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Finds of Medieval Coins from Eski-Yurt, Crimea

This article focuses on the circulation of coins in an anonymous Golden Horde town, which preceded the modern Eski-Yurt, on the outskirts of Bakhchysarai, Crimea. The coins found at the site are compared to others (those from hoards and isolated specimens) in Crimea. The results point to a date between the second half of the 13th century and the late 14th century. The highest economic activity occurred from 1340–1380. The distribution of coins with regard to mints is broadly the same as in other Crimean towns (most were minted in Qirim, Sarai al-Jedid, and Azaq). The presence of rather numerous “al-Jedid” coins suggests that they, too, may have been minted in Crimea, but the evidence is insufficient for a definite conclusion. Most coins from the Eski-Yurt collection were minted under Uzbek Khan and Janibek Khan (1340–1350), and there are no coins minted after 1380.

Keywords: Golden Horde, Jochi Ulus, Volga region, numismatics, coins.

Introduction

The circulated coins are among the most important information sources concerning the history of the Golden Horde settlements. Unfortunately, researchers often delayed publication of available information. As early as 1963, G.A. Fedorov-Davydov pointed out that quite few data on the Jochid coins in Crimea were described in publications (1963: 193). Regrettably, the situation has not changed over the recent dozens of years. The present paper provides information on the coins from Eski-Yurt, and aims at filling this gap.

Eski-Yurt (‘Old Settlement’) is currently a district in the city of Bakhchysarai. Since its origin in the 13th century and until the early 18th century, the settlement was a separate town (Kniga..., 1999: 59); later it was a suburb district of the former capital of the Crimean Khanate (Manstein, 1824: 75–76). In general, the site has been studied insufficiently. Archaeological research was carried out in 1924 by U. Bodaninsky (Bakhchysarai Museum)

and A.S. Bashkurov (Scientific Association of Oriental Studies). Researchers noted that the toponym of Eski-Yurt was not an original name (Bashkurov, Bodaninsky, 1925: 295); the name of this settlement during the Golden Horde’s time remains unknown*.

In the last 100 years, this territory has rapidly been developed. In the 1930s, in its plain areas, orchards were laid out; and in the 1970s, the few hills were leveled in the course of factory constructions in Bakhchysarai. At present, only few largest türbe-mausoleums survive in Aziz, in one of the Eski-Yurt cemeteries.

*A.A. Ivanov in his paper on the inscriptions from Eski-Yurt wrote: “The town could hardly have been named Eski-Yurt (‘Old Settlement’) in antiquity. Presumably, this name is rather young, and the settlement is old as compared to Bakhchysarai, founded in the early 16th century, or to Fort Kyrk-Or, the headquarters of the Crimean Khans in the 15th century. This place can also hardly have been named Krym (Qirim)...” (1989: 30).

Jochid coins from Eski-Yurt

Coins are among the most important information sources about the settlement's history. Notably, silver and copper Jochid coins have been found in three hoards in Bakhchysarai earlier. Unfortunately, only quite scarce information concerning these finds is available. In 1890, a sachet containing 282 silver coins from the 13th century was found, and transferred to the collection of the Taurida Academic Archive Commission (Otchet... za 1890 g., 1893: 117, 124; Fedorov-Davydov, 1960: 132, No. 10). In the same (or the previous) year, a jug containing 282 Qirim silver coins was discovered. Some coins minted in 765 AH (1363–1364) showed countermarks. Only four of these coins were transferred to the collection of the Taurida Academic Archive Commission (Otchet... za 1890 g., 1893: 124; Fedorov-Davydov, 1960: 152, No. 123). It is not clear what coins were hoarded in the jug, because until now, no silver Qirim coins with a date of 765 AH have been known. The third hoard from Bakhchysarai was found in 1891, and contained not only silver, but also copper Jochid coins. However, the only information on 87 silver coins transferred to the Archaeological Commission is currently available. According to W.G. Tiesenhausen's identification, all these coins belong to a single type minted in the rule of Uzbek Khan, in 713 AH (1313–1314) (Otchet... za 1891 g., 1893: 132; Fedorov-Davydov, 1960: 152, No. 124). Judging by the scarce information available, the three hoards were found in the area of the Bakhchysarai railway station; thus, they are associated with Eski-Yurt. Recently, it was announced that two copper Jochid coins had also been found in this area. Researchers believe that these coins were minted in Qirim in the 1360s and 1380–1382, respectively, under the rule of Tokhtamysh Khan (Bely, Voloshinov, Karlov, 2004)*.

