

The numismatic collection of the numismatic History Museum of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca holds at present almost 100,000 pieces, it consisting of coins, medals, paper-money and covering a long period from ancient down to present times. The most important constituted collection of the numismatic department is the Esterhazy collection, with over 2,000 gold, silver and common metal coins and medals. This collection includes two rare pieces, one in gold, the other in silver, both Becker's copies after the gold medal of the Romanian prince Michael the Brave, dated 1600. As is commonly known, there is only one original piece in the world, in the Viennese collections.

This paper is aimed at a double target: to signal the existence of these two pieces in the Cluj collection, on the one hand, and to demonstrate that we have to deal with a medal not with a coin – as it is considered in certain Romanian and foreign numismatic works. Consequently, we shall be referring to the original piece in the Viennese collection, not unconditionally to the pieces in our own collection.

For the sake of precise information we shall briefly present the two medals at Cluj:

1. The gold piece: D=40,7 mm; W=17,301 gold 986‰.

Obverse: circular: **MICHA-EL: VAL:[achiae] TRANS:[alpinae] VAIW:[oda] S:[acrae] C:[aesarae] R[egi]Ć: M:[aiestatis] CONS:[iliarius] PER::**; circle of dots; continuous circle; in field: bust front Michael the Brave with furcap and plume fastened with a clap, beard and twisted moustache, fur coloured brocade cloak done up with three buttons;

Reverse: circular: **TRANSYL:[vaniam] LOCVMT:[enens] CIS: TRAN:[sylvaniam] PAR:[tiumque] EI: SVP:[iectarum] EXER. [citus] GE:[neralis] CAP[itaneus];** in field: **A:[nno] D:[omini] / VIGILAN/TIA: VIRTU/TE: ET: ARMI/S: VICTORI/AM: NACT/** floral motif VS floral motif/ **1600/** two arabesques (double spirals).

From among the numerous readings of the legend offered so far by various authors since the original piece was published by Du Val in 1759, we stopped to this one, achieved by the well-known Romanian numismatist Constantin Moisil in 1920<sup>1</sup>.

2. The silver piece: D=32, 4 mm; W=13, 33 g; silver 875 ‰.

The obverse and the reverse are the same as those of the gold piece, the difference between the two pieces consisting in the model of the claps which holds the plume on the fur cap and in the disposition of the two circles on the reverse. Obviously, both pieces in our collection show differences as related to the original, but we do not propose to discuss these aspects here.

Since 1759, when it was first mentioned by Du Val as 10 ducats coin, the gold medal of Michael the Brave roused the interest of research workers who discussed the reading of the legend, the period when and the place where it was coined etc. The

---

<sup>1</sup> O. Iliescu, *La monnaie-medaille de Michel le Brave (1600)*, *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, tome XXXII, No. 3-4, Juillet-December, 1993, p. 224.

character of the piece whether coin or medal, was generally neglected. The list of those who concerned themselves with these aspects is too long and we do not mention them now<sup>2</sup>. We shall take here in discussion the opinions of three researchers who take up opposed positions: O. Iliescu (who considers the piece as coin-medal) and Huszár Lajos (who considers the piece as a coin) on the one hand, and St. Tănăsescu (who is a firm supporter of the idea that it is a medal) on the other hand.

Essentially, Tănăsescu<sup>3</sup> bases his assertion on the following arguments: in 1600, the tenant of the mint in Baia Mare (which belonged to Rudolf the second), Friedrich von Herbestein, had a litigation with Muraldo and he had to pay the latter 24,000 thalers. Herbestein was exempt from the payment of this sum by Michael the Brave and when he return to Baia Mare he coined this medal for his benefactor after the pattern of Rudolf's thaler which was being minted in the same town in 1600<sup>4</sup>. Once this theory accepted, it implies that the unknown engraver never seen Michael, and maybe himself never seen the medal which one way or another reached emperor Rudolf and later the collection in Vienna. Or, we know that the obverse portrait of the prince is one of the most real, so we think that the engraver saw Michael before he made the medal. We do not think that an engraver from the mint of Baia Mare, where Michael never passed (because it is a long way from the limit were we are sure that Michael went in Transilvania and Baia Mare which is in extreme North of the country) was in one of towns where Michael was present.

