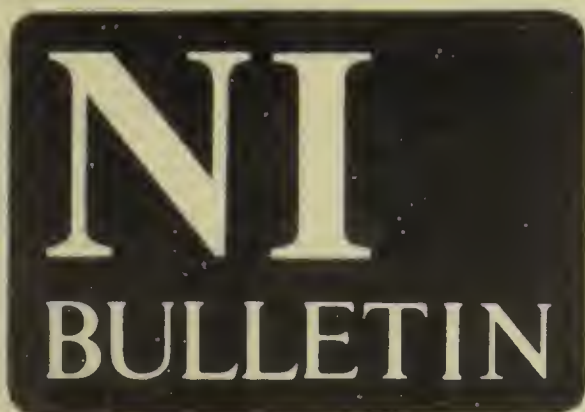


20 years of service to numismatics



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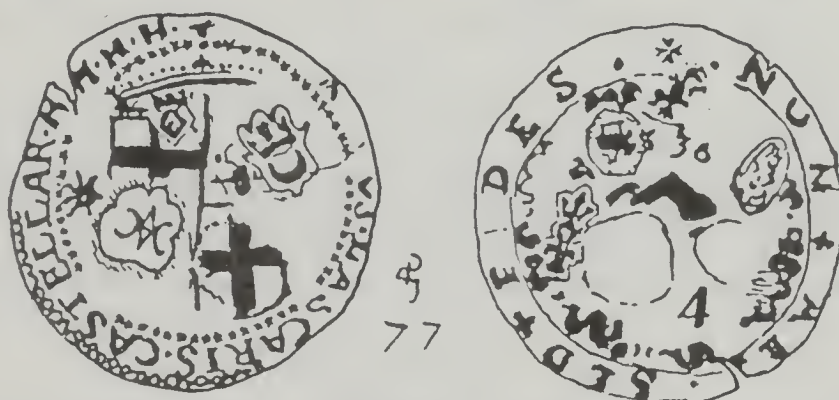
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ABOUT THOSE COUNTERSTAMPS: MALTA

by Paul F.L. de Groot, Calgary, Alberta, CANADA, NI#1786

Many years ago I saw at a local coin shop a very dirty worn coin with three counterstamps and possibly a fourth. Neither the dealer nor I knew what it was let alone its value (still unknown to me for that matter), but we soon agreed upon a price and I took it home. Upon cleaning the coin I discovered it had no less than seven counterstamps (fig. 1). Who says you should not clean coins? I quickly settled upon



(Fig. 1)

Malta as the homeland of the piece, but for lack of books did not get any farther than that it was issued by Grandmaster John Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-1657).

For one thing I had thought that all stamps dated from the 17th century and I could not find the symbols on the few coats of arms of that century's grandmasters that I had seen in auction catalogs, except the double-headed eagle, I thought it was the oldest counterstamp and belonged, so I believed, to Lascaris. I guessed at the sequence of marks and called for assistance from my friends at the Royal Coin Cabinet in The Hague. They dug up an old article on these countermarks and sent me its conclusions. The only thing that surprised me was that the lamb, which to me looked like the most recent, was assigned to Raymond Perellos (1697-1729). Moreover the undocumented article assigned the monogram, read as MA to Emanuel Pinto (1741-1773) and my friend's speculation that it could be AVM for Antoine Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736) and that seemed reasonable to me. Other sources that I saw later had the same sequence as the article. It is only recently that I came upon a well documented article by J. Sammut in *Seaby's Coin and Medal Bulletin* of June 1964 which has the right sequence of the marks. The same sequence is mentioned in a 1975 revision of an older article in Brunk's compilation *World Countermarks on Medieval and Modern Coins*.

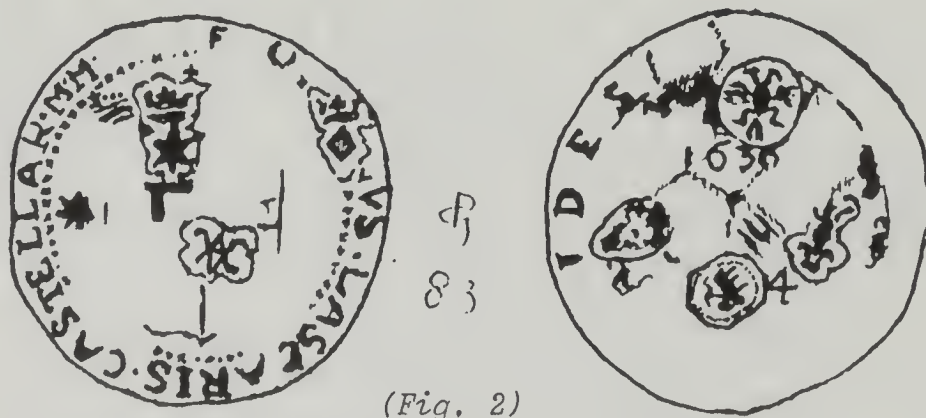
When Lascaris became grandmaster the whole Mediterranean world was in turmoil with all major powers (Turkey, France, Spain and Venice) constantly officially and unofficially at war. Because of its strategic location Malta could of course not stay out of those wars completely. Because the coffers of the Knights of St. John (the rulers of Malta) were empty Lascaris resorted to the example of Grandmaster LaValette in 1565 and minted copper 4 and 2 tari tokens to replace the silver pieces of those values. He had so many struck that it was never possible to

redeem them. That in itself would have been bad enough as the people did not particularly care for base tokens. But soon things became worse when forgers got into the act, and stayed in it for the next century and a half. On eight occasions the grandmasters judged it necessary to have the genuine coins counterstamped. So only one stamp is missing on my coin and that one is rare.

