

Prikazi / Besprechungen

What to do when one is confronted with a malicious subpar review? An answer to Darko Periša's review of Tomislav Bilić's *Coins of the Roman Republic in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb*

Upon reading Periša's somewhat belated review of my book *Coins of the Roman Republic in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb*,¹ I was faced with a truly unenviable task: on one side, I felt the need to offer a response to the readers of *Godišnjak Centra za balkanološka ispitivanja*, but on the other, in doing so, I would have to react to an unprecedentedly illiterate text. The reader of this response will soon have the chance to estimate whether my characterisation of the text in these harsh terms is warranted. I must add, however, that the reputation of the *Godišnjak* has not been advanced with the publication of a text written in English on the level of a third-grade primary-school pupil (and one that has not been proof-read or corrected by a teacher). As a final preliminary remark, I would like to invite the readers to compare Periša's review with one authored by two respectable numismatists in a respectable numismatic journal.² Pegan and Barth's review (in excellent German) is a thorough analysis of my *Coins of the Roman Republic*, which, on the whole, represents a positive endorsement of the book, but at the same time does not refrain from pointing out the mistakes or other inadequacies of the work.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Periša's piece, which will become immediately clear. Already the first sentence might raise an eyebrow of an unwary reader: "The collection of Roman Republican coins curated in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb have been published in..." (when I copy-pasted this text in MS Word, it was immediately underlined – and it remains so). Periša continues with comparing the book he is reviewing with another book I have written in 2010,³ adding that "[b]oth books were published separately within the same museum serial regardless their methodological similarity". What does this mean? They were published by the same publisher, *even though* they apply similar methodology – so, must the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb publish books only if they differ in their methodological approach? In the remainder of my response, I will not highlight every occasion on which such blunders appear, but only those I feel are most representative for understanding the reviewer's incompetence.

What follows is often incomprehensible, but at the same time unequivocally malicious. When summarizing the part of my text that briefly recounts the growth of the Zagreb collection of Republican coins, he seems to imply that the Museum curators at some point lost interest in acquiring new coins: "He [i.e., the author] openly brings to light that all samples of Republican coins have been gathered into the museum up until 1938" (*sic*).⁴ I do indeed "bring this fact to light", in a tone that finds it regrettable, although this has not apparently been recognised by Periša. If he was not unduly malicious, he could have consulted my more overt remark "brought to light" in one of my exhibition catalogues:

"Even today we look back melancholically and somewhat enviously at the Museum's Golden Age [when Josip Brunšmid was the Museum director], at the fact that the Museum was at the time an important participant in the international numismatic market, that it could compete with the actors on the illegal market (now completely

¹ Bilić 2015; Periša 2021. In light of this delayed review, Periša's comment made only a year later resonates in its hypocrisy: "In the penultimate volume of *Bosna franciscana*, Tomislav Bilić published his response, after procrastinating for six years" (my translation of Periša 2022, 217).

² Pegan / Barth 2018.

³ Bilić 2010.

⁴ I will use "sic" extensively, not because I am particularly fond of this phrase, but because Periša seems to fetishize it.

dominant), as well as at the fact that in those days the attitude of the citizens towards the museums and national culture was significantly different in comparison with their behaviour today.”⁵

I will return to this question at the end of this text, commenting on another similar remark by Periša. What follows immediately in Periša’s review, is not readily comprehensible:

“According to the author’s opinion the importance of published collection has been displayed through at least two categories: exceptional importance to researching Republican coins circulation at the area of south Pannonia in particular [*sic*], and also the importance for numismatic-wise study [*sic*] of Republican coins, emphasizing that both categories have been sublimed into golden coin [*sic*] (aureus) of Quintus Cornuficius from Sisak (which have been unique specimen for long period of time [*sic*]). Coloured [*sic*] photographs of this aureus have been published enlarged.”

