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# Roman Finds: Context and Theory

Proceedings of a conference held  
at the University of Durham

*edited by*  
*Richard Hingley and Steven Willis*



CENTRE for ROMAN CULTURE  
Durham University



ROMAN  
FINDS  
GROUP



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# Foreword

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It is an enormous pleasure and privilege to write a forward to this collection of papers on the subject of Roman material culture. It is hard to grasp how far the subject has moved forward since the early days of typological study when the material was studied almost exclusively for its chronological potential. Even within the last thirty years or so we have seen a remarkable diversification of approaches which are partly reflected in the contents of this collection, but it is probably true to say that no single volume of essays can do justice to the way the subject has evolved. And it is not as if the subject has moved on to the point that we can dispense with established approaches such as developing new typologies or ignore the chronological issues. In some ways as we come to understand better individual categories of material the need to revisit them with regard to, say, typology, in order to understand the creation of form and the processes of manufacture in the context of the role, for example, of the individual craftsman, does not diminish.

Several key, strategic issues form the content of papers here, but where are the real pinch-points which are holding back the development of the subject area? Clearly resourcing the study of Roman material culture remains the biggest issue and there are concerns about the training and support of future generations of finds' specialists as the generation which benefited from a better resourced publicly funded archaeology of the 1960s to 1990s moves into senior roles or retires. While PPG16 has undoubtedly brought more resources into rescue archaeology as a whole since the mid 1990s, it has yet, through IFA and other appropriate public bodies, to create the support in the form of professional training and development which will foster the next generation of material culture specialists. As part of that planning there needs to be a more systematic review of the capacity to improve the infrastructure of material culture research, above all via developments linked to the web. Already there are subject areas with vast bibliographies where the profession is chasing too few specialists and where availability via the web for making identifications or understanding context would be immensely beneficial. Work has started here, but to take the case of the highly specialised field of samian/sigillata studies, how intimidating is the prospect of manually researching South Gaulish decorated sigillata through the 13 ring-bound volumes of *Gestempelte südgallische Reliefsigillata (Dragendorff 29) aus den Werkstätten von La Graufesenque* which is being published in conventional

form in 2004 by the Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, Mainz? This, for just one decorated South Gaulish form! Progress in the field of digitised data, that can be made available via the web, with the support of bodies such as the ADS, offers enormous prospects where the benefits in some areas (such as sigillata studies) can be realised on a European-wide scale.

Then there are the issues of quality assurance – how can we be assured of the quality of identifications, or of finds reports in general? How do we know whether someone, competitive in cost though (s)he may be, is competent in a particular field? As far as I am aware there is no recognised HE course in the UK which provides training in Roman material culture studies. Certainly, there are undergraduates and post-graduates who are working on particular subjects under academic supervision with differing levels of academic expertise, but there is also an awful lot of scholarship and expertise in the private domain which is not being realised in a formal educational context. We need to capitalise on this in order to secure the future of the subject area.

There is one helpful new initiative. Taking its lead from a recommendation arising from the 2001 RAE, AHRB has ring-fenced a certain number of postgraduate studentships for material culture studies of any period. Fine, if a student knows that is what (s)he wants and can identify a supervisor, but what about the competent supervisors in departments where there is no graduate with a particular interest in this area? How do we get the students and the expertise properly matched and make real progress? How do we engage the expertise which is outside the HE system? Provision of courses which exploit the full potential of expertise within and outwith the HE sector and which are developed to meet the national need is a way forward, but to do this requires considerable organisation and may not be financially viable under the current financing regime of HE Certificate, Diploma and Masters' programmes. In the meanwhile, given the quality of digital photography now, validation might be conducted on a self-declaration basis whereby the consumer can satisfy her/himself by looking at visual images put up by the specialist of the key material categories of data as part of an electronic publication via the web which might or might not be complemented by a conventional printed publication. Indeed, robustly assured electronic publication has to be the solution for the publication of large datasets and archives which the subject generates.



How might we progress matters? Clearly issues relating to resourcing, enhancing the information base, training and quality assurance require both promotion and co-ordination. There has been a tendency for special interest groups to emerge and proliferate as the subject matter grows and diversifies. So, for example, there are generic groups for environmental archaeology and zooarchaeology and there are period-based groups in finds research, notably small finds and pottery. What is needed is to draw these small groups together under an appropriate banner as a Centre for Roman Archaeology, whether under the auspices of CBA, IFA, the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, or another organisation, to address common issues collectively and provide the focus for dissemination.

I have concentrated particularly on process and structure because it is important, but I should end with Roman material culture itself and its future study. A great deal of research is going on, both empirically and theoretically driven and, notwithstanding the early concerns that PPG 16 would kill off synthetic and fundamental research, this book is testimony to the vitality of Roman finds research at many levels. I have referred to the need to make more

data easily accessible via the web and this leads on to thinking about how we might develop large datasets of material to explore relationships between different sets of material culture together. Ceramics, for example, and glass, too, are traditionally treated separately from the rest of the material finds' assemblage and then there is the question of relationships with animal bone and other environmental assemblages. With the growth of e-science it should be possible to develop methodologies to explore these relationships and so revisit issues surrounding regionality and identity, urban and rural, sacred and profane where our current understanding is so often based on a limited range of the available material and biological data.

There is much to do, but a priority must be to find a mechanism for concentrating our resources, ideally by developing in the first instance an umbrella organisation to coordinate, prioritise and promote the already excellent work which is being undertaken throughout the UK.

*Michael Fulford  
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September 2004*

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accommodation, while the Old Fulling Mill hosted the reception. Funds and support for the conference were provided by the Roman Society, English Heritage and the Centre for Roman Provincial Archaeology (University of Durham), while English Heritage and the Roman Finds Group provided funds for the editing and publication of this volume. Thanks also to Christina Unwin for assistance with the editing, index and illustrations and also general advice and support. John Harris and Spencer Scott of the University of Kent kindly assisted with the illustrations as well. The editors are most grateful to Tara Evans of Oxbow for her constructive input. A grant from Kenneth Arthur John enabled the inclusion of the colour prints.

