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Early Byzantine Jewellery in the Cloisonné Style Allegedly from Olbia

Michel Kazanski

This chapter deals with the finds of artefacts with cloisonné-style decoration from the post-Hunnic period (from the mid-5th century to the end of the first half of the 6th century) in the Hermitage Museum collections. According to dealers, they came from the region of Olbia, an important ancient city near the mouth of the Southern Bug River. It is assumed by some that these finds can be linked to the existence of an unrecognised steppe power centre of the period, but their apparent similarity to the “princely” finds of the period from the Middle Danube area may indicate the eastward movement of some Germanic groups, such as the Angisciri, whose migration begins in the first half of the 5th century. But the a
notable steppe power centre of the period, but their apparent similarity to the “princely” finds of the period from the Middle Danube area may indicate the eastward movement of some Germanic groups, such as the Angisciri, whose migration begins in the first half of the 5th century. However, there are other “princely” finds associated with Olbia, such as an ostentatious polychrome buckle with thickened, round loop and round belt-plate, or earrings with three-lobed pendants.

Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that in the Hunnic period there may have been a power centre of some kind – hypothetically it could have been the “kingdom of Gesimundus”, according to the Hunnic ally known from Jordanes’s notes on the Hunn-Goth war. It is necessary to emphasise, however, that Jordanes took a significant part of his testimony from a Germanic epic, and therefore any historical considerations formed on the basis of the mentioned episode from Jordanes’s chronicle are only hypothetical. But even more significant is the fact that Olbia as a site for the discovery of artefacts must be considered undocumented and perhaps even fraudulent. It is common knowledge that antiquities dealers, in an attempt to achieve the highest possible price, actually claimed a fictitious origin for the goods on offer, from well-known ancient sites such as Panticapaeum (Kerch) or Olbia. So, the geographical location of the origin of the artefacts analysed here is very conditional. We can only speak with greater certainty about their origin in the area of the northern Black Sea coast.

The Olbia Treasure

The most famous find of the post-Hunnic period is the so-called treasure from the collections of P. A. Mavrogordato, which later ended up in the U.S. (Fig. 1). The artefacts from this assemblage formed part of a prestigious female costume and were probably part of the funerary equipment. The most significant part of the jewellery set is a pectoral chain with an oval medallion with a cross motif (Fig. 1:8). Judging by the nature of the cloisonné-style decoration of the medallion, it was produced by Constantinopolitan jewellers. This is also confirmed by the reverse side of the stroke-ornamented medallion, typical of Mediterranean production, while the massive decorated disc clasp of the necklace also corresponds to the traditions of Greco-Roman art workshops. The “treasure” also includes two gold open bar bracelets with club-shaped ends (Fig. 1:9, 10). This type of bracelet appears in Europe in the 1st century AD as a result of an unknown impulse from Asia. For the 5th to the first half of the 6th centuries such “royal” bracelets, albeit more massive, are strongly represented in the burial sites and treasures of the barbarian aristocracy, among others in the tomb of King Childeric at Tournai in Walloonia, in the tomb of the Gepid prince at Apähä in Transylvania and of the Onogur (H) chieftain at Balnina in southern Moravia. Bracelets with club-shaped ends can also be found in aristocratic female graves, such as the grave from the Hunnic period at Regio in the territory of former Roman Pannonia, as well as in the burial mound of a Frankish princess from the second half of the 6th century, in the Hunnic-Bulgarian (Onogurian) burial mound at the Morskoj Čulek burial site on the lower Don River, or at the 2nd half to late 5th century Gepidic burial mound at Beroevo in Transcarpathia. In the Olbia assemblage and in the finds from Morskoj Čulek, the bracelets are paired, although from the same period, in the predominantly male “princely” graves, gold bracelets with club-shaped ends also occur singly. It should be pointed out that such finds are also known from the Byzantine territory, but for example one of the bracelets from Morskoj Čulek bears a Latin weight marking.

