

A “LIMOGES” MOUNT IN EASTERN CROATIA?

BY

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Abstract

Archaeologists are often surprised by things that come to light out of the earth, showing us that people in the past lived a life that was much more intense than we could ever imagine. Unusual finds that step out of frames limited by our imagination often make us search more and dig deeper. Such a find was recently donated to the Vinkovci Municipal Museum (Eastern Croatia). On an unexplored field in the village of Karadžičevo little less than 200 medieval coins and an anthropomorphic mount were found by a local metal-detector operator. Coins were easily identified as nominals of the Hungarian kingdom, dated to early 15th century. After examining the mount most similar objects to our item are described as products of medieval manufactures in Limoges, France. During High Middle Ages workshops there produced, in the service of the church, numerous religious objects. What such an object, of prestige for this part of Europe, is doing in Croatia and whether it is a Limoges Mount will be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *Limoges mount, coins, hoard, Croatia, High Middle Ages, survey find.*

Recently the Vinkovci Municipal Museum (Slavonia, Eastern Croatia) received larger donation of survey finds from a private collector and metal detectorist Mr. Steve Gaunt. Among numerous finds from all periods an unusual find stood out. At first the item was not recognised at all, but after some research it was identified as a mount made in Limoges, France. Can it really be such an artefact, in a province of nowhere?

The aim of this article is to bring this item to light and start some discussion about it.

Since the site is not legally protected, the exact location will not be given; it was found in vicinity of village Karadžičevo, some 10 km NW from Vinkovci (Map 1). According to the finder's information about this item, it was found in a field, almost at the surface. On the same field, a scattered medieval hoard containing silver coins was also found. Therefore he immediately thought that this item was related to the hoard, as part of a chest or casket the money was hidden in.

Altogether 186 coins belonging presumably to a hoard were found (see Appendix A). *Terminus post quem* for this hoard should be late 14th – early 15th century. The coins belong to Medieval Hungarian kingdom, e. g. King Ludovic I the Great (8.06 %), his daughter, Queen Maria (87.10 %) and her husband, King Sigismund (3.76 %), but also coins of the doge of Venice Andrea Contarini (1.08 %) were found. Numerous hoards from this period are known from the territory of medieval Slavonia¹, due to battles for the throne between Queen Mary, her mother, Elisabeth, and her husband Sigismund on one side and the Croatian nobility on other side, which were partly situated in this region². In a battle not far from the site Maria herself was captured and later on imprisoned³.

The mount (Pl. II) found with the coins is made of copper alloy (bronze) in the form of a stylised, forward facing figure; a clearly anthropomorphic religious presentation. It is slightly asymmetric. The body is hollow and the head is solid. The head is ovoid, with eyelet gap and relief moulded nose and lips. The slender neck gradually widens towards shoulders, which extend into vertical sides of the body. On the body, made of thinner plate-like alloy, two holes one above the other are visible. The figure's arms are held in front of the body, with bent elbows. The folds on the garment are highlighted by notching. Eyes once held

¹ MIRNIK 1981: 104-124; PETKOVIĆ 2006a: 23-26; NAD 2012: 418-419.

² ŠIŠIĆ 1902: 51.

³ ŠIŠIĆ 2004: 223.

enamel, now visible in traces and the outside of the mount was gilded. Due to intensive farming activities (ploughing) the mount is bended on one side. Measurements: height: 50 mm; width: 20 mm; weight: 16.4 g.

Similar finds in Croatia are not known. The technological characteristics of this item point to numerous similar finds that originate from manufactures located in the French town of Limoges. In the 13th century Limoges workshops produced a variety of religious objects. Besides reliquaries and plaques also croziers, altar cruets, pyxides, tabernacles and other items used in the service of the Church were manufactured⁴. Such works were known as *Opus de Limogia* or *Labor Limogiae*⁵ or *Opus lemovicense*⁶. Limoges became famous for *champlevé*⁷ enamels, producing on a large scale, and then from the 15th century retained its lead by switching to painted enamel.

