

## Iconography of Imperial coinage of Medieval Serbia

After great conquests of King Dušan in 1334 and 1335 many Byzantine towns and large territories of Thessaly and Epirus came under Serbian rule<sup>1</sup>. In the end of 1335 in Serres Dušan was proclaimed an emperor of the Serbs and in 1346 he was crowned as emperor and Serbia became an empire<sup>2</sup>.

Along with Dušan's conquest campaigns, territorial expansion and strengthening of the state was parallel the development of economy, especially commerce, which during the imperial period resulted in immense monetary production with two clearly distinguished types of coinage. First dates from the period of strong central government, between 1346 and 1355 and is in fact coinage of Emperor Dušan. Second determined by the beginning and end of reign of his heir is the coinage of Dušan's son, Emperor Uroš and after that in the course of disintegration of Serbian state until 1371 feudal coinage of independent nobility.

Lasting for almost two centuries, including coinage of kings, emperors and despots Serbian coinage reached its zenith with Emperor Dušan. It was the period of great reform of monetary system, increased monetization and considerable silver export. By the number of finds from the territory of Serbia, Pontic region and Lower Danube<sup>3</sup> Dušan's coins exceeds all other periods. Well-organized minting with large emissions of dinars as main denomination is related to three most important mining centers in Serbia –Brskovo, Rudnik, Novo Brdo and mint working in Kotor. This coinage was characterized by high quality silver, increased value and fineness in comparison with issues of earlier rulers<sup>4</sup>, high technique of working of die-engravers and strict control of coinage<sup>5</sup>. To this series of reforms that happened to Dušan's imperial dinar should be added the occurrence of new and original representations. Although mentioned at the end of series of monetary changes new iconography was certainly no less significant aspect of Dušan's coins but to the contrary exceptionally important category for its comprehension. The way of understanding often

includes recognizing of cultural and political relations of Serbia and neighboring countries and in particular two monetary systems, Byzantine and West European. Iconographic monetary models of the West recognizable in the issues with Latin script were to remain on the margins of the coinage, which in the same way as the state developed under the influence of Byzantine state ideas and its monetary policy.

The wave of Greek ideas from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was enhanced greatly in 1346 when Dušan was crowned as emperor. With the crown, emperor had taken on the role of unifier of inherited and newly conquered territories, the legislator, reformer but also popularizer of imperial ideology. This last role was supported by profound and developed state program that transferred the magnificence of Byzantine court to Serbia and glorified the cult of royal dignity by representations of Serbian emperor whose insignia are identified with imperial symbols of Byzantine vasilévs. Byzantine stemma, divitiis, scepter were to become indistinguishable part of Dušan's image and main elements of his new monetary iconography.

Central figure on the obverse of Dušan's dinars is Christ seated on the throne with high back (fig.1.I). Originating from Byzantine iconography this representation reached Dušan's coins via Venetian grossi and dinars of Serbian kings<sup>6</sup>. Even though this representation did not evolve iconographically, it in particular periods suffered certain stylistic changes and some innovations. It happened in the time of Dušan

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1. *Istorija srpskog naroda I*, Beograd 1981, 524.

2. *Ibid.*, 527.

3. Ivanišević, V.: *Novčarstvo srednjovekovne Srbije*, Beograd 2001, 35-36, 108.

4. *Ibid.*, 114.

5. Novaković, S.: *Zakonik Stefana Dušana cara srpskog 1349 i 1355*, Beograd 1898, 133-134.

6. Ivanišević 2001, 238-242; Dinars of kings Dragutin, Milutin, Vladislav II, Stefan Dečanski (types: 2.1-2.5; 3.1-3.5; 3.7-3.10; 4.1-4.4; 5.1-5.4).

