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THE VES· GROUP – THE EARLIEST TAURISCAN TETRADRACHMS

UDK: 904:737.1(436.5)»638«

Izvorni znanstveni rad

The group of tetradrachms with the Venetic legend VES· was a predecessor of tetradrachms of the Varaždin A type. Such tetradrachms were minted for a short time in the area of southeastern Carinthia at the end of the first half of the second century BC.

Key words: Celts, tetradrachms, Tauriscan coins, Varaždin type, Venetic legend.

Ključne riječi: Kelti, tetradrahme, novac Tauriska, tip Varaždin, venetski natpis.

In the publication of the important hoard of Haimburg (Carinthia, Austria) R. Göbl has clearly demonstrated that the earliest group of »east Norican = Tauriscan« coins¹ is not a group of coins of Varaždin A type, as he argued earlier (GÖBL 1973: 30), but a group of coins of the FES type (GÖBL 1989: 27–29, 34; 1994: 37). Contrary to his earlier opinion, he argued, on the basis of newly gained evidence from this mixed hoard (containing the earliest tetradrachms of the »Kugelreiter« type and the tetradrachms of the FES type), that the FES group of coins (his categorization: GÖBL 1989: 28, 29, 31, 34) must be removed from the Varaždin A group, into which it was incorporated by TKN (GÖBL 1973: 97–98), particularly since coins of the Varaždin A type were not represented in the Haimburg hoard.

¹ GÖBL 1973 divided the minting into »west-Norican« and »east-Norican«. Later (GÖBL 1994: 37) he defined the »west-Norican« group as the coinage of the Norici and the »east-Norican« group as the coinage of the Taurisci.



Fig. 1a (1:1) and b (2:1). Hess-Divo AG, Auction 307, June 7th, 2007. Lot no. 1427.
Ex Vente AUCTIONES SA, Bâle 11 (1980), 7. Weight: 13.00 g.

REVERSE LEGEND

It is of particular interest that the earliest legend on Norican and Tauriscan tetradrachms appears on the reverse of coins of this group.

Göbl interpreted this inscription on the reverse of the earliest tetradrachms as the Venetic inscription *FES·* (GÖBL 1973: 98).² While writing about this type of tetradrachm, or the inscription on it, various authors unequivocally refer to the legend *FES*³ or even *FEES* (GORINI 2004b: 292, 293, 298; 2005: 29, 30, 33, 59, 63, 64, 67, 74; 2008b: 86). Göbl believed that the legend was written in inverted and retrograde form (*verkehrt und retrograde*) (GÖBL 1973: 31). In the publication of the Haimburg hoard, he pointed out that the retrograde Venetic inscription was written in inverse form on top of the back of the horse (i.e. for the correct reading, the coin should be turned upside down) (GÖBL 1989: 13).

Some time ago I pointed out that the Venetic legend in northern Etruscan (Venetic) script on early »west Norican = Norican« tetradrachms of »Kugelreiter« type C2b should be read as ·*N·NO·L·* (Kos 2004).⁴ This legend was, to further Göbl's intention of establishing a confirmation for his proposal for the absolute chronology of Norican/Tauriscan coinage, erroneously read, again, from the outer edge of the coin, as ·*V·O·K·K* (GÖBL 1973: 24). It should be noted, however, that as early as 1933 this legend had been read as ·*U·O N·N* by Paulsen, but this reading was never taken into consideration later (PAULSEN 1933: 26).

I believe, however, that the legend *FES·* was also written normally above the back of the horse, and should be read from left to right as *VES·*, like the legend ·*N·NO·L·* on later tetradrachms of the »Kugelreiter« type (Kos 2004). To put the legend in inverted and retrograde form on the reverse of both coin types would seem rather unreasonable, since, in that case, only with difficulty could the message (and it is quite obvious that a coin inscription was always meant as a kind of message) be communicated to the public

² Already in 2007, I have pointed out the correct reading of the legend: see Kos 2007, 63 n. 37.

³ ZIEGAUS 1994: 17, no. 587 »darüber retrograde die venetische Legende fes«. GORINI 2004a: 203; KOSTIAL 1997: 48 (...oben venetische Legende fes ...); ZIEGAUS 2010: 184. I have already drawn attention to the wrong reading of this legend in Kos 2007: 63.

