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A SHIELD-SHAPED RING OF EMBOSSED SHEET METAL FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM IN ZAGREB¹

Abstract: In terms of early medieval rings made of bronze (or silver) sheet metal with a widened circular, oval, elliptic, or rhomboid form, usually called the head of the ring, much has been written about their origin, variants, and distribution, as well as the period of their first appearance and the continuity of this truly interesting form of jewellery. Shield-shaped rings, such as they are frequently termed in part of the earlier professional literature, are characteristic primarily for Moravia, and also for eastern Austria and Slovenia. They can also be found in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, and in the last two countries they are considered a jewellery form characteristic for the Danubian region. Finds from Dalmatia and Albania suggest a different solution, and the problems related to this type of ring are certainly more numerous and complicated than previously thought. One particularly interesting example, previously unpublished, is in the collections of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, and its main characteristics tie it to a specific group known as the Blučina type. Another specimen, also unpublished, is a child's ring with a rhomboid widened head found at Novi Banovci (Serbia).

Keywords: Hrvatska (Croatia); Zagreb, Archaeological Museum; Serbia, Novi Banovci; early Middle Ages, jewellery for the hands, rings, shield-shaped rings of sheet metal of the Blučina type.

The extensive collection of chance and individual finds of medieval rings in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (further: AMZ) also contains a rare, but unfortunately not complete, early medieval ring made of bronze sheet metal with a large, decorated circular upper section, attached on one side to the only remaining part of an undecorated banded hoop that did not widen at the joint with the decorated upper section (AMZ S-4103). As most of the hoop is missing, it is not possible to say if the ends of the hoop were cut straight, open, overlapped, or overlapped and were fastened with a rivet. The upper part of the ring is decorated in the usual manner for such rings, with an embossed decoration of dots and wider protrusions created by hammering from the underside. In the centre of the decorative field, surrounded by a single row of dots around the outside, is a four-pointed star formed by embossed dots with concavely rounded

arms with a hemispherical protrusion in the centre and at the end of each arm — a total of 5 rounded protrusions in a 1-3-1 combination. The arms of the star are formed by a double row of dots, while an uninterrupted single line of dots surrounds the central rounded protrusion. The same pattern of dots forms a circular decoration in the semi-circular fields on the outer side of each of the four arms of the star. The diameter of the upper, decorated part of the ring measures 2.45 cm, the width of the hoop 0.60 cm, and the thickness of the sheet metal on the hoop 0.14 mm, while one can only speculate about the height of the ring, i.e., the diameter of its hoop (ca. 2.00 cm). The weight of this incompletely preserved bronze ring is only 0.995 g [Fig. 1:1-2].

It must be noted, with regret, that no information whatsoever accompanied the ring and, hence, nothing is known about its origin, whether it was a gift or purchase, or the possible circumstances of its find. This is hardly surprising, as the ring belongs to an old and, until recently, unorganised museum collection in which data of this type is scarce,

¹ I dedicate this work to my colleague and friend Pera, remembering many heartfelt meetings, fellowship, and conversations about the varied themes and issues of our everyday professional and personal lives.

or does not exist at all. Nonetheless, the preserved parts of the ring are in very good shape, covered by a healthy and solid green patina, and it can be hypothesised that the ring could have been an aquatic find, coming from a river bed (for example, a large number of artefacts from various archaeological periods in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb come from the bed of the Kupa river in Sisak). In contrast to this, the evident damage to the ring is certainly old, perhaps even very old, if it occurred in the medieval period, or it could be more recent if it occurred in the time more or less immediately before the acquisition of the ring for the present Archaeological Museum in Zagreb.²

In Croatia, shield-shaped rings are characteristic of early medieval archaeological sites in coastal Croatia, particularly Dalmatia, where a significant number have been documented. Accordingly, issues related to them have been discussed several times. It should be noted that, at first, they were considered characteristic of the early Croatian cemeteries of the 8th and beginning of the 9th centuries in the region of northern Dalmatia, and the rings themselves were dated from the 8th century to the middle of the 9th century (Belošević 1980: 94). Later, numerous archaeological excavations and new finds greatly contributed to a better understanding of the situation in the wider area of Dalmatia, and the lower boundary for the appearance of shield-

