

## *Ancient Greek coin hoards: Insights into the history of Euboea*

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### *Περίληψη*

Είναι γνωστή η σημασία των νομισματικών θησαυρών στην ερμηνεία αρχαιολογικών δεδομένων. Στοιχεία όπως η αξία, το σημείο και η χρονολογία απόκρυψης ακόμα και η κατάσταση διατήρησης συμβάλλουν σημαντικά στην καλύτερη κατανόηση της ιστορίας των χώρων και της πορείας των ανθρώπων.

Στην περίπτωση της Εύβοιας γίνεται αναφορά σε πέντε θησαυρούς, οι οποίοι ανήκουν στους ύστερους Κλασσικούς και Ελληνιστικούς Χρόνους. Ο καθένας είναι ξεχωριστός αφού άλλοτε η ερμηνεία τους έρχεται να επιβεβαιώσει τα γνωστά από τις πηγές γεγονότα μεγάλης κλίμακας ενώ άλλοτε ανακύπτουν ερωτηματικά και οι θησαυροί αναδεικνύονται ως πρωτογενείς ιστορικές πηγές.

Πρωϊότερος χρονολογικά είναι ο θησαυρός στον ανδρώνα της οικίας II της Ερέτριας. Σε αντίθεση με τον πλούτο της οικίας ο θησαυρός είναι ταπεινός: μισή αργυρή δραχμή Χαλκίδας (338-308 π.Χ) και εικοσιένα χαλκά του Κοινού των Ευβοέων (298/7-286/5 BC). Τα νομίσματα τα οποία αντιπροσωπεύουν κοπές αποδεκτές για συναλλαγές εντός τη πόλης της Ερέτριας φέρουν επιπλέον σημάδια φθοράς λόγω μακράς κυκλοφορίας.

Εντυπωσιακός είναι αντίθετα ο θησαυρός που ήρθε στο φως στα λείψανα της Ελληνιστικής οικία που ανασκάφηκε στο οικόπεδο Ποδαρά στην Ερέτρια. Πρόκειται για έναν διπλό θησαυρό αργυρών νομισμάτων με διεθνή σύνθεση. Διπλός γιατί αποτελείται από δύο υποσύνολα: το ένα σε φθαρτό πούγκι και το άλλο σε μικρό αγγείο. Διεθνής η σύνθεση γιατί εκτός του Κοινού των Ευβοέων έχουμε αθηναϊκές κοπές και αρκετές των πρώτων διαδόχων. Με βάση την υστερότερη χρονολογικά κοπή ο θησαυρός απεκρύβει λίγο πριν τα μέσα του 3ου αι. π.Χ. Η απόκρυψη θα μπορούσε να σχετίζεται με τον Χρεμωνίδειο Πόλεμο ή ίσως με τον σφετεριστή Αλέξανδρο, γιου του Κρατερού, του οποίου το μέρος είχε την ατυχία να πάρει η Ερέτρια.

Αν και οι δύο θησαυροί είναι περίπου σύγχρονοι και βρέθηκαν σε οικίες της εύπορης τάξης εντούτοις δείχνουν την ανασφάλεια του πληθυσμού λόγω συνεχών πολιτικών αναταραχών στα μέσα του 3ου αι. π.Χ.

Σε τάφο στο Βασιλικό Χαλκίδας εντοπίστηκαν 49 χαλκά νομίσματα, όλα κοπές Χαλκίδας. Το σύνολο είναι εξαιρετικά ομοιογενές αφού όλα ανήκουν στην ίδια έκδοση. Ο θησαυρός μαρτυρεί οπωσδήποτε την πίστη ότι ο νεκρός θα μπορούσε να κάνει χρήση του ποσού στην μετά θάνατον ζωή.

