

# Rethinking early Carthaginian coinage

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The coins minted by the Carthaginians in silver, gold, electrum, billon and bronze comprise one of the largest coinages that circulated in the W Mediterranean before the Roman conquest. They provide essential information on both the history and economy of Carthage and on Carthaginian interactions with their neighbors, allies and adversaries. Carthaginian bronze coins, in particular, are frequently found throughout the Punic world, in each of its core regions (N Africa from Tripolitania to Algeria, Sicily, Sardinia, Ibiza and the southernmost Iberian peninsula), as well as in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Yet few accounts of Carthage and the Punic Wars take Carthaginian coinage into consideration, and an emphasis on Greek and Latin literary sources continues to drive the narrative.<sup>2</sup> Of course, in evaluating the political and economic implications of numismatic evidence one needs to distinguish from the start between the issues of the Carthage mint and those of other mints that struck coins under Carthaginian authority. Carthaginian coinage did not follow a linear path of development. As the Carthaginians began to produce coins in Sicily earlier than in N Africa, the start of minting at Carthage deserves careful scrutiny. This essay, based upon an ongoing study of Carthaginian bronze and billon coins, will review the history of modern scholarship and current research on Carthaginian coinage, focussing upon the formative period of the Carthage mint between c.350 and 300 B.C. in order to define the main aspects of its output, its relevance for the monetization of the Carthaginian homeland, and the sequence of the earliest issues.

## *Intellectual background*

Punic numismatics has come a long way since 1631, when Thomas d'Arcos, a Frenchman captured by the Barbary pirates, first described as 'Carthaginian' some Punic bronze coins he had acquired in Tunis. He sent them as a gift to Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, a European scholar who was one of the earliest collectors of Carthaginian coins.<sup>3</sup> It was

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\* *Frequently used abbreviations:*

IGCH = M. Thompson, O. Mørkholm and C. M. Kraay (edd.), *An inventory of Greek coin hoards* (New York 1973);

SNG Copenhagen = G. K. Jenkins (ed.), *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Danish National Museum*, fasc. 42. *North Africa Syrtica–Mauretania* (Copenhagen 1969).

- 1 For the geographical extent of the Punic world and a definition of the term 'Punic', see P. van Dommelen and C. Gómez Bellard (edd.), *Rural landscapes of the Punic world* (Gateshead 2008) 3-5; S. F. Bondi, "Phoenicity, punicity," in J. Crawley Quinn and N. C. Vella (edd.), *The Punic Mediterranean. Identities and identification from Phoenician settlement to Roman rule* (Cambridge 2014) 58-62.
- 2 Cf. S. Lancel (transl. A. Nevill), *Carthage. A history* (Oxford 1995); T. Cornell, B. Rankov and P. Sabin (edd.), *The Second Punic War. A reappraisal* (London 1996); D. Hoyos, *Hannibal's dynasty. Power and politics in the western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC* (London 2003); id., *The Carthaginians* (New York 2010); id. (ed.), *A companion to the Punic Wars* (Chichester 2011); R. Miles, *Carthage must be destroyed* (New York 2010); Y. Le Bohec, *Histoire militaire des guerres puniques 264-146 av. J.-C.* (Paris 2014). There is no mention of the economy of Carthage in Z. H. Archibald, J. K. Davies and V. Gabrielsen (edd.), *The economies of Hellenistic societies, third to first centuries BC* (Oxford 2011).
- 3 P. Tamizey de Larroque (ed.), *Les correspondants de Peiresc: lettres inédites, publiées, et annotées* (Geneva 1972) 197: "Un paquet de médailles et monnoyes (*sic*) antiques et cartaginoises. Les Cartaginoises n'ont point d'inscription et portent un cheval ou teste de cheval avec quelque palme d'un côté et une teste de l'autre". For Peiresc's collection of Carthaginian coins, see P. N. Miller, *Peiresc's Orient. Antiquarianism as cultural history in the seventeenth century* (Padstow