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Die römischen Münzen des Medagliere im Castelvecchio zu Verona

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Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften,
Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften, 239. Band).
Wien, 1995. 704 S., 102 Tafeln. ISBN 3-7001-2181-4.

This thick, heavy and very expensive book records the 19 159 Roman (including a very few provincial issues in Latin, tesseræ, spintriae, medallions, contorniates and modern forgeries), Byzantine, Vandal, Ostrogothic, Langobard and Merovingian coins in the Museo Civico in Verona. It is a perfect example of how to present a vast amount of numismatic material intelligently, clearly and economically; and Dr. Schmidt-Dick (as well as her collaborators M. Alram, R. Göbl and W. Hahn) deserves congratulations for undertaking such a Herculean task.

The book begins with (I.) a preface by Prof. Göbl, and (II.) a history of coin collecting in Verona by Dr. D. Modonesi. These are followed by series of short chapters describing how the catalogue is designed (III.), an extensive list of abbreviations (IV.), and a detailed discussion of the rules used to describe the coins within the catalogue (V.). This introductory material is completed by a concordance with the RIC showing the schema by which the coinage of each emperor is arranged in this catalogue (VI.), by a second concordance (VII.), providing a reverse index of the RIC in the order the coins were struck for the reigns of Augustus through Carausius, and by a bibliography (VIII.). The immensely long catalogue finishes with an overly short index. Sections I.–VI. also appear in Italian (I., III.–VI., in full translation from the German, and II. in the original Italian).

The collection's core dates back to the late 17th century; however, most coins within it are from collections which came into being during the 18th and early 19th century before being acquired by the Museo Civico through donation, bequest or by purchase. In fact, the last major acquisition seems to have been that of the Maboni collection of Roman coins in 1898. All these collections were formed by prominent local scholars (though the coins they acquired were not necessarily found locally), and M. provides numerous useful biographical details about them. Interestingly, contemporary manuscript catalogues of some of their collections still exist. One problem is that there seem to be typographical errors in both the German and Italian versions of M.'s text, as well as some omissions from the German, thus leading to some confusion. Viz.,

Im Jahre 1841 erwarb die Stadt Verona um 25.800 Lire die numismatische Sammlung Verità. Ihre Inventur war im Jahre 1927 Giuseppe Venturi anvertraut worden, der die 11.944 Münzen in sechs Klassen teilte: 6096 Bronzemünzen der Kaiserzeit; 516 Bronzemünzen der Republik; 317 Goldmünzen der Republik; 1291 Provinzialmünzen in Bronze. An diesen wurden weitere 2094 Münzen angeschlossen, die in 1839 inventarisiert wurden. (S.11).

The Italian version provides us with a more accurate picture:

*Nel 1841 il Municipio di Verona acquistò per venticinquemilaottocento lire la collezione numismatica Verità. L'inventario della stessa era stato affidato nel 1827 a Giuseppe Venturi, che ripartì le undicimila novecento quarantaquattro monete in sei classi: monete imperiali in bronzo 6096; monete familiari in bronzo 516; monete **imperiale e familiari in oro 317; monete imperiali in argento 2288; monete familiari in argento 1436**; monete coloniali in bronzo 1291. A questo se ne aggiunsero altre 2094 inventariate nel 1839 (S. 99).*

One of the really important things about this collection, aside from the vast amount of accurately catalogued Roman material now available for scholarly use, is the clear idea it gives us of the kind of coins one can expect to find in a Italian cabinet of the 18th century. Somewhat startling is the remarkable number of fakes it contains: the index lists 572 contemporary forgeries, 361 modern fakes and 57 coins which the cataloguers consider to be of dubious authenticity, or 990 coins in all (over 5% of the entire collection). In fact, there are definitely more modern forgeries in Verona than those listed in the index. For example, while catalogued among the modern invented forgeries (19064–19159; all other modern forgeries and all coins thought to be dubious are listed within the main catalogue) 15 coins have not been included in the index simply because they are thought to be ancient coins which have been recut into something else; and a plated denarius of Brutus, 2733A, catalogued as a contemporary forgery, has seemingly been forgotten as well (in fact, it is probably modern since its style is totally unlike any other published denarius of Brutus – 2733, another plated denarius of Brutus, is probably ancient: see H.A. Cahn, *EIDibus MARTius*, *QT XVIII*, 1989, p. 223, Abb. 2, for another example from the same dies). In addition, there are surely quite a few other fakes inadvertently catalogued as real. For example: 3844, a sestertius of Agrippina I struck under Caius, is a struck Cavino (dies of Klawans 1); 5633, the Colosseum sestertius of Divus Titus, is also a Paduan (same dies as *Ars Classica XI*, 517 = *Ars Classica XVI*, 1625); the Tranquillina dupondius, 12058, is clearly an old fake made for collectors (there were two, both from the same dies as this one, in the Consul Weber collection, *Hirsch XXIV*, 10 Mai 1909, lots 2144–2145); and 18121, a silver “solidus” of Aelia Flaccilla, is termed a cast contemporary forgery, but it is actually an early modern collector’s fake purporting to be a miliarense and is cast from the solidus in the British Museum (*PCR III*, 1488 – note the defect in the obverse field). While 5 of the 39 sestertii of Galba in this collection are already noted as being modern forgeries, I would not be at all surprised to discover that a few more are.

