

COIN COLLECTING IN BELGIUM c.1830-c.1900: COIN DEALERS AND AUCTION HOUSES

THIS PAPER IS ON COIN DEALING in Belgium in the 19th century. We know how coins are sold today and most collectors are familiar with Belgian coin dealers such as Jean Elsen (and sons), Druso Franceschi, Tradart (Michel Max Bendenoun), Willem van Alsenoy, Lea Vandenbruwaene, Jean-Luc Van der Schueren, etc., and collectors visit the numerous coin fairs with hobby dealers and semi-professionals, or well-known sites such as Ebay, Catawiki, Sixbid and many others. Some might even remember dealers from the recent past such as Edouard Terseleer, Marc Hariga, Jean René De Mey, Charles Pire, Pierre Magain, and might have heard of Albert Delmonte, Paul Tinchant and Charles Dupriez.^[1] But how and by whom were coins sold in 19th-century Belgium? That will be the central theme of this contribution. This is not a very systematic study, rather a succession of stories about dealers, but it will nevertheless give the reader some idea of how coin dealing worked in 19th-century Belgium.

A letter from the archive of the Belgian Numismatic Society, dated July 4th 1862 and written by a twenty-year-old student of the *Collège de la Paix* [*sic*] in Namur throws an unexpected light on collecting (*see Doc. 1*):

*‘Monsieur ... I am completely unknown to you ... I am starting a collection of ancient coins ... and for the time being I will limit myself to only two coins of each emperor ... My finances as a student do not allow me to spend much money for the time being ... So I do hope that the coins you will send me will not be too expensive.
Signed: Count Albéric du Chastel.’*

The young du Chastel belonged to an extremely wealthy family. By 1899 he had gathered one of the nicest collections of Greek and Roman coins of his day. Today these coins are one of the prized possessions of the Belgian

* I want to thank those who have provided me with help and information for which I am very grateful: Julian Baker, Jos Benders, François de Callatay, Kartsen Dahmen, Hadrien Rambach and Christine Servais.

[1] Grierson & Blackburn 1986, p. 399-414 for a list of collectors and dealers and for a list of coin auction houses and their catalogues in the collection of the Coin Department of the Royal Library of Belgium: Y. Landrain & A. Renard: <http://www.kbr.be/nl/veilingcatalogi-en-verkooplijsten-munten-en-penningen>

Coin Department. We know where most of his coins came from. Du Chastel was a collector who bought mainly at auctions organized by foreign auction houses such as Rollin & Feuardent or Hoffmann in Paris, Sotheby's or Wilkinson & Hodge in London, or Sambon in Rome.^[2]

Unfortunately we do not know to whom this early letter was addressed. Was it perhaps a Belgian coin dealer? Some of his coins had been found in Belgium and we know that his wonderful aureus of Postumus was bought in 1876 from the Brussels auction house of Franciscus Johannes Olivier, *rue des Paroissiens* 11.^[3] So once in a while there was definitely a Belgian link.



An excellent starting point to find out more about the Belgian numismatic market in those days is the inventory of the Coin Department of the Royal Library of Belgium. This oversized volume starts in the year 1838 and it contains information about all acquisitions, their provenances and prices. It mentions the names of hundreds of collectors, auction houses and coin dealers. A complete study of this inventory would need a book, so in this paper we will single out a few names and illustrate the 19th-century coin and medal market through their activities.

Between 1838 and 1840 there is one name that stands out when we look at the acquisitions of the Coin Department, and that is Joseph-Pierre Braemt (1796-1864), engraver general at the Mint of Brussels and creator of a huge number of medals.^[4] He acquired 3,570 coins and medals during those years; all were bought at auction.^[5] This was something of an official assignment, but it illustrates well how someone could combine the job of engraver at the Mint with buying and selling.

Medal makers are indeed to be found among the earliest professional numismatists. Their activity flourished at the time of the Belgian Revolution. In 1830 and the years thereafter, dozens of engravers produced historic medals trying to sell them to the ever-growing numismatic community. The only fairly well documented dealer from this period is Augustin Noefnet (°1792) and his wife Caroline Wyckmans. They had a shop *Montagne de la Cour* in the very centre of Brussels, and were known as goldsmiths and jewelers. In 1831 and 1832 Noefnet published fixed price lists in which he offered Belgian medals made by engravers such as Hart, Veyrat, de Hondt and many others, as well as medals of the emperor Napoleon, all in bronze

[2] de Callataÿ & van Heesch 1999, p. xvii.

[3] de Callataÿ & van Heesch 1999, p. 145, no. 778: *Vente Olivier*, 9 March 1876 (aureus found in Mons).

[4] Poels, Vandamme & Vanoverbeek 2015; Tourneur 1965, col. 124.

