



# The Multiple Faces of the Countryside: Monetization in the North West of Gaul during the High Empire (1 st -3 rd c. AD)

Johan van Heesch

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# The Multiple Faces of the Countryside: Monetization in the North West of Gaul during the High Empire (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD)

Johan van Heesch

This paper is about the monetization, or the evolution of coin use in the countryside during the High Empire in the North-Western part of Roman Gaul, i.e. the *civitates* of the Menapians and the Nervians (fig. 1). It will also touch on the question of coin use at the end of the Iron Age. Before going into detail it may be useful to discuss briefly the words “monetization” and “countryside”.

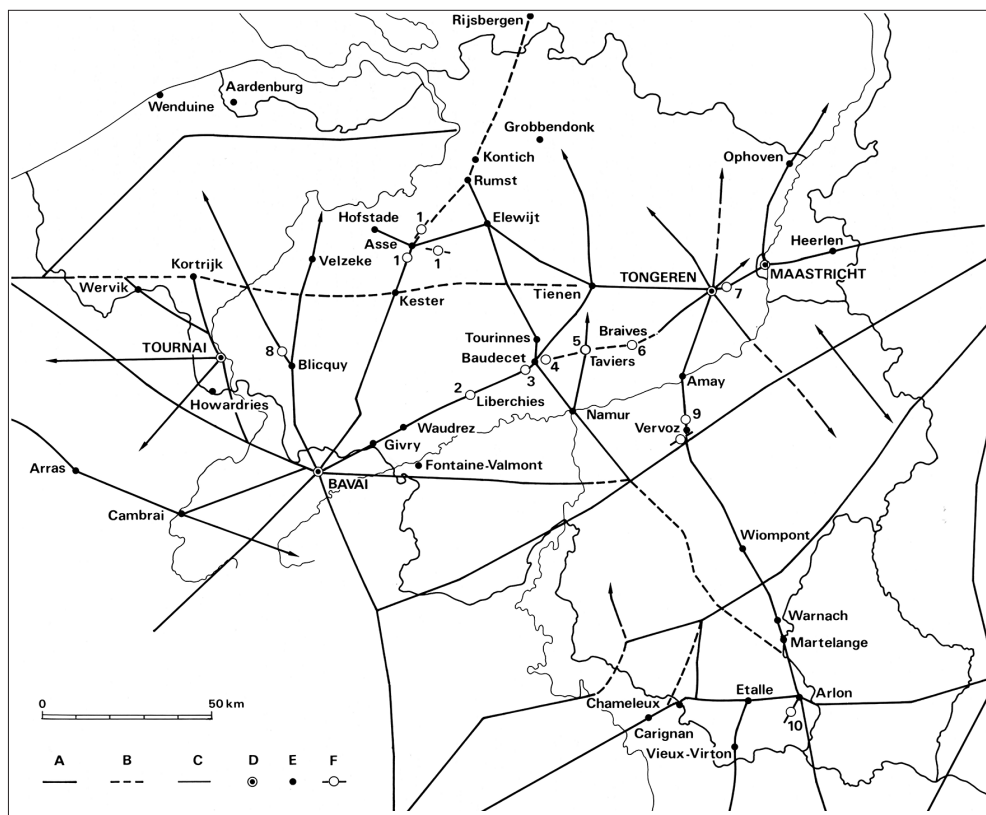


Fig. 1. The left half of this map is the area discussed in this paper: the civitates of the Nervii and the Menapii (from van Heesch 1998, 58, fig. 34).

## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEMS

### Monetization

The word “monetization” is very ambiguous and several different approaches are possible<sup>1</sup>. Should we talk about monetization starting when gold and silver coins are used, or only from the moment that small change started to penetrate into rural areas? Should we limit our search to the Roman period or should we include the Iron Age? If we exclude the Iron Age or the pre-Roman phase we lose the possibility of a long term approach that can help us to determine if the Roman conquest changed a lot, or not<sup>2</sup>.

Or should we approach the subject differently and speak of monetization starting from the moment that a shared or a common unit of account based on coins was adopted? In other words, does monetization of the Roman world start with the introduction of *denarii* or *sestertii* e.g. as units for the payment of taxes<sup>3</sup>? In truth, it is difficult to verify this for most parts of the Roman empire and we know very little about the accounting systems of the Celts. So the word “monetization” is problematical and the term “coin use” might be a workable alternative.

Another difficulty in studying the use of coinage is the fact that coins can be used in different ways and in very different contexts. Remember the categorization of Polanyi, who makes the distinction between All Purpose Money and Special Purpose Money, and Appadurai's idea that coins, like other objects, can become a commodity and have so many different uses outside the simple monetary sphere. As Appadurai defines it: “the commodity situation in the social life of any ‘thing’ [e.g. coins] can be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability [...] for some other thing is its socially relevant feature”. In other words, even “coins” can have a “social life”<sup>4</sup>. The fact that coins can have different functions and are used in different contexts – for example, in relation to the gods, or in a gift exchange arrangement – does not, of course, exclude them from functioning in their traditional commercial way. The more complicated a society becomes, the more complex are the roles played by coins, depending on the context they are used in<sup>5</sup>.

As a student of Roman coinage and the Roman empire, one must also be aware of the “danger” of a “neo-colonial” approach and of seeing Rome as the power that brought civilization to an underdeveloped world, and of underestimating the economic development of Gallic society<sup>6</sup>. Another trap can be the widespread idea that economic growth always developed in a linear, upwards direction, while in reality an evolution with ups and downs seems to be more the case – as shown by the absence of small change between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> c. in Northern Europe after centuries of intensive coin use.

1 Martin 2015.

2 Martin 2015 and also Howgego 1992; 1994; 2013. See also: Aarts 2015; Doyen 2007 and van Heesch 2005.

3 Butcher 2004; Kessler & Temin 2008.

4 Appadurai 1986, 13.

5 van Heesch 2008b.

6 Hingley 2005.

Another tricky point is the fact that if 80% of the Roman population lived in the countryside and only 20% in cities, this would imply that when the countryside was not monetized we can hardly characterize Roman society as being monetized.

We also have to take into account the diversity of the Roman Empire and therefore it is sensible to adopt a regional approach. No synthesis can be written without a more detailed look at the regional patterns.

