



THE BYZANTINE ARMY IN THE CENTRAL BALKANS BETWEEN THE FIFTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES: A SURVEY OF MILITARY INSIGNIA

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Material culture is one of the basic means of establishing communication between two or more groups or within the boundaries of a single group. Sometimes objects speak louder than words, especially when surrounded by people of varied origins, languages, and customs. The Byzantine army in the Early Middle Ages was such a conglomerate of people with different backgrounds. The tumultuous period of the rise of the Byzantine Empire demanded that its army be flexible and open to new weapons and new ways of waging war, as well to the soldiers recruited. The constant need of *foederati* resulted in a great number of barbarians among the troops of the Byzantine army.

The army became the very place where the military and artistic experience of the barbarians and the *Romatoi* mixed. As a result of this, the personal military equipment of a soldier who served in the Byzantine army became eclectic. Some of the elements were inherited from the equipment of the Roman legions, some from the barbarians who served as *foederati*. Belts with a buckle and massive fibulae were universal parts 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 profession and, possibly, military rank. They were worn on the belt and chest area and were clearly visible whether the soldier was an infantryman or mounted on a horse. More precious materials and more elaborated craftsmanship were reserved for the belts and fibulae of higher ranking officers, who could afford more costly insignia themselves, or received them as a sign of imperial gratitude after a successful military campaign.

I will try to approach the presence of the Byzantine army in the Central Balkans from the fifth to the seventh century via military insignia and try to find out how much can be learned by using only this material evidence. I will equate the presence of such insignia on a site with Byzantine military activity and, since most of the finds treated here come from fortresses on the borders with other provinces, I will try to discover if the presence of larger quantities of such material

along a border can be connected with a stronger military presence in that area as a result of it being more exposed to raiding activity.¹

The material analyzed here is composed predominantly of stray finds: 16 belt buckles, 20 belt fittings and 36 fibulae. It 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 (Fig. 1).

The belts worn by the soldiers of the Byzantine army were composed of several elements: a buckle on one end and a metal “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 like a sheath for a dagger or a quiver for arrows. 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 examples have three massive rings on the back.

¹ The raids that hit the Central Balkans were not isolated ones; rather they were part of a wider raiding pattern. The raids usually started at the Danubian *limes* and if not stopped or weakened, they continued southwards. About the raiding activity in the Lower Danube Region, see István Bóna, “Die Awarenfeldzüge und der Untergang der byzantinischen Provinzen an der Unteren Donau,” in *Kontakte zwischen Iran, Byzanz und der Steppe im 6.–7. Jahrhundert*, ed. Csanád Bálint (Budapest: Varia Archaeologica Hungarica 10, 2000). These raiding patterns are also visible in the numismatic material. See more in D. M. Metcalf, “Avar and Slav Invasions into the Balkan Peninsula (c. 575–625): The Nature of the Numismatic Evidence,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 4 (1991): 140–148; 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; Vladimir Popović, *Aux origines de la slavisation des Balkans: la constitution des premières Sklavines macédoniennes vers la fin du V^e siècle* (Paris: Comptes rendus des Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, 1980), 240–244; Maja Hadzi-Maneva, “Hoard of *solidi* and *siliquae* of Stobi,” in *Coins and Mints in Macedonia*, ed. Cvetan Grozdanov (Skopje: Macedonian Academy of Science and Art and the National Bank of the Republic of Macedonia, 2001), 69; [Z. Vinčić and M. Hadzi-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; and [Јован Кондијанов] Јован Кондијанов, “Прилог за упадот на Кутригурите на територија на Илirik во 540 година” [A note on the Coutrigur raid in the territory of Illyricum in 540], *Macedonian Numismatic Journal* 1 (1994): 75–81.

