# PROCEEDINGS OF THE

# XIV$^{th}$ INTERNATIONAL NUMISMATIC CONGRESS

# GLASGOW 2009

# I

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Edited by
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GLASGOW 2011

International Numismatic Council

British Academy

University of Glasgow | The Hunterian

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ISBN 978-1-907427-17-6

Distributed by Spink & Son Ltd, 69 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4ET
Printed and bound in Malta by Gutenberg Press Ltd.

# A STONE *THESAURUS* WITH A VOTIVE COIN DEPOSIT FOUND IN THE SANCTUARY OF CAMPO DELLA FIERA, ORVIETO (*VOLSINII*)

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Excavations at Campo della Fiera, west of Orvieto (Etruscan *Velzna* - Latin *Volsinii*), directed by Professor Simonetta Stopponi of the University of Perugia, are investigating the remains of a large sanctuary, in all likelihood the *Fanum Voltumnae*: the federal Etruscan sanctuary where *Voltumna / Vertumnus* was worshipped.[1] The 2008 season brought to light a stone *thesaurus*[2] for coin offerings, with its content intact.

The *thesaurus* stands in the central area of the excavations bounded by the *temenos* wall, in front of a small temple built between the fourth and third centuries BC and renovated, with a new pavement, in the late Republican or early Augustan period (**Pl. I**).[3] It was placed in front of a monolithic tufa altar (**Pl. II.1**), which it is difficult to date with any precision, but which must date to before the destruction of the city of *Volsinii*, by Fulvius Flaccus in 264 BC. The altar and the *thesaurus* are located close to a second altar or *donarium* aligned with the temple.

A thick layer of ash and coals - clearly the remains of sacrifices - rested against the altar, covering the eastern half of the lid, including the hole in the lid through which coin offerings were made. This layer is dated to the early imperial period on the basis of *sigillata italica* and some coins, the most recent of which is an as of C. Plotius Rufus of 15 BC. By this period, therefore, the *thesaurus* was no longer in use.

The lid consists of a block of leucitite, a local rock of volcanic origin. A thin layer of silt fills the cavity under the lid. No finds came from this layer. Beneath this lay a conical container of the same material as the lid, with no evidence of a seal or of any way in which the lid could have been fixed to the container.

Once the lid had been cleared, its function became clear, as below it some coins were visible under it on the side not covered by the ash layer. When the lid had been removed, these were found to be six in number. They must have been pushed under the lid after the slot was no longer visible and therefore no longer usable to drop offerings into the container. The most recent of these coins - which on the evidence so far appear to be the latest offerings - is an as of M. Maecilius Tullus (*RIC* I², 436), of 7 BC. Including the coins placed under the lid, the total number of coins in or associated with the *thesaurus* is 221.

The excavation has shown that the pit that housed the *thesaurus* was cut into a layer of 'tufarina' (a compacted residue of tufa workings). Fragments of tile and stone were found supporting the container, but no datable material.

*Acknowledgements*: I thank Simonetta Stopponi, Director of the excavations, as well as Claudia Giontella and Alba Frascarelli, for giving me the opportunity to study this *thesaurus*, and for the information about its discovery and some of the images I illustrate. I also thank Valentino Gasparini for drawings and graphic reconstructions; the conservators, Nicola Bruni and Anna Riva, and all the researchers of the Universities of Perugia and Napoli Federico II who were involved in the study of the plant remains with the coins: Manuela Vagnini, Domizia Donnini, Gaetano Di Pasquale, Emidio Albertini and Lorenzo Raggi.

[1] For recent results of the excavation see Stopponi 2007, Stopponi 2009 and Stopponi 2011.

[2] For *Thesaurus* (Greek θησαυρός), a small monument in which coins could be inserted as an offering in a sanctuary (*Opferstock*), see Ziehen 1936, pp. 1-7; Kaminski 1991, p. 64; Sinn 2005, p. 123; Torelli 2005, pp. 354-55.

