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THE ANCIENT OLYMPIC GAMES COMMEMORATIVE COINS

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the study of the ancient Olympic Games based on the analysis of numismatic materials. It presents the history of the Olympic Games held in Elis from 776 BC to 394 AD and highlights their significance in the socio-political life of the ancient world. Attention is focused on the ancient tradition of minting Olympic coins, which was established in 471 BC.

The study provides a detailed description of Olympic coins of various denominations – staters, hemidrachms, tetradrachms, and hemiobols – minted in Elis from the 78th to the 143rd Olympiad (468-208 BC). Special emphasis is placed on the iconographic features of these coins, including the depictions and symbols represented on obverse and reverse, such as the eagle, Zeus, Hera, Nike, and the olive wreath, among others.

In parallel, the research discusses the history of the revival of the modern Olympic Games, which is connected with the name of the French educator, historian and public figure Pierre de Fredi, Baron de Coubertin. It was precisely through his efforts that in 1894, at the Sorbonne Congress, the historic decision was made to revive the Olympic Games. The Olympic Charter was also developed. Since 1952, the foundation was laid for the issuance of commemorative coins of various themes related to the Olympics by the host countries.

The conducted research once again emphasizes the fact that the history of issuing commemorative coins is an extremely vast topic and represents an important part of cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS: OLYMPIC GAMES, ELIS, OLYMPIC COINS, NUMISMATICS, STATER.

The name of the Olympics is derived from the location where the games were held. It was a city of Olympia, located in the west of ancient Greece, in the Elis region. This area was distinguished for the rich and fertile land. There were temples, stadiums, and buildings for athletes. Every four years, in Olympia, there were held athletic games, and the inhabitants of Elis were responsible for organizing these games. About 45,000 spectators were gathered at the Olympic Stadium, indicating the widespread interest of the population in these games.

The Olympic Games represented the oldest and most popular holiday and competition in ancient Greece. They were held in honor of Zeus. As we know, the first Olympic Games in the ancient world were staged in the city of Olympia, in 776 BC. The interval between each of the subsequent Olympic Games was 1417 days (about 4 years). The Olympic Games played a significant role in the public and political life of the ancient world. The Olympic Games in Elis were held regularly for 1170 years, and a total of 293 Olympic games are known today, which were held until the year 394 BC, when the Roman Emperor Theodosius I abolished these games, because he believed that the Olympic Games were associated with excessive idolatry. Athletes from the Elis region were gathered to take part in the Olympics. During the Games, all wars were stopped, since the competition was considered to be a grandiose and glorious event.

The ancient Olympic Games represented a more important event than simple sports competitions. It was a profitable business and provided a political and cultural forum, as there were held many events during the Games. It was necessary to accommodate athletes, their trainer, and spectators and provide them with food and souvenirs. The Games have united thousands of citizens from every region of Greece, bringing them together at fairs, shows, and concerts.

The core constituent elements of the Olympics were sports competitions and religious rituals. On the first day of the Olympics, athletes took an oath and brought donations to God. The referees were also taking an oath to umpire fairly justified, and then, the competitions were held during the next three days.

The ancient tradition of the Olympic Games also implies the oldest experience of the minting of Olympic coins. Ancient Greeks believed that the creation of Olympic money brought society closer to the Olympic Games. Those, who could not attend the Games, could have memorable souvenirs and Olympic coins. Olympic coin practically was not being used as ordinary money, but there was still an exception, already at the time of the modern Olympic Games.

According to various versions, the first Olympic money had been appeared since the year 471 BC. The Olympic coins were either silver or golden staters (the unit of currency), on the one side of which, there was initially an image of Zeus, a heavenly creature headed the heaven and mountains, or his wife Hera, and later. They began depicting images of athletes on coins, competing in particular competitions, and also, various sports and theatrical scenes were portrayed. On the other side of the special Olympic money, as a rule, there was an image of Nike, the goddess of victory in ancient Greek mythology, or the eagle as a symbol of strength, since its size, strong claws, and sharp eyes were considered to be the king of the air, and of course, a crown of olive leaves, which was traditionally placed on the winner's head.

