

CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE NUMISMÁTICA
INTERNATIONAL NUMISMATIC COUNCIL
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DE NUMISMATIQUE
INTERNATIONALER NUMISMATISCHER RAT
CONSIGLIO INTERNAZIONALE DI NUMISMATICA



COMPTE RENDU 66/2019

PUBLIÉ PAR LE SECRÉTARIAT DU CONSEIL

ISSN : 1562-6377

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OBITUARIES

Ute WARTENBERG*

PETER ROBERT FRANKE (2 NOVEMBER 1916–30 NOVEMBER 2018)



Students often know very little about their professors and the lives they lead outside academia. In the case of Peter Robert Franke, who died on 30 December 2018 in Berlin, this was different. In his seminars at Saarbrücken University, where he taught for twenty-five years, one would learn much about him and his past, which to those born years after World War II seemed more an adventurous one than that of most academics. He really wanted to be an officer in the navy but World War II obviously put an end to this plan. All his students remember his stories about working as a coal miner in Bavaria, and an official certificate and a carbide miner's lamp were proudly displayed in his office. There was also a carpet in his office, which had clearly seen better days, but it allegedly belonged to Thomas Mann. After learning this, I never dared step on it again.

Peter Robert Franke was born on 2 November 1926 in Lüdenscheid, a small town in Westfalia. His parents were Gertrud Anna and Eduard Hugo Franke, who was an engineer and served in the German Luftwaffe as a pilot. Due to his father's different postings, Franke attended schools in various Germany cities and was then drafted into the army in 1943. At the end of the war, which he was fortunate to survive, he was captured as an English prisoner of war, but released in 1945. As many Germans, he was forced into labor by the Allied forces. It was in this period that he was working in coalmines in US-occupied Bavaria. In 1949, he began to study history, German literature and languages, and geography in Munich, Bonn and Erlangen; in 1954, he defended his PhD thesis on the subject of "Alt-Epirus und das Königstum der Molosser". From 1955 to 1958, Franke worked as a research assistant

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at the Bavarian State collections of coins in Munich, where he worked with its curator Konrad Kraft. As a result, coins became the focus of his future research, and he then completed his habilitation thesis on “*Die antiken Münzen von Epirus*” in 1960 and became a “Privatdozent” in 1961 at the University of Erlangen. In 1961, he received a research position at the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), where he would be employed until his resignation in 1966. In particular the first three years, which he spent in Athens, were formative for Franke, who was always an ardent Hellenist whose love for modern Greece and its people was evident. During his time in Munich (1964–1967), he helped develop ancient numismatics as subject at the University by offering popular seminar for students. When he left Munich in 1967 for a chair in ancient history at Saarbrücken University, he would build in this recently founded university one of the most productive centers of ancient numismatics anywhere.

Franke’s approach to ancient numismatics was decidedly that of a historian. Epirus and its history was (and is) a difficult subject, which he tackled largely from a historical angle by trying to explain the political concepts such as kingship and ancient leagues. Although he assembled over 2000 coins in the die-study, his organization of the material is organized largely within historical parameters of Epirote history, while stylistic considerations are not discussed much. This lack of stylistic argumentation was typical of Franke’s scholarship, which was in stark contrast to other numismatic studies of its period. Studies by Boehringer (Syracuse), Cahn (Cnidus), Barron (Samos), or those by May (Abdera, Aenus) often organize material along stylistic guidelines, but Franke saw coins as explaining and illustrating a historical series of events. A historian such as Dietmar Kienast, who reviewed the book for *Gnomon*, indeed praises what he describes as Franke’s cautious approach to stylistic interpretation of bronze coins, which are supposedly hard to distinguish. The reviewer expressed his hopes that this would set a precedent, a statement in which he takes a stand against an art historical approach to ancient numismatics.

Franke never did another die-study as large as his oeuvre on Epirus, although he prepared to tackle similar studies. During his years in Greece, he continued to travel in northern Greece, where he began to collect material for a massive study of Thessalian coinage. He worked in Athens and various local museums such as Larissa and Volos, where he began to take plaster casts of hundreds of coins. He befriended collectors, such as Basil Demetriadi (BCD) whose collection was already well known then, even before it became legendary in recent decades. Franke published many standard articles on Thessalian coinage, but left the various die-studies to a myriad of students. The attempt to publish the enormous number of excavations coins from Olympia, which he began to tackle in the 1960s, was probably never a realistic undertaking but Franke and various assistants worked on the many thousand coins, which existed as casts in the Saarbrücken Institute; the Olympia excavation coins remain largely unpublished to this day.

