

Chapter 1

Overview of past research and methodological aspects of the work

1.1. Past and present research

Until 2012 there was not a single study dedicated entirely to Roman Republican coin finds from Eastern Europe. Undoubtedly this was because the number of these finds was too small to permit a more in-depth analysis.⁸ In his study addressing finds of Roman coins from the territory of Ukraine M. Braichevskii limited himself to giving the number of finds of Roman coins known to him.⁹ Similarly, V. Kropotkin noted that finds of these coins were exceedingly rare in Eastern Europe,¹⁰ and more characteristic for the region of Transcaucasia.¹¹ Single finds of Roman Republican coins from Western Ukraine (then – Eastern Galicia) were mentioned in the contributions by W. Janusz¹² and K. Majewski.¹³ Thus, because they were so few, Roman coin finds were mostly viewed by researchers as a random rather than a regular element of the archaeological record.¹⁴

The last century, apart from the catalogues mentioned above, brought only a very small number of publications addressing Roman Republican coins finds. One of these was a brief report of M. Liubichev, published in 1999, on a denarius of Lucius Caesius (no. 75) found in eastern Ukraine at Staryi Merchyk, Kharkiv oblast.¹⁵ In 2007, V. Beliavets and V. Sidarovich published a Republican denarius of Manius Aquillius discovered in the Wielbark culture settlement at Nesvilo, Brest

⁸ Cf. Braichevskii 1959; Kropotkin 1961; 1966; 2000.

⁹ Braichevskii 1959, p. 14; p. 228, Plate II.

¹⁰ Kropotkin 1961, p. 22, Plate 6; p. 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 17.

¹² Janusz 1918, p. 49.

¹³ Majewski 1949, p. 17.

¹⁴ It is possible that the catalogues of M. Braichevskii and V. Kropotkin contain a record on a larger number of Republican coin finds. On occasion, citing nineteenth-early twentieth century references, these authors report a find of a “Roman coin”, without noting its denomination, issuer or date of issue, even the most approximate. It is reasonable to conclude that some of these records allude to the discovery of a Roman Republican coin.

¹⁵ Liubichev 1999.

oblast, Belarus (no. 56).¹⁶ Finally, in their contribution of 2009, S. Pyvovarov and Ya. Onyshchuk reported on a hoard of Republican denarii discovered at Pochapy in Zolochiv Raion, L'viv oblast (no. 60).¹⁷

In reality, my article of 2012 is the first provisional analysis of Roman coin finds from the southern region of Eastern Europe (in the main – from the territory of modern Ukraine) then known in literature.¹⁸ The catalogue to this publication included 37 entries, sorted in two categories depending on the reliability of information about them – high reliability (23 entries) and low reliability (14 entries).¹⁹ Next to giving a general description of these coins, examining the general archaeological background of their distribution, plotting them on a maps of the geographical range of archaeological cultures of the pre-Roman and the Roman periods, I put forward two hypotheses on the date and source areas of influx of this coinage into Eastern Europe (see Chapter 4).²⁰ Needless to say, the conclusions published in my 2012 study, drawn from a rather small pool of finds, and almost fully without archaeological context, have since been thoroughly reassessed. Nevertheless, this publication may be said to represent a watershed in the study of Republican coin finds at the time.

At the current stage of the inquiry into Roman Republican coin finds from the territory of Ukraine and Belarus our database of sources is significantly larger. While new evidence started to be collected back in 2012 this activity gathered speed only within the Coins of the Roman Republic in Central Europe project, ie in early 2014.

Let me note at this point that from 2012 until the time of writing not a single piece of information on Republican coin finds from the territory of Ukraine and Belarus came from archaeological research. This gap was filled by the monitoring online resources (see Chapter 1.2). In Belarus information about Republican coin finds, most of them from amateur discoveries as well, to this day has been collected by V. Sidarovich.

By the end of 2014 thanks to vigorous collecting of information our record had been augmented by 110 new finds of coins of the Roman Republic and their imitations, from 35 and five findspots in Ukraine and Belarus respectively, which is tantamount to a three-fold increment.²¹ The analysis of new evidence has significantly, and at times, radically, changed our understanding of the distribution range of Roman Republican coins in the territory of Ukraine and Belarus. In the first place, this applies to hoards: from a single, reliable find, the number of

¹⁶ Beliaevets, Sidarovich 2009.

¹⁷ Pyvovarov, Onyshchuk 2009.

¹⁸ Myzgin 2012. The basis of this article was a subchapter on the Republican coin finds from the territory with a record on sites of the archaeological Chernyakhiv culture, written for my PhD thesis (Myzgin 2010a; thesis abstract: Myzgin, 2010b).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 25-27, Plate 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 24.

