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# A GOLD HOARD FROM SAVARIA

**Abstract:** The hoard came to light in Szombathely-Herény in 1992 and contains 38 aurei from the period of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The hoard terminates with Nero's aureus issued in 62/63, but it may have been buried years, even decades later.

**Keywords:** *Nero Monetary Reform, gold coin circulation, coin hoards, military pay, Pannonia.*

## THE HOARD

**R**oman aureus hoards are quite rare finds, especially from 1<sup>st</sup> century Pannonia. This is one of the reasons why the hoard of coins found in Szombathely's Herény quarter in July 1992 caused a sensation. (*Fig. 1*) The coins came to light while saplings were being planted on the hill overlooking the swamps of the stream Perint, on the territory of ancient Savaria. (*Fig. 2*) The hoard was originally stored in a ceramic vessel, but the ploughing preceding plantation strewn it around an area some 5 metres long. So, the actual place of hiding could not be identified during the control excavation. Scouring the area several times with metal detectors as well, a total of 38 coins were found. According to the archaeologist working on the excavation, this is likely the whole hoard, based on the dimensions of the reconstructed vessel, of which fragments were found.<sup>1</sup>

The series of aurei begins with those of Tiberius (RIC 27, 29) and ends with those minted by Nero in AD 62/63 (RIC 38), so before the monetary reform of AD 64. (*Fig. 3*)

I know of only one hoard of the Central Danubian area of which the last coin is Nero's: Emona 1961.<sup>2</sup> However, this one is composed of denarii and sestertii. It contains merely a single Nero aureus, minted in 56 AD, being the latest coin of the hoard, composed of 48 pieces. Closest in composition to the Herény aureus hoard is the one of Cirkovci.<sup>3</sup> Despite

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DOI: 10.14795/j.v7i1\_SI.498

ISSN 2360 – 266X

ISSN-L 2360 – 266X

<sup>1</sup> TORBÁGYI 1993, TORBÁGYI/KISS 1993

<sup>2</sup> FMRS I. 207. Nr. 155/22. insula XXX.

<sup>3</sup> MIRNIK 1981, 51. Nr.103.=FMRS II. 151–156. Nr. 417.



**Fig. 1.**

having been hidden in the age of Domitian, 50 out of its 94 known coins are from the time of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, of which 17 were issued before Nero's monetary reform. The latest coin of the aureus hoard of Zenum 1875<sup>4</sup> is from the reign of Trajan, minted in 98/99 AD. It contains 6 coins from Nero's age, but all of them were produced after his monetary reform, even though the hoard contains ca. 250 pieces. Among the 36 aurei of the Belgrade 1889 find<sup>5</sup> ending with Hadrian's coin, only one was issued by Nero. The 16 aurei from the Ljubljana 1963 hoard<sup>6</sup> are dated from Vespasian to Trajan. These hoards provide good evidence that earlier aurei were still in

<sup>4</sup> MIRNIK 1981, 52. Nr.112.

<sup>5</sup> MIRNIK 1981, 53. Nr.116.

<sup>6</sup> FMRS I. 197. Nr.155/18 – mentions 13 aurei from the NW part of insula XXIX. from AD 77/78 to AD 103/111.

use for a few decades after Nero's monetary reform, but they disappeared from circulation from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD onwards.

### **NERO'S MONETARY REFORM OF 64 AD<sup>7</sup>**

Pliny reported<sup>8</sup> that Nero reduced the metallic value of gold coins. According to this measure 45 aurei were to be minted from one pound of gold instead of the 40 pieces of the Augustan standard. Augustus's aurei contain 7 scripula of gold (7.96 g), while Nero's ones contain only 6.5 scripula (7.39 g).<sup>9</sup> Pliny's statement has been fully confirmed by the

<sup>7</sup> MACDOWALL 1979, 135–149; NEWBOLD 1974, RIC I.<sup>2</sup> 1984, 134–135, BUTCHER/PONTING 2005

<sup>8</sup> „postea placuit xxxx signari ex auri libris paulatimque principes imminuere pondus et novissime Nero ad xxxv” (Naturalis Historia 33,3,47).

<sup>9</sup> RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 135.