[5] Tourneur 1965, col. 113-126 (esp. col. 124).

as well as in silver.^[6] Prices are still in Dutch guilders, as the Belgian franc had not yet been introduced!^[7] He seems to have been well known outside Belgium, as the future Danish king Christian VIII used these price lists as a reference work for his collection of medals.^[8] Back then newly edited medals were accompanied by a small brochure or leaflet describing the object. They are very rare today but Christian of Denmark kept the one that announced the striking of a satirical medal on the first Belgian ruler Surlet de Chokier (*le régent*). Noefnet used 'flyers' like these to announce new medals. On one of them, printed in 1830, he announces a medal engraved by H. Veyrat in gilt bronze, offered at 1 florin, and a white metal version at 50 cents. The way he tries to seduce his clients is quite particular and rather morbid, as the text on the flyer goes as follows: '*La première médaille frappée décore la poitrine inanimée du glorieux martyr de la victoire, le baron Fellner ... qui trouva la mort ... à la tête de nos braves dans la journée du 26 septembre 1830*' [the first medal that was struck was put on the dead body of one of our heroes, baron Fellner, fallen in September 1830]!^[9]

Private individuals could also decide to commemorate events on medals and sell them. A good example is the medal edited as a joint venture by the manufacturer Hart of Brussels and Verachter, the archivist of the city of Antwerp. Frédéric Verachter wanted to commemorate the visit of Queen Victoria to Belgium in 1843 with a series of medals. In the end they sold about 120 bronze, 5 gilt and only 1 silver medal, and although these sales barely covered the production costs, our archivist was rather pleased, since he considered the whole venture to be very honorific. This was especially the case because Her Britannic Majesty rewarded him with the very heavy coronation medal of pure gold.^[10] This involvement of private persons in dealing and selling coins or medals is a returning feature of all times.

In what follows, some striking examples of the 19th century will be presented. To start, let us have a very brief look at our northern neighbours in the Netherlands. Only few of us realise that Professor Otto van der Chijs was actually the first professor in numismatics of the 'Low Countries'. In 1835 he became *professor extraordinarius* and director of the coin collection of Leiden University. He was a *homo universalis* of the special kind in that he was not only an excellent professor, curator and researcher, but he was

[6] van Heesch 2005, p. 19–20; van Dievoet 2003, p. 286–287; *Catalogue des médailles de la révolution Belgique [sic] de 1830, qu'on peut se procurer en bronze et en argent chez A. Noefnet-Wyckmans...* (s.l., s.d. [1831 or 1832]). In 1833 a supplement of seven pages was published: *Collection des médailles de la révolution Belgique de 1830...*

[7] The catalogue of Noefnet does not mention prices in print; a copy in the library of the author of this contribution contains handwritten prices expressed in Dutch florins.

[8] van Heesch 2005, p. 24; Rasmussen *et al.* 2000, p. 59.

[9] de Witte 1890.

[10] van Heesch 1991.

also the editor and seller of cast iron copies of modern medals and increased his income working also as some kind of gentleman-coin dealer.^[11] This is illustrated nicely by a letter, dated 21 May 1849 addressed to a colleague numismatist of Leuven, Antoine Joseph Everaerts.^[12] In this letter he offers a long list of duplicates of his collection for sale. Prices are clearly marked and the gold coins of the early 17th century are sold at bullion value + 5%. He has also modern coins of William I struck in Brussels for sale. In the same letter he also expects some coins in return of Everaerts and is especially interested in the oldest issues of Brussels. Though he wants them to be sent by post, he worries about the costs of the parcel and suggests to put them in a thick envelope to profit of a lower tariff [*zijnde gewone port*]. To avoid detection of his ingenious plan, he suggests to hide the coins just under the seal [*cachet*] and adds: 'I have received many coins in this way'.^[13]

A very close counterpart of van der Chijs was active in Belgium. In the inventory of the Coin Department covering the years 1838 until about 1852, one name in particular appears at very regular intervals, *viz.* Constant Philippe Serrure (1805-1872). Serrure was a historian, philologist, numismatist and amateur of manuscripts and precious books.^[14] In 1832 he became archivist of the province of East-Flanders, in 1835 university professor, dean in 1847 and even rector or chancellor of the University of Ghent from 1855 to 1857. His first transaction with the Coin Department is dated September 3rd 1840 in the inventory. This first sale involved 21 medieval coins of Brabant for 10.5 francs. Serrure reappears at regular intervals. On the 8th of August 1841 he sold a silver coin of Henry VIII struck in Tournai for 60 francs, as well as 445 Russian coins for 1,856 francs, on the 4th of May 1844, 153 Republican denarii for 344 francs, *etcetera!* These are fairly large amounts if one realises that Serrure as a professor earned something like 4,000 francs a year and the chief gardener at the University of Ghent – for example – only 1,260 francs.^[15]

Serrure was a real scholar and a very active member of the Belgian Numismatic Society from 1841 onwards, but also ... a true coin dealer. Already in 1828 he offers to take commissions for an auction in Antwerp.^[16] He was also the author of a huge number of auction catalogues of coins and medals published by Ferdinand Verhulst, auctioneer in Ghent. Verhulst

[11] van Heesch 2017.

[12] Colaert 1991, p. LX.

[13] Letter P.O. van der Chijs to J. Everaerts, Leiden 21 May 1849, 3 pages (Archives of the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, archive room of the Society in the Royal Library of Belgium).

[14] Deschamps 2004.

[15] *État de l'enseignement* 1842, p. 74. 4.000 francs = professor *extraordinarius*; the 'portière' earned 550 fr. per year!