### The Countryside

In this paper the focus will be on the North-Western parts of Gaul, i.e. the territories of the *civitates* of the Nervians and the Menapians. These *civitates* were created late in the reign of the emperor Augustus, at some time between 16 and 12 BC, but belonged to the Roman world since the conquest of Caesar (58-50 BC). A major Roman road ran through the territory of the Nervians and linked Boulogne with Bavay, Tongeren and Cologne on the Rhine. Though Caesar (*Gal.*, 2.15) pretended that the Nervians disliked foreign traders, wine and luxury, both territories were, during the Roman empire, famous for all kinds of agrarian and artisanal products. The Menapians exported salt and also hams, which are mentioned by Martialis and in the Price Edict of Diocletian (AD 301). The Nervians occupied an extremely fertile region and were without doubt important producers of cereals. The Nervians also had stone quarries and their woollen mantles are mentioned in the Price Edict of Diocletian<sup>7</sup>.

Settlements in these fairly remote areas are common and diversified. There are, of course, the *civitas* capitals – Bavay and Cassel – and the town of Tournai, and somewhat further the *municipium Tungrorum* (Tongeren/Tongres) in the *civitas* of the Tungri that belonged to Germania Inferior from the Flavians onwards. Military fortifications are rare but at least two forts of the *litus saxonicum* already in use by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD are known, one at Aardenburg (NL) and the other at Oudenburg (BE). Another short-lived military occupation, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, is also known in Maldegem. All other settlements can be considered as belonging to the countryside. These are the isolated dwellings, hamlets, and villages of varying size that could have been *vici*<sup>8</sup>. Most of the larger villages had a Roman temple but some sacred sites seem to be at a distance from the village, for example, at Blicquy, where even a Roman theatre was excavated<sup>9</sup>.

So the word “countryside” actually covers a multitude of settlements situated outside the towns. Some larger villages, as Liberchies or *Geminacium* on the Peutinger map, situated just outside Nervian territory in the *civitas* of the Tungri, illustrate well the difference between sites with only a few finds, and those such as Liberchies, where, in addition to a hoard of 368 *aurei*, more than 3000 Roman coins are known. Even an official Roman coin die for *aurei* of Augustus has been preserved<sup>10</sup>!

7 The best general overview remains Wightman 1985.

8 For a good overview over the occupation of these *civitates*: Vermeulen 1992 and De Clercq 2009.

9 Deru & Delmaire 2010; Wightman 1985; Brulet 2009.

10 The coin finds of Liberchies are partially published in a series of excavations reports edited by Brulet (see e.g. Brulet 2001 [2002], 55-58). For a summary of the finds see also van Heesch 2002 and Severs 2011. On the coin die, see now Boffa 2010.

There are several ways to study coin use in the countryside. One option would be to make a complete inventory of rural settlements and list sites with and without finds. This method is difficult and perhaps not the most effective approach, as the example of the large Roman villa at Merbes-le-Château (Hainaut, BE) illustrated<sup>11</sup>. This villa, excavated between 2006 and 2009, and situated on the fertile loamy soils of the Nervian *civitas*, measures c. 100 m and has almost 70 rooms. Although it was completely excavated, only four isolated coins were found. The stray coins at this thorough site excavation were a meagre find, especially when compared with the hoard from the same site containing silver spoons and 122 silver *antoniniani* and 4 *sestertii*. This shows how chance finds can create a completely different picture. Most sites are not completely excavated and even if they are, the excavation method heavily influences the chance of recovery of coins.

For this reason, in this article a top down approach is preferred, using distribution maps that give a general regional wide overview.

Some years ago I commented on the limited presence of stray finds in the countryside and the concentration of coin finds in larger rural centres or settlements (probably villas) situated near the new *civitas* capitals in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD<sup>12</sup>. In this paper, I will focus on the previous period *i.e.* the coin finds before AD 300.

#### FACTS AND INTERPRETATION

In this paper, I will start with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD and present the data in reverse chronological order, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. The reason is very simple: we have much clearer and more convincing data for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. than for the late Iron Age or early Augustan period.

The maps in fig. 2 (AD 138-193) and 3 (AD 193-294) illustrate the coin finds in the two *civitates*. They were drawn some 20 years ago, so new finds could certainly be added but would not change the picture dramatically<sup>13</sup>. Brussels is situated on the extreme right, the North Sea on the left. The dividing line that separates the Menapians from the Nervians is formed by the River Scheldt, on which the modern towns of Tournai, Ghent and Antwerp are situated. Larger dots indicate sites with 10 or more coins, and triangles indicate one or more coin hoards<sup>14</sup>. As 2<sup>nd</sup> c. coins continued to circulate throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> c., and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. *sestertii* are still very numerous in hoards dating from the reign of Postumus (AD 260-269)<sup>15</sup>, it is better to comment on these maps as a whole.

Although this is a remote area on the edge of the Roman empire, it is safe to conclude from the data plotted on these maps that a large segment of the population had access to coins at some point or another. If we have to use the word “monetization”, then it seems appropriate to use it here, whatever the final reason for hoarding, abandoning or losing the

11 Paridaens *et al.* 2010.

12 Van Heesch in print.

13 van Heesch 1998.

14 On fig. 2, 3, 8, 10 and 12, *muntschaat* = coin hoard ; *meerdere munschatten* = more than one coin hoard.

15 van Heesch 1998, 99 and also Doyen 2007.