**Fig. 2.**

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Ref.</b>		<b>Weight (g)</b>
Tiberius PONTIF - MAXIM	14 – 37	RIC <sup>2</sup> 27	5	7.76, 7.72, 7.70, 7.66, 7.59
Tiberius PONTIF - MAXIM	14 – 37	RIC <sup>2</sup> 29	3	7.76, 7.69, 7.66
Claudius IMPER RECEPT	41 – 42	RIC <sup>2</sup> 7	1	7.80
Claudius CONSTANTIAE - AVGVSTI	41 – 42	RIC <sup>2</sup> 13	1	7.76
Claudius EX SC / OB CIVES / SERVATOS	41 – 42	RIC <sup>2</sup> 15	1	7.75
Claudius IMPER RECEPT	44 – 45	RIC <sup>2</sup> 25	1	7.81
Claudius PACI - AVGVSTAE	44 – 45	RIC <sup>2</sup> 27	2	7.72, 7.66
Claudius CONSTANTIAE - AVGVSTI	46 – 47	RIC <sup>2</sup> 31	1	7.60
Claudius DE BRITANN	46 – 47	RIC <sup>2</sup> 33	1	7.69
Claudius IMPER RECEPT	46 – 47	RIC <sup>2</sup> 36	1	7.75
Claudius PACI - AVGVSTAE	46 – 47	RIC <sup>2</sup> 38	1	7.70
Claudius DE BRITANN	49 – 50	RIC <sup>2</sup> 44	2	7.80, 7.71
Claudius PACI - AVGVSTAE	51 – 52	RIC <sup>2</sup> 61	1	7.70
Claudius AGRIPPINAE AVGVSTAE	50 – 54	RIC <sup>2</sup> 80	5	7.79, 7.70, 7.67, 7.65, 7.63
Claudius - Nero Caesar SACERD COOPT IN OMN CONL SVPRANVM EX SC	51 – 54	RIC <sup>2</sup> 76	1	7.63
Claudius - Nero Caesar EQVESTER / OR-DO / PRINCIPI / IVVENT	51 – 54	RIC <sup>2</sup> 78	1	7.65
Nero PONTIF MAX TRP V PP / EX SC	58 – 59	RIC <sup>2</sup> 16	1	7.74
Nero PONTIF MAX TRP VI COS IIII PP / EX SC	59 – 60	RIC <sup>2</sup> 19	1	7.58
Nero PONTIF MAX TRP VII COS IIII PP EX SC Ceres	60 – 61	RIC <sup>2</sup> 23	4	7.66, 7.64, 7.58, 7.55
Nero PONTIF MAX TRP VII COS IIII PP / EX SC Virtus	60 – 61	RIC <sup>2</sup> 25	1	7.65
Nero PONTIF MAX TRP VIII COS IIII PP / EX SC - Ceres	61 – 62	RIC <sup>2</sup> 29	1	7.73
Nero PONTIF MAX TRP VIII COS IIII PP / EX SC - Roma	62 – 63	RIC <sup>2</sup> 38	2	7.71, 7.63

**Fig.3.** Content of the Hoard Szombathely-Herény 1992

weight of surviving coins. After the aurei dated TRP X, the weight of the gold did in fact change, showing a concentration of around 7.3 g.

Even though Pliny only mentions gold coins, actual pieces recovered show that the loss of weight and fineness mostly affected silver ones. While reduction in aurei was of 2%, it rose to 7% in silver coins. The main reason for the new weight might not have been devaluating aurei, but denarii. The latter played a fundamental role in circulation as the denomination used most extensively. However, in order to keep value ratio, aurei had to be changed too. The reform was necessary to fill up the state treasury, which needed more money to fund Nero's grandiose constructions, the prolonged warfare in Britain and Armenia, and the repairs after the Great Fire of Rome in July 64 AD,<sup>10</sup> which added a further unexpected burden on the budget. Moreover, Nero sent aid of 4 million sestertii to Lugdunum in order to rebuild the town destroyed by another fire in late 64 AD.<sup>11</sup> The Neroneia of the following year also needed a lot of money.<sup>12</sup> *"The devaluation of the real worth of the coin denominations then in circulation was one of several measures to raise funds for Nero's depleted treasury."*<sup>13</sup>

### CONTEMPORARY VALUE OF THE HOARD

For a Roman, 38 aurei (=3800 HS=950 denarii) were not worth much, taking into account that a real "superstar" actor at Nero's time earned 500,000 sestertii (= 5000 aurei) a year in Rome. (*Pliny: N. H. VII, 39*) Meanwhile, a legionary's yearly wage was of only 225 denarii (= 900 HS = 9 aurei). If a legionary veteran was discharged with *missio nummaria* he got generally 12,000 sestertii (= 120 aurei) up until the reign of Caracalla.<sup>14</sup> (There might have been exceptions, though, e.g. Gaius, who halved this sum. (*Suetonius: Caligula, XLIV*))

<sup>10</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 15, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 16, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 13.

<sup>13</sup> MACDOWALL 1979, 149

<sup>14</sup> SCHNEIDER 1977, 239

Savaria was, however, a newly built city in a recently organised province.<sup>15</sup> So, its inhabitants could have seen this sum as of great value as well.

