

A NOTE ON ROMAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM ROMANIA

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We have written this short note aware that the exchange of ideas and information is essential when attempting to discuss the display and evolution of Roman military equipment. Any quantitative approach to the subject is bound to be difficult. First because the number of artefacts one could excavate on a site represents in fact but a small sample, and not necessarily the typical one, of those which were in use at that time. Second, because a fairly large number of finds from certain areas are not available to most specialists due to difficulties in establishing contexts or the availability of published final reports. Interim reports, which are more frequent, generally avoid small finds or do not give sufficient data about the archaeological context and thus, important elements of dating are missing.

In Romania, in the last 20 years, large scale excavations were performed on many Roman forts producing mainly small finds consisting of mostly military equipment. We hope that in the near future, this material, which we estimate at around 1,000 bronze objects, will be published. The authors have prepared for print a first lot of 150 pieces from the auxiliary fort at Gilău (district of Cluj) and we have strong reasons to believe that soon more pieces from Porolissum or Gherla and from the legionary fortress at Turda (Potaissa) will be published. Still some big private collections from the last century and those of various museums in the country are not yet sufficiently explored.

A category of equipment which calls for special attention is the cavalry parade armour. At Gilău, in the fort of ala Siliana, in 1978, three pieces belonging to horse armour were found (Fig.1)¹ which were not included in the catalogue of J. Garbsch.² The horse armour consists of two eye-pieces and a central plate with the image of Mars. They were found in the last destruction layer which could be dated immediately after the abandonment of the fort, around A.D.271-274. The two eye-pieces, which seem to have been readjusted, belong to a common type, although only one analogy from Roman Dacia could be mentioned. The fragment from Figure 2 was discovered in the fort at Inlăceni (district of Harghita) which was the garrison of several regiments, among which two cohortes equitatae are known: cohors VIII Raetorum c.R. equitata and cohors IV Hispanorum equitata.³

The rest, of what we consider to be a central plate for the front of the horse, depict the God of War in an identical position and attitude with the similar one from Straubing (Fig.3).⁴ The only difference between these images is the way of outlining the body. The Mars of Gilău is marked with continuous incisions, while the one from Straubing with seriate points.

Another bronze object presenting similarities with artefacts from other provinces is a stud (Fig.4,1) belonging to a shield. It was found in the auxiliary fort at Gilău in an archaeological context not yet dated. The flat disc of the stud is decorated with an incision depicting the head of a genius. The same pattern can be identified on a circular bronze boss (umbo) from Mainz Museum (Fig.4,2).⁵ H. Klumbach found good analogies for this motif on a stud attached to another boss from Mainz (Fig.4,3)⁶ and on a helmet from Waal near Nijmegen (Fig.4,4).⁷ It must be emphasized that the genius from Gilău and the one on the boss from Mainz Museum are almost identical, the only difference is that the first one is looking to the left and the other one, to the right.

It is not clear whether such identical artefacts were produced in the same workshop, or in the same area, or whether they were made by itinerant craftsmen of Syrian origin, as considered by Klumbach, Garbsch and Petculescu.⁸ We think that the hypothesis of specific production centres should not be abandoned, for it is clear that the Roman soldier would buy and in the end sell back his armour to his military unit.⁹ The troops were supplied by workshops, sometimes situated at a considerable distance, as proved by the Hunt Pridianum. The existence of officers of different ranks, specialised in supplying the army with weapons and equipment, supports the assumption that the theory of itinerant craftsmen is not entirely convincing.

On the other hand, taking into account the small finds, other problems arise. J. Oldenstein has proved that the minor objects, like fittings and pendants, were locally produced and the similarities of finds should be explained as a matter of fashion.¹⁰ This is the case of the strap-terminals of so-called 'Germanic' origin. They have been discussed in 1976 by J. Oldenstein who divides them into two categories. The first covers the strap-terminals ending in a ring. Outside the Roman Empire, in Germania libera, were found only strap-terminals of this category. The second group has the annular extension near the mid-point and such pieces are to be found on military sites on the limes. As a matter of fact strap-ends of the first group appear also in the Roman provinces. J. Oldenstein considers the presence of these objects as an influence of the Germanic tribes on the Roman military equipment, against Raddatz who presumes

