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COINS FROM GREEK CITIES
ON THE NORTHERN COAST
OF THE BLACK SEA IN THE COLLECTION
OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN CRACOW
I. OLBIAN “ASES”

The ancient coin collection of the National Museum in Cracow contains a small group of coins emitted by cities on the northern coast of the Black Sea\(^1\). This group presently consists of 25 coins from Panticapaeum, 25 from Olbia, and 1 from Tiras. Even though this is not a large collection in comparison to the collections of these types of coins held by other Polish museums\(^2\), it nevertheless deserves


attention. The present article opens a series of works devoted to the publication of these coins from the Cracow museum’s collection.

Ancient Olbia was founded by Milesian colonists in the early 6th century B.C., at the mouth of the Hypanis (Boh) and Borysthenes (Dniepr) rivers\(^3\). Its extraordinarily original minting has for some time now aroused the interest of numismatists, and there is an extensive literature\(^4\). Polish scholars have also devoted a great deal of attention to this subject\(^5\). One of the most interesting groups produced by this mint consists of the so-called “ases”\(^6\). These are large bronze coins, made by the casting technique. The name “as” was given to them in

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the early 1800s, in view of similarity of their minting technique to the Roman *aes grave*. 

The "ases" emitted in Olbia have aroused controversy both as to their systematics and to their dating. They are divided into four basic series, whose emission dates fall between 475 and 330 B.C. The earliest "ases," cast in two denominations (122 and 36 g), had on the obverse a dolphin and the head of Athene in an Attic helmet, while the reverse was occupied by the representation of a circle with four spokes and the inscription ΕΠΙ ΠΑΥΣ, later replaced by ΠΑΥΣ. This first emission is dated to the years 475-450 B.C. The second series of "ases" includes three denominations. All three have on the obverse the image of the Medusa *en face*. On the reverse of the largest denomination (weight ca. 115 g) is depicted an eagle with outstretched wings, holding a dolphin in his talons, and the legend ΔΠΙΧ. The coins of the two smaller denominations (25 and 11.5 g) maintain on the reverse the representation of the solar wheel from the first series of "ases," but with the same legend, ΔΠΙΧ, as found on the largest denomination. The series of coins under discussion is dated to the years 450-425 B.C. The third series of cast coins was limited to only one denomination, ca. 22 g. It preserves on the obverse the *gorgoneion*, but the reverse of these coins is decorated with an eagle on a dolphin, this time, however, with folded wings. This representation is accompanied by the legend ΟΛΒΙ or ΟΛΒΙΟ. Qualitatively this is a very essential change, since the proper names of Pausanias and Arichos have been

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8 For the history of research on the "ases," see Karyškovskij, *Z istorii...*; by the same author, *Money...* pp. 41 ff.

9 In dating the various series of "ases" I have relied on the conclusions of P. O. Karyškovskij (cf. note 14).

10 Karyškovskij, *Z istorii...*; A. N. Zograf regards the coins with this legend as counterfeit (Antichnye..., p. 125, note 1).

11 E. H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks: A Survey of Ancient History and Archeology on the North Coast of the Euxine*, Cambridge 1913, Plate II. 2; Zograf, *Antichnye...* pl. XXX, 3-4; SNG München, no. 64; SNG GB Nos. 377-378; Karyškovskij, *Z istorii...*; by the same author, *Money...* pp. 41 ff., il. 5, 2-3; Mieleczarek, 'As'-moneř..., p. 110; coins of this type with no legend are also known, cf. SNG München, no. 63.


13 Minns, *Scythians...*, Plate II.1; Zograf, *Antichnye...*, Plate XXXI. 1; SNG München no. 69; SNG GB nos. 379-384.

14 For the larger denomination, see Zograf, *Antichnye...* Plate XXXI. 2; SNG GB nos. 385-386; for the smaller denomination, *Zograf, Antichnye...*, Plate XXXI.3; SNG GB Nos. 387-389.

replaced by the *ethnikon* of the inhabitants of Olbia\(^1\). The series under discussion was emitted in the first quarter of the 4th century B.C. The fourth and final series of "asses" was made up of emissions that bore on the obverse a head of Demeter, presented frontally, and on the reverse, an eagle with open wings on a dolphin, and the legend ΩΑΒΗΓ\(^1\). These last coins, dated to the years 350-330 B.C., were emitted in only one denomination, ca. 112 g.

