

**Foreword by Aleksander Bursche**

## **On the recording and interpretation of ancient coin finds**

The first attempts at the interpretation of ancient coins discovered in Europe outside of the Mediterranean date to the Renaissance, and in Poland were made, more notably, by the savants associated with Cracow University. The occurrence of ancient coin finds was attributed occasionally to supernatural phenomena. For instance, there was a belief that the earth in some localities breeds clay pots full of coins, and that the best time to look for them is at Pentecost. But much more often these finds were recognized as evidence of the actual presence of Greeks or Romans in an area far from the Mediterranean world. Such an interpretation raised the status of one's local homeland. Links with ancient communities known from classical literature would be 'documented' by assorted fabrications and forgeries, e.g. ancient inscriptions or figurines, allegedly discovered in the far North, or by Latin inscriptions on local pottery later identified as dating from the Bronze Age. Many such forgeries were exposed only as late as in the latter half of the twentieth century, and have caused numerous genuine ancient coin finds to be treated with considerable distrust. In point of fact, ancient coins are one of the largest groups of Mediterranean imports and an invaluable historical source.

The first educated interpretations of the occurrence of ancient coins in East-Central Europe were formulated in the second half of the nineteenth century, the time of a major breakthrough in historical sciences, archaeology and numismatics included. Finds of ancient coins and the like start being recorded increasingly often, and their role for the interpretation of socio-economic and political phenomena is recognized.

This is the time when Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), polyhistorian, Noble Prize winner, and classics scholar with an uncanny intuition, made the first educated attempt to explain hoards of Roman denarii found in the territory of the former Barbaricum. What is more important for the subject addressed in this book, in a brief contribution written in 1885 Mommsen interpreted a small collection of 180 late Republican and Augustan denarii from the collection of the family von Bar, landowners from Barenaue, in the vicinity of Hannover. The coins had surfaced during farm work in the nearby fields. Mommsen used them to identify the site of the Battle of the Teutoburger Forest of AD 9. In the Prussian scholarship of the time, and in the much later German scholarship as well, this interpretation met

with severe criticism. In the period overshadowed by Bismarck's idea of building the German state it was unthinkable that the site of the great Germanic victory over Romans, described by Tacitus in his *Annales*, the place where Arminius-Hermann defeated Varus, where three Roman legions had been wiped out, helping to defend "Free Germania", could not be decided by a mere cluster of coins.

More than a century had to pass after Mommsen's publication for evidence from history, or more precisely, numismatics and archaeology, to confirm that his identification had been correct. As a result of metal-detector use, new finds surfaced in the same area, and now they run into several thousands. Other than coins they include elements of Roman weapons, military equipment, etc. They show that a battle fought in the vicinity of Kalkriese/Barenaue had decided that – contrary to the plans of Augustus – the territory between Rhine and Elbe would not be turned into a new Roman province. The area of Tacitus' *Germania* and Ptolemy's *Magna Germania* remained outside the Empire, thus, outside the reach of the more outstanding achievements of Roman civilization. The key evidence to link the finds with the site of the battle of AD 9 was provided by the coins, their dating, proportions, presence of countermarks, or incisions made on the portrait of the first Roman emperor.

Not without reason I proposed to recall here this spectacular, and now universally acknowledged, discovery at some length. It has been significant for three reasons of a historiographic and methodological nature. First, it helped to bring about a major breakthrough in the approach to the significance of metal detector finds among many archaeologists in Central Europe. Second, the methods used in the region of Kalkriese now play an important role in identifying other battlefields of Antiquity. Third and last, but certainly not least, , as early as in the early nineteenth century, Polish researchers linked local finds of Republican and Augustan coins to the aftermath of the Battle of the Teutoburger Forest. Each of the three subjects are addressed at more length below.

A major breakthrough in the recording of ancient coin finds, Roman in particular, was in the 1950s. At this time the first regional catalogues of such finds were published on a wider scale, and the first long-term national projects were launched, of which possibly the best known European initiative was the "Coin Finds of the Roman Period in Germany" Project (*Fundmünzen der römischen Zeit in Deutschland*, FMRD for short), undertaken from 1953 in Munich, later in Frankfurt by K. Kraft, and subsequently expanded by M. Radnoti-Alföldi and her team. In its initial phase this project was financed by the German Research Foundation, *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, and later on, under the new name *Fundmünzen der Antike*, by the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz (*Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz*). The project ran for more than half a century, and had among its outcomes the FMRD catalogue in several volumes ultimately covering almost the entire territory of Germany (except for central Rhineland), and a companion series of *Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike* monographs. The researchers involved in the project started a cooperation with scholars in many countries, including the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Croatia, as well as Hungary and Poland,

contributing to the subsequent publication of several ancient coin find inventories published in German to a largely uniform standard.

