A rare clay token in context: a fortunate and recorded discovery from the necropolis of Tindari (Messina, 1896)[1]

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Introduction

Current research, performed at regional and state archives in Rome, Palermo and Syracuse, has revealed important data on the history of Sicilian archaeology during the post-Unification period (1861–1918). Sicily benefitted from an efficient archaeological safeguarding system, tested and perfected by the Bourbon authorities. The archaeologist Antonino Salinas played a leading role in exploring unknown sites and acquiring finds in provincial areas.

Among Salinas' long-standing research activity in the Messina province, excavations at Tindari's necropolis (1896) represent a crucial event in the history of Sicilian archaeology. Salinas performed extensive explorations at the site, discovering large Roman columbaria and substantial grave goods. Among them a clay token appears to have been neglected by scholars until now.

The scope of this article is to provide an analysis of the above-mentioned unpublished token, whose iconography shows remarkable connections with the coins and cults of ancient Tyndaris (fig. 1). Firstly, we provide a historical introduction to clay tokens, Tindari's site (fig. 2) and its local archaeology, considering the role of Salinas and Baron Sciacca della Scala, who were personally involved in the 1896 excavations. Secondly, we assess archival evidence, offering important information on the clay token and its discovery. Thirdly, an accurate description and analysis of the token are provided, revealing significant data concerning its iconography, production and dating. Lastly, we explain how the production and use of such tokens were connected to religion and civic life in the small community of Tyndaris.

An overview of clay tokens in the ancient Mediterranean

[1] I am thankful to Gabriella Tigano, 'Dirigente Responsabile U.O. 5, Soprintendenza per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali di Messina', who kindly authorised me to study this remarkable and neglected find from Tindari's excavations (protocol number 6110/V2777, 07 October 2014). I am also grateful to Maria Ravesi, the local inspector of the Soprintendenza, who I met in August 2015 in Tindari and who showing me the token at Antiquarium of Tindari. Furthermore, Anna Maria Manenti, 'Funzionario Direttivo Archeologo', kindly helped me to trace the archival evidence of the token's acquisition at the 'P. Orsi' Museum in Syracuse in January 2017.

Clay tokens (or *tesserae*), known since the nineteenth century, are commonly discovered in archaeological investigations, revealing a diverse and widespread production in the classical world.[2] These finds have created some interest among scholars in the past, although most specimens are still unpublished. They present a variety of iconography, which is closely connected with local religion, cults and traditions. The repertoire of images is quite varied and includes deities, heroes, animals, and objects from daily life, sporadically associated with Greek or Latin legends. Well documented are the so-called 'clay seals' or 'seal impressions', produced in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and attested, for instance, in Greece, Egypt and Turkey. Although they present similar iconography, these seals need to be considered as a different class of archaeological materials linked to trade.[3] There is also a rare specimen of a clay *spintria* showing a sex scene, found at Salona and now kept at the Museum of Split (Croatia).[4]

Clay *tesserae* from Palmyra (Syria), showing different shapes and images (e.g. local divinities, priests and religious symbols), are the best-known clay tokens and have been published by scholars in corpora and targeted studies.[5] We also know that a production of clay tokens is attested in Athens: artefacts have been discovered in the Agora and other urban areas since the nineteenth century. These bear a variety of images, like deities from the Greek pantheon, owls, amphorae, the name of commanders, etc.[6] As reported by Markypodi in this volume, many clay tokens are also missing an excavation context in Athens.

At Seleucia on the Tigris archaeologists found clay model discs of Seleucid coins, which represent coin types both on the obverse and the reverse. Similar artefacts, copying coins of Antioch, have been discovered in Syria (e.g. Palmyra) (fig. 3). Milne has argued that moulds used to make these pieces contained the original coins and small pieces of clay were pressed inside to obtain the discs. Scholars have argued that these tokens were produced – for instance – when the usual currency was in short supply due to a lack of materials, like silver and copper.[7]

Archaeological excavations have proved that clay tokens were also produced in Spain at Emporia and southern Italy.[8] Even if most finds are evidently still unpublished, some

[2] Lenormant (1878–79), vol. 1, 215–16.
[3] Milne (1906), 32–45; Milne (1916), 87–101; McDowell (1935), 231–41; Davidson and Burr Thompson (1943), 107–08.
[4] Buljević (2008), 201–11. On *spintriae* see: Buttrey (1973), 52–63; Bateson (1991), 385–97.
[5] Ingholt, Seyrig, Starcky and Caquot (1955); Raja (2015), 165–86.
[6] Svoronos (1905), 323–38; Kroll (1977), 141–46; Kroll and Mitchel (1980), 86–96.
[7] Milne (1934), 24–27; McDowell (1935), 241–50; Milne (1939), 93–95.
[8] Campo (1993), 204.

