DMITRY LITVAK: *Collectors of all countries, unite!*

The growth of the Internet has accelerated the process of globalization in many areas, including the collecting hobbies. In the long term there is a need to create a useful and understandable way for the inhabitants of the different countries of the world to catalogue and communicate about their banknotes.

His vision of the project presented by Dmitriy Litvak, 57, MS in Civil Construction, IBNS LM204, President of the Russian chapter of the

*IBNS and Board member of the BANKNOTER project. He is also an author of several books and publications in Russian and in English on the history of numismatics. He is the creator of a universal language for the cataloging, the **Esperanto-System**, and a universal system for e-cataloguing for collectors **KAMERTON** and creator of the website www.GHCS.me. In addition Litvak is the moderator of Internet projects «Bonistika Club», «Fox-note» and a contributor to «Numismondo, World Printed Money Picture Catalogue».*

• Dmitriy, tell us, please, how it was started?

From early childhood I collected postal stamps, then pins. In high school I started collecting vinyl records. By the yuear 2000 I had collected around 2,500 records, and before emigration to the United States, I gave the whole collection, as a gift to a local radio station. By the way, I now seem to be coming back to this again.

From each trip out of New York City I have found new vinyl's with about a hundred discs collected.

• **Do you remember when you become interested in numismatic?**

Paper money collection: I started in the late 1980's when I got the "large format" $2. In 1993 I bought my first KRAUSE Banknote catalogue. Each day I spent studing numismatics and even at work, getting reprimanded for it. Later, I found other interesting publications.

• **Which banknotes impressed you the most?**

The strongest impression was made by only square shape banknote [at that time], which was issued by delaRue (DLR) to Thailand. DLR produced it for free, in exchange that it be allowed to circulate and DLR may undertake a circulation study. It was the first ever banknote with OVI (Optical Variable Ink). Until then, DLR notes were proposed in many countries with such a proposal but no countries wanted to take a risk.

In my memory, there are still about a dozen banknotes which made great impressions on me, but only one of them changed my mind as collector, and later led me to writing a book on this topic. It was a "*Super Dollar*". With this began my specialization. I began

to collect counterfeits. Thus, just a few months ago, I presented the rest of my collection to one of the schools where friend of mine working as a teacher.

• **Are you regrettful about it? Children often playfully refer to the** **"*colored papers*" ...**

No, I'm never sorry about it. I moved away from active collecting [of banknotes] about 10 years ago. But I stayed in this area - I am still compiling information, of course, about collecting.

• **Why do you need it?**

To build a completely new product, in this case, a new cataloguing system, as it was necessary to thoroughly explore all that was accomplished before. Analyzing it, I find the errors and hidden problems.

To do it right, it is necessary to have a statistically large number of relevant information samples.

In regards to the future of my collection: I expect that instead it will stay on the shelf for years, as a "dead weight", it is better that it will be active. I considered it, as a starting point for the beginners. The situation in most cases: until they will collect something valuable, years are passing, and their desire to collect banknotes can disappear.

• **What kind of a "new system" you're talking about?**

The answer to this question requires a little excursion into the past. Let's return back to 1997-98 .

It was a time when working with **the *Krause*** catalogues got me puzzled. Every new release of it revealed new problems. Such as, missed issues, wrong valuation, or indistinct errors with applying the existing numbering system and when trying to fit into it new found issues.

The same situation was presented with all notable catalogues, at that time. So, to rectify the situation, I decided to issue my own catalog.
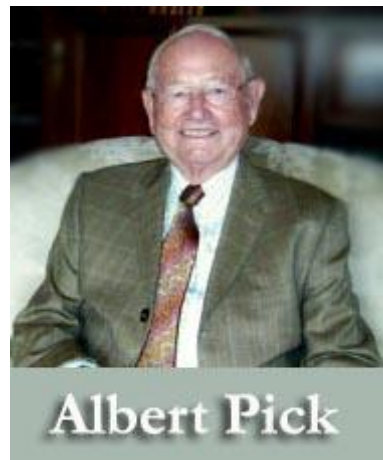
Sorry, nothing good happened.

• In what sense?

After few years of failed attempts, I realized that we had to fundamentally change the approach to the status quo. First, we have to create a brand new numbering system.

After spending a number of years in bottomless studies I gradually came to the idea that it was necessary to profoundly change the approach to the topic and first create a new philosophy: the philosophy of the cataloging system.

• Has this new philosophy been built from scratch, or did you base it on published studies?

Personally for me there are two great names [in this business]: Nikolai Kardakoff and the late Albert Pick. Both of them were the pioneers in the creation of a cataloging system for numismatists.

