

MEDIEVAL BELT SET COMPONENTS FROM NORTH-WESTERN BULGARIA

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Abstract: *The aim of the work is to present the elements originating from belt garnitures – belt buckles, strapends and appliques – stored in the funds of the regional museums in Vratsa and Montana. They belong to the types widespread in the 10th–11th centuries and largely reflect the uniformity of the belt fashion on the Lower Danube. The focus is on belt appliques, which predominate quantitatively. They can be separated into several groups – shield-shaped, heart-shaped, leaf-shaped, geometric shapes with a notch, etc. The fact that the presented pieces find their analogies among the production of the non-ferrous metalworking workshops studied in recent years in the region of Veliki Preslav, allows us to express the working hypothesis of their origin. Although a large number of the objects presented are without a clear archaeological context, as they were the object of illegal trafficking of cultural property, they complete the image of the distribution of these objects. Their publication adds one more touch to the clarification of the cultural unity from northeastern Bulgaria, Dobruja and northwestern Bulgaria.*

Rezumat: *Scopul lucrării este de a prezenta elemente care provin de la garnituri de centură – catarame, capete de curele și aplice – păstrate în fondurile muzeelor regionale din Vratsa și Montana. Ele aparțin tipurilor larg răspândite în secolele X–XI și reflectă, în mare măsură, uniformizarea modei centurii la Dunărea de Jos. Accentul este pus pe aplicile de centură, care predomină cantitativ. Ele pot fi separate în mai multe grupe: în formă de scut, în formă de inimă, în formă de frunză, forme geometrice cu creștătură etc. Faptul că piesele prezentate își găsesc analogii printre produsele atelierelor de prelucrare a metalelor neferoase investigate în ultimii ani în regiunea Veliki Preslav ne permite să exprimăm, ca ipoteză de lucru, originea lor. Deși un număr mare dintre obiectele prezentate este fără un context arheologic clar, întrucât a făcut obiectul unui trafic ilegal de bunuri culturale, totuși ele completează imaginea distribuției acestor piese. Publicarea lor adaugă încă o notă referitoare la clarificarea unității culturale din nord-estul Bulgariei, Dobrogea și nord-vestul Bulgariei.*

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Elements of the medieval belt have been the focus of a number of archaeological studies. They have been commented on as a chronological benchmark, an ethno-determining indicator or a territory marker of one or another state formation. The 10th century belt sets, published either as Hungarian¹ or as Bulgarian², are a classic example in this regard. The workshops for production of non-ferrous metal articles (including belt elements) in the Veliki Preslav region, which have been studied in recent years, have to some extent answered the question of the origin of such items and provided an opportunity to outline the distribution areas of the finished products³. But the insufficient research and publication of belt set components from north-western Bulgaria is the reason why this territory has remained beyond the attention of the colleagues dealing with this issue. Until now, only a few assemblages from this area have been published and briefly commented on in the literature, those from the Yakimovo site⁴, in the Montana region, and Gradeshnitsa⁵, in the Vratsa region.

That is why the current report sets itself a single goal: to present a more comprehensive picture of the belt elements that circulated among the medieval population of north-western Bulgaria. The actual object of the study is the collection of the Regional History Museum in Vratsa and another collection recently acquired by and housed in the Regional History Museum in Montana as a result of a specialized action by the Ministry of the Interior against the illegal trafficking of cultural values.

Belt buckles (Fig. 1–2)

The belt buckles are exemplified by six items. According to their formal and constructive features, they can be divided into two types: double-framed lyre-shaped and plate-and-frame buckles⁶.

Type I. The lyre-shaped buckles are represented by two variants (**Fig. 1/1–3**). In the first case, the strap-supporting frame is oval; in the second case, it is rectangular. In all three specimens, two decorative bud-like protrusions are formed onto the carrier. The supporting frame is oval, without additionally shaped bed for the prong. All three described exemplars are of unknown place of discovery in north Bulgaria and are kept in the Montana museum depository. Geographically, the closest analogies are the published belt buckles from the necropolis near Gradeshnitsa, Vratsa region⁷, as well as from the medieval necropolis near Dolni Lukovit, Lovech region⁸. Lyre-shaped buckles are widespread in north-eastern Bulgaria (Pliska⁹, Preslav¹⁰, Dolni Lukovit¹¹, Gradeshnitsa¹², etc.). As to the territory of modern Romania, such

¹ GOMOLKA-FUCHS 2002, p. 493–514.

² STANILOV 1991, p. 5–70.

³ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011.

⁴ MILCHEV 1963, p. 32–33, fig. 12.

⁵ MAŠOV 1979.

⁶ STANILOV 1995, p. 111.

⁷ MAŠOV 1979, p. 45, fig. 15/4.

⁸ VAZHAROVA 1976, p. 205, fig. 127/3.

⁹ STANCHEV 1955, p. 208, fig. 26/2; KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 202–203, fig. 3/1–3.

¹⁰ VITLYANOV 2004, p. 137, fig. 11/7; TOTEV 2004, p. 239, fig. 8/4.

¹¹ VAZHAROVA 1976, p. 205, fig. 127/3.

¹² MAŠOV 1979, fig. 15/4.

buckles are known from Tîrșor¹³, Păcuiul lui Soare¹⁴ and *Dinogetia*-Garvăn¹⁵. They are also common in the Carpathian Basin¹⁶ (Fig. 2). They are dated to the 10th and the first half of the 11th century.

Type II. Three belt buckles are included in the second type. They have an elliptical frame and a five-sided plate with a round hole for the prong (Fig. 1/4–6). One of them was discovered during planned archaeological research in late-antique and medieval Vratitsa near today's Vratsa, the other two are of unknown provenience. Similar belt buckles were discovered during the archaeological research in a number of centres, such as Pliska¹⁷, Preslav¹⁸, Skala¹⁹, the Pernik fortress²⁰, the Krivina village over the ruins of the antique castellum of Iatrus (Ruse region)²¹, Smyadovo (Shumen region)²², Yakimovo (Montana region)²³, where they are ascribed to the 9th to 11th century period. Outside the borders of Bulgaria, matching buckles have been found in Păcuiul lui Soare²⁴, in Romania, Karos²⁵ and Izsák-Balázspuszta²⁶, in Hungary (Fig. 2).

The discovery of belt buckles similar to the ones presented here among the production of the art metalwork centres near Nadarevo and Novosel gives grounds to launch a working hypothesis of their origin, which should be associated with these two workshops²⁷. Of course, this hypothesis should find additional argumentation.

Strapends (Fig. 3–4)

The strapends are also represented by six exemplars. They are all single-sided, tongue-shaped, and used to be attached to the belt strap with a rivet or a pin. They differ in size and decoration, and can be divided into three types.

Type I. Two strapends originating from the medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (today the village of Harlets, Vratsa region), kept in the regional history museum (RHM), Vratsa, belong to the first type, as well as another strapend from the depository of RHM in Montana. The specimens from Vratsa are crafted by metal pressing, and were found in a fragmented state. Their surface is plain, without decoration (Fig. 3/1–2). The relief edge on one of the strapends repeats its contour, thus emphasizing its tongue-like shape. A similar decoration occurs on the strapend from the Iatrus-Krivina belt set²⁸, whose dating prior to 971 is securely based

¹³ HARHOIU 1972, p. 417–425.

¹⁴ DIACONU, VÎLCEANU 1972, p. 155, fig. 62/10–11, 16–17.

¹⁵ BARNEA, ȘTEFĂNESCU 1971, p. 309, fig. 105/8.

¹⁶ RÉVÉSZ 1987, p. 257–286.

¹⁷ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 203, fig. 3/6.

¹⁸ STANILOV 1995, p. 113, fig. 3/19–21; VITLYANOV 2007, p. 245–246, tabl. I/1, 3, 5.

¹⁹ YOTOV, ATANASOV 1998, p. 107, fig. 3/3.

²⁰ CHANGOVA 1992, p. 142–143, fig. 130/5.

²¹ GOMOLKA-FUCHS 2002, p. 494, Abb. 1.

²² ANTONOVA, PETROVA 1983, p. 7, fig. 22/3.

²³ MILCHEV 1963, p. 34, fig. 14.

²⁴ DIACONU, VÎLCEANU 1972, p. 155, fig. 62/6.

²⁵ FETTICH 1937, tab. XLIII/32.

²⁶ TÓTH 1976, p. 154, fig. 15/12, p. 161, fig. 20/12.

²⁷ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, tabl. XXXI/198, 199, tabl. XXXII/209, 210.

²⁸ GOMOLKA-FUCHS 2002, p. 494, Abb. 1.

on the time of the Bulgarian-Kievan Rus'-Byzantine war when the settlement was burned down²⁹. A similar strapend was also found in the medieval settlement near Odartsi (Dobrich region), destroyed during the Pecheneg invasion in the 1030s³⁰. The Montana strapend is cast and smaller in size (**Fig. 3/3**). Its attachment onto the belt was done by means of three rivets.

Type II. The second type includes three cast strapends with relief geometric decoration. One of them was found during the exploration of the medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta and is now registered in the collection of the RHM in Vratsa. The contour of this strapend is paralleled by a punched ornament, the field formed in this way being filled with rhythmically recurring diamonds and arcs (**Fig. 3/4**). Two other strapends listed in the Montana museum collection, are of unknown provenience. One has a raised edge along the periphery and in the middle, which divides its face into two fields. They are filled with a pattern of circlets (**Fig. 3/5**). The other strapend is smaller in size, its surface being decorated with mirrored geometric shapes (**Fig. 3/6**). Strapends with geometric decoration are known from Samotino (Varna region)³¹, Pliska³², Păcuil lui Soare³³ and Oltina-“Capul dealului”³⁴; they are dated to the 9th and 11th centuries.

Type III. The third type of strapends is exemplified by two specimens decorated with a plant ornament. The one example, found in the medieval settlement of Augusta, has the so-called “palmette tree” motif incised on it (**Fig. 3/7**). Unfortunately, the motif is partially preserved because of the fragmentary state of the strapend when found. The second exemplar is from the collection of Montana regional museum. It is decorated with two five-leafed palmettes rendered in diamond-shaped fields (**Fig. 3/8**). The space between the diamonds is filled with raised triangles. Three rivets helped the strapend to be attached onto the belt.

Strapends similar to those described here have been found in a number of settlements in Bulgaria (Yakimovo³⁵, Pernik³⁶, Pliska³⁷, various settlements in the Varna region³⁸, etc.), in Serbia (Aleksinac fortress³⁹) and northern Dobruja⁴⁰. They are dated to the 10th and the first half of the 11th century (**Fig. 4**).

Belt mounts

This is the most numerous group of belt components, which is easily explained, taking into account the fact that they were arranged along the entire length of the strap, as shown by the reconstructions of medieval belts based on the studies of

²⁹ DONCHEVA 2020, p. 61.

³⁰ DONCHEVA-PETKOVA, NINOV, PARUSHEV 1999, cat. no.697, pl. LI/697, LII/697.

³¹ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1992, p. 198, pl. IV/30.

³² KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 206, fig. 4/11.

³³ DIACONU, VÎLCEANU 1972, p. 154, fig. 63/1.

³⁴ PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2018, p. 377, pl. II/32.

³⁵ MILCHEV 1963, p. 33.

³⁶ CHANGOVA 1992, p. 143, fig. 123/22.

³⁷ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 204–207.

³⁸ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1992.

³⁹ RADIŠIĆ 2018, p. 147, fig. 8.

⁴⁰ PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2012, cat. nos. 9, 12–13, pl. 2/9, 3/12–13.

the necropolis. For greater clarity and convenience, these items will be presented according to the classification of Stela Doncheva⁴¹, taking into consideration some specifics and differences of the materials from north-western Bulgaria, the subject of the study. According to their formal characteristics, they can be divided into several groups: shield-shaped, heart-shaped and leaf-shaped, with a geometric shape and openwork.

Shield-shaped belt mounts (Fig. 5–10)

The seventy-two mounts included in this group have a shield-like form, with bud-shaped protrusions along the contour and a medallion in the middle, which is encircled by a raised edge or a row of granulation. The differences in the shield design allow three main types to be defined.

