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The cooperation between Hall in Tirol and Segovia: the revival of two historic Mints and its museological use

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Abstract

Focusing on the cooperation of Hall in Tirol and Segovia, this paper discusses the necessity of historic research for the museum's management: Opening new perspectives for networking and international cooperation, transferring know-how from one institution to another and enhancing the medial presence of the museum. The close connection between the Tyrol and Hapsburg Spain in the 16th century was uncovered only by intensive research. It exemplifies the importance of historic cooperation, especially for money and minting museums. In the early modern period the new technology of the cylindrical stamping press was exported to the royal Spanish mint at Segovia. Tyrolean know-how and manpower was transferred to the far away Iberian peninsula. The discovery of this historic cooperation prepared the ground for its repetition and the development of a European-wide project. With the museological expertise, after four hundred years a reconstruction of the historical cylindrical stamping press will be exported from Hall to Segovia. The endeavour to reactivate the old Mint at Segovia and the scientific collaboration with the substantial support of the Austrian Historic Institute at Madrid led to a cooperation in the fields of historic research and, as a next step, museology.

Introduction

*"...In a way, a museum is also a place of devotion from which dignity should emanate, and it is in this context that the museum shall feature research activities in the background, at least insofar as it actually functions as a museum, not an exhibition. Moreover, research is the placenta of a museum's credibility. It is decent research that distinguishes a museum from an exhibition hall or pavilion."*¹

It was with these words in an radio interview given in 2006 that Bernd Lötsch, Director of the Vienna Natural History Museum, highlighted the importance of scientific research as one of the main elements of a museum's activities. Only research can open fresh aspects, arguments and topics, a prerequisite for presenting even well-known exhibits to the visitors in ever-new, fascinating contexts, ways and styles.

1. The original quote of Bernd Lötsch, taken from an interview with the Austrian radio channel Ö1 and given in 2006 (see above), reads as follows: "Das Museum ist irgendwo eine Kultstätte auch, es muss Würde ausstrahlen, und damit hängt ja auch zusammen, dass es wenn es ein wirkliches Museum und nicht bloß ein Ausstellungspavillion sein soll, Forschung im Hintergrund hat; das ist der Mutterkuchen auch der Glaubwürdigkeit eines Museums, was es eben unterscheidet von einer Messehalle oder einem Pavillion."

In this paper I will illustrate the impact research can have on museum didactics and marketing by presenting a recent, promising example still under way involving the cooperation of the Mint museums of Hall in Tirol and Segovia in Spain. In doing so, some problems that arose in the venture will also be highlighted.

My paper has four main parts: First, I will explain the origin, development and kind of cooperation between the two institutions and the historical bonds that link them together. Secondly, we will take a brief look at the research project which is connected to this cooperation, and get an idea of its findings. Thirdly, I will present the current planning for cooperation and the steps to be undertaken. Finally, I would like to stress some of the major problems and advantages of cooperation of this kind.

The Mints of Hall in Tirol and Segovia – Historic background and cooperation

We first look at the origins of the cooperation between Hall in Tirol and Segovia by presenting the two institutions and the development of their partnership.



[Figure 1: Palazzo Vecchio]

Today, one of the small towns with mediaeval city centre in Austria, Hall, was a global player in the 16th century; salt mines, river transport and trade had created a prospering and wealthy environment for merchants from Southern Germany, among which Fugger and Höchstetter from Augsburg figure as the most famous names. Since 1477 the city of Hall was the place of the archducal Mint in the Tyrol. In the 16th century, the Mint of Hall housed the first properly working engine for the purpose of minting coins. Until then all coins had been minted by hand-striking, but now they could stream-punch from a ribbon of silver plate. The newly invented technique of a cylindrical stamping press made it necessary to look for a new building which could house such a big engine and access sufficient water supply for the water wheels that were running it. As a result the Mint was moved from its original place in the old town into the Hasegg castle situated southwest of the city, and this is where today's Mint museum is situated.



[Figure 2: Hasegg castle]

The invention of the cylindrical stamping press about 1566 was of tremendous interest to nearly everybody within the European high nobility of the time. The Pope and the Kings of Bohemia and Hungaria sent envoys to examine the new technique, and the Dukes of Bavaria, Jülich-Kleve and Mantua visited the Mint at Hall in person, to give just the most important examples.



