
COIN HOARDS AS EVIDENCE OF TRAGEDIES. SOME GENERAL REMARKS ON THE NORTH OF GAUL (3RD CENTURY AD)

Abstract: Hundreds of Roman hoards containing fairly good silver coins were buried around mid-3rd century AD in the north-west of Gaul. Most were not found in houses but hidden in the ground. Why were so many hoards buried outside the safety of a dwelling and, more importantly, why they have never been recovered? The author explores different explanations and suggests that valuables are only buried outside a house into the soil in case of an emergency. In his view, epidemics, natural disasters or religious offerings do not explain these large numbers of hoards. He returns to the traditional explanation i.e. violence and more specifically invasions from outside the empire. Examples from Estonia during WWII, and others, are exploited to demonstrate that men bury belongings and memorabilia in the ground, when they have to abandon their homes in case of danger.

Keywords: *Roman Empire, coin hoards, Gaul, invasions, 3rd century AD crisis.*

Coin hoards have been lost by accident; offered in sanctuaries or at holy places; thrown away or hidden to secure the owner's possession. This last type of deposit is often described as a coin hoard and that is the term which will be used in this paper for any deposit containing several coins intentionally deposited together. The use of the word "several" is tricky as it is vague and does not precisely define the number needed for a deposit to be characterised as a hoard (one gold coin or at least two items, some use 5, 10 etc.). It is of little use to this paper to go into detail on that question.¹

A very large number of coin hoards is documented for the Roman Empire, a fact well illustrated by the Coin

¹ The maps in this paper, however, display only hoards of minimum 5 coins.

Johan van Heesch

Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels
johan.vanheesch@kbr.be

DOI: 10.14795/j.v7i1_SI.485

ISSN 2360 – 266X

ISSN-L 2360 – 266X

Hoard of the Roman Empire Project of Oxford University and the Ashmolean Museum².

The site contains validated information about 7,500 hoards or 2,5 million coins and the number increases!

Their high frequency, make the coin hoards a vast body of evidence for archaeologists and ancient historians. They contain rare items with historical interest because of their type (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Aureus of Postumus. AD 261. 20mm. Schulte 26b. KBR Brussels.

Hoard can document the frequency of the coins' minting and offer an insight in the economic history.

The main questions of this paper are: why were so many coin hoards "abandoned" in the ground in North Gaul during the 3rd century AD and if the study of these discoveries can contribute to the history of the Roman Empire. Three more questions are central: Is it typical for individuals to bury their belongings in the ground or is this only done in exceptional circumstances? Why were hoards of precious artefacts abandoned and never recovered? Can they play a role as historical evidence?

In the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous papers and books were published arguing that

² See: <http://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/> (accessed September 6, 2019).

the closing dates of the coin hoards are often similar and that they form a coin-find-horizon (e.g. AD 275) linked to catastrophes, especially armed conflicts (wars, invasions, uprisings).³ Many studies explained the presence of numerous coin hoards with a similar closing date as evidence for invasions documented by written sources or even used the coin data to reconstruct invasions undocumented by the ancient authors on the sole evidence of these hoards. Thus, the coinage became an important element to reconstruct history.⁴

In the last decades new interpretations have been offered and numismatists became aware of the danger of this one-sided explanation. Multiple causes for coin burials were described and ceremonial deposits or religious offerings became an important factor in interpreting hoards.⁵ There can be no doubt that valuables were confined to the ground for multiple reasons and, in different eras, different attitudes existed.⁶ It seems clear that in the Iron Age, gold coins and other valuables were much more frequently deposited in sacred contexts than during Roman period. The Merovingian gold coins are often found in graves, which is quite exceptional in Roman times.

This paper aims to argue that a lot of Roman coin hoards buried in the soil were deposited there out of fear of losing valuables or precious belongings and that the fact that they were never recovered was very often due to a catastrophe.

The precise reason for the deposition of a hoard remains often difficult to explain even when a written source is available. On this line, relevant examples come from the stories about hoards in Egil's Saga, written in the 10th century. Egil Skallagrimson is an Icelandic

³ BLANCHET 1936 for invasions; DELMAIRE 1995 and CHRISTOL 1976 for the economic aspects of hoarding.

⁴ DE CALLATAÏ 2017 for an excellent long-term overview with a large bibliography, but also BLANCHET 1936; VAN HEESCH 2017.

⁵ BRADLEY 2017 in general and GHEY 2015 for the evidence from Britain.

⁶ For relevant example, a very documented study, THÜRY 2016.

warrior-poet and farmer who, on a certain day, gets into dispute with his father, Skallgrim, about money. Father decides to leave his home on horseback with a chest of silver on his laps and an iron cauldron under his arm. He places these belongings into a marsh with a stone on top and returns home to die.⁷ This story illustrates the difficulty of interpretation of why hoards are deposited into the soil. Does Skallgrim hide his treasure out of anger or is it some votive deposit in preparation of his death? Or, is the story worthless because it is inspired on a popular tradition that linked the discovery of treasures with well-known sagas?

The paper will point out the numerous coin hoards of the late 3rd century AD in North-Western Europe as an example of what I think it is a fair chance that these hoards were abandoned because of a violent historical event. However, the evidence is often anecdotal and it is up to the reader to express his own opinion.

The hoards selected here have the latest coins minted during the joint reign of Valerian I and Gallienus (AD 253-260) and the Gallic Empire (AD 260-274) and were discovered in northern Gaul and the German provinces (the north of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg and Germany, west of the Rhine).

