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HOARDING IN IRON AGE AND ROMAN BRITAIN:
THE PUZZLE OF THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD
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Introduction

In my first presidential address I provided an overview of coin hoarding in Britain, and noted that the study was linked to a project to study the contexts of Roman hoards from Britain, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. This project started in summer 2013 and will not conclude until 2016; at its conclusion there will be a database of hoards and a volume setting out the results of the project. The project itself has already been modified since its inception, as it is being extended to include Iron Age hoards and we are grateful to Philip de Jersey for generously giving us access to his forthcoming corpus of Iron Age coin hoards, to be published by this Society. In addition, thanks to a Collaborative Doctoral Award, a PhD student will analyse hoards of Iron Age metalwork from Britain from October 2014. In light of this, the project has been renamed ‘Crisis or continuity? Hoarding in Iron Age and Roman Britain, with special reference to the 3rd century AD’ and our two areas of focus are the later third century and the Iron Age-Roman transition. In this paper I propose to discuss, as a case study, the hoards of precious-metal coins from the last eighty years of Roman Britain.

Late Roman silver coin hoards

Turning to late Roman precious-metal hoards from Britain, the most salient feature is just how much Britain stands out in the period between 364 and 408, especially as regards the silver hoards. The coins issued during these years, *siliquae* and *miliarenses*, were struck at mints across the Empire and occur as single finds throughout the Roman world, but hoarding them (or at least not recovering hoards of them) seems to be a characteristic of Britain. There is no other period when the hoarding pattern from Britain is so different from that of the rest of the Empire. We have an extraordinarily rich concentration of hoards of coins from this period including, most famously, the great Hoxne hoard from Suffolk; this is still by far the largest coin hoard of this period from anywhere in the Roman Empire; I will discuss that hoard at the end of this paper.

In 1997 I published a paper which listed 419 gold and silver hoards of the period from 300 to 700 AD from across the Roman world and from beyond the frontiers in Scandinavia, Germany and to the north of the Danube frontier. A summary by metal is shown in Fig. 1.

There are 249 hoards of gold coins, 44 mixed hoards of gold and silver and 126 of silver coins. As regards the gold hoards, Britain (the uppermost column) is well represented but does not particularly stand out: there are 15 finds, compared with 164 from the rest of the Empire.
(central column) and 70 from outside the Empire (bottom column). But if we look at the silver hoards the picture is completely different: there are 73 hoards from Britain and only 25 from the rest of the Empire (and another 28 from outside the Empire), while all the British finds (with the exception of the Patching hoard) are concentrated in the fifty-year period between AD 360 and 408.

Previous discussions of late Roman precious-metal coin hoards from Britain

This phenomenon has been noted by numismatists since Mommsen, but he did not suggest any reason for it, and no one since has offered a truly convincing explanation, as King noted in this journal thirty years ago: 'It is not at all clear, for example, why Britain should be so rich in silver hoards datable by their contents to approximately 380 to 410.' Evans suggested that there may be a link between the hoards of *siliquae* and silver mines in Britain, and in support of this he cited a Roman lead pig from Charterhouse in Mendip with the inscription EX ARG, denoting that the silver has been extracted from the lead. This suggestion was also taken up by Sutherland. Twenty-seven lead pigs inscribed EX ARG are known from Britain, suggesting that silver was mined by the Romans, but the Charterhouse in Mendip specimen belongs to the reign of Vespasian and no pigs are known later than Marcus Aurelius, or pos-

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5 These figures are seventeen years out of date and we now have 56 gold and 160 silver hoards from Britain – more than double the number known in 1997. However, there will be more finds from the Continent as well and I doubt that the proportions will be very different.

