

ADAM DEGLER

**REDISCOVERING THE REMNANTS OF THE NUMISMATIC  
COLLECTION OF THE *SCHLESISCHES MUSEUM  
FÜR KUNSTGEWERBE UND ALTERTÜMER*,  
WROCŁAW (FORMERLY Breslau)<sup>1</sup>**

The numismatic collection of the former *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* of Breslau, now, Wrocław (Silesian Museum of Arts, Crafts and Antiquities), encompassed no less than several hundred ancient coins and a splendid array of several thousand Silesian coins and medals. This was the most valuable public collection of its kind in Silesia before the war, so comprehensive that its catalogues, published in the early twentieth century (Friedensburg, Seger 1901; Friedensburg 1931), are still considered a valuable supplementary source for coin specialists. The collection has been described as ‘the most comprehensive collection ever of Silesian coins and medals, including Legnica-Brzeg issues’ (Pińkowski 2001, p. 165). In 1944, faced with defeat on the eastern front and rightly concerned that Breslau might be threatened by war operations, the Germans decided to evacuate the collection. After the end of the war the collection was never fully recovered and its fate remains mostly unknown.

Today, the main successor of the *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* is the Muzeum Narodowe in Wrocław (National Museum, Wrocław). Objects from the pre-war museum holdings form the core of several of its collections, e.g., the Arts and Crafts and Silesian Medieval Art collections, and its rich sigillography section (see recently, Hermansdorfer 2007). But except for a relatively small number of items, mentioned below, the Museum does not have in its keeping coins or medals from the pre-war German collections.

It was also widely believed in the past that Silesian coins from the *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* formed a significant part of the numis-

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matic collection held by the National Museum in the capital of Poland, Warsaw, but this set was rather derived from the pre-war holdings of the city museum in Zgorzelec (now a Community Centre) (R u s e k 1987, p. 22, footnote 5 [Editor's note]).

In 1958 the museums of Lower Silesia began to receive coins and medals, all of which were accessed, according to the entries in their acquisitions books, from 'hoards', 'findings', etc. from Warmątowice (sometimes under the name 'Warmontowice') or from the inhabitants of that village. Warmątowice Sienkiewiczowskie (German *Eichholz*), distr. Legnica, commune Krotoszyce, is a small village in Silesia near the state border with Germany, found south of the town of Legnica (less than 4 km from the buildings of the municipal waterworks). The main landmark of Warmątowice is the Renaissance palace of the von Zedlitz family, which before the war was owned by von Olszewski family (fig. 1). The largest number of coins discovered at Warmątowice is now in the National Museum, Wrocław (484 specimens purchased in the years 1958–1983, among them 11 ancient coins, mainly Roman denarii, six gold coins, mainly parts of ducats and one gold medal; the majority of acquisitions were Silesian coins and medals from medieval and modern times), and the Muzeum Miedzi (Museum of Copper) in Legnica (410 coins and medals, including 392 specimens presented by Emilia Kunawicz, and 18 specimens offered by Adam Armata). A further 56 pieces are in the Coins, Medals and Seals Department of the National Ossoliński Institute (Ossolineum) purchased in 1969–70 from the inhabitants of Warmątowice, 21 of them ancient coins, the remainder, Silesian coins and medals. A part is traced to an alleged 'treasure,' discovered in 1968 at 'Warmontowice (*sic!*) near Legnica'.

This 'treasure' reportedly included a solidus of Justinian (D e g l e r 2005, p. 254, fig. 12) as well as a modern kreutzer. The two other offers included pieces similarly spread in time, including notably an aureus commemorating Antonia (fig. 6). As early as in 1966 the Ossolineum purchased a kwartnik (a Silesian coin of the grosso type from the fourteenth century), then considered as an issue of the Głogów/Glogau Duchy (in reality it was from the Duchy of Fürstenberg), which, as J. Szwagrzyk wrote, had been 'rediscovered at Warmątowice near Legnica, where during the wartime, a large numismatic collection had become dispersed, including, at least a part of the holdings of the former coins and medals department of the Museum of Silesian Antiquities, Wrocław' (S z w a g r z y k 1966, p. 231). Ryszard Kiersnowski, discussing an alleged hoard from Szczecin belonging to a private owner, Seweryn Knape, and interpreting this set of coins as a pre-war collection, placed in hiding in 1945, found it similar to 'the finds from Warmątowice in Silesia, which location has furnished a certain number of coins originating from the former collections of the Coin Room in Wrocław' (K i e r s n o w s k i 1969, p. 740).

