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ARKADIUSZ DYMOWSKI

**ROMAN DENARII OF TIBERIUS AND CALIGULA DISCOVERED
IN THE DRAINAGE BASIN OF THE WISŁOKA RIVER
IN SOUTHERN POLAND**

ABSTRACT

A. Dymowski 2013. *Roman denarii of Tiberius and Caligula discovered in the drainage basin of the Wisłoka River in southern Poland*, AAC 48, 273–284.

To date only four Roman denarii issued in the period between the coming to power of Tiberius in 14 AD and the monetary reform of Nero in 64 AD are known from Poland, all of them single finds. Three — two Tiberius and one Caligula — were discovered in a small area bordering the river Ropa, the left-hand tributary of the Wisłoka. Presumably these coins had found their way to the area north of the Carpathian range from the south. In seeking to identify possible causes of their influx we need to pinpoint, first, factors related to the functioning and decline of the Kingdom of Vannius, the client state of the Roman Empire, established presumably in the south-western area of today's Slovakia and in Moravia. An alternative interpretation is to link the coin finds in question with the impact from Dacian culture on the area to the north of the Carpathians. Irrespective of the causes of the coin influx, these coin finds, definitely not typical on the territory of Poland, point to the existence in the drainage basin of the Wisłoka around 50 AD of some special circumstances that we can hope to see illuminated by the results of future archaeological research in the region.

Key words: Roman Period; Przeworsk Culture; *Regnum Vannianum*; Roman denarii

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From the drainage basin of the Wisłoka in southern Poland, to be more exact, from the area bordering on the river Ropa, the left-hand tributary of the Wisłoka, comes a number of extremely interesting Roman coin finds. Discovered many years ago they have been mentioned, time and again, in the reference literature but have yet to be subjected to an in-depth analysis and interpretation. But before this is done a brief introduction is needed to the subject of influx of Roman denarii to the territory of present day Poland.

There is ample evidence that the first larger wave of denarii, Republican and issues of Emperor Augustus, took place during the final decades of the first century BC and at the onset of the first century AD (Dymowski 2011, 143–144; cf. also Kunisz 1970, 28; Bursche 1995, 88–89; Kolendo 1998,

124; Romanowski 2010, 37). Imaginably, Republican silver coinage and that of the first Roman Emperor found its way to the territory of today's Poland in substantial numbers and was distributed relatively evenly across the whole territory occupied by Przeworsk Culture during the Younger Pre-Roman and the Early Roman periods, for the most part without going beyond its northernmost reaches (Dymowski 2011, 143). The period of reign of Augustus (27 BC–14 AD) is followed by a several decades, possibly even a century, when silver coinage hardly enters the territory of Poland, if at all. The onset of the next, much larger wave of influx of denarii, this time, Imperial, 1st–2nd century issues, presumably dates to not earlier than the reign of Trajan dated to years 98–117 (Dymowski 2011, 143–144; Dymowski 2013; cf. Lucchelli 1999, 160–161). With this wave, which possibly should to be separated into several phases within the confines of the second century, came the majority of Roman coins known from finds made on the territory occupied during that age by the people of Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures.

The view that the mass influx of 1st and 2nd century Roman denarii to the land east of the Rhine limes and north of the Danubian limes, that is, also to the territory of modern Poland, is datable not earlier than to the second century, tends to be universally accepted at present¹. This makes it easier to explain why hoards of 1st and 2nd-century denarii from the territory of Central European Barbaricum as a rule do not contain coins issued before 64 AD, that is, struck prior to the reform of Nero which lowered the silver content in the denarius and its weight (Lucchelli 1998, 160–161; cf. also Bursche 2008, 53). This is because pre-64 denarii were withdrawn from circulation by Trajan's decree of 107 and soon after this date they virtually, although not at once, went out of use (Duncan-Jones 1994, 195–196; Kunisz 2001, 350–351). Struck of fine silver, the heavier denarii of the first Julio-Claudian emperors issued before 64 AD were the first to disappear from circulation by the end of the first century (Duncan-Jones 1994, 195–196). The next to go were the slightly more inferior Republican denarii, except for the legionary issues of Mark Anthony. Older denarii from the period of the Republic were allowed to circulate until the reign of Trajan, possibly even until Hadrian reigned in the years 117–138 (Duncan-Jones 1994, 196). The legionary denarii continued in use the longest which finds reflection in the structure of hoards. They had been minted in 32–31 BC to pay for armies during the wars with Octavian, using a standards of weight and silver content, similar to that of imperial denarii issued after the devaluation carried of Nero in 64 AD².

