

SLASHING KNIVES (*HIEBMESSER*) – CURVED DAGGER (*SICA*, -*AE*). THEIR FUNCTION AND SYMBOLIC ROLE IN THE LA TÈNE PANOPLY OF WEAPONS

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ABSTRACT: *The La Tène 'standard' panoply of weapons consists of a long sword, a spear and a shield. The panoplies of weapons from temperate Europe are frequently accompanied by knives (known as Hiebmesser in German literature) having a typically La Tène shape, while similar panoplies dated to the same period from the northern Balkans, Lower Danube region and Transylvania contain curved daggers known as sica. Their association with weapons in some funerary inventories led to their identification as battle instruments. However, the analysis of their contexts of discovery points to a different functionality. The slashing knives were used by the 'organizers' of collective banquets to slice and debone the meat, and were seen as symbols of status. The case of the curved daggers of sica type is completely different. A series of archaeological contexts, the morphology and decoration, and archaeological, historical and ethnographic analogies indicate that sica was more likely a sacrificial instrument. Thus, it can be presumed that the elites from the northern Balkans and the north of the Lower Danube, whose identity and social function were publicly expressed through the La Tène panoplies of weapons, also performed ritual functions. Their perception as "ethnic" weapons belonging to the defeated population, promoted by Trajan's Column, probably appeared due to their role as status symbol in the society of pre-Roman Dacia.*

KEYWORDS: *La Tène, weapons, slashing knives, curved daggers, Dacia.*

REZUMAT: *Panoplia de arme „standard” de tip La Tène este formată dintr-o spadă lungă, o lance și un scut. Panopliile de arme din Europa temperată sunt însoțite frecvent de cuțite având o formă specifică culturii La Tène (denumite Hiebmesser în literatura germană), în timp ce panopliile similare de la sfârșitul epocii fierului din zona nord-balcanică, de la Dunărea de Jos și din Transilvania au în componență pumnale curbe denumite sica. Asocierea cuțitelor menționate cu arme în cadrul unor inventare funerare a condus spre ideea că ele reprezintă la rândul lor instrumente de luptă. Analiza contextelor de descoperire a relevat însă altă funcționalitate. Cuțitele de lovit au constituit instrumente pentru tranșarea și dezosarea cărnii, fiind utilizate în banchete colective de către „organizatori” ca simboluri de statut. Cu totul altfel stau lucrurile cu cuțitele curbe de tip sica. O serie de contexte arheologice, morfologia și ornamentica pieselor, analogiile arheologice, istorice și etnografice, indică faptul că sica a constituit mai degrabă un instrument pentru săvârșirea sacrificiilor. În acest caz putem presupune că elita războinică nord-balcanică și nord-dunăreană, a cărei identitate și funcție socială era exprimată public prin panoplii de arme de tip La Tène, a exercitat și funcții rituale. Imaginea de arme „etnice”, aparținând poporului învins, pe care a promovat-o Columna traiană se datorează probabil rolului de status simbol pe care l-au jucat obiectele respective în societatea Daciei preromane.*

CUVINTE-CHEIE: *La Tène, arme, cuțite de lovit, pumnale curbe, Dacia.*

The funerary finds from temperate Europe indicate that the 'standard' La Tène panoply of weapons included a long sword, a spear and a shield (Fig. 1). More rarely other elements of military gear, such

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as helmets or chainmails, were added to this panoply. In other cases, the panoply of weapons that accompany the deceased inside the grave was ‘incomplete’, including only some of its elements (for example, only spears and shields or only long swords and shields etc.). This has been sometimes understood as the reflection of a warlike and/or social hierarchy¹.

A decade ago, it has been noted the frequent addition of knives having a typical La Tène shape (defined as *Hiebmesser* in German literature) to the Late Iron Age panoplies of weapons in temperate Europe, whereas similar panoplies used during the same period in the northern Balkans, the Lower Danube area and Transylvania contain knives having a different morphology² (Fig. 1). The latter have a curved blade and are known in archaeological literature as *sica*. Their inclusion alongside weapons in funerary assemblages led to the idea that they were also part of the fighting equipment. Consequently, slashing knives were often referred to as ‘fighting (combat) knives’. At the same time, the *sica* was considered to be the emblematic weapon of the Dacians.

The aim of this contribution is to discuss the functional and symbolic role of these knives in relation to the panoplies of weapons with whom they were associated. The identification of the functional and symbolic meanings of these knives is largely related to the strategies employed by members of various communities to manipulate the funerary ceremonies, aiming to express certain social identities at both communal and pan-communal level. In order to attain this objective, the analysis of entire archaeological contexts in which these objects were found is important. Finally, the morphological characteristics (the general shape) and their evolution could also contribute to the identification of their function.

The constitutive elements of the funerary assemblages could be interpreted as symbols expressing the attitude of the members of the community towards death, yet at the same time they convey their own perception of the deceased’s former self-image³. Equally, the funerary rituals performed during burial represent social and political events where the nature of the relations between the deceased and the family and respectively the community, his social role and position and, consequently, the status inherited by his descendants are all highlighted. More exactly, the way of manipulating elements of the funerary assemblage is important for the symbolic manifestation of a certain social identity of the deceased or of his descendants⁴. In this regard the weapons were not only means to wage a war. The interring of ‘standard’ or ‘incomplete’ panoplies of weapons in graves had an important role in expressing the inclusion of the deceased into a certain privileged social group. They were the distinctive sign of the warrior class and also of the “citizens”, namely those who were allowed to participate in the public life and in the process of decision-taking.

For instance, Caesar (BG VI, 18) writes that the Celts from Gaul did not allow the children to participate in public gatherings if they were below the age at which they were entitled to bear weapons. Along the same lines, Tacitus (*Germania* XIII, 1) mentions that the Germans “... make no public or private business without being armed. It is not, however, usual for anyone to bear arms until the state has recognised his power to use them. Then in the presence of the council one of the chiefs, or the young man’s father, or some kinsman, equips him with a shield and a spear. These arms are what the “toga” is with us, the first honour with which youth is invested. Up to this time he is regarded as a member of a household, afterwards as a member of the community”⁵.

Consequently, in several communities the weapons appear not only in graves belonging to warriors, but also in those of several craftsmen or healers, as symbols of their inclusion in the freemen class⁶.

¹ Rustoiu 2008, 161–162; Rustoiu, Berecki 2015, 128–131 etc.

² Rustoiu 2007a, 71, Fig. 7; Rustoiu 2008, 151, Fig. 75.

³ Parker Pearson 1999, 9–10; Ferdière 2004, 122.

⁴ Williams 2003, 10; Wells 2007, 472–474; Ramsel 2014, 200–203 etc.

⁵ Church, Brodribb, Cerrato 1942.

⁶ See also Henning 1991; Rustoiu 2008, 90–98; Rustoiu, Berecki 2015; Tănase 2010, 78–81 etc.

The weapons placed by some communities in children's burials⁷, or those found sometimes in the female graves, whose owners were acknowledged as "honorary males"⁸, can be interpreted in the same manner, as a symbol of the virtual belonging of the deceased to the warrior class.

Referring to the slashing knives again, it is noteworthy that inside the graves they were not grouped together with elements of the panoply of weapons. Instead, they are associated with bones resulting from the meat offerings (usually pork). Meanwhile, when these bones are missing, the offering is supposed to have consisted only of boneless meat⁹ (Fig. 2). Accordingly, it is quite clear that the instruments in question were used to slice off meat, like some sort of cleaver. The pointed tip allowed them to be also used for deboning the carcass (Fig. 3/2). Their overall morphology didn't change very much throughout the Late Iron Age (Fig. 3/1). The length of these knives (ca. 25–37 cm) is similar to that of modern-day cleavers. The blade is massive, straight or slightly curved, having a quasi-triangular shape and a pointed end. Morphological changes were observed at the handle, whose shape is one of the main criteria for their typological classification¹⁰. From the point of view of their distribution, it has been observed that certain shapes were preferred in Western Europe, whereas knives of a different morphology were used in the East¹¹. However, the general aspect of these knives didn't undergo major alterations, probably due to their function, namely slicing off and deboning the meat, which didn't change through time. In this context, it has to be also noted that knives having a similar morphology were used in Classical Greece for sacrificing animals and for deboning the meat (Fig 4).

Regarding the contexts of discovery, the slashing knives were not exclusively found in graves with weapons. There are other quite frequent situations in which their presence in women's graves has been noted, without any other accompanying elements that would be specific to the 'male' graves¹² (Fig. 2). As a consequence, the interpretation of these knives strictly as weapons has been already questioned several decades ago¹³.