The most popular rider in the Olympic Games was a racer on a horse and with horse-drawn carts (quadriga). Only rich people could take part in the competition because they were able to keep and ride horses.

The exact date of the Olympic Games is unknown, but the written records begin from the year 776 BC.

Some of Olympic coins issued during the antique Elis Olympic Games have survived until the present time:



Elis, 78th – 80th Olympiad. The years 468 – 460 BC, statera, weight – 11.800 grams. Obverse: the image of eagle flying left, whose wings spread above and below, grasping serpent in its beak. Reverse: an image of the bird's bottom part in the darkness above and wings below. On the right side, vertically from top to bottom, there is marked caption "F-A".



Elis, 78th – 82th Olympiad. The years 468 – 452 BC, statera, weight – 11.750 grams. Obverse: an image of eagle flying left, rending hare in talons. Reverse: the bird's wings are spread above and the bottom part – below, on the right and left sides, in parallel, there is marked caption "F-A".



Elis, 87th – 90th Olympiad. The years 432 – 420 BC, hemidrachm, silver, weight – 2.650 grams. Obverse: eagle standing right on Ionic main column with spread wings, the head is turned left and talons are raised above. Reverse: the bird's spread wings are turned above and the bottom part – below, on the right and left sides, in parallel, there is marked caption F – A. This coin is very rare.



Elis, 87th – 90th Olympiad. The years 432 – 420 BC, stater, silver, weight – 11,51 grams, diameter – 23 mm. Obverse: an image of eagle flying right grasping serpent in its beak and talons. Reverse: the bird's bottom part is spread in the darkness above and wings – below, on the right and left sides, in parallel, there is marked caption “F-A”.



Elis, 93rd Olympiad. The year 408 BC, stater, silver, weight – 11,51 grams, diameter – 23 mm. Obverse: an image of eagle with piercing eye left, and under the eagle, there is poplar or ivy leaf. Reverse: on the above, there is an image of the bird's bottom part, with wings spread below, on the right and left sides, in parallel, there is marked caption “F-A”, all within olive-leaf crown.



Elis, 98th – 100th Olympiad. The years 388-380 BC, hemiobol, silver, weight – 0.460 grams. Obverse: eagle head right, underneath – indistinct details. Reverse: on the above, there is an image of the bird's bottom part, and wings spread below, on the right and left sides, in parallel, there is marked caption “F-A”.



Elis, 101st – 102nd Olympiad. The years 376-372 BC, hemidrachm, silver, weight – 2.610 grams. Obverse: an image of Hera wearing a crown. Reverse: eagle standing and head is turned left, on the right and left sides, there is marked caption “F – A”.



Elis 103rd Olympics. 368 BC, Hamidrah. Silver, 2,770 grams. Obverse: depicts Hera's head, face to right. Reverse: An eagle stands with its wings turned to the left.



Elis, 105th-107th Olympiad. The years 360-352 BC, hemidrachm, silver, weight – 2.560 grams. Obverse: an image of Hera's head, the face is turned to the right. Reverse: eagle standing, and head is turned left.



Elis, 108th Olympiad. The year 356 BC, tetradrachm, weight – 14.500 grams. Obverse: an image of Zeus's head, face is turned to the right. Reverse: an image of a rider on the horse, who is rushing about, rearing up horse, headed to the left, holding a long palm-branch in his right hand. Under the horse, there is the Olympic Cup.



Elis, 109th – 110th Olympiad. The years 344-340 BC, hemidrachm, silver, weight – 2.980 grams. Obverse: an image of Hera's head, the face is turned to the right. Reverse: eagle standing, whose head is turned to the right, on the left side, there is marked caption "F – A"γ. Very rare coin.



Elis, 111th Olympiad. The year 336 BC, stater, silver, weight – 11.580 grams. Obverse: an image of Hera's head, face is turned to the right, with a wreath on the head having caption "FAΛEIQN", and wearing earrings. Reverse: an image of eagle with open wings, standing on rock, looking to right, all within olive wreath.



