

Karl-Josef Gilles, **Der römische Goldmünzenschatz aus der Feldstraße in Trier.** Trierer Zeitschrift, Beiheft 34. Publisher Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Trier 2013. 268 pages, 80 in-text plates.

Since its discovery in September 1993 the largest recorded deposit of Roman Imperial gold coins was known from relatively numerous but mostly quite laconic mentions made in journals, conference proceedings, catalogues or the daily press. Thanks to the acquisition of 2518 coins belonging to this find the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier holds one of the richest collections of Roman gold coins in the world. Needless to say a coin-hoard of this class excited major interest which went far beyond the world of numismatics and scholars, with similar, but varying stories about the circumstances of its discovery. It has even entered the German Wikipedia with an own lemma. Consequently the arrival of the monograph on this deposit published twenty years after its discovery was a great sensation. Its publication was accompanied by the opening of a splendid exhibition, and a research conference in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier organized by Karl-Josef Gilles in the autumn of 2013 in which I had the pleasure to participate.

The hoard was discovered in the city centre of modern Trier, on the site of a multi-storey car park next to the hospital Mutterhaus der Borromäerinnen. In Roman times the space used to be a part of the western district of Augusta Treverorum with the Temple of Aesculapius close by. Other valuable deposits have been recorded in this area of Trier, including a hoard, found in 1628, of forty-nine richly decorated silver plate weighing over 114 kilograms, a gilded silver bowl with the representation of an apostle discovered in 1992, and individual gold coins.

What draws one's attention in the book under review is its excellent and careful edition. The author of the monograph is an expert numismatist and experi-

enced editor, who worked on its elaboration for many years. The catalogue of the aurei forming the deposit was made in the form of a table, admirably lucid, in keeping with the standards of modern Roman numismatics. As far as I could find all the coins have been identified correctly, all 2518 specimens are beautifully illustrated, all of them in black-and-white plates, and some even in colour. Additionally, the work includes descriptions and photographic images of sixty more coins, which may be attributed to the deposit more or less reliably. The illustrated catalogue, which forms the main part of the monograph, has substantial value as a starting point for further studies.

Gilles sets out by presenting a rather extraordinary and complicated story of the discovery of the deposit, which in some places is reminiscent of a crime story. The need to lay deep foundations for the construction of a multi-storey car park at Feldstraße made it necessary in September 1993 for the staff of the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier to carry out a rescue excavation, or rather, an archaeological oversight of a construction area of approximately two thousand eight-hundred square meters. As it progressed, next to several features dated between the second and the fourth centuries, the lower level of a cellar unit was recorded, with a length of circa thirty meters and a height of about sixty centimetres. The work was carried out under extreme time pressure, using heavy equipment. This is how, without being recorded by archaeologists, a significant part of the hoard, the upper part of a bronze vessel, complete with a lid, and at least 420 gold coins, found its way with the soil from the cellar area to the shovel of the digger and then to the lorry. Clearly, as it was then common in the German tradition of archaeological fieldwork, no metal detectors were used as they were working, even though Gilles does not mention anything about this subject. The soil was transported to the landfill at Klockelberg, across the Moselle River, where amateurs with detectors were already waiting. They soon came across gold coins and fragments of a bronze vessel with its lid. The first coins were lifted from the soil still within the sight of the lorry driver.

The situation described is a quite commonly encountered practice during rescue excavation or archaeological supervision made in larger urban centres with a history dating back to at least the medieval period. Happily, this situation is slowly changing, despite the fact that so far some archaeologists and conservators are intransigent and continue to question metal detector use while cases like the one described here, and many others too, leave them cold.

Some of the soil from the cellar area remained on the edge of the trenches and that very same day amateur detectorists moved in and soon recovered more coins. Feldstraße is at the very centre of the city, less than a kilometre from the Rheinisches Landesmuseum so it is quite surprising that nobody registered this fact and informed the police. The lorry driver admittedly

informed the company staff, and later, its owner too, that coins had been discovered in the soil taken out from the construction site, but they did not notify the museum. Most likely, not without reason they were worried that this discovery could delay the progress of the construction work, all the more so because there were plans for the laying of a poured concrete foundation for the car park the next day. More soil was taken out to the dump and the detectorists paid the driver one hundred German Marks to have it spread out. The construction workers soon left the site and the rescue excavation too, without locking the entrance, hard to say whether out of forgetfulness or by intent, although some gold coins also came into their possession given by finders. After the workers had left the site the most dedicated of the amateurs showed up, and in the area of the cellar unit using a detector located the vast majority of the scattered coins, as well as the base of the vessel holding 561 aurei still in situ, yet unrecorded by archaeologists.

