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μηδὲ πολυξείνου δαιτὸς δυσπέμφελος εῖναι·
ἐκ κοινοῦ πλείστη τε χάρις δαπάνη τ' ὀλιγίστη.

Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 722-723

The Unconquerable Sun: An introduction to Koinon III and brief note concerning the solace of numismatics



Gold aureus of Caracalla featuring Sol Invictus, AD 216. Image courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group.

If this year can be described in one word, it would be upheaval—for the first time in my life, it is more difficult than ever to imagine what the world might look like by the time our next volume sees print in late 2021, and I'd imagine folks living under the reign of Caracalla felt even greater uncertainty. He was, by all accounts, a vicious tyrant and downright terrible human being. As Dio Cassius describes him: *«He never loved anyone, but he hated all who excelled in anything, most of all those whom he pretended to love most»* (*Roman History* 11.6). He was said to have an unquenchable thirst for blood, be it animals or even humans, and allegedly killed innumerable people, including his fatherly tutor, Clio, and his own brother, Geta. After Geta's assassination, as all students of Roman coinage surely know, Caracalla issued a *damnatio memoriae*, thereby removing all vestiges of the sibling throughout the empire—though he couldn't get to all the coins. His message on the above aureus seems fairly simple, namely, that the emperor was as unconquerable as the sun, and this message would have undoubtedly struck fear into as many people as it gave hope (if there were any in the latter camp at this stage in his reign). And yet, despite how horrible things were during Caracalla's reign, the sun did rise again; it was Caracalla who did not.

Numismatists are certainly familiar with upheaval because we see it all the time in virtually every area of ancient coinage. Sometimes it is painfully obvious, like the case of the *Eid Mar* denarius. Other times, we have to look a bit closer, like the images of a bloated Justinian as he suffered from the cruel plague that decimated parts of his empire. We can even look at the very origin of coinage and imagine the upheavals it caused in the old way of life—surely, a new means of

reciprocity had emerged that would radically change the world forever. But the lens of upheaval and social discord is one sided, and fortunately, as every numismatist also knows, there are two sides to every coin. When I pick up a follis of Anastasius, I can literally feel the comfort a heavy bronze coin provided to its ancient carrier after years of minuscule bronzes. When I see a local deity on even the tiniest Greek fraction, I can recognize the consolation an ordinary person must have felt—especially during times of upheaval—knowing that he was under the protection of the local gods. So, while ancient coins demonstrate that societal upheaval is as inevitable as the sun setting, they also provide a reassurance that everything is going to be alright once again.

We certainly are not out of the woods yet, but in the meantime, the essays contained in this volume will hopefully bring you some relief as we move forth into the new year, together. We start off with a contribution from a scholar virtually every ancient coin enthusiast knows and admires: David MacDonald. It concerns overstruck sigloi of Azbaal and Baalmelek II of Kition, and is an important addition to the literature that incorporates the most recent evidence emerging in the past few years. Next, we have another contribution from John Voukelatos, who discovered a forgery that has seemingly gone unnoticed for many years, and made its way into important sales and collections. The next three essays are by our own Associate Editor Lloyd Taylor—the first is an overview of the mint at Susa from 311-301 BC, and the second and third exhibit important, newly discovered die and mint control links. If anyone found solace through numismatics during this pandemic, it was Lloyd—I could fill an entire journal with his brilliant papers, which I’m forced to spread out among issues to make room for other scholars. Following Dr. Taylor’s contributions, we have my own essay, which I am truly delighted to share—it reconsiders the strange and unprecedented iconographic shift we see in Akarnanian coinage in the late 3rd and early 2nd century and offers an appealing explanation for this phenomenon. I’ve always found solace studying Acheloios, and that’s been particularly true as I navigate the landscape of the pandemic.

In the section on Roman numismatics we have only one essay this year, but it is an excellent contribution. The paper is by Andrei Bontas, who has become a steady contributor to *Koinon*, and concerns a follis issued by Constantine in its historical context. In the Medieval and Early Modern section, we have our first essay concerning Medieval Russian coinage, written by Dzmitry Huletski—it is a fascinating read about the emergence of fur money, something I did not know existed until I read Dr. Huletski’s essay. The second is by Csaba Tóth and József Géza Kiss. These authors reconsider the appearance of Hebrew letters on Hungarian coins, and provide a thoroughly enjoyable approach to this interesting bit of numismatic history. And, just as with all our previous writers, these gentlemen likewise used coins not as an escape from reality, but as a way of maintaining a commitment to the beauty of the world despite all of its bumps and curves. The final section, Oriental Numismatics, contains our first-ever essay on ancient Chinese coinage by Thomas Walker. It is both thorough and fascinating, and a worthwhile read even for those (like myself) who have never ventured into the waters of ancient Chinese numismatics. Here too we can celebrate his work and take refuge in the fact that, just as the Chinese went through various upheavals, so we all do—and they all pass.

Whatever the future holds, I find solace in the fact that the spirit of *Koinon* is a spirit of mutual cooperation toward a unified goal—the shared appreciation of ancient coins as a virtuous activity. As Hesiod reminded us in the journal’s opening quote, ‘And do not be storm-tossed in

your mood at a dinner party with many guests: when things are shared in common (*κοινοῦ*), the pleasure is the most and the expense is the least.' (Trans. G.W. Most, Loeb). So, as we face difficult times, let's all together behold the mosaic of the ancient coins and recognize that, in their beauty, we can find solace. In short, let's look not to Caracalla but to Sol Invictus, and know that the sun will indeed rise again.

Vivat Achelous!

Dr Nicholas J. Molinari, General Editor
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