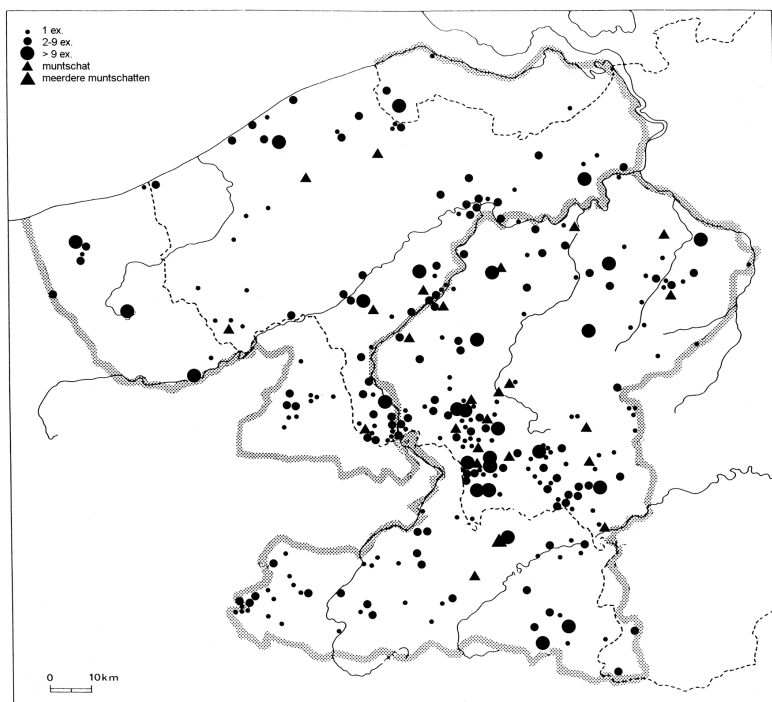


Fig. 2. Isolated coins, stray finds & coin hoards: the Antonines  
(from van Heesch 1998, 107 fig. 90).

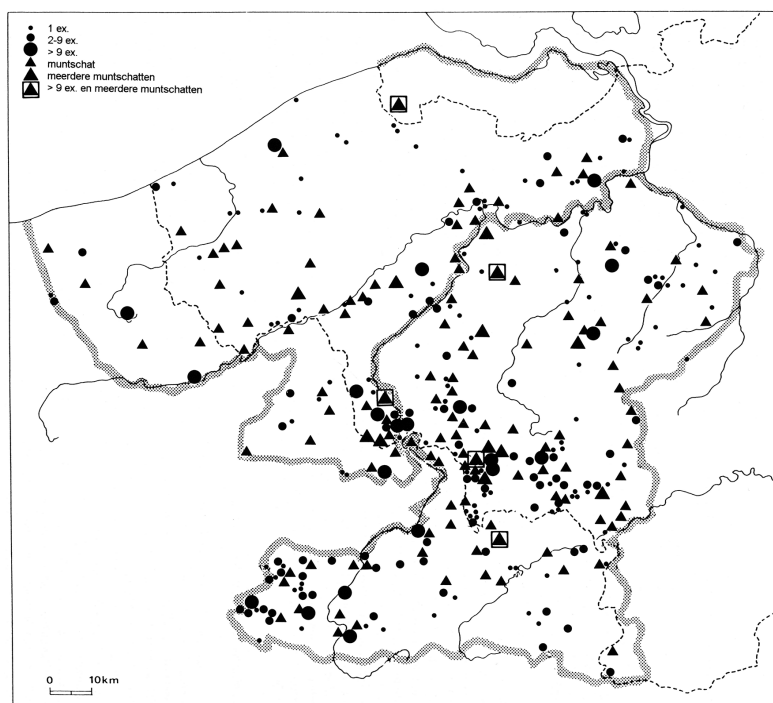


Fig. 3. Isolated coins, stray finds & coin hoards: the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD  
(from van Heesch 1998, 141 fig. 127).

coins was. Also, it cannot be denied that there seems to be some difference between the Western and the Eastern parts. This must be explained by the fact that more settlements are known on the fertile loamy soils in the centre and the East than in the coastal region, and probably also reflects a difference in population density. If we check against historical sources, Caesar (*Gal.*, 2.4.5) mentions 7000 warriors for the Menapians and some 50 000 for the Nervians.

There are an impressive 233 sites (fig. 4) with Antonine coins and 185 sites with 3<sup>rd</sup> c. coins<sup>16</sup>. For both *civitates* we know of some 25 larger settlements: the two *civitas* capitals, and the *vici* or central places. The exact numbers are not of great importance here. What is more important is that there is a serious chance that between 208 and 160 sites were small hamlets or isolated rural habitations, i.e. the “countryside”.

	Sites	≥ 10 coins
Augustus	74	12
Nero	91	7
Flavians	104	13
Antonines	233	37
3 <sup>rd</sup> c.	185	50
4 <sup>th</sup> c.	134	26

Fig. 4. Nervii and Menapii: sites with coin finds  
(data: van Heesch 1998).

During the last decade a lot of new settlements have come to light especially in the northern parts of the territory of the Menapians but coins have seldom turned up at these sites<sup>17</sup>. Take for example the rural complex excavated at Aalter-Langevoorde, where there are traces of occupation from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC, and where during the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC an area of 150 x 150 m was surrounded by an enclosure. Although this is an impressive site and excavations covered a large area, only one coin, a *denarius* of Marcus Aurelius, was found<sup>18</sup>. How should we interpret impressive sites that are poor in coins? Unfortunately, most sites are not completely excavated and the survival (or not) of coins is often accidental, the result of chance or the way the excavations were conducted. But there are so many factors that influence the presence and recovery of coins<sup>19</sup>. It is not difficult to imagine that in one region people used to offer coins to the gods, and that in other parts of the country more

16 van Heesch 1998, 142. Although these data are not up to date, it is not the exact number that will make the difference but the general impression and the distribution is clear.  
17 Vermeulen 1992; De Clercq 2009.  
18 De Clercq 2009, 224.  
19 Blackburn 1989.



perishable goods were deposited and/or consecrated. So a very large range of circumstances can determine whether coins will be found or not.

Be that as it may, it is extremely interesting to see on these maps of the coin finds the huge number of *coin hoards* (indicated by triangles) all over the area. Most are late 3<sup>rd</sup> c. coin hoards of the time of the Gallic Empire (260-274) and contain 2<sup>nd</sup> c. *sestertii*, double *sestertii* of Postumus, *antoniniani* and also, once in a while, *denarii*. Whatever the reason for their abandonment, their sheer quantity shows that in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> c. larger coin denominations were easy to obtain and that *at least a segment of the population* had access to coins and was linked, directly or indirectly, to the economy of the Roman world. Although we know that there was military activity in this area in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c., and that the forts along the North Sea were certainly occupied by military, as were the smaller fortifications along the road of Bavay-Cologne<sup>20</sup>, there is little doubt that most of these finds are civilian in character and that they bear witness to the handling of Roman coins in the countryside.

