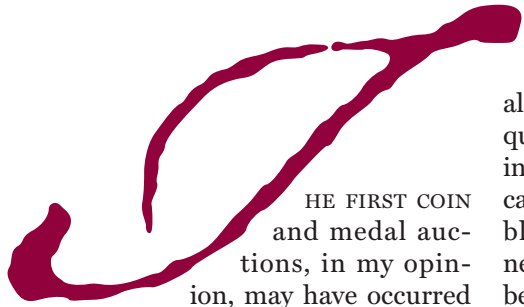


# Early European Coin Sales

*The Dutch and English led the way in numismatic auctions,  
but few catalogs exist to document their efforts.*



THE FIRST COIN and medal auctions, in my opinion, may have occurred as early as the beginning of the 16th century. The first, recorded numismatic sale was conducted in Leyden, Holland, in 1599 and featured the collection of Philips van Marnix (1538-98), Dutch writer and statesman, and son of Jacob van Marnix, baron of Pottes, who, according to an author named Blunt, also was a coin collector.

The library of the American Numismatic Society in New York City possesses records of 3,200 public auctions held in Europe between 1616 and 1780. It is not improbable to extrapolate that 15,000 to 20,000 public auctions were conducted on the Continent during that 164-year period. A researcher by the name of Flugt lists more than 11,000 public auctions held between 1616 and 1825 for which catalogs or parts of catalogs have survived. In most cases, these auctions were of general content, including everything from kitchen utensils and chairs to books and numismatic items. How many coins and medals actually were offered at auction is anyone's guess.

Most early auctions were not cataloged, although one-page broadsides occasionally highlighted some of the pieces for sale. A catalog is known for a coin auction held on July 5, 1616, in La Haye, Holland. Catalogs also document the 1628 sale in Leyden of medals owned by a collector known as Porret, and another sale in Amsterdam in 1663.

Many, if not most, early auction cat-

alogs likely were printed in very small quantities because collectors were few in number. Expensive to produce, the catalogs were fragile, and most probably did not survive. Contemporary newspapers have a better survival rate because of the much larger printings. (With patience and time, a researcher could count the advertisements in the many surviving English, Dutch, French, Italian, German, Polish and Russian newspapers of the period to get a more accurate sense of the number of public sales.)

Abraham de Hondt, the first identifiable Dutch coin auctioneer, offered

the collection of Andres Schoemaker at public auction on April 15, 1720. Lot 1 of this sale probably was a medal of Maximilian of Holland dated 1479. Pieter de Hondt, possibly Abraham's son or younger brother, offered the coin collection of Abraham van Alphen, Burgomaster of Leyden, for sale at public auction on October 2, 1724. This sale is noteworthy for Lot 38, which I can definitively describe as a 1484-dated thaler of Sigismund (1427-96), Archduke of Austria. (Catalogs for both sales reside in the American Numismatic Society's rare book room.) ▶



◀ The first, recorded numismatic auction, held in Leyden, Holland, in 1599, featured the collection of Philips van Marnix. Other sales are known to have been conducted in the mid-17th century in Amsterdam, shown below in a modern photograph.



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The Dutch are represented by several auctioneers:

Zommer (active 1693-1716), 17 sales  
de Hondt (1720-51), 11 sales

de Land (1734-54), 20 sales

Gaillard (1744-66), 11 sales

de Leth (1745-63), 40 sales (often working together with de Land)

Among the earliest English auctions devoted to rare coins was a sale conducted in London by Abraham Langford on March 22, 1753. Featuring the collection of Sylvester Bolton, it consisted of 92 lots of English coins, listed in a 10-page catalog with no illustrations. Langford called an auction of Roman coins for Sotheby, Wilkerson & Hodge on February 11, 1755, and another of tokens, likewise for Sotheby, on March 3, 1764. Fellow London auctioneer James Christie held a coin auction in 1773, and Skinner & Company conducted a sale of ancient and British coins in 1784.

Before 1700, only three, major Eng-

lish auctioneers were particularly known for their advertising: Gillflower (1689-91), 17 sales; Millington (1689-1702), 22 sales; and Bullord (1690-1701), 20 sales. The balance of the major English auctioneers before 1780 are:

Cock (1722-48), 49 sales

Ford (1741-51), 12 sales

Langford (1746-64), 110 sales

Baker (1747-65), 15 sales

Prestage (1749-67), 73 sales

Paterson (1758-80), 30 sales

Prestage & Hobbs (1761-64), 34 sales

Langford & Son (1764-80), 98 sales

Christie (1766-80), 306 sales

A lone Frenchman, Remy of Paris (1755-80), is known to have conducted 74 sales. Since this time, countless rare coin sales have been held by hundreds of numismatic auction houses around the world. Next month, I'll begin my look at the history of American coin auctions.

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