

СИМЕОНОВА БЪЛГАРИЯ  
В ИСТОРИЯТА НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ ЮГОИЗТОК:  
1100 ГОДИНИ ОТ БИТКАТА ПРИ АХЕЛОЙ

I

EMPEROR SYMEON'S BULGARIA  
IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPE'S SOUTH-EAST:  
1100 YEARS FROM THE BATTLE OF ACHELOUS



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Edited by  
*Angel Nikolov*  
*Nikolay Kanev*

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**I**

Съставители

*Ангел Николов*

*Николай Кънев*

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*Редакционна колегия:*

Ангел Николов  
Антон Карабашев  
Георги Николов  
Милен Николов  
Николай Кънев  
Пламен Павлов

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# Archaeological testimonies of Bulgarian presence in the Central Balkans during the ninth and tenth centuries\*

*Milica Radišić*

With the arrival of the Bulgarians in the Lower Danube region around the year 680 a new chapter of the history of Southeast Europe was opened. A militant alliance, they formed a state which was to become the main rival to the Byzantine Empire and the other newly-formed states in the region for three hundred years. In addition to the core area where the capitals of Pliska and Preslav were founded, Early Mediaeval Bulgaria extended over much wider territories, including those of present-day Romania, Serbia and FYR Macedonia. In contrast to the relatively abundant data from the written sources, archaeological markers of Bulgarian presence and influences on these lands remain insufficiently studied. However, in recent years one may observe a growing interest in this topic, especially among students of the Early Middle Ages in the Carpathian Basin.<sup>1</sup> To summarise the evidence of expansion of the Bulgarian Khanate (the First Bulgarian State, an Empire since 917), that is to better understand the character and the ‘intensity’ of Bulgarian rule in the Central Balkans,<sup>2</sup> I shall try to confront the existing archaeological record from these parts with historical knowledge.

In broader terms, the archaeological record from between the late eighth and the tenth centuries testifies to a certain uniformisation of material culture

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\* The text stems from the project ‘Urbanization processes and development of medieval society’ (No. 177021), funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. V. YOTOV, Bulgarian control over the Salt Road in Transylvania during the 9th century: The archaeological evidence, in *Salt and Gold: The Role of Salt in Prehistoric Europe*, eds. V. NIKOLOV, K. BACVAROV, Provasia-Veliko Trnovo 2012, 323–331; P. LANGÓ, Bulgarian Connections of the Find-horizon of the 10th century in the Carpathian Basin: a Case Study, in *Avars, Bulgars and Magyars on the Middle and Lower Danube*, eds. L. DONCHEVA-PETKOVA, CS. BALOGH, A. TÜRK, София-Piliscsaba 2014, 157–164; M. TAKÁCS, The Ninth-Century Carpathian Basin on the North-Western Edge of the First Bulgarian State. An Overview of Some Hypotheses and Remarks and Their Evaluation, in *Between Byzantium and the Steppe. Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honour of Csanád Bálint on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, eds. Á. BOLLÓK, G. CSIKY, T. VIDA, Budapest 2016, 502–518.

<sup>2</sup> In the more recent archaeological literature, primarily Serbian, the label ‘Central Balkans’ usually refers to the territory of present-day Serbia south of the Sava and the Danube: cf. П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни Балкан од 7. до 11. века. Археолошка сведочанства*, Београд 2017, 12. It is used in the same meaning in this paper.

in Southeastern and, to some extent, Central Europe. In view of their common characteristics and the low level of research, settlements and architecture within them will not be discussed in more detail here. Some groups of finds, like certain types of pottery and jewellery, were also widely distributed among the Early Mediaeval populations. It is therefore very hard to judge, before detailed analyses have been performed, which particular (types of) products came from the Bulgarian Danube region, and whether they could testify to migrations, trade, or some other kind of contacts with the Central Balkans. At any rate, the Bulgarian state, developing in the immediate vicinity of the Byzantine centres on the Black Sea coast and in Thrace, should be seen as transferring these patterns to the Balkan hinterlands and the Carpathian Basin.<sup>3</sup> Leaving aside general phenomena, in what follows I will focus on more illustrative evidence, i.e. the finds clearly attributable to the Early Bulgarian heritage. Most of them are of nomadic origin; thus one can assume with more certainty that they reached these remote areas with the Bulgarians themselves.

The Early Bulgarians lived in the area framed by the Lower Danube, the Balkan Mountains and the Black Sea; from there they undertook expeditions and controlled the populations of captured lands. Many sites have been explored in the core areas, first of all bi-ritual cemeteries of the pagan period displaying nomadic customs and material culture of the tribesmen,<sup>4</sup> and south of the Balkan Mountains and in Transylvania the clusters of finds indicative of an eighth-ninth century Bulgarian expansion have been recorded.<sup>5</sup> Yet, although there are historical data on their incursions into the Central Balkans, we still lack more solid archaeological evidence of Bulgarian presence there prior to the second half of the ninth century.

After their state was formed, the Bulgarians resettled Slavic tribes toward the west, imposing on them tributes and a role in defence from the Avars. In the

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<sup>3</sup> cf. V. ВІКІЋ, *Vizantijski nakit u Srbiji. Modeli i nasleđe*, Beograd 2010, 41, 145–147; В. ГРИГОРОВ, Накити в България и Великоморавия от IX–X в. (византийски културни влияния), *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology* 3 (2013) 99–119; I. BUGARSKI, M. RADIŠIĆ, The Central Balkans in the the Early Middle Ages: Archaeological Testimonies to Change, in *Byzantine heritage and Serbian art I. Processes of Byzantinisation and Serbian archaeology*, ed. V. ВІКІЋ, Belgrade 2016, 99.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Ж. Н. ВЪЖАРОВА, *Славяни и прабългари (по данни на некрополите от VI–XI в. на територията на България)*, София 1976, 83–265; U. FIEDLER, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau* 1–2, Bonn 1992; U. FIEDLER, Bulgars in the Lower Danube region. A survey of the archaeological evidence and of the state of current research, in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages. Avars, Bulgars, Khazars and Cumans*, ed. F. CURTA, Leiden-Boston 2008, 154–162; P. РАШЕВ, *Българската езическа култура VII–IX век*, София 2008, 194–200.

<sup>5</sup> Б. БОРИСОВ, Археологические свидетельства праболгарского присутствия на территории Южной Болгарии, *Поволжская археология* 2 (2012) 50–65; I. TOPALILOV, K. STANEV, Two Bulgar Pagan Burials from Plovdiv, in *Avars, Bulgars and Magyars on the Middle and Lower Danube*, eds. L. DONCHEVA-PETKOVA, CS. BALOGH, A. TÜRK, София-Piliscsaba 2014, 83–92; V. YOTOV, Bulgarian control, 324–329.



early ninth century, Khan Krum's army permanently occupied the lands along the Danube – all the way to the Sarmia region in the west – and by the middle of that century the Bulgarians captured the Great Morava valley too.<sup>6</sup> As these were border areas between these two powers, one should count with certain influences from both Bulgaria and the Avar Khaganate.<sup>7</sup> Several finds could testify to that effect, most of them without archaeological contexts.

In addition to certain jewellery types, such as crescent-shaped earrings with star pendants<sup>8</sup> with parallels from both Late Avar and Bulgarian bi-ritual necropolises,<sup>9</sup> and crescent-shaped earrings with triangular attachments,<sup>10</sup> the majority of them coming from the Bulgarian Danube region and Southern Romania,<sup>11</sup> two specific ceramic finds which so far have not been studied more closely could belong to the same horizon. One of them is a fragmented, mildly burnished amphora-like jug decorated with irregular horizontal lines, most likely from present-day Central Serbia (**Fig. 1**),<sup>12</sup> with very close parallels from the Early Bulgarian cemeteries at Varna, Topola and Devnya. These are the earliest specimens of the type, dated to the end of the eighth and the early ninth century.<sup>13</sup> The second vessel is completely

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<sup>6</sup> ЛИБИ II, 34–35; С. ЋИРКОВИЋ, *Образовање српске државе, у Историја српског народа I*, ур. С. ЋИРКОВИЋ, Београд 1981, 147–148; Р. КОМАТИНА, *The Slavs of the Mid-Danube basin and the Bulgarian expansion in the first half of the 9th century*, *ЗПВИ* 47 (2010) 55–78.

