

From dies to punches: techniques for (counter)marking lycian coins and *sigloi*

Entre cuños y punzones: las técnicas para aplicar contramarcas en monedas licias y siclos

Novella Vismara (novellavismara@gmail.com)
Università Milano Bicocca

Abstract: The article examines the modalities with which countermarks were struck on Lycian coins and *sigloi* in the period between the end of the sixth century B C and 360 B C. Two main kinds of tools were used for applying countermarks: punches and dies. While punches bear a positive image of what is to be added to the coin in the negative, dies bear the negative of images, letters and shapes that will appear on the coin in positive. The author presents examples of each type, using cases from Lycian coins and *sigloi*. In the Lycian coinage, about a score of coins are countermarked. Five different examples (two Lycian coins and a *siglos* for countermarks done by punch, and two Lycian coins for countermarks done by dies) are illustrated.

Keywords: Aramaic. Scratch. Symbol. Technique.

Resumen: El artículo examina las modalidades con las que se aplican las contramarcas en las monedas licias y siclos en el período comprendido entre finales del siglo VI a. C. y 360 a. C. Las monedas licias contramarcadas son pocas, unas veinte, pero la comparación con el siclo permite hacer observaciones relacionadas con la técnica con la que se estamparon las contramarcas.

Se utilizaron dos técnicas: punzón grabado en relieve, o en hueco como los cuños (acuñación). Usando el punzón en relieve, la contramarca aparece grabada en hueco en la moneda, usando la acuñación, en cambio, aparece en relieve.

La observación muestra dos tipos diferentes de punzones: uno que deja impresiones simples en la moneda y otro que produce una contramarca con un diseño más complejo. La acuñación es de un solo tipo.

La autora ilustra cinco monedas con contramarcas: tres producidas con punzón en relieve y dos con acuñación. Cuatro son licias y la otra es un siclo. Las monedas licias con contramarcas a punzón en relieve son del tipo prótomo de jabalí / cuadrado incuso, mientras que las acuñadas son una de Ddēnewele (anverso: cabeza de Ddēnewele a derecha y reverso: cabeza de Atenea a derecha) y una de Trbbēnīmi de la ceca de Limyra (anverso: cabeza de león de frente y reverso: trisquel dentro de cuadrado incuso).

Las monedas se reproducen a escala 1:1 y se amplía el detalle de la contramarca.

La interpretación del significado de las contramarcas es generalmente problemática y admite diferentes hipótesis, e igualmente su función no está clara. Para mostrar las dificultades relacionadas con la interpretación, sirve de ejemplo la moneda n.º 4. Representa un símbolo que podría estar presente como elemento secundario en una moneda licia de ceca y emisor inciertos (Vismara, 1989; n.º 191). La misma contramarca, sin embargo, orientada de manera diferente, podría representar una *beth* en el alfabeto arameo.

En general, especialmente para las contramarcas producidas con el punzón, se atribuyen al trabajo de cambistas o banqueros (Le Rider, 1974). En el estado actual de recopilación del material, las contramarcas licias del período considerado no pueden compararse con las bien estructuradas de Cilicia o Panfilia del siglo IV a. C. (Callataÿ, 2000: 103-123).

La recopilación del material resulta un problema particularmente sensible para este tipo de análisis, que exige contar con excelentes fotografías o examinar la moneda en persona. La moneda n.º 5 del catálogo presenta tanto una contramarca estampada como letras incisas. Ahora conservada en el Museo Británico, la moneda proviene de la colección von Aulock y fue publicada en el décimo volumen de la serie *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum* dedicado a ella (*SNGAul* 1964, n.º 4223). La fotografía de la *Sylloge* fue tomada de un molde de yeso que no reproduce ni la contramarca ni las letras incisas, que por lo tanto se documentan aquí por primera vez.

Palabras clave: Arameo. Grafiti. Símbolo. Técnica.

