

A study on the Scythian Bracelets

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Abstract

Scythians kept herds of horses, cattle, and sheep, lived in tent-covered wagons, and fought with bows and arrows on horseback. They developed a rich culture characterized by opulent tombs, fine metalwork, and a brilliant art style. The excavations of royal burials have provided the most complete record of the jewelry of the Scythians.

Typical art objects were in the form of stags or other animals, hammered or stamped out of gold and often inlaid with colored stones or glass.

The Bracelet consisted of two of distinct technique : One made from heavy forged gold bars, terminated with more delicate spiraled finals. Another technique used beaten gold foil, perhaps as thick as a piece of paper with fabulous designs repousse and chased (impressed in relief into the gold with small hammers and chisels) into the metal. They also used stones and clay dies to form gold foil into people repeated also motifs for use in torques and belts.

The Scythian Bracelet were divided into 4 styles according to the shape, Bracelets with ends shaped like beasts style, Spiral style, Layers style, Crown with openwork style.

Scythian Bracelet in the Black Sea region had completely degenerated, stifled by motifs and shapes of Greek origin, retaining its representational realism and its full emotional vitality

Key words: Scythian bracelet, Ends Shaped like beasts style, Spiral style, Layers style, Crown with openwork style

I. Introduction

Personal adornment worn since ancient times by people of all cultures, as ornaments, as badges of social or official status, and as emblems of religion or other belief. In its widest sense the term jewellery encompasses objects made of many kinds of organic and inorganic materials such as hair, feathers, leather, scales, bones, shells, wood, ceramics, metals, and minerals. More narrowly, and as used here, the term refers to mounted precious or semiprecious

stones and to objects made of valuable or attractive metals such as gold, silver, platinum, copper, and brass. Much present knowledge of jewellery is derived from the preservation of personal objects in tombs. Information about the jewellery of cultures in which objects of value were not buried with the dead comes from portraits in surviving painting and sculpture.

Excavations of royal burial sites have provided the most complete record of the jewellery of the Scythians, a nomadic people of the Eurasian steppes, who absorbed Middle Eastern and

Classical Greek influences. Typical objects of the 1st millennium BC were bracelets in the form of stags or other animals, hammered or stamped out of gold and often inlaid with coloured stones or glass. Bracelets, and personal jewellery of the 5th and 4th centuries BC were often made by Greek artisans and combined richness of Greek composition and technique with Scythian motifs.

Scythians was the name used by ancient Greek writers to describe the various nomadic tribes of southeastern Europe and Asia who dwelled north of the Black Sea, between the Carpathian Mountains and the Don River, in what is now Moldova, Ukraine, and western Russia. The name was also more generally applied to all the nomad tribes who inhabited the steppes eastward from what is now Hungary to the mountains of Turkistan. Scythians kept herds of horses, cattle, and sheep, lived in tent-covered wagons, and fought with bows and arrows on horseback. They developed a rich culture characterized by opulent tombs, fine metalwork, and a brilliant art style.

The purpose of this study is reviewing and researching the symbolic meaning and classifying the types of the art style of the Bracelets from the burial mounds of Scythian chiefs.

The method of this research is through the antique records and tombs bequests hereby deals with the characteristics of Scythian Bracelets was divided into the types according to the shapes.

II. Buried Treasures of Scythian Bracelets

The striking and characteristic tokens of Scythian material culture of the end of the 7th-3rd

centuries B. C. -weapons, horse equipment, the so-called animal style of art -represent the particular Scythian variant of the material culture of nomads in the huge area the Central-Eurasian steppes. As time passed forms of things changed, the result both of internal development and of influence from the outside. In the early period of Scythian history the most noticeable influence is that of Western Asia. But already in the 6th-5th centuries B.C. and, particularly, in the 4th century B.C. Greek influence was very strong, enriching Scythian culture as a whole, although primarily the culture of the Scythian aristocracy.¹⁾

The early Scythian art style is an extension of Mesopotamian art, a fact which cannot be denied any longer. The illustration of early Scythians also looks like a branchycephalic Anatolian race, which from early times has also been slowly spreading into Eastern Europe (Koros Culture). They absorbed some northern dolichocephalic peoples also but these represented less than 10% of their population. Today in Europe the territory of Old Hungary is the center of branchycephalic types. This type is growing throughout Europe and dolichocephalic types last remnants are in England and the northern Germanic areas. Looking at early Scythian representation one may as well be looking at the representation of a Hurrian or Assyrian, minus the curly hair.²⁾

