

## A BUCKLE OF PÁPA TYPE FOUND IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE FORTRESS HALMYRIS (MURIGHIOL, TULCEA COUNTY)\*

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During the archaeological excavations fulfilled in 2003, the investigation of the building located behind the northern gate (called *Domus Nord*) led to the discovery of a buckle of particular signification for the chronology of Halmyris and for the general situation in Dobrudja at the end of Antiquity. The buckle was found in the grass level over the western wall of the *thermae* (researched in 1995 by Mihail Zahariade and left covered with soil for a better preservation). The object appeared during the measurement of the walls of *Domus Nord* (in the sector investigated by Traian Dvorski and Alexandru Madgearu, both from the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History, Bucharest).

The object is a bronze buckle that belongs to the so-called buckles with girt used for the attachment of a small bag to the belt (*Taschenschnallen mit Riemenschlaufe*), and more precisely to the Pápa type, named after a piece found in an Avarian cemetery from Hungary. The Pápa buckles have an appendix in the shape of T, whose ends are bended to inside in order to be fastened to the belt. The main part of the buckle has a pair of stylized birdheads on both sides, that are making the difference between this type and the Salona-Histria type, dated in the last third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (from which they derived). The source of inspiration for the pair of birdheads can be identified in the so-called *Pseudoschnallen* described by Joachim Werner<sup>1</sup>, used too for the bag attached to the belt<sup>2</sup>. The birdheads are also present on several types of *Bügelfibeln*. The Pápa buckles are usually decorated on the appendix and on the main part with small circles with a point (eyes) in the center. All the known pieces were cast from bronze. The Pápa type was defined by Syna Uenze, who also specified their function and the date in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>.

The piece from Murighiol is almost entirely preserved (only the nail is missing). The link is a bit deteriorated. Its length is 37 mm; the distance between the ends of the stylized bird heads is 39 mm; the extent of the transversal part is 13 mm; the thickness is 2 mm. Unlike most other pieces, it has no small circles on the birdheads (Fig. 2).

We decided to write a study about this small find because this is the third Pápa buckle discovered in the northern Dobrudja into a little area (the other two were found at Histria and Jurilovca). The concentration of these quite rare objects in the northern part of Scythia deserves attention and should be explained.

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\* A Roumanian variant of this study was published in Căndea, I., Sîrbu, V., Neagu, M., *Prinos lui Petre Diaconu la 80 de ani*, Brăila, 2004, 343-355.

<sup>1</sup> Werner 1986, 58-62. For these objects, see Bálint 1992, 347, 467.

<sup>2</sup> Bott 1976, 260 has remarked that these *Pseudoschnallen* with eagle heads display a Byzantine-Oriental artistic synthesis.

<sup>3</sup> Uenze 1966, 149-152, 165-166, 179-180.

The repertory of all the pieces is as follows (Fig. 1):

1. Anemurium (Cilicia, Turkey). From an early Byzantine city (context not known)<sup>4</sup>;
2. Aromat (Bakisarai District, Crimea, Ukraine). From a 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries cemetery. Associated with Sucidava type buckles<sup>5</sup>;
3. Bratei (Sibiu County, Romania). From the cemetery no 3 (Gepidic)<sup>6</sup>;
4. Deszk-Ambrus (Csongrád County, Hungary). From the grave nr. 16 of an early Avar cemetery. Associated with a sword, a bow, and several arrowheads<sup>7</sup>;
5. Gyód (Baranya County, Hungary). From the grave no 34 of an early Avar cemetery. Associated with a spearhead, a flint steel and another bronze buckle<sup>8</sup>;
6. Histria (Constanța County, Romania). From the room L of a building dated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, located in the "Temple" sector of the city<sup>9</sup>;
7. Jurilovca, point "La Zimbru" (Tulcea County, Romania). From an inhumation grave oriented E-W. Associated with an arrowhead and a knife<sup>10</sup>;
8. Kaliakra (Akres, Dobrič County, Bulgaria). Unknown archaeological context<sup>11</sup>;
9. Keszthely (Veszprém County, Hungary). Stray find from the early Avar cemetery<sup>12</sup>;
10. Kölked-Feketekapu (Baranya County, Hungary). From the Gepidic cemetery A, grave no 647<sup>13</sup>;
11. Kölked-Feketekapu (Baranya County, Hungary). From the Gepidic cemetery, grave no 457 (female). Associated with earrings<sup>14</sup>;
12. Környe (Veszprém County, Hungary). From the grave nr. 66 of a Gepidic cemetery. Associated with a belt garment made in the *Tauschierung* technique, with arrowheads and with a *umbo* from a shield<sup>15</sup>;
13. Kunszentmárton (Szolnok County, Hungary). From the grave no 1 (which belonged to a craftsman). Associated with molds for moulds for pressed belt applications and other garments<sup>16</sup>;
14. Lucistoe (Bakisarai District, Crimea, Ukraine). From the grave no 46 of a Alanic-Gothic cemetery<sup>17</sup>;
15. Murighiol (Tulcea County, Romania). Stray find from the early Byzantine fortress Halmyris (excavations made in 2003). Preserved in the collection of the Institute of Eco-Museal Researches, Tulcea, no 46.205;
16. Pápa (Veszprém County, Hungary). From the grave nr. 1 of a small early Avar cemetery. Associated with a *Pseudoschnalle* and with belt applications<sup>18</sup>;

