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A TRAJANIC DENARIUS FROM A MODERN GRAVE IN INOWROCŁAW AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF ITS INTERPRETATION

ABSTRACT The article is devoted to the interpretation of a 16th-17th century burial of a woman discovered in Inowrocław, who had a medallion made from a Trajanic denarius (RIC 6) placed around her neck. In one of the publications of this find it was stated that the owner wore the medal because she believed that it depicted the head of St. John the Baptist. According to written sources from the 16th and 17th centuries, the people in Poland called the Roman coins they found Saint John's heads. In this article, such an interpretation is considered plausible, but it is not the only one. It is also possible that the medal was considered a beautiful item no matter what it depicted.

Keywords: Trajan, denarius, coin finds, Roman coins, Inowrocław, Cuyavia, medallion, drilled coins, heads of Saint John, XVIth century, XVIIth century, funeral rite, interests in antiquity

ABSTRAKT Artykuł jest poświęcony interpretacji odkrytego w Inowrocławiu pochówku kobiety, datowanego na XVI-XVII wiek, która na szyi miała zawieszony medalik wykonany z denara Trajana (RIC 6). W jednej z publikacji tego znaleziska stwierdzono, że właścicielka nosiła medalik, gdyż uważała, że jest na nim przedstawiona głowa św. Jana Chrzciciela. Ze źródeł pisanych z XVI i XVII wieku wynika, że główkami świętego Jana ludność w Polsce nazywała znajdowane monety rzymskie. W tym artykule taka interpretacja została uznana za prawdopodobną, ale nie jedyną. Możliwe też, że medalik był traktowany jako ładny przedmiot bez względu na to co przedstawiał.

In March 2010, during archaeological excavations carried out upon the ruins of a Franciscan church in Inowrocław (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, Poland), a woman's grave was discovered containing a pendant made from a Roman denarius. The burial, dated by the discoverer of the object, Marcin Woźniak, to the 16th or 17th centuries, was located in the nave of the former church. From the grave furnishings of a woman who died at the age of 30-35, was recovered a pierced silver coin found near the sternum and a bead made of rock crystal, which was found next to the hand of the deceased. The coin that accompanied the buried woman was a Trajanic denarius dating to 98-99. A 1mm diameter regular hole was made over the emperor's head with a drill without damaging the portrait or legend. The reverse of the coin is very worn. This is an intentional erasure, made with a soft object, making the coin slightly concave as it hung vertically, i.e. perpendicular to the natural movement of the coin when worn around the neck. The erasure of the reverse of the coin was made easier by the fact that this face of Roman denarii (but also coins of other denominations) was unusually shallow from the 2nd century

onwards.¹ At the time of discovery, the coin was facing outwards displaying the emperor's portrait, and the meagre reverse side was facing towards the skeleton of the deceased. In the remaining 19 medieval and early modern burials discovered at that time, the only items were pins near the heads and a few small coins, none of which had a drilled hole.² The find has been cited several times in the literature as an example of the use of ancient coins in the modern period.³ According to Wojciech Siwiak, it is a manifestation of one of the folk forms of the cult of Saint John the Baptist, confirmed in Polish written sources for the first time in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁴ As the researcher writes: *The exposed image of the*

¹ It is visible, among others, on coins from the Tokary hoard, see Kunisz 1993.

² More about the practice of putting coins into the graves: Fischer 1921: 173-179.

³ Bogucki, Dymowski, Śnieżko 2017: 285; Bogucki, Dymowski, Śnieżko 2020: 386; Siwiak 2017: 178-179; Siwiak 2018: 121-122.

⁴ Siwiak 2018: 115-116.

emperor, worn around the neck, symbolized the truncated head of St. John placed on a tray or bowl, known to the general public from Christian rituals.⁵ According to the researcher, erasing part of the coin deprived it of *basic monetary features*.⁶ After such treatment, there emerged a disc with an anonymous head of the emperor, identified with the image of the head of St. John on a bowl.⁷ W. Siwiak writes that as one of the determinants of the function of single Roman denarii found as coins of St. John, I accepted that holes were made that testified to the use of coins as amulets and devotional items. However, some coins, when used as ornaments, could be worn without any magical or religious overtones.⁸ Further, the researcher writes about the custom of perforating coins in the Barbaricum.⁹ The interpretation of the find presented logically follows from a reading the written sources, and is convincing, but only to the extent that it is one of the possibilities. A re-analysis of this find¹⁰ leads however to the conclusion that there is much more to add to the description of the coin as well as its interpretation. The aim of this article is to complete the description of this find, to supplement the necessary information in this context about Polish and European culture in the 16th and 17th centuries, especially the custom of wearing medals and using perforated coins, and to present other possibilities of its interpretation. It is not a polemic but a necessary continuation of the discussion.



