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FROM REALITY TO VIRTUALITY. A DATABASE FOR THE CYRENAICAN SPECIMENS FROM NUMISMATIC TRADE

Abstract

The importance of auction sales catalogues in the study of any ancient coinage is unquestionable and they are of prime interest for numismatists in various ways (e.g., to gather a large body of material; to do an almost complete die-study; etc.). For all these reasons, since first catalogues started to appear frequently in the second half of the XIX century, a complete examination would require the treatment of a considerable amount of data.

With the CyReNe-Project (Cyrenaican Research Numismatic e-Project) we decided to face this task and to create a database where all the specimens minted in Cyrenaican cities and sold during the years could be collected together. The aim is to make available all these data in a structured and systematic way and, on the other hand, to safeguard this important cultural heritage. Starting from 2011, due to the numerous looting carried out against the archaeological and numismatic heritage in Libya, the presence of Cyrenaican coins on the market has increased enormously; reconstructing the pedigree of a coin is an useful tool to exclude a possible illicit origin.

For these reasons we began to check past sales (more than 6000 auction catalogues and still counting) and their data will be implemented in the database. Incorrect identifications or attribution changes that have occurred throughout the history of the studies, are just some of the problems we are facing in undertaking such a project.

Keywords

Numismatic trade, Auctions catalogues, Database, Cyrenaica

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it could be probably said with absolute peace of mind, doing research in numismatics is, in some respects, relatively simpler than it was a few decades ago: easier access to the coins of public collections, even when kept at a great distance, with the possibility of having pictures of them in very high resolution; even more comfortable is the consultation of numismatic literature; and last, but not least, a large quantity of material that over the years has gradually become known, thanks to new discoveries, but especially to the public sales of the antiquarian market.

This last point will be at the centre of this contribution¹, where the importance of numismatic trade will be analysed and where a possible solution for the management of the considerable amount of data coming from this source will be proposed. With the *CyReNe-Project (Cyrenaican Research Numismatic e-Project)*, in fact, we decided to create a database where all the specimens minted in Cyrenaican cities during Greek and Roman times and sold by auction houses during the years could be collected together and made available to everyone in a structured and systematic way.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NUMISMATIC TRADE

Anyone who wants to undertake a numismatic work on an ancient coinage, has to face an important matter: in fact, unless they have an iconographic point of view, for which only a few carefully chosen pieces will be sufficient, most studies are based on a large amount of material that should have to be collected.

Antiques and ancient coins have always been collector's items of interest to private lovers, both because of their aesthetics and their relative abundance. Ignoring private collector coins and focusing only on public collections would be a valid practical choice, but a scientific nonsense. An exhaustive body of research cannot be limited to museum or archaeological collections of a public nature. Much of the material is in private hands, and it is only accessible to the researcher in very short moments: its passage in a public sale, which is generally the subject of a catalogue and therefore of a description, is sometimes the only opportunity to "capture" the

¹ This paper is a result of the work currently underway on my PhD project at the University of Padua, "*Cyrenaican Bronze Coinage: economic and social perspectives*", whose aim is to create a catalogue of the whole Cyrenaican bronze coinage, starting from the Greek-Hellenistic period, until the provincial coins of Marcus Aurelius, minted in Rome but for a limited circulation in the North-African region. I would like to thank professor Bruno Callegher, dr. Ella Zulini and all the other organizers of the International Workshop-Seminar held in 2018 in Trieste for the opportunity to present this project in such an interesting congress. Special thanks for help are due also to professor Michele Asolati, for all his advices.

object for research, before its definitive or cyclical disappearance. Precisely for this reason, pieces from the antiquarian market can not and should not be overlooked. The collection of catalogues of the major auction houses thus makes it possible to archive all this material published in public auctions, often with the addition of very well taken photos.

The importance of sales catalogues in this kind of works is consequently unquestionable, since they are of prime interest for numismatists in various ways, especially, as we've said, when there are images of the coins, as it usually happens. First of all, and most important detail, they allow us to gather a large body of material. We have to consider that the first auction catalogue was published in Leiden for the sale of the library of Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde, on 6 July 1599², while the first printed one, devoted only to coins, was issued in Amsterdam for the sale of the John Raphael Grill Collection in 1679³ (Fig. 1): this means that we are now facing more than three centuries of numismatic sales, with a resulting enormous number of coins.

