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COIN AS A MEANS OF PROPAGANDA
(ACCORDING TO GEORGIAN NUMISMATICS)*

Everywhere coin facilitated exchange of goods. It was employed also for different propaganda. Georgians did the same as seen in the monetary groups and types as follows: municipal copper coins of Trapezus with the effigy of Mithras, Georgian-Sassanian drachms, Georgian-Byzantine coins, coins of Giorgi III — king with falcon on hand. So, at least some of monetary types issued in Georgia served for propaganda.

Key words: Georgia, Numismatics, Mithras, Iran, Byzantium, Tbilisi, Propaganda.

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МОНЕТА КАК СРЕДСТВО ПРОПАГАНДЫ
(ПО ДАННЫМ ГРУЗИНСКОЙ НУМИЗМАТИКИ)

Во всем мире монеты способствовали обмену товаров. Ими пользовались и как средством пропаганды. Грузия не являлась исключением. Это видно на примере следующих монетных групп и типов: медные городские монеты Трапезунда с изображением Митры, грузино-сасанидские драхмы, грузино-византийские монеты, монеты Георгия III (царь с соколом на руке). Некоторые монетные типы Грузии служили для различной пропаганды.

Ключевые слова: Грузия, нумизматика, Митра, Иран, Византия, Тбилиси, пропаганда.

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Only Georgian (Iberian) imitations to Roman coins are struck on the territory of Colchis—Lazica and Kartli—Iberia in late Antiquity. However, there was one place populated by West Georgian people — namely, Trapezus, which issued municipal copper coins in the 2nd—3rd cc. Name of Roman Emperor is on obverse, while the name of community — on reverse.

We lack the written sources about the political, as well as cultural and religious history of Trapezus of the 2nd—3rd cc. That is why scholars pay much attention to the artefacts, including the coins. From this point of view, a hoard of municipal copper coins of Trapezus dated back to the 2nd—3rd cc. A.D. and found during Bichvinta (Western Georgia) archaeological excavations in 1958 is of special importance. The hoard seems to be placed in a purse, since fragments of textiles are discovered on coins.

Before Bichvinta excavations, municipal copper coins of Trapezus had not been found outside the city. Based on this, some scholars insisted on the fact that Trapezus did not have independent trade and economic policy and its coins were only of local importance. Archaeological excavations of Bichvinta and in Sokhumi (Western Georgia) in 1959 rejected this thesis. The fact is that, not only the hoard was found there —

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discovery of a single coins of Trapezus became common in these places. This fact is of great importance not only for economic history of the city, but for the study of its political status.

Bichvinta hoard contained 149 coins. Ten of them are silver coins, while 139 are the 2nd—3rd cc. municipal copper coins of Trapezus. The latest coin of the hoard belongs to Philip Junior (244/247—249) and is dated back to 244/245, so the hoard was deposited after 244/245. Before Bichvinta and Sokhumi discoveries coins of Trapezus were something of a rarity. If we take into account findings in Bichvinta and Sokhumi, all information in literature about the coins, also samples and imprints kept in different museums and private collections, we will find out that 340—350 samples of municipal copper coins of Trapezus are found up today. About 230 out of them are found in Bichvinta (numbers cannot be absolutely precise). Mithras, the god of the Sun and light, is portrayed on the reverse of 210—220 coins out of 340—350 samples, Tyche — on 50—55 samples, Dionysus — on 17 samples, Serapis — on 12 samples, Abundantia — on 12 samples, Apollo — on 6 samples, Hermes — on 2 samples, Hercules — on 1 sample, Rhea Cybele — on 1 sample, Pales — on 1 sample.

These numbers assure us that Mithras was the major deity of Trapezus. Mithras, the god of the Sun and light, is not of Greek origin. The question is: why was he so important in the Greek city? This will be understandable if we take into consideration the words of Xenophon, that Trapezus was “an inhabited Greek city on the Euxine Sea, a colony of the Sinopeans on the territory of Colchis” (Xenoph. Anab. IV. 8. 22). Evidently majority of the city population should have consisted of non-Greeks. This is much obvious from the information of Flavius Arrianus, legatus of Emperor Hadrian. Describing the city, he writes to the Emperor: “Two altars of rough stone are still standing there now; but, from the coarseness of the materials, the letters inscribed upon them are indistinctly engraven, and the inscription itself is incorrectly written, as is common among barbarous people... Your statue, which stands there, has merit in the idea of the figure, as it represents you pointing towards the sea; but it bears no resemblance to the original, and the execution is in other respects but indifferent... A temple is there constructed, built of squared stone” (Arr. Periplus. 1—2). As we can see, Arrianus directly indicates that Greek inscriptions are written by the “barbarians”. It is obvious that the Colchians are meant under the “barbarians”. Even more, not only the majority of Trapezus’ population, but also ruling classes should be of “barbarian” origin. It is difficult to imagine the Greek officials could authorize a creation of Hadrian’s statue with non-Greek art concepts. So, there was ethnic basis for triumph of Mithras in Trapezus. From this point of view, some information from national Georgian narrative “Kartlis Tskhovreba” (ქართლის ცხოვრება 1955: 39) is very interesting: “and Andrew (St. Andrew) came to the city of Trapezus, which is the country of Mingrelians (i.e. West Georgians)”. There is no sign of Mithras’ cult in other Hellenic cities of Asia Minor during these times. We should underline that municipal copper coins of Trapezus with the effigy of Mithras are unparalleled in the numismatics of other cities and kingdoms.