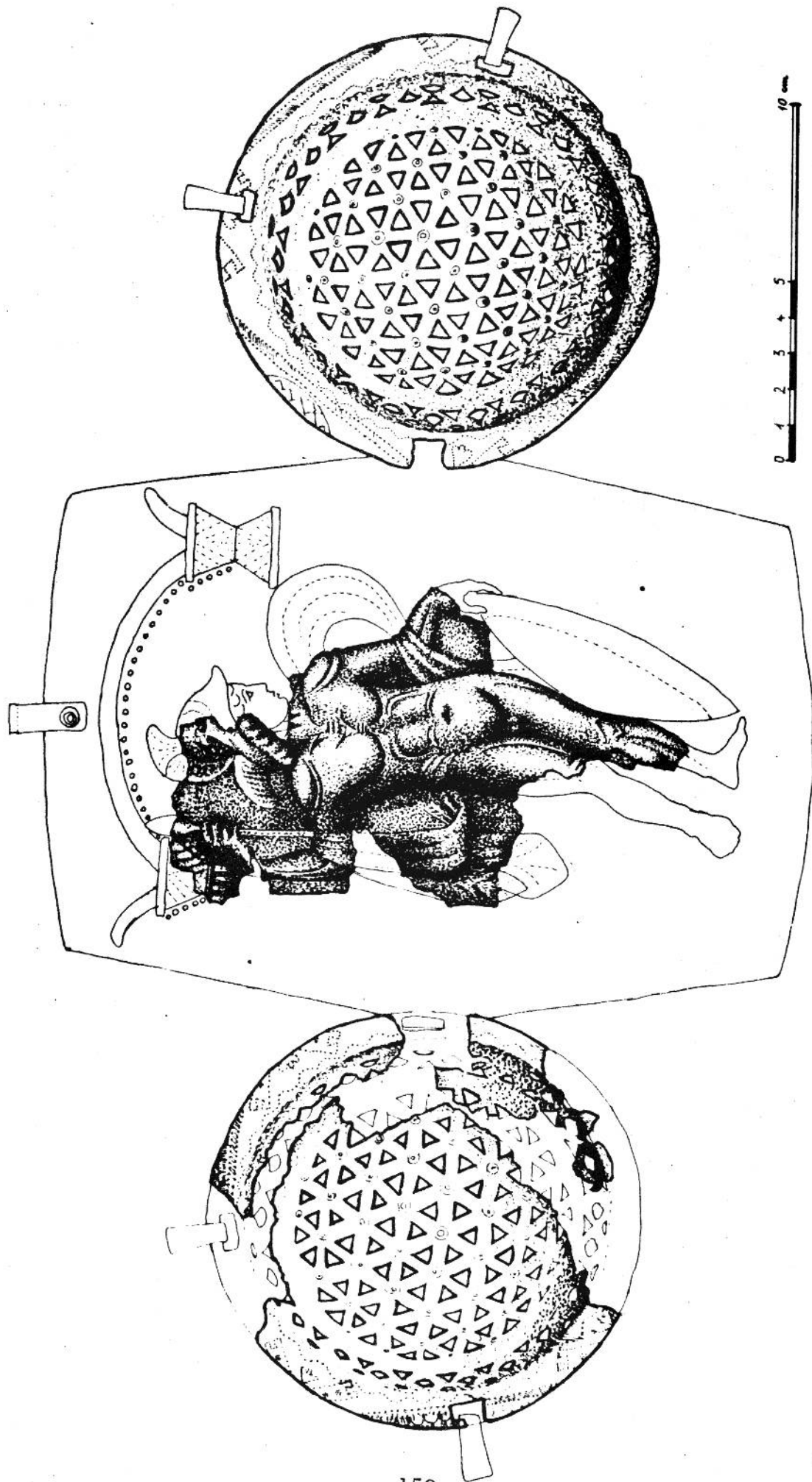


Fig.1: Cavalry parade horse armour from the fort of Gilau

that they must have a Roman origin under Pontico-Sarmatian influence. However the distribution of strap-ends of both types is far more extensive than Oldenstein knew, so, it is hard to believe that they were of Germanic origin. As far as we know, at least two pieces of this kind exist in Britain, from Cramond (Edinburgh) and Newstead.¹¹ From Romania we have ten strap-terminals of both types and two others from the extra-provincial territory inhabited by Dacian tribes. In the Northern part of the Roman territory called Dacia Porolissensis there is a strap-terminal ending in a ring that belongs to the first group (Fig.6,1). It was found at the South gate of the fort at Gilău in a third century context (the level IIB of the porta principalis dextra).¹² Three strap-terminals of the second group were also found in Dacia Porolissensis at Gilău and Turda. The piece from Gilău (Fig.6,3) was discovered at the West gate in a second century context; 10cm above this level, a fragment of Samian ware dated A.D.165-190 was found.¹³ The other two (Fig.6,2; 4), come from a 19th century private collection containing objects from the legionary fortress at Turda, there is no dating evidence for them.¹⁴

