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The Archaeological Treasures of Kosovo and Metohija
The Early Middle Ages*



- 1 . Banjica, 2. Prčevo, 3. Rogovo, 4. Djonaj, 5. Vrbnica, 6. Studenčane, 7. Široko, 8.
Matičane, 9. Ulpijana, 10. Gračanica, 11. Badovac, 12. Koretin, 13. Velekince, 14.
Vlaštica, 15. Čečan, 16. Sočanica, ⊗ Necropolis

* *Археолошко благо Косова и Метохије од неолита до раног средњег века*, Српска академија наука и уметности / Музеј у Приштини, Београд, 1998; p. 372-391.

The relatively long epoch of the early Middle Ages in Kosovo and Metohija can be divided into two phases. The first one, covering the 7th and 8th centuries, witnessed the settlement of the still pagan Slavs, who created a new ethnic, cultural and economic situation in the region (ISN I, 109).

During the second phase - 9th to 12th centuries - the Slavs established their permanent dwellings thereby creating conditions for the development of the economy and, by the same token, of their material and spiritual culture. This second phase was also characterized by the complete Christianization of the Slavs. The beginning of the first phase cannot be definitely established, but for the second phase it can be affirmed that it was limited by very significant events. The first such event was the extension of the Byzantine system of themes to the Balkan regions which, in turn, led to a strong Byzantine cultural influence (Ostrogorski 1969, 242; 1970, 12, 25). The second event was the integration of Kosovo and Metohija into the Serbian state at the time of Stefan Nemanja (ISN I, 258).

In the course of the 6th century, both large and small groups of the Slavs crossed the Danube and roamed throughout the Balkans, some parts of which had been ravaged by earlier migrations and conquests. The purpose of these incursions was plunder, after which they usually returned to where they had come from. By the end of the 6th century, the large-scale Avar-Slavic invasion of Byzantium began. This was a genuine military invasion accompanied by vast devastation of towns and villages. The measures Byzantium undertook to halt such attacks were insufficient. It has been recorded that in the 580's the Slavs plundered the whole of Hellada, the environs of Thessalonica and Thrace, and that they remained there for three whole years without fear as though it was their own country. It was only in 583-584 that they withdrew across the Danube. In 586 the Slavs attacked Thessaloniki and in 588 they occupied Thessaly, Hellada, Old Epirus, Attica and Euboea. Then they crossed over into the Peloponnese and settled there (ISN I, 116).

In the years 600-602, the Byzantines abandoned the Danubian limes and thus opened the way to the Slavs.

According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the Croats and the Serbs were the last newcomers to the Balkans, where they settled in the territories they were given by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. This colonization differed markedly from the previous ones. The earlier settlements were either quiet, tolerated infiltrations or violent conquests of the Byzantine territories. The colonization as described by Porphyrogenitus took place by agreement and with the approval of the Byzantine emperor. At that time, that is, the early 7th century, this was the usual Byzantine practice as the result of past experiences. Confronted with constant pressures along all its frontiers, beyond which frequently lay devastated territories, Byzantium gave some of the barbarian tribes the status of foederati with the right to settle on specific lands. Together with the land, the foederati were given allowances and in return they defended the borders of the Empire from the assaults of other barbarians. Sometimes they also extended military assistance in the campaigns that Byzantium undertook. According to Porphyrogenitus the emperor Heraclius gave the Serbs some land in the Thessaloniki area. As this type of colonization was to be an on-going activity the territory was named Serbia, but the Serbs did not remain there for long (ISN I, 124). They set out to return to where they had come from. But once they had crossed the Danube, they changed their minds and looked for new land in which to settle down.

The Slavs spread over the whole of the Balkan Peninsula. Their tribal organization and, even more, the geographical environment helped them establish a large number of independent territories. That induced Byzantines to call the territory inhabited by the Slavs between Zadar, Thessalonica and the Rhodope Mountains by the general name of Sclavinia. From the outset, the inhabitants of Sclavinia (Jireček 1952, 63-64; Vizantijski izvori I, 177 and 222) were under the ostensible or factual supreme authority of Byzantium. Only later, larger states were formed, but throughout the Middle Ages no single Slavic state encompassed all the Balkan Slavs.

