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SIRMA COINAGE OF EAST-GEORGIAN KINGDOM OF KARTL-K'AKHETI (1744-1801) AND ITS ROLE IN REGIONAL MONETARY CIRCULATION (PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS)

The numismatic history of the east-Georgian Kingdom of Kartl-K'akheti has seemingly been underresearched so far, despite bearing a particular historical significance (reflecting the significance of researching the history of Kartl-K'akheti). The so called sirma silver coins, i.e. the primary and original currency of this Georgian state, constitute a particularly noteworthy numismatic phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Georgian historiography of Soviet period counted only two works devoted to the sirma coinage (Revaz Kebuladze's "Prolongation of the Circulation of Sirma-Silver in Georgia", 1969, and "The Hoard from Pkhoveli", 1975, both in Georgian). We published (in co-authorship) five more articles in the Supplement to Journal of Oriental Numismatic Society, #197, back in 2008. However, not all the relevant issues have been researched comprehensively. Inter alia, the general circulation patterns of the sirma coinage have not been studied so far (we would consider the written sources; the coin artifacts, i.e. the monetary primary sources; as well as the data on the monetary circulation to constitute the three pillars of further research of the economic / monetary history of Kartl-K'akheti).

The goal of our short article is to initiate the meta-analysis of the hoards comprising sirma coins of Kartl-K'akheti.

Initially, the coins in the name of various Afsharid rulers and Karim Khan Zand were issued at Tiflis mint (in the capital of the Kingdom of Kartl-K'akheti). However, the novel silver coinage was being issued since the monetary reform of AH 1179 (1765/6); four denominations were minted in high standard silver: 1½ abazi (= 1 mithqal = 6 dangs = 4.608 g), 1 abazi (= 4 dangs = 3.072 g), ½ abazi (= 2 dangs = 1.536 g), and ¼ abazi (= 1 dang = 0.768 g). Simultaneously, the gold, silver and copper coins of Iran and various Caucasian Khanates, as well as the Ottoman and Russian Empires, and also the Dutch ducats, circulated locally.

We have analyzed 13 hoards comprising the sirma coins. These hoards can be classified as follows:

- I group, reflecting the monetary circulation in the Kingdom of Kartl-K'akheti (6 hoards): Lalakend (1897), Gori uyezd (1906), Ch'ik'aani (1927), Uncertain 1 (2004), Uncertain 2 (2005), Bolnisi (2010s);

- II group, reflecting the monetary circulation in the Caucasian Khanates (4 hoards): Daralagyo (1934), Sovetashen (1938), Chaykend (1953), Qarabagh (2015);
- III group, reflecting the monetary circulation in Georgia after 1801 (when Kartl-K'akheti was annexed by the Russian Empire) (3 hoards): Sokhumi (1899), Pkhoveli (1955), Pasanauri (1970s).

We consider it reasonable to provide short description of the hoards:

I group:

Lalakend (1897): more than 73 sirma abazis (the earliest dated AH 1182 (1768/9), the latest AH 1212 (1797/8));

Gori uyezd (1906): 60 sirma abazis and copper coins of the Russian Empire (5-copeck coins) and Kingdom of Kartl-K'akheti;

Ch'ik'aani (1927): more than 100 sirma abazis (the earliest dated AH 1182 (1768/9), the latest AH 1213 (1798/9));

Uncertain 1 (2004): more than 100 sirma abazis;

Uncertain 2 (2005): more than 100 sirma abazis;

Bolnisi (2010s): 33 sirma abazis and two ½ abazis;

II group:

Daralagyo (1934): silver earrings (with coin pendants?) and buckles, 33 silver buttons made from coins, 631 silver coins, including sirma coins (the majority being abazis, the minority, the ½ abazis), Ganja abbasis, Khoweiza mahmudis, Afsharid silver coins, 1 Russian grivennik dated 1796;

