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## THE ROMAN HOARD FROM BARGER- COMPASCUUM (DRENTHE)

### III. *The Coins*

The leather purse, found at Bargercompascuum, contained 313 *denarii* ranging from Nero till Commodus. As the latest coins are from the years 186–9, it has evidently been hid shortly afterwards, about 190 B.C. Though imperial *denarii*, especially from the 2nd century are not rare in the Netherlands, this is the second largest find which has come to light. In the same province of Drente but in sandy soil, at Ballo, 350 *denarii* from Vespasian to Lucius Verus have been found in 1839, followed by others in 1871 and 1873.<sup>1</sup> 246 coins from Hadrian to Septimius Severus came to light in 1811 at Renkum near the Rhine.<sup>2</sup> The other finds are either small hoards or just stray finds.

The Bargercompascuum *denarii* (of which one has been lost) are the following:

Nero	RIC	52, 53, 56
Otho	„	3, 12
Vitellius	„	18, 20, 22
Vespasian	„	10(3), 15, 30(4), 42, 60var, 65, 75(3), 77, 86?, 90(4), 124, 185, 218 238, 362, ?(69–74), ?(74–79)
Titus	„	8, 25b, 49
Domitian	„	137, 154, 155, 173var, 178, 191, 197
Nerva	„	9, 14, 15, 16, 17
Trajan	„	9, 12, 21, 37, 40, 49, 52, 54?, 58(3), 59(2), 60(3), 67(2), 116, 118, 119, 119 or 121, 128(3), 131, 142(3), 212(2), 220, ?(103–111), 274, 315, 318, 331, 332, 334, 337, 343, 347, 353, BMC 385, 390, 626
Hadrian	„	38, 39, 39b, 42, 45, 77, 80, 82, 83(2), 96, 100, 101(2), 120(2), 126, 127, 129, 137, 161(2), 163, 169, 172, 175(3), 182, 183, 184, 202, 218, 228, 230(2), 234, 244, 256, 257, 261, 266, 267, 274(2), 276(3), 280, 296(2), 332, 338, 345, 398, 411var, 422, 436a(2), BMC Pontus cf. p. 22 (167–136 B.C.)
Antoninus Pius,		11(2), 12, 26, 54, 61, 63b, 64, 64(plated), 112, 129, 136, 137, 153, 164, 176?(plated), 179, 181(4), 201, 202, 203, 205, 209, 216, 221, 229a(2), 230(2), 231, 238, 239, 240, 249(2), 251?, 252, 253, 254, 260, 264, 265, 274(2), 275(2), 294b, 343, 344, 347, 348, 351(5), 358, 361(2), 362(4), 363, 368, 373(2), 374, 378, 384, 394a(3), 417a, 424, 426, 429(3), 444, 448d, 450b, 453, 454, 458, 463, 466, 467b, 468, 473, 475a, 475b, 496, 497, 508, 515(2), 515var, BMC 918
Marcus Aurelius	„	2, 35, 51(2), 70, 141, 163, 211(2), 259, 304, 353, 377, 429, 431, 433, 438, 441, 442, 444, 463(2), 501, 505, 537, 561, 674, 686, 688, 694, 696, 712(3), 737, 744, 745, 788(2)
Commodus	„	95, 101, 121, 157, 159, 193 (plated), 267, 273, 279(2), 281

From the external evidence there appears that these coins had not been buried but were only provisionally hidden. Thus they do not constitute a proper hoard representing the careful savings of a provident inhabitant but rather the working capital of probably some itinerant merchant. Therefore no far-reaching conclusions may be drawn from it. Besides, the treasure does not show any special features or regional peculiarities. It could have been found anywhere in the Western part of the Roman Empire or just outside its boundaries. That the use of Roman coinage was not confined to the Empire alone, but also spread into *Libera Germania*, has been known since long.

Therefore only some remarks of a general character may be made. The frequency of the coins of Hadrian and Antoninus compared to those of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus furnishes another proof of Mr. Kraft's theory,<sup>3</sup> that the circulation of coins only reaches its zenith several years after their issue. The relative scarcity of Antonine *denarii* of the period 141–5 and the presence of not less than 26 Diva Faustina coins – undated but naturally struck after her death in 141 – point to the probability that this issue was confined to those years. An amusing feature is the occurrence of a *denarius* from distant Amisus at the Black Sea, mingled – evidently by mistake – among the Roman *denarii* of Hadrian. Of these 313 *denarii* three are plated. The fact that the latest one is plated shows that such 'counterfeit' coins are strictly contemporary to the 'genuine' specimens and thus must be official. These three plated *denarii* might be considered the precursors of the debased coinage which was soon to come!

The obvious question which value is represented by the contents of our purse, is most difficult to answer. Hardly any data about the buying power of ancient money is known, especially not for this part of the world. We know that under Hadrian (117–138) the imperial officials, all of them *equites*, were divided into four classes of 300,000, 200,000, 100,000 and 60,000 *sestertii* a year respectively i.e. 75,000, 50,000, 25,000 and 15,000 *denarii*. As values and prices were remarkably steady during the 2nd century up to nearly its end, we may say that our purse contained the equivalent of a week's salary of an – only relatively! – minor official; that is: at least enough to provide the prime necessities of a middle class city family during seven days. Let us say; about 20 to 25 pounds, as pounds go. We must bear in mind, however, that the purse has not been found in a Roman city but in an outlying rural community, where Roman coins were not used for prime necessities but chiefly for the purchasing of imported fancy goods.

We know from the finds of *terra sigillata* in Friesland and Groningen, that regular imports started between 140 and 150 A.D. and reached a peak about the year 175.<sup>4</sup> The region where the purse has been found, was practically uninhabited but a much frequented road lead through it. Contrary to Groningen and Friesland, hardly any imported ware has come to light in the less prosperous Drenthe. There-

fore the owner of the purse might have merely been passing through on his way to more lucrative regions. But herewith we have left the safe domain of numismatic evidence for the dangerous field of pure conjecture!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Byvanck 181-2

<sup>2</sup> Byvanck 163

<sup>3</sup> Brought forward at the *Congrès International de Numismatique*, Paris 1953: Actes, 175-9

<sup>4</sup> Glasbergen 356

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