

Some forgeries of the Leopold I Habsburg Kreutzer coins (1657-1705) found in Transcarpathia and Bucovina

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Throughout the centuries, counterfeiting money was a very profitable business and even the harshest penalties could not prevent the recurrence of such misdeeds. Usually, the forgers turned their attention to the most popular types of the coins on the monetary market.

The silver Kreutzer coins struck by the Emperor Leopold I Habsburg (1657-1705) were frequently used in the commercial exchanges from the historical regions of Transcarpathia and Bucovina. There is no wonder that these popular coins were often falsified. This article is one of the first publications about the counterfeits of Leopold I Habsburg coins found in the nowadays Ukraine, presenting seven single finds of forgeries from Transcarpathia and Bucovina. All these coins are counterfeits and not officially debased coins or imitations. Unlike imitations, these fake coins were made to minimize the production costs and to increase the profit.

The investigations focused only on forgeries of the 3 and 15 Kreutzer denominations. The explanations behind the apparition of these forgeries are the following:

- The 15 Kreutzer coins had a high value, so counterfeiting them was a profitable action;
- The 3 Kreutzer coins were the most popular Kreutzer issue, so falsifying them minimized the risk of disclosing the fakes.

The 6 Kreutzer coins circulated less in Transcarpathia and Bucovina; forgeries of these issues were very rare.

The fake Kreutzer coins reported in this paper have as prototypes original coins struck by the Košice, Prague and Kremnica mints.

All the investigated forgeries were faithful reproductions of the originals. Due to their high quality, it probably took a long time until they were exposed as fakes. In this period, low quality forgeries practically disappeared from the market because of the high technical level reached by the state mints. Consequently, the forgers faced a difficult challenge trying to reproduce the coins struck by the official mints that employed modern devices.

The forgeries were produced in the following stages:

- Producing the blanks using a base metal/alloy – copper or brass (Cu-Zn alloy);
- Producing the dies by engraving;
- Striking the blanks with the counterfeit dies;
- Adding a metal layer onto the blank surfaces to create the appearance of a valuable/original coin.

The application of a silvery superficial layer was a step of utmost importance in the forging process. Such appearance could be produced either by silver amalgamation or by tinning. X-ray fluorescence

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(XRF)¹, a modern method of numismatic investigation, provided some hints about the method of the finishing used in these particular cases. XRF analyses were made on four coins (nos. 1-2 and 6-7); the results are also given in the catalogue.

The element with the highest percentage served to identify the metal/alloy used to produce the blanks. The XRF data indicate that the forgers employed either copper (nos. 6-7) or brass (Cu-Zn alloy) (nos. 1-2).

Tinning can be evidenced by the presence of tin on the coin surface. This was the case only for the coin no. 6, on which 0.11% Sn was detected. On the other hand, silver was detected on the surface of coins nos. 2, 6 and 7 (0.30%, 0.18% and 1.92 % Ag, respectively). No mercury was detected in these coins.

The presence of corrosion products on the surfaces of coins nos. 2 and 7 prevented the clear identification of the finishing method in these particular cases.

It is a difficult task to localize the workshops where these forgeries were produced. The counterfeits might have been manufactured in Transcarpathia and Bucovina, but the Hungarian Kingdom, Transylvania and Wallachia cannot be excluded. Through commercial exchanges, such forgeries might have circulated far away from their manufacturing place, especially if they were part of large batches also containing original coins.

We can speculate that the individuals who falsified the Kreutzer coins were skilled metalworkers, such as jewellers, blacksmiths or people with a previous work experience in official mints.

Summarizing, our investigations led to the following conclusions:

- The considerable amounts of Leopold I Habsburg Kreutzer coins on the monetary market caused their use as prototypes for the production of forgeries;
- The most frequently falsified denominations were the 3 and 15 Kreutzer;
- No counterfeit of the 6 Kreutzer coins was found until present in Ukraine. This absence can be explained by the reduced frequency on the market of these coins, but also by the fact that the 6 Kreutzer coins were rarely encountered in Transcarpathia and Bucovina hoards;
- The low denominations of Kreutzer coins (2, 1½, 1, ½ and ¼) were not often found in the monetary circulation from Transcarpathia and Bucovina, so forgeries of these small coins of Leopold I Habsburg also appear to be very rare;
- All the investigated coins are skilled forgeries, in keeping with the high technical level of the state mints that employed modern equipments and techniques;

The forgeries of the Leopold I Habsburg Kreutzer published in this paper demonstrate the extent of the counterfeiting activities in Transcarpathia and Bucovina at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries.

We are thankful to Lilia Dergaciova for the critical notes on this article and to Alexander Litvinchuk for providing the data about the finding of the counterfeited coins.

¹ The XRF data were obtained using an Expert 3L W108U spectrometer; the analyses were made at the Institute of Physics, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kiev).

CATALOGUE

Forgeries of the 3 Kreutzer coins of Leopold I Habsburg

Prague prototype, year 1699 (V. Novotný, *Mince Leopolda I. 1657-1705*, Hodonin, 2005, p. 49)

1. AE 1.75 g; 20x21.5 mm; alloy composition: Cu 82.69%, Zn 16.98%, Pb 0.18%, Fe 0.08%, Ni 0.04%, As 0.03%.
Obverse: LEOPOLDUS D G XIS (3) AGHR REX
Reverse: 16-99 GER HUNRO (GE) HENIAE

Košice prototype, year 1697 (*ibidem*, p. 52)

