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# Aigeai in Cilicia and Tyre in Phoenicia. A Surprising Connection\*

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**Abstract:** In this paper three mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD coin types of the civic coinage of Aigeai in Cilicia are discussed, and it is suggested that they were modeled on prototypes from Tyre in Phoenicia. The images on all three coin types are firmly rooted in Tyre and were adopted by Aigeai. This observation has consequences for the interpretation of the Aigeaian coins and calls for caution when trying to understand such coin images only from the local context of the minting authorities.

**Keywords:** Tyros (<http://nomisma.org/id/tyre>), Aigeai ([http://nomisma.org/id/aegeae\\_cilicia](http://nomisma.org/id/aegeae_cilicia)), Roman provincial coinage ([http://nomisma.org/id/roman\\_provincial\\_numismatics](http://nomisma.org/id/roman_provincial_numismatics)), Kadmos (<https://d-nb.info/gnd/118930222>), Heracles (<https://d-nb.info/gnd/118639552>), Apollon (<https://d-nb.info/gnd/118503642>), Thea Roma (<https://d-nb.info/gnd/118602381>)

**Zusammenfassung:** In diesem Beitrag werden drei Münztypen der städtischen Münzprägung von Aigeai in Kilikien aus der Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. besprochen, und es wird herausgearbeitet, dass sie nach Vorbildern aus Tyros in Phönizien gestaltet sind. Alle drei Bilder sind ursprünglich fest in Tyros verwurzelt und wurden erst sekundär in Aigeai übernommen. Diese Beobachtung hat Konsequenzen für die Interpretation der aigeaischen Münzen und erfordert Vorsicht, wenn man versucht, solche Münzbilder nur aus dem lokalen Kontext der Prägeautoritäten zu verstehen.

**Schlagwörter:** Tyros, Aigeai, kaiserzeitliche Städteprägung, Kadmos, Herakles, Apollon, Thea Roma

Aigeai in Cilicia and Tyre in Phoenicia are two important harbor cities in the eastern Mediterranean with a prolific production of civic bronze coins in the Roman imperial period, especially in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>1</sup>. Both cities boasted their civic traditions and cults: Aigeai was proud of her cult of Asclepios and depicted the eponymous goat on her coinage, Tyre represented the time-honored cult of Heracles-Melqart and referenced foundation stories of Dido and Kadmos. Both cities stressed their link to the Mediterranean Sea, featuring ships and maritime themes. In the following, three remarkable adoptions of motifs are discussed which suggest a special connection between the two cities in the 250s AD.

## Kadmos and a foundation hero

Tyre elaborates on its relation to the civilizing hero Kadmos<sup>2</sup>. Among other mythical scenes, which include his sister Europa, the city since the time of Philippus Arabs (r. 244–249 AD)

minted a coin type showing Kadmos standing to the left in front of a bull. He holds a spear in the crook of his left arm and a patera in his outstretched right hand (**fig. 1**)<sup>3</sup>. In the upper left part of the scene is a vignette of a city with gate and towers. The same type was also minted in Tyre under the emperors Trebonianus Gallus<sup>4</sup> and Volusianus<sup>5</sup> (r. 251–253 AD). Again in the reign of emperors Gallienus<sup>6</sup> (r. 253–268

\* Thanks are due to Florian Haymann (Frankfurt) for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> On the coinage of Aigeai see Haymann 2014. A detailed analysis of the Roman coinage of Tyre is still a research desideratum. In recent years several iconographic studies on the Tyrian coins were published, most recently by Bijovski 2020 and Palistrant Shaick 2021 with further bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Hirt 2015.

<sup>3</sup> [RPC VIII, ID 58995](#).

<sup>4</sup> [RPC IX, no. 1986](#).

<sup>5</sup> RPC IX, nos. [2017](#) and [2018](#).

<sup>6</sup> Babelon 1893, 346 no. 2341; Rouvier 1904, 103 no. 2532; BMC Phoenicia 293 no. 487.



Fig. 1: Bronze coin of Tyre under Philippus Arabs (244–249 AD) (29.1 mm, 18.01 gr). Draped and cuirassed bust of Philip II to r. / Kadmos founding Thebes (RPC VIII, ID 58995 – ANS New York, inv. [1944.100.81900](https://www.ans.si.edu/object/ANSMON:1944.100.81900))



Fig. 3: Bronze coin of Aigeai under Aemilianus (253 AD) (27 mm, 13.4 gr). Laureate draped bust of Aemilianus to r. / Hero founding city (Künker, Auction 236, 7. October 2013, [lot 1177](https://www.kunker.com/lot/1177))



Fig. 2: Bronze coin of Tyre under Valerianus (253–260 AD) (27 mm, 13.49 gr). Laureate draped and cuirassed bust of Valerianus to r. / Kadmos founding Thebes (Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 100, 7. October 2015, [lot 1755](https://www.cng.com/lot/1755))

his wife Harmonia<sup>11</sup> and handing over the script to Greeks<sup>12</sup>.

