

# MARISIA

Studii și materiale

XXXIV–XXXV

Arheologie



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# MARISIA

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XXXIV–XXXV

ARHEOLOGIE

Târgu Mureș  
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# ROMAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM SĂRĂȚENI\*

DANIEL MIHAI CIOATĂ - KOPPÁNY BULCSÚ ÖTVÖS

**Keywords:** Roman military equipment, breast plate, *lorica squamata*, *limes*, Sărățeni

**Cuvinte cheie:** echipament militar roman, pectoral, *lorica squamata*, *limes*, Sărățeni

*Little is known about the Roman auxiliary fort from Sărățeni located on the eastern limes of the province of Dacia. In the present study we will analyze several unpublished finds connected to military equipment unearthed during earlier excavations.*

The Roman auxiliary fort from Sărățeni (Sóvárád) is barely known in specialized literature since the only archaeological excavations were undertaken by Zoltán Székely in 1958.<sup>1</sup> Thus a number of elements were revealed from the ground plan of the fort such as the surrounding walls, various construction phases, the gates and their towers. Their state of conservation is poor because the fort is overlapped the modern settlement and a major road which connects Sângeorgiu de Pădure (Erdőszentgyörgy) to Sovata (Szováta) as well as a local road. Moreover, today's village houses overlay the old constructions and used a significant amount of the stone from these buildings as construction material (Fig. 1).

Even if archaeological research is hindered by the above mentioned circumstances in recent years the Mureș County Museum together with its partners set out to initiate new research through the incorporation of the fort into a larger project dedicated to the research of the eastern limes of Dacia. On this occasion a series of geophysical prospections, field walking and aerial photographic prospections were made.

According to the inscriptions found on the tiles coming from excavations the military unit that was based at Sărățeni was the *c(ohors) p(rima) Alp(inorum)*.<sup>2</sup>

The leader of the excavations from 1958 mentions as finds a number of ceramic fragments, a coin, weapons as well as Roman chain mail scales and fragments from a silver plaque with the figure of an eagle.<sup>3</sup> The present study discusses the aforementioned last two elements from the military equipment.

The armor accessories (*cat. 1*) are part of the defensive military equipment, which raise a number of widely debated issues in specialized literature connected to their functionality, use and the symbology of their decorations.<sup>4</sup>

In Dacia a total of 12 such items were found: at Moigrad–Porolissum<sup>5</sup> (Sălaj), two fragmented items from Bucium (Sălaj),<sup>6</sup> from Oltenia – without the

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<sup>1</sup> Székely 1961, 185–186; Székely 1962, 332–336.

<sup>2</sup> Székely 1962, 334; Gudea 1997, 59; Marcu 2009, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Székely 1962, 334, Fig. 4/13, 14; Piso – Marcu 2008, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Petculescu 1975, 79–88; Robinson 1975, 161; Petculescu 1986, 153–162; Borhy 1994, 145–153; Van Daele 2002, 109–115.

<sup>5</sup> Buday 1914, 73, 91, fig. 5/1; Petculescu 1975, 81–82, fig. 1/1; Petculescu 1986, 154, Fig. 3/1.

<sup>6</sup> Chirilă et al. 1972, 74–75, 77, Pl. LXXXIV–LXXXV, Pl. CXVI/12; Petculescu 1975, 82–83, Fig. 1/2; Petculescu 1986, 154, Fig. 3/2, Fig. 4/1a–b.

