

**“DIPLOMATIC INVENTORY” OF THE AGE OF MIGRATIONS (4TH-7TH CENTURIES): THE MEDALLIONS AND GOLD BARS DISCOVERED ON ROMANIAN TERRITORY**

**Fabian Istvan**

**Assist. Prof., PhD, ”Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu Mureș**

*Abstract: One of the most impressive categories of objects discovered on the territory on modern Romania are the gold and silver medallions with figures of the Roman emperors of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries and the gold bar deposits. How did they got here in this “barbarian” world (if we are to refer to the 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries), what is their classification and what is their archaeological and “diplomatic” value are the main coordinates of the present paper.*

Keywords: diplomacy, barbarians, Roman Empire, archaeology, medallions, gold bars.

The medallions and gold ingots are of the most spectacular presence of the so called “diplomatic gifts” in the territories north of the Danube River. More than that, by wearing such medallions the local chieftain legitimized his power and illustrated his special relationship with the Emperor<sup>1</sup>. “Likewise, they played the role of *sacra insignia* or *regalia insignia* in the barbaric world. At last but not least, the medallions had a certain magical significance”<sup>2</sup>.

A first group of medallions from Simleul Silvaniei can be divided in two main models:

- 1.) *Ornamental medallion* ( a single piece)
- 2.) *Medallions decorated* with images of Emperors.

1.) The ornamental medallion has two identical sides decorated in polychrome style with a rim which closes two circular registers and a middle part formed by an almandine globe. The two circular registers are decorated with triangles in kerbschnitt (the external circle), and a line of triangles in cloisonné (the inner circle).<sup>3</sup>

2) Medallions with images of Emperors

- a.) *Golden medallion* (multiple) with the *Emperor Maximianus Herculus* (286-305).

On the observe: the bust of the Emperor and the inscription AVR VAL MAXIMIANVS P F AVG. On the back: a representation of Hercules, holding in his right hand his bludgeon and on his left shoulder the lion’s fur. The inscription on the reverse is : HERCULI CONSERVATORI AVGG.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Bursche, *Złote medaliony rzymskie w barbaricum. Symbolika prestizu i władzy społeczeństw barbarzyńskich w schyłku starożytności*, Warszawa (1998) (Swiatowit Supplement Series A: Antiquity, vol. II). Apud. C.H. Opreanu, *Medalionul cu măști din tezaurul de la Șimleul Silvaniei (Szilágysomlyó). Precizări iconografice și influențe culturale* in “Analele Banatului” S.N. Arheologie – Istorie, XVIII, 2010. p.82

<sup>2</sup> Ibid .p.82

<sup>3</sup> Harhoiu, *Die frühe Völkerwanderungszeit in Rumänien*, București, 1997, 73. ( *Die frühe...* in the following)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.74..M. Schmauder, *Oberschichtgräber und Verwahrfunde in Südosteuropa im 4 und 5 Jahrhundert. vol II* București, 2002., 73..

b.) *Medallion (aureus) of Emperor Maximianus Herculus (286-305)*. On the observe: the representation of the Emperor with the inscription MAXIMIANVS AVGVS-TVS. On the back, is also the representation of the Emperor sitting on the *sella curulis* holding in right hand a globe on which sits the goddess Victoria, and in his left hand the sceptre. Above the Emperor's head the inscription: CONSUL III P P PROCONS.<sup>5</sup>

c.) *Golden medallion (multiple) of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337)*. On the observe the bust of the Emperor is represented, with the inscription CONSTANTINVS MAX-AVG. On the back two representation of Victoria(one of them with a shield), put face to face and the inscription CONSTANTINI AVG VOT XXX.<sup>6</sup>

