

# Paestum, Velia, Pompeii: Monetary Policies in Tyrrhenian Campania from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD

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Research conducted by the University of Salerno on the use of small-value coins from the late Republican age found in the archaeological sites of present-day central and southern Campania highlights the scarcity of Roman small change: this is the case despite the fact that this was a Romanized region. This was certainly due to the meagre production of small-denomination coins in Rome, but also because of the city's policy of non-interference in the local circulation of small change.

The present study regards three cities, each with a different institutional status: Paestum, initially a Latin *colonia* and subsequently a *municipium* with a mint that was active until the Tiberian age; Velia, a Greek *polis* that became a *civitas foederata* and then a *municipium* after the Social War, which also minted coin; and Pompeii, a community that never had its own currency. A systematic analysis of the coins found in these sites makes it possible to define a more precise history of the coinage produced or used. It also offers insights into the policies adopted to meet the people's needs for small change between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the early Imperial age. Furthermore, an examination of the large number of recovered specimens allows us to check the weight standards of the coinage in use with the values of the Roman system.

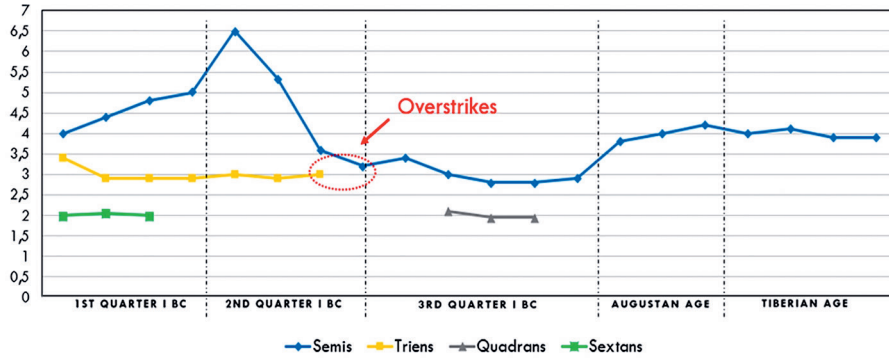
In the case of Paestum, we have examined bronze coins dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the Tiberian age, when the mint was closed down.<sup>1</sup> The most frequently minted coin was the semis, but there was also sporadic production of triens and sextans. The quadrans was coined from the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the time of Octavian,<sup>2</sup> when minting in Paestum reached its peak and some imitations of its coins were struck elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The weight of the semis decreased steadily before being drastically reduced at this time to a weight previously assigned to the triens. This variation is documented by the systematic overstriking of the triens as a semis: an overstatement of the nominal value considering the weight had been halved.<sup>4</sup>

In the same period, Velia saw the minting of the abundant series of Athena/Tripod coins with the Greek inscription YEΛH. The survey made it possible to identify about 1200 specimens, over 1000 of which come from archaeological excavations carried out in the town and mostly from the so-called 'Agora' area and the 'Southern Quarter'.

The data provided by the large sample we have examined lead us to believe that this issue (theoretical weight about 2 grams; diameter 13 mm) corresponded to the value of a Roman quadrans.

A hoard found in Velia in 1967 contained no less than 330 examples of this coin (all of the Athena/Tripod type), along with 27 Republican bronze coins, 26 Republican silver coins and 2 bronze coins from Paestum.<sup>5</sup> The Velia coins in this hoard were struck from

### Weight standards in use at Paestum

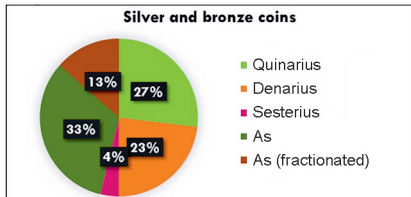


### A hoard from Velia

A large number of Athena / Tripod coins come from a hoard discovered in 1967 (PONTRANDOLFO 1974, 91-111).