[3] For the chronology of the pavement, a decorated '*signinum*', in the third quarter of the first century BC, see Giontella 2009.

The coins were removed from the container in the laboratory, and their layering was recorded. Single coins were numbered when possible and, if not, clumps of coins stuck together. As we will see, this made possible an understanding of the dynamics of coin accumulation.

The *thesaurus* is made, as mentioned, of two superimposed blocks of leucitite (**Pl. 3**). The underside of the lid has a smooth square area in the middle, where it rested on the container, framed by a roughly worked strip: this would have prevented the heavy lid from sliding over the rim of the container.

The form (**Pl. III.3**), differs from that of other *thesauri* from the Italian peninsula and in particular the many examples, predominantly of the Republican period, from central Italy.[4] The *Volsinii thesaurus* belongs to a type consisting of two superimposed blocks but, unlike other known examples,[5] the lower block, which serves as the container, is conical rather than squared. The unusual shape of the container as well as the presence, in the bottom end of the container (**Pl. III.2**), of a small square hole, suggests that it may have been cut from a block that previously had another function: possibly a column drum or a *meta* forming the lower part of a *mola asinaria*, around which the *catillus* revolved. [6]

The coins were systematically removed and samples were taken of the abundant sediments that covered them, with the exception of the uppermost coins. A preliminary analysis of these sediments has shown that they are characterized by abundant small charcoal fragments, a few small animal bone fragments, and many unburned leaves and twigs. The turkey oak (*Quercus cerris* L.) has already been identified among the coals, and the vine (*Vitis vinifera* L.) among the unburned plants. Most of the coins were embedded in these sediments. The 221 coins (including the six under the lid) are as follows:

- 185 Roman Republican *asses* (**Pl. IV, 1-2**).
- 1 *quinarius* of M. (Porcius) Cato (*RRC* 343/2a, 89 BC) (**Pl. IV, 3**).
- 2 *denarii*, of the *aediles* M. Aemilius Scaurus and P. Plautius Hipsaeus (*RRC* 422/1a, 58 BC) and of M. Antonius (*RRC* 528/3, 39 BC ) (**Pl. IV, 4-5**).
- 18 *Divos Iulius* bronzes of Octavian (*RRC* 535/1; *RPC* 620, which suggests a date of 38 BC) and imitations of this issue (**Pl. IV, 6-7**).
- 14 *asses* of Augustus, of the colleges of *IIIviri* of 16-15 BC (*RIC* I$^2$, 373, 376, 379, 382, 386, 389) (**Pl. IV, 8-10**).
- 1 *as* of Augustus, of the *IIIvir* M. Maecilius Tullus (RIC I$^2$, 436, 7 BC) (**Pl. IV, 11**).

The six coins found under the lid are, with one exception, of Augustus, and include the *as* of M. Maecilius Tullus, which is the latest coin in the group. The exception is a *Divos Iulius* bronze imitation, with the heads of Octavian and Caesar.

The order in which the coins were placed in the container does not follow their dates of issue. The surface layer contains all the *asses* of Augustus in the deposit, except those that had been pushed under the lid, as well as eight *Divos Iulius* bronzes. The mass of coins which lies below this contains mainly Republicans *asses*, other *Divos Iulius* bronzes (even in the bottommost layer),

[4] For a list of *thesauri* in peninsular Italy, see Crawford 2003, pp. 76-80. The author - supplementing the list in Catalli-Scheid 1994, p. 60 - enumerates 32 *thesauri*, seven of which are uncertain. Of the 25 certain cases, 22 are from central Italy. To these we can add the one from *Volsinii* described here, and another recently found at Ardea (Di Mario 2007, pp. 71-73). Typological classifications, such as those attempted in the 1990s by Kaminski (1991, p. 72) and by Catalli and Scheid (1994, pp. 58-61), seem inadequate to describe the wide variety of forms.

[5] E.g. the *thesauri* of *Ameria* and San Vittore. Among *thesauri* consisting of two squared superimposed blocks, that from the Agora of Morgantina may be also mentioned (Kaminski 1991, p. 158).

