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BASIC TYPES OF SILVER PAYMENT INGOTS IN EASTERN EUROPE OF 9TH–15TH CENTURIES¹

ABSTRACT: The main goal of this publication is to familiarize western numismatists with the current trends and findings in the research on medieval payment ingots (*grivnas*) in Eastern Europe. The author presents up-to-date chronological classification of silver payment ingots, shortly describes their basic types and gives the basic list of classic and modern works in this field.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: sztabki srebra, grzywny, rubel nowogrodzki, Europa Wschodnia

KEYWORDS: silver payment ingot, *grivna*, Novgorod rouble, Eastern Europe

The standard silver payment ingots (*grivna*, Rus. “*гривна*”) of medieval Eastern Europe have been researched by different scholars and numismatists for already two centuries. There are some descriptive works in the German language published by different authors in 19th–20th c. The basic work in this field “Die Silber- und Goldbarren des russischen Mittelalters: Eine archäologische Studie” was published by Nikolaj Bauer in *Numismatische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 62, 1929; Vol. 64, 1931 and still is very important.² In 1979 Reinhold Kaim published his book “Die Altrussische Münzgeschichte und die Prägungen von 1350–1700, Band I”, where he used all photo-tables and their descriptions from this work by N. Bauer. There

¹ The author from the Numismatic Society of Belarus presents in the article the present state of knowledge in this field after his 20-years’ experience in research of silver payment ingots from private and state museums collections.

² N. Bauer tragically died in 1942 and this work was never published in the Soviet Union. Now a team of historians led by Petr Gajdukov has been working on the proper Russian edition of this major work by N. Bauer about old payment ingots.

is also “Das russische Münzsystem” of 1983 by I. G. Spassky³ known by western numismatists, where basic types of silver ingots are briefly described. At the same time there are many works in this field by different numismatists, mostly in the Russian language, which are unknown to western readers and scholars. The short list of basic classic and modern works includes such authors as A. A. Ilyin, M. P. Sotnikova, N. F. Kotlyar, E.V. Glazunova (Janiushkina), R. Jausheva-Omeljanchik, V. V. Zajcev, A. V. Komar in Russian and P. Karazija in Lithuanian.⁴

In fact, silver and golden ingots are known in Europe since Roman times. But the mass circulation of standard silver payment ingots (grivnas) of regular weight in medieval Eastern Europe (mostly in the lands of the Rus and the Balts) is a very specific phenomenon, and its origins and correct dating should be properly researched.

The silver ingots of medieval Eastern Europe are known by many written sources. The earliest and most general term for them in the old Russian language “*гривна серебра*” is known from the Codex “Russkaja Pravda” (Rus. “*Русская Правда*”) dated by the 3rd quarter of 11th c. The documents in the Latin language referred to grivnas as *sicli*, *argentum fusum finitum*, *marcae argenti fusi* (Polish sources from 1224, 1259, 1270), *marcae slavicales* (Polish Pomerania, last quarter of 13th c.).⁵ The Teutonic Order account books in 1399 referred to silver grivnas in German as *stükke*.⁶ So, we can suppose that silver payment ingots of standard weight originated from the lands of Rus.

The silver and very seldom golden ingots were the biggest “legal tenders” of their time, with the value being determined by precious metal content. Primarily intended for large-scale foreign trade by Scandinavian merchants by weight, they were later used for hoarding purposes, war booty, big payments, mostly for real estate and military needs. Hence, silver payment ingots of standard weight were used by rulers, noblemen and big traders and were uncommon in every day circulation. So, the origins of standard silver payment ingots which facilitated and hastened big money payments were set out by increasing economic developments and rising foreign and local trade.

Sometimes in mid 13th–early 14th c. silver payment ingots were cut into fractions (Fig. 1) to make small payments in some parts of Eastern Europe with the shortage of small silver coins in local money circulation. As for decline of silver payment ingots in circulation, it was also determined by economics of its times, mostly by increasing usage of gold coins in money circulation of Eastern Europe in early 15th c.

³ The well-known book “Russkaja monetnaja sistema” by I.G. Spassky was first published in 1957, published in English in 1967; its 4th revised edition of 1970 was translated into the German language and published in 1983.

⁴ See the comprehensive list of basic works in the attached bibliography.

⁵ Gumowski 1908, p. 11–25.

⁶ Adameczyk 2004, p. 175.

