



Paul Balog, Rome 1981  
(Photo by Michael Bates)

# PAUL BALOG AND THE SYLLOGE PROJECT OF THE ISRAEL MUSEUM

STEFAN B. HEIDEMANN AND HAIM GITLER

## A LIFE BETWEEN HUNGARY, EGYPT AND ITALY

On August 15, 1900 Paul Balog<sup>1</sup> (né Pál) was born into a well-to-do family in Budapest. His father was Soma Balog and his mother Iren Mittelmann. His early adulthood fell into the violent aftermath of World War I and the Red Terror of the Béla Kun Communist regime, happening in the shadow of the advancing Romanian army and growing anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic sentiments among Hungarians. The Red Terror turned into the White Terror which broke out after the downfall of Béla Kun's regime in the summer of 1919, resulting in raging violence against communists, leftists, intellectuals and Jews. The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 left Hungary economically devastated and resulted in the loss of two-thirds of its territory.

At this time Balog studied medicine in Budapest and Pécs. After 1924 Hungary's economy recovered. In 1926 Balog finished his studies and married Ilona Plichper from Croatia; she was, like him, a dermatologist. In the same year, they immigrated to Egypt and settled in Cairo where he was appointed director of the laboratories of the Umberto I Italian Hospital. There he achieved a distinguished medical career.



*Paul Balog, official document, 1929*

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<sup>1</sup> For biographies, bibliographies and obituaries of Paul Balog, see Kurt Munzel, Biographie und Bibliographie Dr. Paul Balog anlässlich seines 80. Geburtstages, *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 30 (1980), pp. 97–102 (includes an extensive bibliography); Michael L. Bates, Paul Balog, 1900–1982, *ANS Newsletter*, Winter 1983, p. 2 (with photograph); Idem, Paul Balog, 1900–1982, Commission Internationale de Numismatique, *Compte rendu* 30 (1983), pp. 25–27; G. Oman, Ricordo di Paul Balog (1900–1982), *Studi Magrebini* 15 (1983), pp. 209–220 (includes a bibliography); Idem, Paul Balog (1900–1982), *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano di Numismatica* 30 (1983) [Rome, 1986]; Na'ama Brosh and Ya'akov Meshorer, In Memory of Paul Balog, *Israel Museum Catalogue* 293, Jerusalem, 1988, pp. ix–x.

In 1935 the Faculty of Medicine at Elizabeth University, Pecs, granted him the privilege to practice privately as ‘Chief Doctor’ in the field of ‘Pathology of Exotic Diseases’. Between 1922 and 1941, he published no less than forty articles in medical research. In 1933 and 1937 Royal and Imperial Italian Knighthood was bestowed upon him in recognition of his achievements.<sup>2</sup>

In Cairo Balog soon became acquainted with Marcel Jungfleisch (1879–1958), a French agricultural engineer who had arrived in Egypt already in 1902.<sup>3</sup> After working for years in a sugar refinery, Jungfleisch entered the service of *Crédit Foncier Égyptien* in Cairo in 1927. He had a passion for Islamic numismatics and started to publish in this field in the same year. Jungfleisch had considerable influence on Balog’s interest in Islamic coins and on his future numismatic trajectory in collecting and in his studies. Both were interested in Fāṭimid and Mamlūk coinages and also in Egyptian glass weights and tokens. Probably at the end of the thirties Balog began collecting Islamic coins.<sup>4</sup> He acquired them in the *sūqs* of Egypt and on his travels throughout the Middle East. He became deeply immersed in their study, while at the same time continuing his medical practice and research. His training as a scientist and scholar and his passion for research turned him into the leading expert on Islamic coinages of Egypt. The result was a remarkable, uninterrupted, creative scholarly record in numismatics which began with three articles published in 1949 in the *Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte*—which already show his keen interest to enter almost unexplored territory. The first article dealt with the minting technology of small debased Egyptian *dirhams*, a subject which at that time hardly drew the attention of collectors; the second studied a pre-mature occurrence of *naskhī* script on a Fāṭimid *dīnār*; and the third described a group of Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk gold coins from a hoard.<sup>5</sup>

