

# **EARLY MEDIEVAL WARFARE OBJECTS FROM THE CENTRAL BALKANS**

by

Jelena Jaric

(Macedonia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Masters of Arts degree in Medieval Studies

Accepted in conformance with the standards of CEU

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External Examiner

Budapest

May 2009

I, the undersigned, **Jelena Jaric**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 25 May 2009

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## INTRODUCTION

Belligerency was always part of history. Every society has its own militant side, as inevitable way of surviving. The weapons, as tools of destruction and violence, represent the darkest side of the human kind. Yet, they are also media for showing social and military status, sometimes origin and belonging to a certain group, as well as technological achievements. The weapons are the best indicators for a military activity; their presence in a given area can be equaled with the army presence.

Beside weapons themselves, other groups of archaeological material can be considered in an analysis of warfare. The personal equipment of the soldiers had a utilitarian function, but at the same time; they marked a soldier's profession and perhaps, his rank in the military hierarchy.

Hence, the military insignia can be as indicative of an army presence as the weapons. However, military objects and insignia can be used for longer time, therefore they do not represent by themselves a material evidence to reconstruct military activities in a certain area. In this context, the numismatic material is more than useful. Coins provide more precise dating of the weapons and the military insignia, if found together. Furthermore, the coin hoards were often deposited in ground as result of incoming raids, thus they can be interpreted as indirect evidence for different types of military activities and their devastating affects in the history of a geographical region..

The Central Balkan provinces were raided continuously from the fourth till the seventh century by various barbarian people. The Empire was fighting by any means not to lose this rich and strategically important area. Therefore, this area offers an interesting material for the research on the impact of military activities in this period and on the material culture of related

social groups. The scope of this research will be upon the archaeological finds that witnesses for the military actions of the *Romaioi* and the barbarians. In the terms of modern-day geography, this material comes from the territory of Republic of Macedonia. This selection of objects was based on practical reasons, as this material was available for my academic research. Yet, it cannot be observed as isolated, or randomly selected source material. This material can be put to its true historical context only if parallels and comparisons are made with the similar, contemporary material from the rest of the Balkans. Furthermore, contemporary territorial units important for military activities (geographical regions, provinces, -military-administrative areas) should also be taken into consideration for the evaluation of the objects of modern museum collections.

The Early Middle Ages on the Balkans were denoted with the rise of the Byzantine Empire. From its very beginnings, this empire was put into a great test – the incursions of the barbarians – the autochthonic ones and the newcomers. The autochthonic ones were tribes of Indo-European origin, who lived in the vicinity of the Roman Empire long time before the beginning of the Middle Ages. The newcomers among the people of the *Barbaricum* were different tribes and tribal federations of Asian origin. These Germanic groups or nomadic horsemen were a great threat, because their way of waging war was not seen before. The Byzantine army had to be re-shaped, as to cope with this new danger more effectively.

The main goal of this research is to answer how and how much was the territory of the Central Balkans influenced and altered by the military collision of the *Romaioi* and the barbarians. This question was approached via several points.

The first chapter deals with chronological and geographical framework. The chronology is based on military events that are of great importance for the Central Balkan area. Yet, it is noticeable, that these events fit in a broader chronological pattern of barbarian raids and the



military response of the Byzantine Empire to them. The survey of the geographical features of the Central Balkans was done as to see if they can be a factor for offensive and defensive activities in the given area. I will take the mountains and river valleys as two main geographical features; the mountains as possible natural defense and the river valleys as communication routes. Also, this chapter gives basic background information of the administrative division of provinces in the Central Balkans, also an important issue for the organization of military-administrative areas of the region.

The second chapter introduces the question of provincial border line and their defense, seen through the military insignia of the Byzantine army – belt buckles and massive fibulae. Most of these finds come from border line fortifications. By studying the concentration and distribution patterns of these finds, I will try to find out which provincial border line was mainly effected by the barbarian raids and what factors contributed to the transformation of this system. Since this material is represented mostly by stray finds, so the dating was done on the basis of stylistic analysis and typology.

The third chapter deals with the urban life in the Central Balkans, represented through case study of four big urban centres: Stobi, Heraklea Lynkestis, Skupi and Bargala. The material analyzed in this chapter is quite miscellaneous- it ranges from the weapons to hoards of Byzantine coins. However, there is a very significant aspect for the interpretation of these finds: all these objects and coins were found in destruction layers of these big cities. Based on this evidence, here I will try to identify who were the people who raided the big cities and what followed after such raids. The barbarian raids are usually considered as main reason for ending the urban life of a city. Although the barbarian raids had deep impact on the urban life in the Central Balkans, but the layers of renewal that follow the layers of destruction introduce the possibility that big cities found the way to survive the great barbarian incursions. Thus, the

interpretation of these finds and features can offer a new image on the decline or revival of these urban centres in the period of Early Middle Ages.

At the very end of this introduction to this research, I must mention the this thesis would not have come to existence if there was not the work of several Macedonian archeologists: Anica Ćorgjevska and Professor Elica Maneva' work on the material from Heraklea Lynkestis; the long-term excavations of Bargala lead by Professor Blaga Aleksova and the wide – range research of Professor Ivan Mikulčić – the excavations in Skupi and Stobi. The survey of the military insignia is also a joint work of his and of Professor Viktor Lilčić. As for the numismatic material from the Early Middle Ages, I must mention the work of Jovan Kondijanov and Maja Hadži-Maneva.

## I. THE CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

In a chronological and geographical sense, this research is focused on the military actions in the Byzantine provinces of the Balkans during the Early Middle Ages. This area was the cross-road of routes connecting the East and the West, a link between two different worlds – the Barbaricum and the Byzantine Empire and more often than not, a great battle field. Better understanding of the geography of this region will lead to a better understanding of military actions[history?], and also of the mutual influence between the Romaioi and the barbarians on many levels.

The territory of the Central Balkans was inevitably included in the wars of the Byzantine Empire and the barbarians. During the Early Middle Ages, it was divided among several administrative units of the Byzantine Empire. The administrative division of the provinces will be elaborated further in this chapter(see Maps 1 and 2).

The chronology of this research follows the general chronology of the Byzantine Empire, limited as much as possible to military events that are crucial for the Balkans only. Other events that influenced the history of the Balkans, although in an indirect manner, are also discussed. The chronological framework is built on written sources<sup>1</sup> and archaeological material.

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<sup>1</sup> For building part of the chronology of this research, I have used the translation of Franjo Barišić or two reasons: it is an excellent compilation of critically approached primary sources concerning the history of Central Balkans; my knowledge of Greek is not yet profound enough to use these sources in the original language. See [Franjo Barišić, Mila Rajković, Bariša Krekić, Lidiја Tomić, ed.]Фрањо Баришић, Мила Рајковић, Бариша Крекић, Лидија Томић, *Византиски извори за историју народа Југославије* [*Byzantine sources for the history of the nations of Yugoslavia*](Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences, 1995.) (Hereafter: Barišić, *Byzantine sources*.) For the general history of the Balkans during the Middle Ages, see George Ostrogorsky, *The History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969) and John V. A. Fine, *The Early Mediaval Balkans, A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.) (Hereafter: Fine, *The Early Mediaval Balkans*.) Of the works of these two authors, I would recommend the latter as being newer and more up to date with current scholarship. For a general overview of the chronology of the Middle Ages, see *The Middle Ages*, ed. Brian Tierney (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999) and David Knowles with Dimitri Obolensky, *The Middle Ages* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968).

## ***I.1. THE CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK***

### **I.1.1. The problem of the Early Middle Ages in the Central Balkan area**

Defining the borders of the Middle Ages is still one of the most challenging tasks in modern scholarship. The region and the topic of research are some of the factors that influence the construction of the chronological framework and the timeline within it. The chronological borders of this research will be seen more as processes of transformation than as set dates. Late Antiquity transformed into the Early Middle Ages gradually, but yet irreversibly. The foundations on which the Late Antique world was laid were completely different than the ones of the later period, as George T. Dennis describes in the introduction to his translation of Maurice's *Strategikon*:

...around the Mediterranean, into Europe and into Africa, one empire had held sway...There was simply Rome and non-Rome...Law and order were maintained and enemies had in check by one of the most efficient military machines in history, the Roman legion..."<sup>2</sup>

The Early Middle Ages brought the fading away of the strict dividing line between the Barbaricum and the civilized world. Christianity made them equal, at least those barbarian tribes that adopted it. The falling Western Empire and the rising Byzantium had a constant need of *foederati*, so the yesterday's enemies became the today's allies.

The chronology of this research will begin with the first serious threats to the empire to the period when they were more or less neutralized. That is the period between the middle of the third century and the middle of the seventh century.

The emphasis here will be put on the fifth and the sixth centuries, because the events that happened during these two centuries are archaeologically the best documented on the territory of

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<sup>2</sup> George T. Dennis, Tr. *Maurice's Strategikon – Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), vii.

the Central Balkans. The middle of the third century is taken as the lower chronological border for this research because I consider that the events that happened from that point onwards have deep repercussions on the following ones. The upper chronological border coincides with the end of the First and the beginning of the Second Avar Khaganate, the period when the severe Avar and Avaro-slavic<sup>3</sup> raids on this territory stopped. The timeline within will be focused on military actions, such as barbarian invasions and attacks and the response and measures taken against it by the Romaioi.

### **I.1.2 Military actions in the Central Balkans during the Early Middle Ages**

During the rule of Diocletian great changes took place which seriously affected the Central Balkan region (248-305). In the third century, the Goths were invading Roman territory from across the Danube.<sup>4</sup> Diocletian realized that the empire is too large to be ruled and defended by one man alone, so he introduced tetrachy. His military reforms, combined with those of Constantine, shaped the imperial army so as to deal more effectively with the current threats. The army was divided in two major groups: the guardians of the frontiers (the so-called *limitanei*) and mobile troops organized in five units, each of them under a commander who reported directly to the emperor itself. The task of the mobile units was to move swiftly from one endangered border to another.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>In this research, the Slavs will be seen only through the scope of their raiding activity with the Avars. The settlements of Slavs in this period on the territory of today's Republic Macedonia are still an open question in Macedonian archaeological discourse, although in older literature some archaeological finds are treated as evidence for Slavic settlements. See [Blaga Aleksova] Блага Алексова, Епископијата на Брегалница- прв словенски црковен и културно- просветен центар во Македонија [*The Bishopric of Bregalnica -- the first Slavic Ecclesiastical and Cultural Centre in Macedonia*].(Prilep: The Institute of Old Slavic Culture of Prilep, 1989), 14. (Hereafter: Aleksova, *Bishopric of Bregalnica*.)

<sup>4</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 19. See also Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 8-43.(Hereafter: Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*.)

Although the rigid, legion-based army was transformed with these reforms into a mobile, horseman-based army, it did not stop the barbarian invasions. In 375, shortly after the foundation of Constantinople, the Huns crossed the river known today as the Volga.<sup>6</sup> In doing this they penetrated into Gothic territory and forced them to cross the Danube and seek refuge in the Balkans. The Goths stayed about a century, first as enemies, then as allies of the empire.<sup>7</sup> Still in this period, the crossing of Volga by the Huns triggered the movement of the Goths to imperial territory. They did not become a serious threat to the empire until the fifth century.

In 378, the Gothic and the Roman armies clashed at Adrianople in Thrace. Emperor Valens, who died in the battle together with many of his men, was succeeded by Theodosius. He made *foederati* out of the Goths, settling the Ostrogoths in Illyricum and the Visigoths in Thrace.<sup>8</sup> From this moment onwards, the Ostrogoths played major roles in the history of the Balkans in general and in the territory of the Central Balkans.

Still, making an alliance with one of the barbarian tribes does not necessarily mean that the others would not attack. In the period between 383 and 392, Pannonia was the target of intensive

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<sup>6</sup> For a general history of the Huns, see: Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns -- Studies in their History and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973): 486-597; E. A. Thompson, *The Huns* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Colin D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila: Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966): 211-214; *Attila und die Hunnen*, ed. Alexander Koch et al. (Speyer: Historischen Museum der Pfalz Speyer, 2007), 378-388; István Bóna, *Les Huns: Le grand barbare d'Europe (IVe-Ve siècles)* (Paris: Errance, 2002), 223-238; *Gold finds of the Migration period in the Hungarian National Museum*, ed. Éva Garam and Attila Kiss, (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 2002); *Hunnen und Awaren, Reitervölker aus dem Osten*, ed. Falko Daim et al. (Eisenstadt: Amt Der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, 1996): 67-165, 465-484. For the Huns in the Balkans, see [Jovan Kovačević] Јован Ковачевић, *Аварски Каганат [The Avar Khaganate]* (Belgrade: 1977), 31. (Hereafter: Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*.)

<sup>7</sup> For a general history of the Goths, see Rolf Hochmann, *Die Germanen* (Munich: Nagel Verlag, 1971); Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991); Alexander Alexandrovich Vasilev, *The Goths in the Crimea* (Cambridge, Medieval Academy of America, 1936); Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Thomas S. Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); *The Ostrogoths from the Migration Period to the Sixth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Sam J. Barnish and Federico Marazzi (Woolbridge: Boydell, 2007); Peter Heather, "Theodoric, King of the Goths," *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995): 145-173; E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the time of Ulfila*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). For more about the Goths in the Balkans and their relationship with Byzantium, see [Nada Zečević] Нада Зечевић, *Византија и Готи на Балкану у IV и V веку [The Byzantine Empire and the Goths in the Balkans in the Fourth and Fifth century]* (Belgrade: Institute for Byzantine Studies, 2002), 205-207.

<sup>8</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 11.

raiding activity. After the division of the empire in 395, the provinces south of the Danube were again sacked by the barbarian tribes situated along the Danube *limes*: Sarmatians, Quadi, Alani, Vandals, Marcomanni, Vandals, and Huns.<sup>9</sup> This was the first time the Huns appeared on the Danube frontier and thereafter they became a serious threat to the Byzantine Empire. The first part of the fifth century was marked by Hunnish domination. They had military tactics and weapons that the Romaioi had never seen before, as well as the knowledge needed to breach fortifications.<sup>10</sup>

One of the biggest raids was that of 447, led by Attila himself. The targets were the rich Balkan cities; Stobi,<sup>11</sup> the capital of Macedonia Secunda, was one of them. Other cities, such as Sirimium, Singidunum, Viminacium, Serdika, Naissus, Philippopolis, Margus and Ratiaria<sup>12</sup> were sacked. The armies of Attila came dangerously near to the capital itself, so the Emperor Theodosius II built the Long Walls, as protection for the outskirts of Constantinople.<sup>13</sup>

The whole outcome of this raid was devastation and sacking of no less than 70 cities. The southernmost point of the Hunnish raids were the Thermopylae. The Huns also raided Illyricum and Thrace and forced the empire to pay them tribute.<sup>14</sup> The Hun domination of the the Balkans lasted until 450, when they shifted the focus of their raids to the West. Attila was defeated in Gaul and died in 453.<sup>15</sup> After his death, a strong anti-Hun coalition led by the Gepid king,

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<sup>9</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 67. (Hereafter: Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*.)

<sup>11</sup> This attack on Stobi will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>13</sup> The army of Attila penetrated up to the forth of Athyras, about 40 km away from Constantinople. The Theodosian Long Walls ran from the Black Sea to Selymbria on the Sea of Marmara. See Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*, 68.

Ardarich, defeated the Huns. This battle ended the era of Hunnish domination in the Balkans and they had no more influence in the military actions there.<sup>16</sup>

With the disintegration of the Hun federation, the Goths again became a threat to the Byzantine Empire. They settled a territory they regarded their own north of Stara Planina.<sup>17</sup> They launched attacks on Greece, Thrace, Thessaly, and Macedonia from there, reaching almost to the hinterland of Constantinople.<sup>18</sup> The Emperors Leo and Zeno tried to fuel the conflict between the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths, but with no success. In 479, the Ostrogoths, ruled by Theodoric, were offered settlement in Dardania, in the vicinity of Pautalia.<sup>19</sup> They accepted the offer, but that did not stop them from further raiding. Again, big cities were the target of raids: Heraclea Lynkestis and Epidamnos were evacuated and the citizens of Thessalonica took the defense of the city into their own hands.<sup>20</sup>

Byzantine authority was reasserted in the Balkans when the Ostrogoths moved to Italy in 489. Again, this was part of the imperial Byzantine policy of playing one barbarian tribe against another. After 476, the Germanic<sup>21</sup> leader Odoacer ruled the West under the overlordship of the Emperor Zeno. Theodoric was sent to Italy to restore the Byzantine control. Yet, Theodoric formed a kingdom of his own, with the capital in Ravenna, including parts of the Western Balkans, Istria, Dalmatia, and part of Pannonia. Although the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy

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<sup>16</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Stara Planina is a mountain range in the eastern Balkans. It runs along the border of today's Bulgaria and the eastern part of today's Serbia, then it continues eastwards through central Bulgaria and ends at the Black Sea coast. It is also known under the names of Balkan Mountain and Haimos Mountain.

<sup>18</sup> Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Different literature attributes Odoacer to different Germanic or nomadic tribes, e.g., John V. A. Fine, Jr. in his *Early Medieval Balkans*, considers him as a Goth. Yet, Walther Pohl, in his article about ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages, raises the possibility of ethnic ambiguity -- he adopted different identities during different stages of his career, according to the current needs. About this topic, see more in Walter Pohl, "The Conceptions of Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages," *Archeologia Polona* 39(1991): 41, and Robert L. Reynolds and Robert L. Lopez, "Odoacer: German or Hun?" *The American Historical Review* 52, No. 1(1946): 36-53. Interesting reading related with this topic would also be Andrew Gillet, ed., *On Barbarian Identity-Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnout: Brepols, 2002.)



triggered other conflicts later on, its formation solved the problem of the Gothic presence in the Balkans.<sup>22</sup>

During the rule of Anastasius (491-518), the empire was weakened and went to war with the Persians. Reforms had to be introduced. The one that he made on the monetary system<sup>23</sup> affected on the army, too. Payments to soldiers increased with these reforms, so it attracted many natives and thus decreased the barbarian element in the Byzantine army. The end of the fifth century was a stable period, especially when compared with its tumultuous beginning.

The sixth century brought great changes. The empire had to face danger coming from two different groups, the fierce Avars and the less belligerent but omnipresent Slavs. The Avars<sup>24</sup> gradually moved from their homeland in Central Asia towards the Hungarian Plain, where they established a powerful federation.

The sixth century was also marked by the rule of one of the most powerful Byzantine emperors -- Justinian (527-565). This emperor had a vision of uniting both parts of the empire under his power. He had a strong army led by experienced generals -- Belisarius and Narses -- but he also had an unresolved conflict with Persia. To avoid fighting on two fronts, Justinian had to neutralize the Persian threat. He combined his experienced units with newly recruited soldiers and created the new field army of Armenia. Being no match for the again enhanced Byzantine army, Persia signed the so-called Perpetual Peace in 532.<sup>25</sup> To enforce the protection of the Balkans, Justinian undertook an ambitious building program. On the territory of today's

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<sup>22</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> See more in Philip Grierson, ed., *Byzantine Coins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>24</sup> About the general history and material culture of the Avars, see Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren: ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1988.), 567-822; *Hunnen und Awaren, Reitervölker aus dem Osten*, ed. Falko Daim et al. (Eisenstadt: Amt Der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, 1996): 202-257, 465-484; *Gold Finds of the Migration Period in the Hungarian National Museum*, ed. Éva Garam and Attila Kiss (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 15.

Republic of Macedonia alone around 400 fortifications were built or renewed during the sixth century.

Having annulled the Persian danger, Justinian could then focus on his re-conquest of the West. He perceived Theodoric as his biggest opponent and the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy as the main obstacle for his uniting of Western and Eastern Roman Empire. Justinian fought 40 years for Italy, Spain, and North Africa. This ambitious project required more and more soldiers, so Justinian sent part of the *limitanei* to Italy and thus left the Danube *limes* poorly defended.<sup>26</sup> The weakened Danube *limes* will attract the barbarians north of the Danube into raiding on imperial territory. This was the beginning of the Avar-Slavic invasions.

The first written records on the Slavs situate them north of the Danube.<sup>27</sup> They were sacking in Thrace and Macedonia and somewhat in Greece (Corinth was the southernmost point they reached). From the mid-sixth century, the raiding activities of the Slavs became an annual matter.<sup>28</sup> Although the raiders were very mobile, they were lightly armed and did not possess the knowledge needed to conquer fortified cities. They were still just raiding on Byzantine territory, but not settling. Their settlement was probably triggered by the formation of the First Avar Khaganate in Pannonia.<sup>29</sup> Some of the Slavs moved towards the south and were settled on Byzantine territory as *foederati*,<sup>30</sup> but a greater number were subdued by the Avars.