²¹ Myzgin 2016.

these deposits has now been brought up to five. Their analysis has helped narrow down the date and source areas of the influx of Roman Republican coins and their imitations to the territory of present-day Ukraine. A new element in the analysis, as compared to the preceding stage of research, are now finds of imitative Roman Republican coins, previously unknown or not identifiable as such.²²

1.2. Methods of data collection and criticism

Information about Roman Republican coin finds from the territory of Ukraine and Belarus was collected in three ways: by making a review of existing literature, monitoring online resources, and via personal communication with private finders.

While working on the published materials it was crucial not only to find information about the coins but also to subject this data to careful verification. At this stage I had to face a number of challenges, associated with the substandard quality of the primary publications. Here, a few words of explanation are in order. The vast majority of ancient coins was discovered and published for the first time in the late 19th – first half of the 20th century. The general level of publication of ancient coin finds at that time was rather low, and too often, these publications contained no images of the coins, neither were any closer determinations given. This was due largely to the lack of specialist catalogues: until 1952, the time of the publication of the catalogue of E. A. Sydenham,²³ just two catalogues of Roman Republican coins had been in use: the contributions by H. Cohen²⁴ and E. Babelon,²⁵ not always accessible outside major research centres. What is more, researchers rarely subjected the evidence received to proper critique and published their data in the finds corpora as valid. This tendency is characteristic in particular for the coin finds catalogues of M. Braichevskii²⁶ and, even if to a lesser extent, V. Kropotkin.²⁷ This may be demonstrated by quite a few examples. For instance, a very common mistake observed in these corpora are entries on coins of Julius Caesar, either from single finds, or from hoards (eg, nos. 63, 64, 138 in the Catalogue). This error was the result of incorrect determination of the coins on the evidence of the CAES legend, one that appears on a large number of 1st-2nd century denarii as part of the titulature. These incorrect determinations were trusted by the authors of the coin corpora, made in the 19th-early 20th century, too often by non-professionals. But today, on the evidence of the chronology of validated hoards of

²² Ibid.

²³ Sydenham 1952.

²⁴ Cohen 1857.

²⁵ Babelon 1885.

²⁶ Braichevskii 1959.

²⁷ Kropotkin 1961; 1966.

Roman coins,²⁸ and of the chronology of reliable single finds,²⁹ it is absolutely clear that coins of Julius Caesar are extremely rare in Eastern Europe. Another dubious group are coin finds not verified by the author of the publication, as is the case eg, of a bronze as, allegedly recovered in a settlement of the Zarubintsy culture on Zamkova Hora (Castle Hill) at Kyiv (no. 114), which is more likely to come from an early numismatic collection. A definitely far-fetched find would be the hoard of coins, reportedly from the Consular period of the Roman Republic, provenanced to Trypillia (no. 78). Furthermore, some coin finds may appear to be reliable but lack confirmation in later published literature. It is so with a Republican coin excavated at the village Zarubintsy (no. 115) recorded in an entry in the catalogue of V. Kropotkin, in a wording attributed to Ye. Maksimov, the supervisor of this archaeological fieldwork, which is not mentioned in any of the later publications (see below).

A major problem with these early publications of finds is that their entries often lack detail: too often, their authors were content to note the time of issue of a coin without recording the issuer, the details of its appearance or its type. This is typical not only for catalogues from the 1950s but also for a much later age, even quite recently. As said earlier, on the one hand this could be due to the lack of catalogues, but on the other this is something typical for other ancient and historic coin finds. Thus, the original determinations of the Republican part of the hoard from Korolevo (no. 21) are given using the monetary groups (Gens) of H. Cohen, without specifying particular types, making its chronological analysis unfeasible. Or, in the publication of first hoard from Pochapy (no. 60) published by Ya. Onyshchuk and S. Pyvovarov there is no finds catalogue at all – the authors restricted themselves to giving only a general information about the coins making up this assemblage.

It was also found necessary to confirm published entries on coins provided with a determination. In this way some inaccuracies were identified in the published determinations of some of the coins from Mala Kopanya (nos. 50-52), and from the hoard from Ivano-Frankivsk (no. 14).

Obtaining information about coins from new finds was an entirely different process. This was done by monitoring the data available online – more precisely – on the treasure hunter internet fora.

The largest web resource in Ukraine where information about new finds – Roman Republican coins – is published, is website www.forum.violity.com. On this website private individuals upload photographs of their coin finds in order to have them determined and evaluated before they are put up for auction on the same site. A report about a coin find includes its photograph and a minimum of detail about the findspot and circumstances of discovery. This made it necessary in every case to get in touch with the amateur finder to obtain more details about

²⁸ Dymowski, Myzgin 2014.