A good starting point can be considered a small coin hoard discovered at the Roman villa from Merbes-le-Château, province of Hainaut, southern Belgium, at a place called "Champ de Saint Eloi", the field of Saint Eligius - the patron of the goldsmiths but, also, of the minters! The name of this findspot suggests that metal finds were known from this site for a very long time.

Two lots of coins were found. A small group of four brass sestertii of the 2nd century AD and a purse with 122 silver radiates or antoniniani from Caracalla (AD 215) to the joint reign of Valerian I and Gallienus (AD

⁷ Egil's Saga, 59, but also 88, which is a very similar story, is cited about Egil hiding his money shortly before his death. In that paragraph the author suggests that our hero buried his treasure in a ravine, a marsh or a spring as English coins [*enskir penningar*] have been found by people at a certain location.

253-260). The most recent radiates were minted in AD 259-260 in Cologne.⁸ The deposit was hidden in one of the rooms of the villa, more precisely, in a small cellar. It was found together with two copper cauldrons, a wooden box, two silver spoons and some other belongings. All artefacts were only half hidden in the ground. This last detail was used by the archaeologists to argue that because the hoard was not entirely buried, this is not a proper hiding. They suggested a possible religious deposit, also, because of the presence of a small ornamental plaque with the depiction of the Danubian rider.

This is a plausible hypothesis but other explanations cannot be ruled out.

What is important is that this hoard is not an isolated case in the North-West of Gaul. It should be interpreted in the larger context. As a matter of fact, huge quantities of deposits almost contemporary are known. No other chronological segment of the Roman rule on this area has provided us with more hoards than those abandoned during the reign of Valerian I and Gallienus and the usurpers of the Gallic empire, such as Postumus (AD 253-269). This is illustrated in figure 2, an overview of the known hoards from the years AD 254-274.

In this table regional differences are clearly visible.⁹ The north-west of Gaul (table: West modern Belgium, Nord-Pas de Calais, Picardie, Haute Normandie and Ile-de-France) clearly has a bias of finds in the first two periods while other regions tend to have more hoards in the later periods i.e. from AD 271, the reign of Tetricus I (and later). We could split the periods into smaller segments to fine-tune these data, but the main point to make is that even in a relatively short span of time regional patterns are noted. The regional patterns become even clearer when the hoards from the late 3rd century AD are mapped. The most comprehensive map of hoards ending with coins of Postumus, is the one published by

⁸ PARIDAENS et al. 2010; AUTHOM/PARIDAENS 2015.

⁹ VAN HEESCH 1998, 150.

Region	Valerian I Gallienus	Postumus	Marius Victorinus	Tetricus I	Total
	%	%	%	%	Number
Britain	10	8	15	67	149
Netherlands	8	33	0	58	12
East-Belgium	23	32	9	36	44
Germany	27	23	15	35	66
Pays de la Loire	2	24	14	61	51
Poitou-Charentes and Limousin	16	25	6	53	32
Aquitaine	24	8	0	68	25
West-Belgium	33	56	3	8	72
Nord-Pas de Calais	15	72	3	9	65
Picardie	13	52	5	30	61
Haute Normandie	15	54	10	21	39
Ile-de-France	14	49	8	30	37
Auvergne	39	39	11	11	18
Rhône-Alpes	54	17	5	24	41

Fig. 2. Coin hoards from Gaul and the Germanies, AD 254-274. Data: VAN HEESCH 1998, 150.

Haupt showing the large concentration of finds in the north-west of Gaul, more precisely in northern France and Western Belgium (Fig. 3).

Even more impressive is the rarity of hoards buried after the murder of Postumus (AD 269) in this same area. The hoards from the last quarter of the 3rd century AD (and they are numerous) are mainly found towards the *limes*, large areas of France but also in Britain (Fig. 4, English hoards not displayed).

HOW CAN THIS PATTERN BE EXPLAINED?

The fact that hoards are missing from one region from a certain period onwards, could be explained as a sign of the return of a golden age with peace, making the hiding of hoards unnecessary. This however does not explain why so many hoards buried during the reigns of Valerian I/Gallienus and Postumus were *not recovered*. When peace or prosperity returned, it is highly probable that hoards were recovered. And that clearly did not happen! On the contrary, the maps suggest a serious issue occurred in this part of the empire.

Before trying to figure out this event,

let's have a look at the evidence of settlements and the coin series of the sites from those areas. I have commented on these several times in the past.¹⁰ Although many 3rd century AD settlements are known, the exact date of their inhabitancy or abandonment is always difficult to establish in this part of the empire. Despite the fact that coins could have circulated over decades, even centuries, they may offer some insight on the history of a site. Usually, coins can give some information about when coin circulation started but also when it ended. Even when some sites have been well-excavated, most of our data come from stray finds or finds by metal detectorists. Therefore, a precise archaeological context is generally missing. That is not an objection as the overall scheme offered by these stray finds allows us to have some idea about what circulated on the site. Certainly, one must be careful with interpretation. Sites are rarely exhaustively re-searched or excavated. The upper layers may be absent, the earlier layers were sometimes levelled in antiquity etc. Furthermore, when proper archaeological

¹⁰ VAN HEESCH 1998 and 2017.

