
HORSEMEN FROM THE RHINE. EARLY ROMAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM CAPIDAVA (I)

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REZUMAT:

Articolul aduce în prim plan descoperirile de echipament militar roman din ultimile patru campanii de la Capidava, respectiv între anii 2015 și 2019. Echipamentul prezentat este, în marea parte a sa, caracteristic echipamentului călăreților auxiliari romani din secolele I-II p. Chr. Pieseile au fost descoperite în contextul cel mai timpuriu cercetat vreodată la Capidava, respectiv prima fază de piatră a castrului, mai exact ruinele unor clădiri, pe care le bănuim a fi barăci militare, situate în *retentura dextra*. Aceste clădiri au fost descoperite cu ocazia cercetării arheologice exhaustive a edificiului numit *Principia* romană târzie, o clădire mare cu absidă, care datează din secolul IV p. Chr. Acesta suprapune barăcile timpurii, care au fost anterior demolate până la nivelul primei asize de elevație din zidărie de piatră legată cu pământ.

ABSTRACT:

This paper emphasizes on the discoveries of Roman military equipment from the last four campaigns from Capidava (2015 - 2019). The equipment presented is, for the most part, characteristic of the equipment of Roman auxiliary horsemen from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. The artefacts were discovered in the earliest context ever researched at Capidava, respectively the first stone-masonry phase of the fort, more precisely the remains of some buildings, which we believe to be military barracks, located in the *retentura dextra*. These buildings were discovered during the exhaustive archaeological research of the building that we believe to be the Late Roman *Principia*, a large building with an apse, dating from the 4th century AD. It overlaps the early barracks, which were previously demolished to the level of the first elevation course, made from stone masonry bonded with earth mortar.

CUVINTE CHEIE: Echipament militar roman, pandantiv trifid, limes-ul Dunării de Jos, cavalerie romană, castrul auxiliar

KEYWORDS: Roman Military Equipment, Trifid pendant, Lower Danube limes, Roman Cavalry, Roman Auxiliary Fort

Introduction

The present paper covers the recent discoveries (2015-2019) from *Capidava* as part of the wider archaeological research project of the 'Late Roman *Principia*', a large building with an apse, dating from the 4th century AD, located in the south corner of the Late Roman *Capidava* Fort (Pl. I/1). *Capidava* is a Roman and later Early-Byzantine fort situated on the Lower Danube *limes*, as part of the province of *Moesia Inferior*, later *Scythia*¹.

The publication of this material aims to bring further proof of the early Roman occupation level from the Lower Danube area, especially at *Capidava*. We have only recently published the *balneum* from *Capidava*, dated between the 2nd and 3rd centuries and the main gate of the nearby fort (*porta principalis dextra*, if not *porta praetoria*)². However, both excavations revealed a limited quantity of small finds and conclusive artefacts, in general, relevant for dating purposes. The present endeavor is meant to bring some clarity to this subject through the publication of the first materials dating from the early centuries and to raise once more the question about the origins of the *Capidava* fort.

¹ For the historical overview, see the introduction to our latest monograph, Opreș and Rațiu 2017, 13-24.

² See, lately, Opreș et al. 2018; Opreș and Rațiu 2019a (Early Roman *balneum*); Opreș and Rațiu 2019b, 127 (main southern gate).

The Roman military equipment presented here is characteristic of the cavalry equipment from the 1st century AD. The artefacts were discovered in the earliest context ever researched at *Capidava*, respectively its first phase of construction. The archaeological context of the finds consists of the remains of some buildings, which we believe belong to the barrack blocks, located in the *retentura dextra*. These buildings were discovered during the exhaustive archaeological research of the building called the Late Roman Headquarters. The apse building overlapped the previous barracks, which were demolished to the level of the first stone course of the masonry.

Archaeological context and dating

The excavations at the 'Late Roman *Principia*' began in 1957 with the research of the early medieval context consisting of several sunken hovels that were overlapping the building³. The archaeological research of this edifice was resumed in 2013⁴ and was planned, according to a multiannual plan, involving an open-area excavation (squares of 4 × 4m). The building was divided by topographic means, first into 20 and then 28 such squares. Their excavation was carried on a predetermined order to allow the recording of as much stratigraphic information as possible. During the archaeological research, six different archaeological contexts were excavated, dating from the 1st to the 11th c. AD.

The pieces of equipment were discovered in Context no. 6, the earliest context excavated until now from *Capidava*. An array of buildings, a paved street and a well represent this context; all preserved only in a thin layer of maximum 0.40m, underneath the 4th c. *Principia*. In order to erect the larger Late Roman *Principia*, the ground needed to be leveled, and many of the former structures were destroyed on that occasion. However, some of the features of these structures were preserved at the ground level, mainly the floor and one or two courses of masonry. The floors of the barracks are made of hardened clay and have a thin layer of burning. On these floors, within what we think to have been the early Roman military barracks, the items here published were found.

The context is rich in artifacts, especially pottery shards, although the discoveries are not distributed evenly on the entire surface of the context. Inside the barracks fragments of *terra sigillata* and other fine wares were found⁵, along with the military equipment presented here and items such as a folded knife, glass fragments and a few bronze coins (the majority from Vespasian, but some as early as Claudius I⁶). Outside the barracks near the fountain, a large quantity of amphorae fragments were discovered, most of them belonging to Shelov B type⁷. The amphorae were very fragmented, nevertheless after counting singular necks and rims we estimated that as many as 36 different amphorae were discarded in that place. We are taking into the account the possibility of a rubbish pit, even though the pit itself was not found during the dig⁸.

The masonry is made of earth-bounded stone and it is preserved only at a height of a single course from the elevation. The walls are 0.6m thick, the foundations are shallow, with one or two courses of smaller stones compared to those used for the elevation courses. The floor, as mentioned above, is made of battered clay, and has a thickness of 10cm.

The area South from Barracks No.1 and Barracks No.2 represents a paved street, made from medium sized limestone slabs (Pl. II). Part of this street is overlapped and destroyed by a medieval storage pit (Pl III/1 and Pl IV/2-4). When we re-excavated this pit⁹ we used the opportunity to record the stratigraphic situation underneath the Context no. 6. The paved street was built on a layer of compacted sand that stands on natural soil, the very

³ See Florescu et al. 1959, pl. I. This first plan ever published included the short side of the *horreum* with the L-shaped corner pillar of its portico, part of the NE long side of the Late Roman headquarters and half of the building's southern pentagonal apsis and some 28 Middle Byzantine sunken hovels excavated during 1957 season. See also the general plan of the fort in the first monograph, Florescu et al. 1958, pl. I-II. Other important observations on the same *principia* building prior to the systematic research undertaken starting from the 2013 season belong to Radu Florescu, see Florescu 1975, especially 368-371.

⁴ Opreș et al. 2014, 35-36. Five subsequent campaigns followed in 2014 and in 2016-2019: Opreș et al. 2015; Opreș et al. 2017; Rațiu et al. 2018; Rațiu et al. 2019; Rațiu et al. 2020.

⁵ The pottery is still in the documentation stage, an ample study is forthcoming.

⁶ Courtesy of Mihai Dima, the numismatic expert involved with this project at *Capidava*. The coins are still under research and will be an important part of the general publication strategy. Besides these new 1st century coins, one should remind the ones known before our recent excavations: two stray finds, a Republican 2nd century BC denarius of M. Calidius, Q. Metellus and Cn. Fulvius and a Greek Imperial issue of Tomis (Domitian), were published a long time ago, see Poenaru Bordea 1983-1985, 169-170. An earlier *as* of Vespasian was found in 1983 in the eastern sector, next to curtain wall G, yet not in a relevant stratigraphic position, see Talmățchi 2005-2006, 334, no 20.

⁷ Šelov 1986, 396-397.

⁸ The area of the supposed rubbish pit was used for dwelling in the 11th century.

⁹ The mentioned storage pit was previously excavated in 1950's by a team lead by Grigore Florescu. See Florescu et al. 1959, pl. I (dwelling no. 6, partially superposing an earlier destroyed dwelling to which actually the storage pit belonged).

'Rock of *Capidava*'¹⁰. This proves the fact that our context no. 6 is the earliest context excavated so far at *Capidava*, however it does not exclude the existence of a previous timber phase erased at the construction of the subsequent stone one. Inside Barracks no. 2 the floor was removed during the excavation in the same intent to find the timber phase. One thing is certain, as it can be seen in Pl. III/2, underneath the floor of the barracks there is a layer of grey earth mixed with burned organic material, alas no artefact whatsoever. Extensive excavations on this context will eventually shed light on this issue and hopefully will reveal a 'context no.7', the much sought-for 'timber phase' from *Capidava*.

