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Coin finds from Capo d'Orlando (Messina, Sicily)

Mariangela Puglisi

We have heard of the accidental discovery of four poorly preserved bronze coins from the area of Capo d'Orlando, given by the local Archeoclub to the Archaeological Department of the Heritage Commission of Messina, and now on display at the local Museum¹.

They were found on the eastern slopes of «Monte della Madonna», close to the building known as «Miramare». Unfortunately we have no more information about the circumstances of the find, whether the coins were noticed all together, in the same layer, or scattered in the soil or even whether they were collected with other samples.

In the last two decades, the region of Capo d'Orlando – hypothetically identified by some scholars with the ancient city of *Agathyrnon/Agathyrnum*² – is giving more and more evidence of its ancient life³, so that we are slowly becoming able to draw a more definite picture of the site than that described thirty years ago by Luigi Bernabò Brea⁴.

In the area of the find various shards have been found, so far unexamined, but covering a large span of time. These include a quantity of Hellenistic black glazed pottery⁵, but apart from this, we have no other archaeological evidence.

On the opposite slope of the hill, a hut dated to the Late Bronze Age has been recently excavated⁶, as well as a Hellenistic necropolis located in the urban area (via Letizia/via Veneto) and dated to the time of the Punic Wars⁷.

Further, not far from the Port of San Gregorio, in a place named Bagnoli, in 1986 the remains of a bath-house came to light, part of a Roman villa of the 3rd–4th century AD⁸.

As far as concerns other coins from this area, we should mention the recent publication of some samples from the territory, whose exact find location is unfortunately unknown⁹.

1 Capo d'Orlando is situated on the northern coast of Sicily, approximately 150 km east from Palermo and 100 west from Messina. The find was made by Mr. Silvio Damiano, who gave the coins to the President of the local Archeoclub, Mr. Carmelo Caccetta, who promptly informed the Heritage Commission of the discovery, and kept them at the Museum in Capo d'Orlando («Antiquarium Comunale Agatiride»). I am grateful to Dr. Mariacostanza Lentini, Director of the Archaeological Department of the Heritage Commission of Messina, and Dr. Angela Merendino, in charge of the area of Capo d'Orlando, who gave me the

opportunity of studying and publishing these coins. I would like also to thank Dr. Silvia Hurter for her kind interest.

2 In general on the site of Capo d'Orlando: L. BERNABÒ BREA, Che cosa conosciamo dei centri indigeni della Sicilia che hanno coniato monete prima dell'età di Timoleonte, in: *Le emissioni dei centri siculi fino all'epoca di Timoleonte e i loro rapporti con la monetazione delle colonie greche di Sicilia*, Atti del IV Convegno CISP, Napoli, 9–14 aprile 1973, IV Suppl. AIN 20 (Roma 1975), pp. 3–52, here pp. 11–12; G. SCIBONA, s.v. Capo d'Orlando, in: *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites* (Princeton 1976), p. 194; G. SCIBONA, s.v.

Capo d'Orlando, in: G. NENCI/G. VALLET (eds.), *Bibliografia Topografica della Colonizzazione Greca in Italia e nelle Isole Tirreniche IV*, (Pisa/Roma 1985), pp. 425–428.

3 U. SPIGO (ed.), *Archeologia a Capo d'Orlando. Studi per l'Antiquarium* (Milazzo [Me] 2004).

4 BERNABÒ BREA (n. 2).

5 P. COPPOLINO, *Materiali dal territorio: Le tracce della storia*, in: U. SPIGO (n. 3), pp. 33–44.

6 M. C. LENTINI/F. ROVETTO/F. G. ARDITO, *Resti di una capanna della Tarda Età del Bronzo*, in: U. SPIGO (n. 3), pp. 69–78.

7 C. BONANNO, *La necropoli*, in: U. SPIGO (n. 3), pp. 79–90.

8 U. SPIGO, *Il complesso termale*

di località Bagnoli-S. Gregorio, in: U. SPIGO (n. 3), pp. 91–108; M. A. MASTELLONI, *Le monete di loc. Bagnoli-S. Gregorio*, in: U. SPIGO (n. 3), pp. 141–146: all the coins excavated are Roman, except for two bronzes which are Syracusan: one of Dionysius I (Head of Athena/Hippocamp) and the other of Hieron II (Head of Poseidon/Trident).