In addition to the quantity, we must also consider the quality of the specimens that are offered for sale: a significant number of them, in fact, has no comparison with museum pieces, and in this way they increase our knowledge on the subject we are dealing with, give us more data for statistical analysis and the frequent presence of a good quality photograph of the coins often allows to discover new dies with the possibility of a more complete die-study⁴. It is also not so unusual that new variants or coin types appear in the market: looking at the Cyrenaica, which is at the centre of our research project, just to give a single example among the many possible cases, we could mention the wonderful gold stater of Cyrene, sold in 2014 by Nomos Ag⁵ (Fig. 2).

² Among the lots there were several numismatic books, but also some ancient coins as well.

³ Rambach 2010, 37. See: Dekesel 2003, II, 1209 (cat. n. G 145). Clain-Stefanelli, instead, reports that the first known numismatic auction took place as early as 1598 in Leiden, Netherlands, where the collection of a French gentleman was sold in 1598 (Clain-Stefanelli 1965, 21), but it's probably an erroneous information.

⁴ Although this is very true for today, when the use of the internet and computer technologies makes it much easier to access a huge amount of data from large and small auction houses, already 30 years ago specimens from numismatic trade were a source of information that could not otherwise be obtained, as we could see in de Callatay 1990.

⁵ Gold stater, magistrate Pheidon, mint of Cyrene, 312-310 BC: Nomos AG, Auction 9 (21 October 2014), lot n. 197 (from the Battos Collection) = CNG, Triton XIX (5 January 2016), lot n. 2113 (from the Dr. Lawrence A. Adams Collection). This coin is published in Asolati 2016a, fig. 10. The piece is absolutely unique and unpublished in catalogues; the representation on the reverse of the full-length *Apollo Citharoedus* has never been proposed on other Cyrenaican coins, and it recalls the model of the so-called *Apollo Palatine*, attributed to Skopas during his stay in Athens (about 370-360 BC): Asolati 2016a, 315, note 37.

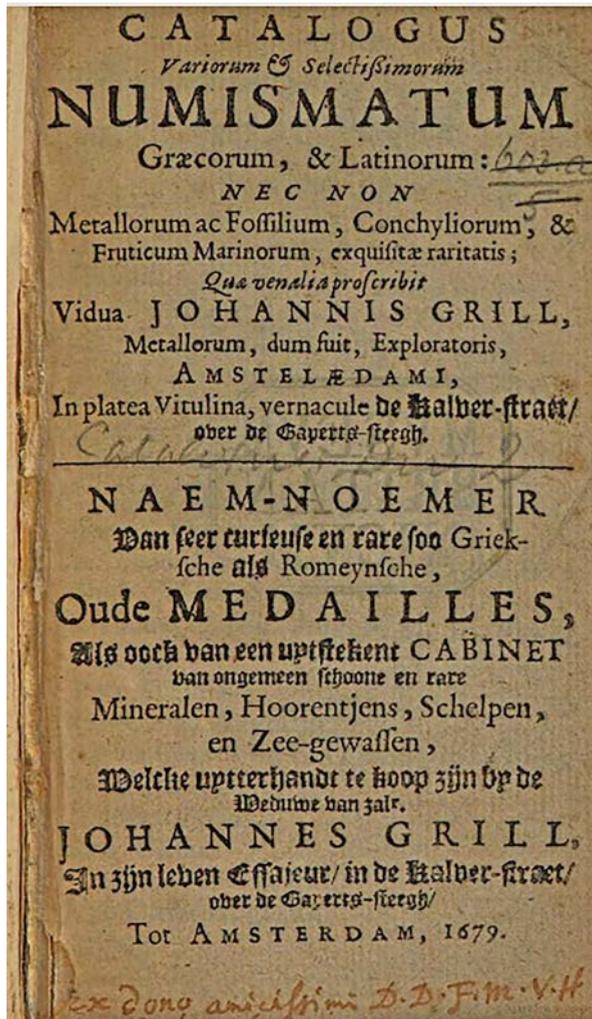


Figure 1 – Cover of the printed catalogue for the sale of the John Raphael Grill Collection; 1679
(source: Google Books)



Figure 2 – Cyrene, Gold stater, magistrate: Pheidon, 312-310 BC;
Nomos AG, Auction 9 (21 October 2014), lot n. 197 (source: CoinArchives) [x1,5]

Finally, we must not forget and underestimate the possibility of recreating, through the various steps in public sales, the pedigree of a coin. It is generally used to indicate a coin's past or present ownership and in numismatics, as in the art world, provenance can be an important factor in determining its authenticity⁶; but in our case, as we will explain better below, pedigrees are also useful to exclude a possible illegal origin of the specimens sold.

