

HOARD OF SERBIAN AND VENETIAN MEDIEVAL COINS FOUND
ON THE OLD TRADE ROUTE:
VENICE - HUNGARY - BOSNIA - SERBIA - DUBROVNIK -
BYZANTINE - BLACK SEA



ZELJKO KNEZEVIC

1. King Stefan the First Crowned 1217-1228

Silver "flag" matapan type. 21mm, 2.057g.

Obverse: The king standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: STEFANV REX S STEFANV (STEFAN KING SAINT STEFAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: dot and line next to right leg.



2. Doge Jacopo Tiepolo 1229-1249

Silver "flag" matapan type. 20mm, 2.042g

Obverse: Doge standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: IATEVPL DVX S•M•VENETI (JACOPO TIEPOLO DOGE SAINT MARCO VENETIAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: two lines to the left and a triangle to the right below the elbow.



3. King Uros the Great 1243-1276

Silver "flag" matapan type. 20mm, 2.066g

Obverse: The king standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: VROSIVS** REX •S•STEFAN (UROS KING SAINT STEFAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: two lines left.



4. King Uros the Great 1243-1276

Silver "flag" matapan type. 20mm, 2.209g

Obverse: The king standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: VROSIVS• REX •S•STEFAN (UROS KING SAINT STEFAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: two lines and a dot to the left.



5. King Uros the Great 1243-1276

Silver "flag" matapan type. 20mm, 1.958g

Obverse: The king standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: VROSIVS' REX •S•STEFAN' (UROS KING SAINT STEFAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: two lines to the left and a triangle to the right.



6. Doge Raniero Zeno 1253-1268

Silver "flag" matapan type. 21mm, 2.042g

Obverse: Doge standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: •RA•CENO• DVX S•M•VENETI (RANIERO ZENO DOGE SAINT MARCO VENETIAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: two lines left and a dot between the legs.



7. Doge Raniero Zeno 1253-1268

Silver "flag" matapan type. 21mm, 2.052g

Obverse: Doge standing on the left, the saint is on the right and holding together a flag with a cross in the middle. Latin description: •RA•CENO• DVX S•M•VENETI (RANIERO ZENO DOGE SAINT MARCO VENETIAN) around.

Reverse: Jesus seating on a throne, blesses with his right hand and in his left holding book of gospels decorated with 5 gems. Greek letters: IC XC (Greek: Ιησους Χριστος - Jesus Christ) above. 4 triple dotted pellets around the throne. Mintmarks: two lines to the left and two circles, one between the legs and the other to the right next to the left leg.



The time period of the reign of these 4 rulers found together:

1217-1228
1229-1249
1243-1276
1253-1268

Descriptions on the coins:

STEFANV REX WITH STEFANV
IATEVPL DVX S•M•VENETI
VROSIVS* REX •S•STEFAN
VROSIVS• REX •S•STEFAN
VROSIVS' REX •S•STEFAN'
•RA•CENO• DVX S•M•VENETI
•RA•CENO• DVX S•M•VENETI

The Venetian standard is 96-98% silver content, 20-21mm diameter and weight 2.178g +/- 1% which corresponds to weights from 1.960g to 2.396g.

These 7 correspond to the Venetian standard taking into account any damage:

King Stefan the First Crowned 2.057g
Doge Jacopo Tiepolo 2.042g
King Uros the Great 2.066g
King Uros the Great 2.209g
King Uros the Great 1.958g
Doge Raniero Zeno 2.042g
Doge Raniero Zeno 2.052g

My next step is to analyse the silver with a spectrometer, the results of which I will publish later.



Doge Jacopo Tiepolo began his reign one year after the death of King Stefan the First Crowned in 1229 and ruled Venice during the 5-year reign of Serbian King Radoslav 1228-1234, the 9-year reign of Serbian King Vladislav 1234-1243, and the first 6 years of Serbian King Uros the Great 1243-1249. King Uros the Great ruled for another 27 years until 1276.

Doge Raniero Zeno began his reign 10 years after the beginning of Uroš's reign, in 1253, and reigned until 1268, 8 years before the end of Uroš's reign and the beginning of Dragutin's reign in 1276.

Since they were found together, it means that they were in circulation together. And since Doge Raniero Zena's coin is the latest Venetian coin found, the year these coins were lost must be somewhere within his reign 1253-1268! Since the coins of the Serbian king Uros the Great are in excellent quality and in accordance with the Venetian standard, my opinion is that they were lost at the beginning of the reign of Doge Raniero Zeno sometime around 1253-1254.



