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**THE FUNERARY USE
OF 4TH-CENTURY COINS: CASE
STUDY GRAVE G-2456 (VIMINACIUM)**

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The Funerary Use of 4th-Century Coins: Case Study Grave G-2456 (Viminacium)

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Abstract: In 2019, in the southern Viminacium necropolis (Više Grobalja site), the grave of an inhumed deceased (Grave G-2456) was discovered buried in a wooden coffin. Within the grave, four bronze coins of Constans and Constantius II with the same reverse legend were found. What makes this grave so special is the position of one of the coins on the right eye of the deceased, another one in her right hand, and two further coins in her left hand. This was the reason for conducting research on the remaining Viminacium graves in which coins had been found in the same positions.

Keywords: Coins, Funeral practice, Viminacium, 4th century.



Introduction*

Some of the reasons why the capital of the Roman province of Upper Moesia – Viminacium (the present-day Stari Kostolac in Serbia) – is known among scholars is because of its large number of excavated graves: they are dated from the Eneolithic all the way to the Middle Ages (15,000 graves). Certainly, the largest number of excavated graves dates into the Roman period, as the city and the legionary fort were surrounded with cemeteries (**Fig. 1**) (Vojvoda, Anđelković Grašar 2022, 13). Until the present day, the archaeologically confirmed and, to the greatest ex-

tent, excavated cemeteries are the southern, eastern, and northeastern ones, while the existence of the northern and western cemeteries is yet to be definitively confirmed.¹ Among the cemeteries dated into the period from the 1st to the early decades of the 5th centuries (the site of Burdelj and an area at the site Pećine),² those that were systematically published so far include some of the graves from the southern (the sites of Više Grobalja and Pećine) and the eastern Viminacium cemeteries (the site of Kod Koraba), in four volumes (Зотовић, Јордовић 1990; Korać, Golubović 2009; Golubović, Milovanović, Redžić 2022; Redžić, Golubović, Vojvoda, 2022.).

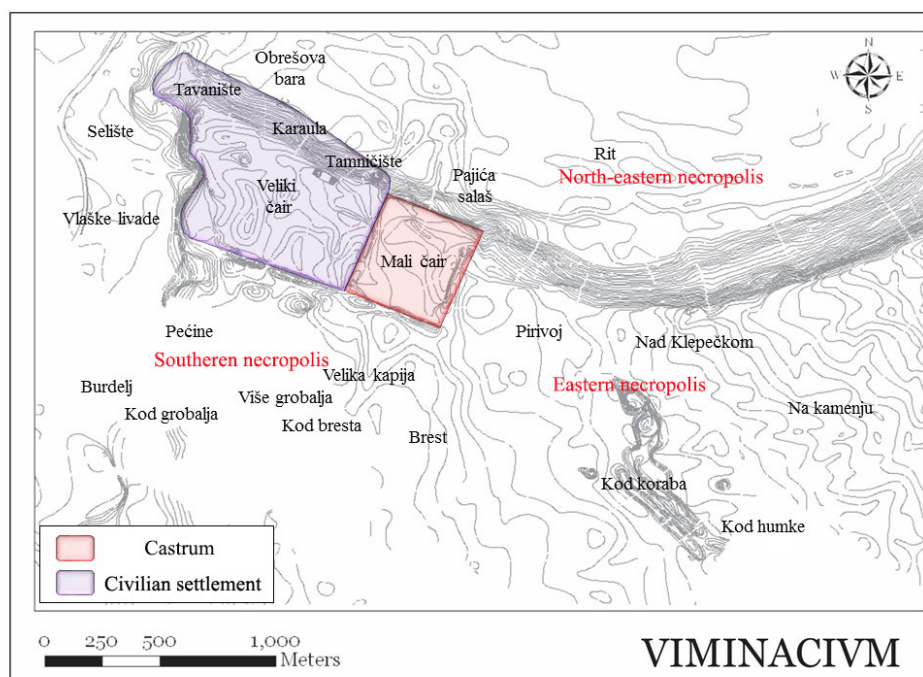


Fig. 1. General situation at the Viminacium site.

In the Roman cemetery that is situated to the south from the city and the legionary fort (the southern necropolis), several separate spatial burial units can be distinguished, with different chronologies, although this is not always the case. They are frequently separated from each other by spaces that contain no burials at all. This is why, within the southern cemetery, different separate burial areas were defined that contained graves from Late Antiquity. Due to the building activities of several parts of the Kostolac 2 thermopower plant, protective archaeological excavations in this area have been conducted for decades, only with short interruptions (from 1977 until the present day). Over time, certain regularities have been noticed that define the directions in which specific burial areas spread within the southern cemetery. Three directions have been clearly defined (Fig. 2), leading from the Roman legionary fort (one route from the southern gate) and the civilian settlement (two routes) towards the south, with cemeteries being formed around

* We would like to express our gratitude to Milica Tapavički-Ilić for her translation of the text and to Dave Calcutt for his proofreading.

