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Unpublished Denarius from the « Bellum Sociale »

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Abstract: The recent discovery of an unknown type of denarius of the Civil War (91-87 BC), with details similar to a previous Roman republican denarius, allows the extension of the number of issues struck by the Italic rebels. We discuss its possible place within the issues of the period.

This work is an update and a translation of a previous article that has been published on an Italian journal¹. In that work I reported the existence of a denarius issued by Italic rebels during the Social War, that was not listed in my Corpus published in 1987². After the publication, this specimen was presented by Artemide auction no. XXXIV, lot 56. It was held on the 10th of December 2011 and was illustrated with a better colour image³ (cf. Fig. 1).



Figure 1: The unpublished denarius

Obverse = male head (Apollo?) right, wearing a oak leaves crown; below the chin traces of *. Below the neck, **ITALIA**. Dotted border.

Reverse = The Dioscuri standing facing before their horses each holding a spear, surmounted by stars. Dotted border.

Weight grams 3,65 – diameter mm 20 – die orientation h 8 (marked traces of oxidation)

The only information we know about the provenance of this piece is that it was found many years ago not far from Policoro, in the province of Matera, near the old Greek city of Lucanian Heraclea (founded in 433 BC by people coming from Tarentum and still inhabited during the Roman times).

The area where the coin was found is definitely inside the area of circulation of the denarii from the Social War that was fought by Italic confederates against Rome between 91 and 87 BC⁴.

¹ Campana 2008.

² Campana 1987.

³ <http://www.deamoneta.com/auctions/view/65/54>

⁴ Campana 1987, p. 35-38.

The coin is an imitation of the common republican denarius struck by L. Memmius, issued in Rome in the years 109-108 BC (cf. Fig. 2).

This type would have been known to the Italic people who after a few years rebelled against Rome to request the Roman citizenship.



Figure 2: L. Memmius denarius (Cr. 304/1), 109-108 B.C.5

Obverse = Male head (Apollo?) right, wearing a oak leaves crown; below the chin, ✱. Dotted border.

Reverse = The Dioscuri standing facing before their horses, each holding a spear; below the exergue line, L·MEMMI. Dotted border.

The Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, were the brothers of Helen and Clytemnestra and the Doric heroes by excellence. They fought against Theseus, king of Athens, who kidnapped their sister Helen, they freed her and crowned as king of Athens the pretender Menestheus, chasing away Theseus's sons⁶.

The manly head on the obverse of the coin has been suggested could be portraying Menestheus, the mythical king of Athens. According to Homer's Iliad, he led the Athenians warriors in the Troy war and was amongst the soldiers hidden within the wooden horse. When Troy fell, he went to Melos, where he became king.

Some historians also suggest that he founded the city of Skyllition on the coast between Kroton and Kaulonia in southern Italy.

An alternative view, which I believe to be more likely, is that the manly head portrays the god Apollon, since a similar head is also represented on other republican denarii, in particular of Gar, Ogul and Ver (Cr. 350A, 86 BC), P. Crepusius (Cr. 361) and L. Censorinus (Cr. 363, 82 BC).

The unpublished denarius with the legend ITALIA goes with the customary tradition of the Italic confederates to copy republican denarii issued a few years before, a custom particularly evident during the first phases of the Social War. Only in the last phases of the war the Italic rebels would issue coins with original design and a strong propagandistic message.

As a consequence of these facts this denarius should have been issued during the first year of the war 90 BC and could be classified between series 2 and series 3 of my Corpus, possibly struck in the mint at Corfinium in 90 BC.

Series 2, which follow series 1, is defined by the type *helmeted head right/Dioscuri on horseback right* like the classic Roman republican denarii, and is composed of 3 issues (2a, 2b e 2c on my

⁵ Ex auction NAC 70/2013, n. 67 g. 3,81.

⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*, 32-35.

