

# ROMAN COINS OUTSIDE THE EMPIRE

## Ways and Phases, Contexts and Functions

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## Session V: Regional patterns – the East and the South

### Influx of Roman coins in Georgia

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Georgia is a rather small-sized country with a big history. Situated on the edge of Europe the country was always happy to absorb all manner of European trends, including numismatic ones.

As early as in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC Themistagoras of Miletus made a home for himself and other Greek colonists at Phasis in Colchis, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. And so, western Georgia met Europe. Western Georgia was known as Colchis, and the region to the east and south was Iberia. As such, Georgia may be said to be a synthesis of the West and the East.

With time, Greek commercial control over the narrow coastal strip of Colchis was replaced by Roman hegemony – and the area came to be known as Lazica in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The hegemony was based on a well-manned system of small Roman forts (*castelli*), from Pitius to Apsaros. The kings of Lazica, client state of Rome, dwelling inland (the hinterland), benefited from *pax Romana* and prosperity, gaining a handsome profit by trading with gallant Pontic cities: e.g., Sinope, Amisus and Trapezus. The whole area on the Black Sea may be viewed as a multicultural region which continued the tradition of the age of Hellenism assisted mainly by Roman money and protected by the Roman army. Farther to the east, Iberian kings, some of whom were Roman citizens, welcomed Graeco-Roman transit from Central Asia and India. Spices, precious wood and gemstones were carried to Europe via the Transcaucasian trade route<sup>1</sup> and other routes<sup>2</sup>. Soldiers and merchants brought in money, rich deposits of which are shown in Map 1<sup>3</sup>.

For Colchis/Lazica – 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> c. BC:

- a) Coastal strip (Dioscurias and its vicinity) – 7 republican denarii altogether, dated from a) 171/151 BC. up to M. Antonius.
- b) Inland (Vani and other locations) – 26 republican denarii, and a quinarius, dated from 119/110 (90/80) BC and later. 23 denarii from a hoard together with denarii of Augustus (2) and a drachm of Archelaus, king of Cappadocia.

Mints are mostly Occidental.

The best method to understand better coin circulation in Lazica during the Roman times is by examining numismatic evidence from the well-known coastal *castellum* Pitius and the city in its neighbourhood, and additionally, the hoards from the Lazi hinterland.

<sup>1</sup> Strabo, XI, 7, 3; Plin., Nat. Hist., VI, 52; Dundua T. 1993, p. 29–37.

<sup>2</sup> Dundua T. 1999a, p. 30–32.

<sup>3</sup> For numismatic data see Dundua G. F. 1982; Dundua G. F. 1987; Dundua T. 1997.



1st c	2nd c.	first half of the 3rd c.	second half of the 3rd c	4th c
Dupondius of Augustus	municipal copper of Trapezus – 25 silver coins of Caesarea in Cappadocia – 9 Rome (AR, copper) – 7 <b>mints:</b> Asian – 1 Pautalia – 1	<b>247 pieces:</b> municipal copper of Trapezus – 191; silver coins of Caesarea – 31; copper of Neocaesarea – 3; of Sinope – 1; of Amisus – 1; of Nicomedia – 1 <b>149 pieces from hoard<sup>4</sup>:</b> municipal copper of Trapezus 2nd – 3rd c. (L. Verus-Philip Junior) – 139; didrachm of Hadrian – 4; didrachm of Commodus – 1; drachm of Septimius Severus – 2; drachm of Julia Domna – 1; drachm of Caracalla – 1; drachm of Geta – 1 All the drachms and the didrachms are the Caesareian silver issues.	<b>some 100 pieces,</b> mostly copper struck in Rome – 70, including also antoniniani; Antioch – 11; Cyzicus – 6; other mints are represented by unique samples	<b>more than 500 copper pieces; 310 from the hoard:</b> Constantine I – 11; Helena – 4; Constantine I (struck after his death) – 52; Constantine II – 6; Constantius II – 102; Constans – 75; Constantius or Constans – 60 <b>mints:</b> Constantinople – 20; Antioch – 87; Nicomedia – 51; Cyzicus – 31; Alexandria – 10; Siscia – 9; Thessalonica – 1; unidentified – 101 <b>single finds:</b> Licinius, Constantine I, Helena, Constantine I (struck after his death), Crispus, Constantine II, Constantius II, Constans, Valentinian II <b>mints:</b> Antioch – 30; Constantinople – 20; Nicomedia – 11; Cyzicus – 5; Thessalonica – 6; Siscia – 7; Trier – 1; Sirmium – 1; Alexandria – 1; unidentified – 127

