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AN HIMERA MYSTERY

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A. Historical Background

In 649 BC the Geek *apoikia*, home away from home, of Himera was planted on Sicily's northern coast[1]. The first settlers, Ionian by descent, were dispatched from Zankle, situated on the Sicilian side of the straits of Messina, and from Chalkis in Euboia, Zankle's metropolis.

Apart from a transitory period, around 560, of domination by Phalaris of Akragas[2], Himera succeeded in maintaining its independence until the later 480s. The early years of the same decade witnessed the virtual amalgamation of two Siceliot Greek, both basically Dorian, mini-Empires. Their respective architects were Theron, dictator of Akragas, and Gelon, son of Deinomenes, of Gela, conqueror and dictator of Syracuse. Fearing engulfment, Terillos, Himera's dictator, forged alliances with Anaxilas, dictator of both Zankle and its twin city, Rhegion, on the Italian side of the Messina straits, and with Carthage. To no avail. In 484, with Gelon's approval, Theron drove Terillos out of Himera and installed his own son, Thrasydaios, as its ruler. Anaxilas and Terillos responded by soliciting intervention from their external allies. A full scale Carthaginian invasion of Sicily was repulsed, at Himera, in 480 by the combined armies of Gelon and Theron[3].

In 476, in the context of bickering between Theron and Hieron, Gelon's successor, the Himeraians rose up against their Akragantine overlords. Short-lived, their revolt was brutally crushed by Theron in person. In the wake of a massacre of the rebels, new citizens were brought to Himera to replace them[4]. Akragantine control of the city continued until either 472, in the usual view, or, as I have sought to argue elsewhere[5], in 468.

From its liberation until its destruction in 409, in the course of a new Carthaginian invasion of Sicily[6], Himera's autonomy remained uncompromised.

B.Himera's Coinage Overview

Towards the end of the sixth century BC Himera began to mint coins. The highest, and major, denomination consisted of drachma pieces, approximately 5.70 grams in weight, struck on the Chalcidian standard. These Chalcidian drachmas, subject of a monograph by Colin Kraay[7], fall into two overlapping groups. The obverse type of both is a strutting cock, probably a canting device. The cock heralds the day, in Greek *hemera*, which resembles *Himera*, the mint responsible. Reverses of the first group feature a simple, but attractive, geometric design; those of the second a hen, presumably complementary to the cock.

The imposition of Akragantine control in 484 was reflected emphatically by several changes in Himera's coinage. These comprised abandonment of the Chalcidian weight standard in favour of the Attic, in use at Akragas and throughout Gelon's sphere of influence, and various other innovations which will be described in section C below.

With the cessation of Akragantine domination in 472 or 468, Himera's mint was once again reorganised. The Attic standard, now ubiquitous in Sicily, was retained, the Himeraians emphasised their regained independence by adopting new types. The obverse of the major denomination, the tetradrachm, displayed a chariot drawn by two horses; the reverse the eponymous nymph Himera together with representations of the facilities, thermal baths and spas, which emerged as Himera's main attraction

and revenue source. Catalogued and discussed in a definitive study by F. Gutmann and W. Schwabacher[8], the chariot/nymph coinage remained in production until Himera's destruction by the Punic invaders in 409.

C. The Coinage of the Akragantine Period

Subject of an important survey by G. K. Jenkins[9], the coinage struck at Himera during the period of Akragantine control consists of didrachms, drachms and hexantes, with the Chalcidian standard abandoned, as already noted, in favour of the Attic.

While the five obverse dies reflected by the extant drachms continue to feature the cock, somewhat less assertive in a revised depiction, of earlier groups, ten of the associated reverse dies display the *parasemon*, emblem, of Akragas, a fresh water crab. The type of two further reverse dies (so too the reverse type of the single surviving representative of the hexantes) is not the crab but an *astralagos*, knucklebone. Three of the obverse dies are combined with both crab and *astralagos* reverses and, as Jenkins notes[10], the relative condition of the dies concerned indicates that the crab was used first and then replaced by the *astralagos*. The crab reverses, with one anepigraphic exception, bear the legend *HIMEPA*; the legend accompanying the *astralagos* is *HIMEPAION*.

In an earlier article in this journal[11] I have suggested that the two *astralagos* reverse dies are to be associated with the transitory revolt of Himera against its Akragantine overlords in 476. Once in control of the city's mint, the rebels combined current obverse dies, whose types made them acceptable to the new order, with newly prepared reverse dies on which a new motif replaced the hated blazon of the conquerors. The new type was accompanied by a modified legend, *HIMEPA*. The city's name in the nominative case, the crab reverses had insinuated Himera's subordinate status as part of the Akragantine empire. By changing the inscription to *HIMEPAION*, genitive case, *of the men of Himera*, the rebels spelled out that the authentic inhabitants of Himera were back in the saddle.

Like the drachms, the didrachms display the cock of Himera on the obverse. All reverses feature the crab. The legend, *HIMEPA* throughout, accompanies the crab on the reverse. Jenkins[12] assigns these higher denomination coins pragmatically to two groups while acknowledging that strictly speaking there are three.