Type I. The mounts included in this type have an elongated shape, with a broad base and a pointed rim and four to six "bud" protrusions located along the edge. Within the type, two groups are identified, for the crafting of which a different production technique was used, casting (twenty-three mounts, **Fig. 5**) and pressing (ten mounts, **Fig. 6**). The attachment was achieved by means of two rivets. The decoration of the majority of the commented specimens is reduced to the shaping of a central medallion through a relief edge along the periphery. One item from the Montana regional museum collection has a trefoil rendered in the central medallion (**Fig. 5/3**). Another belt mount from the same museum collection is decorated with a stylized three-leafed palmette in relief, with a diamond-shaped central leaf. The lateral leaves sprout up from volutes at the base, each leaf tapering to the top of the mount (**Fig. 5/21**). Two mounts from the medieval settlement over Augusta have the decoration rendered as a five-leafed palmette (**Fig. 5/22–23**). The ornament of another mount from the same settlement consists of two arched rows of granulation (**Fig. 5/20**). The smooth surface of three of the mounts suggests a possible use as models. This type of shield-like mounts has parallels in the materials from Preslav⁴², Pliska⁴³, Durankulak⁴⁴, Starmen⁴⁵, Markeli⁴⁶ and the medieval fortresses near the villages of Novakovo, Debrene and Suvorovo, Varna region⁴⁷. They are generally dated to the end of the 9th and the 10th centuries (**Fig. 10**).

Type II. Twenty-eight cast (**Fig. 7**) and six pressed belt mounts belong to this type (**Fig. 8**). Although they have the same shape as the previous type, they are distinguished by their proportions and greater variety in decoration. They are shorter and wider, and the number of bud-shaped protrusions along the edge varies from three to six. The mounts were attached onto the belt by means of two or three rivets or two pins. The central medallion of the considered mounts is formed with the help of a raised edge along the periphery or a row of granulation. On one specimen from the collection of Vratsa regional museum, this raised edge passes into trefoil

⁴¹ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, p. 109–127.

⁴² MAVRODINOV 1959, p. 230–231, fig. 274/3; BONEV 1993, p. 72–73, fig. 12/a–b; VITLYANOV 2007, p. 257, fig. 2/13.

⁴³ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 207–209, fig. 5/9–10.

⁴⁴ MELAMED 1989, p. 137, tabl. V/20.

⁴⁵ HENSEL *et alii* 1970, p. 237, fig. 7/1, 3.

⁴⁶ MOMCHILOV 2015, p. 404–406, fig. 1/6–7, 9–10, fig. 2/6–7, 9–10.

⁴⁷ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, tabl. XX–XXII.

palmettes by means of volutes at the base (Fig. 7/1). The linear granulation forming the central medallion of a mount from Augusta is surrounded by relief leaves ending in volutes. They, in turn, include side "buds" in the decoration (Fig. 7/5). The decoration of eight belt mounts consists of a stylized palmette with a different number of leaves. Such are the mounts found in Augusta and in the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo, Vratsa region, as well as the examples of unknown provenience from the collections of the two museums (Fig. 7). On one mount from Augusta the so-called "twig" ornament is depicted (Fig. 7/25), on another – curved arcs in relief (Fig. 7/22). An exemplar from the collection of the Montana museum has an opening (Fig. 7/21). Two other mounts from the same collection have an extra wide width. Similar artefacts occur among the materials from Pliska⁴⁸, Odarts⁴⁹, Drastar, Popina and Sredishte (Silistra region)⁵⁰. The published complete belt set from Iatrus-Krivina includes similar mounts⁵¹. Comparable mounts and models originating from the workshops near Nadarevo and Novosel not far from Preslav connect the production of the above-commented exemplars with this area⁵². Outside the Bulgarian territory, they are attested in Păcuilui lui Soare⁵³, Oltina-"Capul dealului"⁵⁴ (in Romania), Kadoros, Zemplin and the complete belt set from Szentes-Nagyadz (in Hungary)⁵⁵ and in Svrlijgrad (in Serbia)⁵⁶. They are dated to the 10th century and only for some assemblages a later date is accepted, including the beginning of the 11th century. It was assumed that they had a limited area of distribution, mainly in north-eastern Bulgaria and Dobruja, but the museum collections in Montana and Vratsa require rethinking this thesis (Fig. 10).

Type III. This type includes a group of four pentagonal trapezoidal and one hexagonally shaped mounts (Fig. 9). In the classification of Stela Doncheva similar belt components are included in the group G of mounts of geometric shape⁵⁷. They are presented here because of their decoration, which features a central medallion formed by a raised edge or row of granulation. This technique is related to the previous two types. Three of the pentagonal mounts are cast and one is pressed. On two of the specimens, a three-leaf palmette is featured in the medallion (Fig. 9/1, 3). The cast mounts are of unknown findspot somewhere in north-western Bulgaria, and the pressed one is from the medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (Fig. 9/5). The hexagon-shaped mount originates from the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo (Fig. 9/4).

Heart-shaped belt mounts (Fig. 11–15)

This is the second largest group of mounts in the considered collections. It includes sixty-one examples. In terms of their shape, the mounts referred to in this

⁴⁸ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 207–209, fig. 5/11–15.

⁴⁹ DONCHEVA-PETKOVA, NINOV, PARUSHEV 1999, cat. no. 673, p. 674, pl. L/673–674.

⁵⁰ ATANASOV 1985, p. 130, tabl. I/3.

⁵¹ GOMOLKA-FUCHS 2002, p. 494, Abb. 1; DONCHEVA 2020, p. 61, fig. 7.

⁵² KONAKLIEV 2005, p. 241, tabl. I/3; BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, p. 110, 275–276.

⁵³ DIACONU, VÎLCEANU 1972, p. 155, fig. 62/2.

⁵⁴ PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2018, p. 386, pl. II.

⁵⁵ LANGÓ, PARAY-HORVÁTH 2016, p. 583, fig. 10; BÁLINT 1991, Taf. 64.

⁵⁶ RADIŠIĆ 2015; RADIŠIĆ 2018, p. 145, fig. 6/8.

⁵⁷ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, p. 126.

group resemble a heart, although this definition is quite conditional. In general, they are quite close in formal terms to the leaf-shaped belt mounts. Usual is the absence of "bud"-like shapes on the edge of the mount, except for one at the base. Certain typical details in shaping and decoration allow this group of mounts to be represented in two main types.

Type I. Thirty-six mounts are included in this type, the variety of which allows three variants to be distinguished.

The first variant (twenty-three items) have a classic round shape with one "bud" protrusion in the centre of the base (Fig. 11). The decoration consists of variations of the palmette (three-leafed, five-leafed) and the trefoil. A mount from Augusta has a heart-shaped opening at the base (Fig. 11/9). Seventeen of the mounts are casts (Fig. 11/1–17), and the remaining six crafted by metal pressing (Fig. 11/18–23). The majority of these fittings originate from the medieval settlement over Augusta and one comes from the land of the village of Golyamo Peshtene (Vratsa region). The rest are from unknown sites in north-western Bulgaria, and belong to the collections of the two museums.

The second variant of the considered mounts resembles the first, but the top of the mount is shaped as a "bud" protrusion (Fig. 12/1–4). Three exemplars from Augusta and one from the village of Golyamo Peshtene are included here.

The third variant is very close to the previous one, but the "bud" at the base is quite elongated (Fig. 12/5–13). The decoration involves a central field shaped by a raised border or row of granulation. Sometimes the raised edge transforms into curled side leaves of three-leafed palmettes (Fig. 12/12–13). These belt mounts originate from the medieval settlement over Augusta, from the land of the village of Selanovtsi (Vratsa region), and the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo, as well as from unknown findspots in north-western Bulgaria (Fig. 15). Heart-shaped mounts of this type can be found among the materials from Pliska⁵⁸, Preslav⁵⁹, Vetren⁶⁰, Skala⁶¹ and Markeli⁶². They date back to the 10th century. Their discovery in Pliska, in layers dated with anonymous *folles* class A2 (976–1930/1035), allows us to draw their upper chronological boundary to the first half of the 11th century⁶³.

Type II. This type comprises twenty-five specimens, divided into four variants (Fig. 13–14).

The first variant includes fourteen mounts, with a classic heart shape and a single "bud" at the base (Fig. 13/1–14). The difference between them and the previous type is in the proportions – these have a narrower base and an elongated, pointed top. The decoration features the typical stylized palmettes with three or more leaves. Two specimens have the palmettes surrounded by a scalloped line and granulation. The belt mounts described here originate mostly from the Vratsa region – the medieval settlement located over the vestiges of Augusta, the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo and from the medieval layer of the fortress near Mezdra.

⁵⁸ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 207–209, fig. 5/5–8.

⁵⁹ TOTEV 2004, p. 237, fig. 6/6; VITLYANOV 2004, p. 257, fig. 2/4, 11, 14.

⁶⁰ ATANASOV, YORDANOV 1994, p. 21, pl. III/20.

⁶¹ YOTOV, ATANASOV 1998, p. 108, pl. CXIV/436, 439.

⁶² MOMCHILOV 2015, p. 404–406, fig. 1/19–20, 2/19–20.

⁶³ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 207.

One of the mounts from Augusta was crafted by pressing. The collection of Montana regional museum includes three examples of this variant, the provenience of which is unknown.

The second variant of this type is represented by four mounts (**Fig. 13/15–18**). What is characteristic of them is the mount tip shaped as a “bud” protrusion. Two items are of unknown findspot, one is from the medieval settlement at Augusta and one originates from the Vratitsa late antique and medieval fortress near Vratsa. Three of them are decorated with a stylized palmette closed in a field. Two raised edges dividing the space into three fields are shaped on the mount from the medieval Vratitsa.

The third variant is represented by two mounts with a smooth surface (**Fig. 14/1–2**). One originates from the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo and the other, from the collection of the RHM Montana, is of unknown findspot. S. Doncheva notes that the heart-shaped mounts with a plain surface are among the most mass-produced forms of the three production centres: Nadarevo, Novosel and Zlatar⁶⁴. Similar mounts originate from Pliska⁶⁵, the medieval fortress near the village of Pet Mogili (Shumen region)⁶⁶, Novakovo and Suvorovo (Varna region), Odartsi⁶⁷, Adamclisi⁶⁸, Oltina-“Capul dealului”⁶⁹ and *Dinogetia*-Garvăn⁷⁰ (Romania), as well as from Svrljigrad (eastern Serbia)⁷¹. They are dated to the end of the 9th–10th centuries.

The fourth variant of this type includes five belt mounts – one from the medieval settlement at Augusta and four from the collection of the museum in Montana, which are of unknown findspot (**Fig. 14/3–5**). They feature a rounded base and a slightly pointed tip. They are decorated with stylized palmettes. Comparable belt mounts are known from a number of settlements in north-eastern Bulgaria⁷².

Heart-shaped mounts are of the most common and favoured belt fittings. They occur among the materials from the production centres at Novosel and Nadarevo, as well as in a number of centres in north-eastern Bulgaria (Skala and Odartsi, in Dobrich region; Novakovo, Suvorovo, etc., in Varna region), to the south of the Balkans in Markeli (Burgas region), in Dobruja (*Dinogetia*-Garvăn, Adamclisi, Oltina-“Capul dealului”), in Serbia (Svrljigrad), in Hungary (Ketzell). They date back to the 10th century.

Leaf-shaped belt mounts (Fig. 16–20)

This group comprises thirty-two belt mounts. Based on the different decorative technique of these mounts, two main groups can be distinguished.

The first group includes twenty-one items with incised decoration. According to their shape, they can be divided into two types.

Type I. The ten mounts included in the type are elongated leaf-shaped, with

⁶⁴ DONCHEVA 2020, p. 56.

⁶⁵ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 207–209, fig. 5/3–4.

⁶⁶ STANILOV 1993, p. 153, fig. 2/7.

⁶⁷ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, p. 198, tabl. VI/110–117, VII/131–138.

⁶⁸ PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, TALMAȚCHI, ȘOVA 2014, p. 195, pl. VII/10–11.

⁶⁹ PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2018, p. 386, pl. I/10.