Stratigraphy

The general stratigraphy of the Building C1 is relatively simple and representative for the entire stratigraphy of *Capidava*. During the archaeological research the recording of the vertical stratigraphy of the site, and implicitly of the finds and complexes, was made by defining several archaeological contexts (Fig. 1). Thus, we have established six different contexts, as follows:

Disposition and description of the archaeological contextes	
Context no. 1	Modern vegetation level, grey-brown in colour, sandy textured; accidental finds of archaeological material.
Contemporary	
Context no. 2	Occupational level: medium-grey sediment, dusty texture, granular structure. Finds: large quantities of pottery, animal bones and adobe fragments. Complexes: Late-Byzantine sunken dwellings with battered clay floors and hearths.
9 th – 11 th c. AD	
Context no. 3	Occupational level: yellow-brown sediment, homogenous, dusty texture, low compaction degree. This is an incendiary level, proved by evidence of heavy burning. Finds: large quantities of Early byzantine pottery, ceramic construction material, burnt beams and adobe bricks. Complexes: walls from the last constructive phase of the building, with additional partition inner walls. The floors are made from battered clay.
Second half of the 6 th c. AD	
Context no. 4	Occupational level: yellow-brown sediment, homogenous, dusty texture, low compaction degree. This is an incendiary level, proved by evidence of heavy burning. Finds: Early byzantine pottery, ceramic construction material, burnt beams and adobe bricks. Complexes: last constructive phase of the building, with additional partition inner walls. The floors are made from battered clay.
Second half of the 5 th c. - first half of the 6 th c. AD	
Context no. 5	Occupational level: yellow-brown sediment, homogenous, dusty texture, low compaction degree. This is an incendiary level, proved by evidence of heavy burning. Finds: small quantities of late roman pottery, ceramic construction material, some coins, which dates the context. Complexes: walls from the first constructive phase of the building. The floors are made from battered clay and in some places of bricks planted in mortar.
4 th c. AD, possibly	
Context no. 6	Occupational level: yellow soil, sometimes deep red and black from heavy burning. Consists from foundations of walls, made by stone and earth masonry, with battered clay floors and outdoor street pavements. Finds: large quantities of early roman pottery, especially amphorae, military equipment and coins. Complexes: stone buildings, narrow paved streets, a fountain and a large dumping area.
Second half of the 1 st - first half of the 2 nd c. AD	

Fig. 1. The Stratigraphy of *Capidava*, graphical representation.

The military equipment presented in this study was collected from the last (first in chronological order) Roman contexts discovered, namely Context No. 6.

¹⁰ The fort at *Capidava* was erected on a large limestone cliff on the right bank of the Danube, guarding the nearby ford of the river.

Artefacts

Trifid pendants and phalera. The first ensemble was discovered inside Barracks No. 1 near the western wall on the floor (Pl. II) during the 2016 campaign. This type of artefact is a junction loop *phalera*¹¹ with a trifid pendant¹² attached to it (Fig. 2). The pendant has the shape of an oak leaf with two lateral terminals stylized as acorns. The surface of the decorum is represented by stylized grapevine leaves made by *niello* decoration technique. The *phalera* was decorated in the same technique but with a simpler design, namely a rosette. Both objects were made from copper alloy and plated in silver. Today little remains from the decorum, only small fragments of decoration and scraps of silver-plating, enough to indicate, combined with the study of the analogies, how the entire decoration really looked like. Both *phalera* and pendant are still connected together from a loop holder on the back-side of the *phalera*.

From functional perspective, the *phalera* belongs to the type Bishop 2d¹³, the pendant on the other hand belongs to the type Bishop 1c¹⁴. The loops on the back of the *phalera* were used to strap the garment on a leather girdle from the harness located on the chest area (Pl. V). Usually, there was more than one such adornments on a single harness belt. The Doorwerth¹⁵ find shows (Pl. VI) several small *phalera* and pendants on both sides of the chest and a larger set in the center. Besides the visual effect there must have been a phonic effect also, a sort of jingle, which multiplied to a few dozen horses would have been quite impressive (Pl. XI).

The piece was discovered in Barracks no. 2¹⁶, a long and relatively narrow building, belonging to the first archaeological context from *Capidava*, a building almost entirely demolished during the construction of the Late Roman Headquarters (Pl. II). Underneath the foundations of the Headquarters, there were uncovered, among other things, two buildings (Barracks no. 1 and Barracks no. 2), built side-by-side, 5 m in width and more than 10 m in length¹⁷. They were built near a street paved with stone. The few finds inside those two buildings are military objects and fine ware pottery.

Some of the most notable analogies (especially for the pendant) were discovered at Magdalensberg and Wroxeter¹⁸,

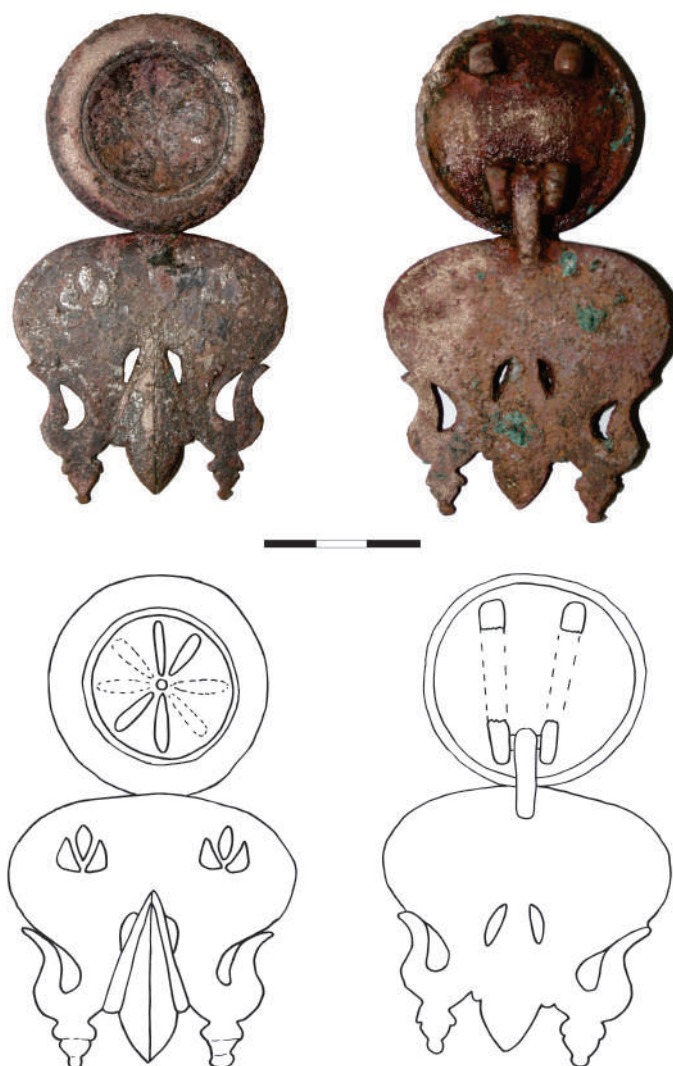


Fig. 2. Trifid pendant and *phalera* from *Capidava* (2016).

¹¹ Diameter: 4.5cm.

¹² Length: 5.7cm; Width: 5.8cm.

¹³ Bishop 1988, 139, fig. 41.

¹⁴ Bishop 1988, 142, fig. 43.

¹⁵ Holwerda 1931, fig. 11 (after Nicolay 2007, 186, fig. 5.11)

¹⁶ The exact function of the building is still under discussion, we are still processing the information from these contexts. The working hypothesis is that it served as military barracks.

¹⁷ Not being the focus of the research they were not entirely excavated, namely their north-eastern side is still not researched.

¹⁸ Bishop and Coulston 2006, 120, fig. 70, nos. 3, 8.

also at Doorwerth¹⁹, Rottweil²⁰, Xanten²¹, Gardun (*Tilurium*, Croatia)²², Biatorbágy²³ (Hungary), *Singidunum*²⁴, *Dura Europos*²⁵. In Dacia there is an almost perfect analogy at Prejmer²⁶ and an analogy for the phalera at *Sarmizegetusa Regia*²⁷. The items are dating from the middle of the first century, based on analogies from other Roman military contexts²⁸.

A second set of phalera²⁹ with trifold pendant³⁰ (Fig. 3) was discovered in the 2018 campaign, situated at around 10 m to the east from the first one (Pl. II). This second garment was in close proximity to a small javelin head, very poorly preserved. The *phalera* is well preserved, but the pendant is missing its lower half. Both the *phalera* and the pendant are identical with the first set, therefore could date from the same time with the same analogies. Being a more recent find the *phalera* and pendant are still in process of restoration and conservation. As it can be observed at Doorwerth, the pendants from a single set are almost identical in size, type and execution (Pl. IV). The ones discovered at *Capidava* have slight differences in size; nevertheless, they belong to the same typology so one cannot exclude any option.

The production of these type of fittings would have been a complex process carried out by highly specialized personnel. J. Oldenstein argues that the silvered and nielloed fittings were produced in large military workshops from Italy and/or Gaul, no later than the middle of the Flavian period³¹. The method used in the production of the fittings was the so-called lost wax method, with one-time molds, which made them reasonably expensive and sought after³².

