

Accessing Italian Cast Coinage

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The Haeberlin Collection: One Hundred Years of Work in Progress

It was not only in central Italy that a shortage of silver and gold might have been the reason for choosing bronze as money, measure, and as a medium of wealth. Nevertheless, the appearance of bronze coinage in the area between Sicily and the Black Sea in the 5th century BC can surely be called a revolution: the emergence of regular token coinage or credit-money was a much more radical approach to monetization than former overvalued electrum and silver coinages. Several generations later we can observe a brief counterrevolution, when, under the growing dominance of the Roman Republic, some communities in central and southern Italy implemented a complex system of image-carrying *bronze bars* and *aes grave*. This coinage was – of course – used next to other forms of money: *ingots/aes rude* – as well as long-established Greek and Etruscan coin traditions. Several contributions of this volume show how important these changes actually were.

Studying cast coinage is a matter of urgency. These objects and the corresponding practices accompanied a city-state on its path to become a Hellenistic super-power. By that time, the usage of coined money had been a part of Italian history for centuries. Simultaneously, up to four metal alloys were struck to produce various handy and widely accepted items for transactions. Coined money had its place in retail, religion, economic mentalities, and to some extent also in communication.¹ Around 300 BC important cities such as Syracuse used gold, silver, electrum and bronze coins of several weight standards at the same time. One explanation for such a peak in diversity was the city's engagement, which ranged from northern Africa² to northern Italy.³ Monetary complexity was a tool of integration and also a source of profit.

Into this era of highly developed monetization falls the beginning of early Roman cast coinage.⁴ Coins were used in several ways, but namely as metal and money. In this respect, Italian cast coinage was “retro”. One major difference was the size of the highest denominations. Should cast coinage therefore be regarded as a peculiar and idiosyncratic or even a backward phenomenon amidst more developed practices and structures? Theodor Mommsen was not the first scholar who saw the importance of cast coinage in regard to political and economic history.⁵ This potential is still underestimated.⁶ To study cast coinage, historians⁷ still need to absorb and harmonize a multitude of studies⁸ from a variety of disciplines concerning various places and authorities. Recent research⁹ has shown how fruitful this work actually is.

The Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin holds one of the most important collections of Italian cast coinage. In 1940, it acquired the Haeberlin Aes Grave Collection (3,502 objects), which also included manuscripts and personal documentation. This material is supplemented by the ‘Alte Sammlung’ (the old, existing, collection of

AES GRAVE
DAS SCHWERGELD ROMS
UND
MITTELITALIENS
EINSCHLIESSLICH
DER IHM VORAUSGEHENDEN ROHBRONZEWÄHRUNG
VON
DR. JUR. E. J. HAEBERLIN.
ERSTER BAND
ENTHALTEND DIE MÜNZVERZEICHNISSE.
MIT EINEM ATLAS VON 103 TAFELN ABBILDUNGEN.



FRANKFURT A. M.
JOSEPH BAER & C^o
1910.

Fig. 1a: Haeberlin goes digital! (Title page of Haeberlin 1910, digitalized by Heidelberg University Library).

Münzkabinett
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Interaktiver Katalog des Münzkabinetts

START SUCHE KARTE

Vordersseite Titel Pro Seite 100

< 1 2 >

Aes Signatum 18202529	Aes Signatum 18202532	Ausculum 18256480	Ausculum 18256485	Ausculum 18256517
Hatria 18202541	Hatria 18203374	Hatria 18203375	Iguvium 18220490	Iguvium 18220491
Iguvium 18220509	Iguvium 18220516	Iguvium 18220519	Iguvium 18220521	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave 18202540
Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200987	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200990	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200929	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200930	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200932
Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200933	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200934	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200935	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200937	Röm. Republik: Aes Grave, Proraserie libral 18200938

Fig. 1b: Haeberlin goes digital! (Interactive catalogue, Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

the cabinet) of *aes grave*, collected over centuries. Ernst Justus Haebler (1847–1925) not only planned to publish a catalogue (fig. 1), but also a detailed study of metrology, as well as the economic, historical, and cultural implications of Italian cast coinage. But his work was never completed. Rudy Thomsen's¹⁰ three volumes partly filled this gap.¹¹ Additionally, many other contributions followed. However, the Haebler Collection has awaited further investigation for more than 100 years.¹²

The aim of this article is to show that an object-centered methodology, online publishing, as well as a revision of all preserved coins is a desideratum.