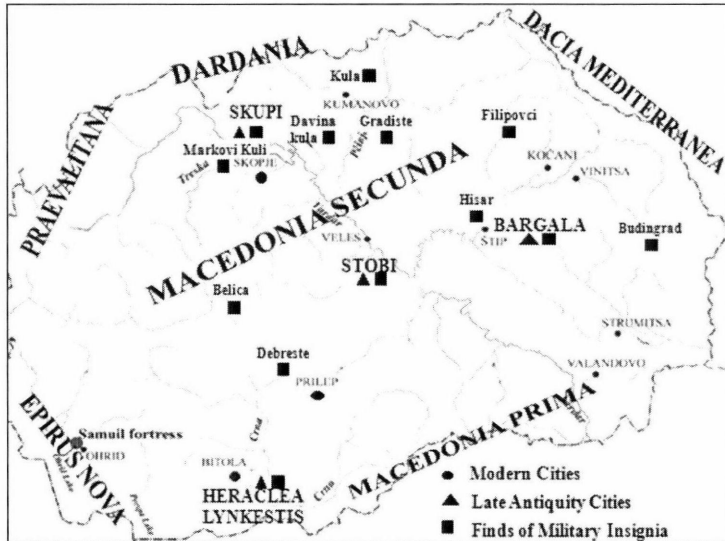


Fig. 1. Distribution of military insignia with the indication of provinces, prepared by the author.

Belts with buckles and metal fittings probably originated from older, Roman forms.² Still, they were adopted by the Germanic tribes and the Avars after their arrival in Europe and new forms emerged, bearing elaborate decoration with mythological symbolism.³ Byzantine buckles had a parallel evolution with the barbarian ones, probably serving as a basic pattern for the latter.⁴ Yet, the barbarian

² Professors Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić dedicated a part of their research to the Early Medieval belt buckles and fibulae found on the territory of today’s Republic of Macedonia. The results of this research, mostly distribution patterns and dating on stylistic analysis and parallels with similar finds, was published in: [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 Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, 1995), 266. The drawings in *Figs. 2, 4 and 5* are taken from this publication. I would like to thank Professor Viktor Lilčić for his kind permission to let me use them in this article.

³ [Ivana Popović] Ивана Поповић, *Златни Аварски појас из околине Сирмијума* [An Avar golden belt from the vicinity of Sirmium], (Belgrade: National Museum of Belgrade, 1997), 20.

⁴ 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):

and Byzantine art influenced each other, so one cannot really state which one was the archetype when it comes to belt buckles or fibulae.

The belt buckles are stray finds in most cases, so they lack an archaeological context. The dating was done on the base of stylistic analysis and typology.⁵ Most of the buckle finds belong to the Sucidava type (*Fig. 2, no. 1–10*). The Sucidava belt buckles represent the oldest type of Byzantine buckled belts, dating from 550–600 C.E. They have a quite wide range of distribution – from the Balkan provinces to the Crimea. The decoration of this type is quite simple, with a motif of a Greek cross and a lunette. This decoration can tentatively be identified as 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 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.⁶

So far, 12 specimens of Sucidava belt buckles have been found in the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia (*Table 1*). Except for those from Stobi

57–74. See also Joachim Werner, *Der Schatzfund von Vrap, Albanien* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 184, 1986), 61–62, and Zdenko Vinski, “Kasnoantički starosjedinci u Salonitskoj regiji prema arheološkoj ostavštini predslavenskog substrata” [The Late Antique 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.

⁵ The typology employed in this article was created by Joachim Werner, Syna Uenze, and Zdenko Vinski based on military insignia finds from necropolises 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 for them. 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. Ivan Mikulčić and Viktor Lilčić have also adopted the typologies of Werner and Uenze, adding the local variants that are typical only for Macedonia. For Uenze's work and contribution, see Footnote 16. For this type of object the most important comprehensive study is: Mechtild Schulze-Dörlamm, *Byzantinische Gürtelschnallen und Gürtelbeschläge in Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum I–II* (Kataloge vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Altertümer 30/1 and 30/2), (Mainz: RGZM, 2009).

⁶ Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Фибули у појасуи украци*, 270. For more about Sucidava buckle belts, see Dumitru Tudor, “Spätromische Gürtelbeschläge aus Südrumänien,” *Dacia* 9–10 (1945): 513. Dumitru Tudor directed the excavation of the fortress of Sucidava. For more about the fortress of Sucidava, see Dumitru 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.

