

# A BALDRIC TERMINAL DISCOVERED AT THE ROMAN TOWN AND FORT OF *POROLISSVM* (ROMAN *DACIA*, TODAY ROMANIA)

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In order to identify new spots for future archaeological excavations a field survey has been organized at *Porolissum* in May 2004 by the County Museum of Zalău. Amongst the artefacts retrieved with this occasion the most attractive item is the *balteus* strap-end.

The piece, made of bronze, is entirely preserved, except the missing rivet from the hinge that held together the fix and the mobile parts of the piece (pl. 1-2).

The piece has 13.8 cm total length, 4.3 cm maximal width and 0.3 cm thickness.

The fix part is 8.9 cm long (including the protuberances to attach the mobile part) and 4.3 cm maximal wide. On the rear side of the fix part there are 5 rivets in a triangular lay out, which served to attach this piece on the baldric belt.

The mobile part is 6 cm long and a maximal width of 3.3 cm. As the decoration, this part is a representation at a smaller scale of the fix part.

The decoration motifs consist of *pelta*, "trumpets" and sea-horses designs. The decoration is the same on both parts of the artefact, but smaller on the mobile part due to its sizes. (see pl. 1-2).

Such a piece was attached at the end of the baldric (*balteus*) - a broad belt that rested on the right shoulder and ran diagonally across the body, suspending the sword on the left-hand side.<sup>1</sup> (see pl. 4)

Concerning the functionality and the manufacture technique, similar analogies have been found within on the Raetian limes: Zugmantel, Feldberg, Weissenburg (Germany) and Corbridge (United Kingdom)<sup>2</sup>. Until this piece, in Romania it was known 1 fragment from - the mobile part - discovered in the auxiliary fort from Gherla<sup>3</sup> (see pl. 5, no. 1)

The find spot of this *balteus* terminal is located at circa 80 m N-W of the N-W corner of the temple of Jupiter Dolichenus (see the map of the site). It must be mentioned here that in the very close vicinity, two pieces - one fragmentary - from a *cingulum* were also found during this field survey (vezi pl. 5, nos. 2-3). Whether all these three pieces were part of the same set - *cingulum-balteus* - it is hard to say but till the systematic excavation of this findspot, such a possibility cannot be totally excluded.

The interesting aspect about this piece is its shape. So far such object was described as being made up of rectangular plate attached to "the baldric's broad end, and heart shaped pendant".<sup>4</sup>

As it was described above, the baldric terminal analysed here has both parts of ivy-leaf shape, which may represent a new type for this category of material,<sup>5</sup> although some military tombstones demonstrates that, actually, this shape was quite normally used by military persons.

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<sup>1</sup> OLDENSTEIN, 1976, 224; BISHOP, COULSTON, 1993, 135; STEPHENSON, 1999, 68.

<sup>2</sup> OLDENSTEIN, 1976, 224; BISHOP, COULSTON, 1993, fig. 91, nos. 12-15.

<sup>3</sup> GĂZDAC, 1985, 404; 420, no. 28.

<sup>4</sup> STEPHENSON, 1999, 69.

<sup>5</sup> A baldric terminal with an ivy-leaf shape has been found in the Lyon burial, but only the mobile part has this shape while the fix part is a rectangular piece, similar to those from Corbridge and Zugmantel, BISHOP, COULSTON, 1993, fig. 91, nos. 12-15; fig. 92, no. 9.

Thus, the examples come from *Perinthos* where three military tombstones depict soldiers in military dress. In all three cases, the baldric terminals are of ivy-leaf shape (see pl. 3). As in one case (pl. 3, no. 1) – the tombstone of Iulius Firmianus – the inscription can be read, it appears that such a shape for a baldric terminal was used even by ordinary soldiers (e.g. *Iul(ius) Firmianus mi(les) le(gionis) I adiut(ricis)*<sup>6</sup>). Therefore, it is probably a matter of time until other pieces of similar shape and functionality will be discovered. It is also possible that such piece has been already found but their state of preservation led to a misinterpretation or no interpretation at all.

The dating of this artefact is a difficult task.