Table 1. Coin finds from Pitius.

<sup>4</sup> The *terminus post quem* for this hoard is AD 245. The deposit may have been buried under the threat of Gothic invasion from Crimea in AD 252 when Pitius was threatened. Both Pitius and Discurias/Sebastopolis produced ca. 238 finds of Trapezuntine municipal issues.



GERZEULI	EKI	SEPIETI
<b>Some 469 pieces:</b> Denarius of Augustus – 1 Local imitation to the stater of Lysimachus – 1  Caesareian silver issues (hemidrachm, drachm, didrachm): Nero – 1 Vespasian – 30 Domitian – 9 Nerva – 22 Trajan – 165 Hadrian – 90 Antoninus Pius and M. Aurelius – 122 L. Verus – 28	<b>907 pieces:</b> Orodes I of Parthia – 1  Caesareian silver issues (nominal – didrachm and drachm): Nerva – 1 Trajan – 2 Hadrian – 712 Antoninus Pius – 55 L. Verus – 1 Julia Domna – 1 (drachm) Caracalla – 1 (drachm) Geta – 1 (drachm) Elagabalus – 1 (drachm)  Denarius struck at Rome: Commodus – 1 Pertinax – 5 Niger – 1 Septimius Severus – 12 Julia Domna – 5 Caracalla – 2 Severus Alexander – 1  Denarius struck at Oriental mints: Septimius Severus – 84 Julia Domna – 9 Severus Alexander – 5 Denarius struck at Alexandria: Septimius Severus – 5 denarius struck either at Rome or Antioch: Geta – 1 Caesareian issues - 775; denarii – 131, mostly struck at Oriental mints	<b>approximately 377 pieces:</b> Roman denarii – 365; mints: Emesa (158), Rome (118), Oriental mints (62) and a small number of Caesareian coins. Issues of Septimius Severus dominated the hoard (227 pieces), mostly struck at Emesa in 194. A Severus Alexander issue probably from AD 222 provides a certain date for the hoard.  Coins from extreme Eastern provinces of Lazica: Augustus (denarius) – 56 Tiberius (denarius) – 1 Caligula (denarius) – 1 Nero (Caesareian hemidrachm) – 1 Nerva (Caesareian drachm) – 3 Trajan (denarius) – 1 Hadrian (Caesareian didrachm) – 2 Hadrian (Caesareian hemidrachm) – 2 Antoninus Pius (Caesareian didrachm) – 2 Faustina Junior (denarius) – 1 Julia Domna (denarius, Laodicea) – 1 Constantine I (solidus, Siscia) – 1 Constantius II (solidus, Antioch) – 2 Constantine I (semissis, Constantinople) – 1 Constantius II (semissis, Antioch) – 1 Constantius II (triens, Antioch) – 1

