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A NEW COINAGE OF THE EASTERN CELTS REPORTED FROM SLOVAKIA

H. Bartlett Wells

The Slovakian numismatic annual Slovenská Numizmatika VI (Bratislava, 1980) contains at pages 23–90 an article by Dr. Eva Kolníková, a senior scholar who is executive editor of the publication, on a coin hoard found at a locality called Ptčie amid the Carpathians of easternmost Slovakia¹. She offers an analysis which is historical, typological and metrological, and presents conclusions on the basis of these ways of considering the hoard.

Among her conclusions are ones holding that the 237 coins involved are all silver «tetradrachms» of the eastern Celts imitating those of Philip II of Macedon, and that they represent the entirety, so far as is now known and with two likely exceptions, of the coin class involved in the hoard. This endows the report with exceptional interest, since it is not every day that numismatic science has an opportunity to consider what is virtually a new and separate coinage from ancient times.

The narrative is to the effect that in 1968 a farmer of the Ptčie parish visited the regional studies museum of the Humenné district, within which the parish is contained, and inquired about the value of a single coin which he exhibited. It was only by degrees that museum authorities managed to learn that the farmer held a major aggregation of coins, and to preserve them for the museum. According to the farmer's statement he discovered the hoard in the spring of 1950 as he was ploughing a slightly elevated section of field upon agricultural land within the parish. The plough struck an earthenware vessel and broke it. The finder and his mother, who was present, were intent upon gathering the coins exposed and paid no attention to the fragments of the vessel. Two hundred and thirty-seven coins reached the museum². There may, of course, have been more, but since none have come to light in the intervening twelve years they were probably few in number.

All the coins imitate tetradrachms of Philip II, and Dr. Kolníková finds that their most likely immediate prototype is another and more direct Philip II imitation which she refers to as «the so-called Audoleon class»³. Her use of the name has warrant in that the prototype she has in mind (an example of which is described and illustrated in Gaebler's *Makedonia und Paionia*, volume III in *Die antiken Münzen Nord-Griechenlands*, Berlin 1935, page 205, No. 13, and plate XXXVIII,⁴ bears an inscription ΑΥΔΩΛΕΟΝΤΟΣ ; yet that prototype is in all other respects an imitation of Philip II, not of the tetradrachms issued by the Paonian king Audoleon. Use of the name Audoleon here is confusing, because it also crops up elsewhere in the numismatics of the eastern Celts, for instance in the subdivision «with monogram of Audoleon-X type» within the Tulghieş-Mireşu Mare class⁵. From the typological point of view, the tetradrachms of the Larissa-Apollo Amphipolis class⁶ with their facing head having sharply upturned locks of hair at the level of the chin also resemble the familiar tetradrachms issued by Audoleon of Paionia.

¹ Hromadný Nález Keltsko-Dáckych Mincí z Ptčia. Referred to in footnotes hereinafter as «Kolníková».

² Kolníková, p. 23–24.

³ Kolníková, p. 62.

⁴ Preda, C.: *Monedele Geto-Dacilor* (1973), pp. 132–142.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 132–142.

Dr. Kolníková finds that there are only two likely additions to the coinage found at Ptičie. One of these has been in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, without indication of provenance, since before 1899⁶. The other is reported in a history of the culture of Soviet Transcarpathia (an area which adjoins easternmost Slovakia) at the threshold of the Christian era⁷.

The Ptičie coins are of good silver (apparently no spectrum analyses have been undertaken as yet; these would be of great interest). The weights range from 12.21 to 14.89 grams. The coins come from five obverse dies and fourteen reverse dies. The author is able to find linkages joining all 237 coins into a single issue, by discovering first two groups among them which link a number of sub-groups internally, and then a link which binds the two major groups internally. This link is her reverse die H, which was used with obverse dies B, C, and E to strike coins in the first group, and also with obverse die D to strike coins within the second group⁸. (It may be remarked that reverse die J is also such a link, in that it was used with obverse dies A and E to strike coins within the first group and with obverse die D to strike coins within the second group.) The author concludes that both groups, and hence all the coins, arose within the same mint. She also believes that the second group arose within a certain, yet not very great, time interval after the first group⁹. Might one not suggest that with two die-linkages between the groups in place of the one she reports, that time interval was in fact very brief indeed? Perhaps the coins were created almost in a single run.