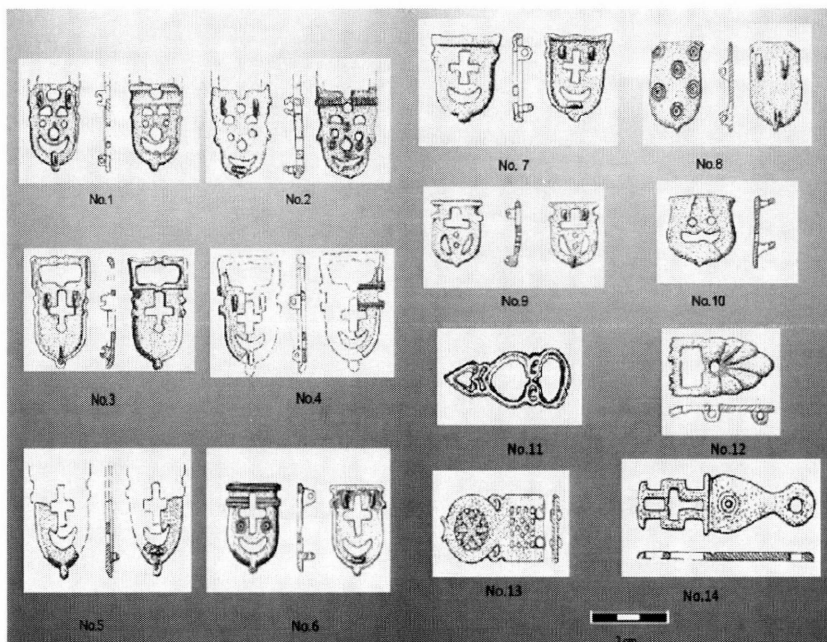


Fig. 2. Metal belt buckles, taken from Иван Мукулчиќ и Виктор Лилчиќ, *Фибули и појасни украси од 6 и 7 век во Македонија, 195–200.*

and Heraclea Lynkestis, they all come from the fortresses situated in Macedonia Secunda, which guarded the border passages to neighboring provinces – Dardania and Dacia Mediterranea. At the fortress Kale-Belica, another belt buckle was found. Its elongated form is quite rare, but still the lunette and the motif of

	Name of site	Vicinity	Material	Quantity	Drawing (Fig. 2)	Fortress of 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	Gradaiste	Kumanovo	Bronze	1	No.10	Dardania
6	Budingard-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. *Sucidava belt buckles, prepared by the author.*

concentric circles mark it as one of the many sub-variants of the Sucidava belt buckle (*Fig. 2, No. 14*).⁷

Fortresses were not built only on the main border passages, but also near local roads inside the provinces. In one of these fortresses, the site Kale, Debrešte, a belt buckle of the Bologna type was found.⁸ It was excavated from a layer dated to the late sixth or early seventh century (*Fig. 2, No. 11*). The Bologna type emerged at the beginning of the seventh century, together with the Balgota type. 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; a 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-type belt buckles typically have the shape of a heart. Their distribution pattern is connected with the coastline, starting in northern Italy (Bologna and Trento) and following the line of Byzantine ports in the Balkans and the Crimea (Istria, Salona, Corinth, Athens, Constantinople, Hersones).⁹ All this makes the find of Macedonia unique; it is one of the rare finds of the 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 (*Fig. 3*).¹⁰

Another border fortress with the province of Dardania is the site of 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

⁷ Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Фибули и појасни украси*, 270.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Vinski, “Kasnoantički starosjedioci u Salonitskoj regiji,” 28. About the finds of Bologna-type belt buckles in Italy and along the Mediterranean, see Cinzia Cavalalari, “Fibbie et fibule altomedievali nel territorio Ravennate e nella costa Adraitica,” in *L'archeologia dell' Adriatico 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; Otto Von Hessen, “Byzantinische Schnallen aus Sardinien im Museo Archeologico zur Turin,” in *Studien zur vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. G. Kossack and G. Ulbert (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1974), 545–557; and Otto Von Hessen, “Il materiale altomedievale nelle collezioni Stibbert di Firenze,” *Ricerche di Archeologia altomedievale e medievale* 7 (1983): 77–87.

¹⁰ This site is about 45 km away from Heraklea Lynkestis (near today's city of Bitola), one of the stations on the Via Egnatia.

