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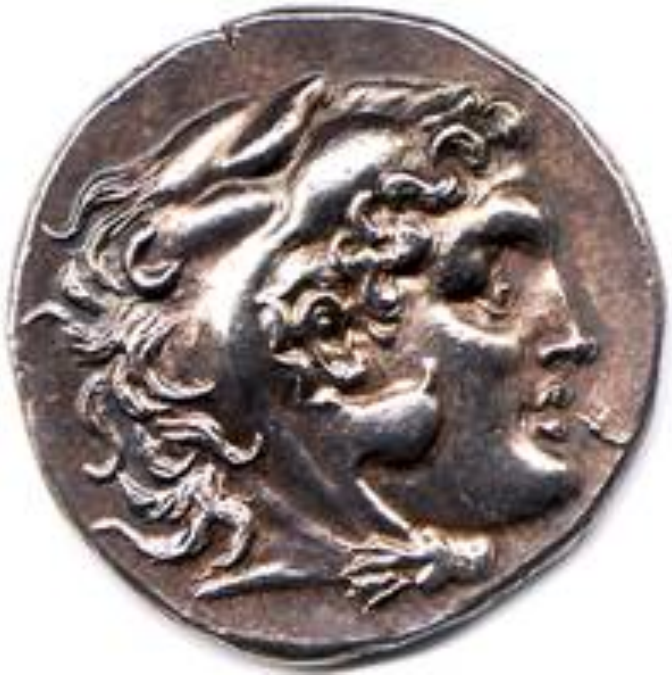

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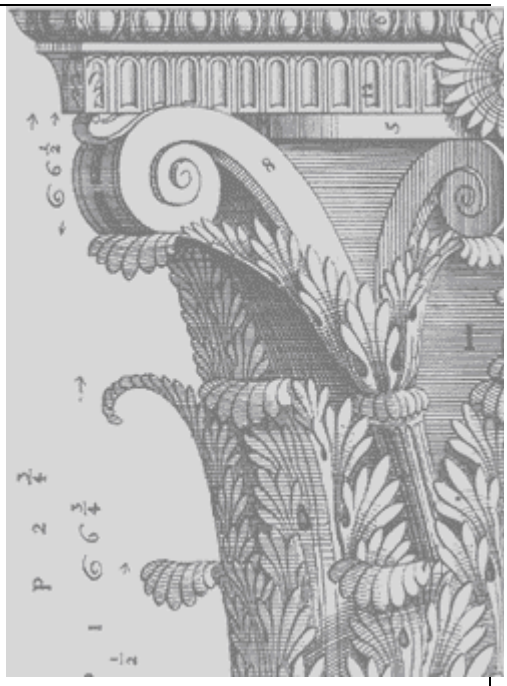

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Philip V, the Selci Hoard and the supposed building of a Macedonian fleet in Lissus[1]

Michael Kleu

Abstract

By concluding a treaty with Hannibal in 215 BC, Philip V of Macedon started the First Macedonian War (215-205 BC). After he had lost his fleet to the Romans in 214 BC, Philip conquered Lissus in 212 BC and thereby controlled an Adriatic port which could serve as basis for a new naval offensive against Rome. Although there is no direct evidence for such an approach, N.G.L. Hammond concluded that Philip had constructed a fleet of Illyrian lemboi in Lissus. This conclusion is based on bronze coins from Lissus and Scodra that seem to conform to the Macedonian coin series and on a report from Zonaras (9.6) regarding Macedonian operations near Corcyra in 211 BC. While the account of Zonaras has to be considered with caution, the bronze coins from Lissus and Scodra have, as primary sources, a high evidential value. Therefore, the article's main focus will be put on these coins which belong to the Selci hoard and were published by Arthur Evans in 1880. Unfortunately, pictures of the Selci hoard's coins have never been published since so that a mistake in Evans's article has been copied in almost all later publications. The article will explain Evans's mistake and offer a new discussion on the coins as evidence for Hammond's conclusion regarding the supposed fleet of Illyrian lemboi that might have been built in Lissus. In the course of this discussion a new dating of the Selci hoard will be proposed.