In the Southern part, called Dacia Inferior, there are five pieces of the second group: two from Drobeta (Fig.6,5; 6) coming from 19th century excavations,¹⁵ two from the auxiliary fort at Racari (Fig.6,7; 8) on the so called 'Limes Alutanus' - on the river Olt, for a long time the Eastern border of the province¹⁶ - and one from the fort at Săpata de Jos (Fig.6,9) which seems to be occupied between A.D.205-242.¹⁷

Another strap-terminal from a military site was found in the East part of the country in the fort at Barboși (Fig.6,10) belonging to the province Moesia Inferior¹⁸ and dated largely in the second and the third century A.D.

Between Dacia Inferior (Oltenia) and Moesia Inferior (Dobrogea) there was a lowland territory populated by free Dacian tribes, a region probably controlled by the Romans. Two strap-terminals (Fig.6,11) from the second group have been found here in the Dacian settlement at Mățăsaru¹⁹ - unfortunately only one example is reproduced by the author who also omitted to give the relationship between the context and finds. This settlement is dated to the second and the third century A.D.

Germanic presence at the Low Danube in the second and the first half of the IIIrd century A.D. is not supported by any evidence. The first Roman emperor who got the title of Gothicus is Claudius II in A.D.270. Thus, the strap-terminals with an annular extension, at the mid point or at the end, are more likely to be considered typical for Roman military equipment and the finds outside the Roman Empire to be accepted as a Roman

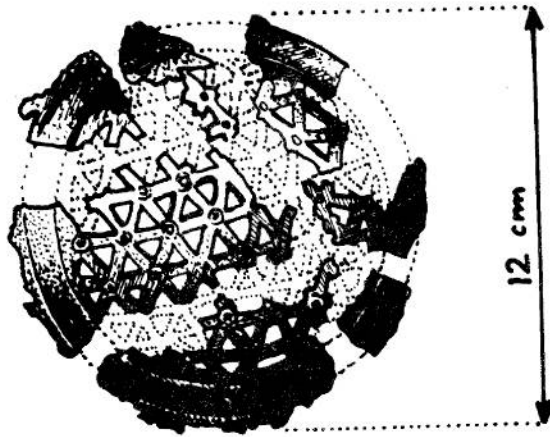
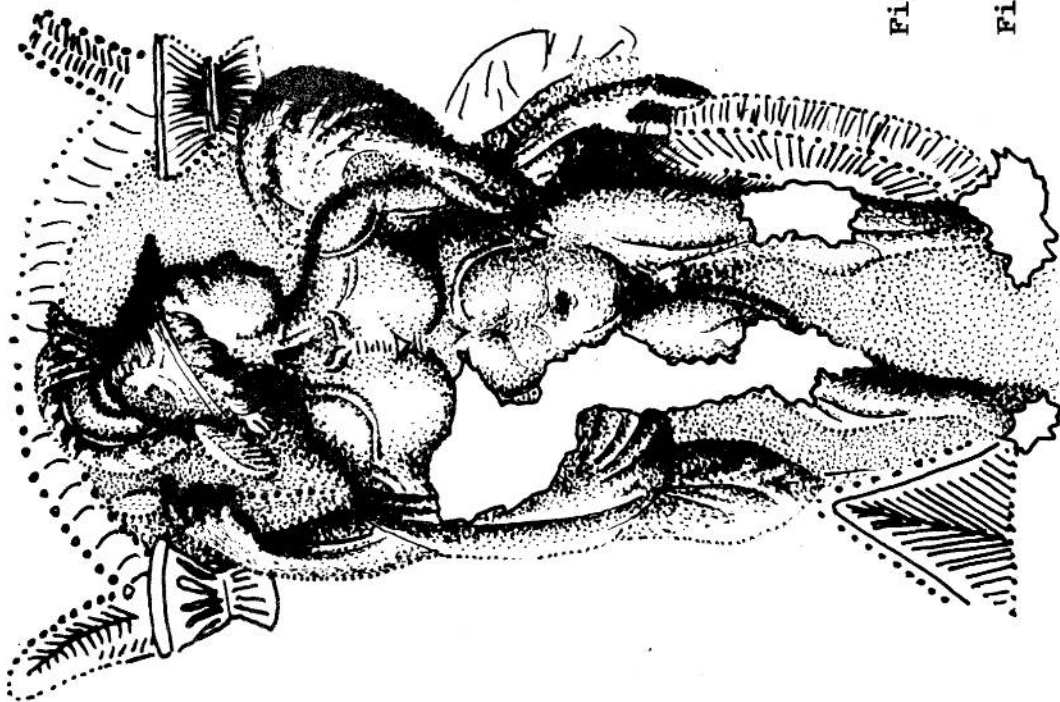