Some light is cast on the inflow of coins from Warmątowice to museums by a written report of Emilia Kunawicz, activist and guide with the Polish Tourist Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze). In 1958, Kunawicz

had purchased from diggers in Jawor “several decagrams of coins” brought out by them from the moat of the palace at Warmatowice. On 9 April 1961 Kunawicz placed these coins in the keeping of Professor Karol Maleczyński, for the museum then being organised in Legnica<sup>2</sup>, where — according to a comment made by the editors of *Biuletyn Numizmatyczny* — they were inventoried and subsequently

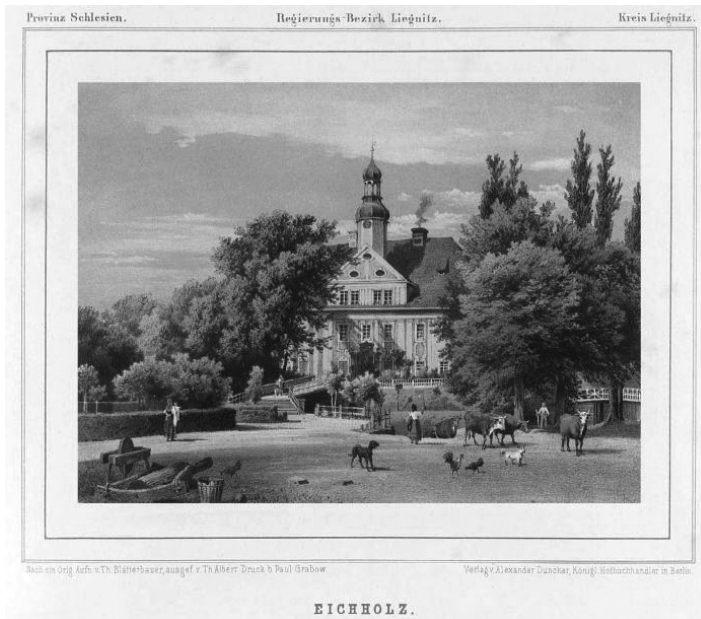


Fig. 1. The Palace at *Eichholz* (now, Warmatowice Sienkiewiczowskie); from the file of Alexander Duncker. Source: Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin, Sammlung Duncker, Band 11, 613 (<http://www.zlb.de/digitalesammlungen/SammlungDuncker/11/613%20Eichholz.pdf>, digitized by Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin from its Historical Collections). The picture shows the moat and the bridge leading to the palace.

entered the collections of the National Museum, Wrocław, which at the time had a different name: Muzeum Śląskie, *i.e.* the Silesian Museum (Kunawicz 1981, p. 76). A list made on this occasion includes: ‘40 Roman, 61 Silesian, 2 Egyptian, 8 Polish, 8 Greek (?), 7 German, 3 Prussian, 1 Austrian, 1 Russian, 1 English, 1 Hungarian and 103 unidentified coins’. Kunawicz publicised the news of this matter, *e.g.*, by writing in April 1960 to a local magazine *Wiadomości Legnickie*. A few months later the Silesian Museum, in cooperation with the District and

<sup>2</sup> This is mentioned by Łucja Wojtasik-Seredyszyn when reporting on circumstances of making purchases from ‘the inhabitants of Warmatowice of coins discovered in the moat of the palace, originating — as is generally thought — from the pre-war collections of *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* in Wrocław’ (Wojtasik-Seredyszyn 2001, p. 215).

City National Councils of Legnica and the Voivodship Monuments Office designated funds to drain and investigate the moat, a project led by Jan Żuławiński (Kunawicz 1981, p. 75). The character of this investigation, and the finds which it produced, are both unclear. This is a matter worth investigating in future, to establish the present location of objects, if any, recovered during this research.