Some of the find spots are not isolated dwellings, but larger rural settlements or local religious centres as, for example, at Blicquy. The site of Kruishoutem, situated south of Ghent on a high point not far from the River Scheldt, was a religious site. The find of a Roman medallion of Commodus in Kruishoutem is stunning as it shows how these prestigious objects could reach remote areas of the empire<sup>21</sup>!

Another aspect of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. that deserves our attention is the high number of *gold coins* – even hoards – in the countryside (fig. 5 and 6). For the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c., 23 isolated *aurei* are known and 8 gold hoards (containing two or more *aurei*)<sup>22</sup>. Most of the isolated coins are older discoveries and their context is not always clear. Two *aurei* come from the Roman military establishment at Maldegem, but others belong to rural contexts. The hoard of Liberchies (*Tungri*) was excavated in a roman *vicus*, but the hoards of Arquennes and Mespelare (each yielding almost 900 *aurei*) come from a Roman villa site<sup>23</sup>. While Arquennes is only 12 km from Liberchies, the site at Mespelare is much more isolated. It is unfortunate that these villa-sites were not professionally excavated, but one wonders how a local villa owner could have obtained such a large fortune, especially in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. (when the hoards of Mespelare and Arquennes were buried). One can only guess about the original owners, but as the latest coins of the Arquennes hoard, all Severan pieces, were in impeccable condition, they cannot have circulated much. A link to the government paymaster cannot be excluded and I would suggest that this was something like a *praemium* paid to an important veteran after his years of military service. From the early empire onwards, military service in the Roman army is documented: for example, the military tribunes Chumstinctus and Auetius, both Nervians, and mentioned by Livy in 11-10 BC<sup>24</sup>. However, these gold coins could also reflect commercial activity by local landlords in the food-producing regions. Gold coins were

20 Brulet 1990.

21 van Heesch 1994, 62 (image); 1998, 262.

22 Callu & Lorient 1990 and van Heesch 1997, 87.

23 Liberchies: Thirion 1972; Arquennes: van Heesch 1998, 227; Mespelare: van Heesch 1998, 271.

24 Chumstinctus and Auetius: *tribuni ex civitate Nerviorum* (Liv., *Perioch.*, 141).



not the privilege of the soldiers or the officials and were occasionally even distributed by the emperors to the “common” people<sup>25</sup>.

The coin-finds shown on these maps (fig. 2 and 3) may represent the use of money in different ways, and the immobilisation of hoards and coins in time and space – perhaps as offerings or because of war, invasion or simply economic crisis. However, their sheer presence is proof that people were manipulating coins and had plenty of them at their disposal.

Emperor	Aurei
Trajan	8
Hadrian	4
Antoninus	6
Aurelius	1
Gallic emperors	4

Fig. 5. Isolated finds of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. gold coins from the civitates of the Nervii and Menapii.

Findspot	Number	Latest coin
Aartrijke 1	9	145-147
Aartrijke 2	2	137-161
Arquennes	907	207
Berlare	several	Postumus
Liberchies ( <i>Tungri</i> )	368	166 (?)
Mespelare	900	193 ?
Mont-Saint-Aldegonde	?	Caracalla
Saint-Léger	2	Lucius Verus
Teralfene	2	Antoninus Pius

Fig. 6. Gold hoards: Nervii, Menapii and Liberchies.

When one moves backwards in time and compares the distribution maps of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (fig. 7 and 8) with the two already discussed, one is immediately struck by the difference. Of course, in periods of relative peace, hoards are usually recovered and thus would not show up on our maps. Most of these dots reflect the finds of copper coins, and, more rarely,

25 Examples in Millar 1977, 135-139 (with reference to D.C. 49.25.5). It is also interesting to note the frequent references to gold coins in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. See also Lorient 2003, 63 (with reference to D.C. 76.1.1).

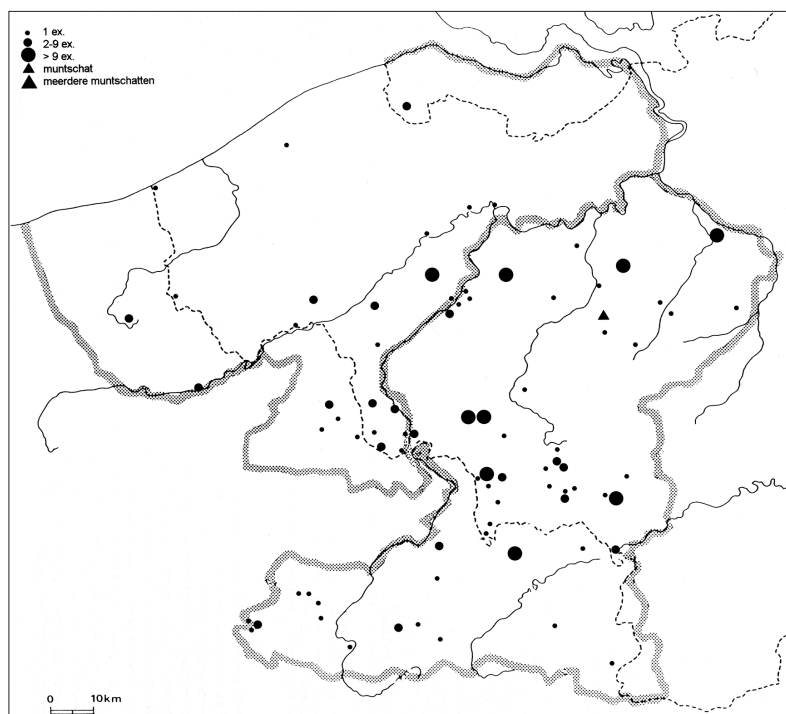


Fig. 7. Isolated coins, stray finds & coin hoards: Octavian-Augustus  
(from van Heesch 1998, 61 fig. 36).

