

Apollo Belenos on Norican and Tauriscan coins

Apolon Belenos na novcu Norika i Tauriska

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Izvleček

[*APOLLO BELENOS NA NOVCIH NORIKOV IN TAVRISKOV*] Glava na sprednji strani novcev Norikov in Tavriskov se v strokovni literaturi pogosto istoveti z glavo Apolona, kar interpreti utemeljujejo z upodobitvijo in videzom boga na novcih, ki so služili kot predloge za kovanje teh novcev. Oblast, odgovorna za izdajo novcev, je najverjetneje poznala identiteto na novcih upodobljenega božanstva, vendar ga je interpretirala kot "narodnega" boga Belena/Belina. Identifikacija Apolona s tem lokalnim božanstvom je bila po keltskem svetu široko razširjena, kar najbolj prepričljivo dokazuje gradivo na območju Norika in Akvileje. Zato ne čudi, da so lokalne keltske kovne oblasti izbrale za upodobitev na sprednji strani novcev prav "narodnega" boga, saj je njegovo čaščenje izpričano na posvetilnih napisih, v svetiščih, v literarnih pričevanjih in, morda, v plastiki.

Ključne besede: 2. in 1. st. pr. n. št., Apolon, Belen, Belin, novci, Noriki, Tavriski

Abstract

The head on the obverse of Norican and Tauriscan coins is often casually identified as Apollo's, mainly based on the god's appearance on suggested prototypes for these coins. The issuing authorities most probably recognized the identity of the god portrayed on the coins they imitated, but they interpreted him as their 'national' god Belenos/Belinos. The identification of Apollo with this native deity is widespread throughout the Celtic world, with the most persuasive evidence coming from Noricum and the region of Aquileia. It is no wonder that the local Celtic minting authorities chose to portray their 'national' god on their coinage, since his worship is attested to in dedicatory inscriptions, sanctuaries, literary testimonies and, perhaps, plastic arts.

Keywords: 2nd and 1st c. BC, Apollo, Belenos, Belinos, coins, Norici, Taurisci

INTRODUCTION

The beardless diademed head on the obverse of Norican and Tauriscan coins is often casually identified in numismatic literature as Apollo's, which is sometimes further qualified with quotation marks (Göbl 1973, 82, 97; Mackensen 1975, 250–252; Kos 1977, 18–19; id. 1998, 248, 341; Kostial 1997, 40, 42, 48; Dembski 1998, 87–88,

90; Marcer 2005, 77; Ziegauš 2010, 183, 186, 188, 221). Suggested prototypes for these coins are found with the Apollo on Philip's gold staters (via the Gallic coinage) (Pink 1937, 45, 51–52, 56, 62; id. 1939: 112–113; cf. Göbl 1992, 9), Philip's drachms (or, more precisely, 1/5th of a tetradrachm) (Allen 1980, 11) via the 'beardless' Celtic series from east Austria, west and north-west Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia (Allen 1987, 31), and in Patraus'

tetradrachms (Forrer 1908, 153–155; Marcer 2005, 77; Gorini 2009a, 119; id. 2009b, 209; cf. Allen 1987, 31). However, there are no discussions on the question whether this identification had any meaning for the Celtic peoples that issued those imitations, i.e. whether they chose the depiction intentionally, recognizing the identity of the deity on the original coins and deliberately reproducing it on their own. Since both the Norican and Tauriscan authorities that issued these coins apparently broke off with earlier Celtic monetary tradition in this region, which characteristically imitated the coins of Philipp II with a depiction of a bearded and diademed head of Zeus on the obverse (see e.g. the Ribnjačka hoard),¹ a cogent explanation for this shift should be offered. Furthermore, if they indeed deliberately chose to depict Apollo on their coins, then a plausible interpretation should be presented as to why they did so and what meaning this particular representation had for them. I will offer here two related explanations for both these issues: that the local authorities indeed deliberately chose to depict the god Apollo on their coins and that they did so because they identified this Greek deity with their native deity Belenos. That is, the *Apollokopf* on Norican and Tauriscan coins specifically represents the Celtic god Belenos, whom the Celts identified with Greek Apollo.²