The area of the site of *Porolissum*, where this piece was found, has not been yet excavated, therefore no archaeological context can be provided. The site had a period of Roman existence from 106 to c. 270 AD. The funerary tombstones used above as analogies have been dated around 214 AD.<sup>7</sup> Still, such a precise dating cannot be applied to the artefact under study as it was an object of military fashion,<sup>8</sup> certainly it had a much wider period of use. In the case of the Lyon burial, beside the baldric terminal coins dated in AD 194 were also found but they can be considered only as a *terminus post quem*.<sup>9</sup> Following the technique<sup>10</sup>, the shape and the motifs used in the decoration of this piece it can be suggested a period between mid 2<sup>nd</sup> to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.

### Bibliography

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<sup>6</sup> SPEIDEL, 1976, 133.

<sup>7</sup> SPEIDEL, 1976, 132.

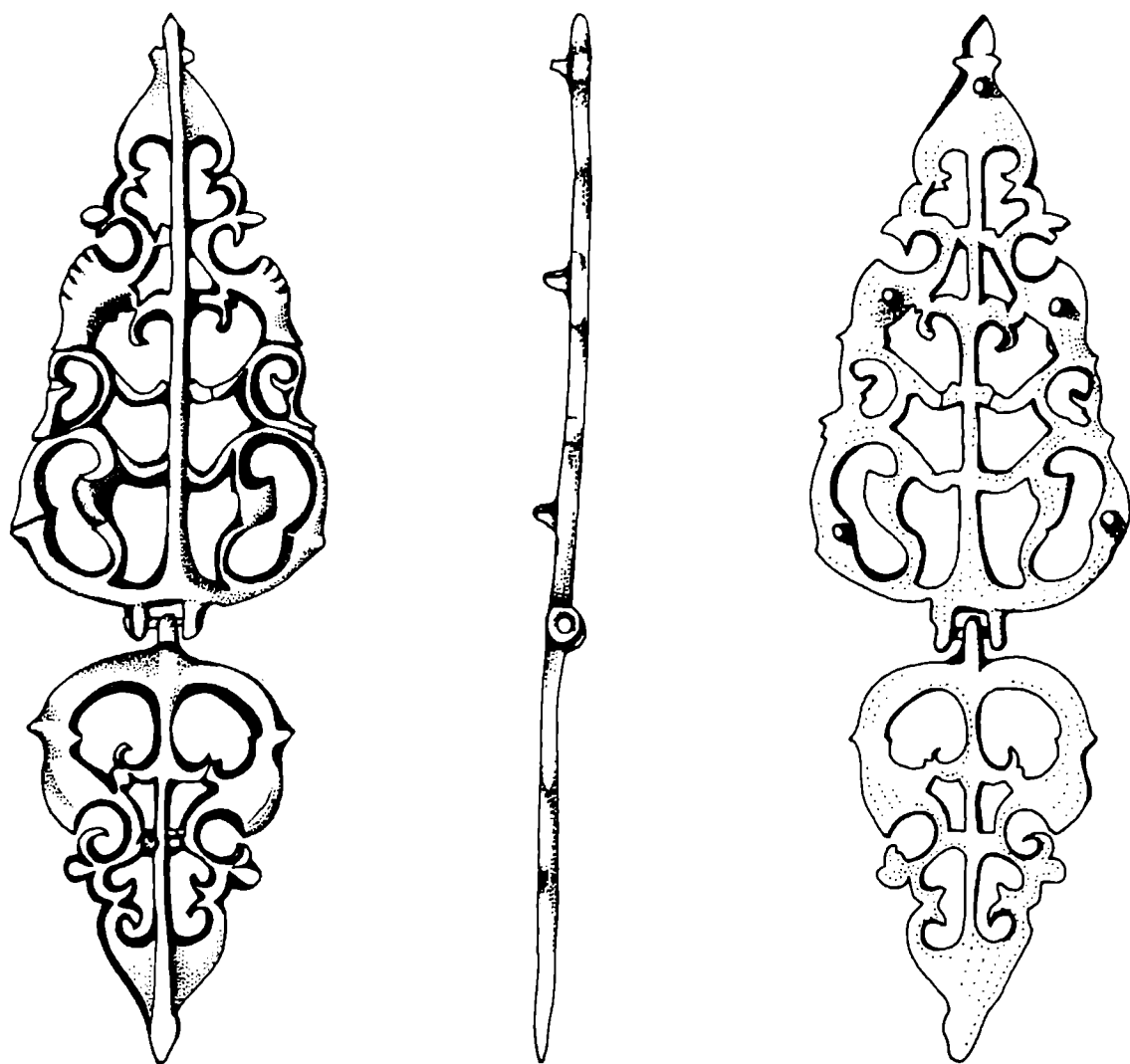
<sup>8</sup> For a larger dating – 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD – of these tombstones see PFUHL, MÖBIUS, 1977, 120.