Under the emperor Aemilianus (r. 253 AD), Aigeai minted a coin type which on the reverse depicted exactly the same scene of a standing man with a spear in the crook of his arm and patera as well as the bull and the vignette of a city (**fig. 3**)<sup>13</sup>. The legend under the vignette reads NAYAPXIC and thus relates to Aigeai ruling the waves.

Even if the motive of a bull leading the city founder to the place of a foundation is a frequent motif in Greek foundation myths<sup>14</sup>, it is obvious that the coin types of Aigeai and Tyre are formally so closely related that one served as the model for the other<sup>15</sup>. Since the type is

AD), Valerianus (r. 253–269)<sup>7</sup> and Salonina<sup>8</sup>, this coin type was produced, and it is in this period that the vignette of the city is identified through the Greek legend ΘΗΒΕ as Thebes (**fig. 2**). The legend unambiguously clarifies that the coin depicts the well-known myth of Kadmos, a hero from Tyre, who was guided by a bull to the place in Boiotia where he first fought a dragon – a topic which is also featured on Tyrian coins<sup>9</sup> – and later founded Thebes. This image lays claim to the Greek civilizing hero and connects him to his Phoenician hometown Tyre. Kadmos is a key figure in the coinage of Tyre, other types show him embarking on a ship<sup>10</sup>, standing with

<sup>7</sup> Rouvier 1904, 99 no. 2500.

<sup>8</sup> Babelon 1893, 349 no. 2360; Rouvier 1904, 107 no. 2565; Baramki 1974, 266 no. 311.

<sup>9</sup> Elagabalus: Babelon 1893, 327 no. 2236; Rouvier 1904, 77 nos. 2372. 2374. Gordian III: Babelon 1893, 333 no. 2266; Rouvier 1904, 86 nos. 2428–2429; BMC Phoenicia 280 f. nos. 425–426. Gallienus: Babelon 1893, 346 nos. 2339–2340; Rouvier 1904, 103 nos. 2530–2531. Salonina: Rouvier 1904, 107 no. 2564; BMC Phoenicia 295 no. 496.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. BMC Phoenicia 277–294 nos. 411. 446. 469. 489.

<sup>11</sup> [RPC VIII, ID 6540](https://www.rubicon-collector.com/coin/58995).

<sup>12</sup> RPC VIII, ID [6505](https://www.rubicon-collector.com/coin/6505). [27531](https://www.rubicon-collector.com/coin/27531).

<sup>13</sup> Haymann 2014, 354–355 M230.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lichtenberger 2003, 95 n. 743.

<sup>15</sup> See also Haymann 2014, 197.





Fig. 4: Bronze coin of Tyre under Trebonianus Gallus (251–253 AD) (30 mm, 14.77 gr). Laureate and cuirassed bust of Trebonianus Gallus to r. / Heracles and Apollon ([RPC IX, no. 2002](#) – Jerusalem, Israel Museum, inv. 82.04068)



Fig. 5: Bronze coin of Aigeai under Gallienus (253–269 AD) (27 mm, 15.69 gr). Radiate and draped cuirassed bust of Gallienus to r. / Heracles and Apollon (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 163, 25. April 2007, [lot 177](#))

first attested in Tyre, it has to be assumed that this was the model for the coin type of Aigeai<sup>16</sup>. This is also supported by the observation that the theme fits nicely with the broadly communicated message of the Tyrian coin emissions dealing with Kadmos as founder of Thebes. The attempt to find a connection between Aigeai and Kadmos, as presented by Tanja Scheer, is very much artificially constructed and not very compelling<sup>17</sup>. Florian Haymann has convincingly suggested that in Aigeai a local foundation hero was depicted, whose name we cannot identify with certainty<sup>18</sup>. Since this topic is not further elaborated in the coinage of Aigeai, it seems indeed that a Tyrian coin type was adopted in Aigeai. This adoption related to a coin type that was specific to Tyre and the adoption for an otherwise unattested founder was later applied in Aigeai and could have been related to an otherwise unknown founder of the city.