6 Mommsen 1873, 133.

7 King 1981, 5.

8 Evans 1915, 500–1; *RIB* II.2404.4.

9 Sutherland 1937, 91.

10 *RIB* II catalogues 70 inscribed lead pigs from Britain (2404.1–72). Of these, 23 originate from the Mendip mines, 3 from south Welsh mines, 3 from mines in Shropshire/Powys, 8 from Flintshire mines, 22 from Derbyshire mines, 4 from Yorkshire mines and 7 from other sources. Thirty-five have emperors’ names and these include Claudius I (2), Nero (1), Vespasian (15), Nerva (1), Trajan (1), Hadrian (8), Antoninus Pius (3) and Marcus Aurelius (4). 27 are inscribed EX ARG indicating that silver was being extracted from the lead.
possibly Septimius Severus, suggesting that mining of lead stopped around the end of the second century AD. Furthermore, the evidence from elsewhere in the Empire does not suggest a clear link between mining areas and significant concentrations of hoards or single finds of coins.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1932 Mattingly commented: ‘Gold hoards are very scarce; the beautiful Corbridge find is the one notable exception in modern times. Silver hoards, on the other hand, are amazingly common – the miliaria and siliquae of the late fourth century are in fact scarcely found hoarded except here. The reason for this curious phenomenon is worth searching out. We might guess that Britain was on a silver, rather than a gold standard, that silver hoards represent the buried wealth of the Roman-Britons and that the rapacity of the tax-collector may have been as much feared as the fury of the barbarian invader. It is doubtful if the map of these hoards will finally show much evidence for barbarian invasion as operative at all.’\textsuperscript{12} J.W.E. Pearce, the great expert on the coinage of this period and author of \textit{RIC IX}, published many hoards of \textit{siliquae} and discussed the structure of \textit{siliqua} hoards and the problem of clipping,\textsuperscript{13} but never addressed the wider issue of why silver hoards are so common in Britain. O’Neil provided another perceptive discussion of Theodosian hoards from Britain, both bronze and precious-metal coins, and notes how common hoards of \textit{siliquae} are from Britain and how rare they are from the Continent, without suggesting an explanation.\textsuperscript{14}

In an influential paper on late Roman gold and silver coin hoards from Britain, Carson noted the theory that ‘the frequency of late Roman silver coin hoards in Britain in comparison with the relative paucity of such hoards in other areas’ is due to ‘more thorough recording in this country’, but dismissed it: in support of this he cited three hoards of \textit{siliquae} from France, Italy and Romania.\textsuperscript{15} Instead he suggested the reason for the large number of \textit{siliqua} hoards from Britain in the late fourth century was the scarcity of gold coins of that period, noting that ‘only four substantial gold hoards are on record [from Britain], Bredgar (Claudius I), Corbridge I (Antoninus Pius), Water Newton (Constantius II and Constans), and Corbridge II (Maximus)\textsuperscript{16}. However, the many hoards and single finds of gold coins of the second half of the fourth century AD from Britain published by Bland and Loriot in 2010 mean that this explanation is no longer tenable: in Fig. 1 we have seen that late Roman gold hoards are proportionately as common from Britain as from elsewhere in the Empire, and Bland and Loriot were able to catalogue as many as 57 hoards containing gold coins with terminal dates between AD 350 and 475,\textsuperscript{17} while Fig. 17 shows that single finds of gold coins from Britain have a late fourth-century peak that is only a little lower than that in the first century AD.

In his discussion of this phenomenon in the publication of the Hoxne Treasure, Peter Guest noted ‘the answer to the problem raised by the quantity of hoards from late Roman Britain containing gold and silver objects must therefore lie in the peculiarities of the hoard record in Britain, rather than in the circulation patterns of precious metals [citing Bland 1997]. If this is right, the question arises whether the unusual nature of the pattern in Britain is a consequence either of a greater frequency of the burial of hoards there than on the Continent, or a lower frequency of retrieval. The answer seems to be that it is a combination of both: more hoards were originally buried in Britain and, as a consequence, more were left the ground’.\textsuperscript{18} In conclusion Guest asked ‘is it possible that in Britain hoards were buried without the intention of ever recovering them?’\textsuperscript{19} Other recent commentators on coin circulation and hoarding in Britain have not directly addressed this question.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{11} Collingwood 1922, 82–3, also commented on the frequency of silver hoards from Britain of this period, noting that the latest coins are of Constantine III (407–11), while on the Continent later issues are found; he did not, however, suggest a reason.
\textsuperscript{12} Mattingly 1932, 95.
\textsuperscript{13} For example, Pearce 1933.
\textsuperscript{14} O’Neil 1933.
\textsuperscript{15} Carson 1976.
\textsuperscript{16} Carson 1976, 79.
\textsuperscript{17} Bland and Loriot 2010.
\textsuperscript{18} Guest 2005, 30–1.
\textsuperscript{19} See also his discussion of this phenomenon in Guest 1997.
\textsuperscript{20} Casey 1980; Reece 1987 and 2002; Abdy 2002.
This phenomenon has been largely ignored by historians who have written general accounts of Roman Britain,\textsuperscript{21} including those who have written accounts of the end of the province.\textsuperscript{22} However, some recent accounts pay greater attention to hoarding in this period: for example, Millett had a brief discussion of late Roman hoards of plate and jewellery and suggests ‘their burial more likely continues the earlier habit of burying rich objects for ritual purposes’,\textsuperscript{23} and Hobbs and Jackson’s account of Roman Britain, which uses the British Museum’s collections as a starting point, discussed many individual hoards.\textsuperscript{24} They noted: ‘The hoards indicate that a point was reached when it was no longer deemed wise to keep hold of these objects, as being caught with them was potentially dangerous. All these hoards were buried, probably for later recovery, although in some cases there may have been a religious motive – the placing of material under ‘divine’ protection or ‘gifting’ to the gods in the hope of salvation. The increasing vulnerability of the province to ‘barbarian’ attack was no doubt a factor, but we should also consider the possibility of internal strife, which made the wealthy feel insecure, particularly as the military presence significantly declined after the time of Constantine III (ad 407–11).’\textsuperscript{25}

