

Medea Tsotselia

Recent Sasanian Coin Findings on the Territory of Georgia

Avertissement

Le contenu de ce site relève de la législation française sur la propriété intellectuelle et est la propriété exclusive de l'éditeur.

Les œuvres figurant sur ce site peuvent être consultées et reproduites sur un support papier ou numérique sous réserve qu'elles soient strictement réservées à un usage soit personnel, soit scientifique ou pédagogique excluant toute exploitation commerciale. La reproduction devra obligatoirement mentionner l'éditeur, le nom de la revue, l'auteur et la référence du document.

Toute autre reproduction est interdite sauf accord préalable de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France.



Revues.org est un portail de revues en sciences humaines et sociales développé par le CLEO, Centre pour l'édition électronique ouverte (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

Référence électronique

Medea Tsotselia, « Recent Sasanian Coin Findings on the Territory of Georgia », *Histoire & mesure* [En ligne], XVII - 3/4 | 2002, mis en ligne le 30 octobre 2006. URL : <http://histoiremesure.revues.org/index888.html>
DOI : en cours d'attribution

Éditeur : Éditions de l'EHESS
<http://histoiremesure.revues.org>
<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <http://histoiremesure.revues.org/index888.html>
Document généré automatiquement le 29 septembre 2009. La pagination ne correspond pas à la pagination de l'édition papier.

© Éditions de l'EHESS

Medea Tsotselia

Recent Sasanian Coin Findings on the Territory of Georgia

Pagination de l'édition papier : p. 143-153

1 The purpose of this paper is to present a close and concentrated relationship between the Sasanian Iran and Georgia based on numismatic evidences¹. Georgia is a small country in the Caucasus and the foundation of its culture was laid by Georgian tribes who inhabited this area for several millennia.

1. Georgia in Sasanian period

2 The first millennium B. C. saw the formation of two Georgian states on this territory: the Kingdom of Colcheti or Lazika (according to antique and Byzantine sources), which from the 8th century A. D. came to be referred to as Abkhazeti and the Kingdom of Iberia (according to Greek sources) or Kartli (in Georgian sources).

3 Relations of Iberia with the countries of the ancient world are documented not only by Georgian written source “The life of Kartli”, but also by foreign writers’ records (Strabon, Plinius, Ptolemaeus, Appianus, Plutarchos, Movses Khorenatsi). Besides, there is a great number of epigraphic pieces and archaeological findings most of which were discovered in the old ancient capital of Iberia – Mtskheta, which was a well known political-administrative and cultural-economic town having close relations with different countries of the Old World (Iran, Rome, etc.). Georgian archaeologists excavated a number of sites and found lots of artifacts that shed light upon political, economic, commercial and cultural relations. All these make links more visible and particularly the links of Iberia kingdom, that were quite real in the first centuries A. D. and even earlier.

4 Roman expansion towards Georgia began in the 1st century A. D. Roman emperors recognized Iberia as their ally; local kings had titles “a friend and ally of Caesar and the Romans”. They enjoyed a relative independence and were honored at the Roman court. Iberia was obliged to give military help though the Romans did not interfere much in their home policy. However, the changes and upheavals of the 3rd century A. D. had their impact in Iberia, as elsewhere. A new Persian state – the Sasanians came to power. The Iberians remained throughout that period in regular touch with Sasanian Iran often incorporating eastern elements in their art and allowing themselves to be won over Sasanian Mazdaianism. Though Sasanian Iran and Kartli maintained close interrelations, those contacts were not always peaceful and voluntary.

5 One of the world’s richest and oldest collections of cultural heritage lies in Iran. In this region was a common historical and cultural background shared by all the peoples living in that area. Over the ages, the flow of goods, ideas, as well as artists and merchants have caused innumerable manifestations which reflected Iranian cultural heritage. From the 3rd century of the Christian era until the middle of the 7th century, the Sasanian kings ruled over a realm comparable to that of the emperors of Rome and Byzantium. They passed on the concept of an unified empire and a tradition of legendary royal power.

6 Sasanian art reached great heights of perfection. Artists excelled in such minor arts as metalwork, seals, and striking coins. The wealth of Iran was never greater than in this time. The Sasanian culture and art, that had emerged as a result of active interactions of various ethno-cultural traditions, have long outlived the Sasanian state, deeply affecting the cultural development of various peoples of the East and West in the subsequent period. The economic and political institutions and cultural traditions that were formed, played an important role

in history and were preserved in the course of many centuries. The Sasanian period can be regarded as an important stage in the history of the Transcaucasian peoples.