Fig. 1. Trajan's denarius found in a modern grave in Inowrocław, MJK collection (photo: K. Jarzęcki)

Description of the coin¹¹ (Fig. 1):

Trajan (98-117), denarius, 98-99 AD, RIC 6? = Woytek 57a?, mint of Rome

Obv: laureate bust of Trajan right, IMP-CAESNERVATRAI ANAVGGERM

Rev: outline of a standing female figure to the left, in the left hand a cornucopia, in the right hand stretched out in front of her, she holds an unrecognized object pointing upwards (olive branch?),¹² (P?)[...] (TR?) [...] C O S I I (P P?), dotted border silver, 2.44 g, 17.2-18.8 mm, 6 h, hole diameter 1 mm, on the right side of the figure on the reverse, at thigh height an engraving resembling the letters "M S"

site 19, A 1, object 6, no inv. MKI-A-219 I 19-10/10, 26. 03. 2010

Based on the mutual arrangement of the visible letters in the reverse legend and their arrangement concerning to the presented figure, its reconstruction seems most likely as: P M T R P C O S I I P P. The figure standing is most likely Pax. If such a reading is correct, the denarius should be classified as RIC 6 = Woytek 57a from the period autumn 98-late 99 AD¹³ (with an indication of the beginning of this period).¹⁴ The average weight of this type, calculated on the basis of 15 specimens available on acsearch.info, is 3.342 g (weight from 3.17 to 3.5 g).¹⁵ These numbers give an idea of both the low popularity of this type of denarii and a significant decrease in the weight of the specimen from Inowrocław as a result of drilling and erasure (20-30%). The metallographic research of K. Butcher and M. Ponting shows that these coins, struck even before the reform of Trajan, have a very high silver content compared to other denarii of this emperor.¹⁶

⁵ Ibid.: 120.

⁶ Ibid.: 123.

⁷ Cf. Mt. 14, 11.

⁸ Siwiak 2018: 119.

⁹ Ibid.: 119-120.

¹⁰ I would like to thank the director of the Jan Kasproicz Museum in Inowrocław and the discoverer of the object, Mr. Marcin Woźniak for providing the materials and agreeing to their publication, detailed explanations, and all kind help I needed. I am very grateful to Mr. Wojciech Siwiak for an inspiring conversation about this find at the numismatic conference in Augustów in June 2014.

¹¹ See: Jarzęcki 2021: 70, 79-80, 83.

¹² Another possibility is the caduceus, found much less frequently and in known cases in combination with the legend of PONT MAX, etc. A character depicted with this attribute is considered Felicitas. This is the type RIC 13 from 98-99 AD.

¹³ The reverse of the denarius from Numismatik Naumann, Auction 11, Lot 530, 29.12.2013, No. 1822271 seems to be the most similar in terms of iconography. Its obverse was struck with a different die.

¹⁴ Jarzęcki 2020: 86.

¹⁵ Access date: 21. 06. 2021.

¹⁶ Butcher, Ponting 2020: 421-423.



Fig. 2. Denarius subaeratus of Faustina the Younger with a drilled hole, private collection (photo: the owner of the coin)

Regarding the “Saint John’s heads”, a term appearing in Polish written sources from the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century,¹⁷ it can be assumed that such a term was given to Roman coins because portraits were very rarely presented on coins circulating in Poland in the 15th century and earlier. An eagle and a crown were often depicted in the 15th century. A crown and a lion were shown on the Prague groschen, which were popular in Poland. It was this type of coin that the population associated with money. Ancient coins with realistic portraits of emperors and their family members had to be considered something extraordinary. The depiction of a human head, for example on the most popular denarii in Poland, those of Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, or Hadrian, who wore beards, was therefore associated with the severed head of St. John the Baptist, who was imagined likewise with a beard. So it was a very similar mechanism of the formation of certain beliefs, as the one that some Celtic staters were associated with the rainbow (the so-called rainbow staters) and their creation at the point where the rainbow touches the ground. The presentation of the tribute from the Magi to the Child Jesus, described in the gospel as an occasion when they fell on their face,¹⁸ made them associated with epilepsy, and their intercession was sought to both protect against this disease and to alleviate its symptoms. So the coins of Cologne bearing their names were ready-made amulets.¹⁹ There were more similar beliefs and legends related to the iconography of coins. They came from naive faith or jokes. For example, in the 18th century, there were voices that Augustus II

