



Studying coin related objects and redefining paranumismatics

Lyce Jankowski

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I

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Studying coin related objects and redefining par anumismatics

Besides coins, any coin cabinet has a number of other artefacts - most of them related to coins, such as ancient coin boxes, imitations of coins, old teaching or exhibiting panels, rubbings, photographs, handwritten tickets... Some of these items are written documents and could therefore be transferred to archives. It is usually agreed to keep some documents, coin tickets for instance, next to the coin they relate to. However, there is no common policy concerning the various types of documents, such as rubbings or coin catalogues. As a consequence, usage varies a lot from one institution to another. How can we fix the limit between the documents or objects that need to be kept with the coins and those that do not? This paper will try to address more broadly the question of which objects fall under the scope of numismatics, which do not and will focus on objects that are not proper coins but coin-related items. There is no generally accepted term to designate these items. The word *par anumismatica* (on the edge of numismatics) is the more suitable and will be used in the article.

There is no common consent though on the definition of *par anumismatica*, which had been rather used as an umbrella term. *The First dictionary of par anumismatica* defined it in the restrictive way of "any coin-like object which is not a coin, produced in metal, plastic, etc., normally unofficial and bearing an inscription either with, or without a value" (Edge 1991, p. xi). This definition includes tokens, medals, tallies, jetons, which are also considered to be proper *numismatica*¹. *The Dictionary of English Numismatic terms* excludes tokens and medals in its definition as: "A modern term for the study and collecting of materials such as play-money or 'model' coins, casino chips, wooden 'coins' or flats, elongated coins, silver 'bars', telephone cards, stock certificates and bonds, and the like, that may be somewhat similar to coins or banknotes but were not officially issued by government authority and are not included in one of the long-standing accepted categories of coins, tokens, banknotes, historical medals and war medals" (Manville, p. 182). This paper aims to propose another definition based on some of the material that is to be found in the Heberden Coin Room of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Many objects may be coin related and are likely to be associated to a coin collection. For instance, the collection of East Asian coins of John Reilly² that was donated to the American Numismatic Society (ANS) in 1937 included coins but also numismatic books and objects that he considered related to coinage. His collection counted 27,151 coins (including charms, tallies, gambling tokens and paper money), the objects numbered up to 500. These objects were works of art and antiques such as for example a weighting scale, a sword *tsuba*, figures, carvings and jars with coin designs³. Were these objects of any numismatic interest? We can doubt that John Reilly himself would have considered them as part of numismatics. They were gathered through a more general interest for coin representation, and coin usage in East Asia. The ANS eventually decided to return them to the family. Storage would have come into consideration, but we can also assume that curators were not comfortable with the great variety of material involved and the conservation issues related.

In the author's experience, the question of the numismatic significance of an object is a recurring issue. Should a coin imitation be kept in a coin collection? Can we dispose of vintage coin boxes? These were the questions that the author had to answer when beginning to rearrange the East Asian coin collection at the Heberden Coin Room in the Ashmolean museum. Three objects from this collection will be presented: a lacquer box used as a coin cabinet, an ingot imitation, and a coin catalogue, and their relevance to numismatic studies will then be discussed.

1. Lacquer box

One of the lacquer boxes kept in the Heberden Coin Room is a Japanese stack of fourteen lacquer trays (*jubako*). It is a red lacquer over wood (made with the *kawari nuri*

¹ The *Dictionnaire de numismatique* describes 'Numismatique' as the «science qui traite de la description et de l'histoire des monnaies, médailles, jetons, méreaux, papier-monnaie et tout autre moyen d'échange» (Amandry 2011, p. 412).

² John Reilly, Jr. (1876–1931) was an American collector of East Asian coins and a benefactor of the American Numismatic Society. He was described as "an omnivorous collector of everything an anything in any way related to Far Eastern numismatics" (Bowker 1940, p. 231).

³ The objects are listed in the 'List of the deed' (ANS archives). Are to be found 4 large book-cases, 1 bronze jardiniere, 4 coin panels, 1 wooden box, 1 pottery pagoda, 3 lacquer boxes, 9 wood signs, 3 *kakemono* with characters, 1 *kakemono* with two figures, 2 lacquer trays, 6 bronze ornaments, 1 wooden box, 1 Korean weighing machine, 3 brass money signs, etc.

technique). Each tray is layered with a red silk and provides twenty-eight inserts. The box was used as a coin cabinet, but cannot be used anymore (for reason of conservation and practicality) and we can ask ourselves if it has to be kept or not in a coin room. One can argue that being a useless object, it takes a much-needed space. It could be transferred either to a department of Asian art or of decorative arts. But such an object is of little interest for those because it has no real artistic value⁴: the technique is quite common, the design too.

The coins contained in that box belonged to Kutsuki Masatsuna 朽木 昌綱 (1750–1802), daimyo of Fukushima in Tanba province, also known as the Tamba prince⁵. Kutsuki Masatsuna was a polymath with a personal interest for numismatics. He wrote the first book in Japan devoted to non East Asian coins, the *Seiyō senpu* 西洋錢譜 [Account of Western Coins] in 1787. This book included European coins and medals that he had collected, thanks to a Dutch friend, the Japanologist Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812)⁶. Kutsuki Masatsuna was one of the most prominent numismatists in Japanese history. His East Asian coins collected in Japan in the late 18th century are a first hand material⁷. This box is a testimony of what a coin cabinet could be in Japan in the end of 18th century. The structure with the inserts has been inspired by European examples of coin cabinets, but the box itself is inherently Japanese in its design (stacked trays) and materials (lacquer and silk). It reflects the personality of a collector, who was Japanese but strongly curious of Europe at a time, when Japan was closed to foreign contacts. This coin cabinet even useless today is part of the collection and should be valued as such. It does not prove relevant for the study of the coins of Kutsuki's collection but is of great importance when it comes to studying the history of coin collecting.

2. Ingot imitation

Among other objects that are not proper coins, the Heberden Coin Room accommodates two impressive mock-up ingots. One is an imitation of a gold ingot mounted on a wooden board. It dates back to the end of 19th century and was acquired by a British collector,

George Uvedale Price (1853–1929)⁸. This is not a forgery for its purpose is not to deceive anyone. It represents a store ingot for military emergency use, a type of ingots that were first produced by Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537–1598), followed by the Togukawa shogunate. According to the accompanying label, these gold ingots were made with a proportion of four fifth gold and one fifth of silver, weighting 43,350 *momme* – ca.165 kg. None of these ingots having survived, the mock-up specimen of the Ashmolean fills the lack of material. It must be considered as an equivalent to the electrotype copies of coins and antiquities that were produced for museum display and for private collectors.

The mint museum of Osaka has its own imitation exhibited – it is a good didactic object and impressive enough for display. It is an imitation, but still relevant for Japanese numismatics for it gives shape to an object that would be difficult to imagine.

