

THE PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY NUMISMATIC COLLECTION

History

Princeton's coin collection goes back at least to 1849, when alumni donated to the University (until 1896 incorporated as the College of New Jersey), over 5000 sulfur casts of Greek and Roman coins. These had originally been assembled for Lord Vernon by the Roman artisan Antonio Odelli, better known as a gem engraver; his sources, predictably, seem to have been Italian collections. Princeton still retains the Odelli casts, in their original wooden trays, and the university's friends and alumni have continued to be major contributors to the collection.

Early records for coin acquisitions are lacking, but they surely all came as donations: the first large groups of classical coins to be given were the personal collections of Moses Taylor Pyne, Class of 1877, and of Eugene C. Pomeroy, Class of 1906. After 1873 the collection was kept in Chancellor Green Library, the University's first purpose-built library, until its transfer in 1948 to the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the newly constructed Firestone Library. By this time the Art Museum, where some Library coins had previously been on display, had received the donation of Dan Fellows Platt, Class of 1895, later augmented by the 1968 bequest of Professor Ernest DeWald. The Museum retains these two groups of classical and Byzantine coins, with occasional acquisitions, but the Library collection has always been the larger and more active one. It regularly acquires coins by gift and purchase, with significant accessions annually reported in the *Princeton University Library Chronicle* (henceforth *PULC*); and it offers periodically changing small displays, often coordinated with the larger exhibitions of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. In addition it has mounted three major numismatic exhibits since 1988: "Rome and Her Enemies," an augmented version of the Munich Staatssammlung's travelling exhibition "Rom und die Germanen" (1988: see *PULC* XLIX, 1988, pp.293-5); "From Croesus to Constantine" (October 1992-March 1993: *PULC* LIV, 1993, pp.293-5); "Money: Whence it Came, Where It's Going" (1997).

The first recorded curator, from the 1920s to 1940, was Shirley Weber, Professor in the Department of Classics. Weber arranged for the creation of a photographic record of the first 4,110 coins in the collection – unfortunately without text, but still useful today. From 1942 to 1967 the curator (honorary) was Louis C. West, who was also President of The American Numismatic Society. During West's tenure at Princeton the contents of the collection more than tripled, and its classical, Byzantine, western medieval and American coins were disposed in convenient steel trays like those used at the ANS. Under him, too, a fund for the purchase of numismatic materials – books and coins – was established with the sale of duplicates from the donated coin collection (chiefly American) of Charles Cass, Class of 1902.

West's teaching introduced many Princeton graduate students to numismatic methodology.

From 1967 until July 2004, the collection's curator was Brooks E. Levy, who with the collaboration of Pierre Bastien produced the first volume of a catalog of the Library's collection of Roman coins. In 2003 a new fund for the advancement of numismatics at the University was created, through the generosity of Cornelius C. Vermeule III. Named the Townsend-Vermeule Fund, and augmenting an earlier donation of funds for coin purchase, it honors Dr. Vermeule's wife, the late Emily Townsend Vermeule (Princeton LHD 1989). Since September 2004, the curator has been Alan M. Stahl. Among his plans for the strengthening of the collection is the acquisition of coins of the medieval Mediterranean, especially those that illustrate the interaction among European, Byzantine and Islamic monetary systems. A high priority for the department is the cataloguing of all of the collection on an online database, with descriptions and photos of all coins and medals available over the internet. Included in the database will be coins from the Art Museum as well as the Library collection, and also the coins from the Antioch excavations, with site find information that will allow them to be mapped electronically and to be associated with artifacts and photographs from the excavation.

Contents

Greek: The collection contains over 3000 Greek-inscribed coins of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, as well as the "pseudo-autonomous" coins issued by Greek cities under the Roman Empire; coins issued by Greek cities in the names of Roman emperors are housed with the Roman material. The most notable single group consists of 314 silver staters and fractions of Tarentum, the gift of Baldwin Maull, Class of 1924; 122 of these are described in W. Fischer-Bossert's *Chronologie der Didrachmenprägung von Tarent* (Berlin/London, 1999). Mark and Lottie Salton in 1996 and 1998 offered 367 Greek and Roman coins, filling many gaps in the collection (see *PULC* LVIII, 1997, pp. 596-601; LX, 1999, pp. 119-22). In 2000 the Library's Bactrian holdings, previously negligible, were augmented by a gift of 15 tetradrachms from Cornelius C. Vermeule III.

