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978-1-107-07834-5 - Stesichorus: The Poems Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary

M. Davies and P. J. Finglass

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

I DATE

Stesichorus' mythological narratives eschew the kind of historical references or personal reminiscences that could shed light on when their author lived. The creative interaction of one fragment with a specific passage of the *Odyssey* indicates that Stesichorus knew the latter work, and that enough of his audience knew it to make the imitation worth his while.¹ Translating this relative dating into anything more precise, however, is not easy. According to the lowest Homeric chronology with any serious scholarly support, the *Iliad* was composed shortly after *c.* 680,² and the *Odyssey*, which shows the influence of the *Iliad*,³ well within the second half of the seventh century;⁴ this would put Stesichorus' activity no earlier than, say, 610. But many scholars advocate a much earlier dating for the Homeric poems;⁵ if they are right, Stesichorus might have been composing decades before 610 and still have had the chance to respond to the *Odyssey*.

More promising, at first sight, is the reference that Stesichorus apparently made to Hesiod as the author of the *Aspis*,⁶ which yields a *terminus post quem* coincident with the date of this poem. But that could be any time between the late seventh and mid sixth centuries.⁷ The most recent discussion places the work

¹ See fr. 170n.

² West (1995) = (2011–13) I 188–208; cf. (2011–13) I 209–11, 231.

³ See K. Usener (1990).

⁴ See West (2005a) 58 = (2011–13) I 303, (2012) 237. According to West, the *Odyssey* was influenced by the lost *Argonautica*, which cannot be earlier than the middle of the seventh century, since it implies exploration of the Black Sea, where there are no Greek finds from before *c.* 640.

⁵ See e.g. Lane Fox (2008) 381–4, who argues for an eighth-century date for the *Iliad*, and R. Rutherford (2012), who reviews West's argument.

⁶ Fr. 168. See *ad loc.* for the form that this reference might have taken.

⁷ See Janko (1986) 43 (referring to parallels with archaic art). Cf. the wide range of possible dates suggested for another poem wrongly attributed to Hesiod, the *Catalogue of Women* (Cingano (2009) 116–17).

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

between 591 and *c.* 570; after 591 because its closing lines are thought to refer to the fall of Crisa during the First Sacred War, and before 570 because of the interest taken in the subject by vase-painters from *c.* 565, and a possible reference to the poem on the François vase of *c.* 570.⁸ But much of the First Sacred War is of doubtful historicity, attested as it is by late, partisan sources who may be fabricating archaic history to suit their own ends;⁹ we can hardly treat the fall of Crisa as a reliable chronological datum. The evidence of art is more valuable, but still far from cogent. The circulation of a newly-composed *Aspis* might indeed have encouraged vase-painters to portray this myth on their wares. Equally, both poem and vases could be independent responses to a more general interest in the myth of Heracles, the poem perhaps postdating the earliest vases; or the *Aspis* might have taken some time to achieve popularity, and thus influenced the vase-painters years or decades after its composition.¹⁰ The evidence provided by the François vase is the most intriguing: it portrays a centaur called Melanchaetes, a word used as an epithet in a list of centaurs from the *Aspis*, which may have been misunderstood by Clitias, the vase's inscriber, as a proper name.¹¹ But even if we accept the link (which may be mere chance), Clitias could have been misremembering a poem that he first encountered many years before. Hence the dating of the *Aspis* cannot be restricted to the early part of the sixth century; and as a result it does not provide as helpful a chronological limit on Stesichorus as we would like. Nevertheless, the *Aspis* is not without value for our investigation. It is most unlikely

⁸ Thus Janko (1986) 38–47; cf. Cingano (2009) 111. Janko also uses his presumed dating of Stesichorus' poetic career (570–540) to date the *Aspis*; we omit this consideration to avoid circular reasoning.

⁹ See N. Robertson (1978), J. Davies (1994), R. Fowler (1998) 13 n. 30.

¹⁰ After all, the *Iliad* does not make an identifiable impact in art until well after its composition (not until *c.* 580, according to Burkert (2012)).