Sovetashen (1938): 2 sirma 1½ abazis, 12 Yerevan abbasis, 1 Tabriz abbasi (the earliest coin dated AH 1181 (1767/8), the latest AH 1185 (1771/2));

Chaykend (1953): 1226 coins and tinned copper cup: Safavid coins (819), Afsharid coins (2), Shirwan abbasis (79), Ganja abbasis (295), sirma abazis (71) (the earliest, the Safavid shahi dated AH 1071 (1660/1), the latest, the Ganja abbasi dated AH 1201 (1786/7));

Qarabagh (2015): More than 400 coins, including Ganja and Shirwan abbasis, and sirma abazis (approximately 25% of total number);

III group:

Sokhumi (1899): 10 Sirma abazis, Ganja abbasis, Ottoman, Russian, and Georgian-Russian coins (1804-1834 series); deposited in the 2nd quarter of the 19th century;

Pkhoveli (1955): 111 coins, including 8 sirma abazis, 60 Russian, 24 Georgian-Russian and 19 Polish-Russian (the earliest, the sirma abazi dated AH 1193 (1779/80), the latest, Russian ruble dated 1842);

Pasanauri (1970s): 576 coins and 2 silver winecups, including 150 sirma coins (9 1½ abazis, 136 abazis, 4 ½ abazis and 1 ¼ abazi), Ottoman (1), Persian (1), Russian (386), Georgian-Russian (14), Polish-Russian (24) (the earliest, the para of Mahmud

I (1730-1754), the latest the 25-copeck coin dated 1858).

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The sirma coinage constitutes 100% of coins in the hoards of the I group, but only 5.6-25.0% of the coins in the hoards of the II group, and approximately 0.5-26.0% of the coins in the hoards of the III group.

As to the share of sirma coins of various denominations, 8 hoards out of 11 for which we have numerical data comprise exclusively sirma abazis (i.e. the share of the abazi denomination is 100%); 2 hoards comprise also other denominations, the 1½ abazis, ½ abazis and ¼ abazis as minute admixture (5.7% of ½ abazis within the Bolnisi hoard, the rest being abazis; 6.0% of 1½ abazis, 2.7% of ½ abazis and 0.7% of ¼ abazis within the Pasaauri hoard, the rest being abazis); while only 1 hoard, the Sovetashen one, comprises only two sirma coins, both being 1½ abazis (100%).

The share of the AH 1211 (1796/7) (only 1 year out of 28 registered!) abazis is remarkably and unexpectedly high, being 42.5% within the Lalakend hoard, and 37.5% within the Pkhoveli hoard.

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The meta-analysis of 13 hoards comprising sirma coins clarified some relevant issues.

It became clear, that the sirma coinage played an extremely significant role in the monetary circulation of the region in the last 3rd of the 18th century - 1st half of the 19th century. It dominated exclusively within the boundaries of the Kingdom of Kartl-K'akheti, and provided for up to a quarter of the monetary mass circulating in the neighbouring Muslim Khanates; remarkably, the sirma coinage retained its significance even after the Kingdom of Kartl-K'akheti was annexed by the Russian Empire in violation of the 1783 Georgievsk treaty.

Evidently, the abazi denomination was the principle one minted, and circulating widely, constituted the backbone of the national monetary economy. The 1½ abazi (6-dang) denomination could be minted to facilitate the trade relations with southern neighbours still preserving the older and heavier weight standard (of 6 dangs) for their abbasis.

The high mint run of the AH 1211 (1796/7) abbasis, issued in the wake of the Qajar destruction of Tiflis in 1795, still awaits an explanation (renovation works or other extra expenditure funded by the deposited silver transformed into coinage?).

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Further research of the monetary circulation of Kartl-K'akheti envisions the analysis of the single coin finds; cooperation with colleagues in Azerbaijan and Armenia; detailed publications of the new hoards; and detailed re-publications of the previously known hoards, including the detailed study of their composition and statistical processing of numerical data; general analysis of all three elements of the monetary circulation, i.e. the gold and copper coinage along with the silver one.