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HOARDS OF ROMAN COINS FOUND IN BRITAIN

AND A COIN SURVEY OF THE ROMAN PROVINCE

By H. MATTINGLY

On finding that I was to share in the tribute which we are bringing to Sir George Macdonald, I vowed, as do those who mean to give of their best, the first thing that should meet me on my way home. Such vows have a way of turning out badly—or, at least, awkwardly—for the vowers, and this has been no exception to the general rule. The first subject that met me on my next appearance at the British Museum was the question of Roman coins found in Britain, and I felt, as Jephthah might have done if, instead of his daughter, his pet mongrel had come out to meet him: was the offering good enough?

Vows, however, are not made to be broken. The Roman coins found in Britain shall be my subject. But, simple and slight though my own remarks will be, Sir George Macdonald himself will accept them, I know, as a not unworthy tribute, if they are understood to be only the first move towards a complete survey of the evidence of Roman coins for the history of ancient Britain.¹ Such a survey, needless to say, entails much labour and may take a long time before completion. But it needs doing and it will not become any easier with delay. A large amount of material is already available for use at the British Museum and the Haverfield Library, Oxford; much more can be readily drawn from a careful study of the chief journals of archaeology and numismatics. If any who have in their possession information about coin-finds that is either unpublished or not easily findable will place it at the disposal of the editors of this paper, something like completeness should be finally attainable. Where the hoards have been found in pots, illustrations of those pots would be very valuable for purposes of dating. Whether the complete result could be published would depend on its final bulk, and, in any case, very careful compression would be essential: certainly, sufficient could be published to be of very material value to the historical student.

The subject of coins as evidence for Roman Britain has only recently been treated by my friend, Mr. Collingwood, in chapter xii

¹ M. Adrian Blanchet has already done the work for France in his *Les trésors de monnaies romaines et les invasions barbares en Gaule*, Paris, 1900.

M. Sture Bolin has recently summed up the evidence for Germany in *Fynden av Romerska Mynt i det fria Germanien*. Lund, 1926.

of his *Archaeology of Roman Britain*,¹ and treated with so much wisdom and knowledge that I should like to assume it as read by all my readers and repeat as little as possible where I can hardly hope to improve. It has seemed to me that I can best add to his results if, first, I deal with the various classes of finds as they must appear in a survey of Britain and, secondly, if I draw closer attention to the hoard, as opposed to the site-find, and indicate the sort of information that it is likely to give. In so doing I can first sketch a plan of our proposed survey and then offer some justification for the labour it must cost.

Finds of Roman coins in Britain must be classified according to several distinct principles. They must be classified according to their kind. The isolated find of one or a few coins on a site showing no further traces of Roman occupation must clearly be distinguished from the site-find or string of coins that marks successive periods of occupation on some well-defined Roman position. Both must be clearly distinguished from the hoard or mass of coinage, committed to the earth at one particular moment, or, even if added to after its first interment, at any rate sealed at some definable date. These three types of find, then, must throughout be kept distinct. Isolated finds must, in the end, run up to a very high total and it might be urged that they should be omitted. But, apart from their obvious local interest, they have a serious scientific value, inasmuch as they mark possible sites for future exploration, and help to build up the evidence for the periods of Roman occupation in different parts of the island. In rare cases such finds are of serious numismatic interest: we may instance the beautiful legionary *aureus* of Septimius Severus, found quite recently at Colchester. Isolated finds must, as far as space allows, be published in our survey. The value of site-finds is fully appreciated by archaeologists and is admirably explained by Mr. Collingwood in the work just quoted. The interest of these finds is invariably archaeological rather than numismatic, and this fact should determine the form of their publication; it is the dates, not the numismatic minutiae, that primarily matter. But, if I may be allowed to express a personal view, economy in description should never be carried beyond the point of recording briefly by reference to a standard work every coin that can be exactly identified: the space required for such a record will never be excessive. The great advantage of a coin-survey here would be to enable the student to compare at a glance a large number of histories of sites in coins and to interpret that of his own site the more accurately thereby. Finally the hoard, more interesting to the numismatist than other finds, as it enlightens him on doubtful points of chronology, but no less interesting to the historian because of the hints it gives of political or economic disturbance in the place where it occurs. These three

¹ Methuen, London, 1930.

are the distinct classes of find of which our survey must be composed.

