

## Note on the diffusion of swastika fibulae with horse-head decorations in the Late Roman Period

Maurizio BUORA

### Izveček

Avtor obravnava tipologijo in razprostranjenost fibul v obliki svastike s konjskimi glavicami. En primerek je bil najden med zaščitnimi izkopavanji na Gradu v Vidmu leta 1987. Razširjene so od Dacije, Mezije, Dardanije, Panonije in vzhodnega Norika do severovzhodnih meja Italije, največ primerkov pa poznamo iz antičnih Burgen (Novi Banovci). Nekaj jih izvira iz rimskih taborov; datirane so v 3. in 4. st. n. š.

A swastika fibula with four horse-heads (*pl. 1: 1*) was found near a house dating from the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> or the early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup> in 1987, during an emergency excavation on the Udine castle hill. The fibula was found in soil, which had frequently been disturbed in the past, as it was part of a burial ground, which was continuously used from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fibula was located in a discharge pit adjoining the house, containing material, which could be dated to the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

On its back the bronze fibula, measuring 3,9 x 3,9 cm, still has an attachment for the clip and part of the clasp tip. The front of the fibula displays the four horse heads and punched concentric ring decoration of clear Roman origin.

The excavations showed that the site continued to be inhabited by local Roman people even after the Lombard invasion (568 A.D.). Although part of the material in the pit had been damaged by the construction of foundations in the middle of the Mediaeval Period, statistically, a high percentage of the material recovered from the site can be dated to the Late Roman Period up to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

### ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICONOGRAPHIC MOTIF

The figures on the fibula combine two very common motifs, the swastika and the animal heads, which

### Abstract

The author examines the morphology and area of diffusion of the swastika fibulae with four horse-heads: one of them was found in 1987, during an emergency excavation around the Udine castle (Italy). Their area of diffusion included Dacia, Moesia, Dardania, Pannonia, Eastern Noricum and the north-eastern border of Italy, with a concentration of examples in the city of ancient *Burgenae* (Novi Banovci). These fibulae are also present in the remains of Roman military camps and have been given a 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century date.

appeared in different times and places and blend here in a manner not dissimilar to Celtic and Germanic art motifs.

"Appliques" with the same swastika arrangement and horse heads have been found in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., that is belonging to the Negau horizon, e. g., in grave 33, barrow 5 in Dolenjske Toplice (*pl. 2: 3*)<sup>2</sup> or in the first part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in some princely tombs in the Balkan Peninsula, including the one in Peretu, in Rumania (*pl. 2: 1*).<sup>3</sup>

In the high and middle imperial period, fibulae of Almgren 234 and 235 form were common among Germanic people. The curved arms end in groups of rosettes, which could be interpreted as stylized heads. The arms could be free, as in a specimen dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century from the princely necropolis of Häven, in former East Germany,<sup>4</sup> or connected by metal bars forming a round frame, as in a specimen found in Nestegögaard, in Zealand, kept in the National Museum, in Copenhagen.<sup>5</sup> It is not difficult to see in this motif the direct antecedent of the *triquetra*, or the decoration with three animal heads radiating from a single centre, which adorns some shield umbos from the Lombard period. About ten such specimens, exclusively Italian, and dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. have been identified.<sup>6</sup>

A decorative motif similar to the *triquetra*, formed by three stylized animal heads with curved necks inside a circle, occurs on an ornamental bronze disk found among the objects in a girl's grave, No. 15, in the nobles' necropolis of Friedberg, used around the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century by an Alemannic family (*pl.*

2: 5).<sup>7</sup> Closely related to these ornaments, but at the same time similar to our fibulae, are some disks in the Budapest Museum belonging to the Avar culture (*pl. 2: 6,7*).<sup>8</sup>

The importance held by the horse in the ancient world is well known. The representation of this important animal has its own tradition in different fields. The head of Bucephalus, the war horse of Alexander the Great, is shown on Seleucid coins,<sup>9</sup> and this motif was transmitted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to Roman-Campanian coinage.<sup>10</sup> The same motif is found later in gem carving (four gems in the Aquileia museum are carved with a horse head turned to the right).<sup>11</sup> Turned in the same manner to the right, the horse head is also found on the disk of a few lamps, perhaps from Pollentia's workshops.<sup>12</sup>

