

**THE MINTING  
OF CROSS  
DENARII  
IN KALISZ**

**A. Kedzierski & S. Milek**

**Translated by  
Donald S. Yarab**

## Adam Kędzierski & Sławomir Milek

### THE MINTING OF CROSS DENARII IN KALISZ\*

Anonymous, unmarked denarii with depictions of Christian symbols are the most commonly discovered early medieval coins in the Polish lands. Due to the cross images on their reverses, they are commonly called cross denarii or cross pennies.<sup>1</sup> Another characteristic feature of these coins is the raised edge on both sides, preventing them from breaking and wearing out. Despite ongoing disputes and discussions, the question of the origin of some types of cross denarii remains unresolved. Most likely, the older varieties from the first half of the 11th century were associated with Saxon minting, but some of the younger varieties were produced by local workshops. Indisputable evidence of this is the identification of an anonymous cross denar (CNP 851-860/848) that has an identical reverse to the undoubtedly Polish coin of Sieciech, the palatine of Władysław Herman<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1<sup>3</sup>).



Figure 1: Cross denar CNP 851-860/848 and Sieciech's Type I/2 from Słuszków

The discovery of a small hoard of late varieties of cross denarii from Kalisz has allowed for the identification of coins that can be attributed to specific individuals. A recently published group,<sup>4</sup> consisting of two CNP 867 cross denarii, as well as one each of CNP 860, CNP 986, and CNP 1013, provides the possibility of determining another issuer of cross denarii, apart from Sieciech. The remains of the building from which the deposit was recovered were located in an early medieval craft and trade settlement, not far from the stronghold at Zawodzie. The heavily damaged structure, affected by cultivation and tree roots,

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\*Publication Information: Kędzierski, A., Milek, S. 2005. Mennica denarów krzyżowych w Kaliszu. *Rocznik Kaliski* 31, pp. 227-236. Translated by Donald S. Yarab in 2023 at Cleveland, Ohio, for personal scholarship purposes only.

<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive typology of cross-denars was presented by Marian Gumowski in his work *Corpus Nummorum Poloniae*, Kraków 1939 (hereinafter CNP). The researcher distinguished eight types of cross-denars depicting on the obverse: a temple - I, a chapel - II, an alpha and omega or the letter S - IV, a beaded cross - V, a plain cross - VI, a pastoral staff - VII, a head, a hand, or a pastoral staff and a banner - VIII. Cross-denars that did not fit into the others were classified as type III - transitional.

<sup>2</sup> A. Kędzierski, *Polskie denary krzyżowe w skarbie ze Słuszkowa*, WN XLII, 1998, v. 1-2, pp. 31-35.

<sup>3</sup> See S. Suchodolski, *Moneta możnowładcza i kościelna w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej*, Wrocław 1987, pp. 16-21, for Sieciech's Type I/2.

<sup>4</sup> Excavations in the Old Town were conducted by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences under the direction of Dr. Tadeusz Baranowski; T. Baranowski, D. Cyngot, A. Kędzierski, S. Milek, D. Wyczółkowski, L. Ziąbka, *Badania wykopaliskowe na terenie Starego Miasta w Kaliszu w latach 2001-2004*; Aneks III: Monety wczesnośredniowieczne z badań Starego Miasta w latach 2001-2004, *Rocznik Kaliski*, t. XXX, 2005, pp. 63-63; the CNP 860 cross denar was discovered during the 2005 research season.

yielded not only coins but also a large quantity of ceramic vessel fragments, animal bones, and a unique fragment of a golden ornament in the shape of a bull's head.

Several of the found vessels were shattered at the moment of the hut's destruction, as the preserved remains, lying in distinct clusters, allow for their full reconstruction. This fact, along with the abandoned rich belongings, indicates the sudden abandonment of the building, which was never rebuilt and left behind valuable items. Its inhabitants must have perished or vacated the area. Therefore, it was not a typical fire but likely an event related to military actions. It is highly probable that the destruction of the residential structure can be linked to Bolesław the Wrymouth's invasion of Kalisz during the civil war in 1106 between the descendants of Władysław I over the throne succession.<sup>5</sup>

