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FROM KYIV TO PEREYASLAVETS (Πρεσθλαβίτζα). THE EARLY MEDIEVAL STONE EGG IMITATIONS AND GLAZED EGG-SHAPED RATTLES FROM DOBRUDJA, ROMANIA

ABSTRACT

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This article focuses on the finds of glazed egg-shaped rattles as well as on egg imitations of chalk and of Roman bricks discovered in Dobrudja and in nearby Varna. It is assumed that they were used in magical and religious rituals connected with fertility and vegetation cults, as well as in apotropaic and healing rites. Chalk imitations dated prevalingly to the 10th century could be relics of a local Christian-pagan syncretism. Glazed items were most probably imports from Kyiv workshops in Kyivan Rus'. The latter should be associated with the presence of people engaging in military operations led by Rus' princes, namely mercenaries and even more probably, with merchants travelling along the waterways leading from the Varangians to the Greeks. This route was most intensively exploited in the time from the middle of the 10th to the middle of the of 11th century, which correlates with the chronology of the layers and graves where these glazed eggs were discovered, their dating points mainly being to the 11th century.

Keywords: Dobrudja, Kyivan Rus, glazed egg-shaped rattles, Early Middle Ages

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dobrudja, a region in Romania called also Lesser Scythia, was a cultural melting pot during the Early Medieval Period. It was first and foremost affected by its localization; it is an area squeezed and limited to the final section of the Lower Danube and its delta. On the east, the Black Sea shore constitutes its natural border; the coastal line running from the north changes from the lagoon type to a sheer cliff of limestone. Solely from the south, the region of Dobrudja does not have any geographical border as it opens up with its wide front toward the Danubian Plain. Having been geographically formed this way, once the Danube River is crossed, its last section is formed into multiple backwater pools enabling an easy river crossing which makes the region a perfect communication artery leading southward. The important geographical element of this region is its biodiversity which permits any settlements to flourish; historically, it was inhabited by populations with post-antique traditions, as well as subsequent waves of peoples migrating here from across the Danube, *i.e.*, Slavs, Bulgarians or Pechenegs (*cf.*, Barnea and Ștefănescu 1971; Rădulescu and Bitoleanu 1984; Bozhilov and Gyuzelev 2004). The area from which the stone egg imitations and glazed egg-shaped rattles analyzed here come from encompasses the territory of today's Dobrudja within its current borders, *i.e.*, its northern part within Romania and the smaller southern part in today's Bulgaria and the neighbourhood of the modern Varna city (Davidova 2011).

2. STONE EGG IMITATION AND GLAZED EGG-SHAPED RATTLES: DESCRIPTION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE FINDS

Fourteen ceramic egg-shaped rattles and seven of their fragments from the territory of Dobrudja are known in the literature; they have been found in Byzantine fortresses such as Dinogetia-Gărvan, Tulcea county (Barnea 1967, 327, fig. 149: 12, 13), Hârșova-Carsium, Constanța county (Paraschiv-Talmațchi 2017, 278, fig. 5: 3), Păcuiul lui Soare, Constanța county (the only reference in: Paraschiv-Talmațchi 2017, 278), a settlement in Nufăru, Tulcea county (Mănuțu-Adameșteanu 2018, 111), the cemetery of Isaccea, Tulcea county (Vasiliu 1984). Chalk eggs were discovered within the Christian rock-cut monastery in Murfatlar-Basarabi, county Constanța (Damian *et al.* 2009, 125, 127, fig. 19: a-c) and also in a pit in Isaccea near the fortress in Noviodunum, Tulcea county (Stănică *et al.* 2010, 208). Additional information in literature on the subject can be found about one more glazed-rattle egg from the settlement in Isaccea as a stray find (Fig 1: 1-6; Vasile 1984, ft. 120). Another three egg-shaped rattles are known from northeastern Bulgaria, more precisely from the area located exactly at the southern border of Dobrudja. In the first source text on the subject, all three glazed egg imitations were attributed to the excavations car-

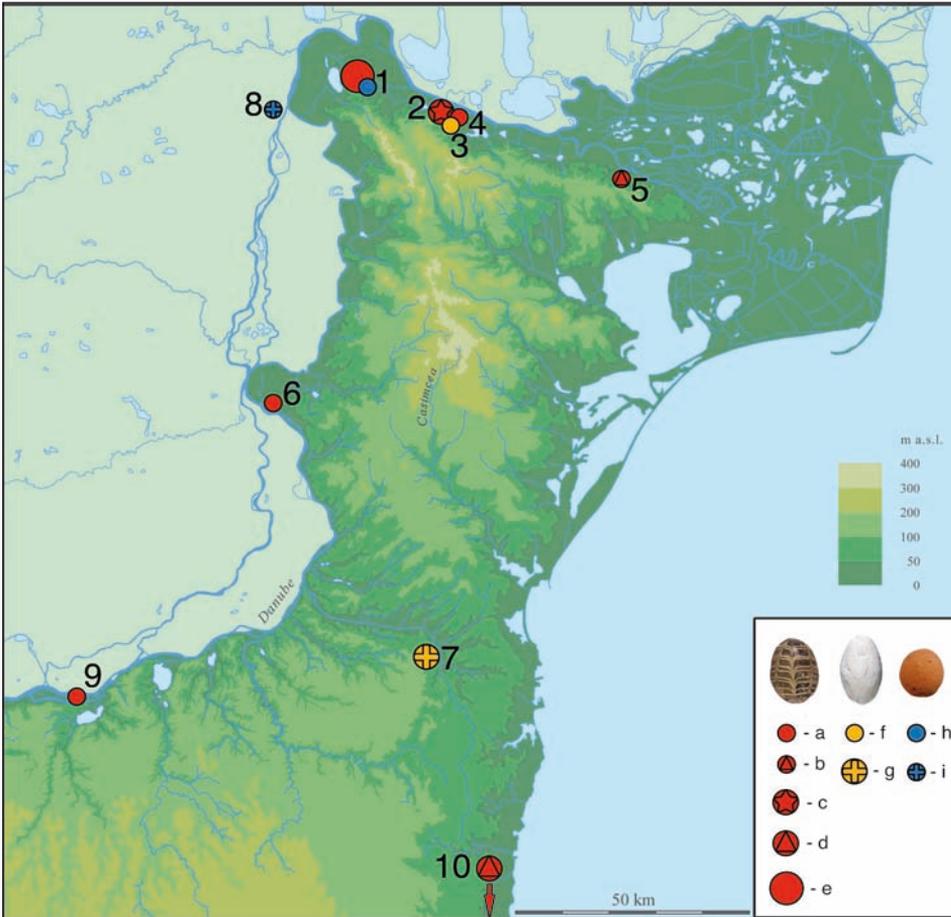


Fig. 1. Glazed egg-shaped rattles from Dobrudja and its vicinity:

1 pc – a) fortress, b) settlement; 2-5 items – c) cemetery, d) settlement; more than 5 items – e) fortress. Egg imitation of chalk: 1 item – f) settlement; g) rock cut monastery; Egg imitation of reused Roman brick: 1 item – h) fortress, i) cemetery.

Romania: 1 – Dinogetia-Gărvan, Tulcea County; 2 – Isaccea-Tumulus IB, Tulcea County; 3 – Isaccea-Lutarie, Tulcea County; 4 – Isaccea-Noviodunum, Tulcea County; 5 – Nufăru, Tulcea County; 6 – Hârșova - Carsium, Constanța County; 7 – Murfatlar-Besarabi, Constanța County; 8 – Brăila, Brăila County; 9 – Păciiul lui Soare, Constanța County

Bulgaria: 10 – Varna Thermae, Varna Province (drawing B. S. Szmoniewski)

ried out in the 1960s on the Early Medieval cultural layers around the Roman *thermae* in Varna (Fig. 1: 8; Yotov and Pavlova 2004, 85, 95, no. 67). In works published later, however, the place of the discovery of one of the three eggs is described as an inhumation cemetery in Odartsi, in Bulgaria (Yotov 2018, 470, fig. 6.3) yet it is done without relating to any source information. In a monograph on this 11th century cemetery by L. Doncheva-