Both lived in Berlin in the 1950s. Most likely, were familiar with each other. Both sent to the Krause Publishing their ideas. But only one of them was chosen, as a main author for the numbering system used in their publications.

There is a logical explanation to this decision. Despite the fact that the system proposed by Kardakoff was more advanced and based on a scientific basis (Please, do not forget that Kardakoff was a scientist, whose work on systematization was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1956!) and was much ahead of its time. Kardakoff's system represented so-called two-dimensional (2-D) model of the recording of information, but at that time it wasn't a tool that could fully disclose its advantages.

In contrary, system proposed by Albert Pick was based on linear (1-D) model recording of information, was fully consistent with existing rules and narratives of numbering systems. It was much easier to understand [at that time]. It was more practical to use "with pen and eraser" [Sorry, no smartphone or PC's at that time].

 But from the beginning, there was a concealed problem.

The life span of this system, as well as, all which are built on the same principle, ran out just in time for the beginning of the widespread use of the PC and the Internet, roughly for 50 years. This is a great result by itself.

• So *what happened now?*

In modern times technology is fully upgraded every two to three years, as well as the magnitude of catalogue information almost doubles every year. And no matter how great was the idea 70-75 years ago, unfortunately it obsolete today.

Well, it was very decent in 1960-70s. In the 1980's it was still respectable, but began to display its inefficiency. And since the late 1990's, the beginning of rapid development of computer technologies, it began to rapidly fall in reputation. And, finally, 2007, with the advent of the first smartphone, collectors around the world only dream about an application for their use.

To paraphrase Lenin: *The publishing house Krause made a huge step forward by launching the publication of a universal catalog, but continues to make two steps back, by using obsolete numbering system of Albert Pick ...*

Despite, Owen Linzmayer was a first who "*stepped out of closet*" by creating his famous "Banknote Book", he rather delayed for a while, imminent collapse.

• And do you think you have found a solution?

Yes.

At some point I realized that if I'll continue to follow the classical scheme of catalogue development, I'll inevitably face the dilemma of having to compromise, which I unconditionally did not want to do, because my dream was to build an uncompromising numbering system.

Thus, in 2005, I created the "universal language" for cataloging - the ***Esperanto-System (ES)***. As the name implies, just like its predecessor, the universal language *Esperanto, this "language"* will combine only the best from existing systems (such as John Law; Albert Pick, Nikolai Kardakoff, Joe Boling, Friedberg's, Owen Linzmayer, Dmitry Zagorenko, Vadim Tislenko, Scott Semans, Michael Mitchiner, Higgins & Gage, etc.).

Based on it I built the universal numbering system *ICONS* (Individual Collectible Item Organizer and Numbering System), and, finally, *KAMERTON* – the universal system for collectors (Literally from Russian which means the "tuning fork").

• **Why did you choose that name?**

*KAMERTON* is a universal template that is used to configure the

"sound" of all components of the cataloging system in unison, likethe notes in the chord.

• **Before you tell us basics about developing the system, please answer: Why it was essential? Thousands of collectors still enjoy existing systems .**

It's a profoundly mistaken belief that "*the collector = the cataloger*". For the rare exception it isn't.

For a local catalog project - this really works. But when the authors are trying to extend their experience and this particular principle on the whole country or global level, it leads to failure.

Let's take, for example, Peter Ryabchenko. As a collector, he has done the greatest thing. He spent dozens of years of painstaking research to find and record statistically huge amount of Russian numismatic items. Thus, he did a great job on systematization. He organized data by several parameters:
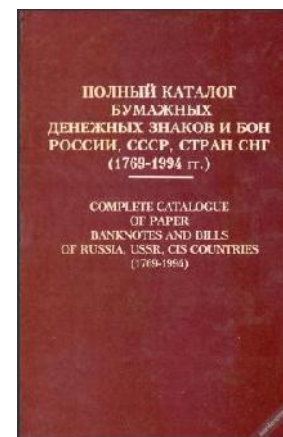
what, where, and what distinguishes one from the other… But, when he tried to turn this into a "Ryabchenko catalog"….the result you know

The same thing happens with the vast majority of the great names from collector society. But you can't blame them for it.

At that time (when they learned the basics of numismatics) there was no "*personal computer*" or "*smartphone*". So, based of the existing cataloging of data, they were forced to construct everything with the "*pencil and eraser*" philosophy.

Fifty, forty … and even ten years ago, this kind of approach was only possible. But today the situation has changed. Unfortunately, everywhere, except collectibles.

• **What do you mean?**

All existing web application for collectors creates for it users "*pseudo-electronic*" catalogues. Each of them literally "copy and paste" the data from hard copies of catalogues. Thus theyinherited all hidden problems from them.

I want to free the slaves!

