

**DO CROSS
DENARII OF
WLADYSLAW
HERMAN EXIST?**

Adam Kedzierski

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In the second half of the 11th century, cross denarii - coins with a distinctive high edge, featuring Christian symbols and a circular legend composed of circles, wedges, and individual letters - were the circulating currency in the territory of Poland. They were accompanied by other foreign coins, which were much less numerous, as well as denarii of Polish rulers produced in Kraków. There was also an extremely rare currency produced by Sieciech - the palatine of Władysław Herman. The beginnings of the issuance of cross denarii can be traced back to Saxony.¹ Exploiting the huge silver deposits opened and extracted during the reign of Otto I after 968 AD in the Lower Harz Mountains, in the Rammelsberg massif near Goslar, as well as on the western slope of the Harz Mountains in Gittelde and in Upper Saxony near Mitteweida,² the Saxons were provided with a constant supply of cheap raw material and the possibility of minting coins on a large scale for trade with the Slavs. Certainly, Polish mints during the time of the first Piasts could not undertake such a large-scale production. The total number of known denarii specimens of Bolesław the Brave and Mieszko II barely exceeds 200 pieces. The situation changed fundamentally during the reign of Bolesław the Bold. His close contacts with secular and ecclesiastical Saxon feudal lords resulted in the establishment of a well-organized mint workshop, which probably took place around 1070.³ The mint of Bolesław the Bold in Kraków began to produce money on a large scale. The short, limited three-year production of royal denarii by this ruler is estimated at about two million pieces,⁴ indicating that there was already the potential in Poland to mint a huge number of cross denarii.

A large amount of silver resources allowed for the minting of coins on a large scale. Obtaining silver in Poland, due to natural resources, was undoubtedly much more challenging than in Saxony. Deposits of ores containing silver are found in Lower Silesia, in the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland, and in the Świętokrzyskie (Holy Cross) Mountains.⁵ The oldest known information about silver mining in Polish lands comes from an 11th-century source concerning Olkusz, in the account of Rabbi Rashi of Troyes.⁶ A somewhat later piece of information about silver mining is provided by a bull of Innocent III from 1136: "Item villa ante Bitom que Zversov dicitur cum rusticis argentifossoribus et cum duabus tabernis nonnisi ad archiepiscopipertinet iurisdictionem."⁷ Mining of silver was supposed to take place in an unidentified location of Zwierzów near Bytom. A similar old record concerns the exploitation of lead ores in the Otmuchów-Nysa domain of the bishops of Wrocław.⁸ Recent archaeological research in Dąbrowa

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¹ S. Suchodolski, *Początki mennictwa w Europie Środkowej, Wschodniej i Północnej*, Wrocław 1971, pp. 15-26.

² T. Dziekoński, *Metalurgia miedzi i srebra w Europie Środkowej od XV do końca XVIII wieku*, Wrocław 1963, p. 67 and n.

³ R. Kiersnowski, *Pieniądz kruszcowy w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej*, Warsaw 1960, p. 314.

⁴ S. Suchodolski, *Mennictwo polskie w XI i XII wieku*, Wrocław 1973, pp. 98-99.

⁵ H. Kocka-Krenz, *Kruszec srebrny na ziemiach polskich we wczesnym średniowieczu*, w: *Surowce mineralne w pradziejach i we wczesnym średniowieczu Europy Środkowej*, Wrocław 1988, pp. 81-90.

⁶ R. Pytel, *Wzmianka o Olkuszku oraz kopalniach złota, srebra i soli w Polsce XI-wieku*, *Slavia Antiqua*, t. 17, 1970, pp. 171-177; D. Rozmus, *Czy Olkusz ma coś wspólnego z biblijnym Ha-Elqos?*, *Slavia Antiqua*, t. 43, 2002, pp. 97-132.

⁷ *Kodeks dyplomatyczny Wielkopolski*, wyd. J. Zakrzewski, 1.1, Poznań 1877, p. 12, nr 7.

⁸ T. Dziekoński, *Metalurgia miedzi i srebra*, p. 18.

Górnicza-Łosień confirmed the reference to silver mining in Poland. Relics of furnaces, slag containing lead, and trace amounts of silver indicate local extraction of the metal from ore, which could have been used for coin production.⁹ Silver mining in the late 11th century seems certain. The cheaper domestic raw material obtained from local mines must have encouraged independent minting.