However, after a telephone conversation at night with Gilles the detectorist's conscience got the better of him, and the next morning he brought his finds to the museum: a plastic bag of almost one thousand four hundred aurei and the vessel base filled with coins. He claimed also that they had been discovered by a third party in the hope that the cellar area would be covered over with the concrete foundation and nobody would find out about the hoard that had been found underneath. In the days that passed he delivered a further 154 coins; altogether he brought in a total of 2104 coins, thus 83,6 percent of the recovered part of the hoard. Two other finders came forward with coins they had discovered in the landfill at Kockelsberg. Within two weeks the museum succeeded in recovering more than two thousand five hundred coins, that is, presumably, about 96 percent of the hoard, from nineteen individuals, nine of whom were original finders. All of them remain anonymous to the reader and are referred to quite euphemistically as HK 1, HK 2 and so on, from the word »Herkunft«, that is provenance. Characteristically enough the museum did not take the initiative to make a search of the site with metal detectors despite the fact that individual coins continued to surface even half a month later. What is more, in 1973 the same location yielded the find of an analogous lid from a bronze vessel and it is possible that another, similar hoard is still to be found under the garage or, undetected by archaeologists and amateur prospectors, was taken out to the town dump.

Sadly enough, the reader is not told whether legal measures, if any, were taken against the finder, who, on the one hand had entered the site of an archaeological investigation illegally, but on the other probably had been instrumental in saving the better part of the coin-hoard from being buried under construction concrete. We learn nothing either of the consequences, if any, suffered by the staff of the company and its owner and whether the individuals who of their own free

will brought the coins recovered in the dump were rewarded in some way. This question is very interesting and important from the point of view of archaeological ethics.

I have deliberately reconstructed here – following in the author's footsteps – the shocking circumstances of discovery of the largest deposit of Roman Imperial aurei discovered so far because its case is highly instructive and demonstrates the damage that may be caused by the failure to use metal detectors in archaeological field-work. Sadly, this is still too common a practice especially in excavations made in the Mediterranean region. In short, this sort of research has to be recognized as unprofessional, one that often results in the failure to recover very significant evidence such as coins.

Discussing the way the coins had been hidden, Gilles focused his attention on the bucket-like bronze vessel and finds analogical to it, and on leather bags which originally would have held the coins making up the deposit. The vessel had been concealed about fifty centimetres below the floor of a cellar in use during the second to fourth century. Close to buckets known as the Östland type the vessel had a slip lid with a built-in locking mechanism. It was heavily corroded and cut into three parts by the digger shovel when lifted from the ground. Only the base of the bucket remained in situ together with 561 coins.

The vessel has a relatively limited number of comparanda and as the author is right to say, its flimsy construction was better suited for storing valuables than for transporting them. Found next to the coins resting in the lower portion of the vessel were fragments of cowhide and thin cloth. The coin rolls had been wrapped in a piece of cloth and then packed in leather bags. At least one of these bags would have been secured using a seal-box, type 2b according to Alex R. Furger and Emilie Riha, discovered near to the bottom of the vessel. The author notes that often bags were fastened using a seal-box but does not give any examples. For the most part money bags were secured with lead sealings, although admittedly, there is some evidence for the use of seal-boxes like, for example, in one of the hoards from Kalkriese.

It is hard to say how widespread this practice was for the lack of a larger number of coin-hoards documented in situ. Gilles cites as an interesting analogy to the way the coins had been formed into a roll for safe-keeping the hoard from the not too distant Horath in Rhine-Land-Palatinate retaining rather well-preserved remains of bags, or better said, small bundles made of coarse linen. Neither does the author cite close analogies to finds of coin rolls placed in a bag and a bronze vessel such as for example the hoard from Nefenbach in Switzerland (M. von Kaenel et al., *Der Münzhort aus dem Gutshof in Nefenbach. Antoniniane und Denare von Septimius Severus bis Postumus*. Zürcher Denkmalpflege, Arch. Monogr. 16 [Zurich 1993]) or the deposit from the castellum at Regensburg-Kumpfmühl in east Bavaria (A. Boos / L.-M. Dallmeier / B. Over-

beck, *Der römische Schatz von Regensburg-Kumpfmühl* [Regensburg 2000]).

