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Georgian Coins with Byzantine Iconography and Imperial Titulature of the Georgian Kings

The paper deals with the monetary issues of Georgia in the 10th-15th cc.¹ 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 10th c.-the beginning of the 13th c. is a time of very strong Imperial feelings; II. and the 13th-15th cc. – of their reminiscence.

The Byzantine Imperial titulature was long established in the Georgian political reality. Court titles were bestowed upon kings and princes of the Georgian states. The Georgian nobles were among them as well. Those who received the titles were the most vivid members of Georgian aristocracy living in Georgia or outside its borders. It is also important to point that all the Byzantine titles in Georgia from the beginning up to the end of the 11th c. were granted by the Byzantine Emperors.

The situation was changed during the reign of David IV (1089-1125). From that time on the court titles had disappeared and the Georgian rulers are styled with those Imperial titles, which were preserved for the Byzantine Emperors. The latter were hereditary and the Georgian sovereigns held them without official approval of the Byzantine Emperors.

¹ The paper has been written for the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Belgrade on August 22-27, 2016.

How numismatic material is complementing to our knowledge about Byzantine court titles? The data given below is from the valuable resource for the Georgian numismatics – Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics in four volumes published recently.² The online version of catalogue is also available.³

David III Kuropalates' (ruler of Imier Tao, part of South-Western Georgia, +1001) **coins with the depiction of cross potent.**

Obverse: Georgian legend (abbreviation everywhere) – ԿՐՊԼ/ԾԵ “Christ, forgive David”.

Reverse: Cross potent on the four steps and Georgian legend – ԿՐՔԼ “Kurapalati”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – Bagrat IV's (king of Georgia in 1027-1072) **first emission.**

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Greek legend – Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ – “the Holy Virgin”, close to nimbus, in different ways.

Reverse: Marginal Georgian legend – ԿՐԾԾԿԿԼԸԸԵԵԵԸԾԾԸ – “Christ, exalt Bagrat, the king of the Abkhasians” (i.e. the Western Georgia). In the centre – ԾԸԸԸ/ԴԴԴԴԴԴԴԴԴԴԴԴ “and Nobilissimos”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – Bagrat IV's second emission.

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Greek legend – Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ – “the Holy Virgin”, close to nimbus, in different ways.

Reverse: Marginal Georgian legend – ԿՐԾԾԿԿԼԸԸԵԵԵԸԾԾԸ – “Christ, exalt Bagrat, the king of the Abkhasians” (i.e. the Western Georgia). In the centre – ԾԸԸԸ/ԴԴԸԸԸԸԸԸԸԸԸԸ “and Sebastos”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – Giorgi II's (king of Georgia in 1072-1089) **first emission.**

² Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics. Parts 1-4. Authors – Tedo Dundua, Giorgi Dundua. Compiled by Alexander Boshishvili, Apolon Tabuashvili, Leri Tavadze etc. Tbilisi. 2013-2015.

³ Online English-Georgian Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics. Academic Staff: Tedo Dundua, Giorgi Dundua, Alexander Boshishvili, Apolon Tabuashvili, Leri Tavadze, Akaki Chikobava, Natia Phiphia, Emil Avdaliani etc. <http://geonumismatics.tsu.ge/en/>.

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Distorted Greek abbreviation for – Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC – “the Holy Virgin”, to l. and r. from nimbus. Greek legend – ΜΡ ΘΥ – appears sometime.

Reverse: Marginal Georgian legend –

ተገርፅገገገርቀደኑርፅርተጋሩገኑጎርፅቀገ – “Christ, exalt Giorgi, the king of the Abkhasians and the Kartvelians” (i.e. the Eastern and Southern Georgia). In the centre – ፅር/ፍኑሪገ/ፀሪገ – “and Nobilissimos”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – Giorgi II’s second emission.

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Distorted Greek abbreviation for – Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC – “the Holy Virgin”, to l. and r. from nimbus. Some specimens have different legend – ΜΡ ΘΥ Η ΒΛΑΧΕΡΝΙΤΙΚΑ – “St. Virgin Blachernitissa”.

Reverse: Marginal Georgian legend –

ተገርፅገገገርቀደኑርፅርተጋሩገኑጎርፅቀገ – “Christ, exalt Giorgi, the king of the Abkhasians and the Kartvelians”. In the centre – ፅር/ሲገገኑ/ፀሪገ – “and Sebastos”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – Giorgi II’s third emission.