Zbigniew, who ruled over Kalisz at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries, was the eldest son of Herman and an unnamed woman, likely from a non-royal lineage. When Władysław became the supreme prince after Bolesław the Bold fled Poland, Zbigniew, who had no inheritance rights from his father, was sent to the cathedral school in Kraków and later to one of the German monasteries. In 1193, Polish exiles residing in Czechia abducted Zbigniew from the monastery and placed him at the head of a rebellion against the palatine and his father. Through a settlement with Władysław Jr., he obtained control over Silesia. However, he did not hold onto it for long, as the former supporters of Zbigniew, bribed by the voivode Sieciech, defected to the opposing camp. The young prince left Silesia and sought refuge with his followers in Kruszwica. In a bloody battle with Władysław's forces that took place near the city, the defeated Zbigniew fell into captivity. For the next four years, he was imprisoned in the stronghold of Sieciech in Mazovia. Released by his father's order, he was restored to favor in 1097. It was then that he first acted against Herman jointly with his younger brother, Bolesław the Wrymouth. As a result of this action, he assumed rule over Greater Poland, Kujawy, and the Sieradzko-Łęczycka Land, governing all the strongholds in those territories. No later than 1102, after his father's death, he began to rule over Mazovia as well.<sup>6</sup> The period of his rule from 1097 to 1106 made him the independent ruler of half of Poland at the time, and this certainly happened no later than 1100, when, after another rebellion by the juniors, the hitherto all-powerful palatine Sieciech was expelled from the country. After his father's death, the paths of the brothers diverged. Despite meetings, disputes arose between them time and again, with the first one occurring during Władysław's funeral. Krzywousty's policy clearly showed a tendency for confrontation. He entered into an agreement directed against Zbigniew with Kievan Rus, Hungary, and the Bohemian prince, while simultaneously raiding the neighboring lands of Pomerania. Meanwhile, Bolesław's propaganda accused Zbigniew of preparing for war. The catastrophe occurred in 1106 when, after a surprising offensive in which Kalisz was captured, Bolesław deprived his brother of all his lands except Mazovia.<sup>7</sup> After a brief period of peace, Bolesław once again attacked Zbigniew's territory, forcing him to flee the country. The seizure of lands from Herman's eldest son served as a pretext for an unsuccessful invasion of Poland by German and Czech

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<sup>5</sup> Gallus Anonymous, *Cronica*, lib. II, 38, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* NS, t. 2, 1952, p. 108; Polish translation by R. Grodecki in: Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika Polska*, Wrocław 1965, p. 113: "However, Bolesław quickly arrived at Kalisz and encountering the resistance of a handful of Zbigniew's faithful, he took over this stronghold within a few days."

<sup>6</sup> Zbigniew's brother - Bolesław the Wrymouth ruled in Lesser Poland and Silesia.

<sup>7</sup> It is astonishing that the chronicler Gallus Anonymous mentioned only Kalisz as the place of Zbigniew's resistance. Could it be that the stronghold on the Prosna River was one of the most important, if not the most important center of the state of Władysław's elder son? The strategic location of Kalisz near the border with Silesia and further with Bohemia likely played a leading role here. It should be noted that in terms of military matters, the Czechs allied with Bolesław III could have launched a joint attack on Zbigniew's state precisely from Silesia, through southern Greater Poland. It is significant that the fall of the Kalisz stronghold opened the way for Krzywousty to conquer most of his elder brother's lands. This event was so important and had such far-reaching consequences in the war that the garrison of Gniezno surrendered without a fight.

forces under the leadership of Emperor Henry V. Around 1112, Bolesław, under the pretense of allowing Zbigniew to rule, summoned him to return to the country. When Zbigniew arrived in Poland, he was imprisoned, blinded, and soon after died.

The previous findings of coins did not allow for any attribution of coin emissions to Zbigniew, as denarii bearing his name are not known. However, over half a century ago, Józef Jodkowski speculated that a prominent prince like Zbigniew must have minted his own money.<sup>8</sup> The denarii found in the Old Town seem to confirm this thesis, although it is difficult to locate the prince's mint in Mazovia, as J. Jodkowski believed. Among the five recently discovered coins in the Old Town of Kalisz, two denarii of the VI type, variants CNP 867-868, are of fundamental importance for further considerations. Both depict a straight cross in the border on the obverse and a knight's cross with the letter "V" on the reverse. The coins lack any legends commonly found on other older varieties of cross denarii.

