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- *ANEPIGRAPHIC BRONZE COINS OF CONSTANTINE AND FAMILY*
- *FACES OF EMPIRE–PART IX– IMPERIUM'S FIRST FACE (ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE SUCCESSORS)*
- *300,000 ARCHEOLOGICAL ITEMS (AND COINS) SEIZED IN RAIDS IN SPAIN*

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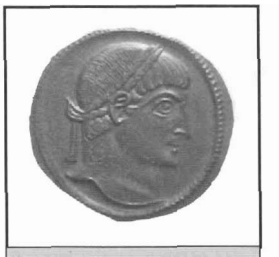

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About the cover: A photograph of an anepigraphic bronze coin of Constantine the Great from the Antioch mint (upper left), and another photograph of an anepigraphic imitation bronze coin of Constantine II from the Nether Compton Hoard. Both photos by John Jencek. The coins are from the collection of Robert M. Harlick.

The Celator office will be closed on July 3rd-4th, and August 6th-10th for the ANA. Check the "On the Road" section for further details. Office hours are normally Noon to 6PM EST. Please keep in mind that this is a one-person business when you're trying to reach me. Thank you!

300,000 Archeological Items (and Coins) Seized in Raids in Spain

by Mark Gredler

In one of the biggest operations ever, against archeological pillaging, over 200 Spanish Civil Guards arrested 52 people and seized over 300,000 archeological items and coins. The raids took place the first week of February of 2007. The 52 arrested included 30 pillagers, 13 intermediaries who bought and sold the items, as well as 9 collectors who had made purchases. The owners of five numismatic businesses were among those involved. The arrests took place in several different provinces of Andalusia in Southern Spain, as well as Madrid, Barcelona, and Zamora. There were 68 different addresses searched simultaneously, and all but one of those arrested were Spaniards. The lone foreigner was an Italian citizen. It was stated that additional arrests in the coming days could be expected.

The action was called Operation Tertis, named for a Phoenician colony in Southern Spain that dates to 1100 BC. The seized objects were of varied origin: Phoenician, Iberian, Roman, Visigothic, and Arabic. Items included mosaics, bronze statues, stone idols, columns, coins, and amphoras. It was reported that four stone idols had been purchased for 40,000 euros ($52,375) and one of those arrested had paid 180,000 euros ($235,687) for a coin collection. That must have been quite a coin collection!

It was stated that these individuals belonged to 18 distinct groups, and it was known that they had pillaged 31 distinct archeological sites–14 in the province of Seville, 11 in Badajoz, 3 in Cadiz, 1 in Huelva, 1 in Malaga, and 1 in Jaen. These raids are the culmination of investigations that were begun with information gained in another operation that took place between February and April of 2005. The 2005 operation involved underwater treasures from various galleons sunk off the coast of Cadiz, Spain, and ten people were arrested in that operation.

The news reports stated that the archeological sites were located with metal detectors, topographical maps, and published reports of excavations. Much of the damage was done at night, sometimes working at a site on consecutive days. In addition, many of the sites were on private farms, and the guards of the farms not only allowed the pillagers entrance, but even advised the pillagers when unfamiliar vehicles were in the vicinity. The pillagers avoided open fields, due to patrols of the Civil Guard. It was stated that these groups have destroyed most of the archeological sites where they operated, with the holes they made to find pieces of interest.

Many of the deals to sell the coins and artifacts that had been pillaged, and that were seized in this operation, were made in the area around the Plaza del Cabildo in Seville. For years in this plaza, on Sundays, there has been a flea market for coins and archeological items. There is a similar flea market, much larger and with stamps as well, in the Plaza Mayor of Madrid on Sundays as well. Over recent years, there have been increasing actions at these flea markets to try to control the illicit plunder of archeological sites and protect the "Historical Patrimony" of Spain. Sometimes hundreds of archeological items (but not coins) have been seized, only to be returned after several years of legal battles. For the most part, ancient and medieval coins have not been the target of these actions. It appears that this may be changing, and perhaps ancient coins are no longer exempt from close scrutiny.