Unlike Tănăsescu, H. Lajos<sup>5</sup>, comes to conclusion that the medal (which he considers a coin) was minted in the encampment at Șelimbăr after Michael's victory on 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1599; he relies on stylistic arguments, on the type of letter and on the fact that, at the beginning of the XVIIth century, the mint in Sibiu, a town dependent on emperor Rudolf, was very active; it was the place where both, coins and medals, were being minted in the name and with the authorization of the emperor Rudolf<sup>6</sup>.

Consequently, in order to maintain our own opinion that this piece is medal, we shall assume Tănăsescu's position (that the piece is a medal) and Huszár's idea that the place of minting was Sibiu or the military camp at Șelimbăr.

Yet, we consider that the argumentation concerning the character of this piece can be deepened if one reads the history of Michael the Brave more attentively, having in mind the targets he set for himself and the expenses involved in their achievement.

What stands out from a study of the documents of those times and the works of some well-known Romanian historians?

First, we know that Michael the Brave, ruler of Wallachia between 1593-1601, is a descendent from a rich princely family and had had a long-lasting commercial activity before becoming *ban* of Craiova and, later waiwode. At the time of his ascent to the throne, he was one of the richest Romanian boyars, married to a woman from

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 221-239.

<sup>3</sup> St. D. Tănăsescu, *Despre medalia lui Mihai Viteazul*, BSNR, 1973-1975, nr. 121-123, p. 237-239.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Huszár Lajos, *Három szebeni veretű aranyérem*, *Numizmatikai közlöny*, LXXXII-LXXXIII, 1983-1984, p. 31-34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> Ban is the deputy of the waiwode (=king) in a region of the country.

the aristocracy, who was rich as well. In the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, the personal and the public money were not separated, the prince being able to spend indiscriminately from the two sources. We know, for instance, that in 1595, on the eve of the battle at Călugăreni, Michael sent his family to Târgoviște along with wealth, other treasures being buried at different monasteries<sup>8</sup>. As a consequence of the war against the Turks, Michael stopped paying the tribute to the Sublime Porte, this tribute and other financial obligations being the most oppressive expenses of the country<sup>9</sup>. Of course, the money that should have been paid as tribute was not save as it had to be spent on the army and the war in general.

In fact, Michael the Brave, who had dexided to fight against the Turks, had to face a special challenge exactly regarding the army. Up to Michael the Brave, the armies of the Romanian Provinces<sup>10</sup> had a medieval structure, they being made especially of noblemen (boyars) and peasants. Such an army bore the name of "country host" and its maintenance was not the exclusive duty of the ruler. In the XVIth century, as a consequence of the technical progress, armies underwent significant changes all over the Europe. The fire arms turned the medieval army into an unles crowd, a military career became a science and those who knew to handle fire arms would sell their skills for money, in this way the mercenary armies emerged<sup>11</sup>. A gifted general, Michael the Brave realized that the battles against the Turks could not be won with the old country host; Therefore, when he begun negotiations with Rudolf II, he asked to the emperor for money needed for the maintenance of mercenary troops. After 1597, Michael enlisted Hungarian and Cossack mercenaries (about 4,000 men), paid by Rudolf's agent Lassota, whose pay roll book has been preserved. The rest of the mercenary army consisted of Serbs and Bulgarians, paid from the revenues of the prince; they were also stimulated by the hope to conquer their own freedom and by the land ownership in Wallachia<sup>12</sup> Michael used to grant. For these reasons, the pay of the Serbs and Bulgarians was lower than that of the other mercenaries. Beside, these mercenary troops, there also stood the country host, which the Romanian prince could not give up, of course. Nevertheless, the maintenance of this army of mercenaries and the costs of the war in general, were Michael's heaviest financial burdens in a country devastated by the endless row of anti-Ottoman battles.