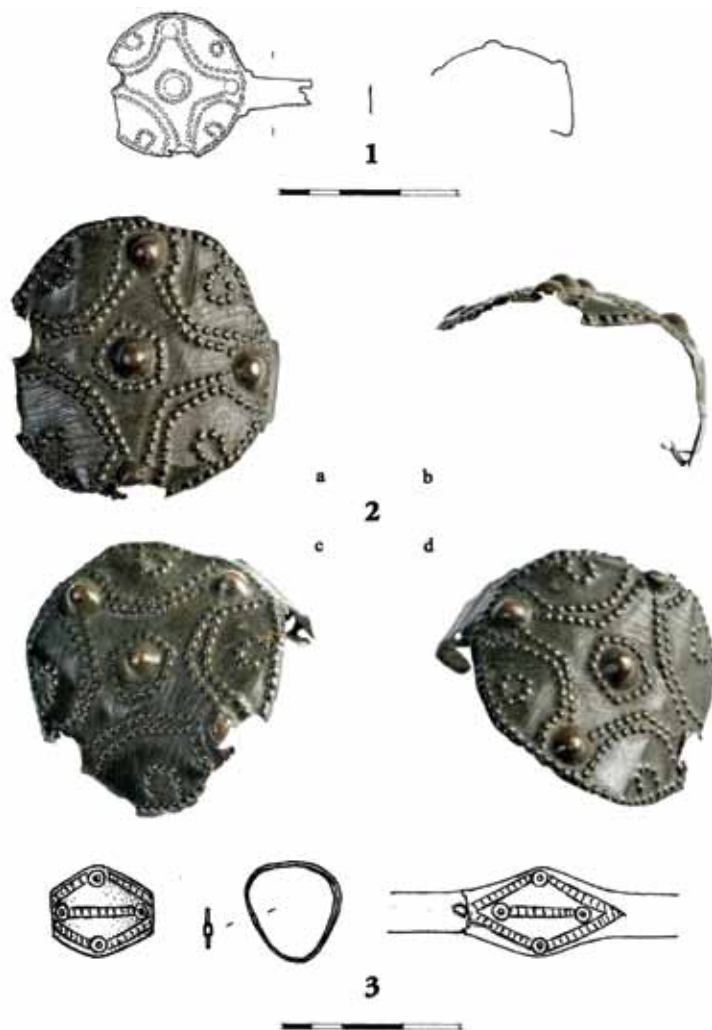


Fig. 1. The shield-shaped ring from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, S-4103. 1 - The drawing of the ring in 1:1 scale (drawing: Miljenka Galić, AMZ). 2a-d - Photographs of the ring in ca. 2:1 scale (photo: Igor Krajcar, AMZ). 3 - The drawing of the ring in 1:1 scale (drawing: Anita Dugonjić, AMZ).

² As well as this one, the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb has one more ring (S-1617 = P-9615) with a rhomboid shield-shaped upper section or head of the ring (*further*: widening.) The rhomboid widening is decorated with incision and punching, while the banded hoop to the ring was attached with an iron rivet on one of the shoulders. The ring is very well preserved, and came from Novi Banovci (Republic of Serbia), and was purchased for the AMZ between 1892 and 1912. It has very small dimensions and most probably belonged on a finger of a very small child. The dimensions of the ring are: height 1.65 cm, width 1.30 cm; width of the shield-shaped 1.26 cm; weight of the ring 1.627 g.

shaped rings was placed in the first half of the 8th century, the area of distribution encompassed the region of Dalmatian Croatia, and certain evidently late Roman and circum-Mediterranean similarities were recognised and specified in the workmanship and decoration of the rings, such as a cross, Christogram, pentagram, etc. (Belošević 2007: 263-264). In the recent period, following certain previously noted observations (Kurnatowska 1980: 167-168), research has moved forwards, and today the appearance, form, and development of shield-shaped rings are considered related to enclaves of autochthonous late Roman and early Byzantine populations in Dalmatia, the eastern Alpine region, the central and lower Danube basin,

and the south-eastern Balkans, which independently of one another, and in contact with new arrivals of various provenances, would have created a related but not necessarily identical object based on the same or approximately the same model from Late Antiquity. It is considered that this process in Dalmatia had its beginnings at the end of the 7th and in the 8th century, continuing until around the middle of the 9th century, and in individual cases, it seems to have been present longer (Petrinec 2005: 35-37; Petrinec 2009: 131-134, 240). Such a developmental process lasted long enough that it would have left behind sufficient recognisable and chronologically valuable typological variants that, except for their basic elements, are nonetheless inapplicable to the formal features and typological characteristics of the shield-shaped ring from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. The model for its features and characteristics should be sought elsewhere, and certainly not at present in Croatia.

A second, considerably larger, zone of finds and distribution of early medieval shield-shaped rings encompasses the region along the Morava river in Czechia and Slovakia, as well as regions in the neighbouring Austrian Danube basin, and in eastern Austria and western Hungary (Eastern Alpine, Dalmatian, and Lower Danube regions: Kurnatowska 1980: 159 Ryc. 4:1; Lower Danube: Fiedler 1992; 180-182; Grigorov 2013: 106-107, 109, 112). In Czechia and Slovakia, shield-shaped rings (*prstěny štítkové, štítkové prstěny*) have long ago been noted as a special feature and, accordingly, considerable attention has been paid to them. There are considerable numbers of rings with a distinct widening of the upper section and the frequent use of dotted decoration made by hammering from below (embossed), and they are considered a special type of shield-shaped rings, named after the many examples found at the famous site of Blučina, not far from Brno in Czechia (Poulik 1947: 153-157). At first, there were even dilemmas as to whether these rings should be placed among those manufactured in the Danube basin or if they should be considered an import from Byzantium (Eisner 1947, 4), but the conviction soon prevailed that these were in fact the products of local (Slavic) inhabitants dwelling in Moravia and, hence, these rings should be dated to the second half of the 9th century (Poulik 1947: 156; Poulik 1948: 51, 54, 201-202), in some cases with continuity even into