Esmonde Cleary’s 1989 treatment of late Roman Britain included a detailed discussion of coin circulation and hoarding in the fourth and early fifth centuries.\textsuperscript{26} He was aware of the disproportionate numbers of silver hoards from Britain, but did not suggest any reasons for this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{27} Similarly in his treatment of late Roman Britain, de la Bédoyère had a chapter entitled ‘Treasure hoards and the end’ which contained this explanation for late Roman treasure hoards: ‘Hoarding by burial was the standard practical method of protecting valuables in the pre-modern world. Although it increased during periods of uncertainty, hoarding occurred at all times and in all places. Gold and silver provided the best medium for storing a large amount of wealth in a portable form. In the normal course of events hoards were recovered in order to redisplay plate, and pay taxes and other debts. The residue may then have been rehoarded, and perhaps added to, recovered and so on. All that remain are the caches which at some point in the cycle were lost, forgotten about, or whose owners were prevented from recovering them. Individual high-value items normally only enter the archaeological record through casual loss, and for obvious reasons this was (and is) extremely rare. As a result hoards are the most important source of surviving ancient treasure.’\textsuperscript{28} Noting the large number of silver hoards of this period, de la Bédoyère commented: ‘The preference for silver in Britain may have been traditional and might explain Carausius’ enthusiasm a century earlier for producing pure silver coinage.’\textsuperscript{29} In the most recent scholarly account of Roman Britain David Mattingly noted: ‘The distribution of c. 100 late Roman coin hoards found in Britain is revealing of massive failure of elite groups in eastern England to retrieve their stored wealth.’\textsuperscript{30}

One explanation that has been suggested by the current author is that there was a tradition in Britain of saving and hoarding silver coins,\textsuperscript{31} and this was adopted, probably independently, by de la Bédoyère and also by Guest, who cites Bland 1997.\textsuperscript{32} However, that begs as many questions as it answers and it is worth considering the distribution of other silver artefacts of this period to see whether that offers any insights into the pattern of the coin hoards.

\textsuperscript{21} For example, Collingwood and Myres 1936; Richmond 1963; Frere 1967, 1978 and 1991; Scullard 1979; Salway 1981 and 1993; Wacher 1978; Todd 1981.
\textsuperscript{22} For example, Johnson 1980; Faulkner 2000; Dark 2000 (who discusses the end of coin circulation after 400 (pp. 54–5), but not hoarding as such).
\textsuperscript{23} Millett 1995, 120. For a more extended discussion of this theme by the same author see Millett 1994.
\textsuperscript{24} Hobbs and Jackson 2010.
\textsuperscript{25} Hobbs and Jackson 2010, 154.
\textsuperscript{26} Esmonde Cleary 1989, 91–9, 138–40.
\textsuperscript{27} Esmonde Cleary 2013, a general account of the western provinces in the late Empire, has a detailed treatment of hoarding in the third century, but does not discuss the late fourth- and fifth-century hoards.
\textsuperscript{29} de la Bédoyère 1999, 160; see also de la Bédoyère 2006, 258–9; Moorhead and Stuttard 2012, 242.
\textsuperscript{30} Mattingly 2006, 538.
\textsuperscript{31} Bland 1997, 39–42.
\textsuperscript{32} de la Bédoyère 1999, 160; Guest 2005, 30–1.
Late Roman silver plate, ingots and brooches

Plate

Late Roman silver plate was manufactured and used throughout the Empire, and in 2006 Hobbs recorded 46 hoards of the fourth and fifth centuries that contained silver plate and other objects but excluded coins, while a further 28 hoards combined silver coins with precious-metal objects. A recent volume arising from a conference on the Traprain law treasure of *hacksilber* contains a good summary of recent work on the subject.

