Britannia 45 (2014), 469–499

Reviews

The Gloucester Hoard and Other Coin Hoards of the Britannic Empire. Coin Hoards from Roman Britain XIII. By R. Abdy, E. Besly and F. López-Sánchez. Moneta, Wetteren, 2010. Pp. 188, pls 94. Price: €65.00. ISBN 978 90 77297 81 0.

This thirteenth volume in the Coin Hoards from Roman Britain series includes nine articles describing eight coin hoards from the last decade of the third century. All include coins struck in the names of Carausius or Allectus, the leaders of the so-called Britannic Empire, though their contents vary considerably. The Ashbourne hoard from Derbyshire, for instance, contains two very rare Carausian gold aurei (increasing the number of such coins known from 23 to 25), while the other seven hoards comprise primarily copper-alloy radiates issued during the final 30 years or so of the third century. The Gloucester hoard is by far the largest with 15,376 coins; the Milbrook (Hants.) and Gilmorton (Leics.) hoards contain 4,384 and 1,255 coins respectively, Elveden (Suffolk) another 627, Market Drayton (Shrops.) 174, Little Orme (Gwynedd) 68, and Morecombe Bay (Cumbria) 50. The volume closes with 94 plates illustrating various types from all the hoards, some more useful than others.

Britain has now produced some 600 known hoards terminating with coins of Carausius and Allectus, though there are significant differences between them in terms of the proportions of the 'British' (should that now be 'Britannic'?) usurpers' coins they contain. In their 1988 publication of the contemporary Normanby hoard, Bland and Burnett suggested that this large group could be divided into four categories depending on the relative quantities of Carausian/Allectan coins compared with earlier coins and/or issues of the legitimate emperors Diocletian and Maximian (with an additional fifth category proposed by Besly in his 2006 catalogue and discussion of the Rogiet hoard). The Gloucester hoard counts as a 'legitimist' hoard in that it comprises a substantial number of coins struck after the reform of Aurelian in A.D. 274 — termed 'Aureliani' to distinguish them from earlier radiates — as well as far more coins of the first Tetrarchy than of the British usurpers (1,453 compared to 34). Coins of the Britannic Empire are also only present in small quantities in the Gilmorton hoard, although the overwhelming majority of its coins were struck before A.D. 274. The differences within this group of seemingly contemporary hoards are amply demonstrated by the Elveden II hoard where 625 out of 627 coins are Carausian or Allectan and which otherwise contains only single coins of Probus and the first Tetrarchs.

Unravelling the complexities of late third-century hoarding in Britain was not, however, a priority for the volume's editors, a challenge which will have to await another day. Instead, its virtues lie in presenting new numismatic data, either in the form of new hoards or, in the Gloucester case, in publishing in detail an old but extremely important find, albeit exactly 50 years after its discovery. The main reason for the delay, as noted in the Preface, is because a large proportion of the hoard comprises coins issued after the Aurelianic reform that are relatively rare elsewhere (some extremely so), while the standard numismatic reference for the period has long been obsolete (the fifth volume of *Roman Imperial Coinage* was published in two parts in 1927 and 1933). Fortunately, the publication of both the La Venèra hoard by Estiot and, subsequently, the Rogiet hoard by Besly ensured that by 2006 the state of numismatic knowledge had developed sufficiently to facilitate the production of an up-to-date catalogue of the Gloucester hoard.

That this was achieved so promptly is due to the diligence and tenacity of the editors, all of whom should be wholeheartedly congratulated on their achievement. In their report they list the coins by emperor, mint, production series and type; in future anyone confronted with a coin of Aurelian, Tacitus, Florus, Probus or Carus and his family, will need to refer to the Gloucester report for the fullest reference. The discussion preceding the catalogue is naturally heavily numismatic, but it is also expertly succinct and should be read alongside the catalogue as it is here that many of the details and intricacies of this previously poorly understood period of Roman currency are contained.

