

JACOB SVETOSLAV'S COINS – A MYSTERY FROM THE 13TH CENTURY

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Abstract: Jacob Svetoslav is one of the most enigmatic persons in the Bulgarian history. He rules a large possession to the Danube River, in the border with Hungary, the Banat of Severin and the area of Oltenia. Svetoslav is a pretender from the Bulgarian throne and the brightest proofs from that are the coins, which he mints. Known at the moment specimens are around twenty single copper hollow coins, eleven of which are discovered in Romania, and one collective find. Scientists classify them in two types in dependence of the image. No one of the Jacob Svetoslav's coins is discovered in his possession in the nord-west Bulgarian lands. This mystery no has his explanations for long time. Explanation is in the response of the question when despot Jacob Svetoslav makes his coins. His coinage must to be placed in the time when he is a claim from the Bulgarian throne. Pictures on the coins present that they are made in 1275. On them Jacob Svetoslav is presented with the despot title, but the same fact that he produce coins presents him as an independent ruler.

Key-words: Late Middle-Ages; medieval coins; Bulgarian kingdom; Oltenia; Hungary.

Jacob Svetoslav's name with the title "Bulgarian despot" appears for first time in his letter to the Russian bishop Cyril III (1242-1281) from 1261¹. It is assumed that he is among the Russian princes who were leaving their homes during the Tatar invasions. Probably Jacob Svetoslav comes in Bulgaria to the end of the Ivan Asen II's reign (1218-1241) and rapidly become a part of the Bulgarian aristocracy. In 1261 he got married to one of the Nicean ruler John IV Laskaris' sisters, named Eudokia². She is a granddaughter of Ivan Asen II and his second wife, the Hungarian princess Anna Arpad. Her greatest sister is wife of the Bulgarian king Konstantin Tih (1257-1277). Later Jacob Svetoslav's intermarry with the Asen family will make him pretender of the throne, and his connection with the Hungarian royal dynasty will determine his key role in the relations between Hungary and Bulgaria.

From 1263 the despot is patronized by the Hungarian king Bela IV (1235-1270), without being dependent of him. In 1264 comes a civil war in Hungary. Jacob Svetoslav brings the Bulgarian king Konstantin Tih. He is direct interest from the situation in Hungary. He rules the lands to the Danube River in nord, including the region of Vidin. In south his possession stretches near the border with Byzantium and may include the lands around Pirot, Tran and Niš (today in Serbia), and probably Sofia. In west his possessions extends to the region Kučevo. Eastern border probably pass in west of Oryahovo. His residence is not known, but it can be assumed that it were Vidin³. Probably later the territorial domain of the Svetoslav's possession changes, while its centre removes at east. Despot has a large possession in the border with Hungary. In the neighbor waterside of the Danube River is located the Banat of Severin, covering the area of Oltenia, today in Romania. Around 1264 this region is a domain of Stephan V (1246-1272), successor to the throne and future king of Hungary. There are suggestions that during his campaign in the Banat of Severin in 1264 Jacob Svetoslav conquers briefly a part of Oltenia.

In 1266 Stephan organizes a march against Jakob Svetoslav⁴ and captures the towns Pleven, Vidin and Oryahovo⁵. In the next years the despot is dependent on Hungary, but he separates from the Bulgarian kingdom. Most likely the reason for this is the marriage of Konstantin Tih with the Byzantine princes Maria in 1268. After the Irina's death the king is no longer connected with the

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¹ Ангелов, 1967, p. 143; Ников, 1920, p. 115.

² Pachymeres, 1980, p. 152.

³ Ников, 1920, pp. 178-182; Ников, 1930, p. 140; Мутафчиев, 1986, p. 303.

⁴ Ников, 1920, p. 203, № 21.

⁵ Ников, 1920, p. 205, № 25, p. 206, № 27, p. 208, № 29.

Asen family. Svetoslav thinks that he has more rights on the throne in comparison with Konstantin. Apparently then he displays his pretension from the throne and he declared him-self as independent ruler. The brightest proofs from the Jacob Svetoslav's claims from the Bulgarian throne are the coins.

Known at the moment specimens are around twenty single copper hollow coins (*stamini*)⁶, discovered by one piece in Popovo, Novakovo near Varna, Targovishte, Shumen, Provadia, Vetren, Tutrakan, as well at excavations in the Tsarevets hill in Tarnovo (four pieces) and archaeological researches in Silistra (twice at four pieces)⁷. A lot of them – eight pieces – are found in the archaeological excavations in the castle Vicina in Romania. Very interest is the one at the moment collective find with Jacob Svetoslav's coin from Ruse, containing thirty one coins, twenty seven on which of the despot and four of the Bulgarian king Konstantin Tih⁸. Jacob Svetoslav's coins are with crude and primitive style. Some inscriptions in the reverse are in negative or a part of the letters are turned. Matrixes are made from men without experience in the coinage. These coins are found rarely and this indicates that they are made in limited number for short time. The rough production of the coins suggests that they were produced into the Svetoslav's possessions.