### TYPE AND DIFFUSION OF HORSE-HEAD SWASTIKA FIBULAE

The horse-head swastika fibulae have been considered together with the fibulae of the type with arms bent at right angles. The horse-head fibulae, in particular, belong to type Almgren 232 as is shown in a specimen from Rumania. The taste for these decorations is clearly evident in the Late Roman Period, when animal representations as well as fibulae of geometrical shape were appreciated.

The specimens, so far known, bear a certain resemblance to each other in both form and dimensions, which are nearly constant.

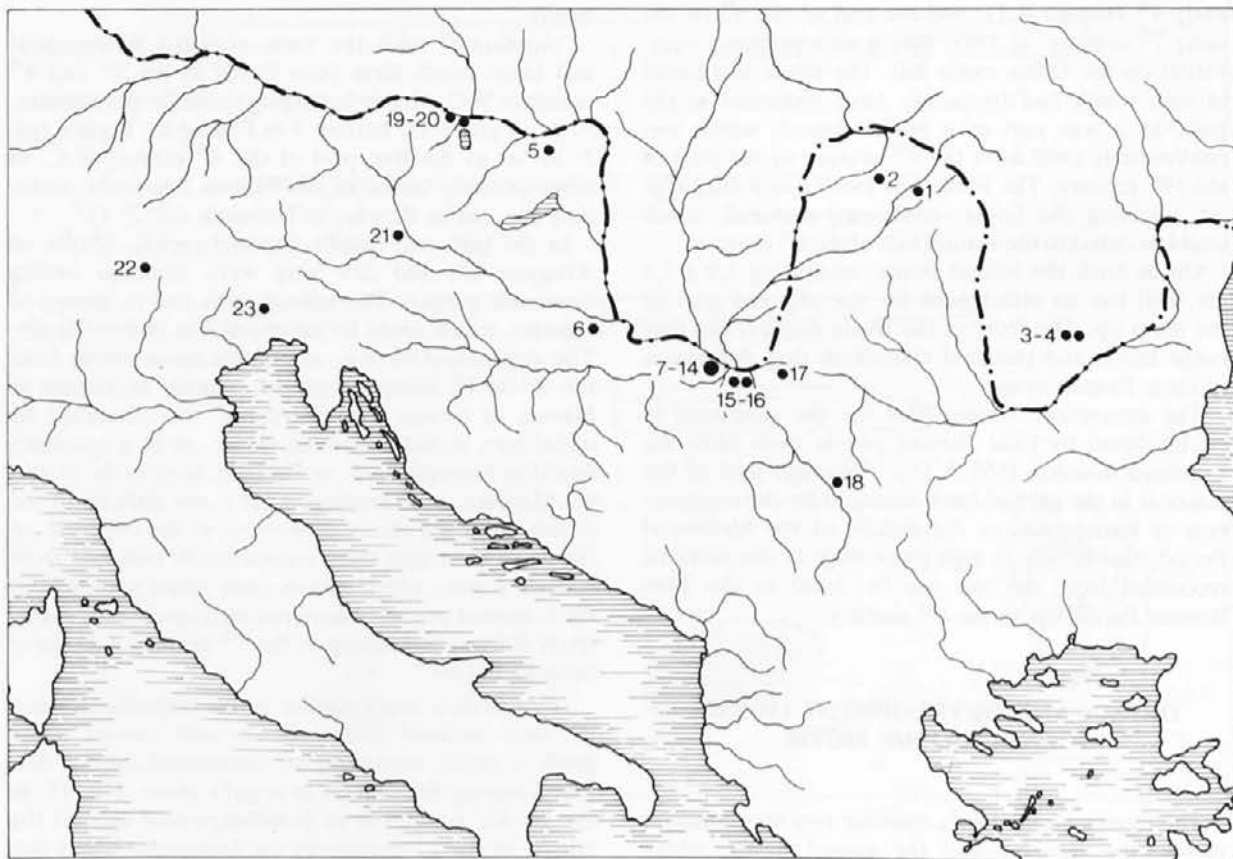
The authors who have studied these specimens have pointed out the Balkan origin of this type of fibulae. As can be seen in the catalogue of finds given in the appendix, their area of diffusion included Dacia, Moesia, Dardania, Pannonia, Eastern Noricum and, to a much lesser extent, Italy (close to its border with Pannonia and Noricum and very near to the Rhaetian border). Related forms and no examples from our group seem to have been prevalent in Germany. We refer to the fibula numbered 1058 from Saalburg (*pl. 1: 9*) which has a single nut eye at the centre and has substantially different heads.<sup>13</sup>