This is truly appalling English and I fail to see how a respected journal can publish such nonsense. Periša has scornfully commented on the fact that the publisher of my book has commissioned a translation agency and “not a person” for proof-reading my book – I am pretty sure that the agency employs humans for the actual proof-reading – and I do highly recommend some such service both to Periša and the editors of the *Godišnjak*. Nevertheless, I did emphasize this twofold importance of the Roman Republican coin collection of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, and did offer the example of Quintus Cornuficius’ aureus as an illustration of this claim. What is important to Periša here, however, is not this observation, but rather the fact that I subtly exonerated the authors of the definite study of the coin⁶ from a blunder for which they are not to blame. Thus, the fact that “the author decided to assort [*sic*] this anecdote into the history of research of this collection” was motivated by the wish to resolve a bibliographical juncture, but in a way obviously too subtle for Periša. Also, Hoffiller’s primary publication of the coin was naturally included in and superseded by Dukat and Mirnik’s paper in question, and the fact that the funds for its purchase were provided by Hoffiller’s wife – adduced by Periša – is truly anecdotal and without any value for a numismatic discussion (as opposed to the replacement of Cornuficius with Confucius – unexplainably called “Konfucie” by Periša – in the definite publication of the coin).

The reviewer continues with a discussion of the hoards of Republican coins kept in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb:

“Therefore, they [the hoards] need re-evaluation and republishing, for the most part due to latest cognitions [*sic*] regarding dating newest types and sets [*sic*] of Republican coins. That has already been done for some hoards, namely Cesarica near Karlobag, so that the author brings nothing new for this hoard.”

Indeed, Periša is correct in that many of the hoards in question are in need of a re-evaluation. This is exactly why I have re-evaluated many of them (Vukovar, Stara Pazova, Lički Ribnik, Valpovo/Osijek, Sisak-Kupa), while several others were revisited by other authors. Periša fails to acknowledge any of this, although I have provided copious bibliographical references to all works of a more recent date that readdress the hoards in question.⁷ Indeed, the Cesarica hoard, published in the 1980s, was not re-evaluated – neither by me nor any other scholar – so Periša’s comment is unnecessary (“the author brings nothing new for this hoard”).

Periša continues with what he believes is a serious methodological issue. I must cite his comment in full, both because it shows his complete lack of understanding of the modern study of numismatics and for the abysmal English:

“The evidence that Bilić in his book arguably uses museology and informatically formed organization [*sic*] rather than scholarly numismatic or archaeological criteria is detected in the fact that coin’s samples [*sic*] have been published by actual age [*sic*] instead by content of hoards or sites of single finds. However, the author himself tabulated according to the sites [*sic*] as a substitute. Also, the hoards containing, both Republican and early Roman Imperial coins, have artificially been divided in this book.”

Now, one must wonder why Periša does not cite any work that conforms to his criteria for the publication of the collections of Roman Republican coins. At the same time, I am happy to cite many scholarly works that have applied exactly the same method as I have used in the *Coins of the Roman Republic*.⁸ Naturally, this is simply because I have followed the standard scholarly practice in publishing an important museum collection. No amount of hardly comprehensible English can mask this plain fact. It would be unprecedented if I ventured to publish Roman Imperial coins in a book unequivocally restricted to Republican coinage; also, it would be remarkable if I structured the systematic collection of Republican coins according to site finds or hoards. With that said, I have

⁵ Bilić et al. 2014, 11 (the text in question is mine, as is the translation).

⁶ Dukat / Mirnik 1984.

⁷ Bilić 2015, 13–14.

⁸ Berger 1989; Borić-Brešković / Popović 2006; Ghey et al. 2010; Gruber 1910; Kos / Šemrov 1990; Militký / Vacinová 2018; Wiercińska 1996.

provided, as Periša clumsily noted (“the author himself tabulated according to the sites”), an index of site finds (pp. 18–19) and hoards (pp. 20–22), while my introductory discussion focuses almost exclusively on the provenanced stray finds and hoards (pp. 9–15 with subheadings “Individual finds”, “Hoards” and “Coinage of the Mazin type”). Thus, this is another example of Periša’s selective and malicious reading of the book he is reviewing.