⁷⁰ ȘTEFAN *et alii* 1967, p. 296, fig. 173/8.

⁷¹ RADIŠIĆ 2015, p. 21–34; RADIŠIĆ 2018, p. 145, fig. 6.

⁷² PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, tabl. XXVI.

one or two “buds” formed at the edge (**Fig. 16**). The incised ornamentation consists of different variations of the “twig” motif, as well as of arc-and-circlets combinations. Seven of the mounts are from the collection of the museum in Vratsa; they come from the medieval settlement over Augusta and the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo. Four exemplars, which have no known place of discovery, are from the collection of the museum in Montana.

Type II. Ten mounts belong to this type (**Fig. 17**). They are wider, decorated with different variants of the “twig” motif, arcs, curves, etc, with some specimens having four or five “buds” formed at the edge. Within this type, there is also a variant with a rectangular, oval or triangular opening at the base. They were found in the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo and the medieval settlement at Augusta, as well as among the materials of unknown provenience in north-western Bulgaria, now stored in the depositories of the two museums.

Belt mounts, comparable to those presented here occur among the materials found in Pliska⁷³, Preslav⁷⁴, Skala⁷⁵, Suvorovo and Provadia (Varna region)⁷⁶, and Markeli⁷⁷; they are dated to the 10th and the first half of the 11th century (**Fig. 18**).

The second group of leaf-shaped mounts are with relief decoration (**Fig. 19**). It includes eleven exemplars from the collection of the museum in Vratsa, which originate from the medieval settlement at Augusta, with one stray find coming from the area between Gigen (Pleven region) and Ostrov (Vratsa region), villages on the banks of the Danube River. Here again we can describe them as elongated and wide. The decorative pattern is of palmettes, trefoils, or resembling a cluster of raised “buds” enclosed in three circular fields as is the case of one mount. It is worth-noting that most of these materials have direct parallels in the production of the workshop at Novosel.

Leaf-shaped belt mounts occur among the materials from the production centres at Novosel and Nadarevo, as well as from Preslav, Silistra, Skala and Markeli. Outside Bulgaria, similar fittings are also known from Hungary⁷⁸, Romania⁷⁹ and Serbia⁸⁰. They are dated within the 10th and first decades of the 11th century.

Openwork belt mounts (**Fig. 21–22**)

Typical of this group of mounts is the presence of openings and cutouts, which have a decorative function and participate in the artistic shaping of the mount. In formal terms, three main types are distinguished.

Type I. Five mounts are included in this type, the shape of which is close to a leaf or heart (**Fig. 21/1–5**). One mount from the Montana museum collection has three round holes at its top and base with the field between them being occupied by a floral pattern (**Fig. 21/1**). In another mount from the same collection, the hole

⁷³ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 210, fig. II/16.

⁷⁴ VITLYANOV 2004, p. 247, fig. 2.

⁷⁵ YOTOV, ATANASOV 1998, p. 109, pl. CXIV/447.

⁷⁶ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, tabl. XXIII–XXV.

⁷⁷ MOMCHILOV 2007, p. 259–265.

⁷⁸ FODOR 1996, fig. 1, 6.

⁷⁹ PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, TALMAȚCHI, ȘOVA 2014, p. 195, pl. VII; PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2018, p. 386, pl. I.

⁸⁰ RADIŠIĆ 2018, p. 147, fig. 7.

is heart-shaped and occupies the central part of the item (**Fig. 21/2**). The opening is similar to the one of a mount from Augusta, but unlike the others, it is equipped with a "bud"-like protrusion at the base and the top (**Fig. 21/3**). A fitting from Augusta and another one from Montana have rectangular openings around which an incised floral ornament develops (**Fig. 21/4–5**). These mounts are less common and yet, similar ones can be found among the materials from the workshop at Novosel⁸¹, as well as from Preslav, Suvorovo and Botevo, Varna region⁸² and from the fortress near Debrene, Dobrich region⁸³ (**Fig. 22**).

Type II. Five mounts with a rectangular shape and a rectangular opening are included here. They are mostly undecorated (**Fig. 21/6–10**). Only in one case the surface of the mount is scalloped. All fittings were found in the area of Augusta and the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo and are now part of the collection of the museum in Vratsa. Similar mounts occur among the materials from the production centres at Nadarevo⁸⁴ and Novosel⁸⁵, as well as from the region of Varna⁸⁶ (**Fig. 22**).

Type III. Three triangular fittings belong to this type. The one, coming from the RHM Montana collection, also has a triangular opening and a trefoil-decorated top. The other two mounts originate from the medieval settlement at Augusta. The base of the triangle is shaped like a trefoil, and the opening below it is round. It is not excluded that they were used as loops for suspension in the belt set.

Geometrically-shaped mounts (Fig. 23–24)

The geometrically-shaped mounts in the considered collections are represented by twenty-five specimens. They are divided into four types.

Type I. These are round-shaped mounts. They are decorated with an incised ornament representing rosettes (twelve items) or raised "buds" (two items). Six of them were found in the medieval settlement at Augusta, and the rest are of unknown discovery place (**Fig. 23/1–14**). Similar mounts can be found among the materials from the production centres at Nadarevo and Novosel⁸⁷, as well as from Pliska⁸⁸, Markeli⁸⁹, Skala⁹⁰, Starmen⁹¹, medieval settlements around Varna⁹², *Dinogetia*-Garvăn (Romania), etc. They are dated to the 10th and the 60s of the 11th century.

Type II. This type includes six mounts with a rectangular shape achieved by connecting four circles, between which the diamond-shaped field thus formed is emphasized in relief. They have a bud-like protrusion at one side. All exemplars originate from the settlement at Augusta. Four are cast in bronze, one is cut out from sheet copper, and one is pressed (**Fig. 23/15–19**). Such fittings occur among

⁸¹ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, p. 122, tabl. XLVII.

⁸² PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, p. 144–145, tabl. X–XI.

⁸³ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, p. 144–145.

⁸⁴ KONAKLIEV 2005, p. 242, pl. II/11.

⁸⁵ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, pl. XLVIII/522.

⁸⁶ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, p. 27, 192, pl. I/17–20, II/21–27.

⁸⁷ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, p. 123–124, pl. XLVIII/525.

⁸⁸ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 210, fig. 5/23–24.

⁸⁹ MOMCHILOV 2015, p. 401–402, fig. 1/1–2.

⁹⁰ YOTOV, ATANASOV 1998, p. 110, pl. CXV/454.

⁹¹ HENSEL *et alii* 1970, fig. 7/8.

⁹² PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, pl. IV/58–78, V/79–84.

the output of the production centre at Novosel⁹³, as well as among the finds from Preslav, Okorsh (Silistra region) and medieval settlements around Varna⁹⁴ (Fig. 24). They date back to the 10th century.

Type III. The third type is represented by the so-called double crescent-shaped mounts. It comprises four exemplars. The individual lunate segments forming the mounts are separated from each other by an incised line and end in protrusions at both ends. One example found in the Golyam Grad fortress, near Staro Selo is composed of three such segments (Fig. 23/20–23). Similar fittings come from Pliska⁹⁵, Vetren⁹⁶, Debrene⁹⁷, Suvorovo, Izvornik and other sites⁹⁸. They also occur among the production of the workshops at Nadarevo⁹⁹ and Novosel¹⁰⁰ (Fig. 24). The mounts of this type are dated to the 10th and 11th centuries.

Type IV. The fourth type of fittings with a geometric shape is represented by two mounts. They are composed of three connected spheres, being attached onto the belt by means of a pin. One mount was found in the medieval settlement at Augusta, and the other was a stray find from the land of the village of Golyamo Peshtene. They are now stored in the depository of the museum in Vratsa (Fig. 24).

The multi-component belt, as an element of early medieval culture, remains one of the most studied phenomenon by specialists. The empirical material accumulated over the past decades reveals both the production centres and the regions of distribution of these finds. The present preliminary report overcomes a blank spot in the very geographical “heart” of this fashion, north-western Bulgaria.

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⁹³ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, pl. XLVIII/527–540.

⁹⁴ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, pl. V/85–97, VI/98–100.

⁹⁵ KONSTANTINOV 2015, p. 210, fig. 5/17–18.

⁹⁶ ATANASOV, YORDANOV 1994, pl. III/23.

⁹⁷ YOTOV 1993, p. 123.

⁹⁸ PLETNYOV, PAVLOVA 1994–1995, pl. XLVIII/841–850.

⁹⁹ KONAKLIEV 2005, p. 241, pl. I/10.

¹⁰⁰ BONEV, DONCHEVA 2011, pl. XLVIII/547.

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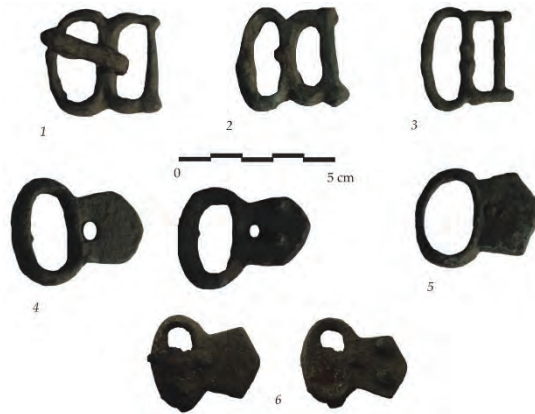


Fig. 1. Belt buckles. *Type I*: 1–3 Unknown findspot. *Type II*: 4–5 Unknown findspot; 6 Medieval fortress Vratitsa (1–5 RHM Montana, 6 RHM Vratsa).

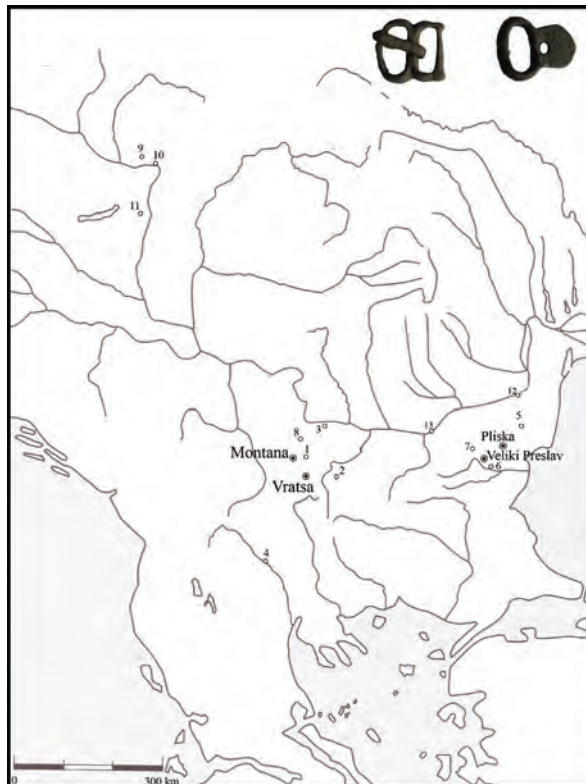


Fig. 2. Belt buckle distribution map: 1 Gradeshnitsa, Vratsa region; 2 Dolni Loukovit, Lovech region; 3 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 4 Medieval fortress Pernik, SW Bulgaria; 5 Skala, Dobrich region; 6 Smyadovo, Shumen region; 7 Novosel, Shumen region; 8 Yakimovo, Montana region; 9 Tarczal, Hungary; 10 Izsák-Balázspuszta, Hungary; 11 Târgșor, Romania; 12. Păcuiul lui Soare, Romania; 13 Yatrus-Krivina, Rousse region.



Fig. 3. Strapends. *Type I* – 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (inv.№ 565); 2 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (inv.№ 566); 3 Unknown findspot. *Type II* – 4 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (inv.№ 445); 5–6 Unknown findspot. *Type III* – 7 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (inv.№ 511); 8 Unknown findspot (1–2, 4, 7 RHM Vratsa; 3, 5–6, 8 RHM Montana).

