

Cartography on Carthaginian Gold Staters

The mysterious markings on gold staters produced by Carthage between 350 and 320 B.C.E. appear to be stylized maps.

A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR students of early cartography is that most maps were created using lightweight, easily transported and hence perishable materials. Some maps, however, were made of more durable substances. According to a 1967 article by A.E.M. Johnston, published in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, one of the oldest, extant Greek maps is found on a coin minted by Memnon of Rhodes and represents a relief map of the hinterland of Ephesus.

Along the same lines, I have discovered stylized maps on Carthaginian coins minted between 350 and 320 B.C.E. These gold staters are classified by G.K. Jenkins and R.B. Lewis in their 1963 reference *Carthaginian Gold and Electrum Coins* as belonging to Group IIIa. The maps can be seen on the reverses, in the exergue, below a bold image of the Punic horse.

The hitherto problematic markings in the exergue of these Carthaginian coins are discussed by Jenkins and Lewis, and by L. Müller in the second volume of his 1860 work *Numismatique de l'Ancienne Afrique*. Müller claimed to be able to read these "inscriptions" as EL.AE, explaining them as abbreviations for two personal names. Jenkins and Lewis ruled out Müller's hypothesis on the basis that the Punic letter "E" is found only in Neo-Punic and does not

by Mark McMenamin

The Phoenicians, and especially the Carthaginians, were known for their prowess as navigators and seamen. Carthage, on the north coast of Africa near the site of modern Tunis, dominated the western basin of the Mediterranean.



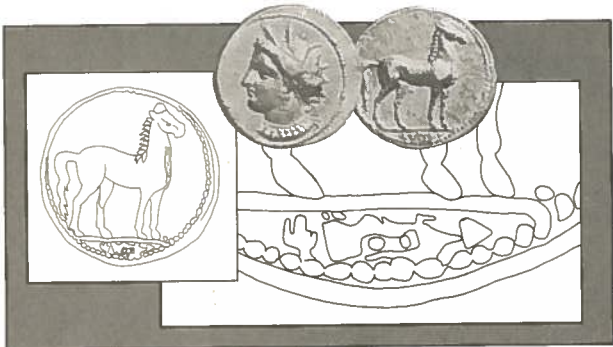


Figure 1: The reverse of a Carthaginian gold stater (Jenkins-Lewis 11) shows a map in the exergue. Note the rectangular Mediterranean basin and the central dot representing Sardinia. Britain and Ireland are visible above the Iberian peninsula. The triangular landmass at the right may be India; the irregular shape at the left may be America.

appear in inscriptions until the 1st century B.C.E. Nevertheless, Jenkins and Lewis were frankly puzzled by the inscription-like patterns, which they considered a "baffling problem." They felt these images seemed "quite unnecessarily obscure by comparison with the inscriptions on other Punic coins of the same date" and that it was reasonable to question the nature of the "inscription."

This problem is resolved, I believe, by recognizing that the putative inscription actually is a schematic map of the Mediterranean region. The pattern is best observed in Specimen #11 of Jenkins and Lewis, shown in Figure 1. Based on this premise, the central rectangular incuse in the exergue pattern represents the Mediterranean basin; the right edge of the incuse is the Levant coast of the Phoenician homeland. The lower

edge represents the north coast of Africa. The lower left corner narrows to a point, representing the Strait of Gibraltar, and the top edge represents the southern coast of Europe, from southern Spain to east of Italy. The two dots within the incuse area are Sardinia (left) and Sicily (right).

The triangular image to the right of the incuse rectangle, which is connected by a narrow land bridge, represents India. England and Ireland appear as small protrusions to the north of the Iberian peninsula.

Of compelling interest is the landmass portrayed to the west of the Iberian peninsula. On this coin, it appears as a three- or four-pronged island much larger than Sardinia or Sicily. The landmass also can be seen on other Punic coins.

Figure 2 shows details of the exergue of a second coin, Jenkins-Lewis 9-1. The Mediterranean portion of the map appears to be drawn on a larger scale. It accurately reflects both the position of Sardinia and the northeast trending to southwest trending inflection in the southern European coastline in the vicinity of Genoa. The unknown landmass again appears to the west. Figure 3 shows another specimen (Jenkins-Lewis 9-2), struck from the same reverse die, with dots to the west of India that may represent islands and landmasses on the west side of the Bay of Bengal.

