ΑΚΙΣ – FLUSSGOTT STATT STEMPELSCHNEIDER

ΑΚΙΣ – River God instead of Die Cutter

Dieter Salzmann

1990

Recently Chr. Boehringer[1] and G. Manganaro[2] have independently published several specimens of a previously unknown silver minor coinage type from Sicily (Fig. 1)[3]. These pieces show on the obverse the head of a youthful river god with long hair and horns ex face, as well as to the right a legend, which is read by Boehringer as ΣΙΚΑ and by Manganaro as ΣΙΧΙ̣Ą or ΣΙΧĄ. On the reverse a ship's stern is depicted, flanked by three pellets each, in whose interstices the letters NI–KA appear retrograde and *boustrophedon*. The six value pellets identify the denomination with a diameter of 8–9 mm and a weight of 0.32–0.39 g as a hemilitra.



Four of the five specimens now known, preserved in various private collections[4] were found in Sicily according to Boehringer's information, two of them allegedly in or near Kamarina[5]. Based on this provenance the silver coins must originate from a Sicilian mint; however, the inscription cannot be connected with any of the known coin-producing places on the island. For the localization of the mint as well as for the reading and interpretation of the obverse legend, Manganaro and Boehringer have made divergent proposals. However, neither of the two authors has recognized the true meaning of the obverse inscription, which is decisive for understanding the new coin type.

Manganaro, who treats two specimens of the hemilitra in a larger context concerning Sicilian minor silver, rules out that the inscription read by him as ΣΙΧΙ̣Ą or ΣΙΧĄ next to the river god's

[1]Chr. Boehringer, Der sizilische Stempelschneider SIKA–, NAC 14, 1985, 85–95, Taf. I; III, 1 (hereafter abbreviated: Boehringer).

[2]G. Manganaro, Dai mikrò kermata di argento al *chalkokratos kassiteros* in Sicilia nel V. sec. a. C., NG 34, 1984, 11–39, esp. 30 ff., Taf. 5, 78–78a.

[3]Here Fig. 1 (scale 3.5:1) = Boehringer 85, no. 1, Taf. I, 1. – I thank Chr. Boehringer for the photograph.

[4]The specimens Boehringer 92, Taf. I, 2 and Manganaro Taf. 5, 78a are identical.

[5]Boehringer 85; 90 (specimens 1 and 4 in or near Kamarina).

head represents a die-cutter's signature. He recognizes in it the abbreviated ethnikon Σιχια(νίνων) or Σιχα(νίνων) of the small town of Ichana attested in Sicily. Because of the aphlast on the reverse, the coins were struck in connection with Syracuse's victory over the Athenian expedition in the years 415–413 BC[6].

Boehringer, who even dedicates a separate treatise to the new hemilitra, proposes Kamarina as the mint instead. For this attribution he advances – briefly summarized – the following arguments: The reverse image with the aphlast as a sign of a naval victory points to a location situated on the coast; this is also confirmed by the legend NIKA. Because of the Doric form νίκα instead of the Ionic-Attic νίκη, Chalcidian cities such as Katane, Naxos and Leontinoi are to be excluded as minting places[7]. Rather, the mint is to be sought among the Doric cities in the south of Sicily between Selinus and Syracuse as well as Messana. With "great probability" Kamarina is the mint, which is indicated not only by stylistic comparisons but also by the reported findspot of two pieces[8]. The dating proposed is the last decade of the 5th and the first decade of the 4th century BC[9].

The obverse legend is read by Boehringer – as mentioned – as ΣIKA, written retrograde. While Manganaro limits himself in his interpretation to the alternative ethnikon or die-cutter's signature, Boehringer at least also considers whether the name of a river god might be meant. However, he rejects this in itself obvious possibility with the remark that there was only an insignificant little river called Sikanos in the territory of Akragas in Sicily[10]. Since, moreover, there is no place name in Sicily with this sequence of letters at the beginning and die-cutters had written their names in a similar position on coins of a series of Sicilian cities, ΣIKA is also to be understood as an abbreviated artist's signature. The name could be completed to Sikas or more probably to Sikanos[11].

