



Richard G. Doty
*ICOMON. Impressions of the first ten
years, 1994-2003*

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ICOMON

Impressions of the first ten years

1994–2003*

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ICOMON (the International Committee of Money and Banking Museums) celebrated the past first decade in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Since I have been associated with the group since the beginning, I was asked to write a brief history of this growing **ICOM** organization, setting down its challenges and accomplishments, personalities and publications. I shall do so with pleasure. But I must stress that what follows will not be an orthodox history, but rather my impressions of an unorthodox, gifted group of people whom it has been my privilege and pleasure to serve. For if there was ever an organization whose people formed its heart and soul, that organization is ours. Without the cheerful volunteerism that has distinguished **ICOMON** from the very beginning, there would have been nothing *but* a beginning. Without the hard, sustained labor of many people, **ICOMON** would have disappeared almost as soon as it saw the light. But because so many wanted it to succeed, it did succeed, overcame its early challenges, and today stands as one of the most dynamic, effective voices in all of **ICOM**.

We date the beginning of **ICOMON** to 1994 – specifically May 1994, when a group of money, mint, and bank museum personnel met in London (at the Bank of England premises – very appropriate!) to formally organize a new member of **ICOM** (the International Council of Museums). The above choice of wording was deliberate: The London meeting was held, not to create a new museum group, but rather to ratify, rationalize, and formally proclaim the existence of a museum group that already existed, albeit on an informal basis. Other members may have longer memories, but for me, the seeds of **ICOMON** germinated at the Brussels International Numismatic Congress, which took place in the early autumn of 1991. Christiane Logie (Brussels/Belgium) and others spearheaded a series of informal

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talks, late-night telephone calls, and other communications, including an inspiring recital in her private home. Reiner Cunz (Hannover/Germany) joined this group in the very beginning. Many of us discovered that problems and possibilities that we thought were uniquely our own, were shared by others – problems of outreach, questions of security, the prospects of the Internet. As we talked at the congress (and continued to correspond during the following months and years), we became convinced that there was room and need for a new numismatic organization. It should be one that saw things from the somewhat neglected *perspective of the museologist* – parallel, complementary, and cooperative to the brilliant efforts of the International Numismatic Commission, which is occupied with different aims, tasks, and duties. **ICOMON** is conceived for the benefit of the numismatic world, challenging for us, but not at all meant as a challenge to the INC. And so the London meeting, far from being a leap into the unknown, came about as the inevitable next step in an ongoing process. Natural, unforced, the new movement attracted the idealism and loyalty of many. It inspired optimism.

At the London meeting, an **ICOMON** board was chosen. Mando Oeconomides (Athens/Greece) became president, Christiane Logie secretary and Rafael Feria y Pérez (Madrid/Spain) treasurer. I assumed the duties of vice president. The crew was completed by Michael Alram (Vienna/Austria, as representative for national coin cabinets), Reiner Cunz (Hannover/Germany, for regional museums), John Keyworth (London/United Kingdom, for bank museums), Albert A. J. Scheffers (Utrecht/Netherlands, for mint museums), Elena Horz de Via (México, for Latin America), Takashi Ohkubo (Tokyo/Japan, for Asia), Hortensia von Roten (Zurich/Switzerland, for Central and Western Europe), John Sharples (Melbourne/Australia, for Australia and Oceania), and Tuuka Talvio (Helsinki/Finland, for Northern Europe). But official confirmation would have to wait until the following year. Under **ICOM** statutes, plenary meetings are held every third year. Matters of general interest are discussed, and **ICOM** subgroups hold meetings of their own in conjunction with the major event. Since the next **ICOM** meeting would take place in Stavanger (Norway) in summer 1995, **ICOMON** would be meeting there too. Formal elections would then give us officers for the next three years. We began preparing for our part in the proceedings. More directly, we began arranging a speakers' program, working with local groups for member accommodations – doing all the things that had to be done, promoting **ICOMON** to become a real, audible voice for a specialized group of museum professionals.

The Stavanger meetings may have been our greatest test, and I'm proud to say that we passed it with flying colors – always due to the generosity and hard work of our members. We had more than twenty speakers over several days, and we would eventually publish their presentations in the first of our proceedings volumes. Best of all, we attracted new members, and our organization began to assume the outlines of today's global network.