3. Catalogue

The last example is a catalogue of 'Chinese coins' composed of several volumes bound together in the manner of a Chinese book. It is a manuscript written in 1893 by Christopher Gardner (1842–1914), a coin collector and British diplomat⁹. The first volume includes a preface, a presentation of "Races inhabiting the Chinese empire", an "History of China", and some "Chronological tables"¹⁰. The second volume is a "Description of coins in the collection"¹¹. The third and the following volumes have been dismantled but contains coins stitched on the manuscripts, next to a rubbing of their reverse or to a duplicate. Various plates of rubbings taken from coins or charms have been added at the end.

This manuscript is a mixed media object: paper document/coins/ rubbings. It is also a protean text being both a monograph and a catalogue of coins. Because of its nature, this object has been a problem for conservation and storage. Some attempts have been made to separate the coins from the manuscript (in order to store them). This logic takes into account the identity of the material: coins are to be stored in the coin room and paper in the archives. But this manuscript is an artifact in itself: it is an object that has been created by a collector using different media. Removing the coins alters or deletes its overall meaning, because this very collection was considered as a whole. Each coin

⁴ Coin cabinets are to be found in decorative arts museums. In 2014, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, was successful in securing £534,000 through a public appeal to purchase a medal cabinet (W.8:1,2-2014) probably designed by Charles Percier (1764–1838) and made by Martin Guillaume Biennais (1764–1843). In that case, materials and craftsmanship were both of highest quality and most of the coin cabinets do not approach that level.

⁵ The provenance of the collection was sourced by Helen Wang (Sakuraki-Wang-Kornicki 2010, p. 14).

⁶ Kutsuki Masatsuna did publish several books on numismatics, the most famous being the *Wakan kokon senkakan* 和漢古今泉貨鑑 [Album of Chinese and Japanese coins old and new] in 1798. His correspondence with Isaac Titsingh had been published (Lequin 1992).

⁷ The coins illustrate the large scope of material available for collection in Japan at that period, including Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese coins - both official and unofficial.

⁸ Little if nothing is known of the collector: he must have lived in Amoy (today's Xiamen, on the coastal province of Fujian in China). He donated these ingots along with his collection of coins to the Bodleian library in 1903.

⁹ C. Gardner was the first Western numismatist specializing in Korean coinage (Gardner 1898-1893). His collection of East Asian coins was donated to the Ashmolean Museum in 1947. It included Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese coins.

¹⁰ This first volume may be considered as outdated, it's a summary of the knowledge as of the end of 19th century.

¹¹ There is a total of 2,365 coins.

gains its meaning by being in the group not by standing on its own. The sequence of coins illustrates not only a chronology but the state of understanding of Chinese numismatics by a British collector at the very end of 19th century.

In itself this manuscript does not bring anything new to Chinese numismatics because it is now outdated but it is a valuable testimony on the building of knowledge. For example, the author dismantled and recomposed the volumes while compiling his work and added new sheets. It is a testimony of a numismatic work in progress. Through that artifact we can explore the collecting process, and enter a form of archaeology of collecting. The way coins were mounted is much eloquent for the history of the collection. And sometimes, the message of the display is much more important than the coins themselves. That is the reason why the dismantling of this catalogue in order to integrate the coins into the Ashmolean Museum collections was a mistake and should be stopped. There is no defined category into which to place this object made of proper official coins. Although, when looking at East Asian tradition, a diversity of objects made out of coins are to be found: the most usual being swords or chatelaine made of cash coins strung together. These objects have no monetary use, but they reflect the role of coinage in religious practice or social marking.

Conclusion

The term par anumismatics has been so far an umbrella term to designate coin-like objects at the edge of numismatics. However it is simplistic to believe that numismatic studies are only interested in coins, and that other forms of unofficial coinage (such as tokens and jetons) are at the edge of this discipline. Medals, tokens and jetons are part of the numismatic research. Other objects though are of interest for the numismatist, and these are objects related to coins or to coin collections which are meaningful either for numismatics or the history of numismatics. These objects could be divided in three categories: objects made out of coins (or copies of), objects representing one or several coins, and objects accompanying a coin or used to store coins (such

as a coin ticket, a coin cabinet, or in a Chinese context a red envelope). Of course these categories are likely to overlap. We can discuss whether the second category falls under the scope of art history rather than numismatics. We may then have to take into consideration not only what the actual object is but also what the people who created it would have seen in it. The red paper-cut below is a representation of two strings of cash coins. This object was considered not as an imitation, but as a genuine hell string of cash coins. Metal currency is not in use in the afterlife but only paper money according to tradition. It is a currency of ethnographic nature, but still a currency. It has its place in an ethnographic museum, but it also has its place in a numismatic collection. The *par anumismatica* or coin related items are considered much less valuable and interesting than coins. However these objects bring some lights on topics that are not properly numismatics such as history of collecting, or social and religious practice, etc. And because they are coin-related, numismatists are in the best position to understand their value and interest.

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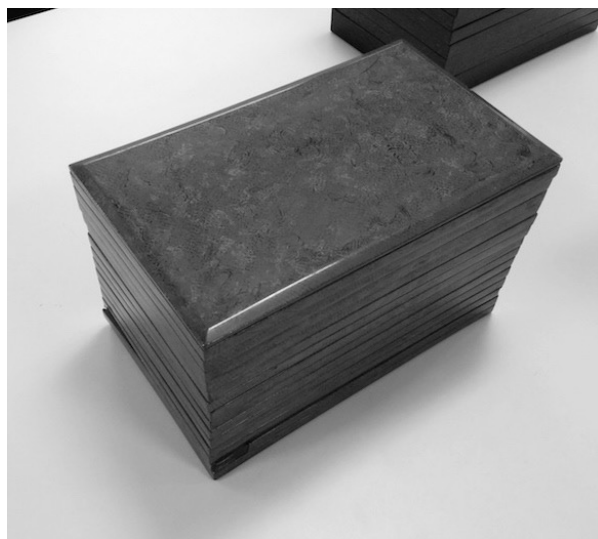


Fig. 1 Coin cabinet, Japan – late Edo period, L. 26 x l.15.5 x H. 16, Ashmolean Museum.



Fig. 2 Coin cabinet (detail), Japan – late Edo period, L. 26 x l.15.5 x H. 16, Ashmolean Museum.



Fig. 3 Gold ingot (imitation) 大法馬金, Japan – end of 19th century, L. 43 x l. 32, Ashmolean Museum.

