

CLASSICAL JEWELLERY IN THRACE:  
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT, ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

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Splendid sets of jewellery, most of them with previously unknown shapes, were discovered in the extremely rich princely graves in the Kukova, Mushovitsa, and Arabadzhiiskata tumuli from the necropolis near Duvanlii, as well as within the Getic territories of what is now north-eastern Bulgaria. They impress by their skillful workmanship and the variety of both shapes and decoration. Refined examples of Near Eastern and Greek jewellery are met alongside traditional models developed by local Thracian workshops and influenced by original items. The Thracian Classical period considered here is characterised by aristocratic decorations, combined into conservative compositions, which stood the test of time and turned into insignia of local royal authority.

**The Jewellery of the Odrysian Aristocracy**

The princely necropolis near the village of Duvanlii, Plovdiv region, excavated during the 1930s, remains emblematic of Thracian culture in the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods. This is especially relevant for the Odrysian kingdom, the most powerful within the lands south of the Balkan Mountains, in the upper reaches of the Hebrus and Tonzus rivers. The necropolis consists of around 50 tumuli, the richest of them – Kukova, Mushovitsa, and Arabadzhiiskata – lying 2-10 km from each other. Although the three tumuli and the grave constructions in them differ, the grave goods, especially the sets of gold jewellery, are quite similar in terms of shape and composition and, most probably, are close in date.

The Kukova tumulus measures 15 m in height and about 100 m in diameter. It is one of the largest on Bulgarian territory. It had not been specially constructed for burial, but a limestone slab-built tomb was dug to a small depth into the southern tumular slope (Filov 1934, 6, 19, 39). This had been discovered and plundered by local people, thus the exact number of finds subsequently collected remains questionable and there is no information available on their finding places. The opulent burial gifts comprise much gold jewellery: eight hoop earrings, decorated with filigree threads and granules (Fig. 1, 1); two omega-shaped pendants for earrings with ends

