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ОБРАЗ ВЕРШНИЦІ НА МОНЕТАХ СХІДНИХ КЕЛЬТІВ ТА КУЛЬТ КЕЛЬТСЬКОЇ БОГІНИ ВІЙНИ

HORSE-RIDER IMAGE ON THE COINS OF THE EASTERN CELTS AND THE CULT OF CELTIC WAR GODDESS

Анотація.

*У статті розглядається іконографія кельтських монет Південно-Східної Європи. Основна увага приділена монетам, знайденим у Закарпатській області України. **Мета статті** полягає у розкритті символізму кельтських монет, зокрема образу вершника/вершниці на реверсі цих монет. **Дослідницька методологія** базується на використанні структуралістського підходу. Наукова новизна полягає у простеженні зв'язку іконографії монет з релігійними уявленнями та культовими практиками давніх кельтів. Кельтські монети Закарпаття переважно становлять імітації емісій Філіпа II та Авдолеона. Образ вершника/вершниці присутній майже на всіх кельтських монетах Закарпаття та прилеглих регіонів. Хоча у більшості випадків людська фігура на коні зображена досить схематично, на окремих екземплярах неважко помітити жіночий образ. Всупереч стереотипам масової культури, немає підстав вважати, що у кельтському суспільстві була поширена практика, коли жінка очолювала плем'я або брала участь у війні як лідер або воїн. Водночас, жінки відігравали велику роль в ідеологічній та релігійній сферах війни. Є підстави вважати, що зображена на кельтських монетах фігура людини верхи на коні сприймалася як образ божества війни, плодючості та конярства. З високою мірою ймовірності можна вважати, що цим божеством була Епона або подібна до неї богиня. Кельтські монети широко використовувалися як у*

торгівлі, так і в ритуальних практиках. Зокрема, у писемних джерелах згадується кельтський звичай присвячення монет богині полювання. Знахідки монет зі слідами пошкодження долотом, схожими на ті, що виявляють у галльських та галло-римських святилищах, також слід розглядати у даному контексті.

Ключові слова: латенська культура, Закарпаття, Галиш-Ловачка, вершиник/вершинця, Епона, кельтська релігія.

Summary.

*The article deals with the iconography of the Celtic coins which come from the South-Eastern Europe. Main attention is paid to the coins found in the Trans-Carpathian region of Ukraine. **The aim of this article** is to shed light on symbolism of the Celtic coins, in particular on a horse-rider figure on the reverse of these coins. **Research methodology** is based on the structuralist approach. The scientific novelty. The author shows how the imagery of the coins was connected to the Celtic religious beliefs and cults. The Celtic issues from the Trans-Carpathian region were derived chiefly from the coins of Philip II and Audoleon. A horse-rider image is present on almost all of the Celtic coins from the Trans-Carpathian area and nearby regions. While on most of coins the rider's figure is highly schematized, some of them contain a detailed image of a female figure. There is no reason to suggest that the Celtic women used to lead their communities or were widely involved in the warfare as military leaders or individual fighters. At the same time, their significance in the religious and ideological spheres of warfare was great. One can assume that the horse-rider depicted on the Celtic coins was considered rather as an image of deity associated with war, fertility and horse-breeding. It is highly probable that this deity in fact was Epona or other related goddess. The coins were widely used in both trade and ritual practices. In particular, the Classical sources mention the Celtic ritual of devotion of coins to the goddess of hunting. The findings of coins with chop-marks, similar to those found in the Gallic and Gallo-Roman sanctuaries, should be mentioned in this context as well.*

Key words: La Tène culture, Trans-Carpathian region, Galish-Lovachka, horse-rider, Epona, Celtic religion

The problem statement. The Iron Age Celtic coins rarely occur on the territory of present day Ukraine. Except some occasional findings from the lands eastward of the Carpathian mountains, most of them come from the Trans-Carpathian area. This is the only region of Ukraine where the Celtic La Tène culture was widespread from the 3rd to the early 1st centuries BC. The biggest La Tène settlement in the Trans-Carpathian region laid on the Galish and Lovachka hills near Mukacheve. It had been

unsystematically excavated by amateur archaeologists from 1844 to 1930. Among other objects, they revealed a burial, made in a pit rounded by stones with the inventory of more than 30 Celtic derivations of Hellenistic coins. Unfortunately, in the early twentieth century the occupation layer of Galish-Lovachka was mostly destroyed by agricultural works. More than a hundred silver derivations of Philip II coins were found in a hoard from the La Tène settlement at Gut (Garazdivka), Berehivskiyi district. There are also separate findings of the Celtic coins coming from different locations of the Trans-Carpathian region¹.

