DUCEZIO, THE ORACLE AND THE FOUNDATION OF KALÈ AKTÉ

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After the fall of the Deinomenid dynasty (465 BC), the political interests of the Sicel and the Syracusans converged against the xenoi settled in the territory of Aitnia.

If the Sicel aimed to recover the territories taken from them by Hieron I and to claim their independence, the new republican government of Syracuse intended to eliminate any possible threat to its power. During the joint attack of 461 BC. Ducezio, hegemon of the Sicel, showed off his military and political capabilities. He contributed decisively to the victory and obtained an equal division of the conquered lands between Sicel and Syracusans.

If the Sicel’s ethnic claim promoted by Ducezio was initially tolerated by the Greeks of Sicily, the situation quickly changed in 451 BC. The constitution of an ethnic confederation inspired by the Greek amphictyonic model, known in the sources as synteleia, was decisive in this sense. The territorial conquests made at the expense of the Greeks provoked the reaction of the Syracusans and the Agrigentines, who obtained an overwhelming victory against the native component at the centre of Nomai.

Demonstrating that he had received the Greek paideia, after the defeat suffered Ducezio chose to go as a supplicant to Syracuse. In the same year he was sent into exile in Corinth (450 BC). Diodorus specifies, however, how the head of the Sicel was confined to Corinth only for a short time. Violating the agreements made with the Syracusans, he claimed to have received from the gods, through an oracular response, the order to found the center of Kalê Akté in Sicily.

Aim of this paper is to analyze the way Ducezio, appropriating of the usual colonial model of Greek tradition, managed to legitimize decisions of a purely political nature, such as his return home and the constitution of a new center in Sicily. It will also be interesting to understand the reason that prompted Corinthians and Peloponnesians to participate as apoikoi in his colonial expedition: their presence assimilated Ducezio, a non-Greek exponent of the Sicel aristocracy, to the greatest founders of colonies of the Greek tradition and legitimized his role.

Ducezio, moreover, was not new to this expedient: already on the occasion of the foundation of the center of Menainon (459 BC) and of the federal and religious center of Paliké (453 BC), he chose to lead a colonial expedition as the founder of cities, receiving all the honours that were due to him. The decision to adopt Greek codes of conduct, despite the fact that its aim was to claim the ethnic identity of the Sicel and to obtain the independence of its people from the Greek element, demonstrates the extreme value of these models and the influence that the Greek formation had in his political experience.

Following his return in Sicily (446 BC), Ducezio chose to found the new centre in the Northern area of the island, far from the Syracuse threat, where he could count on the support of Archonida of Erbta, an exponent of the Sicel elite who found a rich confederation of Sicel cities. This choice should be considered in the wider historical context that began to oppose Athens to Syracuse, where the Sicel and Archonida himself chose to side with the Athenians.

Purpose of the article will also be to analyse why the Syracusans waited for Ducezio's death to attack the federal center of Paliké and put an end to Sicel’s aspirations, instead of attacking in the aftermath of his exile.