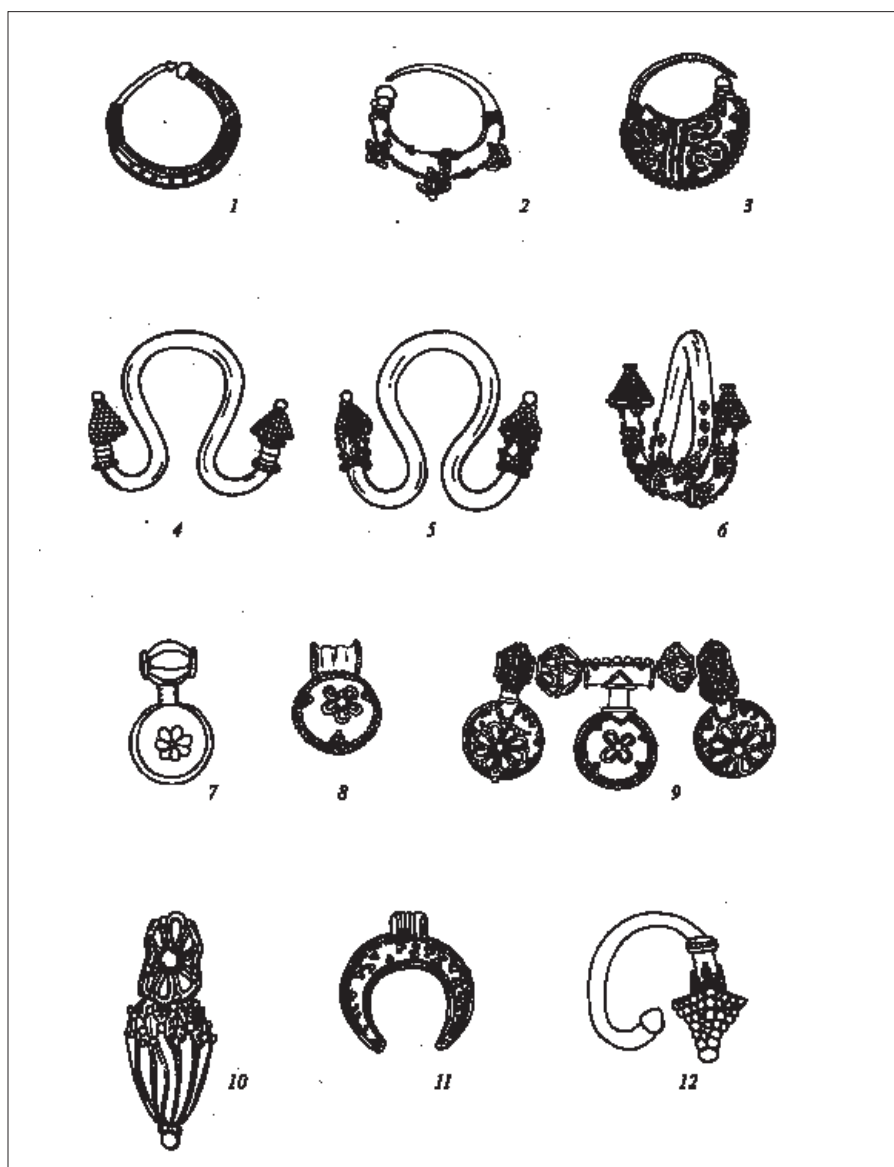


Fig. 1.  
 1. Hoop earring from Kukova tumulus, Duvanlii. 2. Hoop earring from Mushovitsa tumulus, Duvanlii. 3. Boat-shaped earring from Arabadziiskata tumulus, Duvanlii. 4. Omega-shaped pendant from Kukova tumulus, Duvanlii. 5. Omega-shaped pendant from Mushovitsa tumulus, Duvanlii. 6. Spiral pendant for earring from Arabadziiskata tumulus, Duvanlii. 7. Composite bead of the necklace from Kukova tumulus, Duvanlii. 8. Composite bead of the necklace from Mushovitsa tumulus, Duvanlii. 9. Detail of necklace from Arabadziiskata tumulus, Duvanlii. 10. Amphora-like pendant from Kukova tumulus. 11. Crescent-shaped pendant from Koprivets. 12. Hoop earring terminating

shaped as granule covered pyramids (Fig. I, 4); a torque, made of spirally twisted wires, with upward-turned ends (Fig. II, 3); a necklace of composite beads, decorated with a filigree rosette and a blossom-shaped central pendant (Fig. I, 10; II, 1); two open bracelets with ends shaped as stylised snake heads (Fig. II, 5); a pectoral, decorated in the repoussé technique; two massive rings, with hoops that widen in their lower parts and elliptical bezels one with no decoration and the other with an incised cock (Filov 1934, 39-46). Multiple silver and bronze vessels have been found in the grave construction (amphora-rhyton, phiale, hydria, jug) as well as painted Greek vases (black-figure and black-glazed kylikes), an alabastron, and a bronze mirror (Filov 1934, 46-58). The black-figure kylix, dated to the first quarter of the 5th century BC (Reho 1990, cat. No. 453), may be considered the *terminus post quem* for dating the grave.

The Mushovitsa tumulus is much smaller: height 4 m and diameter 32 m. The inhumation burial construction consists of a wooden coffin resting in a rectangular pit, dug out in the centre of the solid terrain of the tumulus. Almost all finds were located around the head of the skeleton (Filov 1934, 82-4). The discovery *in situ* of a full set of head decorations is of particular importance for the reconstruction of the composition of this type of jewellery, which became insignia of the Odryian aristocracy (Tonkova 1997, 18-20, fig. 1). The main items from this set – ten hoop earrings – ‘used to lie, arranged in chains on both sides of the cranium’, the lowest among them being decorated with an omega-shaped pendant (Filov 1934, 89). Based on this, I feel there are sufficient grounds to propose a reconstruction with the gold jewellery being stitched to a textile ribbon or kerchief. The earrings are similar to those from the Kukova tumulus, except for the small rosettes attached to the lower part of the hoop (Fig. I, 2). This is valid for the omega-shaped pendants for earrings as well (Fig. I, 5). The necklace consists of simple bi-conical beads alternating with composite beads (Fig. I, 8). This is a variant of the item from Kukova tumulus, the only difference being the shape of the basic element. Another type of pectoral with chains attached by means of ‘Thracian’ type fibulae (Fig. III, 1) has been found on the chest of the skeleton. These decorations had been accompanied by lavish grave goods – a silver phiale, a bronze hydria, a bronze mirror, a terracotta bust of a female, a black-figure Attic amphora, a black-glazed kylix, three stained-glass oinochoai, seven alabastra, glass beads, agate and amber, and clay-made cult objects (Filov 1934, 89-97). A red-figure Attic amphora, dated to the first quarter of the 5th century BC, may be considered as a chronological marker for dating the grave (Reho 1990, cat. No. 454). A date a little earlier is proposed for both the earrings and the necklace from the burial (Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 122, 126).

