

THE SAINT ELIGIUS MEDALLION OF MAURICE POUILLARD

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Saint Eligius (Eloi, Eloy or Eligio), Bishop of Noyon, is recognized as the patron saint of gold- and silver-smiths, jewelers, blacksmiths and numismatists. Eligius was born in Chaptelat, about six miles from Limoges in western France, around the year 590 AD, to educated Gallo-Roman parents, Eucherio and Terrigia; he died in Noyon on December 1, 660 AD. Eucherio recognized his son's uncommon metalworking ability and sent him to the well-known goldsmith Abbo, master of the mint of Limoges, to perfect his innate skills.

After about seven years, Eligius went to Neustria (the western part of the Kingdom of the Franks), where he worked under Babo, the royal treasurer, with whose endorsement King Clotaire II¹ commissioned him to make a heavily engraved and ornamented golden throne² or "royal chair" with gold and precious stones. The story goes that not only did he manage to make a magnificent throne with the amount of gold supplied, but through his skill in working the

gold in fact he made two. The king, surprised with Eligius' honesty and ability, without hesitation named him master of the mint in Marseille. Subsequently after Clotaire II's passing, his son and successor, Dagobert I, became the new king and appointed Eligius to be the chief counselor. In 639 AD, after the death of King Dagobert I, Eligius left the court to become a priest. After his death, Eligius was canonized³ both for his holy life and for his great zeal in art.

Both the famous golden throne and some of the coins attributed to Saint Eligius are part of this incredible French medallion that we are presenting in this publication⁴.

There are numerous medals attributed to the Saint, most of which were produced in Europe, particularly in France by unions of metalworkers or by guilds in Germany that also honor him as a patron saint.

Most of the recent medals for Saint Eligius show modern coinage technology while retaining the traditional themes and contemporary design elements, but perhaps the most beautiful and representative is the



Silver trial edition with golden details EE/XXV 1972 – Obverse.

¹ Son of Chilperic I and Fredegunde. In 584 AD he succeeded his father as king of Neustria, but his mother ruled for him until her death in 597 AD. In 613 AD, after the death of his cousin Theodoric II, king of Austrasia, Clotaire II was called in by Austrasian nobles to assume rule. He thus became king of all the Franks.

² The actual throne is known, and metallurgical analysis reflects that it is made of bronze and cast iron, engraved and gilded with traces of gold leaf remaining. It has been used and repaired several times from St. Denis to Napoleon. *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*. Paris: RMN, 1991, pp. 63-68.

³ There is not an exact date for his canonization, but we know that Eligius helped poor and sick people, in many instances reporting miraculous healings. He founded several monasteries to which he introduced, at least partially, the Irish monastic rule. He also built the basilica of St. Paul and restored the basilica of St. Martial in Paris.

⁴ On December 1, 2018 the numismatic event "San Eloy 2018" took place for the third year in a row in San Francisco, Córdoba, Argentina, organized by the *Centro Filatélico y Numismático de San Francisco*. At this time the first anniversary of the creation of the Federal Institute of Numismatic Researchers of the Argentine Republic (IFINRA) was celebrated, with important dissertations by numismatists of the prestigious institution, of which I am a member. The original "working" version in Spanish of this article was published in the December 1, 2018 *Boletín Electrónico del Centro Filatélico y Numismático de San Francisco*, No. 55, San Francisco, Córdoba, Argentina, pp. 9-13.

magnificent Medallion of Pouillard of the 1970's presented by the Monnaie de Paris, of which not much was known until this article.

This first medallion, or "grand medal," was coined by the Monnaie de Paris in 1972, its beautiful design with carefully crafted details engraved by Maurice Pouillard (1912-1978), master engraver for the Monnaie de Paris, medalist and musician. As the son of a master engraver, he achieved his potential as an apprentice to his father. He continued the courses of the sculptors Wléric and Arnold from 1928 to 1932. He studied at the School of Applied Arts and succeeded his father. After the Second World War he entered the Mint as an engraver. He was also known as a specialist in heraldry.



