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Tokens in the Athenian Agora in the third century AD: Advertising prestige and civic identity in Roman Athens¹

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Introduction

Athens is the earliest classical city in the ancient Mediterranean to have employed tokens on a significant scale, using these objects from the middle of the fourth century BC until the latter part of the third century AD.² These tokens were, from their very beginnings, indispensable for the workings of Athenian democracy. *Symbola*, the Greek word for *tesserae*, had the form of clay plates cut along a jigsaw line in the fifth century BC. They bore the names of tribes and demes and were employed in allotment procedures. These procedures were indispensable for the distribution of magistracies among the citizenship and the workings of the participatory democracy.³ Taking on a monetiform appearance from the fourth century BC onwards, *symbola* were used as evidence of attendance at the law courts, the Assembly (*ekklesia*) and the Council (*boule*); they also operated as *theōrika* (the entrance fee to the Greater Dionysia and the other festivals). Tokens were also distributed to be exchanged for wheat, as a rare testimony preserved on an honorific decree of the mid-third century BC testifies.⁴

Nevertheless, for quite a long period of time Athenian tokens were primarily studied as pieces in museums or private collections; the implications of this are discussed in Makrypodi's paper in this volume. Crosby's publication in *The Athenian Agora* vol. X (1964)

¹ I am very grateful to Clare Rowan for organising the conference, at which this paper was first presented. I am also grateful to John H. Kroll (Oxford), Christina Kuhn (Oxford), Kenneth Sheedy (Sydney), Stamatoula Makrypodi (Athens) and Brian Mertens (Athens and Oxford) for helpful discussions. Sylvie Dumond has greatly facilitated my study at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens and a particular debt of gratitude is owed to her. I also wish to thank the Ephorate of the Antiquities of the city of Athens for providing me with access to the material. Finally, I thank the anonymous reviewers.

The following abbreviations are used:

IG = *Inscriptiones Graecae* (1873–).

SEG = *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum* (1923–).

SNG = *Sylloge Numorum Graecorum*.

² Lang and Crosby (1964), 75–130, in particular p. 76: 'Athens would seem to be the only city in which they were in abundant use in the Hellenistic period' and pp. 83–85 for the chronological conspectus. For earlier tokens outside the classical period see Schmandt-Besserat's paper in the present volume.

³ *SEG* (1923), 36.232, 38.50; Lang (1959), 80–89; Crosby (1964), 77; Staveley (1972), 48–51, 69–72; Rhodes (1981), 690; Whitehead (1986), 277–90.

⁴ *SEG* (1923), 57.33; Crosby (1964), 77.

has been an important step forward in the study of these objects, since it mapped tokens against find contexts, data invaluable for addressing questions of chronology and function.

The find

The present contribution examines a hoard of 60 tokens and 30 closely related pieces.⁵ This is one of the largest token hoards excavated in Athens to date. The find was previously published by Crosby in the catalogue of the Athenian Agora tokens but the implications of this hoard for Athenian history have yet to be discussed.⁶

In a small pit (D 11:6 in the Athenian Agora Excavations reference system) dug into the bedrock at the northeast corner of what has been named Room II of a ‘Roman House’, 60 lead tokens were unearthed (cat. nos. 1–60). The ‘Roman House’ once stood on the south slope of the hill of Agoraios Kolonos, on which the marble temple of Athena and Hephaistos still stands. No pottery or datable finds were recorded in pit D 11:6. It belongs to ‘section ΠΘ’ or ‘D 10–12’ according to the most up-to-date classification of the site plan of the Athenian Agora.⁷ The architectural remains excavated there in 1935 under the direction of T. Leslie Shear have been regarded as part of a house,⁸ although there are no compelling reasons to come to this conclusion.⁹ The vicinity to other securely identified Roman houses in the valley further south between the Pnyx and the Areopagus made the identification seem probable.¹⁰

Five rooms were excavated and two more can be conjectured by the presence of fragmentary walls and floors that are aligned with the better-preserved structure (fig. 1). If the structure were a house, the extant rooms would have belonged to its NW corner. A nearby well, which was in operation until about the mid-third century AD and presumably belonged to the house, might be used to provide an idea of the location of the courtyard. The house size is hard to calculate but it is well known that the majority of the Athenian houses throughout antiquity ranged between 120 and 150m², whereas a few from the Roman period reached 335–420m².¹¹

⁵ See the complete catalogue at the end of this paper.

⁶ Crosby (1964), 112–13, 137.

⁷ Frantz, Thompson and Travlos (1988), pl. 3.

⁸ Shear (1936), 14–19 with the plan on fig. 13 showing the cistern and only two of the excavated rooms because the excavation at that point had not progressed further. In this preliminary excavation report the tokens found were designated as ‘seals’.

⁹ Crosby (1964), 137; Thompson and Wycherley (1972), 228.

¹⁰ Young (1951), 272–79.

¹¹ Frantz, Thompson and Travlos (1988), 37.

Eight further tokens were contained in a stratum (D 11:7) on the northern side of the house in Room I (cat. nos. 61–68). The fill here also included 23 coins, the latest of which was an issue of Probus (AD 276–282). The coins remain unpublished.¹²

In the nearby cistern (D 10:1) located 12m NW of the ‘Roman House’ and connected to it through a rock-cut channel (D 11–12), 22 further tokens were discovered (cat. nos. 69–90).¹³ The fill in the cistern (which included pieces of sculpture and a large quantity of painted plaster and iron fragments) was the result of the sack of the city by the Heruli in AD 267. The latest coins were those of Gallienus (AD 253–268) and Postumus (AD 258–267).¹⁴ The cistern is thought to belong to the house not only because of the rock-cut channel but also because tokens of the same design were found both in the stratum from Room I (D 11:7) and in the cistern (D 10:1). A dolphin countermark is found on tokens from all three deposits (cat. nos. 1–47, 52–53, 58, 65–66, 86–87, 89).