It is important to offer at the outset a methodological justification for these interlaced hypotheses. The difficulty of attaining complete knowledge of the ancient world, consisting of conclusively proven hypotheses, should not be employed to protect either a status quo or, much less so, an impasse reached by previous scholars in the field. When a significant number of indications point to a certain direction, the mere inability to conclusively prove the validity of a hypothesis, which is inherent in the nature of the material being studied, as well as in the vagaries of the survival of archaeological records, should not be taken as a proof of the invalidity of one particular hypothesis or, much less, the validity of an opposite view, which has little or no evidence on its side (Sourvinou Inwood 1995, 133–134). Sourvinou Inwood further

argues against the preconceived notion of favoring the apparently more rigorous negative approach that implicitly or explicitly negates the value of a hypothesis if it cannot be conclusively proven, even though all available evidence supports it, or at least none of this evidence contradicts it (1995, 134). Thus, if I am able to provide firm evidence in favor of the hypotheses I have outlined above, they should be considered to stand as long as some convincing counter-evidence is brought to light. That is, my hypotheses, which explain all the available data, remain valid until they are falsified by new data or different plausible interpretations of the existing records.

APOLLO ON COINS?

The first issue that should be discussed is whether Norican and Tauriscan Celts recognized the identity of the figure on the coins they imitated. Since the Apollo on Patraus' coins is neither identified by an inscription nor depicted in an easily recognizable way,³ while the Gallic coins adduced by Pink as intermediaries between Philip's coins and that of Norici and Taurisci are also both anepigraphic and iconographically uncharacteristic of Apollo,⁴ as are, indeed, the gold staters of Philip themselves, together with Philip's 'drachms',⁵ and the Celtic coins adduced by Allen as intermediaries between Philip's coins and that of Norici and Taurisci,⁶ there does not seem to be much in support of the thesis that the Norici and Taurisci could have recognized Apollo on the coins they imitated. Nevertheless, the fact that they reproduced this particular image on their coins, as noted above, contrary to the hitherto prevailing minting tradition, suggests they indeed made some considerable conscious

³ On Apollo on Patraus' coins see Pavlovska 2008, 38–39.

⁴ For these coins, see Muret, Chabouillet 1889; La Tour 1892; Blanchet 1905; Brenot, Scheers 1996; Gouet, Prieur, Schmitt 2001; Delestrée, Tache 2004; id. 2007. Due to chronological reasons, these coin types could not have been the exemplars for the coinage of the Norici and Taurisci (see e.g. Blanchet 1905: i.258 fig. 123 = BN 2628–2635 = Delestrée, Tache 3120–3121; Blanchet 1905: ii.369 fig. 349 = BN 7892 = Delestrée, Tache 69; Blanchet 1905: ii.294 fig. 293 = BN 8593–8606 = Delestrée, Tache 158–161; Blanchet 1905: ii.418 fig. 453 = BN 3719–3724 = Delestrée, Tache 3558), since they are dated at the earliest in the second half of the 2nd c. BC.

⁵ For these coins, see Le Rider 1977.

⁶ For these coin types, see *OTA* 385–398, 463–483; Dembski 1998, nos. 734–752, 1387–1412.

¹ For the Ribnjačka hoard see Liščić 1957; Pink 1957; Dukat, Mirnik 1976, 192; Mirnik 1981, 39 no. 36; id. 2008, 118–120; Kos, Mirnik 1999.

