

Coin Collections and Coin Hoards from Bulgaria  
(COCHBulg)

# COUNTERFEIT STUDIOS AND THEIR COINS

(volume IV in series)

by  
Ilya Prokopov and Rumén Manov



Sofia 2005

## **COUNTERFEIT STUDIOS AND THEIR COINS**

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## OPEN LETTER

[ALAN VAN ARSDALE AND THE FRIENDS FROM CFDL]

Dear Alan, dear Friends,

We are a small group of enthusiasts who since 1990 have been interested in counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins. Up to now we have always been in great difficulty in our efforts to show to the general public what we know, no matter how limited it is. We are getting ever more confident that revealing the truth about this specific and unusual activity - bringing to light the information about the counterfeits, is not always well received. We are used to sticking to the facts and we have always shown things the way we see them and the way we understand them. We would therefore expect anybody who would question our position to support his thesis with particular facts and evidence.

We would never let ourselves point a finger at anybody who has ever sold or offered wrong coins or objects. This is not a business of ours. It is our deep conviction as well that whoever wants to spend his money for classical coins and other antique valuables may have a choice - just to gamble or to get consulted beforehand by someone who is knowledgeable in this subject. This is the law of the market that regulates everything. For us, however, it is the moral criteria that are of major importance. The mere financial aspect of this issue notwithstanding, there is a number of things we all should be thinking of. One of these, for example, is the fact that the process of collecting is a wonderful activity offering relaxation to the individuals and giving them delightful knowledge as well as good health and long life. Many collections use to develop into museum entities thus becoming easily accessible and useful for the general public. When properly arranged ancient artifacts are in themselves a mirror objectively reflecting the past, thus allowing people to look at themselves and be able to take the right steps into the future. Any counterfeits creeping among the authentic items and being presented as originals help undermine this fragile and highly vulnerable system. The falsification of the past makes the future a potential minefield. Adding to the above the hazards of modern times that

Alan so often draws attention to, like the specific example of eventual financing of destructive and threatening activities by resources accumulated from selling counterfeits, we do believe that our work is necessary, no matter how limited is the benefit of it.

The immediate reason for this open letter is connected to the continuous uneasiness we are being forced into in this country as well as to some ill-intentioned remarks concerning our activities. Nobody is faultless, neither we are. We are very careful to show only the things we are sure of, which however is not a guaranty against any mistakes. We would offer all who either approve or disapprove our activities to join the club for discussion and share their opinions only in case they are substantiated. There is nothing better than the constructive debate and the fair play.

We kindly invite everyone who would like to make any comments on our work to do so at the CFDL and offer the respective evidence for their opinion.

I. Prokopov and followers/ colleagues  
March 2005  
Sofia

## SOME INTRODUCTORY WORDS

We took the liberty to change our system of work, thus hoping this to be of greater benefit to the readers. Instead of offering the arid catalogue presentation of the counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins we have encountered, now we furnish our audience with more of our commentaries and observations. Thus we expose everything we know and we are sure of.

We have divided the work into a theoretical section and practical observations. The first part includes methodological advice and information about the studios that produce counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins. The information is not much detailed because it is kept in deep secret and it is difficult to get close to it. However, this is all we have at our disposal for the time being. Not many counterfeiters tend to get out in the open and share their secrets. This is valid only for those who perceive themselves as artists and strive for acknowledgement and wider audiences. The rest who are the bigger part go under cover because their business is illegal.

The catalogue part also has several sections. In the first section some newly identified counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins are included. In the second one the coins of the private collection of R. Manov from Sofia are displayed. Not all the coins we present here are of "high quality" and hard to identify. However, they are quite often used in this booklet as a good illustrative material of the different studios.

We offer the third part as a basis for discussion. There we display coins we suspect as fake but we lack evidence to prove this. We do believe that truth will come out of discussion and we do hope we will learn something new and interesting. We expect the book thus organized to be more useful.

In the beginning of this consecutive booklet dedicated to modern counterfeits of classical coins we would like to remind our readers of the basic methods of their production. Thus with explanations given further in the catalogue we will try to clarify how a certain counterfeit has been produced.

Counterfeits of ancient coins can be divided to the following groups according to the production technology.

1. Struck by using the ancient manual technology of blowing with a hammer but utilizing dies that are made nowadays;
2. Pressed by means of a mechanical press with dies produced nowadays;
3. Processed by manual engraving of old coin cores;
4. Processed from old coin cores with dies or die fragments made nowadays by means of a hammer strike or pressing.
5. Cast in different metals with the help of moulds prepared in advance. We identify several ways of casting:
  - A/ Classical casting at normal atmospheric pressure;
  - B/ Casting under pressure;
  - C/ Casting and immediate additional pressing (while the material is still hot)
  - D/ Casting / spaying under pressure by means of an explosive capsule. This method is still a well-kept secret. We do not have enough information available, so we cannot make detailed comments on the technology.

6. Galvanoplasty method. This method is being less frequently used in Bulgaria at the present moment. In the past there was a very good school that manufactured the copies for museum expositions as well. Now the masters are not alive and there are no students of theirs.

Coin counterfeits, replicas, copies, etc. that were produced following the above methods in the 80-ties of the 20th century, nowadays represent an invariable part of the coin flow circulating among collectors and being offered on the market. Following a 20-year-long "withdrawal" of the counterfeits of silver coins of Apollonia Pontica, Messembria, Istros and others, which resulted from the shock experienced by the collectors when being confronted with this repulsive phenomenon, some samples of the above coins are back on the market. What is different about them now is the ancient look they have acquired meanwhile. A real patina has been formed on top of the artificial wearing out of the surface. Unlike copper and bronze coins which form an authentic good-quality patina only after an extensive period of time and under constant conditions, the silver ones need just about 20 years to create a proper patina. Having in mind the fact that there is still

no "die study" made on the abovementioned coins, a dangerous phenomenon is under way. It is no more possible to prove definitely whether a certain coin is original or fake. That is why we present here each single coin that we are positive of being a counterfeit one.

Recently, especially after 2000/2001 a serious confusion also took place regarding the origin of the counterfeits - which was the "studio" that produced the given coin (counterfeit, copy or replica). New trading and exchange of coin dies was initiated quite intensively. This is a comparatively recent phenomenon, yet it is developing quickly enough. For example I would point out the fact that a great number of steel coin dies can be already found in the USA and various ancient coins - Greek and Roman, can be struck with them. A small portion of these dies were produced and used in the countries from which they were purchased before the year 2000. The bigger portion of the dies that were taken out of these countries was prepared to order of foreign clients. These dies were made on client's request and were never used. A new problem, very dangerous in nature, was thus created. The dies that had been used before they were taken out of the country could still be identified and registered as per their production, so that collectors and all concerned are to be informed about them. Those dies however that have been made on order and subsequently exported without being used at all, are "time bombs" in themselves. We would not be able to follow their production. That is why we expect this to be done by our colleagues in the countries these dies have been imported in or wherever cast forgeries are likely to appear.

Apart from the export of steel dies outside the borders of our country, a large-scale exchange and trading with dies takes place within the country's territory. In order to preserve these dies after their physical amortization, exact imprints are being taken from them and castings are made subsequently. Thus forgeries (casts) of fake struck coins are being produced. Certain counterfeiters that are less talented and potent limit their efforts to simply making copies and casting coins - in other words they steal from their "brothers in morality".

Some of the coin counterfeits that are displayed further in the catalogue might coincide with those from our first booklet - D. Dimitrov, I. Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins, Sofia, K&K Publishers 1997. The authors of the current publication would like to apologize for these repetitions. We believe however this would be useful because the circulation of the abovementioned booklet was withheld in

Bulgaria and it was not duly distributed. We suppose that these repetitions would be tiresome only to the few readers that managed to obtain our first booklet. It was distributed freely in Berlin in 1997 during its first presentation at the International Numismatic Congress. Just about 100 pieces of it have been circulated worldwide. Moreover the photos in the booklet from 1997 were of a lower quality, not enlarged and much darker than necessary. We do believe that displaying again some of the counterfeits with bigger and clearer photos, and in some instances in colour will be more helpful to the readers.

## DIAGNOSTICS

METHODS FOR INDIVIDUAL WORK OF THE EXPERT IN IDENTIFYING GIVEN COUNTERFEIT OF AN ANCIENT COIN, MEDALLION OR ANOTHER COIN-SHAPED RECORD OF THE PAST.

**Comparing coin dies** still remains one of the most reliable methods for identifying the counterfeits. Let us take for example one fake silver coin of Apollonia Pontica that was produced around 1980. As far as style is concerned it is no different from the genuine coins because the die has been crafted strictly following the original coin. It was cast using silver from old coins that have been worn out and annulled. The results of the metal analysis correspond in full to the standards for metal composition. What else could experts use from the panoply they have? Examination of the metal structure, etc. is an option? This type of research is complicated and requires expensive laboratory devices. Such procedures would be effective only in case of analyzing coins that are exceptionally rare and expensive. Applying them for thousands of coins is not possible and effective at this stage. Therefore comparing the dies of a coin that has patina and looks like an authentic one with the dies of a coin that has already been proven counterfeit gives an immediate answer even when only one of the dies coincides. Basically this method is quite similar to comparing finger prints. One should select points of support, enough in number on the different characteristic parts of the coin relief. Thus a network of points is formed which identifies the die of the counterfeit. The network is being laid over the coins that are being examined and in case a coinciding occurs we will know we have come across another coin that has been struck with the same counterfeit die. In such case we know for sure that we are dealing with an indisputable counterfeit. When using this method one should take into account the following specifics and deviations:

- The die which is made of tempered steel gradually undergoes certain changes upon a continuous utilization. This is due to the gradual distempering and deforming which result from the die's usage. Factors are as follows: periodical strikes on the red hot coin core, temperature deviations combined with the pressure of the mechanical, pneumatic or

eccentric presses, used for the production of counterfeits, as well as multiple blows with a hammer. It is necessary to follow the logic of the deformation and the deviation of the points as well as to envisage their new position;

- Incomplete overlapping and coinciding of the network. This could happen when the coin core is off centre or has an irregular form. In such case we should not compare the whole image but only a certain characteristic section of it.

- Coinciding of only one side of the coin. This happens when counterfeiters have combined one of the dies we already know with a new unregistered one. Coinciding of only one side of the coin means for sure, that the respective coin is a fake one.

### **Observation of the characteristics of the metal and the coin surface.**

This is done by means of a microscope or another device for magnifying the object that is being studied. When using this method we could identify the following deviations, details and specifics:

- The texture of the surface of both sides of the coin and especially of the edge;

- The metal of the coin and more specifically the nuances and the visible deviations;

- Traces of additional coercions;

- Identifying the types of artificial patina and the methods for fixing them.

In the first place this observation can reveal the presence of several metals. For instance coins could be produced by casting them in some base metal - copper or copper alloys, and subsequently coating them with a precious metal. Silver is the metal used mainly. Very often copper or other similar sedimentations could be detected upon precise examination. In some instances they breach the thin silver coating and create certain coloring. Usually it is just a nuance. For example when the core is a copper one, the coloring is red.

Another important factor is to determine if the metal composition is "off". For example it is a common phenomenon with counterfeits to have silver coins struck in a metal that is of a slightly more intensive grey colour than usual. One of the reasons that coins are produced from such kind of metal is that ingredients making the silver easier to cast or strike are added to it. In the case of coins made of base metals, more specifically sestertii, dupondii and asses, the alloy almost always differs from the genuine one.

The alloy has either a higher content of copper or is a certain type of brass, however it does not resemble the unique aurihalcum from ancient times. When using genuine core of old worn coins the following peculiarities could be noticed: when striking a coin upon the entire core with a new die the diameter of which is smaller than the core itself, the periphery and the edge remain in a higher position than normal, the main image sags deeper in the core and the ridge, thus obtained is easy to identify visually, as well as by touching; when striking a coin upon the entire core with a new die bigger in diameter than the core itself the edge gets flattened and the coin resembles a grain of lentils when being observed sideward. On very rare occasions the new die and the core might coincide perfectly. If this happens however and the struck coin is a success, it could still be easily discerned because of the edge that gets an unnatural shape, as well as additional cracks and bumps. When heated for second striking very often the old nucleus explodes and or disintegrates. This is the reason counterfeiters use pressing on cold worn cores. They usually seek to work with old and worn cores that have a proper patina. When using the cold pressing technology in a specific regime they can manage to obtain a good image and to preserve the genuine patina. Such an item is difficult to identify, so it is the edge in the first place that is to be analyzed. It is difficult to preserve the patina on top of the edge because the pressure is exerted vertically and the patina flakes off. Close examination is needed to establish the way the edge has been disguised. The camouflage often consists of artificial patina mixed with inert materials, a mixture of grounded genuine patina and silicate admixtures. Whatever substance is used it is not the genuine one and can be identified.