A concentration of examples, so similar to each other as to justify the assumption of a local production centre, has been found in the area of Novi Banovci (the ancient *Burgenae*) which is at the centre of the area of diffusion of these fibulae (*pl. 1: 2-7*). Other finds were made in neighbouring areas, showing their gradual spread outward (*fig. 1*). Small variations in the motif can be seen in fibulae from other places. For example, in the shape of the ears or in the outline of the horse head.

Unfortunately, in most cases it appears that the fibulae of this type belong to old finds or lack a suitable context. The chronological terms have been listed above for the fibula from the Udine excavation.

*Fig. 1:* Map of diffusion of swastika fibulae with horse-head decorations.

*Sl. 1:* Razprostranjenost fibul v obliki svastike s konjskimi glavicami.



The fibula from Tisens-St. Hyppolit comes from a site, from which much material of the Late Roman Period and the 6<sup>th</sup> century has been excavated, and which was inhabited by a Roman population, as was the hill on which the Udine castle now stands. The fibulae from Cristești in Transylvania and from Beograd-Kalemegdan, Gornji grad were found in the remains of Roman military camps.<sup>14</sup> The fibula from Dragovita near Niš has been given a 4<sup>th</sup> century date.

We can also say that these fibulae are widely present in Dacia and along the middle and lower Danube, and

only exceptionally do they appear on the borders of Italian territory.

Perhaps it is possible to relate this fact to the presence of troops originating in Dacia, Moesia and Dardania and moving to Aquileia, attested by several inscriptions. Some funeral monuments in Aquileia of soldiers originating in these areas have been dated to the Tetrarchy.<sup>15</sup>

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#### LIST OF FINDS

##### Rumania

1. Cristești, Transylvania. – Pârvan 1982, 205, fig. 255.
2. Transylvania. Museum Cluj. – Almgren 1923, 104, pl. 10: 232.
- 3, 4. National Museum, Bucharest. Inv. No. 0972 and 0973. – D. Popescu, *Dacia* 9-10, 1941-1944, 500, fig. 9: 96, 97.

##### Hungary

5. Szöny (*Brigetio*). Hungarian National Museum, Budapest. Inv. No. 4.1933.53. – J. Hampel, *Arch. ért.* 13, 1893, 451, fig. 5; Almgren 1923, 104.

##### Croatia

6. Osijek (*Mursa*). Muzej Slavonije, Osijek. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 41.

##### Serbia

7. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Arheološki muzej, Zagreb. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 42a.
8. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Arheološki muzej, Zagreb. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 42b.
9. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Arheološki muzej, Zagreb. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 42c.
10. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Arheološki muzej, Zagreb. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 42d.
11. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Narodni muzej, Beograd. Inv. No. 1138. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 42e; Trbuhović 1988, 155, No. 2, fig. 4.
12. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Narodni muzej, Beograd. Inv. No. 1139. – Vinski 1968, 132, pl. 8: 42f; Trbuhović 1988, 155, No. 1, fig. 1.

13. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Narodni muzej, Beograd. Inv. No. 1142. – Trbuhović 1988, 155, No. 3, fig. 5.
14. Novi Banovci (*Burgenae*). Narodni muzej, Beograd. Inv. No. 1143. – Trbuhović 1988, 155, No. 4, fig. 2.
15. Beograd-Kalemegdan, Gornji grad (*Singidunum*). Muzej grada Beograda, Beograd. Dated 4<sup>th</sup> century. – Bojović 1983, 139, pl. 30: 290.
16. Beograd-Kalemegdan, Donji grad (*Singidunum*). Muzej grada Beograda, Beograd. Dated 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century. – M. Bajalović-Hadži-Pešić, *Srednjeevokovnom Beogradu u pohode* (1977) cat. No. 1.
17. Kostolac (*Viminacium*). – Bojović 1983, 67.
18. Dragovita by Niš. Narodni muzej, Niš. Inv. No. 180/SV. Dated 4<sup>th</sup> century. – Jovanović 1978, 69, cat. No. 91, fig. 145.

##### Austria

19. *Carnuntum*. Private collection. – J. Matouschek, H. Nowak, *Röm. Österr.* 9/10, 1981/1982, 168, fig. 53 on the p. 182, pl. 15: 53.
20. *Carnuntum*. Private collection. – Matouschek, Nowak 1986, 201, fig. 29 on the p. 221.
21. Leibnitz (*Flavia Solva*). Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz. – Matouschek, Nowak 1986, 201.

##### Italy

22. Tisens-St. Hyppolit. – V. Bierbrauer, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Ethnogenese im Alpenraum*, Nationes 5 (1985) 29, fig. 9: 7; id., *Arch. Korrb.* 15, 1985, 509, fig. 8: 1; id. 1986, 262, fig. 9: 1.
23. Udine-Castle hill. Diggings 1987. – G. Bergamini, M. Buora, *Il Castello di Udine* (1990) 23, fig. s. n.

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- <sup>1</sup> Buora 1987, 335–340.
- <sup>2</sup> Kromer 1960, 113, fig. 1: 5; Teržan 1976, 402, pl. 38: 2.3.
- <sup>3</sup> Moscalu 1989, 172–173 with list of finds and previous bibliography.
- <sup>4</sup> Keiling 1989; Krüger 1989, 216.
- <sup>5</sup> Eggers 1965, 48 and plate on p. 51.
- <sup>6</sup> Menghin 1977, 23 ff.
- <sup>7</sup> Christlein 1978, 55–57.
- <sup>8</sup> Information courtesy of Dr. M. Nagy, with sincere thanks.
- <sup>9</sup> The horse head appears on coins of Seleucus I (a. 312–280 B.C.), Seleucus II (246–226 B.C.), Antiochus III (222–187 B.C.), Seleucus IV (176–175 B.C.) and Demetrius I (162–150 B.C.).
- <sup>10</sup> It is found, for example, on a didrachma struck in Metapontum between 280 and 276 B.C. (Crawford 1983, 13/1), on a *lira* struck in Rome shortly before 269 B.C. (Crawford 1983, 17/1), on a *triens* from the same mint dated between 275 and 270 B.C. (Crawford 1983, 18/3) and on a Roman *lira* struck between 241 and 235 B.C. (Crawford 1983, 25/3).
- <sup>11</sup> Sena Chiesa 1968, 352–353.
- <sup>12</sup> Gualandi Genito 1986, 130–131, Nos. 29, 30.
- <sup>13</sup> Böhme 1972, 108, No. 1058, pl. 27.
- <sup>14</sup> Pärvan 1982, 205, fig. 255; Bojović 1983, 139, pl. 30: 290.
- <sup>15</sup> Rebecchi 1976, 65–142.

## K razprostranjenosti poznorimskih fibul v obliki svastike s konjskimi glavicami

### Povzetek

Odkritje fibule v obliki svastike s konjskimi glavicami med izkopavanji na Gradu v Vidmu (*t. I: 1*)<sup>1</sup> predstavlja priložnost za ponovno preučitev takih fibul.

