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IN MEMORIAM PROFESSORUM

ALEXANDRU BARNEA *ET* ALEXANDRU AVRAM



Alexandru Barnea
(17 février 1944 – 8 mai 2020)



Alexandru Avram
(16 septembre 1956 – 4 août 2021)

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SOMMAIRE
CONTENTS
I N H A L T

ADRIANA PANAIT, FLORICA (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ, <i>Argumentum</i>	9
MIHAI BĂRBULESCU, <i>Alexandru Barnea, tel que je l'ai connu</i>	11
VLAD NISTOR, <i>Memories about Alexandru Avram</i>	19
INGA GLUSZEK, <i>The Athenian black gloss pottery from Histria. Some remarks about the technology of production and technique of decoration</i>	33
ALINA IANCU, LIVIU MIHAIL IANCU, <i>The first lead spindle whorl reported from Istros</i>	63
RADU GABRIEL PETRE, <i>Haute cuisine in ancient Athens. An investigation into the dining habits of a Classical city</i>	77
DRAGOȘ HĂLMAGI, <i>Theoroi and theorodokoi in Istros and Samothrake: a new reading of SEG 51, 936</i>	99
LUCREZIA UNGARO, <i>Immagine e potere dell'impero attraverso il programma figurativo: novità e continuità nel Foro di Traiano</i>	107
CRISTINA-GEORGETA ALEXANDRESCU, <i>Contribution on the Mithras/Sol iconography: the depiction of Mithras with rayed crown</i>	163
ANDRZEJ B. BIERNACKI, ELENA KLENINA, <i>Organodetrinitic limestone from the quarries in Hotnica in architectural details from Novae (Moesia Inferior)</i>	181
RADU ARDEVAN, MIHAIL MUNTEANU, <i>Deux fragments de diplômes militaires romains</i>	201
ADRIAN IONIȚĂ, FLORIAN MATEI-POPESCU, <i>Badge of rank: the miniature spearhead baldric fastener discovered at Feldioara/Marienburg</i>	213
CIPRIAN CREȚU, ANDREI DORIAN SOFICARU, <i>An Early Byzantine privileged burial from Histria. (Re)discoverig grave 58 from the Basilica Extra Muros sector</i>	227
 <i>COMPTES RENDUS</i>	
Gerrie Van Rooijen, <i>Goddesses of Akragas. A Study of Terracotta Votive Figurines from Sicily</i> , Sidestone Press, Leiden, 2021, 383 p, 202+32 fig., ISBN 978-90-8890-900-9 (<i>Florina Panait-Bîrzescu</i>)	247
Chiara Tarditi, Rita Sassu, <i>Offerte in metallo nei santuari greci. Doni votivi, rituali, smaltimento, Atti del seminario internazionale online 29 ottobre 2020</i> , THIASOS. Rivista di archeologia e architettura antica 10, 2, Supplementum V, Roma, Edizioni Quasar, 2021, 68 p., ISSN 2279-7297 (<i>Liviu Mihail Iancu</i>) ..	250
<i>ABRÉVIATIONS</i>	253

BADGE OF RANK: THE MINIATURE SPEARHEAD BALDRIC FASTENER DISCOVERED AT FELDIOARA/MARIENBURG

ADRIAN IONIȚĂ*, FLORIAN MATEI-POPESCU**

Keywords: Roman Dacia, Feldioara/Marienburg, Roman military equipment, baldric fastener, miniature spearhead

Abstract: The authors publish a baldric fastener in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead, discovered during the archaeological excavations conducted within the Feldioara/Marienburg medieval fortress. For a better understanding of the archaeological context and the dating of the piece in the first half of the 3rd century AD, the Roman finds from Feldioara are briefly reviewed with special emphasis on the coins. The spears with this characteristic head functioned as a symbol of the Roman authority and were carried by various type of soldiers from the *officium* of the governor: *beneficarii consularis* or *procuratoris*, *frumentarii* and *speculatores*. Although the Roman discoveries from that area speak for a possible rural frontier settlement, the very presence of this miniature spearhead, which functioned also as badge of rank, proves that the area was under the surveillance of the Roman army through these *officiales*, most likely the *beneficarii procuratoris* or *beneficarii consularis*.

Cuvinte-cheie: Dacia romană, Feldioara/Marienburg, echipament militar roman, închizătoare de *balteus*, lance miniaturală

Rezumat: Autorii publică o închizătoare de *balteus*, realizată sub forma unei așa-zise lănci miniaturale de beneficiar. Aceasta a fost descoperită în timpul cercetărilor arheologice din cetatea medievală de la Feldioara/Marienburg. Pentru mai buna înțelegere a contextului arheologic și a datării piesei în prima jumătate a secolului al III-lea p.Chr., sunt reluate pe scurt descoperirile romane de la Feldioara, cu accent deosebit asupra monedelor. Lăncile prevăzute cu acest vârf caracteristic au funcționat ca simbol al autorității romane și au fost purtate de diferiți soldați din oficiul guvernatorului, cum ar fi *beneficarii consularis* sau *procuratoris*, *frumentarii* și *speculatores*. Chiar dacă descoperirile romane din zona respectivă indică mai degrabă existența unei așezări rurale de graniță, prezența acestei închizătoare de *balteus*, care este totuși un simbol de rang, dovedește că zona se afla sub supravegherea armatei romane, prin intermediul acestor *officiales*, cel mai probabil *beneficarii procuratoris* sau *beneficarii consularis*.

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INTRODUCTION

The village of Feldioara (Feldioara commune, Brașov County – German: Marienburg; Hungarian: Földvár), located in the Bârsa depression, on the left bank of the Olt River and about 20 km north of the city of Brașov, is known especially for its medieval preserved heritage. Starting primarily from the German name of the settlement – Marienburg / Fortress of Holy Mary¹ – but not only, there had been located the main headquarters of the Teutonic Knights in the short period between 1211 and 1225, when they were settled in Țara Bârsei (German: Burzenland; Hungarian: Barcaság) by the Hungarian king Andrew II.