This conclusion is surprising. For Boehringer's argumentation proceeds from the apparent premise that the legend beside the head of the river god is to be read "beginning to the right of the neck, retrograde and from the inside"[12]. However, there is no reason or occasion whatsoever for this reading direction. For if one begins at the top left, the sequence of letters AKIƸ results. That the sigma appears reversed in this case is by no means unusual. The phenomenon of individual retrograde letters within a legend can be observed again and again on other Sicilian coins as well. As obvious examples I refer only to issues from Naxos and Syracuse[13]. To confirm that only AKIƸ can be the only correct and justified form of reading, a brief glance at Pauly's Realencyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften[14] or in Roscher's Mythologisches Lexikon[15] suffices: It is the name of a Sicilian river god well known from myth. The coin image is thus unambiguously identified by the legend as Ἄκις.

The design of the obverse of our coin type thus follows a common scheme: representations of

[6]See note 2 above.

[7]Boehringer 86.

[8]Boehringer 90.

[9]Boehringer 91.

[10]Boehringer 89 f.

[11]Boehringer 91.

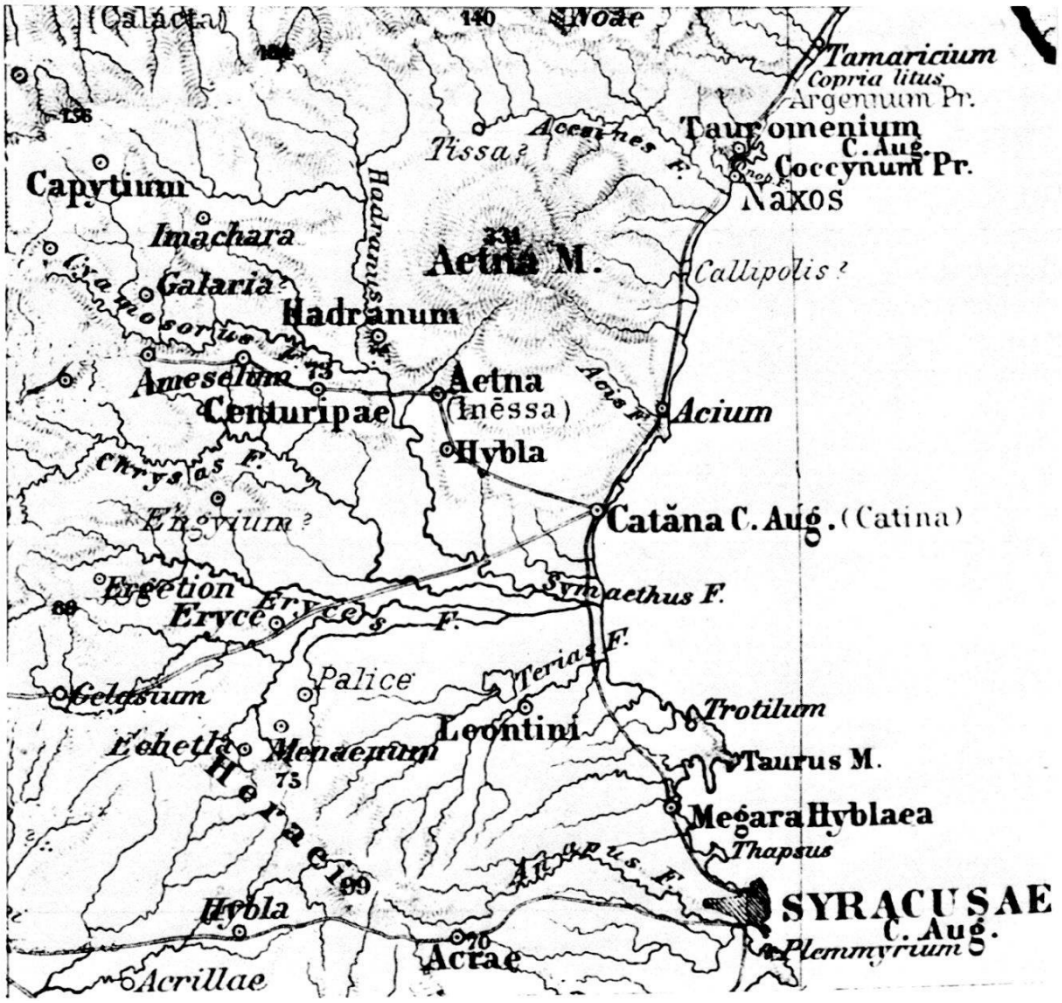
[12]Boehringer 85.

[13]H. A. Cahn, Die Münzen der sizilischen Stadt Naxos (Basel 1944) 120, no. 58; 123, no. 68; 124, no. 71 and 73; 128, no. 87; 133, no. 105. – E. Boehringer, Die Münzen von Syrakus (Berlin 1929) 196 ff., no. 449–462; 211, no. 532; 213, no. 543; 246, no. 704 and 707; 249, no. 721 E.

