

Some thoughts on early segestan bronze coinage

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica**

Band (Jahr): **88 (2009)**

PDF erstellt am: **17.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-179769>

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JOHN MORCOM

SOME THOUGHTS ON EARLY
SEGESTAN BRONZE COINAGE

Although we are all devastated by Silvia Hurter's tragic and untimely death, we are thankful for her legacy of a substantial contribution to numismatics over many years. She was at all times most generous in sharing her considerable knowledge and experience with others.

We can be happy that Silvia was able to complete her important major work on the didrachms of Segesta¹, which also contained helpful appendices dealing with other silver denominations, and the early bronze coinage. This book will be of great value to all students of this fascinating coinage. Many of us had been looking forward to further volumes on Segesta from Silvia but, alas, it was not to be.

I felt that one appropriate contribution to this special issue of *Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau* dedicated to Silvia would be something on the early bronze coinage of Segesta, and this short piece is offered in grateful memory of a most congenial and much valued colleague.

In this note, I refer to the relevant fractions of the litra, the basis of the small denominations of Sicilian currency from perhaps the mid 460s BC, as tetronkia, trionkia, and dionkia, rather than the terms 'trias', 'tetras' and 'hexas'. The Roman based terms which have been used for many years are confusing, and the confusion was increased when, at some point in the 1960s, the terms trias and tetras were exchanged, so that what was once termed a tetras became a trias and what had been a trias was now a tetras². The confusion was made greater because some subsequent works continued to use the old nomenclature.

Little has been published on the bronze coinage of Segesta since the major work of Denyse Bérend, presented at the *VI Convegno del Centro Internazionale di Studi Numismatici* held in Naples in April 1977, and published in the proceedings of that institution³, and which included a comprehensive die study.

Silvia's recent work has done much to clarify the chronology of the didrachms of Segesta, and useful stylistic comparisons can be made between some of the heads on the reverses of the didrachms and those on the obverses of the early bronze coins. For example, there is a close similarity between the reverse of Silvia's Period III, 114 (R61) (*Fig. 1*) which comes around half way through the group as arranged by Silvia, which she dates to c. 440/35 – 420/16, and the

¹ S. MANI HURTER, *Die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta, mit einem Anhang der Hybriden, Teilstücke und Tetradrachmen sowie mit einem Überblick über die Bronzeprägung*, SSN 1 (Zurich 2008).

² H. CHANTRAINE, *Bemerkungen zum ältesten sizilischen und römischen Münzwesen*, JNG 12, 1962, pp. 51–64, particularly pp. 51–58.

³ D. BÉREND, *Le monnayage de bronze de Segeste*, in: *Le origini della monetazione di bronzo in Sicilia e in Magna Grecia. Atti del VI Convegno del Centro Internazionale di Studi Numismatici*, Napoli 17–22 Aprile 1977, AIN, Suppl. 25 (Rome 1979), pp. 53–77.

obverses on coins in Bérend's Group B (e.g. nos. 17–19) (*Fig. 2*). Similarly the reverse of Silvia's Period IV, 184 (R 103) (*Fig. 3*) is very close to the obverses on coins placed by Bérend at the start of her Group C (nos 40–41) (*Fig. 4*).



Fig. 1 Segesta didrachm, Hurter Period III, 114.
BM 121-3-9-3



Fig. 2 Segesta tetronkion, Bérend Group B 19.
SNG Morcom 665



Fig. 3 Segesta didrachm, Hurter Period IV.
BM, SNG Lloyd 1180



Fig. 4 Segesta tetronkion, Bérend Group C40.
BMC 49

Silvia dates her Period IV to c. 412/10 – 400 or later. The dates of striking of the silver and bronze coins where such similarity of style exists are unlikely to be very far apart.

Bérend suggests a start date of c. 420 for the bronze coinage of Segesta but, in the light of Silvia's dating for the didrachms, and in the light of the stylistic

similarities between the silver and the bronze issues, the bronze coinage may have started a little earlier, say, c. 430.

I would accept much the greater part of Bérend's arrangement of the bronze coinage, but there is one part of the arrangement which I would question, and that is the placing of her Group B after her Group A. The uncountermarked coins in Group A are struck on a lower *litra* standard of about half the weight standard of the uncountermarked coins of Group B. Christof Boehringer⁴ appears to agree with Bérend in placing Group A before Group B, and suggests that there was a moment when the city was willing and wealthy enough to revalue the bronze standard from the lower level at which it had previously been introduced when there had been a state of emergency. However, this seems unlikely at a time when the general trend of the weight standards for bronze coinage was downwards.

