

A Look at Schillings of the Free Imperial City of Riga

by Charles Calkins

The seaport of Riga is the capital of Latvia and the largest city of the Balkan states. It is located on the Gulf of Riga, a bay of the Baltic Sea, at the mouth of the Daugava river. The area was settled in ancient times by the Livs, a Finnic tribe, giving the area its name of Livonia. Riga began developing economically due to the Daugava being used as a Viking trade route to Byzantium. By the 12th century, German traders were visiting Riga, establishing an outpost near Riga in 1158. After a failed attempt at Christianization in the late 1100s, Bishop Albert landed with a force of crusaders in 1200, and transferred the Livonian bishopric to Riga in 1201, which became the Archbishopric of Riga in 1255.

Albert established the Order of Livonian Brothers of the Sword in 1202 to defend territory and commerce, and Emperor Philip of Swabia caused Livonia to become a principality of the Holy Roman Empire. The Order of Livonian Brothers was given one-third of Livonia, and the Church the other two-thirds, which included Riga. In 1211, Riga minted its first coinage, and gradually gained more independence through the 1200s. In 1236, the Order of Livonian Brothers was defeated in battle with the Samogitians of Lithuania. The remaining Brothers were incorporated into the Teutonic Knights as a branch known as the Livonian Order. The Livonian Order subsequently gained control of Livonia.

In 1282, Riga became a member of the Hanseatic League, a confederation of towns and merchant guilds which provided legal and military protection. In addition, from

1228 to the 1560s, the states of the Livonian Order, the Archbishopric of Riga, Bishopric of Dorpat, Bishopric of Ösel-Wiek, and the Bishopric of Courland were loosely organized into the Livonian Confederation to protect against Russian expansion.

The Archbishops of Riga also acted as the secular rulers of Riga, even striking coinage with the names of the current archbishop in the legend, with the earliest known struck in 1418. In 1561, the region converted to Lutheranism, and the archbishopric came to an end. Coins continued to be struck in the name of the last archbishop, Wilhelm, Markgraf von Brandenburg, until his death in 1563.

Figure 1 shows a type III schilling of Wilhelm, dated 1563. The obverse shows an eagle, with Wilhelm's family shield on its chest, and the legend GVILHELM D G A E RI. The reverse shows the 63 of the date around the small coat of arms of Riga, consisting of two crossed keys of St. Peter, representing the patronage of the Pope, with a cross of the Livonian Order above due to their influence in the city, and the legend MONETA NOVA RIGE.



Figure 1 Schilling of Wilhelm

By the early 1500s, the power of the Hanseatic League had declined, and Riga was under foreign threat. The Livonian

War, from 1558-1583, was fought between Russia, Denmark-Norway, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the Kingdom of Poland, over control of Livonia.

After a significant defeat of the Livonian Order and the dissolution of the Livonian Confederation in 1561, Riga was given the status of Free Imperial City of the Holy Roman Empire that same year, meaning that it was a self-governing city directly subordinate to the emperor, and not to a duke, count, bishop, or other ruler, secular or religious. At the time, only about sixty-five of the approximately four thousand cities and towns in the Holy Roman Empire had the status of Free Imperial City. This status lasted until 1581, near the end of the Livonian War, when Riga accepted the rule of Poland, and the Polish monetary system was introduced.

As a Free Imperial City, Riga issued new coinage under the same standards as were specified in the 1422-1426 monetary reform of the Livonian Confederation, with the following denominational relationships: three pfennigs to one schilling, nine schillings to one ferding, four ferdings to one mark, four and one-half marks to one thaler, and three thalers to one ducat. The coins that were struck composed the pfennig, schilling, two schillings, ferding, one-half mark, mark, one-half thaler, and thaler, all in silver, and a three ducat issue in gold. According to Fyodorov's *Baltic Coins of the XIII-XVIII Centuries*, only the schilling was struck each year from 1563 to 1580 (plus an undated issue), with the other denominations struck only intermittently.

