

# Coins from the frigate NICHOLAS

By Pekka Sarvas

A total of 679 Russian coins have been, within 30 years of work, recovered from the wreck of the Russian frigate, located in the year 1948. With excavations started as a private local enterprise, lacking the control of antiquarians, a number of coins are expected to have gone astray. Anyhow such a large number of coins recovered must be of importance for a chronological monetary survey. Coins have been handed in to the museums concerned unevenly, owing to the extended period of excavations. Thus the following inventory: see table 1.

A certain part of silver- and copper-coins have corroded beyond recognition; yet every coin found is certainly Russian.

Only 3 gold coins are found. One is a 1½ imperial (equivalent to 5 roubles) struck in 1778 by Catherine II. Fig. 1:2. Such a coin is well expected in a Russian warship during the War of 1788–1790, agitated by the Swedish King Gustavus III.

Thereagainst two gold-coins are conspicuously old, being 2 roubles from 1718 resp. 1721, struck by Peter the Great. Fig. 1:1. These coins belong to a monetary standard differing from Catherine II:s. By observing their actual weight, resp. their fine-weight, these coins can not be brought to match the imperials of the Empress Catherine. Both 2 roubles have got stuck to a partly melted round object, obviously tin? This is maybe a tin-medal, which together with the gold-coins made up the private "treasure" of some officer onboard.

The 39 silver coins (fig. 1:3–7) found in the wreck all represent common types from the reign of Catherine II. This is a list of silver coins: see table 2.

The majority (93,8 per cent) of all coins from the NICHOLAS represent copper coinage. Among copper coins 95,3 per cent are represented by the big-sized 5 kopek coins (they dominate the entire group of coins by 89,4 per cent). This fact is quite in order as the 5 kopek piece turned out as chief currency within the Russian realm during the reign of Cather-

ne II (see: B. F. Brekke, *The Copper Coinage of Imperial Russia 1700–1917*). Copper coins of smaller size are 2 kopek coins (23 pieces, the youngest struck 1788), from the reign of Catherine II. To copper currency further belong two 1 kopek coins from 1788, and five antiquated ½-kopek coins from the reigns of Anna (1730–1740), respectively Elisabeth (1741–1761).

The chronological spread of the 5 kopek (fig. 2: 1–4) coins is fairly interesting. From a total of 445 coins with their minting-year recognized (73 per cent of the grand total), only 43 coins (9,7 per cent) are datable to the 1780:ies. Bearing in mind that of 5 kopeks struck all told the 1780:ies make up for 25,7 per cent (see: Brekke op. cit.), a fact which stresses the slow monetary circulation in Imperial

Table 1

Location	Numbers	Gold	Silver	Copper	Total
The National Museum of Finland	64048	3	14	181	198
"	64059			69	69
"	64070			16	16
"	68048			2	2
"	68076			16	16
"	68098			11	11
"	76053	1	20	21	
"	77002	24	110	134	
"	77064			4	4
The Maritime Museum: recent finds				11	11
" : exhibited				19	19
The Municipal Museum of Kotka				178	178
Total		3	39	637	679

Table 2

1 rouble:	14 pieces	the youngest struck	1781
1/4 rouble:	11 "	" "	1785
20 kopeks:	9 "	" "	1787
15 kopeks:	2 "	" "	1788
10 kopeks:	3 "	" "	1784

Fig 1

*Gold- and silver-coins from the frigate NICHOLAS. 1. Two golden 2 roubles by Peter the Great corroded to a round tin-object. 2. A golden 5 roubles by Catherine II fr. 1778. 3. A rouble from 1776. 4. 25 kopeks fr. 1769. 5. 15 kopeks fr. 1778. 6. 15 kopeks 1788. 7. 10 kopeks fr. 1778.*

