

Monetary supply in Noricum

In 15 BC the Regnum Noricum was occupied in a more or less peaceful way by the Romans. Till the reign of Claudius I Noricum was only a sort of Roman province with special rights and –further called „regnum“. Only under the reforms of Claudius I the real Roman Provincia Noricum was established.

The background for this peaceful occupation we can find in the good relations inbetween Rome and the regnum Noricum from which we know even from the 2nd century BC on, where for example in 113 the consul Papirius Carbo tried to support the Noricans against the invasion of Kimbern and Teutons. The good relations were founded in commercial relationships: the Romans needed the excellent Noric steel and the Noric reguli loved Roman luxury goods. Roman merchant-families were settled in the capital of Noricum on the Magdalensberg in Carinthia and the Norici who had their own silver currency (tetradrachmes and oboloi) were also used in the Roman coins of the Republic, as the coin finds in this city show.

About the early Roman Noricum we are not very well informed so e.g. we do not know how the administration had been, and if the Norican reguli still were existing. But as we know from the time of Claudius I and later there had been no Roman legion stationed in this country which neighbours were in the west Raetia, in the south Italia and in the east Pannonia. The northern frontier was with the river Danube that of the Roman empire.

About the monetary circulation in the early time coin finds and especially the hoards are able to bring some light in the dark. The coinage of the Norici, which was established about 130 BC is, as mentioned above, a silver one following –as the most celtic coinages– the Greek system: tetradrachms and oboloi were produced in two main phases, the second – the one which interests us here –from about 80 BC with the head of Apollo in the obverse and a rider in revers and a written name of several kings. When about 30 BC the

trade between Rome and Noricum increased, the exchange between Roman denarius and Norican tetradrachm became necessary, but Roman money policy only allowed an exchange rate of 3 denarii for 1 tetradrachm, which should be worth 4 denarii. Therefore it was a chance for the Romans to earn money by buying Noric tetradrachmes –and the reaction of the Norici was, that they made an alloy adding more and more copper to the silver till the tetradrachms ended in a pure coppercoinage, which was not important any more. Latest from the 20ties of 1st century BC the mintage of Norican tetradrachms was stopped.

The oboloi, which were produced parallel to the big silver coins for small and local currency remained. They were further produced and accepted also in the first years of Roman Noricum and further till the cut under Claudius I. Though we do not know in what form the new province was integrated to the Imperium Romanum we can be sure, that there existed high ranked Romans who overtook the military and civilian administration of this land and all the necessary personal with them; and it is further sure, that they were paid from Rome in Roman currency that means with aurei and denarii. It seems clear that it was nearly impossible to use these coins for the daily life –small change was needed for it, but as we can see regarding the coin finds especially within the heart of Regnum Noricum, in today Carinthia and its surrounding, the normal Roman small change i.e. sestertii, dupondii and asses arrived very scarce there. Therefore we can imagine, that not only the Celtic inhabitants but also the Romans used for every day life the local small silver currency for which we can reconstruct the exchange rate. The root for this is a report of Arrianus, a writer living in the 2nd century AD, who writes in his accounts of hunting methods also these of former Norican Celts, who offered money to the temple for each hunted animal. The result of his comparisons also with Roman coins is, that 1 Roman denarius was worth 16 Celtic oboloi, that means further, that 1 obolos was equivalent to 2,5 Roman asses.

The possibility to use the small change of a country in which people are used of it seems to have been very important for the Romans. In this case it was not necessary to provide the new province suddenly with bronze coins which were not so easy to produce and of which Rome and Italy itself had a big demand in this time. By the way, the Romans made it in Noricum like somewhere in eastern provinces, where the mints of the autonomous times were allowed to produce small change (in bronze), the so called Greek imperials, for the needs of daily life. In Noricum, where never bronze coinage was established they used also for their own demand the local

currency of small silver coins, the oboloi. Therefore it is not astonishing, that these oboloi are found in together with Roman coinages (asses, and denarii) as well in hoards –like in the one of Aguntum (Eastern Tyrol), where 15 Celtic oboloi were together with one as of Augustus in one hoard– or in settlements as on the Magdalensberg and others.

With the reforms of Claudius I in Noricum a veritable Roman province with a senatorial procurator was established and the Celtic silver small change was replaced by sestertii, dupondii, asses and even smaller denominations.



Norici: tetradrachm of Adnamat. 1st half of 1st century BC.
Obv.: head of Apollo I. Rev.: horseman with spear. ADNAMATI.

Scale 2:1



Norici: obolus. 2nd half of 1st century BC.
Obv.: head of Apollo I. Rev.: cross made by lines with central point.

Scale 2:1

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