After the flourishing of Islamic numismatics in the nineteenth century, the field became dormant after World War I. Together with George C. Miles (1904–1975) of the American Numismatic Society and John Walker (1900–1964) of the British Museum, Balog revived interest in Islamic numismatics as a scholarly discipline in the West after World War II. Unlike other western Islamic numismatists of his time, who mostly worked on coinages of the early Islamic empire, he touched almost all periods but directed his interest in particular to later periods such as the Ayyūbids and Mamlūks. His curiosity always explored new or little researched fields such as Fāṭimid coinages of Sicily or the Ikhshīdids of

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<sup>2</sup> We are much indebted to Michael Bates who made some of Paul Balog’s personal documents available to us.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Schwartz, *Nécrologie, Marcel Jungfleisch, Revue numismatique* 6 (1958), pp. 241–242.

<sup>4</sup> Balog writes of about ten years of collecting efforts: Paul Balog, *Quelques dinars du début de l’ère mamelouke bahrite, Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte* 32 (1949–1950), p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Balog, *Aperçu sur la technique du monnayage musulman au Moyen Age, Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte* 31 (1948–1949), pp. 96–105 ; Idem, *Apparition prématurée de l’écriture Naskhy sur un dinar de l’imam Fatimite al-Mousta’ly Billah, BIE* 31 (1948–1949), pp. 181–185; Idem, *Deux dinars inédits du dernier roi ayoubite d’Égypte Al Malek Al Achraf Abou ’l-Fath Moussa, BIE* 31 (1948–1949), pp. 187–190.

Egypt. His research was usually stimulated by a discovery or acquisition of a hoard which offered new and hitherto unknown material and insight.

In 1961 serious health problems caused him to retire from his medical profession. In 1964 he was granted Italian citizenship in recognition of his outstanding services as a physician at the Italian Hospital. In the same year the Balogs moved to Rome. Retirement allowed him to become a full-time numismatic scholar. The achievements of these years shaped the entire numismatic field.

Balog published the fruits of his research in more than seventy papers and four seminal monographs and monographic articles.<sup>6</sup> *The Coinage of the Mamlūk Sultāns of Egypt and Syria*, appeared in 1964.<sup>7</sup> It mapped Mamlūk coinages for the first time and was lavishly illustrated with 44 heliotype letter-size plates. Before that volume appeared, no major catalogue of Islamic coins had ever been so well illustrated. Almost every type could be found with an image, giving for the first time a visual impression about the development of Mamlūk coinages. It still remains an indispensable tool for any research on the subject. For archaeology, it provided the first reference to all the abundant, badly struck, worn and corroded, ubiquitously encountered Mamlūk copper coins found on sites and in unprovenanced hoards. Although this corpus, based upon the collections and literature available to Balog, seemed complete at the time, numerous additions and corrections followed but were scattered in the literature. In 1970, just six years after the initial publication, Balog summarized the most important new discoveries of Mamlūk coins in an article. His personal copy of MSES, kept at the Israel Museum, is witness to the growth of his knowledge and the steady increase of his collection. Since then the field of Mamlūk numismatics has expanded tremendously upon the comprehensive foundation that he laid.

Balog also shared another passion with Jungfleisch, the collecting of Egyptian glass weights and tokens. Today they are rarely encountered on the market. In his days, however, they were available in large quantities in the markets of Cairo. His collection of Fāṭimid tokens or weights was published in two lengthy articles in the *Annali* of the Italian Numismatic Institute in 1974 and 1975.<sup>8</sup>

In 1976 he published his *Umayyad, 'Abbāsīd and Ṭūlūnīd Glass Weights and Vessel Stamps*.<sup>9</sup> In 1974 he had already donated his entire collection of glass weights and vessel stamps to the American Numismatic