## 20 Silver for the Barbarians: Interpreting Denarii Hoards in North Britain and Beyond

*Fraser Hunter*

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### **Introduction**

Hoards of Roman denarii from north of Hadrian's Wall have excited interest since the sixteenth century. They are usually linked to historical references to conflict on the northern frontier in the reigns of Commodus and Severus (*e.g.* Robertson 1978). However, this is only one aspect of the phenomenon. The recent discovery of two denarii hoards on an Iron Age site in north-east Scotland has prompted a reappraisal of how these hoards arrived in native hands and how they may have been used.

### **Denarii hoards from Birnie**

The recent finds come from an unenclosed Iron Age settlement at Birnie, near Elgin in Moray, some 300 km north of Hadrian's Wall. They were excavated in 2000 and 2001 following the discovery of a scatter of 18 denarii by a metal-detectorist in 1996. Aerial photographs (Jones *et al.* 1993, 69, pl. VIII) revealed the presence of later prehistoric roundhouses in the same field, presenting a tremendous chance to investigate the connection between

a hoard and a settlement. The two hoards were buried in Iron Age pots less than 10 m apart in the heart of the settlement. The site was a long-lived one, and details of the sequence await radiocarbon dating, but results to date indicate it was occupied during the Roman Iron Age. An interim account can be found in Hunter (2002). Study of the coins by Nick Holmes (NMS) is in progress: initial results indicate that both hoards consist of just over 300 denarii and date to the period AD 193–97, with perhaps a few years between them (Fig. 20.1).

### **The wider picture**

To put the Birnie finds in context, all coin hoards north of Hadrian's Wall up to AD 250 have been considered. Systematic study, notably by Anne Robertson (1975, 1978, 2000), has put the subject on a firm footing. The Scottish examples were considered in detail by her in 1978: her 29 hoards can now be expanded to 45, with eight new finds and eight additional antiquarian records from Scotland and north Northumberland (some known to Robertson but not viewed as certain hoards). This provides a reasonable dataset for analysis: 38 are denarii hoards, three aurei hoards, two bronze and two uncertain. They are summarised in Appendix 1, where references to individual hoards may be found.

While the size varies considerably, from a mere handful to almost 2000, a typical denarii hoard would contain several hundred coins. In five instances the hoards were said to include non-numismatic material, although only the jewellery from the probable scattered hoard at Usan (Angus) survives. Find circumstances vary: some are clearly associated with Roman sites, others (as at Birnie) with Iron Age sites, while many are apparently isolated finds. This question of their final deposition is discussed further below. The container also varies, with Roman vessels of pottery, glass, bronze and perhaps stone; Iron Age pots; and cloth and leather bags. These latter were probably most common, as around half had no surviving container. The updated distribution (Fig. 20.2) is less skewed to the east coast than previous commentators have suggested; even when hoards from Roman sites are discounted, there is a spread in south and central Scotland as well, with a few scattered (and often uncertain) examples further afield.

This article will focus primarily on those hoards not



*Fig. 20.1. Hoard of denarii found at Birnie (Moray) in 2001, contained in two leather pouches within an Iron Age pot.*  
© National Museums of Scotland

certainly associated with Roman sites, and consider their life cycle upon leaving the Roman world: why did they move beyond the frontier, how were they used there and how and why were they finally deposited? The necessary initial step, however, is to assess the quality of the data.

### Source criticism

Discoveries of Roman coin hoards have a long pedigree (Fig. 20.3). Roman finds have always been of particular interest to antiquarians, and the classical training of the average minister or lord made him a reasonably reliable observer of Roman coins. As a result, from the 18th century onwards we have some details of most hoards, and in a number of cases quite a good list of emperors. The rise in discoveries comes with agricultural and industrial expansion c.1750–1850, while metal-detecting and excavation finds have sustained matters in recent years.

The date of the latest coin in a hoard is of course simply a *terminus post quem* for the date of deposition, with its reliability depending on both burial and recovery circumstances (Abdy 2002, 7–9): in particular, how representative a sample of contemporary coinage were the coins, and how well were they recorded. Sadly, the quality of information is highly variable. As Fig. 20.4 shows, we can be fairly confident about the latest emperor with little more than half of the hoards. With many older discoveries there are uncertainties over whether the latest emperor was correctly identified (especially as they may be represented by only one or two coins), or whether hoards ending in ‘coins of Antoninus’ are really of Antoninus Pius or a later emperor with similar titles (such as the later Antonines or Caracalla). The problem is seen in Fig. 20.5, where hoard terminal dates are categorised by data quality: the large number of poorly-recorded hoards apparently of Antoninus Pius is worrying. Furthermore, several of the ‘early’ finds only appear so because of the poor records, while there is an absence of old finds of post-Severan hoards, perhaps because a few late issues could be easily overlooked. This cautions against interpretations relying on too much chronological precision. In general, however, the well-recorded hoards confirm the basic trends.

Hoard size is also an issue. The coins of the reigning emperor were always in a minority during his reign, peaking some 20–30 years after his death (Robertson 1978, 189–190); in a small hoard, coins of the current emperor may be absent altogether. Robertson’s figures (1978, 190–2) for a selection of Scottish hoards show the coins of the latest emperor ranging from 2.7 to 6.1% of the total, while in the Edston (Peeblesshire) hoard this figure was only 1% (Holmes and Hunter 1997). Thus the hoards with Trajanic end-dates, all linked to Roman sites, are small and were deposited during the Antonine period.

