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EASTERN BALKANS: OBSERVATIONS ON
THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION
DURING THE 16TH – MID-18TH CENTURYE**

TEODOR KOSTOV

НАКИТИ ОТ МОНЕТИ И ЕЛЕМЕНТИ ОТ
КОСТЮМА С МОНЕТИ ОТ ИЗТОЧНИТЕ БАЛКАНИ:
НАБЛЮДЕНИЯ ВЪРХУ ГЕОГРАФСКО ИМ
РАЗПРОСТРАНЕНИЕ ПРЕЗ XVI – СРЕДАТА НА
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Coin Jewellery and Costume Elements with Coins from the Eastern Balkans: Observations on their Geographical Distribution during the 16th – mid-18th Century

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**Накити от монети и елементи от костюма с монети от
Източните Балкани: наблюдения върху географско им
разпространение през XVI – средата на XVIII век**

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Abstract: This study examines the geographical distribution of coin jewellery in the eastern Balkan Peninsula (early 16th to the mid-18th century) drawing on travellers' accounts and hoards containing large numbers of perforated coins. Travelogue evidence for coin jewellery is most abundant in the region between Ihtiman and Niš, and more limited in the Upper Thracian Plain, present-day north-eastern Bulgaria, and along the Aegean coast. Hoards with large numbers of perforated coins are concentrated in north-western and central northern Bulgaria, the area around Sofia, and the Kraishte region, while occurring less frequently in eastern Bulgaria and only sporadically in the Rhodopes and the Mesta valley. These patterns appear to reflect the larger Christian population in western Bulgaria, identified as the primary wearers of coin jewellery. There is no evidence for the use of this form of adornment by Muslim women in the region during this period. Documented instances of the use of coin jewellery concern Bulgarian, Greek, and Roma women, and are markedly less frequent in urban than in rural contexts.

Keywords: Coin Jewellery, Ottoman Period, Eastern Balkans, Coin Hoards, Travelogues.



Coin jewellery, used in the territories of present-day Bulgaria during the Ottoman period, has long been a subject of research, primarily from an ethnographic perspective, with less emphasis placed on archaeological and numismatic analysis (see, e.g. Костов 1923; Стоянова-Серафимова 1979; Шулекова 1992; Томова 2013; Василева 2019). Certain aspects of this phenomenon have been analysed in depth, most notably the specific types of jewellery incorpo-

rating coins. The present study aims to analyse the available data with a focus on some aspects that have received less scholarly attention: the geographical distribution of this type of ornaments, as well as the religious and ethnic affiliation of those who wear them. The lower chronological limit of the period examined is determined by the earliest evidence for the use of this type of jewellery in the region, dating to 1533 – specifically, the account of Benedetto Ramberti (Ракова, Дакова 2016, 136). The mid-18th century was chosen as the upper limit, as available data suggest that patterns of geographical distribution underwent significant change thereafter.¹

Characteristics of the source material

The conclusions presented in this study are based on two principal categories of evidence: collective finds containing large numbers of pierced coins and data from travel accounts concerning the use of coins in jewellery.

For some collective finds from the period, it can be established with certainty that they include coin jewellery (e.g. Герасимов 1950, 317; Томова 2010). In many other cases, the available evidence supports the interpretation of perforated coins within such assemblages as components of jewellery. Arguments for this could be their discovery in association with remains of woven fabric (e.g. Писарев, Цочев 1972, 275), as well as with beads, and pendants with which they likely formed a piece of jewellery (Герасимов 1964, 240). Additional supporting evidence is provided by the presence of hairpins (Герасимов 1964, 238), and buttons (e.g. Юркова 1985, 63) in some collective finds, probably used to fasten the textile items to which the coins were attached, or by the recovery of collective finds with pierced coins in a burial context (Герасимов 1946, 243, 1963, 261–262).

In another group of collective finds, it remains uncertain whether the coins were originally assembled as jewellery or whether they represent a mixture of circulating unperforated coins and perforated coins reintroduced into circulation. Furthermore objections have been raised against the uncritical assumption that perforated coins necessarily formed part of jewellery, as in many cases the perforations were made without regard for the symmetry of the coin image (Кръстев 2021, 185, n. 11). Indeed, in some preserved examples of coin jewellery, a clear concern for visual effect – achieved through the display of coin imagery and the careful observance of symmetry in perforation – is evident (e.g. Томова 2010, Табло XLV-XLVI). In other cases, however, such an intention is absent, even in jewellery composed of relatively few coins (Томова, 2014, Табло XXXV). This is even more evident in costume elements where coins are arranged in an imbricated pattern, and visual impact is sought primarily through their multiplicity. Contemporary accounts by foreign travellers indicate that such elements were indeed in use during the period (Foresien 1606, 499; Йонов 1979, 397). The occurrence of coins with multiple perforations in such clothing components (Костов 1923, fig. 7) further suggests that the imagery of the coins was not the primary consideration, particularly given the wear caused by friction between adjacent coins.

For the purposes of analysis, I adopt the working assumption that in collective coin finds where more than 50% of the coins are perforated, it is highly probable that they were deposited as part of a piece of jewellery. In finds containing more than ten perforated coins (especially of larger denominations), but in which these constitute less than 50% of the total, I consider the presence of jewellery possible, though far from certain. This is particularly relevant in regions where coin jewellery appears to have been widespread (i.e., where numerous collective finds meet the criteria outlined above). In these regions one may also expect a significant number of pierced coins to have been reused as a means of payment. As will be discussed further below, such regions include the Kraishte area, the region around Sofia, central northern Bulgaria, and especially north-western Bulgaria.