In the early 21st century Eva Kolníková made an important contribution in research of the Celtic coins from the Trans-Carpathian region. She attributed the coins from Galish-Lovachka (eighteen tetradrachmas, one didrachm and three drachmas) to nine types: Kopf ohne Kinn/Rad, W-Reiter, Vogel auf Zweig, Vogel auf Helm, Schnurrbart/Rosette, Audoleonotyp, Audoleonmonogramm 1, Reiter mit kurzen Armen, Armloser Reiter, Schild + Kranz, Schild + Schwert. At the same time, the coins from Gut hoard were attributed to the Huși-Vovriești and Südostdakien types². Kolníková made two important conclusions about the coins from Galish-Lovachka. Firstly, considering the finding of a coin mold, she points out that at least some coins were produced locally. Secondly, the coins from Galish-Lovachka differ significantly from the Celto-Dacian issues of Zemplin and Mala Kopania.

The aim of this article is to shed light on symbolism of the Celtic coins from the Trans-Carpathian area. Using a structuralist approach, I'd like to show how the imagery of the coins was connected to the Celtic religious beliefs and cults.

The main material. Vast majority of the Celtic coins from Balkans and Eastern Europe, including those ones which originate from the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine, contain an image of horse-rider depicted on reverse side. It is generally accepted that the Celtic coins of the South-Eastern Europe were derived from Phillip II of Macedon and Audoleon the king of Paeonia tetradrachms. On the reverse side of both coins the figure of horseman is depicted. The Celtic imitations of Philip II and Audoleon coins from Hungarian plain and Transylvania usually contain image of a rider sitting straight on horse or a rider with outstretched arm (or with branch in arm). Most of the images are highly schematized, however sometimes it is clearly visible that the image of rider actually represents a female figure (figs. 1, 2). In some cases the rider's figure has long flowing hair (as it is visible on coins from Galish-Lovachka³) which is typical for the female images in the Iron Age Celtic art. It seems very likely that a female figure is depicted on the early Eastern Celtic coins of the so called Puppenreiter/Triskele type (fig. 3). It was the most common on the lands of present day Hungary. In the Trans-

¹ Bidzilia 1971, p. 47, 85-87.

² Kolníková 2002, p. 109.

³ Ibid. Abb. 1.7, 2.3

Carpathian region one coin of such type originates from Uzhhorod¹ while another one (also attributed as Audoleonmonogramm 1) comes from Galish-Lovachka².

Subsequently, in the 1st century BC various types of coins depicting female horse-rider, either armed or not, circulated in the Western part of the Celtic world, i. e. in the North-Western Gaul³. The popularity of the female horse-rider image on coins raises the question about social practices or religious beliefs which caused the emergence of such phenomena. To answer this question one should analyze a social position of woman in the Iron Age Celtic society, especially her connection with warfare and horseback riding.

One of the stereotypes connected to the Iron Age Celts in modern mass culture depicts the warlike Celtic women entering a battlefield along with their men or even leading them. The heroic legends of the Irish Ulster cycle mention various female warrior characters, such as Scáthach who taught martial arts Cú Chulainn and his brother-in-arms Ferdiad, Aife – another female fighter from whom Cú Chulainn gained his deadly spear Gáe Bulg, and, finally, a queen Medb of Connacht who was famous for being a rival of the Ulads according to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The question to which extent such legendary evidences may reflect the real role of woman in the Early Medieval Irish warfare remains disputable. Thus, one must note that the late VII c. *Cáin Adomnáin* forbids the Irish women to participate in battle and war.