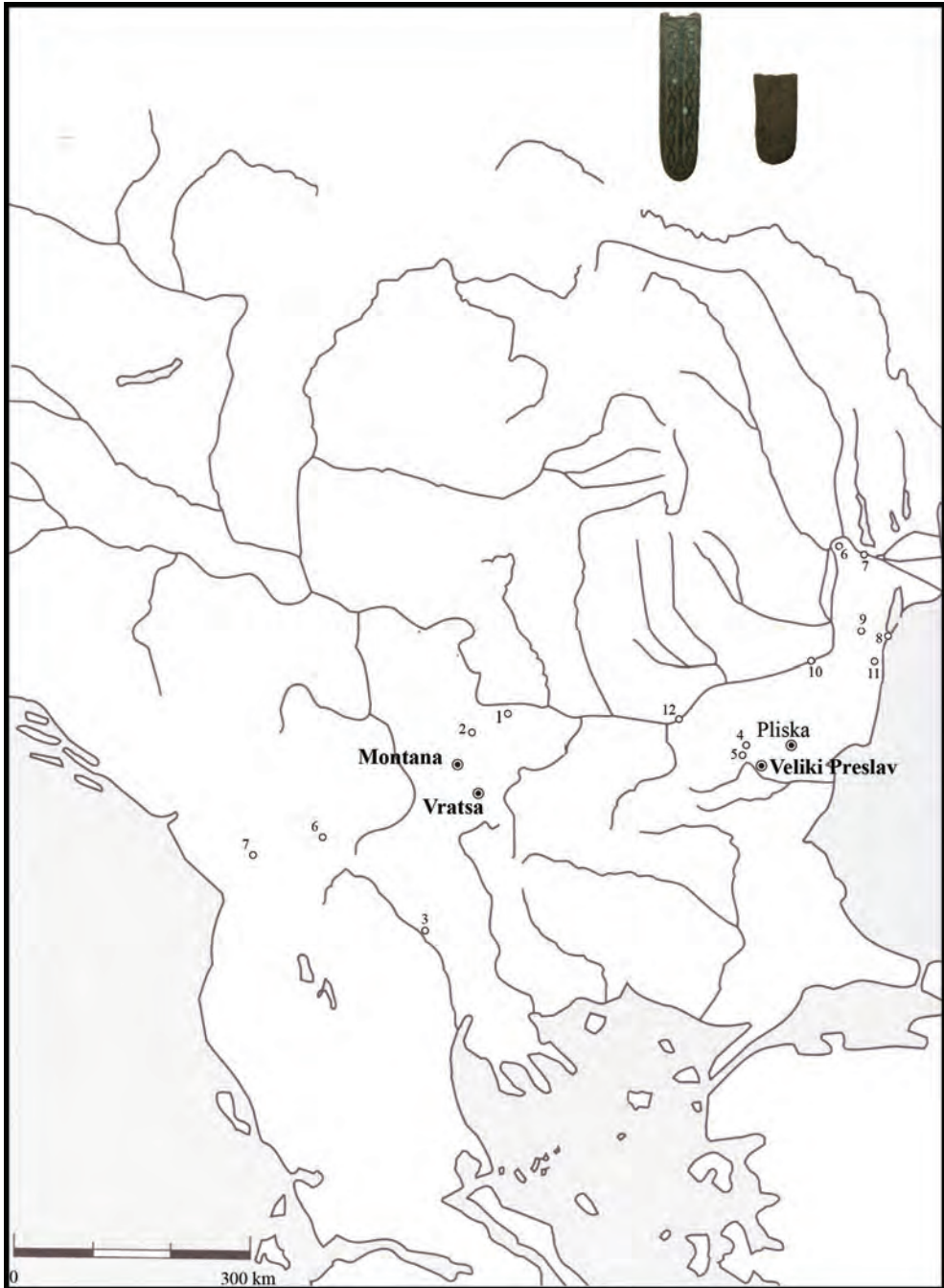


Fig. 4. Strapends distribution map: 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 2 Yakimovo, Montana region; 3 Medieval fortress Pernik, SW Bulgaria; 4 Aleksinac fortress, Serbia; 5 Ras fortress, Serbia; 6 *Dinogetia*-Garvăn, Romania; 7 Isaccea, Romania; 8 Histria, Romania; 9 Târgușor, Romania; 10 Păcuiul lui Soare, Romania; 11 Valu lui Traian, Romania; 12 Yatrus-Krivina, Rousse region.

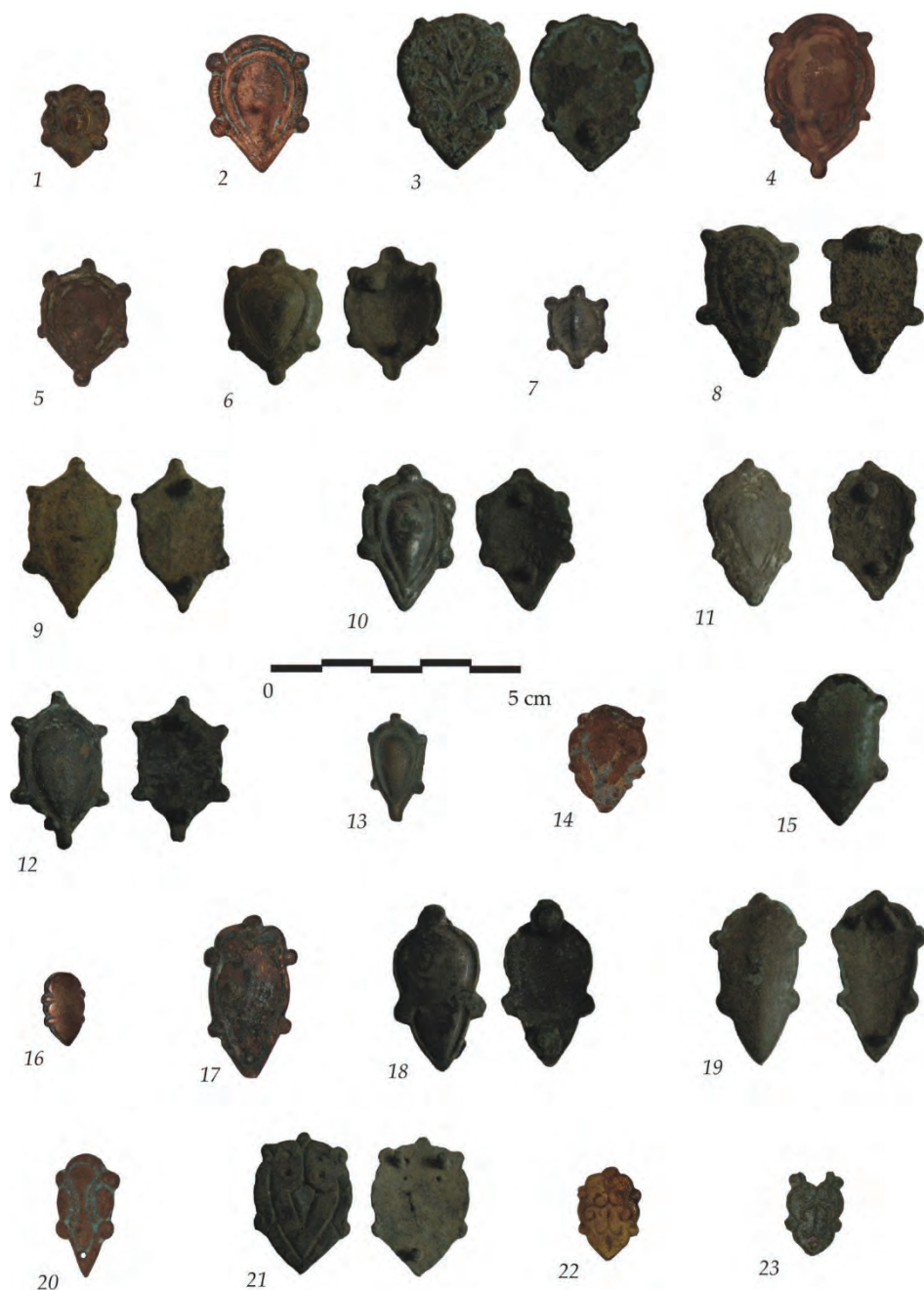


Fig. 5. Casted shield-shaped belt mounts. *Type I* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 1 (inv. № 434), 2 (inv. № 585), 4 (inv. № 446), 5 (inv. № 360), 7 (inv. № 586), 13 (inv. № 376), 14 (inv. № 468), 16 (inv. № 548), 17 (inv. № 415), 20 (inv. № 497), 22 (inv. № 552), 23 (inv. № 437); Unknown findspot: 3, 6, 8–12, 15, 18–19, 21 (1–2, 4–5, 7, 13–14, 16–17, 20, 22–23 RHM Vratsa; 3, 6, 8–12, 15, 18–19, 21 RHM Montana).



Fig. 6. Pressed shield-shaped belt mounts. *Type I* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 1 (inv. № 358), 2 (inv. № 418), 4 (inv. № 549), 5 (inv. № 386), 7 (inv. № 583), 8 (inv. № 417), 10 (inv. № 584); Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region: 3 (inv. № 460), 9 (inv. № 454); Unknown findspot 6 (inv. № 403) (1–10 RHM Vratsa).

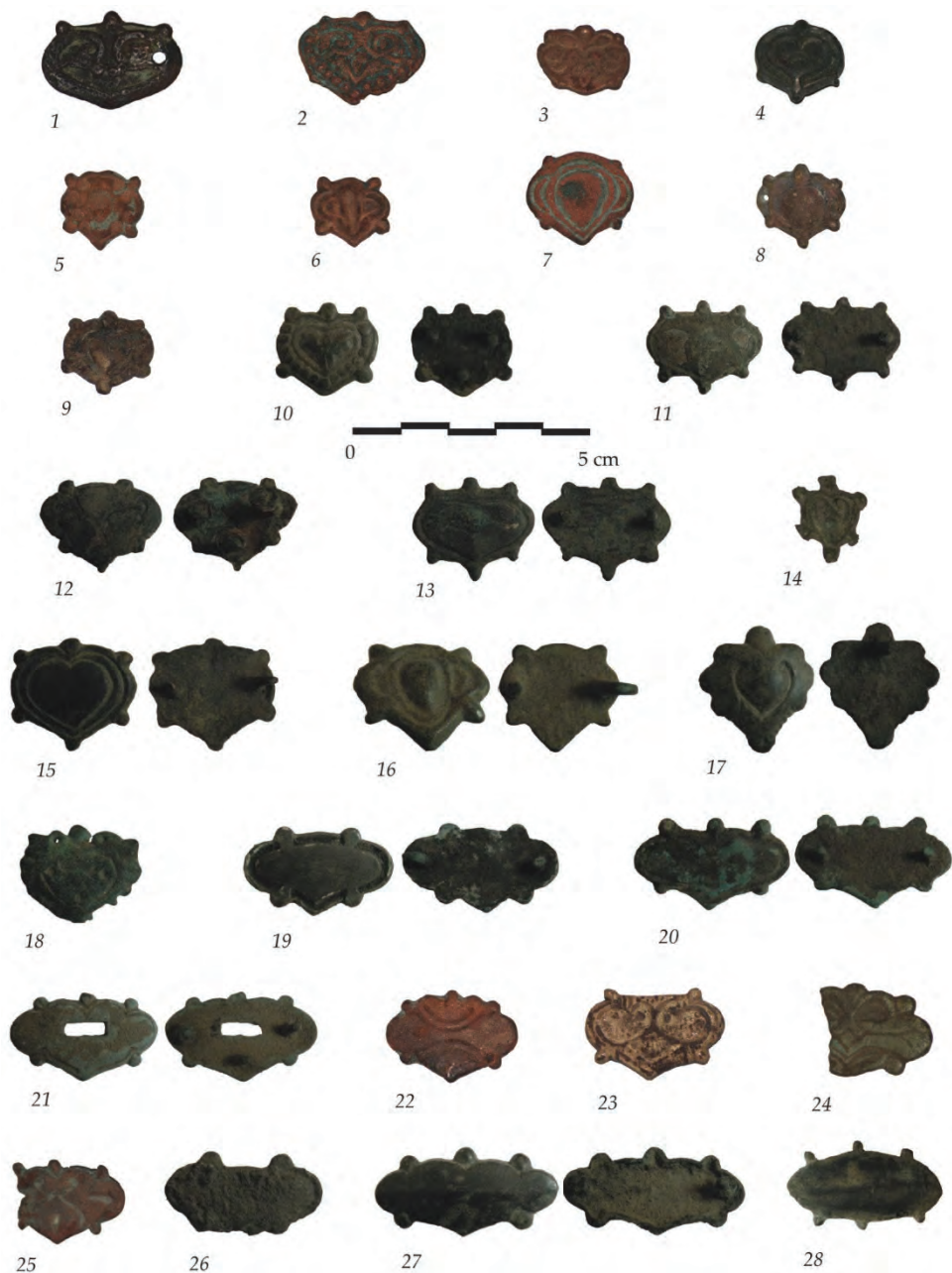


Fig. 7. Casted shield-shaped belt mounts. *Type II* – Unknown findspot: 1 (inv.№ 263), 10–13, 14 (inv. № 679), 15–21, 26–28; Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 2 (inv.№ 382), 3 (inv.№ 389), 4 (inv.№ 416), 5 (inv.№ 447), 6 (inv.№ 496), 7 (inv.№ 591), 8 (inv.№ 424), 9 (inv.№ 589), 22 (inv.№ 544), 23 (inv.№ 390), 25 (inv.№ 363); Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village 24 (inv.№ 482) (1–9, 14, 22–25 RHM Vratsa; 10–13, 15–21, 26–28 RHM Montana).



