
BYZANTINE BUCKLE FROM OROSHÁZA – SZENTETORNYA (HUNGARY, BÉKÉS COUNTY).

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE BUCKLE THAT CONNECTS US

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**REZUMAT: CATARAMĂ BIZANTINĂ DIN OROSHÁZA–SZENTETORNYA (UNGARIA, COMITATUL BÉKÉS).
GÂNDURI DESPRE CATARAMA CARE NE LEAGĂ.**

Scopul acestui articol este de a prezenta una dintre descoperirile din metal ajunse la Muzeul din Orosháza, Ungaria, ca urmare a cercetărilor cu detectorul de metale efectuate de persoane civile. În Ungaria, utilizarea detectorului de metale nu este reglementată clar, deoarece protocolul național este încă în curs de elaborare. An de an, numeroase obiecte ajung în muzee ca descoperiri ale utilizatorilor detectoarelor de metale. Din păcate, utilitatea multora dintre acestea rămâne încă incomplet clarificată. În acest articol, autorul dorește să prezinte o cataramă din bronz turnată, alcătuită din trei părți, care a fost găsită pe teritoriul satului medieval, azi dispărut, Szentetornya, situat la 5 km nord de centrul regional, orașul Orosháza. După cum este prezentat mai jos, datarea și funcția acestui artefact nu au putut fi încă stabilite.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present one of the metal finds arrived to the Museum of Orosháza, Hungary due to the metal detecting surveys conducted by civilian individuals. In Hungary, the situation of metal detecting is quite uncertain as the national protocol is still under development. Year after year, a lot of objects get into museums with the help of metal detectorists, a greater part of which are yet unknown regarding their function. In this paper, the author would like to present a bronze cast buckle divided into three parts which was found on the territory of the destroyed Medieval Szentetornya village, located 5 km north of the regional centre, the town of Orosháza. As it is presented below, the function and the date of this artefact is yet to be determined.

CUVINTE CHEIE: Ungaria medievală, arheologie ungară, detectarea metalelor, cataramă, descoperiri de metal

KEYWORDS: Medieval Hungary, Hungarian archaeology, metal detecting, buckle, metal finds

Introduction

Over the past few decades, a significant quantity of metal small finds has been donated to the archaeological collections of Hungarian museums which are open to civil-professional collaborations with metal detectorists. The Museum of Orosháza have established relationships with nine individuals who collected and donated more than 20,000 items to the institution. Whilst the donated finds are discovered without archaeological context, nonetheless, they still provide important information for professional investigations.

The civilian individuals have primarily worked on sites dating to the 15–16th century, though most of these sites have also uncovered finds from the prehistoric (Bronze Age, Iron Age) and migration (Sarmatian, Avar and Hungarian Conquest Period) periods. The chronology of these sites ranges from the Hungarian Conquest Period (10–11th century), followed by the Árpád Age (11–13th century) to the late medieval (15–16th century) periods, with regards to dating the finds. The wider geographic region of the town of Orosháza was completely destroyed by the Mongol campaign (1241–1242), with the area only starting to prosper again during the first decades of the 15th century. These sites are located in prosperous geographical regions, which explains their existence until the late medieval period. This region participated in the international cattle trade with much prosperity, up until the end of the 16th century, when a Crimean Tatar raid destroyed the population.

The community of the surrounding area was continuously influenced by different areas during the 10–16th centuries. The region of the Balkans had the largest impact on the community and its way of life was brought to the area by population migration, as well as trade connections. Small finds found by a metal-detectorist on the outskirts of

the town of Orosháza suggest southern origins. It is difficult to date these finds from their appearance in the local contexts. The present paper describes the analysis results of an object which, as well as being difficult to date, has uncertainty surrounding its function. This object is therefore of great interest, potentially offering new insights into the region's incredibly complex traditions.

The find and the site

The small find, a buckle divided into three parts, is cast in bronze and perforated (Plate 1/1). With regards to size, it has a length of 2.2 cm, width of 1.5 cm and weighs 2.46 grams. The widest part of the buckle has a cambered sidewall and is a short trapezoid shape, which connects to a slightly elongated circular-shaped part and a smaller, somewhat angular, circle piece¹.

