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**THE IRON AGE CROSS-SHAPED STRAP DIVIDERS
AS PARADIGMS OF THE WHEEL MOTIF ON
EDONIAN AND ICHNÆEAN COINS
(6TH - 5TH CENTURIES BCE)**

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Abstract: *The article builds upon the author's previous research in which he analyzed the relations between a category of Iron Age objects known as cross-shaped strap dividers and a similar motif inscribed within a wheel on the coins of Getas - king of the Edonians. Presented in detail within the article are firstly the dividers from the Balkans, Central, and Eastern Europe, with regards to their form, context of discovery, cultural affiliation, purpose, and mutual interaction. Then, starting from the coin of Getas, the author analyzes in detail the coins of the Edonians and other neighboring peoples (primarily the Ichnaeans) with a reverse depiction of a wheel whose spokes coincide with the dividers. Within those frameworks, several hypotheses are considered regarding the ethnic groups that could have first introduced this specific wheel into coinage, which would also give them the status of bearers of the indicated Iron Age objects. Also discussed at the end of the article are the semiotics of this motif within the framework of the specific coins - separately and in relation to their obverse representations.*

Key words: Iron Age, Macedonian bronzes, cross-shaped strap dividers, symbolism of the wheel, numismatics, Edonians, Ichnaeans, Paionians, Cimmerians, Strymon, Axios

The initial impulse of this research was the reverse of one of the so-called "Thraco-Macedonian coins" from the first decades of the 5th century BCE, which features a wheel with four specifically profiled spokes.¹ It is inscribed in a square field with an inscription informing us that the coin was minted by

¹ At the conference, we presented a study with a different title and a broader topic ("Iron Age paradigms of some motifs on coins from the Central Balkans minted in the 5th century BCE"), which, due to the limitation of the size of the printed articles, had to be reduced to a narrower topic.

"Getas king of the Edonians" - an ethnic group which, based on historical sources, was located in the south-eastern part of Macedonia, mainly in the lower valley of the Strymon river (T.V: 9, 10). We were attracted by the similarity of the spokes of this wheel with a category of bronze objects from the Iron Age known as "cross-shaped strap dividers", discovered in various parts of the Balkans, but also more widely in Europe (T.VII: 1-3 compare with 4 and with T.I). It was especially important to us that a large number of them were also found in parts of Macedonia that are near the territory of the Edonians (T.IX). In our monograph dedicated to the mythological and religious aspects of the so-called "Macedonian/Paeonian bronzes" we have tried to show that it was not a matter of random coincidence, but of introducing into this coin a motif from older traditions, probably as a symbolic mark specific to the indicated ethnic group.² In that work, we first made an overview of the Iron Age strap dividers, their form, chronology, distribution, the contexts in which they were discovered, as well as the hypotheses regarding their purpose. The fact that these objects, unlike the motif shown on the coin of Getas, do not have a circular rim, we tried to justify through its execution in an impermanent organic material that has in the meanwhile disintegrated. In support of this, we presented a divider with such an element made of bronze, discovered in Batina (Northern Croatia) (T.V: 1-8). At the same time, we justified the geographical distance of this parallel in relation to the strap dividers from Macedonia and the coin of the Edonians by the presence in this part of the Peninsula of other objects, similar to the one indicated (T.V: 12 "Zlokukjani" - Skopje), which, analogously to them, are usually associated with the so-called "Cimmerian" or "Thraco-Cimmerian bronzes" (Ристов 1999, 12-15). We decided to experimentally check this assumption by making a replica of a strap divider that we supplemented with a wooden rim through which we then passed and crossed two cords (T.VII: 6-9). Apart as evidence for the possible combination of such elements, this model also served us to check two of its aspects - the functionality as a strap divider that stood on the chest and back of a human body, and the possibility that at least some of the Iron Age strap dividers were supplemented with such a rim of organic materials (T.VI; T.VII: 10) (Чаусидис 2017, 446). In the end, through appropriate comparative material and other arguments, we considered the possible symbolic meaning of these objects as well as the very act of crossing the human body - especially the female one (Чаусидис 2017, 498-506). We justified the adornment of a woman with an object that was previously (in Central and Eastern Europe) part of a horse's harness through her symbolic identification with the harnessed horse, while the presence of a wheel and a cross (normal or oblique) as part of it - through the solar-celestial symbolism of these elements and the belief that they would provide stimulation and protection of the life-giving cycles within her body (menstrual cycle, development of the child in the womb, and its birth and nurishment) (Чаусидис 2017, 498-516).

² In detail on the below-presented elements of this research: Чаусидис 2017, 464-479.

Building upon the mentioned research, in this article we will refer in more detail to the finds that were included in the indicated comparisons, and above all to their cultural-historical and mythical-symbolic implications.

1. Cross-shaped strap dividers

These objects are referred to by various names in academic literature: "hollow crosses", "kreuzförmige Riemenkreuzungen", "kreuzförmige Hülsen", "Hohlkreuze", „крестовидные распределители ремней“, „крстовидни предмети“, and „разводници“ (T.I – T.IV). The variants with a crescent-shaped supplement are also named by some authors as „коњски чеони украси“ (T.II: 4, 5, 7; T.III: 2, 4, 5-8). On this occasion we decided to use the term "cross-shaped strap dividers" (overview of the names and corresponding literature: Чаусидис 2017, 466). They represent bronze objects (most often with dimensions from 4 to 10 cm) that are made up of four tubes joined in the form of a cross with arms of equal length, whereby the same cross-shaped cavity is formed in their interior. The arms of the cross usually end in a ring-like profile, while on the front side of the central part, where they join, there is a circular motif. In most strap dividers, the rear surface is more or less cut off, which provides access to their hollow interior (T.I: 2, 3; T.III: 12; T.IV: 7, 9). In the following paragraphs, we will present some of these finds, starting with those that are geographically closest to the mentioned coins.

The first and currently largest core of Iron Age strap dividers (with about twenty samples) is found in the **lower valley of the Vardar/Axios River** (T.IX), specifically in the region of Gevgelija: „Suva Reka“ (T.I: 1, 2), „Milci“, „Raul“, and „Vardarski Rid“; Valandovo: „Meleznik“ (T.I: 3, 4; T.II: 7) and „Karakush“ – Dedeli, and some other unknown sites in the two regions (T.I: 6).³ A significant number of such finds should also be expected in the neighboring areas of the Republic of Greece. At a certain distance from this core are the three finds from **Chalcidice**, one of which comes from Nea Michaniona in the Thermaic Gulf (T.II:12) (Вокотопούλου 1990, 98-102, Fig. 52: 7630, photo: 62, 63), the second from Trilophon-Messimeri (T.II: 9), and the third also somewhere from the western part of the peninsula (T.II: 10) (Bouzek 1974, 158). A pair of strap dividers come from west of the Vardar/Axios valley – in the vicinity of Arnissa/Ostrovo in the region of Edessa (T.I: 5) (Χρυσσοστόμου 2016, 27-29, fig. 29). To the south, from this Lower Axios or South Macedonian core, there is another - **Thessalian** one, with 12 such objects, all found at the same locality of Valanida near Elassona, today kept in the Archaeological Museum in Volos (T.II: 1-6) (Kilian 1975, 28, 123, Taf. 27). Strap dividers have also been found in **Greek sanctuaries** (map T.VIII: 9): the Heraion of Argos (T.II: 8), Dodona, Pherai, Olympia (T.II: 11), and Delphi (Bouzek

³ An overview of the finds from this region, with source literature: Митревски 1991, 56, 57; Видески 2003, 28, 29; Bouzek 1974, 158; Чаусидис 2017, 466-469; for the information about the ten findings from Karakush (unpublished, discovered during illegal excavations) we thank B. Husenovski from the Gevgelija Museum, where they are currently housed.

1974, 158; Kilian 1976, 164, 165. Taf. 1: 4). It seems most likely that these finds reached the sanctuaries as offerings left by the believers, due to religious reasons (as votive gifts or as part of their costume). Judging by the shape of the objects and their absence in the necropolises and settlements of ancient Hellas, it can be assumed that the donors of these objects came from outside lands, perhaps from the indicated two cores. The **third core**, much more distant than the previous ones, is located in the Glasinac region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, T.VIII: 9), represented by around ten specimens discovered at the sites of Taline (T.III: 7), Čitluci (T.III: 1, 2), and Osovo (T.III: 3-6) (Benac & Čović, 1957, T. XXVI: 2, 3; T.XXXI: 18, 19). In addition to the usual specimens, this core stands out by the subtype with one arm shaped like a crescent moon. The **fourth Balkan core** is located in the southern areas of Pannonia (T.VIII: 9). Of the many finds, we will mention here the following: two specimens from "Kaptol" at Slavonska Požega (Vejvoda & Mirnik 1975, 595, 596, T.7: 2); one accidental find from Sotin near Vukovar (Вински 1955, 33); three strap dividers from Donja Dolina near Gradiška in the northern border region of Bosnia and Herzegovina (T.III: 10-12) (Truhelka 1902, 265, 269, 271; Čović 1987, 248, T. XXVIII: 3); Dalj in Eastern Croatia (Kossack 1954, 158); one find from Rospri Ćuprija near Belgrade (T.III: 9) (Bouzek 1974, 158).

In the interspace of the indicated cores, there have also been discovered some individual finds, namely one specimen at Vlashnje near Prizren in Kosovo (T.I: 7), more similar to the northern ones (Luci 2013, 126 – cat. no. 165), and another one with a crescent supplement in Rehovë near Psar/Kolonjë in Albania (T.III: 8) (Aliu 1985, 275, 280 – T.II: 9). Deserving of special attention is a single and atypical divider from Novgrad (Tsenovo, northern Bulgaria) with a crescent supplement, but with a cruciform corpus whose arms are quite short (T.VIII: 2) (Стефанов 1974, 277, 278, Обр. 25).⁴

Aside from the mentioned cores that can be treated as parts of some unifying "Balkan areal" of these objects, there is also another one that spreads in Central and Eastern Europe, whose numerous finds, quite distant from each other, at least for now do not indicate any regional cores. That is why we will present them as one whole through several most characteristic examples. The strap dividers from this area differ from the indicated Balkan specimens at the level of form (flat and somewhat thicker, i.e. shorter arms that are not assembled through rounded, but through angular joints), the numerical presence in closed assemblages (usually consisting of three or four specimens each), and the archaeological context i.e. purpose (not as jewelry for people deposited in graves, but mostly as elements of a horse's harness, ascertained in graves and hoards) (map on T.VIII: 9).⁵ The first three finds from Eastern Europe are consi-

⁴ In our previous research (Чаусидис 2017, 466, 493, 495, 965, 1055, 1058) we made a mistake i.e. inversion of this divider and the one from Osovo (T.III: 5), resulting from the wrong signatures given by Vasić (Васић 1986, 5, Сл. 3: 4 and 6).

