

Patronship much revered

National History Museum presents unique coin from Great Duke of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania — Vytautas — and the Battle of Grunewald

By Mikhail Grigoriev

The silver coin of uneven form (similar to a circle) denotes a penyaz (denary) and was hand-minted in approximately 1380-1400, probably in Novogrudok (today's Grodno region) — where it was discovered in September 2009. This year, the coin was purchased from a Minsk collector by Belvnesheconombank. Two such coins are thought to exist in the world, with the second found in 2001 in Lithuania (at Lower Castle Museum in Vilnius). It is now kept by Lithuania's National Museum. One side of the coin features a



Cyrillic inscription of unknown meaning; the reverse depicts a lion with an open jaw.

The Director of the National History Museum, Sergey Vecher, tells us that the largest Belarusian collection (of almost 400,000 exhibits) has received a coin 'of huge value', whose authenticity has been confirmed by an international group of experts from Belarus, Poland and Russia.

Co-operation between the museum and Belvnesheconombank began about three years ago, when

one of two famous copies of a Grand Duchy of Lithuania ancient map (compiled at the order of Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł, in late 16th-early 17th century) returned to the country. Later, the bank assisted the museum in claiming collections of rare printed books from the 17th-18th century, and in allocating money for the restoration of two 16th century books: *Apostle*.

The Chairman of Belvnesheconombank, Pavel Kallaur, notes that support for establishments engaged in the preservation of our historical-cultural heritage is important to his bank. Co-operation with the National History Museum ranks highly in this respect.



Coin from Duke Vytautas' times — a rare exhibit

Welcoming educational development

Three secondary schools and five kindergartens built in Minsk annually, with the tradition to continue in the future

"This year, 3,600 boys and girls were welcomed at new schools," explains Minsk City Executive Committee Chairman Nikolai Ladutko. "Simultaneously, educational establishments constructed 40 or 50 years ago have been undergoing reconstruction and modernisation in the capital, with 25 percent of the city budget annually spent on developing education." At present, almost every school in Minsk has two computer-equipped rooms, with the Minsk Mayor stressing the high level of education provided in the capital. Over the past five years, almost 80 percent of Minsk's alumni have entered higher educational establishments each year, while republican Olympiads on certain subjects see Minsk schoolchildren placed top in 13 disciplines (among 16). Meanwhile, participants of international Olympiads have captured 26 medals.

Snowstorms and frosts bring no threat to plants



Brest's winter garden became a city attraction

By Olga Kobayakova

Winter garden welcomes its first visitors in Brest

The winter garden is situated close to the pedestrian zone of Brest's 'Arbat': Sovetskaya Street. The relatively small territory is home to over 500 varieties of plants, with most hailing from the collection of Brest's A.S. Pushkin State University. This was enriched with rare plants this year, donated by Minsk's Central Botanical Garden. These include tropical palms, ficus, papaya, bananas, strelitzia and lotus, comprising the garden's three sections: tropical jungle, semi-tropical and desert.

The idea of opening a winter garden began in 1965, when the first greenhouse featuring exotic

plants opened, at Brest's Pedagogical Institute. In 2008, the collection numbered over 250 different plants. Brest's biologists already boast wide research into nature protection and distribution of ecological knowledge. Eight books — published in different years — disclose the beauty of our native land.

The winter garden is not the only biological project run by the A.S. Pushkin State University. In 2006, the educational establishment opened its own small botanical garden — called 'a garden of never ending blossoming' by local lecturers and students. Forty hectares are home to over 120 varieties of trees, bushes and flowers, blossoming from early spring to late autumn — one after another.

Pigweed, marjoram, thyme John's-wood and others...

Rossony Herbs Museum makes Belarusian beverage known worldwide

By Irina Ivankova

The Chinese have given us their tea ceremony, which gives birth to the most delicate of feelings. The Japanese, in turn, have turned tea drinking into a strict ritual, while the English say 'everything stops for tea' — which is traditionally served at 5pm.

Residents of the village of Klyastitsy, in the Rossony district, have been sharing Belarusian style tea drinking, with local collectors of wild herbs and berries promoting Belarusian herbal teas. Their national gastronomic recipes are being celebrated as part of the Slow Food international movement — an organisation set up in 1986 in Italy to counteract the domination of fast food. The idea is to shift from eating quickly on foot to taking the time to relish each mouthful or sip. Simultaneously, we are encouraged to preserve the traditions of national and regional cuisine. The official website of Slow Food details projects which aim to protect small producers, preserving traditional manufacturing methods. From the post-Soviet space, only Armenia, Georgia,

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus are represented.

Belarusian herbs are already known abroad. "We are situated along an ecological route, with our village having six farm guesthouses. Guests always wish to take something traditional home with them; herbal teas — made by ourselves — are very popular as a souvenir and treat," explains the host of one guesthouse, the Director of the Eco-Rosy nature protection establishment, Alla Khoren. One of the first to become involved in rural tourism in Belarus, she decided to buy a small house near the guesthouse to make her teas when their success really became apparent. The Khoren Herbs Museum is now established there.

"In here, we dry our herbs," Alla indicates, opening the museum's wooden door. "John's-wood, marjoram, meadowsweet, pigweed, blackberries and mountain ash

grow nearby, but we usually collect thyme from further away." The museum appears simple from the outside but smells wonderful inside. Raspberry beetles, marjoram and John's-wood are drying on a cloth, while the berries from dogrose and hawthorn are dried in a special oven.

Her souvenir herb collection consists of ten elements. "This makes a pleasurable tea which generally improves health; we don't wish to put the body out of balance," explains Alla, showing us a small pink bag tied with a ribbon. Its label features the Slow

Food emblem. "We use an old grinder on stems," Alla continues, showing us an iron wheel with a handle and blades. Alla's family collects herbs, as do neighbours and local schoolchildren, on a volunteer basis; this year, schoolchildren harvested 16kg of herbs.

In 2010, the UNDP assisted the project, helping decorate the museum. Not long ago, herb collectors attended the *Terra Madre* (translated as 'mother-land') conference: held every other year in Italian Turin, under the Slow Food aegis and focusing on 'correct' gastronomy. According to Ms. Khoren, the production of herbal tea will never become a major commercial project, since it would then lose its appeal.

Not long ago, a local version of *Terra Madre* was celebrated in the village, on Mother Earth Day. Schoolchildren came to the museum to drink tea with a jam made from wild berries, and to learn about herbs and the art of enjoying 'slow food'.