[Figure 3: Cylindrical stamping press]

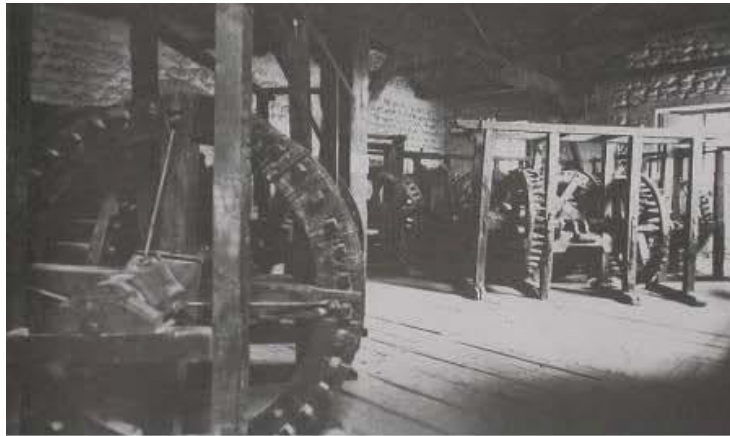
When, in 2003 in an attempt to renovate the Hasegg castle, unexpected fragments of wall paintings from the 16th century appeared under the old courtyard's plaster walls, giving new evidence of how important the building with its Mint must have been for the Hapsburg princes. One might think that the Mint had to be run as a maximum security institution where silver was handled and processed in considerable quantity, thus hiding the well known beauty of a factory. On the contrary, visitors were expected, and even intended to see and witness the splendours of the new technique.



[Figure 4: Courtyard before and after restoration]

Obviously, the risk of a transfer of the technology without permission of the archduke was considered low. It seemed that the cylindrical stamping press was to be copied without exhaustive explanation and training. However, commissioning such a machine was highly attractive due to its tremendous potential for rationalising in money production, especially in Spain where the immense wealth of silver flowing in from the New World had to be minted, and the interest in this new technique was high. After extensive negotiations, Archduke Ferdinand II. permitted the transfer of knowledge from Hall to his royal cousin Philipp II. In 1584, the pieces for a cylindrical stamping press and well-trained personnel from the Tyrolean mint started out for Segovia where a new Royal Mint had been established for the purpose.

Regardless of the many problems the new Mint faced during the first years of its existence, the technology turned out to be most useful to the Spanish crown. It spread inside the Spanish empire, and parts of it were copied and set up at Potosì in Bolivia. This is a most important fact for us, because in the 18th century the cylindrical stamping presses were demolished both in Segovia and in Hall. So, the Potosì copy is the only remaining original stamping press in the world, although it is not a full-fledged stamping press but only a stretching unit.



[Figure 5-7: Stretching unit at Potosi]

But let us return to Hall in Tirol. The Hall Mint was closed in 1809 during the Napoleonic Wars and the castle of Hasegg which once housed the Mint declined and was used as a dwelling. It was only in 1975 on the verge of the Olympic Games at Innsbruck that the old tradition of the Mint could be revived by the establishment of a museum of minting techniques. In 2003, this museum was completely renewed and extended. The core of the new museum is the impressive reconstruction of the cylindrical stamping press, and is the result of detailed studies on the object. This research, and the reconstruction, was carried out by historians and numismatists Heinz Moser, Heinz Tursky and Werner Nuding. Today, the reconstruction of the cylindrical stamping press is a crowd-puller of the museum.

The studies in the run-up to the reconstruction brought to light the connection between the history of

the Mint at Hall and the one in Segovia. The Segovian Mint, built in 1584, was used for its original purpose until 1868. Since then, the building has been used as a mill. Once the mill was closed in 1967 the building remained without further use and decayed. It was only in 1988 that the historian Glenn Murray Fantom started an initiative to save the buildings and to reconstruct the Mint. Since then the City of Segovia aimed to revive the complex and open a museum of minting in Segovia. In the course of the year 2007 archaeological excavations took place and these offered the opportunity to compare these findings with the sources, which became evident during the historical research of the project. The remaining structure at Segovia shows a considerable potential: The original use and shape of the 16th century building is remarkably discernable. In recent years, the city of Segovia pushed harder to recover the historic building, and planning for the museum has been intensified.





