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THE COUNT OF CAYLUS (1692-1765) AND THE STUDY OF ANCIENT COINS

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The Count of Caylus stands out as a major figure of the eighteenth century. Born at the very foot of the French throne (his mother was a niece of Madame de Maintenon and he grew up in the vicinity of the Sun king), Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières-Grimoard de Pestels Levieux de Lévis, comte de Caylus, had many lives. He quickly renounced the military career he first embraced. He trained himself to be an engraver and attained respectable achievements. Curious by nature, he haunted circles, artistic and not, where few aristocrats of his quality dared to venture. He made a name for himself as the presumed author of many bawdy books ('littérature paillardé'). A generous benefactor since his youth, he sponsored different kinds of artists. Also as a youth he made 'le voyage en Italie' and, with years, he increasingly devoted most of his time to antiquities. The days of the last decades of his life were split in two parts: to visit and sponsor his artists during the mornings, such as Edmé Bouchardon or Jean-Marie Vien, and to write about antiquities in the evenings, with very little time devoted to the many entertainments a man of his rank and fortune may have enjoyed (he had a yearly rent of 60,000 French pounds, which may be compared to the 4,000 French pounds given by Choiseul for Barthélemy).

A member of both the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (1731) and of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (1742), Caylus was very influential in encouraging the revival of Greco-Roman antiquity in the arts against the vapidité of the 'style rocaille'. A natural target for the Encyclopedists and the instigators of the Enlightenment, he was hated by Diderot who made a cruel epitaph when he died: '*Ci-gît un antiquaire acariâtre et brusque; ah qu'il est bien logé dans cette urne étrusque!*' ('here lies a short and cantankerous antiquarian; how well he is housed in this Etruscan urn!').

His reputation faded quickly after his death, and for a long time oscillated between – to take the words of his first biographer – the bad (to have been the incarnation of the losing party of the Antiquarians against the Philosophers) and the worst (to be presumed as the author of bawdy literature).¹ Rediscovered more recently as a potential father of scientific archaeology, Caylus is now involved in another dispute, along with Johann Joachim Winckelmann, propagated by modern commentators who try, sometimes with a touch of nationalistic feeling, to establish a hierarchy between these two characters.² When they were alive, Caylus and Winckelmann disliked each other, so it would be easy to establish a catalogue of differences between the two.

Caylus himself explicitly made clear his aversion to collecting coins: '*Wishes are often unlimited: the one for coins is not only the most extended, but the necessity of completing the series we suffer to see incomplete, and the impossibility of gathering the coins already mentioned in other cabinets, are both a matter of grief and disgust I experienced in my youth. These reasons have prevented me from following their study*' (my translation).³ Still, as a determined antiquarian, Caylus had no problem acknowledging how coins could be helpful in understanding history, all the more since their images and legends are the results of official and contemporary desires. In a compromising and somewhat ambiguous statement, he even dared to place coins before texts, and

* I would like to express my warm thanks to my friend Peter van Alfen, who kindly improved my English

² Ibid., pp. 328-66.

³ Caylus, Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, grecques, étrusques et romaines (hereafter 'Recueil'), IV, Paris, 1759, p. 143.

¹ Rocheblave 1889, p. VII.

so proved to be not too far from the now famously mocked abbé Hardouin, who held only coins as trustworthy witnesses of the past, dismissing at once almost all our literary evidence.⁴

I would like to argue in this paper that Caylus is worthy of quotation in the history of numismatics, definitively more so in that respect than Johann Joachim Winckelmann. A first but unimportant reason is that he left his name on a numismatic book published soon after his death without indication of place or date, but which was produced in his youth (c. 1730):⁵ the publication of the Republican and Imperial Roman gold coins belonging to the king of France, (*Numismata aurea Imperatorum Romanorum e Cimelio Regis Christianissimi delineata et aeri incise, s.l.* [Paris], s.d. [1766?], 68 plates). All the coins – approximately 1,500 – were drawn and engraved in copper by Caylus himself, whose name appears in bold letters on the title page. No text was provided with the plates, on which the engravings are of a decent quality.

His real tribute to numismatics is to be found in his *opus magnum*, his *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, grecques, étrusques et romaines*, the first volume of which appeared in 1752 and the seventh and last one in 1767, shortly after his death in 1765. These seven volumes form an extraordinary disparate monument in which coins are actually rarely reproduced but, as we shall see, when they are, they are done so with an original and surprisingly modern angle.

