
ROMAN FIBULAE IN THE COLLECTION OF THE LOWER DANUBE MUSEUM CĂLĂRAȘI

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Abstract: *In the collection of the Museum of Lower Danube Călărași is housed a large number of fibulae discovered, in particular, on the iconic sites of Ostrov-Ferma 4 and Izvoarele (former Pîrjoaia, settlement associated with Sucidava of Moesia). These were discovered during the archaeological investigations and field surveys carried out at Ostrov-Ferma 4 or exclusively during field surveys in the case of the settlement/settlements from Izvoarele/Sucidava. In addition to the fibulae discovered in these sites, several other examples were donated to the Museum or left in custody, following confiscations at the Bulgarian-Romanian border, by the Romanian Border Police. The authors present this small assemblage discovered, according to the available information, on the territory of Bulgaria, in the Silistra area (Durostorum), respectively in an unknown place in Greece. We consider that their publication is necessary as some of the finds have unique traits and have few analogies in the corpus of brooches from the Lower Moesia.*

Moreover, because these finds were discovered outside a clear archaeological context, the question arises as to their authenticity. While some of the finds (Figs. 1-2, 8) they have not been cleaned and have all the characteristics of the antique (bronze) alloy, other finds (Figs. 3-7) – probably purchased in Greece – were somehow cleaned and kept for a long time. For this reason, the material (a bronze alloy) has become whitish. Even if we have close parallels to them, we maintain some suspicion about their authenticity.

Rezumat: *În colecția Muzeului Dunării de Jos din Călărași se află un număr mare de fibule descoperite, în particular, pe importantele situri arheologice de la Ostrov-Ferma 4 și Izvoarele (fostă Pîrjoaia, așezare asociată cu Sucidava din Moesia). Acestea au fost descoperite pe parcursul cercetărilor arheologice și a cercetărilor de teren desfășurate la Ostrov-Ferma 4 sau exclusiv în timpul perieghzelor în cazul așezării/așezărilor de la Izvoarele/Sucidava. Alături de fibulele descoperite în aceste puncte, alte câteva exemplare au fost donate Muzeului sau lăsate în custodie, în urma unor confiscări la granița bulgaro-română, de către Poliția de Frontieră din România. Autorii prezintă acest lot redus descoperit, conform informațiilor de care dispunem, pe teritoriul Bulgariei, în zona Silistra (Durostorum), respectiv într-un loc necunoscut din Grecia. Considerăm că publicarea acestora este necesară întrucât unele exemplare prezintă caracteristici unice și își găsesc puține analogii în cadrul descoperirilor din Moesia Inferior.*

Mai mult, deoarece aceste piese au fost descoperite în afara unui context arheologic clar apare problema referitoare la autenticitatea lor. Dacă în cazul unor piese (Fig. 1-2, 8) acestea nu au fost curățate și prezintă toate caracteristicile aliajului antic (bronz), altele (Fig. 3-7) – achiziționate, probabil, în Grecia – au fost cumva curățate și păstrate o perioadă îndelungată. Din acest motiv, materialul (un aliaj de bronz) a devenit albicios. Chiar dacă avem paralele apropiate pentru acestea, ne menținem o oarecare suspiciune privind autenticitatea lor.

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Keywords: Roman period; Early Byzantine period; Greece; Bulgaria; Durostorum; fibulae; stray finds.

Cuvinte cheie: perioada romană; perioada bizantină timpurie; Grecia; Bulgaria; Durostorum; fibulae; descoperiri întâmplătoare.

INTRODUCTION

The collection of fibulae housed in the Lower Danube Museum from Călărași relies mainly on the two iconic sites of Ostrov–*Ferma 4* and Izvoarele (former Pîrjoaia, associated with the ancient Sucidava of Moesia). Both sites delivered a large number of fibulae discovered during field surveys and in few numbers during the archaeological campaign in the early Roman rural settlement from Ostrov–*Ferma 4*. In contrast, the site from Izvoarele has never been excavated¹. One of the earliest mentions on brooches found in the area of Ostrov–*Ferma 4* dates back in the 1980s when V. Culică published a dump pit found on the clay promontory of the Danube. Among a very rich collection of pottery consisting mainly of coarse ware and lamps, one fibula of Avcissa type was reported² that had been found in a context dated back to the first half of the 1st century AD³. As for the ancient Sucidava, the rich assemblage of fibulae gathered from the Danube beach during several decades by the late V. Culică and other curators from the Museum of Călărași stands out because of their abundant number and outstanding variety⁴.