artefacts have been studied by scholars. Thanks to Mannino's works, we benefit from a series of papers on the so-called 'monete di terracotta' (terracotta coins) found in the ancient city of Metapontum (Matera), mostly in dump contexts of the Keramikos quarter, an ancient manufacturing urban area. The small discs carry types taken from the local coinage of Magna Graecia and Sicily, like the grain-ear, a common type on Metapontum's coinage. Imagery is also taken from the coinage of Caulonia, Leontinoi and Thurium. Mannino records a remarkable terracotta die showing a coin type of the Terina mint, which certainly testifies to a local production of these artefacts at the Keramikos quarter in Metapontum.[9] Another Hellenistic token has been found at Monasterace Marina (Reggio Calabria), ancient Caulonia, reproducing the types of a bronze coin of Epizephyrian Locris.[10] Two significant sets of tokens found at Marcellina-Laos (175 specimens) and Sala Consilina (480 specimens), may testify to the local production of terracotta coins with an unknown 'exchange value'. Guzzo considered their production to form part of the early stage of the monetary economy of the Brettii in the area before the group began using real coins.[11]

Sicily had clay token production as well, although most of the finds are totally unpublished. A remarkable series is attested at ancient Makella (modern Marineo), a small town in the province of Palermo, not far from Corleone. Here archaeologists discovered a set of small clay discs depicting Demeter (or Hecate) carrying two torches; these finds have been provisionally dated by De Simone to the end of the fourth century BC. Further research is on going in order to understand how the tokens were used in the local community of Makella.[12]

Tokens have been also found at the so-called 'Sanctuary of Palikè' at Mineo (Catania), which developed during the fifth century BC. Tokens were produced utilising circular pottery sherds in the Hellenistic period, when the sanctuary was still operational. Only one carries a Greek legend (no. 580). Archaeologists interpreted these either as 'attendance tokens' to access the agora, or as *tesserae* for games. The latter, for instance, are also documented in Magna Graecia (e.g. Incoronata of Metaponto).[13]

[9] D'Andria (1978), 409–12; D'Andria (1980), 418–20; Mannino (1993), 207–42; Mannino (1998), 61–71; Pedroni (1998), 5–10; Mannino (2002), 167–69, 286–87. At the beginning, D'Andria had even considered these terracotta tokens to be a joyful creation of the local ceramicists, who were copying circulating coins using clay (D'Andria (1978), 411: 'Non resta che pensare ad un gioco dei fornaciai che si divertivano ad imitare in argilla le monete metalliche circolanti').

[10] Gargano (2010), 6–8.

[11] Guzzo (1989), 111–12.

[12] De Simone (1997), 225–27; Spatafora and De Simone (2007), 36. The present author is currently studying and publishing all tokens found at Marineo (Palermo). For a preliminary analysis of Makella's finds see Crisà (2019).

[13] Franchi (1986), 177–78; Maniscalco (2008), 115–17, 238, nos. 580–83.

Introducing Tyndaris, a small ancient town in the Messina province

Historical sources provide us with a good record on ancient Tyndaris. Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse, founded the city in 396 BC to counter any potential Carthaginian advance from western Sicily.[14] After a few years, Tyndaris expanded to approximately 10,000 inhabitants. The Romans conquered the city in 254 BC, and it became a *civitas decumana*, paying 1/10 of its harvest to Rome.[15] Cicero's *Oratio in Verrem* offers detailed descriptions of Tyndaris in the first century BC. In fact, we know that Verres, praetor in Sicily between 71 and 69 BC, oppressed its inhabitants, seized their fine arts objects and punished Sopater, a local magistrate (*proagora*).[16] Tyndaris was also involved in the civil wars between Octavian and Sextus Pompeius and was re-founded as *Colonia Augusta Tyndaritanorum* in 22–21 BC. The city was prosperous during the Roman imperial period, as the archaeological evidence at insula IV and 'Cercadenari' quarter clearly testifies. Tyndaris became an episcopal see during the Byzantine period and was finally sacked by the Arabs in AD 836.[17]

After the Arab invasion, Tyndaris lost its importance and was progressively abandoned by its inhabitants, who probably moved to other neighbouring centres (e.g. Patti). Nevertheless, following a long abandonment, sixteenth century antiquarians (e.g. the well-known Sicilian author T. Fazellus (1498–1570)) became interested in the history and archaeology of Tindari. Substantial ruins and monuments, like the theatre and the Roman basilica, were still visible at that time. The remains also arose interest in the eighteenth century, as the detailed report by I. Paternò Castello (1719–86), Prince of Biscari, proves. In the first half of the nineteenth century a local antiquities market, incentivised by local collectors, travellers, diggers and even priests, made Tindari a remarkable centre for antiquarianism. For instance, E. Pirajno (1809–64), Baron of Mandralisca, visited the town and bought some archaeological finds to increase his collection of antiquities at Cefalù. Meanwhile, a branch of the Commission of Antiquities and Fine Arts – an antiquities safeguarding body of the Bourbon government that had its headquarters in Palermo – operated at Tindari. The site also had custodians to supervise the archaeological ruins.[18]

Social context at Tindari: D. Sciacca della Scala and A. Salinas

[14] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, XIV, 78, 5–6.
[15] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, XXIII, 18, 5.
[16] Cicero, *Against Verres*, II, 4, 84–92.
[17] Spigo (2005), 15–18; Crisà (2008), 236–40; Gulletta (2011), 606–10.
[18] Crisà (2012), 38–42; Crisà (2018), 53–57.