Numerous finds in the cistern provide indications of the decoration of the interior. Two ivory furniture attachments depicting the Muses were found there.¹⁵ A herm of Herakles in *rosso antico* and a feminine-looking head crowned with an ivy wreath, probably Dionysos, were also found.¹⁶ The deep red marble of the herm would have been a rare extravagance at Athens. The Dionysos head, a work of the second century AD, standing just under a metre tall, would have probably been a part of a group composition, perhaps with a satyr. Five bronze statuettes were also recovered from the cistern. They depict Pan, Herakles of the Farnese type, Hermes, a bull representing either Zeus or Apis, and the snake-daimon Glykon.¹⁷ A portrait herm was also discovered.

This inscribed portrait herm deserves particular attention.¹⁸ The honorary dedication commemorates ‘Moiragenes, son of Dromokles, of the deme Koile, *eponymos* of the tribe Hippothontis’. The portrait head is smaller than life size and depicts a clean-shaven man of mature age gazing forward solemnly. On stylistic and technical grounds, the portrait is

¹² Crosby (1964), 137.

¹³ The cistern is aligned with the eleventh column of the Hephaistos temple and is 58.20 metres south of the stylobate. The tokens and their types according to Crosby (1964): IL1074 (type L202), IL201, IL203–04, IL209, IL212, IL253, IL258 (type L250), IL199 (type L251), IL200, IL202, IL205–08, IL211, IL213, IL215 (type L263), IL257 (type L265), IL240 (type L272), IL286 (type L289), IL241 (type L290).

¹⁴ Crosby (1964), 137.

¹⁵ Agora BI 166 and BI 167: Shear (1935), 444, fig. 8; Shear (1936), 17, fig. 15.

¹⁶ Herakles (Agora S 590): Harrison 1965, 173, n. 230. Dionysos (Agora S 589): Shear (1935), 444–47, fig. 9. The androgynous head was identified as a maenad, presumably because of the chignon and the Venus rings at the neck, both of which appear in youthful, languid images of the god. See Gasparri (1986), nos. 119–26.

¹⁷ Shear (1936), 15–19.

¹⁸ Agora S 586: Harrison (1953), 35–37, no. 25, pl. 17; Geagan (1964), 199, no. H372.

considered to be a work of the Hadrianic or early Antonine period (second century AD).¹⁹ As *eponymos*, Moiragenes was a prominent and wealthy citizen who donated the funds to cover the prytany's sacrifices.²⁰ The Koile lies within the city *trittys* of the tribe Hippothontis (the *trittyes* were a divisional system used in the city). But the house where the herm was found lies within the boundaries of Melite, a deme from the tribe Kekropis. Melite had always been inhabited by reputable citizens, such as Antiphon, Epicurus, Callias, Phocion and Themistocles. As with Koile and Kollytos, which were all situated to the west of the Acropolis and within the city walls, this was a prominent deme.²¹

Moreover, the walls of the house were brightly plastered in light green and pink to resemble panels of marble revetment. Floors laid in *opus reticulatum* and pebble mosaic would have lent further prestige to the interior. Mention should also be made of the location itself, which provided residents with close access to the heart of the city, as well as sought-after views of the square of the Agora below and the Acropolis and Areopagos above.

Among the 90 tokens discussed here two pieces stand apart because of their Hellenistic date. One was found in the cistern (D 10:1) and carries the representation of a kantharos (cat. no. 69 = fig. 23). The other is decorated with a palmette (cat. no. 62 = fig. 19) and was found in the stratum of debris in Room I (D 11:7).²²

The architecture

Only a small part of the original structure of the 'Roman House' is preserved (fig. 1). A long wall running approximately eight metres NE to SW forms the continuous back wall of Rooms II and III (fig. 1). Room II is almost square in shape, ca. 12m² and is accessible through the much bigger trapezoidal-shaped Room I (ca. 20m²), which functions as an antechamber. Room III (25m²), lying to the SW of Rooms I and II, is rectangular and was connected to Room I via a doorway. Another door provided access to the SE and another access to the SW. The extremities of the preserved walls betray that once they would have continued forming more rooms. But their partial preservation does not provide much clarity as to what existed to the east of Room III. To the south, Room IV, which runs from NE to SW, is delimited by the

¹⁹ Smith (1998), 83–84.

²⁰ On the *eponymos*: Oliver (1941), 3; Geagan (1967), 99–101; Meritt and Traill (1974), 21.

²¹ Lohmann (1999), 1190.

²² For palmette parallels: Postolacca (1868), nos. 683–702; Crosby (1964), 106, cat. nos. L210–11. There are no known parallels for this particular type of kantharos on other tokens.

natural rise to the NW, and had a door providing access to the rest of the structure, which is not preserved.²³

After examining the relationship of the pit (D 11:6) to the architectural remains, the conclusion can easily be reached that the pit was a true hiding place, not visible to anyone who might have glanced through the door of Room II. It is a space providing controlled access. Moreover, Room II is accessible only through an antechamber (Room I). This would qualify Room II as belonging to the ‘second layer of depth’ in the building, according to current terminology, because it would have been designated for ‘inhabitants’ and not ‘visitors’.²⁴

The remains hinder an exact comparison with known examples of different building types. Nevertheless, the hierarchical arrangement of space – some spaces being generally accessible and others possibly accessible only to a limited group – is a special feature typical of the seats of cult associations.²⁵

Interpretation of the types

The 90 tokens from Agoraios Kolonos are closely interconnected. Forty-six specimens belong to the same uniface series, displaying a Hermes bust right (cat. nos. 1–44, 65–66, figs. 3–7). The remaining 44 specimens are distributed over an additional 23 types, catalogued at the end of this piece. We can observe that the tokens exhibit mostly gods, both established deities (Athena, Hermes and Poseidon) and ‘new’ gods, who acquired significance in the Hellenistic period (Serapis and Alexander the Great). Here only the most significant in terms of imagery will be discussed.