**Table 2. Hoards from the hinterland (Lazica).**

### Interpretation of Tables 1 and 2

First, the empiric level. On the sea coast we find mostly provincial silver of Caesareian issue, municipal copper of Trapezus, and Imperial copper money, struck predominantly at the mints of Antioch and Asia Minor, recorded in assemblages, hoards and as single finds. The inland zone absorbed only Caesareian silver, accompanied by Roman denarii, struck in greater quantity by Eastern e.g., Syrian mints. Further to the east the presence of Late Roman gold issues and denarii of Augustus, mixed with Caesareian silver issues, create a truly astonishing picture of Lazica. On an academic level interpretation starts with the outstanding of Caesareian issues – most likely they were brought in by merchants, either from Sinope or Amisus, as objects imported from these centres dominate in Lazica. However, in satisfactory commercial balance this money would facilitate the foreign trade and not domestic exchange. Some more money was necessary. One possible scenario is that the inhabitants of Lazica never had their own coinage but could barter a sufficient amount of Roman coinage for their economy, and the closest *aerarium* branches were that of Cappadocia and Syria. And for the absence of bronze coinage in the same area (Lazica) there is only one possible explanation – there was no need for small trade in Lazica in general. Thus, copper coins would have entered



the area for military purposes only, as part of soldiers' *stipendium*. This statement can be argued as follows:

Why did the soldiers have to be paid in copper?! Indeed, silver money and especially gold, being of lighter overall weight was easier for transfer to the camps<sup>5</sup>. Why is it then that coins recovered from the site of former Roman camps, everywhere (e.g., on the Rhine), are dominated by bronze issues?!<sup>6</sup> When you are paid some few hundreds per year, and – usually in three instalments – everybody expects this to be done in basic units. This is absolutely logical. But when you are in military camp, having all the supplies you need, and also – a future opportunity to acquire a small farm with carefully saved money just invested in, what would you prefer – all of your money with you at the border, or most of it kept safe in a bank? The latter would have worked perfectly with the first Roman cycle of capitalism and normal banking-system in service<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the soldiers received only copper as pocket-money. The written sources speak of silver donatives issued to the legions. But they also mention how dangerous it could happen for large sums of money to be in camp – Vitellius made his way to the throne thanks to financial assistance from the soldiers (not necessarily money)<sup>8</sup>. Thus, officials could avoid dangerous accumulation of money in camps, on one hand, and on the other hand, they always possessed some extra money for large state commercial operations.

The Georgian case can provide more arguments that copper was paid to the soldiers. With a handsome agriculture, which could find market everywhere – in the hinterland towns inhabited by the Colchians, in the prosperous Greek cities in the coastal strip with an already mixed population and finally, abroad, first in Miletus, then Athens and Sinope – this land provided a well developed middle class, with money<sup>9</sup>, but it failed to create a small service-system until the 10<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>10</sup> Hands were needed elsewhere. And the Hellenic economies also failed here due to the country's excessive humid conditions; the Greeks had no idea how to drain the marshes<sup>11</sup>. This is, perhaps, why copper money was never respected here. The only attempt by Phasis to issue small denominations was again connected with the beloved silver – 3 hemitertartemorii show this attempt was an abortive one<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, just a few copper coins from 6<sup>th</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC are found in the coastal strip<sup>13</sup>.

And then an amazing thing happens – a copper “revolution” marks the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. Copper is everywhere – Dioscurias and its region not only show some twenty copper Pontic municipal pieces of Eupator's time discovered there<sup>14</sup>, but also produce local autonomic Dioscuriadi (pl. I:1)<sup>15</sup>, mostly to be spread in Crimean Bosphorus; Vani/Surion in the deep inland zone produced finds of some 200 synchronous copper coins, struck either in Pontic cities, or locally by the king of Colchis in 84 BC, Mithridates Philopator Philadelphos, son of Mithridates Eupator (pl. I:2)<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, as a Pontic satrapy, Colchis was fortunate to have a king of its own only for a definitely small period<sup>17</sup>. Full-scale economic transformation – this could be an immediate answer. Alas, it took a whole century and a half, even more, for the next influx of copper coins. The written sources contain reports on Romans stationed on the

<sup>5</sup> Wolters R. 2000–2001, p. 579–588.

<sup>6</sup> Wigg D. G. 1997, p. 281–288; Wigg D. G. 1999a, p. 111, 121; Wigg D. G. 1999b, p. 327–346; Berger F. 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Dundua T. 1996; Andreau J. 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Tac. Hist., I. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Dundua T. 1999b, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Dundua T. 1997, p. 113–114.