Venetian merchants would never use in trade Serbian money that is not in accordance with their standard, and sometime immediately before the beginning of the reign of Doge Raniero Zeno, somewhere around 1250-1252. the first mine in Serbia opened, in Brskovo. We know that Venice was not satisfied with the silver and coins minted in Brskovo because already in 1252 they issued a request that the money minted in Brskovo be wholly, returned to the mint, sold at a lower price and taken out of circulation! That request was repeated several times in the following years!

Due to the danger of inferior coins entering circulation, coins that are lighter and with less silver content that deviated from the Venetian standard that was in force for more than 60 years, since 1193, I believe that Venetian merchants noticed the problem and after 1252 were very careful with Serbian money.

Analysing the Serbian matapan type, one thing is certain. The finest coins, well minted, well made, matching the Venetian standard in weight and silver content, having decorative letters, a separate and upright letter S on the right side and mintmarks on the reverse, must be first issues.

Second issues retain the Venetian standard in terms of weight and silver content and mintmarks, but the quality of the coinage is visibly lower and they have no more decorative letters or an upright letter S on the right side but it's S in the same position as the other letters only separated by dots.

The third inferior issues were most likely minted after 1252 with Brskovo silver, they differ from the Venetian standard, the production and minting is worse, the silver is of lower quality and the silver content is lower by at least 25%, they no longer have mintmarks, S is in the same position as other letters, but it is no longer separated by dots, and the letters in the description are beginning missed, which indicates less experienced and even illiterate moneyers.

Here in this hoard we have 4 early Serbian matapan from the first and second issues.

These coins must have been minted until about a few years after 1252, when Venice first complained about the Brskovo matapan. Since then, the minting of increasingly inferior matapan begins, which soon deviated from the Venetian standard in terms of weight and silver content.

The poor workmanship of these later matapan is evidence of the drastic changes that occurred after the opening of the first mine. Venetian moneyers were replaced by less experienced Serbian moneyers. The Venetian standard was replaced by a domestic standard, and less control caused an influx of domestic and foreign counterfeits. The mintmarks are no longer present because the mints did not want to be identified.

IS THE FIRST COIN FROM STEFAN THE FIRST CROWNED?

If the first coin is the money of the Serbian king Stefan the First Crowned, then it was probably in circulation between 1228 and 1253, some 25 years, the period between the end of the reign of the First Crowned and the beginning of the reign of the Venetian Doge Raniero Zeno. The excellent state of preservation points to the possibility that it was either in someone's possession for a long time, unused, or that King Radoslav and King Vladislav minted their father's money for trade with Venice and Dubrovnik. For now, we have no material evidence and this remains a possibility and an assumption!

