

## MEDIEVAL JEWELLERY FROM XANTHI IN OXFORD

In 1921 and 1922 some bronze jewellery from Xanthi and its environs was presented to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, by the late Stanley Casson. It consisted of two «Illyrian» fibulae, fragments of fibula bows, fragments of spectacle fibulae, and some rings and bracelets. Casson clearly thought of all these objects as dating from the Early Iron Age. Thus, in his *Macedonia, Thrace and Illyria*, he lists under Iron Age material «bronze wristlets and other ornaments from Othman Euren and other villages in the neighbourhood of Xanthi». He added that all these objects were now in the Ashmolean<sup>1</sup>. He was followed by L. Rey, who also lists as Iron Age material «anneaux de bronze ('wristlets'), fragments de fibules à disques et autres ornements provenant d'Othman Euren et autres villages des environs de Xanthi»<sup>2</sup>. Rey had clearly had further details from Casson concerning the nature of his gifts to the Ashmolean. Finally, a local historian from Xanthi, St. Ioannides, having come across a reference in an encyclopaedia to Iron Age finds from Xanthi<sup>3</sup>, wrote to the Ashmolean Museum in 1960 asking for further information. He was sent photographs and descriptions of the objects —mostly bracelets— which are accessed as coming from Xanthi itself, and in 1965 published the photographs and information, without comment, in *Θρακικά Χρονικά*<sup>4</sup>. It so happens that, although many of the objects that Casson gave to the Ashmolean are of undoubted Iron Age date, the bracelets are medieval. The following brief remarks, based on a quick survey of the literature, are merely intended to show that this is the case, without going any more deeply into problems of interpretation.

The objects to be considered consist of five bracelets and a pair of earrings. The bracelets are all penannular and are of four distinct types.

1. 1922.367. Bronze penannular bracelet (Fig. 1, 1). Diameter 0.064; width 0.005-0.012. Bright green patina with some earth incrustation. Made of four strands of twisted wire terminating at each end in an open loop. Damaged at both ends. From Xanthi.

1. S. Casson, *Macedonia, Thrace and Illyria*, Oxford, 1925, p. 172.

2. L. Rey, «Bohemica (Bohemitsa)», *Albania* IV (1932), 48.

3. Ἀρχαῖος Θρακικὸς Λαογραφικὸς καὶ Γλωσσικὸς Θησαυρὸς XV, 35-36, n. 6.

4. St. Ioannides, «Ἀντικείμενα ἀπὸ τὴν Ξάνθη στὸ Ashmolean Museum Oxford», *Θρακικά Χρονικά* V (1965), 128-129.

Such twisted wire bracelets are very common in medieval contexts in the Balkans. They were discussed by V. Lahtov, who dated them to the 11th to 12th centuries on the strength of examples found in dated contexts in the Ochrid region, and considered them to be common to medieval cultures in the central Balkans, especially south of the Danube<sup>1</sup>. Other examples have recently been found in Bulgaria: a stray find at Bizone on the Black Sea coast<sup>2</sup>, and (also in the central southern part of the country) in medieval tombs at Hvoina<sup>3</sup> (between Assenovgrad and Smoylan) and Tchernozem<sup>4</sup>. The latter is of some interest as the medieval burials were made in a Thracian tumulus of the fourth century B. C. In south western Bulgaria, a twisted wire bracelet has recently been discovered at Ablanitza, and dated by the excavator to some time between the 9th and 14th centuries<sup>5</sup>. Finally, another example was recently found in a medieval necropolis at Leshnje in Albania<sup>6</sup>.

2. 1922.366. Bronze penannular bracelet (but with ends slightly overlapping) (Fig. 1, 2). Diameter 0.050; width 0.012-0.018. Light to dark green patina, much worn. Divided into panels by means of pairs of incised lines. The panels are decorated with curvilinear rows of small dots either with or without larger dots arranged in fives on the swelling ends and in a pair and a group of three on other panels. From Xanthi.

3. 1921.1249. Bronze penannular bracelet (Fig. 1, 3). Diameter 0.055; width 0.012-0.026. Green patina, fairly worn. *Pointillé* decoration of three kinds: small, closely-spaced dots along straight incised grooves defining the main decorative fields, similar dots in wavy lines in the middle and at the ends

1. V. Lahtov, «Slav jewels at Ohrid and environs», *Yearbook of the Popular Museum in Ohrid* I (1957), pl. 1, figs. 4, 5, 6, 7; pl. 2, fig. 8; pl. 3, figs. 33, 34; pl. 4, fig. 35; pl. 6, figs. 63, 64. *Idem*, «Les bijoux des habitats archéologiques datant du haut moyen âge dans la région d'Ohrid», *Musée National d'Ohrid, Recueil de Travaux*, Edition spéciale, (Ohrid 1961), 44-45, pl. 11, 1 and 2.

2. M. Mirtchev, G. Tontcheva et D. Dimitrov, «Bizone-Karvouna», *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique à Varna* XIII (1962), 99, fig. 73, no. 8.