Historical accounts considering the Iron Age Celtic women taking part in either military campaigns or political life are rather scarce. Cornelius Tacitus stresses that it was a common practice among the Britons to go to war under a female commander [solitum quidem Britannis feminarum ductu bellare] (Ann. XIV. 35). At least two ancient British female political and military leaders are well-known: Cartimandua the queen of Brigantes who entered into treaty-relationship with Rome, and Boadicea or Boudicca the queen of Icenii who raised a large-scale rebellion against Roman rule. According to the Roman authors, such as Tacitus or Cassius Dio, Boudicca herself played a role of military commander and personally led attacks on the Roman ranks standing on her own chariot.

In Britain the existence of some women who probably played a role of military leaders in their communities is attested by archaeology. At least two female ditched-enclosure chariot burials dating back to c. 300 BC come from the Parisii area in East Yorkshire⁴. The one from Wetwang is especially notable for it was situated on top of the hill and included residues of the pig – a dish which typically accompanied the Celtic warrior burials. The only ‘female’ artifact in the Wetwang burial was a bronze mirror.

On the other hand, there are very few accounts referring to women of the Continental Celts who acted either as fighters or as military leaders. The anonymous

¹ Torbágyi 2012, p. 552.

² Kolníková 2002, Abb. 2.8.

³ Green 1998, p. 182-186, fig. 88.

⁴ Thurston 2010, p. 218

Greek author of *Tractatus De Mulieribus Claris In Bello* mentions Onomaris, a noble Galatian woman who took on the leadership when her fellow countrymen suffered from starvation. While not a single man agreed to fund the emigration from badlands, Onomaris led her people to cross Ister and conquer the country where she ruled as a queen thereafter (Anon. Tract. d. Mul. XIV). Unfortunately, any historical circumstances of the Onomaris' leadership are known and the question whether she was a historical or legendary character remains open.

Other sources describe barbarian women, both Celtic and Germanic, as those who rather encourage their husbands in battle and prevent them from desertion. The woman's role as a keeper of her husband's weapons and his partner in peace and war is described by Tacitus, who emphasizes Germanic warrior's tradition to bring sword, spear, shield and horse to his bride as a wedding gift (Tac. Germ. 18). However, it seems that on the battlefield women could take weapons in their own hands only in extreme cases. For example, the late Roman author Paulus Orosius describes how women of Cimbri and Teutones, after their husbands were defeated, 'turned the sword, which they had taken up against the enemy, against themselves and against their own children' (Paul. Oros. Hist. ad. pagan. V. 16. 17)

Archaeological evidence prove that the Celtic female fighters may seem to belong more to myths recalling fierce Amazon warriors than to reality¹. Some female individuals indeed enjoyed an unprecedentedly high social position in the society of the Hallstatt and Early La Tène periods². However, the rich female graves of that periods are not necessary to be interpreted as the burials of female political or military leaders as far as in Iron Age and Early Medieval masculinist warrior societies, noble women played an important role in the alcohol distribution³.

Elements of military equipment rarely occur in the La Tène burials which could be classified as female ones. Arnold pays attention to several graves which contained spearheads besides the sets of female personal ornaments. Two of them were discovered at the Hallstatt site Stuttgart-Bad Constat; another one comes from Giessübel-Talhau. Middle La Tène rich female grave from Sinsheim-Dürhem is of particular interest because it contained the relic Urnfield bronze spearhead. Considering this fact, Arnold comes to conclusion that weapons in female burials played a symbolic role or indicated the social rank of dead⁴. In fact, only a few of the La Tène burials from both Gaul and Central Europe were once reported as the female graves containing some elements of military equipment. As far as information about those graves usually comes from the old or outdated sources it cannot be regarded as reliable in most cases. There are also some La Tène cremation graves containing

¹ Nelson 2004, p. 113.

² Arnold 1995, p. 154-155.

³ See: Enright 1996.

⁴ Arnold 1991, p. 86-91.

spindleworls or typical female ornaments along with the sets of military equipment that are usually interpreted as double burials¹.

Probably the most notable example of the La Tène woman grave which contained a piece of weapon is the rich LT B2 burial 67 from Mlčechvosty near Prague (Czech Republic). The burial of mature woman was furnished with the bronze neck-ring, two anklets, three arm-rings (one of which was made from sapropelite), three bronze Duchcov fibulae and bronze finger-ring. But the most intriguing item of the burial inventory is the La Tène sword in scabbards which was put along the body's right side². This is rather typical detail of the Central European rich male warrior burial. However, the above-mentioned grave includes neither shield nor any other detail of the military equipment. So the emergence of the sword among the usual feminine grave goods may reflect rather a high social position of the buried woman than her previous military experience.