² Representations of other Celtic deities were recently recognized on local coinage. For the recognition of the Celtic deity Lugh in the depictions on some coins of Danubian Celts imitating the tetradrachms of Philip II and Thasos see Gricourt, Hollard 1997 and Torbágy 2014.

effort in choosing a new iconographical solution. Moreover, the new depiction was derived from coins that did not regularly circulate in the region occupied by the Norici and Taurisci.⁷ These two facts show that their choice was not haphazard, but had to be motivated by something. I will not attempt to hypothesize on the ways such knowledge could have been acquired by the local minting authorities, since they are all based on common sense. Naturally, it could be claimed that the local minting authorities arbitrarily chose this particular depiction from any of the exemplars adduced above without understanding the identity of the character depicted on the obverse of the coin. However, then it remains to be explained why they chose to imitate the coins that did not even circulate in this particular area, and also what motivated the rather abrupt change in the local tradition of coin production (that is, the introduction of new iconographical solution). At this point, I will provisionally argue that the minting authorities recognized Apollo in the exemplars from which they derived this particular depiction, explaining my reasons for assuming this premise in the subsequent discussion.

APOLLO AND BELENOS

The motives of the minting authorities of the Norici and Taurisci for selecting the depiction of Apollo on their coins will become clear in the following discussion. Thus, the first issue that must be addressed is why the Norici and Taurisci would consider Apollo important. The most plausible explanation for the god's importance among the Norici and Taurisci is that Apollo was identified with the Celtic god Belenos throughout the Celtic world. Moreover, the most convincing evidence for this identification, both in form and number, comes precisely from Noricum. However, since this particular body of evidence is non-numismatic, I will first review the numismatic evidence for this identification which comes from Britain and Gaul.

The deity Belinos can perhaps be recognized in the name of the first-century AD British king Cunobelinus or Cynobellinus (Henig 1984, 50; Darrah 1994, 137, 173). He is mentioned by some historians (Suet. *Calig.* 44.2; Dio Cass. 60.20.1, 21.4; cf. Oros. 7.5.5), and his name often appears

on coins.⁸ Furthermore, Cunobelinus' coins depicting Apollo indicate his association with this deity (Henig 1972, 210–212 with Pl. XI.A = *LIMC* II.1 454 no. 574), while a temple dedicated to Apollo Cunomaglus from Nettleton Shrub (*RIB* 99b; Wright 1962, 191, no. 4) suggests a possible association of Cunobelinus with Apollo Cunomaglus. Apollo was indeed syncretized with Bellinus in an altar inscription from Cumbria (*RIB* 611.4-5). Thus, a somewhat tentative Apollo-Belenos nexus, also evidenced in coinage, can be recognized in 1st-century Britain.

This same nexus, here also evidenced in coinage, can likewise be recognized in Gaul. An inscription *BELINOC* appears on 1st-c. BC Gallic coins of the central-west region (*BN* 6378-6380; Blanchet 1905, i.104, ii.423–424, pl. II.15); another contemporary Gallic coin type of the same region bears the inscription *BIINOC*, *BEINOC*, or *BIENOC* (*BN* 7050–7055; Blanchet 1905, i.104, ii.423, pl. II.14; Brenot, Scheers 1996, 120–121, pl. 30, nos. 856–857). The latter seems to imitate the bust of Apollo on the denarii of C. Piso L. F. Frugi (Blanchet 1905, i.202, 423; Brenot, Scheers 1996, 121), and it was claimed that the depiction on these Gallic coins represents Apollo Belenos (Muret, Chabouillet 1889, 161). The problem here is similar to the one discussed at the beginning of this paper: did Gallic moneymakers understand the figure on Frugi's coins as depicting Apollo, interpret this deity as identical to their Belinos, and depict it on their coins as their important deity? Literary testimonies indeed support the identification of Apollo with Belenos in the Gallic context. Thus Ausonius informs us of Apollo-Belenus' temple at Burdigala, with its attending priest Phoebicius, and various other names associated with the worship of Apollo (*Prof.* 4.7-14, 10.22-25), while Belenos is syncretized with Apollo on an inscription from Bardonecchia (*AE* 1959, 170).⁹ This shows that Apollo was identified with Belenos in Gaul, and it seems entirely possible that he was depicted on Gallic coinage.

⁸ See, for example, Allen 1975; de Jersey 2001; Morris 2013.

