

Moulds for metal ornaments and belt decorations (6-7th century AD) from south Bulgaria

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The paper discusses two moulds for casting ornaments. The first is from the Bolchar area, Gorna Sekirna lands near Breznik. It is stored at the Museum of History - Pernik (Inv. No. 1/1960). It is made of soft rock. By the incised images it can be concluded that another symmetrical part existed. It was used to cast jewelry and decorations worn by women: an earring whose frame resembles twisted wires, a necklace pendant and a cylindrical-conical object, probably a bell body. For the fourth object judgments can be made based on a partially preserved casting channel. There are traces of scale along these channels and incised images, which testify to the mould utilization. The mould was not found during archaeological excavations and its dating is based on parallels from the 5-6th and 6th centuries. These parallels are from sites both in the provinces and outside the Empire. In this particular case some hints at the date (*terminus ante quem*) are presented by the latest coins from Late Antiquity sites in the Bolchar area: the middle of the 6th century

The second find comes from the Eastern Rhodope area and is a private possession. It is the face of a two-sided mould for casting belt decorations and trimmings. It is made of a Late Antiquity brick fragment. There are no traces of its use. The images of three types of appliques are incised: a T-shaped one, a symmetrically shield-shaped one and

a partially preserved lower part (?) of an applique with parallel sides and an irregular oval end. Parallels to these appliques are known as belt trimmings from north Bulgaria and Dobruja: Plochata (Kaylaka) near Pleven, Sadovsko Kale, Piatra Frecatei, Tulcea District, etc. All parallels date back to the 6th – the beginning of the 7th century. As a whole, they are rarely found south of Stara Planina. Recently, more similar finds in the area south of the Maritsa River and along its right-hand tributaries have been discovered. In most cases they originate from sites (primarily fortresses) intensively inhabited during the 4-6th century (7th century, respectively). The date of their last deposits can well serve as a *terminus ante quem*. Since the belt decorated with metal appliques in the study period was common for professional soldiers or militarized population, the question should be raised as to the reasons for the presence of such population groups in those fortresses. One possible answer could be related to the protection and defense of Adrianopolis hinterland and the main road crossing diagonally present Bulgarian territories to the capital of the Empire. These small fortresses were probably demolished or abandoned in the 580-590s AD as a result of the Avaro-Slavic campaigns in Thrace and towards Greece or in the middle of the second decade of the 7th century at the latest during the Great Avar campaign towards Constantinople.