

Pierre Charles Victor Bastien

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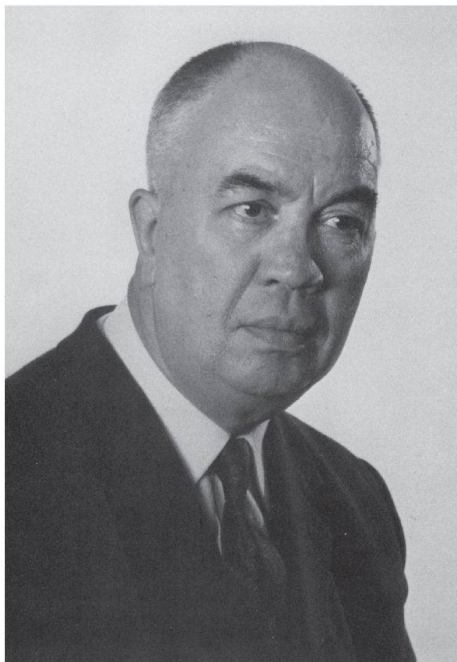
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Pierre Charles Victor Bastien
(Lille, 9 March 1912–Princeton,
13 May 2010)



On May 13, 2010 the numismatic community lost one of the foremost specialists of the Late Roman Empire, and the Swiss Numismatic Society one of its most distinguished honorary members, elected in 1979.

Dr. Bastien was born in Lille on March 9, 1912, the oldest of four children. After completing his secondary education at the boarding school of Froyennes in Belgium, he attended medical school at the University of Lille, where he became Doctor of Medicine in 1937. The following year he became Chief Surgeon, and during World War II he was attached to a field hospital. Taken prisoner, he was sent to Dunkerque and appointed surgeon in the hospital there, a city where he would remain and practice until his retirement in 1977, when he and his wife Marie-Louise (née Fayette, 1914–2000 – Malou for her family and friends) moved to the USA, and settled in West Windsor, New Jersey, near Princeton. He started collecting coins after the war and became a serious scholar of Roman history and coinage. Parallel to his medical profession, he pursued advanced studies in numismatics and in 1965 he received a degree from the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, in Paris, and a

Doctorate in history in 1972. He specialized in the period of the Tetrarchy and the fourth century in general, focusing on the study of the mint of Lugdunum (Lyon). Between 1972 and 1987, Bastien in six volumes wrote the history of that mint from its reopening under Aurelian in AD 274 to the death of Jovinus in AD 413, when it practically stopped issuing coins. A first supplement volume was published in 1989 in collaboration with Michel Amandry and Georges Gautier, and a second volume by M. Amandry et al. in 2003. This is a model publication of a Roman mint¹.

Pierre Bastien applied the discipline and rigor of his medical training to his numismatic interests and felt the need and responsibility to share his knowledge with other colleagues and amateurs. He traveled all over Europe, the Western World and the USA to visit coin cabinets and private and public collections – though never behind the then iron curtain, not even to Bucharest when in 1982 the Romanian Numismatic Society elected him Honorary member – and from 1955 on published articles in most of the scholarly journals devoted to numismatics. His work on the mint of Lyon and others of his more ambitious projects necessitated monographs, so in order to be able to publish the results of his research promptly and in detail without constraints, he founded the series *Numismatique Romaine*, with the publishing house Cultura in Wetteren, Belgium (twenty one volumes have appeared).

Dr. Bastien recognized from the beginning the importance of publishing hoards and catalogues and dedicated a tremendous amount of meticulous work to that task. Eight volumes of NR deal with hoards, the most spectacular perhaps is the *Trésor de Beaurains (dit d'Arras)* published in 1977 with Catherine Metzger. With admirable patience and perseverance, Bastien succeeded in reconstituting this important cache of gold and silver coins, medallions and jewelry that had been dispersed after its discovery in 1922. Interred in 315, it represented the personal wealth of a Roman officer and gives us invaluable information not only on the coinage of that time but also on the craftsmanship of the engravers and metal workers.