In the course of archaeological works in Eski-Yurt in 2005, S.V. Karlov revealed 37 medieval copper coins. Eleven more coins were collected at the site by the local citizens, who transferred them to the Bakhchysarai Historical, Cultural and Archaeological Museum-Reserve. We have analyzed all these finds, and provide the relevant data in the table.

Discussion of the composition of the coin assemblage

Despite the small number of coins, certain preliminary conclusions can be reached concerning the circulation of

coins in Eski-Yurt during the Golden Horde period. Most (ca 13 spec.) of the coins in the assemblage belong to the Qirim-Solkhat type (Qirim coins with no indication of place of issue). It is also known that the majority of copper coins from Stary Krym are of Qirim mintage as well (Severova, 1990: 43). The Eski-Yurt assemblage contains al-Jedid coins (3 spec.; as well as 4 spec. with illegible Kufic inscriptions, of a similar type), Sarai al-Jedid coins (ca 7 spec.), Azaq (2 spec.), Shehr al-Jedid (1 spec.), presumably Hajji Tarkhan (1 spec.), and possibly a foreign pül (Bahri Mamluk?) (1 spec.). The coin bearing the name of Tokhtamysh, but with no indication of place of issue, was probably minted in Majar, the Northern Caucasus. Some coins from Eski-Yurt, with place of issue indicated as "Sarai al-Jedid" and with a flower rosette (especially imitations), might have been minted beyond the Lower Volga region (Fig. 1). New information will be helpful in identifying the places of issue of these coins.

In the described assemblage, the youngest date minted on the coins is 783 AH (1381–1382). Only one coin is dated to the 13th century; one more coin is dated to the 13th to 14th centuries (the exact date is unknown), five or six coins are attributed to the 1340s, four to seven coins to the 1350s, two coins to the 1360s, and seven coins to the 1380s. Undated coins, including the Tokhtamysh coin and the Hajji Tarkhan (?) pül, can also be attributed to the 1380s or to a later period. The minting time of some coin types is unclear. Further information on this point will possibly facilitate more exact attribution. For instance, coins bearing the image of a lion framed with stars and the "Qirim pül" legend are presumably dated to the mid-14th to early 15th centuries (Lebedev, 2000: No. m53). However, there are no solid arguments for this (or any other) dating.

Let us focus on coins of particular interest, or those with a debatable attribution.

Püls with eagle images (Fig. 2) were described by C.M. Frähn (1832: 39), but their minting place has been established only recently. S.A. Yanina (1954: 437) studied the Bulgarian numismatic assemblage, and attributed this set of coins to Sarai al-Jedid mintage. However, in 1958, she renounced her previous interpretation, and reinterpreted the legend as 749 AH (1348–1349) with no indication of place of mintage (1958: 406). Still later, she put forward another hypothesis: "Qirim mintage in 744 AH" (1343–1344) (Yanina, 1962: 156). Abundant coins bearing stylized images of a double-headed eagle have been found in the Volga region. On the basis of this fact, many researchers proposed this region as the place of issue of these coins. Fedorov-Davydov (1999: 126) pointed that "the most reliable attribution of such coins is the New Sarai or Sarai mintage". The coin circulation in Crimea of the Golden Horde period was studied later than that in the

*Until now, no Qirim coins of the 1360s have been known. The authors have possibly identified such coins, but unfortunately the cited work does not contain any description of them. It is also unclear what particular type of coin has been attributed to the Qirim coins minted under the rule of Tokhtamysh Khan.