Interpreting the patterns is further complicated because we have hoards deposited by both Romans and natives. If we isolate those certainly connected to Roman sites, clear

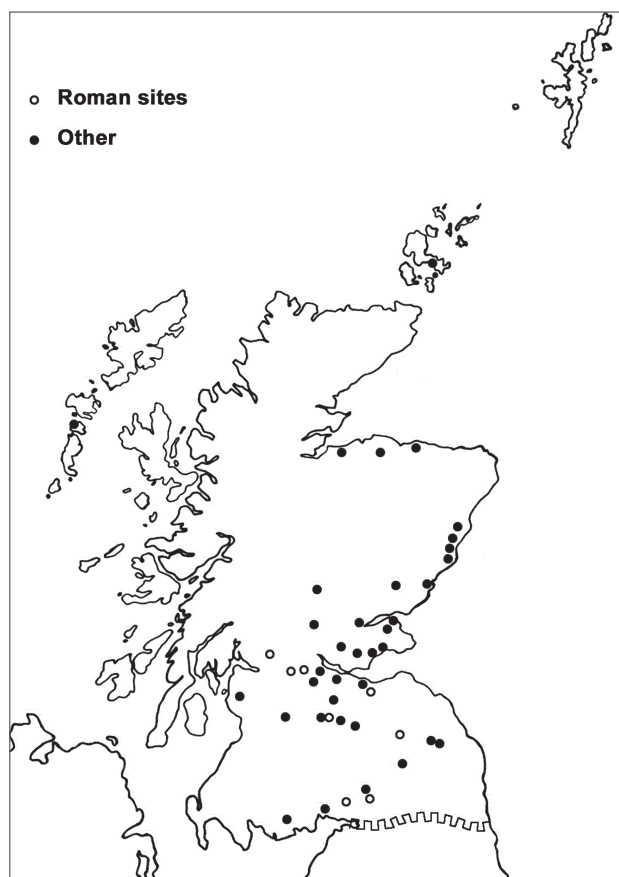


Fig. 20.2. Distribution of Roman coin hoards north of Hadrian's Wall to AD 250

patterns emerge (Fig. 20.6). Hoards associated with Roman sites can be correlated with the periods of occupation. By contrast, those hoards without Roman associations peak after the Antonine occupation, as has been noted before (e.g. Hanson and Maxwell 1983, 141–2). The breadth of this peak is worth noting, however: broadly similar numbers from Antoninus Pius to Severus, with a smaller quantity of post-Severan ones. Again the question of data quality rears its head. If we remove poorly-recorded hoards and those with fewer than 20 coins, the peak becomes much sharper, from Commodus to Severus Alexander (Fig. 20.7) – but we now have only nine hoards in the sample (from originally 37 in non-Roman contexts), so they may not be representative. This leaves something of a quandary: do we take the pattern from the small number of well-recorded hoards, or (with due reservations) accept the potentially longer timescale suggested by the larger number with poorer quality data? At present it seems safe to say that the phenomenon of denarii hoards on non-Roman sites certainly ran from the reigns of Commodus to Severus Alexander, but there is a good chance that some batches of coin came north earlier, at least in the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

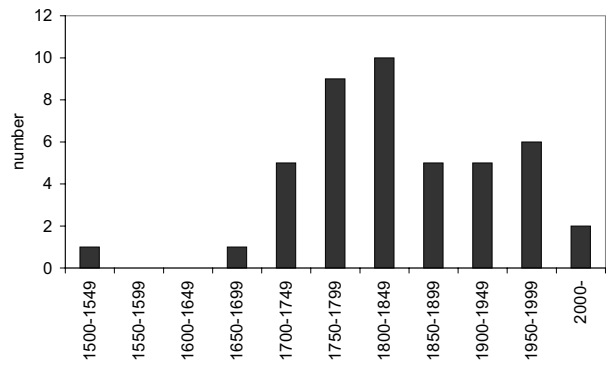


Fig. 20.3. Discovery dates of Roman coin hoards shown in Fig. 20.2. Where the find date is not known the date of first publication has been used

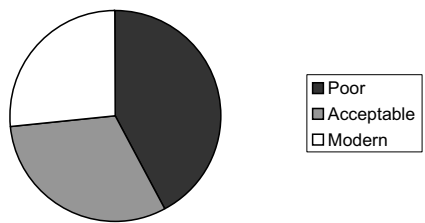


Fig. 20.4. Record quality for the hoards under study

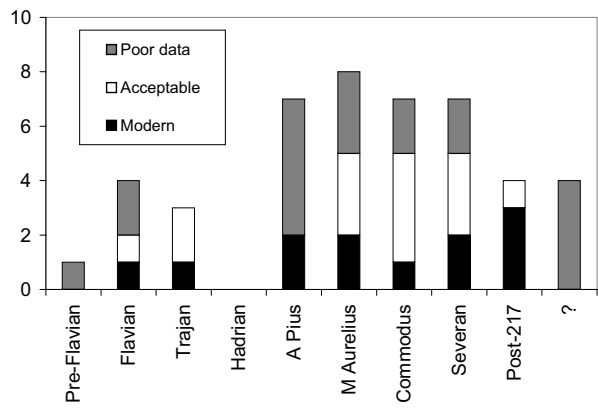


Fig. 20.5. Terminal dates of the hoards, categorised by data quality. Hoards of AD 69 have been categorised with Flavian ones, those of AD 193 with Severan ones

