

SOME ATHENIAN ARMOR TOKENS

(PLATE 40)

THE nine lead tokens illustrated on Plate 40 were found in 1971 in the Agora well with the large lot of 3rd century cavalry tablets discussed in the preceding paper. Coming from the same context as the tablets, the tokens should date with them to around the middle of the 3rd century B.C.¹ Each token is stamped on both sides. On the obverse is shown a piece of armor—helmet, corslet, greave, or shield—except in the case of 9, on which is figured a Nike. On the reverse is a letter—alpha, gamma, or delta. All of the tokens are restruck, which accounts for the deep incuse fields of their obverses and the occasional distortion of the reverse letters. On the reverses of 1, 2, and 5 one can make out traces of an earlier letter that was replaced when the tokens were stamped for the second time.

In the following listing, reference is made to similar Athenian lead tokens that I have examined in the Athens Numismatic Collection and in the storerooms of the Agora. Most of the tokens in these collections have been published by Achille Postolacca and Margaret Crosby:

A. Postolacca, "Piombi inediti del nazionale museo numismatico di Atene," *Annali dell' Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica* 40, 1868, pp. 268-316, with illustrations in *Monumenti inediti pubbl. dall' Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica* VIII, pl. LII. Cited as "Postolacca".

M. Crosby, "Lead and Clay Tokens," Part II of M. Lang and M. Crosby, *The Athenian Agora*, X, *Weights, Measures and Lead Tokens*, Princeton 1964, pp. 69-146, with pls. 19-32. Cited as "Crosby".

1 (IL 1575) Diam. 0.019 m.

Obv. Helmet to right

Rev. Γ (traces of earlier alpha or delta)

The helmet, of Attic type, has a low metal crest and a shallow pointed visor; it is ornamented along the lower edge of the bowl with a row of curving leaves arranged as in an aplustre. The majority of the helmets shown on Athenian lead tokens in the Numismatic Museum (Postolacca, nos. 635-644, of which only no. 640 is illustrated) are similar in form but lack the leaf ornamentation. Helmets of other types occur on Crosby, nos. L 189-L 192. All of these parallel tokens have plain reverses, without letters.

¹ Above, pp. 83-140.

2 (IL 1574) Diam. 0.020 m.

Obv. Identical corslet (same die)

Rev. A (traces of earlier letter, a gamma?)

3 (IL 1573) Diam. 0.023 m.

Obv. Identical corslet (same die)

Rev. Γ

The corslet consists of a short braestpiece and an attached skirt of two rows of leather flaps (*pteruges*). The breastpiece is composed of four horizontal bands, presumably of leather, which are crossed at each arm by vertical shoulder flaps. Since the protuberance from the neck looks too long and too narrow to have been a neckguard, I assume it to be the exposed part

of a frame on which the corslet was hung.² All of the corslets figured on other Athenian lead tokens (Postolacca, nos. 742-747, of which no. 743 is illustrated; Crosby, nos. L 227-L 229, pl. 27) have the same or at least a very similar form, including the protruding pole. Two of the tokens catalogued by Postolacca are said to have a letter on their reverse, no. 743 an incuse gamma, no. 744 a delta; I could find neither among the seven corslet tokens now in the trays of the Athens Collection.

4 (IL 1572) Diam. 0.021 m.

Obv. Greave to right

Rev. A

5 (IL 1576) Diam. 0.021 m.

Obv. Identical greave (same die)

Rev. Γ (traces of earlier letter, a gamma?)

6 (IL 1577) Diam. 0.018 m.

Obv. Identical greave (same die)

Rev. Δ

For Attic tokens, all with blank reverses, that picture similar greaves, see Postolacca, nos. 622 (illustrated) and 623; Crosby, nos. L 184-L 186, pl. 26.

7 (IL 1579) Diam. 0.020 m.

Obv. Round shield emblazoned with A

Rev. A

8 (IL 1578) Diam. 0.021 m. Broken along upper edge.

Obv. Identical shield (same die)

Rev. A

The shield is bordered with a circle of dots representing a riveted rim. The Athens Numismatic Collection now possesses seven lead tokens, all with blank reverses, showing similar shields with the alpha blazon; four are listed in Postolacca, nos. 589-592, of which no. 589 is illustrated. Two other such tokens, also with plain reverses, have been found in the Agora excavations: Crosby, nos. L 27a, b, pl. 27, with my comment below, pp. 144, on L 27c. There are two additional shield tokens on which a vertical is subjoined to the crossbar of the alpha blazon to give the monogram Α (*ibid.*, no. L 26; J. N. Svoronos, *Journal international d'archéologie numismatique* 3, 1900, p. 330, no. 135, pl. IZ': 20). The significance of the monogram is puzzling, but there can be no doubt about the simple alpha that appears in the now eleven other shield representations. It clearly stands for Athens.