Coins found during the 2005 excavations and collected by local citizens

No.	Issuer	Mint	AH	Number	Weight, g	Reference	Notes
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Anonymous	–	–	1	0.96	(Lebedev, 2000, No. m1.	2nd half of the 13th c. (?)
2	Tokta	Solkhat	–	1	1.05	(Ibid., No. m8)	On the obverse side, there is a face framed by the traces of inscription: “Toktu-bek fair-minded khan”; on the reverse side, there is a composite tamga in the center, combining signs of Batu and Nogai house, and an inscription around it: “Solkhat mintage”
3	"	Qirim (?)	–	5	0.85 1.54 1.60 1.63 1.77	–	1340s (?) With an image of a double-headed eagle
4	"	"	–	1	...	–	1340s (?) With an image of a double-headed eagle (?). Broken; weight was not determined
5	"	Sarai al-Jedid	–	5	0.67 1.68 1.77 1.83 1.95	–	1350–1360s Imitation (?). With a flower pattern
6	Qildibeq	Azaq	763	1	2.56	–	–
7	Anonymous (?)	Shehr al-Jedid	–	1	1.30	–	1360–1370s
8	Anonymous	Al-Jedid	“872”	2	2.08 2.10	(Fomichev, 1981: 234, No. 150; Pavlenko, Lebedev, 2005: No. m17)	Distorted date. Minted in 772 or 782 AH (1371–1372 or 1380–1381)
9	"	"	783	1	1.95	(Fomichev, 1981: 234, No. 151; Pavlenko, Lebedev, 2005: No. m18)	–
10	"	Al-Jedid (?)	–	4	1.40 1.61 2.15 2.98	(Klokov, Lebedev, 2002: 116, No. 137/15)	Kufic inscription on this type remains illegible. Probably “al-Jedid”
11	Tokhtamysh	–	–	1	1.73	(Yanina, 1954: No. 127)	–
12	Anonymous	Qirim	–	2	1.76 1.95	(Lebedev, 2000: No. m53)	Lion framed with stars. Unclear time of minting. V.P. Lebedev dates this type to the period from the mid-14th to early 15th century
13	"	Hajji Tarkhan (?)	–	1	1.81	(Klokov, Lebedev, 2002: No. 100/8) (?)	Identification was made by the ornament. Legend did not survive. Minted in the late 16th c. (?)
14	"	Azaq	–	1	1.90	–	Unclear type
15	?	Al-Jedid	?	1	1.65	–	–

Table (end)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
16	Anonymous	—	—	1	2.05	(Lebedev, 2000: No. m22)	Unclear time of minting. Probably, Qirim mintage
17	"	Qirim	—	1	0.97	—	Unclear type of Qirim pūls. Legend "Qirim mintage" on the tamga sides
18	—	—	—	1	0.65	(Lebedev, 2000: No. m67) (?)	Anepigraphic pūl
19	?	?	?	15	0.35 0.52 0.62 0.67 0.70 0.74 1.24		Unidentified. Some coins show traces of inscriptions and images. Eight coins are broken, their weight was not determined

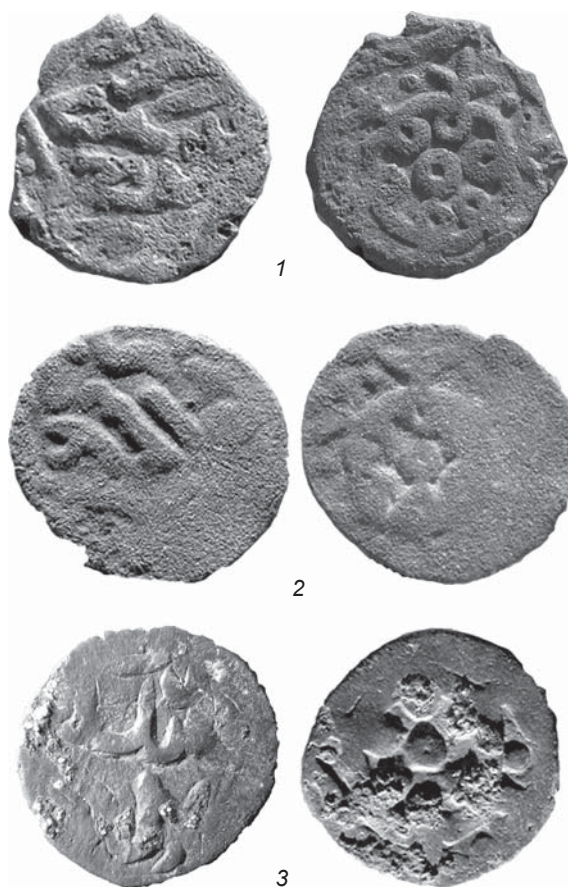


Fig. 1. Anonymous: Sarai al-Jedid. 1350s–1360s. Flower pattern.