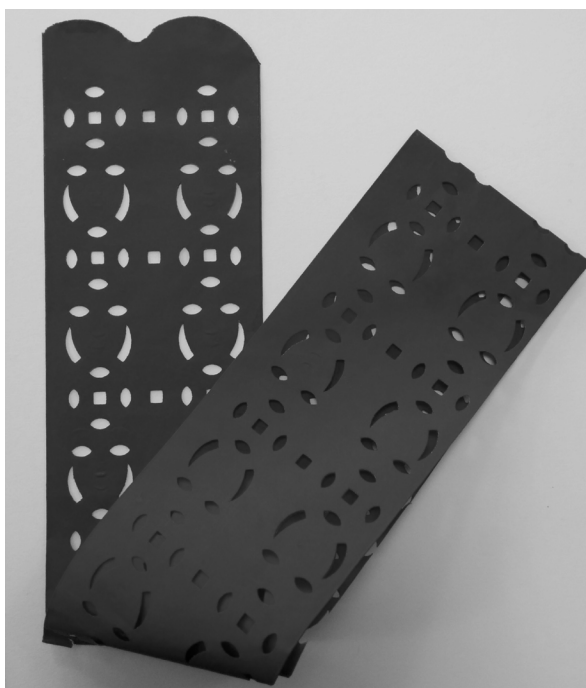


Fig. 4 Funerary money China, 21st century, l. 44 x L. 74, Ashmolean Museum.

INDEX

VOLUME I

PREFACE

<i>Foreword:</i> Maria Caccamo Caltabiano, Mariangela Puglisi	15
<i>Summary Report:</i> Maria Caccamo Caltabiano	17
Saluto del Prof. Giuliano Volpe – Greetings of Prof. Giuliano Volpe, Presidente del Consiglio Superiore ‘Beni culturali e paesaggistici’ - President of Italian Council ‘Cultural Heritage and Landscapes’	26
Saluto della Prof.ssa Aldina Cutroni Tusa	28
LECTIO INAUGURALIS	30
LUCIA TRAVAINI, <i>Mints as Volcanoes: Fire and Technology</i>	

GENERAL NUMISMATICS

AMATO R., MANENTI A., <i>Comunicare le monete. Didattica e divulgazione al Museo “Paolo Orsi” di Siracusa</i>	39
ANGELI BUFALINI G., <i>Il Medagliere MNR, la Banca dati Iuno Moneta e il Bollettino di Numismatica del MiBACT. Un trinomio per la tutela, valorizzazione e fruizione del bene numismatico. Bilanci e prospettive.</i>	43
APOLITO P., <i>Monete medievali da Kyme in Eolide: un rapporto preliminare</i>	47
ARTHUR P., SARCINELLI G., <i>Between computation and exchange: coins (and not coins) from the excavations at the Castle of Lecce - Italy</i>	51
ARZONE A., CAPIOTTI F., <i>Il Catalogo della Collezione di monete greche del Museo di Castelvechio di Verona</i>	56
BALBI DE CARO S., BULIAN G., <i>Il nuovo Museo della Zecca di Roma</i>	62
BALDI E., <i>Online catalogue of the Ostrogoths at the British Museum and possible developments for further research.</i>	67
BATESON J.D., <i>Dr. Hunter and the Prince of Torremuzza’s Sicilian Coins</i>	72
BORBA FLORENZANO M.B., LO MONACO V., GIANEZE RIBEIRO A.M., <i>Ancient Roman coins in the University of São Paulo - Brazil</i>	75
BÖRNER S., <i>Das Heidelberger Zentrum für antike Numismatik</i>	78
BRACEY R., <i>Contributions of die studies to the study of the intensity of ancient coin production: The work-station Problem</i>	83
BRZIC A., <i>Against the History? Vienna Mint and its coinages for Serbia 1868-1914</i>	88
BURRELL B., <i>Coins from a Well at Caesarea Maritima and the Currency of Fifth Century Palaestina</i>	91
CALLATAÏ F. de, <i>Fontes Inediti Numismaticae Antiquae (FINA): a short presentation</i>	95
CARDON T., <i>Les monnaies et méreaux en contexte archéologique: une source pour l’étude du salariat (France, XI^e-XV^e s.)</i>	100
CASSANO M.R., TRAVAGLINI A., FIORIELLO C.S., BRANDI S., CAMILLERI V.G., DE PINTO N., SILVESTRI M., <i>La collezione numismatica del Museo di Santa Scolastica - Bari</i>	105
CAVALLARO E., <i>Sulle vie di una nuova scienza: la trattatistica numismatica tra Cinque e Seicento</i>	109
CHIANTINI C., <i>Un Ripostiglio di IV-V secolo proveniente dagli scavi del Sottosuolo Capitolino</i>	113
CHIMIENTI M., <i>L’archivio della zecca di Bologna</i>	117
CHOWANIEC R., WIĘCEK T., <i>History of town Akrai/Acrae, Sicily, in the light of new numismatic finds</i>	122
CIURCINA C., AMATO R., <i>Segnalazione di rinvenimenti monetali da indagini condotte a Siracusa negli anni novanta del Novecento.</i>	126
CONVENTI A., LAZZARINI L., <i>Analisi chimiche di monete di elettro e oro di Siracusa greca</i>	131
CRISÀ A., <i>Collecting coins and connecting collectors: Government and social networks in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1816-1860)</i>	135
D’OTTONE RAMBACH A., <i>Arabic Coins from the Italian Royal Collection. Addenda to the Corpus Nummorum Italicorum. A Preview</i>	140

