

Wiadomości Numizmatyczne, R. LXIII, 2019, z. 207

DOI 10.24425/wn.2019.131223

NEVYAN MITEV

**COINS OF SIGISMUND III VASA (1587–1632)
FROM THE REGION OF VARNA, BULGARIA**

ABSTRACT: The coins of Sigismund III Vasa (1587–1632) were one of the most numerous foreign specimens to be found all over the Ottoman Empire. They were part of the coin circulation in the Bulgarian lands at the end of the 16th and in the first half of the 17th century. The Sigismund's coins were preferred also as hoarding issues and that is why they are often presented in coin hoards from that time. The aim of this study is to present the variety of denominations of the ruler found in the region of Varna and to explain their significance and the role in the coin circulation in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th century.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Zygmunt III Waza, Varna, Bułgaria, trojak

KEYWORDS: Sigismund III Vasa, Varna, Bulgaria, three groschen

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, better known as Rzeczpospolita, was established by the Union of Lublin in July 1569 concluded between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1587 Sigismund III Vasa was enthroned and ruled until 1632.¹ During his long reign, the king minted a huge number of coins, which became one of the main currency in Central and Eastern Europe.

A lot of coins of Sigismund III Vasa were found in the Bulgarian lands. The first researcher who paid attention to these issues was Todor Gerasimov. The numismatist documented several hoards of Sigismund's coins.² Milko Mirchev published one of the largest and most important treasures from the Bulgarian lands from the Ottoman period. In this coin hoard the coins of the Polish-Lithuanian

¹ Arnold, Zhihovski 1965, pp. 75–76.

² Gerasimov 1964, p. 222; Gerasimov 1946, p. 236; Gerasimov 1952, p. 402; Gerasimov 1964 a, p. 243; Gerasimov 1955, p. 608; Gerasimov 1959, p. 357.

ruler are represented by more than 100 specimens.³ Miroslav Klasnakov published several coin hoards from the southern Black Sea coast⁴ and Lachezar Lazarov from northeastern Bulgaria.⁵ In his book H. Haritonov makes an attempt to present all European coins found in the Bulgarian lands dated to the period of the 15th–18th century.⁶ Krasimir Krastev made a huge contribution to the research of the abovementioned coins. In his general research on the coin circulation in the Ottoman state during the second half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century he made an attempt to collect, document and analyze the abovementioned issues.⁷ In a separate article, the author of this study and the co-author Dragomir Georgiev, published the coins of Rzeczpospolita (16th–18th century) from the depository of the Museum of History in the town of Provadia.⁸ In another research, with the co-author Vladimir Bekov, we have presented the coins of Sigismund III from the collection of the lawyer Hristo Raev from Varna.⁹ The list of the numismatists who have published coins of Sigismund III from the Bulgarian lands presented in this review is certainly not complete, but here I discuss only those whose contribution is the most significant.

It is worth mentioning the researches of A. Mikołajczyk as well. He studied the issue of the 16th–18th century Polish coins occurrence outside the country of their origin¹⁰, including the Bulgarian lands.¹¹

K. Krastev established that till 2015 only three hoards from the region of Varna with coins of Sigismund III were documented. Single finds have also been found in this geographical area. Most of them are kept by individual collectors and that is why it is difficult to define the exact number of coins. Here I am going to discuss only the published issues.

PROVADIA

It is a small town located 45 km west of Varna. During the Middle Ages it was one of the most important fortresses in the Bulgarian state.

We know 8 specimens of three groschen (or trojaks as they are also known) of Sigismund III found in the area. The group consists of one specimen from Poznań, struck in 1591, three coins from Bydgoszcz struck in 1596, 1598 and 1599, one from Olkusz, 1600 and another coin from 1600.

³ Mirchev 1970, pp. 211–216.

⁴ Klasnakov 2013, pp. 132–146.

⁵ Lazarov 1990, p. 28–44.

⁶ Haritonov 1998.

⁷ Krastev 2015.

