

Zurich People and Their Money: Coinage on the Limmat

When driving into the main station of Zurich, travelers coming by train pass a house on which a graffiti artist has transformed "Zuerich" into "Zureich" (too rich). Affluence is omnipresent in modern Zurich indeed: on the Bahnhofstrasse, banking houses with luxuriously gleaming counter areas impress an international clientele; and a take-away fried sausage in the main station costs about as much as an opulent lunch elsewhere.

In between the main station and the Bahnhofstrasse stands the monument of Alfred Escher (*1819, †1882). He is the father of Zurich as an international center of finance, since as an energetic and powerful visionary he contributed decisively to the integration of Zurich and Switzerland.

Before the time of Alfred Escher, however, Zurich in terms of populousness or economical importance was far from being at the top of Swiss cities. Nevertheless, money had mattered already in old Zurich, the prestigious commercial town on the Limmat. After the city had taken over the right to mint coins from the abbess of Zurich, it minted its own money for many centuries. What the old coins report of the city on the lake, you can read here.

Helvetia, Tigurini, Potin Coin (Zurich Type), Early 1st Century BC



Denomination:	AE (Potin Coin)
Mint Authority:	Tribe of the Tigurini
Mint:	Undefined
Year of Issue:	-100
Weight (g):	3.6
Diameter (mm):	19.0
Material:	Others
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Sometime around the beginning of the 1st century BC, perhaps even a little earlier, Celts of the Tigurini tribe broke the ground of the Lindenhof in Zurich. These first archaeologically traceable inhabitants of "Zurich" had already quite a differentiated coinage system: gold and silver coins were used for far trade and large transactions; and potin coins – cast from an alloy of copper, tin and lead – were used for daily trade on the local market.

This Celtic potin coin is of the so-called Zurich type, bearing a stylization of mercury's wand on the obverse and a stag on the reverse. Such coins were used exclusively on the local market.

East Frankish Empire, Herman I of Swabia (926-949), Denarius, Zurich



Denomination:	Denarius (Pfennig)
Mint Authority:	Duke Herman I of Swabia
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	926
Weight (g):	1.34
Diameter (mm):	23.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Coinage was introduced in Zurich in the course of the 9th century. As vicegerents of the East Frankish King Otto I, the dukes of Swabia had their own denars struck here. These early coins were considered reliable and thus used far beyond Zurich: Denars from Zurich have been found as far as Germany, Scandinavia, Poland and Russia.

This denarius was an issue of Herman I of Swabia. The obverse depicts the duke's name HERIMANNVS, and the reverse bears a monogram-like cross with letters. The inscription reads, DC TV RE CV (DC = dux comes, duke count; TVRECV = Zurich).

Holy Roman Empire, Fraumünster Abbey of Zurich, Hedwig of Wolhusen?, Light Pfennig (Half Bracteate), c. 1100



Denomination:	Denarius (Half Bracteate)
Mint Authority:	Abness Hedwig of Wolhusen?
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1100
Weight (g):	0.45
Diameter (mm):	23.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Around 853 AD, King Louis the German founded the Fraumünster Abbey of Zurich for his daughters Hildegard and Berta. To allow the two young women a comfortable life, the king provided the abbey with rich properties.

In 1045, the German King Henry III assigned the abbess of the Fraumünster Abbey with the right to hold markets, to collect tariffs and to mint coins. These rights changed the rank of the abbess in Zurich remarkably: she now became bearer of important political duty and power.

At that time a vivid trade began to develop in Zurich, as in other towns of the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore money was needed. The abbess thus began to issue light pennies, which were cheap and could be produced quickly and in large quantities. Light pennies were minted on both sides, but since they were very thin, the dies were visible on the opposite side too.

Holy Roman Empire, Fraumünster Abbey of Zurich, Elizabeth of Spiegelberg (1298-1308), Pfennig (Bracteate)



Denomination:	Pfennig (Bracteate)
Mint Authority:	Elizabeth of Spiegelberg
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1300
Weight (g):	0.34
Diameter (mm):	17.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The early coins from Zurich mostly depicted the patron saints of the city, Felix and Regula. Later issues, however, show the portrait of the respective abbess. This coin depicts a schematic picture of Abbess Elizabeth of Spiegelberg. She wears a nun's veil, but also a necklace as a worldly attribute. This demonstrated the double position of the abbess of Zurich: clerical principal as well as feudal lord.

