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THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAŃ: HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION OF COINS AND MEDALS

The origins of the existing collections of the Department of Coins and Medals in the National Museum in Poznań (subseq.: GNMNP) may be traced to the collections of the Poznań Society of Friends of Learning (PTPN). The Society was established in 1857 (as Society of Friends of Learning of Poznań) to collect, study and make available the relics of Polish history to the general public. The same year, the Museum of Polish and Slav Antiquities in the Grand Duchy of Poznań was established attached to the Society.¹ When the predominantly German board of trustees of the Raczyński Library gave the Society notice to vacate its previous premises in the Library, the Society's most generous benefactor, Seweryn Mielżyński (1804–1872) lent his support. In 1871, he bought a house in what is now no. 35 Młyńska Street in Poznań, and offered it to the Society. A building constructed on its site was designed specifically for museum and library purposes. On 8 November 1882, the extended museum facility officially opened its doors under the name of the Mielżyński Museum.² In the period of the Second Polish Republic, during a project of reorganization of the Poznań museums, the collections of the Society were successively transferred to the Greater Poland Museum (coins and medals entered that museum only during the Second World War, transferred by Germans in the process of abolishing Polish institutions).³ However, let us go back to the beginnings of the public numismatic collection in Poznań.

In 1894 the Provincial Museum (*Provinzial-Museum der Historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen*) was created in Poznań headed by its Director, Dr Franz Schwartz (1864–1901). It added to its collections mainly the resources of the Historical Society of Poznań (*Historische Gesellschaft zu Posen*) established in 1885. In November 1902 the Provincial Museum was renamed the Emperor Frederick Museum (*Kaiser Friedrich-Museum*, KFM), and moved shortly afterwards to a newly constructed building (1904). Its Director, Prof. Dr Ludwig Kaemmerer (1862–1938) held this position between 1903 and 1918. The numismatic collection was an important part of the museum's resources in the Department of Cultural History (historic coins and medals) and the Department of Prehistory (hoards, ancient coins). Plaquet-

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¹ Olejniczak 1987, p. 79.

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³ Olejniczak 1982, p. 109.

tes, medallions and artistic medals were placed in the Department of Artistic Crafts. Interestingly enough, the management of the Provincial Museum took special care to present the history of coinage of Greater Poland (then — *Provinz Posen*) against a broader background of the history of Polish coinage. This liberal approach in displaying the works of Polish art and culture was presumably in line with the official policy of the Prussian state. In presenting coins and medals struck in mints of Greater Poland, emphasis care was taken to highlight the German contribution to the history of Polish coinage (e.g., senior mint officials and die engravers of German origin). Another possible objective could have been “taking the presentation of the past from Polish hands”,⁴ even strictly Polish past, at a time when a Polish Society of Friends of Learning was active in Poznań.

From the very first years of its operation, the Provincial Museum pursued an extensive campaign of acquisition of numismatic items. In 1895 it bought a sizeable batch of coins and medals (over 200 items) from the collection of Max Kirmis (1851–1926), initially based in Poznań, and subsequently (from the early 1880s) in Neumünster in Holstein, a secondary school teacher, collector and popularizer of history, author of the first handbook of Polish numismatics (*Handbuch der polnischen Münzkunde*, Poznań, 1892). This purchase included Polish medieval coins, early modern coins from mints of Greater Poland (Poznań, Bydgoszcz, Wschowa, Łobżenica) and medals produced in Greater Poland during the partition period.⁵ The Museum also acquired medieval and early modern hoards found in Greater Poland, some of them by purchase.⁶

On the occasion of the KFM’s opening on 30 October 1904, the Numismatic Society in Poznań (*Numismatische Gesellschaft in Posen*) (1899–1918/1919), donated to the Museum a collection of 342 Polish coins, spanning the period from early medieval to issues of the Free City of Cracow from 1835, on the condition that the Museum display the coins to the public.⁷ This donation, while very valuable, was incomplete (more notably, it included no gold or silver coins of higher denominations). Taken together with coins and medals already held by KFM, it led the Museum to establish a permanent numismatic gallery, made available to visitors in the Department of Cultural History already in 1904 (additionally to coin hoards and single finds, mostly Antique, displayed in the Department of Prehistory).