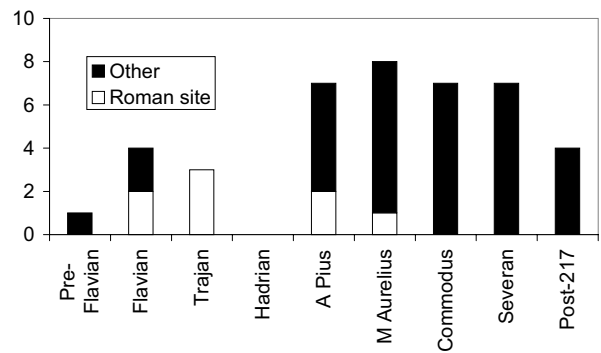


Fig. 20.6. Terminal dates subdivided into Roman and non-Roman associations

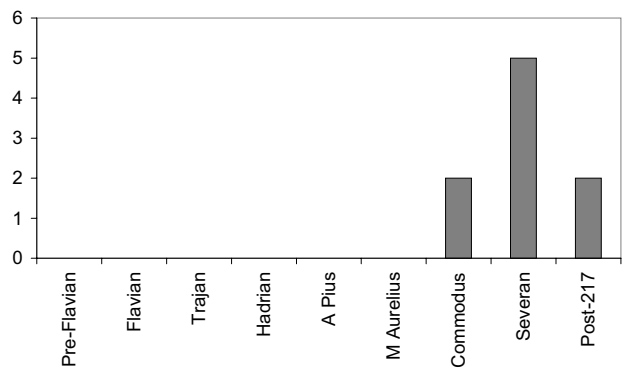


Fig. 20.7. Terminal dates of the best-recorded hoards (non-Roman associations, over 20 coins)

### *Coins beyond the frontier: dates and motives*

Robertson (1978) separated these hoards into four chronological clusters, but they are better treated as the same phenomenon – trying to split them up by emperor forces a historical filter over the data which is unwarranted, especially given the dating uncertainties mentioned earlier. They are best seen as a unitary spread from *c.* 160/180 to *c.* 230. The chronological pattern of hoards without Roman associations can usefully be compared to northern English hoards and to the general British picture (Fig. 20.8): data are from Robertson (2000), using all hoards without discriminating for data quality. There are marked differences, with the rest of Britain rising from Hadrian to a peak under Marcus Aurelius and then dropping off sharply, before rising again after Severus. Northern England shows a more pronounced peak from Hadrian to Marcus Aurelius than the overall UK pattern. Neither matches the peak north of Hadrian's Wall, however, which focuses in Comman and Severan times. This is significantly different from the pattern within the province.

How should this be interpreted? Commentators generally start from the historical sources: references to warfare early in the reign of Commodus, to Virius Lupus buying peace around AD 197, and to the politics and warfare of the Severan campaigns create a strong temptation to interpret the coin hoards in terms of these events. For instance, Robertson (2000, xxvi) commented that the Comman hoards 'may well have been lost in the warfare at the beginning of Commodus' reign' and notes that the 'Scottish hoards ending with Severan coins can certainly be linked with Severus' campaigns in the north'. Indeed, in her 1978 paper she tries to fit as many hoards as possible into a Severan phase, arguing, for instance, that

the peace payments to the Maeatae cleaned out the Roman banks, and that hoards with earlier terminal dates should be seen as Severan (Robertson 1978, 192). This is special pleading – we should take the data at face value and interpret them as they stand unless there are good reasons not to. Here the historical sources have constrained past interpretations. Given the likely spread of dates the hoards should not be tied solely to specific historical events or campaigning armies: they are better seen as gifts or bribes to powerful local people or groups which were part of a general and long-running policy. This has been suggested before, and argued most persuasively by Todd (1985) for the Falkirk (Stirlingshire) hoard; it should be applied more widely to all these hoards. The evidence at Birnie of hoards in direct association with an Iron Age settlement is best explained as just such a 'gift'. They could also represent the outcome of raids on the province, although the dual hoards at Birnie and the existence of a selective range of other materials (see Hunter forthcoming) is more consistent with a deliberate Roman policy.

It seems that the historical sources can be as much a constraint as a support – while they provide a general model, it is far from the total story. This is confirmed by a consideration of the wider European picture. The Scottish hoards are not unique: they form part of a pattern that stretches from Ireland to Russia. Lind's (1981) survey of the Continental material provides a convenient baseline for wider study. His catalogue is comprehensive for Sweden, and for other areas lists hoards with at least 20 denarii. Detailed regional studies have confirmed the broad patterns he identified (*e.g.* Berger 1992, 133–50).

There are strong similarities in the overall trends across northern Europe, with differences in detail. In all areas there is a marked concentration from Marcus Aurelius to

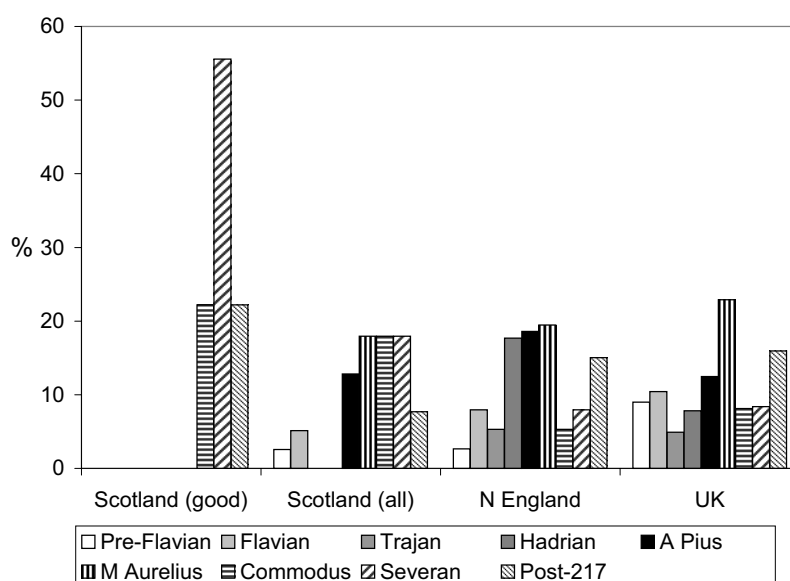


Fig. 20.8. Hoard dates for Scotland compared to northern England and the general British pattern (using data from Robertson 2000). Sample size (l to r): 9, 32, 113, 345