The nowadays settlement is located on a terrace about 20-25 m high, which advances as a spur from west to east in the Olt River floodplain, with the archaeological site covering mainly the eastern segment of the terrace. On the eastern end of the mentioned spur a medieval stone fortress is preserved (recently consolidated and renovated); it is separated to the west by a vast defensive ditch, whose artificial or natural origin could not be determined. Further to the west, there follows an area with an approximately triangular plan, bounded by a defensive ditch, artificially created, with an opening of about 30 m and a depth of 15 m; the ditch follows an arched path corresponding at both ends with the edges of the terrace². This territory represents a probably prehistoric earthen fortification³. Located in the centre, the Evangelical church is surrounded by a small enclosure wall with an oval path which does not constitute a fortification in itself.

Over time, archaeological researches were carried out in various locations, which revealed the existence of dwellings corresponding to several periods: Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman era, Middle Ages and the modern period. The archaeological research from 1990 to 1995 revealed, among many others, traces of a Roman settlement unknown until that date⁴. We must also stress that there should be no confusion between Feldioara/Marienburg and Feldioara (Ucea commune, Brașov County) located about 25 km west of Făgăraș, where a Roman auxiliary fort and a military *vicus* on the right bank of the Olt River are located⁵.

The Roman settlement of Feldioara was noticed within the former earthen fortress⁶; stratigraphically, this was identified through the existence of a 20-30 cm thick layer of dark

¹ First mentioned in 1240, under the name *Castrum Sanctae Mariae* (Ub. I, p. 68-69); Saint Mary is the patroness of the Crusader order, as confirmed by the parallel with the city of Marienburg (Malbork) in northern Poland, founded by the Teutons after leaving Țara Bârsei, at the middle of the 13th century.

² Nowadays a large part of the defensive trench has been filled with earth and levelled.

³ The Hungarian name of the village Földvár = earthen fortress derives from this fortification; in Romanian, it gave the current name – Feldioara.

⁴ See for example the map from TIR L 35.

⁵ TIR L 35, p. 41; Tudor 1968, p. 281; Țentea, Matei-Popescu, Călina 2021a, p. 23-25, no. 4; Țentea, Matei-Popescu, Călina 2021b, p. 304-305.

⁶ The excavations were conducted within six different sectors marked with letters from A to F: sector A (1990-1991) – the south-eastern edge of the terrace, of the area bounded by the great defensive ditch; Sector B (1990-1991) – located around the Romanesque basilica; Sector C (1990) – located in the garden of the parish house; Sector D (1990-1995) – the plaza with a roughly trapezoidal plan that lies between the Romanesque basilica (the Evangelical church) and the evangelical parish house; Sector E (1991) – the western edge of the territory bounded by the great defence ditch; sector F (1991-1995) – the stone fortress, located at the eastern edge of the plateau on which the village is located (fig. 1/a). Archaeological materials dating from the Roman period were discovered practically in all sectors; various works carried out in a series of households located inside the former earth fortress also revealed such artefacts. The densest habitation of the Roman era was particularly recorded in sectors A and D. Within the latter a consistent layer of remains was also noticed.