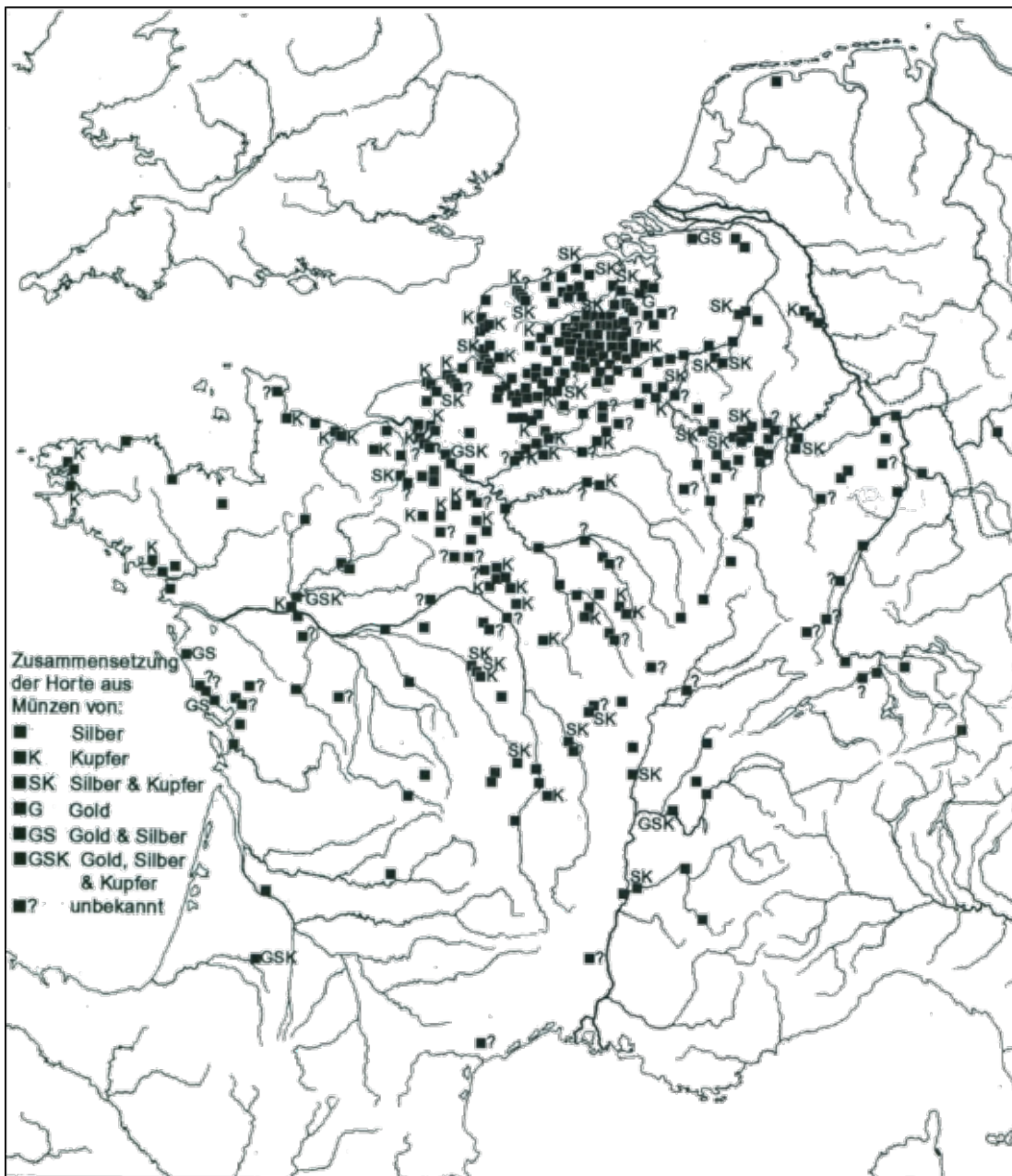


Fig. 3. Postumus hoards in Gaul and the German provinces (HAUPT 2001).

excavations are missing, the precise profile of a site is often difficult to be established (could be a villa, a sanctuary, a hamlet, a *vicus* etc.). Nevertheless, our data allow us to distinguish two main patterns of coin loss on the area under study. First of all, there are the sites with the coin series (often starting in the 1st century AD) precisely ceasing during the reign of Postumus (AD 260-269). On those sites, coins of his successors (Victorinus, Tetricus I) and, especially, the very common copies of radiates are completely absent or present in very low numbers. In most cases, these

settlements show no evidence of 4th century AD coins either. Secondly, there are the sites where the coin circulation seems to continue into the 4th century AD. These ones have large numbers of copies of radiates (the so called barbarous radiates approximately to be dated AD 275-300) and very often continue straight into the 4th century AD with large numbers of e.g. Constantinian coins. Most of these 'survivors' are the larger towns or settlements that had a military occupation.

