

TWO PREHISTORICAL FIBULAE FROM OLTENIA

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Abstract: In September 2013 the author of these lines had the opportunity to document in Târgu Jiu two special fibulae.¹ One of them dates back to the early Hallstatt, the other to the late La Tène.² Despite being dated almost a millennium apart from one another, it so happens that, due to the history of archeological taxonomy, both items received the same name in the Romanian specialized literature: “fibulae with shield”. The only thing that the two fibulae have in common, besides the modern labelling, is their present home: Oltenia. The immanence of both items in this part of the country is rather unusual – furthermore reason to take notice of them at once.

Rezumat: În septembrie 2013, autorul acestor rânduri a avut prilejul să documenteze la Târgu Jiu două fibule inedite. Una dintre fibule datează din Hallstatt-ul timpuriu, cealaltă din epoca La Tène târzie. Hazardul istoriografic al taxonomiei arheologice face ca piese datate la un interval de aproape un mileniu să fi fost denumite în mod asemănător în literatura de specialitate românească: „fibule cu scut”. Pe lângă etichetarea modernă, cele două fibule mai au în comun doar regiunea în care se află astăzi: Oltenia. Ambele piese sunt prezențe insolite în această parte a țării – un motiv în plus pentru semnalarea lor neîntârziată.

The Fibula from the First Iron Age

Description and technical data. The fibula (Fig. 1) was crafted using a single bronze segment, cast and hammered. The bow is an oval plate placed between two pairs of loops shaped like the number “8”. The lateral spring is made of two coils. The support of the pin is a half coil continued with a cone-shaped volute that rises towards the centre (9.5 coils). The plate is ornamented with straight and curved lines and with engravings that describe the lines of an hourglass with three small knobs in repoussage. Total length: 17.4 cm; diameters of the plates of the spring: 8.5/4.3 cm; maximum thickness of the plate of the needle: 0.13 cm; length of the needle: 14.7 cm; diameter of the volute: 5 cm; height of the volute 2.5 cm; weight of the item: 51.90 g. MJAȘ Târgu Jiu, “Old Fund”, inv. No. 1815.

Archaeological commentary. The origin of the voluted fibula was not mentioned in the register of the Museum from Târgu Jiu. The majority of the bronze items found in the collection of this museum have been discovered in Gorj³ County. Therefore, the area of acquisition of the institution from Târgu Jiu only covers the regions of northern and central Oltenia. From this perspective, it may be assumed that the fibula was discovered in Gorj County. However, the singularity of this item in this part of the country could be an argument in favour of the hypothesis that the fibula was purchased from outside Oltenia. The uncertainties regarding the discovery and recovery of the fibula do not hinder debates on its *archaeological* valence. Given the cultural context of the first Iron Age, is it possible that such a fibula be worn and abandoned in Oltenia?

Strangely, the specialists disregarded this item although it has been in the Museum from Târgu Jiu for almost a century.⁴ The item is not present in Dumitru Berciu’s study about the prehistory of Oltenia, it is missing from Tiberiu Bader’s repertoires as well as from more recent contributions and analysis.⁵ The fact that recent publications disregarded the fibula is not worthy of praise, nor is it surprising. However, Berciu’s silence

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² The author has the written approval of the direction of the Regional Museum (*Muzeul Județean*) “Alexandru Ștefulescu” (MJAȘ) from Târgu Jiu (decision no. 1300/21.10.2013), allowing him to publish this article. The author has the approval of the owner, Sabin Cornoiu, to publish the La Tène fibula.

³ The deposit in Drăguțești (Oancea, Gherghe 1981) and the sword in Grui (Marinoiu, Calotoiu, Bratu 1997) are already known in literature, but the discoveries in Căpreni, Ceplea (Ploșoru), Groșerea (Aninoasa), Peștișani and Valea Mare (Runcu) are still waiting to be published.

⁴ The “Old Fund” („Fondul vechi”) of the Gorj Museum was built between 1894 and 1926 (Mocioi 1978, pp. 5-8).

⁵ Berciu 1939, pp. 169-170; Bader 1970; Bader 1971; Bader 1983, pp. 27-29; Calotoiu 2000a; Calotoiu 2000b; Bratu 2009; Lazăr 2011, pp. 104-106.

