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Marseille archaïque : une nouvelle fraction à la tête de satyre de face

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Tommaso Cherubini

... 16 more!

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Index

Jean-Albert Chevillon et Olivier Bertaud

Marseille archaïque : une nouvelle fraction à la tête de satyre de face6

Luciano Giannoni

A first attempt for a quantitative analysis of Etruscan coinage 13

Federico De Luca

Monograms on staters minted in Aspendos during the IV-III Century BC. Numerical notes linked to the size of the issue 40

Cruces Blázquez Cerrato y Diego Barrios Rodríguez

Hallazgo de una moneda de *Gadir* en Salamanca 73

Guy Rancoule, Gisèle Gentric et Jean-Claude Richard Ralite

Les monnaies pré-augustéennes trouvées dans le département de l'Aude..... 84

M^a Jesús Aguilera Romojaro

Las monedas asmoneas (135-37 a.C.) 191

Louis-Pol Delestrée et Hugo Taittinger

Un coin monétaire pour le quinaire éduen d'ANORBOS-DVBNO 231

Ramón Rodríguez Pérez y Fernando Penco Valenzuela

Circulación monetaria en el ámbito minero de Cerro Muriano..... 236

Luis Amela Valverde

La serie RRC 452 de César 252

Pablo Núñez Meneses

Sobre la rareza de los trientes visigodos gallegos: cuatro colecciones de referencia 265

Pablo Rueda Rodríguez-Vila

Aportación al corpus monetario visigodo: un triente de Liuva II acuñado en Tuy 278

Marc Parvérie

Supplément au corpus des monnaies arabo-musulmanes découvertes en France 283

Almudena Ariza Armada

Simbología monetar: feluses omeyas orientales y moneda judía. Estudio comparativo..... 295

Manuel Mozo Monroy and Morten Søvsø

Discovery of a unique golden Arabic morabetin from the year 1218 of the Safar Era in Gørding (Ribe-Denmark) 324

Pablo Núñez Meneses

Un real inédito del duque de Lancáster 340

Régis Lamblin et Jean-Claude Bedel

Découverte d'un contre-signal sur les monnaies de Claude Faure et Charles Laurent..... 346

Pedro Damián Cano Borrego

Una consulta sobre la circulación de la plata provincial española en las Indias Occidentales españolas en el A.H.N. 355

Francisco Jiménez Martínez

El botón en la China Imperial como símbolo de rango social durante la dinastía Qing 368

Pablo Núñez Meneses

Cinco cobres míticos de los Borbones 379

Tommaso Cherubini

La Orden de la Legión de Honor. Las variantes de su insignia en la historia..... 385

Pablo Núñez Meneses y Daniel Casal Fernández

Siete rarezas de ceca Jubia 396

Sorin Langu and Cristian Onel

A Hybrid Coin Discovered Around the City of Bârlad, Romania 404

Manuel Giménez Puig

Dos medallas uruguayas conmemorativas del rechazo de las invasiones inglesas de 1806 y 1807..... 408

Damián Salgado

La Colección del Gabinete Numismático del Museo Histórico Nacional (Buenos Aires, Argentina) 420

Antonio Prieto Barrio y Francisco Javier Hernández Navarro

La Medalla de África de 1912 y sus variantes 439

News

Alejandro Lascano Molina

Estudio de los denarios ibéricos de Bolksan pertenecientes a la ex colección de la Hispanic Society of America..... 462

Alejandro Lascano Molina

El Felús Magrebí en el Tercer Siglo de la Hégira (Siglo IX d.C.) 464

Alejandro Lascano Molina

La Real Casa de la Moneda de Barcelona..... 466

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A Hybrid Coin Discovered Around the City of Bârlad, Romania

Sorin Langu* and Cristian Onel**

* Galați, independent researcher, ** Bârlad, independent reasearcher

Keywords: hybrid coins, Frederic the Great, Stanislas Poniatowski, Prussia, Poland, Zwittermünzen

Abstract: The article presents a rare coin discovered around the Bârlad town. The coin has the obverse like Prussian coins of Frederic the Great and the reverse like Polish coins of Stanislas Poniatowski. It seems to be a hybrid coin, Zwittermünzen, and the cause of issuing it could be an economic war of Prussia against Poland. The coin had arrived through the Austrian and Russian soldiers who fought in Ottoman-Russian War of 1786-1792.

Several coins, now in various private collections or museum collections, have been discovered in the city of Barlad area in recent years¹. Among them is a rare specimen, which we continue to present.



Figure 1: hybrid coin (x1,5)

The coin dates back to 1783, although the last figure is heavier to identify, the coin being slightly scraped. It dates from the period of the three divisions of Poland, 1772, 1793, 1795², more precisely between the first and the second. The weight of the coin is 3,19 g and the diameter is 20 mm.

