**Managing the Numismatic Heritage of Modern Greece**

Greece’s economic and monetary history is inextricably linked to the history of the Bank of Greece, which was established in 1927 as the country’s central bank. Responsible for implementing monetary policy in Greece and safeguarding the stability of the Greek financial system, the Bank was also entrusted with the exclusive right to issue national currency.

Apart from its official role, the Bank of Greece is also committed to preserving the nation’s historical and cultural heritage. In the late 1930s it started building up its Numismatic Collection, by embarking on an effort to systematically collect coins and paper currency of Modern Greece. Over time, the collection has been augmented mainly through important private numismatic collections that were either purchased or donated. In 1950, the Bank acquired the Theodora Brisimitzakis collection of Modern Greek coins and medals. In the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, it also purchased two collections of ancient coins, belonging to the renowned collectors Rhéna Evelpidis and Nikolaos Petsalis, respectively, thus reflecting its keen interest in Greek antiquity. Finally, in 1999, the Panos Tazedakis collection of Modern Greek medals and orders, the largest and most complete collection of its kind in the world, passed into the possession of the Bank of Greece.

The Numismatic Collection consists of more than 150,000 objects. **<photo1>** These include pre-coin mediums of exchange, ancient Greek and Greco-Roman coins, coins and paper currency of the Modern Greek State and other states, plus a number of exonumia (medals, plaquettes, decorations, tokens), as well as draft designs, patterns and various other elements used in the process of coin and banknote production.

The collection of ancient Greek coins in particular, comprises about 5,500 pieces from Greek antiquity, dating from the invention of coinage in the late 7th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. Gold, silver or bronze, the ancient coins in the possession of the Bank of Greece have been minted by different issuing authorities (city-states, confederations of city-states, nations and kings) in the regions of Greece per se, Magna Graecia and Asia Minor. As a whole, they cast plenty of light on the country’s celebrated past, and attest to the large diffusion of Greek civilisation and its strong influence on the ancient world.

The treasures of the Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Greece include complete series of Modern Greek coins and paper bills, spanning the period from the establishment of the modern Greek state (phoenixes introduced by the Kapodistrias government in 1828-1832) to 2001, when the euro was introduced. **<photo2>** The collection helps keep the memory of the country’s national currency alive, and traces the social, economic and political developments that have shaped the history of the Modern Greek state.

Since the adoption of the euro as the single European currency, the contemporary numismatic collection is being constantly enriched with all the subsequent issues of euro banknotes and coins. These include circulation coins, commemorative coins issued to mark important anniversaries, as well as collectable proof-quality coins.

The Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Greece also features a wide range of coins and banknotes used in European and other countries in the 19th and the 20th century. A large part of the Theodora Brisimitzakis collection falls under this category. The foreign section of the Numismatic Collection is regularly expanded with the addition of the newest issues by the world’s largest issuing central banks, as well as numerous specimen notes from across the globe.

Although usually cast or struck in the shape of large coins, medals are not a medium of exchange. They are issued by government or private bodies (e.g. corporations or clubs) and, depending on their purpose, can be prize medals (awards of honour) or commemorative medals to mark a variety of historical, political, religious or sport events and anniversaries. The Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Greece (the Tazedakis and the Brisimitzakis collections in particular) thoroughly document the history and evolution of modern medals in Greece, from the arrival of the Bavarians under king Otto, which effectively marks the introduction of the genre to the country, and up to the present day.

An exceptional part of the Bank’s overall Numismatic conglomeration is the Panos Tazedakis collection, comprising military excellence awards, honorary medals and decorations of the Orders of Excellence. Crafted by major goldsmiths and internationally acclaimed jewellery houses, these awards and decorations are fine examples of miniature art, adorned with enamel and gemstones. Apart from their high value as collectibles, they are also precious for research purposes, as they provide significant insights into the historical background of their time.

Alongside awards and decorations of all the Greek Orders of Excellence (Order of the Redeemer, Order of George I, Order of Honour, Order of the Phoenix and Order of Beneficence) from 1829 to date, the collection also prominently features various ecclesiastical medals awarded by Greek Orthodox Churches, such as the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, or the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Mark of the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

Another significant part of the Numismatic Collection consists in objects granted by the Bank’s Printing Works Department (IETA). **<photo3>** The IETA started printing banknotes in 1947, and minting coins in 1972. Its production history also includes various other printing and minting assignments on behalf of the Bank, the Greek State, or third parties, notably related to security documents, such as foreign banknotes, securities, bonds, Treasury bills, vouchers, lottery tickets, passports, commemorative coins, medals, etc.

This section of the Numismatic Collection illustrates the entire creative process of making banknotes and coins, from the inspiration and the conception of the idea, the selection of the theme, the artwork and the manufacturing of dies and printing plates, all the way through to the final stages of production. Of particular interest are the artists’ preliminary attempts to put their ideas on paper, as documented in numerous draft designs and sketches, their early tries on a three-dimensional medium (relief models of coins) or, in the case of banknotes, the intaglio plates and their numerous trial prints. These objects are sometimes associated with coins and banknotes that were indeed put into circulation, and other times mere drafts that have never made it to actual production, but still reflect the artistic perceptions and trends of their time.

As important testimonies of technological advances over time, this section also includes special equipment, artefacts and material once used in the production of banknotes and coins: machinery, quality control instruments, tools, precision scales, corrective clichés, intaglio prints, guilloche plates, glass plates, films, watermark moulds, and uncut banknote sheets.

