

Politics, Power and Preservation [Session]

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Submitted by Moderator: Susan Reyburn

## **Coinage, Politics, and Power: Preservation grants and fundraising at the library of the American Numismatic Society**

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“Parva ne Pereant.” (So the small things may not perish). This is the motto of the American Numismatic Society, adopted during a redesign of the seal and motto of the Society in 1907. At that time, the Society had already existed for almost 50 years. The motto reflects the mission of the Society – to advance the study and public appreciation of coins, currency, medals, and related objects of all cultures as historical and artistic documents and artifacts. The Society, like the objects it cares for, is small, with only 17 full-time employees and a handful of part-time or consultant staff. However, the vision of the Society and the collections themselves are quite large – over 100,000 library items and more than 800,000 numismatic objects from all time periods and all parts of the world (SLIDE). Small-staffed libraries, like that of the ANS, are frequently under tight budget restrictions and so that we also do not perish, it becomes imperative to seek external sources of funding, and grants are a significant resource of potential income. This paper will explore some creative projects being fostered and funded by individual and larger government support within the historical context of numismatic literature and one such museum institution (SLIDE) devoted to the preservation and study of that literature, the American Numismatic Society.

Coins have long been used as political propaganda (SLIDE); the small surface and portable size make them ideal media to transport ideas as far away as people carry them and their ubiquitous nature make them ideal for promoting the face of authority or symbols of power. Throughout history, coins have become synonymous with power both figuratively and literally. From the earliest days of coin invention, the ancient Greeks and Romans have embraced this potential for presenting political messages and communicating ideologies and achievements in a variety of art forms (SLIDE), and these influences can be felt also in the numismatic literature that later illustrated these ancient coins. The earliest numismatic authors began writing in the sixteenth century fueled by the renewed discovery of the ancient world that epitomized the Renaissance (SLIDE). This is not to say that earlier authors did not comment on, or illustrate, coins, which do appear frequently enough in medieval manuscripts (SLIDE). But an in-depth study of coinage, which fulfills the definition of “numismatic”, came first in 1516 with the metrological work of Guillermo Budé (SLIDE). Another prominent figure working at the time was Hubertus Goltzius (SLIDE), an accomplished engraver and printer from the Low Countries

who published more than a dozen numismatic and other volumes, many of which were produced at his own private press, open from 1563-1576. At the end of one of his books, Goltzius lists the names and regions of all of the different coin cabinets and important officials that he visited while researching his publications. Although Goltzius did make two trips around Europe to visit hundreds of numismatic collections and reproduced many coins with generally accurate engravings (SLIDE), he could be quick to exaggerate the details of the actual coin cabinets that he visited and equally quick to embellish his engravings. Errors abound and the visually flawless engravings may have been an attempt to present images as more attractive in order to satisfy his wealthy patrons. In his 1563 book *Julius Caesar*, (SLIDE) Goltzius specifically lists the collections of 978 coin-cabinets that he claimed to have visited between 1556 and 1560 (a sample of which you see here). Modern study has shown that Goltzius seems to have only made it as far south as Naples and when mapped against his travel diary and other evidence, it appears likely that the number of collections he had printed has been inflated.

Nevertheless, his desire to please his patrons with clear images and impress his readers by offering this remarkable list of important collections and individuals is perhaps not unexpected since many of these travels relied on such patron support to happen. For many non-profit organizations today, this situation is all too familiar and finding the means to adequately fund certain endeavors can be a full-time job. Recent projects (SLIDE) at the Harry W. Bass, Jr. Library of the American Numismatic Society have directly encountered the pressures of appealing to different authorities to preserve the past, which have often dictated many of the activities and goals of the Library.

I would like to further illustrate this with some examples. In recent years, the library has initiated major projects to give call numbers and barcodes to the collections, essential information that facilitates access and helps with security. However, despite the importance of this project, we discovered that it is very difficult to find someone to grant funds for what are essentially unsexy cataloging duties. After compiling a list of necessary goals in our 5-year job plan, we discovered that very few of these were attractive options to donors or grant agencies, which are both major sources of funding for the Society. As we went down our list of goals, we came upon a number of priorities for preservation needs, which seemed to have several attractive funding options in both the government and private sector (SLIDE). Submitting applications to both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Bay and Paul Foundation, which is an independent private foundation in New York City, resulted in modest sums from both organizations. However, it was an interesting and unique opportunity to compare the process – we were notified of the private funds within a couple months after submitting a single application, while it was over 8 months later that the NEH grant notification appeared, despite the fact that the respective funds were nearly equal amounts. This was also our third attempt at applying for government funds and required more than a dozen pages of application materials and edits over time. Application deadlines can appear more flexible with private foundations and rolling deadlines proved to be very helpful to get things going. Government granting agencies, on the other hand, like the NEH or New York State applications have strict deadlines, which generally occur only once a year, so strong advance planning is required.

