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Crossing boundaries. An analysis of Roman Coins in Danish Contexts.

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The first volume of this outstanding monograph by Helle W. Horsnæs, concerned with the finds of Roman coins from Zealand, Funen, and Jutland, was published in 2010. Only three years later, the readers have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with another volume of this work, which is, in my opinion, even better than its predecessor. In this very well illustrated, second (and the last) volume, the author deals with the finds from the island of Bornholm. Therefore, the two parts of this study cover the entire present-day territory of Denmark. Despite the fact that the territory featured in Vol. 1 is considerably, over 70 times, greater than the land area of Bornholm, nearly a half of the Roman coins from the Danish finds came from Bornholm (2,675 coins as of 2010). Moreover, this island can be clearly identified within the same cultural context during the Iron Age as the two other Baltic islands, Gotland and Öland. On the other hand, Zealand, Funen, and Jutland were, in the same period, culturally associated with the neighbouring territories of the mainland Europe and southern Scandinavia.

The first chapter presents an introduction into the subject of the Roman coins found in Bornholm as well as an outline of their archaeological background. The author goes on with a brief description of the recording of the coin finds from Bornholm and the research on the obtained material. Of particular interest are the informative sections on recording and interpreting the coin finds obtained with the use of metal detectors by amateur archaeologists. The Danish legal regulations (the *danefæ* legislation) now in force sanction the amateur prospecting for archaeological artefacts, including Roman coinage. All the retrieved items are recorded by the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals (currently part of the National Museum), including the data on the provenance of each specimen. This particular procedure has made it possible to collect a wealth of information relating to the finds in Bornholm, which was most probably, as of 2010, the area with the highest proportion of the recorded finds of ancient Roman coins beyond the provinces of the Roman Empire. Thanks to the intensive detector activity, the number of the registered Roman coins from Bornholm had increased four-fold in the years 1980–2010, while the number of the sites with the registered finds of Roman coinage had risen from 52 to 170. The Polish reader will find particularly valuable all the comments and clues related to the methodology of the interpreting of coin finds performed by amateur archaeologists in close collaboration with the local museum. For the coin finds from Bornholm, there are sufficient amounts of information on their exact locations and

contexts, allowing the scholars to determine the facts that could only be presumed or suspected in Polish conditions on the basis of rudimentary, and often contradictory, details. Danish scholars also have the enviable opportunity of conducting the multi-faceted research and approaching the topic of numismatic finds thoroughly and comprehensively, which is possible thanks to the obtaining of detailed information on the finds. In addition, detector surveying at selected sites is conducted by amateur archaeologists in a planned and well-ordered manner under the supervision of professional archaeologists. At the same time, the author describes certain problems and limitations resulting from the use of detector archaeology as well as some difficulties in interpreting the material mostly obtained from the mixed plough layer. Also noteworthy are the comments on the multi-season exploration of the sites and the observed regularities in obtaining the finds from such places.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the categories of the coins found in Bornholm. Obviously, the author has devoted very much of her study to the most frequently found denarii, which constitute about 91% of all the Roman coins retrieved on the island. An overwhelming majority of the denarii are datable to the period from the final years of Nero's reign until the early years of Septimius Severus' reign, with a clear prevalence of the issues dating to the Antonine dynasty. The earlier denarii are represented by a single subaeratus of Tiberius, while the later ones by the very few coins from the issues until as late as, and including, the reign of Maximinus Thrax. The denarii finds from Bornholm are noted for their remarkable consistency in chronological composition. The chronological patterns of the hoards, the finds from the sites with multiple denarii, and the amount of the denarii from the sites where no more than several denarii had been found, are very similar. 33 subaerati, including some of them considered as possible, constitute only 1.4% denarii found on the island. Even less significant is the percentage of the so-called Barbarian imitations in the overall number of the Bornholm denarii. Only 13 pieces have been identified, with no clear die links to the similar coins found elsewhere. It is also notable that reworked denarii, deliberately fragmented and pierced, are very rare, recorded only as non-hoard coin finds. All of these non-standard coins can be seen on very good photographs. Unfortunately, only very few of the denarii from the finds can be linked with any archaeological context, datable in various instances from the early 3rd to the mid-6th century. As regards other coin types, siliquae (4th c.), antoniniani (3rd c.), bronze coins (2nd–4th c.) are among the very rare finds in Bornholm. Apart from the denarii, another comparatively significant proportion of Roman coins in the finds from this island (around 9%) are the 5th- and 6th-century solidi, including some relatively rare imitations and issues of the so-called successor states, largely as part of hoards. It is also worth noting that ancient coins are sometimes found in Bornholm, in very small amounts, in the hoards dated to

the Viking age, i.e., according to the general European terminology, to the early medieval period.

In Chapter 3 (“Bornholm in a wider context”), the author draws a comparison between the Bornholm finds and those from some other territories of the European Barbaricum, in an attempt, among other things, to address the question of the possible inflow routes of the Roman coinage into Bornholm. Due to the fact that the structure of the Bornholm finds is clearly different from those from the other parts of Denmark, she makes an attempt to seek some closer analogies in the territories to the east of Bornholm, on the Baltic islands of Gotland and Öland, and in the present-day Poland and Ukraine. As Helle W. Horsnæs’ monograph attests, it is not necessary to rely on very complicated statistical data processing tools in order to formulate precise conclusions (which are, in my opinion, mostly correct). In many individual instances, a simple column chart detailing the structures of the specific assemblages of coins would be sufficient. For the imperial denarii, as based on an analysis of the chronological structure, the author indicates two groups of hoards in the territory of the Barbaricum that are potentially corresponding to the two outflow periods. The denarii hoards with a “younger” structure from Poland, but particularly from Ukraine and the Hungarian Plain, bear a close resemblance to the finds from the islands of the Baltic Sea, including Bornholm. They would mark out the later and probably larger inflow wave from the territories of the Roman Empire, whose traces can be found over a vast area from the Baltic to the present-day. Referring to these territories, the author also points to the large body of the evidence of the late deposition dates of the 1st- and 2nd-century denarii, especially those representing the later wave, namely the mid-4th century or even later. The question of the finds of the 5th- and 6th-century solidi should be obviously discussed within the context of the entire West-Baltic area, in particular the Polish region of Pomerania, where such coins have been found in considerable amounts.