Volga region. According to the most recent discoveries, coins with the image of a double-headed eagle have been found in the Crimean Peninsula considerably more often than in the Lower Volga region. K.K. Khromov alone reported more than 500 different varieties and imitations of such coins in Crimea (2004: 16). Khromov suggested

that these coins were minted in Qirim in 743 AH (1342–1343), while imitations were produced until the 1360s (Ibid.: 19). In our view, the proposed interpretations of legend are debatable, yet the places where these coins were found suggested Qirim mintage.

Yanina dedicated one of her publications to the coins of Shehr al-Jedid (Fig. 3). A significant number of such coins have been reported from the fortified settlement of Old Orhei, located between the villages of Trebujeni and Butuceni in Moldova. Yanina proposed to identify New Town with Old Orhei (1977: 201–209). This hypothesis was accepted and became popular among the researchers.



Fig. 2. Anonymous: Qirim (?). 1340s (?). Stylized eagle image.



Fig. 3. Anonymous: (?) Shehr al-Jedid. 1360s–1370s. Mono-epigraphic.

The Shehr al-Jedid coins have been recorded in Crimea. Khromov reviewed 12,500 pūls found in Ukraine and Crimea, and identified 53 coins from Shehr al-Jedid: 6 coins from the Odessa Region; 8 coins from the Nikolaev Region, and 39 coins from Crimea

(http://www.hordecoins.folgat.net/r_online_shehr_ae_ukr.htm).

A significantly greater number of Shehr al-Jedid coins was found in Old Orhei (252 pūls among other finds from 1947–1981) (Abyzova, Byrniya, Nudelman, 1981: 81–86). V.A. Sidorenko (2000: 277) hypothesized that the New Town coins were minted in Sarai al-Jedid, renamed by Abdallah Khan. However, in the Volga region, such coins are quite rare; hence, this hypothesis is untenable. At present, the most reliable hypothesis on location of the mint of Shehr al-Jedid coins (Yangi-Shehr and others) has been put forward by Yanina. However, the interpretation of the coin legend is also debatable. According to E. Nicolae, a Romanian numismatist, the legends on the Shehr al-Jedid pūls mention the name of Kutlug-Bugi (Nicolae, 2003).

The al-Jedid copper coins are of two types (Fig. 4). One more type is very similar in design and bears a still undeciphered Kufic inscription (these pūls were probably minted in the same place as the above-mentioned al-Jedid coins).

Al-Jedid pūls with a complicated design, four “good luck knots”, and a distorted date of “872” AH have been already reported from Azov, Majar, and Selitrennoye fortified settlements (1 spec. from each) (Fomichev, 1981: 234, No. 150; Pavlenko, Lebedev, 2005: 35, No. m17; Klovov, Lebedev, 2002: 108, No. 91/4). A vague inscription is visible below the date. V.P. Lebedev noted that such coins were “often found in Crimea; therefore, it seems reasonable to interpret the unclear word below the date as ‘Qirim’” (Pavlenko, Lebedev, 2005: 35). Their time of minting is also debatable. According to Lebedev, the real date may be either 782 or 772 AH (either 1380–1381 or 1370–1371) (Ibid.). In our view, the first date is preferable, because it is closer to the date of 783 AH (1382–1383) minted on other al-Jedid pūls with a very similar design. Al-Jedid copper coins with slightly different ornamentation and the date of 783 AH (1382–1383) have also been reported from Azov (1 spec.), Selitrennoye (1 spec.), and Majar (3 spec.) fortified settlements (Fomichev, 1981: 234, No. 151; Klovov, Lebedev, 2002: 109, No. 94/7; Pavlenko, Lebedev, 2005: 35, No. m18).