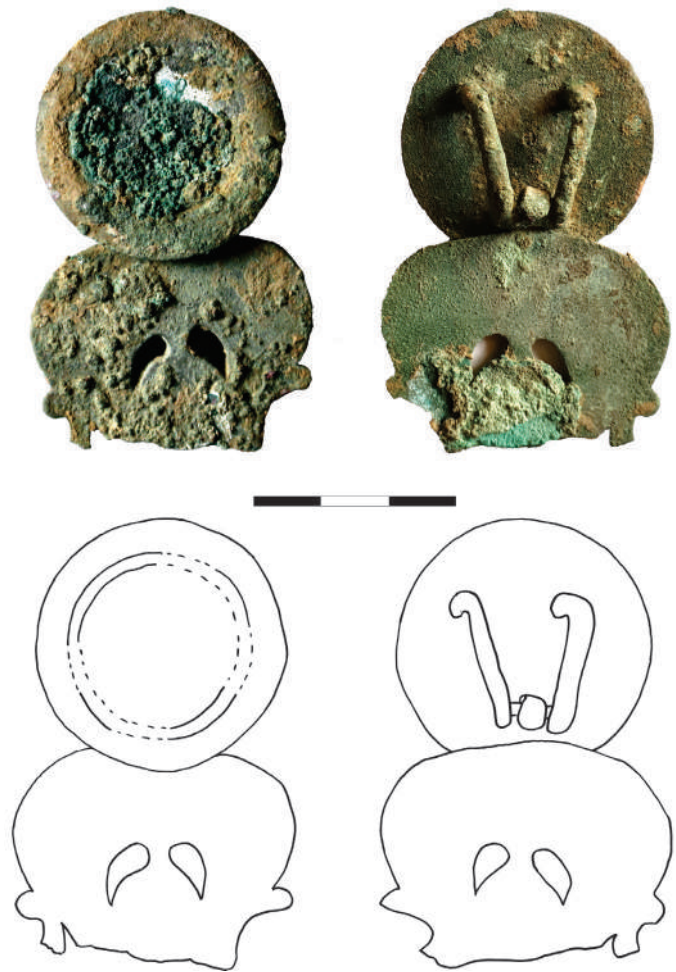


Fig. 3 Trifold pendant and phalera from *Capidava* (2018).

Lunate pendant. The symbol of the crescent moon is widely spread across history, from prehistory to present day; the crescent (*lunula*) is a very powerful symbol, which represented throughout the antiquity the moon and femininity, complementary to the phalera, which represented the sun and masculinity³³. For the Roman horsemen the *lunula* was very important, since this type of garment is found in many sites and very different contexts for both horses and men. The reliefs from Trajan's Column depict numerous horses wearing *lunula* pendants hanged from

¹⁹ Nicolay 2007, 186, fig. 5.11.

²⁰ Dixon and Southern 1992, 69, fig. 38.

²¹ Nicolay 2007, 144, fig. 4.10

²² Radman-Livaja 2010, 93, no. 81.

²³ Mrav 2010, 154, fig. 3.

²⁴ Vujcovic 2013, 33, Pl. I/5.

²⁵ James 2010, 88-89, no 190, fig. 41, no. 190.

²⁶ Petculescu 1998, 265, no. 18, pl. 5/18.

²⁷ Ferencz 2009.

²⁸ Bishop 1988, 112-116; Dixon and Southern 1992, 68; Bishop and Coulston 2006, 120-121; James 2010, 88; Petculescu 1998, 285.

²⁹ Diameter: 4cm.

³⁰ Preserved length: 3.4cm; Width: 4.4cm.

³¹ Oldenstein 1985, 86-87.

³² Oldenstein 1985, 87.

³³ Bishop 1988, 107.

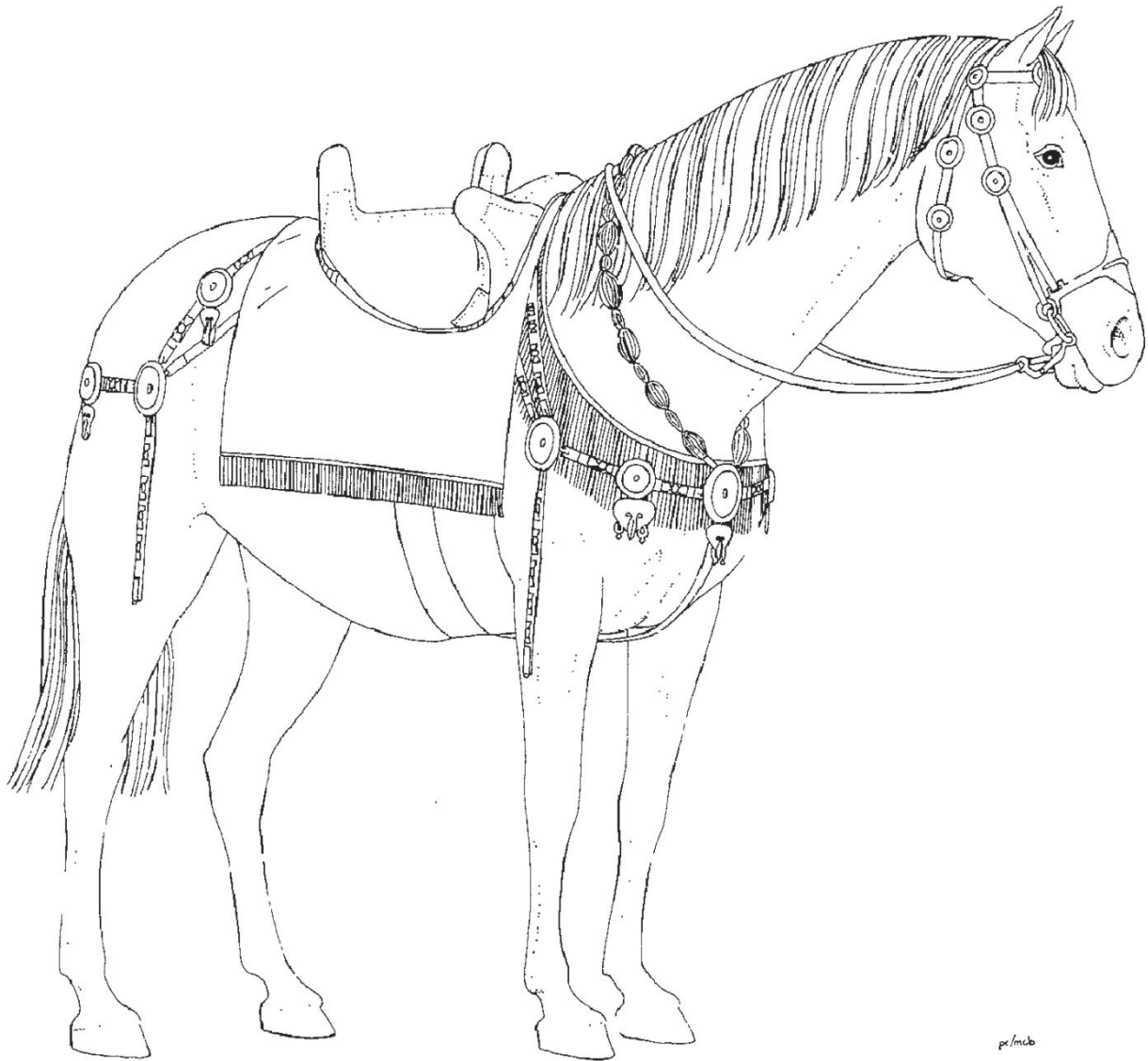


Fig. 4. Typical Flavian harness (Bishop 1988, 114, fig. 30)



Fig. 5. Lunule pendant (lunula) from Capidava.

phalerae and pinned to their peyralls or to other parts of their equipment (Pl. III). The *Capidava* lunate pendant³⁴ is a relatively large bronze piece, somewhat poorly preserved. It belongs to the type Bishop 9g³⁵, arguably the most simple type. Unlike the lunular pendants made for human wear, this one is one sided, meaning that it has a front and a back, therefore used for adorning the horse equipment.

As previously mentioned, the lunate motif was widely spread all-over the Roman world, therefore many analogies can be found for the one in *Capidava*, such as those from Wiesbaden, Zugmantel, Aalen, Osterburken, Straubing and Langendiebach³⁶ (Germany), Beuningen (Netherlands)³⁷, and *Dura Europos*³⁸ in Syria.

„D” shaped belt buckle.