the second half of the 10th century (Dostál 1965: 394). Subsequently, not much later, four forms of the shield-like widening were typologically distinguished (circular, oval horizontal, oval vertical, and rhomboid), along with two, or rather, three variants of decoration - *var. a*: a decoration hammered from below consisting of rounded and dotted protrusions; *var. b*: an engraved floral or geometric decoration combined with a punched pattern in the fields between; and *var. c*: an incised decoration or a combination of incision and punching (Hrubý 1955: 268-269; additional elaboration: Dostál 1966: 57-58; Rejholcová 1995: 70), and all these forms and decorative variants are attributed as chronologically contemporary to the period from the last third of the 9th century to the first quarter of the 10th century (Hrubý 1955: 267-268) or, at the earliest, from the second third of the 9th century to the period around the year 900 (Budimský-Krička 1959: 142-143) [Fig. 2]. More recently, a chronological span has been suggested from the

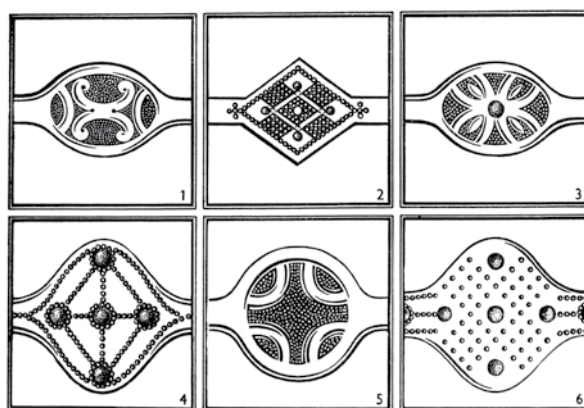


Fig. 2. Forms of shield-shaped widenings on rings from sites in Moravia (from: Hrubý 1955, 269 Obr. 42). 1,3 - Oval lengthwise. 2 - Rhomboid. 4,6 - Oval transverse. 5 - Circular.

second half of the 9th century to the beginning of the 10th century (Rejholcová 1995: 70/Čakajovce-Kostolné; to the second half of the 10th century or into the early 11th century: Dostál 1965: 394; Knific 1974: 18; Szőke 1996: 101), so the earliest dates remain those placing the appearance of the shield-shaped rings in the lower Austrian part of the Danube basin in the first quarter of or the early 9th century (Friesinger 1974: 97; Tovarnik 1986: 435), which were later corrected to an even earlier date and time, i.e., the period before the year 800 (Tovarnik 1993: 274), while more recently, even

the third quarter of the 8th century is mentioned (Hausmair 2016: 49/Micheldorf/Kremsdorf).

The observations of Hungarian archaeologists have contributed to a better knowledge of the issues involving shield-shaped rings, based primarily on insights and conclusions gathered during excavations of Avar cemeteries. In the 1960s, the presence of shield-shaped rings in Hungary was noted as early as in the first half of the 7th century, but they were more commonly produced and used in the following century, as was shown and proven by finds from late Avaric graves from the late 8th century (Kovrig 1963: 166-168. Similarly, Čilinská 1966: 156-158; Čilinská 1975: 89-90, Fig. 10:3/type III). Recently, these and numerous other new data have meant that today, with considerable certainty, it can be established that narrow and less widened upper parts of these rings were, in terms of relative chronology, an earlier element characteristic of the final late Avar and early Carolingian periods, while examples with a broad widening often decorated with rounded protrusions – known as the *Blučina* type – were later than the former type and were closer to the middle and second half of the 9th century (Szőke 1992: 869-871; Szőke 1992a: 87-88; Szőke 1996: 101; Müller 2010: 217).³ This dating is, hence, more or less congruent to the dating that relates the appearance and use of this late group of shield-shaped rings in the eastern Alpine region to the *Köttlach I* horizon, with the beginning of this horizon placed in the period around the middle of the 9th century, continuing into the first half of the 10th century (Giesler 1980: 86, 87 Fig. 2:9, 95-96).⁴ Grave goods have clearly shown that shield-shaped rings, generally speaking, were

a jewellery form characteristic of female and child graves, and only rare examples were found in male graves. This is true for all the regions of distribution mentioned here, as well as both phases or periods of use of shield-shaped rings.

In the eastern Alpine region, because of the variety and relative abundance, the finds of shield-shaped rings discovered in Slovenia are essential (Gorenjska/Upper Carniola, central and eastern Slovenia), although any more comprehensive reports about this type of early medieval material are as yet scarce that exceed the framework of a catalogue publication of grave, settlement, or chance finds (Knific 1975: 18).⁵ It should certainly be emphasised that the local production of these rings was probably proven for Slovenia (Veršnik 2009: 37/Ljubična nad Zbelovsko goro), where rings with open ends that overlap predominate, as opposed to the rare rings whose ends were joined with a rivet, that examples are more frequent with a widened upper section, and that among the decorations variously conceived incised banded patterns and impressed circles with a dot in the centre, as well as the decoration of embossed rounded protrusions and dots, were all approximately equally represented. Among the shield-shaped rings from Slovenia, in particular examples of the *Blučina* type, so far not a single example has been registered with a circular widening.

