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AND MODERN*

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When arranging a permanent exhibition in a numismatic museum various considerations should be taken into account.

What are the requests for such an exhibition? And what are the expectations from the view point of the visitor? Which is the public visiting the museum? Are they schoolchildren, are they adults, are they tourists or are they experts in numismatics, such as professionals or collectors?

To find a common denominator to satisfy all the abovementioned categories of visitors is not an easy task, as compromises and concessions become necessary.

After the decision has been made, as to the subject of the exhibition, a macro-plan should be worked out in staff meetings. Here already enters the designer. How big are the premises at our disposal which may either limit or widen the exhibition space?

If it is a numismatic museum of importance, such as connected with the National Museum of a country, or a museum of the National Bank, or else probably a numismatic museum unique in its country, the history and development of the means of payment of that country should be strongly emphasized without, however, neglecting the wider field of numismatic research which should find its expression in the exhibition.

Speaking pro domo, as former director of the Kadman Numismatic Museum, Tel-Aviv, we arranged an exhibition aiming to give an appropriate answer to most of the requirements of the various categories mentioned above. This is of course only possible by compromise.

We had the experience of our first coin exhibition arranged back in 1962 in which we showed in three 10m long showcases the development of the means of payment from barter to modern money. At that time, we had little experience and even study-visits to museums in Europe and the United States could not contribute to our knowledge.

Narrow tables were attached to these showcases to enable us to show further material. In the course of years, the museum acquired by purchase and donations more material, part of which we believed should be exhibited too in appropriate places. So over time the exhibition became overloaded with material, a fact that turned the coins, interesting for the expert, into a collection of mere buttons to the lay visitor. Thousands of coins filled the showcases, without proper explanations, just giving the name of their country of origin and the name of the rulers who issued them. This situation became unbearable.

Some ten years ago, we decided to arrange a new exhibition without changing its original subject, namely "Means of payment from their beginning to the present day", which was basically correct.

The designer planned instead of the former three endless showcases, showcases of approximately 1m width each, as planned by our staff, each dedicated to a specific subject.

The main idea was to reduce the drastic number of coins exhibited and to show them from various aspects. We succeeded in breaking the monotony of the "button exhibition" by adding to almost every showcase various non-numismatic items, such as archaeological objects, be they a sculpture, a glass or decorated pottery vessel, an inscription relevant to the subject, etc. In many cases maps were added to show the region in which the coins were struck, or the lands ruled by the kings (etc.) whose coins are exhibited. Where necessary, genealogical tables were added.

The exhibition starts with barter objects of 'primitive money' from Africa and Oceania, touching on the ancient metal bars and to what is said in the Bible about means of payment mainly in the period of Abraham.

In the 6th century Greece showcase, are a series of drawings of hoplites carrying shields bearing a variety of emblems, as depicted on contemporary Attic vases, to explain the subject of the "Wappenmünzen", replicas of which, from the Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, are exhibited thereunder.

In quite a number of showcases enlarged drawings of important coins are added.

Comparison between die sinking and gem cutting from an art perspective are shown at length.

The purchasing power of the Greek coins during the 4th century BC is shown as well as the pre-Hellenistic and Seleucid money systems.

The Jewish coinage is shown in a series of showcases from those of the 4th century BC to those of the 2nd century AD.

A map shows the city coins of the Holy Land from the 2nd century BC to the 3rd century AD. Each city, 38 of them, is represented by a beautiful preserved specimen at the place of the relevant city on the map. This is followed by a rich series of coins of Aelia Capitolina, the Roman Jerusalem and by such of Caesarea Maritima and Neapolis.

Roman coins are shown from their earliest period, not without showing and explaining the inflation of the 3rd century AD, by giving an excerpt of Diocletian's edict of maximum prices showing the standard of living by comparing prices of basic food with wages prevailing and exhibiting a glass vessel of the measure of 1 pint and a stone weight inscribed 'A', i.e. 1 Libra.

Another showcase turns to the Late Roman Empire when Christianity was declared the State Religion, a fact well reflected on the coins of the period.

Thereafter the Byzantine coins, on which for the first time the denominations of the bronze coins are systematically indicated, are shown.

These are followed by Arab coins, which are generally iconoclastic and thereafter the showcase dedicated to the Crusaders. Here the way they advanced towards Jerusalem, which they took in 1099 AD, is shown. Their coins depict the public buildings of the Holy City, such as the Tower of David, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dome of the Rock.

Then follow Mameluk and Ottoman coins and finally we exhibit the coins of the State of Israel, the emblems of which are all borrowed from the repertoire of the ancient Jewish coins.

In front of all the showcases are narrow tables showing further material for the expert. Every showcase has a lengthy introduction in Hebrew and English, giving the historical background of the region and period as well as numismatic remarks.

One table showcase shows the weights used to weigh means of payment, such as silver and gold prior to the use of coined money, and in another table showcase the striking of coins is explained by means of original dies (ancient and modern), drawings, etc.

In the centre of the exhibition hall various coin hoards are exhibited.

It should be mentioned here that 98% of the coins exhibited are genuine and only 1% of them are on loan from other institutions. Our collection comprises today some 85,000 objects, in the main ancient and modern coins, but also paper money, medals, weights and measures as well as seals and gems.

At this point technical matters should be mentioned:

- A. Lighting - Two sorts of light should be used. The ones inside the showcase above the coins are most successful if the coins stand at an angle of about 70°. This causes the coins to appear in the best possible relief. In addition, projectors should be used to light the showcases still more from outside and add light in the exhibition hall as such.
- B. Mounting of the coins - The coins should be mounted in a manner to appear detached from their background. This is made possible by hanging them in a screw/wire device.
- C. Cleaning of coins - In spite of the fact that collectors dislike the removal of the patina from the coins, we clean all coins, those exhibited and those which are in the store-rooms. On cleaned coins

the details are much clearer and speculative observations on types and reading legends can be avoided.

D. Security - The showcases are closed with special locks, applied in hidden places invisible at first sight. Each lock has a different key. Besides this alarm devices are applied to various showcases in which the more valuable coins are exhibited.

Furthermore a general alarm system with detectors and fire-sensors is installed. Special cameras transfer movements in the exhibition hall in a closed circuit system to screens in the control room of the security officer. The guard in the exhibition hall is armed.

The final aim of the exhibition is to show the story of money in the best possible way and, according to reactions of colleagues and exhibition experts who saw the exhibition, we believe we have achieved a big step forward in this extremely difficult field of coin exhibiting, in a didactic as well as aesthetic manner.

This is the difference between a conservative modern permanent coin exhibition and a temporary one which is either dedicated to a special subject, as we see it here in the premises of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank, or for instance the wonderful organised temporary "Money" exhibition so ably arranged by the staff of the British Museum at the occasion of the CIN congress in London 1988.