9 M. A. MASTELLONI, *Monete dal territorio*, in: U. SPIGO (n. 3), pp. 45–68: Roma: 1 struck in Sicily, 1 axis; Campania, Neapolis: 1; Apulia, Arpi: 2; Orta 1; Lucania, Paestum: 3; Bruttium, Rhegion: 2; Sicilia, Abakainon o Alontion: 1; Alontion: 7; Messana, Mamertines: 1 onkia, 2 pentonkia, 1 tetras (halved); Syracuse: 1 of the end of the 5th century BC, 4 of Dionysios period, 2 of Agatoclean period, 17 of Hieron II (5 halved), 1 of Roman period; Thermai: 1; Tyndaris: 3; Siculo-punic mint: 1; Lipara: 2.

On analysis, the coins were found to be in poor condition, and there is no reason to doubt that they must have been found *in loco*, as bronze coins in such a worn condition and so oxidised very rarely enter the antiquarian market.

They can be attributed to the cities of Syracuse, to a Siculo-Punic mint, to Apameia, in Phrygia, and to Panticapaeum, on the west side of the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

The most ancient is a Syracusan bronze *litra* from the time of the Fourth Democracy (289–287 BC) or of Hicetas (287–278 BC) with Zeus Hellanios/Eagle on thunderbolt¹⁰ (cat. 1).

Some Syracusan series circulated widely in the whole Sicilian region. This one, in particular, seems to be less widespread and its presence is restricted to the eastern and southern parts of Sicily, maybe due to its short period of issue¹¹.

The find of Capo d'Orlando represents, however, a typical situation we can observe in this area in the post-Agathoclean age.

As far as concerns the Siculo-Punic coin with a female head (Obv.) and a horse (cat. 2), as it is in poor condition, exact identification seems impossible, neither could restoration make it more legible. Nevertheless, its style and shape place it at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC.

In general, the circulation of Punic denominations in eastern Sicily is not unusual, even if less widespread than in the west. There are many Carthaginian issues – most of all of local mints – attested in the Greek tradition area of the island, dating back to the first half of the 4th century BC to the middle of 3rd century BC. The most documented are the series with a male head/galloping horse¹²; female head/standing horse in front of a palm tree¹³ – the one which our coin may resemble – or female head/horse's head¹⁴. This bears witness to intense monetary circulation during the period – despite the conflictual relationship between the Greek and Punic areas of Sicily –, probably due to the movements of people within the two territories¹⁵.

Very interesting, and, as far as I am aware, unique in Sicily from this origin, is the coin from Panticapaeum, Bosphorus, dated between the beginning of the 2nd and the end of the 1st century BC, with an eight-rayed star and a tripod¹⁶ (cat. 3).

As far as we know from numismatic literature, the Asia Minor coin from the mint of Apameia of Phrygia – head of Zeus/cult-statue of Artemis Anaitis – is also the only example of its type found on the island (cat. 4). It is dated between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st century BC (130–70 BC).

Being bronze coins, their presence so far from their place of origin may sound strange, but actually is not, if we consider the constant relationship between Sicily and the eastern Mediterranean area, dating back to previous centuries.

10 SNG Cop. Sicily nos. 789–797.

T. V. BUTTREY, *The Morgantina Gold Hoard and the Coinage of Hicetas*, NC, 7th series, XIII, 1973, pp. 1–17.

11 For the patterns of circulation of this series in Sicily, see

M. PUGLISI, *La Sicilia nell'età ellenistica: caratteristiche della circolazione monetale*, PhD thesis, University of Messina Messina 1999/2000,

in press, Catalogue.

12 SNG Cop. North Africa nos. 94–98.

13 SNG Cop. North Africa nos. 109–119

14 SNG Cop. North Africa nos. 144–178, 192 ff.

15 Cf. M. PUGLISI, (n. 11).

16 SNG Stancomb Collection XI, no. 588.

These links are also documented in the iconographic field, above all in relation to Syracusan coinage and, for instance, also in the currency of the cities of Olbia, Sinope (Black Sea) and Cyzicus (Propontis)¹⁷.