Every Object Matters

In her dissertation, Marleen Termeer was able to convincingly analyze network structures¹³ as well as the iconography of Roman Republican colonial coinages. Her work underlines that cast coinage contributes valuable information towards an understanding of Roman expansion. Marleen Termeer's study demonstrated that this needs to be accomplished by reviewing the entire monetary system as well as all available parallel evidence.

All of this work is based on chronology. After long and complex debates, it is now considered very likely that most of the Italian cast coinage appeared under Roman control.¹⁴ Thus, the growth of Roman power was not the end of local coin production: in many ways it was its beginning. Looking at these developments in context with the changes in the Hellenistic east, we need hardly be surprised, given that monetization generally increased. Various denominations reached areas that were formerly untouched by coined gold, silver, and bronze. It was also in these decades that some Celtic populations started to mint their own coinage. Like the Italians, many other populations were inspired by established discourses of coin iconography.

From this perspective, the ancient world was shrinking. Since there are more than 17 known mints that produced cast coinage,¹⁵ historians have a precious group of sources. Analyzing areas of cast coinage and silver-based currency contributes to understanding networks from various perspectives. Cast coinage connected cities with their hinterland. Even if the military events of the 3rd century BC are a plausible background for the monetization of Italy, the role of Rome's military engagements should not be overestimated.¹⁶ Most of Rome's expenses were not paid with coined money.¹⁷ On the other hand, apart from *ramo secco*, image-carrying *bronze bars* of a large size only were emitted in Rome.¹⁸ *Aes grave* can therefore be seen as a form of a highly *cooperative coinage*¹⁹ that shaped networks.

It is likely to assume that individual and more complex local decisions lay behind these functions.²⁰ Roman interests were negotiated via cast coinage. The iconographic discourse reflects *paideia*. Knowledge has various media. Could cast coinage be read as a

form of coined history: a bronze echo of collective memory? The title ‘Accessing Italian Cast Coinage’ has two dimensions.

Aes grave was also creative coinage. For a while it was perhaps more trustworthy than some of the debased silver or electrum coinages of the 3rd century. It certainly was more universal when compared to currencies based on two- or three-alloys. Understanding cast coinage’s metrology would shed more light on these crucial questions concerning its currency functions. Cast coinage was not lucrative enough to warrant faking. But was it convenient? The *As* or *nummus* could be pretty heavy, weighing several hundred grams. The idea that cast coinage was not an ideal object of daily trade is therefore not surprising.²¹ But these denominations were not small change either.²² If three *Asses* equaled one Silver-*nomos* or Didrachm, everyday trade would not have been too hard to handle. Local economies were used to exchange via heavy bronze pieces.²³ Despite the availability of cast coinage they did not stop using *aes rude*.²⁴ Moreover, *aes grave* was built on small denominations.

The existence of quarter *unciae* shows that one *As* (48 *quartunciae* equals 1 *As*) was a lot of money. Extraordinarily large transactions could have been made with precious metal – be it coined or otherwise. Researchers are confronted with a parallel system, in which the power of cast coinage was innovative. With cast coinage, Rome, its colonies, and some of its allies found an entry into monetization. Regardless of whether this was a conscious strategy or not, the practice was successful. Haebler’s corpus listed over 13,000 objects in 1910. Assuming it is likely that melting down cast coinage was more profitable than melting down struck bronze coinage, a disproportionately large part might have been lost. To use cast coinage presented an economic advantage for a time. Thus, the realization of the Roman Republican expansion and its survival against powerful Hellenistic opponents also has to be explained by analyzing cast coinage.

Cast coinage and its contexts carry individual as well as structural implications, and therefore every object matters. Scholarship, however, is presented with some significant problems.

Like Clockwork

The main challenges of research on Italian cast coinage are best highlighted through a fitting example. The following coin²⁵ is just such a precious piece of evidence (fig. 2).

The obverse of the *As* shows a bearded male head with traces of a diadem, turned to the left (perhaps a *genius* – maybe the *genius* of the local lake). The left field reads “TN”. The reverse shows a bird of prey, perhaps a sea eagle, standing to the left and with its head reversed. Its claws hold a fish and the letter “R” placed in front of its head reveals the city of the coin’s production: Reate/Rieti.