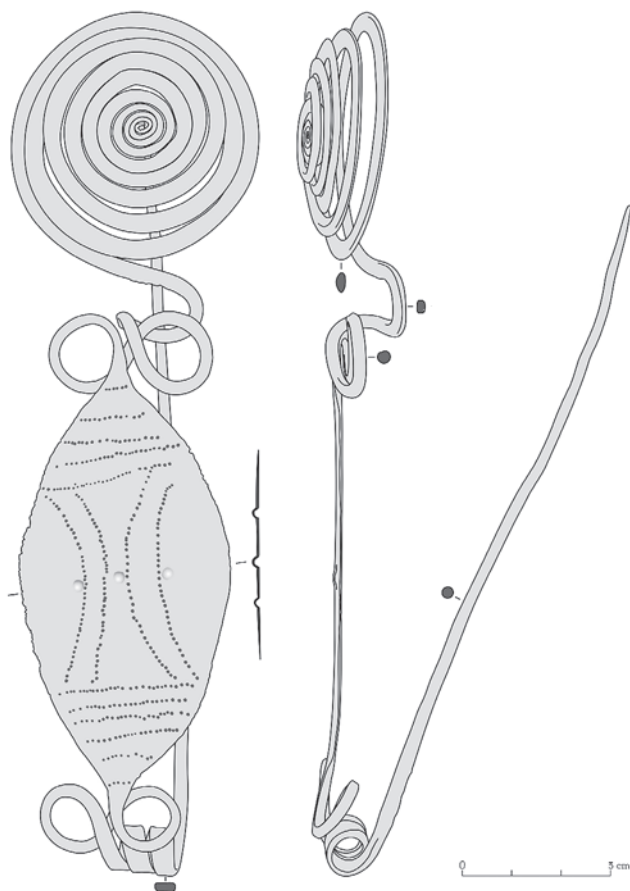


Fig. 1. The Early Iron Age fibula from the Regional Museum Târgu Jiu.

in Dridu¹¹ – a discovery dating from middle Hallstatt (Ha C), judging by the two-spring¹² fibula. However, most of the Röschtz-Sanisläu items may be synchronized with an unprecedented evolution in the bronze metallurgy illustrated by the horizons of the great deposits along Tisa's drainage basin, from the beginning of Hallstatt.

Fibulae of the Röschtz-Sanisläu type are quite frequent inside the Carpathian Arc (Fig. 2)¹³. Since the last publication signed by Tiberiu Bader, the corpus of the discoveries has gained a few new findings¹⁴ that expressively complete the area of distribution of this sort of fibulae. The samples discovered in Pleszów,

on the subject, following his thorough study of the collections from Târgu Jiu, is rather intriguing.

The morphology of the item suggests that it belongs to the fibulae that were initially called, in Romanian specialized literature, *fibulae with shield made of a single wire*.⁶ Throughout time, the specialized literature in Central Europe used different names for these objects, settling for “*einteilige Blattbügelfibeln von Typ Röschtz-Sanisläu*” – *one piece (pin) fibulae with plate spring type Röschtz-Sanisläu*.⁷ Just like other pretentious fibulae dating from the 11th – 8th century B.C., the items labeled as type Röschtz-Sanisläu illustrate an enhancement in the importance of the ornaments in the scheme of the “bow” fibulae (*Violinbogenfibeln*).⁸

The fibulae type Röschtz-Sanisläu are found in funerary contexts dating from the early and the middle period of the Urnfield Culture (*Urnenfelderkultur*, Ha A1-2) and, quite frequently, in deposits belonging to the Kurd-Bodrog, Gyermely and Hajduböszörmény⁹ horizons. Except for the Carpathian Arc, this type is present in later deposits (Ha B1), for example, in Niedzieliska or Valea Lupului,¹⁰ as well as

⁶ Bader 1970, p. 209.

⁷ Bader 1983, pp. 27-31; acc. Müller-Karpe 1951, pp. 196-197, fig. 2b/6; Müller-Karpe 1958, p. 10; Bezler 1974, p. 46; Novotná 2001, pp. 19-22.

⁸ Vasić 1999, p. 20.

⁹ Novotná 2001, pp. 20-22.

¹⁰ Novotná 2001, p. 21; acc. Brunn 1968, p. 88 and 61, fig. 6.

¹¹ Enăchiuc 1995, p. 302, fig. 7/8.

¹² Bader 1983, pp. 71-93 (*Zweischleifige Bogenfibeln*).