GANDOLFO L., <i>Sulle tracce del Salinas. Testimonianze inedite dal suo Museo</i>	144
GARGANO G., <i>Problemi e spunti di riflessione dall'analisi dei rinvenimenti di monete negli scavi archeologici a Vibo Valentia</i>	147
GIANAZZA L., <i>A collaborative inventory of coin finds</i>	151
GIL CURADO T., <i>Contact and Commerce between Portugal and United Kingdom during Medieval and Post-Medieval Period. Numismatic Perspective</i>	154
GRIMALDI J., <i>Il Medagliere del Museo Archeologico Comunale di Frosinone</i>	159
GUSAR K., ŠUČUR J., <i>Numismatic finds from Pakoštane - Crkvina, Croatia</i>	164
HEDLUND R., <i>The Return of the Art Cabinet: Numismatic databases and virtual meeting places</i>	170
HOUMOUZIADIS J., <i>Non-Destructive Assessment of Material Content of Bronze Coins</i>	174
JANKOWSKI L., <i>Studying coin related objects and redefining par anumismatics</i>	179
KOPIJ K., <i>Coin Propaganda and Communication</i>	183
KRISHNAMOURTHY R., <i>The influence of Early Roman Imperial coin symbols on Sangam age Chera and Pandya coins</i>	188
LA MARCA A., <i>Monete da scavo, scavi con monete: il "laboratorio" della Missione Archeologica Italiana a Kyme Eolica</i>	192
LOMBARDI L., RUOTOLO G., <i>Antonino Salinas, Scritti scelti di Numismatica</i>	196
LOPEZ B., ARSLAN E.A., <i>Die Design Reconstruction: Merging Numismatics with Information Technology</i>	199
MARCHAND S., <i>The IBISA System for Computer-Assisted Coin Identification and Hoards Study</i>	204
MARCHESI E., BALDI E., <i>Rinvenimenti numismatici basso-medievali nel contesto archeologico di Monte Lucio (Re)</i>	207
MORELLI A., <i>Monete di epoca romana repubblicana nella collezione numismatica del Museo Nazionale di Ravenna</i>	213
NAPOLITANO M.L., <i>Hubertus Goltzius, totius antiquitatis restaurator: numismatica e storia antica in Sicilia et Magna Graecia (1576).</i>	217
OTERO MORÁN P., GRAÑEDA MIÑÓN P., CRUZ MATEOS M., <i>La nueva exposición y Gabinete Numismático del Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid)</i>	222
PARISOT-SILLON C., CORSI J., SUSPÈNE A., SARAH C., <i>Ancient silver coinages between Rhône and Po (3rd-1st centuries BC). New data from elemental analyses.</i>	227
PELLÉ R., FRANGIN E., CHAPON P., <i>Les petits bronzes tardifs de Massalia: une utilisation extrême ou des frappes récentes. L'exemple de deux lots trouvés en fouille</i>	232
PELLÉ R., ZAABA O., STITI K., SOUQ F., <i>Le lot monétaire de la fouille archéologique de la Place des Martyrs à Alger</i>	237
PELSDONK J., <i>Digital traps. The complexity of publishing numismatic databases on the internet</i>	243
PETER U., WEISSER B., <i>CNT - The web portal for Thracian coins</i>	247
RAMBACH H.J., <i>The coin-collection of Don Carlo Trivulzio (1715-1789)</i>	248
RUOTOLO G., <i>La Sicilia di Filippo Paruta descritta con Medaglie</i>	252
RUSKE A., <i>The new Money Museum of the Deutsche Bundesbank. Experience and outlook</i>	256
SANTANGELO S., <i>Monete e ripostigli della Sicilia araba e normanna nel Medagliere di Siracusa</i>	259
SINNER A., PARDINI G., PIACENTINI M., FELICI A.C., VENDITTELLI M., <i>Analysis of the metal of the coins of Ebusus and Northeastern Spain (3rd-1st C. B.C.E.)</i>	264
SPAGNOLI E., <i>Piombi monetiformi da Ostia e Porto: problematiche interpretative</i>	269
TRAVAGLINI A., CASSANO M.R., CAMILLERI V.G., DE PINTO N., FANIZZA M., FIORIELLO C.S., <i>L'area della Basilica episcopale di Gnatia: la documentazione numismatica</i>	273
TRAVAGLINI A., <i>Monete e riti a Hierapolis di Frigia</i>	276
UJES MORGAN D., <i>Unpublished Greek Coin Finds from Rhizon/Risan in Sir Arthur Evans's Collection, Ashmolean Museum</i>	281
VOGT S., <i>To whom belong the coins? Jewish coin collections, the Nazis and museums of today</i>	286
WILLIAMS D., <i>Joseph Eckhel and his correspondents from Sicily and the south of Italy: the Prince of Torremuzza (Palermo) and Michele Vargas Macchiucca (Naples)</i>	291
WOODS A.R., <i>Twenty-First Century Numismatics: Google and the Digital Exhibition</i>	296
WOYTEK B., <i>Joseph Eckhel and his network of correspondents: a research project on Numismatics in the Age of Enlightenment</i>	299
ZVEREV S., <i>The monetary reforms in Russia in the mid-17th century</i>	303

ANTIQUITY, GREEK

Archaic - Classical

ARENA E., <i>L'emissione a leggenda ΝΕΟΠΟΛΙ(ΤΩΝ) e la fondazione di Tauromenion</i>	307
ARNOLD-BIUCCHI C., VAN SCHAİK K., <i>The meaning of the crab on ancient Greek coins and its relation to ancient medicine: a new approach</i>	313
BERTHOLD A., <i>Considerations on the horses of Maroneia</i>	319
CANTILENA R., <i>Una moneta d'oro di Lampsaco a Poseidonia</i>	323
CHILLÉ M., <i>La moneta dei mercenari nell'Anabasi di Senofonte</i>	328
CONSTANTINESCU B., CRISTEA-STAN D., TALMATCHI G. M., CECCATO D., <i>New information on monetary arrow heads found in Dobroudja based on X-rays analysis of their alloy composition</i>	332
CORFÙ N.A., <i>The Tetartemorion, the smallest pre-Hellenistic silver-coin</i>	339
DESTROOPER GEORGIADIS A., <i>Les Monnaies des fouilles du Département des Antiquités de Chypre à Kourion; la période classique</i>	344
FLAMENT C., <i>État d'avancement du corpus monétaire argien: Les émissions du IV^e siècle av. n. ère</i>	349
GEROTHANASIS D., <i>The early coinage of Kapsa reconsidered</i>	355
GRIGOROVA-GENCHEVA V., PROKOPOV I., <i>New Hoards with Small Denomination Coins of the Island of Thasos (6th - 5th century B.C.): Context, Interpretation and Dating</i>	360
HOFF C., <i>Lycian Tiarate Heads Reconsidered</i>	365
IVANOVA H.I., <i>A retrospect of Apollo in the coinage of Apollonia Pontike</i>	369
KOUSOULAS D.A., <i>Unbearded Hercules on the Coins of the Sicilian cities in the 5th century BC. Some observations of the iconographical type and its spreading in the sculpture</i>	374
KROLL J.H., <i>Striking and restriking on folded flans: evidence from Athens, Cyzicus, (?)Sinope, Elis, Thebes, and Aegina</i>	378
MANENTI A.M., <i>Dee, Ninfe, donne: oggetti di ornamento nell'iconografia delle monete greche e in vari altri reperti del Museo Archeologico di Siracusa</i>	383
MARCHAND S., <i>Electrum Coinage of the Ionian Revolt: the Complete Series of Abydos</i>	387
MARTINO A., <i>Lyre's representation on ancient Greek coins: a musical and political path between symbol and Realien</i>	391
PUEBLA MORON J.M., <i>El astrágalo de Hermes en la moneda de Himera (483-472 a.C.)</i>	395
RACCUA C., <i>Dal "bue" alla civetta. Riverberi di un percorso politico e culturale</i>	399
RUSSO N., <i>Una lettura non tradizionale del ruolo del Sileno: i documenti monetali</i>	405
SALAMONE G., <i>La 'testa femminile' sulle monete greche: funzione giuridica e identità della polis</i>	410
SANTAGATI E., <i>Identità federale nelle emissioni monetali: alcuni esempi</i>	416
SAPIENZA A., <i>La triskeles e le sue varianti iconografiche: analisi diatopica e diacronica dei documenti monetali</i>	420
TEKIN O., <i>Winged-Horse with Bird's Tail: Identification of a Creature on the Coins of Mysia and Troas</i>	425
TRAEGER B., <i>Die Münzprägung und Geschichte von Phliasia (Peloponnesus) bis zum Ende der hellenistischen Zeitepoche</i>	429
TRIFIRÒ M.D., <i>I gesti della divinità: il multiforme Apollo</i>	434
WAHL M.P., <i>Bildkontakte reconsidered. A few remarks on the Adoption of Kimon's Arethusa in Thessaly</i>	439
WELHÖFFER H., <i>Die Nymphen aus Thessalien. Obol aus der Sammlung Wellhöfer</i>	443
WOJAN F., <i>Réflexions sur la nature du monnayage au nom des Éléens: monnayage civique? monnayage de sanctuaire? monnayage de panégyrie?</i>	449