With both the raw material and technological capabilities, the production of cross denarii on a large scale could be conducted in Poland. Known domestic imitations of these coins are attributed to Sieciech, the all-powerful palatine of Władysław Herman. Their identification was possible through the analysis of the largest hoard of cross denarii from Słuszków near Kalisz.¹⁰ In the hoard, previously anonymous cross denarii with a simple cross on the obverse of the CNP 851-860/848 variety¹¹ (fig. 1/2) were found, which were struck with the same reverse die as the denarii of the voivode type I/2¹² (fig. 1/1). Further comparisons of cross representations were made in connection with the palatine's mint, including the specimens CNP 851-860/1480 (fig. 1/3), whose reverses were very similar to those seen on large denarii of Sieciech type I/I (fig. 1/4).¹³ A total of 25 cross coins associated with the dies of the palatine's large denarii were identified - variety 1/2 (the average weight of this group being 0.938 g, with a diameter of 12.7 mm). Denarii bearing Sieciech's mark appeared in hoards from the middle of the last decade of the 11th century,¹⁴ so his cross denarii discovered in the vicinity of Kalisz, as well as in Central Poland¹⁵ and Silesia,¹⁶ are similarly dated.

⁹D. Rozmus, R. Bodnar, *Badania archeologiczne na wielokulturowym stanowisku 8 w Dąbrowie Górniczej - Łośniu, województwo śląskie*, w: *Badania archeologiczne na Górnym Śląsku i ziemiach pogranicznych w latach 2001-2002*, pp. 146-155, Katowice 2004.

¹⁰A. Kędziński, *Wczesnośredniowieczny skarb denarów krzyżowych ze Słuszkowa koło Kalisza w świetle nowych badań*, w: *Kalisz wczesnośredniowieczny*, ed. T. Baranowskiego, Kalisz 1998, pp. 91-108.

¹¹Cross denarii varieties according to M. Gumowski, *Corpus Nummorum Poloniae*, Kraków 1939.

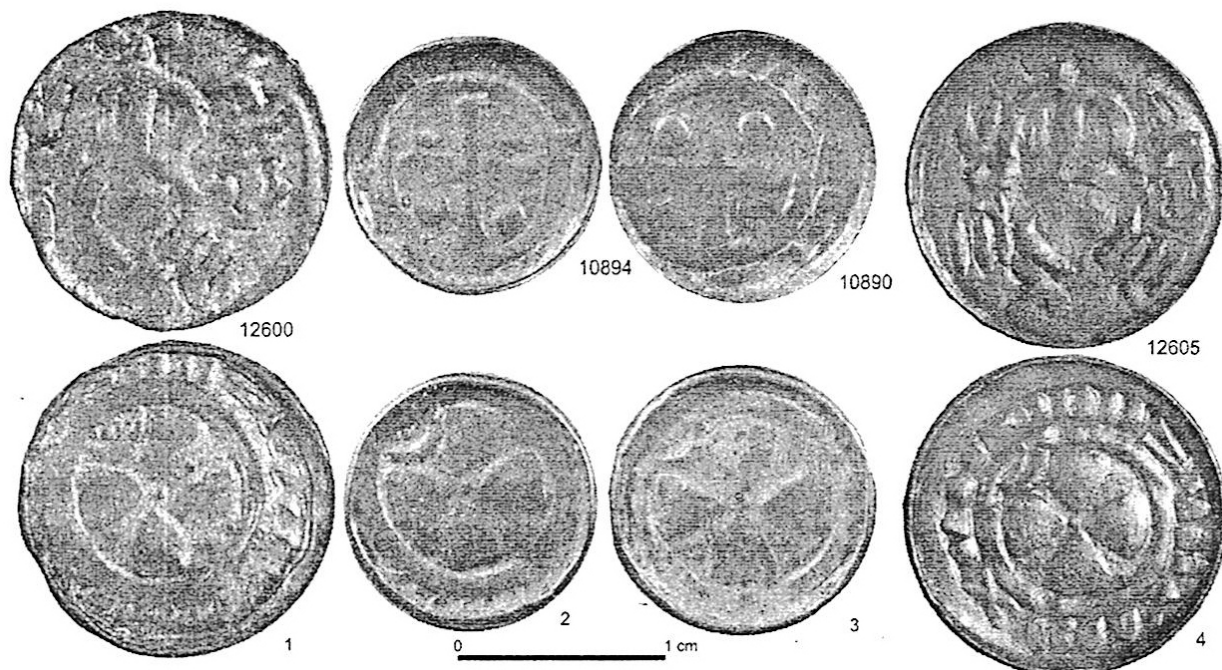
¹²S. Suchodolski, *Moneta możnowładcza i kościelna w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej*, Warsaw 1987, pp. 12-44.