The decorative motif on the circular shield-shaped widening of the ring, the circular form of the peltate widening, and the smooth and undecorated banded hoop not broadened at the join with the shield-shaped widening make the example from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb distinctive and, hence, even more interesting. Suitable comparisons for these characteristics at present are offered merely by rare examples, most-

³ Szőke also considered that in Moravia examples of the *Blučina* type extended all the way to the second half of the 10th century, taking as an example the finds from the cemetery of Čakajovce-Kostolné, gr. 426, where a shield-shaped ring of this type was found together in a grave with a pair of S-circlets (Rejholcová 1995: 156 Pl. LXVIII). This same find is, in fact, dated to the second half of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century (op. cit., 70). A chronological framework close to that once suggested by W. Hrubý (1955) was supported in Hungary by Sós 1973: 120-121.

⁴ In contrast, the earlier group of shield-shaped rings with a narrower and less widened upper section would be approximately contemporary to the early Carolingian cemeteries of the “*Sopronköhida-Pitten-Pottenbrunn*” type in Lower and Upper Austria and north-western Hungary, with the “*Vör-Köttlach*” horizon in the eastern Alpine region, and with the early Great Moravian period in Moravia and south-western Slovakia.

⁵ Knific listed the finds from most of the then known Slovenian sites, noting an example from the site of Kranj-farna cerkev, gr. 120/53, discovered together with a raceme earring of the Bijelo Brdo culture and, hence, dated to the 10th or early 11th century; Korošec 1979: 219-221 (group 4.1a — “*of thin sheet-metal*”, earlier variant; group 4.2a — “*of thicker sheet-metal*”, later variant); Bitenc and Knific 2001, 90 no. 288 (Bled-Pristava), 91-92 no. 291 (Kranj-farna cerkev), 100 no. 328 (Gradišče nad Bašljem), 103 no. 340 (Ljubična nad Zbelsko Goro). — Some twenty years ago an exhaustive BA dissertation (84 pages) for the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana was written on the subject of early medieval shield-shaped rings from Slovenia, but unfortunately it was not published (Udovč 2003).