Η ίδια ομοιογένεια παρατηρείται και στον θησαυρό στο ιερό της Ίσιδας στην Ερέτρια. Πρόκειται για 352 χαλκά νομίσματα, όλα κοπές Ερέτριας που βρέθηκαν στο σηκό του ναού, βεβαιώνουν ότι τα ιερά λειτουργούσαν στην αρχαιότητα και ως τράπεζες. Είναι γνωστό δηλαδή ότι ποσά «καταθέτονταν» στα ιερά με σκοπό την καλύτερη φύλαξη αλλά και ότι τα ιερά δάνειζαν τις πόλεις. Οι δύο θησαυροί που χρονολογούνται λίγο μετά τη λεηλασία της Ερέτριας από τους Ρωμαίους το 198 π.Χ. φανερώνουν τη γρήγορη ανάκαμψη της τοπικής οικονομίας.

Ο θησαυρός των 1300 νομισμάτων βρέθηκε τυχαία πολύ κοντά στην Ακρόπολη των Ωρεών. Πε-

ριείχε κοπές των δύο τελευταίων Μακεδόνων Βασιλέων: Φιλίππου Ε' και Περσέα. Το εύρημα ζωντανεύει την μαρτυρία του Πλουτάρχου για τη συντριβή του Ρωμαϊκού στόλου από τις δυνάμεις του Περσέα. Τα χρήματα, που αποτελούν μέρους του στρατιωτικού ταμείου, προορίζονταν για την αγορά προμηθειών για τον μακεδονικό στόλο στην αγορά των Ωρεών. Μαρτυρούν τον πλούτο μιας μεγάλης δύναμης, που εκείνη την εποχή έδινε μάχη για την ύπαρξη της.

### ***Introduction***

The importance of coin finds for interpreting archaeological data is well known. In particular, the study of hoards can provide valuable information for the history of the region in which they were found. In the case of Euboea, the excavated coin hoards mirror the upheavals in the history of the island in the last centuries BC.

Coin hoards constitute complex finds and require a threefold analysis.<sup>1</sup> First is the traditional approach. It is the numismatist's duty to define the primary context, i.e. to establish the minting authority as well as the social and political environment from which the coins originated.

The use and reuse of the coins for purposes of transactions are acknowledged as the secondary context. Their acceptance or denial in the markets, the reconstruction of trade routes, the possible forms of payment, whether the coins belonged to a treasury or savings, the question of devaluation or inflation, and even the reuse of coins as jewels or their withdrawal from the market are valuable pieces of information. These are issues that help reconstruct the 'life history' of the coins.

The tertiary context is closely connected to the 'historical moment' of the deposition. The question of how the coins were deposited and the reconstruction of the circumstances that led to the burial of a coin hoard are nevertheless the most neglected, since coin hoards usually reach scholarly publication deprived of any information regarding their original findspots. On the other hand, deposition is something that can be examined using a traditional archaeological perspective. Questions concerning intentional deposition or fortuitous loss and the characteristics of the place at the time of concealment are classification categories that can be treated as the starting point for further research. Furthermore, since coins are considered one of the most reliable archaeological categories, the reconstruction of the 'historical time and place' is a further step forward in the fundamental effort of discovering the 'meaning' and interpreting situations in a given place at a given time.

All three contexts are interrelated and demand the close cooperation of numismatists and archaeologists. The examination of the deposition circumstances is unthinkable without concrete knowledge of the hoards' composition and the coins' minting authorities. Furthermore, the purpose of hoarding is often clearly revealed when the special character of the findspot—harbour, fortress, shrine—is also taken into consideration. On the other hand, incongruous phenomena such as the hoarding of Classical bronze coins along with Late Roman ones or the discovery of Byzantine coins in mediaeval coin hoards in northern Europe present themselves as the most intriguing ones.

The combined study of the above parameters provides the researcher with the possibility of distinguishing some fundamental social categories for the coin hoards and examining them 'in context'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is possible to distinguish hoards as savings. People used to save money along with other valuable objects, often for more than one generation in order to secure or improve their financial status. The discovery of these hoards can sometimes be related to times of crisis: revolts in a city, wars, the threats of military actions and looting, raids, battles and sudden destructions. The unexpected changes that

1. For the theoretical premises of studying coin hoards in 'contexts': Myrberg 2009, 157-158.

2. Evgenidou and Tselekas 2010, 9-11.

occurred in the lives of the people made it impossible for them to return and claim their hidden treasures. Hoards were dedicated to the gods since early times, and capital was accumulated in shrines. An important aspect of ancient money is its function as capital, not unlike today. Therefore, hoards could have constituted in their beginnings a public treasury or a private fortune. They could have belonged to merchants, soldiers and travellers, and were transferred from one city to another for the purchase of goods or for the payment of rents, loans or simply travel expenses. Hoards are not uncommon in funerary contexts. Since the height of the Classical period Charon's obol was given to the dead in order that he or she could pay the necessary price for the journey to the underworld. In parallel with this practice, the deposit of smaller or larger sums of money along with the deceased was not unusual.