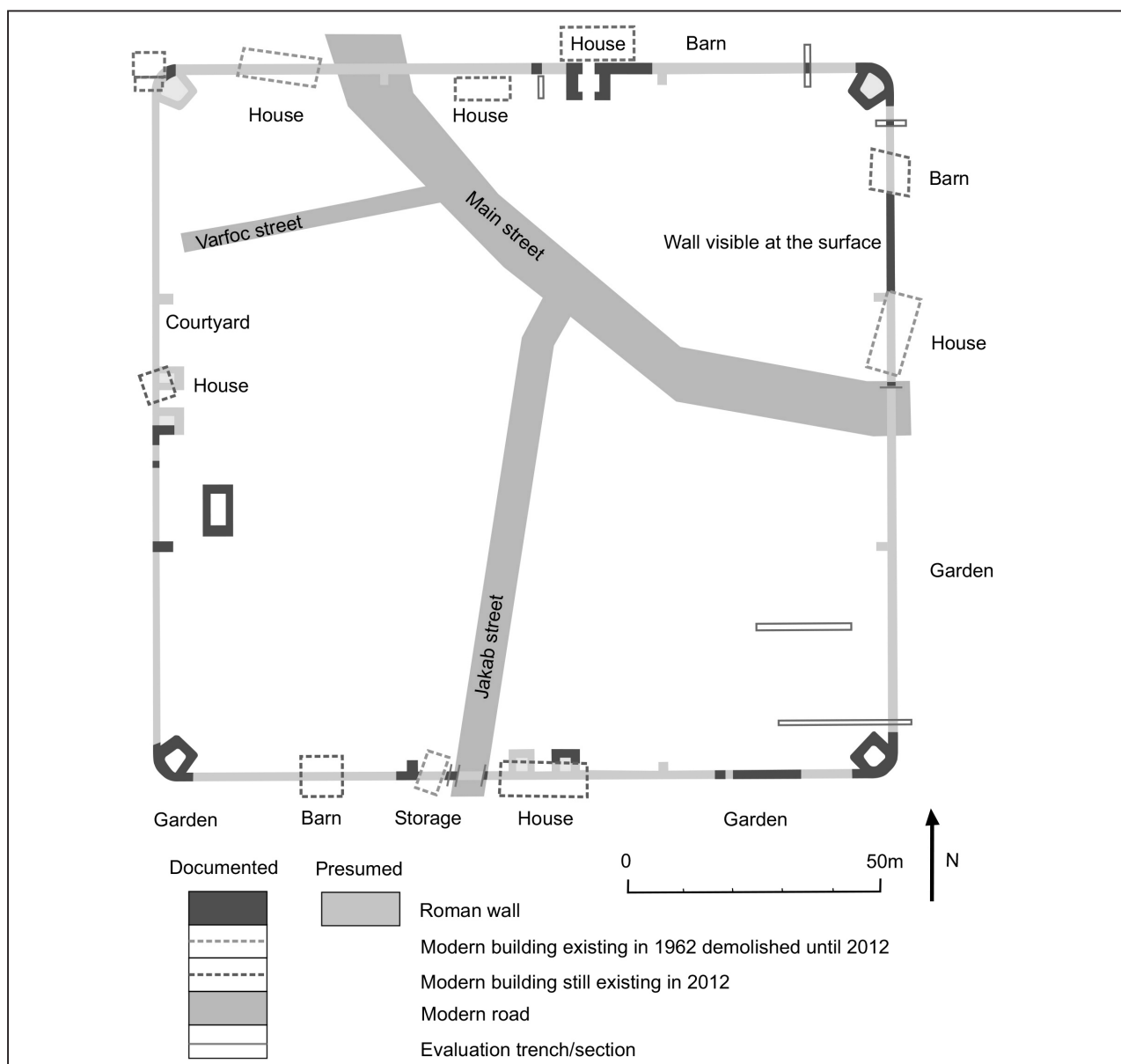


Fig. 1. Excavation plan from 1962 made by Sz. Pánczél based on Székely 1962, 333, pl. 2.

exact place of discovery,<sup>7</sup> Vețel–Micia<sup>8</sup> (Hunedoara), two items from Cășeu–Samum (Cluj)<sup>9</sup> and five items from Turda–Potaissa (Cluj).<sup>10</sup>

The armor accessories were introduced in military inventory the earliest around the half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>11</sup> with the spread of a new type of a semi-rigid *lorica squamata* which enabled the attachment of the scales vertically and not only

horizontally.<sup>12</sup> These scales were quadrangle-shaped with a slightly curved upper side in order to imitate the curve of the neck and were fastened in pairs in the area of the chest thus providing an easier way for clothing such type of armor.<sup>13</sup> M. Bishop proposed the use of breast plates including the case of the so-called “Alba Iulie-type armor”<sup>14</sup> (a combination between the *lorica squamata* and *segmentata*) identified at the base of a statue found<sup>15</sup> in the above mentioned town. It seems that the representation can also be confirmed archaeologically through a find from Santa Maria

<sup>7</sup> Pârvan 1926, 9, 26, Fig. 15, Pl. 5; Petculescu 1975, 82–83, Fig. 2/2–3; 1986, 154, Fig. 4/2.