Ingots

Silver ingots, in the shape of a double-axe, were made from around AD 300 to the early fifth century. They bear makers’ stamps as a guarantee of purity (Fig. 2). We know that from the accession of Julian in 361, and very likely earlier, each legionary soldier received a donative on the accession of a new emperor of five gold *solidi* and a pound of silver and these ingots, which typically weigh a pound, almost certainly represent such donatives. One would, therefore, expect these ingots to be found where soldiers are based.

Brooches

Another artefact type which also shows a similar distribution are late Roman crossbow brooches (see Fig. 4). These have been studied by Swift, who concludes that they were worn by the military and imperial officials. The brooches are concentrated along the Rhine and Danube frontiers with a scattering across Britain and northern Gaul with almost no examples in southern Gaul or the Mediterranean provinces.

Distribution

The distribution of hoards containing silver plate and silver ingots is summarized in Table 1 and Fig. 5 and shown on Fig. 3. With very few exceptions, ingots are found along the frontiers of the western Empire. In fact their distribution is clearly closely tied to the presence of the

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33 Hobbs 2006.
35 See Weigels 2003 for a corpus of silver ingots: he catalogued 82 examples from 25 hoards.
36 Hendy 1985, 177.
37 Swift 2000.
military (with a few examples that passed beyond the frontier into Ireland and Germany – perhaps these were paid to the laeti, federate troops recruited from peoples outside the Empire in the late fourth century, who subsequently took them home). Hoards containing silver plate are slightly more widespread than ingots or hoards of silver coins, as there are five finds from Italy and four from north Africa, but they too show a strong bias to Britain and the Rhine and Danube frontiers.

If we look at the hoards from outside Britain that contain silver coins, there are eighty in all, half from within the Empire and half from without. These too have a concentration along the Rhine and Danube frontiers of the Roman Empire, in Germany to the east of the Rhine and to the north of the Danube frontier. The similarities between the distribution of crossbow brooches and of hoards of silver coins and finds of ingots is striking, except for the fact that the brooches are not so concentrated in Britain and are more heavily concentrated along the frontier. Hoards of plate also occur in Britain in some quantity and along the Rhine and Danube frontiers, but in contrast to the ingots and crossbow brooches, they are also found in the Mediterranean provinces of Spain, Africa and Italy. Guggisberg has shown very clearly how many categories of late Roman precious-metal artefacts – Fidelity rings, Kaiserfibeln, gold medallions, silver vessels, ingots and so on were made by the Emperor for use as donatives and given both to recipients within the Empire and also to peoples beyond the frontier.\(^38\)

The concentration of finds of silver ingots and other artefacts such as crossbow brooches and, to a lesser extent, of silver plate in the frontier provinces of the western Roman provinces, might suggest that the large numbers of late fourth-century hoards of silver coins in Britain reflects the substantial military presence in the province. However, Britain does not have the same preponderance of finds of these other artefacts as it has of hoards of siliquae.

In addition, it needs to be borne in mind that the army stationed in Britain in the late fourth century was much smaller than that of the first and second centuries AD. The latest estimate of the number of troops in Britain in the late fourth century, based on the information in the Notitia Dignitatum, is that there were 5,000–6,000 comitatenses and no more than 12,500 limitanei;\(^39\) this compares with a strength of 50,000 soldiers two centuries earlier.\(^40\) So perhaps we

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\(^{38}\) Guggisberg 2013.

\(^{39}\) Mattingly 2006, 238–9.

\(^{40}\) James 1984, followed by Esmonde Cleary 1989, 61–2 suggests a smaller number: no more than 12,000 men. Of course the same shrinkage in the size of the army would have occurred along the Rhine and Danube frontiers.
Fig. 3. Hoards of late Roman silver coins (c. 330–700 AD; plus signs), silver plate (dots) and silver ingots (triangles) (map by Dan Pett).
Fig. 4. Distribution of late Roman crossbow brooches (Swift 2000, 28).

Fig. 5. Hoards of silver coins, ingots and plate.
should look for an explanation in the tradition of hoarding silver in Britain, although I do not find this totally satisfactory.

**Hoarding in Britain, AD 330–408**

Some 700 hoards of coins of all metals are known with a terminal date between 337, the death of Constantine I, and 408, the first year of Constantine III’s reign, after which the supply of fresh coins to Britain from the Roman mints becomes very irregular. Just under 200 of these hoards contain precious metal coins, while some 500 have bronze coins. In Fig. 6 I have divided these 80 years into five unequal periods, reflecting the terminal dates of the gold and silver hoards.

