

A FRAGMENT OF A MEDIEVAL WALLACHIAN COIN HOARD FOUND AT AMĂRĂȘTII DE JOS, DOLJ COUNTY

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Rezumat: Scopul acestui articol este de a introduce în literatura de specialitate numismatică un fragment de tezaur descoperit la începutul secolului al XX-lea, cuprinzând emisiuni de la Mircea cel Bătrân și Mihail. Menționat în câteva studii de specialitate dedicate monetăriei lui Mircea cel Bătrân, tezaurul nu a fost publicat în întregime și nu a fost integrat, prin urmare, în cadrul unei analize extinse a teaurizării în perioada 1418-1420. Deși tezaurul păstrat în prezent este constituit din doar șase ducați muntenești, acesta este reprezentativ pentru circulația monetară și pentru fenomenul teaurizării din timpul domniei tumultuoase a lui Mihail I, reflectată în plan numismatic prin descoperirea câtorva tezaure semnificative pentru cercetarea monetăriei muntenești, concentrate din punct de vedere geografic în vestul Țării Românești. Deosebită este, de asemenea, și prezența a două monede emise de Mircea cel Bătrân în asociere cu misteriosul personaj Petrusian/Petruslan/Petrustan/Radustan, al cărui nume scris cu caractere neobișnuite pentru monetăria Țării Românești a determinat emiterea unor variate ipoteze privind identitatea sa.

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to introduce into the numismatic scientific literature a fragment of a coin hoard found at the beginning of the twentieth century. The hoard contain coins struck in the name of the Wallachian Princes Mircea the Elder and Michael I. The hoard has been shortly mentioned before in some studies dedicated to the coinage of Mircea the Elder. However, the treasure was not fully published and was not integrated in an extensive analysis of the hoarding phenomenon during the years 1418-1420. Although the hoard comprises only six Wallachian ducats, it is representative for the monetary circulation and for the hoarding phenomenon from the tumultuous reign of Michael I, which is reflected in the numismatic landscape through the finding of some quite significant coin hoards for the research of the Wallachian coinage. It is important to mention that the hoards which were hidden between the years 1418-1420, are concentrated from the geographic point of view in the Eastern area of Wallachia. Meaningful for this study is also the presence of two coins issued by Mircea the Elder in association with the mysterious character called Petrusian/Petruslan/Petrustan/Radustan. His name, which is written with a series of unusual letters for the Wallachian coinage has lead to the existence of various hypothesis regarding the identity of this unknown personage.

Cuvinte-cheie: Țara Românească, tezaur monetar, ducat, Mircea cel Bătrân, Mihail I.

Key-words: Wallachia, coin hoard, ducat, Mircea the Elder, Michael I.

The main purpose of this study is to present the coins that constitute the small hoard which was found at Amărăștii de Jos, Dolj county in 1938. The hoard is mentioned in all the studies that treat topics like the coin finds from Oltenia or late coinage of Mircea the Elder. Therefore, I find that a proper presentation of these coins is very important and useful, in order to have a clearer image about the numismatic landscape of Oltenia, which present some specific features.

The paper is structured in three parts: the first one focuses on the history of the hoard and on how it was presented in the numismatic literature during the years, the second part is dedicated to the presentation of the coins preserved at the present moment in the hoard, along with the catalogue of the pieces, while the last part contains a discussion about the hoarding phenomenon during the reign of Michael I.

The history of the coin hoard

The coin hoard found at Amărăștii de Jos was frequently mentioned in the studies which dealt with the reformed coinage of Mircea the Elder, as an important numismatic evidence for the monetary circulation in the western part of Oltenia. Although the hoard seems to have been found in 1938, it is brought in the public attention for the first time in 1965, during the Medieval Romanian Numismatics

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Symposium, when Octavian Iliescu holds a lecture about five hoards containing coins with the representation of the prince: Constanța/1938, Gura Șuții/1937, Amărăștii de Jos/1938, Turnu Severin/1930 and Orșova/1878¹. Taking the sketchy information about the hoard of Amărăștii de Jos, published as a summary of his lecture by Octavian Iliescu, the treasure is also mentioned by Gheorghe Popilian², Toma Rădulescu³ and Adina Berciu-Drăghiceanu and Dinică Ciubotea⁴. In all these papers the hoard is presented as being constituted from seven coins, amongst which four of them being issues of Mircea the Elder, while three coins are struck in the name of Michael I. It is important to mention that in 1987, Constanța Știrbu and Paraschiva Stancu indicating that at the beginning the hoard was made of seven coins, they notice that at the present moment in the collection of the National History Museum of Romania only a number of six coins are preserved, three issues of Mircea the Elder and three issues of Michael I (inventory numbers 7158-7163)⁵. Unfortunately, in the absence of a publication with full descriptions of the monetary pieces, at the present moment it is almost impossible to identify the seventh coin, that seems to be lost.