For all these reasons, and especially in order to be as complete and exhaustive as possible, many recent important researches have necessarily had to take into account the material coming from the numismatic trade, whether they were specific and very well defined works (as – for example – one of W. Fischer-Bossert's latest paper about two early electrum series from Asia Minor, where specimens from private collections and auction houses' sales account for more than three-quarters of the recorded pieces⁷), but also for projects with a much wider scope, as the Roman Provincial Coinage⁸.

THE CYRENE-PROJECT

(CYRENAICAN RESEARCH NUMISMATIC E-PROJECT)

CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN LIBYA AND THE THEFT OF THE SO-CALLED “TREASURE OF BENGHAZI”

However, when working on Cyrenaican coinage, another factor must be taken into account, which in part also directly affects the antiquarian market.

On 17 February 2011, in the wake of the so-called "Arab Spring" that led to the Tunisian revolution of 2010/2011 and the Egyptian revolution of the same year, Libya experienced a first phase of popular uprising, then resulted in a real civil war between the rebels and loyalist forces to Colonel Mu'ammar Gaddafi, who after months of conflict, was deposed and executed on October 21⁹. Since then, the North African country has fallen into a continuous state of clashes and civil wars that have also led to the destruction and looting of part of the cultural and archaeological heritage of the region¹⁰. This has been followed by a constant flourishing of illegal

⁶ In addition to the fact that a coin that was once part of a famous collection may be more desirable to some collectors.

⁷ Fischer-Bossert 2016, 6-16.

⁸ E.g., see *RPC*, III, n. 3477: it's a Nerva's tetradrachm, minted in Antioch, where out of 16 known specimens, 9 come from the antiquarian market (<http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/3/3477/>).

⁹ On the events that characterized Libya in that period and on the possible causes, see, for example, Idowu and Oladiti 2016 and Hilsum 2012.

¹⁰ Numerous sites between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were damaged during the conflict, like the

trafficking in Libyan cultural goods, which find it very easy to escape to neighbouring countries due to the impossibility of controlling the very long borders (especially towards Egypt) and the lack of surveillance.

The drama of that situation was obvious right from the beginning, so much so that after the first rebellions an international conference was immediately organized, promoted by the Second University of Naples and UNESCO, entitled "For the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Libya. A Dialogue among Institutions" (Monumental Complex of Belvedere of S. Leucio, Caserta, 1-2 July 2011)¹¹ and on 21 October 2011, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, there was a meeting for Libya's Cultural Heritage, with the aim of urgently examining the preservation of cultural heritage in the country¹². Moreover, ICOM, the International Council of Museums, has recently drawn up a "Red List" of the treasures still present on the Libyan territory in a state of danger, each accompanied by photos and scientific files: statues, mosaics, funerary furnishings, pottery, architectural elements, sarcophagi and, of course, coins¹³.

Actually, the numismatic material, which is easy to export illegally and then resold, has been obviously one of the hardest hit¹⁴ and all these facts have had a great influence on the numismatic market, and not only on what is usually called as "black market", made by clandestine trades that usually leave no, or at least very few, traces; but also on the international numismatic trade, managed by famous auction houses. The graph in Fig. 3, which represents the presence of Cyrenaican coins among the specimens sold by the main international auction firms¹⁵, clearly shows how the number of these pieces has gradually increased since 2011¹⁶. This has made very

ancient city of Ghadames, the Rock-Art sites of Tadrart Akakus, and even the archaeological sites of Cyrene, Leptis Magna and Sabratha, which were already UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

¹¹ The proceedings of the conference were published in 2012 (Ensolì 2012a).

¹² <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/799/>

¹³ <https://icom.museum/en/ressource/emergency-red-list-of-libyan-cultural-objects-at-risk/>

¹⁴ As it has already been pointed out several times: see, for example, Asolati 2016b, 11; or Amandry 2016, 287.

¹⁵ Data obtained through the site coinarchives.com for the period 2007-2016.

