

A Contribution to the Study of the Old Bulgarian Diadem (the 8th-9th centuries)

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This article is a review of the diadems that were found in the area of the Old Bulgarian culture. From a typological and functional point of view they could be divided into two groups: 1) diadems-bands, consisting of a thick wire, twisted in most of the cases, that were used mainly to affix the veil to the head or the hair; 2) multielement diadems, consisting of a various number of decorated metal appliqué, attached to a strip of soft textile.

Diadems-bands (Fig. 1) are found mainly in necropolises of the common population, in female and children's graves. Having in mind the small number of the finds and the specific semantic meaning of the adornment, we could suppose that they were used in specific ritual practices - e. g. the crowning of the bride. The diadems are found in graves, often accompanied with lots of other adornments, and point to a „funeral-wedding“ rite.

Multielement diadems are found rarely and they usually lack some of the elements - part of the appliqué are missing. It is undoubtedly due to the short life of the material to which the elements were attached and their possible reuse for a different purpose. These diadems usually cover only the front part of the head and that is why the term *prochelnik* (forehead adornment) is used.

Several finds date back from the time of the First Bulgarian kingdom. A diadem (*prochelnik*) dated in the late 10th century - the first one third of the 11th century was found *in situ* in grave 31 of the Christian necropolis at the Eastern Gate of the Outer Town of Pliska (Fig. 2 7) on the skull of a 2-3 years old child. The adornment consists of three round silver gilded appliqué, pressed on a matrix, and four small copper appliqué between them.

Two similar appliqué, probably elements of a diadem (*prochelnik*), are kept in the collection of the Archaeological Institute and Museum in Sofia (обр. 2 4-5). It is hard to define the date of the two abovementioned finds because there is no relevant data about their provenance. Close analogies from the Avar necropolis Igar and the necropolis Bacsujtalu (latter belonging to the Bulgarians-Kutrigurs according to D. Csallany) can provide some information in this regard. Several finds from the Avar necropolis Pusta Toti and from the necropolis Bolshie Tigani are also similar to the second appliqué.

The only find known from the territory of the Republic of Macedonia comes from grave 4 of the Mediaeval necropolis Krstevi, situated near the castle of Prosek (Demir Kapija) (обр. 3 1). The diadem (*prochelnik*) was found *in situ* on the skull of the skeleton. It consists of three rows of thin silver appliqué - rhombs and isosceles triangles and hanging almond-shaped pendants. There is a

rectangular plate shaped as a double swallow-tail in the middle of the adornment. The rhombic and the isosceles triangular appliqué are decorated with a stylized floral design (*Lilium candidum*), shaped like a heart. The appliqué were attached to a soft textile. According to the reconstruction the diadem was ca. 36 cm long and 4 cm wide (7.5 cm including the pendants). Beside the diadem the grave yielded also 5 finger-rings, a pair of earrings, 6 bracelets and a necklace of glass and metal beads. The large amount of adornments as well as the young age of the deceased (20-23 years old) attest that she was probably buried with her wedding dress.

The most luxurious find from the zone of the Old Bulgarian culture is the diadem from the Preslav hoard (Fig. 3 2, 1-2, 5). It consists of five (preserved) arch-shaped appliqué measuring 5.4 x 4.4 cm, made of gold sheets and decorated with colourful enamels. One of the most popular scenes of the Mediaeval art is depicted on the central appliqué - „The Ascension of Alexander the Great to heaven“. The second pair of appliqué, flanking the central one, represent *senmurves* (dogs-birds), and the next two appliqué - images of griffins in profile, to the right. According to the reconstruction, made by T. Totev (Fig. 3 2, 6), the Preslav diadem initially consisted of seven appliqué and was 31 cm long. It is most similar to the diadem from Sahnovka, which is however of a later date.

From a semantic point of view the diadem is an adornment of the highest rank. Prince Boris I Michael is represented on a portrait from the Moscow version of the Homiliary Gospel with a diadem (crown-stemma) shaped like a solid metal band with appliqué in the middle (Fig. 2 1). A young man (probably Simeon) wearing a diadem (crown-stemma) decorated with trefoils and with pendants hanging from the sides, is depicted on a painted sherd, found at the Round (Golden) church in Veliki Preslav (Fig. 2 3). Tsar (king) Simeon is depicted again wearing a diadem on a gold intaglio seal (Fig. 2 2).

The current review of the finds from Mediaeval Bulgaria leads to the conclusion that at the highest social level the diadem served as the ruler's insignia, the one used by the Bulgarian rulers after their conversion to Christianity; at a lower level the adornment was worn mainly by young women and girls and was an important element of the female wedding attire.