In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., such "asses" performed the function on the local monetary market of a full-valued bronze coin. As has been demonstrated by Russian and Ukrainian numismatists, they constituted the counterpart of the obol and its 1/3, 1/4, and 1/8 fractions\(^1\). In addition to "asses," another type of cast bronze coin was also emitted in Olbia: the so-called "dolphins"\(^1\). The custom of using cast bronze coins was in any event not limited to Olbia alone, but was a characteristic phenomenon through the northwestern region of the Black Sea basin. Beginning towards the end of the seventh century B.C. and throughout the sixth, Olbia, Apollonia, and Istria emitted coins in the shape of arrowheads\(^2\). In the latter half of the sixth century B.C., the Istria mint produced small cast bronze coins showing a solar wheel with four spokes on the obverse, and the legend ΣΤ on the reverse\(^2\). In Niconium, at the mouth of the Dniester, cast coins on the model of the Olbian "asses," with the image of an owl on the obverse and a solar wheel on the reverse, were issued in the name of Skyles, King of Scythia\(^2\). The impact of the

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\(^1\) The problem of interpreting the inscriptions on the Olbian "asses" is discussed in some detail by *Vinogradov, Politieeskaja...*, pp. 111 ff. The first inscriptions, ΠΕΠΙ ΠΑΥΣ, are interpreted as the name of an official. The next inscriptions, ΠΑΥΣ and APIX, are taken to be the names of the tyrants who ruled the city at that time. The appearance of the city's name on its coins is associated with the fall of tyranny in Olbia at the end of the fourth century B.C. Cf. also Mieleczarek, *Na grunicy...*, p. 12.

\(^1\) Cf. Minns, *Scythians...*, Plate II, 4; *Zograf, Money...*, Plate XXXI, 4; SNG München nos. 75-76; SNG GB nos. 390-393; Karyszkovskij, *Zistoriji...* by the same author, *Money...*, pp. 57 ff; Mieleczarek, *'As's monter...*, pp. 113 ff.


\(^2\) The coins bearing the legend ΣΥΓΛΕ (or a variant) on the obverse, which occur in three denominations, were emitted in the first half of the fifth century B.C. On this topic, see
Olbia mint is also visible in Cercinitis, located on the west coast of the Crimean. In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., this city emitted cast bronze fish, identified as *bieluga huso huso*, in imitation of the Olbian "dolphins." At this same mint, in the fifth century B.C., small cast coins were also produced, with a dolphin on the obverse and the letters KA on the reverse. As full-valued bronze coins, the Olbian "ases" constituted a supplement for the electron and silver coins circulating on the local market. The bronze coins in question had a relatively limited local range. There are a relatively small number of known "ases" finds outside the area that was under the direct influence of Olbia.

The National Museum in Cracow acquired its first "ases" in 1908, when a set of objects bequeathed by Gustaw Steingraber made their way to the museum's collection. The legacy included objects of various sorts, among which were Polish and ancient coins. From two old inventory cards we learn that among these latter were two large bronze coins, which in all likelihood should be identified as Olbian "ases." The first of these cards contains the following description: "Bronze


medallion; on one side, the head of a woman; on the other, an eagle with a Greek inscription.” The preserved pencil sketch of the coin, with traces of the post-casting grinder and a diameter of 7 cm, makes it possible to identify the coin in question as a cast Olbian “as.” The description implies that this was a coin belonging to the last series of “ases,” dated to 350-330 B.C. It is much less likely that the gorgoneion familiar from the second series of “ases” would be described as “a woman’s head.” The description of the second coin is harder to interpret: “Ancient bronze medallion, on one side a head, on the other a griffin’s head.” From this description there is no way to deduce the series of “ases” to which the coin in question should be assigned. The diameter indicated on the card (7 cm) and the pencil sketch of the coin allow only for the supposition that it belonged among the largest coins cast in Olbia.

That same year, 1908, one other “as” made its way to the collections of the National Museum in Cracow. This time the description found on the old card is far more competently written: “Copper coin, completely oxidized, with image of face of the Medusa with tongue extruded, en face; on the reverse, an indistinct relief (lapping on a dolphin), to the sides of the fish and the bird are the letters X A P I.” What is more, the description also contains the characteristic name of the coins in question: “Oblian as (Olbia Sarmatica).” This was thus an obol emitted in the second series of “ases,” in the years 450-425 B.C. It is also noted on the card that the example in question had been “acquired from the excavation at Olbia.” The coin had been obtained from Ignacy Terlecki (1860-1916), who at that time lived in Kertch on the Crimea. Terlecki was one of the most outstanding collectors of coins from the Greek colonies on the northern coast of the Black Sea, and his collection presently constitutes the foundation of the outstanding collection of such coins at the National Museum in Warsaw. But Terlecki’s interests in art objects were much broader. He carried on an exchange of museum exhibits with the National Museum in Cracow. The Olbian coin in question, along with a host of other numismatic artifacts and works of ancient art, were sent to the Cracow museum in exchange for copies of engravings held by the latter in duplicate. In all likelihood we are indebted precisely to Ignacy Terlecki for the relatively precise identification of the coin in question. The two “ases” described earlier had been acquired only after the death of the previous owner, Gustaw Steingraber, which most likely explains their rather inadequate identification on the inventory card.