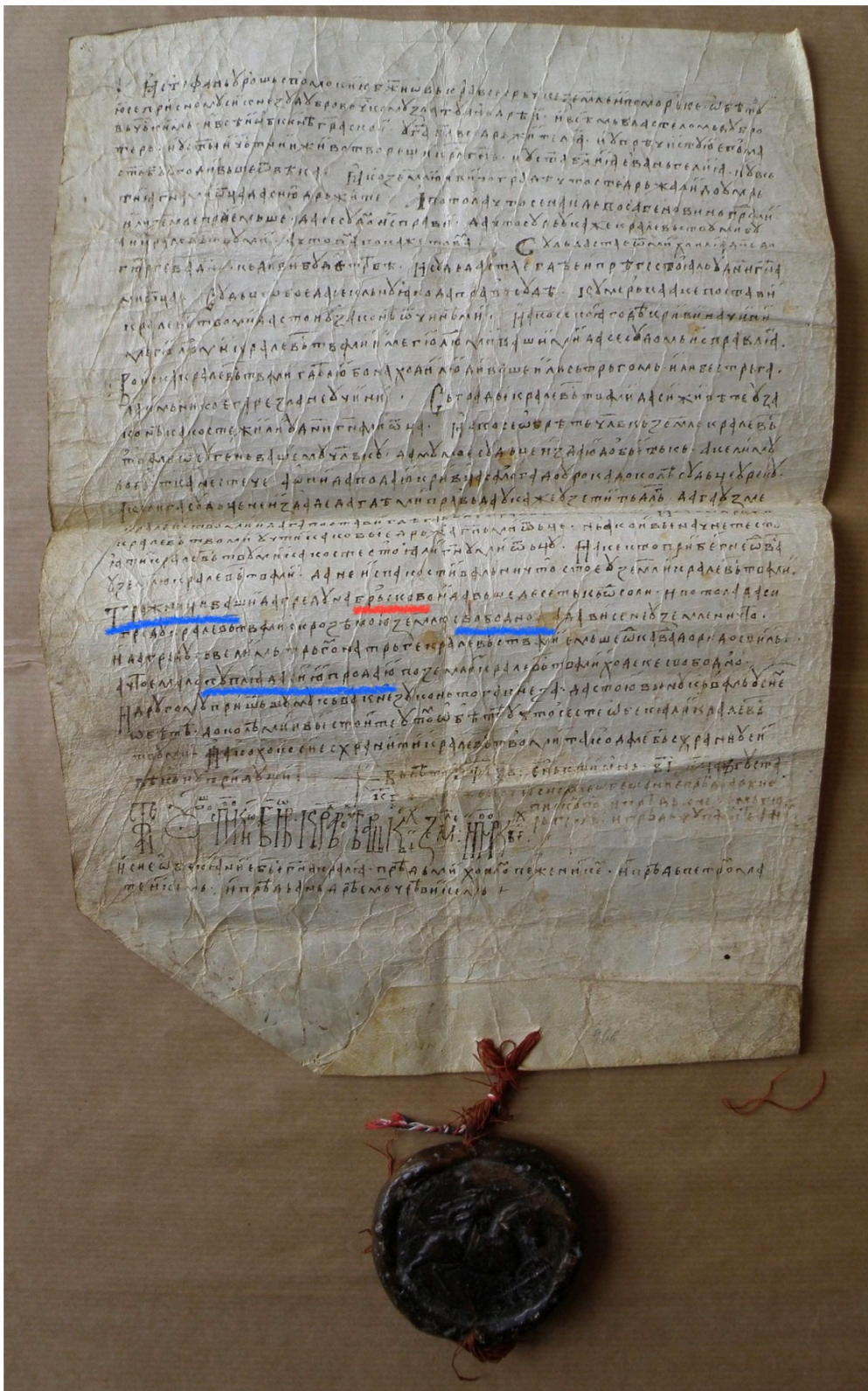
The reign of the 43rd Doge of Venice, Jacopo Tiepolo, was from 1229 to 1249 and coincided with the reign of the Serbian king Uros the Great for 6 years.

The reigns of the Serbian king Uros the Great 1243-1276 and the 45th Venetian doge Raniero Zeno 1253-1268 coincided for 15 years.

The money of all four rulers could have been in circulation during the reigns of King Uros the Great and Doge Raniero Zeno and could have been lost or buried between 1253 and 1254. If it had been lost or buried later, the matapan of the Venetian Doge who ruled after Raniero Zeno would have been present as well as the inferior matapan of King Uros the Great.

There is another possibility, which is that either there were stocks of money of King Stefan the Crowned, which Uroš decided to use from 1243, or due to the existence of his father's mold, Uroš minted a certain amount of his father's money before the first issue of his money with his own name. This is also just an assumption.

On August 23th, 1254, King Uroš the Great wrote in a charter to Duke Zlat Andrić of Dubrovnik and his lords and citizens of Dubrovnik: "that the lands and vineyards that you held until the death of my father, that you still hold them now."



Uroš does not mention the brothers Radoslav and Vladislav, but the father, King Stefan the First Crowned, and the lands and vineyards that were then in the possession of the people of Dubrovnik! Uroš confirms and continues his father's policy! Not the politics of the brothers who ruled before

him. Was some of his father's money saved that Uroš put into circulation again? We don't know, but it remains an open possibility and assumption!

He also says: "Your merchants should go to Brskovo and give a tenth of the salt, and then they should go through my land freely without anything being taken from them, and they should go to the squares of my kingdom to buy and sell silk robes to sell around the country of my kingdom walking freely..."

Uroš mentions Brskovo. From its opening until 1254, Brskovo became a trade center because of the silver mine and the mint. Merchants from Dubrovnik are invited to trade freely and to visit Brskovo. Uroš has a good reason for that call. Trade is key to the economic development and prosperity of Serbia.