We often find *countermark* applied in the literature to refer to a mark stamped with a punch on an already minted coin; the operation may have been carried out by a private citizen, e.g. a banker or moneychanger, or by a public official (Le Rider, 1975: 27). In the Lycian coinage dating from the end of the sixth century to 360 BCE, the countermarks were not widespread. About a score of coins are countermarked. The small sample, however, is sufficient to give us a sense of the countermarking techniques employed, especially with regard to the shape of the dies and punches. This has not been the focus of investigation to date, be it the overview by Georges Le Rider (Le Rider, 1975: 27-45), which focused on the institutional basis of countermarking, whether public or private, or be it analysis of specific types, such as the work of François de Callataÿ on Cilician coins (Callataÿ, 2000: 103-123). Morphological and technical differences regarding countermarking operations have not generally been delved into, save by Josette Elayi and André Lemaire in their analysis of western Semitic countermarks on Greek coins, which point out that these may be incused or in relief (Elayi, and Lemaire, 1999: 157). Documentation collected so far on Lycian coins, added to comparative findings from Persian *sigloi*, enables us to better specify what kind of tools were used for striking countermarks, whose own shape is obviously determined by the tools. One of the most intractable problems in analyzing material of this kind is the quality of the reproductions of the coins being examined, which cannot go unmentioned, for all that it is mundane. For example, we might cite coin Cat. No. 5 from the von Aulock Collection now held at the British Museum (inv. No. 1979,1010.76; *SNGAul.*: No. 4223). The *Sylloge* von Aulock cast plaster reproduction shows neither the countermark nor the scratch that can that can be seen both upon direct inspection or in a photograph.

Two main kinds of tools were used for applying countermarks: the punch and the die. While punches bear a positive image of what is to be added to the coin in the negative, dies bear the negative of images, letters and shapes that will appear on the coin in positive. There are three possible methods:

A) Linear punches. These bear a positive of the «type», be it a symbol or a letter, which will appear in negative on the coin. The punch face has basic geometric shapes, such as dots, lines, and semicircles, of various sizes. The marks left by such punches may appear as missing metal on the planchet or blemishes left by what has happened to the coin over its lifetime, rather than a deliberate action. It can be difficult and arbitrary to determine with certainty what the marks are. One example is the following:

- 1) Obverse: forepart of boar facing left, two thrust legs / Reverse: incused square with protruding lines and bodies.

Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Münzkabinett, inv. No. 37.189; gr 9,33; Ø mm 17,01; Type as Vismara, 1999: No. 3 (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Cat. No. 1.

On the obverse, in front of the nose, there are two parallel impressions, one slightly curved. The two marks in front of the boar's nose are not accidental marks or blemishes due to wear or cleaning but the result of deliberate action. What they mean is another problem. Ascribing them merely to metal sampling would seem an oversimplification. They may be a backward Lycian letter K, made in two strokes as is found on some of Kuprlli's coin legends (Vismara, 1989: No. 109), but they might also represent P Z in Aramaic characters: it is sufficient to browse the Elayi and Lemaire catalog (Elayi, and Lemaire, 1998: 108-128) to realize the difficulty of interpreting these signs. It may seem like a shot in the dark to count among possible explanations a letter from one of the many alphabets of the Persian empire, albeit from a Semitic area, but in this regard we must bear in mind that Lycian coins, although limited in number, circulated outside the actual area of Lycia (Vismara, 1999b). A specimen (Dressel, y Regling, 1927: No. 111), completely comparable to this one, though from a different pair of dies, was found in the Demanhur Hoard, in Egypt (IGCH 1637; Vismara, 1999b: 28).

B) Contoured punches. These are made specifically for the purposes of countermarking. The shape of the punch face corresponds to the contour of the image or letter or symbol to be pressed into the coin. The inner area is carved out so that only what is meant to appear in negative on the coin remains. The thickness saved may be greater or less so that the mark comes out as narrow or wide or as deep or shallow as need be on the coin surface. Depending on the saved edge thickness, different outcomes are obtained.