the Strong ordered the genitals of Countess Cosel to be depicted on one of the thalers. These are the so-called Coselgulden^s.²⁰ I have purposefully juxtaposed the beliefs about the meaning of coin iconography of very different scopes and characters. Coming back to St. John’s heads, one can ask whether the coins with realistic portraits of Sabina, Faustina the Elder and the Younger, Lucilla, Crispina, Julia Domna, etc. were called the same. What were the chances that anyone would consider the image of empress Faustina the Younger (Fig. 2)²¹ to be the image of a bearded hermit who *has his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey*.²² The next questions concern how widespread such view was in fact, and how long did it last. It is worth asking whether the information in our sources about calling Roman coins which were found heads of Saint John is given a rank adequate to the scope of such a view in the past. Could it be that the term was a local, related to Małopolska or even to the area of Kraków? Could it be that, paradoxically, the term which was supposed to be a folk name and as such was readily repeated in literature, functioned primarily in the consciousness of educated people who knew it from literature? It is worth adding that at the beginning of the 20th century, according to descriptions of Polish folk culture, very different customs were practiced even in neighboring villages,²³ so it is worth being careful in treating the observed phenomena as a nationwide principle. As mentioned above, there are references to coins called Saint John’s heads from the 17th, 18th, and later centuries.²⁴ However, they are identifying, they are used in the context of a colloquial, folk name and, as it can be assumed, used by uneducated people. Maybe this is how one can explain the fact that Michał Greim, who lived in Kamieniec Podolski in the 19th century, when asking Jews about Saint John’s heads to buy them, received evasive answers.²⁵ Perhaps Greim, wanting to find a common language with people who did not have specialist knowledge of Roman coins, tried to use the term which in the light of literature these coins were to be called, but for Jews this term was

¹⁷ From the latest works, see: Jaworski, Crişan 2012: 259-264.

¹⁸ Mt. 2, 11.

¹⁹ Among the coins included in the treasure discovered in Bydgoszcz cathedral in 2018 is a rolled ducat of Ferdinand III from Cologne with the names of the Magi. Perhaps it was an amulet. The coin is in the collection of the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz and is presented at the permanent exhibition ‘The Bydgoszcz Treasure’ as no. 46.

²⁰ From the rich literature: Janusz 1912: 169.

²¹ Thank you very much to the owner of the coins with fig. 2 and 3 for the information and permission to publish photos.

²² Mt. 3, 4.

²³ Werner 2013: 13.

²⁴ Siwiak 2018: 116-118.

²⁵ Jaworski, Crişan 2012: 259.

incomprehensible. It is puzzling whether a person living in the 16th, 17th, and later centuries and used to coins with portraits of Polish kings could have been convinced that the Roman coins depicted the head of Saint John the Baptist on a bowl and not some ruler. It is also very important to recognize exactly what features a medal made of a Roman coin should have to consider it the St. John's head. Would we include in this category the coin (Fig. 3) shown in the photo? The only thing known about its archaeological context is that it was in a lot of coins purchased in Serbia. Similar questions can be asked about the drilled Commodus denarius, knowledge about whose archaeological context is restricted to the fact that it was found in Kokocko (powiat of Chełmno),²⁶ or the Trajanic denarius found in 2003 near Pułtusk.²⁷ Is it possible to draw such conclusions regarding coins about which we know so little and known from photos, remembering that the custom of perforating coins is already practiced from ancient times?²⁸ How can you be sure that they have not been drilled by the population of the Wielbark culture? In my opinion, in the context of the argument presented by W. Siwiak, it is worth writing about the essence of the information about the belief that Roman coins represent the head of St. John the Baptist. By the way, if such an interpretation is correct, we would be dealing with a unique case of indicating that a specific coin, the archaeological context of which is well known, was perceived in this way. There is also a question of whether the alleged need for medals with the head of St. John the Baptist has been satisfied to some extent thanks to the coins of Wrocław on which such a head was actually depicted? How many known finds of medals made of Wrocław coins are there? It is also worth analyzing the discovery of a pendant made of a Roman coin in a 16th-17th century grave in the broader context of the culture of that period, not only of folk beliefs, and considering other possible interpretations. The main question is what was or rather what could have been the state of knowledge of the woman buried in Inowrocław about the coin she wore around her neck.