¹³ Müller 2000, p. 37; Novotná 2001, p. 22, pl. 26.

¹⁴ Karcag (Kemenczei 1984, p. 174, pl. CXCVIII/11), Bad Aussee (Farka *et alii* 2008, p. 131, no. 2.3.30 and p. 186, no. 5.1.12.), Vinča (Vasić 1999, p. 20, no. 39), Radzovce (Novotná 2001, p. 20, no. 17), Dridu (Enăchiuc 1995, p. 283, nos. 73-74, p. 302, fig. 7/11-12, f. XIV/1-4).

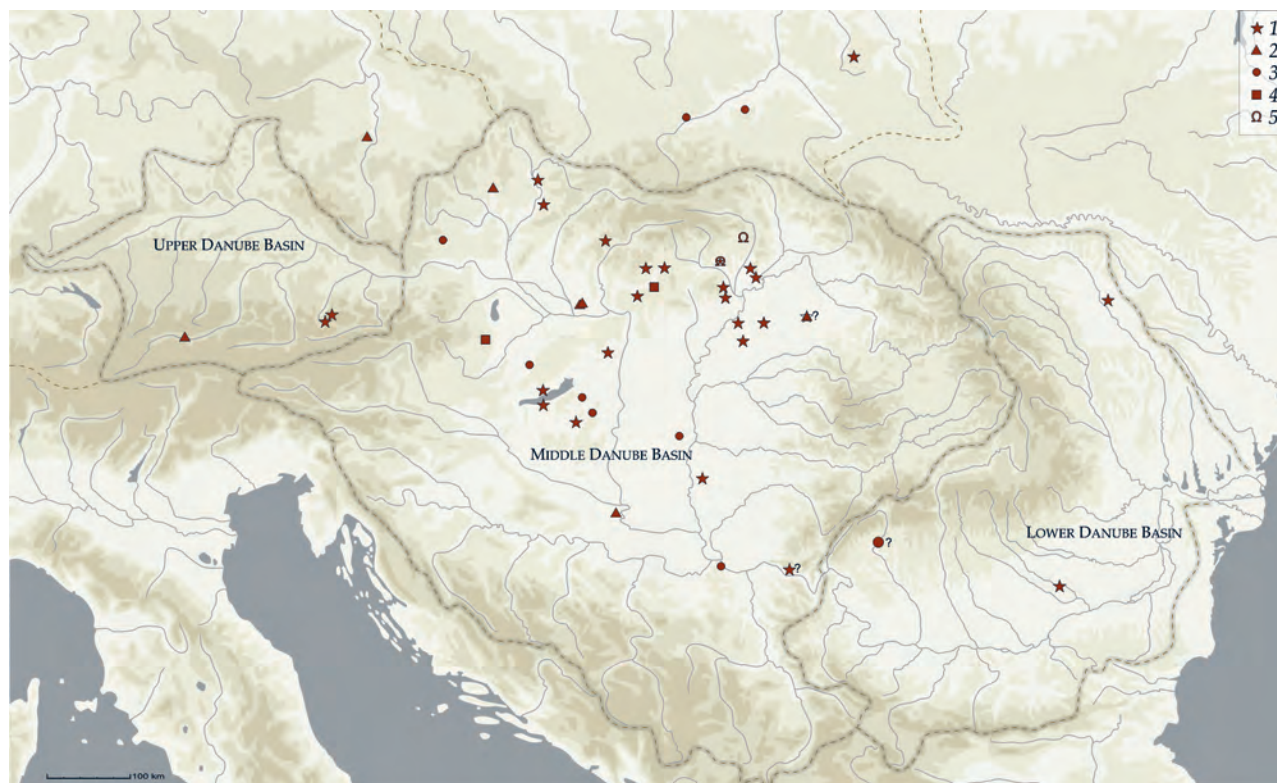


Fig. 2. The distribution of the Röschtitz-Sanislău-type fibulae (after Bader 1983, f. 41B, with additions). Legend: 1 - hoard/deposit; 2 - cremation burial; 3 - unknown context; 4 - settlement; 5 - cave.

Žabno, Valea Rusului and Dridu¹⁵ are an expression of the power structures inside the Carpathians and of their capacity to assert their authority outside the Carpathian Basin.