- 2) Sardis, Obverse: archer / Reverse: incused square.

New York, American Numismatic Society, inv. No. 1994.100.73537; gr 5,45¹ (fig. 2a).



Fig. 2. Cat. No. 2-3.

¹ A similar countermark is on a licia stater from the Auction Stack's, Bowers, Coin Galleries, 07-07-2011, No. 1021.

The punched countermark on the obverse shows the punch edge cut deeply into the coin face. The meaning of the mark is not obvious to us today. However, it is clear that its shape is not a matter of chance but that whoever made the punch wanted to obtain a specific shape that meant something to the moneyers.

- 3) Obverse: forepart of a boar facing left, two thrust legs / Reverse: incused square with Maltese cross.
London, The British Museum, inv. No. 1909,1005.1; gr 9,25; Ø mm 22; Type as Vismara 1989, No. 16 (fig. 2b). (Fig. 2).

On the obverse in front of the boar's nose there is a ogival punched countermark with a stroke. It could be a stylized boar skull.

The greater thickness of the punch edge kept punches from penetrating the metal. This distinguishes their countermarks from those made with dies, since the image stays more or less at the depth of the coin surface.

C) Dies whose face is usually not contoured but round or square, as in the specimens available, and bears an engraved letter or motif to be reproduced in relief on the coin. The concave symbols, letters, and images appear on the coins in positive. This category of countermarking includes all the 'great' countermarks, often municipal, found on coins from Pamphilia and Cilicia (Callataÿ, 2000: 103-123; Elayi, and Lemaire, 1998: 108-128). Here again we can illustrate with two different examples.

- 4) Ddēnewele. Obverse: head with tiara, facing right / Reverse: DDĒNEWELE Athena head wearing Attic helmet, facing right.
London, The British Museum, inv. No. 1899.0140.86; gr 8,40; Ø mm 21 (fig. 3a).

On the reverse in the left field toward the bottom we find a die-struck countermark (Mørkholm, and Zahle, 1976: 63, a). The symbol obtained, once the countermark is oriented as suggested by Mørkholm and Zahle in the 1976 graphic reconstruction, falls into a vast category of subsidiary symbols whose function and meaning is generally not very clear (Vismara, 1996: 165-171). Specifically, it is comparable to a mirror image of one of the symbols that appear on the reverse of a coin with no legend whose obverse bears a helmeted Athena head and reverse bears a Hermes head wearing a petasus (Vismara, 1989: No. 191). However, if it is oriented according to the direction of its position on the coin planchet, it could be an Aramaic beth.

A final example of die-struck countermark is the following:

- 5) Trbbēnīmi, minted at Limyra. Obverse: T [R B] front of a lion scalp, lower part of field has three scratch marks / Reverse: Z Ẽ M Triskele with triskele in the middle ring.
London, The British Museum, inv. No. 1979, 0101.76 (Ex von Aulock Collection); gr. 9,43; Ø mm 26 (fig. 3b). (Fig. 3).

As noted above, neither the etched letters on the obverse nor the countermark were recorded in the von Aulock Collection description of the specimen (*SNGAul.*, No. 4223). The use of plaster casts, which have a hard time rendering scratches and countermarks, especially if they are not sharp or deep, without making them seem faded, hindered identification of the detail even later on. Poor preservation of the obverse countermark makes it hard to read. It could well be like the symbol No. 31 from the Mørkholm-Zahle table (Mørkholm, and Zahle, 1976: 63). The etched letters are unique to this specimen among Lycian coins from the period documented so far. The interpretation of the marks is uncertain. The second letter, in the orientation suggested, could be an Ā, which appears



Fig. 3. Cat. No. 4-5.

the most likely reading, but might also be an inverted Greek or Phoenician L. The vertical lines may be a J.

In conclusion, a small group of Lycian coins, along with one *sigloi*, allows us to detail a variety of methods for applying countermarks in the region around Lycia.

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