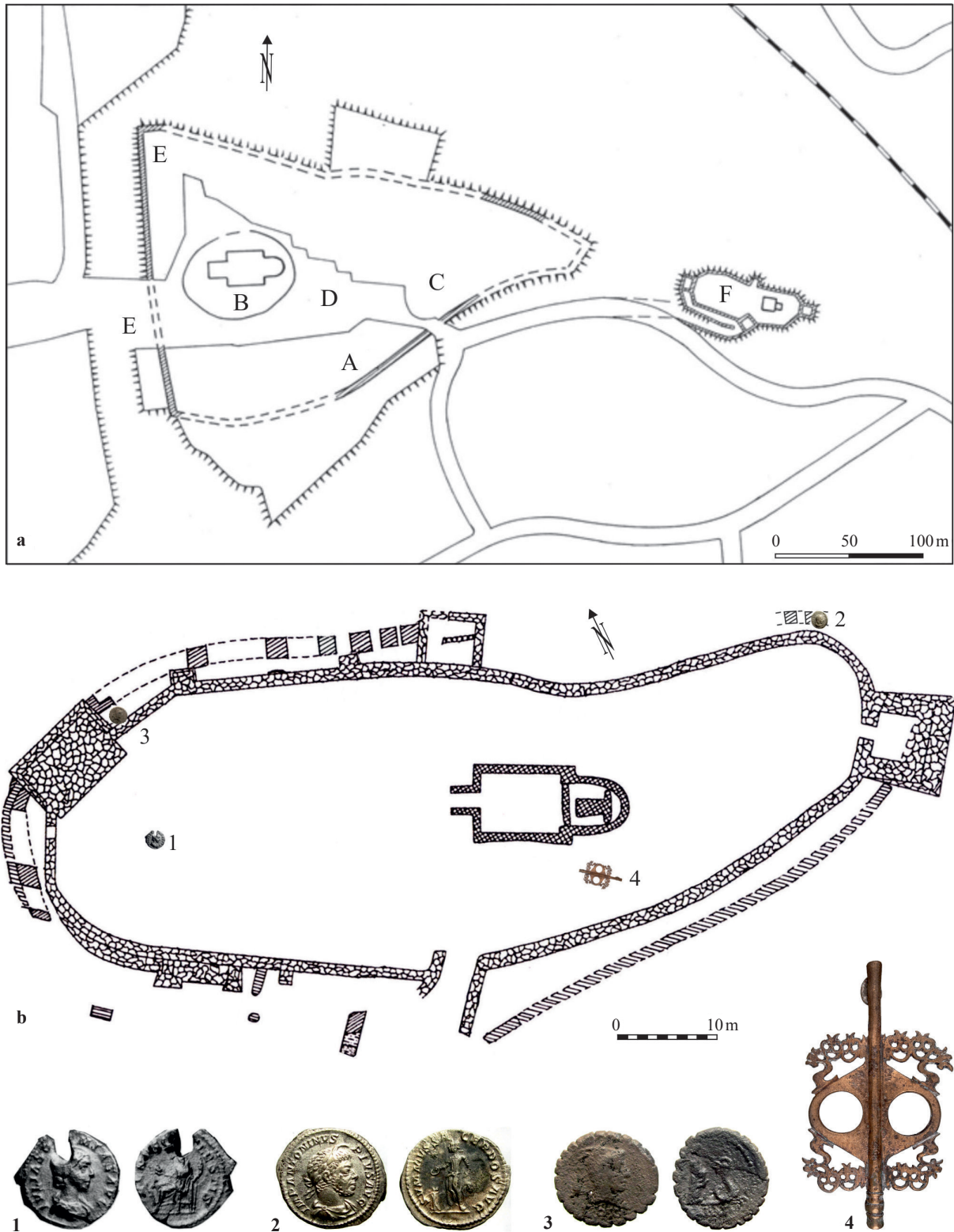


Fig. 1. a) Layout plan of the Feldioara archaeological site (according to Ioniță *et alii* 2004, p. 168); b) layout plan of the Feldioara medieval fortress and the Roman archaeological discoveries; 1-3. Roman coins; 4. baldric fastener in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead.

brown earth with many mud-bricks remains, resulting probably from the burnt walls of the straw and clay houses. Numerous and varied materials were gathered from the Roman period deposit: ceramic vessels, glassware, tiles, grinders, two fibulas, two sponges, a bracelet, a needle, a bronze thimble, etc.⁷. The layout plan of the houses could not have been traced, but several hearths and a furnace were noticed.

A number of 23 Roman coins were also found, though many of them within the medieval contexts (see below the entire discussion about the general chronology of the Roman occupation layer)⁸. We point out that the most important part of the Roman settlement was overlapped by a medieval cemetery belonging to the German settlers, who came here after the middle of the 12th century⁹; the Roman layers were sometime cut by the medieval graves.

THE MINIATURE *BENEFICIARIVS* SPEARHEAD BALDRIC FASTENER

The most spectacular find is a baldric fastener (“Balteusschließen”) designed in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead. It was found during the 2013 archaeological season, in the excavations conducted within the medieval fortress, exactly in S. 7/2013, square 4, at -0.26 m depth, between the apse of the small church, from which only the foundations are still preserved, and the south-eastern segment of the southern rampart (on the right side of the entrance to the fortress) (fig. 1/4). From the stratigraphic point of view, it was found in a layer of grey soil pigmented with mortar, characteristic of the medieval habitation in the fortress. Most likely the item got there, just like some of the Roman coins presented below, during the Middle Ages, being unlikely to have been lost during the Roman period on the hilltop where the stone fortress would have been built 1000 years later. The hilltop, located near the settlement, was certainly used during the Roman period as an observation point, since the spot offers excellent visibility over the Olt River valley and part of the Bârsa Country.

Description: a bronze cast baldric fastener in the shape of a miniature spearhead. The piece was probably silvered, some traces being still visible. Large mount shaped in the form of a stylized miniature spearhead with raised central rib tapering to the slightly bolded upper end. Above the lower domed head there are baluster-and-rib mouldings. In the middle, there are two symmetrical oval flattened projections forming the blade of the spearhead. The blade has the two characteristics large circular holes, symmetrically disposed on each side of the rib. Under and above the blade, there are four openwork *peltae*, bound to the blade by two stylized dolphin shaped links on each side. The outer face of the fastener is polished and silvered, while the back side is flat. On this back side a retaining ring is weld in the median area and two characteristic headed studs at the both ends. The very presence of the retaining ring allows us to establish the function of this object as baldric fastener (fig. 2).

Measurements: Weight = 50.60 g; L = 11 cm; l = 5.4-6 cm; thickness = 2.5-3 mm.

These so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearheads are generally discovered in the proximity of the frontiers of the Roman Empire, and sometimes even within important sites located beyond the frontiers¹⁰. They could have functioned as brooches, strap terminals, simple baldric mounts, terminal plates, belt fasteners, or, rarely, even as baldric fasteners. To the latter category belongs

⁷ Ioniță 1994; Ioniță *et alii* 2004, p. 27-28, 90-92, 199-201, 219.

⁸ Two of these coins will be now published, for the other 21 coins see Popescu 2004.

⁹ Ioniță *et alii* 2004, p. 29-58, 93-123, 202-226.

¹⁰ Petculescu 1993.



Fig. 2. Baldric fastener in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead.

also the item here published, having on its back, between the two headed studs, the typical retaining ring¹¹. They imitated at reduced scale the big-heart shaped spearheads, used by certain ranks of subordinated officials, like *beneficiarii consularis* or *procuratoris*, *speculatores* or *frumentarii*, all serving in the *officium consularis*¹². Among them, this type of spearhead was mostly connected with the *beneficiarii consularis* or *procuratoris*, being considered as the symbol of “the sovereign power of the Roman state for which they were acting”¹³. Around the *beneficiarii consularis* it seems

¹¹ For the baldric fasteners of different types and shapes, mostly *phalerae*, see Oldenstein 1976, p. 226-234, 281-282, nos. 1105-1125.