[16] Deschamps 2004, p. 340.

was active between 1823 and 1891 and published the staggering number of 538 auction catalogues! In those published in the 1850s and 60s it is often towards Serrure that prospective buyers are asked to address their written orders.^[17] Professor Serrure was always in search of extra money and in the end his 'greed' led to his deposition as rector of the university.^[18] His activities were often contested. Members of the Royal Academy of Belgium and also Verachter, archivist of Antwerp, even described him as: a scholar of doubtful quality, stubborn or a real haggler or *marchandeur / sjacheraar*.^[19] During the last years of his life, he was even compelled to sell his incredibly rich collection of coins to pay his debts. They were offered for sale in at least five auctions organized by Edouard Macau, a notary in Tournay.^[20]

Serrure's doubtful reputation is well reflected in a rather vicious letter written by another member of the Belgian Numismatic Society: Louis De Coster, mayor of Heverlee (from 1836 till 1847) near Leuven. De Coster is shocked by Serrure's activities as a coin dealer and on June 9th 1854, he decides to write to Piercot, the *ministre de l'Intérieur* or Home Secretary. The letter goes as follows (loosely translated; see *Doc. 2*):

'Dear Mr. Home Secretary,

A certain professor of Ghent University, Mr. Serrure, ignoring the duties imposed on him and on his noble mission, openly acts, and since several years, as a coin dealer.

Because of his mercantile zeal, and not at all bothered by any feeling for dignity nor any dignity for his Country or towards his profession as a professor, this civil servant reached the lowest category of junk-shop-commerce possible. For this man is not really interested in Numismatics as a science but uses it as a disgraceful way to traffic coins and medals.

Assisting at all auctions and organising several others at his own account, he is often and for longer periods absent; he neglects his teaching, provoking justified complaints.

Many a times, Monsieur le Ministre, we have seen him deserting the University, in the middle of the year, to assist at public auctions in Holland and elsewhere, and often during entire weeks. I have no doubt that he will leave shortly to participate at the auction that will take place in Amsterdam, starting the 19th of this month and that will continue for ten days, at the least.

[.....]

Signed, Your very humble and very obedient servant,

Louis De Coster, directeur de la Revue Numismatique Belge.'

The Home Secretary takes these accusations very seriously and starts an inquiry, the result of which is quite straightforward. After checking the presence or absence of professor Serrure at his courses, the university declares that Serrure never or rarely skipped lessons and that he did not leave for the auction mentioned by De Coster. The university knows that Serrure

[17] Deschamps 2004, p. 363-364.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 369.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 373 and 375.

[20] All catalogues are described in detail by Deschamps 2004. See also Blogie 1982 for Belgian auction houses and Grierson & Blackburn 1986.

cooperates as a contributor to auction catalogues but in no way was there any proof of his commercial activities. Case closed.^[21]

As a matter of fact a lot of these 19th-century numismatists contributed in one way or another to auction catalogues. Our Polish 'hero' Joachim Lelewel,^[22] whose qualities as a scholar no one can doubt, was the author of the auction of the 'Cabinet Leclercqz', a huge collection of some 6,000 ancient and modern coins and medals, sold in April 1839 by notary Schoeters in Brussels.^[23] Camille Picqué, curator of the Coin Department in Brussels, was author of the auction catalogue of the collection of the engraver Braemt, sold by the auctioneer Van Trigt, *rue Saint-Jean* 30, in Brussels on 20-21 March 1865.^[24] But Louis De Coster, this respected member, director of the *Revue belge de Numismatique* and mayor of Heverlee was surely right if he found that selling coins was not an honorable occupation for a professor or so... or was he not?

Actually De Coster (1800-1879) was not as 'innocent' as one could think. The obituary notice on Louis De Coster published in *Revue belge de Numismatique* 1879^[25] and written by viscount Baudouin de Jonghe, contains a subtle remark, an observation formulated in a way only people like Baudouin de Jonghe d'Ardoye were capable of putting it: 'The modesty of his resources' writes de Jonghe 'did not allow him to keep *all* his coins. So he *ceded* a large part of them to the numerous collectors...'.^[26] Was this coin amateur and politician perhaps also a coin dealer? A gentleman-coin dealer of course? It certainly looks like! When one goes through the inventories of the Coin Department of the Royal Library of Belgium, the name De Coster appears at least as often as Serrure. They were not only competitors as bidders during coin auctions, but also as *fournisseurs* or suppliers of the Royal Library! De Coster appears in the inventories between 1848/49 and 1870. In

[21] These documents are in the State Archives of Belgium, Brussels: *Hoger Onderwijs, Oud Fonds*, 536 (*Requête Serrure*).

[22] On the 'cult' honouring the Polish numismatist and historian Joachim Lelewel in Belgium see e.g. Colaert 1991, p. 178-179.

[23] Serrure 1880, p. LXV and [J. Lelewel], *Revue du Cabinet des Médailles de feu M. Leclercqz*, Bruxelles à la Librairie Polytechnique, 1838, 124 p. (catalogue in the Coin Department of the Royal Library; an annotated copy with realised prices and some names of clients). See also the announcement for this sale in *L'Indépendance belge*, 8 avril 1839, p. 4 (with the name of Schoeters, Brussels).

[24] *Catalogue des monnaies et médailles formant la collection de feu M. Braemt léguées par lui à la caisse centrale des artistes belges ...*, 20-21 mars 1865, Brussels, 1865, 51 p. & 4 p. with realised prices (annotated catalogue in the Coin Department of the Royal Library of Belgium; a copy of this catalogue with on its title page a handwritten annotation 'par C. Piqué' is in a private collection). The sale realised 6,083 francs.

