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XXX

Arheologie

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The fibula from Suseni (Photo: B. Rezi)

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The brick kiln from Cristești, Mureș County (Photo: C. D. Crișan & D. Cioată)

Correspondence:

Muzeul Județean Mureș
CP 85
str. Mărăști nr. 8A, 540328
Târgu Mureș, România



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TWO LA TÈNE BRONZE DISCS FROM TÂRGU MUREȘ, TRANSYLVANIA

SÁNDOR BERECKI

Mureș County Museum, Târgu Mureș

Keywords: Celts, disc, triskele, helmets, harness-mounts, scabbards

In the yard of the Elementary School nr. 2 from Târgu Mureș, in a drainage trench, two discs were incidentally discovered. The exact date and circumstances of the discovery are not known, the pieces were inventoried in the 21st of January 1981 in the collection of the Mureș County Museum, and they were published for the first time in 1994.¹ Regarding their functionality, the discs were interpreted as clothing appliqués or harness ornaments. Later, in the archaeological repertory of the Mureș County,² the village Micești³ is mentioned as their place of discovery, a village that was merged with Târgu Mureș in 1564 (!). The author refers to the paper of V. Zirra from 1971, where neither the piece nor the information can be found. Therefore, these dates of the repertory can be considered erroneous by any means. The pieces went through conservation-restoration processes in the ninth decade of the last century, when they acquired a blackish colour. Besides the qualitative and aesthetic upgrading, the recent reconditioning of the artefacts brought to light some possible aspects relevant for their functionality (Fig. 1).

Description of the discs

1. Domed, hemispherical disc, made by lost-wax casting – ‘à cire perdue’ – method, of bronze, decorated with continuous whirling or *triskele* in relief, with a globular knob at each of the three terminations of the spirals, creating a tricorne⁴ in the middle of the plate. This main ornament was completed at its extremities by other three, smaller globular knobs; each of them was placed at the end of a semi-spiral, composing the so called comma-leaves or stud-throws,⁵ in relief. The whole margin of the ornament was bordered by a curved line in relief. Six cavities of the knobs can be observed on the inside. The attaching of the piece could be determined

¹ Petică 1994, 34, pl. 3/7, 8.

² Lazăr 1995, 256, LXXXVI.1.A.r.

³ Hungarian: Kiszfalud.

⁴ Jope 2000, 384.

⁵ Jope 2000, 380, 384.



Fig. 1. The bronze discs from Târgu Mureș.

before the recent conservation, after the restoration of the artefacts: it was realised with a pin and a perforated rivet on the centre of the inner side of the piece, broken in antiquity. On this rivet a rusted, poorly preserved iron plate could be observed. The iron core could be detected in the engraving of the bronze rivet, too. Diameter: 43.88 mm, thickness: 1.83 mm, weight: 30 gr.

2. Domed, hemispherical disc, smaller than the previous one, cast of bronze using the same lost-wax method, with slightly different ornament: whirling or *triskele* formed by three meanders in relief, one of their end with globular, 'impressed' cordon and the other with three other, smaller knobs in relief, as well. The attaching of the piece was realized with a rivet placed on the inside of the disc, chipped in antiquity. The piece had smoothed surface on the inside. Diameter: 26.82 mm, thickness: 2.00 mm, weight: 13 gr.

Both artefacts are in the collection of the Mureș County Museum, inventory nr. 7008 and 7009.

Functionality

In many cases such artefacts were catalogued as phalera or appliqués, clothing or harness ornaments, while their exact role could not be determined. However, their form and fastening system indicate some possibilities. Hereinafter we will enumerate some interpretations of the domed, hemispherical discs which present technical and attaching similarity with the artefacts from Târgu Mureș.

The artefacts considered clothing ornaments usually have a mobile pin, like the piece from Krakow, Poland.⁶ Three such bronze pieces were discovered at Curtuiuşeni.⁷ Similar, but

⁶ Poleska 2006, fig. 21/23.