The Avars emerged into Europe fleeing from the Turkish federation, which was expanding in the mid-sixth century.<sup>31</sup> They subdued the tribes who lived around the Black Sea,

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<sup>26</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*, 85. About the origin of the Avars, see Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 11-24. Kovacevic dedicated a whole chapter to the origin of various nomadic people in Asia, including the Avars. He also refers to the mentions of these tribes in Chinese accounts, which are of great importance for reconstructing of the pre-European phase of the nomadic tribes.

including the Coutrigurs.<sup>32</sup> One of the best known raids of the Coutrigurs is that of 539/540. The whole of Illyricum was sacked, and the marauders reached even Chalcidice. This raid is also documented on the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia via numismatic material.<sup>33</sup>

When it comes to warfare, the Avars were quite the opposite of the Slavs. Although their units were also mobile and lightly equipped, their weapons and training were far superior. They were experienced horsemen and persistent enough to besiege fortified cities. The Avar Khans ruled a great conglomerate of people, having subdued the Slavs, the Protobulgars, and the remnants of the Huns to their power.<sup>34</sup> The only weak spot in Avar warfare was their inability to use and build boats.<sup>35</sup> The Slavs were familiar with watercraft and they played a major role in crossing the Danube and attacking cities with ports.

The Avars emerged on the Balkans by interfering in the matters of two other barbarian tribes -- the Gepids and the Lombards. The Gepids took over the territory that was vacant after the departure of the Ostrogoths for Italy, but the Lombards wanted to claim it. The alliance of the Lombard king, Alboin, and the Avar Khagan Baian in 566/7 brought the Avars into Pannonia. Sirmium and the control of Pannonia were promised to Avars if they defeated the Gepids. The Gepids themselves, fearing a fight with two armies instead of one, turned to the Emperor Justin II. They offered him Sirmium as a reward for the imperial help.<sup>36</sup> In 568 the fight for Sirmium started; long sieges of Sirmium followed; both sides were winning and losing battles. The citizens of the city had to endure famine for several years and abandoned the city. The city finally fell under Avar control in 582, the same year Maurice became emperor. The loss of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> [Jovan Kondijanov] Јован Кондијанов, "Прилог за упадок на Кутригурите на територија на Илирик во 540 година" [A note on the Coutrigur raid in the territory of Illyricum in 540]. *Macedonian Numismatic Journal* 1(1994): 75-81.

<sup>34</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*, 86.

<sup>36</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 40.

Sirmium was meant the loss of control over Pannonia, and also the loss of an important strategic base for controlling the Danube *limes*.<sup>37</sup> After the Lombards withdrew to Italy, the Avars were the sole masters of Pannonia. Here they built their federation under the rule of a khagan.

The First or the Great Avar Khaganate lasted from 568 to 626 and the Second Khaganate from 626 to 811.<sup>38</sup> The period of the First Avar Khaganate was the peak of Avar power and the period of the most severe raiding activities. Usually, the Morava-Vardar route was used for invading the Central Balkan region. These raids are well documented via archaeological material on the territory of present-day Republic of Macedonia. The final destinations of most of these raids were the capital itself or the second best -- Thessalonika. Two years after the conquest of Sirmium, an army of 5000 Slavic warriors, by the order of the khagan, reached the Long Walls of Constantinople.<sup>39</sup> Being unable to conquer the capital, the Slavs turned the scope of the raid towards Thessalonika; yet that was another failure.<sup>40</sup> In 584, the Avars conquered Singidunum. Two years later, another siege of Thessalonika followed, but did not last long. The reason for the rapid withdrawal of the Avaro-slavic army was the appearance of plague and famine in the barbarian camp.<sup>41</sup> This siege was followed by great raiding activity in the provinces of Dardania, Macedonia Prima, Macedonia Secunda, and others. This was the year when urban life ended in the cities of Heraclea Lynkestis, Bargala, Stobi and a destruction layer is documented on the fortress of Markovo Kale in the vicinity of Skopje. The same raid is documented and coin-dated on two fortresses in the vicinity of Prilep.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> The chronological framework of the Khanates is given by Jovan Kovačević. See Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Whitby, *Maurice and Theophylact Simocatta*, 90.

<sup>40</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 54; Barišić, *Byzantine Sources*, 175.

<sup>41</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 57; see also Barišić, *Byzantine Sources*, 176-184.

<sup>42</sup> The life in these two fortresses, on the sites Baba and Selce, ended in 586. The last coins found there belong to the 585/86 emission. See [Ivan Mikulčić] Иван Микулчиќ, *Средновековни градови тврдини* [Medieval cities and fortresses]. (Skopje, Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1996): 330.

The raiding activity of the Avaro-slavic army lasted up to 591, when Emperor Maurice made peace with the Persians and transferred large army troops to the Balkans. He re-conquered Singidunum and chased the Avars and the Slavs behind the old Danube frontier. Nevertheless, the Avars besieged Singidunum in two other occasions, in 593 and 596.

In 599, the Avars broke the defense of the *Romaioi* and reached the Long Walls of Constantinople. This attack was neutralized by the plague that hit the Avar army. One year later, Maurice re-conquered Sirmium and thus established the old Danube frontier completely. A peace treaty was made and the Avars were paid annual tribute for not attacking the empire. Maurice broke this treaty first; in the very next year he sent armies across the Danube.<sup>43</sup>

Although the campaign of Maurice almost destroyed them, the Avars consolidated again quite fast. The Danube frontier again lost its defensive importance and the Avars attacked during the reign of Phocas and Heraclius. This was also the period of the largest Slavic settlement in the Balkans. The Avars shifted the scope of their raids to the west and attacked parts of today's western Bosnia, Croatia, and Dalmatia.<sup>44</sup> Salona was conquered between 619 and 626.<sup>45</sup>

In the second decade of the seventh century, Thessalonika and Constantinople again became the targets of the Avaro-Slavic raids. In 617 or 618, Thessalonika was under siege again; the mighty fortifications of the city again proved unbreakable and the city was left intact. The novelty of this siege is that it was carried out by the Slavic tribes who lived in the vicinity of Thessalonika. They invited the Avar Khagan to participate in the siege, promising rich gifts, but

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<sup>43</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkan*, 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Florin Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500-1250*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 74. (Hereafter: Curta, *Southeastern Europe*.)

they negotiated as equal allies. The settlements of several Slavic tribes were already established, although some Slavs were still part of the Avar federation.<sup>46</sup>

The Avars also did not succeed with the siege of Constantinople in 626. This is an important date, because it denotes the end of the First Avar Khaganate and the domination of the Avars in the Balkans. Although the power of the Avars was weakening with every failed siege, the empire still perceived them as a threat. An abundance of fortifications, built and re-built during Justinian's rule on the territory of today's Macedonia, was still in use, judging from the archaeological material<sup>47</sup> coming from them.

The attack started in the summer of 626. It was a joint attack of the Avars and the Persians. The horsemen were led by the Khagan himself.<sup>48</sup> Although siege machines were brought or built on the very same spot, the Long Walls protected the city again. The siege lasted for nine days and it ended with a catastrophic defeat for the Avars. A fleet of monoxyla navigated by Slavs and Bulgars which the khagan was heavily counting on was destroyed and the surviving Slavs fled.

The events that followed this unsuccessful siege neutralized the Avars as dominant military force on the Balkans. The Byzantine emperor no longer perceived them as a serious threat and refused to pay them tribute. The khagan ordered the murder of his Slavic subjects who had survived the siege and fled and were the reason for a conflict. This conflict resulted in a battle in 629; and c. 635 the Bulgars, led by Koubrat,<sup>49</sup> were freed from the Avar federation.<sup>50</sup> The army of the Avar federation was decimated by these actions.

<sup>46</sup> Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs- History and Archaeology in the Lower Danube Region c. 500-700*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 108. (Hereafter: Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*.)

<sup>47</sup> The material mentioned above mostly consists of military insignia of the Byzantine soldiers who guarded these fortifications. See more in Chapter 2.

<sup>48</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 64. See also Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, 108.

<sup>49</sup> Koubrat had five sons, but only two of them are important for the Balkans: Asparukh, who led the Bulgars to the Balkans and Kouber, who led the *Sermensianoï* back to their homeland. The *Sermensianoï* were the people and the

The lost supremacy in the Balkans denotes the beginning of the Second Avar Khaganate. Yet, in this period the Avars were of minor importance for the Balkans because they were expanding to the west. After the fall of the Avar Khaganate, the newly established Bulgar state and the empire fought for the Central Balkans.<sup>51</sup>

## ***1.2. THE GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK***

### **1.2.1. The geographical features of the Central Balkans and main communications**

The main geographical features of the Balkan Peninsula are the mountain ranges. The rivers were also an important feature, because most of the roads ran along river banks. Although the mountains are the predominant feature on the Balkan landscapes, they do not have the function of ideal natural protection. That is mostly due to the fact that almost all the mountain ranges run north-south and thus make the Balkans open to invasions from the north. The Stara Planina range, running east-west, is an exception; it is not high enough to be an efficient barrier, but with an adequate military presence it could be defended. Thus, this range later became the border between the Byzantine Empire and the state of the Bulgars.<sup>52</sup>

The main roads of the Balkans ran along the river valleys. Every micro-region had its own local network of routes and paths, but four major roads can be distinguished (See Map 4):

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descendants of the people who were taken into the Avar Khaganate as slaves from the Balkan provinces. Although they lived among barbarians, they kept their Christian religion. In 680, taking advantage of the turmoil within the Avar federation, they went back to their homelands in the Balkans. However, Kouber had the idea of settling these people and ruling them independently from the Avar khagan and the emperor. It is said that the *Sermensianoï* settled in the field of Κεραμῆσιος, on the outskirts of Thessalonika (see Barišić, *Byzantine Sources*, 213; Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 88.)

<sup>50</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> This expansion ended in the Avaro-Frankish war (971- 805). When the war was finally over, the western parts of the Avar Khaganate were under Frankish control and the eastern parts had been conquered by the Bulgars, whose state was growing rapidly. The Avars appeared twice more in the Balkans, in 811 and 814, in completely new circumstances not as conquerors, but as mere mercenaries in the army of the Bulgar Khan Krum. (See Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 90-94.)

<sup>52</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 2.

- The famous Via Egnatia, that connected the Adriatic coast with Constantinople, beginning at Dyrrachion (Durrazzo, Durres) and went through many stops, such as Lychnidos (today Ohrid), Heraklea Lynkestis (near today's Bitola) and Thessalonika, the second city by importance in the empire<sup>53</sup>(See Map 5).

- The second was a military road beginning in Constantinople, crossing Thrace via Adrianople and Serdika (modern day Sofia), then extending to Naissus (modern day Nish) and Singidunum (modern day Belgrade), dividing on the middle Danube into two routes: one continued to follow the Danube line and ended in today's southern Germany; the other route turned west from the Danube and followed the Sava valley.<sup>54</sup>

- The third road also began also in Constantinople and went to Thrace; it turned north at Adrianople and crossed the Stara Planina range on the slopes near the Black Sea coast; then it turned west, passing through the plains south of the Danube and cut through the mountains south of the Iron Gates section of the *limes* and rejoined the second road near Singidunum.<sup>55</sup>

- The fourth road followed the Morava and Vardar valleys and connected the inland of Central Europe with the Aegean coast and the islands in the Mediterranean. It crossed the whole Central Balkans, beginning at the Danube and leading to Thessalonika<sup>56</sup> (see Map 6).

Good road infrastructure meant better trade and easier transfer of an army from one endangered border to another. Yet, it made the empire more vulnerable, because the roads were used by the barbarians, too. One of the most exploited roads by the barbarians was the Morava-Vardar route, which provided a direct link of the Danube regions and the Mediterranean.

<sup>53</sup> Fine, *The Early Mediaval Balkans*, 3

<sup>54</sup> Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 600-1026. (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> Aleksova, *Bishopric of Bregalnica*, 12.



The river valleys not only provided conditions for establishing a network of roads on the Balkans, but they also served as borders. That was especially convenient for areas with no mountain ranges to serve as protection, such as the Great Hungarian Plain. The Danube was the only border between the empire and the Barbaricum. Although conceptualized as defense line, it was also a place for trade between the Romaioi and the barbarians and a bridge for mutual influences.

Except for Danube, Sava, and the lower Neretva, the Balkan rivers were not navigable.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the navigability of rivers did not play a great role in the barbarian invasions, because many of the tribes<sup>58</sup> that raided the Balkans had no knowledge of building and using boats. Most of them were horsemen, who followed the riverside roads to reach the target areas of their raids. Rivers that were not very wide or not rocky and very fast did not cause problems for horsemen as they were trained to cross such rivers with their horses. Crossing rivers with horses made the attackers vulnerable during the crossing and at the moment of arriving on the other river bank, because they could not use their bows and arrows in that period. Thus, a well organized defense line along the rivers provided good protection. On the other hand, horseman warriors, particularly of steppe origin, were trained to make “surprise” crossings (even at night) and to attack the defenders. Thus, the mountains and the rivers of the Central Balkan area provided certain natural elements for the defense of the region, but it was not strong enough without a well organized military-administrative system.

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<sup>57</sup> Fine, *The Early Mediaval Balkans*, 3

<sup>58</sup> See footnote 34.

## I.2.2 The provincial borders and the administrative system of the Central Balkan region c. 400 in the Central Balkans

The territory of the Central Balkans belonged to several different provinces:<sup>59</sup>

-Macedonia Secunda or Macedonia Salutaris:<sup>60</sup> most of the territory of the Central Balkans belonged to Macedonia Secunda, also known as Macedonia Salutaris. This province followed the line of the river Vardar. The capital of the province was Stobi.

- Macedonia Prima: the southern and the central part of the Central Balkans, with the capital at Thessalonika. One of the biggest cities, Heraklea Lynkestis, lay in Macedonia Prima. This province was also important because the greatest section of Via Egnatia ran through it.

- Epirus Nova: a small, southwestern part of the Central Balkans lay in Epirus Nova. The capital of this province was Dyrrachion. The city of Lychnidos (modern-day Ohrid) was in the territory of Epirus Nova and one of the most important urban and ecclesiastical centers during the Middle Ages.

- Dardania: the northern part of Central Balkans lay in Dardania and Skupi (today Skopje) was its capital and an important archbishopric see until 535, when the newly founded Iustiniana Prima took over the function of capital of the province. This area was the most exposed one to barbarian raids, if they were not stopped at the Danube *limes*.

- Dacia Mediterranea: a very small, northeastern part of the Central Balkans lay in this province. Bargala, another big city (near modern Štip), first belonged to Dacia Mediterranea, but by the end of the sixth century was listed as a city in Macedonia Secunda.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup>*Notitia Dignitatum* (<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/notitia1.html> , last accessed May 13, 2009.) and [Rajko Bratož] Ражко Братој, Ранохристијанската црква во Македонија и нејзиниот однос со Рим[The Early Christian Church of Macedonia and its relationship with Rome] *Macedonian Heritage* 13(2000): 3-4.

<sup>60</sup> Both of these names refer to the same area; Macedonia Salutaris is the older one.

- Praevalitana: a small, northeastern part of the Central Balkans.

It is important to stress that this administrative division pre-dates the Early Middle Ages. This is the administrative division that the Romans employed after acquiring the Balkans in the second century C.E. Thus, the administrative system of the area was not created in a situation of continuous raids to this area and was vulnerable to these attacks. As a response, it required certain transformations in order to cope with the new situation.

### ***1.3. CHAPTER CONCLUSION***

In the Early Middle Ages, the Balkan Peninsula was a great battlefield for the Byzantine Empire and the people of the Barbaricum. The rich provinces on the Balkans were equally important for both the barbarians and the Romaioi. Conquering the cities, especially the capitals, promised booty for the barbarians, but also control of the provinces themselves. The empire fought the loss of these provinces by any means. Fortifications were built and rebuilt and manned by great numbers of troops. More often than not, the emperors fueled conflicts between the barbarian tribes or settled tribes as *foederati* to play the role of buffers against the other tribes.

The Central Balkan area was directly involved in most of the major raiding activities; it had minimal natural defenses by mountain ranges and many river valleys cut across it that could have been used as routes by barbarian marauders. The border between the provinces of Dardania and Macedonia Secunda was especially threatened because this area lay on the long Morava-Vardar route. The rich urban centers: Skupi, Stobi, Heraklea Lynkestis, and Bargala were targets of the barbarian raiding patterns, so therefore these raids and raiding patterns are expected to be confirmed via the archaeological material coming from destruction layers of these big urban centres and the fortifications of the borders. Thus, a study targeting the military impact on this

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<sup>61</sup> Aleksova, *Bishopric of Bregalnica*, 42.

area should focus on these particular areas and settlement types in order to trace the signs of raids in the archaeological finds and features.

## **II. MILITARY INSIGNIA: THE BARBARIANS AND THE *ROMAIOI***

Material culture is one of the basic means of establishing communication between two or more groups or within the borders of one group. Military insignia had the same meaning in the Middle Ages as it has today for the modern armies -- denoting a soldier's military rank and status.

The objects that I chose to treat as the military insignia of the Byzantine army are the belt buckles and the massive fibulae. I will argue for the Byzantine provenance of this group of objects, follow their development and origin from earlier forms, and equate their presence on a site with Byzantine military activity. Most of the finds treated here come from fortresses on the borders with other provinces, so I will try to find if a connection between the presence of larger quantities of such material along a border with greater military presence in that area as result of it being more exposed to raiding activity.

The material analyzed comes mostly from the provinces of Macedonia Secunda (also known as Macedonia Salutaris) and Macedonia Prima. They bordered on the north with the province of Dardania, on the east with Dacia Mediterranea, and on the west with both Praevalitana and Epirus Nova. The borders with Dacia Mediterranea and Epirus Nova short ones, but those with Dardania and Praevalitana were quite long, both approximately the same length (see Maps 1 and 2).

**II.1. BELT BUCKLES AND OTHER BELT ELEMENTS**

The personal military equipment of a Byzantine soldier was quite eclectic. Some of the elements were inherited from the equipment of the Roman legions, some borrowed from neighboring barbarian tribes. Belts with a buckle were a universal part of the uniform of every soldier, beginning with lower ranks and ending with the “generals”. They had a utilitarian function, but also served to mark the military hierarchy.

A belt had a buckle on one end and a “tongue” on the other. Along the length of the leather base many metal fittings were applied, including so-called “ribs” to prevent the twisting of the belt. Sometimes they had little hooks on one side, used for hanging requisites. A characteristic that distinguished the early Byzantine belt buckles from their Roman predecessors is how the buckles were applied to the belt; the Roman ones were applied by studs, but the Byzantine have three massive rings on the back side. Belts with buckles and metal fittings probably originated from older, Roman forms.<sup>62</sup> Still, they were adopted by the Germanic tribes and the Avars after their arrival in the Carpathian Basin and new forms emerged, bearing elaborate decoration with mythological symbolism.<sup>63</sup> Byzantine buckles had a parallel evolution with the barbarian ones, probably serving as a basic pattern for the latter.<sup>64</sup> Yet, the barbarian and Byzantine art influenced each other, so one cannot really state which was the archetype when it comes to belt buckles or the rest of the cloth fittings and jewelry.

The belt buckles from the territory of today’s Republic of Macedonia are found on sites which in certain period had a high concentration of Byzantine military personnel. These are stray

<sup>62</sup> [Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić] Иван Микулчиќ и Виктор Лилчиќ, *Фибули и појасни украси од 6 и 7 век во Македонија* [Fibulae and belt decorations from the sixth and seventh centuries found in Macedonia] (Skopje: The Faculty of Philosophy of the University of “St. Kiril and Metodij”, 1995), 266 (Hereafter: Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decorations*).

<sup>63</sup> [Ivana Popović] Ивана Поповић, *Златни Аварски појас из околине Сирмијума* [A Gold Avar belt from the vicinity of Sirmium] (Belgrade: National Museum of Belgrade, 1997): 20. (Hereafter: Popović, Avar belt.)

<sup>64</sup> For more information about the relations between the Byzantine and Avar belt buckles, see Zdenko Vinski, “O kasnim bizantskim kopčama i o pitanju njihova odnosa s avarskim ukrasnim tvorevinama” (“Late Byzantine belt buckles and the question of their relation to Avar decorative craftwork”), *The Journal of the Zagreb Archaeological Museum* 8, No.1 (1975): 57-74. See also, See Joachim Werner, *Der Schatzfund von Vrap, Albanien* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie die Wissenschaften 184, 1986), 61-62.

finds in most cases, so they lack an archaeological context. The dating was done on the base of stylistic analysis and typology.<sup>65</sup> The studies of Joachim Werner, Zdenko Vinski, and Syna Uenze have contributed the most in the research on Byzantine belt buckles and fibulae.<sup>66</sup>

Joachim Werner was the first to indicate the possible Byzantine provenance of these belt buckles and made a typology of them, while Zdenko Vinski tried to find the origin of these artifacts in the older Roman and local, autochthonic traditions of the Balkans and Italy.<sup>67</sup> Syna Uenze deals with this material found on the site of Sadovec, where two great Justinian fortresses have been excavated.<sup>68</sup> Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić have also adopted the typologies of Werner and Uenze, adding the local variants that are typical only for Macedonia.

