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The Wreath of Naxos and Some Thoughts on an Unwreathed Wreathed (?) Archaic Naxian Stater in *ACANS*

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In 2006 the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS) purchased a rather battered archaic stater (Fig. 1) minted by the largest and most important of all the central Aegean islands, Naxos.¹ At first glance it would appear that the coin's emblem, a kantharos or wine cup (a symbol of Dionysos and thus appropriate to the god's island), was not decorated with an ivy wreath and no wreath is mentioned in the dealer's catalogue.² Only the earliest staters of this mint (produced between *ca.* 540/30 and 520/15 BC) depict a kantharos with a neat wreath of ivy just below the lip of the vessel, and one might then put the new coin with the more numerous 'unwreathed kantharos' staters issued between *ca.* 520/15 and 490 BC. But this would be a hasty decision: the reverse die can be matched with that of a wreathed Naxian stater contained in the 1990 Hoard: Sheedy *Cyclades* Naxos 10 (R10) (Fig. 2).³ In addition to examining evidence for the true type of this stater, in this brief article I plan to review the significance of the wreath in our understanding of one of the earliest issues of Greek silver coinage.

The fact that the archaic coins of Naxos could be divided between those in which the kantharos was decorated with a wreath and

those without has been well known for some time. Jameson, for example, dated the wreathed staters 'vers 550 BC' in the 1913 catalogue of his collection, and the unwreathed coins 'vers 500 BC', but he did not provide any evidence for this suggestion, and it is indeed misleading to suggest that the two series are divided by a half century.⁴ In 1962 Ross Holloway claimed that the unwreathed staters came before the wreathed coins.⁵ He argued that the wreath of ivy leaves had been placed on the kantharos to mark a key event in Naxian history, the defeat of a Persian attempt to subjugate the island in 500 BC. In Book 5, 28-37, Herodotos tells us that the Persian king Darius had been persuaded by Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletos, to attack the richest of the Cyclades with a fleet of some 200 ships and the assistance of Naxian exiles. After a siege of four months the Persians retired (leaving the Naxian exiles to continue the battle). According to Holloway, the wreath, as a crown around the vessel; was 'in every respect a fitting celebration of their triumph'.⁶ Furthermore, the ivy wreath had a special significance for it was a symbol of Dionysos who had conquered the East. Holloway's comparison with the symbolism of Dionysos (including ivy



Figure 1 (a) and (b). Macquarie University. ACANS inv. 07A1.



Figure 2 (a) and (b). 'Wreathed' Naxian stater from the 1990 Hoard.

crowns) employed by Alexander the Great to celebrate his conquest of the East suggests that this last idea was a little forced; Dionysos and Alexander both claimed victory over people far to the East, in central Asia (and thus in virtually mythical lands), rather than the Persians. But the wreath nonetheless still makes a good victory symbol.

Holloway compares the Naxian wreath with the crown of olive leaves placed around the helmet of Athena on Athenian coins minted after 480 BC as a symbol of Athenian victory in the Persian Wars—suggesting that the Athenians imitated the Naxian example. In addition, he found that the kantharos was also symbolic of ships built on Naxos (ref. in *Suidas*) and went on to speculate that 'the wreath of the kantharos is also a garland of victory decorating the warships of Naxos'.⁷ But the ships of Naxos played no part in the island's survival in 500 BC; rather, the Naxians shut themselves in behind their walls and withstood a siege. It was certainly no mean feat to ward off a Persian attack of such magnitude (though one wonders how ready or how skilled the Persians were in siege warfare). It must

have evoked mixed feelings to find that the enemy was assisted by exiles who, as noted above, continued the attack after the Persians withdrew, so that the siege degenerated into a form of civil war. It was hardly a victory to compare with the Athenian defeat of the Persians in massed battles on land and sea, but it was a victory.

