

Plebiscite Notgeld from Schleswig 1919-1921

Propaganda or Money-spinner?

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Abstract

During World War One, local authorities began printing “notgeld” (emergency money) in Germany because of an immediate shortage of coins. Over time, emergency money evolved from being an emergency measure into a collectors item with colourful illustrations often drawn by artists. After World War One, at the peace conference in Versailles, it was decided, that a new Danish-German border should be defined on the basis of plebiscites in Northern and Middle Schleswig. Before and after the plebiscites, emergency money were used to advocate national agendas and is a testimony to the state of mind in Schleswig at a time when much was at stake. In this article, the development of this particular kind of money will be examined, and a closer look will be taken upon the significance they had as a means of propaganda as well as a profitable commodity.

Keywords: Emergency money, plebiscites, Schleswig, propaganda, collectors item.

Introduction

By the outbreak of World War One emergency money printed on paper started replacing coins in Germany and during the war the phenomenon spread all over the country. In the years before the war, the German Reichsbank had started building up a gold reserve. This development was reinforced in the war years 1914-18 when war expenditure led to rising public spending and higher inflation, which made the metal value of coins exceed the face value. This meant that the demand for gold, silver and war-essential metals like copper and nickel kept on rising. As a consequence both the Reichsbank and ordinary people hoarded these metals. In the beginning, The German Reichsbank tried to solve the shortage of circulating coinage by printing a temporary paper currency, the so-called "Darlehenkasenscheine". Despite this initiative, The German Reichsbank could not keep up with the demand for paper money and locally public and private entities were forced to start printing their own emergency money. Altogether more than 100,000 distinct emergency paper notes were printed in Germany between 1914-1923. (Maynes 2019, 681-682; Heymsfeld).

Emergency money was valid for a short period, typically only a few months. In the beginning, they were simple and factual, but over time they developed into small works of art with colourful motives often drawn by artists. After the defeat in World War One, some of Germany's borders should be redefined by plebiscites. In Schleswig, where the people should decide on a new Danish-German border, emergency money became a part of the propaganda in the plebiscite campaigns. "Plebiscite money", as they have been termed by numismatists (see for instance *Numismatisk Forening for Nord- og Sydslesvig* 2015), was emergency money illustrated with national motives referring to the two plebiscites in Northern and Middle Schleswig held in February and March of 1920. This type of emergency money will be the main focus of this article.

Only little has been written about plebiscite money from Schleswig. In 2010, Inge Adriansen and Immo Doege wrote the book *Dansk eller tysk? Agitation ved folkeafstemningerne i Slesvig i 1920* about the use of posters, flyers and emergency money as part of the national agitation at the plebiscites in 1920. Other than that, a number of catalogues gather and describe the many different types of emergency money printed in Schleswig during and after World

War One (for instance: Johansen 2018, Lodberg 2006, Lindman 2006, Sørensen 1995), and a few books or articles focus on the history of emergency money in Schleswig-Holstein or analyze specific bank notes. In this article, however, the development of plebiscite money over time from both before and after the referendums in Schleswig will be examined, and a closer look will be taken upon the significance this type of emergency money had as a means of propaganda as well as a money-spinner.

The Origins of Plebiscite Money

In late 1916, the lack of coins had become so critical in Schleswig that they had to start printing emergency money in this area. The problem was now so widespread, that The German Reichsbank accepted the use of emergency money with lower values as long as the issuer could guarantee the amount. This demand was, however, rarely respected. In Schleswig-Holstein, the president of the government sent a confidential letter to the local authorities on 17 April 1917, where he within reasonable limits accepted the printing of emergency money. It was not only local authorities and banks who issued emergency money. Also, private companies, shops and organizations printed scrips and tokens that should replace the national currency (Krog 2011, 36).