[14]RE^2 I 1 (1864) 119 f. *s. v.* Acis; RE I 1 (1894) 1170 *s. v.* Akis no. 1 (Hülsen); no. 2 (Wentzel). See also Kl. Pauly I (1964) 218 *s. v.* Akis (K. Ziegler).

[15]Roscher, ML I (1884–1886) 210 *s. v.* Akis (Roscher); L. Preller – C. Robert, Griechische Mythologie I^4 (Berlin 1894) 625 f., note 4.

river gods with inscribed names appear on coins of a whole series of Sicilian cities[16], to which Akis now also joins. The head of Akis, with its youthfulness, follows a new form of representation of river gods on Sicilian coins, which in the last quarter of the 5th century BC replaces the traditional image of older, bearded river gods[17]. The hemilitria will also have been struck during this period.



The river Akis rises on Mount Etna and flows into the sea near the present-day town of Acireale (Fig. 2)[18]. The myth about Akis is recounted in detail by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* 13, 749 ff. According to this, Akis, a son of Faunus and the nymph Symaithis, was in love with the Nereid Galatea. When the Cyclops Polyphemus killed him out of jealousy with a boulder from Etna, he was transformed into the river Akis[19].

[16] Akragas of Akragas: LIMC I, 1981, 447, no. 2, Taf. 341 (C. Arnold–Biucchi); Amenanos of Katane: LIMC a. O. 664, no. 2–5, Taf. 533 (H. A. Cahn); Assinos of Naxos: LIMC II, 1984, 902, Taf. 670 (H. A. Cahn); Hipparis of Kamarina: U. Westermark – K. Jenkins, The Coinage of Kamarina (London 1980) 202 f., no. 164–166.

[17] Cf. H. A. Cahn – L. Mildenberg – R. Russo – H. Voegtli, Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. Griechische Münzen aus Grossgriechenland und Sizilien (Basel 1988) 89, no. 286; 96, no. 314.

[18] On the location see A. Holm, Geschichte Siciliens im Alterthum (Leipzig 1870) 27; W. Sartorius von Waltershausen – A. von Lasaulx, Der Ätna 2 (Leipzig 1880) 179; H. Kiepert, Formae orbis antiqui (Berlin 1894–1906) map XIX (from which the detail shown here in Fig. 2 is taken). – The river today bears the name fiume Aci or fiume di Iaci and is canalized for irrigation purposes.

[19] See also Theokr. 1, 69; Serv. on Verg. ecl. 7, 37; 9, 39. – Cf. also C. Weiss, Griechische Flussgötter in vorhellenistischer Zeit (Würzburg 1984) 68.

With the identification of the obverse image as the river god Akis, the question of the localization of the minting place of these hemilitria arises anew and under changed circumstances. In doing so, one must proceed from the assumption, as the known parallel cases show, that only those cities depicted personifications of rivers on their coins that lay in their vicinity[20]. Kamarina, as Boehringer believes, is therefore ruled out in any case. Unfortunately, the ancient sources are silent about to which settlement's territory the so famous river Akis belonged. According to the topographical location, Katane and Naxos on the coast as well as Aitne/Inessa and Hybla in the interior would be possibilities. The Doric inscription Nika speaks against Katane and Naxos, while the reverse representation, which apparently alludes to a naval victory (or is an abbreviated ethnikon meant after all?), speaks against the two other cities. As a further hypothesis, one might consider whether the coins were struck by a place of the same name located directly on the Akis, which of course cannot be proven more precisely for lack of indisputable evidence. At any rate, a place with the name *Acium* is mentioned as a *statio* in the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* 87, 2, which is to be localized near present-day Acireale at the mouth of the Akis in the sea. The scattered settlement remains and finds in the wider area around Acireale do indeed reach back to the 4th century BC, but point rather to a rural structure than to an independent city[21]. A concrete attribution of the coin type with Akis and aphlast does not seem possible to me at the moment. As a fact, however, it must be stated that the mint must have been located in the east of Sicily near the Akis and Mount Etna.

[20] Cf. the rivers and cities cited above in note 16.

[21] On the archaeological evidence see comprehensively G. Bejor, in: G. Nenci – G. Vallet (eds.), Bibliografia topografica della colonizzazione greca in Italia e nelle isole tirreniche III (Pisa-Roma 1984) 15 ff.; see also R. Wilson, Archaeological Reports London 1987–1988, 117.