Fig. 1 Tetradrachm; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Inv. No. 9832

If all of these coins were in fact made more or less at the same time and were kept together (as could readily occur in the event that they were a community treasure rather than a commonplace shopping medium), then one would expect individual coins to reflect little or no wear from circulation, as distinguished from the wear upon the dies that has been reflected as a result of the process of manufacture by striking. Kolníková does not comment regarding wear from circulation, and in future study of this group of coins from Ptičie it might be interesting to pursue that matter as well.

Kolníková presents photographs of each coin in the hoard. As frequently occurs, these have not reproduced exceptionally well. But she has added clear drawings (the first sheet of which is reproduced herewith) to show how she arranges the coins in nine typological classifications. Within these classifications she also illustrates variants in some number, reflecting stages in the degeneration of the dies used within the particular classification. From this arrangement and the signs of rapid die deterioration one

⁶ Muret, E., and Chabouillet, A.: Catalogue des monnaies gauloises de la Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris 1889, No. 9832. I thank the Bibliothèque Nationale for the photographs of that coin and for authorization to publish them herewith.

⁷ Bidzil'a, V.I.: Istorija kul'turi Zakarpatt'a na rubeži našoi eri, Kiev 1971, p. 86, fig. 38, 1.

⁸ Kolníková, p. 74–75; diagram on p. 70.

⁹ Loc.cit.



Fig. 2 Examples of the Kolníková typological tabulation of the coins from Ptičie.
(The first of the three sheets of this character which accompany the article.)

might suppose that the dies used were of very soft metal, probably bronze of low tin content, which wore and blurred almost from one coin struck to the next, and that the dies were amended at frequent intervals. Differences in quality of workmanship give Dr. Kolníková the impression that a number of persons having varying degrees of skill and experience were at work in the mint¹⁰.

The obverse dies are considered to have been used much longer than those for reverses, and to have lost their originally high quality through progressive wear. On the other hand, since reverse dies were prepared more frequently (five obverse dies vs. fourteen reverse dies), they reflect to a greater extent the increasing barbarization which results from attempts to copy dies at more and more distant removes from the underlying model. Dr. Kolníková concedes that this may arise from a striving after originality as compared with the types of other tribes or social groups¹¹, whereas at the same time the obverse design, perhaps being of less interest as a criterion of tribal association (witness its complete disappearance in the Vel'ký Bysterec-/Gross-Bysteretz-/type, sometimes called the «Cotini» type¹²), becomes stereotyped as time progresses. It is not clear what weight should be given to that concession, in the light of the other evidences of uniformity and of rapidity of execution which this coinage offers.

Western readers will be surprised at the cautious and thorough discussion Dr. Kolníková finds it desirable to offer¹³, at this late date, regarding the question of whether coins of the eastern Celts were struck, or cast in dies. This probably reflects the fact that some numismatic writing in the central and eastern European areas (within Rumania specifically) has in fairly recent years defended the casting theory. Dr. Kolníková does in the end, as one might expect, come down on the side of striking with dies at this stage and within this general area of the coinage of the eastern Celts.

Chronologically Kolníková places these coins probably at the middle of the 2nd century B.C.¹⁴. Although she concedes that the Ptičie coins are still an offshoot of the earlier main phase of the Celto-Dacian coinage, particularly as it is manifested in the western Hungarian counties of Nógrád and Héves (the «so-called Audoleon type») and in Transylvania (the Tulghieş-Mireşu Mare type), and that there is not yet here any reflection of the reduced weight, the scyphate shape, and the debased silver of the second main phase which set in at about that time¹⁵, she nevertheless considers that the degree of stylization justifies placing the Ptičie group at so late a date as this.

It seems, however, that there is a metrological factor which militates in favor of an earlier dating, perhaps somewhere around 200 B.C. or even a little earlier. For her part Dr. Kolníková indicates that the calculated aggregate weight of all these 237 coins is 2916.77 grams (this figure also appears in the German summary and in the Russian summary accompanying her article), and that the arithmetical average weight per coin is 12.30 grams, which is in fact the figure one secures by dividing 237, the number of the coins, into 2916.77, the aggregate weight in grams which is used here. She senses the fact that the figure of 12.30 grams will not do (although she has not eliminated it from her German and her Russian summaries), and resolves to disregard it¹⁶. She presents what might be described as a very simple and general frequency table, as follows:

¹⁰ Kolníková, p. 65.

¹¹ Kolníková, p. 69, citing Winkler, I.: *Stantele și stîlul monedelor daco-getice*, Apulum, 7, 1968, No. 1, p. 228.