A few other unpublished fibulae were donated by some people or were lent to the Lower Danube Museum from Călărași by the Romanian Border Police, which confiscated them at the border between Bulgaria and Romania. Of these, several examples (Figs. 3-7) are said to have been bought from Greece, while the rest of the fibulae have their find spot in the area of Silistra, the ancient Durostorum – the of Legio XI Claudia headquarter. Of this legionary headquarter we have some published brooches discovered during intensive utilitarian works in present-day Silistra, during field surveys, but also donated or confiscated over the years.⁵ However, some of the brooches discussed in the following lines have unique traits and a very few analogies in the fibulae' spectrum from Moesia Inferior. Thus, we believe it will be an excellent opportunity to present them to the scientific milieu.

Moreover, because these finds were discovered outside a clear archaeological context, the question arises as to their authenticity. If in the case of several finds (Figs.

¹ On the latest overview on Sucidava–Izvoarele see Elefterescu 2017, 99-100, footnotes nos. 2-3.

² Culică 1980, 326, no. 54, fig. 4/8. On the fibulae from *Durostorum*–Ostrov–*Ferma 4* see Nuțu, Elefterescu 2018.

³ Among the finds there was discovered a sesterce issued by Trajan, see Culică 1980, 326.

⁴ Curta 1992, 37-97.

⁵ As for example Хараламбиева 1998-1999 (2003), 136-140.

1-2, 8) they have not been cleaned and have all the characteristics of the antique (bronze) alloy, other pieces (Figs. 3-7) were somehow cleaned and kept for a long time. For this reason, the material (a bronze alloy) has become whitish. Even if we have close parallels to them, we maintain some suspicions about their authenticity.

EYE-FIBULA – ALMGREN III/53

The first fibula of this small assemblage belongs to the so-called 'eye-decorated' group. This name reflects the main decorative motif consisting of concentric circles (or circle and dot) incised on the foot and bow (Fig. 1). The origin of the 'Augenfibeln' is generally considered Germania Libera, from where they will be gradually dispersed in the Roman provinces along the Rhine River. This diffusion slowly decreases from the origin area, and this type is infrequent at the middle and lower Danube, but also occurs in remote provinces, as Britannia⁶. A general chronology suggests a life period from the Augustan until the early Flavian age. For the Almgren II I/53 variety, Kunow showed that appeared already in the Tiberian period, but their number is small and the presence is sporadical. Later, in the Claudian and the Neronian periods, this variety will replace the earlier Almgren 45-50 varieties, and to some extent, they are specific for the Claudian period.⁷

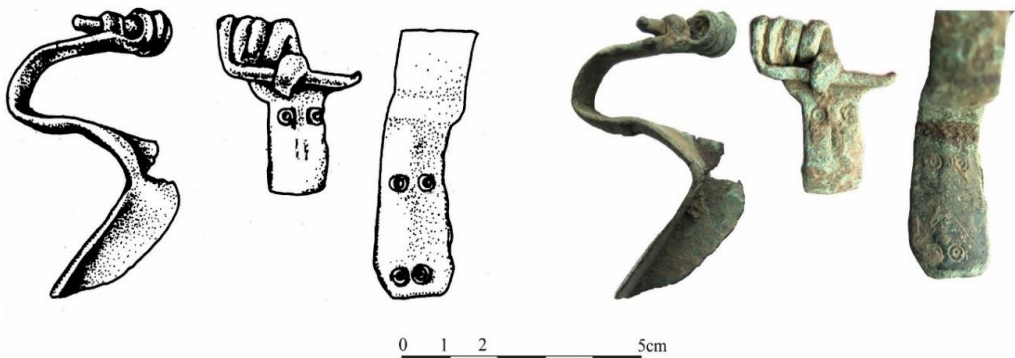


Fig. 1. The eye-fibula Almgren III/53 – drawing and photo with details.