Hellenistic

APOSTOLOU E., <i>Les plinthophores rhodiennes et la fin de ce monnayage</i>	454
AUMAÎTRE H., <i>Àkè Ptolémaïs sous les Lagides: un atelier au cœur des problématiques Syro-Phéniciennes</i>	459
BODZEK J., <i>New finds of moulds for casting coin flans at the Paphos agora</i>	463
CALLATAÏ F. de, <i>Greek Overstrikes Database: a short presentation</i>	467
CARRIER C., STEFANAKI V.E., <i>Le système des monnaies de bronze crétoises de l'époque hellénistique</i>	470
CARROCCIO B., <i>Tesorette, corrosione, coniazioni parallele, cronologia: I "Tridenti" di Ierone II</i>	475

CONSTANTINESCU B., OBERLAENDER-TARNOVEANU E., CRISTEA-STAN D., <i>Information on silver and gold Dacian Koson type coins based on alloys composition, analyzed by X-Ray Fluorescence, and on their possible emissions chronology</i>	481
DEROSE EVANS J., <i>What archaeology can tell us about the date of the opening of the civic mint at Sardis, Turkey</i>	486
ILKIĆ M., ČELHAR M., <i>South-Liburnian pre-imperial numismatic finds from Southern Italy and Sicily</i>	489
LANNIN M.N., <i>A Window into Seleucid Regional Mints: Reuse of Obverse Dies in the 3rd-2nd Century BC</i>	493
MAREST-CAFFEY L., <i>Images of Power in Seleukid Persis: A New Study of the Victory Coinage from Susa</i>	497
MORENO PULIDO E., <i>Influencias sículo-púnicas en la amonedación del Fretum Gaditanum</i>	502
GRANDJEAN K., MOUSTAKA A., <i>The Hoard IGCH 270</i>	507
PANAGOPOULOU K., <i>Hellenistic Macedonia Revisited: Some Evidence in Redating the 'Later Macedonian' Silver Alexanders</i>	511
PAVLOVSKA E., <i>A Part of a Rare 'Paeonian' Hoard from Macedonia</i>	516
SOLE L., <i>Riflessioni intorno al ripostiglio IGCH 2132 da Gibil Gabib</i>	521
SPINELLI M., <i>La dea "regale" di Locri Epizefiri</i>	527
TSOUKANELIS K., <i>A New Bronze Coin of Alexander Molossos, Son of Neoptolemos</i>	531
VAN SCHAİK C., <i>The Currency of Medicine: Healing Iconography on the Coins of Triikka, Epidauros, Kos, and Pergamon</i>	535
WOLF D., <i>The Bronze Coinage Reform of Ptolemy II</i>	540

ANTIQUITY, OTHER

Western

CHAVES TRISTÁN F., PLIEGO VÁZQUEZ R., <i>Nuevos testimonios monetales de emisiones Hispano-Cartaginesas en la Península Ibérica</i>	549
GEISER A., <i>Courants monétaires gaulois entre Alpes et Jura</i>	553
GRUEL K., NIETO-PELLETIER S., DUVAL F., <i>Existe-t-il un système monétaire armoricain basé sur le billon à la fin de l'indépendance gauloise?</i>	558
KOCZWARA P., <i>Finds of cisalpine drachms and other Celtic coins in the Central and Southern Italy</i>	563
MILITKÝ J., <i>Das keltische Münzwesen des Horizonts LT C1 und C2 in der Tschechischen Republik</i>	567
MONTANARO S., <i>La monetazione dei centri peuceti</i>	572
NICK M., <i>Celtic Coin Finds in Switzerland: The recent volume of the Swiss Inventory of Coin Finds</i>	577
NICOLAU KORMIKIARI M.C., <i>How monetarized was Numidian society in Antiquity?</i>	580
PARIS E., <i>Circulation monétaire en Languedoc central au Deuxième Âge du Fer (VIe - Ier siècles avant J.-C.): comparaisons diachroniques des agglomérations de Béziers, Magalas et Agde</i>	584
PILON F., <i>Frappe et coulage de monnaies à l'époque gauloise: synthèse de quelques découvertes et caractérisations chimiques récentes</i>	589
RODRÍGUEZ CASANOVA I., <i>Dos nuevos conjuntos de divisores atribuidos a la II Guerra Púnica</i>	594

Eastern

BARKAY R., <i>Portraits of the Nabataean Kings as Depicted on Their Coins</i>	600
GITLER H., TAL O., <i>A Preliminary Report on the Nablus 1968 Hoard of the Fourth Century BC</i>	604
MAGUB A., <i>Coins of Mithradates II of Parthia (c. 121-91 BC)</i>	609
MUESELER W., <i>The place of the two Wekhssere in the history of Lycia</i>	614
SANCINITO J., <i>Parthian Circulation: A study of the Wilson Hoard (IGCH 1816)</i>	619
SCHINDEL N., <i>A Note on the Coinage of Khusro I</i>	623
SHAVAREBI E., <i>The so-called 'Thronfolgerprägungen' of Ardashīr I reconsidered</i>	627
SMAGUR E., <i>So similar and yet so different. The iconography of Kushan pantheon</i>	631
TANDON P., <i>The Identity of Prakāśāditya</i>	636

VOLUME II

ROMAN NUMISMATICS

Roman Republic

BARBATO M., <i>The Roman Republican coins from excavations in the Sacred area of the Largo di Torre Argentina (Rome): New data in the light of recent research</i>	649
BRANSBOURG G., <i>The Currencies of the Roman Republic. Summary of an Argument on Weights and Currency Reform</i>	654
BRUNI V., <i>La moneta provinciale in Spagna durante la guerra sertoriana (82-72 a.C.)</i>	656
D'ANGELO G., MARTÍN ESQUIVEL A., <i>Un lingotto con il segno del "ramo secco" dalla Pinacoteca Civica di Ascoli Piceno</i>	661
HOLLSTEIN W., <i>Zum Prägeort des Sicinius/Coponius-Denars (RRC 444)</i>	666
KATZ R., <i>Muttonis Mutunus: Q. Titius and the Case of the Obverse Head</i>	671
MARTINS MAGALHÃES M., <i>Le monete romane repubblicane del Museo Storico Nazionale di Rio de Janeiro e la Sylloge Nummorum Romanorum Brasil</i>	676
MCCABE A., <i>The Roman Bronze Coinage struck in Apulia and South East Italy in the Second Punic War</i>	681
PIZZILLI E., <i>Il caso dei Bacchanalia nel documento monetale</i>	686
RIPOLLÈS ALEGRE P.P., GOZALBES M., <i>The Unofficial Roman Republican Asses produced in Spain</i>	691
SCHWEI D., <i>Forgers' Misunderstanding of Roman Coin Types</i>	696
ZAWADZKA A., <i>Some Gallic attributes on Roman Republican coins in the light of recent archaeological findings</i>	701