When making the analysis one can very well notice the differences in the copy-making techniques and afterwards in the touch up work of the original image. The critical point for the counterfeiters is the borderline when the machine copying ends and the manual touch up work starts. At first glance with the naked eye there is no visible difference between the image of the counterfeit and that of the genuine coin. Although high-tech copying devices are being used dies themselves are not adequate for striking, pressing or casting of coins. After the machine processing the metal flan gets further manual processing. Traces of machine work have to be covered up and the finest details of the image are to be finished. Expert analysis with considerable magnification of the item almost always would reveal the existing marks left by both the machine and the human hand. Traces are often barely visible but specific. If there are no traces whatsoever and the whole relief surface is equal on all levels, this should ring a bell. In

such instances we should suspect the presence of a counterfeit. The absence of the ordinary traces that are natural for the authentic coin is also a sign for something wrong.

One of the basic activities for identifying a counterfeit is the analyzing of the metal. For example three apparently different samples of silver have been identified so far that were used for cutting fake tetrobols of Histiaia and trihemiobols of the island of Thassos. The metal of the genuine coins is unique in nature and does not show visible deviations. Being very well acquainted with the characteristics of the genuine coins is therefore necessary. Continuous handling of genuine coins is highly recommended. The best option is keeping several not so costly coins in a pocket and rolling them as beads. The skin gets used to the touch of the ancient item and the fingers start to memorize details which would hardly urge the person himself to ponder upon. Such peculiarities are the feel of the relief, the rubbing of the edge's rims that have acquired an odd roundedness, the natural "waxy" mildness of the surface and of the fine details. Apart from that when touching the genuine metal one will scent a very specific odour. The metals and the patinas of the authentic coins have their own unique fragrances that one remembers for sure and that become his reliable assistant in fake detecting. This experiment is easy for anyone to perform. One should for example carry with him several genuine Roman denarii for a period of 2-3 months (he risks having his pocket torn if he chooses coins of the higher denominations) and roll them between his fingers all the time. When the person gets used to the feel of these coins he should add some fake denarii to his pocket. Then one will be able to tell the genuine coin from the counterfeit without even looking at them. Without looking at the coins he will also be able to identify them with a high degree of reliability only by their odour.

**Different additional coercions** can be exerted on the finished coin. For example it is a common phenomenon to imitate a metal purity check. As a disguise a strong hit with a sharp object is being exerted on one side of the coin thus producing a section. This action is an imitation of the ancient fashion. What could be noticed however using an image magnification are the differences in the surface of the coin itself and inside the section made. A difference from the original would always exist. What is only needed is a close examining and comparing.

### **Surface examination.**

This is done with the aim to detect even the tinniest divergences from the original. For example one can notice that on the surface of certain silver struck coins there are some bubbles as well as small flakes resembling dried cracked soil. Generally such surface is typical of the cast coins. However they are not the only ones that show strange marks on their surface. Many of the coins with a similar surface structure are ones that are struck and not cast. On many occasions before the coin gets struck the core is being cast and is natural for it to bear traces left by the casting process. One of the reasons for having these bubbles and casting marks is the raised relief of the image of certain coins. As the striking is made by means of a pneumatic or an eccentric press on a cold piece of metal the lowest parts of the core's surface often remain insufficiently treated. The pressure exerted by the press is not strong enough to eliminate the bubbles on the lowest part of the relief. The multiple sparkling pits and small lines are not always the air bubbles typical for the cast but are in fact lumps caused by the strong pressure of the steel die on the piece of cold silver shaped as a core. The marks on the core left by the casting combined with the pleating of the material as a result of the strong pressure create this surface unique in nature. Ancient people did not use such powerful presses and did not make coins by means of cold pressing. Typically the coin masters used to heat the coin core up to a certain temperature degree and controlled the process visually as per the gleaming of the metal. The heated core was subsequently struck with a strong blow of a heavy hammer. The genuine technology ensures the maximum contact between the coin die and the heated metal. The unique surface of the genuine struck coins, as well as the die lustre, so valuable for the collectors, are thus created. Another shortcoming of the coin production through processing of a cold core is the quick wearing out of the coin dies. Upon close examination one will inevitably notice also the defects resulting from the early and uneven destroying of the dies.

### **Examining and identifying artificial ageing and patination.**

Most frequently coins are made look older by using a cylinder filled with abrasive materials. The cylinder is rotated at slow speed by an electric drive. The coin is dropped inside and is kept whirling continuously. This process is being cut short when the counterfeiter decides that the sharpness and the height of the relief have been lowered to a desirable extent. It is the wear of the lower surfaces that is the major sign betraying that the coin has undergone a procedure of that kind. Genuine coins, in the course of their continuous use, wear out by the touch of a countless number of human

fingers. This manner of rubbing, however, results in the gradual wear of only the most raised points of the relief while with fakes all parts of the coin surface get equally worn out. Some of the counterfeiters use small leather bags which they fill with a number of coins and then carry them fastened to their belts thus imitating the natural process of friction and wearing of the coins. In order to shorten the time for artificial ageing the fakers frequently place the bag on a shaft which moves it up and down thus imitating the motion characteristic of walking or riding a horse. By means of this method, as well as of other similar ones, the worn look attained is close to that typical of the original. It is only the most raised part of the relief that flattens. However, rubbing metal against metal is quite different from rubbing metal with numerous human fingers. This specific gesture which has become a symbol since the time money was invented, and which is meaningful to every nation worldwide, is one of the major factors for the natural wearing of the coins.

The next step in the process of counterfeiting is to plate the coin with an artificial patina. The most frequently used patina is obtained mechanically. Layers of paints mixed with inert materials are laid on the coin surface. The fixing of all these is done by glues. In making an analysis the glues used can be very easily detected. The structure of the piled-up layers is also an easily discerned indicator of counterfeiters' interfering. The crust formed by materials that are either incompatible or cannot be found together in nature is another indicator of a fake. The chemically obtained patina can also be easily spotted. Although its colour may resemble that of the original patina only slightly deviating from it in the hues, its texture is much more different. It lacks both the density and the lustre intrinsic to the original. One should be very careful and keep his eye open to the optical illusion of "depth" characteristic of the original patina of the bronze coins which in practice is impossible to be counterfeited.

Besides collectors need to be wary all the time of coin counterfeits or copies that are made of the wrong metal. Certain coins can be found, rarely enough, that skillfully and intelligently replicate and imitate the original though made of a different metal, i.e. they are manufactured from a metal that has never been used for the production of the genuine coins. Such coins are not always fakes but unscrupulous dealers are likely to present them as such.

In case there are no points of support for making observations following the above mentioned positions, the method of the examination should be changed. When coin dies have been deliberately used for a long time so that both the edges and the coins themselves become apparently

"authentic", no traces of machines or human hands can be found. Then it is possible to resort to another method, which is:

**Style and artistic analysis.** This type of analysis is made by a very thorough comparison of each minute detail of the coin of interest with genuine coins and illustrations. Several approaches and techniques exist. In accordance with the inner feeling and for the sake of working convenience the object of examination can be considerably magnified and divided into sections or into separate details of the image. The impression of close resemblance one gets when observing the whole image unexpectedly changes when one starts scrutinizing the detail. The tooling of the molds, it could be seen, has had its effect. When a certain figure, attribute or symbol is magnified to a very great extent then the differences are very clearly revealed. They can be seen in the lines of the letters, in the way the fingers, the brow, the eye of the minute figure with a size no bigger than one millimeter were engraved by the slate-pencil. In the past, when making the genuine engraving of the metal, the master used to give the final touch of the whole composition according to his own logic and his own means of expression. The slate-pencil he used for engraving the metal made no deviations. The aim of the imitator is to reproduce the same image but his actions follow a different logic and sequence of work. This is the reason for the presence of parasitic marks and lines not typical of the genuine master. It can be noticed most clearly in the touch-up work and in the finest details. A peculiarity which is important to be mentioned here is when alongside with the style which does not correspond to the original one flagrant blunders can be seen as well. This could happen when, for example, the engraver did not capture the meaning of symbols and characters and reproduced something nonexistent. Sometimes one can also notice elements of the iconography that are either fabricated or misunderstood and misinterpreted, as well as certain impossible hybrid images. Having a perfect knowledge of the portraits of historically important personalities, of the iconography, the characters and attributes, depicted on coins, as well as being aware of the accompanying specific symbolism - this is what can be used as a very powerful weapon against the less competent counterfeiters.

## **COUNTERFEIT WORKSHOPS FOR COPIES AND REPLICAS IN BULGARIA**

### **STUDIO "VARNA - 1"**

It is represented by a chief master-engraver and his several technical assistants. None of his assistants, however, is an engraver or a student of the master. The studio operates openly and works on customers' orders. The greater part of the production is struck in the classical way with a heavy hammer. The silver coins of Apollonia Pontica, Messembria, Istrus and others are manufactured there. Most of the dies they use in their work are made by themselves but sometimes they resort to dies produced by outsiders, which they apply predominantly in the striking of large bronze coins, Roman sestertii mainly. Their strongest point is in the production of their locally distributed coins - pre Roman coins from the Western Pontic region. The ill-fated "Black Sea Hoard" was made on client's order in this very studio. The studio's master has a very good knowledge of the numismatic material he works with. When this learning is combined with a talent and skills then the production is very difficult to identify if ill intentions and deceit are the aim. What we believe, however, is that this studio is not engaged in illegal business and does not use any dealers. Our observations have shown that the studio displays its manufacture in the clear. In this respect a vivid example is the fact that the dies used for the striking of the numerous silver coins of Apollonia Pontica and Messembria were also used for production of souvenir coins made of aluminium or some other alloys. Thus we managed to discern hundreds of silver coins and determined them as being modern. Unfortunately, a great part of the products of Studio "Varna - 1" have already been spread all over the world as coins of authentic origin.

### **STUDIO "VARNA - 2"**

They don't have engravers of their own. Dies they use in their work are made by other coin engravers. For example, they have purchased several hundreds of dies from the some studios in the towns of Haskovo and

Dimitrovgrad. Most of their products can be found as souvenirs and they are not intended to be used for cheating the clients. They usually strike large pars - art replicas of Roman bronze coins: sestertii, asses and dupondii. One can easily tell the material they work with is different from bronze. It is either pure copper or brass alloys. These materials are easier to work with when using presses. These studio's products are pressed, not hammered. Coins that are more difficult to identify, however, can be produced in this studio on client's request. We have seen perfectly made aurei, denarii and other copies of rare and precious metals. When opportunity occurs we are going to show you more from their production in our future booklets. Due to the fact that they buy and work with ready-made steel dies the coins they produce are not marked.

#### STUDIO "NOVI PAZAR"

It is located in a small town in North-eastern Bulgaria near Varna. This studio is the most productive of all the studios manufacturing coin casts. They have a large market in the country and their coins are being ordered and exported abroad by many "merchants" . There is a strong demand for their production. This studio has several characteristic features. In the first place, it is the production of coins made by base metal - copper or copper alloys, additionally coated with a precious metal. The metal used as coating is mainly silver. Often after thorough and detailed examination there could be noticed copper sedimentations piercing through the thin silver coating thus giving it a reddish tint. The craftsmen of this studio are highly experienced in making artificial patina as well as in covering the marks left by the casts. Their derivatives are of much higher quality than those produced by Studio "Southwest". They manufacture coins of all possible denominations and the quality of the metal surface of their casts is often close to the quality of the struck coins. Unfortunately, in this case again, the coins of high quality are not distributed on the national coin-market that makes it difficult for us to display them. Their production is limited, made only on a contractual basis and aimed for export. Therefore it is difficult to be documented. We have seen several gold and silver coins that we suspect to have been made in this studio but for the time being we cannot make any comments because of limited data. We believe that in near future Studio "Novi Pazar" will be mentioned again.

