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OBITUARIES

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IOANNIS TOURATSOGLOU (1940 – 2021)



Iannis Touratsoglou, unknown date

When Iannis Touratsoglou died on 13 September 2021 in Athens, the numismatic community lost a much beloved friend and a distinguished scholar. His scholarly output, his stellar career as a museum curator and director, and his varied work as a field archaeologist set him apart in the modern world of academia and museums.

Touratsoglou was born on 23 November 1940 in Thessaloniki. A child of Greeks who originated from Istanbul (or Konstantinople as the Greeks still called it), he saw himself as a citizen of the world. He loved to travel, had many friends in countries all over the world, and was fluent in several languages as his academic oeuvre so clearly illustrates. For most of his career, he worked in the Athens Numismatic Museum, first as Ephor from 1982 onwards and then as Director until his retirement in 2002. During these 30 years, numismatic scholarship in Greece saw a transformation, in which a whole generation of numismatists enlivened the field. Many were inspired

by Touratsoglou, who became a teacher and mentor to students and colleagues from all over Greece and Europe.

Having studied Classical archaeology at the University of Thessaloniki under Manolis Andronikos and George Bakalakis, he joined the Archaeological Service, where he became in 1967 *Epimeletes* of Western Macedonia in Beroia. In 1982, he was appointed as curatorial staff and later as Deputy Director at the Numismatic Museum in Athens, where he worked under Mando Karamessini-Oikonomidou until her retirement in 1994. It was in the early 1980s that he undertook his PhD at the University of Saarbrücken, where he completed a thesis on the Roman provincial mint of Thessaloniki under Peter Robert Franke. He was awarded a *summa cum laude*, and the work appeared under the title “Die Münzstätte von Thessaloniki in der römischen Kaiserzeit (32/31 v. Chr. bis 268 n. Chr.)” in 1998 as the twelfth volume in the series *Antike Münzen und geschnittene Steine*. From 1994–2002, Touratsoglou was Director of the Numismatic Museum; in the last years before his retirement, he also oversaw as Director the Epigraphic Museum. A third, simultaneous appointment came in 1999, when he took over the helm of the National Archaeological Museum. There he was faced with the difficult task to oversee the renovations after one of the deadliest earthquakes of the second half of the 20th century caused significant damage to the collections and the building in Athens. Together with his successor as Director, Nikolaos Kaltsas, he re-installed the exhibition rooms of sculpture in the museum.

In the Numismatic Museum, Touratsoglou and his team of curators were also responsible for the move of the museum from the first floor of the National Archaeological Museum to the *Iliou Melathron*, the house that the architect Ernst Ziller built in 1878–1880 for the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. The exhibition in the splendid upper rooms of the mansion, which is decorated with elaborated wall and ceiling paintings in a pseudo-Pompeian style is a challenging environment for a numismatic exhibition, as the contradiction between the opulent decoration and small coins had to be handled delicately. Under Touratsoglou’s curatorial leadership, an exhibition was conceived and installed, which allowed visitors for the first time to appreciate that the Athens cabinet, in particular in the ancient Greek and Roman field, represents one of the great European numismatic collections alongside Berlin, Paris, London, or Vienna. The exhibition opened to the public in 1998 and has become a major tourist destination in Athens. Due to Touratsoglou’s considerable acumen to find sponsors, the numismatic collection grew significantly under his leadership; here the donation of a decadrachm of Athens, one of the key *desiderata* until then, was a major achievement in the years of his directorship.

A keen sense for novel ideas and underlying trends made Touratsoglou so effective as an administrator and scholar. In the 1990s, he became deeply

interested in the increasing role of computers and the internet for numismatics, a field called today “digital numismatics”. Then in its infancy, the internet was barely known to people in museums and the public at large, but Touratsoglou had begun to think about ways how museums could display their collections in this new online medium. In 1998, the first online exhibition in the field of numismatics opened, which was a collaboration of the Numismatic Museum, Athens, and the British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals. Under the title, *PRESVEIS: One Currency for Europe*, the project was conceived and overseen by Ioannis Touratsoglou and Ute Wartenberg; it was funded by the European Commission Directorate General X (Raphael Programme 1996–1998) and by The Hellenic Ministry of Culture. It addressed the topic of earlier currency unions, which was of significant political interest in anticipation of the introduction of the EURO in 1999. In a second project, DRACMA, also supported by EU funding, Touratsoglou participated in developing a CD Rom, with the University of Messina, the Cypriote Archeological Service, and the Archaeological Museum in Agrigento. As an early promoter of the computer and the internet as tools for research and public outreach, Touratsoglou was a proponent of practices which later became mainstream in academia. This was especially notable as museums in Greece had been slow in adopting databases and the internet for their collections.

