

ANTIQUITY AND MODERNITY: ROMAN EMPIRE AND 20TH CENTURY BRAZIL

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Abstract

The classical influence in Brazil has always been present. The Portuguese conquest and the various migrations directly influenced Brazilian culture. Our objective is to identify the monetary representations, existing in modern coinage, influenced by the Roman world. To do this, we will analyze the numismatic collection of the National Historical Museum, Rio de Janeiro, an important numismatic archaeological collection in Latin America.

Keywords

Antiquity; Empire; coins; Archeology; History.

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Resumo

A influência clássica no Brasil sempre esteve presente. A conquista portuguesa, as diversas migrações, influenciaram diretamente na cultura brasileira. Nosso objetivo é identificar as representações monetárias, existentes nas cunhagens modernas, influenciadas pelo mundo romano. Para isso, analisaremos a coleção numismática do Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, importante acervo arqueológico numismático da América Latina.

Palavras-Chave

Antiguidade; Império; moedas; Arqueologia; História.

Introduction

One of the tasks of modern Archeology is to read, or re-read, iconography. The role of images in the construction of historical and archaeological knowledge is analyzed. Therefore, we can insert the coins in this last phase, which, for a long time, was confined to technical reserves in museums, being only an object of conservation, not research. According to Funari:

[...] It is not, therefore, a question of believing in what the document says, but of seeking what is behind what we read, of understanding what intentions and interests explain the opinion expressed by the author, this is our focus of attention (Funari, 1995: 24).

Ancient coins served as inspiration for countless later civilizations, such as the Turkish one analyzed below. Old issues will serve as a model for current coins, as we can analyze in this 50,000 Turkish lira coin.



Figure 01: Photo and private collection: Cláudio Umpierre Carlan, 2023. In the Image, Teshub, Hittite god of prosperity and time, holding an ear of corn (expression of Man, World and Sun). The image of the deity is presented in a relief from Ivriz (8th century BC), today Konya in Turkey. Despite Islam being the predominant religion, approximately 98% of the population, representations of non-monotheistic deities are accepted and protected by the country's constitution. In the caption: "A world where no one goes hungry", referring to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), created in 1945, with the aim of modernizing and improving agriculture. On the obverse image, the laurel wreath, Roman influence, with the Turkish coats of arms (half moon with star), with the caption, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Republic of Turkey. Weight of 1.50 g, issued by the Turkish Mint in 2002, with a diameter of 20 mm. Material used: aluminum and nickel copper.

Thus, even in a predominantly Islamic country, such as Turkey, they sought a way to legitimize their present in the Hittite past. Identify a deity from the past, for an important action, focused on agriculture. In this sense, the coins as a document can inform about the most varied aspects of a society. Both political and state, as well as legal, religious, mythological, aesthetic.

Without a doubt, it is in the field of political ideas and propaganda where the service of Numismatics to History is most fruitful...[We must] reflect on the

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significance of currency in the ancient world, in a world where there were no means of information comparable to ours , where illiteracy extended to numerous layers of the population. Coin is a tangible object, an object that opens all doors and provides well-being. In it one can contemplate the effigy of the sovereign, while the reverse sides show his virtues and the prosperity of the time: Felicitas Temporum, Restitutio Orbis, Victoria and Pax Augusta... these are slogans, propaganda (Roldán Hervás, 1975: 166).

We can identify this legitimizing function of currency, as an instrument of political propaganda in various periods of History. Both in the ancient world and in the Brazilian Old Republic, according to the model below:



Figure 02: Photo and Collection, Cláudio Umpierre Carlan, June 2023. Obverse: Images of D. Pedro I (1798-1834) and President Epitácio Pessoa (1865-1942), overlapping, symbolizing the union of both governments. This coin was minted in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence, as we can identify in the ACCLAM captions. INDEPENDENCE X. PPRESID OF THE REPUBLIC. Between the two representations, we identify the image of the Southern Cross. These overlapping images were common in the Roman Empire. Series commemorating Independence, worth 1000 Reis, aluminum bronze.