¹ Until the end of the 19th century, to the north and west of the city and the legionary fort, isolated graves had been discovered, but those sites have not yet been systematically examined. In 1882, M. Valtrović (Валтровић 1884, 6, 10) conducted sondage excavations to the south, north, and east of the legionary fort, finding graves in all of the listed places. According to the grave remains plundered by the locals at that time, he concluded that there were graves also to the west of the city (Vojvoda, Golubović, Mikić 2021, 8, note 6).

² Within the separate burial area in the southern cemetery, at the site of Burdelj, Viminacium inhabitants were buried until the middle of the 4th century. Another area containing Late Roman graves is situated at the site of Pećine, which was used as a burial ground until the early decades of the 5th century. Here, Late Roman graves intersect the earlier, already abandoned areas with cremation and inhumation graves (Vojvoda, Golubović, Mikić 2021, 10).

them whose graves date from the end of the 1st to the end of the 4th centuries (Golubović, Milovanović, Redžić 2022, 79–80). The cemetery with Late Roman graves in rows – one of which is the subject of this paper – is located on the western side of one of the routes that started from the southeastern part of the settlement (the Više Grobalja site). Burials from the Late Roman period were also discovered along the other two routes (the sites of Pećine, Više Grobalja, and Brest-Korabe). Owing to the direction in which they spread, they were separated from the earlier burials within the same area, and there are only a few rare cases where older burials were damaged by later ones (Golubović, Milovanović, Redžić 2022, 80, 91).

During the Late Roman period, further south of the locations mentioned above, smaller burial areas were formed along vicinal roads that were connected to the already mentioned three main routes that led towards the city and the legionary fort (the site of Burdelj). Burials from the 4th century were also attested in the eastern Viminacium cemetery (the site of Pirivoj), as well as within the *castrum* itself (Nikolić, Marjanović, Stojić 2021, 15–40) and within the arena of the amphitheatre, which was previously abandoned (Nikolić, Bogdanović 2015, 554; Bogdanović, Rogić, Vuković-Bogdanović 2018, 47; Bogdanović 2019, 73).

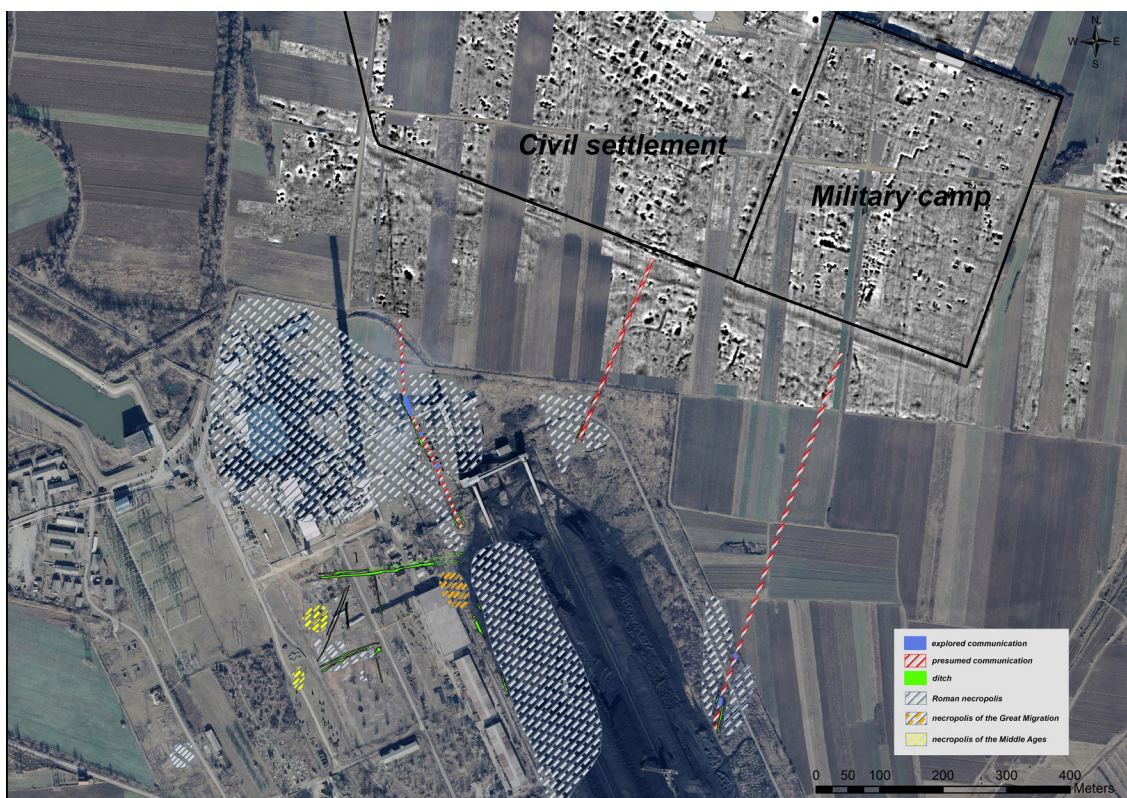


Fig. 2. Routes between the legionary fort and the settlement according to the position of cemeteries (after: Golubović, Milovanović, Redžić 2022, 79, Figure 3).