¹¹ [Hes.] *Asp.* 186 Ἄρκτον τ' Οὔρειόν τε μελαγχχαίτην τε Μίμαντα. The end of the line may have been misremembered as Μίμαν τε, or that might be the true text (as conjectured by West (1961) 140), which would turn μελαγχχαίτην into a proper name.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 DATE

to be earlier than the late seventh century, and as a consequence, Stesichorus' poem will not have been composed before, say, 610.

Pliny and Plutarch refer to a poem of Stesichorus containing an emotional reaction to a solar eclipse.¹² If we assume that this work was prompted by an actual eclipse, that this eclipse was total or near-total, and that it occurred in Sicily, south Italy, or Greece, three possibilities emerge: the eclipses of 608, 585, and 557.¹³ Of these, the total eclipse of 557 is the most plausible candidate, since its zone of totality fell squarely across Sicily and Greece.¹⁴ By contrast, the zone of totality in 585 passed somewhat to the north of Sicily and Greece; while during the annular eclipse of 608 the strip most in darkness was to the north of Sicily, and far to the north of Greece. But the initial assumption that Stesichorus' poem was in fact the response to an eclipse is open to doubt. Eclipses had already found their way into Greek poetry,¹⁵ and these literary descriptions could be imitated by later writers with no direct experience of the real thing; eclipses no doubt lived on in folk memory, too. There was nothing to stop Stesichorus from incorporating one into a narrative if he judged it appropriate, whether or not one had recently taken place.¹⁶

What about external testimonia to Stesichorus' career? The earliest is provided by Simonides, who was active in the late sixth and early fifth centuries.¹⁷ After describing Meleager's victorious spear-cast at the funeral games for Pelias, he adds 'for thus did Homer and Stesichorus sing to the peoples'.¹⁸ In Simonides'

¹² See fr. 300n. ¹³ For the data see Ercoles (2007).

¹⁴ Thus West (1971a) 306 = (2011–13) II 84–5.

¹⁵ Cf. Archil. fr. 122 *IEG*, Mimn. fr. 20 *IEG*; also Hom. *Od.* 20.356–7.

¹⁶ Thus Ercoles (2007) 74.

¹⁷ He wrote poetry in praise of Eualcidas of Eretria, who died in 498 (T₅₄ Poltera), and in celebration of the Greek victory at Plataea in 479 (fr. 10–17 *IEG*). For further discussion see Molyneux (1992); Molyneux does not provide evidence that Simonides was active before 510 (as Poltera notes, his edition, p. 7 n. 34), but if we can rely on his traditional birth date of 546 it is likely that he was composing by that date.

¹⁸ Simon. fr. 273 Poltera (T_{b37} Ercoles; see Stes. fr. 4).

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

view, Stesichorus was a figure of the past, an established classic worthy of being set alongside the very best composer of epic. Hence our poet was at least a generation older than Simonides, and probably more. He therefore seems unlikely to have been active after, say, 540.

Scholarship on Stesichorus from the late fifth century onwards contributes further relative datings. Glaucus of Rhegium asserts that Stesichorus took the *harmateios nomos* and his dactylic metre from Olympus,¹⁹ a musician perhaps of the late eighth century.²⁰ According to Megaclides, Stesichorus' *Oresteia* was heavily influenced by the poet Xanthus;²¹ unfortunately, we have no independent means of dating the latter. Chamaeleon in his work *On Stesichorus* claims that the works not only of Homer but also of Hesiod, Archilochus, Mimnermus, and Phocylides were set to music.²² Archilochus' *floruit* was placed in 664/3, Mimnermus' in 632–629;²³ so if Chamaeleon was working with these or similar dates, and if he meant that Stesichorus set the work of these poets to music (not a certain inference), he probably imagined that Stesichorus was composing in the late seventh or sixth century.

A startlingly different chronology is implied by the author of the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Orchomenians* and by Philochorus, who claim that Stesichorus was the son of Hesiod.²⁴ This

¹⁹ Fr. 2 Lanata (Tb20 Ercoles). For Glaucus' life and work see Huxley (1968).

²⁰ The *Suda* makes him a contemporary of Midas (king of Phrygia 738–696?). For the sources for Olympus see further Campbell's edition, pp. 272–85, supplemented by West (1992) 331 n. 9.

