

Greek-Illyrian coinage of the central Adriatic region: an overview

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The paper offers an overview of the latest research on the so-called Greek-Illyrian coinage of the eastern Adriatic. More precisely, it focuses on the part of the region encompassed by the modern Republic of Croatia, i.e. the central Adriatic region. The coins in question were issued by the Greek poleis Pharos, Issa, Heraclea and Korkyra and by the Illyrian ruler Ballaios from the first half of the 4th to the 2nd c. BC, mostly in bronze but rarely also in silver. During this period, a distinctive regional monetary system can be reconstructed, one that played an important role in both local and regional economic history of the central Adriatic region.

Keywords: Greek-Illyrian coinage, Pharos, Issa, Heraclea, Korkyra, Korčula, Ballaios

Scholars customarily refer to the coins issued by the Greek *poleis* on the eastern Adriatic shore as the Greek-Illyrian coinage. In this particular case, this is somewhat imprecise; otherwise, it is also inapplicable to all coin issues covered by this umbrella term. But for all intents and purposes, this is still a useful label that more or less clearly designates the monetary production of both the eastern Adriatic Greek polities and Illyrian cities and rulers closely interacting with them during the late Classical and the entire Hellenistic period on the eastern Adriatic.¹



Central Adriatic region with toponyms associated with Greek-Illyrian coinage

¹ The term 'Greek-Illyrian' is used in scholarly literature as a standard designation for the issues of Greek colonies in the eastern Adriatic (such as Apollonia, Dyrrhachium, Pharos, Issa, Heracleia etc.), at the same

The earliest Greek coins struck on the central part of the eastern Adriatic shore were issued by the mint of Pharos, modern Stari Grad on the island of Hvar.² This mint issued a small number of silver coins during the second quarter of the 4th c. BC, which were followed by a number of bronze issues of various denominations during the next two centuries. The dominant iconographical motif that appears on the coins of Pharos is the head of Zeus on the obverse, accompanied by a goat and, most often, a legend designating the city on the reverse. Some reverse types add a snake, which has prompted some researches to identify this Zeus as Zeus Melichios, a chthonic deity worshipped in the Hellenic world (Visonà 1982, 148 n. 7; Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 175–176). Other deities appear on smaller denominations of Pharian coins, such as Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone, while the reverses depict, alongside the ever-present goat, a cluster of grapes. The issues of the Pharian mint were sometimes overstruck by other minting authorities, such as the mysterious ‘ΔI(M)’, perhaps designating a local ruler that exercised his authority over the island of Hvar, most probably sometime in the second half of the 4th century.³ Later coins of Pharos bear a series of portraits of a youthful male on the obverse, accompanied by a cantharos and the ethnic Φ–Α. These coins were issued in the (late) 3rd c. BC, and some of the portraits might represent the local strongman Demetrius of Pharos,⁴ who got involved in political and real battles with the great powers of the time, while some others might represent the Illyrian ruler and king Ballaios,⁵ a mysterious personality not mentioned in any literary or epigraphical sources and known only through his coinage.

time encompassing the coins issued by Illyrian rulers (such as Monunios, Mytilos, Ballaios, Genthios etc.) and polities, such as tribal communities (Daorsi, Labeates) or towns (Lissos, Shkorda, Rhizon etc.), cf. Rendić-Miočević 1989: 341, 400. See also Kos 1998: 128–131 s.v. *Grčko-ilirski novac* and Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 175. This treatment of the subject-matter stems, as everything else in the field does, from the seminal and ground-breaking work of Brunšmid 1898 = Brunšmid 1998. I would like to thank Paolo Visonà, who has read and commented upon a draft version of this paper, and who, as always, generously and unselfishly offered his valuable suggestions.

² On this mint see Bonačić Mandinić 1995; Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 175–177; Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2012; 2017; Jeličić Radonić 2017.

³ On these issues see Visonà 1981; 2010: 33–35; Rendić-Miočević 1989: 385–388; Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 179; Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2017: 92–93.

⁴ For this identification see Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 177; Jeličić Radonić 2017: 196–197.

⁵ For this identification see Rendić-Miočević 1989: 342–343, 346.



