Portraits of Russian Empress Elizabeth, 5 Kopecks Minted at Sestroretsk in 1758, and Eagles Designed by Dassier and Hedlinger on Russian Coins

From the very beginning of her reign in 1741 and until 1754, Elizabeth was not very fortunate with the portrait images that represented her on the silver coins. A beautiful woman appeared somewhat plump, with a sunken homely face, and on the Moscow roubles she even had a very short neck. Coin portraits of Elizabeth of that time make her appear ennoble, but what is surprising to me is that the engravers responsible for this do not get a taste of lashes on their backs. The reason for this royal charity lies in the fact that the bust on all coins looks quite lush and dimensionally vast and somewhat appalling. Perhaps the Empress was flattered, and that saved unskilled craftsmen from severe punishment.

By the time Elizabeth ascended to the throne there were no upscale engravers remaining in Russia. This situation is well characterized by the fact that towards the end of 1742 they even released Osip Kalashnikov from his custody. A past time famous engraver of Peter's medal and coin portraits, Kalashnikov, who is credited with the authorship of a large number of portraits of Peter on the coins, now was purblind. He was deprived of his liberty for a theft in 1727 (for an attempt to sell mint dies) and he miraculously avoided the death penalty. Kalashnikov was given bail to work at the Moscow Mint, where he worked mainly on roubles' dies. Vision did not allow his to carry out more delicate jobs.

It's safe to assume that the problem with the Empress's portrait has been noticed not only by our contemporaries. As early as the beginning of 40s Elizaveta orders her portrait from the Swiss (directors of Stockholm mint in Sweden) medallist Johann Carl Hedlinger, who engraved a beautiful and very detailed portrait of Anna for the 1736 rouble. The master starts preparing a medal in a similar style staying in Schwyz (Swiss), his hometown. But he does not manage to finish it in time. However his sketches find their way to Petersburg. From 1748 in Moscow lives and works Scottish medallist and engraver Benjamin Scott. In 1751 he moves to Petersburg, where he organises the master-class for medallist training. Among his pupils there was Timothy Ivanov, subsequently a famous Russian medallist and engraver. Besides his work in gold coins and medal portraits, from 1754 Scott works on rouble and poltina dies. Scott's portraits of Elizaveta Petrovna appear quite nicely on coins, particularly if to compare them to the previous works. There is an assumption that Scott and other engravers who worked on the dies and medals around that time, adopted Hedlinger's sketches as an example for what Russian Empress may like.

Image 1: Jacques Antoine Dassier

The top beauty marks the portrait image of Elizabeth reaches in the works of Jean Dassier son - Jacques Antoine Dassier (image-1), also a known medallist from Sweden, who was invited in 1756 to work in St. Petersburg. He was lured into Russia by high salary, dedicating 2 years of his life to working at the reconstructed St. Petersburg Mint. During this time he managed to leave an unforgettable mark on coin dies and medals. His last student was a former student of Scott – Timothy Ivanov. Upon returning home from Russia the famous medallist dies.

It seems that the medal minted in 1757, in honour of the opening of the Moscow University, with a portrait of Elizabeth made J.-A. Dassier, was one of his most successful creations in Russia. This medal, 51 mm in diameter, although it is not known as widely as, for example, a medal "for the death of Peter the Great", created by his father (with the initials «JD»). However, for the coinage of Russia, and numismatics, namely it is of great interest due to the perfectly executed portrait of Elizabeth. Not in vain Jacob Reichel (1778-1856), a passionate numismatist and medallist, many

years later gained fame as a copyist with making a copy of this very medal. The obverse of the table-medal (see image-2, the first example) has a classical bust of the Empress Elizabeth, where she is shown wearing a crown and robes, with curls falling onto her shoulders. Under the portrait engraver put his signature - «DASSIER».