¹² Eibl 1994, p. 278-297; Rankov 1999, p. 23-31; Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 285-288; Cupcea 2006-2007; Cupcea 2009; Cupcea 2014, p. 21-22 and 42; Piso 2019, p. 117. For *frumentarii*, bearing the same type of spear, see the funerary monument of Victorius Sabinus, φρουμένταρις Αἰγούστου, from Perinthus (Thracia), Sayar 1998, p. 266-268, no. 80, pl. XXI, fig. 80 (p. 268: “Unter der Inschrift befindet sich in flachem Relief die Darstellung der Spitze einer sogen. Benefiziarierlanze. Diese war das Dienstabzeichen verschiedener, mit besonderen Aufträgen betrauter Soldaten wie *beneficiarii*, *speculatores* und *frumentarii*”), Bérard 2004, p. 362-369; see also at Scupi (Moesia), another *frumentarius legionis VII Claudiae piae fidelis*, during the 1st century AD, CIL III, 8201 = IMS VI, 47. For *speculatores* see the funerary stele of *L. Blassius Nigellio, speculator legionis VII Claudiae*, from Viminacium (Moesia superior), CIL III, 1650 = ILS 2378 = IMS II, 106.

¹³ Alföldy 1959, p. 11-12; see also Ritterling 1919.

that the *officium* of the governor was built around the *beneficarii consularis*, being the officials often detached within the *stationes* around the province¹⁴, therefore they must be distinguished somehow within and outside the Roman army.

From the Dacian provinces the only other baldric fastener in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead was discovered at Micia. It is very similar in shape and size with the piece from Feldioara, but the upper part of the *pelta*-shape openwork ornaments and the central stud are missing. Moreover, it has only two openwork ornaments, each one disposed on each side of the rib¹⁵. Other eight pieces, smaller in size and without the typical retaining ring, published by Liviu Petculescu, are only baldric mounts (Slăveni, Răcari, somewhere in Oltenia region, Drobeta, Micia, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa)¹⁶. Among them, four bear *pelta*-shape openwork ornaments, just like the baldric fastener from Micia and the fastener published here. From this point of view the baldric fastener from Feldioara has the most lavish *pelta*-shape openwork ornaments. Another simple baldric mount, in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead, still unpublished, was discovered at Apulum, during a survey conducted by Alexandru Diaconescu in the Partoș district of Alba Iulia, in the south-east corner of the Podei plateau¹⁷.

Baldric mounts were discovered beyond the Dacian provinces, too. We can therefore mention a baldric mount in the shape of a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead discovered during the excavations at Mătășaru, not far from the frontier of Dacia inferior¹⁸. The item has three studs on its back, being highly probably produced in the province, and dated by Liviu Petculescu in the first half of the 3rd century AD¹⁹. The baldric mount from Mătășaru bears a very close resemblance to the mount discovered at Medieșul Aurit, an important settlement located beyond the frontier of Dacia Porolissensis²⁰.

Two direct analogies regarding the shape and function of our item are known: one discovered beyond the Roman frontier at Vimose, part of a ritual deposition into a bog²¹, and the other one discovered on the frontier of the province of Raetia at Rainau-Buch²². We do not, however, count the fragmentary items, discovered at Pfünz and Osterburken for example²³, which could have also been baldric fastener, but having missed their middle parts with the retaining rings, the identification is not at all sure.

Recently, a plain rectangular belt buckle was published, with an open frame enclosing a so-called *beneficiarius* miniature spearhead design, probably belonging to a soldier of the legion *III Cyrenaica*, highly probably a *beneficiarius legati legionis*²⁴.

¹⁴ Ott 1995, p. 67-68; Rankov 1999, p. 16-21; Cupcea 2014, p. 43-48; Piso 2019, p. 114-120.

¹⁵ Petculescu 1993, p. 195, no. 4 and p. 184, fig. 1/4.

¹⁶ Petculescu 1993, p. 184, fig. 1/1-3, 5 and p. 186, fig. 2/6-9.

¹⁷ Bounegru *et alii* 2011, p. 100, no. 172.

¹⁸ Bichir 1984, p. 58, pl. LII/8 and LIII/4; Petculescu 1993, p. 182-185, 196, no. 7, fig. 2/7.

¹⁹ Petculescu 1999, p. 895-896, no. 8: "all these three baldric fittings were manufactured in *Dacia* province and date in the first half of the 3rd century AD possibly around AD 250" and p. 900.

²⁰ Dumitrașcu, Bader 1967, p. 40, fig. 20, pl. XVI/8; Petculescu 1993, 182-185, 196, no. 6, fig. 2/6; Petculescu 1999, p. 899, no. 28, 900 and 905, pl. 3/28, dated to AD 200-250/260.

²¹ Bishop, Coulston 2006, p. 32, fig. 13; Pauli-Jensen 2014, p. 375-376, fig. 2.

²² Oldenstein 1976, p. 252, no. 385, pl. 40/385; Bishop, Coulston 2006, p. 184, fig. 119/1.

²³ Oldenstein 1976, p. 252, nos. 386-387, pl. 40/386-387.

²⁴ Raviv, Zissu 2021.

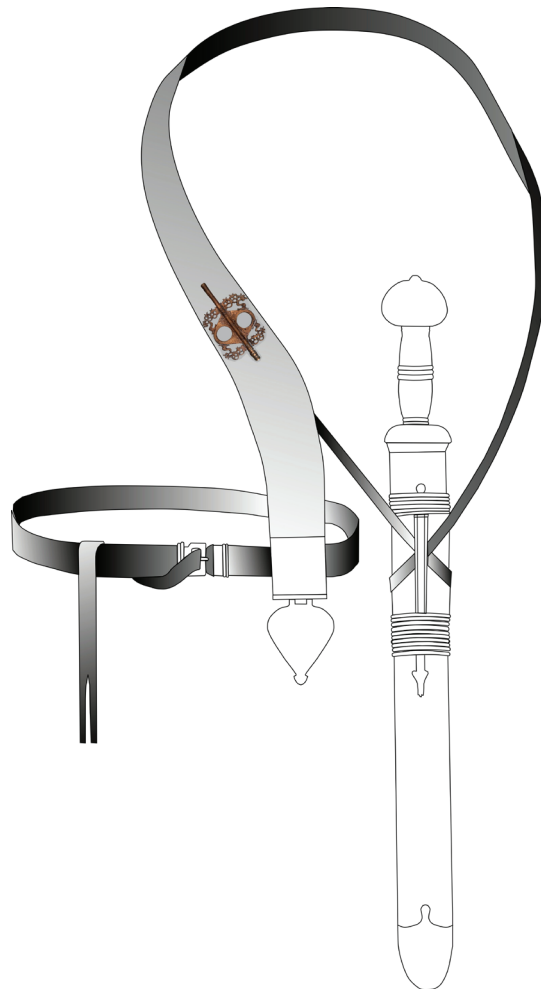


Fig. 3. Proposal for the reconstruction of the way of wearing the baldric fastener.