Severus, dropping off sharply thereafter (Fig. 20.9). In Scotland and Germany the peak appears broader, with a significant number of hoards of Antoninus Pius. The sparse Irish examples also fit this pattern (Bateson 1971), while Germany shows an earlier Augustan phase. In Poland, the former USSR and Scandinavia the pattern is much more focussed on Commodus and Severus. The overall focus on the late second and early third century is, however, essentially similar. The hoards from Scotland should thus be seen not as responses to peculiarly British historical events, but as reflecting a long-lived and widespread Roman policy of 'diplomatic gifts' to peoples beyond the frontier which was applied across northern Europe for a period of over 50 years. In other words, it was part of a process rather than tied to a series of historical events. Of course this was a twin policy of military might allied to diplomatic guile which has a long pedigree (cf. Gordon 1949; Howgego 1992, 5–6; Austin and Rankov 1995, 147–9), but the military has been overplayed and the diplomatic underplayed in interpreting the Scottish hoards.

This is not to suggest that there was a blanket policy applied irrespective of local circumstances. Apart from differing local uses of the coins (which will be considered below), the subtle differences in the date profiles noted above point to regional variations within the broad policy framework. The evidence from Friesland (Netherlands) is a good example: while there are two small denarii hoards ending in 180 and 194, fitting the general patterns, there is also a Hadrianic hoard and a series of antoniniani hoards ending in 253–73 which are unparalleled in other areas (van der Vin 1996).

Why do the hoards stop? Berger (1996, 59) has related it to a policy decision by Severus to stop paying subsidies, while Erdrich (2000) has noted for parts of Germany a general lack of earlier third century material which might

suggest policy changes around this time. This is not so pronounced in Scotland, however, where there is a range of finds broadly datable to the late second / early third century, albeit in lower quantities (Holmes and Hunter 2001, 174–5). Moreover, it is clear from the graphs and from specific Scottish examples like Edston and Falkirk that it does run through and beyond the Severan period. If the policy changed this was more likely in the 230s. Could it be the economics of the situation? With the continual devaluation of the denarius and the introduction of the antoninianus, Roman silver may have been a less desirable commodity and the nature of diplomatic gifts could have changed. The question remains unresolved.

### Use of the coins

What use was made of these denarii in an Iron Age context? There was no circulating monetary economy in Scotland outwith Roman sites: finds from native sites are few and show a strong preference for silver and (where available) gold, rather than bronze small change (Robertson 1975, 418). Indeed, Roman coinage is generally seen as having little impact (Nash Briggs 1995, 251–2). If not to buy things, what were the denarii for?

They are often interpreted as bullion to be converted into ornaments. As Todd (1985) pointed out, however, there is an almost total lack of silver ornaments in the late second to third century. It is only from the late fourth century onwards that silver jewellery starts to appear in any appreciable quantity, and this can best be related to the renewed supply of silver from *hacksilber* hoards. It is, of course, possible that silver ornaments were manufactured but have not entered the surviving archaeological record. Extensive analysis of crucibles by Andrew Heald (at the National Museums of Scotland), however, has provided

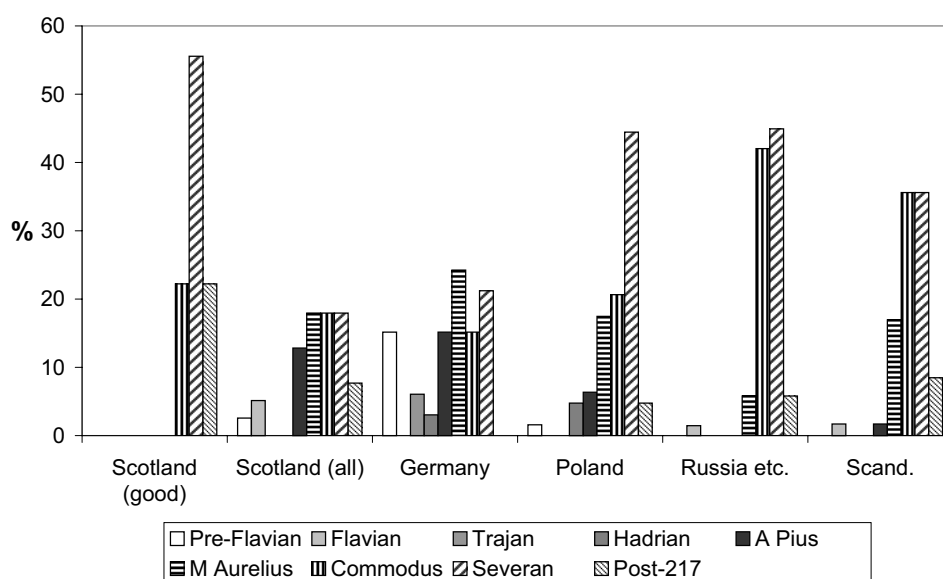


Fig. 20.9. Hoard dates beyond the northern frontiers (from data in Lind 1981). Sample size (l to r): 9, 32, 33, 63, 69, 59

no evidence of silver-working until the post-Roman period – except on Traprain Law, with its late Roman *hacksilver* hoard (Curle 1923). So what was the silver used for?

I suggest it functioned not as money in a market economy sense but as a special-purpose coinage, much as Celtic coins did earlier in southern Britain. When reviewing the lack of Celtic coinage in northern Britain (Hunter 1997b) I suggested three factors in the adoption of coinage: the stimulus of a coin-using culture; selection of only certain aspects of this external coinage; and, initially, restricted use of coins for special purposes. This is the pattern found in the early phases of Celtic coinage in both Gaul and southern Britain, where Greek and subsequently Roman coins provided the models. I argued that there was no stimulus in the north to use coins because contacts with the south were concerned primarily with the exchange of a restricted range of prestige goods, and coins had no role in this.