Discussion

In 2019, within the part of the cemetery that was formed along the middle route leading from the civilian settlement (the site of Više Grobalja; **Fig. 2**), among the graves positioned in rows, an inhumation burial was excavated (Grave G-2456), with the deceased buried in a wooden coffin (**Figs. 3–4**). The skeleton of an elderly woman was discovered at a relative depth of 1.68 m, orientated in an east-west direction, with its eastern part deviating 5° towards the south. The deceased was placed in a supine position with her arms resting next to the body. Possibly due to soil weight, the head was turned slightly towards the right. The skeleton bones were well preserved, and the skeleton measured 1.68 m in length. Around the skeleton, six iron nails were discovered, belonging to the wooden coffin in which the body was buried. Based on the position

of the nails, the dimensions of the coffin have been reconstructed: it measured 1.80 x 0.60 m. Next to the deceased's left foot, a glass bottle was unearthed, as well as a silver-plated bronze mirror. In the stomach area, two chain links were discovered, while next to the left tibia there was a glass bead.

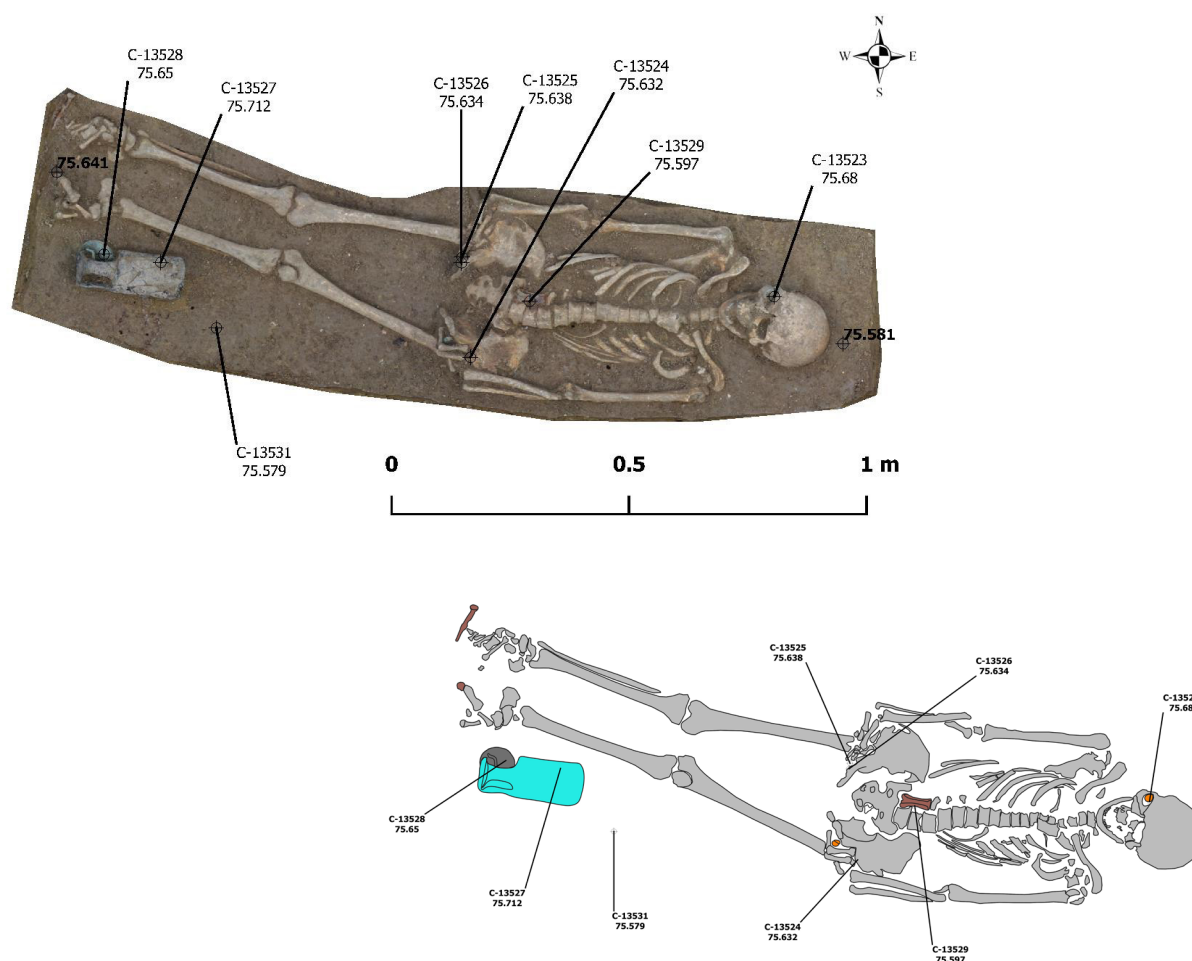


Fig. 3–4. Grave G-2456 with the deceased buried in a wooden coffin (Figures 1, 3–8 and photos Cat. nos. 1–4 belong to the documentation of the Archaeological Institute, Belgrade).