²¹ Stes. fr. 171.

²² Chamaeleon fr. 27 Giordano (Tb21 Ercoles), on which see Ercoles.

²³ By Apollodorus and the *Suda* respectively, the latter reflecting earlier scholarly tradition. Phocylides is dated shortly after the middle of the sixth century by the *Suda*, which makes him a contemporary of Theognis (see West (1974) 65–6); in fact, he is more likely to have lived in the first half of the sixth century (see West (1978a) = (2011–13) II 68–77). When Chamaeleon put him we cannot tell.

²⁴ Arist. fr. 579 Gigon (Ta18 Ercoles), Philoch. *FGrHist* 328 F 213 (Ta19(a)). The source of the Aristotelian fragment, Tzetzes, goes on to say that Stesichorus was a contemporary of Phalaris of Acragas (who reigned in the

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 DATE

relationship may have been invented as a response to perceived similarities between their poetry, or have arisen somehow from the poets' shared Locrian connexions: Hesiod is said to have died in Ozolian Locris after seducing the girl who became Stesichorus' mother, while Stesichorus' birth was placed in Metaurus, a settlement associated with Epizephyrian Locri.²⁵ If this account dates Stesichorus much earlier than we would expect, a different report does the reverse. According to the Parian Marble, a work of chronology inscribed in 264/3, the year 485/4 was when 'Stesichorus the poet arrived in Greece'; the same date saw Aeschylus' first victory and the birth of Euripides.²⁶ Such a chronology is ruled out by the testimony of Simonides. It may have originated from a desire to synchronise Stesichorus with two tragic poets whose work he influenced; or it might refer to a different poet who took the name Stesichorus and for whom this is our only evidence.²⁷ Whatever the truth, we may disregard this reference in our search.²⁸

With Cicero we return to a more familiar chronology: he puts Stesichorus' death, and Simonides' birth, in 556/5.²⁹ His dating is probably taken from Apollodorus of Athens,³⁰ although there is no explicit evidence of this. The *Suda's* dates for Stesichorus,

second quarter of the sixth century) and Pythagoras (born perhaps in the mid-sixth century). But this information will be based not on actual chronological data, but on Stesichorus' associations with both figures in the later biographical tradition (see West (1971a) 302–4 = (2011–13) II 79–81).

²⁵ The different views and their supporters are set out by Ercoles (2008) 37 with n. 2; he rightly argues that both may have been responsible for the growth of the myth. For Metaurus see further pp. 13–15.

²⁶ *FGHHist* 2B 239.50 (Ta36 Ercoles); Στησίχορος ὁ ποιητὴς εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀ[φίκετ]ο. According to the same source, a fourth-century poet took the name 'Stesichorus of Himera the Second', which shows that at least one artist sought celebrity by adopting the name of his archaic predecessor.

²⁷ For these hypotheses, and their proponents, see Ercoles (2008) 36.

²⁸ For the possible significance of the reference to Stesichorus 'coming to Greece' see p. 25.

²⁹ Cic. *Resp.* 2.20 (Ta5(a) Ercoles); supplements are owed to Mommsen (1860) = (1905–13) VII 39–41 and Rohde (1881) 568–9 = (1901) I 106–7.

³⁰ Apollod. *FGHHist* 244 F 337 (Ta5(a) Ercoles); thus Mommsen (1860) 167 = (1905–13) VII 41, Jacoby (1902) 196–7.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

632–556, are probably shared with Cicero’s source; so are Eusebius’, which give 611/10 for Stesichorus’ *floruit* and 560/59 for his death.³¹ These figures have no particular authority, however, being ‘founded on nothing but the assumption that Stesichorus was younger than Alcman and older than Simonides’.³² Reports that Stesichorus lived to a great age reflect a general *topos* concerning poets’ lives.³³

Our search has proved frustrating, but not quite fruitless. If we say that Stesichorus’ career covered some of the period between 610 and 540, we shall not be far wrong.