#### STUDIO "SOUTHWEST - 1"

This studio came into existence in the 80's of the last century and is

located somewhere in the region of the town of Dupnitsa, South-western Bulgaria. It does not work permanently. Nevertheless, they periodically put numerous coin "emissions" on the market. The several "coin hoards" comprising only tetrobols of the type of town of Histiaea of the Euboea island were made by them. Some of these "pseudo-hoards" consisted of 500-1000 coins each. The number of the dies used for their coinage amounts to several dozens. We managed to count as many as 60 combinations of obverse and reverse dies. The metal the coins were struck in is a bit greyer than usual. In our opinion one of the reasons that in this very studio tetrobols of Histiaea are being manufactured is the fact that some genuine samples of these coins have been discovered in the region of Dupnitsa. They were used as prototypes for reproducing the counterfeits of whole coin treasures. It is obvious that the better specimens of the uncovered ones were retained by the organizers of the "studio" and used for making copies. The numerous samples of counterfeits we have seen show that the genuine coins have been very skillfully copied and reproduced. There is no difference from the originals that is visible to the naked eye which means that the die-making machinery used by the counterfeiters for copying was of good quality (modern). The coin dies were used for a certain length of time so that the edges be worn out and the coins assume a more authentic appearance. The counterfeiters have done their work with such a dexterity that it took us half a year to make sure that the coins we deal with are fakes. We compared the dies with genuine coins and illustrations. One has the feeling of a very close resemblance; still the remaking of the dies has left its imprint. The most important factor, however, in telling the counterfeit from the original, is the metal. So far we have found out 3 different batches of silver used for striking tetrobols of Histiaea and trichemiobols of the island of Thasos. Counterfeits of smaller denominations of silver coins of the island of Thasos of the types - dolphin / a concave square; 2 dolphins / a quadripartite incuse square have also emerged on the Bulgarian market most recently. Here again genuine coins uncovered in the Western Rhodopes mountain were used for prototypes.

#### STUDIO "SOUTHWEST - 2"

Typical of this studio is the production of counterfeits of Greek coins of the bigger nominal by means of casting. A great number of counterfeits of staters of the island of Thasos - of the Satyr and Menada type, tetradrachms and staters of Maroneia and Abdera, tetradrachms of Phillip II and Alexander III have been known so far. The representatives of this studio use genuine coins of a good quality as prototype. They take imprints and do

the casting following the classical method, however they do not perform these procedures precisely enough. They are probably a group of people with poor technological training. Namely for this reason they choose large and heavy coins which are more suitable for this kind of forgery. In contrast however, they are experts in disguising the counterfeits after they are cast. What they usually do with their samples is to treat them additionally with some acid thus hiding the traces of sprue and tiny bubbles, typical of the cast

The next step is to coat them with some patina. The patina chosen by the counterfeiters is dark-colored, close to the colour of the argentic oxides. Before being laid on the surface the patinas are treated with an acid that additionally complicates the discerning of the coins. This method results in a great amount of waste. As a matter of fact, however, the successful counterfeits are difficult to detect. One of the effective ways of telling them from the genuine ones is to identify the artificial patina. Besides, upon considerable magnification the specific texture of the metal treated beforehand with an acid can be seen. On several occasions this studio has also produced coins which after having been treated with an acid were seriously burnt and then cooled following a formula that is this studio's specialty. Most probably this is being repeated several times up to the point of forming a specific crystal cream-colored structure typical of the silver coins and objects that underwent fire in the past. This sort of coating is also difficult to be discerned.

### STUDIO "DIMITROVGRAD"

It was founded by a student of Studio "Haskovo". The town of Dimitrovgrad itself is situated within the administrative region of Haskovo in South-eastern Bulgaria. This studio is extremely active, having, we might say, an aggressive style. So far we have identified their dies designed for striking the following coins:

1. Electrum staters of Cyzikus;
2. Gold staters, half and quarter gold staters, etc., of Philip II, Alexander III the Great, Lysimachus, Croesus and Panticapaium;
3. Silver staters, tetradrachms, didrachms, drachms, tetrobols, hemiobols and obols of Abdera, Amphipolis, Aenus, Catana, Maronea, Neapolis in Macedonia, Olynthus, the Island of Rhodes, Syracuse and the Island of Thasos;
4. Silver staters, tetradrachms, didrachms, drachms of Philip II, Alexander III, Philip III Arrhidaeus, Philip V, Lysimachus and Ptolemaeus I;
5. Gold Roman Republican aurei of Cn. Domitius, Cn.f. L.n.

Ahenobarbus and Sextus Pompeius;

6. Silver Republican denarii of L. Scribonius Libo, C. Plancius, D. Iunius Brutus Albinus, Q. Sicinius, Q. Pomponius Rufus, Ahenobarbus, Pompey the Great, Julius Ceasar, Brutus (incl. Brutus and Lentulus), Cassius, M. Antony, M. Antony with Octavian, M. Antony with Lucius Antony, Cleopatra VII of Egypt and M. Antony, Caius Antony and Octavian Augustus, etc.;

7. Gold imperial aurei, solidi, semisi, tremisi of Claudius I with Agrippina, Julia Domna, Probus, Diocletian, Crispus, Procopius, Galla Placidia, Aelia Eudocia, Aelia Pulcheria, Marcian and Anthemius;

8. Silver imperial denarii and siliqui of Tiberius Augustus, Caligula with Octavian, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius Augustus, Vespasian Augustus (including Vespasian with Titus and Domitian), Titus, Domitian and Constantine II Augustus;

9. Bronze medallions of Maximian Augustus and Constantius I Chlorus;

10. Gold imperial solidi and hyperperoni of Justin I, Justinian I, Maurice Tiberius, Phocas, Michael II with Theophilus and Andronicus I;

11. Silver hyperpera (nomismi) of Alexius I Komnenos and others.

So far we have not had the opportunity to furnish documentary evidence of this studio's production as a whole. We were not allowed to take photographs of the coins we have incidentally seen up to now. What we can show here is only several specimens. It is worth noting that sometimes the master engraver puts a marking in the form of a Cyrillic inscription in positive thus showing that the coin is a copy. The inscription, however, can very easily be erased and the surface under it can be coated with patina. The productivity of this studio is high and in some cases the engravers' work is of very high quality. Some of the coins produced by them could hardly be discerned. Our intention is to represent their production more completely in the near future.

We might note that almost each coin produced by them through striking has being duplicated by a cast coin, often of poor quality. This gives us ground to assume that these comparatively low-quality casts are not the produce of the above studio but of another "manufacturer" specialized in using the coins struck by studio "Dimitrovgrad" as prototypes for secondary counterfeiting.

#### STUDIO "SOFIA - MB"

The style of work is strongly influenced by the Italian schools of fine arts. This studio's master is a professional painter. He received his schooling

of fine arts in Italy. His specific academic style is often telling of his authorship of counterfeits. What is specific of this counterfeit studio is that is engaged in reprocessing or making the touch-up work of genuine Roman coin cores. They give preference to the high denominations - sestertii, dupondii and asses, that offer a larger field to work on. Sometimes this counterfeiter produces only parts of dies and strikes with them the original cores thus affecting only a section of the surface of the coin core. It is easy to identify this studio's style of work. For example, it seems as if the characters in the Roman mythological scenes were mechanically transferred from the time of the Italian post-Renaissance masters. This studio works on original coins of no special value that are extremely worn out which are transformed into expensive Roman bronze coins. Part of the inscription is modified by a supplementary striking, images are being added, etc. This however often results in damaging the existing details of the relief and this cannot be concealed. For that reason a large part of the production is easier to discern and it is not fit for export to countries with wealthy clients. Such coins, which are not very successful imitations, are sold in this country at more modest prices. In this studio they use artificial patina based on paints that are mixed with glues. Upon careful examination this can easily be detected because of the unnatural piling up of layers, of the multiple tiny cracks, etc. A great number of false sestertii, aces and dupondii of rare and precious coins, spread the world over, come from this studio. They can be discerned by the style of the master when he had to create a new die or just a certain part of it. The letters also differ from the authentic ones.

We took the liberty to change our system of work, thus hoping this to be of greater benefit to the readers. Instead of offering the arid catalogue presentation of the counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins we have encountered, now we furnish our audience with more of our commentaries and observations. Thus we expose everything we know and we are sure of.

We have divided the work into a theoretical section and practical observations. The first part includes methodological advice and information about the studios that produce counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins. The information is not much detailed because it is kept in deep secret and it is difficult to get close to it. However, this is all we have at our disposal for the time being. Not many counterfeiters tend to get out in the open and share their secrets. This is valid only for those who perceive themselves as artists and strive for acknowledgement and wider audiences. The rest who are the bigger part go under cover because their business is

illegal.

The catalogue part also has several sections. In the first section some newly identified counterfeits, copies and replicas of classical coins are included. In the second one the coins of the private collection of Mr R. Manov of Sofia are displayed. Not all the coins we present here are of "high quality" and hard to identify. However, they are quite often used in this booklet as a good illustrative material of the different studios.

We offer the third part as a basis for discussion. There we display coins we suspect as fake but we lack evidence to prove this. We do believe that truth will come out of discussion and we do hope we will learn something new and interesting. We expect the book thus organized to be more useful.

Regardless of the competition and the struggle for existence between the different schools and studios for manufacturing counterfeits, copies and replicas of ancient coins there is a recent process of integration. It is already clearly proved that these manufacturers do favours to each other, for example they exchange information and coin dies. Apart from that, they have divided among themselves the market and have arranged the distribution of the export and sales activities. It's a fact that the counterfeit business has been divided into different ages and different types. A part of the counterfeiters that are good in manufacturing items from the ancient Roman age limit their activity and get specialised strictly in this field. They subsequently exchange among themselves the finished products or dies. Thus each one of them is able to meet the requirements for any order.

In the above short review we did not cover all counterfeit studios because we do not have information about them. We have found out that there are some more of them available. For the time being, however, we have only indirect information about them. The investigation process is complicated as well as time and resource consuming.

# CATALOGUE

## HERAKLEIA, LUCANIA ITALY

1. AR didrachm?, 22/22 mm; 5,244 g; 12h

Obv. Head of Athena r., wearing crested and ornamented Athenian helmet.

Rev.  $\Delta / \text{K} / \Phi$  **ΗΡΑΚΛΙΩΝ** Herakles, naked, stg. facing, head and body turned to r., strangling lion with both hands, between legs - owl r., in field to l., - club.

Cast.



## NEAPOLIS, CAMPANIA ITALY\*

2. AR, 21/20 mm; 5,181 g; 12h

Obv. Laur. head of Apollo l.

Rev. **ΝΕΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ** Forepart of man-headed bull walking r., head facing, crowned by Nike flying r., beneath bull - **ΣΑ**.

Cast.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



3. AR Tetradrachm, 23/22 mm; 12,024 g; 1h

Obv. Head of Athena to r., wearing crested helmet ornamented with olive-leaves and floral scroll.

Rev. **AΘE** Owl standing to r., head facing, olive-twig and crescent, all within incuse square.

The Athena tetradrachm shown here is one of the poorer quality products of Studio "Southwest - 2". It is manufactured by means of casting of silver. It can be clearly seen that in the process of artificial ageing both the burning and the acid treatment were overdone. The pitting in the metal is too deep and the texture arouses immediate suspicion. For the purpose of disguise, the obverse of the coin had received a strong blow with a sharp object, the typical way of testing the metal that was used in ancient times. However, as one can clearly see straight away, the surface of the metal inside the section made is too smooth. This is because the section was made later, so its surface was not affected by the acid and the temperature. In itself this very coin is not dangerous and it would hardly be misleading to anybody. What is important here is that coin is one of the few available examples of the produce of Studio "Southwest". This "studio's" items probably have a guaranteed export market because their products are almost not present on the local "market". This is why it is impossible for us to show more specimens of their production.