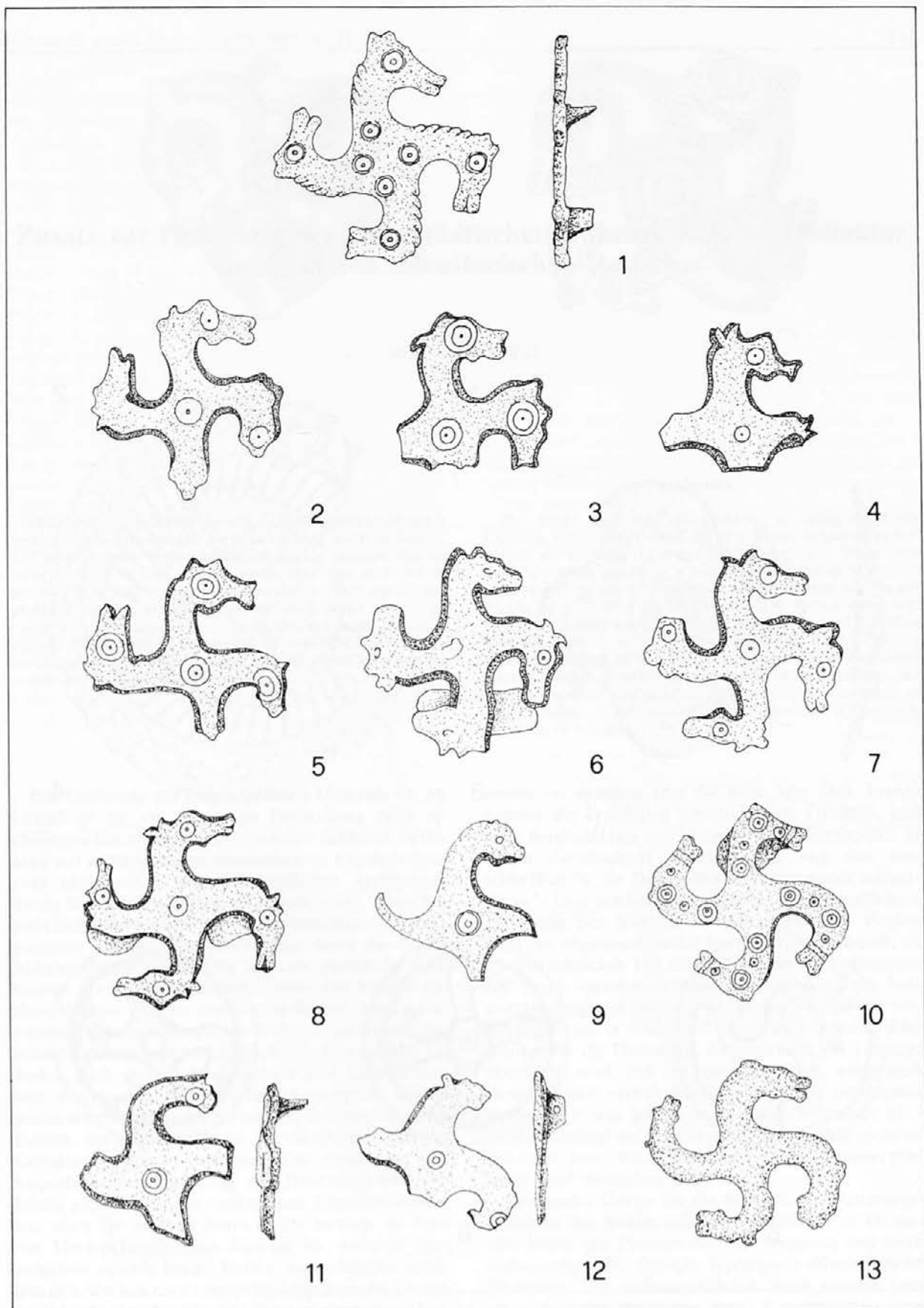
Tovrstne fibule združujejo dva zelo običajna motiva, ki se pojavljata v različnih dobah in na različnih območjih. Motiv svastike z živalskimi glavicami je znan že v prazgodovini, npr. na aplikah iz groba 33 gomile 5 iz Dolenjskih Toplic (*t. 2: 3*)<sup>2</sup> ali onih iz Peretu v Romuniji (*t. 2: 1*)<sup>3</sup>, v poznorimskem obdobju pa npr. v nekdanji Vzhodni Nemčiji<sup>4</sup> ali na Danskem.<sup>5</sup> V 7. st. najdemo podoben motiv trojnega zavojka z živalskimi glavicami na langobardskodobnih predmetih v Italiji,<sup>6</sup> pa tudi v alamanskem okolju (*t. 2: 5*).<sup>7</sup> Pri Avarih (*t. 2: 6,7*)<sup>8</sup> pa srečamo prav motiv svastike z živalskimi glavicami. Tudi upodobitve konjske glave so pogoste. Nahajajo se na helenističnih<sup>9</sup> in rimsko-kampanijskih<sup>10</sup> novcih, na rimskih gemah<sup>11</sup>