This piece, representing a depiction of a saint, should be seen as a typical representative of medieval figurative mounts used among ecclesiastical objects (e. g. reliquaries, altar crosses)⁸. Since parallels mentioned below are dated somewhat earlier it should be kept in mind that our example travelled longer, and as a valuable piece probably was kept as family heritage. Those were also used for caskets, small chests that could have held money.

What do we know about the medieval site where it was found? Judging by medieval documents a village or property called *Jakabfalwa/Jakoffalua* (1491, 1496, 1498, and 1499) and *Jakabffalwa/Jakabfalwa* (1507, 1515/1516, and 1520) existed at the site⁹. Historians presume that the settlement was erected even as early as the 12th century¹⁰. During June 2006 a part of the Late Middle Ages cemetery belonging to this village was excavated¹¹.

The nobility of medieval Slavonia was closely related to both Hungarian and the Bosnian courts, therefore they could have afforded to own prestige objects, such as casket made in Limoges. Finds of papal bulls (lead seals) from Rudine¹² and Beketinci¹³ testify to the fact that toponyms that today designate ruins or fields once were known even at the papal court in Rome. Consequently we should not be surprised by such finds – we should be surprised rather at the fact that so few luxurious medieval objects find their way to museums.

ANNEXA.

List of coins found on the site¹⁴

| Ruler | Type | reference | Mintmark | Amount |
|-----------|-------|-------------------|----------|--------|
| Ludovic I | Denar | Huszár 542 var. a | | 3 |
| Ludovic I | Denar | Huszár 547 | | 12 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | No mark | 34 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | * – * | 2 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | * | 1 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | + – + | 19 |

⁴ REBOLD BENTON 2009: 161.

⁵ ADDISON 2008: 97.

⁶ ACKLEY 2014: 26.

⁷ Enamelling technique.

⁸ Best known examples are: crosses from Navelsjo and Ukna, Sweden (O' Neill 1996:185-186) and casket from Victoria and Albert Museum (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85517/reliquary-chasse-unknown/>).

⁹ ENGEL, unpublished 94; P. Engel wrongly puts this village in area of Ivankaovo, Retkovci, Rokovci and Andrijaševci. Petković (2006) corrected his mistake.

¹⁰ PETKOVIĆ 2006: 86-87.

¹¹ RAPAN PAPEŠA 2006: 44-45.

¹² KRAMBERGER 2013.

¹³ MINICHREITER, MARKOVIĆ 2009: 30.

¹⁴ Determination done by S. Gaunt.

| | | | | |
|------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|----|
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | ✚ | 1 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | ✚ | 4 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 566 | Unknown | 3 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | ✚ | 11 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | Λ | 26 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | Ω | 2 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | C Ω | 8 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | K | 3 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | S | 2 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | I | 9 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | h | 17 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | V | 1 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | Λ | 1 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | No mark | 2 |
| Maria | Denar | Huszár 569 | Unknown | 16 |
| Sigismund | Denar | Huszár 576 | T | 1 |
| Sigismund | Denar | Huszár 576 | O | 1 |
| Sigismund | Denar | Huszár 576 | No mark | 4 |
| Sigismund | Parvus | Huszár 580 | No mark | 1 |
| Andrea Contarini | Soldini | CNI 16, Meyer 122 | | 2 |

Totals:

| | |
|---|------------|
| Ludovic I. the Great (1342-1382) | 15 |
| Maria (1382-1395) | 162 |
| Sigismund (1387-1437) | 7 |
| Contarini (1367-1382) | 2 |
| Grand Total | 186 |