The buckle was discovered on the territory of the destroyed Medieval Szentetornya village, located 5 km north of the regional centre, the town of Orosháza². The medieval village was one of the richest settlements in Békés County according to the 16th century Ottoman Tax Registers, perhaps due to its location next to the main cattle trade road. Over the last decade numerous systematic metal detector surveys have been conducted in the territory of the medieval settlement site, one area of which recovered more than 1300 copper and bronze small finds³. Most of these finds date to the 15–16th centuries, though wider investigations have also recovered finds from other relevant periods (8–9th, 10–11th, 12–13th centuries).

Parallels and research history

There is scarce mention of similar buckles in Hungarian archaeological publications, with only one other example known, from the site of Domony, in Pest County, discovered by Gábor Fazekas through metal detector survey. This site contained much fewer finds than Szentetornya, all of which were dated to the 12–13th centuries, except a Scythian arrowhead. Although the buckle was a surface find by metal detectorist, it is also believed to possibly date to the 12–13th century⁴.

Similar buckles have been found in grater numbers in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Croatia. According to archaeological literature, these types of artefacts date between the 10th – 15th century (Pl. 1/5) and there are two primary theories regarding their function. One explanation is that they were book clasps, whilst the other view is that they were part of clothing, most probably shoe fittings⁵.

Many sources state these buckles were originally used as book fastenings. The objects are representations of cultural demands and originate from the Balkan region in the 10th century⁶. Books with these fastenings can also be found in distant areas, though in much smaller numbers⁷. Their terminology indicates their origin, with a good example of this a parallel from the collection of the University of Groningen (Pl. 1/3): *Specific types of book fasteners can be connected to specific kinds of texts or regions, such as the “alla greca”, the slit-braid leather straps (Fig. 5/2), which relates to 15th century A.D. Greek texts*⁸. In this case the Greek-style is represented by triple interlaced straps⁹.

All Bulgarian archaeological publications describe these buckles as book fasteners and connect their presence with local cultural requirements. Their presence in the discarded waste material from the site at Novosel and in Preslav and Priska, the sites of major fortifications, provides further supporting evidence of their origin being local¹⁰. The function and the dating of these finds are so strongly accepted in northeast Bulgaria that a recently published study of a dozen isolated finds described as book fasteners (Музейна Сбирка, Стара България – The

¹ Found by András Bene, database number: 2015/282.32.

² Site identification number in the Hungarian Archaeological database is: 59800.

³ An enamel brooch fragment deserves mention within the relatively small amount of prehistoric and migration period finds assemblage (Vaday 2018).

⁴ We are grateful to Mónika Jászberényi (Ferenczy Múzeumi Centrum, Szentendre) for her help in accessing this assemblage.

⁵ Diaconu's opinion that these could be accessories of the religious clothing (Diaconu 1969, 504–505; Diaconu and Vilceanu 1972, 158).

⁶ Boudalis 2016, Fig. 18 (Plate 1/2). Georgios Boudalis letter to the author on 03. 06. 2021. *This type of metal rings for book fastenings have been used for centuries and there is no easy way to date them. This specific example could be dated any time between at least the 10th (and most likely even earlier) and the 17th century.*

⁷ Mongait 1955, 179, Ris. 138/24, 180, Ris. 139/8.

⁸ Wijk 2020, 75, Fig. 5/2.

⁹ Boudalis 2016, 21.

¹⁰ Bonev and Doncheva 2011, 141, with further reading.

Old Bulgaria Collection), from a private collection, date all individual pieces to the 10th century¹¹. These statements are generally accepted of the finds at the lower Danube region from Romania. However, at the site of Tropaeum Traiani/Adamclis similar artefacts have been recovered, with authors of contextual observations identifying them to be shoe buckles¹². Similar comments have been made by Petre Diaconu of the buckles at the site of Păcuil lui Soare¹³.