<sup>7</sup> At this point it is not necessary to comment the finds of Late Avar belt pieces which were, with due caution, attributed to Krum's Avar mercenaries: I. BUGARSKI, *Early Mediaeval Finds from Veliko Gradište and the Appearance of Late Avar Belt Elements along the Southern Bank of the Middle Danube*, *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 12/1 (2008) 87–96, or to the movement of their refugees after the fall of the Khaganate: I. BUGARSKI, N. MILADINOVIĆ-RADMILLOVIĆ, I. POPADIĆ, M. MARJANOVIĆ, *Early Mediaeval Burial at Stubline Near Obrenovac: Spatial, Anthropological and Archaeological Analyses of the Southernmost Avar Grave*, *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica* 48 (2013) 285–305.

<sup>8</sup> М. БАЈАЛОВИЋ-ХАЏИ-ПЕШИЋ, *Накит VIII–XVIII века у Музеју града Београда*, Београд 1984, кат. бр. 3, Т. III/3; П. ШПЕХАР, *Средњовековни налази из области Браничева*, *Гласник Српског археолошког друштва* 23 (2007) 366, сл. 2/7–8.

<sup>9</sup> É. GARAM, *Das awarenzeitliche Gräberfeld von Tiszafüred*, Budapest 1995, 278, Abb. 149/1–12, 254; В. ГРИГОРОВ, *Метални накити од средновековна Бугарија (VII–XI век)*, София 2007, 35, 39, Обр. 18, 29.

<sup>10</sup> М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Неки подаци о изradi предмета од обојених метала на Кључу Дунава у IX–XI веку*, *Зборник народног музеја* 11 (1983) 101, Т. II/6, V/4–5.

<sup>11</sup> В. ГРИГОРОВ, *Метални накити*, 35, Обр. 19/1–2, Обр. 53.

<sup>12</sup> The find-place is unknown. As it is housed at the National Museum in Kragujevac (without inventory number), it can be assumed that it came from the wider area of this town. I wish to express my gratitude to the curator, Igor Djurović, for providing me with the photographs of this vessel and another one, to be discussed below.

<sup>13</sup> М. ХРИСТОВА, *Амфоровидните съдове като хронологичен показател (по данни от биритуалните некрополи)*, in *EURIKA. In honorem Ludmилae Doncevae-Petkovaе*, eds. V. GRIGOROV, M. DASKALOV, E. KOMATAROVA, София 2009, 232–233, Таб. I; М.

preserved, 16 cm high, with a roughly finished handle and notches on the body. It comes from an unrecorded grave in Botunja near Kragujevac (**Fig. 2**)<sup>14</sup> and cannot be linked directly to pottery from Bulgarian bi-ritual necropolises.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, this jug can perhaps be dated prior to the Christianisation of Bulgaria, as very similar forms were part of the repertoire of so-called yellow pottery. Characteristic of the Late Avar period,<sup>16</sup> it was also present in Bulgarian settlements.<sup>17</sup> Although the Botunja find cannot be interpreted with certainty, it should still be mentioned here as it illustrates a form of material culture typical of both the above-mentioned cultural circles.



Fig. 1. Amphora-like jug of an earlier type, central Serbia (National Museum in Kragujevac)



Fig. 2. Ninth-century jug, Botunje (National Museum in Kragujevac)

ХРИСТОВА, Керамика из биритуалних могилникав нижнег Дунаја и вопросы ее хронологији, *Поволжска археологија* 1 (11) (2015) 103, 118, Таб. III/I, Рис. 6/1–2 (type I).

<sup>14</sup> М. БОГДАНОВИЋ, *Старе културе на тлу централне Србије. Каталог изложбе*, Крагујевац 1981, 58–59, кат. бр. 86. The find was dated roughly to the ninth-tenth centuries. We do not know if the Botunja grave produced more finds. The catalogue states that the jug was burnished, which could not be concluded from the photograph (see note 12).

<sup>15</sup> I would like to thank Maria Hristova for her useful comments on both vessels.

<sup>16</sup> D. BIALEKOVÁ, *Žltá keramika z pohrebisk obdobia avarskej riše v Karpatskej kotline*, *Slovenská archeológia* 15-1 (1967) 5–76. The jug from Botunja is very similar to the one from Čelarevo: Р. БУНАРЦИЋ, Извештај са заштитног археолошког ископавања раносредњовековне некрополе на локалитету „Циглана“ код Челарева, *Грађа за проучавање споменика културе Војводине* 8-9 (1978) 48, Т. IX/1.

<sup>17</sup> V. PETROVA, The early medieval yellow pottery from Pliska, Bulgaria: the question of its provenance and the problem of its origin, in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, ed. J. HENNING, Berlin-New York 2006, 315–340; T. VIDA, Zur Frage des gelben Tafelgeschirrs der frühmittelalterlichen Eliten im mittleren Donauraum, in *„Castellum, civitas, urbs“: Zentren und Eliten im frühmittelalterlichen Ostmitteleuropa*, Hrsg. O. HEINRICH-TAMÁSKA, H. HEROLD, P. STRAUB, T. VIDA, Budapest, Leipzig, Keszthely, Rahden/Westf. 2015, 313–327.

Single inhumation graves from the vicinity of Obrenovac and Belgrade and from the Djerdap region have been dated roughly to the ninth century; given their uncharacteristic pots and other general pagan burial features, such as north-south orientation of the graves, they cannot be specifically ascribed to Slavs, Bulgarians or Avars.<sup>18</sup> That pagan customs outlived the Christianisation of the Bulgarian state<sup>19</sup> is testified to at the Ravna cemetery by Knjaževac, which also produced ceramic grave-gifts.<sup>20</sup> This necropolis has become the best-studied Early Mediaeval cemetery in Serbia south of the Sava and the Danube; it was dated from the last decades of the ninth to the first half of the eleventh century. Some Bulgarian features have also been encountered at the site, a matter to be discussed below.

The picture provided by later archaeological material is much clearer. In stratigraphically excavated sites the objects of Bulgarian origin were more frequently found in contexts from the second half of the ninth and the tenth century. Particularly illustrative are two characteristic groups of finds – amphora-like jugs and belt pieces. The fact that they were usually found in fortified settlements is especially important for our analysis.

Unlike common kitchenware which was widely distributed across the area of the so-called Balkan-Danube culture, which also includes present-day Serbia,<sup>21</sup> amphora-like jugs were mostly used at the time of expansion of the First Bulgarian State in what is now Northern Bulgaria. Rarely found outside the core areas,<sup>22</sup> they are fairly indicative for our study. Completely or mildly burnished, they often bear incised magical-symbolic runes or letters and are sometimes decorated with incised parallel lines.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Д. МИНИЋ, Посуде као гробни прилози на средњовековним некрополама у Србији, *Годишњак града Београда* 25 (1978) 88, 92; М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Словени у југословенском Подунављу*, Београд 1990, 50, 91 (кат. 49), 110 (кат. 101); *Винча у праисторији и средњем веку. Каталог изложбе*, ур. С. ЋЕЛИЋ, Београд 1984, 91–92, 131–132; D. RADIČEVIĆ, Medieval Necropolises of 9th–11th Century in the Lower Serbian Danube River Basin, *Istros* 19 (2013) 499–502; А. ПРЕМК, П. ПОПОВИЋ, Љ. БЈЕЛЈАЈАЦ, Вајуга-Песак. Извештај о сондажним ископавањима у 1980. години, у *Ђердапске свеске* 2, ур. В. КОНДИЋ, Београд 1984, 115.

<sup>19</sup> In English-language literature a distinction is often made between the *Bulgars* (before their baptism in 864/5) and the *Bulgarians* (after the christening): cf. U. FIEDLER, *Bulgars*, 152, n. 1. As most of the finds discussed in this article can be dated to the later period, I use the term ‘Bulgarians’.