From the mid-7th century, the Balkans became fully colonized by the Slavs. Regardless of their status, that is, whether their state entities were fully or partially independent, or they lived within the frame of the Byzantine Empire, the Slavs were exposed to the powerful influence of Byzantium. Its political, social and economic norms thus exerted a vital influence on the development of such norms in the Slavic communities. The impact of Byzantium was enhanced by the fact that the Slavs, by inhabiting its territories, found themselves in immediate contact with the natives. That these contacts were significant is also testified to by numerous linguistic elements, by the continuity of toponyms and, certainly, by the ease with which Christianization was effected.

The earliest systematic investigations of the Slavic material culture in Kosovo and Metohija began in 1975 by the project entitled "Kosovo in the Early Middle Ages".¹ Nearly one third of the territory was very carefully surveyed, but with few reliable results. In places where early mediaeval settlements could have been situated, only archaeological material dating from much later periods was found. It was obvious that small, temporary settlements could not leave important traces that could readily be visible. On the other hand, life in most of these settlements might have carried on in the course of subsequent centuries so that continuous habitation and building activities in the same place might have destroyed the material remnants of previous times.

Natural communications and favourable living conditions in the Kosovo and Metohija region contributed to making this territory attractive for settlement. It may thus be assumed that there were several "sclavinias", or that, in any case, settlements were numerous. This is largely confirmed by somewhat later written sources - charters dating from the Nemanjic period, that is, from the 12th to 14th centuries.² From them we learn that the entire territory of present-day Kosovo and Metohija was densely populated mainly by the Slavs. A large number of the Slavic settlements and their even distribution are proof of their long existence there, which means that their integration into the Nemanjić state did not imply the change in the ethnic composition but only in the ruling power.

The early Middle Ages are characterized by the construction of numerous small churches (ISN I, 230).³ In the surveyed territory, the traces of a considerable number of churches of different size have been discovered. But just like the settlements, they

¹ The directors of the excavations were Mirjana Ljubinković, PhD and Jovan Glišić, PhD.

² As an example, cf. the data offered by the Chrisobull of Dečani, published by P. Ivić and M. Grković in 1976.

³ T. Marasović (1986, 36) mentions the same example as the one cited here, concerning a great number of churches on a relatively small territory.

date from later times. Only after more detailed investigations would it be possible to ascertain whether they are older than is assumed at present.

In contrast to surveying, archaeological excavations have up to now yielded considerably more results.⁴ There now are information about some fifteen sites with the early mediaeval finds. In all these cases we are dealing with necropolises. Five of them are dug into prehistoric layers, five are on the sites dating from the late Classical period and the rest are in places with no traces of earlier cultures. Research has been carried out at eleven sites, while only surface finds were registered in the remaining ones so that data about them are less reliable. In none of the cases was it possible to ascertain the location of the settlement to which the graves could have belonged. From the number of graves, however, and the type of finds, it was possible to define them as small rural settlements.

Despite a comparatively small number of such sites, they are clearly grouped along two of many communications used by the Slavs during their migrations. For example, in the Beli Drim valley there are five sites (Brnjica, Prčevo, Rogovo, Djonaj and Vrbica), while another two (Studenčane and Široko) are situated along the direction that gravitates to this line of communication. The second group of seven sites (Matičane, Ulpiana, Gračanica, Badovac, Koretin, Velekince and Vlaštica) is concentrated along the direction leading from Kosovo to the Kosovo part of the Morava valley. The position of another two sites, more towards the north (Čečan and Sočanica), can be designated as the divide of the two above-mentioned directions. That the Slavs inhabited this area during the first phase of their arrival in the Balkan Peninsula, from the 7th to 8th centuries, is indicated only by the sporadic finds from Rogovo near Djakovica and Čečan near Vučitrn. From an isolated grave at Rogovo came bronze lunated pendants dated to mid-8th to mid-9th centuries. The grave itself, however, is oriented north to south, which indicates its pagan origin (M. Garašanin 1966, 40-41). From Čečan there is a three-loop earring with pendants of spirally twisted wire, dating from the 8th to 9th centuries. There are no data as to how the owner of the earring was buried, but all the jewelry from this site dates from the 10th to 11th centuries, by which time the deceased must have been Christians (V. Jovanović 1976, 128-145). To classify these necropolises according to the period they belong to is impossible because they all date from approximately the same time - starting from the 10th century and lasting to the 11th, 12th or 13th centuries.