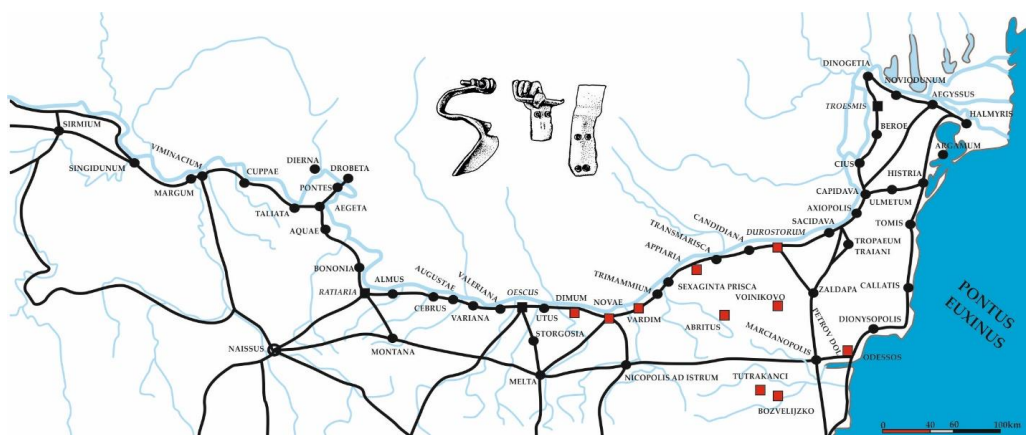
Sixteen finds⁸ were discovered south of the Danube, on the territory of Moesia Inferior, mostly in the Roman settlements located along the riverbank (Map 1). The most numerous eye fibulae were discovered at Appiaria/Rjahovo, near Ruse, where

⁶ Bayley, Butcher 2004, 148.

⁷ Kunow 1998, 105-106.

⁸ This number is relative, as we rely on information from Хараламбиева 1996-1997 (2002) with data collected mainly from North-East Bulgaria and since their number probably increased. However, in Dobroudja we have no information regarding other finds of this type.

four examples are noticed. Two varieties have been set, the variety with an eye on the foot, and a second variety with the bow and foot of equal length and undecorated. A. Haralambieva noticed that the first variety of 'classical' eye-decorated foot is of a local origin because the motifs consisting in ring-and-dot were incised in a particular manner.⁹ E. Genčeva presented a single find from Novae/Svištov and introduced it among the late variety of Augenfibeln – type 39b¹⁰. The rest of south Moesian finds includes fibulae from the fortified settlements as Dimum/Belene, Novae/Svištov, a Roman villa at Vardim, and other settlements from north-eastern Bulgaria, in Dobrich and Varna districts.¹¹



Map 1. The distribution of Almgren III/44-64 in Moesia Inferior.

KNEE BROOCH WITH HINGE BOJOVIĆ TYPE 22.8

The hinged fibula from the Lower Danube Museum Călărași is fragmentary. Thus, we have no possibility to reconstruct its lower part, especially the shape of the catch plate (Fig. 2). Based on parallels, we may consider that the catch plate was perpendicular and hook-shaped.¹² In terms of shape, it is close to Cociș type 19a8 also hinged, having a curved bow and sometimes a small protection head-plate rectangular-shaped.¹³ A fibula from Gornea, in southern Dacia, is analogous to the one discussed here and

⁹ Хараламбиева 1996-1997 (2002), 34, nos. 3-4, pl. 1/3-4.

¹⁰ Генчева 2004, 124, pl. 29/5.

¹¹ Хараламбиева 1996-1997 (2002), 31-42, fig. 1, pls. 1-3.

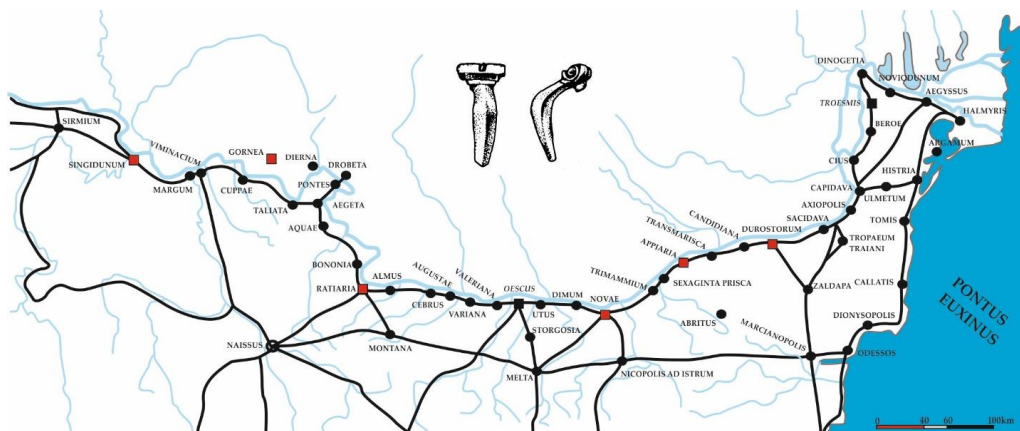
¹² Bojović 1983, 60, pl. 25-26/243-247; Генчева 2004, 109, pl. 15/6-9.