The two remaining principles of arrangement are, of course, the geographical and the chronological. First, the geographical. It would be the natural procedure to take England, Scotland and Wales, county by county, and, in alphabetical order of names, to list (a) the isolated finds, (b) the site-finds, and (c) the hoards recorded for each. It would be highly desirable to illustrate the general results obtained by one or more coloured maps. A general index would make possible the quick finding of any given place. The chronological principle would best be served by tabulated lists of (a) site-finds and (b) hoards, where the number of coins of each reign would be summarily recorded. Finds of similar character from different localities would automatically meet here.

Such would be the nature of the coin survey we propose. Without venturing on extravagant hopes, we should be able to expect from it certain definite results—an increasingly clear definition of the beginning and ending of Roman occupation in different parts of the island, and an approximate idea of the varying intensity of occupation from time to time and from place to place. Further, we might hope to penetrate even into the dark places outside the Roman light and realise something of those islands of Roman-British civilisation which still stood out in the fifth century above the sea of barbarian invaders. It is becoming increasingly clear that the darkness of the dark age of post-Roman Britain is to some extent an optical illusion—the faint lights that try to fall on the mid period are so readily focussed by us either on the far, Roman, or on the nearer, Saxon, side. We may hope to chart out the sites on which Roman coins continued to circulate after the legions had gone, even perhaps to discover how the mixed populations of the abandoned and invaded province learnt to make for themselves new coinages on the model of the Roman.

We turn to the find in the more customary numismatic use of the word—the hoard proper,—the treasure, large or small, deposited by its owner in the safe-keeping of mother earth and never claimed by him and his heirs or assigns. The practice of hoarding in ancient times was probably almost universal. In all parts and in all periods of the Roman Empire men would put away their savings and, in a small percentage of cases, fail to recover them. Of these derelict hoards, again, only a small percentage comes to our knowledge. Such sporadic hoards may occur anywhere and at any time: the circumstances that determined their deposit, loss and recovery by us are alike individual and casual.

But there are factors that vitally affect the distribution—both local and chronological—of hoards. In times of foreign or civil war the normal tendency to hoard money is intensified by the fear of

danger, particularly in the most exposed regions. And under the same circumstances casualties will be unusually numerous and there will be more lost hoards that may come to our knowledge. At least one other vital factor, however, is concerned; a stable money-system encourages the normal circulation of money in trade, an unstable system or, worse still, a reform of the currency that does not give general satisfaction drives men to become misers in spite of themselves and to put underground money that should ordinarily have been employed in business. Particularly in cases when an old coinage was demonetised and the surrender value was too small to satisfy its owners do we find coins hoarded in masses quite outside the normal range. Such hoards, too, have their own reason for being frequently abandoned; for old coinage, if not surrendered on demand at the Government rates, sinks to metal value and, where this is almost negligible, is barely worth recovering. Whether other less obvious facts may have to be considered, only a long comparative study of hoards can show. The two which we have mentioned are instantly operative, sometimes singly, sometimes in combination.

So far as present knowledge goes, hoards of Roman coins in Britain of the first and second centuries A.D. are mainly sporadic—it is not easy to separate them into a few clearly distinguishable classes and to assign approximate causes to each class. We might hope to glean from hoards some evidence of the commercial relations of Rome and Britain between the invasions of Julius Caesar and of Claudius. We might look again for illustration of the great revolt under Boudicca or of the destruction of the Ninth Legion by the Brigantes towards the close of Trajan's reign. Turning from the political to the economic side, we might hope to see some evidence of the gradual withdrawal of Republican coinage from circulation—perhaps, some indications as to the relations of Imperial money in the first period to the preceding British coinage. On all these points we cannot at present get beyond an occasional guess in relation to some particular hoard: we may confidently hope that a survey, in which hoards from all parts are brought together and collated, will at once give positive answers to many such questions. Negative evidence, when it covers a really wide range, may be almost as valuable as positive. If, for example, we can say that over the whole of Britain there is no discrimination in hoards between the debased *denarii* of Nero and the much worse debased *denarii* of Septimius Severus, we shall have valuable evidence for the view that the two circulated freely side by side. The cleavage between the heavier pre-Neronian gold and silver and the lighter post-Neronian issues is already clearly established.