### *Hellenistic coin hoards in Euboea*

A large number of coin hoards are known from Euboea. Especially during the last few decades, our knowledge has been enriched by numerous well-recorded coin hoards. The present study will focus on five hoards, which are all dated to the Hellenistic period: (1) the hoard found in the wall of Andron f in House II in Eretria,<sup>3</sup> (2) the double hoard excavated in 1981 in Eretria by Petros Kalligas (CH 8.281 and 8.282), (3) the Vassiliko hoard in c.1965, (4) the Iseion Hoard (IGCH 221) excavated by Nikolaos Papadakis in 1914 in Eretria, and (5) the Oreos hoard in 1902 (IGCH 232).

Let us begin with the oldest coin hoard under discussion: the hoard found in the eastern wall of Andron f of House II during excavations conducted by the Swiss School.<sup>4</sup> This imposing residence with a surface area of 1200 m<sup>2</sup> was first built in the Late Classical period. In the late 4th century BC the house was subject to changes and was divided into two apartments: the former north and east tracts were separated from the rest of the house and transformed into an individual residence with its own bath and kitchen.<sup>5</sup> The hoard was originally hidden in the bricks of the eastern wall of the andron and was found resting on the stone socle (Fig. 1).

The hoard contained one half drachma of Chalkis and 21 bronzes of the Euboean Koinon. The half drachma is dated to between 338 and 308 BC, and the bronzes to between 298/7 and 286/5 BC. All the coins were very worn and had therefore circulated for an extended period of time before their concealment.<sup>6</sup> As is well known, bronze coins were accepted for transactions only within the limits of power of the issuing authority.<sup>7</sup> These facts demonstrate the narrow spectrum of their owner's activities. According to the available archaeological data, House II of Eretria was still occupied in the 3rd century BC. There are no traces of a violent destruction. It is nevertheless certain that by the early 2nd century BC the house was not inhabited anymore and had been abandoned, since no pottery of the time was discovered.<sup>8</sup> The unknown owner of the coins probably felt insecure, but we can only speculate as to the reason(s) that he or she was unable to return to claim the money. It is tempting, though, to relate the concealment of the hoard to the outbreak of the Chremonidean War.<sup>9</sup>

The turmoil the inhabitants of Eretria endured in the aftermath of the Chremonidean War can be traced in the double-hoard find that came to light during salvage excavations conducted by P. Kalli-

3. Brunner 1998, 251, 261.

4. Brunner 1998, 251.

5. Reber 1998, 94-110.

6. Brunner 1998, 260-261 n. 65-86.

7. For acceptance and circulation of bronze coinage within the boundaries of a city: Penna 2006, 55-59, especially 59; Psoma 2009, 9, with bibliographic references.

8. Reber 1998, 111-112.

9. Picard 1979, 267-278.

gas in Zoi Podara's plot in 1981.<sup>10</sup> The excavator's report tells us of two lots that were found on top of each other. The above one contained 101 silver pieces which were probably kept in a small pouch of perishable material (hoard 1a). Beneath it a second hoard was found (hoard 1b). This hoard contained 117 silver pieces and was in a considerably better state of preservation, since it was kept in a small pot that prevented oxidation. Careful analysis of the archaeological data demonstrated that the hoards were hidden very near the wall of what used to be a well-built private house and beneath the floor that was, in all probability, made of wood. The owner, so as not to attract attention, had deliberately used a humble pot that had already been damaged in antiquity.<sup>11</sup> The house stood in the west part of the city not far from House II, which we have just discussed.