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<sup>6</sup> An almost complete bibliography of his numismatic studies can be found in Kurt Munzel, Biographie und Bibliographie Dr. Paul Balog anlässlich seines 80. Geburtstages, *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 30 (1980), pp. 97–102. Some of his articles were recently reprinted in P. Balog, *Studies in Egyptian Coins*, Numismatics of the World vol. 45, Frankfurt am Mainz 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Balog, *The Coinage of the Mamlūk Sultāns of Egypt and Syria*, American Numismatic Society, Numismatic Studies No. 12, New York 1964 (abbreviated MSES).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Balog, The Fāṭimid Glass Jeton, *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano di Numismatica*, Naples 1974, pp. 175–264, and in the same journal 1975, pp. 121–212. The final answer whether these 'jetons' are tokens or coin weights is still pending.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Balog, *Umayyad, 'Abbāsīd and Ṭūlūnīd Glass Weights and Vessel Stamps*, American Numismatic Society, Numismatic Studies No. 13, New York 1976.

Society in gratitude for the support by George C. Miles and the interest he showed in this project. The Mamlūk glass weights of his collection that would have gone along with the present sylloge volume are now housed at the ANS in New York.

Four years later, his fourth and last monographic study, *The Coinage of the Ayyūbids*, appeared.<sup>10</sup> The final stage of the preparation of this volume was made possible only with the extraordinary help of Norman D. Nicol who did the most laborious task of editing and correcting the catalogue that describes several thousand individual coins. Jere Bacharach co-ordinated much of the further efforts. Michael Bates of the American Numismatic Society and Nicholas Lowick (1940-1986) of the British Museum also supported the project at various stages. A generous grant by fellow numismatist Samir Shamma (1911-2001) finally ensured the publication of this much anticipated first comprehensive mapping of Ayyūbid coinages. Despite the rapid progress in Islamic numismatics since the nineties of the last century, Balog's Mamlūk and Ayyūbid corpora will continue to be an indispensable reference. Balog's relentless productivity ended with his death in Rome on November 6, 1982.

Balog received many honors in his lifetime. In 1957 his important contributions to Islamic numismatics were recognized with an Honorary Membership by the International Numismatic Commission. In 1968 The Royal Numismatic Society, London awarded him its prestigious medals, as did the Société Française de Numismatique, Paris in 1970. In 1972 the American Numismatic Society followed with the honor of a Corresponding Membership and the Archer M. Huntington Medal. In 1978 The Royal Asiatic Society also elected him as Honorary Member.

In his lifetime, Balog generously donated parts of his collections to various museums. The gift of the glass weights and tokens to the ANS was mentioned above. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, received many valuable objects from him, among them Sasanian and Islamic seals and textiles from various parts of the Islamic world including North Africa, Turkey and Syria. His first gift was a remarkable piece of Persian brocade from the seventeenth century. Later donations include bronze vessels of the late Mamlūk period and nineteenth century Mamlūk revival pieces. At the end of his life he bequeathed his entire coin collection to the numismatic department and his specialized library of about 2,000 books to the Israel Museum's library. Theodore Horowitz, his lifelong friend from his Egyptian years, was helpful in organizing the transport of these items to Jerusalem.

## PAUL BALOG'S COIN COLLECTION

Balog's splendid coin collection was the fruit of more than forty years of scholarly selection and collecting. It grew at a time when he had – perhaps with the exception of his friend, Marcel Jungfleisch, and occasionally R. G. Gayer Anderson (1881-1945) – no competitors in the Egyptian antiquity market. He often rescued coins from the melting pot of

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyūbids*, Royal Numismatic Society, Special Publications No. 12, London 1980.

jewellers. In 1949 he wrote in one of his first articles about early Bahrī gold coins: "Dix ans de recherches, un dévouement sans cesse en lutte contre l'apathie générale, l'âpreté des fondeurs d'or et l'incompréhension des thésauriseurs ont été consacrés à cette entreprise".<sup>11</sup>

He built up his collection when collectors like him or his older contemporary, the military physician and collector of Islamic art Gayer-Anderson, were still pioneers in protecting Islamic cultural heritage in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> The rise of public awareness of the need to protect antiquities from illegal plundering makes the creation of a collection of such magnitude and depth impossible to duplicate today.