### THE OWNER OF THE HOARD

The city was founded by Emperor Claudius and named Colonia Claudia Savaria as a deduction colony for veterans of the Legio XV Apollinaris, as evidenced by the tombstones found nearby.<sup>16</sup> There was no Celtic antecedent to the city, and Celtic archaeological finds were only sparsely found in the area of Szombathely.<sup>17</sup> The ancient Celtic centre used to be the oppidum on the mount of Velem Szent Vid, ca. 10 miles (15 km) from Szombathely. The main north-south axis of the city was the Amber road, to which the insula-system marked out at the foundation of the colonia was adjusted.<sup>18</sup> The earth-timber remnants of city walls and buildings, however, can be dated only to the Flavian era.<sup>19</sup> The earliest datable stone monuments also come from this time. They are: an architrave-inscription of the temple dedicated to the founder of the city, Divus Claudius,<sup>20</sup> a milestone, indicating Savaria's distance from Rome<sup>21</sup> and two inscriptional panels from 82 AD, which most likely related to the construction of the *Forum Provinciae*.<sup>22</sup> Still, the beginning of the Roman city is probably somewhat older, as new excavations outside the southern city walls indicate that the life in the colony may have started there. Most of the earliest coins, minted by emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, were found in this area<sup>23</sup> – though this might be a result of the usage of modern excavation methods. Remnants of several early buildings were

<sup>15</sup> On discussions concerning the province's establishment, see summarised in: KOVÁCS 2014, 15–22, most recently KOVÁCS 2017, KOVÁCS 2018

<sup>16</sup> MÓCSY 1974, 76–79, TÓTH 2011, 11–14

<sup>17</sup> ILON 2004, 77–85

<sup>18</sup> MÓCSY 1965, TÓTH 1971

<sup>19</sup> MEDGYES 1998, SOSZTARITS 1994

<sup>20</sup> MRÁV 1996–1997

<sup>21</sup> KISS/ SOSZTARITS 1996–1997, 101–113.

<sup>22</sup> TÓTH 2011, 58–60, Nr.2–3.

<sup>23</sup> REGESTEN 3, 126–128

unearthed at the site of the large Isis temple, built in the last third of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Most of these are workshops, dating from the era of Claudius or maybe even earlier. Under the reign of the Flavian dynasty, a smaller Isis shrine, built in timber, but with high-quality wall paintings, was already standing.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the most notable segment of the city's population were the veterans. The veterans received a piece of land on the *territorium* of the *colonia*. We do not know the size of a veteran's parcel, as their value varied according to the quality of the land. (*Hyginus const.limit.Gromatici* 204). However, their price was obviously equal to the amount of *missio nummaria* paid to veterans.<sup>25</sup> Several of them, though, soon moved to Carnuntum. Their old comrades-in-arms were there, and another reason for moving might have been the better business opportunities near the military camp.<sup>26</sup> They were probably the ones let go with a *missio nummaria*, a cash payment regularly in use since the reign of Augustus.<sup>27</sup> After Hadrian, it became the usual practice.<sup>28</sup>

Part of the stone monuments found in Savaria suggests that representatives of merchant houses from Northern Italy (mostly Aquileia) appeared in the region simultaneously with the Roman conquest. One of the earliest evidence of this is a votive stone dedicated to the goddess Aecorna, erected by people from Emona.<sup>29</sup> While we may not be sure of the stone dating back to the Tiberian era<sup>30</sup>, we cannot exclude representatives of Northern Italian and Aquilean merchant houses showing up along the Amber road already after 6 AD, following Tiberius' troops marching against Maroboduus on the Danube front. "*Cupido augendi pecuniam*", meaning craving for wealth, took merchants even to the lands of enemies.<sup>31</sup> Immigrant Italian merchants might have had

their *emporia* here even before the colony was built, with soldiers as their customers, besides local people. The tombstone of T. Marcius T. f. *negotiator* from Aquileia came to light in Mischendorf-Oberwart on the *territorium* of Savaria.<sup>32</sup> A military camp was built in Salla already under Tiberius,<sup>33</sup> and the auxiliary fort in Arrabona could be dated to the same period as well.<sup>34</sup> However, we can only suppose there was one in Savaria, as no archaeological evidence supports the theory so far. The *militaria* found in Szombathely also date to the Claudian or, more precisely, the Flavian era, thus belonging to veterans and not active soldiers.<sup>35</sup> The oldest objects, such as *terra sigillata*<sup>36</sup> or *amphorae*<sup>37</sup> could not be predated the Claudian era. However, the denarius hoard of Zarkaháza,<sup>38</sup> buried during Tiberius's reign, could already be related to these merchants' activities.

