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# NUMISMATIC COLLECTIONS

Sergei KOVALENKO\*

## 75 YEARS TO THE NUMISMATIC DEPARTMENT OF THE PUSHKIN STATE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, MOSCOW

In 2020 it will be 75 years since the Numismatic Department of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts was established as an independent unit within the museum's structure. The history of this department's creation can actually be traced back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a numismatic collection began to be assembled in the library of Moscow University that was used by teaching staff in their work with students. After 1812 this steadily growing collection came to be known as the Münzkabinett. In 1851 it was incorporated into the university's Museum or Cabinet of Fine Arts and Antiquities. The efforts of Ivan Tsvetaev to set up an independent and public university museum were finally crowned with success when the Alexander III Museum of Fine Arts was opened on May 31, 1912. The collections from the Münzkabinett were then added to the new museum's collections of original items. In 1924, when the Museum acquired the status of a state institution independent of Moscow University, the university's collection of coins and medals formed the core of the Numismatic Cabinet, which in turn became a sub-section of the Sculpture Department of the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>[1]</sup>

From its beginnings as a modest university collection it had grown into one of the finest numismatic collections in Russia, confining more than 200,000 objects and accounting for approximately a third of the total number of items held today in the Pushkin Museum.

The end of the Great Patriotic War in 1945 marked the beginning of the country's return to peaceful life and put forward the new tasks in all areas, including culture. The Pushkin Museum, whose main aim during the war was the preservation of the collections, was recovering gradually to normal life. Due to the museum items returning from evacuation, the colossal work on their registration, restoration as well as preparation of the permanent museum exhibitions and beginning of the scientific work had to be done. Still in 1944, according to Decree no. 771 of the Council of People's Commissars from June 27, the decision was taken on the growth and enlargement of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in order to turn it into a museum of universal importance. In line with this decision the Committee of the Arts on May 4, 1945 approved the new staff structure of the Museum. It

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[1] On the history of the Münzkabinett of the Moscow University: Kharko 1960.

should have allowed the Museum to proceed as soon as possible from the recovery period to the balanced growth of its activity on wider basis as opposed to the period before the war. According to the new structure the partial reorganization of the existing museum's departments as well as the creation of six new departments were foreseen. The emergence of the Numismatic Department among the latter should be considered as an evidence of that important role that collecting, studying and exhibiting numismatic monuments were playing by that time in the museum's activity.



Ill. 1 – Lev Kharko (1899–1961)

Art historian, archaeologist and numismatist Lev Kharko (1899–1961) became the first Keeper of the Department (Ill. 1). Being during the previous twenty years the only curator of the museum numismatic collection, Kharko alone was conducting a tremendous job on its replenishment, registration, study and publicity. Due to his initiative the members of the Department staff prepared a permanent numismatic exhibition devoted to the history of the main parts of the collection. He coordinated as well the whole process of the systematization and registration of the numismatic collection of the Saxon kings consisting of 150,000 specimens. This collection was saved from destruction by the Soviet troops in the last days of the war and brought to the Museum from the Dresden Gallery. In 1958 it was returned to the German Democratic Republic.

On the request of Kharko Moscow and Leningrad mints began supplying the Numismatic Department with samples of their production and as a result a representative collection of the Soviet medallic art was formed in the Department.

It was Kharko who initiated the organization of the special depository in the Museum similar to the one in the State Hermitage, where the most valuable objects made of precious metals had to be stored. He drew out the plans of the rooms, worked out and compiled the list of the necessary equipment. He did a lot for the enlargement of the collections. Because of him, for example, in 1951 circa 5,600 coins, medals and badges came to the Department from the former Museum of the Oriental Cultures and thus the whole section of the Far-East numismatics emerged.

Coin-finds made during the archaeological excavations resumed in 1945 and conducted by the museum specialists in the Crimean and Taman peninsulas became an important source of the numismatic material. More than 1,200 coins originating from the archaeological investigations of the Panticapaeum, the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom, as well as 250 coins found in the excavations of Hermonassa, the big Greek city of the Asian Bosporos, were given to the Numismatic Department (Ill. 2-3).