Most of the known buckles have been recovered from excavations near the lower Danube region, however, examples are also known from sites near the upper section of the Danube river, which authors have dated to the 10–11th centuries. A similar buckle has been recovered from Yakimovo, a site of Hungarian importance near Barancs/Braničevo, in the territory of Kostolac¹⁴. Each of these finds is connected to sites of border fortifications, thus with the Byzantine Empire and its' cultural influence, however they were peripheral from the Byzantine point of view. A further buckle is known, from the monastery of Dombó at Rakovac¹⁵. Although the site is situated near the contemporary Byzantine border, the object was found, without dating evidence, in the cemetery of the medieval monastery, which could suggest a later dating of the find, as the below examples demonstrate.

Buckles dated to the 10–11th centuries have always been found within the contemporaneous Byzantine borders. The author is only aware of one exception to this, outside the Byzantine Empire at a settlement feature in Dodești (Moldavia, Vaslui County)¹⁶. The authors of the archaeological publications most often referencing this find did not discuss its possible function.

Multiple examples are known of similar buckles outside of the Byzantine borders, northwest from the above mentioned Dodești, as referenced in the publications of Lia and Adrian Bătrîna¹⁷. These buckles have been generally dated to the 14–15th centuries, having been found together with, or in the same context as, coins from this period (Alexandru cel Bun, Petru II, Hunyadi Mátyás/Matei Corvin). At the sites of Baia, Bistrița and Netezi buckles have been found in graves, meanwhile, at Rădăuți, a buckle was recovered from a settlement feature/context. These buckles, according the author, could be book clasps, part of shoes or clothing, or from a horse harness¹⁸.

West of the lower Danube, in a region in Dalmatia, a small concentration of buckles can be observed¹⁹. All of these were found in graves or unstratified from the territories of cemeteries. The authors who published the finds from Dalmatia seemingly did not know of discussions as to their function in the publications by their Bulgarian and Romanian colleagues and, therefore, did not comment on this aspect. Dušan Jelovina published the first buckle from Knin, recovered from a cemetery near the fortification, interpreting it as part of a belt dating to the pre-Croatian period (9th century?)²⁰. A few years later, Maja Petrincec published another, undated, buckle from Cetine as a pendant, despite the fact that it was recovered from the leg area of a grave²¹. Petrincec published another unstratified buckle almost a decade later, from Biskupija, as a shoe buckle. She also reconsidered her earlier opinion regarding the function of the buckle at Cetine²². At the same time Tonči Burić published a paper on shoe buckles, following the find of Kaštela. In this paper he identified all the buckles from Dalmatia as shoe buckles and dated them to the 14–15th centuries, referencing the find from Cetine, as well as a new unpublished specimen (Proložac)²³.

To sum up, most known parallels date to the 10–11th centuries, with a few cases dating to the 14–15th centuries also observed. According to our present knowledge, all of these later dated specimens came from a smaller region and, in contrast with the earlier dated objects, most of them have been found in churchyard cemeteries.

¹¹ Türk et al. 2021, 192–195, Tab. 90–91.

¹² Paraschiv-Talmațchi, Talmațchi and Șova 2014, 166, Pl. II/8–9. Detailed bibliography for the lower Danube finds: Florescu, Florescu and Diaconu 1958, 235, Fig. 118/6; Ștefan et al. 1967, 298–299, Fig. 173/21; Doncheva-Petkova, Ninov, Parushev 1999, 99, Tab. XLV, 567; Henning 2007, 676, Taf. 6/68.

¹³ Diaconu and Vilceanu 1972, 158, Fig. 62/14.

¹⁴ Bonev and Doncheva 2011, 142, footnote 320; Janković and Janković 1990, 98.

¹⁵ Stanojev and Stanojev 2015, 221, Fig. 14.

¹⁶ Teodor 1978, 79, 203, Fig. 44/4; Teodor 1984, 108, Fig. 61/13; Spinei 1985, Fig. 12/6; Hăncianu 2011, Tab. 66/10.

¹⁷ Bătrîna and Bătrîna 1984, 237, Fig. 2/1; Bătrîna and Bătrîna 1985, 307, Fig. 5/2; Bătrîna and Bătrîna 2012, 70–72, Fig. 41/1.