Besides the grave goods listed above, four bronze coins from the 4th century drew special attention. They were positioned on three different points of the body. One of them was placed on the deceased's right eye (Cat. no. 1; **Fig. 5**), the second one was in the left hand (Cat. no. 2; **Fig. 6**), while the remaining two were in the right hand (Cat. nos. 3–4; **Fig. 7**). All of the coins bore the same reverse legend (FEL TEMP REPARATIO); however, they had three different reverse images. Three of the coins belong to the issues of Constans and Constantius II, while ascribing the fourth coin to a specific emperor could not be done with any certainty. Nevertheless, according to the images represented on their reverse sides, all of the coins were dated into the period between the years AD 348 and 361.



Fig. 5. Detail of grave G-2456 (Cat. no. 1, coin to the deceased's right eye).



Fig. 6. Detail of grave G-2456 (Cat. no. 2, coin in the deceased's left hand).



Fig. 7. Detail of grave G-2456 (Cat. nos. 3-4, two coins in the deceased's right hand).



Cat. no. 1 – Constantius II

Bronze, struck, fraction of a follis

Weight 3.70 g, size 22.30 mm

Obv. D N CONSTAN-[TIVS P F AVG]

Bust draped, cuirassed, right, head diademed.

Rev. [FEL TEMP –REP]ARATIO // TS star

Helmeted soldier, spear in left hand, walking right, head left; leading a small bare-headed figure from a hut beneath a tree; the spear points downwards, between the soldier and the small figure (further: Falling horseman).

Mint of Thessalonica, RIC VIII, p. 412, no. 114

AD 348–350

Museum Viminacium inv. 04_574; Field inv. C-13523

Unpublished.



Cat. no. 2 – Constantius II

Bronze, struck, fraction of a follis

Weight 3.88 g, size 20.84 mm

Obv. D N CONSTAN-TIVS P F AVG

Bust draped, cuirassed, left, folding globe, head diademed.

Rev. [FEL TEMP] – REPARATIO // [.]M[.]

Emperor standing left, in right hand holding standard with Chi-Rho on the banner and resting left hand on shield; in front of him are two bound captives wearing pointed caps, standing facing, their heads turned towards one another.

Mint unknown, no reference

AD 348–355

Museum Viminacium inv. 04_04_575; field inv. C-13524

Unpublished.



Cat. no. 3 – Constans

Bronze, struck, fraction of a follis

Weight 4.04 g, size 22.20 mm

Obv. D N CONSTA–NS P F AVG

Bust draped, cuirassed, left, holding globe in right hand, head diademed.

Rev. FEL TEMP REPAR-ATIO // Illegible

Helmeted soldier, spear in left hand, walking right, head left; leading a small bare-headed figure from a hut beneath a tree; the spear points downwards, between the soldier and the small figure.

Mint unknown, no reference

AD 348–350

Museum Viminacium 04_468; field. inv. C-13525

Unpublished.



Cat. no. 4 – Constantius II or Constans?

Bronze, struck, fraction of a follis

Weight 4.04 g, size 22.20 mm

Obv. Illegible

Bust right

Rev. Illegible

Falling horseman.

Mint unknown, no reference

AD 348–361

Museum Viminacium inv. 04_576; field inv. C-13526. Unpublished.

Compared to the previously discovered Viminacium graves, the grave described here is unique, mostly because of the position of a coin on the eye of the deceased. Across all of the Viminacium cemeteries, this coin position occurs extremely rarely – not only from the 4th century, but also from earlier periods. In another grave (Pećine, Grave G-5900) made of vertically positioned bricks forming a coffin, the deceased was laid on their back, their left arm bent at the elbow and placed upon the pelvis, while the right one was stretched next to the body. A bronze coin was found between the eyes (fraction of a follis, Divus Constantine I, struck during his sons' reign from AD 337 to 348). It can be presumed that it was possibly placed on the left eye, but over a period of time and due to the fact that the head turned slightly to the right, the coin slid from the eye and ended up being positioned between the eyes, closer to the right one (**Fig. 8**). Besides the coins, a double-sided bronze buckle with an elliptic ring was unearthed, positioned between the legs and next to the left tibia. There is only one other example known of a triple perforated bronze coin discovered on the left eye of the deceased deposited directly into the grave pit without any structure (the site of Pećine, Grave G-1827).³ Among the grave goods from the grave mentioned above, there was also a ceramic pot, deposited next to the lower leg (Vojvoda 2018, 68; Cattelain 2023, 85). The perforated coin is illegible, and it is only certain that it is a dupondius from the period of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 351, Cat. no. 2266). However, although the coin belongs to an early period, the grave itself is most likely from the 3rd century, with the coin having been in use over a longer period of time. In the Viminacium cemeteries, finds of coinage from the 1st century within graves dated into the 3rd century appear rarely, but this case is definitely not an isolated one (Vojvoda, Mrđić 2015, 28–29).

