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Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte des spätrömischen Münzumlaufs
in Ägypten und Syrien

Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike (SFMA) Vol. 12. Berlin, 2000.
3 volumes, 291 pp., 747 pp., 156 annexes (maps and graphs)[1]

In this three-volume study Hans-Christoph Noeske takes the coin finds at the pilgrimage center of Abu Mina as the starting point for an exhaustive survey of late Roman and early Byzantine coin finds in Egypt and in the Diocese of the East (Cyprus, Cilicia, Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Arabia). The sheer scale of the work is impressive, compassing in excess of 100,000 coins from more than 150 find assemblages, most unearthed in archaeological excavations. Judging from the bibliography, HCN's systematic review of the literature stopped in 1987 or 1988, though a few later titles are cited. While an early cutoff is understandable given the years required to analyze this vast data base, there is an unfortunate aspect. For as HCN himself stipulates, archaeological methodology has improved rather recently. Earlier excavators often overlooked very small or very worn coins. According to G. Bijovsky, it is only in the last twenty years that the tiniest bronzes have received careful attention.[2]

The finds, both coin hoards and individual finds, are catalogued in Volume 2. The bronze hoard from Abu Mina – some 8600 coins accumulated in a vessel as votive offerings – and individual finds from the site are published here for the first time, as are hoards and/or individual finds from about a dozen other sites. HCN has updated earlier publications by adding references to RIC, LRBC, DOC, and other standard literature. But it was impossible to bring these publications into full conformity with current research standards because the hoards themselves were not accessible.

HCN's analysis of this mass of information follows just two lines of inquiry: the frequency of coins from different periods at different sites, and the changing mix of mints over time at various sites. Volume 3 presents these data in the form of graphs, along with some supplementary illustrations – excavation photos and site

1 My thanks to Kenneth Harl, who read and commented helpfully on an earlier version of this review.

2 G. Bijovsky, The Currency of the Fifth Century C.E. in Palestine – Some Reflections in Light of the Numismatic Evidence, in: D. Barag (ed.), Studies in Memory of Leo Mildenberg, INJ 14, 2000-2002, p. 207.

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diagrams from Abu Mina; diagrams of other sites; maps showing findspots for the material under study; and photos of moulds for casting imitative coins. At the end of Volume 2 there are tables of the mints represented at nine major sites, divided by period. A simple entree to the hoard material, in the form of lists or tables of hoards with similar dates of closure, would have been useful but was not provided.

Volume I offers HCN's commentary on his methodology and survey. The finds are divided into a number of groups, related by geography, metal, type of assemblage (hoard or individual finds), and by the structure of the assemblages. For each of these groups, HCN describes the graphs and compares various assemblages, then interprets the shared patterns in light of monetary policy and/or major historic events. (The particular character of individual sites might have affected the currency that circulated there, but proved relatively insignificant within the parameters of HCN's inquiry.)

Thirty gold hoards – eight from Egypt, including one from Abu Mina, and 22 from the Diocese of the East – show important similarities and differences. Many of them begin with solidi from the reign of Valentinian, a pattern that HCN attributes to the statute of 366 (*CTh* 12.6.12), which ordered that solidi received as taxes should be melted into gold bars, assuring the rapid disappearance of older gold coinage from circulation. The «Valentinian group» still appears in Syrian hoards with dates of deposit in the 560s, and persists in Egyptian hoards until after 660; to explain these patterns HCN cites the huge production of gold coinage in Valentinian's reign, made possible by the melting down of older coinage. The «Valentinian group» is followed by a large gap, lasting in Syria until the 450s and in Egypt until the beginning of the sixth century. HCN notes the contrasting abundance of gold coins of the Theodosian dynasty in the northwest of the empire, the result of tribute payments to barbarian tribes, notably the Goths and the Huns, after the catastrophe at Adrianople. From the middle of the fifth century the Isaurians of southern Asia Minor also received considerable sums, and HCN suggests a correlation with the reappearance of new gold coins in Syrian hoards. A handful of short-lived hoards from the Diocese of the East are related to the war between Heraclius and Chosroes II. In contrast only two hoards appear to have been buried at the time of the Arab conquest, one in the Diocese of the East and one in Egypt. Byzantine gold continued to circulate in both economies and to be supplemented by the arrival of new issues until 696/7, when Abd al-Malik introduced the Arab dinar.