Local, indigenous people did not yet live in the city at the time, but rather to its west, as indicated by the distribution of mound graves<sup>39</sup>. A few natives may have become involved in commerce, as suggested by a tombstone found at Répceszentgyörgy. It bears the name of Atta, Bataionis f. *negotiator*, from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>40</sup>

So, the hoard could have belonged to a veteran, who had hidden his saved money on his land. This hypothesis is reinforced by the location: the *territorium* of the *colonia*, where their land parcels may have been. Around the hoard, there was no trace of any building. Unfortunately, we do not have clear information on what kind of denomination were the soldiers or veterans paid with. Written records indicate the amount in sestertii, but we can only suppose that actual payments took place in silver. Maybe, in

<sup>24</sup> HARSÁNYI/KUROVSZKY 2014

<sup>25</sup> SCHNEIDER 1977, 238ff

<sup>26</sup> MÓCSY 1959, 37

<sup>27</sup> SCHNEIDER 1977, 238ff

<sup>28</sup> FORNI 1953, 41, WATSON 1965, 150

<sup>29</sup> RIU I. 135, TÓTH 2011, Nr.202.

<sup>30</sup> KOVÁCS 1998

<sup>31</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 2, 62.

<sup>32</sup> MÓCSY 1959, Nr.86/1

<sup>33</sup> REDÓ 2003, 202–204.

<sup>34</sup> SZÓNYI 1990, 667–674

<sup>35</sup> MRÁV 2010–2013, 63–68, 87, MRÁV 2013

<sup>36</sup> GABLER 1979

<sup>37</sup> BEZECKY 1981

<sup>38</sup> TORBÁGYI 1997–1998, 7–10

<sup>39</sup> GABLER 1994, 380

<sup>40</sup> TÓTH 2011, Nr.190

the case of *donativa*, they might have used gold. Under the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty the donative was regularly paid only to praetorians from AD 42.<sup>41</sup> However, if it was a single payment, such as a soldier's *donativum*, it should have consisted of coins of a single issue or at least of emissions close in time. The ca. 70-100 aurei found in Zvonigrad 1938 allegedly all come from the same ruler, Vespasian.<sup>42</sup> They were most likely part of a single payment.

In everyday life, people mostly used silver and bronze coins, artisans likely received payment in those. From the time in question, we cannot really envision works such grandiose or refined to be paid in gold.

The gold coins could also have been collected by a merchant who made a fortune on this new and yet undiscovered market. The composition of the coins also suggests a long-time accumulation, especially from 40 AD, up from which we have pieces from nearly each single year.

### WHY AND WHEN THE AUREI WERE HIDDEN

The latest coin of the hoard was minted in 62/63. Based on its state of preservation, it could not have been in circulation for very long, so it must have ended up in Savaria fast, where the owner added it to his treasure. At first glance it would be obvious that the coins were hidden due to Nero's monetary reform, with the owner afraid that they would have had to hand back older, more precious pieces. However, Roman historians do not mention any type of compulsory change or forced surrender of earlier coins following the reform. The hoards also reveal that pre-reform aurei were used up until Domitian, they start missing from hoards only from the 2nd century onwards. The hoards of Brigetio,<sup>43</sup> Villach<sup>44</sup> and Katafa<sup>45</sup> do not contain any pre-reform aurei. Even the huge gold treasure of

<sup>41</sup> JAHN 1984, 54–55

<sup>42</sup> PEGAN 1964, 75–76; MIRNIK 1981, 52, Nr.112a

<sup>43</sup> FMRU 3. 209–212

<sup>44</sup> FMRÖ II/3. 35–41

<sup>45</sup> REGESTEN 3. 35–36

Trier, of ca. 2,500 pieces, contains only two pre-reform Nero aurei.<sup>46</sup>

We do not know of any war or turmoil in Pannonia dating back to the last years of Nero's reign which could have been a reason for hiding the treasure. We have no notice of any similar hoards from the same era in the surrounding area, either. Of course, it is not necessary for the hoard to have been buried in the few years following its closing. We could also surmise the owner began or continued to collect pre-reform coins already after AD 64. So, this small fortune might have been hidden a long while, maybe even decades later. The Regensburg-Kumpfmühl 1989 hoard contains 25 aurei and 610 denarii. Its content clearly indicates most of the gold coins – except for a single Faustina minor aureus (147–161) – were minted 20 years before the last denarii.<sup>47</sup> We do not know how much Savaria's area was affected by Domitian's Germanic wars of the 80s, during which the Emperor himself visited Pannonia.<sup>48</sup> However, the military movements could have given enough reason for the owner to keep his money safe. Still, this is just another supposition, as the treasure ended up buried for private reasons, and the owner later had no chance to unearth it again.

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<sup>46</sup> BURSCHE 2014

<sup>47</sup> BOOS/DALLMEIER/OVERBECK 2000

<sup>48</sup> KOVÁCS 2014, 75–84

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