

OPENWORK SLOTTED STRAP TIPS FROM NORTHEASTERN BULGARIA

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Cuvinte-cheie: *vârf de curea ajurat, palmetă, decor în formă de S, nord-estul Bulgariei.*

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Rezumat: *Subiectul acestui articol este o colecție de 12 noi vârfuri de curele ajurate în „stilul grifon și tipril” găsite în nord-estul Bulgariei. Până în prezent, doar șase astfel de piese sunt cunoscute și publicate, cu frunze de palmier „bandajate”, ceea ce face ca acest grup de piese să reprezinte una dintre rarele apariții din Bulgaria. Lucrul comun care unește toate aceste vârfuri de curele, în afară de partea de la bază, este compoziția frunzelor de palmier „bandajate” în diferite combinații de frunze și volute curbate formând un buchet cu două fețe la vârful curelei. Piesele cu fante găsite în Bulgaria diferă de modelul original al grupului Mihldorff-Skalyste și nu urmează direct ornamentația acestuia. În practică, se formează o nouă compoziție, care dezvoltă într-un mod nou prototipul dat, care, împreună cu forma vârfului de curea ajurat, formează un nou grup local de artefacte. Fiecare vârf al curelei prezintă o interpretare diferită a motivelor cunoscute și rareori se întâlnesc două obiecte total identice.*

Toate vârfurile de curele ajurate prezentate aparțin practicii locale de bijuterii, lucru confirmat de faptul că nu a fost găsit un astfel de exemplar în afara țării. Aceste piese susțin într-un mod convingător teza despre originea bulgară a vârfurilor de curea cu fante, care nu au analogii în afara zonei Dunării de Jos. Pe măsură ce erau turnate, seturile de centură sunt cel mai masiv material și trăsătura principală a celui de-al doilea Chaganat avar, de la vârfurile de curea din secolul al VII-lea până la începutul secolului al IX-lea, în timp ce turnarea ajurată cu creștături este specifică metalurgiei bulgare, din secolul al VIII-lea până la începutul secolului al X-lea. Unele dintre ele sunt de calitate

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scăzută și rudimentare, altele sunt precise și oferă un desen. Decorul este în conformitate cu practica locală a producției de seturi de curele și cu poziția importantă a vârfurilor de curea ajurate cu fante în ea. Ele se disting de piesele avară timpurii (a doua jumătate a secolului al VII-lea - începutul secolului al VIII-lea), care reflectă perioada avară timpurie și mijlocie, precum și de cele care aparțin stilului avar târziu, al celui de-al doilea Chaganat avar, de vârfurile de curea din secolele VIII-IX. Între vârfurile de curea avară predominante sunt cele mici de casetă, care diferă semnificativ de vârfurile de curea cu fante masive, din Bulgaria.

Asemănările și diferențele sunt rezultatul interpretării individuale a motivelor și tradițiilor în producția și utilizarea curelelor decorate populare în moda eurasiatică. Acest lucru este valabil și pentru perioada ulterioară secolului al IX-lea, când pe teritoriul Bulgariei medievale, în secolul al X-lea, începe producția organizată la scară largă de turnare de seturi de curele și tot felul de produse populare. Ornamentația lor este semnificativ diferită de cea a curelelor maghiare, care sunt din nou manifestarea diferitelor regândiri ale trăsăturilor și influențelor stilistice.

Cele două grupuri principale de piese, vârfurile de curea cu fante deschise, au datări diferite. Vârfurile de curea cu fante din bronz „stil grifon și tipril”, inclusiv cele cu palmete „bandajate”, au fost produse în perioada caracteristică stilului - a doua jumătate a secolului al VIII-lea până la începutul secolului al IX-lea. Vârfurile de curea anterioare sunt cele cu ornamente de diferite forme și dimensiuni, mai ales vârfurile de curea din secolul al VII-lea - prima jumătate și mijlocul secolului al VIII-lea. Similară este datarea a numeroase descoperiri, dintre care unele au fost discutate, de pe teritoriul Chaganatului avar și al stepelor eurasiatice. Vârfurile de curea de plumb cu fante dese reprezintă și ele produse locale, dar sunt o replică ceva mai târzie a decorațiunilor ajurate. Ele sunt preponderente în principal de la mijlocul și din a doua jumătate a secolului al IX-lea până la începutul secolului al X-lea.

Abstract: The subject of the present article is a collection of 12 new openwork strap tip in the “griffin and tipril style” found in Northeastern Bulgaria. Up to now, only six slotted openwork with “bandaged” palm leaves are known and published, making this group of monuments one of the rare occurrences on the Bulgarian lands. The common thing that unites all these strap tips, apart from the slice at the base, is the composition of the “bandaged” palm leaves in different combinations of leaves and curved volutes forming a two-sided bouquet at the strap tip. The monuments with slits found in Bulgaria differ from the original model of the Mihldorff-Skalyste group and do not directly follow its ornamentation. In practice, a new composition is being formed, which develops in a new way the given prototype, which, along with the shape of the slotted openwork strap tips, forms a new local group of monuments. Each strap tip presents a different interpretation of the known motifs and rarely meets two totally identical objects.