The noble family of Sciacca della Scala played a significant role in the history of Tyndaris, since the barons were often members of the local Commission, became mayors of nearby Patti, and owned vast lands within Tyndaris' archaeological site. More importantly, from the eighteenth century they had gathered a substantial collection of archaeological finds from Tindari, where they often performed excavations or acquired ancient artefacts from farmers. Finds included Latin and Greek inscriptions, vases, statues, bricks, urns and coins; collections were stored in the family castle at Scala (Patti, Messina) and many travellers were hosted by the barons. The Sciacca's archaeological collection markedly increased between the Bourbon (1816–60) and post-Unification period (1861–1918).

Domenico Sciacca della Scala (1846–1900) (fig. 4), the last antiquarian and collector of this Sicilian noble family, was a well-known politician, working as under-secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry in Rome. He wrote some remarkable works, for example *La crisi agraria* (1885), *L'aumento di tassa e la cooperazione agricola* (1897) and *La tassa sullo zucchero indigeno* (1900). He suddenly died in 1900 without a will and his archaeological collection was largely distributed among his heirs.

The role of Antonino Salinas (1841–1914) is crucial in the history of post-Unification archaeology in Sicily. As director of the Museum of Palermo, the first Professor of Archaeology and a numismatist, Salinas shaped a new institution. The museum was to represent all phases of Sicilian history and promoted a regional identity in contrast to a national identity supported by the Italian government. Salinas operated as an active archaeologist in the Messina province, also encouraging donations to the Palermo Museum from local collectors and performing surveys on largely unknown sites (e.g. San Fratello, San Marco d'Alunzio and Tripi). As we can argue from the 'Escursioni archeologiche' (*Notizie degli Scavi*) and archival records, Sciacca had a good relationship with Antonino Salinas, who often came to Scala to study his substantial numismatic and archaeological collection. We can therefore infer that these trips made Salinas interested in Tindari's archaeology. As a landowner, Sciacca could give Salinas permission to excavate on his properties on Tindari's promontory, where a vast area of ancient graveyards was totally unexplored. This sort of 'exchanging of favours' was very profitable. In fact, at the end of 1895 Salinas met Sciacca before beginning a new archaeological exploration.[19]

The necropoleis of Tyndaris: archaeological context and archival evidence

[19] Salinas (1880), 191–200; Orsi (1915), 1–9; Cimino (1985), xxi–xl; Crisà (2012), 42–43; Spatafora and Gandolfo (2014), 12–30; Crisà (2018), 54–57, 73–79.

Before analysing the archival evidence relevant to the clay token, a brief description of Tindari's necropoleis (fig. 5) is essential to contextualise the 1896 excavations. Nevertheless, we do not possess thorough data on the necropoleis, because most of the previous and recent investigations, carried out by the Superintendency of Syracuse and Messina in 1956, 1974 and the early 2000s, remain largely unpublished.

From the fourth century BC until the imperial age the ancient city benefitted from many graveyards which today cover vast areas, mostly outside the town's walls (south and east: Contrada Scrozzo and Santa Panta; south: Locanda). However, some tombs lay inside the outer town limits, especially in Contrada Cercadenari. Inhumation and incineration are both attested at Tindari. Grave goods are substantial and include Hellenistic and Roman pottery, lead and glass urns, coins, large clay medallions, etc. Antiquarian and archival sources report that bodies were often buried on a thick layer of marine sand. A wide range of graves, like 'cappuccina' tombs, columbaria and square monumental structures, were common at Tindari.[20]

Crucial documentation, previously neglected by scholars, has been recently discovered at the Central State Archive in Rome and the Archaeological Museum Archive in Palermo. A complete journal of excavations written by Salinas and his assistant 'in the field' Guido Scifoni, including a detailed inventory list, dispatches, letters and black and white pictures (fig. 6), sheds new light on the 1896 explorations and their impact on Tindari's local community. This community mostly comprises the state authorities, priests, custodians, skilful workers, women and even children, who were all involved in the excavation. Salinas employed a substantial local workforce to conduct a seven-month investigation from January to July 1896 in the ancient necropoleis and along the city walls, which he fully reinforced and cleared of wild vegetation.[21]

In particular, a few lines of the journal of the excavation record a short description of our clay token, which certainly generated interest among the workers and Scifoni, who did not discard it. In fact, according to late nineteenth century archaeological and antiquarian methods in Sicily, only a selection of finds was kept and inventoried. This, for instance, often excluded animal and human bones and fragmentary pottery. The token was preserved and properly described as follows:

[20] Giardina (1882), 161–62; Scaffidi (1895), 68–69; Spigo (2005), 89–92.
[21] Orsi (1896), 116–17; Crisà (2018), 73–79, TIND.7.90–91.

