

On the roller minting of Stephen Bocskai's Madonna thalers

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Introduction

During his eventful life, Stephen Bocskai served at the court of the emperor, then under the princes of Transylvania, fought victorious battles against the Turks and the Habsburgs. Rudolf II was forced to negotiate peace with him and the Diet of Szerencs elected him Prince of Transylvania and Hungary in 1605.

He died of a serious illness on December 29, 1606. During his short, two-year reign, he did a lot for the independence and territorial growth of the Principality of Transylvania and was one of the Hungarian politicians who did the most for the Reformation.

Stephen Bocskai's coinage was dominated by gold coins, but he also minted silver in relatively large quantities and in many forms. He used the mints that existed at his time, so coins were made in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), Sibiu (Nagyszeben) and Baia Mare (Nagybánya). Despite the relatively short reign, his thalers were made in no less than five characteristically distinct forms.

This publication will discuss the so-called Madonna thalers minted in Nagybánya. At that time, the roller minting technique was already being used in Nagybánya, the essence of which is that the plates containing the obverse and reverse minting dies are mounted on two cylinders, each plate contains a number of minting dies depending on the coin size – five in the case of thalers – and the metal plate is introduced between the oppositely rotating cylinders, on which the coin is pressed and then cut out. Roller minting dies are shown in Figure 1.



[<https://mgmindex.de/index.php?title=Datei:Walzenpr%C3%A4gwerk.png>]

Figure 1: Cylindrical dies used in roller minting

There is relatively little literature available on roller minting. The most frequently cited monograph is [1], and in the Hungarian literature it is only mentioned in passing [2-3].

One of the characteristics of roller minting is that the dies attached to the individual cylinders cannot be separated, so that the obverse and reverse sides are struck together with five resulting in five thalers together. At the same time, the cylinders used together could also be attached by rotating them with respect to each other, thus allowing the obverse and reverse minting to be combined. In the following, we will discuss the consequences of this possibility in the case of Stephen Bocskai's Madonna thalers.

Csaba Tóth prepared an overview of Stephen Bocskai's minting [4], while Ferenc Óvári summarized the die variants of the Madonna thalers by classifying them according to their formal characteristics [5], however, neither work deals with the characteristics resulting from roller minting.

Madonna minting dies

During the data collection and writing of the third Preprint of the upcoming Transylvanian thaler catalogue [6, 7], we collected sufficient material to present all minting variants of Madonna thalers. Of

the 106 Stephen Bocskai thaler-type coins we have come across, which are in public and private collections and have been auctioned in recent years, 57 were minted in Nagybánya, and the reverse of them shows the Madonna with the Child. From this database, it was clearly possible to establish that these thalers were made with 5 obverse and 5 reverse minting dies, i.e. one cylinder-pair was used for their minting.

Images of the obverse dies are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Obverses of the Madonna thalers

The reverse dies are shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Reverses of the Madonna thalers

The existing and past thaler variants

Since the cylinders have 5 obverse and 5 reverse dies, the two cylinders can be positioned in five different ways relative to each other (one die of one cylinder can be placed opposite any die of the other cylinder). In this way, 25 different thaler variants are conceivable. Of these, from the database at our disposal (images and catalogues), we have identified ten Madonna thaler variants.

The table below contains all possible obverse-reverse combinations (in columns o-r) and, if there is a thaler with such a combination in our database, or, if there is none, but Resch [8] lists it in his catalogue, the corresponding Resch identifier (in column R) and the number of such coins in our database (in column N). The obverse and reverse numbering is as given in Figures 2 and 3.

o-r	R	N	o-r	o-r	R	N	o-r	R	N	o-r	R	N
1-1	13	10	1-2	1-3			1-4			1-5		
2-2	14	11	2-3	2-4	-	1	2-5			2-1		
3-3	19	9	3-4	3-5			3-1			3-2	-	1
4-4	15	11	4-5	4-1			4-2			4-3		
5-5	16	12	5-1	5-2	17	0	5-3	18	1	5-4	15A	0

It is striking that the vast majority of thalers in existence today were struck with the primary pairing, but it is also clear that at least three of the four other possible pairings were also used, although certainly in quantities at least an order of magnitude smaller.

The table also shows that there are two thalers in our database that Resch did not know about, and two thalers that Resch lists for which there is no image in our database. We have no information about the grey-coloured combinations, but they must have existed due to the characteristics of roller minting.

We have no image or reference to the once-turned combination at all (in the second o-r column), but given the very rarity of the other combinations, it cannot be ruled out that thalers were also minted in such combinations.

Since we know all the obverse and reverse images that existed, it is possible to construct an image for any combination. Figure 4 shows the two thaler variants (R17 and R15A) that are included in the Resch catalogue but are not available today, as we have constructed them from the images.



Figure 4.: Constructed images of the Resch 15A and Resch 17 thalers

A confusing version

We have shown above that it is very likely that Stephen Bocskai's Madonna thalers were made with a pair of cylinders in 1605. Seemingly contradicting this, the Pannonia Terra V. Chamber Auction offered

a Madonna thaler dated 1606 under lot number 189. According to the signature, “*Unpublished year! Surface engraving!*” There is no indication of the nature of the surface engraving.

