

Wrong Country!

The DT-54 tractor on Albania and North Vietnam

This series continues to draw attention to world banknotes with vignettes of items that are not from the country of issue. Understanding the connection of such an image to the country of issue often relates to other factors worth exploring on the banknote.

Several of the prior “wrong country” examples in this series were easily explained as convenient, with a cost savings using a stock image or a simple mistake. In this case the image was very deliberate, in two countries who were at the time behind the iron curtain. Most currency collectors are of an age to well remember this. The “iron curtain” was popularized by Winston Churchill in a 1946 speech and represented the huge military, political, and cultural differences between the ideological and physical boundary that separated communist Eastern Europe from democratic Western Europe during the Cold War.

The banknotes for discussion are the Albania 25 lekë banknote dated 1964 (P37/B222a) and 1976 (P44/B222b) and the North Vietnam 20 Đồng dated 1969 (P74A/B306). The both notes were printed by China Banknote Printing and Minting, Shanghai. The theme for the notes is agriculture. The entire seven note series of Albania acts as propaganda, extolling the virtues of the socialist society. The front of the Albania banknote depicts a happy woman field worker holding a wheat sheaf with the background showing the modern harvesting of a wheat field with a combine and truck. The reverse continues this modern take with a tractor pulling a man on a plow in a wheat field. The North Vietnam 1 Hào (two versions), 2 Hào, and 20 Đồng of the 1964-75 series depict hog, rice, and wheat farming. The reverse shows a very similar note as the Albania note with the same brand tractor also pulling a plow in a wheat field.

Both the Bank Note Book and Pick only mention a tractor, not the exact model - the DT-54. The diesel powered tractor was produced from 1949 to 1979 at three different plants in the Soviet Union! The plants, located in Stalingrad, Kharkov, and Altai U.S.S.R., produced nearly a million varieties of this model. This author only wonders why the Russian printer Goznak was not pressed into service as the printer for one or both of these notes.

So why was this particular tractor displayed? One could easily infer the tractor was not generic, but displayed in an exact manner to purposely convey the helping hands of the fellow socialist big brother country of Russia providing the modernization of agriculture – with most viewers expecting Russia to aid all Communist countries including those satellite nations behind the iron curtain.

The whole Albania series is reasonably priced and would easily fit in a collection of Albanian, propaganda, and agricultural and industry theme banknotes. The North Vietnam note was never issued and should be considered at least scarce to rare. The Bank Note Book assigns a value of \$400 in uncirculated condition. There is currently one online for sale in uncirculated condition for sale for \$1,600 while another has a current bid of \$370 (without buyer’s fee) closing in mid February.



