



Argentum Romanorum sive Barbarorum

Permanences et évolution des usages monétaires
de l'argent du IV^e au VI^e siècle dans l'Occident romain

Tradition und Entwicklung im Gebrauch des Silbergeldes
im römischen Westen (4.-6. Jh.)



The coin clipping phenomenon in sub-Roman Britain

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At some point after Rome relinquished control over Britain it passed from a coin-using economy to an Early Medieval style bullion economy with any surviving coins reduced to incidental forms of bullion. There is sparse evidence for the precise end of Roman Britain. A confused letter of Honorius coincides with Constantine III's (AD 407-11) withdrawal of mobile Roman forces from the island. The story of St Germanus of Auxerre depicts independent Britain declining throughout the AD 420s and 430s. The bitter endgame is noted in a diplomatic letter post-dating AD 446. Thereafter Ambrosius Aurelianus (a contemporary of Syagrius) established equilibrium with the Saxon invaders for a couple of generations.

It is from this world that the phenomenon of clipped siliquae in Roman Britain emerged. Hoards show that was possible for silver coinage to be withdrawn from an unclipped circulation up to the eve of Constantine III, at which point regular shipment of Roman coinage ceased. (Although isolated earlier silver clipping cases exist and even rarer gold clipping.) The siliquae from the great Hoxne treasure show several cycles of clipping down to the edge of the bust, with no overall weight standard targeted. Further hoards of the period can be placed in category order suggesting a drawn-out process which belies their terminal coin according to the declining presence of miliarenses alongside the siliquae and increasing presence of hacksilver.

Understanding the duration of the clipping process comes from the exceptional Patching hoard, tpq AD 460s. Patching's post-AD 410 Gallic siliquae were unclipped, suggesting that clipping had ceased by the time of their importation shortly after the midpoint of the century. This broadly coincides with the sketchy historical picture and suggests clipping was an attempt to keep dwindling stocks of insular Roman currency circulating in this period.

With the peculiarity of clipped siliquae to Britain in mind, the Bédailhac-et-Aynat hoard has been linked to the Continental movement of Constantine III's troops. Possibly this is a clue that the British usurper, prior to his takeover of Continental mints and facing the expensive process of accession, had initiated clipping to stretch funds before his departure. If so, this was continued to the point of currency burnout by the independent communities of Sub-Roman Britain in the ensuing decades.

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