### II.1.1 Sucidava belt buckles

Most of these belt buckles belong to the Sucidava type (Table II, fig 1-10). The Sucidava belt buckles represent the oldest type of Byzantine buckle belts, dating from 550-600 C.E. They have quite wide range of distribution -- the Balkan provinces and Crimea. Some examples come from the vicinity of Constantinople (see Table III, fig 5) and some from Egypt.<sup>69</sup> The decoration of this type is quite simple, with a motif of a Greek cross and a lunette. This decoration is tentatively Christian. The decoration of the second variant represents an anthropomorphic mask. The imitation of human facial features is achieved by various combinations of the cross and the

<sup>65</sup> The typologies used in this chapter are all based on military insignia finds from necropoli and coin-dated destruction layers of fortresses. That sets them in a closed archaeological context and makes it possible to build a relative chronological system upon them.

<sup>66</sup> Syna Uenze, *Die Spätantiken Befestigungen von Sadovec (Bulgarien)* (Munich: Die Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992). (Hereafter: Uenze: *Sadovec*.)

<sup>67</sup> The oldest scholarship on this topic treated them as of barbarian origin, with centres of production in today's south Russia, See N. Fettich, "Die Metallkunst der landnehmenden Ungarn," *Archaeologica Hungarica* 21 (1937): 122, 136, 280 (reference cited in Popović, Avar Belt, page 21, footnote 9.)

<sup>68</sup> Syna Uenze's great contribution on the matter of military insignia is the typology of fibulae, although she also refers to the belt buckles.

<sup>69</sup> Zdenko Vinski, "Kasnoantički starosjedioci u Salonitskoj regiji prema arheološkoj ostavštini predslavonskog substrata" (The Late Antiquity autochthonic occupation in the area of Salona seen through the archaeological remnants of the pre-Slavic substratum), *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju Dalmatinsku* 69 (1974): 37. (Hereafter: Vinski, "Salona.")

lunette, as well as by adding some additional decoration such as concentric circles. There are many sub-variants of the two basic variants that indicate a productive expansion in the late sixth century.<sup>70</sup>

Most of the Sucidava belt buckles come from fortifications, but a great number came from urban sites in the Balkans and Pontic regions. Specimens come from Vukovo (southern Bulgaria), Osijek and Salona (Croatia), Caricin Grad (Justiniana Prima?, Serbia). The fortress specimens come mostly from the Danube *limes*: Chezava (Novae) and Veliki Gradec (Taliata) in Serbia; Orshova (Dierna), Sadovec-Golemanovo Kale (see Table III: fig 6), Razgrad and Archar (Ratiaria) in Bulgaria; Piatra Frecaței and Celei ( Sucidava) in Romania <sup>71</sup>

The first finds of such types came from the Lower Danube region, on the northern border of the empire. The eponymous site of these belt buckles is the site of Celei, on the left bank of Danube (in today's Romania), which used to be the fortress of Sucidava (see Table III, figs: 1-4). This fortress was built of the periphery of Dacia Traiana and was part of the *limes* fortification system. It was rebuilt during the rule of Justin I (517-527) and Justinian I (527-565). The Sucidava belt buckles in this fortress are dated by coins from the rule of Justinian I until the rule of Maurice Tiberius (582-602). <sup>72</sup>

So far, on the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia, 12 specimens of Sucidava belt buckles have been found. Except for those from Stobi and Heraclea Lynkestis, they all come from the fortresses that used were for guarding the border passages to neighboring provinces -- Dardania and Dacia Mediterranea.

<sup>70</sup> Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decorations*, 270. For more about Sucidava buckle belts, see D. Tudor "Spatromische Gurtelbeschläge aus Sudrumanien," *Dacia* 9-10 (1945): 513. D. Tudor directed the excavation of the fortress of Sucidava. For more about the fortress of Sucidava, see D. Tudor, "La fortificazione delle città romane della Dacia nel sec. III dell'e.n." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 14, No. 3 (1965): 368-380.

<sup>71</sup> Vinski, "Salona:"37-38.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 38.

	Name of site	Vicinity	Material	Quantity	Drawing	Fortress on the border line with:
1	Stobi	Gradsko	bronze	2	none	None, a city
2	Heraclea Lynkestis	Bitola	bronze	1	No.7	None, a city
3	“Davina”, Cucer	Skopje	bronze	1	No.1	Dardania
4	“Kula”, Celopek	Kumanovo	bronze	2	No. 8, 9	Dardania
5	“Gradiste”, Gradiste	Kumanovo	bronze	1	No.10	Dardania
6	“Budingrad”, Budinarci	Berovo	bronze	1	No.4	Dacia Mediterranea
7	“Hisar”, Creska	Stip	bronze	1	No.5	Dacia Mediterranea
8	“Kale”, Belica	Brod	Silver alloy	1	No.6	Dacia Mediterranea
9	“Markovi Kuli”	Skopje	bronze	1	No.2	Dardania
10	unknown	unknown	bronze	1	No.3	unknown

Table 1: Distribution of Sucidava belt buckles

As shown above, the Sucidava belt buckle is the predominant type. At the fortress Kale, Belica, another belt buckle was found. Its elongated form is quite rare, but still the lunette and the motif of concentric circles mark it as one of the many sub-variants of the Sucidava belt buckle (Table II, fig 14)<sup>73</sup>.

Fortresses were not built only on the main border passages, but also near the local roads inside the provinces. In one of these fortresses, the site Kale, Debrešte, a belt buckle belonging to the Bologna type was found.<sup>74</sup> It was excavated from a layer dated in the late sixth – early seventh century (Table II, fig 11).

### II.1.2 Bologna belt buckles

<sup>73</sup> Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decorations*, 270

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



From the beginning of the seventh century another design for belt buckles was employed. Unlike the Sucidava belt buckles, which were cast in one piece, the new Bologna and Balgota types consisted of two pieces connected by a hinge. These two types emerged in the first half of the seventh century; the closer dating is from 620 to 660. Although they co-existed as forms, the Balgota type is a more common find than the Bologna

Bologna belt buckles typically have the shape of a heart; they have a distribution pattern that is connected with the coast line. It starts in North Italy (Bologna and Trento) and follows the line of the Byzantine ports in the Balkans and Crimea (Istria, Salona, Corinth, Athens, Constantinople, Hersones).<sup>75</sup> All this makes the find of Macedonia unique -- it is one of the very rare finds of Bologna type anywhere and one of the few finds that is inland, not on the coast. This might be explained by the fact that this site is not far from the Via Egnatia, an ancient road connecting the ports of Dyrrachion and Constantinople.<sup>76</sup>

Another border fortress with the province of Dardania is the site Dolno Gradiste, Filipovci in the vicinity of Kumanovo. A palmate-shaped belt buckle was found there. The palmate is reminiscent of old Hellenistic traditions, which were revived again in the Eastern Mediterranean. In spite of this decoration, the rings on the back mark this buckle as Byzantine<sup>77</sup> (Table II, fig 12). The “tongues” that were applied on the other side of the belt are also a common find. The one coming from Heraclea Lynkestis demonstrates the fine craftsmanship of

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<sup>75</sup> Vinski, “Salona:” 28. About finds of Bologna belt buckles in Italy and along the Mediterranean, see more in: Cinzia Cavalalari, “Fibbie et fibule altomedievali nel territorio Ravennate e nella costa Adraitica. In *L’ Archeologia dell’ Adraitico dalla Preistoria al Medioevo*, ed. Fiamma Lenzi ( Florence: Istituto per I Beni Artistici Culturali, Naturali della Regione Emilia Romagna, 2003): 631-635; M. G. Maioli, “Fibule romane, bizantine e barbariche del Museo Nazionale di Ravenna,” *Felix Ravenna* 111-112 (1976): 89-123; O. Von Hessen, “Byzantische Schnallen aus Sardinien im Museo Archeologico zur Turin,” in *Studien für Vorund Frühgeschichtlich Archäologie. Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65 Geburtstag* (Munich: publisher, 1974), 545-557; and O. Von Hessen, “Il materiale altomedievale nelle collezioni Stibbert di Firenze,” *Ricerche di Archeologia altomedievale e medievale* 7 (1983): 77-87.

<sup>76</sup> This site is about 45 km away from Heraclea Lynkestis (near today’s city of Bitola), one of the stations on the Via Egnatia.

<sup>77</sup> Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decorations*, 272.

the capital. It was made of a silver sheet and was probably part of a belt worn by a higher ranking officer in the Byzantine army (Table II, fig 13).

### **II.1.3 Metal fittings of the belt**

Metal fittings (see Table I), so-called belt “ribs” are also a common find in fortresses. The first use of such metal fittings dates from fourth century; they are found in tombs of soldiers.<sup>78</sup> During fifth and sixth centuries a new form emerged, the “propeller-shaped ribs.” In Macedonia, they occur as stray finds from the border fortresses. Beside the propeller ribs, many other types of metal fittings are found. Some of them have merely a decorative function, but some have hooks for hanging other pieces of military equipment, like a sheath for a dagger or a quiver for arrows.

The shape and function of these belt buckles are shown in the table below. The last two finds, the ones from Davina, are not as uniform as the rest. The griffon as a motif probably originated in the Middle East, not Europe. Ivan Mikulčić sees the influence of Irano-Sassanid traditions in this form, although the way they were applied to the belt betrays the Byzantine provenance. This form, via the Byzantine workshops and traveling craftsmen, reached the rich Alan burials in Caucasus and the Avar burial in Pannonia (Bócsa, Kunbábony) dated to the seventh century. The finds from Davina may have belonged to a nomad warrior raiding through this area.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibidem,

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, 273.

	Site	Vicinity	Shape	Dating	Material	Function	Quantity	Drawing	Border line fortress with:
1	Kanarevo	Kumanovo	"propeller"	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	bronze	rib	1	no.15	Dardania
2	Belica,	Porechje	"propeller"	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	bronze	rib	1	no.16	Prevalitana
3	Zdunje	Porechje	"propeller"	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	bronze	rib	1	No.17	Prevalitana
4	Zelezec	Demir Hisar	"propeller"	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	bronze	rib	1	No.18	Near the border with Dacia Mediterranea
5	Belica	Brod	Elaborated, Many details	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	iron	hook	2	No.19,20	Dacia Mediterranea
6	Celopek,	Kumanovo	Maltese cross	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	iron	decoration	2	no. 21, 23	Dardania
7	Celopek,	Kumanovo	6 – leaved rosette	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	iron	decoration	2	No.22, 24	Dardania
8	Celopek	Kumanovo	square, serrated edge	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c.	iron, polished	decoration	1	No. 25	Dardania
9	Kamenica	Delcevo	square, serrated edge	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c	iron, polished	decoration	3	No. 26-28	near border with Thrace
10	?	Veles	square, serrated edge	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c	iron, polished	decoration	1	No. 29	Dardania
11	Koreshnica	Demir Capija	square, serrated edge	5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> c	iron, polished	decoration	3	No. 30-32	inland
12	Davina - Cucer	Skopje	2 heads of eagle/griffon	7 <sup>th</sup> c	Alloy of copper and silver	Decoration, hook	1	no. 33	Dardania
13	Davina -Cucer,	Skopje	Miniature buckle	7 <sup>th</sup> c	?	jointing of a case with the belt	1	No.34	Dardania

Table 2: The distribution of belt fittings (see illustration with corresponding numbers in Table 1).

## II.2. MILITARY FIBULAE

### II.2.1 Finds of military fibulae from the Central Balkans

Fibulae were also part of the personal equipment of a Byzantine soldier. They wore cloaks and mantles<sup>80</sup> that were clasped with massive fibulae. The most common type of fibulae

<sup>80</sup> George T. Dennis, tr. *Maurice's Strategikon, Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 138.[didn't you give a short form of this in the first chapter? use it here]

from the Early Middle Ages are the fibulae with a bent leg (see Table V), which have a distant origin in the forms of the La Tène culture in Central Europe and the Danube Region. There is a certain hiatus in their usage during the Roman Period (first to third century C.E.), with some rare finds from Lower Danube region, where they reappeared again in the fifth century. Their distribution expanded during the sixth century, reaching the maximum by the end of the same century. This type of fibulae continued in use during the seventh century, but with a reduced distribution. The distribution was then focused on the few *limes* fortifications that were still under Byzantine control, especially in the Djerdap Canyon section of the Danube. Finds in the inland area of the Balkans are rare.<sup>81</sup>

Syna Uenze dedicated an elaborate study to this type of fibulae. She identified several prototypes dating from the fourth and the fifth centuries, but most of the production chronologically was set in the sixth century. She refers to only one specimen found on the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia and she denotes it as a new south Balkan variant.<sup>82</sup> The collected group of fibulae with a bent leg from Macedonia shows a multitude of different sizes and decorations. This can be interpreted as an indicator for the fast development of this form and the appearance of a great number of different centres of production.

The latest forms of the fibulae with a bent leg are found together with Sucidava belt buckles. They are found usually in *limes* fortifications with great layers of destruction, co-dated around 600, interpreted as result of Avar and Avaro-Slavic raiding activity. Such a group finds are confirmed in Sadovec, where two neighboring Justinian fortresses were excavated -- Sadovsko Kale and Golemanovo Kale (the fortress of Sucidava),<sup>83</sup> and some fortresses from Macedonia (e.g., Markovi Kuli, Skopje).

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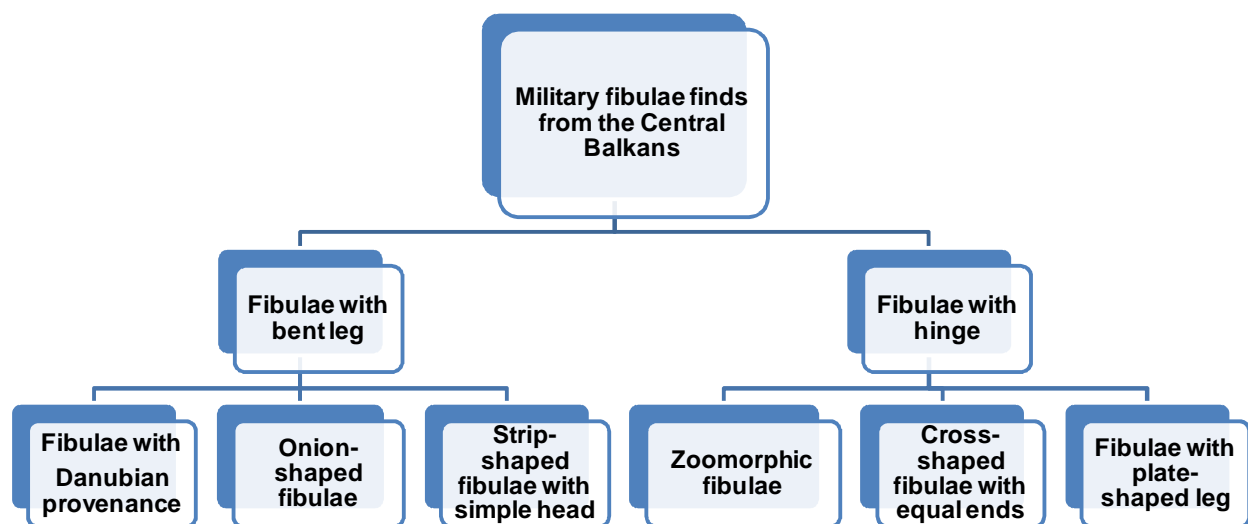
<sup>81</sup> Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decorations*, 258-259.

<sup>82</sup> Uenze: *Sadovec*, 137-160.

<sup>83</sup> Vinski, "Salona": 38-39.

Based on the origins of the pieces, the finds can be divided into imports and local products. The imports are usually cast in bronze and they have parallels with finds from the Danube regions. The local workshops used the method of minting (stamping) and used iron as the material. The most common types of fibulae found on the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia are the fibulae with a bent leg and the fibulae with a hinge, though the fibulae with a bent leg are predominant. Each type has its own variants.

The finds of fibulae with a bent leg can be divided into three variants: fibulae of Danubian provenance, onion-shaped fibulae,<sup>84</sup> and strip-shaped fibulae with a simple head; information of the finds provided in Table 3, as well with the corresponding number for an illustration).



Typology of fibulae finds [give this a figure number so it will appear in the list of figures at the beginning of the thesis]

<sup>84</sup> I have encountered another term referring to this type of fibula- "the crossbow fibula." See more in Barbara Deppert-Lippitz, "A Late Antique Crossbow Fibula in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 35 (2000): 39-70.

## Fibulae with a bent leg

The fibulae with Danubian provenance are the smallest group. All these finds are imported; they have no counterparts in local production. Their dates range from the beginning to the end of the sixth century.<sup>85</sup>

The strip-fibulae with a simple head are denoted by Ivan Mikulčić as clearly of local provenance. Probably there were several workshops, but so far only one has been found and excavated, the workshop that was part of the fortress of Markovi Kuli, Skopje. Three fibulae were found in the workshop; one was found earlier in a layer of fire and destruction, together with 16 coins of Justin II. The latest coin found dates to 569. The fifth specimen, minted in iron and decorated with a gilded copper sheet, was found in the nearby water tank.<sup>86</sup> These are the only fibulae finds that came from an intact archaeological context and have closer chronological dating.

The group of onion-shaped fibulae is of local production; only two fibulae are identified as imports.[how many are there?] Most of the finds of this variant of fibulae with a bent leg come from Salona. They were worn by high ranking civilians during the Late Roman period. This tradition was kept in the Eastern Roman Empire and since they are also found in fortifications, is logical to assume that they were worn by soldiers, too. The chronological borders of the usage of these fibulae are from the fourth to the sixth century. Specimens coming from *limes* fortifications are usually made of gilded bronze. There are very few examples from Pannonia; the main concentration is in the area of Salona. Zdenko Vinski inferred that one of the centres for production must have been in the prefecture of Illyricum.<sup>87</sup> After 600, onion-shaped fibulae survived in two regions: among the Lombardi in North Italy and in the provinces of

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<sup>85</sup> Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decorations*, 259.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, 257.

<sup>87</sup> Vinski, "Salona:" 8.

Dalmatia and Epirus Nova (parts of today's coastal Croatia, Albania, and the some southwestern areas of the Republic of Macedonia). The latter is known to be the territory of the Comani-Crue culture.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The older Albanian scholarship treated the Comani-Crue culture as the beginning of the proto-Albanians, although the geographical boundaries seem too wide. The *terminus ante quem* does not support this theory either, because the existence of the culture ends in the eighth century. Modern Macedonian scholarship treats the Comani-Crue culture bearers as Romanized and tentatively Christian local people, whose task might have been to protect the areas around big roads, such as Via Egnatia. For Macedonian sites of the Comani-Crue culture, see [Elica Maneva] Елица Манева, *Средновековен накит* [Medieval jewelry] (Skopje: The Republic Institution for the Protection of Cultural Monuments-Skopje, 1992).

	Site	Vicinity	Variant	Origin	Material	Quantity	Drawing	Border line fortress with:
1	Gradiste - Taor	Skopje	fibulae of Danubian provenance	import	Bronze (casted)	1	No.1	Dardania
2	Davina - Cucer	Skopje	fibulae of Danubian provenance	import	Bronze (casted)	1	No.2	Dardania
3	Heraclea Lynkestis	Bitola	fibulae of Danubian provenance	Import (?)	Unknow alloy	1	No.3	None, a city
4	Markovi Kuli	Skopje	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	5	No. 4-8	Dardania
5	Kalja – Barovo	Skopje	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	3	No. 9-11	Dardania
6	Davina - Cucer	Skopje	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	4	No. 12-15	Dardania
7.	Isar-Shipkovica	Tetovo	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.16	Prevalitana
8.	Kale-Izishte	Brod	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.17	Dacia Mediterranea
9.	Gradiste-Podvis	Kichevo	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.18	Both Epirus Nova and Prevalitana
10	Kula-Godivje	Ohrid	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.19	Epirus Nova
11	Kale-Brailovo	Prilep	Strip-shaped fibulae with simple head	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.20	Macedonia II to Macedonia I
12	Kalja-Barovo	Skopje	Onion-shaped Fibulae	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.21	Dardania
13	Gradiste – Pcinja	Kumanovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	import	Iron (stamped)	1	No.22	Dardania
14	Vukasija-Pezovo	Kumanovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	import	Iron (stamped)	1	No.23	Dardania
15	Gradiste-Jegunovce	Tetovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.24	Prevalitana
16	Brikul-Lukovica	Tetovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.25	Prevalitana
17	Kalja-Gorno Cajle	Gostivar	Onion-shaped Fibulae	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.26	Prevalitana
18	Budingrad – Budinarci	Berovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	local	Iron (stamped)	2	No. 27, 28	Dacia Mediterranea
19	Sobri – Orashe	Tetovo	unknown	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No drawing	Prevalitana
20	Kalja-Barovo	Skopje	unknown	local	?, (stamped)	1	No drawing	Dardania

Table 3: Distribution of fibulae with a bent leg [can you move this table up in the text a bit so there isn't so much blank space?]