2 LIFE

Stesichorus’ poems tell us nothing explicitly about his life.³⁴ Here we consider the evidence for his homeland and his family. Understanding where he came from will turn out to be important for assessing aspects of his poetic career.

Stesichorus is associated most persistently with Himera, a Greek city on the north coast of Sicily,³⁵ which was proud enough

³¹ *Su c* 1095 (Ta10 Ercoles); Euseb. *Chron.* Ol. 42.2, 55.1 (Ta5(b)). For other sources containing, or consistent with, these dates, and also probably derived from Apollodorus, see Ercoles (2008) 35 n. 1.

³² West (1971a) 302 = (2011–13) II 78. West (n. 2 in each) points out that the date for Stesichorus’ birth is exactly forty years after the *floruit* for Alcman given by the *Suda*, which in its entry for Stesichorus emphasises τοῖς δὲ χρόνοις ἦν νεώτερος Ἀλκμᾶνος. Willi (2008) 52–4 is too credulous of these datings.

³³ See Kivilo (2010) 216–17. These reports may nevertheless be right, purely by chance, since his enormous output suggests a relatively long life; see pp. 18–20.

³⁴ For this whole subject see Kivilo (2010) 63–86.

³⁵ Thuc. 6.62.2 refers to Himera, ἥπερ μόνη ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει τῆς Σικελίας Ἑλλάς πόλις ἐστίν. ‘Here Ἑλλάς functions as an adjective, as it sometimes can do; but the choice of word, the normal noun for “Greece”, may lend a certain emphasis: Himera was an outpost of Greece’ (Hornblower (2004) 193; cf. his n. on 6.62.2 and Willi (2008) 51). For Himera see further Allegro (1999) (with useful maps), Fischer-Hansen *et al.* (2004a) 198–201, Domínguez (2006) 292–8, De Angelis (2012) 176–9; for Greek settlement in Sicily more generally see Malkin (2011) 97–118, Tribulato (2012b) 17–23.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 LIFE

of its poet to cast him in bronze.³⁶ Traditionally Himera's foundation is dated to 648;³⁷ recently discovered archaeological material is consistent with a date in the mid-seventh century.³⁸ It was founded, Thucydides tells us, from Zancle, whose own mother city was Chalcis in Euboea.³⁹ Most of the Himeran colonists⁴⁰ were of Chalcidian descent, but they were joined by political exiles from the Dorian city of Syracuse, called the Myletidae. That name might indicate that they first settled at Mylae, another, earlier Zanclean foundation on the eastern tip of Sicily's northern shore, which Strabo calls Himera's mother-city.⁴¹ As a result, the Himeran dialect was mixed, containing Chalcidian and Dorian elements, but the laws and customs (νόμιμα) of the Chalcidians prevailed.⁴² Such blending is borne

³⁶ The statue was made before the Carthaginian sack in 409, and taken to Carthage before being returned to Thermae Himerenses (the nearby successor city to Himera, founded 409) by Scipio Aemilianus after Carthage's destruction in 146 (Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.86 = Ta42 Ercoles). It constitutes the earliest evidence for Stesichorus' connexion with Himera; the next references come in Glaucus of Rhegium (fr. 2 Lanata = Tb20) and Plato (*Phaedr.* 244a = Ta17).

³⁷ Thus Diod. 13.62.4.

³⁸ Thus Brugnone and Vassallo (2004) 761 n. 3, Vassallo (2010) 42 with n. 8; earlier reports which deny archaeological evidence for settlement before 625 can be disregarded.

³⁹ Thuc. 6.4.5–6; cf. Lane Fox (2008) 284. Zancle was founded from Cyme, another Chalcidian settlement, before further settlers arrived from Chalcis and the rest of Euboea. Different types of evidence place its foundation *circa* either 770 or 720 (thus Lane Fox (2008) 285–6; cf. Domínguez (2006) 266). Around 494 the city was captured by Anaxilas of Rhegium, who renamed it Messana (today's Messina) after his homeland of Messenia (cf. Simkin (2012) 184–6).

