

RECENT ACQUISITIONS OF BRONZE AGE OBJECTS AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art has recently added to its collection a selection of objects from the Late Bronze Age in Europe. Acquired from several sources, these objects add to the Museum's small collection of European Bronze Age materials, which includes objects from Ireland and Scandinavia. The recent acquisitions, all of copper alloy, likely come from the Carpathian Basin region and in most cases find parallels in objects from Slovakia, Hungary, or Romania. All of the pieces exhibit a dark green patina; their largely intact surface is marred by only occasional instances of lifting.

Large "Posamenterie" Fibula,

fig. 1, (L: 27.8 cm.; Dm of largest spiral: 10.3):

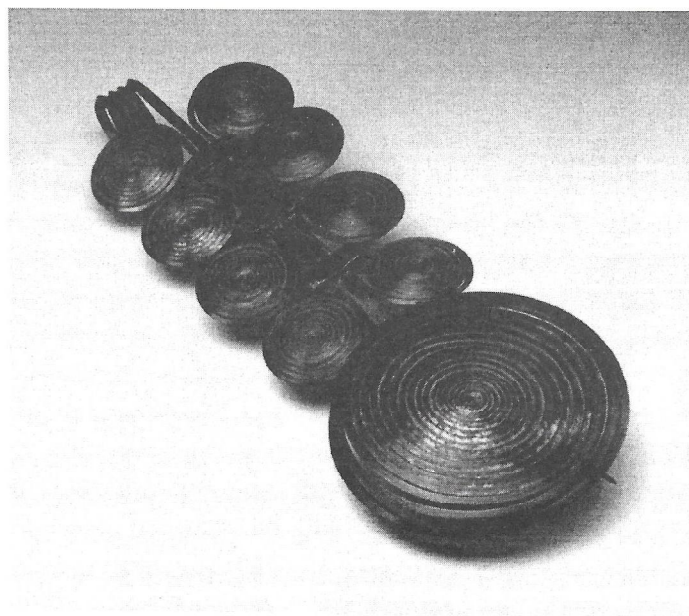


Figure 1: Large Posamentarie Fibula, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Caroline Howard Hyman Gift, in memory of Margaret English Frazer, 2000 (2000.281.2)

A single large spiral and eight small spirals are the principal decorative elements of this fibula. The body of the fibula, made up of the large spiral at its foot, bow, spring, pin and catchplate, has been crafted from a single, extremely long wire, rhomboid in shape. The four pairs of smaller spirals that extend from the main spiral to the coil at the fibula's head are attached to the bow by means of three rectangular fasteners.

The development of the "posamenterie" fibula has been much studied and its typologies well formulated.¹ This piece falls into the Rimavská Sobota category (Type A), departing from the eponymous examples only by the absence of a figure-eight at the spring. With its four pairs of spirals, it offers an intact example of subgroup A3. Numerous examples of this type survive, including some from deposits in Hungary,² Romania,³ and the Balkans.⁴

Also known as "composite variant" fibulas, these large and dramatic brooches, composed of multiple parts, are perhaps the most characteristic jewelry form of the Late Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin region. Usually found in hoards, they may well have had a symbolic or religious use in addition to a practical one. The orientation of pendants found on some posamentarie brooches suggests the pins would have been worn horizontally.⁵

Diadem,

fig. 2, (Dm at widest extent: 26 cm.; H at greatest extent: 13.7 cm; Dm of largest spiral: 7 cm.):

