THE CUP OF GAIVS VALERIVS VERDVLLVS FOUND AT ARCOBRIGA (MONREAL DE ARIZA, ZARAGOZA)

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Abstract: In this paper I present two fragments from a fine walled ceramic vase found in Arcobriga that are part of the production of Gaius Valerius Verdullus, and I advance some views regarding the restoration of the epigraphic text that characterizes it.

Keywords: Gaius Valerius Verdullus, Arcobriga, thin walled ware, Roman archaeology, Roman history.

During the excavation campaigns conducted by Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa, the 17th Marquis of Cerralbo1 in the first decade of the last Century in Arcobriga2, in the municipality of Monreal de Ariza (Zaragoza), two mating pieces from a fine walled vase that are part of Gaius Valerius Verdullus’ production came to light, although unfortunately the exact archaeological finding context remains unknown3.

Both fragments (figs. 1-5) pertain to the bottom of the vase and to a portion of its body. It is a fine walled small drinking cup of a type that has a certain

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1 The Marquis of Cerralbo (Madrid 1845-1922) was a passionate archaeologist who made several excavations and to whom we owe many publications. About the Marquis and his works see Díaz Andreu – Mora Rodríguez – Cortadella Morral 2009, 63-66 and specifically for the excavations at Arcobriga cfr. Jiménez Sanz 2008, 211-221 and Lorrio Alvarado 2010, 187-212.


3 Sánchez Sánchez 1987, 58; Mínguez Morales 1989, 184, nr. 11 e 186; Sánchez 1992, 147; Sáenz Preciado 1993, 642; Gil Zubillaga 1995, 160; Gil Zubillaga 1997, 443, nr. 11. The piece is currently preserved at Museo Arqueológico Nacional de Madrid inv. Ny. 0/27/ARC/1118. I take this opportunity to thank the curator Maria Ángeles Castellano Hernández for allowing me to access and study of the two fragments.

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affinity with the shape Mayet XXXIII⁴, characterized by a beige *impasto* and by a brown slip coating, with a metallic sheen and an internal sand blasting (*fig. 6*). The flat foot (diam. 3.3 cm) not taller than 2 mm followed by a band is framed between two rows of beads, and decorated with flowers, each having a central button and six lanceolate petals that are arranged alternately on two registers. On the bigger fragment, the only one bearing an inscription, is still partially preserved the signature of the potter, among the flowers (*fig. 7a-b*):

\[
\text{G(aius) VAL(erius) VERDV[llus p]ingit}
\]

Sáenz Preciado 1993: +CIT

As usual, in this production the epigraphic texts are written freehanded directly on the matrix before firing with an object that has a slightly rounded tip, and the words are separated by a point⁵. The name of the potter, as in all his production, presents the *praenomen* abbreviated with a single letter G followed by the abbreviation of the first three letters of the *nomen* VAL in ligature and the full *cognomen* Verdullus accompanied by the verb *pingit*, which identifies him as the author of the decorative project for the vase. In this instance it should be noted that only the G, in particular that of the verbal element, is poorly shaped and almost deprived of the vertical rod⁶.

On the second level that follows the one with the flowers, also squarely fit within a row of beads, runs a second epigraph of which unfortunately only two fragments remain (*fig. 8a-b*)⁷:

\[---]TIS[---]SATV[---]


As indicated, the spaces before SATV and after TIS respectively, concern the final part and the initial one of two words difficult to integrate, and for which it is not possible to establish the exact location within a most extended epigraphic text that is almost completely lost. The circumference of the cup, and therefore the maximum length of the inscription, corresponds to approximately 30 cm for a total of about 120 characters; of course the text could be shorter since it does not necessarily have to occupy all the available space.

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⁵ In this regard, see in particular the matrix fragment with remains of inscription in Mayer i Olivé 2011, 133-136.


⁷ In the transcription we have omitted the first and the last brackets: in fact it is the same gap, being the inscription circular.
Previous publishers have not proposed an integration for the word ending in TIS and have limited themselves to advancing and accepting the hypothesis of reconstituting SATV with Saturnalia, identifying this drinking vase and the whole series derived from the same matrix as a present destined to be offered in the well-known festivities\(^8\). The conjecture is obviously acceptable although there is no indication that it can be confirmed with absolute certainty, considering that the fragments that have come to us have no iconographic elements besides the flowers, which can aid in the interpretation of the vase. However, it should be noted that another set of drinking vases of the potter himself presents an unusual decoration with subjects taken from the food world that seems directly inspired by the thirteenth and fourteenth books of Martial in which literary descriptions of xenia and apophoreta, verses that accompanied the gifts offered to the guests at the Saturnalia and the banquets, are collected\(^9\).

However, the link with these festivities is less truthful when dealing with another production series by Gaius Valerius Verdullus, from which a fragmented specimen with gladiatorial scenes was found in Velilla de Ebro (Zaragoza), Colonia Victrix Iulia Celsa. On the bottom of this one we find the rest of the inscription that refers to the munera, probably including the indication of the date with the names of local magistrates: [- - - - - - - - - - - - -]. The incomplete word ending in LIA was integrated by Urbano Espinosa as Saturnalia\(^10\) and has therefore given rise to the identification of all these containers as gifts given on the occasion of this celebration.

