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FUNDMÜNZEN TODAY
A FIL ROUGE IN RESEARCH AND A NEW
METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

Abstract

Starting from a personal experience as the author of several volumes of the series “Ritrovamenti Monetali di età Romana” (Monetary Findings of the Roman Age), an attempt is made to reason about the importance and impact that the German Fundmünzen initiative has had in Italy as well. Starting from this reasoning, an attempt is made to propose a new key to the numismatic discipline that can enable it to face the challenges of the future by evolving its methodology and scientific approach.

Keywords

Fundmünzen, Coin finds, Numismatic research, Numismatic methodology

My background on the subject of the Fundmünzen began with a study conducted more than 15 years ago in the northern area of Padua¹ and continues to the present day, with the recent publication of a volume in the series ‘Ritrovamenti Monetali di età Romana nel Veneto’ (RMRVe)² and another one for the series ‘Monetary Finds from the Roman Age in Friuli Venezia Giulia’ (RMRFVG)³.

Apart from numismatic and archaeological research, as far as I am concerned, an important role has been played by documentary and archival research, which has opened up new horizons on the possibilities of valorising numismatic assets, perhaps proposing a way of overcoming the difficulties associated with the partial cluttering of old finds or ancient collections. But these documents offer much more: information on the society of the time, on the personalities who were around the museum institutions or archaeological excavations, on the antiquarian world⁴ or on the land holdings from which the finds emerged. All this information is often not adequately taken into account.

Numismatic research is fascinating precisely because of the multitude of connections it allows, not only in the humanities: if we do not foster these connections (both scientifically and from a disciplinary point of view), then how can we expect to progress? The numismatist, as we have known since the time of J. H. Eckel (1737-1798) and C. M. T. Mommsen (1817-1903), is not only a numismatist or an archaeologist in the strict sense⁵, but sometimes has to be a bit of a historian, a bit of an economist, a bit of a chemist, and more.

It is above all by virtue of the multifaceted and interdisciplinary capabilities that numismatics, more than other disciplines, naturally manages to express, that the identity of our discipline must be preserved and enhanced. This is certainly a good reason, but is having a good reason enough? Even when we want to search for interdisciplinary connections, we spontaneously set limits, be they disciplinary, thematic, geographical or chronological. What would happen instead if we also tried to consider aspects that go beyond that? This is what is asked of us by European calls for proposals, for example. Let us try to think then if an evolution of the discipline could find a new dimension that would guarantee a response to these new demands: numismatics could become, by virtue of its synergetic characteristics, the *pass par tout* of the sciences of antiquity. This is why creating synergies can help to build a discipline that can address, in different ways and with different contents, multiple

¹ CARRARO 2008.

² CARRARO 2022.

³ CARRARO 2023; CARRARO 2023a.

⁴ In this regard, it is relevant to mention a recent conference organised on this subject in Trieste; GARIBOLDI 2022.

⁵ BREGLIA 1964, pp. 17-24.

audiences, guaranteeing not only the survival but also the revival of numismatics with the possibility of access to the major research projects that today want to focus on themes such as digitisation, sustainability, ecology, gender equality.

Are these topics far from us? I think not. Apart from the already obsolete idea of digitising volumes or artefacts, which I have had the opportunity to discuss elsewhere and do not want to talk about now⁶. I will just mention that the *Fundmünzen der Römischen Zeit in Deutschland (FMRD)* series, which became *Fundmünzen der Antike (FDA)* in 1986, and which has since expanded to various countries in Europe⁷, has been one of the central themes of numismatic research for 70 years. One of the great merits of the series is precisely the possible synergy between the various regions under study, which results in the possibility of comparisons and connections.

The intuition of this great publishing project was inspired and characterised the second half of the 20th century by stimulating it with new questions about the economy and the circulation of money, and in fact it promoted the emergence of various projects, as we heard yesterday. But is it still a workhorse? Perhaps a somewhat tired horse by now. Even the transition from book to digital is now overtaken by the emergence of new limits. Integrated databases have come into being, projecting towards other archaeological disciplines but still retaining strong disciplinary boundaries, or access limits in fruition or implementation, and in any case limits linked to the desire to claim and avow the tool to an individual or a small team. The direction is therefore certainly correct, but the progress of work seems too slow to favour the re-proposition of numismatics as a cutting-edge and strategic subject in the scientific and economic policies of the future tout court.

In 2011, Dr. Kemmers of Göthe University in Frankfurt and Dr. Myrberg of Stockholm University published an article in *Archaeological Dialogues* entitled “Rethinking numismatics”⁸: they suggest compatible approaches to the artefact category ‘coins’ as a source for so-called ‘little stories’, to be analysed from the perspective of historical archaeology and material culture studies, which rarely study ancient coins. The two scholars argue that the monetary function is an essential aspect of coinage, but not the only one. This article is important because it shows an attempt to identify the various fields of application of numismatic research outside of numismatics, in a holistic key if you will. In 2011, this article was certainly a big step forward but today it is no longer sufficient, however it remains a launch pad.

In conclusion, I am hypothesising the possibility of complementing scientific research with a greater focus on the contemporary world, its needs and interests. In

⁶ CARRARO 2014; CARRARO 2022a.

⁷ For project impacts in northern Italy see for example GORINI 1990; GORINI 1995; ARSLAN 2002; CALLEGHER, GORINI, 2004.

⁸ MEYBERG N., KLEMMERS F. 2011.

this way, it would be possible to envisage outputs that go beyond the digital database and represent a solution to cultural, social or economic problems highlighted in the present and specifically identified in target areas.

I want to give just one example: let us try for a moment to reason about ancient coinage with an eye to the contemporary world: current short- to medium-term economic strategies somehow declare the decline of the globalisation process and intend to strengthen local production systems in order to foresee a contraction of long-range trade, which, given the price increases linked to political conjunctures, become not only uneconomic, but also dangerous in terms of sustainability and continuity. This is a mechanism that history has already shown us and of which numismatists are well aware: could numismatics therefore help develop strategies and action plans?

Another important, perhaps unstoppable and certainly in some respects disturbing phenomenon is that represented by cryptocurrencies, in the context of which physical currency is no longer even envisaged. It was possible to foresee these aspects in Italy (here's an essential term: 'foreseen') in 2018 when the budget law introduced further tightening on the use of cash. Another theme that can be further implemented is that of the communicative power of currency (just think of the dinosaurs that have appeared on coins around the world on several occasions since the release of the film Jurassic Park at the turn of the last century), but one could go on and on with so many examples, each from his or her own country or personal experience. In closing, therefore, I would like to leave you with the hope that I have provided the stimulus to think about the prospects for the development of numismatic research *tout court* in an interpretative key that is not only current but even of support and foresight for future challenges.

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