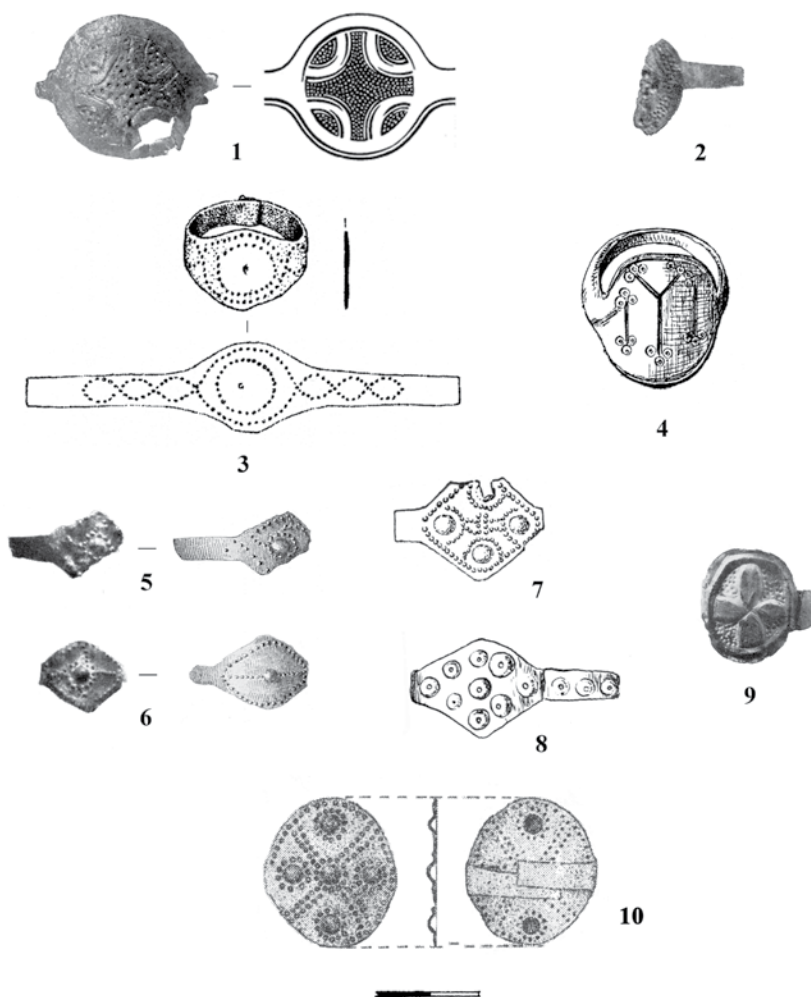


Fig. 3. Comparisons of the form and decorations present on the shield-shaped ring from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, S-4103. 1-4 - Circular shield-shaped widening: 1 - Staré Město-Na valách, gr. 52/50 (Hrubý 1955, 268-269, 474, Tab. 73:9); 2 - Devín-Staré vinohrady; gr. 17/m (Kraskovská 1963, 396, 399, 405 Tab. III:13); 3 - Nin-Ždrijac, gr. 54/f-ch (Belošević 2007, 64, 267 no. 16, Tab. LIV:14); 4 - Brestovac, 1821, hoard? (Hampel 1905/2, 425; Hampel 1905/3, Taf. 320:9). 5-10 - Smooth and undecorated banded hoop not broadened at the juncture with the circular widening: 5-6 - Boleradice-Radle, gr. 37/f (Poulik 1948, 155, Tab. LXVII:6-7); 7 - Skalice-Háj, tumulus 8: gr. 1/f (Budimský-Krička 1959, 65-66, 142 Abb. 33:4, 186 Taf. XVII:9); 8 - Bled-Pristava II, gr. 68/f [sic!] (Korošec 1979, 68, Korošec 1979/2; Tab. 11:5a); 9 - Steinabrunn, gr. 80 (Friesinger 1965, 90, Abb. 2); 10 - Izvoare-La pod la Hărmănești (Mitrea 1980, 111, 184 Pl. XLV:2).

ly discovered in Moravia. A circular shield-shaped widening with a decorative motif of a four-sided star in the centre can be noted only on one partly damaged ring from the site of Staré Město-Na valách, gr. 52/50 Hrubý 1955, 474 no. 1042:1, 269 Fig. 42:5, Pl. 73:9),⁶ although this differs from the Zagreb example both in the decorative technique (incision and punching) as well as the simplicity of the decorative composition, which, according to the differences in the workmanship, did not utilize either the prominent rounded protrusions or the dotted hammering of a circular pattern (Měřínský

1985: 38, 108 Fig. 1, 138) [Fig. 3:1].⁷ Examples with a circular peltate widening like the above are rare. To tell the truth, their existence has long been recognised (Hrubý 1955: 268), but as suitable comparisons only two can be mentioned here; an incompletely preserved ring of the *Blučina* type from the Moravian cemetery of Devín-Staré vino-

⁶ The ring belongs to Hrubý's decorative *variant b* (dia. ring 2.3 cm; dia. of the shield-shaped field 1.8 cm), and was discovered on the right hand of the deceased (a boy 15-16 years old), buried with a pair of decomposed iron spurs. For the decoration of the ring see Dostál 1966: 57 Fig. 12:24.

⁷ The circular widening contains an incised four-pointed star with concavely rounded arms, whose outer rim is banded, undecorated, and slightly narrowed towards the ends. The four regularly arranged semi-circular fields that surround the star are decorated with punching. The decoration can be considered conceptionally related to an incised cross with a semicircle in each of the corners that decorates the oval shield-shaped surface of a bronze ring from the cemetery of Velké Bilovice-Úlehly found in the grave of a boy 6-7 years old (gr. 49). Four semicircles made from a two-row dotted pattern with a wart-like protrusion in the middle [Fig. 4:9.3] can be seen on a bronze ring from the cemetery of Břeclav-Pohansko, gr. 342 discovered on the right hand of a female individual of 16-30 years old (Kalousek 1971: 187 no. 8, Pl. 34:6).

hrady, gr. 17/m (Kraskovská 1963: 395 Fig. 6, 396 no. 5, 405 Pl. III:13),⁸ and a similarly incomplete and broken example from Pottschach in Lower Austria, gr. 10/ch (Caspart 1931: 166, 166, Pl. III:13) [Fig. 3:2].⁹ The fragmentary ring from the cemetery of Devín-Staré vinohrady, gr. 17/m and the shield-shaped ring from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb are the only ones among these few rings where the hoop is banded and not widened at the joint with the upper section. This detail is also present on rings with a rhomboid widening, as is shown by examples from the sites of Boleradice-Radle, gr. 37/f (Poulik 1948: 155 no. 5-7, Pl. LXVII:6-6a, 7-7a/two rings) and Skalice-Háj, tumulus 8: gr. 1/f in Slovakia (Budimský-Krička 1959: 66 no.13, 142 Fig. 33:4, 143, 186 Pl. XVII:9) [Fig. 3:5-6,7], and Bled-Pristava II, gr. 68/f in Slovenia (mentioned: Kastelic and Škerlj 1950: 50-5; description, drawing and attribution to

her Carantanian Cultural group: Korošec 1979: 69 (gr. 68), Pl. 11:5a (gr. 192 sic!; same attribution: Knific 1974: 325 Plan V) [Fig. 3:8], while a banded hoop without a broadening at the join with an oval widening is visible on a bronze gilded ring from Steinabrunn, gr. 80 in Austria gr, unique because of the decorative motif on the widening reminiscent of a four-leaved clover (Friesinger 1965: 90, 110, Fig. 20:2) [Fig. 3:9],¹⁰ on one ring from the cemetery of Kaposvár-61-es út, gr. 10/ch (Bárdos 1985: 7, 13, 24 (Pl. I:10), and perhaps also on a chance find from the settlement site of Izvoare-Bahna/La pod la Hărmănești in north-eastern Romania, among the rare examples of a ring of the *Blučina* type from this region (Mitrea 1978: 215, 226, 229, 240 Fig. 10:2, 251 Fig. 21:2; Mitrea 1980: 111, 184 Pl. XLV:2/Izvoare-Bahna; Constantinescu 1996: 186 no. 864, Pl. XXXVII:864/Bahna-Neamț) [Fig. 3:10].¹¹ The decoration composed of five prominent rounded protrusions on the shield-shaped widening of the ring from the above Romanian find, as well as the example from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, places them among the frequent, if not the most common, features on shield-shaped rings of the *Blučina* type [Fig. 4:5.1-5].