Raimund Karl explains the 'male inventory in female burial' phenomenon in terms of the gender role changing. In insular Celtic tradition the head of the household was normally understood to be a male person who amongst other duties required participating in military actions. Therefore his social status was identified with weapons. In special circumstances (e. g. head of the household's absence or his death without leaving adult heirs) woman could undertake this social role. In this case she have to be seen as of 'male gender, but female sex – but equally identifiable by weapons'³. Similarly, Tomasz Bochnak points out that the findings of pieces or even sets of weapons in the female burials of the Latènized Przeworsk culture should not necessary reflect the presence of warrior woman group among the Iron Age Germans⁴.

While the archaeological evidence of female fighters in the Celtic world is rather scarce, the role which women played in ideological sphere of warfare seems to be significant. In particular, Plutarch informs that the Celts appreciated the competency of their women to make decisions concerning war and peace:

Before the Celts crossed over the Alps and settled in that part of Italy which is now their home, dire and persistent factional discord broke out among them which went on and on to the point of civil war. The women, however, put themselves between the armed forces, and, taking up the controversies, arbitrated and decided them with such irreproachable fairness that a wondrous friendship of all towards all was brought about between both States and families. As the result of this they continued to consult with the women in regard to war and peace, and to decide through them any disputed matters in their relations with their allies. At all events, in their treaty with Hannibal they wrote the provision that, if the Celts complained against the Carthaginians, the governors and generals of the Carthaginians in Spain should be the

¹ Rustoiu 2012, p. 164; Jovanović 2011, p. 61.

² Levínský 2009, p. 313-318.

³ Karl 2013, p. 43.

⁴ Bochnak 2010, p. 24.

judges; and if the Carthaginians complained against the Celts, the judges should be the Celtic women (Plut. Mul. virt. VI).

Anonymous *Paradoxographus Vaticanus Rhodii* adds that the Celts used to ask their women for an advice whether to start a war. But in the case of defeat they could cut off the women's heads and throw them out from their lands (Paradoxogr. Vatic. Rhodii. XLV-XLVI). If such a cruel practice could really had taken its place, it may explain a strange behaviour of Galatian warriors just before the battle with Antigones Gonates: 'as they were preparing for battle, sacrificed victims to take presages for the event; and as, from the entrails, great slaughter and destruction of them all was portended, they were moved, not to fear, but to fury, and thinking that the anger of the gods might be appeased by the slaughter of their kindred, butchered their wives and children, commencing hostilities with the murder of their own people' (Just. XXVI. 2. 4). It may be suggested that the Celts' anger against their own wives was caused by the unlucky prophecy given by the women. But sometimes barbarian women themselves took part in the sacrifices of war prisoners, as it is mentioned, for example, by Strabo (VII.2.3).

The female character which foretells the future of certain warrior or even a warband appears in both continental and insular Celtic traditions not infrequently. For example, Boudicca before the battle with Romans 'employed a species of divination, letting a hare escape from the fold of her dress; and since it ran on what they considered the auspicious side, the whole multitude shouted with pleasure' (Cass. Dio.LXII. 6. 1). The information about the prophecies given by females who personally were not involved in the battle occurs more often. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, describing the bad omens before Alexander Severus' death, mention a 'female Druid' [mulier Druias] who cried in Gallic language: 'Go, but do not hope for victory, and put no trust in your soldiers' [Vadas nec victoriam speres nec te militi tuo credas] (SHA. Severus Alexander. LX.3.6).

It is widely accepted that in the Celtic, Germanic and other traditional societies there was a common belief that at least some females are able to *know* the fate and to *see* the future. Such 'sanctification' of women as well as their natural connection to the concepts of fertility, birth and death sometimes caused the ritual victimizing of females captured during the war. Classical sources are full of weird stories about the Celtic human sacrifices. Some of them may be interpreted in the context of Greek and Roman propaganda against the 'savage barbarians'¹. However, in general they should be taken into account because of the reliable archaeological evidences concerning human sacrifices in some Celtic sanctuaries. For example, in the sanctuary of Ribemont-sur-Ancre numerous fragmented human skeletons, both male and female,

¹ See: Kistler 2007.

were revealed along with a large quantity of weapons¹. Similar rituals, thus much less massive, were conducted by the Galatians in Phrigan Gordion².