The presently available archaeological material comes entirely from graves. The sites where it was found and the fact it consists almost entirely of jewelry limit the possibility of broader interpretations.

The most frequent type of jewelry are rings.

They are made of iron, copper, bronze or silver. The usual processes of forging and casting were used. The rings are decorated by the techniques of engraving, filigree or granulation, while the final product is sometimes enhanced by tinning, gilding or silvering. There are several types of rings, each of them having several variants. Most of them have pronounced shoulders and a conical or pyramidal head. They are cast in bronze and have simple, mostly linear decoration on shoulders or heads. These are to be found at nearly all the sites in Kosovo and Metohija, but are widespread in Macedonia as well. They can also be found in the northeastern parts of Serbia. One group of such rings attracts special attention by its form and workmanship. It consists

⁴ The data on sites are given in the Catalogue.

of rather elegant silver rings, richly enhanced with filigree work and granulation. The basic form in this group has a filigree link-band with a large conical or semi-spherical head decorated with filigree and granulation. Analogous rings have been found in other necropolises in Serbia and in Macedonia, and some examples even further away - in Croatia, Romania, Ukraine and Bohemia - Moravia (Jovanović 1988, 24). It may be assumed that such elegant rings came from Byzantine goldsmith workshops, either as models or as end-products.

Bracelets are less attractive kind of jewelry than earrings or rings.

They are made of glass paste or metal. The simplest types are small, oval glass rods which were bent and linked. They are always made in a monochrome paste - black, dark blue or dark green, and occasionally decorated with a white line all round the bracelet. Less frequent are the examples with discreet geometrical or floral motifs. The bracelets made of glass paste, not very frequent in the Slavic necropolises, are found mostly in the territory of Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria. The metal bracelets, either forged or cast and then engraved, are made of iron, copper or bronze, very rarely of silver. Several basic types exist with a number of variants. Bracelets made of four-fold wires with loops at the open ends have been found at a number of sites. Band-like bracelets clasped with hinges are relatively rare and have been found only at Prčevo and Matičane. Bracelets of cast bronze decorated with engravings, always open at the ends which are flat, pointed or in the form of stylized snake's head, have been found at a number of sites. Metal bracelets are as widespread as the ones made of paste (Jovanović 1988, 25).

Earrings are the finest kind of jewelry and are found in various shapes. They are made of forged or cast metal, iron, bronze or silver, sometimes by stamping. They are additionally decorated in the same techniques as the rings. Their simplest shape is that of a circlet with open ends, straight or pointed. Examples with S-finitials are very rare. Somewhat more opulent are the circlets decorated with granulation or those having a bead or a biconical "strawberry". Although rare, notched earrings have also been found. The most festive and certainly the most beautiful earrings are those with four hollow biconical "strawberries" (Jovanović 1988, 22, 24; Ljubinković 1986, 73). One of the variants of this type has a lunated motif instead of a central "strawberry". These earrings, made of silver, are enhanced with filigree work and granulation. Most of them are found at Matičane, but also at Badovac, Prčevo and Čečan. There are analogous earrings of all these shapes in a number of sites throughout Serbia as well as in all the surrounding territories.

Necklaces consisting of several hundred glass beads constitute a unique find and have been discovered only at Matičane. The beads, as many as 1,500, are cylindrically, spherically or egg-shaped. They are mostly white, but there are also yellow, green or blue ones. Besides glass beads, there also appear metal heart-shaped, pear-shaped, round or spindle-like pendent forms. Some of these are silver or even gilded. Of special interest are double heart-shaped pendants, analogies of which have been found in the jewelry of Old Hungarian origin (Jovanović 1988, 24).