⁷ Nánási 1973, 34, 36, VII/3–5.

flat buttons were considered shoes accessories.⁸ In the grave from Cristuru Secuiesc an analogously shaped and stylistically similar button is mentioned, interpreted as a decorative linchpin from a wagon,⁹ or more probably harness-mount (Fig. 2). However, its dimension is different, since the head of the pin is smaller. At the beginning, the pieces from Târgu Mureş were interpreted as harness-mounts, too. The fastening of these discs is multiple; some of these ornaments were attached with rivets,¹⁰ like in the case of the pieces from Târgu Mureş. Usually these artefacts are larger, such as the one from Hořovičky, Bohemia¹¹ of 12 cm in diameter. In some cases the determination of their functionality was possible due to the special conditions of discovery, like in the case of the harness-mounts from Wintrich, Kr. Bernkastel-Wittlich, Germany.¹²

In the warrior grave from Ciumeşti two similarly bronze casting appliqués were found (diameter 57 mm),¹³ attached to the horizontal, closing iron plate of the chain mail with a central rivet (Fig. 3).¹⁴ Considering its dimensions as well as the technique, it is a proper analogy for the larger disc from Târgu Mureş. Another such chain mail decorated with hemispherical buttons is known from Matochnika (Bulgaria).¹⁵

Along with the engraved ornaments, on the Celtic scabbards, decorative hemispherical metal plates can be observed. These embellishing elements appear usually in pairs, on the upper frontal reinforce below the mouth, as well as on the inset discs of the chape-end. These are of different dimensions; some have less than 10 mm in diameter while others are larger. The pieces from Târgu Mureş probably were not inset discs of the chape-end, because usually these are smaller. The width of the mouths of the scabbards generally measure 45–55 mm, and the ornament from the reinforcement has similar dimensions to the smaller discs from Târgu Mureş. Analogies for buttons on scabbards, decorated in the plastic style can be mentioned from Balassagyarmat or Szob, Hungary.¹⁶ These ornamental elements were frequently attached with rivets, reason why they easily detached, like in the case of the scabbard from

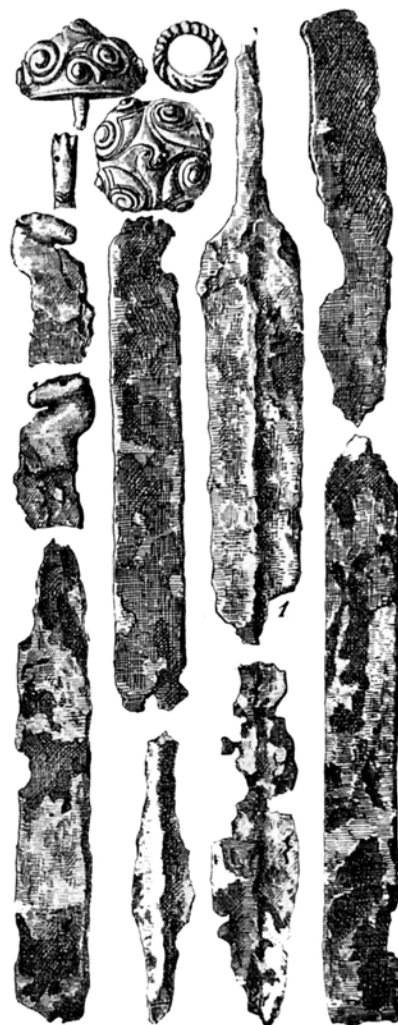


Fig. 2. The grave inventory from Cristuru Secuiesc, Romania (after Roska 1929).

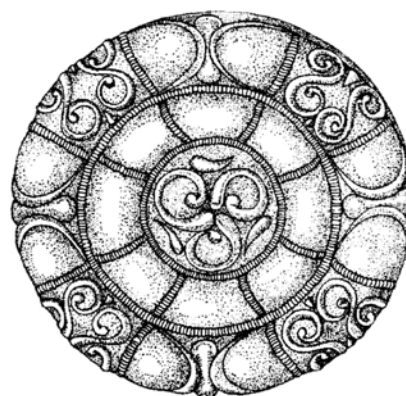


Fig. 3. Bronze disc from Ciumeşti, Romania (after Rusu 1969).

