

Beauty Worth Sharing: An Introduction to *KOINON VI*, with Recourse to Marlaina

NICHOLAS J. MOLINARI



Ms. Marlaina Cabral and General Editor Dr. Nicholas J. Molinari. Summer 2023.

Numismatics, especially Classical Numismatics, is chock-full of beautiful surprises worth sharing. Every day I learn something new, and as a community we all relish in what seems to be a daily revelation of novel discoveries. But I've come to the conclusion recently that numismatists themselves are just as interesting, in fact even moreso than the coins we all cherish. Fairly recently I met one such numismatist: Her name is Marlaina and it would be a rare occasion to find her without a bag of coins—yes, she keeps them all in a small bag resembling a pencil case, where they are constantly rubbing against each other! Marlaina has been a collector as long as I have (nearly twenty years), and although she mostly collects United States and Canadian coinage, she certainly has a fair share of World coins and even a few ancients. Her favorite numismatic objects, however, are tokens—turnpike tokens, tokens from restaurants, Alcoholics Anonymous tokens, *etc.* Among these one stands out: a token from McDonalds, which sits in her bag alongside various silver dollars, large cents, and the rest of her treasure. But it isn't Marlaina's eclectic collection that makes Marlaina so special, or the fact that she may be the only numismatist that carries the majority of her coins in a bag. The most suprising thing about Marlaina is that she has never seen a coin—Marlaina is completely blind.

Like many of you, as soon as I heard about Marlaina I needed to meet her and learn more, and as soon as I did, I realized Marlaina was too good not to share. Marlaina's primary experience with coins (and tokens) is through touch. As she and I sat with her bag of coins this summer, I tested her: I'd pass her a coin from her bag and within seconds—almost instantaneously—she'd identified it, even when the coins were the very same denomination but different years or with only slightly different wear patters, differentiations that would give an NGC grader pause. She tells me that sometimes it is the level of wear that gives it away, sometimes the devices on the reverse. Basically,

it is feel of the coin—to an extremely heightened level of sophistication—through which Marlaina knows all of her coins, and in this way she ‘pictures’ the coin and can identify it. Naturally, with so many coins, numismatics has been a source of endless joy for Marlaina, because for her, each and every coin is so utterly unique—an observation usually reserved for us ancient folks who tend to shy away from mass-produced coins.

As amazing as Marlaina’s ability to identify coins through touch is, it is not her greatest talent. Most surprising of all, should identification get a bit tricky, *e.g.* if she is in a crowded room full of voices or the coins are virtually identical, she uses the coin’s sound (!) as the means of identification. That’s right—Marlaina can literally hear subtle differentiations in her coins. To hear a coin, Marlaina will rub her fingernail across one side of a coin which produces an extremely high-pitched sound that only Marlaina (and presumably others with her condition) can hear. She tells me it is something like ‘beep beep beep beep’ in rapid succession, and the subtle nuances among the pitch of the beeps are the keys to this more advanced identification. With some coins the pitch is so high that she refuses to imitate it and instead laughs at my request. Other coins, such as steel pennies, emit no sound whatsoever, but thereby reveal their secret identities. Needless to say, I was (and still am) completely blown away by Marlaina’s talent, which, to the best of my knowledge, is utterly unique. And it is this uniqueness, this authentic way of engaging with coins, that reminds me of just how special my fellow numismatists are, because in many ways it is our individual appreciation of the coins that makes them so much more than a mere means of exchange—it brings out a beauty worth sharing that we can all collectively behold.