More than a decade ago, in 1947, a treasure of gold, silver and ivory was found by a shepherd boy on the side of a mountain above the small and isolated village of Ziwiye. Ziwiye lies about 25 miles east of Saqqiz, the second largest town of Kurdistan. Destruction of the citadel of Ziwiye by a group of such marauding Scythian warriors, who lacked the discipline and organization of the

Assyrian army to transport back to the homeland a treasure found in the fortress, would fit quite well the limited evidence at our disposition. The last gold object from Ziwiyé to be discussed here is the bracelet with lions in the collection of A.B. Martin. Two pairs of small lions, probably meant to represent young animals, face each other in the middle of the bracelet, while the ends are formed of the heads of adult lions, one of which could be removed to facilitate putting the bracelet on. The gable-shaped foreheads and semi-globular bumps on the ears of the little lions resemble those of Neo-Hittite stone sculptures in such south-eastern Anatolian or northern Syrian. The head from Karmir Blue, however, has none of the stylization of folds into slanting planes, forming sharp arises, which characterize the animals and even determine the shape of the hoop of the golden bracelet.³⁾

The most magnificent pieces naturally come from the royal tombs, where the skeletons were invariably bedecked with golden diadems, head-dresses, necklaces, belts, bracelets, ear and finger-rings, torques, pendants, amulets, beads, buttons, buckles and paste locket but even the less important burials provide an abundance of jewellery and precious materials.⁴⁾

Fertile soils and generous nature along the Black Sea coast and the Dnieper riverside attracted Hellenes as long ago as in the Iron Age. At the same time, Scythians, who had come from Asia and replaced Cimmerians, appeared on the territory, which lay farther to the North. They resided here for a long time and appeared to be suitable trade partners and rich customers for the Greeks. Many masterpieces created by Greek and Scythian goldsmiths are widely known. For body, armament and harness ornaments, they employed all of metalwork techniques common at

the time. These consisted of casting, coinage, engraving, gilding, inlaying, stone setting and others. The images of fantastic animals (griffins, sphinxes, winged animals, and often beasts with human heads) that were depicted in their works, came to be known as the peculiar 'Scythian animal' style. Techniques, which had once been rather primitive, improved considerably during the prosperous times of the Scythian State. Stylization of images developed into a realistic method of interpreting complicated zoomorphic compositions.⁵⁾

The Scythians had a veritable passion for adornment, delighting in decorating themselves no less than their horses and belongings. Their love of jewellery expressed at every turn. The most magnificent pieces naturally come from the royal tombs, where the skeletons were invariably bedecked with golden diadems, head-dresses, necklaces, belts, bracelets, earrings and fingerings, torques, pendants, amulets, beads, buttons, buckles and paste locket but even the less important burials provide an abundance of jewellery and precious materials.

If we disregard the elements and motifs in Scythian art that are obvious borrowings from West Asia and in part from Greek art, adapted to scythian tradition, we shall still see a huge number of other elements peculiar to that people alone, and the product of their own creativity. Despite differences in local features, the existence of which was natural in view of the extensive area inhabited by the Scythians, the common features were obviously predominant. These stemmed from the fact that their art was adapted to the ornamentation of various articles of everyday use, and was stylized in a way all its own.⁶⁾

The most important and impressive of the

Scythian burials are the royal tombs of southern Russia, and of them all Chertomlyk is perhaps the richest, both in the variety and artistic quality of the objects found in it and also in the well high fabulous intrinsic value of the gold work.

In the chamber a dead man lay on his back, facing east. The setting in which he took leave of this world was of extraordinary opulence. A fine bronze torque encircled his neck, a gold earring had been placed in one ear and there were gold rings on all his fingers. In the third small chamber lay two bodies, each adorned with a gold torque, gold bracelets and rings.⁷⁾

Rich Scythian-Sarmatian burial has been discovered near the town of Ipatovo, in southern Russia, containing gold necklets and spiral bracelets, an akinakes (dagger) in a gold-covered scabbard, ceramic vessels, and other offerings. The burial probably dates from the early third century B. C., when the Scythian culture that had occupied the southern Russian steppes was giving way to the Sarmatian culture. Whether the Scythians were assimilated into the Sarmatians, who were moving into the area, or the Sarmatians replaced the Scythians but borrowed heavily from their culture, is not clear, and a burial of this date could help clarify the nature of the transition.