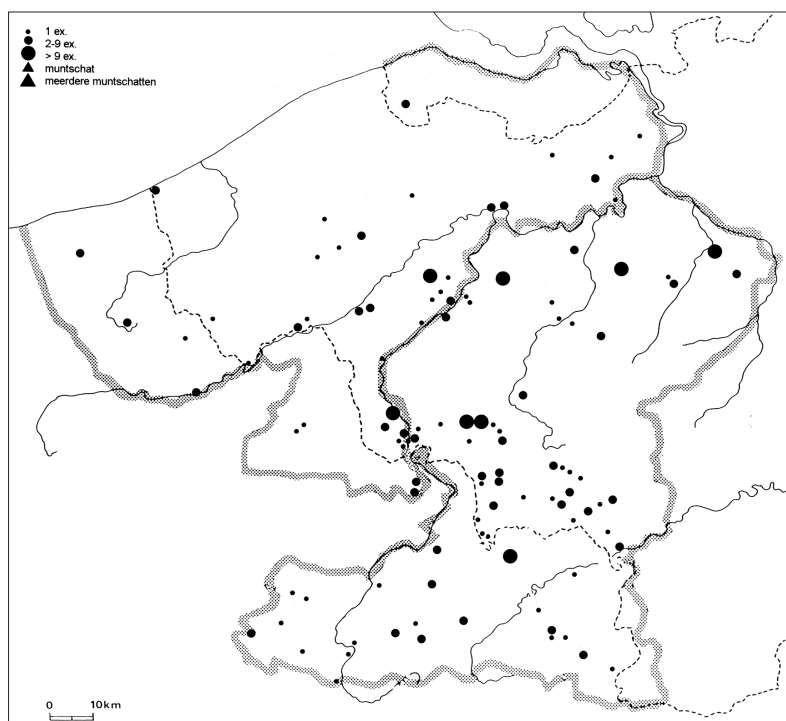


Fig. 8. Isolated coins, stray finds & coin hoards: the Flavians  
(from van Heesch 1998, 106 fig. 89).

silver and gold. Most of the larger ensembles (10 or more coins) on this map are from Roman villages or *vici* or sanctuaries: Bavay, Blicquy, Waudrez, Kruishoutem, Velzeke, Asse, Elewijt and others (Merendree, a recently prospected village is not on the map). Although the time-span covers only half a century, as Claudian or Neronian coins are not included on these maps, the difference with the previous ones (fig. 2 and 3) is such that one is tempted to conclude that the penetration of coin use away from the Bavay-Cologne and the major *vici* was much more limited, and that the intensity of coin use in the remoter areas and on isolated farmsteads was probably less than in the later period. On the other hand, it is certain that small change was available – even in considerable quantities – in the smaller villages. The presence of Augustan coins (fig. 7) is very important as most of these were almost certainly lost or deposited during the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD. The Augustan coins found in villages such as Velzeke, Liberchies or Kruishoutem show that these smaller rural settlements were linked to the monetary economy of the empire<sup>26</sup>. They must have played a role as transit places, markets, sanctuaries and perhaps even custom stations, though we are not well informed about that<sup>27</sup>.

We do not know whether taxes were raised in coins, yet the fact that the whole of Northern Gaul had to pay tribute and had to sustain the army with food or clothing must have impacted on the local economies<sup>28</sup>. We know next to nothing about the way the Roman government organized taxation in this area, but it is quite possible that the burden was passed from the provinces to the *civitates*, who in turn passed the taxation to their elite and nobility, who turned to their peasants and tenants. Perhaps this created some sort of a market economy and specialization that introduced coins and coinage into wider areas. If so, it would not only be larger denominations that played a role; even small change, *asses*, and imitations, would have found their way at a very early date to the smaller *vici* and beyond. Of course, when a farmer returned from a central market place with coins, he could hardly use them at home and probably put them in his piggy bank. Travelling salesmen and returning soldiers would also have introduced coinage to a larger area. Indeed, Menapians and Nervians served from the very beginning in the Roman army and are attested as auxiliary forces during the High Empire. Roman landowners were also responsible for the upkeep of the Roman roads and wage labour as well as slavery existed side by side. We should not underestimate these activities as incentives to monetization<sup>29</sup>!

Two anecdotes are worth repeating here. They illustrate vividly how money earned abroad can change local economies and how one can imagine the functioning of a shop in an isolated settlement. When the Turkish writer, Mahmout Makal, wrote about the situation in his village in Cappadocia in 1948 and later on in the sixties, he described the

26 See the data in van Heesch 1998.

27 France 2001.

28 Internal tax regions are known in Gaul even before the Romans (Caes., *Gal.*, 1.18.3). Especially at the borders of the *tres Galliae*: France 2001, 271-2, 278-9; Duncan-Jones 1990, 30-47. On taxes see also Tiberius (*foederati* and *liberae*): cf. Suet., *Tib.*, 49 and Brunt 1990, 324-346.

29 Kissel 2002, 127-160 (*munitio viarum*), wage laborers: 155 (*mancipes viarum*), cf. *CIL*, VI, 8468-8469 and Tac., *Ann.*, 3.31.

Wage labor: Kehoe 2012, 114-130, 121-128 (tenants – tenancy – wage labor).

transformation of his home village. In 1948 Nügüz (now Nurgöz) was a large settlement with some 130 houses and 708 residents<sup>30</sup>. In just over a decade, the village evolved from a primitive isolated community to a more modern one in the 1960, where money and modern society were gradually introduced. In 1948 money was rare and commerce was organized in a very archaic way. Everything changed when people went to work overseas, a situation that can be compared with the enrolment of local auxiliary forces in the Roman army. Makal writes that for every ten people that went to work in Germany, 150 locals had a better life. Could that have been the situation when Roman soldiers came home from service in the army and brought to their villages luxury goods, a new way of life, and coins?

Even more interesting is Makal's description of the shop in the village:

"There is a shop in our village, as there is in all the neighbouring villages. These shops are as bright as anything after the harvest, but in winter there's very little doing. Don't take me too seriously when I call it a 'shop': it's really only a makeshift. Someone comes along, gets hold of some pieces of wood from a sugar-box or two, and makes what he calls a shelf by fixing them across some wooden pegs which he drives into the wall of some stable, where cattle were housed only five years ago, and sets out on these boards anything he may happen to possess. There may be five or six bottles of raki, to begin with, and some wine; then cigarettes and soap, tin cans, resinous pieces of wood for lighting purposes, buttons, and beads – in all perhaps not more than ten different things. When they run out he gets some more. His chief stock-in-trade which commands the greatest sale are roasted chick peas and 'fistik' nuts, smelling pungently, stuck together from the damp, and running out on to the floor alongside the heap of barley which stands in the corner. The stable, miserably low and even in August so damp that you'd think it was in league with the fountain, has a few stone seats along the wall, so that customers can sit down. There are dominoes and playing cards. It is always full of people.

