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Sicilian accessions for ACANS: Akragas, Messana, Syracuse and Katane

Kenneth Sheedy

Abstract:

This article introduces four Sicilian coins recently purchased for the collection of the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies, Macquarie University. The coins are from the mints of Akragas, Messana, Syracuse, and Katane.

While the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS) has an important and very extensive collection of coins from the Greek cities of South Italy, thanks to the collecting activities of Dr W. L. Gale (now published as *SNG Australia*, vol. 1), its holdings of coins from neighbouring Sicily are modest. In this short article I publish four Sicilian coins acquired by ACANS over the last decade as part of a program to build up its representation of this key region in the history of ancient numismatics.¹

1. Akragas, c.520-510 B.C.

Obv. Eagle with closed wings standing to right; [AKPAC/ANTOΣ] in reverse direction. *Rev.* Crab on plain broad flan.



Figure 1 a/b. Akragas, c.520-510 B.C.

Didrachm. AR 8.54g. Noble Numismatics 85 (2007) 3063. ACANS inv. 07A33. (Fig. 1 a/b).

Akragas, modern Agrigento, lies on the southern coast of Sicily (the settlement is on a low hill some four kilometres inland), commanding a fertile plain and access to the rivers Hypsas and Akragas.² Founded c.580 B.C. by colonists from nearby Gela with participation by Rhodes, it was a powerful and prosperous Dorian city during the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.³ The city's acropolis, the Hill of Athena, still exhibits archaic and

1 I thank Mr Colin Pitchfork for information concerning the coins purchased from Noble Numismatics (Sydney). I also thank the journal's anonymous reviewers for corrections and suggestions.

2 See Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 186-7 with bibliography.

3 Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 186.

classical temples of impressive size.⁴ For most of its early history Akragas was ruled by tyrants, notably Phalaris (c.570-554 B.C.) who expanded the territory of the city at the expense of the local tribes.⁵ We know little about his successors (Alkamenes and Alkandros), who began the minting of coinage.⁶ Theron (489/8-473/2 B.C.) joined with the Syracusan tyrant Gelon I to defeat the Carthaginians at the Battle of Himera in 480 B.C.⁷

The silver coinage of Akragas began c.520/510 B.C. with an extensive issue of didrachms struck on the Attic standard.⁸ On these archaic issues the city ethnic is usually written in full: Ἀκράγαντινος. The obverse depicted a standing eagle, a reference to Zeus Olympios who was to be worshipped in the city with the largest known Doric temple ever undertaken (work began after 480 B.C. but it was never completed). The reverse type was the crab, perhaps a fresh-water variety (?) and thus a reference to the river Akragas rather than the coastal location of the city.⁹ The crab remained the city's defining coin type for a century. The didrachms continued to be struck until c.470 B.C. as the sole denomination of the mint; they were then replaced by tetradrachms (with one brief didrachm issue appearing c.420-410 B.C.).¹⁰

A brief typology of the archaic didrachm coinage of Akragas was presented by Kenneth Jenkins as part of his work on the coinage of Gela.¹¹ His division of the material into four groups drew on unpublished research from the late K. L. Grabow. The ACANS coin belongs to Jenkins Group I, a large group for which Grabow and Jenkins identified some 28 obverse and 29 reverse dies. It can be assigned however, to Group 1c where the eagle faces r.; a very small group for which Grabow and Jenkins knew of only 2 obverse and 2 reverse dies.¹² It shares the same dies with SNG ANS Acragas 916 (so that it would appear Jenkins knew of these dies).

The ACANS didrachm reputedly belonged to an unrecorded hoard found sometime prior to 2000.¹³ It seems not to be from the Comiso hoard of 1970 which has been studied by Christof Boehringer.¹⁴ This find, probably buried c.470 B.C., contained at

4 Longo (2002): 240-255 (with bibliography on the site); Stefani (2014): 148-149.

5 Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 187.

6 On the coinage of Acragas see Rutter (1997) and Hoover (2012): 24-48.

7 Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 187.