The study of collective finds comprising large numbers of perforated coins allows for con-

¹ Compared with the preceding period, after the mid-18th century, collective finds containing large numbers of pierced coins (for the criterion used to define such finds, see below) become considerably more widespread in urban contexts (see, e.g. Владимирова-Аладжова 1990; Петракиев 2020 etc.) as well as in the regions of present-day eastern Bulgaria.

clusions to be drawn regarding the spatial and chronological characteristics of the use of coin jewellery. Before proceeding to the analysis, however, it is necessary to discuss certain characteristics of this group of finds which, if accepted uncritically, could cast doubt on the final conclusions. The most reliable indicator of the date of deposition of a given collective find is the most recent coin within it. It should be borne in mind, however, that the minting date of this coin represents only a *terminus post quem*, both for its perforation and for the deposition of the find itself. Collective finds from this period frequently include coins that predate the latest issue by a considerable margin. While prolonged circulation is one explanation, several other factors may account for this phenomenon: the gradual accumulation of a hoard through the progressive withdrawal of coins from active use and their addition to a collective find or piece of jewellery (e.g. Спасова 1971, 138); the accidental discovery of earlier collective finds and their redeposition within later hoards; and the incorporation of coins into jewellery, later preserved together with coins still in circulation. In all these hypothetical scenarios, with the exception of the last, the moment of perforation may be significantly later than the minting date of the individual coin. The conditions of coin circulation in the Ottoman Empire, where the only restrictions on the use of foreign denominations lay in their lower official exchange rate compared to the akçe (e.g. Кръстев 2021, 9), favored the prolonged use of coins that enjoyed public confidence. This is clearly evident, for example, in the case of the Polish three-groschen coins of Stephen Báthory and Sigismund III (e.g. Герасимов 1963, 264; Юркуова 1981, 130; Лазаров 1990; Томова 2004, 239), as well as Ottoman issues from the late 17th century and early 18th century, such as those of Ahmed III (1703–1731) (Герасимов 1955, 609; Юркуова 1981, 130; Ковачева 1986, 48–50; Rădulescu 2000). Accordingly, a considerable interval may be assumed between the minting of the latest coin and the deposition of the hoard in the archaeological record in cases where the assemblage consists solely of such coins, or where the most recent coin in the hoard belongs to these categories.

These cases clearly illustrate that coins struck earlier may come to be deposited within a significantly later context. This should be taken into account when considering the interval between the minting of the most recent coin in a given hoard and its deposition. It is also important to consider the potential duration of a coin's use as jewellery after perforation and before its deposition within the collective find.

An additional challenge relating to this issue, and with the phenomenon more broadly, is the incomplete publication of many of the coin hoards considered here. In some instances, this results from the fact that not all coins entered museum collections; in others, it reflects the poor state of preservation of certain specimens, especially Ottoman akçes (e.g. Писарев, Цочев 1972, 281; Ковачева 1986, 50, 58). A large proportion of these collective finds has been published without accompanying images of the coins or descriptions of the inscriptions. Consequently, it is not possible to verify the proposed identifications of denominations or issuing authorities, and thus the date of minting, in cases where it is not indicated on the coin.

In certain cases, a substantial chronological gap can be observed between distinct groups of coins within a single collective find. This raises the possibility that these may represent two or more hoards that were combined either by their finders, within museum collections, or prior to final deposition by individuals who encountered an earlier collective find (Rădulescu, Predoi 2004, 47; Кръстев 2021, 255–256).

Due to these circumstances, uncritical reliance on the date of the most recently minted coin in a given hoard as a basis for chronology may lead to erroneous conclusions. This problem can be mitigated by assembling a large corpus of collective finds, identifying deviations from established chronological trends resulting from exclusive reliance on the latest coins in a hoard, and examining the duration of coin circulation. Accordingly, although a substantial proportion of the coins in many of the hoards discussed here remain unidentified, it can nevertheless be argued that they belong to the period under consideration. These finds comprise either a significant number of European coins of the 16th–17th centuries or a considerable number of Ottoman coins from the same period, and in some cases both. In contrast, in collective finds dating to the second half of the 18th–19th centuries, the presence of isolated 16th- and 17th-century coins

is common; however, with some exceptions (e.g., the coins of Stephen Báthory and Sigismund III (Герасимов 1963, 264; Лазаров 1990; Томова 2004, 239; Юркуова 1981, 130), such hoards do not typically contain substantial numbers of European or Ottoman coins from the 16th–17th centuries. Misleading conclusions regarding the chronology of the use of coin jewellery may also arise from the fact that coins from earlier collective finds were sometimes perforated for use as jewellery by their discoverers. This phenomenon is attested even in modern times and is documented in the numismatic literature (Пенчев 1980, 67).

The use of numismatic material - specifically, collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins - to investigate the widespread practice of coin perforation for integration into jewellery assemblages in the earlier part of the period is limited by a marked decline in the presence of both Ottoman and European coins in the territories of present-day Bulgaria between the reigns of Mehmed II the Conqueror and Mehmed III (mid-15th century – 1570s). This phenomenon may be illustrated through statistical data derived from N. Theodossiev's inventory of collective finds (Теодосиев 2017). The rulers of this period, whose combined reigns span 123 years, are represented by coins in a total of 48 hoards. Coins of Mehmed II are attested in 8 collective finds from the territory of Bulgaria (Теодосиев 2017, 698), those of Bayezid II in 15 (Теодосиев 2017, 683), Selim I in 13 (Теодосиев 2017, 703), Suleiman I in 26 (Теодосиев 2017, 706), and Selim II in 5 (Теодосиев 2017, 703). By contrast, the subsequent three rulers – Murad III, Mehmed III, and Ahmed I, whose reigns together cover 43 years, are represented respectively by coins in 19 (Теодосиев 2017, 700), 20 (Теодосиев 2017, 698), and 30 finds (Теодосиев 2017, 682), across 41 different hoards. The increase in the number of Ottoman coins in the archaeological record during the final quarter of the 16th century is paralleled by a corresponding rise in the presence of foreign coinage (Робев 1996, 132; Кръстев 2015, 83–84, 2017, 44).