We can assume that Elizabeth liked this medal, because now her portrait got a decent display in the metal! Based on this portrait Dassier supervised preparation of the coin dies for the silver rouble and the gold 10 roubles. Silver rouble with portrait of Elizabeth, has a diameter of 40-42 mm, and 10 roubles in gold – 31 mm. The dimensions of the portrait's face are unchanged, which suggests that the face image is applied with a master-punch that "replicated" itself in the hands of a skilled engraver.

Curious thing, the portraits on the coins bear no initials or signature of the engraver. It is possible that coin dies were not prepared by the Dassier himself, and that another engraver prepared them under his direct instruction, using the tools that master-engraver prepared. It was a normal practice since the student was to continue to engrave in the style of his teacher after his contract would expire. Image of the face on the medal and on both coins (see. Picture 2) match almost perfectly, although the headwear had been accomplished in a different style. Perhaps this was an engraver Timothy Ivanov mentioned above who had the honours, where as Dassier only added his touches to the dies preparation. I think the engraver of Dassier calibre would add his signature only under his own original work, that he worked on as both a designer and an engraver. Such work was exclusive to a portrait of the medal. So speaking of coin portraits, as the portraits of Dassier, we rather mean that they were made under his supervision and are of his design, but not necessary of his engraving.

Image 2: The first three portraits - Dassier's design. The fourth portrait - Scott's design. The fifth (combined portrait) the work of Ivanov. The sixth item - 5 kopecks from Sestroretsk mint with Dassier eagle design, as well as eagles on all of the roubles displayed in this image (here and after the coins' images are from acsearch.info archive and from private collectors)

The design of the rouble has changed for better. It got a new coat-of-arm's eagle that is referred to as the Dassier's eagle. In combination with a new portrait the coin now appeared beautiful, pleasant and accomplished (see image-2, the third item from the left). In this work one can appreciate the experience that J.A.Dassier acquired at mint in London. The taste and the grace which are displayed in both: the eagle and the portrait are astonishing even by today's standards, not to mention the 18th century in Russia. The eagle's wings turn out to have a natural flow with a pattern of figured feathers expressed in metal so well that it was practically impossible for counterfeiters now to copy it, and as the time proved, not only them. The portrait is very simple and magnificent at the same time. Hitherto it beats all knows portraits of

Russian royalty in its grace. If there was one word that could describe this coin, it's "luxe", top of the range by design! But, it only seems to us so.

It seams that Empress Elizabeth is quite pleased by the work which Dassier did on the eagle. The eagle went into production and was exploited hereinafter to the fullest extend. However, the variation of the portrait which Empress liked on a medal, on coins has a no-go after a short, matter of a couple of months, production. She cannot accept that her majestic bust has been reduced in size (even though so stylishly), which she took simply as stolen! The size of the portrait's face on coins was kept the same as on the medal, where as the coin's area where the portrait needs to fit is much smaller in size on silver and even smaller on gold coins. The royal bust from the medal simply does not fit on smaller coins and had do be minimised. Elizabeth stopped the production of coins displaying her "incomplete" bust. It was stopped as quickly as it began. Monarch's beauty concept takes priority over the artistic finesse and grace of portraits on coins. Elizabeth gives a persuasive suggestion to make portraits based on a portrait made by B. Scott.

It was Timothy Ivanov who had a hand in making portraits, matching size and bust of Elizabeth of Scott's portrait (that was based on portrait sketch made by Hedlinger), with the portrait face designed by Dassier. Ivanov, as a disciple of both masters: Scott and Dassier, managed to combine seemingly incompatible. Having made his portrait in the style and technique of two teachers, he reduced the face of the Dassier's portrait of Elizabeth, while increased the bust, borrowed from the portrait by Scott, thus bringing the portrait to perfection (as much as his talent permitted).

Image 3: Four portraits of Elizabeth by Hedlinger, Scott, Ivanov and Dassier.