Figure 1. Bronze (AE) coin (hemilitra) of Pharos (Stari Grad on Hvar)
 1st half of the 4th c. BC (Göricke Lukić 2017: 19, 51)
 Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2434
 Obv. head of Zeus (Melichios?, for this identification see
 Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 175–176)
 Rv. goat, legend ΦΑΡΙΩΝ
 Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 2. Bronze (AE) coin (hemilitra) of Pharos (Stari Grad on Hvar)
 2nd half of the 4th c. BC (Göricke Lukić 2017: 23, 52; Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2017: 91, 105)
 Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2446
 Obv. head of Zeus
 Rv. goat
 Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 3. Bronze (AE) coin (1/3 trias) of Pharos (Stari Grad on Hvar)
 1st half of the 4th c. BC (Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2017: 82, 84, 86–87, 104)
 Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2526
 Obv. head of Demeter
 Rv. goat, legend ΦΑ
 Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 4. Bronze (AE) coin of Pharos (Stari Grad on Hvar)
3rd c. BC (Jeličić Radonić 2017)

Provenance: Hvar

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2547

Obv. male head (Ballaios?, for this identification see Rendić-Miočević 1989: 342–343, 346)

Rv. cantharos, legend Φ–A

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 5. Bronze (AE) coin of Pharos (Stari Grad on Hvar)
3rd c. BC (Jeličić Radonić 2017)

Provenance: Hvar

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2626

Obv. male head (Demetrius of Pharos?, for this identification see Göricke Lukić, Bonačić

Mandinić 2010: 177; Jeličić Radonić 2017: 196–197)

Rv. cantharos, legend Φ–A

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 6. Bronze (AE) „ΔI(M)” coin (hemilitra) issued on Hvar (?)

2nd half of the 4th c./late 4th c./1st half of the 3rd c. (Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2017: 92–93)

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2641

Obv. head of Zeus

Rv. goat, legend ΔI (designating an unknown local ruler, see Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić

2010: 179; Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2017: 92)

overstruck on a Pharos coin of the head of Zeus/goat type

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ

Another important eastern Adriatic mint was located on the island of Vis, ancient Issa.⁶ It started issuing coins somewhat later than Pharos, about the middle of the 4th c. BC. The earliest Issaeian coins belong to the so-called Ionios-group (perhaps struck before the actual establishment of the polis), and bear a male portrait on the obverse accompanied by the inscription IONIO or IONIOΣ, and a dolphin or a lion's head on the reverse (Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 180; Visonà 2012: 584–585; Göricke Lukić 2017: 31, 53). The Ionios from the obverse may represent a local Illyrian ruler (Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 179; Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2017: 95–96), who lived – and issued coins – during the third quarter of the 4th c. and exercised his authority beyond his native island of Vis. His coins were overstruck on the coins of other Greek-Illyrian mints, in the first place Pharos (although the opposite also applies here, since Pharos overstruck Ionios' earliest issues), and some of them were overstruck on coins that had already been overstruck by Pharos. Ionios' name seems to have entered the realm of legend and myth, and he – or his namesake – was considered as the eponym of the Adriatic Sea itself. After the Ionios-coins, the Issaeians started issuing coins bearing their city's name ΙΣΣΑ with a female head on the obverse and an eight-ray star on the reverse.⁷ These coins were struck in the last quarter of the 4th c. BC, and were, like the Ionios-coins, exclusively of bronze (Visonà 1996: 152; 2017: 209, 219; Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 180). Alternatively, based on the results of the archaeological excavations conducted in Stari Grad on the island of Hvar, these coins are dated to the 1st half of the 4th c. BC (prior to 344 BC) and are considered to represent the first coin-type issued by the Issaeian mint, prior to the Ionios-coins (Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2009: 326; Jeličić-Radonić 2010: 64–65). An apparently silver coin of Issa bearing a cantharos on the obverse and a cluster of grapes between two vine leaves on the reverse was recently found in central Dalmatia (Paškvan, Visonà 2020); it would be a unique example of silver Issaeian coins. During the 3rd c. the Issaeians minted a number of similar coin-types of different denominations bearing the head of Athena on the obverse and a goat or a stag on the reverse. New coin-types bearing the symbols of wine-production, with a crater or the jugate heads of Dionysus and Athena on the obverse, and a grape cluster on the reverse, appeared towards the end of the 3rd c. A series of types showing a male or female head on the obverse and a cantharos with the ethnic Ι-Σ on the reverse may be assigned to the 2nd and 1st centuries; they were issued until the late Hellenistic period, when the mint of Issa ceased its activity.

⁶ On this mint see Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 179–181; Visonà 2017. Paolo Visonà is preparing a comprehensive study of this mint, which will appear in the near future.

⁷ The female head could represent a nymph (perhaps an eponymous nymph, Visonà 2017: 203–204) or the goddess Artemis (Dukat, Jeličić Radonić 2009: 325; Jeličić-Radonić 2010: 64).