#### **APOLLONIA PONTIKA**

4. AR Drachm, 13/14 mm; 2,794 g; 8h

Obv. Gorgoneion facing.

Rev. Anckor, A to l., crayfish to r.

"Varna-1Studio"



Similar.

5. AR Drachm, 13,5/13,5 mm; 2,837 g; 2h

This coin is a very good example of striking by using a worn out die. Although the coin itself is not a worn-out one and it has never been in circulation, the worn die has had its effect on the counterfeited coin. We have seen coins manufactured by means of the same obverse die that however was in different stages of wearing and also some of these coins were not struck from silver but from another material. At first glance the coin shown here looks like it has been in circulation for a very long time and has been worn out as a result of being transferred from hand to hand. What one needs to do here is just to have a look at the wear of the lower parts of the relief and notice that these are worn out just as much as the highest parts of the relief. The obverse die of this coin is also an example of the alteration the die undergoes when being used for a long time. In comparing it to coins that were struck with this very die by the time it was still new, we can find here that the points of support located off centre have moved towards the periphery. This happens when the steel die gets flattened down because of the deformations and the wear of the metal. We recommend deformations to be taken into consideration when an analysis of the coin dies is made.

"Varna-1Studio"



6. Similar.

AR Drachm, 14/13 mm; 3,374 g; 1h

"Varna-1Studio"



7. Similar.

AR Drachm, 13/14 mm; 2,639g; 12h  
"Varna-1Studio"



8. Similar.

AR Drachm, 13/14 mm; 2,983 g; 12h  
"Varna-1Studio"



9. AR Diobol, 11/11 mm; 1,305g; 12h

Obv. Laur. head of Apollo facing.

Rev. Anckor, A to l., crayfish to r.

"Varna-1Studio"



10. Similar.

AR Diobol, 11/11 mm; 0,994 g; 12h

"Varna-1Studio"



11. Similar.

AR Diobol, 10,5/10 mm; 0,992 g; 12h  
"Varna-1Studio"



### MESEMBRIA

12. AR Diobol, 9,5/10,5 mm; 1,447 g; 7h

Obv. Crested helmet facing.

Rev. **M / E / T / A** - in the four quarters of a radiate wheel.

A coin artificially worn out by means of continuous rotating inside a cylinder with abrasive particles within. One can clearly see that the wear has affected equally the raised and the lower parts of the relief.

"Varna-1Studio"



13. Similar.

AR Diobol? 11/11 mm; 1,225g; 3h

The coin has not been tooled additionally after the striking. To compare the texture of its surface with that of the above coin would be useful as a training practice.

"Varna-1Studio"



## CYZIKUS

14. El Stater, 21/20 mm; 15, 948 g

Obv. Head of Herakles with lion's skin r., below tunny.

Rev. Quadripartite incuse square.

The electron alloy is not well prepared. It has an apparently more intense yellow colour than the original one.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



15. El. Stater

Obv. Cybele ride on horseback of panther l., below tunny.

Rev. Quadripartite incuse square.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



## HISTRIA, MOESIA

16. AR Stater, 18/19 mm; 9,374 g

Obv. Two young male heads facing, side by side, one upright, the other inverted.

Rev.  $\text{ΙΣΤΡΗ}$ . Sea-eagle stg. l. on dolphin l., which it attacks with his beak.

"Varna-1Studio"



Similar.

17. AR Stater, 20/20 mm; 9,708 g

The two staters of Istros (NoNo ...) are struck with the same pair of dies. The metal is more intensely grey than the original one. These coins were not treated to look older and on their edges one can see some unsmoothed ridges. They are easily detected. In No . . . one can notice certain irregularities of the noses of Dioscuri resulting from the poor preparation of the blank. At the same time we have come across samples manufactured with the same pair of dies that had a very skillfully done artificial ageing and patina and being mixed with other coins, some fake and some authentic were grouped in coin hoard. We recommend that coin dies be compared.

"Varna-1Studio"



Similar.

18. AR Stater, 20/21 mm; 9, 550 g

The three staters under No . . . are casts. They were made of a metal mixture of grey colour which is suitable for castings and does not leave blebs and tiny bubbles. After the cast they were subject to artificial wear and then plated with silver. In this particular case the raised parts of the relief of these three staters were worn out because of the thinness of their silver coating. It is exactly there where one can notice the grey metal mixture of the cast. Here we have a pattern that is just the opposite of that of the authentic coins - the colour of the highest parts of the coin is grey while that of the low parts is light, silver-shaded. The pattern of wearing of the genuine coins is the opposite: the raised parts are white in colour because the silver gets polished (worn out), while the low parts are dark because the patina which covers them is made of argentum oxide. This type of counterfeits get mixed with authentic coins and are subsequently presented as having been discovered as collective hoards. Hundreds of pieces of these have been manufactured. Quite often their appearance does not seem suspicious at first glance, therefore it is necessary to keep a close watch on the metal structure

and on the silver plating, as well as to look for traces left by the cast. An example of this is the misfitting of the rims due to improper assembling of the two halves of the paraffin imprints of the coin blanks. There is a displacing of the reverses where the number is. We recommend keeping an eye on the colour of the metal on its rigidity. Casts exist that are made of low-melting-point metal alloys - they melt even at the heat of pocket lighter flame. Other casts are manufactured of material so soft that just the pressure of a nail is enough to damage them.

"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

19. AR Stater, 21/19 mm; 9, 750 g

The trace of the unconformity of the coin seam, resulting from the unsuccessful fitting together of the two parts during the cast, can be clearly seen on the reverse.

"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

20. AR Stater, 22/21 mm; 9, 790 g

"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

21. AR Drachm? 17/16 mm; 5,424 g

The patina is artificial having an unnatural bright green colour. It is stuck with glue and is composed of copper alloys and paints. It is not typical for silver coins. We have seen other counterfeit coins that were struck with this same obverse die. The edge has been additionally tooled.

"Varna 1 Studio"



Similar.

22-26. AR Quarter stater? 11/11 mm; 0,836 g

This and the next four coins are silver alloy casts. They differ in quality, however one can come across some very successful samples. There are bubbles on their surface that have been filled with artificial patina. This group of coins imitate a small coin hoard. They have been successfully made look older. The patina has been coated in two layers. The first is a very stable one, brown-black in colour. Over this layer, here and there an incompact green patina imitating copper alloys has been laid on. One can very clearly see all this under close examination.

"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

27. AR Quarter stater? 12/9 mm; 1,148 g

"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

28. AR Quarter stater? 10/10 mm; 0,775 g  
"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

29. AR Quarter stater? 10/7 mm; 0,873 g  
"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

30. AR Quarter stater? 9/9 mm; 1,045 g  
"Novi Pazar Studio"



## **RHODES**

31. AR Drachm/Didrachm, 20/20 mm; 5,056 g

Obv. Head of Helios three-quarter face to r.

Rev. **POAION** above rose, bud in field to r., E and branch of grapes to l.

This coin was not subject to artificial ageing. We have seen several versions of coin dies of gold and silver Rhodos coins manufactured in this characteristic style. The coin displayed here is silver struck but certain gold coins also exist that were struck with the same die. On the surface of the coin, around the face of Helios one can notice some bubbles, the typical traces from casting. However, this coin is struck and not cast. The coin blank was produced by casting, therefore it is natural for it to bear traces of this kind of processing. These bubbles and cast marks are due to the the raised relief of the image of the obverse. As the striking is performed by

either a pneumatic or an eccentric press on a cold piece of metal, the lowest surfaces of the blank often remain insufficiently processed. The compression of the press is not strong enough to eliminate the bubbles. Another shortcoming of coin production by processing of a cold blank is the fast wearing out of the steel coin dies. If you are more attentive you cannot help noticing any defects resulting from the early damaging of the dies in the following areas: between the lips and over the eyes on the obverse side; over the marginal leaves of the rose on the reverse side of the coin. This coin die has also been used for making several moulds for the casting of coins. The items cast with these moulds, we did have a look at, could be easily discerned.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



## THASOS

Below there are five trihemioibols which were struck with one pair of dies and which show slight differences in the centering and shaping of the blanks. The silver they are made of is of standard lower than that of the originals. We display this small group of coins because they have been submitted to some clients of ours as a coin hoard. About ten years ago entire groups of the same coins were presented as collective hoards and were sold without any problems. So far we have seen several versions of coin dies of that kind. We recommend comparing the coin dies and the engraver's style.

32-36. AR 5 trihemioibols

Obv. Satyr kneeling l., holding kantaros.

Rev. ΘΑΣΙΩΝ Either side of amphora.

"South-West 1 Studio"





## THRACIAN, MACEDONIAN AND GREEK KINGS

### KOTYS I

37. AR 15/14,5 mm; 2,835 g

Obv. Male head l., bearded. Border of dots.

Rev. **KOTO**. Two-handled vase.

The coin looks as it was when it was struck, there are no traces of ageing and patina. The die lustre is still preserved. The engraver has interpreted the face of king Kotys as per his own perceptions.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



### Ì ÆÒÏ ÊÏS

38. AR Diobol, 13,5/13 mm; 0.969 g

Obv. **MHOTOK**. Male head l., bearded. Border of dots.

Rev. **MHTOKO**. Labris and bukranon.

This coin looks like the above, without any traces of ageing and patination. It still has the die lustre on it. The engraver has made an error when writing the name of the king on the obverse - he has displaced the

letters beginning from the second through to the sixth. The portrait is an interpretation of the author.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



### MACEDONIA, ALEXANDER III

39. AV Stater, 19/19 mm; 8, 450 g; 12h

Obv. Head of Athena with Corinthian helmet r.

Rev. ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟ. Nike stg. l., holding wreath and ship's mast.

The coin is gold struck from an investment coin with gold content of 916/1000. The die luster is preserved throughout its entire surface. The edge is typical of the "Lipanoff Studio" and it is heavily cracked, grainy. If it is not disguised it can be discerned comparatively easily by the edge and because of the absence of gold oxide. However, we have seen some other samples of this pair of coin dies that were additionally tooled to a considerable extent. Their surface is artificially worn out and covered with tiny streaks, while the edge is additionally rounded off to imitate a genuine one. We recommend comparing the coin dies compared and checking the quality of the gold. This coin has never been published.



40. Similar.

AV Stater 19/19 mm; 8, 450 g; 12h

The alloy of this cast coin has a yellow colour with a slight brownish tinge, and the metal is definitely not a precious one. The coin was subsequently gold-plated and later the gold started to efface thus making the base metal beneath clearly visible. It is quite obvious that this coin is not a proper one. We have decided though to display this very coin so that the technology of its production could be seen "in section" and the methods of identification be outlined. When comparing it with the authentic gold staters of that same period one can very clearly see how much more plastic gold is

when being struck. The gold assumes the shape of the die, as fully as possible, to the last micron, and this is evident when you look at the relief. In this coin the structure of the relief is similar to that of the copper and bronze coins. The contours of the images are coarser and blurred and not as sharply contrasting as those of items made of high-carat gold. When examining thoroughly a similar stater with a complete thick gold coating the observer will not notice any base metal showing through underneath. He should therefore use as reference points the texture of the material and the contrast of the images and inscriptions, if any. An example of a target of close examination on the obverse of this coin is the eye and the protective mane of the helmet. As for the reverse, a point of such an analysis represents, for example, the wreath in Nike's hand. Notwithstanding the good quality of the cast, the contours of the image are sharply outlined and the entire impact of the product is one that is very remote from the original. What we recommend is to compare the tiny details and to keep a close watch on the quality of the gold.



41. AV ? Stater 2,225 g

Obv. Head of Athena with Corinthian helmet r.

Rev. ΑΛΕΞΑΝ / ΔΡΟΥ. Above and beneath bow and club l. In field above - thunderbolt.

This photograph has been taken incidentally, not in a studio and without using a stand and for that reason its quality, unfortunately, is not good enough. This is a struck coin made of good quality gold. The edges left by the die are not effaced. The surface is not processed and the die luster is preserved. The edge is well-rounded and it bears close resemblance to the texture of the original one. We have seen several coins struck by two different obverse dies of this denomination. They were also made of good quality gold by means of striking, still they were artificially made look

ancient. We, however, could not have them available for publishing.  
"Dimitrovgrad" Studio



42. AR Drachm, 17/18 mm; 3,080 g

Obv. Head of young Herakles r., clad in lion's skin.