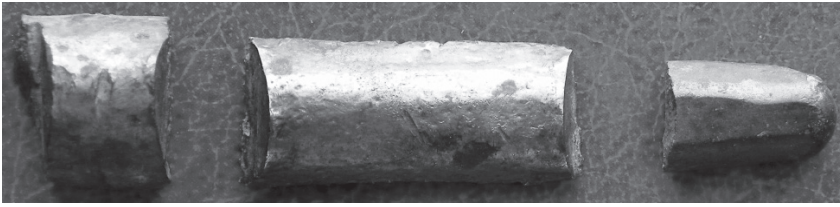


Fig. 1. Fractions of silver payment ingots cut to make small payments. Mid 13th–early 14th c.

The enormous amount of data on the newly found grivnas accumulated over the last 25 years (mostly resulting from metal-detectorists' activities) require a unified approach for their systematic research in the future, including such basic characteristics as:

- weight, dimensions, morphological features of grivnas, metal content analysis in several spots made by modern equipment;
- precise circumstances and places of reliable finding-spots;
- correct description of hoards, containing grivnas together with jewelry, coins and other dating objects.

As per today's data, we can differentiate the following basic types of silver payment ingots which circulated in Eastern Europe in late 9th–mid 15th c. (Table 1).

Table 1. Basic types of payment silver ingots of 9th–15th c. in Eastern Europe⁷

	Type of ingot	Weight*, g	Dating
1	Small rods of irregular weight and shape	30.9?–72.5?	9 th –early 11 th ?
2	Round-shape ingots of irregular weight	161.0–840.0	11 th –early 14 th
3	Forged Scandinavian or early Novgorod? Fig. 2	199.2–243.9	Late 10 th ?–11 th
4	“Chernigov” (North-Rus’) Fig. 3	180.8–205.7	11 th –12 th ?
5	Long Novgorod Fig. 4B	187.0–219.6	12 th ?–13 th
6A	Heavy Kiev (bulgy)	189.4–215.6	12 th ?
6B	Kiev Fig. 4A	146.7–169.9	12 th –mid 13 th
7	“Volhynian” worm-shape Fig. 5	162.0–206.5	12 th ?–13 th ?
8	Lithuanian (West-Rus’) semicircular rod-shape Fig. 4C	86.8–120.7 Average 105.0	Mid 13 th –early 14 th
8A	Prussian (Sambian) rod-shape	120.3–140.5	Mid 13 th
9	Shallop-form “som/sum” of the Golden Horde Fig. 6B	185.0–203.8	Late 13 th –14 th
10	“Novgorod” rouble and its regional varieties Fig. 7	180.0–212.0?	Early 14 th –mid 15 th
11	Lithuanian triangular Fig. 8	170.3–189.5	Late 14 th –mid 15 th

* There are uncut pieces of 1/2 or 1/3 of standard weight in some types of ingots.

⁷ This classification table excludes the formless pieces of “Kama silver” and jewelry (neck grivnas and bracelets), which could have been used for money payments by weight.

The names for ingots (grivnas) of different types were suggested in Russian numismatics already in 19th c. by their first find-spots, i.e. Novgorod-type grivnas were first found in Novgorod, and Kiev-type ones — in Kiev. Considering some newly found (single and in hoards) grivnas, some numismatists from Belarus, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine find new varieties and even new types of silver payment ingots, but their different national approaches separate their research work and split the major classification of silver payment ingots and their regional varieties, which circulated in Eastern Europe in 11th–15th c. It is also necessary to make corrections as regards the circulation time of different types of grivnas considering the known and newly found hoards with grivnas, old jewelry and coins.

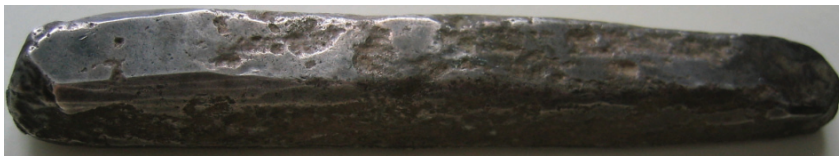


Fig. 2. Forged with a hammer Scandinavian or early Novgorod? grivna. 199.2 g.
Late 10th?–11th c.



Fig. 3. “Chernigov” (North-Rus’) grivna. 11th–12th? c.