*Ill. 2 – Mysia. Cyzicus. Stater. Electrum.  
End of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Found in  
Panticapaeum in 1948. Inv. no. Az-584*



*Ill. 3 – Cimmerian Bosporus. Panticapaeum. Drachm. Silver. Beginning of the  
5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Found in the Taman  
peninsula in 1970s. Inv. no. 231935*

In 1956, Elizaveta Kvaas, a citizen of the Federal Republic of Germany, donated the numismatic collection of the Museum of Russian History abroad. The Museum was created in 1897 by the archpriest of the Russian Church in Berlin, Alexei Maltsev, and was under patronage of the Brotherhood of St. Prince Vladimir. Till 1914 it was accumulating various objects brought and presented by the Russian travelers in Germany. Its numismatic part consisted of more than 1,100 European and Russian coins, medals, awards and tokens.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1964-1965 the Oriental part of the collection was enriched with the donation of the 5,000 coins collected by the known Soviet artist Anatolii Smirnov. They included rare Kufic dirhams of the Middle Asia mints struck in the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries by the rulers of the Samanid and Karakhanid dynasties. Especially noteworthy is the large hoard of the Gold Horde with 4,000 silver dirhams, which belonged mainly to the issues of two Dzhuchid rulers of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Shadi Beg (1399-1407) and Pulad (1408-1413).

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<sup>[2]</sup> Museum of Russian History abroad 2015.

In 1971 the Museum acquired a large coin collection of the prominent Soviet archaeologist and numismatist Eugenii Pakhomov (1880–1965). Pakhomov was Head of the Department of Archaeology and Numismatics at the Baku University and one of the creators of the History Museum of Azerbaijan. His numismatic collection was being formed during 65 years and comprised all sections of numismatics. According to his will, it had to be divided between four Soviet museums, the State Hermitage, the State Historical Museum, the State Museum of Georgia and the History Museum of Azerbaijan. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts became the fifth museum institution on this list. West-European coins, which entered to the Museum from the Pakhomov collection numbered more than 850 specimens. One should mention Dorpatian bracteats of the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries, shillings of the Teutonian Order, coins of Poland dated from the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as those of Lithuania, Riga, Gdansk relating to the periods of the Polish and Swedish domination. As to the Oriental part, the coins of Georgia covering the period from the Early Middle Ages to the time of joining the Russian Empire are worth mentioning. Apart from them, the coins of Eldiguzids, who were ruling Azerbaijan in the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries, those of Khorezm Shahs and Mongols, who occupied Transcaucasia in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries are of considerable interest.

All in all, by 1973 the collection of the Numismatic Department comprised over 115,000 pieces.<sup>[3]</sup> The curators of the Department continued politics aimed at enlargement of the collection and all-sided improvement of its quality. A collection of 3,200 Russian and Soviet coins and medals, including many rare and valuable pieces was acquired in 1978–1979 from Vladimir Stepanov. In 1983 the Ministry of Culture of the USSR bought for the Department a collection of 400 medals devoted to the events of Peter's the Great époque. The owner, Alexander Stakhovich (1884–1959), was a Russian army officer and emigrant, who was living in France and not only collected medals of Peter the Great, but studied them thoroughly. There were pieces belonging to E. Gutten-Chapsky and Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich in this collection (Ill. 4–5).



Ill. 4 – Russian Empire. Peter the Great (1689–1725). Medal for the battle near Lesnaya. Gold. 1708. Stakhovich collection. Former collections of E. Gutten-Chapsky and Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich. Inv. no. 251354

<sup>[3]</sup> Golenko 1973, 213.



*Ill. 5 – Russian Empire. Peter the Great (1689–1725). Medal in commemoration of the Treaty of Nystad. Gold. 1721. Stakhovich collection. Former collections of E. Gutten-Chapsky and Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich. Inv. no. 251359*

Gold medals by Solomon Gouin, a series of silver medals by Philip Müller dedicated to the Russian victories during the Great Northern War (1700–1721) as well as the first Russian decoration medals are centre-pieces of the collection.<sup>[4]</sup> A considerable lot of the modern Polish authors' medals entered the collection during 1984–1985. Masterpieces of Piotr Gawron, Bronislaw Khroma, Jozsef Marek could be mentioned among them. Remarkable European medals of the 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries came from the donation of Eugenia Polosatova (1902–1986) made in 1985. One can mention a medal of 1475 by Gianfrancesco Enzola depicting the bust of Constanzo Sforza and a medal in honour of Giovanni Medici made by Antonio Selvi in 1740. From the same collection originates the magnificent German shell-gem of the 16<sup>th</sup> century depicting the battle between Israelites and Amalekites.

In 1995 the Pushkin Museum acquired 98 Kufic gold dinars from the hoard found at an unknown location in Uzbekistan. It contained many rare coins and even some unique issues of pre-Mongol Middle Asia dynasties of the Great Seljuks, Anushteginids, Karakhanids and Ghurids, who ruled in the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ill. 6).



*Ill. 6 – Great Seljuks and Karakhanids. Sultan Sanjar (1084–1157). Dinar. Gold. 1160. Buhara. Inv. no. 261523*

A hoard of Ptolemaic tetradrachms dating from the reign of Cleopatra VII represents a quite rare acquisition for the Russian museums and was bought in 1994 from the Russian journalist who used to work in Egypt.<sup>[5]</sup> A unique hoard of Late-Roman coins discovered in the North-Western Crimea nearby the modern city of Eupatoria entered to the Museum in

<sup>[4]</sup> Smirnova 2012, 121.

