

NUMISMATIC: A JOURNEY FROM SPAIN TO GREECE

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Abstract

Numismatic is the science of coins in all their aspects and in all that concerns them (from the economic, legislative, metrological and artistic point of view) and it is related to all other branches of historical mythology such as, epigraphy and iconography¹.

The numismatic can be defined as the science that reconstructs, step by step, the history of money, from its beginnings to the present day. It is reconstructed by pointing out both its formal and typological features, just like its economic, political, legal, social and even artistic function².

Its origins are traced to the mid-seventh a. C. and must be interpreted as the culmination of a long process of exchange based on barter, which had set in motion the economy so far³.

People passed from bartering to the processing of the metal because it was a material that could be reduced to fragments without losing its value; it was unalterable; it did not require maintenance and it was easily recognizable and useful to everyone. People then passed from simple metal to the copper ingots, widely used in trade between East and West in the Mediterranean, until when, in the ninth century BC C, the tool of the coin appeared. They were tools for everyday use as currency for exchanges in small entities, such as obeloi, urns and tripods and bars or ingots for the most important economic exchanges. The latter, around the mid-seventh century BC C, began to be replaced by small globes that merchants and shrines with their seal imprinted to make them recognizable, and with time, the issue of currency became a State monopoly⁴.

Numismatic temporary exhibitions

The creation of a show is never an easy task indeed it is not absolutely; just think that the organizing team has to take into account a multitude of diverse people who can visit it such as: domestic and foreign tourists with interest in general, tourists keen on 'topic, occasional visitors, educational tourism, educators, local schools, families with school-age children, vulnerable and scholars and specialists. In museums the object of the study is evident with its materiality, that is, with its shape, its size, its color, its appearance. The task of the exhibition is to open to visitors the network of meanings underlying the goods on display: the "extraordinary semantic condensation" to which each item refers, in order

¹ Forzoni, A., *"La moneta nella storia. Dalle origini a Giulio Cesare"*, Roma, 1995.

² Catalli, F., *"Numismatica Greca e Romana"*, Roma, 2003.

³ Forzoni, A., *"La moneta nella storia. Dalle origini a Giulio Cesare"*, Roma, 1995.

⁴ Bernareggi, E., *"Istituzioni di numismatica antica"*, Milano, 1985.

to improve individuals cognitively, culturally and spiritually⁵. The creation of an exhibition is very complex and it becomes even more complex if its subject consists of a difficult material such as numismatics.

This article may be interpreted as a journey to discover some great exhibitions of coins that have been made over the past two years in major museums in Alicante (Spain) and Athens (Greece).

Alicante

"Monedas. Todas las caras de la Historia" is the title of the temporary exhibition displayed between the months of December 2010 and February 2011 at MARQ's Museum of Alicante, displayed in the temporary exhibition gallery called "Enrique Llobregat". From the title it is easy to see the idea to show how a coin is concealed behind various aspects of history. This exhibition was primarily didactic and aesthetic, with very rigorous scientific criteria. The central section of the room was devoted to display the coins and monetary systems that have been used in the current province of Alicante, from the appearance of the first coins until today. The exhibition was focused on the various points of view from which we can approach the contemplation of a coin, the MARQ's numismatic collection, and Numismatics, an obligatory reference to this auxiliary science of History that study the coins.

The exhibition showed:

- **the use of coins** as a means of communication and propaganda,
- **the coin as a collector's item**, the other uses of the coins,
- **the evolution** of different production systems of the coin,
- **the phenomenon of thesaurization**,
- **the coin as a historical document**.

The middle section of the hall was used to display the coins and monetary systems that were used in the present province of Alicante, by the appearance of the first coins to this day. As we already mentioned, this exhibition devoted special attention to didactic: there were reproductions of the most representative coins, that the visitors could watch and touch, used in the current province of Alicante, a mint or coin-making workshop from the Iberian period was reproduced, with a coin minted actor in front of the visitor, who gave to the visitors copies of those coins. In addition, the room had 19 screens that showed and explained the values used throughout the history of Alicante and that allowed the visitor to watch the coins in large size format photographs, and another 13 screens were used to help the visitor to understand the historical context in registering the coins on display. Moreover, an educational guide was produced for primary and secondary education and

⁵ Zan, L., "*Economia dei musei e retorica del management*", Milano, 2007.

the visitors also had access to interactive screens, guided tours and audio guide services. Finally, the exhibition paid attention to the needs of blind people, who were accompanied by specialised guides allowing the access, in addition to the coins displayed in the corridor previously referred above, the possibility of touch a diorama which reproduced the finding of the Treasury of Islamic coins of Almoradí and also access to two display cases, where the relief of some of the coins on display was engraved in large format.