¹⁶ For the realization of the graph, not all the pieces that have been sold on the market have been taken into consideration, but only those specimens that appeared in an auction for the first time in a specific year and which were not reported a reliable pedigree that would trace them back to historical collections or previous sales. We must also consider that, in recent years, the possibility of creating a sales catalogue with good photographs of the coins has become easier and less expensive than in the past, when certainly many specimens were sold through channels other than those of public sales, for which unfortunately we can not have any trace, and this could have lightly accentuated the increase recorded by the graph in the last period. For all these reasons, this cannot be an absolute figure (this is why we do not show a graduation scale), but nevertheless it illustrates quite well the market trend in

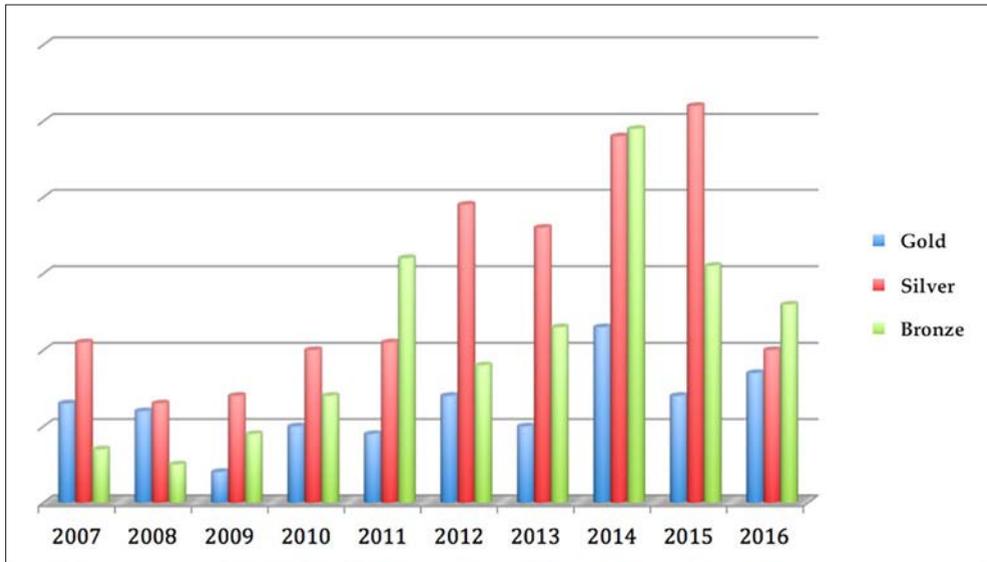


Figure 3 – Number of Cyrenaican coins appeared in sale catalogues of the main auction houses between 2007 and 2016

clear the possibility of scattering of the numismatic Libyan heritage, which, acquired by private collectors, could disappear and be no longer available.

Beside this fact, however, we also have to deal with a sadly famous affair, whose details are unfortunately better defined today. One of the worst consequences for Cultural Heritage during the Libya's civil war in 2011 was certainly the theft of the so-called "Treasure of Benghazi", a large collection of priceless coins, statues and jewellery, stolen from the vault of the Commercial Bank of the Libyan city in May 2011¹⁷. It consisted in a group of antiquities excavated in Cyrenaica after the First World War: there were, for example, objects unearthed from the Temple of Artemis in Cyrene, found during the excavation carried out between 1917 and 1922, including a number of gold items, which date to the sixth and fifth centuries BC¹⁸; materials from the "Palace of Columns" in Ptolemais, an imposing building excavated between 1937 and 1942; a part of the so-called "Benghazi's hoard", with more than one thousand silver coins both Greek and Roman¹⁹; and above all, the numismatic

this time span and, in our opinion, the obvious relationship with the consequences of the looting carried out during the war.

¹⁷ On these facts, see Ensoli 2012b, Ensoli 2013 and Ensoli 2014.

¹⁸ Ensoli 2012b, figs. 5-13.

¹⁹ On this hoard, see Asolati and Crisafulli 2014 and, recently, Asolati and Crisafulli 2018, 121-133 and 235-256.



Figure 4 – Coins from the so-called “Treasure of Benghazi”. On the left, their photos from some past publications; on the right, the same pieces appeared in various auctions catalogues: a) Meliu 1935, pl. I, n. 7 – Roma Numismatics Ltd, E-Sale 21 (31 October 2015), lot n. 510; b) Meliu 1938, 49 – CNG, Electronic Auction 308 (7 August 2013), lot n. 208; c) Pesce 1950, fig. 122 – Hess-Divo AG, Auction 327 (22 October 2014), lot n. 121; d) Pesce 1950, fig. 122 – Hess-Divo AG, Auction 326 (28 May 2014), lot n. 103



Figure 5 – Cyrene, Gold stater, magistrate: Polianthes, 322-313 BC (Naville 1951, n. 99). On the left: Pesce 1950, fig. 122; on the right: Leu Numismatik, Auction 1 (25 October 2017), lot n. 113 (source: CoinArchives)

collection of Angelo Meliu, an Italian numismatist who lived in Cyrenaica for many years between the wars, consisting of over 4000 pieces in gold, silver and bronze, acquired in more than twenty years²⁰. It is estimated that more than 8000 coins were stolen overall²¹.