Another interesting item from the raids is that some of those arrested were falsifying items similar to those pillaged. Some molds for forging coins were seized as well. Items were also exported to other countries, and the Italian member of the group seems to have been in charge of those activities. Some of the archeological items seized were planned to be transported to the airport in Faro, Portugal with a final destination of Belgium.

It was noted that many of the pillagers were collecting unemployment benefits, although they were all maintaining an excellent standard of life, and driving nice cars. The Civil Guard took the opportunity to remind the public that the laws to protect the "Historical Patrimony" prohibit the search for archeological items without prior authorization, and any casual find must be promptly reported to the government. Likewise, an archeological professor took the opportunity to remind the public that society has to protect its archeological sites and that the "Historical Patrimony" does not belong to the owner of a farm, but belongs to the public. "A crime against the Patrimony is a crime against everyone," he said. Another professor observed that they must instill in the children in school an appreciation for the importance of the Patrimony, both as a source for their identity, as well as an economic resource to develop tourism, when tourism is almost all there is to offer.

Several days after the raids and arrests, the City Hall of Badajoz released a statement that none of the pieces seized belonged to the archeological sites of Castillejos I and II. They further stated that these two sites are well guarded by the regional government of Extremadura. It had been reported that of the eleven sites pillaged in Badajoz, the two Castillejos sites were included, as was a site where work was taking place on a highway. It was noted by a City Hall official that the highway site no longer exists, as it was destroyed in the work

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on the highway. Also, the archeologists who have worked these sites said that it was not possible that there were valuable pieces pillaged from these particular sites and later sold, as all the pieces found there had already been transferred to Badajoz.

The news reports talk of the "Indiana Jones Syndrome" in the minds of collectors and aficionados. They lump all collectors and pillagers together in one group. I use the term "pillager" in this article, although the Spanish term used would be literally "despoiler." *El Pais* did point out that many times the finds from official excavations spend years in storage without the money or staff to properly classify and document them. There was some controversy in France recently over the deals the Louvre has made to display items in Atlanta and Abu Dhabi, with some Frenchmen stating that France is selling its soul. But a statement by the French Ambassador, Jean-David Levitte, was of interest to this discussion. He stated that only five percent of France's art holdings are on display at any one time.

While Martin Beckmann notes that single coin finds in plow-soil are not likely to be a big problem,[1] the Spanish news stories present a different picture. They state that everything in the path of finding a coin with a metal detector, although the coin is often of little value, is destroyed. It's not just a matter of losing the context of an individual coin, the position is taken that any action to remove any coin is destructive to the patrimony. The news pictures of items seized make a prominent display of a dozen metal detectors propped up against the tables with mosaics, vases, and other non-metallic items.

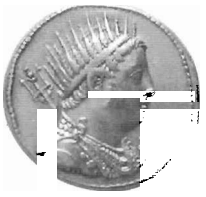
I have talked to both sides of the never-ending battle between archeologists and metal detector enthusiasts in Spain. There is a tendency, on both sides, to paint the picture all black and white. The archeologists paint the picture, unfortunately aided by the media, that all metal detector enthusiasts are pillagers and all collecting is immoral. The metal detector enthusiasts acknowledge that pillaging sites is unethical and immoral. But they also paint the picture that many archeologists are nothing more than glorified treasure hunters, who often keep items indefinitely, "for study," and fail to promptly publish results of their official excavations and finds. The Spanish archeologists acknowledge that the archeologists of the early 20th century were indeed often nothing more than glorified treasure hunters. But they fail to acknowledge that this is sometimes still a problem, or that many items are stored without proper care or cataloging in official storage–away from possible study and appreciation by the public.

