

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft
Band: 57 (1978)

Artikel: Coins of punic Sicily. Part 4
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Kapitel: Introduction
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-174368>

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COINS OF PUNIC SICILY *

Part 4 **

CARTHAGE SERIES 5-6

Introduction

As already stated in part 3 it seems clear from the evidence of hoards that Carthage series 5, Melqart head/horse head, should be roughly of the same phase as the Syracusan coins of Agathokles with Kore head/Nike and trophy, minted most probably after Agathokles' return from Africa and in fact between the years 305 and 295 B.C. For a summary of early third century hoards containing Carthage series 5 coins, see the table of hoards at the end of this instalment. It is evident enough that Carthage series 5 and the Agathokles «Nike» type tend to coincide. This conclusion is set off by a very slightly earlier hoard, Pachino 1957 (IGCH 2151), of the late fourth century, which contains neither the Agathokles Kore/Nike type nor the Melqart head/Horse head, but only the preceding phase of each mint – from Syracuse the quadriga tetradrachms of Agathokles and from Carthage series 3 Kore head/Horse head. On these general reckonings we may assume that Carthage series 5 should start about 300 B.C.

There is no easy way of deciding how long a series is involved; if it is accepted – as will presently be argued – that Carthage series 5 is to be envisaged as a parallel production by two separate mints, this will in any case tend to telescope the possible duration of the series. Provisionally we may think of a period of about a decade for the whole series, in which case it would come to an end by about the time of Agathokles' death (289 B.C.). Third century hoards containing series 5 do not, apparently, include any Sicilian coins later than Agathokles.

That in broad terms series 5 must be defined as two parallel series seems virtually inevitable. In the first place we have a definition by legends. Series 5 a is the mint of the army signed 'MMHNT' or 'MHMHNT' (People of the Camp). Series 5 b is the mint of the «quaestors» signed MHSBM. The only complication is that a few issues from the mhsbm mint are signed 'mmhnt' instead but these as we shall see are clearly exceptional and in fact form an integral part of the mhsbm mint series.

The relative representation of the two series in hoards gives little indication as to the relation between the two series. In the Cefalù hoard there are five specimens of each; in the Megara Hyblaia 1967 hoard there are eight 'mmhnt' and 14 mhsbm speci-

* Final instalment of the publication stated in SNR 50, 1971, 25 ff. (part 1) and continued in SNR 53, 1974, 23 ff. (part 2) and SNR 56 (1977), 5 ff. (part 3).

** Veröffentlicht mit Unterstützung des Schweizerischen Nationalfonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung. – Publié avec l'aide du Fonds National Suisse de la Recherche scientifique.

mens; in the 1971 hoard there are four 'mmhnt and 12 mhsbm. From these samples there is no significant difference of wear between one series and the other, and so far as quantities go the presence of more mhsbm pieces in two of the hoards may simply reflect the fact that the latter was probably minted in greater quantity. While the figures for obverse dies are about equal, the reverse dies are twice as numerous for the mhsbm mint. Series 5 a – Obv. 20 Rev. 39. Series 5 b – Obv. 21 Rev. 81.

The division into two series seems further emphasized by a sharp distinction of both style and fabric. The flans of series 5 b are noticeably more compact than those of 5 a. The stylistic difference is most obvious from the reverse type. In series 5 a some horse heads here placed at the beginning as untypical have some connexion with a type which occurs briefly in series 3 a nos. 176 etc. where similarly the horse's shaggy mane is parted into two lines. But the dominant style of 5 a is a horse head set on a rather long neck with curving outlines, the throat bulging out and the truncation usually deeply curved in to balance. The forceful and swaggering character of this horse head bears a relation to a type of head which had already appeared sporadically in some issues of series 3 (nos. 215–216) as there remarked. This style becomes the normal one of series 5 a, with many interesting variants. The contrast with series 5 b could not be more extreme. In 5 b the horse head has a much simpler and more austere aspect, the neck is short and has none of the curvaceous character of 5 a, the throat does not bulge out and the truncation though varying in shape from die to die is often a quite shallow curve. Moreover the head typical of 5 b has no resemblance whatever to any style known in the previous series 3.

The distinction between series 5 a and 5 b is finally completely confirmed by the different styles of the Melqart-Herakles heads. In neither series is the head of so entirely homogeneous a style as the reverse, but on the whole it is clear that series 5 a has all of the more exuberant and lively examples, matching the style of the horses, while the heads of series 5 b are quieter and more restrained. All this goes to show that we have the work of two quite separate groups of engravers. Obviously enough, for the Melqart-Herakles heads they were drawing largely on prototypes from the coinage of Alexander the Great though without slavish imitation. The difference in the taste of the two groups of engravers may of course simply reflect the chance of which types of Alexander coins happened to come into their hands. In series 5 a the models tend to be those of eastern Alexander mints – Tarsus, Alexandria, Sidon, at all of which before Alexander's death a rather rich style developed; there is also some influence from Babylon. This contrasts strongly with the rather plainer style of Alexander's early Macedonian issues (also at first widely copied in the near east); Carthage series 5 b however shows more traces of these Macedonian styles, also with the addition of some elements from Babylon.

The clear differences between series 5 a and 5 b seem to speak for themselves. While there exists the bare possibility that the two series might be successive rather than parallel there is no indication as to how a transition could be made from one to the other. On the whole it seems much better to think of a parallel issue and of a

mint for the army and another for the quaestors (even allowing for the few exceptions mentioned).