³ Unfortunately, a sketch of Grave G-1827, which was explored in 1982, does not exist.



Fig. 8. The grave G-5900, Pećine site.
A coin between the eyes of the deceased.

In the cemeteries of Viminacium, examples of burials with a single coin in the left or right hand appear much more often, while finds of coins in both hands, as in Grave G-2456, are only a few in number; they are all dated into the first half of the 4th century. This category could possibly also include a grave from the site of Pećine (Grave G-1021) in which two coins were found beneath the left hand. It should be mentioned that the left hand was positioned over the right one, and both were placed on the pelvis. The coins belong to the minting of Constantine I from the year 335–336 and Constantius II from the year 335–340 (Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 251, Cat. no. 1375; 277, Cat. no. 1566). During recent excavations on the same site, in a grave of a child deposited into a simple burial pit with their hands placed upon the pelvis (site Pećine, Grave G-5750), there were two poorly preserved coins from unknown mints in the left hand: a follis of Constantine I of the *urbs Roma* type, minted in the period between 330–337 and a follis of Constantinus II of the *gloria exercitus* type, with two standards and minted between the years 333 and 336 AD. Two coins in the right hand were also found within the grave of an adult deposited into a simple pit with the hands crossed over the pelvis (site Pirivoj, Grave G-224). The first one is a follis of Constantine I, minted in the Trier mint in the year AD 323–324 (RIC VII, 201, no. 429), while the second one is a follis of Crispus from the Sirmium mint, minted in the year AD 324–325 (RIC VII, 475, no. 49). Besides the examples listed here, we can also mention the grave of an infant, constructed out of vertically positioned bricks (site Više Grobalja, Grave G-2317). The hands of the deceased were placed upon the pelvis and between them there were four bronze coins. Due to the poor state of preservation of the deceased's bones, it was not possible to determine how many coins were placed in each hand or if they were all placed in a single hand. All four coins represent fractions of a follis with an image of the 'falling horseman' type on the reverse. Two belong to the issues of Constantius II from the Sirmium mint, dated into the period from AD 351 to 355 (RIC VIII, 387, no. 48). The third one belongs to the imperial issues of Constantius Gallus from an unknown mint, struck between the years AD 351 and 355. Due to the poor state of preservation, it is not possible to ascribe the fourth coin to any of the two co-rulers with any certainty, but it definitely belongs to the issues of the Thessaloniki mint from the same chronological span as the previous three coins. There is a somewhat clearer situation with the grave of an infant deposited into a simple grave pit, Grave G-430 (site Pirivoj), whose hands were positioned next to the body. Although the hand of the right arm is missing, it is certain that the four coins, discovered on the right pelvis side and in the suspected right hand position, can be considered to have been placed in the hand itself. One

of the coins is a follis of Constantine I, minted between the years AD 330 and 333 (commemorative Constantinopolis issues, the mint of Thessaloniki?), while the remaining three belong to the issues of his sons (Constans or Constantius II?). Two of them bear the same reverse legend VICTORIAE DD AVGGQ NN and the image of two Victorias, one minted in the Thessaloniki mint and the second one in the Siscia mint, struck in the year 347–348. The fourth coin (of Constans?) is a *gloria exercitus* type with two standards, minted between the years AD 333 and 336.

As already mentioned, examples of burials with a single coin in either the left or right hand of the deceased are encountered much more often. Still, one needs to be much more careful in such situations, since it is often difficult to determine in which hand the coin was actually placed, especially when the hands are crossed and placed upon the pelvis or when the hand bones or those of the entire lower arms are missing, and the coins were still discovered upon the pelvis in a position where one would actually expect the missing hand. This is why in the table below, sites with graves were distinguished in which there was only a single coin find in the right or left hand, as well as those cases in which it was not possible to determine in which of the two hands it was placed. To date, 33 deceased have been classified with only a single coin find. Among them, in 17 graves, coins were placed in the right hand, in eight graves they were put into the left hand, while in eight graves it was not possible to specify in which hand the coin was placed (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Graves from the Viminacium cemeteries with a single coin find in the deceased's hand.