Silver coinage is almost completely lacking from the finds documented here, and it appears that it did not circulate in Egypt or the Diocese of the East in significant quantities. HCN contrasts the different functions of silver in the west and in the east: In the west, silver siliquae were used to pay foreign troops in the emperor's employ and were hoarded in the barbarian homelands. In the east silver was mainly used for presentation pieces, and much of it was stored in the liturgical implements of the Church. In 614/5 Heraclius introduced a new silver coin, the hexagram, to finance his Persian war, drawing on Church treasures as a source of bullion. Although the *Chronikon Paschale* reports that imperial donatives were paid in hexagrams, not a single specimen turned up in the find material reviewed here, nor indeed has one been found within the boundaries of the empire. Instead, HCN observes, their findspots are concentrated north of the Danube in Carpathia, in the Caucasus, and in Russia north of the Caspian Sea, reflecting the important role of Byzantine silver in winning vassals among the Lazes, Chasars, and Turkic peoples in the border regions between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires. HCN associates the very few Sasanian silver drachms found in Egypt and the Diocese of the East with the occupation of Syria and Egypt by Chosroes II.

Base metal coins naturally comprise the overwhelming majority of the finds documented here. HCN enumerates the particular problems presented by bronze coins of the late Roman period: Low relief, similar types, and the severe corrosion typical of all Egyptian coin finds make reliable identification very difficult. His attempts to compare assemblages across regions and over time are necessarily based on the identifiable coins, which in many cases constitute the minority.

HCN's study of bronze hoards continues the account begun by H. Schubert in the second volume of the SFMA series.[3] That is to say, the present work treats deposits closing at the end of the fourth century and later. Egyptian bronze hoards typically grew slowly over 150 to nearly 200 years. Most began their formation in the Constantinian period, specifically in the mid-330s, due to the extremely large volume of coinage then emitted. Scattered examples of earlier, even pre-Roman coinage also found their way into these hoards. The largest component is the mass coinage of the Theodosian dynasty, which remained the dominant currency in circulation until the reform of Anastasius. The hoard contents tend to match the modules of fifth-century bronze coins, and older coins are assumed to have «passed» as contemporary currency. Issues of large format, such as Tetrarchic «folles» (more correctly called *nummi*), *maiorinae* of Constantius II and Julian, or Æ 2s of the Valentinian and Theodosian dynasties, are lacking throughout. HCN concludes that official recalls and tax policies must account for the disappearance of larger bronze coins, but does not examine the hypothesis in any detail. Thus he does not cite supporting textual evidence, such as the prohibition of *maiorinae* and *centenionales* by Constantius II in 354 (*CTh* 9.23.1), or Honorius' ban in 395 of coins larger than the *cententionalis nummus* (*CTh* 9.23.2), whose implementation in the east was apparently delayed until c. 400. Moreover, HCN never mentions the distinction between billon and bronze, and the abandonment of billon under Valentinian I.[4] Presumably this omission is consistent with HCN's conclusion that monetary reasons for hoarding – the setting aside of «better» coinage – can have played no important role in fifth-century Egypt, when hoarders saved everything

3 H. Schubert, Studien zum spätrömischen Münzumlauf in Ägypten 1: Folles- und Aes-Schätze aus dem 4. Jahrhundert n.Chr., SFMA 2 (Berlin 1984).

4 This transition is documented by M. Amandry, J.-N. Barrandon, C. Brenot, J.-P. Callu, and J. Poirier, L'affinage des métaux monnayés au Bas-Empire: les réforms valentiniennes de 364-368, NACQTic 11, 1982, pp. 286-288. See also the commentary of P. Bastien, Le monnayage de l'atelier de Lyon du règne de Jovien à la mort de Jovin (363-413), NR 16 (Wetteren, 1987), pp. 109-111, who draws attention to the inconsistent results of metallurgical analyses caused by the melting down of earlier coins.

that came to hand. HCN relates the declining frequency of coins issued after 408 to the ongoing reduction of officinae in the eastern mints, and the outright closure of the Alexandria mint shortly after 425.

Faced with a shortage of official currency, fifth-century Egyptian hoarders saved regular coinage and local imitations indiscriminately. HCN reviews J.G. Milne's classification of these imitations[5] and concludes that Classes A through E are in fact official issues of poor quality, whereas Classes F and G are cast counterfeits, produced by the great landowners and also, perhaps, by the Church. Such imitations circulated throughout all of Egypt and their production was apparently equally decentralized: the hoard from Qaw el-Kebir contains many cast imitations from the same mould, clearly a local production of ancient Antaeopolis, while the many cast VOTA imitations in the Abu Mina hoard may be evidence for another local center of production at Abu Mina. Roman coins were not the only ones counterfeited; Egyptian cast coins based on Axumite models occur in hoards from modern Israel and Lebanon as well as in Egypt.