All represented openwork strap tips belong to the local jewellery practice and confirmation is the fact that no such specimen was found outside the country. These monuments prove in a convincing way the thesis about the Bulgarian origin of the belt strap tips with slits, which have no analogue outside the territory of the Lower Danube. As you cast the seat belts are the most massive material and the main trait of the monuments of the Second Avar Khaganate from the strap tip of the 7th century to the beginning of the 9th century, thus the casting slotted openwork are specific of the Bulgarian metalwork from the 8th century to the beginning of the 10th century. Some of

them are of low quality and primitive, others are precise and give a drawing. The decoration is in line with the local practice in the production of belt sets and the important position of the slotted openwork strap tips in it. They are distinguished from the Early Avar monuments (the second half of the 7th century - beginning of the 8th century) referring to the Early and Middle Avar period, as well as those belonging to the late Avar style of the Second Avar Khaganate from the strap tip of the 8th-9th centuries. The predominant among the Avar strap tips are the small cassette straps, which significantly differs from the Bulgarian massive slotted strap tips.

The similarities and differences are the result of the individual interpretation of motifs and traditions in the production and use of the popular Eurasian fashion decorated belts. This is also true for the later period after the 9th century, when on the territory of medieval Bulgaria in the 10th century starts the large-scale organized production of casting belt sets and all kinds of popular products. Their ornamentation is significantly different from that of the Hungarian belts, which are once again the manifestation of the different rethinking of stylistic features and influences.

The two main groups of monuments - the opened slotted belt strap tips have different dates. The "griffin and tipril style" bronze slotted strap tips, including those with "bandaged" palmettes, were produced in the period characteristic of the style - the second half of the 8th century to the beginning of the 9th century. The earlier strap tips are those with ornamentation of various shapes and sizes - mostly at the strap tip of the 7th century - the first half and the middle of the 8th century. Similar is the date of the numerous finds, some of which were spoken, from the territory of the Avar Khaganate and the Eurasian steppes. Dense slotted lead belt strap tips are once again locally produced, but they are a bit later replica of the openwork decorations. Their prevalence is mainly in the middle and second half of the 9th century to early 10th century.

The subject of the present work is a collection of 12 new slotted openwork strap with plant decoration of the "bandaged palmette" type in different variants and several strap tips with geometric decoration. All strap tips originate from Northeastern Bulgaria. Some of them are owned by the Shumen Museum, others belong to a private collection. So far, only six slit openwork strap tips with "bandaged" palm leaves are known and published, which makes this group of artefacts one of the rare ones in the Bulgarian lands. Here I do not dwell on the other varieties of slotted strap tips - openwork with "S" -shaped decoration and those with griffins, which are the subject of another study. I also consider separately the slotted solid lead strap tips, which differ significantly from those mentioned and should be presented separately. The connecting element is only the slot at the base. Both the material of construction (lead alloy) and the shape (solid, without openwork cutouts) are different.

The previously published slotted strap tips with "bandaged" palmettes originate and are stored in various museums - NAIM-BAS, Historical museum - Vratsa, Harlets village, Vratsa region, National museum in Sofia, Regional museum in Varna, Pliska¹. Another such nozzle was found in the pagan

¹ INKOVA 2001, p. 91, tab. III/1; STANILOV 2000, p. 173, fig. 2; STANILOV 2006, p. 170, fig. 5/1-5, 7.

necropolis of the Sultana² (**Fig. 1**). The strap tips have at the top a heart-shaped medallion of lastar, which closes a three-leafed palmette, above the top is bandaged and above it is a four-leafed palm leaves, limited by the base. The common denominator that unites all these artefacts, except for the slit at the base, is the composition of the "bandaged" palm leaves in various combinations of leaves and twisted volutes at the end, forming a two-sided bouquet. It should be clarified here that the NIM strap tip is solid, not openwork³. This form refers to the group of solid strap tips, which were mentioned as a separate group of artefacts.

It has been established that the plant decoration finds parallels with the large group of belt fittings from the areas of the Volga, Crimea, the Caucasus and the Middle Danube⁴. Similar ornamentation is found on the belt strap tips of necropolises and accidental finds in the Southern Urals - Nevolino, Agafonovo, Verkh-Saya, Brody⁵, the basin of the Middle Volga - Lyada⁶, Novinki II⁷, Kerch Peninsula⁸ and etc.⁹ developed variant of the plant motif "bandaged" palmettes is found at the ends of the necropolis Skalyste (burials 128 and 391)¹⁰. Close parallels are known from the Second Avar Khaganate from the beginning of the 8th century - the necropolises Chatai and Radvan above the Danube - Zhitavska ton, the necropolis Holiare¹¹ (**Fig. 2**).

There are different names for this group of monuments, but it is most often referred to as Micheldorf-Skalyste¹². The motif on the variety of garnishes, including buckles, appliques and strap tips is the same - "tied" to the middle leaf palm leaves with alternating straight and rolled leaves. There is no doubt about the dating of the garnishes at the end of the 7th century and the first half of the 8th century. The question of the origin of the main motif is controversial - the "attached" multi-leafed palm leaves in a "bouquet"¹³. The thesis about the Central Asian origin of ornamentation, spread during the resettlement of tribes and groups from Greater Bulgaria, which gradually displaces traditional overlaps in research on the topic (H. Henning, E. Goldina, V. Kovalevskaya, F. Daim), is becoming more and more convincing Byzantine genesis¹⁴.

However, the slotted monuments found in Bulgaria differ from the original model of the Micheldorf-Skalyste group and do not directly follow its

² MITREA 1988, p. 117-118, 134, pl. 13T/104-4.

³ INKOVA 2001, p. 88, tab. I/1.

⁴ TOTEV 2000, p. 61-73.

⁵ GOLDINA 1992, p. 498, 504, Taf. 1/1-4, 5.

