Piakos

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The location of many smaller cities of ancient Sicily is still undetermined. Archaeological research of recent times has led to a solution of some problems, particularly the location of Morgantina[1]. Often there still remains the question of where the Sicel city Piakos lay, which was previously known to us only through a single mention by the lexicographer Stephanos of Byzantion and through very rare bronze coins. The idea that the name of this city was hidden in the corrupt designation ≪Trinakia≫ in Diodoros XII, 29, has been refuted by Beloch in favor of Palike, the great Sicel fortress that Duketios built and that Syrakus destroyed in the year 440 B.C.[2] The previously known bronze coins of Piakos are later.

Recent conjectures are usually based on similarities with modern place names, such as Mirone's suggestion: S. Maria le Plachi near Catania[3], or Cavallaro's proposal that Piakos was the modern Piazza Armerina[4]. Columba also considered Piazza Armerina a possibility, or Placa-Bajana near Bronte[5]. Rizzo proposed no specific location for Piakos, but showed that the city was located in the region of Aetna, as it seems to me, rightly, perhaps in the neighborhood of Randazzo[6]: three of the five known bronze coins of Piakos were found between Adernò and Paternò. Columba's specimen, however, comes from the region of Gela; since this single provenance does not agree with the other three known ones, no complete certainty can be reached as long as no finds provide secure topographical evidence.

[1] In this context, the archaeological exploration of the Gela region by D. Adamesteanu should be mentioned, conveniently summarized in Revue Archéologique XLIV (1957) 20 ff. — On Morgantina see especially K. Erim, AJA 62 (1958) 79 ff.

[2] Surprisingly, Piakos is missing from the relevant volume of Pauly-Wissowa (RE vol. 20, 1). — On the bronze coins of Piakos, B. M. Guide to the Principal Coins of the Greeks pl. 16, 50 and G. E. Rizzo, Monete greche della Sicilia antica pl. LX, 12—14. — Ettore Pais (Ancient Italy 163 f.) interpreted ≪Trinakia≫ in connection with the mention of Πιακηνοί in the quoted passage of Diodoros' Epitome as a mention of Piakos. F. Beloch, Griech. Geschichte I², 1, 136 f. argues convincingly against this in favor of Palike.

[3] Demareteion II 1, 17: quoted by T. G. Dunbabin, The Western Greeks 135, 4.

[4] Annali dell'Istituto Italiano di Numismatica I (1954) 21 ff.

[5] Atti e Memorie dell'Ist. di Num. V (1925) 31 ff.

[6] Intermezzo 19 ff.: Monete greche della Sicilia antica 68 ff.



Photo M. Hirmer

Meanwhile, a previously unknown silver coin sheds new light on the problem. The piece is in a Swiss private collection, whose owner generously gave me permission for publication. Here is the description:

Vs. Head of a nymph to r. ΠΙΑΚΙΝΟ-Σ
Rs. Attacking bull to r. In exergue fish to r. Above ΑΔΡΑΝ[..
Weight: 0.72 g.

We have here a community coinage of similar type to the known alliance coin of Leontinoi-Katane[7]. It connects Piakos with Adranon (modern Adernò), which makes a neighborhood of the two places probable. The types are evidently taken from the later litrae of Katane[8], just as the head of the bronze coins of Piakos copies the stamps that the «Maestro della foglia»[9] cut in Katane. A bull appears again as a reverse image on later bronzes of Adranon from the time of Timoleon: there it doubtlessly represents the river god Adranos, whose human head adorns the obverse[10]. Despite the incompleteness of the reverse legend, our silver litra clearly designates Adranon. The inscription of the obverse, which names Piakos, stands in the same adjectival form as, for example, Συρακόσιος or καταναῖος (sc. χαρακτὴρ?)[11]; the arrangement of the letters, with the separated ending-Σ, speaks for the influence, if not indeed for the hand of the die-cutter of the ΑΣΣΙΝΟΣ-stamp in Naxos[12]. Our coin must be dated a few years later: Adranon was founded by Dionysios I. of Syrakus in 400 B.C.[13], Naxos destroyed in 403 B.C.

Let us return to the geographical question and to the now more established connection Piakos—Adranon. The city Adranon had a predecessor, though not in the same place: a Sicel city near Mendolito, about 8 km southwest of Adernò in the Simeto valley. There interesting archae-

[7]See Num. Chron. 1955, 134 ff.
[8]Rizzo, Monete greche, Tf. XIV, 24—5; Lloyd, SNG II 914: but the fish in the exergue corresponds to that on the hemidrachm of Katane instead of the river-crab on the litra.
[9]Rizzo, loc. cit., Tf. XII.
[10]Rizzo, loc. cit., Tf. LIX, 8.
[11]L. Tudeer, Syrakus — Rückseitenstempel 16, 25, 35, 37 — where the masculine form of the legend accompanies a female head and therefore cannot refer to the type: K. Regling, Warren Cat. 213.
[12]H. A. Cahn, Naxos 115 ff.
[13]Diod. Sicil. XIV, 37.

ological material was found[14], particularly Sicel inscriptions as well as some remarkable bronze ornaments from the late 8th century B.C.[15] However, nothing allows us to conclude about the ancient name of this place.

In light of the coin described here, the question arises whether Mendolito was not Piakos. The close connection between Piakos and Adranon, which the coin demonstrates, supports the statement of the three bronze coins of Piakos that were found near Adernò; it becomes clear that Piakos is not to be sought generally in the region of Aetna, but in the territory around Adernò. Thus the nearby unnamed settlement at Mendolito offers an attractive solution to the Piakos problem.

It should further be remembered that the reverse type of the bronze coins of Piakos — which originated somewhat earlier than the new litra, around 420 B.C. — shows a dog attacking a roe deer. The dog is a rare animal in the iconographic repertoire of eastern Sicilian coins, apart from a dog in Agyrion in the 4th century[16]. Does the dog of Piakos not recall the thousand dogs that guarded the famous sanctuary of Adranos? — like the modern police dogs that are able to distinguish friend from foe[17]. The dogs of Adranos appear on no coin of this city, but there is a dog as reverse type, combined with an Adranos-head in the later series of the Mamertines[18].

The conjecture that Piakos was the name of the ancient city near Mendolito, although not provable, seems nevertheless possible and possesses more probability than all previously proposed solutions. One would then have to assume that Piakos did not cease to exist immediately after the founding of Adranon. Evidently there is no particular historical event that occasioned this alliance coin, probably shortly after 400 B.C., unless it was the founding of Adranon. In any case, the new coin represents a remarkable addition to the later coinages of small silver of the Sicel cities in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., such as Abakainon, Enna, Galaria, Morgantina and Imachara.

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[14]Dunbabin, loc. cit., 132 f.

[15]Briefly on the magnificent color plates in Bernardo Brea, Musei e Monumenti in Sicilia, illustrated, plate to p. 24.

[16]E. Gabrici, Monetazione del bronzo nella Sicilia antica, Tf. IV, 7.

[17]Aelian V. H. XI, 3. — On the proposed connection between the coin type of Piakos and the fable of Odysseus see G. F. Hill, Coins of Ancient Sicily 138 (the suggestion originally comes from Samuel Butler from his highly interesting but hardly scientific book about the authoress of the Odyssey).

[18]M. Särström, Coinage of the Mamertines, Serien VIII gp. A.