Roman: The Roman collection, which includes the "Greek imperials," contains ca. 6000 coins, 650 of which are Republican. There is a considerable holding in the coinage of Roman Corinth, the 1976 gift of Professor Leslie Shear Jr. and the late Ione Shear; about 100 of these are recorded in M. Amandry, *Le monnayage des duovirs corinthiens* (Paris, 1988). Coins from the Republic through Commodus have been published by B.E. Levy and P.C.V. Bastien, *Roman Coins in the Princeton University Library* I (Wetteren, 1985).

Byzantine: over 500 coins in gold, silver, bronze. Some have been described,



*Ptolemaic Egypt, Ptolemy VI, 163-145 BCE,
gold octadrachm of Arsinoe, Kition (Cyprus) mint,
acquired with funds from the Townsend-Vermeule Fund, 2002.*



*Byzantium, Anastasius, pre-reform, 498-507, bronze 20 nummi,
Constantinople, Antioch excavations, 1939.*



*Augustin Dupré, Diplomatic Medal, c. 1792,
bronze striking from original dies, gift of Cornelius C. Vermeule III, 2003.
[actual diameter 68 mm]*

together with examples in the Princeton University Art Museum, in S. Curcic and A. St. Clair, eds., *Byzantium at Princeton* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 97-107. The purchase in 2005 of 27 gold and silver coins, chiefly of the Thessalonica mint, was made possible by funds from the Princeton University Program in Hellenic Studies with the support of the Stanley J. Seeger Hellenic Fund.

Western medieval: ca. 360 coins. The largest holdings are in coins of the Italian states (82), England (56), France (52). Included are 87 coins donated in 2005 by Brooks Levy in honor of the appointment of Alan Stahl as her successor.

Pre-modern Islamic: ca. 300 coins. A collection of similar size of the Department of Near Eastern Studies will be included in the online database.

Pre-modern South East Asian, Far Eastern: A considerable collection of Chinese coins, gifts of O. A. Holzer and of F.J. Tooker, Class of 1894.

Modern world coins and tokens: a very large collection, but generally of minor value and research interest.

United States, including Colonial: about 2000 pieces of varied quality; 200 are Colonial, chiefly the New Jersey and the William Wood “Rosa Americana” series. Notable are donations by C.A. Cass, Jr., and Dean Mathey.

Medals: These now number over 2000. They consist of 4 separately catalogued collections, 2 organized by theme (Aviation, World War I), the rest miscellaneous. (1) Aviation: over 770 pieces on subjects from ballooning to space travel, given by Arthur L. Newman, Class of 1923. Newman’s catalog is available online: http://libweb.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/aids_old/newman; see too *PULC* LXIV, 2003, pp. 363-72. (2) World War I: *ca.* 240 medals, the gifts chiefly of W.D. O’Gorman, Mrs. H.L. Savage with Mrs. Joseph Townsend, and H. Kenaston Twitchell. (3) The Cornelius C. Vermeule III gift of over 450 miscellaneous medals, ranging from Renaissance to modern American; they largely reflect materials used for the donor’s books *Medals to Masters* (Boston, n.d.), and *Numismismatic Art in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), but include a large group, over 100 pieces, on canine themes. (4) *Ca.* 700 miscellaneous medals of varied provenance.

Paper Currency and Financial Instruments: There are very good collections of U.S. Colonial/Continental and Confederate currency, chiefly the gifts of C.A. Cass and of André de Coppet, Class of 1915. There are small holdings in U.S. Broken Bank currency and non-U.S. paper, but with a notable gift of Chinese and Russian 20th-century issues from Professor W.W. Lockwood, and collections of German World War I currency and postwar “Notgeld” from several alumni donors.

With the collection proper should be mentioned two important associated holdings: (1) Its foundation piece, over 5,000 sulfur casts of classical coins made by A. Odelli (see above, "History"). (2) The *ca.* 30,000 Greek, Roman, and Byzantine coins excavated before 1939 at Syrian Antioch. Included are strong representations of local issues in the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and Crusader series. These are kept with their original envelopes, which contain detailed information on find context. The bulk of the coins were catalogued by D.B. Waage, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* IV.2: *Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Crusaders' Coins* (Princeton/London/The Hague, 1952). The Arab-Byzantine and Islamic coins from the Antioch excavations are inventoried in a card file begun by George Miles (and see G.C. Miles, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* 4.1, 1948), with further attributions by Harry Bone and Tasha Vorderstrasse.

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