<sup>9</sup> BISHOP, COULSTON, 1993, 135.

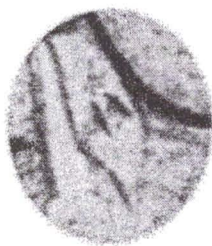
<sup>10</sup> MADYDA-LEGUTKO, 1991, 109.



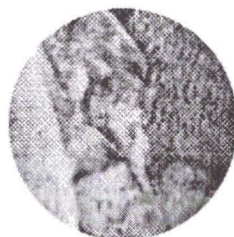
Pl. 1 The *balteus* terminal from Porolissum (photo)



Pl. 2 The *balteus* terminal from Porolissum (drawing by Anca Diaconescu)

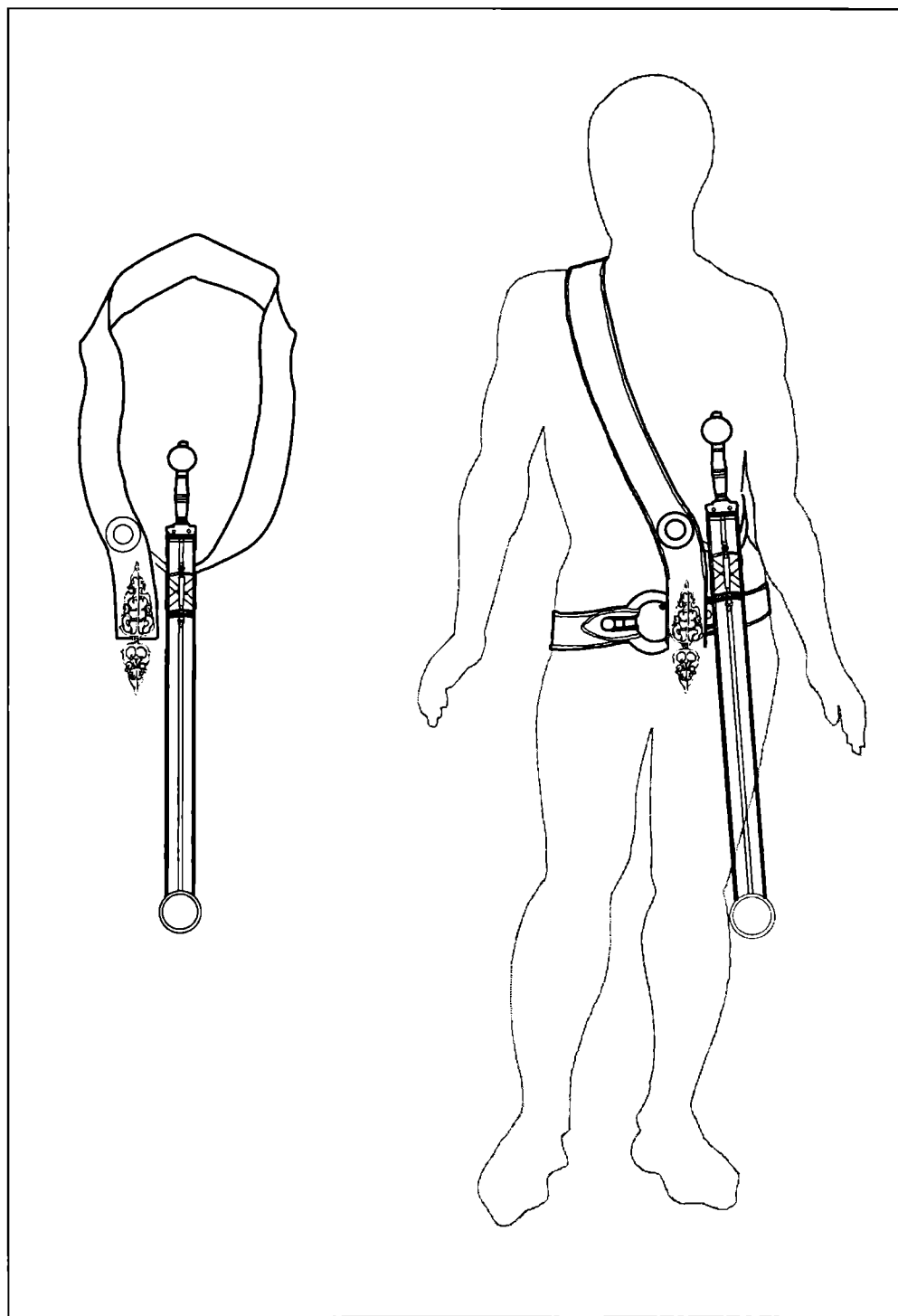


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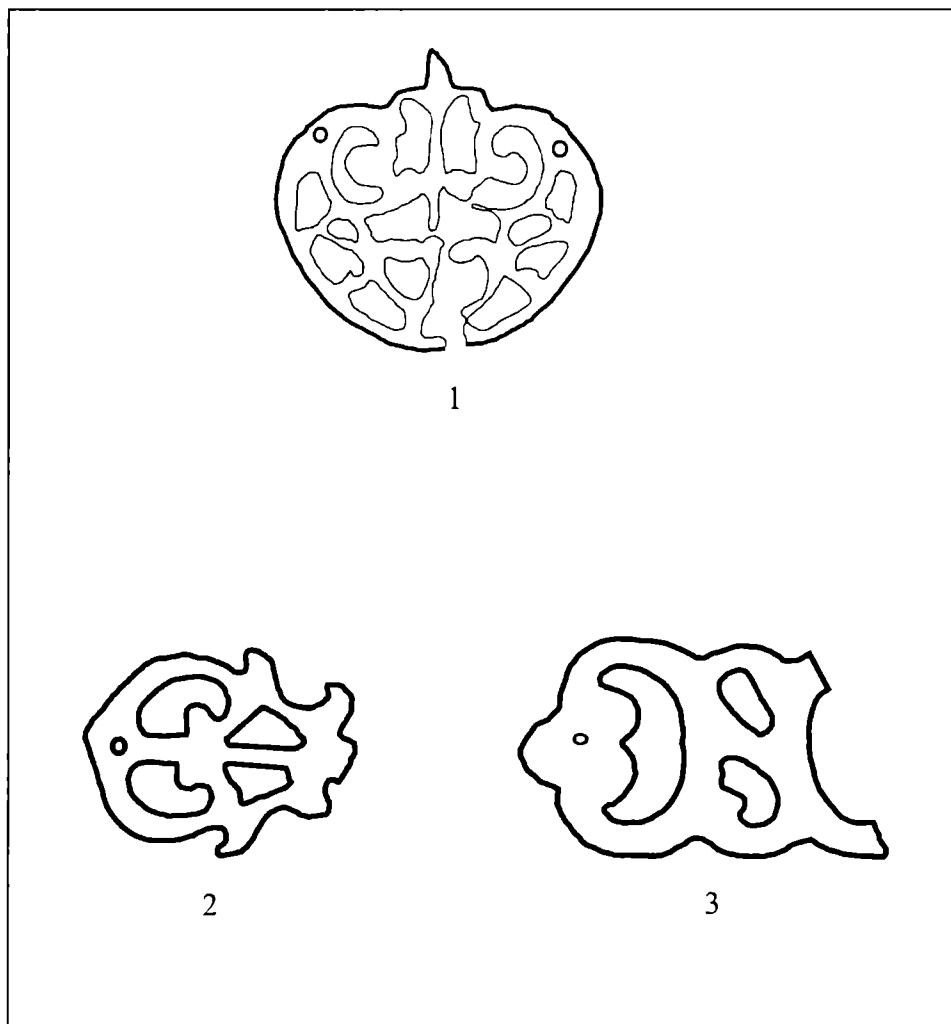