Necropolis	Grave no.	Coin in right hand	Coin in left hand	in hands ?	Coin	Date
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-366	*			Constantine I Follis, Mint of Siscia RIC VII, p. 452, no. 214 Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 250, Cat. no. 1372	326–327
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-895	*			Vespasian As, Mint of Rome No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 110, Cat. no. 126	69–79
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-905	*			Gordian III AE provincial, Mint of Nicaea RPC does not have; Vojvoda 2023, 116, no. II.3/3 (no. 3)	238–244
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-938	*			Trajan Decius AE provincial, Mint of Viminacium RPC IX online https:// rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/ coins/9/1 Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 434, Cat. no. 3244	249–250

Necropolis	Grave no.	Coin in right hand	Coin in left hand	in hands ?	Coin	Date
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-1188	*			Helena, striking under Constantine I Follis, Mint of Sirmium RIC VII, p. 475, no. 54 Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 257, Cat. no. 1430	324–325
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-2935	*			Domitian Dupondius or as (?), Mint of Rome No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 118, Cat. no. 204	85–96
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-5579	*			Bronze coin, lost Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 497, Table 1	?
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-3512	*			Hadrian AE provincial, Mint unknown No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 440, Cat. no, 3295	117–138
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-5861	*			Severus Alexander AE provincial, Mint of Nicaea Unpublished	222–235
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2224	*			Unknown, broken AE Unpublished	4th c. ?
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2362	*			Septimius Severus AE provincial, Mint unknown Unpublished	193–211
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2402	*			Unknown AE provincial, Mint unknown Unpublished	1/2 3rd c.
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2804	*			Aurelian Antoninianus, Mint unknown Unpublished	270–275
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2860	*			Commodus As, Mint of Rome RIC III, p. 431, no. 568 Unpublished	190
Eastern necropolis, site Pirivoj	G-137	*			Constantine I (VRBS ROMA) Follis, Mint unknown Unpublished	334–335
Eastern necropolis, site Pirivoj	G-246	*			Unknown AE provincial, Mint unknown Unpublished	1/2 3rd c.

Necropolis	Grave no.	Coin in right hand	Coin in left hand	in hands ?	Coin	Date
North-eastern necropolis, site Nad Klepečkom	G-84	*			Commodus As, Mint of Rome Unpublished	180–192
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-117		*		Domitian (?) AE provincial, Koinon of Macedonia No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 424, Cat. no. 3139	85–96 (?)
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-978		*		Philip II AE provincial, Mint of Viminacium RPC VIII online https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/2276 Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 433, Cat. no. 3236	244–245
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-2585		*		Probus (?) Antoninianus, Mint unknown No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 344, Cat. no. 2163	276–282 (?)
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-2645		*		Divus Constantinus I Follis, Mint unknown No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 261, Cat. no. 1454	337–340
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-4456		*		Unknown Dupondius or as (?), Mint unknown No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 375, Cat. no. 2641	2nd c. (?)
Southern necropolis, site Pećine	G-5268		*		Unknown Dupondius or as (?), Mint unknown No reference Published: Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 376, Cat. no. 2643	2nd c. (?)
Southern necropolis, site Više gro-balja	G-2832 A		*		Unknown AE, Mint unknown Unpublished	3rd c. (?)
Southern necropolis, site Više gro-balja	G-2832 B		*		Severus Alexander AE provincial, Mint of Nicaea Unpublished	222–235

Necropolis	Grave no.	Coin in right hand	Coin in left hand	in hands ?	Coin	Date
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2320			*	Constantius II Fraction of a follis, Mint unknown Unpublished	348–361
Southern necropolis, site Više grobalja	G-2802			*	Aurelian Antoninianus, Mint unknown Unpublished	270–275
Southern necropolis, site Burdelj	G-21			*	Septimius Severus AE provincial, Mint unknown Unpublished	193–211
Southern necropolis, site Burdelj	G-36			*	Severus Alexander AE provincial, Mint of Nicaea Unpublished	222–235
Eastern necropolis, site Pirivoj	G-347			*	Unknown As, Mint of Rome Unpublished	2/2 1st c. (?)
Northern necropolis, site Rit	G-47			*	Unknown As, Mint of Rome Unpublished	2nd c.
Eastern necropolis, site Kod koraba	G-16			*	Gordian III AE provincial, Mint of Nicaea RPC VII online https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/7.2/1968 Published: Vojvoda, Golubović, Redžić 2021, 67, Cat. no. 48	238–244
Eastern necropolis, site Kod koraba	G-48			*	Severus Alexander AE provincial, Mint of Nicaea RPC VI online https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/3202 Published: Vojvoda, Golubović, Redžić 2021, 66, Cat. no. 43	222–235

The analysis of coin finds from inhumation burials was conducted on most of the discovered graves of the southern Viminacium cemeteries (the sites of Više Grobalja and Pećine) and, to a lesser extent, of the eastern necropolis (the site of Kod Koraba). It showed that the presence of a single coin within a grave is the most frequent situation – 89% at the sites of Više Grobalja and Pećine and 88.20% at the site of Kod Koraba (Redžić, Golubović, Vojvoda 2022, 81, Table 4). Since we are particularly interested in the position of coins within graves and in relation to the position of the deceased, the analysis mentioned earlier made it possible for us to understand that in cases of single coin finds within graves, in most cases it was positioned within the mouth (32.60% for Više Grobalja, 24.20% for Pećine, and 26.66% for Kod Koraba), then around the deceased's head (26.10% for Više Grobalja, 15.35% for Pećine, and 6.66% for Kod Koraba), on the chest (10.50% for Više Grobalja, 10.92% for Pećine, and 20% for Kod Koraba), on the pelvis (6.12% for Više Grobalja, 7.34% for Pećine, and 20% for Kod Koraba), and on or next to either the right or left hand (in the same percentage for the left and the right hand 3.32% in Više Grobalja; the right hand 6.47% and the left hand 5.50% in Pećine, and noted only next to the left hand 6.67% of the time in Kod Koraba). Inhumations where several coins were found were noted to a much

lesser extent. Additionally, they have different position combinations in regard to the deceased.⁴