in na italskih oljenkah.<sup>12</sup>

Prostor razprostranjenosti obravnavanih fibul (tip Almgren 232) obsega Dacijo, Mezijo, Dardanijo, Panonijo, vzhodni Norik in severovzhodno obrobje Italije (*sl. I*). Iz Saalburga je znan primerček, ki se od drugih delno razlikuje (*t. I: 9*).<sup>13</sup> V središču obširnega prostora razprostranjenosti se nahajajo Burgene (Novi Banovci), od koder izvira največ primerkov (*t. I: 2–7*).

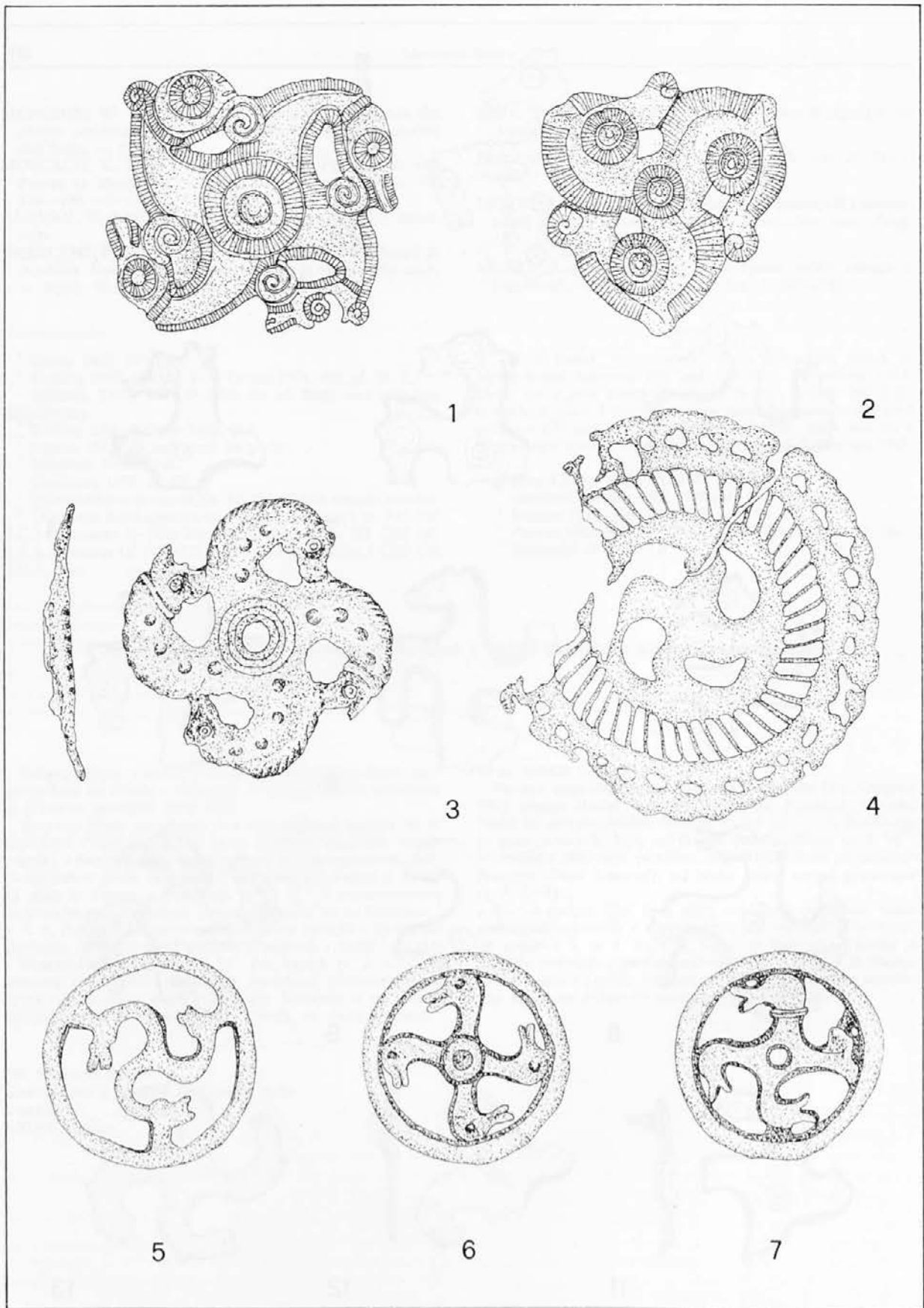
Ker je večina fibul brez ožjih najdiščnih podatkov, samo prisotnost nekaterih v rimskih taborih<sup>14</sup> omogoča domnevo, da sodijo v 3. in 4. st. n. š. Fibuli iz Vidma in Tisensa je mogoče povezati s prisotnostjo vojaških oddelkov iz Mezije in Dardanije v Ogleju, ki jo zlasti v obdobju tetrarhije izpričujejo napisi na nekaterih tamkajšnjih nagrobnikih.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Maurizio Buora  
Civici Musei e Gallerie di Storia e Arte  
Castello  
I-33100 Udine