Let's look at the obverse: it is a Prussian issue, typical of small coins, i.e. pfennig or 1/48 thaler or 1/24 thaler. After the position of the millesim, which fits the FR monogram, and the shape of monogram, we opt for a 1/48 thaler coin, a coin issued by Frederick the Great³. The reverse: the reverse should have looked different, mentioning the value of the coin. Instead we are dealing with the reverse of a typical Polish coin of the late 18th century, a coin issued by Stanislaus Augustus, a crown placed on a circle divided into four quadrants⁴.

¹For example LANGU, ONEL and GHERGHE 2010: 263-266, LANGU, ONEL 2011: 136-139, LANGU, ONEL 2012: 158-159

²SANDFORD 2003: 136-137

³SCGC 1998: 687, 692- 693, KALINOWSKI 2006: 24, NEUMANN 1998: 311

⁴KOPYCKY 1995: 126, SCWC 2002: 1036, HUNKA 1997: 85, tab IIb, IGER 2008: 260, GUMOWSKI 1960: 173, FISCHER 2007: 213

It seems to be a hybrid coin of the 18th century. Hybrid coins are not a novelty, they have been present since antiquity⁵, and their presence continued in the Middle Ages⁶. The 18th century coins are common on Romanian territory, being present in all regions, both as treasures and isolated coins⁷.

The Prussian monetary system is relatively new, since only in 1701, the elector of Brandenburg is recognized as King of Prussia. When Frederick has become king monetary system was based on the reichstaler created in the previous century, but the golden-gold ratio had changed now. Moreover, the regions that formed Prussia at that time were quite different and a monetary reform could also help unite the state. The 1750 reform led by Johan Graumann led to the creation of a supraregional system based on three high-quality gold coins of the taler and its divisions⁸. The reform came in time because between 1756 and 1763 there was the 7-year war, a war that would put Prussia face to face with Austria, Russia and France. To finance the war, Frederick produces a continuous devaluation of the coin, through successive reductions of precious metal, which reach 1760 to two-thirds. After the war, with the 1764 reform, the currencies returned to the value of 1750. The devalued currencies circulated in Poland and severely damaged its economy.

In fact, one of Frederic's purposes since his coming to the throne was Poland's economic destabilization. Prussia issues, in its mints, Berlin, Königsberg, Szczecin and Wrocław, qualitative inferior coins bearing the name of Frederic the Great but imitating contemporary Polish coins⁹. It is the context in which Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski (1764-1795) comes to the throne of Poland. He initiates a monetary reform that will take place in 1766, a reform based on a nominal gold, six silver nominals and four copper nominals¹⁰, designed to cover all market needs. Poland has aligned itself with the German system, based on the Cologne mark, from which 10 Polish thalers were minted¹¹. The major problem was that when they started the reform and set the nominals and their values, they started from an undervalued price of silver. This has led to much higher import costs of precious metal, and implicitly a gradual decrease in coin production¹². At the same time, the Prussians took out the good Polish currency and invaded Poland with their own, inferior currency¹³. The King is pressed to change the report but this will take place in 1787. Meanwhile, the first division of Poland had taken place, which had abducted a third of its territory¹⁴.

The coin presented by us is, we believe, from a group of imitation, hybrid coins, issued by the Prussians, the aim being to destabilize the Polish economy. There is also the possibility of being a fake of a local currency or a war fake coin. It arrived in the area most probably because of the Austrian and Russian soldiers who participated in the Russian-Austro-Turkish war of 1787-1792, with several military operations completed in the area, most important being the battles of Focsani and Mărtinesti¹⁵.

⁵ CARSON 1983: 70-71, MARCOS 1999: 47-54, STUMPF 2017: passim

⁶ STEWART 1983: 312, 314, in German space they are named "Zwittermünzen", and they are since the beginning of 16th century, FREY 1917: 156

⁷ POPEEA and CUSTUREA 1980: 389-394, MARCU 1980: 395-410, SPIRU 1980: 651-658, .MOGLAN, VĂLEANU, and BUTNARIU 2010: 121-150

⁸ ENGEL, SERRURE, 1897: 132, https://www.bundesbank.de/Redaktion/EN/Downloads/Bundesbank/Money_Museum/a_prussian_king_and_his_money.pdf?_blob=publicationFile, consulted online 17.07.2017

⁹ WOJTOWICZ 2006: 9

¹⁰ ENGEL, SERRURE 1897: 540

¹¹ WÓJTOWICZ 2006: 7

¹² *Ibidem*

¹³ *Ibidem*

¹⁴ ZOLLNER 1997: 389-390

¹⁵ LANGU 2017: 26-34

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