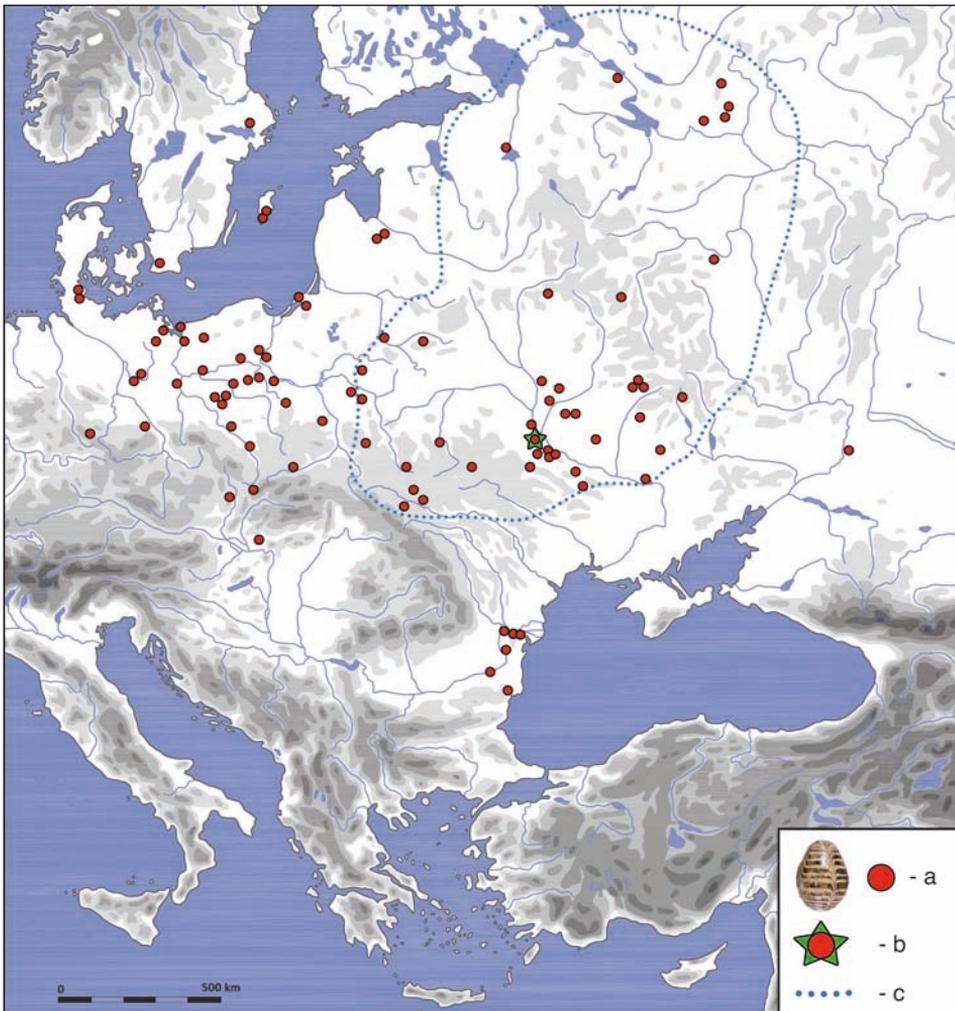


Fig. 2. Distribution of the Early Medieval glazed egg-shaped rattles in Europe: a – place of the find, b – Kyiv, c – approximate borders of Kyivan Rus, 11th-12th centuries. After Gabriel 2000, changed with B. S. Szmoniewski's supplements. Drawing by K. Rosińska-Balik and B. S. Szmoniewski

Petkova (2005), no information is to be found about this find. Finally, two egg-shaped artefacts should be mentioned, made of the Roman brick and found within the territory of Dobrudja inside the Dinogetia-Gârvan fortress mentioned above (Barnea 1967, 327, 328, fig. 149: 12, 13), as well as one such object discovered in one (?) of the Early Medieval graves unearthed in the area of Brăila (Fig. 1: 1 and 8; Căndea 2010, fig. 1; Yotov 2018, 469, fig. 2: 6). This area is visible from Dinogetia since it is located directly on the opposite bank of Danube, southeast of the river.

Thus, Dobrudja constitutes the third biggest concentration of these artefacts outside the north-western Slavic lands, mostly Polish ones (Bukowska 1958; Gabriel 2000; Ślusarski 2004; Kajkowski 2020), and outside of Kyivan Rus' territories (Makarova 1966; Shovkopylas 1980; Gabriel 2000; Sushko 2011; Tkachenko 2018). Apart from Dobrudja, glazed egg-shaped ceramic rattles are sporadically discovered within the areas of habitation of the early medieval Baltic tribes (Shiroukhov 2014, 393), in South Scandinavia (Holger 1948, 469, fig. 2: 6), in Moravia (Merínský 2013, 49) and Slovakia (Fig. 2; Fusek 2013; König 2014, 67, 68).

Regarding their parameters, imitation of eggs including the ones that served as rattles are of the size of big hen eggs or duck eggs. Based on some completely preserved samples, it is possible to estimate the range of their maximal diameters from 2.8 cm to 3.7 cm for chalk items and diameter ranges from 2.7 cm to 3.7 cm and their lengths are from 3.5 cm to 5.0 cm for glazed egg-shaped rattles. In regard to their ornamental patterns, and considering here both the presence of such patterns or its lack and the material used, the eggs can be classified as follows:

- 1) imitation of eggs without any glaze, made of various kinds of limestone as well as of re-used Roman bricks, comprising two variants: a) undecorated; b) decorated ones,
- 2) glazed egg-shaped rattles a) undecorated b) decorated.

Both those decorated and those lacking decoration were made in the technique of forming clay of good quality tempered by the admixture of fine-grained sand. Only in one case did the clay under the glaze have a white colour because kaolin clay was used for its production, however, in all other cases, the good-quality clay had a colour approximately red and orange (Barnea 1967, 327). The glazed egg-shaped rattles were empty inside and their walls had diversified thickness – so, such an egg inside had a kind of a fusiform chamber in which a clay ball or a stone was enclosed that made a sound when the egg was shaken. Its surface was most frequently covered with an opaque dark-brown, black or dark-green glaze. Many attempts to reconstruct the production cycle of glazed egg-shaped rattles have been proposed in the literature (see Kaczmarek 1998; Łukaszczyk 2014; Sushko 2020, Siemianowska *et al.* in print). Some traces of the forming process that have been documented for the damaged examples point to two possible manufacturing techniques. The first one, more frequently observed in the archaeological evidence, was based on modelling the egg in free-form using joined clay bands starting from the wider end of the egg and proceeding to its narrow end provided with a hole. Objects produced by this technique display, however, a lesser regularity of their form (Makarova 1966, 141; 1967, 42; Kaczmarek 1998, 553). Another technique, experimentally confirmed by J. Kaczmarek, was based on wrapping clay with the addition of sand around a wax core. Objects made this way (Kaczmarek 1998, 553 with references) display a significant regularity of their form. The technique of glazing, however, remains unclear. One hypothesis describing it as fusing the glaze in a furnace after the egg having been dried is to be questioned, because, according to Kaczmarek, “this technique was hardly used during the medieval period, as it

required such a combination of raw materials used as components as to provide that the temperature to be reached to fuse the glaze and fire the clay should be approximately the same” (Kaczmarek 1998, 553). T. Makarova assumed that the clay eggs were dipped in the glaze, and as next, their surface must have been covered by decorative patterns (1966, 141; 1967, 42). In view of her suggestion, it still must be unclear whether the object was dipped in the ready melted glaze or rather, if it was smeared with a mixture of powdered glass diluted in water to be fired (*cf.* Kaczmarek 1998, 554 with references).

Type 1, variant a (Fig. 3: 1-3) – the type 1, variant a includes two items resembling eggs and made of chalk, and also one item shaped approximately like the yolk of an egg and made of a recycled Roman brick. Two chalk eggs lacking decoration were found in a cave churches complex, dug in soft chalk rock and localized on the outskirts of the town of Murfatlar-Basarabi, on the right bank of the former Carasu Valley and at a distance of about 20 km west from the historical district of Constanța – Tomis. Inside of a part of an already non-existing chalk hill, within a largely extended block with the parameters of 9.5 × 9.5 m., six basilicas (labelled B1-B4, E3 and E5), were hewn in rock along with five galleries (in some of them, inhumation burials were placed), together with other rooms that created a closed sacral system. Basilicas and galleries had their entrances from the north side, and due to the scarcity of space they were situated next to one another and oriented to the east or in south-east direction (Barnea 1962, 189, fig. 8; Damian *et al.* 2009).

The first of the undecorated chalk eggs of a fusiform shape, both 5.9 cm long and 3.7 cm diameter at, was found of basilica B2 (Fig. 3: 1). It is the smallest of the basilicas and can be regarded as a simple basilica with apses; in this case, the apse is oriented to the south-east (Barnea 1962, 192-194; Damian *et al.* 2009, 121, 122, fig. 5: b). Another undecorated egg with a length of 6 cm and diameter of 3.7 cm was found within the foundation outline of basilica B4 (Fig. 3: 2). This basilica is located directly under basilica B3. Similarly, as with the feature B2, the apse was oriented to the south-east. Basilica B4 is also the most interesting structure due to the quantity and diversity of its depictive motives carved in the soft chalk walls (Barnea 1962, 198; Damian *et al.* 2009, 122, fig. 5: c). The chronology of these finds is determined to be 10th century A.D. (Damian *et al.* 2009, 127, fig. 19: a-b). One imitation of an egg made of a re-used brick of the Roman period, approximating to a hen’s egg by its size, was discovered within cumulative layers of settlements in the fortress of Dinogetia-Gârvan with the chronology relating to the 11th century (1967, 327, 328). Outside the Dobrudja region but quite close to it, namely in the neighbourhood of Brăila on the other bank of the Danube, south-east of Dinogetia-Gârvan, a similar egg was found, round in its form, and made also of a recycled Roman brick; it was placed probably in one of the inhumation graves dated in 10th-11th centuries (Fig. 3: 3; Căndea 2010, fig.1; Yotov 2018, 469, fig. 2: 6).