The traditional names for different types of grivnas in the Russian numismatic literature should not be changed without good reasons, as well as new names for new types and varieties should be properly chosen. N. Kotlyar proved in 1996 that the term “North-Rus” is right for grivnas of “Chernigov” type which were first found near Chernigov, as their weight and newest topography suggested a more northern origin. Now there are some more reasons to suppose that Old Rus’ grivnas of standard weight originated from silver payment ingots of irregular weight which were used by Scandinavian merchants. Long Novgorod and Kiev-type grivnas appeared in circulation perhaps in late 11th–early 12th c. They correlated respectively with northern (Scandinavian) and southern (Byzantine) weight systems. It must be noted that there are also heavy Kiev-type grivnas of “northern” weight. The Kiev-type grivnas disappeared from circulation in mid 13th c. after the Mongols conquered major parts of Rus principalities. The Lithuanian (West-Rus’) semicircular rod-shape grivnas appeared later, i.e. in mid 13th c. In fact,

the three basic types of standard weight grivnas (Novgorod, Kiev and Lithuanian types — Fig. 4) which circulated simultaneously in mid 13th c. had different shapes, weights and represented at least three different monetary weight systems on the vast territories of the Old Rus' principalities and lands. The recent finds from Ukraine give more grounds to suggest a new “Volhynian” type of grivna (Fig. 5).

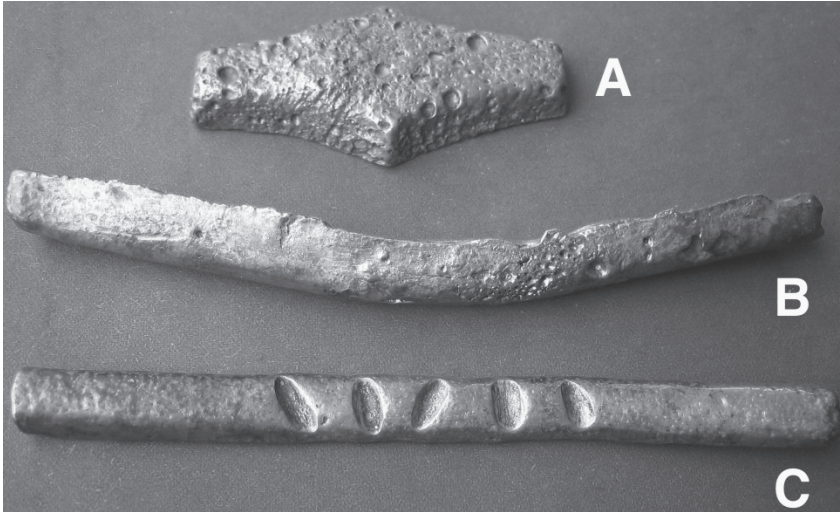


Fig. 4. Silver grivnas from the Vischin hoard (mid 13th c., 1979, Belarus):
 A — Kiev-type grivna. 12th–mid 13th c. B — Long Novgorod-type grivna. 12th?–13th c.
 C — Lithuanian (West-Rus') grivna. Mid 13th c.



Fig. 5. New type — “Volhynian” worm-shape grivna, 198,8 g. 12th?–13th? c.
 A, B, C — photos from different sides.

The early “Novgorod grivna” of 12th–13th c. is longer in shape to discern it from “Novgorod rouble” of 14th–15th c., though shorter but primarily of the same weight. It was cut into two halves which were called “poltina”, i.e. half-

-rouble. The “Novgorod rouble and poltina” (Fig. 7) are first mentioned in historical documents in the 1st quarter of 14th c. Though “Novgorod roubles” originated in Veliky Novgorod, but the name “Novgorod” for major part of these payment ingots is rather symbolic and is used out of tradition. They were also cast in 14th–early 15th c. in different Russian principalities and lands: Moscow, Ryazan, Tver and some others. As a result of separate development of regional monetary systems, roubles and poltinas made in different lands became different in shape and weight. In Moscow lands the uncut roubles disappeared from circulation by 1420-s, being only a counting unit and poltinas declined in weight to 85.3–90.0 g with 20–30% of ligature.⁸

The recent numerous finds of regional varieties of “Novgorod” roubles (Fig. 6A) and poltinas in the eastern and central part of today’s Belarus and in north-eastern Ukraine show that they were widely used in eastern parts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Their different morphological forms make evident that they could be cast in different places such as Kiev, Polotsk, Smolensk and others. Some ingots similar to “Novgorod” roubles in shape and weight could have been also cast in Livonia for trade purposes. The decline in weight of the coins in circulation resulted in gradual weight loss of the regional varieties of “Novgorod” roubles and poltinas, so we can suppose that these ingots circulated for a prolonged period of time, at least from the 2nd half of 14th till mid 15th c.