As they keep a little in hand, they will sell you things on credit, to be paid for at threshing-time; this is where the villager is able to get the little odds and ends of which he stands in need. The rest is up to Sükrün, who writes you down for as much as he thinks fit. Paraffin is sold in the town for 50 piastres a tin, so our grocer demands 70 piastres; you've got to have it, and who can afford to pay 560 piastres down all at once? When you've filled a half-litre bottle once or twice it may serve to keep you in light and firewood; and then spring comes. In summer, in any case, God's 'poor man's lamp' burns in the sky. Young people buy things like chick peas and pistachio nuts and peanuts, and take them as tit-bits for their fiancées. All this goes down on credit, at two or three times the original price, till threshing-time. You buy a button for two eggs, 'cash down', but if it's on credit you have to pay four. The villager, who has no money at all put by, and who can't go and get what he needs in this way from the town in autumn, has to carry this high cost of living as if he were a rabbit with a tin tied to its tail. In their wretchedness these people, who lack even the bare amenities of life in an expensive world, have to mortgage their produce before it is ripe, before they know whether it will ever grow." [Translation by Wyndham Deedes]

30 Makal 1954, 141-142 (English); 1963, 69-71 (French). The English and French editions differ markedly. Apparently the author rearranged several passages in the book, added information in the French edition but also omitted certain paragraphs in the French translation.

What is extremely interesting in this story is the way credit took over the role of money and coins; this example also illustrates well how a local economy, in which money and coins were rare, worked. Of course, the situation in temperate Europe with its mild climate and its flat landscape made it much more accessible to tradesmen and for travellers.

The degree of coin use in the *civitates* was quite high at least in certain rural central places from the 1<sup>st</sup>, even the early 1<sup>st</sup> c. onwards, and this can easily be demonstrated *by the omnipresence of small coin denominations even those smaller than the Roman asses*. Take for example the rural village and sanctuary at Kruishoutem, situated between the River Scheldt and the River Lys<sup>31</sup>. In addition to 33 halved asses or *dupondii*, from the late 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC and the first decades AD, two *semisses* of Tiberius as well as five *Germanus Indutilli L* bronzes have been found. To this can be added the Celtic bronze coins, but we will talk about these later. The same picture emerges from the larger *vicus* of Liberchies, which was possibly an important “transit” site. Liberchies is situated in the *civitas Tungorum* at the border with the Nervians, a frontier that from Domitian onwards became the dividing line between Gallia Belgica and Germania inferior. Large numbers of *Avaucia* bronzes were excavated at this site (fig. 9). These small coins of pure copper, possibly *quadrantes*, were also the common small change in the military establishments on the Rhine and in the Augustan settlements in Germania<sup>32</sup>.

Iron ages bronzes	Total
<i>Avaucia</i>	137
<i>Nervii</i>	89
<i>Germanus Indutilli L</i>	28

Fig. 9. “Celtic” bronze coins from Liberchies (excluding the 72 *potins*).

This brings me to a final but extremely important question. What about the Gallo-Belgic and the Iron Age bronze coins, and the Iron Age *potin* coins, that turn up in fairly large numbers at several “Roman” sites? There is no doubt that the *Avaucia* bronzes date from the reign of Augustus and that these were the actual small change used by the Roman soldiers at the beginning of our era. But at the sites of the Nervians, other series of struck bronze coins, as well as cast *potin* coins, are found. The matter is extremely complicated and neither the problem of the use of small change in Iron Ages societies nor their date can be resolved here<sup>33</sup>.

31 Vermeulen 1992 (coin identifications by J. Lallemand); van Heesch 1998, 262-263.  
32 van Heesch 2008b, 49-57. For a good overview over the occupation of these *civitates*: Vermeulen 1992 and De Clercq 2009. For example the data listed in: van Heesch 2008a, 33. At Liberchies an official Roman coin die for *aurei* or *denarii* of Augustus was excavated, see recently: Boffa 2010.  
33 Doyen 2012. See now also Martin 2015, *passim*.

In my opinion, a strong case can be made to consider the struck *rameau*-bronzes<sup>34</sup> as a parallel series with the *Avaucia* bronzes of Augustan date (fig. 10). Though absolute proof is lacking, they are found together with *Avaucia* coins in Liberchies (a site founded under Augustus<sup>35</sup>), are very numerous in sites with no Iron Age occupation, as at Kruishoutem (in the opinion of the excavator) and some of these coins were overstruck by *Avaucia* type coins<sup>36</sup>. But these are not the only types attributed to the Nervii. Several other coin issues of different fabric and with the inscription *VIROS*, for example, could very well be older, as are the *potin* coins. Does this mean that before the arrival of Roman coins in the last two decades BC, the Iron Age communities in this area were already using small change? It is very probable that the cast *potin* coins of the “*rameau A*” type are the oldest small denominations in Nervian territory (fig. 11). But they are also fairly common on Roman sites. Theoretically, there can be no objection to viewing the Nervian society as already using small change at an early date as was certainly the case in other parts of Gaul<sup>37</sup>. If the Celts used gold coins and even fractions of gold coins, of a very debased alloy, why should they not be “capable” of using small change? The main problem lies with the social implications. If we accept that small change was exclusively used to make small transactions, this implies that commerce and the economy “tout court” needed it and that small transactions were common practice in these parts of Gaul. This can only be explained by an economy that was monetized, at least in certain centres. Of course, coins can have a “social life” and can be used outside the strict commercial sphere. There are contexts in which coins can be used for transactions with the gods, but at least in the places where they were cast or struck we should accept that these objects must have had a monetary function. The question is whether we have to characterize the *potin* coins exclusively as religious money, as tokens, just like the small wheels in *potin* or the miniature tools found in sanctuaries? Although no Iron Age villages

