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**5th Simone Assemani
Symposium
on Islamic coins**

Rome, 29-30 September 2017

**Edited by
Bruno Callegher and
Arianna D'Ottone Rambach**

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PREFACE

The fifth *Simone Assemani Symposium on Islamic coins* was held in Rome on 29-30 September 2017 (cf. programme): a happy and necessary return to the city where our eponym spent his youth, between family and the Maronite College¹ before leaving for Lebanon, the Assemani homeland.

At Rome, on 23 and 24 September 2011, in collaboration with “Sapienza” University of Rome – Italian Institute of Oriental Studies, the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste and the Vatican Library, there was a meeting of scholars of Islamic coins, their origins and growth over the centuries. This enriched the research, certainly with innovative methodology, on the coins of the Umayyad and Sasanian era, sigillography and on historical-epigraphic topics, especially in numismatics². The positive reception of both the initiative and the volume of the Proceedings suggested continuing these meetings: three meetings were in their own way pioneering but they also consolidated a system of relationships not to be dropped. Thus the 4th Symposium, which was held in Trieste on 25-27 September 2014, tackled mainly the history of studies on Islamic coins especially in its perspective as a discipline set within the vast ambits of Orientalism. Instead, as regards Simone Assemani (SA), the discovery was of great importance of documents and papers referring to unexplored years of his human *peregrinatio*, i.e. his prolonged stay in Trieste, employed in translations and management activities at a merchant company, before moving to Venice to work with Giacomo Nani³.

¹ P. RAPHAËL, *Le rôle du Collège maronite romain dans l'orientalisme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Beyrouth 1950, 142-144.

² B. CALLEGHER & A. D'OTTONE, *The 3rd Simone Assemani Symposium on Islamic Coins*, Trieste 2012.

³ The numerous contributions can be found in B. CALLEGHER & A. D'OTTONE RAMBACH, *4th Simone Assemani Symposium on Islamic Coins*, Trieste 2015.

The Rome Symposium, the 5th, confirmed that these meetings have become a keenly awaited get-together; they cannot yet be defined as traditional, but they have inspired something, perhaps more than something, in a rather difficult sector of studies because it entails a command of the Arab language and its multiple paleography or the access to archives in which for the same reason letters, manuscripts, reports of scholars of the 18th or 19th centuries, at the dawn of these researches, are not easily traced. There was full awareness of this in the organizing of the Rome meeting. We opted to continue the direct confrontation, not mediated, on various genres of these studies: to meet again to personally listen to studies, research, questions for debate. To the by now traditional division in two sessions (researches on SA & Islamic numismatics), two other events were added. These may be defined in a graphic way, the first as “resistance to marginality”, the second as “a good result”.

The programme-invitation folder allows a reassessment of what took place during the meeting, not so much as a chronicle but rather the motivations. Daniela Porro, Director of the National Roman Museum, who hosted us in her prestigious rooms where the famed numismatic collection of King Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy is also held, inaugurated the symposium and indicated its potentials. The hope was promptly confirmed in the contributions on unpublished aspects of the biography and studies of SA. No less pertinent were the papers on the numismatic documentation from digs in archaeological sites in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Uzbekistan, Poland, on the plains of western Russia and in Georgia, Sicily or Spain.

The numismatic documentation should be the outcome of recent archaeological investigations but also of archaeology “in the archives”, i.e. of recoveries at Museums in which Islamic money had been neglected. Some colleagues proposed revisions on the metrology of the dinar or mancuso. From diverse points of view the various contributions harmonized with the unifying subject proposed in the call for papers: Islamic money in the archaeological contexts, problems, methods, documentary value for the economic history from the Umayyad period to the Mamluks. Indeed, if within the ambits of Greek-Roman and Byzantine numismatics, the analysis of money finds in archaeological contexts (single finds & hoards) had consolidated a methodology aimed at interpretation of the data in order to define areas of money circulation, contribution of the various mints, the currency stock, exchange rates and even reflections on the units of account long in use in the registrations of debits and credits in the ancient or early medieval world, this was not the case for the finds of Islamic money in archaeological digs. The possible expansion of those methods had therefore to be discussed and any incongruities due to the differences in studying the money and a partial knowledge of the many and in part unpublished Arab language sources.