<sup>8</sup> Petculescu 1986, 154, Fig. 4/3, nota 14.

<sup>9</sup> Isac 2003, 243, fig. 5/2; Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 213, 217, Abb. 5, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Petculescu 1986, 154; Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 216–218, Abb. 22–26; Isac – Bărbulescu 2009, 72, 75 – 77.

<sup>11</sup> Van Daele 2002, 111; Aurrecoechea 2007, 171; Aurrecoechea 2010, 88.

<sup>12</sup> Bishop – Coulston 1993, 117; Bishop 2002, 62.

<sup>13</sup> Van Daele 2002, 110; Aurrecoechea 2007, 171.

<sup>14</sup> Bishop 2002, 62–65.

<sup>15</sup> Diaconescu 2014, 153–155.



con San Albito (Leon, ESP).<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>17</sup> or at the beginning of the next one<sup>18</sup> this type of armors were removed from use.

The ornamentation of these was generally achieved through the *au repoussé* technique (strikes on the surface) followed by engraving and piercing of the details, through stamping or pressing, more rarely engraving.<sup>19</sup>

From the point of view of the decoration, the breast plates can be grouped into two groups with one or three registers inscribed on a broader surface – encircled by an embossed band which follows the contour of the piece at a given distance from the edges.<sup>20</sup> As the finds from Dacia (from *Porolissum*, Bucium, Oltenia, *Potaissa*) also indicate the last one was more frequent<sup>21</sup>. The repertoire of the decoration is generally represented by an image of a divinity in the middle register, by an eagle in the upper and a shield (rarely the Capricorne or the Capitoline Wolf) in the lower register.<sup>22</sup> The preference for deities which protected the soldiers and the army prevailed, such as Mars, Minerva, Dea Virtus or Dea Roma.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, for the find from Sărățeni this cannot be determined because of its poor preservation. The only decorative element which is clear on this piece is the eagle of Jupiter as a symbol of the supreme deity.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of the plaques with a single register like the ones from *Micia*, *Samum*, *Potaissa*<sup>25</sup> or Manching (GER)<sup>26</sup> the surface is occupied by the torso of a god. The eagle does not appear but in the lower part generally a shield is represented.<sup>27</sup>

Another debated issue in specialized literature is the identification of military units which used armors with such accessories and the question whether these were used in combat or not. Based on an example from Pfünz L. Petculescu showed that such armors were worn mainly by the officers from auxiliary infantry units but the finds from

the forts from Petronell–Carnuntum (A), *Lauriacum* (A), *Brigetio*, *Aquincum* (HU) and *Potaissa* (Cluj) demonstrate their use also by legionaries. The possibility that cavalry troops were also equipped with armors that had such breast plates cannot be excluded but there is no clear evidence in this respect.<sup>28</sup>

Given the complexity of the decoration on these breast plates it was believed for a long time that they were used only at parades of the cavalry or in the so-called *hippika gymnasia*. Furthermore, because of the thinness of the bronze plaque from which these were made it seems likely that they had a reduced protective role.<sup>29</sup> However, taking into account the above presented as well as the fact that many among these were found in deposits together with other objects of diverse functions it is believed that armors equipped with such fittings were surely used in combat. Likewise, according to some the objects in question enjoyed a different status in comparison to the parade equipment used on special occasions exclusively by cavalry.<sup>30</sup>

The fragment from Sărățeni was fastened on the left side of the chest. From its width a large part was preserved with the exception of the margins where the fastening holes were situated. Similar cases where the fitting was found together with the scales from *lorica squamata* can be mentioned at Pfünz or Maastricht (D). The find from *Potaissa*, where almost the entire piece was preserved has the height of 17,2 cm and the width of 9,2 cm,<sup>31</sup> while our fragment has a width of only 8 cm preserved. The thickness is 0,7 mm similar to the ones from Dura-Europos under 1 mm<sup>32</sup> or from Maastricht of approximately 0,5 mm.<sup>33</sup>

As previously mentioned, from the point of view of the decoration, the fragment can be included in the type with three registers, although the only register preserved is the upper one on which the eagle is represented. Analogies can be found at *Potaissa*,<sup>34</sup> in Spain,<sup>35</sup> at Orgovány (HU),<sup>36</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Aurrecoechea 2007, 171–173, Fig. 1–3.