Fig. 8. Pressed shield-shaped belt mounts. *Type II* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 1: (inv. № 387), 2 (inv. № 551), 3 (inv. № 596), 4 (inv. № 677), 5 (inv. № 423), 6 (inv. № 536) (1–6 RHM Vratsa).

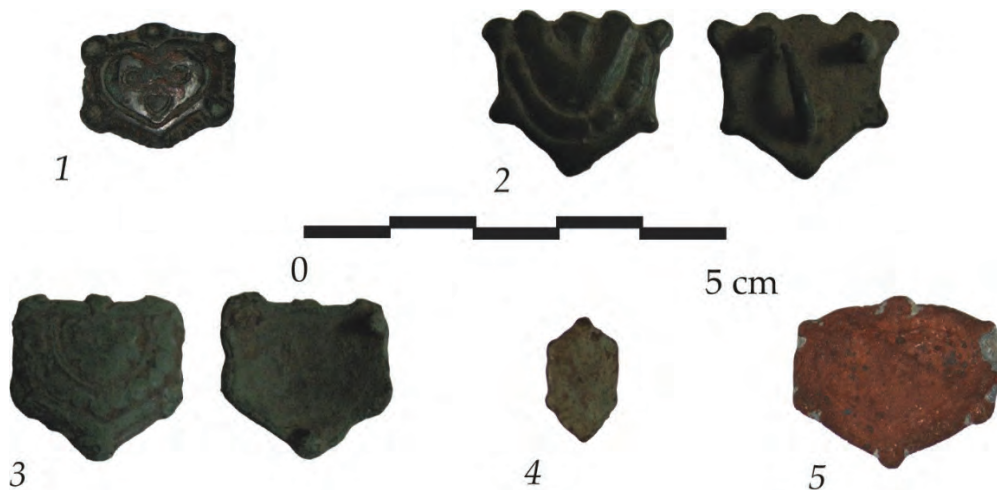


Fig. 9. Shield-shaped belt mounts. *Type II* – Unknown findspot: 1 (inv. № 330), 2–3; Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region 4 (inv. № 483); Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 5 (inv. № 590) (1, 4–5 RHM Vratsa; 2–3 RHM Montana).

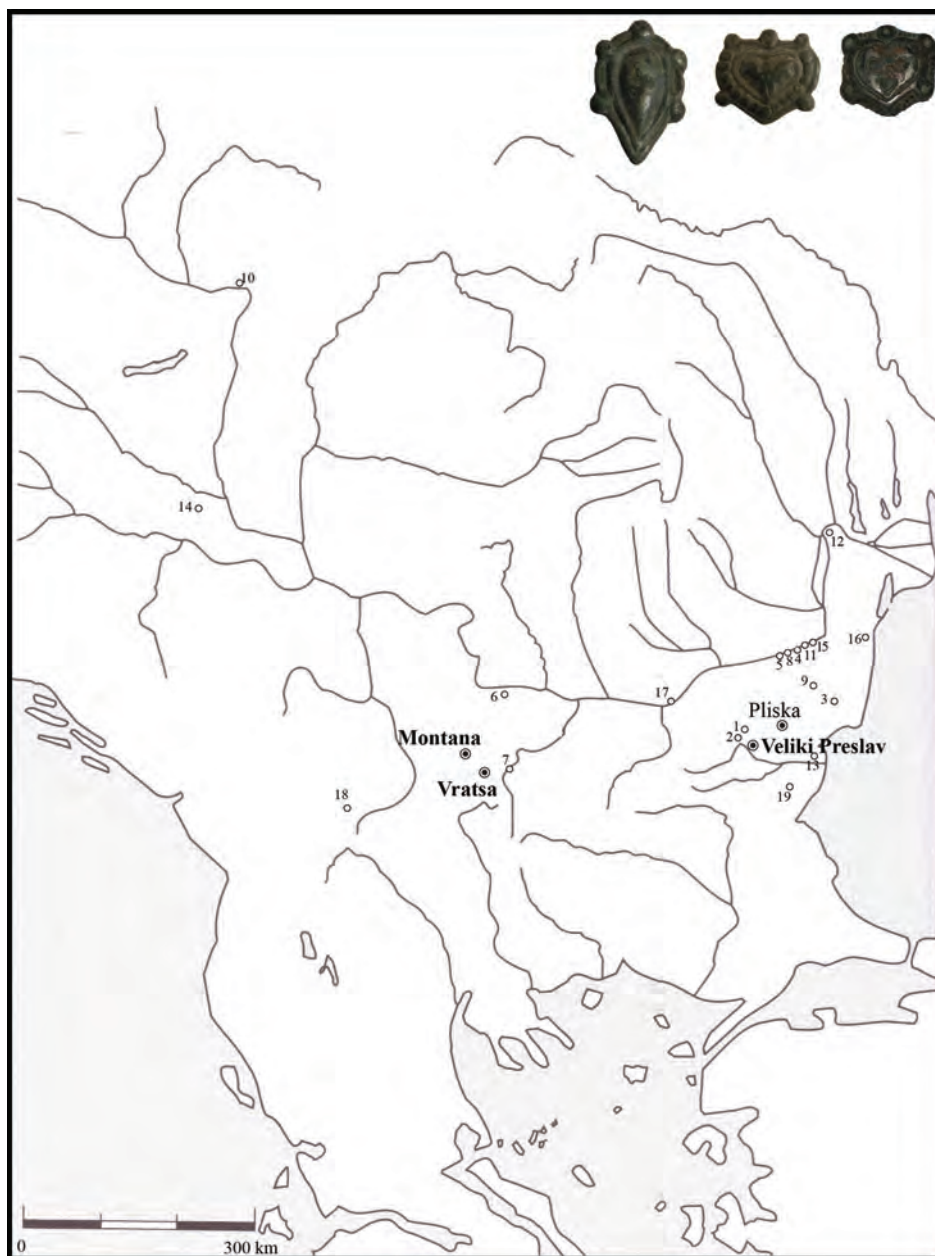


Fig. 10. Distribution map of shield-shaped belt mounts: 1 Novosel, Shumen region; 2 Nadarevo, Targovishte region; 3 Odartsi, Dobrich region; 4 Silistra; 5 Vetren, Varna region; 6 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 7 Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region; 8 Popina, Silistra region; 9 Skala, Dobrich region; 10 Zemplin, Hungary; 11 Păcuil lui Soare, Romania; 12 *Dinogetia*-Garvăn, Romania; 13 Varna; 14 Bâtmonostor, Hungary; 15 Oltina-"Capul dealului", Romania; 16 Valu lui Traian, Romania; 17 Yatus-Krivina, Rousse region; 18 Svrlijgrad, Serbia; 19 Late-antique and medieval fortress Markeli, Bourgas region.

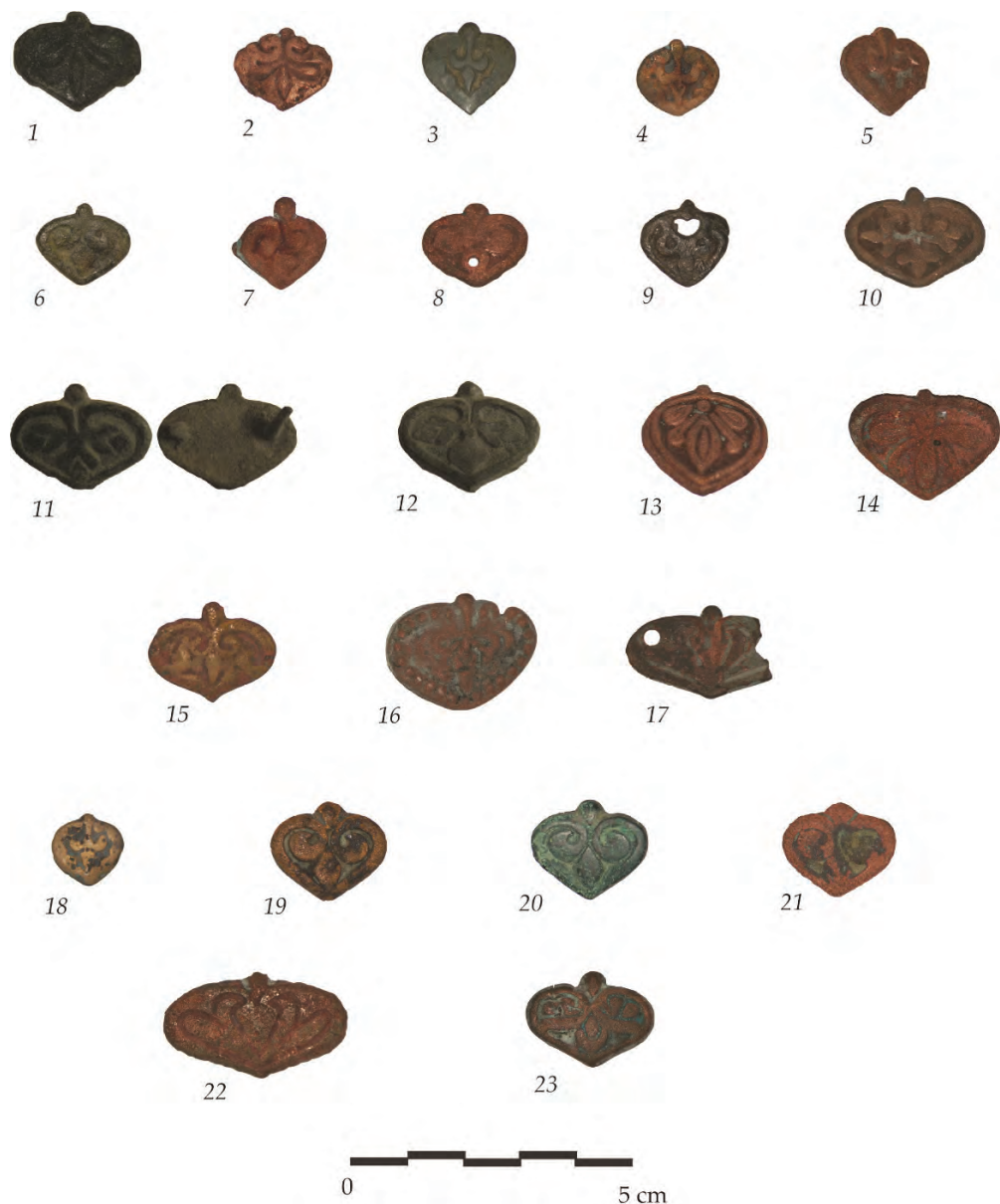


Fig. 11. Heart-shaped belt mounts. *Type I, variante 1* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 1 (inv. № 357), 2 (inv. № 537), 4 (inv. № 554), 5 (inv. № 500), 6 (inv. № 532), 7 (inv. № 553), 8 (inv. № 541), 9 (inv. № 560), 10 (inv. № 425), 13 (inv. № 534), 14 (inv. № 540), 16 (inv. № 381), 17 (inv. № 320), 18 (inv. № 419), 19 (inv. № 422), 21 (inv. № 595), 22 (inv. № 427), 23 (inv. № 594); Unknown findspot: 3 (inv. № 395), 11–12, 15 (inv. № 495); Golyamo Peshtene, Vratsa region 20 (inv. № 570) (1–10, 13–23 RHM Vratsa; 11–12, RHM Montana).