In Figure 4 (Jenkins-Lewis 4), the geographical entities are very stylized. Sardinia again appears as the central dot, and Sicily shows up as a triangle next to the boot of Italy. The Gulf of Gades

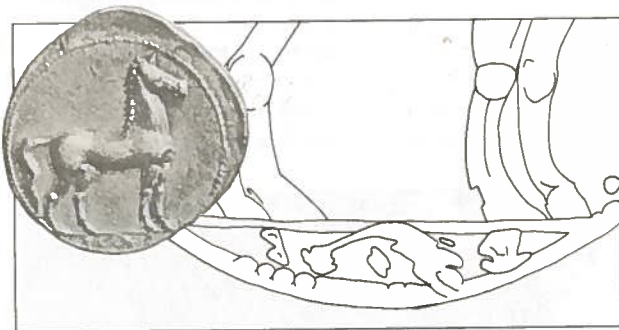


Figure 2: In a close-up of the exergue of Jenkins-Lewis 9-1, a central dot represents Sardinia; the boomerang shape above represents the southern coast of Europe from the Côte d'Azur to the west coast of Italy, with the bend or inflection in the boomerang being near the site of present-day Genoa. Shapes to the left and right may represent America and India, respectively, as on Jenkins-Lewis 11, described above.

(Cadiz) is clearly visible as an arc, with the Strait of Gibraltar separating the Gulf of Gades from a horizontal line denoting the northwestern coast of Africa. A blob-like landmass again looms to the west.

The island of Sardinia is the most prominent and constant feature of all these maps. It is the "central dot" mentioned by Jenkins and Lewis. Its pivotal position is a reflection of the fact that Sardinia was, according to S. Lancel in *Carthage: A History*, "the key factor in Carthaginian domination of the western basin of the Mediterranean." (This portrayal of Sardinia appears on later coins. On the reverse of Spain's 1980-82 5 pesetas commemorating the World Cup Soccer Games, it is the central dot nested below the arched coastline of southwest Europe, visible between the A and Ñ of ESPAÑA.

The Phoenicians, and especially the Carthaginians, were known throughout the ancient world for their prowess as navigators and seamen. The intriguing possibility exists that the landmass portrayed to the west of Spain in Figures 1 through 4 represents an area in the Americas, perhaps the coast of Brazil. If so, these coins could provide direct and well-dated evidence that Carthaginians had made contact with the New World.

Sources

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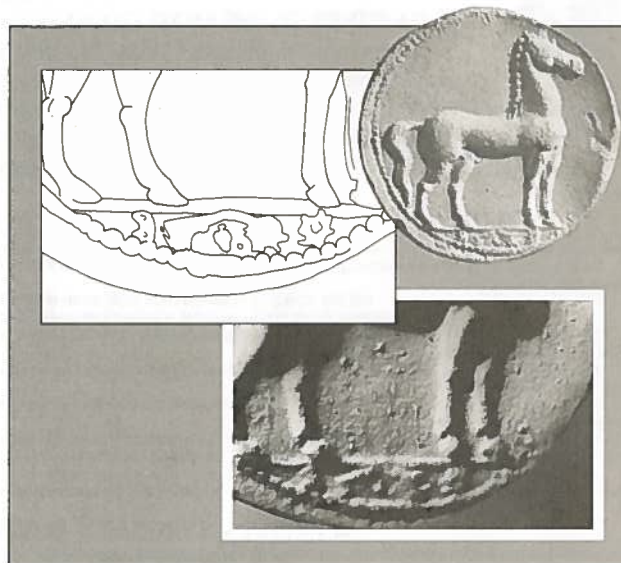


Figure 3: A closeup of the exergue of Jenkins-Lewis 9-2 shows a central dot for Sardinia, with the boomerang shape above representing the southern coast of Europe from the Côte d'Azure to the west coast of Italy. These are flanked by America (left) and India.

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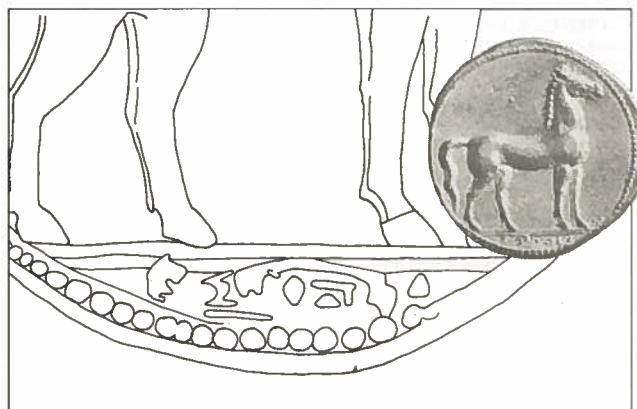


Figure 4: Geographic entities on the map on Jenkins-Lewis 4 are (from left) America; the Iberian Peninsula, showing an arcuate Gulf of Gades; a straight line representing the northwest coast of Africa, positioned below the Iberian Peninsula; Sardinia as a central dot, with the coast of southern Europe above; Sicily, with an L-shaped Italy above; Greece on the east end of the southern European coast; and India.