Figure 7. Bronze (AE) coin (hemilitra) of Ionios issued at Issa (Vis)
ca. 344–325 BC (Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 180; Visonà 2012: 584–585; Göricke
Lukić 2017: 31, 53)

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2342

Obv. male head (Ionios, an Illyrian ruler?, Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 179; Dukat,
Jeličić Radonić 2017: 95–96), legend IONIO

Rv. dolphin above waves

overstruck on a Pharos coin of the head of Zeus/goat type

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 8. Bronze (AE) coin of Issa (Vis)
ca. 320–300 BC (Visonà 1996: 152; 2017: 209, 219; Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010:
180)

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2352

Obv. female head, legend ΙΣΣΑ

Rv. eight-ray star

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 9. Bronze (AE) coin of Issa (Vis)
ca. 290–240 (Visonà 2017: 206, 219)
Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2358

Obv. head of Athena

Rv. goat, legend IC

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ



Figure 10. Bronze (AE) coin of Issa (Vis)
 2nd c. BC (Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 180; Visonà 2017: 208–209, 219, 221)
 Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2416
 Obv. female head
 Rv. cantharos, legend I-Σ
 Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ

Another 4th-c. polity that issued Greek-Illyrian coins on the eastern Adriatic is the mysterious Heraclea.⁸ This city is mentioned in a single Greek literary source (Pseudo Scylax's *Periplus*), and its location remains unknown at present. The coins of this city appear, together with those of Pharos and Ionios-coins overstruck on the Pharian Zeus/goat types, in the famous Škudljivac hoard from the island of Hvar that reflects the coin circulation in the central Adriatic in the second half of the 4th c. BC; the hoard's concealment is dated ca. 330–320 BC.⁹ Two larger denominations of Heracleian coins regularly depict the hero's head on the obverse and his most characteristic attributes (bow and club) on the reverse, accompanied by the city's name in several versions. Different researchers suggested different locations as the site of Greek Heraclea, but the islands of Hvar and Korčula remain the most likely candidates for the location of this city.



Figure 11. Bronze (AE) coin (hemilitra) of Heraclea (Hvar?, Korčula?)
 2nd half of the 4th c. BC (Göricke Lukić 2017: 41)
 Provenance: Hvar
 Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2313
 Obv. head of Heracles
 Rv. bow, club, legend HPAK
 Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ

⁸ On this mint see Bonačić Mandinić 1988; Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 178–179.

⁹ On the Škudljivac hoard see Göricke Lukić 2012; 2017; Visonà 2012.

With Korčula we come to one of the smallest issues of Greek-Illyrian coins known to modern researchers.¹⁰ Only seven specimens of this coin-type are known (the seventh discovered only lately in the Liburnian area to the north-west of the central Dalmatian region, see Ilkić 2016), one of which is known only from numismatic literature (another example of this issue is apparently in a private collection at Lumbarda and remains unpublished).¹¹ Two of these coins are among the holdings of the Numismatic Department of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. The coins bear what is most likely the head of Apollo on the obverse and an ear of grain accompanied by the legend KOPKYPAION on the reverse (a rare example of a full – i.e., non-abbreviated – inscription on Greek-Illyrian coins) (Visonà 2005: 243). Everything points to the 3rd c. BC (more precisely, ca. 250–230 BC) as the date of issuing of these coins (metrological considerations, fabric, module, palaeography, stylistic features) (Visonà 2005: 244–245; cf. Ilkić 2016: 103), but some dissenting voices were raised recently, arguing for the second half of the 6th c. as the date of issue (Cambi 2017, cf. 2002: 42). The portrait of Apollo on the obverse indeed shows some quite remarkable Archaic characteristics, but these can be explained as consistent with stylistic coarsening of the portrait on the coin's Issean antecedents of the head of Athena/goat type (Visonà 2005: 244–245). A Knidian colony that was possibly established on Korčula (*Kórkyra Méléina*) in the Archaic period cannot have anything to do with this particular coin series, because Knidos itself only began to mint bronze coins ca. 375 BC (Ashton 1999: 92; 2006: 8), while the Greeks in general started minting bronze coins (perhaps in Magna Graecia) only in the mid- or second half of the 5th c. BC (Von Reden 2010: 32; Fischer-Bossert 2012: 148; Hollander 2012; Rutter 2012: 136). The KOPKYPAION coins were issued more plausibly by the Issaeon colony mentioned in the Lumbarda Psephisma.