Type I, variant b (Fig. 4: 1, 2) – two items can be included in this type. The first of them was discovered in Murfatlar-Basarabi, the rock cut monastery mentioned earlier, more precisely in its sector 6 in one of the backfills after chalk had been quarried. It is

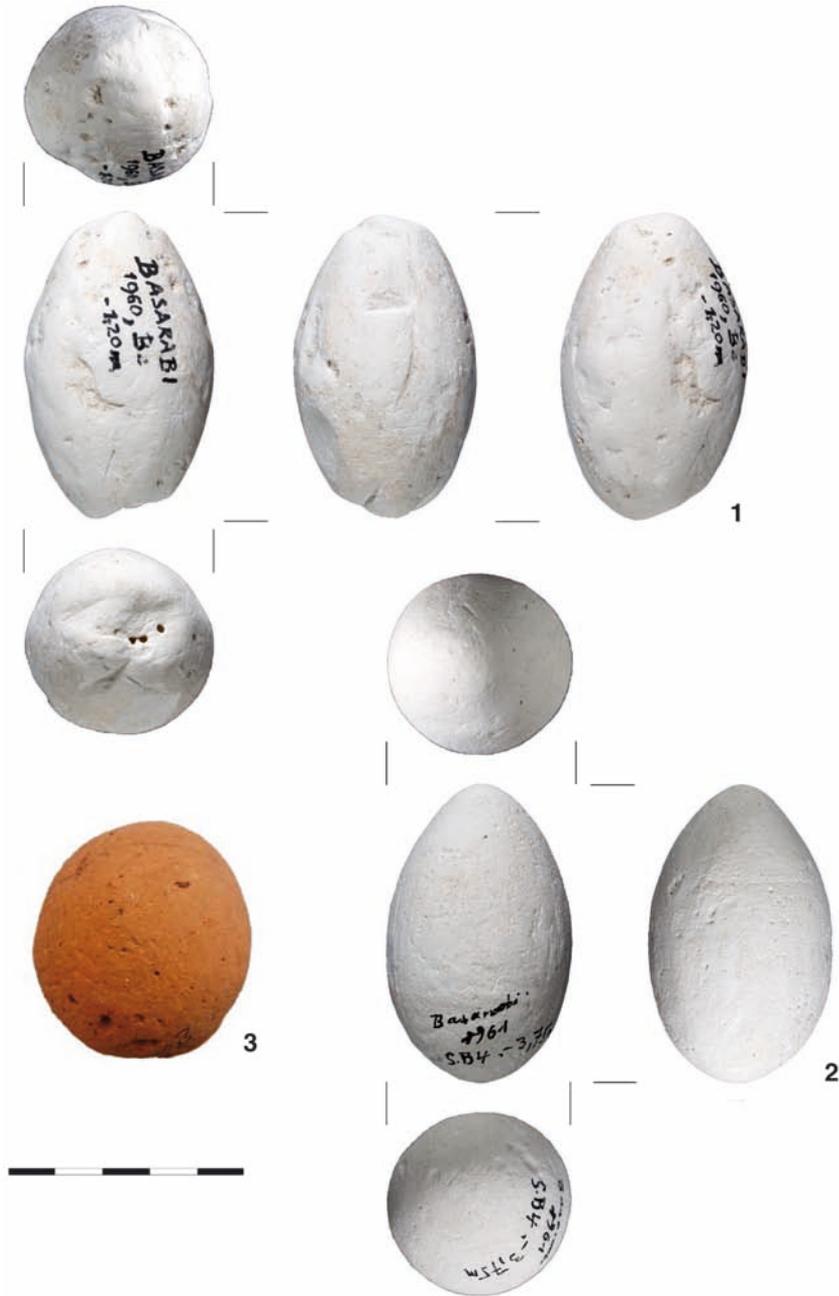


Fig. 3. 1, 2 – Chalk imitation of egg from cut rock monastery in Murfatlar-Basarabi (1 – chapel B2; 2 – trench of the chapel B4); 3 – Roman brick imitation of egg from grave located in Brăila city area (1, 2 – courtesy: Institute of Archaeology Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 3 – after Yotov 2018)



Fig. 4. 1, 2 – Chalk egg imitation from Murfatlar-Basarabi and Isaccea-Lutarie (1 – sector 6; 2 – pit nr 5); 2b – details of the surface engraving (1 – courtesy: Institute of Archaeology Romanian Academy, Bucharest; 2a, b – Eco-Museum Research Institute, Tulcea)

partially preserved, and its surface is richly decorated with a motif of a band consisting of a pattern of bows and triangles – wolf's teeth of different sizes with the preserved parameters of 4.1 cm of length and 3.3 cm in diameter (Fig. 4: 1). The chronology of this item, similarly as in the previously mentioned two eggs, is set in the 10th century (Damian *et al.* 2009, 125, 127, fig. 19: c). Another object made of chalk approximating a hen egg in its size was found in pit 5 in its quarter S2 in the year 2005 during the excavations in the eastern part of the archaeological complex in Isaccea-Lutarie, which is located outside the fortifications (extramuros) of Noviodunum fortress. The analyzed egg is of a small size with a length of 3.6 cm and diameter of 2.8 cm. On its surface, there are several engravings, two of which depict crosses, one is a letter H, and two resemble anchors arranged in opposite directions to each other and joined by their shafts (Fig. 4: 2a-b). Pit 5 along with several other pits, due to the presence of many clay objects inside them as well as Byzantine coins and fragments of glass items has been attributed to the 11th century phase of the site (Stănică *et al.* 2010, 208).

Type IIa. Glazed egg rattle without decoration (Fig. 5: 5). Only one egg-shaped rattle can be included in this group, and it was probably found in Varna in a cultural layer of the Early Medieval Period – in a horizon dated to the end of 10th to the 11th century, in an area where Roman period *thermae* once were (Yotov and Pavlova 2004, 95, fig. 85: 67). The egg was covered with dark-green glaze, now partially rubbed off. Its length is 4.1 cm and its diameter is 3.0 cm.

Type IIb. Glazed Egg rattle with decoration (Figs 5-7). This is the most numerous group regarding the number of discovered items. They are found both in the funerary context and in cultural layers.

Variant 1 (Fig. 5: 1, 3, 4, 6, 7; 6: 2-4; 7: 1) – this variant includes the biggest number of eggs: seven were found in Dobruđja, and two others come from Varna, from its eastern border. Any differences in decoration are insignificant and limited to the thickness of horizontal light-coloured lines forming the feathered patterns obtained by combing and to the precision of applying the motifs onto the surface. They are covered with dark-green or brown glaze, partially decolourised due to the influence of post-depositional factors, and bear ornamental patterns of hues ranging from light to dark yellow. All the items have holes in their bottoms. The largest number (five of the fully preserved eggs) has been found in the early medieval graves in Isaccea; the burials constitute a part of an inhumation cemetery which was dug into the earthwork of a mound from the Roman Period, more precisely, from the first half of the 2nd century AD (Vasiliu 1984, 107, 125, pl. 2).

One item is from Dinogetia-Gărvan, its length is 3.8 cm and its diameter is 3.1 cm. The surface is covered with dark green/brown glaze, additionally decorated by an ornament of a loose circumferential spiral of thin bands of yellow colour that have been feathered at intervals (Fig. 5: 1). In the lower part, at the bottom, there is a small opening. This glazed egg-shaped rattle was discovered in settlement layers of the Roman-Byzantine fortress in Dinogetia-Gărvan; these layers are dated to the 10th-11th centuries (Barnea 1967, 327, fig. 149: 12).



Fig. 5. Glazed egg-shaped rattles. 1, 3 – Dinogetia-Gärvan; 2 – Nufăru; 4 – Hârşova-Carsium; 5-7 – Varna-Roman *Thermae* (1, 3 – cultural layer; 2 – pit; 4 – cultural layer; 5-7 – cultural layer/sunken dwelling destroyed by fire) (1 – courtesy: Eco-Museum Research Institute, Tulcea and 3 – after Barnea 1967, 4 – Parascshiv-Talmaţchi 2020, 5-7, courtesy: Archaeological Museum in Varna)



Fig. 6. Isaccea-Tumulus Ib 1 – Grave 111; 2 – Grave 148; 3 – Grave 148; 4 – Grave 135 (1-4 courtesy: Eco-Museum Research Institute, Tulcea)