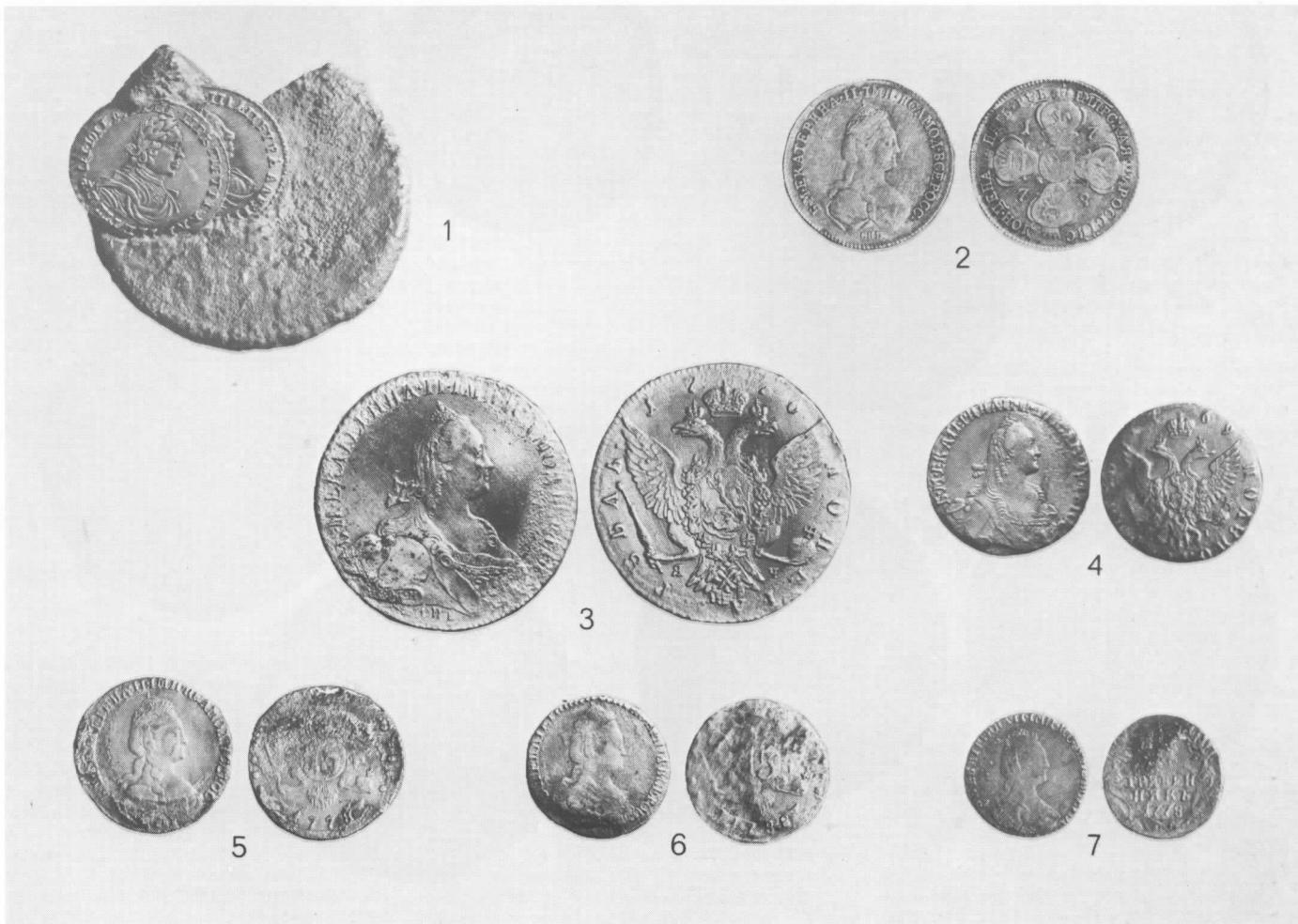
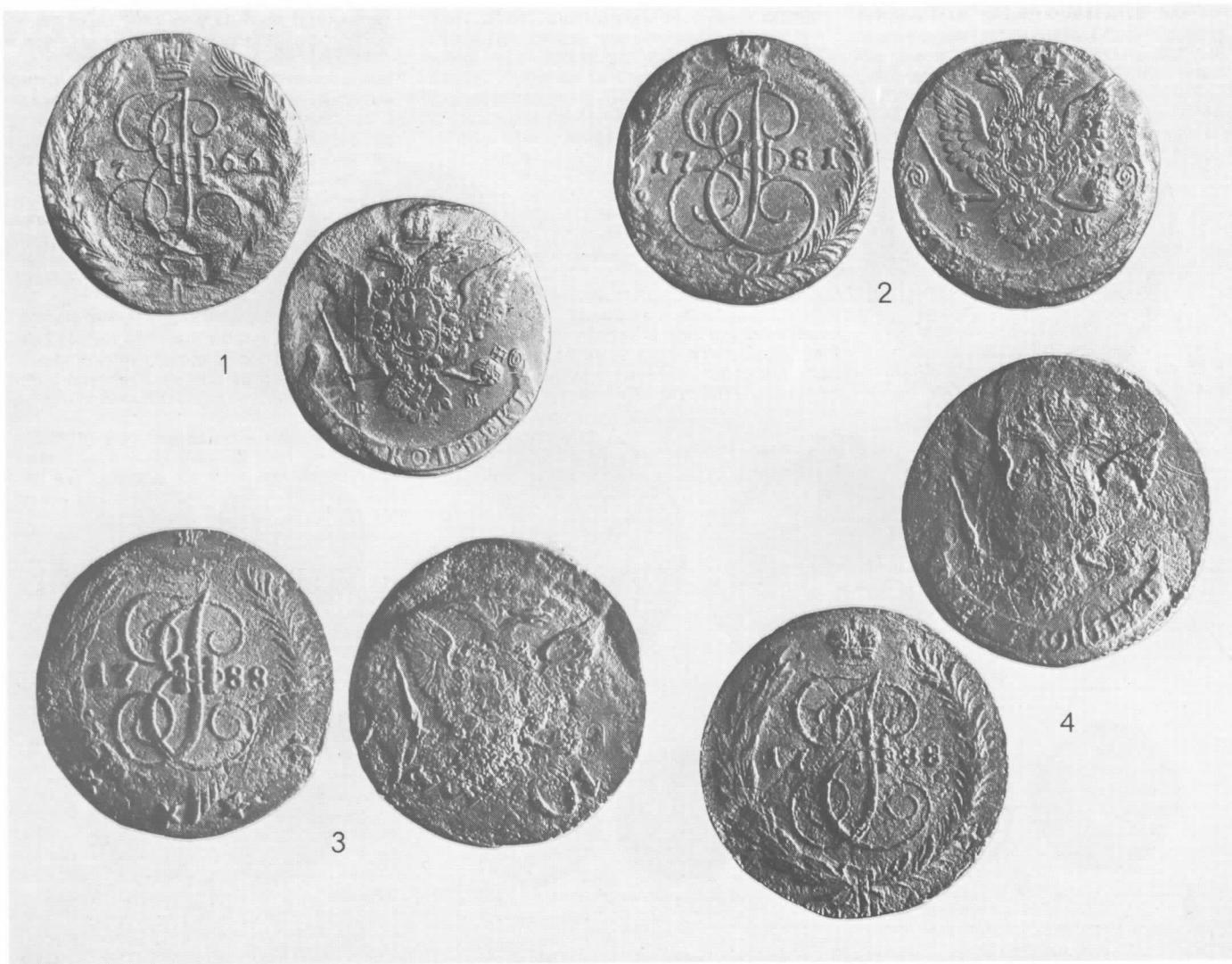