2. AE 1.66 g; 19.5x20 mm; alloy composition: Cu 82.69%, Zn 12.56%, Pb 3.95%, Fe 0.31%, As 0.22%, Ag 0.30%, Ni 0.02%
Obverse: LEOPOLDUS*D:G R (3) ME:S*A
Reverse: 16-97+PATRONA HUNGARIAE
3. AE ? g; approximately 20 mm diameter;
Obverse: LEO D G R*I* (3) A G*E*I*R*
Reverse: PATRONA EGARIAE C-H

Forgeries of the 15 Kreutzer coins of Leopold I Habsburg

Kremnitz prototype, year 1662 (*ibidem*, p. 72)

4. AE ? g; approximately 29 mm diameter;
Obverse: LEOPOLD D:G RE*(XV) S*A*GENV*BO REX*
Reverse: 16-62 PATRONA HVNGARIAE*

Kremnitz prototype, year 1676 (*ibidem*, p. 72)

5. AE ? g; approximately 29 mm diameter; private collection of Litvinchuk Alexander (Rivne, Ukraine)
Obverse: LEOPOLD*D*G*RI (XV) A G N B REX
Reverse: 16-76 PATRONA HVNGARIAE K-B

Unknown mint, year 1689

6. AE 4.89 g; 27x31 mm; alloy composition: Cu 97.41%, As 0.59%, Ni 0.19%, Ag 0.18%, Sn 0.11%, Sb 0.11%, Fe 0.04%, Pb 0.4%
Obverse: D G*R* XV
Reverse: PATRONA *GARIAE 1689

Unknown mint

7. AE 5.44 g; 28x31 mm; alloy composition: Cu 96.68%, Ag 1.92%, Pb 0.38%, Fe 0.36%, Sb 0.31%, As 0.26%, Ni 0.07%, Mn 0.02%
Obverse: DG SA H*B*
Reverse: PATR NA

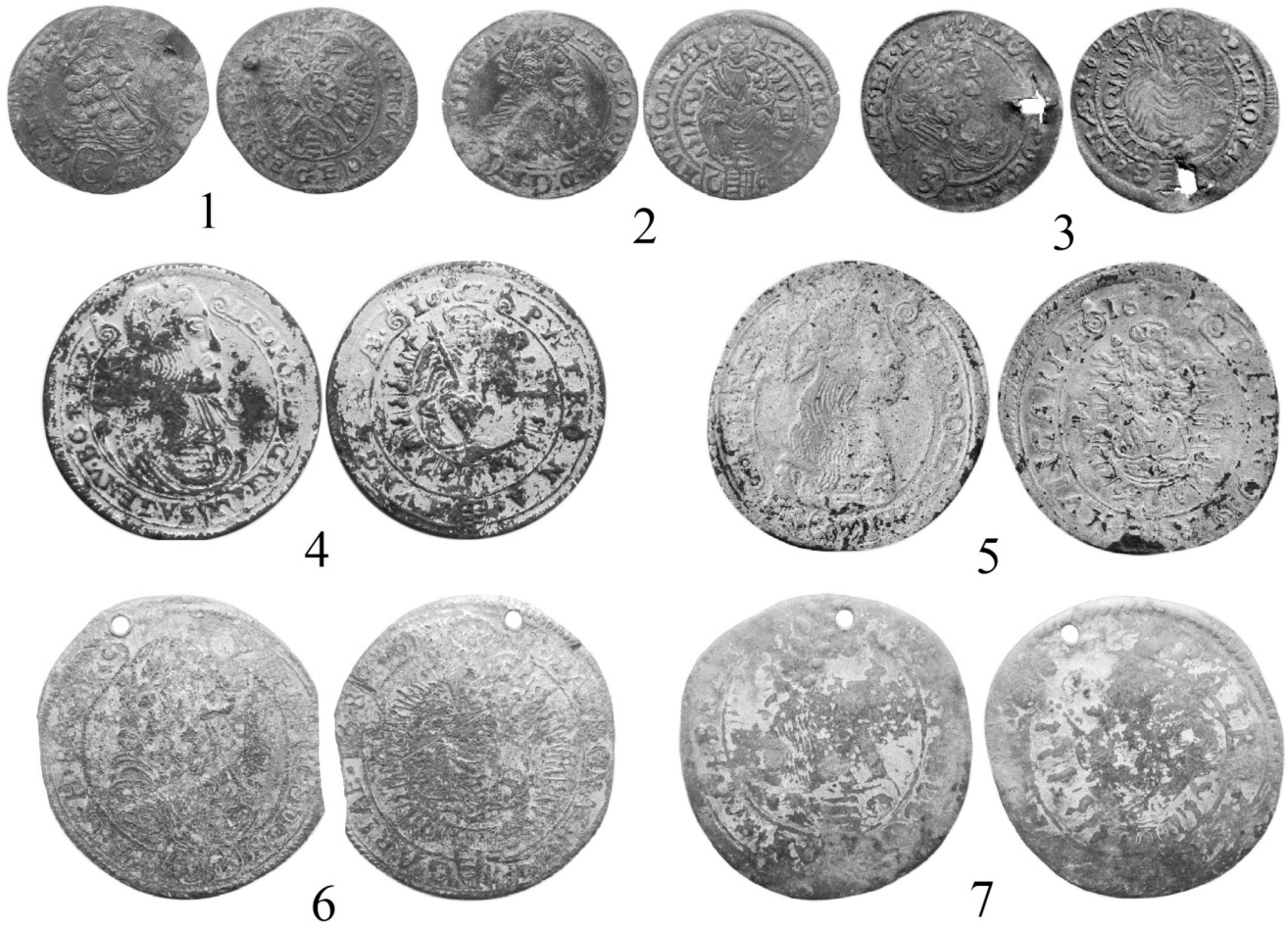


Fig. 1. Forgeries of the Kreuzer coins of Leopold I Habsburg (enlarged).