<sup>20</sup> S. JOVANOVIĆ, M. VUKSAN, Medieval Necropolis, in S. PETKOVIĆ, M. RUŽIĆ, S. JOVANOVIĆ, M. VUKSAN, Zs. K. ZOFFMANN, *Roman and Medieval Necropolis in Ravna Near Knjaževac*, Belgrade 2005, 223–229; П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни Балкан*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> В. БИКИЋ, *Средњовековна керамика Београда*, Београд 1994, 43–44, 112–113, with further references.

<sup>22</sup> V. YOTOV, Bulgarian control, fig. 9.

<sup>23</sup> e. g. Л. ДОНЧЕВА-ПЕТКОВА, *Българска битова керамика през ранното средновековие (втората половина на VI-края на X в.)*, София 1977, 77–85; Л. ДОНЧЕВА-

With the exception of the already-mentioned single find of an earlier date (**Fig. 1**), pottery study has so far revealed that amphora-like jugs occurred in the Central Balkans between the ninth century and the end of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth, and that they therefore cannot be exclusively connected with the First Bulgarian State. The fact that they were more significantly represented in the eleventh and twelfth-century layers speaks in favour of their extended production period, reaching the times of Byzantine ‘reconquista’;<sup>24</sup> thus one should be cautious when dating unstratified finds.

What follows will focus on finds from the localities where the Bulgarian occupation horizon was reliably confirmed. These objects cluster mostly in the Raška valley, in the southwestern part of today’s Serbia, with the greatest concentration in two systematically excavated sites, the Ras Fortress and Gradina – Postenje (**Map/32, 33**). While the first locality produced several dozen shards, sixteen of them bearing characteristic marks, chiefly on handles (**Fig. 3**), there is no precise information about the latter site.<sup>25</sup> Single shards of amphora-like jugs have also been noted in nearby forts and in other parts of Serbia’s interior. Particularly characteristic is the handle bearing the ‘labrys’ rune from Sokolica (**Map/25, 29, 31, 34; Fig. 4**).<sup>26</sup>

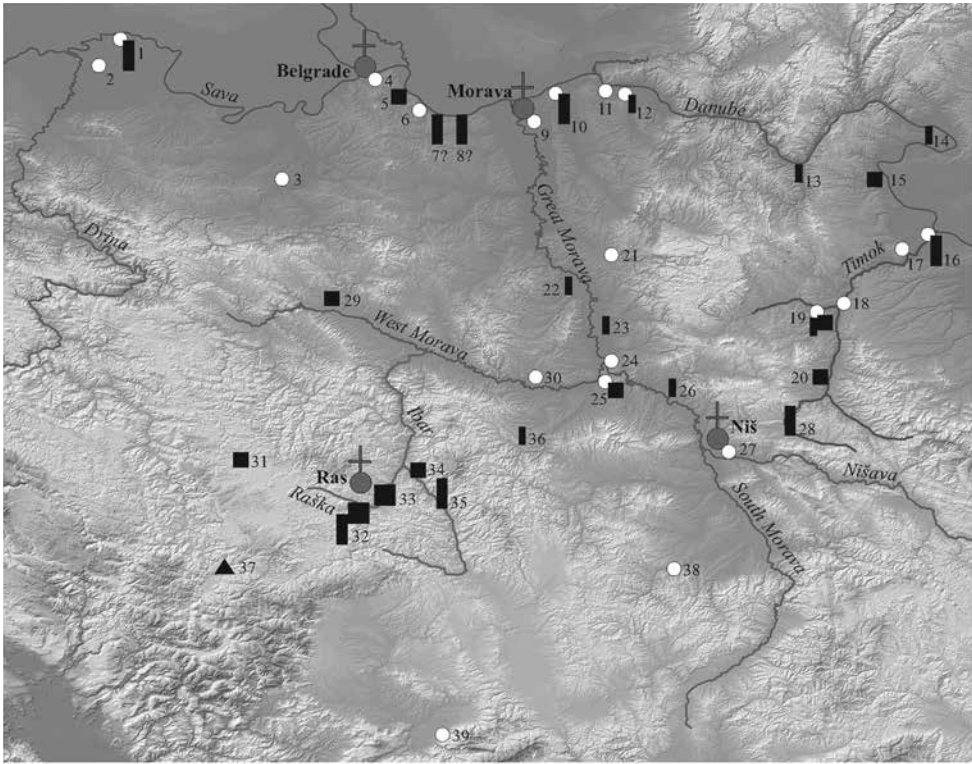
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ПЕТКОВА, *Знаци върху археологически паметници от средновековна България VII–X век*, София 1980, Обр. 16; V. GRIGOROV, J. DIMITROV, New Data about Pottery Production in the 9th–10th centuries in Pliska (Capital of the First Bulgarian Kingdom), *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology* 3 (2013) 121–125.

<sup>24</sup> LJ. BJELAJAC, Byzantine Amphorae in the Serbian Danubian Area in the 11th–12th Centuries, in *Recherches sur la céramique byzantine, Bulletin de correspondance Hellénique, suppl.* 18, eds. V. DÉROCHE, J.-M. SPIESER, Paris-Athènes 1989, 115–118; В. БИКИЋ, Средњовековна керамика из Гамзиграда: порекло и радионице, у *Археологија источне Србије*, ур. М. ЛАЗИЋ, Београд 1997, 321, with further references.

<sup>25</sup> **Ras**: М. РОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, Beograd 1999, 155–159, 297–298, kat. br. 217–220, sl. 105–106; В. БИКИЋ, Прилог проучавању знакова урезаних на амфороидним крчазима из Тврђаве Рас, *Новопазарски зборник* 23 (1999) 17–26; **Gradina-Postenje**: Г. ТОМОВИЋ, Глагољски натпис са Чечана, *Историјски часопис* 37 (1991) сл. 2; Д. МРКОБРАД, Рас-Постење: фазе развоја утврђења, *ЗРВИ* 36 (1997) 213; М. РОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 156 (нар. 622), 298.

<sup>26</sup> **Vrsenice**: М. РОПОВИЋ, V. БИКИЋ, *Vrsenice – kasnoantičko i srpsko ranosrednjovekovno utvrđenje*, Beograd 2009, 113, kat. br. 104, sl. 95/3–4; **Končulić**: Д. БУЛИЋ, Утврђење Градина – Кончулић код Рашке, *Историјски часопис* 57 (2008) 38, Т. 9/10, 13/2. A shard from this site cannot be more narrowly determined precisely due to a lack of stratigraphic information. Judging by other pottery finds, this locality was also settled during the time of Bulgarian rule; **Sokolica**: Д. РАДИЧЕВИЋ, Археолошка налазишта X–XI века у Чачку и околини, *Гласник Српског археолошког друштва* 19 (2003) 234–235, сл. 5/7; **Ukosa**: Д. РАШКОВИЋ, Налази из рановизантијског и средњовековног периода на налазишту Укоса у граду Сталаћу, *Гласник Српског археолошког друштва* 32 (2016) 292, сл. 4, Т. V/3.



- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ■ Individual finds of amphora-like jugs        | ■ Large quantity of amphora-like jugs |
| ▮ Individual finds of belt fittings/strap-ends | ▮ Belt fittings (3-10 pieces)         |
| ▲ Bulgarian runes, Šudikova                    | ○ Byzantine coins                     |
| ⊕ Bulgarian bishopric seats                    |                                       |

Map. Bulgarian finds and Byzantine coins from the second half of the ninth and the tenth century in the Central Balkans

1. Mačvanska Mitrovica; 2. Bogatić; 3. Ub; 4. Belgrade; 5. Vinča; 6. Grocka; 7. Brestovik; 8. Seone; 9. Morava; 10. Braničevo; 11. Ram; 12. Veliko Gradište; 13. Veliki Gradac; 14. Kostol; 15. Ušće Slatinske Reke; 16. Prahovo; 17. Negotin; 18. Zaječar; 19. Gamzigrad; 20. Ravna; 21. Despotovac; 22. Jagodina; 23. Čuprija; 24. Stalać; 25. Ukosa; 26. Aleksinac; 27. Niš; 28. Svrljig; 29. Sokolica; 30. Velika Drenova; 31. Vrsenice; 32. Ras; 33. Postenje; 34. Končulić; 35. Rudnica; 36. Ljubinci; 37. Šudikova; 38. Rujkovac; 39. Prizren

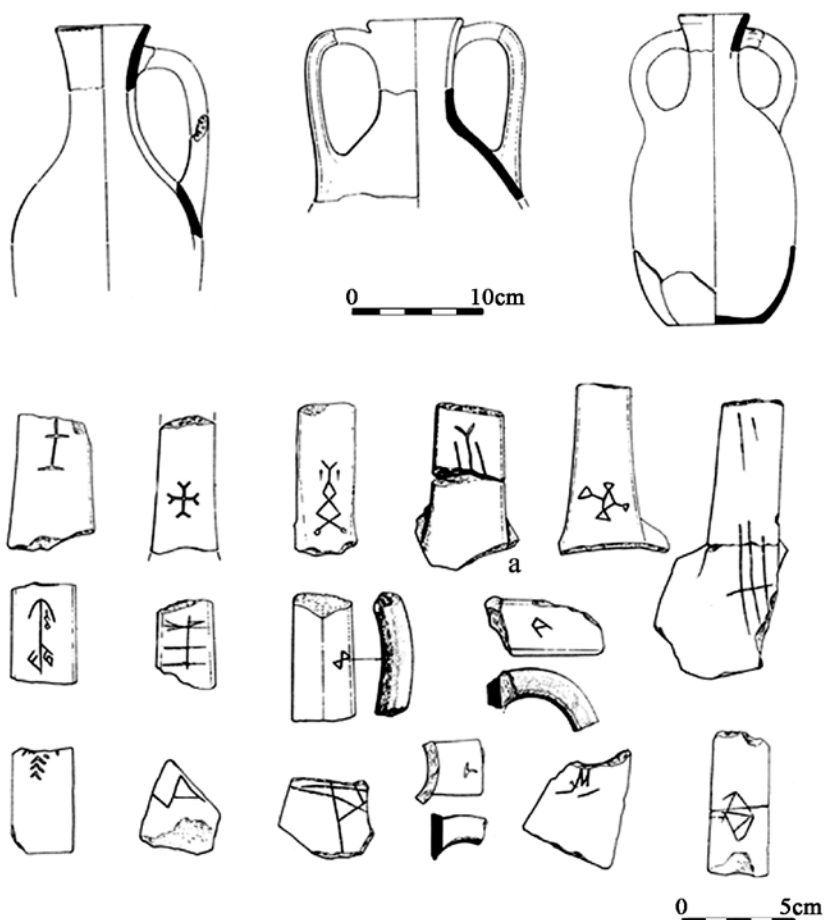


Fig. 3. Amphora-like jugs with Bulgarian signs, Ras Fortress (after M. POPOVIĆ, *Tvrđava Ras*, sl. 105–106)

Although generally better researched, the sites from the Danube region very seldom produced finds of this pottery type. Moreover, it should be stressed that amphora-like jugs from the more carefully excavated localities like the Belgrade Fortress and Veliki Gradac came exclusively from later archaeological contexts, i.e. from the time of Byzantine rule.<sup>27</sup> Only a few finds from Mediaeval settlements in the wider area of Belgrade and Eastern Serbia could be approximately dated

<sup>27</sup> В. БИКИЋ, *Средњовековна керамика*, 60; М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Средњовековно насеље на Великом Градцу у X–XI веку*, Београд 1981, 54; cf. V. ВИКИЋ, *Context, Character and Typology of Pottery from the Eleventh and Twelfth Century Danube Fortresses: Case Studies from Morava and Braničevo*, in *Actas do X Congresso Internacional a Cerâmica no Mediterrâneo – Silves 2012*, eds. M. J. GONÇALVES, S. GÓMEZ-MARTÍNEZ, Silves 2015, 130.

to the tenth century (**Map/5, 15, 19**),<sup>28</sup> and a single amphora-like jug came from a grave at the Ravna cemetery in Eastern Serbia. Its body is decorated with ribs (**Map/20; Fig. 5**),<sup>29</sup> just like the analogous find from the nearby settlement at Gamzigrad.<sup>30</sup> As many as 140 graves have been excavated at Ravna; thus this single jug should not be taken as conclusive evidence of the presence of Bulgarian population there.



Fig. 4. 'Labrys' rune, Sokolica (National Museum in Čačak)



Fig. 5. Amphora-like jug, grave no. 46, Ravna (after S. JOVANOVIĆ, M. VUKSAN, *Medieval Necropolis*, Pl. 8/5)

Perhaps the most common characteristic shared by Bulgarian cemeteries and those from the Serbian Danube region is the presence of certain jewellery types, such as grape-like pendant earrings, earrings with four beads, or finger-rings

<sup>28</sup> **Vinča-Reka**: M. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Словени*, 83–84, кат. 29 (бр. 41); M. JANKOVIĆ, Belgrade from the 5th to the 16th centuries. The Medieval Millennium, in *The Belgrade City Museum 1903–2003*, ed. N. SEFEROVIĆ, Belgrade 2005, 66, fig. 56; **Ušće Slatinske Reke**: A. JOVANOVIĆ, M. KORAĆ, Ђ. JANKOVIĆ, L'embouchure de la riviere Slatinska reka, у *Бердапске свеске* 3, ур. В. КОНДИЋ, Београд 1986, 386, fig. 19/7; M. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Словени*, 110–111, кат. 101, сл. 60; **Gamzigrad**: Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Словенски град, у *Гамзиград. Касноантички царски дворца*, ур. С. ЋЕЛИЋ, Београд 1983, 149, кат. бр. 249; В. БИКИЋ, *Средњовековна керамика из Гамзиграда*, 322, сл. 1/6.

<sup>29</sup> S. JOVANOVIĆ, M. VUKSAN, *Medieval Necropolis*, 228–229, fig. 27, Pl. 8/5.

<sup>30</sup> See note 28.

decorated with a star and eagle. On the other hand, the Ravna grave inventories display some similarities with those from Moravia in Central Europe as well,<sup>31</sup> which is altogether highly illustrative of the cultural complexity and interaction in the Early Middle Ages. The attribution of this cemetery to the Slavic tribe of Timočani, mentioned in historical sources in connection with Bulgarian expansion toward the west, appears to be acceptable.<sup>32</sup>

The other group of objects which can with greater certainty be assigned to the Bulgarians comprises belt fittings and strap-ends decorated with floral ornaments. Under the Byzantine influence these pieces, nomadic in origin, featured a specific decoration dominated by the palmette motif. The most characteristic are the heart-shaped and leaf-shaped fittings, the bulk of which come from Northern Bulgaria, where they have been dated between the end of the ninth and the first half of the eleventh century, or, apparently, predominantly to the tenth. Not known in cemeteries, almost all the finds of an earlier date came from settlements; several production workshops have been located in these parts.<sup>33</sup>

Such fittings were also found at eleventh-century sites in Bulgaria, now including cemeteries,<sup>34</sup> but it seems that at that time they were not frequently used. These finds could have been in prolonged use, or they may witness a short-lived continuation of production after the Byzantines imposed their rule over the Bulgarians. At any rate, they are not known from twelfth-century contexts. Such pieces have also been observed, in more significant numbers, in the neighbouring territories – for example, northeastern Thrace and southeastern Romania – and

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<sup>31</sup> S. JOVANOVIĆ, M. VUKSAN, *Medieval Necropolis*, 204–219.