## Fibulae with a hinge

The fibulae with a hinge are rarer finds than the fibulae with a bent leg. They vary greatly in design and size (see table IV); the only thing that unifies them under one type is the way the pin was connected to the main body of the fibula.

One zoomorphic fibula was found in a fortress bordering on the province of Praevalitana. It is fashioned as a peacock and the closest analogies come from the eastern Alps' region (today's Slovenia and northeastern Italy). Zoomorphic fibulae, as well as belt fittings of same design, are connected with the Germanic tribes, mostly with the Lombardi and Goths.<sup>89</sup> In the late fifth century, continuing in the sixth and seventh century, Dalmatia and Praevalitana were administrative and political parts of Italy, first ruled by the Ostrogoths of Ravenna, then by the Lombards. The short border with Praevalitana is the explanation for the appearance of such finds in Macedonia Secunda,<sup>90</sup> or maybe it was worn by a *foederatus* of Germanic origin who guarded the fortress.

The fibulae with equal ends have the same analogies as the previous variant. Only one find is known so far, again from a border fortification with the province of Praevalitana. Finds like this one come from sites in Istria and Dalmatia as a result of Lombard and Ostrogothic raiding activity. They are dated c. late sixth-late seventh century. The fibula from Jegunovce, Tetovo, is minted in iron, in the same size as the Italian fibulae.<sup>91</sup> The minting in iron might denote it as local replica, inspired by the influence of Germanic fibulae.

The fibulae with a plate-shaped leg are represented by two finds. The one from the city of Stobi was found in the *Domis fullonica* building. It is the only find with a clear date; a coin of

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<sup>89</sup> For more information about zoomorphic fibulae and belt fittings, see Vinski, "Salona:"16-21

<sup>90</sup> Mikulčić and Lilčić, Fibulae and belt decorations, 262-263.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem

Justin I (518-527) was found in the layer above.<sup>92</sup> The other find comes from a border fortification with Praevalitana.<sup>93</sup>

This variant of the fibulae with a hinge cannot be defined clearly as military. Although one find comes from a border fortress and another from a big city that probably had a Byzantine military presence in this period (as shown by other finds of military fibulae), this variant has no analogies and parallels anywhere. The method of minting in iron betrays a local origin, but until more finds are excavated or analogies are found, this remains an enigma.<sup>94</sup>

	Site	Vicinity	Variant	Origin	Material	Quantity	Drawing	Border line fortress with:
1	"Gradiste", Jegunovce	Tetovo	Cross-shaped fibulae with equal ends	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No. 29	Prevalitana
2	"Kalja", Gorno Cajle	Gostivar	Zoomorphic fibulae	import	Bronze (casted)	1	No. 30	Prevalitana
3	Stobi	Gradsko	Fibulae with plate-shaped leg	import	Bronze (casted)	1	No.31	None, a city
4	"Gradiste", Stence	Tetovo	Fibulae with plate-shaped leg	import	Bronze (casted)	1	No. 32	Prevalitana
5	"Davina", Cucur	Skopje	Fragment, a needle	local	iron	1	No.33	Dardania
6	"Davina", Cucur	Skopje	Fibulae with plate-shaped leg (with spring instead of hinge)	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.34	Dardania

Table 4: Distribution of fibulae with a hinge

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 263-264.

<sup>93</sup> See more in Chapter 3.

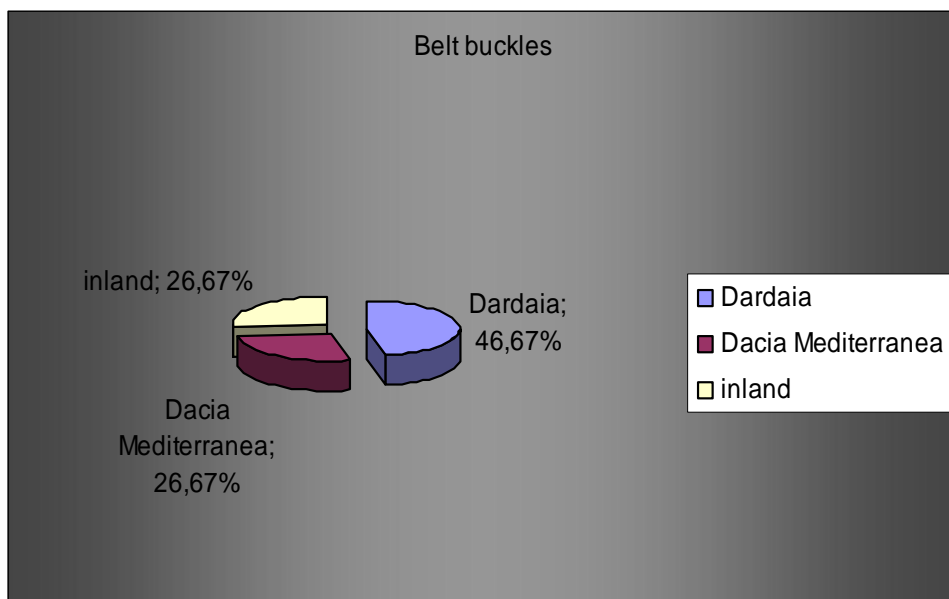
<sup>94</sup> Ibidem, 264.

### II.3. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

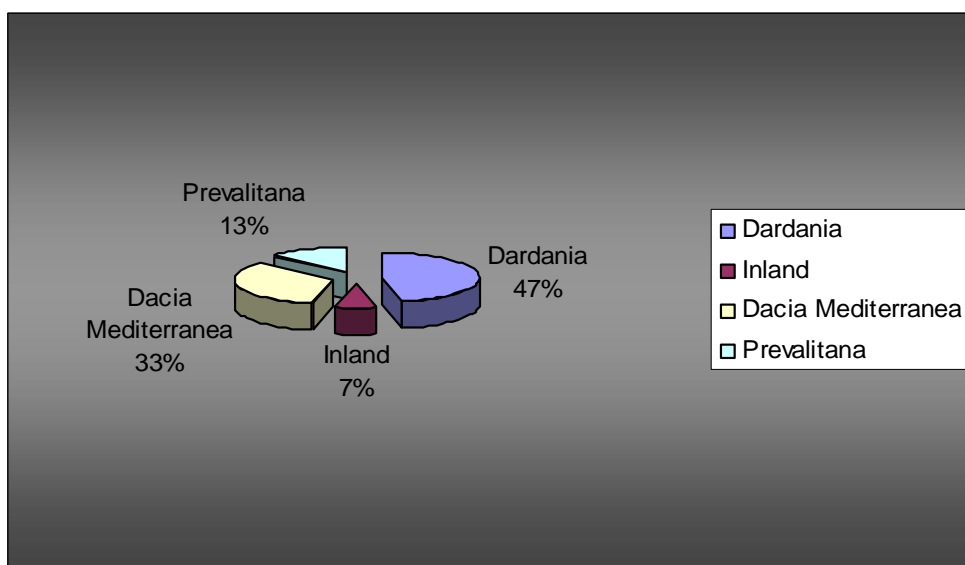
These dress accessories are usually taken as indicators of the presence of the Byzantine army, although one cannot really say that they were exclusively associated with it. Most of the forms originated in older Roman or local traditions. Defining the centres of production is an arduous task, but certainly there were many, as shown by the multitude of finds and great variations in decorating them

The concentration of such material on a site can be interpreted as showing the strength of the military presence there. The fortresses that were the most exposed to raiding activity had the greatest number of soldiers, who, in turn brought larger numbers of insignia. The density of fortresses was less related to the length of the border than to the jeopardy of frequent raids.

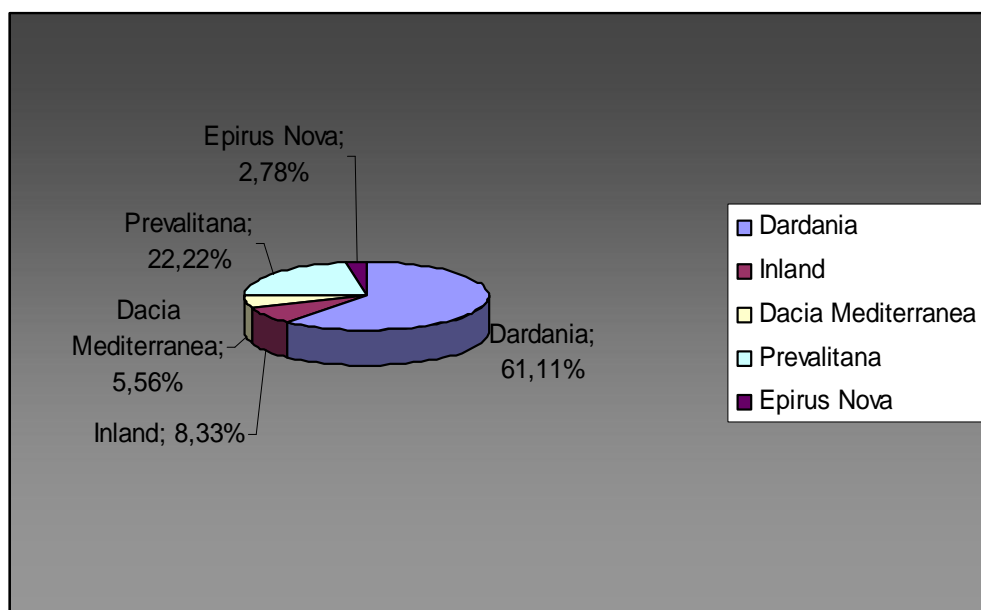
As shown in the graphics below, the border fortresses with the province of Dardania are the richest in finds of belt buckles and military fibulae. They were the first line of attack a raid was not stopped or weakened on the Danubian *limes*, so it is not a surprise that they were the most guarded keeps. Another important factor is the Morava-Vardar route (see Map 3), following the valleys of the two rivers. This route, having no great mountain ranges as obstacles, made the province of Dardania and the entrance to the province of Macedonia Secunda easily accessible for raiding activity. The number of such finds is not only related to the number of military troops in these fortresses. One should also take into consideration when studying the number of such finds in certain areas why these objects ended up as archaeological finds (they were lost by contemporary people). In this context, it should be noted that the higher number of finds may indicate a greater number of raids, because the loss of such finds may have been the result of periods of turmoil as the result of the raids, not normal deposition,.



Graphic I: Presence of belt buckles (N=17)



Graphic II: Presence of metal fittings [N=21]



Graphic III: Presence of fibulae [N=36]

### III. THE BARBARIANS AND THE BIG CITIES

Barbarian raids are still seen as strongest external factor for ending the urban life in an area in the 4th century. They indeed had a negative impact on the flourishing of the urban life, but that does not necessary mean that every city that was attacked by barbarians was erased from the map. Layers of renewal followed the layers of destruction, although the new layers were usually represented with humbler buildings. In most cases, the big cities were just transformed in smaller settlements.

Stobi (Macedonia Secunda), Heraklea Lynkestis (Macedonia Prima), Bargala (Dacia Mediterranea)<sup>95</sup> and Skupi (Dardania),<sup>96</sup> were among the urban centers which were targets of heavy raiding activity. All of these cities were built at good strategic points, situated near main communications, with highly developed trade with the furthestmost regions of the empire. Capturing a city like this promised rich booty for barbarians and control of the surrounding area.

These cities were raided by various barbarian groups, of both Asian and Indo-European origin, it is easier to recognize a raid by the Asian horsemen in a destruction layer, however, because they have special types of weapons created by different traditions and adjusted to a different way of making war. Nomadic horsemen attacked by surprise and swiftly, shooting arrows from reflex bows while mounted on horseback.

#### **III.1. REFLEX BOWS AND ARROW HEADS**

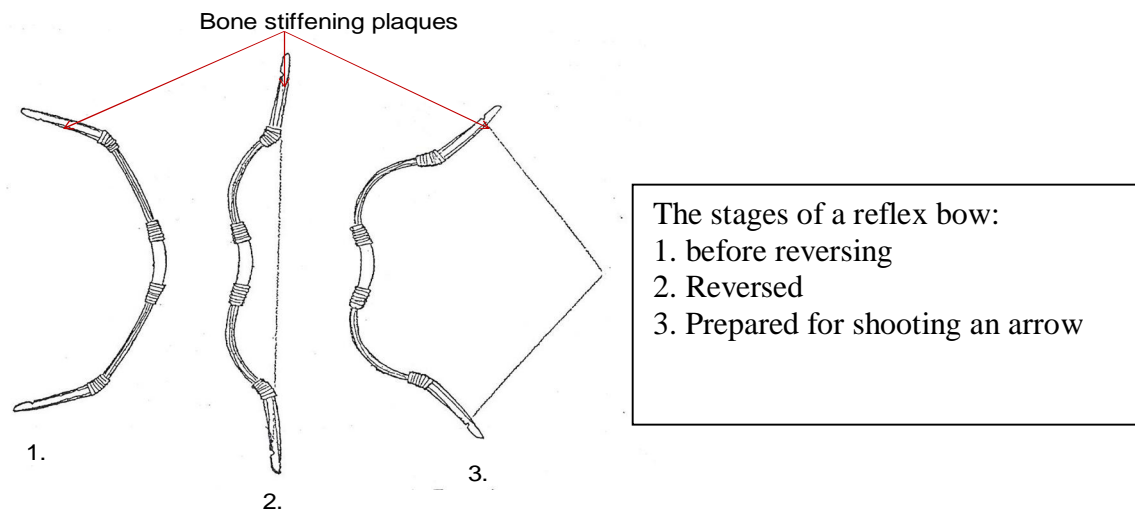
Reflex bows were fashioned by using the elastic forces of wood when twisted in opposite directions. A bow was kept in a case tied to the belt when it was not in use. This type of bow was

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<sup>95</sup> About these three cities in the period of transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, see Ljubinka Džidrova, "Late Antique Towns on the Territory of the Republic of Macedonia in the Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages," MA Thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 1995), 17-79. Ljubinka Džidrova has written an excellent survey of the historical background and urban development of Heraklea Lynkestis, Stobi, and Bargala. For more about Heraklea Lynkestis see Suzana Kasovska, "Between Tradition and Innovation: Christian Floor Mosaics at Heraclea Lyncestis," MA Thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2007).

<sup>96</sup> Urban life in the vicinity of modern Skopje had two centers: Skupi and the fortified city Markovi Kuli. Both of them have been researched, mostly by Professor Ivan Mikulčić.

brought to Europe by the Huns, but it was used by the Avars, too.<sup>97</sup> Plaques, made out of bone or antler, were used for stiffening the most fragile parts of the bow: the ends and the central part.<sup>98</sup> The archers were trained to use the reflex bow while mounted on horses since their youngest age. Special types of arrowheads were used with the reflex bows and they match the types found in the Eurasian steppes.<sup>99</sup> One of the most common types was the three-ribbed arrow-heads.<sup>100</sup>



The presence of stiffening plaques of reflex bows and three-ribbed arrowheads is a clear indicator of a nomadic raid (See Plate VII: figs. 1a, 1b and 2; Plate VIII Figs. 1a and 2.) They were used both by the Huns and the Avars, so if they are not found together with coins or other chronologically more sensitive archaeological material, there will be no solid base for dating and connecting this finds with a certain raid. There is a possibility to distinguish a Hunnish reflex bow from an Avar one: the stiffening plaques of the Avar reflex bows are more curved, shorter and narrower than the Hunnish one. The Hunnish bows had dimension of 130-140 cm; the Avar

<sup>97</sup> [Elica Maneva] Елица Манева, “Коскени плочки од рефлексни лакови и троребрести врвови од стрели со номадско потекло од Хераклеја”. [“Bone stiffening plaques of reflex bow and three-ribbed arrowheads of nomadic origin in Heraklea”]. *The Journal of the Institute of cultural monument protection, Museum and Gallery-Bitola* 5-7-8 (1985/86/97): 51. (Hereafter: Maneva, “Bone stiffening plaques and three-ribbed arrowheads”).

<sup>98</sup> Kovačević, *Avar Khaganate*, 116.

<sup>99</sup> Tivadar Vida, “The Early and the Middle Avar Period”. In *Hungarian Archaeology at the turn of the Millenium*, ed. Zsolt Visy. (Budapest: Ministry of National Cultural Heritage, 2003), 305.

<sup>100</sup> Maneva, “Bone stiffening plaques and three-ribbed arrowheads”, 53.

ones 160-170.<sup>101</sup> The difference in dimensions is more obvious if the earlier Hunnish bows are compared with the Avar ones.<sup>102</sup> These observations cannot be taken as a solid rule, however, because there is difference in the size of stiffening plaques coming from the same bow.

### ***III.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND MILITARY RAIDS***

As an answer to the raiding activity of the barbarians, the Byzantine army was stationed in the endangered areas. The loss of the cities meant the loss of imperial control over a given area and the resources within it. The border fortifications were the first line of defense, but not always efficient, so additional protection of the cities was necessary.

Belt buckles and fibulae worn by the Byzantine soldiers were found in the cities, though not as often as in fortifications. There is a possibility that Germanic *foederati* lived in Skupi, as shown by some of the grave goods found in the eastern necropolis of the city. One of the most exclusive finds connected with the Byzantine army comes from a destruction layer of a city -- the helmet with rivets from Heraklea Lynkestis, which will be discussed further below.

Another important group of archaeological materials that will be discussed in this chapter is the numismatic material. Coins provide rather precise dating of the artifacts found in destruction layers. Coin hoards were deposited in the ground to protect them from danger and they can speak as clearly about the military activity in a given area as finds of weapons and military insignia.

### ***III.3 STOBI***

Stobi was one of the largest urban centers and the capital of Macedonia Secunda; during the Roman Period it had the status of *municipium*. It was a city near the confluence of the Crna Reka and Vardar rivers, which made it easily accessible for the barbarians along the Morava-

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem, 52.

<sup>102</sup> [Š. Nać] III. Nać, "Некропола код Ардарца у раног средњег века" [The necropolis of Ardarac in the Early Middle Ages," *Work of the Museums of Vojvodina* 8 (1959): 83, 87, cited in Maneva, "Bone stiffening plaques and three-ribbed arrowheads," 55.)



Vardar route. Stobi was a rich city with several basilicas, luxurious palaces, and other public and private buildings (See map 3 and Plan 1).

### III.3.1 The Goths in Stobi

To make the city to be safer and better protected from barbarian incursions, some of the luxurious buildings were no longer in use; fortifications were built over buildings with mosaics. Such is the case of the building named *Casa romana*; a strong defensive wall was laid directly on the mosaic floor. Of the many coins found near the base of the wall, the latest was minted by Arcadius (383-393). This building project is probably connected with the Gothic invasion on the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>103</sup>

The coin-hoard found in the theatre is probably connected with the Gothic raids, too. It contained around 70 *siliquae* and 4 *solidi*, minted by the emperors Valentinian I, Valens, Gratian and Valentinian II<sup>104</sup> (See Plan 1). The coins of this hoard were issued in the period between 364 and 378.<sup>105</sup> Based on the short age-structure of the hoard, it can be suggested that it was more a number of coins withdrawn from circulation, deposited and never retrieved, than long-term savings. The Antioch mint was predominant; this hoard does not reflect the coin circulation of this area, otherwise the predominant coins would have been issues of the active mint of Thessalonika instead. This introduces the possibility that these coins have been brought to Stobi, probably from the Orient prefecture.<sup>106</sup> Regardless of the provenance, this hoard speaks of the

<sup>103</sup> [Voislav Sanev and Saržo Saržoski] Воислав Санев и Саржо Саржоски, “Ископувања на внатрешниот бедем на Стоби, 1972-1974” [Excavations of the Inner Wall in Stobi, 1972-1974], In *Студии за старините во Стоби III*, уредено од Блага Алексова и Џејмс Вајсман. [*Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi III*], ed. Blaga Aleksova and James Wiseman. (Veles: Macedonian Review Editions, 1981), 229-234.