The collection is much broader than one would expect just by looking at Balog's publications. Naturally, it is strongest for those coin series that were available in Egypt and the countries nearby, but the intellectual vision for his collection went beyond that limit. He envisioned a comprehensive collection of Islamic coinages of almost encyclopaedic magnitude. His collection includes rich coin series from North Africa, Spain and Sicily in the West and from Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Yemen and India in the East. It contains a wide and varied range of coinages from the period of the Islamic conquest to the late Ottoman Empire. His donation of 5,358 gold, silver and bronze coins tells the history, culture and economy of Islamic civilization. Many coins in his collection are unique or of utmost rarity, but the most valuable for research and study are those dense coin series of a single mint. From the start, Balog pursued a particular interest in gold coinage and attempted to be as comprehensive as possible in this regard. Gold coins were systematically collected according to their dates and mints. It was a time when he could acquire them for little more than their gold value and nobody knew which *dīnārs* were rare and which were abundant, not to speak about rare mint/date combinations in an otherwise ubiquitous series. The most complete series of gold coins are, of course, those of the dynasties which shaped the history of Egypt, Palestine and Syria: the Umayyads, Ṭūlūnids, Ikhshīdids, Fāṭimids, Ayyūbids, Mamlūks and Ottomans. But he also incorporated gold coins from all over the Islamic world to suit his encyclopaedic approach. Unlike many other collectors of his time, however, he was equally interested in silver and copper coinage. For example, he was the first scholarly collector systematically to collect and publish the tiny, debased, often badly engraved and struck Fāṭimid 'Black *dirhams*' of the eleventh century.

His collection is particularly strong in those fields where he could acquire entire hoards, or at least select from hoard material. As a scholarly collector he shared this information with the learned numismatic community. The Mamlūk hoards are listed in the bibliography of this

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<sup>11</sup> See n. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Egypt was one of the first Arab countries which began to protect and preserve its heritage. Egypt had one of the first museums for Arab antiquities (*dār al-athār al-'arabiyya*) in the world, founded in 1881/1884, with its own building in the courtyard of the al-Ḥākim Mosque. It started out as an architectural museum, but it took the twentieth century to develop a concept for the all-inclusive protection of the country's material past. In 1903, the present museum at Bāb al-Khalq was opened.

sylloge volume. Like many collectors in their early years, however, he was at first not aware of the numismatic information a hoard can yield and listed obvious hoard material as just ‘quelques dinars du début de l’ère mamelouke bahrite’.<sup>13</sup> His perception of hoards soon changed and he published them as such.

## THE SYLLOGE PROJECT

The Israel Museum is proud to continue Paul Balog’s legacy and sees it as an obligation to share it with the public. It took, however, many years to realize this vision. The first appreciation of his lifetime achievements and his generous donation led to a joint international conference organized by the Israel Museum and the Israel Numismatic Society, held in Jerusalem on October 17–19, 1988. The organizing committee included such renowned scholars such as Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, Ya’akov Meshorer (1935–2004), Na’ama Brosh, Theodore Horowitz, and Shraga Qedar. The proceedings were published soon thereafter in the *Israel Numismatic Journal* (1988–89). In 1989 Na’ama Brosh, Curator of the Islamic Department of the Israel Museum, and Ya’akov Meshorer, Chief Curator of Archaeology, organized a memorial exhibition of objects of Islamic art that Balog donated to the Museum. A catalogue is witness to this event.<sup>14</sup>

Balog’s most important legacy, his coin collection, however, lay almost dormant for the next eighteen years, only occasionally studied by visitors. For a long time, Haim Gitler, Curator of the Numismatic Department, sought a way to make Balog’s collection more accessible. A fortunate situation arose in Spring 2007 when a knowledgeable and experienced Islamic numismatist, Issa Baidoun, joined the team of the Israel Museum to start a fresh approach to the Islamic collection. Stefan Heidemann (formerly at Jena University) was asked to supervise the Sylloge Project and gave it its scholarly directions. Warren Schultz (DePaul University), kindly agreed to lend his rich experience in Mamlūk numismatics and contributed an overview of the development of coinages and mints in the Mamlūk Sultanate for this volume.