Discovered during a survey in advance of the construction of an oil pipeline, the burial was excavated by a rescue mission from the regional ministry of culture. The occupant, an adult female, lay on her back with her head to the west and her left leg flexed. Six gold necklets, each weighing about nine ounces, have green glass or stone Sarmatian-style inlay and terminals in the shape of fantastic, wolf-like animals. Three bracelets are also carved with images of animals, possibly including a griffin head, in the Scythian

animal style. Close to her right hand were the remains of a wooden cup covered with sheet gold embossed with animals. Other artifacts included a belt decorated with small bone plates engraved with geometric patterns, a gold buckle, a gold-covered wooden cosmetics container (with some surviving organic matter inside), a Greek red-figure cup, a local ceramic vessel, and a Bosphoran amphora (from Kerch, ancient Pantikapaion, on the strait between the Black Sea and the sea of Azov). A large bronze or silver hair pin with a gold head was found in her left eye socket; this may indicate that she was sacrificed, or it may simply have fallen into her eye as the flesh decayed after burial.⁸⁾

Richest grave of the Sarmatian times in the Crimea was discovered under direction of the Soviet archaeologist Askold Schepinsky in May 1974. The barrow was named after the locality Nogaychik, which situated nearby the place of excavations.

In the sarcophagus was buried a woman in age of 35-40, 1 m 70 cm in height. Her head was covered by gold appliques-perhaps it was a head-dress. A pair of earrings laid nearby. A torque was placed on the neck. The endings of the torque with images of animals were at the back and facing the earth. Another necklace and a brooch-pin were placed on top of it. The chest of the dead was ornamented with beads of stone, glass and gold. Two dresses of the dead were made of silk of different quality. Both hands of the dead with massive armlets were inserted into silver cups. The feet were ornamented with bracelets of gold wire and tiny beads of black glass and jet.⁹⁾

These finds show that the Scythian way of art was reproduced in full detail in at least one other region of the steppe and must have been well

known to less fortunate hordes.¹⁰⁾

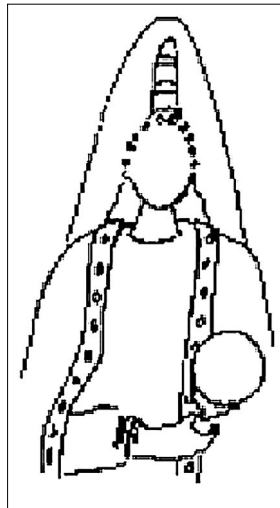
The Scythian antiquities of the archaic period usually depict only the avian head of monster with a beast's ears and a long projecting tongue. Naturally, the Scythians invested this borrowed Oriental motif with their own meaning. The dreadful appearance of the monster carried the idea of the indomitable power and unconquerable spirit that permeated the nomad's entire perception of the world.¹¹⁾

<fig. 1> is the Sakan king, Skuka that is the figure wearing trousers and peculiar conical hat and Scythian Bracelets, led bound before the Persian King Darius. From a rock carving at Behistun 521 B.C.

<fig. 2> is reconstructed figure wearing caftan and Scythian Bracelets from artifacts from a grave at Karagodevashkh.



<fig. 1> Sakan king
carving at
Behistun
521 B. C.



<fig. 2> reconstructed figure
from a grave at
Karagodevashkh

III. Scythian Bracelets Style

The excavations of royal burial sites have provided the most complete record of the Bracelet of the Scythians. Typical art objects were in the form of stags or other animals, hammered or stamped out of gold and often inlaid with colored stones or glass. Through their trading contacts with settled peoples to the south, they obtained a great deal of gold that was elaborately worked into small and large ornaments and personal objects such as drinking bowls and daggers. This gold bracelet is one such example that attests to the Scythians mastery of metalworking. The sloping curve of the bracelet ends with two finely crafted leopard heads. Snarling and growling, mouth agape and ferocious fangs exposed, these cats are clearly not pets but wild beasts. The heads are joined to the bracelet by bands decorated by a series of leaves. The sheer elegance of this gold bracelet would most likely have been reserved specifically for a king or noble.