¹⁸ Bătrîna and Bătrîna 2012, 71–72.

¹⁹ Jelovina 1991, 159, Tab. XXXII, 100; Petrincec 1996, 18; Petrincec 2009, 180, T. 9/2; Burić 2010, Pl. 1/3.

²⁰ Jelovina 1991, 159.

²¹ Petrincec 1996, 18.

²² Petrincec 2009, 180.

²³ Burić 2010, 274.

The assessment of the buckle from Orosháza-Szentetornya

Similar buckles that have been found at the site of Orosháza-Szentetornya, according to European archaeological publications, are believed to be book clasps or part of shoes or clothing. More than 1300 similar objects found by metal detectorists provide a broad conjecture as to their function. In theory, these objects could appear anytime between the 10–16th centuries and could be part of either book clasps or shoes or clothing. However, in practice this is not the conclusion reached.

As discussed above, their original function was book clasps, appearing in the record from the end of the 9th century, though more common from the 10th century, inside the borders of the Byzantine Empire. These buckles can be found as far as the Netherlands with the purpose of book clasps. It is not surprising that they can be found around Orosháza during the 10–12th centuries, when the Hungarian-Byzantine relationship was at its strongest. This could, in part, be the results of the Hungarian invasions of the Balkan peninsula, though not exclusively. We have known examples of Byzantine church buildings west of Orosháza²⁴, as part of the eastern Christianity presence within the region. This is supported by the finds of eastern pectoral crosses, east of the river Tisza region, as published by Imre Szatmári recently²⁵. If this buckle from Orosháza was part of a book clasp, then this book was probably a Bible and a part of the above mentioned cultural group. The object was found 150–200 m away from the church of the settlement.

At the same time, based on metal detector surveys, we can state that in the 15–16th century book clasps and book mounting could have appeared in rural environments. In most cases these are related to Nuremberg, where the Hungarian cattle was exchanged for local economic and cultural products. Most of the book mountings found in the territory of Szentetornya village originated from Nuremberg (Pl. 2/3–14). Parallels to the above described buckle have not been found in the region of any late medieval period settlements, and have been described in internet sources as very rare in the Hungarian archaeological record²⁶.

It has been established that, if the buckle from the territory of Szentetornya settlement was a book clasp, it can most probably be dated to the 11–12th century. In some cases, similar buckles published are stated to be part of shoes or clothing. Amongst archaeologists, this statement is less applicable to the objects dated to the 11th century, but more widely amongst the finds dating to the 14–15th centuries. Within a metal detector survey assemblage (Pl. 2/1–2; Pl. 3/4), the function of several double buckles could be determined as shoe buckles. Parallels to the Szentetornya buckles dated both to the 10–11th and the 14–15th centuries can be found in the Balkan region²⁷. This means that the buckles described in this paper could have arrived to the investigated settlement territory during both periods as shoe buckles.

The considerably-sized assemblage of Szentetornya contains other objects which have foreign origins. The earlier phase of the collection contains finds with parallels from the lower Danube territory²⁸, exactly the area where the above described buckles were also excavated (Pl. 3)²⁹. These finds are also known within the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom, though numbers are very small. It is believed that our buckle is of the same style.

In summary, our knowledge regarding the Orosháza-Szentetornya buckle is limited. It is possible that it arrived to the territory in the 11–12th century as a book clasp: its original function. This theory is supported by historical sources. After the year 1045, considerable changes happened in the region of the lower Danube³⁰. The Pechenegs crossed the Danube river and started to formally settle in Byzantine territories. Their absorption into the local residents started, however not without conflicts³¹. Sources reference Pecheneg-Byzantine conflicts, which ended with the resettlement and conversion to Christianity of the Pechenegs. These events had influence within the Hungarian Kingdom territory. The Pechenegs in the Balkan region were defeated by the Byzantines at the battle of Beroia in 1122. Following this defeat, significant communities of Pechenegs arrived and settled into the Carpathian

²⁴ Zalotay 1957, 50–51.

²⁵ Szatmári 1995.

