

**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ - BOLYAI CLUJ-NAPOCA
INSTITUTUL DE ARHEOLOGIE ȘI ISTORIA ARTEI CLUJ-NAPOCA**

**DACIA FELIX.
STUDIA MICHAELI BĂRBULESCU OBLATA**

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THRACIAN SICA AND DACIAN FALX. THE HISTORY OF A 'NATIONAL' WEAPON

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Valerius Maximus, writing about the Asian campaign of P. Licinius Crassus Dives Mucianus against Eumenes III Aristonicos, in the context of the battle of Leucaea in 130 BC, mentions the capturing of the Roman consul by the Thracian mercenaries fighting for the Attalid pretender, between Elaea and Myrina. 'In order to avoid a dishonoured imprisonment, Crassus rushed against his own death and stabbed a Barbarian's eye with a rod used for horse driving. The enemy, crazed by pain, stabbed the Roman general with his *sica* and through such revenge, spared him from losing his honour'¹.

Nearly two centuries later, according to Fronto, the emperor Trajan used for his Parthian campaign 'experienced soldiers who were not afraid by the enemy's arrows after facing the horrific wounds made by the curved swords (*falces*) of the Dacians'².

The cited fragments are underlining two historical reference points for the evolution of a weapon, which will become in the ancient conscience, a symbol of the warlike character of the Thracian populations in northern Balkans and in the end, of the Dacians. The question is whether the mentioned terms are referring to the same weapon, or the ancient authors had known two different weapons coming from this region.

The word *sica* is designating a curved dagger, with the cutting edge on the blade's inner side and a sharp point, and it is very probably of Thracian origin³. The *falx* represents the Latin word for scythe or sickle⁴, which in the first instance, it may define the same weapon, very close to the above-mentioned agricultural tools. A much coherent conclusion might be revealed through a reconstruction of the history of the Thracian artefacts under discussion.

The weapons with curved blade had a long evolution in the Thracian milieu from northern Balkans. The ancient written sources, the artistic representations and the archaeological evidence are documenting this process.

Very probably, the curved daggers were already known during the 5th century BC, when Herodotus (VII, 75) wrote that the Thracians 'used spears, light shields and short swords' (using a term which was different from *akinakes*, the dagger that was specific for the Scythians and the Getae from Dobrogea). Clemens of Alexandria (*Stromateis*, I, 16, p. 132) speaks about the Thracians 'who invented the so-called *harpe*, a big curved dagger' (mentioned in his text as *mahaira*).

On the mural paintings of the *dromos* from the chamber-grave at Kazanlāk, dating from the 4th century BC, are depicted daggers with curved blade⁵. Similar pieces, dating from the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, were discovered in a series of archaeological sites. Some daggers are coming from the cemetery at Zimnicea⁶, while others were found in the Thracian settlements between the

¹ Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri I* (tr. D. R. Shackleton Bailey), Loeb Classical Library 492, London, 2000 - III. 2. 12. ...*P. enim Crassus, cum Aristonico bellum in Asia gerens, a Thracibus, quorum is magnum numerum in praesidio habebat, inter Elaeam et Myrinam exceptus, ne in dicionem eius perveniret, dedecus arcessita ratione mortis effugit: virgam enim, qua ad regendum equum usus fuerat, in unius barbari oculum derexit. Qui vi doloris accensus latus Crassi sica confodit, dumque se ulciscitur, Romanum imperatorem maiestatis amissae turpitudine liberavit.*

² Corneli Frontonis, *Principia Historiae*, Fontes ad historiam Dacoromaniae pertinentes, I, București, 1964 - II, p. 204. ...*in bellum profectus est cum cognitis militibus hostem Parthum contemnentibus, sagittarum ictus post ingentia Dacorum falcibus inlata volnera despicatui habentibus.*

³ A. Ernout, A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, Paris, 1932, p. 896, s.v. *sica, sicae*. See also DA IV, 2, Paris, s.a., p. 1300, s. v. *sica*, n. 1.

⁴ A. Ernout, A. Meillet, *op.cit.*, s.v. *falx, falces*.

⁵ M. Domaradzki, in *Revue Aquitania*, Supplément 1, 1986, p. 227-228, fig. 1.

⁶ A. D. Alexandrescu, in *Dacia*, 24, 1980, p. 36, 40, fig. 59/12, 17.

Rodopi Mountains and the Balkans, for example at Kabyle⁷ and Seuthopolis⁸. They have a thicker cant and a narrow, slender blade. At the same time, in Thrace were also used swords with a long hilt (held with both hands), having a slightly curved blade, with a T-shaped section and the cutting edge on the inner side⁹. Such swords were identified with *romphaias* mentioned by the ancient sources.