The Roman military belt, *cingulum militare (militiae)*, was most probably called a *balteus*³⁹ during the first two centuries A.D. when it also indicated the status of its bearer. Although the décor of the belt was very different from

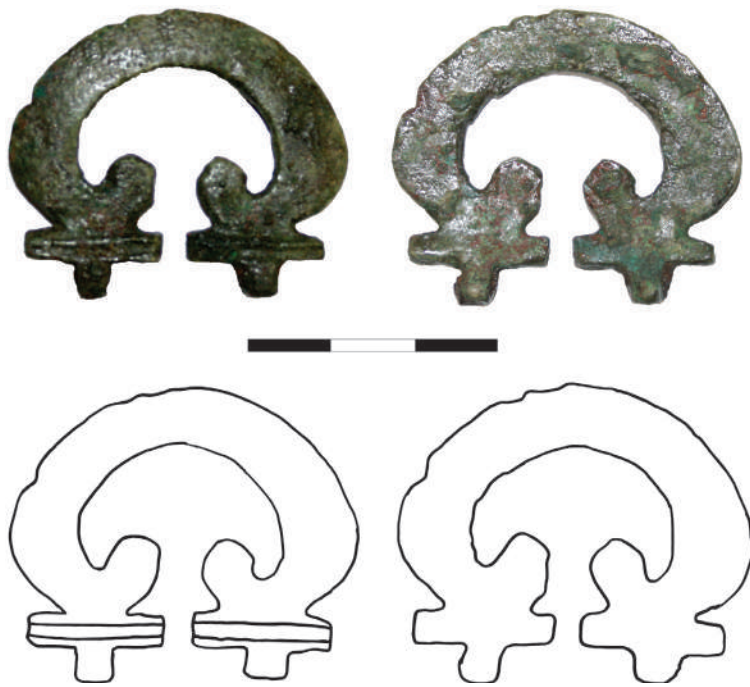


Fig. 6. „D” shaped belt buckle from *Capidava*.

one piece to another, the belt buckles were usually D shaped with internal volutes. These buckles were attached to a bronze plate; which was then attached to the leather belt itself. Commonly the tongue of this type of belt buckle was of the *fleur de lys* type, although, in the absence of the tongue one can only speculate.

The buckle from *Capidava*⁴⁰ has a common form, a well-known typological evolution, and is exceptionally well preserved. The loop of the buckle is wedge-shaped in section and ends in two inward curved lobes. There are two basal bars each with a broad transverse groove above each of the hinge loops; the only atypical characteristic of the piece is that the basal bars are not joined.

The buckle was used to fasten the waist belt of the soldier, and it is usually found in connection with both infantry and cavalry. Very close analogies were found at Roecliffe⁴¹ and Hod Hill⁴² in United Kingdom, Wijk bij Duurstede⁴³

and Velsen⁴⁴ in Netherlands, Wiesbaden in Germany⁴⁵, *Dura Europos*⁴⁶, *Viminacium*⁴⁷, *Tilurium*⁴⁸ (Gardun, Croatia) and also in *Barbaricum*, at Socu-Bărbătești⁴⁹ (Gorj County, Romania).

³⁴ Diametre: 4.1cm.

³⁵ Bishop 1988, 152, fig. 47.

³⁶ Oldenstein 1977, 254, Taf. 44/435-441.

³⁷ Nicolay 2007, 232, fig. 6.12/16.

³⁸ James 2010, 88-89, no 192-198, fig. 41, no. 192-198.

³⁹ Bishop and Coulston 2006, 106.

⁴⁰ Length: 3.7cm; Width: 4.5cm.

⁴¹ Bishop 2005, 182-183, fig. 27/9.

⁴² Bishop and Coulston 2006, 108, fig. 62, no. 15.

⁴³ Nicolay 2007, 36, fig. 2.11.

⁴⁴ Bishop and Coulston 2006, 108, fig. 62, no. 19.

⁴⁵ Oldenstein 1977, 211-212, 275, Taf. 74/971.

⁴⁶ James 2010, 76-77, no 52, fig. 37, no. 52.

⁴⁷ Redzic 2013, 27, fig. 5.

⁴⁸ Radman-Livaja 2010, 76, cat. no. 41.

⁴⁹ Petculescu 1997, 263, no. 4, pl. 1/4.

Dating issues

From all the archaeological finds discovered in the edifice in question, the fine wares pottery (*vasa escaria*) are the most reliable in terms of dating. The narrow dating of these artefacts offered the research team valuable dating markers for the entire context. Therefore, the rather large number of *terra sigillata* finds discovered in connection with the military equipment is invaluable for contextualization.

On top, the typology of the equipment in question is most relevant in terms of dating. Back in 1988 M. C. Bishop made a most compelling argument⁵⁰ for the dating and the typology of the equine harness equipment. Since then all the experts in this field, without exception, adhered to his assertions and chronological typology.

If we start from the assumption that this type of pendants appeared in Magdalensberg, the form's *terminus post quem* is situated around 40 AD⁵¹. It started to circulate during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD)⁵² and increased its frequency in the decades that followed. This can be deduced from studying the sites where other similar artifacts were discovered: the vast majority are dated in the Flavian era. The trifold *phalera* pendants abruptly disappeared from usage from the middle of the eighth decade of the 1st century AD⁵³. Oldenstein separates the finds in two dating groups: the Early Flavian and Late Flavian ones⁵⁴.

Who used to wear them?

The pendants were obviously accessories for horses, however, the question remains, to whom did these horses belong? Because artifacts do not mean much without a historical context, the true aim of every archaeologist is, or should be, to bring even a small contribution to the history of a place, a region, a population, etc. At *Capidava* during the *Principate* there are two military units attested, through inscriptions from the necropolis and a few brick stamps, namely: *cohors (I) Ubiorum equitata* and *cohors I Germanorum civium Romanorum*, both recruited originally from the Rhine area. The fragments of equipment presented in this paper are without exception dated in the first century AD, therefore we consider that troopers from *cohors I Ubiorum equitata* may be their real owners.

The Ubian unit was probably raised under Augustus⁵⁵, as *cohors Ubiorum peditum et equitum*, and served in the campaign led by Germanicus in 15 AD against the rebel Arminius⁵⁶. Under Tiberius the unit bears the title *cohors Ubiorum equitata*, as it appears on a funeral monument from Aquileia belonging to a *praefectus* Titus Iulius C.f. Fab. Viator⁵⁷.

The *Ubii* warriors were brought to Moesia probably shortly after the middle of the first century AD. The troop appears on the diploma from April 28, year 75 AD, as part of the army of Moesia⁵⁸, under the short title "*Ubiorum*", without any numeral or adjective. Another mention of this unit is on a military diploma from 97 AD⁵⁹, once again without numeral. The only known quarters for the troop in Moesia is the fort from *Capidava*, which the unit itself probably also erected.

One tile stamp⁶⁰ (Pl. X/3) and a funerary monument⁶¹ (Pl. X/1) bear witness to its presence at *Capidava*, or at least this was the situation until now. However, both records are very interesting thru the background information that they offer. The tile stamp, in almost cursive writing, without numeral and with the initials VB in a ligature, is clearly indicating a very early dating. In the process of documentation of this tile stamp we uncovered a second fragment of the stamp (see pl. X/2), which at first was interpreted differently⁶². It turned out to be the second *Cohors Vbiorum* stamped tile, identical with the first one.

The inscription on the other hand is a funerary monument and belongs to a veteran of *cohors I Ubiorum*, namely Marcus Cocceius Vitlus. He was honorably discharged during Nerva's short reign, after faithfully serving for 28 years (most likely on September 9th, 97 after being recruited in AD 69, in the context of the Civil War and early

⁵⁰ Bishop 1988.

⁵¹ Mackensen 1991, 174.

⁵² Oldenstein 1985, 87; Mackensen 1991, 174–175.

⁵³ Oldenstein 1985, 87.

⁵⁴ Oldenstein 1985, 86–87.

⁵⁵ Saddington 1982, 59.

⁵⁶ Saddington 1982, 28.

⁵⁷ Holder 1980, 244, no. E 18.

⁵⁸ Eck and Pangerl 2009, 506-509.

⁵⁹ Weisz 1997, 233-238; see also Eck and Pangerl 2009, 510-512.

⁶⁰ Oprea 1997. A second possible later variant of the stamp type has been recently published: Petolescu 2020. It was found north of the Danube, in Strejeştii de Jos (Olt County).

⁶¹ Florescu et al. 1958, 73-77, nr. 1; AÉ 1960, 330 = ISM V, 24.

⁶² Covacef 2000.

reign of Vespasian)⁶³. After his honorable discharge, this *peregrinus* of Celtic origin⁶⁴ became a Roman citizen and important member of the local society at *Capidava*. He passed away septuagenarian, in the early part of Hadrian's reign. One should stress here that usually the veterans remain in the provinces where they have served the most and have grown roots; therefore, we can presume that Marcus Cocceius Vitlus was stationed at *Capidava* at least a few years before the short reign of Nerva.

It is recorded that the unit was part of the great Trajan's army during the Dacian campaigns⁶⁵, and we believe that immediately after the war the unit was (at least partially) brought back to its garrison in *Capidava*⁶⁶. Insofar, the last known diploma to the *exercitus* in Moesia Inferior mentioning *cohors Ubiorum* is that from Sexaginta Prista, dated May 13, 105⁶⁷. It probably remained here until the arrival of *cohors I Germanorum (civium Romanorum)*, which came from Germania Superior before 121⁶⁸. This other German troop remained at *Capidava* up to mid. 3rd century⁶⁹. As to *cohors Ubiorum*, it will be listed a few years later in the army of Dacia Inferior, in the *Asseria* diploma, dated 12 February 126⁷⁰.

