

UNPUBLISHED UNIQUE SERBIAN MEDIEVAL COIN TYPE  
WITH KING ON THE THRONE WITH LION HEADS



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## New discovery of a new type of Serbian medieval coins

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### ABSTRACT

The work was originally published by Edmonton Numismatic Society in the Canadian magazine The Planchet V70 No 07 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

This is the only known type of the Serbian king Stefan Tvrtko I, ruler of the medieval kingdom of Bosnia, with the ruler sitting on the throne holding a scepter and writing feather on the obverse and Jesus sitting on the throne on the reverse. Minted between the coronation as king in 1377 and the taking over the city of Kotor in 1385. King Stefan Tvrtko I first ruled the banovina Bosnia as a ban from 1353 to 1377, and from 1377 to 1391 Tvrtko ruled as king of the Kingdom of Bosnia, which included not only Bosnia as a banovina, but also parts of the former Serbian Empire, Raška, Western Sides and Coastland. The city of Kotor where Tvrtko also later minted money after 1385, is in the coastal part of the new kingdom.

We will compare this new type with other known issues of emperors and kings of the Serbian Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Kingdom of Bosnia and the Republic of Venice in the period of 74 years from 1346 to 1420.

### KEYWORDS

Serbia, Bosnia, Kotor, Stefan Tvrtko I, Middle Ages, money

Through a recent acquisition, I came into possession of so far unpublished example of a Serbian medieval coin, (Picture 1 and 16), which the previous owner attributed to Ban Stefan II Kotromanić. I consider the identification of this coin by the previous owner to Ban Stefan II Kotromanić, more or less questionable.

I also consider the opinion of two colleagues that this is Emperor Stefan Dušan coin to be questionable. All imperial coins of Emperor Stefan Dušan and his son Emperor Uroš with lions of similar design are stylistically different and have the title IMPERATOR on the obverse. On this coin, the Latin letters BOS can be seen on the right side, which can only stand for Bosnia.

There are 4 states and 5 rulers who minted similar type:

### STATES

1. Serbian Empire 1346-1371
2. Kingdom of Hungary 1370-1382
3. Kingdom of Bosnia 1377-1391
4. Republic of Venice 1391-1420

### RULERS AND THEIR MINTS

1. Serbian Emperor Stefan Dusan, Raska mint 1346-1355
2. Serbian Emperor Stefan Dusan, Kotor mint 1346-1355
3. Serbian Emperor Uros, Ulcinj mint 1355-1371
4. Serbian Emperor Uros, Kotor mint 1355-1371
5. Hungarian King Louis I or Ludovic I, Kotor mint 1370-1382
6. Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I, Bosnia mint 1377-1385
7. Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I, Kotor mint 1385-1391
8. City of Kotor independent issue under Venetian protection 1391-1420



(Picture 1) The only specimen with Jesus sitting on a throne minted outside the city of Kotor. Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1391, minted 1377-1385, Knežević 435.

#### IS THIS THE COIN OF BAN STEFAN II KOTROMANIĆ?

Ban Stefan II Kotromanic 1322-1353 was the contemporary of king Stefan Dusan 1331-1346 and later emperor Stefan Dusan 1346-1355. Is this his coin? There are few problems with this hypothesis.

First, ban Stefan II Kotromanic does not have a single type of his coins that has forked Nemanjic crown but round ban crown. Bosnia was banovina during his rule not a kingdom!

It was ban Tvrtko that much later in 1377 was crowned as king of Serbs in Raska, Bosnia, Western Sides and Coastland using Serbian Nemanjic royal forked crown. King Stefan Dusan was last to use that crown until 1346 when he was crowned as an emperor of Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians and this forked crown was then replaced with imperial round crown. There is no evidence that ban Stefan II Kotromanic took and used king Dušan forked crown after 1346! This is simply not possible because he was not king or had such a relationship with Serbia, he was even in an armed conflict with Dušan.

Secondly, even though ban Stefan II Kotromanic did imitate Stefan Dusan helmet and shield (Picture 2), and ruler sitting on the throne with sword over his lap (Picture 3 and 4), types, he would not dare using Serbian royal symbols to represent himself at that time as a crowned king sitting on the throne with lion heads holding a sceptre with a lily on top just like his powerful neighbour.



