

Some problems concerning Roman Republican *denarii* and *aurei* found in India

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This paper is concerned with the theories regarding the date of export of Roman Republican *denarii* to India. Some scholars like P.J. Turner and V. Begley have pointed out that some Republican *denarii* arrived in India already in the time of the emperors Augustus and Tiberius. D.W. MacDowall argues, on the other hand, that the evidence suggests strongly for a date from the time of their issue up to the middle of 2nd century AD.

Coin hoards may serve as an important guide in defining the period of time during which certain coin types remained in circulation. And they also reveal the types of coins available at the time of hoarding. Thus MacDowall proposes from the coins themselves a date for the deposit of Roman Republican *denarii* in India. The Republican hoards that come under his investigation are the Manikyala Hoard, the Pakli Hoard, Captain Howell's Hoard I and II, the Iyyal Hoard and the Laccadive Island Hoard.

However, this evidence could only show the types of coins in circulation at the time of hoarding and also that the Republican *denarii* have been in circulation together with some late Imperial *denarii*. Even though this analysis could not propose a precise date for their export to India, a study of the worn condition of these *denarii* would lead to conclusive evidence on the matter. For, the worn state of the *denarii* suggest that they are worn due to circulation, that they were in circulation over a long period of time, and finally that they may have been exported anytime while they were in circulation. The Republican *denarii* were issued at a standard weight of 4.0g. In captain Howell's Hoard I, the loss of weight is between 0.2g and 0.5g and captain Howell's Hoard II between 0.3g and 0.6g. The Republican *denarii* in the Manikyala Hoard too are worn, which is attested by their line engravings. Moreover the two Republican *denarii* from the Kallikinar hoard have a reduced weight of 2.9g and 3.41g while four other Republican *denarii* from the Madras Museum weigh only 2.08g, 2.47g, 3.42g and 3.62g respectively. The weight of these *denarii* is much lower than that of the *denarii* found in the 1959 Pompey Hoard of 79 AD. Hence one cannot deny the fact that the *denarii* from India lost their weight due to circulation within the Empire where they appear to have been circulating until at least the 2nd century AD.

Although the date and purpose of export of Roman Republican *denarii* are matters of speculation, there is some evidence from the coin hoards themselves to suggest that they arrived in India fairly late in the 1st century AD, more probably in the Flavian Period rather than immediately after their minting as D.W. MacDowall suggests.

Gold or silver currency with a higher metal purity may be melted for the purposes of making jewellery or ornaments or can even be used as bullion for the minting of a local currency. The export of Roman *denarii* and *aurei* to India has been observed in this particular aspect by many scholars. R.E.M. Wheeler, D.W. MacDowall and P.J. Turner suggest that the *denarii* were exported for their metal value to be used as bullion, while others like E.H. Warmington believe that the purpose was to create a Roman currency system in India.

That the purity of the exported *denarii* was a significant factor is seen in the disappearance from circulation within the Empire of issues with a higher silver content, such as the Republican *denarii*. Therefore, the fact that the Roman Republican *denarii* found in Indian hoards were of a higher silver content and that the debased *denarii* were either rare or completely non-existent, is a strong indication that they were not used to establish a deliberate currency system in India.

The purity of the coinage and their presence in hoards suggest that they were meant for a purpose other than circulation and it is more likely that their use was as bullion.