> [p. 48] Dal 4 al 21 Maggio 1896 | Zappatori 9 Portacof(ani/e) 10 | Contrada Scrozzo | Proseguesi il lavoro di rinettamento e scavo del fronte S.O. della muraglia antica, e della torre esistente nella controindicata contrada, non che dell'altro fronte della stessa mura a N.E. delle quali se ne vanno restituendo alla luce molte parti del tutto sepolte. Lungo questo fronte rinvengonsi quà e là cinerari in terracotta, quasi addossati alle dette murara, ed a breve distanza si scovano di frequente scheletri interrati sotto tegole piane, alcune delle quali recano la marca di fabbrica.
> È stato proseguito il lavoro di costruzione della maceria in secco, necessario per trattenere la scarpata di terra tagliata dinanzi le ripetute mure, ed oltre a questa, si è dovuto costruire un altro nel punto dove si depone la terra che mano mano va asportando, non essendo possibile, pel considerevole volume di lasciarla sul posto.
> È stato raccolto: […] Terracotta Disco fittile col rilievo di due mezzi ellissi sostenenti ciascuno una croce. Diam. m. 0,038 – [257].

This passage provides us with much information on the token's discovery. First, we know that the artefact was found between 4 and 21 May 1896 in Contrada Scrozzo (fig. 7), where nine diggers (men) and ten basket carriers (women) were working along the southwest and northeast sections of the ancient walls. Workers excavated portions of the necropolis, discovering many graves, 'cappuccina' tombs and urns, including substantial grave goods, like coins, lamps and a Latin funerary inscription. Scifoni also collected and inventoried a small clay disc, showing two half ellipses and two crosses. It is evident Scifoni did not recognise the iconography of the Dioscuri caps. However, records prove that Scifoni submitted the journal of excavations to Salinas on a weekly basis. The latter repeatedly signed the report. Analysis of the finds was therefore postponed and ideally Salinas would have analysed all finds subsequently, but this never happened.

What was the final destiny of this tiny artefact after the 1896 excavations? In November 1896 most of the finds were packed into big wooden boxes and then moved from Tindari to Palermo by train. Salinas also donated a selection of archaeological objects to Sciacca as a reward for granting permission to excavate his lands at Tindari. The reward included vases, lead and glass urns, perfume containers, coins, bricks, etc. (fig. 8). Among them Sciacca probably obtained this token, accurately described in Scifoni's inventory list. The artefact was then preserved at Sciacca's palace in Scala di Patti until the early twentieth century. After Sciacca's death in 1900, his collection was progressively distributed amongst his heirs. However, the widowed princess Merlo, under the auspices of the archaeologist Paolo Orsi,

donated some finds to the old Superintendence of Syracuse, including a fragmentary Nike sculpture.[22]

After a fortunate investigation at the 'P. Orsi' Archaeological Museum in Syracuse in January 2017, we discovered important and previously unknown archival evidence that helps us to understand the destiny of the clay token. The old museum inventory reports this short note:

> Altro piccolo lotto di terrecotte di Tindari, regalati, come altri precedenti dal rev. Padre Michele Cammisa (Aprile '17), cfr. n. 38209.
> 38280 | V | Medaglioncino fittile sul quale sono raffigurati in rilievo i due pilei dei Dioscuri sormontati da una specie di croce (diam. 34mm).

For some reason, which is still unknown, father Michele Cammisa, a local priest working at the Tindari's sanctuary, obtained a very small set of finds, which included our clay token. Cammisa donated these objects to the Syracuse Museum in April 1917. It can be argued that Paolo Orsi, who then was Director of the museum (1895–1934), personally obtained these finds during one of his visits to Tindari. We can also speculate that father Cammisa was interested in the clay token because it showed two crosses (even if they were stars). The artefact was inventoried at the former National Museum of Syracuse, now called 'P. Orsi'. Finally, all these finds moved to the small Antiquarium in Tindari, whose institution was promoted by Luigi Bernabò Brea in the late 1950s and which opened to the public in May 1960. Room V still preserves finds from Sciacca della Scala's collection, including the clay token.[23]

A remarkable clay token among coins and local cults

Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali e Archeologici di Messina | Antiquarium di Tindari (Tindari, Patti – Messina), Room V | old inv. no. 38280 (ex-Museo Nazionale di Siracusa).