The openness of the museum to Polish numismatics meant that in addition to purchases made at auction houses and from German museums, the KFM was in close contact with leading Polish numismatist-collectors and societies, obtaining from this source valuable Polish coins and medals, mostly

⁴ Stahr 2004a, p. 265.

⁵ Stahr 2004a, p. 261; Murawska 2010, pp. 9–10.

⁶ Stahr 2004a, p. 261; Murawska 2010, pp. 12–17.

⁷ Garbaczewski 2010, pp. 26–7; Murawska 2010, pp. 11–23.

by purchase.⁸ Between 1903 and 1918 the Museum added to its collections more than 1,000 rare Polish coins and medals (not counting hoards), more notably, higher denomination gold and silver coins (47 and 27 respectively), mostly talers, and 7 gold and 53 silver medals.⁹



Fig. 1. Medallion: *The Fall of Phaeton*, by Moderno, cast bronze, diam. 106 mm, MNP GN H1 62, donated to the KFM of Poznań by James Simon in 1903 (photo Sławomir Obst, Photography unit of the National Museum in Poznań).

Among acquisitions of the Department of Artistic Crafts the most important donation was from James Simon (1851-1932), eminent collector, patron of the arts and philanthropist who in 1903 offered the KFM 140 Renaissance plaquettes (Fig. 1)¹⁰, along with more than 60 European plaquettes and medals from the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th century (mostly French, works of e.g., Alexandre Charpentier, Frederic Vernon, Oscar Roty and Jules

⁸ Stahr 2004a, p. 263.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-4.

¹⁰ Stahr 1994.

Clément). Unlike historic coins and medals, the collection of plaquettes and medallions was expanded only sporadically, despite being displayed “in greater part”.¹¹

After the successful Greater Poland Uprising of 1918/19 and the return of Poznań to the Motherland, the KFM passed under Polish administration and was renamed the Greater Poland Museum (*Muzeum Wielkopolskie*, MW). In 1919 the position of its director was taken by Dr Marian Gumowski (1881–1974), imported from Cracow (his tenure continued until May 1932), an outstanding but controversial researcher of impressively broad interests. Considering the fact that Gumowski was one of the best known (and active) Polish numismatists of his day, it is somewhat surprising that during his tenure the Department of Coins and Medals of the Museum remained on the margin of its activities.



Fig. 2. Medallion with a portrait of Kasia Zakrzewska, by Jan Wysocki, 1920, cast bronze, diam. 109 mm, MNP GN H2 284, purchased for the collections of the Greater Poland Museum from Antoni Liske of Poznań in 1926 (photo Witold Garbaczewski).

¹¹ Stahr 2004b, p. 269.

Sources are insufficient to establish what criteria guided the director in developing the collection, and whether there was any policy in this respect. Purchases of numismatic items were few, but some of them – as the purchase in 1926–1927 of Polish medallions and plaquettes from the collection of Antoni Liske based in Poznań – substantially enriched the Museum's collection (Fig. 2). There were also some spectacular donations. The most notable was a gift of plaster models of medallions and plaquettes made by Czesław Makowski, a prominent Polish portraitist–medallist (Fig. 3). They were offered to the Museum by this artist as an expression of appreciation and a form of thanks for the participation of armed units from Greater Poland in the Polish–Bolshevik war (1919–20).



Fig. 3. Plaquette (plaster model – scale 65%) with a portrait of Zygmunt Kramsztyk, by Czesław Makowski, 1905, plaster, MNP GN M 98, donated to the Greater Poland Museum of Poznań by the artist in 1920 (photo Sławomir Obst, Photography unit of the National Museum in Poznań).

Gumowski maintained contacts with institutions both in Poland (e.g., the Warsaw Mint, the National Museum of Warsaw), and abroad (the *Kunst-historisches Museum* in Vienna), but also with auction houses in Germany and with Polish collectors; however, judging by the surviving records, this rarely brought tangible results in the form of gifts or purchases. The aim in such cases was primarily consultation, valuation, and getting information about the numismatic traffic, etc.¹² Perhaps, funds were insufficient to develop a more ambitious purchasing campaign, although interestingly enough, the Museum library continued to be regularly provided with numismatic literature, quite expensive at times.