One of the first to issue emergency money in Schleswig was Sønderborg Bank who released a bank note with the value of ½ mark in December 1916. On the front page of the note, a Viking ship was seen, drawn by curator at Sønderborg Castle Jens Raben. Shortly after, in January 1917 Broager Spare- og Lånekasse (savings bank) followed suit, and issued their first bank note also with a value of ½ mark. Actually, it was a neutral note without any illustrations, but because the savings bank did not have the required permission to print emergency money and probably also because the text was in Danish, which was seen as a provocation in German circles, the authorities banned and seized the notes. Furthermore, the men behind the bank note was imposed a fine on 360 mark. The shortage of coins was, however, still so widespread that the municipality in Broager was able to buy the remaining notes and put them into circulation marked with their official stamp. About half a year later, Haderslev Bank also attempted to issue a bank note in Danish, but

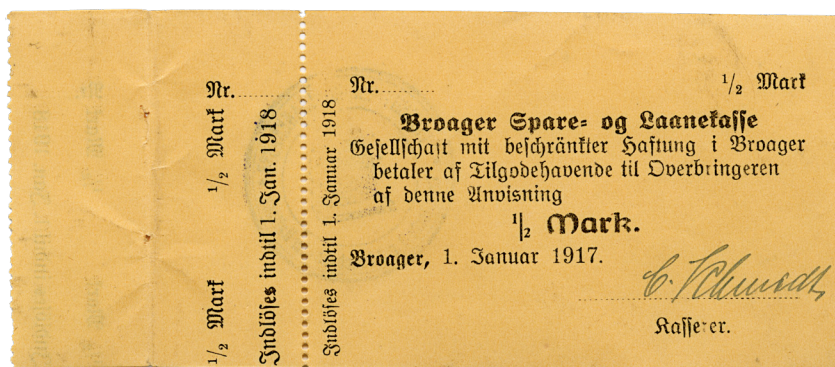


Figure 1: Emergency bank note from Broager Spare- og Lånekasse, issued January 1917. Arkivet ved Dansk Centralbibliotek for Sydslesvig (ADCB).

it suffered the same fate as the one from Broager savings bank (Lodberg 2006, 244-45, 267; Hagedorn 1995, 81-82).

These were only the first hesitant beginnings of the nationally influenced emergency money. Approximately one month before the ending of World War One on 9 October 1918, the German government decided to ask counties and municipalities to start printing bank notes with higher values between 5 and 100 mark. This meant that emergency money became the norm rather than an emergency measure. At the same time the government requested that the notes should be made as ingenious as possible, preferably with watermarks and prints in several colours, which would make forgery more difficult (Petersen 1970, 55). The consequences were that much more focus was directed to the motives on the emergency money, giving them a role beyond the functioning as currency, as for instance bank notes advertising companies and their products (Maynes 2019, 682).

On June 28 1919, the Versailles Treaty was signed. In the articles of the Treaty concerning Schleswig, articles 109-114, it was decided that a new border between Denmark and Germany should be decided on the basis of plebiscites in both Northern and Middle Schleswig. In the period leading up to the plebiscites, both sides produced a large amount of printed propaganda material such as posters, flyers, pamphlets, postcards and books. The plebiscite campaign also influenced the emergency money in the region, creating a new kind which were often decorated with national motives and texts. This type of emergency money could be Danish-minded, German-mind-

ed or neutral and the same note could include different viewpoints promoting both sides in the national struggle. In Northern Schleswig, which was predominantly Danish, the emergency money was mostly Danish-minded or neutral, but a few were with German messages. By contrast, the emergency money in Middle Schleswig, which was predominantly German, was typically with German-minded or neutral motives. Common to them all was their direct or indirect reference to the plebiscites held in February and March 1920, and often the word "plebiscit" was written explicitly on the notes.