⁵ Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 355-357, list of findspots: 534, 535; Kossack 1954, 116-118 (on their purpose and numerical presence as parts of a horse's harness), 125 – map no. 3, 138, 158 – list of findspots.

dered to be some of the oldest, probably from the 8th century BCE. One comes from a hoard found at Holihrady/Голіградь (Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine), consisting of four strap dividers (T.IV: 6) (Żurowski 1948, 163, 189, 203; Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 355). Another one is from Mošenec in the middle course of the Dniester river, also consisting of four specimens (T.IV: 1) (Смірнова & Войнаровський 1994; Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 73, 74, 352 – Abb. 162, 355). A third one comes from grave no. 3 at the "Pšiš I" necropolis in the Kuban region of the North Caucasus (T.IV: 5), and represents the burial of a horse (without evidence of an additional human burial) in which, apart from the other elements of the horse's harness, there were also found three cross-shaped strap dividers (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 249, 337, 342 – Abb. 159: 3; 350). In this group, we should also mention two finds from northern Croatia, although according to their geographical position they gravitate towards the last of the indicated Balkan cores. We mention them here because, according to the above-mentioned components, they are closer to the finds from this area. The first find is from Batina/Kiskószeg, consisting of three simple strap dividers (T.IV: 4), but also one supplemented by an encircling ring (T.IV: 3; T.V: 1-8) (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 356, 698, 699; Foltiny 1961, 179, 181, Taf. 69: 22-24, Taf. 70: 1). The second one is from Legrad near Koprivnica (T.IV: 2), with seven strap dividers that Vinski-Gasparini identifies as a Late Bronze Age hoard (Vinski-Gasparini 1973, 168-170, 216, T.127), while Metzner-Nebelsick – as a probable burial from the Older Iron Age with deposited equipment for a pair of horses, perhaps harnessed to a chariot (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 285, 356, 367, 534).

Sporadic finds of strap dividers have also been discovered on the Apennine Peninsula (Volterra, Tarquinia), but also in much more distant regions – in the west to England and Portugal, and in the east to the area of Pamir, Kazakhstan (Southern Tagisken and Ujgarak, T.IV: 10, 11), the Aral Sea, and all the way to China (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 302, 355, 356, 357; Kossack 1954, 158; Bouzek 1974, 158; Хорват 2021, 152, 165 – Рис. 8: 30, 45).

a) Morphological relations

The cross-shaped strap dividers from the Balkan regions show mutual morphological similarities that do not only apply to the basic shape, but also to their more subtle details. Especially indicative, due to the considerable geographical distance, are the relations between some of the Bosnian and Lower Macedonian and Thessalian specimens, manifested through the slight narrowing of the ends of the arms and their rounded joints (T.I: 1-4; T.II: 1, 2, 12; T.III: 10-12). Among the Thessalian finds, in addition to those that are standard for Macedonia (with arms that become narrower towards the ends and arcingly merge towards the center), there are also specimens with short flat arms that are characteristic for the more northern parts of the Balkans (T.II: 3, 6 compare with T.III: 1, 3) and a subtype with a crescent supplement, typical of Glasinac (T.II: 4, 5 compare with T.III: 2, 4-7). These similarities have led some researchers to trace their origins to these regions (Maier 1956, 66; Kilian 1976, 167; Vasić

1975). There is a possibility that the relations between this latter type extend to a much larger area of distribution of these objects, whereby the genesis of their crescent supplement could be sought in two specimens from its eastern areas. We refer to the finds from Novgrad in northern Bulgaria (T.VIII: 2) (Стефанов 1974, 277, 278, Обр. 25) and Mošanec in the middle course of the Dniester (T.VIII: 1; T.IV: 1) (Смірнова и Войнаровський 1994). The first specimen is interesting because with its crescent supplement it shows relations with such Balkan strap dividers (T.VIII: 2 compare with 3-6), but at the same time with the one from Mošanec (T.VIII: 1) because of the short and broad arms of the cross and the similar relatively large shell-shaped appendage, probably adapted originally to the specific function of this object (T.IV: 1). In support of it such mediating status also points the location where it was found - halfway between the Ukrainian find, on the one hand, and the Bosnian and South Balkan ones, on the other (T.VIII: 9). A high level of relations can also be observed in another variant (perhaps genetically related to the previous ones), represented by the find from Dedeli (Macedonia) which is also characterized by a reduced cruciform part and a dominant lunar supplement (T.VIII: 6; T.II: 7). Engraved on it is a motif in the form of two symmetrical spirals that persistently exists in the specimens from Bujoru in Romania and Sofronievo in Bulgaria (T.VIII: 7, 8), which despite similar contours have lost the character of strap dividers (Чаусидис 2017, 464, 466, 474; Mitrevski 1995, 113).

b) Contextual relations

A significant number of Central and Eastern European strap dividers have been found in contexts that point to their use as elements of a horse's harness. In several cases, this function is confirmed explicitly – through assemblages accompanied by the burial of a horse with its harness, of a man (rider?) placed next to which is his horse's equipment, or implicitly – through hoards of metal objects in which the strap dividers were apparently found as part of a horse's harnessing set. Based on the shape and the numerical presence of these objects in the closed archaeological units, it is believed that they served to cross the straps in the area of the horse's head, combining two, three or four strap dividers.⁶ These include the aforementioned five archaeological assemblages with several such objects each: Holihradу/Голігради (T.IV: 6), Mošenec (T.IV: 1), Pšiš (T.IV: 5), Batina/Kiskőszeg (T.IV: 3, 4), and Legrad (T.IV: 2).

Such a context cannot be confirmed in the Balkan finds, most of which were discovered as deposits in graves (often with confirmed female deceased) in which there are no functional objects related to horses and riding.

Almost all such finds from the territory of RN Macedonia are linked to the necropolises: "Meleznik" (T.I: 3, 4; T.II: 7) and "Karakush" at Dedeli near Valandovo, "Suva Reka" (T.I: 1, 2), "Milci" and "Raul" in Gevgelija (Митревски 1991, 56,

⁶ Regarding the numerical presence and functions of these objects as part of a horse's harness: Kossack 1954, 116-118; Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 356.

57). An exception is just one example from the site of "Vardarski Rid" - Gevgelija, discovered in a settlement layer and in a secondary context, deposited inside a house from the 2nd century BCE, together with other bronze objects from the Iron Age and later times (Митревски 2005, 237, 238, 250 – Сл. 21). Five specimens of strap dividers have been ascertained in graves from the "Meleznik" necropolis at Dedeli: paired in grave no. 34 (T.I: 4) and no. 71 (T.I: 3), as well as a single one in grave no. 81 (T.II: 7). Two of them were discovered in confirmed female graves, specifically in graves no. 34 and no. 81, wherein the first case the divider was found in situ, in the area of the deceased's abdomen (Митревски 1991, 26, 27, 34, 37, 57, Т.Х, Т.XVIII, Т.XX). At "Suva Reka", such an object, supplemented by a saltaleon, was discovered in the central part of grave 25 (T.I: 2) (Пашиќ 1978, 24, 30, Сл. 7: г; Vasić 1987, 704, Т.LXXII: 7). Two strap dividers were also discovered at the necropolis of "Raul" (Bouzek 1974, 158; Митревски 1997, 288). Ten strap dividers were salvaged from illegally excavated graves in the necropolis of "Karakush" at Dedeli, near Valandovo.⁷

Of the finds from the Republic of Greece, at least two were discovered in graves. In grave no.VI at Nea Michaniona, one such divider was found between the thighs of the deceased, together with a phiale and other objects from the group of "Macedonian bronzes" (T.II: 12) (Βοκοπούλου 1990, 98-102, Fig. 52: 7630, photo: 62, 63). Based on the character of these finds and their position between the thighs, by analogy with other finds (Marvinci, Bućinci, Kuç i Zi) it can be concluded that it was a female burial (for parallels see Чаусидис, 2017, A62: 5, 6, Б11). It is thought that two strap dividers kept in a private collection come from a necropolis, this time at Arnissa/Ostrovο (T.I: 5) (Χρυσοστόμου 2016, 27-29, fig. 29), which judging by the identical shape were probably elements of a paired garniture deposited in one and the same grave.

A funerary character is also borne by such finds from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the neighboring Pannonian regions of Croatia and Serbia. At the site of "Greda" - Donja Dolina near Gradiška, two single strap dividers were discovered in inhumed graves (no. XXV and no. XXXVII), specifically in the area of the hip of the deceased, as well as one out-of-grave specimen, probably from a scattered burial (T.III: 10-12) (Truhelka 1902, 265, 269, 271, Т.XI: 26; Т.XV: 14; Т.XVI: 12). In two graves in Glasinac, it is possible to ascertain a paired combination of strap dividers belonging to two different types - one usual and one with a crescent, specifically discovered in Osovo: tumulus II, grave 1, with elements of a horse's harness (T.III: 3, 4), and in Čitluci: tumulus 1, grave 5, with weapons and jewelry (T.III: 1, 2) (Benac & Čović 1957, Т. XXVI: 2, 3; Т.XXXI: 18, 19). At the site of "Kaptol" near Slavonska Požega (Croatia), in tumulus IX, grave 2, a pair of identically shaped strap dividers was found deposited in an urn with cremated remains (Vejvoda & Mirnik 1975, 595, 596, 603, Т.7: 2). A divider has also been found in a Late La Tène burial at Rospi Ćuprija near Belgrade which, due to the presence of a cluster pendant, we can probably identify as female

⁷ An insight into the photographs of these still unpublished finds was made possible to us by B. Husenovski from the Gevgelija Museum.

(T.III: 9) (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 357; Bouzek 1974, 90 – Fig. 27: 8, 158).⁸ At the necropolis of Hallstatt in Austria, one such object, along with other jewelry, was found in each of the two female graves no. 83 (T.IV: 8) and no. 672 (T.IV: 7), of which the second was placed in the area of the head (Metzner-Nebelsick & Metzner-Nebelsick, 1999, 71-74, Abb. 1: Grab 672, Abb. 2: Grab 83; Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 357).

c) Genesis and ethno-cultural attribution

The cross-shaped strap dividers are often associated with some populations that in the first centuries of the 1st millennium BCE moved along the route Northern Black Sea region – Carpathian area – Pannonia – Central and Southern Balkans (T.VIII: 9). In the older literature they are usually identified with the Cimmerians (or Thraco-Cimmerians) about whose movements (military campaigns, migrations) we are informed by historical sources. Although their invasions are associated with the route Northern Black Sea Region - Caucasus - Iran - Asia Minor - Ionia and the Aegean islands, there are opinions that a wave of them reached the Aegean also through the Balkan mainland (Чаусидис 2017, 876-888, 997, 998, with sources and relevant literature). Contemporary academic circles are skeptical regarding this conception and especially the attribution of the indicated finds to a specific population and ethnonym. There is a persuasion that the shape of the strap dividers is the result of their functionality, which is why they existed in an extraordinarily widespread area (from England and Portugal in the west to China in the east), for a long period and without major changes in shape. It is thought that such a character does not allow their treatment as indicators of any specific regional cultural groups (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 355-357).⁹

The genesis of the cross-shaped strap dividers in the Northern Black Sea Region and the Northern Caucasus (Kuban) is unlikely, even though such a theory would fit well with the "Cimmerian" interpretation of these objects. Only sporadic finds have been discovered in these areas (even in the later Scythian period), more likely indicating contacts and influences from the Carpathian Basin and the Danube, which, according to the number of finds and their dating, impose themselves as a more probable genetic core of these objects (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 337, 350, 356). Even such finds from the Hallstatt circle, according to some authors, should be understood as the result of the "Danubian impulse" (Kossack 1954, 138; Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 355). The Eastern European cores of these objects (from the area between the Carpathians and the

⁸ The combination of analogous objects was also ascertained within the mentioned female grave 34 in "Meleznik" at Dedeli (Митревски 1991, 26, 27 – Сл. 33).