(Picture 2) Ban Stefan II Kotromanić helmet and shield type modelled on the coins of King Stefan Dušan, Knežević 429.





(Picture 3) Ban Stefan II Kotromanić ruler sitting on the throne with a sword on his lap type modelled after the coins of King Stefan Dušan and the clearly visible half round closed crown of the ban, Knežević 430.



(Picture 4) Ban Stefan II Kotromanić ruler sitting on the throne with a sword on his lap type modelled after the coins of King Stefan Dušan and the clearly visible half round closed crown of the ban, Knežević 431.

#### IS THIS THE COIN OF KING STEFAN TVRTKO I KOTROMANIĆ?

There are a lot of arguments that it is!

Tvrtko as ban also only had half round closed crown and no crown on his coins (Picture 5), just like ban Stefan II Kotromanic, until 1377. Only after becoming king in 1377 forked open Nemanjic crown appeared on his coins.



(Picture 5) Ban Tvrtko ruler sitting on the throne with a sword on his lap type modelled on the coins of King Stefan Dušan and a clearly visible half round closed ban crown, Knežević 433.

There are 2 types where Tvrtko is shown sitting on the throne, one is with lion heads and one is without.

First type is with Jesus standing on the reverse minted between 1377 and 1385 before he took control over the city of Kotor. Second one is Kotor type with Saint Trifon standing on the reverse minted between 1385 and 1391 after he took control over the city of Kotor.

This new type is third, unknown and unique type, now the only known example of king Stefan Tvrtko I with Jesus sitting on the throne on the reverse, only second known example minted outside the city of Kotor between 1377 and 1385 and the only coin that we have a high resolution picture of as the picture of the other one is only a drawing. Jov 51 4 (1) и Rengeo R 865 (2). (Picture 6)

It is possible that Tvrtko, who as ban minted imitations of Dušan coins, such as the type of the ruler sitting on the throne with a sword over his lap, also minted this new type based on the earlier emperor Dušan and Uroš Kotor coins with the ruler sitting on the throne with lion heads before he took over Kotor in 1385. Same type is minted by Hungarian king Ludovic I, Tvrtko contemporary, in the city of Kotor between 1370 and 1382. After taking the rulership over Kotor in 1385, Tvrtko minted type without lion heads so this new type is therefore the last minted type with lion heads on the throne.

#### DESCRIPTION ON COINS

We can distinguish three different reverses and descriptions on the coins.

Reverse:

Jesus sitting on the throne

Jesus standing surrounded by pearls

Saint Trifon standing surrounded by pearls

Obverse description:

T • RX • RA • BOS • STEPΔIIVS

(TVRTKO KING OF RASKA AND BOSNIA STEFAN)

T : REX : BOS NE : ϣ : RASIE

(TVRTKO KING OF BOSNIA AND RASKA)

STEPHOS : RA SIE : ϣ : BO : T : REX

(STEFAN OF RASKA AND BOSNIA TVRTKO KING)

This new type with Jesus sitting on the throne with an unusual high back throne and an arch going behind the halo, Greek initials IC XC (In Greek: Ιησούς Χριστός - Jesus Christ) above, has Latin description on the obverse: ??? BOS • STEPΔIIVS (??? OF BOSNIA STEFAN). It has enough room for 4-5 more letters so it could read T • RX • RA • BOS • STEPΔIIVS (TVRTKO KING OF RASKA AND BOSNIA STEFAN).

The Jesus standing on the reverse type has Latin description on the obverse: T : REX : BOS NE : ϣ : RASIE (TVRTKO KING OF BOSNIA AND RASKA).

The Kotor type with Saint Trifon standing on the reverse has Latin description on the obverse:

STEPHOS : RA SIE : ϣ : BO : T : REX

(STEFAN OF RASKA AND BOSNIA TVRTKO KING)

Jovanović claims that the letter T in the description stands for the southern coastal area called Travunija. Jov 25 13.2 page 137.



