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REMARDS ON THE TARANTO HOARD OF 1911

In the last issue of *Revue belge de numismatique*, I discussed hoard evidence bearing on the chronology of the early owls of Athens in particular and on the chronology of early Greek coinage in general (1). The mixed hoards on which numismatists have depended to provide the chronological guides for this material are, I pointed out, hoards recovered, with one exception, from the lands of the Persian Empire. Predominating among them are bullion hoards in which there is often far more uncoined silver than silver in the form of coin. The evidence of these same hoards should never be used without taking account of the possibility that any one of them can be made up of parcels of coins that reached their final destinations abroad at different times and by different routes. These hoards have no relationship to the circulation of coinage in the Greek world. And consequently they are misleading guides to the chronology of archaic Greek coinage. In this note I wish to examine the case of the one large mixed late archaic hoard known from the Greek world: the Taranto Hoard of 1911 (2).

The hoard came to light on the 22nd of June of 1911 in the so-called Borgo Nuovo of Taranto, as related by Ernest Babelon in his publication of the hoard in the *Revue Numismatique* of 1912 (3). Babelon's information came from the collector Gregory Vlasto who had bought 168 of the coins, one of the four parcels into which the hoard was divided immediately after its discovery. Learning of the existence of the other three parcels, Vlasto, who lived in France, went to Italy where he bought another 100 coins from the hoard in Rome and then to Taranto where, however, he had to abandon the idea of acquiring the last and largest part of the hoard (318 pieces) — evidently because of the price — although he did see it and was able to make a summary description of the coins.

The condition of the hoard has not satisfied all students of the subject. For Paolo Orsi the Taranto Hoard was nothing more than a jumble put

(2) IGCH 1874.
together by Tarantine traffickers in antiquities: "Su questo complesso, quanto mai eloquente, l'illustre collega, tratto in inganno da erronee informazioni, ha fabbricato un romanzo archeologico, immaginando una nave di commercio, che partita da Focea avrebbe toccato la costa di Tracia e Macedonia, l'Africa, la Grecia, la M. Grecia e la Sicilia, scambiando nelle diverse piazze le sue merci colla moneta delle singole città. Ma purtroppo non trattasi, che di un ingegnoso anzi geniale romanzo. Una rigorosa inchiesta della Regia Soprintendenza di Taranto, come mi scrive il collega Quagliati, ha provato, provenire le monete non da un unico ripostiglio ma la frazione di diversi, gabellati agli acquirenti francesi come una sola unità; essi stanno ad ogni modo a denotare la stragrande varietà del numerario, che aveva corso sulla piazza di Taranto." (4) ("Concerning this group of material, however eloquent it may be, our illustrious colleague has been deceived by erroneous information and has made up an archaeological romance, imagining a trading vessel which having sailed from Phocaea then called at ports along the Thracian and Macedonian coast, in North Africa, in Greece, in Magna Graecia and in Sicily, exchanging its cargo at these various ports for coins of the various cities. But, unfortunately, this is only an ingenious, nay, a brilliant, romance. A rigorous inquiry made by the Royal Superintendency of Taranto, as my colleague Quagliati informs me, has proven the coins came not from a single hoard but parts of several, passed off on the French purchasers as a single find. These finds, however, do show the very great variety of coin that was in use on the market at Taranto").

We are thus faced, according to Orsi, with several finds of Greek coins put into one package. However, in spite of this opinion, the balance of numismatic opinion has been in favor of viewing the hoard as a single find (5). But another negative voice belongs to Laura Breglia, who took up the question in 1967: "Senonché, a questo punto, e dopo tutto quanto si è premesso, vien da domandarsi se realmente il materiale era tutto di provenienza regionale o se il complesso non fosse stato addirittura creato in sede antiquaria con nuclei di materiale di differente provenienza. Comunque sia, ci sembra, e crediamo di non essere troppo rigidì nel nostro giudizio, che il tesoretto di Taranto, che ha dato luogo a tante conclusioni e non soltanto in sede numismatica, non possa esser ritenuto testimonianza scientificamente valida" (6) ("If not, at this point, and after what has been said, the questions arises if really the material was all found