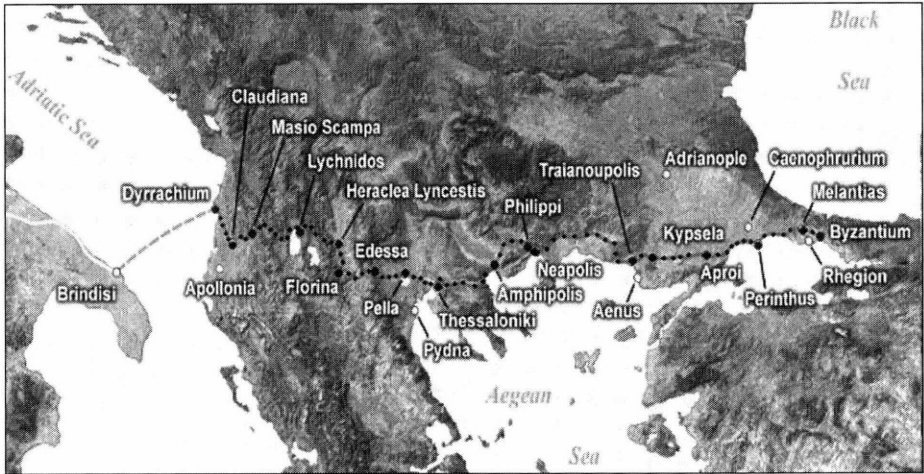


Fig. 3. Via Egnatia Route, taken from <http://www.viaegnatiafoundation.eu/>, last accessed on 16.02.2010.

rings on the back mark this buckle as Byzantine¹¹ (Fig. 2, No. 12). The tongues that were applied on the other side of the belt are also a common find. The one from Heraclea Lynkestis demonstrates the fine craftsmanship of the capital. It was made of a silver sheet and was probably part of a belt worn by a high-ranking officer in the Byzantine army (Fig. 2, No. 13).

Metal fittings (see Fig. 4, No. 15–34), also called “ribs,” are a common find in fortresses. The first use of such metal fittings dates from the fourth century; they are found in tombs of Roman soldiers.¹² During the fifth and sixth centuries a new form emerged, 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. The shapes and function of these belt fittings are shown in Table 2. The last two finds, those 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. The finds from Davina may have belonged to a nomad warrior raiding through this area.¹³

¹¹ Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Фидули и појасни украси*, 272.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ibidem, 273.

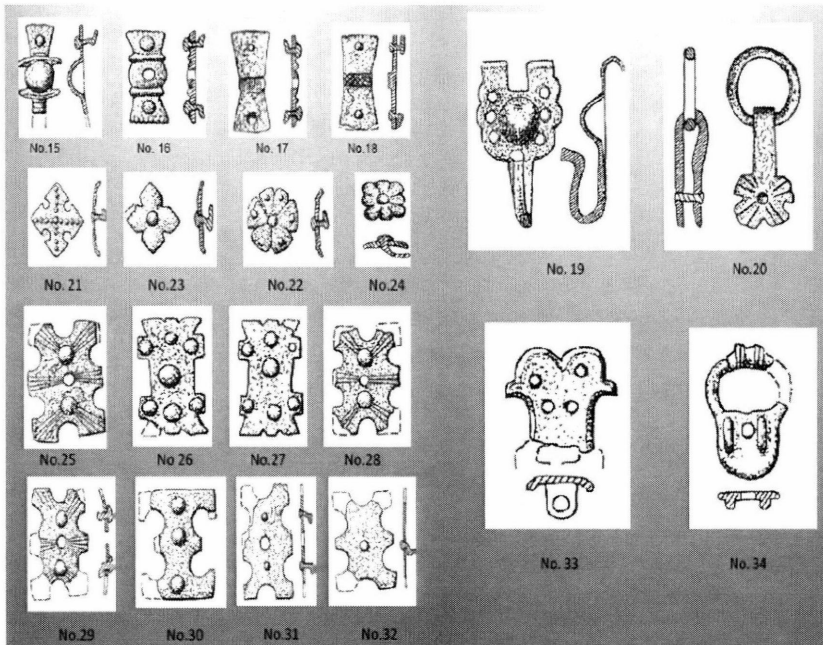


Fig. 4. Belt fittings, taken from Иван Микулчиќ и Виктор Лилчиќ, *Фибули и појасни украси од 6 и 7 век во Македонија, 195–200*.

