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REMARKS ON
TWO UNIQUE COINS OF AETNA AND ZANCLE.

BY
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REMARKS ON TWO UNIQUE COINS OF AETNA AND ZANCLE.

BY BARCLAY V. HEAD, M.R.A.S.

To the excellent descriptions of the two unique silver coins of Aetna and Zancle (Pl. IX. 1 and 2) which the Baron de Hirsch has contributed to the pages of the "Numismatic Chronicle," I may be allowed to add a few comments by way of further illustration.

The marvellous coin of Aetna, now first published, presents us on its reverse with a conception of Zeus in many respects very remarkable, and to the best of my knowledge not found elsewhere on coins. The attributes and adjunct symbols both on obverse and reverse, taken in conjunction with the type, may aid us in particularizing the idea of Zeus which the artist has endeavoured to convey.

They give it a local colouring, so to speak, which the ordinary type of Zeus enthroned, familiar to us all (as e.g. on the coins of Alexander the Great), does not possess.

In the first place the god rests his right hand upon a natural-knotted staff, bent into a crook at the top, instead of upon the ordinary royal sceptre. This peculiarity he shares, as the Baron de Hirsch has pointed out, with the Arcadian Zeus, who was worshipped on the summit of Mount Lycaenum; but on the coin of Aetna the staff is
extremely thin and slight, and exhibits the zigzag appearance which is characteristic of the growth of a stick of vine-wood, which I take it to be.

It can hardly be doubted that the Zeus here represented is the great god of Mount Aetna, the volcanic soil of which was especially favourable to the cultivation of the vine, whence perhaps the vine-staff on which the god rests his arm. See Strab. p. 269. Ἐλασίνθος ὁ ἀνέμος ἰκέων ἑκάστης, τοιοῦτον ἔχων τι ὀλισκαμα πρὸς τὴν ἁμπέλον έικόνα τὴν Ἀιτναῖαν σποδῶν.

Over the whole Aetna region Zeus was worshipped under the name of Zeús Aitnaíōs:

Others Κρόνου παῖς, ὁ Αἰτναύς ἔχεις,
Ἰππον ᾠνειδέσσαν ἐκτορμοκεφάλα
Τυφώνος ὑμβρίμοιο.

Pind. Oi. iv. 10.

In the year B.C. 479 according to the Parian marble, or 475 according to Thucydides (III. 116), occurred the first great eruption of Mount Aetna of which we have any historical record, and it was about this time (B.C. 476) that Hieron took the city of Catana which stood beneath the mountain and changed its name to Aetna, expelling its ancient inhabitants and peopling it afresh with Syracusans. By the new citizens Hieron was solemnly proclaimed ekklesias or founder, κτίστης Αἴτνας. (Pind. Fr. 71).

The city was placed under the special protection of Zeús Aitnaíōs, to whom Pindar has addressed one of his most splendid odes (Pyth. I.), in which in magnificent word-painting he describes the late eruption of the volcano, "Whereout pure springs of unapproachable fire are vomited from the inmost depths; in the day time rivers of lava pour forth a lurid rush of smoke, but in the darkness a red rolling flame beareth rocks with a
TWO UNIQUE COINS OF AETNA AND ZANCLE.

It is noteworthy that across the throne of the god is spread the skin of a lion, or of some other mountain-bred beast of prey, but the most characteristic symbol on the reverse is undoubtedly the Pine tree, ἐλάτη or πεύκη, with which, according to Diodorus (XIV. 42) the slopes of Aetna were once richly clad: τὴν Ἀιτνὴν δρόσο γέμον καὶ ἐκέιον τοὺς χρόνους πολυτελοὺς ἐλάτης τε καὶ πεύκης. So also Pind. *Pyth. I. 58*: Λίτνας ἐν μελαμφύλλιος κορνφαῖς, and on the summit of the Pine-tree, again to use the words of Pindar, “the Eagle of Zeus sleepeth, slackening his swift wings on either side * * * * * and heaving his supple back in slumber.” (*Pyth. I. 10*).

On the reverse we note therefore two indications (the staff of vine-wood and the pine-tree) that the deity represented is the presiding god of Mount Aetna, beneath whose shadow the city stood.

The obverse type and adjunct symbol are also equally characteristic of the place of issue. Seilenos, as we learn from Euripides’ Satyrical drama Kyklopes, was enslaved by Polyphemos, and dwelt in the caves of Aetna with his savage master. More generally the head of Seilenos may be taken as pointing to the cultus of Dionysos, who, as we know from other coins, was especially revered at Catana; but, as if still further to specialize the locality, the artist has placed beneath the head of Seilenos one of those huge
scarabai, κάθαρος, for which Mount Aetna was celebrated. See Aristophanes, _Plac. 73_:

εἰσήγαγ' Ἀιτναίον μέγαστον κάθαρον,

and the Scholiast's remarks on this passage:


With regard to the time of issue it may be remarked that Catana bore the name of Aetna for about fifteen years, but in B.C. 461, its old inhabitants drove out the Aetnaeans and the city once more recovered its original appellation.