The jewellery consisted of a of two distinct styles: Bracelets, earrings and torques made from heavy forged gold bars, terminated with more delicate spiraled finials. The other technique used beaten gold foil, perhaps as thick as a piece of paper with fabulous designs repousse and chased (impressed in relief into the gold with small hammers and chisels) into the metal. They also used stones and clay dies to form gold foil into people repeated also motifs for use in torques and belts. The delicacy and vitality in the designs by these ancient goldsmiths is amazing.¹²⁾

The Bracelet were divided into 4 styles according to the shape, Bracelets with Ends shaped like beasts style, Spiral style, Layers

style, Crown with openwork style.

1. Ends shaped like beasts style

<fig. 3> are pair of Bracelets with terminals in the shape of rams. These Bracelets were formed Gold and bronze; rams' figures consist of two molded and then soldered parts; cast, engraved, filigreed. 6.9x6.5 cm. Bosporan Kingdom. 330-300s BC. Bolshaya (Large) Bliznitsa Barrow.

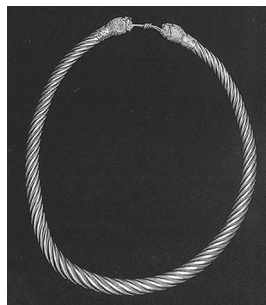
<fig. 4> are pair of Bracelets with ends shaped like the head of a Long-maned Lioness. These Bracelets were formed Gold and bronze;



<fig. 3> Ends Shaped like beasts style
330-300s BC. Bliznitsa Barrow



<fig. 4> Ends Shaped like beasts style
330-300s BC.
Bliznitsa Barrow



<fig. 5> Ends Shaped like beasts style
4th century B. C.
Found at the Solokha kurgan near Zaporozhye

lionesses' figures consist of two molded and then soldered parts; cast, engraved, filigreed. 7.3x6.5 cm. Bosporan Kingdom. 330-300s BC. Bolshaya (Large) Bliznitsa Barrow,

<fig. 5> are Bracelets with lion's head finals. Gold and enamel, 4th century B. C.

Found at the Solokha kurgan near Zaporozhye. From the collection of the Hermitage.

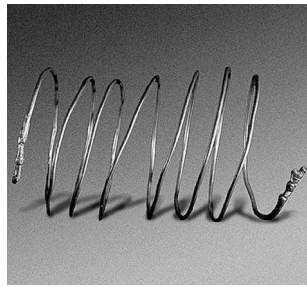
<fig. 6> are pair of Bracelets with Ends shaped like Lion's Heads. Gold and silver; H. 7.8 cm. Bosporan Kingdom, Panticapaeum. Early 4th century BC. Stone Sepulchre, discovered in 1854, Kerch Crimea.

The rest 1 are finials of these silver bracelets are in the form of lion's heads done in electrum. Their worn and fragile condition enables us to see clearly how they were constructed: the head each made from two pieces of sheet metal, and the necks from a strip of electrum mounted with pieces of twisted wire laid side by side. Normally this is meant to create the illusion of a cable pattern. but in two cases here the wires have been laid rather carelessly and can be seen for what they are, The lion's heads closely resemble those on the finals of a good torc found in a Scythian tomb at Kakhovka in 1969. The penannular form of these bracelets recalls that of Achaemenid bracelets, and they may well have been made under Persian influence.¹³⁾

The rest 2 are bracelets themselves are of bronze, but are encased in gold. The terminals are in the form of rams' heads, each made as usual in two pieces joined down the centre, There are collars decorated with spirals of gold wire which somehow recall the anthemion bands that are to be found in Ionic architectural decoration (e. g. on the columns and upper cells walls of the Erechtheum at Athens). Like the lion's head bracelet<fig. 5> their form is akin to that of



<fig 6> Ends Shaped like beasts style
Early 4th century BC
Bosporan Kingdom,
Panticapaeum



<fig. 7> Spiral style
1st century BC. Volga,
Saratov Region



<fig. 8> Spiral style
4th - 3rd century
BC Karasuk Burial
Mound II, Barrow 1



<fig. 9> Spiral style
Late 4th century BC.
Karagodeuashkh
Barrow

Achaemenid bracelets. It is unfortunate that we do not know to which grave group these bracelets belong, but if we had to make a guess, it is most likely that they came from Grave IV which contained the rich necklace and the hair ornaments with their similar collar ornaments.¹⁴⁾

