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THE INCUSE OF TELYS OF SYBARIS

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Towards the end of the eighth century B.C. Achaean Greeks from the Northern Peloponnese founded Sybaris in Calabria in Southern Italy. Located in a fertile and extensive plain watered by the Crati, Coscile and Ranganello rivers, the city flourished and became a by-word for decadent luxury. We hear, for example, of a denizen named Smindyrides who had his bed strewn with rose petals, but could not get to sleep because they were crumpled.

A few years before 510, Sybaris fell under the control of a populist dictator named Telys who expelled the wealthy oligarchs previously in power.¹ The refugees were granted asylum by Kroton, Sybaris' neighbour and rival and also a foundation of Achaean Greek mainlanders. At the time the affairs of Kroton, on the site of modern Crotona, were under the direction of a fanatical and puritanical oligarchy inspired by the teachings of Pythagoras who had migrated to the West in 529. In 510, war broke out between the two cities.² The Krotoniates were completely successful, Telys and his associates were massacred, and the bulk of his surviving subjects fled to the Sybarite dependencies of Laos and Skidros on the Western coast. A puppet Sybaris, doubtless dominated by Telys' oligarchic opponents, was tolerated by the victors who appointed one Kylon as its governor.³

Probably close to 530, Sybarites and Krotoniates and the citizens of another Achaean foundation, Metapontion (modern Metaponto), began to strike

coins, predominantly staters weighing in the region of 8.00 grams. The fabric is unique with the reverse type a mirror image of that of the obverse but *intaglio*. Typical examples of early 'incuse' fabric staters of Kroton and Sybaris respectively are coins A and B in the accompanying illustration. Both are struck on thin, wide flans around 30 millimetres in diameter. The Krotoniate coin features a tripod, alluding to the role of Apollo's Delphic oracle in Kroton's foundation, and the abbreviated ethnic $\Phi\rho\sigma$ in the local script. Its Sybarite counterpart depicts a backward turned bull, probably a type referring to a source of local prosperity; also in evidence is the truncated ethnic MV retrograde and again in the local script.

As time went on the size of the *incusi* at the Krotoniate, Sybarite and Metapontine mints was progressively and almost certainly simultaneously reduced. While at Kroton and Metapontine the flans eventually contract below 20 mm, shrinkage of Sybaris does not proceed further than 23 mm. Coin D in the illustration, from Vienna, marks the final stage of Sybarite contraction. The flan diameter is exactly 23 mm at widest. Accompanying the bull on the obverse is a sub-symbol, a leaf, in the top field, a feature which distinguishes the coin from earlier Sybarite issues. The legend MV retrograde appears in the obverse exergue.

The logical inference from the absence of Sybarite staters struck on flans less than

1. For Telys' seizure of power, the reception of Sybarite exiles at Kroton and the role of Pythagoras see Diodoros of Sicily, 12.9.2-4.
2. On the war between Kroton and Sybaris see Herodotos, 5.44-45; Diodoros, 12.9.5-10.1; Herakleides Pontikos, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, 521 e-f. The flight of Sybarites to Laos and Skidros emerges from Herodotos, 6.21.
3. Kylon as governor of a puppet Sybaris; Iamblichus, *de vita Pythagorica* 74 (Iamblichus' source will be the reputable Siceliote historian Timaios of Tauromenion).

23 mm in diameter is that Sybaris was destroyed by her rival Kroton at precisely the juncture that the *incusi* had shrunk to that width. Confirmation of this deduction is provided by a group of staters, of which C in the illustration is an example, all struck from a single obverse die. The obverse bears the tripod of Kroton in relief and the legend $\Phi\text{P}\text{O}$; on the reverse is the bull of Sybaris incuse with the legend MV orthodox appearing in the exergue. The flan diameter is exactly 23 mm. These coins can only be issues of the puppet Sybaris whose existence under Krotoniate hegemony was permitted after the holocaust of 510.

In addition to the Vienna stater displaying a leaf above the bull on the obverse, extant are other rare Sybarite staters with sub-symbols or differing in other respects from the 'orthodox', 'plain' staters typified by B. Examples of two of these, struck on flans 27 mm in diameter, are held in the Bibliothèque Nationale collection in Paris and by the Naples Museum. On both obverse and reverse of the Paris coin a laurel bough appears above the bull; in the exergue of the obverse the legend MV is inscribed retrograde. The badly corroded Naples coin⁵ features no sub-symbol; its distinctive feature is the appearance of the legend N ζ KA (*nika*; 'victory') in local script in the obverse's upper field; the ethnic MV is not in evidence.

A further abnormal Sybarite stater (E in the accompanying plate) held at Munich in the Staatliche Münzsammlung, has hitherto, so far as I am aware, not received attention. The badly worn obverse is 'normal' with the legend MV orthodox appearing in the exergue; above the bull on the reverse, however, is a laurel wreath. The coin's low weight, 6.743 grams, is partly due to ancient excision of a portion of it. The flan diameter, 27 mm, is the same as that of the aberrant Naples and Paris pieces.

I suggest that the deviant N ζ KA stater and the three staters with sub-symbols are all issues of the dictator Telys concerned to depart from the 'plain' format deployed by the previous regime. If, as seems certain enough, the wreath on the reverse of the Munich piece connotes victory, its message is the same as that of the N ζ KA coin. The two staters may be Telys' earliest productions alluding to his success in seizing control of the state. The other staters with sub-symbols followed; first the Paris coin, then the Vienna piece exhibiting a further contraction of flan diameter and terminating Sybaris' independent emissions.

PROVENIENCE AND WEIGHTS OF ILLUSTRATED STATERS

- A. (Kroton) Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Budapest; 7.00 gm.
- B. (Sybaris) Bundessammlung von Medaillen, Münzen und Geldzeichen, Vienna, (Inv. no. 4.603); 8.15 gm.
- C. (Sybaris II) Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (SNG V, Ashmolean Museum, Part II, no. 1535); 7.70 gm.
- D. (Sybaris) Vienna (Inv. no. 4.599); 7.85 gm.
- E. (Sybaris) Staatliche Münzsammlung, München; 6.743 gm.

4. Part of the de Luynes collection; it is illustrated by E. Babelon in plate LXVII (no. 7) of the first volume of plates of his *Traité des Monnaies Grecques et Romaines* (Paris, 1907). The piece weighs 7.90 grams.
5. The stater (Inv. no. 4.599) belongs to the Santangelo collection; the weight is 7.92 grams.



A

B



C

D

E



5cm