A good many Egyptian bronze hoards close in the first half of the fifth century, with «Cross in Wreath», VOTA, and monogram types. Their deposit, in HCN's view, was not due to political or military events or to nomadic raids, but rather to the slow but relentless deterioration of conditions in Roman Egypt – the weakening of central authority, religious conflicts leading to civil unrest, and socioeconomic dislocations resulting from the formation of great landed estates. There is another cluster of seven bronze hoards that close during the reigns of Zeno and Anastasius (pre-reform). One of these was the Abu Mina hoard, whose closure is attributable to the filling of the receptacle into which the offerings were dropped, rather than to any external cause. HCN explicitly excludes the monetary reform of Anastasius as a cause for hoard closure in Egypt, because the reform was not effected there; Egypt had its own, later currency reform under Justin I. HCN supports his position with a second argument, that the individual finds from Abu Mina reflect a great multitude old bronze currency still circulating well into the sixth century. This claim would seem to require confirmation, since in most digs the late Roman and Byzantine strata cannot be distinguished; but there is now clear evidence of the continuing circulation of older coinage from closed contexts in the Diocese of the East (see below).

The failure to introduce into Egypt the reformed bronze coinage of Anastasius, comprising pieces denominated at 40, 20 and 10 nummi, and the later creation of a unique Egyptian system based on pieces of 12, 6, and 3 nummi, had the effect of creating a closed currency market within Egypt, such as had obtained under the Ptolemies and under Rome until the reform of Diocletian. In light of this new monetary stability, HCN imputes the closure or loss of post-reform hoards to nonmonetary causes, such as the Persian invasion or the Arab conquest of Egypt.

HCN identifies just seven bronze hoards from the Diocese of the East that closed in the fifth century or at the end of the fourth. In composition they generally parallel contemporary hoards from Egypt, but like gold hoards from the re-

5 J.G. Milne, The Currency of Egypt in the Fifth Century, NC 1926, pp. 48-51.

gion they show a weaker tendency to carry older coinage forward. The reform of Anastasius emerges as a decisive factor in hoard formation in Syria: HCN cites twenty bronze hoards (including one each from Paphos and Anemurium) that closed in the sixth or seventh centuries. Thirteen of these open with reformed bronzes of Anastasius, and only one contains pre-reform coinage. HCN argues that older bronze coinage continued to circulate, again based on a claim that pre- and post-reform coins are associated in assemblages of individual finds; this view can now be supported by hoard evidence from several foundation deposits recently cited by Bijovsky.[6] The low representation of pre-reform bronze coins in the hoards is to be explained, in HCN's view, by their meager value; he notes that hoarders also tended to exclude the new 5 nummi pieces, which are lacking from all but two of the hoards.

HCN devotes a number of pages to describing the chaotic currency situation that preceded the reform of Anastasius and the two stages of the reform itself: the introduction in 498 of 40, 20, and 10 nummi pieces on a light standard (36 folles to the Roman pound), and a doubling of the bronze weight standard in 512 (18 folles to the Roman pound). The hoards seem to reflect these stages. One – Sarafand/Sarepta, 1974 – consists exclusively of bronzes of the light standard, whereas twelve later hoards include few or no examples from the first stage of the Anastasian reform, but instead include Anastasian issues on the heavier standard alongside bronzes of succeeding emperors. HCN attributes this pattern to an official recall of Anastasius' first reformed coinage, rather than to the preference of hoarders for heavier («better») coinage, arguing that previous experience with Gresham's law would have compelled the withdrawal of inferior currency. He finds support for his interpretation in the individual finds from this period at Antioch, where 96.8% of the Anastasian folles are of the heavy standard. The contemporary individual finds from Gerasa show quite a different proportion of light to heavy folles, 44.4% to 55.5%.

Hoards and individual finds from the Diocese of the East include few or no bronze coins of Justinian issued between the years 539 and 565. HCN attributes this weak representation to the reform of Justinian, who in 538 raised the weight of the follis from 18 to 13.25 per Roman pound. HCN argues that the gap in the hoards and individual finds reflects an official recall of Justinian's heavy bronze issues. In contrast, bronzes of Justin II are remarkably well represented in hoards that close no later than 610. HCN relates this phenomenon to increases in the gold : bronze ratio and simultaneous reductions in the weight of the follis, so that an abundant bronze coinage was required for the purchase of gold to pay the drastically increased taxes. Rather less persuasive are HCN's attempts to relate smaller fluctuations in the graphs to particular short-lived monetary policies of

6 From 'En Nashut: D.T. Ariel, Coins from the Synagogue at 'En Nashut, IEJ 37, 1987, pp. 147-157. From Capernaeum: E. Arslan, Il deposito monetale della trincea XII nel cortile della Sinagoga di Cafarnao, SBFLA 47 (1997), pp. 245-328. Two unpublished foundation deposits from private dwellings at Ḥorvat Latatin and at Pella are cited by Bijovsky, *supra* n. 2, p. 197.

Tiberius II Constantine, in 578-580, and Heraclius, in 629-631. His conclusion that it was nearly impossible to establish a heavier weight remains somewhat hypothetical.