In recent years, the fields of Warmątowice have attracted the attention of a growing number of treasure hunters who come armed with metal detectors. In spring of 2007, one of them discovered a valuable and extremely interesting group of coins dating from antiquity to the post-medieval period, as well as medals and tokens,<sup>3</sup> at least 44 specimens in all. The finder, asked to hand over the coins to the museum in Legnica, gave up only the least valuable part of his finds; the Legnica Police intervened and recovered the remaining, most valuable portion of the find.<sup>4</sup> It included 28 pieces, including 9 antique coins (figs. 3, 4, 5). These were identified and valued in a specialist assessment drawn up by the staff of the Coins, Medals and Seals Department of the Ossolineum and the National Museum, Wrocław. In view of the substantial market value of the finds and their great importance for Silesian cultural heritage the treasure hunter was charged with unlawful appropriation by the Regional Prosecutor of Legnica.<sup>5</sup>

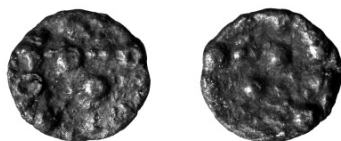


Fig. 2. Celtic coin attributed to the Durotriges of south Britain, third-first century BC. Obv.: seven pellets, in an irregular arrangement, connected by lines (two pellets now defaced); Rev.: seven pellets, in an irregular pattern; silver. Identification made by Marcin Rudnicki, Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University. At present in the National Ossoliński Institute, Wrocław. Photograph by Adam Degler.

<sup>3</sup> 'Orał i wykopał rzymskie monety' (Roman coins discovered when ploughing), Wrocław daily *Polska-Gazeta Wroclawska*, 20 July 2007 (only the pen-name ZYG of the author is known); 'Zabytkowe monety na aukcji internetowej', information and recording uploaded 20 July 2007 on web page tvn24.pl (<http://www.tvn24.pl/0,1515036,wiadomosc.html>). We are indebted for information about new discoveries made at Warmątowice to the vigilance of Warsaw archaeologists who have been monitoring on Internet auctions and coin collectors forums a running basis.

<sup>4</sup> Policjanci odzyskali zabytkowe monety, information from the internet site of the Legnica Police <http://www.legnica.policja.gov.pl>, 'Handlarze zaginionymi monetami zatrzymani w Dolnośląskiem', information from the internet site of KOBiDZ (<http://www.kobidz.pl/app/site.php5/article/7/2715.html>).

<sup>5</sup> According to the 23 July 2003 law on heritage protection and the keeping of monuments, art. 35.1, archaeological artefacts — discovered and recovered as a result of archaeological fieldwork or investigation made using specialist electronic devices — are property of the State (e.g., recently, Degler, Trzciniński 2008, p. 237).

A regular archaeological metal detector investigation was carried out at Warmatowice in July 2007 by the National Centre of Monuments Research and Documentation (Polish abbreviation KOBiDZ), registered office in Warsaw, with the participation of staff from the National Museum, Warsaw, Royal Castle, Warsaw; the Coins, Medals and Seals Department, National Ossoliński Institute, Wrocław; and experienced detectorists who have been cooperating for a long time with Warsaw archaeologists.<sup>6</sup> The result of this investigation was the discovery of assorted coins, e.g. a denarius of Trajan, a Celtic coin of the Durotriges of southern Britain (fig. 2), a counterfeit Republican denarius, and a late fourth century AD Roman bronze (*aes* 2, D. 24 mm).<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 3. Roman Republic, Denarius, Cn. Cornelius Blasio, 112–111 BC, mint of Rome (enlarged). Recovered by the Legnica Police. At present, in Muzeum Miedzi (Museum of Copper), Legnica, as a deposit of the Police Headquarters of that town. Identification (similarly as in a specialist assessment made for the Legnica Police Headquarters, Investigations Section II) and scan by Adam Degler.

The occurrence of such a mixed and unusual group of ancient and post-medieval coins, medals and a modern period imitation of a Roman Republican coin, within a radius of several dozen metres may be explained only by assuming that they belonged to a collection which had become dispersed. To verify this hypothesis it is necessary to identify specimens formerly in the possession of the *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* among the numismatic objects found in Warmatowice. There was a general agreement at this point after the presentation of the Warmatowice discoveries at the meeting of the Numismatic Commission of the Historical Sciences Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 8 February 2008. Such identification is quite feasible, given the level of the scientific description of the collection of the Breslau Museum, which was published in comprehensive catalogues including 1117 entries for medieval Silesian coinage (Friedensburg 1931), and 5159 entries for post-medieval Silesian coins and medals (Friedensburg, Seger 1901); some

<sup>6</sup> Information about this research published on the internet site of KOBiDZ: „Pogotowie archeologiczne” w Dolnośląskiem (<http://www.kobidz.pl/app/site.php5/article/7/2733.html>).

