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I

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The coin-collection of Don Carlo Trivulzio (1715-1789)

Don Carlo Trivulzio was probably the most important collector in the second half of the Settecento in Milan¹. He was extremely wealthy and could afford to buy the best. The range of items he collected seems endless. Amongst his collections, coins were one of the most significant parts. He started collecting them as a 16-year-old, with a coin bought for 7 Lire, and he went on collecting until his death². His family commissioned a posthumous portrait of Don Carlo by Carlo Dionigi Sadis, depicting the collector amongst some of his greatest possessions (Fig. 1)³. Unsurprisingly, the only item which he is shown holding in his hands is a coin : a large Roman gold multiple of Valens (AD 364-378) struck in Trier (Figs 2-2a)⁴.

The significance of the Trivulzio collection of coins can be given with a single example: the purchase *en-bloc* in 1756 of a collection of 168 Roman *aurei* for a total of 4,030 Lire⁵. These coins were sold by the grandson of a Milanese collector, the abbott Gian Matteo Pertusati (d. 1738). There were close family connections, as Luca Pertusati's sister was married to Don Carlo's brother, so Don Carlo may have struck a good deal – but it remains nevertheless impressive to acquire such a large and valuable coin collection in one group. It was not a unique instance : already in 1750, for example, Don Carlo had acquired 100 gold coins from the Marquese Peralta for 2,385 Lire.

Don Carlo left various numismatic notes, on the coins of diverse Roman emperors as well as on the coinage of Giovanni Giacomo Medici (1497/8-1555)⁶. And he also wrote his own catalogue of the gold coins – ancient to contemporary – which he had acquired between

1745 and 1769⁷. It is very meaningful that he not-only commented on their relative rarities (with a scale from « C » for « common » to « RRRR » for the rarest), but also gave recent bibliographical references – including to recent works such as the catalogue of the Vienna collection⁸. He was an erudite collector, remaining updated with contemporary numismatic literature.

Don Carlo had coins of, more or less, every period and country. And it was continued by his heirs. But two main sections must be highlighted: Roman coins, which were probably his numismatic preference, and coins struck by his own family⁹. But he even owned Arabic coins – which was still unusual in *Settecento* Italy –, and kept contemporary coins – that could still be used – which was really innovative for a collector of such high level. This reflect the eclectic nature of Don Carlo's collections, an encyclopaedic mass of objects which he acquired and studied. He owned scholarly items – such as « forms for Roman coins », supposedly moulds but possibly dies¹⁰. And he owned as well extremely valuable coins – such as the gold medallion of Valens (AD 364-378), and a unique gold *quinarius* of Gallienus with his wife Salonina¹¹. When Francesco Gneccchi decided to write an article about the Trivulzio collection of Roman coins in 1887, the collection was such that he chose to only describe a group of 76 Roman gold coins, all unknown to Cohen. The collection, at the time, contained 9.000 Roman coins – of which over 700 in gold.

Differently from, for example, a collector such as H.C.L. v. Schellersheim (1752–1836), who had his collection of Roman gold coins published in 1800, the collection of

¹ Don Carlo, his nephew and his descendants are Marquises Trivulzio, not to be confused with the Princes Trivulzio.

² Seregini 1927, p. 165

³ Oil on canvas, 98 x 72 cm, signed and dated 1789, private collection. Morandotti 2008, p. 155, pl. 4; Squizzato 2011, p. 43.

⁴ The size of the hand on the painting would have suggested a diameter of about 60-65 mm, but the coin weighs 20.24 grams, which fits with the only two other specimens recorded (Gneccchi 1912, vol. I, p. 36, type 5), in Paris (20.0 grams) and Munich (19.5 grams), both 37 mm. Mario Ratto sold it in November 1954 for 3,360,000 Lire to Leo Biaggi (1906-1979). Sold again in the auction NAC 21 (2001), lot 577.

⁵ Seregini 1927, p. 165.

⁶ Ms. Trivulzio 2095. For example, Don Carlo wrote about Roman Provincial bronzes in his collection. He also took notes on the aureus of Mark Antony and Antillus, noting two bibliographical references: Gessner 1738, and Morel 1734, p. 30, fig. 3.