This changed with the Roman invasions, as the presence of the Romans provided a stimulus to coin use: by the mid to late second century peoples in Scotland had been exposed intermittently to coinage for around a century. There was therefore likely to be some familiarity with it. The high-value component of this coinage was preferentially selected (Robertson 1975, 418) – much as early Celtic coinages were based on precious metals. Can we then carry the analogy further and suggest that denarii functioned like early Celtic coins? These are seen as restricted-use coinage, valued as a means of storing wealth, displaying status, paying mercenaries and sealing alliances (e.g. Nash 1978, 7; Haselgrove 1979, 202); perhaps with these denarii we could add dealing with Romans. While little of this can yet be proved, I feel it may give us more realistic insights into the potential uses of these coins. There is certainly other evidence that prestige goods were a key part of social interaction at the time, as seen in the metalwork (MacGregor 1976). This was primarily personal ornaments, but doubtless a role could have been found for this new medium of display and social interaction. It may have functioned over a wider social range than existing prestige goods, as coins by their very nature could be more readily divided or accumulated at a range of scales.

It is worth considering the Scandinavian evidence here. Hedeager has suggested a role for denarii in the Germanic sphere as tokens for ‘limited and specialised transactions’ which acted as the interface between a fully monetary economy and a ‘primitive’ one (Hedeager 1988). This is a more restricted role than that proposed for Scotland, but in either scenario one obvious question is how long such denarii could have been used for. Was this a short-lived use which did not exceed the period of ready supply from the Romans or, once received, did they continue in use through the third century and even beyond? Lind’s (1988) detailed assessment of the Swedish hoards points to a long life-cycle for them once they left the Roman world. Where denarii come from burials in Scandinavia, the burial is

often several centuries later than the coin; in hoards, they are regularly found in association with late Roman *solidi* (Lind 1988; Nielsen 1988). In contrast to the Scottish (and German) hoards, however, the Scandinavian denarii tend to be very worn because of this extended use. This also contributes to the regional differences in the hoard pattern mentioned earlier. Denarii arriving in Scandinavia formed part of a wider secondary circulation pool for up to several hundred years which homogenised the disparate batches of coins. When a hoard was withdrawn it thus reflected a sample of the total coins then in circulation, not the coins at the date they arrived. If the latest coins in circulation were Commodan and Severan then most of the hoards would end in these issues, biasing the whole graph to the last phases of contact. As this model would predict, the biggest hoards are all very similar since they are most representative of the whole coin pool (Lind 1988, fig 3). This seems a more coherent explanation than Lind’s rather contorted attempts to link the hoards to a horizon of payoffs following Gothic attacks in the 240s (Lind 1988, 209–210; cf. Berger 1996, 58).

The lack of wear on the latest Scottish coins indicates they did not spend long in people’s pouches, and the same is true in north-west Germany (Berger 1996, 58). Does this invalidate the idea of secondary circulation as special-purpose coins? Not necessarily, if their use was restricted to a shorter period (perhaps a century or so for the sake of argument) and/or if their movements were restricted and took place largely in bulk rather than as single coins. Nash (1978, 7) has suggested a similar picture for early Gaulish coins: their lack of wear suggests they spent much of their life immobile rather than circulating. In this case we would see less homogenisation, with the chronological pattern reflecting more accurately the dates when the coins arrived. Indeed, the suggested accumulation of the Falkirk hoard as a series of groups of coins over perhaps 70 years provides a possible example of this. Prior to the Birnie finds, only three of the substantial hoards (>100 coins) from Scotland had complete coin lists, of which two (Edston and Falkirk) were anomalous in Romano-British terms. Various reasons have been suggested for this (Reece 1980; Robertson 1982; Todd 1985; Holmes and Hunter 1997); now the local circulation and specific use of the coins may be added. The movement of these coins outwith the empire in a society where their use was different from the more monetarised province might be expected to lead to compositional differences, arising from differences in supply frequency, circulation rate, use, and so on. These need not be marked in every case, however: the north-west German hoards show a similar composition to neighbouring hoards within the Empire (Berger 1996, 57).

There is some supporting evidence for the idea of movement of denarii from the record of stray finds and Iron Age site finds compared to Roman site finds. The Roman site finds tie closely to the occupation periods, and the Iron Age site finds seem to follow this, although the sample is very small. The strays do not, however –

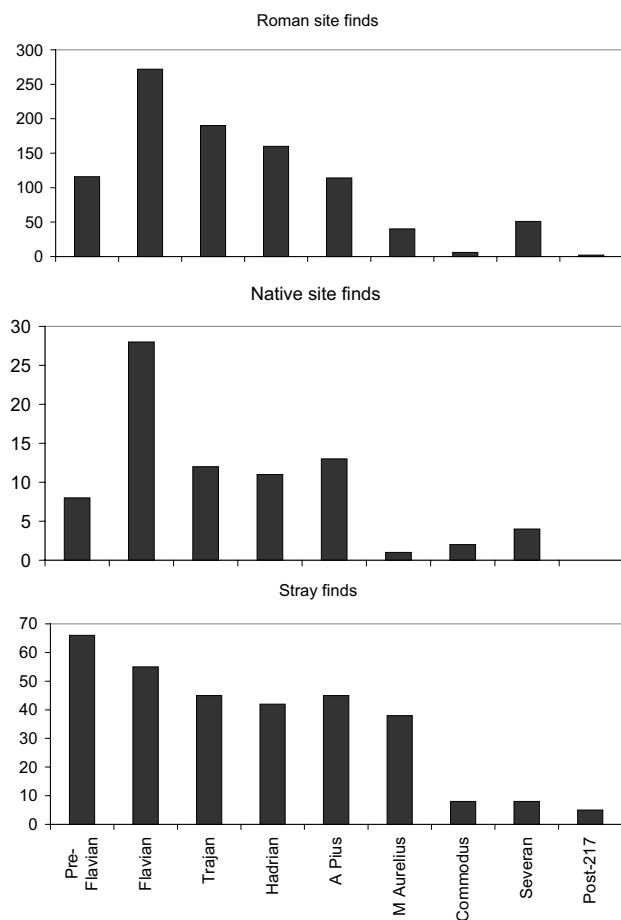


Fig. 20.10. Chronological distribution of Roman coins from Roman sites, Iron Age sites and stray finds. Data from Robertson (1983), Bateson (1989), and Bateson and Holmes (1997; 2003)

