

# Reviews

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Sam Moorhead, *A History of Roman Coinage in Britain*, Greenlight Publishing (Essex 2013), pp. 219, ISBN 978-1-897738-54-2

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**W**ritten by Sam Moorhead, researcher of the British Museum, the book “*A History of Roman Coinage in Britain*”, provides a chronological overview of Roman coinage from Republican period to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, emphasis on Roman coinage used in Britain.

The work emanates from a very attractive series of 22 articles written for *Treasure Hunting*, according to Sam Moorhead, between 2008 and 2011. Using the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) the author provides us with an introduction to the history of each period and then outlines the coinage. The book offers the readers, illustration of 800 coins, and attractively displays images of these coins in a manner which is not often found in many previous books. The 800 coins are illustrated in over 1,600 color pictures, with obverse and reverse for each coin.

Writing as an expert on Roman coinage, the author tries to make the subject accessible to anyone with a level of interest.

The 22 articles written in the *Treasure Hunters* magazine have eased Sam Moorhead’s work in writing this book, obviously adding new elements researched in the course of his activity. The language is accessible, and the text includes constant useful explanations. The pictures are spectacular, as it is stated above. The picture of each coin, obverse and reverse, is joined by information which is relevant in the spirit of the text. We also find items that enable a more accurate comprehension of the text, e.g. the statistical and graphical tables and information of the text, which could be useful to students and researchers in their new research projects.

The originality of this book also consists in the manner in which the author succeeds to synthesize a long historical period, providing information and explanations easy to understand in only 224 pages. The figures offer an obvious advantage, as well as those over 30 colored maps. Obviously, there are some disadvantages in the manner of writing, although the framing in the historical period is excellent, the shallowness of the political explanations may mislead the reader. The author does not intend a historical analysis of the period, but a presentation of the coins and their framing within a historical and political context as precisely as possible. Nevertheless, there are historical events which are easily debated, the tetrarchy being one of them. Throughout the reading, one may notice the coherence of the text and the accuracy of the information used.

The book consists of 28 chapters and *Glossary of terms*. At the end of the book the author provides a bibliographical list section, *Further Reading*, and further information about *Archeological and Numismatic Societies*.

In the first chapters (I-II, pp. 3–11), the author gives an introduction related to some scientific and technical elements related to coins and the method of recording the coins presented in the present book. The book’s database is in chapter I (p. 3), *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, which encourages the voluntary recording of all objects that are not considered as *Treasure*, mainly coins. It is the largest dataset of this kind in the world. To analyze

finds of Roman coins, the author used Reece Periods (p. 5, tab. 2)<sup>7</sup>, together with his own two more added periods to cover the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. In chapter II (pp. 8–11) the author offers information on Roman currency system, while in chapter III, (pp. 12–15), a list of Emperors and Empresses represented on coins found in Roman Britain. In chapters IV and V, (pp. 16–31), is explained the study of coin's obverse and reverse. Chapter VI, (pp. 32–44), includes information on Roman mints, how they worked, and their changes during the reforms. Starting with chapter VII, (pp. 45–49), and ending with chapter XXVIII, (pp. 202–214) a detailed structure of all rulers or emperors who issued coins is presented. Each issuer benefits of a historical introduction, information about mints, coins or, by case, copies of coins, and many coins illustrations, maps, tables and statistical information. By the time the reader reaches this stage in the book they already have a background from the first six chapters, and they are about to get some numismatic information related to historical facts. A minor disadvantage may be considered here the lack of economical information and historical facts related to economy that can make this book not so easy to be understood for a non-specialist.

Chapter XXII, "Coinage of The Britannic Empire: Carausius and Allectus" (pp. 147–156), is an interesting chapter in light of the "C" mint. It is true that scholars know little about this mysterious mint, and the debates are still active.

A particular aspect, among many other interesting topics of this book, is the matter of "*Copies of Severan Denarii*" (p. 109). The author considers that given the large quantity of such pieces, it is likely that they played a role in the economy, possibly substituted for *sestertii*, *dupondii* and *asses* which were not imported in large numbers to Britain at this time. In this case, PAS Database is becoming a vital source of information for these copies. For any researcher this particular case could represent a major research project.

Somehow surprisingly is the absence of information on political events. The author manages to explain very well the period between the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, which is known to be troubled, even more from numismatic point of view.

The author made sure from the very first lines that, as the reader goes through the book's pages, there will be no misunderstood information and he/she will manage to study thoroughly the text.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that this book contains a detailed, educational and attractive presentation of the coinage of Roman Britain from Republican period to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD by using coins recorded in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. It is an excellent introductory guide to the monetary types found in Roman Britain, with interpretation and contextual information setting the coins into a wider picture. In my opinion, both the novice and the more knowledgeable readers can understand the purpose of this book and personally, I enjoyed reading it, and happy to write this review.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Reece – The Coinage of Roman Britain (2002)