Pl. 1: 1 Udine-Castle; 2-7 Novi Banovci (re-designed from Vinski 1968); 8 Osijek (re-designed from Vinski 1968); 9 Saalburg (re-designed from Böhme 1972); 10 Tisens-St. Hyppolit (re-designed from Bierbrauer 1986); 11 Carnuntum (re-designed from Matouschek, Nowak 1986); 12 Beograd-Kalemegdan, Gornji grad (re-designed from Bojović 1983); 13 Dragovita by Niš (re-designed from Jovanović 1978). Scale 1-9,11-13 = 1:1; 10 without scale.

T. 1: 1 Udine-Castello; 2-7 Novi Banovci; 8 Osijek; 9 Saalburg; 10 Tisens-St. Hyppolit; 11 Carnuntum; 12 Beograd-Kalemegdan, Gornji grad; 13 Dragovita pri Nišu. M. 1-9,11-13 = 1:1; 10 brez merila.



Pl. 2: 1,2 Appliques of the princely tomb in Peretu (re-designed from Moscalu 1989); 3 Applique in tomb 33 of burial mound No. 5 in Dolenjske Toplice (re-designed from Teržan 1976); 4 Applique in Niš Museum (re-designed from Jovanović 1978); 5 »Zierscheibe« in the Alemannic tomb from Friedberg (re-designed from Christlein 1978); 6,7 Elements of application from Avar necropolis (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Budapest, courtesy M. Nagy). Scale 1,2 = 2:3; 3 = 1:1; 4 = 3:4; 5-7 without scale.

T. 2: 1,2 apliki iz knežjega groba v Peretu; 3 aplika iz groba 33 gomile 5 iz Dolenjskih Toplic; 4 aplika iz Narodnega muzeja v Nišu; 5 »okrasna plošča« iz alamanskega groba iz Friedberga; 6,7 apliki z avarskega grobišča. M. 1,2 = 2:3; 3 = 1:1; 4 = 3:4; 5-7 brez merila.