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REVIEW ARTICLE

SOME REMARKS ON COIN USE IN PROVENCE.
NEW DATA FROM FRÉJUS (VAR, FRANCE)

Stéphane MARTIN *

Books reviewed :

- C. GOUDINEAU & D. BRENTCHALOFF (dir.), *Le camp de la flotte d'Agrippa à Fréjus : les fouilles du quartier de Villeneuve (1979-81)*. Paris, éditions Errance, 2010. 592 p. ISBN 978-2-87772-398-5. €42^[1]
- M. PASQUALINI, R. THERNOT & H. GARCIA, *L'amphithéâtre de Fréjus. Archéologie et architecture, relecture d'un monument*. Ausonius - Mémoires 22. Pessac, Ausonius, 2010. 226 p. ISBN 978-2-356-13027-3. €70^[2]
- L. RIVET, *Recherches archéologiques au cœur de Forum Julii. Les fouilles dans le groupe épiscopal de Fréjus et à ses abords (1979-89)*. Bibliothèque d'archéologie méditerranéenne et africaine 6. Paris, éditions Errance, 2010. 420 p. ISBN 978-2-87772-444-9. €39^[3]

LAST YEAR SAW THE PUBLICATION OF several books on Fréjus, three of which include the presentation of coin finds. Given the paucity of recently published numismatic finds in Provence^[4], these new contributions are warmly welcomed. As the presentation of the finds varies greatly from one book to another, this review will also be the occasion of some methodological comments on the publication of coin finds in their archaeological contexts.

As a Roman colony, *Forum Iulii* was probably deduced around 49 BC, on the site of a pre-existing town^[5]. After Actium, it hosted for a while part of the new imperial fleet. Remains identified as the associated camp were put to light between 1979 and 1981, during rescue excavations, and have just been published under the supervision of C. Goudineau and D. Brentchaloff. The book is divided in two parts, the structures and the finds, each class of finds being studied by a different specialist. No real synthesis is proposed on the finds. The book ends with a summary in five languages (French, Italian, English, German and Spanish).

The coins were to be studied by G.B. Rogers, who completed the catalogue but died before writing the analysis; this part was carried out for the publication by D. Brentchaloff (Goudineau & Brentchaloff (dir.) 2010, p. 69-106).

Given the importance of the site, a possible Julio-Claudian military camp, something rarely found in Europe outside of Spain, Britain and the Rhineland, the numismatic study is disappointing. Probably because of Rogers's death, coins appear to be the only finds in

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[1] Hereafter Goudineau & Brentchaloff (dir.) 2010.

[2] Hereafter Pasqualini *et al.* 2010.

[3] Hereafter Rivet 2010.

[4] Py 2006 and Feugère & Py 2011 deal only with pre-Augustan issues; moreover, most of the finds are situated in Languedoc and Midi-Pyrénées (western *Gallia Narbonensis*), not Provence.

[5] Rivet (dir.) 2000 offers a synthesis of all the elements concerning the early history of Fréjus.

the book for which the stratigraphical details are not given (although Brentchaloff mentions that the information was present in Rogers's catalogue : « *Il nous a livré un impeccable fichier stratigraphique* », p. 69) ^[6]. This is all the more a problem, as four phases have been identified, from the Augustan to the Neronian period.

The coins are given according to R. Reece's periods in rather unclear graphs, mixing the coins coming from the excavation (at Les Aiguières) with coins from an adjacent sector (L'Argentière) which was not properly excavated. Whereas Celtic and foreign coins have long developments that are not always justified (p. 87-105), and sometimes miss recent literature (for example on the *RPC 533 dupondii*, Geneviève 2008), coins struck in Rome are studied much too briefly (p. 72-74). Yet the Augustan coinage has a peculiar structure for the region, worthy of commentary : it appears (if the author of this review understands correctly the terse catalogue given p. 74) that the camp was mainly supplied by Moneyers coins, mainly *asses* and *quadrantes*, and the otherwise abundant *dupondii* from *Nemausus* and Altar series from *Lugdunum* are either comparatively rare or not represented. This situation stands in sharp contrast with the data available for the region (e.g. Marseilles, Arles, Olbia de Provence). On the other hand, a high proportion of Moneyers coins is typical of the coin supply in Italy : do we have to assume direct supply from Italy to the camp in Fréjus ?