The overall design of the schilling remained constant throughout the Free Imperial City period. On the obverse, the eagle and personalized legend of Wilhelm's schilling

was replaced by the large coat of arms of Riga, consisting of two flagged towers and a dome, with a small cross above, and the head of a lion in the city gate (with the city gate representing the city's right to autonomy), and typically the legend CIVITATIS RIGENSIS. The reverse remained consistent with that of Wilhelm's, showing the small coat of arms of Riga, but usually with a variant of the legend MONETA NOVA ARGENTEA. A typical coin is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 A typical 1575 schilling

The Devil is in the details, however, and that makes this series particularly interesting for error and variety collectors. The author has obtained 55 examples in the date ranges 1563-64, 1566, 1568-72, 1575-79, and the no-date, which are all different from one another.

Figure 3 shows a Free City schilling of 1563, dated the same year as the last of Wilhelm's. Unlike Wilhelm's, however, the date has moved to the obverse, and abbreviates the legend as MONETA NOVA ARGEN.



Figure 3 A schilling of 1563

The date remains on the obverse for schillings of 1564, although examples exist with 64 on the obverse and 63 on the reverse, and the reverse legend MONTEA NOVA RIGE, as if a 1564 Free City obverse die was paired with a 1563 reverse of Wilhelm's.

Figure 4 shows a schilling of 1569, where the legends are now CIVITATIS RIGENS and MONETA NO ARG. This style of castle, with three towers rather than two towers and a dome, is present on the author's examples from 1566, 1568 and 1569, as well as the no-date. This 1569 shows an open rosette separating RIGENS from CIVITATIS, while the 1566 and 1568s show the Cyrillic character Φ , with the 1566 and the two examples of 1568 in the author's sample the only dated coins that use that particular separator. The no-date also uses Φ as a separator at that position on the obverse, so perhaps the no-date was struck ca. 1566-68, but with a reverse from an earlier year that did not yet contain the date. Incidentally, Φ is also used as a reverse separator on the 1566, and is the only coin in the sample which does so.



Figure 4 A schilling of 1569

Starting in 1570, the design began to include a more elaborate city gate and finer detail in the keys, and variations in the legends continued. Figure 5 shows the obverses of two schillings of 1570 where, instead of the city name spelled as RIGENSIS, it appears again as RIGENS but also as RIGENSI.



Figure 5 RIGENS and RIGENSI

Figure 6 shows two uncommon reverse legends used on coins of 1575. The coin on the left has the legend MONETA NOVA RIGE, as did Wilhelm's, and the one on the right MONE NO RIGENSIS. The latter is also unusual in that two legend separator symbols are present between RIGENSIS and MONE – a pellet followed by a star.

Normally, a coin only has one legend separator symbol at any given position.



Figure 6 MONETA NOVA RIGE and MONE NO RIGENSIS

Figure 7 shows another oddity from 1575. On the obverse, the separator and C of CIVITATIS appear to overlap the last few letters of RIGENSIS, causing CIVITATIS to start before the 12:00 position. Part of the legend is difficult to read due to the overlap, but in the figure, the shift is significant enough such that the V of CIVITATIS is easily seen at the position where the C would normally be. On the reverse, ARGENTEA is misspelled as AEGENTEA – an E is in place of the R, and the A's are upside-down V's, missing their crossbars.



Figure 7 AEGENTEA legend

Figure 8 shows the reverses of two schillings of 1576. The coin on the left has a rotated legend and a misspelling – it reads ARGENTA MONE NO, and the one on the right has a misspelling – ARGNTEA – where both should read ARGENTEA. The coin on the right also shows a large cud, indicating that the die has a defect and is wearing out.



Figure 8 Rotated legend and misspellings

Coins that show other types of errors in the minting process can also be found. Figure 9 shows part of the legend on the obverse of a schilling of 1571. Prior to 1575, these coins were struck by hammer blow, which would allow a coin to flip over and be struck again. Here, the legend appears as ARGESIS, where the N of RIGENSIS is partly visible below the first E of ARGENTEA.



Figure 9 Double struck

The “Walzwerk” coining machine, invented in Hall in Tirol, Austria, in the 1550s, was used for striking coins of Riga starting in 1575. This machine consisted of two rollers, one containing a set of obverse dies, and the other a set of reverse dies, that were synchronized by a toothed wheel. A sheet of metal was fed between the rollers, and as the rollers turned, the metal would be impressed. The coins were then cut out of the metal. Figure 10 shows a coin of 1577 where the coin was cut from the sheet in such a way that the rim of the next coin on the sheet is visible. That same coin shows another misspelled variant of the obverse legend – CIVITATI RIGENIS, and a very low position of the lion’s head relative to the gate, as compared with the other coins.