More than that, metallurgic products illustrate the cultural relationship between an intra-Carpathian centre and a certain extra-Carpathian periphery. Between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, black channelled pottery, specific to the intra-Carpathian cultures (Gáva, Reci-Mediaş, Susani) became common in the extra-Carpathian regions.¹⁶ The possibility of a parallel between the presence of the Röschtitz-Sanislău type fibula in Valea Lupului and the distribution of this channelled pottery in Moldavia¹⁷ must be taken into consideration. The appearance and prevalence of channelled pottery in Oltenia (especially in the Vârtop group)¹⁸ might create the perfect cultural background that could have supported the distribution of some Röschtitz-Sanislău fibulae south of the Carpathian Mountains. Nevertheless, the main cultural process of distribution of these big and pretentious fibulae was the “economy” of prestigious goods, dominated in Hallstatt Oltenia by the early intra-Carpathian metallurgic objects.¹⁹

The issue of the metrology of the Röschtitz-Sanislău fibulae has not been fathomed sufficiently. Tiberiu Bader approximated the length of these fibulae to 9 and 18 cm.²⁰ However, the longest known specimens are the ones found in Egyek Kendertag (17 cm)²¹ and Niedzieliska (probably 17.2 cm, as the item was not conserved

¹⁵ Rook 1960, p. 190, p. 193, fig. 10; Gedl 2004, p. 77, no. 217; Dergačev 2002, p. 46, p. 182, no. 170, f. 48/12.

¹⁶ Hänsel 1976, pp. 88-113; Motzoi-Chicideanu 2001, p. 197, note 8-9; László 1994, p. 48; László 2010, pp. 302-310.

¹⁷ Hänsel 1976, pp. 105-113; László 1994, p. 48; Levițki 1994, pp. 152-153.

¹⁸ Hänsel 1976, pp. 101-105, pp. 244-245; László 2010, pp. 314-315; acc. Bader 1971, pp. 69-71.

¹⁹ Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, pp. 36-37; Lazăr 2011, pp. 115-116.

²⁰ Bader 1983, p. 27.

²¹ Kemenczei 1984, p. 172, no. 15, f. 193/9.

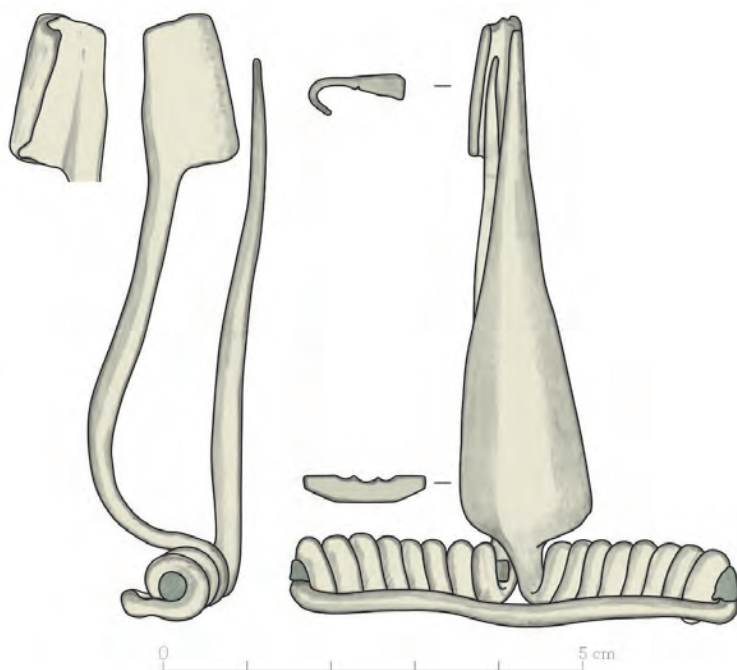


Fig. 3. Late La Tène fibula from Târgu Jiu (the “Cornoiu” fibula).

the conclusion that the fibula was more than a symbolic individual funerary representation. In a cultural context that lacks prestigious burials, such gigantic fibulae could have been crafted only to serve in votive ceremonies.

The fibula from the Second Iron Age

Description and technical data. The fibula from the late La Tène (Fig. 3) was crafted by hammering a silver plate and it presents a bilateral, symmetric resort made of 16 coils. Inside the resort, two fragments of a bronze pin with thick extremities were conserved. The bow has the aspect of a wide plate near the resort and a narrow plate towards the support of the pin. The front of the plate of the bow is slightly convex and chamfered, and the back is slightly concave, with traces of obvious elaboration, not chamfered. The support of the pin is tetragonal and had one broken extremity welded after its discovery. Length: 7.2 cm; resort span: 5.3 cm; weight: 36.9 g.