[25] de Jonghe 1879.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 408: 'La modicité de ses ressources ne lui permettait pas de les [monnaies] conserver toutes. Il en cédaît alors une bonne partie aux nombreux amateurs ...'.

that period he sells at very regular intervals, often dozens, even hundreds of coins at once (1862). In the archives of the Belgian Numismatic Society are several letters of De Coster, and two are particularly revealing about his activities and ... his character.

The first one is dated 1st of February 1861 and is addressed to Jean-Pierre Vander Auwera (1810-1881) of Leuven.^[27] It goes as follows (loosely translated; see *Doc. 3*):

'I have to inform you that I will leave for Holland on the 13th or 14th. I know from experience how important it is to examine with the utmost attention the medals and tokens in Dutch auctions. ... There will be a huge number of fakes. One has to agree on the fact that our friends from 'above the Moerdyc' have no real knowledge about these things; collecting there is just a mania, with no relation to science.'

Not exactly what one would call a very friendly remark!

The second letter of De Coster, dated 19th of June 1862, is of real interest. It is also addressed to Vander Auwera. In this document De Coster explains how he will start an actual coin shop in the centre of Brussels, *rue Saint-Jean* 30; this is the same address as the very active librarian and auctioneer Willem van Trig! The letter goes as follows (loosely translated; see *Doc. 4*):

'Next week I will move to a new home, rue St Jean 30. ... Some very close friends gave me the advice for some time now. Indeed a city as Brussels should have a well-organised, decent and honest numismatic business. Two young gentlemen, very capable and from very civilised Dutch families, having worked with the principal booksellers in Brussels, decided to work together in the book trade; they rented a very nice house in the rue St. Jean. I will hire the first floor at 1,000 francs and will have a big part of the window of the shop. In a large and low display case, I will be showing a great number of coins and medals. A very nice private entrance, on which I will attach a signboard, leads to my apartment.'^[28]

This was probably one of the first true coin shops in Brussels. De Coster tells us that he will be renting the house from two young Dutchman. These are Franciscus Olivier (1829-1887) and Willem Antonius van Trig,^[29] both antiquarians and well known for their numerous book and coin auctions in Brussels. Olivier started his career as auctioneer at another firm, also known for its numismatic sales and run by Ferdinand Heussner, a German located *place Sainte-Gudule* 23.^[30] From 1864 onwards Olivier starts his own business, but he continues to collaborate occasionally with De Coster as his name appears in the coin catalogues of 1874 and 1875.^[31]

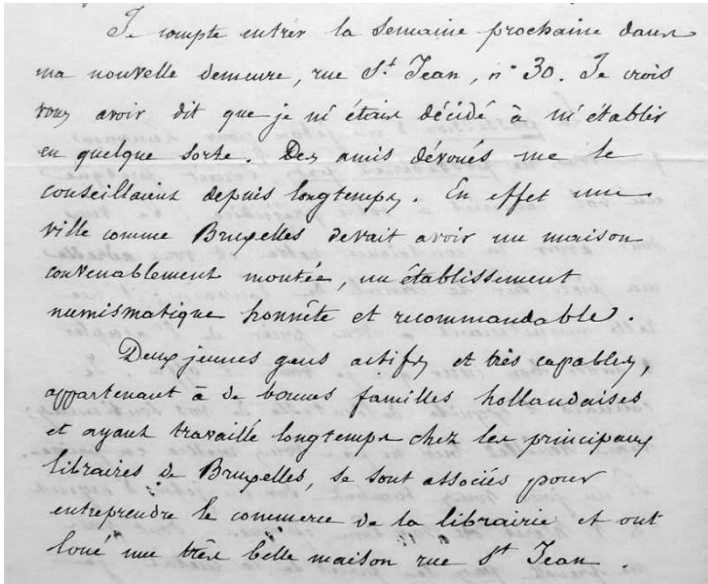
^[27] Member of the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, collector and politician: see Nahuys 1882. For a portrait medal showing Vander Auwera facing; see Royal Library of Belgium, Coin Department inventory no. L235/2 (Brichaut & Wurden 1881).

^[28] Archives of the *Société* (at the Coin Department).

^[29] Deschamps 1983, col. 483-484.

^[30] *Ibid.*, col. 483; coin auction catalogues between 1855 and 1862 in the Coin Cabinet. See also Blogie 1982 and Vandenhoe 1987. Blogie 1982, col. 755-756 lists auction catalogues of Heussner dated between 1852 and 1865.

^[31] Deschamps 1983, col. 486.



J' compte entrer la semaine prochaine dans
 ma nouvelle demeure, rue St^t Jean, n^o 30. Je crois
 tout, avoir dit que je ne étais décidé à m' établir
 en quelque sorte. Des amis dévoués me le
 conseillaient depuis longtemps. En effet une
 ville comme Bruxelles devait avoir un maison
 convenablement montée, un établissement
 numismatique honnête et recommandable.

Deux jeunes gens actifs, et très capables,
 appartenant à de bonnes familles hollandaises
 et ayant travaillé longtemps chez les principaux
 libraires de Bruxelles, se sont associés pour
 entreprendre le commerce de la librairie et ont
 loué une très belle maison rue St^t Jean.