Our meetings in 1996 and 1997 took place in Central Europe. The 1996 gathering was held in Austria at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and two **ICOMON** members were of outstanding assistance. Günther Dembski no longer works directly with us, but remains active, having important tasks in the parent organization **ICOM** and also in the International Numismatic Commission. His support in Vienna was crucial. Michael Alram performed brilliant beneficial work for us in Vienna and remained a vibrant member of the **ICOMON** board for many years. At this meeting and the one the following year, we gained many new Central and Eastern European members. Our treasurer Rafael Feria took care of the Stavanger and Vienna proceedings in one volume.

The 1997 annual meeting was held in Berlin on the occasion of another International Numismatic Congress. It was a somewhat smaller gathering than that in Vienna, but much useful work was done. The support by Reiner Cunz for our first meeting in Germany was very welcome. A round table on research in money museums was organized, and the special identity of our new group was becoming more and more firmly established. The sessions were held at Humboldt University, Berlin.

The next triennial **ICOM** meeting took place in Melbourne, Australia, in early October 1998. Despite the long distances and high costs of travel, I am very proud to say that many **ICOMON** members made the decision to attend and participate. Some of our sessions took place in the historic gold mining town of Ballarat, and a major publication, shepherded into being by our good colleague John Sharples of the Museum of Victoria in Melbourne, stands as permanent testimony to one of our most successful meetings. Following **ICOM** statutes, we held elections for the **ICOMON** board. Michael Alram was elected vice president, Rafael Feria y Pérez would serve again as our treasurer, Albert Scheffers as our secretary, and I was elected your president. Most of these officers were elected to second and final three-year terms at the next combined **ICOM** and **ICOMON** conference (Barcelona, 2001). In addition to the posts I just mentioned, the board had and has representatives for regional museums, mint museums, bank museums, and representatives for the Americas, Australasia, Europe, and Africa.

The 1999 annual meeting was one of our greatest successes, thanks in no small part to the hard work and dedication of Rafael Feria y Pérez and his employees of the Museo Casa de la Moneda. We could rely on the help and the facilities of the Royal Spanish Mint (Real Casa de la Moneda, Fábrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre). Held in Madrid in mid-October, the meetings had well over two hundred participants. Again Rafael prepared the proceedings, the records of our "*International Congress on Money Museology*". Many new professionals across Spain and well beyond were inducted into our ranks. During the Madrid conference, it was also decided that an **ICOMON Newsletter** should be published at regular intervals. It had a bilingual French-English forerunner since 1994, the **ICOMON Magazine**, published in Brussels by Christiane Logie. Dr William Bischoff

(New York/USA) and I volunteered to edit and send the newsletter to all interested parties. Our first issue went out early in 2000, sent largely by airmail. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 led to a dramatic deterioration in the United States postal service, and so we determined to create an electronic as well as print version of the newsletter, sending the electronic version whenever possible. This practice has continued and expanded. As of this date, less than fifteen percent of the publication run still goes out through the normal mails.

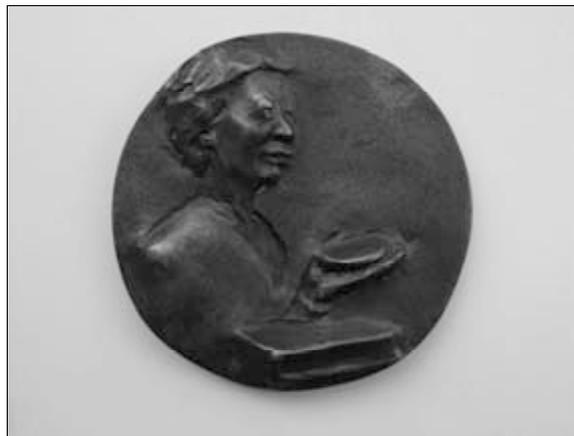


Fig. 1. Cast medal 2001 for Christiane Logie, sculpted by a friend of her, the Dutch-Belgian artist Marit Hertzdahl-Hartman, Riemst/Belgium (* 1938). Bronze, diameter: ca 90 mm. 50 copies were cast by Binder in Haarlem/Netherlands. The Neolatin inscription is from Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven/Belgium). The medal was inaugurated by Raf Van Laere (Hasselt/Belgium) and Albert A. J. Scheffers (Utrecht/Netherlands) and presented to Christiane Logie in 2001 at the Barcelona congress.
(Photos: Roswitha Imlau, Hannover, 2007).