Analysis of the contents of the deposit made by the author is largely a formal affair, some of the calculations and tabulated lists is of minor significance for the subsequent findings. Presumably, there were more than 2650 aurei in the hoard, about 18,5 kg, of which circa ninety-six percent passed to the museum collections in Trier. The earliest coins are the two issues of Nero from the period 63–64, the latest appear to be the two aurei of Septimius Severus (for Julia Domna) from 193–196. Except for four percent of coins of Vespasian struck at Lyon (Lugdunum), the remaining ninety-six percent were minted in Rome.

Thus, only two coins date from before Nero's reform of A. D. 64 – which reduced the weight of the aureus – and found their way into the deposit because of their substantial wear and low weight. Coins from the debasement of A. D. 64 until Titus account for almost three fourths of the hoard, and coins from the period 64–68 for one third of it, the effect of the impressive minting activity following Nero's reforms; over ninety-nine percent are aurei coined up to the period 167–168, and six specimens are almost thirty years younger, from the period 193–196. Only fourteen coins (0,6 percent) date from 82 to 99/100, the period after the return to the pre-A. D. 64 standard (mean weight 7,27 grams). The small number of the aurei of Domitian had, in the view of Gilles, economic causes associated with their rapid withdrawal from circulation in a way similar to pre-A. D. 64 coins. In discussing the matter of an overall shortage in the deposit of aurei with a higher weight from before Nero's reform, Gilles neglects to mention as a vital factor the regulations introduced by Trajan in 107 withdrawing from circulation coins issued before A. D. 64.

According to the author, the deposit was originally assembled in late 167, at the latest, in early 168, which is indicated especially by coins at the bottom of the vessel in a leather bag fastened with a seal-box. Interesting in this context is the identification of two coin rolls found there, one of one-hundred four, the other of eighty-nine specimens nearly identical in their composition, that means from Nero's reform (64/65) up to Marcus Aurelius. Gilles suggests that this deposit was topped up in 193–196 by a much smaller bag, originally found at the very top of the vessel, near to the lid, containing at least six aurei, Didius Julianus (193) up to Septimius Severus (for Julia Domna), an issue dated traditionally to the period 193–196 although the minting of this coinage on the accession of this emperor appears to be most likely. It is possible that this bag also contained some earlier coins, although, on the other hand, the deposit does not include coins from the final years of the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.

It is regrettable that other than the tables the monograph is fully deficient of statistical data in the form of diagrams, especially a comparison of the composition of the deposit with other, relatively numerous

hoards of aurei hidden within the Roman Empire during the latter half of the second century.

Gilles enumerates and illustrates in colour all the unique and so far unknown aurei types, proposing their dating based on the chronology adopted in Roman Imperial Coinage corpora. More than eighty (two percent) specimens of a new type or an unknown variety are recorded in the deposit, which is, especially for gold coins of the early Empire, a sensation, but on the other hand does not surprise, given their sheer number. And it is not only the variation in the division of the legends but also wholly unknown reverses, variants of images and legends, bust and die combinations, some of them encountered so far only on denarii. And yet these new legend or image types are not accorded any discussion or interpretation. The same goes for the very precise calculations of the rarity of individual coin types present in the hoard, die-linked specimens or the analysis of the alignment of the obverse axis to the reverse axis, which do not lead to any further conclusions, if only to what extent the structure of the hoard is representative of the mass of gold originating from finds or recorded in corpora and auction catalogues. At the same time it seems that despite the high absolute number of unique coins and also the sizeable group of die-linked pieces, the composition of the deposit is for the most part quite typical. The large number of die-linked coins is likely to be the result of the large number of coins making up the hoard, although in order to prove this one would have to present appropriate statistical and comparative calculations with other deposits of aurei from the same period.

A vital element of the study is the analysis of the metrology and the chemical composition of the coins. The author separated seven coins in the hoard which because of their weight, substantially lower than the theoretical (by between about ten to fifteen percent), he described as fractions of an aureus (*Teilstücke*). Still, this difference is less than one gram, thus, is less than one scripulum (ca. 1,14 gram), the smallest Roman unit of weight. Which means that these are ordinary aurei, only as a result of the al marco method used in casting their flans, with a much reduced weight and at times clearly reduced in size but thickened flan. Whereas in a situation of excessive weight it was always possible to clip the flan, in a situation where a flan was markedly underweight nothing could be done for it.