Rev. **ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ** Zeus seated l. on throne with back, holding eagle and scepter.

This cast coin is just an attempt for producing a counterfeit. An original drachma has been used as its prototype. The coin was cast of an alloy and then silver-plated utilizing electrolysis. Its surface was not processed before the coin was silver-plated. The manufacturers did not make it look older and fill in the pits before coating it with silver and finally putting the patina on. They would have done so if they intended to produce a counterfeit. One can clearly see large pits on the reverse above the head of Zeus and on the rim of the edge, to the left of the eagle. What this coin would have looked like had it been finished as fake one can see in No . . .

"Novi Pazar Studio"



Similar.

43. AR Drachm, 18/18 mm; 3,890 g; 1h

This is a specimen that was cast using an imprint of an authentic coin. The metal is an alloy based on copper. This coin has undergone a very serious processing after being cast. There are some pits and tiny bubbles, very few in number, that can be seen on the obverse while there are almost no traces left by the casting on the reverse. The coin is well plated with silver and then processed again to be patinated and to have its surface shaped in order to give it closer resemblance to the original. Very often on

the surface there are copper sedimentations which come up the silver plating no matter how thick it is. The raised parts of the relief and the edge should be carefully examined. It is namely there that silver first gets rubbed out. We also recommend a close examination of the coin for finding copper sedimentations. They are easily discerned by the reddish colour.

"Novi Pazar Studio"



### PHILIP III ARRHIDAEUS

44. AR Drachm: 18/18 mm; 4,347 g; 1h.

Obv. Head of young Herakles r., clad in lion's skin.

Rev. **ΦΙΛΙΠ...** Zeus seated l. on throne with back, holding eagle and scepter.

This is a cast of an authentic coin with traces of a metal check, with additional marking, etc. The drachma shown here is a good quality counterfeit sample and it could misleading not only to beginners in the field of coin collecting. It originates from the same studio as No... and is manufactured using the same technology. On the reverse of the drachma of Philip III Arrhidaeus one can clearly see the red spot of copper that has come up near the feet of Zeus.

"Novi Pazar Studio"



### PHILIP V

45. AR Tetradrachm, 32/31 mm.; 16,937 g; 12h

Obv. Diad. Head of Philip r., with close bard.

Rev. **ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ** Athena Alkidemos advancing l., brandishing thunderbolt, and holding shield.

The coin is a copy of an authentic tetradrachm. The edge is

unnaturally flat as it is with contemporary coins. The texture of the surface is uneven with tiny bubbles on it. Although the metal it is made of is a silver alloy with different admixtures, it is much different from the original. It does not look like being manufactured by any counterfeiters or copy-makers from Bulgaria.



### **PTOLEMY II - IV? OF EGYPT**

46. AR 24/24 mm; 4,589 g; 6h

Obv. Diad. Head of Ptolemy r.

Rev. ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ. Eagle stg. l., on thunderbolt.

The coin has a very low relief. It looks like a souvenir copy. It is not a product of any Bulgarian masters.



### **KANIT**

47. AE 21/19 mm; 13,60 g

Obv. Male head r., wearing tainia.

Rev. ΒΑΣΙ / ΚΑΝΙ. Fasces and 2 axes.

This struck coin is made of an alloy in which copper (Cu) is the predominant ingredient. The author-engraver has misinterpreted the iconography. The style does not correspond to what is known of the genuine coins of this Skittish ruler. The engraver has not captured the meaning of the symbol of the reverse - the fasces. Apart from being a hybrid of the portrayals of Philip II and Philip V, the obverse of the coin is reproduced in

a mediocre way. We might have said that the picture of the meager Scythian coinage has been enriched for sure with the existence of this coin, had it not been so bunglingly done.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



## ROMAN COINS

### L. IULIUS BURSI

48. AR Denarius, 19/19,5 mm; 2,979 g; 6h

Obv. Dr. bust of young male r., combining attributes of Appolo, Mercury and Neptune. Club behind.

Rev. **L IVLI BVRSI**. Victory in quadriga r.

"Lipanoff Studio"



### TIBERIUS

49. AV Aureus, 20/19 mm; 3,630; 12h

Obv. **TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS**. Laur. head r.

Rev. **TR POT XVII / IMPVII**. Tiberius in quadriga r., holding eagle-tipped scepter.

"Haskovo-1" Studio.



50. AR Denarius, 20/20 mm; 3,686 g; 6h

Obv. **TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS**. Head of Tiberius r.

Rev. **PONTIF MAXIM**. Pax std. r., holding branch and scepter.

This coin is a cast. The entire core is covered on the reverse with small circular pits - caverns with only few of them being on the obverse. The surface of the coin is covered with multiple tiny bubbles. At several places there are marks left by defects of the wax positive that were imprinted on the cast.

"Novi Pazar" Studio.



### **CAIUS (CALIGULA)**

51. AE Sestertius, 38/38 mm; 26,335 g

Obv. **C CAES.....GERMANICVS PON.....**

Rev. Oak-wreath?

This is one more example of a remake of a coin. An authentic old core has been used. By means of new dies this core has been struck as one of the rare and precious coins - sestertii of Caligula, most probably with a legend **SPQR PP OB SIVES SERVATOS**. The obscure contour of a wreath can be seen on the reverse. After it was struck the coin was coated with artificial patina with unnatural green colour. Obviously the sticking components were not firm enough because some initial flaking of the patina and certain uncovering of parts of the genuine core can be seen. The entire periphery and the edge are raised because the new die had a diameter smaller than that of the old core. This is why they became the most raised parts of the coin relief. We would recommend keeping coins with similar relief under close watch.

"Sofia - MB Studio"



## **AGRIPPINA**

52. AE Sestertius, 35/34 mm; 25,764 g; 7h

Obv. **AG.....CAESARIS AVG.**

Rev. Carpentum drawn by two mules.

This is a remake of a sestertius. This is an attempt for striking a rare and valuable coin of Agrippina from a badly worn out coin on which a bust of a man is visible. The counterfeit studio that produced this coin is specialised mainly in the processing or tooling of genuine Roman coin cores. The big nominal - sestertii, dupondii and aces are this studio's main preference as they offer a larger field to work on. Sometimes this counterfeiter prepares only certain parts of dies with which he strikes on the genuine cores affecting just a part of their surface. The same procedure was used for the above coin. The inscription on the obverse is fragmentary, the reverse that is of the rare type without an inscription is quite successful. The old image however is in contrast and does not correspond in a natural way with the new one.

"Sofia-MB Studio"



## **NERO AS CAESAR**

53. AE Dupondius, 29/28 mm; 16,202 g; 6h

Obv. **NERO CLAVD CAES DRVS GERM PRINC IVV.** Dr. bust l.

Rev. **SACERD COOPT IN OMN CONL SVpra NVM EX S C.**

Simpulum and lituus above tripod and patera.

The coin is manufactured by means of galvanoplastics. First it was either cut in soft metal or cast from a low melting point metal. After that, by means of galvanization, it was plated with copper. The copper coating, though having been well tarnished, is identifiable at a glance. This treated copper surface was first colored in reddish-brown here and there and then a low quality green patina was laid on the colored spots. There are two perfectly identical circular traces on the edge as if was perforated with the point of a small mill. These were very carefully disguised by being filled in

with paste. It is possible that these traces have been left by electric terminals and were disguised in this manner. Unfortunately we had no chance to take a photograph of the edge.

"Sofia-MB Studio"



### **NERO AUGUSTUS**

54. AE Sestertius, 24,781 g; 6h

Obv. **NERO CLAVDIVS CAESAR AVG GERM TR P IMP P.**

Laur. head r.

Rev. Nero on horseback right, holding spear; behind him rides a soldier carrying a vexillum, **S - C. DECVRSIO** in ex.

The coin is cast in copper or a certain copper alloy, its prototype being a genuine coin. There are circular pits-caverns on the edge, which would not have this particular look if the coin was struck. Had the coin core been heated up and been subjected to a blow with a heavy hammer, these perfectly circular flaws would have been filled up or would have lost shape. Apart from that the edge is unnatural in form. The letters of the obverse inscription have been levelled in height by sanding. It can be clearly seen that a machine has been used for this manipulation. The marks left by the disc of a power tool are quite evident. The patina is artificial and has an acceptable brown colour but an ugly and unspecific bright green mixture of copper alloys, glue and paint has been stuck on top of it. The coin is well manufactured and certain people might be taken in by it. We recommend that casts of this pair of coin dies be kept track of. Probably there are more copies existing.

"Novi Pazar" Studio.



## OTHO

56. AR denarius, 16,5/ 16,5 mm; 3,463 g; 5h  
Obv. ...**TO CAESAR AVG TR**. Bare head r.  
Rev. **SECV...TAS PP**. Securitas stg. 1.  
"Novi Pazar" Studio.



## VESPASIAN

57. AE Sestertius, 35/34 mm; 27,377 g; 6h

Obv. **IMP CAES VESPASIAN AVG P M TR P P COS II**.

Laureate head r.

Rev. **IVDEA CAPTA**. Jewess in attitude of mourning, seated right beneath palm tree; to left, captive Jew with hands tied behind back standing right; captured weapons behind. **S C** in ex.

The color of the coin is reddish so we may guess that the material most probably has a prevailing percentage of copper in its content. In this particular case the manufacturer has used one of the following possible ways based on galvanoplastics: soft metal struck and electrochemical plating; low melting point metal cast and electrochemical plating. One can notice at first glance that the copper plating though well tarnished dark bears evidence of this. First the treated copper surface was here and there laid on with a reddish-brown patina and then covered with a green one that is of low quality and very unnatural in color. In preparing the die the obverse of a sestertia was copied with almost no alterations, but the image of the reverse that obviously had a lower relief had to be tooled afterwards and finally shaped. This makes it possible to register the traces of intervention even regarding the style of work. Two perfectly circular marks can be noticed on the edge, as it is with No..... The common features, the color of the metal and the patina show that these items were manufactured in the same studio.

"Sofia-MB Studio"



## DOMITIAN

58. AV Avreus, 19/19 mm; 5,250 g; 12h

Obv. **DOMITIANVS AVGVSTVS**. Laureate head r.

Rev. **GERMANICVS COS XIII**. Germania seated r. on shield, mourning; broken spear below.

A rather unsuccessful product of an unknown school of counterfeiters. The coin was struck from gold. The engraving is quite badly performed. The portrait of Domitian bears only a faint resemblance to the original and is a kind of a mixture of Domitian himself, Vespasian and Tit. The beaded circle below at 6 h is distorted and the inscription is uneven, with its letters looking strange. The letters M and S are especially interesting as an example of close examination Things are the same on the reverse - uneven inscription again, with letters irregularly raised and written in a style and manner that are not typical for the Roman practice. Germania was engraved in a posture of some sexless creature that has a hangover, her left leg hanging oddly in the air, her rough-palmed left hand put out to her head without touching it however and her wrist unnaturally twisted. The broken spear down in the field below is more alike a crooked iron fitting. It is obvious that the iconography was not captured correctly.



## TRAJAN

59. AE Sestertius, 21,130g 5h

Obv. ....**TRAIANO AVG GER DAC**.... Laur. dr. and cuir. Busr r.

Rev. Facade of Trajan's Forum formed by 6 columns, a central entrance, four niches, on the top of the roof a facing quadriga? In ex. **FORVM TRAIAN**.

The coin is manufactured out of an old badly worn off authentic core of a sestertius of Trajan. The producer has prepared fragments of two new dies. The obverse die is in the form of a belt surrounding the portrait of Trajan and bearing an inscription. The reverse die consists only of the image of the forum and the inscription beneath the image. The striking is executed over the old patina. On the obverse it is apparent that the inscription is

sagged unnaturally low, it does not fully coincide with the layout of the old one and its relief stands in sharp contrast to everything around it. Some traces of the relief of the old inscription are hardly noticeable on the reverse. The stroke has been uneven and has "compressed" harder one of the sides. That is why the image is not equally contrasting. The new patina is artificial and overlaps the old one. The colour is quite real but beneath the new green patina the old brown one can be seen through.