The “hoard” also contains two gold rings with rectangular bezels with spiral ends and cloisonné decoration (Fig. 1:5, 6). Rings of this type are well known and documented for the European setting of the post-Hunnic period. Let us recall the finds from the “princely” mound of Bakodpuzsta in the area between the Danube and the Tisza, as well as from a set of female artefacts from Chluj-Someșeni in Transylvania, in the already mentioned grave at Berehove, the Alemannic burial site of Lüttrach in southern Germany, the Ficarola burial site in northern Italy, and finally the finds from the northern Black Sea coast at Dżurga-Oba near Kerč, Taman and Kuban.15 These analogies dating from the middle to the end of the 5th century allow a more precise dating of the Olbia assemblage, while the geographical extent of their distribution, in my opinion, clearly indicates their origin in the Mediterranean region. The Olbia set also includes a pair of circular twisted earrings strung with polyhedral beads of probably Danubian origin (Fig. 1:4). It also includes two earrings with moon-shaped pendants, below which leaf-shaped pendants are suspended, all again decorated in the cloisonné style (Fig. 1:2, 3). Ornaments from the Italian hoard of Reggio Emilia and the earrings from Varna13 are analogous to these jewels dating from the second half of the 5th century to the first half of the 6th century.14 Another pair of similar earrings also came from a burial chamber among forty graves near Dżurga-Oba in eastern Crimea.15 The reverse side of the Olbia earrings is stroke-ornamented, as in the central medallion of the Olbia necklace mentioned above. It is likely that we are dealing with a set of ornaments made at the same time as part of a single order in an unknown art workshop in the Mediterranean. The Olbia assemblage also includes a pointed pin with a hemispherical garnet head (Fig. 1:14), the analogy for which is unknown to us. The Olbia “treasure” chronologically falls into the post-Hunnic period of the second half of the 5th century, i.e. like the famous Germanic “prin-
ely” finds of Bakodpuzsta (graves 1–2)16, Chluj-Someșeni17 and Apähä.18 The ostentatious female jewellery set from Olbia points to a Mediterranean, probably early Byzantine origin.19

Buckle

The buckle, supposed to be from Olbia (Fig. 2), was purchased from the antiquities dealer Nadelius in 1903 by the Imperial Archaeological Commission, along with other artefacts from the Hunnic period represented by a polyhedral end- ing in polychrome style and a buckle with a thickened circular loop and circular buckle plate. It is currently housed in the Hermitage.20 The buckle has an oval loop fitted with
an oval plate, and is decorated all over the surface in the cloisonné style – the Zaseckaja V group. An important characteristic is the decoration of the loop made up of small garnets in separate cells. This type of ornamentation is not common. However, one can recall the typologically related buckles, the scabbard fitting and the decorative appliqué from the aforementioned grave of Childeric in Tournaill Figs.3:8, 12, 14, 18–20, buckles from Apahida – burial I Figs.3:7–9, 16–18, and artefacts from burial II Figs.3:2, 4, 8, 25 and burial III from the same locality, as well as the buckle from the Alamanic “princely” burial at Rüden Figs.3:22–24, and a buckle from a similar recently discovered grave at Kranj-Lajh in northern Illyricum, Slovenia Figs.3:21–22. The last-mentioned can be referred to a period no older than the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries, according to the analogous shape of the tongue with a basal shield. Analogous decoration of the edges is represented by the head-plate and the foot of the brooch in the “Moda domubia” from the Desana hoard Figs.3:7–8, and the rim decoration of a pater from Gourdon in Burgundy Figs.3:29–30. All these finds are dated to the second half to the end of the 5th century or the first half of the 6th century. In the older Hunnic period (second half to late 4th – first half of the 5th century), similar decoration of small garnets in separate cells was used on sword handles from burials koted on 24th June 1904 at Kerč Figs.4:1–30, and also in the case of the central medallion of the phaleara from the treasure from Szilágysomlyó/Şimleul-Sârăiei in Transylvania Figs.4:2–22.

Buckles analogous to the Olbia one formed part of the prestigious male “warrior” clothing of the second half of the 5th century, although they can sometimes also be found in women’s clothing. These examples are representative of the Mediterranean arts and crafts tradition and are often considered to be imports from Byzantium or, more generally, from the Mediterranean It cannot be ruled out that the buckle in question represents a part of the “central” art workshop at Constantinople, as suggested by the production technology used.

**Necklace of Polyhedral beads**

According to the dealers, the necklace made of polyhedral metal beads decorated with inlaid semi-precious stones is also of Olbian origin Fig.2:2, analogues of which can be found in the central Danube region in Zmajevo, Apahida, Chii-Sonešeni, and in Crimea in the aforementioned Kerč burial chambers destroyed on 24th June 1904.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize once again that the Olbian origin of all the above mentioned artefacts is based on the claims of antiquities dealers only, whose interest was to increase the price of their goods by linking it to the attractiveness of the site. However, as the finds from Morskoj Čulek near Tanais Fig.5 show, there is a link between the “princely” post-Hunnic finds in the steppe and older ancient centres. On the basis of the finds of these prestigious artefacts it can then be stated with certainty that the early Byzantine elite’s predilection for luxury objects with cloisonné decoration, widespread in Europe, was reflected in the regions of the northern Black Sea.
Chapter 2: Discovery of the Gold Jewellery Hoard at Mšec


2. In the case of the finds from Heulàp–Ásd from the first half of the 2nd century AD, the gold objects connected with the most powerful level of the northern baronians – the Romans.