<sup>7</sup> The finds from Warmatowice were presented by the author of the present article at the meeting of the Numismatics Commission of the Historical Sciences Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences (8 February 2008) and at a conference at Třešť (Czech Republic): ‘Nálezy mincí, jejich archeologický kontext a historický význam’ (8 October 2008).

entries represent a larger number of specimens. Some 2300 coins and medals were recorded, complete with their photographic images or drawings of very good quality, with a detailed description. A certain number of additional photographs was enclosed with separate publications of the finds. The correct and consistent identification of the Warmątowice finds requires their comparison with entries made in the archival inventory books or catalogue index cards: accurate identification depends closely on the degree of detail of the archival records — which at present are unknown to us.

On the basis of the publications it has been possible to identify a number of specimens — five Silesian kwartniki from mints at Namysłów, Żagań and Głogów (Kamocka 1993, pp. 183–185, cat. nos. 6, 9, 10, 19, 24), a jetton of Duke George Rudolf of Legnica (1621–53), in the Museum of Copper in Legnica (Pieńkowski 2001, p. 166), and a Johann Leonhard Oexlein medal struck in 1779 to commemorate the Treaty of Cieszyn/Teschen (fig. 4), (Degler, Trzcíński 2008, p. 236). Another piece definitely from the collection of the Breslau museum of interest is a posthumous thaler of Duke Julius Sigismund of Oels/Oleśnica (1664–84), (fig. 5). Not all the attempts at identification yielded universally acceptable results. In discussing challenges which face the scientific description of Silesian kwartniki, M. Haisig drew attention to ‘(...) the dispersal of the entire material evidence known from before the last war, which in its majority had been in the keeping of the *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* of Wrocław’ (Haisig 1966, p. 193), noting, at the same time, that the predominance of kwartniki of Głogów published in Friedensburg (1931) ‘is



Fig. 4. Silver medal of Johann Leonhard Oexlein, struck to commemorate the Treaty of Cieszyn/Teschen of 1779 (Friedensburg 1901, no 4489 — this specimen). The size of the medal agrees with the description in the catalogue of Friedensburg to the tenth part of the millimetre. On the obverse is seen the signature of the author of the medal, which also appears on the specimen in Friedensburg. Specialist identification of the medal: Magdalena Karnicka, National Museum, Wrocław, in a specialist assessment made for Legnica Police Headquarters, Investigations Section II. At present, in Muzeum Miedzi (Museum of Copper), Legnica, as a deposit of the Municipal Police Headquarters of that town. Condition as it was shortly after discovery (photograph published on a coin collectors forum).



visible also after a review of kwartniki at present found in collections in Wrocław' (Haisig 1966, p. 195, footnote 7). However, an attempt made by the same researcher to compare a kwartnik from the collection of the Silesian Museum with an analogous specimen described in Friedensburg produced a negative result (Haisig 1966, p. 194). Even so, some time later we see the same specimen published as 'probably identical' with the coin from the collection of the *Schlesisches Museum* (Kamocka 1993, p. 185, footnote 12 [Editor's note]).

It is not fully understood how the collection of the Schlesisches Museum came to be dispersed in the area of Warmątowice but we can suggest the most likely course of events. The Keeper of Monuments for Lower Silesia, Günther Grundmann (1892–1976), had drawn up a list of Lower Silesian localities at which were placed into storage the art and library collections evacuated in 1942–1944. The National Museum, Wrocław, retains the following information about this action: '(...) it helped save many paintings of [Michael] Willmann as well as numerous epitaphs. At the time, they were put in storage in museum repositories across Silesia. Nevertheless, much of the multi-cultural heritage of the region suffered destruction. Most probably, the Germans were able to take some of the artefacts out to the West, whereas others suffered destruction or became dispersed during the war operations. The work of destruction was made complete by the Soviet armies and looters.' (Gołaj, Wojturski 2006, url). The same, mostly as regards paintings and sculpture, is probably true of 'the smallest works of art' — coins, medals and seals.