<sup>11</sup> Dundua T. 2000, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Dundua T. 1999b, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Dundua T. 1993, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Dundua T. 1993, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Dundua T., Dundua G., Javakhishvili N., Eristavi A. 2003, p. 13, No. 19–20.

<sup>16</sup> Dundua T. 1993, p. 46–50.

<sup>17</sup> App. Mithr., 64.



Eastern Black Sea coast by this time; and archaeology reveals plenty of synchronous copper coins. Until the 6<sup>th</sup> c. copper money comes and goes, and there is in fact one more gap for the 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>18</sup>. The Byzantines had gone!

So, copper comes and goes, like the soldiers did. This means that partly the Imperial armies used to be paid in copper, or bronze, does not matter (Fig. 1).

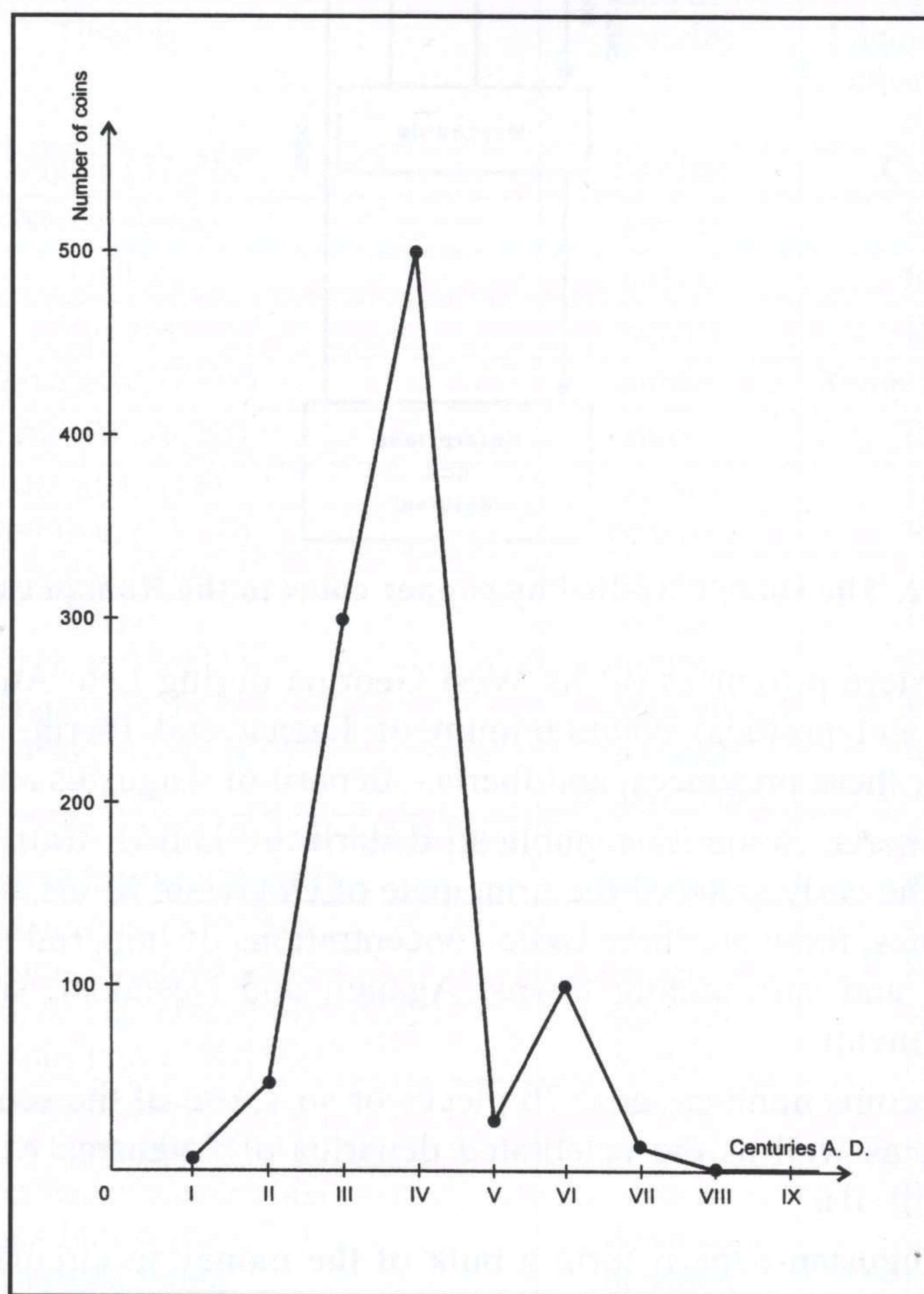


Fig. 1. Copper money from Pitius.

Now about the route travelled by copper coinage to end up in a soldier's pocket. Municipal coins used for payment first went to a local *fiscus* as taxes from individuals, only then – to a camp ascribed to a given province. As to the imperial copper – as far as the hoard from Pitius is represented by the pieces with different mints and chronological characteristics, a direct link between the mints and camps in Lazica can be rejected fully. Trade has never existed without state credit<sup>19</sup>, which have to be returned back. From high commercial class, whole-sale traders, money moves towards enterprises and estates, then – to the shops of smaller merchants. Upper and middle classes, already having money, pay their taxes. The state administration depends on them. The Roman soldiers could be paid this way, from the *fisci*<sup>20</sup> in Asia Minor and Syria (Fig. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Dundua G., Dundua T. 2006, p. 182–186.

<sup>19</sup> Wolters R. 1987, p. 23–58; Lo Cascio E. 1993, p. 280, No. 27; for the Greeks: Howgego Ch. 1995, p. 20, 26.

<sup>20</sup> For the *fisci*: Wolters 2003, p. 147–160.