Fig. 3. Hadrian's as with a hole, probably found in Serbia, private collection (photo: Owner)

The burial of a woman with a medallion made from a Trajanic denarius, dated to the 16th-17th century and discovered in Inowrocław, dates from the era in which various people were interested in ancient culture. This obvious information can be supported by a quote from A. Abramowicz's work: *Only Renaissance scholars realized that Roman coins were found in our country, they were able to define them and draw historical consequences from it.*²⁹ It should be added that in a given period these interests became popular, but their beginnings were earlier. Ancient objects that attracted attention were not only coins but also gems. One of the many known cases of the use of ancient glyptic in the Middle Ages and later times is the carnelian gem with the representation of Athena, discovered in 1937 during archaeological research in Gniezno. It can be assumed that it was lost the second half of the 12th or the first 13th century. The gem has been modified by adding a crossbar to the spear held by Athena. In this way, the image of a cross was obtained. This gem from Gniezno is not considered an import from ancient times, but an import from the Middle Ages, probably from the Rhineland.³⁰ Of course, the question arises of whether the person who used this gem was aware of its original function, or regarded it as simply being a fine old object. There are more similar examples of the Christianization of ancient glyptics. One of them is the so-called 'The Great Cameo of France', which adorned a reliquary, and until 1620 was considered as a work depicting the triumphs of Joseph, son of Jacob at the court of the pharaoh.³¹ The examples given above seem to indicate that a similar process could be at work in the case of the coin from Inowrocław – the ancient object was given a new Christian meaning. However, the matter is more complicated. First of all, the Emperor Trajan, very clearly visible on the coin and described by

²⁶ Siwiak 2018: 122-123. By the way, judging by the photo, the reverse probably shows Salus standing to the left at the altar and holding a scepter in his left hand, e.g. type RIC 33 from 181-182 AD.

²⁷ Siwiak 2018: 121; cf. Bodzek 2006: 210.

²⁸ Siwiak 2018: 119-120.

²⁹ Abramowicz 1992: 14.

³⁰ Kolendo 1998: 79-86.

³¹ Ryś 2016: 586-591.



Fig. 4. Ducat of Hamburg from 1497, The Bydgoszcz Treasure, MOB collection (photo: W. Woźniak)



Fig. 5. Ducat of Stralsund from 1638, The Bydgoszcz Treasure, MOB collection (photo: W. Woźniak)



Fig. 6. Ducat of Gelderland from 1649, The Bydgoszcz Treasure, MOB collection (photo: W. Woźniak)



Fig. 7. Medallion made of a silver Swedish coin from the 16th century, The Bydgoszcz Treasure, MOB collection (photo: W. Woźniak)



Fig. 8. Medallion made of a silver Saxon coin from 1616, The Bydgoszcz Treasure, MOB collection (photo: W. Woźniak)



Fig. 9. Jesuit medal from the first half of the 17th century, The Bydgoszcz Treasure, MOB collection (photo: W. Woźniak)

a legend, did not resemble the bearded hermit depicted, among others, on the 15th-century hellers from Wrocław, a figure ever present in Christian culture.³² Although he was not a Christian, due to the justice shown to the widow who lost her son, he was not condemned as a pagan but ended up in Limbo – the edge of Hell. Moved by this story, Pope Gregory the Great obtained for him the grace of salvation from God.³³ So Trajan became a saint, and this story is known from dozens of works of art. It is also described, inter alia, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, who placed Trajan in the sixth circle of Paradise.³⁴ Thus, it is possible to imagine that his image was worn by a Christian woman who was aware of whom the medallion represents. It is worth remembering that the Renaissance period was also a time when interest grew in ancient coins, and not only on the part of erudite scholars. From the town of Impruneta, near Florence, we know of the burial of a woman, dating to the 15th century, who held in her right hand half a bronze republican as. We also know the late-medieval burial of a man from Bologna holding a coin from the Roman Empire in his hands folded on his chest.³⁵ Of course, it is not known what the people who put these coins into the grave knew about them. We cannot be sure that they knew they were ancient coins, any more than that they did not have such knowledge. Knowledge about ancient coins, however, must have been quite common, since four silver Roman coins were recognized as such in the 1600 in a posthumous inventory from Bydgoszcz of the Lewkowicz couple, and in 1605 – a “silver Roman penny on a string” by a townswoman from Radziejów.³⁶ For the people who wrote these documents, it probably did not matter that uneducated people of their time would

³² More: Kiersnowski 1988: 370.