<sup>104</sup> Maja Hadži-Maneva, “Hoard of solidi and siliquae of Stobi,” In *Coins and Mints in Macedonia*, ed. Cvetan Grozdanov (Skopje: Macedonia Academy of Science and Art and the National Bank of Republic of Macedonia, 2001), 69. (Hereafter: Hadži-Maneva, “Hoard of Stobi”.)

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem, 70.

<sup>106</sup> The mint of Antioch was meant to supply the Orient prefecture with coins. Hoards with a short age structure and well-preserved coins from non-local mints may indicate a military presence, e.g., a soldier’s paycheck, a soldier who came to Stobi from the Orient prefecture. This is just my suggestion, nevertheless, Hadži-Maneva notes that finds of *solidi* and *siliquae* are rare on the territory of the Byzantine Empire (see Hadži-Maneva, “Hoard of Stobi”, 75),

Gothic danger in the late fourth and the early fifth century in the Central Balkans. Furthermore, another hoard with fourth-century bronze coins was found in the theatre, chronologically similar to this Antioch hoard.<sup>107</sup>

### III.3.2 The Huns in Stobi

Stobi was probably attacked by Huns in the middle of the fifth century; the archeological material witnesses a severe destruction by fire. The presence of nomadic barbarians in Stobi is indicated by the remnants of a reflex bow and a three-ribbed arrowhead found in the *Domus Fullonica* building complex. The burned reflex bow was found in Ward 21, together with a dagger, and the arrowhead was found in Ward 28 (See Plan 1). The destruction layer contained an abundance of coins; the latest ones among them were of Theodosius II and Valentinian III. They were minted by 450 or 455, respectively. The renewal phase of the building complex is dated with the coins of Marcian (450-457) and Leo I (457-474), so the *terminus ante quem* of the destruction layer can be set at 450.<sup>108</sup> Two other three-ribbed arrowheads were found in Stobi, also coming from layers with similar dating<sup>109</sup> (See Plate VIII). Weapons of the nomadic horsemen and the coin dating indicate the possibility that this destruction layer is due to Attila's attack in 447, when no less than 70 big urban centers in the Balkans were destroyed (See Plate VIII, Fig. 1 and 2).

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except for the territory of today's Romania, where most of the hoards of *siliquae* have been found. For hoards from the territory of today's Romania, see G. L. Duncan, *Coin Circulation in the Danubian and Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire AD 294-578*, (London: Royal Numismatic Society, 1993): 55-76.

<sup>107</sup> [Ž. Vinčić and M. Hadži-Maneva] Ж. Винчиќ и М. Хаџи-Манева “Еден колективен нумизматички наод на римски бронзи од античкиот театар во Стоби” [A collective numismatic find of Roman bronze coins in the Antique Theatre in Stobi], *Macedonian Numismatic Journal* 4 (2000): 55-76.

<sup>108</sup> [Ivan Mikulčić] Иван Микулчиќ, “Некои нови моменти од историјата на Стоби” [Some new factors in the history of Stobi], in *Студии за старините во Стоби*, [Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi III], ed. Blaga Aleksova and James Wiseman] (Veles: Macedonian Review Editions, 1981), 210.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*, 211.

### III.3.3. The presence of the Byzantine army and the Avaro-Slavic raids

Except for the weapons of nomadic horsemen, objects that were used by the Byzantine soldiers were also found in Stobi: two Sucidava buckle belts and a fibula with a plate-shaped leg.<sup>110</sup> The latter was found in the *Domus Fullonica* building complex. The stratigraphic layer above contained a coin of Justin I (518- 527). All these finds expanded in usage during the sixth century and they can offer some small indications for the possible presence of Byzantine troops in Stobi during the same century.

Besides the weapons and the military insignia, the coin hoards are also good as witnesses of military activity. In one of the northern wards of the *Casino Basilica*, a coin hoard was found dated by the latest minted coins to 585.<sup>111</sup> This hoard is probably connected with the Avaro-slavic plundering of the Balkan provinces before the siege of Constantinople in 586.

### III.4 HERAKLEA LYNKESTIS

Heraklea Lynkestis was one of the biggest cities in the province of Macedonia Secunda and a station on the Via Egnatia route (See Map 5). It became bishopric in some period in Late Antiquity and, just like Stobi, it was a city with luxurious private and public buildings (See Plan 2).<sup>112</sup> It is also one of the archaeological sites with the best evidence for barbarian raids, seen in an abundance of heterogeneous material: nomadic weapons, military insignia of the Byzantine army, and numismatic material.

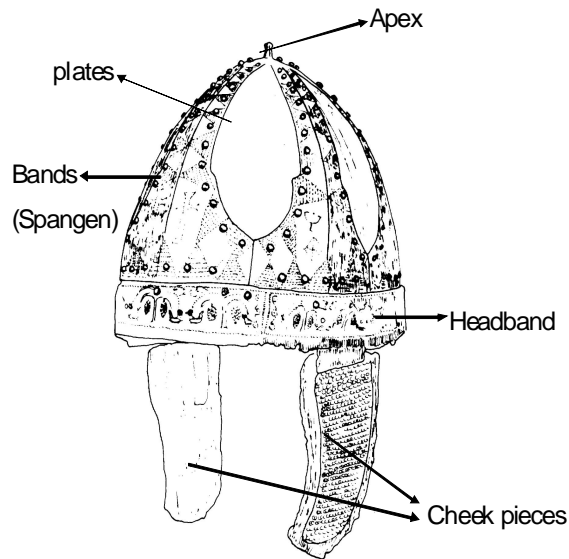
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<sup>110</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>111</sup> Aleksova, *Bishopric of Bregalnica*, 68.

<sup>112</sup> The public and sacral buildings in Heraklea Lynkestis were paved with luxurious mosaics. More about the mosaics of Heraklea Lynkestis and their dating, see in Suzana Kasovska, *Between Tradition and Innovation: Christian Floor Mosaics at Heraclea Lyncestis*, Budapest, 2007, 59-62. Also see Suzana Kasovska, "Between Tradition and Innovation: Christian Floor Mosaics at Heraclea Lyncestis". *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 14 (2008):259.

### III.4.1. A helmet with rivets



Helmets with rivets, also known as *Spangenhelms*,<sup>113</sup> were luxurious items of personal equipment. Only 30 helmets with rivets have been found so far; they have a remarkable dispersion from Europe to Egypt and Libya. The dating also has a broad range, from the late fifth to the beginning of the seventh century.

The helmets with rivets are probably Eastern, thought to originate from the Irano-Sassanid tradition. This type was introduced to Europe by the Goths during their stay in the Black Sea region in the third century.<sup>114</sup> Usually, this type of helmet is connected with the Germanic tribes,<sup>115</sup> but the broad pattern of distribution indicates that they were also used by others. Finds of helmets with rivets in Coptic Egypt are probably connected with the presence of the Byzantine army in that region.<sup>116</sup> It is an object that denotes higher rank in the military hierarchy, thus making it a favorite among barbarian chieftains and Byzantine generals.

<sup>113</sup> Helmets with rivets are also known as Baldenheim helmets or Narona/Baldenheim helmets.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen V. Grancsay, "A Barbarian Chieftain's Helmet," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 7 (1949): 274. See also Simon James, "Evidence from Dura Europos for the Origins of Late Roman Helmets," *Syria* 63 (1986): 107-134, and Rolf Hachmann, *Die Germanen* (Munich: Nagel Verlag, 1971), 160-162.

<sup>115</sup> This opinion is based on the distribution -- the largest number of such finds come from the burials of high-ranking Germanic warriors -- as well as the depiction of Germanic rulers wearing *Spangenhelm* on some of their monetary emissions. See [Elica Maneva] Елица Манева, "Нумизматички предлошки во декорацијата на шлемот со спојки од Хераклеја" [Numismatic models in the decoration of the helmet with rivets from Heraklea], *Монетите и монетоковниците во Македонија* [Coins and Mints in Macedonia], ed. [Cvetan Grozdanov] Цветан Грозданов. (Skopje: Macedonia Academy of Science and Art and the National Bank of Republic of Macedonia, 2001), 89. (Hereafter: Maneva, "Numismatic models.")

<sup>116</sup> [Elica Maneva] Елица Манева, "Шлем со спојки од Хераклеја" [Helmet with rivets from Heraklea], *Antiquité Vivante* 36 (1986): 78. (Hereafter: Maneva, "Helmet.")

The main parts of a helmet with rivets are made of iron. The conical body of the helmet consists of four or six plates, bound together by bands made of copper or bronze. Some of the helmets have cheek pieces or a nose piece. The rims of the headband can be perforated for applying a protective leather piece on the inside of the helmet or to attach a piece of mail to protect the neck. The helmets with rivets bore elaborate decorations, usually a thin sheet of gold or silver with stamped motifs was applied to the head band. The bands and the cheek pieces were decorated with motifs that imitated fish scales. These impressions were made by the technique of punching [stamping?]. i've corrected this sentence before. you have to accept changes in spelling like motif—it is not a choice]

One helmet with rivets was found in a destruction layer of the south annex of the Episcopal Basilica in Heraklea Lynkestis. It is coin-dated to 586.<sup>117</sup> The helmet follows the basic pattern as other finds of this type. The thing that makes it unique is the decoration of the headband,<sup>118</sup> which was apparently inspired by images on Byzantine coins ( See Plate VI).<sup>119</sup>

The main decoration is made of six representations, stamped with pseudo-coins. The representations are repeated four times; the whole length of the headband is decorated. The central representation is the most important because it is most indicative for the time this helmet was created. The representations are accompanied by short sentences in Greek, which ask the help of the Lord for good health and safe return from the battlefield of the one who owned this helmet.

<sup>117</sup> Maneva, "Helmet", 71. Heraklea Lynkestis is not the only archaeological site where the raids of 585 have been confirmed. Vladimir Popović's analysis of the coin circulation in the Central Balkans shows that coins minted in 585/6 are not present. In Heraklea Lynkestis the last coins found are from the 584/5 emission. See more in Vladimir Popović, *Aux origines de la slavisation des Balkans: la constitution des premières Sklavinies macédoniennes vers la fin du Vie siècle* (Paris: Comptes rendus des Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, 1980), 240-244.

<sup>118</sup> Due to its unique decoration, Maneva even suggests that it may represent a special variant of the helmets with rivets -- the Heraklea variant.

<sup>119</sup> Maneva, "Helmet," 71-77. Maneva has described and analyzed the decoration of this helmet in several of her texts, thus it is well known to the scholarly public. Therefore, I will focus on one point only, the one that provides the dating of the helmet. For more information about the numismatic background of the decoration of this helmet, see in Maneva, "Numismatic models," 85-89.

The image represents Christ on a throne, with a chlamys and halo, blessing two frontally standing male figures. They are not marked as rulers, but the scene is reminiscent of a numismatic one where emperors got the right to rule by a blessing from a representative of the Celestial Kingdom -- Christ or the Virgin. So, if the male figures can be considered as rulers, that the helmet was produced in a period when there was another ruler beside the Roman emperor. This ruler had to have ruled with an authorization from Constantinople, however, and that could be the Ostrogoth King Theodoric. The right to rule with Italy was acknowledged to Theodoric by Constantinople in 497 and this year can be taken as *terminus post quem* for the production of the helmet. The inscriptions in Greek,<sup>120</sup> the motif taken from Byzantine coins, and the high-quality craftsmanship speak of a Constantinopolitan workshop.<sup>121</sup>

The benevolence of Constantinople toward the Ostrogoth king ended in 523, when an edict was issued which prohibited pagans, Jews, and heretics from serving in the imperial or any other type of service. From this year onwards, the relations between the Ostrogoth Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire worsened and finally ended in the Gothic wars. Therefore, 523 can be taken as the *terminus ante quem* for the production of the helmet.<sup>122</sup> This helmet was found in a destruction layer coin dated to 584/5; if the dating of the production is taken into consideration, that would mean that this helmet was in use for more than a half century and that it might have had more than one owner. Such a long uselife speaks even more about the importance of this helmet as an insignia of power in the military hierarchy. The stylistic analysis of the helmet can also provide possible a provenance of the helmet. This changes the perspective of viewing helmets with rivets as exclusively worn by the Germanic warlords and rulers. This helmet was

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<sup>120</sup> Combined with the stamped representation, the inscriptions have prophylactic and eschatological symbolism; they were believed to protect the owner of this helmet. See more in Henry Maguire, "Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages," *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1037-1054.

<sup>121</sup> Maneva, "Numismatic models," 86.

<sup>122</sup> Maneva, "Helmet," 80-81.

made for and worn by a general or another high ranking officer (*Romaion* or *foederatus*) in the Byzantine troops who had the task of defending the city during barbarian raids in the last decades of the sixth century.

### **III.4.2. Stiffening plaques from reflex bows and three-ribbed arrowheads**

Two stiffening plaques and three three-ribbed arrow heads were found during the excavation in Heraklea Lynkestis (See Plate VII, Fig. 1a, 1b, and 2). Two three-ribbed arrowheads and the two stiffening plaques were found in the vicinity of the episcopal residence. Due to the location, they might indicate the same raid, although that is not certain. The third arrowhead was found near Basilica D.

Although these finds did not come from an intact layer with clear marks of destruction, such as the finds of this type from Stobi, they indicate the presence of nomadic horsemen in Heraklea Lynkestis. The artifacts were found in locations without numismatic material, so they cannot be connected with a specific raid and the attribution of the reflex bow can be discussed only on the basis of the form stiffening plaques. The stiffening plaques of the reflex bows were poorly preserved, with parts missing. This fragmentation makes the attribution difficult, but they probably belonged to an earlier form of a reflex bow, although it cannot be determined is it a Hunnish or and early Avar one.<sup>123</sup>

### **III.4.3 Cloth fittings: The Barbarians and the *Romaioi***

As discussed in Chapter 3, cloth fittings that can be considered as the military insignia of the Byzantine army were also found in Heraklea Lynkestis. Again, it is important to stress that

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<sup>123</sup> [Elica Maneva] Елица Манева, “Коскени плочки од рефлексни лакови и и троребрести врвови од стрели со номадско потекло од Хераклеја Линкестис” [Bone stiffening plaques of a reflex bow and three-ribbed arrowheads of nomadic origin in Heraklea Lynkestis], *Collection of Works of the Institution for Protection of Cultural Monuments and Natural Rarities, Museum and Gallery of Bitola* 6-7-8 (1985/86/97): 55.

these finds are scarce in big urban centers; they are more typical for the border fortifications. A Sucidava belt buckle, one fibula with hinge (of Danubian provenance) and “tongue” made of silver plate were found in Heraklea Lynkestis.<sup>124</sup> The dating of all these objects is in the sixth century.

Two cloth fittings are connected with the presence of the Avars in Heraklea Lynkestis.<sup>125</sup> The circle and the pentagonal fitting were found near the Episcopal Basilica and they might have been applied to a belt. They are fashioned as jewelry of the polychromatic style, with cloisonné technique (See Plate VII, Fig.3)

### ***III.5 BARGALA***

Bargala was another important urban center and bishopric between the fourth and the seventh century, but even its development was occasionally interrupted by barbarian raids. Later, in the High Middle Ages, this city became one of the most important ecclesiastical centers in the Balkans.

As shown by the numismatic material, the city was plundered by barbarians on at least two occasions: in 586 and 616-617.<sup>126</sup> In both cases, these attacks were part of broader raiding activity by Avaro-slavic marauders, which ended with the siege of Thessalonika[both times?].

The Avaro-slavic army attacked Bargala in 585 and devastated great part of the city. Great destruction by fire is confirmed near the western entrance of the city and the basilica, as well as serious damage to the fortifications. Three-ribbed arrowheads were found near the basilica and the main entrance of the city. A coin hoard was also found south of the basilica; the

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<sup>124</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>125</sup> [Anica Ćorĭievska] Аница Ѓорѓиеvsка, *Патот низ времето на Хераклеја Линкестис* [The Path of Heraklea Lynkestis through time] (Bitola: The Municipality of Bitola and the Institution and Museum of Bitola, 2007): 176-177.

<sup>126</sup> Aleksova, *Bishopric of Bregalnica*, 65, 68. Aleksova sees the group of finds (two silver earrings and two golden *solidi* of Phocas), hidden near the basilica, as indicating a raid that was part of the raiding pattern of the Avaro-slavic army that ended with the siege of Thessalonika in 616-17.



latest coins are semi-folles of Maurice, minted in Thesalonika in 584/5.<sup>127</sup> This coin hoard contained 13 golden coins, 270 bronze coins and one golden ring. It is supposed that it was deposited in ground by a tradesman shortly before the devastation of the city.

### ***III.6. SKUPI AND THE FORTIFIED CITY OF MARKOVI KULI***

At the beginning of the Early Middle Ages two cities existed in the vicinity of today's Skopje. The first was Skupi, founded as Roman *castrum* and then developing into a large urban settlement in the valley of the Vardar River; the second was a fortified city on the slopes of Vodno Mountain, founded around the sixth century. The two cities probably had a parallel existence for some time (See Plan 4).<sup>128</sup>

#### **III.6.1. Skupi**

Skupi was one of the most important cities in the Balkans during the Roman period; that is confirmed by its status as a *colonia*. It became the capital of the province of Dardania and archbishopric until 535, when the newly built Iustiniana Prima took on this role. The rich urban life in Skupi ceased to flourish by the end of the fourth century, however, in the two following centuries, Skupi's territory decreased and it became a small settlement with humble buildings.

During the fourth century, a large necropolis was in use in the eastern part of the city, the so-called Eastern Necropolis (See Plan 3). So far, approximately 300 graves have been excavated; among them, 106 belong to the period between the middle of the third and the fifth century. There is a great variety of grave constructions and evidence of burial rituals. Among

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<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, 68. See also [Blaga Aleksova] Блага Алексова, Трезорот со византиски монети од Благала [The Byzantine coin hoard from Barga], In *Coins and Mints in Macedonia*, ed. Cvetan Grozdanov. (Skopje: Macedonia Academy of Science and Art and the National Bank of Republic of Macedonia, 2001), 96-97. Aleksova refers briefly to the destruction of the city in 585 without giving more detailed information about the archaeological material, e.g., the number of three-ribbed arrowhead finds or photographs or technical drawings of the same, yet, she states that part of the basilica was renewed after it had been damaged in the Avaro-slavic raid (Ibidem, 57).

<sup>128</sup> Traditionally, it is considered that Skupi was devastated by an earthquake in 518, but the city was the capital and bishopric of Dardania until the founding of Iustiniana Prima in 535.

these burials, a small group of around 10 graves<sup>129</sup> contains grave goods that might indicate that Germanic *foederati* lived in Skupi for some period of time.

The grave goods analyzed in this sub-chapter were found in 9 graves (Catalogue 1, Inv. 1-9): several finds of onion-shaped fibulae, possibly of Danubian origin, belt buckles and buckles for fastening boots. The fibulae are dated to the second half of the fourth century;<sup>130</sup> the belt buckles have a similar dating. The fibula from grave 200 (Inv. 8, Fig.1) has the closest analogies with buckles used during the fourth century and found on the *limes* along the Danube and Rhine.<sup>131</sup> The other specimens of buckles have an oval, “D”-shaped form (Inv.1, fig.1; Inv.1, fig.1 and fig.2; Inv. 3, fig.1 and Inv.4, fig.2.) Mikulčić identifies them as Visigothic.<sup>132</sup>

It is known that the Goths became *foederati* of the empire after the battle of Hadrianople; Theodosius settled the Ostrogoths in Illyricum and the Visigoths in Thrace,<sup>133</sup> although Germanic people were present in the Byzantine army from the rule of Constantine the Great onwards.<sup>134</sup> This could be the explanation for the presence of these finds in Skupi -- Germanic warriors fighting for the empire who settled and were buried in the city’s necropolis together with their families.<sup>135</sup>

### III.6.2. The fortified city of Markovi Kuli

Skupi was devastated in a great earthquake in 518, but this was not the end of urban life in the vicinity of today’s city of Skopje. As the Vardar Valley proved unsafe for a city in a

<sup>129</sup> These graves are only males, with material that can be considered military insignia.

<sup>130</sup> [Ivan Mikulčić] Иван Микулчиќ, Доцноримски гробови од Скупи [Late Roman burials from Skupi], *Annuaire - Faculté de philosophie de l'Université de Skopje* 26 (1974): 136. (Hereafter: Mikulčić, “Late Roman burials.”)

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem, 137. See also Rolf Hachmann, *Die Germanen* (Munich: Nagel Verlag, 1971), 155.