The history of the hoard from Amărăștii de Jos is quite troubled. The fragment kept in the numismatic collection of the National History Museum of Romania was initially part of the collections of the National Museum of Antiquities. In 1956 the National Museum of Antiquities became the Institute of Archaeology, the newly research institution having in care all the archaeological goods that constituted the heritage collection of the museum. However, with the establishment of the National History Museum of Romania at the beginning of the seventies, some consistent part of the coins and archaeological pieces were transferred in order to prepare the permanent exhibitions of the museum and to enrich its collections. Among the many coins which were part of the National Museum of Antiquities collections and that are now preserved in the National History Museum of Romania Coin Room, was also transferred the Amărăști hoard. It is important to mention that according to the reports signed at the moment of the handing out of the pieces the hoard consisted of only six coins, being impossible to mention if the seventh coin issued by Mircea the Elder and mentioned by Octavian Iliescu in 1965 truly existed and was lost.

Concerning the context of the finding, due to the scattering of the National Museum of the Antiquities archives I didn't have the chance to identify the documents based on which the coins were introduced in the museum collections. According to the information found in the transfer documents the coins were identified as Amărăștii de Jos hoard and thanks to the short description of the hoard made by Octavian Iliescu it is known the year when the hoard was found. However, with all this sketchy information preserved about this treasure it can be stated the fact that these coins represent only a fragment of a larger hoard. It should be taken into consideration that all the hoards that contain issues that bear the name of Michael are constituted of hundreds of pieces. Another argument that makes me believe that the number of the coins from the Amărăștii de Jos hoard was much more significant is the variety of the coins which we have at our disposal now, one of the coins being a issue from Mircea the Elder from the Târgoviște mint, two of the coins being issued in the Severin mint, while the rest of three coins were minted at Severin by Michael, the son of Mircea the Elder.

Amărăștii de Jos hoard composition

Having in mind the structure of the hoards found in Oltenia and that were hidden during the years 1419-1420, the six coins that constitute at the present moment the so-called hoard from Amărăștii de Jos are a quite homogenous group. The preservation state of the coins shows that the pieces were circulated for a long period of time, many of the details of the legend and of the iconography being impossible to render. In the case of the coins issued by Michael I, there should also

¹ Iliescu, 1965a, p. 1062; Iliescu, 1965b, p. 272.

² Popilian, 1968, pp. 1-20.

³ Rădulescu, 1981, p. 92.

⁴ Berciu-Drăghiceanu, Ciubotea, 1981, p. 27/1; Berciu-Drăghiceanu, Ciubotea, 1987, p. 79/1.

⁵ Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, p. 108/2.

be taken into consideration the fact that they are struck in a carelessly manner, which make difficult the identification of the marks. The first coin of the group and the earliest issue is minted in the name of Mircea the Elder and presents all the elements that indicate the fact that the coin was struck in the mint from Târgoviște, such as the royal mantle and the carefully drawn iconography⁶, particularly visible on the reverse, where the feathering of the eagle and the shapes of the crest and of the shield are skillfully defined. Outstanding is the presence of the *tau* mark in the second field of the shield, a mark which due to the degradation of the engraving quality of the dies will evolve in the form of a sign that looks like the Greek or Cyrillic letter *pi* - π ⁷, as on the reverse of the third coin. Due to the existence of coins MBR 205a and MBR 205b, which present the shield with *tau* letter in the second field overstruck on some ducats marked with a five star rays in the second field of the shield, we can deduce now that this coin is a later issues of type IV⁸ struck in the Târgoviște mint⁹.