"Sofia - MB Studio"



60. AE Sestertius, 22,360 g

Obv. ....**TRAIANO AVG GER**.... Laur. dr. and cuir. Bust r.

Rev. Basilika Ulpia - building facade with three distyle avant-corps, each set on two-tiered base, central epistylon surmounted by quadriga...In ex. **BASILICA VLPIA / SC**.

All that was said about the above coin "**FORVM TRAIAN**" is also valid for this one. Under close examination one can detect the shifting of the inscription layouts as well as the low relief of the old inscriptions and the raised and sharp relief of the new ones. The letters are with a different height, etc. For example the letters of the inscription **BASILICA VLPIA** are raised and not outworn, although in the case of a coin that is in circulation it is its most raised part touched by human hands that gets worn out first. At the other part of the coin core the letters are almost completely worn out, in this case standing significantly lower on the relief of the coin.

"Sofia - MB Studio"



## HADRIAN

61. AE Sestertius, 34/33 mm; 26,033 g; 6h

Obv. **HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS**. Laur. head r.

Rev. **IMP VIII PP TR P COS VIII**. Doplphin wrap around Anchor. In ex. SC.

"Varna - 2 Studio"



## ANTONINUS PIUS

62. AR Denarius, 19,5/17 mm; 3,067 g; 6h

Obv. **IMP CAES T AEL HADR ANTONINVS AVG PIVS PP**. Laur. head r.

Rev. **TR POT... COS IIII / .IETAS**. Goddess stg. opposite.

The obverse is scattered with tiny bubbles. There is a mark along the neck, which however is not the result of metal removing, but of the casting. There is a certain outflow of metal right beneath this mark - across the letter **M** from the inscription **IMP**. There is a defect in the apple of the eye, resulting from the cast. One can clearly see the marks left by the tool used for working on the surface of the original or on the wax positive with the aim of achieving a more contrasting image. On the reverse: bubbles are clearly visible on the face of the goddess and on the folds of the garment down the knees.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



## MARCUS AURELIUS

63. AR Denarius, 17/17 mm; 3,362 g; 12h

Obv. **IMP CAES M AVRE . ANT** ..... Laureate bust of Markus Aurelivs to r.

Rev. **PM TRP XV COS III**. Clasped hands.

The coin is a silver cast. The bubbles typical of casting can be clearly seen on the field around the emperor's portrait. For example, the letter V (top left - at 11 h) was either not compacted well enough or the wax positive was not properly cast and as a result the relief of this letter is not good. On the reverse there is a large lump on one of the hands and there are bubbles on the field as well. The coin was plated with an artificial patina which at first glance is quite acceptable but when examined closely some separate impastos with their shades of colors become evident. The very texture of the patina differs from the original one and it has a somewhat peculiar dark brownish tinge. The patina looks as if it has been attached. The edge (unfortunately we don't have a photo of it at our disposal) is flat. It was rounded off later, however this additional manipulation can be detected because of its artificial appearance.

"Novi Pazar Studio"



64. AR Denarius, 17/17,5 mm; 2,680 g; 12h

Obv. **M ANTONINVS ARMENIACVS**. Laur.bust r.

Rev. **PM TR P XIX IMP II COS III**. Annona stg. l., emptying contents of cornucopia into modius.

This is a cast of a genuine coin. The obverse is scattered with pits, the cast is not precise. The eye, the chin and the raised parts of the relief are fuzzy because of the cast. On the reverse: the upper part of the figure is completely fuzzy, certain parts of the letters of the inscription are missing.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



## SABINA

66. AR Denarius, 18/18 mm; 3,336 g; 6h

Obv. **DIVA AVG SABINA** Bust of Sabina to r.

Rev. **CONSECRATIO** Eagle stg. r.

A coin cast after an authentic one. When examining the reverse it is hard to detect that the coin is a cast. On the obverse however the lined and uneven surface is clearly visible. The metal is slightly greyish and is quite different from the one characteristic of this age. The coin has a sharp smell of a resin similar to colophon as well as of some other chemicals. One should take into consideration that this coin has been produced in many copies.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



67. AR Denarius, 18/18 mm; 2,971 g; 7h

Obv. **SABINA AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG** Bust of Sabina to r.

Rev. **CONCOR ... AVG** Concordia seated l., holding patera.

This is a cast of an authentic coin that has been in circulation. After the imprint was made there was some tooling of the face of Sabina. In order to make it more contrasting the whole profile was outlined and carved and there was some touch-up work on the mouth. As a result the impression of the face was changed and Sabina's portrait attained a slight resemblance to that of Maria Theresia. The angle of the relief on the coin core was changed. Some tiny bubbles and lumps remained after the casting. Along the periphery, close to the edge, bubbles and caverns are quite apparent. On the reverse of the cast, the face of Concordia and the upper part of the high chair are not crisp enough.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



## **PERTINAX**

68. AR Denarius, 18/17 mm; 2,663 g; 12h

Obv. **IMP CAESP HELV PERTIN AVG** Laur. head of Pertinax to r.

Rev. **PROVID DEOR COS II**. Providentia stg. l., rises r. hand towards the star.

This item is probably a cast of a genuine coin. The casting was very well done. Besides, the mold has fitted so thoroughly and tightly to the coin edge that the cast could confuse the observer and make him think it is a struck coin. However because of the maximum compactness of the edge and the flan as a whole aimed at attaining a total "effect of the original" this coin has one significant weakness. The lower part of the flan, the field between the inscription and the image, has become pleated and swelled in big bumps. This happens when the casting wrapping material is not compact enough and for this reason it sags under the molten metal. On close view under magnification this is very clearly seen. By the way this is the weak point of a great number of counterfeiters. While being able to interfere in numerous ways in the raised parts of the relief, the fakers have limited potentialities to intervene in the lower parts. It is possible, indeed, to tool the surface, to make it smoother, to polish it using goldsmith instruments, either manually or mechanically, but it is a very difficult task to perform all this to the very base of the image and the letters without causing a suspicious displacement. Apart from that the marks left by the engraving tools on the surface are in general very difficult to hide. Having in mind that using so many efforts and so much time increases the price of the product and the risk of spotting the marks left by the tools, the tooling procedure is very seldom applied and for very rare and very expensive coins alone. Here and there some bigger air bubbles which are the result of the process of casting are visible on the surface. The lack of crisp detail is evident in some of the letters. As far as the edge is concerned though it has assumed the shape of the original and has the cracks reproduced on it, it has a specific rounding which is odd and not typical of the original.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



## MACRIN

69. AR Denarius 19/19 mm; 3,977 g; 6h

Obv. **IMP CM OPEL SEV MACRINVS AVG.** Bust of I.

Rev. **LIBERALITAS AVG.** Liberalitas stg. l., holding cornucopia and abacus.

The coin is directly struck from silver. On the surface of the obverse and the reverse some traces from the core casting process can be found. The inscription is not crisp enough and the style of carving the letters reminds of the "Lipanoff Studio" manner of work. Besides, the concept of the iconography of the original was not deciphered correctly because on the reverse Liberalitas is depicted with a sun-crown. The portrait of Makrin is odd-looking and unnatural, the wrinkles on his forehead are too big.



## SEVERUS ALEXANDER

70. AR Denarius 19/18 mm; 2,650 g; 6h

Obv. **IMP ALEXANDER PIVS AVG.** Laur. bust r.

Rev. **MARS ULTOR.** Mars advancing r., holding spear and shield.

The coin is directly struck from silver. A genuine denarius was used as a prototype. The fake coin displayed here is unsuccessfully manufactured and of low quality. One can see on the obverse large bubbles on the neck of the emperor and on the reverse some traces that were formed because the material was not compact enough. There are large drop-like metal sedimentations localized on the edge. We advise all concerned to be wary of this pair of coin dies and to be careful when making a comparison because if a coin is more skillfully manufactured, its quality could be as high as that of the silver Roman coins from the pseudo-treasure that were published in : I.Prokopov, E. Paunov. Cast Forgeries of Classical Coins from Bulgaria, Sofia 2004, no. no. 14-85.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



## CONSTANTINE I THE GREAT

71. AV Medallion 4 aurei 33,5/33,5 mm; 21,117 g; 12h

Obv. **CONSTANTINVS NOB CAESAR** Bare. hd. r.

Rev. **SENATVS**. Constantine in military attire, standing facing hd. l., raising r. hand and holding scepter in l. hand. In ex., PR.

This gold medallion was struck in the 80-ies of the 20th century. It has been on offer a couple of times, however unsuccessfully. Later a tiny hanging ring was welded on it. It was given an artificial worn out and ancient look. Because of the apparent differences from the original as well as the mediocre style of the engraver's work the coin can be easily dismissed and no one should be taken in by it.

"Haskovo Studio"



72. AR Medallion 36/36 mm; 16,233 g; 6h

Obv. **CONSTANTINVS AVG** Diad. hd. r.

Rev. **SENATVS**. Constantine standing l., holding globe in r. hand and scepter in l. In ex., SMR

This silver medallion, one of the many produced by the counterfeiters and replica-makers, is characterized by the comparatively good performance of the engraver as far as the obverse is concerned. The image and the inscription are quite acceptable. The execution of the reverse is more unconvincing though. The medallion was struck from electrolytic silver - 999,9. Immediately after the striking the item was touched with a hand that was sweaty and dirty and the person's fingerprint can be seen on the reverse. The basic principle that should be observed when examining silver coins and medallions dated after the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century is to check the silver composition. In this particular case the silver is entirely different from the one used in the

4th century.

"Dimitrovgrad Studio"



### CRISPUS CAESAR

73. AV Solidus, 21/20 mm; 4,612 g.

Obv. **FL IVL CRIS PVS NOB CAES** Nude and laureate bust l., holding spear and shield on l. shoulder.

Rev. **CONCORD IA AVGG NN.** Concordia seated l., holding caduceus in r. hand and cornucopia in l., in r. field - star. In ex., **S.M.A.N.**

The gold is of lower standard, with a high copper content, showing reddish here and there. Most probably this is a copper coin that was plated with gold. At certain spots on the most raised part of the relief the gold has been rubbed out and some other metal, more reddish in colour which is probably a copper core can be seen through. When comparing it to the authentic gold solidi of Crispus one can clearly see that the metal used for this coin is much less plastic than the gold of the above genuine coins. When struck the authentic gold assumes the shape of the die to the maximum and this is evident in the relief. The texture of the relief of this coin however is the same as the one of the copper and bronze coins. The contours of the images are coarser and smeared and not as sharply contrasting as they are when the coin is made of gold of high content. Besides, the core is not so well shaped as it is with the gold coins from that age. The border of dots is carelessly made as in the case of the cheaper bronze coins.

Coin master: unknown



## CONSTANTIUS II

74. AV Solidus 20/20 mm; 4,331g.

Obv. **FL IVL CONSTAN TIVS PERP AVG.** Cuir. and helmeted, Pearl-diademed bust three-quarters facing, holding spear on r. shoulder and shield in l. hand.

Rev. **GLORIA REI PVBLICAE.** Roma and Constantinopolis, enthroned facing, supporting between them a wreath inscribed **VOT / XXX / MVLT / XXXX.** In ex., **CONS.**

This is a cast of an impression of a genuine coin. The tooling after the cast was made was not finalized. There are many clearly visible traces that bear evidence to this. Here we offer just a couple of examples. When making the impression of the obverse the coin was moved off a bit and the most raised point of the relief, i.e. the nose of the emperor, formed a certain clearance. Subsequently when the cast was made the emperor's nose became fleshier, resembling that of an old drunkard. There is no historical data available at the moment that Constantius was too fond of drinking wine. Along the periphery of the coin there are some bubbles left from the cast - up at 11 h and some fills positioned down between 5 h and 7 h. The wax positive of the reverse was not of good quality and there are two spots where the surface got crumpled. The first is where the crossed legs of Roma are situated and the second is behind the figure of Constantinopolis. Down along the periphery from 5 h to 9 h a large swarf-like fill can be seen, similar to the one on the obverse but a bit longer. It is obvious that in order to correct the positive an attempt for additionally carving the face of Constantinopolis was made, in result of which the personification of the great city looked like the Grim Reaper (see the magnification).

