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THE COINAGE OF SKYLLETION: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTE

Paolo Visonà

The recent publication of two volumes on the excavations conducted at Locri Epizephyrii by the University of Turin in 1973–1978 has provided some important new information on a bronze issue whose attribution to Skyllation has hitherto remained uncertain.¹ These rare coins bear on the obverse a young male head l., wearing a plain or laureate *pileus*; on the reverse is the monster Skylla facing l. Both types are within a linear border, and are often overstruck on Syracusan bronzes of Dionysius I with Head of Athena/Hippocamp.² While their existence and south Italian provenience have long been recognized,³ the location of their mint of origin has proven more elusive. R. S. Poole and B. V. Head assigned them to Cumae,⁴ but this attribution is ruled out by the complete absence of finds in the archaeological record of Cumae, and of Campania in general.⁵



¹ M. Barra Bagnasco (ed.), *Locri Epizefiri II. Gli isolati I₂ e I₃ dell'area di Centocamere* (Florence 1989); *Id.*, *Locri Epizefiri III. Cultura materiale e vita quotidiana* (Florence 1989).

² Cf., *exempli gratia*, the specimens assembled by R. Calciati, *Corpus Nummorum Siculorum* vol. III. *La Monetazione di Bronzo* (Novara 1987) 319–320; SNG ANS 3, 800; SNG Cop Italy, 1992–1993; SNG Lloyd, 723; SNG Deutschland, Staatliche Münzsammlung München 4, 1722. The overstriking have been discussed by S. Garraffo at the 8th Convegno del Centro Internazionale di Studi Numismatici, devoted to *La monetazione dell'età dionigiana* (Naples, May 29–June 1, 1983), whose proceedings are now in print.

³ See L. Sambon, *Recherches sur les monnaies de la presqu'île italique depuis leur origine jusqu'à la bataille d'Actium* (Naples 1870) 358: «il est reconnu que cette pièce provient habituellement des terres de l'ancien Bruttium.»

⁴ Cf. R. S. Poole, *BMC Italy* (London 1873) 90, nos. 36–38; HN 37. Although an exhaustive investigation of when this mint attribution was first proposed is presently impossible, it should be pointed out that, before Poole, it was adopted by G. Fiorelli, *Singularità di due monete cumane di bronzo*, in: *Osservazioni e Memorie*, *Annali di Numismatica* 1 (Naples 1846) 187–189.

⁵ Doubts on the attribution to Cumae were voiced by G. F. Hill, *Greek Coins acquired by the British Museum in 1917 and 1918*, NC 78–79, 1918–1919, 4 (Skyllation in Bruttium «seems a to be a better, though of course quite conjectural, attribution») and J. Babelon, *Catalogue de la Collection de Luynes*, vol., I. *Italie et Sicile* (Paris 1924) 157–158. See recently G. Gorini, *La collezione di monete greche di Paolo Orsi*. *Catalogo* (Rovereto 1985) nos. 62–63. According to R. Calciati (*supra* n. 2) 319, these coins «could come from the environs of Scillezio (area of north-center)», *i.e.*, from Sicily (but he nowhere locates Skyllation in his maps on pp. 261 and 283). However, he provides no evidence for this statement.

Although no detailed coin report from the Locri excavations has yet been made available, three specimens of the issue described above, two of which from a layer dated between the late 4th and the mid-3rd centuries B. C. (stratum I *b*), are listed by M. Barra Bagnasco in her discussion of the stratigraphy of the Hellenistic quarter investigated in the 1973–1978 campaigns.⁶ This evidence can be added to that of ten other examples of the same issue from the excavations conducted at Locri between 1908 and 1972, representing the largest number of finds from a single site in Magna Graecia.⁷

Such an unparalleled concentration of these bronzes is hardly insignificant. Locri lies approximately 85 km on the Ionian littoral to the south of Roccelletta di Borgia (near Catanzaro Lido), where the site of Skyllention has been located.⁸ Archaeological investigations conducted here since 1966 have yielded no examples of this issue, but only a relatively small portion of the settlement area has been excavated thus far, and excavation has seldom reached Hellenistic levels.⁹ Nonetheless, at least two specimens of the Syracusan issue overstruck with Young male head/Skylla are among the site finds from Roccelletta di Borgia, suggesting that they circulated at Skyllention before the establishment of the Roman colony in 123/122 B. C.¹⁰ These bronzes are also extremely common at Locri, where they arrived probably in the first half of the 4th century B. C., when Bruttium entered into the political orbit of Syracuse,¹¹ and must have remained in circulation at least until the end of the Second Punic War.¹² Since Skyllention was incorporated into Locri's territory by Dionysius I,¹³ it is not surprising for Dionysian bronze coins to be found at both sites. Yet, it seems unlikely that these coins could be overstruck while the Syracusan tyrants were still a force to be reckoned with, nor are there any indications that the issue with Young male head/Skylla may represent a mercenary coinage countenanced by the authority of

⁶ M. Barra Bagnasco, *Lo scavo*, in: M. Barra Bagnasco (ed.), *Locri Epizefiri II* (*supra* n. 1) 29, n. 90 (inv. no. 77/119, from stratum I *a*, dated *c.* 250–200 B. C.); 41, n. 132 (inv. no. 76/113, from stratum I *b*) and n. 133 (inv. no. 78/138, from stratum I *b*). The author dubitatively attributes two of these coins to Cumae, and (without explanation) one to Skyllention.

