

## SOME NEO-PUNIC COIN LEGENDS

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The corpus of Punic and Neo-Punic coin-legends are now available in the attractive edition "Monete Puniche"<sup>1</sup> by L.-I. Manfredi. As always with collections such as this is one, several points remain where one may differ of opinion. We note especially the reading of a sign occurring, it seems, on several coins as the letter z. In several instances this reading has a long tradition, but this does not necessarily mean that it is correct; on the other hand, newer readings, which cannot stand, are also given. We note only a few instances (numbers and page references are referring to MP): 1) NB 31, p. 270. 2) NB 139, 142, p. 292, 293.

As far as the second case is concerned, should the drawings given on pp. 292 and 293 be more or less correct and trustworthy, one wonders why different readings are given. There seems to be no real difference of letters between the word read in NB 138 as *b<sup>c</sup>lt* and as *zb<sup>c</sup>l* in NB 139 (see fig. 1), and the same holds true for NB 141, where the reading *b<sup>c</sup>lt* again seems also more appropriate.<sup>2</sup> These readings were, of course, also adopted by Müller<sup>3</sup> and Mazard.<sup>4</sup> The occurrence of *b<sup>c</sup>lt* on coins, whatever its precise meaning, has been well known and documented for a long time and does not need any additional proof (cf. NB 62-65, 71, 218-219). Discussing this legend Manfredi remarks: "Le monete NB 141-142 presentano accanto al toponimo una parola che può leggersi come *zb<sup>c</sup>l*, in cui z corrisponde al pronome relativo *š* attestato nelle emissioni della stessa zecca, ma di epoca augustea, con al rovescio la raffigurazione di Oceano e la leggenda *šb<sup>c</sup>l tyn(...)* (NB 151-152).

<sup>1</sup>Lorenza-Ilia Manfredi, *Monete Puniche, Repertorio Epigrafico e Numismatico delle Leggende Puniche*, Bollettino di Numismatica, Monografia 6, Roma 1995 (=MP).

<sup>2</sup>The reading of *zb<sup>c</sup>l* in NB 141, not mentioned in the catalogue on p. 292, but cf. p. 137 sub nr. 66, cannot really be checked with the drawing, but the reading *b<sup>c</sup>lt* is at least equally possible.

<sup>3</sup>L. Müller, *Numismatique de l'Ancienne Afrique*, ouvrage préparé et commencé par C. T. Falbe et J. Chr. Lindberg, refait, achevé et publié par L. Müller, ii, Copenhague 1861, id. iii, Copenhague 1862; id., Supplément, Copenhague 1874, see vol. iii, pp. 144-145, 149ff.

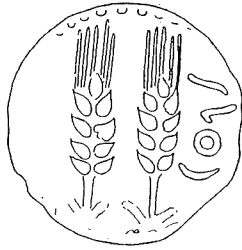
<sup>4</sup>J. Mazard, *Corpus nummorum Numidiae Mauretaniaeque*, Paris 1955, pp. 180f., 589-594.

Tale leggenda e correntemente resa come *mb<sup>cl</sup> / mp<sup>cl</sup> tyn(...)*, ma il primo segno può agevolmente essere letto come *šin*, che è la forma graficamente corretta del pronome relativo e che corrisponde alla più antica formula *šb<sup>cl</sup> s̄ys* attestata sulle emissioni di Panormo-*s̄ys*. L'espressione *zb<sup>cl</sup>* delle monete NB 141-142 e quella *šb<sup>cl</sup>* delle serie NB 151-152 è la medesima e va resa come "dei cittadini di", in quanto in neopunico è ampiamente attestato lo scambio tra *šin* e *zayin*". Note that the reading *zb<sup>cl</sup>* is not mentioned for NB 139, although it is given in the catalogue. Its relation to the *šb<sup>cl</sup>*-legend is not really illuminating as the relation *b<sup>cl</sup>l - mb<sup>cl</sup>* has been accepted for a long time, and the remark that the interchange of *z* and *š* is widely attested in Neo-Punic is debatable at best. Most supposed instances should preferably be seen as graphical uncertainties, rather than as an interchange of phonemes, since *z* and *š* in Neo-Punic sometimes look more or less like each other. In this case there is however no question of a *zayin* of this type being written. The question whether in some (or all ?) instances of *mb<sup>cl</sup>* the reading *šb<sup>cl</sup>* should be preferred is an altogether different one.

The first case is more interesting. The reading *przmš* on the obverse legend of NB 31 (see fig. 2) was already proposed in the 19th century, cf. e.g. Müller.<sup>5</sup> Since then our understanding of the Neo-Punic script has increased considerably, and one may now conclude that the number of cases where *z* is indicated by a short oblique stroke are very limited. Therefore this reading is inadmissible. The explanation of this legend as *prz mš*, where *prz* is to be related to *prš*, possibly some type of coin, upheld thanks to a supposed phoneme interchangeability, is as unnecessary as it is improbable. As we do not have access to a photograph of this coin, we must base our reading on the drawing in MP, which concurs with the one given by Müller. The small stroke may be used in Neo-Punic script for *b*, *d* or *r* and one might read *prdmš*, *prbmš*, which remains without interpretation, however. Another possibility seems to be to take the first three signs together and to suppose that they form together the letter *h*. For *h* consisting of three strokes of which the first looks like *p*, the second one a little bit like *r*, but without a closed 'head', and the third one consisting of a short half length stroke, cf. e.g. Friedrich-Röllig-Amadasi,<sup>6</sup> and see fig. 3. The reading *hmš* for this legend seems therefore a likely possibility, the meaning being probably the fifth year of someone's reign.

<sup>5</sup>Müller II, 1861, p. 15, no. 28.

<sup>6</sup>J. Friedrich - W. Röllig, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik*, 3. Auflage, bearbeitet von M.G. Amadasi Guzzo, Roma 1999, Schrifttafel v, second column, letter forms from Lepcis.



NB 138 obv.

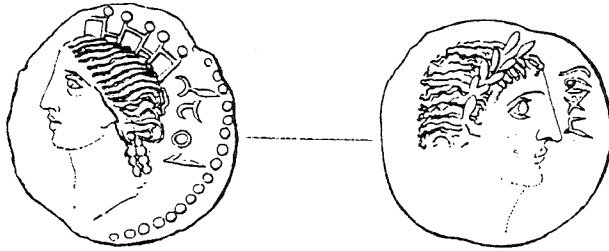
ed.: b'lt



NB 139 obv.

ed.: zb'l

fig. 1



Müller ii, 1862, p. 15 no. 28

fig. 2

ל'י ל'י ל'י

fig. 3