¹³ Cociș 2004, 96-97.

shares the same fastening system as well as a similar rectangular-shaped protective head-plate, although not stepped¹⁴.



Fig. 2. The knee brooch with hinge Bojović type 22.8 – drawing and photo.



Map 2. The distribution of the brooches Bojović type 22.8 along with the Danube *limes*.

The hinged knee brooches are well-known in neighbouring provinces, particularly in Moesia Superior, at Singidunum/Belgrade and its territory (Map 2). From the varieties set by D. Bojović, his variety 22.8 shares common features¹⁵. From the province, we know a series of analogous finds dispersed mainly on the Danubian *limes* (Novae/Svishtov, Appiaria/Rjahovo and Ratiaria/Archar, the latter in Moesia Superior) but they occur in small number.¹⁶ From the rural settlement at Durostorum-

¹⁴ Cociș 2004, 197, no. 1138, pl. 73. A close parallel comes from Varvaria/Bribir, in Liburnia – see Šeparović, Uroda 2009, 60, no. 121.

¹⁵ Bojović 1983, 60, pl. 25-26/243-247.

¹⁶ Хараламбиева, Андреева 1994-1995, 13, nos. 15, 17, 22, pl. 2; Генчева 2004, 109, pl. 15/6-9.

Ostrov Ferma 4, two finds were published¹⁷ while another one is a stray find from Dobroudja dated back by S. Cociș between AD 170 and AD 220¹⁸.

DOUBLE PELTA FLAT BROOCH

Among the brooches presented in this paper, one of the most impressive examples is a double peltate brooch (H – 2.5 cm; L – 3.6 cm) or, judging by the shape, two axes-shaped motifs (Fig. 3). Excellent conservation status; made of a whitish alloy without porosity, well-polished. The centre of the fibula it has a slightly rhomboid-shaped centre with two side arms each ended with a pelta or an axe. The decoration consists of notches on sides and three circles-and-dot motifs. The motif of the affronted double axes is not uncommon. For one such find but having a long tail and two edges one can look at an example found at Dura Europos, but the poor photograph provided by N. Toll does not allow identifying the decorative pattern¹⁹.



Fig. 3. Double pelta/axes flat brooch – drawing and photo.

¹⁷ Nuțu, Elefterescu 2018, 58, pl. 9/67-68, fig. 9/67-68.

¹⁸ Cociș 2011, 255, pl. 2/13.

¹⁹ Toll 1949, 68, pl. 17/159.

Nevertheless, the parallels for this find are scarce as the closest finds come from Moesia Inferior (from an unknown find spot in Dobroudja²⁰), Dacia and another was traced on an auction on the internet²¹. In Dacia, only one example is to be found, in the *balneum* from Cioroiul Nou where a *vexillatio* of the Legio VII Claudia stationed during the 2nd century AD. The context is unclear, as it was discovered in the *caldarium*²². This parallel is more elaborate having a raised centre decorated with criss-cross incisions, but the construction system is also with a hinge. Based on the context from Cioroiul Nou we can suggest a military connection for this type.

HORSE-SHAPED BROOCHES

The horse-shaped fibula (Fig. 4) has a weight of 2.3 cm height and the length of the base of 2.9 cm; its total length is 3.5 cm. It is very well preserved; made of a yellow alloy without porosity and shine. The general appearance can be traced in all the provinces from the Middle and the Lower Danube. Particular is the head of the horse that reminds the horse's head from swastika fibulae with horse-head terminations.

The next horse-shaped fibula (Fig. 5) is of 2.9 cm in height and 2.3 cm in length. It is also very well preserved; made of a yellowish metal, no porosities, very well polished. Alveolar back; both the pin and the catch-plate are broken. Based on the alveolar back the fibula was cast using the lost wax process.