There are to be noted the two coins which have visible on the reverse some parts of the debatable legends transliterated by some researchers in the form of: Petrusian¹⁰/ Petruslan¹¹ / Petrustan¹² / Radustan¹³. Numerous arguments were brought in order to sustain the reading of the legend found on the reverse of the coin. It is important to underline that the approaches of the numismatists were oriented to the identification of this mysterious character. This is understandable considering the fact that the identity of this character will bring a completely new perspective on the reign of Mircea the Elder, by filling an uncovered area by the written sources. However, in the attempt to give a name to this eventual associate of the reigning prince, the numismatists skipped the numismatic method and they didn't analyze carefully the letters of the legends, most probably due to the fact that no one had a significant number of coins at his disposal¹⁴. This might be one of the reasons why the opinions about the language of the legend are not unitary, some of them considering that for the legend were used Latin characters, despite the fact that the obverse legend is rendered with Cyrillic characters, while some of the historians consider that for the reverse legend were used Cyrillic characters. In anticipation of some easily readable coins, a proper approach would consist in the analysis of each letter of the reverse legend of a considerable number of coins. Regarding the two coins from Amărăștii de Jos hoard, at first appearance it seems that the letter A it is for sure a Cyrillic character *az*, while the shape of the letter Ć is similar with the ones found at the end of the obvers and reverse legends of the coins issued by Michael I. Considering the last observation, the hypothesis advanced by Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu according to which some of the issues of Michael I were struck during the last years of the reign of Mircea the Elder¹⁵ is getting stronger. His assumption was inspired by the observation of the marks found on the reverse of the coins of Michael which were the same with the marks identified for the coins struck for Mircea the Elder in the Severin mint, as can be seen in the illustrations for the reverses of the coin number three and for the coin number five, which present the mark π in the first field of the shield.

⁶ Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2010, p. 258.

⁷ Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2008, p. 393.

⁸ In this study I use the clasification proposed by Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu in the annotations of the book *Monetele lui Mircea cel Bătrân*, written by Octavian Iliescu, of which he is editor. See the footnote number 40 from Iliescu, 2008, pp. 130-131.

⁹ Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2008, p. 392.

¹⁰ Iliescu, 1970, p. 23. Later Iliescu reconsider this hypothesis and suggests that at the present moment we do not have enough data in order to sustain a realistic assumption.

¹¹ Moisil, 1913, p. 47.

¹² Sfîngă, 1994, pp. 7-9; Șeptilici, 2017, pp. 340-343.

¹³ Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2008, p. 394.

¹⁴ The hoards that contain coins bearing the name of Petrusian/Petrustan/Petruslan/Radustan are scattered in different collections: National History Museum of Romania, Museum of the Iron Gate Region, Museum of Oltenia.

¹⁵ Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2008, pp. 394-395.

1. Wallachia, ducat, Mircea the Elder, cca. 1410-1418

AR; 0.45 g; ←; 13.45 x 14.30 mm

Ob. IGĐ[...] Б[...]B

Rv. [...]GĐMI [...]VAB

Metal composition analysis¹⁶: Ag – 96.66%; Cu – 2.2%; Au – 0.28; Pb – 0.57%.

Catalogue reference: MBR 205 var.; Iliescu 2008 secțiunea II, clasa B, seria III; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2012 VIII.54.

Inv. no. 7160

2. Wallachia, ducat, Mircea the Elder and Petrusian/Petruslan/Petrustan/Radustan, cca. 1416-1418

AR; 0.43 g; ↘; 13.85 x 15.95 mm

Ob. IGĐMP VABO

Rv. PCCT USIAN

Metal composition analysis: Ag – 94.16%; Cu – 4%; Zn – 0.36%; Au – 0.35%; Pb – 0.9%.

Catalogue reference: MBR 208; Iliescu 2008 secțiunea II, clasa B, Grupa II - seria II; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2012 IX.1.

Inv. no. 7162

3. Wallachia, ducat, Mircea the Elder and Petrusian/Petruslan/Petrustan/Radustan, cca. 1416-1418

AR; 0.40 g; ↓; 14.15 x 15.10 mm

Ob. IGĐ[...] V[...]

Rv. PCT USIAN

Metal composition analysis: Ag – 87.43%; Cu – 11.34%; Au – 0.3; Pb – 0.44%.

Catalogue reference: MBR 214-215; Iliescu 2008 secțiunea II, clasa B, Grupa II - seria V; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2012 IX.5.

Inv. no. 7158

4. Wallachia, ducat, Michael I, 1418-1420

AR; 0.39 g; →; 13.95 x 14.80 mm

Ob. [...]X ΛBOC

Rv. IGĐ[...]X [...]OC

Metal composition analysis: Ag – 82.14%; Cu – 15.51%; Zn – 0.15%; Au – 0.25%; Pb – 1.69%.