The most common opinion about the miniature spearheads is that they were badges of ranks of the *beneficarii*, *frumentarii* or *speculatores*²⁵, imitating at a reduced scale the head of the spears which they carried²⁶. The badges allowed them to be distinguished among the other soldiers and to be recognised as officials direct commissioned by the governor of the province, by the provincials, and by the people living beyond the Roman frontier. Most of them bear *pelta*-ornaments, which could have had apotropaic characteristics, but their exact meaning, if there is any, is indeed difficult to understand²⁷. However, being parts of the Roman military equipment, it is difficult to set them on the same scale with the spears themselves, which were probably formally given to the officials in the moment they entered the service, as the depictions on Roman monuments seem to attest. Taking into account the discovery of such spearhead in the area of the sanctuary of Osterburken²⁸, it is highly possible that it was deposited at the end of the service in that *statio* and not simply lost.

²⁵ Petculescu 1993, p. 181 and 192; Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 29-30.

²⁶ See the spearhead discovered at Osterburken (France, Nelis-Clément 2014, p. 174, fig. 15), and the one preserved in the Wiesbaden Museum (Ritterling 1919, p. 10-11, fig. 1); see also Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 285-288.

²⁷ Petculescu 1993, p. 192.

²⁸ Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 285-288; France, Nelis-Clément 2014, p. 174, fig. 15.

Nothing allows us to believe that they had received miniature spearheads on the same occasion, since they were so different in shape, size and function, and if they were to function as badges, they must have been more standardized. Moreover, all the known pieces are to be dated after approx. AD 170 and the *beneficarii consularis* or *procuratoris* (since the area was part of the province of Dacia inferior), *frumentarii* and *speculatores* were all acting well before that moment²⁹. The spears themselves were the only symbol of their office in the governor's staff, being considered sacred, just like other *signa*³⁰, the miniature spearheads being only decorative imitations inspired by them. They seem to have come into fashion together with the *balteus* (fig. 3) sometime after the Marcomannic wars and disappeared when the *limes* collapsed on the Rhine frontier and in Dacia around AD 260. Nevertheless, connected with the spears themselves, they could also distinguish the *officiales* among their fellow soldiers and the *provinciales*. These badges were not probably received by the *officiales* when were appointed – they only received the spear with the characteristic shape of the head –, but it is highly possible that some of them simply commissioned these baldric mounts or fasteners sometime after, as a merely private initiative.

THE COINS EVIDENCE AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE ROMAN SETTLEMENT FROM FELDIOARA

Along with the discovery of the baldric fastener, the coins evidence is also important for establishing the general chronology of the Roman habitation of Feldioara. As it has been already mentioned, 23 Roman coins were found during the archaeological excavations. Three of them were discovered within the medieval fortress, where no Roman level or other Roman period materials were noticed, except for the baldric fastener. Twelve coins were discovered within the medieval graves, out of which seven coins seem to have been used as funerary obols: two Imperial *denarii* – Caracalla AD 213 (G. 4A), Iulia Mamaea AD 222 (G. 6); four *denarii* fourées – Iulia Domna AD 204 (G. 5), Septimius Severus AD 205 (G. 21), Severus Alexander AD 223 (G. 57), Caracalla AD 210 (G. 93a-b); a *sestertius* – Severus Alexander AD 226 (G. 46); and five coins were found, more or less by chance, in the filling of the grave pits: two Republican *denarii* – Roma SAFRA 150 BC (G. 56), Q. Pomponius Musa 66 BC (G. 22); an imperial *denarius* – Geta Caesar AD 203 (G. 38); two *denarii* fourées – Elagabal AD 218-219 (G. 50 and G. 74).

²⁹ The same conclusion by Petculescu 1993, p. 193: “Therefore, I think that the hypothesis stating that miniature spearheads were badges of *beneficarii* rank is improbable, insofar as badges are as yet unattested in the Roman army, with only one possible exception, the ‘Optime maxime conserva’ baldric mounts, which were remarkably uniform set of pieces throughout the Roman Empire”.

³⁰ Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 286: “Comme les enseignes, les lances de ce type pouvaient donc être plantées dans le sol, sur un espace sacré comme c’est le cas dans la station d’Osterburken. Cet objet symbolique et religieux représente en quelque sorte la puissance de Rome, de ses dieux et de ses autorités partout où elle est transportée. Dans les provinces, les *hastae* à deux yeux étaient habituellement portées comme signe distinctif de l’*auctoritas* du gouverneur (ou d’une personne en charge d’une institution) par ses *officiales*, en particulier par lorsqu’ils étaient en service détaché ou appelés à se déplacer. De la même manière, les détachements militaires emportaient les enseignes ou étendards, symbole de la personne même de l’empereur”. It seems like the spear itself with its characteristic spearhead was named *signum*, too, as it appears on the inscriptions of the *beneficarii consularis* from Samum (Cășeu), Dacia Porolissensis (*sub signo* or *sub signis*), France, Nelis-Clément 2014, p. 131 and Piso 2019, p. 115-116. This idea was set forth by Kovács 2005, p. 958: “The *signa* can be identical with the spear-ensigns stuck on the earth in front of BF-*statio*. These inscriptions are from the middle of 3rd c. (AD 239, 243) therefore the change of name (from *lancea-hasta* to *signa*) cannot be ruled out either”.