⁴ Stifter 2009, 367 and 370, n. 3, on the contrary, proposed the reading »·n.no.u.«; see also Strobel 2009, 505.



Fig. 2. Reverse legend. 1: Ziegau 2010: 183 cat. no. 510; 2: Baldwin's Auctions Ltd, Dmitry Markov Coins & Medals, M&M Numismatics Ltd (Auction, January 4, 2012), Lot no. 246; 3: Auktionshaus H. D. Rauch GmbH, Auktion 76 (October 17, 2005), Lot 49.

All three letters in the legend are documented on inscriptions that are characteristic of the region of Valle di Cadore and Lågole. The first letter of the legend is the Venetic V and appears in identical form on inscriptions from Cadore⁵ and the sanctuary of Lågole-Calalzo near Pieve di Cadore.⁶ The letter E appears in such a form on inscriptions in Cadore and Lågole,⁷ and also in the area of Isonzo.⁸ The letter S in such a common form is also documented on inscriptions in Cadore⁹ and Lågole (MARINETTI 2001: 356, no. 196.), and is also known from Gurina.¹⁰ All the inscriptions cited should be read from left to right. The legend ends with a full stop, which was used for separating syllables (*punctuation syllabique*) (LEJEUNE 1974: 34). According to Marinetti, all independent letters (i.e. consonants that are not followed by vowels) are separated by full stops (MARINETTI 2002: 45). This phenomenon is also called *puntuazione sillabica del Venetico* (PROSDOCIMI 2002: 36) and is also well documented in the aforementioned legend ·N·NO·L· (KOS 2004).

The legend *VES·* shows the correct punctuation for an initial syllable. Because of the *punctuation syllabique*, the legend should almost certainly be read as *VES* + consonant. It is, however, almost impossible to establish which consonant should follow after *S·*.

It should also be noted that this legend was correctly read as *ves* by Paulsen as early as 1933 (PAULSEN 1933: 26). According to Paulsen, this legend should be interpreted as the Venetic personal name (*Vornamen*) *vesu·s·* (gen. *vesos*), later documented on Latin inscriptions as Vesius, Vesonius, Vesidia, Veselia (PAULSEN 1933: 26). According to Lejeune, *vesos* is the Venetic form of the Latin *proprius*.¹¹ Documented Venetic words beginning with *ves* also include *Veskes* (LEJEUNE 1974: 226 no. 77), which should mean a type of kin, while *Ves-ketei* could be connected with the term meaning adoptee (LEJEUNE 1974: 241 no. 122). Such meanings, however, would seem unusual, from the semantic point of view, for the legend of a coin, in which one would more plausibly expect a name. To Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel, compound words with *vesu-* (meaning good), in which *-u-* in front of the first consonant of the second article would be syncopate, would seem most likely.¹² Nevertheless, the completion of the legend must remain unsolved.

⁵ Inscription Ca 18 (PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 505); Ca 64 (PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 544).

⁶ MARINETTI 2001: 348, no. 177. See also LEJEUNE 1974: 279, no. 213.

⁷ Inscription Ca 16 (PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 501). MARINETTI 2001: 364, no. 264; LEJEUNE 1974: 265, no. 164.

⁸ Inscription Is 3 (PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 596).

⁹ Inscription Ca 15 (PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 499).

¹⁰ Inscription Gt 4 (PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 617). See also LEJEUNE 1974: 277, no. 210.

¹¹ LEJEUNE 1974: 101, 214 no. 56. The word in the form *veso.s.* appears on an inscription in Este: PELLEGRINI – PROSDOCIMI 1967: 200 (Este 1).

¹² I am grateful to Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel (Vittoria) for some valuable suggestions.

E. Weber pointed out that local names beginning with *Fes-* or *Ves-* cannot be identified (WEBER 1973: 75). H. Birkhan was convinced that such a name could not be Celtic, but rather of »Mediterranean« origin (BIRKHAN 1973: 69). X. Delamarre, on the contrary, lists some dozens of Celtic names beginning with *Ves* that are documented on inscriptions (DELAMARRE 2007: 198).

AREA OF MINTING

34 coins of VES· type have been documented to the present, of which 32 specimens (94%) were contained in the hoard of Haimburg,¹³ and one specimen was found at the pre-historic settlement of Gracarca, not far from Haimburg.¹⁴ The only other specimen with this inscription is kept in the Coin Cabinet in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), with unknown provenance (GÖBL 1973: 126, pl. 19, no. 6). The coins of this type that have been offered at various coin auctions in the last few years are most probably part of the Haimburg hoard. For their minting, three obverse dies and four reverse dies were used (1:1.33 ratio). That definitely indicates a short-term minting of a rather small number of coins.