d.) *Golden medallion (multiple) of Emperor Constantius II (337-361)*. On the observe the image of the Emperor equipped with a shield. On the shield: the representation of the Emperor on horseback, on the right side the symbols of defeated enemies while on the left side two goddesses: Virtus and Victoria. Above them the inscription: FL IUL CONSTANIUS NOB CAES. On the reverse: a frontal image of the Emperor in armor, *paludamentum*, and holding in his right hand a spear. The dominating inscriptions are: GAVUDIVM ROMANORVM and M CONS<sup>7</sup>

e.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Constantius II (337-361)*. On observe: the bust of the Emperor and the inscription: FL IUL CONSTANTINVS PERP AVG. On the reverse: the personification of the city of Constantinople and the inscription GLORIA ROMANORVM.<sup>8</sup>

f.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. On observe: the bust of the Emperor and the inscription: VALENS MAX AVG. On the reverse: the personification of the city of Constantinople represented as a woman with one foot placed on ship and a globe in her right hand and a scepter in the left. Above is written: ROMA.<sup>9</sup>

g.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. On observe: the bust of the Emperor with the right hand lifted in a gesture of salute and in left holding a globe. The inscription above the Emperor's head: D. N VALENS MAX AVG. On the reverse: the Emperor in a chariot with his hand rose in a salute and two representations of goddess Victoria holding in their hands palm branches and crowns. In the medallion's legend are five images represented symmetrically: a box, two groups of crowns and tow purses of money. The inscription is: D. N VALENS MAX AVG.<sup>10</sup>

h.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. The observe and the reverse are the same as the medallion from point f.). The only difference is the pearled rim, not in kerbschnitt as at the medallion from point f.)

<sup>5</sup>Harhoiu, *Chronologische fragen der volkerwanderunzeit in Rumanien în Dacia* N.S. 1990, .170 (*Chronologische...*in the following ), 170, idem *Die frühe...* .74, Shmauder, *op.cit.* .73

<sup>6</sup>Miclea-Florescu, *Daco-romanii. Vestigii milenare de cultură și artă,II*, București, 1980 .45 Harhoiu *Die frühe...* p.74, Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II . 73

<sup>7</sup>Miclea-Florescu, *art.cit* .47 Harhoiu, *Chronologische...*170 , idem *Die frühe...* .75, Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II . 73

<sup>8</sup>Harhoiu, *Chronologische..* p.75, Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II p.74

<sup>9</sup>Harhoiu, *Chronologische..* p.75, Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II p.74

<sup>10</sup>Miclea-Florescu, *art.cit* p.47 Harhoiu, *Chronologische...* p.170, idem *Die frühe...* p.75 Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II p. 75

i.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. On observe: the bust of the Emperor with the right hand lifted in a gesture of salute. The inscription above the Emperor's head: D. N VALENS P.F. AVG. On the reverse: the Emperor on horseback with a woman standing before him holding the Horn of Abundance and with the right hand she is holding her clothing in which are with five fruits. The inscription is: GLORIA ROMANORVM.

j.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. On observe: the bust of the Emperor. The inscription above the Emperor's head: D. N VALENS P.F. AVG. On the reverse: the Emperor on horseback with a woman standing before him holding a torch with the left hand and her clothing with the right. Under the line of the ground there is another female representation the Horn of Abundance and with the right hand she is holding her clothing in which are with five fruits. The inscription is: GLORIA ROMANORVM.

k.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. On observe: the bust of the Emperor with the right hand raised and holding the globe in the left. The image of the emperor is covered by three granulated triangles. The inscription above the Emperor's head: D. N VALENS P.F. AVG. On the reverse: the image of three emperors, the one in the middle is wearing a crown. The inscription: PIETAS DDD NNN AVUSTORVM. The legend: TESOB (Thesalonicae obryciatum).<sup>11</sup>

l.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. Completely identical with the one before.