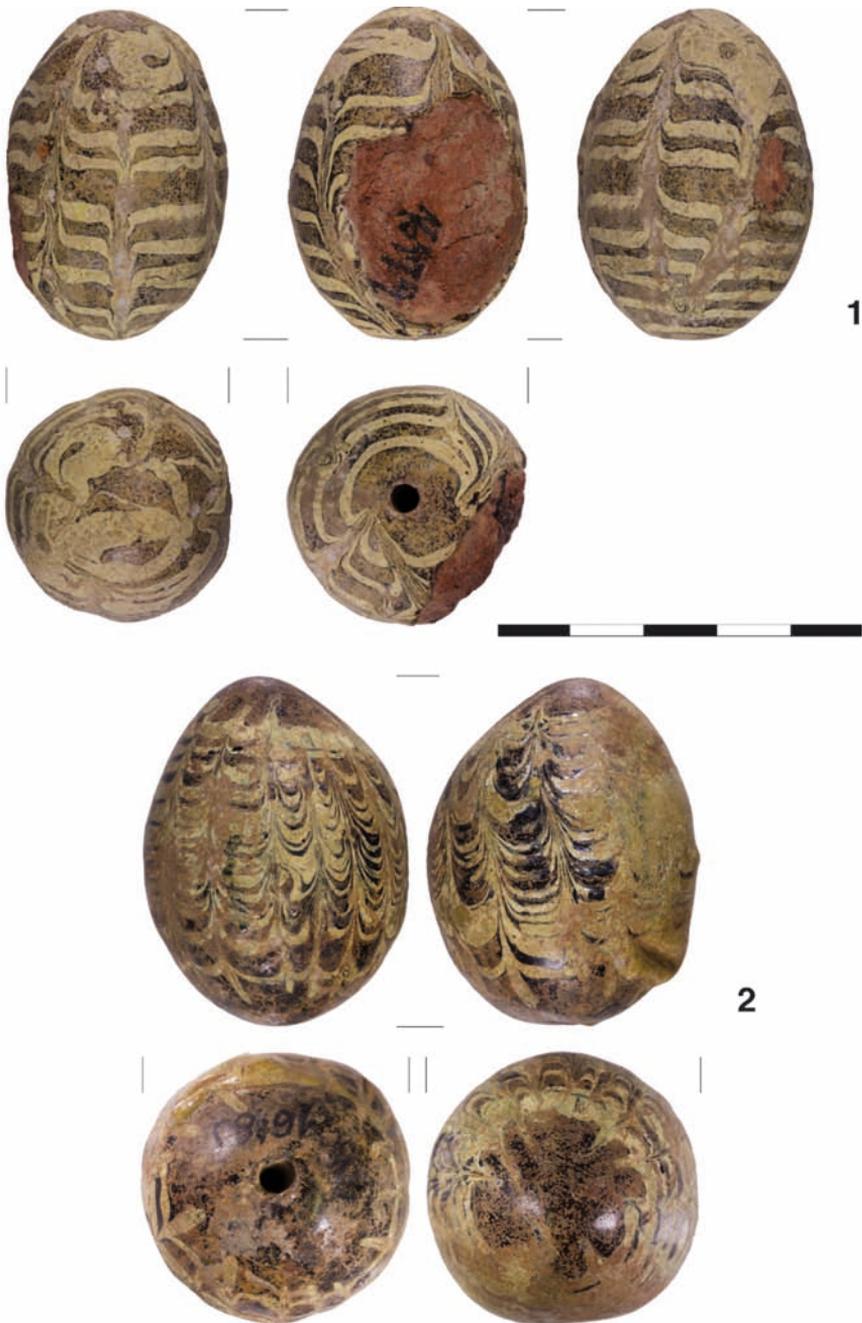


Fig. 7. Isaccea-Tumulus Ib 1 – grave 129; 2 – Isaccea-Noviodunum, stray find
(courtesy: Eco-Museum Research Institute, Tulcea)

Two glazed egg-shaped rattles, one of them belonging to this variant and the other of type IIb variant 2 (Fig. 6: 1) constituted a part of the grave good assembly of Burial 111, in which an adult person was buried. These items were placed by the left thigh (Vasiliu 1984, 125, pl. 8: 21). The parameters of the egg of this variant are: length 4.5 cm, diameter 3.3 cm (Fig. 6: 2).

In Grave 129, which also belonged to an adult person, one egg was placed by the left thigh. Partially damaged, length 4.6 and 3.1 cm wide (Fig. 7: 1). Apart from this artefact, there was also in the grave a bronze ring (Vasiliu 1984, 126, pl. 8: 19).

Another egg was one of the two elements of the grave good assembly in Burial 135. The adolescent person buried inside was also given a glazed egg-shaped rattle (Fig. 6: 4) by the left thigh (length 4.6 cm and diameter 3.5 cm). Additionally, in this grave there was also a bronze ring of an approximately circular shape and made by twisting two wires (Vasiliu 1984, 127, pl. 8: 18).

In Grave 148, in which an adult was buried, the grave goods included one egg (Fig. 6: 3), length 4.6 cm, diameter 3.1 cm, placed similarly as in the others, by the left thigh (Vasiliu 1984, 127, pl. 8: 17).

Two other glazed egg-shaped rattles bearing similar decoration were found in settlement layers dated to the Early Medieval Period in the times where the fortresses were playing their role for the Byzantine empire, in Dinogetia-Gărvan (Fig. 5: 3) mentioned here several times and in Hârşova-Carsium (Fig. 5: 4). In the first case, as with the rest of such cases, the item was discovered within the layers dated in the 11th – first half of 12th centuries. Its dimensions are: length 4.7 cm and diameter 3.3 cm (Barnea 1967, 327). The glazed egg-shaped rattle from Carsium was unearthed in a part of the early medieval fortress, south of Feature 1/2008, in a cultural layer which can be dated to the period from the second half of the 10th century to the 11th century and perhaps to the beginning of the 12th century based on the evidence of glazed ceramics found there. Its parameters are: the height at 4.75 cm and its diameter at 3.6 cm (Fig. 5:3; Paraschiv-Talmaţchi, 2017, 278).

Another two glazed egg-shaped rattles were found in the early medieval cultural layers dated to the 11th to 12th centuries in the area where Roman *thermae* had been located. The first of these items (4.2 cm long, 3.1 cm diameter) was said to have been found within the Square 1 at a depth of 2.2 cm (Fig. 5: 6). The second item might have been found at the depth of 1.3 cm in a semi-dugout dwelling localized in Square 9 which could have been burnt at the end of the first half of 11th century which was indicated by the finds of 18 Byzantine coins dated in the time from the end of the 10th century but prevailing in the 1st half of the 11th century. It is 3.8 cm long with a diameter of 2.9 cm (Fig. 5: 7) (Yotov 2005, 144, 145, 149, 152: 41-42).

Variant 2 (Figs 6: 1 and 7: 2) – this group includes two glazed egg-shaped rattles. The first of them belonged to a grave good assembly in Burial 111 along with the item type IIb variant 1 described earlier (Fig. 6: 2) (Vasiliu 1984, 125, 8l. 8: 20). It is of irregularly oval shape, with slightly articulated tip, especially one side looks as if during its firing in

the kiln, part of its glaze dribbled toward the bottom. Its parameters are: 5.0 cm long, 3.7 cm diameter (Fig. 6: 1).

Another glazed egg-shaped rattle of this type was accidentally found in the surface layer within the fortress in Isaceea-Noviodunum (Vasiliu 1984, 140, ft. 120). It is of irregular shape, especially in its upper part. It is 4.9 long with a diameter of 3.7 cm (Fig. 7: 2).

Variant 3 (Fig. 5: 2) – One egg of this type with dark green glaze on its surface and with the thread decoration of approximately lemon colour. This decoration is made with very low precision. It is 3.5 cm high with the parameter of 2.7 cm. Found in a waste pit in Nufăru, strada Bisericii (Church street). In this pit, numerous fragments of ceramic vessels were also unearthed, as well as a spindle whorl made of the Ovruch pyrophyllite slate. The whole content of the waste pit is dated to the time between the end of the 11th century and the first decades of the 12th century, no later than the year 1122 (Manucu 2018, 111).

3. FUNCTION AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The quite significant role and social impact of the glazed egg-shaped rattles in Slavic communities is indicated by the fact that in the case of Dobruđja, they are found on the sites which bore a great importance for the defence, administration or trade exchange of the region. These sites are mostly localized along the right banks of the Danube (Dinogetia, Isaceea, Noviodunum and Carsium), as well as on the coasts of the Black Sea (Varna) – namely, along the very important military and trade route leading to Constantinople. Let us then consider how the contemporary inhabitants of this region could have perceived these egg-shaped rattles. It is beyond any doubt that in Central and East Europe during the Early Medieval Period, in their various forms ranging from a natural egg through egg-shaped stones to glazed clay rattles, eggs in general constituted an outstanding element of both spiritual and material culture of Early Slavic communities.

Could these kind of artefacts be perceived in a similar way also around the lower run of Danube? With the above question, another one arises: who were the owners of the egg-shaped rattles?

An egg has always enjoyed a deep symbolic meaning mainly in connection to its being associated with a new life, fertility, renewal (Newall 1971; Newall 1984), and for a traditional society, it represented a kind of “life condensed” as it was cleverly put by Kazimierz Moszyński *in statu nascendi* (Moszyński 1967, 316). The process of life being formed inside an egg finds its reflection in many cosmogonic myths (Kowalski 1998, 172). In the case of territories occupied by Slavic settlements, a certain archaism and prehistoric character of the motive of the world hatched from the cosmic egg has been pointed out (Toporow 1977). Moreover, Adrian Mianecki maintains that according to this archaic Slavic cosmogony, the world is hatched from the egg without any forces coming from outside, including any divine entities, therefore without any involvement of gods (Mianecki 2010, 178-182; Mianecki 2011, 139).

Much has already been written on the subject of the possible functions of these egg-shaped objects made of stone or glazed clay, especially specimens from the territories settled by Slavs. A part of these interpretations, including ones that saw in them toys or amulets against vampires (Rabiega 1949, 119; Hensel 1984, 120, 121) has already been rejected (*cf.*, Kajkowski 2020, 33, 34). However, there are still some researchers who interpret them as toys (Sushko, 2018, 87, 91, fig. 3: 1, 2). Considering various places of depositing the analyzed products, such as settlements and fortresses, burials and a rock cut monastery, it must be stressed that all the cases should be treated individually yet associated with the sphere of magic and rites. Especially in regard to the evidence coming from settlements and fortresses, and in other territories with compact Slavic settlements also from hillforts, the finds of egg shells or glazed egg-shaped rattles have been the subject of some rich and sophisticated interpretations. Based on ethnographic evidence, they are mostly associated with fertility rites reflecting vegetative and human reproduction processes, with healing treatments, undoing charms, or with initiation rituals (Moszyński 1967, 280, 286, 316, 441, 513; Wawrzeniuk 2004, 144, 211-212; Kajkowski 2020, 70).