Now is the end of the second decade of the 21st century, but collectors are still slaves to various numbering systems, the core of which was invented back in the 1860's, when the first edition of the postage stamps catalog.

I became convinced that the secret of success is a means of ending the monopoly of printing houses held by the dominant firms: KRAUSE etc.

Only the bigger printing houses could afford their own research and in-house data networks. All the rest had to be the slaves to those who developed their own numbering systems and, kept them in secret. Why should they help the slaves to freedom?
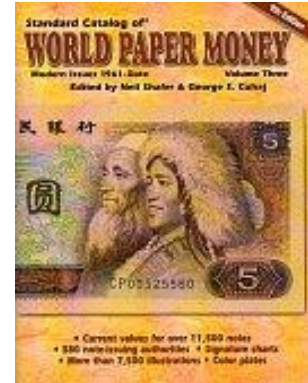
• Is it so bad? The system is still working, and many are happy about using it...

If you imagine a situation, that such a system will operate for a longer period of time (50-100 years) and the amount of new data can significantly exceed the existing data And it will be almost impossible [for future generations] to get the idea of their schemes and at some point it will cause a logjam and collapse.

The current generation of users with varying degrees of success continues to use multiple catalogs, based on the [even today] obsolete ideas, which cannot be said about future generations. For them, it will be impossible, and no means, to try to figure out the "*grandpa catalog*".

Anyway, the ultimate goal is to create a quality product for the users.

So, why not focus on its interests and create a system which: firstly, never ever changes its own rules in favor of its present situation; and secondly, would not have been the secret behind the seven seals, and allowed users to gain it maximum potential, without any visible effort.

The Standard Catalog of World Paper Money (SCWPM) and all others, base the numbering system on those used by Albert Pick. It is a very good informative source, not only for beginners, but

also for many experienced numismatists. That is why we are all enslaved to existing printed catalogues.

Even if the collector's area of interest is located in a narrow segment of the knowledge he has to buy the whole hard copy edition, which includes substantially more information than they may require.

The *KAMERTON* is an automated and intuitive application that manages web applications that will revolutionize the cataloguing industry.

The ***KAMERTON*** is not an opponent of present day catalogs. On the contrary! It is their unifying point. With it help they can amalgamate into a single information space.

The ***KAMERTON*** happens to be a unique instrument that allows us not only to describe all existing collectable issues, but also to organically add in it any newly-discovered items which would be added later. First is the technology, then the management. I want to embrace technological changes, and base future of the ***KAMERTON*** on modern technology.

Another unique option of the ***KAMERTON*** its total flexibility and versatility, starting from only one universal rule (which everything is built upon) to the universal template which apply to all tasks of the web application.

The ***KAMERTON*** can be used for all types of collectibles and any activity where cataloging is applicable.

• **Please introduce the KAMERTON.**

I have done a labor intensive and painstaking job, which required simultaneous data comparison on several parameters. The deeper comparisons made, the more parameters were discovered that

require inclusion in the system. This led to the establishment of a database of **Universal Indexes** (**UIN**).

Every piece of information: the place of issue, type, variation, or sale price at auction, etc. - All of it is in **UIN**. Each numbering line, or designation or recognition of a collectible item page consists of a **UIN entry**.

Their combination is unique for each record, so it can be automated.

As a result, for the first time, a real chance to build a new generation electronic catalogue. This kind of catalog will be without all the deficiencies of hard copies publications. Moreover, built on a universal language, this system can be used on any electronic devices and facilitates greater understanding between collectors.

• **What are the advantages of the electronic catalogue versus printed edition?**

The main advantages are:

- • there are no limits to the data provided;

- • the availability of full-color images in high resolution;

- • the cost of updates is minimal;

- • update almost instantly, as soon as new information is available.

Also it has features that are unique for an electronic catalogue:

- • image magnification (zoom);

- • hyperlinks;

• endless possibilities for finding and working with data that utilizes the potential of a mobile application.

• Are there any signature features in your system?

Sure! The **KAMERTON** has a property that is unique to this system, the universal template.

For the first time, the option to automatically assign cataloging numbers.

For the first time, the user will be given the opportunity to print or transmit the catalog by request.

The intuit interface;

I hope that in the near future for the vast majority of collector products the brand name **KAMERTON** will be familiar, as products of Krause publishing house.

• When the KAMERTON to become available for collectors?

All the above ideas led to the creation of **GHCS** (Globally Harmonized Communication System). It includes a **KAMERTON** as a communication system, and **Brotherhood of Collectors**. The new generation a social network for the collectors linked to the **KAMERTON**.

• How to describe the main idea of *Brotherhood of Collectors?*

To describe it I'll paraphrased the famous slogan: "***Collectors of all countries, unite!***"

I created startup www.GHCS.me.