⁹ In Serbia and Macedonia we found similar ceramic objects from the Late Neolithic, Eneolithic and Bronze Age, which could be treated as possible older prototypes of the Iron Age dividers (Чаусидис 2017, 916-926, 1002, 1003; Чаусидис 2016).

Caucasus) are taken as sources and mediators not only in relation to the western regions (Hallstatt culture), but also regarding the distant specimens from China (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 355, 356).

We think that the "Cimmerian" i.e. "Thraco-Cimmerian thesis" regarding these objects should not be rejected en bloc. The terms "Cimmerians" and "Thraco-Cimmerians" do not have to be treated literally, but as a stereotypical name under which the sources denoted the movement of a conglomerate of various populations, most likely of Indo-European or Indo-Aryan origin, whose initial nucleus was located between the Carpathian area to the west and the North Caspian region to the east. In our previous studies, we presented several related toponyms and ethnonyms (with the root *sint/sind* – meaning *river* in Indo-Aryan) present at the end points of this trajectory (Black Sea region and Macedonia), which could be taken as an additional argument in support of the indicated assumptions (Čausidis 2017, 888-892, 998, 999; Čausidis 2018).

If we apply this concept in the interpretation of the above-presented cross-shaped strap dividers, then their indicated Balkan cores could be connected with the migratory routes and settlement areas of the mentioned populations across the Peninsula: southern Pannonia – Bosnia – Albania – southern parts of Macedonia – Thessaly (T.VIII: 9; T.IX).

The "Cimmerian" i.e. "Thraco-Cimmerian thesis" is also supported by some quite direct relations between the strap dividers from the indicated Balkan cores, and also their relations with the coins that will be discussed below. As we have seen, in previous literature the extremely high level of similarity between such objects from the Bosnian-Pannonian and Macedonian-Thessalian cores, but also the change of their function from horse harness to jewelry, were sought in some pragmatic spheres such as trade relations between these regions and mostly as a Macedonian import from Bosnia, but also vice versa (Maier 1956, 66; Kilian 1976, 167; Vasić 1975). There have been hypotheses put forward that the transformation of the horse harness into jewelry happened so that the local jewelry makers from Macedonia, discovering the decorativeness of these parts of horse equipment, characteristic of the northern Balkan areas, would adapt i.e. repurpose them into common women's jewelry (Митревски 1991а, 156).

Due to several reasons, we cannot agree with these hypotheses. The first reason for this is that, according to the above-presented finds, the change from horse harness to jewelry is not some local phenomenon specific only to Macedonia, but a more global phenomenon that covered the entire Balkans and even beyond (Metzner-Nebelsick & Metzner-Nebelsick 1999). The second reason is that in traditional cultures jewelry is not just an ordinary ornament, but an important part of the specific costume of an ethnos and a symbol of the identity of its representatives. It primarily functions as a symbolic and signifying object that cannot be so easily transferred from one culture to another, especially if they, as in our case, are different and separated from each other by almost a thousand kilometers. It is hard to believe that objects from a completely different sphere, such as harnessing horses, could be repurposed into human jewelry

for no proper reason. We believe that behind such repurposement (which also included other objects from the group of "Macedonian bronzes") there was another reason that relates to the symbolic and ritual spheres. In a separate study, we tried to show that at its base lies the identification of the woman with the horse/mare, whereby the act of marriage acquires the meaning of her ritual "taming" and "harnessing" and thus passing from the realms of the natural and wild (maiden) into the spheres of the social and cultural (wife). In addition to other arguments, this is also supported by the South Slavic lexeme *coūpyža/su-pruga* (Proto-Slavic: **soprogъa*; meaning "wife") whose etymology includes the meaning *vīer̥nυvaње/uprezanje* - harnessing (Proto-Slavic: **pregnoti*, **pregti*, **pregg*; Indo-European root: **spreng-*), which is also represented in the ancient Greek language (*σύζυγος, ζεῦγος, ζυγόν*).¹⁰

We think that it is more likely that the mentioned cores of the cross-shaped strap dividers and their similarity should be treated as indicators of the movement i.e. migrations in the noted regions of some communities that had the same or close cultural, religious, and perhaps ethnic identity, which is why these objects had a similar shape as part of their jewelry and costume and the similar system of ritual-symbolic identification of the woman with the harnessed horse. In that context, the possible trade or exchange of such objects between the mentioned regions would be possible, and even much more probable. If we take into account their use primarily as women's jewelry, it could even be possible that it was a case not only of transfer (exchange, purchase, sale, gifting) of jewelry, but also of women (as brides-to-be) for whom it was intended and traveled with them between the indicated regions. By this we mean the well-known phenomenon of exogamy i.e. the transfer of women between two remote communities whose culture holds the memory of some kind of mutual primigenial kinship.

2. Coins with a representation of a wheel with a central motif analogous to the Iron Age cross-shaped strap dividers

Unlike our previous research in which we focused only on the wheel motif from the exclusive example of the coin of the Edonian king Getas (T.V: 9, 10), on this occasion we have extended our insight to other coins of theirs, but also to some other neighboring ethnic groups and cities on which appears a wheel with a central motif analogous to the Iron Age strap dividers.

¹⁰ For our arguments in favor of this concept: Чаусидис 2017, 506-513, 966, 967; Чаусидис 2017a. On this occasion, we refer to the extensive study by Metzner-Nebelsick & Nebelsick (1999), which was not known to us during the preparation of the indicated works, and in which a huge archaeological material has been collected that points to the existence of this phenomenon in several European regions, as well as comparative mythological and ritual material that refers to the symbolic relation *woman - horse*. We believe that our semiotic and comparative analyzes and interpretations significantly complement this study.

a) Coins of the Edonians

It is not accidental that our attention in the previous research was drawn precisely to the mentioned coin of Getas, because it is a specimen of an issue with the highest pictorial qualities on the reverse (T.V: 9-11; T.X: 1) (Čausidis 2017, 468 – Д10а: 18-20).¹¹ Unlike the previous research in which we only focused on the mentioned exclusive specimen, on this occasion we will also present other coins of this Edonian king. They represent large silver specimens (octadrachms i.e. tristaters, weighing 27 to 29 grams) on the obverse of which there is a standard depiction of a man with a naked body and a petasos on his head who, turned to the right, leads a pair of unharnessed cattle (probably bulls) (T.X). On some specimens, his figure is accompanied by jewelry on the neck or a pair of spears. Unlike the obverse, on the reverse we can see two different motifs, of which the first type has the already mentioned wheel inscribed in a square field (T.X: 1-6, most likely an earlier motif that appears at the transition from the 6th to the 5th century BCE), while the second type has a quadratum incusum, executed in the form of a "window", i.e. a shallow modeled square which is divided into four equal fields by an inscribed cross (T.X: 7-10, appears later, but not later than 476-465 BCE).¹² Presented in Tatscheva's paper are two specimens of this type, where in the second variant on the reverse, by alternately omitting the frames from the inner squares, a swastika is formed (T.X: 9, 10; the same coins with a darkened background T.XII: 4, 5) which is not noted at all by the mentioned author or in other literature that was available to us (Tatscheva 1998, 626, Fig. 6, 7). This overview shows that the four-spoke wheel is a standard motif on the reverses of Getas' tristaters (Tatscheva 1998, 626, Fig. 1-3). Although in their case the degree of detail in the modeling of this motif is at a lower level than in the exclusive specimen, on some coins one can still recognize the elements that also appear in the strap dividers: a circular motif in the center of the wheel; spokes of the wheel that gradually narrow from the center towards the ends; broadening at the junctions of the spokes and the rim of the wheel (T.XIII: 14-20 compare with 21 and with T.VII).

b) Coins of the Ichnaeans

Silver coins with the same weight and iconography as those of Getas were also minted by the Ichnaeans and/or the city of Ichnae in the first quarter of the 5th century BCE (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 31) that is, around 495/490-480 BCE (Tatscheva 1998, 619). In their case, too, the obverse features the scene of a

¹¹ The coin is listed in the following auction: Gorny & Mosch, Auction 219, 10 March 2014, Lot 106 (Gorny & Mosch 2014, 43).

¹² „So kann man zusammenfassen, daß die drei Rückseitentypen für Getas eine längere Zeitperiode kennzeichnen. Sie reicht von der Wende des 6. zum 5. Jh. v. Chr., als die Emissionen mit dem Vierspeichenrad auf der Rückseite geprägt wurden, bis mindestens zum Jahrzehnt nach 476/5 v. Chr., als die Rückseiten mit den Fensterquadraten verwendet wurden.“ (Tatscheva 1998, 619). Wartenberg also agrees with this dating (Wartenberg 2015, 353); specifically on the coin inscriptions: Slavova 2008.

naked man with a petasos on his head who, turned to the right (this time also to the left), leads a pair of unharnessed bovines, while the reverse has a wheel with 4 spokes inscribed in a square field (T.XI: 1-8). There are also smaller coins with the same reverse but a different obverse (man and horse T.XI: 9, 10; kneeling bull T.XII: 1, 2). It is indicative that although the strap dividers are most similar to the wheel spokes on the exclusive specimen of Getas, in global terms they are closer to the wheels on the Ichnaean coins (T.XIII: 1-13, compare with 21 and with T.I). Here primarily we have in mind the larger ones, because on the smallest coins that similarity is not so high (T.XII: 1, 2). Among the about ten tristaters that we had an insight into, the wheels on the reverse have four spokes which, without exception, gradually narrow towards the ends, finishing with a slight broadening (T.XIII: 1-13, exception T.XI: 5), which is not the case with the Edonian coins where there are also wheels with somewhat straighter spokes (T.XIII: 14-20). Although none of them are as realistic i.e. similar to the strap dividers as the one on the exclusive coin of Getas (T.XIII: 14), we nevertheless have an example which almost reaches this level. It is the motif from a fragmentary coin of Ichnae where the contour of the spokes is just as detailed, with the inner features not visible probably due to wear (T.XI: 2; T.XIII: 1) (*Ichnai* 2022). Such typological homogeneity of the wheels from the Ichnaean coins suggests the possibility that the original place in which the introduction of the Iron Age strap dividers in coinage first took place was precisely their coins (T.XI) from where this motif was then adopted also on the Edonian ones (T.X). In fact, this relation has also been indicated by previous researchers, but motivated by completely different facts and observations (Tatscheva 1998, 620; Psoma & Zannis 2011, 36).

If we agree that the spokes of the wheel on the exclusive coins of the Edonians and the Ichnaeans show a high level of similarity with the Iron Age cross-shaped strap dividers, then from this observation follows the conclusion that the makers of the molds for these coins, during their execution, were not able to model this motif based on some other older coins (where it is much more simple), but on some real object. In our opinion, those could have been the strap dividers (which seem to have still existed in their time), or some kind of other wheels (for chariots or for cult purposes) based on which the strap dividers themselves were modeled upon.

The motif of a wheel also appears on the reverse of coins of other ethnic groups from Lower Macedonia, such as among the Tyntenoi, combined with the same obverse as the Edonian and Ichnaean ones, while the wheel does not have four but six spokes, two of which are the main ones, and four are lateral (T.XII: 7, 8, a coin with such a wheel from the Ichnae: 9, T.XI: 5; a chariot with such a wheel on a coin of the Laeae: T.XII: 6; of the city of Krannon: T.XIV: 11).