⁹ Olmsted (1994, 386) adduces two inscriptions from Glanum, an inscription to Belenos on a stone basin (*IGF* 170) and an altar bearing a dedication to Apollo found in the basin of the nymphaeum (*IGF* 51) (cf. Mullen 2013, 150, 229–231), as a further proof of the association between the two deities in Gaul.

⁷ See Dukat, Mirnik 1976; Kos 1977; Bilić 2012.

APOLLO AND BELENOS/BELINOS IN NORICAN CONTEXT

However, by far the greatest number of testimonies identifying Apollo with Belenos comes from Aquileian and Norican contexts, although with no ramifications upon local coinage postulated thus far. Belenus is mentioned as the chief deity of the Norici by Tertul. *Apolog.* 24.7 and *Ad Nat.* 2.8.5, and he is said to be worshiped in Aquileia as Apollo Belenus (Herodian. 8.3.8; SHA [Iul. Capitol.] *Max. Duo* 23.1-2). There are numerous dedications to Belenus or Belinus in this region, mostly from Aquileia itself, where he is regularly syncretized with Apollo (*CIL* V 732 + p. 1023 (= *ILS* 625), 737, 741, 748-749, 753, 8212; *AE* 1975, 413), and it could be claimed that his cult actually arrived at Aquileia from Noricum (Šašel Kos 1999, 26; id. 2000, 41-42; Scherrer 2002, 35). Identification of Apollo with Belenus/Belinus does not appear in inscriptions from Noricum, but dedications to the latter were indeed found there, and in this region he also had a sanctuary at Villach (*CIL* III 4774 = *ILLPRON* 744; *ILLPRON* 137, 683 + 686, 685 (sanctuary); Šašel Kos 1999, 26, Scherrer 2002, 42, 35-36; Lovenjak 2003, 334-336, no. 4).¹⁰ Furthermore, it is possible that the god worshipped in an important sanctuary at Magdalensberg was actually Belenus/Belinus (Šašel Kos 1999, 25, 27; id. 2000, 42-43; Scherrer 2002, 35). This is corroborated by the existence of an early Augustan statuette of the god Belenus from Concordia near Aquileia, identified as such by an inscription (*CIL* V 1866; Šašel Kos 1999: 27; id. 2000, 43; Scherrer 2002, 35). Considering the references to his sanctuaries and his role as an important deity among the Norici, it would be quite improbable that, besides the (now lost) Concordia statuette and (perhaps) the famous Magdalensberg Youth, at least a few more of his representations did not survive. Several types of figurines were indeed suggested as candidates for being representations of Belenus/Belinus. Thus Istenič (2001, 82; 2009, 236) argued that the bronze statuette of a naked deity with a torque from the Ljubljanica River represents Apollo-Belenus, even though Celtic deities holding or wearing a torque

¹⁰ Šašel Kos (1999: 25; 2000: 42) cautiously argues for including the inscription *CIL* V 1829 + p. 1053 = *ILS* 544 from Iulium Carnicum, where Belinus' sanctuary is mentioned, to the corpus of Norican dedications to the god (cf. Scherrer 2002, 35-36, 43, Karte 13).

are never associated with either Apollo or Belenos (Olmsted 1994, 328).