### Heracles and Apollon

Under the emperors Trebonianus Gallus (r. 251–253 AD)<sup>19</sup> and Gallienus<sup>20</sup>, Tyre minted a coin type depicting on the reverse a standing Heracles and an Apollon embracing, both holding their attributes, club and lyra (**fig. 4**). They each stand in a pronounced contrapposto pose resulting in a rhombus shaped composi-

tion of the couple. Heracles is the main deity of Tyre, and Apollon is also a traditional god of the city, even though he makes no further appearance on the city coins. In Tyre, this type was accompanied by several agonistic coins referencing the local Heracleia and Actia and I have argued elsewhere that the Heracles and Apollon type specifically relates to these Tyrian civic games<sup>21</sup>.

In the time of Gallienus, Aigeai also minted a coin type depicting Heracles and Apollon on the reverse (**fig. 5**)<sup>22</sup>. Because it is formally and stylistically very similar it has to be assumed that the two images are related. Again, it is likely that the earlier coin type of Tyre served as the model for the coin type of Aigeai. Similar representations of the two deities as a couple are extremely rare<sup>23</sup>. The idea that the Tyrian

<sup>16</sup> *Contra* Haymann 2014, 197 (who was not aware that the type is first attested in Tyre).

<sup>17</sup> Scheer 1993, 317–320. The figure on the coin type of Aigeai is also identified by Bloesch 1989, 20 as Kadmos.

<sup>18</sup> Haymann also correctly questions the identification with Alexander the Great as suggested in SNG Levante 1788.

<sup>19</sup> [RPC IX, no. 2002](#).

<sup>20</sup> CNG Electronic Auction 291, 21. November 2012, [lot 267](#).

<sup>21</sup> Lichtenberger 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Haymann 2014, 360 M254.

<sup>23</sup> Lichtenberger 2023.





Fig. 6: Bronze coin of Tyre under Volusianus (251–253 AD) (28 mm, 16.15 gr). Laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Volusianus to r. / Thea Roma seated to l. with spear in l. and two figures in galley in r. (RPC IX, no. 2035 – London, BM 1925,0105.122), photo: RPC



Fig. 7: Bronze coin of Aigeai under Valerianus (253–260 AD) (25 mm, 12.05 gr). Radiate, draped and cuirassed bust of Valerianus to r. / Thea Roma seated to l. with spear in l. and Nike in r. (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 277, 11. April 2012, lot 129)

coins inspired the one from Aigeai is supported by Haymann's observation that within the minting history of the city, it is an exceptional depiction in Aigeai which he explains by suggesting that Apollon was possibly venerated in Aigeai as a founder, even if there is no evidence for this. There is however a Hellenistic bronze coin of the city with Heracles on the obverse and a tripod on the reverse that could attest to some traditional connection between the two deities in Aigeai<sup>24</sup> which might have inspired the adoption of the image of the embracing deities. Again, as with the Kadmos type, we have a unique coin image in Aigeai, which compares closely with a Tyrian coin image. In Tyre it can be explained by the local myths and the civic games related to the two deities. In Aigeai an explanation for their representation is not as straightforward but it seems plausible that some meaning could be ascribed to the image also within a civic context.

### Thea Roma

Under Trebonianus Gallus<sup>25</sup> and Volusianus<sup>26</sup>, Tyre minted civic coins depicting the enthroned Thea Roma on the reverse (fig. 6). She is seated facing left and holds two small figures in a galley in her right hand and a spear in her left arm. The two figures in a galley in her hand probably relate to some maritime myth of

Tyre<sup>27</sup>. A shield is placed in front of Thea Roma. Other programmatic coin types were minted at the same time, namely one featuring Thea Roma and the Tyche of Tyre as a couple<sup>28</sup>, with images of a handshake<sup>29</sup> underlining the concord between Rome and the city of Tyre. Parallel to Thea Roma, coins depicting Tyche were also produced in Tyre<sup>30</sup>, suggesting that a full program of Tyche, Thea Roma, Tyche and Thea Roma as well as the symbolic handshake promoted the intimate bond between Tyre and Rome. The Thea Roma type is continued under Valerianus<sup>31</sup> and Gallienus<sup>32</sup>; under Gal-

<sup>24</sup> Haymann 2014, 173.

<sup>25</sup> RPC IX, no. 2005.

<sup>26</sup> RPC IX, no. 2035.

<sup>27</sup> Among the myths depicted in Tyrian coinage Dido and Kadmos are the most likely seafaring heros which could have been referenced in the Thea Roma image, even if also a more general maritime message of the image might have been intended.

<sup>28</sup> RPC IX, nos. 2000, 2029.

