

## EPIGRAPHICA NUMISMATICA\* MONUMENTAL NYMPHAEA ON ANCIENT COINS

Roman fountains, the most ubiquitous monument of the Mediterranean Basin, did not attract much scholarly interest until lately. For many years, archaeologists reported the discovery of ruined structures to which they gave the name nymphaeum. This they did in many instances admittedly not having sufficient evidence for the identification. The same kind of lag and lack of proof occurred in numismatic research. This was no coincidence: both the archaeologist<sup>1</sup> and the numismatist were hamstrung by the same difficulties. A Roman nymphaeum has a peculiar protean quality: in a ruined state it can easily be mistaken for an entirely different building, a gate, a triumphal arch, a free-standing exedra, a scene-wall, and even a harbor building. Roman architecture was a derivative art: it borrowed from earlier forms and plagiarized itself. It adopted and/or adapted apses, exedra, arches, niches, pediments, projecting aediculae made up of columns and broken entablatures—there is no good translation of *verkröpfte Taburnakelarchitektur*—and used these elements to

\* Only “Toli” Lewis, who helped me so cheerfully and so often with *Architectura Numismatica*, will understand this title. He knows also how much I owe to others, especially my good friend and collaborator Martin Price (*infra*, n. 2) and the generous committee members of the American Council of Learned Societies and of the Graduate Research Fund of New York University.

1 There are innumerable examples of the archaeologist’s dilemma; *vide* the preliminary reports of the so-called nymphaeum at Aphrodisias where the tentative identification was said to be “uncertain” (*AJA* 78 [1974] 127) or characterized as the “once labelled nymphaeum” (*AnatSt* xxv [1975] 18), and now (1977) my good friend and colleague Kenan Erim writes me that “upon more extensive excavation [it] is indeed proving to be part of a thermal establishment, not a nymphaeum . . . , but we briefly explored a nymphaeum outside the city wall in 1968. . . .” Note also the troubled title of a report in the *Bulletin archéologique du Vexin français* 7/8 (1971/72) 168–173 by M. Manson and W. Noel “La construction enterée de Saclas (Essone), cave, bassin ou sanctuaire?”