

# VISUAL-MATERIAL EVIDENCE OF VIKING PRESENCE IN THE BALKANS

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**Abstract.** *The Swedish and Norwegian Vikings were present in the Balkans including in Bulgaria. The archaeological and visual materials found on the Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish territory support this statement. The majority of the objects constitute parts of weapons and tools related to the Scandinavian warfare. Most of these artifacts were discovered in North East of Bulgaria close to the Romanian border. They can be attributed to the Rus princes (father and son): Igor I (912-945) and Svyatoslav I Igorevich (942-972) who passed by the Bulgarian lands in the 10-th century and the Norwegian prince Harald who supported the Byzantine Empire to cause the downfall of the First Bulgarian kingdom at the beginning of the next century. Despite this sorrowful reputation, though, the Viking material culture in Bulgaria, Romania and Istanbul gives evidence to the multicultural mosaic of our region. It also enriches the Balkan history and culture. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to outline the Viking objects discovered in the Balkans.*

**Keywords:** *Vikings, Varangians, the Balkans, artifacts, Byzantine Empire.*

## INTRODUCTION – CONTACTS BETWEEN VIKINGS AND BYZANTIUM

The Swedish Vikings, who are known as “Varangians” mostly in Byzantine sources, were present in the Balkans. They first carried out their military and trading campaigns from Scandinavia to the territories of European Russia, Ukraine and reached the Balkans<sup>1</sup>. A party of Norwegian Vikings called *normen* led by the Norwegian prince Sverkel directly interfered in the Bulgarian history by helping the Byzantine Empire defeat the

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<sup>1</sup> Jansson, 1994, 34-35.

Bulgarian troops and put an end to the First Bulgarian Kingdom at the beginning of the tenth century. Scandinavian warriors took part in the Crusades in the 11-th and 12-th centuries.

The contacts of the Scandinavians with the Eastern Europe and more specifically with the Balkans are abundantly investigated in the Russian and Swedish historiography.<sup>2</sup> However, their availability is quite vague and scanty in Bulgarian research. Few discussions have been carried out by Bulgarian scholars on the presence of Vikings in the Balkans. What is known about the Scandinavian presence in the Balkans is as follows. Firstly, Scandinavians led by the aforementioned Rus Princes Igor I and Sviatoslav invaded the Bulgarian lands through Danube in the end of the first half and the the second half of the 10-th century. Secondly, they contributed to the collapse of the First Bulgarian kingdom supporting the Byzantine emperor Basil II (the Slayer of Bulgarians) (958-1025). Thirdly, they crashed all attempts of Bulgarian rebellions against the Byzantine rule (11-13 century) such as the one organized by Peter Delyan in 1040-1041. Finally, they took part in the Crusades<sup>3</sup>.

However, the other hand, the cultural and historical relations between Scandinavians and the Balkans in the Middle Ages are not reflected solely on historical narrative. They remain available in material-visual artifacts found mostly in North East Bulgaria<sup>4</sup>.

Since no Bulgarian medieval written evidences for the arrival of Vikings at the Bulgarian and Balkan lands are available, the Bulgarian historiography frequently refers to Byzantine annalists such as John Skylitzes (1040-1101)<sup>5</sup> and Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959)<sup>6</sup> as well as chronicles from the remote lands of Kiev Russia such as the Russian Primary Chronicle (*Povest Vremyannikh Let*)<sup>7</sup>. These text sources denominated the newcomers “Varangians” or “Rus-people”<sup>8</sup> since they originated from the Eastern parts of Scandinavia (Sweden) and the first large Russian state (Kievan Rus’) where Slavic and

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<sup>2</sup> Kirpichnikov 1966; Hedenstierna-Jonson, 2009, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Gyuzelev, 2001, 57-58.

<sup>4</sup> Yotov, 2004, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Skylitzes; Wortley, 2010, 319.