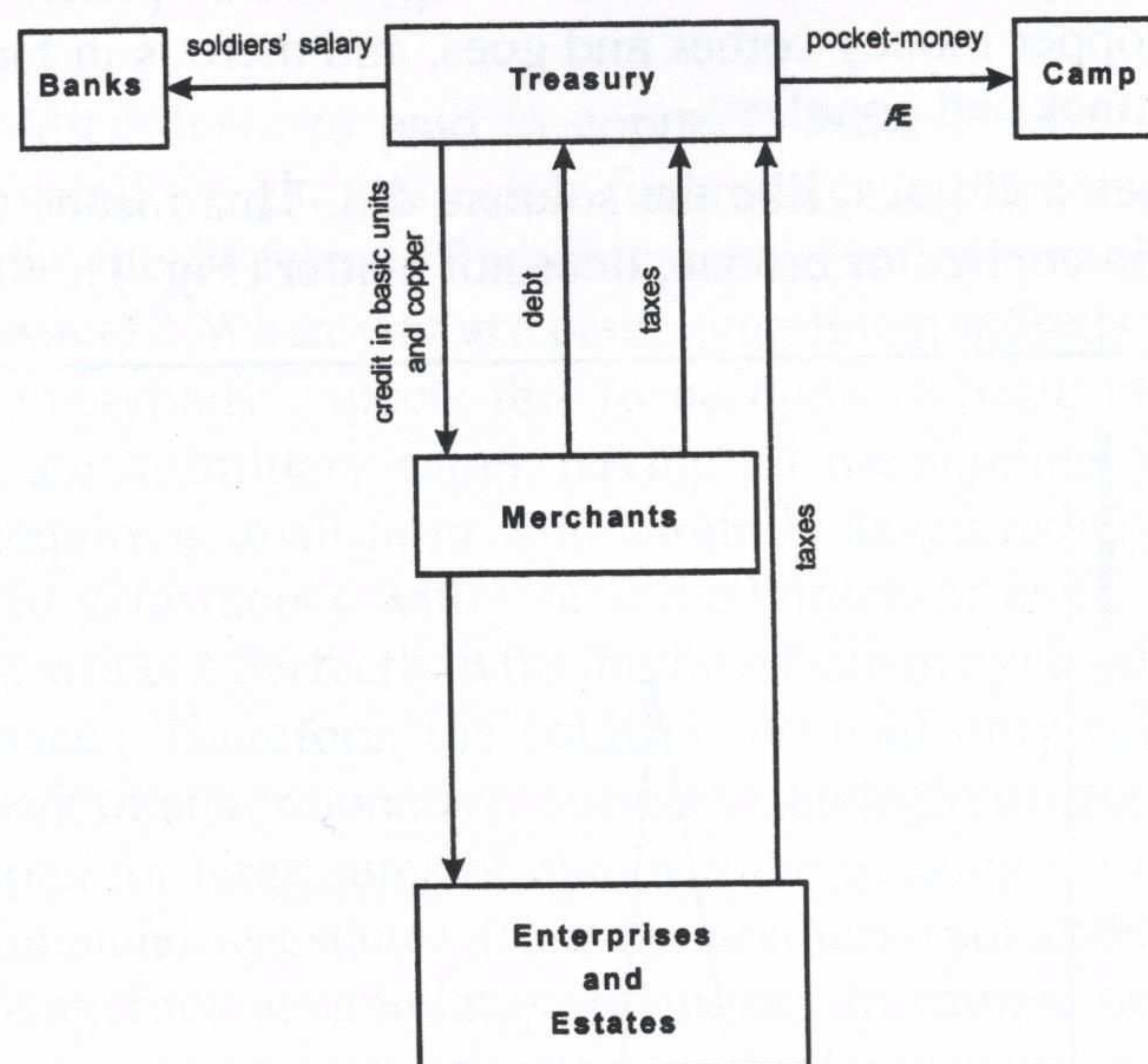


Fig. 2. The route travelled by copper coins to the Roman camps.

As to the Eastern provinces of the West Georgia during Late Antiquity, they seem to form an economic and political condominium of Lazica and Iberia. Lazica provided the Caesareian issues for these provinces, and Iberia – denarii of Augustus and late Roman gold.

Now about Iberia. Some 25 republican denarii are known from East Georgia, dated from 118 BC. until the early years of the principate of Octavian. Mints are mostly Occidental. As to the Roman times, there are three basic concentrations of Imperial money: in the ancient capital of Mtskheta and surrounding towns, Agaiani and Nastakisi; sites in the foot-hills: Zguderi; Ertso and Jinvali.

Roman gold coins number some 70 pieces or so, those of the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. are locally imitated, as well as the celebrated denarius of Augustus with Gaius and Lucius Caesars on reverse (pl. II).

Aurei and Augustan denarii form a bulk of the money in circulation in Iberia, other, debased denarii were, in fact, ignored – a situation quite similar to that in the Roman Orient for some time<sup>21</sup>. If we confront this data with Syrian imports discovered in Georgia<sup>22</sup>, one can suggest that the Syrian provincial treasury (Lazi enjoyed it a bit later) was the source of supply for Iberia.

A severe Imperial crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. limited this supply. Even if it did not, Iberia would have bartered the Roman money no more. Socio-economic transformation of East Georgia towards feudalism needed a supply different than money. The country's stocks of precious metal could be exhausted to support the general reform – the strengthening in number of the upper classes meant a gradual conversion of some yeomanry from farmers to high-level administrators. Food-shortages could happen, and large-scale food supply was, perhaps, necessary. Industry suffered also as some of the artisans had to earn living doing agriculture jobs. The amount of industrial goods *per capita* was quickly diminishing, thus creating a demand for small-scale local debased issues with the king as the only potential power to strike these coins<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Dundua G. F. 1982, p. 240.

<sup>22</sup> Dundua T., Silagadze N. 2000, p. 20, 52, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Dundua T. 1997, p. 106.