The Arabadzhiiskata tumulus is small in size: 2.7 m in height and 30 m in diameter. The grave had been dug in solid terrain, almost in the centre of the tumulus, the pit being coated and covered with wooden beams (Filov 1934,

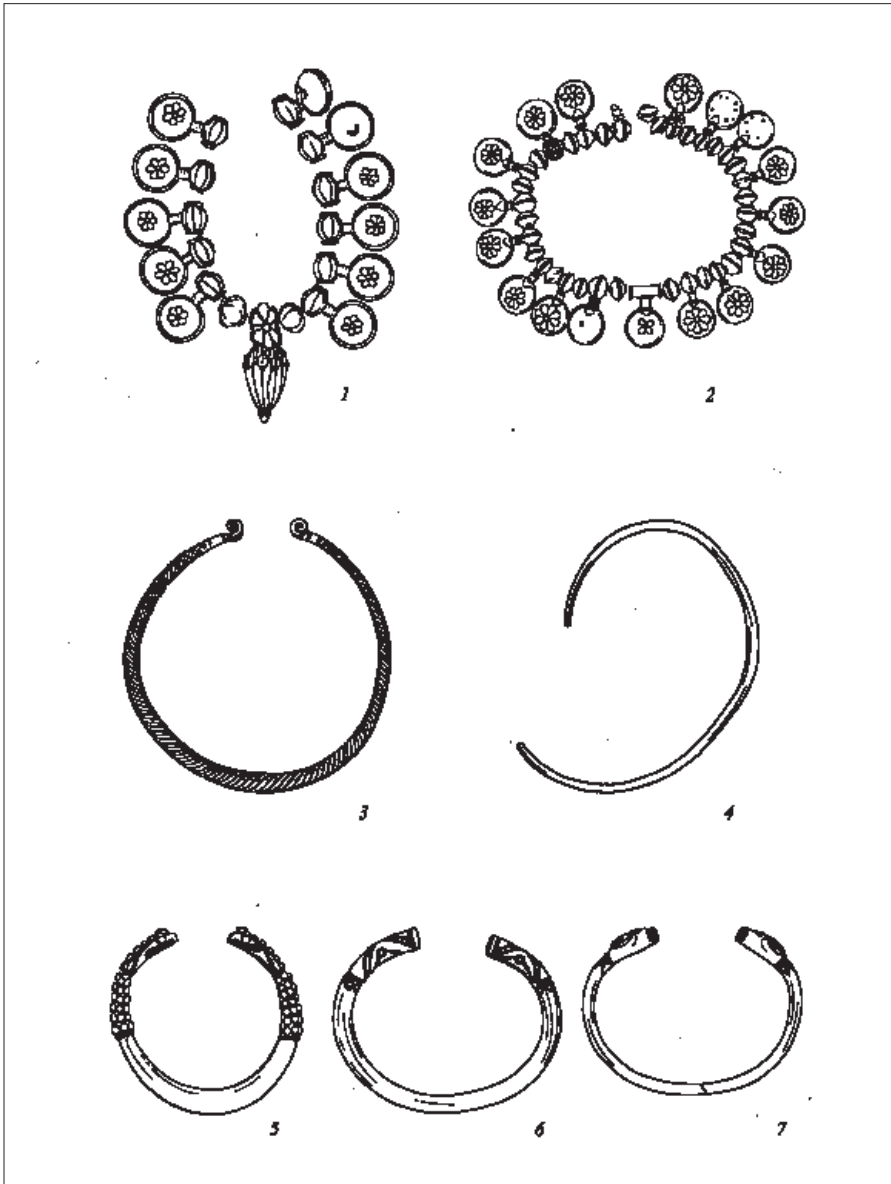


Fig. II.