³³ Jońca 2019: 125-148.

³⁴ Dante, *Paradiso*, XX, 43-48.

³⁵ Fiò 2012: 34.

³⁶ Siwiak 2018: 116.

have called them Saint John's heads. Among the elite of that time, not only knowledge about such coins was obvious, but also the ability to refer to their symbolism with creativity, e.g. in the case of medals of Stephen Báthory (1576-1586).³⁷ The 16th and 17th centuries were also a time of increasing popularity of medallions made. Some idea of this phenomenon is given by the so-called "Bydgoszcz Hoard". It consists of a deposit of 486 gold coins from various European countries dating to 1495/96-1652, and ornaments, discovered in 2018 during archaeological research at the church of St. Martin and St. Nicholas in Bydgoszcz.³⁸ Three of the ducats from the hoard were drilled to make pendants from them. One was a ducat of the city of Hamburg struck in 1497 with a hole made in such a way as to display the figure of the Virgin Mary with Child on the medallion thus created³⁹ (Fig. 4), another was a 1638 ducat of Stralsund bearing a double-headed eagle⁴⁰ (Fig. 5) and the third was a ducat of Gelderland of 1649 on which a standing knight was displayed⁴¹ (Fig. 6). These medals were deposited along with other similar coins, for example a rolled ducat of the province of Holland from 1649⁴² and a rolled ducat of Ferdinand III (1637-1657) from Cologne.⁴³ Among the ornaments, there were two silver coins with small ears soldered to them. One of them was a Swedish ½ mark dating to 1545 (?)⁴⁴ (Fig. 7) and the other a Saxon 1/4 thaler from 1616⁴⁵ (Fig. 8). No coin from the "Bydgoszcz Hoard" was converted into a medallion with its reverse side intentionally erased. There was only one medallion in the hoard not made from a coin (Fig. 9): a brass Jesuit medal, coming from Italy or Spain.⁴⁶ It could best be considered as an item brought during a pilgrimage. Some other 17th century medallions, found thanks to archaeological excavation, came to Poland in this way. A possible example may be another find from Bydgoszcz – a brass medallion bearing the inscription ROMA and five figures of saints, probably referring to figures placed above the portico on

both sides of St. Peter's Square in Rome, and on the other side of the Virgin Mary with Child, found in a grave in the church cemetery at the Bernardine church.⁴⁷ Very rich material was excavated during archaeological research carried out in various sites in Gdańsk. From the "Theatrum Gedanense" come Portuguese 3 reals minted under Sebastian I between 1557 and 1578 with a pierced hole,⁴⁸ a solidus of John III of Reval, minted in 1570 (?) and pierced twice with a nail,⁴⁹ and a token of Kilian Koch (died 1632) with astronomical motifs on the obverse and an allegorical scene on the reverse with a hole drilled through from the reverse.⁵⁰ From the Lastadia site, a 15th-century token is known, which, after making a hole in it, was converted into a medallion displaying the figure of the saint bishop and several other tokens without direct reference to religious content.⁵¹ From the Swan Tower come a false 3 groschen coin (trojak) of Sigismund III with a round hole. Neither the portrait nor the coat of arms was displayed on the medal thus obtained.⁵² Examples of other finds of coins, converted into other items, in which a specific element of iconography was not emphasized, could be a token dating to 1638, or a later example from Gdańsk Market Hall area with a large central hole and two small ones on the sides,⁵³ and from the church of St. Nicholas in Gniew, a kreuzer of Ferdinand II from 1633, pierced twice without displaying either the portrait or the eagle. Also from Gniew comes a token with a hole pierced on the obverse in such a way as to display the portrait of Queen Anne Stuart. Evidently, not all medallions made from coins during the 17th century were religious. The known ones can be divided into three categories: 1. Medals of an unmistakable religious character; 2. Medals whose character is debatable. Sometimes it seems that the connection of the depiction on the coin with Catholicism could have been of some importance, as in the case of silver coins from the Bydgoszcz Hoard depicting Catholic rulers, or the rolled-up ducat bearing the names of the Magi, which were regarded as protecting from epilepsy; 3. Medallions with no apparent connection to religion. The medallion found in Inowrocław probably belongs to this division, but it could be classified into any one of these three categories. It could be

³⁷ E. g. Awianowicz 2019.