<sup>6</sup> Moravcsik; Jenkins, Constantine Porphyrogenet, 1967, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Cross; Wetzor, 1953, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Scandinavian communities intermingled<sup>9</sup>. Russian and Swedish scholars also consider that the Scandinavians in the Balkans were Vikings from Sweden, more specifically from the Viking trade center of Birka located at the lake of Melaren and the Island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea<sup>10</sup>. The Swedish provenance of the Scandinavians who came from Scandinavia, European Russia and today's Ukraine; settled in the Balkans and served as mercenaries and personal bodyguards of the Byzantine emperor, has been confirmed in travel notes written by Arab travelers such as Ibn Fadlan<sup>11</sup> in his work *Risala*, where he describes the journeys through the Volga Bulgaria<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, Swedish Vikings comprised the Viking group who moved southeast to the Balkans via the large water routes of Volga, Don, down through Dnepr, and Danube where they reached the coasts of the Black sea and Byzantium. This is the so-called „Put iz varyag v greki” (trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks)<sup>13</sup>. This immense waterway proved to be the threshold to the Byzantine European periphery coinciding with the Balkans, where the Varangians left their material-visual legacy of their military and commercial travels and presence at the Balkans (FIGURE 1).

Hence, the Bulgarian archaeology and art history has further contributed to the analysis of this evidence for Scandinavian presence in the Balkans (including the Bulgarian territory). It would be sufficient to mention in this regard scholars such as the archaeologist Valeri Yotov<sup>14</sup> from the Varna historical museum and the art-historian Oksana Minaeva<sup>15</sup> who was a member of the Bulgarian Art History Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. They are among the few scholars who worked on the area of the Scandinavian presence in the Balkans and Bulgaria.

According to the above-mentioned scholar, there are a lot of common similar stylistic features in the external aspect and the decoration of the Scandinavian objects found in the Bulgarian

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<sup>9</sup> Duczko, 2004, 156-158.

<sup>10</sup> Holmqvist, 1993, 65-66; Melnikova, 2011, 187-188.

<sup>11</sup> Бораджиева; Наумов, 1992: IV, 22, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Wikander, 1978, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Melnikova, 2000, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Yotov, 2004, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Minaeva, 2012, 75-76.

territory with those excavated next to the Swedish Viking center of Birka situated not far from Stockholm<sup>16</sup>. This statement has been supported by Swedish scientists as well such as Lena Holmqvist<sup>17</sup>. This discovery also confirms the presence of Scandinavians in the Balkans and particularly in Bulgaria. So, these Vikings, denominated *Rus* by the Arabs and *Varangians* by the Byzantines, used to assault the Byzantine capital and periphery along with Slavs and Pechenegs; served as Byzantine mercenaries and personal bodyguards of the emperor; and helped Basil II (976-1025) defeat the Bulgarians and subdue the First Bulgarian kingdom<sup>18</sup>.

## THE SCANDINAVIAN ARTIFACTS

The discovery of Scandinavian finds in the lands southeast of Scandinavia, including the Balkans, confirm the standpoint that Scandinavians were actively present at these territories rather as conquerors than as peaceful settlers and wanderers traveling to new places. These artifacts have acquired a more specific nature in the Balkans (and Bulgaria). The objects originated from Scandinavia have been found mostly in the northeastern and the northwestern parts of Bulgaria, on the border with Romania as well as in the Istanbul cathedral of Hagia Sophia. The majority of the objects have been manufactured of metal (iron, bronze)<sup>19</sup>. Generally, among them predominate those associated with weaponry and the outfit of the medieval Scandinavia. Viking finds on the Bulgarian and the Balkan territory can be provisionally split into several groups: weapons and equipment; monuments related to the cult of their ancestors or divinities from the Scandinavian pantheon (Odin, Thor, Freyr); and objects of everyday use such as straps and harness.

### **Weaponry – Axes**

The first group of finds are weapons and military equipment. They constitute the most numerous and consequently

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<sup>16</sup> Minaeva, 2012, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Holmqvist, 1993, 132.

<sup>18</sup> Gyuzelev, 2012, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Yotov, 2004, 36-37.

the most obvious component of the visual-material evidence for Scandinavian presence in the Balkans and Bulgaria. They entail elements of the so-called offensive weapons (axes, swords) as well as devices attached to parts of the clothing such as tips for sword sheaths, for instance. It can be suggested that the objects related to weaponry and military equipment occupy almost the entire arsenal of Viking artifacts in Bulgaria. We can start with the investigation on the axes, since axe was the most popular and affordable weapon for each warrior of Scandinavia<sup>20</sup>. Despite being in terms of a construction the most simplified kind of a weapon (a long shaft + edge), the Viking battle-axe is not to underestimate. This weapon is one of the basic visual components of the Scandinavian warrior equipment. That is why a lot of people could afford it. In the same way as the elite Viking warrior, the Scandinavian farmer (bond) used an axe both, as an agrarian tool and as a weapon to fight against wild beasts and people. In other words, their simplicity does not decrease their efficiency as weapons. Especially the long and heavier two-hand axes (Danish axes) were stable weapons, which could function as defensive weapons. Their shaft was approximately between 130 and 180 cm. whereas the entire weapon was very heavy; it could reach 3-5 kg.<sup>21</sup> Let us imagine, an ordinary sword weights on average between 1 and 2 kg, being the heaviest the two-hand types of swords. The axe edge itself was light, which gave the possibility to swing with one hand like a spear over the head<sup>22</sup>.