(Picture 6) Three known types of king sitting on a throne with lion heads of the Serbian king Stefan Tvrtko I. From left to right: Jesus sitting on a throne, Jesus standing and the Kotor mint Saint Trifon standing on the reverse. Knežević 435, Jovanovic catalogue Jov 51 4 (1) and Rengeo R 865 (2) and private collection.

All city of Kotor issues with ruler sitting on the throne with lion heads or without, under Serbia, Hungary, Bosnia and Venice, have saint Trifon standing on reverse. Only king Stefan Tvrtko I had coins like this with Jesus standing surrounded by pearls and sitting on the throne on the reverse.

This new type is the only known type with Jesus sitting on the throne on the reverse and ruler holding a sceptre and a writing feather that looks like a short spear on the obverse. Sceptre with a lily on the top is in his right hand and a writing feather is in his left hand with its head pointing downward. Face is very similar to emperor Uros city of Kotor and city of Ulcinj examples (Picture 7 и 8), which is strong indication that king Stefan Tvrtko I minted this issue between the beginning of his rule as a king in 1377, 6 years after the death of emperor Uros and taking over the city of Kotor in 1385. His later, city of Kotor issues, are dating from 1385-1391, when city was under his rule but there are exclusively without lion heads on the throne.





(Picture 7) Comparison of the new type of King Stefan Tvrtko I with the issue of the city of Ulcinj follaro type of Emperor Uroš 1355-1371 with lions on the side. Interesting facial and chin line similarities. Knežević 435, Jovanović catalogue Jov 27 1 (1) and private collection.



(Picture 8) Comparison of the new type of King Stefan Tvrtko I with the issue of the city of Ulcinj follaro type of Emperor Uroš 1355-1371 with lions on the side. Interesting facial and chin line similarities. Knežević 435, Jovanović catalogue Jov 27 1 (1) and private collection.

This is very rare, unique and the only known type of king Stefan Tvrtko I with Jesus sitting on the throne on the reverse. Only other type outside Kotor mint is a drawing with Jesus standing on the reverse (Picture 9) published by Jovanovic under reference Jov 51 4 (1) and Rengeo under reference R 865 (2). Description is also different and without Stefan title.





(Picture 9) Comparison with the drawing of the only known non-Kotor type of King Stefan Tvrtko I, but without the title Stefan in the description. Knežević 435, Jovanovic catalogue Jov 51 4 (1) and Rengeo R 865 (2).

## WRITING FEATHER

After the death of king Stefan Tvrtko I in 1391, Kotor became fully independent but asked the Republic of Venice for protection because of continued Ottoman threat. The city officially acknowledged the sovereignty of the Republic of Venice in 1420.

It's very interesting to note that all other examples have ruler holding a lily tipped sceptre, a Serbian royal symbol, in his right hand and a globus with a cross on the top in his left hand except two known coins.

One is this new type where ruler is holding same lily tipped sceptre in his right hand but a writing feather with its head pointing downward in his left hand. The question arises, if on this coin Tvrtko is shown holding a writing feather in his left hand, did he write with his left hand?

Second one is a city of Kotor independent issue under Venetian protection where Saint Mark is holding same writing feather with its head pointing downward but in his right hand. The description on the obverse is: S MARCVS VENETVS (SAINT MARCO THE VENETIAN).

Reference is Jov 25 17 (1) and D 8.1.1-2 (3), seven registered examples. (Picture 10)



(Picture 10) Comparison of the new type of King Stefan Tvrtko I with the independent issue of the city of Kotor under the protection of Venice 1391-1420 with a depiction of Saint Mark sitting on a throne and holding the same writing feather with the tip also pointing downwards only holding it with the other hand. Knežević 435, Jovanovic catalogue Jov 25 17 (1).

Same writing feather with its head pointing downward in the rulers hand on the issue under Venetian protectorate is very strong indication that our new type is minted by no other than Serbian king Stefan Tvrtko I. It is more likely that the city of Kotor would for their newly independent city imitate king Stefan Tvrtko I coins rather than a distant issue of ban Stefan II Kotromanic who died in 1353, 38 years earlier!