Plebiscite Money Issued Before the Plebiscites

Both Danish- and German-minded plebiscite money was issued before the plebiscites in Northern Schleswig held on 10 February 1920. In the beginning of the plebiscite campaign, the area was still governed by German authorities. As a consequence it was still a challenge to produce plebiscite money with Danish motives, as experienced by the municipality in Broager when they circulated a new note on 8 December 1919. The motive of this note shows a view of Broager Church from the sea in the twilight and to the



Figure 2: Emergency bank note from Broager Spare- og Lånekasse, issued December 1919. ADCB.

right a mast where the Danish flag is swaying. Written at the bottom of the note is the title of the Danish national anthem “der er et yndigt land”. Because of the use of the Danish language and the Danish flag in an area that was still a part of Germany the note was banned shortly after (*Kalundborg Avis* 1919, Sørensen 1995, 14). Nevertheless plebiscite money with Danish motives did not disappear and both in Sønderborg, Dynt and Broager new bank notes were issued already in 1919 advocating the Danish cause (Lodberg 2006, 14, 21, 64-66).

In Middle Schleswig plebiscite money was also issued before the referendums. For instance in Flensburg, where the German-minded municipal corporation hired the artist Johann Holtz to draw their bank notes. The choice of Holtz was no coincidence. He was very active on the German side in the national struggle, where he also drew many posters and leaflets. In total Holtz was behind five different emergency notes in Flensburg of which four can be characterized as plebiscite money. Three of them were issued before the plebiscite and one after. Holtz was not given a free rein to design the notes, but had to make several different drafts, which were carefully scrutinized and selected by the municipal corporation. The example below shows that the details were thoroughly considered

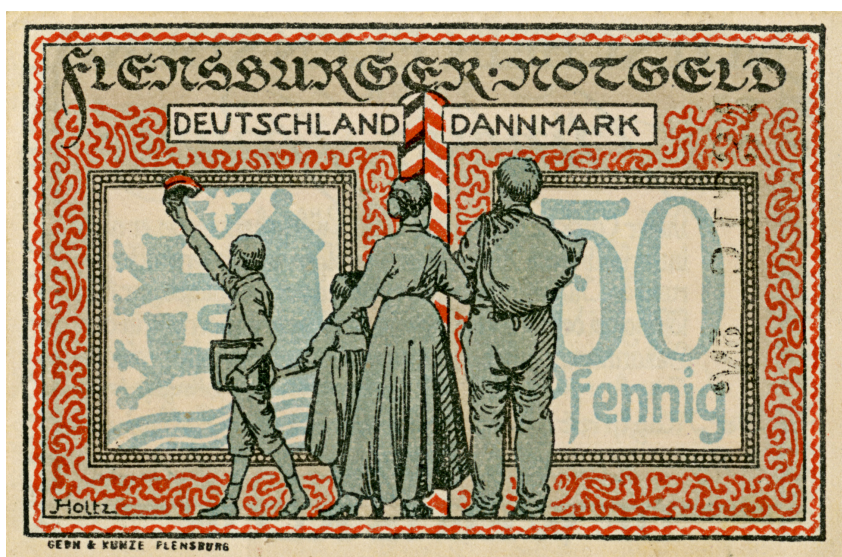


Figure 3: Emergency bank note from Flensburg, issued January 1920. ADCB.

and the symbolics carefully thought-through. On the note you see a family standing in front of a road sign that points to Germany in one direction and Denmark in the other, representing the choice they would be facing with the forthcoming plebiscite. The parents seem to be hesitating, but the boy is already on his way towards Germany pushed on the back by his sister, who also looks in that direction. The boy is waving his red cap towards Germany. Red caps were typically worn by older pupils from the upper secondary schools in Flensburg. Even though they were not old enough to vote at the plebiscite, many participated very actively in the campaign on the German side, making the red cap a sign of German patriotism. Furthermore, Holtz has placed the coat of arms Flensburg's on the German side of the sign showing that the town belonged to Germany (Zubek 1977, 75).