However, the proper *sica* has developed to its final shape by the end of the 3rd century BC and at the beginning of the next century, in the aristocratic milieu from northern Balkans, more precisely in the cultural area archaeologically defined as Padea – Panagjurski kolonii¹⁰ (fig. 1). It includes groups of riding warriors following the same interests and applying similar combat techniques, therefore using common panoplies of weapons. Their defensive equipment included shields and sometimes helmets or chainmails, whereas the offensive weaponry consisted in long swords of La Tène type, spears and curved daggers. The elements of funerary rite and ritual, as well as the distribution of specific burials belonging to the Padea – Panagjurski kolonii group indicate that this aristocracy was characterized by an ethnic mixture, with people belonging mostly to the tribes of Triballi, Small Scordisci and Dacians.

The funerary contexts belonging to the Padea – Panagjurski kolonii group revealed a large number of curved daggers, offering the possibility to identify their typological-morphological characteristics¹¹. From a morphological point of view (fig. 2), *sica* is a curved dagger having a 'channel for running blood' on the blade (*Blutrinne*). On average, their dimensions vary between 25 and 35 cm, but some pieces are smaller or larger than this size. Despite such morphological unity, some differentiated elements can be identified in the haft's shape (with a spit or rings), the blade's curve or thickness (with narrow, curved blade, others with an angular edge and some with a massive blade and a deeper blood channel) etc. However, such details have no chronological or chorographic values, since all these variants are contemporaries across the whole area under discussion. In many cases, these daggers were decorated on the blade with zoomorphic or 'geometric' elements¹², which may suggest that in the ancient time, such weapons were invested with spiritual valences. Not at last, in some cases the daggers were found together with their scabbards.

As concerning the distribution area, the Padea – Panagjurski kolonii group was documented mostly in northern and north-western Bulgaria, Oltenia, the Iron Gates region, western and southern Muntenia and south-western Transylvania (fig. 1). The earliest discoveries are known from the south of the Danube, the originary area of the warlike groups which migrated towards

⁷ M. Domaradzki, in V. Velkov (ed.), *Cabyle*, II, Sofia, 1991, p. 59, pl. 26/9.

⁸ L. Ogenova-Marinova, in D. P. Dimitrov et al., *Sevtopolis*, I, Sofia, 1984, p. 184-185, fig. 17.

⁹ M. Domaradzki, in *Revue Aquitania*, Supplément 1, 1986, p. 231; See for example a piece found at Zabardo (okr. Smolian); K. Kolev, in *Izvestija na muzeite ot jojna Bălgaria*, 13, Plovdiv, 1987, p. 89, fig. 11.

¹⁰ Z. Woźniak, *Wschodnie pogranicze Kultury Latenskiej*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk, 1974, p. 74-138; *idem*, in *Germania*, 54, 2, 1976, p. 388-394; V. Zirra, in *Dacia*, N.S., 15, 1971, p. 235-237; *idem*, in *ArchRozh*, 23, 5, 1971, p. 539-540; *idem*, in *TD*, 1, 1976, p. 175-182; A. Rustoiu, *Războinici și artizani de prestigiu în Dacia preromană*, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 11-40; *idem*, in H. Dobrzanska, V. Megaw, P. Poleska, *Celtes on the margin. Studies in European Cultural Interaction (7th Century BC – 1st Century AD) dedicated to Zenon Woźniak*, Kraków, 2005, p. 109-119.

¹¹ C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor, in *Dacia*, 11-12, 1945-1947, p. 17-33; E. Tudor, in *SCIV*, 19, 3, 1968, p. 517-526; D. Berciu, in *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology*, 6, London, 1966, p. 75-93; H. Ciugudean, in *ActaMN*, 17, 1980, p. 425-432; R. Popov, in *Izvestija-Sofia*, 5, 1928-1929, p. 273-290; *idem*, in *Izvestija-Sofia*, 7, 1932-1933, p. 349-353; B. Nikolov, in *Izvestija-Sofia*, 28, 1965, p. 163-202; *idem*, in *Arheologija-Sofia*, 23, 3, 1981, p. 30-41; *idem*, in *Arheologija-Sofia*, 32, 4, 1990, p. 14-25; N. Theodosiev, N. Torbov, in *Izvestija na Muzeite v Severozapadna Bălgaria*, 23, 1994, p. 11-58; ș.a.

¹² See A. Rustoiu, in C. Cosma, D. Tamba, A. Rustoiu (eds.), *Studia Archaeologica et Historica Nicolae Gudea dicata. Festschrift für Professor Nicolae Gudea gelegentlich des 60. Geburtstages*, Zalău, 2001, p. 181-194; *idem*, *Războinici și artizani...*, p. 57-62. The ornaments on the blades were not always identified, either because of the poor state of preservation, or because of ignorance. Therefore a closer examination of the finds from the museums' deposits and exhibitions may reveal an increased number of decorated daggers.

north, to Transylvania, a territory in which they eliminated the authority of the Celtic tribes. The same groups were probably at the origin of the Dacian Kingdom founded by Burebista¹³.