Roman Empire

BRUNI S., <i>An AE3 mule of Priscus Attalus: new light on dating the Urbs Roma Felix series</i>	706
CARBONE F., <i>Semissi pestani a Pompei: dati sulla circolazione</i>	710
CASOLI A., <i>Due conii ritoccati di Nerone</i>	713
CECCARONI E., MOLINARI M.C., <i>I reperti numismatici provenienti dai recenti scavi del santuario di Ercole di Alba Fucens</i>	717
CHIAPPINI A., <i>Virtù e personificazioni nel Libro delle Medaglie da Cesare a Commodo di Pirro Ligorio</i>	720
DEGLER A., <i>Aureus of Postumus with the owner's graffito (Gounthiou)</i>	723
DELL'ORO D'AMICO F., <i>Le Puellae Faustinianae nella monetazione di età antonina</i>	727
DOWLING M.B., <i>The Letter E at Delphi: a reconsideration of Plutarch, Faustina, and the appearance of the mystery on Roman coinage</i>	733
DROST V., <i>The Seaton Down hoard (UK, Devon): c. 22,900 Constantinian nummi</i>	737
ELLITHORPE C., <i>Striking a Dissonant Chord: The Geographical Targeting of Trajan's Debillator Coinage in Dacia</i>	742
GIROD V., <i>Mammae gratias ago: mères et fils dans le monnayage impérial des Julio-Claudiens</i>	749
KÜTER A., <i>Imitatio Alexandri - Drusus Minor auf einer Tessera des Münzkabinetts der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin</i>	753
LANCHI C., <i>La circolazione monetaria in epoca adrianea: alcuni esempi da Roma, dall'Italia e dal limes germanico-retico</i>	758
LEMPEREUR O., BLET-LEMARQUAND M., <i>Les frappes de deniers impériaux à Alexandrie à la fin du II^e siècle ap. J.-C. : premiers résultats d'analyses</i>	762
MARVEGGIO C., <i>The Sabetta coin collection</i>	767
MONDELLO C., <i>Nuove osservazioni sui contornati: la serie dei Literaten-Büsten</i>	772
ORTIZ CÓRDOBA J., <i>Set of coins from late antiquity found in the town of Ronda (Málaga, Spain)</i>	777
PERASSI C., <i>Monete dal suburbio di Mediolanum. La documentazione dalla grande fossa di asportazione 10114</i>	782
STAFFIERI G.M., <i>I ritratti senza corona sui bronzi imperiali alessandrini</i>	787
TONISCH M., <i>Prices, wages and values in the Roman Empire: The Analysis of the Epigraphical Evidence</i>	792
VICARI SOTTOSANTI M.A., <i>Testimonianze della circolazione degli antoniniani in Italia meridionale e insulare</i>	797
ZANCHI P., <i>Le monnayage de Diocletien seul empereur (été 285-Mars 286) à Siscia</i>	801
ZIEGERT M., <i>Aus alt mach neu. Nachahmungen und Legitimationsstrategien in der Münzprägung Vespasians</i>	806

Provinces

AWIANOWICZ B., <i>Peculiarities in the legends of Flavian aurei and denarii minted in Syria</i>	812
BILIĆ T., NAĐ M., <i>Coin circulation 3rd c. BC - 31 BC in north-west Croatia</i>	816
BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO C., <i>Circulación monetaria en el territorium de Regina Turdulorum (Casas de Reina, Badajoz, España)</i>	820
BODZEK J., KOPIJ K., SMAGUR E., <i>Finds of Roman Coins in Poland - Lesser Poland. Preliminary Report</i>	825
BREITSPRECHER V.J., <i>Sicheres Zeichen? Asylstädte und ihre Tempeldarstellungen</i>	830
CALABRIA P., <i>Le zecche provinciali: una diversa prospettiva di studio</i>	834
CAMPO M., <i>La moneda en las necrópolis del arco mediterráneo de Hispania (siglos I-II d.C.)</i>	836
CARBONE L.F., <i>The epigraphic attestations of denarii in the Provincia Asia (133 BC - AD 96)</i>	841
CARVALHEIRO PORTO V., <i>Western and Eastern Provincial Roman Coins: a view from the margins</i>	846
CONEJO DELGADO N., <i>Villae Romanas y Via de la Plata: aproximación a la economía rural romana de la parte occidental de la Península Ibérica a través del registro monetario</i>	850
DAHMEN K., <i>The 1740 hoard of Roman denarii from Preussisch-Görlitz near Osterode in Eastern Prussia (Gierłoż/Ostróda in Poland). A find's history and coin catalogue based on a manuscript by Friedrich Wilhelm Stosch</i>	854
DELOUM S., <i>Le Trésor Monétaire Inédit de Guernine (Djendel - Algérie): Étude Historique et Monétaire</i>	857
DI JORIO Francesco, <i>Il culto di Cibele in Gallia: preesistenza di un culto o diffusione di tipologie da Roma verso la "periferia" dell'impero? L'evidenza numismatica di Avennio</i>	862
DRAGANOV D., <i>The coinage of Anchialus: Iconography</i>	866
DYMOWSKI A., <i>The inflow of Roman Republican coins to the territory of present-day Poland</i>	875
FLUECK J.E., <i>The Augustean monetary circulation at Lugdunum on the basis of stratigraphical and statistical analyses. New dating clues for the Augustean coinages of Nemausus and Lugdunum?</i>	880
GĂZDAC C., <i>Patterns of hoarding in the Roman provinces from the Middle and Lower Danube (2nd-3rd c. AD)</i>	885
GENEVÈVE V., SARAH G., DUVAL F., <i>Une production inédite de monnaies coulées de Nîmes datées des années 70/90-110 p.C. dans le Sud-Ouest de la Gaule</i>	891
GROZANOVA L., <i>The development of Pautalia (province of Thracia) during the 2nd-3rd century AD viewed through the city coinage. Some observations</i>	896
IACULLI U., <i>Aspetti della monetazione provinciale: atletismo ed identità civica</i>	900
JELLONEK S., <i>Dynastic propaganda of Caligula-imperial patterns and provincial answers</i>	904
KELEŞ V., OYARÇIN K., YILMAZ M.D., <i>Roman colonisation of Parion in light of coins</i>	908
KOUREMPANAS T., <i>The bronze coinage of the Roman quaestors of Macedonia</i>	914
MIŠKEC A., <i>Roman coin hoards from 3rd century in the territory of present day Slovenia</i>	917
MORA SERRANO B., <i>'Literatura numismática' en el sur de la Península Ibérica: Mitos regionales e historias locales</i>	921
MUNTEANU L., <i>Some considerations of the Roman coin finds in the hinterland of the provinces of Dacia and Moesia Inferior</i>	925
PETER U., <i>Die Münzen ohne kaiserliches Porträt von Philippopolis (Thrakien)</i>	930
PILON F., <i>Les monnayages d'imitation de la seconde moitié du III^e siècle après J.-C. dans les provinces nord-occidentales de l'Empire romain. Importance des découvertes de Châteaubateau (France) pour leur étude</i>	936
ROMANOWSKA A., <i>Roman coin finds from Przeworsk Culture settlements in Lesser Poland (Małopolska)</i>	941
SCHINZEL C., <i>Coin Finds in the Swiss Canton of Solothurn and Roman Hoards</i>	946
TROMMENSCHLAGER L., FETET P., <i>Un atelier de faux monnayage magnétien à Martinville (88): de l'enquête à la résolution</i>	952
TSAGKALIA C., <i>The Iconographical Type of Dionysus Lyceus/Aesymnetes on the Provincial Coinage of Patrae: An Interpretative Approach</i>	958
WATSON G., <i>The system of coin production in Roman Asia Minor: new light on an old problem</i>	963
ZAJĄC B., <i>Circulation of Trajan's silver Greek imperial coins struck in Lycia and Cappadocia in the light of coin finds in Europe</i>	967