7 Penetration of the Sasanians into Caucasia and their control for a time on parts of the great Silk Route across Asia led to the influence of Iranian culture on Georgia. Iranian-Georgian political and cultural contacts had a centuries-old history. The geographical position of both Iran and Georgia supported the influence of practically uninterrupted communications between the two countries from earliest times. The historical and cultural contacts that arose very early between these neighbouring areas reached their summit in the Sasanian period, while their historical inheritance and geographical conditions differed from each other.

8 The interrelations of Georgia with its great and powerful neighbour were complex and deep. They included all spheres of political, social, economic and cultural life of a country and continued even under unfavourable conditions to both countries. It is natural that those interrelations influenced on the material culture of Iberia and had particular role in the different aspects of Georgian civilization, material culture and art. Historical, political and trade-economic relations maintained by Georgia with eastern and western countries, the existence of the main trade route passing through Georgian territory favored penetration of foreign coins into the country. Coins were put into circulation and hoarded in the case of emergency. Sasanian coins found within the territory of Georgia are of great interest. A comprehensive study has been performed on these coins found on the territory of Georgia and kept in various museum collections of the country.

2. Sasanian coins

9 It was my aim to study Sasanian coins and trace, as far as possible, the routes of their spread over the territory of Georgia, to know how, when and why they could be exported out of the Empire and what was their use and life on the territory of Georgia. Of all the remains of the Sasanian pe-riod only coins contribute to a continuous chronological unbroken sequence throughout the whole period of the dynasty. Our knowledge of Sasanian coin findings is mainly based on archaeological evidences and hoards found in different spots of Georgia. They can be divided into some categories – single finds, accidental finds, hoards and samples that have been found archaeologically. All Sasanian hoards found on the territory of Georgia consist of drachms that were the main unit of money circulation in Sasanian Iran. Drachm was an international currency, face value of goods, the means of wealth saving.

10 Frequent finds of Sasanian coins in East Georgia made it possible to extend limits of the known area of their distribution. Most of find spots are located in Iberia/Kartli kingdom. The large majority of coins came to light in Mtskheta – the capital of Iberia and its environments in the course of archaeological works carried on during 55 years. The finds help to understand when Sasanian coins have been imported to Kartli, when they were put into circulation, how they were used in West and East Georgia on those days, as there were two independent kingdoms on the territory of modern Georgia. Sasanian coin findings of recent years have helped us in many ways to get clearer idea of chronology. Thanks to the numismatic findings, we are able to reconstruct the history and extent of the influence of Sasanian kingdom on Georgia. All recent finds are good examples of Sasanian silver coins of the 5th-beginning of the 7th century.

11 Judging from the local finds it was in the 3rd century A. D. that Sasanian coins made their first appearance on the territory of Georgia. They were found together with Roman and Parthian coins. The rich burials of Iberian kings at Mtskheta contained Sasanian coins. The earliest was struck in the name of Ardashir i. The coin was found in 1980 in a stone grave N° 25 together with rich woman's burial objects dated from the late antique period. The coin is the only recorder specimen of Ardashir i's coin discovered on the territory of Georgia and the first and the only golden coin of this shah. This type of the coin (iii/2) was minted at the end of his reign (233-240) being in circulation until his death.

