

A 16th century A.D. Süleyman I hoard with several very rare akches

Slobodan SREĆKOVIĆ*

I have been collecting and studying Ottoman coinage for more than 20 years, and during that time I have bought many coin hoards mainly composed of akches. Unfortunately, except for one hoard of akches (minted during the reigns of Murad I and Bayezid I), I have never discovered the provenance of these hoards. Sellers simply refuse to tell me, wishing to keep the places secret. In pre-1985 days, antiquities were only occasionally found. But in the last 20 years metal detectors have come into use. So, regrettably, despite the fact that more hoards than ever are reaching the market, it is virtually impossible to determine where most have come from.

Several of the hoards purchased have contained akches of Süleyman I, and the best of these acquisitions came in February 2004. It contained a total of 262 coins, 244 of which were of Süleyman I. Among the Süleyman akches were a dozen rare types, including three that were unrecorded. There were also akches of two preceding rulers, Bayezid II and Selim I.

Overall, the coins were distributed among the 17 mints shown in the Chart 1. Note that among them were akches from Balya, Harput, Konya and Mudava, which are very rare. Still, the most valuable coin in the hoard was an akche with an unusual obverse design struck in Kostantiniye. This akche was unique until May 2006, but after that similar was posted on the web; see www.zeno.ru (Oriental Coins Database), number 30929. It feels as though I have seen a billion of akches during my life, but such a finely designed and made example I have not. It must be an akche made on the occasion of some special event for Sultan Süleyman. I will attempt to find out what the connection and event is, because such a masterpiece deserves to be much closer analyzed and appreciated.

The majority of the 244 Süleyman akches were 93 pieces, weighting a total of 65.69 g that were struck in Kuçayna (see Chart 2, line 8a). Several obverse and reverse types were found in this group and two of Süleyman's three coinage periods are represented. Eight akches came from the first period, weighting a total of 6.21 g (line 8a), and all of them are of type S or the S-variety¹, minted at the inauguration of his coinage.

The remaining Kuçayna group (line 8b) is made up of third coinage akches, struck after the mint managers were replaced². This lot is composed of recorded types and few rare coins, of which three are unrecorded (Fig. 1).

From the capital Kostantiniye (line 6) came 10 akches, from all three coinage periods. One of these is very rare, nicely struck, and unrecorded (Fig. 2). It has an unusual obverse and was made during his last coinage.

* Belgrade; slobodan.sre@sbb.rs

¹ Slobodan Srećković, *Akches, III, Süleyman I Kanunî, i Majdanpek u drugoj polovini XVI veka*, Godišnjak za 926-974 AH, Belgrade, 2004, pp. 43 and 123-125.

² Srdjan Katic, *Uloga Jevreja u otvaranj i razvoju Rudnika i Majdanpek u drugoj polovini XVI veka*, Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju, Belgrade, 8, 2001, 1-2, p. 5.

Chart 1

| # | Mint name | Bayezid II | Selim I | Süleyman I | Total |
|-----|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1. | Amasya | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| 2. | Edirne | | | 4 | 4 |
| 3. | Balya | | | 1 | 1 |
| 4. | Harpurt | | | 1 | 1 |
| 5. | Konya | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 6. | Kostantiniye | | 3 | 10 | 13 |
| 7. | Kratova | | | 21 | 21 |
| 8. | Kuçayna | | | 93 | 93 |
| 9. | Mudava | | | 3 | 3 |
| 10. | Novar | 1 | 5 | 12 | 18 |
| 11. | Novaberda | | | 20 | 20 |
| 12. | Serez | | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 13. | Sidrekapsi | | | 19 | 19 |
| 14. | Siroz | | | 2 | 2 |
| 15. | Srebreniçe | | | 13 | 13 |
| 16. | Üsküp | | | 8 | 8 |
| 17. | Tire | | 1 | - | 1 |
| 18. | Illegible | | 5 | 33 | 38 |
| | TOTAL | 2 | 16 | 244 | 262 |