Both hoards in Podara's plot are of Attic weight standard: the majority of the coins are drachmas of the Euboean Koinon.<sup>12</sup> Next to these were Athenian tetradrachms of the Pi style, posthumous drachmas of Alexander the Great and the early Diadochs.<sup>13</sup> A tetradrachm of Antiochus I Soter in the pot (Fig. 2) and a tetradrachm of Antiochus II Theos (Fig. 3) in the hoard placed on top represent the latest chronological issues. Antiochus I's tetradrachm belongs to the Apollo on omphalos type and indicates that the closure of the hoard was possibly 280 BC.<sup>14</sup> The tetradrachm of the upper hoard is of the seated Heracles type; it was minted in Cyme and is of later date, possibly an issue of Antiochus II's sole reign (261-246 BC).<sup>15</sup>

The close proximity of the two hoards suggests that they were hidden almost simultaneously, with slight precedence given to the underlying hoard. The hoards of Podara's plot can hardly be considered as saving hoards since large denominations are almost absent. Their burial could suggest a feeling of insecurity, probably due to the upheavals of the Chremonidean War and the rivalry between the great powers of the time for domination in southern Greece. The Macedonians eventually regained Eretria, and that could have caused all their political opponents to flee.<sup>16</sup> In the late 350s BC, Eretria joined Alexander the usurper king and son of Krateros. Antigonos Gonatas was relentless in asserting his authority around 245 BC.<sup>17</sup> The important Eretria 1937 hoard (IGCH 175), which contained some 476 coins, is independently dated around 245 BC on account of the Ptolemaic issues it contained. Thus, the find has been associated with the old king's violent reaction and Eretria's fall.<sup>18</sup>

The excavator proposed c.270-260 BC as the time of deposition of the double Eretria hoard.<sup>19</sup> However, the assignment of the seated Heracles type to the sole reign of Antiochus II provides us with 261 BC as a *terminus post quem*. It has been considered that the western part of the city suffered serious losses after Antigonos Gonatas' recapture, even before the final destruction by the Romans in 198 BC.<sup>20</sup> These unfortunate circumstances in the middle of the century could therefore account for the deposition of the double hoard in Eretria.

The fact that coin hoards reflect the financial status of the owners is best exemplified if one com-

10. Kalligas 1983, 113-114. The excavation was carried out in Zoi Podara's plot at the corner of Aristogeitonos and Filoxenou Street.

11. Drawing and photos of the pot: Kalligas 1983, 114, fig. 2, pl. 44a-b.

12. The 'upper' hoard contained 101 coins, 78 of which were of the Euboean Koinon. The 'lower' hoard contained 117 coins, 93 of which were of the Euboean Koinon.

13. Due to the corrosion, the exact classification of the Pi-style tetradrachms is almost impossible, but some of them belong to Pi II and some to Pi III-V. On the Pi style and dating between 353-c.290 BC: Kroll 2011a; 2011b, 4-6.

14. Oikonomides-Karamessini 1983, 145-146, no. 117. cf. Houghton and Lorber 2002, 379, fig. (3)d. The double hoard is stored in Eretria's archaeological museum and was re-examined by the author in December 2013.

15. Oikonomides-Karamessini 1983, 141, no. 101. cf. Houghton and Lorber 2002, 503.

16. Picard 1979, 265-271; Reber 1998, 151. On the military operations in general: Will 1979, 221-228.

17. Picard 1979, 272-274.

18. Picard 1979, 153-163.

19. Kalligas 1983, 121.

20. Kalligas 1983, 124; Reber 1998, 151-153.

pares these two hoards with the previously mentioned hoard from House II. The double hoard in Podara's plot indicates a rich owner, perhaps a merchant with contacts on the Asia Minor coast, since a significant part of the coins were minted there. The total amount concealed was 263 drachmas in silver, which was a considerable amount of money. Some indication as to the value of this sum of money can be provided through two approximately contemporary parallels: 30 drachmas were granted to each ambassador as travel allowance according to an Athenian decree, dated probably to the second quarter of the 3rd century BC.<sup>21</sup> In another case, ten drachmas was the wage of the inscriber who had to inscribe an honorary decree for a religious official in the mid-3rd century BC.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the 'purse' found in House II reflects the issues that at the time circulated in the agora of the city. The hoard was concealed while the house was still in use; but the secret was obviously forgotten, and the coins were finally buried under the debris.