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<sup>4</sup> Russell 1982, 144, fig. 7/23.

<sup>5</sup> Loboda 1976, 139, fig. 4/8.

<sup>6</sup> Florescu, Miclea 1980, 213, nr. 829.

<sup>7</sup> Garam 2001, 110, 213, Taf. 76/6.

<sup>8</sup> Kiss 1977, 39, Taf. VI/34-2.

<sup>9</sup> Pippidi, Bordenache, Eftimie 1961, 233, fig. 5/2.

<sup>10</sup> Coja 1977, 166-167.

<sup>11</sup> Haralambieva 1993, 42, T. I/5.

<sup>12</sup> Lipp 1885, 43, 102, Abb. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Kiss 1996, 165-166, 207, Taf. 102/ A 647-15.

<sup>14</sup> Kiss 2001, I, 147; II, 98, Taf. 84/B 457/7.

<sup>15</sup> Salamon, Erdélyi 1971, 49, Taf. 9/6.

<sup>16</sup> Csallány 1933, 53-54, Taf. 3/5, 4/3.

<sup>17</sup> Ajbabin 1990, Pl. 31/4.

<sup>18</sup> Jankó 1930, 124-141, 286-287, fig. 87/12.

17. Pécs-Köztemető (Baranya County, Hungary). From the grave nr. 54 of an early Avar cemetery (a triple grave of a man, a woman and a child). Associated with six arrowheads<sup>19</sup>;
18. Rujno (Dulovo County, Bulgaria). From an Early Byzantine fortress. Preserved in the Museum of Silistra, no 2329. Not yet published. Information given by dr. Gheorghi Atanasov;
19. Sărata Monteoru (Buzău County, Romania). From the cremation grave no 1/1943 of a Slavic cemetery. Associated with a knife<sup>20</sup>;
- 20.-21. Varna (Bulgaria). Two pieces preserved in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Varna, no 116.095 and 118.889. Not yet published. Information given by dr. Anna Haralambieva;
- 22.-23. Asia Minor – unknown location. Two pieces preserved in the collection of the Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum, no O 40182, 40183<sup>21</sup>;
24. Byzantine Empire – unknown location. Preserved in the collection of the Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum, no 40645<sup>22</sup>;
25. Hungary - unknown location. Preserved in the Kaposvár Museum<sup>23</sup>;
26. Iran – unknown location. Not published. Preserved in the collection of the Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum, no T 70/1051-1052<sup>24</sup>;
27. Unknown location. Preserved in the Kofler-Truninger collection (Lucerne), inv. no K. 8065 Y<sup>25</sup>;
28. Unknown location. Preserved in the Diergardt collection (Köln)<sup>26</sup>.

It can be observed that 10 of the 28 buckles were found in early Avarian and late Gepidic cemeteries from Hungary and Transylvania (where their concentration is obvious). In many cases they were associated with weapons. In fact, these buckles were pieces of military equipment, being attached at the belt worn by the Avar horsemen. Unlike other contemporary types of buckles (Salona-Histria, Gátér, Syracuse), they were not found until now in the western regions of the Byzantine Commonwealth.