With these grants we were able to address some of our preservation concerns (SLIDE), such as re-housing a number of important rare auction catalogs and also starting an inventory of our rare bindings. In addition to preservation, areas of digitization also seem to be gaining momentum as the subject of grants for libraries and archives and present attractive options to donors as well as for the libraries and archives themselves. Last year, we were successfully awarded a modest grant from the Delmas Foundation (SLIDE), a foundation in New York City, to initiate digitization of our archives. This afforded us the opportunity to begin adding significantly to our digital collections and working towards establishing a form of digital asset management that would reach across all of our collections, including adding external links to areas such as the Virtual International Authority Files and locally to our coin collection database (SLIDE) and library catalog. As this was the initial phase of such digitization, our focus was to establish the foundation of how the data and metadata would be collected, stored, and presented, before expanding to include a larger volume of digital assets. Our final product is still very much in progress, but this is the test version we ended up with at the end, which displays some interesting features, including active links to stable URIs in our object collections, as you see here (SLIDE), and the library catalog (SLIDE).

Needless to say, we've had significantly more success acquiring grants from private foundations, which have proved to have an application and reporting process that is much more manageable for our small library staff (and by small library staff, I mean me). There are a lot of advantages for both private and government grants and I list a few of those here (SLIDE), as briefly mentioned in this discussion and directly observed from my own experiences. Of course each institution will have different needs and different staff and our Society's staff does not include a grant writer so this added duty falls on top of the minimal library staff and as such clearly influences our overall impressions of the processes.

Private institutions are generally easier to apply for and require only a couple pages of project description followed by an overview of budget and staff involved (I realize I'm over-simplifying things, but generally speaking, this was true in many of the cases that we found). The application for government grants was much more extensive, but at the same time, it is still immensely helpful to go through the full process as much of the information can be re-used for different applications. The funds available through government grants are also significantly higher and perhaps reflective of the amount of work necessary for the application process. I also found and attended a free workshop offered through the Metropolitan New York Library Council that went through the entire application process for New York State grants and offered guidance on how to best address the different sections of the application process. Moreover, I received feedback from the New York State grant agency on why my initial application was rejected, which was extremely helpful in making corrections for future submissions. Government grant websites often post samples of accepted applications and budgets, which offer useful guidance on wording and organization of your application. In the end, although there may have been projects on our long-term list that we would have liked to address first, we always had multiple projects in mind so it can be seen that having guidance by way of strict grant agency guidelines ultimately helped us focus our goals and decide which of our projects we should carry out and when. Given the variety of benefits for both government and private foundation grants, perhaps the best option is a combination of the two.

I'd like to close with a quick word too on the importance of private donor funding for our non-profit organization as well. Private individual donations have always been where the bulk of our income is generated and I think it's only fair to find new and exciting ways of presenting the needs of the library in a way that will also excite our donors into wanting to help and take part. Unlike the government and foundation grant applications, there is no structured application process in appealing to donors for support, but at the same time, there is no guarantee either on what outcome (or income) you might expect to receive. However the appeal of the types of projects are similar to those of larger foundations and again offer a new opportunity to explore and prioritize collection goals in a new way. The benefit too of private donations is that they can come in a variety of forms, and our library and numismatic collections grow significantly because of such object donations.

Our barcoding and call number cataloging project continues to move along at a slow but steady pace thanks to the devotion of library interns and volunteers over the years, although we hope that one day we can find a way to stress the importance of this project in a way that will attract the necessary donations. We can take some comfort in knowing that the creators of the books and numismatic objects within our care also felt a certain level of pressure to promote themselves in a way to attract donors and fund their endeavors. Sometimes it helps to have this added guidance and we are grateful that we are able to explore and benefit from both private and government grants in different ways.

Thank you.