An operation like this not only condemns illegal pillaging, but also brings to question the very act of collecting art. I have recently read an interesting book on the subject: *Who Owns Objects? The ethics and politics of collecting cultural artifacts*. This book contains a series of papers on both sides of the issue, and was the result of a workshop at Oxford toward the end of 2004. It was noted that there are two fundamentally different paradigms through which artifacts are viewed. The archeologist sees the items as social products, with the context of their creation and use, and rediscovery, being crucial to proper interpretation. This is contrasted with the collector, who sees the items as artistic products, with the goal being proper interpretation of the item itself. Another parallel shared was that of literary study. Some critics are concerned with what the author meant, while others are concerned with the true meaning and value that come from the individual readers themselves. As I stated earlier, I am bothered by the tendency to make the

continued on page 34 ....

In Loving Memory of Chris Connell, a good friend and true numismatist.

John & Nancy Wilson



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Spanish Raids Cont. from pg. 31

arguments all black and white, either/or. But most of us would agree that ***both*** the context and the interpretation of the item itself are important.

In one of the papers, George Ortiz points out that asking whether art needs collectors is akin to asking if children are in need of mothers. Many museum collections begin with the efforts of passionate collectors. He also pointed out that many ancients collected the art of those who came before them. In fact, if not for the collection of the ancient Greek art by ancient Romans, much of that art would have been lost to humanity forever.

But what I see a need for more than anything else is more collaboration between the two sides, including the sharing of more information. In Spain, in particular, there is an avoidance of metal detectors by archeologists even when the usefulness of the detectors has been demonstrated. For example, I was told of the American serviceman stationed outside of Madrid who found a Roman villa where a bar was dumping trash. When he found some mosaics, he immediately reported the find to the proper authorities and a formal excavation of what turned out to be a very important site took place. But when he offered to aid the archeologists by checking the discarded and sifted dirt with his metal detector, there was little eagerness to take him up on his offer. This remained true, even when he demonstrated that the archeologists had discarded a Roman silver finger ring, some coins, and a fibula with colored paste–all in the dirt they had thrown away during excavation.

I was told of a similar case where a castle, partially in ruins, was being excavated by archeologists. A couple of metal detecting enthusiasts requested and were granted permission by the authorities to check the discarded dirt outside the castle, which was awaiting removal by dump truck. Several coins and buttons were located, as well as musket balls from the Napoleonic Wars. Although the finds were ***only*** several hundred years old, far more recent than the actual castle, the items were still of historical interest.

A final example of possible productive collaboration is with the investigation of ancient battle sites. These sites are usually over large areas, and without an established settlement that could be excavated, often on land that is plowed and used agriculturally. In similar circumstances in the U.S., metal detecting enthusiasts have been placed into service to find and flag targets over a large area of a civil war battlefield, and then smaller teams of specialists (with archeologists) perform the actual recovery and logging of the items. In Spain, I am talking of battlegrounds between the Romans and Celtiberians, often from the second century BC. I have heard of such sites being pockmarked significantly by those looking for coins, with items of historic interest such as lead sling bullets left behind next to the holes.

Anyway, I hope I have shared some news that you will find as interesting as I did, as well as some food for thought. Please note that the immoral actions of a few may spoil collecting, even of coins, for us all.

One additional note on the raids: There was a raid of the Sunday morning flea market in the Plaza Mayor about twelve years ago. Stamps, coins, and archeological items are sold in this flea market, and the raid involved seizing many archeological items for sale. Some ten years later, over five thousand items from one vendor were returned, with all charges dismissed. While visiting Madrid in June, I saw that this vendor is still in business at the Plaza on Sundays.

Endnote

[1] Beckmann, Martin, "Numismatics and the antiquities trade," The Celator, Vol. 12, no. 5, 1998, pp. 34-38.

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Who Owns Objects, Edited by Eleanor Robson, Luke Treadwell, and Chris Gosden (Available at David Brown Book Co, www.oxbowbooks.com)

About the Author–Mark Gredler is an engineer with the Federal Aviation Administration, who lived for ten years in Spain while helping the Spanish government improve their air traffic control system. He has been married for 31 years with four children and two grandchildren. His hobbies, in addition to ancient coins, include archeology, art history, photography, studies of Spanish refrains, the *Libro de Buen Amor* ("Book of Good Love") and poetry by Becquer.

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