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A new Etruscan toponym for Populonia: *poepi*



Discovered in 2015 in an old private British collection a previously unpublished silver didrachm or stater of Populonia in a remarkably good state of preservation allows the reading of a clear Etruscan legend, a new toponym for Populonia to be added to the glossary Etruscan of place names: *poepi*. The coin is very similar in style and fabric to two other examples in the Archaeological Museum of Firenze (SNG Firenze 70–71¹) and a third specimen from an American collection (CNG e-sale 327, 2014, lot 5). All three coins are in such poor condition that no legend was discernable.

Description

Etruria, Populonia. AR Didrachm (8.32g, ø 22mm). 4th century BC.

Obverse: Head of Turms I., wearing winged and decorated petasos; below, retrograde Etruscan legend *poepi*. Dotted border. Reverse: Blank.

Ex VCV collection, Roma Numismatics sale 10, 2015, lot 23. For similar types cf. EC I² Populonia 11.1 (8.24g) and 11.2 (8.17g); CNG e-sale 327, 2014, lot 5 (7.43g).

Attested toponyms of Populonia on coins in Etruscan script

pvplvna, EC I Series 38–40, 54, 60, 67, 80–81, 85, 88 and 133–140 = TLE⁴ 357, 378, 409, 459; 789 = RIX³ N.20–24, 27

mi:pvplvna:les, EC I Series 68 = TLE 358 = RIX NU N.28–29 (interpreted as: 'I am the les of Populonia', possibly meaning the law or custom as in *nomos* or *lex*)

vetalv pvflvna, EC I Series 132; TLE 379; RIX NU N.25, 26, 30 (*vetalv* is to interpreted as a personal name, possibly of a mint official).

[*vetalv fvflvna xa*], TLE 794; RIX NU N.31; GARRUCCI p. 56, 10⁵ (a misreading of an alleged sextans in the Parma Museo Archeologico, cf. EC I, p. 293, note 284 *contra* CHRISTOFANI⁶). This erroneous reading has led to the understandable assumption that the name of Populonia was connected the Etruscan deity *fuf-luns* (= Dionysos/Bacchus) as attested on the Liver of Piacenza, cf. TLE 719.

The Etymology of Populonia

The etymology of Populonia is very complicated and has been much discussed by

- 1 SNG FIRENZE, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum Italia*, Firenze, MA II (Firenze 2010).
- 2 I. VECCHI, *Etruscan Coinage Part I, A corpus of the struck coinage of the Rasna*, (Milano 2012).
- 3 M. PALLOTINO, *Testimonia Linguae Etruscae* (Roma 1968).
- 4 H. RIX, *Etruskische Texte, Editio minor II. Texte* (Tübingen 1991).
- 5 R. GARRUCCI, *Le monete dell'Italia antica* (Roma 1885, reprint 1967).
- 6 M. CHRISTOFANI, *Problemi iconografici ed epigrafico-linguistici*, in: *Contributi introduttivi allo studio della monetazione etrusca: atti del V Convegno del Centro internazionale di studi numismatici – Napoli, 20-24 aprile 1975*, IIN Supplemento al volume 22 degli *Annali* (Roma 1976), p. 351.

Latin and Etruscan etymologists. The presence of the above new word *poepl* is earlier than the previously recorded toponyms for Populonia and puts in doubt whether the deity *fufluns* is connected with Populonia, as is commonly presumed, at least in the 4th century BC before the thorough Romanisation of Etruria and the subsequent assimilation of toponyms. It is much more likely that *poepl* is a contraction connected to the Proto-Italic **poplos* and obviously related to the Umbrian *publu/poplum* ('group of brandishers', i.e. soldiers) and Latin *populus*, *populum*, *populi* ('a people, as forming a political community, the public, a district or nation'). It is also related to the Oscan *puplunai*, a title of Juno meaning: 'she who increases the number of the people' possibly in the sense of the *iuvenes*, i.e. 'the army', (cf. *ImIt* I, pp. 535-7, Teanum Sicicium 4-6⁷). Livy states in book 5 of *Ab Urbe Condita* that Juno/Uni was originally an Etruscan goddess of the Veientes, who was ceremonially adopted into the Roman pantheon after Veii was sacked in 396 BC.

Claudius Ptolemy in his *Geography* (3.1.4), defined Populonia as a *polis* and used the Greek term ΠΟΠΛΩΝΙΟΝ, while the Latin authors used various toponyms including: *Populonium*, *Populonia* and the ethnic *Populonenses*, cf. BTCGI XIV, Populonia pp. 199-202⁸. However, this word is not attested in Indo European languages outside of Italy and the *populus* family of words may have been borrowed from Etruscan in the first place, cf. Rix 1995⁹.

Weight standard

The weight standard of this issue without mark of value is close to an Attic didrachm or Corinthian stater, which chronologically places the series to the interim period in the 4th century between the first denominated Metus didrachms marked X and the second series marked XX.

Iconography

The coin type employed is that of the head of Etruscan Turms wearing a winged petasos. In Etruria Turms generally fulfilled the same functions as Hermes/Mercury, being the god of commerce and the messenger between mortals and the immortal gods. In Etruscan iconography he accompanies gods and heroes, conducts the goddesses to the Judgement of Paris, delivers the egg of Helen to her parents, Latva and Tuntle (Leda and Tyndareos). On a mirror from Vulci, now in the Vatican Museums, he conducts the shade of Teireias (*hinthial terasias*) to Uthuze (Odysseos) and is called *turms aitas* ('Turms of Hades) or Hermes Psychopompos ('Hermes, guide of souls'). For further reading cf. BONFANTE¹⁰ and GUMMUND – SIMON¹¹.

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7 M.H. Crawford (ed.), *Imagines Italicae: A Corpus of Italic Inscriptions* (London 2011).

8 *Bibliografia Topografica della Colonizzazione in Italia e nelle Isole Tirreniche XIV* (Pisa – Roma – Napoli 1996).

9 H. Rix, *Il Latino e l'etrusco*, in *Eutopia* 4,1, 1995, pp. 73-88.

10 G. and L. BONFANTE, *The Etruscan Language* (Lancaster 2002), p. 208.

11 N.T. DE GRUMMOND – E. Simon, *The Religion of the Etruscans* (Austin 2006), p. 53, iv.9.