



VOLUME 5



JOURNAL OF THE
NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION

OF AUSTRALIA.

<http://naa-online.com>

NUMISMATIC LITERATURE

BY C. E. PITCHFORK

Coin Collecting differs from most other hobbies in the diversity and intensity of the interests which it instills in its followers. The acquisition of a coin, token, medal etc., regardless of its intrinsic value, impels its owner to familiarize himself with the piece and the social and economic history of the country and period to which it pertains. Therein lies the key to the relationship between the hobby and literature. Books and its related sister publications (catalogues, lists and journals) are so inseparable that even the advanced collector cannot in truth be called a "numismatist" unless he combines the art of collecting with the exploration of the printed words which hold the romances and secrets of the individual pieces in his collection. It has been said that the importance of books to the numismatist is clearly indicated by his reluctance to part with them; a collector may dispose of his coins, some or all, in his lifetime, but the books are sold by his executor. So many libraries of great numismatists appear only on the market following the death of their previous owner. In this regard throughout the world regular auction sales are held for such libraries and in numismatic books in general. A significant number of dealers exist essentially from the trading in numismatic literature.

Numismatics, often considered as a leisurely pastime, a delightful hobby, or a profitable enterprise, is in fact a very exacting science. Encompassing world history from the time of the ancients to the present day, it concentrates on money, one of the determining factors in the evolution of world history.

Coins and History are closely related; to collect coins without trying to explain their historical background is a senseless enterprise. To assist collectors, scholars, numismatists and dealers there has evolved over the last 500 years a collection of writings and catalogues that has taken the then known knowledge and by scientific, historical, archaeological and epigraphical evidence developed it to a point of today's knowledge of numismatics. To the many writings of the past each month adds a considerable number of new publications.

This volume of knowledge is very extensive, and for almost all, except the most experienced numismatist, difficult to have a comprehensive grasp of the right selection of reference material to catalogue or identify a particular coin.

Over three hundred years ago the need was already felt for a guide to the interested numismatist of the then known publications on hand to consult. In 1644 Philippe Labbe printed in Paris his *Bibliotheca nummaria* in two parts. It soon found interest in Germany where Burcard Gotthelf Struve published in Jena his *Bibliotheca numismatum antiquiorum*. In 1760 another German by the name of Hirsch (a famous numismatic name in the 20th century), presented the numismatic reader with a better and considerably larger work called, *Bibliotheca numismatica*. The constantly increasing number of scientific papers on coins and medals during the past two hundred years discouraged any further attempts to give a general conspectus of numismatic publications, leaving the field open to specialized or selected bibliographies. Lipsius in 1801 printed a good catalogue of publications printed before 1800. This was followed up by J. Leitzmann who published as a supplement those books published between 1800 and 1866. The reprint of these two books was made in 1977 and is 60 mms thick and 750 pages in length. It came provided with a keyword and subject-place index that allows the interested person to find the most appropriate book, but not necessarily the only books printed to then. In the 20th century the vast increase in publications has meant the requirement of selected bibliographies being published. A few general listings have also been produced and include:

1. Grierson P. "*Coins and Medals, a Selected Bibliography*" London 1954.
2. Grierson P. "*Bibliographie numismatique*" (revised edn of above) Brussels 1966.
3. Clain-Stefanelli E.E. "*Select Numismatic Bibliography*" Washington D.C., 1965.
4. Clain Stefanelli E.E. "*Numismatic Bibliography*" Munchen 1984 (this publication has 1848 pages, 18,311 entries and com-

prehensive indexes. It is by far the best general numismatic bibliographical publication available today.)

Many others of either a specific subject or general nature have also been published and Clain Stefanelli lists throughout her publication many hundreds of such works.

The advanced collector, fast becoming a numismatist should consult, after having decided on the direction of his collecting enthusiasm, Clain Stefanelli book on "*Numismatic Bibliography*" to determine the principal works including auction catalogues that encompass the series of interest. If he is searching for information then access to the 9 volumes of "*The American Numismatic Society, Dictionary Catalogue of the Library*" would indicate what has been published on that topic and exists in what is probably the largest numismatic library in the world. They also publish at least two volumes annually called "*Numismatic Literature*" (last issue No. 118), which indicates the recent articles not previously listed on all numismatic topics. Not least in this area of important sources of information is by looking through the numismatic literature publications concentrating on a specific subject, country or series. Many specialists texts have excellent bibliographies in the publication, either appearing as a separate chapter or by the extensive use of footnotes.

A new collector should buy the main publications prior to buying the coin, although most of us have probably acquired the coin and then chased around trying to find out what has been published on it. The books as they are steadily acquired become in their own right a passion that requires in most cases more effort than the coin in acquiring. Many scarce books rarely come on the market (and when they do then generally at some enormous price), whereby explaining the post war phenomenon of books long out of print being reprinted mostly as an inferior copy to that of the original (particularly in regards to the plates). Most great published Greek collections have been reprinted and in all cases of a quality not like the original editions (eg.

BMC, Weber, Hunterian Collection, McLean, SNG Copenhagen & Von Aulock, Jameson). This phenomenon has also extended to famous Auction sales where catalogues have had a new edition printed many years after that sale (eg. Pozzi, Consul Weber, Ratto, Franz Trau). The net effect is that although the reprint is better than no work the fine detail of the plates of the original are lost. Naturally the price of the original set is rarely affected by the appearance of the reprint.

My own library began as a general numismatic library with regular purchases of books and sometimes catalogues and lists, but most came on a regular subscription basis from that company, society or dealer. With the purchase of two important Australian libraries in the early 1970's came the need to start to rationalize my numismatic literature needs. Subsequent heavy purchases from dealers and other collectors has increased the quantity of the library to about 180 metres of shelf space.

In recent years I felt that I required a catalogue of this library (a task attempted some years ago with cards, of a type usually held in most libraries but never completed), but recently with the aquisition of a computer I have completed the simplified listing of my holdings of catalogues, lists and journals. This listing runs to 67 pages and provides the basic information I need to know: eg. Auction House, the number and/or date of sale, do I have a price realized list, where it is located in what book case and shelf (with 40 book-cases with up to 12 shelves a necessary piece of information), their value, and the subject content in broad terms for the catalogues issued by that auction house. The book produced as a printout of these holdings, can be regularly updated because of the automatic date code entry and reprints to only those areas where a change of information has taken place resulting in a supplement being produced as desired.

The value of this information is that the catalogue so produced details the current holdings and by inference the missing numbers or what I am missing in my library.