It is well known that during the Classical period the shields of certain Peloponnesian armies were emblazoned with the state's initial, the Lakadaimonians using a lambda, the Sikyonians a sigma, and the Messinians a mu.³ This practice seems not to have taken hold at Athens. At least the literary sources and representations on vases inform that Athenian hoplites continued to bear shields with personal devices down to the end of the 5th century, after which time this evidence gives out.⁴ A few Attic

² A corslet with attached "collar" is shown in the panoply sculptured in the gable of the stele that contains the Ephebic Oath: recent photo published by G. Daux, *Χαριστήριον εἰς Ἀναστάσιον Κ. Ὀρλάνδον* I, Athens 1965, pp. 79-80, pl. I; *RevEtGr* 84, 1971, pl. II, facing p. 371.

³ References and discussion in G. H. Chase, "The Shield Devices of the Greeks," *HarvStClass Phil* 13, 1902, p. 77; L. Lacroix, "Les 'blazons' des villes grecques," *Études d'archéologie classique* 1, 1955-1956, p. 104; J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1970, pp. 18-19, 263.

⁴ Chase, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-77, 81-83; Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20, 262-263. It has been observed that after the Persian Wars there is a drastic falling off in the variety and interest of shield blazons on Attic vases. From this time onwards the devices are few and monotonous (e. g., the apotropaic eye, a chariot wheel), and shields often lack heraldry altogether. Beazley (in L. D. Caskey and J. D. Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, Part II, Boston 1954, p. 79) attributes this decline of heraldry to the change from Archaic to Classical taste in art, Shefton (in P. E. Arias, M. Hirmer, B. Shefton, *A History of 1000 Years of Greek Vase Painting*, New

vases from the end of the 6th into the second half of the 5th century depict shields that are inscribed AΘE or simply A,⁵ but such shields are conspicuous by their infrequency. The only evidence for Athenian shield devices in the Hellenistic age is that of our tokens, which might imply that the old custom of personalized blazons had finally been superseded by the more militarily sound one of using a uniform state emblem. But here another factor must be taken into consideration. As explained below, the shields represented on the tokens must have been state property and were naturally inscribed with a state emblem. It stands to reason, therefore, that the shields with A or AΘE that appear on a few 6th and 5th century Athenian vases were copied from shields that in real life were likewise provided by the state, as opposed to the

privately owned, hence privately decorated, shields that were regularly carried by Athenian hoplites during these two centuries.

9 (IL 1580) Diam. 0.020 m. Broken along left edge.

Obv. Nike standing left, holding a (?) trophy in her right hand

Rev. A

The indistinct object held by the Nike is certainly not one of her usual attributes: wreath, garland, or palm branch. Her left hand hangs empty. Because of the unusual object held, the present Nike has no exact parallels on other lead tokens, cf. Postolacca, nos. 235-239, of which no. 235 is illustrated; Crosby, no. L 93. None of these other Nike tokens has a letter on the reverse.

Although the purpose of most ancient tokens is notoriously uncertain, there is good documentary evidence that some were distributed by the state to be exchanged for public pay or for allotments of grain.⁶ The iconography of the present tokens suggests for them an analogous function, namely, that they were to be exchanged for the issue of state-owned armor. Admittedly, an iconographical difficulty is posed by the Nike token. But since our only clue to the significance of this token is given by the eight tokens found with it, the Nike, too, ought to refer to some kind of military equipment. A military standard is one possibility, though more probably the Nike stands for an item like a spear or sword that does not lend itself to depiction in the small field of a token. Surely it is not pure coincidence that tokens showing spears or swords are unknown to the catalogues of Postolacca and Crosby.

If these really are quartermaster tokens, the letters alpha, gamma, and delta on their reverses ought to designate sizes. The three items that would have to be fitted by sizes—helmet, corslet, and greaves—are the only three that are coupled with gamma or delta. Shields must have come in one size for everyone, and so it probably is significant that both shield tokens have only alphas on their reverses. The same

York 1961, p. 357) to the increasingly democratic nature of Athenian society. But the latter may go too far in suggesting that "it seems to reflect contemporary mid-5th century conditions when Athenian shield devices tended to be an *alpha* (for *Athenaioi*) and those of the Spartans a *lambda* (for *Lakedaimonioi*)."⁷ In the later 5th century shields with devices of their own choosing were still being carried by Alkibiades (Eros on thunderbolt; Plutarch, *Alkibiades* 16) and Lamachos (gorgon; Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 574).