8 Jenkins (1970): 162-164; Rutter (1997): 113-4.

9 Rutter (1997): 113.

10 Rutter (1997): 132-133, 149-150; Hoover (2012): 29-37.

11 Jenkins (1970): 162-164.

12 Jenkins (1970): 163.

13 Noble Numismatics 85A (2007) lot 3063.

14 Boehringer (2010).

least 375 coins of which 93 were didrachms of Acragas.¹⁵ The ACANS didrachm appears to share dies with a worn coin in this find, Comiso cat. No. 11 (Boehringer Group 1). Boehringer noted that the dies for cat. 11 are 025/R26 in the still unpublished study of U. Westermark, *The Coinage of Akragas c.510-c.406 B.C.*¹⁶

The ACANS coin is an interesting relic from the earliest period of Greek coinage in Sicily. As a result of the general down-dating of all Greek (and Lydian) coinages it now seems that no coins were struck in Sicily before 530 B.C.; the earliest issues may have come from Naxos and Himera.¹⁷ Syracuse may not have opened its mint until c.510 B.C. Akragas seems to have commenced minting at the same time, but unlike Syracuse issued only didrachms throughout the archaic period with very little change to the design of its types.

2. Messana, c.420-413 B.C.

Obv. Biga of mules driven to left by female charioteer wearing long chiton and *epiblema* and holding reins and *kentron*; two dolphins in exergue; above, ΜΕΣΣΑΝΑ



Figure 2 a/b. Messana, c.420-413 B.C.

Rev. Hare running to right; below, dolphin to right; around, ΜΕΣ/Σ/ΑΝ/ΙΟ/Ν

Tetradrachm. AR 15.81 g. Noble Numismatics 78A (2005) 4934. ACANS inv. 05A04. (Fig. 2 a/b).

The modern Sicilian town of Messina lies near the narrowest point on the Straits of Messina, facing Reggio Calabria on the shores of Southern Italy. Although initially a base for pirates from Cyme in Asia Minor, it was later settled by colonists from Euboea during the middle of the 8th century B.C.; they named their new home Zancle (meaning 'scythe', a reference to the shape of the harbour according to Thucydides (6.4-5)).¹⁸ The *polis* struck small issues, initially on the Euboean standard, prior to 493 B.C.¹⁹ The city fell into the hands of Samian exiles in 493 B.C. but then was taken by Anaxilas, the tyrant of Rhegium, in 488 B.C. The city was renamed Messene (after the city in the

¹⁵ Boehringer (2010): 6.

¹⁶ H. A. Troxell in the entry for *SNG ANS* Acragas 914 notes that 'Jenkin's groups 1a and 1b must have overlapped somewhat'.

¹⁷ Rutter (1997): 101-116.

¹⁸ Caccamo Caltabiano (1993) esp. 1-11 for an introduction to the history of Messina. Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 233-234.

¹⁹ Rutter (1997): 108- 110. Hoover (2012): 220.

Peloponnese); the later arrival of mercenaries with Dorian origins led to the Dorian spelling of the city's name, Messana c.450 B.C.²⁰ In 480 B.C. Anaxilas began a new coinage that would be struck at both Rhegium and Messana.²¹ These coins were tetradrachms struck on the Attic standard and with the same types: on the obverse, a mule-biga, and on the reverse, a hare. Anaxilas had won the mule-biga race (the apêne) at Olympia in 484 or 480 B.C.²² This race was dominated throughout its history at Olympia (c.500-444 B.C.) by aristocratic entrants from Magna Graecia; several were commemorated by Pindar with epinician odes (Olympian 4 for Psaumis of Kamarina and Olympian 5 and 6 for Hagesias of Syracuse).²³ The hare was a reference to Pan, a deity worshipped at both Rhegium and Messana (and thus appropriate for this 'shared' coinage).²⁴ The city ethnic allowed the coins of Messana to be identified. Although the iconography of this coinage was devised by the tyrant Anaxilas, and celebrated his personal achievements as well as the control of Rhegium's leaders over Messene, it was continued after the violent rise to power of an oligarchy in 461 B.C. As the apêne was deleted from the events of the Olympic Games in 444 B.C., the type arguably became an anachronism. The driver of the mule-biga was initially depicted as a bearded male who sat in the biga.²⁵ In c.425 B.C. the shape of the chariot changed – (the seat was removed) and the bearded driver was made to stand – perhaps echoing the charioteer of the horse-drawn quadriga on Syracusan coins.²⁶ In c.420 B.C. the driver became a female figure wearing a long flowing chiton and epiblema or shawl (and is perhaps to be recognized as the nymph Messana, the personification of the city).²⁷