¹ Berger 1992, 157–159; Bursche 1994, 472–475; Lucchelli 1998, 161–162; Wolters 1999, 385–386; Erdrich 2001, 127–128; Ciołek 2003, 28; Bursche 2004, 196–198; Bursche 2006, 222; Berger 2008, 105; Reece 2008, 70; Ciołek 2009, 159; Dymowski 2013.

² Kunisz 1970, 119; Wielowiejski 1970, 132; Crawford 1978, 152; Duncan-Jones 1994, 196–206; Gązdac 2010, 130–135; see also Bolin 1958, 336–357.

Hoards recovered in Poland did not contain denarii issued under Tiberius (14–37), Caligula (37–41) and Claudius (41–54)³. The few hoards attributable to the first wave of influx mentioned earlier contain no denarii younger than issues of Augustus (Dymowski 2011, 134 [with a list of references]). On the other hand, the quite numerous hoards of imperial denarii from the 1st–2nd centuries, interpreted as an echo of the second wave of influx, as a rule do not contain denarii older than the late, i.e., post 64 AD issues of Nero (54–68)⁴. In the case of single finds, over a half a century ago M. Gumowski in his study on Roman coin finds from Poland (Gumowski 1956) referred to four denarii from the chronological time-frame of interest to us here: all were struck under Tiberius (including 1 coin of Germanicus). Two of these records definitely are inaccurate as to the identification of the coin or outright false⁵. The two other finds as to which there are no grounds to suspect their authenticity, are a denarius of Tiberius from Zielona Łąka (Gumowski 1956, 124, No. 29) and a denarius of the same emperor from Jasło (Gumowski 1956, 128, No. 8). Two more, single finds, with a similar chronology, are cited by A. Kunisz in his inventory of Roman coin finds from Lesser Poland (Kunisz 1985): a denarius of Caligula from Biecz (Kunisz 1985, 26, No. 7-V) and a denarius of Tiberius from Gorlice (Kunisz 1985, 64–65, No. 58-I). No other Roman denarii finds, issues Tiberius to Claudius, have been recorded in Poland so far (see Fig. 1).

We do know too much about the find from Zielona Łąka. According to the information provided in the study by C. Fredrich (1909, 206, No. 32), in 1909 the coin was reported to the Kaiser Friedrich — Museum zu Posen, now the National Museum in Poznań, by Appelt, a schoolteacher. The coin was not purchased for the museum collection but its obverse legend recorded on this occasion: “Ti. Caesar Divi Aug. f. Augustus” leaves no doubt that it was an issue of Tiberius.

The denarius from Jasło belonged to an assemblage of coins discovered in the nineteenth century during railroad construction in Lesser Poland. Reportedly, the coin was discovered at an unspecified location on 6 June 1875. This

³ Information in reference literature about the presence of early imperial denarii, Tiberius to Claudius, in deposits cannot be true. I mean here the denarius of Germanicus in the hoard from Rekowo, powiat Bytów (Gumowski 1956, 111, No. 5; cf. Ciołek 2007, 198–200, No. 280 [with a list of references]) and the denarius of Claudius in the putative hoard from Błotnica Strzelecka, powiat Strzelce Opolskie (Gumowski 1956, 123, No. 61e; cf. Ciołek 2008, 25–26 [with a list of references]).

⁴ Only nine deposits of 1st–3rd century silver coins recorded in Poland contained Republican denarii, one in each hoard, except for one case when there were two of them in the same hoard; one hoard of denarii included a unique Augustus denarius see Dymowski 2014.

⁵ The Tiberius denarius from Nowa Cerekwia, powiat Głubczyce (Gumowski 1956, 122, No. 14a; cf. Ciołek 2008, 158–170, No. 250–253 [with a list of references]), and the denarius of Germanicus from Świniary, powiat Gniezno (Gumowski 1956, 124, No. 10; according to Fredrich 1909, 205, No. 14 was an unspecified coin of Germanicus).



Fig. 1. Finds of Roman denarii of Tiberius and Caligula in Poland; drawn by A. Dymowski and I. Jordan.

- 1 — Zielona Łąka, powiat Pleszew, województwo wielkopolskie; 2 — Jasło, powiat Jasło, województwo podkarpackie; 3 — Biecz, powiat Gorlice, województwo małopolskie; 4 — Gorlice, powiat Gorlice, województwo małopolskie.

record, included in the first publication of this find by L. Piotrowicz⁶, was repeated in later literature⁷. This denarius, a Tiberius issued 14–37 AD by the mint at Lugdunum (RIC 26), is now in the Archaeological Museum in Krakow⁸ (see Fig. 2). The diameter of this specimen is 18.7 mm, its weight — 3.025 g.