In point of style the tetradrachm of Aetna exhibits some technical peculiarities which are noticeable on certain other Sicilian coins struck apparently before B.C. 476. Thus the hard stiff folds in which the _iûmâs_ of _Zeus_ falls about his body bear a close resemblance to the folds of the chiton of _Nike_ on a tetradrachm of Catana (B. M. _Guide_, Pl. IX. 25); and the somewhat awkward way in which the eagle with closed wings sits above, but not actually touching the top of the pine-tree, may be compared with the equally unusual manner of depicting a bird (in this case an aquatic bird) with closed wings, standing, without any support, in the field of the obverse of the same coin of Catana, above the back of the bull.

In fabric, as well as in style, these two coins resemble one another so closely (cf. the circular incuse, the border of dots, &c.) that one might almost be justified in ascribing them to the same workshop of the same engraver.
Another coin which in style is also extremely like our Aetnaean tetradrachm is the unique piece of Himera in the cabinet of the Prince of Waldeck (Imhoof. Mon. Gr. Pl. B. 3). On this coin also the Nymph Himera wears an ample peplos, the folds of which are indicated in precisely the same stiff and linear manner which is so remarkable on the coin of Aetna. All three pieces are certainly almost contemporary, and the date of the Aetna coin B.C. 476—461 may serve to fix the date, within a little, of the other two.

Let us now turn to the tetradrachm of Zancle of Attic weight (Pl. IX. 2). This coin is not only of the highest metrological interest, as the Baron de Hirsch and Dr. Imhoof-Blumer have already pointed out, but it is a document of considerable archaeological importance for the history of Greek art.

From the very advanced style of the figure of the striding Zeus on the obverse I should have been inclined to attribute it to about the middle of the fifth century, but according to our historical data the name of Zancle was no longer in use after the death of Anaxilas in B.C. 476, it having been superseded by that of Messana already at the time of the first occupation of Zancle by a mixed body of Samians and Messanians, B.C. 494 (Herod. VII., 164), or on the expulsion of the Samians by Anaxilas some time before his death in B.C. 476 (Thuc. VI. 5), τούς δὲ Σαμίους Ἀναξίλαος Ρήγων τῷ τόπῳ δύο πάλιν τὸν άστερον ἑκβαλὼν καὶ τὴν πάλιν αὐτὸς (sodd. αὐτοῖς) ἐνεμίκησεν ἄθροισιν οἰκίας, Μεσσάνην ἀπὸ τῆς Αττικῆς τῷ Αρχαιοποιήσατο ἄνωθεν. Unless, therefore, we suppose that the name Zancle was not entirely discarded (cf. Paus. VI. ii. 10—where mention is made of the ancient Zanclaeans at a later period as distinct from the Messanians), we are compelled to fix the
date of this most remarkable coin before B.C. 476. It may, however, be accepted as good evidence that the name of Zancle was not abandoned as early as B.C. 494. Even for a work dating from 476 the freedom of style and mastery of anatomical detail exhibited in the attitude of the figure of Zeus are, so far as I know, unexampled on any other ancient monument.

To the accurate descriptions of the other coins given by the Baron de Hirsch I have nothing to add, except that the coin of Gela (Pl. IX., 5) is not from the same die as the specimen in the British Museum (B. M. Guide, Pl. XVI. 24). My friend, Dr. Hermann Weber, has, however, lately acquired a specimen of this rare piece, unfortunately in poor preservation, which is from the same dies as the remarkably fine specimen photographed on the Baron de Hirsch’s plate.

As it is always satisfactory to be able to trace the provenance of coins as important as those of Aetna and Zancle, I may mention that I have been informed that for many years past these two coins have lain in the cabinet of a well-known private collector at Catania, where they were seen some ten or fifteen years ago by Prof. Salinas of Palermo, and by Dr. Imhoof-Blumer. On the death of their original possessor they were offered for sale, with the rest of the collection, by Signor Verga, one of the heirs. The British Museum not being in a position to give the large sum demanded for the collection, which, moreover, consisted for the most part of ordinary Sicilian coins already represented in the national coin cabinet, the whole was acquired by the late Signor Castellani, from whom the rarest specimens have passed into the cabinet of the Baron de Hirsch.
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COINS OF SICILY.

The image shows various coins from Sicily, each with distinct designs and inscriptions, illustrating the diversity and historical significance of Sicilian coins.