The most frequently utilized battle-axes were the so-called Danish axes, which were so sharp that a single swing could cut through a knight along with his horse. In this regard, a skillful warrior wearing one long axe was capable of opposing a shield-and-sword armed knight. Two axes have been found in northwestern and northeastern Bulgaria: in the Vrachansko region, close to the Barzina village and in the Shumenski region, at the stronghold near to the Stana village, not so far away from the Novi Pazar city (FIGURE 2). For the manufacturing of the axes incrustation with silver and copper thread was used<sup>23</sup>. Artistic motifs and subjects were included in its decoration. These

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<sup>20</sup> Pedersen, 2008, 181.

<sup>21</sup> Yotov, 2004, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, 2005, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Yotov, 2004, 39.

art motifs were directly associated with the North Germanic animal style of the so-called “four-legged beast” and with the animal menacing pose<sup>24</sup>. In the case of the axe from the Vrachansko region, the illustration includes two snakes and a four-legged animal, while the axe from Shumenski region – two birds. The edge of both axes is relatively narrow but arched. These axes are lightened (300 grams and length of 25 sm.<sup>25</sup>. This logically leads to the suggestion that these were one-hand (short) axes and could be combined with a wooden shield with a central umbo in the other hand when battling. Both axes date from the period between the end of the 10-th century and the beginning of the 11-th century.

### **Weaponry – Swords**

Unlike the axes, there have been found more swords in number – 4 being one of them not preserved (FIGURE 3). Swords were not so widely distributed the same as axes, since few Vikings could afford to buy this expensive article, which was manufactured and forged in the expensive workshops of the Frankish empire, from where they were exported to Scandinavia. Unlike axes, swords were usually perceived as a representative weapon owned by the rich and the noble (jarls) of Scandinavia who were the only ones who could afford it. The manufacturing was a complicated task that used to take a lot of time and means. Therefore, the production of swords was ordered in advance, whereas the axes could be manufactured more quickly. The first of the three entire Viking swords in Bulgaria was found in the region of the medieval fortress near to the Opaka village, not far from Popovo city. Its dating has been determined around the 9-th century, when a set of military campaigns against Byzantium were organized. Hence, it could be associated with the campaigns of the Kievan prince Svyatoslav. A second sword was found in the region of the Gradeshnitsa village, Vrachansko region. It dates from a later period, the second half of the 10-th century<sup>26</sup>. The approximate one-century difference in the dating corresponds to the dissimilarities in its structure if we compare it to the previous

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<sup>24</sup> Näsman, 1991, 67.

<sup>25</sup> Yotov, 2004, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

sword. Whereas the sword from the Opaka village has its guard upright, the two arms of the guard of the one from the Gradeshnitsa village are symmetrically twisted from both sides. The third sword is from the Govezda village in the Montansko region and is determined as one of the most preserved swords in medieval Bulgaria. It has a long ending (tip) and a straight guard, which places it closer to the form of the later medieval swords of Europe from the period between 12-th and 14-th century<sup>27</sup>. Like the one from Gradeshnitsa, the third sword is probably related to the campaigns of the Magyars into the Balkans. But this does not decrease the Scandinavian influence. Apart from the three more preserved swords, a part of another sword has been found in Northeastern Bulgaria (the exact location is unknown)<sup>28</sup>. The edge has a similar form and it dates from the second half of the 10-th century.

### **Weaponry - Tips for sword sheaths**

Besides the offensive weapons (swords and axes), another component of the military equipment are the tips for sword sheaths. In Bulgaria, several tips for sword sheaths have been found. These have a different decoration, which according to the Bulgarian art historian Oksana Minaeva draws them closer to those excavated in the Swedish Viking city of Birka (Minaeva 2012). According to the Bulgarian archaeologist Valeri Yotov the tips for sword sheaths in Bulgaria are probably 15 (FIGURE 4). They constituted small tracery and thick cases with rounded asymmetric shape and were manufactured of bronze by means of casting. The tips (endings) were attached to the wooden sword sheath<sup>29</sup>.