This reduction in the quantity of coins between the mid-15th century – 1570s likely explains why, to date, no hoard from present-day Bulgaria containing large numbers of perforated coins can be securely dated – on the basis of its latest issue – to a period earlier than the first quarter of the 17th century. A possible exception is a hoard from Plovdiv (Цончев 1960, 212). However, the number of perforated coins it contains is not specified, only a small proportion of the coins have been identified, and the find has not been published with a detailed description of the perforated specimens. Among the earliest hoards with substantial numbers of perforated coins are those from Belyakovets, Darzhanitsa, and Yahinovo. In the Belyakovets hoard, the most recent identified coins are 26 akçes of Ahmed I (1603–1617). The primary publication also records a Tuscan quarter thaler of Cosimo II de' Medici (1609–1621) (Писарев, Цочев 1972, 280). However, the description of the coin's imagery and its reported weight indicate that it is in fact a *giulio* of Cosimo I de' Medici (1537–1574). Nevertheless, 987 out of 1207 Ottoman akçes remain unidentified, and these could significantly affect the chronology of the hoard (Писарев, Цочев 1972, 281). In the Darzhanitsa hoard, the most recent identified coin is one of the Austrian Archduke Leopold V, dated 1629 (Кръстев 2021, 280). Yet nearly half of the assemblage consists of unidentified Ottoman coins; in addition, it includes 13 Ragusan *grossetti*, whose minting began in 1626 (Мушмов 1919, 163; Кръстев 2016, 150). In the Yahinovo hoard, all coins are three-groschen pieces of Sigismund III (1587–1632), though no minting dates are specified in the report (Герасимов 1957, 326). Given that, in Bulgaria, such coins are predominantly (with minor exceptions, see, e.g., Пенчев 2019a, 139) issues from the earlier phase of Sigismund III's coinage (i.e., before 1607/9) (Горячев 1998, 52; Кръстев 2016, 150), it is reasonable to assume that the Yahinovo specimens belong to this group. However, as noted, three-groschen coins of Sigismund III also occur in hoards containing significantly later material; the early date of the Yahinovo hoard therefore remains uncertain.

No hoards containing large numbers of perforated coins have been identified among those dated to the mid-15th to late 16th century (e.g. Кръстев, Иванов 2017; Пенчев 2016, 2019b; Димов 2020). However, this absence does not in itself establish a firm lower chronological limit for the phenomenon. Large collective finds from this period are held in museum collections (e.g., from Gorna Krushovitsa (Gerasimov 1979, 140) and Vidin (Филипова 1994, 106), yet few have been published with detailed descriptions of the individual coins. Consequently, it remains un-

clear whether the lack of reported perforated coins in the existing literature reflects their actual absence in the finds. Moreover, even after the late 16th-century increase in numismatic material, hoards containing only small numbers of perforated coins (Лазаров 2004; Кръстев et al. 2016) or none at all (e.g. Томова 2003; Пенчев 2022; Кръстев, Кичукова 2024) remain common.

Notably, the numerous hoards dated to the 14th and early 15th centuries likewise lack large numbers of perforated coins (Жекова 2016, 2019, 2020; Кузев 1996a, 1996b, 1994; Пенчев 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2015, 2024; Кръстев 2014; Карайотов 1974; Дочев 1983, 2004; Конаклиев, Дончева 2009, 586–587; Dumitrescu 2012; Иванишевић, Лутовац 2012). St. Kostov's report of a chain incorporating perforated coins of Ivan Shishman remains an isolated case (Костов 1923, 138). It is likely that this item, like the hoard of perforated coins of Ivan Shishman from the village of Troitsa (Gerasimov 1979, 136), derives from material that was discovered and subsequently perforated long after the coins were minted – a scenario corroborated by another hoard from the same village (Пенчев 1980, 67).

Geographical distribution of coin jewellery and religious and ethnic affiliation of its wearers until the mid-18th century. The area along Via Diagonalis

For the reasons outlined above, foreign travelogues constitute the primary source for the initial phase of this period – from 1533 (the earliest evidence of coin jewellery in the region) to the second quarter of the 17th century (the minting date of the latest coins in the earliest hoards containing large numbers of perforated coins). Of particular importance for the conclusions drawn here is the concentration of travellers' accounts along the three main routes crossing the eastern Balkan Peninsula: the *Via Diagonalis* (*orta kol*), the Aegean coastal route (*sol kol*), and the road running parallel to the Black Sea coast (*sağ kol*) (Halaçoğlu 1981, n. 1; Антонов 2018, 9). Consequently, significant parts of the study area remain undocumented in these sources.