<sup>[5]</sup> Kovalenko 1996.

1999.<sup>[6]</sup> One more example of the numismatic collection of the archaeological origin is represented by the coins that came from Georgii Volchev, who collected more than 700 coins found at the ancient settlements on the site of Merv. This numismatic assemblage covers the whole period of the coin history of Merv, which lasted over two thousand years and comprises rare and unique pieces. Among them one should mention little-known issues of the local ruler of Merv as well as a few samples of the Parthian and Kushan-Sasanian coinage (Ill. 7–8).



Ill. 7 – Merv. King of Merv (Ardashir?). Bronze. AD 240–260. Inv. no. 268461



Ill. 8 – Parthia. Artaban II (AD 1038). Drachm. Silver. Inv. no. 267998

Addressing the very recent acquisitions of the Department one should recall the collection of Jurii Schulz, Head of the Department of Latin Language of the Moscow Medical Institute, who used to work in the Numismatic Department of the Pushkin Museum during 1947–1951. In 2005 Schulz bequeathed to the Department over 360 West-European and Russian personal signets of 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ill. 9–10) as well as more than 100 gold Roman, Byzantine, West-European and Russian coins.<sup>[7]</sup>



Ill. 9 – Russian Empire. Personal seal of Great Duke Michael. Agate. After 1858. From Schulz collection. Inv. no. 267299



Ill. 10 – West Europe. Seal of Oldenburg family. Rock crystal. 19<sup>th</sup> century. From Schulz collection. Inv. no. 267311 (scales 100% and c. 50%)



<sup>[6]</sup> Kovalenko 2011.

<sup>[7]</sup> Smirnova 2012, 121.



Ill. 11 – Nobel medal in physics of Iliya Frank. Gold. 1958. Inv. no. 270160 (scale 85%)

In 2013 the Nobel medal in the field of physics awarded in 1958 to the Soviet scientist Iliya Frank was bought by the Department (Ill. 11). In 2018 the prominent Bulgarian medallist Bogomil Nikolov donated to the Museum small collection of ten medals (Ill. 12-13).



Ill. 12 – Bogomil Nikolov. Medal “Veni, vidi, vici”. Bronze. 2009. Inv. no. 275470 (scale 50%)



Ill. 13 – Idem “Spirit of Prometheus”. Bronze. 2010. Inv. no. 275472 (scale 60%)

One cannot pass over the generous gift by Theodore V. Buttrey, which he made to the Department’s library in 2004. Ted handed over several thousand numismatic auction catalogues he thoroughly collected during many years. Thanks to this donation, the Numismatic Department of the Pushkin Museum at the moment is the only institution in Russia that possesses such

a powerful tool for numismatic research formed by this full selection of specialized numismatic auction catalogues up to 2000.

In the beginning of 1990s numismatists of the Pushkin Museum became the first museum curators in Russia involved in the process of creating electronic numismatic databases. A database called “Nika” was especially worked out for the registration of the numismatic collection of the Pushkin Museum. By the end of the 1990s the whole collection of ancient coins of the Department (then c. 27,000 pieces) was put into this database and this provided easier search and access to the relevant information regarding these coins.

Thanks to the initiative of the Keeper, Dr Nataliya Smirnova, the Numismatic Department of the Pushkin Museum in 1998 was the first among Russian numismatic institutions to become member of the International Numismatic Commission and actively joined in the life of the international numismatic community. Curators of the Department took part in the international conferences, delivered papers at the request of international museums and institutes, helped foreign colleagues to establish relations with Russian scholars and collectors. In 2003 during the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Numismatic Congress, Nataliya Smirnova was elected member of the International Numismatic Council. In April 2005 the Council collectively visited Moscow and participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> All-Russian Numismatic Conference, which was organized by the Numismatic Department. The work of the conference coincided with the opening of the exhibition devoted to the history of the numismatic collection of the Pushkin Museum as well as with 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Moscow University. More than 1,000 exhibits from the collections of the Numismatic Department along with archive documents from the museum Department of Manuscripts were on display.

Exhibition activities have always been an important part of the work of the curatorial staff of the Department. Regrettably, the permanent numismatic exposition has been absent in the Pushkin Museum, so the numismatic material has been mainly shown in temporary exhibitions. Special attention was paid to the presentation of the development of the modern medallic art in the USSR (1962, 1967) as well as in some socialist countries like Poland (1978, 1989) and Hungary (1982). An exhibition of the Russian medals dedicated to the events of Peter the Great époque and originating from the collection of Stakhovich held in 1989 enjoyed special public interest.<sup>[8]</sup> Japanese paper money of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries called “hansatsu” were on display in the same year. Ancient coins were being exhibited in the small thematic exhibitions dealing with the coins of Northern Greece and Macedonia (1991) or with those of the Greek cities of the Northern Black Sea littoral (1993) as well as in the large exhibition devoted to the history of coinage in Antiquity with more than 1,000 coins on display (1999).

