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The public display of archaeological remains of the Royal Mint House at Porto

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1. HISTORY

The Porto Town Hall has an important numismatic collection, organised since the mid-eighteenth century (that constitutes nowadays the Numismatic Office) charged with its conservation, study and exhibition to the public. It started in 1850 with the acquisition of a private collection (John Allen's) which was progressively enriched through donations, purchase, or integration of archaeological remains. It is constituted by Portuguese (several of them coined in Porto) and foreign pieces relating to various periods. The final installation of the Numismatic Office of Porto Town Hall on the premises only took place in 1987. Nowadays, its holdings present a certain diversity of objects and materials.¹²⁸

On the other hand, the Town Hall takes charge of the building where the Mint used to work almost uninterruptedly from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century.

The presence of the monetary letter P and its variations has permitted the identification of a great deal of mintage works of the Royal Mint of Porto namely from the first phase of working with coins from all the reigns, since the reign of King Fernando (fourteenth century) until the reign of King Sebastião (end of the sixteenth century). In this large period of time, at least twelve different species of gold, eleven of silver, sixteen of silver alloys and ten of copper were minted. The contrast with the productions of the second phase of the Royal Mint - between the reign of King João IV (in the middle of the seventeenth century) and the reign of King João V (in the first half of the eighteenth) - is quite evident with the exclusive production of species in silver (sixteen) and gold (three), which also seems to point out to a specialisation in this kind of metals, in opposition to the Royal Mint in Lisbon which maintained the productions in copper.

During the history of the Royal Mint of Porto, it underwent improvements and enlargements that are also reflected in the link it always kept with the neighbouring building of the ancient Customs House.

The riverine area - which since the Roman period was of great urban importance, due to its privileged relationship with the river and with the international trade network - witnessed during the fourteenth century the constitution of a true «services centre of the crown», inserted in a strategy of increasing affirmation of the Royal power in town. The Customs-house,

the Treasury's Audit Office, the Trader's Bourse, numerous houses of royal officials, artisans, wealthy people, along with the Mint and the Minters quarter, were located here. A new street opened parallel to the river – the Rua Nova – which became since the last decade of the fourteenth and during the following century a rectilinear axle of unusual dimensions and growing importance in the town's daily life, both economical and social. The Notaries' Court, the Customs Judge's, Master of Scales and Treasures' houses were also located in the neighbourhood.

This complex of Royal buildings, known as «Casa do Infante», since, according to tradition, it was Prince Henry the Navigator's birth place, underwent restoration works already in our century. Classified as a National Monument in 1924, it was given to the municipality in the 1950s and occupied by the town's History Office, which, in 1980, began the Porto Historic Municipal Archives. The need to enlarge this service led to a project of remodelling of the «Casa do Infante», and the opportunity was seized to profoundly study the historic roots of the building.

During the development of the project, involving an architecture and building construction process now in operation, articulation was possible between documentary research in the Historic Municipal Archives, architectonic study and archaeological investigation, and it allowed better knowledge of the whole building and evolution of the Mint in Medieval and Modern times.

New data exposed turned out to be of great importance to the building's history and to the town's history itself. The whole team involved in this project concluded that the best way of valorisation and diffusion of data would be the creation of a 'musealised' space. It will constitute one of the nuclei of the Town's Museum, mainly devoted to Porto's ancient and medieval history. The historic periods and functions the building assumed during more than six hundred years of uninterrupted occupation will be emphasised.

2. TYPOLOGY AND CHARACTERISATION OF RESOURCES FOR 'MUSEALISATION'

Future public display of the Porto Mint's space assumes a series of particularities:

1. The building – where two Mint Houses, the Customs House and other royal services were located – is a centre of attraction to a high degree. Due to its location in the Historic Centre of the town, recently classified as a World Heritage site, and to its insertion in the community and nation-wide recognition, it assumes a great symbolic importance.

It proceeds from a process of architectonic stratification, since the fourteenth century until the present time. As for occupation of the spot

and to diachronies on the organisation of spaces, a multiplicity of historical and architectonic facts has to be taken into account.