On the basis of this proposed link with the Persian attack in 500 BC Holloway concluded that the wreathed staters followed an earlier production of unwreathed kantharos coins (Fig. 4). He then dated the wreathed issues between 500 and 490 BC when the island was finally overrun by the Persians. The evidence of hoards and the technique of manufacture demonstrate that this order is incorrect. Wreathed staters are confined to three hoards (Santorin, Demanhur and 1990) made up of coins from the 6th century BC (though the Demanhur Hoard may possibly belong to the decade 500–490 BC), while unwreathed staters occur in 6th and 5th century BC finds. The wreathed staters are generally smaller, dumber coins which resemble the earliest issues of Aegina.⁸ In comparison with the unwreathed staters, the incuses created by the wreathed reverse



Figure 3. Enlargement of Figure 1a.



Figure 4 (a) and (b). 'Unwreathed' Naxian stater. Triton VII (2004) lot 217 (12.35g).

dies are smaller, and are sunk deeper into the flan, creating thin-walled interior divisions. While all of the wreathed coins were manufactured using reverse dies which did not flatten the surface of the coin around the incuse a number of the unwreathed reverse dies did flatten this part of the coin, and as this is a later development in the technology of Greek minting. I have suggested that the wreathed coins were minted between *ca.* 540/530 and 520/515 BC, and that the unwreathed coins were produced in the following years down to around 490 BC.⁹

Let us return to our coin. On this enlargement of the damaged obverse type of the *ACANS* coin (Fig. 3) we can arguably see traces of an ivy wreath to either side of the kantharos wall, notably to the left. I suspect that this stater was produced from the same obverse die as the 1990 Hoard coin (Fig. 2) to which it is linked on the reverse, but this coin is also damaged and the type has been distorted (especially the handles). At present there is no evidence that the reverse dies employed for the production of wreathed coins were ever re-used with the later unwreathed series. Furthermore, the state of the

reverse die when used to strike first our stater and then later the 1990 Hoard stater coin was already poor; there were already a number of large cracks in the die. This indicates that it was approaching the end of its working life.

It is worth reviewing the catalogue of archaic Naxian staters in order to consider the relative size of the two series (Sheedy *Cyclades* 193–200). Prior to the sale of our stater, there were 19 known specimens of the wreathed kantharos, the product of 8 obverse and 11 reverse dies. Using Good's formula for the calculation of the number of dies employed at the mint on the basis of the surviving sample, we apparently have around 84% of the total obverse dies used (which gives an estimate of 9–10 dies) and 63% of the total number of reverse dies (giving a predicted total of 17–18 dies).¹⁰ In contrast, there are some 58 unwreathed staters recorded; the 32 known obverse dies are an estimated 62% of the total, and the 41 known reverse dies are 47% of the total used. Wreathed staters are then quite rare.

Let us consider provenance.¹¹ Naxian wreathed staters are known to have occurred in only one hoard discovered

during the 19th century: the Santorin

hoard (*IGCH* 7), a find of some 760 coins made on the island of Thera in around 1821. Since then single examples have been added from the Demanhur hoard in Egypt (*IGCH* 1637: found 1900–1901) and the 1990 Hoard from the Eastern Mediterranean (*CH* VIII, 8). The Santorin hoard is believed to have contained 14 Naxian staters. Nicolet-Pierre has suggested that those archaic Naxian staters which first appear in collections between 1821 and 1880 were most probably all from this hoard: she lists 7 wreathed and 7 unwreathed coins.¹² It is quite possible that there were more wreathed Naxian staters in this find; the listing of 14 examples made by Borrell seems to have been only that part shown to him.¹³ Of the 20 wreathed staters known today, just over half (11) had appeared by the end of the 19th century. Over three-quarters (17) were known by 1930. Since 1930, more than 70 years ago, only another three wreathed coins have come to notice—four if we now included the ACANS stater.