One of these tips for sword sheaths has been discovered in northeastern Bulgaria, but the exact location still remains unclear. Its decoration resembles other tips for sword sheaths found in the Viking center of Birka (today a Swedish archaeological complex) as well as in Russian Viking settlement centers such as Gnezdovo, Ladoga, in Ukrainian archaeological reserves such as in Pskov and Kiev. The ornament reminds the old-Scandinavian style

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<sup>27</sup> Kirpichnikov, 1966, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Yotov, 2004, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Borre, which constitutes interlacing of geometrical and curved lines. What can be noticed on one side is the image of a bird with open wings, whereas on the other side there are intertwined snakes clutching each other's bodies and preparing for scrimmage or battle. This is frequently a popular theme in old-Scandinavian art. It is the so-called the Jellinge style, which is typical especially in Denmark<sup>30</sup>. The dating can probably be attributed to the end of the 10-th century and the beginning of the next century.

Another tip for sword sheath is found in the Razgradsko region, close to the stronghold of the Miladinovtsi village. The pictorial composition on the surface of both sides also supports the attribution of Scandinavian origin to the object. The interweaved serpentine geometrical shapes allude to the "Germanic four-legged beast" style, which constitutes the representation of animal images mutually grabbing each other. This can be interpreted as a battle scene in that case. The dating is probably the 10-th century.

A third tip for sword sheath has been discovered in the Pavlikeni region<sup>31</sup>. It has two openings that have probably played decoration functional role. There also were indented nicks shaping the image of a fish (more precisely a fishbone), one of the most interesting animal symbols in medieval art as a whole featuring the mythical and ritual systems of many marine civilizations as well. On some of the borders of the tip there is gilding, which suggests that the bearer of the respective sword sheath could afford a more expensive and more exquisite workmanship. According to the Swedish scholar Charlotte Hedenstierna there were tips for sword sheaths with gilding in Scandinavian (Norway and Denmark) as well, and these gave evidence to the eminent provenance and political power of the one wearing it<sup>32</sup>.

Another metal plate of a sword sheath has been discovered close to the Stana stronghold, not so far from Novi Pazar city. Its decoration is compound of interweaved lines (or ribbons), accompanied by an image of a protruding face in the middle.

Similar stylistic compositions combining the above-mentioned motif of "a Germanic four-legged beast" with

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<sup>30</sup> Bertelsen, 2002, 145.

<sup>31</sup> Yotov, 2004, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Hedenstierna, 2002, 68.



interweaved geometrically curved or parallel lines can be observed in other sword sheaths tips (for instance, those found in Madara, from Chirpan city (Starozagorsko region), the region of the Preslav stronghold). The last sword sheath tip found in the Preslav region contain is decorated with vegetation elements such as palmette, heart-shaped leaf, clear-cut ribbon, and massive bud. However, the exact location of a great number of sword sheath tips is still not established. Instead, what is known is that they have been discovered in northeastern Bulgaria. Apart from sword sheath tips, there have been found tips of sword handles in the northeastern Bulgarian settlements of Preslav city and Manastirishte village (FIGURE 5).

### **Pagan cult objects**

Besides weapons and the elements connected with the Viking warrior outfit, there have been discovered, although few in number, artefacts illustrating the cult of the pagan divinities from the Scandinavian pantheon (Odin, Thor, Freyr). More specifically, these are four small amulets discovered in Drustur city, Veliki Preslav city, and not far from Shumen city, as well as on the aforementioned Danube island (today a part of the Romanian territory)<sup>33</sup>. The last amulet, which was found in Romania, probably resembles a miniature axe and was published by Petre Diaconu and Dumitru Vilceanu<sup>34</sup>. Georgi Atanasov also considers that these small amulets are related to Viking pagan beliefs and were used in the complex sacrificial rituals of the Varangians arriving at Danube<sup>35</sup>. Analogically, the Polish archaeologist Wladimir Duczko, among other East-European and Russian researchers, writes about the availability of a great variety of small amulets in the shape of a hammer (Thor's hammer, Mjolnir) (and axe) along with other significant objects linked to the way of life and the environment in the Viking settlements of the European Russia, the Baltic region and Ukraine (Kiev)<sup>36</sup>. Returning to Bulgaria, other amulets, this time in the shape of small axes, have been excavated in the Bulgarian territory. Their

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<sup>33</sup> Yotov, 2004, 41.