Eggs were especially important within the annual spring ceremoniality in the pre-Christian tradition (new year rites), and subsequently, within the Eastern rites at the beginning of the ecclesiastical year (Rybakov 1981, 33; 1987, 668-670; Mianecki 2010, 174). In spring, eggs were used to spark new life by the means of quite a range of ritual activities, including adding them to seed corn, inserting them in furrows and patches of fields with the intention to ensure good harvest; putting them under fruit trees (Niewiadomski 1989). The colours used to paint traditional Easter eggs also bear important symbolic meanings. The use of green and red was closely related to the vegetation symbolism of nature and human life. On the other hand, the yellow colour referred to solar symbolism (Mianecki 2010, 174). In the latter case, it is probably a reference to the egg as a symbol of the sun in the beliefs of the Eastern Slavs (Shovkoplyas 1980, 97).

Evidently, these artefacts had a great apotropaic significance. Their possession may have been intended to provide protection of households against thunderstrikes or to ward off evil powers; they may have been intended to protect their owner against an “evil eye” or functioned as some kind of charm (Stawska 2006, 140; Kajkowski 2020, 34). Remaining with the subject of households, one more usage of eggs shells and glazed egg-shaped rattles should be mentioned, namely as foundation deposits because clearly some of them are found in just this context, for example under the floor of a semi-sunken dwelling (Kajkowski 2020, 57, 58). However, in the view of the lack of the exact information about the context and conditions of finding glazed egg-shaped rattles in the analyzed region, we are unable to draw any firm conclusions on their original purposes. The available information at our disposal for the objects discussed in this paper is of relatively limited use in this respect, we can only state that one glazed egg-shaped rattle and another one made of chalk covered with engravings were found in waste pits. Some other glazed items were discovered inside a semi sunken dwelling destroyed by fire and localized on the site of the Roman *thermae* in Varna.

It may be suggested that the chalk egg and the glazed egg-shaped rattle thrown into the waste pit are remnants of the purification rite widely known in folk medicine and based on rolling an egg along the body of an ill person, and in the case of applying the method to animals, it aims at increasing their body volumes and making them fine-looking and healthy (Antoniewicz 1913, 183; Moszyński 1967, 28). Thus, in order to neutralize an illness which would have been transferred from an ill human to an egg, just as in the case of neutralizing other kinds of bad spells and charms, such eggs or their shells, or their stone or clay imitations, were afterward dug into the ground on different spots, for example in fields (Antoniewicz 1913, 183).

An undoubtedly important role was played by an egg as such, and as a symbol, also in the form of egg imitations made of Roman brick or as glazed items, in the cult of deceased ancestors. The custom of putting glazed egg-shaped rattles into graves is confirmed by archaeological evidence from multiple early medieval cemeteries spread across territories populated by the North-western Slavic tribes as well as by Eastern Slavs. In the case of the egg imitations made of Roman brick, they were quite an isolated find. It was probably believed that giving eggs and their glazed clay imitations to relatives' graves by the magic power spellbound in them would protect the peace of the deceased, ward off evil powers from them and at the same time, it would prohibit their return to the world of the living (Kowalski 1998, 174). To conclude, it must be said that the presence of an egg or its imitation inside a burial represents a symbol of the belief in rebirth, resurrection, and eternal life (Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński, 2000, 110). Following this line of reasoning, one must notice that an egg becomes an element which is able to bind this life and the afterlife together in the rite of passage and is therefore the sign of life's victory over death; it becomes a symbol of an immortal soul, especially in the pagan concept of soul (*cf.*, Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński 2000, 107-113; Bator 2000, 126, 127).

One should also mention here a custom of rolling eggs along graves, by the means of which souls of the deceased could be granted life residing inside an egg (Moszyński 1967, 280). Within the circle of the Orthodox tradition, eggs are consumed in the cemetery at the graves of ancestors mainly during spring rites, furthermore they were placed in a coffin or in the hands of the deceased in Polish and Russian Folklore (Niewiadomski 1989, 66; Miannecki 2010, 177).

In contrast, in the burials within territories of the settlements of the North-western Slavs, resurrection eggs were most frequently placed close to the feet of the deceased and sometimes near their waist or skull (Kajkowski 2020, 32, table 1). In the cemetery of Isaccæa, some other regularity of their depositing is observed, namely placing them by the left thigh. In the light of recent interpretations, the arrangement of grave good assembly must have had a great significance. A part of such principles was associated with usage practices *i.e.*, with the possibilities of using the items after death, whilst other items were placed there with non-pragmatic purposes (Kościelecki 2000, 74). Therefore, the arrangement of grave goods is a "reflection of the eschatological imaginarium" (Kajkowski 2020, 32). Per-

haps placing resurrection eggs by the thighs of the deceased was associated with the place of their body where grave goods were given to equip them for their journey to the otherworld, as it may be the case with the grave goods placed at their feet (Kajkowski 2020, 35, fig. 1). Evoking more examples of using eggs within the eschatological perspective in Slavic folklore would exceed the frames of this work, especially in the view of a rather small number of funerary finds of eggs and their imitations.

Considering the conditions and contexts in which such artefacts are found, *i.e.*, in close proximity to a craftsmen's centre in Kruszwica in Poland, J. Kaczmarek associated the glazed egg-shaped rattles with magical rituals performed by craftsmen as a part of the production cycle (Kaczmarek 1998, 558). The eggs could have been in the possession of a person who was capable of transforming matter by the means of fire, for example, and therefore deeply rooted in the sphere of the sacrum (Kajkowski 2020, 56, with references). Due to the lack of evidence that would confirm any intensive production on the sites where the analyzed artefacts were found, it is difficult to see how the evidence supports such an interpretation.

The final aspect of the discussion on the role played by egg-shaped rattles and their imitations in the settlement and funerary contexts, some recent musicological research on the subject of these rattles must be mentioned. In the light of this research, sounds coming out of them during shaking can be placed on the very threshold level between those audible phenomena and infrasonic ones. Thus, the human perception of the sounds must have been very limited if not rudimentary while "the most clear range of the sound frequencies from such rattle is placed outside of the reach of human hearing range" (Gruszczyńska-Ziółkowska and Tatoń 2021, 126, 127). This research has also shown that the round hole placed at the bottom or base of the egg, having a proper size and joined with the inside, could find its purpose in adjusting narrow frequency bands, which could be visibly observed on spectrometers. These frequency bands were registered on levels of about 1 kHz. The chamber provided with the hole leading inside it through which the air gets in enables achieving a resonance effect, such as in any Helmholtz resonator (Gruszczyńska-Ziółkowska and Tatoń 2021, 117, 118; Tatoń 2021, 84-86). Therefore, the hole at the base of glazed egg-shaped rattles, apart from the inevitable purpose in the production process (the product was bedded with its help during its being formed), served also to strengthen the sound produced by the rattle. It remains an open question though with what purpose the rattle was shaken if its sound was hardly audible for a human ear. Taking into account the complexity of early medieval Slavic peoples' spiritual sphere, it is possible to suggest that apart from warding evil spirits off, such sounds could have aimed at revoking ancestral or other spirits from otherworld to attend the rites, so the sound frequencies that were hardly within the human reach but still certain to be produced could have been believed to be perceived by non-human inhabitants of the otherworld. According to Kajkowski, the audibility of such sound frequencies accessible to animals, especially dogs, could be connected to their role in the Early Medieval Slavic eschatological perspective of the passage to the otherworld

(cf., Kajkowski 2020, 51). One cannot exclude that this type of sounds aimed at calling a guide (a psychopomp), who is to take the soul of the deceased to the underworld after death.

The last context to be mentioned are the chalk eggs discovered in the rock cut monastery complex of Murfatlar-Basarabi. The location of this find and its chronology speaks for regarding it as a quite unique one. They should be seen as the earliest known egg imitations, and what makes the find even more significant, they were discovered in a Christian context. It is worth mentioning that egg imitations made of limestone have been discovered on several sites in Poland, among others in strongholds: Czeremo (Florkiewicz 2016, no. 276, fig. 22: 3), Sąsiadka-Suciejsk (Chudzik 2013, 124), Opole and Wrocław (Pankiewicz and Siemianowska 2020, 65, fig. 9: g-j) and made of clay in Kyiv, Ukraine (Sushko 2020, 107, ryc. 2; 16-19). On the surfaces of some of them, there are notches and hollows interpreted by some researchers as ornamental patterns. The rest of them, *e.g.*, those from Opole and Wrocław, are considered to be limestone models made of local stone from Opole deposits (Pankiewicz and Siemianowska 2020, 65 with references).

Returning to the subject of the Murfatlar-Basarabi finds, as mentioned above, they are the earliest egg imitations in the area in question, especially when taking into consideration the accuracy of dating of the complex which, by the way, is doubted by some, "but all scholars agree in dating its existence to the 900s (Curta 1999, 136). How, therefore, could their occurrence within the cave monasticism context be explained? Undoubtedly, they were used in rites since besides the chalk eggs, a cross was also found there, made of the same material and decorated with notches arranged into triangles and a rhombus, as well as fragments of liturgical (eucharistic) chalices (Damian 2015, pl. 28: 4). Therefore, we might focus on the resurrectional symbolic of an egg, since an egg is, according to the words of Andrzej Wierciński, "relatively homogenous inside, transforming into the most complicated living organism" (Wierciński 1997, 59). An apparently dead chalk egg could include (and be regarded as) a symbol of life, which certainly can be referred to the resurrection of Christ.