Three of Holtz' bank notes were issued on 16 January 1920, roughly two months before the plebiscite in Flensburg. This was not a random date. For a long time, it had been expected to be the last day of German rule in the plebiscite areas which were to be overtaken by an international commission, "Commission Internationale de Surveillance du Plebiscite Slesvig" (CIS), appointed by the victors in World War One. Meanwhile the seizure of power in Schleswig by the CIS was delayed until 26 January, but this could not be anticipated when the release-date of Holtz' money was decided. The municipal corporation in Flensburg thus calculated that 16 January would be the last chance to put their signature on bank notes, that should be part of the propaganda in the plebiscite campaign. By doing so they aimed at putting the notes into circulation as late as possible. Hereby the notes would still have an effect in the closing part of the plebiscite campaign and make it harder for the new rulers to replace them on a short notice with more neutral or maybe even Danish-minded bank notes (Zubek 1977, 75).

Plebiscite money issued after the plebiscites

A significant part of the plebiscite money in both Northern and Middle Schleswig was not put into circulation until after the plebiscites in 1920. Everything indicates that this was the case with the majority of the notes, but since many lacked a date of issue it cannot be concluded with certainty. Under all circumstances, the motives

on these notes could not have been intended to play a role in the plebiscite campaign and must therefore be seen in another light.

Apart from the neutral plebiscite money, that did not support either of the sides in the national struggle, most of the notes issued after the plebiscites roughly fall into two categories – those who celebrated and those who showed discontent with the results of the plebiscites. The result of the plebiscites in zone 1 (Northern Schleswig) and zone 2 (Middle Schleswig) had been quite clear. On 10 February 1920 around 75% of the registered voters in zone 1 voted in favour of Denmark, while approximately 80% voted in favour of Germany in zone 2 a little more than a month later. On both the Danish and the German side a considerable number of plebiscite money were issued in memory of the victory in zone 1 and 2 respectively. The Danish-minded population rejoiced in the fact that Northern Schleswig would now become a part of Denmark, which was emphasized on new plebiscite notes with statements like “once again the divided bends together” (“atter det skilte bøjer sig sammen”) and “by the reunification with Denmark the justice of the people has been done” (“ved genforeningen med Danmark sker folkets ret fyldest”) (ADCB, D9095-5,1). In Dybbøl, they went so far as to release plebiscite money in the Danish currency in April 1920. This was before the town became a part of Denmark and hence before the Danish currency was introduced in Northern Schleswig. As expected, the notes were banned after just two days and have most of all been contemplated as a Danish manifestation of the victory in zone 1 (Lodberg 2006, 107).

On the German side, some notes were issued celebrating the victory in zone 2. For instance Holtz made a 50 pfennig note a year after the plebiscite celebrating the German victory in Flensburg (Bakowsky, 17). As this area was already German country, the celebrations were often more restrained and focus was turned to Germany's ability to hold their ground and on a hope for better times to come. A few notes even called for reconciliation between Germans and Danes (Bonefeld 1981, 8-13). Especially on the Peninsula of Anglia a lot of the so-called “memory notes” (“Erinnerungsscheine”) were printed with references to the result in zone 2. An example is this note issued in Husbyholz in July 1921, where you see two cornucopias pouring out food aid before the plebiscite in zone 2. The note praises the will to stay German through “hardship and pain”

(“Not und Schmerz”) in spite of the Danish attempts to “lure” (“locken”) people into voting for Denmark with food aid and money (ADCB, D9095-5,3).



Figure 4: Emergency bank note from Husbyholz, issued July 1921. ADCB.

Far from all bank notes celebrated the results of the plebiscites and the prospect of a new border dividing Schleswig in two. On the Danish side, the disappointment was great in those circles who hoped for a border further to the south or that, at least, Flensburg would become part of Denmark. Although the plebiscite had shown a clear German majority in Flensburg, their opinion was that Denmark had a historical right to acquire the city. They felt that the Danish government was more concerned with maintaining a good relationship to Germany rather than getting this part of Schleswig back to Denmark. This was expressed on plebiscite money in Gramby, where the Danish Prime Minister C. Th. Zahle was depicted as the scapegoat. On the back page of this two-mark bank note, issued in the Easter of 1920, you see a woman (“Mother Denmark”) wrapped in the Danish flag stretching out her arms for two girls in white dresses depicting zone 1 and 2. This symbolizes Denmark reaching out for both Northern and Middle Schleswig. In the center of the picture PM Zahle in the black suit is trying to come between the woman and the girls, but is being held back by the Danish king Christian X. The note is a tribute to the Danish king who

was dissatisfied with the prospect of Flensburg becoming German. He therefore dissolved the Danish government on 29 March 1920 in what proved to be a futile attempt to change that decision.