Fibulae were also part of the personal equipment of a Byzantine soldier. They wore cloaks and mantles¹⁴ that were clasped with massive fibulae. The most common type of fibulae from the early Middle Ages is the fibula with a bent leg¹⁵ (see Table 3 and Fig. 5). This type has 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 the 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 fibula continued in

¹⁴ George T. Dennis, tr., *Maurice's Strategikon, Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 138.

¹⁵ Syna Uenze dedicated an elaborate study to this type of fibula. She identified several prototypes dating from the fourth and fifth centuries, but most of the production was set chronologically 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, see Syna Uenze, *Die spätantiken Befestigungen von Sadovec (Bulgarien)* (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992).

	Site	Vicinity	Shape	Dating	Quantity	Material	Function	Drawing (Fig. 4)	Borderline fortress with:
1	Kanarevo	Kumanovo	'propeller'	5 th -7 th c.	1	Bronze	Rib	No.15	Dardania
2	Belica	Porechje	'propeller'	5 th -7 th c.	1	Bronze	Rib	No.16	Praevalitana
3	Zdunje	Porechje	'propeller'	5 th -7 th c.	1	Bronze	Rib	No.17	Praevalitana
4	Zelezarec	Demir Hisar	'propeller'	5 th -7 th c.	1	Bronze	Rib	No.18	Near border with Dacia Mediterranea
5	Belica	Brod	Elaborated, many details	5 th -7 th c.	2	Iron	Hook	No.19, 20	Dacia Mediterranea
6	Celopek	Kumanovo	Maltese cross	5 th -7 th c.	2	Iron	Decoration	No.21, 23	Dardania
7	Celopek	Kumanovo	Six-leaved rosette	5 th -7 th c.	2	Iron	Decoration	No.22, 24	Dardania
8	Celopek	Kumanovo	Square, serrated edge	5 th -7 th c.	1	Iron, polished	Decoration	No.25	Dardania
9	Kamenica	Delchevo	Square, serrated edge	5 th -7 th c.	3	Iron, polished	Decoration	No.26-28	near border with Thrace
10	?	Veles	Square, serrated edge	5 th -7 th c.	1	Iron, polished	Decoration	No.29	Dardania
11	Koresnica	Demir Kapija	Square, serrated edge	5 th -7 th c.	3	Iron, polished	Decoration	No.30-32	Inland
12	Davina- Cucer	Skopje	Two heads of eagle/ griffon	7 th c.	1	Alloy of copper and silver	Decoration, hook	No.33	Dardania
13	Davina- Cucer	Skopje	Miniature buckle	7 th c.	1	?	Joint of case and belt	No.34	Dardania

Table 2. Belt fittings, prepared by the author.

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.¹⁶

The fibulae with Danubian provenances 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 century¹⁷ (Fig. 5, No. 1 and No. 2). 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

¹⁶ Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Фибули и појасни украси*, 258–259.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 259.

	Site	Vicinity	Variant	Origin	Material	Quantity	Drawing	Borderline fortress with:
1	Gradiste-Taor	Skopje	fibulae of Danubian provenance	Import	Bronze (cast)	1	No.1	Dardania
2	Davina-Cucer	Skopje	fibulae of Danubian provenance	Import	Bronze (cast)	1	No.2	Dardania
3	Heraclea Lynkestis	Bitola	fibulae of Danubian provenance	Import (?)	Unknown 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	Praevalitana
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 Praevalitana
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	Local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.22	Dardania
14	Vukasija-Pezovo	Kumanovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	Local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.23	Dardania
15	Gradiste-Jegunovce	Tetovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	Local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.24	Praevalitana
16	Brikul-Lukovica	Tetovo	Onion-shaped Fibulae	Local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.25	Praevalitana
17	Kalja-Gorno Cajle	Gostivar	Onion-shaped Fibulae	Local	Iron (stamped)	1	No. 26	Praevalitana
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	Praevalitana
20	Kalja-Barovo	Skopje	Unknown	Local	Iron (stamped)	1	No drawing	Dardania

Table 3. Fibulae with bent leg, prepared by the author.