Like Marlaina’s special gift, this volume is full of beautiful surprises. In the section on Greek coinage we have nine essays. The first is a fascinating argument by Ukrainian numismatist Ivan Butkevych, in which he maintains that the earliest Scythian coins struck in electrum feature stylized cuneiform logograms on the reverse punch—a bold proposition met with impressive evidence, and a perfect example of the melding of different approaches to provide a new insight into the coins. Next we have a comprehensive paper concerning the dismounting horseman scene on Cilician coins by Petr Velesý—it is exceptionally well written and an important contribution to Greek iconographic studies. Here I’m reminded that, in conducting research, nothing is more important than passion, and Petr exhibits such passion as well as anyone. Following Dr. Vesely’s article, William E. Daehn discusses minting anomalies in Greek Sicily, and uses experimental archaeology to help flush out the details. The essay is insightful and engaging and a welcome addition to the journal—indeed, the entire field could benefit from more studies like this. Next, we have my own brief essay documenting a new overstrike from Abakainon over a Messanian undertype. I was delighted to find it particularly because one of my mentors, Dr. David MacDonald, absolutely loves overstrikes, and I’ve been looking for years to discover a new one to show him.

The next three essays concern Hellenistic coinages: First, Associate Editor Lloyd Taylor and Marko Andric present a new addition to the corpus of Alexander decadrachms, complementing Dr. Taylor’s earlier work on these massive coins. Next we have Julian Wünsch’s commentary on an important collection he recently cataloged, that of Klaus Grigo, which contained many significant coins from the eastern edges of the Greek world. Following Julian’s essay we have another essay by Dr. Taylor, this one concerning the Baktrian coregency legend coinage of Seleukos and Antiochos—it is fascinating and thorough and yet another important contribution to Seleukid studies.

Rounding out the Greek section we have two more essays. The first is one I wrote when I discovered a fairly recent auction listing for a coin featuring Acheloios tentatively attributed to Kietis, a region in Cilicia that, like so many pockets of the ancient world, is also full of hidden beauty. Following that essay, Christoph Öhm-Kühnle provides a corpus of some rare types from Amyzon featuring Artemis paired with a kithara, and in doing so has found two new lovely varieties worth sharing. Such small, often overlooked treasures are yet another reminder that it is always worthwhile to take a second look—you never know what surprises are lurking there waiting for you.

Although we have no essays on Roman coinage, we have three great essays in the Byzantine, Medieval, and Early Modern section. The first two essays are by Sam Cowell. One documents two new important Palaeologan Torneses, and the other discusses the importance of Fourrée Hyperpyra of John V Palaeologus, which seem to reflect the times in more ways than one. Finally, we have another contribution from David Spenciner who teamed up with Theodore Dziemianowicz to produce an overview of the appearance of Christian Saints' names and images on European coins from before 1000 AD.

As usual, the journal closes with a catalog of new varieties, and this year we have ten new coin types to exhibit. There has been a small change in the catalog format: henceforth entries will have a more traditional catalog look with coins depicted at actual size (enlargement added where needed) and attribution appearing below each coin. I do hope the readers like this change and that we have even more submissions moving forward. Finally, an small administrative change: articles will now be accepted on a rolling basis. However, as in the past, contributors are strongly encouraged to submit their drafts by mid-April to be considered for the Fall publication date. I also encourage contributors to reach out to me early if they anticipate submitting an article, which will enable me to reserve space. All this is good news of course, because it means we are getting lots of submissions!

Returning to Marlaina, aside from having a new coin friend, I now have an even greater appreciation for what one can accomplish when he or she really loves something. Deep down each and every one of us is capable of making genuine, unique contributions to numismatics, we just have to utilize our gifts and follow our passion. And while many of you have already found your specialties and I certainly encourage adhering to our predecessors in the many fine ways of assessing numismatic evidence, formulating catalogs, producing detailed studies, and using such information to fill out a broader historical picture with great accuracy, I also urge everyone not to miss the most important contributions of all—the ones only *you* are supposed to make. For it takes the individual perspective of each of us to constitute the common knowledge of the beautiful world of numismatic history, and should you have any misgivings about making your own contribution to *KOINON*, I urge you to follow Iphegenia's advice: 'let it be shared, if it is beautiful.'

Vivat Achelous!

Dr. Nicholas J. Molinari, General Editor