Conclusion

The beginnings of the Roman fort at *Capidava* are somewhat in obscurity, as nobody can say for sure the event or the decade in which the fort was first built. It is clear that it was erected after AD 46, yet one may assume either the early years of Vespasian, a moment linked to the making of the province of Moesia Inferior or even later, until the end of the Dacian Campaigns of Emperor Trajan. The safe assumption was to attribute the erection of the fort at *Capidava* to Trajan who ordered its construction as part of the effort to strengthen the Danube limes after the Dacian incursion into Moesia. Until recently there were too many stray finds from the early period of the fort and very few objects discovered in context. Nothing inside the precinct was excavated, nevertheless, published. The areas dated in the first two centuries that have been already excavated were the *balneum*, the harbor and the necropolis. The bathhouse (*balneum*) excavated thirty years ago waited until last year for publication, alas not by the original team that did the main excavation⁷¹. The harbor and the necropolis still await to be published, with no foreseeable finalization.

Our paper aims to raise an important question: wouldn't it be more logical and simple to explain that the auxiliary fort from *Capidava* was erected by and for *cohors I Ubiorum equitata*, somewhere before the making of the Province of Moesia Inferior? It would give an explanation as to where the troop of Ubians was stationed until the reign of Trajan (since it was attested in Moesia and yet no other site would claim them!). In addition, the rather early military equipment presented above, along with some other ceramic fine ware and a few coins, all dated at the middle of the first century AD, would have an obvious explanation. Even the elevated status among the local elite of some veteran families from the Ubian cohort would make more sense, since in this scenario the troop would have been at *Capidava* for almost half a century.

J. Oldenstein discusses in a paper from 1985⁷² the production of the military equipment and how the study of this topic is relevant in the historical interpretation of the archaeological context. One of the examples he offered in his paper is about the harness fittings with phalera and pendant, silvered and decorated in *niello* technique. The scholar argues that this type of equipment is found in the long pacified and rich provinces and in the newly conquered or in course of being conquered provinces. In „older” *limes* provinces the finds are already local copies of the originals usually lacking decoration. In the light of this demonstration, we are once more inclined to place the finds from *Capidava* in the early Flavian period. An interesting parallel to this situation is the *Samia vasa*⁷³ production that near the end of the first century AD loses in quality but gains in quantity as a result of a production shift from the Gallic and Italic centers which lose ground in favor of the local production⁷⁴.

⁶³ Opreș 2018, 151-152. On the troop's listing in two imperial constitutions dated September 9, 97, see Eck and Pangerl 2009, 510-512.

⁶⁴ Opreș 2018, 151 and n. 27. The *cognomen* Vitlus is known in several inscriptions from Gaul, *Germania superior* and *Regio II* in southern Italy.

⁶⁵ Petolescu 2002, 134; Matei-Popescu 2010, 235.

⁶⁶ Aricescu 1977, 84-94.

⁶⁷ Matei-Popescu 2010, 235 and n. 2120.

⁶⁸ AÉ 2008, 1728, a military diploma, copied after a constitution issued in AD 121.

⁶⁹ Matei-Popescu 2010, 214.

⁷⁰ Petolescu 2020, 134; AÉ 2009, 1035.

⁷¹ Opreș et al. 2019; Opreș and Rațiu 2019.

⁷² Oldenstein 1985.

⁷³ The unpublished Samian pottery from this context from *Capidava* is, although very fragmentary, of the best quality and most definitely imported, Gaul included.

⁷⁴ Oldenstein 1985, 88.

It is then possible, if not probable, that *Capidava* was one of the first forts erected in the early years of Vespasian and manned by *cohors Ubiorum equitata*. The troop's earliest mention within the army of Moesia in the diploma given in 75 AD fits with this assumption and one should accordingly imagine an initial Flavian "Holzlager" at *Capidava*. Given the 3rd-4th century *a fundamentis* reconstruction of the fort we should point out that such an earth and timber phase would be extremely difficult to identify in any archaeological context. One should finally add that supplementary arguments to Vespasian's construction activities by the Lower Danube are available elsewhere in Dobrudja, but we shall leave this important topic to a later, thorough analysis.

Our theory regarding a Flavian *Capidava* will have to wait for being checked and confirmed, after the analysis of the entire material from the earliest context from *Capidava*, including the numismatic finds. This supposition makes sense if we are to take into consideration the conversion of the local *dava* – an important "Machtzentrum" in Getic times and possibly also one of the Thracian strongholds in early 1st century AD. Florian Matei-Popescu has convincingly demonstrated in two different contributions the whole 1st century history of the land and the subtle takeover and adaptation from Thracian *strategiae* to Roman fortresses and *territoria*, such as *territorium Capidavense*.⁷⁵ The succeeding Roman *Capidava* kept being an important crossing point of the river with a well-documented customs *statio*⁷⁶, and controlled a large agricultural territory, with many *vici*, *villae rusticae* and local communities, quite expressive according to epigraphic sources⁷⁷.

ABBREVIATIONS

AÉ	L'Année Épigraphique. Revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'antiquité romaine, Paris, 1888–.
ISM V	Em. Doruțiu-Boilă, <i>Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris, V: Capidava-Troesmis-Noviodunum</i> , București, 1980.

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⁷⁵ Matei-Popescu 2017; Matei-Popescu 2018.

⁷⁶ Opiș and Rațiu 2016.

⁷⁷ Bărbulescu 2001, 104-112, 184-188.

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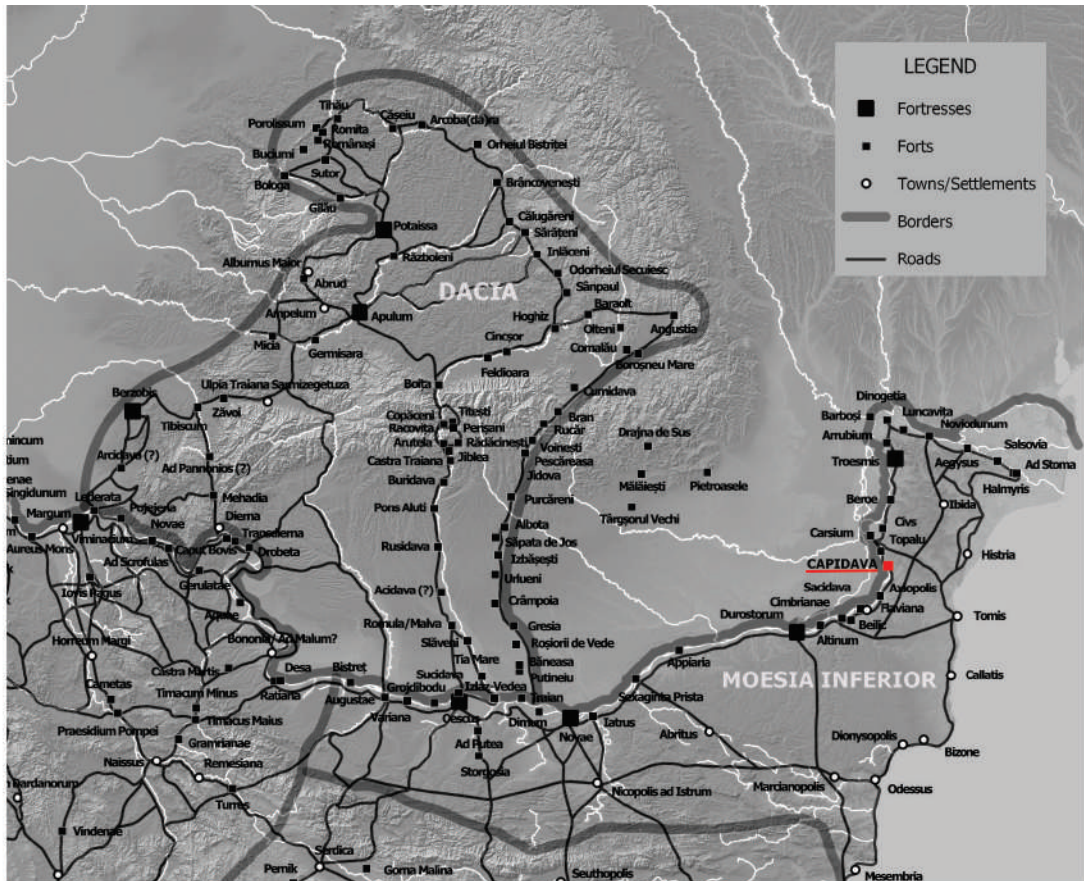
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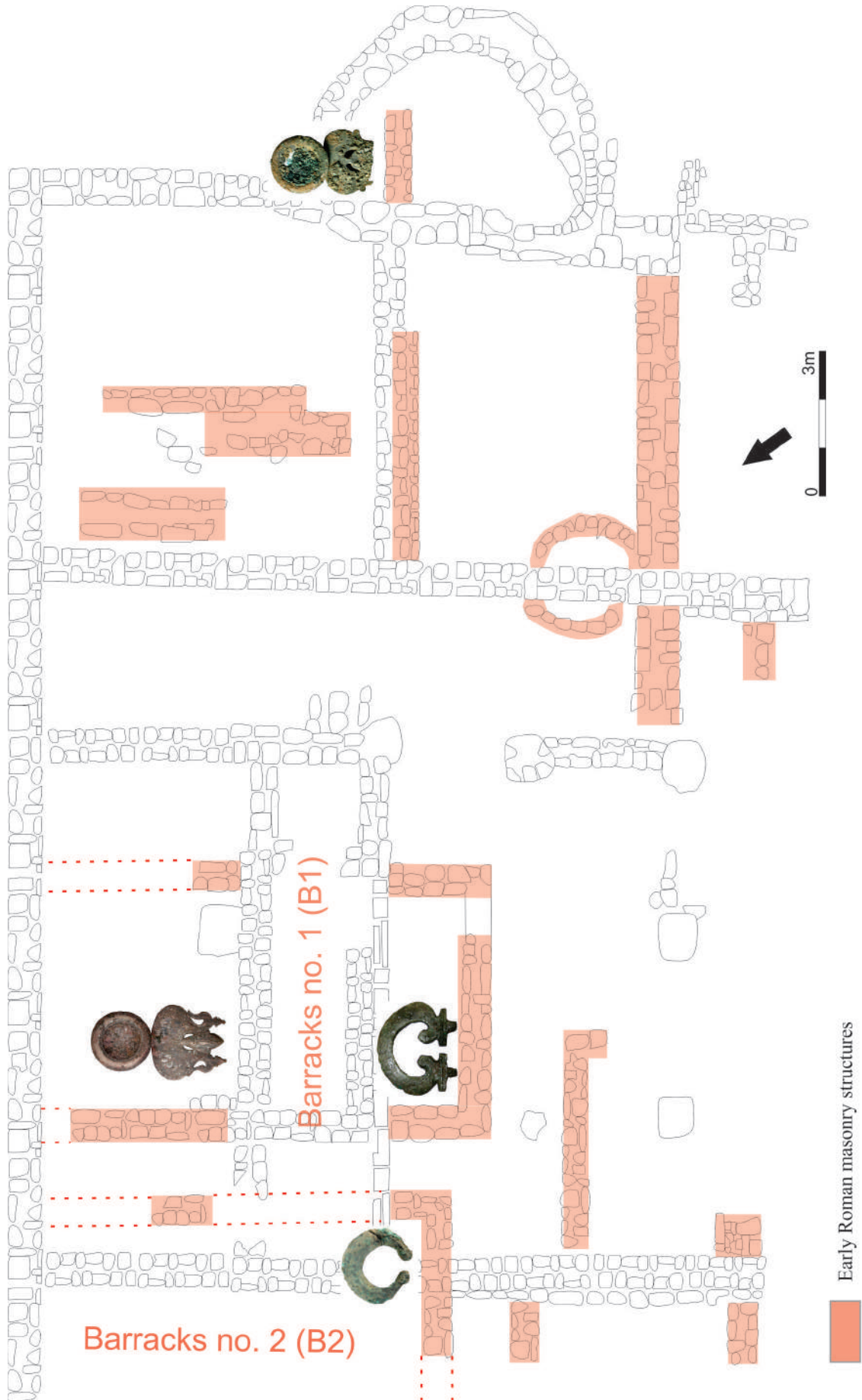


