

EARLY IRON AGE FIBULAE FROM DESA – „CASTRAVIȚA” DISCOVERED IN 2017 AND 2018

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Rezumat: În paginile articolului sunt prezentate fibulele descoperite în localitatea Desa (jud. Dolj), punctul „Castravița”, în timpul cercetărilor arheologice din anii 2017 și 2018. Cele 11 descoperiri se alătură celor 23 de fibule deja publicate, astfel încât numărul total al fibulelor descoperite pe grindul „Castravița”, în tumulii din prima epocă a fierului sau în vecinătatea acestora, este în prezent de 34. Din cele 11 fibule fragmentare prezentate, 7 fac parte din categoria fibulelor arcuite cu dublu resort și portagrafa în formă de clepsidră, iar o fibulă are portagrafa în formă de scut beotic. Nu este exclusă posibilitatea ca un mic tutulus de bronz, descoperit în apropierea unei fibule, să provină de fapt de la o fibulă de tip ochelari, ceea ce ar ridica numărul total al fibulelor de epocă Basarabi de la Desa la 35. Fibulele descoperite în punctul „Castravița” se încadrează, din punct de vedere cronologic, într-un interval de timp cuprins între mijlocul secolului al VIII-lea a. Chr. și mijlocul secolului al VII-lea a. Chr.

Abstract: In the pages of the study are presented the fibulae discovered in Desa (Dolj county), site „Castravița”, during the archaeological researches from 2017 and 2018. The 11 discoveries join the 23 fibulae already published, thus the total number of the fibulae discovered on „Castravița” sandhill, within the Early Iron Age tumuli or in their vicinity, is today 34. From the 11 fragmentary fibulae presented, 7 are to be included in the category of the double looped bow fibulae with a sandglass catchplate, while one fibula has a Boeotian catchplate. It is not to be excluded the possibility that a small bronze tutulus discovered near a fibula to have been part of a spectacle type fibula, in which case the total number of the fibulae from Desa dated in the Basarabi period would be 35. From a chronological point of view, the fibulae discovered in „Castravița” can be framed in a time span comprised between the mid 8th c. BC and mid 7th c. BC.

Cuvinte-cheie: Desa, tumuli, fibule, prima epocă a fierului, Basarabi.

Key-words: Desa, tumuli, fibulae, Early Iron Age, Basarabi.

Introduction

The village of Desa, in the SW part of Dolj county, has become well-known in the literature, first of all, because of the Early Iron Age findings attributed to the so-called „Basarabi phenomenon”, but not only¹.

The excavation of the Basarabi type tumular necropolis, which started in 2002², continued during 2017 and 2018. Thus, following the complet excavation of the tumuli identified since 2016 (T6-T10), new inhumation graves have been discovered, as well as several metal pieces and pottery vessels.

The focus of the present study is represented by the fibulae discovered during these last two archaeological campaigns, thus completing the catalog of all the fibulae attributed to the Early Iron Age and discovered within the Basarabi type tumular necropolis from Desa – „Castravița” between 2002-2016³.

Catalogue of discoveries

Abbreviations used:

Tx = Tumulus number x;

Grx = Grave number x;

Length = L.;

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¹ Bâsceanu, 2015-2016, pp. 22-23.

² Bâsceanu, 2015-2016, p. 23; Bâsceanu, 2017.

³ Bâsceanu, 2015-2016.

Width = w.;
Diameter = d.;
Height = h.;
Thickness = thk.;
Weight = wt.;
Minimum = min.;
Maximum = max.;
Inventory number = inv. no.

1. Three fragments from a fibula, possible an iron one (fig.1/1).

Context: T7, nearly in the center zone of the tumulus. Discovered at -0,52 m depth, together with some very small bone fragments, probably human.

Dimensions:

Fragment no. 1. d. = 2,3 cm; thk. = 0,6 cm; wt. = 2,33 g (fig.1/1(1)).

Fragment no. 2. d. = 1,6 cm; thk. = 0,6 cm; wt. = 1,37 g (fig.1/1(2)).

Fragment no. 3. L. = 2,1 cm; thk. = 0,3 cm; wt. = 1,28 g (fig.1/1(3)).

Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

2. Fragmented iron fibula with a bronze plated ribbed-bow, round in cross-section (fig.1/2).

Context: T7, nearly in the center zone of the tumulus. Discovered at -0,76 m depth, within a pit with comingled human and animal remains.