Unfortunately, Brskovo soon becomes the subject of discussion and disagreement between Serbia and Venice. Venice is unhappy because they consider Brskovo silver and money to be a fraud!

This charter of King Uroš is today preserved among the Serbian royal documents in the State Archives of Dubrovnik under the reference (1186-1479) 12540823 - King Uroš A.

WAS THE FIRST COIN DRAGUTIN?

If the first coin is the money of the Serbian king Stefan Dragutin 1276-1282, then several questions arise.

Where is the money of Lorenzo Tiepolo 46th Doge of Venice who ruled 1268-1275, Jacopo Contarini 47th Doge of Venice who ruled 1275-1280 and Giovanni Dandolo 48th Doge of Venice who ruled 1280-1289, the last two ruled during Dragutin's reign? Why isn't his money in this little hoard? Where is Dragutin's other money? Why is only one present next to three coins of his father Uroš the Great and two coins of Doge Raniero Zeno? If the money was lost during Dragutin's reign, we would expect most of his coins! But most examples are present from Uroš the Great, so it is logical to conclude that the hoard was buried during Uroš's reign. If this is true then the first coin cannot be King Dragutin's money!

Also, the coin of the 43rd Doge of Venice Jacopo Tiepolo 1229-1249 had to remain in circulation and somehow stay in our area from 27 up to 53 years in order to be used during Dragutin's reign 1276-1282. It had to survive the reign and coinage of as many as 5 Venetian Doges who ruled from the reign of Doge Jacopo Tiepolo to the reign of Dragutin!

My last question would be how is it that Dragutin suddenly mints more beautiful matapan than his father Uroš, despite the situation that developed since the opening of the Brskovo mine when the quality of forging began to decline during Uroš's reign and Dragutin inherited the same father's mints and moneyers after taking power?

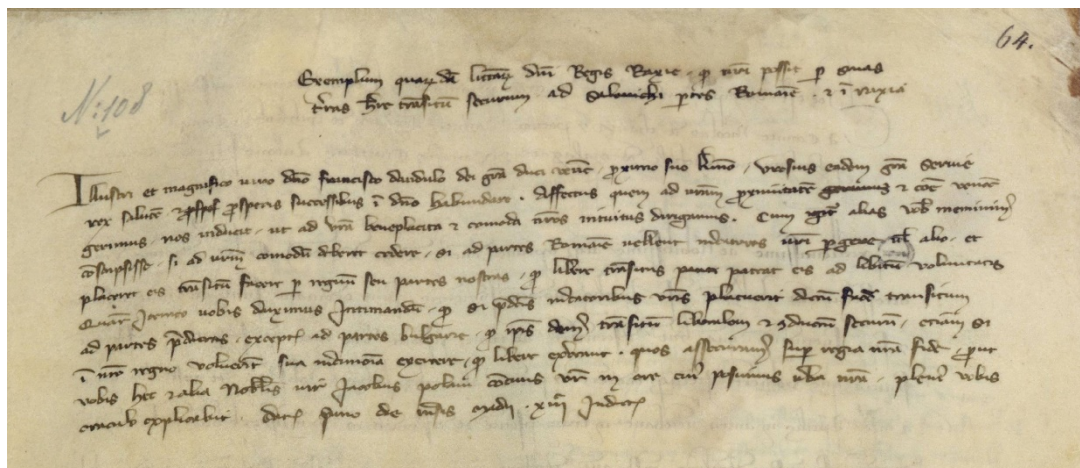
My opinion is that coinage in Serbia did not have a humble beginning and then reached its peak, but rather that it started at a peak because it was first minted by experienced Venetian moneyers! Due to non-compliance and deviation from the world-recognized standard, the quality of Serbian coins declined during the second half of Uroš's reign after 1254, and that decline culminated during Milutin's reign 1282-1321, whom Dante Alighieri publicly calls him counterfeiter of money! Two clear and registered historical facts are the complaint of Venice in 1252 against Brskovo matapan and the request for its withdrawal from circulation and Dante's Divine Comedy from 1308, where the Serbian king is called a counterfeiter of money. It is a period of 56 years in which Serbian Matapan type money experiences a decline in quality in every sense!

It is important to note that from Dragutin's reign in 1276-1282, Serbian money experienced a new boom and development with new types. That new beginning is further developed during the reign of Milutin, the reigns of Dečanski and Dušan leading to enormous variety and true artistry equal if not more beautiful than any other medieval coins!