Ø: 34.59mm; weight: 7.18g; thickness: 4.46mm | Material: orange clay containing meagre sand elements | State of preservation: fairly good; the token does not have any fractures and the obverse is perfectly readable | Discovery date: 04–21/05/1896 | Find spot: Contrada Scrozzo (necropolis of ancient Tyndaris).

[22] Orsi (1920), 345–47; Parisi (1949), 141–42; Spigo (1998), 144–45, 155; Crisà (2012), 42–43.

[23] Bernabò Brea (1961), 209–10; Spigo (2005), 72, 78. On father Cammita see Reitano (1961), 96, 99, 121, 128; the author offers us little information on his activity at Tindari. We know that Cammita was responsible for supervising renovation works, commissioning new furniture and bells (1920), and reclaiming the old sanctuary's cemetery to build up a new public square. Finally, father Cammisa resigned from his duties on 3 July 1923 and moved to the USA to join his brother's family. I am grateful to Mari Gkikaki regarding father Cammisa's interest on the clay token.

Side 1: The two small, stylised caps of the Dioscuri, formed by two ellipses (left: 9.13 x 19mm; right: 9 x 19mm) and two crosses representing stars on the top (left: 8.74 x 9mm; right: 10 x 9mm).
Side 2: Originally blank; it shows '38280' (black ink), which is an inventory number probably written by Paolo Orsi in early twentieth century.[24]
Date: end of the first century BC (?).
Bibliography: n/a.[25]

The clay token (fig. 9), which is a unique specimen at present,[26] carries the stylised iconography of the *pilei* of the sacred twins appearing in relief. Two ellipses represent the caps and two crosses symbolise the stars. In terms of production, the token's circular shape is regular, although the orange clay is not highly purified and shows sand elements. By contrast, light-brown highly refined clay was used to produce other Sicilian tokens showing Demeter/Hekate, found in Marineo (near Palermo). It is possible Tindari's tokens were produced by impressing a small clay 'flan' with a mould or struck using a die. As mentioned above, a rare terracotta die has been found in Metaponto that produced similar artefacts. We should however exclude the idea that another terracotta or lead/bronze token prototype might have been used, like the one published by Vajna and Vismara, because the relief of the *pilei* is quite prominent, the result of a presumed 'stamping' process.[27]
Castor and Pollux were frequently represented on Greek, Roman and provincial coinage. Their iconography was diverse and included, for instance, the sacred twins represented as horse riders, their juxtaposed heads wearing caps (fig. 10), or just the *pilei* and stars themselves. The long-standing and widespread adoption of imagery associated with the twins can be connected to their role as rescuers/saviours of soldiers and sailors in times of danger.[28]
Our clay token looks like a 'banal' small object. Nevertheless, it discloses important information on religion and daily life within the community of Tyndaris. The cult of the Dioscuri was markedly widespread in Laconia and Sicily, and it was a traditional cult at Tindari. Its founders even named the city in honour of Tyndareus, father of Castor and

[24] The clay token does not have a current inventory number of the Superintendency of Messina.
[25] Only archival records have been fully copied and examined. In particular see Crisà (2018), TIND.7.90–91.
[26] The Superintendence of Messina reported that no tokens are currently kept at its local storehouses (letter of 23 November 2016, prot. no. 0007480). Thus the author could not perform a direct survey in local storehouses in Messina.
[27] De Simone (1997), 225–26; Vajna and Vismara (2001), 1018–20; Spatafora and De Simone (2007), 36. As already mentioned, Marineo's tokens will be fully published by the present author.
[28] Milne (1906), 33, no. 13; Savio (2002), 51–69; Rovithis Livaniou and Rovithis (2011–12), 10–11, 79–80.

stepfather of Pollux. Tyndaris' coinage shows many connections with the Dioscuri. The images are either 'direct' references (standing and armed Dioscuri, the Dioscuri on horseback, heads of the Dioscuri, etc.) or 'indirect' (Helen of Troy, Zeus, caps, etc.), attested from the fourth to first century BC. In particular, stars are extremely common on Tindari's coinage; these allude indirectly to the sacred twins and their power to protect sailors in danger. A long continuity of cult is demonstrated by a mosaic (fig. 11), which shows two caps and stars and a bull, found in the apodyterium of the baths of insula IV and dated to the third century AD.[29]

The caps of the Dioscuri are not only attested on coins in the Greek world. For instance, among the published lead Hellenistic tokens found in the Agora of Athens is a specimen that shows the iconography of the Dioscuri's *pilei* (fig. 12), which appears on the obverse and reverse. Both caps are shown with a star of eight rays. These caps are more detailed than the *pilei* on our clay token, which can be seen only on the obverse.[30]

The dating of Tindari's clay token can only be achieved through iconographic and stylistic comparison, since Salinas and Scifoni did not perform stratigraphic excavations at Tindari in 1896, as is typical of late nineteenth century Sicily. Of course, Tyndaris' coinage offers much material for comparison. Some issues, generally dated to the 'Roman period' (or 'after 214 BC'), show more detailed caps and stars on one side and an eight-ray or nine-ray star on the other with the ethnic legend T-Y-N-Δ-A-P-I-T-A-N (fig. 13).[31] On other occasions the *pilei* are paired with the veiled head of Demeter on the obverse (fig. 14).[32] This iconography is quite detailed: the stars are well defined with six-rays and the caps have a cuff on the bottom.