<sup>29</sup> RPC IX, no. 2047.

<sup>30</sup> One of the most common coin types of Tyre, cf. e.g. BMC Phoenicia 269–292 nos. 369, 372–373, 385, 388–393, 396–405, 416, 419, 423–424, 431–432, 436, 445, 449–453, 474–477.

<sup>31</sup> Babelon 1893, 343 no. 2324; Rouvier 1904, 99 no. 2498; BMC Phoenicia 287 nos. 454–454, 456–457.

<sup>32</sup> Rouvier 1904, 103 nos. 2527–2528; BMC Phoenicia 292 no. 480; Baramki 1974, 264 nos. 296–297; Gemini, LLC Auction VI, 10. January 2010, lot 786.



lienus Thea Roma is even depicted in a hexastyle temple<sup>33</sup>.

A short time later, under Valerianus, Aigeai depicted the same seated Thea Roma on the obverse of a bronze coin, but this time she does not hold the two figures in a galley in her right hand but a Nike (**fig. 7**)<sup>34</sup>. The seated female figure had been identified as Athena by Florian Haymann because of her importance in the city, but the commonalities with the Tyrian coin image are apparent and a seated Athena is lacking in previous coins of Aigeai so that again it can be assumed that the isolated coin of Aigeai is modelled on the Thea Roma coin type of Tyre. Even if in this case it has to be stressed that a seated Thea Roma type is quite common in the eastern Mediterranean<sup>35</sup> and the possible connection between Tyre and Aigeai is less certain than that postulated with the other two types discussed above. If, however, the Tyrian coin type inspired the coin of Aigeai, then it can be considered, as Haymann assumed, that it was indeed adopted as a type for the local Athena and not necessarily related to Thea Roma because at that time Rome as a topic is not as dominant in Aigeai as in Tyre and Thea Roma could be locally rebranded as Athena.

### Aigeai and Tyre

The adoption of coin motifs from Tyre in Aigeai is surprising, since there is no evidence for a special relationship between Aigeai and Tyre in the 250s AD. The strongest connection that can be seen between the two cities is their importance as stops on maritime routes in the eastern Mediterranean. Aigeai had a special position as a stepping stone to Syria and Alexandria<sup>36</sup>, and Haymann showed that its civic coinage in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD was also influenced by coin images from Northern Syrian cities<sup>37</sup>. The new evidence for the adoption of coin images from Tyre underlines that Aigeai in this period has to be seen as a melting pot and that also cities along the southern Levantine coast such as Tyre influenced the choice of coin motifs in Aigeai.

What are the practical consequences of such an adoption? There is no evidence that the adoption resulted from a sharing of dies, as has been observed for other cities in Asia Minor<sup>38</sup>. Such die links are usually more regional (»Lieferbezirke«) and not trans-Mediterranean. Also, in Aigeai the obverse die links of this period are restricted to Cilicia<sup>39</sup>. We therefore have to assume that Tyrian bronze coins indeed travelled to Aigeai and that at least some of them, which could be integrated into the civic images, were adopted. These adoptions were not random but the coin images of Tyre were chosen because they offered an option for integration into the visual world of Aigeai. It seems that coin images were adopted during a period of crisis, when Shapur had occupied Northern Syria<sup>40</sup> and Aigeai increased its minting output. It is not possible to find a more clear and concrete explanation for the surprising connection between the coinage of Aigeai and Tyre, but it is useful to describe the phenomenon and, in the future, to look out for similar adoptions. What we can learn in any case from the three examples is that sometimes the reverse images on civic coins of the Roman period were not necessarily originally designed for their use in the minting city but could be adopted from foreign contexts. This however does not imply that the images were arbitrary and lacked local meaning, but they had to fulfil certain criteria to be adaptable to different contexts, namely that it must have been possible to ascribe new local meaning to them. Thus, they shed light on the sometimes surprisingly non-linear and multi-authored creation of coin images and they call for cau-

<sup>33</sup> Baramki 1974, 266 no. 308. This parallels similar depictions of Tyche in a hexastyle temple.

<sup>34</sup> Haymann 2014, 358 M245.

<sup>35</sup> Vermeule 1959.

<sup>36</sup> Robert 1973, 170–171; Holtheide 1982, 9; Haymann 2014, 7–9. 279 no. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Haymann 2014, 129–138.

<sup>38</sup> Kraft 1972; Watson 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Kraft 1972, 87.

<sup>40</sup> Kettenhofen 1982.



tion in interpretation if we do not entirely understand the complexity of their genesis.

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