⁵ Chase, *op. cit.* (footnote 3 above), p. 110, nos. 147, 152. Further examples of AΘE cited by J. de la Genière, *CV A*, Laon 1 [France 20], p. 25, *ad* pl. 33 [905]: 3, 8.

⁶ Crosby, pp. 76-78; M. Rostovtzeff, *Klio*, Beiheft III, *Römische Bleitesserae*, 1905, pp. 10-42.

applies to the Nike token, also with an alpha, for whatever the Nike represents, it can hardly be a piece of fitted body armor.

Hardly any of the other extant Athenian lead tokens with representations of helmets, corslets, greaves, and shields are stamped with reverse letters. Yet we may now assume that they were also employed in the distribution of government-issue equipment. This is, in fact, independently suggested by an earlier Agora find of a group of four such tokens. The find (Agora deposit A 18:8) consists primarily of a hoard of ninety-two bronze and two silver coins buried in a shallow tile-lined shaft in the floor of a house at the extreme southwest corner of the excavations. The coins date from the late 4th and early 3rd centuries B.C. and give a date of deposit in the 260's or a little later.⁷ Mixed in with the coins were the four lead tokens, one displaying a corslet (Crosby, no. L 227b), one a shield with the alpha blazon (Crosby, no. L 27b), one a strung bow (Crosby, no. L 168, pl. 25), and one that was in such an illegible condition that it was not inventoried. This last token was listed by Crosby as another shield token, no. L 27c, which, she wrote, "is badly preserved and shows only the shield" (i. e., not the blazon upon it). She apparently discovered the token among the context pottery and other uninventoried material from the deposit, but the token now seems to be lost. Even so, one may doubt the correctness of her identification. If only the edges and bulging relief of a circular object were visible, might not the object rather have been a helmet, perhaps with a low crest suggesting the border of a shield? A second shield token in the deposit would be difficult to understand. A helmet, on the other hand, would help to fill out the "panoply" of corslet, shield, and bow. For it does look as if the four tokens comprised a set that was issued to one man, who upon being called to active duty could turn them in at the arsenal for the requisite equipment. The tokens were obviously of some personal importance to have been kept with the man's sizeable accumulation of small change.

W. K. Pritchett has collected references to the public supplying of armor at Sparta, Syracuse, and Athens.⁸ The thousand shields donated to the Athenian people by Pasion (Demosthenes, XLV. 85) will have been used for this purpose, as was the great quantity of armor (ὄπλα πολλά) that Lykourgos had stored up on the Acropolis (Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators* 852C). We may assume that such equipment was kept on hand primarily for the arming of irregulars—thetes and slaves—at time of total mobilization; for Athenians of the hoplite register were legally responsible for procuring their own military equipment. In the 3rd century and later, however, military service was no longer compulsory. Apart from a volunteer citizen cavalry and select infantry, Athens had come to rely on a small standing

⁷ *Hesperia* 11, 1942, pp. 333-334, with *AthMitt* 89, 1974, p. 202.

⁸ W. K. Pritchett, *Ancient Greek Military Practices* I, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971, pp. 3-4, note 3.

force of paid mercenaries;⁹ and the number of irregulars to be armed occasionally at public expense must have grown to include much of the city's middle-class population. It seems too that the state assisted even in the arming of the mercenaries. When serving as *στρατηγὸς ἐπὶ τοὺς ξένους* early in the 3rd century, Phaidros of Sphettos furnished means to the *demos* by which the soldiers under his command could be equipped "as best as possible."¹⁰ In view of such considerations as these, we need not be surprised that all of the armor tokens from the Agora excavations that can be dated from their archaeological contexts have proven to be Hellenistic in date.

The large building of rectangular plan adjacent to the Hephaisteion on Kolonos Agoraios has been tentatively identified as the Athenian arsenal, primarily from certain similarities to the arsenal of Philon in the Peiraieus.¹¹ The building is only about seventy meters from the well in which our nine lead armor tokens were found. But apart from such moderate proximity, there is really nothing to connect the tokens with this enigmatic structure. If the context of the tokens is any indication, they are more likely to have come from the Hipparcheion, the office that housed the lead cavalry tablets and the clay *symbola* of a hipparch for Lemnos before these were discarded in the same well as the tokens.

The armor represented on the tokens is certainly suitable for mounted warfare in the Hellenistic period, when cavalrymen fought with shields and were more heavily armed in general than most soldiers on foot.¹² But would any Athenian cavalryman have used public armor? By law the *hippeis* were expected to purchase their own equipment, just as they were expected—albeit with a government loan, the *katastasis*—to purchase their own mounts.¹³ They were presumed to be well enough off to do so, and, as Xenophon points out (*Hipparch.* I. 22-23), they could also spend their "pay" (*μισθός* but apparently here a reference to the *katastasis*) on arms as well. However, in the same passage Xenophon informs us that, since the phylarchs were responsible for seeing that their men were armed properly

⁹ W. S. Ferguson, *Hellenistic Athens*, London 1911, pp. 127-128, 337-338.