Appliques made of sheet silver have also been discovered in necropolises with rich hoards. These were cast or stamped on a matrix and sometimes gilded. Rectangular or triangular appliques are in fact parts of diadems worn as forehead ornaments but which could also have been sewn on to clothing. This type of ornamentation is also of Old Hungarian origin.

The workmanship, the kind of material used and the shapes of the jewelry indicate that these articles were produced by domestic craftsmen. They worked according to traditional models brought from their homeland. But they also adopted some forms from the indigenous Byzantine population.

It is possible that some of these articles were made by travelling Byzantine craftsmen or in their workshops in the remaining Byzantine enclaves. The bulk of material discovered which is of finer workmanship originated in the 10th to 11th centuries. Before or after that period, the jewelry was usually made of cheaper material, the workmanship was much simpler as were the forms themselves. Much later, in the 14th century, when the domestic goldsmiths reached their peak, expensive jewelry made its appearance once again, but now such items are found in the graves of the well-to-do urban population.⁵

In studying the necropolises dating from the early Middle Ages in Kosovo and Metohija we find it important to stress that in the graves only personal jewels of the deceased were found and parts of their dress, such as buttons or clasps for belts, occasionally pocket knives, but there are no additional grave goods. Even in comparatively rich graves there are no coins, pottery or weapons. The question therefore may be posed: is this not due to the nature of the barter economy which would otherwise be a normal phenomenon in the territories where there were no towns or large settlements with developed crafts and trade. Coins in the graves are, however, very rare even in the later times when we know that there were cities and market centers, well-developed crafts and trade and even mints where good-quality silver coins were produced. A valid reason for this lack of coins and other grave offerings may be attributed to Christianity which recognizes life after death but whose conceptions exclude the notion of money and other gifts for the deceased.

The burial customs indicate that Christianization had been completed by that time. In all the necropolises the dead were oriented west to east with their heads placed in the west. The deceased were buried directly into the ground and very rarely were coffins or planks used. In some necropolises the dead were put into a kind of sarcophagus made of thin, unhewn stone slabs.⁶ There are examples of such burials in Macedonia as well. This manner of burying the dead lasted a long time in Kosovo and Metohija, in fact, up to the 16th century. No special marks have been found over the graves.

The inventory of finds dating from the early Middle Ages in Kosovo and Metohija is on the whole known over a broad area from Bohemia, Hungary, Croatia and Romania in the north to Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia in the south. Nonetheless, there are items which have not been found north of the Sava and Danube Rivers, such as bracelets made of glass paste or those of four-fold wires with loop finials. Likewise, there are no rings with pronounced heads or shoulders, while necklaces consisting of hundreds of glass beads are also rare. Such finds are characteristic of a distinct Slavic culture formed on the soil of Serbia and Macedonia, as well as in a part of Bulgaria over a period from the 10th to the 12th centuries.

⁵ The best example is yielded by the finds from Novo Brdo.

⁶ Djonaj, Vrbnica and later Zaskok (15th-16th c).

Catalogue*

Matičane Necropolis (10th-11th century)



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century

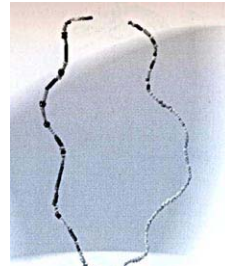


Ring
10th-11th century

* *Археолошко благо Косова и Метохије од неолита до раног средњег века, Каталог, Српска академија наука и уметности / Музеј у Приштини, Београд, 1998; p. 679-728.*