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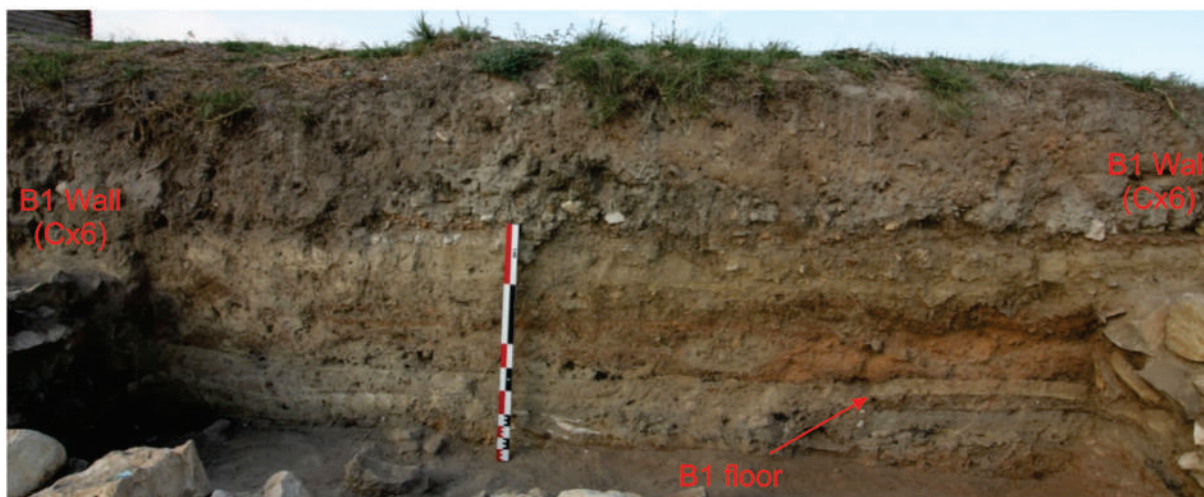
Pl. I. 1. Lower Danube Provinces (after Matei-Popescu and Țentea 2018, 157, pl. I);
2. Capidava Roman fort, Baths and Necropolis (after the authors).



Pl. II. Plan of the Late roman Principia excavations, with emphasis on the Early Roman discoveries, with light red (drawing and photo by Al. Rațiu).

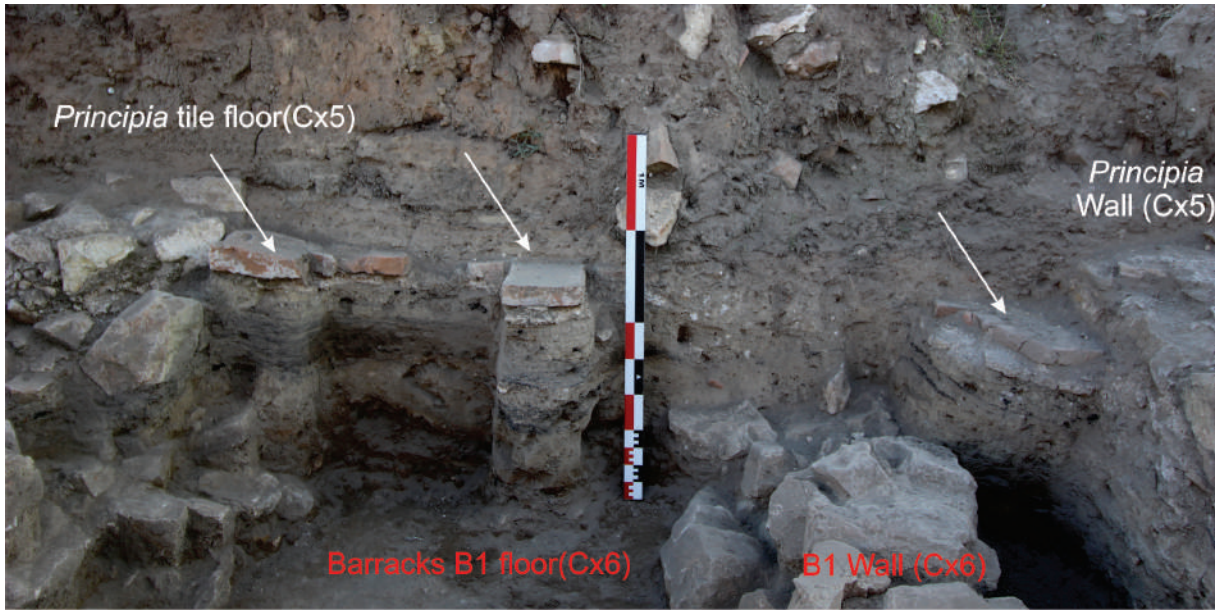


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Pl. III. 1. Orthophotoplan of the Principia from 2017 (photo by Dan Costea); 2. Profile thru Barracks no. 1, with the floor on which the belt buckle and the first trifid pendant and phalera were found (photo by Al. Rațiu).