Silver trial edition with Golden details EE/XXV 1972 – Reverse

(Goldsmith and Coiner, Minister of Finance for Dagobert I and Bishop of Noyon), with engraver's name M. Pouillard placed diagonally at lower right. The reverse features the magnificent and famous golden throne that Saint Eligius designed for King Clotaire II, surrounded by thirteen Merovingian Frankish gold coins⁵ attributed to Saint Eligius (as moneyer) both for the Royal Mint of Paris and for Marseille under Clotaire II and Dagobert I, these coins divided at top with a Merovingian gold eagle (aquiliform fibula) most likely based on the piece plated in *Orfèvrerie mérovingienne, les oeuvres de saint Eloi et la verroterie cloisonnée* (Paris, 1864 - Plate 9); the legend surrounding reads PATRON DES ORFÈVRES, MONNAYEURS, NUMISMATES, FORGERONS, MARECHAUX FERRANTS, ET TOUTES GENS OF FINANCE (patron saint of goldsmiths, coin-setters, numismatists, blacksmiths, silversmiths and all those related to finance).

In all cases these medallions have on the edge the mark of the mint of Paris in the form of a cornucopia with a microscopic letter A inside. The diameter of all known pieces is 115 millimeters, with weights varying from 520 +/- grams for the pieces produced in copper and bronze to 620 +/- grams for those minted in 0.950 silver (these represented with the number 1 for "first standard"⁶ representing the fineness of silver 950/1000). The first known medals marked with the year of 1972 from the first production of Pouillard were most likely the rare editions of presentation in 0.950 silver and the very first copies to either be plated in silver or gold.

⁵ Gold solidi and tremisses in the name of Eligius as moneyer were minted at Paris and Marseilles. "Ancient Coin Series: The Merovingians..." by Mike Markowitz, Coinweek.com, August 30, 2016.

⁶ The small number 1 in front of the cornucopia represents "1st standard" (*1er titre*), meaning the highest level of silver (95% pure). Silver marked with a 2 was 0.800 or "2nd standard." This is important to note since this practice/standard mark was used only until 1973.

We know this medallion was struck in different metals and finishes in limited numbers. We have only begun to investigate all the details related to the production of these magnificent and intriguing pieces of French exonomia. It is my hope that this brief but specific article will inspire a more detailed work with more data and/or corrections concerning the production of this beautiful work of numismatic art that combines different elements in a careful and detailed form.

Technical information:

With scalloped edge, the obverse of this medallion shows the legend SAINT ELOI (ELIGIVS) ✠ 588-659 ✠ around a standing Saint Eligius with a golden nimbus and pastoral staff, interlaced with inscriptions in six parallel lines that summarize his life achievements: ORF-EVRE / MONN-AYER / MINI-STRE / DE DAG-OBERT / EVE-QVE / DEN-OYON

At the moment we do not have a detailed census of the production from Monnaie de Paris; the collected information below simply follows from records of the sales in the last decade, auction files and some pieces in private collections. I have also found specific information regarding this medallion in a book and in magazines and publications dating from 1973 and 1994. It is worth mentioning that some of the published details regarding these medallions are vague or contradictory, and at the time of publication of this article the Monnaie de Paris has not answered my request for more information concerning production numbers. *C'est la vie!*



The medallion shown to the left is one of two known to the author with edge marking "EE" (*Exemplaire d'Editeur*) to denote a "Special First Edition" for the artist to present to dignitaries. This 1972 medal by Pouillard was given to M. André de LATTRE, Vice Governor of the Banque de France and member of the Monetary Control Commission. Made on a silver planchet with selectively gilt details and with "EE/XXV" on edge, being from a special first run of (up to) 25 pieces in 0.950 silver with gold leaf, this example was delivered in an official Monnaie de Paris green leather-and-velvet box specially made and engraved in gold letters for M. de LATTRE. This piece weighs 620 grams, matching all the known examples in 0.950 silver. To our knowledge, all EE specimens have the same number XXV, perhaps so that no one recipient would look more important than another!

The German catalog *Eligius - auf Münzen Medaillen Marken Plaketten* (1993), by Helfried Ehrend, published by Numismatische Gesellschaft Speyer e.V., shows this medal cataloged as No. 65 and explains that all the silver pieces were the same weight⁷ and that there are silver pieces without gilding that are numbered from 26 to 100⁸. It stands to reason that the whole series of 100 medallions made in silver are of the same weight, including the selectively-gilt

"EE" pieces.