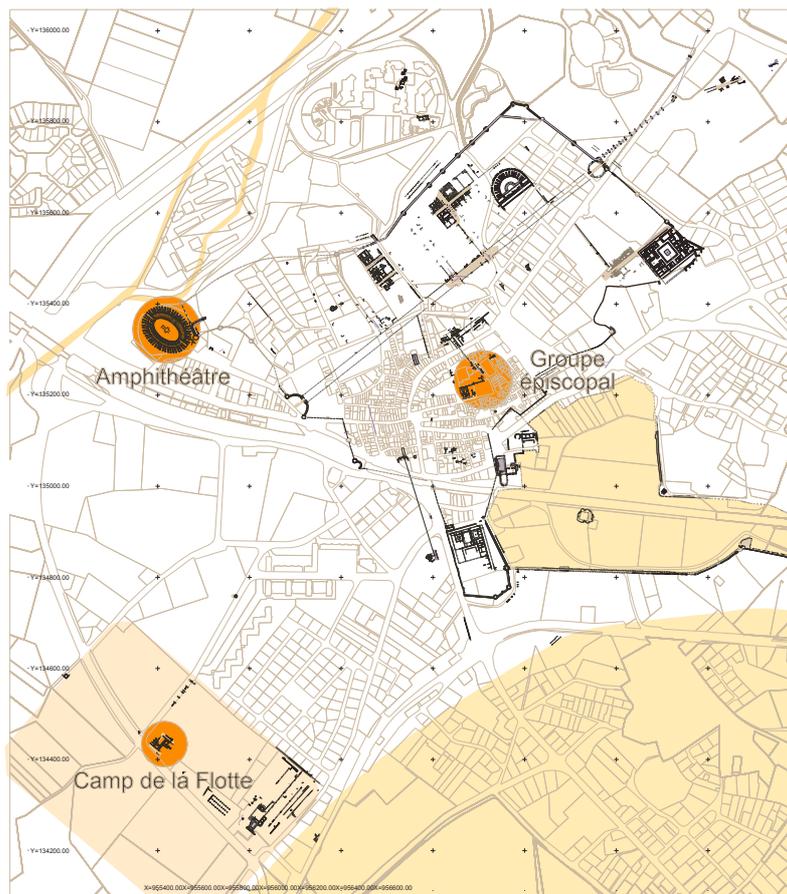


Fig. 1 – Location of the sectors published in 2010
(after River (dir.) 2000 and BDU Fréjus)

[6] Mentions of four coins in context (three from Augustan features, one from a Tiberian feature) for this excavation are to be found in Rivet (dir.) 2000, p. 326.

Rather awkwardly, the coins corresponding to the occupation of the camp (roughly from 10 BC to AD 70) are not presented in a detailed catalogue ; but it is the case for the finds of the late antiquity (from Gallienus to Gratian), at least two centuries after the camp was abandoned. This is justified by Brentchalloff as follows : “*Pour ne pas priver totalement d’expression le regretté Rogers, nous éditons un aperçu de son catalogue, celui des émissions tardives dont il était particulièrement friand*” (p. 69). This might be a touching reason, but it is not a serious one. On the whole, the chapter is not satisfying at all, and this study ought to be done anew, although this will be difficult given the way the data are published.

The amphitheater, also situated outside the city walls, is known for a long time. In 2006-07, a campaign of excavation took place, prior to restoration works. The results were published in 2010 under the direction of M. Pasqualini, R. Thernot and H. Garcia. The structural remains of the building are of course the main object of this work. All the stratigraphical information is presented, along with the analysis of the ceramics (p. 68-93), but the finds are mainly used as dating instruments. Although this chapter lacks a Harris matrix, we find a table (fig. 13, p. 39) assigning every stratigraphical unit to one of the four phases, each of which is divided in two or four sub-phases. The text gives more detail about the nature of the different levels. There is no summary of the main results at the end of the book, neither in French nor in any other language.