Eight coins come from the Roman layer, or can be connected with various archaeological features corresponding to it, more or less damaged by the overlapping medieval habitation, or even from archaeological layers adjacent to the Roman one, brought there as a result of numerous interventions into the soil: three imperial *denarii* – Septimius Severus AD 195 (S. 38/1995, -0.70 m), Septimius Severus AD 204 (S. 32/1994, *passim*), Severus Alexander AD 225 (S. 34/1994, -0.93 m); four *denarii* fourées – Caracalla AD 209 (sector A, S. 7/1990; pit no. 40 b, -1.90 m), Divus Severus AD 211 (S. 35/1994, -0.30-0.40 m), two unspecified fragmentary (S. 4/1991, -0.65 m and S. 6/1992, -1.45 m); a cast bronze coin “*denarius*” – Caracalla AD 209 (S. 11/1992, -1.40 m).

All three coins found in the fortress are in secondary contexts, which will be briefly presented to correctly understand the more or less random nature of their presence there. The first coin, a *denarius* of Iulia Soaemias Bassiana (AD 218-222)³¹ (fig. 1/1), broken at one edge, was found in S. II a/1994 (inside the fortress, in the western part of the courtyard), at -1.80 m, in a pit, that went much deeper (about -4.20 m) and contained medieval and modern materials. It is not excluded that the coin was first punctured and worn as a medallion (until the “ear” was broken), a fact also suggested somewhat by the positioning of the rupture in relation to the effigy of the character, sometime in the Middle Ages or modern period³². Other two coins are still unpublished³³, since they were found in the 2016 archaeological season, when extensive excavations were conducted as part of the restoration works at the fortress that took place in 2013-2016. A *denarius* of Elagabal (AD 218-222)³⁴ was found 10 cm east of S. 56/2016 (outside the fortress, near the north-eastern segment of the northern curtain, about 4-5 m from the eastern tower), at -0.48 m, in a black/dark brown layer with mortar fragments and pigment, rare brick pigment, 3-4 cm above the remains of the wall attributed to the Teutons (fig. 1/2).

The other coin, a Republican *denarius* L. Roscius Fabatus 64 BC³⁵ (fig. 1/3), was found in S. 65/2016 (outside the fortress), on the second floor of the northern rampart, at 0.60 m from the wall of the western tower, in the filling of the 1991 excavation³⁶.

³¹ Popescu 2004, p. 65, 131, 249, fig. 83/13.

³² By forcing the description of the piece with elements not resulting from the publication nor the *de visu* examination, it was also issued the opinion has been also put forward that the coin was cut with a chisel, to check the quality of the metal, mandatory in the Middle Ages, a practice unknown for the Roman period (Purece 2013, p. 306); this assertion ignores the evidence of the broken and even perforated coins, during the Roman period, from the hoard of Vârtope, which contains, among other pieces, coins from the 2nd-3rd century AD (from Trajan to Gordian) (Dudău 2006, p. 67, 137-138). It should also be noted that coins were generally checked by practicing a notch and not by breaking a piece.

³³ The two coins discovered in 2016 were identified and studied by our colleague Aurel Vilcu, from the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology, to whom we are very grateful.

³⁴ Obverse: IMP ANTONINVS PIVS AVG; laureate bust draped towards the head with horns right. Averse: SVMMVS SA-CERDOS AVG; Elagabal standing to the left, sacrificing over tripod, holding patera and branch, star in the left field; silver 3.17 g; 20.5 × 18.2 mm; RIC IV.2, p. 38, no. 146, Rome, AD 218-222.

³⁵ Obverse: Head of Junona Sospita to the right; control mark behind, below L · ROSCI. Reverse: Girl and snake face to face; to the left control mark, below FABATI; silver ⚡ 2.62 g; 19.9 × 18.5 mm; burnt; RRC, p. 439-440, no. 412. 1 (*denarius serratus*), Rome, 64 BC, L. Roscius Fabatus (“his types reveal his Lanuvine origin”).

³⁶ S. 65/2016 overlapped S. 1a/1991; on this occasion, the coin that was unnoticed in 1991 and discarded along with the earth when refilling the section was recovered. However, it is certain that it comes from this area, located at the junction between the northern enclosure wall, the west tower and the remains of the wall attributed to the Teutons. Most likely the coin was in the La Tène layer, which was massively recorded on the hill of the fortress, later pierced by the foundations of the medieval walls.

As it can be seen, 20 coins belong to the Imperial period (2nd-3rd century AD), and three to the Republican period (2nd-1st century BC), with four types of coins being distinguished: eleven silver *denarii* (eight Imperial and three Republican), ten *denarii* fourées (counterfeit), a cast bronze “*denarius*”, and a bronze coin (*sestertius*).

The question of the coins originating from a supposed hoard discovered by the German colonists barely settled at Feldioara, and later divided among the various families, for use as a funerary obol has been recently stretched forward³⁷, based on circumstantial arguments, which, however, do not withstand a thorough analysis. Firstly, the discovery context of the coins, where at least some of the pieces were found in Roman period deposits (or in neighbouring layers, accidentally arrived there as a result of various interventions on the soil)³⁸, as mentioned above, does not advocate the existence of a hoard. We cannot say for sure that even the coins discovered in the filling of the graves’ pits (two Republican *denarii*, one Imperial *denarius*, and two *denarii* fourées) arrived there as funerary obols, or simply by chance because they were in the layers affected by the digging of the pits. Also, for coins found in pits with other destinations, dug out during Middle Ages, the intentional or random element of their presence in the respective contexts cannot be proved.