After the investigations, the knowledge of certain aspects of its architectonic evolution was possible. The fourteenth-century Customs House consisted of a central courtyard separating two high towers. At its back the Mint House developed, whose works were organised in two wings opening on to a central courtyard, also occupied by structures related to the process of coinage, that archaeological works are documenting. For security reasons great walls surrounded the whole building. Several doors ensured the entrance in the building. Some of them opened directly to the street, others led to the interior of the Customs. To the outside, near the East limit and close to the door, the discharges of waste deriving from the mintage occurred, according to the documents. The water supply necessary for the metallurgical activities came from outside the courtyard of the Mint through a tube of granite.

The first phase of work of the Mint House ended around 1590 and it is formally extinguished in 1609. In 1688, the minting work was retaken inside the Customs House in an area where we can still identify the melting furnace with the chimney and the cavities for the bellows.

2. Archaeological levels with remains of ancient spaces (walls of buildings, pavements of flagstones or large brick, industrial vestiges, remains of furnaces in the soil, sequences ...) – although deactivation of the Mint and continuous occupation of the building led to a high degree of destruction of the Mint levels. The archaeological works are documenting the process of coinage.
3. Archaeological objects and remains of industrial processes represented by a great variety of materials: crucibles, cupels, pincers, coins – gold, silver, silver and copper alloy, ... – flans, cuttings, metal debris points of bellows, dies, blanks, metallic scraps, stripes and ingots of metallic alloys ...

The excavation and study of these works are not yet concluded but the discovery of structures, associated with the remains that have been found makes reconstitution of the functionality of areas and operations carried out there possible, allowing investigation on economic and urban daily life aspects, during the Ancient Regime.

Articulation with the Numismatic and the Urban Archaeology Offices is possible at this level, as they hold collections, which have already been studied.

4. Archival information from the Porto Municipal Historic Archives relating to the internal organisation (Regulations), to the personnel (lists of officers are known), and to the process of coinage.

The concession of a charter granting privileges to the *alcalde*, Minters and other Mint officers in Porto's Mint house by King Fernando in 1370, latter confirmed by King João I, in 1385, is the first reference to coinage in Porto, revealing the privileged status of Minters, forming a corporation apart and living in its own quarter. The regulation of the Mint, conceded in 1391 by King João I, makes it possible to understand its functioning and internal organisation, defining a production line that engaged a great mass of specialised personnel, from the selection of metals and adjustment of alloys, to the cutting out of metals and coinage, supervised by security, vigilance and quality control responsible officers. A great set of documents from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries permits us to acknowledge the names of many of the employees and add the list of functions of specialised personnel as the stamp openers, the weighing-machine officer, the counter, the counter-testers, the gold refiner, and in the area of the furnaces, the coalmen, the bellows-blowers, the founders, and other workers.

5. External information to the Porto Mint, contextualizing money production and use.

3. PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE MUSEOLOGICAL ARRANGEMENT

This museological nucleus will try to characterise the monument and archaeological site under different angles, reflecting this approach upon more general aspects of the town's History.

The development of the process of public display bears in mind three interface levels:

1. Articulation between Archives and 'Musealised' Space - those will be physically independent circuits that share the same building; visitors won't meet, but there are information nets established between them. This parallel circuit will allow us to give the public interpretation of archaeological remains and knowledge concerning the historic significance of the place.
2. Articulation between the Mint and the building's and the town's history: this block underwent three big moments of transformation which it is necessary to explain - roman period / fourteenth - seventeenth centuries / seventeenth century - present time. On the other hand, it was the Crown's centre of services in town, and thus it relates to Porto's History.

3. Articulation with European monetary history: knowledge of industrial processes for monetary production (casting, analysing, and coinage), diffusion of the European monetary systems, exploitation of inter-regional European relationships.

4. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MUSEOLOGICAL CIRCUIT

As stated before, the museological circuit will remain independent from the Archive services. There will only be a common area, at the entrance level, where the access control, the ticket-office, the shop and the cloakroom will be placed. The courtyard will once again become the vectorial centre of the building, leading to each of the functional circuits created with the remodelling and enlargement of the «Casa do Infante».

Due to the extension of the museological circuit and to the profusion of archaeological and architectonic elements it is not possible to keep a strict and rigorous chronological sequence. However, a logical sequence of speech will be preserved, in connection to the itinerary that has been defined. Tools will be successively presented for the interpretation of remains and architectonic structures that are being crossed.

The Visitor will be led along the various spaces of the building so as to become aware of the historic density of local occupation, since the Roman period until the present, always in articulation with the town's global history.