<sup>32</sup> P. ŠPEHAR, *Remarks to Christianisation and Realms in the Central Balkans in the Light of Archaeological Finds (7 th–11 th c.)*, in „*Castellum, civitas, urbs*“. *Zentren und Eliten im frühmittelalterlichen Ostmitteleuropa*, Hrsg. O. HEINRICH-TAMÁSKA, H. HEROLD, P. STRAUB, T. VIDA, Budapest, Leipzig, Keszthely, Rahden/Westf. 2015, 86–87; P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs*, 55–59.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. С. СТАНИЛОВ, *Старобългарски ремъчни украси от Националния Археологически музей, Разкопки и проучвания 22* (1991) 5–70; В. ПЛЕТНЪОВ, В. ПАВЛОВА, *Ранносредновековни ремъчни крайници във Варненския археологически музей, ИИМВ 28-43* (1992) 158–223, Т. IV–XI; В. ПЛЕТНЪОВ, В. ПАВЛОВА, *Ранносредновековни ремъчни апликации във Варненския археологически музей, ИИМВ 30-31* (1994-1995) 24–239, Т. VII–XLVII; С. БОНЕВ, С. ДОНЧЕВА, *Старобългарски производствен център за художествен метал при с. Новосел, Шуменско*, Велико Търново 2011, 104–127, Т. XXXII–XLIX; M. INKOVA, *A contribution to the problem of producing the Old Bulgarian belt-fittings from the 10th century*, in *Die Archäologie der frühen Ungarn. Chronologie, Technologie und Methodik* (RGZM – Tagungen 17), Hrsg. В. TOBIAS, Mainz 2012, 277–293; S. DONCHEVA, *Metal Art Production in Medieval Bulgaria. Jewelry craftsmanship in Bulgaria at the Middle Ages*, Saarbrücken 2012, 2–20, 57–68.

<sup>34</sup> Л. ДОНЧЕВА-ПЕТКОВА, *Одърци. Некрополи от XI в.*, София 2005, 145–147, Обр. 22, Т. XLII.



interpreted in a Bulgarian context.<sup>35</sup> The finds from Macedonia have not been discussed in more detail.<sup>36</sup>

In Serbia, heart- and leaf-shaped fittings are evenly distributed throughout different regions; they are somewhat more numerous along the Sava and the Danube (**Map/1, 7, 8, 10, 12–14, 16**),<sup>37</sup> in eastern (**Map/19, 28; Fig. 6**)<sup>38</sup> and southwestern Serbia (**Map/32, 35**).<sup>39</sup> These are either stray finds or they come from settlements. The group of eight cast fittings, found by chance at Rudnica by the Ibar river (**Fig. 7**),<sup>40</sup> is unique in these parts as it most probably belonged to a single belt-set.<sup>41</sup> It comprises four narrow and wide appliqués each, belonging to the same type and ornamented with trefoil palmettes consisting of a central rhomboid and two oval side leaves. In the reference typology the fittings of

<sup>35</sup> Д. МОМЧИЛОВ, Старобългарски апликации от Маркели, в *Плиска–Преслав 11*, ред. П. ГЕОРГИЕВ, Я. ДИМИТРОВ, София 2015, 401–418; С. PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, G. TALMAȚCHI, С. ȘOVA, Repere arheologice medievale-timpurii în zona Adamclisi (jud. Constanța), *Revista Bistriței* 28 (2014) 170–179, 183, Pls. VI–VII.

<sup>36</sup> К. RISTOV, Gradishte Taor. Late Antique Settlement and Fortress, *Folia Archaeologica Balkanica* III (2015), 382, 385, fig. 26.

<sup>37</sup> **Mačvanska Mitrovica**: D. MINIĆ, Le site d'habitation médiéval de Mačvanska Mitrovica, *Sirmium* 11, Belgrade 1980, 55–56, Pl. XVIII/5–7, 17–18, 20, 22, XXVIII/2–4; **Brestovik and Seone**: CS. BÁLINT, *Südongarn im 10. Jahrhundert*, Budapest 1991, 105, Taf. XXXIIIa/2–7, 9–18, 20–21 (The two find-places of most of the fittings published by Csanád Bálint are localised on the basis of information obtained from Nataša Cerović, curator of the National Museum in Belgrade); **Braničevo**: М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Словени*, 98, кат. 64 (бр. 23, 25, 26); **Veliko Gradište**: I. BUGARSKI, Early Mediaeval Finds, 92–93, fig. 7; **Veliki Gradac**: М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Средњовековно насеље*, 61, сл. 28, Т. IX/14; **Kostol**: CS. BÁLINT, *Südongarn*, Taf. XXXIIIa/1; **Prahovo**: М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Неки подаци, 108–109, Т. IV/11–12, VI/8.

<sup>38</sup> **Gamzigrad**: Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Словенски град, 142, 159, кат. бр. 279; **Svrljig**: М. РАДИШИЋ, Раносредњовековне апликације из Сврљиг-града и осврт на сличне налазе на нашем тлу: о функцији, хронологији и културној припадности, у: *Етнокултуролошки зборник за проучавање културе источне Србије и околних области* 19, ур. С. ПЕТРОВИЋ, Сврљиг 2015, 21–28, сл. 1.

<sup>39</sup> **Ras**: М. ПОРОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 160, 297, кат. бр. 224, сл. 99/3.

<sup>40</sup> V. IVANIŠEVIĆ, I. BUGARSKI, Post-Antique Settlement Matrices in the Central Balkans: Use of Justinianic Landscape in the Early Middle Ages, forthcoming. I would like to thank Vujadin Ivanišević of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade, for the information (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade).

<sup>41</sup> For the reconstruction of Early Mediaeval belts see e.g.: G. GOMOLKA-FUCHS, Eine Gürtelgarnitur vom ungarischen Typ aus der frühmittelalterlichen Siedlung von Krivina, Bezirk Ruse, Bulgarien, *Eurasia antiqua* 8 (2002) Abb. 1, 7; С. ДОНЧЕВА, Реконструкција на коланни гарнитуре по материали от ранносредновековни център за метало пластика при с. Златар, Преславско, в *Преслав 7*, ред. С. БОНЕВ, Велико Търново 2013, 152–170. Good examples are also belts with narrow and wide fittings from the area of the rivers Dnestr and Prut in present-day Moldova: С. РЯБЦЕВА, О балканских связях населения Пруто-Днестровского региона, По материалам находок предметов цветной металлообработки, в *Преслав 7*, ред. С. БОНЕВ, Велико Търново 2013, 171–172, Рис. 1/9–12, 14–16, 18–20, 24–26.

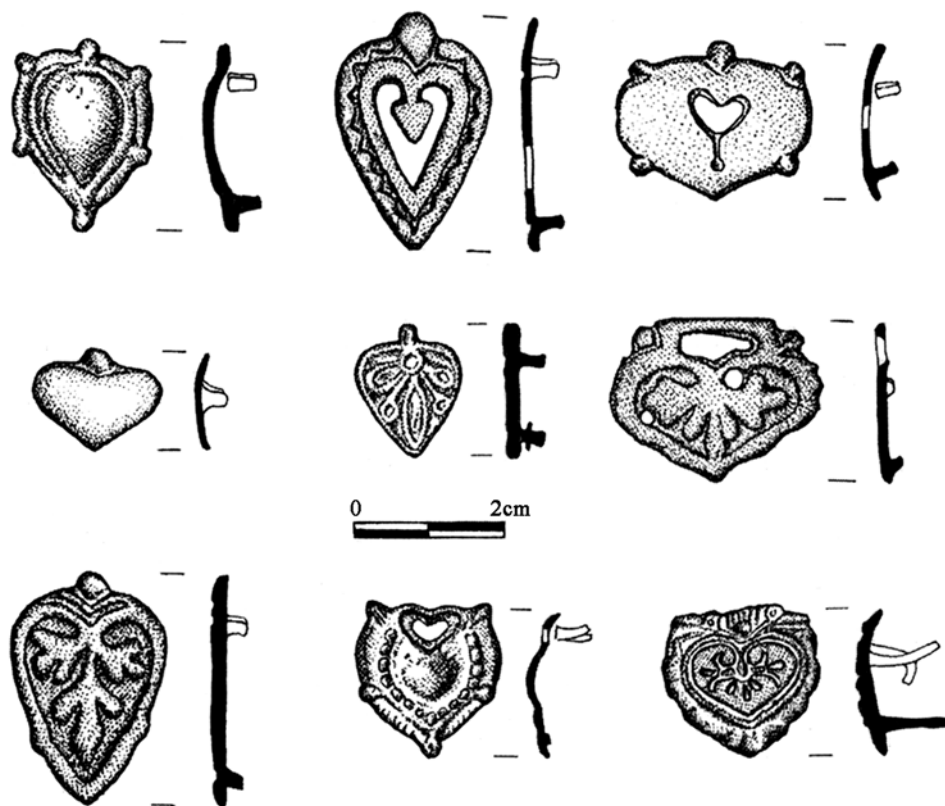


Fig. 6. Heart- and leaf-shaped fittings, Svrlijig (after M. РАДИШИЋ, Раносредњовековне апликације, сл. 1)