³⁸ The treasure is deposited in the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz (MOB Dep. 5955) and presented at the permanent exhibition.

³⁹ MOB Dep. 5955/279.

⁴⁰ MOB Dep. 5955/466.

⁴¹ MOB Dep. 5955/118.

⁴² MOB Dep. 5955/307.

⁴³ MOB Dep. 5955/136.

⁴⁴ MOB Dep. 5955/487.

⁴⁵ MOB Dep. 5955/488.

⁴⁶ MOB Dep. 5955/507.

⁴⁷ MOB/A-7815, see: Siwiak 2015: 266.

⁴⁸ Paszkiewicz 2013: 33, 344.

⁴⁹ Paszkiewicz 2013: 34, 344.

⁵⁰ Paszkiewicz 2013: 35, 344.

⁵¹ Paszkiewicz 2013: 62-64, 353-354.

⁵² Paszkiewicz 2013: 107, 368.

⁵³ Paszkiewicz 2013: 153, 387.

classified as belonging to the first one, if the owner believed that it depicted the head of St. John the Baptist. It is debatable whether in such a case it was necessary to wipe the reverse to deprive the coin of its monetary features (if the person was aware that the “Saint John’s head” was a coin, and this is not obvious). We could count this medal in the first or second category if the owner knew that it was Emperor Trajan, who treated the widow fairly and was saved. In that case, wiping out the Pax figure would be understood as removing the image of a pagan deity and avoiding idolatry. But we could categorize as belonging to the third, if she wore it as a nice object or was aware of its connection with the ancient world, which could be attractive to her for various reasons, possibly interconnected, e.g. as a contemporary object for saints who were alive at that time and who could use it. Yes, finding such a medallion in a sacred space seems to encourage us to recognize it as an object imbued with religious significance, but comparisons with the finds from the church of St. Nicholas in Gniew show that it is not at all obvious. Such a comparison shows, however, that there are at least several possible interpretations of the medal from Inowrocław. It is worth adding that in the second half of the 17th and in the 18th century, the division into religious and secular medallions became even more clear.⁵⁴ This is indicated, inter alia, by the finds from Gdańsk, but also from archaeological excavations of the church in Płonkowie in Cuyavia, where the most numerous coins were recovered from the second half of the 17th century, and only religious medallions come. Medallions made from coins were also worn around their necks by Jewish women living in Poland. The *Gazeta Warszawska* for May 25, 1791 mentions that “Jewish women to wear ordinary ducats around their necks with beads”.⁵⁵ It should also be bourn in mind that the custom of making medallions from ancient coins lasts from antiquity to modern times, and is found in many countries.

The custom of importing medallions from abroad, which has been mentioned above, is also associated with the conscious import of foreign coins and tokens as something not encountered in Poland, but also in the context of various concepts – impressions from travels abroad, sacred places, ancient ruins, other and cultures visited.

In addition to the medallions, among the archaeological evidence of contacts with Italy are also finds of coins, an example of which, not too distant geographically, is a copper quattrino of Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605) from the Jubilee Year 1600, found in Rynkowo near Bydgoszcz.⁵⁶ A very well-known example from contemporary Polish literature is the information from the Diaries of the Polish nobleman Jan Chryzostom Pasek that in 1660 he brought from Denmark *numismata* not known in Poland.⁵⁷ Theoretically, Trajan’s coin found in Inowrocław could also have been brought from such a trip, although it is no less likely that it was found in the area of Inowrocław, which is full of finds of ancient coins, including ones from the period of Trajan.⁵⁸