⁶ Piotrowicz 1936, 101. L. Piotrowicz noted that on that same day a medium-sized bronze coin (as) of Titus was discovered in Jasło but it does not follow from other information found in his publication whether the two coins had surfaced at the same location.

⁷ Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, 78, No. 227 [with a list of earlier literature].

⁸ Inv. No. MAK/10462. My warm thanks for preparing the material and making it available for publication go to Jacek Górski PhD, Director of the Archaeological Museum in Krakow and to Paulina Poleska PhD and Bożena Reyman-Walczak from the same institution.



Fig. 2. Jasło, powiat Jasło, województwo podkarpackie, Poland. Roman coin: a Tiberius denarius, AD 14–37, Lugdunum; Photo by A. Susuł (Archaeological Museum in Krakow).

The coin's die axis is approximately at 12 o'clock. On the obverse is the emperor's laureate head right and legend TI[CAESAR]DIVI-AVGFAVGVSTVS. Represented on the reverse is a female figure (Livia?) seated right, holding branch and sceptre, chair legs plain, double line below chair); the legend reads: PONT[IF-MAX]IM.

The denarius from Biecz, was recorded by A. Kunisz who drew on earlier references in literature and on information from J. Reyman (Kunisz 1985, 26), was discovered after 1945 at an unspecified location. It is not entirely clear on what grounds A. Kunisz revised its earlier attribution of a denarius of Germanicus to that of Caligula⁹. During the 1980s the coin reportedly was in keeping of the regional museum in Biecz, current name — Muzeum Ziemi Bieckiej (Kunisz 1985, 26). Unfortunately, at present not only is there no denarius of Caligula or Germanicus in this museum, but not a single Roman denarius to speak of¹⁰. Nevertheless, A. Kunisz was a sufficiently conscientious and experienced numismatist that the authenticity and attribution of the Caligula denarius from Biecz must remain unchallenged. Unfortunately, the coin itself must be regarded as lost.

Almost the only record on the unspecified Tiberius denarius from Gorlice, during the 1950s in keeping of the museum in Gorlice, is to be found in an unsigned and terse published included in the first volume of *Acta Archaeo-*

⁹ Kunisz 1985, 26, Footnote 1 to find No. 7-V; this determination is duplicated in: Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, 14, No. 25, which also lists earlier literature.

¹⁰ The regional museum in Biecz (Muzeum Ziemi Bieckiej) now has in its keeping ten Roman coins: two asses from the 2nd century, a sestertius from the 2nd century, an Alexandrian coin from the 3rd century and six bronzes from the 4th century. For exhaustive information on this matter I am indebted to Marta Bartuś, the Director of the Museum in Biecz.

logica Carpathica¹¹. The coin had been discovered before 1939 in the town centre, near to the church. In 1985, according to the published inventory of A. Kunisz who cited a private communication from Alfred Waclawski, Director of the museum in Gorlice (Muzeum Polskiego Towarzystwa Turystyczno Krajoznawczego w Gorlicach), the coin was considered to be missing (Kunisz 1985, 64, No. 58-I).

As we have confirmed, the denarii, issues Tiberius to Claudius, are exceedingly rare among Polish finds if we compare their four specimens described earlier to e.g., several thousand 2nd century denarii discovered in the same region. To some extent this could be explained by the small quantity of denarii issued during the indicated period, and especially in the reign of Caligula and Claudius (Kunisz 1978, 56 and 66), which could explain minor outflux of this coin type from the Empire. On the other hand however these denarii are fairly abundant elsewhere in the European Barbaricum, first of all, in Dacian finds¹². How then do we interpret these four coin finds from Poland?