During this period, Via Diagonalis (here considered together with accounts of travellers who followed the Dubrovnik–Kyustendil–Pazardzhik route) was the route most frequently traversed by foreign travelers; consequently, it provides the greatest amount of evidence for the use of coin jewellery. Such references occur both in descriptions of women's dress in specific settlements and in more general accounts of clothing across broader regions. The western and eastern limits of these descriptions extend, respectively, to the region around Niš (with 17th-century evidence indicating the distribution of coin jewellery even further west (Brown 1685, 28–29) and to the area around Cisir-i Mustafa Pasha (von Betzekh n.d., fol. 46; Йонов 1979, 294). The highest concentration of such accounts, however, lies between Klisura/Kuruçeşme (near Bela Palanka) and Ihtiman/Vetren (Gassot 1550, 7; Busbequius 1581, 37; von Betzekh n.d., fol. 43r; Pigafetta 1585, 125; Foresien 1606, 499; Le Fevre 1611, fols. 188r–188v; Deshayes 1624, 72; Pouillet 1668, 171; Benaglia 1685, 47; Drieschius 1721, 228–229; Цветкова 1975, 151; Chesneau 1887, 12; du Fresne-Canaye 1897, 35; Lubenau 1914, 102; Йонов 1979, 291, 1986, 138, 140, 309; Ракова, Дакова 2016, 136). It should be noted, however, that some travelers incorporated material from earlier accounts into their own narratives, thereby potentially distorting the overall picture. This is the case, for example, with Ramberti's travelogue, which was subsequently used by Jacques Gassot (Цветкова 1975, 75), Jean Chesneau (Цветкова 1975, 71), Pierre Lescalopier (Цветкова 1975, 150) and Philippe du Fresne-Canaye (du Fresne-Canaye 1897, 35, n. 1). Such reliance is particularly evident in passages describing coin jewellery.

Evidence for a wider distribution of this practice in the western section of the Diagonal Road is supported by collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins, the latest issues of which date to this period. Five such hoards are known from the Kraishte region and the area around Sofia (Fig. 1): **Yahinovo** (as noted above, this hoard includes coin types also attested in later collective finds, and its attribution to the period remains uncertain), **Kazichene**, **Birimirtsi** (only 69 of 540 coins are perforated; it is thus unclear whether these formed part of jewellery or entered the hoard following secondary reintroduction into circulation), **Razhdavitsa**, and **Poletintsi** (Герасимов 1957, 326, 1938, 456; Григорова 1973; Тонев 1989; Юркова 1985, 63; Тонев 2005, 164). With considerable reservations, the collective find from **Bistritsa** may also be included in this group, although only 40 of 986 coins are perforated (Порева 1965). By contrast,

only one comparable find is currently known in the Upper Thracian Plain (a region of similar extent): namely, the hoard from **Dinkata** (Герасимов 1963, 258). Nevertheless, toward the end of the period, travelers' reports of coin jewellery increase in the section of the route east of Plovdiv (Rycaut 1668, 210; Gerlach 1674, 514; Lucas 1712, 237–238; Drieschius 1721, 627; Hildebrandt 1937, 159).