Furtermore, Osmuk (1997, 12) believes that the sanctuary at Kobarid could have been dedicated to Belenos. Out of 26 bronze statuettes found in the sanctuary, seven represent 'classical' Apollo, one an 'adorant with radiate crown', while another seven a rather unusual 'Heracles' (defined by a lion skin) with a radiate crown, more precisely, a leaf crown arranged as sun rays (Osmuk 1997, 14). These statuettes, especially the 'adorant', have a number of parallels from the Norican territory and the part of the Venetic territory (with a single exception) bordering with the Norican. Osmuk's 'adorant' is elsewhere styled 'Helios' or 'Sol' (Puš 1968, 415, referring to a statuette from Ljubljana), while an almost identical statuette from Sežana is believed to represent a Heracles (Žbona-Trkman 1983, 36), by analogies with a 'Heracles' from (?) Kobarid, now lost but formerly in Ljubljana (Tadin 1979, 20, no. 32 with T. XIX: 31; Osmuk 1997, 12), and Slavia Veneta/Beneška Slovenija (Tagliaferri 1986, 34, Tav. III: 2, 360, 382, Tav. CXXXI: 1; 1988: 154, who further claims it was modeled upon a 'Belenos'-statue from Dernazzacco described below; Càssola Guida 1989, 62, no. 20),¹¹ identical with Osmuk's 'Heracles' from Kobarid.¹² These 'solar' statuettes certainly do not simply represent a classical Heracles, and analogues for them are found in statuettes from Gurina (Fleischer 1967, 158, no. 213 with Taf. CXI: 213), Caprino Veronese (Fogolari 1950-1951, 373, no. 51 with Tav. IIIo on p. 367), who styles it a Kouros-Helios, Dernazzacco in the Natisone Valley (Tagliaferri 1986, 33 Tav. II; 1988: 228-229, who calls it a Belenos; Càssola Guida 1989, 82, no. 32, now lost; cf. no. 33 on p. 83 from the Museo Archeologico in Aquileia, and no. 34 on pp. 84-85, from the vicinity of Aquileia; also three statuettes without provenance from the Trieste Civici Musei,

¹¹ Also the recently found Heracles of the same type from the vicinity of Cividale (Franceschi et al. 2004, 205, with fig. 1 on p. 206).

¹² Compare also *LIMC* IV.1 766 *Herakles* 769 (clay figurine), IV.1 767 *Herakles* 777 (= Reinach 1897, ii.220.3), 778 (= Fleischer 1967, 124-125, no. 161 with Taf. LXXXIX: 161), 780 (= Reinach 1897, ii.218.1), 783 (= Reinach 1897, ii.220.2), all bronze. This type is called 'Heracles with drinking cup', and Macr. *Sat.* 5.21.16, 21 associates the representations of Hercules with a drinking-cup (*scyphus*) with his crossing of the sea to Erytheia, accomplished in the cup of Helios (Boardman, Palagia, Woodford in *LIMC* IV.1 766).

Càssola Guida 1978, 59–60, nos. 44–45, 147, no. 118), Ljubljana-Grad (Plesničar-Gec 1991–1992, 49), and a winged statuette from the vicinity of Cividale (Tagliaferri 1986, 34 Tav. III: 1; 1988: 131, who calls it a Belenos; Càssola Guida 1989, 95–97, no. 39, here styled ‘flying Eros’).¹³ It seems reasonable that the statues of ‘adorant’ or ‘Helios/Sol’ found in the Norican and adjacent Venetic territory indeed represent Apollo-Belenos/Belinos, as argued by Sivec, Dirjec (1998, 39, cat. 279) for the first Ljubljana figurine, perhaps further syncretized with Heracles, as evidenced by the ‘Heracles’-type of statuettes. Plesničar-Gec (1991–1992, 50), although she denies that the statuettes represent Belenos (*cf.* Càssola Guida 1989, 63, 96), dates their production to the late La Tène period, while Càssola Guida (1989, 62, 82) similarly dates both the ‘adorant’ and ‘Heracles’ figures to the 3rd–2nd c. BC.¹⁴ These dates fully correspond to the chronology of Norican and Tauriscan coinage, since it is convincingly argued that they started minting their coins from at least the mid-2nd century BC, or at the very end of the 1st half of the 2nd c. BC (Kos, Šemrov 2003, 386–387; Kos 2007, 60–63; *id.* 2009, 311; *id.* 2010, 81, 102; *id.* 2012, 355–356; *id.* 2013, 364; Kos, Žbona Trkman 2009, 276, 279; Kos, Mirnik 2011, 102; Miškec 2012, 381, 383; Strobel 2014, 75–77).