As other large national collections, the vast holdings of the Numismatic Museum in Athens present a considerable challenge to its staff as it grew over the last century from a small collection to one containing hundreds of thousands of coins, medals and other objects. It is constantly enriched through coins from excavations, gifts of significant private donations, or various confiscations from the illegal trade. To create inventories of all these many objects and organize them is a massive challenge, and Touratsoglou professionalized some curatorial practices, which was not always easy considering the limited funding available. Following the tradition of his predecessors, Varoucha and Oikonomidou, he focused on cataloguing coin hoards, of which the Athens collection contains a very significant number. Under Touratsoglou’s leadership, the Numismatic Museum was a lively place, in which visitors were welcome for serious research. His attention to keep the library up-to-date with new publications made it an important place of research for anyone interested in numismatics.

As a scholar, Touratsoglou’s scholarly research and output cover a wide field. While numismatics was his primary field, he widely published important findings in the field of Hellenistic pottery, where he made significant contributions in particular to the excavation finds from Macedonia. In the field of numismatics, his numismatic training in Germany was always visible: as he approached coins as archaeological artifacts, which needed detailed description and context. His major publications were focused on hoard finds from Macedonia and other regions, which served as the basis of a wider analysis of historical and archaeological analysis of the subject.

Two of his monographs illustrate the variety of his approach (*Disjecta Membra: two new Hellenistic Hoards from Greece*, Athens 1995 and *Ο Θησαυρός της Κρατήγους Μυτιλήνης : Νομίσματα και τιμαλφή αντικείμενα του 7ου αι. μ.Χ.*, Athens, 2008; with *Ευγενία Χαλκιάε*). However, he remained particularly interested all his life in Macedonia and Hellenistic coinage, and his book on coin circulation in Hellenistic and Roman Macedonia was a *tour de force* in this field, where in particular the analysis of monograms presented a novel approach (*The Coin circulation in Ancient Macedonia: ca. 200 B.C.-268-286 A.D.: The hoard evidence*; Athens 1993). As readers and reviewers of Touratsoglou's books and articles knew, his highly literary style (in whatever language he was writing) was not easy to understand, but if one persisted, his numismatic analysis and historical messages became clear. In 2009, Touratsoglou was honored with a two-volume *Festschrift ΚΕΡΜΑΤΙΑ ΦΙΛΙΑΣ – Studies in Honour of Ioannis Touratsoglou*, in which his many friends and colleagues in a variety of fields celebrated the man and his work in over 600 pages. He received many awards, among them, in 2002, the *Jeton de vermeil* of the *Société française de numismatique* and in 2012 the Archer M. Huntington Medal from the American Numismatic Society. He was honored with a final resting place on the beautiful First Cemetery in the center of Athens, where he is buried alongside some of the great citizens of Greece, including a few archaeologists, almost next to his colleague Demetrios Laza-rides, the excavator of the Macedonian site of Amphipolis.

Ioannis Touratsoglou was a great scholar but foremost a humanist, as he would remind one on many occasions. He dedicated his life to his research and his work, his museum colleagues, his many friends. Despite his extraordinary devotion to working long hours, he was an avid reader, enjoyed music as well as films and, most importantly, always found time for his many friends. He entertained them in his tiny studio apartment on Kybelis Street, right next to the National Archaeological Museum. On a large terrace, he would hold his famous *soirées*, with delicious food and wine that he procured from all over Athens. He would enquire about other friends, ask about new books and exhibitions abroad, offer sage advice to those in need, and make plans for the future. Using a Jewish phrase, he was a Mensch.