After Gumowski's retirement in 1932 the position of the MW director passed to Nikodem Pajzderski (1882–1940). The intensity of activities aimed at acquiring numismatic products decreased further, although on some rare occasions the Museum would express interest in received offers. This is the case of Roman coins from Słowikowo, reported to the Museum in early 1938 which matter was addressed by Curator Dr Jerzy Koller as the representative of the MW.¹³ Another notable point is the absence of evidence in the Museum's records for cooperation during the tenure of Gumowski and Pajzderski of its cooperation with the (Polish) Numismatic Society active in Poznań in 1920–1939.

Things changed dramatically after the outbreak of the Second World War. In September 1939 Germans took over the collections of the MW, including the numismatic collection with an exceptionally rich representation of gold specimens (almost 100) and silver coins. Director Pajzderski was arrested, imprisoned in Fort VII in Poznań and shot. Reopened officially on 21 January 1940, the Museum reverted to its former name *Kaiser Friedrich-Museum* (*Landesmuseum des Reichsgaues Wartheland*) now with Dr Siegfried Rühle, *Sturmbannführer* SA, art historian arrived from Gdańsk as Director. The department of coins and medals became the charge of Dr Reinhold von Sengbusch brought from Riga who was assisted by Carl Stempel.

From the first days after its opening the Museum began purchasing numismatic items for its collection, both from antiquity dealers and auction houses, contacting also the *Reichsbank*. These purchases were often consulted with prominent German numismatists, e.g., Richard Gaettens in Munich and Prof. Arthur Suhle, then a manager in the *Staatliches Münz-kabinett* in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin.

The Germans kept a record in the inventory books of the Museum of seized Polish private and institutional collections. Thus, already in 1940, the Museum had taken over the collections of Paweł Czarnecki of Dobrzyca, the Counts Skórzewski of Lubostroń, Michael Levy of Inowrocław, Marian Gumowski of Dębowiec, the Poznań Society of Friends of Learning (moved

¹² Murawska 2011, pp. 27f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

from the Mielżyński Museum of Poznań), and the Benedictine monastery in Lubiń (turned into an internment camp for priests and monastics from Greater Poland). In the following years, the KFM added to its resources the collections *e.g.*, of Franciszek Zygarłowski (medals, religious pendants, plaquettes, coins, emergency money) and Paweł Wańkowicz of Poznań (an impressive collection of gold coins) and other collections or their fragments whose owners remain unidentified today.¹⁴

In mid-1944, under the supervision of Carl Stempel, the collections started being prepared for evacuation. Coins and medals were placed in boxes, which were next placed in cases, sent to locations safe from bombing. Information about this action survives far from complete. A part of the collection was taken to Pniewy (then *Pinne*), another to the manor at Słupiec (*Schlegel*, now a district of Nowa Ruda). Its later fate is unknown.

War losses suffered by the Department of Coins and Medals of the MW (renamed the National Museum in Poznań, MNP, in 1950) were severe. All gold specimens and higher denomination silver coins were lost, what remained of the collection fell into disarray making provenance identification impossible. The ravages of war spared the valuable collection of plaster plaquettes and medallions of Czesław Makowski and the collection (nearly complete) of Renaissance and Art Nouveau plaquettes donated by James Simon. The task of organizing the resources was addressed in the 1950s and 60s by Curator Kazimierz Szuda, who continued as the head of the Department until 1970. He was succeeded by Julian Olejniczak (until 2011) who with great energy continued to expand the collection (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Sigismund III, a Crown half-portugal (five ducats), 1611, Cracow mint, gold, 17.21 g, diam. 31 mm, MNP GN P 4227, purchased for the MNP collection in 1991 (photo Witold Garbaczewski).

Currently the numismatic collection of the MNP numbers over 155,000 objects. The majority (c. 100,000) are coins, both Polish (c. 50,000) and foreign spanning the ancient and the modern period. Other resources consist of more than 2,200 plaquettes and medallions (including a collection of several

¹⁴ On the KFM in Poznań during the Second World War see Łuczak 2011, pp. 204–15.

score plaster models) and more than 11,500 medals, religious pendants, orders and badges. An important element in the structure of the collection is a group of c. 3,500 sigillography items, a set of nearly 20,000 Polish and foreign paper money, and a series of hoards from the 10th–20th century. The numismatic collection of the MNP is one of the three largest and most significant public numismatic collections in Poland.

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