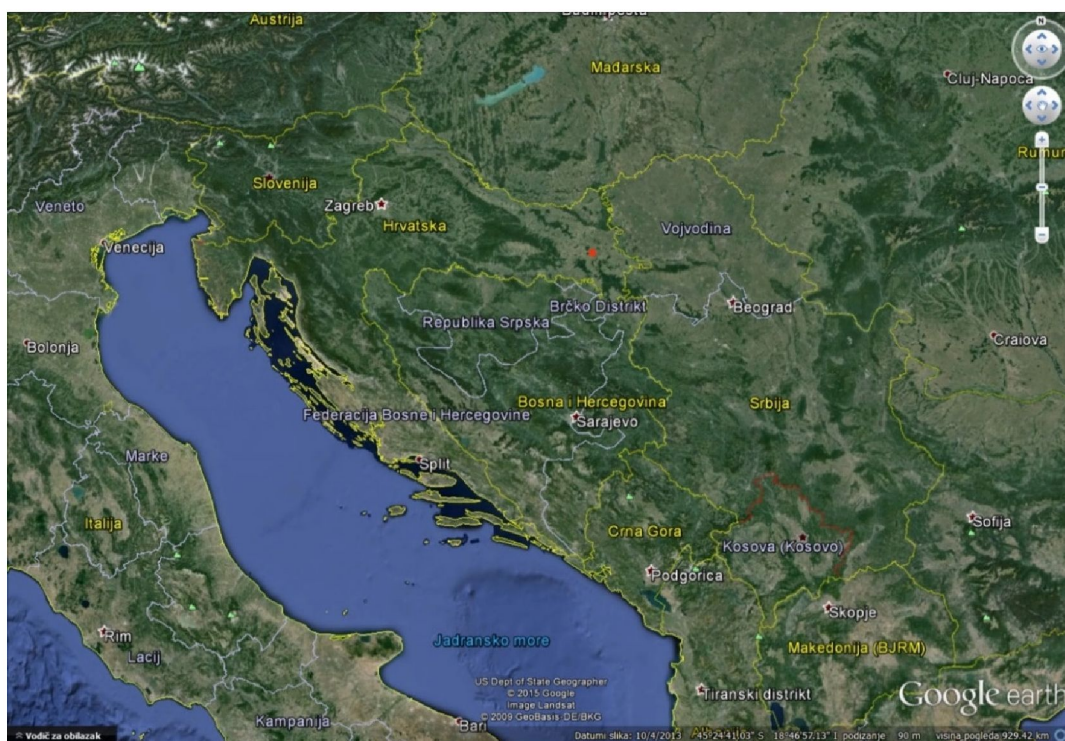
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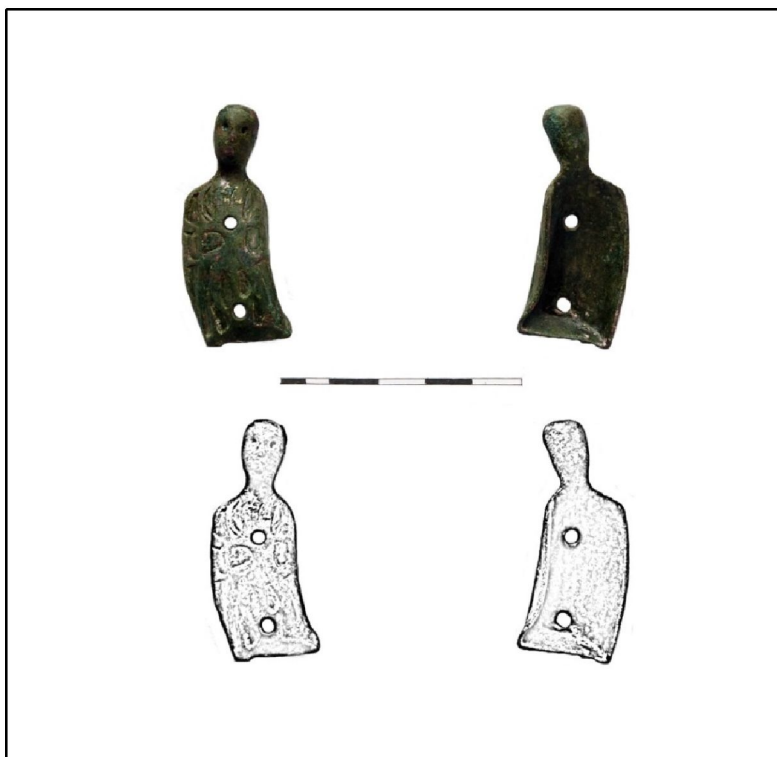
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. I. 1 - Map of the Croatia with site marked (Google Earth map); 2 - Front and back side of the mount (Photo and drawing).



1



2

Pl. I. 1. Map of Croatia with the site marked (Google Earth map);
2. Front and back side of the mount (Photo and drawing).