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WITH BYZANTINE ICONOGRAPHY

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## REVIEW OF GEORGIAN COINS WITH BYZANTINE ICONOGRAPHY

This paper deals with the monetary issues of Georgia in the 10th-15th cc<sup>1)</sup>. The aim of the research was a precise attribution of numismatic data and consideration of the corresponding historical information.

The period under discussion is very important in view of the Byzantine-Georgian relationship. The numismatic expression of this conjuncture forms a special interest – particularly, as Georgian money was struck in Byzantine style and Georgian kings claimed their imperial titles stressing this way a formal integrity of the Orthodox World – Byzantium and Georgia were regarded to form unique Orthodox space.

It is appropriate to split the whole period into two stages: I. the 10<sup>th</sup> c. – the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> c. is a time of very strong imperial feelings; II. and the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> cc. – of their reminiscence.

The initiator of the Georgian coinage inspired by Byzantine style was David III Kuropalates, seignior of Imier Tao, a part of historical Southwestern Georgia. The Description of his miliaresion/drama in Georg./is as follows:

David III Kuropalates<sup>1a)</sup>. Miliaresion. The weights range from 3.1 to 3.5 gr. d ≈ 23-24 mm. Half drama (?) – 2.1 gr. d = 22.9 mm. Oltisi /Pl. I, Fig. 1/.

Obv. Georgian legend/abbreviation everywhere/ – †ᲗᲣᲗᲚᲗ «Christ, forgive David».

Rev. Cross potent on the three steps and Georgian legend – ᲕᲠᲠᲗᲚ «Kuropalati».

Only four specimens are known from this emission.

<sup>1)</sup> The author is largely indebted by the general works about the Georgian coins: E.A. Пахомов, *Монеты Грузии, часть I*, С.-Петербург, 1910; D.M. LANG, *Studies in the Numismatic History of Georgia in Transcaucasia*, New York, 1955; Д.Г. Капанадзе, *Грузинская Нумизматика*, Москва, 1955. Still the attributions presented here totally differ from the previous pattern.

<sup>1a)</sup> In the 10<sup>th</sup> c. the kingdom of Kartvelians /i.e. Iberia/ was a system of the principalities formally ruled by one King. And the others, including David, were his formal vassals.

The dating of this issue rests on a precise knowledge of the year in which David was granted the title of Kuropalates. And it is thought that this title was bestowed upon him for his special help to the emperor Basileios in the struggle against mutinous grandees. The army of Bardas Sclerus was annihilated by David's generals near Halys River. This event took place in 979. The study dates the emission of the coins of David III to 979, it was in that year that he received the title of Kuropalates and coins bearing that title would have served as a magnificent memorial to that historical event<sup>2)</sup>.

From the 4 specimens now discussed none of them was found in Georgia. They were discovered far away from there, on the territory of Eastern, Central and Northern Europe/Russia, Estonia, Germany and Sweden/<sup>3)</sup>. How did they find their way to those regions? Two hypotheses exist concerning this item:

1) typologically these coins are very close to almost synchronous silver pieces of Basileios II and Constantine VIII, and they have the same weight and standard. So it was good money and could circulate everywhere together with Byzantine currency. Russian merchants used to come to Constantinople regularly and then they took the silver pieces of David Kuropalates to Europe;

2) trading contacts between Georgia and Russia must account for the findings of these coins on the territory of Eastern, Central and Northern Europe, effected via Tmutaracan /modern Taman Peninsula/, this view being corroborated by other evidence as well. A rare Tmutaracanian piece was found in Georgia – the imitation of a Miliarion<sup>4)</sup>.


The supposed mint for coins of Kuropalates is Oltisi, his residence /modern Oltu in Turkey/.

<sup>2)</sup> But still we have a suspicion. Why do these coins copy Imperial silver of 977; maybe David was already Kuropalates while preparing auxiliary for the Emperor? PH. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, v. III part two, Washington, 1973, p. 610, pl. XLVI, n. 16. And one more question – there is Patriarchal cross on the supposed prototype. Still another pattern was used also while modelling this coin. v. PH. GRIERSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 536, 554-555, nn. 16, 17-18, pl. XXXVII, nn. 16, 17-18.