3. The view of Nydam I, II, and III does not correspond with the most valuable discoveries from Nydam Mosegaard Museum. Nydam I and II contain complete or nearly complete intact barrows, and Nydam III is a necropolis with several barrows.

4. In Kn.


7. Droberjar 2020, 25, fig. 8:11.


10. Dickinson

11. Dickinson


13. Svoboda 1965; Limburský et al.


20. The present paper may contain adapted excerpts of previous works or previous publications in the field of foils and metallurgy.

21. To this end, the gold foil used in the present study was obtained from the Historical Treasury exhibition. Over time, many of these items were transferred to other collections or temporary exhibitions before the exhibition was transferred to the University Museum in Tübingen in 2019.

22. Some of the artefacts from the Antakya gold hoard are at present curated at the National History Museum of Romania and part of the Historical Treasury of the University of Tübingen.
Thermae. The grave goods were made of gold and silver, some also 637–640; Lăzărescu 2019, 96–99. For Florești-Polus see also Alicu 1995), where two of the vessels had also been probably repaired 1994/1995, 176–191.


Bărbulescu (eds.) 1992, 132, 362). For a 1510, 7–13. In the Late Antique graves widespread finds predominated, such as brooches with complex designs, fibulae with ornamental terminals or double-sided comb. In addition to the stray treasures of Theodoric, there is a class of brooches that in this context, such as the so-called Theodoric type mound stands out, probably found in a secondary position at the left of the grave, with the images of a palm tree or another symbol.

Cf. generally von Rummel 2007. To the Friulian Plain ( Ciglenečki et al. 2011, 260, 262, fig. 5.1). Some other authors have also pointed 2009. 348–349, pl. 4, fig. 5; Vinski 1980, 20; Knific 2005, 341, fig. 8: 31/3, 287/3; Urek et al. 2016, 14–15.

Sagadin 2008, 142, fig. 29–30. Some other authors have also pointed 2009. 348–349, pl. 4, fig. 5; Vinski 1980, 20; Knific 2005, 341, fig. 8: 31/3, 287/3; Urek et al. 2016, 14–15.

in the area, one cannot overlook the proximity to the former 2007, 62–65. In some recent publications, the authors, with the help of archival material and old publications, have already started to use various data e.g. Knic 2011, cat. no. 26, 77, cat. no. 245; Knic 2008, 334–337, 342, fig. 4, l. 4, 6. Knic 2014, 16–19, 39–40, 55, 59, 338, notes 1, 2, 4, 5, 7.

Žiča 1994, 33. The idea of this cemetery comes in various forms: for example, the burial mound was found at the so-called 'Hradisko' near the town of Žuráň in Moravia ( Paulus 1859).

Three of the spherical elements at Apahida paste was used and the 296–300; Engels 2007). On the other hand, in the central part of the Ailenberg seen from the Neckar valley see Fuchs (ed.) 1997, 338–341, figs. 22–23; 356–364.

Harhoiu 1998, pl. 66a, d. The mention of a similar mount found at 1854, 56; 2004, 64; 2007, 3–4.

The burial mound was found at the so-called 'Hradisko' near the town of Žuráň in Moravia ( Paulus 1859).

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For the history of research in the late 19th and early 20th centuries also see Knic 1992. In some recent publications, the authors, with the help of archival material and old publications, have already started to use various data e.g. Knic 2011, cat. no. 26, 77, cat. no. 245; Knic 2008, 334–337, 342, fig. 4, l. 4, 6. Knic 2014, 16–19, 39–40, 55, 59, 338, notes 1, 2, 4, 5, 7.

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Zaseckaia et al. 2007, 48–60.

Schmauder et al. 2017, 164–167; Engels 2007. In some recent publications, the authors, with the help of archival material and old publications, have already started to use various data e.g. Knic 2011, cat. no. 26, 77, cat. no. 245; Knic 2008, 334–337, 342, fig. 4, l. 4, 6. Knic 2014, 16–19, 39–40, 55, 59, 338, notes 1, 2, 4, 5, 7.

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Osteoglyptic occupation, based on the finds and a considerable number of deceased people with artificially deflected skulls (16). An undecayed skeleton with a head supposed to belong to a foreigner, namely to the Germanic people – Osteoglyptic occupation, was found in the excavations in Fig. 6.