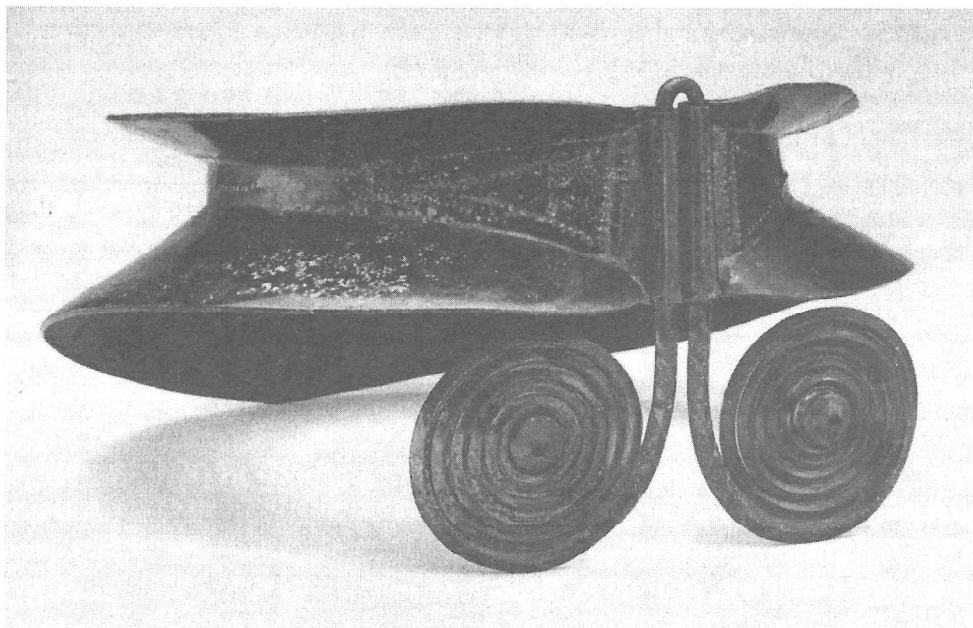


Figure 2: Diadem, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Caroline Howard Hyman Gift, in memory of Margaret English Frazer, 2000 (2000.281.1)

Made from a single sheet of hammered bronze plate, the collar of the diadem is composed of a narrow band, decorated with lines of punched dots, sandwiched between outward extending projections. In contrast to the straight edge of the underside, the upper edge forms a subtle slope that culminates in a point at the diadem's widest part (presumably the front). On the opposite side (the back?), the metal sheet curls around to create two channels through which a fastener with spiral terminals passes. The spiral terminals are decorated with an incised pattern of triangles and lines. Pointed rivets appear at the center of the spirals. The diadem has received a number of minor repairs, most notably where the spiral fastener projects from the metal band.

Three other examples of this type of diadem – the Vácszentlászló type – survive intact. The piece unearthed at Vácszentlászló, now in the Hungarian National Museum, was found with thirty-two other objects as part of a hoard, though a cup appears to have been the only companion to the diadem. Another example, said to be one of two (the other now lost) found in a grave in Istenmezője, also resides in the Hungarian National Museum.⁶ The Betliar Castle owns the third, which comes from an unknown findspot.⁷ Fragments from another example were found at Rimavská Sobota.⁸ Finds at Nagybátony have yielded two miniature diadems, one of which was accompanied by a miniature bronze ax, and fragment of a miniature pin.⁹ The rarity of the type and the paucity of information concerning their find circumstances leave many questions concerning their dating and use.

Figure-eight Bow Fibula,

fig. 3, (L: 11.1 cm; Dm of large spiral: 4 cm.):

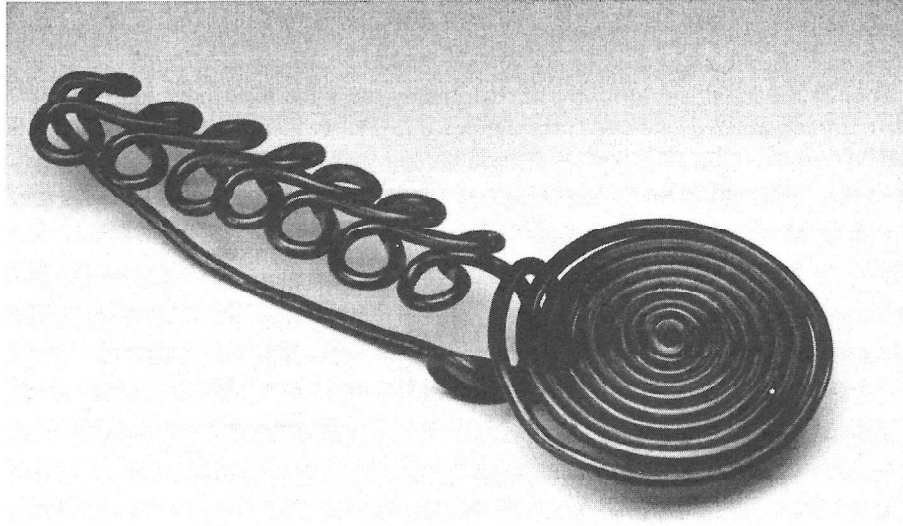


Figure 3: Figure-eight Bow Fibula, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Caroline Howard Hyman Gift, in memory of Margaret English Frazer, 2000 (2000.281.3)

Composed of a single, rounded wire, this small fibula is decorated by a row of seven figure-eight forms that terminate in a spiral. It is completely intact with only the needle suffering from a slight bend. Though lacking a coiled spring, the piece most closely resembles the thirty some known examples of the fibula-type associated with Čaka. The wide-ranging distribution and diverse contexts of the Čaka pins suggests that the type enjoyed a long period of production. Considered an early development of the posamentarie fibulas, they have appeared in gravesites, hoards, and settlements in many countries across central Europe including Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Austria, and Germany.¹⁰