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(4) P. ORSI, Di un insigne tesoretto di aurei persiani e siracusani rinvenuti ad Avola (Sicilia), in AMIIN, 3, 1, 1927, p. 29.
(6) L. BREGLIA, I rinvenimenti di monete ateniesi in Sicilia e in Magna Grecia, in Atti del I Convegno del Centro internazionale di studi numismatici Napoli 5-8 aprile 1967. La Circolazione della Moneta ateniese in Sicilia e in Magna Grecia (supp. AIIN, 12-14), Rome, 1969, p. 3-32.
in the area or if this group of material was not actually put together on the antiquarian market from groups of coins from different places. However it may be, it seems to us, and we believe that we are not too strict in our judgement, that the Taranto Hoard, which has given rise to so many conclusions, and not only those in numismatic discussions, cannot be considered a scientifically valid witness”.

Twelve years later Attilio Stazio gave the following measured judgement at the Bern Numismatic Congress: “Una...indagine della Soprintendenza alle Antichità di Taranto avrebbe accertato, «provenire le monete non da un unico ripostiglio, ma da frazioni di diversi, gabellati agli acquirenti francesi come una sola unità». Sulla base dei risultati di detta indagine, L. Breglia negava attendibilità ai dati ricavabili da tale complesso. Non è possibile, purtroppo, conoscere quali sicuri elementi di giudizio siano emersi dalla «rigorosa inchiesta» della Soprintendenza di Taranto; d’altra parte, il nome e l’esperienza di M. Vlasto hanno un tale peso che la sua versione dei fatti ha avuto largo credito fra gli studiosi. Anch’io, nonostante le iniziali riserve, propenderei oggi ad accedere a tale interpretazione, che mi sembra verisimile proprio per l’eccezionalità della composizione del tesoretto (assenza di moneta tarantina e, al contrario, abbondante presenza di esemplari di zecche diversissime e lontane, mai più documentati nella zona e, in massima parte, nell’intero territorio della Magna Grecia). Ma questa stessa eccezionalità fa escludere che se ne possano ricavare elementi atti a documentare la fisionomia della circolazione monetale in quella area”.

final comment is certainly accurate: the Taranto Hoard has nothing to tell us about coins that circulated in Magna Graecia. But it has much to tell about the way coinage functioned in archaic Greece.

In the period which ends approximately in 470 BC the hoards of Magna Graecia reflect a well defined area of monetary circulation (8). In fact, the traditional hypothesis is that there existed among the Achaean cities of Magna Graecia a kind of monetary union that permitted the incuse coinages of those cities to circulate freely in each others' territory. As a consequence, there is a kind of «standard» hoard in the area composed of coins of Sybaris (and her dependent cities), Croton, Caulonia and Metapontum (9).

Under this head one may include the following hoards: IGCH 1877 (Southern Italy, circa 1950); IGCH 1878 (Southern Italy, before 1900); IGCH 1881 (Curinga, 1916: also coins of Taranto); IGCH 1883 (Calabria, 1842: more than 1000 coins); Coin Hoards II, n. 9 (Valesio); Coin Hoards VIII, n. 46 (Rutigliano: this hoard was found in the Province of Bari and it is therefore not strictly within the Achaean area; also coins of Taranto and Poseidonia) and Coin Hoards VII, n. 9 (San Nicola di Amendolara, 1976).

After 480 the composition of the hoards becomes less clear cut (10). The oldest and best known hoard from the Achaean area is of a different character than the hoards surveyed above. This is the Sambiase Hoard, which contained 43 coins of Sybaris and 2 staters of Corinth (11). Corinthian coins, however, were regularly overstruck to produce the incuse se-


(9) The term "area chiusa di circolazione" (closed area of circulation) was introduced by L. Breglia, Contributo allo studio della circolazione monetale in Magna Grecia, in RAAN, 19, 1939, p. 141 ff.