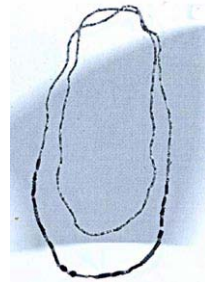
Ring
10th-11th century



Glass paste beads
10th-11th century



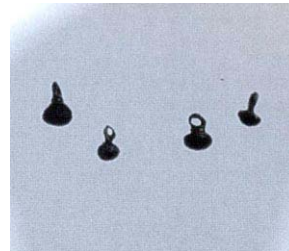
Earrings (pair)
10th-11th century



Glass paste beads
10th-11th century



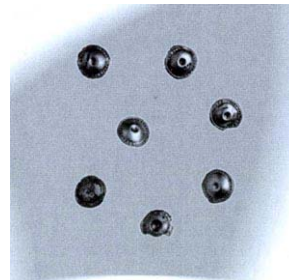
Earrings (pair)
10th-11th century



Strawberry-shaped ornament /4 pieces/
10th-11th century



Earrings (pair)
10th-11th century



Appliqué /7 pieces/
10th-11th century



Bracelets
10th-11th century



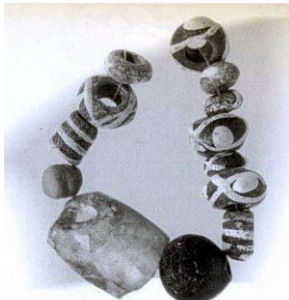
Glass paste beads
10th-11th century



Glass paste beads
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Glass paste beads
10th-11th century



Bracelet
10th-11th century



Pendants
10th-11th century



Bracelet
10th-11th century



Bracelet
10th-11th century

**Badovačko polje, Badovac
Necropolis (10th-11th century)**



Ring
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-11th century



Earring
10th-11th century

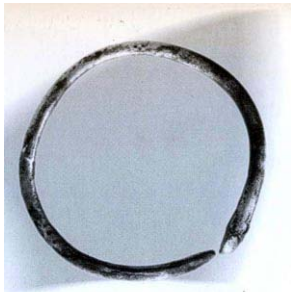


Ring
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century

**Vrbnica
Necropolis (10th– 13th century)**



Ring
10th-13th century



Earring
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century



Bracelet
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century



Earring
10th-13th century



Earring
10th-13th century



Earrings /pair/
10th-11th century



Ring
10th-13th century



Earrings /pair/
10th-11th century



Earring
10th-13th century



Earring
10th-11th century

**Čečan near Vučitrn
Early mediaeval settlement**



Ring
10th-11th century

**Široko near Suva Reka
Necropolis (10th– 11th century)**



Ring
10th-11th century

**Prčevo – Boka near Klina
Necropolis (10th– 13th century)**



Ring
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century



Bracelet
10th-13th century



Bracelet
10th-13th century



Bracelet
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century 9



Earrings /pair/
10th-13th century



Appliqué
10th-13th century

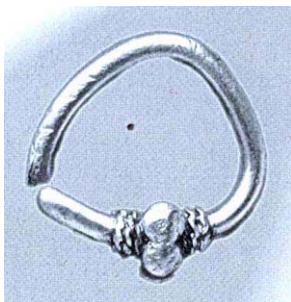
**Vlaštica
Necropolis (11th– 12th century)**



Ring
11th-12th century



Ring
11th-12th century



Earring
11th-12th century



Bracelet
11th-12th century



Bracelet
11th-12th century



Earrings /pair/
11th-12th century

**Djonaj near Prizren
Necropolis (10th– 13 century)**



Ring
10th-13th century



Ring
10th-13th century



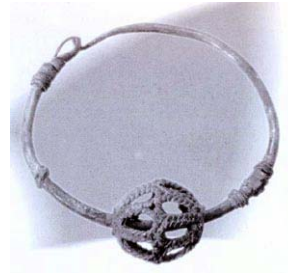
Ring
10th-13th century



Earring
10th-13th century



Earrings /pair/
10th-13th century



Earring
11th-15th century



Bracelet
10th-13th century



Bracelets
11th-15th century



Bracelet
10th-13th century



Bracelet
11th-15th century

Velekince Necropolis (11th-15th century)



Bracelet
11th-15th century



Ring
11th-15th century



Ring
11th-15th century

Abbreviations	References
ISN I	Istorija srpskog naroda I
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