¹² Forrer, R.: *Keltische Numismatik der Rhein- und Donaulande*² (1968), Vol. I, p. 151 with fig. 288.

¹³ Kolníková, p. 70-73.

¹⁴ Kolníková, p. 82.

¹⁵ Kolníková, p. 81; Preda, p. 183.

¹⁶ Kolníková, p. 76.

There are 3 coins weighing from 12.21 to 13.00 grams;
 52 coins weighing from 13.01 to 14.00 grams;
 182 coins weighing from 14.00 to 14.89 grams;

- and then she goes farther with respect to the second category, reporting that of its 52 coins only five fall from 13.01 to 13.50 grams, the remaining 47 more closely approaching 14.00 grams¹⁷. The arithmetical average weight of 12.30 grams secured on the basis of the received aggregate weight of 2916.77 grams does, in the light even of this simple table, become absurd. That is still more clearly demonstrated by the fact that the coin of least weight among the 237 comes to 12.21 grams - and this being so, the average weight of all is still to be 12.30 grams?

It is a pity that Dr. Kolníková did not heed this alarm bell which she herself had sounded, and take two very simple further steps in order to resolve her suspicions concerning these points. She presents on her pages 34-41 the individual weight for each of the 237 coins, and upon adding those weights together several persons, working separately and with mechanical aids such as bank calculating machines and mathematical computers, have agreed in finding that the aggregate weight for all 237 coins is 3353.42 grams (this may still be wrong, but not so much so any longer). On that basis the arithmetical average weight is 14.149 grams.

The second step is to draw up a complete frequency table for the 237 coins. It is difficult to transpose the graph into a compact form suitable for easy publication, but the following attempt may be made:

<i>Coin weights</i>	<i>Number of coins</i>	<i>Coin weights</i>	<i>Number of coins</i>
12.21-12.30 grams	1	13.61-13.70 grams	4
12.31-12.40 grams	0	13.71-13.80 grams	6
12.41-12.50 grams	0	13.81-13.90 grams	14
12.51-12.60 grams	1	13.91-14.00 grams	21
12.61-12.70 grams	0	14.01-14.10 grams	36
12.71-12.80 grams	0	14.11-14.20 grams	34
12.81-12.90 grams	1	14.21-14.30 grams	46
12.91-13.00 grams	0	14.31-14.40 grams	24
13.01-13.10 grams	0	14.41-14.50 grams	16
13.11-13.20 grams	0	14.51-14.60 grams	13
13.21-13.30 grams	0	14.61-14.70 grams	4
13.31-13.40 grams	2	14.71-14.80 grams	4
13.41-13.50 grams	4	14.80-14.89 grams	3
13.51-13.60 grams	3		

Setting aside the three utter sports at 12.21, 12.55, and 12.86 grams, this yields a beautifully balanced curve starting with two coins at 13.31-13.40 grams, rising sharply to a summit at 14.01-14.10, 14.11-14.20, and most particularly 14.21-14.30 grams, and then falling, but a little more gradually, to three coins at 14.80-14.89 grams. The weight standard thus evidently falls in the neighborhood of 14.20 grams, and it is perhaps the inadequacy of the weighing system employed under the circumstances of this Celtic society remote from the Mediterranean world that accounts for the equal spread of weights both above and below that standard, whereas the mints of late classical antiquity one would expect fewer coins above the standard than below it.

This arithmetical average of 14.149 grams is a very high figure for a Celto-Dacian tetradrachm (the same is true of the apparent standard of 14.20 grams, but since figures

¹⁷ Kolníková, p. 75.

for arithmetical averages are more readily accessible for purposes of comparison we may set the supposed standard aside).

Such an average compares very well with extreme upper-limit cases for the tetradrachms of Philip II of Macedon himself. In his volume *Le Monnayage d'Argent et d'Or de Philippe II*, Le Rider cites on page 345 a particularly select and well-preserved group of 86 Philip tetradrachms coming from the Kalamaria hoard. Their weights ranged from 14.37 grams to 14.49 grams. The arithmetical average came to about 14.435 grams. This may be taken as high for the underlying prototype, and the Ptičie average is within 0.30 grams of it.

Furthermore, Preda speaks¹⁸ of the Crişeni-Berchieş type of coinage within Dacia to the following effect: the coins of phase *a* of that coinage run from 12.98 to 14.85 grams, with most coins over 14 grams; the light pieces are an exception; the average weight is 14.07 grams; and that average is the highest registered for all the categories of the local coins of Dacia known thus far – save for the imitations of the Philip III type, which are based on the underlying weight standard of the tetradrachm of Alexander the Great, heavier than that of Philip II. The coins of phase *a* of the Crişeni-Berchieş type are of good silver, as Dr. Kolníková finds the Ptičie coins to be. Dr. Preda dates phase *a* of the Crişeni-Berchieş type to approximately the end of the 3rd century B.C.