The horse-shaped brooches occur on vast areas clustering in the Roman provinces from the Middle Danube with some peripheral finds in the Oriental and North-African regions²³. One such example was discovered at Dura Europos on the Euphrates in a context from the first half of the 2nd century AD²⁴. More fibulae depicting horses are recorded in Dacia at Buciumi²⁵, Moesia Superior²⁶, Carnuntum/Bruck an der Leitha²⁷ in Pannonia where these „Tierfibeln“ were reported since Erszebet Patek monograph²⁸, Lauriacum/Enns²⁹, Flavia Solva/Wagna near

²⁰ Cociș 2011, 255, pl. 2/18.

²¹ This fibula has spring and an almost triangular-shaped centre, see <https://www.antiquesnavigator.com/d-2506310/roman-bronze-double-pelta-brooch--fibula.html> accessed at 11.03.2020.

²² Bondoc 2015, 52, fig. 31.1, pl. 67/514.

²³ In the latter one such brooch was discovered at Thamusida/Sidi Ali ben Ahmed in Mauretania Tingitana, see Gerharz 1987, 96, no. 96, fig. 14.

²⁴ Toll 1949, 66, no. 166, pl. 17.

²⁵ Cociș 2004, 115, pl. 100/1398.

²⁶ Petković 2010, 197-201, pl. 36/1-8.

²⁷ Matouscheck, Nowak 1985-1986, 188-189, 220, fig. 13-14.

²⁸ Patek 1942, 125, pl. 19.

²⁹ Jobst 1975, 114-115, 207-208, pl. 46/320-323.

Leibnitz³⁰ in Noricum and south of the Lower Danube at Opaka³¹ in Tărgovishte region, Stan and Mirovtsi in Novo Pazar region³², in Moesia Inferior (Map 3).



Fig. 4. Horse-shaped brooch – drawing and photo.

At Durostorum – Ostrov we have one of the few examples of the local production of horse-shaped brooches. This find is a waster made in a bivalve mould with faults, casting seams not removed and unfinished fastening system on the back of the piece³³. Together with other fragmentary moulds and remains of crucibles, it represents a proof of the production of fibulae in the local workshops during the 2nd century AD³⁴.

The fibula no. 4 is rather common from the point of view of the details. One can notice a close parallel from Ribić, in Bosnia and Herzegovina³⁵. The fibula no. 5 depicting a horse with naturalistic details has very few analogies (Fig. 5). Most of the horse-shaped brooches are rather schematized with very few details and are flat. In this case, the backside of the brooch is concave, and some details (the mane, the bridle,

³⁰ Kropf, Nowak 1998/1999, 159-160, pl. 70/408-410, 71/411-413.

³¹ Rusev 2012, 338, pl. 6/2.

³² Хараламбиева, Атанасов 1992а, 60, pl. 2/4-5.

³³ Elefterescu 2011, 96-97, no. 8, pl. 3; Elefterescu 2013, 200, no. 79, pl. 12/3; Cociș 2019, 49, pl. 117/8.

³⁴ Nuțu, Elefterescu 2018, 124, fig. 17-19.

³⁵ Busuladžić 2010, 80-81, 185, no. 239.

and the horsetail) are carefully rendered. One brooch having detailed features was discovered at Nicopolis ad Istrum/Nikjup and dated back to the 3rd-4th centuries AD³⁶. A second very close parallel was discovered at Brigetio/Szöny³⁷ and in our opinion is the result of the same workshop as the fibula from the Lower Danube Museum of Călărași. Both fibulae from the collection of the Lower Danube Museum Călărași date back to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. However, this way of representation will appear over centuries in the Merovingian period where such horse-shaped brooches appear, some made of silver and gold plated with semi-precious inlaid stones³⁸.

