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The Monetary Art of Wallachia in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries. Discourse, Image and Production Technique

The main purpose of my dissertation project is to study the Wallachian numismatic resources dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from an artistic point of view. Most numismatic studies focus on the economic and coin circulation aspects, therefore the images preserved due to the numismatic material are not a topic researched in depth. The Wallachian Middle Ages is not so rich in images, consequently the images gain a symbolic powerful charge constituted in an ideological discourse, which due to the circulation of the coins was accessible to lots of people. Hence the coins are considered objects that carry ideological meanings due, on the one hand, to the fact that the coin striking is a royal right which legitimates the state independence and the royal authority, on the other hand, the coins offer the possibility to convey a complex message expressed with images and texts.

The monetary system of Wallachia was constituted in the second half of the fourteenth century, being one of the latest medieval monetary systems to emerge. Given the circumstances the Wallachian coins feature a lot of external influences (political, economic and cultural) that were assimilated on a local background. A relevant example is the fact that the Ducat, the Wallachian silver coin, from a metrological point of view is similar with the Bulgarian Groschen, a Balkan version of the Venetian silver Groschen, while from an iconographic point of view the Ducat is the bearer of some images strongly influenced by the Central-European iconographic tradition, realized in a autochthonous style presenting byzantine elements. Therefore, my study is framed by two premises. Firstly, I would like to identify the main occidental sources that influenced the monetary iconography of the Wallachian coinage in order to mark the cultural relations and exchanges between Wallachia, which is an orthodox Balkan state, and the Central-European states. Also, I would like to mark the fact that the coins are evidences of the reception of the Late Gothic art in the Balkan space.

Secondly, I would like to identify and highlight the construction and the use of the monetary discourse as a means to legitimate the reign and the authority of the Prince.

As a separate chapter of my thesis I would like to study the production technique of the Wallachian coins. In order to achieve the proper results I will use microscopy analyses that are essential in the understanding of the microstructure of the silver used for striking the coins and that will allow me to reconstruct the minting technique. Also, I will do X-rays fluorescence analyses which will allow me to identify the composition of the alloys used in the minting process. This type of analyses will provide information about the changes suffered by the coin silver during the years, information which completed with the iconographic studies will help me to identify the monetary reforms implemented by the Princes.

For this research I will study a numismatic corpus of approximately 10000 coins preserved in the numismatic collections of the National History Museum of Romania's Coin Room. Most of the coins are constituted in hoards, discovered in the Twentieth and Twenty-first centuries, some of them not being studied until now.

Concerning the methodology of studying this numismatic corpus for achieving the mentioned premises I will conceive an analysis frame for the coin images, something more flexible that will allow highlighting also the stylistic differences, not only the presence or the absence of some elements. I will organize the images according to this frame, having in mind also the structure of the hoards and the historical information that the hoards provide to us.

Through this dissertation I would like to reveal a different perspective in studying numismatics, originating from academic disciplines such as history of art and cultural history, providing thus an alternative to traditional numismatics, which has mostly focused on the economy and history aspects thus far.