On this account, slashing knives cannot be associated with the panoply of weapons. Functionally, they were tools for slicing off and deboning the meat. The inclusion of such objects in graves containing panoplies of weapons, but also in graves comprising feminine assemblages, could be discussed from a different perspective. M. Schönfelder considered recently that, due to their functionality, these knives could have played a role in certain collective banquets, where they were used by the 'organizers' to slice and distribute the meat to the participants. These 'organizers' enjoyed a higher social status, which explains the association of these knives with the panoplies of weapons¹⁴. In the same way, the presence of such tools in women's graves could indicate a similar status related to the right to slice and distribute the meat to other members of the group participating in the feast¹⁵. This idea appears to be also supported by the concomitant occurrence of regular domestic knives in funerary assemblages (especially female) from a series of cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin, indicating the existence of other cutting tools for personal and not collective use¹⁶. While dealing with the role of instruments for slicing meat,

⁷ Nicolăescu-Plopșor, Wolski 1975, 54; Rustoiu, Comșa 2004; Härke 2004; Rustoiu, Berecki 2015 etc.

⁸ Arnold 1995; Simniškytė 2007; Sankot 2014a.

⁹ Osterhaus 1981, 14–16; Némethi 1993, 119–120; Szabó, Tankó 2012, 128; Marion, Guillaumet 2012, 190–193 etc.

¹⁰ Regarding the typology of the early La Tène finds, see also Osterhaus 1981. Regarding the typology of the finds discovered in Central and Eastern Europe and for a more detailed classification of the finds defined within the Dürrenberg type, see also Dizdar 2013, 122–137.

¹¹ Osterhaus 1981, 6, 10, Maps 1–2; Stöllner 1998, 105–108, Fig. 24; Gaspari et al. 2004, 283–284, Map 1; Schönfelder 2010, Fig. 4; Dizdar 2013, Maps 11–13, Fig. 47/1–4.

¹² Schönfelder 2010, 226–227, Table 1.

¹³ Osterhaus 1991.

¹⁴ Schönfelder 2010, 229.

¹⁵ Pavel Sankot also noted that the occurrence of such knives in several graves with or without weapons indicates the high social status of the deceased: Sankot 2014b, 154.

¹⁶ See, for example, the cemetery at Ludas, in Hungary, or that at Zvonimirovo, in Croatia: Szabó, Tankó 2012, 128–129; Dizdar 2013, 266–267.

M. Poux has also considered their ceremonial implications, pointing to their equal use in sacrifices. These knives and other objects used for the aforementioned purpose appear in graves of the great aristocracy of Gallia¹⁷.

The symbolic importance of the knives in question appears to be also indicated by the care given to their appearance, some having ornamented handles or blades¹⁸. Finally, there are cases recording the existence of metal, equally ornamented, or leather sheaths¹⁹. The displaying of the slashing knives attached to the belt where other members of the community or the outsiders could see them suggests once more the role played by these objects as a rank or status symbol.

Considering the role of the slashing knives, the practical and symbolic function of the curved dagger of the *sica* type has to be questioned. The latter also accompanied the La Tène panoplies of weapons from funerary contexts of the northern Balkans, the Lower Danube area and Transylvania²⁰. This connection, as well as the evidence provided by the battle scenes depicted on Trajan's Column, which show Dacians using such curved knives during the confrontations with the Romans, led to the idea that the objects in question were real weapons.

Morphologically, the *sicae* have a curved blade with an inner cutting edge and a 'blood channel'. Generally, the length varies between 25 and 35 cm, but there are also knives that fall outside this range. In spite of the overall morphological unity, there are some distinctions regarding the shape of the handles, the curvature of the blades or their thickness (some knives have an arched narrow blade, others have an angular edge and some massive knives have a more pronounced blood channel) etc. (Fig. 5/1). Many such knives were ornamented on the blade with zoomorphic or geometric patterns²¹ (Fig. 5/2).

From the chronological point of view the earliest finds are from south of the Danube, where *sicae* were found in graves belonging to a northern Balkans' military elite (defined archaeologically as the so-called Padea-Panagjurski Kolonii group) which were dated to the end of the 3rd century and during the 2nd century BC (Fig. 6). North of the river, the funerary contexts containing La Tène panoplies of weapons are known already for the 2nd century BC (La Tène C2), whereas the latest ones belong to the time of Augustus²². During the 1st century AD it appears that north of the Danube the panoplies of weapons have suffered a series of structural modifications. Namely, the long swords of the La Tène type disappeared, their place being probably taken by the swords with a curved blade and a long handle known as *falx*, *-cis*²³. Both the archaeological finds and figurative representations from the time of Trajan's Dacian wars (see below) document the latter. Concerning the *sica*, with a few exceptions²⁴, there aren't many clear contexts that could confirm their use during the 1st century AD, yet this could be more likely the result of the poor quality of archaeological research and scarce information than a real situation²⁵. Suggestively, the representations on Trajan's Column indicate their use until the conquest of Dacia by the Romans.

¹⁷ Poux 2004, 42.

¹⁸ Sankot 1996, 560–562; Schönfelder 2010.

¹⁹ Schönfelder 2010, 229.

²⁰ Knives of this type are also known in other regions around the main distribution area, such as several finds discovered in the Scordiscian milieu and even further to the west, or those occurring in the composite 'Celts-Dacians' environment in south-western Slovakia: Majnarić-Pandžić 1970, p. 24/10, 28/5, 46/6; Todorović 1972, Pl. 11/1, 13/1, 17/4, 29/2, 34/6; Stalio 1986, p. 33, fig. 42; Dizdar, Potrebić 2005, p. 60–62, map 1; Gaspari, Krempuš, Brišnik 2004, p. 284–285, Map 2; Nešporova 2002, p. 141, 314, Fig. 101/2 etc.

²¹ Rustoiu 2007a; Rustoiu 2007b; Rustoiu 2008, 153–158.

²² Torbov, Anastassov 2008; Łuczkiewicz, Schönfelder 2008; Anastassov 2011; Rustoiu 2012, 171–178.

²³ Rustoiu 2007a.

²⁴ See, for example, a grave from the Beograd-Karaburma cemetery, dated to the 1st century AD, which includes a *sica*: Todorović 1972, Pl. 36/1.

²⁵ The fortified settlements and fortresses where such finds were found have been generally dated to the 2nd/1st century BC – 1st century AD, see for example Glodariu, Iaroslavl'schi 1979, 139, Fig. 72/7–9 (unfortunately, the drawings are too schematic, rendering incompletely the morphological details); Rustoiu 2002a, 74, Fig. 4 etc.

Regarding their function, the possibility that such objects were also used in certain circumstances as weapons cannot be excluded. Still, some archaeological contexts, a series of morphological details, as well as the structure of the panoplies (comprising a sufficiently complete arsenal even without these knives) suggest another interpretative possibility.

Thus, the discovery of several curved knives in certain sanctuaries of the Thracian populations inhabiting the western Rhodopes, such as at Babjak²⁶ (Fig. 7/1), indicates that they should be more likely interpreted as sacrificial instruments than offerings of weapons, given the rare occurrence of the latter in such kind of contexts. In this regard, the usual iconographic representation of the priests in Classical Greece holding a sacrificial knife (*machaira*) in their hands, thus showing one of their distinctive attributes, is significant²⁷. Furthermore, curved knives have been illustrated in several scenes on painted pottery as attributes of some heroes of the Greek mythology (for example Perseus²⁸ or Iolaos²⁹).

The same function appears to be indicated by the ornamentation of the objects in question. For example, the blade of the dagger found at Corcova (Mehedinți County) was decorated with a pair of eagles facing each other, while the tip of the sheath ended with the head of a ram³⁰, an animal that was frequently chosen for sacrifices³¹ (Fig. 7/2). Similar eagles, more or less stylized, are represented on many other finds discovered mostly in north-western Bulgaria and Romania. They appear together with celestial symbols. In other cases, the blade of the daggers is decorated only with astral representations included in more or less elaborate combinations³² (Fig. 5). The link between the eagles and the warlike elites of pre-Roman Dacia is also illustrated by other representations, in which the birds of prey belonging to the celestial divine domain were at the same time important messengers facilitating communication between the human realm and the world of gods. Amongst the most significant examples are the silver phalerae from the hoard found at Lupu (Alba County), which depict female characters associated with images of horse riders and eagles, also facing each other³³ (Fig. 8).

The patterns visible on the blades of the *sicae* are different both in style and function from the ornamentation seen on the scabbards of the La Tène long swords that are used during the Late Iron Age throughout Continental Europe. The numerous long swords of this type are decorated with pairs of dragons or griffins (Fig. 9/1–2). Both the zoomorphic lyre and the pairs of griffins are part of an iconographic code which is relatively unitary and probably characterized certain distinct groups within the warlike social category³⁴. These symbols, probably having magic meanings, also played an important role as agents of social communication. They were “read” and acknowledged by the members of a pan-European warlike elite (who used to identify themselves through this visual code), as well as by various individuals belonging to other social or hierarchical categories that went in contact with them³⁵. In this

²⁶ Tonkova 2005, p. 171, 174, Pl. V/5,7.