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28 One argument for the interpretation of the coin in question as an Olbian “as” may be the fact that Steingraber also donated to the museum other coins from Greek cities on the northern Black Sea coast.
31 It should be noted that in those days the Numismatics Department of the National Museum in Cracow, which was particularly oriented towards Polish numismatics, did not have access to the appropriate scholarly literature on Greek coins.
All three of the examples under discussion have now been lost. The documentation indicates that by 1951 the three “ases” were no longer in the Cracow museum’s collections\textsuperscript{32}. Since the numismatic collection of the National Museum in Cracow suffered certain losses during the Second World War, it is safe to assume that the coins in question disappeared during this period\textsuperscript{33}. Yet another “as” made its way to the National Museum in 1948, however, along with a group of coins and medals belonging to Leon Kostka (1871-1948)\textsuperscript{34}. This coin belongs to the fourth series of Olbian “ases,” dated to the years 350-330 B.C., with the head of Demeter on the obverse, and an eagle holding a dolphin in its talons on the reverse, with the legend OABIVH. The coin from the Cracow museum’s collection has an additional symbol, in the form of an ear of grain and the letter Y, which enables it to be assigned to the latest emissions of this series of cast Olbian coins\textsuperscript{35}.

The Olbian coins discussed above, which once were or now are part of the collection at the National Museum in Cracow, constitute a small but interesting group. As one would expect, they belong to the most popular types of the second (cat. 1) and fourth (cat. 2 and 3) series of “ases.” Particularly noteworthy is the coin obtained from Ignacy Terlecki, which is labeled as having been found in Olbia (cat. 1). The coins were obtained in part thanks to the generosity of private citizens (in this case Gustaw Steingraber and Leon Kostka), and in part thanks to the diligence of Feliks Kopera, the museum’s director, and Marian Gumowski, the custodian of the numismatic collection, who made the decision to give the engraving copies to Ignacy Terlecki in return for an Olbian “as.” One can only regret that these objects, of extraordinary importance for the Cracow museum, did not survive the war, and have been lost. They constituted a relatively representative group, given Polish circumstances, of Olbian cast coins. At present the collection of the National Museum in Cracow contains only the “as” obtained from the collection of Leon Kostka (cat. 2).

\textsuperscript{32} In that year a physical inventory was made in the Numismatic Room. Since there is no stamp on the cards in question to verify the existence of the object, the Olbian “ases” in question by that time were no longer in the collection.

\textsuperscript{33} Though the numismatic collection was hidden, the German occupiers found it; cf. B o d z e k, \textit{The History...}, p. 72; B. Ha c z e w s k a and E. Ko r c z y n s k a, \textit{Coins and Medals at the Numismatic Cabinet}, (in:) Emeryk Hutten-Czapski...p. 50.

\textsuperscript{34} On the subject of Leon Kostka, a well-known collector who was also the custodian of the National Museum in Cracow, see K. Bu cz k o w s k i, (in:) PSB, vol. XIV, Wroclaw 1968-69, pp. 351ff.

\textsuperscript{35} cf. K a r y š k o v s k i j, \textit{Money...}, p. 57ff; \textit{SNG Cap.} no. 73 ; \textit{SNG GB} no. 393.
CATALOGUE:

1. Olbia, ca. 450-425 B.C.;
   obv. Gorgon’s head en face;
   rev. Eagle with outspread wings on a dolphin, APIX;
   AE;
   wt.-?; dia.-68mm; axe-?;
   n.o F.K. 6152\textsuperscript{36};
   acquired in 1908 r., from I. Terlecki;
   Found in Olbia before 1908;
   Zograf, Antičnye..., Pl. XXXI, 1; SNG GB nos 379-384;

\begin{center}
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2. Olbia, ca. 350-330 B.C.;
   obv. Head of Demeter en face;
   rev. Eagle on a dolphin on l.; below, ear of grain and Y, HIBAO;
   AE;
   wt- 111.74 g; dia.- 70.8mm; axe- 12.00;
   inv. no. MNK-VII-A- 4066;
   acquired in 1948 r. from L. Kostka;
   Zograf, Antičnye..., Pl. XXXI, 4; SNG Cop. nr 73; SNG GB, nr 393;

\textsuperscript{36} Coin lost before 1945.
3. Olbia? ca. 350-330 B.C.?
obv. Female head;
rev. Eagle, Greek inscription;
AE,
wt-?; dia.- 70 mm; axe-?;
no F.K. 5452\textsuperscript{37};
acquired in 1908 from G. Steingraber’s donation (Book of Entry no 3662);
cf. Zograf, Antičnye..., Pl. XXXI, 4; SNG Cop. nr 73; SNG GB, nos 390-393;

4. Olbia?
obv. Head;
rev. Head of a Griffon !?
AE, wt-?; dia.-70 mm; axe-?;
no F.K. 5454\textsuperscript{38};
acquired in 1908 from G. Steingraber’s donation (Book of Entry no 3662).

\textsuperscript{37} Specimen lost before 1945.
\textsuperscript{38} Coin lost before 1945.