this type are dated to the end of the ninth and the tenth century.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, finds of almost the same shape and decoration, but made out of gilded silver, are known from Hungarian cemeteries.<sup>43</sup> The analysis of metal fittings from Bulgarian collections has shown that these were most usually made from copper alloys, while pieces from the Early Hungarian necropolises were mostly made from more precious materials and in more luxurious techniques.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> В. ПЛЕТНЪОВ, В. ПАВЛОВА, Раносредновековни ремъчни апликации, 64, Т. XXVI/457–462 (type CX8).

<sup>43</sup> L. RÉVÉSZ, Tarcsl-Veréb-árok (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county), in *The Ancient Hungarians. Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. I. FODOR, Budapest 1996, 122.

<sup>44</sup> M. INKOVA, A contribution, 281–286; cf. L. RÉVÉSZ, I. M. NEPPER, The Archaeological Heritage of the Ancient Hungarians, in *The Ancient Hungarians. Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. I. FODOR, Budapest 1996, 48.

For the time being, the smallest concentration is observed along the Great Morava river (**Map/22, 23**). Yet, precisely in this region, in Ćuprija, a fitting of this type has been found in a grave. Placed by the feet of the deceased, it was probably in secondary use.<sup>45</sup> Only a single fitting comes from an unknown site in the Middle Morava valley, likewise dating from the end of the ninth and the tenth century.<sup>46</sup> Other belt elements of Bulgarian origin from this date have also been found in the Central Balkans, though in relatively small numbers, like strap-ends decorated in the same style (**Map/13, 19, 26, 36**).<sup>47</sup> The bronze strap-end from Aleksinac illustrated here (**Fig. 8**), at first dated to the Late Antiquity,<sup>48</sup> resembles the finds from Bulgaria which are usually dated later, between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Apart from a palmette, particularly characteristic is an almond-shaped ornament, typical of Bulgarian finds.<sup>49</sup> While having parallels in Bulgaria, two round belt appliques from the Ras Fortress are unique in this region (**Fig. 9**).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> М. ВАСИЋ, С. ПЕТКОВИЋ, В. МАНОЈЛОВИЋ-НИКОЛИЋ, М. КРИЖАНАЦ, Резултати истраживања вишеслојног налазишта Norgeum Margi-Равно-Ћуприја у 1989. години, *Весник Војног музеја* 39 (2009) 141; cf. М. РАДИШИЋ, Раносредњовековне апликације, 28.

<sup>46</sup> This unpublished find is housed in the Regional Museum in Jagodina. I wish to thank the curator, Smiljana Dodić, for the information. Cf. В. ПЛЕТЊОВ, В. ПАВЛОВА, Ранносредновековни ремњни апликације, 54, Т. XXI/348–352 (type CVIII2).

<sup>47</sup> **Veliki Gradac:** М. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Средњовековно насеље*, 61, сл. 28, 30; **Gamzigrad:** Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Словенски град, 125; Ђ. ЈАНКОВИЋ, Гамзиград у средњем веку, у *Felix Romuliana–Гамзиград*, ур. И. ПОПОВИЋ, Београд 2010, 211, сл. 187. The strap-end from Gamzigrad was dated to the eleventh century. However, due to a lack of stratigraphic data and because finds from the end of the ninth and the tenth century also occur at the site, we should not discard the possibility that the find came from the time of Bulgarian rule; **Aleksinac:** Д. РАШКОВИЋ, Римско насеље Praesidium Pompei – Римљани у Алексиначкој котлини, у *Ниш и Византија* 5, ур. М. РАКОЦИЈА, Ниш 2007, 224, сл. 18/2, 2а; **Ljubinci:** Д. РАШКОВИЋ, Н. ДИМОВСКИ, С. ЦРНОБРЊА, Рановизантијско утврђење Градиште у Љубинцима – Жупа александровачка, *Жупски зборник* 5 (2010) Т. 9/3.

<sup>48</sup> See note 47.

<sup>49</sup> В. ПЛЕТЊОВ, В. ПАВЛОВА, Ранносредновековни ремњни накрајници, 186, Т. XI/88; П. ДИМИТРОВ, Метални украси от Велики Преслав, *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology* 2 (2012) 109, Т. 5/3.

<sup>50</sup> М. РОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 160, 297, kat. br. 225–226, sl. 93/4–5.



Fig. 7. Heart- and leaf-shaped fittings, Rudnica (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

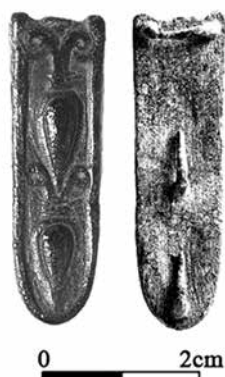


Fig. 8. Strap-end, Aleksinac  
(after Д. РАШКОВИЋ, Римско насеље,  
сл. 18/2, 2а)

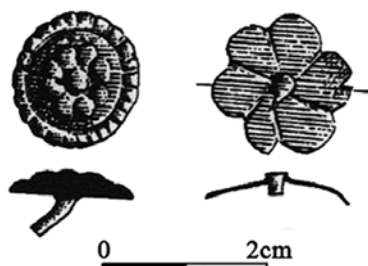


Fig. 9. Round belt appliques,  
Ras Fortress (after M. ПОПОВИЋ,  
Тврђава Рас, сл. 93/4–5)

In addition to Bulgaria, belt-sets decorated in the ‘palmette style’ were widely used in Early Mediaeval Hungary as well. Elements of a widespread nomadic fashion style, these belts from Bulgaria and Hungary are very much alike,<sup>51</sup> which created problems in the interpretation of such finds in present-day Serbia, a territory subjected to the influence of both states. It is particularly

<sup>51</sup> cf. P. LANGÓ, *Bulgarian Connections*, 157–164; P. LANGÓ, A. PATAY-HORVÁT, *Hungarian Belt – Bulgarian Belt? Some Notes on the Distribution of Ribbed Belt Mounts, in Between Byzantium and the Steppe. Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honour of Csanád Bálint on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, eds. Á. BOLLÓK, G. CSIKY, T. VIDA, Budapest 2016, 567–589.

difficult to interpret numerous appliquéés from the right bank of the Danube – from Brestovik and Seone – which are similar to both Bulgarian and Hungarian finds.<sup>52</sup> These finds have been connected with the Bjelo Brdo culture and the Hungarian expeditions to the Middle Danube region.<sup>53</sup> Yet, as in the course of the tenth century this area was part of Bulgaria,<sup>54</sup> one should not exclude a second possibility – that they were of Bulgarian origin.

This was already pointed out in the case of the find from Veliko Gradište, which had originally been interpreted in a Hungarian context.<sup>55</sup> To try to resolve this issue, it would be necessary to conduct more detailed analyses – a topic for future study, which is also going to include an as yet unpublished two-piece appliqué from Brestovik. It consists of a heart-shaped part and a ring attached to it by a hinge (Fig. 10).<sup>56</sup> In comparison with single-piece appliquéés, such elements were very rarely attached to Early Mediaeval belts. Even after surveying the abundant related literature, I could not find direct parallels for this find; typologically most similar is an element of the well-known belt-set from Iatrus in Northern Bulgaria, dated to the first half of the tenth century.<sup>57</sup> The open-work heart-shaped part alone was made in a way very similar to that used for certain single-piece appliquéés from Bulgaria.<sup>58</sup> In contrast to those, the finds from the Serbian hinterlands can be attributed more reliably to the Bulgarians, as they have direct parallels in their material culture.<sup>59</sup>



Fig. 10. Two-piece appliqué, Brestovik  
(National Museum in Belgrade)

<sup>52</sup> See note 37.