As a consequence, *sica* arrived at the north of the Danube already defined from the morphological point of view, in the 2nd century BC (La Tène C 2). Thenceforth, the dagger was used in Dacia until the Roman conquest under Trajan. Such finds are almost always present in the tumuli graves belonging to the Dacian Kingdom period, dated in La Tène D, while the latest funerary contexts are dating from the Augustan period¹⁴. Some daggers are also known from Dacian fortified settlements and fortresses¹⁵, which suggest the social status of their owners.

From the main distribution area, the curved daggers reached also some peripheral regions and even distant territories. Thus, a series of pieces are coming from the Scordiscian area¹⁶ (fig. 3/1-2), witnessing the frequent contacts, aggressive or peaceful, between these communities and the Dacian Kingdom. The westernmost discoveries are known from the present-day Slovenia¹⁷. Towards north, *sica* reached the mixed Celtic – Dacian milieu from present-day Slovakia¹⁸ (fig. 3/3). Rarely, *sicae* have been identified in the Hellenistic area, for example at Histria a curved dagger was discovered in an incineration grave belonging to a Barbarian mercenary from the time of Mithridates VI Eupator¹⁹. Another dagger with scabbard was depicted on the ‘weapons’ frieze’ in the Athena Nikephoros temple at Pergamon²⁰, dating from the beginning of the 2nd century BC²¹ (fig. 4/2-3). An almost identical piece was found in an incineration grave from Corcova (Mehedinti – fig. 4/1), dating from the first half of the 1st century BC²². Therefore, the dagger depicted on the temple’s *stoa* at Pergamon indicates the presence of some Thracian mercenaries in this region, in the context of the military conflicts from eastern Mediterranean Basin at the beginning of the 2nd century BC²³.

¹³ *Idem*, *Războinici și artizani...*, p. 33-40; *idem*, in H. Dobrzanska, V. Megaw, P. Poleska, *Celtes on the margin. Studies in European Cultural Interaction (7th Century BC – 1st Century AD) dedicated to Zenon Woźniak*, Kraków, 2005, p. 115-118.

¹⁴ A. Vulpe, in *TD*, 1, 1976, p. 193-215; M. Babeș, in *SCIVA*, 39, 1, 1988, p. 3-32; A. Rustoiu, in S. Mitu, F. Gogăltan (eds.), *Studii de istorie a Transilvaniei*, Cluj-Napoca, 1994, p. 33-37; *idem*, *Războinici și artizani...*, p. 20-21, 47-55.

¹⁵ I. Glodariu, E. Iaroslavschi, *Civilizația fierului la daci (sec. II î.e.n. – I e.n.)*, Cluj-Napoca, 1979, p. 139, fig. 72/7-9 (unfortunately, the drawings are poor and the ‘blood channel’ is not shown); A. Rustoiu, in V. Vasiliev et al., *Solotvino-“Cetate” (Ucraina Transcarpatică). Așezările din epoca bronzului, a doua vârstă a fierului și din evul mediu timpuriu*, Bibliotheca Thracologica 33, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 74, fig. 4 etc.

¹⁶ N. Majnarić-Pandžić, *Keltsko-latenska kultura u Slavoniji i Srijemu*, Vinkovci, 1970, pl. 24/10, 28/5, 46/6; J. Todorović, *Praistorijska Karaburma*, I, Beograd, 1972, pl. 11/1, 13/1, 17/4, 29/2, 34/6, 36/1 (grave dated in the 1st century AD !); D. Božič, in *ArhVest*, 32, 1981, p. 328, n. 75-76, pl. 3/36, 37, 9/9; B. Stalio, in *Cahiers des Portes de Fer*, 3, Belgrade, 1986, p. 33, fig. 42; M. Dizdar, H. Potrebica, in H. Dobrzanska, V. Megaw, P. Poleska, *Celtes on the margin. Studies in European Cultural Interaction (7th Century BC – 1st Century AD) dedicated to Zenon Woźniak*, Kraków, 2005, p. 60-62, Map 1; etc.

¹⁷ A. Gaspari, R. Krempuš, D. Brišnik, in *ArhVest*, 55, 2004, p. 284-285, Map 2.

¹⁸ T. Nešporová, in *Archeologické výskumy a nálezy na Slovensku v roku 2001*, Nitra, 2002, p. 141, 314, fig. 101/2; K. Pieta, in *SlovArch*, 53, 1, 2005, pl. 11/4; *idem*, *Slovakei in der Latènezeit*, pl. 69/1, 8 (forthcoming). I would like to thank K. Pieta for the information offered during a very useful documentation stage at the Institute of Archaeology, Slovakian Academy of Science at Nitra, in November 2006.

