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**THE SILESIAN (RATAJE) BRACTEATE FBG 70 –
A RESULT OF A 13TH CENTURY PILGRIMAGE TO AMIENS?**

ABSTRACT: The Fbg 70 Silesian bracteate bears an unusual depiction that – in the authors' opinion – has not yet been satisfactorily explained. They thereby present here a completely new interpretation of this imagery, tracing it back to, on one hand, the traditions of earlier Silesian issues and on the other to the earliest, openwork pilgrim badges from the Amiens sanctuary, which depict the reliquary of the head of St. John the Baptist. They also suggest that some features of this depiction might be inspired directly by the said reliquary without the pilgrim badges as an intermediary. The Fbg 70 bracteate would therefore constitute only the second known example of a Polish coin depicting a reliquary – the first being the type 1 deniers of Bolesław IV the Curly. The authors suggest that the Amiens reliquary might also be depicted on other Silesian coins, for example on the Fbg 74 bracteate.

ABSTRAKT: Wyobrażenie na śląskim brakteacie Fbg 70 nie doczekało się jak dotąd, zdaniem autorów, satysfakcjonującej interpretacji. Zaproponowali zatem nowe spojrzenie na to przedstawienie, wywodząc je z jednej strony z tradycji starszego mennictwa śląskiego, z drugiej zaś z ikonografii najstarszych, ażurowych znaków pielgrzymich z sanktuarium w Amiens, gdzie przechowywany jest relikwiarz głowy św. Jana Chrzciciela. Sugerują także, że pewne cechy wyobrażenia mogły być zainspirowane wyglądem samego relikwiarza, bez pośrednictwa wspomnianych znaków pielgrzymich. Brakteat Fbg 70 byłoby zatem drugą, obok denarów Bolesława IV Kędzierzawego typu I, polską monetą średniowieczną z wyobrażeniem relikwiarza. Autorzy zwracają uwagę, że relikwiarz z Amiens może występować również na innych monetach śląskich, jako przykład wskazując brakteat Fbg 74.

KEYWORDS: Medieval Silesian coinage (13th century), iconography of St. John the Baptist, Amiens pilgrim badges, the reliquary of the head of St. John the Baptist

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: mennictwo śląskie w średniowieczu (XIII w.), ikonografia św. Jana Chrzciciela, znaki pielgrzymie z Amiens, relikwiarz głowy św. Jana Chrzciciela

Wiadomości Numizmatyczne recently published an article by Witold Garbaczewski, devoted to another attempt made by this author to find an iconographic model for the Silesian bracteate mentioned in the title¹, attributed to Henry I the Bearded (1201–1238) or Henry II the Pious (1238–1241). The unusual image on this coin (Fig. 1), has not been interpreted satisfactorily so far² and is regarded as unique among the Rataje bracteates, on which the head of St. John the Baptist as the patron of Silesia or the head of the prince were depicted.³ Several years ago W. Garbaczewski formulated a hypothesis about presenting on the bracteate Fbg 70 a completely original image, “circles of light”, as a reflection of St. John the Baptist – not his person, but his mission as a Witness of the Light, preceding the coming of Christ (Prologue of the Gospel according to St. John).⁴ In order to verify this hypothesis, he has conducted an extensive query of various types of sources over the years.⁵



Fig. 1. Rataje bracteate Fbg 70 – drawing from Friedensburg 1931 publication

So far we have not dealt with bracteates, let alone their iconography, but we were intrigued by the attempt to look for analogies (even if only formal), which was the basis of the article by W. Garbaczewski, between the Silesian bracteate from the 20s and 30s of the 13th century and coins, older than it by many centuries, from various cultures – half-bracteates from the Danish Hedeby, especially Celtic staters of the

¹ Garbaczewski 2019.

² Szczurek, Dannenberg 2011, p. 20; Garbaczewski 2019, pp. 139–140.