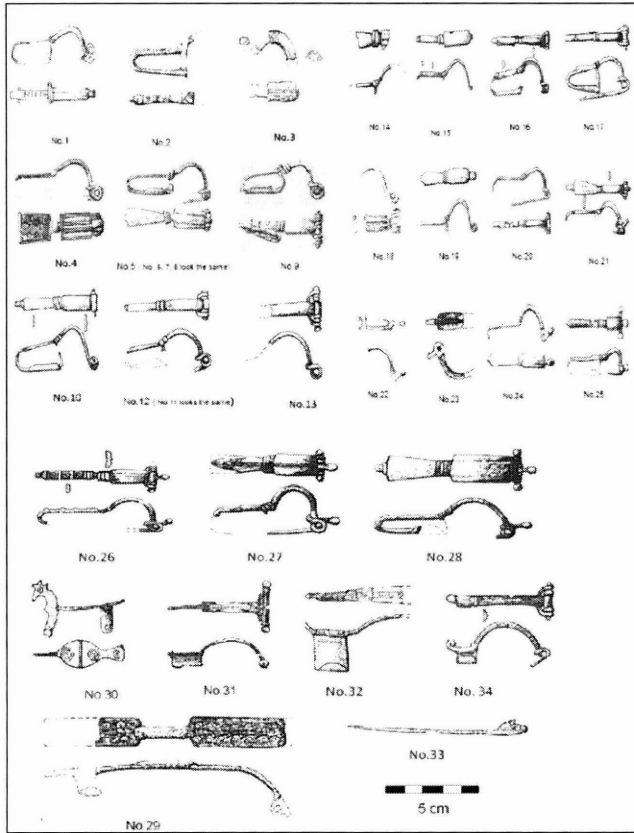


Fig. 5. Fibulae, taken from Иван Микулчиќ и Виктор Дилчиќ, *Фибули и појасни украси од 6 и 7 век во Македонија, 195–200.*

been found and excavated, the workshop that was part of the fortress of Markovi Kuli,¹⁸ Skopje (Fig. 6). Three fibulae were found in the workshop; one was found

¹⁸ During the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, about 400 fortifications were renewed or built in the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia as enhanced protection from barbarian raids. See Ivan Mikulčić, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Befestigungen in Nordmakedonien: Städte – Vici – Refugien – Kastelle*. Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, vol. 54 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 190–195. The fortified city at Markovi Kuli was one of the newly built fortifications. It was built on three leveled terraces with internal walls between them, 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, where the workshop was found. For more information about this fortification and the excavations undertaken there, see [Ivan Mikulčić] Иван Микулчиќ, *Скопје со околните тврдини* [Skopje with the surrounding fortifications],

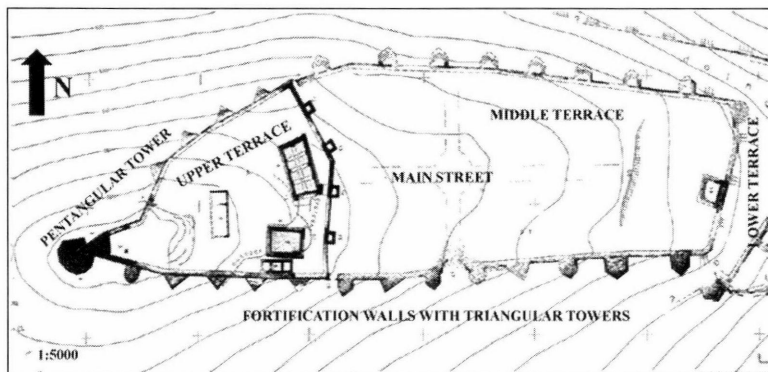


Fig. 6. Plan of the fortified city at Markovi Kuli, Skopje. Taken from Иван Микулчиќ Скопје со околните тврдини, 48–49.

earlier in a layer of burning and destruction, together with 16 coins of Justin II (565–578). 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.¹⁹ These are the only fibula finds that came from an intact archaeological context and can be assigned close chronological dating.