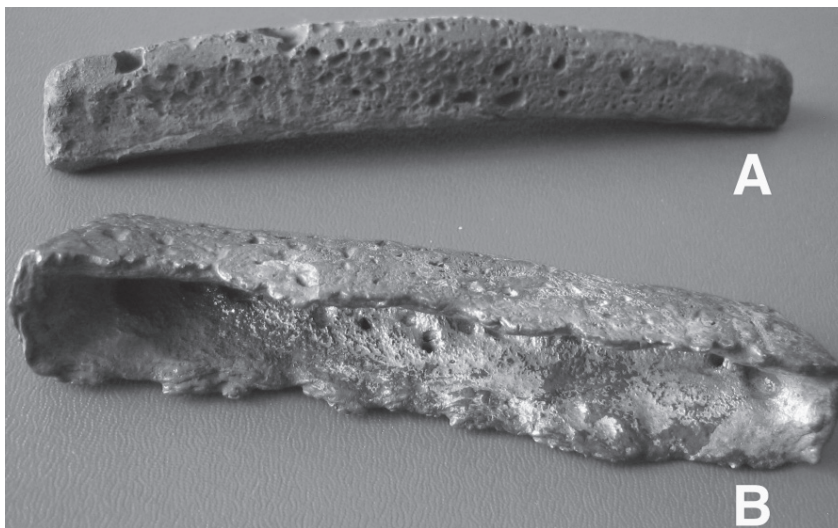


Fig. 6. Silver grivnas from the Kobrin hoard (late 14th c., 2003, Belarus): A — local variety of “Novgorod” rouble, 188.0 g. B — Sum/sommo of the Golden Horde, 200.2 g.

⁸ Зайцев 2017, p. 132–134.

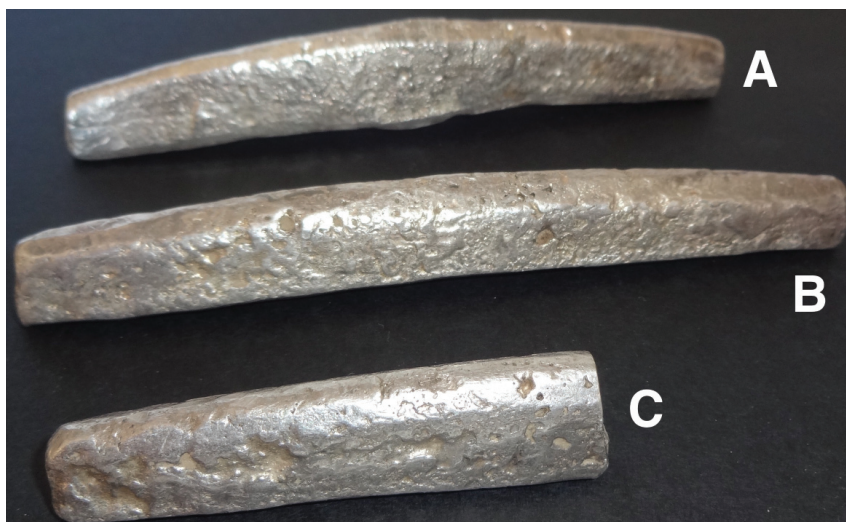


Fig. 7. “Novgorod” roubles and poltina. Early 14th–mid 15th c.:
A — short (hunched) rouble; B — long rouble; C — poltina.

At the same time, no finds of “Novgorod” roubles and poltinas have been registered in today’s Lithuania in contrary to the Lithuanian triangular grivnas (Fig. 8). This type of payment ingot combines some morphological features of the short “Novgorod rouble” and the shallow-form “sum” (sommel) of the Golden Horde. The average weight of Lithuanian triangular grivnas is 170.3–189.5 g, their halves (poltinas) — 85–95 g, but in very pure (97.4–98.9%) silver, as per researched pieces. Some newly found hoards with grivnas of this type contain mostly worn out low-silver Prague groats of Wenceslaus IV (1378–1419), thus the metal before their casting should have been purified. All this and the known topography (today’s eastern Lithuania, western and central part of Belarus, north-eastern Ukraine) of the single and in hoards found Lithuanian triangular grivnas and poltinas leave no doubt that this is a separate type of silver payment ingot which was cast and circulated in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 4th quarter of 14th till mid 15th c.

“Novgorod” poltinas were widely marked at the ends by small dies in Rus’ lands (Fig. 9) since 1370-s with the aim to give them, slightly different in weight after cutting, the status of legal tender money of certain value (perhaps, guaranteed by the ruler at the moment of stamping). Since early 15th c. the cut edges of Rus’ poltinas were extra marked to avoid illegal theft of metal by people. And by 1430-s the casting and marking of payment ingots in the lands of North-Eastern Rus’ gradually stops.⁹

⁹ Зайцев 2018, p. 16.

