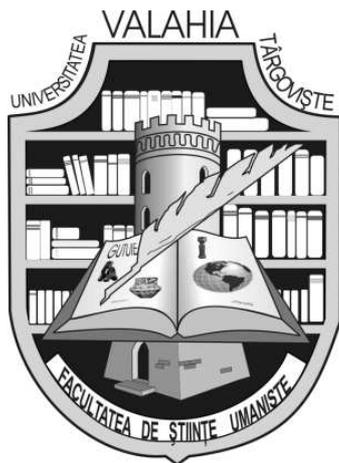


Ministère de l'Education, de la Recherche, de la Jeunesse et du Sport
L'Université Valahia Târgoviște
Faculté de Sciences Humaines

ANNALES



D'UNIVERSITÉ VALAHIA TARGOVISTE

SECTION
d'Archéologie et d'Histoire

TOME XIII
Numéro 2
2011

Valahia University Press
Târgoviște

Annales d'Université Valahia Targoviste Section d'Archéologie et d'Histoire publie des mémoires originaux, des nouvelles et des comptes-rendus dans le domaine de l'archéologie préhistorique, de l'histoire du moyen âge, de l'environnement de l'homme fossile, de l'archéologie interdisciplinaire et de patrimoine culturel.

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ISSN: 1584-1855

An iron belt-buckle from the Late Iron Age discovered in Arad – Aurel Vlaicu Boulevard

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Abstract: An iron belt-buckle from the Late Iron Age discovered in Arad – Aurel Vlaicu Boulevard. The accidental discovery in the year 2001 of an iron bracelet, with snake head ornaments in Arad (Aurel Vlaicu Boulevard, near Betel Pentecostal Church) has signalled the existence of an archaeological site in the area. In the year 2011, from this very site, we have saved a piece used in clothing, a belt buckle with iron plates, covered with bronze sheeting (partially conserved). It belongs to the Babes II type (Rustoiu 6b). Similar pieces can be found in the “Geto-Dacian” group, having been made in 1 century BC. Across the territory of the modern city Arad, traces of numerous archaeological sites have been found dating from the 2nd century BC to 1st century AD some of the more important being Arad – Gai I, Arad - Sala Polivalentă, Arad – Strada Caisului, Micălaca – Deluț and Micălaca – Old Cemetery.

Key words: Arad city, belt-buckle, clothing item, Dacian civilization, Late Iron Age.

Introduction

In 2001, the accidental discovery of a double spiral iron bracelet with snake head endings dated in the Late Iron Age during the excavation work done for the building of the “Betel” Pentecostal Church (Arad, Aurel Vlaicu Boulevard), posed the problem of a possible archaeological site existing in this location (E. Pădurean, 2002). In 2011, in the same location, specifically in the flower beds located in front of the “Betel” Pentecostal Church which faces the Astral MINOLTA Group building (GPS coordinates: 46°11'41.32"N, 21°18'01.92"E (fig. 1) another interesting archaeological artefact has been recovered, together with a pottery shard, which we will present in this paper.

Presenting the discoveries

Iron belt-buckle (fig. 2-3), with the following dimension: length = 175 mm; maximum width = 76 mm; thickness = 2 mm. The artifact has been made of iron and bronze, using the technique of hammering.

The iron board belt-buckle, modelled in the shape of a fish, shows a complex structure denoting ingenious craftsmanship. In the first phase, the piece has been made from iron through hammering, the base plate (“core”) being cut out in the desired shape. One end of this plate becomes narrower, creating a “neck” which ends in a slightly flattened conical button which is actually the hook used to hold the belt-buckle. At the opposite end, the plate has been bent throughout its entire width creating a tube which had been part of the hinge. The arched edges of the base (the core), over a length of 4 mm, have been bent to 90° toward the interior, creating thus a border necessary when applying the iron and bronze foils. Over the core of the iron plate, two thin iron foils have been applied closely following the shape of the piece, one on the exterior, another on the interior, both of them covering the hook with the conical button as well. A bronze foil (ornate, perhaps?) had been applied over the interior iron foil, but unfortunately, it was preserved just near the border on the bent



Fig. 1 - Arad city and the exact location of the discovery (Google Earth image).



Fig. 2 - The belt-buckle (photography):
A, B = averse, reverse

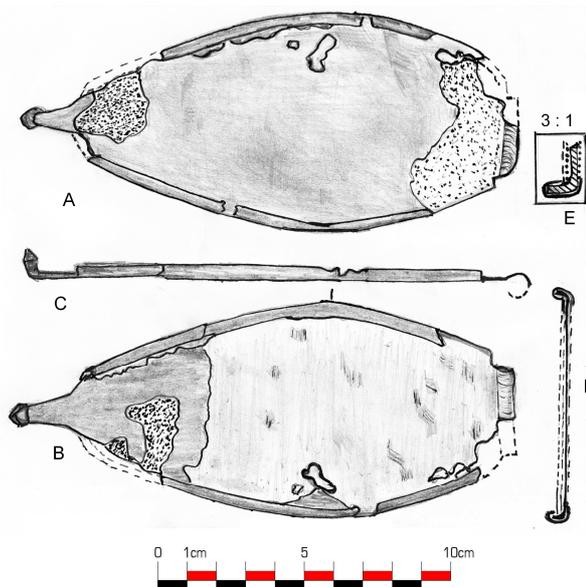


Fig. 3 - The belt-buckle (drawing): A, B = avers, reverse. C, D = profile, E = detail.

edges. An iron plate had been made separately, with a border in the shape of a spout (fig. 3/e), which was applied over the long arched edges in order to affix (similar to a staple) the three metallic foils to the “core” of the belt-buckle.