Elsewhere, i.e., where appropriate, I have applied a more analytic approach to Roman Republican coins circulating in the region: both before⁹ and after¹⁰ the *Coins of the Roman Republic* was published; some of these works, if not all, are known to Periša. Similar remarks also apply to many of Periša’s following comments on the Mazin-type coinage. He opens his discussion on the subject by quoting extensively from my brief exposition on the subject, which is followed by a number of incomprehensible English sentences, such as “[h]e [I. Mirnik] was motivated to conclude it was about circulated coinage”, “[e]ven though the way and time of coins arrival to Iapod territory remained secret” and “the presence of African and Italic coins already more than a century old, existing at relatively limited area and period cannot prove Iapod utilised those coins as mean of payment”. Periša continues with what he believes is a key point in his criticism: “Despite the fact Bilić, in his book, has quoted notably significant [*sic*] Popović’s [the author’s surname is actually “Popović”] work, the section where Popović plausibly explain [*sic*] the hoards of the Mazin type Bilić obviously hasn’t even read.”

If ever there was a malicious comment, this is it. Throughout my work I have cited Popović’s seminal *Novac Skordiska* on multiple occasions (where appropriate), literally dozens of times, which is not hard to check. As an avid reader of my oeuvre, Periša is well-aware of this fact, but he intentionally criticises what is clearly a brief overview where I have noted several – specifically selecting the most recent – among many conjectures on the nature of the Mazin-type coinage, as if this was an in-depth study of the problem. He would have done better if he had consulted my later and more comprehensive analytic work on the coinage of the Mazin type,¹¹ but from all the recent studies on the subject in question it transpires that Popović’s 1987 book is – perhaps regrettably – not part of the “canon” of works on the Mazin-type coinage, as it certainly is with respect to the Late Iron Age coins of the Pannonian Basin and the Central Balkan area.

Without noticing that Livy’s account of the 2000 asses received by the Iapodic envoys from the Romans in 170 BC was not introduced in the discussions of the Mazin-type coinage prior to the publication of my *Coins of the Roman Republic*, Periša elaborates on this passage thus:

“[Livy’s account] consequently, goes in favour to [*sic*] Popović’s thesis whatsoever [*sic*], interesting curiosity here is that the amount received was coper [*sic*] not silver coins. If this is Roman present... had been [*sic*] significant amount for Iapods’s opinion, then the owners of those hoards containing heavy casted coins would have surely been wealthy people (given the fact those coins had been used as a mean [*sic*] of payment rather than raw material).”

This is a truly baffling passage, and I simply fail to decipher it. Periša seems to attempt to say that the amount of coinage received by the Iapodic envoys was large, but how the use of these asses as means of payment favours Popović’s thesis, which, in contrast, postulates that the Mazin-type coinage was utilized as raw material by the Iapodes, must remain a mystery.

Next, Periša discusses the attribution of a small group of coins kept in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb to one of the two hoards found in the area of Livno in 1930. Following Mirnik, I have associated these coins with the Tribić hoard.¹² What follows is the reviewer’s idiosyncratic description of the hoard in question:

“Furthermore, the Tribić hoard was found in 1930 containing 112 samples [*sic*] of Roman coins, of which largest part belonged to Republican denarii while only fewer portions [*sic*] were Augustinian [*sic*] coins. Eight denarii as well eight specimens of bronze and copper coins (sestertii, dupondii, asses) [*sic*]... The large number of Roman silver coins had been listed inside the collections [*sic*]. Numismatic collection [*sic*], all packed up had been allocated [*sic*] to the Land (National) Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, but however, had never been registered to [*sic*] inventory catalogues of classical antique and medieval coins pertaining the collection [*sic*] hasn’t even been unpacked. For all those reasons one should keep hoping the Tribić hoard is awaiting to be scholarly reanalyse [*sic*] following modern numismatic catalogues.”

Now, I wonder whether the translation agency I have commissioned for the proof-reading of the book Periša is reviewing would be of any help with this passage. It is completely unacceptable for a scholarly journal to publish such nonsense in 2021, in what is presented as a serious – moreover, as a highly critical – review of a scholarly book, clearly intended for international readership. If, as the author of the book being reviewed, I am

⁹ Bilić 2012; 2014.

¹⁰ Bilić 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2021a.

¹¹ Bilić 2019. Cf. Visonà 2018 and Bertol Stipetić 2022 for the most recent comprehensive studies of the problem.