⁴⁰ The term 'colonisation', as applied to Greek overseas settlement in the archaic period, has come in for criticism in recent scholarship, since it may carry associations that could confuse the unwary. Note however the argument of Willi (2012a) 72 n. 51 that it 'may refer quite generally to any process of collective settling in an ethnically (and linguistically) foreign environment, without necessarily implying an "organized, state-sponsored venture"'.

⁴¹ Strab. 6.2.6; thus Bérard (1957) 241, Alessio (1970) 92 n. 384. For Mylae see Nielsen (2002c) 59–60.

⁴² Thuc. 6.5.1.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

out by dialectal variation in Himeran inscriptions.⁴³ It may also be reflected in the names of the city's founders, Euclides, Simos, and Sacon:⁴⁴ while men called Euclides are found all over the Greek world, Simos and related names feature strongly in Euboea, and Sacon is attested in Dorian Sicily but not in Euboea or other Ionian settlements.⁴⁵

Himera's ties with other Chalcidian settlements are evident from its material culture. Recent house excavations have led to the discovery of 'craft connections between Zankle and Himera right from the latter's foundation'.⁴⁶ The similar coinage introduced into Zankle, Naxos, and Himera in the third quarter of the sixth century suggests enduring institutional and economic links.⁴⁷ So too does a Himeran law inscribed on bronze from the second half of the sixth century, written in the alphabet of Chalcis, which may have been produced by the same workshop as another such inscription from the unidentified Chalcidian settlement at Monte San Mauro near Caltagirone.⁴⁸ A Himeran coin dated between 413 and 408 depicts the head of Kronos,⁴⁹ a god whose associations with Zankle were strong, and whose

⁴³ So *IGDS I* §7 (550–500) Πρ]ατυίδεο is an Ionic genitive of a derivative from Πράτυς, while *IGDS I* §8 (6th c.) κόρῃι (with metrically guaranteed short first syllable) shows a typically Ionian, and so Euboean, lack of compensatory lengthening (cf. Dell'Oro (2010) 16 with n. 11); the unusual γλαυκόπι (instead of γλαυκόπιδι) in the same inscription may have been chosen because names in -ι usually have dental stems in west Ionic, and so the form may have sounded more epic to Himeran ears (thus Dell'Oro, pp. 17–18). But *IGDS I* §14b (c. 400) Ἡρακλείδα is a Doric genitive, and *IGDS I* §11 (475–450) ἠέλλῃ, aorist passive from ἰέλλω 'send', is also found on a Doric inscription from Delos (*ID* 87.2, c. 400). See further Mimblera (2012a) 195–6.

⁴⁴ These names are given by Thuc. 6.5.1.

⁴⁵ Thus Knoepfler (2007) 95; cf. Bérard (1957) 241–2.

⁴⁶ De Angelis (2012) 177.

⁴⁷ Thus Kraay (1971) 10 ('these three coinages, minted on a common standard, which was employed, as least for coinage, nowhere else in the West must be treated as a single phenomenon'), (1984) 13–16, 19, Torelli (2003) 676–7.

⁴⁸ *IGDS II* §15; see Brugnone (2003) 84. According to Frasca (1997), this town should be identified with the settlement called Euboea mentioned by Herodotus (7.156.3; see Fischer-Hansen (2002) 143–9, Fischer-Hansen *et al.* (2004a) 191–2, Mercuri (2010)).

⁴⁹ Serbeti (1992) §1.

Cambridge University Press

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M. Davies and P. J. Finglass

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 LIFE

characteristic weapon, the sickle, gave its name (in the local Sicilian language) to that town;⁵⁰ it thereby hints at shared cultic practices between mother and daughter city.⁵¹ A continuing close association is implied by Herodotus' account of how Himera sheltered the tyrant Scythes of Zancle after he was deposed in 490.⁵² It may even lie behind the appearance of the figure Perieres in Stesichorus' poetry.⁵³ One of Zancle's founders, Thucydides tells us, had that name, which is not attested elsewhere except in mythology.⁵⁴ Did its Zanclean flavour appeal to the Himeran poet?⁵⁵

In common with other cities in Sicily and south Italy, Himera may have become more Dorian as time went on.⁵⁶ A cult of Pelops, that quintessentially Dorian hero, could have existed from the late sixth century.⁵⁷ The city fell under the control of Theron of Acragas and his son Thrasylus after the battle of Himera in 480. An attempt by the Himerans four years later to encourage Hieron of Syracuse to intervene on their behalf resulted in a purge by Theron of many leading citizens, and the settlement of Dorians (and any others who wished to come) in their place.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ See Thuc. 6.4.5, Call. *Aet.* fr. 43.68–71 Harder, Poccetti (2012) 56, Simkin (2012) 167–70.