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[8] Zavorotnaya 1988.

The first exhibition of the cycle “Great Russian victories seen through medals and engravings” was opened in 2009. Exhibition was devoted to the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Poltava battle, which became one of the decisive battles of the Great Northern War between Russia and Sweden (1700–1721). Along with medals dedicated to this event, engravings served as prototypes for the medallic images were exhibited. Second exhibition of the cycle dealing with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Patriotic War of 1812 marked the beginning of a quite intense period in the exhibition activity of the Numismatic Department, during which the new numismatic exhibitions were held in the Museum every year. It suffices to recapitulate their titles to give a sense of the scope of the material exhibited: “Dreaming and Doing. Medals of Jane McAdam Freud” (2013), “Translatio Nummorum. Roman Emperors and Roman Antiquities in Renaissance” (2014), “Collection Forgotten for a Century. Numismatic Monuments from the Collection of the Museum of Russian History Abroad” (2015), “Heads and Tales – Tails and Bodies: Engraving the Human Figure from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period” (2016) (Ill. 14), “Sveonum Monumenta Vetusta. The Numismatic Collection of Elias Brenner and Pavel Demidov” (2017) (Ill. 15).



Ill. 14 – Exhibition “Heads and Tales – Tails and Bodies: Engraving the Human Figure from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period”. 2016.



Ill. 15 – Exhibition “Sveonum Monumenta Vetusta. The Numismatic Collection of Elias Brenner and Pavel Demidov”. 2017

A small permanent exhibition presenting masterpieces of the Renaissance medallion art was opened in 2018. It is noteworthy that all exhibitions enumerated represented the result of the fruitful cooperation with foreign colleagues, museum curators, collectors, members of charity institutions, who established friendly and professional relationships with the curators of the Department. One can recall among them the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and the Brotherhood of St. Prince Vladimir (Germany), The Social and Cultural Affairs Welfare Foundation and the Benaki Museum (Greece), the Swedish Numismatic Society.

All these exhibitions were accompanied either with brochures or with proper exhibition catalogues. In 2018 the Swedish Numismatic Society awarded curator of West-European coins and medals Dr Julia Krasnobaeva with the silver medal of Elias Brenner for the catalogue “Sveonum Monumenta Vetusta”.<sup>[9]</sup>

Preparation of the collection catalogues represents one more important aspect of the work carried out by the curators. The Numismatic Department of the Pushkin Museum became the first Russian numismatic institution to have taken part in the international project “Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum”. Two parts of the first volume devoted to the coins of the Greek cities of the Black Sea appeared in 2011 and 2014.<sup>[10]</sup> The second volume, which registered coin issues of the cities of Magna Graecia and Sicily, was pu-

<sup>[9]</sup> Krasnobaeva 2018.

<sup>[10]</sup> SNG PMFA I/1 2011; SNG PMFA I/2 2014.

blished in 2017.<sup>[11]</sup> The catalogue of Byzantine coins in Russian and English languages came out in 2015.<sup>[12]</sup> The whole number of the coins thus published totals 4,600 specimens.

Cataloguing various sections of the collection has been going on. At the moment ancient coins belonging to the known Russian writer Vasilii Rozanov have been prepared for publication as well as pre-Islamic coins, French medals of the end of 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and badges of the Russian Empire.

Nowadays all sections of the numismatic collection of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts number more than 220,000 objects and are divided as follows:

- Ancient (28,500)
- Oriental (28,000)
- Western (68,000)
- Russian (61,700)
- Casts (35,000).

Descriptions of more than 174,000 objects, which are mostly accompanied with digital images, are put into a special electronic database, whose usage considerably facilitates registration and systematization of the collections. Since 2010 the Internet-portal of the Numismatic Department (<http://www.coins-and-medals.ru/>) has been functioning. It acquaints all concerned with the news on the Department's life and activities of the Russian and international numismatic communities. One can find there digital publications as well as images and descriptions of the most interesting objects in the collection.

The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts at the moment is in the process of reconstruction, modernization and expanding. As a result, the Numismatic Department hopefully not only will get new enlarged offices and depositories, but would be able at last to put on display the permanent exposition which has never been within the walls of the Museum and which could demonstrate the numismatic collection and tell about its history in full.

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<sup>[11]</sup> SNG PMFA II 2017.

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