The coin is an important addition to the ACANS collection because it can be dated to the era of Athenian attempts to exert influence in Sicily. According to Thucydides (3.90.4) Messana entered into a *symmachia* (military alliance) with Athens in 426 B.C. and an Athenian fleet was then based at its harbour.²⁸ The Messanians later became allies of Syracuse. During the years of the Athenian expedition to Sicily (415-413 B.C.) they remained neutral.²⁹

The coinage of Messana was the subject of an important study by Maria Caccamo Caltabiano published in 1993. Although our coin was not included in her work it can be

20 Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 234.

21 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 33-38ff.

22 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 12ff.

23 <http://hippologia.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/chapter131.pdf>

24 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 103-106.

25 See Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): pl. 72-75

26 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 96.

27 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 101-103.

28 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 6.

29 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 6-7.

assigned to catalogue no. 514, Series XIV in Period III.³⁰ This series sees the introduction of the female charioteer. These coins were struck on the Attic standard and our example, the ninth known, is the lightest specimen recorded (15.81 g).³¹ Period III covers the era of the Peloponnesian war and the Athenian invasion of Sicily. Series XIV is dated 420-413 B.C. and thus covers the Sicilian campaign (415-413 B.C). The dies may be identified as O.205' and R. 213.³² The die pattern is complex. O. 205' is linked to six reverse dies – including two from the previous period. R 213 is linked to three obverse dies.³³ This series was evidently the result of intense minting activity perhaps associated with the arrival of the Athenians (?). It is interesting that O.205 is known from 32 coins (in combination with R.211). It was later recut, and as O.205' it was used to strike no less than 66 surviving coins.

3. Syracuse, c.415-405 B.C.

Obv. Charioteer driving *quadriga* to left; above, Nike flying right, crowning the charioteer; crane standing left below horses; in exergue, two dolphins to left.

Rev. Diademed head of Arethusa left, surrounded by four dolphins; below truncation of neck, EVMHNOV; above, ΣΥΡΑΚΟΣΙΟΝ.



Figure 3 a/b. Syracuse, c.415-405 B.C.

Tetradrachm. AR 17.20 g. CNG 245 (2010) 42; Noble Numismatics 98 (2012) 5025. ACANS inv. 12A02. (Fig. 3 a/b).

The most important Sicilian mint was Syracuse.³⁴ Founded in the 8th century by colonists from Corinth and Megara led by Archias, it quickly became a regional power.³⁵ Coinage began in the last decade of the 6th century B.C. under the local aristocratic rulers, the *Gamoroi*.³⁶ Their coins depicted a *quadriga* on the obverse, and a personification of the local spring nymph Arethusa on the reverse. These types were continued and developed by Gelon I, tyrant of Gela who took control of Syracuse in 485 B.C. and established the Deinomenid dynasty.³⁷ The tyrants were overthrown in 465 B.C. and the 'Second

30 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 101-115, 281.

31 Caccamo Caltabiano (1993): 281.

32 O.205' indicates the recut die of O.205.

33 Caccamo Caltabiano 1993: 279-282.

34 See Rutter (1997) and Hoover (2012): 334-393.

35 Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 225-231.

36 Rutter (1997): 114-5.

37 Rutter (1997): 121-124.

Democracy' (465-405 B.C.) installed; a huge statue of Zeus Eleutherios was erected to mark the new rule, but the traditional coin types continued.³⁸ Faced with the threat of Carthage, Syracuse reverted to a tyranny in 406 B.C. when the *strategos* Dionysos came to power (406-367 B.C.).

The ACANS tetradrachm, carrying the signature of Eumenes, is the first 'signed' coin in the collection. The letters can be clearly seen beneath the neck of Arethusa. The practice of signing dies was rare – and largely confined to Sicily. Only about twenty names are known.³⁹ Most of these engravers worked at Syracuse. One of the most famous coins in antiquity (and today) was an issue of Syracusan tetradrachms from c.405-400 B.C. engraved by Kimon depicting a three-quarters head of Arethusa encircled by dolphins.⁴⁰ The ACANS coin shows the more traditional profile head of the water nymph, but again her nature is proclaimed by four encircling dolphins.