The distribution of find spots suggests that this group of coins was most probably minted somewhere in the area of southeastern Carinthia. This group of coins actually represents the beginnings of the minting of various types of tetradrachms and their fractions that have been ascribed to the tribes of the Norici and Taurisci.



Fig. 3. Map of sites.

It is a very significant, but far too neglected, fact that the Venetic script of northeastern Italy was used on the earliest tetradrachms of the Tauriscan group. This could easily be interpreted as evidence that the die-cutters of the earliest coins with the aforementioned legend *VES·* in the hoard of Haimburg in Carinthia must have come from Carnian Venetia. Also, the production of slightly later tetradrachms of the »Kugelreiter« type with the first legends in

¹³ GÖBL 1989: cat. nos. 208–237 (30 specimens); SCHRETTNER 1993: 287–288 (publishing two specimens that were not taken into account by Göbl). Coins of this type on sale in various auctions most probably originate from this hoard.

¹⁴ KELLNER 1990: App. 6, however, did not note the exact finding site (»Fundstelle ... in Noricum gelegen hat«).

Venetic script (T) must reflect influences from northeastern Italy (See Kos 2010). This supposition would further be supported by the fact that the obverse of the later-minted coins of the »Kugelreiter« type (with the legend ·N·NO·L·) was minted with the same die as the latest tetradrachms in the hoard of Enemonzo in northeastern Italy (Kos 2010: 100).

The coinage of tetradrachms of the VES· group was immediately followed by the minting of coins of type Varaždin A. Göbl noted that, on some reverses of the Varaždin A group (die 77A), the remains of the letters of the legend VES· can still be perceived, proving that the legend must have been erased from the reverse die before its re-use.¹⁵ A detailed study of specimens cited by Göbl, however, cannot confirm his claim (GÖBL 1973: Tab. 19, 7–8). On the reverse of both coins, minted with two very different dies, no remains of the inscription can be found (Fig. 4; 2–3).¹⁶



Fig. 4. Reverses of tetradrachms of VES· type (1: Ziegaus 2010: 183 no. 510) and Varaždin A type (2: W 26.837; 3: W 26.921).

Nevertheless, the minting of coins of the Varaždin A type did not occur in Carinthia, but must have moved from southeastern Carinthia along the Drava River approx. 170 km further to the east, to the area around Križovljan Radovečki, not far from Varaždin, in Croatia.¹⁷

I propose an indeed hypothetical but logical assumption that a travelling die-cutter, after finishing the production of dies, and with them minting coins of the VES· type in southeastern Carinthia, travelled along the Drava River (for about 170 km) to the next local tribal chieftain (mint-master), who placed an order to produce coins for his own needs in a local workshop.¹⁸ For the production of the new coins (of Varaždin A type) the die-cutter, in the beginning, most probably re-cut dies previously used for minting coins of the VES· type in Carinthia (Kos – MIRNIK 2011: 102). The fact that the legend was omitted on the newly minted tetradrachms would indicate that a legend in Venetic script must have lacked any meaning to the new mint master(s) in the new environment. In any case, such a sequence of minting requires a new relative chronological arrangement of the obverse and reverse dies of tetradrachms of the Varaždin A type.

It should also be noted that, in the preserved part of the hoard from Križovljan (Varaždin), the Varaždin A type was represented by only three coins (KOS – MIRNIK 2011: 92 cat. nos. 1–3). For the rest of the coins of Varaždin A type, no data about sites of discovery is known.

¹⁵ GÖBL 1973: 98 (note to reverse 77A); 1989: 29.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Klaus Vondrovec of the Vienna Coin Cabinet, who kindly sent me photos of both coins.

¹⁷ For the site and the hoard see KOS – MIRNIK 2011.

¹⁸ Such evidence in favour of travelling die-cutters who were, at the same time, also minting coins has lately been strongly supported by the archaeological evidence. See ZIEGAUS 2002; 1998: 649. MACKENSEN 1975: 249 had already assumed that the mint (workshop) was not fixed in a specific place. His idea was later embraced by GÖBL 1994: 30, who used the term »workshop« rather than the term »mint«.

