

Dating the Destruction of Sybaris

The destruction of Sybaris is an important date in the chronology of incuse coinage; not only because the city is one of the candidates for its introduction, but because the Sybarite incuse coinage does not display the same reduction in flan size seen in other poleis. This provides a fixed date around which the narrative for this reduction can be constructed. For example, Noe cites the influence of Sybaris prior to its destruction on the thin incusi of Metapontum¹. The conventional date of 510 BC for the destruction of Sybaris rests on a chain of chronological assumptions involving Diodorus' annalistic framework tied to Athenian and Roman chronological sources and an assessment of indeterminate time periods. The argument advanced here is that the date should not be treated as an untouchable fixed point when assessing physical or numismatic evidence, because the literary date is itself reconstructed and carries a margin of uncertainty.

Diodorus Siculus, describing events from the vantage of the 1st century BC, writes that the Thessalians², together with the remaining Sybarites, attempted a refoundation of Sybaris 58 years after its destruction, but were expelled by Kroton (μετ' ὀλίγον 'after a little while') and the city 'was moved to another site and received another name (μετὰ βραχὺ 'shortly afterwards')³. After their second expulsion, the Sybarites requested that Sparta and Athens assist their repatriation and take part in the refoundation. Sparta refused, however Athens responded, sending ten ships with additional settlers⁴. This new polis of Thurii was founded not far from the original location of Sybaris. It is important to note that the 58 years is tied to the attempted return by the Thessalians and original Sybarites, believed to have taken refuge in the daughter cities of Laus and Scidrus⁵, not to the later foundation of Thurii. Therefore, the date for the destruction of Sybaris is only defined in relation to the foundation of its successor as 58 years (also known as Sybaris II) plus the indeterminate temporal phrases μετ' ὀλίγον and μετὰ βραχὺ relating to the time taken for Kroton to expel the Thessalians and for them to move to a new site and receive an additional panhellenic populace.

The date for the foundation of Thurii also needs to be examined. Diodorus Siculus' work is handled annalistically, and he notes that this foundation occurred "When Kallimachos was archon in Athens, the Romans elected as consuls Sextus Quinctius . . . Trigeminus"⁶. There are therefore two reference points provided for the dating – the archon in Athens and the consuls in Rome. The calculation of the destruction date therefore depends on establishing a secure date for the foundation of Thurii and understanding that this forms the bottom boundary for the destruction of Sybaris i.e. if you treat μετ' ὀλίγον and μετὰ βραχὺ as effectively zero the destruction of Sybaris would be 58 plus zero years from the foundation of Thurii.

Looking at the Archon reference first, Develin⁷ lists Kallimachos as archon in 446/5 BC, with the primary reference for the date being Diodorus 12.7.1, which is a circular argument, and a fragment of a didaschia⁸

¹ Noe, S.P., *The Coinage of Metapontum*, Parts 1 and 2 (with additions and corrections by Ann Johnston), ANS Numismatic Notes and Monographs 32 and 47, New York, 1984, p. 12.

² The Thessalians have no history of colonisation, so their involvement seems unlikely and is often assumed to be historically uncertain. Perhaps the meaning is akin to Θετταλοί τινες, though that is not in the original text i.e. people from Thessaly, perhaps mercenaries or other displaced people, rather than a formal colonisation from the metropolis.

³ "ὕστερον δὲ ἔτεσιν ὀκτώ πρὸς τοῖς πεντήκοντα Θετταλοὶ συνώκισαν, καὶ μετ' ὀλίγον ὑπὸ Κροτωνιατῶν ἐξέπεσον κατὰ τοὺς ὑποκειμένους καιροὺς" Bibliotheca Historica, Diodorus Siculus, Book XII chapter 10, 2-3; the same chronology is also in Book XI, chapter 90

⁴ Diodorus Siculus, Sophron edition 2017, Book XII chapter 10.4

⁵ Histories, Herodotus, 6.21

⁶ "ἐπ' ἄρχοντος δ' Ἀθήνησι Καλλιμάχου Ῥωμαῖοι μὲν κατέστησαν ὑπάτους Σέξτον Κοῖντιον ... Τριγέμινον" Bibliotheca Historica, Diodorus Siculus, book XII, chapter 7

⁷ Athenian Officials 684-321 BC, Robert Develin, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p83

⁸ IG ii² 2318 [83]

(an Athenian official record of dramatic performances) as a further support. The relevant segment of the inscription (including modern line numbers) is

80 Θαλ[— — ἐχορήγει]
81 Κα[ρκίνος ἐδίδασκε]
82 ὑπ[οκριτής — — —]
83 ἐπ[ὶ Καλλιμάχου]

The inscription dates the theatrical production as in the archonship of Kallimachos; without other sources providing a secure date to the archonship of Kallimachos it confirms the archonship of Kallimachos but does not independently establish its absolute date for it and thus for the date of the foundation of Thurii. The epigraphic evidence therefore does not support a specific date. Nevertheless, considerable scholarship has underpinned the reconstruction of the archon lists and the date of 446/5 BC is generally accepted. However, it may be that Kallimachos simply fills a convenient gap in the reconstructed archon lists.

The Roman consular chronology is supported by the *Fasti Capitolini*, which is a large marble inscription compiled in the reign of the emperor Augustus listing Roman consuls from 483 BC⁹. The fasti is missing the years 449–423; however, interestingly, it does list the consuls cited by Diodorus.

Sex. Quintilius¹⁰ Sex. f. P. n.