⁶ SMIRNOV 1952, p. 117, tab. 22/7.

⁷ BAGAUTINOV, BOGACHEV & ZUBOV 1998, p. 93, fig. 15/5, p. 97, fig. 17/9; BAGAUTINOV, BOGACHEV, ZUBOV & STASHENKOV 2001, p. 31.

⁸ AJBABIN 1982, p. 179, fig. 6/10.

⁹ STANILOV 2000, p. 163, fig. 3.

¹⁰ VEJMARN & AJBABIN 1993, p. 17, fig. 11, p. 92, fig. 64/30.

¹¹ ZABOJNIK 2000, p. 334, Abb. 1-2; ZABOJNIK 1985, Taf. 3/22; TOČIK 1968, Taf. LXXVI/40; IVANOV 2000, p. 69, tab. 1/2-3.

¹² On the topic of the name of the group of monuments: STANILOV 2006, p. 160.

¹³ For details on the origin of the type: IVANOV 2000, p. 61-73; PLETNIOV 2009, p. 109.

¹⁴ HENING 1979, p. 102; GOLDINA 1992, Taf. I; GOLDINA 1979, p. 79-90; KOVALEVSKAJA 1979, p. 22; DAIM 2002, p. 88-204.

ornamentation¹⁵. In practice, a new composition is created, which develops in a new way the given prototype, which together with the shape of the belt strap tips with slits, forms a new local group of monuments. Each belt end presents a different interpretation of the known motifs and two completely identical objects are rare. Confirmations of this are the new 12 slotted nozzles presented here.

The first nozzle has a straight base, a rectangular cut and a rounded strap tip (Inv. no. 22673). Historical museum in Shumen. Dimensions: length 4.8 cm, width 2-2.2 cm, thickness 0.2-0.25 cm (**Fig. 3.1**). The openwork decoration consists of a ten-leaf attached palm leaves, composed of five double semi-palm leavess. The lower opposite leaves of the two pairs of palm leaves at the top are curled inwards and form a heart-shaped cut, one of the upper ones rests on the frame and the other is curled towards the central stem, the attachment in the middle being emphasized by two parallel incised lines. The leaves at the base are more richly shaped. The lower ones touch the frame and bend to the stem. The upper ones are elongated and form a heart-shaped cut with a smooth "S"-shaped outline under the slit. From the stem of the attached palm leaves in the middle comes a dense heart-shaped bud. The whole plant composition resembles a dancing female Figure. An embossed edge runs along the outline, separated from the image field by an incised line. On the front part are incised lines, giving volume to the leaves and the whole composition. The outline of the details at the end and on the entire surface on the reverse side has a punctured line of incisions made after casting with a sharp tool.

The second slotted strap tip is similar to the first (**Fig. 3.2**). Dimensions: length 4.5 cm, width 1.8-2 cm, thickness 0.25 cm. Inv. no. 22675. Historical museum in Shumen. Above the straight base is a rectangular cutout, the outer frame of which is slightly bevelled at one end, the top has a smooth oval shape. The composition, locked in the dense frame of the outline, consists of ten-leafed "attached" palm leaves, whose lower leaves, at the top, form a heart, accentuated by openwork of round slits. The leaves above the heart shape are short and reach the straight sides of the frame. Above the middle "attached" part is the second part of the composition - three pairs of opposite leaves, the upper ones also curved in a heart shape. The individual elements of the plant ornament are accentuated by round holes / cutouts, symmetrical located over the entire surface of the nozzle. A lanceolate bud emerges in the middle between the leaves. The Figure here also resembles an anthropomorphic shape, but unlike the one on the first strap tip, it is not moved and curved to the side, but static and centrally located along the middle axis of the object.

The third strap tip is also a variant of the previous two, but here the composition is slightly different (**Fig. 3.3**). Dimensions: length 4.8 cm, width 1.1-1.3 cm, thickness 0.25 cm. The object is a discarded product with disturbed proportions and uncast horizontal side, limiting the rectangular slot above the base. The top is rounded with a slightly disturbed outline. The plant decoration consists of ten-leafed "attached" palmettes. The lower double leaves (double semi-palm leavess) at the top lock a heart-shaped cut, above which a second one of the

¹⁵ AJBABIN 1982, p. 179, fig. 6.

two double semi-palm leavess at the base is formed in a mirror image to the base. The other leaves are symmetrically arranged and have a different shape, emphasized by the openwork holes on the surface of the strap tip. Here the composition does not resemble so clearly an anthropomorphic Figure similar to the objects presented, but can be considered a stylized version of the same ornamentation.

The next strap tip also partially resembles the first two, but the composition is much more stylized and simplified (**Fig. 3.4**). Dimensions: length 4.5 cm, width 1.4-1.5 cm, thickness 0.2 cm. It is an elongated shape with a straight base and a wide trapezoidal cut with two "ears", a continuation of the lateral straight sides, issuing be above it and a rounded top at the bottom. The decoration consists of eight-leafed palm leavess, whose two leaves at the lower end form a heart-shaped openwork shape, divided into three fields by cutouts - horizontal rectangular with rounded sides at the top and two triangular above it. The two leaves above them are shortened and are parallel to the frame. The other four are symmetrically located on the middle axis in the direction from the middle to the base and are separated from each other by cutouts with different outlines and sizes. The whole plant composition resembling a tree (the "tree of life") is included in a dense frame. The difference between the front and the back is clearly expressed, as the former is additionally treated with a sharp tool and the surface is polished.