²⁷ van Straten 2005, 19.

²⁸ Carpenter 1991, 106, Fig. 161.

²⁹ Carpenter 1991, 121, Fig. 180.

³⁰ Rustoiu, Sîrbu 1999; Rustoiu 2007a, 69, Fig. 4.

³¹ For example, a large ritual pit was discovered inside the Dacian settlement at Sighișoara-Wietenberg containing a large quantity of ovicaprine bones, whereas pork and cattle ones predominate in the settlement: Rustoiu et al. 1993; El Susi 1997.

³² Rustoiu 2007b.

³³ Two decades ago, I proposed a classification of the phalerae based on their size. Thus, the eagles with snakes form a pair of facing images, followed by two pairs depicting each a feminine character and a rider, while the last phalera, the largest, being placed below the others: Rustoiu 1997, 84–85, Fig. 74. This arrangement of the pieces allows a more adequate ‘reading’ of the images displayed on the phalerae, compared to a classification based on iconographic themes. Equally, it is quite clear that the origin of these iconographic themes can be found in the representations of the northern Balkans’ aristocratic art of the 5th–3rd century BC: Rustoiu 2002b, 123–134.

³⁴ Ginoux 2012.

³⁵ See a theoretical approach in Castillo Butters, De Marais, Earle 1996, 8–9.

context, it is important to note that the decoration was located on the scabbard on a highly visible area, sometimes (if not in the majority of cases) being enhanced using inlays of various coloured materials, or through gilding, as it is the case for example with a scabbard from Aiud, in Transylvania. P. S. Wells has noted that "...these images are for the most part visually simple... They were structured in such a way that their content could be grasped quickly"³⁶.

In contrast, the curved knives (*sicae*) have different decorative features. These pieces were decorated on their blade, and not on the scabbard (Fig. 9/3–4). Thus the symbols decorating the blades were only visible during their use within certain sacrificial rituals and could have only been observed by a reduced number of initiated individuals having the right to participate in these ceremonies. This situation is similar to that of the daggers or short swords having the hilt decorated with anthropomorphic details and the blade incised on the upper part with symbols representing the moon, which are widespread in temperate Europe during the La Tène period (Fig. 9/5). These objects were very probably used, like the curved knives of the northern Balkans, in sacrificial rituals by a restricted number of masters of the sacred³⁷, so the symbols incised on the blades were only visible during particular religious ceremonies.

Consequently, if the curved daggers were used for performing sacrifices then it could be considered that the warlike elite, whose identity and social role was publicly displayed through the panoplies of weapons, was in also charge of ritual functions. This would explain the occurrence of the curved daggers together with military equipment on the one hand, and the importance that these objects played in the display of the ritual functions, along with the social and political ones, on the other. In order for this to be clear to all members of the community, the curved daggers were carried at the waist in sheaths made of metal or organic material (probably leather and/or wood)³⁸.

A comparable practical and symbolic functionality is also known among other populations, such as some communities from the Middle East, particularly in Yemen, but also in Saudi Arabia or Oman. The examples provided by the ethnographic study of these communities allow a better understanding of the functions of such weapons. Thus, *janbiya* or *jambiya* (or *khanjar* in the eastern part of the Arabic Peninsula) is a curved dagger with two cutting edges (Fig. 10/1). The youngsters are allowed to bear these daggers once they have completed the rites of passage to become men. However, the right to bear them is also conditioned by the social position and status of their owners. The two most important types of *janbiya* are the '*aseeb*' (or '*asib*') and *thumah* (or *tuza*). Ordinary members of the tribes have access only to the first type, whereas the second type is limited to the elites of the community, the chieftains and the aristocrats. In Yemen, until the fall of the hereditary regime of the imams during the 1960s, *thumah* was reserved for the religious elites of the country. More than that, the difference between the two types of *janbiya* is not about the shape of the dagger itself, but rather in the shape of the sheath and the manner of wearing it. Namely, '*aseeb*' has the tip of the sheath strongly curved and is worn at the waist in a vertical position in the middle of the body (Fig. 10/3), whereas *thumah* has the tip of the sheath less curved and is fixed at the waist more to the right of the body, in a 30 degrees angle (Fig. 10/2). Additionally, the daggers worn by members of the tribal elite had their sheaths decorated with a silver or gold sheet, all the more so because the use of gold was restricted in the past through social rules (some sort of taboos) to the sheiks (*shaykhs*), the tribal leaders. It is noteworthy that the sheaths ornamented with silver or gold sheets were made by Jewish craftsmen until 1949–1950, when they emigrated from the peninsula to Israel. This reinforces the concept of a privileged relation established between the elites seeking to acquire rank symbols, including weapons, and the prestige craftsmen who are recognized as highly specialized, just as it has been documented in numerous cases in Iron Age Europe or pre-Roman Dacia.

³⁶ Wells 2008, 81.

³⁷ Fitzpatrick 1996; Megaw 2002, 411.

³⁸ The amount of metal sheaths known so far is smaller than the number of curved daggers, which would suggest the use of sheaths made of organic materials.

Finally, it should be added that the shape, decoration and colour of the sheaths or that of the belts that the daggers were hanging from varied significantly, thus serving not only to distinguish between different social categories, but also to signal the inclusion of the individuals into different tribal groups³⁹.

To conclude, *janbiya*, the curved daggers of the Middle East, were primarily signs of the social status or of the inclusion of individuals into a certain cultural or tribal community, even though in certain circumstances they were also means of expressing violence. Even so, they weren't weapons usually used in military conflicts. This could be a case similar to that of the *sicae* from the Balkans and Dacia.

Still, if this is the case, how the illustration of these daggers as battle weapons in the scenes on Trajan's Column can be explained? Very probably, their role as status symbols for the warlike and sacerdotal elites of the Dacian Kingdom made the imperial propaganda to transform these daggers into a distinctive ethnic attribute, being therefore associated with the image of the defeated. Thus, the *sica* is represented in a realistic manner as a weapon (and not as an instrument of another nature) on numerous Roman monuments beginning precisely with the time of the conquest of Dacia. Trajan's Column, which shows the 'movie' of the Dacian–Roman wars according to a propagandistic and iconographic program developed for the public of the imperial capital, probably played a part in consolidating the image of the curved dagger as the 'national' weapon of the Dacians⁴⁰ (Fig. 11/2). On the Column, king Decebalus ends his own life with a *sica* (Fig. 11/5), the same type of dagger that is also represented on the funerary monument of T. Claudius Maximus⁴¹ (Fig. 11/4). Furthermore, *sica* appears on coins commemorating the Roman conquest and the organizing of the new province⁴². On an epigraphic monument discovered during the 19th century in the former capital of the Dacian Kingdom (only half is still preserved in precarious conditions in the Museum of Deva), which was dedicated by the soldiers of the Legio IV Flavia Felix, the letters L and FF were rendered in the shape of curved daggers⁴³. Finally, the *sicae* are also depicted on minor art objects that commemorated the Dacian–Roman wars, such as the bronze plaque discovered more recently at Gârla Mare (Mehedinți County)⁴⁴ (Fig. 11/3).

However, the real weapon used by the Dacians during the wars against the Romans is reproduced on other imperial monuments. Probably the best known example is the trophy at Adamclissi which illustrates the *falcis*, swords that have a blade arched towards the pointed end and a long handle suited for battling with both hands⁴⁵ (Fig. 12/2). The length of such swords is between 64 cm⁴⁶ and 87 cm⁴⁷. There are no traces of the *sica* at Adamclissi, a fact already noted by different researchers in the course of time⁴⁸. Erected between AD 106 and 109 and finished before the completion of the Column in Rome, the monument from Dobrogea follows an official iconographic program imposed by the imperial authorities⁴⁹. Nonetheless, unlike the Column, *Tropaeum Traiani* aimed at a less educated public compared to the Greek inhabitants of the Black Sea cities or the citizens in Rome. This population consisted of

³⁹ Regarding the entire discussion around the *janbiya* daggers, see more thoroughly Cammann 1977; Heinze 2013; Heinze 2014; Heinze 2016.

⁴⁰ Cichorius 1896–1900; von Schnurbein 1979, 122–126, Fig. 4–7.