¹⁹ A. Rustoiu, *Războinici și artizani...*, p. 41-46; *idem*, in *Istros*, 10, 2000, p. 277-288.

²⁰ R. Bohn, *Das Heiligtum der Athena Polias Nikephoros*. Mit Beitrag H. Droysen, *Die Balustradenreliefs*. *Altortümer von Pergamon II*, Berlin, 1885, pl. 45/2; B. Kull, in *PZ*, 77, 2002, p. 208, fig. 17. A. Rustoiu, in *Studia UBB. Historia*, 51, 1, 2006, p. 51-52, fig. 7. The illustration of the relief from Pergamon was provided by my colleague Florin Gogăltan, to whom I would like to thank.

²¹ The dating of the ‘weapons’ frieze’ on the *stoa* of Athena temple at Pergamon is still unclear. Certain specialists suggest that it was built in 183 BC, after the victory of Eumenes II against the Galatians. Other opinions suggest its constructions after the defeat of Antiochos III at Magnesia, or that the depicted weapons are trophies captured after a series of battles won by the Attalid kings. See a synthesis of this problem at E. Polito, *Fulgentibus armis. Introduzione allo studio dei fregi d’armi antichi*, Roma 1998, p. 91-95.

²² A. Rustoiu, V. Sîrbu, in *Instrumentum*, 9, 1999, p. 12, fig. 1; V. Sîrbu, A. Rustoiu, G. Crăciunescu, in *TD*, 20, 1999, p. 218-220, fig. 2.

²³ Thracian mercenaries were included in the army of Antiochos III at the beginning of the 2nd century BC: G. T. Griffith, *The Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World*, Groningen, 1968, p. 166.

As concerning the apparition and use of the curved dagger of type *sica* within the Thracian cultural area, it is significant that in the nearby Celtic milieu²⁴, as well as in the Illyrian one²⁵, some other types of daggers or fighting knives were used, each specific to a precise environment (fig. 5).

As conclusion, *sica* was a weapon used by the Thracians for close fighting, which evolved morphologically in northern Balkans from the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 2nd century BC. Thanks to the northern migration of the warriors belonging to the Padea - Panagjurski kolonii group, the curved dagger disseminated in the Dacian milieu and was later on used in the territory dominated by the Dacian Kingdom, until the Roman conquest.

After the founding of the Roman province Dacia in AD 106, it looks like the *sica* was nevermore used. Until now, no archaeological arguments can prove the contrary. Still, the curved dagger was represented in a realistic manner on many Roman monuments, right after the conquest of Dacia. The Column of Trajan, presenting the 'picture' of the Dacian wars, had probably played an important role in the imposition of the curved dagger's image as a 'national' weapon of the Dacians²⁶ (fig. 6/2). Decebalus committed suicide with a *sica* (fig. 6/5), while the same type of dagger is depicted on the funerary monument of T. Claudius Maximus (fig. 6/4), the officer who claimed the capture of the Dacian king²⁷. At the same time, the Dacian *sica* appears on coins commemorating the Roman victories against the Dacians²⁸. On a fragmentary inscription, discovered in the 19th century in the former capital of the Dacian Kingdom (now preserved in the Museum of Deva), set up by the soldiers of the *legio IV Flavia Felix*, the letters L and FF were shaped as curved daggers²⁹. Not at last, *sicae* also appear on pieces of minor art which commemorate the Dacian wars, for example a small bronze plaque recently discovered at Gârla Mare (Mehedinți - fig. 6/3)³⁰.

Another question concerns the disappearance of *sicae* after the Roman conquest, more precisely whether this fact is related to the symbolic meanings of this weapon for the warlike and sacerdotal aristocracy of the Dacian Kingdom.

On other occasion³¹, analysing the decoration from the curved daggers' blades, it was underlined the high frequency of the pairs of opposed prey birds, depicted together with solar symbols. The eagle was usually associated with the supreme celestial divinity and its image is ubiquitous in ancient art. All these depictions may suggest that the curved daggers were not simple weapons and were also invested with spiritual symbolic meanings. In this context, it should be observed that the zoomorphic decoration was always made on the same side as the so-called 'blood channel' (*Blutrinne*). A rather similar situation was also noted in the case of Germanic populations. Zeno-Karl Pinter remarked, using the songs of the Nordic *Edda*, the symbolic value of the Runes scribbled on the swords' blade 'in the blood channel': "If the victory you seek/Rightful you shall write on your sword/In the blade's channel/ Twice the Rune of Tyr"³².