<sup>3)</sup> Near St. Petersburg, place Lodeinoe Pole, Russia; place Völlja, Estonia; Mecklenburg-Schwerin, place Schwaan, Germany; Gotland, Dalhem, Hallföse II, Sweden. P.B. Кебуладзе, В.М. Потин, Монеты Давида Курапалата вкладах западноевропейских денариев, *Matsne /Historical issue/*, 1970, n. 2, Tbilisi; Corpus Nummorum Saeculorum IX-XI, qui in Suecia Reperti Sunt. Catalogue of Coins from 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Centuries Found in Sweden, 1. Gotland. 3. Dalhem-Etelhem, Stockholm, 1982, p. 5, pl. I, 2:12.

<sup>4)</sup> P.B. Кебуладзе, В.М. Потин, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

The kings of Georgia – Bagrat IV/1027-1072/<sup>(b)</sup>, Giorgi II/1072-1089/ and David IV /1089-1125/ – were enjoying St. Virgin Blachernitissa type taken from the coins of Constantine IX<sup>(c)</sup> and maintained after.



The very characteristic trait of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. Georgian numismatics is an obvious tendency towards weight lightening – a reception of a new standard, the Byzantine 2/3 miliaresion, called tetri // took place during the reign of Bagrat IV. This term already figures in the 11<sup>th</sup> c. documents<sup>(d)</sup>.

Now let us describe the material:

Bagrat IV. I emission. Tetri. The weights range from 1.6 to 2.2 gr. d = 26-27 mm. 1055<sup>(e)</sup>, Kutaisi / the Western Georgia/<sup>(f)</sup> /Pl. I, Fig. 2/.

Obv. Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium.

Greek legend – Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ – «The Holy Virgin», close to nimbus, in different ways.

Rev. Marginal Georgian legend –  – «Christ, exalt Bagrat, the king of the Abkhasians» /i.e. the Western Georgia/. In the centre –  – «and Nobilissimos».

Only 12 specimens are known. The dating is based on the king's Byzantine title and other political traits.

Now briefly about the mentioned Georgian title – «the king of the Abkhasians». A country is economic-geographical region. Unique culture is formed within on a basis of the intensive interior economic links. And Georgia is such complex. It was formed by an economic synthesis of the East /Iberia/ and the West /Colchis/, and since the Mingrelian /i.e. the Colchian/ language has been transferred to a position of a family-language. A bit earlier the Svanetian and the Abkhasian languages were put on the same position by the Mingrelian language. In the 8<sup>th</sup> c. new dynasty was founded in Colchis, or Lazica. And this ruling house was from the province of Abkhasia, part of Lazica. Lazica now is called «the Kingdom of Abkhasians», and the languages spoken here are Mingrelian, first, then – Georgian. And soon after Georgia – a new economic complex – came to realization, and some times later the country was unified by

<sup>(b)</sup> We have a gap in national minting until this time; only Arabs blocked in Tiflis continue their issues /v. Д.Г. Капанадзе, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-53/. As to phenomenon of Georgia, it will be discussed a bit later.

<sup>(c)</sup> PH. GRIERSON, *op. cit.*, pl. LXII, n. 3.

<sup>(d)</sup> T. DUNDUA, *Georgian Ethnocultural Evolution and the West According to Numismatic Material* /the 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. - 1453/ (in Georg. with Engl. summary), Tbilisi, 1997, pp. 200-201.

<sup>(e)</sup> The dating will be argued below.

<sup>(f)</sup> Capital by that time.



- Obv. Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Greek legend – MP – ΘΥ, to l. and r. from nimbus.
- Rev. Marginal Georgian legend –  $\dagger\text{ႣႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧ}$  – «Christ, exalt David, the king of Abkhasians»<sup>(b)</sup>. In the centre –  $\text{ႧႧႧႧႧႧႧ}$  – «and Sebastos».

And the second type has the cross on Rev. while St. Virgin is maintained. II emission. Half tetri. The weights range from 0.5 to 0.9 gr. d = 23-29 mm. 1089-1099. Kutaisi /Pl. II, Fig. 7/.

