

## “HOREA – REX DACIAE” – CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NUMISMATIC SYMBOLS OF THE PEASANTS’ UPRISING OF 1784-1785

**Abstract:** The information about the outbreak and progress of this uprising spread with astounding swiftness for the 18th century. Through oral dissemination, official or personal letters exchanged between the authorities and newspapers, information about the peasants’ uprising, its expansion and the possible scenarios it could lead to spread at a remarkable speed, both inside Transylvania and in Hungary and Austria, reaching also other parts of the European continent with great ease.

Medals – both those that remained in the stage of drafts and those which were minted in 1784-1785 – played an important role in popularizing the leaders of the 1784-85 uprising within the Habsburg Empire and across its borders. Many of these remained in the stage of etchings, drawings or designs, some of them having a remarkable artistic and documentary value.

**Keywords:** Horea’s Uprising, serfs, nobility, medal, symbols

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The 1784-1785 uprising led by Horea exerted a tremendous influence even in the counties adjoining the historical province of Transylvania. Its echoes exceeded the area of the Apuseni Mountains, influencing Maramureş and Sătmar, besides other regions. Information on the outbreak and progress of this uprising spread with astounding swiftness for the 18th century. Through oral dissemination, official or personal letters exchanged between the authorities and newspapers, information about the peasants’ uprising, its expansion and the possible scenarios it could lead to spread at a remarkable speed, both inside Transylvania and in Hungary and Austria, reaching also other parts of the European continent with great ease.

In 1784 and 1785 many lines were written about these events. Moreover, the portraits of the three leaders of the uprising were made of bronze or plaster, the results being more or less close to reality. During the first months of the uprising, it was believed that the three leaders were nobles, so artists, whether amateurs or professionals, endeavoured to depict them as handsome as possible. However, after news spread out that they were peasants dressed in *opanaci* and sheepskin coats, their portraits were achieved, in most cases, as caricatures. Still, there some portraits that have been preserved are close to reality.

Fifty portraits were made by foreign artists, in 1874-1785, in Vienna, Erfurt, Regensburg, Königsberg, Strassburg, Nürnberg and Alba Iulia. Renowned engravers and publishers at that time (Iacob Adam, Antonius Predich in Alba Iulia, Mangot, Mayr in Regensburg, Moeglich in Nurenberg, F. C. Rehe in Königsberg,

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Fr. Strober in Vienna and Iohan Martin Will in Augsburg) manifested an interest in the leaders of the uprising.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the portraits they made, in the very first days of the year 1785, more precisely on 5 and 6 January, there also appeared in the Habsburg Empire a series of medals with name of Horea. On their legend, the leader of the rebellious peasants is also given the title of King of Dacia (*Rex Daciae*).

Two such medals are mentioned in a series of documents from the period of the 1784-1785 uprising. Thus, Gregoriu Daniel from Elisabetopole (present-day Dumbrăveni, Sibiu County), in a letter dated 5 January 1785, addressed to a Roman Catholic priest in Rome, informed the latter that Horea had minted coin (*pecuniam curavit cudi*) and described to him the inscription *Hora bea și hodinește* (*Horea is drinking and resting*). Another letter, this time written by Miklosvári Jozsef, dated 6 January 1785, sent to a certain *Clarissimus Dominu*, gives information about the fact that “Horea minted money,” describing the same medal as in the letter above. Also on 6 January 1785, Kovács Szigmond, Attorney of County Alba, wrote an epistle in Aiud, addressing it to an unknown person, in which he stated the following: “This Horea entitled himself King of Dacia and as for the kind of money he minted, 20 kreutzers and ducats, I’m sending you here their effigy... I’ve drawn the shape of the coins neatly from a ducat and plenty of soldiers here have such money.” The drawing in Figure no. 1 is similar to *Horea is drinking and resting*. On 15 January 1785, Bölöni Adam sent from Zalău a letter to his brother-in-law, containing information about the fact that Horea had minted coin and other money, describing a medal whose legend featured the inscription *Nos pro Caesare*. Mention should also be made of the letter sent by the Vice Comites of Satu Mare, Szuhány Ladislau, who wrote on 16 January 1785 to the Vice Comites of Bereg that “Horia minted money” and described a medal on which it was written *Horia be și hodineste* (*Horea is drinking and resting*).<sup>3</sup>