This cooperation of representatives of the western world of scholarship with Polish researchers could happen only after the Solidarity movement and the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is not to say that there were no similar recording initiatives during the communist period. A very similar project was developed at the Cracow branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences as part of the upsurge of Marxist-inspired source studies addressing ancient and early medieval coins, originally conceived to take in finds from every region of Poland. However, ultimately Roman coin finds were published in inventories covering the historical provinces of Silesia, Lesser Poland, Mazovia and Podlachia, with additionally the catalogue of hoards of Roman coins from Poland at large, unfortunately at a very uneven level. Published in Polish, they had no chance of entering European circulation. Not that in those days this perspective was entertained by many in Poland.

The shift in the research policy in Poland to the grant system, the opening up of national frontiers, accession to the European Union and the possibility of applying for European grants have substantially changed the standing of some research disciplines in Poland, not least of archaeology and numismatics. Thanks to several grants financing the cataloguing of ancient and early medieval coins found in Poland, accompanied by research, papers presented at conferences, and a large number of publications in congress languages, the position of Polish numismatics has vastly improved. One confirmation of this was the decision taken by the General Assembly of the International Numismatic Council at its September 2015 meeting in Taormina to hold the 16<sup>th</sup> International Numismatic Congress in 2021 in Poland. As part of the breakthrough associated with the development of digital humanities in 2014, the University of Warsaw started to develop the first computer coin finds database, accessible on-line, consistent with the NUMIZ world standards in cooperation with the German Archaeological Institute in Frankfurt am Main, the University of Oxford, the British Museum in London, and the American Numismatic Society in New York. Moreover, Poland has been one of the initiators of the digital numismatics Working Group of the European consortium DARIAH-EU. For more than a decade Arkadiusz Dymowski has been an active participant, and on occasion, also a coordinator of the abovementioned grants and works.

Parallel to the progress of the study of coin finds, and more broadly, the progress of professional numismatics and archaeology, since the early 1980s, and in Poland not more than a decade later, there has been explosion of amateur prospecting with the use of metal detecting in Western Europe. It has sparked much controversy and a severe polarization of the archaeological, numismatic and conservation community. In some European countries (most notably, England and Denmark) the response to this growing movement has been the decision to enter into a close cooperation with the metal detectorists and to treat them as allies; in other countries some research communities have come to regard them as enemies of the archaeological heritage (numismatics included) and waged war on them, mostly with precious little

success. Worse still, there have been attempts by the authorities to bar professional archaeologists from using metal detectors, which inevitably led to a major loss of evidences and contexts.

It is important to note that coins are a class of small finds which are recovered most frequently by amateurs. In this situation, from one year to the next, there has been a deepening disproportion in the level of their recording. In some countries, sometimes in parts of the same country (German *Länder*), most of the finds that are recorded come from amateur discoveries, with is in stark contrast to the very small fraction they make up in other countries. This has led to utterly paradoxically situations whereby we have from Britain, one of the least prosperous of Roman provinces, the largest record on Roman coins from finds per 100 km<sup>2</sup>. This lack of congruity makes it difficult to use some statistical tools when we wish to make quantitative or cartographic analyses covering the entire territory of the Roman Empire, reducing dramatically the potential of comparative studies and our grasp of socio-economic and political phenomena taking place during Antiquity. Similar disproportions are apparent in the territory of the Barbaricum, for example when we compare the record from Denmark and Sweden. The case of Poland is like that of Sweden, where because of the law in force a great many finds made by amateur metal detectorists fail to reach academic circulation.

The admirably consistent research made by Arkadiusz Dymowski aims at filling this acute gap, at least when it comes to the territory of Poland. Using the potential offered by the Internet, he went on to amass an impressive body of data on Roman coin finds made post 2000. This information helped to substantially alter the cartography of discoveries, which prior to his project was a reflection of the map of the territory of partitioned Poland, showing the highest density of finds in the Prussian sector, the smallest in the Russian. Moreover, A. Dymowski decided to apply some novel statistical tools that, to some extent at least, may help to level out the differences resulting from the non-uniform recording. Last, and most admirably, in spite of never having taken a university course in archaeology, he has succeeded in making full use of the significance of the archaeological context of the coin finds, much better than many an archaeologist concerned with interpreting numismatic finds.