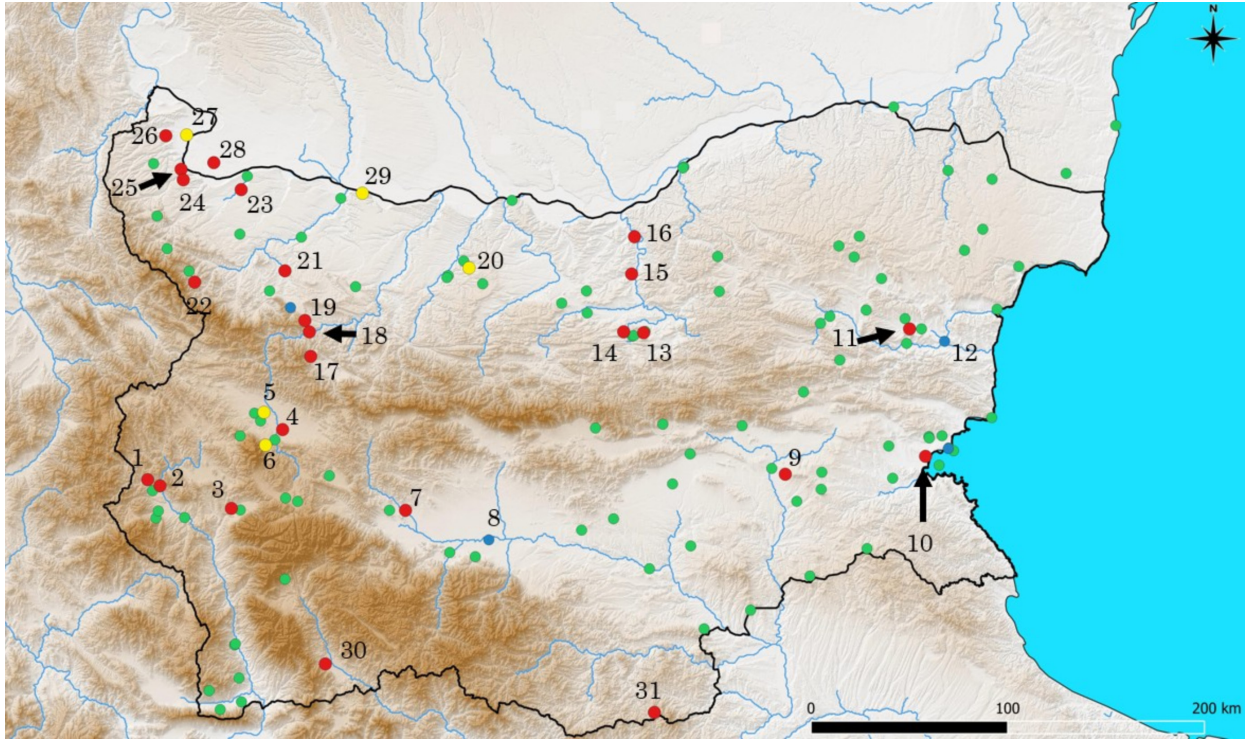


Fig. 1. Collective finds from the 17th to the mid-18th century. Red circles indicate hoards where perforated coins constitute over 50% of the total, or where there is definitive evidence of coin jewellery. Yellow circles indicate finds with a large number of perforated coins, but comprising less than 50% of the total number of coins. Blue circles indicate finds with an unspecified number of perforated coins. Green circles indicate finds with no data on perforated coins or containing only isolated examples. Finds mentioned in the text: 1 – Poletintsi, 2 – Razhdavitsa, 3 – Yahinovo, 4 – Kazichene, 5 – Birimirtsi, 6 – Bistritsa, 7 – Dinkata, 8 – Plovdiv, 9 – Kozarevo, 10 – Burgas, Iztok district, 11 – Komarevo, 12 – Dabravino, 13 – Lyaskovets, 14 – Belyakovets, 15 – Polski Trambesh, 16 – Tsenovo, 17 – Radotina, 18 – Lyutibrod, 19 – Pavolche, 20 – Pleven, “Nuclear Instruments Plant,” 21 – Krivodol, 22 – Kopilovtsi, 23 – Traykovo, 24 – Darzhanitsa, 25 – Gaytantsi, 26 – Peshakovo, 27 – Vidin, “City Stadium,” 28 – Desa, 29 – Oryahovo, 30 – Gotse Delchev region, 31 – Chernichevo. Data about the finds, that are not mentioned in the text can be found in N. Theodossiev’s *Inventory of Collective Coin Finds*. (Теодосиев 2017) and *Coin Hoards of Dobrugea*, Volume I (Custurea et al. 2007).

Several clarifications are required regarding the distribution of this form of ornamentation in relation to religious affiliation. Travellers’ observations concerning religious identity are likely to be reliable, given Islamic requirements concerning female veiling (Sandys 1621, 68–69; Gerlach 1674, 19; Drieschius 1721, 227). However, evidence relating to Muslim women remains limited owing to their more restricted presence in public spaces (Dernschwam 2014, 259).

Travel accounts from this period consistently identify the wearers of coin jewellery as Christians, while such ornamentation is absent from descriptions of Muslim women (Besolt 1590, 526; Gerlach 1674, 19; Юнов 1979, 393, 415). Moreover, 17th-century Ottoman documentation attests to a Christian population in all settlements where the relevant collective finds have been recorded

(Razhdavitsa (Грозданова 2001, 111, 1989, 140), Poletintsi (Грозданова 1989, 139), Kazichene (Грозданова 1989, 103), Birimirtsi (Грозданова 1989, 95), Bistritsa (Грозданова 1989, 95), Yakhinovo (Грозданова 2001, 191), Dinkata (Грозданова 1989, 394)). It should be noted, however, that the inclusion of these settlements in poll tax (*jizya*) or *voynuk* registers does not preclude the coexistence of a Muslim population. The absence of Western European accounts describing Muslim women wearing coin jewellery may be explained by Islamic prescriptions restricting the display of adornment in the presence of non-*mahram* men (i.e. those whom a woman is permitted to marry) (Rahmi et al. 2025, 1786). The few existing descriptions of adorned Muslim women – primarily from major urban centres such as Edirne (Йонов 1979, 415–416) and Constantinople (Sandys 1621, 68–69) – do not mention coin jewellery. Although such items might theoretically have been worn in public beneath head coverings in other settings (e.g. in rural areas), the distribution of collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins (discussed below) suggests this was either not the case or occurred only on a very limited scale.

The question of the ethnic affiliation of the wearers is more complex. As many travelers did not speak Slavic languages, their ability to distinguish between different Christian populations in the eastern Balkans remains uncertain. A further complication arises from the use of “Greek”, which in such accounts often denotes religious rather than ethnic identity. It should be emphasised that the descriptions related to Bulgarian women are the most abundant. This is largely due to the fact that, in roadside settlements, women of this group appear to have taken advantage of the flow of travelers - selling various goods in the Upper Thracian plain (Hiltebrandt 1937, 159; Dernschwam 2014, 259; Gerlach 1674, 514), or performing dances for payment, particularly in the village of Kuruçeşme (Pigafetta 1585, 125; Цветкова 1975, 151). As a result, they are more frequently noted in travellers’ accounts. In light of these considerations, the following analytical conclusions may be drawn.

