TABLE OF CONTENTS - SOMMAIRE

LAW AND PRACTICE REGARDING COIN FINDS
Laws and Regulations on Coins and other Relics in China’s Past and Present, by Sven GÜNFTER and Shumeng LIU

NUMISMATIC COLLECTIONS
The coin collection of the American University of Beirut, by Jack NURPETLIAN

150 Years of the Münzkabinett Berlin. People – Coins – Medals, by Bernhard WEISSER

The numismatic collection of the University Library of Ghent, by Huguette TAYMANS

The numismatic collection of the University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil, by Viviana LO MONACO

OBITUARIES
Ino Nicolaou, by Demetrios MICHAELIDES, Evangéлина MARKOU & Michel AMANDRY

VARIA
Stellungnahme der Numismatischen Kommission der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e. V. zum Begriff „numismatischer Wert“ im Kulturgutschutzgesetz (KGSG), by Dietrich O.A. KLOSE & Bernhard WEISSER

The size of numismatic literature. II. Playing through time (c. 1800–2018) with DONUM (ANS), by François DE CALLATAÝ

MEETING OF THE INC
Meeting of the Committee (Berlin, March 11th–13th, 2018)

REPORTS 2018

ACCOUNTS OF THE INC

AUDITOR’S REPORT

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

MEMBERS
Institutional members
Honorary members
Especially from the 14th century, the European rulers demonstrated a great interest in old coins: in the beginning, the greatest demand was for imperial Roman coins and, in the 19th century, interest in Greek coins was aroused. This tradition served as a model for the formation of numismatic collections in Brazil, because, in the second half of the 19th century, the new ruling class of the country sought to emulate European elites and, somehow, legitimize their value as heirs. For this reason, the first numismatic collections were of Portuguese and Brazilian coins[1]. José Neves Bittencourt’s records show that in 1839 the medal collection of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro was the fastest growing section, thanks to donations and purchases of coins from all places and from all periods. The author justifies this interest in numismatics not only because of the artistic and technical value of the coins, but above all for their value as “small portable monument”[2]. Among the largest Brazilian numismatic public collections, I would like to mention the collection of the Museu Histórico of Rio de Janeiro, the Bernardo Ramos collection in Manaus, and the collection of the University of São Paulo. Worthy of note is also the small but still significant collection of the Paranaense Museum in Curitiba. Not to mention the many collections of banks and private collectors as like as: the ‘Herculano Pires Collection’ of Banco Itau in São Paulo; the collection of Banco do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro; the collection of Banco Safra in São Paulo[3]. Here I will talk about the numismatic collection of the University of São Paulo (Universidade de São Paulo – USP).

After a 25-year-long journey started in 1963, a statute of 1988 definitively regulated the integration of some specialized institutes and four museums: the Museu Paulista (MP), the Museu de Arte Contemporânea (MAC), the Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia (MAE) and the Museu de Zoologia (MZUSP). These institutes have academic autonomy and can offer post-graduation programs. They differ from University Departments in that they concentrate their activities in research on material culture and in the scientific care of the collec-

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tions, as well as carrying out educational activities and outreach programs. So, the Numismatic Collection of the University of São Paulo originates from the convergence of the collections of Museu Paulista and Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia. For this reason, the coins, even if now they belong to the same collection, have different inventory numbers.

![Fig. 1 – Museu Paulista (http://www.spbairros.com.br/museu-do-ipiranga/)](image)

The Museu Paulista (fig. 1), inaugurated in 1895, was designed by the Italian architect Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi\(^\text{[4]}\) in the neighborhood of Ipiranga, the place where in 1822 – according to the narrative – the independence of Brazil from Portugal was declared. The original assemblage of the Museu Paulista’s collection came from the ‘Sertório Collection’\(^\text{[5]}\), made up of different categories of objects collected without scientific criteria\(^\text{[6]}\). In 1894 this collection was moved to the new building in Ipiranga and classified. Among historical and naturalistic objects, there was a little sample of about one hundred coins. Over the years this initial little assemblage was enriched by donations and purchase of coins, medals and gold ingots\(^\text{[7]}\) (from 1901 to 1910, about 500 pieces have been added). In the same period, the original lot of ancient coins was formed thanks to the purchase of Júlio Ribeiro’s private collection and of a small set of forty-three Roman coins from the excavation of a Villa in São João da Pesqueira in the Douro region of Portugal\(^\text{[8]}\). From 1916, the Museu Paulista focused on the History of Brazil: the

\(^{[4]}\) Bezzi had also collected artworks, which were inherited by his daughter Vera and then purchased by MAE (see below).

\(^{[5]}\) Carvalho 2014.

\(^{[6]}\) Ribeiro 2015, p. 9.

\(^{[7]}\) Florenzano 2005, p. 52.

\(^{[8]}\) Ribeiro 2015, pp. 10–11.
'Girardet Collection', made up of eight medallions bearing the effigies of the Presidents of the Republic of Brazil, and a medal containing the Constitution of the Empire printed on parchment, in circular form, minted in 1824, were acquired. With the same focus in mind, in 1922, the philatelic collection was created through the purchase of five collections of official stamps from the 1913’s series. Later, commemorative stamps of the Centennial of Independence of Brazil were added. Donations continued to arrive, and in 1943 the Annual Report of the museum recorded 9,000 pieces in the numismatic collection, of which 2,500 were on display.