¹² Mirnik 1981, 45, no. 69 = 48 no. 90.

placed in a position to offer contrary arguments to malicious defamations, I would prefer that these are at least formulated in comprehensible language. I will limit my comments to two observations: one, if Periša manages to prove that the five coins in question indeed belonged to the Bastasi hoard, as he announces in the present review, I will gladly accept his correction and treat it as an advancement in our knowledge on both hoards from the area of Livno, an advancement that was facilitated – perhaps even motivated – by my publication of the pieces kept in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. Two, Periša's observation that "it was him [Franciscan Fr. Lujo Marun] who donated five denarii to the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb" and which consequently belong to the Bastasi hoard, is not based on any evidence, since in the Zagreb inventory books the name of the person who donated these particular coins is not recorded. I expect this is another example of Periša's special insight at work, his uncanny ability to communicate directly with historical actors and to witness historical events unhindered by alternative interpretations, which is the basis of his idiosyncratic approach to studying history and archaeology.¹³

Periša finishes his review with two bizarre observations. First, he notices I have published, following the catalogue, a list of Roman Republican coins no longer in the holdings of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (not, in Periša's words, "the largest number of Republican coins are not in the numismatic collection of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb anymore", whatever this means). To the best of my knowledge, museums are not usually inclined to publish such lists. The turbulent history of the museums in Central Europe is certainly the primary reason why some material is missing, but these cataclysmic events do not tend to leave much trace in written records, for one reason or another.¹⁴ I sincerely believe that museums should nevertheless publish such lists, even if they are misinterpreted or simply misread by incompetent readers. Thus, Periša claims that the loss "refers [*sic*] to the coin hoards from Mazin, Lički Ribnik and Salona", which is nonsense since the phantom hoard from Salona was never kept in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. Furthermore, when he claims that J. Brunšmid "endeavour[ed] to have this hoard [the Mazin hoard] content integral [*sic*]", he is clearly unaware that Brunšmid, along with trying to "return" the part of the Mazin hoard that was kept in the National Museum in Belgrade during the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Serbia (which is commended by Periša), also donated eleven pieces from this same hoard to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and never attempted to claim the 47 pieces from the hoard actually kept in this Austrian museum in order for them to be "returned" to the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb.¹⁵ Indeed, one should be careful to judge a scholar on curated information, especially those curated by someone who has an axe to grind.

Finally, the most bizarre observation is kept until the very end:

"There are namely two European leading numismatists authorities [*sic*] linked to the reviewed book – directly Peter Kos as the recension writer [*sic*] prior to book publication and indirectly M. Crawford whose book has been maximally exploited by Bilić to make his own book. Whereas P. Kos has been able to see the character of Bilić's book prior to publication but apparently agreed to be recension writer [*sic*] for some reason, Crawford could have seen it only after its publishing. The latter knows the best whether it flatters to [*sic*] him, the fact that, someone based on his book, completely made his own [*sic*]."

Periša seems to imply here, although this is not completely clear from his poor English, that I have somehow insidiously misappropriated Crawford's *RRC*. What I have done – and what is a norm in publications of Roman Republican coins – is to classify the coins from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb according to this standard reference catalogue for this type of coins. This is literally what *everybody* does in comparable scholarly projects (see above the references in note 8). What is more, a work of this kind would never have received a positive peer review from anybody, let alone from Peter Kos and Ivan Mirnik (who peer reviewed my *Coins of the Roman Republic*, as noted in the copyright page of the book) if the *RRC* was not used. I can only imagine what Pegan and Barth's review would look like if I somehow failed to use the *RRC* in 2015 (together with the updated version of the catalogue of Roman Republican coins in the British Museum, Ghey et al. 2010, itself following Crawford).¹⁶ Here the malevolence of Periša is truly brought to the fore.

As a conclusion, I have to express my bewilderment over the fact that such a subpar review, both in terms of argumentation and quality of language, could appear in an otherwise respected scholarly journal. I strongly believe it is time to abandon, once and for all, the favouritism of one's protégés in all registers of scholarship, especially in scholarly publishing that desires to be taken seriously.

¹³ Bilić 2021b, 284–285.

¹⁴ For the history of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb see Balen / Dukat 1996; Solter 2016; for the history of its numismatic collection see Bauer 1963, 8–11; Dukat 1996, 137–140; Mirnik 1977, 47–50; Mirnik 1989, 40–44; Solter 2016, 13, 22–23, 64–66, 159, 229, 244–245.

¹⁵ Bertol Stipetić 2022, 11.