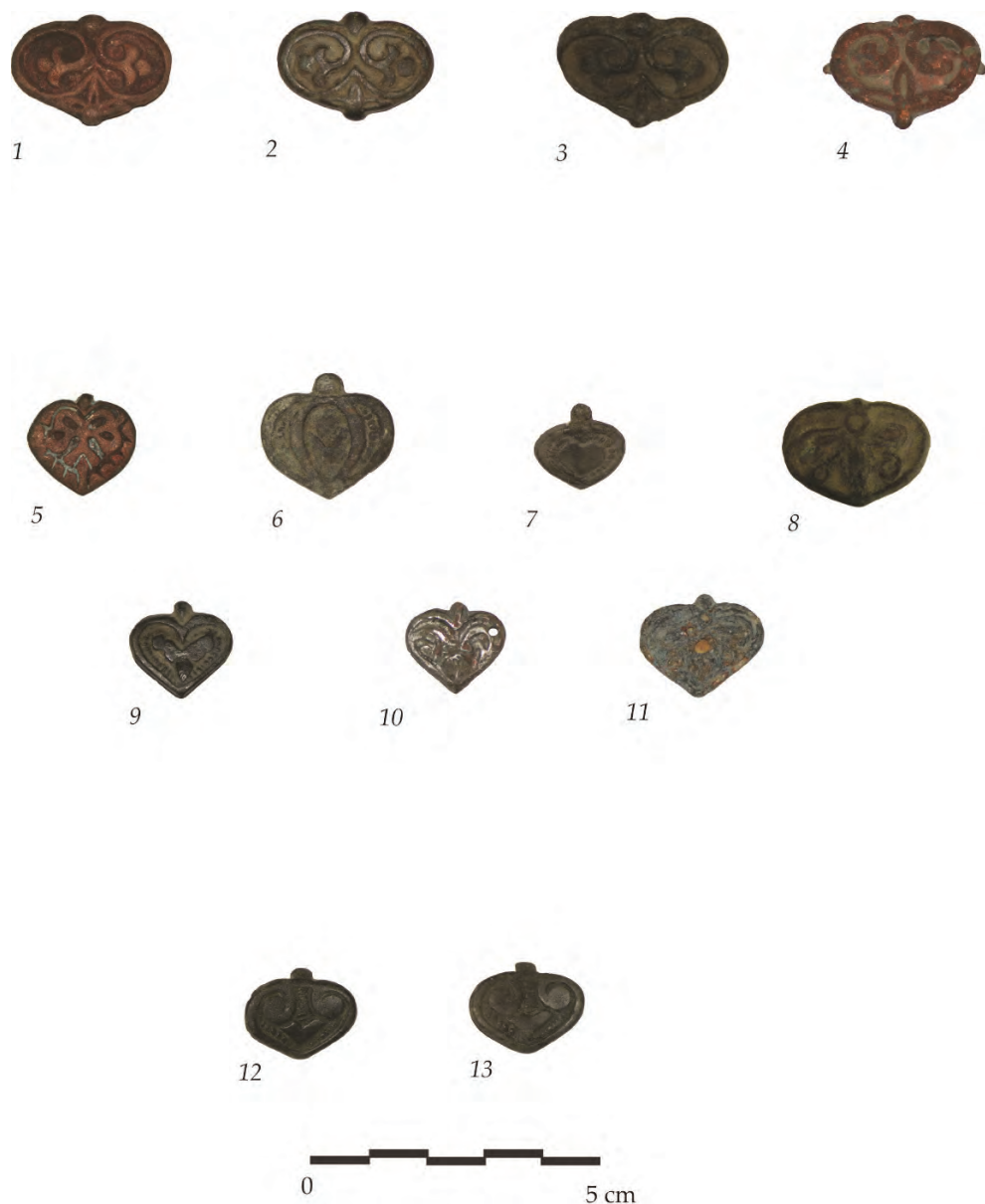


Fig. 12. Heart-shaped belt mounts. *Type I, variante 2* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 1 (inv. № 426), 3 (inv. № 547), 4 (inv. № 588); Golyamo Peshtene village, Vratsa region 2 (inv. № 567); *Type I, variante 3* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 5 (inv. № 448), 7 (inv. № 533), 9 (inv. № 538), 10 (inv. № 539), 12 (inv. № 359), 13 (inv. № 593); Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village 6 (inv. № 452); Unknown findspot 8; Selanovtsi village, Vratsa region 11 (inv. № 314) (1–7, 9–11 RHM Vratsa; 8 RHM Montana).



Fig. 13. Heart-shaped belt mounts. *Type II, variante 1* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 1 (inv. № 369), 2 (inv. № 431), 3 (inv. № 420), 4 (inv. № 493), 6 (inv. № 530), 7 (inv. № 535), 8 (inv. № 543), 10 (inv. № 592); Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village, Vratsa region 5 (inv. № 453); “Kaletu” fortress, near Mezdra, Vratsa region 9 (inv. № 662); Unknown findspot: 11–13, 14 (inv. № 402); *Type II, variante 2* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 15 (inv. № 527); Medieval fortress Vratitsa 16 (inv. № 30); Unknown findspot 17–18 (1–10, 14–16 RHM Vratsa; 11–13, 17–18 RHM Montana).

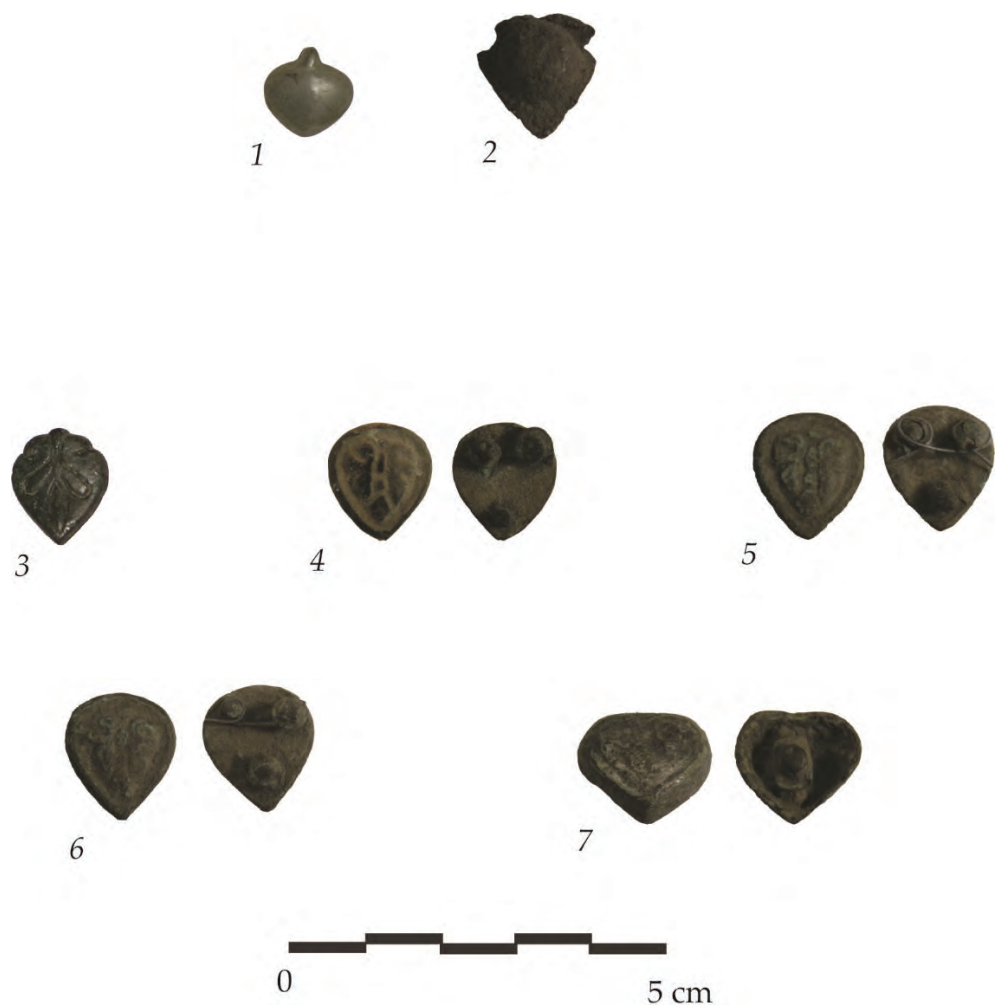


Fig. 14. Heart-shaped belt mounts. *Type II, variante 3* – 1 Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village, Vratsa region (RHM Vratsa, inv. № 670), 2 Unknown findspot (RHM Montana); *Type II, variante 4* – 3 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta (RHM Vratsa, inv. № 587), 4–7 Unknown findspot (RHM Montana).



Fig. 15. Distribution map of heart-shaped belt mounts: 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 2 Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region; 3 Novosel, Shumen region; 4 Nadarevo, Targovishte region; 5 Selanovtzi village, Vratsa region; 6 *Dinogetia*-Garvăn, Romania; 7 Kezel, Hungary; 8 Skala, Dobrich region; 9 Svrlijgrad, Serbia; 10 Late-antique and medieval fortress Markeli, Bourgas region.