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>133</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 11.

<sup>134</sup> Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 19.

<sup>135</sup> The grave goods from the child and female burials, mostly jewelry, also suggest a barbarian, possibly Germanic, origin, see Mikulčić, “Late Roman burials,” 132-135.

period with intensive barbarian invasions, a new fortified city was built on a plateau of Vodno Mountain, now the archaeological site Markovi Kuli (See Plan 6).

It was built on three leveled terraces with internal walls between them, but all surrounded by a strong fortification built with the technique of *emplekton*. The fortification had 40 or more towers with triangular or pentagonal bases. The highest terrace was the acropolis of the town. The acropolis itself, as well as the middle and lower terrace, had its own ring of fortification wall with gates and towers (See Plan 5). The towers of the inner walls did not have such massive and strong construction as the ones with triangular or pentagonal base of the outer fortification. The fortification had a water supply system with two big water tanks.<sup>136</sup>

This site has been excavated several times.<sup>137</sup> The excavations near the front tower of the acropolis revealed a destruction layer filled with cinders and charred wood. A strip-shaped fibula with a bent leg and coins of Justin II (569) were found. Later, a small workshop for jewelry, cloth fittings, and other smaller objects was found in the section of the middle terrace. So far, this is the only find of a metal workshop from the Early Middle Ages on the territory of Republic of Macedonia. Three fibulae of the same type as that from the destruction layer were found here.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> [Ivan Mikulčić] Иван Микулчиќ, *Скопје со околните тврдини* [Skopje with the surrounding fortifications] (Skopje: Makedonska kniga, 1982): 50. (Hereafter: Mikulčić, *Skopje*.)

<sup>137</sup> This site was abandoned during the seventh century but re-populated from the turn of the tenth century onwards. The second settlement was known as “the city of Črnče.” About the excavations, see more in [Ivan Mikulčić and Nada Nikuljska], Иван Микулчиќ и Нада Никулска, “Рановизантискиот град Маркови Кули на Водно кај Скопје - истражувања 1977” [The Early Byzantine town of Markovi Kuli in the vicinity of Skopje-- excavations 1977]. *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 5 (1979): 65-74; Ivan Mikulčić and Nada Nikuljska, “Маркови Кули, Водно, Скопје, 1978” [Markovi Kuli, Vodno- in the vicinity of Skopje, 1978], *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 6 (1983): 123-133; [Ivan Mikulčić and M. Bilbija], Иван Микулчиќ и М.Билбија, Маркови Кули, Водно, Скопје, 1979 и 1980.[Markovi Kuli, Vodno- in the vicinity of Skopje, 1979 and 1980], *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 7/8 (1987):205-220.

<sup>138</sup> Mikulčić, *Skopje*, 50-53.

A cheek piece of a helmet was found, again in a destruction layer of the acropolis, along with coins of Justinian I and Justin II. Ivan Mikulčić identifies this helmet as Avar, possibly originating in the Crimea area.<sup>139</sup>

The last group of finds that is connected with barbarian raiding activity was found near one of the water tanks. It contained two pieces of golden jewelry, a Sucidava belt buckle and a strip-shaped fibula with a bent leg, decorated with golden applications.<sup>140</sup>

All these finds have the same *terminus ante quem* -- the end of the sixth century. Probably they are all related with the Avaro-slavic raid in 586, yet, the city continued to exist during the seventh century. So far, it is the only urban settlement to show clear signs of renewal after the great Avaro-slavic incursion at the end of the sixth century.

### ***III.7. CHAPTER CONCLUSION***

Four big urban centers have been discussed in this chapter. They all have long histories of existence centuries before the Early Middle Ages. These cities were built on excellent strategic points, easily accessible by major communication routes, e.g., the *Via Egnatia* or the Vardar-Morava route. They all had flourishing urban lives due to the fact they were important administrative and ecclesiastical centers.

Their development was interrupted by the raiding activity of various barbarian groups: Goths, Huns, Avars and Slavs. Yet, it is of crucial importance to stress that the same cities were raided by different barbarian groups in different time periods. The destruction layers are followed by layers of renewal, although with lower architectural quality and on a smaller area. In the case of Skupi, the center of urban life was transferred to a new site in the vicinity of the old one, but the earthquake in 518 played as great a role in this relocation as the barbarian raids.

<sup>139</sup> Mikulčić and Nikuljska, "The Early Byzantine town of Markovi Kuli in the vicinity of Skopje- excavations 1977"].: 71-72.

<sup>140</sup> IMikulčić and Bilbija, "Markovi Kuli, Vodno- in the vicinity of Skopje, 1979 and 1980:" 212-213.

## CONCLUSION

Due to its specific geographic position, the Central Balkan area was deeply involved in the military conflicts of the barbarians and the Byzantine Empire. It was an intersection of the main routes and thus easy accessible. The accessibility was even more facilitated because of the lack of natural defense, such as mountain ranges.

The prosperous provinces of Central Balkans were raided by various barbarian peoples during the period between the fourth and the seventh century. Gothic, Hunnish and Avaro-slavic marauders left the marks of their presence through destruction layers in the fortifications and the big cities.

As it was shown by the archaeological material, the border line between the provinces of Dardania and Macedonia Secunda has the biggest concentration of finds of military insignia; that indicates strongest military presence there. The density of fortifications on a border line was determined by the level of raiding activity that it was exposed to, not by its length. Macedonia Secunda and the southern part of Dardania were the first regions of Central Balkans to be attacked, if the raid was not stopped on the Danube limes.

The big cities were not spared from the raids of the barbarians. The final target of most of the barbarian raids was the Capital itself or Thessalonika. All the routes leading to these two cities passed through the Central Balkans and the barbarians raided the cities along the main communications.

The various barbarian people who raided the cities of the Central Balkans left their mark in the destruction layers. Sometimes is not as easy to connect a destruction layer with a raid that

was noted in the written sources; as result of lack of archaeological material that is chronologically more sensitive, such as the coins and the coin hoards. Some of the material is quite representative for a given group e.g. it is easy to notice the presence of the nomadic horsemen if the destruction layers contain remnants of a reflex bow. As a counterpart of the material that can be connected with the barbarian marauders, the military insignia of the Byzantine army is also present in the destruction layers.

As already mentioned in the introduction, the barbarian raiding activities are observed as the main external factor for abolishing the urban life in the Central Balkans. Yet, the stratigraphy of Stobi, Skupi (together with Markovi Kuli), Baragala and Heraklea Lynkestis tells a slightly different story.

These cities or at least portions of them were indeed destroyed in the barbarian raids. Yet, the layers of destructions were followed by the layers of renewal. That is shown by observing various micro-locations in some of these cities.

One destruction layer in *Domus Fullonica* in Stobi contains material attributed to the Hunnic raids, thus dated in the middle of the fifth century; the other one contains military insignia of the Byzantine army, dated from the middle of the sixth to the beginning of the seventh century. This shows continuity of c.150 years. The same case is with the Episcopal Basilica in Heraklea Lynkestis, at least two destruction and two renewal phases can be observed from the material found there. The Basilica of Bargala also have three building phases, one of them is denotes as a renewal phase after the destruction by an Avaro-Slavic raid. Even more interesting, the luxurious and expensive mosaics that paved many public and private buildings in Heraklea Lynkestis have broader chronological framework from the middle of the fourth till the end of the sixth century, which overlaps with the period of the biggest barbarian raids on the Central Balkans.

The barbarian raids indeed had a deep impact on the urban life. Yet, I would suggest that definitely altered, but not completely abolished the urban life, at least not in the case of these four cities. Of course, measurements were taken as to make these cities more enduring. Luxury was appreciated in these cities, but if necessary it was sacrificed in the need of greater safety. Fortification walls cut through the beautiful mosaics, as shown with the case of *Casa romana* in Stobi. The cities diminished in size, as to fit better in the newly built fortification rings.

This alteration of the urban life is best represented by Skupi. There is a possibility that during the fourth century, Germanic *foederati* lived here. They probably had the task to stop the advancing of the raids further more to the south of the Balkans. During the fifth century, the city diminished in size greatly.

Skupi was devastated by an earthquake in 518, but it was the capital and bishopric of Dardania till 535, at least nominally. The centre of the urban life was shifted to the slopes of the near-by mountain. This city was built as response to the contemporary threats; with an elaborated system of fortifications. It was abandoned in some moment in the seventh century, but repopulated again in the late tenth century.

The big cities of the Late Antiquity had to change in terms to survive. It is a fact that the urban life was taken down to a lower level, but that does not equal with the end of it. The burned down palaces and basilicas were replaced with new ones, although sometimes with more humble ones. Fortification walls were built to protect the diminished territory of these cities. The big cities were re-shaped by the current needs.

The Early Middle Ages were indeed a period of great changes; it was a period of the collision of an Empire in rise and the barbarians of various origins. The constant danger of barbarian raids influenced the urban life. This is visible through the continuous layers of destruction and renewal. The very renewal phases mirror the ability of the Empire to

reconsolidate after every raid and prepare better for the next one. This changes the traditional way of observing the barbarian raids as the terminal factor for the city life in a given area. Instead, they should be observed more as a factor that alters the way the cities and the surrounding areas functioned and were defended.



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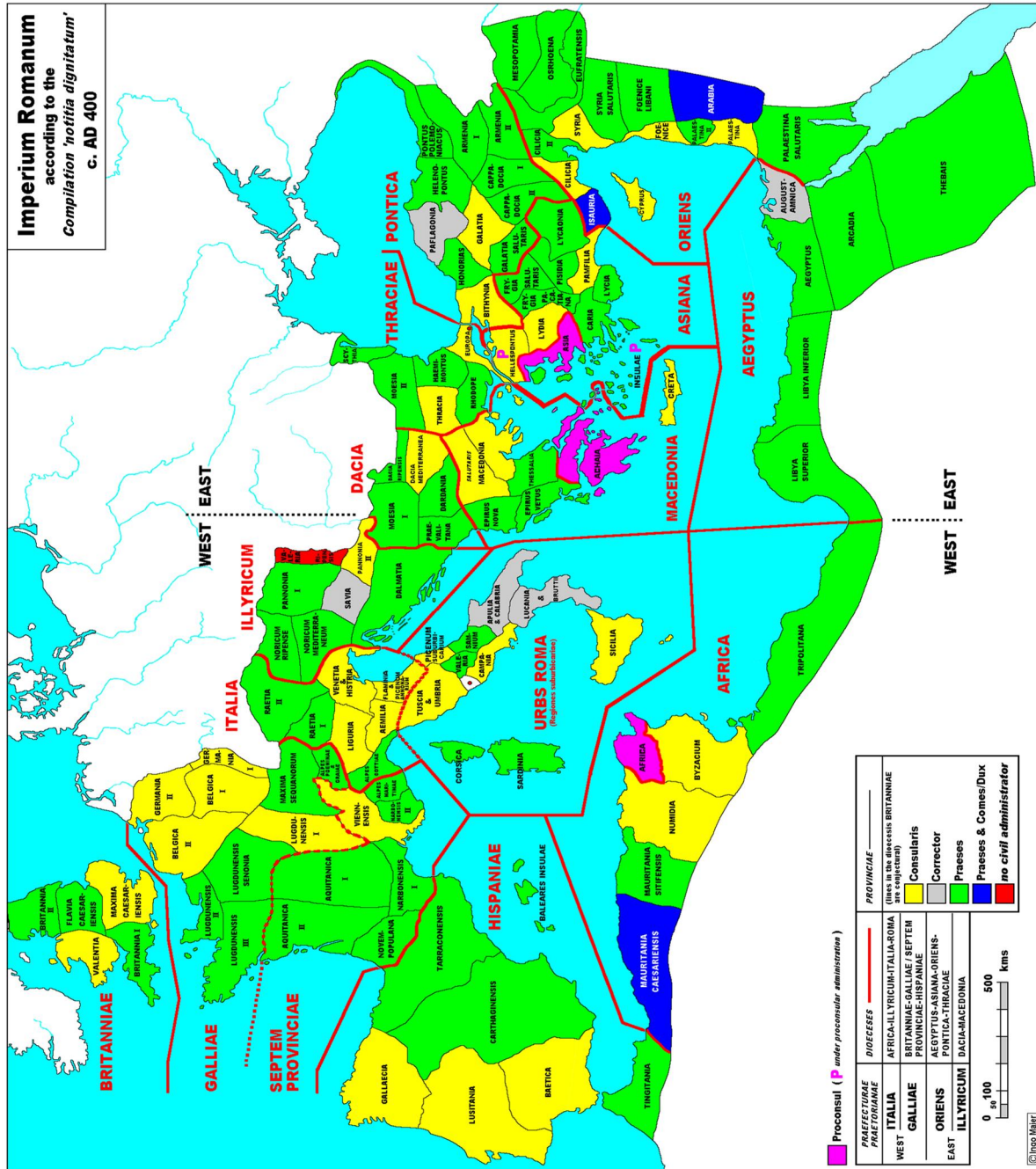
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## APPENDIX



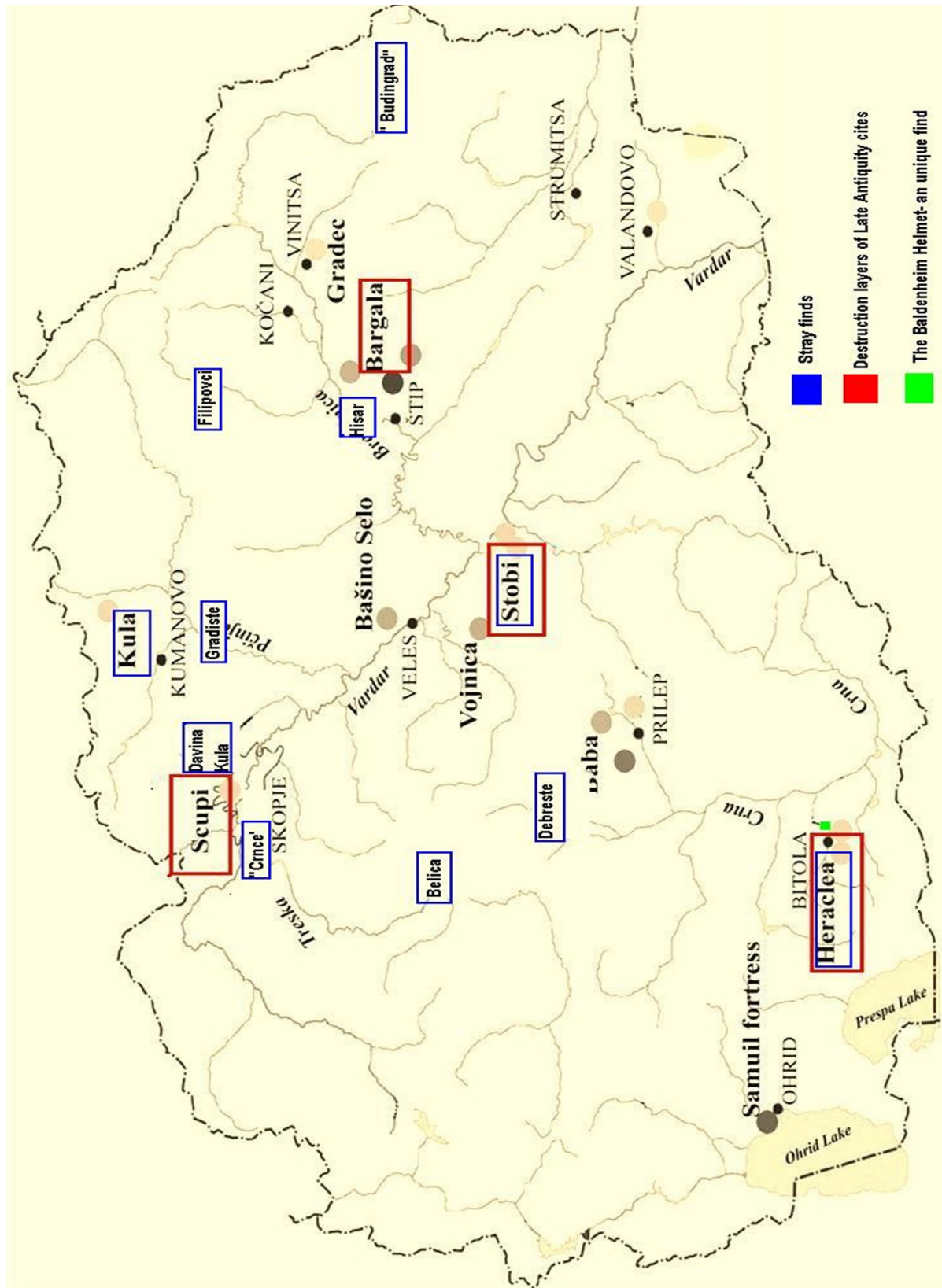
Map 1: Administrative division according to *Notitia Dignitatum*  
(<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~igmaier/map.htm>, link last accessed at 13 May 2009.)





Map 2: Administrative division on the Central Balkans. Taken from: Bratož, “The Early Christian Church of Macedonia and the relationship with Rome”, 3.





Map 3: Distribution of several groups of archaeological finds( map done by author)

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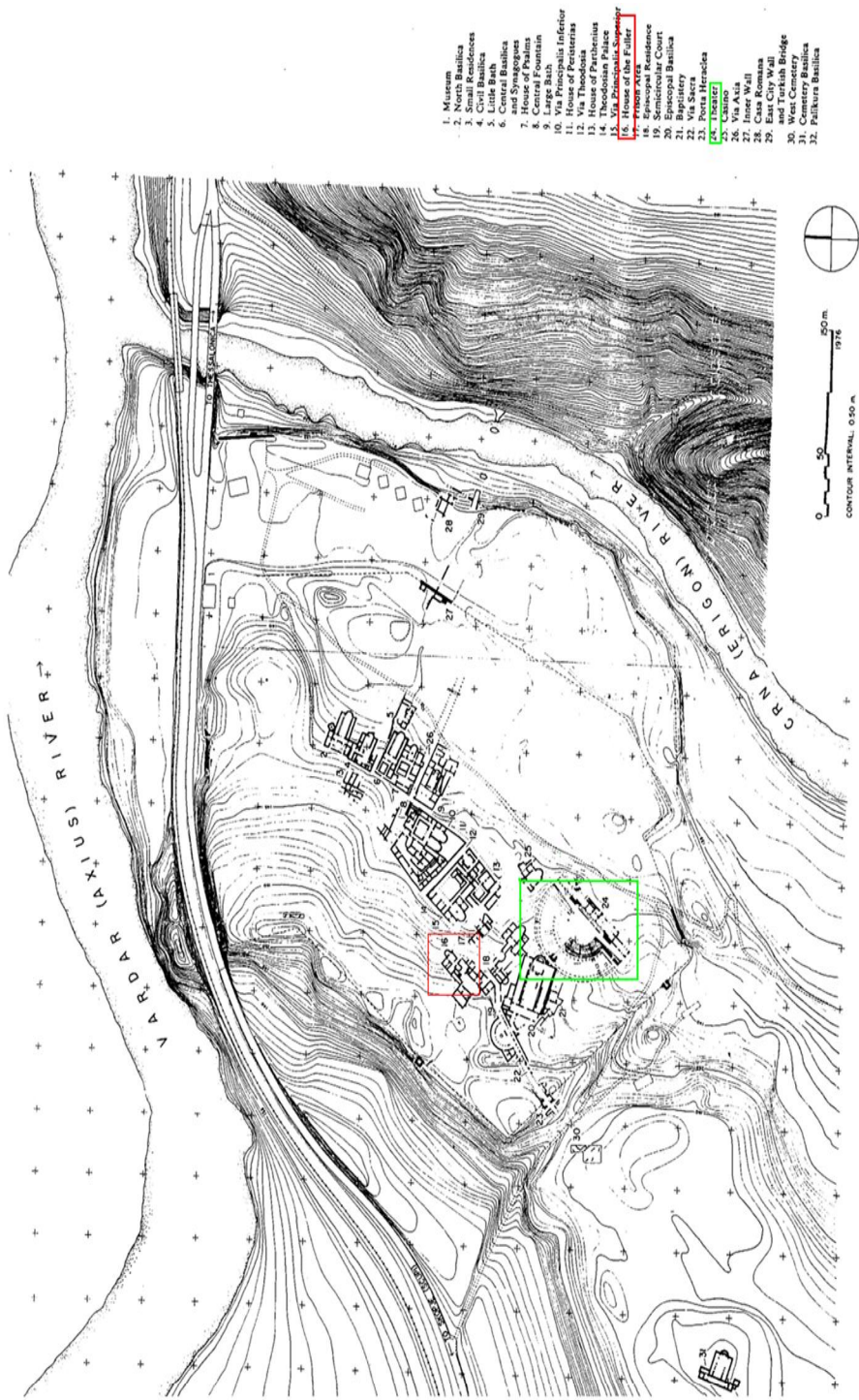




