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NOTES ON A NUMISMATIC MANUSCRIPT from the Trivulzio collection in the ANS Library

Hadrien J. Rambach

As I was conducting research on the Trivulzio collection of coins and engraved gems recently, I realized that a number of purchases by members of the Trivulzio family—including numismatic books—were clearly not the property of the celebrated collector Don Carlo Trivulzio (1715–1789) (fig. 1), but rather that of his heirs, notably his great-grand-nephew Giorgio Teodoro Trivulzio (1803–1856). One example is Georg Zoega’s study of the Egyptian coins in the Borgia collection: *Numi Aegyptii Imperatorii Prostantes in Museo Borgiano Velitris*, Rome 1787. Don Carlo would die a mere two years after the book was published, and it was apparent that he was not the first owner: the Trivulzio copy, which was sold in an auction by George A. Leavitt & Co. (New York, 6–11 February 1888, lot 1040), was bound for Pope Pius VI (1775–1799).

Another intriguing numismatic publication was purchased by the ANS from a Kolbe & Fanning auction, in New York on 12 January 2013 (lot 38—now ANS, rare book room, shelfmark C667) (figs. 2–3). It is a well calligraphed—and nicely illustrated—manuscript, a codex dated 1720 and titled *Conjectures upon the British & Saxon Coins &c.* The ANS purchase was reported in this magazine by Elizabeth Hahn (Spring 2013, pp. 40–41), but no additional research has been done since. The catalogue entry by Kolbe & Fanning described the volume as follows:

Small square quarto [178 by 145 mm.], contemporary dark blue crushed full morocco; sides bordered in double gilt fillets, intricately paneled and decorated in a gilt floral motif, with a crown surmounting gilt floral sprigs in the centers; spine with five raised bands, with

resulting panels richly decorated in gilt; board edges decorated in gilt; gilt inner dentelles; all page edges gilt; marbled endpapers. 7 blank leaves; hand-colored coat of arms drawn on recto of following leaf; leaf with ink panel on recto; manuscript title within ink panel, ruled; 1–11, 11–29, (1), 30, 30–64, 64–65, 65–72, (2), (73)–89, (1) pages [page numbering begins on title verso]; leaf paneled and ruled in ink on verso; 2 blank leaves; 3 manuscript leaves; 4 blank leaves. Accomplished throughout in black ink. 136 pages in all, comprising: 1 page depicting a coat of arms within a double panel, hand-colored; 42 manuscript pages, comprising a main title, a supplementary title, an addenda page, an index page, and 38 pages of descriptive text; 6 pages comprised solely of double panels, 3 of them additionally ruled; 56 blank pages; 31 hand-drawn pages in ink depicting coins and a few medals, including 7 plates of coins all or partially heightened in colors (some of the illustrations on 2 further plates are heightened by a brown wash).

The volume includes the pasted engraved heraldic bookplate of Robert Stearne Tighe (1760–1835), and it was listed as lot no. 1272 in the anonymous catalogue of his library-auction by William Richardson in London on 22 January 1800 (and over the following six days). It then reappeared in the collection of William Simonds Higgs (d. 1829), a collector renowned for having owned one of the 12 original Petition Crowns, as well as an aureus of Allectus. At his estate-auction by Sotheby & Son, in London on 26–28 April 1830, it was catalogued as lot 714. It sold for 3l. 19s. to the bookdealer John Cochran, who then offered it in his fixed-price catalogue of 1837, listed as lot 660 for only 2l. 12s. 6d. (fig. 4). One must assume that he had lost the hope of a profit by then.

Fig. 1: Don Carlo Trivulzio.
Portrait by Donigi Sadis,
1789 (Private Collection)
98 × 72 cm



The fate of the manuscript after 1837 is not clear. It reappeared as lot 176 in the so-called “second Trivulzio book-auction,” which refers to two auctions held by George A. Leavitt & Co. in New York, on 27 November 1886 and on 6–11 February 1888. The catalogue-description of that sale is still glued in the volume. The contents of these two sales were consigned by the Italian book-dealer Ulrico Hoepli, who had acquired these books and manuscripts in 1885 from the daughter of the famous pro-revolutionary Cristina di Belgioioso d’Este, *née* Trivulzio (1808–1871), who at the same time also sold a number of antiques to the dealer Giuseppe Baslini. Who had owned the volume between 1837 and 1885? Hoepli bought it from Maria Trotti Bentivoglio (1838–1913), *née* di Belgioioso (fig. 5), but she had little money and is not believed to have added to any of the family collections. Maria’s grand-father had died in 1812, long before the manuscript was sold in England. Therefore, it would seem that it was previously owned by her mother, Cristina di Belgioioso, but it is surprising as she faced financial difficulties in the 1830s. This remains nevertheless the most plausible provenance, unless this numismatic manuscript entered the Trivulzio family collection through the wedding of Cristina to Emilio di Belgioioso, or by that of Maria to Ludovico Trotti Bentivoglio.

