

THE DIVISIONARY COINAGE OF MIRCEA THE ELDER WITHIN THE MARIA AND DR. GEORGE SEVEREANU COLLECTION

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Abstract: *The author presents a lot of six divisionary Wallachian coins issued under Mircea the Elder (1386-1418) from the Maria and Dr. George Severeanu Collection. After organizing the numismatic material according to the marks on the obverse, five groups resulted, adding novel information for a better understanding of the coins issued by Mircea the Elder. Thus, this lot of divisionary coins from the Maria and Dr. George Severeanu Collection has a significant contribution to our insight into this monetary species otherwise insufficiently treated in the literature. The catalogue and the illustration complete the article.*

Rezumat: *Autoarea prezintă un lot format din șase monede divizionare ale Țării Românești, bătute în timpul domniei lui Mircea cel Bătrân (1386-1418), din cadrul colecției „Maria și dr. George Severeanu”. În urma organizării materialului numismatic în funcție de mărcile aflate pe aversul pieselor au rezultat cinci grupe de emisiuni care aduc noutăți importante în vederea unei mai bune cunoașteri a banilor bătuți de Mircea cel Bătrân. Prin urmare lotul de emisiuni divizionare din cadrul colecției „Maria și dr. George Severeanu” are un aport semnificativ la cunoașterea acestei specii monetare aparținând domnitorului, insuficient valorificată în cadrul literaturii de specialitate. Catalogul materialului numismatic și ilustrația completează structura articolului de față.*

Mircea the Elder's divisionary coin, the *ban*, has a special place within the ruler's mint, having been found in monetary discoveries and also mentioned in the commercial treaties of his time. Thus, the commercial privilege offered by Mircea the Elder to the merchants of Brașov in 1413 mentions the *ban*, the name under which the silver denarius of the Bans of Slavonia had circulated in Transylvania and Wallachia. The text indicates that two silver denominations were issued during Mircea's reign: the ducat and its divisionary coin, the *ban*, the equivalent of a Hungarian obol¹. As to the origin of the term *ban*, the numismatic literature proposed two hypotheses. The first associates its origin with the coins of the Bans of Severin, from where the term would

* The Numismatics and Medals Cabinet, Bucharest Municipality Museum.

¹ Moisil 1926, p. 129.

have spread to the other Romanian territories². The second one ascribes its origin to the issues of the Banat of Slavonia³.

Within the Maria and Dr. George Severeanu Collection, comprising a valuable lot of medieval Wallachian coins, six such issues from the reign of Mircea the Elder are kept. The heraldic representations on the *bani* issued by Mircea display an inclined halved shield with a Wallachian eagle on top. The reverse displays a cross with arms of equal length and with various marks in the quarters. On the coins we studied, various marks are noticeable both in front and behind the eagle. After organizing the material based on the marks on the obverse, five groups resulted:

- **Group I:** The mint mark **Å** in front of the eagle and a cross made from four globules behind it, on the obverse – the mint mark **M** in one of the cross' quarters and a ten-ray star in each of the remaining three quarters (no. 1);

- **Group II:** The mint mark **G** in front of the eagle on the obverse - six-ray stars in the cross' quarters on the reverse (no. 2);

- **Group III:** A five-ray star in the shield's first quarter and three dots in front of the eagle on the obverse – three dots in the cross' quarters on the reverse (no. 3);

- **Group IV:** Three dots in front of the eagle on the obverse - three dots in the cross' quarters on the reverse (no. 4);

- **Group V:** No mint mark on the obverse – flower with three petals in the cross' quarters on the reverse (nos. 5-6).

Within the best known medieval Romanian coin catalogue, *MBR*⁴, the presentation of the coins issued under Mircea the Elder is incomplete as it only mentions one variant, the one with the mint mark **Å**; the authors ignoring the existence of several coins published prior to 1977⁵ in their work.

Analyses on their metal composition had a significant contribution to the classification of coins attributed to Mircea the Elder. Based on the analysis of some of the coins, which have a silver title of over 90%, they were placed during the second stage of his reign, alongside the effigy-type ducats⁶. This theory is also supported by Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu who proposes reducing the time span of their issuing to the period between 1410 and 1418, based on the analysis of several hoards and the moment they would have been hidden⁷. Discussions on Mircea the Elder's divisionary coins have resumed in recent years in an attempt to offer a better systematization of this monetary species⁸.

The shield's position on the ban's obverse, depicted inclined as on the reformed ducats with the effigy on the obverse and the shield on the reverse, supports the

² Severeanu 1915, p. 116.

