

MONETARY CIRCULATION IN KARTL-KAKHETI IN THE 2ND HALF OF THE 18TH C. – BEGINNING OF THE 19TH C.: ADDITIONAL DATA *

Abstract

Researching the history of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti would be uncomprehensive in the eventuality its *economic history* is ignored. The numismatic data appear to be the most numerous, equitable, and *quantitative* primary sources for studying the economy of this Georgian state. It seems to be imperative to register exhaustively, as far as feasible, all coin finds, including both the hoards and single finds, as an indispensable preliminary stage for the future meta-analysis. This work aims at publishing new primary material for studying the numismatic history, namely the monetary circulation of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti (1744-1801). It reviews eight new monetary complexes dated to the last third of the 18th century – the beginning of the 19th century. They all comprise the coins circulating in the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, later Kartl-Kakheti annexed by the Russian Empire, and were formed on this territory. Five complexes out of eight comprise partially or exclusively the national Georgian coins (struck in the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti); the other three are made up of the Russian Empire coins imported from Russia.

Keywords: *Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, Sirma coins, Georgian numismatics, Monetary circulation, Meta-analysis*

Our goal is to continue researching the numismatic history of the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti (henceforward, *the KKK*) (1744-1801), namely the monetary circulation in this Georgian polity, by means of publishing and reviewing the new primary data: 8 monetary hoards dating back to the last third of the 18th c. – first decades of the 19th c. They all reflect the monetary circulation in Kartl-Kakheti, originally the Kingdom, later annexed by the Russian Empire. Five of them comprise exclusively national Georgian coins (struck in the KKK), whereas the other three are also exclusively Russian Empire coins imported from Russia. Two out of eight had already been published; we have provided only the new data; as to the other six, they have been published for the first time.

These eight monetary complexes are as follows:

* The article is prepared within the framework of the project “Monetary Politics and History of the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti (1744-1801)” funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation (Young Scientist’s Grant #YS-21-2879).

Monetary Complex I: A Hoard of Sirma coins from Manavi

Irakli Paghava published the then available data on this complex in 2019 and 2023, registering 116 silver coins, i.e. sirma abazis issued at Tiflis mint. He conjectured that the sample available for study comprised up to 60% of the total number of coins and dated the hoard at the end of the 18th c., as it comprised no coins of the 19th c. We have established that the coins were dispersed along the road to Manavi fortress (no traces of container?); the hoard originally comprised more than 200 (up to 300) coins, rather than 116, including 2 half-marchilis, while the rest were truly the abazis. Evidently, the initial sample comprised the randomly selected specimens; most of the conclusions made in the initial publication retain validity.

Monetary Complex II: A Hoard of Sirma coins from the vicinities of Dusheti

A hoard comprising 18 silver coins was found in the vicinities of Dusheti in eastern Georgia decades ago. All of them constituted the sirma abazis of Tiflis mint (Figs. 2.1-2.18): AH “119” (1190?) (Fig. 2.1, 3.01 g), 1191 (Fig. 2.2, 2.99 g), 1193 (Fig. 2.3, 2.88 g), 1201 (Fig. 2.4, 3.02 g), 1202 (?) (Fig. 2.5, 2.84 g), 1205 (Fig. 2.6, 3.01 g), 1207 (3 specimens, Fig. 2.7, 2.56; Fig. 2.8, 2.89; and Fig. 2.9, 3.00 g), 1210 (Fig. 2.10, 2.73 g), 1211 (7 specimens, Fig. 2.11, 2.75; Fig. 2.12, 2.76; Fig. 2.13, 2.84; Fig. 2.14, 2.97; Fig. 2.15, 2.98; Fig. 2.16, 3.01; Fig. 2.17, 3.05 g), 1213 (Fig. 2.18, 2.87 g). ** The total weight of the hoard coins was 52.16 g. The oldest coin was dated AH 1190 or 1191, the youngest AH 1213 (1798/9). The hoard was deposited by the end of the 18th c.

This hoard is typical for the monetary circulation of the KKK: It comprises exclusively sirma coins, namely the abazis. Irakli Paghava has classified similar hoards as *standard economic deposits* (Group I hoards); being the short-term accumulation hoards formed after the monetary reform of King Irakli II, they reflect the monetary circulation in the KKK in the last third of the 18th c.

In terms of composition, the Dusheti hoard resembles those from Bolnisi and Lalakend; they all predominantly comprise the later period coins, with a clear preponderance of the AH 1207 and 1211 abazis (perhaps indicating increased activity of Tiflis mint in these years).