This was the financial situation of Wallachia and Michael's army about 1599, when he decided to invade Transylvania in the name of Rudolf II. **In our opinion, this dramatic financial situation could have been the most important argument in favour of the hypothesis that the gold piece minted in 1600 was a coin.**

Yet, let us pursue the analysis of the internal incomes available to Michael, beside his personal and public money, along with the subsidies granted by Rudolf. The maintenance of the troops also was an obligation of the monasteries and boyars which sustained a certain number of cavalrymen for three month a year. After the

<sup>8</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *Tezaurul domnesc, Studii*, XIV, 1961, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> In 1593 only the tribute of Wallachia was 155, 000 gold coins.

<sup>10</sup> In the XVIth century there were three Romanian provinces: Wallachia in the South of the modern Romania, Moldavia in the East (both under Turk domination) and Transylvania in the center of the country administrated by Hungarians.

<sup>11</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul*, București, 1936, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

conquest of Transylvania, Michael's soldiers were spread in villages and towns which had to provide for them. We learn about this from the chronicler Szamosközy<sup>13</sup> who related in detail about the conflict in the town of Hunedoara. The same chronicler tells us that after the defeat of the cardinal Andrei Bathory<sup>14</sup>, Michael brought to Bălgrad (Alba Iulia) Bathory's treasure estimated to over 200,000 florins. At the same time, the Hungarians nobles were afraid to attend the proceedings of the diet in Bălgrad (1599) because rumour had been spread that Michael intended to have them killed using as a pretext their belonging to Protestant religions, but in fact for estate and cattle<sup>15</sup>.

Michael used the diet in order to obtain the needed funds, asking them to approve heavy taxes for all social classes. During the first month of his rule in Transylvania, the direct taxes increased from 3 to 16 florins per family. The last, but not the least, Michael also applied to disguised indirect taxing by loans from townships. The chronicles have kept record of the following loans: from Cluj 6,000 florins, from Orăștie and Bistrița 1,000 florins each, from Tg. Mureș 14,000 florins, from Sibiu 10,000 florins. These are undisputed sums furnished by some other largest towns of Transylvania, but we may assume that neither the smaller towns nor the mining regions escaped such taxation. Beside the sums of money obtained in this way, there also were requisitions of food, wood, cloth, carts, wine, onions and weapons<sup>16</sup>.

Consequently, Michael was trying to face the needs of the war by extremely unpopular measures which ultimately also constituted one of the causes of his fall. Whoever knows the history of Michael the Brave also possesses an image of the intellectual capacities of the prince who was undoubtedly aware of the negative impact of the measures he was taking. **If Michael had intended to mint money in order to face his expenses, we can assert that most of these measures would not have been taken.**

This statement is also supported by other arguments. By ruling Transylvania in the name of the emperor Rudolf II, Michael was permanently surrounded by Rudolf's messengers and agents<sup>17</sup>, yet none of them ever signaled the prince's intention to mint currency, which would have granted him a certain degree of independence in relation to Rudolf. Such an attempt would not have escaped the attention of Szamosközy, who was extremely hostile especially to Michael the Brave and to Romanians in general, and who spent most of the year 1600 in Sibiu.

Pursuing our analysis of the facts, we shall dwell upon several arguments. Rudolf is known to have been a great expert in the medal-coining art and one of the greatest collectors of the epoch. He protected at his court outstanding medal engravers and kept up personal relationships with the leaseholds of mints, as for instance with the above mentioned Herbestein at Baia Mare.

<sup>13</sup> I. Crăciun, *Cronicarul Szamosközy și însemnările lui despre români (1566-1608)*, Cluj, 1928.

<sup>14</sup> Prince of Transylvania between March-October 1599 he fought against Michael in the battle from Șelimbăr and he was killed on battle field by Szecklers which fought by Michael's side.