⁸ Mitev, Georgiev 2017, pp. 599–604.

⁹ Bekov, Mitev 2015, p. 84.

¹⁰ Mikołajczyk 1979, pp. 165–265; Mikołajczyk 1986, pp. 139–209. About this question see also his joint research with Vinogradov: Mikołajczyk, Vinogradov 1977, pp. 129–144.

¹¹ Mikołajczyk 1982, pp. 18–32.



Figs. 1–8. Coins from the depository of the Museum of History in the town of Provadia.
 1. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Poznań, 1591; 2. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Bydgoszcz, 1596; 3. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Bydgoszcz, 1598; 4. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Bydgoszcz, 1599; 5. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Olkusz, 1600; 6. Three groschen of Sigismund III, 1600; 7. A counterfeit of three groschen of Sigismund III; 8. A counterfeit of three groschen of Sigismund III.

Two specimens among the coins presented in this paper are very interesting. They are distinguished with schematics, incorrect inscriptions, and also struck on a copper core. All these characteristics indicate counterfeit. Similar specimens are known from other regions in Europe. Different issues of Sigismund III — three groschen, six groschen (szóstak), thalers, etc. were objects of counterfeit.¹²

¹² Boyko-Gagarin 2014, pp. 42–45; Boyko-Gagarin 2012, pp. 165–170; Boyko-Gagarin 2017.

I suppose that they are also local products. This tradition in Bulgarian lands was established in the Antiquity.¹³ More similar finds from the region have to be published so that such an opinion can be proved. Till now the most logical opinion seems to be the suggestion that these issues are counterfeits from the lands of Rzeczpospolita, perhaps its eastern part — today the territories of Ukraine and Belarus, which were brought to the Bulgarian market due to the trade through the lands of Wallachia.

THE COLLECTION OF MR. HRISTO RAEV

Three more specimens of three groschen are kept in the private collection of Mr. Hristo Raev from Varna. According to the information they originate from the region of Varna. The coins are as follows: one from Riga, 1597, one from Kraków, 1619 and one struck in 1594 in Poznań.



Figs. 9–11. Coins from the collection of Mr. Hristo Raev from Varna. 9. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Poznań, 1594; 10. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Riga, 1597; 11. Three groschen of Sigismund III from Kraków, 1619.

THE HOARD OF DABRAVINO

As I already mentioned the coin hoard of Dabravino is one of the biggest hoards from the Ottoman period, found in the Bulgarian lands. It was found at the beginning of the 20th century. The hoard consists of 1451 silver coins (571 European and 880 Ottoman). The coins date back to the 16th–17th century. From all the issues, 165 coins were struck during the reign of Sigismund III Vasa

¹³ Mitev, Georgiev 2017, pp. 599–604.

— 127 three groschen, 9 six groschen, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ thalers.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the hoard was published more than 30 years ago, there are no photos of most of the coins and some mistakes in their identification might have been made. Only one specimen has a photo, but the coin is in very bad condition. From the description of the coins it could be concluded that most of them were struck in Polish mints, in Poznań, Kraków, Olkusz, Bydgoszcz, etc. In addition, coins of Lithuania and Gdańsk are presented. I would like to mention that the coin hoard of Dabravino definitely deserves further research.



Fig. 12. An ort ($\frac{1}{4}$ thaler) of Sigismund III struck in Kraków, 1623.
From the coin hoard of Tutrakantsi.

THE COIN HOARD OF TUTRAKANTSI

The coin hoard of Tutrakantsi was found in 1986 during the ploughing of a field. It consists of 315 coins. From them 309 are Ottoman and six are European ones. The only coin of Sigismund III is an ort ($\frac{1}{4}$ thaler), struck in Krakow in 1623.¹⁵

THE COIN HOARD OF NEVSHA

In 1966, in the locality of „Bozluca“, in the village of Nevsha, municipality of Provadia, a coin hoard of silver Ottoman and European coins was found. The treasure was given to the Museum of History — Provadia. It consists of 628 pieces. 606 Ottoman and 22 European coins. The latest issues are from the time of sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839), from the first half of 19th century. That is why it may be concluded that the hoard was hidden in the first half of 19th century.¹⁶

In this deposit the coins of Sigismund III are represented by 6 specimens of three groschen. The coins come only from the Polish mints — Poznań, Bydgoszcz and Kraków.