In this spirit, and using these methods, A. Dymowski embarked on a project and research financed by the National Centre of Science addressing the elusive question of the occurrence of Roman Republican coin finds in East-Central Europe, to the north of the Sudetes and the Carpathians. The most salient feature of this project is that, since the launch of these studies in 2014, the number of the known finds had grown at least twofold – which is no accident, but mostly to the credit of the Author and his fellow researchers taking part in the grant.

To set this fact within the proper context, we have to return to the history of the study of Roman Republican coin finds in Poland, recalling the ideas of T. Mommsen, the finds made at Kalkriese, and the Battle of the Teutoburger Forest. In 1810, Tadeusz Czacki, head of the Volhynia Lyceum in Krzemieniec (now Kremenets,

Ukraine), an institution which had a large numismatic library and a collection of nearly twenty thousand coins, completed his textbook of coinages in Poland and Lithuania for the students of his school *O rzeczy menniczej w Polsce i Litwie dla uczniów Wołyńskiego Gimnazjum* (“About Coinage in Poland and Lithuania for Students of the Vollynian Lyceum”), published in 1835, a pioneering work and an ambitious attempt at writing a synthesis of the history of coinage in Poland. In this work Czacki described some numismatic finds, more relevantly – using the archival records of the Benedictine monastery of the Holy Cross – a hoard reportedly discovered on the Łysa Góra (Bald Mountain) summit – a mountain which due to its extraordinary form has a special place in the Polish historical and literary tradition. The hoard allegedly contained “several hundred pieces of silver coin and a few score gold coins, with the images of Caesar and Augustus”. The reliability of this record handed down by Czacki was examined in great detail by Jerzy Kolendo, who understood that the hoard in question included Roman denarii from the first and the second century, one of many recorded in the territory of the Barbaricum. Not less interesting in this context is the comment made by T. Czacki, well acquainted with classical written sources, including the *Germania* and the *Annales* of Tacitus. For the Polish historian, pedagogue and numismatist had concluded that the mountain used to be a sacred site with “an ancient temple of Castor and Pollux”, and went on to add that “apparently these coins were a part of the plunder taken from the Legions of Varus, sent here in sacrifice”. Thus half a century earlier than the text of T. Mommsen we find in Polish literature an attempt at linking ancient coins discovered in the territory of the Barbaricum to the Battle of the Teutoburger Forest.

A similar idea was put forward in the second half of the twentieth century by Andrzej Kunisz, one of the most outstanding Polish specialists in Roman numismatics. In 1970 he published, soon after its discovery, the Połaniec hoard from Lesser Poland, the first collective find of Roman Republican and Augustan coins recorded north of the Carpathians, and which is discussed at some length in the present volume. Next to other attempts at interpretation, Kunisz admitted that the hoard could be a fragment of plunder taken by the Germans in the Teutoburger Forest. With the evidence now available this interpretation is no longer tenable, but it should be stressed that this new data was unknown to A. Kunisz.

Our main source in interpreting the circumstances of the influx of Roman coinage to the territory of east-central and northern Europe and its uses there are finds of coins and medallions, and the context of their discovery. On this subject we have almost no input from the written record, with the exception of details pertaining to the political circumstances of the influx of this coinage, mostly related to the period of the Late Empire. However, there is one significant exception: the highly significant passage in the *Germania* of Tacitus (cf. the discussion below). Not without reason is this passage discussed in extenso in the work presented here, indeed a fragment is used as an element of its title.

The interpretation of the said passage has been an object of a great controversy

among scholars – historians, numismatists and archaeologists. In somewhat simplified terms, some of them gave credence to the words of Tacitus and accepted the existence of two distinct zones of the influx and use of Roman coinage, one of them closer to the Roman borders, the other deeper in the heartland of Germania, and, most importantly, accepted the information about the preference shown by *superiores barbari* for older coins – *serratii bigatiquae nummi* – which presumably were a conventional description of Republican denarii. The other group of scholars treated this record, to a greater or a lesser extent, as a topos, challenging in particular the reliability of the information about the acceptance of only the older, Republican denarii by the Germans inhabiting the more remote reaches of the Barbaricum in the second half of the 1st century AD. In the last half century this second group of scholars had gained an upper hand, represented by outstanding historians and numismatists as the late J. Kolendo or R. Wolters.