The bust of Athena on a ship (cat. no. 48 = fig. 9, cat. no. 49) might be interpreted as the vessel carrying Athena, or the goddess piloting it. The image refers to the dedication of the *peplos* (Athena’s garment), which was suspended on the mast of the Panathenaic ship and during the Panathenaia festival was brought from Kerameikos to the foot of the Acropolis.²⁶

This is not the only case of a festive procession portrayed on a token. Two well-known specimens of the Roman imperial period, one excavated in the Agora and one in the Hallerstein Collection (now at the University Museum of Göttingen) depict a cart driven by

²³ The architectural remains were recorded by John Travlos: PD 581 (DA 155), kept in the Agora in Athens and digitalized on ascsa.net.

²⁴ Markus (1993), 169–244; Irvine, Hanks and Weddle (2012), 91–117.

²⁵ Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2002), 125–28.

²⁶ Deubner (1932), 32–34; Shear (2001), 143–54.

horses and carrying a stylis (mast); this is the cart of Dionysos which featured at the Anthesteria (fig. 2).²⁷ Tokens, which were introduced in the Late Classical period in Athens in order to facilitate participation of the citizen body in governance, came to be used for a broader range of uses in the course of the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD.²⁸ First and foremost in the Roman period, tokens seem to have been connected with participation in festivals, and the sharing of gifts and benefits associated with these celebrations, as the iconography of these specimens indicates.²⁹

All the ‘Hermes bust’ examples are countermarked with the design of a dolphin swimming right. This dolphin punch is deeply impressed on the specimens, which exhibit a thin and particularly wide flan. As a result small holes have often developed in the area of the countermark. It seems that the ‘Hermes bust’ examples may have been reused because they exhibit thin, spread flans. Overstrikes cannot be ascertained because no traces of the older types – if they have ever existed – are discernible. The softness of the material could possibly account for the fact that the details of any earlier die are lost.³⁰ The preservation of most of these specimens makes it impossible to conduct a full die study, but the 17 pieces where such examination could take place were found to be distributed over five dies. The *kerykeion* or caduceus has a curved staff on at least six tokens (IL217, IL220 = fig. 3, IL226, IL228, IL232, IL238, IL270) and this is probably the first die. The pleats of the neckline and the straight stem of the *kerykeion* are all very similar on a number of tokens (IL222 = fig. 4, IL225, IL234, IL245, IL264) and this is probably another die. Two more tokens have a distinctly small head and belong to yet another die (IL235–36 = fig. 5). Specimens IL227, IL263 (fig. 6), IL269 (fig. 7) and IL278 can be distributed over two distinct dies respectively. Hermes, the herald god, is not a stranger to tokens. The *kerykeion*, his divine badge, frequently occurs on the Hellenistic tokens of the city. It is found, for example, on early Hellenistic lead letter-tokens, pieces connected with the allotment of jurors and other state functionaries.³¹ The *kerykeion* is also found accompanied by the legends ΑΓ or ΑΓΟΡ and

²⁷ Benndorf (1875), 612 no. 4, plate X, no. 51; Crosby (1964), 95, cat. no. L88.

²⁸ Bubelis (2010), 182–83.

²⁹ This conclusion is easily reached when comparing the iconography of the Hellenistic tokens and the iconography of the Roman period tokens of Athens.

³⁰ Overstriking is well known for the Late Classical bronze dikast tickets, probably some sort of ‘recycling’. For bronze tokens struck on earlier issues of bronze tokens see Svoronos (1923–1926), pl. 100, no. 31. There are also bronze tokens which have been overstruck on Syracusan bronze coins: Svoronos (1898), 50, no. 48 (1), pl. Δ.12, 48 (3), 50 (δ), 51, nos. 58 (α), 58 (δ), 59 (α), (β), (ε), 60 (α), 61 (δ), 63 (γ) pl. Δ.25, 52, no. 67 (α), pl. Δ.28; Boegehold (1995), 72, no. 18.

³¹ Svoronos (1900), 324, no. 37 pl. I, 22, no. 51, pl. I, 31, 325, no. 69 pl. I, 49; Crosby (1964), 87, cat. nos. L7, 88, L19.

ΠΙΕΝ.³² The former legends refer to the *agoranomoi* (market overseers) and their functions or the administration of the *agorastikon* fund, while the latter references the workings of the Council of the Five Hundred. Quite a few Hellenistic tokens carry a *kerykeion* combined with an ear of wheat (at times also accompanied by a poppy head), suggesting that this device was employed in the context of wheat distributions.³³

There are particular aspects of Hermes that make him a suitable presence for procedures involving communality and participation. It is in the god's specific nature to preside over distributions. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* the god performs a sacrifice followed by the allocation of 12 shares on equal terms.³⁴ Hermes is thus associated with spaces where honours are defined and sharing takes place. The theology is a deeply social one, because the sharing of honours is closely connected to reciprocity. Hermes' works find resonance in the broader frame of the city-state as a political and religious community since here too specific procedures are instituted so that repartitions are realised and decisions are reached.³⁵

A major trend observed among the tokens of the hoard is their imitation of coin types. The 'Hermes bust' series bears a close resemblance to fractions of Athenian civic issues of the imperial period.³⁶ The 'standing Hermes / standing Serapis' tokens (fig. 24) constitute a pasticcio of two distinct reverses found on Roman imperial coinage of the third century AD, specimens of which have been found in the Athenian Agora.³⁷ Standing Hermes was a design also employed on Athenian provincial coins of the imperial period.³⁸

The 'head of Athena / boukranion' series (cat. no. 52 = figs. 11, cat. no. 53) is likewise probably inspired by Athenian drachms of the second century AD. The 'Serapis bust / prow' series closely copies – in a simplified manner – Roman provincial issues of the cities of Asia Minor.³⁹ Alexander the Great (cat. no. 58 = fig. 15, cat. no. 88 = fig. 27) is likewise well known from the civic issues of cities of imperial Asia Minor and also appears on lead tokens

³² ΑΓ or ΑΓΟΡ: Svoronos (1900), 332, nos. 159–62, pl. III, nos. 4, 5, 7; Crosby (1964), 102, cat. no. L170; Bubelis (2010), 186. On the *agorastikon* fund: Bubelis (2013), 122–6. ΠΙΕΝ: Svoronos (1900), 198. On the contrary Dumont (1870) thought the type was associated with festivals and ΠΙΕΝ refers to Penteteris. More obscure is the meaning of the legend ΕΡΧΟ and ΕΡΧΟΥ, which also accompany images of the *kerykeion*.

