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ON IBERIAN IMITATIONS OF GRECO-ROMAN MONEY

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ABSTRACT

The present article examines locally produced imitations of Greek-Roman coins discovered on the territory of ancient Georgia, which are preserved in the Georgian National Museum.

The study focuses on three types of imitations: staters of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC), the staters of Lysimachus (306-282 BC), and the denarii of Octavian Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD) with images of Gaius and Lucius Caesar. Particular attention is devoted to the representation of birds on these imitations – a feature absent from the original prototypes found elsewhere. This unique detail was noted by E. Pakhomov and A. Zograph, while D. Kapanadze dedicated a special study to the subject, considering the bird image as a symbol of power and a characteristic sign of local origin.

Regarding this issue, among archaeological finds, the imitations of Octavian Augustus's denarii are noteworthy, specifically, the image of three birds identified on the emperor's diadem. Also, the imitation of Augustus's denarius (1st century AD) discovered in 2004 and 2013 at the Dedoplist Gora palace complex and a votive offering of 15 coins found at the altar (13 denarii of Augustus and 2 imitations of Alexander the Great's staters made of electrum), which must have been placed in a glass vessel. The imitations of Augustus's denarius discovered at Dedoplist Gora were presumably produced from the second half of the 1st century AD and were in circulation alongside with original denarii. The discovery of Augustus's denarii as hoards has been confirmed in Mtskheta, Bagineti (22 coins), and on the territory of present-day Azerbaijan (12 coins).

According to the conducted research, the bird image on the imitations must have been passed down through hereditary tradition from the early imitations of Alexander the Great's staters (Vani site) to the imitations of Lysimachus's staters and subsequently to the imitations of Augustus's denarii.

Archaeological evidence indicates that from the 2nd century BC throughout the ancient period, Georgia maintained a systematic production of Greek-Roman coin imitations. In the early feudal epoch, this process continues in the production of Georgian-Sasanian money, which is ultimately crowned by the unification of Georgia by the Bagrationi dynasty and the implementation of Georgian currency emission.

KEYWORDS: GEORGIAN NUMISMATICS, IMITATIONS, ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S STATER, LYSIMACHUS, AUGUSTUS'S DENARIUS.

Among the coins found on the territory of Georgia, special attention should be paid to locally made coins, imitating the coins of foreign countries that were actively involved in local coin circulation. Such an event is no exception – such a thing is observed in many places on the periphery of the ancient world. For Georgia, whose history is insufficiently covered by written sources, the study of local coin emissions is relevant.

An important role in the coinage of ancient Georgia was played by staters minted in the name of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC.) and his knight Lysimachus (306-282 BC.), the ruler of Thrace-Macedonia, as well as the first Roman emperor Octavian Augustus (27 BC.-14 AD.) Denarius (with images of Guy and Lucius Caesar on the back) [Zograf A.H., Dundua G. 1987: 55-102; Kapanadze d. 1969: 33-38, 42-44; Sherozia M. 2009: 61-71; Sherozia M. 2013: 13] and imitations of the Roman Imperial Aureus [Sherozia M. 2015: 38-61]. Most Russian and European scientists are still skeptical of the local origins of imitations [Пахомов Е.А. 1970: 13; Брайчевский М.1959: 84-91; Крopotкин В.1961: 16; Giard J-B. 2001: 228, 229].

While the research of gold imitations, E. Pakhomov [Пахомов Е.А. 1926: 38] and A. Zograph [Зорграф А.Н. 1951: 101] were the first who observed that on one part of the imitation, namely on the obverse, the emperor's diadem is decorated with images of a bird. This detail is not on the original. No such thing is observed in similar imitations of these monetary found in other countries. D. Kapanadze devoted special research to the image of birds on the imitations of Alexander the Great and Lysimachus staters as a symbol of power, where he underlines that because of this important and characteristic detail, it is possible with complete conviction that these imitations could be considered as local products.