A few examples, drawn more or less at hazard, will illustrate the nature of early imperial hoards in Britain. Hoards of the first period of Roman occupation—Claudius to Agricola—are usually of *Aes*:

a good example is that found at Timsbury, Hants,¹ specially notable because British coins of the so-called 'Hod-Hill' class were found with them. Even more interesting was the South Hampshire hoard,² for, beside imperial *Aes* from Claudius to Hadrian, it contained Republican *denarii*, a few Imperial *denarii* with some imitations and a mass of British tin coins, of a type unknown before. A little hoard of *denarii* found at Kirkintilloch³ let us into a guilty secret of the past: the *denarii*—votive offerings—were all of tin. A rather later silver hoard—that of Edwinstowe⁴—conformed to a general pattern of hoard—*denarii* from Nero to Commodus. Hoards of gold are extremely rare, but the great Corbridge hoard⁵ is still fresh in the memory of many. It contained over 150 coins, ranging from Nero to Antoninus Pius, and comprising a number of rare and interesting types. *Aurei* of Domitian and Nerva, struck on the heavy pre-Neronian standard, were naturally absent. The earlier coins showed considerable wear, the latest were almost *fleur du coin*; there seems, therefore, to be no valid objection to the natural conclusion that worn coins of Nero had not been entirely withdrawn from circulation nearly a century after their issue.

The hoards of the first two centuries of the Empire, so far as we can yet see them, appear to be sporadic and few; they suggest a period of economic stability with long stretches of unbroken peace. In the third century hoards are mainly of silver, more or less debased; they become more plentiful and begin to mass in groups and we begin to see the influence of the growing instability, both in the political and in the economic field.

The first class of third-century hoard contains *denarii* from Nero to Septimius Severus or Severus Alexander, sometimes with a few *denarii* of Mark Antony, which, by very baseness, have survived the rest of the older coinage. Good examples are the Muswell Hill hoard⁶ and the Colchester hoard.⁷ Unrest in Britain may have contributed to make hoarding common, but economic causes were also at work. These hoards consist mainly of *denarii*, with at most a scanty admixture of *Antoniniani*. A little later the *Antoninianus* begins to predominate and the *denarius* only survives in a subordinate place.⁸ Hoards of this kind, running down as late as the great debasement of the silver in A.D. 259, are frequently recorded from abroad but seem to be comparatively rare in Britain. These hoards seem to be a symptom, not so much of political unsettlement, as of growing distrust of the debased coinage and uncertainty produced by the rivalry of the *Antoninianus* and *denarius*. If it finally appears

¹ *Num. Chron.* 1908, pp. 80 ff.

² *Num. Chron.* 1911, pp. 42 ff.

³ *Num. Chron.* 1905, pp. 106 f.

⁴ *Num. Chron.* 1912, pp. 149 ff.

⁵ *Num. Chron.* 1912, pp. 261 ff.

⁶ *Num. Chron.* 1930, pp. 315 ff.

⁷ *Num. Chron.* 1891, pp. 413 ff.

⁸ Cp. Lime Street hoard (*Num. Chron.* 1882, pp. 57 ff.)—Commodus—Philip I—*denarii* and *Antoniniani* mixed: Cambridge hoard (*Num. Chron.* 1897, pp. 119 ff.)—Albinus to Trajanus Decius—also mixed.

that these hoards are really rare in Britain, the fact may have an important bearing on the condition of the island in the post-Severan period.