²⁴ A. Gaspari, R. Krempuš, D. Brišnik, *op.cit.*, p. 283-284, Map 1.

²⁵ M. Guštin, in *JRGZM*, 31, 1984, p. 344-346, fig. 29.

²⁶ C. Cichorius, *Die Reliefs der Trajanssäule*, I-II, Berlin, 1896-1900. For the representation of curved daggers on the Column of Trajan see, amongst others, S. von Schnurbein, in *Germania*, 57, 1979, p. 122-126, fig. 4-7.

²⁷ M. Speidel, in *JRS*, 60, 1970, p. 149-150, pl. 15/1; *idem*, in *ActaMN*, 7, 1970, p. 511-515, fig. 1.

²⁸ *BMC*, III, no. 147, 179 etc., pl. 11/20, 12/15 etc. See also E. Oberländer-Târnoveanu, in E. S. Teodor, O. Țentea (eds.), *Dacia Augusti Provincia. Crearea provinciei*, București, 2006, p. 472-475, fig. 36-37, 42. I would like to thank colleague C. Găzdac for the numismatic suggestions concerning the subject.

²⁹ I. Glodariu, in *ActaMN*, 2, 1965, p. 128-129, fig. 6; IDR III/2, p. 269, nr. 269a, fig. 201; V. Wollman, *Johann Michael Ackner (1782-1862). Leben und Werk*, Cluj-Napoca, 1982, p. 259, fig. 36.

³⁰ I. Stîngă, in *Roman Limes on the Middle and Lower Danube*, Belgrade, 1996, p. 241, fig. 10/5, 11; C. Pop, in *Army and Urban development in the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire*, Alba - Iulia, 2000, p. 333-335, fig. 1.

³¹ A. Rustoiu, in C. Cosma, D. Tamba, A. Rustoiu (eds.), *Studia Archaeologica et Historica Nicolae Gudea dicata. Festschrift für Professor Nicolae Gudea gelegentlich des 60. Geburtstages*, Zalău, 2001, p. 181-194; *idem*, *Războinici și artizani...*, p. 57-62.

³² Z. K. Pinter, *Spada și sabia medievală în Transilvania și Banat (sec. IX-XIV)*, Reșița, 1999, p. 56-57 and a wider approach of concrete examples p. 57-61.

At the same time, the curved daggers were very probably also instruments of sacrifice. Such hypothesis might be sustained by the way in which the 'standard' panoplies of weapons were constituted, both in the central-eastern Celtic milieu of the Middle and Late La Tène and in the northern Balkans region during the following period (fig. 7). Thus, in the Celtic milieu the panoply included a shield, a long sword, a spear or javelin and a fighting knife. From a functional point of view, the warlike aristocracy from northern Balkans was equipped during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC (La Tène C 2-D 1) with the same weaponry, the main difference being the replacement of the fighting knife with the curved dagger of local origin. It was observed that in the Celtic graves, the fighting knife was discovered together with the meat offering, sometimes amongst the bones of the sacrificed animal. This observation contributes to the idea that such instruments had also a ritual role, within the sacrifices³³. In this case, the curved dagger might have also played, beside its role in close fighting, a ritual function as a sacrificial instrument. The decoration on the dagger from Corcova (Mehedinți) might be considered as an argument for this interpretation. Its blade was decorated with opposed eagles, while the lower end of the scabbard was modelled as a ram's head, an animal that was often used for sacrifices³⁴.

Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned observations, Decebalus' suicide with a curved dagger might be interpreted as an assumed sacrifice. Such symbolic gesture, as well as the heroic death in combat constitutes an essential element of the warlike ideology of the Indo-European populations³⁵. Similar examples are known from the Roman, Celtic or Germanic mythology.

Not at last, within the interpretation of the meanings concerning the use of *sica* as *status symbol*, it should be included the evolution of the Dacian aristocracy during the last two centuries before the Roman conquest. During Burebista's reign, the power was divided between the king and the high priest Deceneus. After the assassination of Burebista, the Dacian kings probably cumulated until Decebalus, also the function of *pontifex maximus*. This fact contributed to the transformation of the kingdom into a theocratic state. At the same time, the existence of a warlike king, having also the religious authority, presumes a complete aristocratic hierarchy with similar attributions. A series of archaeological arguments³⁶, but mostly an analytic 'decoding' of the written sources³⁷, suggest the presence of such social structure of the Kingdom until the Roman intervention. The warlike fanaticism fed by the Dacians' religious beliefs may also explain the Roman reaction against the religious structures of the Kingdom. The Dacian sanctuaries were demolished (similar to the Great Temple from Jerusalem after the Jewish revolt) and no local divinities survived, through syncretism or *interpretatio romana*, in the province or in other parts of the Empire³⁸. D. Ruscu remarked that 'the way in which the capital Sarmizegetusa was destroyed, indicates that the Roman authorities sought the annihilation of this spiritual centre and with that, of the Dacian religion'³⁹. Following the Dacians' defeat, an entire aristocracy was 'decapitated'.