As regards the legends, series 5 a has exclusively 'MMHNT/MHMHNT. This legend first appeared in series 3 and thus, as was shown in part 3 of this publication, at c. 320 B.C. Series 1 during the late fifth to early fourth century had by contrast only the simple MHNT. 'MMHNT «people of the army» is an expression involving the term M (people) used in the same way as it is in Phoenician inscriptions to denote the population of a named city; examples can be cited for Tyre, Sidon, Carthage, Gaulos, Ebusus, Lepcis, Caralis, Sulcis, Bithia, Lixus¹. In one inscription it is a term used not for a city but for a temple, the people of the temple of Melqart at Carthage². Acquaro³ has lucidly distinguished between the significance of the term 'M as in 'M QRTHDST, and the term B'L as in the legend B'L ŞYŞ (and perhaps B'L 'GDR etc.)⁴. 'M conveys the sense of the people in its capacity as a popular assembly; B'L on the other hand should signify the individual citizen with full rights. Thus in the case of 'MMHNT we gain the impression that the army in Sicily appears to have been constituted at this period somewhat on the lines of a city or republic with a popular assembly, almost a separate entity within the Carthaginian territory⁵.

In series 5 b by contrast we have the first and indeed the only use on coins of the term MHSBM. How is it to be interpreted? That it means basically «financial controllers» is not now in doubt⁶. But are these officials purely and simply the «paymasters of the army»⁷? – if so it seems strange that the army is not mentioned; and although there is the brief interpolation of a few 'MMHNT issues in the series (nos. 360, 370–374) otherwise exclusively signed MHSBM, this hardly seems a conclusive reason to determine our reading of the legend MHSBM as such. The word MHSBM was not attested otherwise than on the coins until the discovery in 1966 of

¹ Cooke, Textbook of North-Semitic Inscriptions no. 9, 10; Moscati, Riv. Studi Orientali 43, 1968, 1–4; Fantar, Antas, Les inscriptions p. 58 ff.; Acquaro RIN 1974, 77–81.

² CIS 264. 'M is also used more generally for «people of the land» ('M 'RŞ) in the rather older Yehawmilk inscription from Byblus, Cooke Textbook no. 3 (V–IV century B.C.).

³ Acquaro RIN 76, 1974, Note di epigrafia punica I pp. 77–82. For B'L = citizen(s) cf. CIS 120 (a citizeness of Byzantium); Cooke Textbook no. 10 (citizens of Hammon), no. 54 (a citizen of Maktar); also RES 163–164, 505, 679, 942. – Moscati, Riv. Studi Orientali 43, 1968, p. 2, points out the distinction between an élite (viz. a senate) and people clearly shown in inscriptions from Lepcis (Levi della Vida, Rend. Lincei 1955, 550–561).

⁴ However the term often read as B'L on coins of Gades, Sexsi, Lixus, Tingis, is interpreted by Solá Solé as P'L («obra, obra acunada» thus = mint or coinage), cf. Sefarad XXVII 1967, 16 ff. and Numisma VIII 35, 1958, 17.

⁵ Acquaro RIN 1974 p. 80 note 20 notes as a parallel a resolution by the army in an African inscription (Fevrier, Cahiers de Byrsa 6, 1956, 22. 25).

⁶ Bisi, Annali 16–17, 1969–1970, 95 note 96, citing the derivation of the word, which incidentally was not given by Müller.

⁷ Bisi op. cit. 93 says «mhsbm – magistrati incaricati della paga alle truppe simili ai quaestores romani»; but it is difficult to see why they have to be military.

a new inscription at Carthage, dating probably to the early second century B.C.⁸; this inscription records the opening of a new street in the city, mentions the collaboration of diverse classes of the people, and imposes fines for damage to the inscription which would be payable to «our MHSBM». The latter are clearly officials charged with the public finances, on the general analogy of Roman quaestors, as Dupont-Sommer remarks. It is known from Livy that there were at Carthage magistrates to whom he refers precisely as «quaestors» and whose importance in the state was such that they had the right of automatic entry on expiry of office to the all-powerful *ordo iudicum*⁹. Were the MHSBM of our coins these same «quaestors» or were they some purely local officials?

It is of course known that most of the Phoenician cities in the west had similar constitutional features and that for instance there were suffetes (shofetim) not only at Carthage but at Gades and elsewhere, including many smaller towns in Africa; there is also mention of a «quaestor» at Gades¹⁰. Likely enough the Punic cities in Sicily had similar institutions. However there is no indication from the coins that the MHSBM we are concerned with were any kind of local magistrates, and it seems unavoidable to reflect that the coins are those of the Carthaginian state and not of any local city. Should it not therefore follow that the MHSBM on the coins are indeed the «quaestors» of the Carthaginian state? No doubt it fell within their scope to provide pay for the army, *inter alia*, but there seems little indication that they were merely «army paymasters» and they must surely have had wider responsibilities as civil magistrates also. If it were otherwise, there seems little point in the distinction of the two kinds of legend on the coins.

While a coinage in the name of the «people of the army» still went on (series 5 a), it is perhaps relevant to observe that it was at precisely this time, c. 300 B.C., that the civic coinages of ŞYŞ and RSMLQRT had apparently come to an end. At the same date we have the appearance of the Carthaginian coins signed MHSBM. We can only speculate whether these events were at all connected – as if the «quaestors» of the Carthaginian state were in a general financial sense somehow filling the place left by civic authorities which had ceased to emit coins? If so, it may be a sign of some closer and more direct control of the Sicilian territory by the Carthaginian state.

Types

There is little need to discuss again here the type of the horse's head the main and most consistent type of the present and preceding series (ser. 3). In part 2 it was mentioned that, following Ferron and others, the horse's head is to be regarded as an

⁸ Dupont-Sommer, CRAI 1968, 116–132; the date of the inscription is suggested in a final note by Carcopino.

⁹ Gsell II, 201, 275.

¹⁰ Gsell II, 193 ff.