The medals minted during the period of Horea’s uprising, but also in the following years, started drawing the attention of collectors and historians in the 19th century. Jankovich Miklós is regarded as the first historian who published in 1821, in the volume *Tudománuos Gyűjtemény*, the description of two coins minted in the period of the uprising. The obverse of the first coin depicts a heart pierced by a sword and the text *Nos pro Caesare – Hora be si hodineste – Tara plinge si plateste* (*Nos pro Caesare – Horea is drinking and resting – The country is weeping and paying*). The second coin has no emblem on the obverse, just the text *R. D. Hora*.<sup>4</sup>

The work entitled *Mes loisirs, amusemens numismatiques* by Clément W. de Renesse-Breidbach published at Antwerp in 1836, describes, noting that it is very rare, a medal with the symbols of the uprising of 1784-85. According to the description in the catalogue, the legend is as follows: obv: *hora.be.si.hodinueste* –

<sup>2</sup> Ioan C. Băcilă, “Portretele lui Horia, Cloșca și Crișan,” in *Transilvania*, no. 1, 1922, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolae Densusianu, *Revoluția lui Horia în Transilvania și Ungaria 1784-1785 scrisă pe baza documentelor oficiale*, București, Tipografia ”Romanulu”, Carol Göbl, 1884, p. 468.

<sup>4</sup> Jankovich Miklós, *Tudománuos Gyűjtemény*, vol II, Budapest, 1821, pp. 73-86.

*cara.blinse.si.bleteste* / heart pierced by a dagger. Rev.: triple cross, *r – d – ho – ra / 17 – 84*.<sup>5</sup>

Passing over other authors who, throughout the 19th century, focused on the events and symbols of the uprising of 1784-85, we wish to mention only the fact that the work *Numizmatikai Közlöny* written by the Hungarian numismatist Gohl Ödön was published in 1908. Ödön described five silver medals from the former collection of Count Berchtold from Vienna, as well as two lead medals from the collection of the National Museum of Hungary’s History in Budapest. The author considered that they were all dedicated to Horia and Cloșca, without making any assessments concerning their commemorative, positive or satirical purpose.<sup>6</sup> In Romanian historiography, a well-documented presentation,<sup>7</sup> accompanied by new photographic reproductions of medals and badges, appeared in the monograph authored by Octavian Beu: *Răscoala lui Horea, în arta epocii*, published in Bucharest in 1935. Also worth mentioning are the works of I. C. Brăcilă, Nicolae Edroiu, as well as other articles that appeared in brochures, in the press, etc.

According to those who have studied these medals, badges and other insignia referring to the uprising of 1784-85, these artefacts can be divided into four groups:

1. Medals created during the uprising;
2. Medals bearing the insignia of Horea;
3. Medals minted 50 years after the uprising;
4. Medals believed to have an ironical content.

In the second group the best known is the medal that has the text *NOS PRO CAESARE* on the obverse and a conical imperial crown with simple cross at the top, while on the reverse it is written: *HOREA REX DACIAE*, a heart pierced by a dagger being represented centre field; from the heart, pointing up and down, two crosses each with three unequal arms. In the field, one both sides of the cross: *17 – 84*; below, the figure 6. It is made of silver, 900%, its weight is 15.28 g and it has a diameter of 37 mm.<sup>8</sup>

The medals reproduced by Octavian Beu in his work belong to the fourth group. The obverse of the first medal has in the centre, between the two plait circles, with an anepigraph space between them, a group of seven mountains on top of which sits a cross with three unequal arms. In the field, on both sides of the body of the cross: *R(ex) – D(aciae) / Ho – ria / 17 – 84*. On the reverse can be identified the text *HORIA BE SI HODINYEȘTE CZARA PLINSE SI PLETE(ște)*, circular, marginal, in the space between the two circles. In the centre, a heart pierced by a

<sup>5</sup> Clément W. de Renesse-Breidbach, *Mes loisirs, amusemens numismatiques: Medailles et monnaies des ducs de Brabant, Bourgogne, etc. des princes, comtes et seigneurs, hommes illustres, republicues et des villes, pieces obsidionales*, Volume 3, Anvers, 1836, catalogue entry: 998, p. 307.