³ This coin was referred to as bracteate with a radiant rainbow (Gumowski 1960, No. 185). H.-D. Dannenberg in one publication (Szczurek, Dannenberg 2011, pp. 20–21) proposed three possible interpretations of the above-mentioned image. It would be the back part of a human or bear’s body, bent over towards the recipient, tied to an arc-shaped object, or a cut off head (St. John the Baptist or Prince Henry the Pious) lying on a grate to drain the blood.

⁴ Garbaczewski 2007, p. 265.

⁵ Garbaczewski 2019, p. 141.

Kraków type. We do not intend to argue with the hypothesis of W. Garbaczewski, as it is unverifiable in the argumentation used by the author in this article. The author is no longer looking for images carrying a similar content, but only for compositional patterns similar in his opinion, “the original meaning of which no one in the Middle Ages was able to recognize”,⁶ “using only a form that was filled with a different content, appropriate for local conditions”.⁷ One can only ask whether, in the case of a similar composition scheme according to the author, one should also look for any connections between the images on the analyzed half-bracteates from Hedeby and on the millennium older staters of the Kraków type?

We do not think that the schematic representation of the Fbg 70 bracteate, which, in addition, according to the author, has virtually no signs of artistry,⁸ was to be accompanied by any unique, original iconographic program or a deeper theological reflection. A message as simple as the means used to express it is to be expected. In our opinion, the focus should be on two elements of the image that are truly original in Polish coinage – rays radiating from the central image towards the rim of the coin (a)⁹ and on a horizontal, framed, square (trapezoidal) strip filled with vertical (slightly diagonal) lines (b).

The remaining essential elements of the image – an arch in the form of a half-oval (not a circle) and an elongated, vertical bead on the axis of this arch, can be found in earlier Polish coinage. However, for this we have to rotate the coin by 180° in relation to its current, starting from F. Friedensburg, adopted orientation (Fig. 3:1–2). The initial interpretation of the composition on our bracteate is possible thanks to the iconography of the older issues of Silesian coins, especially the way of presenting the human head *en face* without plastic modeling of the face, but with a strong outline of contours. This is how the lower part of St. John the Baptist’s face, as well as the face of the prince on Silesian deniers recently assigned by W. Nakielski to Bolesław III the Wrymouth¹⁰ (Fig. 2:2). This is the simplest possible representation of a face – only its thick contour and nose, without any attempt to mark the cheekbones, which were clearly modelled on, for example, the earlier Wrocław type VIII cross deniers (Fig. 2:1). Two more elements of the image of the Fbg 70 bracteate may indicate that we are dealing here with the representation of a face. There are two distinct arches above the described face (in this case, the eyebrow arches) in the line of the lower border of the strip filled with lines, converging at the base of the nose; note that the upper edge of the strip is usually a straight line. Also, the series of vertical lines above the face (with a clear emphasis that it is without an edge) is a characteristic way of presenting hair, for example on the aforementioned type VIII cross denier (Fig. 2:2).

⁶ Garbaczewski 2019, p. 146.

⁷ Garbaczewski 2019, p. 144.

⁸ Garbaczewski 2019, p. 139.

⁹ All letter symbols are shown in Fig. 3.

¹⁰ Nakielski 2012, p. 147.

The problem of the eyes remains, on stamps of medieval coins, usually strongly, though usually point-accented, on the bracteate Fbg 70, and only possibly marked with horizontal lines below the eyebrow arches. Therefore, we also add this detail to the list of non-standard elements of the image (c).



Fig. 2. Silesian denier with the head of St. John the Baptist (1 – type VIII cross denier; 2 – denier of Bolesław III Wrymouth: Nakielski 2017, Fig. 2b and Fig. 5a)

At this point, we would like to draw your attention to the oldest pilgrim badges from the sanctuary in Amiens, dating back to the 13th century,¹¹ depicting the head of St. John the Baptist, and especially their openwork forms (Fig. 3:3–5). In our opinion, they have, although in incomparably better design, elements characteristic for the image on the bracteate we are interested in, including the three atypical ones mentioned above – rays going from the face to the edge of the round mark (a), a horizontal strip filled with vertical or slightly diagonal lines (b) and sometimes a specific way of presenting the eyes (c).