<sup>17</sup> Petculescu 1975, 87; Van Daele 2002, 111.

<sup>18</sup> Aurrecoechea 2007, 173.

<sup>19</sup> Petculescu 1975, 79–80; Petculescu 1986, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Petculescu 1975, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 217, Abb. 22, 23, 25; Isac – Bărbulescu 2009, 75–76, Fig. 22, 23, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Petculescu 1975, 80; Petculescu 1986, 154; Van Daele 2002, 110.

<sup>23</sup> Petculescu 1975, 80; Petculescu 1986, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Petculescu 1986, 154; Van Daele 2002, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 217–218, Abb. 24, 26; Isac – Bărbulescu 2009, 75–76, Fig. 24, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson 1975, 160, Pl. 454.

<sup>27</sup> Petculescu 1975, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Petculescu 1975, 86, with the bibliography referring to these objects.

<sup>29</sup> Bishop – Coulston 1993, 117; Junkelmann 1996, 69; Van Daele 2002, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Petculescu 1986, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 217, Fig. 22; Isac – Bărbulescu 2009, 76, Fig. 22.

<sup>32</sup> James 2010, 120, Fig. 62.

<sup>33</sup> Van Daele 2002, 110.

<sup>34</sup> Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 217, Abb. 22, 23, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Aurrecoechea 2007, 172, Fig. 8/1; Aurrecoechea 2010, 94, Fig. 2/1.

<sup>36</sup> Borhy 1994, 148; Bishop – Coulston 2013, 139, Fig. 84/1.