Upon closer inspection of the image of the item, it is quite clear that the coin is identical to the 1605 thaler struck with the 2nd obverse and 2nd reverse stamps, but with the year 1606.

Figure 5 shows a comparison of the parts of the two coins around the year.



Figure 5: Comparison of lot 189 of the PTN V. Chamber Auction and the details of the 2-2 1605 thaler

Figure 5 clearly shows that the presented parts of the two coins are identical in every detail (and this is true for the two thalers as a whole), i.e. the year 1606 was recut from 1605. This could of course have been done on all the dies on the cylinder, as was the case with the cylinder containing the reverse dies of Gabriel Báthori in 1608 [11]. If this had happened, then there would be a high chance that there were also surviving recut copies of the other versions on the cylinder. In this case, we do not know of such a case, but the color and shape of the recut number 6 rather suggest a unique intervention on the coin, which may be indicated by the phrase “surface engraving” in the item description (although the remark “unpublished year” is then unjustified). For all these reasons, it seems more correct to conclude that a 1606 cylinder does not exist.

The identification of Stephen Bocskai's roller minted thalers was relatively easy, as they were made with a single pair of cylinders. The identification of other princely thalers minted in Nagybánya, such as those of Sigismund Báthori, is a much more difficult task, which we will discuss in another publication.

Multiple ducats minted with thaler dies

After summarizing the thalers, it is worth mentioning the similar multiple ducats in a few words. It was common practice in Transylvanian coinage to also mint multiple ducats with thaler dies (or vice versa, but this is more of a stylistic issue). This was also the case with Stephen Bocskai. Two of his multiple ducat coins are known today that were made with Madonna dies. One is a six-fold ducat, the image of which can be seen in Figure 6.



From the collection of the Hungarian National Museum
Figure 6.: Six-fold ducat with Madonna stamps

This coin is listed in Huszár's catalog [9] with the identifier 178 and it can be seen that its image is identical to the thaler with the Resch identifier R13, i.e. in the table above it has the obverse and reverse numbers 1-1.

Furthermore, a very peculiar Madonna multiple ducat is known, which I will write about below.

A similar tenfold gold forint, which is definitely different

Huszár [9] publishes a ten-fold ducat (H177), which was made with Madonna thaler dies and refers to the catalogue of Buzdugan et al. [10]. The image of the ten ducat is difficult to make out in both catalogues, but some parts of the circumscriptions make it clear that this coin was certainly not made with the cylinders discussed so far. The image obtained from the museum in Maramureş¹ is shown in Figure 7.



From the collection of Muzeul Judeţean de Istorie şi Arheologie Maramureş
Figure 7.: The ten ducat struck with differing dies

The circumscriptions of this coin in the catalogue [9] are

Obverse: STEPHANUS : BOCHKAI : DE KIS : MARIA : PRINCEPS : TRANSYLVA

Reverse: PARTIVM : REGNI · HVNG : DOMINVS : ET : SICVLOR : COMES

Some of the separators are difficult to identify from the images, but the word PRINCEPS on the obverse is clearly visible (see boxed in Figure 7), while the obverse cylinders used to mint the thalers, shown in Figure 2, have the abbreviation PRIN everywhere.

Similarly, on the reverse of the ten-ducat, the colon is clearly visible between HVNG and DOMINVS (see circled in Figure 7), while on the reverses of the thalers there is a dot everywhere (cf. Figure 3).

It can therefore be stated that a ten-ducat Madonna coin was minted that did not use the cylinders of the known thalers. We do not yet know anything about whether this coin was made by roller minting, and if so, what the other twice four dies on the cylinders were like; this can only be determined through further research.

References

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¹ I am deeply indebted to dr. Sorana Mişcanak (Muzeul Judeţean de Istorie şi Arheologie Maramureş) for preparing and sending me these images.

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Abstract

It is shown that Stephen Bocskai's Madonna thalers were roller minted by using a single pair of cylinders with varying relative rotated positions. All five obverse and reverse dies are known, thus any so far not available thaler type can be reconstructed. A forged 1606 thaler as well as a Madonna ten ducat are presented this latter minted with dies definitely different from those used for thalers.

Keywords

Madonna thaler, Stephen Bocskai, roller minting, forgery.

Summary

Stephen Bocskai's thalers minted in Nagybánya were made by roller minting (with 5 obverse and 5 reverse dies per cylinder). Based on our relatively extensive database, it can be proven that the so called Madonna thalers were made in 1605 with a single pair of cylinders, which, due to the possibility of mounting the cylinders rotated relative to each other, could have resulted in a total of 25 variants. We present that we still have images or catalogue references for ten of these variants, which were made using four different cylinder pairings. Since we know the image of every obverse and reverse die, the image of any thaler minted with any die variant can be reconstructed. It is shown that a Madonna thaler allegedly struck in 1606 is manipulated in its date. We also present a ten ducat piece that was made with Madonna minting dies, but not with the cylinders used for thalers.