The second class of third-century hoard—the most common and the most significant of all—is very well represented in Britain.¹ It consists of masses of debased billon of the Empire from Gallienus to early Aurelian and of the Gallic Empire, Victorinus to Tetricus (Postumus, as a rule, slightly, if at all, represented): earlier or later coins occur, if at all, in minute proportions. Sometimes the burial apparently took place under Aurelian, sometimes it was a little delayed, to Probus or even to Diocletian. Hoards of this kind were conditioned by economic, rather than political, causes. The times no doubt, were bad, life was uncertain and dangerous, exposed to the risks of foreign and civil war, and the trouble was diffused—not confined to a few frontier districts. But all these general causes will not explain hoards as widespread in place and as concentrated in time as ours, nor will they explain why hoards composed of coins earlier than *circa* A.D. 273 should quite frequently not be buried till some ten years later. The composition of the hoards betrays the reason for this burial. The better silver before the great debasement of 259 had been withdrawn from the market—melted down, hoarded or called in by the Government: it therefore hardly appears. The new coinage of Aurelian was in the main deliberately excluded. From 259 to 273 the Government had been issuing money of vanishing intrinsic value at the old nominal value—practically speaking, an issue of Government war stock. The disastrous condition of the empire precluded any question of a redemption of this stock at *par*, and, undoubtedly, if we could trace the details, we should find that the business world faced the facts and reckoned with the real depreciation of the coinage. But private holders of the coinage must have hoped for the best and refused to believe that Aurelian, when he called in the old money and issued new, would not assign to it at least a tolerable surrender value. But they did not know their man; whether or not out of a regard for the army as against the civil population, he resolutely extricated the State from debt by throwing the loss on the private citizen. We do not know at what value the old coinage was called in: we do know that it must have been so low as to amount almost to repudiation. The proof of this lies in the great riot or civil war in Rome and in these numberless hoards, which angry or desperate owners refused to surrender and laid aside for the better times—which, we now know, were never to arrive. Britain, we have said, is very rich in these hoards. If we were right above in suspecting that in the previous period it had shown confidence

¹ Good examples are: Eastbourne hoard, *Num. Chron.* 1902, pp. 184 ff.; Upton, *Num. Chron.* 1930, pp. 318 f.; Luton Hoo, *Num. Chron.* 1863, pp. 112 ff.; Cambridge, *Num. Chron.* 1889, pp. 332 ff.; Carhayes, *Num. Chron.* 1900, pp. 209 ff.

in the Government and had not been quick to hoard the earlier and better silver, we can understand that resentment at the action of Aurelian must have been peculiarly intense here. In 286 we find Carausius in Britain modelling his first coinage, not on the reform-coins of Aurelian, but on the debased billon of the Gallic Empire. It looks as if the new financial system of Aurelian had not succeeded in forcing itself on the unwilling province; the 'Expectate veni' of the coinage of Carausius is simply the vocal expression of a chronic disloyalty.

A third class of third-century coins, consisting almost exclusively of coins of the reform of Aurelian, is very rare in England: those coins probably never came into wide circulation here. Instead, we find hoards of our British usurpers, Carausius and Allectus, which hardly occur elsewhere, except for finds of one mint of Carausius (Rouen) in North France; here, it was probably a sense of insecurity that made hoarding popular. Notable among these hoards are those of Colchester¹ and Linchmere²—both of high value for the determination of the order of the issues. A full survey of the island would probably enable us to say with certainty where the disputed 'C' mint really was—Camulodunum, or Clausentum, or elsewhere.

The fourth century brings a new set of hoards, offering a new set of problems for solution. If we deal with them rather more summarily here, it is not because they are any less important than the earlier ones, but because the problems are more involved and their solutions more distant. First of all, we have the hoards of Diocletian's tetrarchy, sometimes closed before A.D. 305, sometimes extending well down into the reign of Constantine I. On the correct interpretation of these hoards the solution of the problem how the *folles* of Diocletian is related to earlier and older coinage must depend. Good British examples are Little Malvern³ and Little Orme's Head.⁴

Next follow hoards of the Constantinian period, massed either round the central period, with such types as 'Providentia Augg.', 'Beata Tranquillitas' predominant, or round the last seven years (A.D. 330–337), with the main reverse 'Gloria Exercitus.' Such hoards are probably not uncommon in Britain, but not very many are at present to hand in usable form.⁵