Fig. 1 – Letter of Louis De Coster to Jean-Pierre Vander Auwera, 1862 1861
 (Archive of the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium,
 Royal Library of Belgium, Letters) – see annexes Doc. 4

This is perhaps the right place to mention some of the (numerous) other Belgian auctioneers that published coin catalogues on a regular basis. There is for example Camille Vyt from Ghent; his sales of coins and medals take place between 1871 and 1906.^[32] In Brussels, we could perhaps single out F. De Nobele, *rue de la Tulipe* 2, who was active between 1893 and 1926 and seems to have issued even a fixed price list in 1894.^[33] The world of these auctioneers of the 19th century is not well explored yet, but quite a few were also active Europe-wide.

In an auction catalogue published in February 1854 by Edouard Ter Bruggen, 'greffier' in Antwerp, situated *rue des Sœurs-Noires* 23,^[34] one finds a list of 26 addresses in 5 different countries where his auction catalogues can be obtained. It mentions 7 Belgian towns, but also 2 cities in France, 1 in England, 3 in the Netherlands and 5 in Germany, from Cologne to Berlin (Fig. 2).^[35]

^[32] Camille Vyt: catalogues in the Royal Library of Belgium dated 1868-1920; see Blogie 1982, col. 873-874.

^[33] Vandenhole 1987; Coin Department, Library: *Catalogue de monnaies, médailles, jetons, brochures et livres numismatiques*, Bruxelles, décembre 1894, 16 p.

^[34] E. Ter Bruggen, auctions in Antwerp between 1848 and 1875; see Blogie 1982, col. 834-835.

^[35] Edouard Ter Bruggen, *Catalogue d'une riche collection de médailles et jetons relatifs à l'histoire des XVII provinces des Pays-Bas ; métaux et monnaies obsidionales formant*

Le Catalogue se distribue :

à ANVERS,	chez le Greffier ÉDOUARD TER BRUGGEN, longue rue Neuve, S ⁿ 2, N ^o 1449.
» BRUXELLES,	chez M. E. LEROY et HÉRIS, experts du Musée.
» »	» » SLAES-COCKX, marchand de tableaux, longue rue Neuve.
» GAND,	» » VANDERVINNE, peintre.
» »	» » DE CAUWER, marchand de tableaux, Steendam.
» LIÈGE,	» » VAN MARCKE, marchand d'estampes rue de l'Université.
» BRUGES,	» » BOGAERTS, imprimeur-libraire, rue Philipstok.
» MALINES,	» » HANICQ, antiquaire.
» TOURNAY,	» » HOTTELART, antiquaire, près de l'Esplanade.
» LILLE,	» » TENCÉ, marchand de tableaux.
» PARIS,	» » FAVART, marchand de tableaux, place de la Bourse.
» »	» » A. FEBVRE, marchand de tableaux, rue Choiseul.
» »	» » BORANI et DROZ, libraires, rue des S ^{ts} -Pères, 9.
» LONDRES,	» » FARER, War Jourstreet, 14.
» »	» » H. MOGFORD, Dembighstreet, 102.
» AMSTERDAM,	» » H. ROOS, Huis met de Hoofden.
» »	» » G. DE VRIES, junior, courtier, Prinsengracht.
» ROTTERDAM,	» » M. A. LAMME, artiste peintre.
» »	» » JONCKERS, kunstkooper.
» LA HAYE,	» » WEIMAR, id.
» COLOGNE,	» » LORENT, peintre, rue Sachsenhausen, 6.
» »	» » M. HEBERLÉ, libraire.
» MUNICH,	» » BRULIOT, conservateur du Musée.
» BERLIN,	» » ARNOLD et BORCHARDT, antiquaires de la cour, Linden, 19.
» DRESDE,	» » JULES BLOCHMANN, rue du Château, 25.
» HAMBURG,	» » R. BURGHEIM, Valentins Kamp, 85.

Fig. 2 – Back cover of Edouard Ter Bruggen, *Catalogue d'une riche collection de médailles et jetons relatifs à l'histoire des xvii provinces des Pays-Bas ; méraux et monnaies obsidionales formant le cabinet de Monsieur le G^l T...*, 23 février 1854, Antwerp 1854

The coin trade was – even for our Belgian dealers – clearly an international one! These international activities are also reflected in the occasional collaboration between auctioneers, especially in the second half of the 19th century. Sévérin Cortvrintd, a Brussels-based bailiff (*huissier* or *deurwaarder*), occasionally sells coins in association with experts from Paris. A sale of 1887 is held in association with Raymond Serrure, a grandchild of Constantin Serrure and the sale of the collection of Renier Chalon, dated

le cabinet de Monsieur le G^l T..., 23 février 1854, Antwerp 1854, 88 p. List of the dealers of the catalogue on the back of the catalogue: Antwerp, Brussels (2 addresses), Ghent (2), Liège, Bruges, Malines, Tournai, Lille, Paris (3), London (2), Amsterdam (2), Rotterdam (2), La Haye, Cologne (2), Munich, Berlin, Dresden and Hamburg.