As in the previous publication, each class of finds is presented on its own at the end of the book. The coins are catalogued by J. Françoise (p. 215) ; each coin is illustrated by colour photographs. The shots are out of scale ^[7], but the diameter of the coins is given in the table above, with the weight. The dig has yielded only five coins. This is not surprising for a stone built monument, which was probably frequently cured during its occupation. All five coins come from rubble layers, mostly from the sewers.

It is easy, with the aforementioned table, to assign each coin to its phase and to know the type of layer where it was found. But the ceramological analysis is conducted for each phase, and it is not possible to have an exhaustive account of the ceramics associated with the coins. Only a selection of the ceramics is drawn and presented (p. 190-214) ; luckily it includes material coming from the same layers as the coins, but this does not solve the problem.

To sum up, the method adopted here to present the finds allows for a rather precise study per phase. But a more detailed approach, comparing assemblages from each layer or structure, cannot be carried out. The finds are used mainly as a means of dating the different phases, not as a means of approaching the conditions of deposition and the use of the objects by ancient people.

The book published by L. Rivet deals with excavations in the centre (both actual and ancient) of the city, conducted by P.-A. Février or himself during the 1980s. As Rivet notes in his introduction, it took a long time for the publication to see the light, but it was worth it. In all, seven operations unearthed part of the *forum* and a *domus*. Each sector is presented separately, phase by phase (chap. 1 to 5), before a synthesis is attempted in the conclusion. As in the first book, this one ends with a summary of the main results in the same five languages.

Particularly welcomed is the exhaustive and detailed publication of the finds. Synthetic tables (for example, p. 29-32 for the *Nord-Est Cathédrale* sector, or p. 221 for the first oc-

^[7] Apparently, Françoise was not consulted for the publication.

cupation of the *domus*) allow a global comparison of the different contexts ; but instead of dividing the finds, as is usual in archaeological reports, between the different classes, they are published by stratigraphic layers, making it easier to grasp the singularity of each context. Structures are often presented with the finds, and Rivet gives a global interpretation of both. The coins, identified by D. Brentchalloff, are presented along with the other finds ; color photographs, at a 1:1 scale, are given only for the *Jardin du Palais de Justice* and the *Place Formigé, secteur occidental* excavations. On one of the plates (fig. 252), some of the coins are badly oriented. It is also to be noted that some of the ceramic plates are slightly pixelated (for example, fig. 355-371); the shape of the vessels are recognizable but blurred, and it does bother the reader.

In a classical way, the finds are mainly used as a dating instrument, and there is no real attempt to compare the structure of the finds assemblages, except for the 2nd phase of the *domus* of the *Place Formigé* (dubbed “*domus à l’atrium fleuri*”) (p. 241-339, particularly p. 295-337). Methodologically, this constitutes one of the highpoints of the book, thanks to the exceptional situation of the house. Built in the late Augustan period, it was abandoned around 70, after having been largely cleaned out by its inhabitants (p. 282). Part of the upper floors collapsed, sealing the underneath levels; as the house of phase 3 was built on top of the newly formed rubble, the remains of phase 2 were only marginally disturbed (p. 241-242). The comparison with Pompeii and Herculaneum often returns ; if this is valid for the structures, we must keep in mind that the situation is different for the finds. The movables of the “*domus à l’atrium fleuri*” were taken by their possessors, apparently without any hurry (p. 282), whereas in the Vesuvian cities most of the movables were left in place, except for the more valuables (most notably coins and jewels), grabbed by the inhabitants in their flight. Even if we can no longer consider Pompeii as a snapshot of Roman life in 79 AD, the selection process in the “*domus à l’atrium fleuri*” was different, largely prepared and careful. Of course, this is not ignored by Rivet (p. 295, in a discussion of the different factors conditioning the interpretation). It does indeed limit the interpretation of most of the finds, but paradoxically facilitates the interpretation of valuable finds, including coins : except if the context clearly indicates voluntary deposition (which does not seem to be the case), we can consider that all such finds were lost and not recovered.