¹⁰ IG II², 682, lines 24-28: καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν χειροτονηθεὶς πλεονάκις καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ξένους γενόμενος τρὶς τὴν πᾶσαν ἐποιήσατο σπουδὴν ὅπως ἂν οἱ στρατιῶται ὡς ἄριστα κατασκευασάμενοι παρέχωντο τὰς χρείας τῷ δήμῳ.

¹¹ H. A. Thompson and R. E. Wycherley, *The Athenian Agora*, XIV, *The Agora of Athens*, Princeton 1972, pp. 80-81.

¹² The two primary sources date from the 2nd century B.C.: Polybios, VI. 25. 3-11, and the cavalry relief on the Aemilius Paullus monument at Delphi (H. Kähler, *Der Fries von Reiterdenkmal des Aemilius Paullus in Delphi*, Berlin 1965). But the tradition of heavily armed cavalry probably goes back to the preceding century, so A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armor of the Greeks*, Ithaca 1967, pp. 122-123. On the lighter cavalry equipment of Xenophon's day (no shields), Xenophon, *Eq.* XIII; J. K. Anderson, *Ancient Greek Horsemanship*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1961, pp. 142-151; Snodgrass, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹³ Above, pp. 97-98.

(καλῶς), it was not unthinkable for a phylarch to contribute equipment out of his own pocket.¹⁴ Xenophon did not expect that many phylarchs would be so generous. But from an inscription we know of one later cavalry officer who was: a certain Theophrastos, hipparch in 220/19, who "took charge of the cavalry, seeing to the feeding of the horses of the cavalymen, and, so that the latter would be equipped with arms as best as possible, made a donation of ten minas to the officers."¹⁵ There is much here that one would like to know more about. Did these officers distribute Theophrastos' ten minas directly among their men, or did they themselves purchase and distribute the equipment? Did the equipment thus obtained become the private property of the individual knights,¹⁶ or did it belong to the public domain only to be used by them on loan? While these questions must necessarily remain unanswered, the fact remains that, however well off the cavalymen of 3rd century Athens may have been, they did not always furnish all of the armor and weapons that their officers thought they ought to have. On occasion, perhaps fairly regularly, such armor and weapons were provided for them. Consequently the nine tokens from the Agora well might very well have been employed for the arming of cavalymen, as one would expect from their discovery with other artifacts that were unquestionably involved in the cavalry's administration.

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¹⁴ At *Hipparch.* VIII. 4, Xenophon urges his ideal hipparch to buy a supply of extra leather straps, so that his men could repair immediately any saddle straps or bridles that should happen to break in action. But in this case, as Xenophon remarks, the cost to the hipparch would be negligible.

¹⁵ *IG II²*, 1303, lines 13-17, with the fundamental supplements of W. S. Ferguson and S. Dow (*Hesperia* 2, 1933, pp. 447-449) and A. Wilhelm (*Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien* 83, 1946, pp. 115-123: [χειρ]οτονηθεὶς δὲ καὶ ἵππαρχ[ος εἰς τὸν ἐν[α]υτὸν τ[ὸν] ἐ[πὶ Μ]ενε[κ]ρ[ά]του ἄρχοντος ἐπ[ε]με[λήθη] το[ῦ] ἵπ[π]ικο[ῦ] ἔ[κ]ει, ἵπ[π] π[έ]ας π[ά]ντας ἵπποτρόφων ἐν[δ] δέ[ξ] τοῖ[ς] ὀπ[λοῖς] ὥ[ς] ἄρι[στα κ]α[τέσκει]νασμένο[ι] ὁ[σ]ιν, [ἐ]π[έ]δωκεν δέκα [μνῶ]ν ἐπὶ δ[ο]σιν τ[οῖς] λ[οχ]α[γ]οῖς. Ferguson and Dow remark, "It is difficult to see what the Hipparch had to do with *Lochagoi*, who are known in Athens only as subordinate infantry officers, though the use of the word for cavalry officers is attested." I suspect that *lochagi* is a slip for *phylarchoi*.

¹⁶ Cf. the gift of eight hundred shields made by Charidemus and Diotimos to the young Athenians who had been disarmed after Chaironea (Demosthenes, XVIII. 114, 116), although even here it remains uncertain whether the shields were given outright to the men on a permanent basis or were distributed only for their temporary use. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that the shield, spear, and cloak presented by the *demos* to each Athenian ephebe (*Ath. Pol.* 42. 4) were to remain the permanent property of the recipients.