Corpus) with *helmeted head right and crown/Dioscuri on horseback in opposite direction each holding a spear*, these issues are linked by a series of common dies, the first two defined by the legend *C. Paapi C. e Mutil* in Oscan language (cf. Fig. 3-4) and the last (known in unicum specimen at the Bibliothèque National of Paris) carries for the first time the legend *ITALIA*, repeated both on the obverse and the reverse of the coin (Fig. 5)⁷. This series is an almost exact copy of the republican denarius struck by *C. Servilius M.f.* (Cr. 239/1, 136 BC) (cf. Fig. 6).



Figure 3: Confederate denarius (Camp. 4; Series 2a), 90 B.C.8

Obverse = Female head (Italia) right, wearing a helmet ornate with a wave crest and a griffin head. Behind, laurel wreath. ✱ ·ITVM below. Dotted border.

Reverse = The Dioscuri on prancing horses opposing and looking at each other, two stars above. The spears are pointing down. In exergue, >·ITANNIT·<. Dotted border.



Figure 4: Confederate denarius (Camp. 5; Serie 2b), 90 B.C.9

Obverse = Similar to the previous one, ✱ ITALIA below.

Reverse = Same die as before (more worn).

⁷ For further details, see Campana 1987, p. 53-55.

⁸ Ex auction CNG 57/2001, 942 g. 3,74.

⁹ Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 1853-12592 g. 3,50.



Figure 5: Confederate denarius (Camp. 6; Serie 2c), 90 B.C.10

Obverse = Same die as before (more worn).

Reverse = Similar to the previous one, **ITALIA** below.



Figure 6: Denarius C. Servilius M.f. (Cr. 239/1), 136 B.C.11

Obverse = Similar to the previous one, below, * and **ROMA**.

Reverse = Similar to the previous one, below, **C·SERVEILI·M·F**.

The repetition of the legend **ITALIA** on both sides of the denarius classified as Campana 6 from series 2c (cf. Fig. 5) is very interesting, a situation that leads us to believe that this could be a hybrid and that the new die was destined for a new issue that never took place, possibly because of the departure of the general and Samnite consul C. Papius Mutilus for the Campania front, an event that led to the reorganization of the Samnite mint.

Series 3 (cf. Fig. 7) is very varied and forms the largest issue of the confederate coinage¹², the main characteristic is the laureate female head, which is the personification of Italy, depicted not in a military sense with a wing and crested helmet, but as *Fides*, underlining the sacredness of the word given under the oath of the Italic confederate, whose scene is described on the reverse and again copied by a roman coin, with a much simpler scene, the one of the famous aureus of the oath (Cr. 28/1-2 e 29/1-2) (cf. Fig. 8).

Series 3 then is the product of a mint that is completely renewed and restructured and is operating to finance the first military campaign against Rome by the Italic confederates.

¹⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. FG 119A g. 3,46.

¹¹ Ex Heritage World Coin Auctions 18.vi.2013, n. 24802 g. 3,92.

¹² Campana 1987, p. 56-77.



Figure 7: Confederate denarius (Camp. 69; Serie 3c), 90 B.C.13

Obverse = Laureate head left of Italia, with necklace and pendant earring. Behind, **ITALIA**. Dotted border.

Reverse = Eight warriors, four each side, pointing their sword and swearing on a piglet held in the arms of the *sacerdos faecialis* sitting. Behind, a standard. In exergue, **M**. Dotted border.



Figure 8: Gold Stater of the oath (Cr. 28/1), 225-212 b.C.14

Obverse = Laureate Janiform head of the Dioscuri. Dotted border.

Reverse = Oath taking scene with two warriors, (one Roman and the other one representing the Italian allies) one bearded without armour the other bearded and with armour, standing facing each other, holding spears and touching with their swords a pig held by a figure kneeling between them. In exergue, **ROMA**. No border.