Fig. 6 shows the relative numbers of hoards of precious-metal and bronze coins per annum for each period. In the Constantinian period hoards of bronze coins greatly outnumber those of silver and gold: this reflects both the very substantial production of bronze coins at this time and the limited numbers of precious-metal coins entering Britain at this time. Gold coins are scarce both as single finds and hoards before 364, and they peak in the period 364–78 (Fig. 17); silver coins only start to enter Britain in significant quantities after the reduction in weight of the *siliqua* that occurred in c.357; the finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme show that the issues of Constantius II and Julian are very common as single finds, but hoards of *siliquae* are rare before 367.

The bronze coins of the House of Valentinian of the period 364–78 are very common as site finds across much of Britain, and hoards of these coins also occur regularly, although there are fewer than for the previous period. In 383 the Roman mints in the West started to strike a larger denomination, 21–22 mm in diameter, which is very rare in Britain (these coins are

![Fig. 6. Precious-metal and bronze hoards in Britain, 337-408: hoards per annum.](image)

41 Reece 1973; Walton 2012.
42 Bland and Loriot 2010.
43 For the date of the reduction of the *siliqua* see Bland, Moorhead and Walton 2013, 139, n. 10.
44 Bland, Moorhead and Walton 2013.
Fig. 7. Hoards of late Roman silver coins (c.330–465: stars), silver ingots (triangles) and plate (dots) from Britain (map by Dan Pett).
common in Spain and Italy), while after about 388 the only bronze coins found in Britain are those of the smallest denomination, about 12–13 mm in diameter. The study of the circulation of these issues in Britain is complicated by the fact that on most examples the legends and mint-marks are normally off the flan, making full identification impossible, so these coins are likely to be under-represented in the record as they are frequently categorised as ‘late Roman illegible’. By contrast, after 364 there is a sharp increase in the supply of both gold and silver coins to Britain and both gold solidi and silver siliquae peak with the large issue struck at Milan between 394 and 402. After 388 the precious metal hoards become more numerous than the bronze hoards.

Fig. 8 places the volume of coin hoarding in the period after 388 the context of the Iron Age and Roman periods as a whole. Here we are looking at the numbers of hoards per annum from the start of coin circulation in the Iron Age, around 120 BC, to the end of the Roman period in AD 408. Although the greatest peak falls in the last third of the third century, when the number of hoards of radiates reaches a peak, there is a second peak, not much lower, at the very end of the Roman period.

Distribution of precious-metal hoards in Britain

Lastly I consider the distribution of the precious-metal hoards (I have not mapped the bronze deposits). Fig. 9 shows all of the precious metal hoards of our period and there is a wide distribution across England and Wales (with one find from Scotland – Traprain Law). There are, however, some unusual features – for example the five hoards from north Wales and three from Cornwall are unexpected, as well as the large number of finds from the Isle of Wight (which is also strong in hoards of fourth-century bronze coins – unlike Wales and Cornwall).

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45 A feature that is also found only in Britain.
Fig. 9. All late Roman gold and silver hoards from Britain, AD 337–475. (Map by Dan Pett; Roman roads courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre.)
Note: In Figs 9–14 hoards including gold coins are indicated by dots and hoards without gold by stars.
Fig. 10. Precious-metal hoards of 337–64. (Map by Dan Pett; Roman roads courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre.)
Fig. 11. Precious-metal hoards of 364–88. (Map by Dan Pett; Roman roads courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre.)
Fig. 12. Precious-metal hoards of 388–95. (Map by Dan Pett; Roman roads courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre.)
Fig. 13. Precious-metal hoards of 395–402. (Map by Dan Pett; Roman roads courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre.)
Fig. 14. Precious-metal hoards of 402–75. (Map by Dan Pett; Roman roads courtesy of the Ancient World Mapping Centre.)
If we look at the hoards of the first period, 337–64, we find all four of the hoards from north Wales belong to it (Fig. 10). The next group, from 364 to 388, is more widely distributed, but the finds from Cumbria and Cornwall are unusual, although, since there is only one hoard from each area, not too much should be made of that (Fig. 11). Could this reflect military activity?

Cornwall features again in the next two groups, from 388–95 and 395–402 (Figs 12 and 13). There is also an East Anglian group – nothing unusual there – and a south-western group – which matches late Roman villa distribution quite well.

