



FROM THE HISTORY OF COIN HOARDS AND MONEY CONTAINERS

PhDr. Elena Minarovičová

Homes and museum collections contain objects which did not fulfill the function of currency, but were closely connected with care for money and its protection. Although most people now deposit their savings in banks, everybody probably has a money box at home, in which small coins are symbolically placed. The content of money boxes is real "treasure", especially for small children, who acquire a positive relationship to money and gain an understanding of saving in this way.

However, many people who have money boxes for small coins at home may not realize the origin of this tradition of saving or hoarding coins, that its roots reach back to the distant past and are closely connected with conscious hiding of a certain amount of money.



Hoard of gold solidi from Bíňa, district of Nové Zámky, mid 5th century AD, hidden in an earthenware pot.



Hoard of more than three thousand gold and silver from Pác, district of Trnava, 14th century, hidden in an earthenware pot.

People have been concerned with their money and its safe storage since time immemorial. Conscious hiding of money was most frequently connected with the state of the monetary economy and the situation of the particular time and place. In the course of historical development, the position of the owner was reflected in the forms of storing coins. In uncertain times of war, when plundering expeditions threatened, in times of devastation and rebellion, it was safer to store money underground than to carry large amounts of money around or to leave it at home.

Many such hidden hoards returned to circulation after a time, but, for unknown reasons, many such treasures remained untouched for centuries or millennia.

Discovered coin hoards are sources of primary importance for history and numismatics. The individual coins in a hoard document the composition of the coins in circulation in a certain time and place. The majority of discovered coin hoards were deposited in various containers. Coins were most frequently put in earthenware, stoneware, ceramic, glass, tin, bron-

ze or copper containers. They could also be wrapped in cloth or leather, or placed in barrels, cases, wooden or metal boxes, cassettes and so on.

Coin hoards were deposited in various places. They were hidden underground, in water, wells, gardens and fields, inside the walls of houses, under floors, in lofts and cellars, under the foundation of buildings, in churches, castles and mansions, graves, caves, woods and hollows under the roots of old trees. Coins are often found on the line of old trade routes, at their crossing points, or on the site of old markets.

Many such coin hoards, together with their containers or wrappings, most frequently earthenware vessels, in which they were hidden for a long time, have become part of museum collections. After expert study in the museum or other scientific institutions,

they become a basic historical source for tracing the history of money in Slovakia, and for the early history of the country in general.

I already said that hoards, especially of medieval coins, were most frequently hidden in earthenware vessels. The containers for coins, in a sense money boxes, have great importance even without their contents, but they do not always receive sufficient attention.

The connection between the vessel and coins is actually important evidence for the date of some types of ceramics. The date a hoard was hidden is determined from the date of the latest coin in the hoard. The pots in which coins were hidden were those used in the home at the time. Earthenware pots easily disintegrate, so they usually were not used for long. It is possible to assume that the pots were made a relatively short time before the hiding of the hoard, perhaps an average of ten years before. The dating of pots by means of coins deposited in them is a reliable aid to the chronological assignment of types of ceramic. The earthenware vessels



Money boxes and socks of metal, ceramics, beads and textile from the 19th and 20th century.

Money boxes made from silver or silver plated in the form of an ass and a hen, 19th century.



Ceramic and porcelain money boxes.



first it was usually a piece of leather or textile in which money was simply wrapped. With the passage of time, the classic form of money pouch developed. This had already happened at least two thousand years ago. We find this form not only in the ancient

East, but also in our cultural region from early times, and they have continued to occur until today. In the early Middle Ages, the pouch was an important part of noble dress. It was worn hanging from the belt. In ancient mythology, we meet Mercury, god of trade and profit, often depicted with his attribute – a pouch.

Perhaps from the 18th century, we know large storage purses, popularly called "harmonica", still used today in modified form. Storage purses remind us of the period of use of large silver coins of the thaler period, while small purses from the 18th to 19th centuries made of precious materials were probably intended for gold coins. More recent purses from the 19th

found so far form a continuous series, which assists the study of the development of ceramics from the earliest times.

The first medieval pottery money box dates from the 14th century. It had a domed shape with a knob at the top. Two 17th century money boxes have been found in Slovakia – at Modrý Kameň in the district of Lučenec and in Závada. Both vessels had the shape of a flattened ball. Each had a narrow opening for coins on a swelling and was glazed, but they differed in size. Similar money boxes from the 15th to 17th century of egg, ball or domed shape with a narrow opening for coins have also been found in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. It is worth mentioning that the earthenware vessel of green colour from the find at Modrý Kameň contained a precious hoard from the beginning of the 17th century. It contained 325 coins, made up of gold ducats, silver thalers and half thalers.