1



2

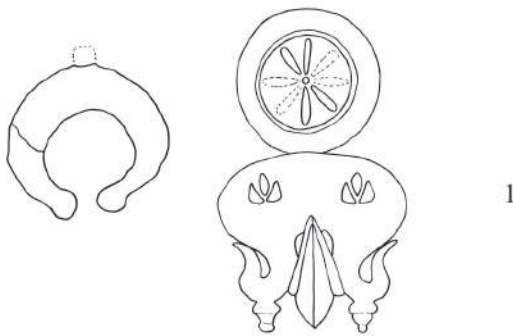
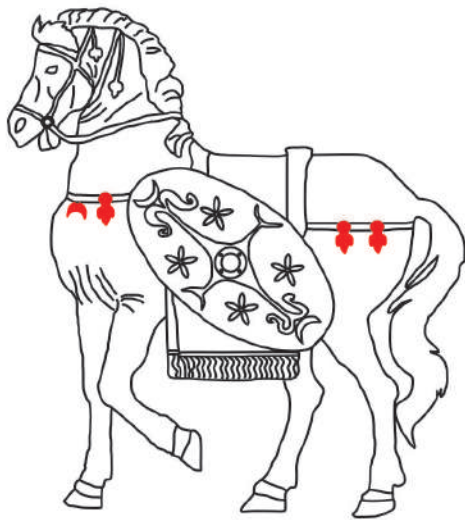


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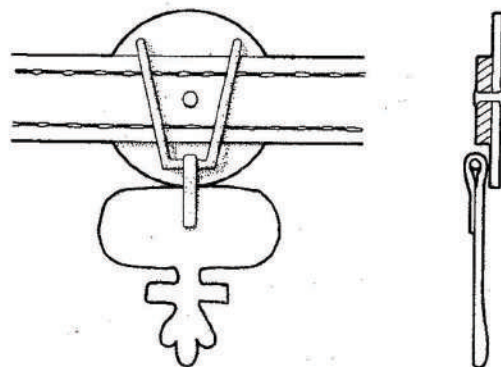


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Pl. IV. 1. Profile thru Barracks No. 1 with detail of the tile floor of the principia and the context beneath this floor; 2. Detail with the provisions pit G1, southern exposure; 3. Detail with the profile resulted from the excavation of G1, near the scale is the wall of B1; 4. Photograph with G1 pit, B1 barracks and the paved street. (Photos by Al. Rațiu)



2

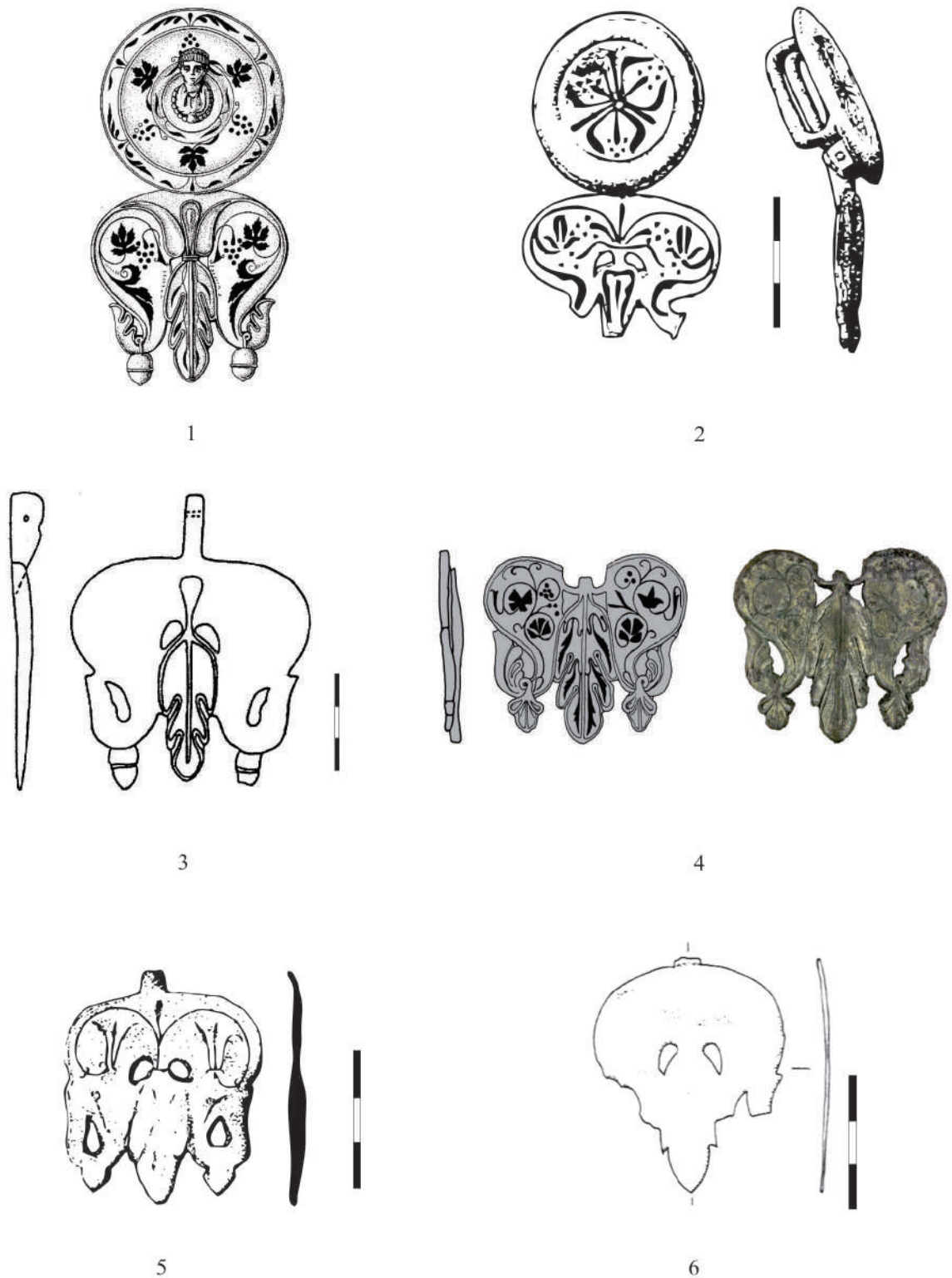


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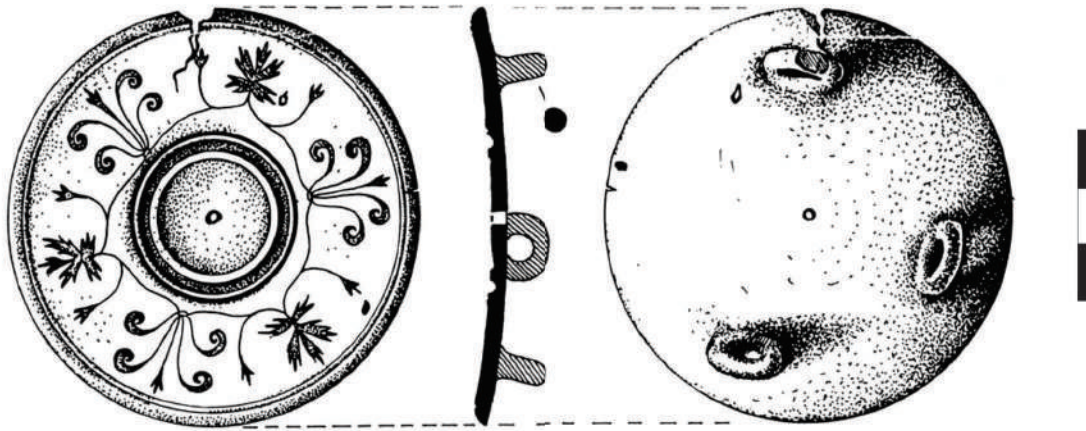
Pl. V. 1. Representation on Trajan's Column of horses adorned with the type of fittings discovered at Capidava (photo and drawing by Al. Rațiu); 2. Lunula on a roman cavalry equipment depicted by a metope from Adamclisi Monument (© Constanta - Muzeul National de Istorie si Arheologie, Foto: Ortoľ Harl 2012, downloaded from <http://lupa.at/21419/photos/3>) 3. Example of how the phalera was fitted on a leather strap (after Bishop 1988, 97, fig. 24/2).



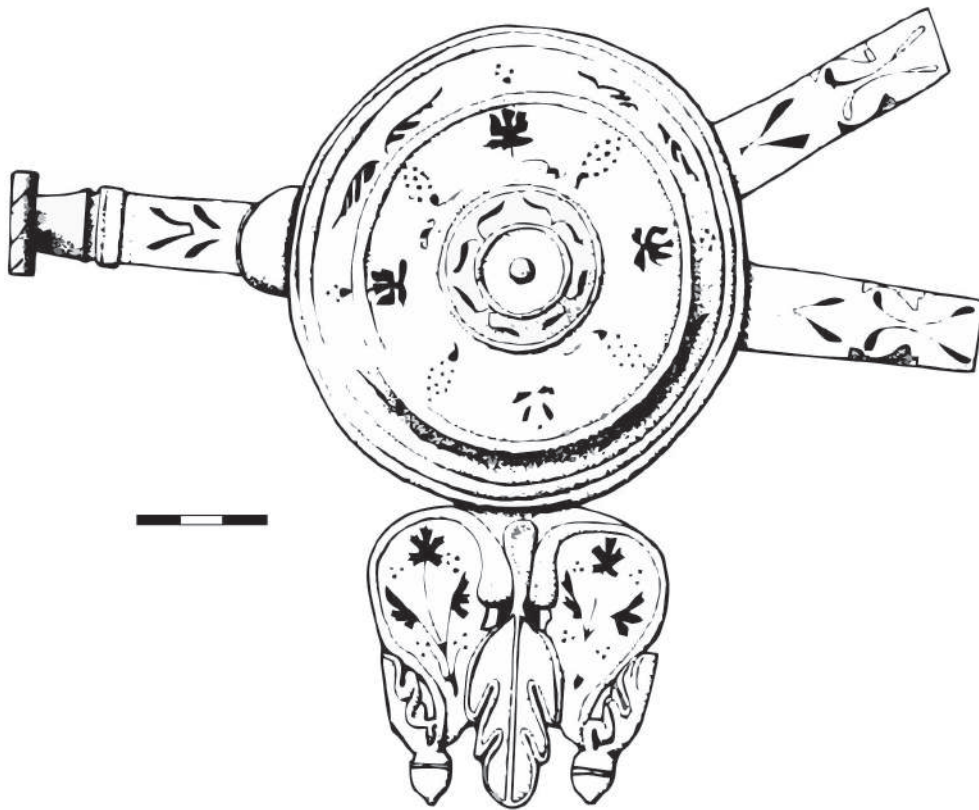
Pl. VI. 1. A very close analogy from Doorwert (after Nicolay 2007, 186, fig. 5.11); 2. Capidava (photo by Al. Rațiu); 3. The entire set discovered at Doorwert (after Nicolay 2007, 186, fig. 5.11). The finds from Capidava resemble in shape and size with the smaller ones from Doorwert.