Map 5: *Via Egnatia*. Taken from <http://www.viaeignatiafoundation.eu/>

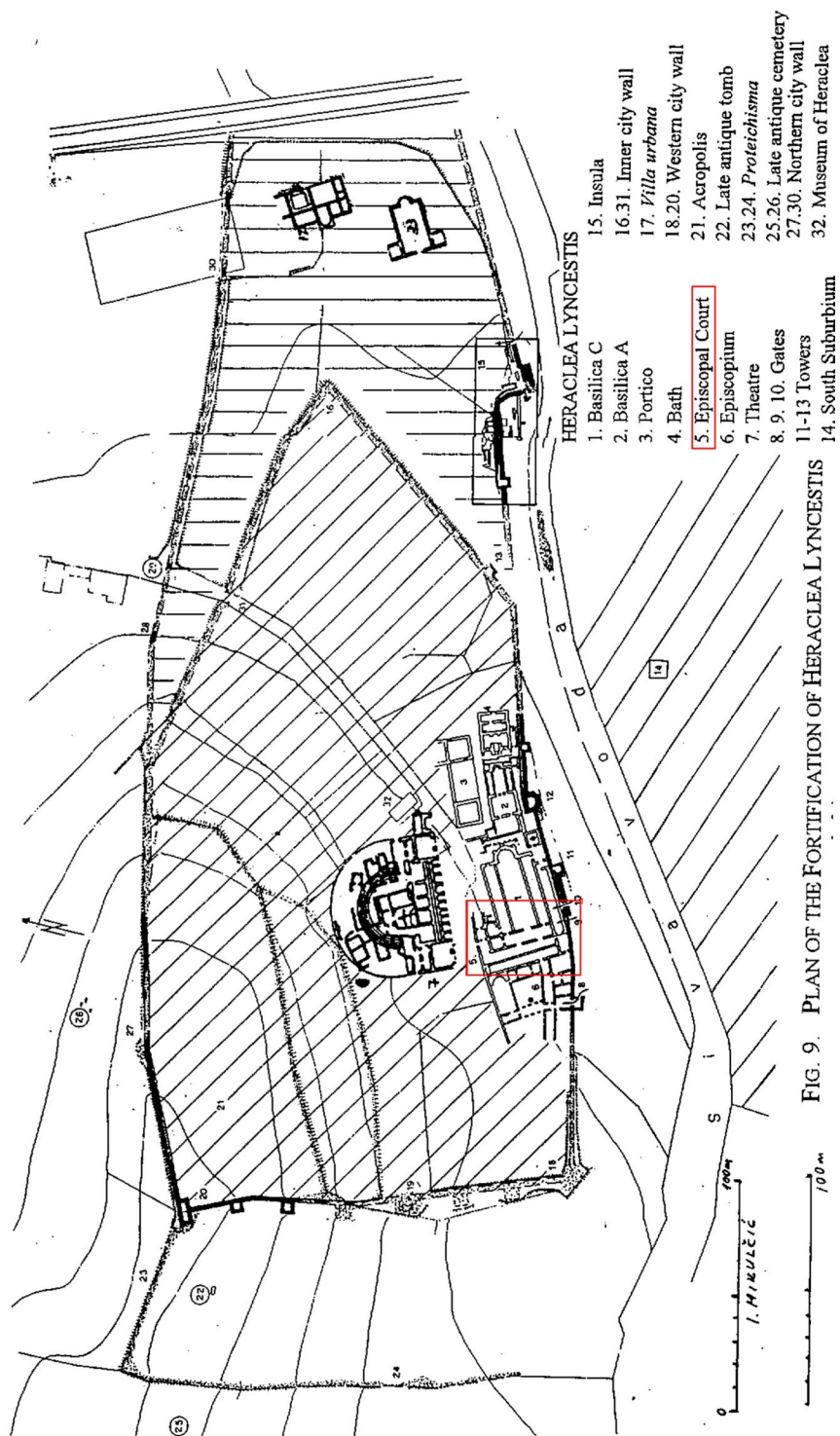


Map 6: Vardar – Morava Route ( Map done by author)

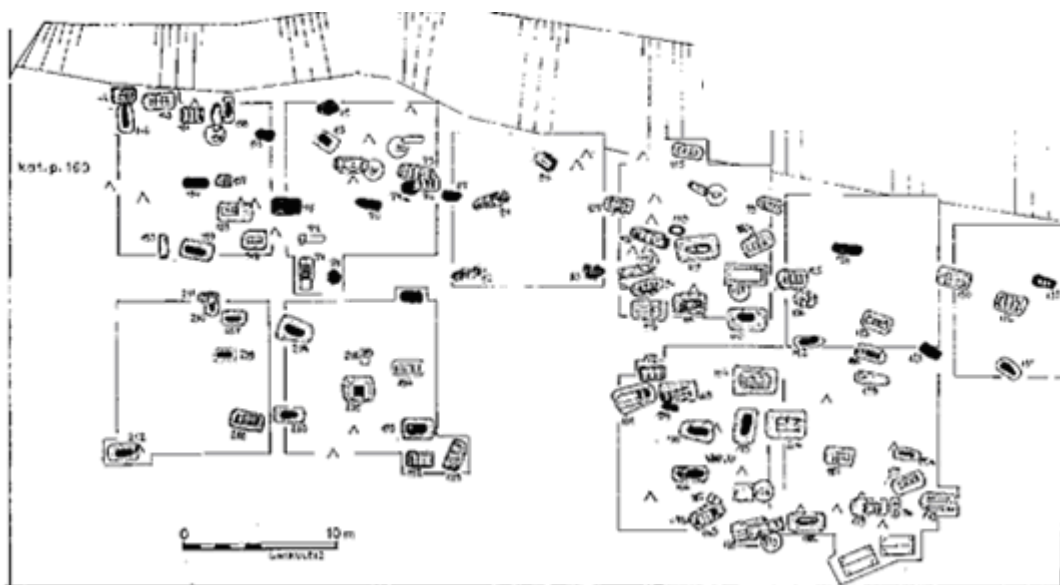


Plan 1: Stobi. Taken from *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi I* (1973), plate 7.

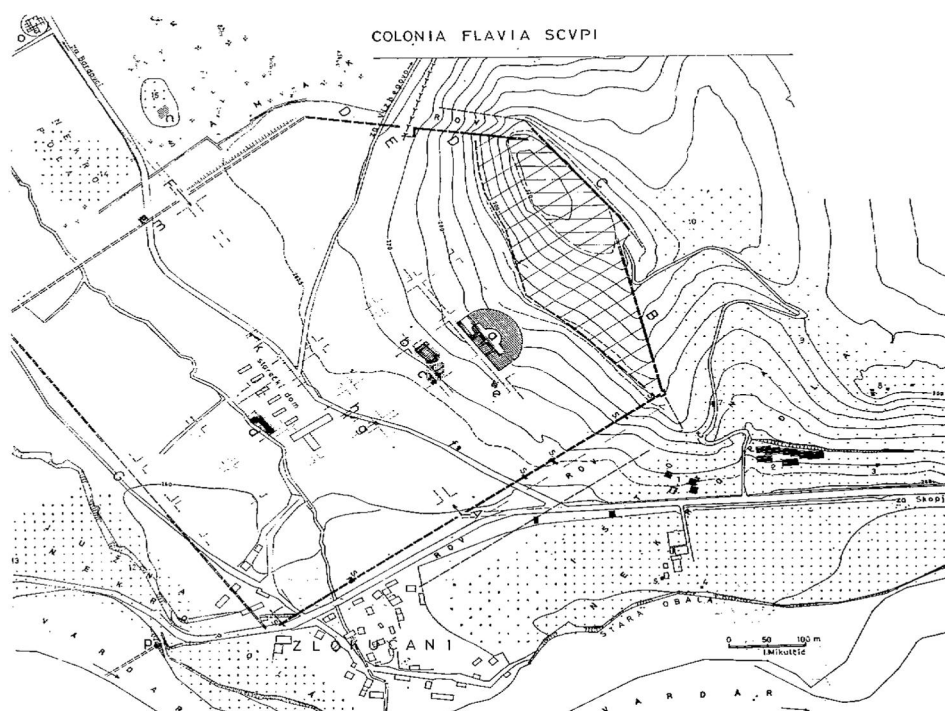




Plan 2: Heraklea Lynkestis. Taken from Ivan Mikulčić, "The size of the Late Antiquity cities of Macedonia". *Istorija X-1* (1974).



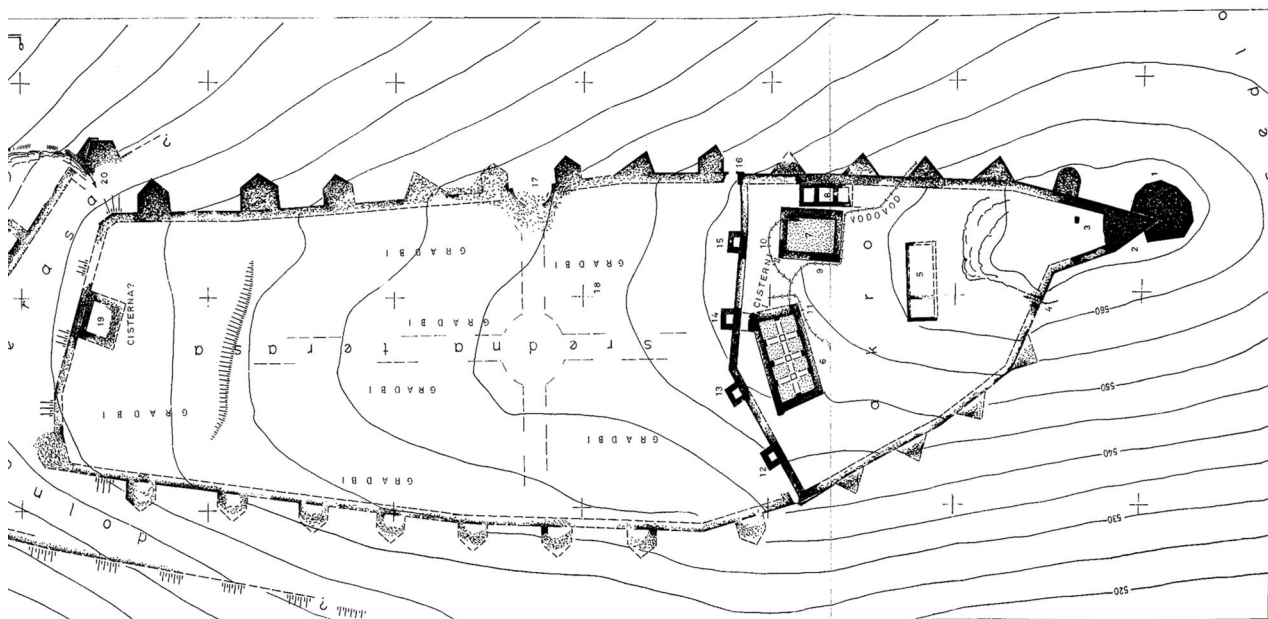
Plan 3: Skupi- Eastern Necropolis. Taken from Ivan Mikulčić, *Skopje with the surrounding fortifications*, 1982.



Plan 4: Skupi. Taken from Ivan Mikulčić, *Skopje with the surrounding fortifications*, 1982.



Plan 5: The acropolis of Markovi Kuli. Taken from Ivan Mikulčić, and Nada Nikuljska, “The Early Byzantine town of Markovi Kuli in the vicinity of Skopje- excavations 1977”]. *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 5 (1979).



Plan 6: Markovi kuli, “The Early Byzantine town of Markovi Kuli in the vicinity of Skopje- excavations 1977”]. *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 5 (1979).



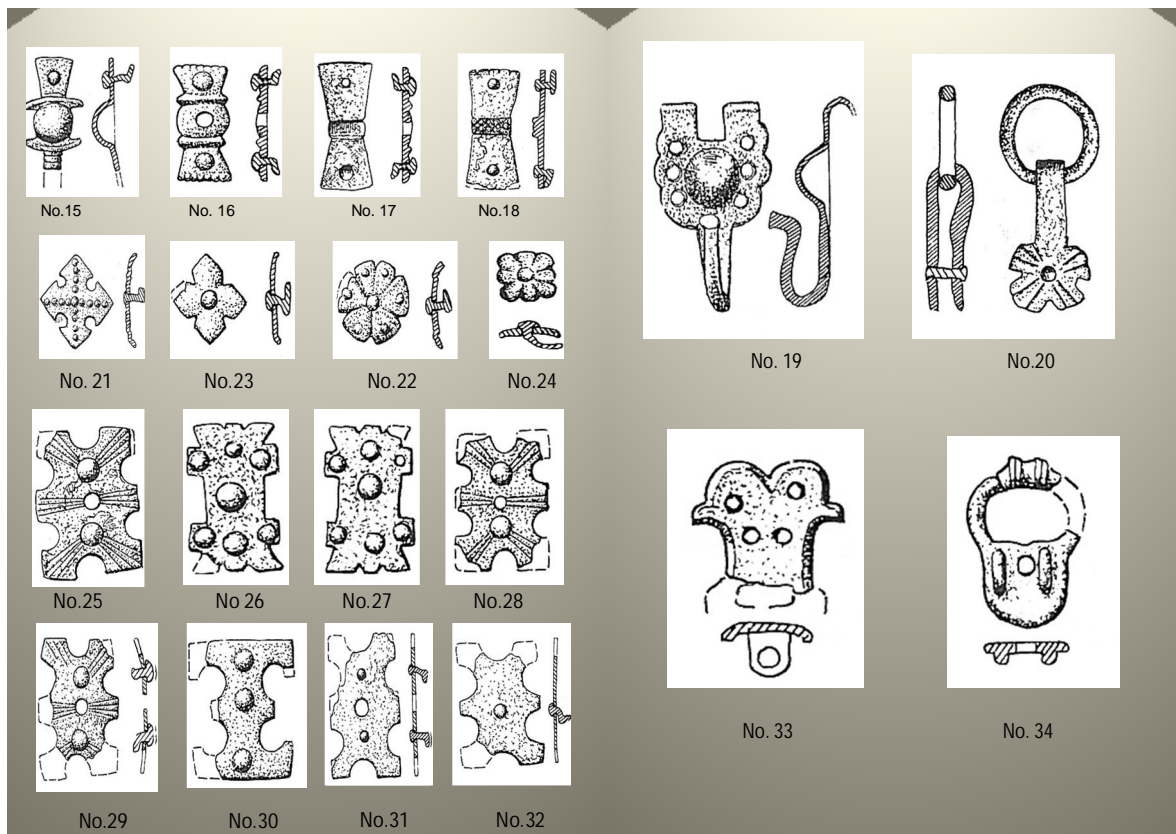
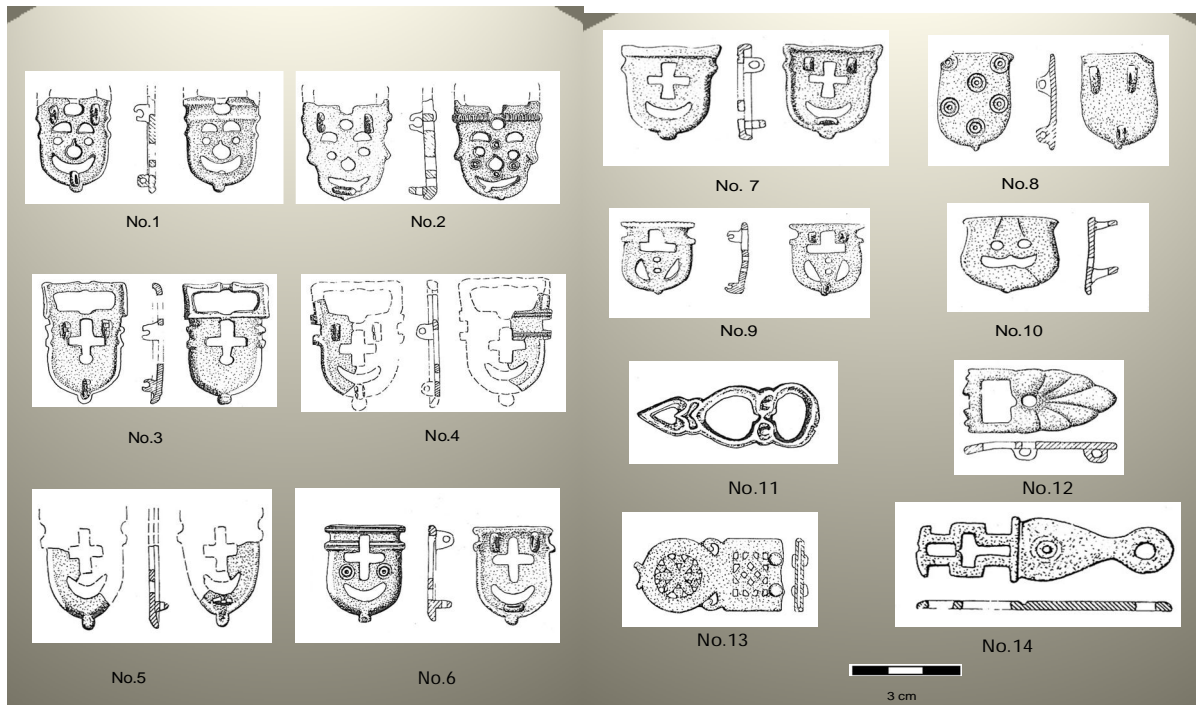


Plate I: Metal belt fittings from Macedonia from Macedonia. Taken from Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decoratios*.



Plate

II: Sucidava and other types of belt buckles from Macedonia Taken from Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić,  
*Fibulae and belt decoratios.*

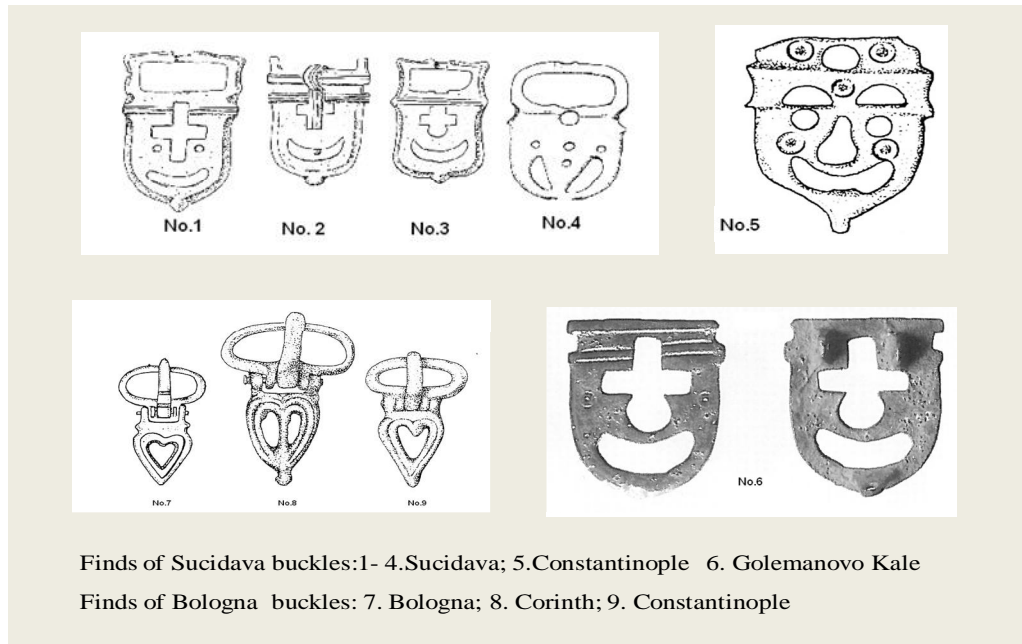


Plate III: Finds of Sucidava and Bologna belt buckles from other regions. Taken from  
 Zdenko Vinski, "Salona" .

