MONEY

R. WOLTERS: *Nummi Signati. Untersuchungen zur römischen Münzprägung und Geldwirtschaft*. Pp. viii + 475 ills, tables. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999. Cased, DM 188. ISBN: 3-406-42923-8.

There is a group of questions which have always been central to the history of the study of Roman imperial coinage and the monetary economy. They include the organization of the Roman mint, the meaning of SC on the imperial bronze coinage, the authority to coin, the minting policy of the empire, coin-propaganda, and the legal status and value of Roman coinage. These are the big issues which this big book sets out to tackle. It is in origin the author's habilitation thesis from Braunschweig University, and it forms a compendious treatment of these familiar topics. It is full and well-researched, as one would expect from a German thesis of this high level. It also makes for genuinely interesting reading in parts.

It is not primarily a book of new ideas. The author has eschewed this approach by choosing to go straight for the traditional questions. It is, however, a full statement of the evidence on many of the important issues with well balanced and not always orthodox judgements offered on the problems. Wolters seems more at home with subjects where the evidence is numismatic and literary. Here he has done extensive first-hand research. He comes up with more than the usually cited ancient references when considering such old chestnuts as 'Did the Romans ever look at their coin-types?' in relation to the propaganda issue (which he covers very well), and he has obviously found some new material to shed light on these questions. He is also good on hardcore numismatic issues, producing an interesting new ordering of the issues of Claudius and an imaginative answer to the problem of whether the bronze coins of Caligula were melted down after his death. He argues that the Senate ordered their withdrawal after Caligula's murder while Claudius was away from Rome, possibly as an honorific gesture towards their new emperor who, in return, reacted rather negatively and suppressed the issue of bronze coinage for the next twenty years, to clarify the point that the Senate no longer had any rights of initiative in the area of the coinage.

W.'s handling is, by contrast, somewhat less sure when the evidence involves looking at the coin-hoards and what they can tell us about the nature of coin-circulation. References to two of the most extensive coin-hoards publication series, *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain* and *Trésors Monétaires*, are notable by their absence from the bibliography. In discussing the question of whether older, better coins were removed from circulation by the consumer or by the state, he goes for the latter option. He points especially towards the Neronian monetary reform of A.D. 64, which saw a lowering of standards and an increase in production, as the point at which Republican and early imperial silver coins start to disappear from circulation (p. 376). The hoard evidence seems to suggest a slightly different picture. Early Julio-Claudian denarii do not really disappear from circulation until the reign of Domitian, while Republican denarii persist until the reign of Trajan (Hadrian in Britain), and in considerable quantities, moreover, long after Julio-Claudian denarii had dwindled to a small percentage of the circulation pool. Furthermore, this phenomenon causes a problem for the idea that the force behind the removal of old coin from circulation was the recycling of coin by the state, the explanation which W. favours. Early imperial denarii seem to have a slightly higher fineness than the mean for all Republican denarii (98% as opposed to 96.8% to take their gross mean finenesses, though the available analyses

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are not totally reliable) and, being newer, were certainly less worn. But by the late first century A.D. these variations were slight in comparison with the difference between both these groups and, say, Nerva's denarii, which have a mean fineness of about 92%. There was therefore no great reason for their differential treatment from the state's point of view if the main motive for withdrawing old coin from circulation was recycling for profit. If, on the other hand, the coin-using population played a large (though not necessarily exclusive) rôle in removing coins from circulation, then perhaps some irrational factor such as the greater visibility of imperial denarii—nicely distinguished by the name and bust of the reigning emperor—over the confusing variety of Republican designs might be canvassed as an explanation for this otherwise puzzling phenomenon. The idea would be that consumers removed the good coins of Augustus and his successors for illegal recycling and resale as bullion but left the older coins of the Republic well alone, perhaps encouraged by other factors such as an exaggerated impression of the difference in fineness between the two groups. That there was selective removal of finer coins by the population in defiance of the law is strongly suggested by the coins in the Snettisham (Norfolk) jeweller's hoard, so called because it combines silver and bronze coins with silver jewellery, scrap gold, finger-rings, and gemstones (see C. M. Johns, *The Snettisham Roman Jeweller's Hoard* [London, 1997]). Seventy-four of the eighty-three denarii in the hoard are of the reign of Domitian, an extraordinarily high proportion for a group of coins buried in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the probable date of the hoard. Domitian's coins seem to have been specially selected by the silversmith for their high silver content to be reused as bullion. Specialist metal-workers are not necessarily representative of the population as a whole. Nevertheless, this hoard is a demonstration, albeit a very rare one, that selective removal of coins of particular emperors which were known or were believed to be of especially good silver did take place. It is some such mechanism, rather than rational state initiative alone, that best explains the otherwise inexplicable survival of Republican coins and the thorough removal of early imperial coins in the late first century A.D. Not that older, better coins were not being constantly removed from circulation by the state to produce newer, baser ones throughout this period. But that was not all that was going on, and it may not have been more important in its effects than the choices being exercised by the Roman coin-user.

This is, however, merely a minor difference of approach. This book is a mine of thought-provoking information and good sense, and it should serve as the starting point for future discussion of many of the topics it so admirably covers. If someone could undertake the probably rather expensive task of translating it into English, it would reach a far wider audience, gain a much higher profile, and have a greater impact on the debate within our increasingly monoglot academic world.

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THE HISTORIES OF MEDICINE

P. J. VAN DER EIJK (ed.). *Ancient Histories of Medicine. Essays in Medical Doxography and Historiography in Classical Antiquity*. Pp. viii + 537. Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1999. Cased, $134. ISBN: 90-04-10555-7.

As the title suggests, this volume deals with the various ways in which Greek and

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