With defeats at the Battles of the Trebia (218 BC), Lake Trasimene (217 BC) and Cannae (216 BC), the Second Punic War (218-201 BC) had started in the worst way possible for the Roman Republic. Thus, it seemed a reasonable idea for Macedonia to join forces with the Carthaginians in order to link itself with the apparent winner of the war, and Philip V consequently concluded a treaty with Hannibal in 215 BC.[2] After the Romans learned about this treaty,[3] it became one of their chief concerns to prevent Macedonian troops from crossing the Adriatic Sea in support of the Carthaginians in Italy.[4] Rome therefore positioned the praetor Marcus Valerius Laevinus with 50 warships close to Brundisium, in

[1] I would like to thank Dr Volker Heuchert (Ashmolean Museum Oxford) for providing me with photographs of two coins from the Selci hoard, which were published for the first time in KLEU (2015), pp. 63-68 together with some initial thoughts on the issues discussed in the present paper. I would also like to thank Dr Emma Nicholson (Exeter), Dr Robin Whelan (Oxford) and the two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on this paper.

[2] Pol. 7.9. Due to annalistic distortions, the other sources for the treaty's details (Liv. 23.33.1–23.34.9; App. Mac. 1.2; Iust. Epit. 29.4; Eutr. 3.12.2 and Zon. 9.4) can be neglected. WALBANK (1967), p. 42; HAMMOND (1988), p. 394 n. 4. After the Battle of Cannae, it is likely everybody thought that the Carthaginians would soon be victorious. Thus, Hieronymus of Syracuse joined Hannibal almost at the same time as Philip V did. Pol. 7.3.

[3] Liv. 23.34.1–9, 23.38.1–4; App. Mac. 1.3; Eutr. 3.12.3; Zon. 9.4.

[4] Liv. 23.38.5–6. Irrespective of whether or not Philip really intended to cross to Italy, the Romans had to be prepared in case he did.

order to protect the city and the Calabrian coast, and to keep an eye on events in Greece.[5] Then, in 214 BC, Rome's fears were realized: Laevinus was informed that Philip had captured Oricum and was besieging Apollonia Illyrica.[6] Until this point the Macedonians had had no base on the Illyrian coast, with the result that crossing the Adriatic Sea would have been quite challenging. But since the king was now in control of Oricum and besieging Apollonia, there was a serious threat of invasion, because the two cities provided, via the Strait of Otranto, the shortest possible route to Italy. Furthermore, the fact that Hannibal had just won Tarentum over to the Carthaginian side also offered an ideal harbour for disembarkation.[7] Therefore, Laevinus quickly intervened and reduced Philip to such a disastrous situation that the latter was forced to burn his fleet of 120 Illyrian *lemboi* and to retreat overland to Macedonia.[8] In the following years, he concentrated on reducing the so-called Roman 'Protectorate' in Illyria to its coastline before he finally took Lissus in 212 BC and probably[9] Scodra as well.[10] By this possession of Lissus, Philip now controlled an Adriatic port which could serve as a basis for an invasion against Italy or—rather more likely—as a basis for the Punic fleet.

The Macedonian possession of the port is connected with the question of whether the king then constructed a new fleet of Illyrian *lemboi* in Lissus, which would have represented a new threat for the Romans.[11] N.G.L. Hammond thought that bronze coins minted in Lissus and Scodra, as well as a passage from Zonaras, proved the building of such a fleet.[12] Indeed, Zonaras reports that Philip was operating in the area of Corcyra around the year 211 BC.[13] If this tradition is reliable, it is conceivable that the Macedonians had acquired a new fleet at some point and used it now in order to reach the island. In this case Lissus would have been one of the possible ports at which a fleet could have been constructed.[14] In Hammond's

[5] Pol. 8.1.6; Liv. 23.38.7–11, 24.40.2. Livy speaks erroneously of 55 warships. HOLLEAUX (1921), p. 187 n. 1.

[6] Liv. 24.40.2-7.

[7] Pol. 8.24-34; Liv. 24.13.5, 25.8-11. For the remaining literary sources of Hannibal's take-over of Tarentum cf. SEIBERT (1993), p. 274 n. 27.

[8] Liv. 24.40.5-16.

[9] Pol. 8.14.10 and the coins from Scodra discussed in this article suggest that Philip took this town as well, although Polybius speaks only in very general terms about Lissus and its surroundings. As ISLAMI (1966), pp. 227f. sees it, one could expect that generally Scodra was important enough to be mentioned by name by Polybius if it really had been taken by the Macedonians, but since our literary sources are rather fragmentary Islami's argument is not decisive.

[10] Pol. 8.13.1–8.14.11; Liv. 27.30.13, 29.12.3 and 13. The Roman "Protectorate" was a result of the Illyrian Wars (229-228 and 219 BC) and incorporated an area stretching from the coast near Apollonia to the region south of Lissus, and inland to the territory of the Atintani, while Corcyra served as a naval base. HAMMOND (1988), p. 391. It is unclear whether the term "protectorate" is appropriate in this context. BADIAN (1958), p. 45 and ECKSTEIN (2006), p. 266 and (2008), pp. 42–58, for example, prefer to speak of unofficial *amici*, who were to some extent independent of Rome.