The nature and role of these Sicilian signed dies have recently been explored by Keith Rutter (who delivered the Gale Lecture at ACANS in 2012).⁴¹ He argued that almost all were created during the years immediately following the defeat of the Athenians at Syracuse in 413 B.C. and the advent of the Carthaginian invasions of Sicily, perhaps down to 400 B.C.⁴² The ACANS coin can then be dated immediately after the tetradrachm of Messana (inv. 05A04) discussed above, but is yet another example to be discussed in relation to the Athenian Expedition against Syracuse and its aftermath.

The work of the 'signing artists' is associated with innovation in design and more accomplished and even flamboyant styles of engraving. Some commentators have attempted to link these issues with the commemoration of victory.⁴³ The source of the silver for these coinages is said to be war booty or ransom. The meaning of the iconography on two series of Syracusan decadrachms engraved by Kimon and by Euainetos has been debated.⁴⁴ In the exergue of these large coins we see armour and the inscription ΑΘΛΑ; in 1891 Arthur Evans proposed that these 'medals' were prizes in games (the *Asinaria*) and that the armour could be identified as spoils from the victory over the Athenians

38 Rutter (1997): 124-126.

39 Rutter (2012): 74-75.

40 Tudeer 1913: cat 78-81. Cf. the recent sale of an example from the David Walsh Collection in *Numismatica Ars Classica* 77 (2014) lot. 15.

41 Rutter (2012): 71-89.

42 Rutter (2009): 125-130; Rutter (2012): 73.

43 Evans (1891): 339ff. Fischer-Bossert (1992).

44 Jongkees (1941).

in 413 B.C.⁴⁵ Most scholars would today associate these coins with Dionysos I and his campaigns against the Carthaginians.⁴⁶ The bibliography is extensive.⁴⁷

The names of at least nine engravers are known from Syracuse – largely because they sign using more than one or two letters: Euainetos, Euarchidas, Eukleidas, Eumenes, Euth..., Kimon, Parme..., Phrygillos/Phry..., and Sosion.⁴⁸ In a number of cases only the first few letters are inscribed, and it is then impossible to identify the artists. The signature EY or EV might refer to Eumenes or to his contemporary, Eukleidas.⁴⁹

The ACANS tetradrachm is signed EVMHNOV. This engraver began signing his name with an eta, EVMHNOV, and later changed the fourth letter to an epsilon giving EVMENOV.⁵⁰ In the corpus of Syracusan signed coins prepared by Lauri Tudeer, the ACANS specimen can be identified with catalogue no. 18: obv.7, rev. 12 (though the coin itself was unknown to Tudeer).⁵¹ One of the most interesting aspects of this tetradrachm is that the work of Eumenes may be placed at the very beginning of this period of signed dies (he is the first, along with Sosion, among the artists studied by Tudeer). The career of Eumenes is known from tetradrachms dated c.413-409 B.C. and from drachms dated c.410-406 B.C. The ACANS tetradrachm then illustrates the earliest years of this brief era of the signed dies.

4. Katane, 2nd -1st centuries B.C.

Obv. Reclining and naked figure of the river god Amenanos, l. arm resting on an overturned amphora and holding a reed, and with a rhyton in his raised r. hand; dot border.



Figure 4 a/b. Katane, 2nd -1st centuries B.C.

Rev. Two pilei surmounted by stars; below, two monograms, separate by the head of a lion facing r., combining the letters ΛE and ΩN ; below pilei, KATANAIQN.

AE chalkous. 6.55 g. Noble Numismatics 98 (2011) 5022. ACANS inv. 12A01. (Fig. 4 a/b).