Not all the medallions were silver and numbered. The most commercial producer of this design was reflected in the news found published in the *Coin World* numismatic magazine of August 1973⁹, in which we can see on the cover the presentation of the piece and then on page 30 in detail the design and varied information saying that these pieces could be acquired directly from the *Administration des Monnaies et Médailles* in Paris. At the time of the presentation of the sale of these pieces in 1973, *Coin World* reported that the price of the bronze medals was 96 francs (about 24USD at the time) and the price of those in silver was 770 francs (about 193.50USD). The specific code of order for these medals was M-4414.

The Numismatist magazine from December 1994 says that only 100 original pieces were struck in silver and lacquered copper¹⁰. We know the offering was for 100 numbered pieces made in lacquered copper and plated silver (marked "CUIVRE" for copper but plated in silver), with an undetermined quantity of non-numbered pieces minted in bronze marked either "BR" or "BRONZE" to describe the metal. To my knowledge, lacquered silver-plated copper pieces were probably marked and sold in a period ranging from 1972 to 1977 and therefore these were marked with the year that



⁷ Note that details regarding weight seem to be approximate and differ from other publications, but we can confirm that the silver fineness is 950/1000 and not 935/1000, and all silver pieces weigh 620 grams and not 608 grams as noted in the book.









⁸ Also, it is worth mentioning that the quantities described in this book might be different when compared to periodical reports.

⁹ Photo courtesy of the American Numismatic Society Library

¹⁰ "The Extraordinary Life of St. Eligius" by Doug Andrews, page 1711, *The Numismatist*, December 1994.

they were delivered to the buyers. This can be confirmed with the examples listed in my census, correlating higher numbers with later dates, the numbering punches used for this work changing according to the year. It is also interesting to note date placement on the edge: The silver and silver-plated copper issues of 1972, 1973 and 1975 show the date to the right of cornucopia (with CUIVRE in between, in the case of the copper issues), while the bronze and unplated copper pieces of 1973-1979 show the date to the left of the cornucopia.

Estimated census and production of known pieces¹¹

YEAR	METAL	NUMBER	WEIGHT	COMMENTS	EDGE
1972	1 ("first standard," 0.950 silver) with gilt details	EE/XXV	620 gr.+/-	Two currently known, one presented to M. Andre de Lattre, Vice Governor of the Banque du France, the other presented to M. Pierre Dehaye, Director of the Coins and Medals Administration, both with XXV for number on edge	
1972	1 ("first standard," 0.950 silver)	1 to XXV	620 gr.+/-	No gilding or EE	(no photo available)
1972	CUIVRE (copper with silver plating)	26/100	520 gr.+/-	Lowest edge number seen and confirmed so far is 32	(no photo available)
1973	CUIVRE (copper with silver plating)	44/100	520 gr.+/-	Silver plating not noticeable on edge due to wear	
1975	CUIVRE (copper with silver plating)	73/100	520 gr.+/-		
1973	BR (bronze)	n/a	520 gr.+/-		
1974	BRONZE (bronze)	n/a	520 gr.+/-		
1976 ¹²	BRONZE (bronze)	n/a	520 gr.+/-		
1977	BRONZE (bronze)	n/a	520 gr.+/-	Possible 7/6 overdate	
1978	?	n/a	520 gr.+/-	Unknown medals dated 1978	
1979	CUIVRE (copper without silver plating)	n/a	520 gr.+/-	Possibly one of the last pieces that left the Monnaie de Paris, based on the year and "copper" mark, originally made to be plated but never plated or numbered. ¹³	
1980	Base white metal	n/a	500 gr.+/-	Without visual confirmation of the edge markings I found the sale of a piece in white metal dated 1980 (could be an unofficial piece).	

¹¹ As noted before, all specimens have a scalloped edge and a diameter of 115 mm, with mintmark cornucopia (Paris).

¹² Carlos Janson Collection

¹³ Jorge Madonna Collection

Sample obverses of the different types of medals known:



Silver-plated copper type



Unplated copper type



Bronze type



Base white metal type

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