The first sylloge is conceived as the pilot of a book series on Islamic coins in the collection of the Israel Museum. Mamlūk Egypt was chosen to lead off for two reasons. First, the Egyptian series is by far the strongest in Balog’s collection, and secondly, this part allowed Balog’s collecting efforts – meaning his collection – again to contribute to the field for which he laid the foundations.

Since the publication of his Mamlūk corpus in 1964 much progress has been made in Islamic numismatics in general and the study of Mamlūk coinages in particular. Milestones were achieved mainly as a result of the appearance of a series of dissertations. In 1967 Jere Bacharach’s thesis, followed by numerous studies, correlated textual sources and numismatic

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<sup>13</sup> See n. 4.

<sup>14</sup> See n. 1. Brosh and Meshorer, *Catalogue*.

evidence.<sup>15</sup> In 1977 Michael Bates suggested a reclassification of the coinage to better reflect the sequence of events and the different succession of issues in each region and mint.<sup>16</sup> In 1994 Stefan Heidemann's dissertation on *Das Aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261)* took Mamlūk coins of the period of the Mongol wars as political statements of rulers and governors, independent from the chronicles.<sup>17</sup> In 1995 Warren Schultz studied Mamlūk coinages with a new approach on literary sources and metrology<sup>18</sup>, a study which was also followed by numerous articles. Finally, in 1998 Lorenz Korn published a sylloge of the Tübingen University collection on the coinage of Ḥamāh<sup>19</sup> in Syria, a mint which was only active during the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods. Numerous archaeological publications and coin hoards supplement our current understanding of the circulation of coinage in the Mamlūk sultanate.

Since the 1990s the need for a revision of the MSES became more and more evident and urgent. The pioneering catalogue of 1964 – a towering achievement – reflects naturally the understanding of Islamic coins and the state of the art at that time. Often Balog did not attempt to attribute coins to specific mints. Die studies were unknown at that time in Islamic numismatics. Metrology was at its early stages, and archaeological evidence hardly existed. Many important coin types were unknown. In 1964 the MSES was the best illustrated catalogue ever published in Islamic numismatics. Illustrations, however, were still expensive and not every coin could be depicted.

Today Islamic numismatics focuses on different questions than it did 47 years ago. The mint and its production sequence are the focus of numismatic research but not dynasties or rulers any longer. The die is perceived as the most important meaningful unit and coins contribute to its reconstruction. The examination of dies allows us to establish figures about relative minting output and to compare them through time. This requires more illustrations of coins of the same type, much more than was possible in 1964. The aggregated weights – the metrology – shed light on the legal mode of exchange and minting technology. The die axis gives us hints about the working of the mint.

To establish this new information we decided to start with a revision of Balog's corpus with one of the richest collections of Mamlūk coin ever formed. Since the publication of Balog's corpus, the numismatic material for such an endeavour has grown tremendously. It is no longer possible for

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<sup>15</sup> Jere Bacharach, *A Study of the Correlation Between Textual Sources and Numismatic Evidence for Mamluk Egypt and Syria, A.H. 784–872 / A.S. 1382–1468*, Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1967.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Bates, *The Coinage of the Mamlūk Sultan Baybars I: Additions and Corrections*, *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 22 (1977), pp. 161–181, pl. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Stefan Heidemann, *Das Aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261). Vom Untergang des Kalifates in Bagdad über Aleppo zu den Restaurationen in Kairo*, *Islamic History and Civilization* 6, Leiden u.a. 1994 (Ph.D. diss., Free University Berlin, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Warren C. Schultz, *Mamluk Money from Baybars to Barquq, A Study Based on the Literary Sources and the Numismatic Evidence*, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Lorenz Korn, *Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen, Teil 4c. Bilād aš-Šām; 3. Ḥamāh*, Tübingen, Berlin 1998.