Fig. 2: Reate, As, 314,92 g, 78–82 mm. Haeberlin 1910, 149 no. 1 pl. 93,6; Rutter 2001, 44 no. 250 (275–225). Münzkabinett Berlin, SMB, SPK, 18263396.

“What was it for? Why was it adopted? Why was it adopted at that particular time? What, if anything, does it tell us of Rome’s economic, political or cultural development?”²⁶

Over 30 years ago, Andrew Burnett asked some simple questions about *aes grave* which still point out the general lack of evidence. The *As* of Reate was found in Poggio Catino. Its context contributes to the knowledge of the limited main circulation area of *aes grave*.

What was it for? Coins from Reate remain exceedingly rare and the only known denomination is what Haeberlin called an *As*. The weight standard and metrological questions remain uncertain as there are far too few documented examples. And even more questions remain unanswered: Was it an *As*? Was it a *nummus*? Are there other coin finds in this area that could possibly shed some light on coin circulation and use?

Why was it adopted? Why was it adopted at that particular time? It is plausible that this coin was cast when the city fell under Roman control in about 290 BC, or later. Keith Rutter and Italo Vecchi date it about 275–225 BC.²⁷ This leaves a 50-year time window, which covers more than two generations. Who could have been involved? Alberto Campana discusses the role of Manius Curius Dentatus, who was prominently involved in the wars that changed the political map around Reate. This would lead to a top-down perspective even neglecting complex structures of social negotiation processes. Evidence of the consul’s participation in the choices that underlie the monetization of Reate is hard to find. The letters “TN” may hint at a magistrate’s name, but responsible

for what? Managing the mint? Was he involved in the iconographic choices?²⁸ Up to this point, many questions have been raised by a coin that – since it bears letters – offers more information than many other examples.

What, if anything, does [cast coinage] tell[s] us of Rome's economic, political or cultural development? All coins carry historical implications. The eagle is one possible starting point. Similar iconography frequently appears around the whole Mediterranean basin.²⁹ On Italian cast coinage, eagles can be identified in at least three contexts.³⁰ Far away from Reate we come closer to shared iconography but not in terms of chronology: the Eagle of Akragas knew many styles and poses.³¹ But it was in the 5th century when it appeared in a design comparable to the eagle of Reate (fig. 3).

Can these parallels shed any light on the coinage of Reate? There are some coin finds of Akragas as far as the north of Italy.³² Perhaps a critical number of Classical coins still circulated in the 3rd century. Here, we might however observe a conscious or even elaborated archaism – or, perhaps better: classicism. We possibly observe a *translatio* of Classical images into vogues of Hellenistic Italy. If so – did the pictures of the coins stay in the minds of more than just a small group? Which (local?) myths and stories might the eagle have been carrying? Or was it a variation of more contemporary coin types? Should these phenomena be regarded as arbitrary and independent developments? Questions such as these can be raised about all of the coin types transmitted by Italian cast coinage.

Historiography has left traces of some authority's interest in the response to their coin types, although they are few. Graffiti, erasures, countermarks, pierced coins, signs



Fig. 3: Akragas, Onkia, 3,58 g, 12h. Westermark 2018, 284 no. 994,5 O3/R4, c. 415–406 BC (this object).

of usage – all these little differences hint at object-histories and embody resonances the coins provoked.

Many objects are damaged and included in pools of *aes rude*. This should be kept in mind while speaking about the meaning of iconography for religious and other cultural practices. The authors of the iconographic discourses cannot be asked. But the objects are still there and it is possible to reconstruct communicational and economic functions as well as historical responses. There are, however, limitations:

- a. Chronology and purpose:³³ The clockwork of chronology³⁴ is a fragile system. Precise dating often is proposal. Broad dating leads to general assumptions. Closely connected questions of metrology are still open to debate. It remains uncertain if military campaigns were the main reasons for emitting cast coinage.³⁵ Even in late antiquity, military payments were partly paid with goods and not only in coins.³⁶ The purposes of *aes grave* can be explained by needs and consumption and might have been diverse: military payments, penalty charges, festivals, games, magistrates' salaries, taxes, infrastructure, or lack of small change.³⁷
- b. The individual: All insights are connected to questions of dating and purpose. What can we deduce about the production process? Who were the parties involved? What kinds of individual choices were possible? How "local" were local decisions?³⁸
- c. Interpretation: Resonance and functions depend on chronologies and parallel evidence³⁹ and are therefore hardly traceable. This ambiguous coin discourse still is intriguing. Resonance ranges from ignorance, recognition, positive emotional response, or from a perception of art to religious practices, and even to philosophy.⁴⁰ Cast coinage reached Switzerland, northern Italy, Croatia, the Czech Republic,⁴¹ and Turkey.⁴² But what were its functions and how many people actually came into contact with these objects?⁴³

Summary

The study of cast coinage provides opportunities for generations of researchers to come. The monetization of Italy is an even broader field that cannot be seen in isolation from the history of the entire monetized world.⁴⁴ In a digital environment the accessibility of evidence grows. Publishing cast coinage online is a way to conserve, to tap into, and to protect cultural heritage.⁴⁵ Digitization does not stop with object epistemologies. It can also include parallel evidence of Italian and Hellenistic mentalities, ethos and philosophy.

Cast coinage is placed between Greek, Etruscan, Celtic and middle-Italic traditions. The economic and historical settings of cast coinage are seldom clear enough for interpretation.⁴⁶ The *As* of Reate illustrates that there is much more to analyze than synchronic perspectives. Cast coinage was a brazen mirror⁴⁷ and not exclusively an *interpretatio italica* of Classical or even Archaic pictorial traditions. Cast coinage produced hybridiza-

tions of identities. It is a key source for investigating monetization, as well as the beginning and the transition of one successful project to another. Cast coinage is paradigmatic.

The intentions of money makers cannot be analyzed, but functions, practices and resonance can. The brief case study of Reate shows that mimetic strategies need to be deconstructed. The typology of the eagle of Reate is almost the same as the Akragantine one – but not quite.⁴⁸ Generally, cast coinage makes use of *mimicry* – it is the difference that matters. There is cast idiosyncrasy: individual agency could materialize in coins. Idiosyncrasy did not blindly follow role models or even orders, but did not want to perform defiance (or even otherness) either.⁴⁹ From the economic point of view, cast coinage was pragmatic; in some ways it looked conservative but it was in fact progressive. Its manifold power of inclusion explains its success as well as its decline – and its end.⁵⁰

Can cooperative research lead to a finer typology? Several specimens of cast coinage still remain in the collections as well as deposits of *aes rude*. Must we expect new contextualized finds?⁵¹ Can we come closer to the process of production? Reflecting methods could perhaps partly fill the void of missing die studies. There are manipulations, such as graffiti and countermarks.⁵² They reveal historical resonances.⁵³ These objects can tell us a little more than others. Signs of use offer valuable information. Relative and absolute chronologies depend on it. The material has to be fully published to study it. To follow each object is a way to achieve a better position for asking questions about politics, power, and *The Culture of Cast Coinage*.

The starting point could be an online publication of the Haeberlin-Collection. The future of research on the monetization of Italy could be set on networking and an open stage. A platform based on all available collections is needed to find and research coins. Users should be able to add to the collection by entering their own (cast) coins into the web portal.⁵⁴

A *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum Online* would provide a place of exchange both of ideas and material. It would become a new central portal that over time would also be able to replace Haeberlin's corpus and move forward towards big data and citizen science.

Notes

¹ Concerning the development of cast coinage, Laum 1924 is still good to think with.

² Visonà 2016, 116. 118.

³ Gorini 1992; Arslan 2006.

⁴ Termeer 2015, 187.

⁵ Mommsen 1860, 170–211. 229–280; critical remarks: VII–VIII.

⁶ For example: Coffee 2017, 25–85; Kuttner 2004, 294–321. See further: Termeer 2015, 172. For heavy metal coinage as an important phenomenon within history of the monetization of the Italian peninsula, see: Cornell 1995, 61, 180f. 287f. 394–397. On iconography: Morello 2008; Hollstein 2011, 59–67. Thonemann

2015 impressively shows that coins are one key source for studying the history, politics and culture of the Hellenistic era.

⁷ Vecchi 1988, 49–53. Concerning the state of research, see: Rutter 2001. Important web-portal on the coinage of the Roman Republic based on the standard catalogue of Crawford 1974: <<http://numismatics.org/crro/>> (16th December 2019).

