



Christel Schollaardt

*Taking care of collections of different ownership, or how the Geldmuseum deals with legal and practical differences in handling collections of different owners*

ICOMON e-Proceedings (Vienna, 2007) **No** (2008), pp.13-20

Downloaded from: [www.icomon.org](http://www.icomon.org)

# **Taking care of collections of different ownership, or how the Geldmuseum deals with legal and practical differences in handling collections of different owners**

*Christel Schollaardt*  
*Manager, Collections and Research*  
*Geldmuseum*  
*Postbus 2407*  
*3500 GK Utrecht*  
*The Netherlands*

[c.schollaardt@geldmuseum.nl](mailto:c.schollaardt@geldmuseum.nl)

## **Abstract**

The Geldmuseum was founded in 2004 by the Dutch Department of Education, Culture and Science, the Department of Public Finance, the Dutch Central Bank and the Royal Dutch Mint. The collections we take care of have different owners. For all of these collections we have agreements with the owners, describing the responsibilities of the different parties, the span of control, the matter of reports and inspections. In this paper, I will give an insight into the transition from our being a traditional numismatic museum, taking care of a single State collection, to a so-called 'science-centre' with an exhibition on people and money, taking care of five collections of five different owners.

We started out in 2004 by writing a collections management plan including:

- Mapping of the collections, their content and importance
- Categorising the different parts of the collection
- Appointing core collections
- Setting up management plans in the fields of:
  - physical management
  - information and registration management
  - quality management
  - mobility management
  - cooperation

All of this was done before the actual move in early Spring 2007 of the collections from their original locations to the Geldmuseum at Utrecht. Since March 2007 all five collections have been physically present at Utrecht in our new storage rooms. We still have a lot of work to do, and setting up a list of priorities was the next step to take.

## **Introduction**

The Geldmuseum, was founded in 2004 by the Dutch Department of Education, Culture and Science, the Department of Public Finance, the Dutch Bank and the Royal Dutch Mint. The collections we take care of have five different owners:

- 1 The State collection of numismatic objects owned by the Department of Education, Culture and Science, originally in the custody of the Royal Coin Cabinet at Leiden.
- 2 Another State collection of numismatic objects and production machinery, owned by the Department of Public Finance, originally taken care of by the Dutch Mint Museum at Utrecht,
- 3 The numismatic collection of the Dutch Central Bank, originally housed at the Dutch Bank in Amsterdam,
- 4 The collections of the Royal Dutch Mint, founded in 1994, the year of the privatisation of the Dutch Mint, formerly part of the Department of Finance, containing also numismatic objects and production machinery, but also material related to the history of the Mint itself.
- 5 A numismatic collection, owned by the Society of Friends of the Museum.

For all of these collections we have agreements with the owners, describing the responsibilities of the different parties, the level of control, the way we have to report to the owners, and inspection regulations.

In 2004, we found ourself dealing with the merger of three museums, founded by four different groups, owned by five different owners. Where did we start? In order to get a grip on All of this, my collections department made a collections inventory and a collections management plan. We started out by mapping the collections.

### **Mapping the collections.**

By merging the collections we have now established a unique constellation of a wide range of monetary-historic collections of coins, medals, paper money, gemstones, exotic money, savings boxes, pictures, laboratory equipment, coin weights and coin-weight boxes, designs, coin dies, plaster casts, proclamations for coin circulation, different production equipment along with an outstanding library and documentation collection. The total number of objects is approximately 400,000.

Other important numismatic collections in the Netherlands can be found in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (17<sup>th</sup> century medals), Teylers Museum at Haarlem ( medals and coins of West-Frisia and Gelders), the Wereldmuseum at Rotterdam (mainly ethnographic money) and a few larger provincial Museums. Each of these cover only relatively small parts of the Dutch numismatic heritage. As far as Dutch numismatic objects are concerned, we obviously manage the largest and most important collection in the world.

### **Collection categories**

The main point of the collections consists of numismatics and monetary history in its broader sense. We will strive to maintain this point of focus, notwithstanding the fact that the exhibition part of the Geldmuseum focuses on the culture of money in general sense. Traditionally, our institutions were appointed to preserve and conserve the numismatic heritage of our country and we still feel obliged to follow this. On the other hand, collecting stories and other oral history projects is also important, and we will take this on in time.