⁸ Megaw 2003, 231.

⁹ Roska 1929, 315, fig. 83; Ferencz 1997, 6, pl. I/10.

¹⁰ Schönfelder 2002, 258, Abb. 161.

¹¹ Filip 1976, VIII/3.

¹² Schönfelder 2002.

¹³ Rusu 1969, 276, Abb. 5; Rusu-Bandula 1970, 7–8, pl. VIII; XIV.

¹⁴ Rustoiu 2006, 51.

¹⁵ Lazarov 2006, 171, 178, fig. 11.

¹⁶ Szabó-Petres 1992, 58, 85, 121, pl. 3, 71; Szabó 2005, 142.

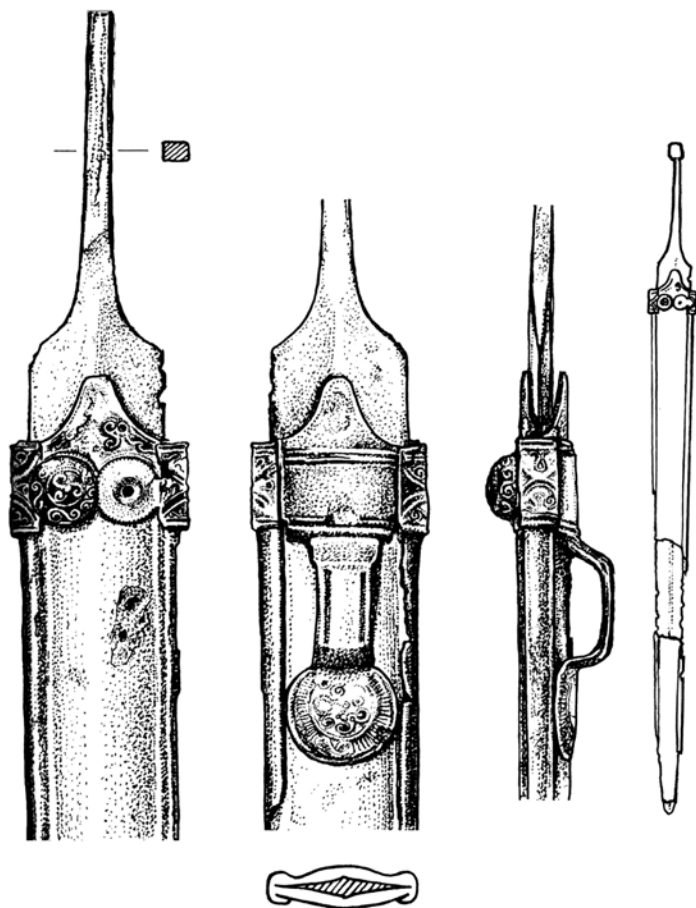


Fig. 4. The scabbard from Gáva, Hungary (after Szabó–Petres 1992). on the helmet from Apahida (Fig. 5/2) appears,²² but the attaching method cannot be reproduced.²³ Presumably the button had the same functions as the discs on the helmet from Ciumești.

The helmet from Silivaș (Fig. 5/6) also has two domed hemispherical buttons: a flatter one on the lower part of the bowl, probably with the functional role of attaching the cheek-guard, too, and another on the top of the helmet. Both are abundantly ornamented with Waldalgesheim style motifs.²⁴ From the widely known helmet from Amfreville, France, the upper ornamental button detached itself (Fig. 5/5), but the binding rivet and the pin were preserved.²⁵ Similarly attached ornaments can be observed on the helmet from Monterenzio-Monte Bibele²⁶ and Castelrotto in Italy (Fig. 5/3),²⁷ or Trbinc, Slovenia²⁸ (Fig. 5/4). The artefacts from Sitzerath were also interpreted as helmet attachments, in a first instance and reconsidered later as harness-mounts.²⁹

Aiud,¹⁷ or from Gáva–Katóhalom (Fig. 4) and Szob¹⁸ in Hungary.