Mithraism shaped itself a rival of Christianity. Then Mithraistic evidences from Trapezus also carry a possibility of Christians being well-established there (Dundua 2013: 101—127).

Not accidentally, Roman soldiers stationed at Pitius—Bichvinta in Colchis—Lazica had abundantly this Mithra-type coins as pocket-money.

“He assembled the whole province by preaching; everyone coming to Clement was converted to his doctrine about the Lord; more than 500 persons used to be baptized by him daily and then — dismissed. 75 churches were built there in one year by the true faith, and all the idols — destructed, all the temples in neighbouring regions — demolished, 300 miles around everything being destroyed and leveled due to his permanent work” (Martyrium S. Clementis 1886: 630). This aggressive and obviously exaggerated proselytism is “apocryphal” deed of either the third, or the fourth Bishop of Rome (the Pope), Clement (92—101). Indeed, this is amalgam from apocryphal Greek acts of martyrdom, dated by the 4th c. Clement was banished from Rome to Chersonesus (Crimea) by Emperor Trajan (98—117) and set to work in a stone quarry. Still, he managed to go on with his Christian propaganda (Martyrium S. Clementis. 1886: 627—630).

Clement could really inspire a creation of Christian organizations in those regions. But nobody could have ever believed the story about destruction of the idols and the temples in the 1st c. A.D., stipulated by Clement. And under whose protection and by whose money could be those churches built?! So, the whole

story is to be believed only partly. Then, what is about 300 miles (Roman mile is equal to approximately 1480 m.) mentioned there?! If it is true, then Pitius, city in Colchis/Lazica, and its outskirts come within it. Still, there is the main problem to be solved for Clement — was he in Crimea, or is this again a fiction? The narrative of his martyrdom in Crimea is not older than the 4th c. (Trajan orders Clement to be thrown into the sea with an iron anchor). Even Eusebius writes nothing alike (Schaff 1882: 399—405; Clement of Rome 1997: 360; Eusebius. HE. III, IV: 6—11, III: XI, XV, XX, XXI, XXXVII, XXXVIII; Eusebius 1926: 197, 233, 235, 241, 289). But the lack of tradition that he was buried in Rome is in favour of him having died in exile (Chapman 1913: 36).

Mikhail Sabinin (Сабинин 1871: 33—34) and Mikhail Tamarashvili (Tamarashvili 1995: 189—190) thought of Clement's converts working hard in Colchis/Lazica for the faith, both of them having in mind a proximity of Northern and Eastern Black Sea coasts, and not these 300 miles from the narrative. Very likely, the note about the exact distance is not to be ignored.

History of Pitius provides more arguments. If not an existence of early Christian communities in the outskirts of Pitius, nobody would ever think to strengthen the Mithraistic propaganda among the soldiers of the local garrison (stationed from the 3rd c. A.D.) (Studies in History of Georgia 1970: 545, 549), *a priori*, Mithra-worshippers, at the point when even pocket-money, distributed among them, was Mithra-type municipal copper of Trapezus. Municipal coins used for a payment first went to a local *fiscus* as a taxes from individuals, only then — to a camp ascribed to a province. Both, Pitius and Trapezus were the cities of Roman province of Cappadocia. Thus, Mithra-type municipal copper coins of Trapezus in the pockets of the Roman soldiers of Pitius could mean nothing, but money paid to the soldiers (Dundua 1999: 3—4; Dundua 2005). Still, some providential measures are not to be denied. The place with strong Mithraistic propaganda is the same place for strong Christian propaganda, for Mithraism was destined to lure the lower classes to enter its well-censored ranks, and not the Christian communities (Dundua 1999). And eparchy of Pitius is the first ever recorded one for Lazica (Studies in History of Georgia 1973: 186).

Copper coins of Trapezus with the effigy of Mithras found in Pitius:

Obverse: Bearded Emperor, right.