This could mean that king Stefan Tvrtko I possibly minted similar types with Jesus sitting on the throne, and Jesus standing on the reverse, minted outside the city of Kotor and saint Trifon standing on the reverse, minted in the city of Kotor. Minting of those with Jesus must have been very low as there is not many around today, only 2, so they are much more rare than Kotor with saint Trifon standing on reverse issues. While there is just one single drawing of Jesus standing on the reverse type in Miroslav Jovanovic catalogue (1), he published 3 Kotor Saint Trifon standing on the reverse examples claiming there are combined 20 registered examples. Dobrinic (3) have listed 39 examples in his book "Catalogue of Coastal Medieval Cities" pages 30 and 31 and Dimitrijevic (4) has published 3 more examples in his book "Catalogue of Serbian Medieval Money" pages 451 and 452, reference D 374. (Picture 12, 13, 14, 17 и 19)

## IS THIS THE COIN OF KING KONSTANTIN BALŠIĆ?

Konstantin Balšić was a Serbian nobleman from the Balšić dynasty and the son of Đurđe I and Teodora Dejanović. After his father's death in 1378 and the death of his uncle Balša II in 1385, rule was taken over by his uncle's brother, Đurađ II, while Konstantin ruled over the area between the Bojana and Drim rivers. He ruled Krojo since 1394 and extended his authority to Danj and its surroundings. After an unsuccessful attempt to capture Drač, according to the decision of the Venetian court in Drač in 1402, he was executed.

On the only known coin of Konstantin, the Latin description on the obverse reads: D : REX COSTANTINVS (LORD KING KONSTANTIN), and on the reverse: . S: STEFANV: . SAINTS: (SAINT STEFAN SKADAR). From the description, it is clear that this cannot be Konstantin Balšić's money because his money bears his full name. (Figure 18)

## IS THIS THE COIN OF KING STEFAN DABISA?

The only other potential candidate for this new type could be king Stefan Dabisa 1391-1395 who became king after the death of king Stefan Tvrtko I. If that is true it would make this coin super rare and only second coin minted by this king known to exist.

This new type could have been minted by king Stefan Dabisa after Tvrtko death within that transitional period from Kotor being under the rule of the Kingdom of Bosnia to being fully independent city and requesting the Republic of Venice support and protection becoming their protectorate.

On the lead seal published by Tesaň museum (5) in "Medieval charters and seals of Bosnian rulers and nobles" page 9, as well as on the only known coin of his, king Stefan Dabisa is sitting on the throne holding lily tipped sceptre in his right hand and a cross tipped globus in his left hand. He has long hair and beard wearing Nemanjic forked royal crown.

The only published coin of king Stefan Dabisa is published by Jovanovic under reference Jov 52 1, page 253 (1) with Latin description: • ST • DABISA • R • BOSNE • ERASIE • (STEFAN DABISA KING OF BOSNIA AND RASKA). (Picture 11 и 20)

However, I think it is less likely that King Stefan Dabisa minted this new type for the simple reason that he would use his personal name as his coin show.





(Picture 11) Comparison of the new type of King Stefan Tvrtko I with the only known example of King Stefan Dabiša. Knežević 435, Jovanovic catalogue Jov 52 1 (1).

## CONCLUSION

The type with lion heads on the throne was minted by the first Serbian emperor Stefan Dusan in the city of Kotor between 1346 and 1355. His son second Serbian emperor Uros also minted similar type in the city of Kotor during his reign between 1355 and 1370. After Hungary took over the city of Kotor and king Ludovic I reigned between 1370 and 1382, similar type was minted. At the same time in the Kingdom of Bosnia our new type has been minted during the reign of king Stefan Tvrtko I between 1377 and 1385. All these types have lion heads on the throne!

Next similar types but without lion heads were minted during the reign of king Stefan Tvrtko I in the city of Kotor between 1385 and 1391 and in the city of Kotor during the independent period and later under Venetian protection between 1391 and 1420.

This type cannot belong to Emperor Stefan Dušan or Emperor Uroš because it is stylistically different and they have the imperial title IMPERATOR on their coins. It cannot be the money of Ban Stefan II Kotromanić because he did not have the title of king, nor was Bosnia in his time a kingdom but a banovina. It cannot be Hungarian money, none of their kings at that time had name Stefan. Neither is King Konstantin Balsic nor king Stefan Dabiša, because they would have used their personal name and Venice would certainly have had its patron Saint Mark on the coin.