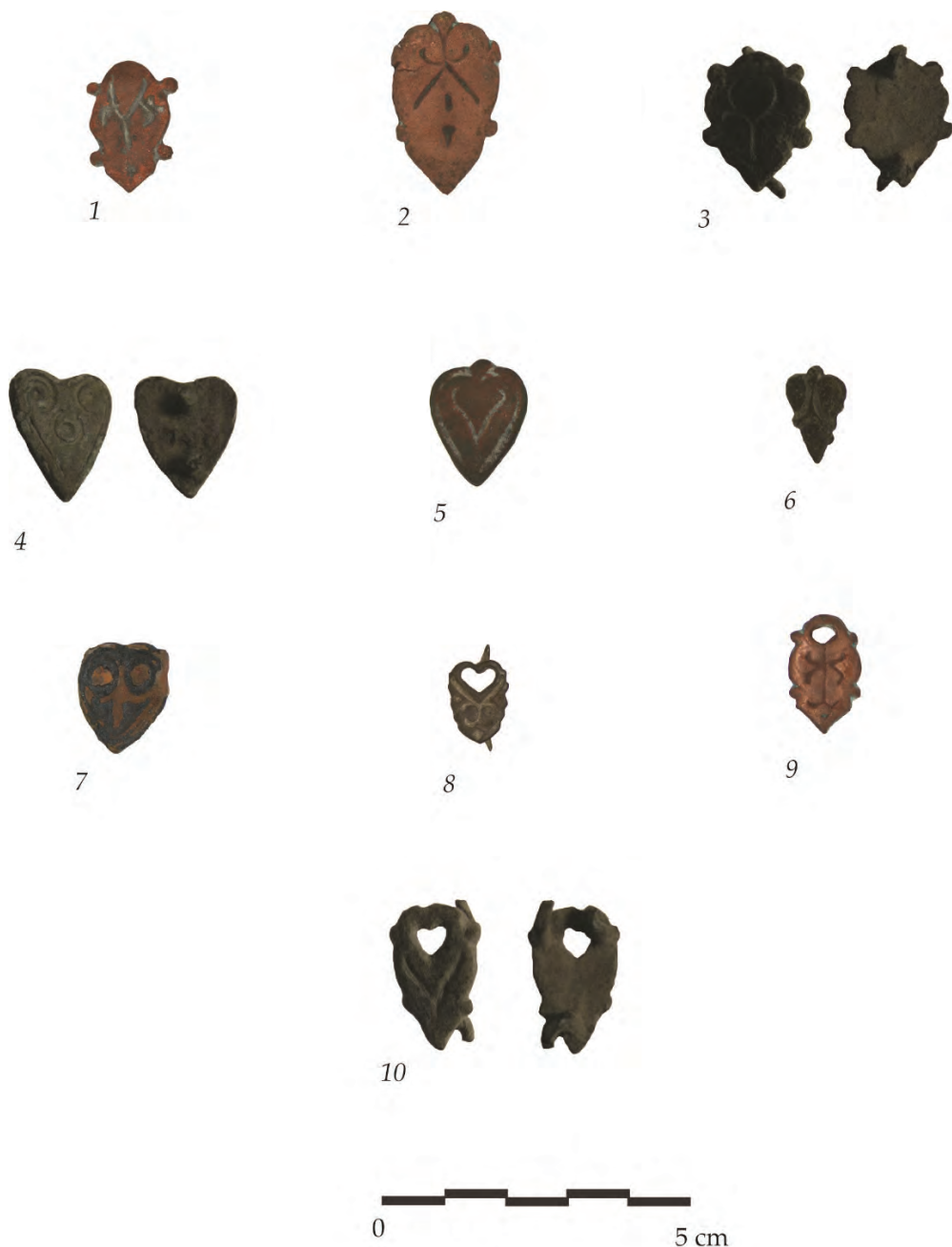


Fig. 16. Leaf-shaped belt mounts with incised decoration. *Type I* – Unknown findspot: 1 (inv. № 401), 3–4, 5 (inv. № 317), 10; Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 2 (inv. № 501), 6 (inv. № 436), 7 (inv. № 365), 9 (inv. № 491); Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village, Vratsa region 8 (inv. № 456) (1–2, 5–9 RHM Vratsa; 3–4, 10 RHM Montana).

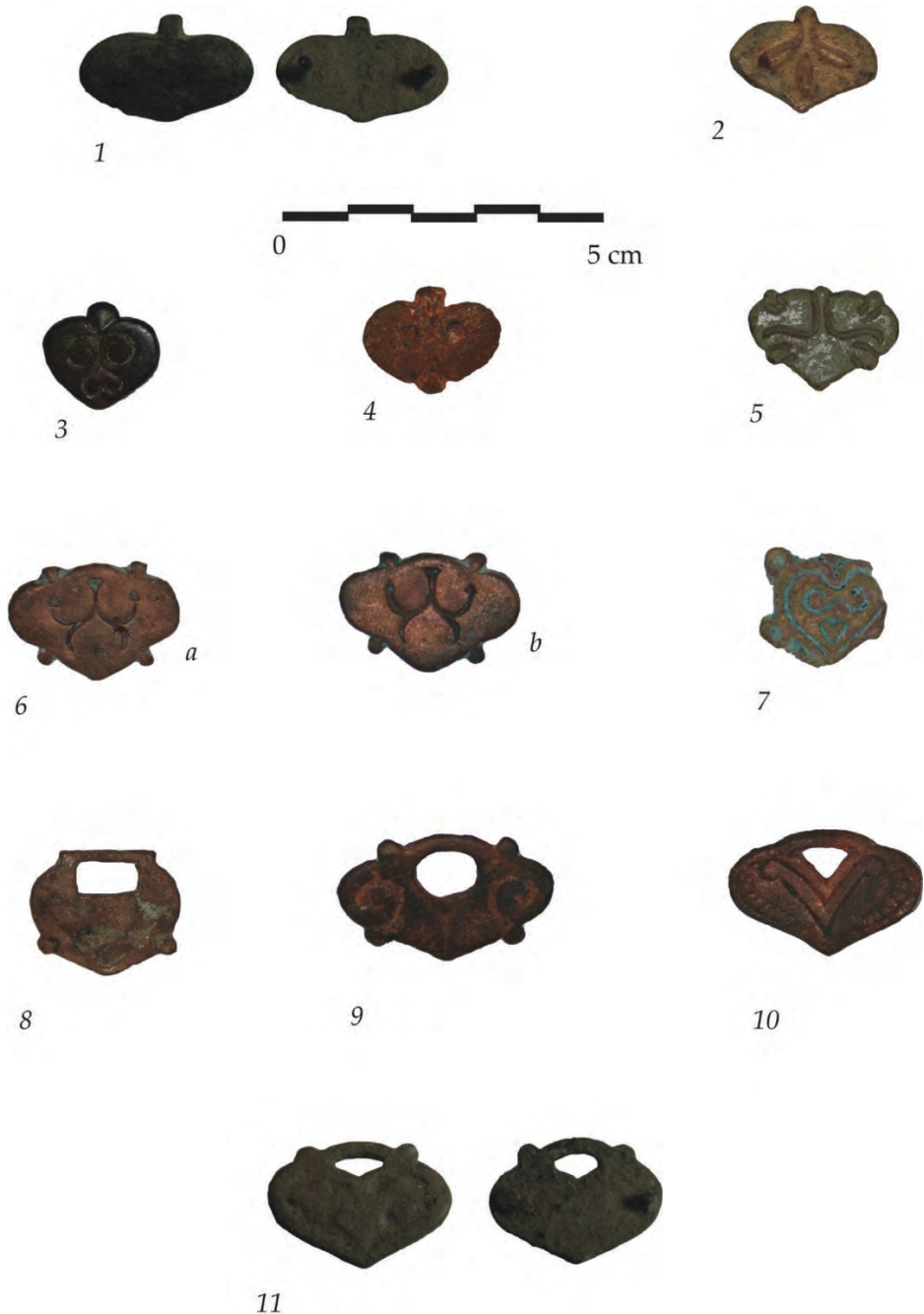


Fig. 17. Leaf-shaped belt mounts with incised decoration. *Type II* – Unknown findspot 1, 3 (inv. № 396), 4 (inv. № 409), 11; Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 2 (inv. № 378), 6 (inv. № 428), 7 (inv. № 366), 8 (inv. № 413), 9 (inv. № 432), 10 (inv. № 433); Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village, Vratsa region 5 (inv. № 478) (2–10 RHM Vratsa; 1, 11 RHM Montana).

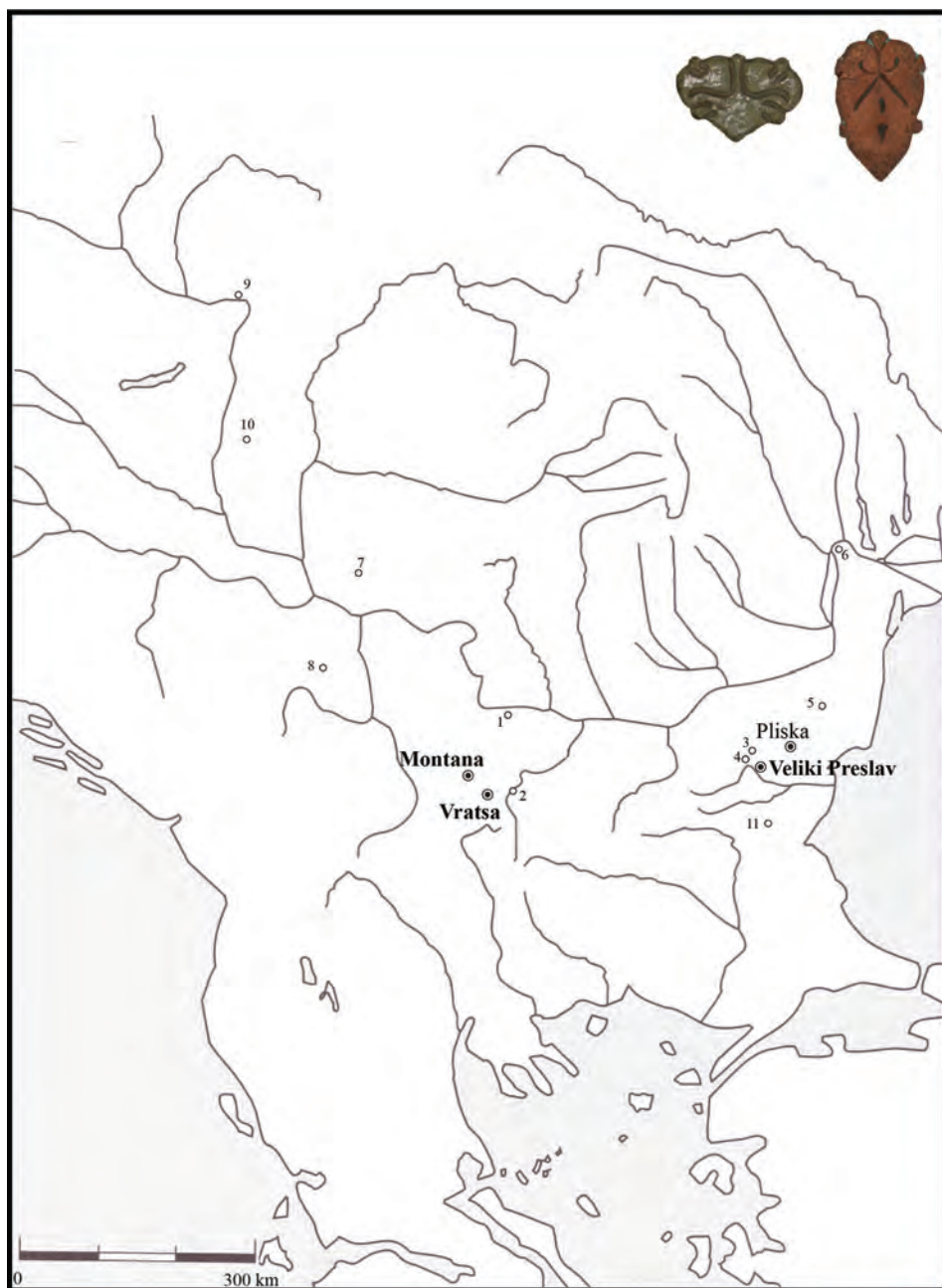


Fig. 18. Distribution map of leaf-shaped belt mounts with incised decoration: 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 2 Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region; 3 Novosel, Shumen region; 4 Nadarevo, Targovishte region; 5 Skala, Dobrich region; 6 *Dinogetia*-Garvăn, Romania; 7 Œetin, Romania; 8 Rudnik, Serbia; 9 Zemplin, Hungary; 10 Kezel, Hungary; 11 Late-antique and medieval fortress Markeli, Bourgas region.



Fig. 19. Leaf-shaped mounts with relief decoration: Unknown findspot 1 (inv.№ 319), 6 (inv.№ 264); Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 2 (inv.№ 414), 3 (inv.№ 435), 5 (inv.№ 531), 7 (inv.№ 368), 8 (inv.№ 379), 9 (inv.№ 388), 10 (inv.№ 528), 11 (inv.№ 559); Stray find from the area between Gigen and Ostrov 4 (inv.№ 470) (1–11 RHM Vratsa).



Fig. 20. Distribution map of leaf-shaped belt mounts with relief decoration: 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 2 Area between Ostrov (Vratsa region) and Gigen (Pleven region); 3 Novosel, Shumen region; 4 Nadarevo, Targovishte region; 5 Varna; 6 Oltina-“Capul dealului”, Romania; 7 Silistra; 8 Adamclisi, Romania; 9 Kezel, Hungary; 10 Late-antique and medieval fortress Markeli, Bourgas region.