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



## THEODOSIUS II

75. AV Solidus 20/20 mm; 4,511 g

Obv. **DN THEODO SIVS PF AVG.** Cuir. and helmeted, Pearl-diademed bust three-quarters facing, holding spear on r. shoulder and shield in l. hand.

Rev. **GLOR ORVI S TERRAR H.** Emperor standing facing l., holding labarum in r. hand and globe with long cross in l., in l. field - star. In ex., **CONOB.**

This coin is a typical product of "Lipanoff Studio" as far as the image and the carving of the inscription are concerned. The coin has a die lustre. The sharp ridges due to the striking process are preserved. The texture of the edge is highly specific and is characteristic of this studio - the metal is crystal-like and with tiny cracks. Even an attempt for additional processing and smoothening is made, the texture of the edge will still show evidence that this is not an authentic coin. This is valid for all coins struck by the "Lipanoff Studio". This makes it difficult for any dishonest clients to present their products as authentic ones. We would advise all numismatists to examine at the first place the edge of the coin which arouses their suspicion.

This coin was published with a small black-white photo in D.Dimitrov, I.Prokopov, B.Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K & K Publishers 1997, p.66, no.199.



## **FAKE COINS, REPLICAS AND COPIES FROM THE OF "RUMEN MANOV COLLECTION", SOFIA**

The counterfeits, copies or replicas displayed below belong to Mr. R. Manov from Sofia and are of a "lower" class. Therefore they are easy to discern and would hardly be of any difficulty even for the collectors-beginners. Anyway they exist and have joined the "circulation environment" of today. Part of them have already been publicized with photographs that are unfortunately not of a very good quality. In order to follow the principle of completeness we display them at the end of this publication with a better illustration. Harmless as they are, they help training the eyes of the young collectors and amateurs and also help in identifying the specific styles of the different "studios" for counterfeit production. With everything we said above we should also mention the fact that a lot of people have begun to collect counterfeits as well. This is why we would like to be useful in this aspect too and we publish all counterfeits, copies and replicas we have ever come across.

### **GREEK COINS**

#### **ABDERA, THRACE**

76. AR Stater, 23/22 mm; 8,831 g; 7h;

Obv. **ΑΒΔΗ**. Griffin seated l., in l. field bee.

Rev. **ΕΠΙΦΙΛΑ / ΔΟΣ**. Heracles seated l. on lion's skin, holding club.

This coin is a coarse casting of a prototype which is also a counterfeit coin struck from silver. The studio for counterfeits where it was made (although we do not know much about it for the time being we do not think it is dangerous and that is why we do not make detailed comments) does not have an engraver of its own, so prototypes made by others are being used there. The prototype coin is published in: D. Dimitrov, I. Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins, Sofia, K&K Publishers 1997, p.10, no.14. One can also come across casts in silver or in bronze/brass alloy. With counterfeits of higher quality produced with the

impression of this pair of dies the surface is being processed after the casting and a thick coating of high-standard silver is spread on it. Usually this is done by means of electrolysis. Finally it is patinated in an appropriate colour. The cast shown here is a flan. It was not finished because of its poor quality. Using it for the production of a counterfeit will be pointless as it will be easily discerned. Using the impression for comparing coin dies is strongly recommended.



### ODESSUS

77. AR Tetradrachm, 31/29 mm; 11,664 g; 1h

Obv. Bearded head of the "Great Got" of Odessos r., wearing tainia.

Rev. **ΘΕΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛ ΟΔΗΣΙΤΩΝ**. The "Great Got" of Odessus - Darzalas, stg. l., holding phial and cornucopia. In ex. - **ΚΥΠΣΑ**.

This coin was struck in studio "Varna-2". The tetradrachm shown here is an example of artificial ageing and patination. The ageing was done in a cylinder filled with abrasive materials. The cylinder is rotated by an electric drive at low speed. The coin is dropped inside and is kept whirling continuously together with other objects, sand, pebbles, etc. This process is put to an end when the counterfeiter decides that the sharpness and the height of the relief are as flattened as necessary. Then the artificial patina is laid on. The patina of the tetradrachm of the town of Odesos on the Western Pont that is shown in the photo is created mechanically. A layer of paints mixed with inert materials and some glue was laid on. The coin which was initially struck with the same pair of dies but with no artificial ageing at all can be seen in: D. Dimitrov, I. Prokopov, B. Kolev, *Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins*. Sofia, K&K Publishers 1997, p. 10, no.13.



## PANTIKAPAIUM

78. Stater, 21/20 mm; 7,067 g; 12h

Obv. Bearded head of Pan tree-quarter face to l.

Rev. ΠΑΝ.Griffin stg. l., on stalk of corn, head facing, holding spear in his mouth.

The low-quality bronze cast shown here was made using a prototype - a well-manufactured fake coin. We display this cast here in order to help those who are interested in studying the specific features of the dies of the counterfeit itself. Thus the reader can be protected from being misled when coming across a struck counterfeit coin that is well disguised. The coins struck with the same pair of dies from which the positives for the above cast were imprinted, are made of gold. We have seen staters that were very precisely struck and skillfully made look older by means of patina imitating gold oxide. Unfortunately we did not have the opportunity to document any of them. One can also come across certain counterfeits - high-quality casts made with this pair of coin dies which are very well processed, made look older and gold-plated by means of electrolysis. Comparing coin dies by taking into account even the minutest details is therefore recommended.

Published in: I. Prokopov, K. Kissyov, E. Paunov. Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria, Sofia 2003", p. 9, no.1



## LYSIMACHUS

79. AR Drachm, 20/20 mm; 4,650 g

Obv. Head of Alexander the Great r., wearing horn of Ammon.

Rev. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩ ΛΥΣΙΜΑΧΟΥ. Athena enthroned l., holding Nike, and resting l. arm on shield.

The coin is a combination of two already published dies. See: D.Dimitrov, I.Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K&K Publishers 1997,p. 16, obv. Die - no.33, rev.die - no. 35.



## **Q.CASSIUS LONGINUS**

80. AR Denarius

Obv. Young beardless male head r., scepter over shoulder.

Rev. Eagle stg. r. on thunderbolt, between lituus and jug,

**Q.CASSIVS** below.

The steel die only for the obverse of this coin was published in the book I. Prokopov, K. Kissyov, E. Paunov. *Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria*, Sofia 2003, p.50, No. 118. Here we present a sample of the entire "product". In the first publication it was mentioned that this is the work of Slavei from the town of Haskovo. It is highly probable however that this is a co-product of the studio in the town of Haskovo and the studio in the town of Dimitrovgrad.



## **IULIUS CAESAR**

81. AR Denarius

Obv. **DIVI . IVLI** Laur. head of Caesar r., lituus behind.

Rev. **Q.VOCONIVS VITVLVS**. Bull-calf walking l.

This is an artistic replica produced by studio "Haskovo - 1". It could hardly be confused by collectors with the authentic one. We display it here in order to achieve greater completeness and to give an example for examination. When looking at it one can very clearly see the surface of a silver coin manufactured with the technology of cold metal pressing. This very same method was used for the production of a number of dangerous counterfeits and we do believe it would be very helpful to those who show any interest in the matter to know how to identify the texture of the material resulting from the cold metal pressing. After having a look at the surface of both sides of the coin the first conclusion you can come to is that this particular item is a cast. The numerous dots, however, are not the tiny air-bubbles usually occurring in casting but lumps resulting from the high pressure exerted by the steel die upon the cold silver piece that was molded as a coin blank by means of casting. This unique surface is a result of the combination of the traces left on the coin blank during casting and the lumpy surface of the metal formed by the great pressure. In ancient times no

presses were used and no cold metal pressing was applied for the production of coins. Usually the coin blank was heated up to a certain degree of temperature and the coin masters were controlling the process visually. Then the heated coin blank was being forged with strong blows of a heavy hammer. The original technology allowed the coin die and the heated metal to fit together to the maximum. This is how the unique surface of the authentic coins struck by hand in ancient times has been achieved. The above coin was not only manufactured by cold pressing but was made of metal having a low silver content - of about 600-800/1000. Such kind of flans are made by casting of old silver coins dating from the period between the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The ingredients of the metal alloy - copper, nickel and zinc, constituting a high percentage of its content, make it more resistant to rubbing when the coins are in circulation, yet much less flexible. The result is this specific surface of the coin-replica. However there are coins produced with this same technology using dies similar to the original ones that can be highly misleading for the collectors and the museum curators. Even when the surface was being tooled with the purpose of disguising traces there is always some sort of a giveaway that remains. It could be "captured" when examined closely by means of microscope or a powerful magnifying glass. The example we show here gives a very serious point of support to the numismatists in identifying fake coins by their surface.



## 82. AR Denarius

Similar no.....but different variant.

Obv. DIVI . F., behind, head of Caesar r., lituus before.

Rev. Q.VOCONIVS VITVLVS Q. DESIGN S - C. Bull-calf walking l.



### **OCTAVIAN AUGUSTUS**

83. AR Denarius, 21/20mm; 3,522 g; 5h

Obv. **CAESARI / AVGVSTO**. Laur. head l.

Rev. **S P / Q R**. Front view of tetrastyle temple.

The coin was published in: D. Dimitrov, I Prokopov, B. Kolev, *Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins*. Sofia, K&K Publishers, 1997, p.29, No. 74. The coin displayed in the above book was freshly struck having the die lustre on it while the one shown here is artificially made look older.



### **GALBA**

84. AE Sestertius

Obv. **IMP SER SVLP GALBA CAES AVG TRP**. Laur. bust r.

Rev. **LIBERTAS PVBLICA**. Libertas stg. l., holding pileus and scepter.

"Varna - 2 Studio"



### **NERO CLAUDIUS DRUSUS**

85. AR Denarius, 18/18 mm; 3,400 g

Obv. **NERO CLAVDIVS DRVSVS GERMANICVS IMP.**

Laur head l.

Rev. **DE GERMANIS.** Triumphal arch surmounted by equestrian statue l.

Published in: Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K&K Publishers 1997, no.75-76.



### **AGRIPPINA AND CALIGULA**

86. AR Denarius 19/19 mm; 3,25 g

Obv. **C CAESAR AVG GERM** Laur. bust of Caligula r.

Rev. **AGRIPINA MAT C CAES AVG GERM** Dr. bust of Agrippina r.

This is an artistic replica of Studio "Haskovo-1". It was published in: D. Dimitrov, I Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K&K Publishers, 1997, No. 80, but the photo of the first publication is not good enough.



### **NERO**

87. AR Denarius

Obv. **IMP NERO CAESAR AVGVSTVS.** Laur. bust r.

Rev. **IVPPITER CVSTVS.** Jupiter enthroned l., holding scepter and thunderbolt.

The coin is a Lipanoff product and has never been published. It was

struck from a brass alloy which is quite obvious. Some silver coins also exist that were struck with the same coin dies. We recommend comparing the coin dies as it is possible to artificially make silver coins look older thus allowing dishonest dealers to offer them as authentic.



### VESPASIAN

88. AR Denarius

Obv. **IMP CAES VES PAS AVG PM TRP PPP COS III.**

Laureate head of Vespasian r.

Rev. **S C** Two capricorns to r. and l.

The coin was published in: I. Prokopov. Contemporary Coin Engravers and Coin Masters of Bulgaria, "Lipanoff Studio". Sofia 2004, p. 26, No. 32. We show the coin here coated with artificial patina of argentum oxide.



89. AE Sestertius

Obv. **DIVVS AVGVSTVS VESPASIANVS.** Laureate head of Vespasian r.

Rev. **ROMA.** Roma stg. L., holding spear and Victory, **S - C.**

Published in: D. Dimitrov, I Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K&K Publishers, 1997, p. 35, No. 94. We

show the coin here artificially made look older with fake patina and silicate sedimentations on it imitating the natural earthen patina.



### **DOMITIAN**

90. AR/AE Denarius

Obv. **IMP CAES DOMIT GERM PM TRP XI.** Laur. head of Domitian r.

Rev. **IMP XXI COS XV CERM PPP.** Minerva adv. r., holding shield and spear.

This coin is a product of "Lipanoff Studio" and has never been published. It was struck from a brass alloy and subsequently silver plated.