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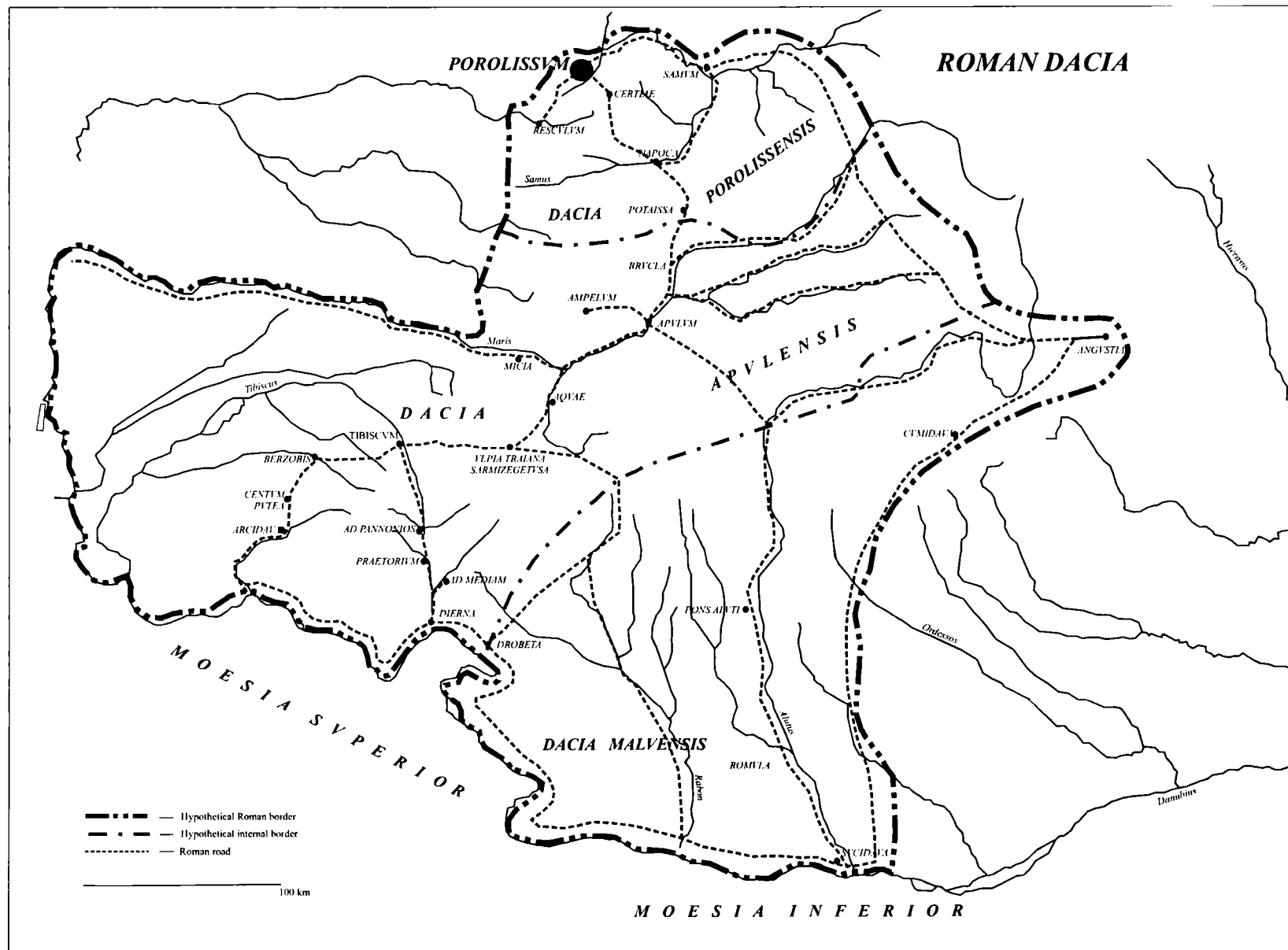
**Pl. 3** 1. The tombstone of Iulius Firminianus (after Speidel 1976);  
2. A tombstone from Perinthos (after Pfuhl-Möbius 1977)



