

# Silvia Hurter's Segesta coins and history in western Sicily

Autor(en): **Rutter, N. K.**

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N. K. RUTTER

SILVIA HURTER'S SEGESTA  
COINS AND HISTORY IN WESTERN SICILY

PLATES 1–2

Silvia Hurter's *Die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta*, published in 2008 by the Swiss Numismatic Society as the first volume in the new series *Swiss Numismatic Studies*,<sup>1</sup> represents a major step forward in Sicilian numismatics. Over many years the rich and varied coinage of Segesta languished in comparative neglect, for a number of reasons sketched by Silvia Hurter in the introductory sections of her book. The people of Segesta were not Greeks and their coinage was regarded as derivative, 'barbarian' work. Furthermore, not much was known of Segestan history, and what *was* known, apart from a few references to a longstanding border dispute with Selinus, derived its significance only from its connection with Athenian ambitions in Sicily and the role of the Segestans in the famous *History* of Thucydides. Now, in a work that was ten years in the making (her own Trojan War), Silvia Hurter has made handsome amends to the Segestans. For a start, the book offers much more than its main title suggests: in addition to collecting together the small change (mainly litrae, but also a few hemilitra, hexantes and a late flowering of hemidrachms), it revisits the tetradrachms, originally put in order by Ph. Lederer in 1910, and also the bronze, the subject of more recent studies.<sup>2</sup> The result is a comprehensive and well-illustrated work on the coinage of Segesta as a whole which invites conclusions and stimulates interest and new work far beyond the coinage of Segesta itself.

From the start of minting around 470 the principal denomination of Segestan coinage was a silver didrachm weighing about 8.67g, minted on the Euboic-Attic standard common in Sicily. Silvia Hurter expertly identifies 12 series of these didrachms which she distributes among four Periods: Period I

<sup>1</sup> S. MANI HURTER, *Die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta, mit einem Anhang der Hybriden, Teilstücke und Tetradrachmen sowie mit einem Überblick über die Bronzeprägung* (SNS 1) (SNG [Biel] 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Tetradrachms: Ph. LEDERER, *Die Tetradrachmenprägung von Segesta* (Munich, 1910); *id.*, *Nachträge zur Tetradrachmenprägung von Segesta*, *Berliner Münzblätter* XLVIII/310 (October, 1928), pp. 3–7; L. MILDENBERG, *Kimón in the manner of Segesta*, *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Numismatics*, New York – Washington, September, 1973 (Paris – Basle, 1976). Bronze: D. BÉREND, *Le monnayage de bronze de Ségeste*, *Atti del VI Convegno Napoli 1977*, *AIIN suppl. to vol. 25* (Naples, 1979), pp. 53–77; Ch. BOEHRINGER, *Bemerkungen zur sizilischen Bronzeprägung im 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, *SM* 28, Heft 111 (1978), pp. 49–64.

(c. 475/470–455/450; Series 1–3); Period II (c. 455/450–445/440; Series 4–5); Period III (c. 440/435–420/416; Series 6–8); Period IV (c. 412/410 – early fourth century; Series 9–12). Although some series are die-linked (2 to 3, 6 to 7, 7 to 8), the overall picture of the minting of the didrachms is that they were issued in blocks according to need, rather than in any regular or continuous way. Silvia Hurter identifies heavy output of coins in particular in the first two decades of minting and in the 440s. For several years before Segesta started to issue its own coins, didrachms on the same standard had been struck by three Greek mints on the south-west coast of Sicily – Selinus, Akragas and Gela. Yet at the very time when Segesta was starting to issue its didrachms, the Greek cities mentioned were *giving up* their own production of this denomination in favour of a larger coin, the tetradrachm. Thus for many years from the mid-fifth century onwards, Segesta was left as the main provider of didrachms in Sicily.