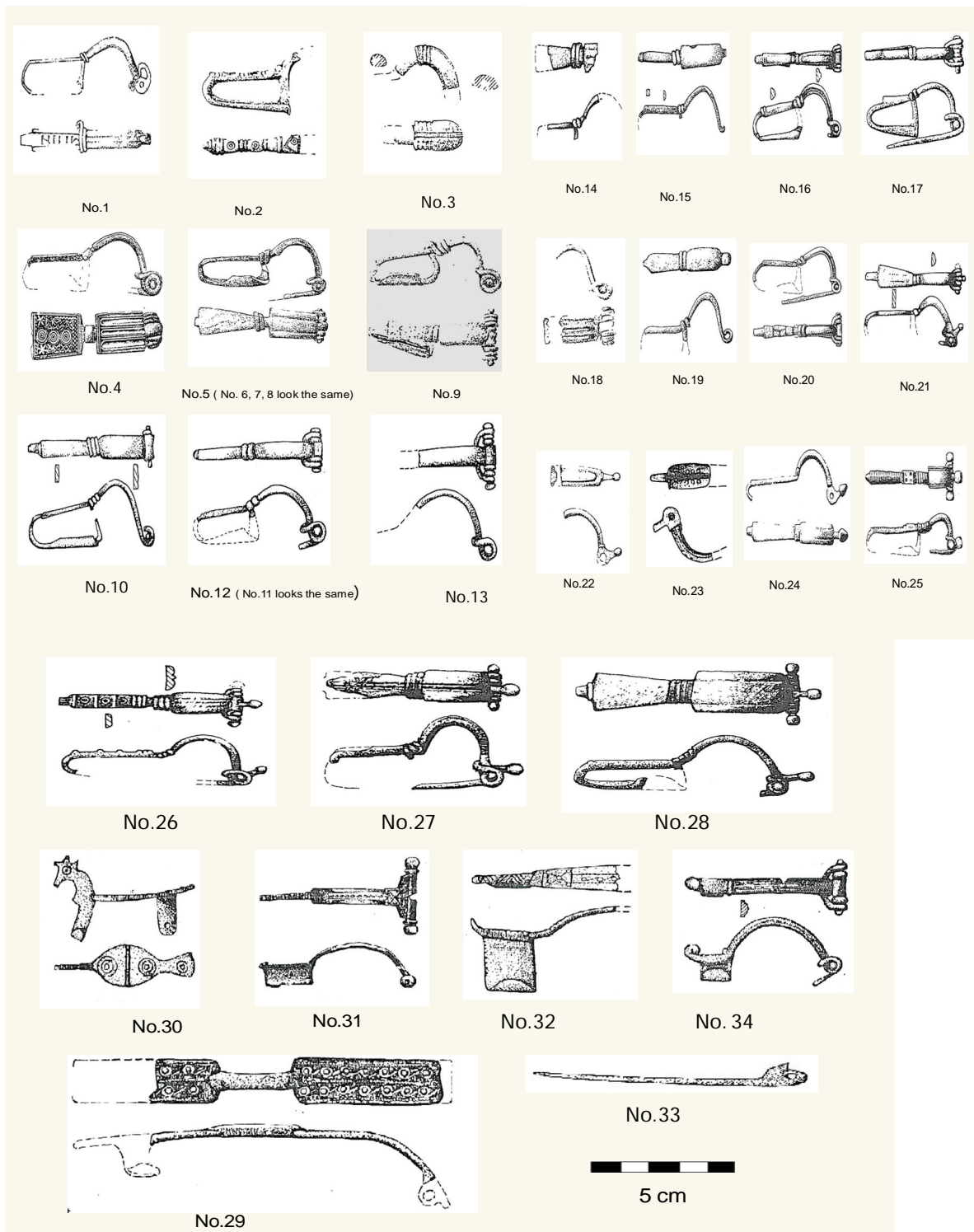
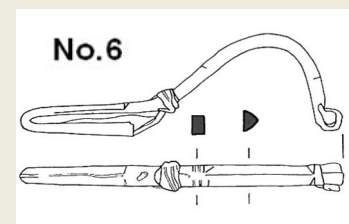
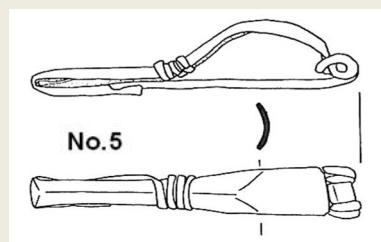
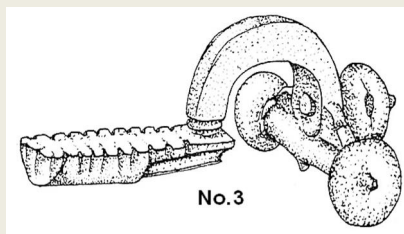
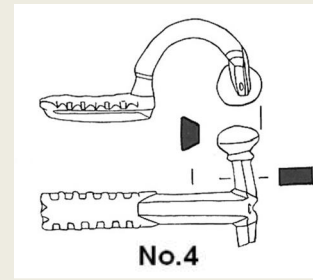
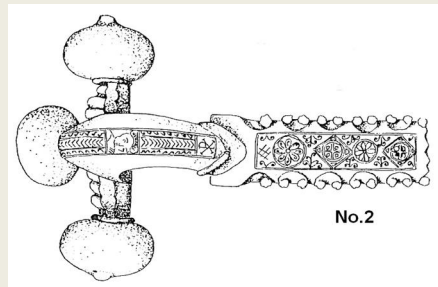
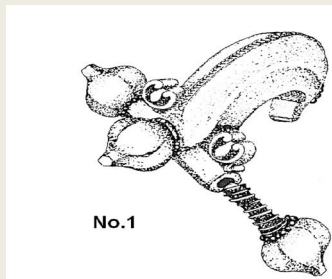


Plate IV: Fibulae with bent leg and fibulae with hinge from Macedonia Taken from Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić, *Fibulae and belt decoratios*.



Fibulae with bulb-shaped head: 1. Deboj; 2. Osijek; 3. Salona; 4. Sadovec  
Strip-fibulae with simple head: 5-6. Sadovec

Plate V: Some finds of fibulae with bent leg. Taken from Zdenko Vinski, "Salona".

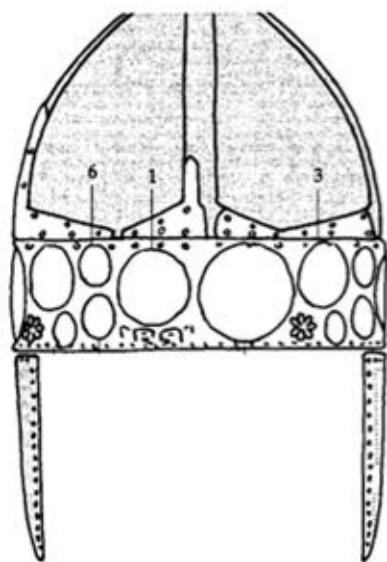


Fig.1a

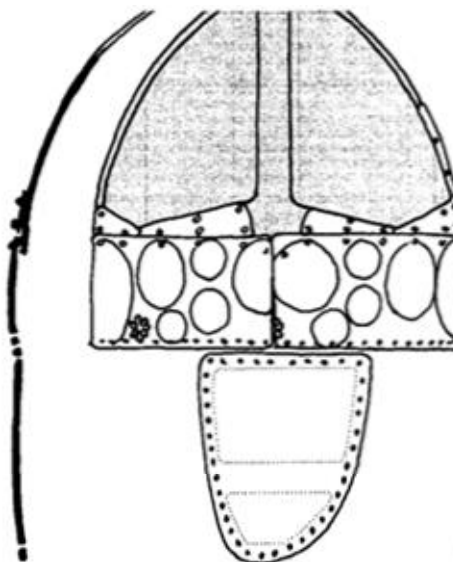


Fig.1b



Fig.2a



Fig. 2b

Plate VI: Reconstruction of the helmet with rivets

Figures 1a and 1b taken from: Elica Maneva, "Numismatic models in the decoration of the helmet with rivets from Heraklea", 90.

Figures 2a. and 2b taken from: Elica Maneva, "Helmet with rivets from Heraclea", 86.





Fig.1a

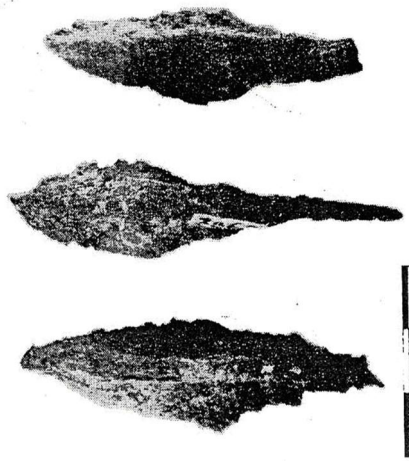


Fig.2



Fig.1b



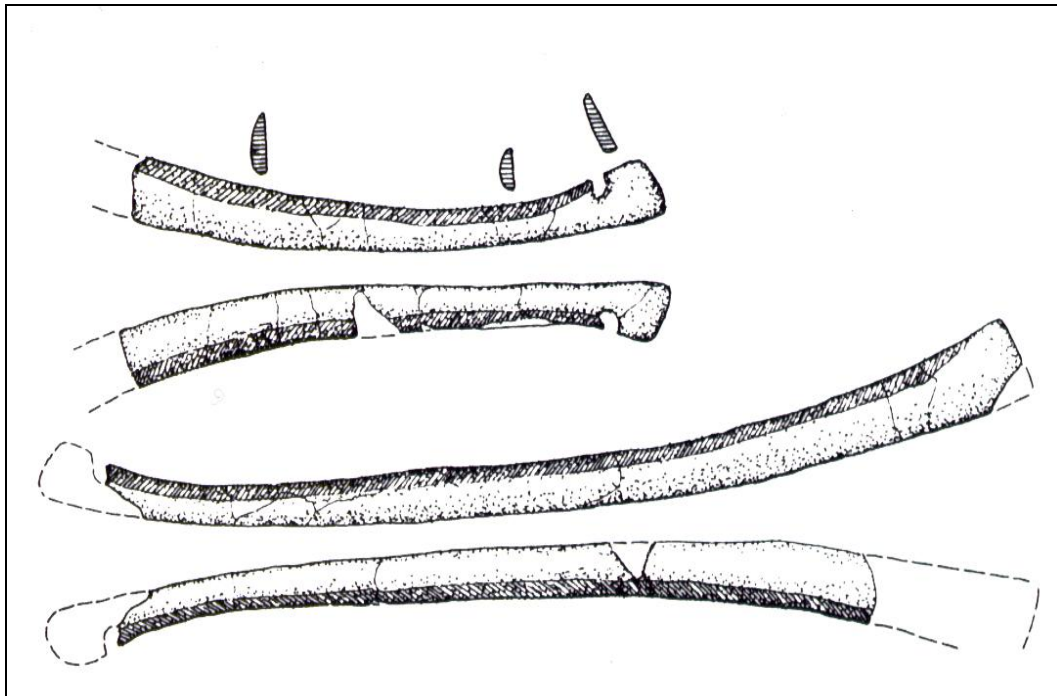
Fig.3

## Plate VII:

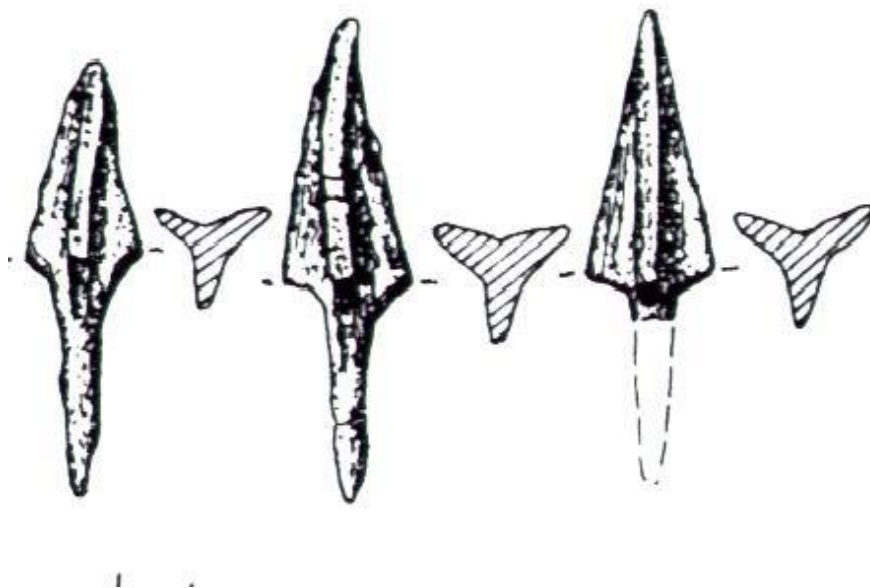
Weapons and cloth fittings of nomadic origin in Heraklea Lynkestis

Figures 1a and 2 taken from: Elica Maneva: "Bone stiffening plaques of a reflex bow and three-ribbed arrowheads of nomadic origin in Heraklea Lynkestis", 57-58.

The colour photos ( Figure 1b and 3) were provided for me by Anica Ćorgievska from the Museum of Bitola, to whom I am specially grateful.



**Fig. 1a**



**Fig. 2**

Plate VIII: Nomadic weapons in Stobi. Taken from Ivan Mikulčić, *Some new factors in the history of Stobi*, 216.

## Inventory of grave goods of tombs from the Eastern Necropolis of Skupi

### Inv.1 – Tomb 11 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** inhumation, male(?)

**Grave goods:** little buckle found on the left knee,  
probably for fastening a boot. (fig.1)

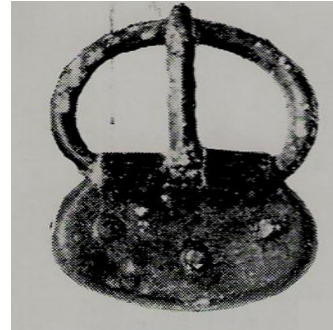


Fig.1



5 cm

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 119 and 137.

### Inv 2. –Tomb 77 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** inhumation, adult male

**Grave goods:** two small buckles(fig.1 and 2), found on the knees, probably for fastening boots

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 120 and 137.

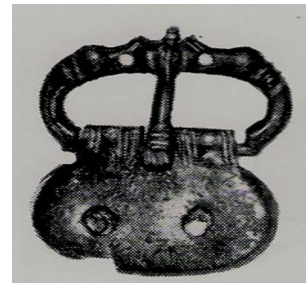


Fig.1

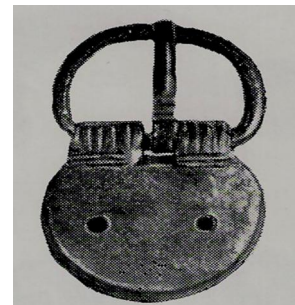


Fig.2

5 cm



### Inv.3 – Tomb 96 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** inhumation, 2 young males

**Grave goods:** fragment of a bronze buckle belt (fig.1)

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 122 and 137.

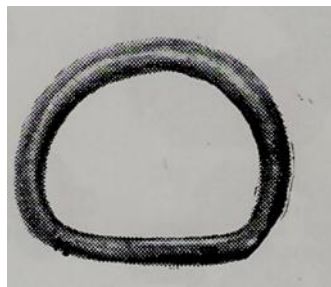


Fig.1



5 cm

### Inv.4 – Tomb 126 of the Easter Necropolis of Skupi

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** cremation, male (?)

**Grave goods:** onion-shaped fibula (fig.1a, b,c) and iron buckle belt (fig.2)

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 130, 136 and 137.



Fig.1a

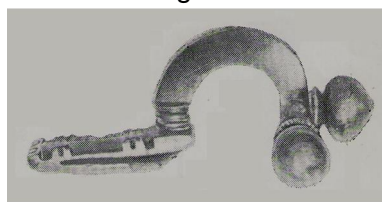


Fig.1b

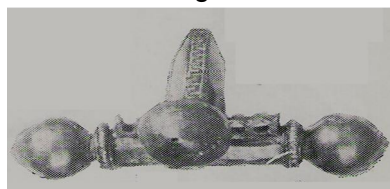


Fig.1c

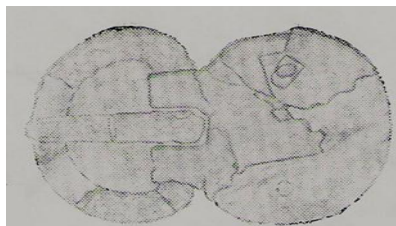


Fig. 2



5 cm

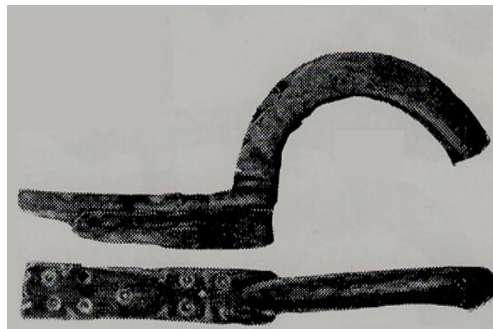
Inv.5 – Tomb 179 (or 180a) of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** cremation, male(?)

**Grave goods:** onion-shaped fibula (fig.1a)

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 130 and 136.



5 cm

Inv.6- Tomb 189 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** inhumation, adult male

**Grave goods:** bronze, onion-shaped fibula (fig.1a, b), two coins: Constans II( 337-361) and Julian II( 360-363).

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 125 and 136

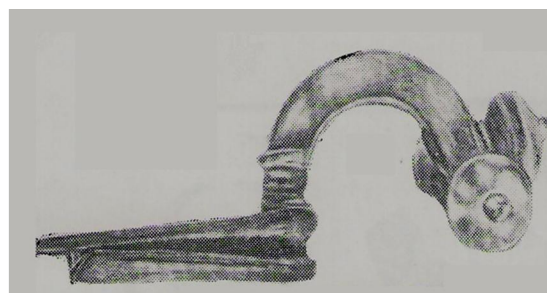


Fig. 1a

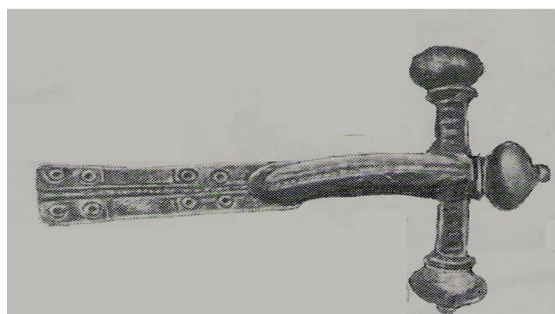


Fig. 1b



5 cm

Inv.7- Tomb 108 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** shallow pit covered with tegulae

**Burial ritual:** inhumation, young male

**Grave goods:** onion-shaped fibula (fig.1a,b)

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 115 and 136.

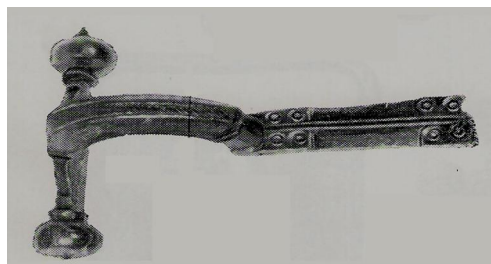
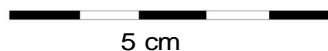


Fig.1a



Fig.1b



Inv.8 –Tomb 200 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** stone sarcophagus

**Burial ritual:** inhumation, young male

**Grave goods:** bronze, onion-shaped fibula (fig.2) and square, silver belt buckle, decorated with stamping (fig.1)

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman Burials from Skupi, 130, 136 and 137.

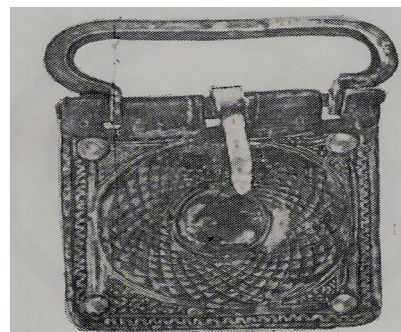


Fig. 1

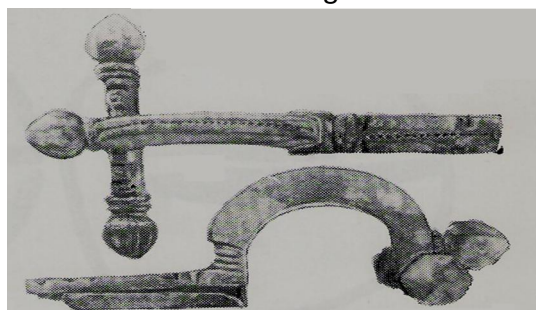
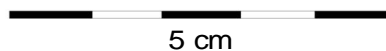


Fig. 2



Inv. 9 –Tomb 82 of the Eastern Necropolis

**Grave type:** stone sarcophagus

**Burial ritual:** inhumation,  
adult male

**Grave goods:** bronze buckle belt (fig.2) ,  
leaf-shaped pendant found on the lower part  
of the left leg, probably it was applied to a  
boot(fig.1) and coin of Constans( 337-350),  
minted in Thessalonika.

**Reference:** Ivan Mikulčić, Late Roman  
Burials from Skupi, 120, 137 and 138



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

5 cm