The possible symbolism of numbers and the meanings of individual decoration and decorative combinations on early medieval objects from the Great Moravian period noted long ago (Klanica 1970: 73-79), but later mostly disregarded, is possible to apply specifically to these rings. In fact, on the widened upper section of the greatest number of shield-shaped rings decorated with rounded protrusions, there are either only *one* (1), rarely

⁸ The fragmentary bronze ring belonged to one of the fingers of the right hand and, on the basis of the grave goods, it was found in a wealthy male grave together with an iron spear, axe, spur (1), and a knife in a pottery vessel.

⁹ A shield-shaped ring with a circular widening with non-*Blučina* characteristics comes from the Nin-Ždrijac cemetery, gr. 54/f-ch in southern Croatia. The ring is bronze, open, and decorated with impressed points forming a circular decoration on the shield-shaped widening [Fig. 3:3]. It was found on the right hand of a female skeleton buried together with a child (Belošević 1980: Pl. XXXVI: 12-12a; Belošević 2007: 53, 64-65 no. 5, 145 Pl. LIV:14, 265 no. 16). The circular shield-shaped widening is visible on several other rings with non-*Blučina* type characteristics, including an exceptional gold closed shield-shaped ring from a supposed hoard discovered in 1821 at Brestovac near Požega in eastern Croatia [Fig. 3:4]. The ring is decorated with incised straight vertical lines with triple dotted circles on the ends (a circle with a dot in the middle), formed based on a so-called pre-Bulgarian IYI or, according to others, a Christian symbol, or a possible syncretic blending of pagan and Christian; in more detail Fiedler 2012: 110 and with important citations in notes 26-28. For this ring, see Hampel 1905 (2): 425; Hampel 1905 (3), Pl. 320:9 (s.v. "*Presztovác*"), and more recently Bühler 2014: 29, 152, 193-194, Taf. 9:1-4, 57:1-8, 58:1-4; Grigorov 2007: 51, 189 fig. 59:11 (type II/4); Grigorov 2013, 112 Fig. 9:II/4; Atanasov 2018: 377-378, where along with the ring from Brestovac, two other Early Bulgarian rings decorated with the symbol IYI were depicted (Fig. 4,6 and 7). — It should be noted that the circular form could be widened on at least two of a total of three shield-shaped rings discovered at the cemetery of Kaposvár-61-es út, gr. 10/ch and 23/f, see Bárdos 1985: 13 Fig. 7 (below), 24 Pl. I:10 (gr. 10/ch), 25 Pl. II:23 (gr. 23). In this sense, of interest is a ring made of bronze sheet metal discovered during excavations at Doróol in the old part of Belgrade in an archaeological layer dated to the 10th-11th centuries, Bikić and Bugarski 2022: 15 fig. 6:8, 17.

¹⁰ A similar decorative arrangement can be noted on the mounts of individual eastern Mediterranean belt buckles dated to most of the 7th century, Schulze-Dörrlamm 2009: 180-181, 247 (type D 13).

¹¹ The ring is bronze and decorated with five large wart-shaped protrusions hammered from below. It seems to be quite well preserved, but it was published without any metric data (according to the drawings or photographs the dimensions of the crown were ca. 2.7-3.1 x 2.3-2.5 cm). The site where the ring was found is dated to the 8th and 9th centuries, Mitrea 1978: 215, 226, 229, 240 Fig. 10:2, 251 Fig. 21:2; Mitrea 1980: 111, 184 Pl. XLV:2 (Izvoare-Bahna); Constantinescu 1996: 186 no. 864, Pl. XXXVII:864 (Bahna-Neamț). One of two shield-shaped rings found in the Romanian lower Danube basin in the cemetery of Izvoru-La Drăghiceanu, gr. 248 belong to rings with one protrusion, Mitrea 1989: 198 Abb. 41:2.

three (3),¹² more frequently *four* (4) and *seven* (7), and most often *five* (5) or *nine* (9), sometimes even *eleven* (11) prominent wart-like protrusions, so that it seems the protrusions have not merely a decorative, but also some other, symbolic role characteristic for rings [Fig. 4]. *Four* (4), *five* (5), and *seven* (7) rounded protrusions form a cross with their arrangement¹³, *seven* (7) and *nine* (9) rounded protrusions form a cross inscribed with a Christogram (X),¹⁴ while *eleven* (11) rounded protrusions form a row of three crosses with an inscribed Christogram (X) whose arms cross in the centre of the central cross, connecting the vertical arms of both side crosses.¹⁵ In addition to the interpretation of Christian symbolism, the same expression can be joined by a numerological component, which attributes not merely a quantitative but also qualitative descriptive meaning and value to each of the above numbers:¹⁶ *one* (1) is the starting point and centre of the beginning and represents the totality contained in one individual – in