November 1889, was organized in collaboration with M.C. Van Peteghem, also from Paris.^[36]

Foreign coin dealers also advertised in Belgian newspapers. On 21 November 1851 a numismatist of Munich, Joel Nathan Oberndörffer (1799-1843) announces his visit to Brussels in *L'Indépendance belge*: he will be staying one week in the *Hôtel de Flandre* and has with him a nice collection of Belgian coins and coins of other countries.^[37] In 1880, in the same newspaper, the well-known coin auctioneer of Amsterdam Gerardus Theodorus Bom (1814-1884) advertises for his next auction.^[38]

Another 'foreigner' and one that can be found frequently in the inventory of the Coin Department, is Justen. He starts selling coins to the Library in 1871 (41 pieces at once) and we find him supplying coins and medals at a regular basis until 1877. Who is this Justen? The answer comes from advertisements in 19th-century daily newspapers. The *Journal de Bruxelles* of the 30th of August 1856 (p. 2) mentions A.-G. Justen^[39] as 'fabricant-orfèvre', born in Venlo in 1806 and now living in Brussels. Justen was certainly also a coin dealer. He advertises on a fairly regular basis in the same newspaper in the years 1858 and 1859. His advertisement is worthwhile looking at in detail. It goes as follows (loosely translated; see Fig. 3):^[40]

'IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Persons who might find old coins be they in silver or billon, when ploughing a field, or demolishing an old building, are informed that undersigned will buy these at a price much higher than their metal value in gold or silver.

To avoid damaging or breaking them, one is asked NOT TO CLEAN them.

We buy also entire collections of medals and coins at the highest price.

A. JUSTEN, rue des Fripiers 3, in Brussels.'

^[36] S. Cortvrindt (Bruxelles) & R. Serrure (Paris), *Catalogue d'une jolie collection de monnaies, médailles et sceaux anciens, Bruxelles 28 mars 1887*, Brussels & Paris, 1887, 28 p.; S. Cortvrindt (Bruxelles) & C. Van Peteghem (Paris), *Collection du feu M. Renier Chalon. Première partie, monnaies & médailles, 14, 15 et 16 novembre 1889*, Brussels, 1889, 51 p. Séverin Cortvrindt, Brussels, see Blogie 1982, col. 697 (she lists auctions between 1879 and 1888).

^[37] On Oberndörffer see Barth & Pegan 2015, p. 234-237.

^[38] *L'Indépendance belge*, 1/II/1880, p. 4 and 4/II/1880, p. 43; see also *Handelsblad*, 20/IX/1851, p. 4 (collection of Geelhand). The Royal Library of Belgium has auction catalogues of Bom dated between 1848 and 1886 and 1885 till 1941 (= Bom & son).

^[39] Adolf Gideon Justen (Venlo 17/III/1806 – Brussels 22/II/1876). This antiquarian left Venlo in 1843 when the town was returned to Belgium after king Willem I accepted the peace treaty with Belgium. See Canters 1984, pp. 83-84 and 147 (many thanks to Jos Benders for this reference).

^[40] *Journal de Bruxelles*, 30/VIII/1856, p. 2 (*ibid.* 10/IX/1858, p. 4; 7/X/1858, p. 4; 11/II/1859, p. 4).

AVIS IMPORTANT.

Les personnes qui trouveront d'anciennes monnaies en or, argent ou billon, en labourant la terre, ou en démolissant de vieux bâtiments, sont informées que le sousigné les achète à un prix beaucoup plus élevé que la valeur de l'or ou de l'argent.

Pour éviter de les abîmer ou casser, on est prié de ne pas les nettoyer.

On achète aussi des collections de médailles et monnaies au plus haut prix d'amateur.

A. JUSTEN,

Rue des Fripiers, 5, à Bruxelles.
(2839)

Fig. 3 – Advertisement of Adolph Gideom JUSTEN,
Journal de Bruxelles of the 30th of August 1856

These 19th-century newspapers are indeed a fabulous source and are very easy to access nowadays since a lot of them can be consulted online on the internet site of the Royal Library!^[41]

This announcement of Justen refers to coin finds and very occasionally even the Coin Department seems to have bought coins not only at auction, from collectors or dealers, but directly from the finder! This at least is what one can conclude from a note dated 6 March 1873: '*Acquis (d'un) paysan de Vilvorde [Bought from a farmer from Vilvoorde], denier de l'empereur Henri III (1045), 20,5 francs.*' Possibly a find that was never published?

It is of course impossible to list and discuss all persons that occur in the inventory of the Coin Department or present all dealers etc. There is one however that deserves an honorable mention in this contribution, and that is Charles Dupriez. Charles Dupriez was born in Hombourg-l'Évêque in Lorraine on 31 March 1871 (died December 1952). Most numismatists know him mainly for his catalogue of Belgian coins and proofs,^[42] but perhaps also because he was the dealer who sold the largest coin find on Belgian soil ever: the hoard of some 150,000 13th-century silver coins from the *rue d'Assaut* in Brussels, found in 1908.^[43] Dupriez also published, on a fairly regular basis, fixed price lists in his numismatic publication the *Gazette Numismatique* that appeared between 1895 and 1913. At the very end of the 19th century Dupriez sold large quantities of coins to the Royal Library. His name appears for the first time in the registers of the Coin Department in 1883 ... That is strange, as in that year Charles Dupriez was only 12 years old. That of course is the disadvantage of archival documents where first names are rarely mentioned. The same problem arises with Serrure who seems to have sold heaps of coins to the Coin Department decades after his death! But of course there are three numismatists, all dealers and serious

^[41] Royal Library of Belgium: Belgica Press, <http://opac.kbr.be/belgicapress.php?lang=EN>

^[42] Dupriez 1949.

