

# Georgian silver coins struck with the name of David Kuropalates

The present article aims to reevaluate the date of a particular coin group related to medieval Transcaucasia. These extremely rare silver coins bear the name of *David* on the obverse and the title of *kuropalates* on the reverse. The coin type can be described as follows:

*Obv.* Two borders of pellets, dot in the middle of field. Two lines of inscription in Georgian *asomtavruli* script, paired characters are accompanied with strokes above (as marks of abbreviation):

ႠႠႠႠ  
ႠႠ  
ქ(რისტ)ე შ(ეიწყალ)ე  
და(ვი)თ

*Rev.* Two borders of pellets, cross potent on three steps, four characters in respective sections:

Ⴀ-Ⴀ-Ⴀ-Ⴀ  
კ(ურა)პ(ალა)ტი

The entire legend reads and can be translated into Greek and English as follows:

ქრისტე	შეიწყალე	დავით	კურაპალატი
krist'e,	šeic'q'ale	davit	k'urap'alat'i
Χριστέ,	ἐλέησον	Δαυιδ	κουροπαλάτης
O Christ,	have mercy	upon David	Kuropalates!

To date, examples of these coins have only been recovered from four Viking-age hoards:

1. Germany, The Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the Schwaan hoard 1859, tpq 1025 (Lisch und Masch 1861). The coin is now kept in the

Schwerin regional museum (fig. 1, after Lisch und Masch 1861).

2. Sweden, Gotland, Dalhem parish, the Hallföse II hoard, 1884–1885, tpq 1056 (CNS 1.3, no. 2). The coin is now kept in the Royal coin cabinet, Stockholm (fig. 2, after Jonsson E. 2018, 8, fig. 10).
3. North-West Russia, St. Petersburg region (formerly part of the Olonets region), the Lodeynoe Pole I hoard 1878, tpq 1105 (?) (Markov 1910, 29; Bauer 1929, 70–73; Potin 1967, 146–149). The coin was acquired by Ju. B. Iversen for his private collection and is now kept in the Hermitage museum, St. Petersburg (fig. 3, after Kapanadze 1955).
4. Estonia, Pärnu region, the Võlla (formerly Wõlla) hoard 1903, tpq 1005 (Bauer 1929, 38; Potin 1967, 116–117; Molvögin 1994, 61–74). The coin is now kept in Berlin coin cabinet (fig. 4, after Paxomov 1970).

About these finds, see also (Potin, Kebuladze 1970; Zimon 1982).

Based on the varieties of characters and the die comparison, one can conclude that the above-mentioned coins were struck using two pairs of dies: 1/R1 (die-identical specimens from Schwaan and Hallföse) and 2/R2 (die-identical specimens from Lodeynoe Pole and Võlla).

It is commonly believed that these coins appear to have been struck before 1001 AD, during the last decade of David III Kuropalates' rule, i.e. David the Great, prince of Tao, *kuropalates* and king of Iberia between 990–1001 from the Bagratid (*Bagrat'ioni*) dynasty. This generally accepted attribution was first proposed by Victor Langlois

for the Schwaan specimen in (Langlois 1860, 36–37), and then accepted by G. C. Flisch and G. M. C. Masch, Ju. B. Iversen in the 19th century. In the 20th century, this opinion was shared by E. Pakhomov (Paxomov 1970, 52–53) and D. Kapanadze (Kapanadze 1955, 54–55); see also (Dundua 2009, 5–11).

Langlois described the coin as an imitation of Byzantine silver *miliaresia*, which is naturally true, but he wrongly assumed that the Byzantine prototype of the coin with the name of David appeared to be the *miliaresia* struck under John Tzimiskes, 969–976, and Basil II, 976–1025 (“cette médaille est imitée des pièces byzantines de Jean Zimiscès et Basile II”: Langlois 1860, 36). Thus, he dated the David coin into the late tenth century. Nonetheless, the design and appearance of crosses on *miliaresia* of the said emperors are far too different (cf. DOC, vol. III, part 2, pl. XLII and XLVI) and, strictly speaking, have not much in common with the design of the David coins. Indeed, according to the appearance of crosses on steps (‘Calvary’), the prototype of comparable proportions must have been dated back well into the ninth century, where we see the same design of the *miliaresia* struck between 775 AD under Leo IV and 867 AD under Michael III (cf. DOC; vol. III, part 1, pl. XII–XXIX).