Another ensemble of great importance for identifying the youngest varieties of cross denarii and Zbigniew's mint is the deposit from Słuszków, a village located 23 km northeast of Kalisz. The hoard dates to the early 12th century,<sup>9</sup> the time of the war between Władysław Herman's sons. Unearthed in 1958 and incompletely preserved, the collection now comprises 13,061 artifacts, of which 12,829 are cross denarii, mainly from the latest varieties. The youngest well-dated coin in the hoard is a Hungarian denar of Coloman (1095-1116),<sup>10</sup> from the middle period of the ruler's reign. The ensemble from Słuszków, in addition to its unusually large number of artifacts, contains 122 extremely valuable denarii with the Sieciech mark,<sup>11</sup> as well as two large collections of cross denarii similar to CNP 867- 868 and CNP 813.<sup>12</sup>

Both deposits presented above, although completely disproportionate in terms of the number of coins, but certainly very close chronologically, contain extremely rare variants of CNP 867-868 cross denarii. The ascetic representations on these coins indicate that we are dealing with one of the youngest, if not the youngest, varieties of cross denarii. This is also confirmed by their metrological characteristics: 1470 whole specimens with an average weight of 0.886g and a diameter of 12mm.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> J. Jodkowski, "Czy istnieją monety Zbigniewa, syna Hermana?" [Do coins of Zbigniew, son of Herman, exist?], WNA, 1940-1948, p. 127. It should be mentioned that according to S. Suchodolski, the first emissions of coins by Bolesław Krzywousty date back to the beginning of the 12th century, *Mennictwo polskie w XI i XII wieku* [Polish Coinage in the 11th and 12th Centuries], Wrocław 1973. The coin of type I, depicting the prince with a spear and bearing the name Bolesław, was most likely produced even before 1106 and could express the aspirations of Władysław's younger sons to take control of the entire country.

<sup>9</sup> A. Kędziński, "Wczesnośredniowieczny skarb denarów krzyżowych z miejscowości Słuszków koło Kalisza w świetle nowych badań" [Early Medieval Treasure of Cross Denarii from the village of Słuszków near Kalisz in the Light of New Research], in *Kalisz wczesnośredniowieczny* [Early Medieval Kalisz], ed. T. Baranowski, Kalisz 1998, pp. 91- 107; the same, "Polskie denary krzyżowe" [Polish Cross Denarii], p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> L. Réthy, *Corpus Nummorum Hungariae*, Budapest 1899.

<sup>11</sup> Of these, 120 specimens bear a knight's cross on the reverse side - type I according to S. Suchodolski. Apart from two examples from the village of Rzeczek Wólka near Ciechanów and one specimen acquired by J. Przyborowski in Wrocław, these are the exhaustive findings of this type of palatine coins, imitating the cross denarii on the reverse side, S. Suchodolski, "Moneta możnowładcza i kościelna w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej" [Noble and Ecclesiastical Coinage in Early Medieval Poland], Wrocław 1987, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> S. Suchodolski, "Poklad z doby raného středověku nalezený v obci Słuszków, okr. Kališ (Velkopolsko)" [Hoards from the Early Middle Ages found in the village of Słuszków, district of Kalisz (Greater Poland)], *Moravské numismatické zprávy*, no. 7, 1960, pp. 27-28

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the two discovered denarii of this type from Stare Miasto in Kalisz have even lower weights than the coins from Słuszków: 0.532g and 0.472g, making them among the lightest known cross denarii.



nr inw. 11336

**Figure 2: Cross denar CNP 867-868 from Słuszków**

To attribute the discussed type of cross denarii to Zbigniew, it is necessary to trace their distribution and chronology. The denarii classified as CNP 867-868 are known, besides a single coin from Rokosowo,<sup>14</sup> only from the southeastern part of Greater Poland (Fig. 3).

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<sup>14</sup> The hoard from Rokosowo near Śrem contains a cross denar of type 867-868. The assemblage was handed over by the Zakrzewski family to the National Museum in Kraków in 1960. However, it is uncertain whether the deposit was not mixed. There are also known specimens similar to CNP 867-868 but with poorly marked balls between the arms of the straight cross on the obverse and with a residual legend in the borders: Grójec, Konin district, or Leźnica Mała, Łęczyca district.