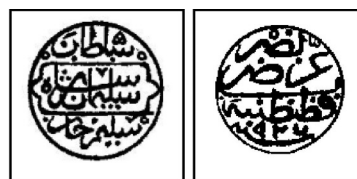
Chart 2

| # | Mint name | Süleyman I | Weight | Percentage | Average weight |
|-----|--------------|------------|---------|------------|----------------|
| 1. | Amasya | 1 | 0.49 g | 0.409 % | 0.4900 g |
| 2. | Edirne | 4 | 2.36 g | 1.639 % | 0.5900 g |
| 3. | Balya | 1 | 0.76 g | 0.409 % | 0.7600 g |
| 4. | Harpurt | 1 | 0.68 g | 0.409 % | 0.6800 g |
| 5. | Konya | 1 | 0.67 g | 0.409 % | 0.6700 g |
| 6. | Kostantiniye | 10 | 6.53 g | 2.440 % | 0.6530 g |
| 7. | Kratova | 21 | 14.93 g | 1.607 % | 0.7109 g |
| 8a. | Kuçayna | 8 | 6.21 g | 3.278 % | 0.6997 g |
| 8b. | Kuçayna | 85 | 59.48 g | 34.830 % | 0.6997 g |
| 9. | Mudava | 3 | 2.00 g | 1.229 % | 0.6660 g |
| 10. | Novar | 12 | 8.20 g | 4.918 % | 0.6830 g |
| 11. | Novaberda | 20 | 13.45 g | 8.196 % | 0.6720 g |
| 12. | Serez | 2 | 1.22 g | 0.819 % | 0.6100 g |
| 13. | Sidrekapsi | 19 | 13.02 g | 7.786 % | 0.6850 g |
| 14. | Siroz | 2 | 1.29 g | 0.819 % | 0.6450 g |
| 15. | Srebreniçe | 13 | 8.24 g | 5.327 % | 0.6338 g |
| 16. | Uskup | 8 | 5.40 g | 3.278 % | 0.6750 g |
| 17. | Illegible | 33 | 23.23 g | 13.524 % | 0.7039 g |
| | TOTAL | 244 | | | |

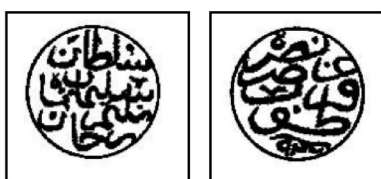
The akches struck in Kratova (line 7) contained 21 pieces, weighting a total of 14.93 g. These akches are from all three periods of Süleyman's reign. Among them was a rare, so far unlisted, Süleyman akche (Fig. 3), struck during his second coinage.



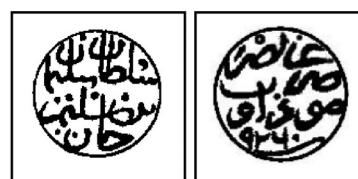
1. Kucayna 926 AH; 0.73 g
Ø 12 x 13 mm



2. Kostantiniye 926 AH; 0.72 g
Ø 12 x 13 mm



3. Kratova 926 AH; 0.71 g
Ø 13 x 14 mm



4. Mudava 926 AH; 0.67 g
Ø 11 x 13 mm

Twenty pieces come from the Novaberda mint (line 11) and their weight a total 13.45 g. These akches were struck during Süleyman's second and third coinage periods.

Another group came from Sidrekapsi (line 13) and numbered 19 pieces, weighting a total of 13.02 g. These are from Süleyman's third period, and all of them are well known types.

The group of akches struck in Srebreniçe (line 15) contained 13 pieces, weighting a total of 8.24 g, struck during his first coinage, whereas the akches struck at Novar contained 12 pieces (line 10), weighing 8.20 g, came from all three periods.

The mint of Üsküp (line 16) is represented by eight akches, weighting 2.36 g. As with most mints represented, the Üsküp akches are from all three periods.

The mint in Edirne (line 3) gave four akches, weighting a total of 2.36 g, two coins each from Süleyman's first and third coinages.

Three of the hoard's akches were struck in Mudava (line 9). They weighed an even 2.00 g. One is unlisted (Fig. 4) and was struck during the third period when Süleyman conducted his last campaign to Sziget³.

Two akches come from Serez (line 12), and together weighed 1.22 g. Both are from Süleyman's first period, as were two akches from the Siroz mint (line 14), which weighed 1.29 g.

A single akche each represents the mints of Amasya – first period (line 1), Balya – second period (line 3), Harpurt – second period (line 4) and Konya – first period (line 5). All of them have been previously reported.

The statistics in Chart 2 reinforce what is already known. The heavier akches are those which were minted earliest, during the first coinage period, 926-941 A.H., which are the mints closest to the presumed find spot at Kuçayna. Note that, through quality control trended to be less evident the farther from the capital's main mint, akches from Kostantiniye are lighter than any of the others. I noticed this peculiarity some time ago, that most of akches from the Kostantiniye mint were lighter than those from other mints⁴. Perhaps the explanation is that because Kostantiniye was the central controlling mint, agreement with akche weight requirements was ignored. Perhaps they were only concerned that the style and design were proper⁵. Even more curious is the fact that the weight of the Balya akche is heavier than any of the others found in the hoard.

Notice also the high average weight of the group of illegible akches. These have unreadable mint names on the reverse, though most of them can be proven to have been struck at the Kuçayna mint because of their obverse type.

This hoard was surely hidden in the eastern part of Serbia, close to where Kuçayna is situated, near present day Požarevac. Because of the value represented by these coins, equal to 4 *sultanis* in gold, it may well have been a small merchant's sales receipts, buried out of fear during the Sziget campaign of 1566. This was of course a very difficult time and thieves filled the roadways. People were forced to travel with hired guards for security, but our merchant apparently had no bodyguard and was either too frightened to return to reclaim his wealth, or couldn't remember where he had buried his cache of akches, or maybe was caught up and killed in the Sziget fighting.

³ Slobodan Srećković, *A szigetvári hadjárat során vert akcsék*, Éremtani lapok, Budapest, December 1990, pp. 1-10.

⁴ Idem, *Akches*, III, *Süleyman I Kanunî, 926-974 AH*, Belgrade, 2004, pp. 89-97.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 89.