Similar artefacts with a functional as well as decorative role appear on the helmets of the period; the separate buttons from the top of the bowl are a specific element of the Celtic helmets, while for example in the case of the Etruscan type these are organic part of the metal plate.¹⁹ On the bowl and cheek-guard of the helmet from Ciumești unornamented knobs fixed with rivets can be observed (Fig. 5/1). Their purpose was to enforce the bowl as well as to fix the leather to which the mobile cheek-guards were attached.²⁰ A disc with a similar role can be observed on the helmet from Lagole di Calalzo, Italy, where for fastening, the plate was entirely perforated with the rivet.²¹ Together with unornamented discs, a lateral button with a *triskele* in relief

¹⁷ Ferencz 2007, pl. XI.

¹⁸ Szabó–Petres 1992, pl. 13, 72, III/1.

¹⁹ Schaaff 1988b, 319, Abb. 1.

²⁰ Rusu 1969, 269, Abb. 2; Rusu–Bandula 1970, 4, pl. IX.

²¹ Gambacurta 2001, 317, fig. 1/1.

²² Rusu 1969, 291–3, fig. 10/1–3; Rusu–Bandula 1970, pl. XVII.

²³ Zirra 1976, 143–4, fig. 11/1, 1a.

²⁴ Rusu 1969, 287, 299, fig. 9 / a–d; Rusu–Bandula 1970, pl. XIX; Crișan 1973, 61, fig. 4/a–b.

²⁵ Duval *et al.* 1986, IV/2.

²⁶ Müller 1989, 50, Abb. 17.

²⁷ Schaaff 1974, 158, Abb. 8–10, T. 48–53.

²⁸ Schaaff 1988a, 296, Abb. 7–8.

²⁹ Megaw 2003, 231.