Why was the wreath removed? It is noticeable that the types of the earliest archaic Greek coinages were often subject to modifications. Perhaps the most famous example is Athens, which began issuing coins with the changing *Wappenmünzen* types before adopting the standard head of Athena.¹⁴ The largest 6th century BC mint in the Aegean, that of Aegina, experimented with several different types of turtle shell (proto-trefoil collar, proto-heavy collar, etc.) before deciding on the

Paros, the great rival of Naxos, the first obverse type depicted a goat above a leaping dolphin; the dolphin was soon abandoned (perhaps only two obverse dies were ever employed).¹⁶ We might note that the dolphin on these Parian staters lies near the edge of the coin; it is in relatively low relief in comparison to the high central goat emblem and tends not to be clearly struck. In addition, it can be further obscured by wear. On reviewing the surviving wreathed Naxian staters we can see that because the line of the wreath occurs close to the highest point of the type (the rim of the kantharos) it also tends to be obscured by wear to the coin (just as the nose of facing heads on coins tends to be rubbed flat). When the surface of the obverse was damaged the wreath might disappear completely (as has almost happened on the ACANS stater). I would suggest that the Naxian mint recognised that early wear to the wreath of the kantharos type could make the coin look prematurely worn, and so made the decision to omit it from the design. Why should this have been a concern? I think the answer is that coins with worn types suggested to those who received them that the weight of the coin had been reduced, and that they would be foolish to accept them at the value prescribed by the authorities. It may then have been a practical concern with the reputation of the coinage which led the Naxian mint authorities to adjust the type rather than an interest in iconography.

thin collar variety that became the typical archaic turtle form.¹⁵ On neighbouring

Notes

1. Macquarie University. ACANS inv. 07A1.

Sheedy (2006) Naxos catalogue number	Current location	Earliest known appearance	Hoard	Hoard discovery date
2	Paris	1862	Santorin	1821
9b	Paris	1829	Santorin	1821
6a	Paris	1829	Santorin	1821
9b	Paris	1835	Santorin	1821
4a	London (PK)	1824	Santorin	1821
5	London (PK)	1824	Santorin	1821
11a	London (PK)	1824	Santorin	1821
Late 19th century				
6b	Athens	1894		
4e	Market	1896		
4d	Market	1897		
9	Vienna	1895–1900		
Early 20th century				
8	Berlin	1906		
11b	New York	1909		
1	Formerly Gotha	1927	Demanhur	1900–1901
1910–1930				
4c	Paris	1911		
4b	Cambridge	1923		
3	Market	1929		
1930 to present				
7	Berlin	1955		
12	Market	1990		
10	Market	1994	1990 Hoard	1990
+	ACANS	2006		

- 10.25g. On the early mint of Naxos see K A Sheedy, *The Archaic and Early Classical Coinages of the Cyclades*. *RNS SP 40* (London 2006) 86–92, here abbreviated as Sheedy *Cyclades*. I wish to thank the journal's anonymous reviewer for corrections and advice.
- Spink *Numismatic Circular* 2006 (CXIV: 6) GK2106.
 - Sheedy *Cyclades* 194, cat. 10 = J Kagan, 'An Archaic Greek Coin Hoard from the Eastern Mediterranean and Early Cypriot Coinage', *Numismatic Chronicle* 1994, 22–23, cat. 21.
 - R Jameson, *Monnaies grecques antiques* (Paris 1913) vol. 1, 303, cat. 1305–6.
 - R R Holloway, 'The Crown of Naxos', *American Numismatic Society. Museum Notes* 10 (1962) 1–8.
 - Holloway *op. cit.* (n.5) 4.
 - Holloway *op. cit.* (n.5) 4.
 - R R Holloway, 'An Archaic Hoard from Crete and the Early Aeginetan Coinage', *American Numismatic Society. Museum Notes* 17 (1971) 1–21.
 - Sheedy *Cyclades* 86–92.
 - Sheedy *Cyclades* 88–89, 154.
 - Most of the information concerning the acquisition of these coins was obtained from H Nicolet-Pierre, 'Naxos (Cyclades) archaïque: monnaie et histoire. La frappe des "canthares", de la fin du VIe siècle', *Numismatica e Antichita*

- Classiche* 26 (1997) 63–121. I thank Dr Dembski for information concerning the Vienna stater (Sheedy *Cyclades Naxos* 9).
12. Nicolet-Pierre, *op. cit.* (n.11) 63–121.
 13. H P Borrell, ‘Unedited autonomous and imperial Greek coins’, *Numismatic Chronicle* 1843–44, 134.
 14. C M Kraay, *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins* (London 1976) 60–63.
 15. *Ibid.*, 41–49.
 16. Sheedy *Cyclades* 94–96.

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