m.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valens (364-378)*. This piece is lost, but it had on the observe the bust of the Emperor with the right hand raised. The inscription above the Emperor's head: D. N VALENS P.F. AVG. On the reverse: the Emperor on horseback with a woman wearing o crown standing before him. The inscription: GLORIA ROMANORVM.<sup>12</sup>

n.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Valentinian I (364-375)*. The observe the image of the shielded emperor. On the shield a battle scene: the emperor charging the enemy. The inscription: D N VALENTINIAVS P F AVG. On the reverse goddess Victoria is writing on a shield hold by Amor: VOT V/MULT X. The inscription: VICTORIA D N AVGVSTI. The legend: TESOB.<sup>13</sup>

o.) *Golden medallion of Emperor Gratian (367-383)*. The observe the bust of the emperor and the inscription: GRATIANUS P.F. AUG. On the reverse: the personification of Rome on a throne holding a piece of earth in her right hand and a spear in the left. The inscription: GLORIA ROMANORVM. In the legend: TROBS (Treveris obryziatum tertia officina).

From the chronological point of view the medallions can be divided in two main group: the age of the Tetrarchs and the dynasty founded by Constantine the Great (medallions b, c, d, e), respectively the Valentinian dynasty (the remaining medallions). In this way the timeline covered is about 100 years, with a pause between the years 339 – 375. This gap can be linked with the defeat of the Goths in 332 when the problem of a clear danger towards the line of the Danube was resolved. The presence of such medallions around the year 378 can be

<sup>11</sup>Miclea-Florescu, *art.cit* p.47 Harhoiu *Die frühe...* p.77 Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II p. 76

<sup>12</sup>Harhoiu *Die frühe...* p.78

<sup>13</sup>Miclea-Florescu, *art.cit* p.47 Harhoiu, *Chronologische...* p.170, idem *Die frühe...* p.77 Shmauder, *op.cit*, vol II p. 74

explained with the resuming of tribute towards the Germanic tribes in a desperate attempt from the part of the Roman Empire to search for allies in the eve of Hunnish invasion.

A very interesting Christian medallion was also found at Simleul Silvaniei in an princely grave together with other valuable golden objects: it has a diameter of 6.65 cm and it was made using different goldsmith techniques. In the center is a cross made of triangular granules surrounded by five concentric circles made in cloisonné technique. The medallion was the property of a local Gepidic leader from the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

Simleul Silvaniei was not the only place in which such important pieces of “diplomacy” were discovered. At Barlad-Valea Seaca, Sannicolaul Mare and Cluj-Someseni such medallions appeared especially in areas dominated by Germanic (Gepidic) tribes.

At Barlad- Valea Seaca<sup>15</sup> two medallions were discovered at the local, Migration Age cemetery: one (discovered in grave M501) is actually a *solidus* from the time of emperor Constans (337-350), transformed into a medallion by attaching a golden strip 0,4 cm wide. On the observe there is an inscription: CONSTANS AVGVSTVS DDNN AVGG, and two representations of goddess Victoria holding a globe on which is inscribed: VOT X MULT XX.

The second medallion was discovered in M507 is also a *solidus* from the time of Constantius II (337-361) to which, clumsily, a strip was attached. On the observe the crowned bust of the emperor is represented and the inscription FLVL CONST(AN)TIVS PERP AVG. on the back of the coin in the center the figures of the emperor and his wife holding together a crown and the inscriptions : GLORIA REIPUBLICAE and VOT XX MULT XXX. At the rim of the coin some letters are covered by the soldering but another letters are visible: M, A, Q which leads us to the mint that battered the coin: Aquileia.