The image-3 clearly displays that Scott dressed Empress in style of apparel as sketched on a portrait by Hedlinger, which was made using a drawing Elizabeth sent to him. In his turn Ivanov took this style from Scott. It also shows that the face of Elizabeth made by Ivanov performed in the style of a face from portrait made by Dassier, but with a shortened neck. Of course, the size of coins on image-3 was changed to provide clarity in comparing design and style of appropriate parts. All roubles are approximately the same size, and the medal was conceived by Hedlinger to be 1.5 - 2 times larger.

I must say that Ivanov was a diligent and worthy disciple, who lived up to the expectations of SPB mint. Actually, this was his work as a portraitist (medallist) and as a skilful engraver-copier, who combined both style of portraits into one. The portrait has his initials «IT». There is also a medal "To Victor over Prussia" dated 1759, which has exactly the same portrait that bears the signature of the medallist "TIMOFEI.I.F.", indicating authorship. This portrait's grace and beauty merged in unison and enjoys approval. Portrait of Ivanov goes into mass-production, appearing on coins from SPB between 1757 and 1761. Thus, the fate has arranged an interesting meeting to Dassier's and Scott's portraits, assigned by their student and the vagaries of fate.

The project of copper money reform aimed at introducing heavier weights to copper coins, which began at Anna's times when new weight was introduced to Polushkas and Dengas, and the result of which was to be the withdrawal from circulation of lightweight standard coins, that was introduced by Peter the Great, continues and reaches its logical end. The aim of the project was to add weight, sustainable and stable purchasing power to copper coins. After the "experiments" with the change of the copper weight standard, under the supervision of Peter Shuvalov, the financial system has stabilized.

Copper coins remain the main currency within Russian state, where there is a shortage of it due to economic development, spending and acquiring new territories. Finally, the time has come to release the most profitable, large copper coin, which was to eliminate this shortage, increasing trade within the country. Such coins were introduced by Elizabeth in 1758 all-Russian 5 kopecks copper coins. As a result of many years of implementation and consistent financial policy, five kopeck coins added in weight and turned from lightweight coins of Peter I - 20.48 grams each, into full-weight coins of his daughter Elizabeth - 51.19 grams each. It was the aim of the project, which Elizabeth reached with Shuvalov's help.

So ruble in copper coins now weighed just over a kilogram, under Catherine II this leads to an attempt of creating of a curious Sestroretsk copper ruble that weight just over a kilogram. It was an attempt to create a reserve of copper coinage in banks without involving 5-kopecks coins, as the guarantor of bank-bills. Despite its heavy weight 5-kopecks of Elizabeth and Catherine II became a solid basis of copper-based monetary economic system in the country.

Image 4: Three trial design variations of 5 kopecks rejected for mass production, and an approved design on a coin

It is believed that in addition to the approved design of 5 kopecks, there were other trial coin designs presented for consideration with corresponding emblems (see. Image-4): 1) St George (Moscow) - was approved for the lower denominations; 2) Crossed anchors (St. Petersburg) - rejected; 3) Sables (Siberian kingdom) - rejected. The result is not too surprising. If you consider that the Empress thought herself rather a Muscovite and that it was not for the first time that Moscow's emblem was displayed on all-Russian coins, then it's easier to accept that continuity also played violins in making this choice.

In 1757, Her Majesty Elizabeth publishes nominal decree for hasty minting of copper 5 kopecks coins at 16 rubles from a pood of copper. One side of the coin was designed with monogram of Empress, and the other – with the national emblem, the national eagle designed by Dassier, as he first appeared on rubles with portrait of his work.

Thus, it would seem, that by the 1758 eagle migrated from silver coins to copper. Finding the copper coins with Dassier eagle (as on the last coin in the image-2) in a more or less good condition and with visible signs of "patterned" feather in wing design is difficult, but possible. These "patterned" feathers, perhaps, can be considered one of the characteristic features of Dassier's eagle, except for basic shapes, and other

elements. But interestingly enough, on the 5 kopecks coins of Sestroretsk Mint in 1758 (where Dassier's eagle is found more often), there are two main variations (see. Picture-5), coins with the eagle of the second variation can be found occasionally in virtually untouched condition, untouched by repairs.