Based on the situation in the field, these results must be interpreted with a certain amount of caution. In some situations where coins were unearthed next to the skull, one must take into consideration that it is possible that the coins slipped down to the eye. In such cases, and regarding the percentage of coins found next to the head, the position of coinage on the eye could be considerably bigger. The same could be true with the position of coins discovered on the pelvis or chest, in cases when the hands were placed in one of these two positions and in cases when, due to the poor state of preservation of the osteological finds, the hands are missing.

Since the subject of this paper is the grave (Grave G-2456) with four coins, we will only consider the analysis of other Viminacium inhumation graves that revealed the same number of monetary finds. Four coins were found in each of the nine graves from the southern cemeteries (the sites of Više Grobalja and Pećine), placed in eight different positions. One of the positions was repeated only once. In six graves, all of the coins were discovered together, in one single spot, and as follows: next to the right hand, on the chest, on the pelvis, next to the right leg and, in two graves, close to the feet. In three graves with four monetary finds, different coin positions were noted: three coins around the head – one within the mouth; three coins next to the feet – one next to the left hand; next to the head – next to the left hand – next to the feet (Vojvoda, Mrđić 2015, 23; Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 26).

Conclusion

We shall first consider the custom of burying the deceased with coins placed on their eyes which, according to literature at our disposal, has not been examined sufficiently, nor is it frequently represented in the Roman provinces in the Balkans. An example is known from Bulgaria (the site of Tegra, present-day Marten, 10 km to the northeast of the town of Ruse), in which within the grave of a deceased placed in a simple grave-pit and laid on their left side, a coin struck under Valens was found on the left eye.⁵ Similar examples of burials with coins placed on one or even both eyes of the deceased are much more common in the western provinces of the Roman Empire, such as Belgia, Gaul, Germania, and Italia. In these territories, this phenomenon is usually dated into the period of the 3rd and the 4th centuries (Cattelain 2023, 85–86). We learn from historical sources that there was a tradition of closing the deceased's eyes, but this was performed manually and the use of coinage for such purposes is never mentioned. Pliny the Elder considers this custom to be a very important one, explaining that its aim was for the living not to see the open eyes of the deceased, but also that they open for one last time on the funeral pyre, prior to cremation (Pliny, *NH* XI.55). Quotes by Valerius Maximus reveal that people expected the closest relatives to perform the task of closing the eyes (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, 2.6.8). Lucan also writes that Caesar's soldiers during the Civil War claim: '...and from looking in vain for a hand to close our dying eyes.' (Lucan, *The Civil War*, V.280).

Contrary to our knowledge related to the Roman period, which is modest, we possess much more data regarding this custom during the 19th century, which was widely practised on almost all of the continents and originated from Europe. On the one hand, the eyes of the deceased were closed with coins in order not to open again, since it was believed that a deceased with their eyes open could take someone along with them. On the other hand, closing the eyes with coins enabled the deceased to sleep peacefully (Cattelain 2023, 88). However, besides the interpretations mentioned here, one cannot neglect the fact that this also represented a cosmetic action. The eyes of the deceased were usually closed by hand; however, due to muscle stiffness, they usually re-opened again on their own. In order not to make such a sight upset relatives and friends of the deceased, silver coins were usually placed over the eyelids, since they were heavy enough to

⁴ For detailed data about the position of coins in regard to the deceased from the sites of Više Grobalja, Pećine and Kod Koraba cf. Vojvoda, Mrđić 2015, 21–24, Graph 7; Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 21–24, Graph 6; Redžić, Golubović, Vojvoda 2022, 82, Graph 12.

⁵ We are truly grateful to our colleague Nikola Rusev from Bulgaria for sharing with us the information about the aforementioned grave.

keep the eyes closed until the burial.

The tradition of burying the deceased with coins in their hand occurs somewhat more often and usually involves only a single coin, rarely two, or sometimes even a few coins. During the Roman period in Gaul, coins deposited in the hand appear in some 10% of all cases (Doyen 2023, 22). A single coin in a grave is usually interpreted as 'Charon's obol.' As the research conducted until the present-day on Viminacium cemeteries has confirmed, this custom was attested with graves from the 1st and the 2nd centuries, as coins were placed either in the mouth or close to the head of the deceased. During the 3rd and especially in the 4th centuries, this custom was replaced by depositing coins (one or two of them) into the hands of the deceased, most likely with the same purpose. Regarding the presence of two coins, in our case placed in the deceased's hand, they can be connected to the myth of Psyche's journey into the Underworld, for which she needs one coin for the outbound and one coin for the return journey (Golubović, Milovanović, Redžić 2022, 49; Găzdac-Alföldy, Găzdac 2013, 299–300).