### **HADRIAN**

91.Obv. **HADRIANVS AVGVSTVS PP** Laureate bust of Hadrian to r.

Rev. **COS III** Crescent and star.

Published in I. Prokopov. Contemporary Coin Engravers and Coin Masters of Bulgaria, "Lipanoff Studio". Sofia 2004, p. 36, No. 49. Here we display, in order to make a comparison, two coins struck with one and the same pair of dies but from different metals.



## LUCIUS VERUS

92. AE Sestertius

Obv. **IMP CAES L AVREL / VERVS AVG.** Laur. bust r.

Rev. **CONCORD AVGVSTOR TR P II.** M. Aurelius and L. Verus clasping hands. In ex. COS II.

Published in: "D.Dimitrov, I.Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K&K Publishers 1997, p. 41, no. 115.



## SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

93. AR Denarius, 18/18 mm; 3,250 g

Obv. **SEVERVS AVG PART MAX.** Laur. and cuir. bust r.

Rev. **IOVI CONSERVATORI.** Jupiter stg. l., holding scepter and thunderbolt. In ex.: SMN.

In the book I. Prokopov, K. Kissyov, E. Paunov. Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria, Sofia 2003, p. 58, No. 142 we published a coin struck with the same obverse die. Now we display a sample - a combination with another reverse die. As with No. ... in the first publication it is mentioned that the coin is a product of Slavei from Haskovo. It is also possible this coin to be a co-product of the studios in Dimitrovgrad and Haskovo.



## **JULIA DOMNA**

94. AE Sestertius, 33/32 mm; 17,780 g; 12h

Obv. **IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG.** Bust of Domna l.

Rev. **IVNONI LVCINAE S C.** Juno enthroned l., holding flower and child? in swaddling clothes.

Juno is holding with her right hand a creature that does not have the slightest resemblance to a new-born child. The engraver has apparently misinterpreted the iconography of this goddess.

"Varna - 2 Studio"



## **ELAGABAL**

95. AR Denarius

Obv. **ANTONINVS PIVS FEL AVG.** Laur. and dr. bust r.

Rev. **TRP II PP.** The Emperor in quadriga l. In ex.: **COS II.**

In the book: I. Prokopov, K. Kissyov, E. Paunov. Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria, Sofia 2003, p. 60, No. 148 we published the steel die for the obverse of this coin. Now we display the entire "product". As with No. ... in the first publication it is mentioned that the coin is a product of Slavei from Haskovo. It is also possible this coin to be a co-product of the studios in Dimitrovgrad and Haskovo.



### **MAXIMINUS I THRAX**

96. AR Quinarius, 14/14 mm; 1,498 g; 12h

Obv. **IMP MAXIMINVS PIVS AVG.** Laur. and dr. bust r.

Rev. **MARTI PACIFERO.** Marti stg. l., holding bunch and scepter.

In the book I. Prokopov, K. Kissyov, E. Paunov. *Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria*, Sofia 2003, p. 62, No. 154 we published this very coin but it was badly illustrated. Here we display it in a better photo under magnification.



### **PHILIP I**

97. AR Antoninianus, 22/21 mm; 4,544 g; 11h

Obv. **IMP M IVL PHILIPVS AVG.** Rad. and dr. bust r.

Rev. **VICTORIA AVG.** Victory adv. r., holding wreath.

The style is very bad. The studio that manufactured the coin is unknown. The inscriptions have been done by someone who was obviously illiterate.



### **PAULINA**

98. AE Sestertius

Obv. **DIVA PAVLINA.** Veiled and dr. bust r.

Rev. **CONSERVATIO.** Paulina seated l. on peacock flying r.

Published in: D. Dimitrov, I Prokopov, B. Kolev, *Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins*. Sofia, K&K Publishers, 1997, p.48, no. 140.

The item we display here is made look older with an artificial patina and silicate sedimentations imitating traces of earthen patina.



## ROMAN PROVINCIAL COINAGE

### DIONYSOPOLIS, GORDIAN III

99. AE 5 Assaria, 26/25 mm; 12,449 g; 6h.

Obv. Bare heads of Gordian and Serapis confronted.

Rev. ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ.. Snake in center, head r., in l. field, control mark - E.

The coin is a comparatively coarse cast. The wax positive has been subsequently unskillfully tooled in order to sharpen the relief of the image. The result achieved is a great difference from the original. The impression is as that of a souvenir. The coin has been additionally made look ancient and patinated. Coins manufactured following this of technology could become very dangerous and can fool any novice collectors after having been subjected to serious ageing and patination. We recommend that the coin dies be compared.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



### **DIONYSOPOLIS, GORDIAN III**

100. AE 5 Assaria, 28/26 mm; 13,080 g; 6h.

Obv. Bare heads of Gordian and Serapis confronted.

Rev. **ΔΙΟΝΥ ΚΟΠ ΟΛΕΙΤΩΝ**.. City-goddess stg. l., holding cornucopia and patera, in l. field, control mark - E.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



### **MESEMBRIA, PHILIP II**

101. AE 5 Assaria, 27/26 mm; 13,289 g; 12h.

Obv. Bare heads of Philip II and Serapis confronted.

Rev. **METAMB / ΠΙΑΝΩΝ**. Athena with Corinthian helmet stg. l., holding shield and spear.

"North-East Bulgaria Studio"



### **MAXIMIAN I HERCULIUS**

102. AR Denarius

Obv. **IMP MAXIMIANVS PIVS AVG**. Laur. and dr. bust r.

Rev. **PIETAS AVGG**. Jug and sacrificial attributes.

In the book: I. Prokopov, K. Kissyov, E. Paunov. Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria, Sofia 2003,

p. 69, no. 176 we published the steel die of the obverse of this coin. Now we represent the very coin with its reverse. As in no. ... in the first publication it is said that this is a work of Slavei from Haskovo. There is a probability that this coin could be the result of the joint work of the studios in Dimitrovgrad and Haskovo.



### LICINIUS I

103. AV Avreus 18/18 mm; 5,250 g; 12h

Oby. **LICINIVS PF AVG** Laur. head r.

Rev. **GLORIA EXERCITI AVGG** Horseman l., raising r. hand.

A coin that was struck with this pair of dies has been published in two of our booklets: D.Dimitrov, I.Prokopov, B. Kolev, *Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins*. Sofia K & K Publishers 1997, p.61, no185; I.Prokopov, K.Kissyov, E.Paunov. *Modern Counterfeits of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins from Bulgaria*, Sofia 2003, p.70, no. 177. In the former we mentioned that this is an aureus, it however was represented by a small and bad-quality photo. In the latter we displayed a silver coin struck with the same pair of dies and its photo was not a good one too. The photo of the silver coin was taken immediately after it was struck and shows some flashes of high intensity. The coin we display here is successfully made look older and there are traces of artificial patina on it. We think that there is an imitation of gold oxide here and there. One can instantly spot however that the gold this coin was struck from is of lower content than that used for the originals. We recommend that coin dies are kept under close watch.



## CONSTANTIUS II

104. AR Siliqua 20/20 mm; 3,276 g; 12h

Obv. **DN CONSTANTIVS PF AVG.** Diad. Head r.

Rev. **IOVI CONSER / VATORI CAES.** Jupiter seated on throne holding Victory and scepter. Under throne - **SIG V / SIG X.** In r. field - star, in r. field - eagle. In ex. **SMANG.**

A similar cast manufactured in the same mold but from a different material which is not silver but white alloy instead, is published in: Dimitrov, I Prokopov, B. Kolev, Modern Forgeries of Greek and Roman Coins. Sofia, K&K Publishers, 1997, p. 63, no. 191. We display it here in a better photo and under magnification.

Cast!



## THEODOSIUS II

105. Billon Solidus? 20/20 mm; 4,239 g

Obv. **DN THEODO SIVS PF AVG.** Cuir. and helmeted, Pearl-diademed bust three-quarters facing, holding spear on r. shoulder and shield in l. hand.

Rev. **GLOR ORVI S TERRAR H.** Emperor standing facing l., holding labarum in r. hand and globe with long cross in l., in l. field - star. In ex., **CONOB.**

The iconography is the same as in the previous number. The manufacture is very coarse. On top of the brass from which the coin was produced there are traces of a white metal as if the coin was silver plated. In the recent years we have seen some more of these coins cast by means of the same coin mold.



## DISCUSSION

In this consecutive booklet we have taken the liberty of finally showing a number of coins that we suspect of not being genuine, though we do not have undeniable evidence of this. What we propose is to organize a discussion on this theme in which we hope the truth will come to the forth.

### AINOS

106. ARTetradrachm, 22/22 mm; 16,200 g

Obv. Head of youthful Hermes r., wearing petasos ornamented with row of beads above brim.

Rev. **AINI** above goat walking r., symbol before. All within incuse square.

Besides the style deviations which can be noticed in the details there are certain things in this coin that are quite annoying. For example, there is no wear whatsoever of the beads on the petasos. These are in themselves a die lustre although they are positioned on the most raised part of the coin relief. On the contrary, the hair tresses, the eye and the eye-lids are considerably more worn out even though they are situated on a lower part. The petasos was almost bowl-shaped and it lacks the characteristic protraction of the periphery, and the small specific umbo on the top is also missing. The shaping of the he-goat, both in style and anatomy, also is odd looking. Only one of the sides of the incuse square is done while the others are not even envisaged.



Enlarged  
150%

## ATHENS

107. AR Tetradrachm, 25/26 mm; 16,997 g; 1h

Obv. Head of Athena to r., wearing crested helmet ornamented with olive-leaves and floral scroll.

Rev. **AΘE**. Owl standing to r., head facing, olive-twigs and crescent, all within incuse square.

We have a number of remarks on the style and the technology of making of this coin. For example it is a four and as it is evident the striking was done using a force greater than usual. As a result there is a cracking, most uncharacteristic in nature, i.e. the base-metal filling was thus allowed to become visible. This is something which no manufacturer would let himself do as it would ruin his attempts to cheat the others and to keep the greater part of the precious metal for himself. The mane of the helmet is not fitting to the back of the neck and fragments of it go down to the eyes instead of being up above the forehead. On the reverse the leaves of the olive branch are engraved very sharply and look unnatural. The bird of Minerva is also looking odd with its legs strangely deformed. If there was a kind of a stroke it should have left its mark on the more raised parts of the relief too. There are certain style resemblances to some of the products of the "Lipanoff Studio".



Enlarged  
150%

## MARONEIA

108. AR Stater, 22/23 mm; 10,909 g; 1h

Obv. Horse prancing l., with loose rein.

Rev. **ΕΠΙ ΧΟΡ ΗΓ Ο**. Around linear square, vine with branches of grapes within square.

If the item is a counterfeit then it probably was manufactured quite a

long time ago, somewhere in the 70-ies or the 80-ies of the 20th century. It is the low and non-contrasting relief of the image that makes impression here as well as the lack of high inner tension of the metal that is obtained as a result from the casting. When comparing these coin dies with those published in the work of E. Schonert-Geiss, *Die Munzprägung von Maroneia (Griechisches Munzwerk)*, Berlin, 1987 (*Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur der Antike* 26) this very pair of coin dies cannot be seen.



Enlarged  
150%

### **HISTIAIA**

109-113. AR, 5 Tetrobols

Obv. Head of nymph Histiaia r., wreathed with vine.

Rev. **ΙΣΤΙΑΙΕΩΝ**. Nymph Histiaia seated r. on galley, holding mast.

Here we display only 5 coins struck with different pairs of dies. Up to now however we have seen and photographed about 1000 pieces, struck with several dozens of coin dies. What draws the attention here is the fact that coins struck with same dies are made of silver of a different quality. We have made observations and we have some critical remarks on the style of work and on some technological details as well.





Enlarged  
150%

### TRAJAN

114. AR Denarius, 18,1/17,5 mm; 2,705 g; 6h

Obv. **IMP CAES NERVA TRAIAN AVG GERM.** Laur. head r.

Rev. **PM TRP COS II PP.** Concordia seated l., holding patera and cornucopia.

Probably the coin is a cast from an imprint of a genuine coin, having a low relief and a lot of bubbles. The texture of the surface is unnatural.



Enlarged  
150%

### **RELEVANT REFERENCES**

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### FRAGMENTS



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