[Figures 8-12: State of buildings at Segovia in 2006 (before the detailed archaeological excavations of 2007 took place)]

Cooperation between the museums of Segovia and Hall started in 2003. The cities and the Austrian Historic Institute at Madrid signed an agreement of mutual support. Regular meetings were used for museum personnel to become familiar with the respective local arrangements. In particular, finding out and dealing with the different institutions concerned with the conservation of historical monuments turned out as major issues in the meetings. Finally, in 2006 the Segovians decided that they would like to assign the reconstruction of the cylindrical stamping press to Werner Nuding, the builder of the reconstruction at the Hall museum.

As part of the cooperation between the two institutions, historic research on the minting history will be further enforced. The agreement between the cities of Hall and Segovia included a research project on the mutual history. Under this project, an edition of sources on the minting history is planned, which will be published in cooperation with Karl Rudolf, the director of the Austrian Historic Institute at Madrid. The aim is to recover all documents dealing with the cylindrical stamping press including its transfer from Hall to Segovia. At this moment only the documents at the Archive of the Tyrol, the Tiroler Landesarchiv, have been found and await scientific examination. Even though these documents should be the most important, it will be necessary to start research activities in the Spanish National Archives at Simancas and in the Austrian National Archive at Vienna.

The documents so far discovered in the Tyrolean Archives give an impression of their potential use for the restoration of the mint at Segovia. The Tyrolean mint employee Johannes Linggahöl, sent to work at Segovia for the Spanish crown, reported regularly to Ferdinand II, Archduke of Tyrol. From his letters we can extract details on the buildings erected at Segovia in 1584 and the changes that happened to them in the following years. This is most significant information for archaeologists and architects at Segovia.

Sometimes, however, we detect deep-rooted testimony of prejudice in documents of this sort. Linggahöl, for example, explained in July 1588 to the Tyrolean Archduke that one would have to leave the Cylindrical Stamping Press to the Spanish, but “*if they get it into their hands, it will only take eight days for the press to be ruined entirely*”. As to this point, the Tyrolean members in our cooperation project are a little more optimistic. As I already stated in my paper in last year’s ICOMON-Meeting at Frankfurt, some broader issues such as aspects of social history are also touched in our sources, e.g. travel conditions in the 16th century, or conditions of work in the Tyrol and Spain. The political importance of the Mint at Hall has been further clarified by the recent studies and will become part of the museum’s presentation. In doing so, our ongoing research programme allows us to update the museum at a steady pace and to keep it interesting for our visitors.

Hall in Tirol

1477 – mint at Hall

1567 – transfer to Hasegg castle

1584/85 – transfer of presses and personnel to Segovia

1809 – close-down of the mint, dwellings in the castle

1975/76 – first mint museum in Hasegg castle

2003 – the present mint museum opens gates

Segovia 1584 – opening of the new mint at Segovia 1868 –
close-down of the mint 1870-1967 – buildings used as a mill Since 1988
– start of activities for conservation and endeavours to build-up a
museum

[Figure 13: Time-scale Hall/Segovia]

Current research programme

What are the current plans for the cooperation project? As mentioned before, the publication of the main sources will be prepared, and the reconstruction of the cylindrical stamping press designed for Segovia will be realised. In particular, such reconstruction allows us to increase publicity. The transport of the press from Hall to Segovia will re-enact the first transfer of knowledge and equipment four hundred years ago, and media interest in such a unique event is virtually assured. For both Mints such publicity is most welcome, as cooperation in content is made public on large scale and will attract visitors to both museums. But to achieve this, the Segovian Mint in particular needs to be revived, its buildings opened to the public and the planned Mint museum realised. This will cost a lot of time, political good-will and, above all, money, and cooperation can be useful in these endeavours: The long-term experience of the city of Hall in the conservation of historical monuments, building construction research, and especially in the revitalisation of the Hasegg castle with its Mint museum, will be considered by the Segovians.