In dependence of the image scientist classify them in several types. According the most scientists Jacob Svetoslav's coins are two groups⁹. In the first covers coins with diameter from twenty to twenty five millimetres and weigh around two grams. On the averse is portrayed a bust of St. Demeter with aureole, body armour and mantle, his hands are placed for pray. In the reverse is represented Jacob Svetoslav with stemma, diviticia and loros. In the right hand he holds a sword, with the left he supports on a shield. The second type coins are too with diameter from twenty to twenty five millimetres, but his weigh is from two to two and seven grams. On the reverse is presented the despot with the same dress and pose. On the averse is portrayed again St. Demeter but full-length, with aureole, tunic, mantle and body armour. Inscriptions on the two types are similar¹⁰. Between the coins in each group they are some differences. For that reason some scientists suppose that the Jacob Svetoslav's coins are in fact four types¹¹.

In the representation of Jacob Svetoslav there is a specialty. The stemma is without the typical pearl pendants and in the first publications it is considered for a helmet. On some of the Jacob Svetoslav's coins he holds a pearl collar. Despot is borrowed the iconography from Bulgaria and Byzantium, but he not copies it completely. On one coin from Tsarevets and one from Ruse there are marks of reprint. The saved letters indicate that these copies are printed on Konstantin's coins¹².

Important speciality of the Jacob Svetoslav's coins is that no one of them is discovered in his possession in the Nord-West Bulgarian lands. This mystery no has his explanations for long time. It is one of the reasons for Petre Diaconu¹³ to support that the coins belong of the Bulgarian king Theodor Svetoslav, but they are made in the period before he borrow the throne.

Explanation to this strange is in the response of another question – when despot Jacob Svetoslav makes his coins? According some researchers Svetoslav's coinage were in the period 1264-1266 – in the time from the attack on the Banat of Severin to the Stephan's march¹⁴. More likely his coins have to be related to the time after 1272. The collective find from Ruse confirms the later data. Availability of four Konstantin's coins shows that the coinages of the two persons are synchronous. Weight of the Jacob Svetoslav's coins is the same as these which the king cuts in the beginning of his government. It is close to the weight of the coins of all the more legitimate rulers

⁶ Дочев, 1980, р. 3, р. 7, № 5; Дочев, 1992, р. 79; Павлов, 2000, р. 171.

⁷ Пенчев, 2005, pp. 417-423; Пенчев, 2010, pp. 102-105.

⁸ Пенчев, 1999, pp. 89-102.

⁹ Дочев, 1992, pp. 79-81.

¹⁰ Мушков, 1924, р. 90; Герасимов, 1936, pp. 245-249; Маргос, 1968, р. 225; Пенчев, 1985, р. 22; Дочев, 1992, р. 80.

¹¹ Авдев, 2007, pp. 77-84.

¹² Дочев, 1992, р. 7; Пенчев, 1999, р. 93.

¹³ Diaconu, 1995, pp. 242-256.

¹⁴ Сотиров, 2006, pp. 215-238.

from 12th-13th centuries¹⁵. Consequently, Jacob Svetoslav's coinage must to be placed in the time when he is a claim from the Bulgarian throne. Pictures on the coins present that they are made in 1275. On them Jacob Svetoslav is presented with the despot title, but the same fact that he produces coins presents him as an independent ruler. St. Demeter's image is a mark of his ambitions from the throne – the saint is the patron of the Asen family. Explanation from the lower title is in the negotiations, which he leads in the same time.

All known despot's coins are discovered near Tarnovo. The sources give contradictory information from the territory governed by Svetoslav. It is likely to assumption that his coins are made not in Vidin, but in the castle Tsherven, near Ruse¹⁶. But do not forget that at the moment in the excavations in Tsherven there are not found Jacob Svetoslav's coins.

It is impressive that Svetoslav not separates in the time when Konstantin is married with Irina. He not contests the king's legitimacy. Jacob Svetoslav detaches not from Konstantin's kingdom, but from this of the Konstantin's son. Instead of going to war, Svetoslav draw closer to the regency. Sources display that the initiative comes from Queen Maria. Despot goes in Tarnovo, where between him and the king's family starts negotiations. In the same time he begins to make coins.

In result of the revisions Jacob Svetoslav is adopted by Queen Maria, but as her second son, who can not to contest the throne of her own child Michael. From Jacob Svetoslav the queen's purpose is clear. He agrees to protect the crown prince's rights, but this position will secure him influence in Tarnovo. In this time Hungary reduce more and more. Maria suggests to Svetoslav participation in the government and this is enough to him at the moment¹⁷. Despite of the successful negotiations queen Maria still thinks Jacob Svetoslav for a threat. As we understand from the Georgius Pachymeres's chronicle¹⁸, after the end of the negotiations Jacob Svetoslav returns in his land and soon he dies. Writer alludes that the despot were poisoned by order of Maria. The exact data is not known, but evidently he is killed in 1275 or 1276. Maria eliminates Jacob Svetoslav, but she not makes the grade to secure the throne for her son. Michael never is an independent king in Tarnovo.

In this way finishes the life of one of the most enigmatic persons in the Bulgarian history – a man with adventure spirit, power and ambitions, which bring him to a tragic death. His government is still connected to a series of mysteries. May be future archaeological investigations and newfound coins will throw a light on the Jacob Svetoslav's life.

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¹⁵ Авдев, 2005, pp. 30-33.

¹⁶ Пенчев, 1999, pp. 92-93.

¹⁷ Ников, 1920, pp. 186-189.

¹⁸ Pachymeres, 1980, p. 171, p. 173.

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