The slotted strap tips from the Varna Museum, Regional museum in Vratsa and the village of Harlets, Vratsa region, are similar to the presentations. (**Fig. 1, 2-3, 5**). As similar as their elements are, each of them presents a different version of the composition "attached" palm leavess. This, in turn, suggests the variety of models on which the slotted strap tips are made in our country. Such an openwork strap tip originates from burial 384 in the Skalistin necropolis, dated to the second half of the 8th century - beginning of the 9th century¹⁶ (**Fig. 4.1**). Its suspension is hinged, but not with a slot, but with pins at both ends of the base. A belt set with openwork ornaments, found at burial 116 from the necropolis at Ciglani near Vrbas, Serbia, dates back to the 8th century¹⁷.

An even more stylized version of the composition is offered by the next openwork strap tip (**Fig. 3.5**). The rectangular cut above the right base is not properly delineated, the outer frame is curved, without a delineated "ear" at one end, the strap tip is wide and slightly curved in the middle. The object is a discarded product and there are no traces of additional processing and use. Dimensions: length 2.8 cm, width 1.2-1.3 cm, thickness 0.2 cm. The leaves of the ten-leafed "attached" palm leaves are outlined with embossed lines, closing the slit holes on the surface of the object. The openwork openings have a different shape, as the middle leaves are round, and at the base the opening resembles an equilateral triangle.

Similar stylized geometric ornamentation is observed on a nozzle from Brusyany¹⁸ (**Fig. 5.1**). A similar openwork cassette strap tip, fastened with pins,

¹⁶ VEJMARN & AJBABIN 1993, p. 88, fig. 61/26.

¹⁷ SANDOR 1971, p. 252, tab. XXXV/116, 1-8.

¹⁸ BAGAUTINOV, BOGACHEV & ZUBOV 1998, p. 93, fig. 15/5, p. 97, fig. 17/9.

was found at the necropolis in Komarno (burial 78) from the second half of the 8th century¹⁹ (**Fig. 4.3**). The same periodic openwork strap tip with geometric decoration of checkerboard round holes of different sizes from Mikulcice belongs to the same period²⁰ (**Fig. 4.4**).

The next openwork strap tip offers a completely different composition (**Fig. 3.6**). Dimensions: length 4.8 cm, width 1.4-1.7 cm, thickness 0.2 cm. Inv. no. 22674. Historical museum in Shumen. Its shape is elongated with a narrow rectangular cut above the base, protruding "ears" different in length beyond its outline and a rounded strap tip. The composition is three-part, divided into three fields of transverse embossed stripes, in which are placed eight-leafed palm leavess with semicircular lateral outer leaves, closing the motif in a circle and forming a light heart-shaped fold at the upper end. Below them, the short lower leaves, reaching the outer semicircle, curl in a mirror. Along the vertical axis are the other two pairs of leaves, highlighted by buds above the pointed strap tip in the middle. Along the outline of the object passes a dense embossed frame.

Similar cassette strap tips with stylized attached palmettes are known from the Tiszafured complexes²¹ and Dévaványa in Hungary²² (**Fig. 4.5**). At the Late Avar necropolis near Žitavska ton, Slovakia, a whole range of such garnishes were found - trapezoidal hinged appliques and strap tips fastened with pins and rivets²³. A large openwork strap tip with this type of decoration was found at the Uherské Hradiště complex, Moravia, Czech Republic (**Fig. 4.6**)²⁴. A variant of three longitudinally rounded heart-shaped compositions composed of attached palm leavess with inwardly curved leaves is observed on the strap tip of the necropolis in Malaya Ryazan²⁵ (**Fig. 5.2**).

The next openwork strap tip offers a stylized version of the "attached" palm leaves composition (**Fig. 3.7**). Dimensions: length 5 cm, width 1.4-1.6 cm, thickness 0.2 cm. The strongly elongated and narrow shape ends with a straight base and a trapezoidal cutout with rounded corners above it and a rounded strap tip. Of importance are the traces of the use of the nozzle, which are visible not only on the surface but also on the outside of the slot. Traces of its hinged attachment to the main part of the gasket with the help of narrow metal strips have remained on the metal at both ends. This circumstance is an important reference for the reconstruction of this type of slotted strap tips to the belt set.

The decoration consists of two "attached" palm leavess, located one below the other along the axis of the object and separated by an embossed frame parallel to the straight base. The motif has a narrow elongated stem, two pairs of oppositely curled leaves and two pointed buds between them, and such a base is not pronounced. The openwork cutouts are large and wide and predominate over

¹⁹ TRUGLY 1987, p. 320, taf. XXI/27.

²⁰ PROFANOVA 1992, p. 738, taf. 24, 23.

²¹ GAVRITUCHIN 2001, p. 56, fig. 9/25; GARAM 1995.

²² GARAM, KOVRIG, SZABO & TOROK 1975, p. 129, Fig. 5, 25, 13.

²³ BUBINSKY-KRICHKA 1956, p. 110, taf. XVII/1-10.

²⁴ PROFANOVA 1992, p. 747, taf. 33C/13.

²⁵ BAGAUTINOV, BOGACHEV & ZUBOV 1998, p. 93, fig. 5/2, p. 97, fig. 8.

the dense outline of the plant decoration. The whole composition is included in the double embossed frame of the object.

