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Cultural Institutions of Forlì:
Exposition and Didactic
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roman coin collection***

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The Piancastelli Numismatic Collection in Artistic and Cultural Institutions of Forlì: Exposition and Didactic Exploitation of a world-renowned roman coin collection

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Istituti Artistici and Culturali di Forlì keep many important works of art and many significant documents, but surely Piancastelli's collections and funds are an invaluable treasure of worldwide importance.

Carlo Piancastelli, born in 1867, a *Romagna's humanist*, as he has been defined by one of his biographers, thanks to his landed properties near Fusignano, Ravenna, and his cultural interests, was a passionate collector, who, at his death in 1938, left to the city of Forlì an invaluable ensemble of autographs and manuscripts, all referring to Romagna, and a very important coin collection of high quality and conservation²¹.

His main passion for every aspect of Romagna's history, culture and folklore was expressed in collecting sixty thousand volumes, three hundred thousand autographs, thousands of engravings, drawings, paintings, portraits, parchments, postcards. He left a complete documentation of Romagna's political, artistic, literary, scientific, and musical life and, by consequence, of many historical personalities, artists, poets, writers, scientists or musicians who, in some way and some time, had been interested or involved in Romagna's history and cultural life.

These interests were part of a personality which had been formed in humanist studies from childhood in the exclusive college S. Carlo of Modena. When he went to Rome to attend University he discovered coin collecting, but he left apart this interest for a while.

Only later this authentic passion, as he defines it, became another fundamental aspect of his collecting activity. He collected coins as one of the most immediate testimonies of roman civilisation, in which he saw an ideal vision of greatness and beauty, thus he collected above all pieces of the first centuries of the Empire, putting together an excellent document of this phase, which anyway he completed with republican and late imperial specimens²².

He didn't confine his interests to rarity of pieces, what he looked for was completing series, but also with particular regard to quality and conservation of pieces.

Between 1900 and 1930 he was in touch with all major numismatic firms world-wide, buying most interesting pieces, often coming from other

dissolving great collections, in that way he was also able to form unique medallions and contorniates sections.

Carlo Piancastelli's will expressly stated that a Catalogue of the roman imperial coins had to be published. S. L. Cesano, keeper of the Museo Nazionale Romano, began it in 1941, but she was interrupted by the war and she could not start again till 1950. In 1951 the Collection was exposed, the Catalogue described 3,276 pieces, coins from Caesar to Aemilianus, and medallions and contorniates till the end of the Empire²³. In 1970 I was charged with reordering the whole collection and with cataloguing the extant coins: 309 roman republican coins, 1,119 roman imperial coins from the middle of the third century till the end of the Empire, 463 roman provincial coins, 354 various pieces: tesserae, countermarked coins, false coins.

Three catalogues were the result of this work, with a complete photographic documentation of pieces²⁴, this is the composition of the collection and the situation of edited sections:

309	Roman	Republican	Ercolani	1972
2948	Roman	Imperial 50 BC-253 AD	Cesano	1957
223	Roman	Medallions	Cesano	1957
106	Roman	Contorniates	Cesano	1957
547	Roman	Imperial 253-305 AD	Ercolani	1974
539	Roman	Imperial 305-476 AD	Ercolani	1980
463	Roman	Provincial		
354	Roman	Tesserae, countermark		
166	Byzantin	Byzantine and Ostrogoth		
426	Italian	Medieval coins		
200	Italian	Medals		

This collection's importance is well known, casts from its pieces were exposed in the great Augustean exhibition in Rome and where often utilized by many numismatists for their researches.

Some minor sections were inspired by interests in Romagna and include coins from Romagna's mints and medals, related to its history and to its main historical figures, amongst which are particularly important medals from the Napoleonic period, from the First World War and Mussolinian period.

Some thematic temporary exhibitions have been held, last of which «*The image of Rome in Piancastelli's coin collection*», in spring 1998.

On every occasion the same general criteria have been followed: reduced number of coins, well lighted and with clear explanations in every showcase, didactic panels with enlargements, which illustrate the central theme and its historical connections.

Thematic permanent sections are now foreseen, to illustrate iconographic and institutional aspects of the roman world through coins, a particularly rich official document, confronted with other artistic and literary sources. Piancastelli's coins, thanks to their high quality and good conservation offer a wide range of iconographic examples of every aspect of Roman life.

We can cite one aspect illustrated in the exposition «*L'immagine di Roma*» that will be developed in a permanent section.

The political importance of portraiture in the late Republican Rome and the role of the portrait as a mark of personal influence and power in the founding of the Empire, is illustrated confronting the statue of the so called «*Togato Barberini*» with some monetary portraits. The togate brings portraits of ancestors, as happened during funerals, as a mark of belonging to an ancient, relevant family. The portrait of the tribune Antius Restio appears after his death, in the emissions of his son as a moneyer in 47 BC, of the same realistic style is the portrait of Caesar, who in 44 obtained from the Senate the right to put his own image on coinage. A third, more idealised, portrait shows Antonius, *capite velato*, as Pontifex Maximus, the beard on his face is a mourning mark for Caesar's death.

Another permanent section will analyse roman iconographic influence through the centuries, confronting roman coins and modern medals.

An online catalogue is also foreseen as well some hypertexts regarding the main themes of the exhibition. So, a unique collection will be accessible to specialists and collectors, but the main objective is didactic utilisation for students of every degree, to approach them to the reality of history, to the actual importance of the ancient world's knowledge and of the preservation of cultural heritage.

ENDNOTES

²¹ A. Mambelli, *Un umanista della Romagna, Carlo Piancastelli*, (Forlì 1938); G. Zama, «il bibliofilo e collezionista Carlo Piancastelli nelle sue lettere a Emilio Biondi», in *Studi Romagnoli VII* (1956), pp.305-315

²² E. Ercolani Cocchi, «Piancastelli collezionista numismatico», in *Studi Romagnoli XXXII*, (1981), pp.21-224

²³ S. L. Cesano, *Catalogo della Collezione Numismatica di Carlo Piancastelli*, (Forlì 1957)

²⁴ E. Ercolani Cocchi, *Aes grave - Moneta romana repubblicana. Catalogo della Collezione Numismatica C.Piancastelli*, (Forlì 1972); Eadem, *Monetazione romana imperiale 253-305 d.C. Catalogo della Collezione Numismatica C.Piancastelli*; Eadem, «Monete con contromarche del periodo Giulio-Claudio nella Collezione Numismatica C.Piancastelli di Forlì», in *Studi Romagnoli XXV*, (1974); Eadem, *Monetazione romana imperiale, 305-476 d.C. Catalogo della Collezione Numismatica C.Piancastelli*, (Forlì 1978)