Figure 5: Emergency bank note from Gramby, issued Easter 1920. ADCB.

Dissatisfaction with the result of the plebiscites was more widespread on the German side, where the anger of losing Northern Schleswig was expressed on a number of highly nationalistic bank notes. Some of these showed e.g. the Danish flag being torn apart, stamped on or hanging inert from broken flag poles. On other notes Northern Schleswig was termed as "Neu-Dänemark" (New Denmark) underlining that Denmark illegitimately had incorporated a piece of Schleswig, which according to Germans had never been Danish. Historical events stressing German defeats of Denmark, important persons and occasions in the struggle for Schleswig-Holstein's independence from the united Danish monarchy in the middle of the nineteenth century and German monuments in Northern Schleswig were also popular motives on German plebiscite money in the years following the plebiscites. A few notes outright expressed the hope that a new generation would strive to regain the lost country. Many new plebiscite notes were put into circulation in the form of topographical series with a related story or shared theme. Amongst others a topographical series from Süderbrarup

on Anglia of no less than 8 notes with different historical motives, including this tribute to the German victory at Dybbøl in 1864 (ADCB, D9095-5,3).



Figure 6: Emergency bank note from Süderbrarup, issued 1921. ADCB.

On 18 May 1920 the CIS banned the issuing of emergency money in Northern Schleswig. A violation of the ban would be punished by a fine twice the amount of notes issued (*Bekanntmachungen der internationalen Kommission für Schleswig*). Officially this meant that the printing of emergency money ceased in Northern Schleswig, which became a part of Denmark in June 1920. Even so a few municipalities proceeded with the production of new plebiscite notes. For instance Augustenborg who released two memory notes in 1921 without monetary value (Lodberg 2006, 81-82). In the case of Middle Schleswig, the production of emergency money continued until the introduction of the so-called “Rentenmark” in late 1923, which were introduced to put an end to the hyperinflation in Germany (Kürtz 1981, 120).

Plebiscite money as a money-spinner

Apart from being a means of payment and propaganda of the plebiscites in 1920, plebiscite money quickly became a popular collec-

tor's item. This is clearly witnessed in the newspapers of the time where plenty of examples can be found with collectors advertising for buying and selling emergency money as well as newspaper articles drawing collector's attention to new notes.

The demand from collectors meant that several municipalities started speculating in the production of new plebiscite money and in the month following the plebiscites, many new notes were issued. Apparently more money was produced than was needed to cover the demand for emergency payments. At any rate, newspapers wrote articles in the spring of 1920 pointing out, that the intention behind the new notes no longer was to fill a need for means of payment, but primarily to make profits by selling to collectors (*Sonderburger Zeitung* 1920; *Vestkysten* 1920). The production of plebiscite money could be profitable business for two reasons. First of all collectors were willing to pay more for the notes than the face value. For instance some of Holtz' plebiscite notes from Flensburg were sold for 5 to 10 mark, even though they only had a face value of 25 pfennig (Skora 2002, 126). Secondly, collectors kept the bank notes after they had expired which meant that a lot of them were never cashed in. This is for instance evident from a report made by the savings bank in Sønderborg, where only around 40% of 127.000 printed notes had been returned after the expiry date (Petersen 1970, 58). That plebiscite money could be a good money-spinner also became evident in Flensburg. In the period alone from 14 March to 12 October 1920 the city earned 400.000 mark selling emergency notes (*Jyllands-Posten* 1920; Zubek 1977, 71).