CONCLUSION

Belenos was an important Celtic deity, in particular among the Norici. He was regularly identified with Apollo by the Celts, including those at the head of the Adriatic. Since the Gauls, Britons, Norici and the inhabitants of the region of Aquileia all identified their Belenos with Apollo, he could well be the Gallic Apollo mentioned by Caesar (*BG* 6.17.1-2).¹⁵ The Norici and Taurisci apparently imitated coins on which Graeco-Roman Apollo (or his imitations) was depicted. Given that they recognized the god as such on these coins, it seems more than probable that they equated him with their native deity Belenos/Belinos, as was usual in the Celtic world. In this case, the depiction of Apollo on the coinage of the Norici and Taurisci must have represented Belenos/Belinos. Moreover, their actual motive in selecting any of these particular exemplars for their new coinage must have been the well-attested importance of Belenos/Belinos in their religion and cult, exemplified in dedicatory inscriptions, sanctuaries, literary testimonies and, perhaps, plastic arts.

That neither the claim that the local authorities recognized the Apolline identity of the portrayals on the exemplars which they imitated and, consequently, deliberately chose to represent the god on their coins, nor that they did so because they identified this Greek deity with their native deity Belenos/Belinos can be conclusively proven, should not be used as proofs for the fallacy of the hypotheses I have just outlined, since a significant number of pieces of evidence supports them, while none contradict them. The hypotheses expounded here explain all the available data in a satisfactory manner, while the apparently more rigorous negative approach explains none, and the latter’s acceptance would only prolong a scholarly impasse under the guise of methodological rigor.

¹³ For reviews of analogies, see Žbona-Trkman 1983, 36; Osmuk 1987, 74; Plesničar-Gec 1991–1992, 50.

¹⁴ For an interesting discussion on the survival of the cult of Belin(us) in the Slavic period up to the 19th century, see Šašel Kos 2001, 9, 14–15. Additionally, the Krkavče menhir (Istria), with its two radiate figures, known among other names as ‘Berlina’ among the local populace (Puhar, Pleterski 2005, 59, 71), might indeed represent Belin (Župančič 2008), but this is impossible to prove.

¹⁵ For a tentative connection between Belenos (*Belen-*) and **Pelun*/**Pelin* → **Pelen*, from which the name ‘Apollon’ is derived, see Kothe 1970, 230, n. 1. The Gallic root *bel-* is probably derived from IE **bhel-*, ‘brilliant, white’ (Pokorný 1959, i.118–120; Olmsted 1994, 387).

Abbreviations

AE = *L'Année épigraphique*. – Paris.

BN = *Bibliothèque nationale*.

CIL = *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*.

IGF = J.-C. Decourt, *Inscriptions grecques de la France*. – Lyon 2004.

LIMC = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.

ILLPRON = M. Hainzmann, P. Schubert, *Inscriptionum lapidarium Latinarum provincii Norici usque ad annum MCMLXXXIV repertarum indices*. – Berlin 1986.

ILS = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*.

OTA = R. Göbl, *Ostkeltischer Typen-Atlas*. – Braunschweig 1973.

RIB = *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*.

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Apolon Belenos na novcu Norika i Tauriska

Sažetak

Prikaz glave na aversu noričkog i taurišćanskog novca često se usputno interpretira kao prikaz Apolona. Glavni argument za takvu interpretaciju su prikazi Apolona na predloženim prototipovima za norički i taurišćanski novac. Kovničarski autoriteti najvjerojatnije su poznavali identitet božanstva prikazanog na novcu kojeg su imitirali, ali su ga interpretirali kao svog lokalnog boga Belena/Belina. Identifikacija Apolona s tim lokalnim božanstvom sveprisutna je u keltskom svijetu, a najuvjerljiviji primjeri dolaze upravo iz Norika i s područja Akvileje. Ne čudi stoga što su lokalni

keltski kovničarski autoriteti odlučili na svojem novcu prikazati upravo svojeg "nacionalnog" boga, čije je štovanje potvrđeno posvetnim natpisima, postojanjem svetišta, u literarnim izvorima te, možda, kulturnoj plastici.

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