4. IMPORT OR LOCAL PRODUCT?

As proven as it is in the case of chalk eggs or those made of a recycled brick (observed only in Dobruđa) to be local products, this is not so certain in the case of glazed examples. It is widely assumed that the glazed egg-shaped rattles, and especially those with bodies made of white kaolin types of clay, as well as those of clay of various red hues, were products of workshops in Rus', particularly localized in southern Rus' in and around Kyiv which is indicated by the density of finds in this territory (Fig. 8: 1-5; Hilczerówna 1950, 13, 15; see also Makarova 1967, 37). Another concentration of such sites can be observed far away from the borders of Kyivan Rus', namely in Silesia, in Greater Poland and in Kuyavia (Fig. 2; Ślusarski 2004, 80-83; Siemianowska 2008, 71, 72). In the case of Kyivan workshops,

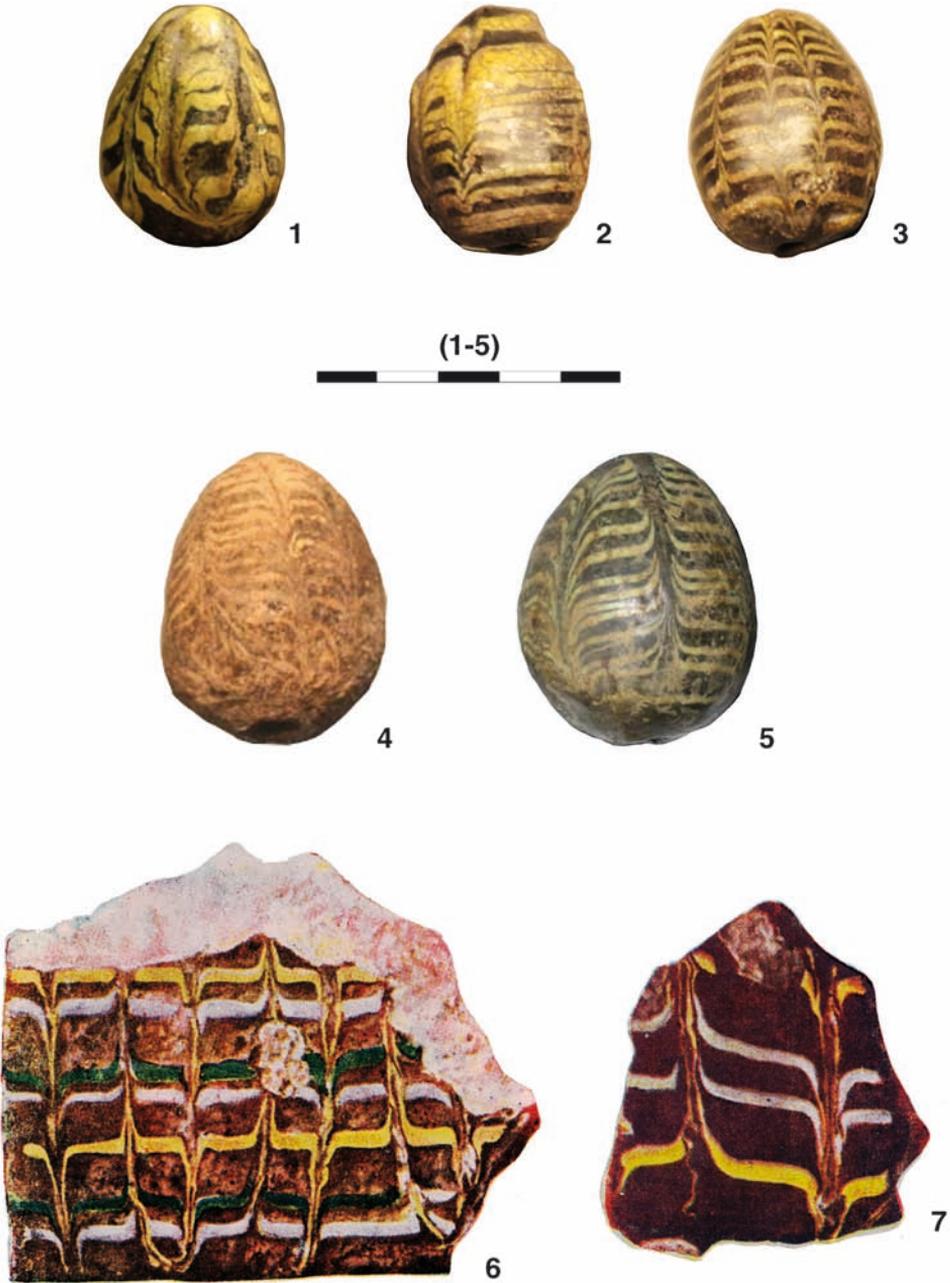


Fig. 8. 1-5 – some examples of the Early Medieval glazed egg-shaped rattles from Kyiv, and 6, 7 – 12th Century glazed ceramic tiles from Belgorod Kyivsky (Ukraine) (1-5 Authors' photo, 6-7 after Rybakov 1948, without scale)

their production must have constituted a collateral branch of production of glazed tiles (Fig. 8: 6-7; Rybakov 1948, 439). On the other hand, over the finds from Polish lands there is a heated discussion as to their origins. A great majority of researchers tends to the option of regarding them as products of local glassmaking or pottery workshops modelled after products from Kyivan Rus' (Ślusarski 2004, 80-83; Siemianowska 2008, 71, 72; Gruszczyńska-Ziółkowska and Tatoń 2021, 106; Pankiewicz and Siemianowska 2020, 65). It is therefore not suitable to regard a part of those products as imports from the East, but it should be seen more widely, as connected with much more comprehensive influx of thoughts, ideas, technologies conveyed by a travelling specialized craftsman (Siemianowska *et al.* in print).

4.1. Eggs of chalk and re-used Roman bricks

In the case of imitations from Murfatlar-Basarabi and also from Dinogeta-Gărvan and Brăila, as it was mentioned earlier, they should be regarded as local products which is indicated by their material: chalk and Roman bricks. However, our attention should be drawn by the finds from the sacral complex which is a place of particular interest. Firstly, its location near the Stone Dike in Dobrudja, the largest work of fortification in tenth-century Bulgaria (Curta 2019, 229), which was completed by a system of reinforcements consisting of 26 forts located in the distance from about 3 to 5 km and aiming at protection against raids and incursions of Magyars and Pechenegs (Curta 1999). Secondly, the character and diversity of the engravings left on their walls, of the multilingual inscriptions in different alphabets, ranging from Turkic runes, Cyrillic and glagolitic characters, to Old Church Slavonic Greek and possibly Bulgar languages, or the rich scope of depictions such as: crosses, ships, trees, ladders, dragons, plows (Curta 2019, 235). Both the inscriptions and depictions are the endless topic of discussions over their interpretations (Popkonstantinov 1987; Georgiev 2004). Not going into their details which would exceed the frames of this work, we want to focus our attention on the fact that a part of the symbols, such as a dragon or a ship, is interpreted through the prism of Christian symbolism (Curta 2019, 233, 234), or as the evidence for the presence of Varangians in Dobrudja, who „may have been in the service of Kyivan prince Sviatoslav, during his ambition campaign that started in 968” (Spinei 2009, 54). The very complex, according to F. Curta, was well organized and modelled after lavra, namely consisting of cells of hermits separated by a church or a chapel (Curta 2019, 235). The fact of the presence of the engraved images such as boots, though, it is true, less numerous than in the monastery in Ravna (Bulgaria), indicate that the complex of Murfatlar-Basarabi could well be linked to pilgrimage. Who those pilgrims were though, it is hard to define, most probably they were of different ethnic origin, as it is suggested by the multilingual inscriptions (*cf.*, Atanasov 1996). They could have been travelling monks, or laymen too (Kostova 1994-1995, 165).

Thus, the question remains open when we should search for the beginnings of the tradition of making egg imitations out of chalk in this part of Southeast Europe. The custom

of giving eggs as grave goods was well known in Dobrudja and in the neighboring territories, also on the northern side of the Danube where 3 cremation burials and 55 inhumation burials were documented as including eggs as grave goods in the bi-ritual cemeteries dated in the end of 7th century (Komatarova-Balinova 2012, tabl. 3 and 5). What is interesting, a concentration of burials with grave good assemblies including eggs could be noted north of Danube in southern Muntenia, in the cemeteries of Sultana and Izvorul located in a close distance from each other (Fiedler 1992, Abb. 111). In the case of the territories lying in the basin of the middle Danube, the custom of giving eggs to graves is known in Avar cemeteries where it „can be observed throughout the Avar Age and it is not limited geographically to certain region, however (Tugya 2016, 2017, 217, fig. 5.1). In a later period, the territorial extent of the occurrence of graves containing eggs increased and included cemeteries localized in territories populated by Slavs and Magyars, especially starting in the end of 10th century (Dragotă 2014; Smetánka 2014).

Concluding this discussion on the subject of the origins of chalk imitations of eggs in Murfatlar-Basarabi, we have to consider them as possibly made by a local monk, by a pagan, or by a pilgrim, similarly as in the case of the engravings and inscriptions. Regarding the locations of their discoveries, as well as the same material used to produce egg imitations and other cult objects (cross, fragments of liturgical (eucharistic) chalices), it seems most appropriate to associate them with the resurrectional symbolic.

4.2. Glazed egg-shaped rattles

On the other hand, in the case of glazed egg-shaped rattles, they are most probably imports; however, one cannot exclude the possibility of their being local products. Yet, due to the lack of any documented remnants of specialized pottery workshops or glassmaking workshops in Dobrudja from the Middle Byzantine Period, it is rather unlikely. It is true, however, that several kilns were discovered in Nufăru as well as in Păcuiul lui Soare, both dated in 11th c., but only local pottery was burnt in them whilst glazed products were imported from Constantinople (Curta 2006, 295 with references).