Sites that do not seem to survive the era of Gallienus-Postumus are: Waasmunster

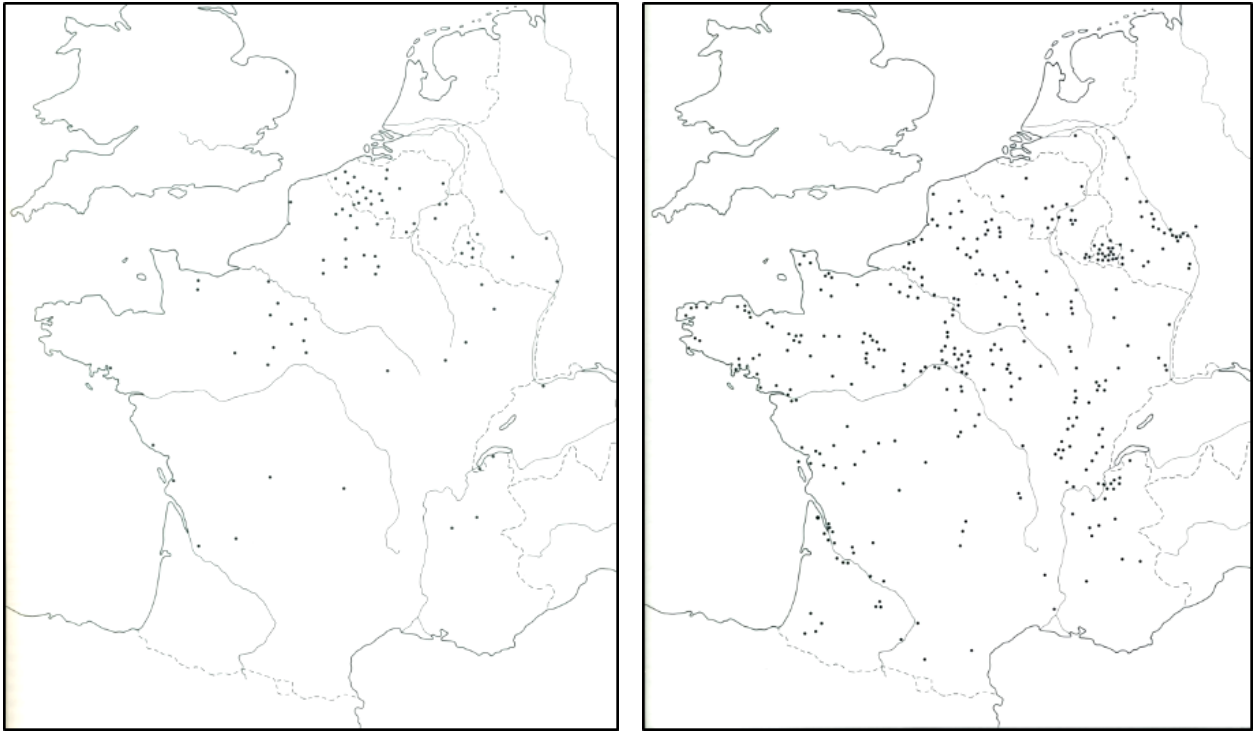


Fig. 4. Left: hoards of antoniniani with latest coin of Postumus. Data: Lafaurie 1975; map: van Heesch 1998, 153. Right: coin hoards with latest coin of Tetricus I – Aurelian/Probus (AD 271-282). Data: Ziegler 1983. Map: van Heesch 1998, 151.

(B), Elewijt (B), Kester (B), Pommeroeul (B), Velzeke (B), Sains du Nord (F). Those that continue in the late 3rd and 4th centuries AD are military camps along the North Sea coast such as Oudenburg (B) and Aardenburg (N) (both belonging to the *litus saxonicum*) and the town of Bavay (*Bagacum*, F), the *vicus* with sanctuary of Blicquy (B) and so on.

Thus, the combination of the hoarding pattern, including a large number of hoards ending about AD 260 (± 5), and the data

Emperor	Total	>29 coins
Augustus	74	3
Nero	91	1
Flavians	104	4
Antonines	233	11
3rd century	185	18
4th century	134	9

Fig.5. The consequence of the 3rd century AD troubles on the number of settlements: number of modern villages in the civitates Nerviorum et Menapiorum (= north-west of France, western half of Belgium) that have produced Roman coin finds per period. Hoards not included (data: VAN HEESCH 1998).

provided by the single finds showing the abandonment of some sites around AD 260 (± 10) seems to suggest that something happened in this region during the reign of Valerian I and Gallienus and/or Postumus (Figs. 2 and 5).

WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED?

First of all, one should admit that the chronological data is not entirely accurate, thus, it is scholarly ethical to keep the information at a larger level than giving a precise year for the deposition of each hoard. Although scholars – myself included – have tried to be more accurate about defining a *Fundhorizont*, it has been admitted that it is not very prudent to create the illusion of an absolute chronology. Many numismatists have clearly demonstrated that the end date of a hoard is not that important. As a matter of fact, people that put aside coins always keep the best denominations available for them. The most available coin on the market was the billon (or silver) radiate or antoninianus. However, this denomination was subject to a well-documented and continuous debasement

precisely during the reigns of Gallienus, Postumus and his successors. It is reasonable to accept that the last coins in a hoard tend to fall after a debasement, as hoarders singled out the better coins and paid with the lesser and most recent ones. Moreover, most of the hoards studied here are chance finds, thus, one is not always certain that they have been entirely recovered.

On this line, the hoards of the reigns of Valerian I-Gallienus and of Postumus are high in number and many of them never been recovered in antiquity.

Here are some questions to be asked: why are they buried in the ground?; is this what people usually did in every circumstance or just in case of emergencies?; and most importantly: why were these hoards never recovered by their owner(s)?

The last question will be discussed first as many explanations can be forwarded, but few seem to explain the massive hoarding in and about AD 260 (± 5). Some of the more common reasons are: losing track of the exact findspot, natural disaster, unexpected “natural” death of the owner, religious offerings, dumping coins because minted by usurpers or rendered worthless, pandemics such as the “plague”, general violence: e.g. the barbarian invasions, war and military expeditions, general insecurity caused by wandering bandits etc.

Although a single cause explanation is always dangerous and that the quote of Harold Mattingly repeated by Roger Bland that “instead of ‘barbarian invasions’, we must read ‘general troubles of the age of which barbarian invasions were a part’¹¹ contains much truth, I want to argue for a more specific explanation.

Let us try to examine the main possibilities one by one.¹²

- *Losing track of the exact findspot*: this certainly happened. Certain elements of the landscape can change but this cannot be the only reason why so many hoards of one period were not recovered.

¹¹ BLAND 2018, 61.

¹² For the economic background WITSCHERL 1999.