¹³A. Kędziński, *Polskie denary krzyżowe w skarbie ze Słuszkowa*, „Wiadomości Numizmatyczne” XLII, 1998, z. 1-2, pp. 21-48, ibidem, *Czy istnieją monety Zbigniewa, syna Władysława Hermana?*, „Wiadomości Numizmatyczne” XLIX, 2005, z. 1, pp. 23-37.

¹⁴S. Suchodolski, *Moneta możnowładcza*, pp. 38-44.

¹⁵A. Kędziński, *Polskie denary krzyżowe*, p. 32.

¹⁶Hoard containing cross denarii, including specimens of the CNP 851-860/848 variety (with a reverse identical to the second side of Sieciech's large denarius type I/2), were discovered in 1847 in the village of Drożyna (German: Druse) in the Polkowice district, as well as in a hoard from the vicinity of Krosno Odrzańskie (?) - B. Buttent-Stefaniak, D. Malarczyk, *Obieg pieniężny na Śląsku we wczesnym średniowieczu (od X do połowy XII wieku)*, Wrocław 2009, pp. 36-37 and 180-181.



1. Cross denarii of palatine Sieciech from Słuszków

Within the Słuszków hoard, two massive collections of cross denarii were also identified, which can be linked to Sieciech's emissions through chains of die connections. The first group consists of denarii similar to the CNP 813 variety (fig. 2/1) with a total of 1,916 specimens (average weight of coins 0.891 g, diameter 13.3 mm). The second group includes 1,470 cross coins (average weight 0.886 g, diameter 12 mm) resembling the CNP 867-868 variety (fig. 2/2).



2. Denarii varieties CNP 813 and CNP 867-868 from Słuszków.

Discoveries of coins from both varieties were mainly recorded in southeastern Greater Poland, as well as in Central Poland,¹⁷ and their chronology is associated with the years around 1100-1105. It was during this time that Sieciech was expelled from the country,¹⁸ and his mint workshops could have been taken over by Duke Zbigniew, who ruled Kalisz at that time. The aforementioned cross denarii do not exhaust the list of Polish emissions. Certainly, among them belong the coins of the CNP 858 variety, similar to the specimens we associated with Sieciech. Their obverses depict a simple cross with four pellets between the arms, while the reverses feature a knight's cross with a mark in the shape of the letter U or V instead of a wide arch. In the relatively narrow outer border, partially preserved letters R and X can be seen, similar to those on Sieciech's cross denarii, among lines, triangles, and trapezoids (fig. 3/1-2).