Instead, Franke collaborated with many other researchers on publishing various *Sylloge* volumes of the Munich collection but also of the famous collection of Hans von Aulock. Its index was compiled by Franke, Wolfgang Leschhorn and Armin Stylow, and, before the advent of internet databases, became a crucial tool for researching the over 8,700 coins of this important collection. Long before Roman provincial coins became fashionable through the publication of *Roman Provincial Coinage* in the 1990s, Franke championed the study of these coins. In a small, unpretentious book *Kleinasien zur Römerzeit. Griechisches Leben im Spiegel der Münzen*, published in 1968, he introduced the subject to students and collectors. Hans von Aulock's collection provided most of the images, and as reviewers (among them T.V. Buttrey, Glen Bowersock, Tony Hackens and many others) noted the book's title sounded grander than its contents. As so often, Franke wanted to let coins speak, and his collaboration with Max Hirmer resulted in some of the most beautiful coffee table books in numismatics (*Die Griechische Münze*, 1964, or *Römische Kaiserportraits im Münzbild*, 1961). Franke's research interests reached into other areas such as Roman excavations coins in the Saar region, metallurgy or wine. In 2004, he joined Helmut Meyer and J. Schäfer in a study on pigs. (*Hausschweine in der griechisch-römischen Antike. Eine morphologische und kulturhistorische Studie*). The publications only hint at the breadth of his interests and his many passions for obscure subjects. What appears unusual today in an era of extreme specialization is Franke's courage to go outside his academic field and for example publish letters of Thomas Mann, an area in which he had probably little scholarly expertise.

Franke's greatest influence however was undoubtedly as a teacher and advocate of numismatics as an academic discipline. In his 25 years in Saarbrücken, he created an internationally renowned institute of ancient history, with a strong focus on ancient numismatics, which attracted an extraordinary number of students, both on the undergraduate and graduate level. Any student that had ever attended one of his seminars was familiar with his "Bestimmungsübungen", instructions how to identify coins. They would be put in front of unsuspecting students, but they learned how to look and how to describe. Franke also took his seminars on small excursions through the countryside of the Saarland. I remember vividly that such walks were ideally organized in the rain when the ploughed fields would supposedly reveal coins. Perhaps it was only in my imagination but I remember Franke finding a Roman coin during one of these trips. His excursions to Mediterranean countries such as Turkey, Greece, or Albania when it was still behind the Iron Curtain were legendary. As one can only imagine, life among the many students in such a small institute was not always easy, and, Franke's demeanor was at times hard to take for students who did not live up to his exacting standards. He belonged to a generation in which women were allowed to do their studies but when it came to positions, men would be given preference – since they had a family to

support. It was undoubtedly his personal experience with his daughter, Sabina Franke, a Near Eastern scholar, that made him rethink his position towards women academics, and he was most supportive of some of his female students. But they were warned that they had to work twice as hard as any man if they wanted to succeed, and this piece of advice, given to me in the 1980s when I started, proved to be absolutely correct. When Franke retired in 1992, many of his students were in leading positions in museums and universities. This network of “Franke students”, which is particularly strong in Greece, helped revive the discipline of ancient numismatics there.

Franke’s love for coins was not just academic as his enormous collection of 4100 coins illustrates vividly, which was acquired in 2004 by the Numismatic Collection at the Yale University Art Gallery. To the end of his long and active life, he was still interested in researching coins, and his connection to collectors and dealers in Munich was always close. After retirement, Franke and his wife Leonore moved to Munich, where he had particularly close ties to the Staatliche Münzsammlung, where his former student Dietrich Klose, currently the director, has worked since 1984. Blessed with an active mind and never-ending curiosity, he continued to publish articles and books until the end of his long life. Franke was frequently invited to teach or research at institutions in Europe and the United States, and he received awards and honors for his numerous academic achievements, which included the Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society (1988) and the Archer Huntington Medal of the American Numismatic Society (1992). His students and colleagues presented him with a volume of essays, *Hellas und der griechische Osten*, in his honor on his 70th birthday. In 2007, Katerini Liampi organized a conference in Ioannina, where his Greek and many of his international friends presented Franke with a moving event with over 50 papers; it was published in 2013 under the title *Numismatic History and Economy in Epirus during Antiquity*.

It is not easy to describe a life of any man or woman and do it full justice. For me, this is particularly true when it comes to Peter Franke. I must have met him when I was six or seven years old, and my initial contact with him was through his children who were my contemporaries and avid lovers of music. He was a very proud father of Sabina, Bettina, and Christoph, and he often spoke of them. His wife, Leonore Franke, always led a very active life outside academia, which he supported, but it was clear that her tireless, quiet work in the background allowed Franke to focus on his scholarship and many administrative duties. Academia and numismatics in particular attract a certain type of human being, people who enjoy sitting for weeks, sometimes years, behind their desk or in a library researching in meticulous detail every aspect of some coinage. Although Franke spent most of his life in this world, he was different. His energy and personality were such that one could have imagined him easily as head of a big company or, in different times, as an officer in the navy. Our small field of numismatics is fortunate that Peter Robert Franke made it his life.