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, Plappart (Krähenplappart) undated (c. 1425-1440)



Denomination:	Plappart (Krähenplappart)
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1425
Weight (g):	2.34
Diameter (mm):	24.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

This coin marks the transition of the mint prerogative from the abbess of the Fraumünster to the city of Zurich. For more than 350 years, the abbesses had held the right to issue coins. They had not issued coins themselves, however, but had leased the privilege to entrepreneurs. In 1364, the abbess finally concluded an agreement with the city of Zurich directly, thus virtually assigning the coin prerogative to the town. In 1425, Emperor Sigismund confirmed the seigniorage with a document.

As soon as the city's right of coinage was official, it started to issue plapparts with the imperial eagle on the reverse. Somewhat disrespectful, people called those coins "crow's plapparts" (Krähenplapparte).

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, Heller (Haller) undated (16th c.)



Denomination:	Heller (Haller)
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1500
Weight (g):	0.24
Diameter (mm):	15.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The heller, which was incidentally called haller in Zurich, was used as a divisional coin that is, as coin with a low nominal value, which was used to make up small differences in transactions. To keep the cost of these small coins low, they were only stamped on one side. The device on this heller shows the Zurich coat of arms.

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, Taler 1512



Denomination:	Taler
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1512
Weight (g):	29.56
Diameter (mm):	43.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Zurich began relatively early with the minting of large silver coins: the first Zurich taler was issued in 1512 already. At that time the city was flourishing, and a silver coin of high denomination was thus desirable. However, to show its wealth and urban culture, Zurich not only wanted a large coin, but also a beautiful one. This taler depicts the city's patron saints Felix and Regula, as did earlier Zurich coins. But in a miraculous way, a third saint called Exuperantius had suddenly appeared. Legend had it that he had come across the Alps as friend and attendant of Felix and Regula, and that he had been executed with them. In fact, Exuperantius was an invention of the early 14th century.

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, Guldiner (Kelchtaler) 1526



Denomination:	Guldiner (Guldentaler)
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1526
Weight (g):	28.99
Diameter (mm):	43.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

After the Reformation, Zurich became a rich city. In 1525 all the churches and monasteries in Zurich's territories were abolished and their possessions confiscated. In gold and silver, a sum of about 14,000 guldens was accumulated – not to mention the pearls and precious stones. For comparison: a craftsman at that time earned about one gulden per week.

Naturally, after the introduction of the Reformation the city's patron saints Felix and Regula could no longer be depicted on the Zurich coins. Therefore the city's money now bore the shield of Zurich. On the obverse of this guldiner (another term for "taler") two lions each hold such a shield with one paw, while they support the crowned imperial coat of arms with the other. The imperial arms signified that Zurich was a free imperial city, subject only to the emperor and owing allegiance to no other overlord. On the reverse of the guldiner, the shield of Zurich is in the center again, this time surrounded by the arms of the Zurich bailiwicks.

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, 1/2 Crown undated, c. 1558-1565



Denomination:	1/2 Krone
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1560
Weight (g):	1
Diameter (mm):	20.0
Material:	Gold
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

This half gold crown clearly shows the hand of the famous Zurich engraver Jakob Stampfer, who worked between 1558 and 1565 in the Zurich mint. Therefore this coin must have been minted in those years even though it is not dated. On the obverse, a crowned imperial eagle bears the coat of arms of Zurich on its breast. The reverse shows crossed lilies and the inscription DOMINE SERVA NOS IN PACE (Lord, preserve us in peace).

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, Groschen 1563



Denomination:	Groschen
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1563
Weight (g):	2.44
Diameter (mm):	22.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The Zurich mint masters still minted their coins from ecclesiastic silver confiscated at the time of Reformation during the early 1560's. This source permitted the city a considerable augmentation of coinage. Talers were issued in great numbers, but also small coins such as the groschen (groat) shown here.