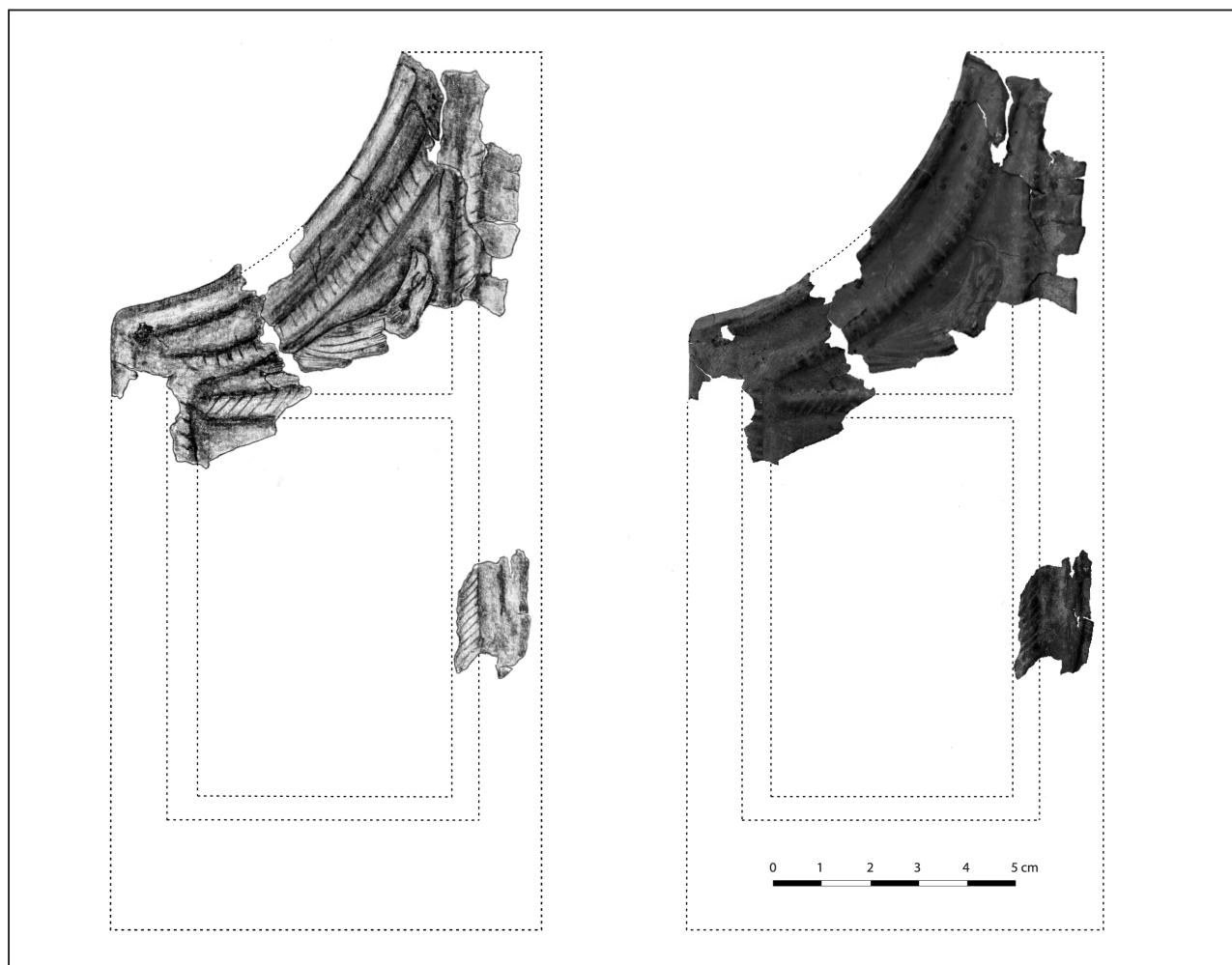


Fig. 2. Breastplate from Sărățeni. Drawn by M. Ferenczi, photographed by A. Dobos.

Musov (CZ)<sup>37</sup> or *Carnuntum* (or *Brigetio*).<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the details of the context of discovery were not preserved but we know for sure that it came from the fort from Sărățeni so, most probably, it belonged to an officer from the auxiliary infantry unit stationed there.

In the absence of more accurate data on the context of discovery one can say that its dating falls into the broad chronological limits of the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD until the middle of the next century.

The *lorica squamata* represent one of the most frequently used armors of the Roman army, which probably was easily produced and repaired.<sup>39</sup> In the beginning the scales were fastened on a textile support or on a skin.<sup>40</sup> From the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD a

more rigid armor was introduced<sup>41</sup> on which the scales were fastened among themselves with the help of a wire. This type of armors were used at least in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD both by legionaries and auxiliary units as well.<sup>42</sup>

We decided to discuss separately the fragments of the *lorica squamata* because on the basis of its form and material they seem to originate from a different armor. One could presume that such type of armor would not be produced from different scales but a certain uniformity of the defensive equipment would be kept. The scales from cat. nr. 3 are slightly wider and smaller than the ones from cat. nr. 2 and their lower parts are diagonally cut and rounded.

The small size as well as the thickness of only 0,05 cm suggests a reduced protection, fact which does not exclude the use of such armors only in sport activities.

<sup>37</sup> Komoróczy 2009, 124, Fig. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Borhy 1994, 148.

<sup>39</sup> Sim – Kaminski 2012, 100.

<sup>40</sup> Feugère 1993, 125.

<sup>41</sup> Bishop – Coulston 1993, 117; Bishop 2002, 62.

<sup>42</sup> Bishop – Coulston 1993, 85.

## Catalogue

### 1. Breast plate (Fig. 2)

It is a bronze object (not from silver as was previously mentioned by Székely) from which only four fragments were kept in the Mureș County Museum.<sup>43</sup> Three from these were reintegrated and form the upper part of a bronze plate. The upper part of the breast plate can be distinguished, slightly curved trying to imitate the curve of the neck. From the decoration one part can be observed in the shape of a string which follows the contour of the object and closes the upper register where a bird can be seen. The bird is an eagle which keeps its beak pointing upwards. The fourth fragment belongs to the same object but without knowing its exact place of discovery the decoration is the same, an embossed band in the shape of a string although slightly narrower.