<sup>6</sup> Vitalie Umlauf, “Revoluția populară din 1784-1785 condusă de Horia, Cloșca și Crișan, reflectată în medalistică și insignografie,” in *Buletinul Societății numismatice române*, no. 131-133, București, 1983-1985, p. 361.

<sup>7</sup> Dimitrie A. Sturza, A. Papiu Ilarian and Nicolae Densușianu researched and described the portraits of Horea, Cloșca and Crișan in the 19th century.

<sup>8</sup> Vitalie Umlauf, *Revoluția populară din 1784-1785...*, p. 362.

curved dagger, from which the triple cross rises. It is made of silver 900‰, weighs 25.7 g and has a diameter of 43 mm.<sup>9</sup>

The second medal with Horea's insignia reproduced by Octavian Beu has the following legend: Obv. 900‰, circular, marginal, between an exterior pearly circle and an interior plait circle. In the centre, seven mountains from which the cross with three unequal arms rises, surmounted by a crown. Rev.: *HORA BE SI HODINESTIE CZARA PLINSE SI PLIETESTE*, between two circles, the insignia of Horea: a heart pierced a dagger overlapped by the cross with three unequal arms, but surmounted by a crown. It is made of lead and has a diameter of 42 mm.<sup>10</sup>

A medal made of lead, with the diameter of 42 mm and a weight of 19.63 g, is present in *Huszár Lajos*<sup>11</sup> *Éremtár Gyöngyös*, in the section *Medals from Hungary during the period 1526-1800*. This is the medal that on the obverse has a simple embossed cross, with three arms, rising between three hills. Underneath the third arm (*suspendaneum*) of the cross appear *R.-D. / HO-RA/ 17-84. (Rex Daciae Hora, 1784 = Hora, King of Dacia, 1784)*. On the reverse is written the following text: *HORA. BE. SI. HODINVESTIE \* CARA. BLINSE. SI. BLETESTE.*, while in the centre is featured a heart pierced by a sword, and from the top of the heart rises the same cross with three arms that we also encounter on the obverse.<sup>12</sup>

At the National Archives of Hungary from Budapest, in the *Károlyi Family Fund*, in the *Acta Motus Valachorum* file, there is preserved the etching of a medal dedicated to Horea (see Fig. No. 1). Legend: Obv.: on the edges, according to the drawing, the coin should have been serrated. Then there are two simple concentric circles and the text *Hora Be si Hodineste / Tara Plentse si Pleteste*. In the centre is depicted a heart pierced by a dagger with a curved handle. From its top rises a triple budding cross. On both sides of its foot are featured two arrowheads coming out of the upper part of the heart. Rev.: The decoration of the edges is identical to that on the obverse. The same triple budding cross is represented in the centre field part, thrust in the ground like a tree with strong roots. The lines drawn at the base of the cross, which also suggest its stability, are seven in number, reminiscent of the seven cities of Transylvania. On either side of the cross, between the second (*patibulus*) and the third arm (*suspendaneum*) is written the text *R. / D. (Rex Daciae)*. Below, underneath the third arm, the inscription reads *HO-RA / 17-84*.

As in the case of the other medals that refer to Horea's uprising, in this sketch the symbols on the obverse also have a Catholic resonance. The heart pierced by the dagger is reminiscent of the cult of the "Sacred Heart", a practice that began among the Roman Catholics in the 17th century. The triple budding cross represents an emblem of the papal jurisdiction, being present most of the times on the occasion of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 364.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 364.

<sup>11</sup> Huszár Lajos (1906-1987): Hungarian numismatist, author of the work *Die Medaillen- und Plakettenkunst in Ungarn*, published in 1932 and of *Régi Magyar emlékérmek katalógusa 1500-1849* (in 5 volumes).

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.huszarlajosermetar.eoldal.hu/cikkek/tortenelmi-ermek-magyarorszagrol-es-europabol/1\\_\\_-tortenelmi-ermek-magyarorszagrol-1526-1800.html](http://www.huszarlajosermetar.eoldal.hu/cikkek/tortenelmi-ermek-magyarorszagrol-es-europabol/1__-tortenelmi-ermek-magyarorszagrol-1526-1800.html)

ceremonies and processions. The use of these Catholic symbols can be explained through the fact that those who made the sketches for these medals were more familiar with Roman Catholic than with the Orthodox depictions, the three leaders of the uprising being members of the latter denomination. Thus, even if they were commissioned by the Hungarian nobility or by Horea, the artists used the graphics and the symbolism they were more familiar with.

