

Roman Piggy Banks?

Investigating the Social Life of Containers for Coin Hoards

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What was the Project about?

This project was designed to examine the often forgotten aspect of coin hoards, the containers used for them. Rightly the hoards are widely reported and discussed but almost entirely from a numismatic point of view. There has been a lack of study of the containers used for these hoards and whether they offer any insight into the specific hoard itself or the circumstances of its deposition.

What was the Methodology of the Project?

- The hoards I chose to study were selected by applying two criteria:
 - Location:** All my hoards had to come from Roman Britain. I decided to use Hadrian's Wall as the northern border of that area in my study.
 - Level of Data:** All the selected hoards needed enough data for me to be able to record their location, composition, date, what sort of container they used and their size.
- Once I had selected my hoards I designed a database to record all available information about them. This database would allow me to examine how the variable data (date, composition and size) affected the use of containers

What were the Results of the Project?

Overall there are 4 points to be drawn from the results generated:

- Bronze/Copper, Base Silver and Silver hoards show a similar pattern of composition corresponding with an increase of diversity amongst containers. Gold hoards likely show the same change, there is however a problem with gold hoards either being of exclusively high or low purity with no data for mixed composition gold hoards.
- There is an influence of date on the diversity of vessels used with a clear rise in diversity up until the third century and then falling off after that. There is a clear spike in the third century (corresponding with an increase in diversity of hoard size and numbers).
- The size of a hoard seems to have had a very limited impact on the diversity of container types used. There is little change represented here. With a larger dataset it might be possible to observe a greater pattern of influence. This can be seen in figure 1.
- Hoard size does influence the level to which pottery is used as a container. There is a clear rise based on the influence of size that pottery becomes much more likely to be the container used for hoards with the exception of Class 5. This can be seen in figure 2.

Size of Hoard	Amount of Vessel Types
Class 1	6
Class 2	4
Class 3	4
Class 4	4
Class 5	5

Figure 1: Influence of size on vessel diversity

Size of Hoard	% of class that is pottery
Class 1	50%
Class 2	63.64
Class 3	80.94%
Class 4	86.95%
Class 5	76%

Figure 2: Influence of size on usage of pottery



Map showing the geographic distribution of hoards studied in this project. Source: Author

The Class System:

In order to allow comparison by size across hoards I have created five categories. These are shown in Figure 3.

Class of Hoard:	Number of Coins:
1	1-50
2	51-150
3	151-500
4	501-2000
5	2001+

Figure 3: The class system devised for the project

Key references:

- Abdy, R., Besly, E. and Lopez-Sanchez, F. (eds.) (2010) *The Gloucester Hoard and other coin hoards of the Britannic Empire Coin Hoards from Roman Britain XIII*, Wetteren: Moneta.
- Abdy, R., Ghey, E., Hughes, C. and Leins, I. (eds.) (2009) *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain Volume XII*, Wetteren: Moneta.
- Abdy, R., Leins, I. and Williams, J. (eds.) (2002) *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain Volume XI*, London: Royal Numismatic Society.
- Robertson, A. (1974) 'Romano-British Coin Hoards: Their Numismatic, Archaeological and Historical Significance', in Casey, J. and Reece, R. (eds.) *Coins and the Archaeologist*, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports 4: 12-36.
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The Frome Hoard
Source: The History Blog (2011)

Two Examples of Hoards

- Above:** The Frome Hoard is a larger example of the use of pottery containers. The hoard contained 52,503 coins dating to the 4th century
- Below:** The Beau Street Hoard is an example of organic containers still visible in the way the coins were found. 17,577 coins were found in 8 bags dating to the 3rd century.



The Beau Street Hoard Bag 8
Source: Beau Street Hoard (2014)

References:
Beau Street Hoard (2014), *Bag 8 of the Hoard*.
www.flickr.com/photos/beausthoard/13910231315/ [Date accessed: 19/09/2016]
The History Blog (2011), *Local museums score Roman coin hoard, gold torcs*. www.thehistoryblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Frome-hoard.jpg [Date accessed: 19/09/2016]