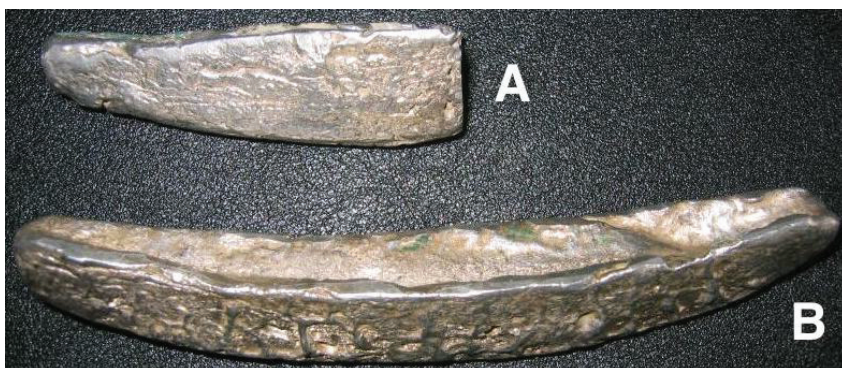


Fig. 8. Lithuanian triangular grivnas from the Litwa hoard (early 15th c., 2003, Belarus):
 A — poltina, 88.45 g; B — grivna, 172.18 g.



Fig. 9. Moscow poltina marked with the stamp “Rus’ letter Д” — initial of Dmitry Ivanovich, Grand Duke of Moscow and Vladimir (1359–1389).

Standard payment ingots were also marked outside Rus’, i.e. in Livonia, Prussia and perhaps in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Common for German lands, marking of silver ingots could have naturally originated from historic Prussia and Livonia. The earliest record for this is dated by the year 1274 when the Grand Master of Teutonic Order demanded that “... remelted silver to be marked by everybody...”.¹⁰ Today it is difficult to identify the exact places of marking the silver payment ingots with “non-Rus” stamps (Fig. 10). They differ in style from the known Rus’ stamps and there are less than 10 known types of them in contrast to more than 50 known types of stamps used in North-Eastern Rus’. Unlike numerous poltinas and sometimes roubles with Russian stamps, the “non-Rus” ones are very scarce on poltinas and very rare on uncut roubles. The majority of poltinas and roubles marked with “non-Rus” stamps were found in the eastern part of today’s Belarus and just some pieces in eastern Ukraine with absolutely no recorded finds in today’s Lithuania or Latvia. By the newly known hoards with coins, the circulation time of poltinas and roubles marked with “non-Rus” stamps could be dated by the 2nd half of 14th–1st half of 15th c.

¹⁰ Gumowski 1908, p. 11.



Fig. 10. Poltina marked with the stamp “crown in dot circle”. Late 14th–early 15th c.

If you have new reliable information regarding finds of payment ingots in Eastern Europe, please contact the author to the e-mail: ishtal@tut.by

ABBREVIATIONS

- ВИД — Вспомогательные исторические дисциплины (сборник)
 ВНК — Всероссийская нумизматическая конференция
 МНО — Московское нумизматическое общество
 ГИМ — Государственный исторический музей (Москва)
 ГЭ — Государственный Эрмитаж
 СНВЕ — Средневековая нумизматика Восточной Европы (сборник)

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PODSTAWOWE TYPY SREBRNYCH GRZYWIEN W EUROPIE WSCHODNIEJ W IX–XV W.

(Streszczenie)

Głównym celem tej publikacji jest przybliżenie zachodnim numizmatykom aktualnego stanu badań nad średniowiecznymi grzywami w Europie Wschodniej. Autor przedstawia nowoczesną klasyfikację chronologiczną srebrnych grzywien, krótko opisuje ich najważniejsze typy i podaje spis dawnej i nowej literatury przedmiotu.

Znane w Europie już od czasów rzymskich srebrne sztabki płatnicze standardowej wagi najprawdopodobniej powstały w XI w. jako środek płatniczy dla obsługi handlu arabsko-skandynawskiego i nazywały się grzywami srebra. W XIII w. na terenach dawnej Rusi istniały co najmniej trzy różne systemy wagowo-pięniężne, każdy z właściwym typem grzywiny — nowogrodzkiej, kijowskiej i litewskiej. W źródłach historycznych na początku

XIV w. srebrne grzywny nowogrodzkie nazywane są już rublami, a po podzieleniu na pół — półtinami. Na dzień dzisiejszy da się wyróżnić 11 typów grzywien płatniczych, w tym północnoruska, litewska trójkątna, tatarska i najnowszy typ — wołyńska. W końcu XIV w. półtyny i rzadziej całe ruble były kontrasygnowane różnymi znakami. Natomiast w połowie XV w. srebrne grzywny całkowicie wycofano z obiegu, zastępując je napływającym z Europy Środkowej nowym środkiem płatniczym — goldguldenami i dukatami.

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