- *Natural disaster*: it is known that transmarine transgressions changed the coastlines along the North Sea, but it is obvious that the hoards are situated more inland and there were no tsunamis sowing death.
- *Unexpected natural death*: this cannot explain the patterns discussed above, while it might occasionally have happened, it cannot be considered as a general explanation as there are simply too many finds. Furthermore, it is unlikely that individual hide his valuables in the soil as a general habit.
- *Religious offerings* are of course an acceptable justification for some coin deposits, but it does not at all explain why so many hoards of one particular period survived. If the religious explanation is favoured then one must ask why hoards from preceding decades are much rarer.¹³ Such a sudden change in habits is hardly thinkable.
- *Dumping coins because minted by usurpers or rendered worthless*: a hypothesis that seems to attract numismatists especially when writing about the enormous hoards of barbarous radiates that indeed seem worthless. This explanation, true or not, is of no importance here, as most of the mid-3rd century AD coin hoards contain coins with a respectable amount of silver.
- *Pandemic*: this is an interesting trail. In 2017, Kyle Harper published a very stimulating book, *The Fate of Rome. Climate, disease & the End of an Empire*. He gives a high importance to the Plague of Cyprian. Cyprian became a Christian in AD 245 and was bishop of Carthage. He died in AD 258.¹⁴ In his writings, the bishop mentions a virulent disease, that Harper characterises as a viral haemorrhagic fever to be compared with

¹³ E.g. civitates of the Menapians & the Nervians, NW-Gaul: Decius – Gallus (249-253): 7 hoards; Valerian-Gallienus (253-260): 27 hoards; Postumus (262-269): 62 hoards, see VAN HEESCH 1998, 128 fig. 110. See also the maps in HAUPT 2001, 198-211.

¹⁴ HARPER 2017, 136-147.

the Ebola virus. Although it is presumed to have reached the northern limes by AD 256 and must have weakened the military forces considerably, this pandemic is mainly attested in the Near East, the Balkans and Italy. The hypothesis that it might have reached the North of Gaul and the coastal areas that we are concerned about cannot be entirely dismissed. However, it seems difficult to believe that only this area was heavily affected, and, personally, I consider it as a weak explanation for our hoards.

- *Violence*: violence and the permanent abandonment of one's belongings because of troubles in this area is the hypothesis I favour. All kind of peril situations could have overcome the area that concerns us: banditry, revolt, civil war and invasions from abroad.

The fact that hoarding comes to an abrupt end during the reign of Gallienus/Postumus (AD 260-269), that many sites are abandoned (cf. supra) is a convincing proof. Furthermore, it is known that military forts have been reconstructed during the reign of Postumus along the North Sea shores, e.g. Oudenburg (Belgium), and the forts along the Roman road from Bavay (France) to Cologne (Germany), studied in detail by Raymond Brulet.¹⁵ The numismatists are well aware that right in this period (AD 257) the mint of Cologne (or Trier as suggested by some) started coining silver antoniniani and aurei in huge numbers to pay the soldiers in the north. The messages on these coins are often telling and mention the military importance of Gallienus' presence and victories over the Germanics: *Gallienus cum exerc suo, Victoria Germanica* etc.¹⁶

Written sources also confirm the general threat and the invasions. The texts of Aurelius Victor (*Caesares*, 33, 3), Eutropius (*Breviarum*, IX, 5, 8, 2), Orosius (*Historiae*, VII, 22, 7-8), Zonaras (*Epitome historiarum*, XII, 24, PI 632)

¹⁵ BRULET 1990; VANHOUTTE 2015. See also the contributions in REDDÉ 2006.

¹⁶ GÖBL 2000 for the coins of Gallienus.

and the *Historia augusta* (Aurelianus, VII, 1-2) are well known, but they are not very precise and they are sources of a later date.¹⁷ At the same time, they do not give a real clue what happened in the coastal region of northern Gaul. It could be plausible that the danger came from the North Sea or via the rivers, as the Scheldt, which may also explain why Postumus has minted in AD 261 aurei, antoniniani and bronzes with a galley depicted on the reverse (*Laetitia Aug*), and in AD 262 antoniniani with the reverse inscription *Neptunus redux*.¹⁸ One can note that most of the hoards of Gallienus/Postumus are concentrated mainly near the North Sea coast than to the Rhine limes. Thus, the connection between hoards' burials and attacks by the sea and major rivers is not farfetched. It does not mean one should try to follow the invaders along the rivers of that area using coin finds as evidence, as suggested by some scholars, but I we would like to emphasize that the invasion theory (over the sea and via the main rivers) remains a highly acceptable explanation.¹⁹

The fact that the coin deposits of the succeeding reigns (Victorinus and mainly Tetricus I [AD 271-274] and thereafter) are situated elsewhere in Gaul (see figure 3b) points also to a frequent misinterpretation of the hoards of the second half of the 3rd century AD. They are too often exclusively associated with the "famous" invasions of AD 275.²⁰ The hoards buried under Gallienus/Postumus are earlier and completely different in composition, as they contain relatively good silver coins. They are the reflection of a completely different historic episode.

This brings us to a final argument in

¹⁷ Still important for the Gallic Empire: LAFaurie 1975 and for a general overview of the history of Gaul WIGHTMAN 1985. See also: ÁLVAREZ JIMÉNEZ 2007.

¹⁸ On the coins: ELMER 1941, 33; SCHULTE 1983, 78. The ship could be a reference to the conquest of Britain. See also: ÁLVAREZ JIMÉNEZ 2007.

¹⁹ GRICOURT 1988: Daniël Gricourt published a detailed analysis of all coin finds of this period and tried to go deeper on the chronology of these invasions. In my view, he went to much into detail about this chronology.