³³ Engel (1884), 20, cat. no. 200; Crosby (1964), 102–03, cat. nos. L172–73.

³⁴ *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, lines 126–29.

³⁵ Jaillard (2007), 237–41.

³⁶ Svoronos (1923–26), pl. 92, nos. 30–34, pl. 99, nos. 42, 44.

³⁷ Crosby (1964), 112 mentions five coins from the Antioch mint with this Hermes design on the reverse: two of Valerian (AD 253–260) (Thompson (1954), 379) and three of Gallienus (AD 253–268) (Thompson (1954), 487, 498). Four examples of Roman coins carrying Serapis reverses are known from the Athenian Agora: one of Caracalla (Thompson (1954), 216 = BMC, vol. 5, 455, no. 126), one of Gordian III (Thompson (1954), 306 = RIC IV.3, no. 30) and two of Gallienus (Thompson (1954), 468).

³⁸ Svoronos (1923–1926), pl. 92, nos. 27–29.

³⁹ Bricault (2017), 229–31, pl. 24, nos. 26–31 (Magnesia ad Maeandrum, Smyrna).

from Roman Ephesos.⁴⁰ The type of the mature, bearded head with hair gathered in a bun and revered expression likely represents the personified *Demos* (cat. no. 88 = fig. 27).⁴¹ The similarity between the design of coins and tokens has already attracted the attention of scholars.⁴²

The lion head tokens (cat. nos. 45–47, fig. 8) relate to architecture and are representations of waterspouts. These specimens are remarkable because they are mould-made, a technique rarely used for Athenian tokens.

The countermark

The dolphin countermark found on 52 tokens is the link that associates the finds of all three deposits: those in the pit of Room II (D 11:6), those in the destruction debris in Room I (D 10:1), and those in the cistern (D 11:7). There are two distinct punches for the dolphin countermark. The smaller is found on the ‘Lion head with tenon’ series. It is only 8mm long and possesses a rill around the dolphin. The larger punch is approximately 11mm long (including the free space left around the dolphin) and was used on the extensive ‘Hermes bust’ series (with the punch placed consistently at 3h) as well as on tokens carrying the types of ‘Athena bust on ship’, ‘Athena / boukranion’, ‘bearded head right’, ‘head of Alexander the Great’, ‘bust of Poseidon’ and ‘helmet’. On the majority of the ‘Hermes bust’ series the countermark is placed consistently on the right (41 out of a total of 46), which suggests that they were all countermarked within a short period of time and possibly from the very beginning of their manufacture. On the whole, 53 out of 60 tokens contained in the pit D 11:6 were countermarked with the dolphin (one of either of the punches). Crosby has suggested that the repetition of the same countermark on different types suggests that all these tokens were all issued by the same authority, who presided over all stages of the tokens’ use: distribution, authentication, and the collection of the tokens back.⁴³

On Palmyrene tokens, which are generally made of clay and two-sided, space was deliberately left on one of the sides for the addition of a small design made on a separately attached piece of clay and carrying a stamp, sometimes produced by impressing a gem. While the designs of the two sides were taken from the ready-made patterns manufactured at the

⁴⁰ Civic issues: *SNG France* 2326 (Hadrian, Aegeae, Cilicia); Waddington, Babelon and Reinach (1904–1912), 288, pl. LXXIV.26 (rev.) (Marcus Aurelius or Commodus, Nicaea, Bithynia). Tokens: Gülbay and Kireç (2008), 133, no. 188a, 136–38, nos. 195–200.

⁴¹ Martin (2013), 10–69.

⁴² Postolakas (1880), 7; Crosby (1964), 77; Bubelis (2010), 182–88; de Callataÿ (2010).

⁴³ Crosby (1964), 83.

workshop and offered to the commissioners, this third aspect, the punch, was the personal badge of the commissioner. It was carefully prepared and attached as pastillage. The private punches safeguarded the authenticity of the tokens and prevented their counterfeiting.⁴⁴

In this case, the dolphin countermark bears a connection to the commissioners of the tokens, the people who occasioned their use and distribution. Saying that, the different designs of the faces could signify a variety of occasions. Therefore, the ‘Hermes bust’ series, which is more abundantly preserved, may be linked with the most recent occasion. This is a tentative interpretation because while in Palmyra specimens of the same type bear different private punches, in Athens specimens of different dies have the same countermark. This is a phenomenon that may be related to the coherence of the lot and the circumstances of the discovery.

Similarly, the countermark of a stork and lizard is placed on 15 of the types found together on the floors of the shops in the Stoa of Attalos, as well as the Stoa’s environs. The find is contemporary to the Agoraios Kolonos tokens.⁴⁵ Although the exact meaning of the countermarks still escapes us, it is evident that they helped regulate a complex system of token distribution.

Interpretation: functions and meanings of Athenian tokens

The evidence presented above permits the formulation of some hypotheses concerning the possible roles – religious, political, social – played by these tokens. Specimens of the ‘Hermes bust’, ‘Hermes / Serapis’ and ‘Lion with tenon’ series have also been found in the Bouleuterion Plateia, the most conspicuous spot of Athenian politics, which suggests a connection with the works and aspirations of the civic elite, and particularly elite euergetism.⁴⁶ The politics of elite euergetism were intended to result in the praise and admiration of the citizenry and were translated into prestige and status.⁴⁷ The considerable expense linked to the magistracies and offices of Roman Imperial Athens (e.g. the sacrifices financed by the eponymous archon, the hoplite general, the prytanising tribe) and the related

⁴⁴ Ingholt, Seyrig, Starcky and Caquot (1955), iv–v; du Mesnil du Buisson (1962), 18–20; Makrypodi (2016), figs. 1–2, 6.

⁴⁵ Mylonas (1901), 119–22, pl. 7; Crosby (1964), 116.

