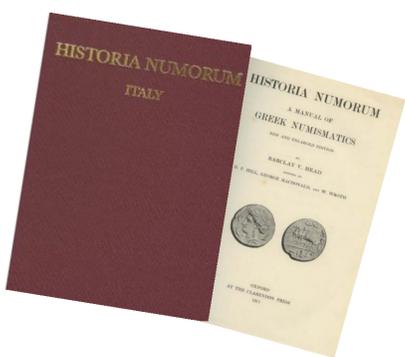


Historia Numorum³

Sicily and Adjacent Islands

What is *Historia Numorum*?

Historia Numorum (HN) provides an account of the development of Greek coins in their historical contexts. The volume on *Sicily and the Adjacent Islands* includes Greek and Punic issues, and local coins produced under Roman rule; they range from the early 5th century BC to Tiberius (AD 14-37). This book radically revises and up-dates information of the first publication of HN in 1886 by B.V. Head and its 2nd edition in 1911. It is part of the new edition initiated with the volume on Italy published in 2001 (ed. N.K. Rutter).



Historia Numorum is an innovative and unique research project which will result in the compilation of a reference book from existing catalogues, museum collections and coins from excavations, which have not yet been seen in publishing. This influential publication shall provide a complete reference work of Sicilian coinage for numismatic scholars, classical researchers and coin collectors. One of the innovative factors is close attention paid to the weight of the coins. The URSS research focused on the weights of Syracuse, the most powerful city of Eastern Sicily throughout antiquity.

Recording Process

To begin with, we used existent catalogues of Sicilian coins and collected information about the Syracusan coins in Excel spreadsheets. We recorded their weight, the collection they originate from and any symbol they bear, and calculated the mean weight and standard deviation of each coin type. In total we catalogued 2,266 coins.

We spent a week conducting research in the Coins and Medals Department at the British Museum on many hitherto un-catalogued coins. This will provide the reference work with original information.

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Case study

These two coins are very similar on first look, but they belong to different series of the same type. They are both from Sicily, and from the time of Hieron II, who reigned from 275–215 BC.

The graph below illustrates that as well as having a higher frequency, coins of series B, have a lower weight than those in series A. The table below outlines this and other differences between the two coin series.

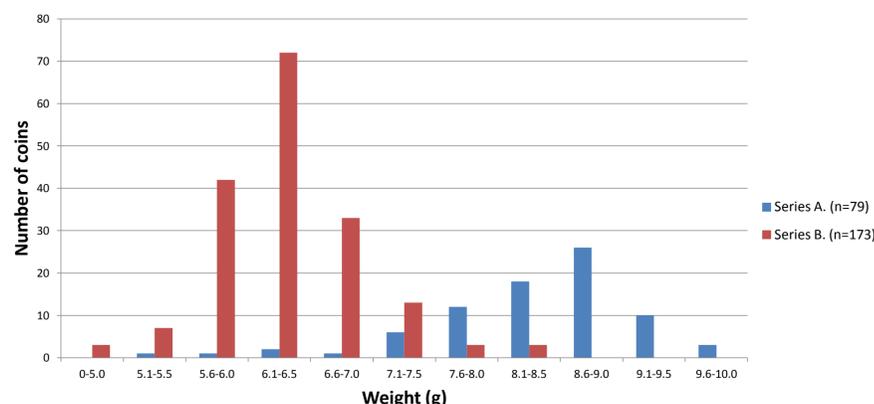
	Fig. A	Fig. B
Weight average (g)	8.39 (from 79 coins)	6.93 (from 173 coins)
Obverse	Head of Poseidon, sculpted and voluminous	Head of Poseidon, cruder detailing
Reverse	Trident with long shaft and vegetal decoration	Trident with short and wider shaft. The spirals in the trident curl in the opposite direction
Legend	IEP - ΩΝΟΣ	IEPΩ - ΝΟΣ
Lead content	>2%	22-25%



Fig. a is dated to c. 269/64-240, Fig. b was made later, probably c. 240-215 BC (both figures from <http://www.coinarchives.com>).

The reduction of the weight in Series B is combined with a substantial adjunction of lead as shown by recent research. Lead is not only less expensive than copper, but also lowers the melting point. Both made the coin production less expensive. If the coins' face value was the same as before, the state made considerable profit. This is to be explained as a consequence of the First Punic War (264-241 BC) which opposed Rome and Carthage. Hieron II of Syracuse was on the Roman side. The decrease of the weight and the addition of lead are part of the tentative to meet the financial problems caused by the war.

Bar chart to compare the weights of both series



Why study coins?

Numismatics is the study of coins, paper currency and medals. Coins are a vital source of primary evidence for the study of ancient history and archaeology. It is unique in that they can provide much information independent from other sources. Coins are a reliable source of information as they were mass produced and disseminated. They provide information on economical asset, political propaganda, how a ruler or a community wished to be perceived, and religious cults of the area. They can be dated with knowledge of rulers and mints, and thus are indispensable for the dating other objects found in the strata (archaeological layers).

Why study weights?

Although there are no written sources on the weights of coins, by studying the weights we can discern links between coin types or groups. The weight can help to define coin types, and with the consideration that local coinages worked on various weight systems, studying the weights of coins can help us place certain coins in accordance to the mint and their chronological order. Moreover, metal is a value, and its manipulation by the minting authority reveals economic and political measures.



We must also remember that in antiquity the production of individual coins though controlled was not standardised to the same extent as today. Weights varied from coin to coin. Therefore average weights are calculated in order to evaluate the intention of the producer to meet a standard. In reference works as *Historia Numorum* weights help the user to identify the coin they are looking up.

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