The results of the chemical analyses of 64 coins from the Gloucester hoard from Aurelian's reign, pre- and post-dating the A.D. 274 reform, are discussed by Ponting and can be added to previous analyses undertaken by Cope and Northover. Reformed 'Aureliani' were struck with a mint-mark of XXI, which seems to confirm that the new coins were produced from alloys that were 20 parts base-metal and one part silver. An increase to a fineness of 5 per cent from a previous standard of 3 per cent might not seem particularly significant today, but announcing the near doubling in the quality of Rome's most used denomination in such an obvious and innovative manner demonstrated the emperor's ability to stabilise the currency after so many decades of decline. The tracking of various trace elements in Aurelian's coins seems to indicate that the mints were supplied with copper ore directly from specific sources, an observation borne out by small quantities of iron in coins from the northern Italian mints of Milan and Ticinum. This might appear a minor point, but if so it suggests that the recycling of old coins was perhaps less important in manufacturing the new coinage than is generally supposed.

Hitherto the late third century was often perceived as one of decline after the grandeur of earlier times, yet the improved knowledge of the coinage of Carausius and Allectus has shown that there is more to this period than simple degeneration. Much is still uncertain, however, about Britain on the eve of the final century of Roman occupation and about the causes of the apparent upsurge in coin hoarding during and after the Britannic Empire. While this publication of eight other coin hoards of the A.D. 290s does not deal with this specific issue, it does provide the numismatic tools with which we might begin to unravel the problems. This volume will be an important resource for anyone interested in this intriguing period of British (and Roman) history. Time will tell if it leads to a more sophisticated appreciation of hoarding at the turn of the third and fourth centuries, although given the potentially catastrophic changes currently being wrought in Britain's museums, it may well come to be celebrated as one of the last pieces of collaborative numismatic research of its meticulous kind.

Cardiff University PETER GUEST
GuestP@cardiff.ac.uk
doi: 10.1017/S0068113X14000038

Pratiques et espaces funéraires: la crémation dans les campagnes romaines de la Gaule Belgique. By M.-J. Ancel. Archéologie et histoire romaine 23. Editions Monique Mergoil, Montagnac, 2012. Pp. 650, illus. Price: €80.00. ISBN 978 2 35518 021 7.

This is a not quite conventional burial publication, based on a doctoral thesis passed in 2010. It combines part publication of three excavations with a synthesis of burial practice in rural northern France in the first to third centuries A.D. The principal focus lies on cremation rituals, privileging Ancel's own analysis of cremated human bone as its main evidence. It examines the features met in cemetery excavation: monuments, pyres, surface spreads and buried deposits of material consumed in rituals as well as burials themselves; cemetery layout and landscape setting are also investigated. Its principal readerships will be those interested in Roman Gaul, its funerary culture and rural societies, and/or in methods for reconstructing cremation rituals in the Roman and other periods.

The title slightly misleads as A. exploits data from two non-contiguous regions, Lorraine and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The study partially updates a 'classic' of Roman funerary archaeology, van Doorsaeler's 1967 synthesis of burial practice in northern Gaul, and complements a similar investigation focused on central and south-eastern France (*Gallia* 66 (2009)). With the latter A. shares a distinctive perspective on Roman funerary archaeology in which two intellectual traditions converge, analysis of burial ritual as a system of sacrifices, inspired by J. Scheid, and examination of human skeletal taphonomy as evidence for ritual process, developed by H. Duday and colleagues. These studies reveal the potential for more direct translation of research questions into fieldwork where facilitated by close links between developer-funded archaeology and universities in France.

A short first section gives clear if schematic frameworks for the study regions, their Iron Age and Roman histories and settlement patterns, as well as the historiography of the study of cremated bone and of regional funerary archaeology. Discussion of methodology prefaces the analysis of case studies in section 2: 90 and 14 burials and related features respectively from Mécleuves, near Metz (later first to third century), and suburban Lens (first century), and 10 burial-related features, but no burials, excavated near Contrexéville, Vosges (later first to early second century). All three sites are associated with modest rural settlements. In each case detailed