3. Origin of the strap divider motif on the coins

If we agree that the central motif of the wheels on the presented coins resembles i.e. has some connection to the Iron Age cross-shaped strap dividers

(T.XIII compare with T.I-III), then the question arises as to how i.e. by the mediation of whom it was first transmitted onto them. This could at the same time answer another very important question: which of the mentioned Lower Macedonian ethnic groups could be treated as the immediate bearers of these Iron Age objects. Of crucial importance for these analyzes is the question of whether and to what extent these objects overlap in a chronological sense.

Although in recent times no one has specifically dealt with the chronology of the cross-shaped strap dividers from Macedonia, there is a principled view that, being discovered in the same closed contexts with typical forms of the "Macedonian/Paeonian bronzes", they should also be generally dated to the time of their existence, namely in the 7th, and perhaps also in the beginning of the 6th century BCE.¹⁵ Accepting this view would not support our theory because it would mean that between them and the indicated coins (which date to the very end of the 6th and the first half of the 5th century BCE) there would be a discrepancy of at least a hundred, and maybe almost two hundred years. But some specific finds or indirect contexts show that this discrepancy is significantly shorter, and even that the Macedonian strap dividers are synchronous with the presented coins. The most interesting in that sense is Grave VI from Nea Michaniona in Chalcidice, in which a strap divider typical of the Lower Axios types (T.II: 12 compare with T.I: 1-4) was deposited together with Attic black-figure vessels dating to the first decades of the 5th century BCE (Βοκοπούλου 1990, 99, 102). Such younger dating is also supported by the presence in the same grave of an arched fibula with a square saddle-shaped foot whose type in Chalcidice existed from the last decades of the 7th to the first half of the 5th century BCE, while on the territory of RN Macedonia it is mainly dated to the 6th century BCE, but remained in use until the first half of the 5th century BCE (R. Vasić, 1987a, 45, 46, 54; Mitrevski 1987, 32, 33). Dated at the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 5th century BCE is also Grave XXXVII from Donja Dolina, with a deposited strap-divider identical to the Lower Macedonian ones (T.III: 12) (Jašarević 2012, 17).

a) Edonians, Ichnaeans or Paeonians?

The main dilemma regarding the above question is whether the introducers of this motif on coins were the Edonians or the Ichnaeans. Although in principle we would not like to favor such an exclusionary concept, in the following lines we will try to evaluate the arguments that point to each of these options, while as a third alternative we will also include the Paeonians. Before moving on to this assessment, we will briefly present the territories on which these ethnic groups were spread.

¹⁵ Митревски 1991, 57. In more recent works, the author dates the "Paeonian cult bronzes" only in the 7th century BCE (Митревски 2021, 177), which would consequently also mean a narrowing of the chronological span of the strap dividers that accompany them in the same necropolises and burial units.

On the basis of several written sources it can be concluded that the territory of the Edonians in general terms extended east of the Axios River (T.IX). The core of their land (probably at a later time) was located around the lower valley of the Strymon River and Mount Pangaion. The inhabitants of Mygdonia and Sithonia were also considered part of the Edonians. It seems that in older times their territory was larger, which is indicated by the old toponyms whose root contains their ethnonym, such as Ἡδωνός – the old name of the gold-bearing river Echedoros (today Gallikos), as well as Ὀδωνίς – the old name of the island of Thasos. A core of ancient toponyms with the same root has also been recorded in Albania. Some sources actually refer to the expansion of this ethnos across the territories east of the lower valley of the Axios (with Mygdonia and Chalcidice) and a migration (together with the Cimmerians and Treri) to Asia Minor. But then, with the expansion of the ancient Macedonians, they would be pushed out of most of the indicated two Lower Macedonian areas. However, it seems that the Edonians are a relatively new population that was not present in the Balkans during the Trojan War (Tatscheva 1998, 622; Перпова 1996, 151-153, 159, 160; Delev 2007).

The territory of the Ichnaeans, on the other hand, extended in the region of Bottiaea, which in certain periods was part of the kingdom of Paeonia or was under its strong influence, until the last decades of the 6th century (510 BCE) or the first decades of the 5th century (480 BCE) when it was occupied by ancient Macedonia. The eponymous city of Ichnae was located about 20 km northeast of Pella, in the area of the modern village of Kouphallia (T.IX) (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 26, 29, 30; Wartenberg 2015, 351).

The lower valley of the Strymon River, where the core of the Edonians has been located, is at the very periphery of the spread area of the "Macedonian/Paeonian bronzes" to which the cross-shaped strap dividers belong conditionally. So far, these items have not been discovered in the narrower area associated with this ethnic group. The closest finds to them are those from western Chalcidice. One of the main and currently densest cores of strap dividers is located in the lower valley of the Axios River (Valandovo-Gevgelija region) which is quite close to the territory and the eponymous city of the Ichnaeans (T.IX) on whose coins this motif is both the most common and the most similar to the strap dividers (T.XI). These facts, however, do not exclude the possibility that the credit for their presence on the coins should be attributed to the Edonians - especially if we take into account the opinions that their native territory was in the lower course of the Axios, from where they would only later settle in the lower valley of the Strymon (Delev 2007). In that context, the introduction of the motif of a wheel with spokes analogous to the strap dividers could be credited to the Edonians and their desire to present these objects on their coins, most likely as a symbol of their identity.

In recent times, the "Macedonian bronzes" are more and more often and with more arguments linked to the territory and culture of the Paeonians (Митревски 2021, 174-177), from which stems the conclusion that this ethnic group

was the main bearer of the cross-shaped strap dividers from Lower Macedonia. Taking this into account, it seems quite legitimate to assume that this ethnic group would also be credited with introducing our specific type of wheel into the indicated coinage. Considering the native territory of the Ichnaeans and the location of their eponymous city of Ichnae, this ethnic group could also be treated as a Paeonian tribe or, at the very least, as a tribe that was close to the Paeonians.

Could the Edonians be included in this Paeonian circle?

As far as we know, they were not explicitly considered a Paeonian tribe, but the mutual relations of these two ethnic groups become actual if we take into account the sources that also place the Paeonians around Strymon and Pangaion, regardless of whether it was one of their original regions or new territories in which they moved later, perhaps after the conquests by the ancient Macedonians of their native area in Lower Macedonia i.e. the lower course of the Axios.¹⁴

However, contrary to the logic and plausibility of these assumptions, things are nevertheless much more complicated, taking into account the very serious observations that not only the Edonian, but also the other coins presented above were actually minted in the same region between the lower courses of the Strymon and the Nestos, and not in the native areas of the ethnic groups to which they were attributed by signature, and which were located in Lower Macedonia (T.IX). This is the thesis in which certain authors seek justification for the similarity of all these coins, not only in terms of their iconography, but also in style, technique of minting and weight. The reasons and motives for this uniformity are sought on various sides, whether in the existence of some kind of monetary union,¹⁵ or even some kind of separate entity located here with a political or economic character.¹⁶

Summarizing the presented facts and weighing their plausibility, it seems to us at least slightly more likely that the first introducers of the motif similar to the cross-shaped strap dividers into coinage would have been the Ichnaeans, regardless of whether such coins were minted in their native region of the Lower Axios Valley or east of the Strymon. Then this motif from their coins could have been adopted by the Edonians within the framework of the assumed monetary union that functioned in the indicated region. But the dilemmas on this matter do not end there.

¹⁴ In more detail about this: Делев 2014, 399-407.

¹⁵ "Adopter les types du voisin est un phenomene que l'on observe souvent dans le monde antique; cette habitude est etroitement liee aux besoins de chaque autorite emettrice de faire circuler son numeraire dans la meme zone commerciale que le voisin plus puissant. Un accord monetaire entre differentes autorites emettrices plus ou moins voisines conclu dans cette perspective ne peut pas etre exclu non plus." (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 33).

¹⁶ "On comprend donc qu'il faut dissocier le monnayage frappe au nom des Ichneens de la ville d'Ichnai et l'attribuer a une autorite emettrice, voire une comrnunaute politique qu'il faut situer entre le Strymon et le Nestos." (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 38)

b) "Cimmerians"

Within the group of the "Macedonian/Paeonian bronzes", the strap dividers do not belong to the category of the most typical finds of this kind spread out through their entire range. So far, they have been ascertained primarily in the lower course of the Axios and in the areas of Chalcidice near the eastern coast of the Thermaic Gulf (T.IX). If it is accepted that this group of objects belonged primarily to the Paeonians, then they could reflect the presence in their environment of some separate group or perhaps another ethnos that would have eventually been assimilated by them.¹⁷ If we agree with the noted conditional "Cimmerian" or "Thraco-Cimmerians" interpretations of the cross-shaped strap dividers from Central and Eastern Europe, then they could point to the presence in the lower course of the Axios River of some smaller enclave of these ethnic groups which during their movement through the Balkans settled or perhaps temporarily stayed in Lower Macedonia (T.I: 1-6; T.II: 7, 9, 10, 12). Another enclave of theirs could also be indicated by the compact group of strap dividers from Thessaly (Valanida near Ellassona T.II: 1-6) and perhaps the so far isolated find from Southern Albania (Rehovë – T.III: 8; see map on T.IX).¹⁸

Could the Edonians be included in these Cimmerian theses?

In several of his works, J. Bouzek tried to do this, but it seems that he was citing a non-existent source (allegedly Strabo), which, according to him, referred to some alliance between the Cimmerians, the Treri and the Edonians. In our attempt to check and confirm or dispute this observation, we still found sources (which Bouzek does not mention at all) that could indirectly refer to it.¹⁹ The first is Aristotle's account (mentioned by Stephanus of Byzantium) according to which the city of Antandros, located on the shores of the Propontis "... was called Edonis, secondary to Thracian Edonis being settled there, or Cimmeris according to Cimmerians who inhabited it for hundred years ...". The same city, referred to as Edonis and Cimmeris, is also mentioned by Pliny (Stephanus Byzantinus, *Ethnika*; Plinius 5.123; Delev 2007). Although these accounts cannot be treated as proof of any alliance between the Cimmerians, Treri and Edonians, the parallel association of all three ethnonyms with this city may point to some kind of mutual relationship between the peoples behind them. If this piece of data is interpreted as an indicator of some kind of closeness (ethnic or otherwise) between the Edonians and the Cimmerians and it is put in relation to the possible Cimmerian origin of the Iron Age strap dividers,

¹⁷ The complex multiethnic and multilingual character of Lower Macedonia and Chalcidice in particular has been indicated by Herodotus (Herodotus 1.57) and Thucydides (Thucydides 4.109) (Чаусидис 2017, 903).

¹⁸ The presence (much more intense) of the Cimmerians in the mentioned regions was also indicated by N. G. L. Hammond (Hammond 1972, 427).