³³ U. Osterhaus, *Zur Funktion und Herkunft der frühlatènezeitlichen Hiebmesser*, Kleine Schriften aus dem Vorgesichtlichen Seminar Marburg, Heft 9, Marburg, 1981, p. 14-16; I. Némethi, in *TD*, 14, 1993, p. 119-120. M. Poux, *L'Âge du vin. Rites de boisson, festins et libations en Gaule indépendante*, Montagnac, 2004, p. 42 observed that the implements used for preparing the meat had also a ceremonial significance, being involved also in sacrifices, and knives, alongside other instruments were placed in graves belonging to the highest aristocracy in pre-Roman Gaul.

³⁴ It is significant that in the iconographic representations of the Classical Greece, the priests usually hold a knife for sacrifices (*mahaira*), which is one of their distinctive attributes. See F. van Straten, in S. Georgoudi et al. (eds.), *La cuisine et l'autel*, Turnhout, 2005, p. 19.

³⁵ J.-L. Brunaux, B. Lambot, *Guerre et armement chez les Gaulois*, Paris, 1987, p. 46-48.

³⁶ A. Rustoiu, *Războinici și artizani...*, p. 123-141.

³⁷ See in this case the convincing analysis of Z. Petre, *Practica nemuririi. O lectură critică a izvoarelor grecești referitoare la geți*, Iași (Polirom), 2004, p. 249-289. See also D. Ruscu, *Provincia Dacia în istoriografia antică*, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 61-63.

³⁸ D. Ruscu, *op.cit.*, p. 60; S. Némethi, *Sincretismul religios în Dacia romană*, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 185-200. The author (*op.cit.*, p. 216-218) suggests that this is the result of a 'conversion' process.

³⁹ D. Ruscu, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

This fact explains why the local elites are absent from Roman Dacia, in contrast with the situation from the neighbouring provinces (Pannonia and Moesia), in which the indigenous aristocracy was integrated in the new social structures and is attested in the epigraphic evidence⁴⁰.

The disappearance of curved daggers after the Roman conquest is therefore the consequence of the dissolution of a warlike and at the same time religious aristocracy, for whom *sica* was more than a weapon. Besides its role in combat, it was an instrument of sacrifice and an attribute of this social group. In this case, it should not be excluded that the 'ethnic' or 'national' significance given to the curved dagger in the Roman major or minor representations might have been determined by the original meaning of the weapon in the pre-conquest Dacian society.

Still, on some Roman monuments also appear other weapons with a curved blade, but they are different from the daggers. Such implements, with a rather straight blade and a curved top, having a longer hilt to be used with both hands, are depicted on the metopes of the monument from Adamclissi (*Tropaeum Traiani*)⁴¹ (fig. 8/2). At the same time, from the military fort at Birdoswald, in Britannia, are coming two inscriptions displaying similar pieces⁴² (fig. 8/3-4). They were dedicated by the soldiers of *cohors I Aelia Dacorum miliaria equitata*, an auxiliary unit probably recruited during Hadrian's period. However, the inscriptions are dating from the beginning of the 3rd century AD⁴³.

The question is whether these images are an interpretation of the curved daggers, or they represent another weapon. A similar piece was discovered at Sarmizegetusa Regia, the former capital of the Dacian dynasts. It has a length of 64 cm and towards the top it was marked with a circle⁴⁴, a symbol often encountered on some *sicae* (fig. 8/1).

Another question is when these swords with curved blade, functionally different from the curved daggers, appeared. As mentioned above, until the Augustan period, the Dacian panoply of weapons included the long sword of La Tène type. Very probably, by the end of the 1st century BC or the beginning of the 1st century AD, this weapon became obsolete and the archaeological contexts of the following period did not reveal any finds of this type. Therefore the long sword was replaced by the one with curved blade, similar to the piece from Sarmizegetusa Regia and later depicted on some Roman monuments. Perhaps such modification of the panoply of weapons was a result of some restructuring in the Dacian social sphere. In this case, it is possible that the new swords with curved blade (resembling the Thracian *romphaias*, used several centuries before, but not identical) might have been the offensive weapon of the warriors, the *capillati* mentioned by ancient sources, freeborn people with military duties and subordinated to the *pilleati*⁴⁵, the exclusive owners of the curved daggers. On Trajan's Column such distinction cannot be observed, since both the characters wearing *pilleus* and those with a bare head used *sicae*, but this situation can be justified by the 'ethnic' attribute of the curved daggers on this monument. Nevertheless, the auxiliary units recruited in Dacia probably amongst the so-called *capillati*, preserved for a longer time their characteristic weapon, like a symbol of their origin, as the monuments from Britannia may suggest. It is almost sure that the Dacian auxiliaries had not used such swords within the Roman army, since the cohorts were equipped with standard Roman weaponry⁴⁶. On the other

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 48-67 (especially p. 55-60).