The so-called 'Grundmann's list' mentions Eichholz (today's Warmątowice) as a planned place of storage of the numismatic collection of the art collections of Breslau. It would appear that the most valuable pre-war numismatic collection indeed was evacuated and placed in hiding in the palace at Warmątowice. In February 1945, the building was occupied for a short time by the Soviet army. Presumably, many valuable coins and medals, including gold specimens, were robbed at this time. The rest would have found their way into the wide palace moat. 'The people living there [at Warmątowice — AD] said, that during the war operations, when the palace was on fire, to save the collections, Soviet soldiers grabbed the display cabinets and cases and threw them into the moat. Later, the people salvaged the wood for household purposes and the coins spilled into the moat' (Kunawicz 1981, p. 75). Understandably enough, in 1981 in Poland, one could not write openly about the vandalism of Soviet armies. According to the word-of-mouth accounts circulating in the period when Kunawicz was publishing her report, the Soviet soldiers used larger coins to play ducks and drakes on the moat. Robert Pieńkowski has observed that the coins and medals discovered at Warmątowice are mostly lower value specimens (for instance, reproductions of medals made in non-precious metal) and suggested that the more valuable 'coins of the Wrocław museum were taken to Russia, where they remain in hiding to this day' (Pieńkowski 2001, p. 166). This would mean that the greater part of the collection placed in storage at Warmątowice was shipped out by the Red Army.



Fig. 5. Silesia, duchy Württemberg-Oels/Oleśnica, posthumous thaler of Duke Julius Sigismund (1664–1684) from 1684 (Friedensburg 1901, no. 2443 — this specimen — identification based on minor imperfections of the flan) (d = 39 mm, enlarged). Expert identification of the coin by Barbara Butent-Stefaniak, Coins, Medals and Seals Department, Ossolineum, Wrocław for the purpose of the specialist assessment made for Legnica Police Headquarters, Investigations Section II. At present, in Muzeum Miedzi (Museum of Copper) in Legnica as a deposit of the Municipal Police Headquarters, Legnica. Scan: Adam Degler (a). Photograph: Friedensburg 1901, Plate 26, 2443 (b). The scan represents the state of preservation of the specimen shortly after its rediscovery in 2007. We can see that, in comparison to the pre-war photography, the state of preservation deteriorated substantially.



Therefore what we need to resolve is whether in 1945 there really was a fire in the palace or, only robbery and vandalism. As we already know, the palace moat was drained probably in the early 1960s or later. At this time, presumably, the coins and medals were spread with the sediments taken from the moat and thus found their way to the fields of the village. This would explain the intensive inflow of coins from Warmątowice to museum collections during the 1960s and why even today they continue to be discovered in the fields.



Fig. 6. An aureus of Claudius struck in Rome c. AD 41–45 to commemorate the emperor's mother, Antonia Minor (enlarged). Purchased for the collection of the Ossolineum in 1969 from an inhabitant of Warmątowice together with 'an original Saxon penny from the tenth/eleventh centuries' and 'a heller of Legnica from the fifteenth century' (descriptions by J. Szwagrzyk in the Acquisition book). Inv. No. Oss.: B.5656. Photograph by Andrzej Solnica, Ossolineum.

Today it is hard to question the soundness of the assumption that Warmątowice is the place where the numismatic collection of the *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* was placed in storage in 1944, eventually to find its way back to the collections of several museums in Lower Silesia. This conviction is at present quite well established in the circles of Lower Silesian numismatists. It finds additional support from the attempts made to identify coins and medals, and from the archaeological investigation of 2007. Even so, the "Warmątowice question" continues to be surrounded by much haziness. It is still unclear how the gold coins, ones which ought to have been the first to be seized by the Soviets, came into the possession of the inhabitants of Warmątowice. Also still insufficiently understood is the fate of the coins after they were placed in storage in the palace. Neither do we know whether, and if so, which part of the numismatic collection of the *Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer* was taken to Russia and whether it survived there as a unit. Only consistent identification, based on a comparative analysis of specimens held by museums in Wrocław and Legnica (perhaps, also in other museums of Lower Silesia) and what is known at present of specimens once held by the *Schlesisches Museum* — from written sources, photographs and other evidence — may dispel the doubts regarding the latter question.

Unfortunately, the four ancient coins described above are the only specimens from the archaeological investigation conducted at Warmątowice. All the remain-

ing finds of which we know originate from random discoveries made by amateurs and, recently in particular, by metal detectorists. The place is known probably to all the community of treasure hunters in Lower Silesia, who may not even be aware of the fact that each of these coins and medals should be treated as a 'war loss' (Pieńkowski 2000, pp. 64–65), part of a former museum collection of major importance for the culture of Lower Silesia.<sup>8</sup> It seems that the only chance for salvaging what still remains of the old collection buried in the ground is by continuing the archaeological fieldwork in the area.