Rivet treats the finds from the “*domus à l’atrium fleuri*” in a way not dissimilar to P. Allison’s treatment of 30 Pompeian houses (Allison 2004), although he does not have Allison’s comparative approach (and he has “fresh” data). It is still rare to see the finds studied this way^[8], but it is without doubt a method that ought to gain a wider audience. In contrast with the segmented presentation (each class of finds given to a different specialist) generally adopted, this method offers a global view on structures and finds, and (in my opinion) facilitates the interpretation. In the case of the “*domus à l’atrium fleuri*”, the distribution maps are particularly telling (fig. 382, 385, 396, 397). Most of the *sigillata* was found in the rear of the house (rooms 5 to 9), whereas the common ware and the loom weight are mainly found in the front rooms (1 to 4), three of which communicated with the street. This distribution has allowed Rivet to assess or confirm the function of the rooms : public areas at the front (vestibule, staircase, kitchen and shop) and private apartments (rooms 5 to 9) at the rear. A distribution map of the coins was not included in the book, but gives a very interesting insight in the coin use of the “*domus à l’atrium fleuri*” (fig. 2).

[8] A recent publication on Vindonissa goes in the same direction : Benguerel & Engeler-Ohnemus 2010.

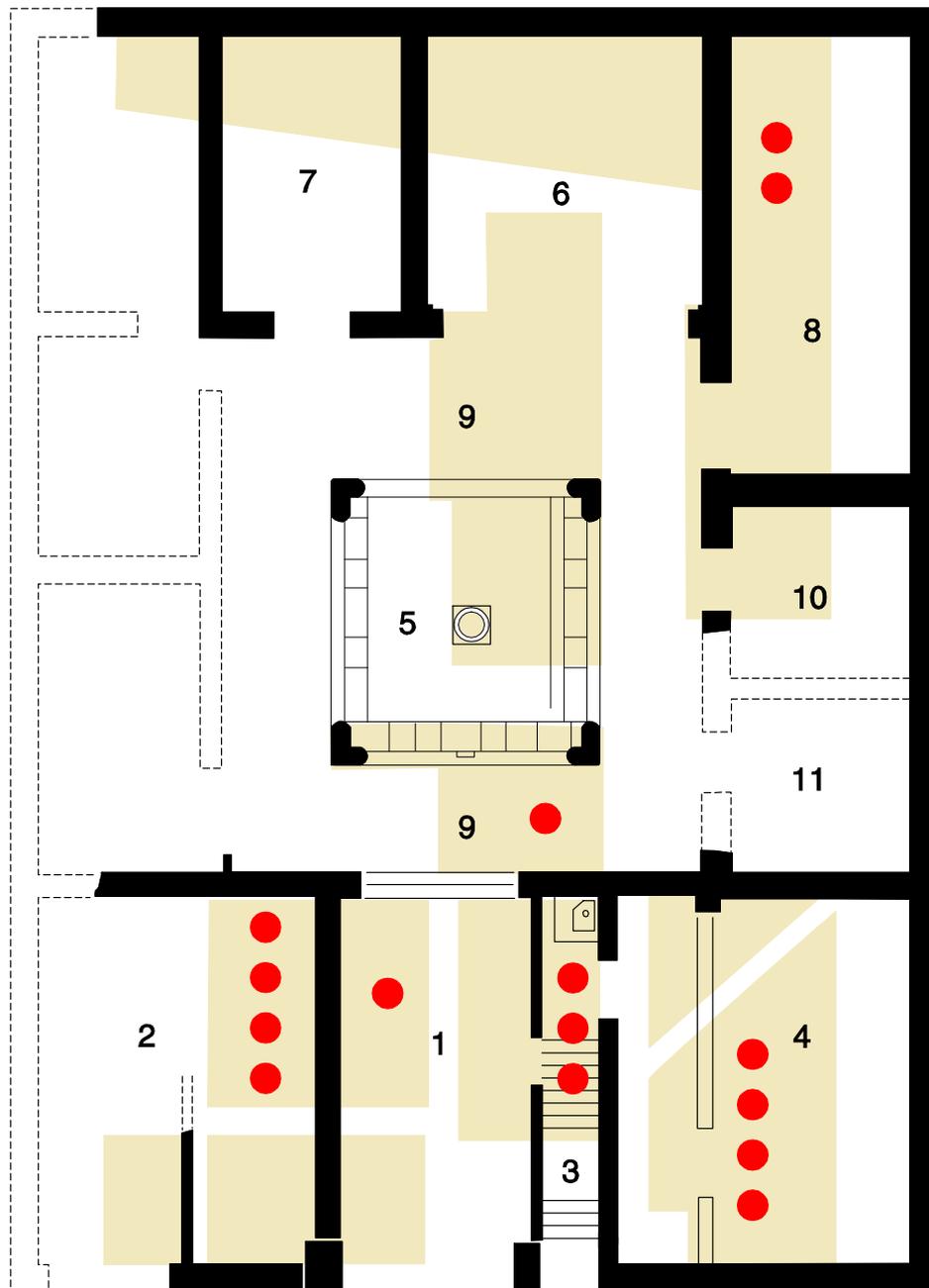


Fig. 2^[9] – Distribution map of the coins found in the “domus à l’atrium fleuri” (L. Rivet, S. Saulnier)

12 out of 15 coins cluster in the front rooms, and another one was found just behind the vestibule, in the portico 9. This distribution matches very closely those of the loom weights and common ware. What are the implications? That coins were mostly lost in the public spaces, next to the street, where productive activities were carried out, and that no or few coins were handled in the private sphere. This leads toward an interpretation of coins as means of exchange, with the following scenario: transactions were being conducted in front of the house, in the vestibule (room 1), the shop (room 2) or the kitchen (room 4), to acquire goods necessary to the inhabitants, and maybe sell the products of the weaving