Fig.2: Cavalry parade horse armour fragment from Inlăceni

Fig.3: Decorative plate from cavalry parade armour depicting Mars; from Straubing

influence. Yet, it is not certain that the Pontico-Sarmatian origin could be denied.

If publishing bronze objects from Dacia could change some previous conclusions, in some other cases the old hypotheses are still valid. For instance, the button-and-loop fasteners discussed by Wild,²⁰ which are frequent on Romano-British sites, are very rare in Dacia. We can mention one example from Gilău (Fig.5,1) belonging to Wild's Vc class, which was found in a context dated at the end of the second century A.D. Another example is a loop-fastener with enamelled head (Fig.5,2) belonging to class Vb, from the fort at Barboși in Moesia Inferior.²¹ Although very few in number, the loop-fasteners from the Low Danube are unlikely to be imports from Britannia as such artefacts could be locally produced under the influence of fashion.

NOTES

1. DIACONESCU, 1983.
2. GARBSCH, 1978.
3. GUDEA, 1979, 258 Pl.XXIII,7.
4. KEIM et al., 1951, 26-7, Nr.17, Pl.29.
5. KLUMBACH, 1966, Fig.12,2.
6. Ibid. Fig.12,2.
7. Ibid. Fig.11,3.
8. PETCULESCU, 1980, 392.
9. BREEZE, 1976, 94.
10. OLDENSTEIN, 1976, 69-85.
11. RAE & RAE, 1974, 195.
12. ISAC et al., 1981, Figs.3 & 8.
13. ISAC, 1982, 71-2 Nr.12.
14. BAIUSZ, 1980, 382 Nr.575, Pl.III; 376, Nr.206.
15. TUDOR, 1976, 128 Nr.45, 48; Pl.IX,6, 9.

16. TUDOR, 1965, 249, Fig.8,3, 4.
17. CHRISTESCU, 1935, Fig.13,9.
18. SANIE, 1981, 181 Nr.27, Pl.53,6.
19. BICHIR, 1984, 57 Nr.3, Pl.LI,17.
20. WILD. 1970, 137-46.
21. SANIE, 1981, 181 Nr.26; Pl.47,2.