⁴⁶ Crosby (1964), 112. ‘Hermes/Serapis’ (IL699) from Bouleuterion Plateia F10 and one un-inventoried specimen from northwest of Bouleuterion (F8), ‘Hermes bust’ (IL58) from near Bouleuterion deposit F 12:4 (third to fourth century AD); ‘Lion’s head with tenon’ (IL127–28) from the northwest corner of the Bouleuterion Plateia; ‘Hermes head right / head right’ (IL129) from near the northwest corner of Bouleuterion Plateia (F10).

⁴⁷ Veyne (1990), 214–16; McHugh (2017), 124–34.

distributions of money, food (including grain) and gifts gave the incentive for token distribution.⁴⁸

Parallel situations can be found elsewhere in the Roman Empire. In Ephesos the imagery and legends on tokens suggest they were connected to festivals, serving to enhance the status of the elite, who issued the tokens and sponsored the activities. Of importance here is the use of abbreviated names and monograms of wealthy and influential individuals, which functioned as symbols to communicate with token-users.⁴⁹ Caius Vibius Salutaris' endowment to the citizenry of Ephesos was such a case. The gifts would have been distributed with the aid of tokens.⁵⁰ In Palmyra, tokens used as entrance tickets to sacred banquets carried the representation of one or more of the priests responsible for the celebration. Banqueting was obviously a means of negotiating social power and civic identity. The image of the donor or donors, accompanied by their name, would have circulated on tokens among the beneficiaries, in other cases among the members of an association; these objects must have been much sought-after for the benefits of attending a one-time event as well as for the access and prestige associated with exclusive spheres of societal life.⁵¹

In Athens of the Second Sophistic concerns for elite status and identity were apparent.⁵² Clans, an archaic organisation that was revived under Augustus, provided the candidates for priesthoods and magistracies as well as governing bodies (the Council of the Five Hundred and the Council of Areopagus). Magistracies and priesthoods were no longer elected but had transformed into life-long positions, to which members of the clans were appointed.⁵³ The plague and the economic crisis under the Antonines meant that the expense of holding an office became more acute. The intentional resemblance of tokens to well-known coin types may have been chosen as an abstract allusion to the funds donated and a more concrete appeal for increased prosperity in view of the crisis of the Severan period in the early third century AD.

In AD 212, when the *Constitutio Antoniniana* granted Roman citizenship to almost all in the Empire, the Athenian clans must have felt prompted to accentuate their status in a much more ostentatious way. Reference to venerable ancestors was one way of differentiating their own citizenship, based on noble ancestry, from the en masse citizenship granted by imperial

⁴⁸ Geagan (1967), 6–8, 18–31.

⁴⁹ Gülbay and Kireç (2008); Kuhn (2014).

⁵⁰ Wankel (1979), 167–249, no. 27.

⁵¹ Seyrig (1985); Kaizer (2002), 116–20, 255–58; Al-Asʿad, Briquel-Chatonnet and Yon (2005); Raja (2015).

⁵² For the Second Sophistic in general: Borg (2004); Whitmarsh (2013); Johnson (2017).

⁵³ Geagan (1967), 75, 81; Woloch (1969); Oliver (1980); Oliver (1981), 83–88; Camia (2014).

degree. An honorific epigram of AD 240 (*IG* II² 3679) records that the *Claudii* of Melite claimed descent from illustrious personalities of the past: the general Conon and Alexander the Great.⁵⁴ The emphasis on status and ancestry of the family can be glimpsed in a dedicatory inscription from ca. AD 200, where on the occasion of an intermarriage between the *Casiani* of Steiria (a deme on the east coast of Attica) and the *Claudii* of Melite, the ancestry of the honorands is meticulously inscribed with the former family claiming even Perikles among its ancestors, counting 21 generations backwards.⁵⁵ The *Casiani* of Steiria were of the *genos* of the *Eumolpidai*, which claimed descent from Poseidon and were traditionally hierophants, the highest priesthood in the Eleusinian cult.⁵⁶ The family of the *Claudii* of Melite, contemporaries to *Casiani*, were of the *genos* of *Kerykes* and occupied the *daduchia* priesthood, second in importance after the hierophants.⁵⁷ It is tempting to think that the issue and distribution of the tokens of Agoraios Kolonos were managed by members of the Athenian elite and that the designs represented the divine ancestry and celebrated the priesthoods of these families, advertising their connections in the same way as these inscriptions.

The predilection for Hermes and Alexander the Great on the tokens of Agoraios Kolonos can only partially be explained as adaptations of contemporary coinage in and outside Athens. Instead they are linked to the self-consciousness and self-portrayal of the elite. The 44 ‘Hermes bust’ tokens form a coherent ensemble and point to a particular event, which could have been initiated by a man of the *genos* of *Kerykes*, because this group claimed descent from Hermes himself. The dolphin countermark is connected to the final phase of this event. It is of some significance that the dolphin countermark is found on all ‘Hermes bust’ specimens but is not restricted to them. Was the same authority responsible for the various series of tokens, the related events, and the countermarking? Could the initiator behind the dolphin countermark have been a priest of Poseidon-Erechtheus? It is nevertheless tempting to see the dolphin design and the way that it almost obliterates Hermes’ face as an expression of the competition between the elite families for status and priesthoods.⁵⁸ Tokens and the events associated with them were instruments in the elite’s quest for primacy. The types commemorate family priesthoods, divine forefathers and historical ancestors. They bear

⁵⁴ Clinton (2004), 55–56.

⁵⁵ The Athenian Agora I 7483: Clinton (2004), 39–56, figs. 1–5, particularly 54–55. The 21 generations are compatible with the actual date of the inscription by a reckoning of thirty years to a generation.

⁵⁶ Mylonas (1961), 167–68, 230–31.

⁵⁷ Follet (1976), 274–78; Clinton (1992), 78; Byrne (2003), 153–59.