The thickness of the bronze plaque is 0,07 cm, its reconstructed width is 8 cm, height 8,9 cm and weight 5,23 g. It belongs to the type with three registers but unfortunately the middle and the lower registers were not preserved. It was decorated with the *au repoussé* technique with embossed ornaments with engraved and pierced details.

*Analogies:* Given the highly fragmentary state of the object analogies can hardly be found. The exact position of the bird is not known neither is the nature of the representations from the other registers which would permit a precise identification. Bearing this in mind, the closest analogies are from *Potaissa*,<sup>44</sup> Spain<sup>45</sup> and Musov (CZ).<sup>46</sup>

### 2. Lorica squamata scale (Fig. 3)

The bronze *lorica squamata* plate was found in 1958 at Sărățeni and kept in the Mureș County Museum.<sup>47</sup> It has a rectangular shape with the exception of its lower rounded edge. It is broken in the area where three pairs of holes were located, on its two sides and in the upper part. The holes were used to fasten the scales among themselves and on a textile support or on a skin. Measurements: height: 1,5 cm, width: 1,2 cm, thickness of plate: 0,05 cm, weight: 0,12 g.

*Analogies:* Buciumi,<sup>48</sup> Carnuntum (type Von Groller nr. IV).<sup>49</sup>

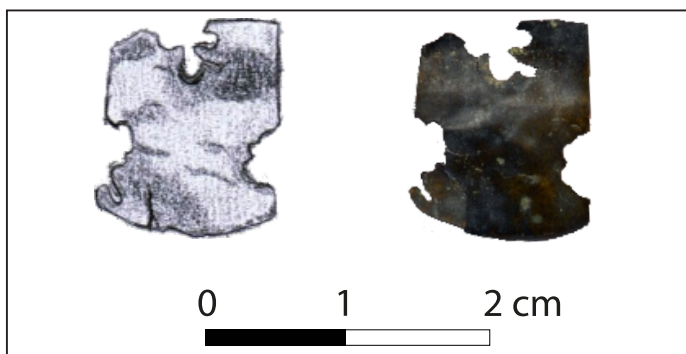


Fig. 3. *Lorica squamata* scale from Sărățeni. Drawn by M. Ferenczi, photographed by A. Dobos