Finally the latest finds, between 402 and 475, retreat to the south and east, with two outliers in Yorkshire (Fig. 14). What we need to do with all these distributions is to drill down and see whether we can find any common denominators in the contexts of these hoards.

**Hoard of 337–64**

- 11 gold and silver hoards (0.4 per year).
- 290 bronze hoards (10.7 per year).

This period is the era of Constantine’s sons and his nephew Julian, from 337–64. Only 11 hoards of precious-metal coins are known, but hoards of bronze coins are extremely numerous – 290 have been recorded and some, such as this example from Thornbury near Bristol, can be very large indeed (Fig. 15).

This pattern largely reflects the pattern of coin loss at this time. Bronze coins of the period 330 to 348 are the most common that occur in Britain – they dominate most site assemblages, as is apparent from Fig. 16, which is Reece's analysis of the coin loss pattern of a typical Romano-British site. So it is not surprising that there are many hoards of this period.

While only two hoards containing silver coins close during this period, the pattern of single finds of *siliquae* recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme shows that the reduced-weight coins of c.357–64 were in fact present in Britain in significant quantities: over a third (34.1 per cent) of the 700 coins recorded by the Scheme date to this period. This implies that the frequency of hoarding of these coins is not directly related to the numbers actually in circulation in Britain (although of course some of the single finds of c.357–64 recorded by the Scheme could represent later losses).

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Fig. 15. Thornbury (South Glos) hoard: 11,460 nummi to AD 348 (courtesy Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery).

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46 Bland, Moorhead and Walton 2013, 133.
Fig. 16. Site finds from Britain (after Reece).

Fig. 17. Single finds of Roman gold coins in Britain (coins per annum) (Bland and Loriot 2010).
Gold coins, which were almost absent from Britain during the third century only gradually increase during the 4th century and are still scarce until after 364 when the numbers increase (Fig. 17). Analyses show that gold coins start to contain very small amounts of platinum from the 350s onwards, suggesting that new mines were being exploited and this could well provide the main reason for the increase in coin finds.

The silver coinage follows a similar pattern: although the new denominations, the *siliqua* and the larger *miliarensis* (Fig. 18), were introduced by Constantine around AD 324, it is not until the *siliqua* was reduced in weight in around 357 (Fig. 19) that it starts to be found regularly either in hoards or as single finds.\(^{47}\)

**Hoards of 364–88**

- 45 hoards of gold and silver coins (1.88 per year).
- 96 hoards of bronze coins (4 per year).

In the next period, the dynasty of Valentinian I from 364 to 388, the number of gold and silver hoards increases. Bronze hoards are still found regularly and outnumber the precious-metal deposits, but they are rather less common than in the preceding period.

**Hoards of 388–95**

- 46 hoards of gold and silver coins (6.6 per year)
- 40 hoards of bronze coins (5.7 per year).

Hoards of gold and silver coins increase further in the next period, from 388 to 395, and overtake bronze hoards for the first time.

**Hoards of 395–402**

- 75 hoards of gold and silver coins (10.7 per year)
- 73 hoards of bronze coins (10.4 per year)

Both the precious metal and the bronze hoards peak in the period from 395 to 402. The mint of Milan issued gold solidi and silver *siliquae* in great quantities in this period: 367 of the 580 *solidi* in the Hoxne treasure belong to these years (Fig. 20) and 4,624 of the 14,547 *siliquae* (Fig. 21). These issues came to a sudden end in 402 when Honorius moved the Comitatensian mint from Milan, by then increasingly exposed to barbarian raids across the Alps, to the safer location of Ravenna. The great concentration of hoards that close with these issues has no other parallels in the Roman period except for the radiate issues of the end of the Gallic Empire in 274.

\(^{47}\) *Miliarenses* are always much scarcer finds: Bland, Moorhead and Walton 2013, 117, 138
We need to enter a health warning as regards the hoards of bronze coins. The only bronze coins that occur in Britain after 388 are *nummi* of the smallest module, normally poorly struck and with the name of the emperor and the mint mark very hard to read. As is the case with *siliquae*, the latest bronze *nummi* to enter Britain in any quantity is the issue that closes in AD 402. However, unlike the gold and silver coins which normally can be, and have been, identified accurately in earlier publications, the bronze hoards are often not so well described and so not all of the 73 hoards can definitely be said to close at this time. Even with that qualification, there is a very definite spike in the number of hoards that end with these issues.

