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NOMISMATA PROJECT – NOT YOUR USUAL (AND DÉJÀ VU) DATABASE!

As an assistant professor at the University of Siena with research interests in maritime and landscape archaeology from Classical antiquity to later periods, I am glad to share my positive and insightful experience with the NOMISMATA project and its database. Prior to this, I worked as research fellow at University of Haifa and I conducted research on various inscriptions and finds from the Ma‘agan Mikhael B shipwreck. During this work, I explored and then used the NOMISMATA database to improve my research on coins and finds from the Byzantine period, especially for comparative and qualitative analyses. When dealing with this database, I noticed the importance of such accessible and well-developed instrument in supporting my work and fostering much deeper my engagement with such a complex subject. I also found this instrument particularly straightforward and supportive, and this led me to explore more deeply this dataset and to get acquainted with this subject too.

Having said this, coins from the Byzantine world have been a major subject in numismatic scholarship for decades. A long series of historical and numismatic research concerning coins iconography, economy, mints, and materials have been conducted and published by generations of international scholars. One of the key aspects of these fascinating finds that have vast audience among specialized scholars and non-experts too is their geographical distribution and chronological reference. This is exactly one of the lacunae that this very high-profile project and related innovative database successfully cover. The project aims to shed new light on over 5,000 finds and more than 210,000 coins from the Byzantine period (AD 498–1453), scattered across three continents, from Europe, Africa, to Asia (specifically, North and Continental Europe, Near and Far East, and the whole North Africa), as well as to elucidate their value as key reference for the study of social, political, and economical dynamics. Thus, the project fully explores the rich body of Byzantine coins and finds by focusing on a large and coherent dataset made of multiple chronological and geographical references, which are divided into a series of well-organized and fully developed thematic sections.

The project database includes a vast set of details and information on hoards, excavation finds, field deposits, but also on museum and archival collections worldwide, from various areas and former regions of the Byzantine world (and beyond). It provides a full dataset of references on monetary politics, currencies, mints roles, circulation patterns and dissemination models. By doing so, the database forms a high-value digital and open access instrument. It locates and documents the geography and chronology of Byzantine coin finds as result of archaeological fieldwork and also examines the evolution of Byzantine monetary system and their relations with other currencies, as well as mints activities and money stocks.

The database is highly exhaustive and clearly presented through high-quality data and geographical references, and it is also fair to say that this is the first time these data have been processed and presented in such a coherent and well-integrated way. Coins and finds are included within the database according to their main site finds, chronology, pattern, material, and role. Each of these details here mentioned also provides a focus on a different aspect that coins include and these relate to political, social, economic, geo-strategical perspectives. A key strength of the project is its linear narration and remarkably comprehensive graphic and writing style, which brings together the analysis of various sources, and conveys what is behind the types, the distribution of finds and the circulation of coins during the whole Byzantine period. In addition, a further valid feature of the

database is the presentation as a unified thread of the location and circulation of coins from continental Europe to the Far East or North Africa, through underlining the coin multi-faceted role in many aspect of the daily life of Byzantine communities.

Another of the clear strengths of the database is the number and quality of the sources cited. Drawing vastly on the excavation finds and museum and archive collections, the use of these data to integrate the historical analysis is highly engaging without becoming too standard or a bias. This makes the database, not an already seen one, but ‘your database’ whether you are a numismatic or not! In fact, here the coins details are very straightforwardly presented and all appear to be absolutely relevant as they provide a fuller insight into coins and finds conditions, while further information on bibliography and references assist further the vast audience in a much wider discussion on main aspects of coin design and production, and for the first time integrates coins, finds, and mints history. This very extensive bibliography and set of sources make it easy to find additional information and research details, and this forms an invaluable source and a precious tool for both students and researchers. By integrating data on Byzantine coins and finds the database fully ensures interoperability with various numismatic databases. By making bibliography accessible the database also enable users to verify directly the data and information included in the platform. In all, this tool is vast in scope and well-researched, while maintaining database navigability and making the instrument highly engaging. Therefore, this should be largely used with satisfaction by enthusiasts and researchers in related fields (and beyond)!

Last but not least, the high-value of this project is further represented by the intense and prolific research activity of NOMISMATA team, and this is based on large scale surveys on grey literature and archaeological reports, as well as on papers in specialized peer-reviewed journals, and museum and collections catalogues and archives. These sources form the base on which the project has been developed, and these sets of information contributed fully to the database and all these are visible and accessible in the sections of the database itself. And behind each project there are students, researchers, scholars, that make all these things feasible and real, and here it is worth to highlight that this project had its inception in the groundbreaking idea of Giorgio Donato, IT manager and graduate student of ancient history at the University of Trieste. The project, in fact, originated in 2022 from Giorgio Donato’s MA thesis under the supervision of prof. Bruno Callegher (University of Trieste) and Cécile Morrisson, emeritus research director at the CNRS (Paris) and member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (Paris). The project then received university’s IT infrastructure, thus ensuring support, maintenance, development of the database and developed intense and fruitful research activities. From the creation of the team to the establishment of an international committee, by passing through participations in international congresses and dissemination of outputs in scientific journal, today Nomismata represents an established and authoritative reference in the international scene of numismatic, archaeology, and ancient history studies.

This project forms a very well-developed, highly researched, and truly fascinating study on the Byzantine coins. Through a groundbreaking chronological-geographical approach and geo-referenced application, it associates coins and finds from the Byzantine world and draws essential connections both with the world of mints and with the world of coin users, thus including multi-leveled aspects of political, economic, and social history. This makes both the project and its advanced database, an essential tool and very useful source for current and future study of history, numismatic, and archaeology, and the vast audience of scholars will benefit from this tool for long time. In short, may this thrilling project (and its database) have a long and wealthy life!

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