Emperor	Type of coin	Mint	Number of coins
Augustus (2 BC – 4 AD)	denarius	Lugdunum	145
Tiberius	aureus	Lugdunum	1
Tiberius	denarius	Lugdunum (and other Gaulish mints)	3
Caligula (37–38)	drachm	Caesarea	1
Nero (64–68)	aureus	Rome	4
Galba	aureus	Rome	1
Vitellius	aureus	Rome	1
Vespasian (77–78)	aureus	Rome/Lugdunum	2
Titus (73, 76, 80)	aureus	Rome	4
Domitian (76)	aureus	Rome	1
Domitian (77–78)	denarius	Rome	3
Trajan (106)	aureus	Rome	1
Trajan	aureus	Rome	1
Trajan (103–111)	denarius	Rome	1
Trajan (98–117)	denarius	Rome	1
Trajan (112–117)	denarius	Rome	1
Trajan	hemidrachm	Caesarea	1
Hadrian (119–122; 125–128; 119–138; 134–138)	aureus	Rome	7
Hadrian (125–128; 134–138)	denarius	Rome	3
Antoninus Pius (149/150)	aureus	Rome	1
Antoninus Pius (155/156)	aureus	Rome	1
Antoninus Pius (140–144)	denarius	Rome	1
Antoninus Pius (155/156)	denarius	Rome	1
Faustina Senior (141)	aureus	Rome	2
Faustina Senior (after 141)	denarius	Rome	1
Faustina Junior (under Pius)	aureus	Rome	1
Faustina Junior (161–177)	denarius	Rome	1
Faustina Junior	denarius	Rome	2
M. Aurelius under Pius (151/152)	aureus	Rome	1
M. Aurelius under Pius (156/157)	aureus	Rome	1
Commodus	aureus	Rome (?)	1
Septimius Severus (201)	aureus	Rome	2
Septimius Severus	drachm	Caesarea	1
Septimius Severus	Æ		2
Gordian III	aureus		2
Philip Senior	aureus		1
Philip Junior	aureus		1
Decius Trajan	aureus		1
Valerianus	aureus		1
Carinus	Æ		1
Constantine I	solidus	Nicomedia	1
Constantius II	solidus	Antioch	1
Valens	siliqua	Antioch	1

**Tab. 3. Roman coins from Mtskheta and the region.**



Emperor	Type of coin	Mint	number of coins
Augustus (2 BC – 4 AD)	denarius		32
Domitian under Vespasian (77/78)	aureus	Rome	1
Antoninus Pius (150/151)	aureus	Rome	1
Faustina Senior under Pius (after 141)	aureus	Rome	1
Faustina Senior under Pius (after 141)	denarius	Rome	1
M. Aurelius and Commodus (175/176)	aureus	Rome	1
Commodus (190)	aureus	Rome	1
Caracalla and Geta (198/199)	aureus	Rome	1
Caracalla under Severus (204)	aureus	Rome	1
Elagabalus (218/219)	aureus	Rome	1
Elagabalus (218/219)	aureus	Oriental mint	3
Elagabalus (220–222)	aureus	Rome	2
Severus Alexander (226)	aureus	Rome	1
Severus Alexander (228)	aureus	Rome	1
Gordian III (240)	aureus	Rome	1

**Tab. 4. Roman coins from Zguderi.**

Emperor	Type of coin	Mint	Number of coins
Augustus (2 BC – 4 AD)	denarius		14
Julia Domna (198–209)	aureus	Rome	1
Severus Alexander (225)	aureus	Rome	1
Gordian III	aureus		2
Valerianus	aureus		1
Carus	aureus	Antioch	1
Diocletian	aureus		1

**Tab. 5. Roman coins from Ertso and Jinvali.**

Thus, Roman copper money hurried back home with Imperial garrisons withdrawn from Lazica; and silver or gold was back as a means of exchange for food; both of them having no opportunity of being re-struck as Georgian money.