²⁰ WIGHTMAN 1985 for the historic data.

favour for the “violence” argument as an explanation of hoards burial. In my view, peoples, as an overall pattern, do NOT place their valuables into the ground or take them out of their traditional hiding places as dwellings or stables unless there is a serious, predicable and immediate threat! During peace time, it is a higher chance that valuables are hidden in the house or in adjacent buildings. Hiding valuables outside is not so obvious. People may see you burying the hoard, the exact spot can be difficult to locate again, others might come across the deposit by chance etc.

There are well known and well documented examples that illustrate such matters in a very convincing way. The hoards and valuables transported by the inhabitants of cities near the Vesuvius during its fatal eruption in AD 79 for example, as well as the small purses hidden by the Roman soldiers near Kalkriese in AD 9.²¹ Certainly, examples of more recent historic periods are better documented and clearly illustrate how people behave about the fear of being plundered as well as how they recovered their belongings to hide them elsewhere, preferably outside their houses. The best known story – frequently mentioned – is the that of Samuel Pepys, who in October 1667 ordered his father and his wife to bury his gold coins outside London in fear of a Dutch invasion.²² To these well-known examples, I have added a few more in a previous paper²³ but others might be quoted, as they illustrate this aspect of human behaviour.

Geeraert Janssen, an Antwerp merchant of the 16th century, witnessed the Spanish Fury or the sack of Antwerp on 4th of November 1576. During the uprising of the Netherlands against Philip II and the war against the protestants, there was an overall lack of money to pay the army, thus, the soldiers started plundering the city, soon joined by

²¹ BERGER 1996 on Kalkriese. The Pompeian finds are sufficiently well known. Inhabitants fled with bags full of money, they did not have the chance and time to bury them.

²² VAN HEESCH 2017, 401; PEPY's Diary, 13 and 19 June, 10 and 11 October 1667.

²³ VAN HEESCH 2017.

German and Walloon soldiers, who originally were supposed to protect the town. It resulted in an unprecedented pillage of the houses and, in the end, the death of more than 2,500 peoples. Janssen described his adventure in a very detailed letter to Jacop Cool written on Wednesday, the 14th of November 1576. The story goes as follows:

*“The bell sounded an alarm, so that also all citizens put on their armour and armed themselves with guns ... When the Spaniards had gained the town and driven away and slain all their enemies, they attacked the houses of the citizens ... The pillage lasted four or five days ... the fire came near in our street that we thought our house also would be burned down, so that we carried all our goods into the cellar to save them. I had concealed the bonds of Christopher Willemsen in a secret place in my room, with about fifteen or sixteen Flemish pounds in money; but fearing the fire, I removed all to the cellar, and buried it under the turfs. While I was about this, six German soldiers entered our house; when I heard them, I made a pit in the turfs, and buried myself in it to save my live. two of them climbed upon the turfs to see whether any **money** or jewels were buried underneath, and finding me they drew at once their poniards to stab me. ... As soon as they had taken me upstairs, two of them went again to the cellar and searched under the turfs, where they found the bonds of Willemsen with my money, which I did not mind much, considering that I had saved my life. That whole night I remained with them at the fire, and agreed with them to ransom myself; each of them took a garment, a piece of velvet and armozine [silk]; for what remained I was to give them two hundred daalders. ... but I could get no money in the whole town within two days, so that they carried the goods away from the house ...”²⁴*

The letter clearly shows that within the towns, where open ground was not always at hand to bury valuables, they used the cellar instead. This story reminds the one of the hoard from Merbes-le-Château, mentioned earlier in this paper, that was half hidden in the cellar.

²⁴ HESSELS 1887 (1969), letter no. 64, 145-148.

A story, not so different of the one of Pepy's, comes from Napoleonic Europe and took place in 1814. Constant, a valet of Napoleon Bonaparte, relates how he received 100,000 francs in gold that were a personal gift of the emperor shortly before or after his abdication in April 1814 at Fontainebleau. Constant placed the coins in five bags and buries them in a well-hidden enclosure in the woods near a house that he owned. A few days later, Napoleon reclaims the gold and 'pretends' not to remember having given whatsoever to Constant, as a private gift. In panic, the valet returned to the spot and dug up a deep hole without finding the bags with the gold. Afraid of having been robbed and accused of theft, he starts digging at another spot and in the end recovers the bags with the gold coins.²⁵

Again, this is another clear example of hiding valuables, this time in a secure place away from the scene of politics (Fontainebleau).

The last example concerns Estonia during World War II. The country was seized by the Soviet Union in 1940, occupied by the Germans from 1941 till 1944 and reoccupied by the Soviets in 1944 preceded by a mass exodus of Estonians. It is estimated that ca. 70,000 people fled the country.²⁶ In 2012, Mats Burström published an interesting study: *Treasured Memories. Tales of buried belongings in wartime Estonia*. He interviewed several descendants of the families who fled from the Soviet occupation and asked if they ever buried some of their belongings. The stories are not very spectacular but do illustrate how humans react during political crisis and what they do with personal belongings. Three cases are presented here.

The first one comes from an autobiography by one of the refugees, Aleksander Raukas.²⁷

"I decided that in order to provide for every eventuality I would save our most prized

possessions from the approaching frontline and devastation. I obtained two empty oil drums that held about 200 litres each and coated their outsides with asphalt. In them I placed my photographic archive and mementos, a number of books, Elsa's needlework, my forester's uniform, my hunting rifle, paints, folding camera, linen and clothing, and as much else as would fit. I drove the oil drums out into the forest and buried them in dry, sandy ground. Then I drew a map with detailed directions to the hiding-places and then in turn buried the 'treasure map' in a bottle."