Some of the specimens merit special attention:

- The calligraphy of the legends on the AH “119” specimen (Fig. 2.1) is quite peculiar; there is an error in the invocation; the floral decorations are atypical as well. Nevertheless, the weight is normal: 3.01 g. This specimen could be an imitation; hopefully, future die analysis would solve this issue;
- The calligraphy of the legends on the AH “1202” specimen (Fig. 2.5) is also peculiar, while floral decorations are also atypical. The weight is only 2.84 g. Future die analysis would reveal or refute any links with other coins, indubitably issued at Tiflis mint;
- The specimen dated AH “1207” (Fig. 2.7) is a cast forgery, as indicated by the porousness of the coin surfaces and ‘washy’ relief. The weight is anomalously low: 2.56 g. The alloy is still to be established. Remarkably, this is the first ever cast-in sirma abazi we have ever seen.

** For figures, see Georgian text.

Monetary Complex III: A Complex of Sirma coins from a Jewelry Piece (*the Gold Market hoard*)

25 silver coins were sold at the Tbilisi (ancient Tiflis) market for precious metal jewelry (so called 'gold market'); all of them constituted the sirma abazis of the KKK, but had non-precious metal earlets soldered to one of the coin sides, transforming these coins into buttons or jewelry elements. Unfortunately, because of wear and soldering, the dates could be read on five coins only (AH 1191?, 1193, 1201, 1204?, 1210?). This monetary complex was evidently formed by the end of the 18th c.

In terms of composition, it is identical to Kojori II and Yerevan II complexes (according to Irakli Paghava's monograph on the sirma coinage of the KKK); all three comprise sirma type coins with traces of soldering. Remarkably, in all three complexes in the absolute majority of cases the earlets were soldered to the non-Quranic side of these coins: Presumably, the artisan was a Muslim. These monetary complexes have remarkable ethnographic value as well.

Sirma abazis were transformed into buttons (jewelry?) due to the following reasons: 1) Availability, 2) High precious metal content, and 3) Content of the legends (Quranic formula) and their exquisite calligraphy.

Monetary Complex IV: Monetary complex from Eastern Georgia ("Hoard with Unknown Find Location IV")

We had an opportunity to study a complex of several silver coins brought for sale to the Tbilisi flea market in 2023. Identical incrustations and patina indicated the same provenance of the coins. This complex comprised 6 coins: 2 sirma abazis – 1 dated AH "12..." (Fig. 4.1, holed, 3.09 g), and 1 dated AH 1195 (Fig. 4.2, holed, 2.87 g), sirma shauri, with the last digit of the date being „7" (Fig. 4.3, fragmented, 0.49 g); minor denomination coin of the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 4.4, 0.61 g); Russian Empire 1774 grivennik of Catherine II (Fig. 4.5, 1.48 g); late Shirwanshah coin, AH 93[7] (Fig. 4.6, a brockage, 0.68 g). Total weight: 9.22 g. The youngest coins with legible date is the sirma abazi dated AH 1195 (=1780/1), and there are no 19th c. coins in this hoard. Therefore, it was deposited by the end of the 18th c.

In terms of composition, this monetary complex resembles the hoards designated as Mtianeti I, Mtianeti II, and Pshaveli (in the monography by Irakli Paghava). They share the following features: 1) Chronological incompactness, comprising not just the late 18th c. sirma coins of the KKK and Russian grivenniks, but also the much earlier coins; 2) Typological inhomogeneity, comprising only the limited share of sirma coins (50% by number and 70% by weight - 6.45/9.22 g), whereas typically it is 100%; 3) High share of minor denominations: 4 coins out of 6 (66.7%) have a relatively low weight; three have a weight much less than 1.0 g; typically, the hoards of sirma coins comprise basically almost no coins of minor denominations; 4) High share of defective coins: 2 out of 6 (33.3%) were holed or fragmented which is also atypical for the contemporary KKK hoards. All these hoards constitute *ethnographic-religious monetary complexes* (according to Irakli Paghava's classification), being also *the long-term accumulation monetary complexes*.

This monetary complex testifies once again to importing of the Russian grivenniks into the KKK (after signing the 1783 Georgievsk treaty? Perhaps, due to intensive striking of minor denomination silver coins at St. Petersburg mint after 1784).

