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The Severan coin hoard from Shapwick (*JRA* 14, 358-72): a comment

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Since most coin hoards are found without any archaeological context, even when excavation after discovery is possible, prompt publication of a large hoard of *denarii* with its context is so unusual an event that a few extra comments and questions may be allowed.

I have doubts about the comparison with the site at Frocester (Glos.). The finds there suggested the remains of an iron-bound chest, and it might be that that was a strong box. If so, it was a permanent feature but was found empty. The Shapwick hoard was deposited in a scoop in the ground and was presumably a temporary hiding-place for a sum of money which might be roughly £150,000 to £250,000 in modern terms. The hiding of the hoard would, in a sense, be more 'normal', and certainly more safe, if it were done within the walls of a derelict building rather than an active farm. From the archaeological details this seems to be a possibility.

The coins were mainly struck after the reform of Septimius Severus in 194 and a silver content of around 55% was quoted from the work of D. R. Walker. Although it does not affect the Shapwick paper, I would like to draw attention to the work of K. Butcher and M. Ponting which warns against the uncertainty of Walker's results and suggests a fineness nearer 46-48% for such coins.¹

Silver and gold coinage may well have been sent to Britain mainly to pay state debts and state servants, and these, such as army personnel, are sometimes cited in connection with coin hoards. The distribution of hoards similar to that of Shapwick is not heavily biased towards the military zone — Bristol, Muswell Hill in London, and Shapwick itself are examples. But we could bear in mind that the soldier who would have the most money to hand is the one who has recently retired with his accumulated savings from the legionary accounts and with his retirement bonus. For hoards the size of Shapwick military connections might therefore seem more likely than agricultural explanations, such as the recent sale of even a large flock of sheep.

Most hoards of the early 3rd c. comprise a mixture of new and old coin. Only a hoard very close to the official source is likely to consist entirely of new coin. The old coin in most hoards has a standard composition which reflects the coin-pool in circulation at the time of hoarding, so any interpretation has probably to depend on the recent coinage, and the balance between new and old.² On this basis, the Shapwick hoard is not very far removed, in business terms, from the source of money imported into Britain.

Yet the interpretation of any coin hoard by means of the coins it contains is impossible, for the simple reason that the people who buried the hoard could not then have known why they were unable to recover it. This leaves on one side votive deposits, for which there seems no evidence in the present case. But recent work on the composition of hoards does hold out hope of defining groups of coin hoards and so moving closer to a method of explanation.³

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- 1 "A study of the chemical composition of Roman silver coinage, AD 196-7," *American Journal of Numismatics* 2nd ser. 9 (1997) 17-36.
 - 2 R. Reece, "Numerical aspects of Roman coin hoards in Britain," in J. Casey and R. Reece (edd.), *Coins and the archaeologist* (London 1988) fig. 1, p. 88.
 - 3 P. Guest and R. Reece, review of A. S. Robertson, *An inventory of Romano-British coin hoards*, in *British Numismatic Journal* (forthcoming).

Errata to volume 14 (2001)

Errata to article by R. Tybout (33-56)

- The editor regrets that an additional note (n.81) inserted by him caused errors in cross-references:
- 35, n.13: read "House of Augustus: see nn. 64 and 126; villas in Torre Annunziata and Boscoreale: see nn. 104-5, 112, 124, respectively"
 - 37, n.22: read "See the Appendix below, esp. n. 125"
 - 41, n.46: read "See, e.g., n.99 below"
 - 53, n.113: read "Supra n.104"