In a study published more than 10 years ago I sustained that these buckles were made by craftsmen of Byzantine origin in Pannonia, for their Avar masters<sup>27</sup>. Based on the discovery of some new pieces in Asia Minor and Crimea, Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm has recently argued that the Pápa type of buckles was created in the workshops of the Byzantine Empire<sup>28</sup>. A similar opinion was expressed by Anna Haralambieva<sup>29</sup>. Indeed, the presence of some buckles in territories that were not under Avar domination can suggest this interpretation, but there is still another possibility. James Russell supposed that the buckle found at Anemurium in Asia Minor can testify a trade with buckles of Barbarian origin in the empire<sup>30</sup>. We should also remark that all the Pápa type buckles found outside the Avar qaganate were discovered near the

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<sup>19</sup> Kiss 1977, 98, Taf. 40/54-2.

<sup>20</sup> Nestor 1953, 85, fig. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Schulze-Dörrlamm 2002, 224-226, nr. 221, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Schulze-Dörrlamm 2002, 224-226, nr. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Fettich 1923-1926, 160-161, Taf. 3/1.

<sup>24</sup> Schulze-Dörrlamm 2002, 226, nr. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Uenze 1966, 179, nr. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Uenze 1966, 180, nr. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Madgearu 1993, 171-183. See also Madgearu 1997a, 44, 63, 118, 151, 154, 155.

<sup>28</sup> Schulze-Dörrlamm 2002, 224-226.

<sup>29</sup> Haralambieva 1997, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Russell 1982, 144.

sea, in or near harbors, in Dobrudja, Crimea and Asia Minor (with the exception of the piece from Iran). In this light, the concentration of these buckles in the north-Danubian area dominated by the Avars (Pannonia, Transylvania, Wallachia) and near it continues to be an argument for the genesis of this type in the workshops mastered by the Avars and for the export in the Byzantine Empire. The pieces found in Crimea can also be related to the Avars, because it is known that the north-pontic area continued to be under Avar domination until the rebellion of Kuvrat in 635<sup>31</sup>. Even if we admit that the Pápa type of buckles were produced in the Byzantine Empire, it is obvious that they were made especially for barbarians, as their spreading area is clearly showing.

It could be supposed that these buckles came in Dobrudja with the warriors of the Avar confederacy, who exerted the domination over the surviving cities. All the buckles were found in or near such cities. In all the cases (Halmyris, Argamum, Histria, Akres), the coins continued to circulate until around 614<sup>32</sup>. The Avar domination, if existed, it was exerted by warriors who collected the tribute. All these cities are harbors. It is not excluded that the Avars tried to gain control over several points suitable for sea attacks fulfilled by the Slavs who fought in their confederacy (these Slavs took part with their small boats at the great siege of Constantinople in 626, as we find out from the Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor<sup>33</sup>). At Histria was also found a Nagyarsány type buckle, the single of its kind in Dobrudja. This type is without any doubt of Pannonian origin<sup>34</sup>. This second buckle confirms the Avar presence at Histria in the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, whatever it was its form.

The Avarian domination was the consequence of the retreat of the imperial army from the Danube. A peace treaty was concluded with the Avars in 604 in order to let the Danubian army to be transferred to the Persian front<sup>35</sup>. This meant a peaceful period for Dobrudja. The coin circulation displays a certain revival between 603-607, which reflects the recovery of the trade in the new peaceful conditions. The cities located on the seashore (Histria, Tomis, Callatis, Akres) or near the Danube Delta (Halmyris, Argamum) preserved a better economic situation and some urban features, because the maritime contacts were not affected by the barbarian inroads. There are no proofs in Dobrudja for destructions dated around 614. The extinction of the cities was in most cases not violent, but a result of the disappearance of the relations with the Empire<sup>36</sup>. The great Avar and Slavic invasions of 614-626 were directed especially toward the important cities from the south that could provide a rich booty. The smaller settlements were left in peace as sources of supplies. The Avars were interested to preserve the conquered people, because their economy depended on the tribute taken from them<sup>37</sup>.

Of course, the evidence for this Avar control is scarce, but it can be compared with the situation encountered at Corinth, where several 7<sup>th</sup> century graves with weapons and buckles of

<sup>31</sup> Szádeczky-Kardoss 1975, 271-272; Pohl 1988, 273.