²⁶ Excluding the above mentioned site at Domony. It is necessary to build a database of the metal detector finds such as exist in Great-Britain (<https://finds.org.uk>).

²⁷ Türk et al. 2021, 188–189, Tab. 89/1, 5; Burić 2010, Pl. 1/1–2.

²⁸ Ștefan et al. 1967, Fig. 169/4; Diaconu and Vilceanu 1972, Fig. 56/7; Bătrîna and Bătrîna 1985, 310, Fig. 6/1; Doncheva 2011, 123–132; Paraschiv-Talmațchi 2018, 395–395, 403, Pl. II/15; 404, Pl. III,15; Türk et al. 2021, 189, Tab. 89/5; Türk et al. 2021, 443, Tab. 216/6; Türk et al. 2021, 495, Tab. 242/5.

²⁹ A considerable amount of object can be found within the 15–16th centuries assemblage (primarily rings and buttons) which have parallels in the Balkan, however most of them connected to the Serbian archaeological assemblage than the lower Danube region.

³⁰ Madgearu 2013, 122.

³¹ Krumova 2005, 210.

Basin, with permission of the Hungarian King³². It is possible that groups of Pechenegs settled around the Orosháza region at this time, though historical sources do not mention this. Round stirrups characteristic of the Pecheneg-type, with narrow treads have been found by metal detectorists at the neighbouring Csorvás settlement³³. According to Pálóczi-Horváth András, these stirrups could be connected with the Pechenegs movements in the area in the 11–12th centuries³⁴. Neither the analysed buckle nor the stirrups provide enough evidence of the movement of the Pechenegs or other settlers within the area, much more data is needed to categorically prove the arrival of a new population to the region³⁵.

Afterword

The present paper focuses on a sole artefact. The above described object was discovered and arrived to the museum through community archaeological activity. The author was also helped by a community of archaeologists to write this paper. I am thankful to Neda Dimovski (Subotica, Srb), Stella Doncheva (Shumen, Bg) and Silviu Oța (București, Ro) for their support. This object connects researchers from three different countries where the typology has been identified. A curious fact is that these types of buckle appear in the results of an internet search for the keywords: *celtic bronze beautiful authentic amulet* (Pl. 1/4). Behind the mysterious world of the Celts we can clearly see the presence of some Byzantine codices in the past, which is our common historical inheritance³⁶.

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³² Györffy 1990, 113, 115–117, 119.

³³ The Turkish etymology of the name *Csorvás* means *sand*. Ironically part of the site destroyed by a sand quarry.

³⁴ Pálóczi-Horváth 2018.

³⁵ It is an interesting fact that the region coin circulation at the time of the reign of king Bela II (1131–1141) can be considered as the “big boom”. From the whole material found with metal detectors only few can be dated before this period. In the same time is really interesting that at Orosháza, the centre of the region inhabited by Muslim population dealing with money exchange and have strong connection with the Balkan region.

³⁶ This paper was edited by Gábor Hatházi, translated by László Lichtenstein, maps were made by Csaba Fejes. We would like to thank their advices and work.