Even if some early reports indicated that part of the coins turned up in Egypt²² and that others have been sold on the black market in Libya²³, we are unfortunately sure that part of them have appeared also in some important international auctions (Fig. 4). One last example emerged in October 2017 in the Auction 1 of the new Leu Numismatik (lot n. 113)²⁴: among a group of ten coins, which are part of a “Kyrenaica Collection”, there was a gold stater that was certainly one of the stolen pieces of the Treasure of Benghazi (Fig. 5)²⁵. In particular, that coin was found during excavations at the Palace of Columns in Ptolemais and was published by G. Pesce in his monograph “Il Palazzo delle Colonne in Tolemaide di Cirenaica” in 1950²⁶; moreover it is recorded also in the Carabinieri’s “Illegally stolen cultural property Database”²⁷ and in the one of the Interpol²⁸. Luckily this time we were able to point out the fact before the sale and Leu Numismatik, after being informed, rightly decided to withdraw the coin from the auction²⁹.

²⁰ With regards to the Meliu Collection, reference should be made to Asolati 2016a, where the number of specimens included in the collection, based on the inventories that had been drawn up, was significantly increased to about 4300, compared to the 2000 that were initially assumed (Ensoli 2012b, 234).

²¹ “364 gold coins, 2433 silver, 4884 bronze” in addition to “306 jewellery and 43 other ancient artefacts”. The numerical detail is that provided by the official document of the Department of Antiquities of Cyrene and Benghazi and reproduced also in Ensoli 2012b, 229 (English translation comes from Bailey 2011).

²² Meo 2011.

²³ Bailey 2011.

²⁴ <https://leunumismatik.com/en/lot/3/113>

²⁵ Cattaneo and Asolati 2017.

²⁶ Pesce 1950, fig. 122. The image was then republished in Ensoli 2012a, fig. 17 and in Luni 2014, fig. 7.

²⁷ <http://tpcweb.carabinieri.it/SitoPubblico/getRepertiLibia?numPage=30> (with the number: 103584[297]).

²⁸ <https://www.interpol.int/notice/search/woa/1110710>

²⁹ It is very likely that also the other Cyrenaican specimens sold during the same auction and always belonging to the “Kyrenaica Collection”, for none of which it was possible to reconstruct a valid pedigree, could belong to the so-called “Treasure of Benghazi” too; however the lack of certain evidence (only a small part of the specimens of this treasure were photographed in the past and there is no valid and complete documentation establishing the precise composition of the “treasure”) has not allowed to extend the veto on the sale to these coins too. Moreover, the quantity and the quality of specimens of Cyrenaican mints that this auction house continues to offer for sale, even though it no longer reports the belonging to the “Kyrenaica Collection”, we think may arise from the same origin.

THE PROJECT: DATA MANAGEMENT, SOURCES AND SOME PROBLEMS

Past numismatic sales, therefore, are of primary importance in the Cyrenaican case: if it's possible to reconstruct the pedigree of a coin and to point out that it was already sold before 2011, this would be an incontrovertible proof that it does not come from the looting of the recent years. This means that, in order to offer as much objectivity and security as possible, almost all past auctions must be verified, dealing with a not insignificant amount of data.

With the *CyReNe-Project* (*Cyrenaican Research Numismatic e-Project*) we decided to face this task and then make the results available in a way that would be more easily presented to the scientific community and to anyone interested in these results, creating an instrument for a possible control of pieces placed on the market. The idea is to produce a digital database, connected to a web portal that can be accessed from the website of the Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Padua, available online and freely accessible, where to record all the specimens minted by Cyrenaican cities and sold during the years in auctions and online sales sites³⁰. Nowadays, information technology and database are a primary tool of research and communication in almost every field, and numismatics, as shown by recent lines of research, could exploit with enormous advantage the potential that they offered. The database is an instrument that could make available to the scientific community, in a structured and systematic way, a mass of otherwise disordered data, developing the potential offered by digital technologies. On the basis of other projects of “digital numismatics”³¹, it aims to create a useful tool with a dual purpose: of study – and consequent enhancement – of the coinage of a region, Cyrenaica, for which nothing of this has ever been done so far; and especially of safeguarding, at least at the level of virtual data, this numismatic heritage, which is now at risk.