As already mentioned, our clay token shows a pair of Dioscuri caps that are simply outlined as ellipses (*pilei*) and crosses (stars). Thus, it is better to opt for two other coins, which offer a much more cogent iconographic point of comparison in order to obtain a more precise dating. In particular, C. Julius Longus, a local duovir (IIVIR), issued a coin showing two caps which

[29] Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 14.208; Spigo (2005), 52–54; Musti (2005), 141–43; Crisà (2006), 42–45; Crisà (2008), 240–41.

[30] Lang and Crosby (1964), 92, no. L59, pl. 21, no. L59 A–B (parallel provided by Mairi Gkikaki); see also Wilding's and Küter's articles in this volume on the interaction between tokens and coins.

[31] Tyndaris, *Æ*, uncia, after 214 BC: Obv.: *Pilei* of the Dioscuri with stars; below IX; Rev.: Eight-ray star, T-Y-N-Δ-A-P-I-T-A-N; von Duhn (1876), 32, no. 21; Gabrici (1927), 194, no. 51; Minì (1979), 444, no. 28; Calciati (1983), vol. 1, 82, no. 23; Campana (2001–02), 78, no. 26; Crisà (2006), 43.

[32] Tyndaris, *Æ*, sextans, after 214 BC: Obv.: Veiled head of Demeter left; Rev.: TYNΔAPITAN, *pilei* of the Dioscuri with stars; von Duhn 1876: 30, no. 9; BMC Sicily: 236, no. 16; Gabrici (1927), 194, no. 42; Minì (1979), 444, no. 27; Calciati (1983), vol. 1, 82, no. 22; Campana (2001–02), 76, no. 21; Crisà (2006), 43.

have an ellipse shape along with chin straps and stars, associated with a dolphin and the legend EX D(ecreto) D(ecurionum) (fig. 15).[33]

Another coin (fig. 16) shows a rudder between the legend D-D on the reverse; this clearly alludes to navigation and, as we know, the Dioscuri traditionally protect sailors.[34] More importantly, the obverse offers a close iconographic link with our token. In fact, it represents not only a pair of similar caps, but the stars are even modelled as two stylised crosses, which are very similar to those on the clay *tessera*. This issue – as with the previous one – has been dated to 44–36 BC due to its legend (D-D). Thus, we can argue that the *tessera* might be produced in the same period – or generally speaking, at the end of the first century BC. This date roughly matches those of the Roman lamps and the Latin funerary inscription found by Scifoni and Salinas in the same area.

Final remarks

Records have provided important data on our clay token from Tindari. The journal of excavations, written by Scifoni and Salinas in 1896, offers valuable information on the social context of the campaign, its workers, archaeological methods and activities in the field. Nevertheless, documentation is still lacking for some aspects. First, we only know the discovery area and do not have data on the exact find spot nor on the stratigraphy – this is, however, coherent with contemporary archaeological practice in late nineteenth century Sicily. But archival research in Rome, Palermo and Syracuse has shed new light on the collecting history of the clay token, which is now perfectly clear from its discovery in 1896 to its final move to the Antiquarium of Tindari. This information also confirms the role of priests (like father Cammisa), who worked at the sanctuary and were occasionally interested in collecting, acquiring or selling Tindari's antiquities from the late eighteenth century onwards.[35]

Salinas acted as director of Tindari's excavations. As a skilful numismatist and an expert in Sicilian numismatics, he had an interest in Tyndaris' coinage and certainly knew all its coin iconography, including the caps of the Dioscuri. Why then did Salinas not acquire the clay

[33] Tyndaris, *Æ*, fraction, late 1st century BC (44–36 BC?): Obv.: *Pilei* of the Dioscuri, C·IVLIVS C F. LONGVS II VIR; Rev.: Dolphin right, EX DD; von Duhn (1876), 32, no. 22; Gabrici (1927), 194, nos. 53–56; Minì (1979), 445, no. 33; Calciati (1983), vol. 1, 83, no. 27; RPC, vol. 1, 649; Crisà (2008), 244–48; RPC, suppl. 3, 19, Tyndaris; Villemur (2016), 437–38, no. 2 (the author has recently confirmed the attribution to Tyndaris).

[34] Tyndaris, *Æ*, fraction, late first century BC (44–36 BC?): Obv.: *Pilei* of the Dioscuri with highly stylised stars; Obv.: Rudder between D-D; Minì (1979), 445, no. 32; Calciati (1982), vol. 1, 83, no. 26; Villemur (2016), 439, no. 7.