Both Pakhomov and Kapanadze acknowledged that the attribution of these coins different from that linking them to David III of Tao, is also possible, given that there was another David, king and kuropalates of Iberia (876–881). However, the two numismatists jointly rejected this hypothesis based on historical grounds and following the previous scholarly tradition.





Yet the thorough typological examination of the coins with the name of David Kuropalates inevitably leads us to the conclusion that this coin type is not related to any of the coinages of the late tenth century. On the contrary, these coins do share some important features with ninth-century Byzantine coins in both obverse and reverse design and, in particular, with the late ninth-century Islamic coinages in flan production techniques. Following on from my observations on the ‘steps’ which appears to be clearly borrowed from a standard design of Byzantine silver *miliaresia* struck in the first and second thirds of the ninth century, I

am inclined to explain the design of double dotted circles (borders of pellets) as a copy of triple dotted circles typical of 8th and 9th century *miliaresia*. The design of the latter element of Byzantine silver coins becomes more complicated already in the reign of Leo VI the Wise (886–912): the borders become ornamented with globules (DOC; vol. III, part 2, pl. XXXIV ff.). The appearance of the flans of the David coins is extremely similar to that of the flans typical of the later phase of the Middle ‘Abbasid period (c. 867–892 AD). The flans are cut from silver plates using a ring-shaped cutting tool, with no further handling/elaboration of the edges. This technological feature is particularly common for various types of Transcaucasian and Khazar imitations of ‘Abbasid dirhams dated c. 870–890 AD.

As recent metal analysis has shown (Jonsson E. 2018, 8), the fineness of the Stockholm specimen of David Kuropalates’ coinage is relatively high (886 ‰), which may also point towards much earlier date than the late 10th century (see: Ilisch L. et al. (hrsg.) 2003).

The hoards containing the four known coins of David Kuropalates date into the Late Viking Age, which would seem a contradiction. Nevertheless, I have already had chances to point out the examples of eleven-century assemblages from Eastern Europe with rare ninth-century types of Khazar and Transcaucasian silver coins. Cf. the early-eleventh hoard of Mäkrälä Rautu, St. Petersburg region (formerly Finland) containing a mid-ninth century Khazar *runic dirham* (Kuleshov 2009) and the mid-eleventh century necklace from Ristiniemi Hiitola, containing a unique coin with the name of ‘Ali b. Ja’far, most probably struck in Georgia in the last third of the ninth century (Kuleshov and Jonsson 2018).

To conclude, we must decisively reject the attribution of coins with the name of *David Kuropalates* to David III (kuropalates in 990–1001) and reliably reattribute them to David I (kuropalates in 876–881). This new attribution has already been explicitly implemented for the Hermitage specimen, now permanently exhibited in St. Petersburg, and for the Stockholm specimen (Jonsson E. 2018, 8, with reference to my personal communication).

Dies 1/R1		
	Fig. 1. The Schwaan specimen	Fig. 2. The Hallföse specimen
Dies 2/R2		
	Fig. 3. The Hermitage specimen (Lodeynoe Pole)	Fig. 4. The Berlin specimen (Völla)

## Litterature

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## Svensk sammanfattning

Artikeln omvärderar en grupp av mycket sällsynta georgiska silvermynt som på åtsidan bär namnet *David* och på frånsidan titeln *kuropalate*. Fyra mynt är kända från lika många vikingatida fynd. Ett av mynten kommer från Hallföse, Dalhem socken på Gotland medan de övriga har fyndprovenienser från Tyskland, Estland och nordvästra Ryssland.

Det är allmänt vedertaget att mynten slagits under David III Kuropalates, 990–1001. Författaren avfärdar den rådande typologiska jämförelsen och anser att mynten har hämtat sin utformning från Bysantinska miliaresa slagna under perioden för Leo IV och Michael III regeringar, 775–867. En teknisk analys som beaktar präglingsteknik och silverhalt pekar också på en tidigare datering av mynten. Den slutsats som presenteras är att mynten är betydligt tidigare och har präglats för David I 867–881.