The first effective group is represented by a single specimen struck from obverse and reverse dies otherwise unreflected. Unlike any of its successors in the other two groups, the crab reverse strongly evokes the style of counterparts at Akragas itself. Conceivably, but not necessarily, it was manufactured at and dispatched from the Akragantine mint.

The second effective group of crab didrachms, represented by 37 extant specimens which reflect four obverse dies and twenty reverses, has conspicuous stylistic affinities with the drachms. The natural inference is that the didrachms of the first two groups were concurrent with the drachms featuring the crab reverse.

The third group of didrachms, stylistically dissimilar from and certainly later than all the drachms and didrachms of the first two groups, and struck later, consequently, than 476, is represented by 147 extant specimens reflecting 10 obverse and no less than 62 reverse dies.

As Jenkins observes[13], the disproportion between obverse and reverse dies exemplified by the didrachms of the second and third effective groups is remarkable and unparalleled. In his own words: *'in no other Sicilian coin series of this period for which we have any realistic estimate do we find any such proportion'*. He goes on to point out that the ratio found in practice is dramatically lower, in the order of one or two reverse dies for each obverse. To illustrate the normal situation from Himera itself, extant specimens of the cock/hen drachms which

immediately preceded the issue of the Akragantine period reflect 64 obverse dies and 72 reverse dies[14]. Extant specimens of the chariot/nymph tetradrachms produced after the liberation reflect 9 obverse dies and 15 reverse dies[15]. Reinforcing the standard paradigm from elsewhere in Sicily, extant specimens of the early drachms of Gela, struck under the Deinomenid dictatorship that eventually transferred to Syracuse, reflect 30 obverse dies and 57 reverse dies[16]. Especially apposite, the surviving representatives of the didrachms, struck at Akragas from the inception of its coinage until the early 470's, reflect 81 obverse dies and 134 reverse dies[17].

Jenkins[18] finds it difficult to be sure in what direction the explanation of the anomaly presented by the crab didrachms of Himera lies. He contemplates the possibility of some fundamental difference in minting technology involving a grotesque consumption of reverse dies, but is forced to admit that the coins concerned exhibit no technological abnormality. Far from it, in all technological respects they closely resemble their contemporary Akragantine counterparts. At a loss, Jenkins concludes that whatever the reason for the large number of reverse dies is, their quantity is clear evidence that the crab didrachms of Himera overall, of which those of the effective third group constitute the greater part, represented a considerable issue.

D. The Crab Didrachms of the Third Group

In what follows I propose to narrow my focus to the crab didrachms of Himera of Jenkins' third effective group, that for which the disproportion between obverse and reverse dies is most striking. My aim is to expose the full extent of the peculiarities involved and their implications. In the course of discussion I shall take issue with Jenkin's contention that despite the interpretational difficulties the group presents, we can at least be confident that a large volume of coinage is implicit.

Table

Number of specimens	:	147	Number of reverse dies	:	62
Number of obverse dies	:	10	Number of varieties	:	75

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
a	a								
	b	b							
		c	c						
		d	d						
			e	e					
				f	f				
			g				g		
				h			h		
						i	i		
						j			j
							k		k
						l		l	
								m	m
1	2	6	5	7	8	7	4	1	8
2	4	9	9	10	9	10	8	3	11

The above table is constructed on the basis of the 147 extant specimens of the post 476 Himeraian didrachms identified either by K. L. Grabow, whose collection of material passed into Jenkin's hands, or by Jenkins himself. The upper case letters A through J in the top row represent the ten obverse dies reflected. The lower case letters a through m represent linked reverse dies reflected, 13 in all. Their combinations and links are fully displayed. The figures in the penultimate row represent totals for unlinked reverses reflected which are coupled with each obverse die. 49 unlinked reverse dies are reflected and so 62 reverse dies in all. The figures in the final row represent the totals for all reflected reverse dies, linked and unlinked, coupled with each obverse die reflected.

Division of the number of specimens (147) by the number of obverse dies (10 yields a *survival index*, in terms of obverse dies, of 14.7. As Jenkins appreciates[19], without resorting to any sophisticated mathematical formulae, we are able to assert with confidence that it is enormously unlikely that further obverse dies will be reflected by any further specimens that turn up. 14.7 is substantially above the index figure of 7 - 8 at which the chances of a further specimen reflecting a new die are as small as 1 in 100[20].

Given that, almost certainly, all the obverse dies from which our group of didrachms was struck are reflected by the extant specimens; given too, validity of current wisdom to the effect that in the context of normal Greek minting procedures 10,000 coins on average could be struck from each obverse die[21], it follows that overall the group comprised in the region of 100,000 didrachms. Consequently, and ineluctably, the massive volume of coinage envisaged by Jenkins on the basis of the number of reverse dies is out of the question.