A great quantity of the most varied money container exist today. The historic types of money container include the sock, forerunner of the purse, from which the saying "save in a sock" may have developed. In museum collections, we especially find socks made from woven metal threads, often supplemented by metal circles for closure. Some socks are crocheted, embroidered or made entirely from little pearls or glass beads. Ladies' crocheted socks or purses for holding coins were already used in the 17th-19th centuries both in America and Europe.

Apart from the sock, the forerunners of the modern purse include the money pouch. It accompanied coins from their origin until the present, and with varying sizes, shapes and forms, which changed over time. At

and early 20th centuries, made from cloth or leather with metal frames or woven from copper wire, could be hung on belts.



Ostentatious metal money box, 19th century.

Money box made from metal plate, 19th-20th century. (bottom left)

Metal money box representing an African, the hand with a coin moves, c.1900.





Ceramic money boxes in the forms of a hippopotamus and a devil.

Various modern piggybanks.



In medieval noble dress we can observe how purses developed together with costume. They clearly had to be in harmony with the style of the time. Book illustrations and works of art, especially paintings document this.

The purse was almost always subject to the changes of time and fashion. The most varied forms, mostly made with artistic feeling from precious materials, were very popular. They were made from brocade, mother of pearl, silver, gold and ivory. The purse was often more valuable than its contents. Purses covered with mother of pearl were especially fashionable in the Rococo, Biedermaier and Secession periods. In the second half of the 19th century, purses with pearls or glass beads sewn on in various patterns were also popular and sought after objects. They were popular gifts, for example on the occasion of marriage.

However, in all periods the purse had to correspond to the form of currency and fulfil the criteria of security. From the end of the 18th century, the form of purse had to react to changed conditions in connection with the origin of paper money. Some purses are intended especially for banknotes, others only for coins, or they combine both functions. They are not as ostentatious as those from earlier centuries. In contrast to the fine materials of brocade purses covered with mother of pearl, decorated with silver and gold or embroidered with pearls, leather, synthetic material of textile now have priority in production of purses. They are made especially with regard for security, and their form is determined by practical considerations.

Apart from money pouches, socks and purses, money boxes have a special position. Metal money boxes shaped like objects such a medieval tower, windmill or tankard, have his-

toric importance. The more demanding examples are made of silver or are silver plated and have the form of various animals, for example a hen or donkey. Money boxes of Modra pottery, porcelain or faience depicting a pig, a cat with a basket, an old woman with geese, mushrooms, a girl sitting on a large bag into which she throws a coin, a hippopotamus or the devil, document the resourcefulness, fantasy and creative invention of their makers.

A great number of the most varied containers for coins exist today. The history of the traditional earthenware or ceramic piggybank reaches back to 17th century Europe, but there are also older records of it. Today piggybanks of varying size are made not only from ceramic or porcelain, but also from wood, blown glass, plaster or other material.

The more recent metal money boxes from the last century are secured against removal of the contents with locks. They are simpler in shape, for example, a case, chest, book or small safe. These money boxes have circular holes for paper money and closable slots for coins. The key to the money box was kept in the bank, so that the owner avoided the

temptation to take out his savings. The Živnostenský úverný ústav in Bratislava, Všeobecný úverný ústav Zaps. spol. s r.o., Filiálka Novomestskej ľudovej banky úč. spol. at Vrbov, Občianska záložňa and other financial institutions formerly provided their clients with such money boxes. This money box from the thirties is adorned with beautiful decoration. On one side is the shield of the city of Prague and on the other a picture of the building of the Prague city insurance company. On the back of the money box is the inscription "Learn to save in youth, so that you will not be hungry in old age."

Mechanical money boxes with larger dimensions date from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. They were more or less intended for advertising purposes or for the needs of shop keepers. They originated in America, where they were very popular in that period. Movement of a small lever pushed the inserted coin to the right place. For example in the case of a money box in the form of a bust of an African (about 155 x 134 mm in size), the coin was placed on the hand and a lever moved it directly to the opening mouth. The eyes also opened and closed.

Modern money boxes and purses of the most varied forms are certainly not threatened with disappearance. Especially the purse – that traditional everyday object – is not threatened even by cashless transactions. Its changes are not ending, because people do not like to carry small coins in their pockets. The purse is undergoing further innovations in connection with the development of payment with cheques and credit cards.

**Photos: M. Červeňanský
(Objects from the collections of the Slovak National
Museum in Bratislava and from private collections.)**