



## CD ROM as an equal partner of a book, not a rival (Methodological essay on publication media in numismatics)

Once upon the time we were very happy with those beautiful vinyl discs on our gramophones playing our favourite songs. Later, tape-recorders appeared. One could record everything available and compile his/her own recordings and copy them for friends. Were there any visible animosities between those two media for users? They both parallelly coexisted together even up to these *compact* days. Very many people still use all three types of data carriers. Our decision always depends on what we need it for. **Every single medium has its own characteristics; advantages and limits.**

As book users in majority of cases, our numismatic community has got accustomed to passive consuming information. Once definitively printed, books and catalogues are used as primary sources for data we need. Unless we buy two copies of one title; one for the library and the other one to be cut into pieces for our personal card index... Here, **the process of informing people generally ends with publication of a book or a catalogue.** New electronic media are very dynamic and offer information you can directly form according to your needs. In case of these new methods, **the process of practically infinite exploiting of an electronic source depends on user, his/her abilities and knowledge, purposes and opportunities.** The only clue exists: We must know what we want and how to get it. Information is the target; form and media are given by our purposes and opportunities. We need to know something about computers and software and have it available. This is all about recipients.

Having in mind any new numismatic publication, the author starts every time to consider its form and media, i.e. who is the potential user. **A book represents unchangeable consensus in form of information published. An electronic medium demands individual cooperation of the user.** Both media have their advantages and limits. But they **perfectly support one another.** There is no rivalry, but an **organic complementary coexistence exists.** Especially in case of catalogues, we would prefer to have them published as books and CD ROMs together every time. And then, let people decide what they will use; when, where and why. But let us give them the opportunity to decide.

To be honest to say that, we are deeply indebted to Susan Tyler-Smith for inspiring us to write all these remarks. [See review of *Numismata Orientalia Regni Bohemiae: Corpus Sasanicus*, CD ROM by Vlastimil Novák and Jiří Militký. National Museum, Prague, 2000. In: *ONS NL*, 169 (Autumn 2001), pp. 8–9.] Because of the review and several e-mails from colleagues commenting our new CD ROM publication, we started to ask questions why people do not distinguish between a printed medium and an electronic one. **Why do they expect the CD ROM to have characteristics of a book and vice versa?** Why do they criticize limits of one medium and do not see its advantages? Do they not know how to use their computers? The answer is not so simple and impertinent. It is more less a relict of our conventional conservative point of view related to libraries full of printed information. **We are still not used to work with a new type of information in a creative way instead of accepting it passively.**

We have made a fatal mistake in process of publishing our CD ROM. We supposed users to know how to handle with the medium and information on it, and we have not had any detailed user's manual printed in the booklet. When you take a book you are supposed to be able to read. When you take a CD ROM you are expected to know something about computers. When something is printed wrongly, it is forever. When we are not satisfied with electronic information we can work on its primary form until we are happy.

**Photographic performance** always points to the quality of every publication. Sometimes is very difficult to reach the highest class (worn coins, bronzes, etc.) and everybody's point of view is very individual. Having a bad photo once printed, there is nothing to do (do you remember prints sometimes even worse than the photos themselves or selections of the best preserved coins in non-*sylloge* publications?). When we are not happy with a digitally published photograph, we can copy it to our HD or FD and using special programs (Adobe Photoshop, Thumb) we can get the best result. This is also the case of photo tables and comparisons. Let us copy the photos anywhere else and create a

nice table (a new database) or simply open the next picture in a new window to have a comfort comparison. There is no need to print the photos and compare them on our table. Coins are published everywhere in a conventional way; i.e. upside up. When we do not know how to turn them on our screen (preventing our stiff neck), let us remember what we do with books – let us just simply turn the computer monitor...

**Indices** create more serious trouble. There are strict capacity limits for the software performing filtration. The more sophisticated filter we have (multifunctional filtration), the more memory capacity we need. The standard CD ROM represents 650 MB and we have also hundreds of photographs there. We always have something in exchange for anything else, and it is always useful to follow the one-VOLUME/CD-publication. The request for *active filtration* of any database is fully legitimate, **but** it means the *full installation* of the CD, i.e. one should already have a database system (e.g. Access) or install it from the CD itself. And here we are with license policies and AT/MAC incompatibilities... Every sorting given exclusively by the author must find someone who will disagree. Anyway, there is a more complicated filtration possible in usually supplemented *doc/pdf* version via standard instruments: EDIT-FIND/REPLACE. And why not to built a new database on completely new criteria from the material available?

**Unique running numbers** in electronic publications usually consist of several complements because of combination of different formats (database, index, *doc*, etc.). There is a unique element, plus characteristic additional element of the particular format (e.g. *collection* no., plus *database* no.). Links connecting individual formats are necessary. For a potential reference, the unique element must be used.

**Sylloge principle** in electronic publication helps to bring **all** original material to the user and decreases subjective view in numismatics. But nothing can replace personal contact with coins!

Technology and quality of outputs are changing, as well as the ways of using them. But our approach to all kinds of media as mediators of primary information will be the same.

Being adequately cheap, a CD ROM does not want to become a substitute for any printed matters. Its distribution advancing the proper book can signalize a simple lack of financial sources for conventional publication. The electronic catalogue should be an equal partner of a book, not a rival.

Our CD ROM with Sasanian coins from the Czech collections is distributed by the National Museum in Prague (for details see [www.aconet.cz/npm](http://www.aconet.cz/npm)) and we are also negotiating with the Spinks, London ([dsaville@spinkandson.com](mailto:dsaville@spinkandson.com)) and Stephen Album, Santa Rosa, Ca. ([album@sonic.net](mailto:album@sonic.net))

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