

INTERFACE is a cooperation between the coin find inventories of nine European states to provide common internet access to the digital libraries of coin finds that they hold.

In the 1980s cooperation between electronic databases containing information on coin finds generally concentrated on the standardisation of core data in order to facilitate the transfer of information between them. At a series of international meetings some progress was made, but it rapidly became clear that full implementation was impossible. Too great were the disparate interests of individual projects and the constrictions imposed upon them, often the result of political decisions taken by funding bodies rather than scholarly requirements. The result was that when individual projects were set up, they were seldom compatible, but were tailor-made to suit individual requirements. Rarely was the same database adopted by different groups, one notable exception being the Slovenian programme NUMIZ, which was implemented not just in Slovenia but also in Austria, Croatia and Germany.

In view of the fact that many databases have now been running successfully for 15 years or more, there is little chance that this situation will change. However, corpora of coin finds are now being produced right across Europe, and the benefits of central access to this enormous pool of data are obvious, providing an extremely powerful research tool for numismatists, archaeologists and historians alike, as well as increasing awareness of the potential of coin find studies more generally. In the past this would only have been possible via the transfer of data from the individual projects to a single central database. But since many of these projects are now starting to provide internet access to their records, there are new possibilities of cooperation which have not been available in the past. INTERFACE plans to take advantage of this in order to set up a common access portal for internet databases of coin finds.

An important advantage of an internet portal over a single centralised database is that it would allow the individual national databases to continue in their present form with their own specific needs and aims, and in no way affect their sovereignty. At the same time it would make use of the fact that the core data of coin descriptions is generally very similar in order to enable searches across databases. A particularly fine example of such a portal is the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (KVK) - www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/hy... - which provides common access to library databases throughout the world. The principle behind INTERFACE is simple. The structures of the participating databases are extended to include standardised fields on the core data (metadata) required for searches (ruler, denomination, mint etc.). These complement existing fields, rather than replacing them, and the individual databases can be set up to generate them automatically. A search produces a results list compiled from this metadata, and includes a link through to the original databases, where further more detailed information on the individual entries can be obtained. INTERFACE will also include an interactive GIS-application to map results and facilitate searches.

On the initiative of the project Fundmünzen der Antike (FdA), Frankfurt am Main, a group of coin find specialists met in Frankfurt in September/October 2004 to discuss the possibility of setting up such a portal. Further meetings were held in Konstanz, Germany, in March 2005 and Nieborow, Poland, in September 2005.

Following discussions on the basic concept and architecture, a trial version of the portal has been developed and successfully tested by the Databases and Information Systems group at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Frankfurt (Ina Lehmann and Roji Varughese), and was presented at the ICOMON meeting in Utrecht in October 2008. A first full version is now being tested online by the consortium and is due to be available to the public from early 2009.