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IMAGINES NVMMORVM: Thesaurus Iconographicus Nummorum Graecorum – A New Numismatic Project in Berlin

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Launched on 1 January 2025, *IMAGINES NVMMORVM: Thesaurus Iconographicus Nummorum Graecorum* (ImagNum) is part of the Academies Programme of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities **(Fig. 1)** — the largest long-term research initiative in the humanities and social sciences in Germany, notable for its international scope and structure (https://www.akademienunion.de/en/research/the-academies-programme). Established in 1979/80 and jointly funded by federal and state governments, the Programme is coordinated by the Union of Academies. Its primary aim is to explore, document, and preserve cultural heritage across its historical and geographical breadth. By creating comprehensive and enduring knowledge repositories, the Programme contributes to scholarly advancement and the long-term safeguarding of cultural memory. Increasingly, the results of these initiatives are made available digitally, ensuring access for both the academic community and the wider public interested in history, culture, and the humanities.

ImagNum investigates ancient Greek coinage in relation to visual culture and cultural history, developing an iconographic thesaurus structured according to Linked Open Data principles. For the first time, a digital research tool will systematically reveal processes of image transfer and transformation on coins while situating them in their historical and cultural contexts.

The project, conceived as a twenty-five-year initiative, is led by Prof. Dr. Annette Haug (Chair of Classical Archaeology, Kiel University), Dr. Ulrike Peter (Project Director and Research Coordinator, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, BBAW), and Prof. Dr. Bernhard Weisser (Director, Coin Cabinet, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). ImagNum is conducted in collaboration with leading institutions, including the German Archaeological Institute, the Big Data Lab at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, and the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents at

the University of Oxford.

At the core of the project is the digital publication of the Berlin Coin Cabinet's extensive Greek coin holdings. With over 110,000 specimens, this collection ranks among the five most significant worldwide and spans more than a millennium — from the seventh century BC to the late third century AD. Its systematic study represents fundamental research of exceptional scholarly importance. The online publication, featuring persistent identifiers, high-resolution images, and standardized data formats, preserves this cultural heritage while making it accessible for broad scholarly use beyond the field of numismatics.

Building on this material and on other corpora, ImagNum is developing a comprehensive numismatic image database, the Thesaurus Iconographicus Nummorum Graecorum (ThING). This platform generates image-related authority data, enabling systematic access to Greek coin iconography. By interlinking visual motifs, inscriptions, and contextual data, ThING opens new research pathways and innovative perspectives for the study of ancient visual culture.

The project also integrates artificial intelligence (AI) to unify digitized coins into a single analytical framework. AI-based image recognition and data linkage allow comparative analysis of vast quantities of material, forming the basis for new questions in visual and cultural history.

These questions are explored across five thematic research modules:

Module 1 examines how spatial and cultural contexts shape the meanings of coin images. Unlike traditional studies, which often assumed unambiguous meanings and onedirectional communication — especially for 'propaganda' media — ImagNum focuses on the polyvalence of images and their capacity to generate multiple meanings across regions. Analysis traces the circulation of motifs through the mobility of coins, die engravers, and technologies, with particular focus on Asia Minor (Troas and Mysia) and the Black Sea region — zones of contact between Greek settlers and indigenous populations. These case studies illustrate early processes of 'glocalisation', where transregional imagery was adapted to local interests and cultural exchange.

Module 2 explores coins as mediators between issuers and recipients. Coins, produced, used, and interpreted by diverse actors, actively shaped and negotiated identities. Whereas earlier scholarship often viewed coin imagery as simple expressions of civic or royal ideology, this module investigates the communicative intentions of different actors and the reception of coin images in varying social contexts. Special attention is given to reworked coins, motifs adopted from other media, and evidence from circulation and archaeological finds. Comparative studies across regions and periods reveal complex networks of meaning, showing how coins functioned as intermediaries between political power and public perception.

Module 3 addresses the material, medial, and serial nature of coins and how these features influence their aesthetic and semantic effects. As small, round, two-sided metallic carriers produced en masse, coins occupy a unique position within visual culture. ImagNum investigates how these characteristics affected the transformation of motifs from other media and their adaption to local traditions. The study focuses on North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, and Italy — regions shaped by intense cultural interaction during Phoenician, Greek, and Roman expansion — and explores how shared visual concepts were reinterpreted locally through form, material, and communictive intent.

Module 4 examines the interaction between image and inscription as a paradigm of 'iconotexts'. Legends and images, often studied separately or hierarchically, are treated as mutually interacting elements that jointly construct meaning. By digitizing and integrating existing corpora of coin inscriptions into ThING with persistent identifiers, the project enables systematic investigation of visual-textual interactions — whether complementary, competitive, or contradictory — including cases where either text or image is absent.

Module 5 situates coins within temporal frameworks, tracing their 'afterlives' from antiquity to modernity. Drawing on Aby Warburg's concept of *Bilderfahrzeuge* ('image vehicles'), this module examines how coin imagery transcended original contexts through imitation, collection, and scholarly reception. The rediscovery and reproduction of ancient coins from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, as well as their continued reinterpretation in later art and scholarship, reveal

the enduring influence of ancient visual culture. The module contributes to understanding how meanings evolve over time and how Greek coin imagery continues to shape cultural memory.

The overarching aim of ImagNum is not only the systematic digital publication of numismatic collections but also the contextualization of individual objects within broader historical, cultural, and intellectual frameworks. By combining traditional scholarship with cutting-edge digital methods, the project preserves an essential part of the world's cultural heritage while providing new tools for its interpretation.

For further information, see https://www.imagines-nummorum.eu/en or https://www.bbaw.de/forschung/imagines-nvmmorvm-thesaurus-iconographicus-nummorum-graecorum-online

Fig. 1. IMAGINES NVMMORVM Logo.