
The AUREUS program, study and characterization of minted gold in the West from the end of the Hellenistic period to the first century of our era

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Résumé

This paper aims to present the AUREUS program, founded by the Centre-Val de Loire Region and lead by Pr. A. Suspène, and its first results. AUREUS' ambition is to understand the establishment of the first unitary gold mint in Western Europe, which provided the Roman gold coinage. By confronting approaches from historians, numismatists and researchers in archaeological science from several universities, French institutions and laboratories (University of Orléans, University of Tours, CNRS, Department of Coins, Medals and Antiquities of the National Library of France), the AUREUS program allows us to establish the evolution of the gold coinage production in the western part of the Mediterranean basin between the end of the IVth century BC and the 1st century AD. This multidisciplinary approach will allow us to compare historical data with the chemical analysis obtained by Laser Ablation Plasma Mass Spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS), undertaken in the IRAMAT-CEB laboratory at Orléans. At the end of this project, almost 1000 coins from the main gold coinage area (Africa, Greece, Italy, Sicily, Celtic world, Spain) and pieces of jewellery from French patrimonial collections (mainly from the Department of Coins, Medals and Antiquities of the National Library of France) will have been chemically analysed in order to acquire a fingerprint of the gold material used by the artisans. In the course of this program, the classification of the material will be re-examined and improved. Furthermore the AUREUS program will provide decisive information on the supply of gold metal; on the control of gold stocks; on the role of war in gold transfers; on the degree of economic and political integration of the different areas concerned; and last on the economic, political, military and social uses of gold in antiquity.

Mots-Clés: Gold coinage, Western mediterranean, Roman world, Celtic world, Grec world, Chemical analysis

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