So far, then, with regard to minting technique and weight standard, Segesta is fitting into a Greek model of coining, and specifically the Greek monetary tradition of south western Sicily, but other elements of the coins, the types and the inscriptions, introduce new perspectives. First the types: on the obverse, a hound; on the reverse, a female head (*Pl. 1, 1*). Who are they? In our Greek sources the dominant version of the Elymian story starts with Thucydides in the later part of the fifth century: the Elymians, he says (6.2.3), were refugees from Troy. Later writers fleshed out this broad picture, telling in particular of a Trojan woman named Aigeste, who was sent to Sicily by her father or banished there by the Trojan king Laomedon. In Sicily Aigeste was seduced by the river-god Krimisos, who took the form of a hound, and she became the mother of Aigestes/Akestes/Agastos, a mighty hunter who founded three cities, Segesta, Eryx and Entella.<sup>3</sup>

In the light of these accounts of the mythological origins of Segesta, the hound on the obverse of the didrachms must represent the river god Krimisos. Now, numerous river gods are shown in animal form on coins of both Sicily and southern Italy, but the animal chosen elsewhere to symbolize the various rivers is always a bull, often depicted with a man's face or head as at Gela (*Pl. 1, 2*). There is no forerunner or parallel in Sicilian coinage for a hound symbolizing a river, except on coins whose iconography is derived from those of Segesta itself. It is an original creation by Segesta, based on the city's own traditions. Silvia Hurter gives us an illustration of a more recent specimen in her book (p. 43, fig. 6). On the reverse, the female head must represent the 'Trojan' Aigeste, the consort of Krimisos, and in this way the obverse and the reverse portray respectively the father and the mother of the hero Aigestes.

Unlike the hound as river god on the obverse, the portrayal on a coin of the head of a local divinity is a familiar concept both in Sicily and South Italy. Perhaps the best known example comes from Syracuse, whose coins featured almost from the beginning around 500 a head of Arethusa, the famous fresh-water spring situated

<sup>3</sup> On Aigeste and Aigestes, see C. ARNOLD-BIUCCHI, LIMC I/1 (Zurich – Munich, 1981), pp. 355–7 and pp. 357–8 respectively, s.v. *Aigeste* and *Aigestes* respectively; on Krimisos, see M. CACCAMO GALTABIANO, LIMC VI/1 (Zurich – Munich, 1992), pp. 135–7, s.v. *Krimisos*.

right next to the salt waters of the Great Harbour there (*Pl. 1, 3*). The influence of Syracusan Arethusa heads, whether in profile or facing, on the iconography of other coinages in southern Italy, in particular on the Tyrrhenian coast, and also in Sicily, was wide and lasting. I illustrate just one out of many examples in the coinage of Neapolis Campaniae (*Pl. 1, 4*). On the coinage of Segesta Silvia Hurter notes how the influence of Syracuse can be traced throughout the fifth century, sometimes only superficially, but on other occasions with remarkable closeness (p. 22, with Plate 19). Here are some examples of the latter:

*Pl. 1, 5 and 6*: Segesta R9; Boehringher Syrakus R47 (in the 460s);

*Pl. 1, 7 and 8*: Segesta R52 (no. 96); Boehringher Syrakus R365 (no. 514) (3 rolls of hair) (in the 440s);

*Pl. 1, 9 and 10*: Seg. R103 (no. 184) and Boehringher Syrakus R 463 (no. 676) (Segestan example in the last decade of the fifth century, copying a slightly earlier Syracusan).

Silvia Hurter points out (*loc. cit.*) that the value of the Syracusan models as chronological indicators for Segesta copies is limited because Segesta did not always follow the same order of minting as Syracuse, but still, this demonstration of the pervasive Syracusan influence on the iconography of the heads of Aigeste at Segesta prompts an obvious question: Why did it happen? *Why* were the die-engravers of Segesta so regularly influenced by the styles of a mint situated over 200 kilometers away to the east? One might say that they were simply reflecting admiration for artistically outstanding Syracusan types: if the Segestans wanted to represent a female deity on their coins and chose to do so by showing her head, then the only model among the coinages of the western Greeks in the early part of the fifth century was Syracuse. However, as noted above, imitation of Syracusan types was widespread not only in Sicily but in Italy too: there appear to have been at least two channels of imitation, from Syracuse to Segesta and from Syracuse to Campania.