⁴¹ Speidel 1970, 149–150, Pl. 15/1. The relief on the funerary stone of T. Claudius Maximus reproduces the scene of Decebalus' suicide as it was depicted on Trajan's Column, yet given that the deceased boasted that he himself captured and decapitated the Dacian king, on the monument in Philippi the *sica* is not pointing towards the neck of Rome's enemy, but in the other direction. It is probably attempting to suggest in a rather encrypted manner that, despite the official history, Decebalus' suicide failed and it was the Roman legionary who subsequently captured him.

⁴² Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2006, 472–475, Fig. 36–37, 42.

⁴³ Glodariu 1965, 128–129, Fig. 6; Wollman 1982, 259, Fig. 36.

⁴⁴ Stângă 1996, 241, Fig. 10/5; Pop 2000, 333–335, Fig. 1.

⁴⁵ Florescu 1965, Fig. 195, 197, 199, 215, 218a–b, 221.

⁴⁶ Glodariu, Iaroslavschi 1979, 137–138, Fig. 71/1.

⁴⁷ Horedt 1958, 14–16, Fig. 2/4.

⁴⁸ Alexandrescu Vianu 2006, 224–226.

⁴⁹ Ferris 2003; Alexandrescu Vianu 2006.

colonists settled in these areas and the military staff garrisoned in Dobrogea. Significantly, the triumphal monument at Adamclissi was placed at the intersection of the roads that ran across the region, where it could be seen by the travellers along these routes⁵⁰. Taking into consideration the local audience that the propagandistic monument was addressing to, it could be presumed that the provincial sculptors, unlike the artists in Rome, preferred to represent on the stone metopes the real weapons used by the barbarians who confronted the Roman troops. These were probably known in the region given the proximity to the former Dacian Kingdom and following the recent events. The discovery of several swords of the *falx* type, especially in the area of the capital of the Dacian Kingdom⁵¹, confirms that these were real weapons and not something imagined by the Roman stonemasons or authors⁵². Such swords with a curved blade are documented also in later, provincial funerary contexts in Dacia⁵³ and Pannonia⁵⁴. They suggest that a number of free people originating from the local communities known prior the conquest, who had the right to bear such weapons or at least to display them on the occasion of funerary ceremonies, survived the Dacian–Roman wars. The soldiers included into the various Dacian cohorts that were sent to different corners of the Roman Empire were probably recruited from amongst this category. These soldiers were responsible for the iconographic perpetuation of the *falx*, which has also become an ethnic emblem. The best examples are two epigraphic monuments from Britannia, from the Birdoswald fort, which illustrate such weapons⁵⁵ (Fig. 12/3–4). These were dedicated by the soldiers of the *cohors I Aelia Dacorum miliaria equitata*, an auxiliary unit probably recruited during Hadrian⁵⁶, which at the beginning of the 3rd century AD, when the aforementioned monuments are dated, still preserved the memory of the origin of their military unit through the symbolic use of an ‘ethnic’ weapon.

Conclusions. Returning to the issue raised in the beginning of this paper regarding the function and symbolic role of the slashing knife (*Hiebmesser*) and of the curved dagger (*sica*), both frequently occurring together with the La Tène panoplies of weapons, the analysis of the contexts of discovery revealed that the objects in question were not necessarily battle instruments.

In the case of the slashing knives, it is clear enough that they were utensils for the slicing off and deboning the meat. Their use by the ‘organizers’ of collective banquets, namely by persons having a high social position, transformed these knives into status symbols. This explains their occurrence in funerary assemblages together with panoplies of weapons, the latter being equally invested with an important role in the displaying of a specific social identity. The presence of several slashing knives in graves with female assemblages very probably illustrate in a symbolic manner a similar status, namely that of an ‘organizer’ having the right to cut and distribute the meat to other members of the group participating in the feast.

The situation is different when referring to the daggers of the *sica* type. Although their use as weapons in certain circumstances cannot be entirely excluded, their function appears to have been another. A series of archaeological contexts, the morphology and the ornamentation of the finds, as well as the archaeological, historical and ethnographic analogies, indicate that the *sica* was more likely a sacrificial instrument. Accordingly, it could be supposed that the warlike elites from the northern Balkans and the north of the Danube, whose social identity and function was expressed publicly through the La Tène panoplies of weapons, also performed ritual functions. This could explain both the occurrence of the

⁵⁰ Ferris 2003, 67; Alexandrescu Vianu 2006, 232–233.

⁵¹ Glodariu, Iaroslavschi 1979, 137–138, Fig. 71/1.

⁵² Corneli Frontonis, *Principia Historiae*, Fontes ad historiam Dacoromaniae pertinentes, I, Bucureşti, 1964 – II, p. 204. ... *in bellum profectus est cum cognitis militibus hostem Parthum contemnentibus, sagittarum ictus post ingentia Dacorum falcibus inlata volnera despicatui habentibus.*

⁵³ Horedt 1958, 14–16, Fig. 2/4; Rustoiu 2007a, 73, Fig. 9.

⁵⁴ Palágyi, Nagy 2002, 88, 171, Pl. 5/13.

⁵⁵ Wilmott 2001a, 98; Wilmott 2001b, 110–112, Pl. 3/1–2. See also Mitrea 1939, 264–270, Fig. 4; Russu 1980, 29–33, Fig. 5–6.

⁵⁶ Wilmott 2001b, 103–122.

curved daggers together with other weapons and the role played by them in ritual practices along with the social and political ones. Finally, the perception of the *sica* as an 'ethnic' weapon belonging to the defeated nation, which was promoted by Trajan's Column, was probably a result of its role as *status symbol* in the society of pre-Roman Dacia.

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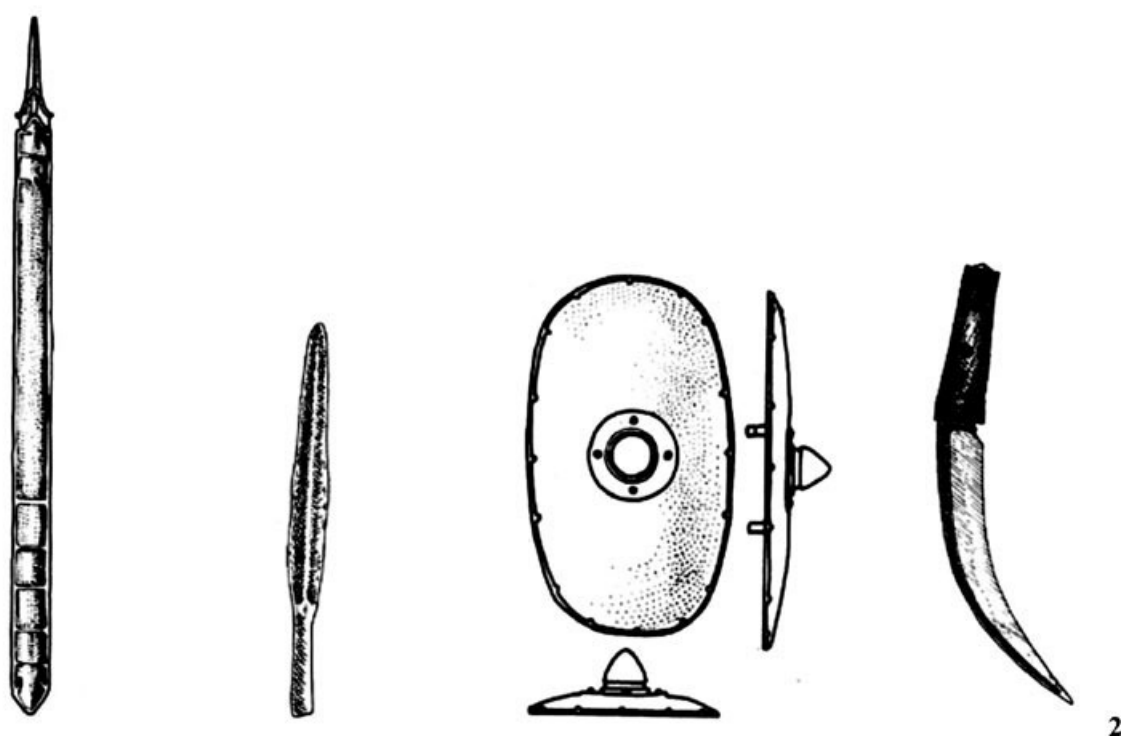
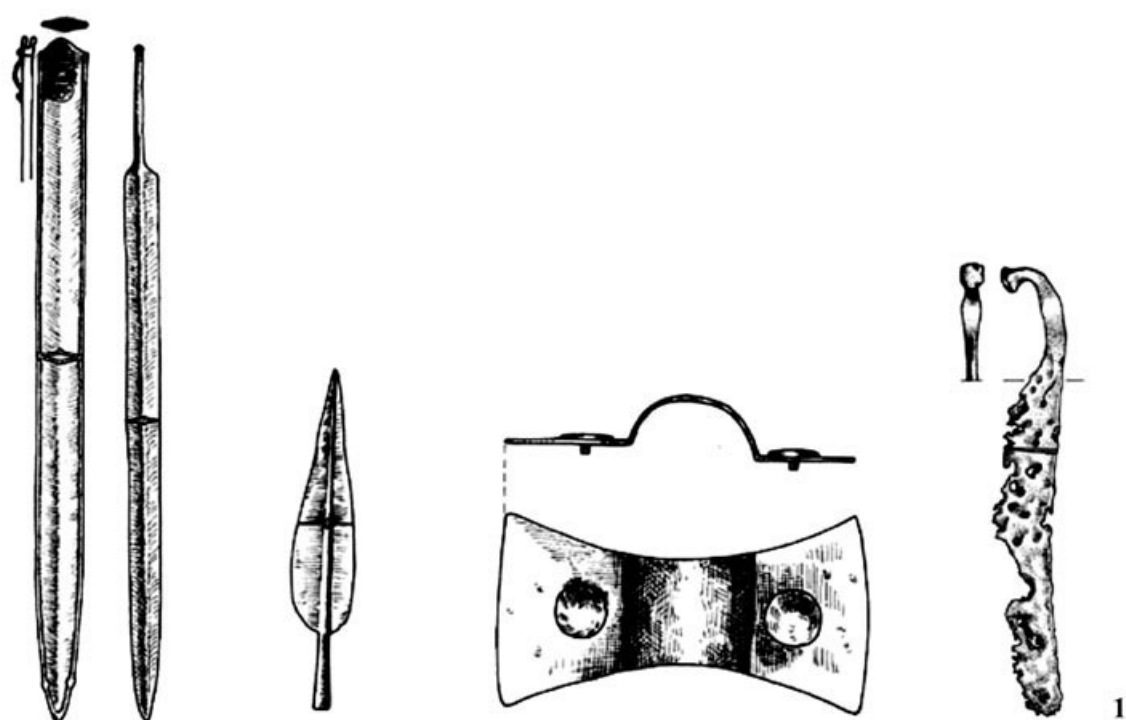