(10) IGCH 1884 (Santo Stefano di Rogliano, ca. 1910), also a coin of Poseidonia. IGCH 1885 (Strongoli, 1955) 13 coins among which 1 of Poseidonia and 1 of Taranto. IGCH 1886 (Bruttium, 1920) with a coin of Taranto. IGCH 1887 (Bruttium, 1963) In a hoard of 175 coins 15 of Taranto, 14 of Poseidonia, 1 of Laus and 1 of the Serdaiol. IGCH 1889 (Cittanuova, 1879). The hoard contained about 600 coins. There was present, among other issues, a coin of Taranto, 1 of Ami-, 1 of Laus and 2 of Poseidonia. For the hoard of Croton 1956 (CH VIII no. 24) see below. It is worth noting two groups of coins from sanctuaries: Garaguso (J.-P. Morel, Atti del decimo convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia, 1981, p. 489-493 and Oria, CH VIII, n. 23. Even though it was found in the Apulian area the composition of the Oria find is of the classic Achaean area type, coins of Sybaris, Metapontum, Croton and Caulonia.

(11) IGCH 1872.
ries, and it is not surprising that occasionally they made their way inland (19). A coin of Corinth was part of the Calabria 1864 hoard, a large hoard containing coins of Sybaris, Croton, Caulonia, Metapontum and a stater of Poseidonia (13).

If we now consider the hoards from the inland area of Achaean South Italy datable before 480, the uniformity of their contents is truly amazing. Of course, as Stazio observed, it is true that these hoards do not document monetary circulation connected with everyday mercantile exchange (14).

It is evident, none the less, that at the end of the sixth century and during the first years of the next, the inland region of Magna Graecia was not receiving coin directly from the entire Greek world but almost exclusively from the Achaean Greek cities of southern Italy. And at this point in our discussion it will be useful to return to Taranto and the hoard of 1911.

The Taranto hoard is made up of several groups of non-Tarantine coins. Two stand out from the rest as identifiable "parcels".

I. There is a «standard hoard» of the usual type of the interior of the Achaean area. This Achaean group makes up half the hoard (Sybaris: 135 pieces; Metapontum: more than 149; Croton: more than 80; Poseidonia: one coin; Ami: one coin).

II. A second «parcel»: also comes from Magna Graecia: 96 coins of Velia. The coins of Velia did not circulate in the area defined by the «standard hoards» of the coinages of the Achaean cities.

In addition to these two units there are coins of the major mints of Greece itself, which are known in other finds in Magna Graecia or Sicily (Aegina: 15 coins [also known in the Selinus hoard] (15); Athens: 8 coins [also present in the Pyrgi hoard and in Sicily] (16); Corinth: 13 coins [also in the Sambiase hoard and the Calabria 1864 hoard] (17); Akanthos: 5 coins [also known in the Gela and Selinus hoards] (18)).

The four Athenian coins of the owl type illustrated by Babelon are all of Seltman type H (19). This could be to be another «parcel» of coins

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(15) C. ARNOLD-Brucchi, L. Beer-Tovey, N. Waggoner, A Greek Archaic Silver Hoard from Selinus, in ANSMN, 33, 1988, p. 1-35.
(17) IGCH 1872 and 1873.
(18) IGCH 2066 and Selinus, above n. 15.
(19) C.T. SELTMAN, Athens, its History and Coinage before the Persian Wars, Cambridge, 1924.
that were brought en bloc from Greece to the West. Sicily contributed 8 coins of Selinus and 5 of Himera. Northern Greece is represented by 43 coins divided among the mints of Lete, Mende, Potidaia, Thermae, Thasos, Peraathos. Next the group from the Cyclades: Cea, Naxos, Tenos, Thera (?). And from Ionia Phokaia, Chios, and Calymnos. It has been suggested that the hoard also contained coins of Neapolis (Macedonia) and of the Orescii (Macedonia) (20).