My piece is a 4 tari, struck in 1636. The countermarks in sequence are:

- 1) a Double-Headed Eagle: Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-1657), edict May 1646
- 2) Head of St. John the Baptist: Rafael Cotoner (1660-1663), edict April 1662
- 3) Crowned Fleur-de-Lys: Adrien de Wignacourt (1690-1697): edict August 1696
- 4) Crowned Star: Ramon Despuig (1736-1741): edict December 1740. This is the mark that is missing on my coin.
- 5) Crowned Crescent: Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1772): edict January 1741
- 6) Monogram MA: the same, edict May 1766
- 7) Crowned Mascule (Diamond): Emanuel de Rohan Poldhuc (1775-1797): edicts June 1777 and January 1778
- 8) Paschal (Easter) Lamb carrying the banner of the Order: the same, Edict July 1792

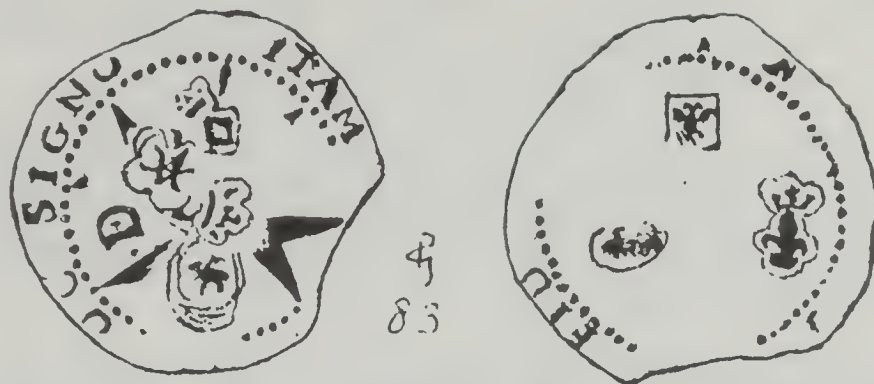
It is not surprising that my battered piece does not show very much of the original design, the crowned coat of arms of Lascaris with his titles on one side, and on the other two clasped hands, 1636 above and T.4 below, with the motto *Non Aes Sed Fides* around, which means "Not Copper But Trust" (in silver value, I suppose). The inscription area fared somewhat better than the central part of my coin.



Since that first coin I have acquired several of these battered four and two-Tari pieces, including one with the Star (Fig. 2). This is scarce as Ramon Despuig died on January 15, 1741 and his successor, elected on the 18th, lost no time in changing the mark to his own.

Another piece that entered my collection was a four Tari of Grandmaster Jean Parisot de la Valette (1557-1568) issued in copper to finance the fortification of Malta after the Great Siege of 1565.

This was the first such piece.



(Fig. 3)

It too is counterstamped with all stamps the same as those on the Lascaris pieces except the first. The double eagle is in a square instead of in a circle. (Fig. 3.) In Schembi's book on the coins of Malta there is such a piece with the double eagle in a square cut shield (◻). Possibly La Valette's coins were validated at a different time or, less likely, at a different rate. I wrote Malta for information but received no information.

Several Maltese Grandmasters also counterstamped Dutch liondollars. In none of the book on Maltese coinage that I have seen is there information on these pieces, and my request for information remains unanswered. Unfortunately I do not possess any. They are much rarer than the copper pieces.

Recently I found a piece on the counterstamped liondollars in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1963, pp. 149-155 by Victor F. Denaro. According to this article a decree of 20 August 1609 of the Council of the Order of St. John shows that German and Hungarian thalers had been countermarked during the Grandmaster Alof de Wignacourt (1601-1622) with his arms (lilies) on a shield. This mark has been mainly encountered on Lion dollars, as has the peacock of Grandmaster Antoine de Paule (1623-1636). The double-headed eagle of John Paul Lascaris de Castellar (1636-1657) has been found on other Dutch dollars.

ISRAEL, 50 SHEQALIM, 1984

by John DeMarais, Lincoln, Nebraska, NI #1539

Continued inflation has reduced the value of the sheqal to such an extent that the fifty-sheqal note is now only worth about thirty cents. As a consequence, a fifty-sheqal coin has been introduced. It is aluminum-bronze, is 28mm in diameter and has a reeded edge. The obverse bears the image of an ancient Jewish coin and a very small state shield. The plain reverse has the value, the date and two eight-pointed stars flanking the value. With triple digit inflation, Israel can expect 100-sheqal coins in a couple of years, perhaps combined with a new monetary unit representing some multiple of the sheqal.
