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New evidence for the use of silver ingots-money in the Bulgarian Kingdom in the 13th-14th c. (Abstract)

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The present article discusses poorly known processes and phenomena in the monetary sphere and the monetary circulation in Bulgaria and Byzantium in the 13th-14th c. In the period under consideration, in addition to the use of the traditional gold coins and monetary signs that were exchangeable for them, a new practice became widespread in the international trade relations - the payment of large sums of money in gold and mostly silver ingots, cast in accordance with a specific weight and monetary system. This way of payment became even more widespread from the late 13th or early 14th c. onwards, when in almost all Bulgarian commercial centers, mostly in the port cities on the Western Black Sea coast, the use was established of both real Byzantine hyperpyra and of ideal Byzantine units. This type of gold coin with scyphate shape and a standard weight of 4.40 grams was adopted as the main currency of the Bulgarian Kingdom already in the late 12th c. - due to its good reputation of a recognized international currency. Despite the decrease of the gold content of the Byzantine hyperpyron from 21/22 carats in the 12th c. to 11/12 carats in the early 14th c., it preserved its prestige in the trade in the entire Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Black Sea, the southern parts of the Russian princedoms, and the vast lands of the Golden Horde Khans in the east. In the period under consideration, these were the golden hyperpyra of the Byzantine Emperors Andronicus II and Michael IX Palaeologus (1294-1320) and the hyperpyra from the joint reign of Andronicus II and Andronicus III Palaeologus (1325-1341). In the process of devaluation of the gold nomisma and the establishing of the silver coins in the monetary circulation on the international market, a transition to an ideal unit occurred. Every larger commercial center established its own ideal unit that corresponded to a fixed weight of silver and gold coins or silver ingots, depending on their content of precious metal. The standard weight of the ideal unit or the so-called saggio (from egzagium - weight) varied between 4.00 and 4.40 grams. The silver and gold coins were exchanged by weight in accordance with the weight of the saggio. Such ideal units and payments that conformed to their weight are known from Mesembria (present-day Nesebar), Varna, Licostomo and Vicina at the mouth of the

Danube on the Black Sea, present-day Romania.

For large commercial deals and payments in the 13th and especially in the 14th c., silver ingots of certain weight were used. This practice was known and used in Western European states, mostly in the Italian cities of Venice, Florence, Pisa, and Genoa. The ingots that were cast there were shaped like round buns or bars with weight that was related to the silver mark of 200-250 grams that was used as the main monetary-weight unit. These western ingots were used in Byzantium and in Bulgaria with a silver content of 965 and 925/1000. In Byzantium itself, silver bun and bar ingots were also used, but they were related to the Byzantine litra/libra of 324 or 307-311 grams, and to the lighter ounce of 27/28 grams.

A third type of ingots were used on Bulgarian and Byzantine markets, mostly bar-shaped and with eastern origin, mainly from the Russian princedoms and especially from the Venetian colonies on the Sea of Azov and the Crimea. These bars were known as sommo, with weight of 204-207 grams and silver content c. 925/1000. Written sources have recorded the use of sommo in Mesembria, in accordance with the standard weight that was adopted by the community.

Genoa used massively such bars for payments in the Black Sea area and mainly in Bulgarian ports, from where it exported wheat, flour, biscuit, timber for shipbuilding, and beeswax. A number of documents are known from Genoa that mention Genoese ships captured by the semi-independent Bulgarian ruler Dobrotitsa who controlled a narrow coastal strip between the fortress of Kaliakra and the mouth of the Danube. When the ships were captured, the men of Dobrotitsa not only confiscated the cargo and the cash from the ships, but also demanded large ransoms in silver bars for the captured passengers. For this reason, Genoese authorities in Pera, Constantinople, declared Despot Dobrotitsa among the most dangerous enemies of the Republic.

Three hoards of silver bars are known from the territory of Bulgaria. Two of them have mixed contents of jewellery, coins, and ingots. In 1971, near Nikopol on the Danube, a mixed hoard was discovered, containing gold jewellery (0.327 kg), silver vases and jewellery (3.5 kg), seven gold and silver coins, and ten silver ingots - six bun-shaped, two bars, and two shapeless. The average weight of the bun-shaped ingots is 305-307 grams, and of the bars - 59 and 29 grams (a double and a single ounce). These weight measures indicate their Byzantine-Genoese origin, as they were cast in accordance with the Byzantine weight libra/litra, used in Constantinople and Pera. The latest among the coins are two silver issues of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425), respectively a half and a quarter hyperpyron. The hoarding of the treasure trove could be related mostly to the defeat of the western knights led by the Hungarian King Sigismund I (1387-1437) at Nikopol on the Danube on September 26, 1396, by the united army of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I (1389-1402).

The second hoard was found in Uzun Bair locality near Tulcea on the Danube (present-day Romaina). It consists of silver and gilded jewellery, 105 silver ingots, 204 gold hyperpyra, and 23 440 silver asprae-dirhams and their imitations by the Khans of the Golden Horde. Ninety-two of the ingots were bars weighing between 170 and 219 grams and with an average weight of 201 grams. The presence of gold hyperpyra of Andronicus II with Michael IX Palaeologus indicates that the hoard was buried c. 1320-1330.

The third hoard comes from Toshevtsi, Vidin region. It was found in a Christian grave from the 14th c. It contained three amorphous pieces of silver, weighing 131, 61, and 33 grams. They may have been a kind of a family treasure, or were material used for artisanal production.

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