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'war losses' although quite established at present may be unfortunate when applied to the territory acquired by Poland after 1945 because, in theory, the German side could claim such objects for its own. A more appropriate term may be 'a loss for the culture and heritage of Lower Silesia'.

ADAM DEGLER

ODNALEZIENIE RESZTEK KOLEKCJI NUMIZMATYCZNEJ  
*SCHLESISCHES MUSEUM FÜR KUNSTGEWERBE UND ALTERTÜMER*  
Z WROCŁAWIA

(Streszczenie)

Warmątowice Sienkiewiczowskie pod Legnicą nabrały specjalnego znaczenia dla numizmatyki na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej. W księgach akcesyjnych Muzeum Miedzi w Legnicy oraz Muzeum Narodowego i Ossolineum we Wrocławiu monety pochodzące „ze skarbu” z tej wioski lub zakupione od jej mieszkańców pojawiają się już od 1958 r. Łączna liczba monet i medali z tego źródła przechowywanych obecnie w tych instytucjach przekracza 1000. Większość z nich stanowią śląskie monety i medale, średniowieczne i nowożytny, ale jest też kilkadziesiąt monet antycznych (głównie rzymskich denarów, lecz także aureus Klaudiusza upamiętniający Antonię i solid Justyniana).

Choć do dziś nie została definitywnie wyjaśniona kwestia, skąd taka liczba monet znalazła się w posiadaniu mieszkańców Warmątowic, to w środowisku numizmatycznym od wielu lat panuje powszechna zgoda, że mamy do czynienia z dawną kolekcją, przechowywaną przed wojną w Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer w ówczesnym Breslau, która liczyła kilkaset monet antycznych i kilka tysięcy monet i medali śląskich, średniowiecznych i nowożytnych. Warmątowice znalazły się na tzw. liście Grundmanna, będącej zestawieniem miejscowości na Dolnym Śląsku, w których zdeponowano obiekty biblioteczne i muzealne ewakuowane w latach 1942–1944. Zbiory Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer ewakuowano w 1944 r. Numizmaty, jak wynika ze znalezisk, trafiły do Warmątowic i umieszczone zostały w pałacu, należącym przed wojną do rodziny von Olszewski. Gdy w lutym 1944 r. w pałacu stacjonowały wojska sowieckie, doszło do rozproszenia kolekcji. Z pewnością część zbioru trafiła do fosy opływającej pałac. Nie wiadomo, czy i jaka część zbioru została zagrabiona przez Armię Czerwoną. Jeśli tak się stało, to należałoby się spodziewać, że większość kolekcji mogła zostać wywieziona w głąb Rosji. Fosa była oczyszczana w latach sześćdziesiątych XX w. i, według wszelkiego prawdopodobieństwa, brakiem nadzoru archeologicznego należy tłumaczyć fakt, że przez dziesięciolecia okoliczni mieszkańcy oraz poszukiwacze dolnośląscy znajdowali na polach należących do wsi wiele cennych numizmatów. Muł wydobyty z dna fosy musiał zostać wykorzystany jako nawóz.

Większą grupę monet znaleziono w Warmątowicach w 2007 r. Poszukiwacz-amator przedstawił zróżnicowany typologicznie i chronologicznie zbiór numizmatów antycznych oraz śląskich na jednym z forów internetowych. Gdy informacja o znalezisku trafiła do Krajowego Ośrodka Badań i Dokumentacji Zabytków, zdano sobie sprawę z wartości odnalezionych zabytków, które stanowią w świetle prawa nie tylko obiekty zabytkowe, ale i stratę wojenną (dla kultury i dziedzictwa Dolnego Śląska). Znalazca próbował zatrzymać cenniejszą część znaleziska dla siebie i dopiero w wyniku interwencji Policji z Legnicy udało się odzyskać wszystkie numizmaty. Obecnie przechowywane są w Muzeum Miedzi w Legnicy jako depozyt Komendy Policji w Legnicy. Również w 2007 r. archeolodzy przeprowadzili w Warmątowicach badania archeologiczne z wykorzystaniem wykrywaczy metali. Pozyskano monety antyczne: denar Trajana, rzymską monetę brązową z IV w. po Chr., monetę celtycką wybitą w południowej Brytanii i nowożytną fantazję imitującą denar z okresu Republiki Rzymskiej.

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