¹⁴ Mirchev 1970, pp. 211–216.

¹⁵ Lazarov 2004, pp. 74–102.

¹⁶ Lazarov 1990, pp. 28–44.

THE COIN HOARD OF DALGOPOL

In 1956, while digging house foundations in Dalgopol, a hoard of 1500 coins was found. The bigger part of them were akches of the Ottoman Sultans from Mehmed III (1594–1609) to Murad IV (1623–1640). Only one groschen and one thaler were struck by Sigismund III Vasa. The coin hoard was hidden in c. 1635–1640.¹⁷

* * *

The most common coins of Sigismund III in the Bulgarian lands are the trojaks. The local people from Bulgaria and Wallachia called them “babki”. A lot of the abovementioned coins are highly worn out and perforated. This fact indicates their secondary use as decorations.

K. Krastev analyzed the reasons for the massive existence of the coins of Rzeczpospolita in the Bulgarian lands. According to him, this fact testifies to the powerful economy of the country at the end of 16th and in the first half of 17th century. A large share of revenues of the crown was connected with export of agricultural produce. In Krastev's opinion, the coins of Rzeczpospolita reached not only the Ottoman state, but other countries as well, e.g. Russia and German states.¹⁸ T. Gerasimov believes that the wide distribution of the coins and their good reception by the local people was owing to their high quantity, which favored their inclusion in the trade operations in the Levant. The author also believes that the coins of Sigismund III Vasa entered the Balkan Peninsula through land trade and mostly from Wallachia.¹⁹

During the Ottoman period, one of the biggest Dubrovian colonies in the Bulgarian lands was located in the town of Provadia. Till now almost all the known specimens have been found in the area of the town. There is no doubt that the Dubrovian merchants used the issues of Sigismund III in their trade with the European continent.²⁰

The other option is that the coins entered the region of Varna via one of the biggest sea ports on the Black sea coast — Varna. At that time, the city was conducting sea trade on a large scale and was one of the most important ports in the Ottoman country.

Probably both opinions are correct and the coins of Sigismund III entered the region of Varna by land and sea.

¹⁷ Gerasimov 1959, p. 357; Mikołajczyk 1982, p. 24; Teodosiev 2017, p. 79.

¹⁸ Krastev 2015, p. 161.

¹⁹ Gerasimov 1964, p. 222.

²⁰ Mitev, Georgiev 2017, pp. 599–604.