Close to the one presented with insignificant differences is the openwork nozzle without traces of use from the fund of Historical museum in Shumen (**Fig. 3.8**). Dimensions: length 4.2 cm, width 1.3-1.6 cm, thickness 0.25 cm. Inv. no. 22594. The shape is elongated with a straight base, a slightly curved trapezoidal cutout and a slightly curved strap tip. The decoration here also consists of two pairs of attached palmettes, located one above the other on the middle vertical axis, but here the leaves are denser and roughly outlined, with a disturbed shape and symmetry and weakly pronounced strap tips between them. The two fields with the palmettes are separated by a narrow cut with an irregular shape, in contrast to the front strap tip, where the palm leavess are separated by two openwork symmetrical cuts and an embossed frame between them.

Similar ornaments are found on openwork strap tips from the late Avar era 8th - early 9th century, such as those of burials 106 and 116 at the necropolis Feserlak, Shomod region²⁶ (**Fig. 6**), Vesznek necropolis (burial 58), etc.²⁷ Several such belt sets were found at the necropolis next to the Slovak shipyard in Komarno (second half of the 8th century - beginning of the 9th century), (burials 21, 24, 78)²⁸. From the necropolis to Žitavska ton (burial 31), near the complex in Komarno, a similar belt region originates²⁹. Slotted nozzle decorated with "attached" palm leavess was found in the Outer Town of Pliska³⁰ (**Fig. 1.7**). Avar belt end with shortened proportions is stored in the fund of the Varna museum³¹.

The last slotted strap tips are ornamented at first glance with geometric openwork decoration, which actually represents a highly stylized version of the plant composition "attached" palm leavess. The first two are discarded products, similar in ornamentation (**Fig. 3.9-10**). One has a broken cut at the base, half filled with metal and an incorrectly curved strap tip (**Fig. 3.9**). Dimensions: length 3.6 cm, width 1.3-1.6 cm, thickness 0.25 cm. The decoration is asymmetrical, consisting of three pairs of stylized palm leaves arranged one below the other, resembling a fir twig and separated from each other by openwork cutouts, filled at the end with metal - a consequence of poor quality casting. The top of the lower pair of leaves rests on the inner outline of the rounded frame, and those at the base form a triangular hole. An embossed border runs along the outline of the object.

The other is only a part of the nozzle, from which the upper half is preserved (**Fig. 3.10**). Dimensions: length 3.2 cm, width 1.6-1.7 cm, thickness 0.2 cm. Above the straight base is formed a rectangular cutout, the final limiting side of which is not completely cast. Only its bases on the longitudinal parallel sides of the object are visible. The ornament is similar to the one described above, as here the pairs of leaves were probably not three, but four, given the preserved three of them and

²⁶ SIMONOVA 1982, p. 199, fig. 4/106, 126.

²⁷ GARAM, KOVRIG, SZABO & TOROK 1975, p. 328, fig. 5/58, 33-35, 42.

²⁸ TRUGLY 1987, p. 320, taf. XXI/25; CILINSKA 1982, p. 381, tab. X/1, p. 387, tab. XVI/1-8.

²⁹ BUBINSKY-KRICHKA 1956, p. 123, Tab. XXX/2.

³⁰ STANILOV 2000, p. 173, fig. 2; STANILOV 2006, p. 170, fig. 5, 7.

³¹ PLETNIOV & PAVLOVA p. 196, tab. II/9.

the obvious breakage of the lower part of the strap tip. The preserved three pairs of leaves are separated by openwork-like cut-outs, the one at the base being round in shape. Unlike the previous one, the frame at the end is double, as the inner border is decorated with a pseudo-pearl row.

A discarded product without traces of use is the penultimate nozzle with such decoration. Here, however, the arrangement of the leaves is in the opposite direction (**Fig. 3.11**). Dimensions: length 3.6 cm, width 1.5-1.7 cm, thickness 0.25 cm. The strap tips of the three pairs of leaves are directed not to the curved end of the object, but to its base. The one on the lower leaves rests on the inner part of the frame, and the upper ones do not form a particularly regular heart-shaped cut at the rounded end. The outer side of the slot is broken and the edges protruding from the parallel sides of the casting are strongly curved.

Similar to the last three strap tips (**Fig. 3.9-11**) decoration is applied on some pressed garnishes from the necropolis in Der-Deglavete quince (burial 757) and Fenlak³². The latest style in the Middle Avar period (the last third of the 7th century - beginning of the 8th century) is the "geometrized", which is found in both stamped and cast garnishes, a technique common to the "Late Avar" period³³. Such openwork decoration is found on buckles from Herson, Kerch, Skalyste and others³⁴ (**Fig. 4.7-8**).

The last strap tip is completely different from the ones presented so far. It is the largest and its decoration is entirely geometric (**Fig. 3.12**). Dimensions: length 5 cm, width 2.2-2.3 cm, thickness 0.2 cm. The base is straight, the slit is wide and with a regular rectangular shape, the strap tip is rounded. The surface is ornamented with openwork geometric decoration of triangles, distributed in three rows of four oppositely facing each other Figures.

Such cassette belt sets are known from the Tiszafüred complex, Hungary from the end of the 7th century to the beginning of the 8th century, which are an important starting point for dating a wide range of finds³⁵ (**Fig. 7.7-8**). The Tiszafüred-Mayoros necropolis, Szolnok district, occupies a special place among the Avar monuments not only because it is one of the largest fully excavated necropolises and published monuments of this circle, but also because of earlier finds, apart from those from the "Late Avar" period, which further refines the periodization. The materials from the necropolis make it possible to show the variants at this early stage, which subsequently enter the later phase. An example of this is the transformation of the "knitted ribbon" into a geometric form, the filling of the surface of the object with rows of embossed notches and others³⁶.