The more conspicuous and sophisticated the emergency money became, the more the demand increased; particularly plebiscite money with national motives were desired. Hence the creativity was large in meeting the demands. We have already heard that topographical series were made, and that local artists were hired to draw the notes. When it became clear that the CIS was planning a ban on emergency money in Northern Schleswig in May 1920, many notes were stamped with the text "invalid as means of payment", in order to continue the sale to collectors (Petersen 1970, 58). This was far from the only examples of suppliers who were willing to go far in trying to profit on the issuing of emergency money. In Gramby, the town council decided to send a representative to Denmark in order to establish "a place of sale in every town". The intention was to sell the

emergency money from Gramby for a price of one Danish krone a piece and that the surplus should go to the parish council and their work trying to relieve some of the burdens World War One had put on the people in the town (*Viborg Stifts Folkeblad* 1920).

In some cases, the regulations were violated in order to get plebiscite money into circulation. In an article H.C. Petersen shows how the town council in Augustenborg cheated with the date of publication on two new notes, making it appear as if they had been issued before the CIS banned emergency money in Northern Schleswig on 18 May 1920 and how they deliberately used a printing office in Hamborg which was outside the jurisdiction of the CIS. The plebiscite bank notes were stamped with a publication date 8 April 1920, but the correspondence between the involved persons show that they impossibly could have been put into circulation before 18 May. This clearly indicates that these notes were printed exclusively with collectors in mind (Petersen 1970, 59-71).

The example from Augustenborg was far from exceptional and catalogues of emergency money show that false bank notes were being made in many places. In particular Süderbrarup on Anglia seems to have been the center of a good deal of shady business with plebiscite money. Here Heinrich Appel had his printing office which was responsible for the making of a lot of plebiscite money in this and the surrounding towns. Appel's printing office had bought the rights from municipalities to print their money, leading to an extensive production primarily intended for collectors, which sometimes happened without the knowledge and accept of the council members. Appel was also responsible for selling the notes and often they gave the impression that they had been in circulation for a longer time, but in fact they were sold with a very short expiry date and unclear specifications about where to be cashed in. In that way, Appel hoped to increase the profit by making it more difficult to cash in the money (Schultz 1989, 11).

Conclusion

As illustrated in this article, emergency money from the Danish-German border region was not just a means of payment. In the period leading up to the plebiscites in 1920, a special kind of emergency money came into existence. This type of money was used to advocate national agendas in the time before and after the plebi-

scites and is a testimony to the state of mind in Schleswig at a time when much was at stake. Despite the diverse motives and messages on the plebiscite money most of them belong to one of the four following categories. The first category consists of notes issued before the plebiscites, who acted as either Danish or German propaganda during the plebiscite campaign. The second category include notes that were issued after the plebiscites and express discontent with the results. These types of notes were released both by Danes, who had hopes for a border further to the south, and by Germans, who saw the loss of Northern Schleswig as a national humiliation. The third category is plebiscite money issued in memory of the plebiscites commemorating the results. Often these type of notes were termed as "memory notes". The fourth category are neutral notes referring to the plebiscites but without showing support for either the Danish nor the German cause.

Initially, the intensions behind the plebiscite money seem to have been twofold - a genuine wish to meet the lack of coins as well as affect the national mindset in the plebiscite areas. Certainly affecting the national mindset in Flensburg was an important part of the considerations made in connection with the making of Johann Holtz' emergency money issued in January 1920. Quickly, it, however, became apparent that the production of plebiscite money could be a profitable business both because collectors were willing to pay more than the face value and because they did not cash them in when they expired. The financial incentive for public and private entities to make their own notes was so great that at least by the spring of 1920 this appear to have been the primary cause for the continued issuing of new plebiscite money. In fact all indications suggest that the production increased after the referendums had taken place in 1920. Not as a result of increasing demands for emergency payments or to enhance national agendas, but primarily because plebiscite money were a much-coveted collectors item. Therefore, the suppliers took several more or less legitimate steps to meet the demands of collectors and counterfeiting was frequent.

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