3. Chr. Djambov, «Église médiévale et nécropole près du village Hvoina», *Annuaire du Musée National Archéologique Plovdiv* VI (1968), 88, fig. 7.

4. P. Detev, «Fouilles des tumulus près du village de Tchernozem», *ibid.* VII (1971), 43, fig. 6.

5. V. Čačeva, «Trouvailles de nécropoles du village Albanica, Département de Blagoevgrad», *Bull. Inst. Arch. Bulg.* XXXII (1970), 298, fig. 1.

6. L. Ylli, «Leshnje, Nekropole Kampagne 1971», *Buletin Arkeologjik* (1971), 153 ff., pl. 3, bottom right (a reference I owe to Dr K. Kilian). Cf. the bracelet on the Munich market (U. Lindner, *Lagerliste der Antiken* Nr. 2 [Munich, n. d. (1972)] no. 52; rather inaccurately described as «8. Jh. v. Chr. oder später».

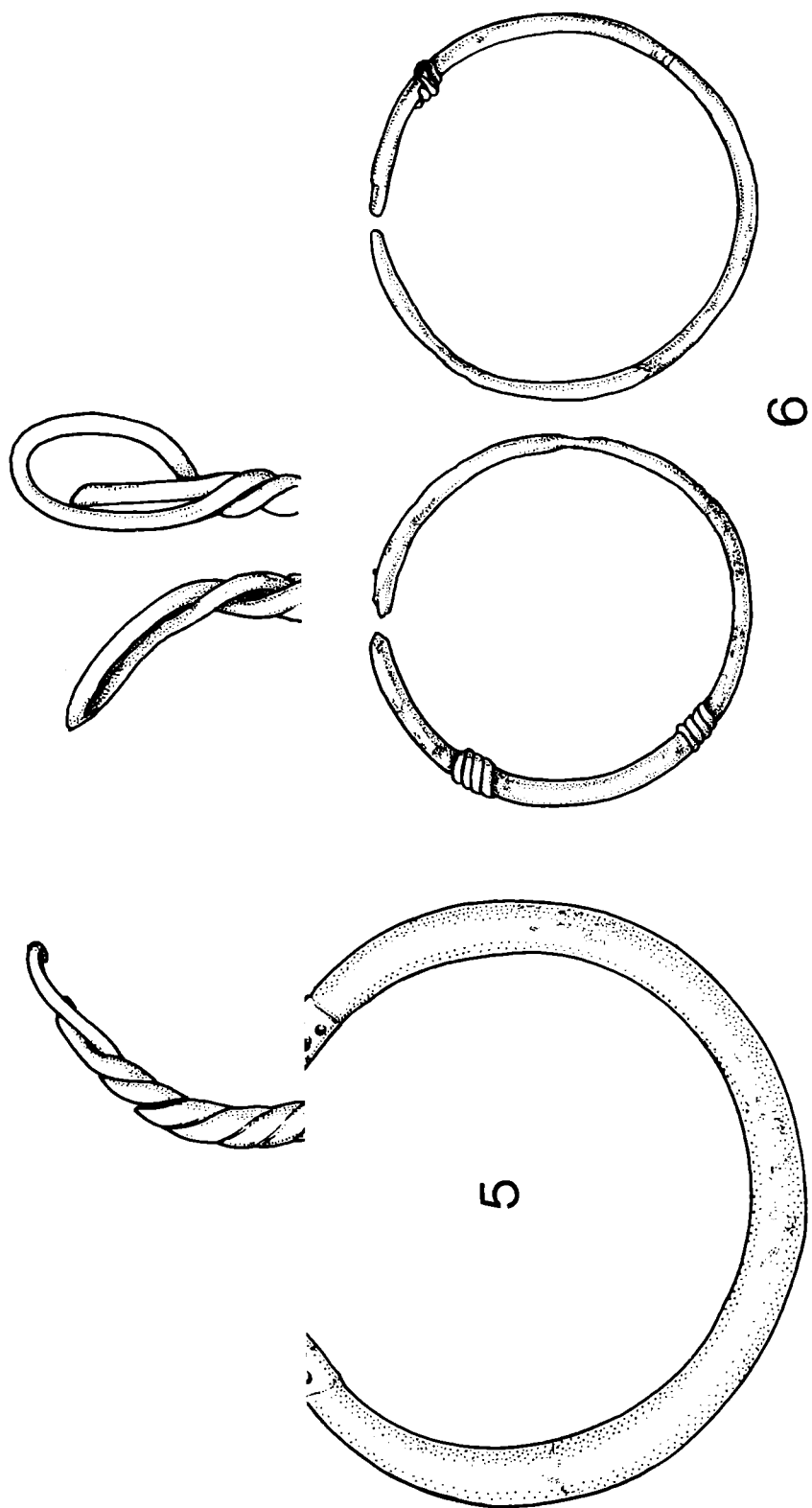


Fig. 1.



of the bracelet, and larger impressions within a concentric circle in groups of four on the ends, and singly on each side of the central band. The points where the ends begin to swell out are defined by means of small nicks which continue a little way towards the centre. From Mustafadzova (N. E. of Xanthi).