Fig. 1. Panoplia de arme „standard” în zona central-europeană în LT C (sus) și în zona nord-balcanică în LT D (jos) (după Rustoiu 2007a).

Fig. 1. The La Tène ‘standard’ panoply of weapons in Central Europe in the LT C period (above) and in the northern Balkans in LT D (below) (after Rustoiu 2007a).

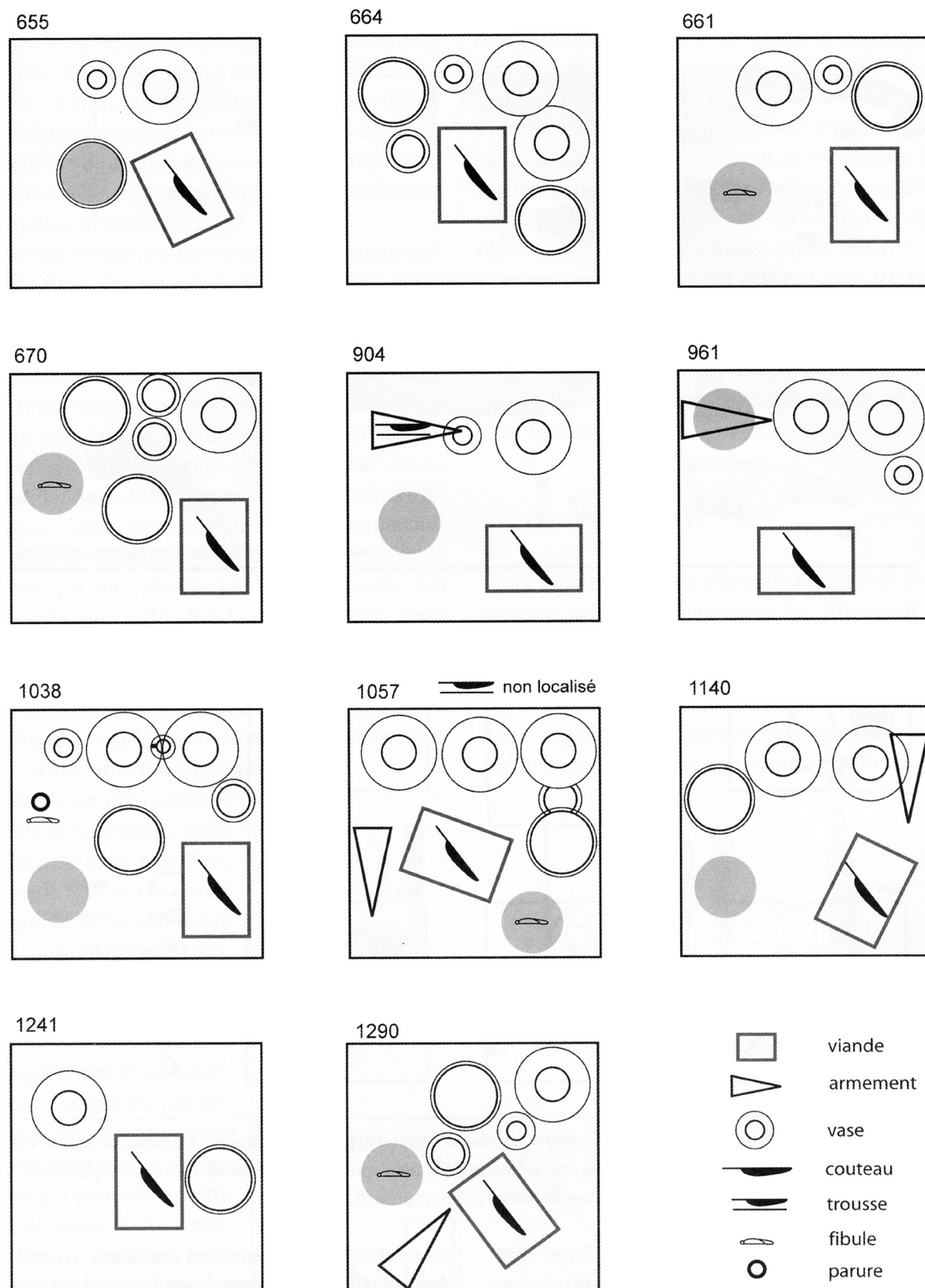


Fig. 2. Necropola de la Ludas. Poziția cuțitelor în morminte în raport cu inventarul funerar: pătrate – ofranda de carne; triunghiuri – arme (după Marion, Guillaumet 2012).

Fig. 2. The cemetery from Ludas. Position of knives in the graves in relation to the funerary inventory: square – meat offerings; triangles – weapons (after Marion, Guillaumet 2012).