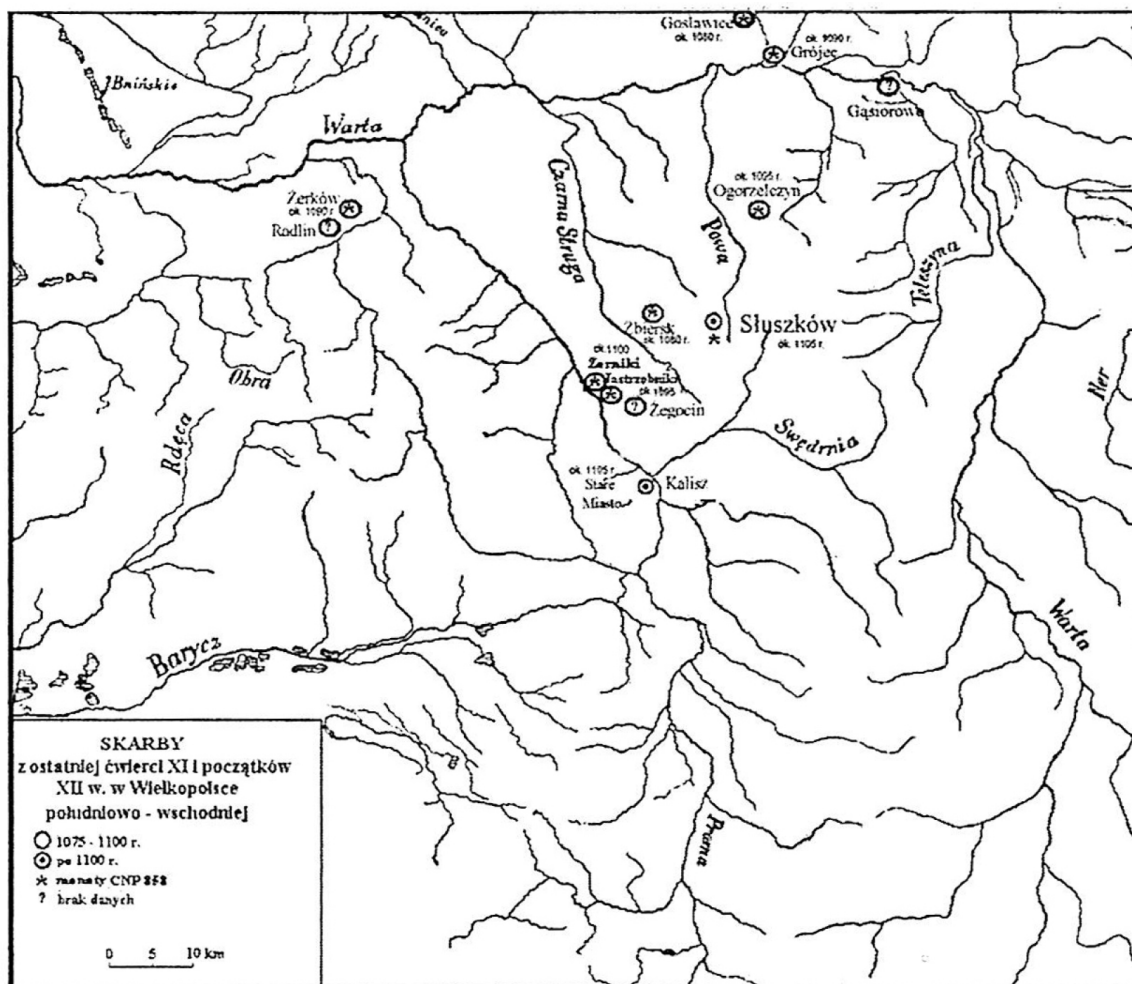


3. Cross denarii varieties CNP 858 and CNP 851-860/848 from Słuszków.

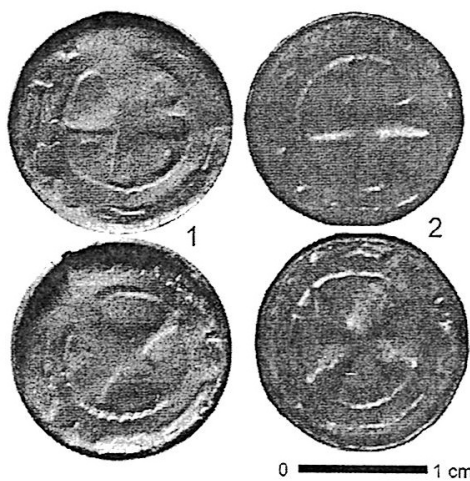
While the cross coins associated with Sieciech and Duke Zbigniew belong to rare emissions found in a small area, the CNP 858 cross denarii are one of the most common varieties of high-edge denarii from the last two decades of the 11th century found throughout the entire Polish state at that time. They are absent in the Połabie and Pomerania regions where other Polish coins are not present in hoards. The mass production of CNP 858 cross denarii is evident, for example, by their presence in the compositions of all well-described hoard finds from the late 11th century in southeastern Greater Poland (fig. 4).

¹⁷A. Kędziński, *Czy istnieją monety Zbigniewa*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁸K. Benyskiewicz, *Książę Polski Władysław Herman 1079-1102*, Zielona Góra 2010, pp. 262-278.