Figure 3: Distribution of finds of cross denarii of CNP 867-868 type

The distribution of these findings is practically limited to the areas of Kalisz and its surroundings. Therefore, besides the large deposit from Słuszków, the recent discovery of a small ensemble in the Old Town of Kalisz, containing such cross denarii, shows the limited scope of their circulation in Piast Poland. The dating of the CNP 867-868 variety can primarily rely on the composition of the hoard from Słuszków, which is dated to the first half of the 12th decade, based on the Coloman denar (see footnote 9 and 10). The absence of CNP 867-868 denarii in deposits discovered near Kalisz, dated to the end of the 11th century or the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries, such as the hoard from Ogorzelczyn near Turku<sup>15</sup> or Leźnica Mała near Łęczyca,<sup>16</sup> may also indicate their late chronology. It seems that the production of CNP 867-868 cross denarii coincided with the period just before the war between Herman's sons in 1106,<sup>17</sup> and therefore, their circulation was probably limited to Kalisz and its surroundings. It should be noted that Bolesław III abandoned the production of cross denarii in favor of coins with his own image and the inclusion of his name in the legend. The findings regarding possible emissions by Zbigniew have focused on the CNP 867-

<sup>15</sup> A. Tabaka, "Wczesnośredniowieczny skarb monet z Ogorzelczyna, pow. Turek" [Early Medieval Treasure of Coins from Ogorzelczyn, Turek district], *WN XLV*, 2001, no. 2, pp. 177-197.

<sup>16</sup> A. Mikołajczyk, "Zbiory numizmatyczne Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi" [Numismatic Collections of the Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum in Łódź], *Prace i Materiały Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi. Seria numizmatyczna i konserwatorska*, vol. 1, 1981, pp. 5-66.

<sup>17</sup> Indirectly, the era of production of the CNP 867-868 variety is also confirmed by the aforementioned circumstances of leaving the coins and the golden ornament in the house in the Old Town.

868 variety, but could the aforementioned denarii from the Słuszków hoard, CNP 813, also have been produced slightly earlier by Władysław I's eldest son? (Fig. 4)



nr inw. 11028

**Figure 4: Cross denar CNP 813 from Słuszków**

There are known connections between the coin dies ranging from Sieciech's emissions and the contemporary cross denarii of the VI type (858) and CNP 851-860/848, specifically through the denarii of the CNP 813 variety, all the way to the CNP 867-868 coins (Fig. 5).