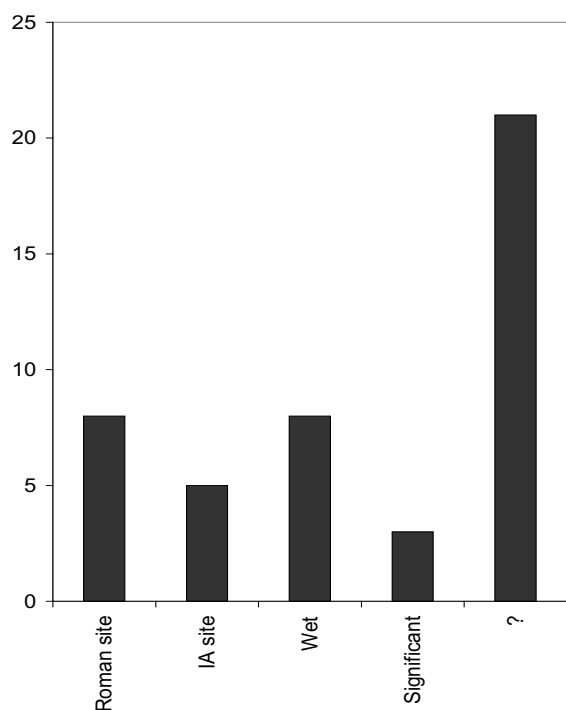


Fig. 20.11. Hoard find circumstances

there was clearly some post-Antonine coinage circulating, and this may well be the 'leakage' from hoards which were dipped into and saw active social use (Fig. 20.10).

Some support for this secondary life of denarii may be adduced from coin moulds. Three moulds for fake denarii are known from Scotland; in two instances the issues they represent are at odds with the normal ones on counterfeiters' moulds south of the border (Holmes and Hunter 2001). Could this be because the Scottish "market" was more concerned with the presence of silver coins than with the numismatics of them?

### Contexts and motives for burial

Historically the tendency has been to see coin hoards as buried for safekeeping but, as Aitchison (1988) has noted, they may equally have been votive offerings. The contexts in which they were buried may give us some clues to the motives behind their burial. Sadly, few have detailed contextual information, but many can be broadly categorised: from or close to a site (Roman or native); in a wet location; in a significant/unusual location; and, most commonly, from an unknown location or one with no obvious significance (Fig. 20.11). With any further hoard finds it is imperative that the find-spot is archaeologically investigated, on a scale which allows it to be contextualised: as the work at Birnie has shown, this is vital if we are to understand such finds. Without putting hoards in a setting, they are little better than nineteenth century stray finds, and study of the findspots should be standard for new discoveries.

This varied locational evidence hints at a range of motives, including both safekeeping and votive deposits. If we consider Roman sites, the hoard from the foundation trench of the headquarters building at Elginhaugh (Midlothian) and the plated coins from the well at Bar Hill (Dunbartonshire) are both *prima facie* cases of votive hoards. With other finds linked to Roman sites, such as the aurei hoard from Broomholm (Dumfriesshire) and the bronze hoard from near Castledykes (Lanarkshire), there is nothing about their location to suggest that they are anything but security hoards, although the records are too poor to be sure. Of the finds from native sites, the small hoard from Aitnock (Ayrshire) was in destruction deposits and may have been part of a ritual marking the end of the site's use. The motive behind the Edston hoard, close to a large rock near a hillfort, is uncertain, and with the Birnie hoards it is still too early to assess. The final one, from Lingrow (Orkney), is so scattered that little can be said of it. These hoards do indicate, however, a clear connection with Iron Age sites.

There is a greater likelihood of votive intent with those hoards from wet locations – primarily bogs and mosses, with one from the banks of a river and another from the shores of the Tay (in a location with other hints of Roman-period votive activity; Hunter 1996, 117–18). Such wet locations are often seen as ritually significant liminal



areas, and were often places where retrieval would be difficult. Caution is required: there are safekeeping hoards from wet locations, as Randsborg (2002) has demonstrated with more recent material, and he rightly warns against too rigid a dichotomy between votive and safekeeping, since the deposition of a hoard may have several motives. In the local Iron Age context such watery deposits are commonplace, however, and are best seen as regional traditions of votive hoards (Hunter 1997a). The Roman coin hoards can be interpreted in the same light. Indeed, the coin hoard distribution closely mirrors the main areas of Iron Age hoarding and may reflect this existence of a depositional habit as much as any historical connection with the Caledonii and Maeatae (cf. Robertson 1978, 192).

The coin hoards span areas with different Iron Age hoarding traditions. Those from south of the Forth fit into a context where exotic material was readily incorporated into local practices. In north-east Scotland this was not the case: here hoards show a strong dominance of the local at the expense of the imported. Prestige metalwork deposits exhibit a strong dichotomy, with personal items of massive-tradition metalwork (MacGregor 1976; Ralston 1979, 482–4) being deposited in on-site contexts in contrast to communal items (such as vessels or the Deskford carnyx) being deposited off-site. The denarii hoards cut across this division, with some from settlements and others from off-site locations. This suggests an ambiguity over the nature of these exotic new prestige items. It seems they could be either personal or communal, or that access to them was less restricted than to traditional status items. Given the nature of coinage, which could be accumulated at various scales according to an individual or group's means and motives, this should not be surprising. Indeed, the very varying scales of deposition point to just such a range of social involvement. The person or group behind the Falkirk hoard (over 1,900 denarii) was operating on a very different level from the depositor of the Inchyra (Perthshire) hoard (eight denarii). This is reinforced by the deposit of two bronzes of Maximinus from Hallrule (Roxburghshire). These are not normally treated as a hoard since their value was minimal, but they had been placed 'in the cavity of a stone' (Tancred 1907) and may plausibly represent a small-scale, very personal offering. The same is doubtless true of an unknown and unknowable percentage of coin stray finds. A votive tradition of depositing coins would again find parallel with Celtic coins (Haselgrove 1996, 76).