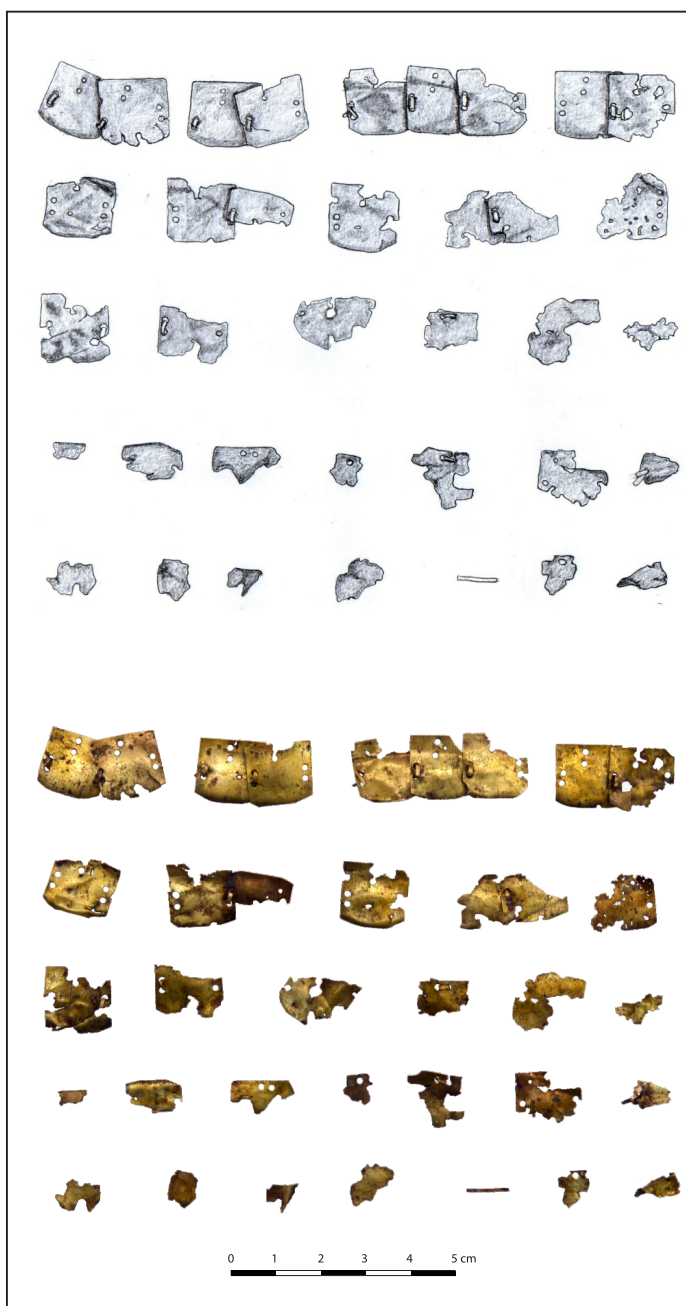


Fig. 4. *Lorica squamata* scales from Sărățeni. Drawn by M. Ferenczi, photographed by A. Dobos

<sup>43</sup> Inv. Nr. 7805.

<sup>44</sup> Isac – Bărbulescu 2008, 217, Abb. 22, 23, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Aurrecoechea 2007, 172, Fig. 8/1; Aurrecoechea 2010, 94, Fig. 2/1.

<sup>46</sup> Komoróczy 2009, 124, Fig. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Inv. Nr. 7805.

<sup>48</sup> Chirilă et al. 1972, 67, Pl. LXVIII/2; D'Amato – Sumner 2009, 126, Fig. 153 a, b.

<sup>49</sup> Bishop – Coulston 1993, 88, Fig. 51/1 (IV)



### 3. *Lorica squamata* scales (Fig. 4)

36 fragments come from a *lorica squamata* with almost 10 whole pieces. These were unearthed in 1958 in the fort from Sărăteni and are kept in the Mureș County Museum.<sup>50</sup> In the time of their recording only 23 scales were mentioned. The pieces are flat, rectangular with the exception of their lower part which is obliquely cut at the corners. In their upper part 6 holes can be seen in pairs and on two sides situated approximately in the middle of the scales. The scales were connected to each other with a rectangular bronze wire.

The pieces kept integer have a height of 1,4 cm, width of 1,5 cm, the diameter of the holes is 0,1 cm and the thickness of the plaque is 0,05 cm. The pieces altogether weigh 3,62 g while only one scale weighs 0,14 g. The wire which connects the scales is 1,4 cm long, 0,05 cm thick and 0,1 cm wide.

*Analogies:* Porolissum/Moigrad,<sup>51</sup> Aventicum/Avenches (Vaud, CH),<sup>52</sup> Dura-Europos/Salhiyé (Deir ez-Zor, SYR).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Inv. Nr. 7805.

<sup>51</sup> Gudea 1989, 589, Pl. CLXXXI/5.

<sup>52</sup> Robinson 1975, 154, Fig. 161.

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### Rezumat

Castrul roman de la Sărățeni, situat pe limesul estic al provinciei, a fost destul de puțin cercetat arheologic, în special din cauza suprapunerii localității moderne peste vechile ruine. În studiul de față dorim să prezentăm câteva piese de echipament militar roman: o serie de solzi de *lorica squamata* și un pectoral fragmentar, toate fiind găsite în timpul primelor cercetări.