The case of coin hoards deposited in graves is interesting. In Vassiliko, a hoard of 49 bronzes of Chalkis was found in a grave.<sup>23</sup> The coins are all attributed to the 53rd series of Chalkis, with a facing Hera head on the obverse and an eagle fighting a snake on the reverse. It has been suggested that the type of metal used for the coins deposited in a grave reflects the social status of its owner.<sup>24</sup> The Vassiliko hoard quite probably reflects the coinage used for the everyday transactions in the city.

The concealment of the Vassiliko hoard can be dated to the early 2nd century. In Greek Macedonia, some 40 funerary treasures have been recorded by Ioannis Touratsoglou. In Macedonia the practice can be dated as early as the late 5th century or the first half of the 4th century BC.<sup>25</sup> The largest of these hoards contain some 100 pieces, while the average is around 30.<sup>26</sup> The practice exceeds by far the purpose of Charon's obol. These hoards bear testimony to the belief that the dead could make use of the money to satisfy their needs in the afterlife just as when they were alive. The hoards also bear testimony to the high degree of monetization in the transactions within a city.

The presence of the hoard of 352 bronzes inside the Isis temple in Eretria (IGCH 221) instructs us on the operation of sanctuaries as banks during antiquity. The coins were discovered in a pot hidden in the earth in the south-west corner of the cella, behind the pedestal that held the cult statues.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of the coins inventoried are Eretrian issues from the period 194-191 BC, which were minted in order to support the Seleucid presence on the island. Indeed, some of these Eretrian examples are so fresh and well preserved that they could not have circulated for long. Perhaps they were safely put away by the personnel of the sanctuary as a reaction to Antiochus' abandonment of his headquarters in Chalkis.<sup>28</sup>

Indicative of the function of the hoard is the almost absolute absence of foreign coinage and the abundance of local bronze coinage. If the city and the sanctuary were pillaged by the Romans in 198 BC, the votive bears witness to the quick recovery of the local economy (which is also otherwise attested).<sup>29</sup>

The deposition of sums of money in sanctuaries is a very old tradition. The most famous case is the pot hoard of 19 electron coins in the Artemision of Ephesos, discovered very near the central base.<sup>30</sup> In the temple of Hera in Perachora four coins of Argos came to light under the base of the cult statue of

21. *IG II<sup>2</sup> 525 + 675 cd + SEG XXXIV 72. 4-7*: Loomis 2001, 217, cat. no. 27.

22. *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1247.27-31*: Loomis 2001, 156, cat. no. 221.

23. Picard 1979, 89, 315.

24. Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2006, 97.

25. Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2006, 95: hoards in Amphipolis and Gazoros.

26. Touratsoglou 1993, 48-55.

27. Papadakis 1915, 120.

28. The historical setting: Picard 1979, 287-290.

29. For traces of recovery in the city of Eretria in general: *École suisse d'archéologie en Grèce* 2010, 80.

30. Le Rider 2001, 59.

Hera Akraia. They formed a foundation deposit.<sup>31</sup> Money was offered to the sanctuaries for safekeeping; security was the paramount reason. Sanctuaries could also provide loans either to individuals or to cities. It has been pointed out that not all sanctuaries could provide loans because the majority of the dedications were of precious objects and not money. It is not clear whether the available capital was derived from the foundation capital or from the sacred treasury.<sup>32</sup> Cases of borrowers who had difficulties in paying off the loans are also known.<sup>33</sup>

The Oreos hoard was found by chance, by workers digging a well in the early 20th century in a field east of modern-day Kastro, which can possibly be identified with the acropolis of ancient Oreos.<sup>34</sup> This important hoard of 1300 silver coins fell victim to the greed of the people who were lucky enough to discover it.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, nothing is known on the possible ancient remains *in situ* or its exact context. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be derived, if all three categories—issuing authority, use and historical moment—are taken into consideration.