The first feasible interpretation would be that a very small quantity of coins struck by the first emperors came into the region together with a great wave of 1st and 2nd century denarii which took place during the second century. As was noted earlier, pre-64 AD imperial denarii (i.e., struck under Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and early into the reign of Nero) fell out of circulation still during the first century. Nevertheless, in some rare cases, denarii hoards dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries, both within the Empire and outside its borders, contained individual denarii of the first emperors. This shows that a very small number of this type of denarii may have continued in circulation until the end of the second century. Of similar hoards discovered within the Empire we can mention the deposit from Edston¹³ (Britain) and the assemblages from Potters Bar¹⁴ (Britain) and Itești¹⁵ (Dacia). For Barbaricum analogous finds would be the deposits from Fröndenberg¹⁶ (western Germany) and Råmose¹⁷ (Zealand). It is quite likely therefore that single specimens of imperial denarii struck before 64 AD may have been brought to the territory of Poland in a mass of later denarii. This presumably was the case of the

¹¹ AAC, vol. I, part 1, 1958, p. 130. This record was duplicated in later publications; see Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, 57, No. 157 [with a list of earlier publications].

¹² Crawford 1985, 235; Moasil, Depeyrot 2003, 176–186. Let us recall that until the conquest of Dacia by Trajan (98–117) this region was a part of Barbaricum.

¹³ Holmes, Hunter 1997, 158–166; a hoard of 290 denarii, the youngest of them Heliogabalus, containing thirteen legionary denarii of Mark Anthony and one Tiberius denarius.

¹⁴ Meadows, Orna-Ornstein, Williams 1997, 116–120; a hoard of 95 denarii, the youngest of them coins of Marcus Aurelius, with a denarius of Claudius.

¹⁵ Depeyrot, Moasil 2008, 213–216; a hoard 272 of denarii, the youngest of them a coin of Septimius Severus, with a single denarius of Tiberius.

¹⁶ FMRD VI 5084; among 257 coins, the youngest of them Marcus Aurelius, there were six legionary denarii of Mark Anthony and a single denarius of Tiberius.

¹⁷ Horsnæs 2010, 76–77; among 428 coins, the youngest of them Marcus Aurelius, there was a single denarius of Tiberius.

Tiberius denarius discovered at Zielona Łąka. At the same time it is unlikely that the same interpretation holds also for the three finds from the drainage basin of the Wisłoka. First, compared to other regions of southern Poland this area has not produced a more outstanding number of finds of post-64 AD denarii (see Kunisz 1985, map on pp. 12–13) with which the early imperial denarii would have entered the area. Second, it is hard to explain using this interpretation the concentration of three coins atypical for Poland at large in a small area bordering the river Ropa.

The second possible interpretation would be to date the influx of imperial denarii struck before 64 AD to the first century, that is, to the time antedating the withdrawal of these coins from circulation within the Empire. In this case two possibilities have to be taken into consideration. First, the denarii had entered the area of today's southern Poland directly from the territory of the Roman Empire. If we accept that imperial silver coinage found its way to the Central European Barbaricum mainly due to political causes¹⁸, then Roman subsidia come into play, or possibly, gifts made to the tribes residing to the north of the Carpathians, all as part of the Roman policy pursued in relation to the Quadi state of Vannius, client of the Roman Empire (*Annales* II.63., p. 478–481; *Annales* XII.29–30., p. 352–355; see also Kolendo 2008). This polity, situated presumably in the south-western region of present day Slovakia and in Moravia, foundered around 50 AD after an attack of northern tribes, among them the Lugii (*Annales* XII.29–30, p. 352–355; see also Kolendo 2008, 203–205), who are identified with the population of the Przeworsk Culture, their territory in what today is central and southern Poland (Kolendo 2008, 160–169). It is quite feasible that at the back of the action taken by the Lugii was diplomacy of the Romans who were made uneasy by the growing power of Vannius, a potential source of threat to the borders of the Roman Empire (Kolendo 2008, 203–204).

Alternately, early imperial denarii could have passed to the drainage basin of the Wisłoka as a result of redistribution within the Barbaricum. To judge from the fact that they were discovered in the Beskidian Piedmont, the most feasible direction of inflow would be from the south. It is worth taking a closer look at finds of denarii issued under Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius recorded to the south of Poland. In Slovakia none are recorded¹⁹, it is the same in Moravia²⁰. This basically rules out the possibility of linking the denarii finds

¹⁸ A closer analysis of circumstances in which Roman coinage found its way into barbarian hands is presented by P. Kehne (2008, 75–81; see also Bursche 1996, 101–121; 2004, 198). Political circumstances of influx of coinage included tribute payments (e.g., for military assistance or keep peace), subsidies (e.g. for client states), plunder, ransoming of hostages, army pay.

¹⁹ See Ondruch 1964; Hlinka, Kolníková 1978, Kolníková, Hunka 1994; see the Krakow TIR volume (Kaczanowski, Margos 2002) which takes in its range much of the area of Slovakia.