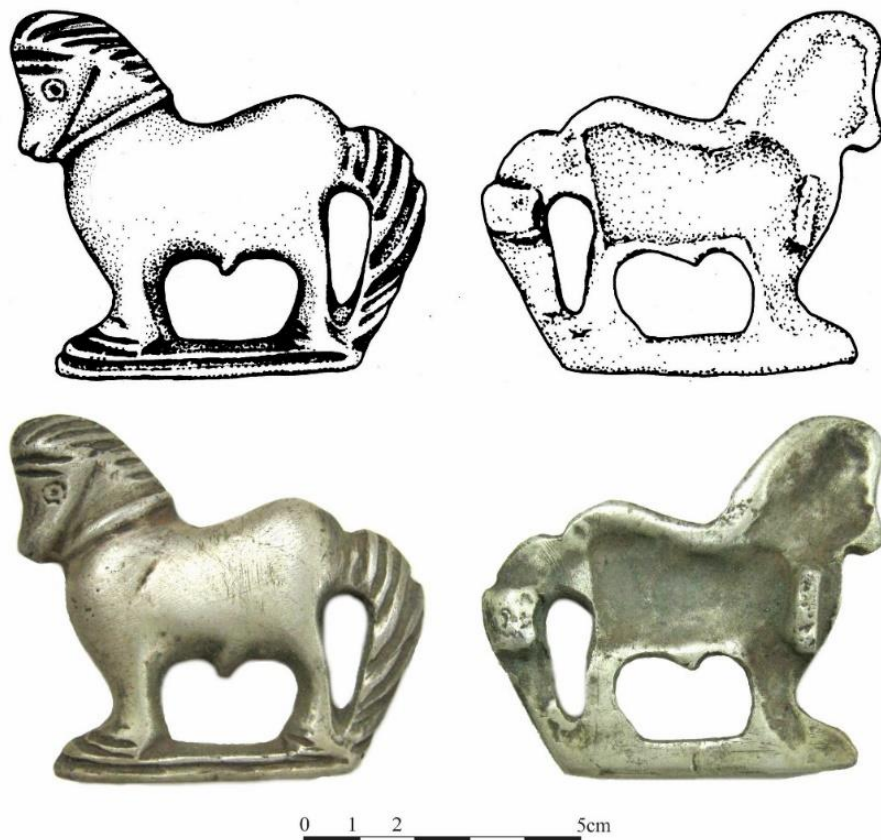
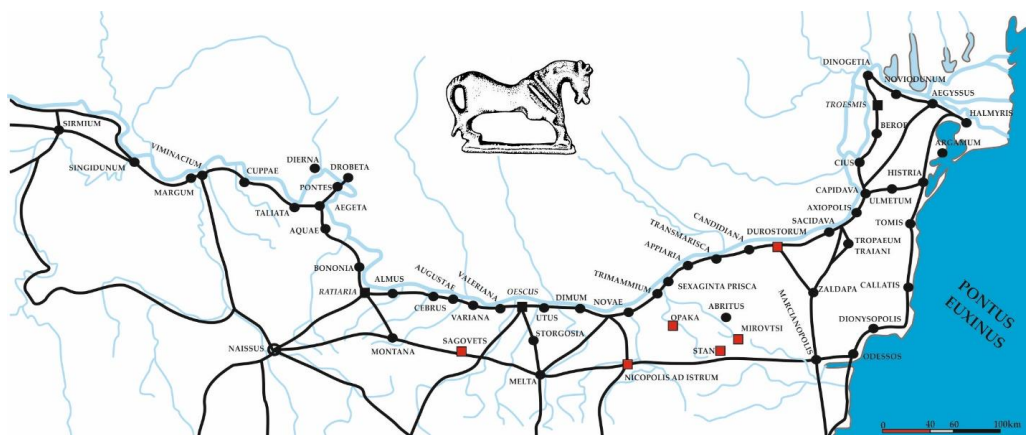


Fig. 5. Horse-shaped brooch – drawing and photo.

³⁶ Бръчкова 1963, 72-73, no. 3, fig. 1/3.

³⁷ Patek 1942, 125, pl. 19/10.

³⁸ Pion 2012, 169-170, fig. 9 – a pair of horse-shaped brooches found inside tomb no. 88 (second half of the 6th century AD) from Bossut-Gottechain, commune Grez-Doiceau, Brabant, Belgium.



Map 3. The distribution of the horse-shaped brooches in Moesia Inferior.

EAGLE-SHAPED BROOCHES – MATOUSCHEK-NOWAK TYPE 3a-4a³⁹

The two eagle-shaped fibulae (Figs. 6-7) are of outstanding quality. Both fibulae depict an eagle or other bird of prey with open wings; the beak touches the right wing, and the tail is flared. This type of fibula comprises examples with a hinge or with spring.

The fibula no. 6 (Fig. 6) has a weight of 2.9-3 cm and a width of 3.7 cm and is very well preserved; no cleaning process is visible. It was made of a reddish alloy without porosity and well-polished. It is a spring fibula. We note the fact that the catch plate was not soldered but cast together with the brooch and bent later when it slightly cracked (eventually it could be interpreted as a scrap).