Compared to the medals or the medal etchings known so far, with reference to Horea’s uprising, the sketch in the Károlyi family fund, the file *Acta Motus Valachorum*, page 326, presents a series of differences:

- The triple cross on both sides of the coin is budding, unlike the other etchings, where the triple cross is simple;
- The two arrowheads that jut out from the heart, on either side of the triple cross, not found in any of the known sketches;
- The dagger that pierces the heart has a straight blade and the handle has one end curved upwards. In the other depictions, the blade of the dagger is either straight or has a curved tip, but the handle is always straight.
- The representation of the triple cross features another important difference. In the medal sketch under consideration here, the cross is represented as a tree that is well anchored into the ground, its roots forming seven mounds in the ground, while in the other drafts the cross stands on top of one of the seven or three mountain peaks.

As regards the text written on this medal sketch, it should be noted that it is similar to that of the other medals or sketches published so far. In his book dedicated to Horea’s uprising, Nicolae Densușeanu argues that the idea of minting these medals belonged to the Hungarian nobility, whose members wished to denigrate Horea in the Emperor’s eyes, accusing him that he had proclaimed himself King of Dacia (R. D.). On the other hand, the fact that “the country is weeping and paying” refers also to the Hungarian nobility, which identified with the country, and to not the rebellious peasants.<sup>13</sup>

Some authors consider that the medals etchings or the medals minted during the first days of the year 1785 had been commissioned by the Hungarian nobility, for propagandistic purposes, to draw the attention of Emperor Joseph II in relation to the danger the peasants’ uprising in Transylvania represented for the integrity of the Empire.

Vitalie Umlauf contends that the meaning of the text on these medals is not at all ironic, but is meant to keep the symbol of Horea alive. This parallelism between “Horia is resting – the country is paying” has either underlying threats or urged for the continuation of the revolt movement. The same author finds it hard to imagine that the nobility, deeply affected by the uprising of 1784-85 and eager to erase from memory the terrors it had gone through during this period, minted symbols and legends in metal, be they ironical for an event they wished had never occurred.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Nicolae Densușianu, *op. cit.*, p. 470.

<sup>14</sup> Vitalie Umlauf, *Revoluția populară din 1784-1785...*, p. 370.

The presence in this fund a medal etching referring to Horea's uprising can also be explained by the fact that the Károlyi family was directly threatened by the influence that the peasants' uprising of 1784-85 had on the serfs on their estate in Satu Mare County.

Due to the severe measures taken by the county authorities, in Satu Mare County there were no overt revolts of the peasantry. However, upon hearing of the peasants' uprising that had gripped the counties in Transylvania and upset by the abusive manner in which they were treated by Count Károlyi Antal's men, the peasants on his domains started, true, tentatively, to voice their grievances. There were a series of complaints, memoranda, secret meetings, delegates that were sent to the higher authorities to draw attention to the peasants' grievances.<sup>15</sup> Such events took place in Ardud, Beltiug, Dobra, Rătești, all located on the estate of Count Károlyi Antal. For this reason, the "Dalton" Division was deployed in the area, entrusted with guarding the region.

From the study of the urbarial documents drawn up for each village in Satu Mare County, the serfs in Ardud had to provide corvée labour 17 days per year with their cattle and 34 with their arms. The census was 1 florin and at Christmas they had to give their master a hen, 12 eggs and 1 fathom of firewood. Cottars had the obligation to perform 12 days of corvée with their arms and the census was 1 florin. Corvée could be redeemed in exchange for 6 florins and 48 kreutzers.<sup>16</sup> The interrogations that the peasants on the estate of Count Károlyi were subjected to after the suppression of the 1784-1785 uprising brought out to light the many abuses that his servants had committed against the peasants and that had prompted the latter to manifest their disgruntlement.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, on 11 December 1784, the serfs in Ardud, Beltiug and Dobra addressed a memorandum to Emperor Joseph II, expressing their grievances against the abuses to which they had been subjected. The memorandum was sent to Vienna through their delegate Ladislau Hittner.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1784, there were also other delegates who left for Vienna on behalf of the peasants on the Károlyi estate: a certain Sziszler and Zabolai István. The latter was imprisoned in the county jail from Carei. Documents from the time, kept in the Satu Mare County Tribunal Fund, the Urbarial Acts series, inform us that in 1784 the village of Dobra alone spent 206 florins and 40 kreutzers,<sup>19</sup> this money being used to pay the journeys of the delegates, the lawyers and the witnesses, in their attempt to prove the abuses to which they had been subjected and improve their life conditions.