The classification of monetary issues was never an aim in itself for Pierre Bastien: his interest went deeper into the interpretation of the imperial function and the historical de-

1 For the early history of the mint see: J.-B. GIARD, *Le monnayage de l'atelier de Lyon. Des origines au règne de Caligula (43 avant J.-C.–41 après J.-C.)*, Numismatique Romaine, Essais, Recherches et Documents 14 (Wetteren 1983) and id., *Le monnayage de l'atelier de Lyon: de Claude I^{er} à Vespasien (41–78 après J.-C.) et au temps de Clodius Albinus (196–197 après J.-C.)*, Numismatique Romaine 20 (Wetteren 2000).

velopments that led to the world of Byzantium and Christianity. His work on imperial iconography culminated in his second magnum opus, the three volumes of *Le buste monétaire des empereurs romains*. Numismatique Romaine 19, 1992–1994, where he analyzed in all the details the different attributes and ornaments of the imperial bust, including the empresses, from the hairstyle, the wreaths and other headdresses they wore, to their military and divine symbols. The book is richly illustrated with superb reproductions of coins, cameos and sculptures, and with precise drawings of the different hairstyles, in particular for the female portraits, sketched with great skill on the computer by Mrs. Bastien.

In the late 90s, Bastien's eyesight declined as the result of macular degeneration, and he had to give up his numismatic activities. But a man who had made such a disciplined habit of writing could not be deterred so he started to write novels, short stories, essays, epigrams and memoirs². He was himself an avid reader of good literature and spent several hours every day with the classics, so it is not surprising. His first work in this new genre was *Les Numismates* (translated as *The Coin Collectors*) published in 1991 just in time for the XIth International Numismatic Congress in Brussels. I remember many of us who do not attend the meetings of the Société Française de Numismatique regularly, wishing a less discrete depiction of our colleagues, for if it is easy enough to recognize the author among the fictional characters, most others remain vague. But Bastien was too much a gentleman to indulge in caricature. Among the most moving of his literary works, is *Souvenirs de médecins* (1998), no doubt in part autobiographical. It portrays the experiences of WWII with deep humanity. His prose is simple and elegant, his tone always compassionate and not without irony.

Pierre Bastien also loved classical music with a predilection for Richard Wagner, in particular Tristan and Isolde, which for him represented one of the highest expressions of human love. In his retirement Pierre Bastien returned to an old passion of his: gardening. He and his

wife, and then his daughter Françoise, spent long hours working in their beautiful property in Cranbury. And it is perhaps appropriate to end here: «Il faut cultiver son jardin» and if there is someone who has done it superbly at all levels, it is Pierre Bastien.

For his achievements he received numerous recognitions and awards. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre for the 1939–1945 war in 1948. He became Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1956 and Chevalier de l'Ordre de Léopold de Belgique in 1960. He was President of the Société Française de Numismatique in 1965, Honorary Member of the Belgian Royal Numismatic Society (1968), Medalist of the Royal Numismatic Society (1970), Huntington Medalist of the American Numismatic Society (1976), Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy (1977), and the list continues.

Pierre Bastien accomplished so much in practically three different careers. It is fair to say that he could not have done so without the constant support of his wife of sixty-four years, Marie-Louise and the help of his long-time friend Hélène Huvelin. Behind every great man there is usually one or more equally great women: Malou was the accomplished administrator of his clinic outside of Dunkerque from 1965 to 1977, the manager of the household, gourmet cook and entertainer, and most of all the *ancilla numismaticae*, making casts of the coins for her husband's publications, editing his writings and learning computer skills for the drawings in the *Buste monétaire*. She created the atmosphere for his productive work. After her death Bastien's daughter Françoise took over that role. Hélène Huvelin was Bastien's assistant in Dunkerque both in his clinic and his numismatic work and became a distinguished numismatist herself³.

Pierre Bastien was an imposing figure, a big and strong man, determined to achieve his goals. He set very high standards for all of us. Though proud and conscious of his accomplishments, he remained modest and reserved. For those who had the privilege of knowing him closer, he will most of all be remembered as a paradigm of integrity, humanity and gentleness.

Carmen Arnold-Biucchi

2 Published in Numismatique Romaine and Cultura, Wetteren, and by the Société des Écrivains, Paris.

3 1916–2006, see the obituary by C. Brenot, RN 163, 2006, pp.5–13.