¹⁶ See, for example, the review of Carson 1978 in Mattingly 1980.

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Tomislav Bilić

Adis Zulić / Faruk Taslidža / Sedad Bešlija / Haris Dervišević / Ahmed Kurt, *Sinan-paša Borovinić, Društveni status, porijeklo, porodični uspon, početak urbanizacije Mostara*, Mostar 2023, 198 str.

U milenijskoj prošlosti Bosne i Hercegovine, vremenski je najduži osmanski period. Tokom višestoljetne osmanske vladavine na prostorima Bosne i Hercegovine, kao i dijelovima susjednih zemalja koji su bili u sastavu sandžaka i od 1580. godine Bosanskog ejaleta/vilajeta, dešavali su se brojni historijski događaji. Dio tih historijskih događaja poznat je u osmanistici, kao i dijelu čitalačke publike. Međutim, ni do danas se, osim fragmentarno, ne zna dovoljno o brojnim značajnim historijskim događajima. Pogotovo se pogrešno interpretiraju znamenite ličnosti i istaknutije porodice. Do toga dolazi kako usljed mitologije i neznanja, tako i nedovoljnog interesovanja. Tek u novije vrijeme historičari – osmanisti i orijentalisti temeljitijim istraživanjima pristupaju pisanju o brojnim dešavanjima, porodicama i ličnostima na tlu Bosanskog ejaleta/vilajeta. U bosanskohercegovačkoj historiografiji do sada publikovane knjige i članci obogaćuju dosadašnja saznanja te koriguju izvjesna ranija pisanja realnije prikazujući stanje i prilike Bosne i Hercegovine osmanskog perioda. Novija knjiga Adisa Zulića, Faruka Taslidže, Sedada Bešlije i Ahmeda Kurta *Sinan-paša Borovinić, Društveni status, porijeklo, politički uspon, početak urbanizacije Mostara* upoznaje nas s ovom znamenitom ličnosti. Rukopis se sastoji od predgovora, tri poglavlja, pogovora, sažetka na engleskom jeziku, popisa slikovnog materijala, izvora i literature, registra imena i toponima te recenzija.

Mostar je jedan od najpoznatijih i najvećih gradova Bosne i Hercegovine. Zbog značaja i bogate i interesantne prošlosti i izaziva pažnju historičara te njihova istraživanja sežu od najstarijih antičkih vremena do savremenog doba. Posebnu pažnju poklanjaju osmanskome periodu, kada početkom 16. stoljeća započinje urbani razvoj grada. Među brojnim događajima i ličnostima Mostara, nezaobilazno je ime Sinan-paše, potomka srednjovjekovne plemićke porodice Borovinić. Bio je jedan od najpoznatijih osmanskih velikodostojnika i veliki dobrotvor – vakif. Svojim vakufskim dobrima prvih godina 16. stoljeća udario je temelje grada Mostara.

U *Predgovoru* saznajemo da je Sinan-paša dio ličnog bogatstva potrošio na izgradnju više sakralnih i profanih objekata u Mostaru na prijelazu iz 15. u 16. stoljeće. Oni su predstavljali nukleus urbanog jezgra grada. Koristeći izvore i literaturu, hronološki i tematski pisali su o Sinan-paši i Mostaru.

U prvom poglavlju “Bosanska vlastela u srednjem vijeku i tranziciji u osmanski politički sistem sa osvrtom na Boroviniće” s više podnaslova dati su osnovni podaci o srednjovjekovnoj bosanskoj vlasteli. Prikazana je gradacija vladajuće strukture te su doneseni podaci o *plemenitoj baštini* kao zemljišnom posjedu i ponosu plemićkih porodica. Dalje se čitalac upoznaje s konfesionalnom pripadnošću bosanske vlastele te mjestom i ulogom koju je imala u vrijeme posljednjih bosanskih kraljeva. Na ovom mjestu lijepo je prikazano stanje u Bosanskoj kraljevini u posljednjim decenijama samostalnosti, njen pad (1463), uspostava i učvršćenje sultanove vlasti, kao i integracija dijela bosanskih plemićkih porodica u osmanski politički sistem. Pri kraju poglavlja konkretnije se piše o političkom i društvenom značaju plemićke porodice Borovinića.