In addition, as a constant feature of this museum, a catalog and a teaching guide for primary and secondary education were produced. The volume can be defined as an accurate and detailed study of the numismatic collection of Marq: is divided into two parts, such as study and catalog. The teaching guide begins with useful information for the teacher, such as the time every guy should take to read and the goals which should be reached. The guide was divided into general aspects of the coin, what types of monetary analysis, numismatics and manufacturing techniques, and the historical evolution of the same; the third and last part of the guide, is occupied by the activities of study that each student can play and is linked at the bottom of the solutions of the exercises.

Athens

For the first time, the National Archaeological Museum, the Numismatic Museum and the Alpha Bank Numismatic Collection of Athens collaborated in the temporary exhibition entitled "MYTH AND COINAGE", which was presented concurrently in both Museums from April 15, 2011 to January 3, 2012. The exhibition offered the possibility of a dialogue between Greek Mythology and ancient coinage and focused on the illustration and use of myth on the faces of coins since the 7th century BC onwards.

The segment of the exhibition under the title "the Illustration of the Myth" was presented at the National Archaeological Museum while that under the title "The Use of the Myth", at the Numismatic Museum.

The exhibition has been divided in five sections with the purpose of promoting and highlighting the mythological themes depicted on the faces of coins throughout antiquity.

- The first section, "**The Dodecatheon**", was dedicated to the Olympian deities.
- The second section, "**Mythical creatures**", included representations of creatures like the Griffin, the Sphinx, the Chimaera or Medusa.
- The third section, "**The demigod Heracles**", was dedicated to the greatest hero of Greek Mythology.
- The fourth section, "**The secondary deities**", was included those figures not as powerful as the Olympian gods.
- The final, fifth section, "**Heroes and mythical stories**", included depictions of heroes and mythical stories, primarily from the Iliad but also from mythological sagas, associated with local coinages.

Even the temporary exhibition "MYTH AND COINAGE" designed Educational Programmes entitled: "When a coin shall roll, a myth shall unfold...".

The Educational Programmes were conducted at the National Archaeological Museum and they are addressed to third, fourth- and fifth-grade pupils as well as to first- and second-year high school pupils.

The primary objective was that the young visitors understood the value of art of ancient coinage and its importance in the dissemination of Hellenic culture. Finally, the children had the opportunity to develop their creative abilities through activities in a visual art workshop. The Educational Programmes were accompanied by leaflets especially designed for each educational level. At the conclusion of the Programme, the children created their coins, thus compiling a "hoard" which will be hidden inside the Museum. The Educational Programmes were offered free at the National Archaeological Museum. Even this exhibition was accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue, with introductory texts and entries on all the exhibit items, both in Greek and English versions.

Conclusions

This trip between Spain and Greece has demonstrated how the world of numismatics is not that far away from reality, as well as an exhibition of numismatic involving the general public. I believe that Alicante and Athens, with their temporary exhibition, have taken into account a myriad of ways that fascinate the visitor to the object in question, have proposed initiatives that have surprised and astonished, but certainly not bored, involving children and adults to make them discover a world otherwise unknown, creating a dialogue and a feeling with the land and contributing to the implementation of educational programs, which, as demonstrated by this museums, can become an integral part of the school year in progress: both museums, in fact, have focused heavily on this aspect. Athens's exhibition was probably a more European-ranging as any information, caption or panel insert was carried out both in English and Greek and web platform, dedicated to the exhibition, was much more exhaustive exhibition of Alicante, in contrast, showed a less formal, more playful and greater sensitivity to the disabled through the creation of special courses and special guided tours. Both products have been well made and have been a hit with critics and audiences.

I hope that the exhibitions held in Alicante and Athens can be a good example of how to set up and develop coin collection especially for those museums which, while having collections of the richest in the world, seem reluctant to make exhibitions of this kind.

Pictures of Marq's exhibition room



Actor who staged the production technique of the coins in ancient times of Marq's exhibition



Playing a hoard money of Marq's exhibition



Pictures of exhibition rooms in the National Archeological Museum