4.3. Probable centres of production and distribution

The most probable direction to search for places of their production seem to be workshops in town centres in Rus', especially Kyivan Rus'. If their production in the workshops across today's Poland is confirmed (as the work of travelling craftsmen), the direction of their trade leading from the latter workshops to such a distant destination as Dobrudja seems highly unlikely as there were no intensive trade bonds nor cultural contacts between Polish territories and Dobrudja, but there certainly were such between Dobrudja and Kyivan Rus'. The whole picture of contacts and relations of Dobrudja with the areas around the middle course of the Dnipro are completed by such finds as of those of the spindle

whorls made of shale from Ovruch (now Ukraine) or miniature axes (Yotov 2005, 144, 145, 147, 148, fig. 1-38; 2018, 468-470, fig. 4, 5, 6:1) along with belt strap ends, swords, sword pommels, sword scabbard chapes and axes discovered in the territories of Dobrudja and north-eastern Bulgaria; they are associated with the presence of Vikings, Ruthenians, Varangians and even with “the Pechenegs, who had direct commercial and military contacts with the Kyivan state in the tenth and early 11th centuries, and since the 1050s they stayed south of the Danube” (Yotov 2003; 2007, 326). However, in the case of the last group of products, it is hardly possible to consider them as “ethnically distinguishing” for Scandinavians (*cf.*, Hillerdal 2006, 101; Mägi 2008, 26). The issue of contacts between Scandinavia and Rus’ during the Viking age as well as their role in building of statehood in Rus’ are the subject of endless debate among archaeologists as well as historians. As is indicated by written sources and archaeological evidence, these contacts were intensive but limited to the time between the middle of the 8th and the 11th centuries (Hillerdal 2006, 94). The far-reaching contacts mentioned above between Scandinavian centres and Kyivan Rus’ with the territories we focus on here, and located on the middle course of the Danube is generally associated with “the Route from the Varangians to the Greeks” described in the Kyivan Chronicles dated to the beginning of the twelfth century, and with the significant role of Varangians as mercenaries in the armies under the command of the Great Princes of the Rus’ (Androshchuk 2013, 117-125; Spinei 2009, 98, 99). Not going into a detailed chronology of these contacts which would exceed the frames of this work (*cf.*, Spinei 2009, 89, 98, 99), it should be stressed however that these territories were of special interest for Rus’ princes, especially in the times of Sviatoslav’s reign (945-972) after his “landing south of the Danube, in the summer of 968” (Spinei 2009, 98). The far-reaching plans relating to the lower course of the Danube were expressed by the Great Prince of the Rus’ in the presence of his mother Princess Olga and boyars, in words diligently noted in the Kyivan Chronicles: “I do not care to remain in Kyiv, but should prefer to live in Pereyaslavets on the Danube, since that is the centre of my realm, where all riches are concentrated; gold, silks, wine, and various fruits from Greece, silver and horses from Hungary and Bohemia, and from Rus’ furs, wax, honey, and slaves” (Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 86). These plans were confounded by the Prince’s policies against Byzantium which resulted in his defeat ending his struggle against the Byzantine army of the emperor John I Tzimiskes, who, as the result of a brilliantly organized campaign, finally caused Sviatoslav to surrender and to return the lands on the right bank of the Danube. During the next year, the Kyivan prince died from the hands of Pechenegs on the Dnipro Rapids 972 (Spinei 2009, 99). Considering Sviatoslav’s plans to transfer his capital to the bank on the lower Danube and his activity in this territory, we can easily assume that along with the Great Prince and his military retinue, some other people must have accompanied them coming from the north, from townships in Rus’ and especially from Kyiv. Presumably, a part of them remained there after the Prince’s defeat and his withdrawal across the Danube; most probably there were merchants among them as well as mercenaries or craftsmen. Possible re-

mains of their presence can be traced in the remains of wooden (oak) constructions of buildings, of enclosures like wattle fences, the wooden mortar or some small items for daily use and cult objects found in the Byzantine fortress in Nufăru, (Damian and Vasile 2011; Madgearu 2013, 93). Those who have discovered the constructions associate them with the presence of Varangians or Vikings on the site (Damian and Vasile 2011, 277) quoting examples of Scandinavian wooden constructions to compare them with, which has resulted in terming these structures in literature as “a varangian street” (Yotov 2007, 323, fig. 2). Considering this complexity of the issue, the so called “Varangian problem”, such an interpretation does not really seem to be very convincing, when we remember that analogical remnants of wooden constructions as well as wooden objects were found on many sites discovered in the territories populated by Slavs, where, like as at Nufăru (however outside the walls of the Byzantine fortress) also glazed egg-shaped rattles were found, for example in Kyiv, Ukraine (Tolochko 1981, 63-94; Sahaydak 1991, 31-51, fig. 11-17, 21-23) or in Opole, Poland (Gediga 2002, 161-172, Barnycz Gupieniec 2000). It is worth noting here that the manner of constructing wooden buildings from the Viking period and Early Middle Ages in Denmark differs from the one evident in the remains of constructions discovered in Nufăru (*cf.*, Barnycz-Gupieniec 1987).

It is difficult to agree with the attempts to associate the toponym Pereslavitza mentioned in the Kyivan Chronicles with the fortress in Nufăru containing the remains of wooden constructions (Yotov 2007, 323, fig. 2; 2018, 468, fig. 1: 1-2) since the archaeological data indicate the foundation of the fortress being shortly after the year 971. Therefore, during this time, Sviatosław must have resided in Dorostolon (modern Silistra) which then fell into John I Tzimiskes’ hands (Madgearu 2013, 102-103, fig. 5) The “large number of amber artefacts” referred to in the literature but not yet published, and “particularly imports and luxury goods indicate a flourishing life in this fortified settlement during the 11th century” (Damian and Vasile 2011, ft. 14; Madgearu 2013, 102-104, fig. 5) which suggests the commercial character of the fortress, apart from the military one, especially when considering its perfect (from the strategic point of view) location on the Saint George branch of the Danube. It must be mentioned in this context that amber products were also found in graves in the Isaccea cemetery where glazed egg-shaped rattles, mentioned earlier, were discovered (Truică *et al.* 2012, table 1, fig. 2: G). We should rather prefer P. Diaconu’s suggestion that Sviatoslav’s residence, the one to which he planned to transfer his capital, must be searched in Preslav – the Bulgarian Capital (now in north-eastern Bulgaria), and the second segment in the compound „on the Danube” refers to a broader geographic concept rather than it refers to a certain place located on the very bank of the river (Diaconu 1965, 37-43; 1987, 284-286; Madgearu 2013, 92). The finds of glazed egg-shaped rattles in the layers of some Byzantine fortresses such as Dinogetia, Noviodunum, Carsium could be associated with the presence of Rus’ inhabitants and Varangians in the ranks of the Byzantine army; the artefacts were kept there because of their apotropaic qualities described earlier. The presence of mercenaries coming from the North was nothing strange

due to the extensive demand for fresh forces, especially for Ruthenians and Varangians during the “period of the “Reconquest” (956-1025), a time when the Empire was in desperate need of large quantities of able-bodied and experienced soldiers to conduct its wars in the East and the Balkans” (Theotokis 2014, 125). Such a permission for their presence was presumably expressed by one of the entries in the Rus’-Byzantine treaty from the year 944 handed down to us in the Kyivan Chronicles, and by which an obligation was put on Great Prince Igor to the following: “If our government shall desire of you military assistance for use against our adversaries, they shall communicate with your Great Prince, and he shall send us as many soldiers as we require (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953, 76; Theotokis 2014, 130). It cannot be excluded that along with mercenaries and merchants, also their families arrived on the banks of the lower Danube. It remains an open question whether or not a part of them, or their descendants, were buried in the mounds of Isaccea, near the fortress of Noviodunum. In one of these mounds from the 2nd century (Tumulus IB) with a diameter of about 37 m located in the eastern part of its embankment, 63 inhumation graves were excavated after it had been primarily used. The graves were oriented on the W-E axis, with the head of the deceased directed west; of those graves, four contained egg-shaped rattles. Several graves were dug in a similar mound (Tumulus IA) oriented perpendicularly to the first one, but unfortunately not yet fully explored. It should be mentioned here that the two mounds were located at a distance of about 300 meters from a flat inhumation cemetery, as it is suggested by a contemporary inventory. The graves dug into the side of Tumulus IB, apart from three instances of child graves, in all other cases in which they could be examined and identified, were all burials of adults. The majority (38) of the graves are without any grave good assemblages but those provided with accompanying objects (25) seem to be related to female burials (unfortunately, we have no detailed anthropological analysis with gender distinctions of the deceased) such as glass products (bracelets, beads, rings, silverware as rings or products of bronze such as rings or belt buckles). In the group of burials with grave goods, the above-mentioned four graves are included in which as many as five egg-shaped ceramic rattles were found (Fig. 9). There is some regularity to be observed in placing them by the left thigh. In one case, (Grave 111) there were two eggs included, in another two graves, apart from egg-shaped rattles, rings were deposited (Graves 129 and 135). Only in one instance, in Grave 148, there was a single egg-shaped rattle. Considering the grave good assemblies from the rest of the burials in this mound, it has to be stated that those described above are rather exceptional. It fits in some regularity observed in graves including egg-shaped rattles and found in early medieval cemeteries from the territories settled by Slavs, this regularity being their rare occurrence inside burials. It may be the confirmation of the thesis about an exceptional character of such items which means that not everyone could afford such a grave good and moreover, the very gesture of depositing an egg-shaped rattle into a grave could have been, in some cases, an indicator of a “special” social rank of the deceased in the local social structure (*cf.*, Kajkowski 2020, 44). Yet another view on the burials with glazed egg-shaped rattles is

