Cow-calf type Greek-Illyrian drachms from Apollonia and Dyrrhachium: Chronological questions

درامات من نوع البقرة والعجل من الیوریا الأغريقيا من آبولونیا وديرها: تساؤلات زمنیة

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Introduction

Vast quantities of silver coins with cow and calf on the obverse and a double geometrical pattern on the reverse weighing around 3.3 g turn up in the north-east Balkan region. These are the drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium, two Greek settlements on the Illyrian coast of the Adriatic (now in Albania). Because of insufficient archaeological or documentary evidence, there have been several unanswered questions about this coinage.

Percy Gardner accepted Theodor Mommsen’s idea (1856 AD) that these coins were produced during the era when the towns came under Roman protection, starting in 229 BCE but there is no evidence whatsoever that the drachm production started in that year. He put the end around 100 BCE based on the calculation from the number of emissions held in the British Museum collection.¹ Many decades later Ceka could list many more for both Apollonia and Dyrrhachium.² Despite renewed efforts by Niculae Conovici³ the chronological questions of this coinage remained uncertain.

Apollonia and Dyrrhachium produced a long series of similar silver drachms around 3.3 g; with cow and calf on the obverse and a double stellate pattern on the reverse. According to the tentative chronology based on the ‘compact model’ hypothesis (yearly new emissions in an uninterrupted series) the drachms were minted during the Roman protectorate of these towns; and the Second Civil War in 49/48 BCE terminated this production. Dyrrhachium stated minting in or a bit earlier than 208 BCE; while most probably all Apolloniate drachms were struck after the third Illyrian war (168 BCE). The majority of the late coins are found in numerous hoards in the north-east Balkan area. They were exported there to replace the role of the Roman republican denarius which were not produced in sufficient quantities between 70-50 BCE.

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