Rest 3 is gold bracelet that is one such example that attests to the Scythians mastery of metalworking. The sloping curve of the bracelet ends with two finely crafted leopard heads. Snarling and growling, mouth agape and ferocious fangs exposed, these cats are clearly not pets but wild beasts. The heads are joined to the bracelet by bands decorated by a series of leaves. The sheer elegance of this gold bracelet would most likely have been reserved specifically for a king or noble. Russia, Date: 500 BC to 400 BC. Dimensions: 3.125" (7.9cm) high.

2. Spiral style

<fig. 7> is seven spiral gold Bracelet with ends shaped like beasts style. This Bracelet is cast, forged, soldered. 27.3 cm. Sarmatian Culture. 1st century BC. Lower reaches of the Volga, Saratov

Region, the Village of Salomatina.

<fig. 8> is many spiral gold Bracelet with beasts of prey tearing at a stag. There are Bracelets made of long golden wires twisted into rings, with cast chased and soldered. 22 cm. Sakae Culture. 4th - 3rd century BC . Karasuk Burial Mound II, Barrow 1, Grave 3

<fig. 9> is gold stamped Bracelet shaped like a spiral ribbon that with figures terminating in Hippocampi.¹⁵⁾ L. 7 cm. Meotian Culture. Late 4th century BC. Karagodeuashkh Barrow, Kuban, Krasnodar Region (formerly Giaghinsky District of Kuban Region).

3. Layers style

<fig. 10> is gold Twin Bracelets with striding fantastic animals. This Bracelet is corals, turquoise; cast and soldered. Diam. 7.5 cm. Sarmato-Alanian Culture. 1st century. Khokhlach Barrow, Lower reaches of the Don, Rostov Region, City of Novocherkassk Russia.¹⁶⁾

<fig. 11> is gold Bracelet with Beasts of Prey Tearing at a Stag. This Bracelet is cast, forged. Diam 8.4 cm. Sarmatian Culture. 1st century BC.



<fig. 10> Layers style
Sarmato-Alanian Culture. 1st century. Khokhlach Barrow



<fig. 11> Layers style
Sarmatian Culture. 1st century BC. Barrow No. 2, Burial No. 2, Volgograd Region



<fig. 12> Crown with openwork style
Sakae Culture. 4th century BC. Karasuk Burial Mound II, Barrow



<fig. 13> Crown with openwork style
Sakae Culture. 5th - 4th century BC. Duzdak Area, Syrdarya Region

Barrow No. 2, Burial No. 2, Volgograd Region, the Village of Verkhneye Pogromnoye.¹⁷⁾

4. Crown with openwork style

<fig. 12> is gold Bracelet shaped crown with openwork style that is cast and chased.

This Bracelet made from wide band of gold divided into three by a longitudinal rib, each surface bearing similar designs of beasts. 8.4x7 cm. Sakae Culture. 4th century BC. Karasuk Burial Mound II, Barrow 1, Grave 3

<fig. 13> is gold Bracelet that two hinged parts

of this cast openwork bracelet are decorated with the relief representation of horses with their hind legs thrown up and touching the withers. The horses' heads are stylized. The manes, hooves and the leafy ornament on the junctures are inlaid with turquoise. Diam. 7.5 cm. Sakae Culture. 5th - 4th century BC. Duzdak Area, Syrdarya Region, Karakumy Desert Central Asia

IV. Conclusion

Scythians developed a rich culture characterized by opulent tombs, fine metalwork,

and a brilliant art style. The excavations of royal burials have provided the most complete record of the jewelry of the Scythians.

Typical art objects were in the form of stags or other animals, hammered or stamped out of gold and often inlaid with colored stones or glass.

The Bracelet consisted of two distinct techniques made from heavy forged diameter spheres to an object without using gold bars, terminated with more delicate solder.

The Scythian Bracelet were divided into 4 styles according to the shape, Bracelets with ends shaped like beasts style, Spiral style, Layers style, Crown with openwork style.

By the time Scythian Bracelet in the Black Sea region had completely degenerated, stifled by motifs and shapes of Greek origin, retaining its representational realism and its full emotional vitality.

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