⁴¹ F. B. Florescu, *Das Siegesdenkmal von Adamklissi. Tropaeum Traiani*, Bukarest - Bonn, 1965, fig. 195, 197, 199, 215, 218a-b, 221. See also S. von Schnubein, *op.cit.*, p. 122-123, fig. 6.

⁴² RIB I, no. 1909, 1914; T. Wilmot, *Birdoswald Roman fort*, Stroud, 2001, p. 98; *idem*, in *ActaMN*, 38/1, 2001, p. 110-112, pl. 3/1-2. See also B. Mitrea, in *RIR*, 9, 1939, p. 264-270, fig. 4 and I. I. Russu, *Daco-geții în Imperiul Roman*, București, 1980, p. 29-33, fig. 5-6.

⁴³ As concerning the cohort, see the comprehensive study recently published by T. Wilmot, in *ActaMN*, 38/1, 2001, p. 103-122.

⁴⁴ I. Glodariu, E. Iaroslavschi, *op.cit.*, p. 137-138, fig. 71/1.

⁴⁵ Z. Petre, *op. cit.*, p. 249-260.

⁴⁶ Only the *numeri* preserved their ethnic character, including the specific weaponry: M. Le Glay, J.-L. Voisin, Y. Le Bohec, *A history of Rome*, Oxford, 2001, p. 322.

hand, at the beginning of the 3rd century AD, the recruiting source of the Dacian cohort from Britannia was very probably modified, as happened for example with the auxiliary units of Britanni cantoned in the Danubian provinces (Noricum or Pannonia), which several generations after their establishment, enlisted soldiers from the provinces in which they served⁴⁷. In the case of the Dacian cohort, only the original name of the unit and the ethnic sign consisting in a curved sword, remained⁴⁸.

As a conclusion, it should be observed that during the last century of the Dacian Kingdom, the local population used two types of weapons with curved blade: the dagger that had a longer tradition and the sword that appeared only during the 1st century AD. Returning to the first question, is it possible that the terms *sica* and *falx* might have referred to different weapons? As underlined above, from the etymological point of view, both words define a weapon with a curved blade. On the other hand, *sica* designates for sure the curved dagger, whereas *falx* might have been used for both weapons, or only for the sword with curved blade, as the term is used nowadays by some archaeologists and historians. Such ambiguity from Fronto's text is also encountered on the monuments. The official ones, with 'central' exposure, like the Column of Trajan or the coins commemorating the conquest of Dacia, are depicting the curved dagger⁴⁹, while the provincial monuments (*Tropaeum Traiani* or the inscriptions dedicated by the Dacian cohort in Britannia) are showing the sword with curved blade, an image which was very probably ordered by the customers in the case of the monuments from Birdoswald. Therefore, in order to avoid the terminological confusions in the literature, the use of *sica*, *sicae* for the daggers and *falx*, *falces* for the swords, would be fine.

Summing up the above-mentioned observations, from the death of P. Licinius Crassus Dives Mucianus, killed by a Thracian *sica* in the service of Eumenes III Aristonicos, until the suicide of Decebalus with a similar type of dagger, the curved weapons of the Thracians witnessed a longer evolution. The final shape of *sicae* was established in the aristocratic milieu from northern Balkans, in the cultural area of the Padea - Panagjurski kolonii group. The same warriors were responsible for the distribution of this weapon north of the Danube, *sica* being later on used by the military and religious elites of the Dacian Kingdom until the Roman conquest. The significance of the curved dagger within the Dacian panoply of weapons was very probably enhanced by its function as instrument for sacrifices. The conquest of Dacia and the subsequent representations of the *sicae* on official imperial monuments commemorating the victory, contributed to the enforcement of the 'ethnic' attribute of these weapons in the ancient conscience. At the same time, the curved swords, which appeared only during the 1st century AD, as weapons used by the common warriors, found their way in the provincial iconography, again as an 'ethnic' symbol. Therefore, *sica* and *falx*, both 'national' weapons of the Dacians, survived in the Roman artistic and symbolic imaginary long after the dissolution of the Dacian Kingdom's aristocracy.

(translated by Mariana Elena Egri)

⁴⁷ A. Husar, *Celți și germani în Dacia romană*, Cluj-Napoca, 1999, p. 125.