MEDIEVAL NUMISMATICS

Byzantine

BALDI E., <i>Coins of the mint of Salona from the archaeological contexts of Classe. New evidence and interpretation</i>	973
CASTRIZIO D., <i>Le emissioni in bronzo «bizantine» della zecca di Alessandria. Una revisione cronologica</i>	978
DARLEY R., <i>All that glitters...: the Byzantine gold solidus, c. 300-1092</i>	982
GKANTZIOS DRÁPELOVÁ P., <i>Eastern mints in the early Byzantine period (6th century AD)</i>	986
GURULEVA V., <i>Syracusan folles of Leo V in Chersonesos</i>	990
HAHN W., <i>The sequence of issues struck by the mint of Rome from emperor Leo III to pope Hadrian I</i>	994
LEONARD R.D. Jr., <i>Andronicus Comnenus's Invasion Money of 1181-1182</i>	998
MARANI F., <i>Il cosiddetto "Tesoretto di Sessa Aurunca" e la tesaurizzazione in Italia centrale alla metà del VI secolo</i>	1003
ŠEPAROVIĆ T., <i>Notes on Byzantine Coins from the 7th to 9th century found in Croatia</i>	1008
SQUIRES D.A., <i>Unpublished Transitional Hyperpyra of John III Vatatzes</i>	1013
TOTEV B., DOBREV D., MIHAYLOV S., LAVYSH K., <i>The Hoards of Early Byzantine Coins from the Monastery in Slavnata Kanara (preliminary report)</i>	1017
ÜNAL C., <i>Kavakli hoard from Aydin Archaeology Museum. "A group of gold coins from the reign of Constans II"</i>	1021
ÜNAL C., ERSOY A., <i>A lead seal of Alexius I Comnenus from Agora sector/ Excavations Smyrna/Izmir</i>	1026

Medieval Europe

ACHACHE ST., <i>Le Trésor du «Loiret» : typologie des monnaies de l'Orléanais et liaisons de coins entre ateliers monétaires</i>	1032
AKOPYAN A.V., <i>Dvin in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. City history in the light of new numismatic materials</i>	1036
ANDREWS M., <i>'Noble, fair and fine': Single finds of English gold coin from later medieval England and Wales</i>	1040
ARICÒ R., <i>Le kharrûbe dei due Ruggeri: un tentativo di classificazione</i>	1046
BALDASSARRI M., <i>Miliarenses and silver grossi in the Western Mediterranean: new documents and perspectives</i>	1052
BALDASSARRI M., <i>The overstriking on Italian Medieval coins: a preliminary "taxonomy" and some motivations</i>	1058
BECKER J.-E., <i>Die Rekonstruktion des Brakteatenfundes bei Leipzig (1831). Ein Beitrag zur Münzgeschichte des Osterlandes am Übergang vom 13. zum 14. Jahrhundert</i>	1063
BOCHNAK A., WOŁOSZYN M., <i>The Sphinx of Slav Sigillography - Type Drogichin Seals in Their East European Context</i>	1069
BOMPAIRE M., <i>Piéforts médiévaux. Réflexions sur l'origine et les fonctions d'un objet monétaire mal connu</i>	1074
BONANNO M., <i>Le monete "locali" di Messina del 1474</i>	1078
CANTO GARCÍA A., MARTÍN ESCUDERO F., DOMÉNECH BELDA C., <i>Monedas fatimíes en el hallazgo de dinares de la calle Santa Elena (Valencia, España)</i>	1083
CLUA MERCADAL M., <i>Alternativas monetarias adoptadas en Catalunya durante la Baja Edad Media</i>	1089
DAY W.R., <i>«Secundum ducatos venetos»: the Roman Senatorial Gold Ducat, 1368-1439</i>	1093
DE BENETTI M., <i>The Alberese hoard. Seventy-six gold florins of the second half of 13th century</i>	1098
DERGACIOVA L., <i>Newly Discovered Coin Hoard in the Republic of Moldova. North Pontic Factors in the Local Money Circulation</i>	1103
ELFVER F., <i>Export of dies between Denmark and the Slavonic area during the 11th century</i>	1106
EMMERIG H., <i>Der Beitrag der schriftlichen Quellen zur Frage nach der Monetarisierung des frühen Österreichs im 12. Jahrhundert</i>	1109
GARBACZEWSKI W., <i>Die sog. „Krönungs-“ und „Inaugurationsmünzen“ im mittelalterlichen Polen und Böhmen (bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts)</i>	1114
GROSSMANOVÁ D., <i>Der Schatzfund von Zlechau /Zlechow/ (Tschechische Republik) und dessen Bedeutung für das Münzwesen im 13. Jahrhundert</i>	1119
HÜRLIMANN F., <i>Die mittelalterlichen Fundmünzen aus Ingelheim am Rhein</i>	1124