Of course it is another matter when the hoards that close with issues of 402 would have been buried in the ground, given that no more silver or bronze coins entered Britain in any significant quantities after that date. Discussions of the date of hoarding of the silver hoards normally turn to a discussion of the date at which *siliquae* were clipped (Fig. 22).\(^{48}\) I think this was a gradual process and I am sure the first steps at clipping occurred in the late 380s and 390s, but it does seem clear that the more extreme level of clipping – as in this example – probably only started after the mint stopped supplying new issues in 402.

At the same time we find a significant number of contemporary copies of *siliquae* (Fig. 23): between about three and eight per cent of coins in hoards are imitations, while eight per cent of the single finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme were copies.\(^{49}\) Analyses have shown that these coins were made of good silver,\(^{50}\) and it seems possible that they were made after the official issues had dried up in 402.

We have no way of knowing exactly how long *siliquae* continued to circulate after 402, but most of those who have considered the problem believe it could have been for 20 or 30 years, based on a study of clipping and wear.

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\(^{48}\) Burnett 1984; Bland, Moorhead and Walton 2013.
\(^{49}\) Bland, Moorhead and Walton 2013.
\(^{50}\) Guest 2005.
Hoard of 402–08

- 19 hoards of gold and silver coins (3.2 per year)
- 2 hoards of bronze coins (0.3 per year)

So what happens after the mint of Milan closed in 402? Gold solidi continue to be struck in some quantity at Ravenna, Rome (Fig. 24) and Aquileia until 408 and these regularly occur in hoards, while Constantine III, governor of Britain who declared himself emperor in 407 and then advanced into Gaul to assert his claim, also struck siliquae at the start of his reign which are found in Britain (Fig. 25). With the exception of a very few later outliers, these are the latest silver coins that occur in Britain.

Bronze coins later than 402 are extremely rare in Britain, and no hoards were known until a small group of eight nummi was discovered at Whittington in Northumberland, just about one mile north of Hadrian’s Wall, in 2007. This contained a GLORIA ROMANOR VM three emperors type which is dateable to 402–06 (Fig. 26). This hoard changed our perceptions of the date of the abandonment of Hadrian’s Wall.

Hoxne Treasure

To conclude, I will look in more detail at one hoard of this period, the great Hoxne treasure which contained 584 gold, 14,587 silver and 24 bronze coins, besides 200 items of gold and silver jewellery and table-ware. The discovery of this hoard in 1992 transformed our perception of...
late Roman coin circulation in Britain, in the same way that other very large hoards have, such as Cuerdale for the tenth century, or Tutbury for the fourteenth century. Forty-six hoards containing gold coins of the fourth and fifth centuries are known from Britain and these have a total of 297 solidi; Hoxne has 584. It is the same with silver: 77 hoards are sufficiently well described to be analysed by reign and these contain 18,978 coins; Hoxne adds another 14,587.

So, the hoard of 159 gold solidi of exactly the same period as those in Hoxne found at Sandridge near St Albans in 2012 (Fig. 27; PAS database reference BH-D67AF4) would have been the largest hoard of late Roman gold coins from Britain if it had been found twenty years earlier, but it is overshadowed by Hoxne.

The Hoxne hoard clearly belonged to a wealthy family – quite possibly a family that owned land in several different provinces of the Roman Empire. It was the equivalent of about three years’ salary for a provincial governor. Some of objects are inscribed with personal names, and most importantly there are two sets with the name Aurelius Ursicinus (Fig. 28). Seven different names are inscribed on various objects in the hoard, but the name of Aurelius Ursicinus appears much more frequently than any others and it seems likely that he was at one
time the owner of the hoard. So we come closer to learning the identity of the owner of this hoard than any other find from Roman Britain, but unfortunately we cannot identify this Ursicinus with any of the people of this name listed in the Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire since they all have the first name Flavius rather than Aurelius.

Several other objects in the Hoxne treasure have personal names and these includes interesting links with named objects in other late Roman treasures from East Anglia, including Water Newton and Mildenhall. We must not forget that the only hoards from late Roman Britain were coin hoards; we also have a small number of truly remarkable finds of gold and silver plate and jewellery, such as the three shown here.

Eric Lawes, who discovered the Hoxne hoard with a metal detector, reported his find very promptly and archaeologists from the Suffolk Archaeological Unit excavated the find the day after the discovery (Fig. 29). Fig. 30 shows a plan of the site and, on the right, of the immediate findspot of the hoard. The only recognizable feature is a ditch. Fig. 31 is a view of the findsit today. The most obvious point about it is that it is an almost featureless field and there is nothing in the landscape to suggest why the hoarder might have chosen to bury his wealth there.