Shaft-Pipe Ax,

fig. 4, (L: 21.6 cm; width: 4 cm.; D: 1.1 cm):

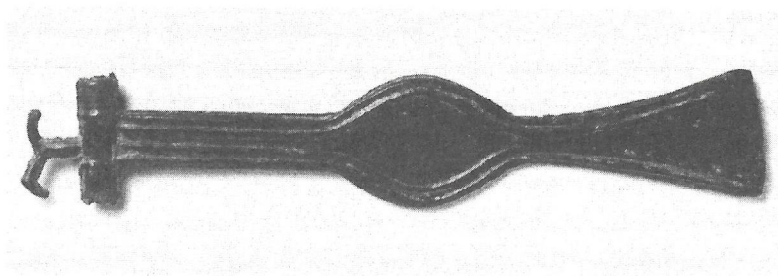


Figure 4: Shaft-Pipe Ax, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Caroline Howard Hyman Gift, in memory of Margaret English Frazer, 2000 (2000.281.4)

Though the humblest form, the ax is in many ways the most intriguing object in the group. It finds no precise parallels among the shaft-pipe axes and disk-necked axes found in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania.¹¹ Flatter, thinner, and less sturdy than they, this ax exhibits an unusual shape: a long neck swells into an oval just before the flare of the blade. A channel articulated by a pair of parallel ribs delineates the ax's outer contours. The pipe, adorned with only two ribs, rests at the very top of the ax, and where one would expect to find a disc or semicircular neck appears a y-shaped protrusion, a remnant perhaps of the sprue used in casting. Indeed, the rough quality of the ax's outer edge may indicate that the piece was never finished.¹²

Armbands,

fig. 5, (L of 2000.407.1: 23.8 cm; Dm of armhole: 7.5cm; Dm of largest spiral: 3.8 cm.):

Made of a single piece of hammered wire, each armband is a tightly wound coil consisting of a succession of twenty rings that would have extended the length of the arm. The ends of the armbands terminate in a spiral. The main body of the armband and the terminals display two distinct shapes in cross-section: the wire of the body is chevron-shaped with a subtle rib delineating the apex, while the spiral wire is round. While both armbands are in good condition, one (2000.407.2) has been slightly stretched out. Parallel examples have been found in Bulgaria¹³ and Hungary.¹⁴

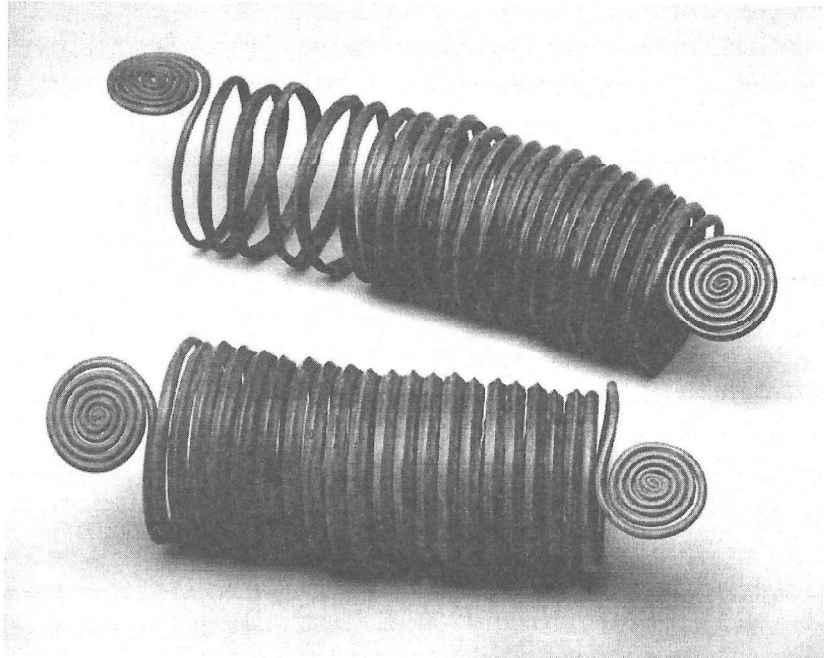


Figure 5: Armbands, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Kurt Berliner Foundation Gift, 2000 (2000.407.1-2)

Giant pin,
figs. 6–7 (L: 69.5 cm.):