Catalogue reference: MBR 223-227; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2013 XII.3-6.

Inv. no. 7163

5. Wallachia, ducat, Michael I, 1418-1420

AR; 0.31 g; ↖; 14 x 14.60 mm

Ob. IGĐMX Λ[...]

Rv. [...] IΛBOC

Metal composition analysis: Ag – 82.64%; Cu – 16.32%; Zn – 0.18%; Au – 0.19%; Pb – 0.98%.

Catalogue reference: MBR 226; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2013 XII.6.

Inv. no. 7161

6. Wallachia, ducat, Michael I, 1418-1420

AR, 0.28 g; ↙; 13.50 x 15.05 mm

Ob. IGĐ[...]X [...]OC

Rv. IGĐMX ΛBOC

Metal composition analysis: Ag – 81.16%; Cu – 15.86; Zn – 0.3%; Au – 0.33%; Pb – 1.37%.

Catalogue reference: MBR 223-227; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2013 XII.3-6.

Inv. no. 7159

¹⁶ The coins were analysed through the XRF technique, using a portable spectrometer Innov-X Systems Alpha Series, with W anticathode tube; SiPIN diode; Peltier cooling effect; work parameters 40 kV tension, 35 μA intensity, acquisition time 120”.

The hoarding phenomenon during the reign of Michael I

As it is known, the reign of Mircea the Elder has offered to the Romanian numismatics the richest monetary material, according to the literature being known more than 50 hoards that contain coins struck by Mircea the Elder and which cover the entire territory of Wallachia.

The analysis of the structure of the hoards as well as of the spread of the monetary finds, give us the opportunity to identify some hoarding horizons that are quite homogenous and coherent. Concerning the structure of the Amărăștii de Jos hoard, the specific feature of the group that allow the framing of the hoard is the presence of the coins struck in the name of Michael I. Therefore, the hoards that contain ducats issued by Michael I and that have been published and that could be associated with the small coin group that makes the topic of this present study are: Basarabi hoard/1963, Bâzdâna hoard/1969, Dudașu-Schelei hoard/1983, Hălânga hoard/1960, Jiana II hoard/1981 and Orșova hoard/1877.

The Basarabi hoard/1963 contains at the present moment a number of 536 Wallachian ducats among which¹⁷: 18 ducats are issues of Mircea the Elder as sole ruler, 433 being issued by Mircea the Elder and the mysterious personage Petrus / Petrusian / Petruslan / Petrutan / Radustan, while 85 of the coins are struck in the name of Michael I, 64 of these coins presenting no mark whilst 19 coins present the same mark as the coins with the numbers 3 and 5 from the Amărăștii de Jos hoard.

The hoard found at Bâzdâna, Dolj county, was unfortunately fragmentarily recovered¹⁸, but still the group of 52 coins is illustrative for this hoarding phenomenon that can be observed in the western part of Oltenia. In terms of the distributions of the coins, the group include: 21 ducats of the first reformed type issued by Mircea the Elder, type which present on the obverse the figure of Christ Pantocrator and on the reverse the representation of the prince holding a sword in his right hand, two ducats of the type IV issued in the Târgoviște mint, 26 coins issued in association with Petrus / Petrusian / Petruslan / Petrutan / Radustan, one ban with the letters P-C and two ducats issued by Michael I.

Probably one of the most remarkable medieval coin and jewelry hoards found on the Romanian territory is the one found at Dudașu Schelei, a treasure which was found in several stages. Although it seems to be incomplete, among the 458 coins that represents the main corpus of the hoard are preserved 59 wallachian issues: 50 issued from Mircea the Elder (one of type I, seven of type IV, 40 coins with the name of Petrus / Petrusian / Petruslan / Petrutan / Radustan and two ban) and 9 coins from Michael I¹⁹.

The hoard found at Hălânga in 1960 and that is often confused in the numismatic literature with the hoard Turnu Severin IV²⁰ due to the fact that the hoard was never completely studied, is comprised of a number of 90 coins struck by Mircea the Elder (71 coins of the first reformed type, one ducat of type IV and 18 ducats with the name of Petrus / Petrusian / Petruslan / Petrutan / Radustan on the reverse) and 9 ducats struck by Michael I. Another important hoard is the second treasure found at Jiana in 1981, containing a number of 210 ducats from Mircea (eight coins of type IV and 202 coins with the name of Petrus / Petrusian / Petruslan / Petrutan / Radustan on the reverse) and five ducats bearing the name of Michael I²¹.