So much for the designs on the coins; now let us turn to the inscriptions, which occur in numerous variant forms, set out by Silvia Hurter in tabular form (pp. 35–9). Throughout the didrachm series the most common legend, appearing to begin with on the obverse, later on the reverse and sometimes on both sides of the coin, is SEGESTAZIB. The letters are Greek, but the form, in particular the ending -ZIB is Elymian. Especially, but not only, in the early years of minting, spelling mistakes or inverted letters noted in the catalogue (e.g. ΣΕΓΕΣΤΑΖΙΒ (V.1), ΣΑΓΕΣΤΑΖΙΒ R11), ΣΑΤΕΣΣΑΖΙΒ (R12), ΣΑΓΕΣΣΖΙΒ (R15)) seem to indicate that the engraver was a local, not a Greek (though this is not to say that such men were not capable craftsmen, even if they had difficulty with their spelling). There has been a lot of debate about the significance of the ending -ZIB. In the light of another inscription, ΣΕΓΕΣΤΑΖΙΒΕΜΙ, which appears on just three reverses (V.5–7) in the later 460s, the ending -ZIB seems to indicate possession: 'I am of Segesta(ns)' (*Pl. 1, 11*). (The genitive is the normal case for the minting authority on Greek coins: 'of the Syracusans' and so on.) After about sixty years of consistent use of the Elymian form ΣΕΓΕΣΤΑΖΙΒ, the Greek form ΕΓΕΣΤΑΙΟΝ appeared for the first time on the didradrachms around 410, but it did not displace the Elymian form and both forms continued to appear until

the end of the didrachm coinage in the early fourth century. Just before 410 the repertoire of denominations at Segesta was expanded to include tetradrachms. In the first Group of these, dating perhaps shortly before or around 410, the first issue (*Pl. 2, 12*, MANI HURTER, pl. 26, T1) combines the Greek form ΕΓΕΣΤΑΙΟΝ in the exergue of the obverse with the Elymian form ΣΕΓΕΣΤΑΖΙΒ the reverse. Subsequent issues of tetradrachms continue to mix those Greek and Elymian forms, often on the same coin as here, while introducing an alternative spelling of the Greek form: ΕΓΕΣΤΑΙΩΝ, with final *omega* rather than *omicron*. So in the last decade of the fifth century we find a complex interweaving of forms in the legends on Segestan coins, no straightforward ‘process of hellenisation’ as has sometimes been claimed.<sup>4</sup>

So far, we have been looking at some of the ways in which Silvia Hurter’s detailed ordering of the didrachms of Segesta has contributed to our understanding not only of the workings of the mint itself, but also of the cultural development of the city. There is much more to learn when, again with Silvia Hurter as guide, we widen our enquiry to include relations between Segesta and other communities in western Sicily. There is currently a lot of discussion and theorising about how the interactions between different peoples in various parts of the ancient Mediterranean world should be characterised and interpreted. Earlier models, ‘hellenisation’, for example, or ‘acculturation’, or ‘world systems theory’, have been found wanting and the discussion is moving away from binary oppositions, such as that between Greeks and the barbarian ‘other’, or between ‘centre and periphery’. What is now emphasised is the *diversity* of local reactions to cultural influences and the exercise of choice, both in what to accept and what to disregard.<sup>5</sup> This theme can be illustrated by comparing and contrasting the coinages of Segesta and its neighbour Eryx. These were both Elymian cities, geographically not far apart, yet their coinages reveal different approaches to the reception of presumably the same or at least very similar cultural circumstances or influences.

At Eryx coinage began slightly later than at Segesta, around 460, and it is distinctive from that of Segesta in three ways.<sup>6</sup>

The first relates to the denominations used. Whereas the main denomination at Segesta was the didrachm, as we have seen, at Eryx down to 410 at least it was a much smaller coin, the litra. Furthermore at Eryx down to about 410 the largest denomination, and that minted only rarely, was the drachma.

<sup>4</sup> T. SIRONEN, Position of minority languages in Sicily: Oscan and Elymian, in T. FISCHER-HANSEN (ed.), *Ancient Sicily*, Acta Hyperborea 6 (Copenhagen, 1995), pp. 184–94.