1. Necklace from Kukova tumulus, Duvanlii.
2. Necklace from Arabadiiskata tumulus, Duvanlii.
3. Torque from Kukova tumulus, Duvanlii.
4. Torque from Golemani.
5. Bracelet from Kukova tumulus, Duvanlii.
6. Bracelet from Golemani.
7. Bracelet from Dolishte.

127-8). The rich burial gifts comprise gold jewellery discovered *in situ*: six boat-shaped earrings with hollow bodies, decorated with filigree and granulation (Fig. I, 3); two spiral pendants for earrings with ends shaped as granulated pyramids (Fig. I, 6); a necklace with simple lentil-like beads alternating with composite beads, decorated with rosettes (Fig. I, 9; II, 2); a signet-ring with an image of a horseman (Fig. III, 4), found on a finger of the left hand; two pectorals with stamped decoration, discovered on the chest (Filov 1934, 129-33). Both the earrings and the beads from this grave feature abundant granulated decoration. They are similar to those found in the two other rich tumular burials from Duvanlii, and they add some new models (the boat-shaped earrings, the ring with a horseman) or variants (the spiral pendants and the necklace) to the jewellery types presented above. As well as the jewellery, the grave contained a bronze mirror, a black-glazed kylix and hydria, a silver strainer, an alabastron, and glass beads, and also small clay and stone cult objects similar to those from the Mushovitsa tumulus (Filov 1934, 133-7). The red-figure hydria from this burial is dated to the mid-5th century BC (Reho 1990, cat. No. 457). The jewellery found in this grave may be dated to the first half or middle of the 5th century BC (Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 122, 130, 149).

The gold jewellery from the necropolis near Duvanlii is more than mere decoration. It combines ceremonial aristocratic decoration into sets. These are, above all, symbols – insignia of the Odryasian aristocracy. This conclusion is widely supported by both the consistent combinations of jewellery from the period under discussion and the conservative composition and models maintained over the following centuries. The set consisting of ten hoop earrings with omega-shaped pendants, a torque, and a necklace remained widespread in rich burials within Odryasian territory through the following two centuries to the end of the Hellenistic period, as is evidenced by the Early Hellenistic burial in tumulus IX of the Seuthopolis necropolis (Tonkova 1997, 18-20). Other kinds of jewellery also played the role of insignia: torques, signet-rings, and pectorals. The torque with out-turned ends, an archaic type, still remained popular to the end of the Hellenistic period, *i.e.* more than two centuries after it had lost popularity in other places. The reason is that it had an important place among Thracian symbols, as can be seen from the depiction of a Thracian goddess wearing this type of torque on the silver greave No. 1 from the Getic princely burial in Adzhigiol (Berciu 1974, 53, fig. 8). It is beyond doubt that gold signet-rings depicting horsemen had turned into insignia of the Odryasian aristocracy. In different compositions (galloping, holding a rhyton or accompanied by a goddess) a horseman is always depicted on signet-rings dating from the 5th and 4th centuries BC originating from Odryasian territory (Tonkova 1996, 60-1). This was also the time when pectorals – perhaps the most typical decoration, having specific symbolism in Thracian ritual costume – spread. These items were typical for the Odryasian court but have also been met with in Getic territory.