- 12 Archaeological findings testify that Sasanian coins of the 3rd century are rare. They are represented only by isolated samples and were found in rather few quantities. Those were drachms of Shapur i (4), Varahran i (2), Varahran ii (4), Narseh (1 golden coin and 3 drachms), the golden coin of Shapur ii found in a rich woman's burial in Akhlagori. Penetration of coinage of the first Sasanian kings to the territory of Iberia did not change the structure of commodity money circulation of the country. Local market of the country was served mainly by Roman and Parthian coins that were means of payment in the 3rd century Iberia.
- 13 First Sasanian coins might have been received as diplomatic gifts to Iberian nobles. It might be that the first Sasanian kings bestowed not only silver plates but gold and silver coins upon the rulers of Iberia.
- 14 If in the 3rd-4th cc. Sasanian coins arrived into Iberia by incidental, later, after the lapse of 150 years, from the 5th century onward a great number of isolated and scattered finds and hoards have been circulated and found in an unbroken succession. Sasanian silver drachms of high silver quality filled the monetary market of Georgia. Sasanian drachms flowed into Kartli being predominant in the monetary market of that time.
- 15 Without chronological gap Sasanian coinage is represented from the reign of Peroz (459-484) the fact is confirmed by many coin hoards. The hoards are mainly composed of coins of Sasanian rulers known elsewhere: Peroz (459-484), Valash (484-488), Kavad (488-531), Husro i (531-579), Hormizd iv (579-590), Husro ii (590-628). Most of them were composed during the Byzantine-Iranian wars and have to be linked with the invasion of the Sasanian armies in East Georgia. All principal varieties of drachms of Sasanian kings are present in these hoards. The composition of some of them belongs to different chronological periods throwing considerable light on the history of East Georgia. 30 hoards of Sasanian coins have been recorded as found in Georgia as well as about 40 other finds of Sasanian coins which may have been hoards.
- 16 The coin hoards break up into 2 groups: hoards that are composed of drachms and mixed hoards composed of Byzantine and Umayyad dirhams. The Byzantine coins also participated in money circulation of East Georgia, but they were not so popular as Sasanian drachms in the monetary circulation of the 5th-7th centuries Kartli. Occurrence and findings of Byzantine and Sasanian Hoards on the territory of Kartli is the reflection of the fight of two powerful empires for hegemony in Transcaucasia.
- 17 Mixed hoards can be chronologically divided into early containing Byzantine coins (Tbilisi, Marganeti and Tselitskaro hoards) and late hoards where Cuphic dirhams of Moslem rulers are found with a few number of Sasanian coins (Mtisdziri, Leliani, Kavshiri, Apeni, Pshaveli hoards). Most hoards belong to the shahan shahs of the 6th-beginning of the 7th century; they are closely similar in general style and of fine constitution. Coins are struck in silver and are in good state of preservation with well-read Pahlavi legends. Drachms that circulated on the territory of Kartli were in fabric, weight, execution and legends the same compared to the most known coins of Sasanian kings.
- 18 All Sasanian rulers are known to have struck coins, the principal denomination being the silver drachm. Gold, obols and bronze issues are found only on some specimens and they were less in circulation. The earliest Sasanian coin found in Georgia dates back to Ardashir i, the latest refers to Yazdgard iii (628-630). The earliest dated coin in the hoards is the drachm of Peroz, marked with the 6th year of his reign and minted at Abarshahr (N° 659).
- 19 Frequent finds of Sasanian coins made it possible to extend the limits of the known area of their distribution. All find spots are located in or near trade centres of Iberia/Kartli. The ways of distribution of Sasanian coins in Georgia can be observed as follows: east and central parts of Kartli along the rivers Aragvi, Iori, Alazani and the Mtkvari valley.
- 20 Topography of Sasanian coin finds is of interest. Majority of coins came to light in Mtskheta and its neighbourhood (in the course of archaeological works carried out during many successive years). Repeated and abundant findings of Sasanian coins in Lagodekhi,

Tianeti, Akhmeta, Tsitelitskaro, Kvareli and Urbnisi regions testify the importance of these geographical spots being trading centres of that time.

21 Though Sasanian drachms were obviously intended to pass as the same denomination, some series in hoards suffer a slight but nevertheless reduction in its weight standard. The weights of the specimens show a focus around 4.05 grams. Coins of Hormizd iv have the high weight standard compared to those of Husro i's and Husro ii's some issues in the same hoards. It can be explained by that the coins of the former were in circulation for a lesser period of time and suffered a lesser degree of wear.

22 The characteristic feature of every standard Sasanian coin issue is the readable legend. Several handwritings of different scribes are seen on the coins of Hormizd iv, Husro i and Husro ii. Some Sasanian drachms of the 6th-beginning of the 7th century have distinct types, legends, certain stylistic features and provenances justifying their assignation to local Caucasian mints with the weights-reduced version of the weight standard. Those coins are less in size bearing crude, stylized portraits of the kings, sometimes legends consisting only of several letters or they are illegible. There was a supposition among scientists about a possibility of existence of mints in Transcaucasia.

23 Striking of drachms of local mints, if such took place, was a subject to a high degree of central control. Drachms might have been struck locally at mints, but it is not clear whether the dies were also cut locally or instead were cut centrally or regionally and sent to the local mints for use in striking.