Figure 10 Shifted cut, CIVITATI RIGENIS legend

From the author’s sample of coins, the diameter of the schilling remained nearly constant before and after the introduction of the Walzwerk, with all specimens ranging from 17mm to 18mm, although prior to the Walzwerk the coins were more irregularly-shaped. Weights also remained at about one gram, although prior to the Walzwerk the variation in weights was greater. Out of 27 coins struck by hammer blow (including the no-date), weights averaged 0.97g ($\sigma=0.111$ g), ranging from the no-

date at 0.71g, to a 1569 at 1.27g. Out of 28 coins produced by the Walzwerk, weights averaged 0.98g ($\sigma=0.063$ g), ranging from a 1575 at 0.84g, to coins of 1576 and 1577, both at 1.10g.

A variation can appear on coins of 1577 and 1578 in which the digits of the date appear upside-down relative to the other design elements. While Figure 10 shows a typical 1577, Figure 11 shows the 15LL and 158L varieties. This particular 15LL is noteworthy in that it has replaced the cross above the keys with a fleur-de-lis, misspelled the legend as ARGETE, and has two rosettes between ARGETE and MONE as legend separator symbols, instead of one single symbol.



Figure 11 15LL and 158L

As seen in the various figures, the separators between elements of the legends also vary from coin to coin. Figure 12 shows some of these separators in detail. Differences in style of these also exist, or in their usage, such as the two-pellet “colon” appearing both vertically or horizontally with respect to the legend text, and the rosettes and single pellet appearing solid or open. Some of these symbols may also appear below the keys on the reverse, most frequently open and closed pellets, and the rosette with angular petals.

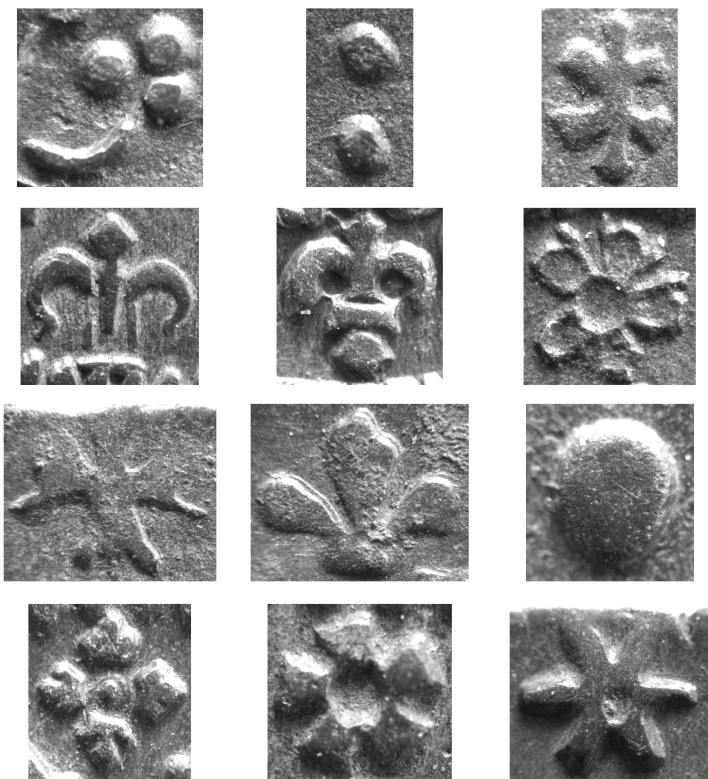


Figure 12 Legend separator symbols

As this article has shown, considering that Free Imperial City schillings were struck for less than two decades, the varieties available are enormous, and provide for a fun and interesting collecting experience. It should be noted that, while Fyodorov assigns an identification number to the standard type of schilling of each year (the range of ID numbers from 578 to 626 include all dates and denominations of Riga Free Imperial City coinage), as well as major varieties of the schilling such as the 63/64, 15LL, 158L and no-date (579, 619, 621, and 626, respectively), variations in legend and style such as those illustrated in

this article are not detailed. The author hopes that this work sheds some light on an apparently lightly-documented series.

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