[6] See Adam 1988, pp. 347-48.

and the three silver coins. Unlike the coins in the surface layer, these coins are associated (as noted above) with remains of a sacrifice. Many of the coins were stacked vertically, sometimes in groups of four or five. These factors, as well as the position of the dated coins, suggests that most of the coins were placed in the *thesaurus* as a single offering, together with the remains of a sacrifice, probably before the lid was put on. The *terminus post quem* is given by the *denarius* of M. Antonius (39 BC) and by the *Divos Iulius* bronzes.

Most of the coins are Roman Republican *asses*, conventionally described as of sextantal and uncial weight, only datable within the wide range of 211 and 91 BC. The vast majority are heavily worn and corroded, and unidentifiable. Their weights range between 13.75 and 41.21 grams, and there are no *asses* certainly issued after the *Lex Papiria* of 91 BC. Two *asses* have so far been more precisely identified: one with the fly symbol (RRC 159/3, 179-170 BC) and one of L. Saufeius (RRC 204/2, 152 BC) (**Pl. IV, 1-2**).

The Republican *asses* could have been in circulation at the time of deposit in the *thesaurus*, in or after the early 30s BC, but we cannot exclude the possibility that they had earlier been kept elsewhere in the sanctuary, and that the later Republican and Augustan coins, as well as the sacrificial remains, were added to the *asses* during a secondary deposit.

The commonest coins after the Republican *asses* are the *Divos Iulius* bronzes, most if not all of which appear to be imitations.[7] The chronology, the mint and the denomination of these bronzes are still the subject of debate. *Roman Provincial Coinage* reviews the various dating proposals of 41-40, 38 and 37-36 BC, and the various proposed mint attributions to *Nemausus*, *Lugdunum*, *Puteoli* or Italy in general.[8]

As far as the possible mint site is concerned, we must recall the hypothesis of Alföldi and Giard, who - on the basis of a *glans plumbea* with the legend L. XI DIVOM IVLIVM, presumably used during the *Bellum Perusinum* - suggested that the *Divos Iulius* bronzes were struck in the area of *Perusia*, not far from *Volsinii*, during the siege of the city in 41-40 BC.[9] Find evidence in support of this hypothesis had until now been lacking. The discovery of these coins in the *Volsinii thesaurus* appears to have only one parallel in the territory of *Perusia*. This, once again, is a votive deposit, briefly described by Francesco de' Ficoroni:[10]

*L'anno 1710. del mese di Marzo à cinque miglia da Perugia, nelle pertinenze del Castello di Mandoleto alcuni Operarj piantando alberi da vite… scuoprirono… quantità di monete di pesi colle solite teste di Giano, e mezze navi nelli loro rovesci, con varie figurine, ed altra copia di metalli lavorati… Delle monete d'argento consolari, sei solamente ne pervennero…, non poche furono quelle di metallo d'Augusto grandi, e mezzane co'nomi de'Triumviri monetali, e in numero di venticinque eran quelle di Giulio Cesare col solito rovescio di Augusto. Vi furono ancora medaglie d'altri susseguenti imperatori, e fin d'Alessandro Severo...*

This description lists several Republican *asses*, some *denarii*, many Augustan coins of the *IIIviri*, and, if the interpretation is correct - I see no plausible alternative - 25 *Divos Iulius* bronzes, as well as imperial coins up to Severus Alexander. The period in which the *Divos Iulius* bronzes were offered at Mandoleto cannot be established. But it is important to note the possible association with Augustan coins and the absence, at both Mondoleto and *Volsinii*, of coins of the second type, with the legend *Divos Iulius* within a laurel wreath on the reverse (*RRC* 535/2).

In the *Volsinii thesaurus*, a number of the *Divos Iulius* bronzes were deposited in the surface

[7] Martini 1988, pp. 33-64, 98-115, proposes a typology of the canonical and imitative *Divos Iulius* bronzes.