24 The majority of Sasanian coin findings in Georgia come from the hoard discovered in 1977 in Tsitelitskaro. The hoard is dispersed, but fortunately 1395 drachms and 10 Byzantine hexagrams have been collected. The hoard has the following sequence of kings: Husro i, Hormizd iv, Varahran vi, Husro ii, Heraclius with Heraclius Constantine (615-630) and Heraclius with Heraclius Constantine and Heraclonas (632-41). The hoard follows the typical pattern of late Sasanian hoards being largely composed of issues of Hormizd iv. Though represented in the hoard Sasanian kings have left extensive coinage (except the usurper Varahran vi (590-591), the only coins of his so far recorded as found in Georgia were in this hoard), the majority of coins (839) belong to Hormizd iv, who ruled only for 12 years. All his coins were struck according to one iconographical type but minted in different mint towns of the Sasanian Empire.

25 Number of issued drachms in Sasanian period directly depended on extent of controlled territories and on duration of king's rule. Though in all big museum collections coins of Husro ii are predominant, it is evident from the Tsitelitskaro hoard that Hormizd iv minted coins in great numbers and frequency. The earliest coin of the hoard dates back to the reign of Husro i. It is a drachm of regnal year 21 (A. D. 552). The latest (youngest) coins being Byzantine hexagrams issued by Heraclius and his sons. Thus, the maximum date range of the hoard covers 89 years.

26 The hoard gives 23 mint towns. Coins of Varahran vi bear 4 different mint places (Meshan, Lower Veh-Kavad, Hamadan and Rayy) indicating to activity of coin issue of this king during his one year reign. The hoard can be considered unique according to its quantity and quality as well. Very few hoards with a significant proportion of drachms of the 6th-beginning of the 7th century have been recorded. None with such a large number of Sasanian drachms has been published so far as can be ascertained.

3. The mints

27 Analysis of coins found on the territory of Georgia brought to light different mint towns.

28 One of the difficult problems of later Sasanian coinage is the identification and attribution of mint monograms. The 50 different mint signatures were found on Sasanian coin findings in Georgia. It is a reflection of the large number of mints existing in Sasanian Iran and the wide circulation of Sasanian coinage itself in Iran and in neighbouring countries as well.

29 All the major mints known for Sasanian kings appear to be represented in single finds and
hoards. The main component of Sasanian currency comes from south-western mints. There
are quite a few emissions of the most numerous for Iran of the time being south-eastern mint
issues. Coins issued in towns bordering with Transcaucasia are missing.

30 For most hoards DYNAN, LD (Rayy), BYT (Bshapur), AS (Aspahan), ST (Stahr), AB
(Abarshahr), DA (Darabgerd), AYLAN (Eran-Hvarrah-Shapur/=Susa), AH (Hamadan), WH
(Weh-Ardahir), HL (Herat), WYH-C (Lower Veh Kavad) have the highest percentage.
Other mints of Sasanian Iran made “smaller contributions” Drachms with GW (Gurgan) and
GWGWN (?)² have their own distinctive style.

31 Many, if not most, of Sasanian coin hoards of the 5th-beginning of the 7th century A. D.
contained no coins from Eastern mints. From the reign of Varahran v (420-438) onwards the
mint of MY (Meshan) entered on an uninterrupted career as a major source of coinage.

32 After analysis of different details in the pictures represented on some Sasanian drachms (of
Kavad, Husro i, Hormizd iv, Husro ii) the following conclusion was reached: coins were
minted in several issues, showing differences not only in details of type and inscription, but
also of weight. The fact pointing to a long period of minting. The royal portraits on some late
Sasanian coins of Hormizd iv, Husro i, Husro ii, bearing different mints are relatively good
workmanship.

33 The end of the 6th century is distinguished by an important event in Georgian numismatics.
Local silver coins issued by erismtavars (local noble governors) came to light. The mint of so-
called Georgian-Sasanian drachms began. Their mint started in the 80'ies of the 6th century;
they were derivations of drachms of the Sasanian shah Hormizd iv. The coins show a
steadily increasing tendency towards independence. First Georgian-Sasanian coins carried
only Georgian letters and Georgian erismtavars monograms (Gurgen, Juansher, Stephanoz) on
the obverse, later the Christian symbol, image of the cross appeared instead of the flames of fire
over the atashdan on the reverse. The next issues of Georgian-Sasanian drachms were struck
according to coins of Husro ii. The name of erismtavari Stephanoz is written in monogram,
later it is spelled out in Georgian letters.