In 1946, when the museum was under the direction of Professor Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, renowned Brazilian historian, the collector Álvaro da Veiga Coimbra, who also taught Numismatic at the University of São Paulo, was hired to take care of the newly created Numismatic Cabinet in Museu Paulista. In 1947 the museum acquired the collection consisting of 310 Greek and Byzantine coins and, one year later, a Portuguese collection of 892 pieces, which included coins from the First Portuguese Dynasty period, from the 13th century. The number of medals in the collection increased through the donation of 30 medals from the French Renaissance by the Governor Lucas Nogueira Garcez and the purchase of 136 French medals. In the mid-1960s the museum received, as a donation from the Consulate of Spain, the series of medals called ‘Discoverers, Navigators and Spanish Founders in America’, consisting of 20 silver pieces.

When the Museu Paulista merged with the University of São Paulo, the collections from the museum were dismembered to give rise to collections from other museums and specialized institutions. Nowadays, the Numismatic Cabinet of the museum contains: more than 900 ancient coins, 4,000 Brazilian coins, 1,500 Portuguese coins and 5,000 foreign coins and medals from 67 different countries.

The Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia owes its creation and the formation of its first collection of ancient objects to Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, descendant of a rich Italian family residing in São Paulo, and to his very close collaboration with Italian institutions. In 1962, Matarazzo established in Resina the Fondazione Maria Raffaella Matarazzo in Caramiello-PrErcolelano. To allow the expansion of the archaeological excavations of ancient Herculaneum, several inhabitants had been expropriated from their residences and the aforementioned institution had the purpose of helping them. Matarazzo built an extensive network of contacts with the intellectual and archaeological circles, which gave him great advantages. In fact, he had the initiative to create a museum of Art and Archeology at Universidade de São Paulo and to make this project possible he called on several Italian and

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[10] Resina is the Medieval name of the city built on the ancient Herculaneum’s remains. The current name, Ercolano, was (re)adopted in 1969.
Brazilian personalities to collaborate. The first few items of the collection of the new museum were the result of an interchange of archaeological and ethnographic objects between Italian and Brazilian institutions[^11]. The first collection of the nascent *Museu de Arte e Antiguidades* (MAA) consisted of 536 archaeological objects from Italian museums and other public entities (especially *Soprintendenze Archeologiche*). Finally, in 1964, the new museum was inaugurated. In the following years, the initial Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology collection was enriched with the influx of Egyptian and Middle Eastern artifacts, with pre-Columbian and Brazilian archeological objects and with African and Afro-Brazilian ethnographic collections, by means of donations, acquisitions and loans for use[^12]. After a reform in 1970, the museum changed its name to *Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia*, known by everyone for its acronym: MAE.

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The numismatic collection at MAE (fig. 2) is made up of: 36 Greek and Punic coins\textsuperscript{[13]}; 36 Roman coins\textsuperscript{[14]}; 4 Parthian coins from the 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD (fig. 3); 2 Sasanian coin from the 6\textsuperscript{th} century; 1 ‘anonymous’ Byzantine follis (10\textsuperscript{th}–11\textsuperscript{th} century) (fig. 4); a Byzantine coin hoard made of 384 coins, from the 12\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{[15]}; 4 Arab coins from 13\textsuperscript{th} century; 2 coins of Hethum II, ruler of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (13\textsuperscript{th} century); 15 Brazilian coins from the emperor Don Pedro II (1831–1889) (fig. 5); 69 corroded coins.

MAE’s numismatic collection was established thanks to the interest of some of the professors who were called to form the museum’s first teaching staff: Professor Ulpiano T. Bezerra de Meneses and Professor Euripides Simões de Paula, who donated items of their personal collections, and Professor Haiganuch Serian, who entrusted her collection to the museum on loan for use. This assemblage grew with the addition of donations from the Museu Monográfico de Conimbriga, from the archaeologist and sociologist Professor Edgardo Pires Ferreira and from other private donors. In 1976, with a loan granted by the FAPES\textsuperscript{[16]} foundation, the 181 artifacts\textsuperscript{[17]} that made up the Bezzi Collection were purchased. In 1984, the most representative and best-preserved coins from this collection were exhibited and sixty of them were stolen in unclear circumstances. This unfortunate event reduced significantly the volume of the MAE numismatic collection.

Since 1976, Maria Beatriz Borba Florenzano, professor of Classical Archeology at the MAE, is the scientific director of the numismatic collection of

\textsuperscript{[13]} Studied by Professor Florenzano and Professor Maria Cristina Kormikiari. Coins were classified and organized in a catalogue, of which a forthcoming publication is expected.

\textsuperscript{[14]} Florenzano et alii 2015.

\textsuperscript{[15]} Hackens 1965.

\textsuperscript{[16]} Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (Foundation for Research Support of the State of São Paulo) is an agency linked to the Secretariat of Economic Development, Science, Technology and Innovation of the Government of the State of São Paulo.

\textsuperscript{[17]} They are mostly Greek pottery and terracotta, fragments of bronze and marble statues from the Greek and Roman eras and oil lamps dating from the Hellenistic period to the proto-Christian period.
the USP. She was responsible for the identification and cataloging, as well as for the photographic documentation of all coins. The poor state of conservation of many specimens had significantly affected the reading of the monetary types; in these cases, the photographs were taken from plaster casts. Part of classical coins from USP’s collection was included in the international project *LIMC* (*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*), which contains “data relating to ancient Greek, Roman and Etruscan documents bearing a mythological or religious representation”[18]. Ancient coins of the USP’s collection were also exhibited in several occasions, not only in Brazil, but also abroad[19].

The *Museu Paulista* and the MAE are constantly working to take care of their collections and to divulgate knowledge through them. Also, they collaborate actively with schools and educational institutions. In this context, the Numismatic Collection of the University of São Paulo today is certainly a precious heritage, but also a dynamic instrument to allow people to connect with the past, unavoidable step to understand our present.

**Bibliographical references**