Thus St. Virgin Blachernitissa series came to an end.

David IV. III emission. Follis. Weight – 10.7 gr. d = 35 mm. 1118-1125. Kutaisi /Pl. II, Fig. 8/.

- Obv. Bust of a king in imperial coat – wearing stemma /imperial crown with cross and the pendants, pendilia,  $\pi\rho\epsilon\pi\epsilon\nu\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\iota\alpha$ /, divitision and chlamys; holds in right hand scepter cruciger, and in left, globus cruciger. And Georgian legend –  $\text{ႧႧ-ႧႧ}$  – «king David».
- Rev. Cross in a centre and marginal Georgian legend –  $\dagger\text{ႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧႧ}$  – «Christ, David the king of Abkhasians, Kartvelians, Ranians, Kakhetians, Armenians»<sup>(c)</sup> /Rani and Kakheti are very Eastern provinces of Georgia/.

The obverse type of this coin is patterned on the reverse of the post-reform aspron trachy /billon/ of Alexius I Comnenus<sup>(7)</sup>. But the imperial coat of the Georgian king is not a fiction.

After this period and for some time, only copper coins were struck in Georgia. Credit money was founded. Asia lacked silver for some time. So Georgian currency was put safely in the royal treasury. A copper issued after could buy the same goods as silver within ratio. Indeed, mostly the Georgian copper pieces are labelled as «silver». Arabic legends on these «irregularly» struck coins are an indication that these were intended to function within the Asian monetary system. The Georgian king is referred to as «the sword of the Messiah». The western typology is however preserved.

<sup>(b)</sup> David gained almost full control over the country only about 1099, and before he had been just «king of Abkhasians». First two issues show the king in this troubled position.

<sup>(c)</sup> David is «king of Armenians» from 1118, so his follis was struck between 1118-1125 /T. DUNDUA, *op. cit.*, p. 151/.

<sup>(7)</sup> MICHAEL HENDY, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire /1081-1261/*, Washington, 1969, p. 86, pl. 7, nn. 2-4.



Rev. St. Virgin seated upon a throne like on the imperial issue of Michael VIII Palaeologus<sup>9)</sup> and corresponding Georgian legend; **ᲔᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ**.

Georgian imitations of Trapezuntine aspers<sup>10)</sup> keep the effigy of stemma within the limits of Georgian culture.

Money called «Kirmaneuli». Several monetary units exist within this group – drama, tetri and half tetri. Kutaisi, mostly /Pl. III, Fig. 12/.

Obv. Caesar holding labarum and **ἀνεξίκακία**. Distorted Greek legends for the names of Comneni. Georgian origin is outlined by a six-pointed star typology.

Rev. St. Eugenius standing holding long cross, and distorted Greek legend<sup>10)</sup>.

This especially interesting period of the Georgian numismatics came to an end in 1453-1461.

<sup>9)</sup> MICHAEL HENDY, *op. cit.*, p. 263, pl. 45, n. 12.

<sup>10)</sup> The rulers of Imereti /Western Georgia/ issued these coins.

<sup>10)</sup> O. RETOWSKI, *Die Münzen der Komnenen von Trapezunt*, Moskau, 1910, pl. VIII, n. 8.



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## ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. I    Fig. 1. David Kuropalates, Miliarsion, 979 (?)  
           Fig. 2. Bagrat IV, Tetri, 1055  
           Fig. 3. Bagrat IV, Tetri, 1068/69  
           Fig. 4. Giorgi II, Tetri, 1074  
           Fig. 5. Giorgi II, Tetri, 1075-1089
- Pl. II    Fig. 6. David IV, Half Tetri, 1089-1099  
           Fig. 7. David IV, Half Tetri, 1089-1099  
           Fig. 8. David IV, Follis, 1118-1125  
           Fig. 9. Giorgi Lasla, Follis, 1210
- Pl. III    Fig. 10. Rusudan, Drama, 1230  
           Fig. 11. David Ulugh and David Marin, Drama, 1261  
           Fig. 12. «Kirmaneuli»