The reverse alludes to the 1st Centenary of Brazilian Political Independence, described in the caption, with the date September 7, 1822-1922. Both political symbols of each period are represented: the crown (left), Monarchy (elevation, power, illumination. They rise above the head and are insignia of power and light (Chevalier; Gheerbrant, 1997: 288-289); and the Phrygian cap (right), the Republic. Since Antiquity, the Phrygian cap has symbolized freedom. When the gladiator in Rome was freed, he received two symbols of the conquest of this freedom: the wooden sword (rudis) and the Phrygian cap. The French revolutionaries also used this symbology.

These images associated two rulers with power, one being the successor of the other. The Visigoth king Égica (610 – 702), in the first half of the 7th century, did the same, managing to make his son, Wittisa (? – 710), his successor. For this purpose, he associated it with his government. These two characters appear together on coins of the period: the king on the obverse and the heir on the reverse. For the same reason, kings Égica and

Wittisa appear together and crowned in some pieces from the end of the 7th century. On the rosaries, a gold coin, the legend, written in Latin, reads: EGICA REX WITTISA REX CONCORDIA REGNI. Father and son present themselves to their kingdom as a dynasty, although one has not yet succeeded the other. On these coins, the king and prince are represented side by side, face to face, with a cross between them. In some examples minted in Toledo, Égica and Wittisa hold and raise the cross.

The National Historical Museum: One Hundred Years of Independence

The construction of nations from the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th was based on a process of expansion and national unification. This political-social, geographical and economic construction was articulated with the ritual and symbolic restructuring of the nation into which intellectuals, artists and cultural producers were co-opted (Chagas; Godoy, 1995: 36). This symbolism passed, for example, through the creation of flags, anthems, seals and others. Through architecture, painting, sculpture, music, medals and literature, the nation is being built symbolically.

According to Hobsbawn, if there was a moment when the 19th century principle of nationality triumphed, it was at the end of the First World War, in 1918 (Hobsbawn, 1990: 159). Exactly at that moment, preparations began for the celebration of 100 years of independence, and Brazil needed a museum that indicated the nation's trajectory, over time, highlighting the traces of National History.



Figure 03: Collection and Photo: Cláudio Umpierre Carlan. Alfenas, January 2023. Obverse: Laurel wreath surrounding a star (in the center) and the value of 1000 réis. Above, Brazil, below the year of minting 1924, during the Presidency of Artur Bernardes (1922-1926). This coin entered circulation 2 years after the celebrations of 100 years of Independence. The laurel wreath, symbolism of immortality, Roman emblem of victory, both in arms and in spirit (Chevalier; Gheerbrant, 1997: 581). On the reverse, image of the Republic (female image), with cornucopia, symbol of happiness and fecundity, representation of several Greco-Roman deities (Fortune, Constance, Ceres, Bacchus, Abundance).

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The MHN was created by decree number 15596, of August 2, 1922 by the then President of the Republic, Epitácio Pessoa (1919-1922), with the function of a museum focused on the History of Brazil. It began its activities on October 11th of that same year, as part of the International Exhibition commemorating the Centenary of the Independence of Brazil, installed in two galleries on the premises of the old Arsenal de Guerra, (transferred to Ponta do Caju in 1908), expanded and decorated to serve as the "Palace of Great Industries", one of the most visited pavilions at the Exhibition.

The acquisition policy brought military, religious and nobility insignia to the museum, which together portrayed the glory of the past, the nobility of the Brazilian people, and the emerging forces of the nation. Vargas, during the Estado Novo (1937-1945), was one of the greatest supporters, donating several personal objects for the collection. Therefore, cultural assets that had previously been dispersed in other institutional bodies, or were undervalued, were handed over to the public (Chagas; Godoy, 1995: 39). We can cite as an example the numismatic collection that was kept at the National Library since the end of the 19th century.

Currently, the MHN occupies the entire architectural complex of the old Ponta do Calabouço, where the Fort of Santiago was originally located, built in 1603, to which was added the Calabouço Prison (1693) - intended for fugitive slaves - the Casa do Trem (1762) - depot of the "artillery train", responsible for moving weapons and ammunition, the War Arsenal (1764) and the Barracks (1835) (Carlan, 2013: 29).

One cannot talk about the MHN numismatic collection without mentioning the fund previously gathered at the National Library, which served as its base. Created in 1810, during the regency of D. João, the National Library had inaugurated in 1880, under the direction of Ramiz Galvão, an offensive to gather a collection of coins and medals, mainly Brazilian, which were temporarily found in the National Museum. Galvão was unable to get the numismatic fund to come to the Library during his administration. But he is considered the initiator of the numismatic collection at that institution.

