

“Prestige and wealth *ex Oriente*: coins as jewelry in Central Asia (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC - 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD) and its relevance to the South Asian phenomenon – case study of archives and collections of St. Petersburg, Russia”

### **INC Travel Grant Report (2017/18)**



Thanks to the travel grant received from the International Numismatic Council I was able to spend a period of three weeks (January 21<sup>st</sup> – February 10<sup>th</sup> 2018) in St. Petersburg as a visiting researcher in the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences. During my stay I was working on the project “Prestige and wealth *ex Oriente*: coins as jewelry in Central Asia (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC - 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD) and its relevance to the South Asian phenomenon – case study of archives and collections of St. Petersburg, Russia”. This research project is focused on one of the non-economic functions ancient Central Asian coins might have assumed, serving as objects of prestige, decoration, amulets, and honorary gifts. Its purpose was to obtain a better understanding how, when, and which of the societies inhabiting ancient Central Asia were reusing coins in the form of jewelry, ornaments and amulets. Another aim of this project was to determine whether this practice was connected with the South Asian phenomenon of adapting and reusing coins and its imitations as decorations. Such a choice of research subject is influenced by my interest in the non-economic functions of Roman coins in Central and South Asia. It enabled me to collect data that I could use in further comparative studies, and provided a better understanding of the different functions of coins, and the tradition of reusing them as jewelry in ancient Central Asia.

I was warmly received by the St. Petersburg academic community, which was welcoming and supportive. During my stay I was doing research mainly in the Numismatic Department of the Hermitage Museum, and in the library and archives of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences. During my visits in the Numismatic Department, HM, I met Vera Guruleva and Konstantin Kravtsov, and had the opportunity to discuss with them my research problems. Vera Guruleva, the Curator of Roman and Byzantine coins, specializing in the secondary use of Byzantine coins among others, showed me the collection of gold Roman specimens, among which I have recognized one locally made imitation of Roman coin from India, which I could include in my dataset. She also allowed me to study Sogdian “bracteates”, imitating Roman coins which, until then, were known to me only from the scientific publications. Konstantin Kravtsov, the Head of the

Section of Ancient and Oriental Numismatics, and the Curator of Kushan coins was also very kind, and allowed me to investigate Kushan coins, among which there are some examples of gold plated, pierced or looped specimens. He also shared with me his knowledge on the imitations of Kushan coins, that have been used as jewelry, providing me with relevant references to the Russian-language scientific papers on the subject.

During my research in the library of the Institute for the History of the Material Culture I was able to study its huge collection of publications on the archaeology of Central Asia, which are inaccessible in Poland. They include many valuable information and records of coin finds from Central Asia, that have been archaeologically excavated. Therefore, such a study provided me with data with known archaeological context, enabling more precise dating of certain practices, as well as the reconstruction of social context in which those coins were reused, changed its function and symbolic meaning. The library staff was extremely helpful, providing me with many advices and suggestions.

Another important part of my stay was the research undertaken in the archives of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, housed in the Institute. The Commission was set up during the reign of Tsar Alexander II and its main objectives were to gather data on all kinds of antiquities on the territory of the Russian Empire and to assess their importance. Therefore, those archives include much valuable information and records of coin finds from Central Asia among others. During my stay I got



acquainted with them, getting familiar not only with the ways they are classified, but I also learned how coins were recorded and how the procedure of its acquisition looked like. I was also able to assess the potential of those archival data for my future research, which is very promising. I also chose a couple of examples from the Samarkand Oblast of the finds of I-II c. AD coins for case studies.

*Me in the library.*

During my stay I also gave a lecture to the researchers, from the Institute, presenting the preliminary results of my research, entitled “Престиж и богатство с Востока: монеты как украшения в Центральной Азии III в. до н.э. – IV в. н.э. в связи с феноменом цивилизации Южной Азии”, which was very positively received. I am very grateful to the them for their keen interested in my scholarship and many interesting questions. I also had the opportunity to present the next International Numismatic Congress, Warsaw 2021, and to invite Russian colleagues to attend this meeting.



*Me, before and in the middle of presentation.*

Last but not least, I visited the great exhibitions in the Hermitage Museum presenting many artefacts from ancient Central Asia and Xinjiang province, such as the bracelet made of Kushan gold coins found in Khotan, from the Nikolai Petrovsky's collection. Also the coin exhibition contains many examples of secondary use of coins from different parts of the ancient world.

To sum up, my research visit in St. Petersburg was of great importance for my scholarly investigations and analysis, and all the objectives proposed in my applications were fulfilled. The results of my research will be presented during the seminar in the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University, and, if my paper is accepted and published, during the 24th Conference of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology and Art, Naples 2018. I am also going to make use of it while working on my post-doctoral project on the non-economic functions of Roman coins in India. I also expanded my professional network, having multiple fruitful discussions with new colleagues I hope to stay in touch and collaborate with in the future.

I would also like to mention, that I very much appreciate the support of Dr. hab. Aleksandr Musin who supervised my stay for all his help, important information and instructions he provided me with, and for putting me in touch with other experts in the field of numismatics and archaeology, such as Vera Guruleva and Konstantin Kravtsov from the State Hermitage Museum, and Valery Nikonorov from the Russian Academy of Sciences among others. I also would like to thank other scholars from the Institute, as well as library and archive staff who I met during my stay for their friendly welcome and help in my research. Clearly, without the support of the INC travel grant my visit would not have been possible, which means that I would have missed out on a very valuable experience that has been very beneficial for my further research. I am most grateful to the International Numismatic Council for that.



*Me, Dr. A. Musin (on the left) and A. Romanowski in the library of the Institute.*

Yours sincerely,

Emilia Smagur

Warsaw, 26.02.2018