A similar decoration is observed on the garnish from the Fenlak complex³⁷. The boundary between the Early Avar and Middle Avar phases is not large. A number of objects coexist with those of the later period. The set of signs is formed gradually and does not appear in a ready form for a short period of time. The

³² GAVRITUCHIN 2001, p. 107, fig. 40/9, p. 132, fig. 54/6.

³³ DAIM & LIPPERT 1984, p. 88-89.

³⁴ AJBABIN 1990, p. 221, fig. 42/10, 13, 15.

³⁵ GAVRITUCHIN 2001, p. 56, fig. 9/325, 21, p. 64, fig. 6/116, 37.

³⁶ DAIM & LIPPERT 1984, p. 83-85.

³⁷ GAVRITUCHIN 2001, p. 132, fig. 54/16.

difference between the two periods is mainly based on the differences in the belt sets. The beginning of the "Late Avar" period ("phase d") is determined by the presence of early versions of cast gaskets, decorated with slots, hung on appliques with pins, etc.³⁸ Compositions typical for summer garnishes, such as griffins and animals on amulets and garnishes, are made in the pressing technique.

An openwork strap tip from the first half of the 8th century, which combines geometric and floral decoration, was found in the Skalyste necropolis (burial 402). The upper part under the base is occupied by checkerboard a slots, under which is a double-wound tendril with five-leafed palm leavess at the end³⁹. From the same necropolis is also known the buckle with openwork geometric decoration of rhombuses and triangles⁴⁰. A cassette nozzle with a mesh-like decoration of rhombuses was found at the early medieval necropolis "Polet" near Ciglan near Vrbas, Serbia, dating mainly to the 7th-8th centuries⁴¹. Extruded sets with two vertical rows of triangles with a belt of notches at the end are known from the necropolis "Director's Forest", North Caucasus (7th-8th centuries)⁴². An early form of a lattice bronze plate with triangular Figures is offered by the collection from the region of Ordosa, Mongolia, where the most ancient variants of plates with geometric ornamentation originate (3rd-1st centuries BC)⁴³ (**Fig. 7, 6**).

All presented slotted strap tips belong to the local jewelry practice and confirmation of this is the fact that no such specimen has been found outside the country. The new monuments convincingly prove the thesis about the Bulgarian origin of the belt sets with slits, which have no analogue outside the territory of the Lower Danube⁴⁴. As the summer belt sets are the most popular material and the main feature of the monuments from the Second Avar Khaganate from the end of 7th century to the beginning of 9th century, so the summer openwork slotted strap tips are typical for the Bulgarian metal sculpture from 8th century to the beginning of 10th century. They are of low quality and primitive, others are precise and produce a skillful drawing. The ornamentation is in accordance with the local practice in the production of belt sets and the important place of the slotted strap tips in it. They differ both from the early Avar monuments (second half of the 7th century - beginning of the 8th century), relating to the early and middle Avar period, and from those belonging to the late Avar style of the Second Avar Khaganate from the end of 8th century - the beginning of 9th century. Predominant among the Avar ones are the small cassette double-sided strap tips for side straps with buttonholes, which significantly distinguish them from the Bulgarian massive slotted strap tips. The similarities and differences are the result of the individual interpretation of similar motifs and traditions in the production and use of the popular in Eurasian fashion decorated belt. This is fully valid for the later period after the 9th century, when the territory of medieval Bulgaria in

³⁸ GAVRITUCHIN 2001, p. 155.

³⁹ VEJMARN & AJBABIN 1993, p. 93, fig. 65/11.

⁴⁰ VEJMARN & AJBABIN 1993, p. 159, fig. 118/2.

⁴¹ SANDOR 1971, p. 225, tab. VIII/27, 10.

⁴² ABRAMOVA 1982, p. 142, fig. 6/21.

⁴³ DAVLET 1975, p. 154, fig. 5/6.

⁴⁴ STANILOV 2000, p. 175.

the 10th century marked the beginning of large-scale and organized production of cast gaskets and all kinds of popular products. The ornamentation on them differs significantly from that on the Hungarian belts common at that time, which is again a manifestation of the different rethinking of stylistic features and influences.

The two main groups of monuments - openwork and compact slotted strap tips have different dates. The bronze slotted strap tips in the "griffin-lastar" style, which includes those with "bandaged" palm leavess, were produced in the period typical for the style - the second half of the 8th century to the beginning of the 9th century. Ornamentation of figures of different types and sizes - mainly at the end of the 7th century - the first half and the middle of the 8th century. The dating of the numerous finds, some of which were mentioned, from the territory of the Avar Khaganate and the Eurasian steppes is similar. The thick lead edges are a slightly later replica of the openwork ornaments. Their distribution is mainly in the middle and mainly in the second half of the 9th century and the beginning of the 10th century. Confirmation of this are the lead strap tips found at the settlement under the Great Basilica in Pliska from the middle of the 9th century.