[8] *RPC* I, p. 161. See also Amela Valverde 2003, pp. 30-35, with a proposed dating to the first half of 37 BC, between the first and second *quinquennium* of the Triumvirate (the office of *IIIvir* is not mentioned on the coins), and attribution to Italy, perhaps to a coastal town.

[9] Alföldi / Giard 1984.

[10] Ficoroni 1732, pp. 24-25.

layer above the mass of the material (which also contained the *denarius* of 39 BC). It is possible that most of the *Divos Iulius* bronzes were offered after Octavian had assumed the title of Augustus, as is certainly the case for one of the coins inserted under the lid. The deposit or re-deposit of the bulk of the coins during this period cannot therefore be excluded.

As evidence for the circulation of the *Divos Iulius* bronzes in the Augustan period, we can cite, among other finds, the votive deposit of Baratella (otherwise known as of Reithia), near Este - which included one of these bronzes cut in half (as is frequently the case with Republican *asses*), probably in the early 20s BC.[11] This would seem to confirm that - at least for the heavier pieces, the diameter of which is anyway similar to that of the lighter pieces - these bronzes may have circulated as *dupondii*, as Michel Amandry has proposed.[12]

This first brief presentation of the *thesaurus*[13] shows its exceptional nature. The only parallel in Italy for its composition is the Sora *thesaurus*. However, in the case of the Sora *thesaurus*, which should reflect coin circulation at the time of Caligula, we have no information about the layering of the coins. Many aspects of the function of *thesauri* in sanctuaries still need to be clarified, as well as, for example, the development of the practice over time, and the relationship between archaeological and literary and epigraphic evidence. One piece in particular comes to mind, from the *Commentarii* of *Fratres Arvales*: *... item foras ad aram reversi thesauros dederunt*, which, it has been argued, could describe, as late of the beginning of the third century AD, the practice of giving *thesauri* (used metonymically for coins, *stipes,* offered in the *thesaurus*) to the altar.[14] The relationship between the altar and *thesaurus* is particularly evident at *Volsinii*.

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[11] Gorini 1994, p. 74.

[12] Amandry 1986. For the analyses of the alloy of these coins, see Amandry / Barrandon 1988.

[13] A full catalogue and analysis of the coins will be published in *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano di Numismatica* 55.

[14] Scheid 1990, pp. 613-14; Scheid 1998, n. 100a, 26 (Elagabalus).

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## KEY TO PLATES

**Plate I**

Aerial view of the excavation, showing the position of the *thesaurus*.

**Plate II**

**1**. The altar and the *thesaurus* lid.
**2**. The container.

**Plate III**

**1**. Plan and section of the lid.
**2**. Plan and section of the container.
**3**. Section and three-dimensional reconstruction of the *thesaurus*.

**Plate IV**

**1**. Fly symbol, AE as, 25.85 g, 33.76 mm, 90°, *RRC* 159/3 - Inv. 08M5478.
**2**. L. SAVF, AE as, 13.75 g, 29.77 mm, 270°, *RRC* 204/2 - Inv. 08M5414.
**3**. C. CATO, AR quinarius, 1.95 g, 14.10 mm, 315°, *RRC* 343/2a - Inv. 08M5495b.
**4**. M. SCAVR, P. HYPSAEVS AED. CVR, AR denarius, 3.58 g; 17.70 mm; 180°, *RRC* 422/1a - Inv. 08M5382.
**5**. M.ANTON.IMP.IIIVIR R.P.C.AVG, AR denarius, 3.68 g, 19.42 mm, 180°, *RRC* 528/3 - Inv. 08M5346.
**6**. CAESAR DIVI.F, AE bronze, 12.76 g; 28.95 mm; 90°, *RRC* 535/1, *RPC* 620 - Inv. 08M5329.
**7**. CAESAR DIVI.F, AE bronze, 11.10 g; 29.16 mm; 120°, *RRC* 535/1, *RPC* 620 - Inv. 08M5717.
**8**. C. CASSIVS CELER, AE as, 10.56 g; 28.89 mm; 310°, *RIC* $I^2$, 376, 16 BC - Inv. 08M5289.
**9**. CN. PISO CN. F., AE as, 10.83 g; 25.55 mm; 60°, *RIC* $I^2$, 382, 15 BC - Inv. 08M5718.
**10**. C. (NAEVIVS) SVRDINVS, AE as, 11.19 g; 26.31 mm; 60°, *RIC* $I^2$, 386, 15 BC - Inv. 08M5288.
**11**. M. MAECILIVS TVLLVS, AE as, 11.91 g; 27.27 mm; 150°, *RIC* $I^2$, 436, 7 BC - Inv. 08M5718.