Monetary Complex V: A Hoard of Irakli II's 1796 Copper Coins with Unknown Find Location

A hoard of copper coins issued by king Irakli II was discovered on the territory of eastern Georgia in the early 2020. All of the coins constituted bistis and half-bistis dates 1796. Reportedly, the hoard comprised 15-25 specimens. It was deposited in the late 1790s, before the KKK was annexed by the Russian Empire.

The homogeneity of the hoard is quite remarkable. It points to the dominance of the national copper currency in the KKK; but also, to intermittent *renovatio monetae*, since this hoard comprised no coins of the earlier types; and possibly also to more or less separate circulation of the silver and copper currencies in the kingdom.

We consider this complex to be the short-term accumulation hoard.

Monetary Complex VI: A Hoard of Russian Empire 5-Copeck coins from Akhmeta municipality

8 copper coins were found in Akhmeta municipality at an unspecified location in summer 2024. All of them constituted the heavy-weight 5-copeck coins of Catherine II, the empress of the Russian Empire, with the following dates: 1763, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1779, 1780, 1781, 1784. All the coins were minted at Yekaterinburg mint (mint designation - EM). The youngest coin was dated 1784; the coins bear no traces of (double) restriking (in 1796); it is also noteworthy that the coin type as such was altered in 1802. Therefore, we consider that this hoard was deposited in the late 1780s, or at the latest, in the 1790s.

The Akhmeta hoard of Russian 5-Copeck coins is quite remarkable due to its composition (depositing a hoard of imported copper coins on the territory of Kartl-Kakheti, before the KKK was annexed by the Russian Empire). Generally, finds of copper coin hoards on the territory of Kartl-Kakheti are extremely rare (*renovatio monetae* practised by Georgian kings discouraged the population from depositing the coinage which could easily lose its value in the proximate years). We have been aware of only two cases:

- 1) 1906 hoard found in the Gori uyezd: sirma abazis of Irakli II; Irakli II's copper coinage of two types: with the effigy of either double-headed or single-headed eagle; 5-copeck and evidently also 2-copeck coins of the Russian Empire;
- 2) Recent find of Irakli II's bistis and half-bistis with the effigy of single-headed eagle (*vide supra*).

Irakli Paghava has already postulated, that foreign copper coins had no status of legal tender on the territory of the KKK; otherwise, its circulation would have jeopardized the production of national token and hence quite profitable copper coinage. The discovery of yet another hoard of Russian 5-copeck coins on the territory of the KKK, far from the Dariali way connecting the Kingdom with the Russian Empire, questions the foregoing. Shall we interpret this monetary complex as a numismatic evidence of some non-economic activity, for instance, Russian military operations on the territory of the KKK? Theoretically, hoarding some copper coins is not a surefire argument proving their circulation locally; the owner could also be planning to export the coins from the KKK.

Hopefully, new discoveries would help in clarifying this issue.

Monetary Complex VII: A Hoard of 2-Copeck coins of the Russian Empire from Tetrtsqaro municipality

25 copper coins were found in Tetrtsqaro municipality (at an unknown location) back in Spring 2024. All constituted the 2-copeck coins of Alexander I (1810-1830 type, 24-roubles-to-pood standard). 24 coins were issued at the Yekaterinburg mint ("E.M.") (1812 – 4 specimens; 1813 – 2, incl. 1 coin with inverted last digit of the date; 1814 - 2, 1815 – 8, 1816 – 4, 1823, 1824- 2, 1825), while 1 was issued at the Suzun mint (mint designation „K.M.“) (1819). The hoard was deposited in the 2nd half of the 1820s.

This hoard was possibly accumulated and deposited by the Russian military deployed on the territory of the former KKK. We have been notified of yet more finds of Russian 2-copeck coins at other locations in eastern Georgia, where Russian military units had been deployed.

Monetary Complex VIII: A Hoard of 2-Copeck coins of the Russian Empire from Telavi municipality

17 copper coins were found in Telavi municipality (at an unknown location) back in Spring 2022. All constituted the 2-copeck coins of Alexander I (1810-1830 type, 24-roubles-to-pood standard). 14 coins were issued at the Yekaterinburg mint ("E.M."), while 3 were issued at the Suzun mint (mint designation "K.M." (dated 1813, 1815, and 1817). The hoard was deposited by the end of 1810s, or in 1820s.

The Monetary complexes VII and VIII reflect the monetary circulation in the east-Georgian provinces, specifically the invasion of the Russian Empire copper onto the local monetary market.