Dimensions: L. = 5,9 cm; d. = 0,7 cm; wt. = 17,26 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

3. Fragment of an iron bow fibula (fig.1/3).

Context: T7, approx. at the S margin of the tumulus. The fragment, representing the loop and part of the bow, was discovered at -0,77 m depth.

The partially preserved bow is round in cross-section.

Dimensions: L. = 3,1 cm; d. = 1,4 cm; thk. = 0,4 cm; wt. = 2,93 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

4. Fragmented iron double-looped bow fibula with a sandglass catchplate (fig.1/4).

Context: T7, approx. at the SE margin of the tumulus. It was discovered at -1,24 m depth.

The fragment preserved only partially the bow, a loop and a part of the sandglass catchplate. It is very possible that the bow was rectangular in cross-section, but due to the strong erosion, we cannot support this with certainty.

Dimensions: L. = 7,4 cm; thk. (bow) = 0,8 cm; d. (loop) = 1,4 cm; thk. (loop) = 0,4 cm; L. (catchplate) = 1,1 cm; max. w. (catchplate) = 0,9 cm; wt. = 17,88 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

5. Fragmented iron fibula with a bronze plated ribbed-bow, round in cross-section (fig.2/1).

Context: T8, in the mantle, near the W margin of the tumulus, in the small and compacted gravel layer, underneath the boulders in the middle of the mound. The fibula was discovered at -0,63 m depth, tighter with a bronze conical head (tutulus), several centimeters to the E (fig.2/2,3).

Dimensions: L. = 6 cm; d. = 0,9 cm; wt. = 18,28 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

6. Fragmented iron fibula with a bronze plated ribbed-bow, round in cross-section (fig.3/1).

Context: T9, at -0,30 m depth, in the superior part of the mantle and near its E limit, more precisely in the earth layer which covered the stone core of the tumulus.

Dimensions: L. = 3,5 cm; d. = 0,8 cm; wt. = 9,63 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

7. Fragmented bronze double-looped bow fibula with a Boeotian shield catchplate (fig.3/2).

Context: T10, at the S margin, more precisely, in trench K17/2016, while leveling its S bank, at -0,66 m depth and nearly at 0,69 m S from the area where were found the right leg bones of the deceased discovered in 2016 (T10/Gr1). In the vicinity of the fibula, two small unidentifiable bones were discovered.

The bow of the fibula is round in cross-section; thicker in the middle, while gradually tapers towards the ends. The loops are both rectangular in cross-section. Near each of the two ends of the bow, it is decorated with a pair consisting of 3 embossed rings and 9 incised circles. On the preserved part of the catchplate it can be observed that it was decorated with two strings consisting each of two incised lines and which, most probably, formed a double „V”.

Dimensions: L. = 6,1 cm; L. bow (between the loops) = 5,6 cm; max. d. bow = 0,7 cm; min. d. bow = 0,4 cm; d. loop = 0,9 cm; thk. loop = 0,2 cm; w. catchplate = 2,2 cm; thk. catchplate = 0,1 cm; wt. = 18,62 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

8. Fragmented iron fibula with a bronze plated ribbed-bow, round in cross-section (fig.3/3).

Context: it was discovered in trench L3/2017, on the S margin of „Castravița” sandhill, at -0,22 m depth.

Dimensions: L. = 6,1 cm; d. = 0,6 cm; wt. = 16,98 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

9. Fragmented iron sandglass catchplate (fig.3/4).

Context: it was discovered at -0,75 m depth, in trench L7/2018, basically in the area between T1 and T3. In its proximity was discovered a small fragment of a channeled inverted rim from a porringer.

Despite strong erosion, it can be observed that the preserved loop is round in cross-section, while the catchplate, alongside its median part, presents a slightly profiled rib.

Dimensions: L. = 3,6 cm; w. (big base) = 2,1 cm; w. (small base) = 1,3 cm; min. w. (middle of the catchplate) = 0,9 cm; thk. (catchplate) = 0,2 cm; thk. (loop) = 0,9 cm; d. (loop) = 1,6 cm; wt. = 7,83 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

10. Fragmented iron loop from a fibula (fig.3/5).

Context: this fragmented iron loop was discovered in the E margin of the sandhill „Castravița” in trench C4/2018, at -0,90 m depth.