Outwardly Zurich minted according to the regulations of the Coinage Act that had been ratified in 1559 in Augsburg by the Imperial Diet. After this Act, the illustration on the obverse of the coin had to show its provenance, here expressed by the image of the Zurich crest. The reverse of the coin had to show its value and the imperial eagle. On this coin the eagle bears the digit 3 on its breast; this meant the coin was equal to three kreuzers and thus was a so-called groschen.

Holy Roman Empire, City of Zurich, Schilling 1589



Denomination:	Schilling
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1589
Weight (g):	1.42
Diameter (mm):	21.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Around 1590, the first enterprises arose in Zurich that specialized in the production of textiles and the textile trade. Ten years later, the textile industry ranked first among all industries in Zurich: in the region about 1,000 spinners were engaged. A spinner earned between 5 and 6 schillings a day, which was about the price of 2 kilograms of bread.

The textile industry gave the impetus for the development of industrialization in Zurich, namely the heavy and the machine industry. Today, the latter employs most industrial workers in the region. Zurich's rise as a financial center would have been unthinkable without the machine industry.

Heiliges Römisches Reich, Stadt Zürich, Ducat o. J. (ca. 1630) KEIN ENGLISCHER TITEL !!!!



Denomination:	Ducat
Mint Authority:	City of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1630
Weight (g):	3.47
Diameter (mm):	22.0
Material:	Gold
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The obverse of this early ducat from Zurich shows the city's patron saints Felix and Regula – an unexpected motif on the coin of a Protestant city: after all Huldrych Zwingli and his reformers had banned the saints from the churches a 100 years earlier. Since the beginning of the 17th century however, theologians' view of patron saints had altered radically. Now they were regarded as precursors of the Reformation. Accordingly, they reappeared in the design of coins, not only in Zurich, but in other Swiss towns as well.

The reverse of our ducat depicts Emperor Charlemagne on his throne. Charlemagne was considered to be the founder of the city. A sword lies across his knees, and in his left hand he holds the orb.

Holy Roman Empire, Republic of Zurich, 1/4 Taler 1652



Denomination:	1/4 Taler
Mint Authority:	Republic of Zürich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1652
Weight (g):	7.99
Diameter (mm):	34.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	

The year of 1648 brought the Peace of Westphalia and therewith the end of the Thirty Year's War. This finally brought the Swiss confederates their complete independence from the Holy Roman Empire. This development had become evident on Zurich coins already a few years earlier: In 1640, the motto CIVITATIS IMPERIALIS (of the imperial city) had disappeared from the legend of Zurich's money and been replaced by DOMINE CONSERVA NOS IN PACE (Lord, preserve us in peace). An understandable wish, considering the chaos of war all around.

Republic of Zurich, Taler (Entrenchment Taler) undated (End of 17th-Early 18th c.)



Denomination:	Taler
Mint Authority:	Republic of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1690
Weight (g):	26.93
Diameter (mm):	43.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Towards the end of the 17th century, Zurich began to mint a series of talers bearing the image of the town on their reverse. Just like sovereigns, the city put its own image on its money. These talers were called schanzentalers (fortification talers) after their motif. The dies for this magnificent coins were cut by the famous engraver Hans Jakob Gessner I.

Republic of Zurich, 20 Schillings 1714



Denomination:	20 Schillings
Mint Authority:	Republic of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1714
Weight (g):	7.83
Diameter (mm):	31.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

In the 18th century, the most common small coins in Zurich were schillings: On the city's market they were a unit of account and used to pay for everyday purchases. As very small change, rappens worth a quarter of a schilling were circulating. Larger acquisitions were paid in talers, of which one equaled 72 schillings. As intermediate coins there were 10- and 20-schilling pieces as well as half talers.

Republic of Zurich, Rappen undated, 18th Century



Denomination:	1 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Republic of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1730
Weight (g):	0.32
Diameter (mm):	1.5
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Small coins, money used in daily trade on the local market thus, were a profitable investment during Early Modern Times: These coins contained so little silver that it was good business to buy silver, alloy it with other metals and mint lots of small coins from it.