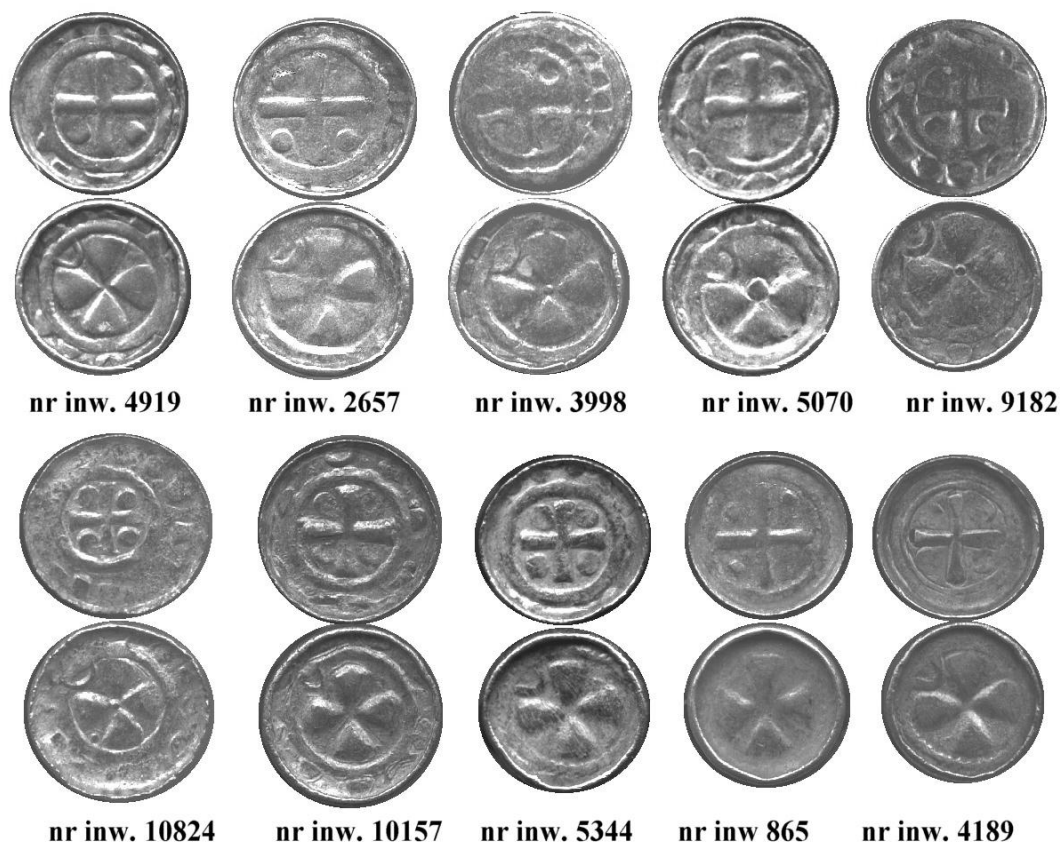


Figure 5: Cross denarii varieties from Słuszków: CNP 858 (inv. no. 4919), CNP 851-860/848 (inv. no. 2657), CNP 851-860/1480 (inv. no. 3998), CNP 813 and 858/1480 (inv. no. 5070 and 9182), CNP 813 (inv. no. 10824), CNP 813/858 (inv. no. 10157), CNP 813/1480 (inv. no. 5344), CNP 867 (inv. no. 865), and CNP 867-868/1480 (inv. no. 4189).

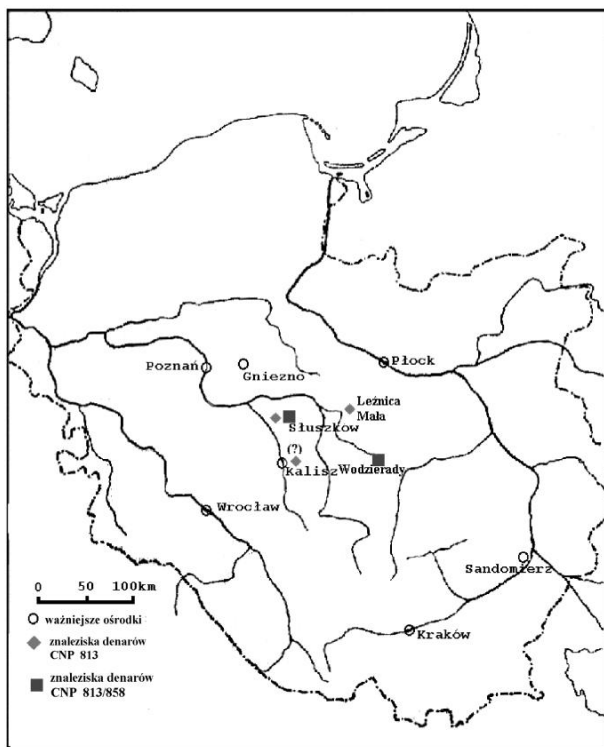
The denarii of the CNP 813 variety appeared in the Słuszków ensemble in a vast quantity of 1916 whole specimens, with an average weight of 0.891g and an average diameter of 13.3mm. This variety of coins is characterized by a small field and a large border with a distinct pseudo-legend on both the obverse and reverse, distinguishing it among the latest emissions of cross denarii. The distribution and chronology of CNP 813 coins, also considered in terms of their attribution to Zbigniew's minting, are quite similar to the previously analyzed CNP 867-868 coins. Findings of coins similar to CNP 813 are concentrated in southeastern Greater Poland: Słuszków, Kalisz (?),<sup>18</sup> the Sieradzko-Łęczycka Land: Leźnica Mała near Łęczyca, and Wodzierady near Łask (CNP 813 - obverse, 858 - reverse).<sup>19</sup> The distribution of findings of

<sup>18</sup> Two cross denarii, CNP 858 and CNP 813, are found in the collection of a collector from Kalisz. Supposedly, they were found in the vicinity of the city in the 1950s. Could these coins also come from the Słuszków hoard discovered at that time?