⁷ Ms. Trivulzio 2093. The leather title (on a vellum binding) reads NVMISM. IMPP. ROM. TOM. I, which suggests that a second volume was either planned or lost.

⁸ The bibliography given by Don Carlo is fairly extensive, but unusually only contains recent publications: Banduri 1718, Eckhel 1779, Hardouin 1733, Khell 1767, Mediobarbus 1730, Morel 1734, Musselli 1752, Paruta 1697, Tiepolo 1736 (for more details, see Rambach *forthcoming*). The presence of Eckhel 1779 amongst the bibliography indicates undoubtedly that this well-calligraphed volume is much later than the period covered.

⁹ The family's collection formed the basis for the publication of Gneccchi 1887. Such 'family-collections' are common amongst the aristocracy, an example being the first volume of the *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* by Vittorio Emanuele III.

¹⁰ Seregini 1927, p. 165.

¹¹ Gneccchi 1887, no. 34 = Seregini 1927, pl. XIII = Mazzini 1957-1958, pl. 28-6. Giuseppe Mazzini (1883-1961) acquired several coins from the Santamaria 1938 auction, such as the Tremissis of Avitus, Santamaria 1938 lot 1087 = Mazzini 1957-1958, pl. 74-12.

Don Carlo was not publicized with a catalogue¹². Little has been written so far on this collection, but a number of documents survive. The most important source is an unillustrated autograph manuscript by Don Carlo, in octavo, of some 200 folios, untitled *Coins of the Emperors and Empresses of the East and the West, minted in gold from Julius Caesar to Joseph II, preceded by some other of kings, cities and families, collected by the Milanese nobleman Carlo Trivulzio from AD 1745 to 1769* (Fig. 3)¹³. Also, Don Carlo would allow selected visitors to have access to his collections, and his heirs continued the tradition. For example, in his book on Republican coins, Gennaro Riccio included a semis of Quintus Plaetorius with the indication « *Coll[ezione] Trivulzio a Milano* »¹⁴. That coin is now considered to be a forgery, but that changes nothing to our point¹⁵. Don Carlo was happy to share his acquisitions with a network of friends and correspondents, who could use them for their researches¹⁶. Similarly, the abbot Gaspare Luigi Oderico – though based in Genova – knew of a Lombardic coin in the Trivulzio collection, to which he referred in a ‘published letter’ in 1786¹⁷. And an exceedingly rare early-14th century coin of Acqui (Piedmont) was illustrated as frontispiece to a 1789 volume by Joannes Baptista Moriundus¹⁸. Contemporary documents, such as the epistolary of the Verri brothers, give information on the Trivulzio collection and how it grew. Modern references to the collection are in fact scarcer. Giovanni Seregni, in his reference work on Don Carlo, only devoted a short chapter to the Trivulzio *medagliere*¹⁹. But, in 1887, Francesco Gneccchi published seventy-six rare Trivulzio’s Roman gold coins, and a most precious source of information is another manuscript written by Don Carlo himself, the list of the *Persone Illustri, o per nascita o per erudizione che furono da me Carlo Trivulzio per osservare le mie poche cose*

*antiche*²⁰. The first entry in this journal tells of the visit of the curator of the Spanish Royal coin-cabinet, Don Francesco Pérez Bayer (1711-1794), from whom he received in 1754 several gold medals, and to whom he gave bronze medals, marbles and books²¹. In 1759, Giovanni Caraffa di Noja obtained several silver and gold coins of Magna Grecia from Don Carlo, in exchange for « *some imperial medals, some Christian rings rather valuable, and two scarabs* »²². Don Carlo’s encounters were not merely commercial. For example in 1773, a French abbot named Bertrand Capmartin de Chaupy (1720-1798) simply asked Don Carlo to copy the legend of some of his gold medals²³. And when the prince of Kevenhüller-Metsch visited Don Carlo in 1772, though he collected Imperial and Provincial coins, no transaction seems to have taken place²⁴. But, the same year, from Giuseppe Bartoli (1717-1788) who was on his way from Venice to Paris, Don Carlo bought a gold coin of Aribertus, an aureus of Maximian, a gold quinarius of Anthemius and a mistruck Republican denarius²⁵. In 1776, he also obtained « *several imperial gold medals* » against an agate cameo depicting Medusa, from the *Commendatore* Genevosio (1719-1795)²⁶. Such exchanges were keeping Don Carlo’s collection alive²⁷, but he did not always agree to them. In 1770, he refused an offer of Abraham Joseph Michelet d’Ennery (1709-1786), willing to give 8 or more gold coins in exchange of three of Don Carlo’s coins. The coins which Ennery wanted were too rare: an aureus of Mark Antony with Antillus, an aureus of Victorinus with the legion, and the gold coin of Gallienus with Salonina²⁸. Don Carlo tried to buy some of Ennery’s duplicates, but the Frenchman only wanted to swap. The habit of Don Carlo to assist scholars by giving access to his rich collections, was shared by his heirs and descendants. When Cattaneo and Castiglioni were writing on Cufic coins in the 1810s, they were able to examine the collection which was then owned by Giangiacomo IV Trivulzio (1774-1831)²⁹. When the two Gneccchis were writing their book on the coinage of the Trivulzio in the