The starting point of the project was the research and recording of information and photographs of past Cyrenaican issues on the antiquarian market, for which different sources must be checked. First of all, obviously, printed sale catalogues must be looked at (either auction catalogues or fixed price lists), for which there are all over the world just some specific libraries³². This obviously takes a lot of work,

³⁰ In this moment the project is in its preliminary phase and therefore the database is not yet ready and accessible online. The hope is that it will be available during the next year.

³¹ Just to give some examples, we could cite the *Online Coins of the Roman Empire* (<http://numismatics.org/ocre/>), the *Coinage of the Roman Republic Online* (<http://numismatics.org/crro/>), the *Roman Provincial Coinage Online* (<http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>) or the *Corpus Nummorum Thracorum* (<https://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/>), which are sources of primary interest for scholars worldwide.

³² At the moment, we have started from the library of the Museum Bottacin in Padua, where we have inspected approximately 6000 catalogues (from 350 different auction houses), which cover a span time from 1830 to modern times. Obviously this was just the beginning of our research, and now,

for which an help could come from archives of clippings from catalogues (the so-called “*photo-files*”) that some institutions have collected through the years with an impressive and peerless effort³³. Nowadays, moreover, we could also take advantage of computer technologies, and in this sense it’s not so difficult to find on the internet sale catalogues that have been digitalized and made available to everyone: in Google Books³⁴, for example, or in the website of some auction houses³⁵, without to forget the enormous work made by some institutions, like the Heidelberg University³⁶ or, recently, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France³⁷, that have digitalized and uploaded thousands of such exemplars. In the end, remaining in the world of internet and computer technologies, we have to mention also commercial databases available on the web, like *CoinArchives*³⁸ or *acsearch*³⁹, where are registered the coins sold by the major international auctioneers: they are particularly useful for the sales of the last 20 years (as for upcoming ones), since they began to collect their data with the beginning of the new millennium, even if also some coins sold in the nineties have been recently uploaded⁴⁰. Besides these, also other commercial web-sites⁴¹ should be considered, even with more attention because, in addition to the fact that there are plenty of them, once a coin they show is sold, then it usually disappears from the net and so it’s no longer available⁴².

thanks to the willingness and kindness of the owner, we are checking the library of Giulio Bernardi, in Trieste, that with more than 20000 catalogues (auction houses from all over the world) is one of the biggest private libraries of auction catalogues. We feel obliged to give him our heartfelt thanks in this publication too.

³³ We could cite, for example, the photo library of the University of Wien, or the ones of the British Museum, of the American Numismatic Society and of the Frankfurt Museum.

³⁴ <https://books.google.com/>

³⁵ Gorny and Mosch, for example, makes its auction catalogues published from 2011 until today freely available and downloadable from the web (<https://www.gmcoinart.de/Downloads.AxCMS#1>).

³⁶ <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/de/sammlungen/artsales.html>

³⁷ <https://gallica.bnf.fr>

³⁸ <https://www.coinarchives.com/>

³⁹ <https://www.acsearch.info/>

⁴⁰ To emphasize even more the importance of these instruments, it is necessary to consider the fact that *CoinArchives*, for example, currently archives 1373020 records from 2785 auctions only in its “Ancient Coins” section, and even more extensive is the section about coins of world from the medieval times to the modern era, with over 3,5 million registered specimens (October 2018); these numbers make their data collection much bigger than any other collection known (the ANS collections database, one of the most important ones, contains information on approximately 600000 objects).

⁴¹ *Vcoins* (<https://www.vcoins.com>), *VAuctions* (<https://www.vauctions.com>), *Ma-Shops* (<https://www.ma-shops.com>), *Tantalus Coins* (<http://www.tantaluscoins.com>) and, obviously, also *eBay* (<https://www.ebay.com>).

⁴² That is obviously a problem that should be not underestimate, since when we start a new work,

At the moment, with more or less 7000 sale catalogues checked plus all the coins found in the commercial databases, approximately 3300 Cyrenaican specimens have been registered, two thirds of them coming from printed sales.

These latter, were certainly the most time-consuming to check, since they require a control of almost every single page⁴³. Moreover great attention must always be paid in order to avoid mistakes and to recognize problem cases, like incorrect identifications or attribution changes that have occurred throughout the history of the studies. These faults, however, in our case are luckily not so frequent, since Cyrene is a rather investigated and well-known mint⁴⁴; in any case they are quite rare for specimens from the archaic and classical periods, but increase during the Ptolemaic phase and in the Roman period.