[11] A fleet of *lemboi* was no big challenge for Roman *quinqueremes* in naval battle, but they were perfect for the fast deployment of troops. For Philip's use of *lemboi* cf. KLEU (2015).

[12] HAMMOND (1968), p. 18 and (1988), pp. 399 and 409f. ECKSTEIN (2008), p. 87 n. 38, follows Hammond's opinion.

[13] Zon. 9.6. The credibility of this passage will be discussed at the end of the paper. Since there is no literary evidence for the supposed fleet besides Zon. 9.6, HAMMOND (1988), p. 401 believes that the *lemboi* returned to Lissus at the end of 211 BC and stayed inactive there for the rest of the war.

[14] Philip had already in 216 BC tried to capture Apollonia Illyrica with a fleet of *lemboi* that was built somewhere on the eastern Greek coast north of the Euripus. Pol. 5.109.1–5.110.9. The same might be true for

view the coins mentioned above suggest that it must have been Lissus, because they conform to the Macedonian coin series. Therefore, he came to the conclusion that the coins might have been used by the Macedonians to pay Illyrian deckhands and to buy timber for the supposed new fleet of *lemboi*. In order to verify Hammond's thesis, we will first have a closer look at the coins in question before we come back to the passage from Zonaras.

The bronze coins from Lissus and Scodra to which Hammond refers belong to a hoard of 38 coins found in Selci, a village in the Albanian highlands. The hoard, which was probably buried shortly after 168 BC, was given to A. Evans, who published the find in 1880.[15] 12 of the coins were minted in Scodra and show on the obverse a round shield with a spiral star in its middle, while on the verso one can find a helmet with neck protection and earpiece which is surrounded by olive or laurel branches and the legend ΣΚΟΔΡΙΝΩΝ (fig. 1).[16] On a possible thirteenth specimen the legend is not decipherable,[17] but after Evans's publication of the Selci hoard four other coins emerged that belong to the series from Scodra.[18] Furthermore, the Archaeological Museum of Tirana possesses coins from Lissus, which show the same helmet and round shield, but have the legend ΛΙΣΣΙΤΑΝ instead of ΣΚΟΔΡΙΝΩΝ, which makes it very likely that the coins were struck in the same context as the ones from Scodra.[19] Evans also noticed the similarity of the 12 or 13 coins from the Selci-hoard to Macedonian types struck during the reigns of Pyrrhus, Demetrius II, and Antigonus Doson. But since the spiral star and the particular form of the helmet did not appear on Macedonian coins before the reign of Philip V, he concluded that the series from Scodra must have been struck during Philip's rule over Lissus and possible control of Scodra, so he dated the coins in the years between 211 and 197 BC.[20] Although it is controversial whether Scodra really belonged to Philip's possessions in Illyria, it is indisputable that Lissus did.[21] Therefore, it is absolutely possible that the coins from those two Illyrian towns were really struck under Antigonid rule, which would explain why they resemble Macedonian types. While Evans's dating has been challenged several times, more

the fleet of 120 *lemboi* that he had to burn in 214 BC (see above). His supposed new fleet could therefore have been constructed at the same place.

[15] Evans (1880). The hoard includes coins from Scodra, Lissus, Apollonia, Dyrrhachium and coins struck in the name of the Illyrian king Genthius, who reigned from ca. 182/181-168 BC. Evans discussed only the autonomous coinage from Lissus and Scodra and the coins struck in the name of Genthius. He did not explicitly comment on the issue of when the hoard was buried but it seems that he considered this to have happened before the Romans had captured Genthius in 168 BC. Evans (1880), 287. Picard/Gjongecaj (2000), p. 156 follow Evans's opinion, which resonates with their dating of drachma from Apollonia and Dyrrhachium. Neither Islami (1966) nor Ceka (1972) discuss when the coins would have been buried, but their dating of the coins fits well with the idea that the hoard was buried in the reign of Genthius. However, more recently Meta (2015), pp. 219-223 dated one coin from Dyrrhachium (Evans (1880), no. 7) to the early years of the period 168-120 BC. Therefore, the hoard could be somewhat younger than originally believed. As Evans (1880), p. 287 n. 29 has already mentioned, one should not overstretch negative evidence in a hoard as small as the one from Selci. Nevertheless, the fact that only one of the coins seems to have been struck later than 168 BC might indicate that the hoard was buried not much later than 168 BC.

