

Versailles – Excavation for the Round Green Grove
Study of a token from King Henri III's Chamber of Accounts
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Sector D5, Inventory no.RV11-424-Ob11, No. d'ordre:223



Obverse

Title: CAM(. . .) COMPVTOR REGIORVM

At the token's center, France's shield crowned and encircled by the Order of St. Michael's chain.



Reverse

Title: S(. . .)DVCENDIS RATIO(. . .)IBVS8

The high relief is quite worn and undecipherable. Nevertheless, a discernable figure with a stretched out arm can be perceived. The year 1580 can be clearly read under said figure.

Official features

Brass
Weight: X g
Diameter: 28mm
Thickness: X mm
Smooth edge

Measured features

Brass
Weight: 3g
Diameter: 28mm
Thickness: 0,75mm

Definition:

The Chambers of Accounts are sovereign jurisdictions charged with the management of finances and taxation within the Kingdom of France (provincial chambers of Dauphiné or Bretagne for example) and the royal estates (chamber of Paris) The latter would also supervise the handling of finances, verify the accounts of all royal agents, register privileges. In order to fulfill all the verifications related to Royal finances, the token or "jeton de comptes" is used to ease the computing and allow for monitoring large amounts of money. Even though coin- like, the token has no monetary value. Nevertheless, its use is definitely linked to coins, that is, earnings and expenses, as it served as a substitute when computing accounts. The marking of the "jeton de compte" depends on its issuing year, but also on the institution to which it is attached. For example, for the same year 1580, the token from the chamber of accounts and the token from the currency court are clearly distinct in their inscriptions as well as in their figurative representations.



Figure 1: Examples of the reverse accounting tokens minted in 1580: left: Chamber of Accounts token, right: Currency Court token.

Description:

A similar token in better state of conservation has permitted to identify with precision the inscriptions on both sides of the token, as well as the figure represented on its reverse. The following description is therefore based on both this token and the one found on the Round Green Grove (Bosquet du Rond Vert) in 2011.

Obverse: In the center, France's shield consisting of three fleur-de-lys, as reminders of the ancient origins of royalty (the Franks) and the Holy Trinity. This shield is encircled by the Collier of the Order of St Michael. At the base of the Collier, the silhouettes of the Archangel Gabriel overthrowing the dragon is still visible. (Fig.2) This element echoes an order founded by Henri III in 1578: the order of the Holy Spirit which counted amongst its members Catholic nobleman and princes of royal blood. The engraving is surmounted by a crown, symbol of royalty and power. The avers also carries the following Latin title: CAMARAE.COMPVTOR.REGIORVM.



Figure2: Collier of the Order of Saint Michael

Reverse: The center figure represents draped woman standing holding a compass on her right hand. She seems to be measuring a celestial globe on which are represented a Sun two groups of three stars in triangular formation, and an isolated star. According to these elements, it most probably represents Urania, a muse from Greek mythology presiding over astronomy and astrology. Under the figure, the date on which the token was minted: 1580. Finally, a second inscription, also in Latin, encircles the central figure: SVBDUCENDIS.RATIONIBUS



Figure3: Token from king Henri III's Chamber of Accounts, from internet site cgh.fr

Interpretation:

The nature of the accounts is generally well specified in the token's inscription. On the obverse, the writing CAMARAE.COMPVTOR.REGIORUM which means "for the King's Chamber of Accounts". On the reverse, the inscription indicates SVBVCENDIS.RATIONIBVS which means "for accounting". It appears clearly from these indications that it is definitely an accounting token probably used by the Paris Chamber of Accounts. The currency value at the time, the "livre tournois" is worth 20 "sou", one "sou" is worth 12 "deniers". To facilitate complex operations, the accounting token would not only allow for faster additions, but also substractions, multiplications, and divisions. It therefore comes as no surprise that the use of this mathematical system lasted until the XIXth century.

Bibliography:

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