For Ptolemaic specimens, these mistakes have their origin in some inconsistencies in literature, generally due to attempts by scholars to attribute emissions with similar types from the various mints active in the territory under Egyptian control. There are some issues that even Robinson⁴⁵ had neglected, not considering the attribution to Cyrenaica proposed by Poole⁴⁶ and based on findings, and which are now commonly accepted. These series, have then been ascribed by Svoronos⁴⁷ to Cyprus, with a much wider following, as you could see, for example in the case shown in Fig. 6⁴⁸. For this reason particular attention must be paid to the sales of coins also from Cyprus, and, especially when there are no photos, the only way is to look at every single coin checking the Svoronos number, which is the main reference usually used in catalogues for Ptolemaic specimens.

Roman provincial coins, instead, could have incorrect attributions especially concerning series with the type of Ammon's head on the reverse. There are some issues of Trajan, in particular silver drachmas and hemidrachmas dated to the third con-

firstly we don't have the possibility to recover older materials, and secondly we have to continue checking these sites in order not to lose something more.

⁴³ Coins from Cyrenaica could be found not only in the Greek section. Just to give some examples, Roman provincial coins could be placed in a separated section or among the Roman ones; Ptolemaic coins are often placed all together, regardless of the mint, but considering only the issuer; etc.

⁴⁴ Especially thanks to some major works, such as the catalogue of the British Museum, written by Robinson in 1927 (*BMC, Cyrenaica*), Naville's book about Cyrenaican gold coinage (Naville 1951), or the publication by Buttrey on the findings from the extramural sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Cyrene (Buttrey 1997).

⁴⁵ *BMC, Cyrenaica*.

⁴⁶ *BMC, Ptolemies*.

⁴⁷ Svoronos 1904-1908.

⁴⁸ For the attribution of this particular coin to Cyrenaica, see instead: *BMC, Ptolemies*, 94, n. 78; Asolati 2011, n. 84



705. **Ptolemy VIII.** 145-116 BC. Æ 43mm (40.65 gm). Uncertain mint in Cyprus. Diademed head of Zeus-Ammon right / Eagle standing right on thunderbolt, Φ before. Svoronos 1641; SNG Copenhagen 651. VF, dark brown surfaces with light earthen encrustation. Rare. (\$300)

From the Collection of Marian A. Sinton.

Figure 6 – Classical Numismatic Group, Mail Bid Sale 53 (15 March 2000), lot n. 705

sulate (100 AD)⁴⁹, drachmas dated to the sixth consulate (114-116 AD)⁵⁰ and bronze issues (*sestertii*, *dupondii* and *asses*) dated to the fifth consulate (103-112 AD)⁵¹, that have also been the subject of debate regarding the mint⁵², especially because E.A. Sydenham, in his publication on the coins of *Caesarea* in Cappadocia⁵³, attributed them to this workshop, following what was proposed by Wroth in the catalogue of coins of the British Museum⁵⁴. Actually, hoards and single finds from archaeological excavations clearly indicate that these coins were used in Cyrenaica while, due to their style, they were probably produced in Rome for an exclusive circulation in the African region⁵⁵. On the other hand, however, there also some coins which the cataloguers assigned to Cyrene on the basis of the presence of Zeus Ammon on them, but that are not Cyrenaican⁵⁶. Others particular Roman Provincial coins, to which a

⁴⁹ *RPC*, III, nn. 1-3.

⁵⁰ *RPC*, III, n. 10.

⁵¹ *RPC*, III, nn. 4-9; Asolati 2011, nn. 176-178.

⁵² Asolati, Calliari, Conventi and Crisafulli 2009, 317-323.

⁵³ Sydenham 1933, nn. 176-178, 202 and 232-233.

⁵⁴ *BMC, Galatia*..., 53, nn. 54-57; 59 and 112-116.

⁵⁵ On this point, see lastly: Amandry 2016. Identical remarks must also be reserved to bronze issues of Hadrian (*RPC*, III, nn. 11-12; Asolati 2011, nn. 179-180) and Marcus Aurelius (Asolati 2011, nn. 181-191), always with Zeus Ammon on the reverse.