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SANIE 1981: S. Sanie, Civilizatia romana la est de Carpati si romanitatea pe teritoriul Moldavei - sec II P.e.n. - III e.n., (Iasi 1981)

TUDOR 1965: D. Tudor, 'Castra Daciae Inferioris Săpaturile lui G. Tocilescu în castrul roman de la Răcari (raionul Filiași, reg. Oltenia)', Apulum V, 1965, 233-57

TUDOR 1976: D. Tudor, in Drobeta II, 1976

WILD 1970: J.P. Wild, 'Button-and-loop fasteners in the Roman provinces', Britannia I, 1970, 137-55

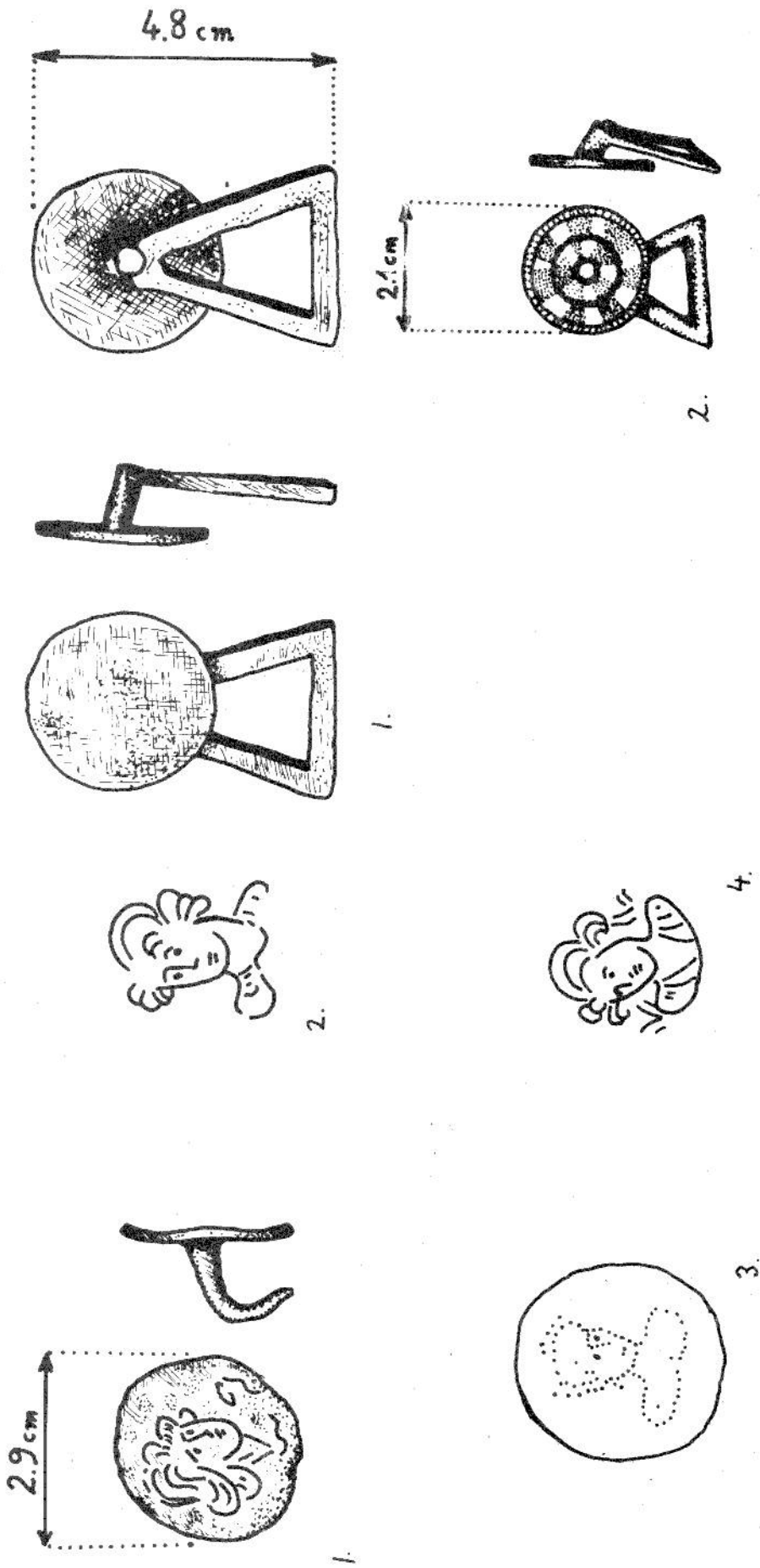


Fig. 4:

Bronze studs from 1. Gilau; 2, 3. Mainz; 4. bronze helmet stud from Nijmegen

Fig. 5: Button and loop fasteners 1. Gilau;