A numismatic collection is a collection of objects with a high ensemble value. The larger part of the objects were produced in series and most of the time also in large quantities. However, in these kinds of collections there are always unique pieces to be found, and these are often used for exhibitions and publication. However this does not devalue the rest of the collections, and indeed they are very valuable for study and presentation purposes.

It can be expected that after finally merging the collections physically, there will be duplicates in the areas of Dutch paper money, coins of the Dutch Kingdom and foreign coins from all over the world of the last two centuries. We will not dispose of these pieces immediately as duplicates are useful for presentations, and we can keep a complete reference collection. In fact the Dutch Government has set up a set of guidelines for accession and de-accession, to which we fully subscribe. I will refer to this later on.

The collections consist of around 400,000 objects and documents, in the following divisions:

- Ancient coins (60,000)
  - Dutch and foreign coins (108,000)
  - Dutch and foreign paper money (80,000)
  - Dutch and foreign medals (51,000)
  
- Gemstones (3,000)

- The Dutch Mint and coin-production (22,000)
- By-products of the Dutch Mint (7,000)
- Numismatic objects and monetary history (6,500)
- Library and documentation (50,000)
- Historic collections of the Dutch Central Bank (500)
- Archives of the Dutch Mint (2,000) which will be transferred to the National Archive.

The next step we took was establishing **core collections**:

A core collection is that part of the total collection that is vital to the image of a museum. The criteria are:

- to be indispensable or very important for realising the goals of the museum
- to be the largest and most unique collection of its kind in the Netherlands and worldwide.

These divisions have, because of their long collection-history, not only a historical character, but are also permanently supplemented, improved and actualised. This means that the limited budgets we have for acquisition are mainly reserved for these core collections. Given these criteria, the following were chosen to be core collections:

- Dutch coins, paper money and medals
- Dutch coin production and coin circulation
- the library and documentation collection

By the way, when I say Dutch, I mean the present-day Netherlands as well as the Low Countries in the Roman times and Middle Ages. This includes all coins, paper money and medals that have been produced in the Netherlands and the overseas territories as well as those that have been used on Dutch soil (among the latter there is quite a lot foreign material from ancient times and the Middle Ages).

For the Netherlands, the Geldmuseum has the duty to be able to give an overview of the total area of numismatics, both in terms of collections and research. This means that in addition to the core collections, we also take good care of the other collections under our jurisdiction.

**For some divisions, selection is not up for discussion as only one of the merging parties was collecting these objects:**

The **ancient coins**, containing 60,000 Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins, were only collected by the Royal Coin Cabinet, as well the medals and the gemstones. From the point of view of acquisitions, we aim for the ancient coins to be a representative collection. No institution will ever be complete in this field, however, we try to fill in some old gaps and build further on already strong points, such as the Greek series and the coins of the Roman emperor Trajan.

For the **medal** department, we do strive to be complete, as the Dutch part is one of the core collections. In particular Dutch medals of the early periods, the 15-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, have our interest, but also 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century art medals.

The **gemstones**, containing 3,000 pieces, is rather a stranger among the numismatic collections, but due to historical collection fashions gemstones form a part of our collections, and I must say, quite a few of our highlights are gemstones, such as the Great Cameo and the Livia-cameo. We do not acquire actively in this area.

The division **Dutch Mint and the production of the Dutch Mint** was only collected by the Dutch

Mint Museum. This area consists of 22,000 objects, machines, tools, building- and construction-drawings, models, dies and other objects related to the Royal Dutch Mint. However, despite its unique character, this collection needs scrutiny as it has objects of quite different sizes, some of them quite large. The largest object is an Uhlhorn press of 1843 weighing several tons, which has not been carefully selected on uniqueness. This collection demands a thorough weeding-process. The models (5000), containing plaster casts, moulds and reduction models are together with the machinery the most voluminous subdivision.

