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THE COIN CABINET OF THE HERZOG ANTON ULRICH-MUSEUM IN BRAUNSCHWEIG

The Coin Cabinet of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig houses approximately 40,000 coins, medals, and coin-like pieces ranging from antiquity to modern times. Some exceptional medieval pieces are displayed in Dankwarderode Castle, while a permanent exhibition in the main museum building showcases key pieces from thematic perspectives. Recently, a long-term loan of around 8,500 coins and medals focusing on the minting of the Welf dynasty and the wider region of Braunschweig has been added, with a selection of silver medals currently featured in a special exhibition. The numismatic collection of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum is made accessible online through a digital coin cabinet.

History

The collection of coins and medals at the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum traces its origins back to the Welf dukes of the House of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel.¹ Several of the Welfs began assembling coin collections from the mid-17th century onwards, which were consolidated into the Kunst- und Naturalienkabinett (Art and Natural History Cabinet) of Braunschweig founded by Duke Carl I in 1754. Initially, following the collection tradition of the time and the interests of the princely court, the focus was on ancient and medieval coins as well as coins and medals of the Welf dynasty. Particularly notable is the collection of North and Central German bracteates held by the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum today, which was expanded in the 19th and 20th centuries through the acquisition of significant collections and treasure finds. The museum director and state conservator, Paul Jonas Meier, also acquired a remarkable collection of French and German Art Nouveau plaques and medals for the museum in the early 20th century. Over the centuries, a universal collection of German, European, and non-European coins was developed as well.

Greek and Roman Coins

The collection comprises around 2,000 Greek coins, published by the former curator Wolfgang Leschhorn in 1998. Due to substantial losses of precious metal coins during the Napoleonic era, only a few gold and silver coins remain in this segment today. Similarly, the Roman coin collection suffered losses from the Napoleonic era. The majority of the approximately 2,500 Roman coins today were also published by Wolfgang Leschhorn in

¹ Leschhorn 2004.

2006. Some outstanding portrait coins of Roman emperors have been added since then. To complete the series of imperial coinage, the Braunschweig dukes did not hesitate to acquire imitations of Roman coins. Thus, the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum also possesses a number of so-called Paduans, Renaissance imitations of Roman coins.

Medieval Coins

Medieval coins have been collected by the dukes since the 18th century. The medieval collection, now comprising around 10,000 pieces, was expanded in the 19th century through acquisitions from the Braunschweig region and Carl Philipp Christian Schönmann, the librarian of Wolfenbüttel. The collection now comprises precious pieces such as the silver throne penny of Henry the Lion (Fig. 1).²



Fig. 1 – Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, coin cabinet inv. 219a/18, silver bracteate of Henry the Lion, showing the duke enthroned between two towers, resting his feet on the city walls, flanked by two lions. Mint of Braunschweig, 1142–1195; silver, 0.71 g, 31 mm. Photo: Robert Raitchel.

Paul Jonas Meier was responsible for incorporating significant medieval treasure finds into the collection at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, such as those from Ausleben and Gröningen in 1872, Seega in 1902, Borne in 1903, and Helmstedt in 1924. Additionally, parts of important private collections, such as those of Emil Bahrfieldt, Arthur Löbbecke, and Heinrich Buchenau, were acquired. A comprehensive publication of medieval coins in two volumes was presented by Wolfgang Leschhorn in 2015.

Medals

Among the more than 1,500 medals, the silver mintings of the Welf dukes stand out, minted from the 15th to the 19th century for special occasions and representation. The collection comprises pieces by famous medal artists such as Heinrich Paul Großkurth produced for the dukes of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel such as a Baroque silver medal from 1694 with an elaborate depiction of the Salzdahlum palace and gardens (Fig. 2).

² Leschhorn 2018.



Fig. 2 – Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, coin cabinet inv. 671/3, silver medal by Heinrich Paul Großkurth for duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel showing the portrait of Anton Ulrich on the obverse and Salzdahlum palace on the reverse. Mint of Wolfenbüttel(?), 1694; silver, 86.77 g, 59 mm. Photo: Robert Raithel.

The medal collection also includes a series of papal medals,³ as well as medal series by the Geneva medalist Jean Dassier and the Swedish artist Lea Ahlborn. The medals from the 15th to 19th centuries were published by Wolfgang Leschhorn in 2019.⁴ A selection of medieval and modern coins and medals from the collection of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum is also included in Wolfgang Leschhorn's publication of the coins and medals of Braunschweig from 2010.

Modern Coins

The universal collection of modern coins includes issues from German and European countries, as well as coins from Asia, America, and North Africa. Germany, Russia, Scandinavia, Italy, and France form a historically significant focus of the collection. This segment of the collection has not been published so far.

Numismatic Research Collection

The numismatic collection of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum has recently seen a significant expansion with a long-term loan of the 'Münzforschungssammlung' (Numismatic Research Collection) of the Braunschweiger Sparkassenstiftung (Fig. 3). This collection comprises around 8,500 coins and medals of the Welf dukes of all lines, cities within the Welf territory, particularly Braunschweig, and the bishoprics, abbeys, and collegiate churches associated with the Welfs. The origins of the Coin Research Collection date back to the 19th century, originating from coin holdings of the Braunschweiger Staatsbank.

³ Leschhorn 2019b.

⁴ Leschhorn 2019a.



Fig. 3 – Herzog Anton Ulrich–Museum, coin cabinet, numismatic research collection inv. 0067, silver medal on the visit of duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig–Wolfenbüttel to Zellerfeld showing Salzdahlum palace on the obverse and two mine workers in a shaft on the reverse. Mint of Zellerfeld, 1705; silver, 39.05 g, 46 mm.

Photo: Johannes Wienand.

The majority of the objects were acquired by Nord/LB from the 1960s to the 1990s through targeted purchases in the numismatic market. The collection provides a precise representation of the development of Welf coinage and medal art, offering unique insights into early modern coinage that facilitates important economic–historical research. The collection, now owned by the Braunschweiger Sparkassenstiftung, is available to the museum as a long-term loan. Currently, the Herzog Anton Ulrich–Museum, in cooperation with the foundation, is presenting selected medals from this significant collection in a special exhibition.

Digitalization

Since 2018, the numismatic collection of the Herzog Anton Ulrich–Museum has been gradually digitized through a digital coin cabinet (<https://www.virtuelles-muenzkabinett.de>). Technically based on the mk-edit/IKMK database system developed by the Coin Cabinet of the State Museums in Berlin,⁵ this platform operates in collaboration with the Berlin Coin Cabinet and other partner institutions in the IKMK network. The cooperation has allowed for the implementation of a technologically sophisticated database solution tailored specifically to the needs of numismatic materials for the Herzog Anton Ulrich–Museum.⁶ Among the treasures already digitized and accessible are the silver throne penny of Henry the Lion, exquisitely designed modern medals, precious metal coins from Greco–Roman antiquity, and Byzantine gold coins. The portal not only features the museum’s own collection but also digitizes the ‘Münzforschungssammlung’ (numismatic research collection) as well as the numismatic collections of the Wolfenbüttel Museum and the University of Braunschweig.

⁵ Dahmen *et al.* 2012

⁶ (Wienand 2019a, 2019b)

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