It is interesting to notice that, in fact, Raukas buried memories and not valuables in the terms of wealth. It is also attractive that a treasure map was drawn. Just as Count Alexander zu Lynar-Redern did in April 1945, when his family buried their silver in a chest on the family estate at Görlsdorf, northeast of Berlin. This hoard was recovered after the fall of the Iron Curtain and sold at Sotheby's in 1996!²⁸

Another example dates from the early part of World War II (1940), when the Aunver family decided to hide their valuable in a less obvious place and *"moved to Mähkli, the old family farm in southern Estonia ... There, they hid a large copper cauldron filled with silver objects such as cutlery, a sugar-bowl, jewellery, and a couple of goblets. The cauldron they covered with tarpaulin and buried in the apiary, where the hives were stored for the winter, which lay at sole distance from the main farm building"*.²⁹

No money though, as this was probably needed to start a new live, but this story also draws our attention as it gives a detailed view of how the owners protected their hoard.

There is no certainty whether this was a general reaction of all Estonians, although Mats Burström may give us a hint: *"Anyway, it seems it was very common during the occupation and the War for Estonians to bury their 'valuables'. I was at a meeting today where there were eight of us. When I brought up your question, it turned out that half of us – four, in other words – had*

²⁵ CONSTANT 1967, 467, 482-484 (original publication: 1830).

²⁶ BURSTRÖM 2012, 23-30.

²⁷ BURSTRÖM 2012, 47.

²⁸ Sotheby's London, Auction 30 May 1996 (with illustration of the map on the catalogue's cover) and LYNAR-REDERN 2000.

²⁹ BURSTRÖM 2012, 61-2.

personal memories of buried stuff..."³⁰

There is no doubt that there are more similar stories but the one presented above are relevant to reveal that people in a stress situation try to secure their valuables and hide them in a safe place.

In our first two examples the "hoards" were recovered by the soldiers, by Napoleon's valet, though with difficulty, as it was the case in the story of Samuel Pepys who had all the troubles in the world and cursed his wife and his father for not having kept a clear record of the exact hiding spot. Most of the Estonian hoards were not recovered, though some returned to their homes recently and searched for their belongings.

Although these examples can be considered as mere anecdotes, I would like to argue that they highlight a typical aspect of human behaviour not limited in time or to a particular historic period, but that is a general pattern of human behaviour. These examples can be used to explain a phenomenon in a far distant past.

However, it has been argued that hoards of the same period found in England cannot be explained by invasions or turmoil in this very period as none are documented.³¹ But what do we actually know in detail about the reigns of Gallienus and Postumus? Almost nothing for certain. Written sources are indeed very general and do not allow us to be specific about precise dates or areas of invasions. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to consider the coin deposit-horizons at face value and use them as an historic source, even for Britain.

Other fairly comparable *Fundhorizonte* of coin hoards are known for various historical periods and often linked with violence, war, civil war or invasion. However, each case has to be studied in detail.

Is Caesar's Gallic War really traceable through the numerous gold hoards of the late Iron Age? That depends of the chronology we may consider for those gold coins that

³⁰ BURSTRÖM 2012, 40.

³¹ BLAND 2018, 67 and 75 for the hoard numbers and 92 for the explanation.

are mostly anepigraphic. Another example is provided by the hoards linked to Vikings' raids in Western Europe in the 9th century. Apparently, the dates of these Carolingian hoards do not match the chronology of these well dated raids.³²

At the end, the point I wanted to make, is that the "old fashioned" explanation or connection between violent events and hoarding still remains a valid one and should not be too easily rejected. Certainly, it can explain the numerous hoards of the reign of Gallienus and Postumus.³³

REFERENCES

ÁLVAREZ JIMÉNEZ 2007

Álvarez Jiménez, D.: Neptvns Redvx. Póstumo y el combate contra la piratería franca en el amanecer del Imperio Gálico, *Aquila Legionis* 9, 7-35.

ARMSTRONG 1998

Armstrong, S.: Carolingian Coin Hoards and the Impact of the Viking Raids in the Ninth Century, *Numismatic Chronicle* 158, 131-164.

AUTHOM/PARIDAENS 2015

Authom, N./Paridaens, N.: La villa gallo-romaine du «Champ de Saint-Éloi» à Merbes-le-Château [Études et documents. *Archéologie* 30] (Namur: Région wallonne).

BERGER 1996

Berger, F.: Kalkriese 1. Die römischen Fundmünzen [Römisch-Germanische Forschungen 55] (Mainz am Rhein).

BLANCHET 1936

Blanchet, A., Les rapports entre les dépôts monétaires et les événements militaires, politiques et économiques, *Revue Numismatique* IVe s.-no. 39, 1-70; 205-270.

BLAND 2018

Bland, R.: Coin Hoarding and Hoarding in Roman Britain AD 43-c. 498 [The British Numismatic Society. Special Publication 13] (London: Spink).

BRADLEY 2017

Bradley, R.: A Geography of Offerings. Deposits of Valuables in the Landscapes

³² For bibliographic detail see e.g. De CALLATAÏ 2017; for the Vikings' raids: ARMSTRONG 1998.

³³ I would like to thank Inge Heeren and Fran Stroobants for their help.