The first variation matches Dassier's eagle as it is seeing on silver coins, apart from some repair nuances on worn out dies. Let's conditionally call this eagle on copper coins - "silver". This is an eagle with a characteristic "bite out" of feathers on the right wing, so it seems that the right wing bents a little in motion. The second variation, except the form of the right wing, has exactly the same form, and in addition, it looks as if the eagle came out from under a fresher dies on which many elements were not subjected to repairs. Let's conditionally call this eagle - "copper".

Image 5: Comparing two versions of Dassier's eagles («silver" and "copper") on copper 5 kopecks coins, the wings of which clearly display Dassier's "patterned" feathers, against Dassier's eagle taken from a silver rouble (coins from private collections)

The only repair-free eagle on copper coins is a "copper" Dassier's eagle, I think, that can be found exclusively among the coins of Sestroretsk mint production. We can assume that it was the very first version that Dassier made for the silver rouble. However, as far as we know, it never landed on silver coins. It seems that it was sent for approbation as a first version, that for whatever reason was rejected. It was then reworked to a version of "silver" eagle with characteristic shape of the right wing, which was approved, whereas a more symmetrical "copper" eagle was put away. Not in vain, the "copper" eagle tools found their use in 5 kopecks production, and didn't go to waste completely. One can almost argue that both eagle originate from the same master-hub. After not accepting the "copper" version of the eagle, the master-hub was trimmed and transformed into a "silver" eagle. In any case, "copper" eagle can rightfully be called a Dassier's eagle and most likely – the first version.

Image 6: One of the best images of "copper" Dassier's eagle (archive Auction House "Alexander")

We can assume that tools for making 5 kopecks dies were made in St. Petersburg and passed to Moscow and Ekaterinburg mints, including master-punches of "silver" eagle, as part of preparation for production of copper 5 kopecks in 1758. In part, this must be true for Sestroretsk as well. It seems to me however, that Sestroretsk mint did not receive master-punches for "silver" eagle (used in rouble production). Instead, they received tools only for "copper" eagle – that was not approved for rouble production. The "copper" eagle was the one applied to dies produced at the Sestroretsk mint. Dies with "silver" eagle were most likely made at the St. Petersburg mint and passed to Sestroretsk as the need for additional dies was becoming apparent and additional dies required. For instance, coins made with the Sestroretsk dies (that used "copper" eagle) have cross of the orb higher up and it dows not touch the denomination inscription. If the same masters used both eagles in the same composition (at the same mint) they would hardly change the composition, i.e. Eagles form would be both interchangeable and there would be no need in changing the placement of the main components relative to each other. In addition, we see two different sets of tools, "Eagle / banner for an inscription," and similar (St. Petersburg) set of letters of the inscription. The assumption that the masters of different mints, with different tools, made dies for Sestroretsk, as a theory, may explain why we often come across the coins from Sestroretsk mint displaying original Dassier eagles, as well as the existence of two versions of eagles on coins of that mint, moreover, it explains why there it a difference in eagle (orb cross) placement relative to the inscription "five kopecks."

Image 7: Comparison of Dassier's Eagle (eagle from rouble overlaid on copper), to its brothers: "silver" (2 left) and "copper" (2 right) eagles on the copper coins (coins from private collections)

As the time went by the wings' patterns on dies and on master-punches used to prepare them has been worn out and replaced by stylized pattern of feathers of a random choice by each repairer. Common features of the eagle remained in shape for a long time, until the degrading instruments were modified beyond recognition. Thus, on the Moscow and Yekaterinburg mints a fairly quick "dissolution" of original Dassier's eagles design took place. Dies are repeatedly repaired, and eventually produced initially without "patterned" feathers (the main features of the original Dassier's eagle), as a consequence of deterioration of the pattern relief and print.