¹⁹ The alleged account by Strabo also appears in the works of N.G.L. Hammond (Hammond 1972, 427), from whom it was probably accepted by J. Bouzek as well. A more detailed overview of this problem and the papers of Bouzek: Чаусидис 2017, 883, 884, 998.

then precisely they could have stood behind the indicated Lower Macedonian core of these objects (and maybe also those in Thessaly and Southern Albania), and hence behind the introduction of the same motif within the presented coinage.

c) The wheel motif on ancient coins: a representation of a utilitarian or symbolic wheel

The wheel motif is not so uncommon on ancient coins, both those of the Hellenic circle and those belonging to other ethnic groups. Although in most cases it is a wheel with four spokes and a circular central motif (wheel axis), there are also examples with six spokes (T.XIV). It is quite logical to assume that we are talking about representations of wheels from real chariots that found themselves on coins due to symbolic or some other reasons (T.XIII: 24). This is supported by other types of wheels with six spokes which often occur as an alternation of those with four, and especially the depictions of chariots with the same such wheels in which animals are harnessed and are being handled by drivers (T.XII: 6-9; T.XIV:11). But, in some cases, along the outer edge of the rim of these wheels there is an arrangement of dashes, which, in turn, is taken as an argument that in these cases the wheel is not depicted as a utilitarian, but as a symbolic object representing the solar disk surrounded by rays (Mesembria – T.XIV:1). This opens the possibility that such a meaning was also borne by at least some of the examples without the indicated dashes (T.XIV: 4 – on a coin of Massalia, a wheel is also represented on the helmet or cap of the character on the obverse).²⁰

Psoma and Zannis treat the wheel from the coins of Ichnae as a common element with the contemporary coinage of Chalcis, and hence, according to them, it should undoubtedly be treated in the context of the Euboean presence in the Thermaic and Strymonian Gulfs.²¹ But, in our attempt to verify this hypothesis, by reviewing the coin issues of Chalcis, we did not find many coins of Euboeia with a wheel on the reverse, which by the way was completely different in relation to ours (T.XIV: 2 compare with T.XIII). According to the available facts (specific profiling of the spokes, morphological relations with the local cross-shaped strap dividers, the absence of corresponding parallels among the Chalcidian coins), we think that, for the time being, it is more likely that this motif on them had nevertheless a local character.

At the basis of this phenomenon and its understanding lies the question for what reasons was the wheel depicted on ancient coins (in general or on the

²⁰ About the symbolism (primarily solar) of the wheel in Hellenic and other ancient cultures: Cook, 1914, 197- 338, on coins: 229, 231, 232, 233, 253-255, 268, 270, 290; Baldwin 1915.

²¹ "Le type de revers des Ichneens, la roue qui est un point commun avec le monnayage contemporain de Chalcis s'inscrit donc sans doute également dans ce contexte de présence eubéenne tant dans le golfe thermaïque que dans le golfe strymonique." (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 43).

specific coins that are the focus of our study). The theories surrounding this can be divided into two basic groups - that it is a utilitarian or a symbolic object. Although the first option should not be ruled out, we must admit that we are currently unable to determine its motivation more clearly. It does not seem convincing to us that this happened spontaneously, without some deeper reason, for example due to the simple coincidence of this motif with the circular shape of the coins or due to distinguishing one monetary emission from another. Somewhat more convincing seems the second option for the introduction of this motif as a symbol and metaphor of travel, dynamism, cyclicity, and instability, which are the basis of trade (buying - selling, profit - loss).

However, on the paradigmatic coin of Getas, and to some extent on the other examples as well, there are elements that do not indicate that it represents a chariot wheel (T.XIII). First of all, the wheels of chariots (two-wheelers or cargo wagons) usually have more than four spokes (mainly six or eight), and more massive wheels in the case of heavy cargo wagons. The reason is that in those examples with four spokes, the span of the wooden hoop between them is larger and without sufficient support, so it is prone to breaking under greater pressure. In such wheels, this could be prevented by reinforcing the ends of the spokes with oblique rods (T.XIII: 24; T.XIV: 4, 6) or through archlike broadenings that would direct the load forces from the more distant part of the hoop towards the spokes (T.XIV: 2, 10; T.XV: 10, 11). In our cases there are no such reinforcements, because the small broadenings at the ends of the spokes could hardly fulfill that function (T.XIII).²² The non-utilitarian character of these wheel motifs is also supported by the fact that in the case of the paradigmatic coins their spokes are not connected to the rim, but there is a gap between them (T.XIII: 1, 14). The same feature inadvertently appeared on our model of a cross-shaped strap divider, for the simple reason that the flat ends of the arms of the strap divider could not quite fit the arched surface of the hoop (T.VII: 6-8 compare with 2, 3). This is another indicator that the Edonian and Ichnaean coins, and in principle most others of the same period, do not depict wheels of chariots, but some other wheels with a symbolic, cultic or signifying purpose, which does not mean that these non-utilitarian objects were not once made according to the shape of the utilitarian wheels.

And indeed, within the frames of the Iron Age cultures from Macedonia, especially in the circle of the "Macedonian/Paionian bronzes", there is a significant number of bronze objects shaped like wheels (most usually with four spokes), which were used as pendants and appliqués - mainly worn on the body as jewelry and amulets, and less often as cult objects or insignia (T.XV: 1-9). In the Greek sanctuaries there were also votive wheels which obviously had no other purpose than to be gifted to those sanctuaries (T.XV: 10, 11). In the more

²² On the dynamic and other functional aspects of early chariot wheels: Pare 1992.

northern parts of the Balkans, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe, similar openwork wheels were a common part of the horse harness.²⁵

Another indirect argument goes in favor of the symbolic and religious character of the wheels from the coins presented here, especially those from Macedonia. It is the account by Maximus of Tyre according to whom the Paeonians venerated the sun in the form of a small disc (or small circle) placed on a long stick (Maximus Tyrius II.8). Although the wheels that we have presented here could not be called disks, their circular shape gives us the justification to consider them as different variants of the mentioned Paeonian solar object, which among the specific ethnic groups (Ichnaeans, Edonians) could have been modeled in the form of openwork disks (compare T.XV: 6, 8). It should also not be ruled out that the ancient author's not entirely precise wording could be behind this discrepancy (Čausidis 2017, 614-619, 974, 975). We think that our interpretations regarding the iconography present on the obverses of the coins of the Edonians and Ichnaeans (and some other neighboring ethnic groups), which we present in the next chapter, also go in favor of the second option.

d) Iconography and semiotics of the Edonian and Ichnaean coins

The iconography and semiotics of the wheel motif from the reverses of the here presented coins of the Edonians (T.X) and the Ichnaeans (T.XI) have so far not been more seriously discussed, and as a matter of fact, neither has been the representation from their obverses. Although the focus of our study is the first motif, we think that its semiotics cannot be considered separately from the representations on the obverses. Hence, we will first refer to the latter compositions.

Previous researchers have put forward an assumption that the figure with a petasos i.e. kausia from the obverse of the coins of Getas represents Hermes (or Ares-Hermes), specifically within the scene of the myth in which he steals the cattle of Apollo (T.X). M. Tatscheva thinks that despite the fact that such a cap is a common attribute of Hermes, it is unlikely that this figure depicts this god due to the absence of the kerykeion as his most important attribute. She nevertheless thinks that he could have been present on these coins, but implicitly. She is led to this observation by the examples in which the name of Getas is written around the figure, according to her in order to indirectly identify it with this king, but also with Hermes, with whom Thracian rulers linked their origin (Tatscheva 1998, 620).

But if we take into account the location where this coin was issued, then it becomes possible to connect this scene with another myth, this time about the clash between Heracles and Strymon - the god of the same-named river in whose lower course the Edonians were settled (T. IX). An incomplete version of this myth is apparently preserved in the writings of Apollodorus (Apollodorus.

²⁵ Čausidis 2017, 565-594, illustrations: Д50, Д51, Д54, catalogue and sources of the illustrations: 1065, 1066.

2.5.11). In this myth, Heracles barely succeeds, along the bank of this river, to collect a part of his scattered herd of cattle, and then, for unknown reasons, he piled up large stones at the lower course of the river, which until then was navigable. The absence of clear motivation for this act prompted I. Marazov to reconstruct the action of the indicated myth based on comparisons with other examples in which there are represented analogous characters and actions. On this basis he adds the key action that gives justification and meaning to the anger and revenge of Heracles directed at the Strymon River, which is the stealing of his herd by the god that personifies it (Marazov 1992, 58-60).

Considering this reconstruction to be quite plausible, we propose an assumption according to which it would have also been encoded in the scene from the obverse of the here presented coins of the Edonians, although Marazov did not take them into account when presenting it. Despite the fact that it also shows certain inconsistencies on these coins, in relation to the reconstructed mythical action, this still does not reduce the probability of their connection. Namely, in the myth, Heracles' herd consists of cows, while the coins show a pair of bovines that bear more the features of bulls. The man who accompanies them wears a petasos on his head, which befits Hermes and people more than the river god. We think that these discrepancies can be justified by two components. On the one hand, it would be the contamination i.e. the identification of this myth with the apostrophized action of the theft of Apollo's herd by Hermes. On the other hand, the presence of a petasos or kausia on the head of the presumed river god Strymon can be justified by his representation on the coins as some kind of mythologized ruler, which would be supported by his mentioning in the sources as an ancestor of the Thracian rulers, and even as a Thracian king.

The proposed attribution of the obverse scene from the Edonian coins actualizes on a deeper level the question of how it found itself on variants minted by other ethnic groups and cities in the neighborhood of the Edonians, and was it interpreted in the same way? It should be emphasized that apart from the presented coins of the Edonians and Ichnaeans, the same scene is also present on the tritaters of the Tyntenoi, but with a different shape of the wheel on the reverse (T.XII: 7, with six spokes, of which two main and four lateral ones), and in some coins of the Orreskioi (T.XII: 3) and Derrones, which are usually dated to 480 BCE (Tatscheva 1998, 620), where only the representation on the obverse is identical, and not just regarding the large, but also the smaller coins.

Tatscheva hypothesizes that the presence of the same obverse scene on the coins of the Edonians and the Ichnaeans may be due to Getas taking over the minting matrix from the latter, after they were conquered and stopped with their minting until 480 BCE (Tatscheva 1998, 620). It seems that Psoma and Zannis also share the same view that the large Ichaeian coins, including the wheel on their reverse, were the original ones.²⁴ From the acceptance of this

²⁴ "Passons maintenant à la grande dénomination émise par les Ichnéens. Comme nous l'avons déjà dit, des monnaies de ce même poids d'environ 30 g et de même type de droit ont été émises par les Orresciens et les Edoniens représentés par leur roi, Gétas, et aussi par

option, it would follow that the obverse scene originally belonged to the Ichnaeans, but as such it most likely did not depict the god Strymon but one of their local river gods. Considering the native territory of this ethnic group and their eponymous city, it could have been the god of the Axios River (T.IX). In favor of this hypothesis one can also present their smaller coins, which we believe also depict a river god equivalent to Strymon, but this time in his zoomorphic epiphany – in the form of a bull (T.XII: 1, 2). This hypothesis would be supported by the fact that in antiquity rivers and river gods were often depicted in the form of this animal or in the form of a composite creature with the front part of its body in the form of a bull (Čausidis 2012, 280, 281; Čausidis 2018, 181, 182).

According to other authors, these cooccurrences can also be due to certain inter-tribal treaties, agreements and coordinations that at the given time regulated coin minting (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 33). If it is assumed that such a union took place in between the rivers of Strymon and Nestos, where these coins are thought to have been minted (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 39, 40, 41), then behind this scene (uniform on all presented coins) and behind the representation of the kneeling bull on the smaller coins, it could still have been the god Strymon in whose territory these ethnic groups found themselves after their exodus from Lower Macedonia caused by the expansion of the Ancient Macedonians.

If the proposed hypotheses turn out to be correct, then both the larger and smaller coins of the Ichnae would feature a depiction of the local river god, whereby in the larger ones he was represented in his anthropomorphic epiphany – as a participant in the key action of his myth (analogous to the stealing of the herd of Apollo), while in the smaller ones – in his more archaic zoomorphic epiphany as a bull. It is quite probable that, analogously as in the case of the Paeonians (Čausidis 2012, 267-276) and the Black Sea Taurians (Čausidis 2018, 181, 182), the Ichnaeans (and the Edonians) also thought of him as their mythical ancestor, and later as a mythical ruler, which would be supported by the mentioning of Strymon in the written sources as a king.