<sup>32</sup> The most recent coins are from 612-613 (Halmyris: Opaït 1991, 473, nr. 123); 613-614 (Argamum: Iacob, Mănuclu-Adameșteanu, Poenaru-Bordea 2001, 203-213); 613-614 (Kaliakra: Parushev 1991, 31).

<sup>33</sup> Mango, Scott 1997, 447.

<sup>34</sup> Petre 1965, 75, fig. 5/1. For this type, see Ibler 1992, 140-145; Garam 2001, 93-94.

<sup>35</sup> Mango, Scott 1997, 420; Lilie 1985, 18; Pohl 1988, 238.

<sup>36</sup> Madgearu 1997b, 315-336; Madgearu 2001, 207-217.

<sup>37</sup> Pohl 1988, 192-193.

Pécs type (of Pannonian origin) were found<sup>38</sup>. Those buckles were pieces of military equipment (like the Pápa buckles). Because the weapons are not usually present in the Byzantine graves, it seems that these funeral finds from Corinth belonged to some barbarian warriors (the swords have analogies in the Gepid cemeteries from Pannonia, while a ceramic jar belongs to the so-called Tisa type<sup>39</sup>). On the other hand, the Christian orientation of the bodies suggests that they were Gepids, not Avars (the Gepids continued to fight in the Avar confederacy). Knowing that Greece entered under Avar domination in the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, we can consider these graves as an evidence for the Avar control over the city of Corinth<sup>40</sup>. We think that the same can be said about the Pápa buckles found in Dobrudja.

The buckle from Halmyris is probably the most recent find in the settlement, being a precious chronological evidence, even if its context remains unknown. It is not excluded that the object belonged to a destroyed funeral assemblage, because at Halmyris was found a grave that can be ascribed to a barbarian woman (the skeleton was crouched), dug in the level set over the martyric tomb from the episcopal church. The age of this grave that profaned the religious building can be placed only after the disappearance of the authority of the bishop at Halmyris. If we admit that the city was conquered by the Avars, than this grave was contemporary with the buckle found at only 20 meters away.

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<sup>38</sup> Davidson 1937, 227-240; Davidson 1974, 512-521; Ivison 1996, 117-118. For the Pécs type, see Ibler 1992, 135-138.

<sup>39</sup> Štefanovičová 1997, 127; Vida, Völling 2000, 32-36.

<sup>40</sup> Weithmann 1978, 247-248; Pohl 1988, 112.

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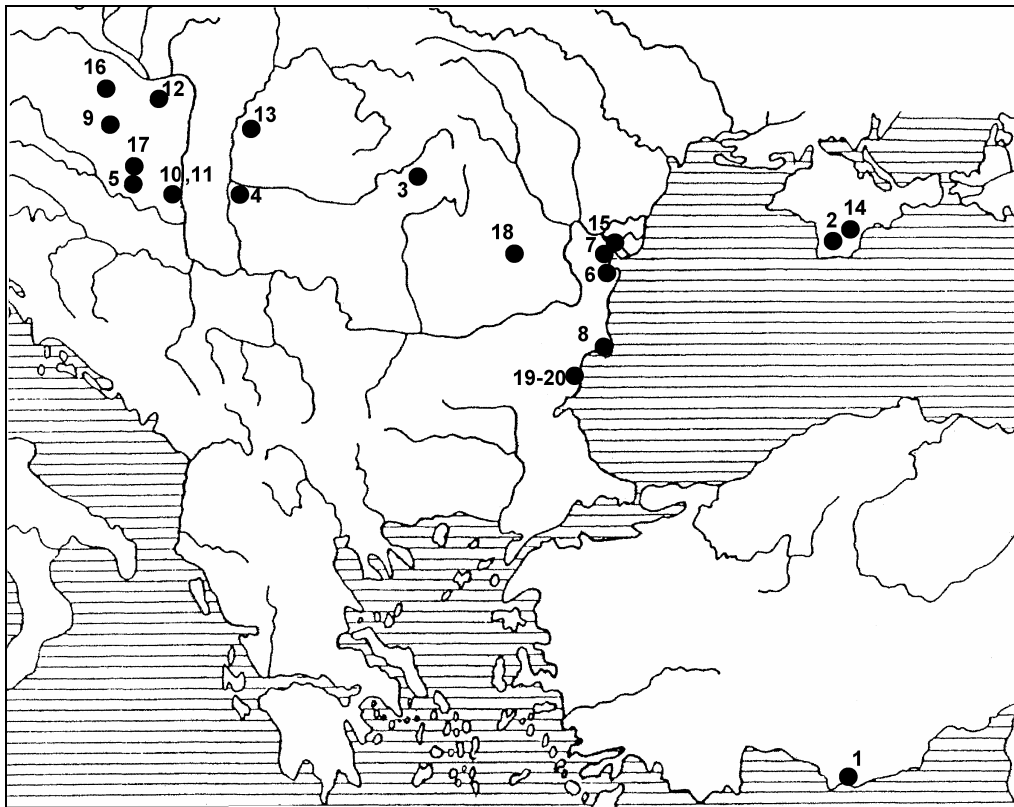