Prolonged observation of the imitations led us to an interesting discovery, namely, in our opinion, in ancient Georgian territory, in late Roman times, on the widespread denar of Octavian Augustus (27 BC. – 14 AD.) (Fig. 1), on which the emperor's grandchildren and Lucius Caesar are depicted, one part of the imitation, the emperor's diadem being decorated with images of three birds (Tab. Figs. 2,3,4¹). It is evident that on the earliest group of these imitations, which has been dated back to the end of the first century AD, three birds were depicted (Figs. 2, 3, 4). The bird is also depicted on a specimen made of very low-grade silver preserved in the Svaneti Historical Museum (Fig. 5), which should be considered as a late specimen [Sherozia M. 2013: 233]. It is clear that the image of a bird was inherited from the Roman gold imitation as a legacy from the local gold imitations as an established tradition.

At first, the image of a bird probably appeared on the earliest, first-generation imitation of

1 Graphic works performed by artists L. Pavlenishvili and Ts. Turkiashvili.

Alexander the Great, found on the territory of the city – Vani. There are three such cases today, two of them are found in Vani, on the “Akhvlediane bis Gora”, one is without a passport (G.F. N5252, 5088, Q.dz.f. N3759. Fig.7,8).

The bird is depicted on most of the imitations of Lysimachus. Their number is from one to five (Figs. 8,9,10,11). The image of birds can be seen on the latest and at the same time the most degraded version of these imitations, found in the village of Aghaiani in the Kaspi district of eastern Georgia, in the Rikiani Valley cemetery – tomb N4, tomb N4 (9) [Mirianashvili N. 1983: 27; Dundua G.F. 1987: 155] (Fig. 11).

The inclusion of the image of a bird in the imitations is related to the beliefs of the local tribes. In general, the decoration of a human (ruler, king, emperor) with a bird (bird) head or crown as a symbol of celestial, heavenly power is not new. The image of a bird has not only an artistic-aesthetic character. First of all, as mentioned, it is a reflection of a variety of beliefs and has a cult-ritual purpose [Бардавелидзе В. 1957; Tsereteli M. 2010: 44-47].

Miniature images of birds are typical of Colchian goldsmithing: Gold necklaces composed of hangers with images of birds, gold earrings decorated with images of birds, and so on [Chkonia A. 1981: 54-59; Chkonia A. 1977: 81-100].

Generally, the decoration with the image of a jewelry bird takes its origin earlier. Late Bronze-Early Iron Age bird-shaped bronze hangers are known, which are found in the tomb dated back to the XIV-XIII centuries BC. [Ramishvili K. 2005: 48.49; Sulava N. 1996: 56]. Also, many bronze ornaments decorated with the image of a bird have been found in Meskheti, Borjomi municipality [Gambashidze O., Gambashidze I. 1995: 57-73. tab.62. N4]. Using the image of a bird on numismatic artifacts of the ancient period, the fact of adorning a diadem or a crown is not known to us. The only localized imitation of a passported, well – dated Octavian Augustus with a clear image of a bird has been found at the “Dedoplis Gora” settlement.

At the end of the I century AD, the fire, which may have been caused by an earthquake, destroyed the palace on the “Dedoplis Gora”, which was operating during the period of – I c. BC. – I c. AD. [Gagoshidze I. 2004: 41]. All coins found in the palace area are damaged due to the fire.

In 2004, an expedition found a badly damaged silver coin in the ruins of Room 15 on “Dedoplis Gora”. After the cleansing-restoration it became clear that the price indicator was a local imitation of the denarius of the first Roman emperor, Octavian Augustus (cut in 2 year BC – 4 year AD) [Sherozia M. 2013: 233]. Although the coin is terribly damaged, the image of birds is still clearly visible (Fig. 5). This specimen is important in other respects, as evidenced by the findings of subsequent archaeological work.

In 2013, during the preparation of the altar in the area of the 20th storehouse, there was discovered a pile of coins welded to each other while fire, presumably placed in a glass vessel. It was situated along with various items and small statues of the Greco-Roman pantheon of deities, a pile of coins welded to each other, their presence in the fire, was discovered. There were 13 silver and two electrum coins in the pile. These are: 2 pieces of local imitation made of Alexander the Great’s stater electrum and 13 pieces of Octavian Augustus denarius [Fig. 13].