DATE OF MINTING

Göbl dated the burial of the hoard of Haimburg to 60 BC, and later to 64/63 BC (Göbl 1994: 39), linking it with the unsuccessful attack of the Boii on Noreia, as reported by Caesar (Göbl 1989: 36). On this basis, he indirectly concluded that the coins of the »FES« type must have been minted between 70 and 64 BC (Göbl 1994: Tab. 14). This groundless hypothesis collapsed at the moment of the discovery of the hoard of Enemonzo (Gorini 2005).

Absolute dates, however, cannot be established, although G. Gorini dated the minting of »FEES« tetradrachms, without any solid arguments, to his second phase in 150–125 BC (Gorini 2005: 63). He also placed the minting of the »Kugelreiter«-type tetradrachms bearing the Venetic letter *X* and the Venetic legends »VOKK« and *BOIO* in the same phase (Gorini 2005: 63, 64). According to his earlier proposal, the »FES« coins would have been minted simultaneously with the coins with the inscriptions »VOKK«, *BOIO*, and *CAVA* at the end of the second century BC (Gorini 2004a: 203). Later still he proposed that the coins with the legends (or letters) »FES«, *X*, *BOIO*, *CAVA*, and »VOKK« were minted in the period 180–130 BC (Gorini 2008a: 99). He also suggested that the minting of *FES* tetradrachms and tetradrachms of the »Kugelreiter« type bearing the Venetic letter *X* would have occurred simultaneously (Gorini 2008b: 86). This, however, cannot be the case, since the coins bearing the inscription *VES·* have the highest average weight, at 12.95 g (Göbl 1989: 32), and must therefore be treated as the very first coins of both groups of Norican and Tauriscan coinages. According to Zieglus, the coins of the *VES·* type were minted in the second half of the second century BC (Zieglus 2010: 184).

The only possible dating for the minting of tetradrachms of the *VES·* group, on the basis of analyses of the hoards of Haimburg (where coins of this type are the earliest) and Enemonzo, is therefore (the same as the minting of tetradrachms of the »Kugelreiter« groups A1, AA1, B1a and B1b) (Kos 2010: 102) to the latest decades of the first half of the second century BC. According to Lejeune, the Venetic inscriptions from the area of Carnian Venetia (*Venetie Carnique*) are of the so-called recent group (*recentis*) that belongs to the period 300–50 BC (Lejeune 1974: 13 and 14). This fact additionally substantiates the dating of this type of tetradrachm to the first half of the second century BC.

It can be summed up that the minting of coins of the *VES·* group, on the basis of the evidence offered by the hoards of Haimburg and Enemonzo, can only be dated to the last decades of the first half of the second cent. BC. The minting of tetradrachms of the *VES·* group was only brief, and of low intensity.

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GRUPA VES - NAJRANIJE TETRADRAHME TAURISKA

U skupinu velikih srebrnjaka tipa Varaždin, čije kovanje pripisujemo keltskom plemenu Tauriska, uvijek su uvrštavani i srebrni novci sa sličnim prikazima, ali s venetskim natpisom VES na reversu. Sastav ostave Haimburg u austrijskoj Koruškoj je pokazao da su bili istovremeno u optičaju i najraniji novac tipa »Kugelreiter« i novac s natpisom VES. Legendu na reversu treba čitati kao VES, a ne kao FES, kako se to najčešće događa. Upotrebljena venetska slova tipična su za *Valle di Cadore in Lågole* u sjeveroistočnoj Italiji. Riječ je o početnom slogu dulje riječi čije značenje nije moguće odgonetnuti.

Do danas su dokumentirana 34 komada novca tog tipa od kojih 32 potiču iz ostave Haimburg, jedan je iz Gracarce južno od Hamburga, a za jednog nalazište nije dokumentirano. Možemo ustanoviti da su ih samo kratkotrajno kovali negdje na području sjeveroistočne austrijske Koruške. Njihovo je kovanje moguće vremenski uvrstiti u zadnja desetljeća prve polovine 2. stoljeća pr. Kr. Očito se isti pečatorezac neposredno nakon kovanja novca spomenutog tipa premjestio istočnije duž Drave te je na području Križovljana Radovečkog kod Varaždina za naručitelja izradio pečate za kovanje tetradrahmi tipa Varaždin.