- of Ancient Europe (Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books).
- BRULET 1990
Brulet, R., *La Gaule septentrionale au Bas-Empire. Occupation du sol et défense du territoire dans l'arrière-pays du Limes aux IV^e et V^e siècles* [Trierer Zeitschrift 11] (Trier: Rheinisches Landesmuseum).
- BURSTRÖM 2012
Burström, M.: *Treasured Memories. Tales of buried belongings in wartime Estonia* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press).
- CHRISTOL 1976
Christol, M.: *Effort de guerre et ateliers monétaires de la périphérie au III^e S. AP. J.-C., l'atelier de Cologne sous Valérien et Gallien*. In: *Armées et fiscalité dans le monde antique* (Paris 14-16 octobre 1976), Colloque national du C.N.R.S. n° 936 (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique), 235-278.
- CONSTANT 1967
Constant, L.: *Mémoires intimes de Napoléon Ier par Constant son valet de chambre, II* (Paris: Mercure de France).
- DE CALLATAÏ 2017
de Callataï, F.: *Coin Deposits and Civil War in a Long-term Perspective (c. 400 BC-1950 AD)*, *Numismatic Chronicle* 177, 313-338.
- DELMAIRE 1995
Delmaire, R., *Les enfouissements monétaires, témoignages d'insécurité ?*, *R Nord-Archéologie* 77-313, 21-26.
- DERNELLE 1967
Dernelle, M. (ed.): *Mémoires intimes de Napoléon Ier par Constant son valet de chambre, II* (s.l.: Mercure de France).
- EGIL'S SAGA
Egil's Saga, translated by SCUDDER B., Penguin classics (London: Penguin Books, 2002).
- ELMER 1941
Elmer, G.: *Die Münzprägung der gallischen Kaiser in Köln, Trier und Mailands*, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 146, 1-106.
- FISCHER 2012
Fischer, Th. (ed.), *Die Krise des 3. Jahrhunderts n.Chr. und der Gallischen Sonderreich* [ZAKMIRA 8] (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag).
- GHEY 2015
Ghey, E.: *Hoards. Hidden History* (London: British Museum).
- GÖBL 2000
Göbl, R.: *Die Münzprägung der Kaiser Valerianus I/Gallienus/Saloninus (253/268), Regalianus (260) und Macrianus/Quietus (260/262)* [Moneta Imperii Romani 36, 43 & 44] (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften).
- GRICOURT 1988
Gricourt, D.: *Les incursions de pirates de 268 en gaule septentrionale et leurs incidences sur la politique de Postume*, *Trésors monétaires* 10, 9-43.
- HARPER 2017
Harper, K.: *The Fate of Rome. Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press).
- HAUPT 2001
Haupt, P.: *Römische Münzhorte des 3. Jhs. in Gallien und den germanischen Provinzen*. *Provinzialrömische Studien* 1 (Grunbach: Verlag B.A. Greiner).
- HESSELS 1887 (1969)
Hessels, J.H.: *Abrahami Ortelii (geographi antverpiensis) et virorum eruditum ad eundem et ad Jacobum Colivum ortelianum (Abrahami Ortelii sororis filium) Epistolae ... (1524-1628) ...* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller). Reprint.
- LAFAURIE 1975
Lafaurie, J.: *L'empire gaulois. Apport de la numismatique*. In: *Temporini, H./Haase, W.: Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II-2* (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter), 853-1012.
- LYNAR-REDERN 2000
Graf zu Lynar-Redern, Al.: *Vergraben im märkischen Sand: Die Geschichte eines Familienschatzes* (Limburg: C.A. Starke Verlag).
- PARIDAENS et al. 2010
Paridaens, N./Authom, N./Clerbois, S./Delplancke, M.-P./van Heesch, J., *Une cachette d'objets de valeur des années 260 apr. J.-C. dans une villa de la cité des Nerviens (Merbes-le-Château, Belgique)*, *Gallia* 67/2, 209-253.
- REDDÉ 2006
Reddé, M. (ed.): *L'architecture de la Gaule romaine: les fortifications militaires* [Documents d'archéologie française 100] (Bordeaux: Ausonius).
- ROYMANS/HEEREN/DE CLERCQ 2017
Roymans, N./Heeren, S./De Clercq, W.:

- Social Dynamics in the Northwest Frontiers of the Late Roman Empire. Beyond decline or transformation [Amsterdam Archaeological Studies 26] (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).
- SCHULTE 1983
Schulte, B.: Die Goldprägung der gallischen Kaiser von Postumus bis Tetricus [Typos 4] (Aarau: Verlag Sauerländer).
- THÜRY 2016
Thüry, G.E.: Die antike Münze als Fundgegenstand. Kategorien numismatischer Funde und ihre Interpretation (Oxford: Archaeopress).
- VAN HEESCH 1998
van Heesch, J.: De muntcirculatie tijdens de Romeinse tijd in het Noordwesten van Gallia Belgica (ca. 50 v.C.-450 n.C.): de civitates van de Nerviers en de Menapiërs [Monografie van Nationale Archeologie 11] (Brussel: Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis).
- VAN HEESCH 2017
van Heesch, J.: Coin Hoards and Invasions? The Evidence of Sites. In: Bricault, L./Burnett, A./Drost, V./Suspène, A. (eds.): Rome et les provinces. Monnayage et Histoire. Mélanges offerts à Michel Amandry (Bordeaux: Ausonius), 399-413.
- VANHOUTTE 2015
Vanhoutte, S., The late Roman coastal fort of Oudenburg (Belgium): Spatial and functional transformations within the fort walls. In: Collins, R./Symonds, M./Weber, M. (eds.): Roman Military Architecture on the Frontiers Armies and Their Architecture in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxbow Books), 62-75.
- WIGHTMAN 1985
Wightman, E.M.: Gallia Belgica (London: Batsford).
- WITSCHHEL 1999
Witschel, C.: Krise-Rezession-Stagnation? Der Westen des römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (Frankfurt am Main : Buchverlag Marthe Clauss).