We currently send out between 300 and 350 copies of each **ICOMON Newsletter**. It appears two or three times per year, normally in late winter-early spring, midsummer, and late autumn.

The turn of the millennium brought about a new inclusiveness. Members of the **ICOMON** board had long discussed holding a meeting somewhere in Latin America, a region underrepresented among our members. Through the kind assistance of the Argentine Committee of **ICOM** and the museum branch of the Banco de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, we were able to make a dream come true. **ICOMON** met in Buenos Aires during the second week of October 2000. The meeting was a great success, and we added a significant number of Latin American institutions and individuals to our roster.

The new millennium saw the departure of several **ICOMON** mainstays and the arrival of several others. Rafael Feria and Albert Scheffers (the “father” of our Logo) moved on to new jobs and challenges in and after 2000. Besides that, Rafael became president of **ICOM** Spain and Albert president of **ICOM** Netherlands. Christiane Logie, who had served so long and so successfully as the spirit, the conscience, and the heart of our fledgling group, moved to Blue Shield, the international organization set up to counteract the theft of the world’s cultural heritage. New people came to the fore, many of whom now serve on the **ICOMON** board: Armine Wehdorn of the Austrian National Bank in Vienna, María Antonia González Arnal of the Banco Central de Venezuela in Caracas, Dai Zhiqiang of the China Numismatic Museum in Beijing, and Angelina Araújo Vélez of the Banco de la República Colombia in Bogotá. Reiner Cunz, Chairman of the German Numismatic Commission (Numismatische Kommission der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), became more closely involved with **ICOMON** – to our great advantage.

ICOM met in Barcelona early in July 2001 – and so did we. Owing in no small part to the hard work of Marta Campo Díaz (Gabinete Numismático de Cataluña, Museo Nacional de Arte de Cataluña) and her devoted, skilled staff, the Barcelona meeting was one of our most impressive. We were one of the smallest, but one of the busiest and most efficient committees of this thrilling congress. It was a magnificent atmosphere, full of readiness for help and a global exchange of experiences with experts of other committees. We heard nearly thirty presentations over three days, each keyed to a larger theme on a particular day. Thus, on 3 July, papers were devoted to *Managing Numismatic Heritage*, a large topic explored in three sessions: *Managing National Numismatic Heritage*, *Managing Numismatic Collections*, and *Numismatic Collections: Special Problems*. Each of these sessions (and others like them on the other two days) had an average of three or four presentations. We were thus able to explore our prospects and problems in a remarkably thorough fashion. As with a number of other annual meetings, the papers given in Barcelona were published in a solid volume of proceedings. This collection is one of the best we ever had, due to the professionalism of Marta

Campo. In Barcelona, Christiane Logie took her leave of us. It was the last meeting she attended, after ten busy years promoting the **ICOMON** idea.

Successful as it was, the Barcelona meeting was dwarfed by that held in Beijing, in October 2002. Sponsored and organized by The People's Bank of China, their China Numismatic Museum, and a number of other public and private organizations, our Beijing gathering bore the general title *Money and Banking: The Varieties of Monetary Experience*. Over sixty papers in several languages were heard between 14 and 17 October, and the two following days were devoted to tours of the China Numismatic Museum, the Summer Palace, and the Great Wall. Approximately 350 people attended part or all of the meetings. Michael Alram prepared an exhibition *Money from Austria*, which was on show in China Numismatic Museum. This was the first step for an exhibition exchange between colleagues from **ICOMON**: the China Numismatic Museum gave an exhibition *Geld aus China* to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 2003. After the meeting in Beijing in record time a bilingual English-Chinese reader with the lectures was produced, which stands as a reminder of our most successful annual meeting thus far. At that time Niklot Klüßendorf (Marburg/Germany) became closer involved with **ICOMON**. Besides his doubtless expertise as German monetary historian, he is an expert for Asian countries.

ICOMON played a far more modest part when it next met. We decided to gather in Madrid in September 2003, planning our meetings in conjunction with those expected at the far larger International Numismatic Congress. We initially encountered some opposition from various members of the International Numismatic Commission, but we explained that many **ICOMON** members belonged as well to the INC and would find it difficult or impossible to finance *two* important meetings in different places, in a single year. But not only practical or financial reasons push and motivate us to close cooperation between **ICOMON** and the INC. Our two organizations complement each other perfectly. Permission secured, we met formally for a one-day presentation of papers. We also had formal and informal conversations with representatives from the Republic of Korea. For the next **ICOM** General Conference and Assembly would be held in Seoul in October 2004, and we must attend – and do our best in advance to make our Korean **ICOMON** meeting as successful as possible.