The group of onion-shaped fibulae is of local production, as shown by their fabrication. The chronological limits of the use of these fibulae are from the fourth to the sixth century. Specimens coming from *limes* fortifications are usually made of gilded bronze. There are few examples from Pannonia,²⁰ the main concentration is in the area of Salona. Zdenko Vinski inferred that one of the centers for production must have been in the prefecture of Illyricum.²¹ After 600, onion-shaped fibulae survived in two regions: among the Lombardi in North Italy

(Skopje: Makedonska kniga, 1982), 50; [Ivan Mikulčić and Nada Nikuljska] Иван Микулчиќ и Нада Никуљска, “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.

¹⁹ Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Фибули и појасни украси*, 257.

²⁰ Endre Tóth, “Későrómai sír Tihanyból (A lemezből készült hagymafejes fibulák tipológiájához). Spätromisches Grab aus Tihany (Zur Typologie der Zwiebelkopffibeln aus Bronzeblech),” *Folia Archaeologica* 43 (1994): 127–167.

²¹ Vinski, “Kasnoantički starosjedinci u Salonitskoj regiji,” 8.

and in the provinces of Dalmatia and Epirus Nova. The latter is known to have been the territory of the Komani-Kruja culture.²²

Fibulae with a hinge are rarer finds than fibulae with a bent leg. They vary greatly in design and size (see *Table 4* and *Fig. 5, No. 29–34*); the only thing that unifies them as 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 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 and belt fittings of same design have been connected with the Germanic tribes, mostly with the Lombards and Goths.²³ In the late fifth century, continuing into the sixth and seventh centuries, Dalmatia and Praevalitana were administrative and political parts of Italy, first ruled by the Ostrogoths of Ravenna, then by the

	Site	Vicinity	Variant	Origin	Material	Quantity	Drawing (Fig. 4)	Borderline province with:
1	Gradiste- Jegunovce	Tetovo	Cross-shaped fibulae with equal ends	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.29	Praevalitana
2	Kalja- G. Cajle	Gostivar	Zoomorphic fibulae	Import	Bronze (cast)	1	No.30	Praevalitana
3	Stobi	Gradsko	Fibulae with plate-shaped leg	Import	Bronze (cast)	1	No.31	None, a city
4	Gradiste- Stence	Tetovo	Fibulae with plate-shaped leg	Import	Bronze (cast)	1	No.32	Praevalitana
5	Davina- Cucer	Skopje	Fragment, a needle	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.33	Dardania
6	Davina- Cucer	Skopje	Fibulae with plate-shaped leg (with a spring instead of a hinge)	local	Iron (stamped)	1	No.34	Dardania

Table 4. Fibulae with hinge, prepared by the author.

²² The older Albanian scholarship treated the Komani-Kruja culture as the beginning of the proto-Albanians, although the geographical boundaries seem quite wide. The *terminus ante quem* does not support this theory because the culture seems to have ended in the eighth century. Modern Macedonian scholarship treats the bearers of the Komani-Kruja culture tentatively as Romanized and perhaps Christian local people, whose task might have been to protect the areas around major roads such as Via Egnatia. For the Macedonian sites of the Komani-Kruja culture, see [Elica Maneva] Елица Манева, *Средновековен накит* [Medieval jewelry], (Skopje: Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, 1992) and Elica Maneva, “La tombe 23 de Saint-Erasme – Ohrid,” in *Homage to Militini Garašanin*, ed. Nikola Tasić (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2006), 607–616. See also Luke Lawan and William Bowden, *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*. (Late Antique Archaeology 1.) (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 59–75.

²³ For more information about zoomorphic fibulae and belt fittings, see Vinski, “Kasnoantički starosjedioci u Salonitskoj regiji,” 16–21.

Lombards. The short border with Praevalitana is probably the explanation for the appearance of such finds in Macedonia Secunda,²⁴ or maybe this item was worn by a *foederatus* of Germanic origin at 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, apparently as a result of Lombard and Ostrogoth raiding activity. They are dated approximately from the late sixth to the late seventh century. The fibula from Jegunovce, Tetovo, is minted in iron, the same size as the Italian fibulae.²⁵ The minting in iron might denote it as a 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 *domus fullonica* building. It is the only find with a clear date; a coin of Justin I (518–527) was found in the layer above.²⁶ The other find comes from a fortification on the border with Praevalitana. This variant of the fibula with a hinge cannot be defined clearly as military. Although one find comes from a border fortress and another from a large 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 specimen remains an enigma.²⁷ The typology of fibulae in the material presented here is summarized in *Fig. 7*.

