Coins of the Helvetic Republic

As a result of the French Revolution the Old Swiss Confederation collapsed at the end of the 18th century. In January 1798, the French invaded the Vaud and proclaimed the Canton of Léman. After that the progress of disintegration run rampant – the people of Lower Valais freed themselves from the rule of their masters, the power of the Abbey of St Gallen broke down, Thurgau demanded independence. In March, Berne fell into French hands, then Zurich. Finally on the 12th of April 1798, the old and varied feudal federation system of Switzerland was replaced by the united and undividable Helvetic Republic.

The Helvetic Republic also attended to coinage. The single feudal states lost their coin prerogatives and the centrally governed state took over. As national currency the Swiss franc was introduced; modeled after the French currency it was divided decimally, so that 1 franc held 10 batzen and 100 rappen. However, the unification of coinage in Switzerland did not prevail. In 1800, some 8000 different sorts of coins are said to have been in circulation. In spite of this the coins of the Helvetic Republic laid the basis for the introduction of the Swiss franc of today thirty years later.
Helvetic Republic, 32 Francs (Double Duplone) 1800, Berne

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination:</th>
<th>32 Franken (2 Duplones)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mint Authority:</td>
<td>Helvetic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mint:</td>
<td>Berne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Issue:</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (g):</td>
<td>15.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diameter (mm):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Material:</td>
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The occupation of the city of Berne by French troops in 1798 led to the break down of the ancien régime in Switzerland. The mint of Bern now had to strike coins for the Helvetic Republic. The currency system of Berne became valid for the whole of Switzerland, because Berne had already adapted its money to the French currency previously. It was new, however, that the French name "franc" appeared on Helvetian money, as shown on this coin.

The motif derived from the old coins of Berne: a Swiss warrior in traditional garb had been depicted on the duplones and talers in the first half of the 1790s, i.e. before the invasion of the French. Since the 15th century, Switzerland had been notorious for its mercenaries. These soldiers in foreign services gained a considerable share of the Swiss national income abroad.
The coinage of the Helvetic Republic was based on the then ultra-modern decimal system, although not consequently. The golden duplone for instance, which had been retained from the old Bernese system as well, equaled 16 old Swiss francs. Originally, the duplone (also called pistole) goes back to the doubloon, which had been an old Spanish gold coin. The Swiss mercenaries had brought these coins back to their home country.
The new franc of the Helvetic Republic was still based on the old batzen: one franc equaled 10 batzen or 100 rappens. This new taler (Neutaler) held 40 batzen and was thus nothing else but a 4-franc piece. The obverse bears, as was demanded in the coinage law of June 1798, "the image of an old warrior holding a liberty flag in his right hand." The coin design was adopted from old coins of the city of Berne.
The attempt to introduce a uniform currency in Switzerland is understandable. Here, as in most other Middle European states, a multitude of coins circulated towards the end of the 18th century. It is hard to imagine the monetary chaos of that time. Coins from different metals and origins were in circulation: cities, bishoprics, abbeys and cantons minted coins at will and mostly without any strict standard. In addition there was much foreign money in use, such as French, Italian, Austrian and German coins. About 8,000 different kinds of coins were circulating then on the territory of Switzerland!
Helvetic Republic, 5 Batzen 1799, Berne

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination:</th>
<th>5 Batzen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mint Authority:</td>
<td>Helvetic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mint:</td>
<td>Berne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year of Issue:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight (g):</td>
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<td>Diameter (mm):</td>
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Even simple mercenaries could earn a good living during the golden age of Swiss foreign military service. But in the course of the 18th century, pays decreased substantially. Saving money for the time after their return home became impossible for most mercenaries. The decrease of income led to economic decline and finally to the collapse of the foreign military service. Around the end of the century, the profession of a mercenary had lost its prestige. Nevertheless, the coins of the Helvetic Republic depicted such a soldier in all his glory.
The coins of the Helvetic Republic were minted in Berne, Basle and Solothurn. But the Helvetic currency was not successful. The various old coins remained in circulation, as the new government had too little reserves to replace them by new coins.
The coins of the Helvetic Republic showed for the first time the symbols of liberty that were also prominent on coins of other republics at that time, for instance on those of France or the United States. This rappen bears a fasces on its obverse, a bundle of rods that had symbolized the republic in ancient Roman times already: the tied rods stand for the strength of unity. The axe in the middle shows that the state will severely punish attacks against that unity. The depiction is finally crowned by a freedom hat, as they had come into fashion during the French Revolution of 1789.