Hard work by and with our Korean hosts and careful planning paid off – the Seoul meetings were held on schedule and were a success. We had hoped that thirty or so would find the resources and the time to make the long trek to the Republic of Korea, but we actually got fifty. Those who attended heard some fifteen presentations, covering many aspects of numismatics and museology. In accordance with **ICOM** statutes, elections for a new **ICOMON** board were also held in Seoul. Those elected to three-year terms were: Hortensia von Roten as president, Reiner Cunz as vice president, Armine Wehdorn (Vienna/Austria) as secretary and representative for bank museums, Heike Winter (Frankfurt,

Main/Germany) as treasurer, Ian Wiséhn (Stockholm/Sweden) as representative for national museums, Cecilia Meir (Tel Aviv/Israel) as representative for regional museums, Angelina Araújo Vélez (Bogotá/Colombia) as representative for mint museums,



Fig. 2. The **ICOMON** delegation visiting the Woori Bank Museum in Seoul.

María Antonia González Arnal (Caracas/Venezuela) as representative for the Americas, Jonathan Williams (London/United Kingdom) as representative for Europe, archaeological museums, and university museums, Takashi Uemura (Tokyo/Japan) as representative for Asia, and Huang Xiquan (Beijing/China) as member-at-large. Tuukka Talvio withdrew from the board and is now one of our “ambassadors” as board member of the International Numismatic Commission. An extensive tour organized by our hosts, rounded out our week in the Republic of Korea.

ICOMON continues to grow, continues to plan, to hope. We have the general outlines of our meetings sketched out through 2010. Our membership reached the number of one hundred. We have come a very long way, in a fairly short time.

But work remains undone, challenges remain unmet. We are still under-represented in Asia and, especially, in Africa. We must work harder to secure more memberships in those regions – and to retain and expand memberships in areas of relatively greater representation – Europe and America. I believe that the surest way of achieving both objectives is to remember the reasons, why we came together in the first place, some fifteen years ago. We met informally and then organized formally, because we wanted and needed a sounding board and a neutral meeting place where *museological* problems could be discussed, ideas be adopted or rejected. The voice of experience and the possibility of new concepts receive equal attention. If we remain true to these memories, we cannot but succeed. **ICOMON** will continue to advise, instruct, and serve.

ICOMON meetings

1991 Preliminary meeting during the 11th International Numismatic Congress in **Brussels**/Belgium

1. 1994 **London**/United Kingdom
2. 1995 **Stavanger**/Norway
(in conjunction with the 17th General Conference and the 18th General Assembly of **ICOM**)
3. 1996 **Vienna**/Austria
4. 1997 **Berlin**/Germany
(in cooperation with the 12th International Numismatic Congress)
5. 1998 **Melbourne**/Australia
(in conjunction with the 18th General Conference and the 19th General Assembly of **ICOM**)
6. 1999 **Madrid**/Spain
7. 2000 **Buenos Aires**/Argentina
8. 2001 **Barcelona**/Spain
(in conjunction with the 19th General Conference and the 20th General Assembly of **ICOM**)
9. 2002 **Beijing**/China
10. 2003 **Madrid**/Spain
(in cooperation with the 13th International Numismatic Congress)

11. 2004 **Seoul**/Republic of Korea
(in conjunction with the 20th General Conference and the 21st General Assembly of **ICOM**)
12. 2005 **San José**/Costa Rica
13. 2006 **Frankfurt (Main)**/Germany
14. 2007 **Vienna**/Austria
(in conjunction with the 21st General Conference and the 22nd General Assembly of **ICOM**)

Planned:

15. 2008 **Utrecht**/Netherlands
16. 2009 **Glasgow**/United Kingdom
(in cooperation with the 14th International Numismatic Congress)
17. 2010 **Shanghai**/China
(in conjunction with the 22nd General Conference and the 23rd General Assembly of **ICOM**)

For further reading:

ICOMON proceedings (www.icom.museum/publications/icomon.html)

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