

Some observations about political and economic relationships between Syracuse and Epirus during the IIIrd century b. C.

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After Asculum Satrianum's battle in the 279 b. C. owing to pressing requests of the Syracusan ambassadors, Pyrrhus believed to undertake the military campaign in Sicily. To escape the vigilance of the Roman ships in the Strait, he directed his navy to Tauromenion, where he disembarked in the 278 b. C. From here he went to Katane, where he was accepted as liberator. Successively he moved to Syracuse, where he broke off the Carthaginians' siege and came in the city with great triumph. New Siceliot troops, among which those of Heraclides, despot of Leontinoi, enriched his army's ranks. He left to western part of Sicily, still subjected to Carthaginian's control. Selinus and Segesta entered into an alliance with Epirot king too. A bigger resistance was opposed at Eryx by Carthaginian garrison that had to surrender at the end because the violent attack of Pyrrhus. After the hold of this town, he celebrated great sacrifices in honour of Herakles as descending from Aeacides and Achilles.

After fall of Eryx only Lilibeus remained in the hands of Carthaginians. The siege of this city was very difficult owing to strenuous resistance of defenders. Dwelling of the siege and the Pyrrhus' character promoted the discontent of Siceliot allies, who at last rose against. Without allies' support, Pyrrhus had to leave his dreams of Sicily's conquest and therefore returned to Italy, beginning again war against Romans.

The presence of Pyrrhus in Sicily has a precious source in the issues of coins. Most of material examined in this side comes from museum collections, but there are also cases of discoveries in archaeological contexts. About these last cases, we remember two hoards of prevalently Syracusan coins, founded in territory and acropolis of Kamarina in the 1967 and in the 1980. It's a group of 19 coins and a hoard of 33 patterns, issued in name of Agathocles, Hicetas and Pyrrhus. The chronology of both deposits has to be sited in the period immediately precedent the hold of the city by Romans.

At Syracuse, Pyrrhus issued coins in the three metals and followed the attic-euboic system in use of the Siceliot cities. We can find head of Artemis on the obverse and Victory with trophy and crown on the reverse and head of Athena on the obverse and Victory advancing with trophy on the reverse. In both cases the representations of deities remember those on issues of Agathocles and Hieron.

The image of Victory winged with crown and trophy represents also an exaltation of triumphs obtained by Pyrrhus against Carthaginians in Sicily.

The head of Athena with helmet is founded also on other two series of coins, coupled on the reverse with Pegasus or crown of oak, at the centre an ear of wheat.

The presence of an oak's ear isn't new in the Siceliot coinage, but in this side we can underline oak's ear is an attribute of Zeus' cult.

There is the representation of Athena Promachos on the reverse of a series of bronze issues, where on the obverse we find the head of Herakles.

The head of Herakles, that minds the bronzes of the III century B.C., can be easily connected with the bond uniting to Pyrrhus, because he is just descending from Aeacides. These issues can be placed within the limits of those celebrations occurred immediately after the hold of Eryx.

Sometimes near Athena Promachos on the reverse there are some symbols referring probably to Syracuse's mint or to particular aspects of cult: they are a trident how we have seen in the precedent slide, a crown, a thunderbolt and an owl. Sometimes Athena Promachos is represented with a thunderbolt in hand in place of the lance.

Athena Alkis can be founded on the reverse of silver staters, where on the obverse there is head of Persephone. In this pattern, referring also some Ptolemaic series, some symbols can be observed near the head of goddess (the trident and the poppy).

The head of Persephone is on the obverse of bronze issues and on the reverse Demeter in throne. This coin has a confront with issues from mint of Locri Epizephiri, where it's issued a silver series with head of Zeus on he obverse and Dion sited in throne on the reverse. We can point out the issues of Pyrrhus in Occident have a strong internal coherence for iconographical, stylistic and ideological affinities. That makes very difficult to admit the existence of one mint. It can be supposed in the first series pattern evoked myths and cults connected to Epirus. Successively to justify the power obtained, elements of iconographical Syracusan tradition should be inserted.

To the cult of Zeus can be connected also the thunderbolt appearing on the reverse of another bronze issue, while on the obverse there is head of Phtias, Pyrrhus' mother. In this case thunderbolt's representation isn't new in coinage of Syracuse, because there was on the issues of Agatochles and will return on those of Hieronymus.

A series of bronze coins closes the first part of our discussion: they represent head of Zeus Hellanios on the obverse and eagle holding between claws the thunderbolt on the reverse.

Zeus' head yet appears on the coins of Epirus and in some mints of Italy (Tarentum, Locri Epizephiri). At Syracuse this pattern could have assumed a particular meaning for the importance of the Zeus' cult in propagandistic key, before for Pyrrhus and then for Hieron II.

Through study of these numismatic sources can be founded important witnesses about the passage of Pyrrhus in Sicily and about the changes following his departure. Particularly the relation of Epirot king with Hieron II appears evident.

Syracuse's theatre has given back a most important epigraphic documentation in relation to the family of Syracusan king. On the cavea's top names of deities and members of the royal family are reported, according to a precise will. The first two parts have been identified for certain with young royal couple, maden up by Gelon, king's son, and Nereis, Pyrrhus' nephew. Their marriage happened in the 235 b. C. and therefore theatre's building is sited after this date. The third and fourth part is dedicated to royal couple, maden up by Hieron and Filistis. The following parts are assigned to deities: the central part to Zeus, followed probably by Hera, in symmetric relation with royal couple. The following deities belong to younger generation, as king's sons, and have been identified with Herakles and other two deities in uncertain interpretation. Among various conjectures put forth, it seems more acceptable to Demeter and Persephone.

Near the Syracuse's theatre an altar was built in the 240 b. C. This monument was enclosed in a *temenos* and was delimited on west from great stalls, arriving as far as the ways bringing to theatre from south. Sources' silent is interpreted by Bell as a precise will of Rome to lessen the importance of Hieron's monument and however the altar is attributed to Zeus' cult. The elements allowing this interpretation are both the dimensions (one stadium in length) and Atlantes' couples on sides of two entrances that supported buildings for the cult of Zeus, according to Vitruvius.

In the next period area of the *temenos* was changed with the building of symmetric *stoai*, dated by Gentili and Wilson at the Augustan Age and by Bell before Roman conquest.

The cult of Zeus assumes a remarkable importance into the political program of Hieron II, which was carried out through the realization of holy buildings at Syracuse: near to *Olympieion*, a monumental temple to Zeus Olympius was built, adding to Olympeion sited out of the city.

Another witness of the connection between the dynasty of Hieron II and the cult of Zeus can be founded in an inscription, cut on marmoreal base discovered in Ortygia, in which it can be read Gelon II, Hieron's son, and people of Syracuse dedicated a statue to Zeus Hellanios.

The centrality of this cult is present also in other cities controlled rightly by Hieron II. In the agora of Megara Hyblea was built a temple, attributed by Bell to cult of Zeus because discovery of an eagle, that had to place on the fronton.

In the agora of Morgantina, the excavations have singled out the presence of four altars, whose three should be dated, according to Bell, at the Hieronian Age and should be dedicated to cult of Zeus.

All these elements should let think to this cult as expression of Hieron's supremacy. This aspect should find remarkable confronts in the reign of Pyrrhus in Epirus, because Zeus and his attributes appear on king's issues and sanctuary of Dodona assumes a most important position.

At this point the cults to ruling dynasties of Pyrrhus and Hieron could be mentioned, because they had chosen Syracuse and Dodona as their capital and had embellished them with important architectonic monuments, like theatres and temples, and made of these a concrete manifestation of their prestige.