At Sannicolaul Mare in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century graveyard in one of the graves the deceased had on his chest a finely engraved golden medallion (and around his neck a few golden plates formed a collier).<sup>16</sup>

Finally at Cluj-Someseni<sup>17</sup> a medallion of great value was discovered. The circular piece is decorated in the cloisonné technique with two lateral fields, ornaments in “peacock eye” style combined with triangles in which semi-precious stones were put. In the center of the medallion is a cross with equal arms which divides the frontal part in a few triangles decorated also with almandine. The medallion has a diameter of 7.8 cm and it was used with a golden necklace. It probably belonged to a Gepidic or Ostrogothic princess from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

### **The gold ingots.**

The golden ingot from Feldioara discovered accidentally in 1880 and donated in 1960 when it was became known. Has the form usual of Roman ingots used by Empire to buy

<sup>14</sup>R. Harhoiu, *Die Medalione aus dem Schatzfund von Șimleul Silvaniei, în Dacia NS*, 37, 1993, p.221-236

<sup>15</sup>V. Palade, *Importuri romane în două morminte din necropola de la Bârlad-Valea Seacă*, SCIVA, 32, 2, 1981, p.205-216

<sup>16</sup>*Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România. Campania 2005* Orientarea este SE-NV. www.cimec.ro.

<sup>17</sup> K. Horedt, D. Protase, *Tezaurul de epoca migrațiilor de la Cluj-Someseni* în Acta MN VII, 1970, p.188.

peace and security towards the “allies”. On the front part the guarantee stamps are applied with the bust of emperors Valentinian II, Gratian, and Theodosius I. The object has a length of 14.95 cm, wide of 2.25 cm, 0.60-0.90 cm thickness, and a weigh of 395 g.<sup>18</sup>

Interesting fact is that in 1934 in the same area another four ingots one was melted and other three were bought by an unidentified private antiquary. Describe and published by Elmer<sup>19</sup>, these ingots are known only from the photos made by Octavian Iliescu.<sup>20</sup>

At Crasna (Covasna county) 20 golden ingots were discovered, some of one when a road was repaired. A few ingots were cut to pieces in order to be sold or to be divided between the discoverers. At the present they are in Hungarian National Museum from Budapest, Kunsthistorisches Museum from Vienna, British Museum and Bibliotheque Nationale.<sup>21</sup> The length of ingots varies between 161-171 cm and their weight between 331-520 g.

The ingots can be divided in four groups:

1. With four or five stamps: *Lucianus obr(yzum) I (primum) sig(navi)* (Me Lucius put the first stamp on the pure gold) and *Fl(avius) Flavianus pro(bavi)(et) sig(navi) ad digma* (I Flavius Flavianus checked and stamped the sample). The first stamp is put once on every ingot, the second is put for 3-4 times.

2. A second group is formed by ingots with four or five stamps: the first is the usual *Lucius signavi...* the second: *Qiuirillus et Dionisus Sirm(io) sig(naverunt)* (I Quirillus and Dyonisos put this stamp at Sirmium). The third stamp is with the images of three emperors with crown and paludamentum at the margin of the image the letters DDD NNN (*Domini nostri tres*) are engraved. A fourth stamp represents the goddess Fortuna, protector of Sirmium, sitting a throne holding in her right hand a palm branch, having above her head a star and the inscription: SIRMIO.

3. The third group is represented by the ingots with the stamp *Lucianus signavi*, the busts of the three emperors, Fortuna with the palm branch and, as a special element the monogram of Christ.

4. The last group is represented by the one bearing just the stamp of Lucius and the images of the three emperors in a pearled frame.<sup>22</sup>

The years when the ingots were molded is somewhere between 367-375 if we are to take into account Mommsen's assertions who, identified the three emperors as: Valentinian I, Valens, and Gratian.<sup>23</sup> Iliescu considered that the ones who stamped the ingots were *curators thesauri sacri* in *arca auri* transferred by Gratian from the West to Sirmium to fabricate golden coins and ingots used by Theodosius to buy the peace from the Goths. The burial of these ingots can

<sup>18</sup>O. Iliescu, *Un nou lingou de aur descoperit în Transilvania* Revista Muzeelor, I, 1965, p.34.