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Distorted Greek abbreviation for – Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC – “the Holy Virgin”, to l. and r. from nimbus. Some specimens have different legend – ΜΡ ΘΥ Η ΒΛΑΧΕΡΝΙΤΙΚΑ – “St. Virgin Blachernitissa”.

Reverse: Marginal Georgian legend –

ተገርፅገገገርቀደኑርፅርተጋሩገኑጎርፅቀገ – “Christ, exalt Giorgi, the king of the Abkhasians and the Kartvelians”. In the centre – ፅር/ሩገሪ/ጋሪገ “and Caesaros”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – David IV’s (king of Georgia in 1089-1125) first emission.

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Greek legend – ΜΡ – ΘΥ, to l. and r. from nimbus.

Reverse: Marginal Georgian legend – ...**ქრისტე**... “Christ, exalt David, the king of the Abkhasians”. In the centre – **სებასტოს** “and Sebastos”.

St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins – David IV’s second emission.

Obverse: Facing bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Greek legend **ΜΡ – ΘΥ**, to l. and r. from nimbus.

Reverse: Cross in the center and marginal Georgian legend – **ქრისტე**... – “Christ, exalt David, the king and Sebastos (?)”.

The **third emission** of David IV is different from the previous issues. St. Virgin Blachernitissa type disappears and the Georgian monarch is in Imperial dress.

Obverse: Bust of a king in Imperial coat – wearing stemma (Imperial crown with cross and the pendants), divitision and chlamys; holds in right hand scepter cruciger, and in left, globus cruciger. And Georgian legend – **დავით** – “king David”.

Reverse: Cross in a centre and marginal Georgian legend – **ქრისტე**... – “Christ, David the king of the Abkhasians, Kartvelians, Ranians, Kakhetians, Armenians” (Rani and Kakheti are very Eastern provinces of Georgia).

Indeed, in the Greek inscription on the icon preserved at Mount Sinai David IV is mentioned as Basileus. He is also Autokrator according to the Georgian records. All his successors up to the end of 15th c. are the Autokrators as seen in coinage.

Coins of Giorgi III (1156-1184) show him in Imperial stemma.

Obverse: Giorgi III in Asian-Byzantine dress. Seated cross-legged, facing. His left (sometimes right) hand rests on his thigh, on another hand up lifted sits a falcon. King wears stemma. Georgian Mkhedruli letters for the name of Giorgi (**გიორგი**, sometimes monogram of **ΓΓ** is added to it) and Asomtavruli legend **გიორგი**, in the K’oronikon 394 (=1174).

Reverse: Arabic legend in three lines: King of the Kings Giorgi, son of Demetre, sword of the Messiah.

Coins of Giorgi IV (1210-1222) show him in Imperial dress.

Obverse: King standing, facing, wearing stemma, with labarum in his right hand and anexikakia, a roll of parchment, wrapped in cloth and filled with dust, a symbol of mortality, in left. Fragments of Asomtavruli legend to both sides of the depiction: ႱႱႱႱ/ႱႱႱႱ/.../.../...Ⴑ Giorgi, son of Tamar ... 30, i.e. in the K'oronikon 430 (=1210)

Reverse: Arabic legend in rosette made up of four leaves: in the year 606 (=1209/1210). Second Arabic legend in segments between the leaves: King of the Kings Giorgi, son of Tamar, sword of the Messiah. Circle around.

Coins of co-rulers, David VI Narin and David VII Ulugh (midst of the 13th) show the same picture.

Obverse: Labarum in the centre and the kings' effigy in Imperial coat on the both sides. On the left and right, Georgian Asomtavruli legends placed vertically ႱႱႱႱ, ႱႱႱႱ – “King David” and “King of the Kings David”.

Reverse: St. Virgin seated upon a throne like on the Imperial issue of Michael VIII Palaeologus, and corresponding Georgian legend on the left and right: ႱႱႱႱ ႱႱႱႱ.

Georgian imitations of Trapezuntine aspers (13th-15th cc.) keep the effigy of stemma within the limits of Georgian culture. This especially interesting period of the Georgian numismatics came to an end in 1453-1461.