Athena/Tripod coin; 2.8 g, 14 mm  
From Velia Hoard n. 75.



Die link scheme for Velia bronze coins from the hoard		Number of die-links
D1	R1	D6 → R9 = 3
D2	R2	D7 → R10 = 1
D3	R3	D8 → R12 = 2
D4	R4	D9 → R12 = 1
D5	R5	D10 → R11 = 3
D6	R6	D10 → R14 = 1
D7	R7	D11 → R14 = 2
D8	R8	D11 → R15 = 1
D9	R9	D12 → R12 = 6
D10	R10	D12 → R13 = 1
D11	R11	D13 → R14 = 1
D12	R12	D13 → R17 = 3
D13	R13	D14 → R16 = 2
D14	R14	D15 → R15 = 4
D15	R15	D15 → R17 = 2
D16	R16	D16 → R15 = 4
D17	R17	D16 → R17 = 2
D18	R18	D17 → R15 = 3
D19	R19	D17 → R16 = 2
D20	R20	D17 → R18 = 6
D21	R21	D17 → R19 = 4
D22	R22	D17 → R20 = 8
D23	R23	D17 → R21 = 24

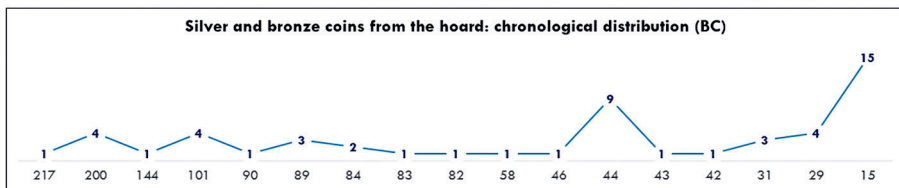


Fig. 1: Above, a summary diagram concerning the weight systems in use at Paestum. Below, a description of a hoard from Velia with die-link analysis for the bronze coins minted by the city, as well as the chronological distribution of the other coins (except those of Velia).

no less than 17 obverse dies and 21 reverse dies with numerous die links. This feature suggests they were issued shortly before they were hidden (the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC). We can therefore hypothesize that these coins were minted in Velia mostly in the final decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC: this was done hurriedly and on a huge scale using mobile dies, as is indicated by the numerous striking errors.

In Pompeii, on the other hand, bronze coins issued by other towns were used to meet the needs of daily life and for retail exchanges. Like other towns, they resorted to splitting bronze coins minted in Rome. The excavated sites (homes, shops, places of worship, etc.) show an increase in the use of foreign small change starting from the years immediately after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punic War. Particularly noteworthy are the small coins from Ebusus and Massalia, which were well known in the area and were thus copied locally.<sup>6</sup> Like the small change of a similar weight in Paestum and Velia, these were probably used with the value of quadrans.

In all three sites, the bronze coins were abundant between the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the early Imperial age, but particularly in the final decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

The growing need for small change, however, was met with a variety of solutions: in Pompeii with the splitting of the Roman as in circulation and the prolonged acceptance of foreign coins, which were copied in unofficial coinage; in Paestum with issues of coins by public or private magistrates; and in Velia with a substantial production in the name of the city.

The widespread use of local coinage – official, private or imitations – confirms Rome's lack of interest in providing such coins.

The most widely sought after coins were the semis and the quadrans. This was a long-lasting need that would be partially met only with the monetary reform of Augustus who, not surprisingly, re-introduced the quadrans to Rome, the minting of which had ceased more than half a century before.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For further details, see Cantilena – Carbone 2015, 67–112 with previous bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Carbone 2014, 30. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Stannard – Carbone 2013, 259–264; Carbone 2014, 49f.

<sup>4</sup> Carbone 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Pontrandolfo 1974, 91–111.

<sup>6</sup> Pardini 2017, 137–144. 147–154. 172–183 with previous bibliography.

## Image Credits

Fig. 1: by the authors.

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