Figure 12. Bronze (AE) coin of Korkyra (Lumbarda on Korčula?)
ca. 250–230 BC (Visonà 2005: 243–245; Ilkić 2016: 103)

Provenance: Lumbarda on Korčula

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2429

Obv. head of Apollo (for this identification see Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 181)

Rv. ear of grain, legend KOPKYPAION

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ

¹⁰ On this mint see Bonačić Mandinić 1994; Visonà 2005; Ilkić 2016.

¹¹ I have obtained the information on the coin in private possession at Lumbarda from H. Potrebica, *pers. comm.*, 2019.

Finally, by far the largest number of Greek-Illyrian coins belongs to the Ballaios issues.¹² Ballaios was a shadowy ruler in the central and southern Adriatic, who does not appear in any of the surviving literary or epigraphic sources. On the other hand, the vast quantity of coins bearing his name, with or without a royal title (almost all made of bronze, with only several silver examples), suggests that he played an important role in the history of the region. During the last decade, the archaeological investigations conducted in the area of Rhizon on the Boka Kotorska Bay have revealed that Ballaios was in power and minted coins ca. 260–230 BC (Ciołek 2011: 92). This has finally put an end to the seemingly endless discussions on the dating of Ballaios' reign; prior to the Rhizon excavations, the closest that the researchers came to the actual date of his rule was 195–175 BC (Šašel Kos 2007: 127–131, 137). This Illyrian strongman issued his coins both at Stari Grad on Hvar and in Rhizon (Jeličić Radonić 2017: 193), but the sheer number of radically different portraits associated with the inscription (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ) ΒΑΛΛΑΙΟΥ and the rather uniform depiction of Artemis on the reverse suggest that the phenomenon of 'Ballaios' coins' is more complicated than it would seem at first glance. Indeed, it seems possible that this type of coins was issued (long after) Ballaios stepped down from the theatre of history (Rendić-Miočević 1989: 343; Jeličić Radonić 2017: 193–194, 197).



Figure 13. Bronze (AE) coin of Ballaios issued at Stari Grad on Hvar or Rhizon (Jeličić Radonić 2017: 193)

ca. 260–230 BC (Ciołek 2011: 92)

Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2668

Obv. head of Ballaios

Rv. Artemis, legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΛΛΑΙΟΥ

Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ

¹² On these issues see above all Ciołek 2011, with an extensive view of earlier opinions in Mirmik, Kapetanović 2019. Marović 1988 should also be mentioned in this context.



Figure 14. Bronze (AE) coin of Ballaios issued at Stari Grad on Hvar (Jeličić Radonić 2017: 192) ca. 260–230 BC (Ciołek 2011: 92)
 Inv. no. AMZ Numismatic department A2729
 Obv. head of Ballaios
 Rv. Artemis, legend BALLAIOY
 Photo by I. Krajcar, AMZ

Some of the coins issued by the Greek-Illyrian minting authorities in the central Adriatic region had a more limited, local circulation. But some had a wider, regional reach, especially the coins of Pharos, Issa and Ballaios.¹³ Indeed, these coinages seem to have formed a distinctive regional monetary nexus that played an important role in the economic history of the central Adriatic region from the 4th to the 2nd c. BC. At that point, because of the radically changed historical circumstances, it was completely and decisively supplanted by Roman Republican coinage.

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¹³ For Pharos see Göricke Lukić, Bonačić Mandinić 2010: 175; for Issa, Visonà 2017: 196–200; Pamić, Visonà 2019: 66; for the distribution of Ballaios' coins, see most recently Ciołek 2011: 315–319, 323–327, 331–332 and Mirnik, Kapetanić 2019: 37–46.

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Pregled grčko-ilirskih kovanica srednjodalmatinske regije

Sažetak

Rad donosi najnovije spoznaje o tzv. grčko-ilirskim kovanicama istočne jadranske obale, preciznije, onog dijela obale koji se danas nalazi u Republici Hrvatskoj, odnosno srednjodalmatinske regije. Riječ je o kovanicama grčkih gradova Fara, Ise, Herakleje i Korkire te o kovanicama ilirskog vladara Baleja. Te su kovanice izdavane od prve polovice 4. st. pr. Kr. pa sve do 2. st. pr. Kr., uglavnom u bronci, ali ponekad, rijetko, i u srebru. U tom razdoblju možemo rekonstruirati postojanje regionalnog monetarnog sustava, koji je imao važnu ulogu u lokalnim i regionalnim ekonomskim odnosima na navedenom prostoru.

Ključne riječi: grčko-ilirski novac, Faros, Isa, Herakleja, Korkira, Korčula, Balej