Caylus and the French numismatists: Claude Gros de Boze, Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, Joseph Pellerin and the others

The second reason is more profound: the Count of Caylus knew everybody in the small world of antiquarians, and among them the numismatists. He knew Claude Gros de Boze (1680-1753) very well, who was the keeper of the royal coin cabinet (1719-1753), as well as the perpetual secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (from 1706).⁶ Gros de Boze used to receive for dinner every Tuesday and Wednesday a group of Academicians.

Jean-Jacques Barthélemy.

It was there that Barthélemy met Caylus for the first time in the late 1740s.⁷ Caylus, now in his fifties and passionate about antiquities, quickly became acquainted with this ‘long abbot’ (as he was later nicknamed), so gifted with the knowledge of ancient languages. Caylus himself never studied Greek and tried courageously to improve his Latin when he became recognized as an antiquarian.⁸ His knowledge of the secondary literature was not great, leading him sometimes to reveal his insufficiencies, as when he comically charged Paciaudi to send his best greetings to Cyriacus of Ancona (died in 1455).⁹ The services the young Jean-Jacques Barthélemy (born 24 years after Caylus) may have provided to him were evident, as well as the social openings Caylus may have offered to Barthélemy.

For sure, Barthélemy became one of his ‘faiseurs’ and this is plainly recognized in the introduction of the first volume.¹⁰ But to what extent? Was he really the instigator of the *Recueil*? Did he suggest, and then convince the count to embark on, what remains his most important achievement, as argued by Sainte-Croix, the biographer of Barthélemy?¹¹ Should we recognize the long abbot behind any comments in the inscriptions? The first edition of Barthélemy’s works is far more restricted: it ends with a notice entitled ‘*Dans le recueil d’Antiquités de Caylus*’ which attributes

⁴ Caylus, *Recueil*, VI, 1764, pp. 151-2, pl. XLV, N° 1.

⁵ As was made clear in the letter written by Caylus on 5 January 1730 to the abbot Antonio Conti (see Rocheblave 1889, p. 154, n. 3 and Rees 2006, p. 73).

⁶ See Babelon 1928, pp. 22-4.

⁷ Rocheblave 1889, p. 93, n. 4.

⁸ On his poor knowledge of Latin, see Sériey 1802, p. 183 (letter

XXXV of Barthélemy to him).

⁹ Babelon 1928, p. 13.

¹⁰ Caylus, *Recueil*, I, 1752, p. XIV.

¹¹ See Sainte-Croix 1797, p. XXXVII. This suggestion was presented as likely by Rocheblave 1889, p. 93 and was taken for granted by Babelon 1928, p. 9.

to him four passages, the only four about which Caylus is explicit about his debt to Barthélemy. *A Nota bene* adds: ‘*Barthélemy a fourni encore diverses remarques au comte de Caylus pour ce recueil, et l’a aidé beaucoup dans la rédaction du premier volume*’.¹²

Caylus and Barthélemy never became friends. Both disliked obligations and they were both obliged to each other. Barthélemy, whose printed autobiography is mute about these details, not only owed to Caylus his election at the Académie des Inscriptions but, partly, also his position as the successor of Claude Gros de Boze as keeper of the royal coin cabinet.¹³ But, as exemplified by several passages of his correspondence to Paciaudi, Barthélemy denied considering Caylus a true antiquarian but constantly treated him as a ‘grand seigneur’. Caylus, on his side, moderately appreciated this lack of esteem disguised with high consideration. In September 1763, he wrote to Paciaudi: ‘*Ne craignez rien de ce que je puis dire à Barthélemy. Sans éclat, j’ai retiré tout doucement mes troupes. Il en sait trop long pour moi, et nous sommes comme nous serons le reste de notre vie*’.¹⁴ Sarcasms against Barthélemy are clearly expressed in his late correspondence with Paciaudi.¹⁵ There we find that Caylus disliked the too close relationship of the abbot with the duchess of Choiseul, born Louis-Honorine Crozat, who was often left alone by a too busy husband. When Caylus died, Barthélemy wrote to Paciaudi: ‘*Depuis nous avons perdu ce pauvre comte ; je l’ai regretté et le regrette encore bien vivement. Mais ma douleur a été au comble par la mort de ce pauvre ambassadeur (Solar), à qui vous savez combien j’étais attaché*’.¹⁶ Barthélemy could not have been more explicit about his priorities.

Joseph Pellerin.

