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Proceedings of the ICOMON meetings held in: Stavanger, Norway, 1995, Vienna, Austria, 1996 / Memoria de las reuniones de ICOMON celebradas en: Stavanger, Noruega, 1995, Viena, Austria, 1996

[Madrid] : Museo Casa de la Moneda, [1997]
269 p. – ISBN 84-88298-03-X., pp. 80-84

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NUMISMATIC RESEARCH AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

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Before starting to discuss the ways in which numismatic research could act as a communication tool between a numismatic museum and the general public, it is essential to define numismatic research in general and by which institutions it is exercised.

The understanding of numismatics as an independent part of historical studies should be undisputed although quite a lot of people see numismatists as a kind of stamp collector whose primary work is to identify coins. This very common and widespread point of view is held not only by members of the general public but also by academics working in universities or even in our museums.

Naturally, it is up to us to ensure that the general public knows what the numismatic profession really includes. First of all, a numismatist is not merely concerned with coins. The numismatist also deals with other forms of money, which have played a major role throughout the whole history of mankind and continue to do so today. In this sense, the different kinds of money become one of the most important sources for historical research as well as for reconstructing the social, economic, political and cultural conditions of a certain period and region. Therefore it is our aim to analyze and describe the role of money within its actual historical context.

"From Cowrie Shells to Credit Cards" was the title of an exhibition arranged by the British Museum during the International Numismatic Congress in London 1986, which gave a clear impression of what numismatics should deal with (1). More than 50 years earlier, in 1935, August von Loehr, the then director of the Viennese Coin Cabinet, rearranged the Coin Cabinet's permanent exhibition in a completely new way. His aim was not only to show coins but also to present a universal monetary history. The title of this exhibition, which remained virtually untouched until 1988, was simply "Geldwesen" and became a model throughout numismatic museology (2).

Summing up the meaning of numismatics, it is the study of monetary affairs in all different ways and in aspects concerning all parts of history.

Taking this into consideration, numismatic research covers an enormously widespread field, so that it requires not only a lot of specialists but also specific scientific methods which have been developed especially for different kinds of money. On the other hand, numismatics relies on very close contact to other disciplines such as history, archaeology, art history, linguistics and ethnology. Therefore, numismatics is frequently included in the institutes of history, archaeology or ethnology of universities or in the historical department of a museum.

Today, numismatic research is carried out mainly by two institutions: by museums and by universities. Despite the fact that numismatics has been

taught at universities in Europe since the 18th century, the main part of research has been carried out by the museums. Nearly every country has one extensive numismatic collection which is either part of a national museum or an independent collection. Even smaller provincial or regional museums have sometimes their own numismatic collection but not always a special curator who is able to handle it.

In universities, the situation is completely different. There numismatics, as a separate field of study, is hard to find. Usually it is integrated in history, archaeology or one of the other aforementioned disciplines. The University of Vienna is one of the very rare places where an independent numismatic institute - founded by Robert Göjbl - has been in existence since 1965. There students have the opportunity of receiving complete training in numismatics during the course of their studies.

Despite the fact that relations between museums and universities are not always untroubled, I am truly convinced that numismatic studies and research can only survive if both institutions work closely together. As can be seen today, when governments have to curb expenses they are inclined to cut the budget for cultural affairs. So universities as well as museums are forced to fight together to secure the diversity of arts. There can be no doubt that numismatics will be one of the first small disciplines to suffer from economic measures. The feeble arguments are the lack of utilization or the low number of visitors in numismatic museums.

Taking this into account we have tried to find a new way of closer cooperation between the Viennese Coin Cabinet and the Numismatic Institute at the University of Vienna. On the one hand, all four members of the museum staff are now integrated in the lecture program of the institute and on the other hand the museum has opened its collections for the teaching program of the university. This has created a very lively and fruitful atmosphere which has formed the starting point for even closer cooperation in the near future.

But now back to the specific functions of a museum, which are traditionally defined as collecting, preserving, investigating and transmitting. A major part of our museum work should be research, forming the basis for transmitting and presenting our collections to the public. The research program of a numismatic museum is very much influenced by its own collection. Normally, the national or regional monetary history of its country or province determines the major part of the research program. In the case of the Viennese Coin Cabinet, the monetary history of Austria forms the nucleus of the research program.

With regards to the ancient period, the two major projects are: firstly, the coinage of the Celtic tribes, who struck the first coins on Austrian territory and, secondly, coin circulation under the Romans. Referring to the central and eastern Celtic tribes, we have one of the best collections in the world. Therefore, the publication which is being prepared by Günther Dembski in the form of a catalogue with additional introductions and commentaries on Celtic history, coin circulation etc. will be a reference work on Celtic numismatics. The Roman project is different to the other projects, in that we deal mainly with coin hoards and stray finds discovered throughout

Austria, which for the most part do not belong to the museums. This requires close cooperation with regional museums, archaeological institutions, the Numismatic Institute at the University of Vienna and the Austrian Academy of Sciences where similar projects are carried out. Moreover, it requires a lot of diplomacy to coordinate all these different institutions and to come into contact with people who are scanning the earth with their metal detectors.