These two bracelets belong to a class of «shovel-ended» bracelets which Lahtov would place in the 11th to 12th centuries. He quotes twelve examples from the Ochrid region and an unpublished piece in Athens from Dodona in Epirus<sup>1</sup>. It is clearly a common shape. One is aware of a similar bracelet from Pirdope, near Sofia in Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>; there must be many more from the southern Balkan area<sup>3</sup>.

4. 1922.365. Part of a bronze penannular bracelet; perhaps a quarter missing (Fig. 1, 4). Extant diameter 0.048; width 0.007-0.009. Decorated on outside and edge with *pointillé* decoration of two kinds: small, closely spaced dots along incised grooves defining, at intervals, decorative panels in which are larger, deeper impressions, either singly or in groups of three or four. From Xanthi.

A similar bracelet, solid, divided into panels and decorated with punched circles and dots was found in one of the medieval tombs at Hvoina<sup>4</sup>, another is known from Klisse-Keui near Sofia<sup>5</sup>. Lahtov published yet another from the Ochrid region<sup>6</sup>. Two bracelets of the same basic form have Greek inscriptions—both Christian prayers—on them: one found recently at Ablanitzia<sup>7</sup> and the other with no apparent provenance in the Sofia Museum<sup>8</sup>. These last have finials resembling, in a sketchy way, snake-heads, and Lahtov has quite rightly connected such vestigial snake-head finials on the medieval bracelets known to him with the classical bracelets of the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. which seem to have been particularly widespread in the Balkans<sup>9</sup>. This idea receives additional confirmation from the discovery at

1. Lahtov 1957 (n. 5, above), pl. 2, figs. 10, 11; pl. 4, fig. 40; *idem*, 1961, pl. 8, 2; pl. 9, 1-7; pl. 10, 1-5.

2. *Bull. Arch. Soc. Bulg.* V (1915) 71, fig. 45.

3. Cf. the silver example in the Stathatos Collection: *Collection Stathatos IV* (1971), 90, pl. 10, no. St. 553, and the «shovel-headed» Byzantine bracelet from Corinth: G. R. Davidson, *Corinth XII* (Princeton 1952), no. 2133 (a reference I owe to my colleague Dr D. M. Metcalf).

4. Djambov, *op. cit.*, (n. 7, above), p. 88, fig. 8.

5. *Bull. Arch. Soc. Bulg.* V (1915), 99, fig. 71.

6. Lahtov 1961, pl. 6, 7.

7. Ž. Važarova and V. Čačeva, «Nécropole médiévale près du village Albanica (arr. de Blagoevgrad)», *Archeologia* X, 2 (1968), 30, fig. 6, (bottom left), and 31, fig. 7.

8. *Ibid.*, 34, fig. 11.

9. Lahtov 1961, p. 46-7.

Shtikë in Albania of a medieval penannular bracelet with finials that are quite definitely in the form of snakes' heads<sup>1</sup>. It may well be that both bracelets (4) and (5) have finials whose decorative patterns are derived from a snake-head prototype.

5. 1922.364. Bronze penannular bracelet (Fig. 1, 5). Diameter 0.068; width 0.008-0.0085. Green patina, some earth incrustation. A plain hoop, apart from flattened rectangular finials decorated on top and sides with small punched impressions around a larger one. From Xanthi.

It has not been possible to find a precise parallel for this bracelet, though most of the features present on it can be matched. The plain loop, and the punched decoration (reminiscent of snakes' heads?) on the finials are to be found on the bracelets assembled by Lahtov<sup>2</sup>. There can be little doubt but that it, too, is of medieval date.

6. 1922.368. A pair of fragmentary bronze earrings (Fig. 1, 6). Diameter 0.043; original width (where preserved) 0.0026-0.0044. Plain loops with remains of bands of fine wire wound round at intervals. From Xanthi.

These objects are clearly earrings, and not bracelets. Originally, probably each had three bands of wire wrapped at regular intervals on their lower halves. Similar medieval earrings have recently been discussed by S. Ercegović-Pavlović, and he considers their typology and distribution in Serbia<sup>3</sup>. In Bulgaria, identical fragmentary earrings were discovered at Hvoina<sup>4</sup>.

1. D. Komata, «Germimet ne Varrezen mesjetare te Shtikes (Kolonje)», *Buletin Arkeologjik* (1969), pl. 1, 4.

2. S. Ercegović-Pavlović, «Contribution à l'étude des boucles d'oreilles en Serbie du IX<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle», *Starinar* XXI (1970), 41-58, esp. 53-54, fig. 3-4. See too, M. A. Sabourova «Coiffe féminine chez les slaves», *Sov. Arch.* 1974/2, 85-97.

3. Djambov, *op. cit.*, (n. 7, above) p. 91, fig. 13.

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