¹² Rambach *forthcoming*.

¹³ I am currently working on the study and publication of this manuscript.

¹⁴ Riccio 1843, p. 169, no. CXXVII-1, pl. 62 (the coin is not listed in the original, 1836, edition).

¹⁵ Babelon listed the coin in 1885 (Babelon *Plaetoria* 1), but suggested that it was either a genuine bronze coin which had been tooled (for example Babelon *Caecilia* 22 or Babelon *Opimia* 2), or that the legend had simply been misread by Riccio. It was not included by Crawford in 1973. The first attested coin issued by a Plaetoria (Crawford 396) is later than the last struck Republican bronze (Crawford 382).

¹⁶ As another example, a footnote indicate the presence of a very rare silver medal of the 5th Duke of Albuquerque, Gabriel de la Cueva y Téllez-Girón (c.1515-1571), in the collection of Don Carlo. Castiglione 1759, p. 187, note.

¹⁷ Oderico 1786, p. VI.

¹⁸ Moriundus 1789. The coin was inherited by the Belgioioso branch (Promis 1852, p. 8), and when it was sold it was acquired by D. Promis for the Royal cabinet (Promis 1873, cat. no. 1). It is a Denaro Imperiale, struck by Oddone Bellingeri (1305-1313) in Acqui (Piedmont). The coin is now part of the Royal Collection, preserved in Palazzo Massimo: ref. *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum*, vol. II, p. 3, no. 15.

¹⁹ Seregni 1927, ch. XI, pp. 165-169, pl. XIII.

²⁰ Biblioteca Trivulziana ms. 2107, cc. 2-11. I am currently working on the study and publication of this manuscript.

²¹ Don Carlo Trivulzio, ms. 2107, c. 2^r; Squizzato 2014, p. 282.

²² *Ibid.*, c. 2^v.

²³ *Ibid.*, ms. 2107, c. 7^r.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ms. 2107, cc. 5^r-5^v.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ms. 2107, c. 6^r.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, c. 10^r. Acquired by La Turbie (1758-1814), the Genevosio collection comprised five cameos of Medusa. One in amethyst (Genevosio 1796 no. 163) is now at the British Museum (inv. no. 1867,0507.393). Of the four in agate (Genevosio 1796 nos 125/131/138/150), two are probably preserved at the British Museum (inv. nos 1867,0507.386 and 1867,0507.399).

²⁷ His competitors would do the same, Pietro Verri for example who would constantly improve his collection of Milanese coins – notably by exchanging coins with the museum in Brera. On Pietro Verri and his collection (now property of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank), see: Crippa 2014.

²⁸ Don Carlo Trivulzio, ms. 2107, cc. 3^v-4^r. The unique Gallienus gold coin was later acquired by Leo Biaggi.

²⁹ On those authors, see Callegher 2015.

1880s, they were helped by Gian Giacomo V Trivulzio (1839-1902). The interest for coins was only lost with Prince Luigi Alberico Trivulzio (1868-1938).