The state of conservation of the artefact is quite modest. The piece presents strong traces of oxidation and corrosion. Extensive areas of iron and bronze foil have not been preserved, with the exception of some small portions near the areas where the border and the plate meet. Only a portion of the tube which has been created through the bending of the hinge system had been preserved, sufficient enough however to typologically frame the artefact.

The pottery shard (fig. 4) belongs most likely to a large storage vessel (upper diameter = 28 cm), handmade, for common use, partially corroded. The paste contains a low percentage of sand. The core is of a dark grey, and the outside paste has a brown reddish color. The lip of the vessel has been decorated with oblique notches. The vessel, based on its shape and ornament, can be dated roughly in the Dacian Kingdom's period (probably 1st century B.C.), and has analogies among the materials found in the *dava*-type settlement of Pecica – Șanțul Mare (I. H. Crișan, 1978).

The two artefacts will be donated to the Arad Museum Complex (CMA) after the publish of this paper.

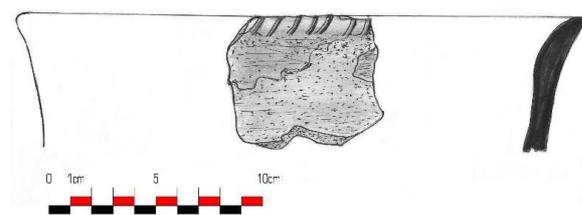


Fig. 4 - The pottery sherd.

Discussions

Iron belt buckles such as the one we are presenting have been widely used in pre-Roman Dacia, as well as in the neighbouring regions of South-Eastern Europe. The piece presented here can be framed in the so-called “Geto-Dacian” belt-buckle group (M. Babeș, 1983, p. 196). It is a Babeș II type (M. Babeș, 1983), or, Rustoiu 6b,

according to more recent classification (A. Rustoiu, 1996). In Romania, artefacts of this type have been found in Orlea, Ostrovul Șimian, Piscul Crășani, Bratei (M. Babeș, 1983), Simeria – Strei (E. Pădurean, 2004), Hunedoara – Grădina Castelului (V. Sîrbu et collab., 2007; 2007b), Piatra Craivii (C. Plantos, 2009). An artifact similar to our own has been discovered in Bulgaria at Altimir (Vrața), the piece belonging also to the “Geto-Dacian” group, type Babeș II (M. Babeș, 1983).

The iron belt-buckles, covered in bronze foil and decorated *au repoussée*, found in the area of what is now former Yugoslavia belong the Laminici type (type I after M. Babeș, type 6a according to A. Rustoiu), even though they are similar, shape-wise, to the piece in discussion.

Belt-buckles like the presented in this paper, but also those belonging to the Type Babeș I (Rustoiu 6a) discovered in Geto-Dacian areal (burial grounds, habitations, “fields of ritual pits”) are dated in the 1st century B.C., being placed in the category of clothing wear belonging to the “classical” era of the Geto-Dacian civilization (M. Babeș, 1983; C. Plantos, 2009; H. Pop, 2010).

Final considerations

The Arad location (“Betel” Pentecostal Church) is thus far the westernmost point in Romania where such items such as the above presented belt-buckle have been discovered. Without a doubt, these types of items are the work of local craftsmen, who have taken over the prototype from the neighbouring populations such as Bastarnians or Scordisci, bringing in however some innovations of their own. In the case of this particular belt-buckle (type II), only the hinge is of Bastarnian influence, not the shape (M. Babeș, 1983).

Unfortunately, even though there are obvious traces of the bronze foil, which must have been likely decorated, we haven’t had the possibility to reconstruct or to describe the ornament. Also, we haven’t been able to specify the context of the item discovered in 2001 either (settlement? burial ground?). We know of several archaeological objectives which can be date roughly between 2nd to 1st century B.C. across the territory of what is now the modern city Arad, such as Arad – Gai I, Arad - Sala

Polivalentă (E. Pădurean, 2002), Micălaca – Deluț (M. Barbu, A. Mureșan, 1987), Micălaca – Cimitirul Vechi (M. Barbu, A. Mureșan, 1987), Arad – Strada Caisului (M. Zdroba, 1982).

We hope that further inquiries will bring more information about the material culture of the Dacian Kingdom's period in the Arad region.

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