<sup>34</sup> Diaconu; Vilceanu, 1972, 140.

<sup>35</sup> Atanasov, 76-80.

<sup>36</sup> Duczko, 2004, 265.

exact number is unknown, maybe because many of these figures are considered not Scandinavian or influenced by non-Scandinavian art (Magyar or Pechenegian)<sup>37</sup>.

### **Objects of everyday life**

So far, we have indicated those objects related to the bellicose existence and the cult attributed to the Scandinavians in the Balkan territory (principally in Bulgaria). Despite the small quantity, among the Viking artifacts are also such objects related to the everyday living such as straps and horse-trapping, antique hasps (fibulas) (FIGURE 6). More specifically, a leather strap tip has been found in Bulgaria, although the exact location is unclear. In reality, according to the Bulgarian archaeologist Valeri Yotov, whom we referred to a couple of times, this tip constitutes a small case with the shape of a cylinder. Two interweaved curved lamellas are also included in the structure, whereas the decoration reminds of the motif of intertwining, interweaving lines or ribbons, serpentine ribbons, as we have already seen in the decoration image on the surface of the axe blades and the sword sheath tips. This is a clear proof for propinquity with the medieval Scandinavian art styles.

According to the Romanian archaeologists Gheorghe Stefan and Ion Barnia, who confirm the presence of a similar leather strap found in Romania, in the ancient Danube settlement of Dinogecia, this similarity consolidates the viewpoint that before crossing Danube (cultural and transitional border) and reaching the Balkans, the Vikings (more precisely the Varangians) have passed by Eastern Romanian regions<sup>38</sup>. This happened when the Prince Igor's (Svyatoslav) warriors crossed the Dnieper river, reached the Black Sea mouth and the Danube coastal regions, where they prepared to cross Danube<sup>39</sup>. The analogy of the Romanian researcher confirms that this strap is a Viking (Varangian) find. Furthermore, a hollow (curved) fibula has also been found, but it is unclear where exactly. It is a silver-cast hemisphere with images of human face on the front side.

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<sup>37</sup> Yotov, 2004, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Stefan; Barnea; Comsa, 1967, 295, fig. 173/26.

<sup>39</sup> Pavlov, 2005, 61.

Interesting to notice are other everyday objects discovered close to the Byzantine fortress Nufaru such as bracelet glass fragments, dated to the 11-th century and objects made of wood such as wooden horses as toys<sup>40</sup>. The glass bracelets exist rather in fragmentary form and have different shapes (circular, semi-circular, ellipsoidal or square). Most of these glass adornments are coloured in different hues of blue, but green, black, violet, yellow or colourless bracelet fragments were also found<sup>41</sup>. Similar bracelets were also discovered in other nearby Byzantine settlements located on the Danube arms, in archaeological sites such as Pucuiul lui Soare, Dinogetia-Garvăn and Isaccea-Noviodunum-Vicina<sup>42</sup>. The presence of bracelets which were typical women's decoration objects and wooden objects different than weapons indicate the presence of peaceful Viking settlements in Romania close to the Danube delta.

### **Runic inscriptions**

Despite not resembling exactly a historical find, since it is not a specific artifact of object, a significant evidence for the presence of Vikings on the Balkans is provided by a runic inscription on the monumental cathedral of Hagia Sophia in today's Istanbul (FIGURE 7). The inscription is probably carved by the future Norse (Norwegian) konung (king) Harald Hardrade (the Severe) (1047-1066), who supported the Byzantium emperor Basil II the Slayer of Bulgarians to bring the end of the First Bulgarian kingdom acting as a leader of a 500 Viking warriors vanguard and a mercenary in the Varangian Guard protecting the same emperor. Another runic inscription is carved in an antique statue from Piraeus in Greece, where a Runic (probably old-Scandinavian) inscription from the XI-th century has been attested (FIGURE 8).

### **CONCLUSION**

Summarizing, among the Varangian finds in the Balkans including Bulgaria, those related to weaponry and bellicose outfit prevail. They demonstrate clearly that Scandinavians arrived and

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<sup>40</sup> Damian; Vasile, 2011, 275-290.

<sup>41</sup> Bugoi, Poll, Adameseanu, Calligaro: Pichon, 2012, 165.

