

ROMAN COINS AS HISTORICAL SOURCES

YARROW (L. M.) *The Roman Republic to 49 BCE. Using Coins as Sources*. Pp. xxxviii + 273, b/w & colour figs, b/w & colour ills, maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Paper, £19.99, US\$25.99 (Cased, £74.99, US\$99.99). ISBN: 978-1-107-65470-9 (978-1-107-01373-5 hbk). doi:10.1017/S0009840X21002936

Focusing on Republican coinage to 49 BCE, Y.'s volume forms part of a valuable series (*Guides to the Coinage of the Ancient World*) aiming to provide accessible and authoritative introductions to ancient numismatics (F. Kemmers, *Functions and Use of Roman Coinage* [2019] is a further recent example). Aimed at students and non-specialists, Y. seeks to introduce Republican coinage and demystify numismatic research and methodology whilst demonstrating how coinage adds to ancient history scholarship. With a significant corpus to draw upon, Republican coinage is in a prime position to supplement literary sources. Y.'s volume is structured around four chapters corresponding to the main ways that coins are discussed in current numismatics ('Money', 'Monuments') and key themes in scholarship on the history of the Roman Republic that coinage can offer insights into ('Mutinies', 'Mobilization'). This structure allows Y. to consider an impressive variety of individual coins and topics.

Chapter 1, 'Money', focuses on three overarching questions: what motivated Rome to produce coinage? Why was there such variation in design comparative to other coinages? Is it possible to draw meaningful numerical data from coinage, and can this answer broader historical questions? Y. first offers an overview of early Roman coin production and supplements this effectively with findspot evidence to show how it augments understanding of the bigger picture (e.g. *aes grave* findspots and investment in maritime defences showing Rome preparing for a possible Carthaginian conflict). Importantly for newcomers to numismatics, Y. provides thorough detail on moneyers along with the difficulties in many cases outside of extraordinary issues in identifying a purpose behind an issue's production. Y. subsequently discusses the significant shifts in coinage during the tumultuous Second Punic War including the debasement of *quadrigati*, reductions in the bronze weight standard, the comparative regularity of gold issues and the introduction of the *denarius* system. Y. offers a nuanced reading of motivating factors behind regular gold issues in this period, arguing that 'we need not choose between ... crisis or prestige ... The prestige of a substantial gold issue can be seen as intended to instill confidence in the monetary system as a whole, thereby ameliorating the financial crisis' (p. 33). Y. then highlights the relative stability of the system until the late 140s BCE, when a significant revaluation of silver coinage and a shift in the unit of account from asses to *sestertii* occurred. The late 140s also saw dramatic changes in the variety of designs on coinage although Y. rightly cautions against directly connecting the two. Y. highlights how design creativity was now possible due to Rome's contemporary dominance as 'there were no other regional coinages with which it might be mistaken' (p. 44). In the final section Y. discusses quantitative scholarship, a key aspect for newcomers to numismatics to consider. Y. offers an accessible overview of much of the significant and most innovative recent scholarship utilising die studies, hoard data, metrological and metallurgical analyses although Y. is careful to highlight the undoubtedly ongoing challenges as well as opportunities in these approaches.

Chapter 2, 'Monuments', focuses on imagery on Roman coinage as 'monuments in miniature' (originally advanced in A. Meadows and J. Williams, *JRS* 91 [2001]). Y. helpfully summarises the most influential scholarly arguments around the nature of

imagery on Republican coinage and how far an ancient viewer might have understood them. Y. effectively demonstrates the interconnected nature of these images to broader themes of *pietas* and *mos maiorum* in, for example, contemporary literature/oratory. Y. highlights the mistake of understanding commemorative family references as ‘private’ types when the claim ‘is not that the individual moneyer and his family are more important than the state itself, but rather his family, and by extension the individual himself, share responsibility for the successes of the state’ (p. 69). Y. develops this by drawing a discerning comparison with public funerals where ancestral and individual deeds ‘inform the next generation’ (p. 69). Y. subsequently considers case studies from coinage produced in 56/55 BCE, which offer a helpful alternative insight into the contemporary political scene. While types continue to praise and memorialise individual/familial deeds, Y. argues that they nevertheless demonstrate both the contemporary influence of Pompey and expressions of opposition to the triumvirate and as such are reflections of the contemporary political climate. Y. goes on to consider a variety of case studies from Republican coinage indicative of how ‘Roman identity was tied to both martial prowess and correct religious observance’ (p. 88). A particularly valuable case study highlights the understudied topic of the representation of foreign peoples and places on coinage as part of this trend.

Chapter 3, ‘Mutinies’, discusses examples of coinage that ‘reflect the self-presentation of those who chose to oppose Rome or attempted to usurp her power’ (p. 114). This focus provides a highly effective demonstration of how numismatics provides an alternative perspective to literary sources. The chapter initially considers case studies from Italy and Sicily where Rome temporarily lost control of peoples under her control. While these focus on western examples, Y. helpfully points readers towards eastern cases. Y.’s analysis of these local case studies is thorough and convincing, demonstrating the importance of closely considering not only the imagery but also the weight standard and production method. This allows Y. to show that in Meles, for example, while the ‘image indicates loyalty to the Carthaginians ... the weight standard says the people of Meles continue to think within the economic system of the Romans’ (p. 118). Y. not only discusses local coinages struck by defecting communities but also the Roman reaction to them, including references on Roman coinage to the Sicilian revolt. This facilitates an effective demonstration of how coinage can supplement the understanding of events. Subsequent sections consider the coinage of the ‘enemies within’ (Sulla, Marius, Pompey) after creeping intrusions of contemporary politics on coinage in the late second century. In doing so, Y. effectively builds on the scholarship first introduced in Chapter 2 around coinage as an acceptable vehicle for commemoration.

Chapter 4, ‘Mobilization’, considers how the late Republican elite sought to speak to ‘popular’ concerns (e.g. ‘bread and circuses’, colonisation, land division, *libertas*) through coinage. Y. demonstrates a vital awareness of the audience when it comes to appealing to ‘popular’ concerns, highlighting how the intended initial viewership would have been adult male citizens from across the social hierarchy, however for others (Roman women, foreign communities, slaves) the images would have served to ‘re-enforce Roman social hierarchy in a multitude of ways: the authority of the senate, the *gloria* and *dignitas* of elite families, the centrality of militarism to Roman identity, the submissive attitude of conquered peoples, the need to control the sexuality of elite women, and more’ (p. 162). A major section in the chapter considers the commemoration of ‘bread and circuses’ on late Republican coinage. Y.’s examples of coinage responding to anxieties over the grain supply in the years prior to Gracchus’ reforms provide a further excellent example of coinage supplementing our understanding of broader historical issues as we see that ‘the moneyers are engaging in a contemporary discourse of how best to follow *mos maiorum*. The

legislation of the Gracchi and others tried to address the same problems to which these coins speak' (p. 177).

Y.'s volume is enriched by plentiful use of high-quality coin images, maps and other illustrations and infographics (e.g. on coin production). Illustrations are accompanied by thorough captions providing information on the individual details of coins and their likely allusions. Y. also includes a detailed timeline and glossary. The bibliography referenced throughout is extensive and highlights much recent scholarship in both numismatics and ancient history. Y.'s concluding section sets out starting points for further individual research on the basis of standard reference and research tools. These fantastic additional details further enable Y.'s volume to act as a highly authoritative, accessible and up-to-date introduction to Republican numismatics from which non-specialists will be well placed to develop their own knowledge and interests.

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