Going beyond the natural question: *why would a discoverer share a so-called hoard within the community?*, the diversity of coins that are difficult to assemble in a hoard according to the hoarding customs (norms of the period) and known examples, strikes as peculiar. On the one hand, three Republican coins, found in secondary contexts³⁹, may come from the Dacian settlement (La Tène period), archaeologically documented at Feldioara⁴⁰, without excluding the lesser possibility that they remained in circulation even in the Imperial period until Trajan’s monetary reform (AD 107) and very rarely after, but not until the 3rd century, no matter the circumstances⁴¹. On the other hand, the Imperial coins, although chronologically spread over a short period of about 30 years (AD 195-226)⁴², can be hardly associated with a hoard because of the composition/nominals in which bronze predominates, the ten fourées *denarii* also having the bronze core, as it is known, to which are added a cast “*denarius*” and a *sestertius*, both of bronze. Some very well-preserved pieces, without traces of blunting, could suggest the idea of hoarding, but, in fact, the explanation lies in the character of the settlement located at the edge of the Empire, its short existence and implicitly the limited period in which the coins were circulated. This could also

³⁷ Purece 2013. It was even assumed that there were two distinct hoards, one composed of Imperial coins much more numerous than those discovered, which were selected by the medieval inhabitants, retaining the qualitative pieces and depositing in the tombs the lower quality coins. The Republican coins (two at the time) would come from another hoard discovered in an area about 20 km northeast of Feldioara, where several treasures containing Republican *denarii* are known.

³⁸ The assessment that the coins could have ended up in these layers or in various other pits, as a result of being part of the funerary inventories of graves destroyed by subsequent interventions is at least risky (Purece 2013, p. 306).

³⁹ Because no Republican coins were actually found in the La Tène deposits, it was wrongly assumed that they actually came from another hoard found in a more distant or closer area. According to this assumption the medieval inhabitants of Feldioara circulated them in the new contexts (Purece 2013, p. 308, 310-311).

⁴⁰ Boroffka 2004, p. 25-26, 88-89, 193-198.

⁴¹ Petac 2010, p. 13-31.

⁴² Besides, the Severan period (AD 192-235) when the coins are dated is characterized throughout Roman Dacia by a sensible reduction of the hoarding process (Petac 2010, p. 182). We also mention that all known hoards that end during this period contain also pre-Severan Imperial coins, which does not happen in the Feldioara site (Petac 2010, p. 38-42).

explain the few known examples of hoards containing in addition to *denarii* and fourées coins⁴³, a *denarius* fourée just out of the mint (“fleur de coin”) that can often be confused with a genuine *denarius* (both in that time and sometimes by numismatists). With these possible exceptions, after all, the *denarii* fourées being officially silver coins, there is a clear homogeneity visible across the territory of Roman Dacia – there are hoards containing precious metals coins, these being the most numerous, and separately hoards comprising common metal coins⁴⁴. We underline once again that some of the coins, at least the seven undoubtedly used as obol (two Imperial *denarii*, four *denarii* fourées, and a *sestertius*)⁴⁵, were discovered separately, possibly during the digging of the grave pits, or as a result of other activities carried out by the medieval community on the area of the former Roman site, over which they had just settled. We, therefore, reject the haphazard opinion that ignores the conditions of discovery, the hoarding rules of the period and even the explanations to the common-sense questions set out above, creating confusion by inventing hoards where they are not. It is not the existence of a supposed hoard that explains the relatively large monetary presence in the modest Roman settlement of Feldioara, but its character, a possible *statio* of the *beneficarii consularis* or *procuratoris*.

The secondary context and the absence of any traces of Roman habitation on the hill on which the medieval fortress was later built⁴⁶ lead us to the idea that the three coins discovered within the fortress belong in fact to the medieval context. This is valid at least for the Imperial *denarii*, while the Republican coin could have come from the La Tène layer (well documented on the hill of the fortress), as mentioned earlier.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to its geographical location on the border and the natural, but also artificial environment (the pre-existence of a large earthen fortification), which were extremely advantageous, Feldioara could not be ignored in the strategy of the Roman frontier of the province of Dacia inferior.

Based on the discoveries, especially the coins, the Roman settlement started after the Marcomannic wars and reached its peak during the Severan period. The cash flow diminished and ceased under Severus Alexander, like in the case of some auxiliary forts, located in the

⁴³ For example, in relation to the areas of the auxiliary forts, the counterfeit *denarii* are present only in two hoards (Vârtope and Porolissum – *Pomet*), in very small numbers, representing 0.33% of the total number of hoarded coins (Dudău 2006, p. 82).

⁴⁴ Petac 2010, p. 27.

⁴⁵ We insist on them because of the specific character of intentional deposition in medieval tombs, which could make them likely (in the opinion of some) to have been part of a hoard found by medieval inhabitants, who then used them as funerary obols, either to save coins in circulation or because they were rare. We can also ask ourselves why the one who discovered/owned the presumed hoard did not exchange the good silver Roman coins for coins currently circulating in the Hungarian Kingdom (Hungarian denars) at the money exchangers. We mention that a Roman *denarius* weighs 20-30 times more than a Hungarian denar from the second half of the 12th century. This is another argument that no inhabitant of the medieval settlement ever disposed of all the Roman coins discovered so far in Feldioara or a good number of them, but only that some were found and reused by different people at different moments.

⁴⁶ It is true that on the citadel on the hill there were intense constructive activities in the last eight centuries, which inevitably led to considerable interventions on the soil, the upper strata being quite affected and mixed. However, if there had been a Roman habitation on the spot, it is impossible that the traces would have completely wiped out.

east, south-east and south Transylvania⁴⁷ (Călugăreni⁴⁸, Sânpaul⁴⁹, Orheiul Bistriței⁵⁰, Râșnov⁵¹, Cincșor⁵², Boița⁵³ and Racovița⁵⁴).

The large number of *denarii* of other quality than the official one (counterfeit, false, from billon) characterizes the Severan dynasty monetary circulation⁵⁵. The very presence of a large number of *denarii* fourées (counterfeit) is also a feature of civilian settlements and the environment of auxiliary forts⁵⁶ and in no case would it be due to a selection from a supposed hoard, made by the medieval inhabitants of Feldioara.