<sup>19</sup>G. Elemer, *Neu Gefundene römische Goldbarren*, Mitteilungen der numismatischen Gessellschaft in Wien, XVI, 1927-1936, p.271, apud Em. Popescu, *Inscripțiile din secolele IV-XIII descoperite în România*, Ed. Academiei RSR, 1976, p.381

<sup>20</sup>Oct Iliescu, *Nouvelles informations relatives aux lingois romains d'or trouves en Transilvanie*, RESEE,3,1965, p.269-281

<sup>21</sup>Th.Mommsen, *Goldbaren aus Sirmium*, Zeitschrift für Numismatik,16,1888, p.251-258; C. Moisil, *Tezaurul de la Crasna* CNA, III, 5-6, p.251-255.

<sup>22</sup><http://www.dervent.ro/s/i/index-Inscr.Crasna.html> (accessed 2015.11. 30)

<sup>23</sup>Mommsen, *op.cit.* p.258

be linked with the hiding of the treasure from Pietroasa when the Goths had to retreat in the front of Hunnish pressure.

A last golden ingot, molded somewhere between the years 379-380 is at the National Museum of Romania. Without knowing the place of discovery the ingot was made by molding being 149 mm long, 22 mm wide, 9.5 mm thick and 393.21 g in weight. It has three stamps: one with the goddess Tyche sitting on a throne holding goddess Nike in one hand, and in the other the Horn of Abundance. The second stamp represents the emperors Valentinian II, Gratian and Theodosius I. The third stamp is an inscription: FLAVIUS CALLIPIUS PRO ET SIGq<sup>24</sup>

These treasures are directly linked with the presence of the Gepidae, or any eastern Germanic tribe, who had “some kind of official relationship with the Roman Empire. (...) These barbarian chieftains knew well the Late Roman society and even the way of life and culture of the senatorial aristocracy and imperial court, longing for many of their aspects”.<sup>25</sup>

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

*Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România. Campania 2005.*

Harhoiu R, *Chronologische fragen der volkerwanderunzeit in Rumanien* în *Dacia* N.S. 1990.

Harhoiu R., *Die Medalione aus dem Schatzfund von Șimleul Silvaniei*, în *Dacia* NS,37,1993.

Harhoiu R., *Die frühe Völkerwanderungszeit in Rumänien*, București, 1997.

Horedt K – Protase D, *Tezaurul de epoca migrațiilor de la Cluj-Someșeni* în *Acta MN* VII, 1970.

Iliescu O, *Un nou lingou de aur descoperit în Transilvania* *Revista Muzeelor*, I, 1965

Iliescu O, *Nouvelles informations relatives aux lingois romains d'or trouves en Transilvanie*, RESEE,3,1965.

Miclea R-Florescu I, *Daco-romanii. Vestigii milenare de cultură și artă*, II, București, 1980

Moisil C, *Tezaurul de la Crasna* CNA, III, 5-6

Mommsen Th, *Goldbaren aus Sirmium*, *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*, 16, 1888.

Opreanu C.H, *Medalionul cu măști din tezaurul de la Șimleul Silvaniei (Szilágysomlyó). Precizări iconografice și influențe culturale* în “*Analele Banatului*” S.N. *Arheologie – Istorie*, XVIII, 2010.

Palade V. *Importuri romane în două morminte din necropola de la Bârlad-Valea Seacă*, SCIVA, 32, 2, 1981.

Popescu E, *Inscripțiile din secolele IV-XIII descoperite în România*, Ed. Academiei RSR, 1976.

Schmauder M., *Oberschichtgräber und Verwahrfunde in Südosteuropa im 4 und 5 Jahrhundert. vol II* București, 2002.

[http:// www.cimec.ro](http://www.cimec.ro)

<http://www.dervent.ro/s/i/index-Inscr.Crasna.html>

<sup>24</sup> [http:// www.cimec.ro](http://www.cimec.ro) (accessed 2105.11.01)

<sup>25</sup> Opreanu., *art.cit.* p.82