Only Jacob Betzek (1564) records the use of coin jewellery among Greeks in the region under review (von Betzekh n.d., fol. 46; Йонов 1979, 294). This reference occurs in his description of the attire of various groups inhabiting “Greece,” a territory he defines as extending from Cisir-i Mustafa Pasha toward Constantinople. At first glance, it is uncertain, whether the term “Greeks” in this context refers to a specific ethnic group or more broadly to the Christian population of what he terms “Greece”. This interpretation is supported by Betzek’s tendency elsewhere to categorize populations primarily on the basis of religion (e.g., “Christians, Turks, and Jews” in Sofia (von Betzekh n.d., fol. 44r; Йонов 1979, 292), as well as by his use of quasi-ethnic labels for regional Christian groups. Betzek appears not to have possessed knowledge of Slavic languages and instead distinguished populations chiefly by dress (noting, for instance, that the inhabitants of Macedonia were “Bulgarians by dress, but richer” (von Betzekh n.d., fol. 44v; Йонов 1979, 292). Moreover, other travelers in the Upper Thracian plain associate such ornamentation with Bulgarians (Rycaut 1668, 210; Йонов 1979, 262, 338, 1986, 274), whereas other descriptions of Greeks omit any reference to coin jewellery (Йонов 1979, 414). However, Edward Brown explicitly records the use of coin jewellery among Greek women (Brown 1685, 28). Notably, both he and Betzek associate this practice exclusively with gold denominations – a detail that appears to be supported by several hoards discovered in areas with a Greek population (Чимбулева 1969; “ΝΟΜΙΣΜΑΤΑ ΚΡΥΜΜΕΝΑ ΣΕ ΕΠΟΧΗ ΚΡΙΣΗΣ” n.d.; Preka, Valassiadis 2009; “Θησαυρός, Κωστάντιανης Ιωαννίνων” n.d.)². Owing, most likely, to the high intrinsic value of such material, the practice does not appear to have been widespread among the Greek population, as Brown himself suggests. Collective finds from the 17th–19th centuries in which only gold coins are perforated include those from the village of Komarevo (Мирчев 1969, 222), Polski Trambesh (Герасимов 1955, 607), Veliko Tarnovo (Петракиев 2020), Shumen (Владимирова-Аладжова 1990, 51), and the village of Gita (Герасимов 1955, 609). Notably, such finds are absent in western Bulgaria. Whether this pattern relates to the observations concerning Greek populations is debatable, particularly given that Thrace – where the highest concentration might be expected

² It should be noted that some of the cited hoards date to a later period (latest coins: Rhodes, 1768/69; Kostaniani, 1825). Moreover, the Rhodes find derives from a shipwreck, and the owner was therefore not necessarily local.

– has yielded only a single such find (Gita).

In the territories of present-day Bulgaria and adjacent regions, travellers also report the use of coin jewellery among Roma women, with the earliest such references dating to the 18th century (e.g. Йонов 1986, 303). Regrettably, although Roma are mentioned frequently in earlier sources, detailed descriptions of their attire only emerge in the 18th century, leaving unresolved the question of when this group adopted coin jewellery.

The most substantial body of evidence for coin jewellery in the area under consideration relates to Bulgarians. While the reliability of accounts regarding Thrace is generally accepted, the Niš–Ihtiman section of the route raises certain questions. It should be noted that many travelers regarded this territory as “Bulgaria” and referred to its Christian inhabitants as “Bulgarians” – a designation that often functioned in a geographical rather than an ethnic sense (Drieschius 1721, 170, 233; Lubenau 1914, 102; Йонов 1986, 308). At the same time, there is clear evidence for the presence of other Christian communities in this area, including Serbs and Vlachs (Тодоров 1972, 42). Coin jewellery in this region cannot therefore be attributed exclusively to the Bulgarian ethnic group.

It is reasonable to assume that the territorial distribution of coin jewellery outlined above correlates with observations concerning the ethnic and confessional affiliation of its wearers. Available data, primarily derived from 16th-century registers, indicate a demographic predominance of Muslims in the Upper Thracian Plain (Кийл 2017, 13, 15, 20). A significant proportion of the Christian population in this region was likely of Greek origin – a group for whom, as discussed, the widespread use of coin jewellery remains uncertain. Although there is no firm basis for projecting this evidence into the 17th and early 18th centuries, it is unlikely that the demographic profile underwent significant change. This interpretation accords with the infrequent references to coin jewellery in Thrace and the near absence of collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins in the region.

By contrast, in the 16th century the Christian population predominated in the Shopluk and Kraishte regions, while Muslims formed a majority only in urban centres (Кийл 2017, 43, 49–50). This demographic structure, combined with a much larger proportion of the population residing in rural areas, likely accounts for the absence of collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins from urban contexts. More generally, such finds from towns in present-day Bulgaria are rare for this period. Examples include the collective find from Pleven (“Nuclear Instruments Plant”) (Ковачева 1988), where only 65 of 624 coins are perforated (raising uncertainty as to whether they formed part of jewellery or entered the hoard after being reintroduced into circulation following their use as ornaments); the hoard from Oryahovo, where only 58 of 140 coins are perforated (Герасимов 1946, 237); and that from Vidin (“City Stadium”) (Герасимов 1963, 257), which likely falls outside the period under review, as its latest coins date to the reign of Sultan Mahmud I (1730–1754). The find from Burgas (“Izgrevev district”) (Класнаков, Пеев 2013) was discovered within the former boundaries of the village of Atanasovo. This pattern is further supported by travellers’ accounts: when references to coin jewellery are tied to specific settlements rather than presented in general terms, they seldom concern urban centres (Стоянова-Серафимова 1979, 29). Notable exceptions include reports on Pirot by Lefèvre (1611) (Le Fevre 1611, fols. 188r–188v; Цветкова 1975, 186), Batočina by Edward Brown (1669) (Brown 1685, 28), Musa Pasha Palanka (modern Bela Palanka, Serbia) by Giovanni Benaglia (1682) (Benaglia 1685, 46–47), Ihtiman by Gerard Driesch (1718) (Drieschius 1721, 229), and Roma in Niš by Johann Kempelen (1740) (Йонов 1986, 303). All of these accounts date to the later part of the period and relate primarily to smaller urban centres. Lefèvre’s account constitutes an exception; however, it refers to the Pirot fair, where the presence of people from surrounding rural areas may reasonably be assumed.

