

John Richard Melville Jones: *Testimonia Numaria Romana*. Greek and Latin Texts Concerning Roman Coinage. London: Spink Books 2023. VII, 687 p. £ 80.00. ISBN: 978-1-912667-97-0.

The “*Testimonia Numaria Romana*” is the long awaited sequel to John R. Melville Jones’ “*Testimonia Numaria*. Greek and Latin Texts Concerning Ancient Greek Coinage”.¹ With its 687 pages, the volume assembles a selection of ancient Greek and Roman text fragments and inscriptions related to ancient Roman coinage and its production and distribution, as well as the agents behind it. Chronologically, the scope runs from the introduction of Roman coinage up to the monetary reorganisation of Anastasius in the fifth century. Some later-dated texts are also included as they are relevant for the periods discussed. Although the volume states that it has left out a lot of subjects, such as texts that are related to weights of medicines and others that refer to the careers of men who assumed a function related to finances or coin production, the volume remains copious.

The collection of the source material in the volume is divided into several thematic chapters, relating to: 1) “Coinage and Money in the Early Days of Rome [001–142]” (pp. 1–95); 2) “Republican Coinage [143–392]” (pp. 97–237); 3) “Imperial Coinage [393–446]” (pp. 239–271); 4) “Coinage of Individual Emperors [447–663]” (pp. 273–405); 5) “Roman Mints and Minting [664–752B]” (pp. 407–468); 6) “Money Changers and Testers [753–786]” (pp. 469–493); 7) “Coin Hoards [787–789]” (pp. 495–497); 8) “Forgeries and Other Irregularities [790–807]” (pp. 499–509), and 9) “Late Roman Imperial Legislation on Coinage [808–886]” (pp. 511–573). The texts within each chapter are mainly ordered chronologically, with the exception of the legal texts in chapter 9. A tenth chapter deals with the names of the different coins used in the Roman Empire and some other related numismatic terms (“Roman Coin Names [887–995]”, pp. 575–611). Here, the lemmas are ordered alphabetically. The volume closes with a section with “Varia and Addenda [996–1054]” (pp. 613–650).

No predecessor of this kind of *testimonia* is known to me. Of course, other scholars have previously published on the history of Roman coinage, based,

1 J. R. Melville-Jones: *Testimonia Numaria*. Greek and Latin Texts Concerning Ancient Greek Coinage. 2 vols. London 1993–2007.

for example, on texts from antiquity.² Much has also been written on the production and distribution of coinage, as well as on banking and credit.³ Furthermore, the studies related to iconography and the selection of coin types make intensive use of ancient texts in order to gain a glimpse of how Roman administration and its central power thought about the selection of coin types and their impact.⁴ Yet, this is the first time that such a volume has assembled different kinds of texts – literary, documentary, religious and legal – related to all domains of Roman coinage. Some texts have already been intensively explored, whereas others need to be discovered or rediscovered by scholars.

Being an expert in numismatics, especially in the field of coin production and its administration, but also mastering the languages of ancient Greek

- 2 A list will be too long for this review. I therefore want to quote here W. E. Metcalf (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*. Oxford/New York 2012 (Oxford Handbooks) and F. Kemmers: *The Functions and Use of Roman Coinage. An Overview of 21st Century Scholarship*. Leiden/Boston 2019 (Brill Research Perspectives/Ancient History) as a good starting point for further reading on the history of Roman coinage and the debates around it as well as the seminal books of L. M. Yarrow: *The Roman Republic to 49 BCE. Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge 2021 (Guides to the Coinage of the Ancient World) and C. Rowan: *From Caesar to Augustus (c. 49 BC–AD 14). Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge/New York 2019 (Guides to the Coinage of the Ancient World).
- 3 Here too a selection is made of publications on these topics: B. D. R. Hellings: *The Denarii of Septimius Severus and the Mobility of Roman Coin: The Case of Roman Germany*. In: *NC* 176, 2016, pp. 171–181; C. Howgego: *Coin Circulation and the Integration of the Roman Economy*. In: *JRA* 7, 1994, pp. 5–21; M. Reddé (ed.): *De l'or pour les braves! Soldes, armées et circulation monétaire dans le monde romain*. Bordeaux 2014 (*Scripta Antiqua* 69); C. Ellithorpe: *Striking a Dissonant Chord: The Geographical Targeting of Trajan's *Debellator* Coinage in Dacia*. In: M. Caccamo Caltabiano (ed.): *XV International Numismatic Congress, Taormina 2015. Proceedings*. Vol. 2. Rome/Messina 2017, pp. 742–748; J. Andreau: *La vie financière dans le monde romain. Les métiers de manieurs d'argent (IVe siècle av. J.-C.–IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.)*. Rome 1987 (*Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome* 265); M. Bange: *Kreditgeld in der römischen Antike. Ursprünge, Entstehung, Übertragung und Verbreitung*. Rahden, Westf. 2014 (*Pharos* 33).
- 4 See, among others, C. F. Noreña: *Coins and Communication*. In: M. Peachin (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*. Oxford/New York 2011, pp. 248–268 (Oxford Handbooks); E. Manders: *Coining Images of Power. Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193–284*. Leiden/Boston 2012 (*Impact of Empire* 15); L. Claes: *Kinship and Coins. Ancestral and Familial Representation on Roman Imperial Coinage under the Principate*. Leuven 2025.