with occurrence of baldachin as heaven above the throne<sup>7</sup>. Contrary to this type other two more infrequent obverse types suffered changes introduced by Dušan's imperial coinage. First motif, standing Christ nimbate, in mandorla<sup>8</sup>, (fig. 1.2) identical as on gold Venetian ducat<sup>9</sup> had been taken over from Dubrovnik dinars<sup>10</sup>. Except for few exceptions this type is related to Dušan's issues with Latin inscriptions as Christ on the throne is characteristic motif on Cyrillic issues. In contrast to Christ in mandorla introduced in Serbian monetary iconography with Dušan, representation of Christ's bust<sup>11</sup> (fig. 1.3) does not represent his monetary innovation. It was omitted on the coins of most of his predecessors and in the time of Dušan it was only revived with one monetary type. Its iconographic belonging to the Byzantine model<sup>12</sup>, not the least unintentionally provided it the place on the coins of two Serbian rulers, King Radoslav<sup>13</sup> and Emperor Dušan who were by the time and circumstances of reign closely related to the Byzantine realm.

In comparison with obverse representations mostly corresponding to the monetary tradition of Dušan's predecessors representations on reverse are confirmation of the most significant innovations, which had decisive influence on Serbian coinage. Their symbolism and explanation are rooted in the time and historical circumstances of their origin but also in the position (of the Dušan's state) that as a boundary of European East and West naturally united two monetary traditions – Byzantine and West European. Regarding the issues minted from 1345 to 1355, from iconographic point of view they can be classified in two groups. First one with motives of battle and victory and second with motives of imperial ceremonies.

According to the current chronology of Dušan's imperial coinage, coins with representation of emperor crowned, in armor with sword, seated on the throne<sup>14</sup> (fig. 1.5) on the basis of Latin intitutionation is dated in the 1345/46 and is the first imperial issue<sup>15</sup>. Modified, this representation relies on the identical motif on the coins of Serbian kings<sup>16</sup>, who imitating similar issues of Naples and Hungarian kings issued coins with image of belligerent king. In accordance with cultural and political influences spreading towards Serbia from south Italy and Hungary this monetary model was taken over but by the use of one important Dušan's insignia-sword, emperor-warrior distinguishes from his western models. It is even to the greater extent underlined by martial symbols and

tone as the principal Dušan's message. Only crown-stemma confirms imperial dignity as belligerent emperor abandoned former scepter and holds sword in both his hands. With this sword he won his victories, made empire instead of kingdom and symbolically encircled his image with his new title 'King of Serbia' - 'Emperor of Byzantium'.

Following the same message and military inspiration but in different iconographic manner occurred first representation of emperor on a horse in the Serbian coinage<sup>17</sup>. (fig. 1.6) Large weight and fineness of silver along with precise work of die-engraver emphasized its attractiveness. Emperor-winner with crown, in divitission with scepter in his hand rides splendidly adorned horse that is standing, striding, galloping or rearing in a triumph. In the search for models used for creation of this representation, considerable chronological gap, quality of production and new reverse type alienate it from similar numismatic representations on Bulgarian and Byzantine coins<sup>18</sup>. Its obviously eastern model, with illustration of victorious symbolism generally speaking relates Dušan's coins with scenes of victories known from Byzantine imperial iconography noticed on the standards from the time of Palaeologus dynasty<sup>19</sup>. Dušan's decision to introduce this type on Serbian money is in connection with pronounced martial character of his state but also with the wish to provide his image with victorious symbolism of Byzantine emperors.

7. *Ibid.*, 254.

8. *Ibid.*, 247-249; Tipes 6.15-6.20.

9. Papadopoli, N.: *Le Monete di Venezia I*, Venezia 1893, 120-137, T. VIII.3.

10. Rešetar, M.: *Dubrovačka numizmatika II*, Beograd 1925, 48-50, T. 3.14; Radić, V.: *Ikonografija Dušanovog carskog novca sa predstavom vladara na prestolu iz zbirke Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu*, *Numizmatičar* 15 (1992), 55-57.

11. Ivanišević 2001, 246; Tipe 6.11.

12. Grierson, P.: *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection, Leo III to Michael III*, 717-867, Vol. III.1, Washington D. C. 1973, 169, 692-694, T. LXI.G.