God; *three* (3) symbolises a trinity in which the Father is number one, the Mother is number two, and number three is the Son, which completes the great triad of existence – for Christians this is the idea of the Holy Trinity, in other words one god in three entities; *four* (4) is related to the meaning of the square (the symbol of soil) and the cross, this is the number of the Bible and the world in its entirety (the four corners of the world, the four winds, the four phases of the moon, the four seasons, the four elements, the four temperaments, the four rivers of Paradise, the four letters in the name of God, the four Evangelists, etc.); *five* (5) is the sum of the first even and the first odd numbers and, as the middle of the first nine numbers, is a sign of union, marriage, the centre, harmony, and balance; *seven* (7) is the sum of the number four, symbolising a square (earth) and the cross, and the number three, which symbolises the heavens and together constitutes the totality of the universe, is common in the Bible, is the key to the Gospel of John, and has similar power and meaning in many other religions; *nine* (9) is the last in the series of single numbers, so at the same time it announces the end and marks the beginning, is a measure of maturation, fertility, and the completion of a job and, as it is the last in the series of numerals, it contains the concept of birth and the idea of death. It can be added that as a ring is in fact a circle, and a circle in its perfect closure is a symbol of harmony and the absolute, from time immemorial of prophylactic meaning and value, it should not be doubted that the symbols used to complete, decorate, or mark the rings were deliberate.

On the other hand, the question remains as to whether it is also possible in this numerological symbolism to recognise an already advanced process of the syncretism of the solar-lunar symbolism of the ancient Slavs with the symbols of the new, only recently accepted, Byzantine Christianity — an issue that will one day certainly require a more thorough examination and exhaustive answer. This answer will be awaited regarding the shield-shaped ring from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, probably in the broader sense a southern Pannonian find that is dated, like the *Blučina* group of shield-shaped rings to which it fully belongs, to the period around the middle of the 9th century to the late second half of the 9th century (Szöke 1996: 101, and following him Tomka 2000: 200).

¹² Attention should be drawn here to an exceptional, unfortunately not complete, silver shield-shaped ring from Doničko Brdo at Gradac in the Šumadija district of Central Serbia (Petrović 1965: 284-285). Its widened upper section is decorated with three transversely placed wart-like protrusions, the edges of the shoulders decorated with a row of incised slanted lines, while the lower half of the ring features three transverse and two perpendicular incised lines. The ring is dated between the 10th and 11th centuries (Đurović 2012: 75 no. 53), but it is more likely to have been earlier and to belong to the first half of the 9th century.

¹³ A similar arrangement of concentric circles with a dot in the centre (seven and four) can be found on the crowns of Byzantine rings from Sicily, see Orsi 1910a: 472 fig. 11 (left and right).

¹⁴ A similar arrangement of concentric circles with a dot in the centre and straight lines that connect them into an eight-pointed star is a decoration on bronze U-shaped mounts found on a series of Byzantine belt buckles attributed to a workshop(s) on Sicily, in the second half of the 7th century and the early 8th century. For some examples of the dating proposed here, see Orsi 1910: 72 fig. 5 (lower right); Orsi 1912: 200 fig. 13 (right); Riemer 2000: 211-212, 437, pl. 93.3, 438, Pl. 96.9 and 450, Pl. 116.2; Eger 2010: 151 Fig. 7:13, 157-158 no. 13; Entwistle 2010: 24-25 no. 25-26 (dating).

¹⁵ Such an interpretation of the symbolism of decoration on these rings considerably increases the number of registered and interpreted Christian symbols on Great Moravian objects. For the situation to the present, see Ungerma 2001: 224-228.

¹⁶ The possible symbolism of numbers and the meanings of individual decoration and decorative combinations on early medieval objects from the Great Moravian period was noted long ago by Klanica 1970: 73-79, but these comments have mostly remained disregarded.