Division of the number of specimens by the number of reverse dies (62) yields a survival index, in terms of reverse dies, of 2.37. Given an index of this low magnitude, it is extremely unlikely that all of the reverse dies deployed are reflected. Towards calculation of the number of dies actually used by the minters one may exploit the appropriate Carter equation[22], that applicable where specimens are between 2 and 3 times the number of dies reflected. The equation concerned, in which D stands for the number (to be calculated) of dies actually deployed, n for the number of specimens, and d for the number of dies reflected is :

$$D = \frac{n.d}{1.124n - 1.016d}$$

In the present case D turns out to be 89. The standard deviation, s, is calculated from the equation:

$$s = \frac{D\sqrt{D}}{n\text{-}1}$$

In the present case, s in 6. Consequently, the number of reverse dies actually employed in striking all didrachms is likely to range from 83 (89 - 6) to 95 (89 + 6).

At this stage we are in a position to absorb fully the conundrums that the post - 476 crab didrachms present.

Given an average of 10,000 coins per obverse die and the normal proportion of one or two reverse dies for each obverse, each reverse should be capable of producing on average 5000 to 8000 coins. The entire issue, however, is in the order of 100,000 which means, assuming equal deployment, that each reverse struck only between 1053 (100, 000 divided by 95) and 1205 (100,000 divided by 83) didrachms. The oddity involved is compounded to the point of bizarreness given that at least 13 reverse dies were each coupled with at least two obverses. If we were to go on to infer that each and every reverse die employed towards striking our didrachms was coupled with at least two obverse dies, we would be confronted with the spectre of at

least 166 (on the basis of 83 reverse dies overall) to 190 (on the basis of 95 reverse dies overall) varieties. In the case of 166 varieties, each would comprise, given equal representation, around 603 exemplars. Given 190 varieties, each would comprise, given again equal representation, around 527 exemplars.

Can some such prolixity of small, discrete parcels of coins be seriously contemplated? The circumspect and rational reaction is, no doubt, that it cannot. And yet, in combination, the statistical data disconcertingly point in some such direction. If in fact, over a relatively short period of time (the amount of die linking reflected by the extant specimens certainly points firmly that way), the mint of the puppet Himera produced didrachms in, on a conservative estimate, 166 - 190 small parcels of from 527 - 603 coins, with each parcel representing coupling of each out of a battery of from 83 - 95 reverse dies with at least 2 out of 10 obverse dies, what could have been the rationale of such a minting strategy? At present I have no solution to offer. Whatever the explanation might be, it is unlikely to be bound up with circumstances specific to the period after the upheaval of 476. As already noted, the preceding group of didrachms, issued alongside the drachms prior to the ill-fated revolt, also features a highly anomalous imbalance between the reflected obverse (4) and reverse (20) dies.

REFERENCES:

1. On the date and circumstances of Himera's foundation, see, for example, T.J. Dunbabin, The Western Greeks (Oxford, 1948), 9 - 12.
2. Phalaris and Himera: so the Letters of Phalaris, whose forger surely drew on available narrative histories.
3. On the spectrum of events leading up to the struggle in 480, see, for example, Dunbabin WG, chapter 14.
4. On the events at Himera in 476, see Diodorus Siculus 11.48. 6-8 and 49. 3-4.
5. 'The date of the fall of the Emmenid tyranny at Akragas', Civilta Classica e Cristiana 7 (1986), 29-35.
6. Himera's destruction in 409: Diodorus 13.62.
7. C.M. Kraay, The Archaic Coinage of Himera, Naples, 1983.
8. F. Gutmann and W. Schwabacher, 'Die Tetradrachmen und Didrachmenprägung von Himera (472 - 409 v.ch.)'. Mitteilungen der Bayerischen Numismatischen Gesellshaft 47 (1929), 101 - 144.
9. G. K. Jenkins, 'Himera : The Coins of Akragantine Type', Supplement to Annali dell' Istituto Italiano di Numismatica, 16-17 (1971), 21 - 36.
10. Jenkins, Himera, 26.
11. 'The drachms of Himera with astralagos reverse', JNAA 6 (1990), 32 - 33.
12. Jenkins, Himera, 25 - 26.
13. Jenkins, Himera, 32.
14. Kraay, Himera, 12.
15. Gutmann and Schwabacher, Himera, 143.
16. See G.K. Jenkins, The Coinage of Gela, (Berlin, 1971), 141.
17. Jenkins, Gela, 161 - 164.
18. Jenkins, Himera, 32 - 33.
19. Jenkins, Himera, 31.
20. On the implications of survival indices with respect to non-represented dies, see, in particular E. J. P. Raven in C. M. Kraay and G. K. Jenkins eds., Essays in Greek Coinage Presented to Stanley Robinson (Oxford 1968), 41 - 45.
21. So, for example, P. Grierson, Numismatics (London, 1975), 109. Conceivably this is generous. Given cold striking, the standard method in most parts of the Greek world, D. Sellwood (Numismatic Chronicle, 1963, 130) estimated average production of around 8000 coins per obverse die.
22. See Giles P. Carter, American Numismatic Society Museum Notes 28 (1983), 199 - 202.

1

2

3

4

1 Drachm; cock/geometric punch
2 Drachm; cock/hen
3 Didrachm; cock/crab
4 Tetradrachm; chariot/nymph