13. Ivanišević 2001, 237; Tipe 1.3.

14. *Ibid.*, 245; Tipe 6.8.

15. Dimitrijević, S.: *Hronologija Dušanovog carskog novca*, *Istorijski časopis SANU* 9-10 (1959), 114-131.

16. Marjanović-Dušanić, S.: *Vladarske insignije i državna simbolika u Srbiji od XIII-XV veka*, Beograd 1994, 84.

17. Ivanišević 2001, 246; Tipe 6.11.

18. Mušmov, N.A.: *Monetite pecatite na balgarskite care*, Sofija 1924, 91, 94-95; Grierson, P.: *Byzantine Coins*, London-Berkeley, 1982, 300; Grierson, P.: *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the Whittemore Collection, Michael VIII to Constantine XI*, 1258-1453, Vol.5.I, Washington D.C. 1999, 185

19. Marjanović-Dušanić 1994, 132.

Dušan's coinage, breaking off with former models accompanying regular representation of the ruler, introduced new reverse representation of helmet with veil, tablet, rosette and plume or fleur de lis<sup>20</sup>. (fig. 1.7) Originating from the kingdom period it would in the time of reinforcement of belligerent spirit of young empire become the representation with dominant influence on the complete imperial coinage. Its appearance on almost all issues of feudal coinage are illustration of emphasized bond between vassal and suzerain and from the point of view of the vassal issuing money "visible expression of subjugation and service to the lord"<sup>21</sup>. For emperor Dušan himself ruler's helmet or military crown was the symbol of conquest and further materialization of insignia present on earlier military coins. Its occurrence in the time of Dušan coincides with affirmation of knighthood to the considerable extent marked by western traditions. As symbol of knighthood the shield in the beginning only enhanced military character of the image but in the next step of development of iconographic scheme it achieved national and with representation of triangular shield on one of Dušan's dinar also heraldic function<sup>22</sup>.

To mark imperial crowning Dušan issued his main and most representative emission, of large quantity and increased weight and fineness of silver<sup>23</sup>. (fig. 1.8) Related to the solemn occasion in 1346 the new iconography ensued emphasizing every detail of this most important imperial ceremony. Standing emperor is crowned by two angels. His stemma, ceremonial divitission and scepter with cross are richly decorated. Even though worthy of Byzantine and imperial the representation of Dušan's crowning did not have its models in the Byzantine coins. Its inspiration could be found in the Serbian wall painting, in the compositions of Family Tree of Nemanjić dynasty<sup>24</sup>. Along with these paintings the "coronation dinar" of Dušan was in service of the cult that wanted to justify by God's intervention the haughty title 'Emperor and autocrat of Serbia and Romania' taken without assent of Byzantine emperor and blessing of Byzantine patriarch. Differences in the iconographic scheme did not, however, change ideological background of Byzantine and Serbian representations –it was symbolism of divine origin of imperial power.

This symbolism would be in the course of time, under Byzantine influence, transferred also to the emperor's family and as joint representation of standing emperor and empress, with crown, scepter, dressed in divitission

for the first time get into Serbian numismatic<sup>25</sup>. (fig. 1.10) In comparison with other iconographic types this one appeared in the largest number of variants. Latin and Cyrillic issues depicted representations of emperor and empress standing, seated facing, seated confronted and holding single, double or triple cross and scepter with cross or pearls.

Absence of ruler's image but not of ideology whose representation it was could be encountered on Dušan's imperial coins with complete reverse filled with an inscription<sup>26</sup>. (fig. 1.9) Made after the Byzantine models Dušan's 'epigraphic issues' transferred into words everything the picture through its religious, military or ceremonial aspect wanted to illustrate. Beautiful Cyrillic letters arranged in four or five horizontal lines shortened Dušan's name and imperial title from his charters<sup>27</sup> did not fail in transmitting a message sent by ideologists of Serbian state.