²⁹ Myzgin 2013.

the findspot and, where possible, about the archaeological context of the find. Unfortunately, in many cases the finders were reluctant to provide this feedback and I had to be content with only a general description of the place of discovery (eg, “Ukraine” or, in a best case scenario, the administrative unit – *raion* or *oblast*). Unfortunately, in recent years the amount of this information has been snowballing, and every day scores – if not hundreds – of finds of different categories of ancient coins are lost to research, Roman Republican issues too, severely eroding our potential for understanding the ancient past of Eastern Europe.³⁰ Thus, each time we have succeeded in salvaging information about these coins, their value for research increases – they are no longer like a leaf torn from the book that is history but only a marred leaf, one that can often be reconstructed, if only in part. It goes without saying that, as a first step, this record needs to be tested for its validity.³¹

The principles guiding the criticism of the evidence obtained from metal detector users have been developed in some detail by A. Dymowski.³² To assess the value of this data there is need to understand the amateur’s qualifications, examine the photograph of the coins, obtain details about the findspot and circumstances of its discovery, associated finds, and so on.³³ Obviously, in our study more often as not the full body of information was unavailable. What we aimed for in this work was to identify the findspots and specify their level of reliability. In some cases, mostly thanks to a series of exchanges with private metal-detector users, we succeeded in obtaining a fairly comprehensive description of the place and circumstances of the discovery of a find or a group of finds. This information, in our view, is sufficient even if not fully reliable. On the other hand, we have much less confidence as to the more general information about the place of discovery when the finder was unwilling to specify the findspot in more detail, and only indicated the administrative unit – *raion* or *oblast*. Worse still, if until late 2014 the finders could be contacted in person via the Violity website, after that date, and this still holds today, this option ceased to be available (because the owners of the site had material interest). This is a true disaster to our work of recording information about new coin finds; all that is left to us now are photographic images of the coins, and if we are lucky, information about the region (the very broad administrative division of the *oblast*) where they were found.

In Belarus a similar methodology of collecting information about new finds has been used by V. Sidarovich. In his country the key metal detector user websites are www.belklad.by/forum, www.kladoiskatel.5bb.ru, www.arheolog.by,

³⁰ Incidentally, the value of these coins in Ukrainian and Belarusian Internet auctions tends to be rather low.

³¹ V. Orlyk, Ukrainian numismatist, although his work was with medieval coins, devoted a brief study to this problem (Orlyk 2013).

³² Dymowski 2012.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 35-36. For a detailed discussion of issues related to the criticism of the coin finds see Bursche 1996, pp. 26-36.

www.belskarb.com/forum. V. Sidarovich has been obtaining details about the place and circumstances of discovery by getting in touch with the finders.³⁴

Not a small amount of information was obtained (by myself and my colleagues) through private correspondence and direct communication with the finders. The information obtained from them was subjected to the same criticism as the metal detector finds published on the Internet. Nevertheless, quite often this information is more precise, with a higher level of reliability.

As may be seen in a situation where our information about finds of Roman Republican coins from Ukraine and Belarus is not of uniform quality it is crucial to determine its level of reliability. In my time I developed a system of grading the reliability on four levels: “reliable” (well documented, almost invariably these are coins from archaeological excavations), “partly reliable” (there is data about the exact findspot and the type of coin (its image)), “poorly reliable” (there is information about the type of coin (its image) and at least an approximate place of discovery) and “unreliable” (the circumstances of discovery are unrealistic or very doubtful, the determinations are incorrect or there are duplicate coins).³⁵ I am fully aware that the critical filters of this sort are open to discussion. Nevertheless, I believe that a system of this sort is sufficient to make a primary criticism and selection of information about coin finds.

Finds of Republican coins from Ukraine and Belarus were assessed for their level of reliability with the following outcome: reliable – 12.5 %, partly reliable – 57.3 %, poorly reliable – 26.9 % and unreliable – 3.3 % (Table 1). Accordingly, most of the information about the coins has been assessed as highly reliable and conditionally reliable. Finds with low reliability, even if for most of them the coin type is known, but not the exact findspot, are not less important in the general statistical calculations, general chronological determinations and coin type diversity.

The next step after collating the information and its critical analysis was cataloguing. The Catalogue of the coin finds was designed to include all the published or otherwise available information with its varying level of reliability. At this point let me note with full force that the Catalogue does not pretend to present a comprehensive and actual number of Roman Republican coin finds discovered in the territories of Ukraine and Belarus. It only reflects the progress made in our research, based as it was, without exception, on the data available to me, collected during a specific time interval. In other words, within the system of “three cultures” of H. J. Eggers the present study is a reflection of “rediscovered culture” (*wiederentdeckte Kultur*), ie, the material that was available to me, but in no way of “dead culture” (*tote Kultur*), ie, all the coins buried in the ground, and much less so, “living culture” (*lebende Kultur*), ie, coins actually in circulation in the

³⁴ Since March 2016 illegal metal detector use and activity of private collectors in Belarus have come under a new, more restrictive legislation (no. 485 of 14 December 2015).