Cassius Dio, who described ritual killings of Roman colonists which were made by Boudicca-led Iceni in honor of Andraste/Andate the war goddess, stresses the sacrifice of women:

They hung up naked the noblest and most distinguished women and then cut off their breasts and sewed them to their mouths, in order to make the victims appear to be eating them; afterwards they impaled the women on sharp skewers run lengthwise through the entire body. All this they did to the accompaniment of sacrifices, banquets, and wanton behaviour, not only in all their other sacred places, but particularly in the grove of Andate. This was their name for Victory, and they regarded her with most exceptional reverence (LXII. 7. 2–3)

It is highly probable that the continental Celts practiced such rituals as well. According to Pausanias, during the Celtic attack on Delphi in 278 BC, Brennus sent a warband to devastate Aitolia. When the Celtic warriors led by Combutis and Orestorios conquered the town of Kallion they slaughtered every captured man and child but the women were treated with an exceptional cruelty: ‘Women and adult maidens, if they had any spirit at all in them, anticipated their end when the city was captured. Those who survived suffered under imperious violence every form of outrage at the hands of men equally void of pity or of love. Every woman who chanced to find a Gallic sword committed suicide. The others were soon to die of hunger and want of sleep, the incontinent barbarians outraging them by turns, and sating their lust even on the dying and the dead’ (Paus. X.22.2). Julius Caesar, in his turn, informs that at the very beginning of the Vercingetorix’s rebellion the Gauls with their leaders Konkonnetodumn and Cotuatus (or Gutuater) savagely butchered Roman merchants in Kenabum (BG. VII. 3). The above mentioned name Gutuater is believed to be the Gallic priestly title which was misunderstood as a personal name³.

In continental Europe numerous Celtic deities of war and fertility are attested in narrative and epigraphic sources. Among them the cult of Epona was, probably, one of the most important. The theonym Epona (from Proto-Indo-European *éḱuos ‘horse’) is known chiefly from the Roman period dedications. The earliest accounts date back to the mid-1st century AD, however it is generally accepted that Epona was a pre-conquest Celtic deity which was subsequently adopted in the Roman Empire. Among the Balkan Celts, the cult of Epona (or other deity associated with horses) was deeply rooted. For example, the 3rd century relief from Western Bulgaria depicts a man in a fight with a snake, an inscription ΣΚΟΡΔΟ (= genitive: ‘belonging to Scordus’) – a tribal eponym and ancestor-deity of Scordisci, and an image of horse, which Nikola Theodossiev interprets as a hippomorphic personification of Epona, the Celtic horse-

¹ See: Amandy et al. 2000.

² See: Dandoy et al. 2002.

³ Evans 1967, p. 96.

goddess¹. This interpretation seems plausible, as far as there was no Celtic male god closely associated with horses.

The cult of Epona was popular throughout an Empire until the late Antiquity. Outside Gaul dedications and images of Epona are well attested in Italy and Balkan provinces, i. e. in Pannonia and Moesia. In the context of our research, it is important to mention an inscription from Aquincum “Iulia Utta E[p]/ponis f(ilia) Flor/ina nati(oue) Anarti(a)” (CIL III, 10552). Woman who used theonym ‘Epona’ as a part of her personal name originated from the Anart(i)oi tribe – a Celtic or Celto-Dacian community which populated the Upper Tisza area at the turn of eras.

Written accounts give reason to suggest that Epona was a protector of horses, mules and donkeys, a goddess of horse-breeding, whose altars were usually placed in stables (Apuleius III.27; Juvenal VIII.146). Miranda Green points out that ‘Epona was depicted as an essentially peaceful divinity, whose iconography associates her above all with fertility and protection rather than aggression and combat’². The goddess was usually depicted as either a horsewoman seated side-saddle upon a mare or sitting on a throne flanked by two (or more) horses³. At the same time, one might pay attention to the fact that the cult of Epona was very popular among the Roman military, especially among the auxiliary cavalrymen, Imperial Horse Guard, as well as among those who served in the legions quartered in Danubian provinces.