Introduction of half-dinar another and less frequently issued denomination ensued with development of monetary system and the reform carried out in 1346<sup>28</sup>. (fig. 1.4) These issues of small quantity and rarely preserved brought great ideological and iconographic change in the Serbian coinage. With them for the first time coins with profane character of representation were minted. On the obverse is crowned head of the emperor encircled by Latin legend stating his name and title while on the reverse is emperor's monogram in Cyrillic surrounded by imperial title written in Latin. If parallel inscription, in Latin and in Cyrillic on the same coin was dictated by its function, being intended as means of interior and foreign trade reasons for appearance of ruler's portrait but without image of Christ could be found in another sphere along with Dušan's imperial portraits<sup>29</sup>. Representing himself on the frescoes

20. Ivanišević 2001, 244-247; Tipes 6.4-6.7; 6.12-6.15.

21. Ćirković, S.: Dopune i obajšnjenja: Stojan Novaković, *Istorija i tradicija*, Beograd 1982, 460, 463.

22. Marjanović-Dušanić, S.: Vladao kao ratnik, Prilog proučavanju nemanjičke ideologije, *Žbornik Filozofskog fakulteta XVII* (1991), 135-6.

23. Ivanišević 2001, 114-115; 246; Tipe 6.9

24. Radojčić, S.: Portreti srpskih vladara u srednjem veku, Skoplje 1934, 39, 49; Radic, V.: The Iconography of the Coinage of Emperor Dušan, *XII Internationaler Numismatischer Kongress Berlin 1997- Akten II*, 1068.

25. Ivanišević 2001, 248-251; Tipes 6.18-6.21.

26. *Ibid.*, 246; Tipe 6.10.

27. Miklosich, F.: *Monumenta Serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae, Bosniae*, Vienna 1858, 145.

28. Ivanišević 2001, 113, 251; Tipes 6.26-6.27.

29. Radojčić 1934, 49, 55-56, 58.

in the splendor of his magnificence, lavish dress and regal insignia without denying his personal glory of warrior and statesman Dušan's striving for glory of the worldly character had vanquished Christian ideal of modesty. This conflict is even more obvious on the coins, as after battle only emperor was left his most important insignia and imperial title<sup>30</sup>. Propaganda emphasis on the ruler's portrait coincides with first intrusion of individualism and perception of monarchy in Dušan's time as a knightly matter.

After Emperor Dušan Serbian political history encountered irregular circumstances ending in the disintegration of the Empire. Dušan's son, Emperor Uroš was ruling the state, which lost significant territories and got class of independent lords. In this situation when silver production decreased, along with central coinage of Emperor Uroš also first feudal issues are encountered. Generally, on the basis of preserved specimens, these were small issues, of decreased weight and in smaller series with iconography depending on models of great imperial predecessor.

First of these examples are monetary types of Emperor Uroš where main iconographic innovation was characterized by merging of various representations from the earlier period. Such was main Uroš's issue with Emperor on horseback on the obverse and helmet on reverse, (fig. 2.1) combination of two most popular issues from two periods of Dušan's reign. This issue had two chronologically distinct variants, earlier with the name of Emperor Dušan and later with legend of Uroš<sup>31</sup>. While obverse representation of emperor on horseback is almost a copy of the Dušan's coin, the representation of helmet had one new iconographic detail – bust with pearls scepter instead of Dušan's plume.

The helmet is present on another Uroš's issue but in new iconographic combination. This time with obverse motif of emperor seated on the throne<sup>32</sup>. (fig. 2.2) Altered iconography of the ruler's representation in two variants (with or without nimbus) by symbolic Uroš's discarding of father's sword that conquers and triumphs returns his representation with scepter to the most ancient models.

Retaining Dušan's helmet on the obverse, Emperor Uroš introduced an iconographic innovation with representation of town on the reverse<sup>33</sup>. It was a vista of the town Zvečan known in the sources for its medieval mint.