³⁵ Myzgin 2015c.

barbarian environment.³⁶ At the same time, I am deeply convinced that the pattern, outlined taking into account these particular features, does represent a reflection of tendencies in the distribution of the material, ones that as I speak are being validated by the most recent finds.³⁷

1.3. Methods of processing and analysing the evidence

One of the key priorities in processing the information about Roman Republican coin finds when developing their Catalogue was to identify their type, mint, date of issue and preservation status.

Coin determination was made using the Roman Republican Coinage (RRC) of M. H. Crawford. From this catalogue we drew information about the date and place of issue of particular coin types. The dating given by H.M. Crawford in his catalogue in quite a few cases diverges from the dating given in earlier catalogues, eg, of E. A. Sydenham and H. A. Grueber. However, quite a few coins in our pool had been published in the past with determinations made with reference to the dates and types in E. A. Sydenham, H. Grueber, and in some cases, H. Cohen. This made it necessary to reassess possibly the largest number of coins to have them in one system – that of M. H. Crawford. If in a given publication the coin determinations had been made with reference to H. Cohen, E. A. Sydenham or H. A. Grueber, I tried to identify their corresponding types in the catalogue of M. H. Crawford. Unfortunately, for these early publications there was no way for me to confirm or refute most of the coin determinations because in their majority neither the images nor the coins themselves had survived. In such case the primary source had to be given credence. With the coins from the most recent finds the situation was just the reverse. Here the coins were determined only from photographs or drawings, published in the literature or on online fora. Worse still, not always the quality of the image in these photographs or drawings was satisfactory. This eg, was true of the quality of the photographic images in the 2005 publication of the Pochapy hoard, and also of quite a few coins from single finds – official issues and imitations. This made the identification of Geto-Dacian barbarous imitations especially problematic, because attribution to this group can often be determined only through direct contact with the coin. Therefore, the coin determinations made from photographs may be expected to contain errors despite the effort taken to reduce their number to a minimum.

A special role in the analysis of the data and visualization was played by the cartographic method. Naturally, mapping was limited to findspots with an exact or with a more or less exact localization (Map 1). Naturally, this approach to some

³⁶ Eggers 1951, pp. 23–25.

³⁷ Eg, we have received reports from private prospectors about ten more Republican denarii found in Zolochiv raion, L'viv oblast.

extent, and on occasion, substantially distorts the true pattern of distribution of the coins. Thus, for example from Zakarpattya oblast we have a record of at least thirty findspots, but only two of them have an exact localization (Mala Kopanya and Korolevo). The situation is almost the same in L'viv oblast, more precisely, in Zolochiv raion. To counterbalance this fallacy another map was created, showing the correlation of the number of finds and their categories in different administrative regions (oblasts) of the study area (Map 2).

In a situation where for vast majority of the coins lacked archaeological context to specify the date and source areas of their influx it was crucial to map their distribution within a setting of the archaeological situation as it was in the region during different periods of prehistory. The territorial range of an archaeological culture – this in itself is a matter of substantial controversy (Map 3 and 4). Nevertheless, I tried to draw on the most up-to-date literature and consulted with colleagues specialising in these periods.

A key role in my work was played by statistical processing of the numismatic material (Diagrams 1-8). The focus was on the percentage ratios of different regions of finds and on constructing chronological profiles. For the sake of objectivity I used 5-year intervals, whereby two coins issued in 89 BC, three coins issued in 88 BC and five coins issued in 86 BC were counted as ten coins and entered in the chronological interval of 90-85 BC. If, for example, the exact date of a coin was unknown but its time of issue was understood to fall in the period between 130 and 115 BC, then the average of 0.33 was entered into each of the chronological periods (130-125, 125-120 and 120-115 BC). In this way, more or less objective chronological profiles were obtained, which is especially important when making a comparative analysis of several similar profiles (eg, two hoards, or hoards and single/cumulative finds, etc.).

Finally, yet another method used in the study of imitations of Republican coins was by grouping. This is important especially in the study of Geto-Dacian imitations, separated as they have been into several groups and subgroups depending on the level of stylization of their iconography. The use of the grouping method for Geto-Dacian imitations of Republican coins was dictated by their staggering variety and, consequently, the unfeasibility of ordering them typologically (differently, for instance, than with Celtic imitations).

In my view, using the methods of data acquisition and processing described earlier I was able to obtain an objective view of the distribution of the coin finds and to assess their character.