Reverse: Mithras' bust in radiant Phrygian cap, right. Protome of a horse in front of him. Several linear circles behind form a stamp (fig. 1).

Obverse: Bust of Septimius Severus, right. Legend — CEOYHPOCA.

Reverse: Horse enthroned, right. Cornucopia behind it. Legend — TPAII ... O (fig. 2).

Obverse: Bust of Julia Domna, right. Legend — MNA ...

Reverse: Mithras as equestrian, right. Horse with its right leg raised over altar. Tree of Life behind equestrian. Part of date below — ET... (fig. 3).

Obverse: Bust of Caracalla, right. Legend — ANTΩNEINOC.

Reverse: Mithras as equestrian, right. Horse with its right leg raised over altar. Column in front of the equestrian with crow sitting on it. Tree of Life behind, date below (fig. 4).

Obverse: Bust of Elagabalus, right.

Reverse: Mithras as equestrian, right. Companions — Cautes and Cautopates. Tree of Life behind the equestrian. Column — in front of the equestrian with Amor standing on it. Inscription is barely readable (fig. 5).

Obverse: Bust of Gordian III, right. Legend — AYKANΓOPΔIANOCCEB.

Reverse: Mithras as equestrian. Tree of Life behind the equestrian. Column in front of him with crow sitting on it. A star above a bird. Horse has its right leg raised. Snake below the line. Legend — ΤΡΑΠΕΖΟΥΝΤΙΩΝ (fig. 6).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Through the “Eternal Peace”, signed in 532, Byzantium acknowledged Iranian right upon East Georgia. The kingship in Kartli was abolished. In the course of the 6th c. there was a constant struggle for the independence of Kartli. This was well reflected on the Georgian-Sassanian coins. In this period the coins in Kartli were struck according to the Sassanian type. On the obverse there is always depicted a bust of an Iranian shah, whereas on the reverse — the emblem of Sassanian fire-worshippers, holy fire — ātar — protected by two armed guardians. To this standard depiction, rebellious Georgians added above the shah’s shoulder cross which served as a symbol of Christianity and of Georgian nationalism. This was an act of great importance. Sometimes, above ruler’s depiction on the edge of the coins we encounter Georgian letters or monograms giving information about the names of Georgian erismtavaris (princes). Moreover, the Georgians replaced the fire on the altar with cross, symbol of Christianity, and thereby got rid of the Iranian emblem. Erismtavari Stephanos placed fully his name in the centre of the coin, next to ruler’s depiction. Here are described the details (both beginning and the end) of the struggle between the Georgians and the Iranians.

The placing of cross on the Sassanian type coins was a revolutionary act, and, most probably, meant more than just putting Georgian letters next to the shah’s depiction (?). By this action Kartli overtly announced its national interests. Moreover, Kartli’s radical erismtavari got rid of the holy fire — emblem of Zoroastrianism — on the coin and demonstratively replaced it with a Christian emblem — cross. So, we deal with local propaganda of Christian, i.e. pan-European ideas.

Anonymous coins with the depiction of cross on the obverse

Obverse: Ohrmazd IV to the right. Legend in Pehlevi: hrm — aphzu (Ohrmazd Augustus), in front of the figure. Cross behind the figure. This is placed within onefold circle of the dots.

Reverse: Fire on altar protected by two guardians. Pehlevi inscription of date and name of the mint are unreadable (fig. 7).

Anonymous coins with the depiction of cross on altar

Obverse: Ohrmazd IV to the right. Legend in Pehlevi: hrm — aphzu (Ohrmazd Augustus). This is placed within onefold circle of the dots.

Reverse: Cross on altar protected by two guardians. Pehlevi inscription of date and name of the mint are unreadable (fig. 8).

Coins with the depiction of cross on altar. Stephanos I — first emission

Obverse: Ohrmazd IV to the right. Legend in Pehlevi: hrm — aphzu (Ohrmazd Augustus). This is placed within onefold circle of the dots. Four Georgian letters (Asomtavruli) on the edge of the coin — ႱႱႱႱ (=Stephanos), with four crescents on the sides.

Reverse: Cross on altar protected by two guardians. Date and name of the mint are unreadable, all placed within twofold circle of the dots (fig. 9).

Coins with the depiction of cross on altar. Stephanos I — second emission

Obverse: shah/ruler to the right. Instead of Pehlevi, Georgian inscription (Asomtavruli) — ႱႱႱႱ (Stephanos) to the left and right. Twofold circle around it.

Reverse: Cross on altar, protected by two guardians. No Pehlevi inscription. Threefold circle around it (fig. 10).