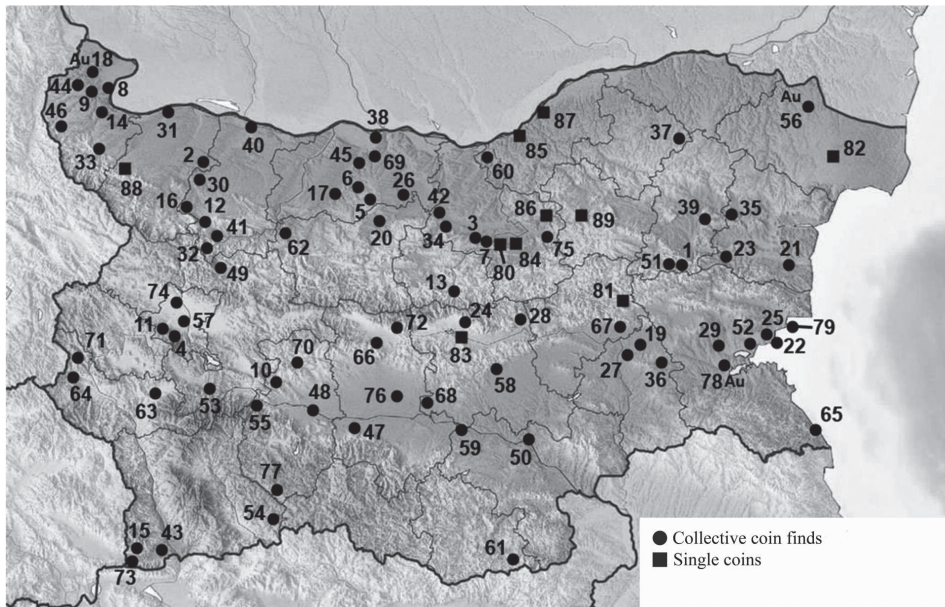


Fig. 13. A map showing the distribution of the coins of Sigismund III in Bulgaria: after Krastev 2015.

Although the presented coins were not found during archaeological excavations and got worn out throughout the years, they are a valuable source for the history of the region of Varna during the Ottoman rule. There is no doubt that in this geographical area, as in the entire country, these issues did circulate for a particular period of time.

Future archaeological research on the region of Varna as well as the publication of new numismatic material will complement the different types of coins of Rzeczpospolita which entered the coin circulation in this geographical area and the Bulgarian lands during the Ottoman rule.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnold S., Zhihovski M.

1965 *Ocherk po istoria na Polsha*, Sofia 1965.

Bekov V., Mitev N.

2015 *Antichni, srednovekovni i renesansovi moneti ot kolektiyata na Hristo Raev*, Varna 2015.

Boyko-Gagarin A.

2014 *Vysokokachestvennaya poddelka polyskogo troyaka Sigizmunda III Vazy, chekanki Poznani 1597 goda*, *Violity: otdyh i puteshestvia*, № 2, 2014, pp. 42–45.

Mikołajczyk A., Vinogradov V.

1977 *Moneta polska w strefie czarnomorskiej i kaukaskiej*, *Wiadomości Numizmatyczne XXI*, 1977, z. 3, pp. 129–144.

Mirchev M.

1970 *Edno sakrovishte ot srednovekovni moneti*, *Izvestia na Narodnia muzey — Varna, VI (XXI)*, 1970, pp. 211–216.

Mitev N., Georgiev D.

2017 *Moneti na Zhechpospolita (XVI–XVIII v.) ot fonda na Istoricheskia muzey v Provadia*, *Dobrudzha (32)* 2017, pp. 599–604.

Teodosiev N.

2017 *Opis na kolektivnite monetni nahodki ot Bulgaria*, tom II, Sofia 2017.

MONETY ZYGMUNTA III WAZY (1587–1632) Z REGIONU WARNY W BUŁGARII

(Streszczenie)

Pod koniec XIV wieku Bułgaria znalazła się pod panowaniem osmańskim. W ciągu pierwszej połowy XV wieku Turcy zdołali podbić niemal cały Półwysep Bałkański. Po bitwie pod Mohaczem w 1526 najeźdźcy podbili nawet część Węgier. W wyniku tej ekspansji w połowie XVI wieku państwo osmańskie rozciągało się na trzech kontynentach — azjatyckim, europejskim i afrykańskim. Na tym rozległym terytorium oprócz monet osmańskich w obiegu obecne były również emisje obce. Monety Zygmunta III Wazy (1587–1632) były jednymi z najpowszechniejszych monet napływowych spotykanych na całym terytorium Imperium Osmańskiego. Pod koniec wieku XVI i na początku XVII stulecia funkcjonowały one również w obiegu na ziemiach bułgarskich. Monety Zygmunta III stanowiły także preferowany środek tezauryzacji, stąd ich częsta obecność w skarbach z tego okresu. Celem niniejszego studium jest prezentacja nominałów władcy znajdujących w rejonie Warny i omówienie ich znaczenia i roli w obiegu pieniężnym Imperium Osmańskiego w XVI i XVII wieku.

The author's address:

Nevyan Mitev

nevyan_1986@abv.bg

ORCID: 0000-0002-7432-8207