^[9] I’d like to thank L. Rivet and S. Saulnier for providing this map.

activity. This seems the natural solution, because we tend to see coins mainly as economic instruments. But it can be a misleading one, and the simultaneous presentation of both finds and structures chosen by Rivet, by displaying all the information in the same place, allows a more complex view. For rooms 1 to 4 are not only neighbouring the street, they are also the only rooms with an earth floor, whereas the other rooms have hard floors, mainly *opus signinum* or mosaics (fig. 280). It is now well known that the nature of the floors greatly affects the number of coins recovered (this was dubbed the “Fishbourne effect” by R. Reece); therefore, although it is to be reminded that earth floors were hard, the high incidence of coins in the front rooms could be attributed to the different nature of the layers excavated (although we must keep in mind that earth floors could be stone hard). One explanation does not exclude the other.

Each of the three books has a different way of presenting the finds, and I find it obvious that Rivet’s choice of presenting exhaustively both the finds and the structures is the more fruitful. Only in doing so will it be possible to cross link the data and to use new methods such as multivariate analysis, as advocated for example by M.J. Baxter and H.E.M. Cool (2010). Too often, the publication of the finds does not give precise enough information, particularly on the spatial distribution ; it is not always possible to assign each find back to its original structure which, in turn, is more often than not impossible to locate on the general plan of the site. All future efforts, all future studies are then compromised. In this respect, Rivet’s book offers a great example of the type of publication we need. Of course, he’s not the only one to do so ; there are others models available : for example, one thinks to the greatly detailed reports published in the German speaking countries, particularly Switzerland, where all the contextual data are also to be found. But it seems to me that the way Rivet organised his work makes it much easier to find the information, and gives instantaneously a unified view of all aspects of the archaeological context, both finds and structures.