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

St.Virgin Blachernitissa. The Byzantine Case	St.Virgin Blachernitissa. The Georgian Case
1. Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-1055) — 2/3 miliaresion	1. Bagrat IV. I emission. Tetri (2/3 miliaresion). 1055. Kutaisi (West Georgia) “... king and Nobilissimos”
2. Theodora (1055-1056) — 2/3 miliaresion	2. Bagrat IV. II emission. Tetri. 1068/69. Kutaisi. “... king and Sebastos”
3. Michael VI Stratioticus (1056-1057) — 2/3 miliaresion	3. Giorgi II. I emission. Tetri. 1073. Kutaisi. “... king and Nobilissimos”
4. Constantine X Ducas (1059-1067) — 1/3 miliaresion	4. Giorgi II. II emission. Tetri. 1074. Kutaisi. “... king and Sebastos”
5. Romanus IV Diogenes (1068-1071) — 1/3 miliaresion	5. Giorgi II. III emission. Tetri and half tetri (1/3 miliaresion). 1075-1089. Kutaisi. “... king and Caesaros”

6. Michael VII Ducas (1071-1078) — 1/3 miliaresion	6. David IV. I emission. Half tetri. 1089-1099. Kutaisi. “...king and Sebastos”
7. Nicephorus III Botaneiates (1078-1081) — 2/3 miliaresion	7. David IV. II emission. Half tetri. 1089-1099. Kutaisi. “... king and ...”. Cross on Rev.
8. Alexios I Comnenos (1081-1118) — tetarteron	

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

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

Reverse: Cross in the center and marginal Georgian legend — ღⴊⴃⴆⴁⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆ... — “Christ, exalt David, the king and Sebastos (?)” (fig. 18).

David IV’s copper coin, type — king in Imperial coat

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

Reverse: Cross in a centre and marginal Georgian legend — ღⴊⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆⴃⴆ — “Christ, David the king of the Abkhasians, Kartvelians, Ranians, Kakhetians, Armenians” (Rani and Kakheti are very Eastern provinces of Georgia) (fig. 19).

The obverse type of this coin is patterned on the reverse of the post-reform aspron trachy (billon) of Alexios I Comnenos. But the Imperial coat of the Georgian king is not a fiction.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19.

“ . . . I witnessed all these privileges, when I entered Tiflis in the year 548/1153. And I saw how the king of the Georgians, Dimitri, in whose service I was, arrived in Tiflis and sojourned there some days. The same Friday he came to the cathedral mosque and sat on a platform opposite the preacher and he remained at his place while the preacher preached and the people prayed and he listened to the khutba, all of it. Then he went out and granted for the mosque 200 gold dinars” (Lang 1955: 17). This is what Arabian al-Farik says about demonstration of tolerancy of the Georgian king Demetre I towards his Muslim subjects. Perhaps, the king wished them to be more faithful. His son Giorgi III selected even more powerful method for the same propaganda.



Fig. 20

Coins of Giorgi III — king with falcon on hand

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 (გო, sometimes monogram of ჳ is added to it) and Asomtavruli legend ჳჳჳჳჳჳჳ, in the K’oronikon 394 (=1174).

Reverse: Arabic legend in three lines: King of the Kings Giorgi, son of Demetre, sword of the Messiah (fig. 20) (Dundua, Dundua 2006: 204, pl. X: 68—69).

The coin shows ruler in the Persian dress, with the false-sleeves and loose trousers, seated also in a very Persian manner, with a falcon on his hand. If not the Arabic legend on reverse claiming that he is Giorgi,

King of the Kings and the Sword of Messiah, Georgian initials on obverse and Imperial stemma on the head, he could have been any of the Muslim dynasts.

But that is the schematic effigy for Giorgi III of Georgia (1156—1184), victorious and celebrated. Neither his grandfather David IV (1089—1125), nor his grandson Giorgi IV Lasha (1210—1222) used to be dressed like him; all they wore divitision, loros and chlamis, common uniform for the Georgian kings within the Byzantine Commonwealth. Even David Ulugh and David Narin, vassal kings of Georgia under the Mongols, are in the Imperial dress, as seen on their drama struck in 1261. Georgian imitations to the silver aspers of Trebizond (with Emperor's effigy on reverse) keep the Imperial insignia within the Georgian culture until the 15th c.

There is no obvious reason to deny the Imperial clothes for Giorgi III. Then his Persian style is completely unrealistic.

Each baroque demands good reason and also a pattern for itself.

It could be a gentle pose towards his Muslim subjects dwelling mostly in Tbilisi, recaptured by David IV, but only recently re-established as Georgian capital.

Fiction as it was, still it contained the real trait — stemma itself, being a permanent attribute of the Georgian kings in the 12th -15th cc.

So, at least some of monetary types issued in Georgia served for propaganda.

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