4. Discoveries of CNP 858 cross denarii from southeastern Wielkopolska.



5. Cross denarii of CNP 858 variety from (1) Zbiersko & (2) Gostawice.

It is quite challenging to pinpoint the exact place of their production. One clue in this regard could be the oldest deposits containing such denarii from Zbiersk and Gosławice, dating back to the early 1080s (fig. 5). Both towns are located on the route from Kalisz through Konin to Kruszwica. The very early appearance of these intriguing cross denarii in these locations may indicate eastern Greater Poland or Kuyavia as the place of their production. Subsequent assemblages of such coins, mainly dating to the 1090s, are known from the entire territory of Poland at that time. An interesting fact is the production period of the CNP 858 variety coins. Its beginnings can be traced back to around 1080, with the end falling around the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries, corresponding to the reign of Władysław Herman. The times of his rule were quite different from those of his older brother, Bolesław II. The pro-papal foreign policy of the Polish king had to be abandoned due to changes in the international arena, in favor of an alliance with the Empire. The newly enthroned prince, supported by the nobles, relinquished part of his power, primarily to his palatine Sieciech, who could decisively contribute to the change of the ruling power.¹⁹ It seems highly likely that, given the circumstances following the overthrow of Bolesław the Bold, a second large and vibrant mint center, perhaps in Greater Poland, could have emerged alongside the existing one in Kraków, producing cross denarii in mass quantities known from finds throughout the territory of the Polish state at that time. Their introduction could have been an emulation of the full-value Saxon cross denarii, which had been in circulation for several decades and enjoyed trust among Polish recipients. It is worth noting that the royal denarii introduced into circulation in the second half of the 1070s by Bolesław the Bold significantly differed in the quality of the metal from the contemporary cross coins, and the circulation of weak-quality coins by the ruling king may have contributed to his downfall. The establishment of a separate mint for cross denarii by the succeeding ruler could have been well-received by his subjects as a return to the production of good currency by the ruler.

Research conducted by S. Suchodolski on the metrology of early medieval Polish coins²⁰ showed that the average weight of Bolesław the Bold's princely denarii produced until 1076 was 0.7 g,²¹ with an average fineness of 450/1000, which resulted in an average of 0.315 g of pure silver. Slightly younger specimens from the king's reign between 1076 and 1079 showed a slightly higher average weight of 0.711 g but with a lower fineness of 214/1000 (0.152 g of pure silver in the coin). The average weight of the denarii of the single type (fig. 6) produced by Władysław Herman was 0.6 g, with a fineness of 600/1000 (on average, 0.36 g of silver alloy).

¹⁹M. Barański, *Dynastia Piastów w Polsce*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 174-175.

²⁰S. Suchodolski, *Mennictwo polskie w XI i XII wieku*, Wrocław 1973, pp. 40-44 and 132-134.

²¹For reference in the study, the weights of the coins were based on without including the 5% loss associated with cleaning the coins, and the fineness calculation used a fineness of 1000/1000 (rather than 960/1000) to determine the pure silver content in the early Middle Ages. The calculations employed the arithmetic mean weight due to frequently working with small groups of coins.



6. Kraków denar of Władysław Herman.

Cross coins of the CNP 858 variety, with a total of 1,014 intact specimens, appeared in the composition of the Służków hoard (average weight of 0.806 g, diameter of 12.5 mm). They contained an average of 0.381 g of pure metal in the four examined specimens.²² In terms of silver content, they surpassed the princely and royal denarii of Bolesław the Bold but were similar in this regard to the contemporary emissions in Kraków under Herman. It is possible that the denarii minted in Kraków under Szczodry were so unpopular in Greater Poland that the new ruler decided to produce imitations of the well-known cross denarii of similar silver content for that market. Identical obverses of Sieciech's cross coins and those attributed to Władysław I were not found. However, the differences concern only minor details, indicating the use of slightly modified representations of the CNP 858 cross coins by later palatine emissions. One may wonder whether Sieciech could have been producing CNP 858 cross denarii as early as around 1080. However, it seems unlikely that at the beginning of Herman's reign, the palatine could have organized such a well-established mint workshop producing more cross denarii than the prince's denarii with his own image and name in Kraków. It is possible, of course, that at the recommendation of the ruler, Sieciech oversaw the production of money and began minting his own denarii towards the end of the 11th century. It can be presumed that the voivode rather joined forces with his mint in Herman's earlier initiative. The scale of CNP 858 denarii production was enormous, and practically every late 11th-century deposit discovered within Herman's realm contains such coins. It is difficult to imagine anyone other than the reigning prince at that time being able to produce their own currency on such a large scale in Poland.

²²S. Suchodolski, *Moneta możnowładcza i kościelna w Polsce wczesnośredniowiecznej*, Warsaw 1987, pp. 12-44.