Dimensions: d. = 2,4 cm; thk. = 0,5 cm; wt. = 4,24 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

11. Fragmented iron sandglass catchplate (fig.3/6).

Context: it was discovered in the E margin of the sandhill „Castravița” in trench C9/2018, at -0,40 m depth.

Dimensions: L. = 3,2 cm; w. (big base) = 2,3 cm; w. (small base) = 1,1 cm; min. w. (middle of the catchplate) = 0,8 cm; wt. = 3,49 g. Museum of Oltenia Craiova, without inv. no.

Some observations

The 11 artefacts presented above do not change in a radical manner the general conclusions from the previous article. The situation is changed only from a quantitative point of view, to this day in Desa – „Castravița” being discovered a total of 34 fibulae/fragmented fibulae.

From a typological point of view, the fibulae discovered in 2017-2018 belong to the double-looped bow type, the most numerous being those with a sandglass catchplate (7 items), while one has the catchplate in form of a Boeotian shield.

With regard to the material from which they were made, four fibulae were made of iron with a bronze plated ribbed-bow (no. 2, 5, 6, 8), two were made from iron (no. 3, 4), while only a single one was made of bronze (no. 7), while for four items it is not certain the material they were made of as only small fragments from them were preserved (no. 1, 9, 10, 11).

Regarding the frequency of the types and sub-types of fibulae in the 2017-2018 archaeological campaigns, the situation is almost identical with the one from 2002-2016: most numerous are the the fibulae of „Vače type” (variant D after T. Bader⁴ – *Zweischleifige bogenfibeln mit rippenverziertem Bügel*, type 5c after S. Gabrovec⁵ or type B II₂ variant α after D. Gergova⁶), while the least numerous are those with the catchplate in form of a Boeotian shield, as the one discovered in 2017, in T10, and which, based on the bow type, belongs to variant A after T. Bader⁷, type B II₂ variant γ , according to D. Gergova⁸, Gabrovec's type 8⁹ or type 2 in the sense of Heilmann¹⁰.

Remains problematic at the moment the small bronze conical head (tutulus) (fig.2/2,3) discovered near a fragmented iron fibula with a bronze plated ribbed-bow (no.5) discovered in the mantle of T8. Only after further lab investigations remains to establish with certainty if the tutulus was either part of a spectacle-type bronze fibula or just an adornment item. The possibility that this bronze piece may have been part of a spectacle fibula is very high, as in Desa, since the beginning of the 20th c., it was discovered a fragment from such a fibula¹¹.

Conclusions

The first thing that stands out is the fairly large number of the fibulae discovered in Desa compared to similar sites (Basarabi, Balta Verde, Ostrovu Mare, etc). This might be explained, first of all, by the intensity of the research carried in the archaeological site from Desa, which started in 2001 and continues to this day.

From a chronological point of view, the types of fibulae discovered in Desa between 2002-2018 strengthen further the idea according to the sandhill „Castravița” started to be used as a funerary space by the Basarabi type communities with the second half of the 8th c. BC until the mid of the 7th c. BC.

Regarding the tutulus found in T8, even if it came from a spectacle-type fibula, it would only contribute to diversifying the types of fibulae found in the Basarabi tumular necropolis from Desa, while the chronological frame proposed above would remain unchanged.

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⁴ Bader, 1983, pp.77-78, 81-83, taf. 27/180-194; 28; 29/217-223.

⁵ Gabrovec, 1970, pp. 27-28, k.VIII.

⁶ Gergova, 1987, pp. 47-48, taf.14/181,182.

⁷ Bader, 1983, pp. 85-87, taf. 29/225-229; 30.

⁸ Gergova, 1987, pp. 49-50, taf. 16; 17/211-219.

⁹ Gabrovec, 1970, p. 32, k.XI.

¹⁰ Heilmann, 2016, pp. 12-15, fig.1, 3.

¹¹ Bâsceanu, 2017, p. 7 and footnote no.3.

tumuli from Desa. My thanks, too, go to Ana-Maria Băluță for reviewing the text in English. All the photos belong to the author. The author is also responsible for all the errors in the text.

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ABBREVIATION LIST

Godišnjak – Godišnjak. Centar za Balkanološka Ispitivanja, Sarajevo.

Oltenia – Oltenia. Studii și Comunicări, arheologie-istorie, Craiova.

PBF – Prähistorische Bronzefunde, München, Stuttgart.

Starinar – Starinar. Nova serija. Arheološki Institut Beograd, Beograd.



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