Finally there is an aspect of the Taranto hoard that has always provoked comment: there is not a single coin of Taras. The latest coins in the hoard are the Metapontine incuse issues struck on a medium diameter flan and thus datable after 509. It would be difficult, therefore, to suppose that there are no Tarantine coins in the hoard because none had been issued before it was buried. In fact the beginning of the Tarantine series was placed about 520 by H.A. Cahn and now about 510 by W. Fischer-Bossert (21). I believe it is more reasonable to admit that none of the coins in the hoard ever circulated at Taranto. They were hoarded, together with the fragments of ingots and broken-up plate, solely for their value in silver. If indeed, as Babelon supposed, the hoard was the property of some ship captain who had traveled around the Greek world, the same captain would still not have been able to realize his profit without changing his foreign coins into acceptable currency in Taranto. Vlasto thought that this was a silversmith’s hoard. I would be inclined to see it as a sanctuary or bankers’ hoard, possibly put away in more than one container (thus Orsi’s information about the plurality of finds).

But more important than the identity of the owner of the hoard is the question of the mechanism that created it. It seems clear to me that there existed at Taranto, and presumably in every other Greek city of the time, a filter that kept foreign coin from being used in the city. That filter can be nothing else than the control of the port and agora by the city. The filter operated so that a major hoard of foreign coin, arriving at various times, many of the pieces contained in it having come in small packets, such as the 8 Type H coins of Athens, or in larger groups such as the 96 coins of Velia, was put away in a sanctuary. With them there were stored coins from the Achaean area of Magna Graecia, which, however, were not legal tender at Taranto. The same filter, operating at Metapontum, Sybaris, Caulonia and Croton, also served to keep foreign coins from moving into the inland areas behind these cities. And this is why in the inland area coin hoards were composed almost exclusively of coins of Metapontum, Sybaris, Caulonia and Croton. The more cosmopo-

(20) IGCH to no. 1874, M. Price in CH VII, 1985, n. 10.
litan character of the hoards in this inland region after 480 is possibly a sign of a greater freedom of movement on the part of the indigenous folk, and it may also have something to do with the rise of mercenary service in the armies of Greek states (22).

If the Taranto Hoard belonged to the fourth century, there would be no problem in seeing it as evidence of the strict controls exercised over the agora by Greek cities. The evidence concerning the ἄγορανόμοιοι is most abundant at Athens, but the office is documented in 120 Greek cities (23). These, together with the ἐμπορίον ἐπιμεληται and the σιτωροφύλακες, represent the instruments by which the Greek city maintained order and regulated commerce, both in the agora of the city and at its port (24). At Athens the regulation of the coinage that was permitted to serve as tender has been dramatically illustrated by the dokimastes inscription from Athens, which reveals that a public slave was charged with distinguishing between genuine Athens coins and imitations not simply to control plated forgeries but to keep the pure silver imitations of Athenian coins out of circulation as well. There was a dokimastes both in the Agora and at the Peiraeus (25). How much of this restrictive control was inherited from archaic Greece one cannot say for sure. The phrase «legal tender» (χρήματα δόξων) was already current in official documents of the sixth century (25). The fourth century certainly attributed the regulation of weights and measures and other financial dealing to the age of Solon (26). And one indication that market regulation was characteristic of the archaic city comes from Naucratis in Egypt, a market bridgehead in a foreign land to be sure, but also a market regulated by the cooperating Greek states (27).

(22) H.W. PARKE, Greek Mercenary Soldiers: from the Earliest Times to the Battle of Ipsus, Oxford, 1933. On the other hand, the hoard that came to light at Croton in 1956, CH VIII no. 24, containing coins of Athens, Corinth and Cyzicus as well as coins of Croton, Rhegium, Velia, Syracuse and Thurioi (the later dating the hoard to after the foundation of Thurioi in 443) may be another case of a hoard created by the action of the filter on the market place.

(23) H. CANCIK and H. SCHNEIDER (eds.), Der Neue Pauly, s.v.

(24) Ibidem. s.v.


(26) IG XVII, 9, Addenda Ultima, 1273/4; Testimonia Numaria, no. 48.


Coinage, moreover, was never a means to facilitate the circulation of precious metals. Quite the contrary; for the Greek city it was an instrument of control and profit. The Taranto hoard, if the ideas advanced above are right, is an important document showing the barrier which impeded the free dispersion of foreign coin in Magna Graecia at the end of the sixth century B.C.