Right now I'm working on transferring the database.

To give you a preliminary idea of the amount of information collected to build the system and its subsequent included in database

   1) The whole world is divided into 360+ **SECTIONS** (the term is used, instead of a **Country**);

   2) Each **SECTION, on** average, consists of 25 **MAKERS** (Issuing Authorities);

   3) Each **MAKER** , on average, consists of 3 **CURRENCY** issues;

   4) For each **CURRENCY** let's add up to 25 **TYPE** indexes, and then the 15 (the maximum possible) indexes **VARIATION**.

To get an idea about the total amount of **UIN** involved in all this work, just multiply all the above.

Furthermore, in order to give the user the possibility to work with really intuitive interface, in the process of developing it was mandatory to manually connect (link in) all **UIN** related to each issue.

Also, to create "variations" database, I have manually to "cut and paste" images of every parameter for each UIN.

• **Is it already something done?**

More than 70% of the activities mentioned above are already finished. I have put a lot of work in research, design and promotion of the **KAMERTON. It** is now on the market and to expand the product penetration, I have decided to put this project on **KICKSTARTER**.

I have been working hard on the design of a prototype scheme for web applications. From an engineering standpoint the risk is low. The key to making the **K**. convertible to the e-environment is to

let many potential users embrace "the pretty amazing function" of it.

My goal is to make all prospective users joyful by browsing the e-application. By doing this "*concealed*" engineering I'm trying to create a friendly, intuitive environment for them.

The programming is not all that challenging, this level of development is simply beyond my current skill set. I am an individual, not a corporate entity with a staff of industry experts at my disposal. One must know what one is capable of and what one is not capable of. Thus I'm looking for a professional programmer who can realize the full potential of the **KAMERTON** and incorporate it into the working web application.

• **What work do you do? For example, in the International Bank Note Society(IBNS)?**

I am not only an **IBNS Life Member**, I'm a board Member and also created the **Russian Chapter**.
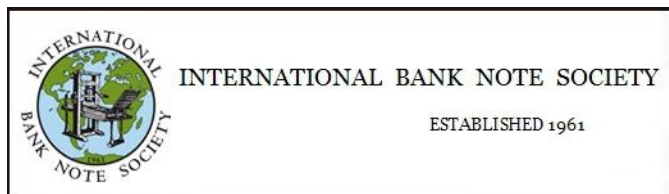
• **What was the idea of creating a Russian Chapter?**

It was the first ever chapter of IBNS established not according to the territorial principle, but language. The Russian speaking collectors are living in different countries and their virtually having no "link" to each other. Also, in some cases, their level of knowledge of foreigner language is not good enough to communicate with other collectors.

• Have you represented the KAMERTON to your colleagues in IBNS?

Yes. Last September I conducted the presentation of *KAMERTON* at the New York Chapter. The respond has surpassed all my expectations. Almost everyone interested in the project and offered their assistance in its implementation.

Also, there is a first public appearance of the cataloging system KAMERON (Esperanto-System) in hard copies. The catalog by Dmitriy Zagorsky "REESTR of the banknotes of CIS 1991-2016", 2nd edition, in English. All numbers are presented with universal code by KAMERTON.

• Are Russian speaking collectors acquainted with your achievements?

At the beginning of the journey, in 1997-98, I conceived this project as the Russian language based. At that time English language was for me the same mystery as the numbering system of Albert Pick.

Right now I am translating *UIN* tables into the Russian language. Also, the website www.GHCS.me will be fully bilingual.

• What do you do besides working on this project?

I do writing for the IBNS journal. Some of them were posted. Four more are waiting "*in a line*". The truth is that few years ago, due to family emergency, I took "A Leave of Absence" (from numismatics). But recently I'm coming back to active work.

I'm a member of *IBNS Expert Panel*. Almost every week I am advising collectors from various countries and have continued this task diligently.

Literally, yesterday, from Italy I received a question about Napoleonic forgeries. In September I advised the Australian colleague on the question of "Russian camp scripts" 1919-20. A little bit earlier, in the summer, I helped Anil Bohor from India. For those who not familiar with him: Anil Bohora released a **Catalogue of Replacement Banknotes** which is recognized throughout the world.

I continue my research and writing books on the history of printers of banknotes and their opponents - "*forgeries makers*".

And of course, most of the time I spending on creating the database of **UIN**.

• **I'm sure these interviews take a lot of effort to achieve a successful result. So what are your personal goals?**

Probably, more free time ... Oh, and I'm committed to the success of the **KAMERTON**.

Anyone who wants to get more information about my project, or help with it completion, please contact me at dml911@gmail.com.

The interview was conducted by Dmitry Nevmyvako, a member of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine.

Odessa, New York, USA

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