In a report from 1881, addressed to Barão Homem de Melo, minister of Empire who donated 114 coins and 10 medals, Galvão used different arguments to achieve his objectives:

The National Library of Rio de Janeiro, exmo sñr., did not have coins or medals due to an organizational defect that is easy to explain; When created, it was thought that these works were rather objects of curiosities, and that is why they

were left as part of the National Museum... It is, however, indisputable that coins and medals are, above all, subsidiary documents of history, and that consequently their proper place is not next to the natural history collections... the place of numismatics is next to history, and history is in the National Library. Thinking like this, all major libraries in Europe have their numismatic section... (Vieira, 1995: 98).

According to Poliano, it is quite possible that Gustavo Barroso, first director of the MHN, used a similar argument to obtain the transfer of the collection from the National Library to the Historical Museum (Poliano, 1946: 9-10). The first batch of pieces, consisting of 406 coins and 6 medals, was donated to the library in September 1880. In the following years, the collection continued to grow, through purchases or donations. For example, the donation of Commander Antonio Pedro de Andrade's collection comprised 13,941 coins and medals, among other significant items; 4,559 coins and 2,054 Portuguese medals; and 4,420 ancient coins.

Commander Antônio Pedro was the largest individual donor to the numismatic collection of the National Library / MHN (Vieira, 1995: 100). Born in Funchal, Madeira Island, in 1839, he emigrated to Brazil at the age of 16. He worked as a journalist at *Correio Mercantil* and *Jornal do Comércio*. As a banker, he worked at Banco Comercial do Rio de Janeiro, of which he was manager, director and finally president (Dumans, 1940: 216). Its more organic cores are distributed among coins from Portugal and colonies (4,599); Roman and Byzantine (4,420 pieces); Brazilian coins (2,337 pieces); Portuguese medals (1,101 pieces) and Brazilian medals (950 pieces). It is also possible that some examples are precedents of the collections of the imperial family, bequeathed by Emperor D. Pedro II, constituted since the First Reign and made up of 1,593 coins and 545 medals, donated by him to the National Museum in 1891 and incorporated by the National Library in 1896.

In 1922, when the National Historical Museum was created, the decree that established it also determined that the numismatic collection existing in the National Library – as well as in other institutions such as the National Archives and the Mint – would be transferred there. At the time the transfer took place, the total collection exceeded 48 thousand pieces. Today it reaches approximately 130 thousand.

Final Considerations

The coin proves to be an excellent source, as from its analysis we find several aspects that cover the series in its entirety. That is, political, state,

legal, religious, economic, mythological, aesthetic aspects. Being able to inform about the most varied retrospectives of a society, it testifies to certain cultural relationships that are important for the historian. But we also cannot forget that currencies, such as documents, are not a reflection of a simple commercial exchange or a boom in the economy. They identify another parallel event, a materiality, constituted by sedimentary layers of interpretations: “the document, thus, is thought of archaeologically as a monument (Jenkins, 2001: 11).

In this sense, coins configured meanings and messages from the sender (emperor, members of his family or people who circulated close to power) to his subjects. They contained symbols that had to be understood or deciphered by the receiver. Such as urban symbols, which represented the city or some important inhabitant, or the insignia of the Roman emperors that reappeared in the Holy Roman Empire – Germanic, during the government of Frederick II (1194 – 1250) (Carlan, 2013: 176).

The study of the numismatic collection of the National Historical Museum allowed us to raise fundamental questions regarding the nature of symbolism and propaganda in numerals. Issues that, however, we did not have the opportunity to analyze in more depth. Therefore, we do not intend for the results we reach in our work to be seen as having a definitive and finished character. New hypotheses and new objectives will guide the work carried out with these museum collections.

Ancient knowledge and practices cannot be separated from their modern uses. Coins serve as an example of this constant interaction. Appearing in Greek Antiquity, coins served not only as a means of exchange, but also as symbols. In modernity, several societies, not just Western ones, were inspired by ancient coins, as is the case with Turkish coinage. Ancient and modern knowledge and practices are always in interaction, as the past is only relevant if it is present, in the form of recreations and reinterpretations, as in this case.

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