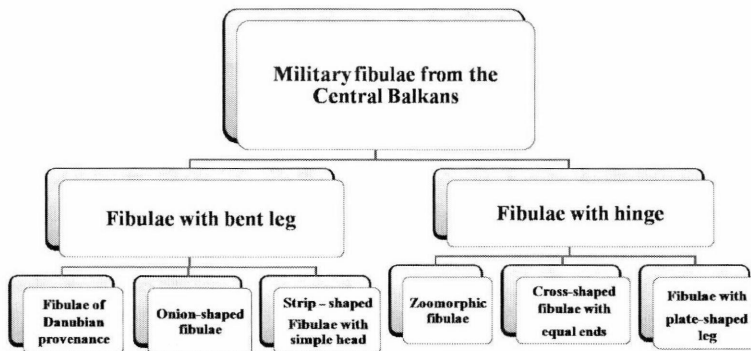


Fig. 7. Typology of military fibulae finds from the Central Balkans, prepared by the author.

²⁴ Mikulčić and Lilčić, *Фибули и појасни украси*, 262–263.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 263–264.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 264.

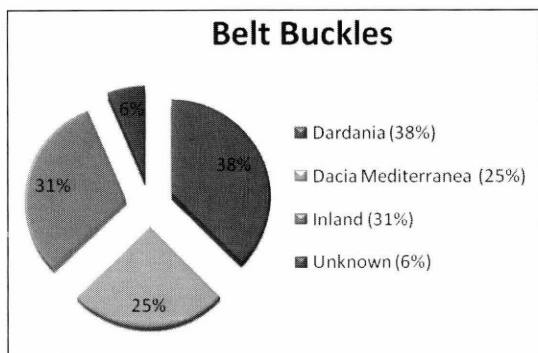


Fig. 8. Distribution of belt buckle finds, prepared by the author.

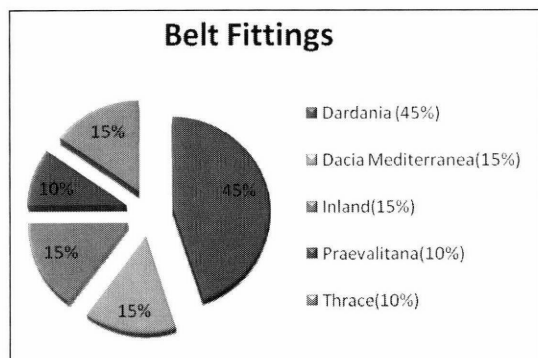


Fig. 9. Distribution of belt fittings finds, prepared by the author.

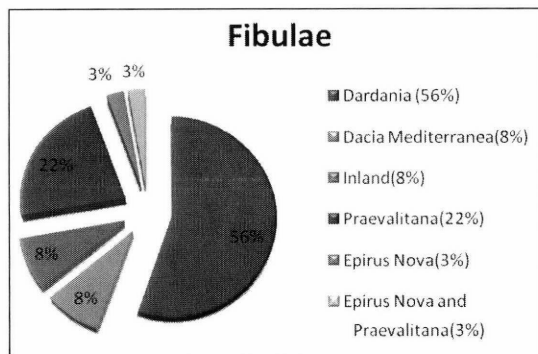


Fig. 10. Distribution of fibulae finds, prepared by the author

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. Their origin is a unique compilation of older Roman forms, some local forms, and the influence of barbarian traditions. The fibulae and belt buckles were worn by the soldiers of the Byzantine army, irrespective of being *foederati* or *Romaioi*. The more luxurious and expensive specimens were worn by the higher-ranked officers. They were quite favored and produced in many centers, as shown by the multitude of finds and great variations in decoration. A 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 (Figs 8–10), 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 if 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 was the Morava–Vardar route, which followed the valleys of these 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 to raiding activity.

The quantity of such finds is not only related to the number of military troops in these fortresses. When studying the number of such finds in certain areas, one should also take into consideration 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 raids, not normal deposition.