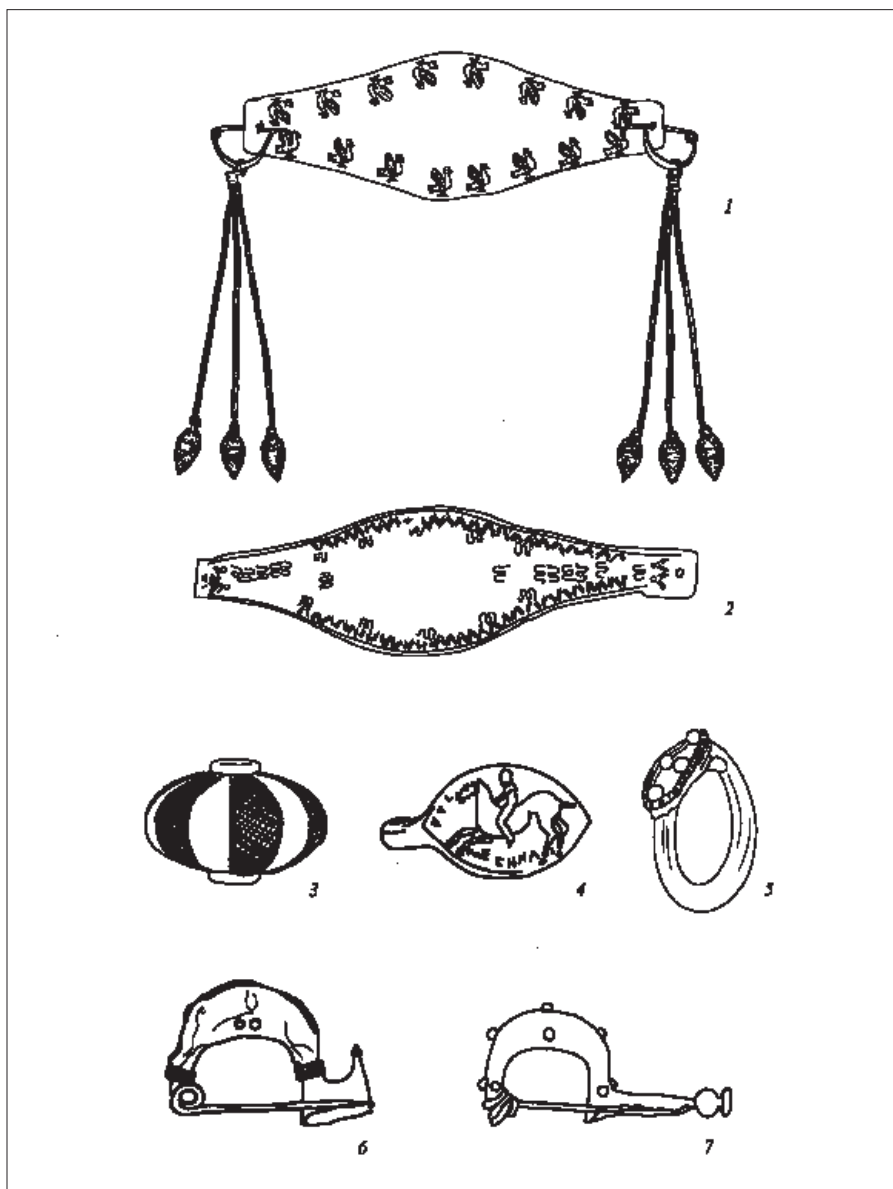


Fig. III.

1. Pectoral with fibula and chains from Mushovitsa tumulus, Duvanlii.
2. Pectoral from Golemani.
3. Bead-pendant from Golemani.
4. Seal ring from Arabadziiskata tumulus, Duvanlii.
5. Finger ring from Golemani.
6. Fibula from Dolishte.
7. Fibula from Koprivets.