The epigraphical text on the Arcobriga cup could be reproducing or be inspired by a passage from one of the literary writers from whom Gaius Valerius Verdullus himself seems, on occasions, to have drawn inspiration from. In addition to the above nominated so-called food vase, we can remember the cup with scenes of the myth of Hyppolitus inspired by verses of Seneca\(^11\). We can in addition call to mind the series with gladiatorial and circus races scenes, very likely linked to Martial’s De spectaculis and Epigrammata\(^12\). For the cup in question you might think about Seneca’s\(^13\) text non semper Saturnalia erunt (Apocol. 12, 2) or a simple phrase as saturnalia dona also seems very likely to be influenced by Martial and his many references to the Saturnalia (II 85, 2; IV

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\(^{8}\) See above note 3.

\(^{9}\) For this series of cups and for their interpretation see Mayer 2004, 115-128.

\(^{10}\) Mayer i Olivé 2010, 97-108.
Of course, SATV could also be part of the noun satyros / satyri, a hypothesis that would make the epigraphic text a caption of the iconographic elements, as it happens in the case of the zodiac vase\textsuperscript{14}. In this case, the iconographic program would likely be inspired by the world of the satyrs, the wine and Baccus, which does not exclude the influence of Martial over the iconographic choice, nor a link with the saturnalia; it would suffice thinking about epigram XIV 107 which accompanied the calathii: nos Satyri, nos Baccus amat, nos ebría tigris / perfusos domini lambere docta pedes\textsuperscript{15}.

However, one cannot totally exclude the possibility that SATV is part of a person’s name and refers, for example, to a local magistrate within this time frame, as in the case of the vases with chariot races\textsuperscript{16}. A limit to the case of onomastic reconstruction is given by the fact that, before SATV, there is a relatively wide space of two letters that would suggest either a text with very much spaced words, or SATV implied in the beginning. The cognomen Saturninus is used at Calagurris where stood a Iitir L. Saturninus as shown on the coin emissions in the Tiberian reign\textsuperscript{17}. However, it should be noted that even if the fragments in question are commonly attributed to the Tiberian age\textsuperscript{18}, the production of Gaius Valerius Verdullus appears, for a number of archaeological and iconographic considerations, later and rather referring to the second half of the first century A.D. and the beginning of the second century A.D. It should therefore be thought of a descendant of the Saturninus attested on coins from Calagurris or other Saturnini of the area, such as Calpurnius Saturninus\textsuperscript{19} of Tricio, from which the only fragment of terra sigillata so far known, with the signature of Gaius Valerius Verdullus, a finding that has led to the hypothesis of the existence of a figlina of him also in Tritium Magallum\textsuperscript{20}.

On the other hand unfortunately, there are no present parallels in the production of Gaius Valerius Verdullus to assume, with certainty, the presence of a consular dating that cannot be excluded a priori. In the limits of the gap between TIS and SATV, and in perfect consistency with the chronology of Gaius Valerius Verdullus’ ceramics, one could enter the names of eponymous Consuls

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[16] Baratta 2017.
\item[17] Espinosa 1984, 97; Villaronga – Benages 2011, 587, nr. 3128.
\item[18] Mínguez Morales 1989, 184, nr. 11 e p. 186; Sánchez 1992, 147.
\item[19] AE 1975, 519; EE VIII 2, 151; Abásolo 1974, 68-69, nr. 73.
\item[20] Sáenz Preciado 1993, particularly p. 643, fig. 97.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of 92 A.D. [Imp. Domitianus XVI Q. Volusius] Satu[rnino ---]. This reconstruction, however, shows the limit that Domitian held the consulate for three months before he was assassinated, a reason why one could prefer the consuls of 87 A.D. Imp. Domitianus XIII and L. Volusius Saturninus instead of the consuls of 92 A.D. While giving another value to the fragment of the word SATV, the vase could still be intended as a gift on the occasion of the Saturnalia.

Regarding TIS, however, it is in fact impossible to reconstruct the term that integrates this ending. Apparently, it is a genitive; we cannot exclude the possibility that it’s a part of a date. In this case, only two months should be taken into consideration, either martius or augustus depending on the idus, nonae and kalendae. If this were the case in both stances, the drinking vase would no longer be tied to the Saturnalia, since these festivals were celebrated between the 17th and 23rd of December.

Whichever was the text, at the moment one can only advance with the hypotheses that it is still another original piece by Gaius Valerius Verdullus, where the epigraphy explains and contextualizes the decoration of the vases and their purpose. The place of discovery attests to the spreading of his production also outside Calahorra, and perhaps not so much as a result of a commercial transaction but rather in a more sporadic way, such as souvenirs or objects carried by individuals who, for various reasons, had relations with Calahorra or where they were going.

Bibliography


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