

Inflow and redistribution of Roman imperial denarii in the area of the Przeworsk, Wielbark and Chernyakhiv cultures and in the Baltic islands in the light of chronological structure of coin hoards

The authors present the opinion that the territories inhabited by the populations of the Przeworsk, Wielbark, and Chernyakhiv cultures during the period of Roman influence (i.e., territories of the present-day Poland, Ukraine, Moldavia, western Belarus, and western Russia) and some of the Baltic islands (Gotland, Bornholm, and probably Öland) should be seen, in the light of chronological structures of the finds, as a separate area of the inflow and redistribution of Roman imperial denarii from the 1st-2nd (3rd) centuries. In the territory of the European Barbaricum, in particular within the area of Przeworsk, Wielbark, Chernyakhiv, and Baltic cultures, there is an evident prevalence of 1st-2nd century denarii, dating from a period from the final years of Nero's reign to the early reign of Septimius Severus, in minor (both single and cumulative) finds and hoards. As based on the source material consisting of 86 hoards from the above-mentioned area, containing no less than 50 denarii with a clearly determined issue chronology, it is possible to indicate six main deposit types according to their chronological structure. Group A is comprised of hoards containing coins no later than Hadrian's issues. The second group consists of Type B deposits dating back to a period from the latter half of Antoninus Pius' reign to the early years of Marcus Aurelius' reign. The third and fourth groups comprise Type C and BC deposits, for the most part dated to the early years of Septimius Severus' reign. In turn, the fifth group (Type D) is composed of deposits with modified chronological structures of the original hoards (mostly of Type C), as a result of the gradual wear and tear of the coins, beginning from the earliest specimens. The sixth group (Type E) comprises deposits of denarii or mixed deposits of denarii and antoniniani, which had arrived from the territory of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century, no later than early 250s. The distinguishing feature for the territories of the Przeworsk, Wielbark, Chernyakhiv, and Baltic cultures is a common presence of Type D deposits in that area. According to the authors, the numismatic material (in this particular case, chronological structures of the hoards as well as minor finds) in conjunction with the archaeological data indicate that the major inflow wave of Roman imperial denarii would have reached the territory of the Przeworsk culture between the reigns of Trajan and Septimius Severus. For the territory of the Wielbark culture, the same phenomenon began a little later on, during the reign of Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius. Two distinct increases in that inflow wave should be datable to the period of Antoninus Pius' or/and Marcus Aurelius' reign (reaching a peak somewhat lower in intensity) and to the early years of Septimius Severus' reign (at a much more intense level). Some of those coins had been deposited within the territories of the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures by the end of the first decade of the 3rd century, as Type A, B, C, and BC deposits. The rest of the denarii, largely a Type C pool, would continue to remain in use over the same area until as late as the Migrations Period, gradually changing its structure into a Type D pool. Further on, as part of the redistribution phenomenon, the migrating Gothic tribes brought those coins to the south-east, into the area of the Chernyakhiv culture. The process began no earlier than very early years of the 3rd century. Few 3rd-century denarii, most likely mixed in with some earlier denarii to a certain extent, arrived into the territories of the Przeworsk, Wielbark, and Chernyakhiv cultures in the 3rd century, by the late 230s-early 240s, or possibly later, around the mid-3rd century, as an admixture to the antoniniani, as part of the Type E hoards. In the case of Bornholm and Öland, where only Type D deposits have been attested, 1st- and 2nd-century Roman denarii would have probably reached these islands as part of the redistribution process from the territory of present-day Poland no earlier than 3rd century AD.

Gotland is a little more complicated case as a majority of the hoards from this island fall under the Type C chronological structure, with a somewhat lower number of Type D deposits. Roman imperial denarii must have reached the island of Gotland in their bulk during the reign of Septimius Severus directly from the Roman Empire or arrived there via the continental Barbaricum, in the same period or a little later on.