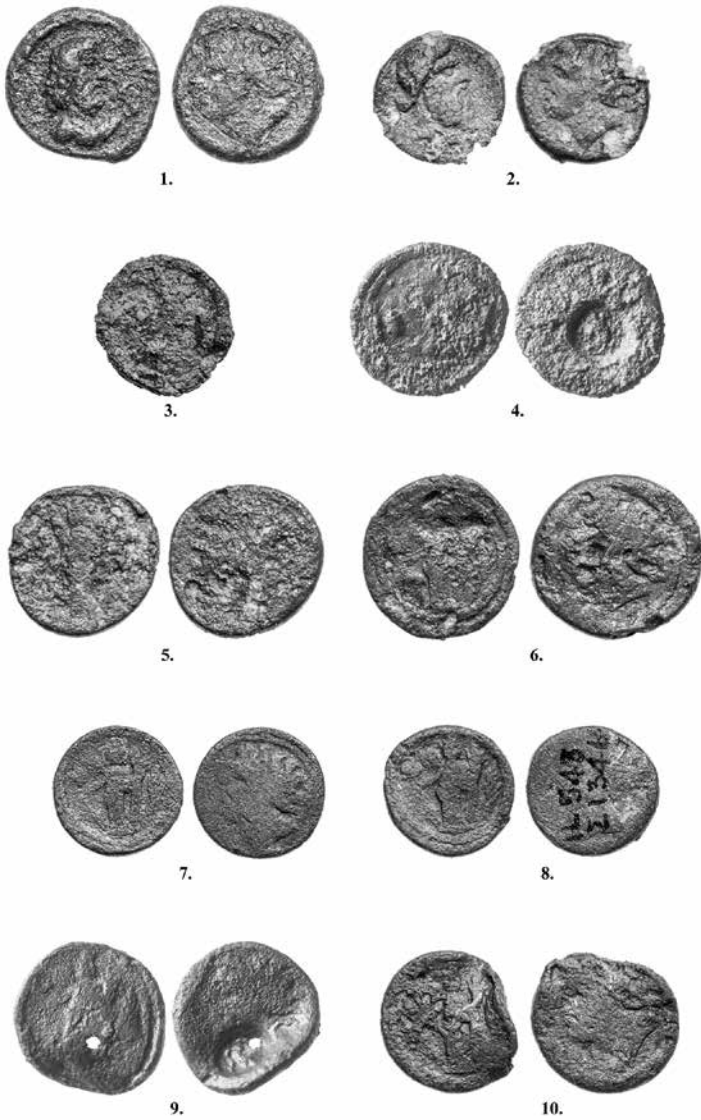


Figure 9.10 Lead tokens cat. nos. 1 and 2–11. Athens, Museum of the Ancient Agora. Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens City, Ancient Agora, ASCSA: Agora Excavations © Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.)

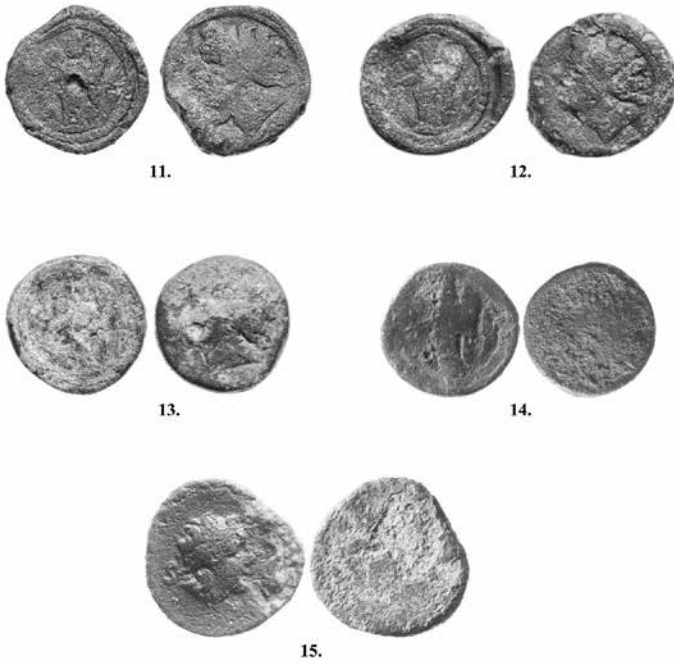


Figure 9.11 Lead tokens cat. nos. 12–15 and 19. Athens, Museum of the Ancient Agora. Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens City, Ancient Agora, ASCSA: Agora Excavations © Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.)