Archaeological commentary. The owner of the fibula claims to have bought it from some children in Craiova who supposedly inherited it from their grandfather. No one can investigate this story that might very well be a false lead. The possibility that the fibula be identified in Gorj County and not around Craiova (Dolj County) can not be excluded. It should be mentioned that the collector’s hobbies include mountain climbing. Does the fibula originate from the mountains in Gorj? The issue remains open and it has to be discussed whether or not, given its morphological features, the fibula of the collector in Gorj would have been worn in La Tène Oltenia.

In the actual state of research, central and northern Oltenia represent a blind spot in the field of the late La Tène plated-bow fibulae. Such items have been found at the periphery of Oltenia (Izvoru Frumos, Ocnița) and in all the regions in its vicinity (Fig. 4). Thus, one would expect the regions in central Oltenia to provide samples of artefacts made of precious metals dating from the late La Tène period. The bilateral resort with 16 coils of the fibula documented in Târgu Jiu and especially the design of the foot that continues the bow (the late La Tène) are

entirely and its size must be deducted from von Brunn’s drawings).²² All other specimens published to the present day are smaller. In other words, the 17.4 cm fibula from the Museum from Târgu Jiu reveals itself as the longest specimen that has been conserved intact, from the entire typological series Röschtz-Sanisläu!

Trying to mention the archaeological context of the fibulae is a lost cause. Nevertheless, the hypothesis according to which the fibula might have been found in a deposit is not entirely ungrounded, due to the fact that the funerary destination of such items has not been proved in the Carpathian region. The hypothesis that it might have been deposited isolated can also not be ignored, because burying a singular item (Einzelstückdepots) characterizes the depositional practice of the early Hallstatt in the South-Carpathian region.²³ The pretentious features of a fibula such as the one from the Museum in Târgu Jiu lead to

²² Sulimirski 1937, p. 256, fig. 3, f. 2/6; Brunn 1968, fig. 6/17.

²³ Bratu 2009, p. 144; acc. Kacsó 2012, p. 199.