Whence the origin of these ceremonial decorations? Their composition is likely to have been inspired by some Near Eastern model (Maxwell-Hyslop 1974, 178, fig. 131) as no parallels have been found, however remote. The jewellery from Duvanlii offers considerable stylistic variety. Some of them are Greek, while the torque, bracelets, fibulae and pectorals, although produced using Greek jewellery techniques, have old Thracian and Macedonian prototypes. The hoop and boat-shaped earrings, the spiral pendants for earrings, the necklaces, and the rings evidence a Greek texture and are often cited as classical examples (sometimes with local features) of Greek jewellery of the time (Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 122, 126, 130, 149; Boardman 1970, 230). However, there are some peculiarities in relation to their spread through the different areas of the northern Balkans (Vasic 1989/1990), originating obviously in contacts with specific craftsmanship from particular centres of jewellery production. Therefore, the most exact parallels to the hoop and boat-shaped earrings from Duvanlii take us to Olynthus (Robinson 1941, 84, 86), the Chalcidice Peninsula (Amandry 1953, 53, fig. 29), and some Macedonian centres. The relationship with the Aegean littoral is confirmed by analysis of the Kukova tumulus bracelets. The specific style of depiction of snake heads presupposes clear Macedonian prototypes (Amandry 1953, 50-1, cat. Nos. 112-9). The origins of the torque, pectorals, and fibula from Duvanlii lie in old northern Balkan roots. The evolution of the torque with outward-turned ends from the Kukova tumulus is very informative – it is a late variation of a type widespread in the Early Iron Age and known from different regions of Thrace (Gergova 1987, 65-6, A55-8). The innovation revealed by this group of jewellery is the use of gold together with filigree and granulation – decorative techniques new for Thrace. Generally speaking, the sets of jewellery from Duvanlii as yet have no parallels outside this region. This suggests that in the first half of the 5th century BC there were some jewellery workshops in Thrace that followed the patterns of Greek jewellery but still reproduced some local traditional models in a Greek style. Undoubtedly, workshops of such a kind had been active in different centres of the Odrysian state (Tonkova 1998).

### **The Jewellery of the Getic Aristocracy**

Over the last ten years, some rich princely graves from the period under consideration have been found within the Getic territories of north-eastern Thrace: near the villages of Golemani, Veliko Turnovo region (northern slopes of the Balkan Mountains); Dolishte, Varna region (Black Sea coast); and Koprivets, Russe region (Danube river bank). The jewellery from Golemani and Koprivets is an element of the burial inventory of rich graves, discovered together with Greek painted vases, bronze vessels, and weapons. These finds are partially published – from the Koprivets complex there is information on the burial construction (Stanchev 1994, 173-4) and a study

of the jewellery (Stanchev 1997), while from Golemani the only available information is on the context of the finds (Shurov/Ilcheva 1992, 52) and a catalogue of part of the jewellery (Marazov *et al.* 1998, 205-6). The jewellery from Dolishte originated from a tumulus grave and only single items of the grave goods have been published (Georgieva 1993, 18, cat. No. 24; Lazarov n.d., No. 4). Therefore, the following comments are based on the jewellery, no chronological reference marks having been found among the accompanying finds.

The find from Golemani was discovered in 1992 in a rough-stone single grave chamber, located in a small tumulus measuring 1.5 m high and 25 m in diameter. The grave goods consist of gold jewellery, weapons, horse trappings, bronze and ceramic vessels, among the last a red-figure pelike (Shurov/Ilcheva 1992, 52). The gold jewellery includes a ring, torque, bracelets, and a pectoral (Marazov *et al.* 1998, 148-51, 205-6), and a large bead supposed to be a necklace element (unpublished). The jewellery from Golemani has no exact parallels in Thrace, but there are some in contemporary Greek, Etruscan, and north Balkan jewellery. The ring (Fig. III, 5) has a heavy hoop, wider in its lower part, and a small elliptical bezel, framed by filigree threads and granulated decoration. An Archaic period Etruscan ring from the British Museum (Marschall 1907, 165, No. 1026, fig. 131) is very close to it in shape and decoration, as is a later item from the 5th century BC, decorated with a rosette of filigree threads and granules, originating from a rich Illyrian grave at Novi Pazar (Vasic *et al.* 1990, 195, No. 140). Based on these examples, the ring from Golemani may be dated to the end of the 6th-beginning of the 5th century BC. The remaining jewellery from the complex is dated to the same period.