The Eagles made with such dies can hardly be called original Dassier's eagles, even though originally they were designed as such. They are their derivatives, their "shadows" in which one may still distinguish the contours and elements of Dassier's design, such as the shape of the wings and tail. However, they are starting to have their own names in numismatic circles, from the "needle" (feathers in the form of thick needles), to the "cloverleaf" (feathers are made with triple endings and resemble shamrocks), and many

other options in between and for all tastes. Every engraver used his favorite tool to simulate feathers of the wings, refilling the gaps left by deteriorated wings' patterns as well as they could, adding to the Dassier design feathers of their own interpretation, and somewhat disfiguring contours of the eagle at the same time.

Image 8: Repaired "silver" Dassier eagle on 1761 coin

It seems that one of the original Dassier's eagles was destined to see the light not on silver coins (for what it was designed in a first place), namely on a copper 5 kopecks of Elizabeth's and later Catherine's reign.

Perhaps on the copper coins, in its original form, "copper" and "silver" eagle versions did not last for too long. However, in 1761 it's still possible to come across some coins with eagles' displaying some partially preserved patterned feathers. Image 8 shows one of those few "modified" eagles the right wing of which still keeps clear, visible traces of "patterned" feathers.

Picture 9: The original Hedlinger's eagle 1736 and its later variations

In the late 1760s Sestroretsk and the mints cease production of the heavy 5 kopecks coins. In different "shadow" variations Dassier's eagle stayed on 5 kopecks made in Yekaterinburg until 1774, when it was completely replaced by an eagle version with small wings. On rubles Dassier's eagles lasted until 1776 inclusive, by the end many of them resembled the shape of proportional "copper" eagle. As a result, the eagles on rubles have been replaced by Hedlinger's eagle in design (tail feathers come together at the bottom). This type of eagle lands on 5 kopecks of Suzun mint, half unexpectedly, in 1788, and stays on coins up until the very end (until 1796). It also becomes a prototype for the specially designed eagle for Paul recoining, and extended to the full-weighted Alexander I 5 kopecks coins of 1802-1810.

Thus, the type of eagle originally designed by Hedlinger (despite forty years break in appearance) stayed on the coins for a total of a little less than 30 years. It returned to complete the history of heavy 5 kopecks in Russia. But 1774 was not yet the end of the Dassier's "shadow" eagle types. They again appeared on coins in 1787 at the beginning of the copper coinage at the Tauric mint (TM). The capitals' mints have also made a small wrench for the production of 5 kopecks between 1787 and 1789 years using Dassier's "shadow" type of eagles, and in 1795 the Moscow mint strikes the last copper eagles of this type. In total, the type of Dassier's eagle was used for about 25 years.

It so happened that the contribution of both medalists, Hedlinger and Dassier, in Russian coinage, was much more significant than what they might have expected, that concerns both - the portrait art, and the

influence on the image on the eagles on coins. These eagles survived not only outlived their creators - medalists, but also several Russian monarchs. Beauty and elegance of these eagles, that portray themselves in coins, continue to delight collectors up to this day.

References and Resource:

1) Oeuvre du Chevalier Hedlinger ou recueil des médailles de ce célèbre artiste, par Ch. de Mechel. Basle, 1776 (Chretien de Maickel "Creativity Gedlinger, a collection of medals by the famous master").
2) V.E. Semenov "Coin Case of the Russian Empire", 2010.
3) The article "Medalists Hedlinger And J.A. Dassier in Russia» (www.realcoins.ru/articles/?id=59).
4) V.V. Uzdenikov "Russian Coins XVIII - beginning of XX century. Essays on numismatics. Facts, assumptions, recommendations ", 2004.
5) R. Zander. "Silver roubles and efimki of Romanov Russia 1654 - 1915", 1998.

About this article:

This article was first published in the “Petersburg Collector” (Питербургский Коллекционер) – Russian periodical magazine in Russian language in 2015. This is an original translation of that text by author.

This article is an intellectual property of E. Skobtchenko, an as such, it is not for sale, reprint or publication without prior agreement with the author.