<sup>53</sup> cf. CS. BÁLINT, *Südungarn*, 105.

<sup>54</sup> J. КАЛИЋ-МИЈУШКОВИЋ, *Београд у средњем веку*, Београд 1967, 32–33.

<sup>55</sup> P. ŠRENAR, *Remarks*, 86; See note 37.

<sup>56</sup> The find is kept at the National Museum in Belgrade (The Archaeological Collection of the Early Middle Ages, inv. no 499). For the photograph I am indebted to the curator, Nataša Cerović.

<sup>57</sup> G. GOMOLKA-FUCHS, *Eine Gürtelgarnitur*, 493–508, Abb. 1; 2/5; 3/1–2; cf. P. LANGÓ, A. PATAY-HORVÁT, *Hungarian Belt – Bulgarian Belt?*, 568–572, 579.

<sup>58</sup> В. ПЛИЕТНЬОВ, В. ПАВЛОВА, *Ранносредновековни ремъчни апликации*, 42–43, Т. XI/197–199.

<sup>59</sup> М. РАДИШИЋ, *Раносредновековне апликациије*, 30–31; П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни Балкан*, 171.

Finally, Byzantine coins may perhaps also be seen as circumstantial evidence for the presence of the Bulgarian state in the Central Balkans. Their return into circulation in these parts has been marked by those minted by emperor Theophilos (829–842), but market monetisation saw a moderate increase only from the tenth century onwards. A little more than one hundred gold, silver and bronze coin-finds from the period between the reigns of Theophilos and John Tsimiskes (829–976) have been collected so far.<sup>60</sup> These finds are usually understood as reflecting Byzantine influences, which were on the rise after the Christianisation of Bulgarians and Serbs from the time of Basil I (867–886). However, one should leave the possibility open that part of these coins came to the Central Balkans with the Bulgarians, who had themselves used Byzantine money. Spatial distribution of the coin-finds partially overlaps that of the above-surveyed objects, covering the valleys of the Sava, Danube, Morava, Timok, and Nišava rivers. In contrast to this, it must be pointed out that no Byzantine coins are known from southwestern Serbia, where objects of Bulgarian provenance are somewhat more numerous (**Map**).

\* \* \*

That the Bulgarians ruled the territories of present-day Serbia south of the Sava and the Danube between the early ninth century and the year 971, when they suffered defeat by the Byzantines, or the beginning of the eleventh century, when so-called Samuel's Empire was terminated, is a well-established historical framework.<sup>61</sup> At first, the direction of Bulgarian expansion was towards the Serbian Danube region,<sup>62</sup> and from the later ninth century its focus shifted to the Danube hinterlands and the clashes with Serbia, which had finally been captured – after several failures – by the end of Simeon's reign (893–927).<sup>63</sup> In the former Serbian possessions Bulgarian bishoprics were founded, in Belgrade, Morava, Niš, and Ras, and perhaps also in Prizren and Lipljan. These bishoprics were later on incorporated into the Byzantine Archbishopric of Ohrid.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> В. РАДИЋ, В. ИВАНИШЕВИЋ, *Византијски новац из Народног музеја у Београду*, Београд 2006, 27–28, 31.

<sup>61</sup> С. ЋИРКОВИЋ, *Образовање српске државе*, 146–148; С. ЋИРКОВИЋ, *Србија између Византијског царства и Бугарске*, у *Историја српског народа I*, ур. С. ЋИРКОВИЋ, Београд 1981, 156–169; Г. ОСТРОГОРСКИ, *Историја Византије*, Београд 1998, 272–296.

<sup>62</sup> Р. КОМАТИНА, *The Slavs*, 55–74.

<sup>63</sup> П. КОМАТИНА, *О српско-бугарској граници у IX и X веку*, *ЗРВИ* 52 (2015) 32–35, with further references.

<sup>64</sup> В. ПОПОВИЋ, *Епископска седишта у Србији од IX до XI века*, *Годишњак града Београда* 25 (1978) 33–38; И. СНЕГАРОВ, *Историја на Охридската архиепископија 1*, Софија 1995, 56–60; П. КОМАТИНА, *Црквена политика Византије од краја иконоборства до смрти Василија I*, Београд 2014, 350–351.

Some views from recent historical literature on the expansion of the First Bulgarian State can be reconsidered on the basis of the presented archaeological data. It has been claimed that new possessions were not integrated by the Bulgarians in their administrative system or controlled by setting up garrisons there, but were rather ravaged, while the population was kept subdued and occasionally resettled en masse in Bulgarian core lands.<sup>65</sup> However, it is not easy to assume that the Bulgarians would conquer a region without an ambition to actually control it, at least to a certain extent, and the finds surveyed here seem to speak in favour of that option. On the other hand, one should underscore that no Bulgarian imperial seal has been found to testify to the presence of an administrative center in the western parts of their state.

Written sources mention Belgrade as an important stronghold, but the archaeological excavations conducted so far have failed to provide a picture of that settlement.<sup>66</sup> Especially important is the often-quoted information from the *Life of St Clement of Ohrid*, stating that the disciples of St Methodius, passing through Belgrade on their way from Moravia to Bulgaria, gained the impression of it as ‘the most glorious city on the Danube’. At that time, Belgrade was the seat of the Bulgarian commander Boritakan (Voritakan).<sup>67</sup> That one of the first bishoprics of Christianised Bulgaria was set up in Belgrade also speaks for the importance of the city to the state, primarily due to its strategic position against the Franks and the Hungarians on the other side of the Danube.<sup>68</sup>

Much as in the case of Belgrade, we know very little about the architecture of the bishopric towns in Morava and Niš. As regards church architecture, we can ascribe only the well-known Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul near Novi Pazar to this period. The church features Pre-Romanesque influences from the Adriatic coast, a region with which Bulgaria had no intense contacts at that time.<sup>69</sup> It became the center of the bishopric of Ras, founded probably during the reign of Peter (927–969) and reflecting the Bulgarian aspirations to subdue their neighbours not only politically, but also spiritually.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> П. КОМАТИНА, О српско-бугарској граници, 35–37.

<sup>66</sup> М. ПОПОВИЋ, *Београдска тврђава*, Београд 2006, 51–54.

<sup>67</sup> *Византијски извори за историју народа Југославије* 1, ур. Г. ОСТРОГОРСКИ, Ф. БАРИШИЋ, Београд 1955, 299; Ј. КАЛИЋ-МИЈУШКОВИЋ, *Београд*, 31–32.

<sup>68</sup> М. ПОПОВИЋ, *Београдска тврђава*, 54.

<sup>69</sup> С. ПОПОВИЋ, Преиспитивање цркве Св. Петра у Расу, у *Стефан Немања – Свети Симеон Мироточиви. Историја и предање*, ур. Ј. КАЛИЋ, Београд 2000, 209–229; cf. П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни Балкан*, 145, 147.

<sup>70</sup> М. РОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 298. For a new interpretation of the church and the references see: Р. МАРКОВИЋ, Beginnings of artistic activity in the Serbian lands (9th–11th century), in *Byzantine heritage and Serbian art II. Sacral art of the Serbian lands in the Middle ages*, eds. D. VOJVODIĆ, D. РОПОВИЋ, Belgrade 2016, 147–149.

