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The New Exhibition of The Coin
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A Numismatic Exhibition for Non Numismatists? The New Exhibition of The Coin Cabinet Of Vienna

Günther Dembski

Director of Kunsthistorisches Museum Coin Cabinet, Vienna, Austria

The coin cabinet of the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum is situated in 12 rooms of the second floor in the main building of this museum. 9 rooms are used as bureaus and depositories and 3 reserved for the numismatic exhibition. In 1993 the exhibition was closed because of restoration and modernisation. Nobody could know at this time that the reopening would not be in the next year but much later because of financial problems in this time. But difficulties and problems can bring also some positive aspects: in the long period of closure we had had many possibilities to visit other coin cabinets, to look at their exhibitions and to learn a lot about the presentation of coins and the numismatic objects.

Before starting the works it had been decided, that the old show cases, made at the end of 19th century should be used further, only at the walls and outside the exhibition rooms new and modern glass vitrines were situated. The old show cases, made exactly for the three exhibition rooms, were refurnished, equipped with non reflecting glass and new security systems (opening and acoustic glass break detectors). The number of these show cases was reduced about 20%, so that the rooms did not look a little overburdened like before.

The exhibition rooms got a new lighting system for common light as well as many spots to light the objects. The floor was renewed, new security installed (room and object surveillance, a fire protection system and TV surveillance) and for the future PC wires were installed. These works lasted – with many interruptions – till the end of 1997.

From the beginning of 1997, the numismatic team of the coin cabinet started final brainstorming how to make the new exhibition. The experience of several visits to a number of coin exhibitions was one basis, the other was the main idea to make a coin exhibition for non numismatists.

The team consisted of four colleagues and everyone had to present his own research field: Karl Schuiz medals, Roswitha Denk «*modern*» numismatics, Michael Airam medieval and Far Eastern and Günther Dembski ancient coinage from its beginning. Besides other themes had to be done which will be mentioned soon.

Even at the early beginning, all of us were convinced that we had to make an exhibition which would show, based on a scientific numismatic-historic background, the story of coins and medals together with the phenomena

caused by these items, and the presentation of this had to interest not only numismatists but especially people who have in general little or no idea about numismatics.

We knew that it would not be easy to reach this target. Today, since the exhibition of the Coin Cabinet was reopened nearly two years ago we think that we have been successful and have reached this target as the visitors themselves tell us and their reactions show.

What were we doing? What changed in respect to the former exhibition, which was mainly established before World War II? The most important fact had been that we occupied a space outside the exhibition area of the corridor with special display cabinets, which were generously sponsored by Erste Bank, Vienna. From the special collection of this bank we got as steady loan moneyboxes from 17th century till today. Other show cases present coin treasures from Roman time till the 19th century, weights, methods of weighing and measuring in respect to coins and at least the history of the Vienna Coin Cabinet is presented with a photocopy of the first inventory (1547) and its researches going back to famous Joseph Hilarius Eckhel (1737 -1798).

Visitors coming in the 2nd floor of the Kunsthistorische Museum are in any way confronted with these objects shown there and will be tempted to go to the – now held open – entrance of the coin cabinet where in room 1, the whole history of medals from the Renaissance till today is shown in 41 small show cases; Decorations of Austria and of the most important countries of the world are shown also in this first room in specially made glass cabinets which are mounted on the wall.

The second exhibition hall is dedicated to the history of money (coins and paper money) from its beginning to the near future with the Euro. Here each show case brings a short overview about the coins of the period, which is shown in it combined with a map for better orientation and a short description of each coin presented there.

The maximum number of items presented in the display cabinets is 25 pieces, mostly less, so that the visitor would not be overburdened in looking at them. 6 showcases have Greek coins, 5 Roman, 9 Medieval and 16 coins of the modern age and there are some more themes which should be mentioned soon.

The display cabinets on the wall show different themes: the development of paper money, the Taler Tree; former world currencies such as the tetradrachms of Alexander the Great, the Guldiner of Florence and the Talers of Maria Theresa; dies for coins and medals and technical development of coinage is also shown in a small way as well as the roots of names of modern coins such as pound, Mark, Lira, Drachma etc.

Two small but famous wooden cabinets for coins are exhibited in this room; they belonged to archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol (1564 - 1595), a Hapsburg, who had been a famous collector of coins but also of other things as the gallery of small painted portraits shows which is presented on the walls in the rooms 1 and 2 – it belongs to the collection of Gemäldegalerie. Its presentation in the coin cabinet has an historical background

Room 3 of the coin cabinet is preserved for special exhibitions which were started by one about Celtic coinage. Since May 2000 there is an exhibition about Roman Coins entitled: Non olet, Das Geld der Römer.

The reopened Vienna coin cabinet has a satisfactory number of visitors: more than 5,000 per month shows us, that our idea to offer the sometimes difficult numismatic world to people who know not too much about it has been right and that the way we found to do it seems not to have been wrong.