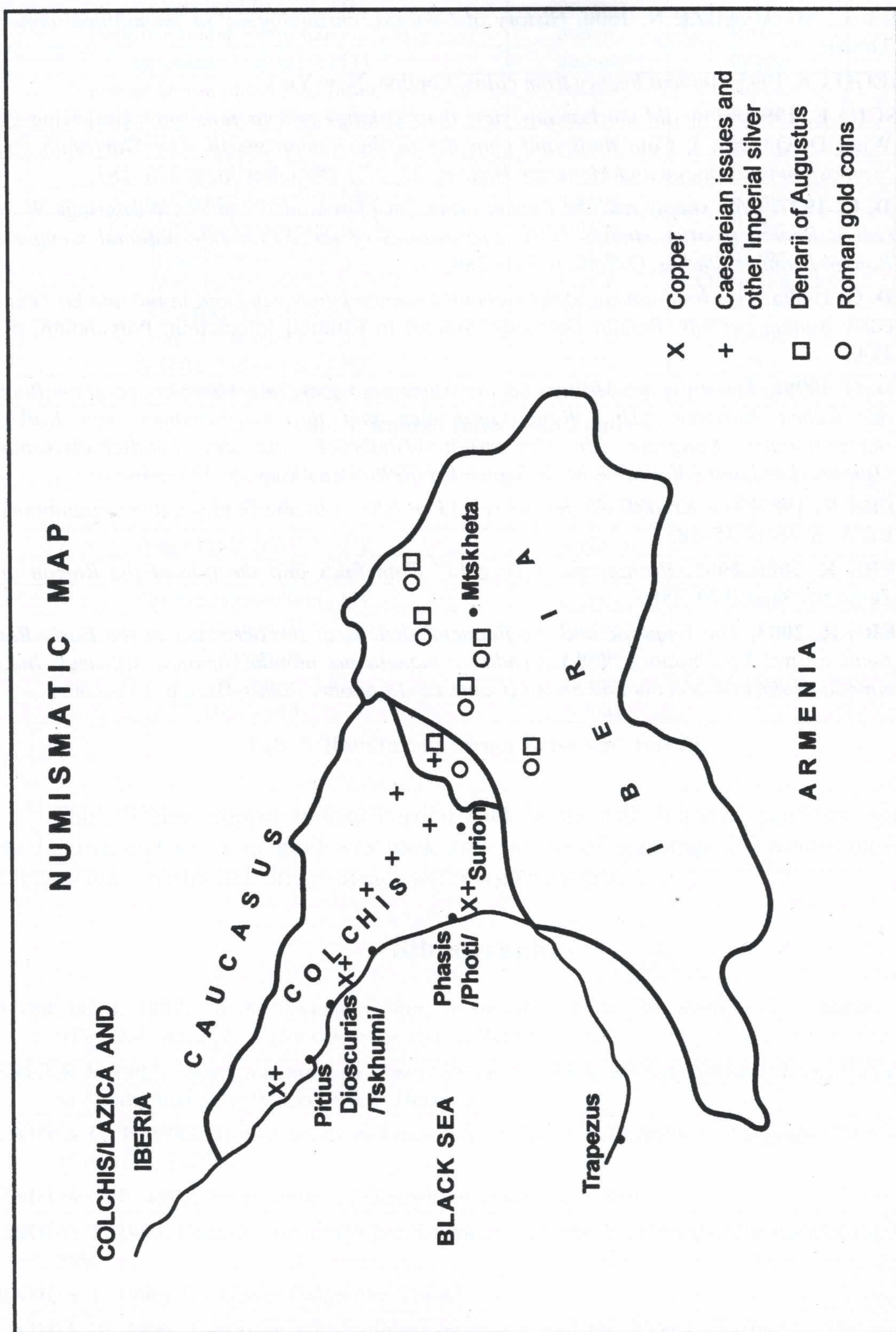
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Map 1. Coin finds in Georgia.





1



2

**Plate 1. Colchis local issues.**



**Plate 2. Iberian imitations of Roman coins.**