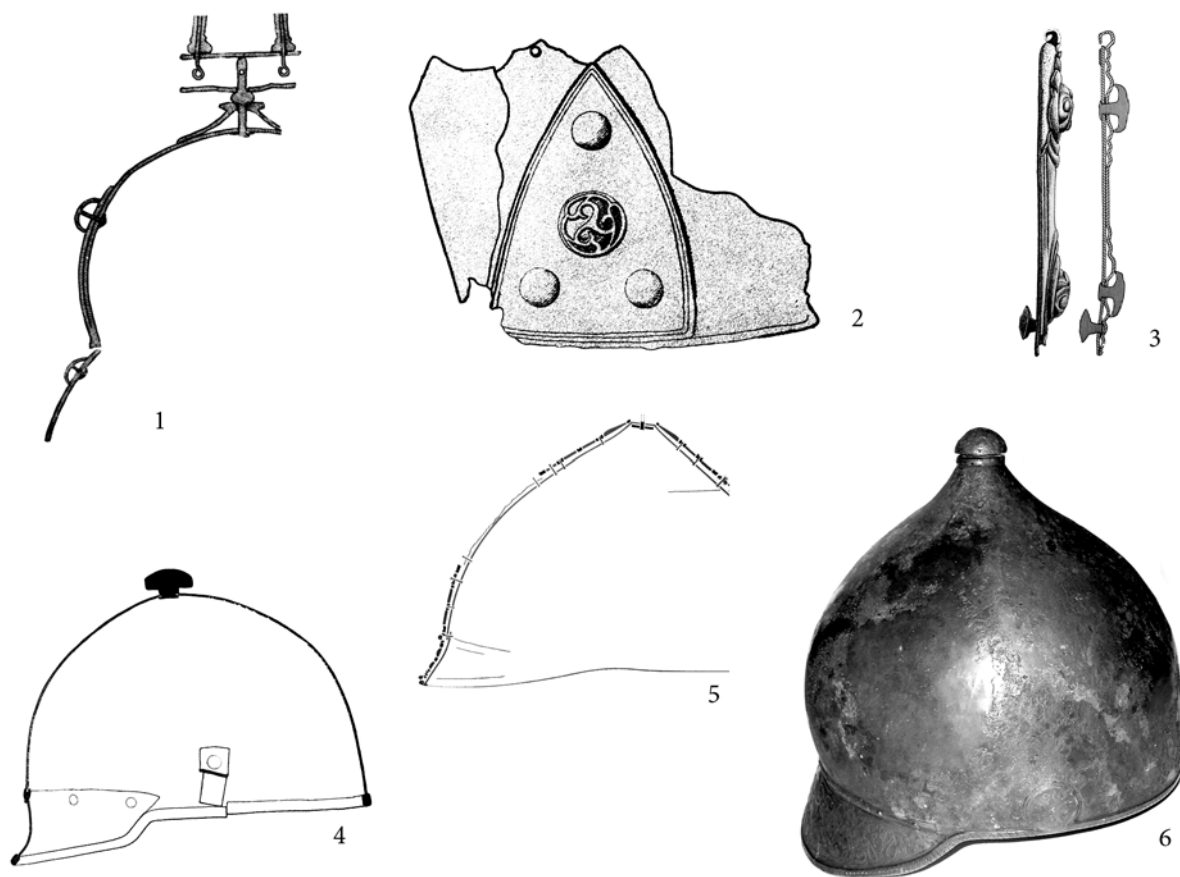


Fig. 5. 1. The section of the helmet from Ciumeşti (after Rusu 1969); 2. The fragments of the helmet from Apahida (after Zirra 1976); 3. The section of the helmet from Castelrotto, Italy (after Schaaff 1974); 4. The section of the helmet from Trbinc, Slovenia (after Schaaff 1988a); 5. The section of the helmet from Amfreville, France (after Duval *et al.* 1986); 6. The helmet from Silivaş (photo provided by A. Rustoiu).

* * *

Due to the differences of the attaching modalities (by rivet with pin in one case and simple rivet in the other), the dimensions and the casting (the inner part of one piece is smooth, the other has cavities – the ‘negatives’ of the ornamental knobs), as well as the different ornament (different ornamental knobs, *triskele* realized by three lines) we consider that the two discs from Târgu Mureş were not part of the same suite. However, the same place of discovery and close technique of casting indicate a common workshop and a single owner.

Most probably the larger artefact was the ornament from the fixing plate of a chain mail. Accordingly, the amorphous rusted iron piece from the inner part of the piece could be from the fixing plate of the chain mail. The interpretation is also plausible because of its size, similar to the analogous piece from Ciumeşti. The combination of iron and bronze elements was a common practice of the La Tène workshops as it is shown by the iron pins with bronze buttons from Courte, Belgium or Paris (?), France.³⁰

Based on its attaching method and size, the smaller piece from Târgu Mureş could be an ornament from the bowl of a helmet, such as the ones from Amfreville or Silivaş, or a fixing element of the leather to which the mobile cheek-guard was attached, like in the case of the helmet from Ciumeşti. It is also probable that this smaller artefact was a decorative element of the enforcement from the mouth of a scabbard or a harness-mount.

³⁰ Megaw 1970, nr. 149, 166.

Regarding the chronology of the discs, one can observe that the artefacts from Târgu Mureş as well as the helmet from Apahida or the chain mail with ornamental discs from the inventory of the grave unearthed at Ciumeşti are the creation of the craftsmen accustomed to the plastic style from the La Tène B period,³¹ (approximately 3rd century BC).³² This artistic style is widely generalized in time and space; therefore, scholars properly considered that such artefacts can only be dated more precisely when they turn up from well defined feature, along with other objects with chronological relevance.³³

The ornamental discs from Târgu Mureş are exceeding aesthetic artefacts of the La Tène artistic creations from the eastern parts of the Carpathian Basin.³⁴ They probably decorated a weapon or armour of a Celtic warrior, probably lost in a presently unsolvable conjuncture.

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³¹ Jacobsthal 1944, 97–105.

³² Berecki 2008, 63.

³³ Szabó 2005, 140.

³⁴ Conservation: Tihamér András, drawing Ana Alfianu, translation supervised by Coralia Crişan.

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