Of course we would like to understand the context of this extraordinary find better. Fig. 32 shows Hoxne in the context of Roman East Anglia. No trace of Roman occupation is known from the immediate area where the treasure was found, although the Roman road from Colchester to Caister St Edmunds is only a mile away and two miles away, at Scole, there is a small Roman settlement on the Roman road from Colchester to Caistor-by-Norwich.

There is also a record of a hoard of 650 gold coins of emperors from Valentinian I to Honorius and Constantine III (very similar in fact to the Hoxne solidi) found at the neighbouring village of Eye in about 1780.\textsuperscript{55} Although local records suggest that the find-spots were nearly four miles apart, it remains a considerable coincidence that two hoards containing over 500 solidi of the same period should have been buried so relatively close to each other and it

\textsuperscript{55} Robertson 2000, 1620.
Fig. 30. Hoxne: plan of site (left) and excavation of findspot (right) (from Johns 2010).

Fig. 31. Findspot of the Hoxne treasure in October 2013 (author).
Fig. 32. Roman East Anglia (from Guest 2005).
seems at least possible that they might form two parts of the same deposit. If this is correct, then we may speculate that the owners of the hoard possessed a large estate and buried their wealth across different parts of it. And Hoxne lies in an area which is very rich in late Roman hoards: Thetford,\textsuperscript{56} Mildenhall,\textsuperscript{57} and Water Newton.\textsuperscript{58}

The aim of the hoards project is to draw all these different strands of evidence together to see if we can draw some more conclusions about the reasons for the very large numbers of coin hoards known from Roman Britain.

Of course a new hoard always has the potential to revise our understanding of coin circulation. One such was the hoard from Patching in West Sussex found by two detector users in 1997 (Fig. 33). It consists of 23 gold \textit{solidi}, 27 silver coins, two gold rings and 54 pieces of silver scrap.\textsuperscript{59} This find pushes the date of the latest known hoard of Roman coins from Britain forward by more than 50 years from about AD 408 to the 460s, as it contained a coin of Libius Severus (AD 461–65), besides some twenty other coins that are all later than 410. Is this hoard the exception that proves the rule or does it completely change the previously-held orthodoxy that Roman coins ceased to enter Britain after the reign of Constantine III? We now have much more data on the number of gold coins issues after AD 408 that occur in Britain,\textsuperscript{60} as well as on bronze coins,\textsuperscript{61} and this has shown that we need to take a more nuanced view of the cessation of coin supply to Britain, as later issues are found in small numbers. However, post-408 issues found in Britain probably came here through small-scale trade, or were brought here by individuals coming to Britain from the Continent and it is still clear that official coin supply of new issues to Britain did end in AD 408.

![Fig. 33. Patching hoard (British Museum).](image)

\textsuperscript{56} Johns and Potter 1983.
\textsuperscript{57} Hobbs 2012.
\textsuperscript{58} Painter 1977.
\textsuperscript{59} Orna-Ornstein 2009; Abdy 2013.
\textsuperscript{60} Bland and Loriot 2010, 84–9.
\textsuperscript{61} Abdy and Williams 2006; Moorhead 2009.
Conclusion

I hope that this discussion of the hoards from latest period of Roman Britain, demonstrates some of the themes that the AHRC project, ‘Crisis or continuity’ will be examining. In this period, as in the third century AD, Britain has a very rich group of hoards, while the pattern of hoarding stands out from that found in the rest of the Empire. We still have no wholly satisfactory explanation for the great concentration of hoards of silver coins from c.360–c.408. The archaeological involvement in the excavation of the Hoxne hoard gave us a great deal of contextual information about the find that would otherwise have been lost (as with the Frome hoard of 52,502 radiates of the third century), but we still have no archaeological context for the hoard itself. All these are issues that the AHRC project will investigate.

In a paper in a volume in honour of George Macdonald, Harold Mattingly wrote: ‘On finding that I was to share in the tribute that we are bringing to Sir George Macdonald, I vowed the first thing that should meet me on my way home … The first subject that met me on my next appearance at the British Museum was the question of Roman coins found in Britain, and I felt, as Jephtha might have done if, instead of his daughter, his pet mongrel had come out to meet him: was the offering good enough?’ I will leave readers to decide whether we are dealing with Jephtha’s daughter or his pet mongrel, but it is good that Harold’s grandson, David Mattingly is involved in the project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


62 Bland 2013.
63 Mattingly 1932, 88.