2: Barboși, Moesia Inferior

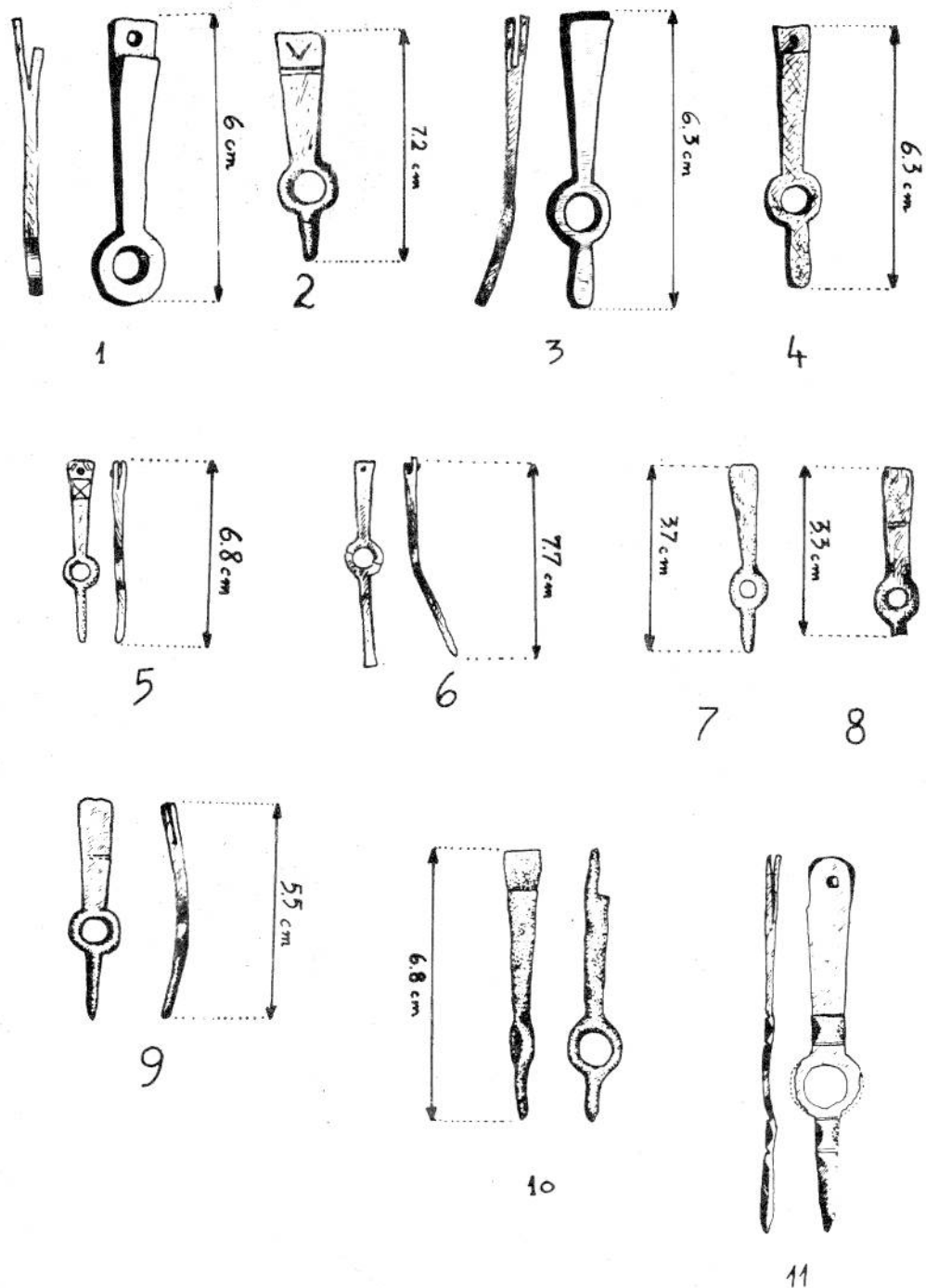


Fig.6: Military strap ends from 1. Gilau; 2,4. Turda private collection; 3.Gilau; 5,6. Drobeta; 7,8. Racari; 9. Săpata de Jos; 10. Barboși; 11. Mătășaru