**PLATE I**

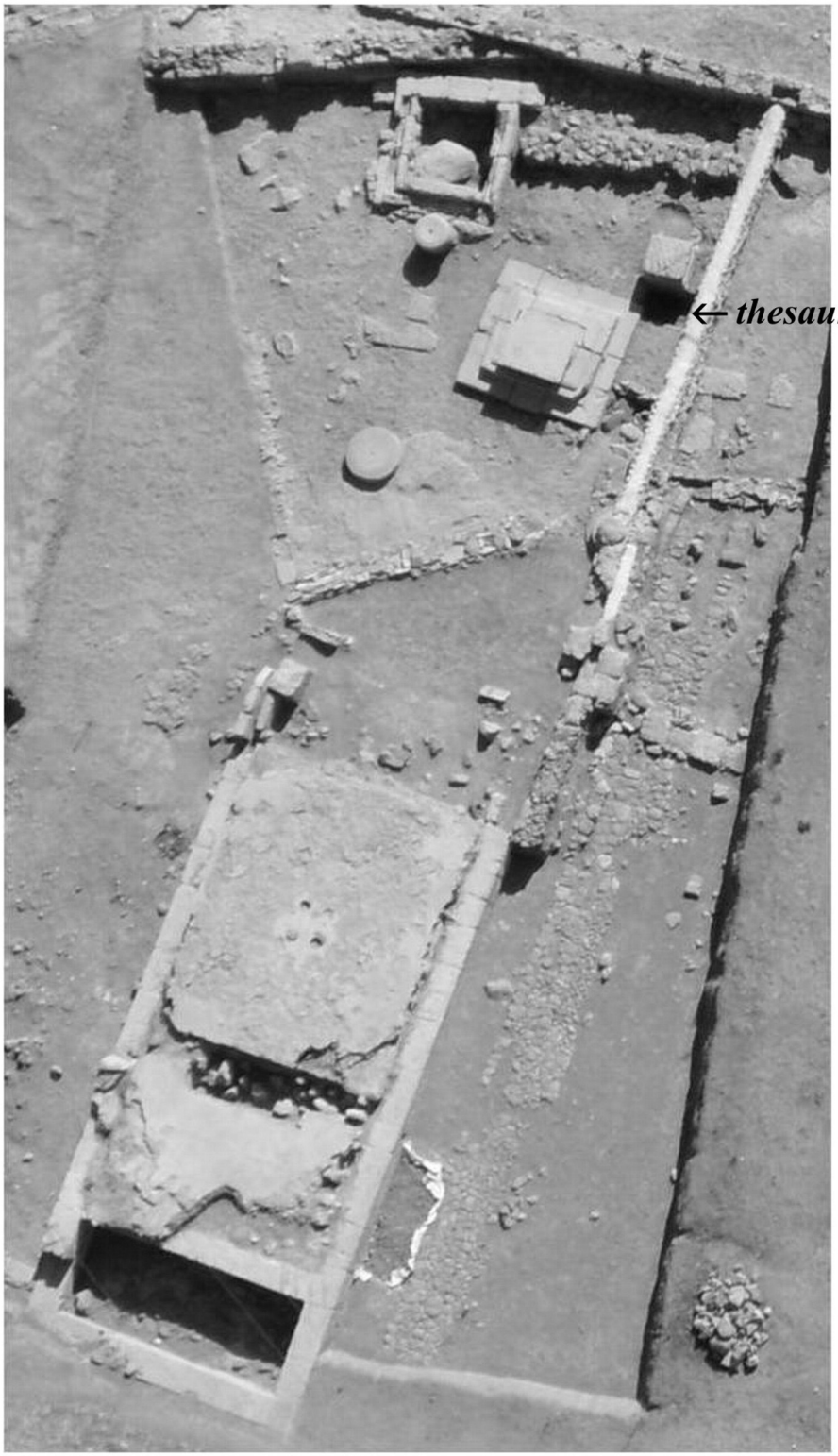

**PLATE II**

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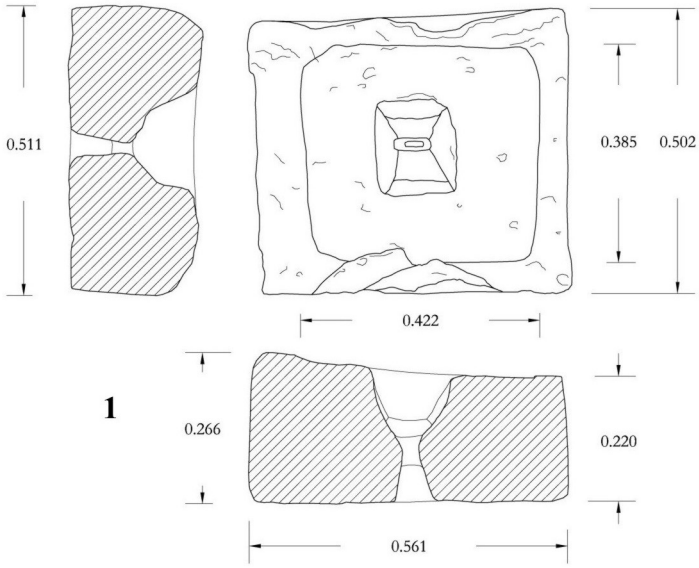
