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*NUMISMATIC EXHIBITIONS.
EXHIBITION IN THE HUNGARIAN
NATIONAL MUSEUM*

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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Hungarian National Museum

It is the basic task of museums to show their collections in collective or thematic exhibitions. Most of these collections - usually the larger ones - are in state ownership, or by all means in social ownership, and therefore it is a just expectation to see them in exhibitions. The curators of the collections have to fulfil these expectations, and should also make the result of their research known to the public; the form of this is - besides publications - the exhibition.

Important numismatic collections are almost without exception in museums, so it is evident that research is made there with the collections as primary sources. Naturally, numismatic research in other institutes - universities, academic institutes, banks, etc. - cannot be questioned. So the task of an expert is to organize exhibitions. Although not exclusively, it has been proven by a series of exhibitions that this task should be fulfilled by researchers, considering the low level of exhibitions organized by dilettanti.

It must be emphasized, however, that organizing exhibitions is only one task - and not the most important - of the researchers in numismatic departments of museums: collection development registering, depot work, conservation, but before all research.

In museums with historical collections generally two types of exhibitions are organized: those based on several collections, and those showing one collection or part of it. Regarding numismatic material, either it is shown as part of an exhibition showing a historical period, or only numismatic material is shown and is only followed by other historical objects or works of art. There are several examples of both types of exhibition. None of them are the only solution, either can be used depending on what should be shown: a full history of a certain period, or exclusively numismatic subject.

1996 celebrates the 1,100th anniversary of the Hungarians coming from the East and settling in the Carpathian Basin, where a hundred years later they founded a European and Christian kingdom, in a spiritual and social sense.

The most important part of the celebrations was the exhibition showing the history of the Hungarian people in the Hungarian National Museum. This exhibition - having the purpose of showing a part of history - has raised several theoretical problems. No historical exhibition should be a book of history, giving a full picture of the period dealt with: all political events, strategic movements, social activities, and works of art. The museum is showing only works of art, which might suggest that the exhibition is the mere illustration of a book of history. The subject is

further complicated by the fact that certain very important historical events could be illustrated by only a few works of art.

It was also suggested, that it was anachronistic to organize an exhibition showing the history of a nation. Although, we do not agree with these views, they should be dealt with. On the one hand, it is well known that there is a strong need to know the nation's past; on the other hand, works of art are, from several points of view, historical sources of their age. Moreover, a historian should deal with the so called 'minor nations' as well, and with their European integration.

The medieval Hungarian Kingdom lost its role as a power in Europe in 1526 as a result of continuous fighting against the Ottomans over one and a half centuries. The same period, when the territory of the country was a constant battlefield had thrown it on the verge of ethnic destruction. This was followed by the Trianon peace treaty, in which Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory. The power agreements during and following the 2nd World War surrendered Hungary to the Soviet Union. As a result of this, Hungary had a colony-like situation. Hungary had a considerable role in ending this situation, although the country became a small territory, dropped behind Europe from an economic point of view, with a comparatively small population. What is the future of this nation in a Europe approaching unification? And what is the role of other "small nations" like Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, and Albania? Theoretically, there are two paths: either melting in to a larger language family and giving up their national existence, or accepting unified Europe, preserving their languages, national culture and characteristics, thus making European culture richer, and through this, mankind. The answer of the historian could be only the second choice, and this is a special task of the museologists of "small nations": they should show their culture in a European context, which was always part of Europe. The collections of museums are the most convenient for this, as works of art are memories of cultural history. Numismatics is extremely important from this point. It is reality, and not prejudice that makes me state this. Coins of certain countries were parts of the European monetary systems practically till the 20th century - denars, groats, thalers. Differences at a local level showed the actual economic situation of a certain state, and at the same time - as plastic works - its art as well. The subject of the representations often expressed the idea of the state. No other objects could express such different notions.

So the social expectation is justified, and it is our task because of the historian's responsibility to organize historical exhibitions. The problem is that without essential knowledge of history a historical exhibition could hardly be understood, but it could also be supposed, that members of a society have a knowledge of the facts on which the exhibition is based. At the same time, modern exhibitions can widen our knowledge more than earlier ones. Installation helps this on the one hand, holding together objects, texts, maps. On the other hand, the static characteristics of exhibitions could be made more dynamic by using multimedia programs. Catalogues, guides, CD ROM-s are completing this and at the same time making it possible to remember the exhibition at home.

The exhibition of the Hungarian National Museum is a historical exhibition trying to show the history of Hungarian people in its completeness. The organizers laid a special stress on cultural history, rendering perceptible European values. To fulfil this task every possible means was used. Installation - show-cases built in a panel in front of the wall - is good for creating thematic units of different types of works of art, and the other part of it gives space for texts, maps, pictures in connection with them. This was the means of showing coin history - Hungarian coin history and the history of coinage and coin circulation. Like the whole exhibition, which shows Hungarian history with a view on European, the numismatic part of the exhibition demonstrates coinage, coin circulation, the issue of coins, the history of orders, all in a European context. Influences on Hungarian numismatics are also suggested. Coins are part of showing everyday life on the one hand, with European history and cultural history on the other.

Hungarian coinage had begun with the foundation of the state around 1000, and the first Hungarian coins had the denars of Regensburg as examples, that is Hungarian coins were parts of the European denar system. As a result of their high quality they appeared in European coin circulation. In one of the show cases of the room that demonstrates this period, are placed coins that show foreign and home trade. Beside the Hungarian denars of 300 years are the foreign coins that had a role in Hungarian coin circulation.

Throughout the historical exhibition, numismatics naturally does not maintain the same role. In certain shorter periods, only a few issues are present, while in other cases an important monetary reform is given a greater role. Richer periods are shown in independent show cases, like the thaler and gold ducat series of Habsburg emperors and Transylvanian princes in the 16-17th centuries. There are also emperors whose portraits are shown on coins. They appear in smaller numbers in the case of certain less important subjects.

When showing [mining?], coins are not missing. From the age of the Renaissance, several historical personalities and events are commemorated by memorial coins and medals. In the 19th-20th century material, bank notes have an important place, the joint stock-companies of economic life are represented by shares and bonds. Each period, political, economic or cultural in numismatics, is shown according to the importance of the coin, memorial coin, order in the chosen period.

This Historical exhibition of the Hungarian National Museum is a so-called permanent exhibition, that is it could be seen at least for one or two decades. The reconstruction of the museum building - lasting according to plans till 2002, the bicentenary - makes it possible to use a large size room for the purposes of cabinet exhibitions. For the first we would like to show the history of the 1000-year-old coinage in the Carpathian Basin in 2000.

This would be an independent numismatic exhibition, dealing only with coin history. The coins exhibited there would make the visitors understand - with the help of texts - monetary systems and technological processes,

shown with illustrations, original dies, maps of finds and the mints of the coins of finds, the circulation of coins in a European context, with exchange and value charts to illustrate the role of coins in economic life. We are trying to show coin history as money history in its complexity. The beginning of coin history in the Carpathian Basin would start in antiquity. Beside and following primitive money the first Greek coins appeared in the territory of Hungary, and the Celts were the first to make coins here. When Pannonia became part of the Roman Empire, Romanized people living here were using Roman coins while they were imitated beyond the borders, in the Barbaricum. Byzantine coins following Roman rule were used by the Hun, Germanic and Avar populations of the Carpathian Basin. This period would be followed by the history of Hungarian coinage from the beginnings in the year 1000, up till now.

When opening this exhibition both types of exhibitions will be seen in the Hungarian National Museum: a general historical exhibition and within the frame of a cabinet exhibition an independent numismatic exhibition.