The other major numismatic character of the time in Paris was Joseph Pellerin, called ‘the old’ since he lived nearly a century (1684-1782). Pellerin built the largest collection of ancient coins of his time, about 33,000 coins, especially strong in Greek coins. Pensioned in 1745, Pellerin, already nearly blind, devoted the rest of his long life to studying his coins. From 1762 to 1778, he published the ten volumes of his numismatic *Recueil* with different subtitles, such as *Recueil de médailles de peuples et de villes qui n’ont point encore été publiées ou qui sont peu connues*. This numismatic monument may have been inspired by Caylus himself, as is claimed by Charles Lebeau.¹⁷ There are several similarities between these two gigantic *Recueils*: not only the titles and the sizes of the enterprises, but also the very idea of publishing interesting pieces as they come along. It is not unlikely that Caylus engraved some of the coins reproduced by Pellerin, as we may infer from a letter to Paciaudi where, speaking of the fourth volume of Pellerin, he says ‘*auquel je travaille*’.¹⁸ In any case, we see Caylus following the progresses of the *Recueil de médailles*, well aware of what would likely be the considerable interest in the publication of Latakia’s hoard, the first hoard of Greek coin to have ever been published.¹⁹

Relations between Caylus and Pellerin are well attested. Pellerin, who ended his career as Premier commis de la Marine and was living in Rue de Richelieu, had a large network of correspondents too but, in 1759, his confidence was broken in the man he used to employ as his intermediary in Italy. Caylus asked Paciaudi to find another correspondent for him adding that Pellerin had one of the most beautiful and largest coin cabinets in Europe. This commission was difficult and Paciaudi failed. Paciaudi himself was versed in numismatics and praised Pellerin ‘*as by far superior to Patin, Vaillant, Spanheim and all the band of antiquarians*’.²⁰ He once sent him some

¹² Sainte-Croix, 1797-1798, IV, p. 226.

¹³ Archives de l’Institut, C9 – see Fumaroli 1995.

¹⁴ Nisard 1877, p. 355 (Letter LXIX).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 372 (Letter LXXII, 24 Oct. 1763), p. 423 (LXXXIII, 26 February 1764), p. 461 (LXXXIX, 1st April 1764).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-1 (Letter XXXIV, 14 Oct. 1765).

¹⁷ Charles Le Beau, ‘Eloge de Caylus’, in *Mémoires de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, XXXIV, 1770, p. 221 (?) – see Rocheblave 1889, p. 121, n. 3.

¹⁸ Nisard 1877, p. 372 (Letter LXXII of Caylus to Paciaudi, 24 Oct. 1763).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 343 (Letter LXIX of Caylus to Paciaudi, 26 Sept. 1763).

coins found in Venice through the intermediary of Caylus, who felt very obliged. The counterpart of these mediations for Caylus was free access to the coin collection of Pellerin who, in addition, offered him some pieces.

Caylus was truly instrumental for advancing everybody's agenda and he enjoyed appearing as such, even in numismatic matters as exemplified by a letter of Pierre-Jean Mariette to Paciaudi: '*J'aurais souhaité vous envoyer la notice de quelques médailles de l'ancienne Ithaque, supposé que M. Pellerin en ait quelqu'une dans sa collection, mais M. de Caylus, qui était présent à l'ouverture de votre lettre, s'est saisi de la commission, et ce sera par lui que vous en serez éclairci*'.²¹

The modernity of Caylus

Barthélemy and Pellerin were the leading numismatic authorities of their time and certainly Caylus was not in a position to compete with them, but I would argue that Caylus was more modern than both of them, and that the rare numismatic passages dispersed in his *Recueil des antiquités* are possibly more illuminating for current research than the much more extended writings of the two French coryphées of eighteenth-century numismatic science.