²⁰ See Pochitonov 1955. This analysis is outdated; unfortunately we do not have an up-to-date list of Roman coin finds from Moravia.

from the drainage basin of the Wisłoka to the territory of the Kingdom of Vannius. A tempting hypothesis, not the least because this polity functioned in the same period as the reign of Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius (*Annales* XII.29–30, p. 352–355; see also Kolendo 2008). Could it be that within this polity Roman silver coinage was used only by a very narrow political elite of the barbarian community and this would be the reason for the absence of these coins from the archaeological record? In which case the finds from the drainage basin of the Wisłoka must be interpreted as coins which entered the area, presumably as gifts, offered to the local political leaders by the “authorities” of *Regnum Vannianum*. What is more, as a result of the invasion of 50 AD the Lugii could have captured the treasury of Vannius (*cf. Annales* XII.29., p. 352–355; Kolendo 2008, 204), imaginably part and parcel with Roman coins (Kolendo 2008, 204) and carried them north of the Carpathian range. To continue the review of early imperial denarii finds elsewhere in the southern region, in the Bohemian Basin only three silver coins from the period of interest are recorded: two denarii of Tiberius and one of Caligula (Militký 2013, 54). A much larger number of denarii with the same chronology is noted on the other hand among the finds from the territory of Dacia (as to hoards, see Moisił, Depeyrot 2003, 176–186) and — given the geographic spread of these coin finds — influx from this particular direction may be accepted as the most feasible.

From an archaeological perspective, culture-wise the situation in the drainage basin of the Wisłoka during the Early Roman period cannot be regarded as clear at present. The region of the Polish Carpathians and the foothills of the Beskidy was an area penetrated by several cultures, most notably, Przeworsk and Púchov cultures; also well legible are elements of Dacian culture (Madyda-Legutko 2004, 72–81; Kaczanowski, Madyda-Legutko 2005, 128). The area where the coin finds of interest were recorded lies to the east of the enclaves of Púchov culture identified so far (Pieta 1985, 26–30; Madyda-Legutko 1995, 38–39 and inserted map No. 3) and to the west of a concentration of sites with Dacian materials (Madyda-Legutko 1995, 38–39 and inserted map No. 3; Florkiewicz 2004, 672–673 and map on p. 660). Could it be that we need to tie the finds of early imperial denarii to Przeworsk culture, its settlement network documented in the drainage basin of the Wisłoka during the Roman period (Madyda-Legutko 2004, 76)? This question will remain unresolved until we have discovered the record, datable to the Roman period, of settlement in the area bordering on the river Ropa and establish conclusively its culture attribution. But we have to note that we cannot hope to link the finds of early imperial denarii to Púchov culture because of the deficiency in the archaeological record of analogical finds from northern and eastern Slovakia — the cradle of that culture during the Younger Pre-Roman and the Early Roman period (Pieta 1985, 26–28; Kaczanowski, Madyda-Legutko 2005, 128).

And so, taking into account the historical, archaeological and numismatic context we can propose two interpretations of the influx of Tiberius and Caligula denarii to the drainage basin of the Wisłoka. First, the coins entered the territory to the north of the Carpathians in connection with the functioning and the downfall Kingdom of Vannius. Possibly, a power centre of Przeworsk culture was there somewhere on the river Ropa around 50 AD and involved itself in political developments in the south. Nevertheless, the existence of such a centre should be intimated by finds of valuable imports from the Roman Empire but as yet — barring the finds of early imperial coins — none have been recorded (*cf.* Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, 6–376 and inserted map No. I). Second, we may seek the causes of the influx of early imperial denarii in the same development, at present hard to define more closely²¹, which also resulted in Dacian culture impact to the north of the Carpathians. Irrespective of the causes of the coin influx, these coin finds, definitely not typical on the territory of Poland, point to the existence around 50 AD in the drainage basin of the Wisłoka of some special circumstances that we can hope to see illuminated by the results of future archaeological research in the region.

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Abbreviations

CM	Collection Moneta.
FMRD	B. Korzus, <i>Die Fundmünzen der Römischen Zeit in Deutschland</i> , Berlin 1973, vol. VI:5.
RIC	C. H. V. Sutherland, <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i> , London 1984, vol. I (revised edition).
WN	Wiadomości Numizmatyczne.

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²¹ According to M. Rudnicki (2012, 478–479) contacts or Pre-Roman Dacia with the area to the north of the Carpathians dating of the Pre-Roman and to the Early Roman period need to be examined within the frames of long distance exchange maintained the length of the Dacian Road.

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