

Federica Missere Fontana. *Testimoni parlanti: Le monete antiche a Roma tra Cinquecento e Seicento.*

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Well known for her many articles on Enea Vico and other Renaissance numismatists, Federica Missere Fontana here provides us with an account of the period immediately following the activity of these pioneer coin-collectors, the century extending from the 1590s to about 1700. This was an age of transition for numismatics, during which an activity marked by fanciful interpretation and

enthusiastic but chaotic acquisition evolved into a well-established auxiliary science befitting the historians of the Enlightenment, with its own recognized methodology and trustworthy canon of types and specimens. *Testimoni parlanti* demonstrates that this evolution was neither straightforward nor inevitable, but the result of an agonistic process involving enormous labors on the part of collectors, dealers, and scholars. During the seventeenth century the fledgling science of numismatics remained in danger of falling into disuse or disrepute on account of the problem of distinguishing genuine coins from modern forgeries, and suffered the attacks of Counter-Reformation zealots who suspected the collectors of pagan sympathies, as well as critics mocking their discipline as pedantic trivia.

The author's method is to examine in depth and in chronological order a number of texts from this period associated with the humanistic circles of Rome, beginning with the ambit of Fulvio Orsini and the Cardinals Farnese, and ending with the work of Ezechiel Spanheim at the expatriate court of Queen Christina of Sweden. Some of these texts are available only in manuscript form in Italian collections, and thus virtually unknown to most researchers in this field.

The first chapter focuses on the *Dialogos de medallas* of Archbishop Antonio Agustín, published in Spanish in 1587, and reissued in two Italian versions printed in Rome in 1592. In a close reading of the two translations Missere Fontana reveals the fine awareness of the editors toward the new vigilance of the Counter-Reformation, such as the removal of a mention of Erasmus from Agustín's original text. Both Italian versions can be viewed as part of a project by Roman antiquarians to shield the science of numismatics from any suspicion of dangerous nostalgia for the pagan past by associating it with an author whose orthodoxy and piety were beyond question, and revealing its usefulness in shedding light on early Christian history.

A manuscript of drawings of 1500 ancient coins in the Biblioteca Civica of Verona, attributed to the Roman antiquarian Lodovico Compagni (d. 1637), reveals in its annotations the constant struggle of Seicento numismatists to separate authentic coins from the products of modern forgers, who were becoming increasingly clever in imitating the style and imagery of antiquity. This was also a concern of Francesco Gottifredi (1596–1669), whose 600 letters offering advice to fellow collectors are preserved in the Biblioteca Oliveriano of Pesaro. For verification these scholars developed the principles of *autopsia*, the personal examination of a specimen, and the necessity of a long apprenticeship in handling large numbers of coins, *la scuola delle esperienze*, which will train a numismatist to detect slight anomalies that a false piece might reveal only to the most practiced eye.

A volume of Adolf Occo's important checklist of Roman imperial money, the *Impp. Romanorum numismata* of 1579, now in the University Library at Bologna, is notable for containing extensive annotations by four distinguished numismatists who owned it in succession: Dionigi Ottaviano Sada, Lodovico Compagni, Leonardo Agostini, and Giovan Pietro Bellori. Their concern with correcting and updating the material originally gathered by Occo reveals a third principle, along with *autopsia* and the *scuola delle esperienze*, which the Seicento numismatists bequeathed to their colleagues of the Enlightenment: the necessity of *risrittura*, of

constantly rewriting and supplementing the older texts to keep the science of numismatics alive and relevant to the concerns of contemporary collectors and scholars. The authority of the older masters must undergo continuous refreshment: only in this way can the ancient coins be trusted as *testimoni parlanti*, speaking witnesses for a vanished past. The concept of coins as *testimoni* originates with Enea Vico, the Renaissance pioneer whose 1555 *Discorsi sopra le medaglie* extolled the nobility and utility of numismatics. Updated and modernized for a new generation of scientific researchers, Vico's arguments entered the Enlightenment in the form of Ezechiel Spanheim's *Dissertatio de praestantia et usu numismatum* of 1664.

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