Fig 2

Copper 5 kopeks coins from the frigate NICHOLAS. 1. and 2. ordinary issues from Jekaterinenburg fr. 1766 and 1781. 3. and 4. are 10 kopeks pieces by Peter III overstruck in 1788.



Russia during the second half of the 18-th century. This can not have been caused simply by the fact that the principal mint was located at Jekaterinenburg, at the eastern slopes of the Ural-ridge. This, however, is not the forum to dig deeper into this interesting question. Yet this case stresses the extraordinary value of underwater finds to monetary circulation during a certain period, compared to coin-hoards from dry land (see: P. Sarvas, *De finska myntskatterna från 1700-talet*. Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift 1967, and *De svenska myntskatterna från 1700-talet*. NNA 1969).

More surprising than the limited numbers of 5 kopeks struck in the 1780's is the fact that one half of these coins (22 pieces) are struck in the single year of 1788. Only two pieces are struck in Jekaterinenburg (mintmarked EM), fifteen are from the mint in St. Petersburg (mintmarked C M), these being old 10 kopek pieces from 1762 overstruck to 5 kopek value. Further to this group belong five overstruck coins with mintmarks not recognizable. The 10 kopek coins of Peter III refer to the 50 per cent devaluation of Russian coppercurrency announced in 1762. Thus old 5 kopek coins were overstruck and issued as 10 kopek coins, 2 kopek coins as 4 kopek coins etc. When Catherine brought her consort from the throne this devaluation was cancelled, and a return to previous copper-standards announced. During the 1760's huge series of Peter III:s 10 kopek coins were again overstruck as 5 kopek coins (see:

Brekke op. cit.). Part of the currency withdrawn from circulation was then stored in the mints as a metalreserve, to be requested and reminted only twenty years later, in connection with hostilities with Turkey and Sweden, causing a sudden need of ready money. — Of 2 kopek coins from the NICHOLAS at least 3 pieces represent the 4 kopek pieces of Peter III, again overstruck into 2 kopek coins; one of these is from the mint of St. Petersburg in 1788. — Worth nothing is the fact that overstruck 5 kopek pieces from 1788 were previously unknown from the St. Petersburg mint! (see: Brekke op. cit. and Grand-Duc Georges Mihailovitch: *Monnaies de l'Empire de Russie 1725—1894*).

The coins from the NICHOLAS were found practically all over the wreck. Yet only one closed deposit is known, a seaman's-chest holding tools and 11 copper coins: nine 5 kopeks (youngest fr. 1788), one 1 kopek from 1788 and one 1/2 kopek from 1731. This cash-amount reflects the properties of the average Russian sailor (under 1/2 rouble).

The youngest coins from the frigate are all struck in 1788: 15 kopeks (1 piece), 5 kopeks (22 pieces), 2 kopeks (1 piece) and 1 kopek (2 pieces). In spite of reduced numbers of for instance 5 kopek coins minted in 1789 and 1790, these values were yet minted to such extend that the entire lack of 5 kopeks is an enigma. The natural answer certainly would be that the frigate foundered in the seasons of 1788 or 1789, before the produce of the Imp.

mint were turned into circulation. The frequent appearing of overstruck coins among the issues of 1788 confirms the picture of a warship suddenly commissioned and manned owing to a pressing situation. Overstruck coins from the Imperial mints, rushed to naval depots, may thus constitute the cash needed for a fresh crew signed on, resp. soldiers mustered.

The ship is however beyond doubt identified as the Imp. frigate NICHOLAS, sunk in the II Battle of Ruotsinsalmi = Svensksund on July 9 th 1790 (see: Chr. H. Ericsson, *A. Sunken Russian Frigate. Archaeology Vol. 25 No 3. June 1972*). Thus another answer must be found to the lack of coins minted in 1789 (or 1790?), either from historical or monetary reasons. It is to be noted that in all coin-hoards from eastern Finland (annexed by Imp. Russia from about 1712—14), with the youngest issues dated 1779—1790, coins from 1789 resp. 1790 are entirely missing (See: Sarvas, NNA 1967). Coin-hoards from dry land are yet not commensurable to a shipcommunity, as men-of-war surely were laid-up off seasons in 1788/1789 resp. in 1789/1790 in naval ports, where crewmembers likely got hold of currency minted during the running or the previous year, should such coinage have been brought into circulation at all.

The question, why coins from 1789 and 1790 are entirely lacking from the hundreds of coins found in the wreck of the Russian frigate, can not have a likely solution at this stage of research.

## On the design and dimensions of the frigate NICHOLAS

By Heikki Sorvali

One of the most interesting and richest under-water sites excavated during the sixties and seventies is the wreck of the Imperial Russian coastal frigate NICHOLAS, properly to be called the NICHOLAS-galley. From year to year this ship yields the finest possible material to the archaeologists concerned. Museums are thus profiting, but the wreck supplies historians with a multitude of facts concerning 18-th century social- and cultural conditions from the area of the Baltic. A survey of the remnants of the ship further

stresses the international interchange of principles and ideas of naval architecture.

When a systematical research started in the sixties the majority of the main-ordnance was already raised from the wreck. Certain structures, such as the quarterdeck and the forecastle, were then already destroyed. The collapsing of the fabric was partly due to such dismantling, partly to the turbulence of modern heavy-powered cargo-vessels closing in regularly. Consequently the entire starboard side, lacking support, collapsed outside. This

occurred approximately in the late sixties/early seventies. In spite of some attempts of short duration to measure the wreck, underwater work concentrated on the recovery of loose objects, as well as on certain closely defined areas of excavation; the most important site being the kitchen-area close to the fore-mast.

From various reasons large-scale measuring-operations in the hull were postponed. The defining of the type of ship was for long a case of subjective opinions and views. The slight hopes for a