<sup>15</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> Such as: Lassota, Ungvad, Pezzen, Corlo Magno etc.

The same chronicler Szamosközy relates that in 1600 Rudolf sent to Michael a golden chain with a medallion<sup>18</sup> as large as a thaler, with the image and the name of the emperor. It was not just a coin turned into a medallion, as proved the fact that on the chest of the emperor there was a heart-shaped diamond. This present was estimated at 60,000 florins<sup>19</sup>.

At this point of our debate we must ask a question: what could prevent us from admitting that it occurred to the Romanian prince to have a medal coined with his image and titles as a mutual polite gesture in response to Rudolf's gift? An affirmative answer to this question would also clear other mysteries concerning this piece. Why is there only one original piece in the world? It is common known that the difficult problem in any monetary issue is obtaining the engraving pattern, after which the very process of minting the coins is relatively simple. The period within which the piece was sure coined (November 1599 – April 1600) is relatively short, and the fact that there is no mention in any document of Michael's order for minting of a medal as a gift to Rudolf can be accounted for by the racing of political events in the summer of 1600. We can also wonder why, in the summer of 1600, when any subsidies from the emperor were cancelled, Michael did not mint any currency? There is only one answer: the prince had never thought of applying to this means. If Michael had wanted to have new currency minted, we do not think that he would have had his own image carried on the obverse, because the minting of an already accepted and circulating gold coin, such as Rudolf's thalers, would have been much easily accepted on the market. In the same time, the high nominal value of the piece as Du Val said (10 ducats) makes us to tell that this piece was destined sooner to the great commercial transactions than to pay the troops. This idea is supported by the monetary circulation in Transylvania of those epoch. The hoards discovered in this region are composed by common coins, silver denars, rarely there are gold coins, too<sup>20</sup>.

Regarding the minting of coins and monetary circulation, we must underline another aspect: in Wallachia, where from Michael came, did not exist the minting of coins tradition (because of the Turks have not admitted it) since the end of XVth century, from the waiwode Laiotă Basarab, the monetary circulation being covered by foreign coins from Transylvania, Hungary, Poland etc. So, Michael himself and his soldiers knew better Transylvanian coins which were, already, accepted on the market.

Finally, the syntagm coin-medal used by O. Iliescu is a modern expression which names the contemporary monetary issues dedicated to a special events and we think that we must judge Michael's gold piece in the context of his age: Middle Age.

We believe that, above the need of money, Michael needed recognition by his contemporaries, or as we might put in nowadays, he needed an "image" among the mighty of the world, first, and foremost in relation to Rudolf II. From this point of

<sup>18</sup> N. Iorga, *Mihai Viteazul*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1979, vol. II, p. 122. Relating this episode. Iorga spoke about a **medal** sent by Rudolf to Michael.

<sup>19</sup> I. Crăciun, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> For exemple, in our collection there is only one medieval hoard containing gold coins, too. It was discovered in 1996 by Adrian Rusu at Vințu de Jos very near from Alba Iulia. The hoard consists in 918 silver coins and 8 ducats and belong to XVIth century till the beginning of the XVIIth, so a period near Michael's ruler in Transylvania.

view, the medal fully corresponds to the task. The legend which begins on the obverse and continuous on the reverse, enumerating Michael's titles recognized by the emperor, the portrait on the obverse which shows us a determined, energetic, elegant figure, while the full dress of state meets the canons of the time: the fur cap with a gold clasp and a precious gem, the graceful plume as well as the brocade cloak with a fur collar. The legend and the portrait on the medal harmoniously complete each other.

Taking into account these arguments found in the chronicles of the epoch and dictated by reasons, we believe that the gold piece of Michael the Brave minted in 1600 can only be a medal ordered by the Romanian prince in order to make himself better known to western Christendom from which he hoped for more sustained support in his struggle against the common foe: the Ottoman Empire.

LIVIA CĂLIAN