[35] Crisà (2018), 112.

token to increase the collections of the Palermo museum and 'associate' the token with Tyndaris' coins, already studied and kept at his institution?[36] As Lenormant reported, Salinas was very interested in even writing a monograph on Sicilian tokens. It is therefore surprising that Salinas neglected the importance of our clay token in offering a selection of finds to Sciacca della Scala as a reward. Being extremely busy as a Museum director, it can be inferred that he probably did not have the chance (or time) to analyse the token before splitting all the finds between Sciacca and the Palermo Museum.[37]

How can we assess token production at Tyndaris? What was the role of clay tokens in the small ancient community in the Messina province? It is hard to provide 'definitive' answers to these questions, due to a lack of data and the uniqueness of our specimen. Nevertheless, we can provide some speculation on token production, use and final disposal, assessing all the evidence and advancing a hypothesis on the role of these apparently 'banal' artefacts at Tyndaris. First, following our overview of past scholarship and the close connections with local mintage, we can infer the Tyndaris tokens were produced for a very narrow circulation on the site – only one specimen is known so far. It is probably unlikely that these tokens were produced as 'terracotta coins', since the latter have normally two stamped sides, while our specimen has a blank reverse. Undoubtedly, further research needs to be conducted to understand the real extent of broader token production in Hellenistic and Roman Sicily and only a targeted analysis of finds can reveal new data on this phenomenon.

In this regard, we mention a significant comparison. A unique clay token (or *symbolon*) was discovered at Iaitas (Monte Iato) in the Palermo province. Dated to the second half of the fourth century BC, it bears a Greek inscription (ΔA) and Acheloos, an iconography also attested on Iaitas' coins since the late fifth century BC. The token, found in the local agora, can show a direct link with the civic, local life of the site.[38]

It is hard to comprehend the exchange value of the Tyndaris token, which clearly does not have any intrinsic value. It is certainly striking that our find reveals connections with Tyndaris' cults and traditions. In fact, it represents another artefact class, in addition to coins and mosaics, which demonstrates a long-standing local veneration of the sacred twins. Since

[36] Fraccia (1889), 52–53, nos. 221–26.

[37] Salinas (1880), 200: 'La numismatica tindaritana è pregevole per un buon numero di tipi non ancora pubblicati. Tacendo per ora di quelli, che mi erano già noti tanto dell'epoca greca che dell'epoca romana, e con nomi di magistrati, ricorderò soltanto quei che ricavai da questa recente visita; come la scoperta di una serie di riconî con tipi tindaritani (berretto de' Dioscuri; pura di nave etc.) […]'. Lenormant (1895–96), vol. 1, 215: 'Le savant numismatiste sicilien M. Antonio Salinas […] il annonce depuis plusieurs années l'intention d'y consacrer une monographie'.

[38] Frey-Kupper (2013), vol. 1, 85.

religion and the civic sphere often overlapped in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the small disc may have been produced as a token to obtain some privileges in a local festival dedicated to the Dioscuri. It is possible that someone who was carrying the token died and was buried in Contrada Scrozzo, close to the ancient walls. Unfortunately, no temples have been discovered in the region thus far; they probably lie under the new sanctuary of the Black Madonna, a modern and excessively coloured church whose construction in the 1950s–1960s irredeemably compromised any archaeological evidence in the acropolis area. A 'missing' temple of Zeus was seen by Fazellus on the Mongiove hilltop in the sixteenth century.[39]

Archaeological context is crucial in advancing an additional hypothesis on our clay token from Tindari. Since it comes from the ancient necropolis area, the token may have been buried in a grave. Thus, the artefact could have been used as Charon's obol, a small coin/token that was placed in the deceased's mouth to pay the ferryman in the underworld. This practice is attested in Sicily from the fourth and early third centuries BC.[40] Moreover, a 'terracotta coin' discovered in the necropolis area of Pizzica at Metaponto has been connected to ritual funerary practices.[41] Svoronos too had considered terracotta tokens as *charoneia nomismata* in his well-known article.[42]

This hypothesis, which cannot be proven due to a lack of data regarding the exact find spot, is suggested not only from archival records, but also from the iconography. As discussed, the clay token reproduces the same *pilei* and stars found on late first century BC low denomination coins of Tyndaris. This is certainly coherent with the common practice to use less valuable coins as Charon's obols.[43] Our clay token, which does not have any intrinsic value, may have been produced as an imitation of these coins to be used to pay the underworld ferryman. If it was not an obol, it might have been hypothetically placed in a grave as a 'talismanic' object, carrying a strong connection with the local cult of the Dioscuri. Only further finds can prove or contradict this hypothesis; other specimens may potentially be traced amongst old excavation materials, which are still unpublished, or new, desirable investigations in the field.

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Fig. 1: Map of Sicily, showing the site of Tindari (Messina).