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Abbreviations:

- СА - Советская археология.
 КСИА - Краткие сообщения о докладах и полевых исследованиях Института археологии
 АН СССР (Kratkie soobščeniija Instituta Istorii Material'noj Kul'tury, Moskva)
 МИА - Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР (МИА)

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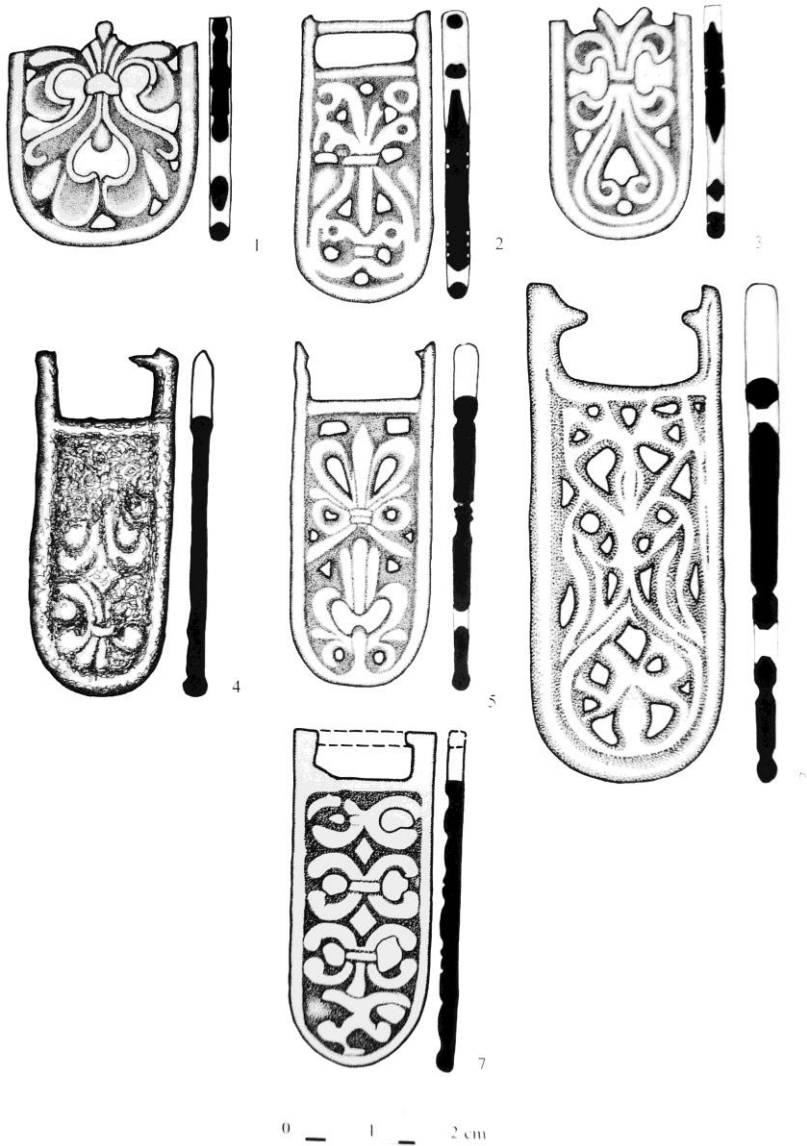


Fig. 1. Slotted openwork strap tips with palm leaves (after STANILOV 2006): 1 NAIM-BAS Sofia; 2 Regional historical museum in Vratsa; 3 Harlets, Vratsa region; 4 NIM-Sofia; 5 Regional historical museum in Varna; 6 Sultana, Romania; 7 Pliska.



Fig. 2. Strap tips found at the Southern Urals (after GOLDINA 1992):
 1 Verkh-Saya; 2 Verkh-Saya; 3 Agafonovo; 4 Nevolino; 5 Brody; 6 Varna;
 7 Verkh-Saya; 8 Verkh-Saya).



Fig. 3. Slotted openwork strap tips with palm leaves found at the Northeastern Bulgaria.



Fig. 4. Strap tips with palm leaves: 1, 7 - 8 Rocky, Crimea (after VEJMARN & AJBABIN 1993); 2-3 Komarno/Komárno, Slovakia (after TRUGLY 1997); 4 Miculčice, Czech Republic (after PROFANOVA 1992); 5 Devaványa, Hungary (after GARAM, KOVRIG, SZABÓ & TÖRÖK 1975); 6 Uherské Hradiště, Moravia, Czech Republic (after PROFANOVA 1992).



Fig. 5. Strap tips found at the Volga region (after BAGAUTINOV, BOGACHEV & ZUBOV 1998): 1 Brusyany II; 2 Malaya Ryazan; 3 Novelties II; 4 Novelties II; 5 Novelties II; 6 Brusyany II; 7 Brusyany II.