The fibula no. 7 (Fig. 7) has a weight of 2.9 cm and a width of 3.6-3.7 cm and is very well preserved. This find has a hinge. Both the catch plate and the area that secures the hinge are broken. It is made of the same yellow alloy without porosity, well-polished, with decoration made by cuts after casting and the eye made of a dot.

The Romanian Guard Coast confiscated them together with the two horse-shaped fibulae. Judging by the similar features, at least in the case of the bird-shaped fibulae, we may believe that they come from the same context, whether a workshop or a grave; if the last case could be proved, they were worn in pairs. As regarding the bird, one can notice that it resembles an eagle, a symbol of strength and fastness associated in some cases with the military milieu. Not coincidentally bird-shaped fibulae and in particular eagle-shaped ones do appear in fortresses or highly militarized provinces from the Middle and Lower Danube.

³⁹ Matouscheck, Nowak 1985/1986, 132-133, nos. 4-6, pl. 14.

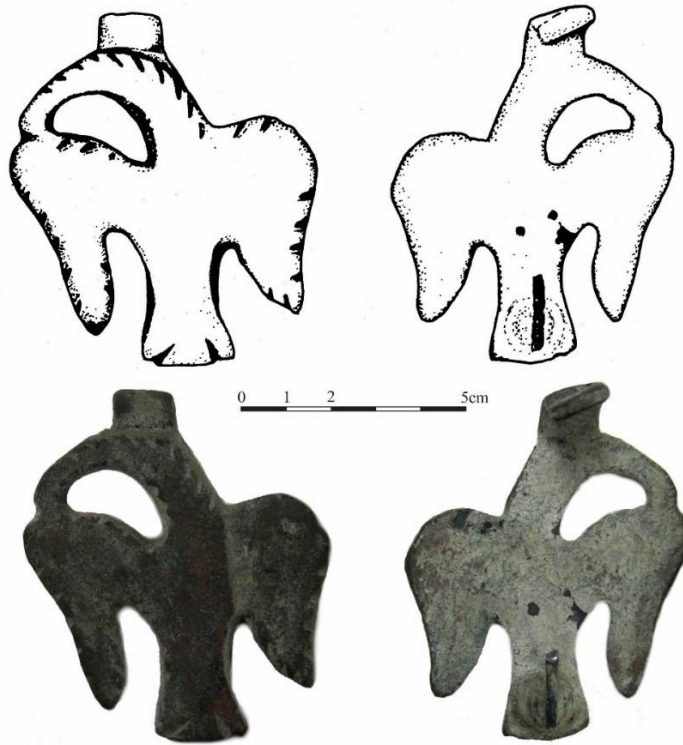


Fig. 6. Eagle-shaped brooch – drawing and photo.

In Dobroudja, a very close parallel for the two fibulae is a stray find from Dunăreni, the fortress on the Danube riverbank associated with Sacidava⁴⁰. A second fibula, also a stray find from Valul lui Traian (Constanța County) is different due to its decoration consisting of circle-and-dot motifs⁴¹. South of the Danube, a brooch of this type is housed in the Regional Historical Museum from Shumen and is dated to the 5th-6th century AD⁴², but their distribution is wide as two 'Eagle fibulae' were found at Dura Europos on the Euphrates proves⁴³. Their context suggests a military milieu, including 'soldiers' dependants' as James pointed out⁴⁴ and the relation between soldiers from the Dura garrison and the brooches from the Middle and Lower Danube are obvious⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ Paraschiv-Talmațchi 2009, 323-324, no. 1, pl. 2/1a-b.

⁴¹ Paraschiv-Talmațchi 2009, 324, no. 2, pl. 2/2a-b.

⁴² Хараламбиева, Атанасов 1992b, 96, pl. 13/6.

⁴³ Toll 1949, 68, nos. 160-165, pl. 17.

⁴⁴ James 2004, 56.

⁴⁵ Toll 1949, 68.

Based on the features, we may wave the fibulae to the middle of the 3rd century AD. However, the early Byzantine series of eagle-shaped (or 'Raubvogel') brooches decorated with circle-and-dot motifs is securely dated to the 6th century AD⁴⁶.