and Latin, Melville Jones provides a translation in English for every ancient text. Furthermore, all texts are given some additional context. All this means that the volume will be a valuable seminal work not only for specialists in the numismatic field, but also for historians, students and all kinds of scholars as well as people interested in Roman coinage. The introduction, which is strangely limited to two pages (pp. III–IV), states that the volume only contains texts that are considered relevant for the subjects discussed in the chapters. However, no further argumentation is given on the choices made, although some extra background information is provided at the beginning of each chapter. Here, it is also a pity that no further attention is paid to bigger, but also smaller, debates that are ongoing regarding some issues. Yet, bibliographical references for specific arguments and theories are sometimes mentioned. Concerning the case of the selection of messages on Roman imperial coinage, the volume's commentary on Statius' *Silvae* 3.3.103–105 [no. 703] refers to an article published by the author of this review stating that the *a rationibus* was the official responsible for selecting the images and legends on the coins. Yet, there is no mention of whether this issue is part of the bigger debate on the 'propagandistic' value of Roman coinage and the authorities behind it, nor does the text discuss the involvement of other candidates who could have selected what is on the coins.⁵ Another example concerns the monetary legislation of Marcus Marius Gratidianus discussed by Cicero in his *de Officiis* 3.20.80 [no. 387]. Here, the commentary refers to several older publications by Michael H. Crawford, although Gratidianus' legal tender law is also the subject of a recent, bigger study by Liv M. Yarrow. This study touches on such issues as the serration of the *denarius*,⁶ a debate that is also related to the text of Pliny's *Natural History* 33.46.132 on Mark Antony allegedly mixing his silver *denarii* with iron [no. 388]. Here, too, there is no further debate, let alone that it is possible to reconstruct this particular debate without any prior knowledge. Yet, here, the introduction to the volume already included a disclaimer admitting that the volume does not purport to be a survey of coinage in the Roman world, where all sources are

5 For more on this debate, see F. Kemmers: Coin Iconography and Social Practice in the Roman Empire. In: L. K. Cline/N. T. Elkins (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Imagery and Iconography*. Oxford/New York 2022 (Oxford Handbooks), pp. 339–357.

6 Yarrow (note 2), pp. 45–46.

presented with full annotation and commentary. Nor does it claim to be an educational sourcebook.

Nonetheless, several of the texts are a pleasure to read in their own right. Here in particular, I want to quote the fragments of Plinius' *Natural History*. Plinius' encyclopaedia is well known for its descriptions of botany, astronomy and geography, but his work has also assembled a breadth of knowledge related to metallurgy and numismatics. Here, in particular the fragments [nos. 98.1–6] related to the early coinage of Rome are of particular interest, as well as Melville Jones' comments on them. The same applies for Livy. His *Ab Urbe condita* is used as one of primary sources for the history of the Roman kings and the Republic, but it also contains a lot of useful references to the development of Roman coinage and the use and misuse of money [e.g. nos. 016; 048–060; 069–071; 073–077; 079–085; 100–104; 108–122; 150–197; 200–201; 205–228; 230–245; 254–293]. Along the same lines, the references by various authors and inscriptions to Iuno, her epithet Moneta, and temple, are interesting to read on their own [nos. 666–678]. Furthermore, the chapter with the texts on forgeries and other irregularities reads as a crime novel at some points [nos. 790–807].

As with all volumes that comprise a lot of data, errors do occur. Unfortunately, there are a lot of typological errors in the indices ("Index of Sources", pp. 653–658; "Index of Names and Subjects", pp. 659–671), which list some references twice (e.g. *optio* and *triens*); leave some references out (e.g. to cited fragments of Cicero's *de Officiis* [nos. 387; 390; 391; 798; 799]); refer to a text number whereas the reference is cited in another text but on the same page (e.g. no. 448 on p. 274 is discussed in no. 447 on p. 274) or record references to the ancient sources not in numerical order (e.g. Plinius, *Natural History* 34.38.137 is listed after and before references within book 33). Furthermore, some selected texts are included twice, such as Martialis' fragment *Noises of the City*, which appears on page 473 [no. 759] and reappears on page 477 [no. 768] without any evident reason why the fragment needed to be included twice in this same chapter on money changers and testers. This last issue, however, is addressed in the introduction, which states that there was insufficient time to delete double cited texts as all texts would then need to be renumbered and there was no time for a repagination to be performed. This lack of time probably also explains why the chapter on money changers and testers starts two pages earlier (p. 469) than indicated in the contents (p. 471). Yet, although the editing of the volume gives the impression of having been

done in haste, readers should not be too hasty in making a judgement here. Often repetitions of texts are done on purpose, so that readers can find the relevant passages under the different subjects discussed. In this way, the repetition of texts aims to increase the user friendliness of the volume.

A final remark, or rather an observation, concerns the visual sources from antiquity related to coin production and coin use which we find on (grave) reliefs, frescos and even on coinage itself.⁷ Although the volume aims to collect only textual material, it would have been an asset to also look at visual sources. Visual sources are often neglected in scholarship or they are treated separately. However, they could be a valuable enrichment for a sourcebook. I might wish that Melville Jones would be granted eternal life, but maybe this remark can inspire another, more youthful, scholar to take up this quest for a subsequent publication?

All in all, the volume presents a collection of more than 1,000 ancient texts, all of which contribute to the larger story behind ancient numismatics in the Roman world, thus making the volume an essential reference work in every library that deals with studies related to history, archaeology, law, economy and coinage. A useful point of interest is that the volume is not only available in printed form, but also as a downloadable PDF.

7 See for example, coins RRC 464/2 and RIC Civil Wars 30; 79; and Trajan 805; the Igeler Säule near Trier or an anonymous grave from Viminacium (Inv. 2989/III) to be found at F. Harl/O. Harl: Ubi Erat Lupa (<https://lupa.at/6809>).

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