The type of pūl with Kufic legend and the ornament with a four-fold rotational axis is preliminarily dated to 1380–1390 (Klovov, Lebedev, 2002: 116, No. 137/15). Yanina interpreted the relevant legend as “Sarai mint” (1954: No. 131), which seems debatable. Such coins have rarely been found in the Lower Volga region: only two pūls from Selitrennoye, and one pūl from Bolghar hill



Fig. 4. Anonymous: al-Jedid. 1370s–1380s. Geometric pattern.

forts (Ibid.; Klovov, Lebedev, 2002: 116, No. 137/15). The Kufic legend may be interpreted as “al-Jedid”.

The comparatively small Eski-Yurt assemblage contains a greater number of the al-Jedid copper coins of Toktamys period than the huge Lower Volga and Northern Caucasus collections, containing many thousands of various coins. Apparently, the al-Jedid coins were minted somewhere to the west of the Volga. The available data on coin circulation in the western part of Jochi Ulus do not provide solid grounds for establishing the exact place. Discoveries of such coins in Crimea suggest that possibly they might have been minted on the Crimean Peninsula. However, such an inference is not yet well-supported.

Apart from the copper al-Jedid coins of the Toktamys period, a silver coin with a date of 785 AH (1383–1384) is also known. It was found by P.S. Saveliev in the Ekaterinoslav hoard. This scholar believed that the coin was minted in Sarai al-Jedid (the word “Sarai” was omitted in the legend) (Saveliev, 1858: 71, No. 130).

Among accidental finds from Eski Yurt, the nominal coin of Toktamys, with no indication of place of issue, is of particular interest (Yanina, 1954: No. 127); another interesting specimen is a poorly preserved pūl possibly minted in Hajji Tarkhan (the coin’s legend is illegible, but the design is as on the Hajji Trakhan pūl (Klovov, Lebedev, 2002: No. 100/8), likely issued not earlier the last quarter of the 14th century (reliably dated coin minting in Hajji Tarkhan started only from that time). We do not know of any records concerning the discovery of any Hajji Tarkhan pūls in the Crimean Peninsula.

Hence, this find provides new information on connections between the Lower Volga region and Crimea in the late 14th century. The Toktamyshe coin was obviously minted in Majar, because the greatest number of this type of coin has been discovered so far in the Majar fortified settlement, in the Stavropol Region (Pavlenko, Lebedev, 2005). The Majar al-Jedid coins were recorded in the Stary Krym hoard, found in 1983 (Severova, 1990: 44–45; Pachkalov, 2002: 204, No. 154).

The Jochid coin collection from Eski Yurt contains a poorly preserved pül apparently issued beyond the Golden Horde's territory. This is likely a Mamluk coin. This attribution was proposed by Stephen Album (USA) in a personal communication. Mamluk coins have been reported from Jochi Ulus and Crimea (see, e.g., (Ivanov N.N., 1999)), but up to the present there have been no publications devoted to the Egyptian and Syrian coins found in Eastern Europe.

Conclusions

Classification of the described numismatic finds by their minting date reflects the dynamics of the economic activity in the Golden Horde settlement. Only one coin has been dated to the 13th century. This testifies to the fact that by that time, the circulation of money was not well developed here. About 20 coins have been attributed to the 1340–1380s. The Toktamyshe nominal coin, the Hajji Tarkhan pül (?), and Qirim püls with the lion image surrounded by stars can also be attributed to the 1380s or later periods. Thus, the economic activity in this Golden Horde settlement was the highest between the 1340s and 1380s. Available data attest to the decay in the money circulation in Eski-Yurt by the end of the 14th century.

In the assemblage under discussion, the majority of coins, on which the place of minting is marked, were minted in Qirim. To all appearances, the coins with the “al-Jedid” sign also belong to this category. These finds are typical mostly of Crimea and neighboring regions. Solitary specimens were minted in Azaq or Hajji-Tarkhan. A significantly greater number of coins was minted in the capital town of Sarai al-Jedid. However, some coins from Eski-Yurt with the “Sarai al-Jedid” legend and flower rosette might have been minted in Crimea, rather than in the Lower Volga region.

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