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Royal Coin Cabinet*

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## **NEW EXHIBITIONS AND SPONSORSHIP AT THE ROYAL COIN CABINET**

Ian Wiséhn

Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm

This paper is about our temporary exhibitions and our experience with sponsors. At the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm, Sweden, these two phenomena go hand in hand. This is also a story about the struggle to build a new national monetary museum.

First, I would like to inform you about our museum. The Royal Coin Cabinet is one of Sweden's oldest museums with collections dating back to the 1570s. The rich collections are the essence of the museum. They are part of our national cultural heritage and the basis of all the activities of the museum exhibitions, as well as research. The collections consist of more than 500,000 objects from all around the world, representing all ages. The largest and most important part of the collection consists of coins, for example two hundred thousand coins from the Viking Age. But there is also paper money, tokens, medals, old share certificates, bank furniture and documents etc. etc. The Royal Coin Cabinet is a specialized museum for numismatics but also a museum concerning the history of Swedish banking.

During the 1940s, our predecessors were able to move the Royal Coin Cabinet to a building that also housed other cultural institutions. They built an exhibition that became quite famous during the early years of peace following the Second World War. Sweden had not been part of the war, so we were able to produce an exhibition that, as it happened, was used as a pattern for other coin cabinets in their effort to rebuild their exhibitions. At that time, our museum got a lot of praise and we became complacent. Because the exhibition was considered so fine there was no point in trying to do something better. So the exhibition from 1940 became permanent until 1994.

But several of the museum staff knew that something drastic had to be done about our galleries. It was uncomfortable to hear middle-aged visitors saying that our exhibition looked exactly the way it did when they were children. But it was true! Not much can be done without money. We did not get any money from the Ministry of Culture in order to do completely new exhibitions. I suppose that they did not think that numismatists could be able to build interesting exhibitions about coins. No wonder as they had seen our old displays with their thousands of coins set out row after row.

Then, with no money about to come from the State, we were contacted by a representative of the Savings Banks of Sweden. For a long time, they

had been worried that their history would be lost if no museum could take care of their old objects. They also wanted their history shown in a permanent exhibition. So, they offered us a sum of 5 million kronor, in order to collaborate with them. Naturally, we were happy with this offer, seeing in it an opportunity to do something radical about our own situation. But we could do very little in our old small premises. It was evident that we had to start thinking about moving the museum and the 500,000 objects that comprised our collections.

Of course, 5 million kronor would not be enough to build a new museum, especially if you have ambitions to build something totally new and modern. But luck struck for a second time! A few years after the first contact with the Savings Banks, the President of the Swedish Central Bank - dating from 1668, it is the oldest central bank in the world - came to us and asked if we would be interested in creating in Stockholm a new exhibition about the history of Swedish coins and banknotes. He offered 20 million kronor. At this, we nearly danced happily around the museum! The President of the Central Bank also facilitated contacts with the Minister of Culture. He had direct access to all the important people. With this, the Minister gave us the "OK" to go ahead, but we would have to find funds for ourselves. We still did not have a new home. Then luck struck for a third time! A possible house was offered to us and we said "Yes, thank you."

The property consists of a manor-like building with two wings on either side of a stone-paved courtyard. It has five floors above ground-level and two basements. The three lower floors of the museum contain exhibition galleries, an auditorium, a reading room known as the "Library of Queen Lovisa Ulrika," a museum shop, and a restaurant. The two upper floors accommodate offices and studios for photography and conservation. The building is situated in Stockholm's Old Town, opposite the Royal Palace. Once we knew where our new home was to be, it became easier to get more money from new sponsors. In all, we got 60 million kronor.

The new premises of The Royal Coin Cabinet were inaugurated by the King of Sweden on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1997. This coincided with a substantial increase in the museum's activities, emphasized by the adoption of a new name: The Royal Coin Cabinet, The National Museum of Monetary History. Our exhibitions not only display coins, paper money, and other systems of payment drawn from the whole world and from all periods, but also place these objects in their economic contexts. It is a museum exhibiting monetary means as well as economic institutions and ideas, both past and present, including economic history as a vital theme. But the transformation of our museum does not imply that we have lost sight of our history as a traditional coin cabinet. Our aim is an expanded sphere of activities, where schools as well as institutions from the financial world are potential collaborators.