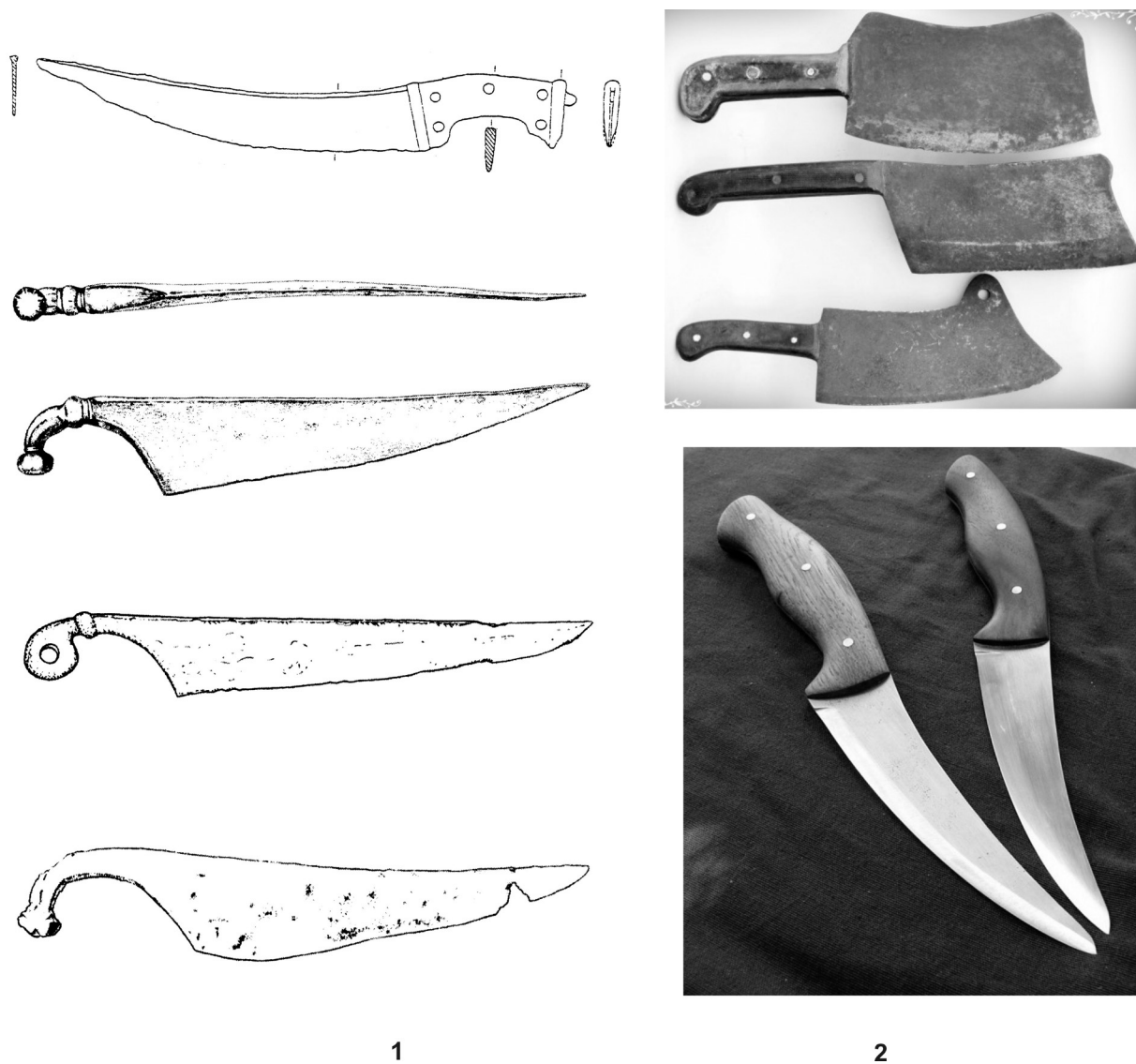


Fig. 3. 1 - Diferite tipuri de cuțite de lovit (după Osterhaus 1981 și Dizdar 2013);
 2 – Satâre și cuțite de dezosat moderne (după Google images).
 Fig. 3. 1 – Different types of slashing knives (after Osterhaus 1981 and Dizdar 2013);
 2 – Modern slashing and deboning knives (after Google Images).



1



2



3

Fig. 4. Scene de sacrificiu și de tranșare pe ceramica pictată grecească din epoca clasică: cuțitele de tranșat sunt asemănătoare cuțitelor de lovire din mediul celtic (după Google images, Louvre and Univ. of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology).

Fig. 4. Sacrificial and slicing meat scenes on Classical Greek painted vessels: the slashing knives are similar with the ones from the Celtic environment (after Google Images, Louvre Museum and Univ. of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology).

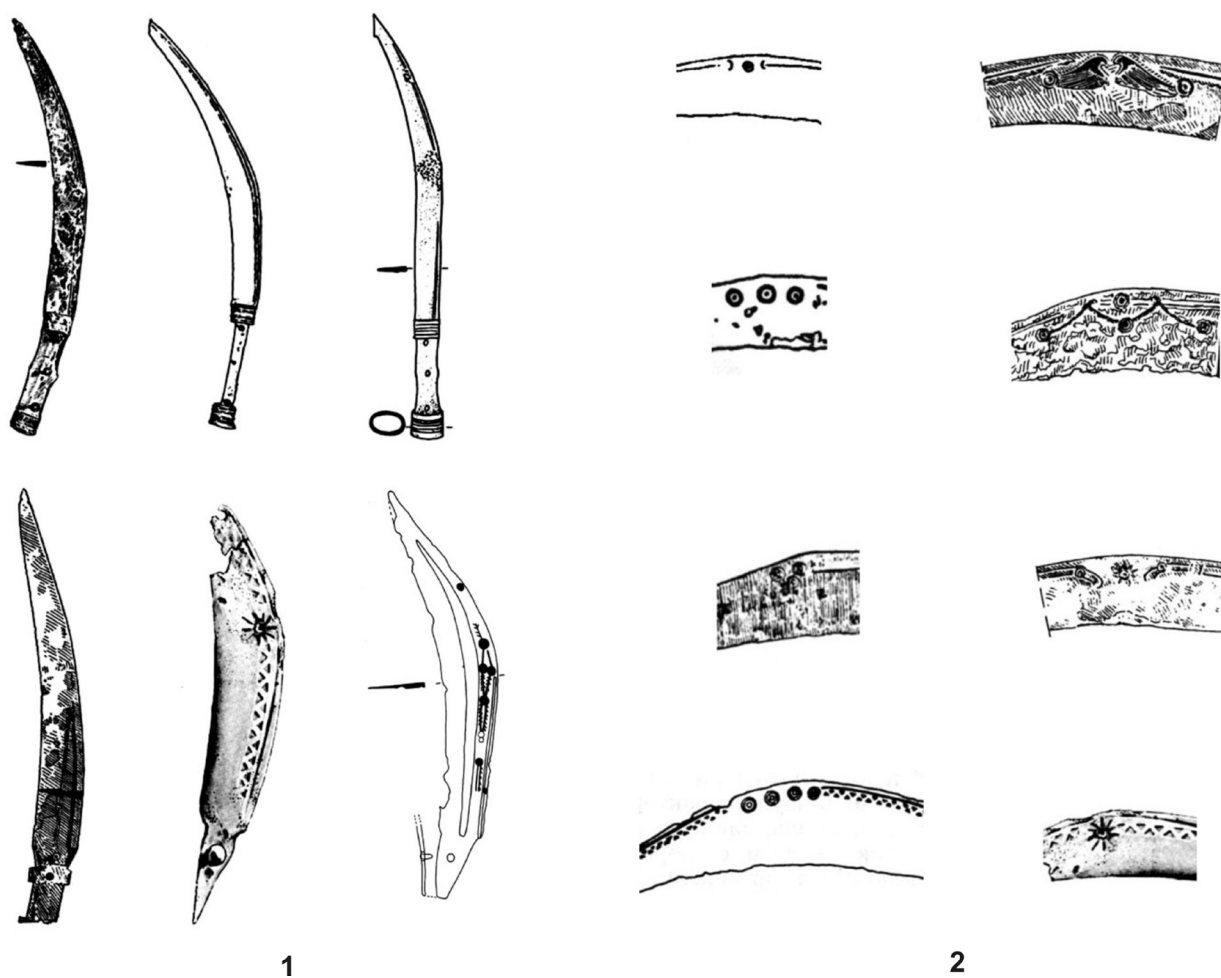


Fig. 5. Forme diferite de pumnale curbe de tip sica (1) și tipuri de ornamente de pe lamele pumnalelor (2) (după Rustoiu 2007a și 2007b).

Fig. 5. Different shapes of the curved daggers of *sica* type (1) and ornamental motifs on the daggers' blade (2) (after Rustoiu 2007a and 2007b).