^[43] Gullbekk 2005; Churchill & Thomas 2012.

scholars, with the name of Serrure: Constant P. Serrure, the father, Constant-Antoine (1835-1898), the son, and Raymond-Constant (1862-1899), the grandson.^[44] Charles Dupriez also was not the first of his family to deal in coins! In 1888, at the age of 17, Charles came to Brussels to become a mine engineer.^[45] He stayed with his elder brother Raymond Dupriez. Raymond actually initiated Charles to numismatics and was himself a very active coin dealer in Brussels at that time! He sells dozens of coins to the Library between 1883 and 1893, the year of his death. He ran a shop *boulevard de la Senne, 14*, as *Libraire-Numismate : achat et ventes de monnaies anciennes* and published already fixed price lists of coins and medals in 1885.^[46] After his death, Charles interrupts his studies and takes over the numismatic activities of his brother. He moves to a new location in Brussels: *place de Brouckère*. Charles Dupriez remains a very active coin dealer during the first half of the 20th century, but that is whole different story, largely in a new century that falls outside the scope of this contribution.

Conclusion

This overview built around a series of anecdotes, illustrates how diversified the commercial numismatic landscape in 19th-century Belgium was. There is much more to tell and so many names, especially of auction houses, great and small, all over Belgium have been left out.

Perhaps also the impression was given of a certain disregard towards our gentlemen-dealers, such as Serrure and De Coster. If so, it is simply to underline the fact that both men were also great and passionate scholars and it is only fair to remember that these collectors and dealers contributed enormously to the knowledge we have today about the history of coins and medals. And that without their zeal, our museum cabinets would not be what they are today.

^[44] Rubbens 1971.

^[45] Sources: auction catalogues in the Royal Library; inventory Coin Cabinet and Alain Dupriez, *Biographie de Charles Dupriez, numismate*, a document of two pages sent to the author of this contribution by Alain Dupriez on 3/X/2010.

^[46] Catalogues in the Coin Department of the Royal Library of Belgium; for a list see Blogie 1982, col. 731.

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Documents

Doc. 1 – Letter of Count Albéric du Chastel, dated 4 July 1862 (Archives of the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, Royal Library of Belgium)

Namur, Collège de la Paix

4 juillet 62

Monsieur

Quoique je n'aie pas l'honneur de vous connaître, je viens cependant vous faire une demande, persuadé que je suis que vous aurez assez de confiance en moi pour m'accorder cette demande. Je suis un inconnu pour vous, il est vrai. Je n'habite pas Bruxelles, mais au besoin mon frère pourrait vous servir de point d'assurance. C'est le Cte Robert du Chastel, boulevard de l'Observatoire n°8. J'en viens donc à ma demande. Je commence une collection de médailles anciennes. Je ne prends pour le moment que deux spécimens de chaque empereur, l'un en argent, l'autre en bronze, puis des Grecques, des consulaires, gauloises, etc. Je désire avant tout une bonne conservation et ne tiens pas à la rareté des revers. Je vous prie donc de bien vouloir m'envoyer quelques médailles afin que je puisse faire un choix. Ma bourse d'étudiant ne me permet pas encore de bien grandes dépenses. Je vous prie donc de ne pas m'envoyer des médailles d'un prix trop élevé. Je vous envoie une liste de ce que je désirerais me procurer d'abord.

En attendant votre réponse pour le plus tôt possible je vous prie
Cte Albéric du Chastel

Doc. 2 – Letter of Louis De Coster to Ferdinand Piercot, 9 June 1854 (Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hoger Onderwijs, Oud Fonds, 536, requête Serrure)

À S. Ex. Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur...

Monsieur le Ministre,

Un professeur à l'Université de Gand, Mr Serrure, méconnaissant les devoirs que lui impose sa haute et noble mission, se livre ouvertement, depuis nombre d'années, au commerce des Médailles.

Dans son ardeur mercantile [sic], et ne prenant le moindre souci de sa dignité ni de la dignité de l'État et du corps enseignant auquel il appartient, ce fonctionnaire est descendu dans la plus bas étage de la friperie,

aussi la Numismatique, chez lui, n'est plus une science, si ce n'est celle qu'il déploya honteusement dans le trafic des monnaies et médailles.

Assistant à toutes les ventes, et en faisant annuellement plusieurs pour son propre compte, ses nombreuses et longues absences lui font négliger ses cours et suscitent de justes plaintes. Plusieurs fois, Monsieur le Ministre, nous l'avons vu désertier l'Université, au milieu de ses travaux scolaires [sic], pour suivre des adjudications publiques en Hollande et ailleurs, pendant des semaines entières, et sans nul doute il se dispose encore à partir pour une vente qui va se faire à Amsterdam, commençant le 19 de ce mois et qui durera huit à dix jours au moins.

Je ne me permettrai pas, Monsieur le Ministre, de m'étendre sur une triste faite qui se passe au vu et au su de tout le monde, je me bornerai à les signaler à votre sollicitude éclairée, à votre haute appréciation.