Distribution of coin jewellery until the mid-18th century in present-day eastern Bulgaria

References to coin jewellery in present-day eastern Bulgaria are comparatively scarce for this period. The earliest account is provided by Martin Gruneweg (1582), who, after crossing Dobruzha along the Isaccea-Dobruch route, first refers to Bulgarians and describes their dress and

coin jewellery at Osanliya (Botevo) (Йонов 1979, 397). Notably, his otherwise detailed descriptions of other groups encountered (Tatars in Dobrudzha (Йонов 1979, 393); Turks and Greeks in Edirne (Йонов 1979, 414–415)) contain no references to coin jewellery. It is also worth noting that Gruneweg was familiar with Slavic languages. In his account of Krzysztof Zbaraski's embassy of 1621, Samuel Twardowski records the use of "Turkish aspers" as ornamentation by Bulgarian women at "Dobrowy" (Prilep, formerly Dobroli, near Sungurlare) (Twardowski 2000, 73). Roman Krzywy has suggested that this place corresponds to the village of Dobrinovo (Burgas region; formerly Hazı Begliy) (Twardowski 2000, 305). However, the village of Dobroli (now Prilep) appears more likely, given the preceding mention of Złukuczany (Twardowski 2000, 72) (identified with the village of Ivanski, near Smyadovo), which indicates that the embassy crossed the Rish Pass and, as with other travellers on this route, passed through Dobroli after descending from the mountains (e.g. Миятев 1976, 32). Robert Bargrave and Edmund Chishull likewise record the use of silver coin jewellery in 1652 at "Cochiuk Dervent Cue" (Küçük Dervent Köy; modern Lalkovo, near Elhovo) (Bargrave 1999, 128) and in 1702 at „Challikcavak" (Rish, Shumen region) (Chishull 1747, 74).

Three collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins have been published to date in eastern Bulgaria (**Fig. 1**): those from **Kozarevo** (Yambol region) (Герасимов 1968, 232), the Izgrev district in **Burgas** (Класнаков, Пеев 2013), and **Komarevo** (near Provadiya) (Мирчев 1969, 222). The hoard from **Dabravino** may also be included in this group, albeit with some reservations. Although the publication neither specifies the number of perforated coins nor identifies them in the catalogue, it can be inferred that a substantial proportion of the small denomination coins (880 of the 1451 coins are Ottoman akçes) have been perforated (Мирчев 1970, 203). To this list, may tentatively be added a recent find from the village of Zahari Stoyanovo (near Popovo), for which only partial data is available (Марчева 2015).

Although coin jewellery was evidently present in this region, it appears to have been less widespread than in the Shopluk, central northern and north-western parts of Bulgaria – likely owing to the smaller proportion and absolute number of the Christian population (Кийл 2017, 26). Kozarevo (Грозданова 1989, 412), Burgas–Izgrev (formerly Atanasköy) (Грозданова 1989, 431), and Komarevo (Андреев et al. 1986, 143) are all documented as having Christian populations during this period. Both the travel accounts and the distribution of hoards suggest that coin jewellery was not widespread in southern and northern Dobrudzha. Indeed, this remains one of the few regions in which collective finds attesting to coin jewellery are lacking even after the mid-18th century, most likely as a consequence of the area's ethnic and confessional composition. Available, albeit limited, evidence from Ottoman registers (16th–17th c.) suggest that Christian populations in Dobrudzha were concentrated primarily along the Black Sea and Danube coasts, with inland settlements containing substantial Christian communities representing exceptions (Грозданова 1989, 256). Gruneweg's observations appear to support this pattern.

The impact of the voluntary conversion of the Christian population to Islam on the use of coin jewellery is of particular interest. Poll tax (*jizya*) registers indicate a decline in the Christian population during the second half of the 17th century compared to the first, a trend especially pronounced in north-eastern Bulgaria (Грозданова 1989, 515–526). This decline likely reflects conversion driven by economic crisis, inflation, and the desire to evade the poll tax (Грозданова 1989, 571, 574) – a hypothesis supported by the limited evidence available on changes in the number of Muslim households in specific settlements during the 17th century (e.g. Кийл 2017, 96, 98). At the same time, historical sources (Марушиакова, Попов 2000, 30; Димитров 1987, 35–36) indicate that formal conversion did not necessarily guarantee exemption from taxation if the authorities suspected that the convert was not genuinely integrated into the *Ummah*. This raises the question of whether conversion entailed changes in dress as a visible marker of integration. Given that clothing functioned as an indicator of status, converts were often provided with new garments or funds for their purchase (Мутафова 2008, 350–351). At first glance, the relative scarcity of hoards containing large numbers of perforated coins from the early 18th century (e.g., Kozarevo (Герасимов 1968, 232), Burgas–Izgrev (Класнаков, Пеев 2013), Kazichene (Герасимов 1938, 456), Vidin–City Stadium (Герасимов 1963, 257), Gaytantsi (Мушмов

1925, 254) may appear to be linked to this process. However, as collective finds from this period are generally rare, the direct connection between these two phenomena remains uncertain. In north-eastern Bulgaria, hoards containing large numbers of perforated coins are absent during the first half of the 18th century. Nevertheless, Kelemen Mikes (1738) documents the use of coin jewellery among Bulgarians in present-day eastern Bulgaria (Миятев 1976, 63), although without specifying particular settlements. It also remains unclear when parts of the Muslim population in north-eastern Bulgaria adopted coin jewellery (Адемова 1983) and whether this development is related to the Islamisation processes of the late 17th century.

