

## **SALAMIS 2020. 2500 YEARS OF LIGHT**

The current exhibition entitled “Salamis 2020. 2500 Years of Light”, is organized by the Numismatic Museum on the occasion of the Panhellenic Celebration of the Anniversary Year “Thermopylae – Salamis 2020” for the 2500 years from the emblematic battle of Thermopylae and the celebrated naval battle at Salamis. These two historic events have raised the free spirit and the military virtue of the Greeks into an everlasting example. This virtue allowed history to advance and destiny to pass from the defeat to victory conveying to these events a universal significance since had the result at Salamis been different and had the Persians been victorious then the course of world history would have been altered dramatically. The victory of the united Greeks at Salamis in 480 BC marked the boundary between East and West for the first time, prevented the dominance of satrapism, rescued the still fragile experiment of the Athenian Democracy and ensured the evolution of the civilization and philosophy, which lay the foundations that allowed the West to form its own culture on three principles: the free spirit, the representative democracy and the fundamental human rights.

The exhibition unfolds in the impressive room at the Iliou Melathron that houses the Museum’s temporary exhibitions and was once the Library of Heinrich Schliemann. It functions as a fruitful visual dialogue between one hundred and forty ancient and modern artifacts and eight contemporary artistic works. Ancient Greek coins of gold, electrum, silver and bronze, Persian darics, Roman and Greco-Roman coins of silver and bronze, Modern Greek coins and banknotes and contemporary medals that are all associated with either the decisive victory of the Greeks at Salamis or Themistocles, “the best and wisest of all allies” and all converse with the creations of the internationally recognized artists Konstantinos Papamichalopoulos and Stelios Gavalas.

The exhibition is divided in six basic units: the first presents the silver of the victors at Salamis, the numismatic production of the fifteen of the twenty independent city-states that participated in the victorious pinnacle of the crucial confrontation between the ancient Greek world and the Persian empire of the Achaemenids. These cities, politically strong and economically prosperous, minted their own coinages of silver, the medal that played a principal role in the beginning of the 5th century BC in all the economic, social and artistic activities. The second unit focuses on Themistocles of Athens and Magnesia; on one hand, the leading figure of the political scene of Athens who persuaded his fellow citizens to build 200 triremes using the silver from the Laurion mines and led them to victory and on the other, Themistocles who was ostracized, ended up in the Court of Artaxerxes I and was proclaimed the hereditary ruler of Magnesia on the Maeander. The third unit centers around the projection of the victory at Salamis in Roman Athens as the greatest glorious victory of the Greeks achieved owing to the mighty Athenian fleet and the ingenious Themistocles. The latter is portrayed victorious on a trireme on the coins issued by the city in the reign of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, all benefactors of Athens, the cultural capital of the Roman Empire. The fourth unit surveys the gold of the opposing Persian forces, the darics that were minted continuously since the time of Darius I and were widely distributed inside and outside the borders of the Persian empire influencing in the form of donations and bribes the political developments on their behalf or paying the Greek mercenaries who

were hired during their military campaigns. The fifth unit refers to the naval superiority and supremacy of the Greeks in the Mediterranean, the theatre of numerous notable naval battles, and their glorious naval victories. At the same time, it presents the exceptional relationship of the city-states, kingdoms and empires with the sea as it is manifested in their numismatic issues where marine deities, warships and their components as well as scenes of naval victories are depicted. The sixth unit examines the projection of the glorious past in the Modern Greek State through the types of coins, banknotes and commemorative medals, where historical events and their protagonists are displayed, like the Athenian general Themistocles leader at the victorious celebrated naval battle of Salamis.

The English historian and journalist Dominic Selwood, on the occasion of the Salamis anniversary, wrote "If the West had a birthday, it would be today" ("This day 2496 years ago, Western Civilization began at Salamis", The Telegraph 22/09/2020). This birthday we celebrate at the Numismatic Museum this year where its selected much-desired acquisitions are announced via the creation of Stelios Gavalas and his vast blue sea emerging through the winning myrtle wreath, a worthy trophy of the twenty one recorded allied cities that fought at the straits of Salamis, while encompassed by the seven paintings of Konstantinos Papamichalopoulos, thus composing an innovative and daring representation of the naval battle with the opposing forces, the Persians, being destroyed and the Greeks being glorified.

The development of the COVID-19 pandemic, the long-term social restrictions at a global level with various quantitative and qualitative gradations as well as the constantly modified health quarantine protocols for the protection of public health de facto set the exhibition within a totally different framework. Under these circumstances, it is realized not in a natural and direct manner, rather by endorsing the health of all potential participants, employees and visitors, and proposing other ways of forming partnerships, creation and coexistence. The absence of audiences is compensated with the digital presentation of the exhibition and its promotional [video](#) and the publication of a bilingual accompanying [catalogue](#).

The catalogue of the exhibition is dedicated to the memory of the dear friends and colleagues Stavros and Chryssoula Baltoyiannis, as a small gesture of recognition of their enormous contribution to Culture and the Arts.

The naval battle of Salamis, an event of epic proportions, universal, eternal and beyond borders, a landmark of virtue and courage invites us to a journey in the centuries and lands that took part and conversed with its fame. Our guide, the artefacts and hoards of the Numismatic Museum contemporary visual creations by Konstantinos Papamichalopoulos and Stelios Gavalas inspired by the Naval battle and its protagonists.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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like to express my thanks to the entire scientific, administrative, technical and security staff of the Numismatic Museum for their hard work in fulfilling this vision. I would also like to convey my gratitude to all who participate in this exhibition with loans from their collections: the Ephorate of Antiquity of the City of Athens, the Ephorate of Antiquity of Argolida, the Bank of Greece and the collector Nikos L. Goumas.

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My heartfelt thanks are extended to the contributors of the Exhibition catalogue who responded to our invitation to author the relevant texts and entries: Eva Apostolou, Wendalina Karagianni, Yannis Kolokotronis, Maria Liaska, Leonidas Bournias, Antonia Nikolakopoulou, Efterpi Ralli, Eirini Rossiou, Vasiliki E. Stefanaki and Panagiotis Tselekas. I owe especially sincere thanks to Panagiotis Tselekas for his comprehensive suggestions during the various stages of the completion of the Exhibition, his valuable and keen contribution to the creation of the Catalogue and our excellent and constructive collaboration in its editing.

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