The need for a constructive comparison with ancient numismatics, especially in the reconstruction of its growth over the centuries, was brought to the attention of

the attendees in the second session of the first day, when the project “Fontes Inediti Numismaticae Orientalis”, acronym FINO, was presented. It should be said that it is considered complementary to the preceding and well-known FINA “Fontes Inediti Numismaticae Antiquae”⁴, in which Islamic money was not considered as ancient – and it certainly is not if with the term “ancient” a line of geographical/chronological demarcation is drawn between the Greek-Roman world and Islamic-eastern world. The opening of a line of research on the history of collecting and studies of Islamic numismatics should strive for an interdisciplinary approach beyond merely classificatory aspects and at the same time a sort of resistance to the danger of considering the numismatics of the Islamic world⁵ as secondary, marginal, with respect to the money of the “classical” world, which has up to now been better known and appreciated thanks to knowledge of the ancient languages: Greek and Latin. The confirmation of an undeclared inter-disciplinarity appears, however, in these proceedings, in the paper *The Nani Collection of Arabic Coins through unpublished documents & drawings by Jean François Champollion (1790-1832)*. Not dissimilar to what emerged from a sort of mini meeting hosted at the 4th session of the Symposium. Volume 35 of the *Materiali on line* of the *Collezione di Vittorio Emanuele II. Monete Arabe* by Arianna D’Ottone Rambach was illustrated, edited by Gabriella Angeli Bufalini in charge of the National Medal Collection and the editorial project of the national numismatic heritage. Daniela Porro, Domenico Tudini, Vittorio Barbato for the technical-administrative part of the project, Annliese Nef and Andrea Saccocci for the scientific part, discussed the necessary synergy in numismatic ambits tout-court because new research, and therefore new results can be identified in documentation wrongly considered as of minor importance.

Five sessions of contributions, therefore, distributed over slightly less than two intense days, made possible by the generous collaboration of many that are mentioned here with gratitude: The National Roman Museum (*Palazzo Massimo*) and the University of Rome for the logistical hospitality, the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste, Numismatica Genevensis s.a., the professional Italian numismatists, Nadia Jazbar & Giulio Bernardi for their respective financial contributions. The support of the International Numismatic Council, the Italian Numismatic

⁴ F. de Callataÿ, « Fontes Inediti Numismaticae Antiquae »: *présentation succincte d’un nouveau projet antiquaire* », *Anabases* 23 (2016), 163-168 ; <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/antike/forschung/documenta-antiqua/numismatik/fontes-inediti-numismaticae-antiquae-fina/>

⁵ For the vastness of the research in this sector of numismatic studies, the two latest surveys are sufficient: L. ILISCH, *Islamic Numismatics (North Africa to Central Asia)*, in *A Survey of Numismatic Research 2002-2007*, M. AMANDRY, D. BATESON eds., Glasgow 2009, pp. 479-504, in part. 479-480; S. Heidemann, Alberto Canto & V. Nastich in collaboration with Simon Gundelinger, Islamic Section: The Mediterranean, Western Eurasia, Central Asia and Later South Asia, in Carmen Arnold-Biucchi et al. (eds.), *Survey of Numismatic Research 2008-2013*, Roma 2015, 531-592.

Society, the University of Trieste Publishers, the Oriental Numismatic Society, the Société Française de Numismatique, the Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, the Italian Institute of Numismatics, the State Mint and Polygraphic Institute and the Sistema Modus is appreciated and influential.

When, at the “Sapienza” – Italian Institute of Oriental Studies, our 5th Assemani Symposium concluded on Saturday 30 September, as always much later than the planned time, whilst saying our goodbyes, the common sentiment was that we had worked intensely, at a good pace, that we had listened and discussed in a fruitful way. As already written in the Proceedings of the 4th Assemani Symposium, organizing these periodic meetings, for myself and I am sure also for Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, is not a major effort. We are convinced that it is indispensable to meet regularly, also to overcome the anonymity of on-line communication/discussion. All of this is taken into account in this volume that is published in both paper and digital format (in the latter with an appendix of photographs edited by Vanja Macovaz). It includes almost all the papers given; some have been added during delays in the publication, while others do not appear by express wish of the individual scholars. Not everything in these papers will be agreed with, but what is proposed will advance our research also thanks to the different positions and criticisms that are bound to emerge. In any case it will be the reason to continue our meetings, with a regularity motivated by the desire to know the economics of the Islamic world through its money, diffusion, the documents that refer to it, but also the biographical doings of those scholars who over the last two centuries initiated and then enlivened this sector of studies.

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