Fig. 1. The spreading area of the Pápa type buckles

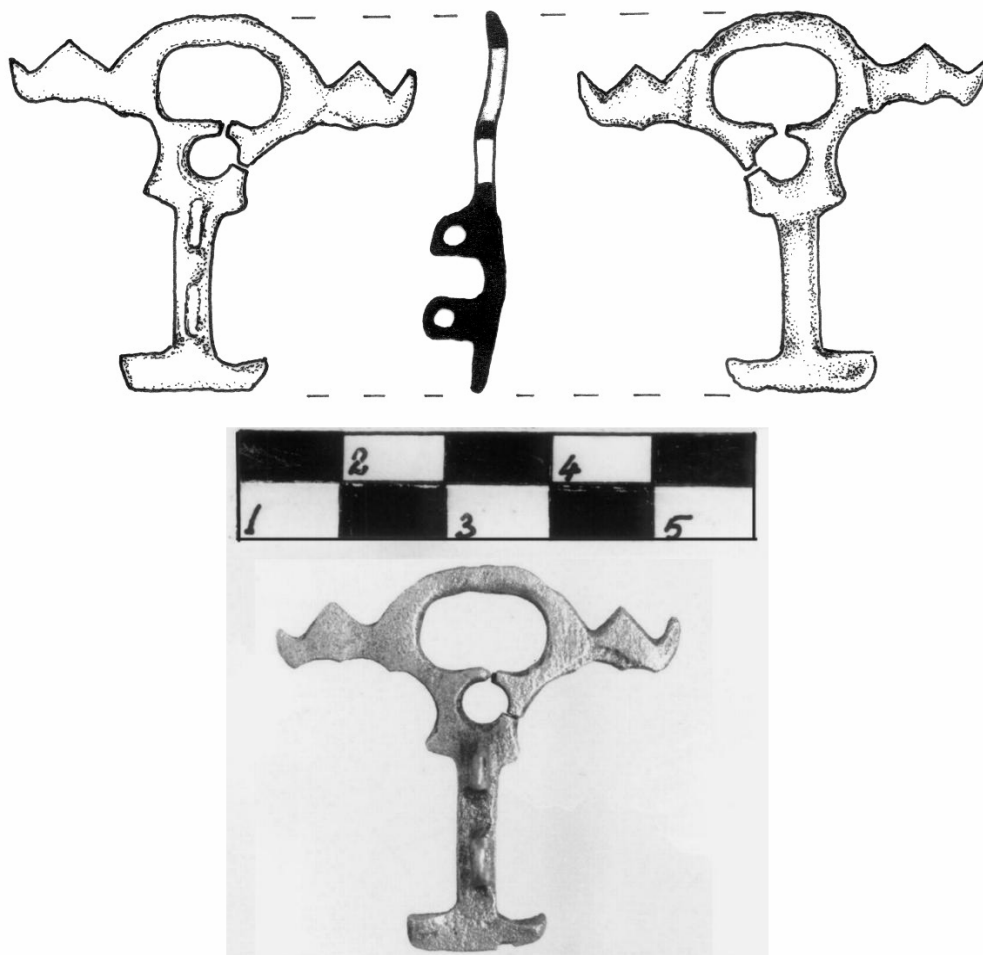


Fig. 2. The Pápa type buckle from Halmyris