47 In Franconia near Badminton, a Gothic settlement with a cemetery from the end of the 5th and the first half of the 6th centuries was discovered in 1984 and 2002 (see Michel 2003, 2013, 2018; in preparation for 2019). In the excavations at Frascaro near Alessandria in Piedmont, a Gothic settlement with a cemetery from the 5th to the 6th century was also discovered. Excavations at Frascaro near Penola, Piedmont, in the 6th and 7th centuries have been carried out. Excavations at Frascaro near Alessandria in Piedmont, a Gothic settlement with a cemetery from the 5th to the 6th century were also conducted. Excavations at Frascaro near Alessandria in Piedmont, a Gothic settlement with a cemetery from the 5th to the 6th century were also carried out. Excavations at Frascaro near Alessandria in Piedmont, a Gothic settlement with a cemetery from the 5th to the 6th century also included.

48 These graves can be connected in one way or another with the Ostrogoths or related Germanic groups of the 5th and 6th centuries. The excavations at Frescaro, 27 graves had been excavated. The wealth of finds the grave from Globasnitz represents an exceptional find among the male graves attributed to the period of the Golden Age of the Ostrogoths at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries (Slabe 1975, 60). The excavations at Frescaro, 27 graves had been excavated. The wealth of finds the grave from Globasnitz represents an exceptional find among the male graves attributed to the period of the Golden Age of the Ostrogoths at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries (Slabe 1975, 60).

49 Excavations carried out between Ágnes Salamon and László Barkóczi on the one hand and Lech Tica and Matei Măruță on the other hand have revealed that the cemetery is located in the Vipava Valley, which belonged to the Eastern Roman Empire.

50 Settlers from Central Europe, related to the Goths, were found there, the presence of foreigners/federates is to be expected, as these are cemeteries along the Limes or at the borders of these regions. Neither the settlement nor the cemetery have been expected, as these are cemeteries along the Limes or at the borders of these regions. Neither the settlement nor the cemetery have been expected, as these are cemeteries along the Limes or at the borders of these regions. Neither the settlement nor the cemetery have been expected, as these are cemeteries along the Limes or at the borders of these regions. Neither the settlement nor the cemetery have been expected, as these are cemeteries along the Limes or at the borders of these regions. Neither the settlement nor the cemetery have been expected, as these are cemeteries along the Limes or at the borders of these regions.
probably led only 40,000 Ostrogoths to Italy, that is, more or less over 20,000 warriors” and Humphries 2008, 531: “as large as 25,000.”

10,000 fighting men, and many died during the struggle against Chronica, Odoacer was starved into surrender. Heather 1996, 221.

See Martindale 1980, 64, “Amalaricus”, and 510, “Gesalicus”; but cf. O’Flynn 1983, 137. More importantly, as Jones pointed out, these federates were probably irregularly paid, which explains their cooperation in Cassiodorus’ Variae (IV, 1). Accordingly, this chapter by Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and John-Lyngvist.

See the separate chapter by Nada Prodanović.

See the separate chapter by Petr Charvát.

Chapter 17: Relief-decorated Horse Harness Pendant from Ravennati


2. Godlewski 1995, fig. 4–3.

3. Werner 1981, fig. 14c.

On the decorative significance and decorative style of horse harness and saddle fittings see Nilsson 2015, 121–123, fig. 50 decorative harness found in the same tomb.


3. Fam et al. 2015, 2, figs. 2.6, 2.71.

3. Arwidsson 2014, 129, fig. 82.


3. Mila 2008, fig. 11.


3. Schmieder 1986, tel., 176, fig. 2.


3. Arwidsson 2014, 63, pl. 19.


3. Arwidsson 2014, 129, fig. 82.


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Chapter 20: Trade and Relationships at the Turn of the 7th Century

1 Högida is known through the work Origo gentis langobardorum (75), where he appears as an unsuccessful successor to the Lombard throne. Due to an adverse circumstance, he and 3,000 other Lombards had to flee to the Black Sea, where he was captured and subsequently sold as a slave. He is later known through his incursions led by the Slavs and Gepids into the Byzantine Balkans and in 550 thanks to Novor in Italy into Italy and to help the Ostrogothic king Totila.


Arwidsson 1977, fig. 57.

Stolpe – Arne 1927, pl. 4:1.

Ljungkvist 2006, 44.


Fourlas 2018, 120; Fourlas 2019; for the Germanic names in the Drauschke 2019, 20, fig. 1:4, map.

Fourlas 2019, 98–100, fig. 6.6.

Militký et al. 2021, 199, 206–207, 214, fig. 4.


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Chapter 1: Samo Negucians


Franks, Frankish.