Distribution of coin jewellery until the mid-18th century in central and western parts of the Danubian plain

No travellers' accounts attesting to the use of coin jewellery are known for the western and central parts of the Danubian Plain. Nevertheless, 16 collective finds (**Fig. 1**) containing coin jewellery or large numbers of perforated coins have been recorded in this region. This includes the hoards from **Tsenovo**, Ruse region (Герасимов 1965, 250), **Belyakovets**, Veliko Tarnovo region (Писарев, Цочев 1972), **Polski Trambesh** (the find is not known in its entirety and may therefore fall outside the chronological scope of this study) (Герасимов 1955, 607), **Pleven** – “Nuclear Instruments Plant” (where only 65 of 624 coins are perforated – raising uncertainty as to whether they formed part of jewellery or were reintroduced into circulation after such use) (Ковачева 1988), **Oryahovo** (where only 58 of 140 coins are perforated) (Герасимов 1946, 237), **Krivodol** (only part of the unperforated coins has been identified, and almost no data are available for those forming the two hair ornaments (“*kosichnik*”) (Герасимов 1950, 317), **Radotina**, near Vratsa (Герасимов 1964, 240), **Lyutibrod**, Vratsa region (37 of 81 coins are unidentified owing to significant wear) (Герасимов 1937, 318), **Kopilovtsi**, Montana region (no information is available on the Ottoman coins in this assemblage) (Томова 2017, 2010), **Traykovo**, near Lom (Йосифова 1992), **Darzhantsa**, Vidin region (only 49 of 128 coins are dated) (Мушмов 1919, 163), **Gaytantsi**, Vidin region (Мушмов 1925, 254), **Peshakovo**, Vidin region (which includes two later coins, dated 1750 and 1810, likely added subsequently) (Герасимов 1964, 243; Филипова, Шидеров 1990; Кръстев 2021, 310), **Vidin** – “City Stadium” (the latest coins in this collective find are of Sultan Mahmud I (1730–1754); thus, it may fall outside the period under review) (Герасимов 1963, 257), the grave from **Pavolche** – Vratsa region (no information is available for 42 of the 52 coins found in the grave) (Герасимов 1946, 243), and Grave No. 25 from the necropolis in the “Svetitsata” locality near **Lyaskovets** (excluding one coin of Sultan Suleiman I, the remaining 6 silver coins in this grave are broadly dated to the 16th–18th centuries on the basis of weight and dimensions; thus, the possibility that this find falls outside the period should not be excluded) (Дерменджиев et al. 2015, 740–741; Чокоев 2015, 77, 276). To this group, may be added the hoard from **Desa** (Romania), located only 18 km from Vidin and 7 km from the Danube (Dumitrescu, Rădulescu 2014). A relatively high concentration of such finds is observable in the Vidin and Vratsa regions and along the Yantra River, in contrast to their near absence in the Pleven region – an area otherwise well represented in the published record of coin hoards. Conversely, the lack of collective finds containing large numbers of perforated coins in the Lovech region appears to reflect the general absence of published finds from this period there.

The high density of hoards containing large numbers of perforated coins west of the Yantra river (exceeding the total number recorded in the rest of present-day Bulgaria) can likewise be linked to the significant proportion and absolute number of the Christian population (Кийл 2017, 26, 27). Available data confirms a Christian presence in the settlements where several of these finds were uncovered: Vidin (Грозданова 1989, 167), Pleven (Fermendžin 1887, 262; Кийл 2017, 35), Gaytantsi (Грозданова 1989, 167), Kopilovtsi (Грозданова 1989, 176), Pavolche (Грозданова 1989, 186), Radotina (Цветкова 1974, 291), Belyakovets (Грозданова 1989, 205), and Polski Trambesh (Грозданова 1989, 210). Grave No. 25 from the Lyaskovets necropolis further attests to the presence of coin jewellery among the Christian population (Дерменджиев et al. 2015, 740–741; Чокоев 2015, 77, 276).

Distribution of coin jewellery until the mid-18th century in the Rhodope mountains and the valleys of Mesta and Struma rivers

Tracing the dynamics of coin jewellery use in the Rhodopes during this period is challenging, owing to the general scarcity of published collective finds (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, the grave from **Chernichevo** (Герасимов 1963, 261–262) provides clear evidence for the presence of coin jewellery in the region. The context of the find – a grave containing a cross – leaves little doubt as to the individual's Christian affiliation. Ethnographic data indicate that coin jewellery and related costume elements were used in the Rhodopes by both Muslim and Christian Bulgarians (Велева, Романска 1969, 90; Кръстева-Ножарова 1969, 134, 136). However, there are no dedicated studies of the hairstyles, veiling practices, and jewellery of the Turkish population in the region. Consequently, it remains unclear to what extent this group adopted coin jewellery or how such practices may have related to those of Bulgarian Christians and Muslims. Accordingly, the available evidence from the Rhodopes does not currently permit an assessment of the impact of Islamisation on the use of coin jewellery.

Although numerous coin finds from this period are known from the Struma and Mesta valleys, relatively few are published with detailed descriptions. At present, the only recorded collective find containing large numbers of perforated coins from this region is known from the **Gotse Delchev area** (Пенчев 2020). Robert de Dreux likewise notes the use of coin jewellery by Bulgarian women in the region of Serres in the 1660s (de Dreux n.d., fol. 69v).

Future research prospects

While the present analysis traces the geographical distribution of coin jewellery and the ethnic and confessional affiliation of its wearers (16th–mid-18th c.), it does not resolve all remaining uncertainties. The findings give rise to several questions: What were the origins of the use of such quantities of coins for costume decoration among different ethnic groups? To what extent is the phenomenon in the eastern Balkans connected to comparable practices in neighbouring regions? When and where did the Roma population adopt this practice? Are there significant differences between urban and rural Christian populations in the use of coin jewellery? To what extent did Islamisation influence this practice, and when was it adopted by Muslim communities? Finally, what processes underpinned the changes in its distribution after the mid-18th century? These issues remain to be addressed in future research.

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