Notre-Dame Cathedral in Amiens, the historic capital of Picardy, soon after 1206 became the most important place of worship of St. John the Baptist. This followed the Fourth Crusade, during which the crusaders in 1204 seized and plundered Constantinople, robbing the city, including numerous reliquaries. One of them, containing the facial part of the skull of St. John the Baptist (with the forehead and eye sockets to the upper jaw without teeth), placed under a transparent “shade” of quartz, was handed over in December 1206 to Bishop of Amiens Richard de Gerbroy by a crusade participant, a canon from nearby Picquigny, Wallon de Sarton. The relic had no base – a precious metal bowl with inscriptions confirming that it was the head of St. John, which the donor had to sell in order to return to his homeland. It was first exhibited in the local Romanesque cathedral, which,

¹¹ Spencer 2010, pp. 217–219.



Fig. 3. Bracteate Fbg 70 (1 – drawing from the publication Friedensburg 1931; 2 – photo from the archives of the Warsaw Numismatic Centre images rotated by 180° in relation to those previously published) and openwork pilgrim badges from the Amiens sanctuary, dated back to the 13th century (3 – No. 236a; 4 – No. 236; 5 – No. 236b – Spencer 2010). Symbols a–c described in the text

however, turned out to be too small in the new circumstances. After a fire in 1218, in the years 1220–1266, a gothic temple was built in its place – one of the largest in France. The relic quickly became a destination for pilgrimages, among others, in 1264, the king of France, St. Louis, later his son Philip III the Bold, Charles VI and Charles VII.¹²

Early, openwork pilgrim badges from Amiens, depicting the head of St. John the Baptist are characterized by several recurring elements. The oval head carries a horizontal stripe of vertical/diagonal lines on its forehead and is surrounded below this stripe by several rays running towards the rim. The eyes are large and almond-shaped, the eyebrow arches are prominent, the chin and moustache drawn with parallel lines (as in the strip on the forehead) fall arched and end with the outline of the face. It should be remembered that in Amiens the relic was not the head of St. John but only a large fragment of the bone of his face that can be displayed. In the reliquary depicting the head, it had to be complemented by a model (sculpture), probably covered, as in other reliquaries of saints' heads, with modelled and embossed gold or silver sheet, repeating the details of the sculpture, as can be observed in the case of the reliquary of the head of St. Eustace from the Cathedral in Basel, kept in the collection of the British Museum¹³ (Fig. 4:1–2). The reliquary of Amiens differed from other quite numerous reliquaries of the heads of saints in

¹² http://www.vpah.culture.fr/educatif/aha/fiches/AMIENS/cathedrale_notre_dame.pdf

¹³ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1850-1127-1

that it depicted a lying head, not a standing one. Soon the missing silver bowl was added to it, replaced in the following centuries by a golden one. A reliquary, currently exhibited in Amiens, in which a fragment of the skull supposedly belonging to St. John the Baptist (Fig. 5), was created in the second half of the 19th century, after the previous one was destroyed (melted down) during the French Revolution. We do not know exactly what the reliquary looked like in the 13th century, as it was only possible to save only the relic and the transparent “shade” with a characteristic form framing it.