The subdivision **dies** (14,000) forms a group of its own. Here lies a difficulty in the matter of preserving a collection while some of it is still being used by the Dutch Mint. Most of the time, the engravers of the Mint just want to examine these, but in other cases they seek casts. Luckily, modern techniques are helping us in this respect, since recently we have laser techniques which do not damage the die itself. Possible solutions lie in returning pieces to the custody of the Mint itself, or giving a different status to this part of the collection. Another problem we have not solved yet is the division between the dies we choose to preserve for eternity, and other dies that we consider less valuable. Until now, everything is being preserved, but that is quite endless and we need to address this.

Until now, the Mint has transferred tools, dies and other material to the Museum. In the category **by-products of the Mint** (7,000), there are objects which have also been produced by the Mint, such as dies for postage stamps, bronze plates for bicycle-taxes, orders and decorations. This collection is considered to be complete.

**The Dutch and foreign coins and paper money** form a subdivision that is considered to contain lots of duplicates as all of the parties collected in this field. And it is true that in all collections we have quite a few the same pieces. But technically speaking, we have no duplicates, since the ownership of the different collections is in the hands of different parties! The question of which coin out of which collection is obsolete is a complicated and sensitive matter.

Since the scientific value of this part of the collection is all-important, I do not think it is a very big problem to have some duplicates, they are not that many and therefore not that difficult to store.

**Monetary culture and numismatic objects**, a subdivision of 'the rest', consists of many objects somehow related to numismatics: money games, euro business, wallets, jewellery, furniture, paintings, exotic money, a collection of document seals, and last but not least an important collection of coin weights and coin weight boxes. We only actively acquire exotic money and coin weights and the corresponding boxes. This section has no duplicates worth mentioning.

**The library and documentation collections** covers almost 700 metres of shelves, containing 25,000 books, supplemented by substantial series of periodicals and auction catalogues (Dutch and foreign), from the beginning of numismatic science (16<sup>th</sup> century) up until now. We are especially strong in general, ancient, foreign and Dutch numismatics, and reasonable strong in monetary history, paper money, minting techniques and metallurgy. The library serves a two-fold goal:

- 1 To promote the knowledge of and interest in numismatics and monetary history for the general public
- 2 To support scholars, both nationally as internationally.

We aim to be complete in Dutch numismatics.

**Historic collection of the Dutch Central Bank** This is a relatively small collection of 500 objects, related to the history of the Bank. It is considered to be complete, so there is no active acquisition.

## Management plans

After mapping the collections and establishing core collections we will set up a collections management plan, which will serve as our guideline for the next five years. This plan includes:

### **-physical management**

**-information management** (including basic object management)

**-quality management** (improving the collections by accession and de-accession)

**-mobility management** (loans management, educational projects, photo-services, the accessibility of the collections)

**-cooperation** with other institutions on development of ideas and guidelines in preservation and conservation.

It is here in the handling of the different collections that we find the most difficulties.

### **Physical Management:**

First we set up the guidelines for our new storage rooms. Originally, we wanted different compartments for different groups of objects; as you all will know, metals require other climate circumstances than do wood or paper. Unfortunately, we ended up with one climate-zone because of the costs. Another aspect of the physical management is the project of new storage boxes for the metal collections. The Royal Coin Cabinet developed a new storage system some years ago, and started out to repack the whole collection. Unfortunately, we have become stranded at the three-quarter mark, and now there are the other collections we have to take care of; so this project will take quite a while to complete. We also need to develop a conservation plan from scratch.

### **Information and registration management**

#### *Registration*

Fortunately, after comparing the basic object management descriptions, this aspect of the collections turned out not to be that different. However, the three main parties did use different database systems for the registration of their collections. So the first step we had to take was to choose an appropriate database system. This appeared to be very difficult and not only because of rational arguments, the discussions were emotional as well! In the end, practical arguments won and we chose the database system that was in use by the Royal Coin Cabinet, a home-made system based on the programme FileMakerPro. Winning arguments were costs, numbers of objects already described, ease of use, and also not unimportantly, the research staff wanted were used to the program. This left us with the task of having to convert approximately 100,000 objects from Adlib (which was used by the Mint Museum) to File Maker Pro.

#### *Inventory-numbers*

Different Museum use different systems of inventory numbers. Since 2004 we have used a joint system, but to avoid confusion in all collections registered before 2004, we will have to renumber substantial parts of some collections.