³ Moisil 1938, p. 103.

⁴ Buzdugan *et alii* 1977.

⁵ Iliescu 1956, p. 307, tipul nr. II, seriile I-IV.

⁶ Știrbu, Stancu 1982, p. 66. Știrbu, Stancu 1987, p. 102.

⁷ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2008, p. 138-140, notele 56-58.

⁸ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2010, p. 268-269. Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2012, p. 57, 61-62, 64.

hypothesis that the divisionary issues chronologically correspond with the period in which the fore mentioned type was struck.

The specimens within the Maria and Dr. George Severeanu Collection are in a very good preservation state compared to the ducats from the first part of Mircea's reign; and the remarks regarding the high percentage of precious metal in the alloy of such coins also apply to the coins within the Collection.

One coin clearly stands-out among the six ones we've studied, belonging to the first group and distinguished by a very good preservation state and the presence of issuing marks both on the obverse and the reverse. It was published by Octavian Iliescu in 1958 in an extended study on the monetary issues of Wallachia⁹ where it was presented in detail and with illustration but without any comments. Considering that all these elements (the marks on the obverse and the reverse, the marks in the quarters) and the presence of the mark **M**, which could represent the Prince's abbreviated name, obviously differentiate the coin in question from the rest of Mircea's coinage, we placed this group at the beginning.

Another coin with issuing marks on both sides corresponds to Group II and is characterized by the presence of the mark **G** in front of the eagle on the obverse. On its reverse a six-ray star appears in the cross' quarters. The mark **G** also appears on another series of divisionary coins dating to the Prince's associate reign with the so-called *Petrus*, *Petrusian* or *Radu Stan*. However, this type has a different die model, with a cross on top of a shield flanked with the mark **P** on the left and **C** on the right¹⁰. The use of **C** on these issues from the associate reign would determine us to chronologically place our specimen in a period relatively close to the issuing of the **P-C** type coins.

The coin belonging to Group III, with a five-ray star in the shield's first quarter, three dots in front of the eagle on the obverse and three dots in the cross' quarters on the reverse, could chronologically correspond to the ducats with the effigy on the obverse and the shield on the reverse, from the group differentiated by the marks on the shield on the reverse, which has four stripes in the first quarter and a five-ray star in the second quarter¹¹.

In the case of the following two groups of Mircea the Elder's *bani*, besides the lack of marks, we also notice a simplification of the issuing marks, making it impossible at this stage of the research to specify to which of Mircea's ducat groups it corresponds.

The coin lot within the Maria and Dr. George Severeanu Collection offers us the possibility of introducing new divisionary issues of Mircea the Elder into the scientific circuit, facilitating a more precise systematization of this denomination in future studies.

⁹ Iliescu 1958, p. 319, nr. 19.

¹⁰ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2008, p. 75, nota 8.

¹¹ Nicolae 2011, p. 80, cf. tipul I, subtipul 3. Buzdugan *et alii* 1977, p. 26, cf. nr. 198.

Catalogue

Wallachia Mircea the Elder (1386-1418)

Ban

Anepigraphic type

MBR, p. 28, cf. nr. 216 (only with mint mark **Α**).

Obv. Inclined halved shield with a Wallachian eagle on top. Various mint marks in front and behind the eagle.

Rv. Cross with arms of equal length and with various marks in the quarters.

Group I: The mint mark **Α** in front of the eagle and a cross made from four globules behind it, on the obverse – The mint mark **M** in one of the cross' quarters and a ten-ray star in each of the remaining three quarters.

1. AR, 0,30 g; 11,09 mm; inv. no. 6580.

Group II. The mint mark **Ϟ** in front of the eagle on the obverse - Six-ray stars in the cross' quarters on the reverse.

2. AR, 0,29 g; 12,67 mm; inv. no. 9556.

Group III. A five-ray star in the shield's first quarter and three dots in front of the eagle on the obverse – Three dots in the cross' quarters on the reverse.

3. AR, 0,14 g; 10,08 mm; inv. no. 7001.

Group IV. Three dots in front of the eagle on the obverse - three dots in the cross' quarters on the reverse.

4. AR, 0,30 g; 10,53 mm; inv. no. 9513.

Group V. No mint mark on the obverse – flower with three petals in the cross' quarters on the reverse.

5. AR, 0,16 g; 10,97 mm; clipped; inv. no. 9511.

6. AR, 0,14 g; 10,93 mm; clipped; inv. no. 9514.

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Plate I. *Bani* during the reign of Mircea the Elder: nos. 1-6 (scale 2: 1).