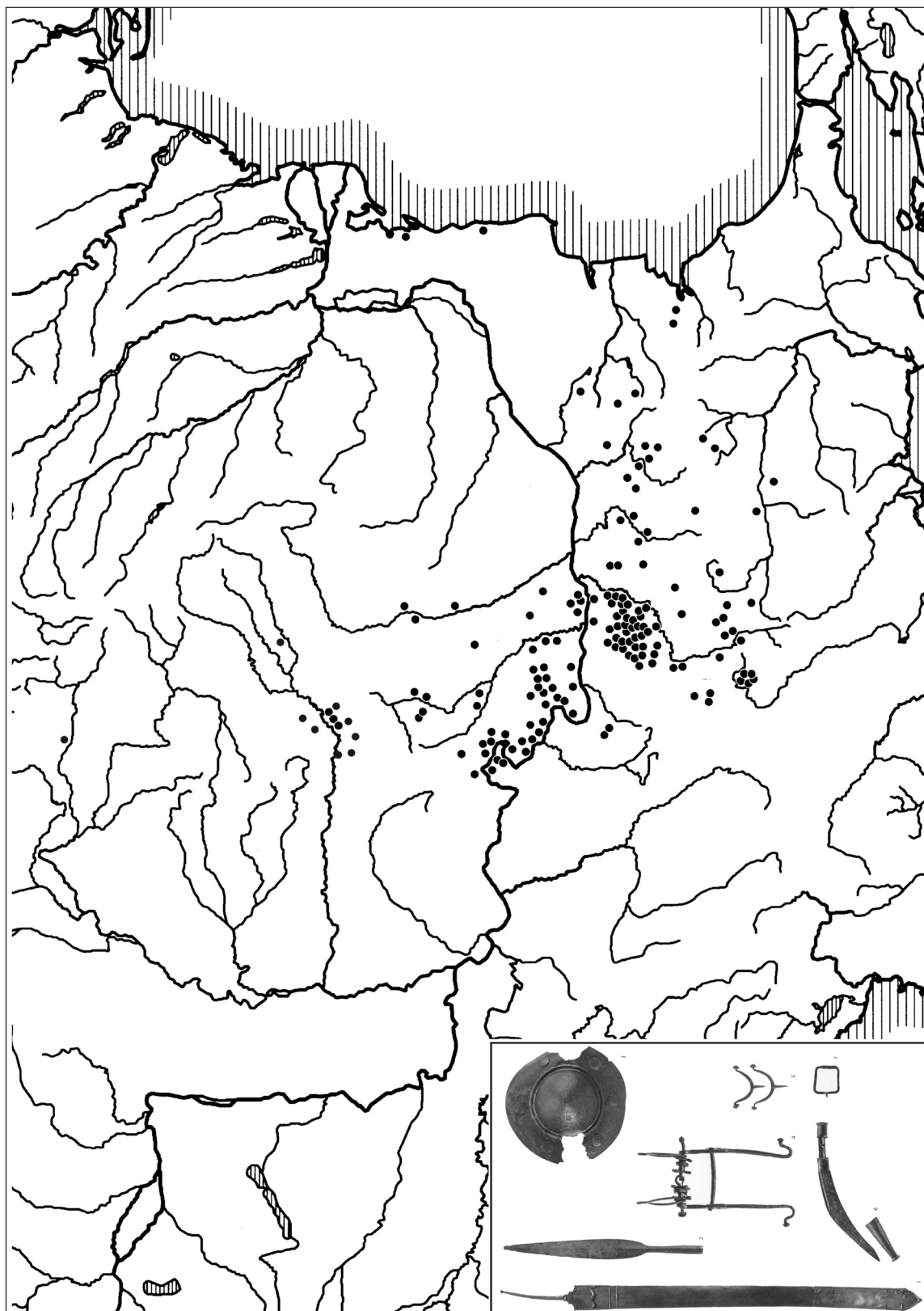


Fig. 6. Răspândirea mormintelor cu panoplii de arme de tip Padea-Panagjurski Kolonii (după Luczkiewicz, Schönfelder 2008 și Rustoiu 2012).

Fig. 6. Distribution of the graves containing panoply of weapons of the Padea-Panagjurski Kolonii type (after Luczkiewicz, Schönfelder 2008 and Rustoiu 2012).

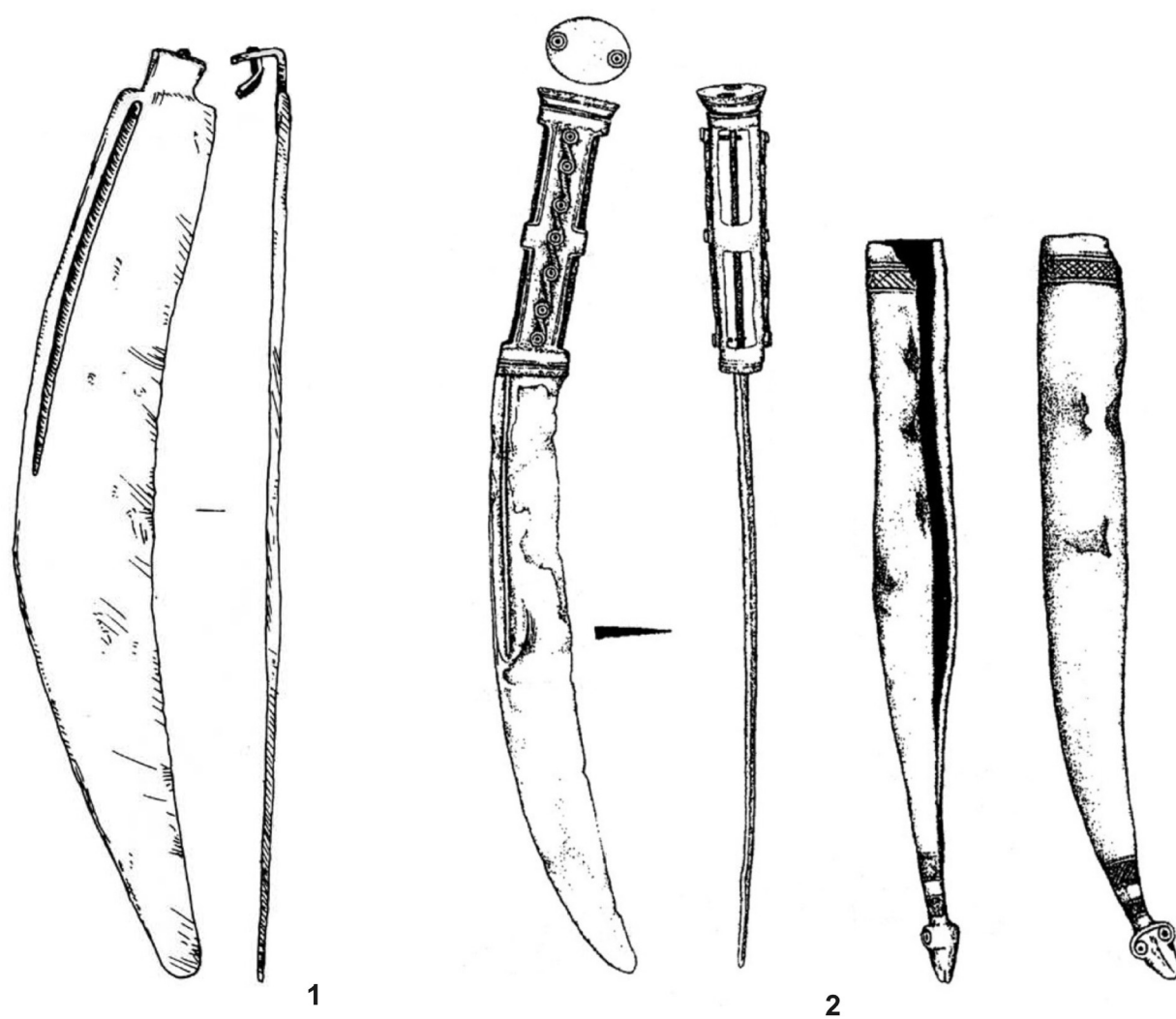


Fig. 7. Pumnale curbe din sanctuarul de la Babjak (1) și dintr-un mormânt de la Corcova (2) (după Tonkova 2005 și Rustoiu, Sirbu 1999).

Fig. 7. Curved daggers from the sanctuary at Babjak (1) and from a grave at Corcova (2) (after Tonkova 2005 and Rustoiu, Sirbu 1999).



Fig. 8. Falerele și fibulele de argint din depozitul de la Lupu (Muzeul Național al Unirii Alba Iulia. Photo A. Rustoiu).
 Fig. 8. The silver *phalerae* and *fibulae* from the hoard at Lupu (Muzeul Național al Unirii Alba Iulia. Photo A. Rustoiu).