So far, the torque (Fig. II, 4) with the shape of a massive hoop with no decoration is exceptional for Thrace, but identical items are known from rich Scythian burials, *e.g.* the electrum torque from Nymphaeum at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (Vickers 1979, 10-1, 44, pl. XVa). As for the two bracelets (open, massive, with slightly thickened ends), with their geometric decoration they lie between local Early Iron Age models (Gergova 1987, 72, Taf. 34-5) and the bracelets with animal-head endings which appear at the turn of the 6th/5th centuries BC, belonging to the same type as those found in Dolishte (Fig. II, 7) and Duvanlii (Fig. II, 5). On the other hand, these items follow shapes widespread in both Near Eastern and Greek jewellery (Higgins 1961, 129). The incised line decoration is also met with in other types of Greek Archaic jewellery – in the spiral pendants for earrings from Myndus, for example (Higgins 1961, 115, Pl. 22d). The pectoral (Fig. III, 2) is made of a gold lamella, and has an incised and stamped decoration consisting of lines and omega-shaped pendants. In shape it has an exact parallel in the pectoral from a grave dated to the beginning of the 5th century BC and found in the Mushovitsa tumulus of the Duvanlii necropolis (Filov 1934, 84, Pl. II, 3).



The large gold bead from Golemani (Fig. III, 3) is made from two soldered lamellae with a geometric incised decoration set in fields framed by filigree thread. Its shape resembles the widespread melon-like beads of Greek necklaces, for example from Eretria from the end of the 6th century BC, but especially a Cypriot necklace from the first half of the 5th century BC (Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 120, Abb. 68-9; 139, Abb. 88). However, these beads were of normal size while those such as that from Golemani measure 2-3 cm in diameter and had been used as the central element in necklaces, such as the necklace from the rich Illyrian princely grave from Atenica dated to the second half of the 6th century BC (Djukni/Jovanovi 1966, 8, 13, Pl. IX, 8; Pl. XV, 16a-b). The style of these beads is considered to have been inspired by Greek examples, while the technique belongs to local tradition. In the Atenica grave the bead is the central element of a necklace of cylindrical fluted elements, like those in the find from Dolishte.

Another rich set of gold jewellery (fibula, bracelet, fragments of pectoral, necklace, etc.) has been found in a tumulus grave close to Dolishte. It is unpublished. Only the gold fibula has been commented upon (Georgieva 1993, 18, cat. No. 24). It has a hollow bow, made of two convex lamellae, and a trapezoid-like plate with an arch-shaped edge, ending with a conical ball (Fig. III, 6). The fibula has prototypes in both north-western Thrace and the neighbouring lands of the Balkan Peninsula (Gergova 1987, 33-4, Taf. 7). The spread of precious metal fibulae through the northern Balkans dates to the end of the 6th-beginning of the 5th century BC, and such is the date of this fibula, too. Unlike the massive bow, typical for this group of fibulae, the fibula from Koprivets has a hollow bow, in which it resembles Italic-type fibulae (Georgieva 1993, 18, cat. No. 14 with references). Another item from this complex – an open gold bracelet with two ends shaped as animal heads – is illustrated in a catalogue (Lazarov n.d., No. 4). The bracelet belongs to an Archaic and Classical type, well known in both Near Eastern and Greek jewellery (Higgins 1961, 129). The bracelets from Dolishte (Fig. II, 7), as well as those from the Kukova tumulus near Duvanlii, are examples of local styles which exhibit Balkan cultural features rather than direct relations with either Near Eastern or Greek prototypes. Among the unpublished gold jewellery from Dolishte are fragments of a pectoral with stamped decoration consisting of semi-circles and rosettes, similar to the one from Koprivets, fragments of a necklace from small tubes of gold leaf with an imprinted spiral ornament, imitations of saltaleoni, and some other jewellery similar to items discovered in Atenica and dated to the 6th-beginning of the 5th century BC (Djukni/Jovanovi 1966, 13, Pl. IX, 8)<sup>1</sup>.

The find from Koprivets was discovered in 1988 in an inhumation grave

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs M. Doncheva, curator in the Museum of Archaeology, Varna, for her information on the find.