⁷ For these finds see E. Pozzi Paolini, *La moneta a Locri*, in: D. Musti (ed.), *Le Tavole di Locri. Atti del colloquio sugli aspetti politici, economici, culturali e linguistici dei testi dell'archivio locrese*, Napoli 26–27 aprile 1977 (Rome 1979) 161.

⁸ See R. Spadea, *Skyllention*, in: R. Spadea (ed.), *Da Skyllention a Scolacium. Il parco archeologico della Roccelletta* (Rome 1989) 69–71.

⁹ E. A. Arslan, *Il teatro*, in: R. Spadea (ed.), *Da Skyllention a Scolacium*, 92, 98; *Id.*, *La moneta*, *ibidem*, 189.

¹⁰ Arslan, *La moneta*, 189.

¹¹ See A. Cutroni Tusa, *Di alcuni rapporti tra Sicilia e Magna Grecia alla luce della documentazione numismatica*, *Magna Graecia* 8, 3–4 (1973) 7–8; Pozzi Paolini (*supra* n. 7) 158.

¹² See Barra Bagnasco, *Lo scavo*, (*supra* n. 6) 25, n. 75 (inv. no. 78/126); 31, n. 96 (inv. no. 78/147); see also 27, n. 82 (issue with Head of Athena/Star between dolphins, inv. no. 77/154). Unfortunately, prof. Barra Bagnasco attributes all these coins from stratum I *a* to Timoleon. Several specimens with Head of Athena/Hippocamp also come from stratum I *b*, and from stratum II, which she dates to the entire 4th century B. C.: see *ibidem*, 39, n. 127 (inv. no. 78/122); 41, n. 133 (inv. no. 78/129); 43, n. 139 (inv. nos. 77/113, 77/120, 77/121); 48, n. 151 (inv. nos. 73/140, 143–146, 190); 53, n. 167 (issue with Head of Athena/Star between dolphins, inv. no. 77/144) and n. 169 (inv. nos. 74/73, 74/77); 54–55, n. 174–175 (a total of 9 specimens in two small hoards). For the dating of these issues to the tyranny of Dionysius I, see R. Ross Holloway, *L'inizio della monetazione in bronzo siracusana*, *AIIN* 25, 1979, 134, and U. Westermark, *Italy and Sicily: The Hellenistic Period*, in: M. Price et al. (eds.), *A Survey of Numismatic Research 1978–1984*, vol. I (London 1986) 19.

¹³ See Strabo 6.261. This annexation may have occurred between 389 and 384 B. C., according to M. L. Lazzarini, *Fonti letterarie ed epigrafiche*, in: R. Spadea (ed.), *Da Skyllention a Scolacium* (*supra* n. 8) 65–66.

Dionysius I, or of his successor. The most plausible view is that the issue in question was minted after the overthrow of the Dionysian tyranny *c.* 344 B. C., a dating now supported by the stratigraphic evidence from the Locri excavations. As a *type parlant*, its reverse is a direct reference to Skyllation, the only Greek settlement in Bruttium with this name. The fact that so many examples of these bronzes have turned up at Locri is explained by the close political relationship between the two centers in the 4th century B. C. (admittedly a result of a forcible annexation), and by their relative proximity to each other.¹⁴ Once again, archaeological fieldwork has produced concrete elements for the solution of a numismatic problem, and the coinage of Skyllation can be reunited with its mint.

¹⁴ Skylla is also found on coins of Thurii and Heraclea Lucaniae from the late 5th to the late 4th centuries B. C., which may have provided prototypes for the issue of Skyllation: cf. R. Ross Holloway, *Art and Coinage in Magna Graecia* (Bellinzona 1978) 55, 128 (stater of Thurii, 415–375 B. C.), 57, 134 (stater of Heraclea, 433–330 B. C.). M. Mastelloni, *Le rappresentazioni monetali*, in: R. Spadea (ed.), *Da Skyllation a Scolacium* (*supra* n. 8) 193, remains skeptical about the attribution of the issue with Young male head/Skylla to Skyllation, despite the unique concentration of finds of these coins at Locri. Lack of an ethnic hardly objects to this attribution, on account of their reverse type and the fact that they only circulated within the region. The earliest issue of Issa in Dalmatia, which was overstruck upon Syracusan bronzes with Head of Athena/Star between dolphins, is also anepigraphic: cf. P. Visonà, *Early Greek Bronze Coinage in Dalmatia and the Škudljivac Hoard: A Reappraisal of IGCH 418–420*, in: *Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of Numismatics*, Berne, September 1979 (Louvain-La-Neuve 1982) 150.