At this point, I would like to stress that numismatic museums not only deal with their own collections but also with a high number of coin hoards and stray finds as mentioned above. This material normally has to be returned after restoration and classification. Concerning my own medieval section, I spend more than 80% of my time meant for research, investigating coin hoards which do not belong to our museum.

Therefore, publishing coin hoards forms the central point of the research program on medieval numismatics. One recent example is the coin hoard of Treubach, a small village in Upper Austria near the Bavarian border. The hoard was found in the village church and consists of more than 2,300 hellers and pennies mainly of the 14th century, demonstrating the trade connections between eastern Bavaria and Northern Italy, leading through the Austrian territory. The hoard was sent by the responsible provincial museum to our department for conservation and classification. This work resulted in a publication financed by the provincial museum (3) and an exhibition in which we tried to demonstrate the scientific process and its results to the public. I consider this to have been a very good example for demonstrating how numismatic research can work as a communication tool. In this particular case, the visitor was involved in the scientific process, the methods of investigation were brought closer and the results were set into a broad historical context.

Besides publishing coin hoards, the most important project in numismatic research of the Viennese Coin Cabinet is to complete the *Corpus Nummorum Austriacorum*, in which the late Bernhard Koch published a survey of medieval Austrian coinage last year, which is to be the basis for all further research (4). The following forthcoming volumes will cover the period of the emperors Maximilian I together with Ferdinand I prepared by Roswitha Denk, as well as the coinage of the Archbishops of Salzburg and the Austrian Noble Houses by Karl Schulz.

Returning again to my medieval section, we are also preparing a completely new publication of the so called "Friesacher Pfennig", one of the most important currencies in the southern alpine region during the 12th and 13th centuries (5). This project can only be realized in close cooperation with the numismatic museums in Hungary because most of the hoards were discovered on Hungarian territory.

For all these projects concerning Austria's monetary history, the enormous collection of the Viennese coin department forms the basis of research. In each individual case one of the first steps is to put the coins together with a detailed description and a picture in a modern database, which is the basis for the catalogue. In the future it is planned to integrate this database, in a slightly modified form, into the permanent exhibition of our

department so that visitors will have the opportunity to get all the information that they want (6).

Finally, I would like to mention one last project which might also act as a model for international cooperation between numismatic museums. The Cabinet des Medailles in Paris together with the Münzkabinett in Berlin and Vienna are preparing a catalogue of the Sasanian coins in their collections. A representative selection of more than 10,000 coins will be put together and published in five volumes by Rika Gyselen and myself. The aim of this project is to publish not only a catalogue but also to give a, to this day still missing, general survey of Sasanian coinage, of Sasanian coin typology, mint activities and attributions.

It seems clear that there is no numismatic museum in the world that is able to finance all research projects out of its own pocket and to realize them with its own personal resources. In Austria, we have two means of funding which provide money for research projects. Returning again to my medieval project, concerning the new publication of the "Friesacher Pfennig" it has been proven that numismatic research does not necessarily cost huge sums of money. The Austrian National Bank sponsored this project with 30,000 Dollars. With the help of this money we were able to employ one young numismatist working half-days for two years. During this time the whole collection was rearranged in a completely new way and was put with full descriptions and pictures, into the database.

To sum up, I would like to point out once again that in my opinion numismatic studies can only survive if all institutions dealing with this matter cooperate closely. The numismatic family all over the world is not very big and therefore it is necessary that we all move close together. The newly founded ICOMON is a perfect instrument for this purpose. It was necessary for all numismatic Museums to be represented in the ICOM and together with the International Numismatic Commission we have the chance to form a very strong community of interests.

NOTES

- (1) J. Cribb (ed.), Money. From Cowrie Shells to Credit Cards. London 1986.
- (2) A. Loehr, Geldwesen. Führer durch die Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien. Heft 24. Wien 1935. See also A. Loehr, Sammlungen von Medaillen, Münzen und Geldzeichen. Numismatische Zeitschrift 28, 1935, 3-11.
- (3) M. Alram, Der Münzfund von Treubach. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich. Folge 3. Linz 1994.
- (4) B. Koch, Corpus Nummorum Austriacorum. Band 1. Mittelalter. Wien 1994.

- (5) H. Winter, Die Neuinventarisierung und Neuordnung der Sammlung von Friesacher Pfennigen am Wiener Münzkabinett. Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Numismatischen Gesellschaft, 37, 1997 (in press).
- (6) M. Alram, Die Datenbank MacCoin am Münzkabinett des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien. Coins and Computers Newsletter 2, 1993, p. 4-6.