construction, shaped as a rectangular pit with rough, stone-coated walls and located in the centre of a tumulus. The stones used to surround a wooden tomb in two parts – a narthex and chamber. As well as gold jewellery, the grave goods comprised bronze objects (hydria, swallow vessel, jug), ceramics (hydria and amphora), weapons (iron spearheads, bronze arrowhead), and objects with a cultic character produced from clay, stone or bone. In addition, two male idols have been found (Stanchev 1994, 173). The burial is dated to the end of the 5th-beginning of the 4th century BC (Stanchev 1997, 38). The following objects have been discovered alongside the corpse: earrings (on both sides of the skull), a pendant, a pectoral, and a fibula (in the pelvic area). The hoop earrings terminate in a small pyramid (Fig. I, 12), while the pendant is crescent-shaped and made of a thin plate decorated with granulation (Fig. I, 2). The fibula is arch-shaped with a massive bow and a triangular elongated plate, folded to form a catch-plate, ending with a small sphere (Fig. III, 7). The pectoral is made of gold sheet, with a decoration consisting of hemispheres and rosettes and produced in the repoussé technique. Except for the pectoral, which has exact parallels in the Kukova and Goliamata tumuli (Filov 1934, 84, 105, fig. 131, 3; Pl. II, 3), the jewellery from Koprivets presents types hitherto unknown in Thrace. Crescent-shaped pendants have been introduced to Thrace through Greek jewellery (Stanchev 1997, 36-7), while the fibula has no parallels in Thrace and is one of the widespread variants of the boat-shaped fibula of Italic origin (Higgins 1961, 145-6). The earrings are of a type that had not spread beyond Thrace, although the inverted pyramid is a well-known pattern in Greek jewellery. This model may be considered as originating from Greek items, most probably contemporary to the spiral and omega-shaped pendants for earrings known from finds in Duvanlii (Filov 1934, 44, fig. 49; 133, fig. 155, 1 and 2), but created instead by Greek jewellers in Thrace. Within the Thracian context different variants of these earrings had developed over more than two centuries. At the end of the 4th century BC they became very large (up to 10-12 cm) and were given fine decoration with both granulation and filigree. It is worth mentioning that even in their Early Hellenistic variants this model followed the development of Greek artistic requirements without leaving Thrace (Dimitrova-Tonkova 1992, 139). The spread and continuation of this type of earring for more than two centuries may be explained, once again, by its value as aristocratic insignia and by its having some religious meaning. This presumption is based on the telling evidence (mentioned above) that the Thracian goddess depicted on the silver greave from Adzhigiol (Berciu 1974, 53, fig. 8) was wearing the same type of earrings and a torque of the type found in the Kukova tumulus.

The following conclusions may be drawn from reviewing the jewellery of the Getic aristocracy found in north-eastern Bulgaria. Compared with jewellery from the territory of the Odrysians to the south of the Balkan Mountains, the style of Getic jewellery shows a greater independence of

direct Greek influence, plus a pronounced partiality for locally developed and gold made shapes (the fibula from Dolishte, the bracelets from Golemani). The influences of Scythian cultural traditions (the torque from Golemani) and even those of northern Italy (the fibula from Koprivlen) can be detected, supposedly penetrating along the Danube and through the central Balkans. This is illustrated by the existence of similar types, discovered in the Getic complexes from Golemani and Dolishte as well as in rich Illyrian complexes of the same date. The relation with Odrysian territory is illustrated mainly by pectorals – similar in shape, decoration and importance on both sides of the Balkan Mountains. The influence of Greek jewellery is seen predominantly in the reproduction of Greek models (bracelets with animal heads from Dolishte; bead with geometric decoration from Golemani), decoration in the repoussé technique (pectorals, the fibula from Dolishte) and, especially, in the development of models typical only for Thrace (the earrings from Koprivets), testifying to the skills and creativity of the distinguished Thracian jewellery workshops from the territories discussed.

As the evidence discussed above shows, the styles and types of Thracian jewellery were multifarious. The jewellery of the Odrysian aristocracy was the result chiefly of Greek but also Aegean influences, evidenced both by the introduction of well-pronounced Greek patterns and by the workmanship of traditional Thracian and Macedonian types produced using techniques typical for Greek jewellery. The artistic achievement of the jewellery workshops near the seat of the Odrysian kings consists in the creation of an original set of head jewellery which acted as insignia to connote membership of the Odrysian aristocracy throughout the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods. The designs of Getic jewellery exhibit an even greater eclecticism, resulting from deep cultural contacts with the central Balkan region, the Danube river valley, northern Italy and Scythian territories. The impact of Greek jewellery is less direct and is expressed rather in the adoption of both Greek models and decorative techniques by local jewellery workshops.

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