Our museum is owned by the Swedish state and we receive money from the Ministry of Culture to pay our rent, salaries, heating and other expenses. The staff consists of twelve people, a majority of whom are curators. Some are working on short-time projects. From two very generous numismatic foundations we get additional funding to buy objects for our collection, to publish books, and to travel. But we do not get any money in order to build temporary exhibitions.

As you all know, it is essential for museums to present new and exciting exhibitions from time to time. Otherwise, the public will lose interest in the museum. The Royal Coin Cabinet produces two or three exhibitions each year. Some of them we undertake because we think the subject is important. Other exhibitions are done because we think that they will be popular. It is important to be on the lookout for topical subjects that can be turned into a temporary exhibition. We often produce catalogues that are sold in our museum shop. So, for the important task of producing temporary exhibitions, we have to seek financial help from sponsors. But the problem is that all Swedish cultural institutions are trying to get money from sponsors, as we all have needs that exceed the funding available from the government. And so, we are all competitors when it comes to fundraising.

The Royal Coin Cabinet is the museum that presents the history of money and banks. It is therefore natural that we turn to financial institutions when we need support. But it is not an easy task. No one wants to be asked to give away lots of money, not even banks. We have to offer them large numbers of free tickets for our museum, so that they in turn can present them to clients or employees. We also let our sponsors use our various facilities free of charge. For better or worse, I think it will be even more important in the future for museums to have good relations with banks and private companies. It does not always have to be a question of financial help. At the same time, it is important that the museums are the ones who decide what will be the theme of an exhibition. We must continue to be independent when it comes to running our museums! Perhaps we have been lucky, but to date none of our sponsors has tried to influence us in any way.

In Sweden, the government is encouraging all museums to get money from sponsors. The government is stepping back a few paces and no longer accepts full responsibility for national museums. Some twenty years ago, it wanted to be strong in the running of museums, but at present it seems that it has little interest in the matter. The state wants to keep the status quo, but without giving out more money. Sadly, enough Swedish banks and companies do not get any large tax reductions when giving money to cultural institutions.

Apart from getting funds from sponsors, the museum is also active in inviting companies, government institutions, societies and private persons

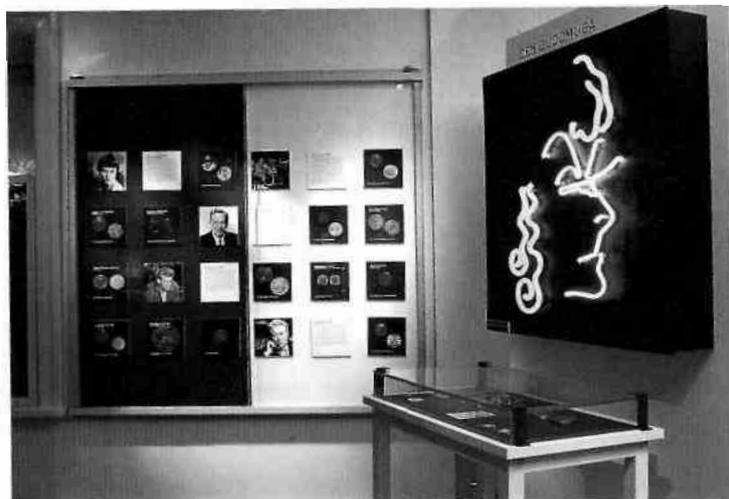
to hire conference facilities for large or small conferences, lectures, and meetings. We have an auditorium seating some 70 people, as well as the museum's restaurant in direct connection. The ground-floor premises are designed to accommodate activities after museum hours. In the summer, the courtyard, too, is available. In this way, the museum earns 1 million kronor each year. It is also positive that all these people who come to our museum, thinking that they will only attend a conference, also get to see our exhibitions. We hope that they will tell their friends that they have visited an interesting museum. In fact, on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2001 the leading Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* had an article in which the paper ranked all Swedish museums - in Stockholm alone, there are more than sixty. The Royal Coin Cabinet was listed as number six in the country. A money museum! I think that would even make our complacent predecessors proud.



**Figure 1.** Jazz-jazz musicians on Medal. Temporary exhibitions in the autumn of 2000.



**Figure 2.** A history about speculation - from Tulpomania to IT. Temporary exhibitions in the spring of 2001.



**Figure 3.** Stardust – Movie stars on Medal. Temporary exhibitions in the autumn of 2001.