Charon’s Obol? An archaeological study of the role of coins in Roman burial ritual (with case studies from Roman Italy, Germany, Britain and unconquered Scandinavia).

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Abstract
Little detailed analysis has been undertaken which looks at the coin in the context of the burial. Their numismatic information is discussed in detail in excavation reports but little or no attempt is made to investigate the function of the coin. In many cases they are simply regarded as payments to Charon, the ferryman of Greek mythology, for the journey to the afterlife; an interpretation based on classical literature. Earliest research into the subject tended to look for evidence for ‘Charon’s Obol’ using the information in the Greek and Roman sources with little or no reference to the archaeological material. This did not allow for a full understanding of their presence and meaning. Publication of Gorecki’s Studien zur Sitte Münzbeigabe in römerzeitlichen Körpergräbern’ (BRGK 56, 1975) and Cantilena’s Un obolo per Caronte? (PdP 50, 1995) significantly changed methodology by analysing burial remains but even these are limited. They look very specifically at one part of the Empire and a single aspect of the coin in the burial, i.e. location and thus are not sufficiently detailed to find patterns which can be tested in different areas of the Roman Empire. This work is a systematic analysis of the coin in the context of the burial using case studies from cemeteries from Roman Italy, Germany, Britain and unconquered Scandinavia (as a comparison to the Imperial evidence). It takes a database of c. 450-500 burials from each of the areas (with the exception of Denmark which has fewer examples) and investigates the pre-Roman tradition, chronological distribution of the practice, the metal type and number of coins used, the length of time between coin and burial date, pierced coins and associated grave goods.

The aims are as follows:
- Thoroughly investigate the coin in the context of the burial in each of the case study areas and compare the patterns identified;
- Explore the origin and spread of this custom, from early Greece to Italy across the Roman Empire and beyond, while investigating the potential religious or social meanings of the practice and its distribution;
- Chart the evolution and the possible reasons for changes and modifications to the practice over space and time;
- Assess the significance of my findings in terms of the transmission of cultural traditions or religious beliefs and practices between ancient societies.

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(DeLanda 1997, 267; see Dark 2000; Faulkner 2000; Wickham 2005; Esmonde-Cleary 2013; Gerrard 2013; for debates on the end of Roman Britain), removing bureaucracy and allowing more fluid relations to occur. An archaeological study of the role of coins in Roman burial ritual (with case studies from Roman Italy, Germany, Britain and unconquered Scandinavia). Download. word thesis.zip (4.090Mb). Little detailed analysis has been undertaken which looks at the coin in the context of the burial. Their numismatic information is discussed in detail in excavation reports but little or no attempt is made to investigate the function of the coin. In many cases they are simply regarded as payments to Charon, the ferryman of Greek mythology, for the journey to the afterlife; an interpretation based on classical literature.