[16] Evans (1880), p. 269f. (no. 1).

[17] Evans (1880), no. 6.

[18] Scholz (1901), p. 125 presents a further specimen found in Rentzi, a village in the area of Scodra. Islami (1966), p. 395 refers to three other exemplars in the Archaeological Museum of Tirana (inventory numbers 3161, 3163 and 3349).

[19] Inventory numbers 3155, 3155/a, 3155/b and 3303. Islami (1966), pp. 232f. and 244.

[20] Evans (1880), pp. 273–280. Brunšmid (1898), pp. 39 and 70 and Scholz (1901), p. 124 follow the dating of Evans.

[21] Cf. n. 9 of this article.

recent studies suggest that he might be correct.[22] However, it is not certain how long Philip was in possession of Lissus and its surrounding territory, so the period in question might have been shorter than Evans imagined.[23]

The Selci hoard also contains a coin from Lissus on whose obverse Evans recognized a goat looking to the right, while the verso shows a thunderbolt and the legend ΛΙΣΣΙΤΑΝ.[24] Hammond was convinced that—as in the previous case—the coin was struck under Antigonid rule, and that the goat and thunderbolt had both been adopted from similar Macedonian types.[25] In 1947, however, J.M.F. May showed that Evans spoke in error about a goat because the coin had not been thoroughly cleaned at that time. In fact, the coin does not show a goat, but a portrait of the goddess Artemis.[26] Consequently, it belongs to a series known from other finds which were dated by H. Ceka to between the years 229 and 213 BC and by S. Islami to a time after 186 BC (fig. 2).[27]

Unfortunately, May hid his clarification in a footnote at a place in his article where nobody would expect it, so that—as far as I am aware—until the present day besides Hammond all other scholars who mention the coin speak about a goat instead of a portrait of Artemis.[28] In any case, although Hammond's assumption that the goat must have been adopted from Macedonian coins was already problematic,[29] the portrait of the goddess does not make his case any better. Although Artemis appears on coins of some Macedonian mints, she also appears on coins from many other places, so the motif need not be explained by a connection with Philip.[30] Regarding the thunderbolt on the verso, the same is also the case. As Evans already mentioned, the symbol can be found on coins from Macedonia, Epidamnus and other areas east of the Adriatic Sea, as well as on coinage from

[22] For other dating and arguments against Evans's opinion cf. MAY (1946), pp. 49f.; ISLAMI (1966), pp. 231f.; CEKA (1972), pp. 153f. For arguments in favour of Evans's dating cf. HAMMOND (1988), pp. 463–466 and KREMYDI (2011), p. 174 and (2012), p. 291.

[23] WALBANK (1967), p. 93 and ERRINGTON (1986), p. 176 assume that the Macedonians had left Lissus before the Peace of Phoenice (205 BC). MAY (1946), pp. 48–52 believes the year 208 BC to be likely. ISLAMI (1966), p. 228 opts for the years 209 or 208 BC.

[24] EVANS (1880), p. 271 (no. 2). Evans's original reading ΛΙΣΣΙ[Ω]ΤΑΝ was corrected to ΛΙΣΣΙΤΑΝ by BRUNŠMID (1898), p. 73 n. 60.

[25] HAMMOND (1968), p. 18 u. (1988), pp. 399 and 409f.

[26] If one turns the coin 45 degrees to the right, one can easily understand Evans's mistake.

[27] ISLAMI (1966), p. 242; CEKA (1972), pp. 150–153. Islami mentions five further specimens of this type from which three can be found in the Archaeological Museum of Tirana (inventory numbers 1690, 3270 and 3309). One other exemplar belongs to the collection of Gj. Abati Shkodër.

[28] VON SCHEIGER (1957), pp. 90f.; ISLAMI (1966), pp. 232f. and 241f. (no. V); CEKA (1972), pp. 151–153; RENDIĆ-MIOČEVIĆ (1989), p. 403; PICARD/GJONGECAJ (2000), p. 156; CIOŁEK (2011), p. 128. Dr Volker Heuchert noticed the mistake when I asked him for a picture of the coin with the goat.

[29] The goat is known on coins from Lissus's possible sister foundation Issa. BRUNŠMID (1898), pp. 62–64 (no. 10–16 and 20). It was also used as a motif on coins from Pharos. BRUNŠMID (1898), pp. 41–46 (no. 1–24). For this reason EVANS (1880), p. 274 considered it possible that the design of the coin was a heritage from Syracuse, the possible metropolis of Lissus, which also applies to the thunderbolt on the verso. Cf. n. 31 of this article.