Pl. VII. Analogies for the trifold pendants: 1. Xanten (after Nicolay 2007, 144, fig. 4.10; not to scale); 2. Wroxeter (after Bishop and Coulston 2006, 120, fig. 70, no. 8); 3. Prejmer (after Petculescu 1998, 282, Pl. 5/18); 4. Biatorbágy (after Mrav 2010, 154, fig. 3; not to scale); 5. Rottweil (after Dixon and Southern 1992, 69, fig. 38); 6. Dura Europos (after James 2010, 89, fig. 41, no. 190).

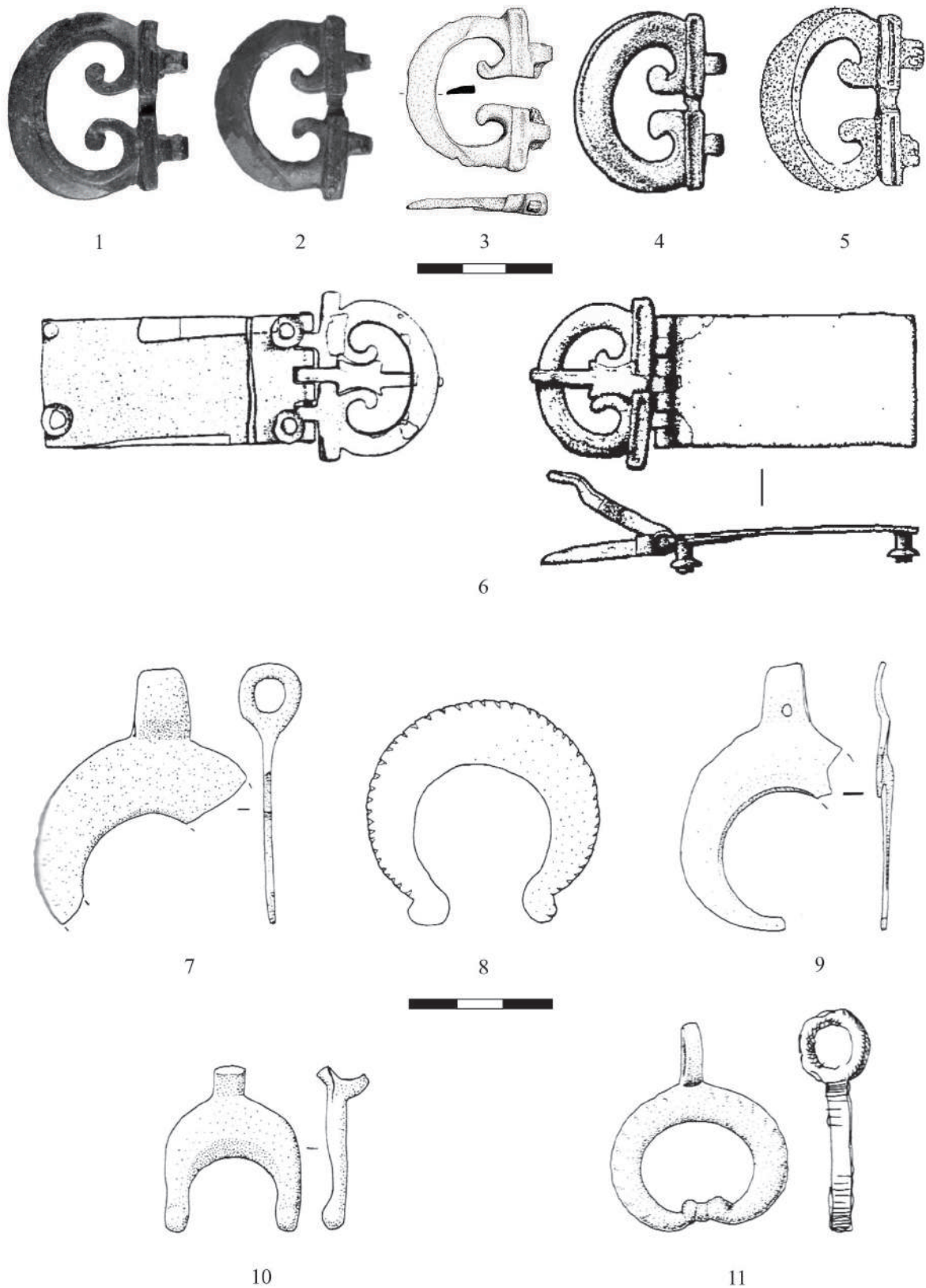


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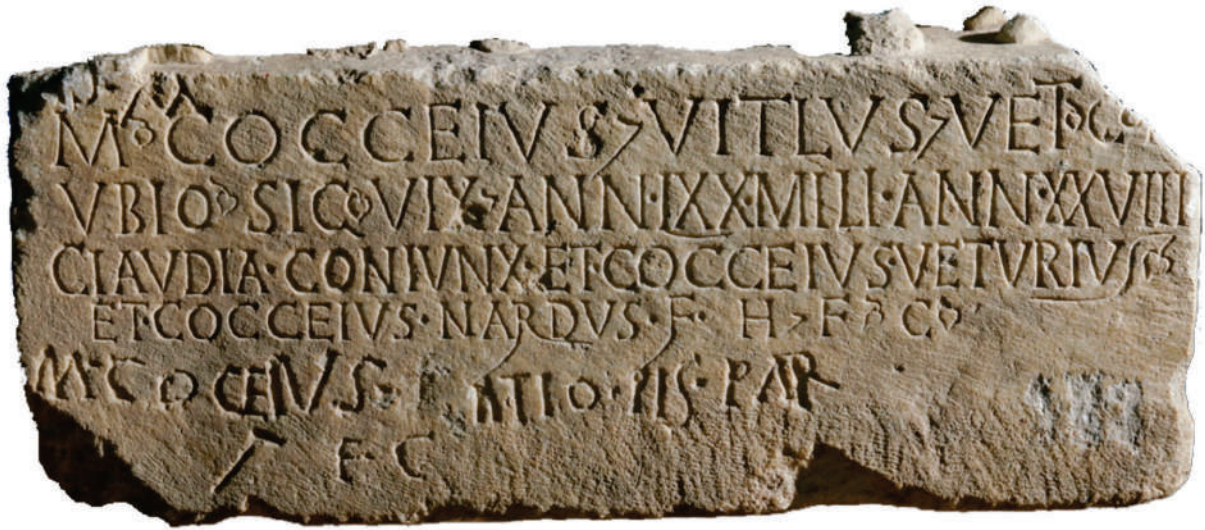


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Pl. VIII. 1. Analogies for the trifold pendants: Sarmizegetusa Regia (after Ferencz 2009, 69, fig. 1);
2. Rheingonheim (after Bishop and Coulston 2006, 120, fig. 70, no. 3).



Pl. IX. Analogies for the belt buckle and lunula pendant: 1. Wijk bij Duurstede (after Nicolay 2007, 36, fig. 2.11);
 2. Gardun/Tilurium (after Radman-Livaja 2010, 76, cat. no. 41); 3. Roeliffje (after Bishop 2005, fig. 27/9);
 4. Hod Hill (after Bishop and Coulston 2006, 120, fig. 70, no. 8); 5. Weisbaden (after Oldenstein 1977, taf. 74/971,
 no. 4, pl. 1/4); 6. Velsen (after Bishop and Coulston 2006, 108, fig. 62, no. 19);
 7 - 11. Dura Europos (after James 2010, 89, fig. 41, no. 192-198).



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Pl. X. 1. Funerary monument of M. Cocceius Vitulus, veteran of cohorts I Ubiorum (© Constanta - Muzeul National de Istorie si Arheologie, Foto: Ortolf Harl 2012, downloaded from <http://lupa.at/15214/photos/1>); 2. Tile stamp of cohorts I Ubiorum (photo I. C. Opreș; drawing Al. Rațiu); 3. Tile stamp of cohorts I Ubiorum (photo I. C. Opreș; drawing after Opreș 1997, 278, fig. 1).



1



2

Pl. XI. 1 - 2. Graphic reconstructions of various military horse garments of the late 1st - early 2nd c. AD.
(© MNIT, Expo LIMES, drawing by P. Connely).