⁵¹ Thus Lane Fox (2008) 285. ⁵² Hdt. 6.24.1. ⁵³ Fr. 287.

⁵⁴ Thuc. 6.4.5 = *IGPN* IIIa 360; Knoepfler (2007) 102 calls it 'a totally unique name . . . that cannot, and should not, be corrected'.

⁵⁵ Caution is in order. The mythological Perieres was king of Messenia, and the renaming of Zancle as Messene in c. 494 (see n. 39 above) might have prompted the invention of a founder with that name. The Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* refers to him, and that poem has no Zanclean associations. But it remains possible that Stesichorus was aware of a founder of Zancle called Perieres, and included that name in his poetry out of local sentiment.

⁵⁶ See Cassio (1997b) 207. Among the inscriptions discussed above (n. 43), characteristically Dorian forms are found only from c. 475; but the sample is too small for this fact to have much value. For the Dorianisation of another Chalcidian town, Rhegium, see Ucciardello (2005) 50–1.

⁵⁷ See Torelli (2003) 678–9.

⁵⁸ Diod. 11.48.6–8, 49.3–4. As Hornblower (2004) 195–6 notes, these may have included Himera's most famous fifth-century resident, the athlete Ergoteles; see further p. 11.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07834-5 - Stesichorus: The Poems Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary

M. Davies and P. J. Finglass

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

Himera's site seems to have been chosen because it lay as far to the west as one could travel without going into Phoenician or Elymian territory.⁵⁹ It was also a convenient location for trade between Spain, Italy, and North Africa.⁶⁰ The oldest remains come from the coast, not the hill inland, suggesting a maritime orientation rather than a defensive posture, and the latest discoveries bear this out.⁶¹ Himeran coinage must have been made up of foreign silver, since the metal is not native to Sicily; it might have come from Tuscany or Spain.⁶² In Hornblower's words, the settlement was, 'like Palermo in later centuries, a culturally, ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous place: on the city streets and harbourside of Himera you could no doubt jostle not only with . . . Dorian and Ionian Greeks, but with more exotic folk as well', such as Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Etruscans, Elymians, and indigenous Sicilians.⁶³ The extensive restructuring of the city plan that took place from *c.* 550 indicates Himera's prosperity, the result of its success as a centre of trade.⁶⁴

For all its wider connexions, the city did not escape local conflict, as a dedication from Samos dating to the first half of the sixth century makes clear. This commemorates the involvement of certain Samians when the Himerans repulsed the Sicilians;⁶⁵ the depiction of a shield and ship's prow in relief suggests that

⁵⁹ The same may be true for Selinus, which was founded from Megara Hyblaea on the south coast of Sicily at about the same time (thus Domínguez (2006) 294).

⁶⁰ Dunbabin (1948) 300–1.

⁶¹ 'Recent finds, such as an important quantity of transport amphorae, . . . show the insertion of Himera within the wide network of commercial interchanges existing in the Tyrrhenian between the later 7th and the first half of the 6th century' (Domínguez (2006) 295).

⁶² See Dunbabin (1948) 301 and Kraay (1971) 11. Himera's archaic coinage, which begins in about 550–540, is more abundant than that of Naxos or Zancle (thus Kraay, cited above, n. 47).

⁶³ Hornblower (2004) 195. ⁶⁴ See Vassallo (2009).

⁶⁵ This inscription may encourage us to question the claim of Franzen (2009) 72 that 'Himerans are not Greek, they are a new breed, a mixture of the natives and Greeks, [who] looked to Stesichorus for the documentation of their mythical lineage.' For relations between Greeks and Sicels/Sicanians see Tribulato (2012b) 23–7.