#### *Digitalisation*

The Internet is a wonderful tool in order to create greater visibility for the collections. However, photographing 400,000 objects is not something we are able to do at the moment. So we decided to create little projects that could be funded for by external parties, or in other cases, we have students who work on a collection as part for their thesis; in these cases, the digitalisation of that part of the collection is done earlier than planned. Last year we worked on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman coins, and this year there is funding for the safe-keeping of World War II heritage which will make it possible to digitise the collection of the emergency paper money. I realise this way of working is not

ideal as it creates a rather scattered image of the whole, but it is the best we can do at the moment.

## **Quality Management**

*Quality control* Since the merger we no longer have curators, but researchers. This implies that they are no longer responsible for a part of the collection as they used to be. In order to keep up the quality of the different collection categories, we decided to appoint one of the researchers as Researcher of Collections, his task being to liaise between the collection managers and the researchers. This was necessary because of the lack of numismatic knowledge in the collections management department.

Another thing we wish to install, but have not yet have realised, is a collections committee, consisting of the Director, the Manager of the Department of Collections and Research, the Collections Researcher and, if necessary, one of the researchers. This committee will deal with matters such as acquisitions, accession and de- accession, loans, restoration and digitising projects. This is in order to prevent these aspects being left to individuals, which can get quite arbitrary.

### *Acquisitions*

The Geldmuseum has no collection of its own; everything we acquire is deposited in one of the collections we manage. As a matter of fact, we do not acquire very much at the moment as our budget is limited to a mere of € 5,000 per year! Luckily, the Society of Friends of the Museum donated a fund of € 50,000 at the opening of the Museum, but it is still way too little to keep up with all the modern developments.

Another problem, dealing with collections of different owners is the division of new objects; in which collection do we deposit what? Of course this only counts for the collections with an overlap. One could always choose the one that has paid for the object gets it, but it is not always that simple, for instance the Royal Dutch Mint used to deposit two pieces of every object they produced in their collection. The Royal Dutch Mint was privatised in 1994 and the ownership of the collection at that stage was transferred to the Ministry of Finance, but the management of the collections remained at the Mint Museum. Since 1994 the Mint has its own collection and the collection of the Ministry, regarded as national heritage, is not being completed. I am trying to convince the Mint to deposit one of the pieces in the collection of the Ministry of Finance, but it is not a done deal yet. And all of this means that the other large collections which used to collect these pieces, the collections of the Dutch Bank and of the former Royal Coin Cabinet, are not complete in this area.

The solution is obvious, namely get rid of the different owners! That sounds tempting, but because of the Dutch funding system for museums, it is financially better to receive money from different Ministries. One could also say that the merger took so long (10 years) and this will last for eternity, so there is no problem in having one collection complete in one category and leaving the others in that category to be incomplete. In that case, my concern lies in the fact that the Dutch Mint is a private enterprise and is always allowed to sell its collection, and then the National Heritage Collections are left incomplete!

In the field of accession and de-accession we have to follow the regulations set up by the Dutch Inspection of Cultural Heritage. The museums are visited once a year, auditing the care and registration of the collections. It is also concerned with matters of security, risk management and so on. All of the collections in custody of the Geldmuseum are inspected in this way.

The bottom line of the regulations is that if a museum wishes to de-accession certain objects, the objects must first be offered to other museums, and only after that can they be sold. The benefits are always meant to return to the acquisition funds.

### *Mobility*

This has to do with setting up guidelines in the field of loans, exhibitions, educational projects, the use of the collections by researchers, and so on.

### *Customer services*

Information on the collections is provided by the collections department, which handles the photo requests and loan requests as well.

### **Cooperation**

Having established the largest numismatic collection in the Netherlands does not mean that this will be the only one. We aim to set up cooperation projects with Teylers Museum, the Rijksmuseum and others, and the Internet is a useful tool in these matters. Also, joining international bodies such as ICOMON and sharing each others experiences is an important part of our cooperation plans.

### **Conclusion**

A merger of different collections of different owners produces lots of questions in collection management, for which we try to find answers that serve both the museum people as well as the owners, but it will take years and years to finalise this gigantic project. Last, but not least, we try to avoid moving; it is a challenge!