Daignez, Monsieur le Ministre, agréer l'hommage du plus profond respect et de la plus haute considération

De Votre très humble et très obéissant Serviteur

L. De Coster

Directeur de la Revue Numismatique Belge
Rue des Alexiens, 58

Bruxelles, 9 Juin 1854

Doc. 3 – Letter of Louis De Coster to Jean-Pierre Vander Auwera, 1861
(Archive of the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, Royal Library of Belgium, Letters)

1 février 61

Mon cher Monsieur Vander Auwera,

Je crois devoir vous prévenir que je compte partir pour la Hollande le 13 ou le 14 ; je sais par expérience combien il importe d'examiner avec la plus grande attention les médailles et jetons des ventes de Hollande. Vous savez que la plupart des collectionneurs de ce pays n'achètent pas eux-mêmes, Nor Van Cleef n'a jamais assisté aux ventes. Ainsi, il est certain que nous allons rencontrer un grand nombre de pièces fausses. D'ailleurs, il faut bien le dire, nos confrères d'Outre-Roerdjck n'ont aucune connaissance pratique de la chose ; collectionner est tout simplement une

manie à laquelle la science est étrangère. Enfin, si vos affaires vous empêchaient de venir à Bruxelles avant le 13, prenez note, s.v.p., que je loge à Amsterdam Hôtel du Café français, Kalver-Strat.

Je viens de faire une démarche à votre intention et j'ai tout lieu de croire que je réussirai. Je connaissais dans ma collection de France le jeton de cuivre frappé pour le mariage de Philippe II avec Isabelle de France : les bustes affrontés d'un côté ; de l'autre, un paon et la légende Concordia ; j'ai proposé au propriétaire de ce jeton un échange que je ne doute pas qu'il n'accepte, et, je présume que ce joli jeton vous ferait plaisir ; j'attends la réponse ; diable, si j'allais suivre la peau de l'ours

L'autre jour, nous sommes allés, Vanden Broeck et moi, voir la collection de jetons de M. Geelhand. Vous remarquerez dans le 1er tome de Van Loon d'argent, un jeton en double sur le mariage de Philippe et Isabelle, Van Loon t. 1, p. 31 no 4, pièce très commune en cuivre (la tête de Philippe d'un côté et celle d'Isabelle de l'autre). Il y a bien un point de plus sur l'un que sur l'autre, et certainement ce seul point ne constitue pas une variété à laquelle on peut tenir. Je voudrais donc vous remettre un couple de jetons d'argent qui manquent, je pense, dans le cabinet de M. Geelhand et vous prier, si possible, de lui offrir un de ces jetons pour un des dits doubles ; vous reconnaîtrez aussitôt que tout l'avantage de l'échange serait pour lui. Le même jeton d'argent se trouve à la vente Van Cleef où je me dispenserais ainsi de l'acheter.

Adieu, mon cher Monsieur, tout à vous.

Louis De Coster
22, rue Bodenbroek

Doc. 4 – Letter of Louis De Coster to Jean-Pierre Vander Auwera, 1862 1861 (Archive of the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, Royal Library of Belgium, Letters)

Bruxelles, 19 juin 62

Mon cher Monsieur Vander Auwera,

La possession d'un jeton pour Louvain que vous ne posséderiez pas, serait presque un vol commis à votre préjudice. Je veux donc avoir la conscience nette et vous adresse ma pièce sur le canal de Louvain ; il me reste maintenant à vous prier de l'accepter d'aussi bon cœur que je vous

l'offre. Je connais l'exquise délicatesse de vos sentiments ; mais veuillez bien ne pas vous mettre en peine. Si un jour vous tombez sur un jeton d'argent de Hieris ou de Van Loon, époques dont vous ne prenez pas les pièces de ce métal, je vous promets de le prendre sans la moindre difficulté.

Je compte entrer la semaine prochaine dans ma nouvelle demeure, rue St Jean, no 30. Je crois vous avoir dit que je m'étais décidé à m'établir en quelque sorte. Des amis dévoués me le conseillaient depuis longtemps. En effet, une ville comme Bruxelles devrait avoir une maison convenablement montée, un établissement numismatique honnête et recommandable.

Deux jeunes gens actifs et très capables, appartenant à de bonnes familles hollandaises et ayant travaillé longtemps chez les principaux libraires de Bruxelles, se sont associés pour entreprendre le commerce de la librairie et ont loué une très belle maison rue St Jean. Je prends le premier que je paye 1.000 fr et je dispose d'une grande partie du centre de la vitrine du magasin devant laquelle j'étale, dans une belle caisse plate, un grand nombre de monnaies et médailles ; une très belle entrée particulière, sur laquelle je fixe mon plaque-enseigne, donne accès à mon appartement.

Rien ne va mieux ensemble que les livres et la numismatique ; les deux branches forment la Bibliothèque proprement dite. Je ne doute pas que je m'accommode très bien de ma nouvelle position. D'ailleurs, il faut que je renonce aux voyages dont je ne sais plus supporter les fatigues ; et puis mes voyages me prenaient tout mon temps et m'empêchaient de rien faire pour la Revue. Maintenant je devrai rester chez moi et je travaillerai.

Adieu, mon cher Monsieur Vander luvvera, je vous réitère l'assurance de mon plus entier dévouement.

Louis De Coster

- J'ai retrouvé l'autre jour une lettre de Lelewel ; si vous n'avez pas cet autographe il vous fera plaisir ; j'y ai ajouté quelques lettres, un peu au hasard.

- J'ai parlé à M. de Brou au sujet de la collection de gravures de M. Geelhand ; j'ai tout lieu de croire que la Maison d'Urenberg est disposée à l'acquiescer.