It cannot be determined how far Bulgarian rule could influence settlement development in the Balkan interior. The formation of fortified settlements in the locations of Late Roman forts, intense throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, should be explained in the context of demographic recovery and settlement strategy of the time, and it was apparently caused by turbulent events and clashes between Bulgaria, Byzantium and Serbia.<sup>71</sup> The reoccupation of the Early Byzantine fortification at Ras is dated to the second half of the ninth century at the latest. The Early Mediaeval fortification reused the existing ramparts, while the dry-stone constructions and palisades were added at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries, or somewhat later. It has been suggested that this type of fortification was not characteristic of the Bulgarian core areas in the Lower Danube region, but that it could have been used at Ras in accordance with the local topographical conditions.<sup>72</sup>

A recent study has shown that in Bulgaria fortifications were started to get built out of stone instead of earth precisely since the early tenth century, and that from that time, in parallel to the reoccupation of the existing fortifications, entirely new ones started to be constructed. The Ras Fortress is listed among the fortifications from the southwestern parts of the Bulgarian state of that time;<sup>73</sup> yet, it is still not clear to what extent the dry-stone constructions can be assigned to the Bulgarians. Traces of Early Mediaeval building activity have been observed at Veliki Gradac as well, where a Late Roman tower was reconstructed and a large settlement was formed in the course of the tenth-eleventh centuries. Although it was explicitly connected with the Bulgarians,<sup>74</sup> the obtained stratigraphic information does not allow for a more precise dating within this span. Thus, we cannot assign it with confidence either to the times of Bulgarian or Byzantine rule in the Serbian Danube region.<sup>75</sup>

It is necessary to mention yet another find which could indirectly point to Bulgarian construction activity and is apparently their westernmost find in the Balkans. It is a rectangular stone block with incised runes – in the form of the letter ‘Y’ between two vertical hastae and others – which was later on used as spolia in the Šudikova Monastery church by Berane in Montenegro (**Map/37; Fig. 11a, b**).<sup>76</sup> As marks on building materials were documented

<sup>71</sup> I. BUGARSKI, M. RADIŠIĆ, *The Central Balkans*, 97; П. ШПЕХАР, *Централни Балкан*, 70, 230; V. IVANIŠEVIĆ, I. BUGARSKI, *Post-Antique*.

<sup>72</sup> M. POPOVIĆ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 141–142, 297.

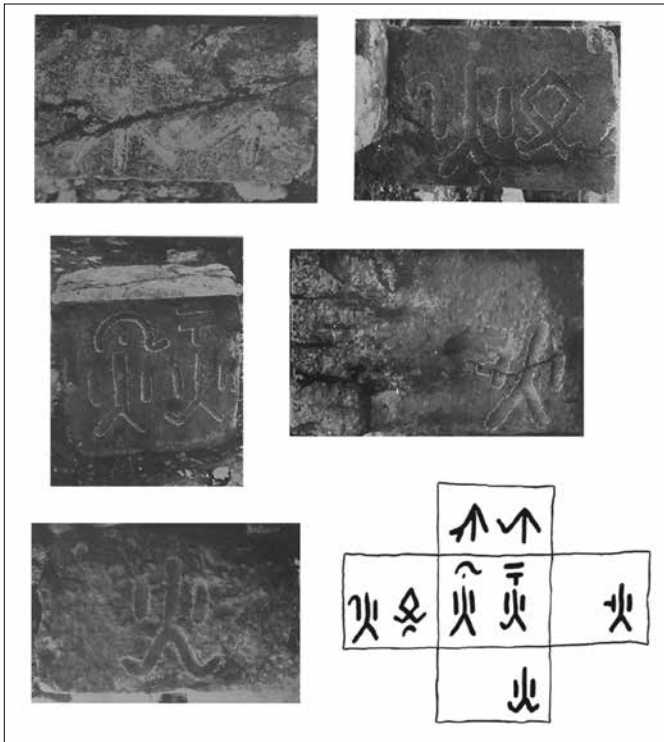
<sup>73</sup> Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Извънстоличните каменни крепости на Първото Българско царство (IX – началото XI в.)*, София 2011, 41–42, кат. бр. 99.

<sup>74</sup> Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Извънстоличните каменни крепости*, 41, кат. бр. 97.

<sup>75</sup> M. ЈАНКОВИЋ, *Средњовековно насеље*, 18–21.

<sup>76</sup> I. PUDIĆ, *Šudikovski znaci*, u *Godišnjak. Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja Akademije nauka i umjetnosti BiH* 3/1, ur. A. BENAC, Sarajevo 1965, 179–185; A. ЛОМА, Шудиковски





a



b

Fig. 11. Bulgarian runes, Šudikova (a – after I. PUDIĆ, Šudikovski znaci, T. I, Ia, II; b – present state of the stone block, Museum of Polimlje in Berane: <http://espona.me/index.php/kultura/1271-naisli-su-bolji-dani-za-sudikovski-kvadar-luzacku-plocu-i-ostale-kamene-nalaze>, accessed 16 October 2017)

камен: досадашња тумачења, смернице за даља размишљања, *Милешевски записи* 7 (2007) 89–97; М. ИНКОВА, За християнската символика на знака „ипсилон“ в старобългарската култура, *Проблеми на изкуството* 3 (2014) 8, Обр. VII/3.

in the capitals of Pliska and Preslav,<sup>77</sup> their appearance in a remote area is quite enigmatic. The Šudikova stone was recently interpreted in the light of Bulgarian presence in the region before their baptism in 864/5, or shortly afterwards, at the time when ‘residues of paganism’ were still encountered in their state.<sup>78</sup> However, the ‘Y’ sign, also seen as a runic cryptogram for the name of Jesus, was widely present in northeastern Bulgaria until the middle or the end of the eleventh century, and documented not only on building materials, but also on ceramic vessels, seals, coins, etc.<sup>79</sup> A handle bearing this sign comes from a tenth-century layer at the Ras Fortress (**Fig. 3/a**),<sup>80</sup> therefore the Šudikova find could perhaps be connected with the Bulgarian conquest of Serbia, to which the area around Berane had belonged.<sup>81</sup> Yet, only future finds from this region could support this suggestion.

By summarising the presented data, some conclusions can be drawn. The period of Bulgarian political influence over the Central Balkans, which lasted for some two hundred years, did not leave much material evidence for their presence there. The indicative finds are widely distributed, but still few in relation to the size of this territory. In contrast to the Middle Danube region, where a ‘Bulgarian’ interpretation is in many cases not reliable, with a striking discrepancy between historical and archaeological data on Belgrade, the sample from present-day southwestern Serbia provides more solid grounds for analysis. A larger concentration of characteristic finds has been observed there, apparently indicating how far west Bulgarian rule may have reached (**Map**).

That these objects did not come to those distant areas through trade or some other contacts of a similar nature is suggested by their statistical representation at different sites. More significant quantities of amphora-like jugs at Ras and Postenje indicate that these fortifications were in Bulgarian possession. By way of contrast, Velika Gradina at Vrsenice, another systematically excavated locality, produced only two such shards; it has therefore been assumed that this fort was situated within the borders of ‘Baptised Serbia’. In this case, the archaeological analysis confirmed the existing historical interpretation of the border between the two states in the Raška valley from the second half of the ninth century.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ж. АЛАДЖОВ, Проучвания върху старобългарските знаци (в търсене на закономерности), *Разкопки и проучвания* 22 (1991) 86–87.

<sup>78</sup> А. ЛОМА, Шудиковски камен, 94–96.

<sup>79</sup> cf. М. ИНКОВА, За християнската символика, 3–8.

<sup>80</sup> М. ПОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 157, kat. br. 220/4, sl. 106/4.

<sup>81</sup> М. ПОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 157.

<sup>82</sup> М. ПОПОВИЋ, *Tvrđava Ras*, 297–298, with further references; М. ПОПОВИЋ, V. ВИКИЋ, *Vrsenice*, 131–134.

Along their frontiers the Bulgarians established certain control mechanisms that included forging some kind of alliances with the local population,<sup>83</sup> which was the main actor in the reoccupation of the Late Roman hinterland fortifications. A model of gaining control over the captured lands would probably involve a limited presence of Bulgarian troops in particularly important strongholds. This might explain the absence of a more significant corpus of Early Bulgarian finds in Serbia and other remote regions of the Bulgarian state of that time, such as Macedonia.

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<sup>83</sup> On the concept of alliances with the Slavs as part of their conquest strategy see: P. KOMATINA, *The Slavs*, 78.