P. Curiatius [s — f. —] n. Fustus Trigemin.¹¹

In the inscription, every tenth year is dated from the foundation of Rome, indicating Sextus Quintilius and Curiatius Trigeminus as the consuls of the year 453 BC. Broughton also confirms the date of this consulship¹² and no alternative date is proposed for this consulship in ancient sources, although the use of different dating schemes means it is a convergent date. As the *Fasti Capitolini* is a late but authoritative compilation of the Roman magistrate lists, the question is whether to accept this, or to attempt to reconcile this date with the Athenian archon list.

Diodorus's own dating references are internally inconsistent based on the sources available by approximately seven years (the archon in 446/5 BC and the consuls in 453 BC) and it should be further noted that Green provides other examples of the annalistic approach used by Diodorus not aligning correctly¹³. However, I am not attempting to resolve dating differences, instead simply illustrate the level of confidence that is appropriate for the date of the founding of Thurii, given its role in checking the plausibility of the destruction date. As demonstrated above, the dating form provided by Diodorus, upon whom the chronological chain is based, points to an annalistic tension at this point between the archon lists and the *Fasti Capitolini*. Part of this divergence may be structural rather than arbitrary as Diodorus's own consular list departs from the *Fasti Capitolini* elsewhere in this same period — he inserts an additional consular college between 457 and 456 BC that the *Fasti* do not carry¹⁴. This accounts for at most one year of the seven-year gap and does not validate either figure: both 453 BC and 446/5 BC are themselves reconstructed dates — the former dependent on the *Fasti*'s own Augustan-era compilation and its lost 449–423 stretch, the latter, as noted above, resting on Diodorus 12.7.1 for its primary support.

⁹ The *Fasti* is missing the years 449–423.

¹⁰ The Greek Κοῖντιος is the accusative form which when rendered into the nominative has the Quint- stem and the -ios ending, collapsing the distinction between Quintius, Quintus, and potentially Quintilius. Therefore the translation of the Diodorus dating remains in line with the different spelling in the *Fasti Capitolini*.

¹¹ Degrassi, A., *Fasti Capitolini*, *Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum Paravianum* (Turin: G. B. Paravia, 1954), 191 pp.

¹² The Magistrates of the Roman Republic, T. Robert S. Broughton with the collaboration of Marcia L. Patterson, p43.

¹³ Green, P., *Diodorus Siculus, Books 11–12.37.1: Greek History 480–431 BC — The Alternative Version*

¹⁴ Diod. 12.3.1, inserting L. Quintius Cincinnatus and M. Fabius Vibulanus between the consular colleges of 457 and 456 BC, against the *Fasti Capitolini*; cf. Broughton, *MRR* I.

A further challenge is that whichever date is accepted it is signposting a single fixed year, whilst the events described by Diodorus in Book XII of *Bibliotheca Historica* take place over a more extended period, running from the rise of Telys in Sybaris to the foundation of Thurii. The date provided must therefore be interpreted from the narrative, with the most logical, but not certain point, being the foundation of Thurii as that is how the chapter is introduced "In Italy it came about that the city of the Thuriens was founded for the following reasons..."¹⁵.

Kraay takes this approach and further suggests a separation of the date for the foundation of Thurii and the Athenian response, setting the refoundation in 446 BC with the additional settlers arriving in 444 BC¹⁶. In this approach there is no need to wait for the messengers to reach Athens and for Athens to gather and send the new settlers. The foundation being referenced by Diodorus is therefore tied to the Thessalians/Sybarites resettling at Thurii and so making the duration required to appeal to Athens and receive additional settlers irrelevant to the reverse calculation for the date of the destruction of Sybaris.

To summarise, the date of 510 BC for the destruction of Sybaris has been derived from establishing a date for the foundation of Sybaris II (58 years from destruction of Sybaris I). There is no independent verification of this date which leaves us only with the option to relate it to the establishment of Thurii, a duration which is described by Diodorus as μετ' ὀλίγον and μετὰ βραχὺ. These terms imply sequence, not duration, which could be months or years. Separately looking at the foundation of Thurii cannot resolve this indeterminate period, and indeed there are some challenges in establishing Thurii with absolute confidence given the misalignment of the archon and consular dates, and their independent weakness. The traditional date of 510 BC for the destruction of Sybaris therefore rests on a chronological assumption rather than direct evidence. While the canonical date remains plausible if aligned to the consular signpost it also requires the indeterminate period to be compressed to effectively zero. The precision of the date for the destruction of Sybaris should be treated with caution when used as a chronological anchor for the development of incuse coinage.

As a footnote, Archaeological evidence from Thurii has been surveyed by Colburn, who concluded that an Attic black glazed and red figure from 440 and a Tarantine pinax assigned to the same date in the layers associated with Thurii was sufficient to confirm the literary date for its foundation¹⁷. The archaeology cannot be as precise in date as properly attested sources; however it does indicate that the dates under discussion are not in conflict with the physical evidence.

¹⁵ "καὶ τὰ μὲν κατὰ τὴν Σικελίαν ἐν τούτοις ἦν. κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἰταλίαν συνέβη κτισθῆναι τὴν τῶν Θουρίων πόλιν δι' αἰτίας τοιαύτας." Diodorus Siculus, Book XII chapter 9

¹⁶ Kraay, C.M., *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins*, London, 1976, p. 173

¹⁷ "A Return to Sybaris." *Expedition Magazine* 18, no. 2 (January, 1976), p11