

Opinion

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Dyslexia in Tanit's Time?

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Two Epigraphic Siculo-Punic coins reveal an undetected 23 centuries old case of dyslexia

As a 6 years old kid, my grandpa used to walk every Sunday along the beach of Carthage with his father, the orientalist Jean Herszek Spiro, picking up in the sand remains of punic votive stele. 20 pieces were brought back to Switzerland. To develop the tactigraphic method [1], I stamped those I had, and then the ones stored in Carthage. In 1993, I edited my atlas [2] of punic votive stele. #37 carries the punic expression "the people of Carthage".

This "bit of data" turned out to be the key to decipher a Punic legend on 23 centuries old coin sold as Lot 58 at Freeman & Sear Gemini I Auction in 2005 [3] (see Figure 1, r.h.s.). On the reverse of the facing right head of a Goddess Tanit is written: "to the people of the camp". This means that this coin has been minted in order to pay the mercenaries of the camp. The deciphering of the reverse of the left facing Goddess coin, sold at NAC Auction 96 as Lot 1039 in 2016 [4], on the l.h.s. of Figure 1, was far less obvious see Figures 2 !.



Figure 1: Siculo Punic coins labelled in auctions as Lots 1039 & 58.



Figure 2: Details of the reverses of the Siculo Punic Coins & their Legends.

to the people of the camp

Figure 3: Transliteration in English of the Punic legend of the Lot 1039 & 198.

Punic has to be read from right to left. The weird legend of Lot 1039, put into English, looks like a tedious string of words, see Figure 3: The letters are correctly ordered, but... each letter is the mirror image of the expected one. In other word, the mint master carved each individual letters into the die as it would be into just any normal support such as a stela! The interesting feature is that the accompanying notice of Lot 198, another coin minted on the same die, and which has been sold \$250'000 [5], qualified this coin as "an extremely rare master piece, extremely fine, of the highest artistic style..", BUT, failed to report the dyslexic character of the inscription! Maybe the artist was of foreign origin and did not quite master the Punic? Every details of this coin is perfect except the lettering which is more than perfect! The Master engraver obviously focussed obsessively on the detail of each letters, forgetting the overall inscription, i.e.: that the letters belonged to a meaningful text, in exergue on a coin, which imply to carve on the dies the overall mirror image including the iconography! This engraver was obviously suffering under a severe dyslexia or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Perfectionism, even though this unique sample of Punic dyslexia remained unnoticed by generations of scholars!

Acknowledgment

None.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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