The essential similarities between the aforementioned pilgrim badges, which are the oldest, artistic transformation of the reliquary’s image, and the bracteate Fbg 70 concern, as we have already mentioned, a number of details of both images. On the pilgrim’s sign, in the upper part of the head of St. John there is a strip of parallel, vertical lines and, due to the curvature of the forehead, also diagonal lines (on some types with a distinct frame), resembling the Roman type tonsure. The tonsure, as a symbol of Christ’s crown of thorns, could be used in the image of St. John the Baptist, who died a martyr, was in the Church after the Synod of Toledo of 633, above all, a symbol of belonging to the priesthood. Images of the head of St. John the Baptist, apart from the most schematic ones (e.g. on early Silesian coins), due to his hermit lifestyle and violent death, usually show dishevelled long hair, a moustache and a beard. We also want to indicate another, in our opinion, more likely interpretation of this element of the image of St. John the Baptist. The strip filled with lines (b) on various varieties of the oldest type of pilgrim badges, underlined with a frame or without it, is placed in various ways: above the forehead (3:3), directly above the eyes, so that its lower end is formed by the eyebrow arches (Fig. 3:4), and finally on the forehead (Fig. 3:5). It seems that this strip, located above the preserved bone – the relic, was to reflect the saint’s hair modelled on the reliquary, but not the tonsure, but a kind of fringe, embossed from a strip of precious metal sheet, just like in case of the aforementioned reliquary of the head of St. Eustace of Basel (Fig. 4:1). This fringe had to clearly contrast with the frontal bone, above which it appeared, it also differed from the upper, smoother part of the head, hence the clear line visible on some pilgrim badges and on the analysed bracteate. It cannot be ruled out that there was a decorative rim above the fringe, a kind of diadem, as on the reliquary of the head of St. Eustace (Fig. 4:1). This type of diadem also adorns the present Amiens reliquary (Fig. 5), perhaps in reference to its earlier form. There are clear points on the upper edge of the strip in the figure presenting our bracteate in the work of F. Friedensburg (Fig. 3:1), which may reflect a diadem decorated with stones on the forehead.

Openwork rim with rays (a) running from the face to the edges (Fig. 3:3) could in turn be an image of some temporary base of the reliquary or, as B. Spencer believed, a vessel with an openwork form in which the head of St. John the Baptist



Fig. 4. Reliquary of the head of St. Eustace from the Basel Cathedral, currently kept in the collection of the British Museum (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1850-1127-1; CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

was displayed.¹⁴ However, we do not think that we should look for any form of radial nimbus, which became fashionable in Gothic art only at the end of the 14th century. Similarly, this time in connection with the relic itself, one should see the eyes (c) on the pilgrim badges from Amiens – large and almond-shaped eyes, but usually devoid of pupils (Fig. 3:3), and sometimes even the protrusions of the eye-balls (Fig. 3:5).

To sum up, regardless of the interpretation of individual elements of the images on the openwork, 13th-century pilgrim badges from the sanctuary of St. John the Baptist in Amiens, there are too many similarities between these pieces and the image on the Rataje bracteates Fbg 70 to ignore them. Especially that they relate to images, on the one hand, from the main sanctuary of this saint in Europe, which was just created and which held the most important relic, and, on the other hand, from the place of his local cult with a long tradition. Moreover, they reflect the face of a saint with a special position in the contemporary Christian world, the precursor of the Lord, a figure placed in the hierarchy right after Christ and Mary,

¹⁴ Spencer 2010, p. 218.



Fig. 5. The present reliquary of the head of St. John the Baptist from the cathedral in Amiens, made in the second half of the 19th century after the previous one was melted down during the French Revolution. From the old reliquary, only the relic of the saint's face and a transparent shade are preserved

worshipped especially in the Eastern Church, but also in the Western one, until the 14th century, when he began to be replaced in the latter by the cult of other saints.¹⁵ The individual, surviving copies of the Fbg 70 bracteate differ in the details resulting from the barbarization of the representation on the subsequent copies of the stamps, but its image can be interpreted in relation to the iconography of the early pilgrim badges from Amiens. The bracteate would therefore depict the reliquary of the head of St. John the Baptist. The saint's head (its outline) is depicted with an embossed line in the shape of a half oval ("circle"), with a prominent nose (sometimes taken for a second, smaller oval – the second "circle"). From the level of the arched, connected supraorbital arches (and thus on the forehead), a trapezoidal, due to the curvature of the head, frame with vertical and diagonal lines inside depicted a tin "fringe" (b), possibly with a decorative diadem. The eyes, or rather closed eye sockets, are defined, at least in some of the bracteates, from the top by the above-mentioned supraorbital arches, and from the bottom by the horizontal lines (c), with the lack of both point-defined pupils and embossed eyeballs. Single lines at the bottom of the nose, in turn, probably reflect the facial hair – an arched moustache line embossed in the sheet. The rays running from the head to the rims (a) are probably the elements of the reliquary bowl.