<sup>5</sup> Among recent work on identity formation I have found the following particularly helpful: M. DIETLER, Consumption, cultural frontiers, and identity: anthropological approaches to Greek colonial encounters, in *Confini e frontiera nella grecità d’occidente. Atti del 37° Convegno di Studi sulla Magna Grecia (3–6 ottobre 1997)* (Taranto, 1999), pp. 475–501; T. HODOS, *Local Responses to Colonization in the Iron Age Mediterranean* (London, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> The fullest published account of the coinage of Eryx is A. CAMPANA, *Sicilia: Eryx (490 – c. 200 a.C.)*, *Panorama Numismatico* 119, 121, 122 (Serravalle (Republic of San Marino)), 1998), pp. 225–62. I base my discussion also on material collected for the third edition of *Historia Numorum, Sicily and Adjacent Islands* (in preparation).

The second difference relates to the designs on the coins. Although at some points the typological relationship between the two mints was close, for example Eryx from about 440 made use of the type of a hound similar to that at Segesta, in contrast to Segesta, with its focus on Syracusan prototypes, Eryx borrowed much more extensively from the repertoire of types of neighbouring Greek cities. Here are a few examples:

The leaf on the obverses of early hemilitra of Eryx resembles a similar device on the coins of Selinus; we have to say 'resembles' rather than 'the same as' because at Selinus the leaf is of a celery plant, at Eryx apparently of an anemone.<sup>7</sup>

The eagle and crab on drachms and litrae of Eryx dating around the middle of the fifth century derive from the types of Akragas. (*Pl. 2, 13*, Eryx; *Pl. 2, 14*, Akragas). Some of the litrae of Eryx even show the same letters ΛΙ (standing for *litra*) that were included on some of the coins of Acragas.

The standing female figure sacrificing on the reverse of litrae of Eryx dating from around 440 to 430 derives from a similar figure on coins of Himera (*Pl. 2, 15*, Eryx; *Pl. 2, 16*, Himera).

The third difference between the coins of Eryx and Segesta is that the inscriptions, or legends, on the coins of Eryx were written from the start in the Greek form, ERVKINON, whereas the Elymian form ERVKAZIB appeared only around 410. That is precisely the reverse of the situation at Segesta. At one point though, around the middle of the century, there was a joint issue of litrai between Segesta and Eryx (*Pl. 2, 17*, MANI HURTER, p. 123, fig. 13), with ΣΕΓΕΣΤΑΙΟΝ on the obverse and ERVKINON on the reverse. On this unique issue the Greek form of ERVKINON has influenced the form in which the name of the Segestans is expressed about forty years before the form appeared with any regularity in the coinage of Segesta itself.

Thus the development of the coinages of Elymian Eryx and Segesta differs notably with regard to choice of the denominations, source of the designs and form of the legends, and the question arises: Why did the two mints respond in such different ways to a presumably similar cultural, and specifically monetary, environment? I offer the suggestion that we should look for an explanation in the different circumstances, the different needs of the two communities: they were different sorts of places. Eryx was a great religious centre famed for its temple of Aphrodite, as Polybius tells us (1.55.7–8). Segesta, although in the later fifth century it did begin to construct its famous temple, was much more significant as a military centre, associated in particular with the gathering and dispatch of mercenary soldiers.<sup>8</sup> My suggestion, then, is that the different character of the two coinages reflects the different roles of the two cities, the one (Eryx) religious, the other (Segesta) military. But whatever the reasons for the differences outlined, in both cases all the external influences came from the Greek sphere, rather than

<sup>7</sup> I. LEE, *The flower of Adonis at Eryx*, NC 1999, pp. 1–31, Pls. 1–8. Lee illustrates the comparative material from Eryx and Selinus on his Plates 1 and 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Diodorus Siculus 13.7.4 (414; 300 cavalry reached the Athenians from Segesta); 13.44.1–6 (410; the Carthaginians dispatched 5,000 Libyans and 800 Campanians to the Segestans); 13.54 (409; the Segestans supply Hannibal with troops).



from another set of close neighbours, the Phoenician/Punic inhabitants of Motya and Panormus. What do we know about *their* reaction to the use of coined money among their neighbours the Greeks and the Elymians? Here again, Silvia Hurter's study has advanced knowledge, clarified problems and stimulated further work.