JONSSON K., <i>The earliest coinage on Gotland and in the Baltic countries</i>	1128
KELLEHER R., <i>The monetisation of Medieval England and Wales: new interpretations from single finds (c.1150 - c.1300)</i>	1133
LOCATELLI S., <i>Aspects of the Monetary Circulation of the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily in the Sixteenth Century. Two Unpublished Coin Hoards from the Island of Lipari</i>	1138
MÄRCHER M., <i>The monetary development in Bornholm in the 12th-13th centuries</i>	1143
NASSAR M.A.M., <i>Il ritratto fisionomico realistico sulla monetazione medievale italiana</i>	1148
NOVÁK V., <i>Islamic silver in the newly discovered hoard dated back to the 10th century from central Moravia, the Czech Republic</i>	1153
PAGHAVA I., <i>Muslim Tiflis before Georgian Conquest: Numismatic Evidence. Monetary Issues in the Name of al-Mustazhir</i>	1155
PASZKIEWICZ B., <i>Lusatian seignorial coinage of Żary and Przewóz</i>	1159
PIERCY J., <i>Hammered Lives: studies from a New Database of the Late Anglo-Saxon Moneyers</i>	1163
POLANSKÝ L., <i>Marginal legends and images on Bohemian deniers of the 10th century</i>	1168
RAEMY TOURNELLE C., <i>Aperçu de la circulation monétaire en Pays de Vaud sous le prisme de cinq églises</i>	1172
ROSSINI F., <i>Renaissance portrait coins: the innovation, its forerunners and the diffusion in Italy and Europe</i>	1177
SARCINELLI G., <i>Rinvenimenti di moneta in Puglia tra Bisanzio e i Normanni. Note a margine dell'edizione aggiornata de "La monetazione nell'Italia normanna" di Lucia Travaini</i>	1182
SCREEN, E., <i>Anglo-Saxon coin imports to Norway: the die-linking evidence</i>	1189
SPUFFORD P., <i>Some Economic Effects of Debasement</i>	1193
VALCI M., <i>A hoard of denari anconetani and ravennati from the Forum of Nerva, Rome</i>	1198

MEDALS

DOBROVOLSKAYA L., <i>Russian-French Friendly Relations in the late 19th - early 20th cent. in Medals, Badges and Jettons (on the basis of the Hermitage collection)</i>	1205
GIMENO J., <i>Vt quiescat Atlas: un estado de la cuestión</i>	1209
GÜNTHER S., <i>Authority or Just Reference? A Case Study on a Russian Medal of Empress Elizabeth (1741-1762)</i>	1214
HAIDENTHALLER Y., <i>Producing the Pole Star: Early modern Swedish medals</i>	1217
JÄRVINEN O., <i>Medallic art of Emil Wikström. A source study</i>	1221
JIMÉNEZ MARTÍNEZ F., <i>El botón contemporáneo: fantasía e imitación del antiguo sistema monetario romano</i>	1225
SANDERS G., <i>The Triumph Medals of the Dutch Republic. An instrument of politics and propaganda</i>	1229
SCHAAL K., <i>«Il faut pour le bon renom de l'Art Français que la médaille et la plaquette de 1900 soient des modèles sortant des mains de nos maîtres les plus renommés». Genèse et réalisation des œuvres de Jules-Clément Chaplain et d'Oscar Roty</i>	1233
SIMMONS F., <i>Commissioning the medal</i>	1238
SPECHTE E., <i>A medal for books. The "Description de l'Égypte"</i>	1242
TURRICCHIA A., <i>Five Centuries of Italian Medals. A Preliminary Statistical Overview</i>	1245

MODERN NUMISMATICS

FRANCISCO DE OLMOS J.M., <i>La influencia de la iconografía de la moneda castellana de los Reyes Católicos en sus descendientes (siglos XVI-XVII)</i>	1253
GIANAZZA L., <i>Coin clipping and monetary crisis: the case of the Italian ducatone</i>	1257
JAMBU J., <i>Évaluer la circulation monétaire en «Flandre». L'enquête justifiant la réforme de l'argent espagnol et l'ouverture d'une Monnaie française</i>	1261
JOYAUX F., BLET-LEMARQUAND M., <i>La fin du monnayage annamite sous le règne de Bảo Đại (1925-1945): le cas de la sapèque</i>	1265
KLEEBERG J.M., <i>John J. Ford Jr., Paul Franklin and their Forgeries of Western Gold Bars</i>	1270

MARCOS ALONSO C., OTERO MORÁN P., <i>El último viaje de la fragata Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes. Un tesoro cultural recuperado</i>	1274
PODDI S., <i>I buoni dei prigionieri di guerra</i>	1279
SANTIAGO FERNÁNDEZ J. DE, <i>Acuñaación de moneda en la España de los Austrias. Asientos para la fabricación del vellón de Carlos II</i>	1282
ŚNIEŻKO G., <i>The plague of forged coins - counterfeits of the copper shillings of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second half of 17th century</i>	1286
VANHOUDT H., <i>The coinage of Philip V in the Spanish Low Countries (1700-1712)</i>	1289
VOREL P., <i>The activities of the Roman Mint at the end of the pontificate of Urban VIII. The rolling of Papal gold, silver and copper coins during the years 1634-1644</i>	1294
ZILCH R., <i>The numismatic iconography of successor state banknotes in Central and Eastern Europe, 1918-1939</i>	1299

ROUND TABLES

1. ANTIQUITY, GREEK: <i>The new LANDscape of Greek Numismatics. Unifying a discipline through Linked Data.</i> Conveners: MEADOWS A.; DUYRAT F.	1305
MEADOWS A., <i>Introduction</i>	1305
1. DUYRAT F.R., <i>The catalogue of the Greek coin collection of the BnF</i>	1306
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6. GRANDJEAN C., <i>Monnaies de fouille en ligne</i>	1308
7. REINHARD A., <i>Digital Publication, Recent Developments at the American Numismatic Society</i>	1308
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BURSTRÖM N.M., <i>Introduction to the Round Table session</i>	1309
BURSTRÖM N.M., <i>Coin finds in religious contexts: introducing the theme</i>	1310
HOULBROOK C., <i>'So Money Really Does Grow On Trees': The British Coin-Tree Custom</i>	1311
KELLEHER R., <i>Pilgrims, Pennies and the Ploughzone: folded coins in Medieval Britain</i>	1311
NAISMITH R., <i>Pecuniary Profanities? Money and Ritual in the Early Middle Ages</i>	1312
PERASSI C., <i>Baptism and Coins in Late Antiquity. Written sources and numismatic finds reconsidered</i>	1312
AUDY F., <i>A link to the past? The ritual use of Roman coins in Viking Age graves</i>	1313
HORSNÆS H., <i>Sacred or Secular? The roles of Landscape, Tradition and Social Context for the function of Roman coins in a non-Roman environment</i>	1313
KEMMERS F., <i>Worthless? The practice of offering counterfeit coinage in Roman religious contexts</i>	1314
EHRNSTEN F., <i>Cheap Salvation? Post-reformation offerings in Finnish churches</i>	1314
GULLBEKK S.H., <i>Medieval Scandinavian Women in Search of Salvation</i>	1315
WIGG-WOLF D., <i>Final Comments</i>	1315
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NOMIKOU E., <i>ICOMON, Purposes and Goals</i>	1317
INDEX AUTHORS AND ROUND TABLES PARTICIPANTS	1321