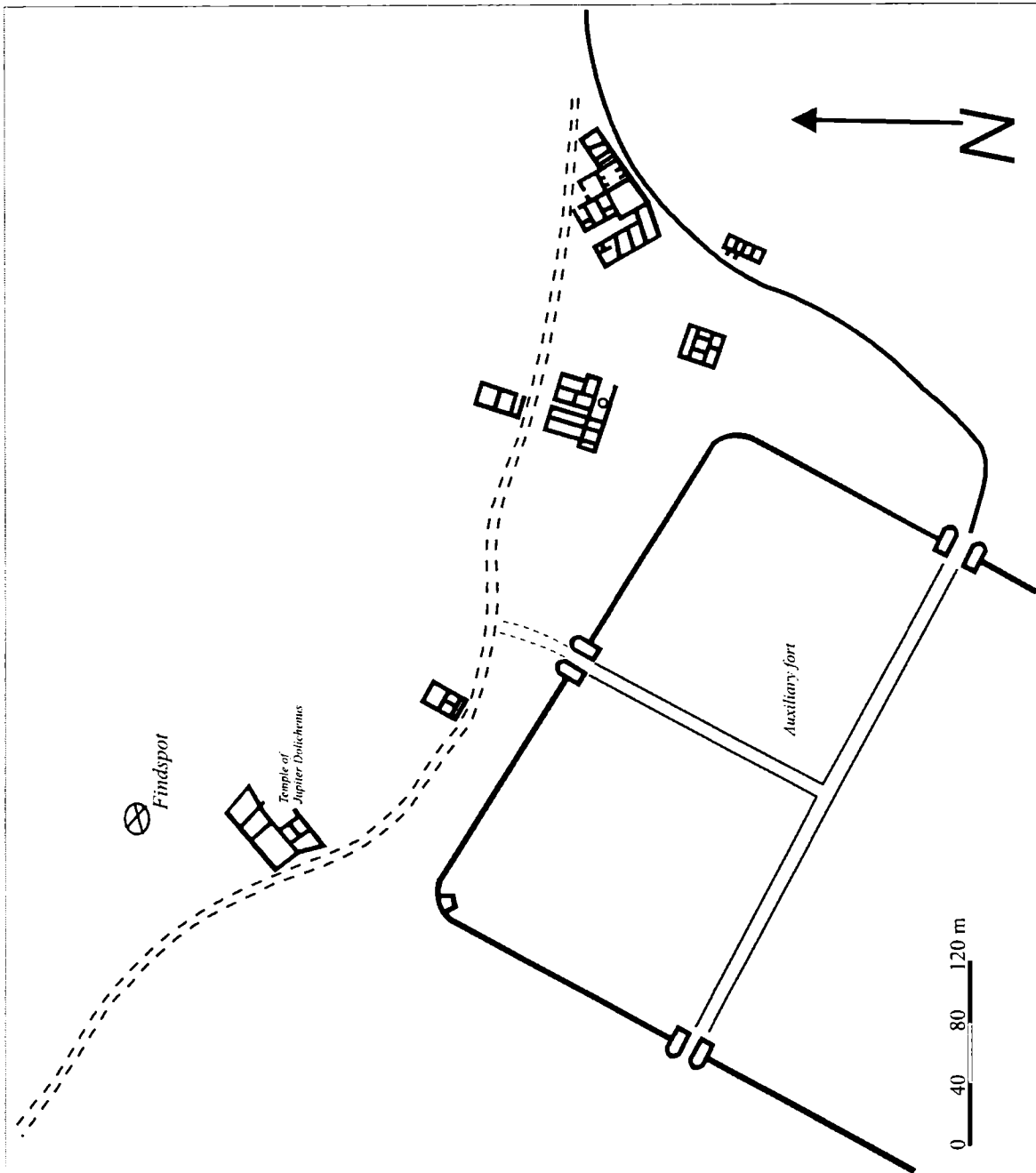
**Pl. 4** The reconstruction of a *balteus* with the Porolissum type terminal (based on Oldenstein 1976); The functional reconstruction of a *balteus* with the Porolissum type terminal (based on Oldenstein 1976)



**Pl. 5** 1. The *balteus* terminal from the Roman auxiliary fort of Gherla (Romania);  
2-3. The fragments from a *cingulum militaris* discovered in the close vicinity with the *balteus* terminal at Porolissum







2. The site with the findspot