Finds of Republican coins recorded within the FMRD project in Germany, similarly to those discovered in Poland, by no means confirmed the supposed preference for Republican coinage. Moreover, the meticulous historical and philological analysis of the *Germania* by J. Kolendo indeed suggested that the relevant passage contains a typical topos stating the existence of a relationship between the mode of government, dress, lifestyle, or the degree of moral degeneration on the one hand, and the distance from the borders of the Roman Empire on the other. The closer to the limes, the more they resembled the situation within the Empire; the greater the distance – the more distant, or outright antithetical they became.

This highly erudite and convincing line of argumentation was completely deconstructed when in early 2015 we learned that in the hoard of Roman Republican coins found at Nowa Wieś Głubczycka in southern Poland (in Silesia) there was a Republican denarius of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus from 61 BC with the countermark IMP·VES, attributed conclusively to Vespasian and the 70s AD.

Now may be a good time to make an embarrassing confession: the Author of this book and myself, used to the established norm and to trusting the findings of experts, needed a long time to accept this piece of staggering evidence. We looked about for a different possible interpretation of the letters of the countermark, we even questioned the actual provenance of the coin. We argued over this matter for a long time with our fellow colleagues, Marcin Rudnicki and Tomasz Więcek. We also asked the opinion of the leading world authorities on this matter, among them Ch. Howgego and R. Wolters.

Nothing doing. Our opponents were correct. Moreover, we found out that in fact there were more finds of this sort, but that because of the time-honoured interpretation they had not been given credence. And so we had to reconcile ourselves with the evidence. As Jerzy Kolendo used to say: “do not be offended by the evidence” (i.e. when it upsets your interpretation). For the Author of the present work this has been quite a challenge – his basic concept and the outline of his study were already at quite an advanced stage. And he had already presented his ideas at a number of conferences and in print.

Nevertheless, in this book the Reader will find an interpretation completely different from the original one, reformulated and fully adjusted to the agreement with the new evidence. Such an admirable aptitude to quickly change one's views in the face of new evidence is something that is found only in researchers of the highest class. And this may be the most important thought that I wished to share in the foreword to this important contribution.

A significant portion of the new finds, among them hoards of Republican denarii which are discussed in the present study, come from north-western Ukraine. These are the fruits of a Polish-Ukrainian cooperation on the documenting and interpretation of ancient coin finds begun in 2010, and continued in the course of a number of projects. Apart from many anonymous Ukrainian amateurs, most of the credit in this regard goes to Kirill Myzgin of the Vasyl Karazin National University in Kharkiv, whose separate monograph dedicated to the finds of Republican and Early Imperial coins from Ukraine and Belarus will be published in 2017.

Among the Ukrainian finds, possibly the most remarkable is a concentration of coins found a small distance apart by amateur detectorists in the vicinity of the villages of Pochapy and Bonyshyn in L'viv oblast consisting of four group finds and some single finds of Republican denarii, ending, if we ignore the imitations, shortly after the mid-1st century – to be precise, in 45 BC. The scatter of these finds is remarkably similar to that observed at Kalkriese, especially in early stages of discovery, as well as in the vicinity of the locality Razgrad in Bulgaria, the site of the Battle of Atritus of AD 251, equally disastrous for the Romans as the engagement in the Teutoburger Forest. The date lack of finds of weapons to date may be due to the fact that most prospectors use a discrimination setting in their detectors which rules out their finding iron objects, which are mostly less valuable than objects made of non-ferrous metals. This issue notwithstanding, given the analogies just named, it may be safe to assume that the area nearby today's village of Pochapy was the scene of a battle fought in the 40s BC not recorded in the written sources. A similarly anonymous battle between the Romans and Germans took place in AD 235-236 on the slopes of Harzhorn, on the western edge of the Harz mountains in Lower Saxony. In this case too coins were one of the first finds, and to this day are still the principal source dating this particular battle. On the other hand, it is not unfeasible that the Republican coin finds from the environs of Pochapy are associated with the operation there of a political and trade centre of the Dacian Lipitsa Culture. No wonder, therefore, that the archaeologists from L'viv decided some time ago to launch regular fieldwork in this area, its results yet unknown.

The thought-provoking interpretations presented in this volume are the effect of in-depth studies which are based on the most recently obtained evidence, most of which are published here for the first time ever. Nevertheless, we must be ready for future discoveries which may change our current understanding and interpretations. Discoveries which, like the Vespasianic countermark on the Republican denarius

from the Nowa Wieś Głubczycka hoard in Silesia, restored the veracity to the testimony of Tacitus given in his *Germania*, questioned on so many occasions and relegated to the realm of literary topoi.

And this is precisely what is the most fascinating in numismatics and archaeology.

Chyliczki, July 2016