For the sake of completeness I also need to point out that there is another issue, possibly dated to 89 BC. It is known in a single specimen, where the legend **ITALIA** is placed in the exergue of the reverse. It is classified as Campana Serie 8, n. 116 (Fig. 9), and is an exact copy of the coeval Roman denarius of M. Porcius Cato (Cr. 343/1a-c).

¹³ Ex auction CNG 63/2003, 1141 g. 3,73.

¹⁴ Ex auction NAC 45/2008, 2 g. 6,82.



Figure 9: Confederate Denarius (Camp. 116; Serie 8), 89 b.C.15

Obverse = Bust of Italy right wearing a diadem and a necklace. Dotted border.

Reverse = Victory seated right, holding a palm branch in her hand. In exergue, **ITALIA**. Dotted border.

From a hypothetical point of view, it is legitimate to suppose that the new unpublished denarius could have been produced during the reorganization phase of the mint in Corfinium, shortly before the issue of the third series.

The choice of the Dioscuri¹⁶, although with a different representation and copied from a different Roman prototype, would tend to confirm a strict temporal vicinity and sequentiality between the unlisted denarius and the first and second series, both dedicated to these two divinities.

Its extreme rarity suggests that it could have been a short lived experiment. Even the particular form of the legend **ITALIA**, with coarse characters, seems to confirm the experimental nature of this issue, struck before the large and articulate series 3, with the famous oath scene.

Naturally we cannot exclude the alternative hypothesis: that this denarius could be the product of an itinerant mint that was following the Italic confederate army. However I believe this hypothesis to be less probable because there is no reference to the commander responsible for the Italic troops, such as Caius Papius, Numerius Lucilius Marcius and Quintus Silo.

A further hypothesis, more intriguing, is the new denarius (cf. Fig. 1) may be issued together with the very rare Serie 8 (cf. Fig. 9).

The order of the issues of the Italic rebels during the Social War proposed in my corpus is still hypothetical and it has not been adopted by the “English school”, as it could be seen from *Historia Numorum*, by Keith Rutter, with a different sequence, assuming that the coinage would have been started in a well structured way, with control marks and with style affinity¹⁷. For the readers convenience I summarize below the sequence of these denarii as suggested by the Campana corpus with the corresponding numbers in *Historia Numorum* (H.N.), trying to classify the unlisted specimen here described (in blue characters).

¹⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, inv. FG 120 g. 3,96.

¹⁶ For a valid history of the Dioscuri on ancient coins, see Cesano 1927.

¹⁷ Rutter 2001, p. 55-57, with the collaboration of Michael Crawford.

