

Andrew Burnett: *The Roman Provinces, 300 BCE–300 CE. Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2024 (Guides of the Coinage of the Ancient World). 362 p., 226 ill., 16 maps. £ 99.99/\$ 130.00. ISBN 978-1-009-42013-6.

Although often overlooked by historians and archaeologists, provincial coinage provides useful information about the provincial perspectives towards the centre of power in Rome. Following this idea, Burnett's book does not present the coinage discussed as Roman provincial coinage, as many scholars do, since this would inherently imply that the Roman state had some kind of agency over these local coinages.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, Rome did have agency over local coinages<sup>2</sup>, but in most cases it did not, or agency cannot not be proven. Consequently, local coinages were “largely the result of the changing cultural attitudes of the provincial elite” (p. 157) towards Rome, as Burnett phrases it; ultimately the local coins reveal expressions of identity by these local communities. Previously, the edited volume “Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces” (Oxford 2005), where Andrew Burnett was also one of the editors, alongside Christopher Howgego and Volker Heuchert, thematically addressed these concepts of identity at length. The current new book continues this idea, but now also offers a guide to all the monetary, economic and iconographic developments of these local coinages in the Roman provinces during the Republic and Empire. Several books have already discussed aspects of provincial coinage in light of the overall theme of the volume. Some contributions in the “Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage” (2012) did this for provincial coinages during imperial times and the same is the case in Liv Mariah Yarrow's book on coinage during the Roman Republic (2021).<sup>3</sup> Burnett's book is now dedicated to these local coinages in their own right, discussing all kinds of coins produced by various mints in the

- 1 Other terms that have been used are Greek imperial coinage or Greek imperials. These phrases are not completely wrong, but refer only to the eastern Greek-speaking provinces, leaving out the local western coinages, and they represent some kind of Greek-culture inspired agency, which is not always the case.
- 2 An illustrative example here is a series of bronze coins in Macedonia, signed by Roman quaestors in the second century BC.
- 3 W. E. Metcalf: *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*. Oxford/New York 2012 (Oxford Handbooks); L. M. Yarrow: *The Roman Republic to 49 BCE. Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge 2021 (Guides to the Coinage of the Ancient World).

west as well as the east from the conquests of the Roman state up to the third century, without losing sight of the wider geopolitical and economic context.

The book itself is part of a bigger series entitled “Guides to the Coinage of the Ancient World”. This series aims to show how coins are meaningful historical data, and offers practical guide books that explain numismatic methodologies, integrate coins with other sources and use coins to reconstruct various historical contexts. Three other books have previously been published in this series<sup>4</sup>, and another entitled “The Archaic and Early Classical Greek World” is forthcoming.<sup>5</sup>

The series editors could not have found anybody more ideally suited to write this guidebook on the local coinages in the Roman provinces. Burnett, who has been a Deputy Director of the British Museum after a full career in the Coin and Medal department in the same museum, has life-long experience with these kinds of coins, with specific expertise on early local coinages within the Roman world, especially the west and Italy. Furthermore, he co-edited the two first physical volumes of the “Roman Provincial Coinage” catalogues, before the digital catalogue project was launched online with the open-source database “Roman Provincial Coinage”.<sup>6</sup> Using the RPC catalogue number system as well as the RRC catalogue numbers, most of the over 200 illustrated coins within the book can be easily found in this database.<sup>7</sup>

The book opens with a preface that describes the main aims of the publication, gives an overview of its structure and explains the collection of the coin material. After a first chapter (pp. 1–43) elaborating on gold and silver in Rome and its provinces, the book continues further with six different chapters focusing on the bronze coins issued by the local cities within the Roman world. Chapter two (pp. 44–76) turns to the adoption of coinage by Rome,

4 C. Rowan: *From Caesar to Augustus (c. 49 BC–AD 14). Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge 2019; L. Kallet/J. H. Kroll: *The Athenian Empire. Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge 2020; Yarrow (note 3).

5 K. Rutter: *The Archaic and Early Classical Greek World. Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge 2026.

6 URL: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>.

7 It appears that some of the younger coins discussed in chapter 7 often lack references.

which happened rather late in the history of the city-state. The relation between Rome, its growing Empire, and its coinage is explored further in chapter three (pp. 77–109). When the Romans started to conquer parts of the Mediterranean, coinage was not imposed on these Roman provinces. Instead, different regions produced, or continued to produce, their own coin series, some of which were connected to the Roman coins in terms of denomination or style. Interrupting the chronological thread between the previous and the subsequent chapters, chapter four (pp. 110–128) focuses on the questions of agency behind all these local coinages within Roman hegemony. Their mutual competitions with each other are also addressed in this chapter. Chapter five (pp. 129–173) continues the previous chronological structure and focuses on the regional and local coinages during the start of the principate. The period saw a gradual division between the coinages in the west, which gradually disappeared in favour of Roman imperial coins, and the east, where local traditions persisted for another two centuries. The local coinages in the east during the second century are further explored in chapter 6 (pp. 174–221), where the question of agency is again central. The final chapter (pp. 222–270) sketches the gradual disappearance of the last provincial coinages during the prolonged crisis of the third century, after which Diocletian introduced a single monetary system throughout the whole empire. The production of local coinages then ceased.

The book benefits from Burnett's expertise as curator and scholar as it combines chronological and iconographic discussions of coin series with different overviews of scholarly debates concerning the coins mentioned. In particular, the discussion of the end of local coinage in the West (chapter 5) and of provincial coinage in the East during the third century (chapter 7) is set out very carefully, in great detail, based on the most current research and not neglecting any exceptions to the general pattern.

To convey different kinds of information, the book chooses to use separate boxes to present texts that offer extra information. Furthermore, the book also includes separate bordered frames for the illustrations and their information. Maps are also included. As a result, some pages appear quite crowded and one may from time to time need to search for the main text between the boxes, figure information, fields, and maps. Indeed, Burnett warns the reader in the preface that this arrangement might feel "overwhelming". Yet, on the other hand, all these information boxes and figure frames convey useful background information or illustrate complicated issues with helpful

graphs, tables, and lists. Alternatively, they may introduce another relevant primary source, such as an inscription or ancient text fragment. For example, box I.3 elucidates on what is meant by “Iberian denarii” and figures 3.22–24 illustrate a coin series of the second triumvirate minted at Thessalonica.

In addition, some useful extras are added to the book. Burnett provides an overview of further reading. Furthermore, lists of numismatic terms and denominational systems, but also a piece discussing the technical details behind the production of coins, written by Burnett’s former colleague Andrew Meadows, are included.

With its detailed, comprehensive information on the coinage, but also because it acts as a state-of-the-art example of numismatic scholarship intertwined with Roman history, quite apart from the fact that no such work dedicated solely to provincial coinages has appeared before, this book will in the coming years become a standard reference work on coinages in the Roman provinces for scholars, students and instructors.

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Liesbeth Claes, Leiden University  
Institute for History  
Assistant Professor of Ancient History  
l.claes@hum.leidenuniv.nl

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