Without excluding the two hypotheses regarding the uniform or different interpretation of the obverse scene from the coins presented here, we can supplement them with another component which, at the same time, will not favor neither one of them. Here we mean the similar spiritual culture of the ethnic groups signed on the presented coins, which would be due to their ethnogenesis from some common ethno-cultural core or to the secondary homogenization of heterogeneous ethnic groups based on their coexistence in a relatively small and accessible geographical region.²⁵ It would not be unusual for such

Litas, personnage d'origine sans doute ichnéenne, comme pourrait nous le laisser supposer la roue au revers des monnaies qui portent les initiales de ce que nous prenons pour son nom." (Psoma & Zannis 2011, 36).

²⁵ According to M. Tatscheva, the noted cultural connections between the various ethnic groups from Lower Macedonia (specifically the Bisaltae, the Orreskioi and the Ichnae) are indicated not only by their mythical traditions but also by their coins (Tatscheva 1998,

closely neighboring ethnic groups living in an area rich in large rivers to create similar myths in which the main characters would be various local river gods with the function of their ancestors and mythical rulers. Regarding the specific river gods, we know that in addition to the Edonian Strymon, the Paeonians also had a similar god (the river god-progenitor Axios) (Čausidis 2012, 267-276). Another river god has been recorded on Chalcidice, named Brykhon (god of the same-named river near the Pallene peninsula), and imagined as a bull i.e. dragon (his name means *the one who bellows*) (Lycophron, Alexandra 1405 ff). The nearby Gigas River also bore a divine character - its name encoding a mythical character similar to the previous one, with a demonic and chthonic nature (Маразов 1992, 59, 60).

On this occasion, we should point out another potential meaning of the bull from the presented coins. Namely, interpreting the meaning of this animal from the coins of the Greek colonies in Italy, J. K. Papadopoulos talks about the bull as a sacrificial animal, but also as a sign of exchange, a measuring standard, and a symbol of wealth. According to this meaning, on the coins of specific cities (for example Sybaris) it is present because of their wealth with cattle and pastures. The first Italic coins also depicted oxen and cows, and there were even cast bronze bars bearing their image. Ancient authors are unanimous in deriving the Roman word for money (*pecunia*) from the word for cattle (*pecus*), whether oxen or sheep (Papadopoulos 2002, 30, 37-39). It is also similar in Slavic languages, where the commercial-economic terms *stoka* (goods, stock) and *dobitok* (profit, income) are synonymous with lexemes denoting *domestic animals*. Furthermore, the first letter of the Proto-Germanic runic alphabet, reconstructed as **fehū*, probably meant money, wealth, but also cattle (Page 1987, 15). This potential interpretation of the bovine figure from our coins does not in itself negate the previous one, but only gives it an additional dimension, since the river god as the god of water and the lower zones of space is at the same time the patron of fertility, abundance and wealth.

Does the meaning of the wheel depicted on the reverse of these coins (T.X; T.XI) become clearer i.e. more specific withing the context of these interpretations of the obverse scenes? If we take into account the basic solar-celestial interpretations of the symbolism of the wheel, as well as the swastika that appears on the coins of Getas as its alternation (T.X: 9, 10; T.XII: 4, 5), then it seems quite probable that the concept of binary oppositions was applied in some of them.²⁶ Therefore, the obverse was reserved for the contents and meanings related to the chthonic god – representative of the lower regions of the universe (darkness, earth, underworld, water), while the reverse – for the upper ones (light, sky, sun, fire). In support of this we can point to one source that, accord-

622). According to Slavova, behind the shared motifs of these coins there was a "common cultural, historical, and mythological background" (Slavova 2008, 177).

²⁶ On the solar meaning of the two motifs, in general and more specifically on ancient coins: Baldwin 1915, 131, 139, 146, 169, 192, especially 166, 167.

ing to its chronology, would completely correspond to our Iron Age cross-shaped strap dividers. Here we are referring to the verses in the Iliad regarding the duel between the Paeonian leader Asteropaeus and Achilles (XXI, 135-385), during which the former enters the river Xanthos to receive help from its god, related i.e. equivalent to his local god Axios since, according to Homer, both originate from the deep-flowing mythical river Oceanus. After killing Asteropaeus, Achilles leaves his corpse in the river, whereupon the god Xanthos, enraged at the desecration of his waters, attacks him with his powerful waves, with Achilles managing to save himself only thanks to the help of Hephaestus (fire - as an opponent of the element water). Hence, this duel, observed on a macrocosmic level, takes on the meaning of a clash between the two complementary cosmic principles and elements (water and fire) which takes place in this world through the mediation of their two earthly anthropomorphic representatives (Čausidis 2012, 275; Гиндин & Цымбурский 1996, 205). As a parallel for this interpretation we can present a type of coins from Mallos (Cappadocia), in which this opposition is present on the same (obverse) side (T.XII: 10). Here, as a representative of the celestial-solar or fiery principle we can treat the winged god, in some cases depicted with two faces, who holds in his hands a circular object (disc with or without a rosette) which would represent the sun. The chthonic i.e. water principle, in turn, is represented by the figure depicted below him, which bears all the marks of the paradigmatic river god Achelous (a bull with the head of a bearded man with one horn on its forehead). In some examples these figures are separated – the former on the obverse, while the latter on the reverse (T.XII: 11) (Cook 1914, 297-299, but with different interpretations; Tahberer 2022).

The hypotheses and comparisons proposed in this study suggest many more relations linked to other finds that deserve separate research. Such a relation is suggested by the shape of the eyes in one of the gold funerary masks from the graves at Archontiko, near Pella (T.XII: 12), which closely resemble the wheels on the coins presented here, especially in the shape of their spokes (T.XIII: 22, 23 compare with the rest), thereby at the same time showing relations with the cross-shaped strap dividers (T.I; T.II).²⁷ The non-accidental character of this similarity is indicated by the geographical and chronological proximity of this find to the regions and ethnic groups with which the presented coins are associated, especially those of the Ichnaeans, and their eponymous city (see T.IX),²⁸ but also the semiotic justification of the identification of the eye with the wheel, which would be based on the category "light", specifically

²⁷ Photo: Lilibaki-Akamati (et al) 2011, 388. For the indicated similarity, we thank I. Eftimovski, PhD student at the Institute for History of Art and Archeology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje.

²⁸ According to A. Kottaridi, the rich archaic graves at Archontiko belonged to the Bottiaeans (whose settlements also included the town of Ichnae), and not to the ancient Macedonians as it is commonly interpreted (A. Kottaridi 2020, 128-139).

through the elements from which it originates (sky, sun, fire) and the elements through which it is perceived (eyes).

Note: The origin of most of the presented illustrations is indicated in the corresponding notes of the article. For all the rest, it is indicated on the tables themselves, through a bibliographic abbreviation, the link to the website from where they were taken, or the number of the table from our monograph (Чаусидис 2017) in which this data is presented in detail.