Elis, 112th Olympiad. The year 332 BC, stater, silver, weight – 11.710 grams. Obverse: an image of head of Zeus turned to the right. Reverse: eagle standing right and wings are closed, thunderbolt behind, and in the front – "H" and coiled serpent, on the left side, there is marked caption "F-A". Very rare coin.



Elis, 113th – 115th Olympiad. The years 328-320 BC, hemidrachm, silver, weight – 2.770 grams. Obverse: an image of Hera's head with hair in a roll and face turned to the right. Reverse: an image of eagle with open wings looking backwards. Extremely rare coin.



Elis, 114th Olympiad. The year 324 BC, silver, weight – 11.750 grams. Obverse: an image of Hera's head turned to the right, below, on the right and left sides, there is marked caption "F-A". Reverse: eagle standing right, with open wings and head turned back to the left, all within olive wreath.



Elis, 112th – 142nd Olympiad. The years 330 – 250 BC, Pamphylian drachm. Aspendos (Greek city, on the territory of Contemporary Turkey), silver, weight – 10.160 grams. Obverse: in the center of coin, there are minted the images of the wrestlers participating in the competition at the start of the wrestle. Between them, in the lower part of coin, there is marked a Greek letter "E", which is the first letter of the word "Elis". Reverse: in the center, there is an image of a participant of competition, who raises his hands above head and expresses the moment of flinging an item, and in its background, two parallel lines are marked horizontally. In the front of athlete, near the hand, there are the images of three fragments of the leg, in a bent position from the upper joint of the leg, including the foot, the lower part of the right leg knee, jointed to each other at the place of the femur, is bent. Under this fragment, there is an image of a wooden, circular baseball-like bat, near the thick part of which, on both sides of the bat, there the images of four balls on each side. Presumably, it was a flinging item of athlete participating in the competition. Behind athlete, there is marked, vertically, from bottom to top, caption: "E TFEDIY". The coin is circular in shape, on both sides of which, there are the balls creating a relief shape. This coin has been minted in quantities large enough. Presumably, it performed the function of money as well.



Elis, 134th/135th – 143rd Olympiad. The years 244/240 – 250 BC, stater, silver, weight – 4.620 grams. Obverse: eagle flying with hare in the catches. Reverse: below, there is an image of the bird's bottom part with wings spread above, on the right and left sides, there is marked caption "F – A".

The convening of the modern Olympic Games is primarily associated with Pierre de Fredy, Baron de Coubertin (01.01.1863 – 02.09.1937), French sports and public figure, historian, educa-

tor and writer. He has been giving lots of thought to organizing the international games aiming at the advancement of sport, because he had seen the public interest in the ancient Olympic Games, and he had drafted the revival of the Olympic Games. On November 25, 1892, at the famous Sorbonne University in Paris, he gave a speech "Reviving the Olympics". His attempt has not been lost and has been a success. On June 23, 1894, a historic decision was made at the Sorbonne Congress – to revive the Olympic Games, since it was demanded by contemporary life. The basic rules and provisions (the Olympic Charter) have been developed and approved at the Congress. The decision was made on the establishment of a single authority, which was designated the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Coubertin assumed the position of a Secretary General, and his friend Demetrius Vikelas was appointed President of this Committee. It was also decided to hold the symbolically first modern Olympic Games in Athens in the summer of 1896 (6-15 April, 1896). Baron de Coubertin was the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1896-1916 and in 1919-1925.

During the period from the I Olympics to the XV Olympics, there was no attempt on the part of the host and organizing country of the Olympic Games to issue commemorative coins. For the first time, such Olympic coins were minted in 1952, at the Games of the XV Olympiad in Helsinki, Finland, and then, at the Olympic Games in 1956 and 1960, commemorative Olympic coins were not issued. Starting with the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, commemorative coins were issued during every Olympiad by the host country of the Olympics.

The Olympic games are being held in both summer and winter sports and are called the Summer and Winter Olympics. They were also supplemented by the Paralympic Games, the World and European Youth Olympic Games. The Olympic commemorative coins have been issued not only by the countries that host and organize the Olympic Games, but also by almost every country in the world, including even small states.

Thus, the history of commemorative coins is too large an issue, and we have tried to describe all the Olympic coins that the host country of the Olympics issued in Antiquity.