34 On anonymous Georgian-Sasanian coins the image of cross appears first on the obverse, near
the bust of the king and later – on the reverse, where the cross is placed upon the atashdan.

35 Minting of Georgian-Sasanian coins was an important act. It might be considered as the effort
of Kartli eristavs to show their political independence and getting more rights and faithfulness
of Georgian governors.

*

36 Having studied the numismatic material from the historical point of view, it became clear that
the old form of political relationship of Kartli with the Sasanian Iran came to an end in the
30'ies of the 7th century A. D. A new power had been looming up in the south-west, little
regarded at first, but destined to reserve the beliefs of half the world and shake the stronghold
of Christianity. It was the power of Mohammed. The Arab invasions marked the end of ancient
history and beginning of a new era, an era of a new faith.

37 During the 7th century even after conquering Tbilisi and East Georgia by Arabs silver Sasanian
drachms still circulated in all regions of the Arabic Caliphate and in Kartli alongside with
Byzantine coins as before, in spite of ceasing of Iran and Byzantine supremacy.

38 Record of both single or group finds of Sasanian coins on the territory of Georgia would repay
further consideration. The study of the arrival and spread of Sasanian currency in Georgia is
still in progress and will continue to be so till Sasanian coins go on to be found in Georgia.

Bibliographie

Mousheghian, Khatchatur, (†), Mousheghian, Anahit, Bresc, Cécile, Depeyrot, Georges & Gurnet, François, *History and coin finds in Armenia, Coins from Duin, Capital of Armenia (4-13th c.), Inventory of Byzantine and Sasanian Coins in Armenia (6-7th c.)*, Wetteren, Collection Moneta 18, 2000.

Tsotselia, Medea, *History and coin finds in Georgia, Sasanian and Byzantine coins from Tsitelitskaro (A. D. 641)*, 26, Wetteren, Collection Moneta, 2002.

– *History and coin finds in Georgia, Sasanian coin finds and hoards*, Wetteren, Collection Moneta 30, 2003.

Notes

1 The program of publications of coin finds in Transcaucasia is placed under the patronage of the International Numismatic Commission.

2 On GWNGWN or ZWNZWN, possibly from Armenia, see K. Mousheghian, A. Mousheghian, C. Bresc, G. Depeyrot & F. Gurnet, 2000.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Medea Tsotselia, « Recent Sasanian Coin Findings on the Territory of Georgia », *Histoire & mesure* [En ligne], XVII - 3/4 | 2002, mis en ligne le 30 octobre 2006. URL : <http://histoiremesure.revues.org/index888.html>

À propos de l'auteur

Medea Tsotselia

Numismatic Departement, Janashia Georgian State Museum, Purtseladze Street 3, Tbilisi – 380 007 Georgia.
mtsoselia@yahoo.com

Droits d'auteur

© Éditions de l'EHESS

Résumé / Abstract

Les monnaies sassanides en Géorgie. Découvertes récentes.

Ce texte étudie les relations étroites entre la Géorgie et l'Iran sassanide d'après les données de la numismatique. Tous les trésors monétaires découverts en Géorgie sont composés de drachmes. À la lumière des dernières recherches, il est maintenant possible de retrouver les traits propres à la circulation monétaire des iii^e-vii^e siècles en Géorgie, d'établir le moment de la pénétration de la monnaie sassanide dans ce pays, d'étudier la répartition géographique des découvertes, de déterminer l'aire et l'importance de cette circulation, ainsi que de comprendre quelles villes de l'Iran sassanide ont produit les monnaies de Géorgie. L'étude souligne que le marché géorgien fut régulièrement et sans interruption alimenté en numéraire.

Mots clés : monnaie

This paper deals with close relationship between Georgia and the Sasanian Iran based on numismatic evidences. All Sasanian coin hoards found in Georgia consist of drachms. In the light of the latest researches, it became possible to re-establish common picture of money circulation in the 3rd-7th cc Georgia, to fix the time of penetration of Sasanian coins into Georgia, to compose a topography of coin findings, to determine the area and intensity of their circulation, to comprehend which mint towns of Sasanian Iran issued drachms for Georgia. It became clear when Sasanian drachms filled the monetary market of Georgia without chronological gap and permanently.

Entrées d'index

Index chronologique : Moyen Age

Index géographique : Europe orientale, Asie et Océanie