⁵⁸ An example is the enmity between the *Claudii* of Melite and the *Claudii* of Marathon: Clinton (1974), 61–62.

witness to the elite's concern to gain the praise of the citizenry and preserve their prestige. Similar to Ephesos, endowments are also attested for Athens: Claudius Atticus' endowment for example (Herodes Atticus' father),⁵⁹ and the so-called Eleusinian endowment.⁶⁰

The meticulous design of Hermes' bust – the winged cap, the draped neckline, the *kerykeion* resting on the god's shoulder – betray a particular admiration and knowledge of classical antiquity. The 'lion with tenon' tokens are similarly classical in design and almost archaic in appearance. Similar observations can be made for the rest of the series. The absorption of the Greek world into the Roman Empire resulted into a particular attachment to the past, mythical genealogy, and local history, which ultimately affected social memory.⁶¹

The iconography of the heavy bronze wreathed coinage of the second century AD can be explained as a product of the same conditions and has also been related to the cultural and societal activities of the Athenian elite. The coin types commemorate divine forefathers and historical ancestors. Issued by influential Athenian families, they were probably used for distributions of money to the Athenian citizenry upon the holding of the eponymous archonship and other high offices of the city.⁶²

Conclusion

The hoard of 60 tokens along with the 30 closely related pieces discovered in the Herulian debris on the southwest slope of the Agoraios Kolonos brings to light the roles these objects played in social life. The above analysis clearly demonstrates the powerful networks of political and sacred affairs that likely prompted the issuing and use of tokens. The imagery and find spots of these pieces suggest tokens were issued by wealthy magistrates with high aspirations. The imagery points to the ambitions of the Athenian elite to preserve their distinguished status in a continuously changing environment.

Close analysis succeeded in placing the tokens in the complex society of imperial Athens and demonstrated how tokens enabled the maintenance of an exclusive community with connections to the broader political, religious and cultural network of the Roman Empire. The acceptance and circulation of the pieces created bonds between issuers and users, and close examination and control of these objects were procedures that shaped social life. Their divine iconography has proven to be more earthly in nature, with the imagery of tokens connected to

⁵⁹ Oliver (1949), 302–03.

⁶⁰ Oliver (1952), 381–99.

⁶¹ Swain (1996), 65–131; Alcock (2001), 323–50.

⁶² Kroll (1997).

identities and ancestry, celebrating priesthoods, shaping relations and contributing to the continuity of primacy among the elite.

Catalogue

60 tokens found in Pit D 11:6 (hoard)

Bust of Hermes right in a round incuse, with winged cap on his head and *kerykeion* on right shoulder. Countermarked with a dolphin (11mm) facing right with a long tail. Uniface.⁶³

cf. cat. nos. 65–66. Unless specified the countermark is in the right field.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 112, cat. no. L264.

1. **IL217**, Ø 21mm, 4.46g.
2. **IL220 (fig. 3)**, Ø 22mm, 4.63g.
3. **IL222 (fig. 4)**, Ø 21mm, 3.69g.
4. **IL223**, Ø 20mm, 2.73g (1/3 broken off), countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
5. **IL225**, Ø 22mm, 5.92g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
6. **IL226**, Ø 22mm, 6.00g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
7. **IL227**, Ø 21mm, 5.95g, countermark obliterated the lower part of the face and the neck.
8. **IL228**, Ø 21mm, 4.59g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
9. **IL229**, Ø 23mm, 7.09g.
10. **IL230**, Ø 22mm, 7.38g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
11. **IL232**, Ø 20mm, 4.77g.
12. **IL233**, Ø 22mm, 5.69g.
13. **IL234**, Ø 21mm, 3.83g.
14. **IL235**, Ø 23mm, 5.22g.
15. **IL236 (fig. 5)**, Ø 21mm, 2.80g, countermark on the left.
16. **IL237**, Ø 22mm, 4.57g.
17. **IL238**, Ø 20mm, 4.57g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
18. **IL239**, Ø 23mm, 6.98g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.

⁶³ Crosby (1964), 112–13, L264 lists 45: 44 + the radiate bust IL283 with no countermark, which was mistaken for Hermes.

19. **IL242**, Ø 20mm, 3.23g.
20. **IL243**, Ø 20mm 3.80g.
21. **IL245**, Ø 20mm, 3.78g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
22. **IL246**, Ø 22mm, 5.69g.
23. **IL247**, Ø 21mm, 4.89g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
24. **IL248**, Ø 17mm, 2.92g. A piece on the left is broken off, probably in the area of countermarking, and almost 1/3 is missing.
25. **IL249**, Ø 20mm, 4.19g.
26. **IL250**, Ø 21mm, 5.69g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
27. **IL251**, Ø 20mm, 4.16g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
28. **IL259**, Ø 21mm, 4.83g.
29. **IL260**, Ø 19mm, 4.80g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
30. **IL263 (fig. 6)**, 23mm, 6.81g.
31. **IL264**, Ø 19mm, 4.45g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
32. **IL266**, Ø 20mm, 4.74g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
33. **IL267**, Ø 22mm, 6.85g.
34. **IL269 (fig. 7)**, Ø 22mm, 4.54g. Countermark on the left, which obliterated the *kerykeion*.
35. **IL270**, Ø 21mm, 5.09g.
36. **IL271**, Ø 22mm, 6.04g, countermark partially erased Hermes' face.
37. **IL275**, Ø 21mm, 5.35g, countermark obliterated Hermes' face.
38. **IL276**, Ø 21mm, 5.13g.
39. **IL277**, Ø 23mm, 4.71g.
40. **IL278**, Ø 21mm, 3.18g, countermark on the left.
41. **IL280**, Ø 20mm, 3.47g, small part broken off.
42. **IL281**, Ø 23mm, 6.16g, countermark partially erased Hermes' face.
43. **IL282**, Ø 21mm, 4.44g, countermark on the right.
44. **IL285**, Ø 22mm, 6.85g.

Other specimens of the same type found in the Agora: **IL335** from Kolonos Agoraios (A–F 9–15) (Ø 21mm, 5.91g). The countermark on the right partially erased Hermes' face. **IL158** (deposit F 12:4) (Ø 23mm, 3.10g) (half of it broken off), countermark on the right.