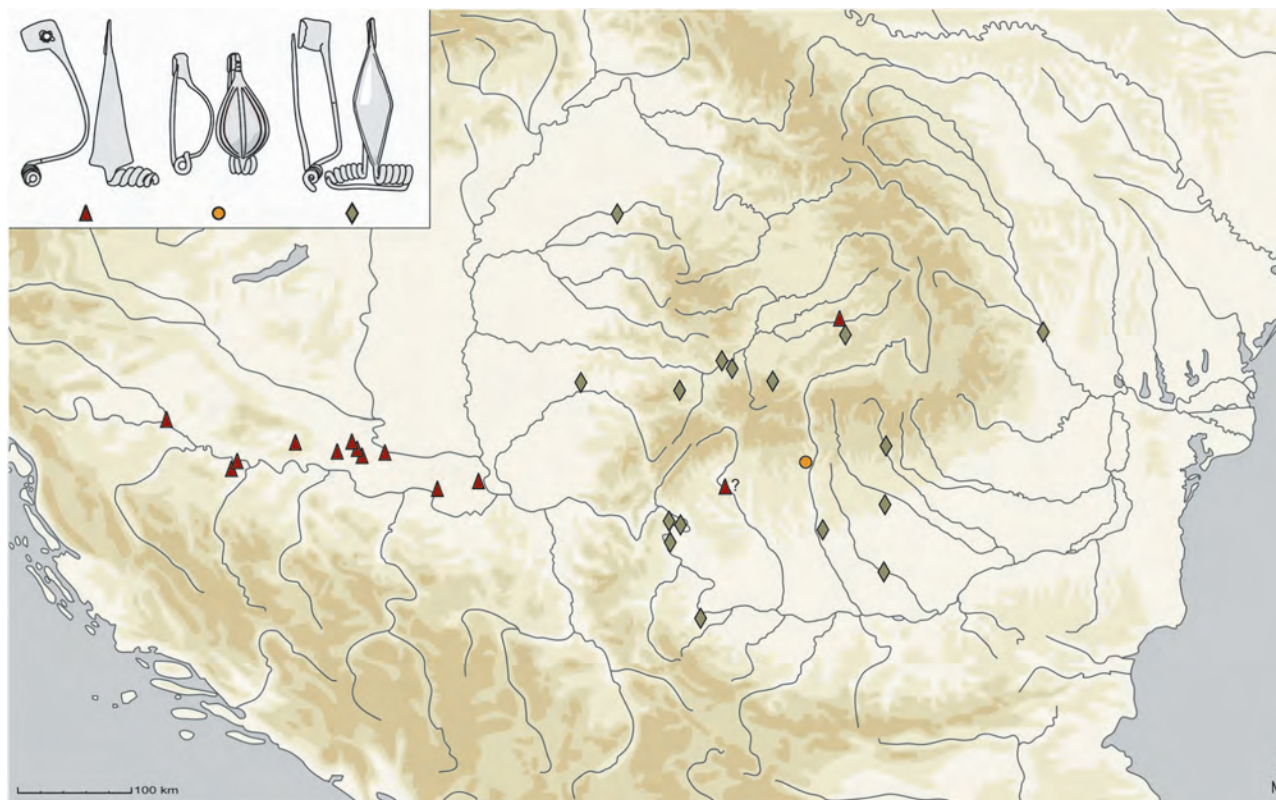


Fig. 4. The distribution of the Late La Tène fibulae with plate-shape bow (after Dizdar 2003, p. 338, map 1 and Spânu 2012, p. 149, fig. 56).

elements specific to many fibulae from the 1st century AD and even from the first decades of the next century.

According to the taxonomy used in the specific literature in Romania, a fibula with a plate bow should be called “with shield”.²⁴ However, the fibula from the late La Tène with a plate bow does not form a homogeneous morphologic group. In Transylvania and in the Lower Danube the fibulae with rhombic plate (usually made of silver) prevail. In Slavonia we find the Vinkovci²⁵ type fibulae, most of them made of bronze, with a plate shaped like an isosceles triangle, with the unequal side of the triangle facing the resort. The two shapes were distributed in different regions (Fig. 4) which reflects the activity of distinct groups of artisans. It is highly probable that the artisans in a certain region did not ignore the manufacture in another. This would explain why fibulae with a triangular plate were found in Oltenia as well as in the settlement of Sighișoara-Wietenberg.²⁶ These objects could have been imported from Slavonia, but, even more probable, the Vinkovci type fibulae served as an inspiration for the shape of the bow. The use of silver, unascertained in the type found in Slavonia, pleads in favour of local execution of both samples.

The cultural interference between the “Dacian” and the “Scordisci” groups are illustrated by the circulation of prestigious goods (drachms of Dyrrhachium and Apollonia, certain types of fibulae - i.e. *Middle-La-Tène-shape fibulae with enamelled plate*), Laminci type belt plates, samples of roman ware from the late republican era,²⁷ etc. The dynamic character of these contacts must be sought not only in the field of “imports”, but also in the world of abstract ideas and aesthetic solutions. The fibula documented at Târgu Jiu might reflect such a loan of a morphological solution outside pre-Roman Dacia.

²⁴ Pârvan 1926, pp. 553-554; Horedt 1973, p. 136 (Germ.: Schildfibel); Rustoiu 1997, pp. 44-45; Spânu 2012, p. 46 *et alii*.

²⁵ Dizdar 2003, p. 338, Map. 1; Dizdar, Potrebica 2005, p. 61, Map. 2; Majnarić-Pandžić 2009.

²⁶ Spânu 2012, pl. 132/4.

²⁷ Conovici 1985a, p. 41; Conovici 1985b, pp. 70-72; Conovici 1986; Popović 1987, pp. 110-111; Guštin 2011, pp. 125-127, figs. 8-9 (with older literature); Božić 2002, pp. 419-422, fig. 3; Spânu 2002, pp. 104-115, figs. 23-24.

Conclusion. Despite the chronological differences, the two fibulae distinguish themselves as prestigious items of dynamic cultural contexts. The two objects date from times when the local metallurgy (bronze and silver) flourished. These periods coincide with the shaping of power kernels that have established over-regional contacts strong enough to pass beyond the natural barrier of the Carpathian Mountains. Manufactured outside Oltenia or processed according to models from outside this region, the two fibulae could have been used and abandoned in the old times near the place that is now the city of Târgu Jiu.

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