I often noticed a misleading confusion between Don Carlo's belongings and items acquired by his descendants. The manuscript by Taylor Combe (1774-1826), *Conjectures upon the British and Saxon coins*, could be a proof of the wide-ranging numismatic interests of Don Carlo – if it had not been written long after his death and acquired at the earliest in 1830³⁰. Georg Zoega's study of the Egyptian coins in the Borgia collection, cannot have been owned by Don Carlo (d. 1789) as the book was published in 1787 and the Trivulzio copy was bound for Pope Pius VI (1775-1799)³¹. Also, the fact that the Trivulzio collection was informally dispersed over the years, is used to give the provenance to items that may – or may not – have ever belonged to it (Figs 4-4a), such as a nicolo intaglio of Sappho signed Pichler of unexceptional quality. Another gem, supposedly sold privately in the 1920s or 30s by Prince Trivulzio, is an engraved diamond with the profile of Nero, which was the property of a goldsmith named Annibale Conti in 1874. A further engraved diamond, with the profile of Numa Pompilius, published by Ernest Babelon in 1922 as the property of a certain Cesare Giandotti, is also supposedly part of the group. Both the coin-collection and the gem-collection of Don Carlo Trivulzio deserve further research, and I am currently working on them.³²

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³⁰ RAMBACH *forthcoming*.

³¹ 1888 auction, lot 1040.

³² My thanks are due to Gabriella Angeli Bufalini, Gian Giacomo Attolico Trivulzio, Federico Barello, Gilles Bransburg, Bruno Callegher, Karsten Dahmen, Paola Di Rico, Jean-Marc Doyen, David Hill, Dominique Hollard, Andrew MacCabe, Numismatica Ars Classica NAC A.G., Marzia Pontone, Gabriella Tassinari, Lucia Travaini, Massimiliano Tursi, Marino Viganò, and especially to Alessandra Squizzato.

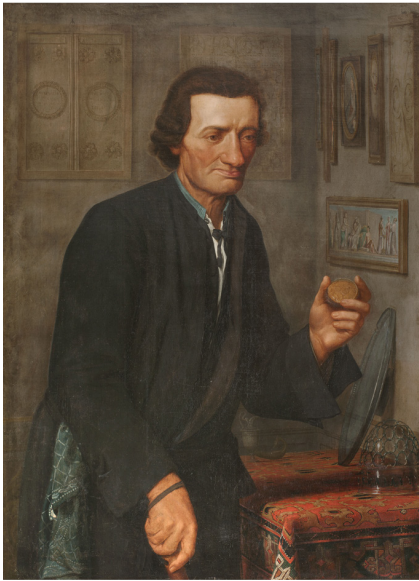


Fig. 1 Portrait of Don Carlo Trivulzio, by Donigi Sadis, signed and dated 1789, oil on canvas, 98 x 72 cm, private collection. Photo by Mauro Ranzani (after Squizzato 2016).

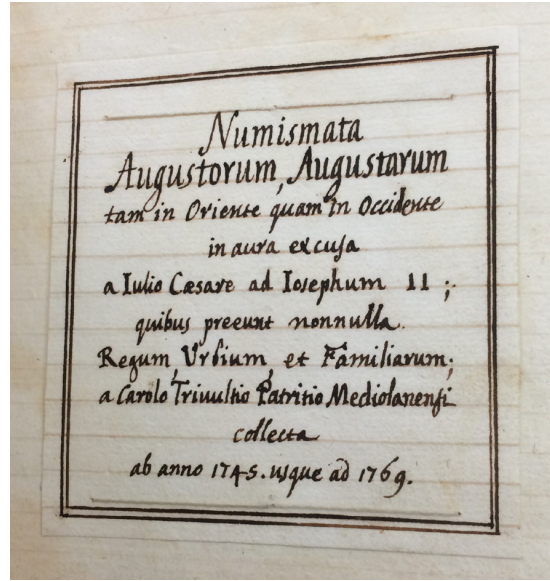


Fig. 3 Title-page of the ms. Trivulzio 2093, catalogue of the coins acquired by Don Carlo Trivulzio 1745-1769. Photo by H.J. Rambach © Fondazione Trivulzio.



Figs 2-2a Gold medallion of Valens (AD 364-378), depicted on the portrait of Don Carlo Trivulzio. Photo © N.A.C. (auction 21 – lot 577).



Figs 4-4a Two views of a finger-ring in gold and steel, set with a diamond engraved of the Medici arms, sold by Prince Luigi Alberico Trivulzio. Drawing by Thorsten Linsner © H.J. Rambach.