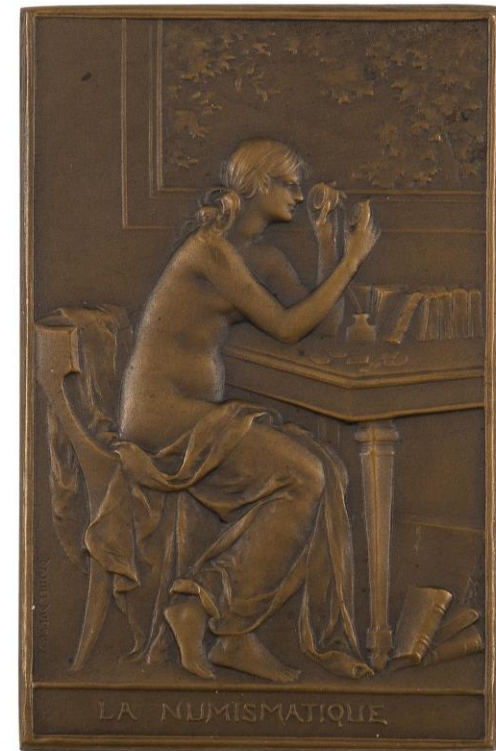


**YALE
UNIVERSITY
ART
GALLERY**

One too many:
sustainable collecting
and collection
management

Dr. Benjamin Hellings

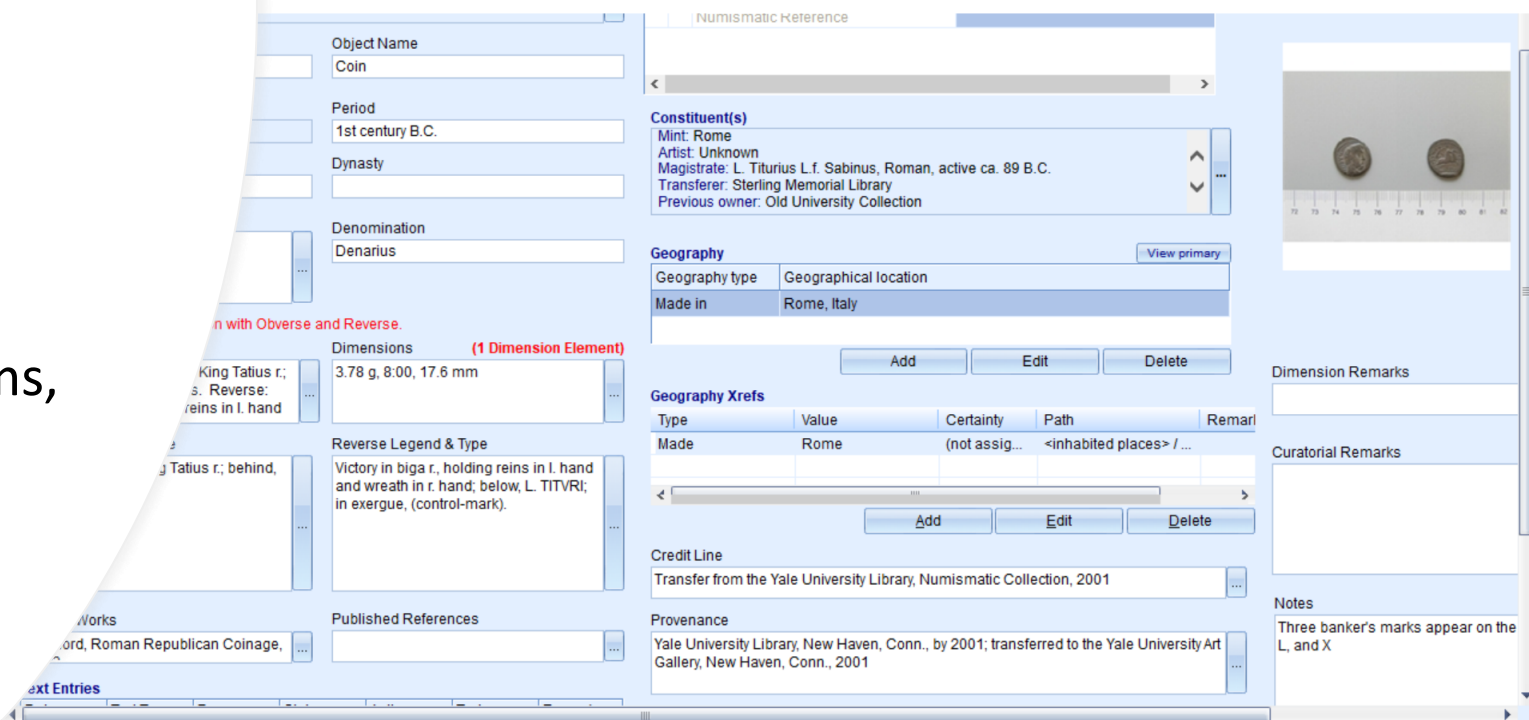
*Jackson-Tomasko Associate Curator of
Numismatics
Head of the Department of Numismatics
ICOMON Secretary*



Inheritance of Problems

1. Record systems

- Systems change
 - Technological improvements
- Changing responsibilities
 - Professionalization of the museum world
 - Curators, Collections Management teams, Conservators, Registrar Teams, and Exhibitions and Art Handlers
- More Information and data for each object



Inheritance of Problems

2. Physical Movement

- Changing rationales
- Short-term solutions
- Record keeping

2. Physical limitations and priorities

3. Curatorial limitations and priorities

4. Support staff limitations and priorities

5. Cost limitations and institutional priorities

6. Exponential growth



On 16 August 2023, the Museum announced that a number of items of jewellery from the collection had been found to be stolen, missing or damaged, and that this was the subject of an ongoing investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service.