Issuing small coins was so profitable that hardly any mint authority abstained from it. In 1750, the city council of Zurich decided to mint small coins primarily. At the same time the city paid close attention that only local coins were used on the municipal market by publishing lists of all forbidden coins.

Republik Zürich, 5 Schilling (2 Batzen) 1784 KEIN ENGLISCHER TITEL !!!!



Denomination:	5 Schillings (2 Batzen)
Mint Authority:	Republic of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1784
Weight (g):	2.85
Diameter (mm):	23.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

Although such 2-batzen coins were marketable money towards the end of the 18th century, only few pieces were in circulation. They were used as so-called "money for councils:" at the end of each session every member of the Great Council (the "Great Council of the Two Hundred") got such a coin, carefully wrapped in paper.

Helvetic Republic, 4 Francs (Neutaler) 1799, Berne



Denomination:	4 Franken (Neutaler)
Mint Authority:	Helvetic Republic
Mint:	Berne
Year of Issue:	1799
Weight (g):	29.34
Diameter (mm):	40.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

In spring 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte and his French troops overthrew the old Swiss confederation. In Zurich and Berne, Napoleon confiscated the state treasures and hauled them off to Paris. The cities were forced to accept the French-made constitution and to give up their respective currencies.

The experiment failed, however. The French had plundered Switzerland to an extent that it was unable to commence a large-scale coinage and replace the circulating coins of the ancien régime. The old coins thus continued to circulate. The attempt to establish a uniform Swiss currency had been unsuccessful. Formally it ended in 1803, when Napoleon reestablished the sovereignty of the cantons in his Act of Mediation – including their right of coinage, of course.

Canton of Zurich, Time of Mediation, 8 Batzen 1810



Denomination:	8 Batzen
Mint Authority:	Canton of Zurich
Mint:	Zurich
Year of Issue:	1810
Weight (g):	7.37
Diameter (mm):	30.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

No coins were minted in Zurich during the time of the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803). But as soon as the French had left the country, the Swiss cantons started to introduce their old coins again.

The Zurich mint was reopened in 1806 under the surveillance of the newly formed canton of Zurich. Initially coins worth 4 batzen were struck; some years later, coins of 8 batzen were struck. The legend, formerly in Latin, now reads, CANTON ZÜRICH.

Canton of Zurich, 1 Rappen 1842, Stuttgart



Denomination:	1 Rappen
Mint Authority:	Canton of Zurich
Mint:	Stuttgart
Year of Issue:	1842
Weight (g):	0.77
Diameter (mm):	14.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

After the interlude of the first centralized Swiss state, the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803), the old authorities reemerged in new appearances; in Zurich, the canton of Zurich came into being.

In 1841, the mint of Zurich was closed down – due to "sickness and age" of mint master Hans Kaspar Wüst. The mint's tools were sold and the position of a mint master abolished. The last coins from Zurich were struck in Stuttgart between 1842 and 1848; it was the end of a coinage tradition that had lasted for centuries. With the foundation of the Swiss Confederation in 1848, the coinage from Zurich at long last came to a definite end. Two years later, in 1850, a common currency was introduced for the whole of Switzerland. Apart from some minor changes, it is used unaltered until this day.

Swiss Confederation, 2 Francs 1860, Berne



Denomination:	2 Franken
Mint Authority:	Swiss Confederation
Mint:	Berne
Year of Issue:	1860
Weight (g):	9.93
Diameter (mm):	28.0
Material:	Silver
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

The foundation of the Swiss Confederation took place on September 12, 1848 – not entirely peaceful: In November 1847, a civil war broke out; it lasted less than a month, however, and caused fewer than 100 casualties. To date, this was the last armed conflict on Swiss territory.

Two years later, Switzerland introduced a single currency for the first time. It was geared after the French franc, since Swiss coinage was to a large extent under French influence anyway. The new Swiss currency unit was the silver franc that was issued in pieces of 5, 2, 1 and 1/2 francs. In addition there were divisional coins of 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 rappens. This system remained basically unchanged until today – save that since 1968 the Swiss coins are not made from precious metals any more, and that the smallest denominations of 1 and 2 rappens are no longer in circulation.