<sup>19</sup> The hoard from Leźnica Mała, viewed by the authors at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Łódź (MAiE), contained two specimens of CNP 813, struck with identical dies, similar to those from Słuszków. Meanwhile, the remnants of the hoard from Wodzieradów in the collection of the Museum of Archaeology (PMA) in Warsaw included a cross denar with an obverse similar to CNP 813 and a reverse with a thick arch between the arms of the knight's cross, also known from the material from Słuszków. K. Mitkowska-Szubert, "Preserved Part of the Early Medieval Hoard from Wodzieradów, Sieradz Voivodeship," *Prace i Materiały Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi, Series Numismatics and Conservation*, vol. 11, 1996, pp. 5-23.



CNP 813 cross denarii partially overlaps with the territory of CNP 867-868 denarii discoveries but also extends to lands located further east of Kalisz (Fig. 6).



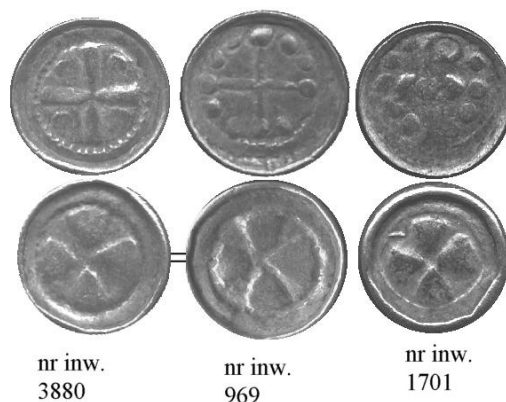
**Figure 6:** Distribution of finds of CNP 813 and CNP 813/858 cross denarii varieties.

The CNP 813 denarii appear to be slightly older than the CNP 867-868 coins, as evidenced by the aforementioned hoard from Leźnica Mała. However, they are certainly younger than the stamp sequences associated with them in the CNP 858 cross denarii. Numerous hoards from the territory of Poland containing these cross denarii mostly do not include CNP 813 varieties in their compositions.<sup>20</sup>

It is unknown whether only the CNP 867-868 and CNP 813 denarii, as well as the CNP 858 cross denarii, executed with identical or very similar obverse or reverse dies, represent the entire range of emissions attributed to Zbigniew. The analysis of die connections among the Słuszków coins, similar to CNP 867-868, reveals cross denarii of types V and VII, which can be associated with the emissions of Herman's eldest son. Within this ensemble, there are four examples of anonymous cross denarii of the VI type, similar to CNP 860 (with four faintly marked points between the arms of the straight cross). They have an average weight of 0.837g and a diameter of 12.1mm (Fig. 7, inventory number 3880). The imagery and metrological data correspond to the coins classified as CNP 867-868.

<sup>20</sup> The only known collections containing both CNP 813 and CNP 858 cross denarii are the hoards from Słuszków and Leźnica Mała.

The reverse of the denar with inventory number 3880 of the VI type is identical to the second side of the V type cross denar (Fig. 7, inventory number 969), known in a single specimen from the Słuszków deposit. The weight of the coin is 0.83g, and the diameter is 12mm, which corresponds to the average metrological sizes calculated for denarii similar to CNP 860 and CNP 867-868. The absence of legend marks in the border indicates its late origin. Could it be that in Wielkopolska, during the reign of Duke Zbigniew, an attempt was made to produce denarii of the V type as well? The unique coin with the image of a cross in a pearl wreath from Słuszków may confirm such a hypothesis. In addition to the V type cross denar, attention is drawn to the anonymous denarii of the VII type from the Słuszków hoard. They bear on the obverse the depiction of a pastoral staff turned to the right, similar to CNP 993, and an image of a knight's cross with a V between the arms, very similar to the reverse of the CNP 867-868 variety attributed to Zbigniew (Fig. 7, inventory number 1701). The two known specimens have an average weight of 0.892g, and their average diameter is 11.1mm. The average weight corresponds to the CNP 867-868 denarii, while the diameter is noticeably smaller and reminiscent of the smallest specimens of cross denarii with a depiction of a straight cross. The undeniable similarity of the reverses of the described cross denar varieties and the similar metrological data strongly suggest a very late dating of the cross denar with the depiction of the pastoral staff to the first half of the 12th decade. Such an image on the obverse should rather be associated with ecclesiastical minting rather than secular. It is difficult to judge the source of this very close resemblance of the reverses of the VII type coin to the CNP 867-868 cross denar. Perhaps this is an argument for the production of a bishopric coin in Wielkopolska in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, somehow linked to Zbigniew's minting?