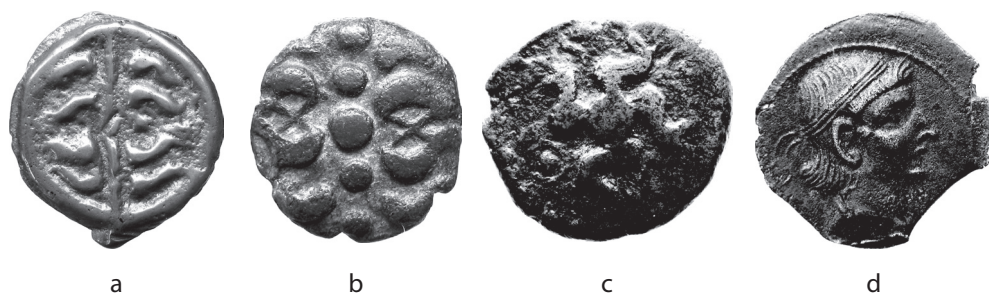


Fig. 10. From l. to r.: a) cast *rameau*-*potin*; b) struck *rameau*-bronze; c) *Avaucia* bronze; d) Germanus Indutilli L (brass). Only obverses shown, no scale (photographs: J. van Heesch, KBR).

34 Scheers 1977, n° 190 (classes 1 and 2); Scheers 1977, n° 190 class 3 is the cast *potin* version of the “same” coin type as class 1. These coins are called “*Rameau*”-bronzes because the motive on the obverse resembles a branch without leaves; in French *rameau* means ‘branch’ or ‘twig’.

35 The Augustan date of the creation of Liberchies is disputed. Some numismatists (research in progress) propose a much older date based partially on the presence of the *potin* coins and Iron Age ceramics.

36 Martberg; Wigg-Wolf 2005, 69 and 181, n° 907. It is not clear if *Avaucia* was overstruck on a Nervian bronze coin or vice versa.

37 Martin 2015.

or market places have been excavated in the area discussed in this paper, this option cannot be ruled out entirely. The distribution map of the *rameau A potin* shows clearly that there is a concentration of finds in the southern parts of the area of the Nervians and in the area belonging to the *Atuatuci*<sup>38</sup>. Perhaps some monetized centres existed on Iron Age *oppida*? Perhaps these coins remained for a long time in circulation and perhaps they still circulated in early Roman times as small change. Potin coins and Iron Age bronze coins do occasionally occur in Roman military camps of Augustan date, as in Nijmegen and Neuss<sup>39</sup>.

Sites	'rameaux A' potins	Total Iron Age
Titelberg (LU)	30	3824
Blicquy (BE)	12	163
Velzeke (BE)	3	37
Kruishoutem (BE)	9	100
Namur (BE)	2	18
Bavay (FR)	12	105
Fontaine-Valmont (BE)	38	324
Nimy (BE)	6	45
Pommeroeul (BE)	3	15
Thuin (BE)	5	25
Liberchies (BE)	95	401
Asse (BE)	8	27
Liberchies fanum (BE)	14	35

Fig. 11. Nervian potin coins of the type “rameau A” in Gallic sites (data: Doyen 2012, 110).

An interesting element in this discussion is the map of the Iron Age gold finds (fig. 12). These are very numerous in both “*civitates*”. This should not surprise us too much, even when they are more numerous than the isolated Roman gold coins! Exactly the same phenomenon occurs in England<sup>40</sup>. This can be explained by the Celtic use of gold in religious deposits, a tradition that was lost in Roman times. The same phenomenon can be seen in Merovingian Gaul. Merovingian gold coins are fairly common today, because they were often deposited in graves.

38 Doyen 2012, 36, 108.  
39 Kemmers 2009, 273; Chantraine 1982, 52-53; van der Vin 1992, 163.  
40 Bland 2013, 222.



When we compare the map of the gold finds with that of the bronze and *potin* coins, there is a very clear difference (fig. 12 and 13). Gold has survived in areas where no bronze or *potin* has ever been found. If all these Iron Age gold coins are from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC, which is not certain at all, does that mean that these bronzes and *potins* must be dated to a different period?

The idea that Iron Age society was more monetized than some numismatists would allow, is worth our consideration. I must confess that I have always seen the Roman conquest, and especially the age of Augustus and the reorganization of Gaul by Agrippa with his mapping of the Roman world<sup>41</sup>, as the starting point of Romanization and the introduction of small change in the very north of Gaul. Though I remain to be convinced that sites such as Kruishoutem or Liberchies had important Iron Age settlements, I cannot rule out the idea that some Iron Age centres used *potin* coins – even in these northern *civitates* – decades before the Roman conquest.

The consequences are important. If we accept *potin* coins as being small change, de facto coins, then monetization or coin use at a basic level would predate the Roman conquest, even in these areas. But although some monetization of the countryside in the late Iron Age in these parts of Gaul is a serious option, I do not believe that the *potin* coins were withdrawn from circulation, as has been suggested. They are not that rare in Roman settlements.

## CONCLUSION

The title of this contribution is “the multiple faces of the countryside”. I hope I have shown that there was no simple and straightforward evolution in the use and dissemination of the coinage. First of all, the use of coin differed geographically. Not all regions started using coins at the same time. Regional or local level differences must have existed between heavily monetized military camps, cities or larger *vici* and isolated farmsteads that few coins reached.

Second, monetization or the intensity of coin use changed over time. This evolution was not one of constant growth, and it is possible that there were periods of intense coin use followed by a downward movement. This undulation might be due to an increase or decrease in population, but might also have been the result of the monetary policy of the government, or of a difference in the coin use tradition of the new occupants. The evolution of coin use after the Romans left Gaul is sufficient proof of that. After a boom in coin use in the later 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> c., the new Germanic kingdoms evolved into a society with hardly any small change (at least north of the Alps), a situation that remained unchanged till the early 14<sup>th</sup> c. with the appearance of a debased billon coinage. But if Iron Age *potin* coins and some of the bronze series from the territory discussed in this paper, really predate the Gallic War, it is also possible that the Romans actually destroyed or slowed down an emerging specialized society where coin use was of growing importance.