The Museum also spoke of its determination to recover the items. This webpage gives details of the losses, describes some of the things that we are doing to recover the items, and says what you can do to help.

What can you do to help?

If you are concerned that you may be, or have been, in possession of items from the British Museum, or if you have any other information that may help us, please email us at recovery@britishmuseum.org

For more general enquiries please email us at info@britishmuseum.org or call (0)20 7323 8000.

What is missing?

On the advice of recovery specialists, we are not sharing full details of the lost and damaged items at this time. What we can share is the type of material that we believe has been stolen.

The vast majority of the items are from the [Department of Greece and Rome](#) and mainly fall into two categories: gems and jewellery. The items illustrated here are similar to those that are missing, but are still in the collection.

Classical Greek and Roman gems

Gems, cameos or intaglios are small objects, often set in rings or other settings, or left unmounted and unfinished. They may be made of semi-precious stone (for example sard, sardonyx, amethyst) or glass; they may be cast from a mould or engraved by hand. The majority of gems are from the Hellenistic and Roman world, but some may also have been made in modern times in imitation of ancient gems. They may feature images of famous individuals from the Classical past, of mythological scenes, animals or objects. These gems are of varied quality. Some will be fragmentary and damaged.

Gold rings, ear-rings and other pieces of jewellery

These date from across antiquity, especially from the Late Bronze Age (about 15th to 11th century BC) and the Hellenistic and Roman periods.



A woman with glasses and a black shirt is sitting at a wooden desk, looking at a laptop. On the desk, there is a black mouse, a tray of small circular samples, and a small electronic device. The background is slightly blurred, showing a computer monitor and some papers.

Moving Forward: Cataloging

- Different tracking systems
- Different cataloging methodologies and systems
- Prioritizations
 - Locations
 - Photography
- Sustainability in systems

Moving Forward: Storage

- Off-site storage
 - Deep inaccessible
 - Secondary annex for access and learning
- Pooling and sharing resources across institution(s)
 - Yale Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage
 - Digital labs: Lens Media Lab
 - Specialized Conservation laboratories
 - Implement treatment
 - Scientific laboratories: Technical Studies Lab
 - Research new methods, materials, etc.
 - Storage facilities (e.g. specialized freezers, etc.)
 - **Open:** Furniture Study Center
 - **Future;** Study Collection Center (= Numismatics, Photography, Prints & Drawings); Textile Study Center; Painting Study Center
 - Security and other staff



Moving Forward: Yale

- Forthcoming:
 - New Annex (Yale West Campus – multiple phase development; next phase numismatics)
 - 100,000+ collection from the American Bank Note Company archive
 - International and American security engraving, models, specimens, proofs, dies, rolls, printing press
- Finishing work on legacy and existing collection (ca. 200,000)
 - Cataloging and processing
 - Deaccessioning



Moving Forward: Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning is the act of lawfully removing an object from a museum's collections.

Where the law does not prohibit a museum from de-accessioning, a museum might consider deaccessioning an object from its collection for one of the following reasons:

- 1- The physical condition of the object is so poor that restoration is not practicable or would compromise its integrity. Objects that are damaged beyond reasonable repair and are of no use for study or teaching purposes may be destroyed.
- 2- The object poses threats to health and safety to the staff and the public.
- 3- The museum is unable to care adequately for the object because of its particular requirements for storage or conservation.
- 4- The object is a duplicate that has no added value as part of a series.
- 5- The object is of poor quality and lacks aesthetic, historical and/or scientific value for exhibition or study purposes.
- 6- The authenticity or attribution of the object is determined to be false or fraudulent, and the fraudulent object lacks sufficient aesthetic, historical and/or scientific value to warrant retention. In disposing of a presumed forgery, the museum shall consider all related legal, curatorial and ethical consequences, and should avoid returning the object to the art market.
- 7- Another museum could more appropriately care for, display and provide access to the object, and it is the intention of the originating museum to assign ownership of the object to that other museum
- 8- The museum's possession of the object is inconsistent with applicable law or ethical principles, e.g., the object was, or may have been, stolen or illegally exported or imported, or the object may be subject to other legal claims for return or restitution.
- 9- The object is no longer consistent with the mission or collecting goals of the museum.
- 10- The object is being sold as part of the museum's effort to renew and improve its collections, in keeping with the collecting goals approved by the museum's governing body.



Guidelines on Deaccessioning of the International Council of Museums

Moving Forward: Deaccessioning

- Deaccessioning is formal change in recorded status of the object
- Disposal is the resulting action taken after a deaccession decision
- Benefits:
 - Free space
 - Remove non-mission contributing objects
 - Review and record all aspects of objects & collection
 - Do not procrastinate problem
 - Generate limited revenue
- Risk:
 - Reputational
 - Human judgement error





The future

- How to move forward while addressing backlog
- Responsible and ethical management and decisions
 - Immediate needs against long-term benefits
 - Limiting costs
 - Financial
 - Individual well-being
 - Sustainability
- One too many to guarantee success?

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