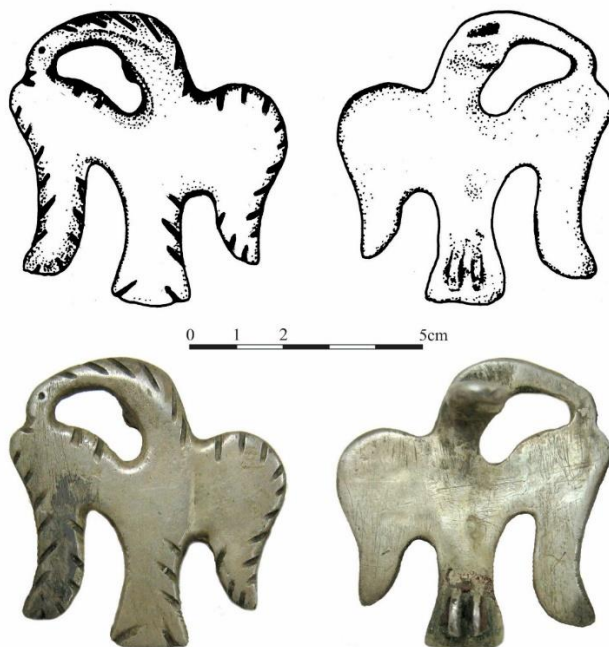


Fig. 7. Eagle-shaped brooch – drawing and photo.

CAST FIBULA WITH A BENT STEM

Only a small fragment from a foot with the catch-plate and a segment of the bow was preserved out of the fibula no. 8 (Fig. 8) having 3.8 cm in length (inv. 59455). The fragmentary bow is decorated with horizontal mouldings. The shape is typical to the so-called 'cast fibulae with bent stem'⁴⁷ dated to the second half of the 6th century AD⁴⁸ clustering at the south of the Lower Danube.

⁴⁶ Simoni 1989, 114, nos. 33-34, pl. 4/5-6.

⁴⁷ Măgureanu 2008, 99-155; Curta, Gândilă 2011, 51-81.

⁴⁸ Măgureanu 2008, 112; Curta, Gândilă 2011, 54, 66-71.

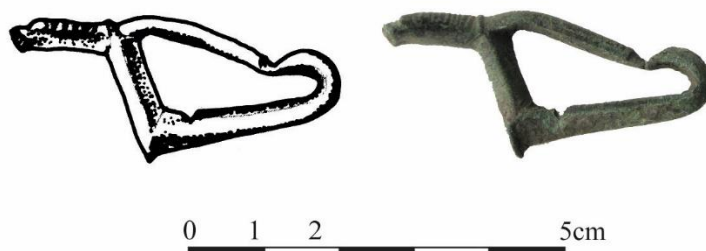


Fig. 8. Cast fibula with a bent stem – drawing and photo.

A FEW REMARKS

The eye-fibula (Fig. 1) is a typical discovery of the settlements on the Danube *limes* in the 1st century AD. Their diffusion in the military milieus indicates a typical artefact of the army, but at the same time, we notice a series of discoveries in the rural settlements. It is also noted the absence of this type in the North of Dobruja. The hinged fibula Bojović type 22.8 (Fig. 2) is also attested on the Danube *limes* and seems to be a type specific to the province of Moesia Superior from which it spread to the surrounding areas in the period following the Costoboci attacks. The double pelta (or double axes) fibula (Fig. 3) is a rarer type, with few parallels known to date. Its attestation at Cioroiul Nou, in Dacia, in the military milieu, may suggest an artefact typical of the army. This is also indicated by the presence of a relatively similar specimen at Dura Europos⁴⁹. Horse-shape fibulae (Figs. 4-5) are specific to the Roman provinces of the Middle and Lower Danube, but the two specimens published in this paper stand out by treating the body differently with naturalistic details. While most brooches of this type are schematic, including the unfinished specimen discovered at *Durostorum*–Ostrov-Ferma 4⁵⁰, the two finds discussed here have a rounded body (almost in bas-relief) and finely rendered details. The same characteristics are representative for eagle-shaped brooches (Figs. 6-7) clustering particularly in the militarized areas of the Danubian provinces. The last specimen in this assemblage is the cast fibula with a bent stem (Fig. 8) dated to the second half of the 6th century AD.

As we have seen in the previous lines, this small group of fibulae consists of heterogeneous specimens, typical of fortuitously discovered archaeological materials and private collections. By all appearances, this small assemblage is a group of finds from various collections, discovered in different areas and introduced into the flow of illicit trade in antiques. For this reason, their publication is all the more important, especially since their scientific value cannot be ignored.

⁴⁹ See footnote 21.

⁵⁰ See footnote 35.

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