A third class of hoard is composed exclusively of the larger module coins of the FEL·TEMP·REPARATIO issues of Constantius II and Constans with corresponding pieces of Magnentius and Decentius. From about A.D. 312 to 348 something like an even run of coinage may be seen. But the FEL·TEMP·REPARATIO issues appear to have been a drastic innovation, first ousting earlier issues and then themselves discarded. Hoards of this class—Cobham Park⁶ and

¹ *Num. Chron.* 1930, pp. 173 ff.

² *Num. Chron.* 1925, pp. 173 ff.

³ *Num. Chron.* 1849, pp. 19 ff.

⁴ *Brit. Num. Journal*, 1912, pp. 81 ff.

⁵ Cp. Langwith (Yorks) (*Num. Circular*, 1924, pp. 432 ff.): Bishop's Wood (*Num. Chron.* 1896, pp. 209 ff.); Tavistock Square (*Num. Chron.* 1925, pp. 398 ff.)

⁶ *Num. Chron.* 1885, pp. 108 ff.

Croydon¹ are good British examples—will contribute materially to our understanding of this curious and transitory money-system.

Passing over hoards of the period of Valentinian I, which are scarce in Britain,² we come to the closing period,—the Theodosian. Gold hoards are very scarce; the beautiful Corbridge find³ is the one notable exception in modern times. Silver hoards, on the other hand, are amazingly common—the *miliarensia* and *siliquae* of the late fourth century are in fact scarcely found hoarded except here. The reason for this curious phenomenon will be worth searching out. We might guess that Britain was on a silver, rather than on a gold standard, that the silver hoards represent the buried wealth of the Roman-Britons and that the rapacity of the tax-collector may have been as much feared as the fury of the barbarian invader. It is doubtful if the map of these hoards will finally show much evidence for barbarian invasion as operative at all. In at least two cases silver and copper were found in close proximity to one another—a fact which may prove of great importance for dating.⁴ The copper hoards of this last age of occupation normally show great masses of Theodosian small change, with some débris surviving from earlier coinages of similar module. The study of these hoards is vital to the problem of the Roman departure from Britain, but has still far to go. What ground has already been won may be seen in Mr. Salisbury's conclusions based on the Weymouth Bay hoard.⁵ Why does Roman coinage in Britain seem to stop at A.D. 395? What does the greater or less massing of the latest coinage in hoards mean? A coin survey should bring us near a final answer to these questions.

And finally what of the Dark Age of Britain, abandoned by the Romans? Were large numbers of barbarous copies of Roman coins on a minute scale struck then? Or are these imitations, small as well as great, to be placed inside the Roman period? Again 'sub iudice lis est.' A single case, where the evidence for post-Roman date is really strong, may be quoted here—the Lydney hoard of 'minimi' or 'minimi minimi,' if the phrase be allowed, showing every grade of degradation from the original Roman type.⁶ Without prejudging the general issue, we may say that the coin survey offers splendid prospects of fresh knowledge here.

Here I must leave the project of the coin survey of Britain,—hoping it will commend itself to Roman students and will enlist such support as is necessary for its successful execution. If it may begin under the auspices of our honoured leader, whose present activities we still admire while we felicitate him on his past, it will take with it the happiest chances of success.

¹ *Num. Chron.* 1905, pp. 36 ff.

² Cp. East Harptree (*Num. Chron.* 1888, pp. 22 ff.)

³ *Num. Chron.* 1912, pp. 275 ff.

⁴ Groveley Wood (*Num. Chron.* 1906, pp. 329 ff. and publication pending), Icklingham (*Num. Chron.* 1908, pp. 208 ff., 1929, pp. 319 ff.).

⁵ *Num. Chron.* 1931, pp. 14 ff. See also *Proc. Dorset Nat. Hist. and Archaeol. Soc.* 1929, pp. 158 ff.

⁶ Publication of this hoard by Mrs. R. E. M. Wheeler is pending.