Knowing about these old fakes gives us an insight into the kind of coins which may well have been thought to be real in earlier periods of collecting. Such coins were also likely to have entered into the published record, *as genuine*, and make up the majority of the “unconfirmed” issues which bedevil modern numismatic scholarship. Thus, having a collection containing large numbers of early modern forgeries (some dating back as far as the 16th century, though most surely from the 17th through the early 19th), as compared to the differently made forgeries of the

late 19th and 20th centuries, provides us with a kind of numismatic time capsule of prime importance. Building up an archive of these old forgeries would be an interesting and valuable project: if we find examples of the same cast sesterlius in numerous collections we might be able to discover when and where it was first made, as well as discovering what types of coins were thought worth faking at specific times. For example, of the 56 Roman medallions in Verona only a maximum of 24 are real: 22 are clearly modern forgeries, while another 10 are optimistically described as being contemporary(!) casts, a possibility I find rather unlikely for most.

The coins are described in the most abbreviated way possible: researchers will not only have to carefully familiarize themselves with the clear, albeit quite complicated, conventions used, but also must have a copy of the relevant standard work for the coins concerned, and to which all the references are keyed (i.e., Crawford for Roman Republican coins, RIC for Roman, MIB for Byzantine, etc.). Each coin is, in fact, given at least one reference to enable the user to find its exact description, though often more (as with issues of Caligula cited with RIC¹, RIC² and MIR; and non-Roman Italic cast bronzes which are given references to Sydenham, SNG München and Thurlow [both in the catalogue and in the bibliography this name appears in error as Turlow]). On occasion, however, an expected reference does not appear: 13958, an AE denarius of Postumus struck with aureus dies has a reference to RIC and Elmer but lacks Schulte (cf. Schulte 16, p. 76, where he notes that just such a piece as this was published in the 18th century by Mezzabarba – could it be this coin?). Almost none of the coins have a provenance or find spot: whether this means that the museum has no records or that such information was not deemed to be of particular importance is not noted. There are also no notes giving bibliographies for any Verona coins published elsewhere (as, for example, the four aurei of Diocletian cited and illustrated by Lukanc).

This was probably the last major collection to be published prior to the appearance of RIC X, and shows quite how desperately it was needed. The mixed group of references SD was forced to use in its stead (Bansa, Cohen, DOC, Fagerlie, Forli, Lacam, LRBC, MIR, PCR and Tolstoi) both makes the researcher's task time consuming and less accurate. In fact, the late Roman issues of the 5th century and their Ostrogothic successors include some of this collection's most interesting coins. The predominance of Italian mints for the early Byzantines is not surprising, but they include some particularly attractive pieces (note that the often cited mint abbreviation "Syri" actually refers to Syracuse, not "Syrien" as stated in the list of abbreviations).

A small number of provincial coins with Latin legends have been included in this catalogue (as those of Dacia and Viminacium in the 3rd century, or the Nemausus asses of Augustus, etc.). However, no mention is made of any local issues from the Roman provinces, whether in Latin or Greek, and this seems perplexing given that Venturi catalogued 1291 "monete coloniali" in 1827. Will they be described elsewhere? If so, why?, since they formed part of the Roman monetary system. Or are they actually forgeries, or non-existent? Rather fascinatingly, there is clear evidence that a Roman medallion of Commodus now in Verona (19005)

reached Asia Minor in antiquity. While originally bimetallic, it seems to have lost its outer ring soon after it was made. However, not only did it circulate as a coin like any other, it was even countermarked in typically eastern fashion (an eight-pointed star, cf. Howgego 436–461 for similar examples).

The 102 photographic plates are remarkable for their clarity and legibility. The coins were photographed directly, not from casts, and the quality of the result is exemplary. Elsewhere I have recently criticized a tendency on the part of some scholars to illustrate all coins from collections or archaeological sites, regardless of legibility or importance. I think there is no scholarly justification for the publication of coins which are excessively corroded or worn (since such coins can not even be used for die studies), or banal or common issues which have been illustrated time and again over the years and are not even in particularly good condition. Such illustrations merely inflate the price of scholarly publications, and are of dubious utility. Yet a major collection of over 19,000 coins can not just be published as an unillustrated list (!) or with only a few plates of especially important pieces. SD has obviously taken a great deal of trouble in selecting the approximately 2320 coins she chose to illustrate (12% of the entire collection). I would assume she has picked out all the unusual, attractive and legible pieces, but I do wonder why, among others, 2617, the rare denarius of Caius Antonius (Cr. 484/1), and 18338, the even rarer Rome tremissis of Olybrius, were not photographed (are they so awful?). While I applaud her decision not to illustrate every coin, I think she ought to have explained the criteria she used for deciding which coins would be illustrated and which would not be.

The index only contains 17 entries: Test marks, graffiti, contemporary forgeries, modern forgeries, dubious imitations, barbarized issues, «Goldabschläge» (i.e., the term for a silver or base metal coin struck in gold: in fact, both coins under this rubric are incorrectly listed; the first, a denarius of Postumus, is an AE Abschlag; and the second is a cast silver solidus, thus, not an Abschlag at all – and as noted above, it is a modern forgery anyway), hybrids (most are surely ancient forgeries), “Technica” (four asses with obverses on both sides), overstrikes, countermarks, obverse brockages, reverse brockages, engravers’ mistakes, hammered edges, and coins deliberately cut in half. Given how important metrological studies have become, it would have been very useful to have had a list of all the gold and silver coins in this collection, or a list of denominations. Again for statistical purposes it would have been worthwhile having a table giving the number of gold, silver and AE coins for each emperor.

While this catalogue is of lasting importance, I unfortunately do have to end on a note of criticism. The binding of this expensive book (over DM 400/\$250) is the cheapest imaginable, and after only a week of light use *all the plates in my copy have fallen out!* This is truly disgraceful, and the publishers surely owe an apology to SD and her associates, the Verona museum, the Vienna Numismatic Commission, and the institutions and individuals who have purchased this book and who will have to have it bound properly before they can actually use it (and purchasers would be justified in demanding a refund as well).

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