The use of coins for funerary purposes is interpreted differently but, in any case, it is related to the journey of the deceased into the Underworld. We shall here mention the most important interpretations.

The first, and most common, interpretation is that the coins were used to pay Charon, whose task was to transport the dead over the River Styx or Acheron into Hades. This custom was noted in the middle of the 5th century BC in Greece. The so-called Charon's obol was usually placed within the mouth, close to the head of the deceased (Nikolakopoulou 2019, 339–340), or in their hand (Delgado 2023, 54). However, this was not the usual custom that was performed equally in all parts of ancient Greece. It seems that such a funerary practice was accepted only by one part of the population. During the Classical and Hellenistic periods in Abdera for example, it was noted that people with a higher social status followed this custom more often, using gold or silver coins for this purpose and less frequently those made of bronze. On the other hand, the middle- and lower-class people did not have coins to spare or considered this custom not to be crucial for the blessed afterlife (Kallintzi, Chatziprokopiou 2019, 439–440; Korka, Lagos 2019, 60). This custom was also practised by the Romans, but they mostly used bronze coins of less value or much older coins that had lost their value long before (Korka, Lagos 2019, 60). However, as was already described with the example of the Viminacium cemeteries, in Roman times, this custom was practised only by a fraction of the city's population.

Following the *pars pro toto* principle, several coins within a single grave were considered a symbol of wealth, therefore highlighting the status of the deceased during their lifetime (Borza 1955, 142; Stevens 1991, 220; Alföldy-Găzdac, Găzdac 2013, 296; Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 77). Usually in such graves there were also other grave goods besides coins, whose quantity and quality also expressed the deceased's wealth (Andújar Suárez, Blázquez Cerrato 2019, 96). The presence of a larger number of coins in the Viminacium graves, especially when they are placed in a single spot, could be understood as the need for the deceased to cover the expenses in the Underworld (*viaticum*). These coins were usually deposited in a pouch (*marsupium* or *crumina*) for the deceased and they were either for him/her to cover the expenses in the afterlife or to display the deceased's social status. A good example for this includes small or large groups of coins (hoards) in some of the Viminacium graves that may include seven to 13 pieces (15 mini hoards) and from 22 to 88 pieces (six hoards). Within these, ten hoards end with coins minted in the 4th century, while four hoards end with those minted at the beginning of the 5th century (Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 27–48).⁶ However, it appears that coin hoards in 4th century graves more likely represent an indication of the deceased's social status and prestige rather than a payment for Charon.

In total, the analyses performed so far have indicated that the custom of depositing coins in graves was practised only by a fraction of the Viminacium population: approximately one third

⁶ The tradition of depositing larger numbers of coins in graves (coin hoards), usually in pouches around the deceased's waist, is typical of the period from the second half of the 3rd century onwards, through the entire Late Roman period (cf. Stevens 1991, 225–226, notes 24–25, 27).

of it, if one considers both inhumations and cremations.⁷ At the same time, at both sites of the southern cemetery (Više Grobalja and Pećine), it was noted that coins were deposited in a much larger percentage in cremations than in inhumations.⁸ Similar results were gained after the analysis of a portion of graves from the eastern cemetery (Kod Koraba).⁹ Basically, in the sample of a total of 7,917 graves with inhumations (of the total of around 9,000 graves examined in Viminacium), we concluded that coins as grave goods were deposited in 19% of them. However, one should consider the possibility that this number is not completely reliable, since a large number of graves, especially those of the Late Roman period, were plundered during Antiquity. As shown with finds from parallel cemeteries and even allowing for the degree of caution, the percentage of coinage within graves could have not been drastically bigger than that stated here (Vojvoda, Mrđić 2015, 12, note 8; Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 12–13, n. 11). In any case, according to the monetary finds analyses from Viminacium, it can be concluded that the presence of a larger number of coins within graves was not a frequent occurrence, but in cases when it did occur, it was typically in the Late Roman period.

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⁷ Regardless of the seemingly low percentage of coins as grave goods in the Viminacium graves, they are actually much higher when compared to analogous cemeteries with known analyses (cf. Vojvoda, Mrđić 2015, 12, note 8; Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 12–13, note 11).

⁸ The percentage of graves containing coins: Više Grobalja – 33.74%, among which: inhumations 28.08% and cremations 42.82%; Pećine – 19.13%, among which: inhumations 14.93% and cremations 39.63%. For data regarding the number of coins from graves of the southern cemetery cf. Vojvoda, Mrđić 2015, 11–12, Table 3; Vojvoda, Mrđić 2017, 11–12, Table 3.

⁹ Whereby the percentage of all of the graves containing coins is 23.33%, among which: inhumations 21.80% and cremations 24.25% (cf. Redžić, Golubović, Vojvoda 2022, 80, Table 1).

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