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- ²² Руссев Н.Д. Указ. соч. – С. 71. «Загорой» названа България царя Тодора Светослава и в постановлении Оффиии Газарии 1316 г. (Руссев Н.Д. Указ. соч. – С. 63).
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A FORGERY OF AN OLBIAN GOLD COIN¹

Forgeries are one of the key hazards of contemporary numismatics. This is not a new problem, but one that many generations of scholars, collectors and coin dealers have had to face since at least the 16th century. However, it is obvious that since the second half of the 19th century both the coin market and numismatic interests have been constantly expanding while at the same time coin prices have been rising. In parallel with this, the business of forgery has also been on the increase. Nowadays forgers are often skilled, well educated and experienced. They use new technologies and devices for making fakes and sophisticated methods to distribute them. This is why they are so dangerous. So, one of the most important tasks for numismatics is to document all known and recognized forgeries as well as to collect them in accessible databases. One could cite here several important publications by eminent numismatists as well as websites concerning the problem².

It is therefore not surprising that the problem also affects the numismatics of the North Black Sea Coast. An example of this is the account of Mr M. Sazonov, a counterfeiter active at Kerch in the Crimea in the 19th century, published by K.V. Golenko³.

The aim of the present paper is to publish a fake Olbian gold coin which appeared a few years ago on the market in Poland (Il. 1). The coin is held in a private collection in Poland and it is known to me only from a photograph. According to the present owner the item had been purchased in the 1990s from “a Russian”⁴. The specimen weighs 4.62 g and its diameter is c. 18 mm. The obverse type is head of Demeter wearing necklace made of dots. On the reverse

is an eagle with open wings and reverted head standing left on dolphin. Above the eagle is a corn-ear, and below the dolphin the legend OABIO.



The coin is said to be a hemistater belonging to a well known series represented by a unique stater weighing 8.49 g and held in the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique at Brussels⁵. The Brussels stater, found in the 19th century on the bank of the Dniester, is ascribed by P.O. Karyshkovskii as contemporary with the 3rd series of the 1 group of silver of similar type dated to the 3rd quarter of the 4th century B.C.⁶ It is of very good style and the dies were prepared by a skilful engraver.

Careful examination of a photograph of the “hemistater” detected serious differences compared to the Brussels piece. The differences are of both stylistic and technical nature. First, the general style of the Polish piece is coarse. This is especially well seen on the Demeter head. The nose, lips as well as the eye (which looks half profile half facing) are shown in a clumsy way. So is the lower oval of the face and the triangular end to the neck. These have nothing in common with the Brussels coin. The head has a third tier of hair which seems unlike any other Demeter heads shown on silver coins⁷. The reverse type presents no better style. The feathers on the eagle’s body are depicted as lines going from the neck to the end of its body. The tail looks like a besom, by contrast with the elegant feathers well seen on the Brussels piece. The same coarse depiction is seen on the wing feathers and the head of the bird which looks much more like a pigeon than an eagle. Similarly, the dolphin’s body is shown with none of the vivid elegance seen on the Belgian piece.

Some other observation should be made. The legend on the Brussels coin is written as OABI, not OABIO. The “hemistater” also lacks the monogram placed in the right field of the reverse of the Belgian specimen. Also, the style of the corn ear on the reverse of the Polish piece is much poorer. It could perhaps be supposed that the “hemistater” belongs to the later series as a deterioration of style is also seen in the case of later silver series. This could explain the difference of weight of the two specimens. The problem is that the corn ear symbol should not appear on later Demeter/eagle on dolphin series. Its

appearance on a later style coin would be strange. All in all, the differences between the Brussels and Polish pieces are striking.

To sum up: The style as well as the weight of the Polish “hemistater” shows it is clearly a modern forgery. An open question remains if this is one of the forgeries already mentioned by A.L. Bertier de la Garde⁸, or a fruit of a brand new production.

¹ I would like to express my deepest thanks to Mr W. M. Stancomb for discussing some points concerning the coin as well as changing my text into readable English. I would like also to thank Dr François de Callatay (Belgium) for providing me with a photograph of the unique original coin. Last but not least, I thank the owner of the coin under discussion for permitting me to examine it.

² There are several monographs published concerning particular forgers; among the most important are, Svoronos J.N. C. Christodoulos et les faussaires d'Athènes. Synopsis des coins faux de Christodoulos // *Journal international d'archéologie numismatique*, 20/1920. – P. 97-107, and 21/1927. – P. 141-146 (reprinted as Christodoulos *The Counterfeiter*. – Chicago, 1974); Hill G.F. *Becker the Counterfeiter*. – London, 1925; Kinns P. *The Caprara Forgeries*. – London, 1984 and a set of books by I. Prokopov concerning Bulgarian counterfeiters of ancient coins (for example, Prokopov I. *Coin Forgeries and Replicas 2006*. – Sofia, 2007). There used to be published a professional journal devoted to fake coins. At first it was known as *Bulletin on Counterfeits* (edited by the International Bureau for the Suppression of Counterfeit Coins), then renamed *The Counterfeit Coin Bulletin* (2000-2002; published by the American Numismatic Society). The contents of the *Bulletin on Counterfeits* are accessible on the website: <http://www.forgerynetwork.com>.

³ Cf. Golenko K.V. The method of counterfeiting ancient coins of the Bosphorus by M. Sazonov as told by himself - translation and commentary // *ANS Museum Notes*, 20. – 1975. – P. 25-28; see also Болдырев С.И. Кто чеканил монеты ΣΑΜΜΑ? // *Боспорский феномен: Проблема соотношения письменных и археологических источников*. – СПб., 2005. – С. 375–378.

⁴ This could mean not only a citizen of Russia, Ukraine or Byelorussia but also a Russian speaker from other countries once forming a part of the USSR.

⁵ Pick B. *Die Antiken Münzen Nord- Griechenlands, Band 1. Dacien und Moesien*. – Berlin, 1898. – Pl. IX, 1; *La Collection Lucien de Hirsch / ed. P. Naster*. – Brussels: *Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Cabinet de Medailles*, 1959. – P. 144, no. 867; Карышковский П.О. Монетное дело и денежное обращение Ольвии (VI в. до н.э.–IV в. н.э.). – Одесса, 1968 [2003]. – С. 267f, № 24, табл. XI= A, 6; Его же. *Монеты Ольвии*. – К., 1988. – С. 60, рис. 6, 9; табл. 12, 8; Анохин В. А. *Монеты античных городов северо-западного причерноморья*. – К., 1989. – С. 35f, 106, № 94, табл. X (with dating 330-310 B.C.).

⁶ Карышковский П.О. *Монеты Ольвии*. – 60.

⁷ I owe this observation to Mr W.M. Stancomb.

⁸ Cf. Карышковский П.О. *Монетное дело и денежное обращение Ольвии...* - С. 27, прим. 9. I had no access to A.L. Bertier de la Garde work.