From the point of view of the data, each of the three publications is useful, for Provence is a region where too few coin finds have been published. Again, given the quality of the data and of the contexts, Rivet’s publication stands out. All in all, 54 coins in 13 contexts, from the early 1st c. AD to the mid 6th c. are available for Fréjus (fig. 3). The following table gives an overview of the information available (fig. 4).

Compared to Olbia de Provence, one of the only sites in Provence for which we have a coin report with contexts (Bats (dir.) 2006), Fréjus presents both similarities and differences. In the earliest levels (down to the mid 1st c. AD), the main type is the small bronze struck in Antibes/*Antipolis* (RPC 531-532), as in Olbia. But in the late 1st and early 2nd c. the supply in Rome-minted coins appears to be much stronger in Fréjus than in Olbia. Is there a direct link with Italy, as the coins from the camp might show ? The material culture of Fréjus is globally more similar to the situation in Italy than the rest of Provence. But what is the nature of this link ? The contexts of the camp would have been useful here, to evaluate the influence of the military elements on the coin pool. But more generally, we need the detailed publication of more coin finds from Provence. The region that houses *Arelate*, *Massalia*, *Glanum* and *Aquae Sextiae*, maybe because of the wealth of architectural remains, lacks precise published archaeological reports. The three books on Fréjus are all the more welcome.

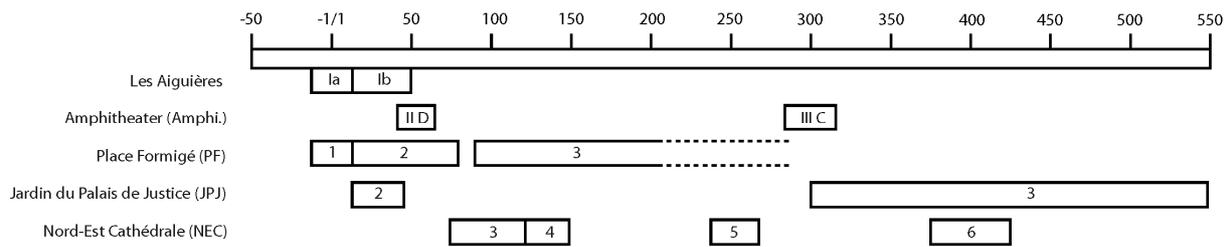


Fig. 3 – Dating of the 13 contexts in Fréjus that yielded coins

	Aigières, état IA	PF, phase 1	Aigières, état IB	PF, phase 2	JPJ, phase 2	Amphi., état II D	NEC, phase 3	NEC, phase 4	PF, phase 3	NEC, phase 5	Amphi., état III C	JPJ, phase 3	NEC, phase 6	TOTAL
Massalia, small bronze				1			1		1					2
Antipolis, small bronze	2	4	1	2	1					1			1	12
Cabellio, small bronze													1	1
Volcae Arecomices, small bronze		1		1										2
Gallia Narbonensis, small bronze				1					1					2
Nemausus, dupondius										1/2				1
Roman Republic, denarius											1 plat.			1
Roman Republic, as		1												1
Imperial as, unidentified				3			1		1 cast					4
Augustus, quinarius	1													1
Augustus, quadrans				1					1 ?					2
Tiberius, as				2								1		3
Caius, quadrans				1										1
Caius, as				2										2
Claudius, as				1		1								2
Vespasian, quadrans										1				1
Titus, denarius								1						1
Domitian, denarius													1 plat.	1
Domitian, dupondius											1			1
Trajan, sestertius											1			1
Hadrian, sestertius													1	1
Antonine, denarius													1	1
Antonine, sestertius									1					1
Marcus Aurelius, as											1	1	1	3
Commodus, as									1 cast					1
Gordian III, sestertius										1				1
Decius, antoninian													1	1
Gallienus, antoninian												1	1	2
GLORIA EXERCITVS, 2 standards													1	1
TOTAL	3	6	1	15	1	1	2	1	4	5	3	3	9	54

Fig. 4 – Synthetic view of the coins found in context in Fréjus

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