Tumulus IB

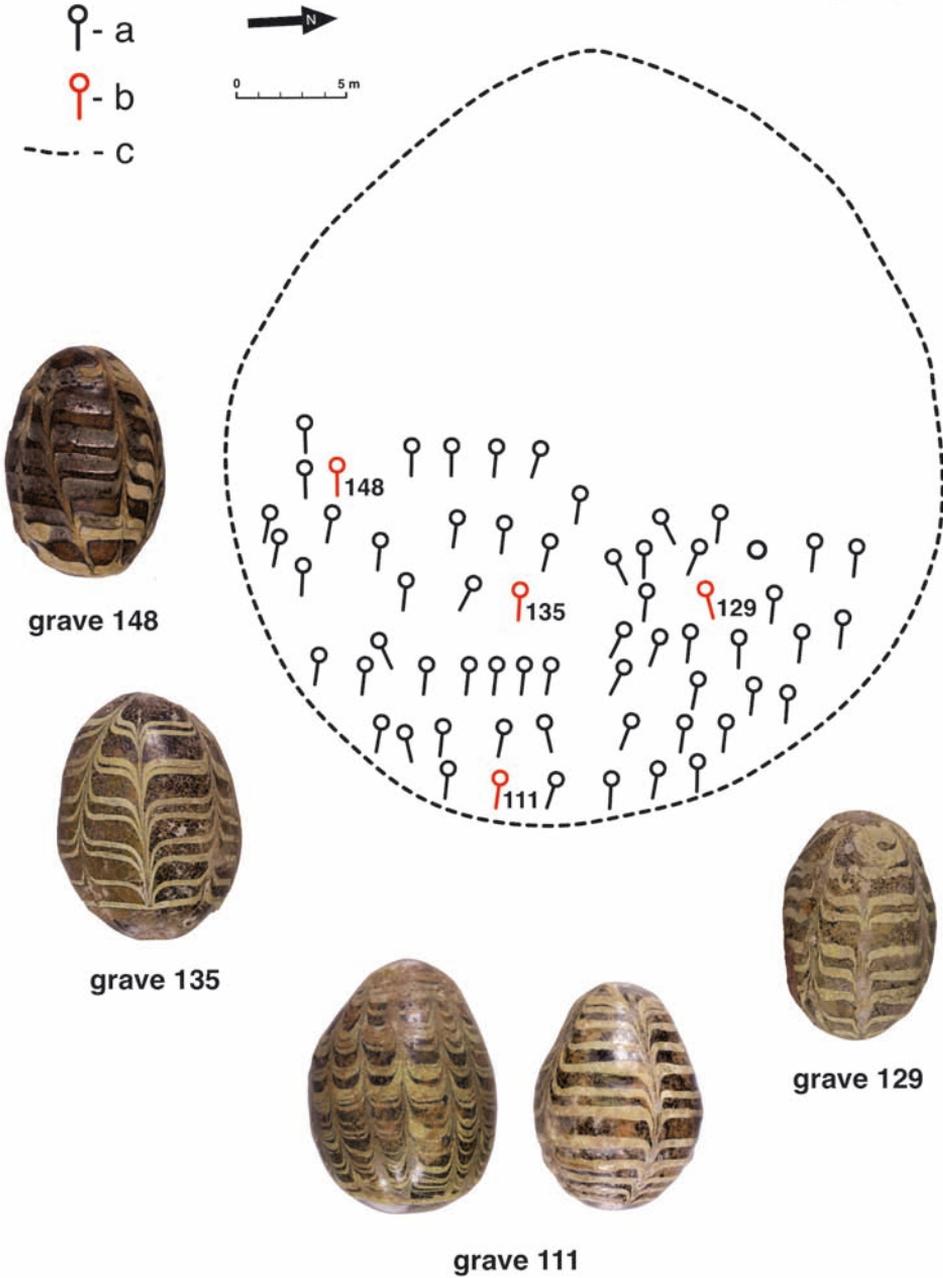


Fig. 9. Isaccea – layout of the tumulus IB: a – grave; b – grave with glazed egg rattles, c – border of the Tumulus (drawing B. S. Szmoniewski, after Vasiliu 1984)

possible in the context of manifesting cultural differences, when we apply Ch. Hillerdale's definition of ethnicity which is intriguing by its simplicity and defining ethnicity to be a consciousness of being different from others and of belonging together (Hillerdall 2006, 88). Perceiving the graves and the mound from this perspective, we can notice their very clear distinction differing them also from the nearby flat graves cemetery from the same period. Apart from the presence of egg-shaped rattles which do not occur outside graves of the Slavic settlement territories, it is a quite striking fact that it was a mound of Roman Period that was used as a location for the burials. It should be mentioned here that the phenomenon is not exceptional in Dobruđa, yet it is typical mainly for nomadic populations (Szmoniewski 2013). Because of this, the secondary use of the mound as a burying ground may indicate, apart from the continuity of burial location, also a common funeral tradition which was represented by the burial mound, a tradition adapted to local circumstances and finally, it probably indicates kinship of the buried people.

Therefore, a part of the graves, and especially those including egg-shaped rattles, may serve as an example of a syncretism of two traditions: the older i.e. the pagan one and the younger, Christian one. In the first instance, the presence of grave good inventory including especially egg imitations in the form of egg-shaped rattles which evoked rather idolatric associations and integrating graves into the previously existing mound may present an evidence of a pagan mentality. On the other hand, the Christian custom is indirectly shown by placing the deceased heads oriented toward the west, whereby it should be observed that such orientation in burials in territories settled by East Slavs can be found also in non-Christian burials (Liwoch 2018, 96, ft. 70). It should be underlined that in the nearby flat grave cemetery in which Christian cult objects like crosses were discovered, the bodies were oriented also with their heads toward the west. Returning to the subject of the pagan tradition of raising mounds by East Slavs, it was so strong that, opposite to the Roman Church, the Orthodox Church, as it was brilliantly observed by Radosław Liwoch, "accepted its existence for at least two centuries after the official baptism of Rus'..." (Liwoch 2018, 96, ft. 70).

Finally, the fact should be invoked that apart from the water way "from the Varangians to the Greeks", there was also a land route leading to Byzantium. The evidence of such a journey to Constantinople by a land route (which is not surprising since in the light of the analysis of a Scandinavian runic inscription, Greece/Byzantium was the most preferred destination, Källström 2016) is provided by an 11th century runestone from Sjonhem on the isle of Gotland on the Baltic Sea. This runestone erected by Rodvisl and Rodavl, the parents, in memory of their dead son, Rodfos the merchant, who, probably during his commercial trip, was robbed of his possessions and killed in the land of the Vlachs (Blakumen), which is localized north of the lower Danube (Pintescu 2001, 4-5; Curta 2006, 303-304; Spinei 2009, 54). It should be mentioned here that glazed egg-shaped rattles have been found on the isle of Gotland and in Southern Sweden (Arbman 1946, 436, fig. 1; Gabriel 2000, abb. 47).

Considering all the facts mentioned above, the lower course of the Danube in the times between 10th and 11th centuries seems to have been a very busy and thriving region where, according to the reported words of Sviatoslav I, all trade was concentrated with each and every valuable kind of goods flowing in from each side of the world; one type of those goods were glazed egg-shaped rattles (*cf.*, Konovalova and Perkhavko 2000).

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the territories analysed in this work, four egg imitations of chalk and two imitations of Roman brick, 14 fully preserved ones and seven fragments of glazed egg-shaped rattles have been found so far. Considering the localization of the finds, one should associate their function, similarly as it has been done for some other territories where such items are discovered (*cf.*, Kajkowski 2020) with magical and religious rituals connected with fertility cults, with apotropaic and healing practices. Three chalk imitations found in Murfatlar-Basarabi complex should most probably be associated with the symbolism of resurrection while the example made of chalk and covered with engravings found in a pit in Nufăru, along with some imitations made a recycled Roman brick should be regarded as local products. Glazed egg-shaped rattles discovered in the settlement, inside the fortress and in the cemetery, are most probably all imports from Kyivan Rus' workshops. Their rare occurrence inside burials, in only one cemetery in Isaccea, indicates the special position of this accompanied individual within their social group, but on the other hand, it could be a benchmark of their foreign ethnic background. The identical placement of the eggs in all of the graves seems to be pointing to a common funeral tradition, however, due to the lack of DNA examinations, it cannot be proven whether these deceased persons were related to each other. Integrating the graves in a large mound of the Roman Period could also be perceived as a sign of common tradition and continuity of their burying ground. Obviously, the finds of egg-shaped rattles could be associated with some presence of people engaged in military operations undertaken by the Grand Princes of Kyiv, mercenaries, or, more probably, merchants travelling along widely understood waterways and being of different ethnicities, from Varangians to Greeks. This episode limited to the time frames from the middle of the 10th to the middle of the 11th centuries correlates with the dating (mainly in the 11th century) of graves and layers in which glazed egg-shaped rattles were unearthed. On the other hand, chalk egg imitations dated earlier, namely to the 10th century seem to be related to some local tradition.

In the light of the remarks presented above, it should be stated that any further egg imitations of chalk and recycled bricks as well as glazed egg-shaped rattles from the analyzed territories will constitute an interesting contribution to any further studies into intercultural contacts in and around Dobrudja during the Early Medieval Period.

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