

ART. VI.—*The Birdoswald hoard and its composition.*
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THE circumstances of the discovery of the hoard in the arm-purse at Birdoswald have already been described in a previous volume of these *Transactions*.¹ Here it may be repeated that the purse lay against the back of the fort-wall and had been buried by the rampart-backing of clay piled up against it. There can thus be no doubt that the purse and its contents were accidentally lost. In this respect the coins differ from the otherwise very similar hoard, found buried below a barrack floor in the *retentura* of Birdoswald fort in 1930, which had equally clearly been deliberately hidden.² The composition of the two hoards is worth comparison. The 30 coins in the barrack-room deposit comprised 11 of Republican families, 6 of Mark Antony and 1 of Augustus, one of Nero, 6 of the Flavians, 3 of Trajan and 2 of Hadrian, these last in mint condition. The 28 in the arm-purse comprised 6 coins of Republican families, 1 of Octavian and 1 of Mark Antony, one of Nero, 3 Civil War and 8 Flavian issues, one of Nerva, 6 of Trajan and 1 of Hadrian, this last in mint condition. Both hoards omit the Imperial issues before A.D. 63, when Nero lightened the coinage; both contain an appreciable number of Republican coins, and both end with coins in mint condition such as would be issued just before the building of Hadrian's Wall began. The arm-purse hoard was lost during the work of erecting Birdoswald fort, while the barrack-room hoard must have been one of the

¹ CW2 169.

² CW2 xxxi 130 f.

earliest deposits to be concealed in any of the newly-erected buildings.

The two hoards further compare in interesting fashion with the Thorngrifton hoard of 1837,³ found in an arm-purse in a Roman quarry on Barcombe Hill, south of Housesteads and east of Chesterholm. This consisted of 63 coins; 3 of gold, comprising one each of Claudius, Nero and Vespasian, the rest of silver, comprising 9 coins of Republican families, one of Nero, 4 Civil War issues, 23 Flavian issues, one of Nerva, 18 of Trajan and 4 of Hadrian, the last in mint condition. It will be observed that the amount of silver in this hoard is just twice as much as in the barrack-room hoard from Birdoswald.

The relation of these amounts of silver to the legionary's pay is worth noting, since it was legionaries who were largely, though not exclusively, engaged in building the Wall. The legionary soldier of Hadrian's day received 300 *denarii* a year, paid in quarterly instalments of 75 *denarii* or 3 *aurei*.⁴ The Thorngrifton hoard thus contained one quarter's pay in gold, and four-fifths of such an instalment in silver. The Birdoswald arm-purse contained just under two-fifths of a pay-instalment, the barrack-room hoard exactly two-fifths. Related to centurion's pay of 5,000 *denarii* a year minimum and 30,000 *denarii* maximum,⁵ the sum is proportionately much smaller. The pay-rates in fact serve as a gauge rather than a clue. But at this point a further distinction may be made between the three hoards. The barrack-room hoard might appropriately be considered a soldier's savings, but it is more likely to be an auxiliary-man's deposit, at a rate of pay recently estimated at 45 *denarii* per quarter from the time of Domitian onwards.⁶ The Thorngrifton and Birdoswald arm-purse deposits, on the other hand, represent floating cash actually being carried

³ AA2 iii 269.

⁴ P. A. Brunt, "Pay and superannuation in the Roman army" (*Papers of the British School at Rome* xviii 50-71), in particular the table on the last page.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 65.

about and momentarily laid down, with no intention of long hiding. It is quite unlikely either that the ordinary soldier carried so much about with him or that he carried it in an arm-purse. These two accidental, work-a-day, deposits thus look more like the current cash of a centurion, laid aside while engaged in work which he was not normally called upon to do, but might undertake for example or instruction.

The three hoards under consideration also give a very clear picture of the current cash circulating in the army of Northern Britain during the governorship of Platorius Nepos, when the Wall and its forts were being built. They demonstrate that, whatever effects the calling-in of early Imperial and Republican silver by Trajan⁷ may have had upon the composition of hoards elsewhere, it was not yet reacting upon those based upon military pay-chests. If these in turn may be taken to represent cash at the provincial procurator's disposal, they will reflect both what silver that official was receiving from the province in taxation and what fresh silver he found it necessary to draw from Rome. Since the fresh silver in each of the hoards represents not more than about three per cent. of the total, the ratio might indicate that the provincial treasury was not so far from balancing its budget as has sometimes been believed, or, in other words, that the British taxation revenues were reasonably buoyant and still reflecting the conservative attitude to money characteristic of the province. It was no doubt upon the basis of such a promising state of affairs that the Imperial Government was prepared to embark not merely upon the building of the Wall but upon the great programme of town-development which was its corollary.

