
From The History Of Armenian Coins. Cross As Symbol Of Christianity In Kingdom Of Cilicia

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After the Kingdom of Cilicia was conquered by Mamluks, the Armenian coinage stopped for a long period of time.



The Kingdom of Cilician Armenia was established on the northeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea at the end of the 11th century. Founded as a principedom, it had its origins in the principality founded by the Rubenid dynasty, an alleged offshoot of the larger Bagratid family, which at various times had held the thrones of Armenia and Georgia.

Their capital was at originally Tarsus, and later Sis. Cilicia was a strong ally of the European Crusaders, and saw itself as a bastion of Christendom in the East. In 1198, with the crowning of Levon the Magnificent of the Rubenid dynasty, Cilician Armenia became a Kingdom.

PanARMENIAN.Net - Some coins of the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia minted under the rule of Ruben, Toros and Levon princes have been preserved.

Description of coins

The princes did not have their own images on the coins, most of which featured a cross, the symbol of Christianity. Various images, including fortresses and military symbols were depicted on the reverse.

Copper and silver coins were issued in big amounts, with rare editions of billon (silver and copper alloy) coins. Silver coins were high-standard and of different value: double dram, dram and half-dram.

After the rule of King Levon II (1271-1289), low-grade coins called takvorins were minted, due to economic and political problems. Seljuk and Mamluk coins were also in circulation.

Description of coins

As a rule, the obverse features the image of the king either standing or sitting on the throne or bending his knees. The king held scepter, lily, sword and other royal symbols. The reverse shows lions and crosses.



Obverse and reverse of King Levon I silver dram

Unique two-language coins of King Het'um I are also known.

Description of coins

The obverse shows the king on a horse, with the name of the king written in Armenian. The reverse features an Arabic inscription with the names of Seljuk sultans Kayqubad I and Kaykhusraw II. The coins are dated to 1200-1400 AD.

The silver coins minted under the rule of King Het'um are of great interest. The coin features the image of King Het'um and Queen Zabel, the daughter of first Cilician King Levon I. This is the only type of coin with an image of a queen, which was minted for a long time after her death.



King Hethum I silver dram obverse

Copper coins were of different sizes and value. The biggest were called Dangs and were minted by Levon I and Het'um I only.

Middle-sized copper coins called Kartez were issued under the rule of Levon II and the kings who followed him. The last Cilician Lusignan dynasty, which fell in 1375, minted the smallest copper coins called Pogs.



Reverses of Kings Levon I, Hethum I copper dangs

High-quality silver coins minted under the rule of Levon I, Het'um I and Levon II were called Drams. The low-grade silver coins issued late were called Tagvorins.

There were also some editions of billon coins with Latin inscriptions, including billon coins King Levon I ordered to mint after conquering Cyprus.

Besides, there were Drams issued for coronation of King Levon I and King Oshin, as well as gold coins - Dahekans - which were probably minted in a very limited number and used as gifts.

The Cilician coins are peculiar due to the inscriptions in the Armenian language and the image of the cross. Most of the coins were minted in Sis, the capital of the Cilician Kingdom, with some made in Tarson and Ayas. It's worth noting that the coins resemble European ones and can be easily taken for Venetian silver Matapans. The Cilician coins also have some resemblance with Cypriot ones due to ties of relationship between the rulers.

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The material was prepared in cooperation with Gevorg Mughalyan, the numismatist of the Central Bank of Armenia.

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