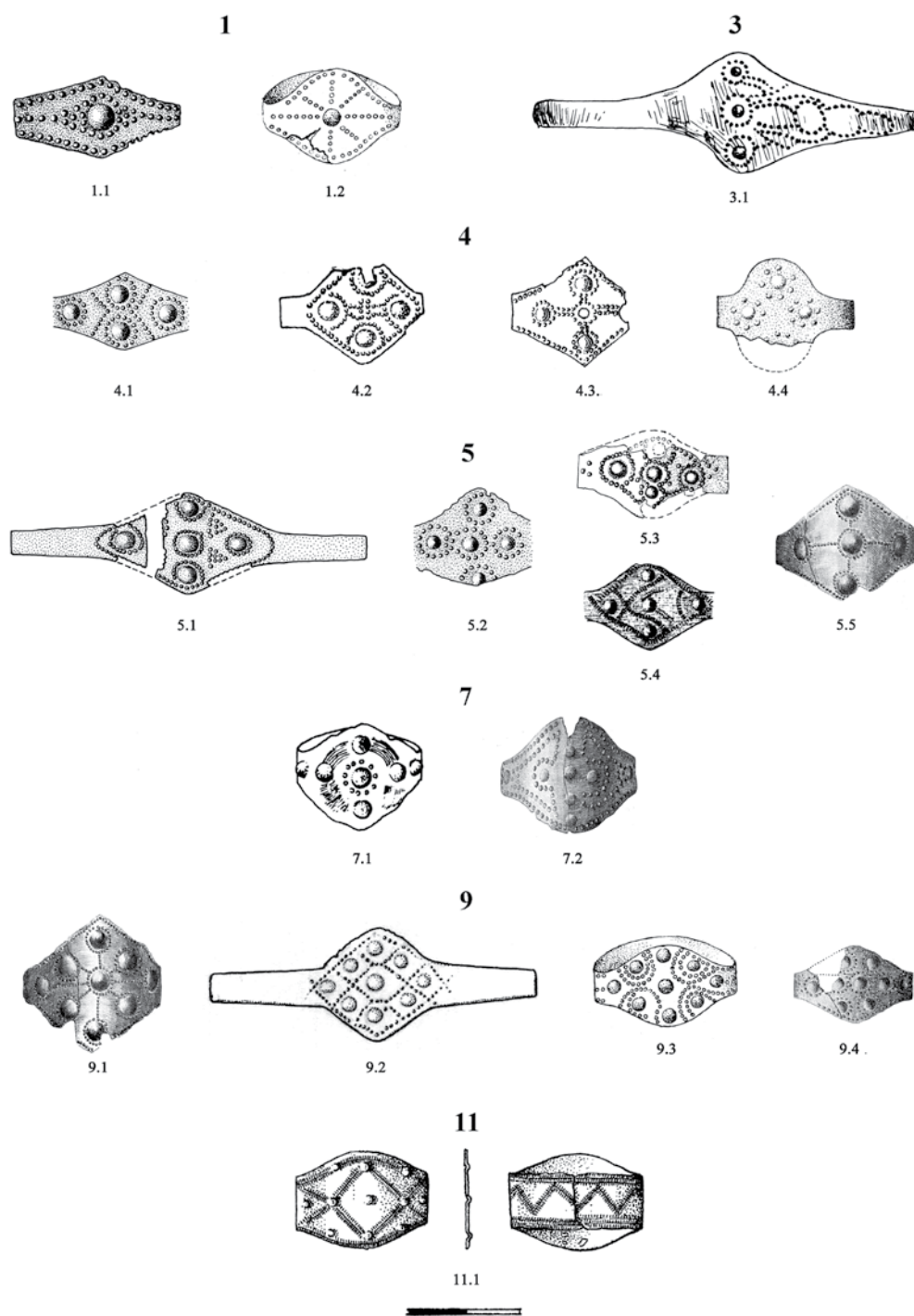


Fig. 4. Rings of the Blučina type with one (1), three (3), four (4), seven (7), nine (9), and eleven (11) wart-like protrusions. 1.1 - Pitten-Kreuzackergasse, gr. 33/f (Friesinger 1977, 60, 129 Taf. 18:5); 1.2 - Břeclav-Pohansko, gr. 342/f (Kalousek 1971, 187 Obr. 342:9, Tab. 34:1). 3.1 - Bled-Pristava II, gr. 142/f (Korošec 1979/1, 72; Korošec 1979/2, Taf. 14:1h). 4.1 - Pitten-Kreuzackergasse, gr. 36/f (Friesinger 1977, 62, 132 Taf. 21:5); 4.2 - Skalice-Háj, tumul 8:gr. 1/f (Budimský-Krička 1959, 142 Abb. 33:4, 186 Taf. XVII:9); 4.3 - Josefov-Záhumenica, gr. 26/f (Šrašková 1958, 65 Taf. 22); 4.4 - Keszthely-Feképuszta, gr. 11/1951/ch (Müller 2010, 266 Taf. 19:21). 5.1 - Pitten-Kreuzackergasse, gr. 42/f (Friesinger 1977, 64, 134 Taf. 23:4); 5.2 - Pitten-Kreuzackergasse, gr. 15/f (Friesinger 1977, 55, 124 Taf. 13:3); 5.3 - Alsórajk-Határi tábla, gr. 15/f (Szőke 1996, 101, 131, Taf. 25:1); 5.4 - Pitten-Kreuzackergasse, gr. 43a/ch (Friesinger 1977, 64, 134 Taf. 23:2); 5.5 - Blučina-Malý kopec, gr. VI (Poulik 1948, 145 no. 17, Tab. XLXI:12a). 7.1 - Kranj-farna cerkev, gr. 120/53 (Valič 1974, 31 no. 124, T. 3:2); 7.2 - Brno-Maloměřice (Poulik 1948, 173, Tab. XLI:2). 9.1 - Blučina-Malý kopec, gr. VI (Poulik 1948, 145 no. 16, Tab. XLXI:10a); 9.2 - Cerov Log-Camberk, gr. 9/ch (Breščak 2002, 107 Sl. 5:3); 9.3 - Břeclav-Pohansko, gr. 342/f (Kalousek 1971, 187 Obr. 342:8, Tab. 34:6); 9.4 - Boleradice-Radle, gr. 46 (Poulik 1948, 157 no. 12, Tab. LXIII:13a). 11.1 - Čakajovce-Kostolné, gr. 426/f (Rejholcová 1995, 46, 158, Tab. LXVIII:18).

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* **Figures and captions**

(gr. - grave; ch - child; m - male; f - female; AMZ - Arheološki muzej u Zagrebu / *The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb*)