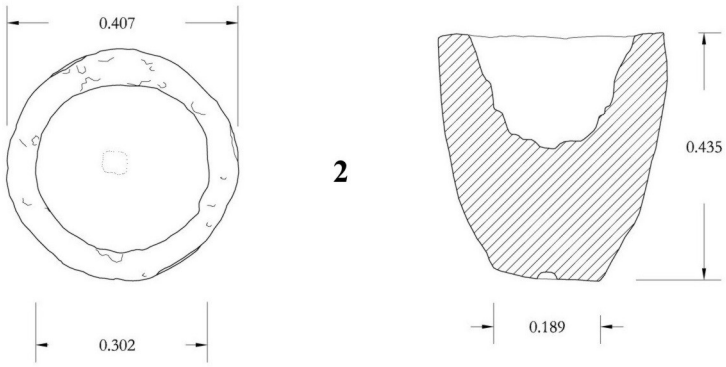
**PLATE III**



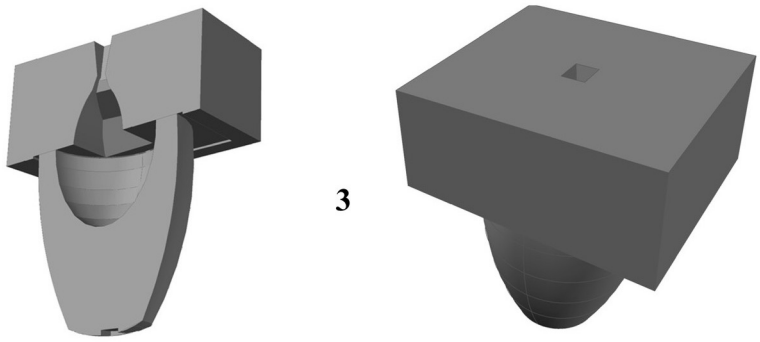



**PLATE IV**

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