The last hoard, about which unfortunately we don't have accurate information about was found in 1877 in Orșova, a significant part being saved due to the collector Ignác Dobóczy. The hoard is now preserved in the numismatic collections of the Hungarian National Museum from Budapest. According to the archives the hoard was comprised at the moment of the discovery of over 1000 coins, alongside the coins issued by Mircea the Elder being found also issues from Michael I and from the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxemburg²².

¹⁷ Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, p. 108/5; Rădulescu, 1990-1995, pp. 190-209.

¹⁸ Rădulescu, 1981, pp. 89-91; Rădulescu, 1984-1986, pp. 61-64; Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, pp. 108-109/7.

¹⁹ Stîngă, 2002, pp. 61-63; Rădulescu, Turturică, 1984, p. 71; Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, p. 114/52; Ciobotea *et al.*, 1985, pp. 65-69.

²⁰ Stîngă, 2002, pp. 45-48; Rădulescu, 1981, p. 93; Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, p. 111/25 IV; correction made by Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 2011, p. 76.

²¹ Stîngă, 1985, p. 146/6; Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, p. 111/27 II; Stîngă, Bălăceanu, 1994, pp. 20-25; Stîngă, 2002, pp. 52-60.

²² Réthy, 1887, pp. 310-319; Berkeszi, 1907, p. 104; Moisil, 1924, pp. 40-41; Știrbu, Stancu, 1987, p. 113/42.

From a geographic point of view all the six hoards which I shortly presented and the hoard from Amărăștii de Jos are concentrated in the area of Dolj and Mehedinți counties, proving the intense economic activities which characterized this area during the first decades of the fifteenth century. The similarities of structure identified for these hoards is a mark that indicates the fact that we deal with samples of the monetary circulation from this specific period, all these hoards being buried in a short period of time, due to some unexpected events. On account of the presence of the Michael I coins, the chronological circumscription for the moment when the treasures were hidden should be 1419-1420, although it seems that coins struck by Michael I as sole ruler were minted before 1418, during the reign of Mircea the Elder. The emergence of this hoarding horizon must be connected with the pressure put by Sigismund of Luxemburg on Michael I in his struggle to regain the Banate of Severin and by the series of ottoman attacks that took the shape of robbery campaigns lead by the ottoman *bey*s which started in 1419²³. The instability of this area is illustrated by the facts that near march 1419 Michael I lost the control over Severin, control which he regained at the end of the year 1419 and lost again in May 1420²⁴. The Banate of Severin was the first point attacked in 1420, when Michael I disappears, being certainly killed in battle, while the Ottomans helped Radu Praznaglava to accede to the Wallachian throne²⁵.

Conclusions

The publishing of this hoard completes, in the first place, the series of hoards that were found in Oltenia, allowing the possibility to study the monetary circulation and the hoarding phenomenon during the first decades of the fifteenth century.

Although the six coins known as Amărăștii de Jos hoard depict, with certainty, only a small fragment of a larger hoard, these are a group of coins representative for the treasures hidden between the end of the year 1419 and 1420. Therefore, on the one hand, the hoard is illustrative for the monetary circulation from the end of the reign of Mircea the Elder and from the reign of Michael I, proving the fact that the coins issued by Mircea were still intensely used, representing the main monetary mass even after his death, most probably due to the better quality of the coins (a slightly higher weight and high purity of the silver as well). On the other hand, as numismatic evidence that can illustrate the occurrence of different historical events in the form of hoarding phenomenon, Amărăștii de Jos treasure can be assigned in the group of hoards hidden between 1419-1420 as a reaction to the Ottoman attacks that took place in this period of time.

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²³ Tahsin, 2009, pp. 141-142.

²⁴ Zoltan, 2016, p. 387.

²⁵ Tahsin, 2009, pp. 142-143.

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Abbreviations

AB – Analele Banatului

AE – Archaeologiai Értésítő a Magyar régészeti, művészettörténeti és éremtani társulat tudományos folyóirata. Budapest.

AO – Arhivele Olteniei

AUC-SFSI – Analele Universității Craiova – Seria Filosofie, Sociologie, Istorie.

BSNR – Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române.

CN – Cercetări Numismatice

MN – Muzeul Național

OSCAIE – Oltenia. Studii și comunicări. Arheologie, Istorie, Etnografie.

RRH – Revue Roumaine d’Histoire

RM – Revista Muzeelor