The considerations listed above concerning the culture of people in the 16th and 17th centuries should be focused on the inhabitants of Inowrocław and its immediate vicinity. As has been mentioned, it is an area rich in finds of ancient coins. The question is when they were first properly understood and appreciated. The Franciscan monastery, next to which there was a cemetery which contained the burial which interests us, possessed its own library. The library’s inventory, drawn up in 1669, i.e. after the destruction and robbery during the war with Sweden in 1655-1660, included 324 items. It included works on biblical, philosophical, hagiographic, homileutical, and legal topics, texts by ancient authors, and the work “*Chronica Polonorum*” by Maciej of Miechów (Miechowita).⁵⁹ It can be assumed that at least among the Franciscans there were people who were potentially able to recognize such coins. Both through their school and pastoral work, the Franciscans had a certain influence on their parishioners, which embraced the countryside surrounding Inowrocław, both the nobility, and the townspeople. The teaching of Latin, including reading fragments of ancient texts, was an opportunity to convey some information about the ancient world, even as basic as the names of emperors and the most important events in their lives. Pastoral work also contributed to this. One can guess that some of the talk revolved around the life of Gregory the Great – a good pope who was revered as a saint, whose prayer was so effective

⁵⁴ More: Kołyszko 2013.

⁵⁵ *Gazeta Warszawska*, no. 42, 25. 05. 1791, supplement. I would like to thank Mrs. Gabriela Frischke from the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz for the information.

⁵⁶ MOB/Mo-6174. The coin was found in 1928 or 1929 during construction work along with many ancient coins. It was purchased for the MOB in 1964.

⁵⁷ Pasek 1924: 63.

⁵⁸ An example is the Trajanic dupondius found near Latkowo (MOB/Mo-7950).

⁵⁹ Sikorski 2002: 351-352.

that he obtained salvation for a pagan and who in this way became a saint. It was also a good example for teaching about the necessity of praying for the dead, about the fact that salvation depends on God's grace, and a reminder that one should constantly strive for them, as a reminder of the warning that: *publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*.⁶⁰ The legend of the holy pope was probably eagerly spread during the Counter-Reformation since it appeared in the book of Fr. Piotr Skarga,⁶¹ and in the 18th century it was quoted by Fr. Benedykt Chmielowski in the context of prayer for the dead in the "Greek church".⁶² It is not known whether the monks from Inowrocław and their parishioners were particularly interested in ancient coins. It is significant, however, that the oldest information about such interests of people from this region, even though they refer to the first years of the 20th century, concern priests whose numismatic collections included coin finds – Antoni Laubitz from Inowrocław⁶³ and Kazimierz Miaskowski from Ostrowo.⁶⁴ In general, however, a woman buried with a medal made from a Trajanic denarius probably had more than one opportunity to learn something about Trajan. The furniture of her tomb shows that she was not a poor person. It may also have some significance that no other coins were inserted into her coffin, although such were found in a dozen or so other graves in the same cemetery or, geographically closest, in Płonkowo⁶⁵ and Słaboszewo.⁶⁶ After all, this custom is associated with a certain mentality that may not have affected her relatives, preparing her body for burial. If more detailed research confirms that the letters "M S" were indeed engraved on the medallion, there would be grounds to assume that she was literate, and the letters could stand for her initials.

⁶⁰ Mt. 21, 31.

⁶¹ Skarga 1615: 209.

⁶² Chmielowski 1745: 134.

⁶³ Jarzęcki, Rakoczy 2010: 55, 59, 60; Jarzęcki 2021: 74.

⁶⁴ Jarzęcki 2021: 75-76. In the collection of the Jan Kasprowicz Museum in Inowrocław there are 100 coins from the collection of Fr. K. Miaskowski - 3 ancient and 97 modern. Most of them are probably part of an unidentified 17th-century. Probably it was a hoard from Łąkoćcin known only from references in the relevant literature, discovered around 1911 (cf. Męclewska, Mikołajczyk 1983: 188).

⁶⁵ Grupa et al. 2015: 49-57; Jarzęcki, Nowosad, Grupa 2018.

⁶⁶ Pietroń 1996.

To summarize the considerations listed above, one could say that currently there is no single satisfactory answer as to how the medallion described in the text above was perceived by its owner. There are three possibilities: 1. It was considered to be a depiction of the head of St. John the Baptist; 2. It was treated as a depiction of Emperor Trajan; 3. It was treated primarily as a nice item, and who exactly was depicted on it was of secondary importance. Due to the uniqueness of this find, and the current state of research into medallions made from coins, it is difficult to indicate any arguments for definitively accepting or rejecting any of them. I am most inclined to consider options 2 and 3 as being the more likely. It is very possible that this issue will never be resolved, because any similar cases discovered in the future will, after all, have to be treated individually.

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