Even if the museum at Segovia is not yet opened, several publications on the revitalisation of the Mint and the regular meetings of the persons involved in the cooperation have already raised expectations and aroused public interest on regional and national levels. For example, in 2007 a selection of papers was published, which were held by experts from Hall and Segovia in 2005 on their meeting at Segovia. This publication deals with the monetary history, museum didactics and revitalisation of the two Mint museums. On the occasion of the last meeting in Segovia, local Segovian media reported more prominently on the discussions with the delegation of the Hall Mint than the visit of the president of the Indian parliament visiting Segovia on the same day. Such little victories for our work on a vivid history are important. They stress the political importance of revitalisation; and it's on this that such ventures depend.



Where we are on the cooperation project?

We should point out some of the major problems which communal museums face by trying to profit from cooperation on international level. First of all, the coordination between such inhomogeneous institutions turns out to be an obstacle that one should not underestimate. Discontinuities are more likely to appear on both sides, and such fissures in continuity can easily become major problems; decision makers, for example, can change due to elections, and it depends on the involvement of politicians in the decision process to which degree these changes might harm processes of cooperation. Anyway, only strong support from the inhabitants secures a cooperation on a longer term,

because only then will politicians of all persuasions back up the expensive endeavours being undertaken. This is the main reason why media presence on a regional level is of vital importance in processes of revitalisation.

A second obstacle is the impossibility of foreseeing and planning the proceedings of the revitalisation process in both institutions. For both sides, the most complicated element of cooperation is the outcome of political decisions in different national systems. At the same time the understanding of such structures and decision processes is the key to a fruitful interaction between the partners, and this is the nucleus for new impulses to ones own work as well.

The challenges

Summing up, several advantages of international cooperation for museums on a communal level can be named. As to these advantages, four main points should be stressed. First, the cooperation (especially in research) creates a constant stimulus to update ones own collection due to new findings. Therefore it becomes easy to extend and modernise the museum, which is the only way to keep a constant level of visitors over a longer period of time.

Secondly, due to the mutual application of the two institutions, the interest of the media is increased. This is similar to regional cooperation, but different to the regional level; international cooperation will increase media interest worldwide as well. This is especially promising in the case of the Mint museum at Hall, because a great share of our visitors come from foreign countries. Therefore we expect a middle-term, or long-term increase of the share of Spanish visitors as a fruit of the cooperation with Segovia.

Thirdly, the circle of potential visitors will be amplified by mutual marketing. This is done on an international level, which increases the relevance of the institutions, and is especially advantageous for regional museums.

Finally, the cooperation unavoidably leads to a closer examination of decision processes in foreign countries. Only at first glance this seems to be a disadvantage of cooperation, but it allows a valuable critical analysis of your own structures and increases the understanding of the network in your own museum and conservation processes. In our case at Hall and Segovia, the question of preservation of the historic buildings is one of our main duties, and both institutions can exchange their experiences in this field.

As to the risks of international cooperation, I would see two major problems. First, there is long-term commitment necessary to establish and maintain the cooperation. Therefore regional museums should be selective in their choice of foreign partners. A long-term commitment is indispensable for doing research, and this should be taken into consideration before starting a cooperation: Do you have qualified staff, or cooperating institutions, for such an undertaking? And is there the necessary will within the museum to support research in (partially) “foreign” affairs, and for the researchers, to support the museum in modernising its presentation?

Secondly, there is the risk of change in decision makers at the partner institution and its financiers, for example for political reasons. One can counter these difficulties by trying to back up the project in a broader public arena. Therefore it is necessary to be visible in regional media and to interact with the public on behalf of the project. Another useful strategy is to create a level of institutionalised communication on the professional level, so that the museum staff of both partner institutions can still get in touch with each other officially even if political changes happen. But without strong support by the public even the best professional contact cannot help to maintain the cooperation. Financial support depends on this.

In cooperation like the one between Segovia and Hall, historical research turns out to be most important, and long-term commitment is necessary. To give some idea what time period we are talking about, the history of the Mint at Hall has already been intensively studied for thirty years

before the historical importance of Segovia became significant and an option for cooperation with Segovia appeared on the scene. We are lucky to have on our side the Tirol Numismatic Society with its excellent numismatists, the city archaeologist, appointed in 1996, with rooms that now have become part of the Mint museum, and a city historian who since 2005 has supported our Mint museum and is eager to extend research on the town's history. Only this support by researchers, combined with the strongest possible commitment of our museum staff, opened and paved the way to the cooperation with Segovia. And it is in this sense that research really is the placenta of the museum's credibility.

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