While the quality of the matapan type declines, the quality of other types increases until the second half of the 14th century, the time of the Serbian Empire under the first Serbian emperor, Stefan Dušan.

THE VENETIAN TRADE ROUTE

Proof of the existence of the northern Venetian route is a letter on May 1st, 1330, where King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski writes to Doge Francesco Dandolo confirming permission for Venetian merchants to pass freely and safely on the way to the Byzantine Empire. It is interesting that since the reign of Dečanski, Serbia no longer mints the matapan type, but still allows free trade of Venetian and Dubrovnik merchants.



The city of Venice always had a special interest in Mediterranean trade, leading to its control over the Adriatic Sea. It had the monopoly in trade between Europe and the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean from the 4th crusade 1202-1204 throughout 13th century. Caravans of mules wound their way along the often hazardous roads.

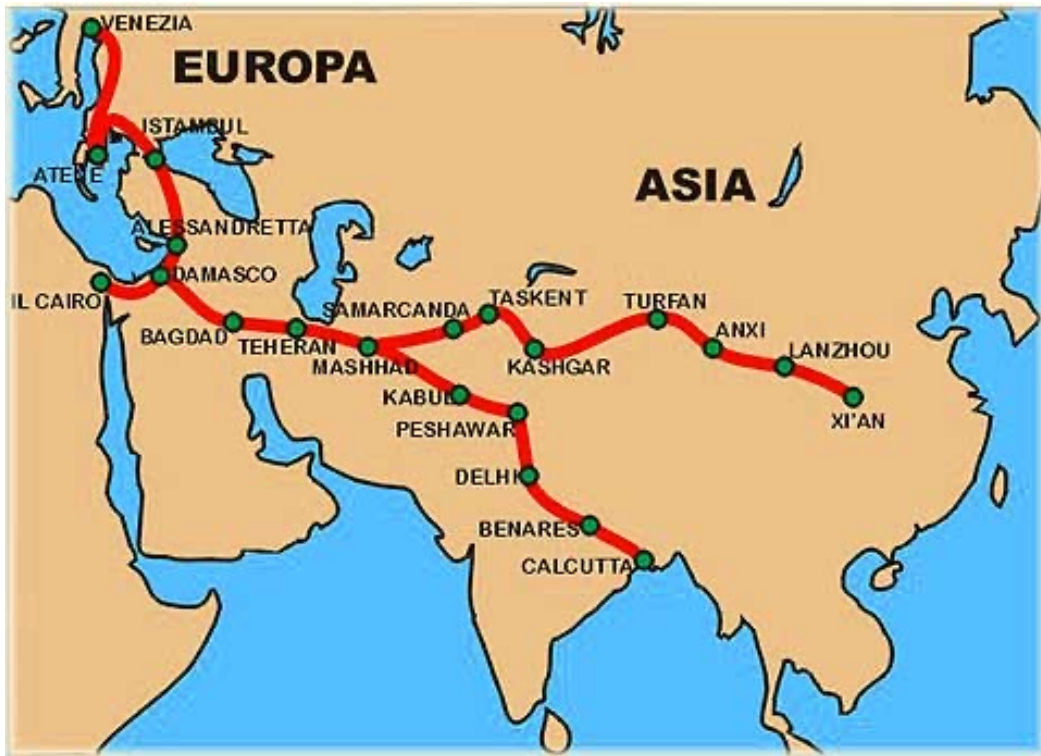
There were basically two main trade routes:

1. The Northern Route, connecting Venice across the Balkans via Hungary, Bosnia and Serbia, through the coastal towns of Split, Kotor and Dubrovnik to Morea Constantinople and the Black Sea, up to Azov and the Crimea.





2. The Southern Route, via Candia to Alessandria in Egypt or via Cyprus to the Syrian-Palestinian coastline (Alexandretta, Latachia, Beirut, Acre and Jaffa).



These 7 matapan coins are very dear to me because they were together in the pocket of a Venetian, Dubrovnik or Serbian merchant in the 13th century and were lost on the old road on the northern Venetian route. They were together, lost or deliberately buried together, stayed for centuries in the earth together and were found together. Today some 770 years later they are still together!



In the picture below, in my hand, you can clearly see very similar patina of all the coins, which indicates a similar content of silver and other alloys because the coins reacted the same to the same soil in which they were together!