¹⁵ Mazurkiewicz 1993, pp. 8–42.

Finally, we would like to draw your attention to a certain detail of the image on the described bracteate, undoubtedly intentional, because it is repeated on a larger number of copies from different stamps, which, however, cannot be derived from any of the recorded pilgrim badges from the sanctuary in Amiens. We mean a specific way of presenting the nose of St. John the Baptist. This part of the face is surprisingly large, wide and clearly two-part. The body of the nose below the nose bridge is depicted as a triangular/discoïd/rectangular pit, with a broad, convex lower part dominating. This is what this fragment also looks like on the skull from Amiens (Fig. 5) – the bone forming the bridge of the nose has been preserved, and the hole in the soft parts (similar to the eye sockets) is abundantly filled with some (resinous?) substance, which makes it seem wide and bulbous. In our opinion, this is a sufficient premise to suggest that the Silesian clergyman, who was the author of the Fbg 70 bracteate stamp, not only modelled its creation on the pilgrim badges brought from Amiens, but that he also saw the reliquary itself – he therefore, in the 20s or 30s of the 13th century, made a pilgrimage to a sanctuary in France, where it was displayed. The issue of Fbg 70 bracteates would therefore be the outcome of this pilgrimage, and the coin itself would be another St. John's Silesian bracteate. At the same time, it would be the second, after the known type 1 deniers of Bolesław IV the Curly with the image of the head of St. Adalbert in a schematic casing,¹⁶ depiction of the reliquary on a Polish medieval coin.¹⁷

And finally, a small remark about the lack of artistry in the image that distinguishes Fbg 70, as raised by W. Garbaczewski. We must admit that the moment we can say what this coin represents, our perception of its image changes a bit. The artist faced a serious challenge and, despite using ready-made iconographic patterns (pilgrim badges), he managed to create an unusual image, not without a certain, though perhaps slightly clumsy, dose of warmth and charm, probably resulting from his personal experience and attitude towards the relics he viewed.

¹⁶ J. Lelewel probably interpreted this idea in this way. Only in the hoard discovered in 2006 at the archaeological site no. 8 in Dąbrowa Górnicza-Łosień, 72 types of the reverse of this denier were distinguished (Rozmus, Tokaj 2000, p. 14, note 38).

¹⁷ And perhaps not the last one as well. After the observations made here regarding the possible connections of the Fbg 70 bracteate with the look of the Amiens reliquary, attention should be paid once again to other thirteenth-century Silesian bracteates with the head of St. John the Baptist. An example is the Fbg 74 bracteate with a rim around the head of St. John placed on a linear but massive horizontal base (<https://aukcjamonet.pl/product/622/henryk-i-brodaty-1201-1238-lub-henryk-ii-pobozny-1238-1241-brakteat-wroclaw>). The rim around the head was interpreted as a halo or as a bowl on which the cut off head of the saint rests (Garbaczewski 2007, p. 263, fn. 268). It should be noted, however, that this “halo” or “bowl” is not round. It surrounds the upper part of the head, but in the lower part it is clearly tapered on both sides towards the massive base described above. It therefore has a shape similar to a bulb rather than a nimbus or a bowl. It seems that it may be the already described here transparent shade protecting the head of St. John the Baptist in the reliquary from Amiens, with a characteristic form like that (fig. 5, see the shape of the shade – Forgeais 1863, p. 94). This is obviously a completely different way of presentation than on the Fbg 70 bracteate, but due to its schematic nature much closer to the aesthetics of early medieval coins.

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BRAKTEAT ŚLĄSKI (RATAJSKI) FBG 70 – OWOC TRZYNASTOWIECZNEJ PIELGRZYMKI DO AMIENS?