Katane, on the eastern coast of Sicily, is counted among the Chalkidian colonies (settled by migrants mostly originating in Chalkis on Euboea) which are among the earliest

45 Evans (1891): 339 ff.

46 Rutter (1997): 155-157.

47 Rutter (2009) and (2012).

48 Rutter (2012): 74-77.

49 Rutter (2012): 76.

50 Rutter (2012): 75.

51 Tudeer (1913): 13.

in Magna Graecia, though it was settled from Sicilian Naxos.⁵² Today the ancient settlement lies beneath the modern city of Catania and its plan is obscured. It was traditionally founded in 729 B.C., at the same time as Leontini. It was refounded by the Syracusan tyrant Hieron in 476 B.C. and renamed Aitna. The new inhabitants, some 10,000 Dorians, perhaps mostly mercenaries, soon after moved to the inland town of Inessa, which they renamed Aitna; the original inhabitants then returned to their old settlement which was again known as Katane. As with most Sicilian cities it suffered during the wars with Carthage. Following the First Punic War (264-241 B.C.), it became a tributary city of Rome. A period of expansion and prosperity then followed which was brought to an end by the battles between Sextus Pompey and Octavian (which saw victory for Agrippa and Octavian in 36 B.C.).

An early bronze coinage was introduced at Katane, perhaps shortly after the mid-5th century B.C.⁵³ The first issues (*trionkia* and *onkia*) depicted the head of a local river god, Amenanos; surprisingly, his name is also provided.⁵⁴ Amenanos was first depicted as a 'man-headed bull' on a large issue of tetradrachms struck between 465 and 450 B.C.⁵⁵ The river god reappears on bronze coins struck at Katane during the late 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.; the ACANS coin belongs to this issue. The denomination is identified by Calciati in his study of Sicilian bronze coinage as Katane 'B', with a module of 18-21 mm and 4.1-9.9 g.⁵⁶ Here Amenanos is shown not as a human-headed bull, but as a reclining man. His identity is suggested by the symbols of reed, overturned amphora and cornucopia. Man-faced bull representations of river gods were the subject of a study by Jenkins, who found that they were comparatively rare in Greek art but more common on coins.⁵⁷ There was a clear concentration in the issues of Magna Graecia (and especially Sicily). The most prominent examples came from Gela but also from Katane. A more 'humanised' version of this figure becomes common from the 5th century B.C.⁵⁸ Our reclining river god adopts a pose that was widely used for later representations of the deity, and is perhaps most commonly associated with Hellenistic and Roman depictions of the Nile as a god. The Strymon river, for example, is also depicted on late Hellenistic bronze coins of Amphipolis in Macedonia (ACANS 12A04) as a reclining naked male holding a reed.⁵⁹

52 See Rutter (1997); Jannelli (2002) with bibliography on the site; Fischer-Hansen, Nielsen and Ampolo (2004): 206-207; and Hoover (2012): 159-174, for an overview of the history and coinage of the city.

53 Calciati (1987). Hoover (2012): 170-174.

54 Calciati (1987): 91-2. Hoover (2012): 170.

55 Hoover (2012): 163-164.

56 Calciati (1987); 97, cat. 9/1.

57 Jenkins (1970): 165-175.

58 Jenkins (1970): 170-1.

59 Gaebler (1935): 39, cat. 63.

On the reverse of the ACANS coin there is a lion head in profile between two monograms that can be read as ΛΕ and ΩΝ. This might plausibly refer to the name of a magistrate.

The ACANS coin, which is illustrated in Hoover (2012) as cat. 625, was originally part of the Tom Virzi collection.⁶⁰ Virzi, who worked as an assistant to the noted dealer Jacob Hirsch in Munich at the end of the 19th century, assembled a celebrated collection of bronze coins from Magna Graecia. The ACANS coin is no. 815 in the oft-quoted but still unpublished catalogue of this collection. Part of the Virzi collection was sold by Bank Leu in 1973; and this coin appears as lot 134. The ACANS coin was subsequently cited by Calciati (cat. 9/1) in his listing of the bronzes of Katane. It was sold at the 2002 Triton sale (lot 176), and purchased by Mr Colin Pitchfork before it finally came to Macquarie University.

Biography of the author:

Associate Professor Kenneth Sheedy was appointed the founding director of the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies at Macquarie University in 2000. He teaches in the Department of Ancient History at this university and is a member of its Ancient Cultures Research Centre. His fields of research and teaching are Greek numismatics and the art and archaeology of Greece with an emphasis on the archaic period.

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⁶⁰ Noble Numismatics 98 (2011) 5022 (with references to previous sales).

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