## ABBREVIATIONS

Acta	Acta. Anuarul Muzeului Național Secuiesc și al Muzeului Secuiesc al Ciucului, Sf. Gheorghe
ActaAntPhilippo	Acta Antiqua Philippopolitana, Sophia
ActaArchHung	Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest
ActaHistSzeged	Acta Historica. Acta Universitatis Scientiarum Szegediensis, Szeged
ActaMM	Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis, Vaslui
ActaMilMed	Acta Militaria Mediaevalia, Sanok
ActaMN	Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca
ActaMP	Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău
ActaSic	Acta Siculica, Sf. Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy
Aluta	Aluta, Sf. Gheorghe
AnB	Analele Banatului, Timișoara
Apulum	Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis, Alba Iulia
ArbFberSächs	Arbeits- und Forschungsberichte zur sächsischen Bodendenkmalpflege, Dresden
ArchÉrt	Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest
ArchKözl	Archaeologiai Közlemények, Budapest
Aregia	Alba Regia. Annales Musei Stephani Regis, Székesfehérvár
Areopolisz	Areopolisz. Történelmi és társadalomtudományi tanulmányok, Székelyudvarhely
ArhMed	Arheologia Medievală, Cluj-Napoca
ArhMold	Arheologia Moldovei, București
Banatica	Banatica. Muzeul Banatului Montan, Reșița
BrukenthalAM	Brukenthal. Acta Musei, Sibiu
Carnuntum Jb	Carnuntum-Jahrbuch. Zeitschrift für Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte des Donaupraumes, Wien
Carpica	Carpica, Bacău
Castrum	Castrum. A Castrum Bene Egyesület Hírlevele, Budapest
CCA	Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, București
CCDJ	Cultură și Civilizație la Dunărea de Jos, Călărași
CercArh	Cercetări arheologice, București
Colloquia	Colloquia: Journal of Central European History, Cluj-Napoca
CommArchHung	Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungaricae, Budapest
Corviniana	Corviniana, Hunedoara
Crisia	Crisia, Oradea
CsSzMÉ	A Csíki Székely Múzeum Évkönyve, Csíkszereda
Cumidava	Cumidava, Brașov
Dacia	Dacia. Revue d'Archéologie et d'Histoire Ancienne, Bucarest
Danubius	Danubius, Galați
DissArch	Dissertationes Archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae, Budapest
Dolg	Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Kolozsvár
Drobeta	Drobeta, Drobeta-Turnu Severin
EL	Erdővidéki Lapok, Barót
EphNap	Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca
Emúz	Erdélyi Múzeum, Kolozsvár
FVL	Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde, Sibiu/Hermannstadt
HOMÉ	A Hermann Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve, Miskolc
Istros	Istros. Muzeul Brăilei, Brăila

# ABBREVIATIONS

JAMÉ	A Nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum Évkönyve, Nyíregyháza
JbRGZM	Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, Mainz
JromMilSt	Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies
KHKM	Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej, Warszawa
Marisia	Marisia (V-). Studii și Materiale, Târgu Mureș
Marmatia	Marmatia, Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Arheologie Maramureș, Baia Mare
MatCercArh	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, București
MedArch	Medieval Archaeology, London
MemAnt	Memoria Antiquitatis. Acta Musei Petrodavensis, Piatra Neamț
MFME	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, Szeged
MIMK	A Molnár István Múzeum Közleményei, Székelykeresztúr
MNMAK	Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Adattárának Közleményei, Budapest
OH	Opuscula Hungarica, Budapest
PRS	Proceedings of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical & Engineering Sciences, London
PZ	Praehistorische Zeitschrift, Berlin
REA	Revue des études anciennes, Bordeaux
RMM-MIA	Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor. Monumente istorice și de artă, București
RevBist	Revista Bistriței, Bistrița
Sargetia	Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis, Deva
SCIV(A)	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie 1974–), București
SCN	Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică, București
SlovArch	Slovenská Archeológia, Bratislava
SMMIM	Studii și materiale de muzeografie și istorie militară, București
SSz	Soproni Szemle, Sopron
StCercIstorCluj	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie, Cluj
StComSM	Studii și Comunicări, Seria Arheologie, Satu Mare
StComSibiu	Studii și comunicări. Muzeul Brukenthal, Sibiu
StudUCH	Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis, Series Historica, Sibiu
StudUClujH	Studia Universitatis “Babeș-Bolyai” – Historia, Cluj-Napoca
Terra Sebus	Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis, Sebeș
Thraco-Dacica	Thraco-Dacica, București
UPA	Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie, Bonn
VAH	Varia Archaeologica Hungarica, Budapest
VjesAMuzZagreb	Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu, Zagreb
VMMK	A Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei, Veszprém
VTT	Veszprémi Történelmi Társaság, Veszprém
WA	Wratislavia antiqua, Wrocław
WiadA	Wiadomości Archeologiczne. Bulletin archéologique polonais, Warszawa