⁸ Burnett 2012, 297–314; Crawford 1985, 39–47; Burnett 1989, 33–64; Burnett 1977, 92–121; Wolters 1999, 10–13.

⁹ Kemmers – Murgan 2016, 277–290; concerning the project, see: <<https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/47223601/AMurgan>> (16th December 2019). Termeer 2015, 170–285.

¹⁰ Termeer 2015, 196 f.

¹¹ Thomsen 1957–1961.

¹² Haeblerlin 1910; Vecchi 2013. Concerning the state of research on the Haeblerlin collection, see: Weisser 2014, 279–305.

¹³ Termeer 2015, 171–178. 183–186.

¹⁴ Burnett 2012, 302–311; Termeer 2015, 222.

¹⁵ Vecchi 2013 lists 23 issuers: Rome, Tarquinii, Volterrae, Uncertain of Inland Etruria, Uncertain of Etruria or Umbria, Ameria, Iguvium, Tuder, Ariminum, Hatria, Firmum, The Vestini, Carsioli, Praeneste(?), Reate, Anonymous series, Issues not in recognizable series, Meles, Ausculum, Luceria, Venusia, Volcei, Uncertain of Samnium or Lucania.

¹⁶ Termeer 2015, 170–172. 178–182. 222. 225.

¹⁷ Burnett 1987, 13.

¹⁸ Termeer 2015, 185.

¹⁹ Mackil – van Alfen 2006.

²⁰ Termeer 2015, 178 f. 196.

²¹ Termeer 2015, 225.

²² Burnett 1987, 6.

²³ Burnett 1987, 3.

²⁴ Kemmers – Morgan 2016, 283–285.

²⁵ Campana 1994, 217 f.

²⁶ Burnett 1987, 2 f.

²⁷ Vecchi 2013, 61 f.

²⁸ Pallottino 1987, 73 f.

²⁹ Westermark 2018, 19–29.

³⁰ Termeer 2015, 196 n. 716. 199.

³¹ Vonderstein 2006, 173–180.

³² Gorini 1992, 97–99.

³³ Burnett 1987, 8 f.; Termeer 2015, 183. 220. 231. 236. 252. 264.

³⁴ Mittag 2015, 19.

³⁵ Termeer 2015, 261.

³⁶ Burnett 1987, 13; Wienand 2012, 43–86; Termeer 2015, 175.

- ³⁷ von Reden 2010, 26.
- ³⁸ Termeer 2015, 170. 192.
- ³⁹ Burnett 1987, 16.
- ⁴⁰ Termeer 2015, 171–182. 189f. 194f. 201–206. 232. 279.
- ⁴¹ Kolníková 2012, 63. 71 no. XII.1; 86 map.
- ⁴² Regling 1927, 183.
- ⁴³ Termeer 2015, 282–284.
- ⁴⁴ Termeer 2015, 183.
- ⁴⁵ Weisser 2014, 279–305.
- ⁴⁶ Burnett 1986, 67–75, esp. 74.
- ⁴⁷ Termeer 2015, 197–200. 226.
- ⁴⁸ For a fruitful implementation of this concept in post-colonial studies, see Bhabha 2000.
- ⁴⁹ For this concept, see: Davis – Lindenberger – Wildt 2008.
- ⁵⁰ Termeer 2015, 191.
- ⁵¹ Termeer 2015, 184. 213.
- ⁵² Haeblerlin 1910, 27 Nr. 108 pl. 12,1.
- ⁵³ Termeer 2015, 251. 262.
- ⁵⁴ The realization of this goal had already begun for Thracian, Troan, Moesian and Mysian coins: <<https://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/>> (16th December 2019).

Image Credits

Fig. 1a: Haeblerlin 1910; <<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/haeblerlin1910text/0009/image>> (screenshot by the author). – Fig. 1b: <<https://ikmk.smb.museum>> (screenshot of an IKMK-search by the author). – Fig. 2: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, SMB, SPK, 18263396; Foto: Lutz-Jürgen Lübke, Lübke und Wiedemann 2017. – Fig. 3: American Numismatic Society (ANS) (original ca. 17 mm); Creative Commons <<http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.8243>>

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