<sup>15</sup> Bujor Dulgău, *Din răsunetul răscoalei lui Horea...*, p. 220.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>18</sup> Satu Mare National Archives (hereinafter ANSM), fund *Satu Mare County Tribunal*, series *Urbarial Acts 18th-19th Centuries*, file no. 277, f. 52. The trial of urbarial settlement between Count Anton Károlyi and the residents of Beltiug, debated before the judgment seat of Carei County, and other annexes.

<sup>19</sup> ANSM, fund *Satu Mare County Tribunal*, series *Urbarial Acts 18th-19th Centuries*, file no. 831, f. 74. Check list of documents submitted to the domanial judgment seat held in Beltiug in the Dobra urbarial settlement trial and the documents concerned.

Under the leadership of Andrei Sister and Ioan Zezer, the serfs in Arduș and Belțiuș met several times, discussing the abuses of their masters.

On 23 January 1785, the serfs in Arduș, Belțiuș, Dobra and Rătești addressed to Iohannes Schickmajer a letter showing the abuses committed against them and expressing their dissatisfaction with their work and life conditions.<sup>20</sup>

Worried about the peasants’ manifestations, the Court of Vienna and the Locumtenency Council ordered the county authorities to confiscate weapons from the peasants. They recommended that this should be done peaceably and with much tact, avoiding thus any form through which they could be challenged to an overt uprising.<sup>21</sup>

The peasants’ rebellion in Satu Mare County is referred to also in documents speaking about the inhabitants of Hurezu, who refused to comply with the patent of appeasing the peasants, claiming that its text did not represent the desire of the emperor, but of the nobility. Moreover, there is a decree dating from 3 February 1785 which ordered the capturing and arrest of a certain Mituts Ladislaus, who had incited the peasants in Arduș, Belțiuș and Dobra to revolt.<sup>22</sup>

Also, as the count was, among others,<sup>23</sup> also Comes of Satu Mare County, he became involved in managing the situation in the city of Baia Mare, where the Mint and the Revenue House were located and where the local authorities were panic-stricken at hearing rumours that the rebels were planning to attack the city. Two letters, one from Szentpáli Ladislau, Vice Comes of Middle Solnoc County, and the other from Balog Gergely, substituted Vice Comes of the same county, informed the authorities that the serfs in the counties of Hunedoara, Alba și Zarand had rebelled against the nobility. They also suggested that the rebels intended to enter Satu Mare County to ransack the Revenue House in Baia Mare and the seize arms and munitions which were stored there.<sup>24</sup> On 22 November 1784, the two letters were sent to the magistrate of the city of Baia Mare by the Mining Inspector, who had in turn been informed about them by the county authorities.

Another interesting aspect that suggests the fact that the uprising led by Horea and all the rumours that had reached Satu Mare County were regarded with seriousness by Károlyi Antal is that in 1784-1785, after the outbreak of the peasants’ uprising, renovation and construction works at Károlyi Castle in Carei were stopped, and the family archive was moved to Budapest, so as to be sheltered from any danger posed by the rebels.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, file no. 227, f. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Bujor Dulgău, *Din răsunetul răscdalei lui Horea...*, p. 221.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> The military and political functions of Count Károlyi Antal: royal chamberlain(1754), captain in the Hussar Regiment (1743), infantry colonel of (1755), Knight’s Cross of the Maria Theresa Order (1759), general (1774), court prosecutor (1760), owner of the infantry regiment founded by Count Bethleen Farkas in 1741, royal advisor (1766), *magister tavernicorum* (1775), director of the school district with the centre in Oradea and Ujgorod (1777-1782), field marshal (1787), Knight the Golden Fleece (1790 to 1791).

<sup>24</sup> Bujor Dulgău, “Din răsunetul răscdalei lui Horea în părțile sătmărene,” in *Satu Mare, Studii și comunicări*, VII-VIII, Satu Mare, 1986-1987, p. 219.