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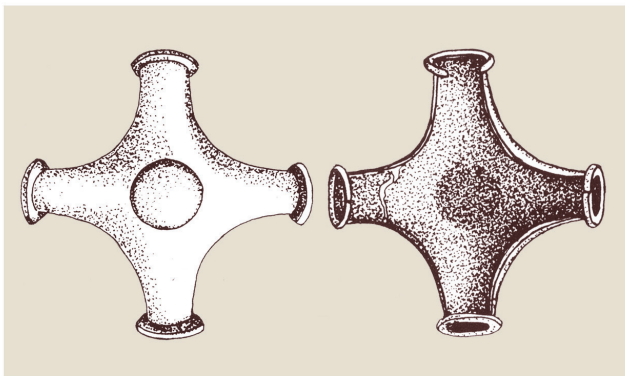
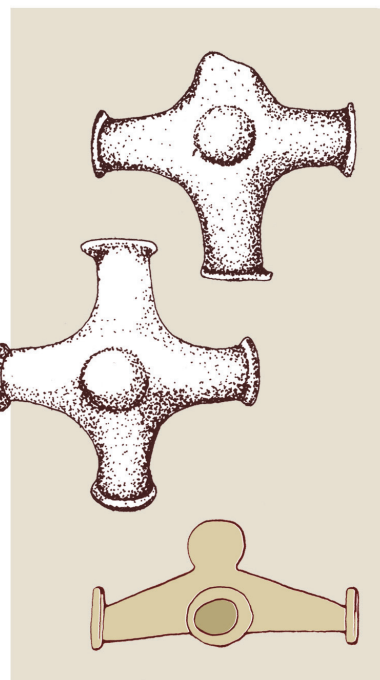
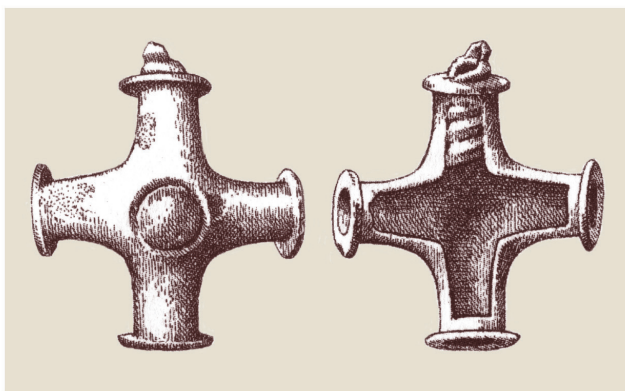
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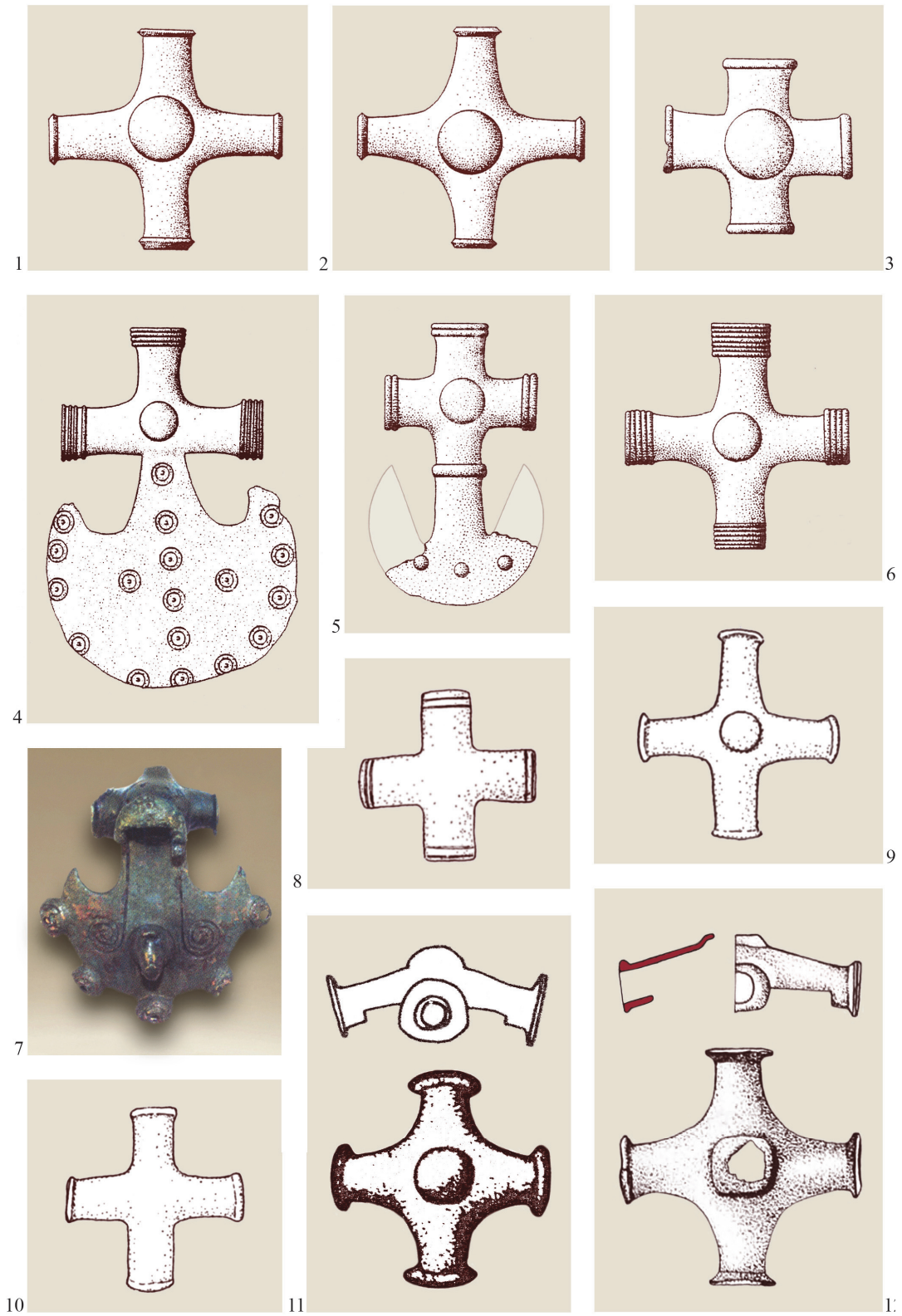
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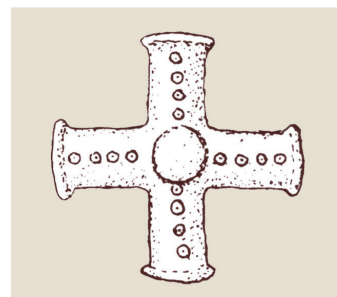
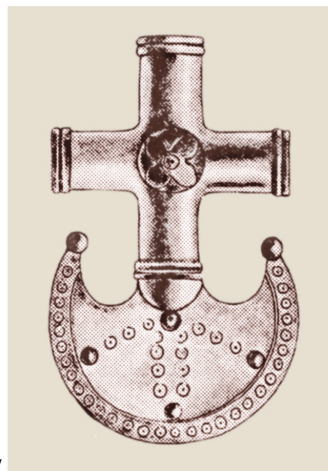
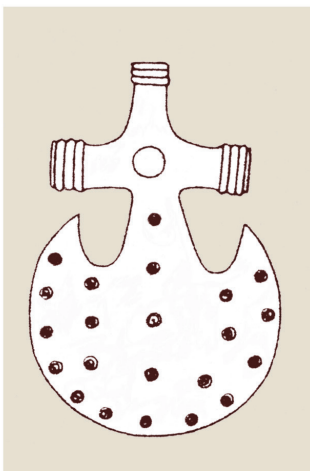
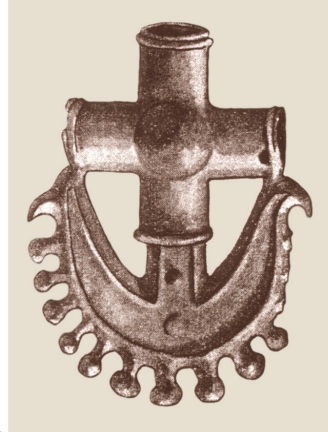
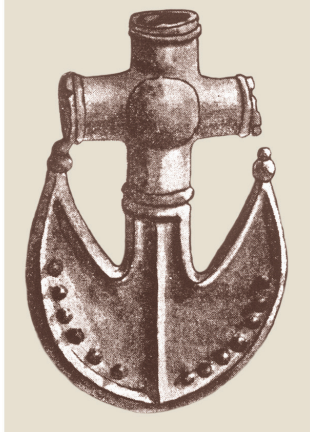
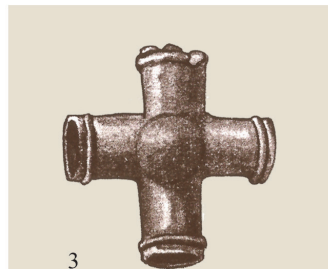
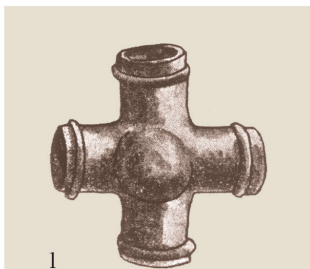
T.I



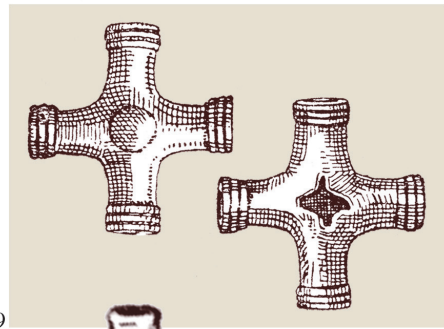
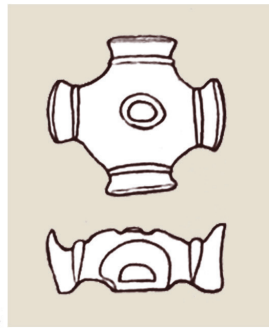
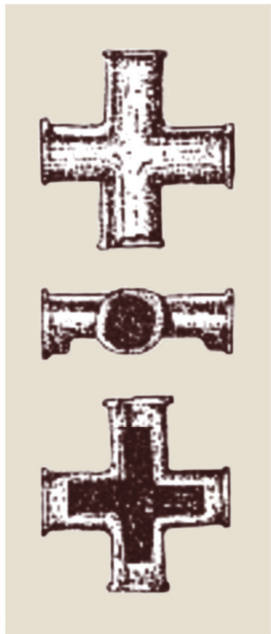
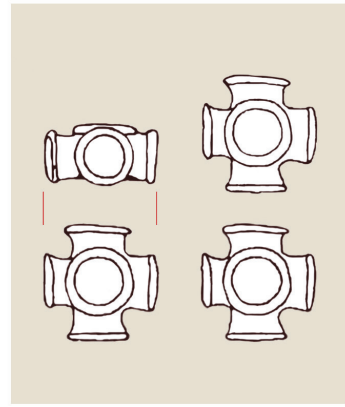
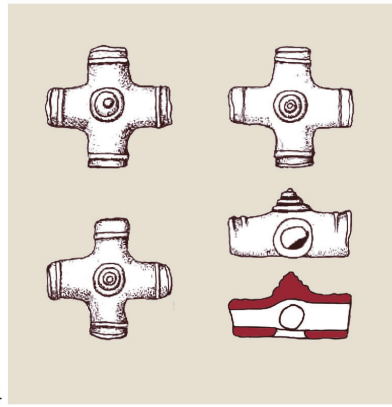
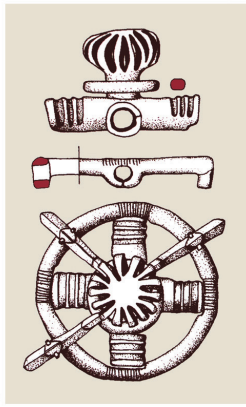
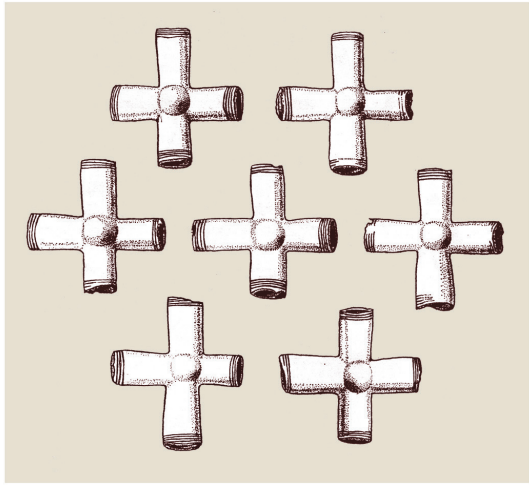
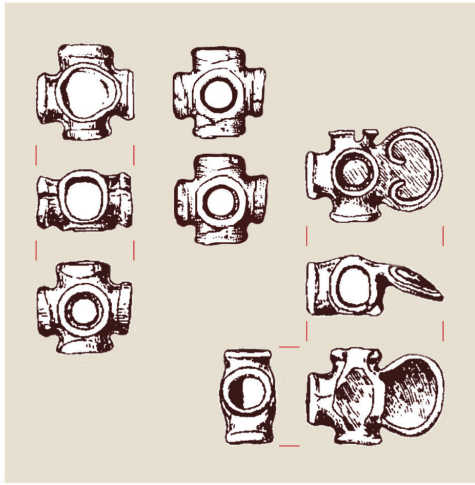
T.II



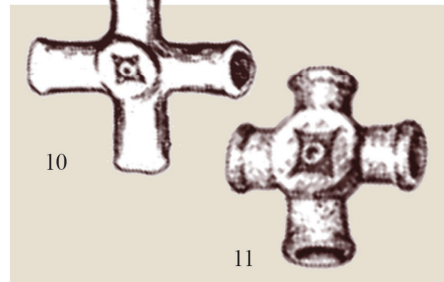
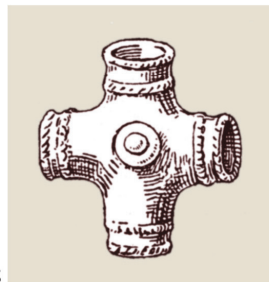
T.III



T.IV

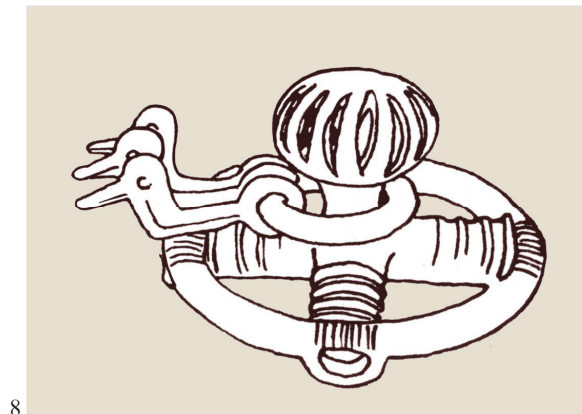
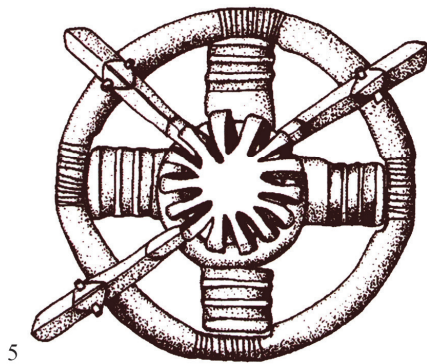
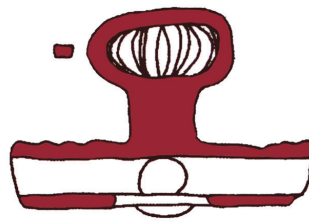
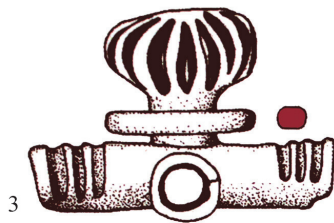