There is one clear indication that weight standards were falling at Segesta, and that is the frequent practice adopted there of doubling the value of coins by countermarking with either additional pellets or annulets, or with value marks overriding the original ones. This practice was widespread in Group B, where all the additional value marks appear to have been added by means of a punch to the coins, and not by alteration of the dies. It is important to note that this countermarking is only really a phenomenon of Group B. Bérend only cites one case of such countermarking in Group C – a specimen in Syracuse which is not illustrated⁵, but which appears to be a case of a tetronkion being transformed into a hemilitron, and only one in Group A, which I believe to be significant when considering the order of Groups A and B. There appears to have been no countermarking in Bérend Groups D and E.

Bérend Group A no. 4 (Berlin 113) shares an obverse die with nos. 1–3, but is distinct from them in that the latter all feature reverse dies with four original pellets, and no countermarks, being therefore tetronkia. In the case of no. 4 (*Fig. 5*), which is (at 9.81g) within the range of weights found in nos. 2–3 (7.68–10.06g), the reverse was, apparently, originally struck as a dionkion (two pellets) and two



Fig. 5 Segesta revalued dionkion, Bérend Group A4.
Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett 1846/6034

⁴ CH. BOEHRINGER, *Bemerkungen zur sizilischen Bronzeprägung im 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, SM 28, 1978, p. 54.

⁵ BÉREND, p. 70, Syracuse 22742.

pellets have been added with a punch, converting it into a tetronkion. Thus this coin, which is of a weight similar to those found for dionkia in Group B, had its value doubled from dionkion to tetronkion by the addition of two pellets.

I believe that the only way in which this revalued dionkion can be explained is to place it at the very start of Bérend Group A, and for that group to have followed Group B. The decision to revalue would have occurred very soon after the introduction of Group A, at which point the widespread countermarking of the Group B coins, would have occurred.

I am aware that others may disagree with my analysis, and I would have valued the acute observations which Silvia would undoubtedly have made on what I have said, had I said it sooner. I would also add that I have not had the opportunity to examine Berlin 113, the sole example of Bérend 4 noted by her, and have only studied the photograph in Denyse's article and the photographs kindly provided by Berlin. It remains to be seen whether examination of the actual coin would cause me to reconsider my views.

I should like to thank the British Museum for permitting me to photograph and use three of their coins for illustrations, and the Berlin Staatliche Museen Münzkabinett for permitting me to use one of their coins for illustration, and Dr Bernhard Weisser for providing me with photographs of the Berlin coin.

Abstract

This article considers the earliest bronze coinage of Segesta and reviews the arrangement proposed by Denyse Bérend at the VI Convegno del Centro Internazionale de Studi Numismatici *Le Origini della Monetazione di Bronzo in Sicilia e in Magna Graecia* held in Napoli in 1977 and subsequently publishes in the *Atti* of that Convegno, and considers the chronology in the light of Silvia Hurter's study of the silver didrachms and other coinage of Segesta *Die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta, mit einem Anhang der Hybriden, Teilstücke und Tetradrachmen sowie mit einem Überblick über die Bronzeprägung*, SSN 1 (Zurich, 2008). It concludes that the chronological order of Bérend's Groups A and B should be reversed, so that Group B, initially struck on a weight standard twice that found in Group A, but with many specimens being subsequently revalued by countermarking, should be placed first in the series.

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag befasst sich mit den frühesten Bronzeprägungen von Segesta und überprüft die Abfolge, die Denyse Bérend am VI Convegno del Centro Internazionale de Studi Numismatici (*Le Origini della Monetazione di Bronzo in Sicilia e in Magna Graecia*) 1977 in Neapel vorgestellt und in den Akten dieser Tagung publiziert hat. Die Chronologie der frühen Bronzeprägung wird im Lichte von Silvia Hurters Monographie *Die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta, mit einem Anhang der Hybriden, Teilstücke und Tetradrachmen sowie mit einem Überblick über die Bronzeprägung, SSN 1* (Zürich 2008) untersucht. Der Autor kommt zum Schluss, dass die Abfolge von Bérends Gruppen A und B umgekehrt werden muss und dass die Bronzeprägung demnach mit den Münzen der Gruppe B beginnt, die anfangs im doppelten Gewicht der Gruppe A ausgeprägt wurde und die viele Exemplare aufweist, die später durch Gegenstempel revaluert wurden.

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