(Streszczenie)

Na śląskich brakteatach z tzw. grupy ratajskiej (od skarbu z miejscowości Rataje, odkrytego w 1850 r.), przypisywanych Henrykowi I Brodatemu (1201–1238) lub Henrykowi II Pobożnemu (1238–1241), uwieczniano z reguły głowę św. Jana Chrzciciela jako patrona Śląska, bądź głowę księcia. Wyjątkowy wśród tych monet jest brakteat Fbg 70 (ryc. 1), którego wyobrażenie nie doczekało się jak dotąd satysfakcjonującej interpretacji. Wcześniej badacze chcieli tu widzieć „promieniującą tęczę” (Gumowski 1960, nr 185), „kręgi światłości” jako odzwierciedlenie misji św. Jana Chrzciciela, Świadka Światłości, poprzedzającego przyjście Chrystusa (Garbaczewski 2007, s. 265; Garbaczewski 2019), czy nawet ekstrawaganckie jak na owe czasy przedstawienie wypiętej w stronę odbiorcy tylnej część ciała człowieka lub niedźwiedzia, przywiązanego do obiektu w kształcie łuku albo ściętą głowę (św. Jana Chrzciciela lub księcia Henryka Pobożnego) leżącą na kracie do odpływu krwi (Szczurek, Dannenberg 2011, s. 20–21). Autorzy artykułu przedstawiają własną interpretację wyobrażenia na brakteacie Fbg 70. Proponują obrócić je o 180° w stosunku do rysunku z pracy Friedensburga (1931) i zestawić (ryc. 3) z najstarszymi, datowanymi na XIII w., ażurowymi znakami pielgrzymimi z przedstawieniem relikwiarza na głowę św. Jana Chrzciciela z sanktuarium w Amiens (Spencer 2010, s. 217–219). Przedstawiają argumenty świadczące, że zarówno na brakteatach Fbg 70, jak i na wspomnianych znakach pielgrzymich znajduje się to samo wyobrażenie – relikwiarz z katedry w Amiens. O ile sposób przedstawienia twarzy na wspomnianych brakteatach można wywieść z wcześniejszych denarów śląskich (ryc. 2), to elementy nietypowe dla tego mennictwa odnajdujemy właśnie na znakach pielgrzymich z Amiens. Są to zwłaszcza (ryc. 3) promienie rozchodzące się od centralnego wyobrażenia ku obrzeżu monety (a), poziomy, obramiony, czworokątnym pas, wypełniony pionowymi i lekko ukośnymi kreskami (b) oraz sposób przedstawienia oczu (w zasadzie zasklepionych oczodołów), zaznaczonych jedynie poprzez łuki brwiowe i poziome kreski poniżej nich (c). Autorzy zwracają uwagę na duże prawdopodobieństwo recepcji na Śląsku, w miejscu o długiej tradycji lokalnego kultu św. Jana Chrzciciela, wzorców z utworzonego właśnie w katedrze Notre-Dame w Amiens, głównego w Europie sanktuarium tego świętego, przechowującego po 1206 r. najważniejszą jego relikwię, zrabowaną w Konstantynopolu w czasie IV krucjaty. Rozważają także możliwość pielgrzymki do Amiens autora wyobrażenia na brakteacie Fbg 70. Eksponowany obecnie w Amiens relikwiarz (ryc. 5) powstał w 2. połowie XIX w., po zniszczeniu (przetopieniu) poprzedniego w trakcie rewolucji francuskiej, po której ocalała jedynie sama relikwia i oprawiający ją, przezroczysty „klosz” o charakterystycznej formie. Brakteat Fbg 70 byłby drugą, obok denarów Bolesława IV Kędzierzawego typu 1, polską monetą średniowieczną z wyobrażeniem relikwiarza. Autorzy zwracają uwagę, że relikwiarz z Amiens może występować również na innych monetach śląskich, jako przykład wskazując brakteat Fbg 74.

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