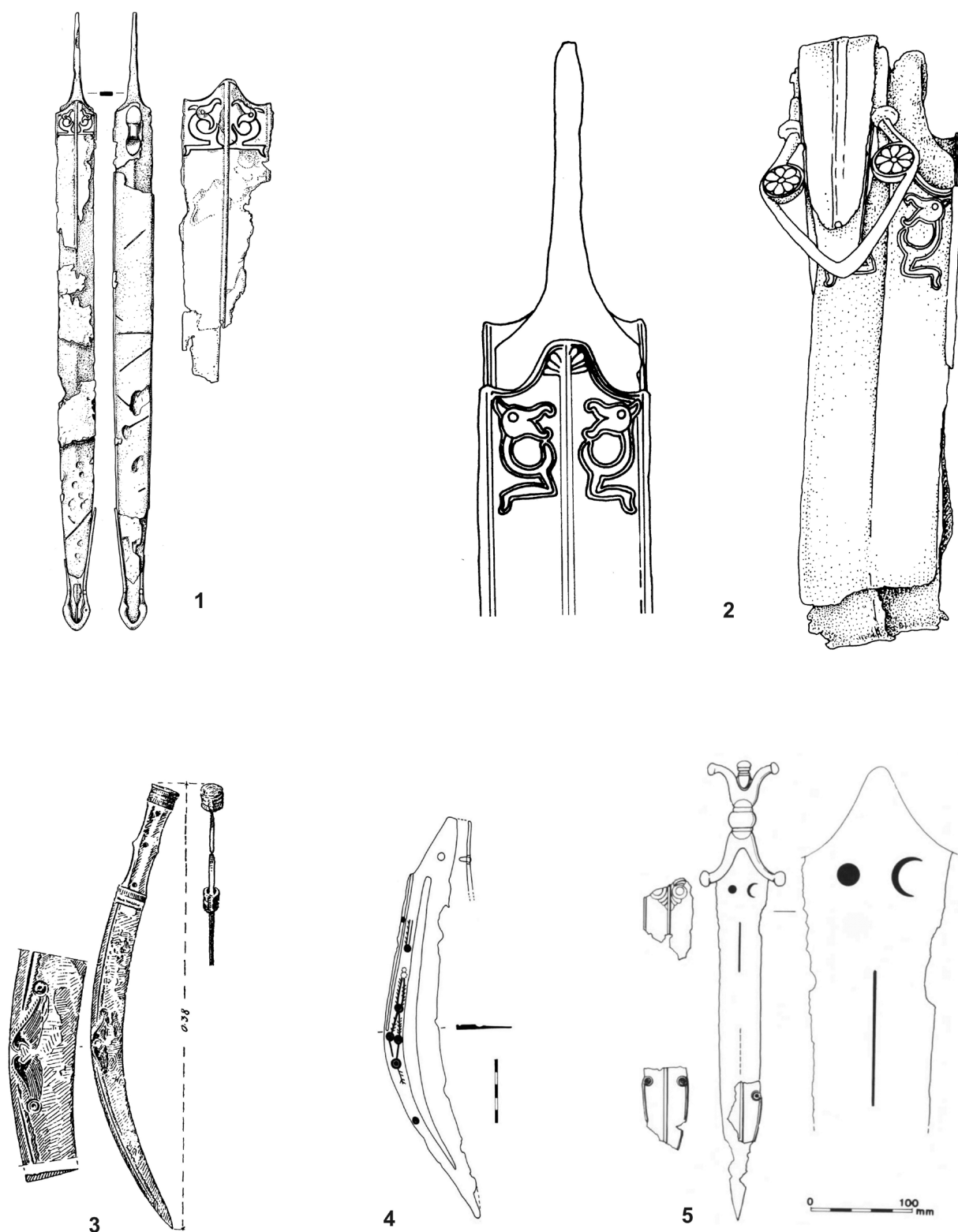


Fig. 9. 1-2 – Spade cu teci decorate cu perechi de dragoni sau grifoni de la Kosd. 3-4 – Pumnale curbe de la Cetate și Piatra Craivii. 5 – Spadă scurtă cu mâner antropomorf descoperită în Rin lângă Mainz (1-2: după Szabó, Petres 1992; 3: după Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1945-1947; 4: după Rustoiu 2007b; 5: după Fitzpatrick 1996).

Fig. 9. 1-2 – Decorated swords with pairs of dragons or griffins from Kosd. 3-4 – Curved daggers from Cetate and Piatra Craivii. 5 – Anthropomorphic hilted short sword from the Rhine at Mainz (1-2: after Szabó, Petres 1992; 3: after Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1945-1947; 4: after Rustoiu 2007b; 5: after Fitzpatrick 1996).



1



2



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Fig. 10. Pumnal curb (1) și cele două tipuri de *janbiya* în Yemen: 2 – *thumah*; 3 – *aseeb* (1-2: după Heinze 2014; 3: după Cammann 1977).

Fig. 10. Curved dagger (1) and the two types of *janbiya* in Yemen: 2 – *thumah*; 3 – *aseeb* (1-2: after Heinze 2014; 3: after Cammann 1977).

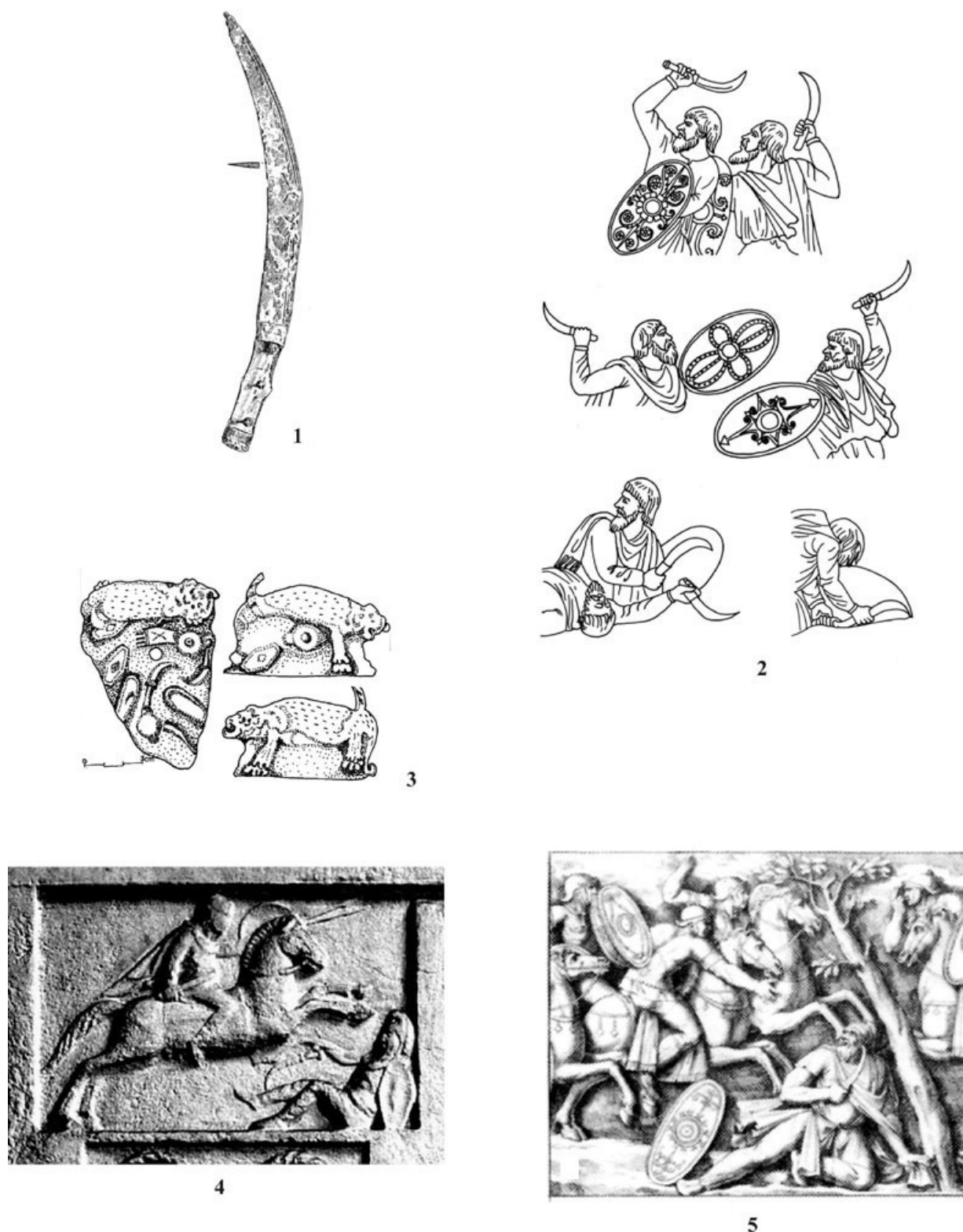


Fig. 11. *Sica* (1) și reprezentările sale (2-5): 1 - Călărași; 2 – Imagini de daci cu *sicae* pe Columna lui Traian (după von Schnurbein 1979 și Cichorius 1896-1900); 3 – Gârla Mare (după Stângă 1996); 4 – Monumentul funerar al lui T. Claudius Maximus (după Speidel 1970); 5 – Scena sinuciderii lui Decebal, pe Columna lui Traian (după Cichorius 1896-1900).

Fig. 11. *Sica* (1) and its representation (2-5): 1 - Călărași; 2 – Images of Dacians with *sicae* on Trajan's Column (drawings von Schnurbein 1979 after Cichorius 1896-1900); 3 – Gârla Mare (after Stângă 1996); 4 – The funerary monument of T. Claudius Maximus (after Speidel 1970); 5 – The scene of Decebalus' suicide on Trajan's Column (after Cichorius 1896-1900).



1



2



3



4

Fig. 12. Fig. 8. *Falx* (1) și reprezentările sale (2-4): 1 – Grădiștea de Munte; 2 – Adamclissi (după Florescu 1965); 3-4 – Birdoswald (după Wilmott 2001b).

Fig. 12. Fig. 8. *Falx* (1) and its representation (2-4): 1 – Grădiștea de Munte; 2 – Adamclissi (after Florescu 1965); 3-4 – Birdoswald (after Wilmott 2001b).