⁵⁶ Ammon is known as coin type also in other regions, such as Egypt (e.g., *RPC*, III, n. 5071),



357. SYRIA, Seleukis and Pieria. Antioch. Trajan. Cos. 2 (98/99 AD). Æ 27mm (13.94 gm). AVTOKP KAIC NEP TPAIANOC CEB ΓEPM, laureate head right / ΔΗΜΑΡΧ ΕΖ ΥΠΑΤ Β in wreath. SNG Copenhagen 185. VF, green patina with earthen highlights. (200)

Figure 7 – Classical Numismatic Group, Auction XVIII (3 December 1991), lot n. 357

lot of attention must be paid, are *asses* and *dupondii* of Trajan with at the reverse the legend “ΔΗΜΑΡΧ / ΕΥ ΥΠΑΤ Β” in wreath⁵⁷. In fact their attribution is still being debated: Sydenham assigned them to the mint of *Caesarea* in Cappadocia⁵⁸; McAlee⁵⁹ and the *RPC*⁶⁰, instead, are inclined to attribute them to Antioch; but, according to findings, as has been already pointed out several times⁶¹, also these coins should be assigned to Cyrenaica. Nevertheless in catalogues, even of the same auction house, these specimens could be classified in different ways, as it’s possible to see in Figs. 7-8.

It should also be kept in mind that all these debated series are relevant not only to printed auction catalogues, but they concern also the research on online sales web-sites and on the commercial databases that we have mentioned earlier: in these cases, more targeted and specific investigations must be used in order to obtain all the specimens we are interested in. Our hope is that with the database that we are planning, all this problems could be overcome and the results could be presented in an easier and more accessible way.

Macedonia (e.g., *RPC*, III, nn. 636-640) or Arabia (e.g. *RPC online*, IV, n. 3530).

⁵⁷ *RPC*, III, nn. 3654-3655; Asolati 2011, nn. 173-175.

⁵⁸ Sydenham 1933, nn. 228-229

⁵⁹ McAlee 2007, 192-193.

⁶⁰ *RPC*, III, 448.

⁶¹ See, for example, Asolati, Calliari, Conventi and Crisafulli 2009; Canovaro, Calliari, Asolati and Breda 2016, 259-261; and, lastly, Asolati and Crisafulli 2018, 66-76. *Contra*: Amandry 2016, 287-289.



928. **Caesarea. Trajan.** 98-117 AD. Æ 22mm (7.34 gm). Cos. 2 (98/99 AD). Laureate head right / ΔΗΜΑΡΧ ΕΞ•ΥΠΙΑΤ •Β within laurel wreath. Sydenham 229; BMC Galatia etc. pg. 58, 100ff. EF, tan patina with spots of verdigris. (\$100)

Figure 8 – Classical Numismatic Group, Mail Bid Sale 47 (16 September 1999), lot n. 928

For this reason, once the database will be entirely structured, we would like to make it freely available on the web through the use of a so-called web portal, in order to allow the online use of the data to an extended and theoretically unlimited number of users, simply through a common browser for Internet (e.g. Firefox, Chrome, Safari, Internet Explorer). The aim is to provide a tool that can be easy to use and immediate, not only for the scientific community, but also for private collectors, with the intention and hope of encouraging them to report any coins in their possession and thus add new knowledge to what has already been achieved.

CONCLUSIONS: IS NUMISMATIC TRADE TOO BIG TO STUDY?

Dealing with numismatic material from the antiquarian market, we are now facing a problem that F. de Callatay pointed already out in 1990, when he wrote:

“Le risque existe, en revanche, que d’ici une vingtaine d’années la masse documentaire se soit accrue dans des proportions telles qu’elle soit devenue pratiquement ingérable selon les procédés traditionnels de consultation aujourd’hui en vigueur”⁶².

After about thirty years we have to admit that his concerns have proved to be founded, since the specimens from the antiquarian market have in this moment no comparison in terms of quantity with any other public or private collection. And these

⁶² de Callatay 1990, 267.

numbers, with the passing of time, are supposed to increase even more. At the same time, unfortunately, no new methods have been developed to speed up this kind of research that requires a lot of time and, sometimes, of money, and for which manual research is often irreplaceable.

However, we must also say that new possibilities are arising: in fact nowadays is easier to get information on coins from all over the world and Internet and computer technologies, especially through the use of digital and online databases, could help to display the data in a better way and moreover with the possibility of updating, which should not be underestimated.

To conclude, numismatic trade is, in some respects, too big to study, but results obtained from this source are nevertheless unquestionable and some of the information that it gives us could not be achieved in another way.

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