Caylus simply looked at the coins differently or, better still, left the coins to numismatists while he concentrated on all their contextual surroundings. Typical is his commentary on a mounted gold Roman coin of Maximus. His interest goes far beyond the coin itself: it goes to the fact that, because it was mounted, this coin is remarkably well preserved; moreover, it attests to a social habit: the flattery of citizens towards their emperors.²² Above all, Caylus was interested in how things were produced. It comes as no surprise then that he succeeded in acquiring the only surviving coin-die out of two found in 1739 in the fountain in Nîmes²³ which he compared with the one kept at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève. Not only did he provide accurate measurements of length and height, as he was wont to do systematically, but he slightly filed the edge of the die to test its composition and analyze its different components. Caylus's attention was also drawn to the clay moulds, found in Lyon at the very beginning of the eighteenth century, prepared to produce cast coins.²⁴ His explanations could easily find a receptive audience today. He tried to cast coins himself and succeeded in reproducing the operation with the same clay moulds. Hence his conclusion that these moulds were not necessarily the works of counterfeiters, but may have served as an expedient in production, especially since they were used to reproduce bad silver coins. He argued that beside struck coins, Roman emperors may have also issued cast coins, and that this phenomenon was not limited to them. Indeed, Caylus provided another example in his volume V of some bronzes of Massalia (which, in addition, he sent to La Monnaie de Paris to be tested).²⁵ This is truly a modern approach, if we consider, for example, how the same point of view has recently been expressed for Ptolemaic bronzes. Being far more advanced than traditional antiquarians, here taken mainly as philologists, he typically concludes: '*Mais c'est aux antiquaires qui joignent à d'autres connaissances celle du métal, à juger de mes vues et des conséquences que j'en ai tirées*' (p. 291).²⁶ Despite the claim that Barthélemy was greatly instrumental in the first volume, it is clear that these comments have to be attributed to Caylus only. Ironically, Barthélemy is, however, responsible for a not too fortunate comment in the second volume: it deals with a golden leaf found on an Egyptian mummy for which the 'long abbot' assumed that it could be the first money of the Egyptians, an hypothesis which has received no support since.²⁷ Lead weights were another matter of interest for

²⁰ Sériey's 1802, p. 297 (Letter LXXI of Paciaudi to Caylus, 8 Oct. 1763).

²¹ Nisard 1877, p. 318 (Letter II of Mariette to Paciaudi, 6 April 1759).

²² Caylus, *Recueil* V, 1762, pp. 313-4 and Pl. CXII, No. I-II.

²³ Caylus, *Recueil*, I, 1752, pp. 284-5 and Pl. CV, No. I.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 286-91 and Pl. CV, No. II.

²⁵ Caylus, *Recueil*, V, 1762, pp. 159-60 and Pl. LVI, No. VI.

²⁶ The question of moulds was of prime interest for Caylus who gave them long comments in *Recueil*, IV, 1759, pp. 343-54 (discussing the quality of clays, oils to be used and materials in which moulds can be made).

Caylus, who published one found in Chio lent to him for study by Joseph Pellerin.²⁸ *Tesserae* formed another category of material close to the coins. Caylus commented on three of them engraved in ivory in his third volume.²⁹ Noticing that each of these ivory *tesserae* had to be cut individually, he made the sensible and general comment that they are proofs of a Roman magnificence funneled into small details. In addition, on the same plate, Caylus illustrates some lead pieces with monetary images. Instead of identifying them as trial-pieces, as has often been the case (wrongly in my mind) in recent scholarship, he considers them as simple fantasies.³⁰ Comparing coins and gems, either cameos or intaglios, Caylus's sentiment is that gems have more often provided a model for die-cutters than the opposite.³¹

Finally, Caylus is to be remembered as a pioneer of Celtic coins, which are usually neglected, since, as he reminds his reader, they cannot be dated or localized and so are consequently of no use to the historian.³² Caylus sent a batch of these coins to M. de Quévanne at La Monnaie de Paris, whose analyses proved that the people who issued these coins were very fine metallurgists. Hence the question: how tribes who had such a poor taste in the arts were so knowledgeable in technology? Our appreciation for Celtic art has changed considerably in the twentieth century, but our surprise at the skill of Celtic metallurgy remains unchanged.

To conclude, it is true to say that, generally speaking, the count of Caylus had only a modest interest in coins. But at the same time, what he did was really remarkable and surprisingly modern for his time.

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²⁷ Caylus, *Recueil*, II, 1756, pp. 18-22 and Pl. IV, No. II.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4 and Pl. XLIX, No. I.

²⁹ Caylus, *Recueil*, III, 1759, pp. 283-4 and Pl. LXXVII – on *tesserae*,

see also *Recueil*, IV, 1759, pp. 160-1 and Pl. LIV, No. V and VI.

³⁰ Caylus, *Recueil*, III, 1759, p. 287 and Pl. LXXVII, No. VII.

³¹ Caylus, *Recueil*, IV, p. 243 and Pl. LXXVI, No. 2)

³² Caylus, *Recueil*, VI, 1764, pp. 328-31 and Pl. CIV.