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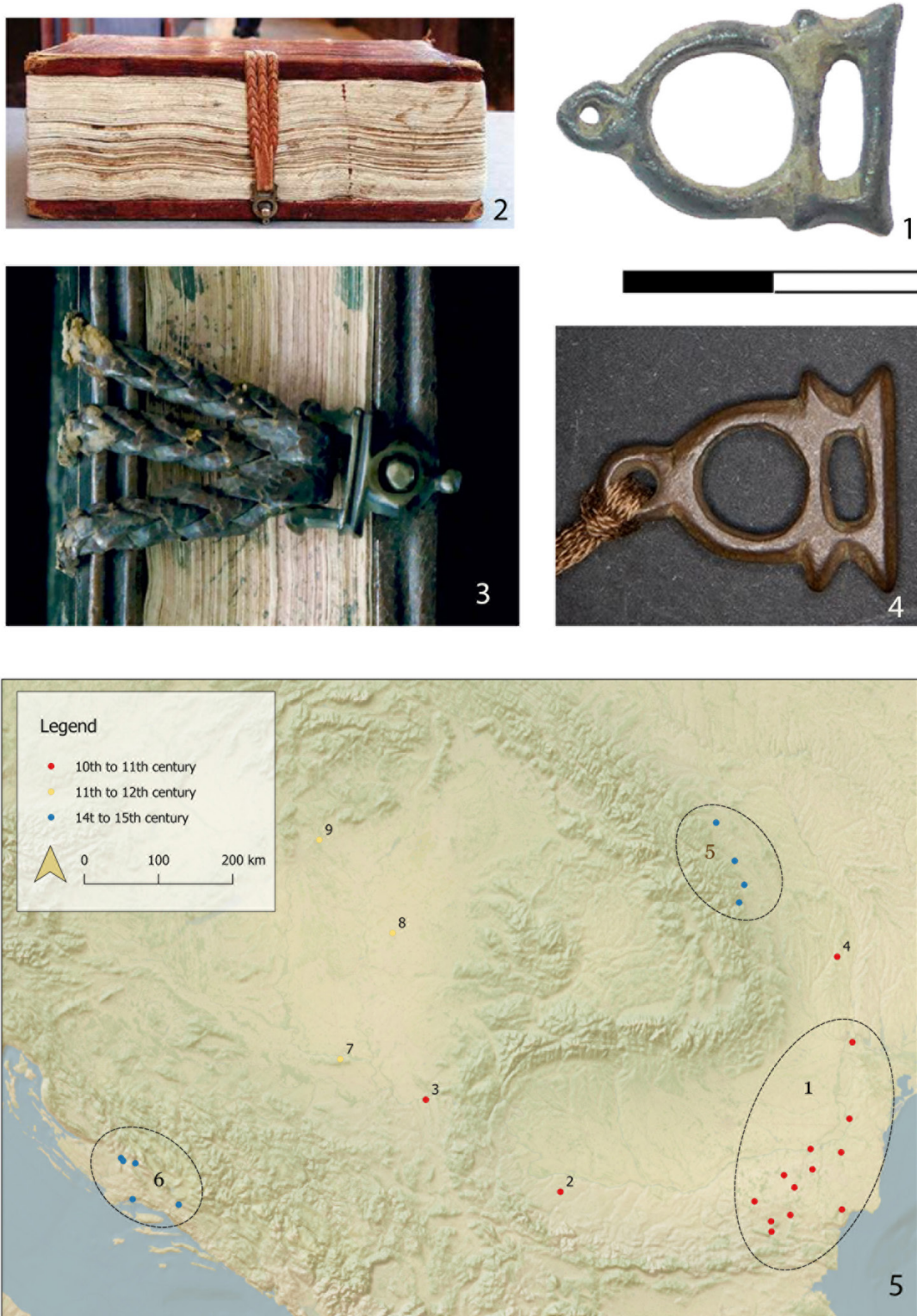
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Pl. 1. 1. Buckle from Orosháza-Szentetornya; 2. Boudalis 2016, Fig. 18; 3. Wijk 2019, Fig. 5.2; 4. „Celtic amulet” on the Internet: <https://www.catawiki.com/en/l/45126629-celtic-bronze-beautiful-authentic-amulet> (last visit on 06.02.2022); 5. Spread area of the buckles (1: Lower Danube, from West to East: Abritus-Razgrad, Novosel, Preslav, Ruyno, Pliska, Skala, Sredishte, Păcuil lui Soare, Odartsii, Tropaeum Traiani-Adamclisi, Capidava, Dinogatia-Garvăn; 2: Yakimovo; 3: Kostolac; 4: Dodești; 5: Northwestern Moldavia, from West to East: Rădăuți, Baia, Netezi, Bistrița; 6: Central Dalmatia, from West to East: Knin, Biskupija, Cetine, Kaštela, Prološac; 7: Rakovac/Dombó; 8: Orosháza-Szentetornya; 9: Domony).



Pl. 2. 1–2. Double shoe buckles (?) from Orosháza-Szentetornya; 3–14. book clasps and fittings from Orosháza-Szentetornya.



Pl. 3. 11th and 12th century finds from Orosháza-Szentetornya.