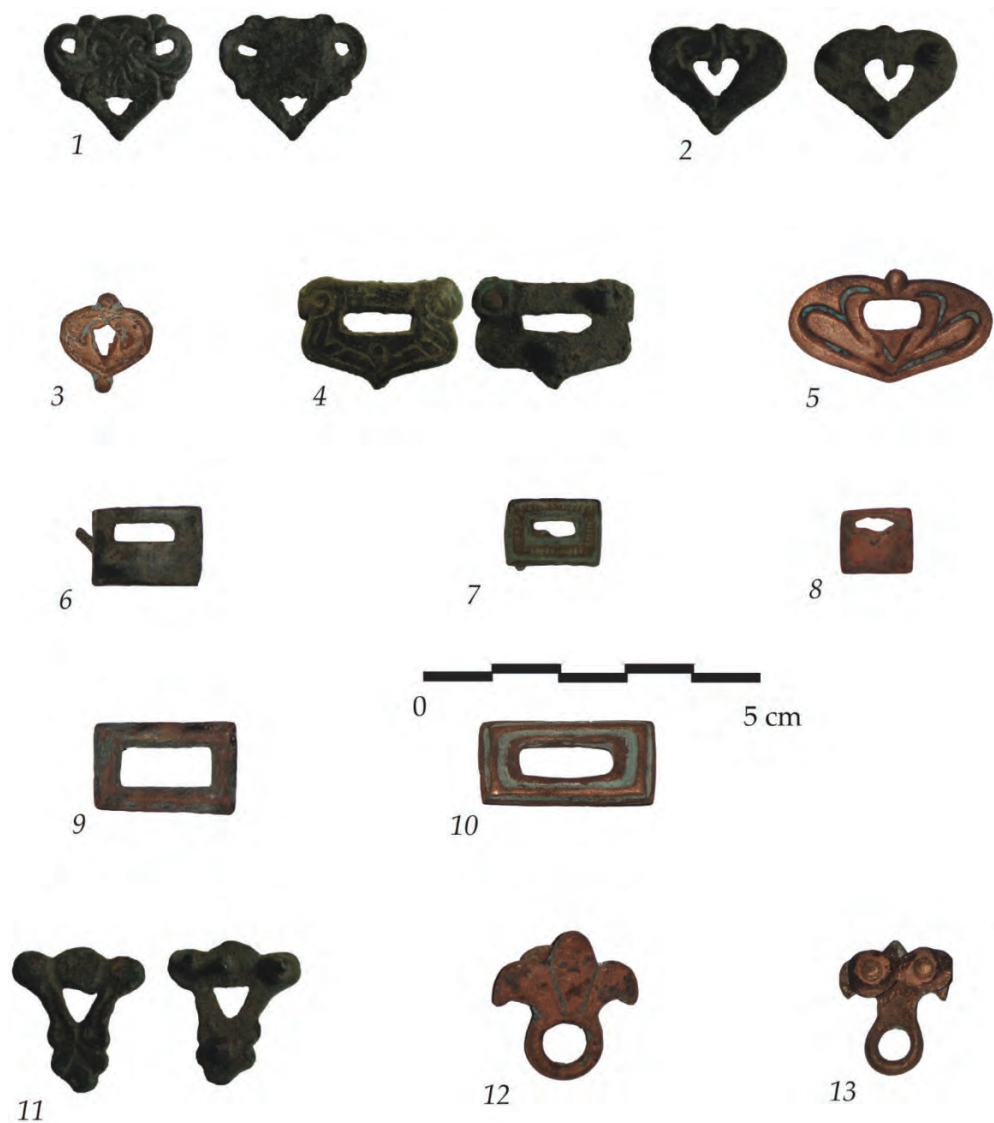


Fig. 21. Openwork belt mounts. *Type I* – Unknown findspot: 1–2, 4; Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 3 (inv.№ 377), 5 (inv.№ 561); *Type II* – Unknown findspot 6 (inv.№ 404); Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village, Vratsa region 7 (inv.№ 455); Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 8: (inv.№ 564), 9 (inv.№ 562), 10 (inv.№ 563); *Type III* – Unknown findspot 11; Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 12 (inv.№ 430), 13 (inv.№ 429) (3, 5–10, 12–13 RHM Vratsa; 1–2, 4, 11 RHM Montana).

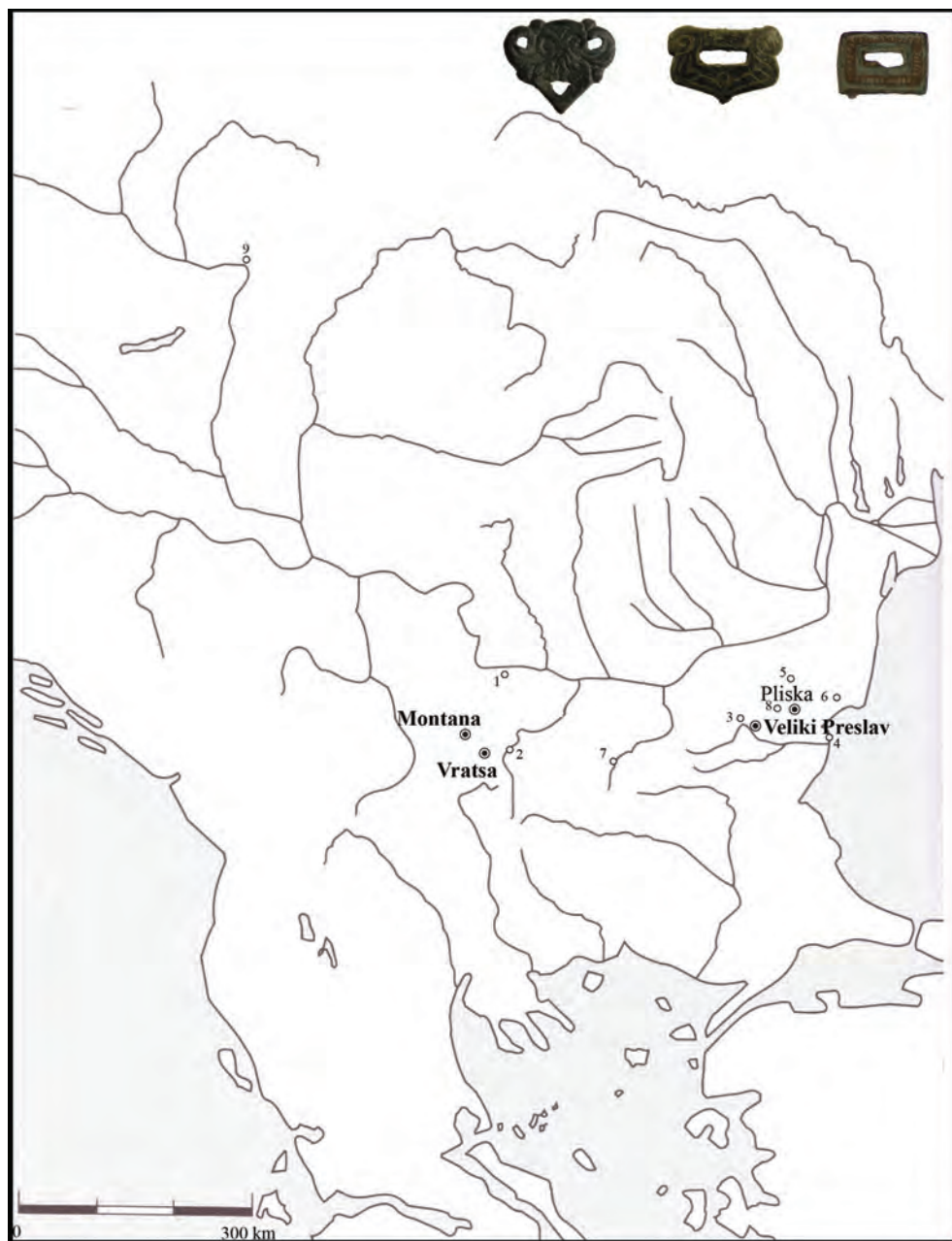


Fig. 22. Distribution map of openwork belt mounts: 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 2 Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region; 3 Nadarevo, Targovishte region; 4 Varna; 5 Balik, Dobrich region; 6 Debrene, Dobrich region; 7 Veliko Tarnovo; 8 Shumen; 9 Karos, Hungary.

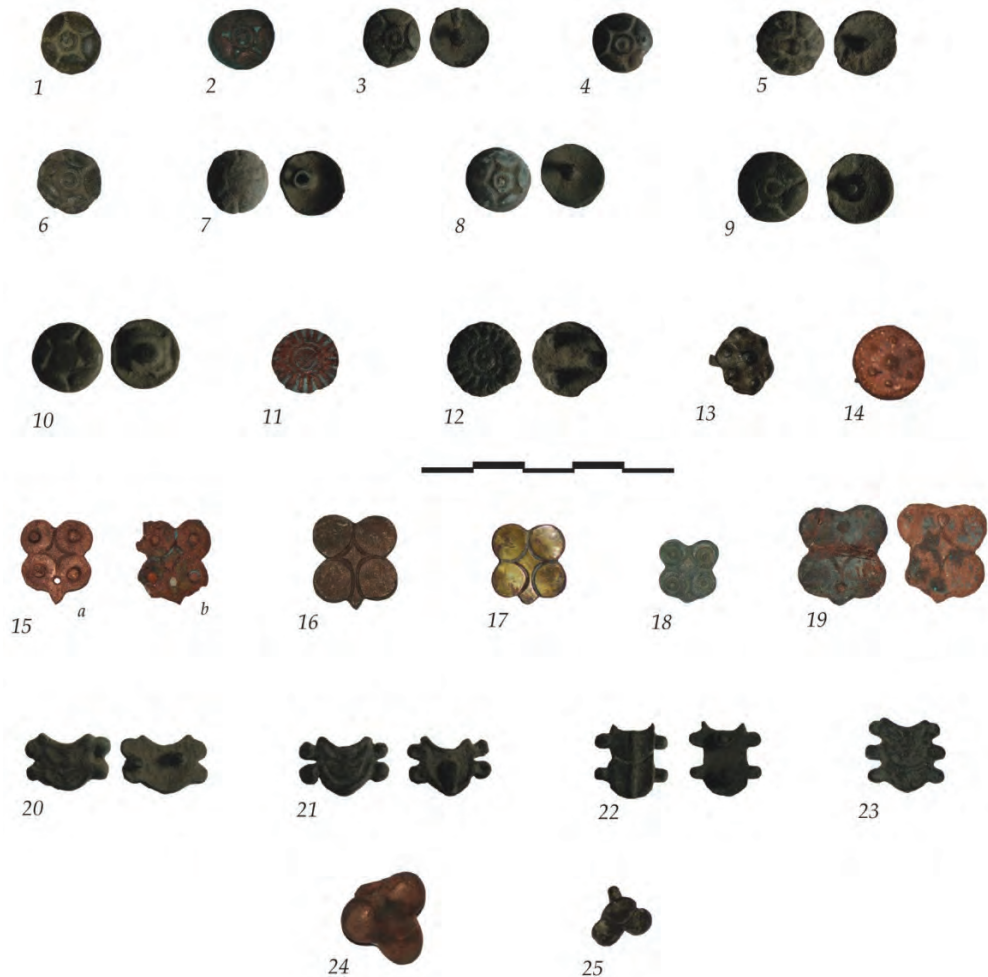


Fig. 23. Geometrically-shaped mounts. *Type I* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 1: (inv. № 397), 2 (inv. № 510), 6 (inv. № 441), 11 (inv. № 439), 13 (inv. № 440), 14 (inv. № 384); Unknown findspot: 3–5, 7–10, 12; *Type II* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta: 15a–b (inv. № 385), 16 (inv. № 438), 17 (inv. № 558), 18 (inv. № 556), 19 (inv. № 367); *Type III* – Unknown findspot 20–22; Medieval fortress “Golemiya grad”, near Staro selo village, Vratsa region 23 (inv. № 461); *Type IV* – Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta 24 (inv. № 555); Stray find from the land of the village of Golyamo Peshtene, Vratsa region 25 (inv. № 568) (1–2, 6, 11, 13–19, 23–25 RHM Vratsa; 3–5, 7–10, 12, 20–22 RHM Montana).



Fig. 24. Distribution map of geometrically-shaped mounts: 1 Medieval settlement over the ancient Augusta, Vratsa region; 2 Medieval fortress "Golemiya grad", near Staro selo village, Vratsa region; 3 Nadarevo, Targovishte region; 4 Golyamo Peshtene, Vratsa region; 5 Late-antique and medieval fortress Markeli, Bourgas region; 6 Balik, Dobrich region; 7 Starmen, Rousse region; 8 Varna; 9 Provadia, Varna region; 10 Okorsh, Silistra region.