Часундце 2017, Д23: 5



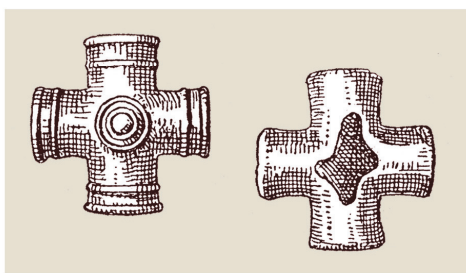
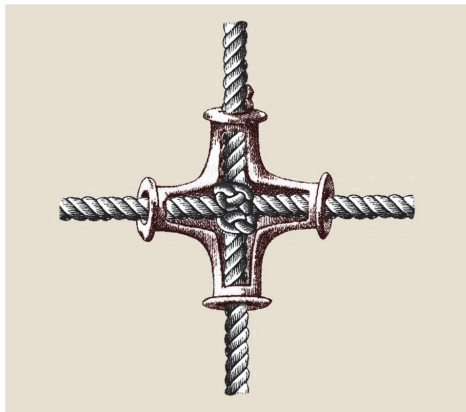
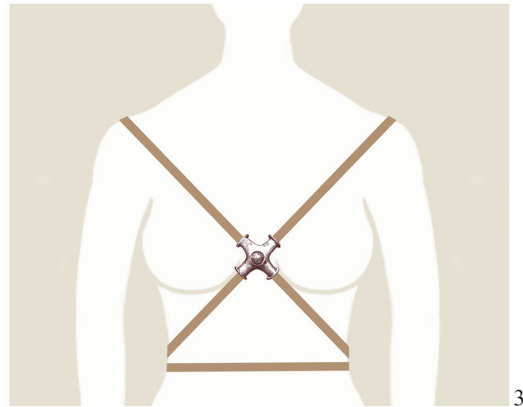
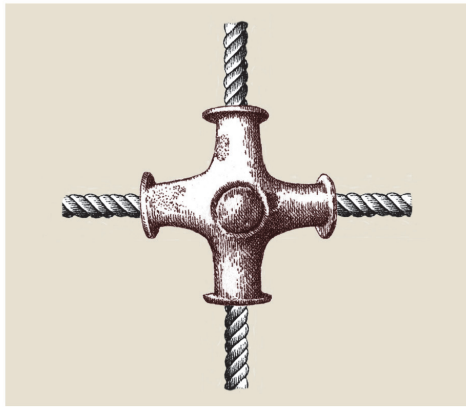
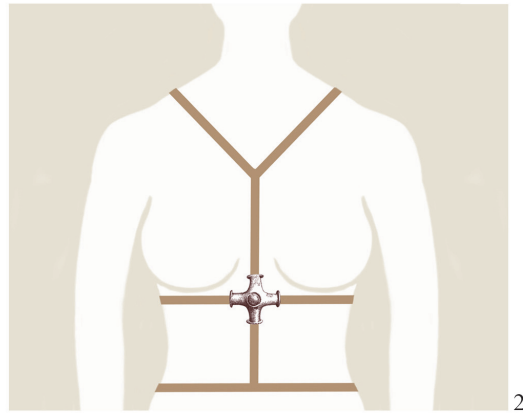
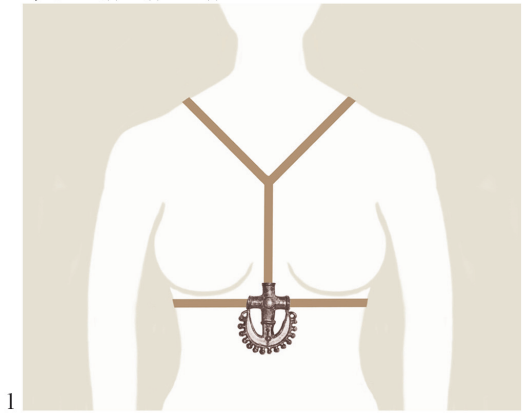
Часундце 2017, Д10: 3

T.V



T.VI

Часписце 2017, Д10: 4; Д14: 1 - 5; Д18: 4.



T.VII



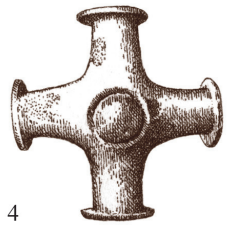
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2



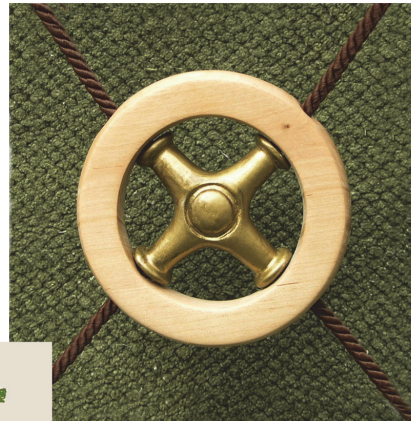
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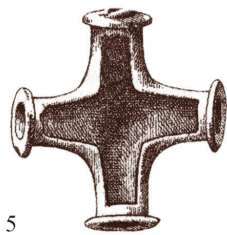
4



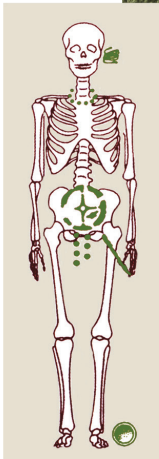
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7



5



Чаусидис 2017, Д77: 10



8



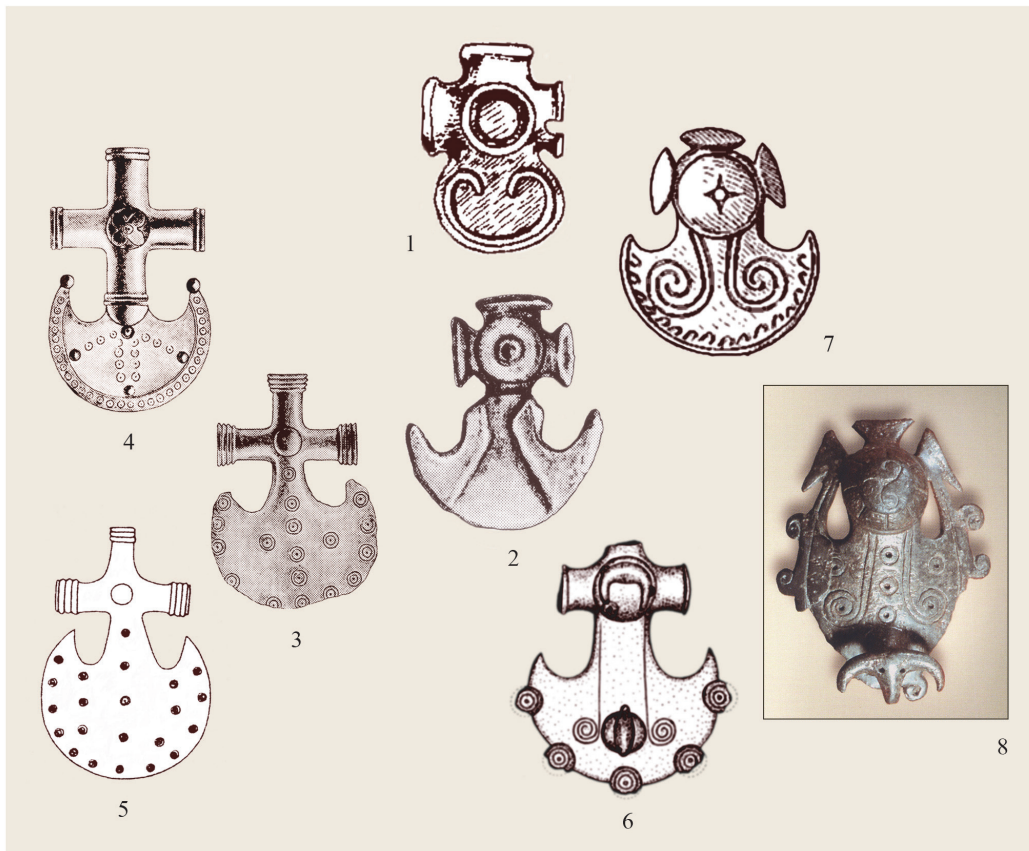
10

Чаусидис 2017, 446



9

T.VIII



9

T.IX



T.X



Gorny & Mosch 2014, 43



<http://www.coinsweekly.com/en/Review-auction/107&id=1283>



Wartenberg 2015, Pl.3: 22



https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1948-0706-1



Tatscheva 1998, 626 - No. 4



Tatscheva 1998, 626 - No. 2



Tatscheva 1998, 626 - No. 5



Tatscheva 1998, 626 - No. 8



Tatscheva 1998, 626 - No. 7



Tatscheva 1998, 626 - No. 10

T.XI



T.XII



1 http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/thrace_macedonian_tribes/ichnae/SNGANS_942.jpg



2 Wartenberg 2015, Pl.2: 16



3 Tatscheva 1998, 620 - 3b



4 Tatscheva 1998, 620 - 6



5 Tatscheva 1998, 620 - 7



6 Чаусице 2017, Д78: 5



7 https://www.vcoins.com/en/stores/numiscorner/239/product/coin_macedonia_tyntenoi_octodrachm_c_480470_bc_extremely_rare/1508762/Default.aspx



8 Чаусице 2017, Д78: 1



9 Чаусице 2017, Д78: 1



10 Tahberer 2022, 5



11 <https://manfacedbullsar.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/648361.jpg>



12 Lilibaki-Akamati (et al) 2011, 388

T.XIII

ICHNAEAN COINS



EDONIAN COINS

T.XIV



1. Mesembria, Thrace
<https://www.comarchives.com/a/results.php?search=MESEMBRIA+diobol&s=0&results=100/>

2. Euboia, Chalkis
<https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/euboia/chalkis/i.html>



3. Gela, Sicily
<http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/sicily/gela/>

4. Massalia, Gallia
https://www.sixbid.com/fr/hess-divo/6717/classica-greek-coins/5540046/classica-greek-coins?term=&orderCol=lot_number&orderDirection=asc&priceFrom=&displayMode=large&auctionSessions=&sidebarsSticky=false



5. Taras, Apulia
http://www.coinproject.com/search_city_result.php?city=Tarentum®ion=CALABRIA&type=1

6. Syracuse, Sicily
http://www.coinproject.com/search_city_result.php?city=Syracuse®ion=SICILY&type=1



7. Volcae, Galia
<https://www.munis24.com/lots/view/623700c12f0fa00ed1890efd>

8. Istros, Thrace
<https://www.dema-coins.com/2021/04/Wheel-money-ancient-greek-coin.html>



9. Pherai, Thessaly,
<https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/thessaly/pherai/i.html>

10. Athens, Attica
<https://www.nbbmuseum.be/en/resources/athenian-drachma-long-tradition-ancient-currency-euro>

11. Krannon, Thessaly
 Чаусидис 2017, Д78: 9

T.XV

Чавенішс 2017, Д50, Д51, Д54.