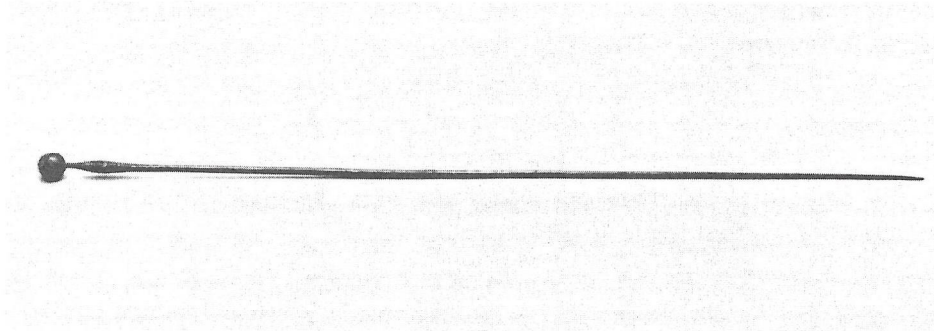


Figure 6: Giant pin, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Ronald R. Atkins Gift, 2000 (2000.400)

A near-spherical knob incised with a zigzag design tops a pin of extraordinary length. With the exception of the ridges that mark a slight swelling near the top of the pin, its length from point to knob is undecorated. These features place the pin within the Malá Vieska category – pins almost exclusively found in hoards in the northern part of the Carpathian basin, particularly in Slovakia.¹⁵

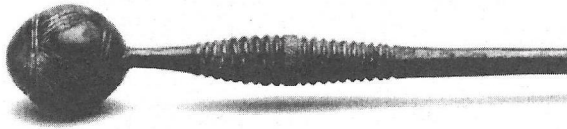


Figure 7: Detail of Giant pin, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Ronald R. Atkins Gift, 2000 (2000.400)

NOTES

- ¹ J. Paulík, "Ružicové spony zo Slovenska," *Slovenská Archeológia* 7 (1959): 328–362.; J. Filip, *Popelníková pole a počátky železné doby v Čechách* (Prague, 1936/37).
- ² P. Patay, "A Bokodi Bronzelelet," *Folia Archaeologica* 16 (1964): 15–20
- ³ T. Bader, *Die Fibeln in Rumänien, Prähistorische Bronzefund [PBF] XIV, 6*, (Munich, 1983), 41–56.
- ⁴ R. Vasić, *Die Fibeln im Zentralbalkan. PBF XIV, 12* (Stuttgart, 1999), 24, no. 92–93.
- ⁵ See, for instance, the "Type B" fibulas illustrated in Paulík, "Ružicové..."
- ⁶ On the two pieces in the Hungarian National Museum, see J. Hampel, *A Bronzkor Emlékei Magyarhonban I* (Budapest, 1886), pl. XXXVIII; M. Novotná, *Die Bronzediademe der Slowakei*, *Musaica* 18 (7), 1967, 47–68; A. Mozsolics, *Bronze- und Goldfunde des Karpatenbeckens: Depotfundhorizonte von Forró und Ópályi* (Budapest 1973), 142, 187, fig. 24.
- ⁷ M. Novotná, "Zwei Bronzediademfunde in der Slowakei," *Musaica* 19/8 (1968): 29–36, and *Halsringe und Diademe in der Slowakei. PBF XI, 4*, (Munich, 1984), 67–69, no. 378.
- ⁸ Novotná, *Halsringe und Diademe*, no. 379.
- ⁹ P. Patay, "Egy Miniatur Bronz Diadéma," *Archeológiai Értesítő* 94 (1967): 53–58.
- ¹⁰ Bader, *Fibeln in Rumänien*, 22–25; J. Říhový, *Die Fibeln in Mähren*, *PHB XIV, 9* (Stuttgart, 1993), 21–24; P. Betzler, *Die Fibeln in Süddeutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz I*, *PHB XIV, 3* (Munich, 1974), 23–26.
- ¹¹ M. Novotná, *Die Äxte und Beile in der Slowakei*, *PBF XI, 3* (Munich, 1970), 53–61, nos. 340–380; A. Vulpe, *Die Äxte und Beile in Rumänien I*, *PBF IX, 2* (Munich, 1970), 66–103, nos. 291–570; Mozsolics, *Bronze- und Goldfunde*; and J. Nestor, "Die verzierten Streitäxte mit Nackensceibe au Westrumänien," in E. Sprockhoff, ed., *Marburger Studien* (Darmstadt, 1938), 178–192.
- ¹² See the conservation report by P. Dandridge, *Files in the Medieval Department*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- ¹³ D. Gergova, *Früh- und ältereisenzeitliche Fibeln in Bulgarien*, *PHB XIV, 7* (Munich, 1987), 68, nos. A79–A81.
- ¹⁴ Mozsolics, *Bronze- und Goldfunde*, 136, pl. 268.