Chapter 4 deals, for the most part, with the contexts of the finds of Roman coins. The most important conclusion drawn from an analysis of the recent finds performed with the use of metal detectors is the attribution of a great majority of them to any particular deposition context. In most cases, however, it is unfortunately still impossible to determine if the coins had been deposited intentionally or were simply accidentally lost or misplaced. A very interesting observation refers to the hoards deposited, in all probability, inside the buildings. On the other hand, the partly melted coins had been presumably damaged by fire in the huts where they had been stored. In the author’s view, only three denarii deposits unearthed in the 19th century (Robbedale, Udmarken, and Borresø) can be treated with certainty as hoards with the determined contents. The composition of the alleged denarii hoards found in recent years (e.g., Smøreng, Sorte Muld, Sylten IV, Biskopenge IX) re-

mains vague. This situation is due to the fact that for the deposition finds from the currently agricultural areas it is extremely difficult to separate the specimens originally belonging to the hoards torn apart and displaced by ploughing out of the total number of the coins found. In most cases, the Bornholm hoards consisted exclusively of denarii. At least in one instance (Smørenge), it is almost certain that the hoard in question was comprised of denarii and one late-5th-century solidus. It is possible that some of the other hoards (such as Sorte Muld) may have been quite similar. The relatively small solidi hoards (with the largest deposit, the hoard of Soldatergård, containing 36 pieces) consisted of coins only or coins and other gold objects, including the Nordic bracteates. The causes of the hoard depositions are not entirely clear; perhaps at least some of them may be interpreted as ritual deposits. As based on her analysis of the denarii and solidi finds, the author concludes that even if the denarii inflow into Bornholm should have begun in the 3rd century, it is still possible that the main inflow wave of the denarii reached the island along with the solidi in the late 5th or even the early 6th century, most likely from the area of the Vistula estuary. Thus, the more widespread use and deposition of Roman coinage in Bornholm could be linked with a fairly short (several decades long) period between the early years of the second half of the 5th century and the first quarter of the 6th century.

Chapter 5 contains a concise recapitulation of the questions discussed throughout the monograph, with an emphasis on the key role of detector archaeology for the obtaining of a considerable amount of the source material, both the coin finds and the data on their specific contexts. According to the author, the Roman coins in Bornholm were usable in a pre-monetary economy as objects made of precious metals. It should be noted that they would have most probably reached the island by means of redistribution from the other territories of the Barbaricum. In consequence, such secondary imports should not be considered as the reliable evidence of direct Roman influence on the Barbarian inhabitants of Bornholm.

The following chapter, which is fairly extensive and very well illustrated with photographs of the relevant coins, covers all the sites in Bornholm with at least one Roman coin found up to the year 2010. Of course, the locations noted for their large finds, such as Sorte Muld, or the sites that form part of the Ibsker complex, are described to a much greater extent and in more detail than the single-find sites. The Polish reader will be impressed by the monograph's detailed maps of the sites with the precisely indicated locations of coin finds. In Polish conditions, such a detailed and accurate coverage of the places of numismatic interest would put them in danger of being totally depleted by random exploration. As can be seen, this kind of risk would be practically absent in Denmark, most likely on account of the above-mentioned legal regulations on amateur exploring with the use of metal detectors as well as the application of this procedure in practice.

The final section is comprised of several tables listing the coins from the relevant finds as a source basis for the descriptive part of the monograph. These tabular lists are perhaps the only part of the work that would deserve a critical remark. The author provides the listing of the denarii from the recent multiple finds and bronze coins only. For the earlier denarii finds and the gold coin finds, the reader must consult some of the previously published literature, which may be quite inconvenient at times. Likewise, the single denarius finds from the recent years have not been recorded in the present monograph. In my opinion, if editorial considerations make it possible, a comprehensive record of finds from a specific area should include a complete list of the coins retrieved there. The list featured in the present study comprises most of the coins found in Bornholm up to the year 2010; unfortunately, the remaining part of the coins is omitted from the list.

The present study by Helle W. Horsnæs can be seen as an exhaustive work on the finds of Roman coins from Bornholm, a small fragment of the vast expanse of the European Barbaricum. Some of the issues, such as archaeological and historical backgrounds of the particular finds, could certainly have been discussed in more detail and complemented with pertinent conclusions. However, whether such broader characteristics would have been indispensable here could be still a moot point. In the light of the present book, it becomes very clear how urgent is the need for equally comprehensive and thorough studies dealing with finds of Roman coins in various other areas of the European Barbaricum, especially those in the East. In her analysis of broader geographical contexts of the Bornholm finds, the author must have by necessity based her conclusions on some amount of incomplete and unverified data concerning the territories of the present-day Poland and, in particular, Ukraine. As regards the coin finds, the existence of many links and interrelations can be clearly identified within the whole extent of the Barbaricum and it is not sufficient to rely on fragmentary studies. As a result, there is an urgent need to focus more attention on thoroughly describing the coin finds, especially Imperial-era denarii, from the entire area of the European Barbaricum. It is only on this basis that a systematic comparative analysis of such finds will be possible, aimed at determining the time, causes, and directions of the inflow and redistribution of Roman coinage on a broader scale.

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