Quite useful are the analyses of the chemical composition of sixty-one aurei, using the X-ray fluorescence, perhaps not the most exact method for testing coins but sufficient for gold as a rough guess. This analysis established that the aurei minted in Rome invariably have a gold content of over ninety-eight percent, on average, about ninety-nine percent. Only the Vespasian coins minted in Lyon were struck from gold of a lower standard, on average, of circa ninety-seven percent. Thus, the analysis of content of this precious metal may be a relevant index of the provenance for the aurei. Regrettably, no analysis of the composition was made of any

of the latest six coins which, given the political turmoil of that period might have been quite interesting.

The most constructive chapter is the one in which coins with punch marks and graffiti are discussed. Their analysis is enabled by excellent quality illustrations. Gilles identified not less than 413 such aurei (16,4 percent), although to my mind some of these marks could be accidental scratch marks or abrasions. Some of the aurei have more than one punch mark or graffiti. Their largest number is on the first-century coins, especially from the time of Nero and of the Flavian emperors. This practice ran out during the first years of Hadrian's reign. Punch marks and graffiti usually have the form of a single letter of the Latin, much more rarely, the Greek alphabet; ligatures and a larger number of letters, three at the most, appear very rarely. The author of the monograph, and its reviewer also, are not in a position to give a convincing interpretation of the purpose of these marks; they could be designations of ownership or were made by money-changers to confirm the quality and authenticity of the coins, that means, the high content of precious metal, which seems to be the more likely explanation.

The aurei from the Feldstraße hoard were equivalent to 66 250 denarii, or 265 000 sestertii, and nearly correspond to the year's salary of the provincial governor of Gallia Belgica stationed in Trier, and surpass the annual income of a provincial fiscal procurator. According to Gilles, it cannot be easily established whether the hoard was private or public property, perhaps belonging to a temple, or possibly, to the emperor, maybe Clodius Albinus, although this last possibility seems unlikely. He suggests that originally the hoard was assembled and deposited in A. D. 167 when the country was in the grip of typhoid, and remained unchanged at least until A. D. 193. However, attributing the failure to recover this deposit with this deadly epidemic is rather doubtful because in this case it would have remained hidden to our day in an unmodified form. Instead, around 196 it was topped up with a small number of aurei from the reign of Didius Julianus and Septimius Severus. The non-recovery and abandoning of the deposit after this period may, according to Gilles, have been occasioned by the fact that its owner or administrator did not survive the civil war waged by Septimius Severus and Clodius Albinus. The latter tried to capture Trier, failed, and committed suicide near Lyon in February of 197. This interpretation seems quite likely. Despite renovation work on the cellar and its use until the end of the fourth century, the hoard lay intact.

In the final chapters of his work Gilles discusses the finds of aurei hoards which close with the coins of Nero to Caracalla from the territory of the western provinces (including Italy) and the region of Trier. He names seventy-five of these hoards, but regrettably, lists them by modern country instead of by Roman province. This list is definitely incomplete, as only in Pompeii more than five of these deposits were discov-

ered, even if we adopt the criteria named by the author. The distribution of these finds on a map, especially their concentrations, was definitely greatly influenced by the level of recording of deposits during the modern period. Especially significant is their absence in the area of northern Italy, Sicily and Dalmatia. It's a shame that the qualitative criterion was not adopted when plotting the finds on the map, that is the size of individual deposits; then the region of the provinces of Gaul and Germania between the Loire and the Rhine would stand out compared with the use of the quantitative criterion. It is interesting that hoards containing the largest number of aurei end, similar to the hoard from Feldstraße, with coins from the time of the civil war in the early reign of Septimius Severus. In Trier and its region next to the Feldstraße deposit four more aurei hoards have been recorded: three small, ending in coins from the time of Antoninus Pius (143/144 or 141–144), and one large, from Perscheid, discovered in 1693, containing nearly six hundred aurei, the latest of them issues from the reign of Commodus (for Crispina), from A.D. 180–182. A large part of coins from this last deposit were set into decorative gold cups.

The superb graphic of the layout of the monograph needs to be stressed, the six thousand excellent quality photographic images of the coins in particular. There is a minor technical flaw: in most of its copies pages 75 f. and 93 f. are doubled. Also, the text abounds in repetitions and overlapping themes, the book does not make for an easy reading.

As regards its substance, the reviewed study is deficient in statistical analyses, a histogram of chronological distribution, and also, the metrology of the coins from the hoard and their comparison in diagrams developed for other deposits containing aurei from the second half of the second century. They would have underlined much better many of the arguments put forward and the conclusions reached.

The monograph under review when treated as a richly commented, superbly illustrated museum catalogue published with the greatest care, is a faultless publication, but as a scholarly monograph, it leaves one, as indicated earlier, somewhat unsatisfied.

Warsaw

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