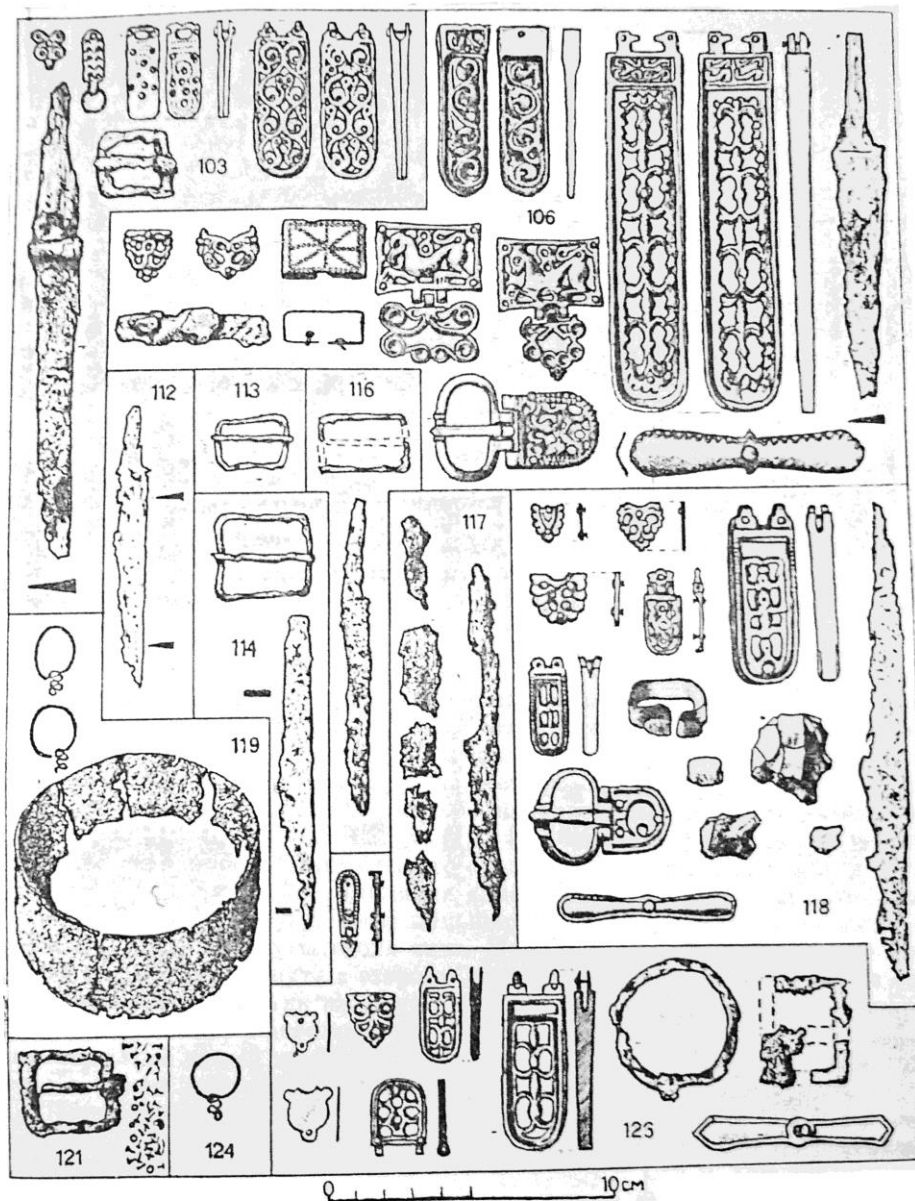


Fig. 6. Artifacts found at the necropolis of Feserlak, Hungary
(after SIMONOVA 1982).

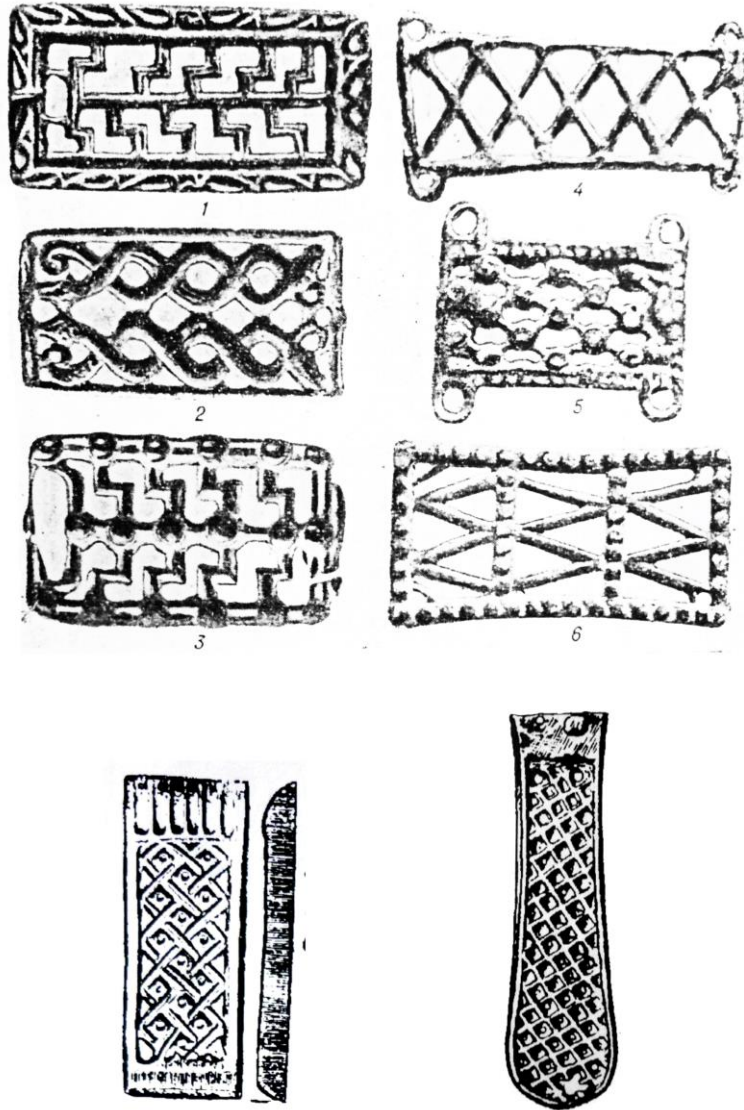


Fig. 7. Openwork plates and strap tips: 1-6 Ordosa, Mongolia (after DAVLET 1975);
7-8 Tisafüred-Mayoros, Hungary (after GAVRITUKHIN 2001).