In summary, comparisons with other known types with lion heads on the throne and similar types minted by 4 different states especially Kotor mint under Venetian protectorate on which saint Marko is specifically holding same writing feather indicates that this newly discovered and unique type must have been minted by king Stefan Tvrtko I in a period from his coronation in 1377 to the takeover of the city of Kotor in 1385 and used before city of Kotor became independent and was later officially under the protection of the Republic of Venice.



(Picture 12) Serbian Emperor Stefan Dušan 1346-1355, Kotor mint, Zagorac collection



(Picture 13) Serbian emperor Uroš 1355-1371, Kotor mint, Knežević 454.



(Picture 14) Hungarian king Louis I or Ludovic I 1342-1382, Kotor mint 1370-1382, Jovanović catalogue Jov 25 11.3 (1).



(Picture 15) The only copy with Jesus standing minted outside the city of Kotor. Serbian king Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1391, minted 1377-1385, Jovanović catalogue Jov 51 4 (1) and Rengeo R 865 (2).





(Picture 16) The only specimen with Jesus sitting on a throne minted outside the city of Kotor. Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1391, minted 1377-1385, Knežević 435.



(Picture 17) Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1391, Kotor mint 1385-1391, private collection



(Picture 18) City of Skadar. Serbian King Constantin 1377-1402, Dimitrijević catalogue D 384.



(Picture 19) City of Kotor independent edition under the protection of Venice 1391-1420, Jovanović catalogue Jov 25 17 (1).





(Picture 20) The only known copy of King Stefan Dabiša 1391-1395, Jovanović catalogue Jov 51 1 (1).



(Picture 21) Comparison of the new type of King Stefan Tvrtko I, Knežević 435, with Emperor Uroš 1355-1371 Kotor mint from the Jovanović catalogue Jov 25 6.1 (1) and Knežević 454, similar faces and the same Nemanjić forked crown



(Picture 22) The idea of the coinage where the ruler sits on lion's heads may come from the earlier type of emperor Dušan and the coronation type where the emperor is standing on the pillow with the lion's heads. Private collection, Knežević 156, private collection and Jovanović catalogue Jov 11 9.3 (1).



(Picture 23) Obverse left to right: 1 Serbian Emperor Stefan Dusan 1346-1355 Raska mint and 2 Kotor mint, 3 Serbian Emperor Uros 1355-1371 Ulcinj mint and 4 Kotor mint, 5 Hungarian King Ludovic I 1370-1382 Kotor mint, 6 Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1385 Bosnia mint, 7 Bosnia mint, 8 1385-1391 Kotor mint and 9 City of Kotor mint independent issue under Venetian protection 1391-1420.





(Picture 24) Reverse left to right: 1 Serbian Emperor Stefan Dusan 1346-1355 Raska mint Jesus standing and 2 Kotor mint Saint Trifon standing, 3 Serbian Emperor Uros 1355-1371 Ulcinj mint Mary standing and 4 Kotor mint Saint Trifon standing, 5 Hungarian King Ludovic I 1370-1382 Kotor mint Saint Trifon standing, 6 Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1385 Bosnia mint Jesus standing, 7 Bosnia mint Jesus sitting on the throne, 8 1385-1391 Kotor mint Saint Trifon standing and 9 City of Kotor mint independent issue under Venetian protection 1391-1420 Saint Trifon standing.





(Picture 25) Obverse from left to right: 1. Bosnian mint of Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1385, 2. Mint of the city of Kotor independent issue under the protection of Venice 1391-1420, 3. Mint of the city of Skadar of Serbian King Konstantin Balsic, 1377- 1402 and 4. Bosnian mint of Serbian King King Stefan Dabiša 1391-1395.



(Picture 25) Reverse from left to right: 1. Bosnian mint of Serbian King Stefan Tvrtko I 1377-1385, 2. Mint of the city of Kotor independent issue under the protection of Venice 1391-1420, 3. Mint of the city of Skadar of Serbian King Konstantin Balsic, 1377- 1402 and 4. Bosnian mint of Serbian King Stefan Dabiša 1391-1395.

## Literature:

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