a single scholar/collector to accomplish this task alone. The sylloge format describing a region with a limited set of mints is necessary as an intermediate phase towards the production of a corpus of Islamic and Mamlūk coinages. In 1931 this format was conceived by the British Academy for publishing Greek coins (*Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*). In 1993 Lutz Ilisch was the first who created such a sylloge for Islamic coins with the publication of the Palestinian coinage in the collection of Tübingen University.<sup>20</sup> The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford<sup>21</sup>, the Oriental Coin Cabinet of Jena University<sup>22</sup> and the Estonian History Museum in Tallinn<sup>23</sup> subsequently followed suit.

Since Balog's collection is especially strong in Egyptian coinages, this determined our choice for this project. The coins are arranged according to their mints in a chronological order. Every coin is illustrated on a plate opposite the description. Changing Arabic spellings of mint names (e.g., the mint of Alexandria) are indicated. The chronological sequence is divided into rulers' reigns and then according to the dates of the coins. This structure is occasionally altered when minting occurred in several metals during one reign and at one place. In such a case an arrangement to place them all under one description was deemed more efficient, disregarding the chronology. Technical data, weight, and die axis, are given in each case. The use of the image of a particular coin in previous publications, usually by Balog himself, is indicated to allow easy cross references. Occasionally, when several examples of one rare type were available, die studies were made. In 1959 Balog acquired a complete Mamlūk copper hoard with the closing date of 746/1345–6; he published it in 1970.<sup>24</sup> Because many of the coins in this hoard are inferior examples we decided to summarize the data of the entire hoard as an appendix, and include in the systematic part of the sylloge only those with images which show at least the date or are useful for die comparisons in the future.

A project such as a sylloge could not have been achieved without the efforts and support of many people. It was made possible through the generous and steady financial contributions of the Abraham Bromberg Fund, Jonathan Rosen, Gabriel Brener and a private collector in New York. We are most grateful to Issa Baidoun who with great mastery and diligence authored the sylloge and was always ready to include changes within the process. Warren Schultz readily agreed to write an introduction on the Mamlūk coinage and

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<sup>20</sup> Ilisch Lutz, *Sylloge Nummorum Arabicorum Tübingen, Palästina IVa Bilād aš-Šām*, Tübingen 1993. Altogether, six volumes have been published to date.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Album, *Sylloge of Islamic coins in the Ashmolean*. Vol. 10, Arabia and East Africa, Oxford, 1999. The sylloge project in Oxford was conceived and co-ordinated by Luke Treadwell. Four volumes have been published thus far.

<sup>22</sup> Tobias Mayer, *Sylloge der Münzen des Kaukasus und Osteuropas im Orientalischen Münzkabinett Jena* mit Beiträgen von Stefan Heidemann und Gert Rispling, Orientalisches Münzkabinett Jena 1, Wiesbaden 2005. The series was conceived and edited by Norbert Nebes and Stefan Heidemann.

<sup>23</sup> Ivar Leimus, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins 710/1–1013/4 AD, Estonian Public Collections*, Estonian History Museum, Thesaurus Historiae II, Tallinn 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Balog, Trésor de monnaies en cuivre mamelouks bahrides, *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano di Numismatica* 23–24 (1977), pp. 199–215.

was helpful with his advice. We are grateful to Michael Bates and Jere Bacharach for their helpful comments. Samuel Wolff kindly improved the draft by carefully revising the English text, and Arianna D'Ottone painstakingly edited the manuscript in the final stage of the project. Last but certainly not least, we wish to express our deepest gratitude to Bruno Callegher, for his ongoing support from the first steps of the project; and to Giulio Bernardi S.R.L. for generously publishing this volume as part of the renowned numismatic series of the University of Trieste.