The simultaneous discovery of the denarius of Octavian Augustus and his imitation is very informative. This fact allows us to draw the following conclusion:

As mentioned above, at the end of the 1st century the palace was destroyed by fire. This allows us to say that as soon as Augustus became intensively involved in the circulation of this

type of denar, from the second half of the 1st century, its local imitations emerged. Octavian Augustus's denar and its imitations, particularly those holding bird images, rotate simultaneously.

Another circumstance that makes these discoveries interesting is that the Roman denarii were discovered as treasures. Such cases are very rare. Although this type of denari was widely used in the entire civilized world of that time, including the Kingdom of Iberia. This is more than half of the valuables of the Roman period mined on the territory of the Kingdom of Kartli, mostly burial material. So far, only one case of treasure has been confirmed. In 1944, during archeological excavations in Mtskheta, on Bagineti (inner fortress), at the bottom of the defensive wall, 22 Denarius of Augustus were discovered [Mtskheta I. 1955: 179].

In the South Caucasus region, we have another Augustus's denarii found in the territory of present-day Azerbaijan. Near the town of Zhdanov (Tazakend district) a treasure consisting of 12 units was discovered [Халилов Дж. 1985: 154].

The first case of the use of these price indicators as a ritual contribution was revealed on "Dedoplis Gora". The coins were presumably placed in a purse and then put in a glass vessel (Fig. 13).

In different periods, on this monument, there were also found Republican denarii on this monument, minted in 67 years BC. In 67 [Дундуа Г. 1987: 146] and the stater of the ruler of Thrace, Lysimachus (306-282 years BC.) [Sherozia M. 2008: 242].

"Dedoplis Gora" is considered to be the residence of the royal family or a nearby social class. The combination of coins found here reflects the socio-economic situation. The involvement of imitations in the circulation of coins indicates an important issue such as the involvement of the royal government in the implementation of the issue. It is obvious that high social circles are consuming them. A clear example of this is the abovementioned monument, as well as the shrine discovered in Mtskheta in 1951, which belonged to a woman of an advanced circle. 63 coins were found here: 9 – gold, 54 – silver. It is noteworthy that four of the 9 gold medals are Roman imperial aureus, and five are local imitations of the statera of Alexander the Great [Kapanadze D. 1955: 82; Matiashvili N. 2016: 18].

In our view, the authorities were involved in the making of the early bird imitations of the August denarii.

In conclusion, it can be said that, since the 2nd century BC imitations of Greco-Roman money were made on Georgian territory. It has a rather broad and long character. This happens throughout the ancient period. This process continues in the pre-feudal era, in the making of Georgian Sassanid money by Georgian nobility. Later, this process was crowned by the unification of Georgia by the ruling Bagratians of Tao-Klarjeti and the implementation of the Georgian money issue.

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DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Denarius of Octavian Augustus (27 BC-14 AD).

Fig. 2. The imitation of the denarii of Octavian Augustus.

Fig. 3. The imitation of the denarii of Octavian Augustus.

Fig. 4. A graphic sketch of an imitation of the denarii of Octavian Augustus.

Fig. 5. The imitation of the denarii of Octavian Augustus discovered on the Dedoplis Gora.

Fig. 6. An imitation of the denarii of Octavian Augustus, preserved in the Svaneti History Museum.

Fig. 7. Imitation of the statera of Alexander the Great from Vani, Akhvlediani hill.

Fig. 8. Imitation of Alexander the Great's stater from Van, graphic sketch.

Fig. 9. Imitation of Lysimachus Statera.

Fig. 10. Imitation of Lysimachus Statera.

Fig. 11. Imitation of Lysimachus statera.

Fig. 12. Imitation of Lysimachus statera.

Fig. 13. A hoard of coins found on Dedoplis Gora, along with fragments of pottery.



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