Back to the manuscript itself: the codex is anonymous, being simply signed “by T. C. A.M. &c.”, and it was sold without an author’s name in both 1830 and 1837. In 1888, the cataloguer suggested the name of the British Museum keeper Taylor Combe (1774–1826) (fig. 6), not realizing that he was born more than 50 years after the redaction of the manuscript. Similarly, George Crabb’s *Universal Historical Dictionary* (London 1833, vol. II) indicates the existence

of a “MS. Account of Saxon and English coins by him, with drawings by Mr. Hodsol, of which the Rev. Mr. Ruding availed himself in his late *History of the Coinage of Great Britain*”, written by George North (1707–1772) and Edward Hodsol (d. 1794), but the date “Anno D. MDCCXX” on the title page of the ANS volume prevents its from being the same. Moreover, the signature does not fit.

The seller in 2013 was Jim Foster—of Liberty Coin LLC in Signal Hill, CA, who kindly wrote that, “I acquired the manuscript in an old coin collection about 20 years ago. The owner told me he purchased it many years earlier at an old book store. He did not say if it was in Europe or America.” At the time of its purchase by Foster, c. 1995, the volume had been studied by John F. Bergman (1944–2000), and later by Harry Manville (1929–2015) and Hugh Pagan, who understood that a critical piece element of information can be found in the volume’s frontispiece (fig. 7): a full-page armorial in red and gold with the Latin mottos *Quis Clarior Fulget?* (i.e., “Who shines more distinguished?”) and *Virtutis Intaminatae hæc sunt munera* (i.e., “These are the gifts of unblemished virtue”). Manville and Pagan identified these arms as those of the Compton family. Unfortunately, their correspondence with Foster was lost after the Kolbe & Fanning auction. Following this remarkable discovery, in his *Biographical Dictionary of British and Irish Numismatics* (London 2009, p. 61), Manville ascribed the volume to a certain Thomas Compton, as did Kolbe & Fanning.

Thomas Compton (1698–1761) was a clergyman, Rector of Great Holland in Essex. He left a 300+ page manuscript diary, which was offered and partially quoted by its owner, John Taylor, in the *Essex Review*,



Fig. 2: Pages from Conjectures upon the British and Saxon Coins etc.



Fig. 3: Pages from Conjectures upon the British and Saxon Coins etc.

A
CATALOGUE OF MANUSCRIPTS,
 IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES,
 OR
THEOLOGY;
 ENGLISH AND FOREIGN HISTORY; HERALDRY;
 PHILOSOPHY; POETRY; ROMANCES;
 THE FINE ARTS (INCLUDING CALIGRAPHY AND SOME SPLENDID PERSIAN DRAWINGS);
 SPORTS; ALCHEMY; ASTROLOGY; DIVINATION;
 &c. &c.
 OF VARIOUS DATES,
 From the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century,
 MANY OF THEM UPON VELLUM,
 AND ADORNED WITH SPLENDID ILLUMINATIONS.
 TO WHICH IS ADDED A SMALL COLLECTION OF
 MANUSCRIPTS IN THE ORIENTAL LANGUAGES;
 WITH AN APPENDIX
 CONTAINING A FEW PRINTED BOOKS,
 SOME OF THEM WITH MANUSCRIPT NOTES AND AUTOGRAPHS OF EMINENT
 PERSONS.

NOW SELLING (FOR READY MONEY) AT THE PRICES AFFIXED, BY

JOHN COCHRAN,

No. 108,

STRAND, (SAVOY STEPS.)

LONDON:

CATALOGUES TO BE HAD AT THE PLACE OF SALE;
 OF W. AND D. LAING, AND W. TAIT, EDINBURGH; M. OGLE,
 GLASGOW; AND MILLIKEN AND SON, DUBLIN.

MDCCCXXIX.

Fig. 4: Cover of an 1829 fixed price list of John Cochran, the first-ever illustrated antiquarian book catalogue.



Fig. 5: Maria Trotti Bentivoglio.



Fig. 6: Portrait medal of Taylor Combe by William Joseph Taylor after Benedetto Pistrucci (Baldwin's 70, 28 Sept. 2011, lot 519) 45 mm.

vol. IX-33 (January 1900), pp. 33–37. This manuscript is now lost, so a comparison of the handwriting has not been possible. Taylor's text does not give us any suggestion of what "A.M. &c" could mean: certainly not an aristocratic-title, nor a scholarly-membership. In fact in his diary, Thomas Compton refers to two manuscripts he wrote: *Poems and Translations* in 1718, and *Articulorum Ecclesiae Anglicanae* in 1723, so it seems unlikely at first that he did write this beautiful codex in 1720. But his autobiography did contain references to a « Charles Smith, Esq., in the Tower of London, a collector of English coins »,

who remains unidentified, and to a "Mr. Richmond, alderman of Harwich, some coins by him, no collector," so Compton's numismatic interest is attested. Moreover, the autobiography also included a "Catalogue of gold, silver, and copper coins, collected from 1719 to 1735, with their cost and worth; all Roman, four columns (sic)." And he did own a small coin-collection, Greek-Roman and English coins, which were auctioned by Whiston Bristow in London on 10–11 February 1763. It is therefore plausible that Thomas Compton is indeed the author of the 1720 codex now owned by the ANS.



Fig. 7: Frontispiece of *Conjectures upon the British and Saxon Coins etc.* with Compton family armorial.

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