The ancient Phoenicians were just like the Greeks, to the extent that they sailed the length and breadth of the Mediterranean from their own homeland (in present-day Lebanon) to trade and to found settlements. In Sicily the coinages of the people of Phoenician origin can be divided into two basic categories: first, what Leo Miltenberg called the 'institutional' coinage, issued on behalf of armies fighting in Sicily, and second, local city coinages, issued by communities within the area controlled by the Carthaginians.<sup>9</sup> I concentrate here on two of the latter coinages, those of Motya and Panormus.

The first coins of the island stronghold of Motya were silver didrachms (*Pl. 2, 18*). The obverse design of a rider jumping from a horse (*apobates*) is copied from a similar type at the Greek city of Himera (*Pl. 2, 16*); the reverse design is a female head of a style we have already seen at Segesta, and which we saw was in turn based on a Syracusan type (above, *Pl. 1, 9, 10*). The inscription on these first coins of Punic Motya is in the Greek form, MOTVAION. Thus the designs on each side of the coins are based on Greek prototypes, and the only element that distinguishes them as deriving from Motya is the inscription – and both the form and letters of that are also Greek.

Kenneth Jenkins arranged these early didrachms of Motya in a relative sequence of seven obverse dies and eight reverse dies linked in 13 die-combinations, and gave them a starting date of around 425.<sup>10</sup> In the light of Silvia Hurter's study, however, that date should be brought down to around or shortly before 410. Silvia Hurter shows that about that time the mint of Segesta took up the coining of didrachms again (Series 9), apparently after a short break. The compact group of didrachms in Series 9 employed three obverse dies and six reverse dies linked together in 16 die-combinations. The significance of this Series 9 of Segesta for the development of coinage in the wider region of western Sicily rests in the fact that all three of its obverse dies were coupled not only to Segestan reverses, but in one case to a reverse with the name of Motya inscribed on it, and in the two other cases to reverses with the names not only of Motya, but also of another Phoenician centre, labelled *sys* on the coins.<sup>11</sup> This *sys* we can now confidently identify as Panormus (modern Palermo).<sup>12</sup> With regard to the dating of the coins involved in these chains of striking, the Segestan obverse V47 is dated about 410, so the Motyan reverses R6 to R9 must similarly dated. They are not the first in the Motyan series, but it is unlikely that all that much time can be allowed for the previous five reverse dies. The starting date for the coinage of Motya cannot be much before 410.

<sup>9</sup> L. MILDENBERG, *Sikulo-Punische Münzlegenden*, SNR 72 (1993), pp. 5–21, at p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> G.K. JENKINS, *Coins of Punic Sicily, Part 1*, SNR 50 (1971) (= *Coins of Punic Sicily* (Zurich, 1997), Part 1), pp. 25–78, at pp. 25–35, Pls. 1–2.

<sup>11</sup> MANI HURTER, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 46–7, with Plates 21–2.

<sup>12</sup> G. K. JENKINS, *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 28–9.

And that is not all. Silvia Hurter raised and devoted much attention to a further significant question: How should we interpret this linking of dies of different mints? There could be two possible explanations for such linking, not necessarily mutually exclusive: dies could have been physically transported between the mints in question; or one mint was striking coins on behalf of the other. In the cases we are looking at, the evidence suggests that both these possibilities were in play – some dies were taken from Motya to Segesta, but the arguments for a central mint are also strong. Silvia Hurter (p. 47) followed Kenneth Jenkins in thinking that the place of minting for these ‘hybrid’ coins was Panormus. According to Jenkins ‘There would have been little point in bringing Motyan dies to Segesta, and even less in taking Segestan dies to Motya. But there would have been some point in taking dies from either one or both these mints to a place where no regular mint existed at that moment – namely Panormus’.<sup>13</sup> However, I do not find that scenario convincing. Why should the mint of Segesta, which had been making coins successfully for 60 years or so, hand over responsibility for the minting of considerable issues of coins (Silvia Hurter characterizes (p. 31) her Series 9 as showing some of the features of a *Massenprägung*) to a place where no minting at all had occurred before? I have already argued more fully elsewhere that it was in fact the mint of Segesta that was striking on behalf of the others, a conclusion that would not have been easy to achieve without the material collected and analysed by Silvia Hurter.<sup>14</sup>

In sum, in Silvia Hurter’s *Die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta* we have a book that puts the study of the coins of Segesta on a new and firm basis and gives us a much clearer view of their context among the coinages of Sicily in general and of western Sicily in particular. For historians the book offers insights into the history and relationships of a city which played a critical role in some of the decisive events of the fifth and fourth centuries. It is a κτῆμα ἐς αἰεὶ.