<sup>42</sup> Diaconu, 1965, 140; Diaconu, 2001, 11-16.

even settled in the Bulgarian and the Balkan territory because of the Variangian-Russ military and trading campaigns to Constantinople in the period between IX and XI century and the recruitment of Varangian warriors as personal bodyguards of the Byzantine emperor and particularly Basil II. They also attest that the contacts between Scandinavians and Balkan people (including Bulgarians) had predominantly military nature. It might be concluded that the settlers from the Scandinavian North have contributed to the downfall of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, their role for the cultural and historical development and ethnical diversity of the Balkans is indubitable.

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## ENCLOSURES

FIGURE 1

Distribution of archaeological excavations related to the Varangians in the Balkans (including Bulgaria), X-XI century and the Dnepr waterway (путь из варяг в греки)

Source: <https://slaviablog.wordpress.com/2014/06/07/varangians/>



FIGURE 2

Battle axes from northwestern Bulgaria (Vrachansko region, Barzina village, Liutibrod village) and northeastern Bulgaria (Razgradsko region, Stana village, Provadia city)

Source: Йотов, В. „Варяги и нормани по българските земи през ранното средновековие – археологически данни“, В: *Снори Стурлусон и корените на нордската книжовност*, Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ София, 2004, стр. 48-60





### FIGURE 3

Two whole swords from the Bulgarian villages Opaka and Gradeshnitsa (1 and 2 respectively) and a pommel with a guard (3rd) from the Romanian island Păcuiul lui Soare.

#### Sources:

Stefan, Gheorghe; Barnea, Ion; Comsa, Maria; Comsa, Eugen *Dinogetia I Așezarea feudală timpurie de la Bisericiuța-Garvăn*, (Biblioteca de Arheologie XIII), Editura Academiei, București, 1967;

Йотов, В. „Варяги и нормани по българските земи през ранното средновековие – археологически данни“, В: *Спори Стурлусон и корените на нордската книжовност*, Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ София, 2004, стр. 48-60



FIGURE 4

Sword sheath tips from northeastern Bulgaria (Razgradsko region, the villages Stana, Zavet, Miladinovtsi, Madara city), Northern Bulgaria (Pavlikeni city, Gigen village)

Source:

Minaeva, Oksana & Holmquist, Lena. *Bulgarian Parallels to Oriental Finds of Metalwork from Birka*, New Bulgarian University, Sofia 2012



Analogy with sword sheath tips from Birka, Sweden.



FIGURE 5

Sword handle tips from northeastern Bulgaria (Manastirishte village and Preslav city)

Source: Йотов, В. „Варяги и нормани по българските земи през ранното средновековие – археологически данни“, В: *Снори Стурлусон и корените на нордската книжовност*, Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ София, 2004, стр. 48-60

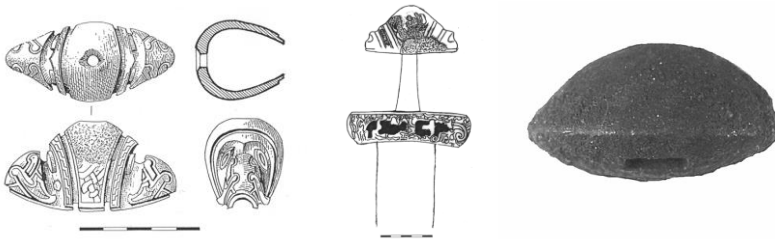


FIGURE 6

Strap tips from Romania (the antique settlement of Dinogecia) and northeastern Bulgaria

Source: Йотов, В. „Варяги и нормани по българските земи през ранното средновековие – археологически данни“, В: *Снори Стурлусон и корените на нордската книжовност*, Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ София, 2004, стр. 48-60



FIGURE 7

The runic inscription from Constantinople (Hagia Sophia cathedral) with the name of Halfdan, a mercenary in the Varangian guard of the Byzantine emperor Basil II.

Source:

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~chrisandpeter/relics/relics.html#Griffitti%20in%20Hagia%20Sophia>

And

James E. Knirk, “Runer i Hagia Sofia” i: *Istanbul, Nytt om runer* 14 (1999), 26-27



FIGURE 8

Antique statue of a lion in Greece (Piraeus) with a runic inscription from the XI century.

Source: The Viking Rune, online

<http://www.vikingrune.com/2008/11/piraeus-lion/>