41 Marquardt 1884<sup>2</sup>, 207–208; Nicolet 1988.

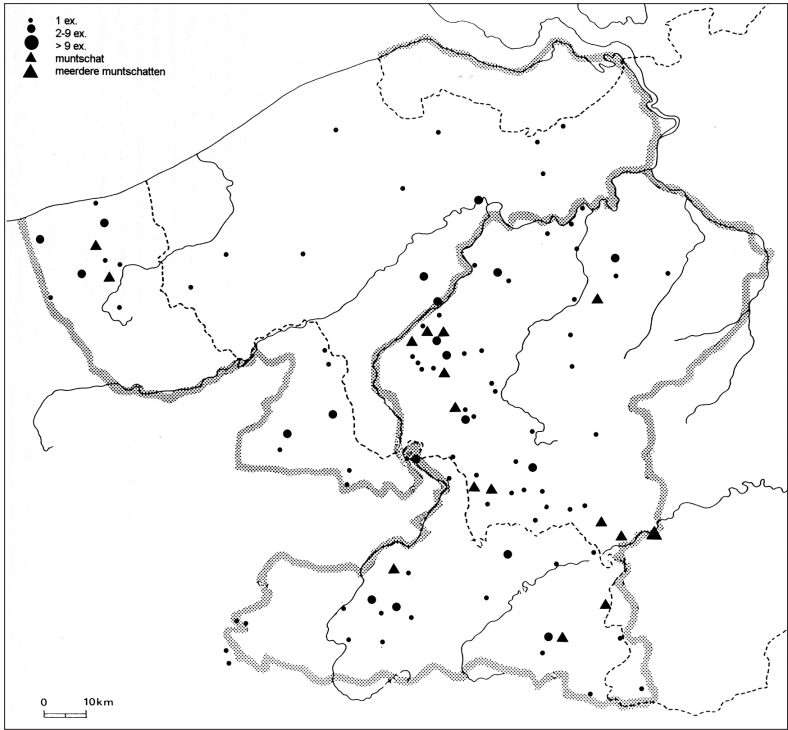


Fig. 12. Iron Age gold coins finds (from van Heesch 1998, 38 fig. 14).

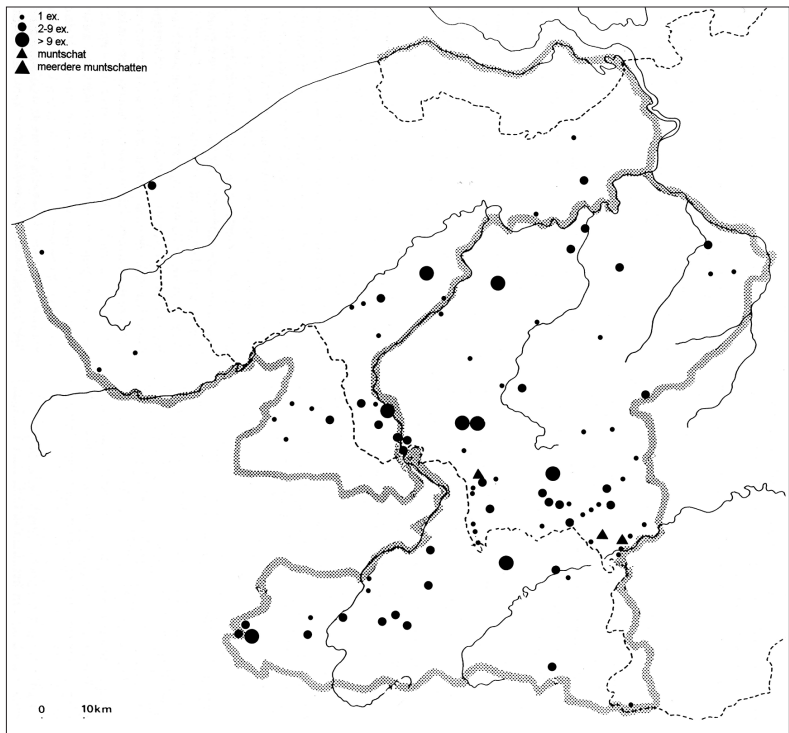


Fig. 13. Iron Age bronze and potin finds (from van Heesch 1998, 42 fig. 19).

I hope that this short overview of coin use in the North West of Gaul showed how dangerous generalizations are. A point made at the beginning of this paper was: if 80 % of the people lived in the countryside, then a substantial part of the population had to have access to coinage and small change if we want a society to be characterized as “monetized”. It is my firm belief that the maps shown in this paper strongly suggest that this was the case in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, but it is extremely difficult to prove this for the preceding periods. But we should also ask if it is sensible to focus on this percentage? We should not forget that a high degree of economic development can be reached without the use of a coinage system, as in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, for example. The maps presented here show only the increase in the role played by coins in the economic development of the area under study.

Today, most historians will agree that the Roman economy was advanced rather than primitive. The Romans used a fairly sophisticated monetary system with high value denominations, small change, credit and scriptural money (bank money). In the North West of Gaul coins seem to have been used in daily transactions at some point, and perhaps even in the very basic transactions, similar to the situation in Roman Italy. The 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD author Columella writes in his book on agriculture that chicken eggs can be stored or ... “*turned into cash*”<sup>42</sup>. This perhaps insignificant line shows how even very small products could be objects of commerce, for very small amounts of money. The biggest problem, however, is not the use of coins in rural environments in Roman times, but the frequency of coin use before the age of Augustus, and even before Caesar, in the North West of Gaul. Can one use at face value the presence of coins as the major and almost exclusive source for the existence of a fairly well developed monetary society from an early date onwards? If we follow the recent excellent book of S. Martin the answer could be “yes we can”<sup>43</sup>; so the easiest or the simplest solution would be to accept the data at face value, which is precisely what S. Scheers did, when she published her *Traité* in 1977. She did not attach much importance to the use of coinage, simply because at that time all numismatists were convinced of the intensity of coin use during the Iron Age. Whatever the correct interpretation is, the fact remains that no archaeological excavation in the area under review ever yielded absolute proof for the use of small change at an early date and more fundamental research is still needed<sup>44</sup>.

42 Col., *Rust.*, 8.5.4: ...*cetera [ova] vel reponantur, vel aere mutantur*. On profit making in agriculture: Duncan-Jones 1982, 33-59.

43 Martin 2015.

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