Aging and deterioration of the collection items is a natural consequence of the relentlessly passing time and their exposure to the surrounding space. At the Bank of Greece, the Centre for Culture, Research and Documentation operates an independent Conservation Centre with sophisticated, state-of-the-art equipment. In specially designed areas for the restoration of canvas, wood, paper and metal, our highly qualified scientific staff is responsible for the maintenance of all the coins, banknotes, works of art, archival material, rare books, and other collectibles in the Bank’s possession.

With a view to preserving knowledge as well as managing the entire material included in the Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Greece, and maximising its value, a Documentation Unit is also in place. It holds a complete record of Greek Government Gazette issues and Bank of Greece circulars relating to the start of production or withdrawal of coins and banknotes; biographical information and lists of works by Greek and foreign artists who have helped design the coins, banknotes and medals of our collection; as well as information about the mints, manufacturers and printing institutions involved in their production.

Furthermore, we actively seek to support research, by making the Collection’s items accessible to Greek and foreign scholars and researchers, by promoting research programmes and making material available for study, as well as by publishing relevant studies, monographs, etc. Some of the objects are also frequently given on loan for various other exhibitions, both in Greece and abroad, thereby reaching much broader audiences.

Preservation, conservation and documentation are not our only objectives. At the Centre for Culture, Research and Documentation, we also aim to make our material available to the general public. This is accomplished mostly through our Museum, where part of the Bank’s Numismatic Collection is on permanent display.

The idea to create a Museum, following the example of other central banks, dates back to 2002; **<photo4>** and reflects the desire of the Bank’s Administration to communicate and explain the role and the functions of the Bank, by way of showcasing the numerus items of high historical and artistic value included in its Collections. Eight years later, in January 2010, the Museum of the Bank of Greece had become a reality, and opened its doors to the public.

The Museum’s mission is to highlight the work and the purpose of the central banking institution, as well as its contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of the country. At the same time, it sheds light on aspects of modern Greek history that allow us to better understand current affairs and developments, and seeks to enhance public knowledge of economic and financial concepts and terms used in everyday life, particularly in relation to the functioning of the financial system.

Since 2013, the Museum and the Collections of the Bank form a separate Section of a newly-established Department. Together with the Library, the Historical Archive and the non-financial Publications, they make up the Bank’s Centre for Culture, Research and Documentation.

The Museum is located at the heart of downtown Athens, and is easily accessed by the city’s Metro network. It is also fully accessible to people with mobility and sensory impairments. Following universal accessibility standards, it is properly equipped with ramps and wheelchair lifts, touchscreens accessible by wheelchair, specially designedinformation panels, hands-on exhibits with Braille captions, and audio exhibits.

With a view to stimulating and sustaining visitor interest and to bringing special themes into a sharper focus, the Museum regularly hosts temporary thematic exhibitions in its dedicated gallery. Since 2010, it has showcased a variety of such special presentations. “The Acropolis and money” focused on the iconography of the Greek drachma banknotes. Introducing the artists involved to the production of the drachma banknotes, we have held two more exhibitions: “Michael Axelos. Between two worlds”, on the first Greek designer of the country’s banknotes, and “A. Korogiannakis, Engraving”, presenting the artist’s remarkable engraving work.

As of February 2016, our Museum also has a travelling exhibition, which is successively hosted by a number of selected Bank of Greece branches throughout the country. Titled “Xenophon Zolotas: The Professor and the Bank of Greece”, it is dedicated to the former Governor of the Bank who has been one of the most prominent figures in the Greek public arena of the 20th century. In addition, the Museum frequently organises and hosts in its premises talks, book presentations, interviews, and also participates in various international events like the Museum day, Museum nights, Global Money Week, etc.

Our main target group are high school and university students. **<photo5>** Around 6,000 people visit our Museum every year, mainly through scheduled guided tours. And we aspire to gradually become a modern centre for financial education, to increase interest in economic history, and to contribute to safer personal financial decisions. Last but not least, we use technology in order to make the visit to the museum a playful learning experience. In that way we reach new audiences (younger visitors, specialised groups) and engage current visitors (make them more active). With multimedia applications, a bilingual audio guide, QR-code exhibits and state-of-the-art technology, we pursue this goal through various educational activities, partnerships with other museums, and other relevant initiatives.

Following that track, we have started a Facebook page in January 2016, which is updated on a weekly basis, in order to reach a younger and newer audience, but also to present and promote the Museum exhibition program, to communicate with the public and give additional information that can enrich the physical visit. Today, the Museum’s Facebook page has more than 2,500 followers. Most of them are 35 to 54 years old, living mainly in Greece, but only 30% of them in Athens.

Potent conveyors of messages and beacons of culture across the world, coins, banknotes and medals are a rich source of information on contemporary economic, financial, political and art history. They commemorate kings, prominent figures, great historical events and anniversaries, or celebrate war and sport victories, whilst at the same time always aim to achieve aesthetic appeal. Major artists, painters and sculptors, as well as highly skilful goldsmiths and medallists have tried their hand at this particular art form, producing masterpieces of unparalleled artistic beauty.

Every museum tells stories. Our Museum is talking about money. From barter economy and the invention of coinage, to the banknote and the plastic money. We talk about the monetary system and policy in modern Greece. About the road to economic and monetary integration. About the evolution of central banking. About the art of designing, minting and printing coins and banknotes; about ideology, symbolism and national identity, as reflected on money throughout the ages.