<sup>25</sup> Szabó Imre, *A Nagykárolyi gróf Károlyi család ezeráves története*, Palárikovo – Tótmegyer, 2013, p. 90.

Thus, it can be concluded that thanks to the political, military and administrative provisions he occupied in Hungary and Transylvania, Károlyi Antal entailed his receiving a series of informative reports on the events of the uprising, but also the echoes it had in the neighbouring counties, especially in Satu Mare County. This may be a plausible explanation for the fact that the Károlyi family fund includes the etching of a medal concerning Horea's personality.

Interestingly, in the legend of the medals the text is written in the Romanian language, with Latin characters, even though Romanians used Cyrillic letters at that time. There are cases in which some words (e.g. *țara*, country) are written down in a similar manner with the phonetics of Hungarian, where “c” is pronounced “ț” [ts] (*cara*).<sup>26</sup> We may ask the question why language that was used was Romanian and not German or Hungarian. These two languages were used at the Court of Vienna and by the Transylvanian nobility. The political authorities of the Empire or of the province in which the uprising led by Horea occurred were familiar with these languages. We believe that by using the Romanian language, these minted medals could be attributed to the Romanian rebels more easily, attracting thus the Emperor's stronger involvement in the effort to suppress the uprising.

The appellative *Rex Daciae*, attributed to Horea in these medals, conferred upon him the role of the leader of a national movement, with a much greater impact on the political and administrative authorities of the Habsburg Empire. Thus, the nobility frightened by the peasants' upheaval could present to Emperor Joseph II the danger that Horea and the uprising he led posed to the authorities in an altogether different light.

What is certain is that these medals played an important role in popularizing the leaders of the 1784-85 uprising in the Habsburg Empire and across its borders. Many of these medals remained in the stage of etchings, drawings or designs, some of them having a remarkable artistic and documentary value.

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<sup>26</sup> See the description in the work of Clément W. de Renesse-Breidbac, *Mes loisirs, amusemens numismatiques...*



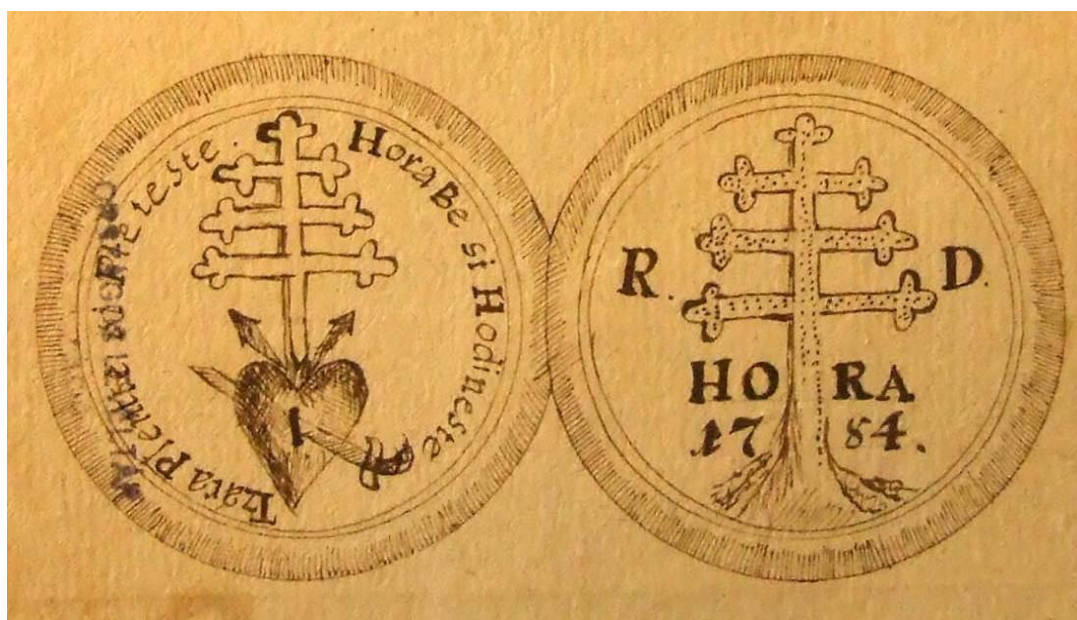


Fig. 1 – Sketch of Horea’s Medal from the Károlyi Family Fund, the National Archives of Hungary, Budapest