**Figure 7:** Cross-denars from the Słuszków hoard similar to CNP 860, CNP 655/860, and CNP 993/867-868.

The presented cross denarii varieties, particularly CNP 813 and CNP 867-868, in terms of their chronology and the distribution of documented findings, are sometimes associated with the rule of Duke Zbigniew over this part of Polish territory. They cannot be unambiguously attributed to Herman's eldest son, but it is also difficult to identify another issuer. One may wonder why the duke did not mint coins with his own name, as Krzywousty did in the early 12th century, but instead used cross denarii. Economic reasons could be significant here – the utilization of a well-established form of money with known designs, already familiar in the Polish lands since the late 10th century. Observing the territorial extent of the elder brother's state, one can presume that he inherited the workshops, metal resources, dies, and, above all, skilled minters and engravers who had been working for Sieciech before 1100. This would explain the sequences of die connections that began in the 90s of the 11th century when the voivode produced his own money and ended in the early 12th century when he had already been exiled beyond the country's borders. It is also worth considering where the CNP 867-868 variety coins were minted. The distribution of their findings is concentrated around Kalisz, so they may have been produced there. This center served as an important administrative

and trading point in the Polish lands from tribal times through the reign of the Piasts.<sup>21</sup> It was in Kalisz that the supporters of Herman's eldest son resisted the forces of Krzywousty. The capture of the Kalisz stronghold opened the way for Bolesław to control the remaining part of Greater Poland. This single and noteworthy military episode of the 1106 battle indicates the great importance of Kalisz in Zbigniew's state (see footnote 7) and may suggest the presence of a mint workshop there.

What is characteristic is the limited distribution of findings and the short circulation period of coins attributed to Zbigniew. This is in stark contrast to the discoveries of slightly older cross denarii - CNP 858,<sup>22</sup> which are also associated with Polish coinage. The CNP 858 coins were found throughout the territory of the contemporary Poland, both in hoards from the last two decades of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century. All the available data on CNP 813 and CNP 867-868 cross denarii indicate that they were minted during the rule of Zbigniew, and the distribution of findings is linked to his territory rather than that of his younger brother, Bolesław.

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Fig. 1. Cross denar CNP 851-860/848 and Sieciech denar type I/2 from Słuszków. Photo by A. Kędzierski. Fig. 2. Cross denar CNP 867-868 from Słuszkow. Photo by A. Kędzierski. Fig. 3. Distribution of findings of CNP 867-868 cross denarii. Photo by A. Kędzierski. Fig. 4. Cross denar CNP 813 from Słuszkow. Photo by A. Kędzierski. Fig. 5. Cross denarii of various types: CNP 858 (inventory number 4919), CNP 851-860/848 (inventory number 2657), CNP 851-860/1480 (inventory number 3998), CNP 813 and 858/1480 (inventory numbers 5070 and 9182), ~CNP 813 (inventory number 10824), CNP 813/858 (inventory number 10157), CNP 813/1480 (inventory number 5344), CNP 867 (inventory number 865), ~CNP 867-868/1480 (inventory number 4189) from Słuszków. Photo by A. Kędzierski. Fig. 6. Distribution of findings of CNP 813 and CNP 813/858 cross denarii. Photo by A. Kędzierski. Fig. 7. Cross denarii from the hoard of Słuszków: similar to CNP 860, CNP 655/860, and CNP 993/867-868. Photo by A. Kędzierski.

<sup>21</sup> M. Młynarska-Kaletynowa, "Kalisz in the 11th-12th Century," in *Early Medieval Kalisz*, ed. T. Baranowski, Kalisz 1998, pp. 13-27.

<sup>22</sup> Kędzierski, *Polskie denary krzyżowe*, p. 33.