Based on the baldric fastener, one can think that at a certain moment, Roman army personnel from the *officium* of the *procurator* of the province of Dacia inferior, or from the *officium* of the *consularis trium Daciarum* was sent to that frontier zone, highly probable the *beneficiarii procuratoris* or *consularis*. The *beneficiarii* of the governor, in comparison with other *beneficiarii* attached to the army officers, such as *beneficiarii tribuni* or *beneficiarii legati legionis*, could have been sent throughout the province to one of the *stationes*, representing the governor himself⁵⁷. Unfortunately, there are no other archaeologically traces of their presence, all the remains uncovered during the excavations being mostly connected with a typical rural frontier settlement and not with a possible *statio* of the *beneficiarii*, a *mansio*, or other type of Roman military building.

Up to this moment, no epigraphic monuments attest the presence of the *officiales* of the *procurator Daciae inferioris* or of the *consularis trium Daciarum*⁵⁸, but three baldric mounts of this type were discovered at Răcari and in Oltenia region, and another one at Mătășaru, beyond the Eastern Dacian frontier in Muntenia region, into a native settlement context. Comparing with the other two Dacian provinces, Dacia superior and Dacia Porolissensis, the evidence is scarce, which

⁴⁷ Dudău 2006, p. 87.

⁴⁸ Matei-Popescu, Țentea 2016, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Matei-Popescu, Țentea 2016, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Matei-Popescu, Țentea 2016, p. 9.

⁵¹ Matei-Popescu, Țentea 2016, p. 16-17.

⁵² Țentea, Matei-Popescu, Călina 2021b, p. 303-304.

⁵³ Țentea, Matei-Popescu, Călina 2021b, p. 305-306.

⁵⁴ Țentea, Matei-Popescu, Călina 2021a, p. 33-35, no. 8.

⁵⁵ Dudău 2006, p. 45-46.

⁵⁶ Dudău 2006, p. 81-82.

⁵⁷ Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 217-227; France, Nelis-Clément 2014, p. 123-124.

⁵⁸ At Urzica (Olt County), not far from Sucidava, a *beneficiarius tribuni* of an unknown auxiliary unit or legion is attested (even one of the legions from the neighbour province of Moesia inferior), but he was obviously part of the *officium* of a *tribunus militum* and not of the *procurator Daciae inferioris* (AÉ 1998, 1110 = ILD, 129: *D(is) M(anibus) / M(arco) Fl(avio) M(arci) fil(io) / Pap(iria) tribu Epste/lae vet(erano) ex / trib(uni) b(ene)ff(iciario) vixit / [ann(is)]... / [- - -]* – belonging to tribe Papiria he probably originated from *colonia Ulpia Oescus* and since the epigraphic field is badly preserved the reading is not sure, he could have been probably an Ulpius and not a Flavius, hence: *M. Ulpius M(arci) fil(ius) Pap(iria) tribu Epstela*). There is no clear indication that this type of badges could have been worn by the lower rank *beneficiarii*. A *beneficiarius* appears on a bronze stud (“*sur un bouton en bronze*”), discovered at Racovița (*Praetorium* on the River Olt frontier), but the piece is now lost (CIL III, 13797 = IDR II, 591: *PAC B - b(ene)ff(iciarius)*) and another one on very fragmented inscription, a graffito on a brick fragment, discovered at Romula (AÉ 1969-1970, 556 = IDR II, 394: *CIN ... / B - b(ene)ff(iciarius)* – difficult to say if he was indeed a *beneficiarius procuratoris*, since it is not at all sure that his *officium* was indeed located there). A *statio* is epigraphically attested at Cioroiu Nou, but the inscription was raised by a *speculator* of the legion *VII Claudia* from Moesia superior during Maximinus’ reign, IDR II, 141 = ILD, 99: *[Dia]nae Sanc[ta]e Mercurio G[u]bernatori e[st] Genio / stationis A[ur(elius) Ger]manus spe[cul]ator leg[ionis] / VII Cl[audiae] [[Max[imianae]]] / [li]bens an[imo] - - -*].

should not be a surprise, taking into account that *officium* of the praesidial procurator and, after AD 168, of the financial procurator of the province of Dacia inferior was not very big, having little personnel, all detached from the auxiliary units of the province, while the *beneficiarii procuratoris* were probably detached from the legions of Dacia or Moesia inferior⁵⁹. If indeed a *statio* should have been located in the area of Feldioara, it only appeared after the Marcomannic wars and disappeared sometime after AD 235 and it was highly probably used by the *beneficiarii consularis* of the *officium* of the *consularis trium Daciarum* from Apulum (in his *officium* must have been at least 60 *beneficiarii*⁶⁰). This perfectly fits with the general trend throughout the Roman Empire, where the *stationes* located along the Rhine and Danube frontiers appeared only around the 160', as a part of the intelligence role played by the *officia* of the governor in the new context. Taking into account the general turmoil, the need to have first-hand intelligence information about the moving of the peoples beyond the frontier obviously increased⁶¹.

To sum up, without being a decisive proof, the discovery of this badge of rank could be an indication that somewhere in a still unidentified location at Feldioara, or in the vicinity, a *statio* was located, where *officiales* were active, highly probably *beneficiarii procuratoris* or *beneficiarii consularis*, in order to survey that frontier zone of the province of Dacia inferior.

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⁵⁹ Ott 1995, p. 33 and p. 82-85.

⁶⁰ For the number of the *beneficiarii consularis* from a legion see Ott 1995, p. 31 and 44, based on an inscription from Lambaesis, AÉ 1917-1918, 57 = AÉ 1992, 1871.

⁶¹ Rankov 1987, p. 246-247; Nelis-Clément 2000, p. 27-28; France, Nelis-Clément 2014, p. 125-128; Piso 2019, p. 118. One of the earliest was however the *statio* from Obernburg raised in AD 141/144, but it was rebuilt around AD 200, see Steidl 2005, p. 89-90; Steidl 2014, p. 106-108.

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