Considering all the facts about the Celtic horse-goddess and its popularity in Balkan region, one may conclude that the coins of the Celtic communities of the South-Eastern Europe depicted Epona or other related deity. This is not surprising, as far as the Celts borrowed their coinage from Hellenistic world, where the image of Nike was often placed on coins.

There is no doubt that the reasons why the Celts adopted Hellenistic monetary system were rather economic than religious. The coins were widely used in both local and interregional trade⁴. At the same time, the coins were probably used for a cult purposes as well, in particular as votive offerings. Arrianus mentions how the Celts used coins in their rituals devoted to a hunting-goddess:

Some of the Celts have a custom of annually sacrificing to Diana; while others institute a treasury for the goddess into which they pay two oboli for every hare that is caught – a drachma for a fox ... and four drachmae for a roe-deer, in consideration of his size, and greater value as game. When the year comes round on the return of the nativity of Diana, the treasury is opened, and a victim purchased out the money collected, either a sheep, or kid, or heifer, according to the amount of sum (Cynegeticus XIII).

One should point attention to the fact that a lot of the Celtic coins have damages, caused by heavy impression of a chisel-like object. In Gaul the majority of

¹ Theodossiev, 2005, p. 90.

² Green 1998, p. 183.

³ Jovičić, Bogdanović 2017, p. 38.

⁴ Militký 2013, s. 35.

coins with chop-marks are associated with the sanctuaries. As David Wigg-Wolf stresses, this confirms that the defacing of coins was indeed part of a ritual practice associated with the temple, and not a purely secular phenomenon – for example to test for plated coins¹. The findings of coins with similar chop marks are not infrequent in Hungarian plain and Transylvania². This ritual practice was probably widespread in the Trans-Carpathian region as well. In 2016 the author of this paper, being in Uzhhorod, bought a Celtic coin with a chop-mark from a local antiques seller (fig. 4). It is most likely that the coin was found by metal detectorists somewhere in the nearby area.

Conclusions. In general, the coinage of the La Tène group of the Trans-Carpathian region wasn't significantly different from other Celtic communities of the Hungarian plain and Transylvania. Most of the coin finds originate from Galish-Lovachka settlement which was a major political and manufacturing center of the local community. The Celtic issues from the Trans-Carpathian region were derived chiefly from the coins of Philip II and Audoleon. A horse-rider image is present on almost all of the Celtic coins from the Trans-Carpathian area and nearby regions. While on most of coins the rider's figure is highly schematized, some of them contain a detailed image of a female figure. There is no reason to suggest that the Celtic women used to lead their communities or were widely involved in the warfare as either military leaders or individual fighters. At the same time, their significance in the religious and ideological spheres of warfare was great. One can assume that the horse-rider depicted on the Celtic coins was in fact an image of deity associated with war, fertility and horse-breeding. It is highly probable that this deity was Epona or other related goddess. The coins were widely used in both trade and ritual practices. In particular, the Classical sources mention the Celtic ritual of devotion of coins to the goddess of hunting. The findings of coins with chop-marks, similar to those found in the Gallic and Gallo-Roman sanctuaries, should be mentioned in this context as well.

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¹ Wigg-Wolf 2005, p. 373.

² Torbágyi 2012, Abb. 6.24; Torbágyi 2019, p. 43.

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Illustrations



Figure 1.

Imitation of Philip II of Macedon. Tetradrachm (24mm, 19.32 g, 12h). Zweigarm type. Carpathian region. Head of Zeus right / Rider on horseback left, holding branch. Source: <https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=356351>



Figure 2.

Eastern Celtic Paeonia issue. Source: <https://balkancelts.wordpress.com/2013/12/10/catu-bodua-queen-of-death/>



Figure 3.

Puppenreiter coin from Middle Danube region. Tetradrachm (13.74 g, 7h). Audoleon monogram type. Source: <https://cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=83793>



Figure 4.

Eastern Celtic coin from unknown location of the Trans-Carpathian region. Tetradrachm (13 g). Private collection.