Beside spaces for entertainment, areas of relaxation with cafeteria, video projections, models and multimedia equipment integrated in the circuit (new technologies will be used to fulfil the mission and to convey the message to the public), the museological language is organised by themes that were dealt with in the spaces where corresponding architectonic and archaeological elements are kept:

- the roman occupation of the riverside
- the medieval borough of Porto and the birth of Prince Henry
- the Crown centre of services in town:
 - Customs house
 - Mint

As for the Mint, three places were selected where related structures are kept (walls, doors, pavements, and furnaces...). A museological speech will be set up relating to the Porto Mint and the minters' quarter, explaining the Porto Mint administration and functioning, the technical processes of coinage and the monetary circulation.

Thus, various themes can be exploited in a didactic and pedagogic way, appealing to a dynamic methodology, by means of the Educational Service already created in the Porto Municipal Historic Archives. We need to

understand the needs of museum visitors. These will support the educational tasks of museums. It will also be necessary to develop solutions to respond to the needs and bring comfort to visitors, in spite of the existing conditions, and to create adequate conditions for a good preservation of the exhibited materials.

5. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Searching for the synthesis of the elements available at Porto and the articulation with similar realities in other European countries we searched for deeper collaboration between professional people in this area. The main objective is to create a European itinerary of Mints in which the 'musealisation' of Porto Mint is inserted. This co-operation project has been proposed along with Segovia (Spain) and Kutna Hora (Czech Republic) to the European Commission program ECOS OUVERTURE. The European Commission approved the project and it started finally in December 1999.

This project's proposal results mainly from the contacts established between the participating regions through web sites and by e-mail correspondence. These three cities have in common important vestiges of former mint buildings in urban areas considered part of UNESCO World Heritage. The mint buildings are managed by local municipalities, and there are remodelling processes in progress. The principal aims of this project are:

1. creation of a European Itinerary;
2. preparation of products for promotion;
3. encouraging cultural tourism;
4. contributing to economic and social development of the regions involved.

The complementary aspects from each region that allow, through the idea of a European Itinerary, the awareness of a common European history and the promotion of the cultural tourism has become the main motivation of the partners involved in this project. The partners involved wish strongly to compare ideas, methods and practises and allow that this exchange of experience enriches their own ways of working.

Starting with these principal partners we expect to have a co-operation network between other local and external partners and to enlarge the contacts in order to provide studies and interchange of information between a great number of corresponding members of the project. As the problems are the same, the need and the feeling of co-operation between the partners will give them additional force to go on. The development of inter-regional cooperation will allow not only the interchange of experiences and knowledge, the introduction of new methods and the deepening of those already known, but it will also be the right moment to promote the awareness of a common history, now that the Euro is about to become the new European currency.

The definition of the work programme and the selection of the activities originally presented has been developed looking at a better adequacy in the proposed objectives and to the particular situations, needs and interests of each one of the participating regions.

The main objective of the project – the creation of the Medieval and Early Modern European Mints Itinerary – has been considered at two levels:

1. The ensemble of the former mint buildings and museums, all with great heritage value, where there has been carried out rehabilitation or improvement processes by the local authorities.
2. The historical, archaeological and iconographic data associated with those heritage buildings composing the complex whole of a common European history.

It is the consideration of both levels that allows the implementation of promotion actions and animation products that are able to reach and involve the public.

This project aims to develop a statement of long-term impact for the three Principal Partners, and the associated aim to launch the fundamentals of the co-operation network and Itinerary in order to, through the involvement of many other partnerships, allow a truly European dimension and diffusion.

The work programme is organised on four work areas:

- Inventory and web site;
- Heritage management and public display;
- Itinerary products and promotion;
- Young public education and promotion.

With three international seminars and a final international conference, this project aims to develop a statement of long-term impact for the three principal partners, and the associated aim to launch the fundamentals of the co-operation network and itinerary in order to, through the involvement of many other partnerships, allow a truly European dimension and diffusion.

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ENDNOTES:

¹²⁸ Grosso modo, this collection holds:

- Portuguese Monarchy coins (which constitute the most valuable and significant set);
- Portuguese Republic coins;
- Greek coins;
- Hispanic coins;
- Roman public coins;
- Various foreign coins;
- Metal chips, receipts, policies, bonds, bills of exchange and banknotes;
- Medals, decorations and medailles;
- Banknotes, bills of exchange's, cheque's, policies and stamps printing plates.