It is not unusual that some towns, which had never had mints, such as Capo d'Orlando (*Agathyrnon-Agathyrnum?*)¹⁸, were subject to fairly intense movements of coinage, involving coins from both nearby areas and distant regions. This could be due to their particular nature, based on farming, commerce and control of the land, that would involve the convergence of various interests, which presumed payments and monetary exchange¹⁹.

Catalogue



1. Syracusae

AE, litra; h 7; 5.47 g; 24–19.1 mm

Obv.: Young laureate head of Zeus Hellanios not bearded [ΔΙΟΣ ΗΛΛΑΝΙΟΥ].

Rev.: Eagle standing, with spread wings, on a thunderbolt [ΣΥΡΑΚΟΣΙΩΝ].

Bibliography: SNG Cop. Sicily nos. 789–797.

Chronology: Fourth Democracy (289–287 BC) or Hicetas (287–278 BC).



2. Siculo-Punic mint

AE; h 11; 2.38 g; 16–15 mm

Obv.: Female head wearing a wreath of reeds.

Rev.: Standing horse, probably before a palm tree).

Bibliography: SNG Cop. North Africa nos. 109–119 (?).

Chronology: end of 4th–beginning of 3rd century BC.

17 Cf. J. F. HEALY, The use of Sicilian and Magna Graecian types in white gold and electrum series of Asia Minor and the islands, *Atti CIN*, Roma, 1961 (Roma 1965), pp. 37–44; M. CACCAMO CALTABIANO, Tipi monetali siracusani in Asia

Minore, in *Sicilia e Anatolia dalla preistoria all'età ellenistica*, *Atti della V Riunione Scientifica della Scuola di Perfezionamento in Archeologia dell'Università di Catania*, Siracusa 1987, *Cronache di Archeologia* XXVI–XXVII,

1987–1988, pp. 103–114; M. CACCAMO CALTABIANO, *Monetazione e circolazione monetale*, in: *La Magna Grecia e l'Oriente Mediterraneo fino all'età classica*, XXXIX Convegno Internazionale di Studi sulla Magna Grecia, Taranto 1999

(Taranto 2000), pp. 291–328; A. D'ARRIGO, *La monetazione in bronzo pesante di Olbia: sue caratteristiche e confronti con le esperienze di Sicilia*, PhD thesis, University of Messina 2004/05.

18 If the site is identifiable with the ancient city of Agathyrnon/Agathyrnum, it does not seem it was ever the seat of a mint, but it does not mean necessarily that it was extraneous to monetary circulation.

19 Cf. M. PUGLISI, *La Sicilia da Dionisio I a Sesto Pompeo. Circolazione e funzione della moneta*, Messina, in press (rielaborazione da PUGLISI [n. 11]). On the contrary, as far as we know from the archaeological point of view, the territories of cities, active as monetary mints, actually produced little numismatic evidence. This may be due, above all, to the reduced importance of coin use, but also to a lack of archaeological exploration in a number of areas.



3. Panticapaeum, Bosphorus

AE; h –; 1.99 g; 15–14 mm

Obv.: Eight-rayed star [ΠΑΝΤΙΚΑΠΙ][ΑΙ] ΟΝ.

Rev.: Tripod.

Bibliography: SNG Stancomb Collection XI, no. 588.

Chronology: beginning of 2nd–end of 1st century BC.



4. Apameia, Phrygia

AE; h 6; 9.69 g; 25–21.2 mm

Obv.: Laureate and bearded head of Zeus.

Rev.: Cult-statue of Artemis Anaitis; on the r. ΑΠΙΑΜΕ; on the left [ΗΡΑΚΛΑΕΙ – ΕΓΓΑΟ].

Bibliography: SNG Fitzwilliam Museum VI, no. 1017.

Chronology: end of 2nd–beginning of 1st century BC (130–70 BC).

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Fig. 1–4: Mariangela Puglisi

Mariangela Puglisi

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