Bronzes of Phocas are only minimally represented in the find material from the Diocese of the East, but early issues of Heraclius of the years 610-616, often overstruck on coins of Phocas, are an important component of several hoards. Heraclius' practice of overstriking the coinage of his predecessor accounts for its absence from overall circulation. To explain the prevalence of the Heraclian issues, HCN cites the reconquest of the Syrian province and its occupation by the Byzantine military, which received this coinage as pay. Issues of Heraclius from the years 616-624 are much scarcer in the find material, and are assumed to have been carried elsewhere by the military. As in Egypt, historical events in the Diocese of the East were primarily responsible for the deposit of bronze hoards. Eight hoards were lost during the war between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires (604-629/30) and another four were lost at the moment of the Arab conquest of the province of Syria Palaestina (631). The contrast with the behavior of gold coinage is noteworthy.

Returning to Egypt in the Byzantine period, HCN explores the possibility of a correlation between monetary factors (gold : bronze exchange rate and bronze weight standard) and the frequency of coins represented in individual find assemblages. The phenomena here are the crude, underweight 12 nummi pieces inscribed for Phocas, apparently all imitative rather than official issues, and the much heavier weight standards employed during the interlude of Persian rule. Consistent with the metrological patterns seen in the Diocese of the East, lighter coins predominate. Thus the light dodekanummia of Phocas are very common, and coins of Heraclius are also common, but there is a gap in the finds for the Persian occupation. HCN attributes the absence of Persian bronzes to metrology, though he earlier relates the parallel gap in Syria to the great financial misery caused by the Persian wars (p. 155). The reviewer thinks it likely that this fiduciary coinage, guaranteed by an enemy state, was outlawed, collected, and melted down for recoining.

HCN notes that the quantitative study of mint representation in the different finds is troubled by two biases in the source material. First, coins of small module are more difficult to attribute to their mints than are larger coins, because their edges, including the exergue with any mintmark, are more likely to be eroded away. Second, some varieties with distinctive types, such as the 12 nummi bronzes of Alexandria, can be attributed to their mints with certainty even when quite corroded, with the result that their mints will be overrepresented. Nevertheless, the breakdown of mints by site conforms largely to expectation. At Egyptian sites, issues of Alexandria and Egyptian imitations are overwhelmingly preponderant, except in the period 450-491, when coins of Constantinople are approximately as abundant as Egyptian imitations, the Alexandria mint itself being closed. In the Diocese of the East, Antioch is the dominant mint of the late Roman period, though beginning in the third quarter of the fourth century Constantinople, Cyzicus, and Nicomedia also contributed importantly to the monetary supply; at some sites, especially in the fifth century, Constantinople actually exceeds Antioch. In the Byzantine period, Constantinople is normally preponderant, with Antioch in second place. In both Egypt and the Diocese of the east there is a significant representation of western mints for the years 324-346.

HCN has provided a scholarly resource of lasting value. It will be the first stop for anyone wishing to ask or answer a question about monetary circulation in the late Roman and Byzantine East, though many users will regret the lack of a general index. HCN himself concedes that his analysis is just a first step toward deeper understanding: His graphs show only the origin of the coinage in circulation. They cannot reveal how swiftly coins moved from place to place, nor how frequently they changed hands in economic transactions, nor the overall makeup of the circulating medium at a given place and time.

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Nouvel Atlas des Monnaies Gauloises. I. De la Seine au Rhin

Saint-Germain-en-Laye 2002. Editions Commios. ISBN 2-951864-0-6. € 87

Das vorliegende Buch ist der erste Band eines Unternehmens, welches sich eine Neu-Edition des unter Kelten-Numismatikern bekannten «Atlas de monnaies gauloises» von Henri de la Tour (dlT) aus dem Jahre 1892 vorgenommen hat.[1] Zwar wurde Letzterer im 20. Jh. mehrmals nachgedruckt und einmal ergänzt (S. 6), doch wird der Atlas angesichts des Zuwachses an Material in den letzten 110 Jahren seinem Anspruch, möglichst alle keltischen Münztypen abzubilden, nicht mehr gerecht (S. 8). Natürlich mag man einwenden, dass für einzelne Regionen und Typen Spezialuntersuchungen existieren, dennoch ist ein Handbuch, das der Numismatiker bei der Bestimmung eines für ihn unbekannten Typs zu allererst zur Hand nehmen kann, gerade bei der Vielfalt des keltischen Münzwesens unerlässlich.

Dementsprechend wollen die Autoren einen neuen Atlas vorlegen, der dem Forscher, spezialisiert oder nicht, die Arbeit erleichtern soll (S. 9).

1 H. de la Tour, Atlas de monnaies gauloises (Paris 1892).

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