<sup>13</sup> G. K. JENKINS, ‘Coins of Punic Sicily, Part 4’, SNR 57 (1978) (= Coins of Punic Sicily (Zurich, 1997), Part 4), pp. 5–68, at p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> N.K. RUTTER, Segesta, hybrid issues and the question of a central mint, SNR 88 (2009), pp. 25–33.



*Abstract*

Silvia Hurter's book on the didrachms of Segesta offers not only an accurate collection and ordering of the coins of the main title, but also new insights into the smaller denominations, the tetradrachms and the bronze. It also stimulates further questions and research on the relations of Segesta with its neighbours, Elymian, Greek and Punic.

*Zusammenfassung*

Silvia Hurters Buch über die Didrachmenprägung von Segesta bietet nicht nur eine vollständige Zusammenstellung und Ordnung der im Haupttitel des Werks erwähnten Münzen, sondern vermittelt auch neue Erkenntnisse über die kleineren Nominale sowie über die Tetradrachmen und die Bronzen. Es gibt auch Anregungen zu weiteren Fragen und zur Untersuchung der Beziehungen von Segesta zu seinen Nachbarn, den Elymern, Griechen und Puniern.

N. Keith Rutter  
School of History, Classics and Archaeology,  
William Robertson Wing,  
Old Medical School,  
Teviot Place,  
Edinburgh EH 8 9AG

*Illustrations*<sup>15</sup>

HAM = Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Mass.

BM = The British Museum, London

ANS = The American Numismatic Society, New York

Plate 1:

1. Segesta, didrachm, Period I, c. 475/470–455/450; MANI HURTER, *op. cit.* (note 1), pl. 1, 12.
2. Gela, tetradrachm, c. 475–470; HAM 1.1965.597.
3. Syracuse, tetradrachm, c. 460; HAM 1.1965.783.
4. Neapolis, didrachm, fourth century; HAM 1.1965.96.
5. Segesta, didrachm (as *Pl. 1, 1* above), R9.
6. Syracuse, tetradrachm, c. 475; E. BOEHRINGER, *Die Münzen von Syrakus* (Berlin, 1929), R47.
7. Segesta, didrachm, Period II, c. 455/450–445/440; MANI HURTER, *op. cit.*, pl. 9, 96, R52.
8. Syracuse, tetradrachm, c. 450; BOEHRINGER, *op. cit.*, R365.
9. Segesta, didrachm, Period IV, c. 412/10–400; MANI HURTER, *op. cit.*, pl. 16, 184, R103.
10. Syracuse, tetradrachm, c. 420; BOEHRINGER, *op. cit.*, R463.
11. Segesta, didrachm, Period I, c. 475/470–455/450; MANI HURTER, *op. cit.*, pl. 3, 30, R18.x

Plate 2:

12. Segesta, tetradrachm, Group I, c. 415/412 – c. 410; MANI HURTER, *op. cit.*, pl. 26, T1.
13. Eryx, litra, c. 455 – c. 445; SNG ANS 3, no. 1341.
14. Akragas, litra, c. 455 – c. 445; SNG ANS 3, no. 989.
15. Eryx, litra, c. 440 – c. 430; BM, SNG Lloyd, no. 936.
16. Himera, didrachm, c. 430; HAM 1.1965.617.
17. Litra, joint issue between Eryx and Segesta, c. 450; MANI HURTER, *op. cit.*, p. 123, fig. 13.
18. Motya, didrachm, c. 410; SNG ANS 4, no. 495.

<sup>15</sup> For advice on, and help with, relevant illustrations I wish to thank Carmen Arnold-Biucchi, Amelia Dowler and Peter van Alfen.





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