



VOLUME 15

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JOURNAL OF THE  
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION  
OF AUSTRALIA INC.

<http://naa-online.com/>

# Some interesting coins at ACANS

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One of the strengths of the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies is the south Italian collection formed by Bill Gale. It makes Macquarie the ideal numismatic complement to south Italian studies in the Sydney area, since the Nicholson Museum holds a fine collection of south Italian vases, put together by Dale Trendall and Alexander Cambitoglou. I had the pleasure of knowing Trendall many years ago (and indeed I had the honour of delivering the Trendall lecture while in Australia in 2004), and he would have been delighted to see the establishment of ACANS, since he always had a very broad and keen interest in all aspects of south Italian studies.

ACANS also holds a fine collection of Republican coins, as well as interesting coins from other parts of the classical world. In this note, I discuss three that happened to catch my attention.

## 1. Naples or Rome?

The first coins made by the Romans were minted around 300 BC. Slightly before the first silver issue<sup>1</sup>, of which there is a fine example in ACANS, were some very rare bronze coins which copy the designs of contemporary coins of Neapolis (ancient Naples) and are, uniquely, inscribed in Greek.<sup>2</sup> The coins are very

close in style and fabric to some coins of Neapolis<sup>3</sup> and there is a very good case for believing that they were made at the mint in Neapolis on behalf of Rome.<sup>4</sup> Such minting of Roman coins outside Rome is a feature of some of the early and mid third century BC. The first Roman silver may also have been minted at Neapolis, as is suggested by metal analysis and other arguments, while another bronze is found mostly in Sicily and was probably minted there, perhaps at Messana (ancient Messina).<sup>5</sup>

Among the bronze coins of Neapolis in ACANS is a coin whose inscription is difficult to read, but whose types are very close to the first Greek-inscribed Roman coin:

Laureate head of Apollo r.

Forepart of man-headed bull walking r.; flank decorated by star; inscription above.

ACANS, Gale CD21.3.16g; axis: 1 (Figure 1).

In the absence of any die-links, the crucial question is the reading on the reverse legend. Only the bottoms of some of the letters are visible, and AIΩ[ seems likely; before the A are traces of another letter, which might be the bottom of an M.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

If the coin does read ]MAIQ[ then the restoration [PΩ]MAIQ[N] and an attribution to Rome are inevitable.

## 2. The seal of Alexander the Great at Rome

Another of the earliest Roman coins has the head of a goddess on one side and a lion on the other.<sup>7</sup> It too may have been minted outside Rome, although the evidence for this is not at all decisive. The type exists in greater numbers but is usually very poorly preserved; however, an example in ACANS has a clear reverse which enables us to make out the details reasonably clearly.

Female head r., hair bound with ribbon and wearing necklace.

Lion walking r., holding sword or spear in mouth; below, ROMANO.

ACANS, Gale 6.17g, axis: 10 (Figure 2).

The identity of the obverse deity is uncertain. The necklace proves that she is female, and she may possibly represent Roma, whose iconography was still variable at this period; the codification of her iconography as based on that of the warlike goddess Athena came only later.<sup>7</sup>

Greater interest attaches to the lion on the reverse. The lion that holds a sword or spear in its mouth is the Nemean lion whose skin was famously impervious to weapons; hence weapons, which would break when used against it, could not harm it. The reference is, of course, partly to one of the labours of Hercules, but more

importantly to Alexander the Great, since we know that this was the design of his signet ring.

The appearance of Alexander's signet on an early Roman coin, possibly in conjunction with the goddess Roma, is of great historical implication. It shows that Rome in the early third century BC was claiming in some sense to be the successor of Alexander. When we combine this with other evidence for the development at that time of military cults and gods of victory, we get a clear view of Rome emerging onto the world scene as a military state, and so claiming to take on Alexander's role as the conqueror par excellence.<sup>8</sup> This provides crucial, and more to the point contemporary, support for the case made 20 years ago by William Harris in his book *War and imperialism in Republican Rome, 327-70 BC*.<sup>9</sup> In that book Harris argues that the previous picture of Roman conquest, namely that Rome essentially acquired an empire in self-defence, was flawed, and that a more valid picture was one that saw Rome as an imperialist power, intent on the benefits of conquest.

## 3. Ephesus under Augustus

ACANS has a good collection of Ephesus, reflecting the interest in that site at Macquarie, and a website of coins of Ephesus has recently been released.<sup>10</sup> For the Julio-Claudian period, when coinage was not issued in large quantities, ACANS holds specimens of the rare pieces depicting the second triumvirate of Octavian, Antony and Lepidus, portrayed with triple jugate heads, and another piece

depicting Claudius and his wife Agrippina II.<sup>11</sup> Particular interest, however, attaches to the third piece, of Augustus and Livia:

Jugate heads of Augustus and Livia, r.  
Stag standing r.; [Γ]ΠΑ[MMATEY]Σ  
MEMNΩΝ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΕΦΕ.  
ACANS. 6.67g, axis: 12 (Figure 3).

The Augustan coinage of Ephesus bears a number of personal names and titles. The *grammateus* Memnon is known on several coins, in conjunction with other men (Charixenos, Zopyrion, Theophilos and Theudas). However, the name Nikolaos is not recorded with Memnon in *RPC*. Since the publication of *RPC* 1, one such piece turned up in a German auction sale<sup>12</sup>, and the ACANS coin now provides confirmation of the reading.

Memnon was the principal magistrate; he is described as *grammateus* and was probably also *archiereus*. The title (if any) and the role of the second named persons like Nikolaos is unclear.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that they were assigned responsibility for the coinage, but that must remain speculation.

## Notes

1. Crawford, RRC no. 13; HN<sup>3</sup> no. 266.
2. Crawford, RRC no. 1; HN<sup>3</sup> no. 251.

3. HN<sup>3</sup> no. 568.
4. A Burnett, D Hook, 'The fineness of silver coins in Italy and Rome in the late fourth and third centuries BC', *Quaderni Ticinesi* XVIII (1989), 151-67.
5. Crawford, RRC no. 23; HN<sup>3</sup> no. 296.
6. Crawford, RRC no. 16; HN<sup>3</sup> no. 276-7.
7. A Burnett, 'The iconography of the Roman coinage of the third century BC', *Numismatic Chronicle* 146 (1986), 67-75.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Oxford, 1979.
10. <http://online.mq.edu.au/pub/ACANSCAE/>
11. *RPC* 1, 2570 (Asklepiades) and 2624 (Kousinios).
12. A Burnett, M Amandry, PP Ripollès, *Roman Provincial Coinage. Supplement I* (London and Paris, 1998), no. 2548A.
13. *RPC* 1, 432-3.

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