It should be noted that the number of coins contained is especially elevated, and thus the estimated sum could hardly have been possessed by only one individual.<sup>36</sup> The hoard contained issues of the last two Macedonian kings—Philip V and Perseus—and their allies, most prominent among them the Rhodians. The site played a key role in the pursuits of the Macedonian kings. Histiaia, later named Oreos, was an important trading station along the sea and land routes that connected the Kingdom of Macedonia with southern Greece.<sup>37</sup> Iōannēs Svoronos, who published the hoard, related the find to the defeat of the Roman fleet.<sup>38</sup> As Plutarch narrates, the Romans were unexpectedly attacked in the straits of Oreos and their fleet ravaged by Perseus' forces in late autumn of 171 BC (*Vit. Aem.* 9). It is indeed possible that this small fortune originated from Perseus' military treasury and was destined for purchasing commodities and provisions for Perseus and his allies in the market of Histiaia/Oreos.<sup>39</sup> The sum is relatively small if compared with the information provided by ancient authors concerning the costs of war in Hellenistic times. So, for example, in the spring of 218 BC the salaries of Philip's 6000 soldiers and 1200 mercenaries amounted to 17 talents per month (Polyb. V 1, 11-12).

## Conclusions

To sum up, the Hellenistic hoards discussed above offer valuable historical information. The hoards found in Eretrian houses can be associated with the upheavals of the 3rd century BC and the Chremonean War in particular. This is the case of the hoard of Andron f in House II and also of the double hoard excavated in Podara's plot. Although there are pronounced differences between them—bronze, local issues for the former, silver issues of the Attic weight standard and of various mints for the latter—both finds attest to the feeling of insecurity and to the unfortunate fate of the persons associated with

31. Payne 1940, 108-109.

32. Chankowski 2005, 69-75.

33. Migeotte 1988, 202-203.

34. Hansen and Nielsen 2004, no. 372, *s.v.* Histiaia/Oreos, 656-658, especially 657-658.

35. IGCH 232; Svoronos 1902, 318-328. 646 coins were inventoried by I. Svoronos.

36. For comparison material: Davesne and Le Rider 1980, 343-344.

37. Kalcyk 1998, *s.v.* Histiaia, 632-633; Picard 1979, 256-258. For the names Histiaia/Oreos: Hansen and Nielsen 2004, 656, no. 372.

38. Interpretation also accepted by Franke 1957, 39.

39. For the economics of the Hellenistic armies: Chanotis 2005, 115-140, especially 115-116 and 137-140; Couvenhes 2006, 397-435, especially 429-435; and as far as the general setting of war expenditure is concerned: de Callatay 2000, 337-355. Robert 1951, 189-190 agrees on the dating but proposes an altogether different interpretation: the find constituted the capital of a travelling merchant with connections to King Perseus and the Rhodians, an opinion also shared by Picard 1979, 291, 313.

them. Although in both cases findspots were houses of people from the middle- and upper-classes, the two hoards are worlds apart. Perhaps this has to do with their different purposes and ‘use contexts’. The hoards from the early 2nd century BC—the funeral one near Chalkis and the Eretrian one deposited in the Iseion—convey the impression of a certain prosperity and stability. In both cases money was deposited safely and no deviation from original purpose is noticeable. On the other hand the military treasury found near the acropolis of Oreoi is illustrative of a great power of the time. The sum was meant to cover war expenditures after successful naval operations. It stands for the wealth of one of the greater powers of the time, which was struggling to exist.

### Abbreviations

- CH = Coin hoard  
 IG = *Inscriptiones Graecae*  
 IGCH = Thompson, M., O. Mørkholm, and C. M. Kraay (1973) *An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards*. New York: American Numismatic Society.  
 SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

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## Figures



*Figure 1:*  
The andron in House II. On the stone socle of its walls, a small hoard of the first half of the 3rd century BC was excavated (photo editing: Matthias Demel).



*Figure 2:* AR tetradrachm. Antiochus I Soter (after 280 but no later than 261 BC). Mint: Seleucia on the Tigris. From hoard 1b (in the pot), found in Podara's plot in Eretria in 1981 (photo editing: Matthias Demel).



*Figure 3:* AR tetradrachm. Antiochus II Theos (sole reign: 261-246 BC). Mint: Cyme. From hoard 1a, found in Podara's plot in Eretria in 1981 (photo editing: Matthias Demel).