Lion's head seen from above with tenon, dolphin countermark. The countermark is 8mm with a rill that delineates the dolphin. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 115, cat. no. L291.

These tokens are mould made, with solid robust flans and flat backs.

45. IL218, Ø 21mm, 6.66g. The countermark is at 12h.

46. IL231, Ø 28mm, 11.79g. The countermark is at 12h.

47. IL221 (fig. 8), Ø 25mm, 9.55g. The countermark is at 6h.

Other specimens of the same type found in the Agora: **IL127** from the northwest corner of the Bouleuterion Plateia (F10) (Ø 22mm, 10.32g). The countermark is at 12h and a small piece is broken off. **IL128** from the northwest corner of the Bouleuterion Plateia (F10) (Ø 26mm, 9.58g). The countermark is at 12h. **IL1203** from the Southwest Area (Ø 23mm, 7.03g). The countermark is at 6h.

Bust of Athena with Corinthian helmet left on ship, the oars are denoted with incisions, star in field right. Just below the ship, countermark of a dolphin facing right (11mm). From pit D11:6. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 111, cat. no. L256.

48. IL224 (fig. 9), Ø 20mm, 2.71g. The countermark is at 9h.

49. IL273, Ø 24mm, 4.95g. The countermark is at 10h.

Side A: Bust of Serapis right. Side B: Prow (right).

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L268.

50. IL219 (fig. 10), Ø 25mm, 4.81g, 6h.

51. IL262, Ø 21mm, 5.52g, 3h.

Other specimens of the same type found in the Agora: **IL590** (Ø 20mm, 5.14g, 3h) and **IL1215** (Ø 19mm, 4.96g, 12h).

Side A: Head of Athena right. Side B: Filleted boukranion with countermark of a dolphin above (11mm).

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 110, cat. no. L251.

52. IL274 (fig. 11), Ø 23mm, 6.45g, 9h.

53. IL294, Ø 17mm, 3.32g, 9h.

Specimen of the same type found in the Agora: **IL1440** from Agoraios Kolonos (Ø 25mm, 6.48g, 3h), dolphin countermark on the reverse at 1h.

Side A: Head of Hermes right in incuse. Side B: Male head right in slight incuse.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L273. Cf. the finds in stratum D 11:7.

54. IL268 (fig. 12), Ø 19mm, 5.92g, 9h.

Radiate male bust right. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 112–13, cat. no. L264.⁶⁴

55. IL283 (fig. 13), Ø 20mm, 6.05g.

Side A: Bust of Poseidon right. Side B: Prow right, square object in field above. Border of dots 13mm in diameter.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L267.

56. IL261 (fig. 14), Ø 20mm, 5.33g, 3–4h.

Bearded male bust right, club in field left, dolphin countermark facing upwards (11mm) behind the bust. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L271.

57. IL265 (fig. 15), Ø 21mm, 7.19g.

Diademed head of Alexander the Great right, dolphin countermark facing downwards (11mm) in the field right. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 114, cat. no. L 275.

58. IL244 (fig. 16), Ø 20mm, 5.79g, countermark in right field.

Side A: Deer standing right. Side B: Prow right, square object in field above.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 114, cat. no. L280.

59. IL272 (fig. 17), Ø 17mm, 3.88g, 6h.

Specimen of the same type found in the Agora: IL1439, Ø 18mm, 5.21g, 5–6h.

Filleted thyrsus (?). Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 115, cat. no. L298.

60. IL279 (fig. 18), Ø 18mm, 3.91g, small piece broken off.

⁶⁴ IL273 was originally mistaken to be the same type as L264. But the bust bears a radiate crown, no *kerykeion* is visible, and there is no countermark.

8 tokens found in stratum D 11:7

Palmette. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 107, cat. no. L212.

61. IL284 (fig. 19), Ø 11mm, 2.33g.

Draped figure standing left, left arm forward and down, uncertain symbols in field left and right. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 97, cat. no. L102.

62. IL288 (fig. 20), Ø 15mm, 2.46g.

Side A: Bust of Athena right in crested Corinthian helmet, owl behind head. Side B: Demeter standing in cart drawn right by two serpents; upraised arms perhaps carrying torch and grain.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 110, cat. no. L245.

63. IL290 (fig. 21), Ø 14mm, 2.42g, 6h.

Side A: Pegasus galloping right, in field below dolphin right (no countermark), all in square incuse. Side B: Bacchus.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 114, cat. no. L282.

64. IL289 (fig. 22), Ø 17mm, 4.72g, 12h.

Bust of Hermes right in round incuse, winged cap on his head, *kerykeion* on his shoulder, countermark of a dolphin facing right with long tail. Uniface.

Cf. the 44 pieces in pit D 11:6 above: cat. nos. 1–44.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 112, cat. no. L264.

65. IL255, Ø 21mm, 5.49g. The countermark on the right partially erased Hermes' face.

66. IL256, Ø 22mm, 4.18g. The countermark is on the *kerykeion* at 7h.

Side A: Hermes turned slightly left; cap, winged shoes, and chlamys falling from left arm. Moneybags in right hand, *kerykeion* in left. In field, lower right, a star; lower left, indeterminate object. Border of dots 14mm in diameter. Side B: Serapis, semi-draped, wearing modius, head turned to left. Right arm outstretched, staff in left hand. In field lower left, star. Border of dots 14mm in diameter.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 112, cat. no. L263. Cf. the finds in Cistern D 10:1: cat. nos. 70–78.

67. IL292, Ø 17mm, 5.81g, 1h.

Side A: Head of Hermes right in incuse. Side B: Male head right in slight incuse.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L273. Cf. the finds in pit D 11:6: cat. no. 54.

68. IL287, Ø 18mm, 5.42g, 9h (thick robust flan).

Specimen of the same type found in the Agora: **IL129** (Ø 19mm, 4.34g) from near the northwest corner of Bouleuterion Plateia (F10).

22 tokens found in cistern D 10:1

Ribbed flaring kantharos.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 105, cat. no. L 202.