To summarise, on Roman sites there is evidence for both safekeeping and votive hoards. Of the rest, some may be buried for safekeeping but a significant number are likely to be votive offerings which can be seen within an Iron Age hoarding tradition. While in the south of Scotland this fits an existing pattern, in the north-east their appearance represents a shift in previous habits.

## Conclusions

The Birnie hoards provide us with our best-contexted examples of coin hoards beyond the frontier and should allow a much greater insight into the kinds of people receiving Roman coins and the ways they treated them. Things changed during the third century: silver coins stopped coming north, Celtic-style metalwork apparently ceased, and by the end of the century we have our first references to a new group, the Picts (Mann 1974, 40–1). Clearly there were changes (as yet opaque), especially within the societies north of the Forth, and it is tempting to see the appearance and disappearance of a new prestige good, denarii, having some role in this. This is a topic for further investigation. In the broader context, we must look beyond the specific historical sources for Roman Scotland and consider instead the wider picture in *barbaricum*, seeing the Scottish hoards as part of a more general pattern of gifts or subsidies beyond the frontier from Pius or Aurelius to Severus which continued on a lower level into the 230s. More speculatively, the use of these coins in Iron Age society could have been more complex than we give it credit for, functioning perhaps like early Celtic coinage as a specialised currency and prestige good. The role of Roman denarii in Iron Age societies was more active and more influential than is generally credited.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix.

Roman coin hoards to AD 250 north of Hadrian's Wall (known to the writer as of January 2003). Alternative names are given in brackets. The 'quality' column reflects the reliability of the record: 1 is recorded to modern standards, 2 acceptable, 3 poor. Italicised entries are certainly or probably associated with a Roman site: the precise location of the Broomholm hoard is unknown, but there is a fort on the farm; Kirkintilloch was found just south of the Antonine Wall; Endrick Water lies close to Drumquhassle fort; Carstairs is close to the Castledykes complex. Of the others, the Benbecula account is a very strange one, and the Milton of Buittle and Burnswark finds are not certainly hoards. The Lingrow finds were scattered and are not certainly a hoard, but they are taken as one here since they would represent an exceptional quantity of site finds for a northern site. Where a number only is given in the reference column, this is the hoard's number in Robertson 2000. Pre-1975 counties and four-figure grid references only are used.

Findspot	County	Quality	Discovery date	Latest emperor recorded	Latest date	Metal	Quantity	Container	Associations	Context	NGR	Reference
Silver Burn (Petercoulter)	Aberdeen	3	pre 1726	?	?	AR	a great quantity			moss	NJ 84 04	966
Glamis (Green Cairn)	Angus	3	pre 1707	Galba	68–69	AR	great quantities	urn		tumulus	NO 38 48	50
Usan	Angus	1	1996–9	M Aurelius	175–176	AR	3		intaglio, Au ring	?	NO 72 54	DES 1996, 12; 1998, 11; 1999, 12
Aitnock	Ayr	1	1901–02	A Plus	145–161	AR	4	wrapped		dun	NS 28 51	184
Deskford	Banff	3	pre 1726	A Plus	138–161	AR	at least 27			?	NJ 51 61	198
Broomholm	Dumfries	2	1782	Domitian	81–96	AV	6			?	NY 37 81	97
Burnswark	Dumfries	2	c 1725	Trajan	98–117	AR	4			Roman camp	NY 18 79	125
Lochar Moss	Dumfries	3	pre 1864	Republican	82 BC	AR	15–16			peat bog	NY 0 7	Jardine 1866, 18
Bar Hill	Dunbarton	1	1902	Marcus	140–144	AR/ copies	13			Roman fort	NS 71 76	206
Kirkintilloch	Dunbarton	2	1893	Faustina II	161–176	AR	min 47		Fe spear, nail	?	NS 66 74	282
Craigiehill (Leuchars)	Fife	3	1808	Severus	193–211	AR	almost 100	jar		?	NO 45 24	376
East Wemyss	Fife	1	2000	Elagabalus	218–222	AR	6			?	NT 33 97	Bateson & Holmes 2003
Leven	Fife	3	1519	?	?	AV/AR	?	Ae vessel		?	NO 37 00	1886
Pitcullo (Leuchars)	Fife	2	1781	Commodus	177–192	AR	19			?	NO 41 19	345
Benbecula	Inverness	3	1808	Severus	193–211	AR	a few pieces	'a Roman urn'		sand bank	NO 85 91	Robertson 1983, 417
Cowie Moss (Fetteresso)	Kincardine	2	1843	Severus	193–211	AR	?	?		moss		367
Fawsyde (Bervie, Kineff)	Kincardine	3	19th century	A Plus	138–161	?	?	?box	2 Ae bars, clamp (?box fittings)	?	NO 84 77	228
Megray	Kincardine	2	1852	Severus	202–210	AR	> 200	urn		?	NO 88 88	368
Portmoak (Kirkness)	Kinross	2	1851	Severus	196–7	AR	> 600	?bag	Fe sword, Ag ornament	bog	NT 18 98	369
Rumbling Bridge (Briglands)	Kinross	1	1938–57	Commodus	186–7	AR	180			bank of River Devon	NT 02 99	335
Milton of Buittle	Kirkcudbright	2	pre 1794	Commodus	177–192	AR	3			?	NX 81 64	Macdonald 1918, 243