As for Emperor Dušan, mint in Kotor in the Littoral minted Latin issues with the name of Emperor Uroš. Differing from Rascian standards according to metrology and iconographic models<sup>34</sup> dinars from Kotor (both of Dušan and Uroš) have on the obverse representation of St Tryphon in mandorla and on the reverse emperor seated on the throne<sup>35</sup>. (fig. 2.3) All elements of ruler's representation are reflection of western iconographic models found on the issues of carlini<sup>36</sup>, used intentionally on coins intended for circulation in the Catholic regions of the country. Similar iconographic style was used on Uroš's representations on follari from the coastal mint in Ulcinj featuring Virgin Orans, the protectress of the town<sup>37</sup>.

Parallel with central coinage of Uroš there are issues of his mother, Empress Jelena and independent lords, who thanks to the disintegration of the state besides pursuing independent policy also seized previously exclusively regal right of minting coins. More as illustration of wish than genuine power of the rulers, feudal coinages were of limited character, concentrated in the traditional territories and often recognized as ephemeral issues of only few specimens. In accordance with that dinars as only denominations of this coinage, of decreased weight, relied on Uroš's coinage and only exceptionally rendered new iconographic models. One of these exceptions is a rare coin of Empress Jelena, Dušan's widow, depicting her standing figure<sup>38</sup>. (fig. 2.4) Before this issue always represented with the ruler, the Empress in the dress and with insignia she had in the Dušan's era is now for the first time depicted alone in accordance with independent policy and government she pursued since 1360<sup>39</sup>.

In contrast to most feudal lords of this time, two most powerful of them Despot Uglješa and King Vukašin minted considerable quantity of coins. Via their large issues Serbian imperial coinage that was drawing to a close made a link with coinage from the time of Dušan. This is confirmed by organization of minting, quantity and energy to invent new representations. This energy had

30. Radić 1977, 1069.

31. Ivanišević 2001, 256; Tipes 9.1-9.6.

32. *Ibid.*, 257; Tipe 9.7.

33. *Ibid.*, 258; Tipe 9.11.

34. Rešetar, M.: *Dubrovačka numizmatika I*, Sremski Karlovci 1924, 386-387.

35. Ivanišević 2001, 262; Tipe 9.30.

36. Engel, A. et Serrure, R.: *Traité de Numismatique du Moyen Age*, Bologna 1964, 1385-1386.

37. Ivanišević 2001, 262; Tipe 9.32.

38. *Ibid.*, 263; Tipe 10.3.

39. *Istorija srpskog naroda I*, 1981, 569, 577, 586-587.

brought vitality in already seen iconographic stereotypes and as in Dušan's time it united two seemingly opposing iconographic models, Byzantine and West European. On the dinars of Despot Uglješa appeared representation of double-headed eagle with wings spread<sup>40</sup>, (fig. 2.5) which as insignia of Despot had origins in Byzantine circles<sup>41</sup>. In contrast to this the joint dinar of Uglješa and Vukašin<sup>42</sup> with Emperor Dušan and cross (fig. 2.6) is of entirely different provenance. While iconographic models of Dušan's obverse representation taken from his crowning dinar were distinctly Byzantine, the foliated cross with lilies in blossom on the reverse was typical motif on the coins of Western Europe<sup>43</sup>.

Representations on Serbian imperial coins are reflection of time and circumstances of their provenance. In accordance with them impressive rise of the state under Emperor Dušan resulted in establishing of state ideology that through monetary representations glorified Emperor and his victories and bestow upon him divine power. New circumstances ensuing sudden death of Dušan did not offer enough elements for the development of such concepts even though in the monetary sphere we witness continuation of state coinage. Except for few types money production was reduced to imitation of already known patterns of the great predecessor.

40. Ivanišević 2001, 264; Tipe 11.5.

41. Marjanović-Dušanac 1994, 116-117.

42. Ivanišević 2001, 264; Tipe 116.

43. Engel, Serrure, 1964, 1386-1386.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2