[30] The portrait of Artemis is known on a bronze coin of Philip V, but also on the coinage of other Illyrian towns and again on coins from Syracuse (the possible metropolis of Lissus). For Syracuse cf. n. 31 of this article. For the Macedonian bronze coin with the portrait of Artemis cf. MAMROTH (1935), p. 250 (no. 27) with plate VII no. 19. For Artemis on Illyrian coins from Pharos and perhaps also from Heracleia Illyrica cf. BRUNŠMID (1898), p. 46 (no. 23 and 24), and p. 58 (no. 16 [?]). For Artemis on Syracusean coinage cf. KRAAY/HIRMER (1966), plate 46 (no. 130).

Syracuse, the possible metropolis of Lissus. Thus, unlike Hammond, Evans did not tie himself down to a decision regarding the origins of the thunderbolt.[31]

While there is no reason to link the Artemis/thunderbolt-coin from Lissus to Philip V, the coins from Scodra and Lissus with round shield and helmet could indeed have been struck during the kings' rule over the two Illyrian towns. The latter would fit well with similar bronze coins from Illyrian Lychnidus, which were without doubt inspired by Macedonian tetrobols and were probably struck while Philip's troops were based there.[32] S. Kremydi asserts in her discussion of the coins from Lychnidus that this kind of bronze coinage was probably used to cover the soldiers' daily expenses, and this might have led, in the case of some towns, to the first and sometimes only local coinage.[33] Hence it is conceivable that the coinage from Lissus and Scodra, with its round shield and helmet, was struck under Philip's domination,[34] yet this might mean nothing more than that there were Macedonian troops in these towns who needed bronze coins to cover their daily expenses. Therefore, it is unlikely that the coins indicate the building of a Macedonian fleet in Lissus, for which we have no direct evidence.

But what about Zonaras? Unlike Hammond, most scholars regard this passage (9.6) as unreliable and therefore ignore it in their studies.[35] If Zonaras is nevertheless right, there is no compelling reason explaining why the ships for this enterprise must have been built in Lissus, since the fleets with which Philip previously acted in those waters came from other areas.[36] Furthermore, it is possible that the king did not construct a new fleet but instead resorted to local transport vessels in order to reach Corcyra.[37] Without the support of the coins under discussion, there is no reason to assume the existence of a new Macedonian fleet from Lissus. The Second Punic War had given the Romans enough to deal with; that Philip seems not to have started a new naval offensive after his seizure of Lissus was therefore one less thing to worry about.

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[31] EVANS (1880), p. 274. According to the disputed literary tradition Lissus and Issa were both Syracusan foundations. Ps.-Skymn. 413f. (FGrH 2048 T1); Diod. Sic. 15.13.4 and 15.14.2.

[32] KREMYDI (2012).

[33] KREMYDI (2012), p. 292. Kremydi assumes furthermore that the metal for the minting was provided by the towns themselves, which might explain the particular legends.

[34] Of course, it is not mandatory that the coin motifs were adopted during the Macedonian hegemony. The Illyrian town of Rhizon struck coins quite similar to the ones discussed here but Rhizon never belonged to Macedonia. For the coins from Rhizon cf. PINK (1940). A further example are the Carthaginian coins minted on Sicily, which imitated Syracusan coins without having been under the sovereignty of Syracuse.

[35] HAMMOND (1988), p. 401 n. 3; KLEU (2015), 67. WALBANK (1940) does not even mention this account of Zonaras in his fundamental biography of Philip V. For arguments against the unreliability of this passage, cf. HAMMOND (1968), p. 19 n. 67 u. (1988), p. 401. In general, Zonaras's account of the First Macedonian War (215-205 BC) is considered with caution by most scholars. Cf. for example ECKSTEIN (1999), p. 405.

[36] Cf. n. 14 of this paper and KLEU (2015), pp. 31-59.

[37] In 219 BC Philip shipped his army to Euboea and from there to Cynus, in order to avoid Thermopylae, which was held by the Aetolians at that time. This campaign started in Larissa and seems not to have involved a regular fleet. Pol. 4.67.5-8. The short distance between the mainland coast and Euboea might have allowed the use of local transport vessels as long as no hostile fleet was nearby. As in the case of Euboea, the distance between the mainland coast and Corcyra is rather small.

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PLATE I

Fig. 1: Coin from Scodra with round shield and helmet (Evans no.1, 14mm / 3.07g, twofold enlargement), Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.

Fig. 2: Coin from Lissus with portrait of Artemis and thunderbolt (Evans no. 2, 12mm / 1.63g, twofold enlargement), Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.