



**Dirhams of the Samanid period with Graffiti found on the
territory of Georgia**

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Abstract

Graffiti as a form of socio-cultural expression has existed since the time immemorial. Many of its examples have survived from ancient Greece and especially from the period of the ancient Roman Empire¹²⁴. The practice of using graffiti was not limited to wall paintings, inscriptions or scrawls, but also to small but common objects such as coins. Money is a public use symbol of any state (especially the small denominations) which was available and intended for any social class.

In the history of Georgia, money has always had an important symbolic load and was used not only in the form intended for trading, but later acquired different functions and carried both ethnographic, propaganda and cultural load. Very often high-quality silver coins of low denomination were used as part of the decoration of a garment or to carry a specific function of the garment¹²⁵.

¹²⁴ For Example, the city of Pompeii that was covered in ash by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

¹²⁵ Very often, a coin of a standard round form was used as a button of clothes.

Keywords: Graffiti; Dirham; Caucasus; Trade.

Introduction

Graffiti made by people on coins is also one of the manifestations of socio-cultural aspect. The mentioned graffiti could have a propagandistic issue, as well as a specific person's personal bias at a specific moment in relation to this or that issue or his personal psychological side.

Often it is difficult not to distinguish whether a scratch or scratches, which do not carry significant content, are intended by the performance, or are unintentional and natural cause.

Unfortunately, In Georgian historiography and specifically in numismatics, proper attention is not paid to the inscriptions on coins, therefore we have practically no works on that issue. There is a different picture, for example, in our neighbor Russia, where many articles or monographs are not devoted to graffiti on coins at all, but the issue is specifically divided and studied according to eras.

Our goal is to overview the graffiti made on the coins of the period of the Samanids (819-999) which were found in the historical territory of Georgia and compare them with the coins found in the bordering region of Georgia (in particular Transcaucasia).

In our article we will review 6 coins that we consider to be the most noteworthy pieces of graffiti. The mentioned coins were found in the territory of Georgia, they were part of the Kufic dirhams hoard.

Methods

Coins are the main source of our research. In our case, the symbols carrying a certain content scratched on the coins, or graffiti.

The main difficulty in the research is to first determine the accuracy of the graffiti on the coins and then to determine their subtle content. In that case, we could use a comparative analysis, which involves comparing similar coins in our neighboring regions and similar graffiti on them with the units cited in our article.

Due to the small size of the coin, the graffiti on it is often very small. Therefore, for an accurate visual perception for the reader we have attached the graffiti handmade descriptions of each coin.

Reasoning

Coin N1 (Fig.1) – minted in 287 AH (897-898) in the city of Samarkand.



Fig. 1

On obverse side, on the whole segment of the center of the coin is scratched so called “full” cross shape. Throughout the Caucasus, the cross was one of the most common symbols during the mentioned period. Similar type of symbols are often found on wall or stone inscriptions.

The mentioned symbol scratched on the coin (Fig. 2) undoubtedly belongs to Christian symbolism, because it repeats the shape of the Greek cross and does not represent a selective combination of two parallel lines.

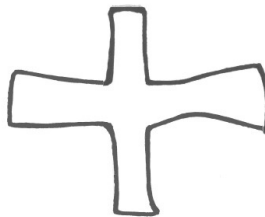


Fig.2

The graffiti scratched on the coin N1 is very similar to coin described by I. G. Dobrovolsky, which is Samanid dirham, also dated 284 AH (897-898) and minted in the city Al-Shah. (Dobrovolsky,1991: 121, 160, 184).

The coin N2 (Fig. 3) – a coin of the Samanid period minted in the year 270 AH (883-884) in the city Al-Shah.



Fig.3

In the center of the Obverse side of the coin, two crossed lines are scratched. In that case, we cannot determine for sure whether that symbol represents a cross (?), as we could say exactly in the case of the coin N1 (Fig.1), or it is a Greek letter X, or it represents some other symbol.

A similar symbol is very often mentioned on Kufic dirhams found in Transcaucasia.(Dobrovolsky, 1991: 137, 148, 153-154) All such dirhams belong to the Samanid period and in that case it is difficult to specify exactly what content the symbol may bear.



Fig.4

Coin N3 (Fig. 5) – struck in 290 AH (903) and minted in the city of Al-Shah, the incised symbolism on that coin is similar to the coin N2. The symbol is scratched on the obverse of the coin. Also in that case, it is very difficult to exactly determine the content of the symbol. We could only make a few assumptions:

It is unlikely that the symbol (Fig. 5) is related to Greek or Latin letter, as it may be in the case of the coin N2. Most likely, that symbol should be related to either a rough scratch of a cross, or some other symbol the exact essence of which we could determine.



Fig.5

Coin N4 (Fig. 6) - minted in the city of Samarkand. Has a very interesting geometric symbol. It is marked on the obverse side of the coin. We could not determine its exact content, but we could cite a coin found in Transcaucasia with a similar symbol scratched on it. According to I. G. Dobrovolsky, that should represent the symbol of the flag, which does not have a wooden tar. (Dobrovolsky, 1991: 115)



Fig.6

The Sketch made by Dobrovolsky is similar to the symbol scratched on our coin (Fig.7).

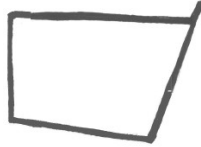


Fig.7

We would like to combine the both coins N5 (Fig.8) and N6 (Fig.9) into one category, because the symbols scratched on them are very similar in content. Symbols consist of either connected or separated parallel lines. Unfortunately it is impossible to determine their exact content.



Fig.8



Fig.9

Conclusion

The graffiti on Kufic dirhams represents a different branch of numismatics as science. Which could reveal completely different aspects of everyday life and its essence. Graffiti on coins could have different content. It could be a state, or religious symbols, or even have a commercial meaning. In the case of graffiti the most difficult task is firstly to determine whether a simple scratch on a coin is a graffiti or not, and then to determine what content it may carry.

In described coins we could distinguish four categories of symbols: the first is a religious symbol (Fig.1), where a cross is undoubtedly depicted and we have no doubt about its symbolic content; The second one could be considered as a symbol of letters and signs (Fig. 3), which could also have the meaning of trademark; The third could represent the state symbolism with the image of the flag (Fig.7); And the last fourth, represent a combination of lines, the content of which is unclear to us, although we do not doubt that those symbols represent graffiti.

As a conclusion we would like to express the hope that above mentioned art on coins will be given due attention in the future as an alternative auxiliary branch of science, which could make many interesting conclusions about the life of people at that time.

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