[39] Giardina (1882), 181–82; Reitano (1961); Crisà (2006), 42–43.
[40] Cutroni Tusa (1995), 189–90, 195.
[41] Mannino (1993), 217–18; Mannino (1998), 67–69; Mannino (2002), 168.
[42] Svoronos (1905), 324–25.
[43] Stevens (1991), 215–16, 219–20; Cantilena (1995), 170–71.

Fig. 2: Tindari – View of the promontory (from the south) and the sanctuary.

Fig. 3: Clay Roman coin reproduction, found in Palmyra (Syria) (Ø 35mm) (Milne (1934): 24, fig. 1a–b).

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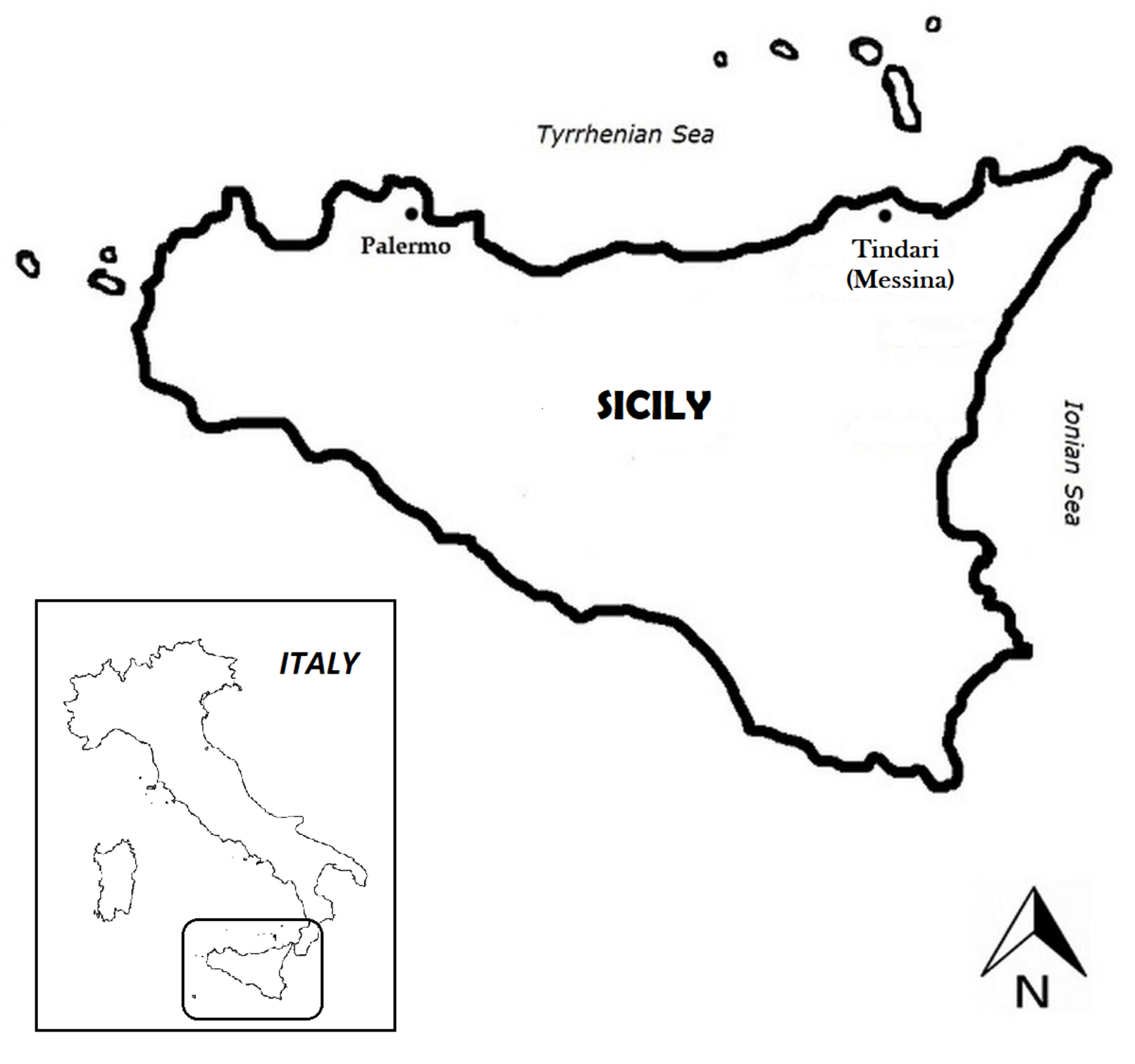
Tyrrhenian Sea
Palermo
Tindari
(Messina)
SICILY
Ionian Sea
ITALY
N

Barone Sciacca Della Scala, s. min.
(Patti, Messina.)


Tindari
Contrada
Scrozzo


869


867


10
cm


38280


10
cm