That this buoyancy continued for some time, with the result that relatively old coinage still continued to circulate in the military districts, is indicated by the Kirkby Thore hoard of *denarii*,⁸ to which Mr Birley kindly draws my

⁷ Sutherland, *Coinage and Currency in Roman Britain*, 18 and 21 f.

⁸ CW2 iii 415; cf. Sutherland, *op. cit.*, 38.

attention. In this hoard, which terminates with a single piece of Crispina and was therefore deposited about A.D. 180, the composition is as follows. 2 coins of Nero, 4 Civil War issues, 19 Flavian issues, 1 of Nerva, 27 of Trajan, 35 of Hadrian, 29 of Pius, 3 of Pius and Marcus, 13 of Marcus, 6 of Verus, 6 of Sabina, 13 of Faustina I, 5 of Faustina II, 3 of Lucilla and 1 of Crispina. Republican silver has now disappeared, but in other respects the coinage circulating in Hadrian's day is still prominently in evidence. Nothing could indicate more pointedly the relative self-sufficiency of the province in relation to its budget.

The hoard itself is composed as follows, the references being to the *Catalogue of Roman Coins in the British Museum, Republican and Imperial* respectively:

1. C. RENIUS. *BMC* i, 122, no. 886 (pl. xxv, 14), much worn.
2. P. MAENIUS ANTIATICUS. *BMC* i, 145, no. 988 (pl. xxvii, 11), much worn.
3. C. PULCHER. *BMC* i, 198, as no. 1288 (pl. xxx, 21) but with O countermark, much worn.
4. Q. THERMUS. *BMC* ii, 302, no. 653 (pl. xcv, 14), much worn.
5. C. NAEVIUS BALBUS. *BMC* i, 369, no. 2967, much worn.
6. T. CARISIUS. *BMC* i, 529, no. 4064 (pl. lii, 4), much worn.
7. OCTAVIANUS, 36 B.C. *BMC* ii, 415, no. 118 (pl. cv, 15), worn.
8. M. ANTONIUS, 31 B.C. *BMC* ii, 527, series III, the legion uncertain, cf. no. 191 (pl. cxvi, 7), much worn.
9. NERO, A.D. 68. *BMC* i, 214, no. 107 (pl. 40, 14), worn.
10. VITELLIUS, A.D. 69. *BMC* i, 373, no. 39, worn.
11. VITELLIUS, A.D. 69. *BMC* i, 370, no. 13 (pl. 60, 23), somewhat worn.
12. CIVIL WAR ISSUE, A.D. 69. *BMC* i, 305, no. 61 (pl. 51, 19), worn.
13. VESPASIANUS, COS. II, A.D. 70. *BMC* ii, 4, no. 30, somewhat worn.
14. VESPASIANUS, COS. III, A.D. 72-73. *BMC* ii, 16, no. 87, somewhat worn.

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15. VESPASIANUS, A.D. 70-79. *BMC* ii, 51, no. 296, somewhat worn.
16. TITUS, COS. VII, A.D. 79. *BMC* ii, 225, no. 13 (pl. 44, 8), somewhat worn.
17. TITUS, COS. VIII, A.D. 80-81. *BMC* ii, 236, no. 82 (pl. 46, 3), slightly worn.
18. DOMITIANUS, COS. IIII, A.D. 76. *BMC* ii, 36, no. 193 (pl. 6, 1), worn.
19. DOMITIANUS CAESAR, A.D. 79. *BMC* ii, 47, no. 265 (pl. 8, 6), slightly worn.
20. DOMITIANUS, COS. XVII, A.D. 95-96. *BMC* ii, 344, no. 234 (pl. 66, 19), slightly rubbed.
21. NERVA, COS. III, A.D. 97. *BMC* iii, 4, no. 26, fresh.
22. TRAIANUS, COS. III, A.D. 100. *BMC* iii, 101, no. 500 (pl. 17, 20), very slightly rubbed.
23. TRAIANUS, COS. IV, A.D. 101-102. *BMC* iii, 46, as no. 121, fresh.
24. TRAIANUS, COS. V, A.D. 103-111. *BMC* iii, 71, no. 285 (pl. 14, 6), fresh.
25. TRAIANUS, COS. V, A.D. 103-111. *BMC* iii, 72, no. 288 (pl. 14, 7), slightly rubbed.
26. TRAIANUS, COS. V, A.D. 103-111. A variant of 25, with bigger bust, slightly worn.
27. TRAIANUS, COS. V, A.D. 103-111. *BMC* iii, 56, no. 168 (pl. 12, 12), very slightly rubbed.
28. HADRIANUS, COS. III, A.D. 119 at earliest. *BMC* iii, 264, as no. 192, but no break in legend, almost mint.