Types	No. Campana	No. H.N.
Head of Italia r., wearing helmet; at r., X / Dioscuri r.; in exergue, <i>viteliù</i>	Serie 1 (1-2)	422
Type as last, but below, * and <i>mùtil</i> / Type as last	Serie 2a (3-4)	426c
Type as last, but at l., wreath; below, * and ITALIA / Type as last, but in exergue, <i>c.paapii.c.mùtil</i>	Serie 2b (5)	426b
Type as last / Dioscuri riding apart; in exergue, ITALIA	Serie 2c (6)	426a
Young male head (Apollo?) r., wearing oak-wreath; under chin, *; below, ITALIA / Dioscuri standing facing between their horses, each holding spear.	Unpublished (Fig. 1)	----
Head of Italia l. / Type as last; in exergue, Oscan control-numeral	Serie 3a (7-34)	415b
Type as last, but at r., ITALIA , below chin, I / Oath-taking scene of eight warriors, four on each side of pig held by attendant; in exergue, no control-mark or III	Serie 3b (35-7)	415a
Type as last, but no I / Type as last; in exergue, Latin control-numeral	Serie 3b (38-54)	415c
Head of Italia r.; but at l., ITALIA / Type as last; in exergue, Latin control-numeral	Serie 3c (55-7)	423
Head of Italia l.; but at r., ITALIA / Type as last; in exergue, Latin control-letter	Serie 3d (58-74)	408
Type as last / Type as last; above, A X	Serie 3e (75-7)	413a
Type as last / Type as last; in exergue, A X	Serie 3e (78)	413b
Type as last, head r. / Type as last; in exergue, B V	Serie 3e (79)	413c
Type as last, head l. / Type as last; in exergue, C T or D S	Serie 3e (80-1)	413d
Type as last, head r. / Type as last; behind, standard; in exergue, Q.SILO	Serie 3g (82)	411
Bust of Mars r., wearing helmet; at l., X and <i>viteliù</i> / Oath-taking scene of four warriors, two on each side of pig held by attendant; behind, standard; in exergue, <i>c.paapii.c.mùtil</i>	Serie 4 (83-5)	425
Type as last, but at l., <i>mùtil.embratur</i> / Type as last; in exergue, <i>c.paapii.c.</i> or <i>c.paapii</i>	Serie 5 (86-97)	428
Head of Bacchus r., in front, <i>mùtil.embratur</i> / Bull goring wolf l.; in exergue, <i>c.paapii</i>	Serie 6a-b (98-101, 102)	427
Head of Bacchus r., within wreath / Bull goring wolf r.; in exergue, <i>viteliù</i> ; above, Oscan control-letter	Serie 6c (103)	420
Head of Italia r.; al l., ITALIA ; at r., X / Italia seated l. on pile of shields, crowned by Victory; in exergue, control-letter, A or B	Serie 7a (104-105)	412a

Type as last, but no legend at l. / Type as last; at l., control-letter, C , reversed E , or F ; in exergue, ITALIA	Serie 7b (106-8)	412b
Type as last, but at l., ITALIA ; at r., XVI / Type as last; in exergue, Latin control-letter	Serie 7c (109-15)	414
Bust of Italia r. / Victory seated r., holding palm-branch; in exergue, ITALIA	Serie 8 (116)	421
Head of Italia l.; at r., viteliù ; at l., X / Warrior with spear and sword standing, l. foot on uncertain object; at r., reclining bull; at l., above, ni.luvki.mr ; in exergue, Oscan control-letter	Serie 9a (117-18)	410
Type as last, but without X / Type as last; Oscan letter, a	Serie 9b (119)	407bis, a
Type as last / Type as last; in exergue, Oscan control-letter	Serie 9b (120-6, 130-47)	407
Type as last / Type as last; Oscan letter, d	Serie 9b (127-9)	407bis, b
Head of Italia r., wearing helmet; around, c.paapii.c.mùtil / Warrior with spear and sword standing, l. foot on uncertain object; at r., reclining bull; at l., viteliù	Serie 10 (148)	424
Head of Mars l., wearing helmet; below or at l., c.mùtil / Warrior with spear and sword standing, l. foot on uncertain object; at r., reclining bull; at l., safinim ; a r., Oscan control-letter	Serie 11 (149-50)	409
Bust of one of the Dioscuri r.; above, star / Italia in biga r., with spear and shield; below, control-mark	Serie 12 (151-62)	417
Bust of Minerva l., wearing helmet and aegis; at r., I / Bacchus standing with spear, holding hand over panther at l.	Serie 13 (163)	419
Type as last, but crowned by Victory and without I / Warrior with spear and sword standing, l. foot on uncertain object; at r., forepart of charging bull; at l., trophy; in exergue, Oscan control-numeral	Serie 14 (164-73)	418
Bust of Minerva r., wearing helmet and aegis, and crowned by Victory / Warrior with spear and sword greeting warrior with sword; at r., forepart of ship which bears mast and sail; in exergue, control-letter, A , or Oscan control-numeral	Serie 15 (174-82)	416

According to the sequence proposed by Rutter the unpublished coin should be classified lower in the list, hence issued towards the last phase of the issues of the Italic rebels, together with other issues derived from imitations of Roman types.

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