Since the Ptičie coins are of even greater average weight than these, and are apparently of silver perhaps nearly or even quite as good, one might like to see further study undertaken in order to determine whether they may not be of equal age, instead of over fifty years younger.

With regard to the position which the Ptičie coins occupy within the archeological history of eastern Slovakia during this general time period, Dr. Kolníková says that archeological finds to date demonstrate that «the first Celtic tribes penetrated there during the course of the 3rd century B.C., but particularly at the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. Finds from the graves of Celtic warriors show that the new settlements were taken sword in hand. The archeological finds from this period are not numerous. On this basis there has come into being a view to the effect that the new Celtic population mingled with an aboriginal native population of the late Hallstatt Kuštanovice culture.»¹⁹

She concludes that we may suppose that «the coin hoard from Ptičie represents a tribal output of some one of the numerous Celtic or Dacian tribes having centers in this northern Dacian area which was closely associated not only with northwestern and eastern Rumania but also with the territory of present-day eastern Hungary, the adjoining portions of Transcarpathia, and eastern Slovakia ... Probably trade, tribal shifts, and conceivably also profit motives removed the hoard from the place of its origin to the valley not far from the confluence of the Laborec and the Cirocha rivers which is the site of the present Ptičie. The reasons for its being buried in the ground, a state which continued for more than two thousand years, cannot be arrived at today. Fear of losing property will have played its part in this instance too. Back of this there always lay danger, the scope of which is attested by the fact the the person who concealed the hoard never came back to recover his property ...»²⁰

This is very well. But there is perhaps a more pointed conjecture that ought also to be put forward and subjected to testing against archeological facts already known or to become known. Dr. Kolníková says in an earlier passage that «the mint whose products are represented in the deposit from Ptičie obviously belonged to a *nicely prospering eco-*

¹⁸ Preda, p. 18.

¹⁹ Kolníková, p. 82.

²⁰ Kolníková, p. 87.

nomic and social center»²¹. If «trade, tribal shifts, and conceivably also profit motives removed the hoard from the place of its origin» to Ptičie, we know of other coinages that were apparently ambulatory: for example, Preda's Huşi-Vovrieşti type, which seems to have been issued by a group of migrants commencing in western Rumania just before the end of the 3rd century B.C., proceeding around the *northern* slope of the Carpathians through what is now Soviet Transcarpathia in the first half of the 2nd century B.C., and coming to relative rest in Moldavia around the end of the 2nd century B.C.²². If tribes were in motion at the earlier of these dates, may the Ptičie people not have been one of them, perhaps coming from more or less the same original settlements?

If easternmost Slovakia was settled by Celts «sword in hand» who «mingled» with the peoples already domiciled there, and if the burying of this hoard reflects «danger, the scope of which is attested by the fact that the person who concealed the hoard never came back to recover his property,» we know of other hoards which seem to have been buried in the face of military disaster. Such a suggestion has been raised in connection with the 1968 Sitichoro hoard from Thessaly, which some have thought might be the camp treasury of the pretender Andriscus, claiming the appellation of Philip VI of Macedon, after his defeat in 148 B.C. by the Romans. This whole separate Ptičie currency, with the possible exceptions of the Paris and the Transcarpathian individual pieces, seems to have been packed into a ceramic vessel and concealed. Need it have been the property of an individual?

Let us suggest instead, merely as a conjecture to be weighed, that this may have been the entire liquid capital of a tribal group which sought to migrate into the Carpathians of Slovakia with its silver minted into these unprecedently heavy coins; that the tribe may have been utterly defeated in battle; and that its surviving members laid the coins away, all in a pot, which they buried at Ptičie, proposing to come back for it later – something which they never did.

This conjecture, like the metrology of the coins, would seem to fall in better with a date just before 200 B.C. for these events, than it would with the date of approximately 150 B.C. proposed by Dr. Kolníková.

One would like to go over the Humenné district with a metal detector and see whether remains of metal weapons do not indicate that a considerable battle was fought somewhere in that vicinity.

²¹ Kolníková, p. 87: «hospodarsky i spoločensky dobre prosperujúcemu centru.»

²² Preda, p. 128–130, and map on p. 123.