69. IL1074 (fig. 23), Ø 13mm, 2.50g.

Side A: Hermes turned slightly left; cap, winged shoes, and chlamys falling from left arm. Moneybags in right hand, *kerykeion* in left. In field, lower right, a star; lower left, indeterminate object. Border of dots 14mm in diameter. Side B: Serapis, semi-draped, wearing modius, head turned to left. Right arm outstretched, staff in left hand. In field lower left, star. Border of dots 14mm in diameter.

cf. the finds in stratum D11:7: cat. no. 67. Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 112, cat. no. L263.

70. IL200, Ø 19mm, 6.63g, 6h.

71. IL202, Ø 21mm, 6.48g, 9h.

72. IL205, Ø 20mm (disintegrated).

73. IL206, Ø 18mm, 5.07g, 12h.

74. IL207, Ø 21mm, 5.93g, 6h.

75. IL208, Ø 20mm, 5.71g, 9h (a small part is broken off).

76. IL211, Ø 22mm, 7.26g, 1h.

77. IL213 (fig. 24), Ø 19mm, 5.23g, 3h.

78. IL215, Ø 21mm, 6.26g, 12h.

Head of Athena right in crested Corinthian helmet in linear circle. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 110, cat. no. L250.

- 79. IL201**, Ø 23mm, 7.20g.
80. IL203, disintegrated.
81. IL204, Ø 21mm, 4.82g.
82. IL209 (fig. 25), Ø 20mm, 4.42g.
83. IL212, Ø 19mm, 3.94g.
84. IL258, Ø 19mm, 5.46g.
85. IL253, Ø 16mm, 2.94g.

Side A: Head of Athena right. Side B: Filleted boukranion with countermark of dolphin (11mm) above.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 110, cat. no. L251.

Cf. the finds in the pit D 11:6: cat. nos. 52–53.

- 86. IL199**, Ø 18mm, 4.06g, 9h.

Bust of Poseidon right, in field right trident with dolphin entwined around it, dolphin countermark left (11mm). Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L265.

- 87. IL257 (fig. 26)**, Ø 20mm, 4.22g.

Side A: Head of the personified *Demos* right. Side B: Head of Alexander the Great left.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), 113, cat. no. L272.

- 88. IL240 (fig. 27)**, Ø 17mm, 5.34g, 6h.

Helmet, dolphin countermark (11mm) left and yet another countermark (12mm) right. Uniface.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), cat. no. L289.

- 89. IL286 (fig. 28)**, Ø 22mm, 6.26g.

Side A: Kalathos or altar. Side B: Kalathos or altar.

Bibliography: Crosby (1964), cat. no. L290.

- 90. IL241 (fig. 29)**, Ø 15mm, 4.44g, 6h.

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Fig. 2: Archäologisches Institut der Universität Göttingen AS-Pb 030 (courtesy of Stephan Eckardt).

Fig. 3: Agora Museum/Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens IL220 (cat. no. 2, Ø 22mm) (courtesy of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture).

Fig. 4: Agora Museum/Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens IL222 (cat. no. 3, Ø 21mm) (courtesy of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture).

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Fig. 7: Agora Museum/Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens IL269 (cat. no. 34, Ø 22mm) (countermark on the left, which obliterated the *kerykeion*) (courtesy of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture).

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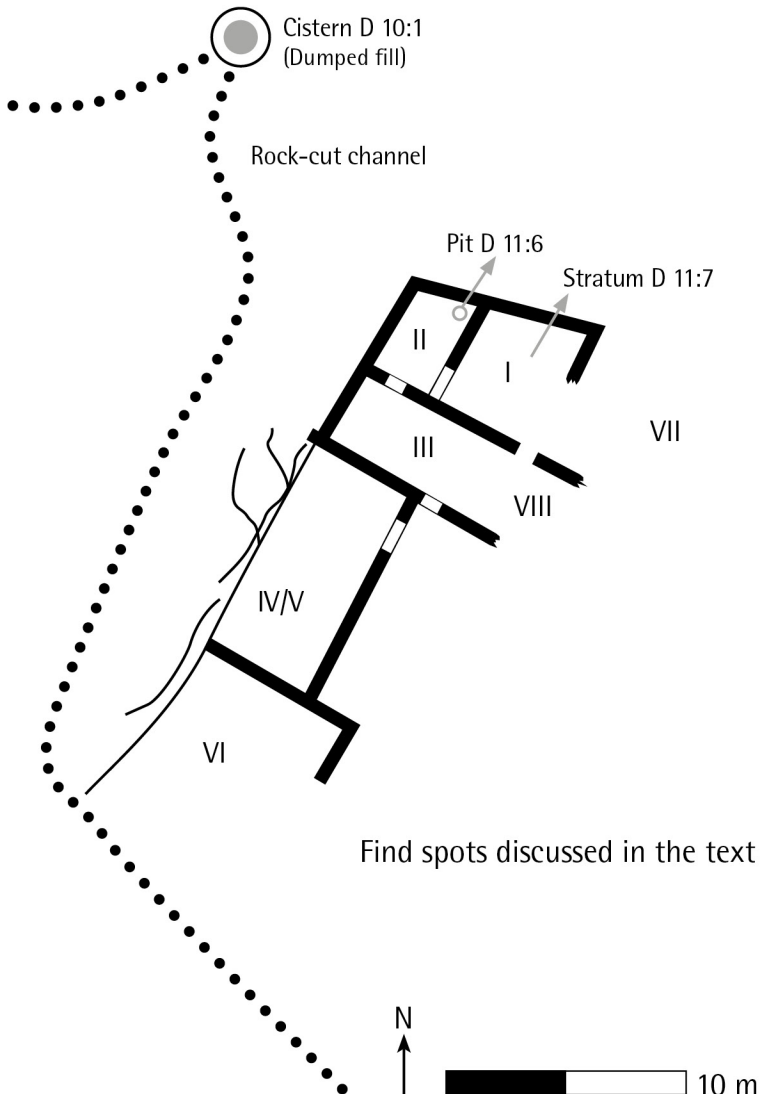
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Figure 1



After the original excavation by J. Travlos 1935-36 (Archives of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens PD 581, DA 155)











































