⁴⁸ In the tumulus grave found at Viscri (Brașov) in 1898, was placed a curved sword with the length of 87 cm: K. Horedt, *Untersuchungen zur Frühgeschichte Siebenbürgens*, Bukarest, 1958, p. 14-16, fig. 2/4. The grave (fig. 9) is probably dating from the beginning of the 2nd century AD, perhaps belonging to an indigenous warrior. As far as I know, no other similar finds were discovered, dating from the provincial period.

⁴⁹ A symbol that appeared also on other artistic representations in the Empire.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Fig. 1.

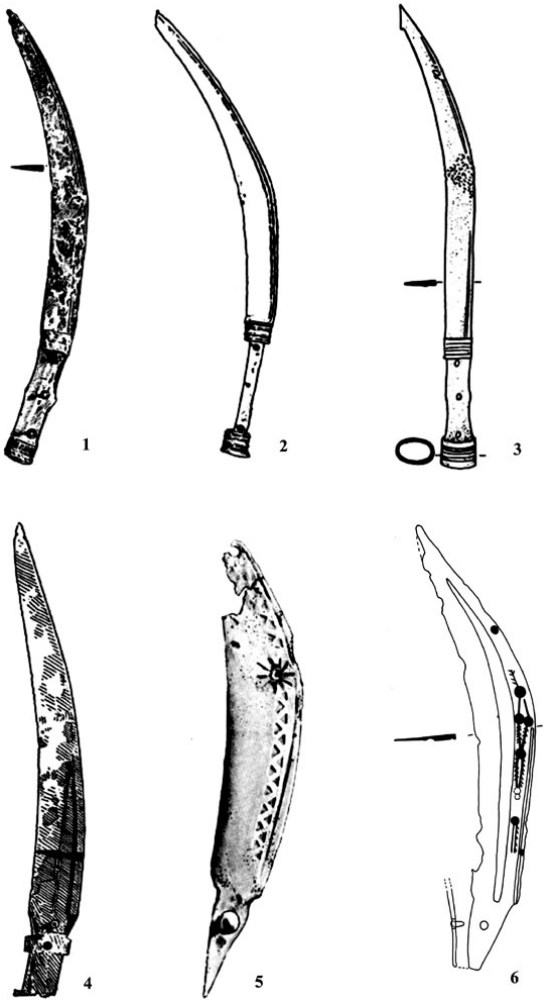
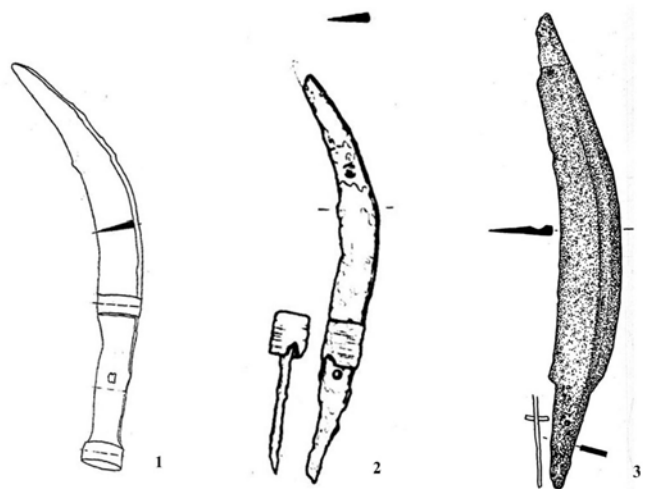
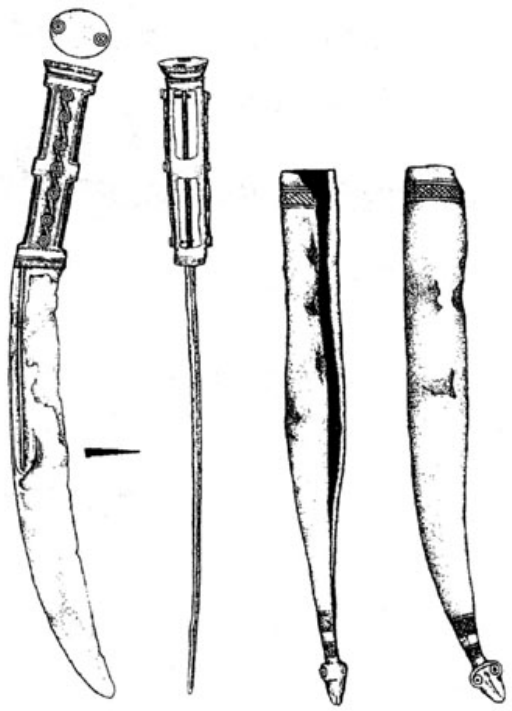


Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.





1



2



3

Fig. 4.

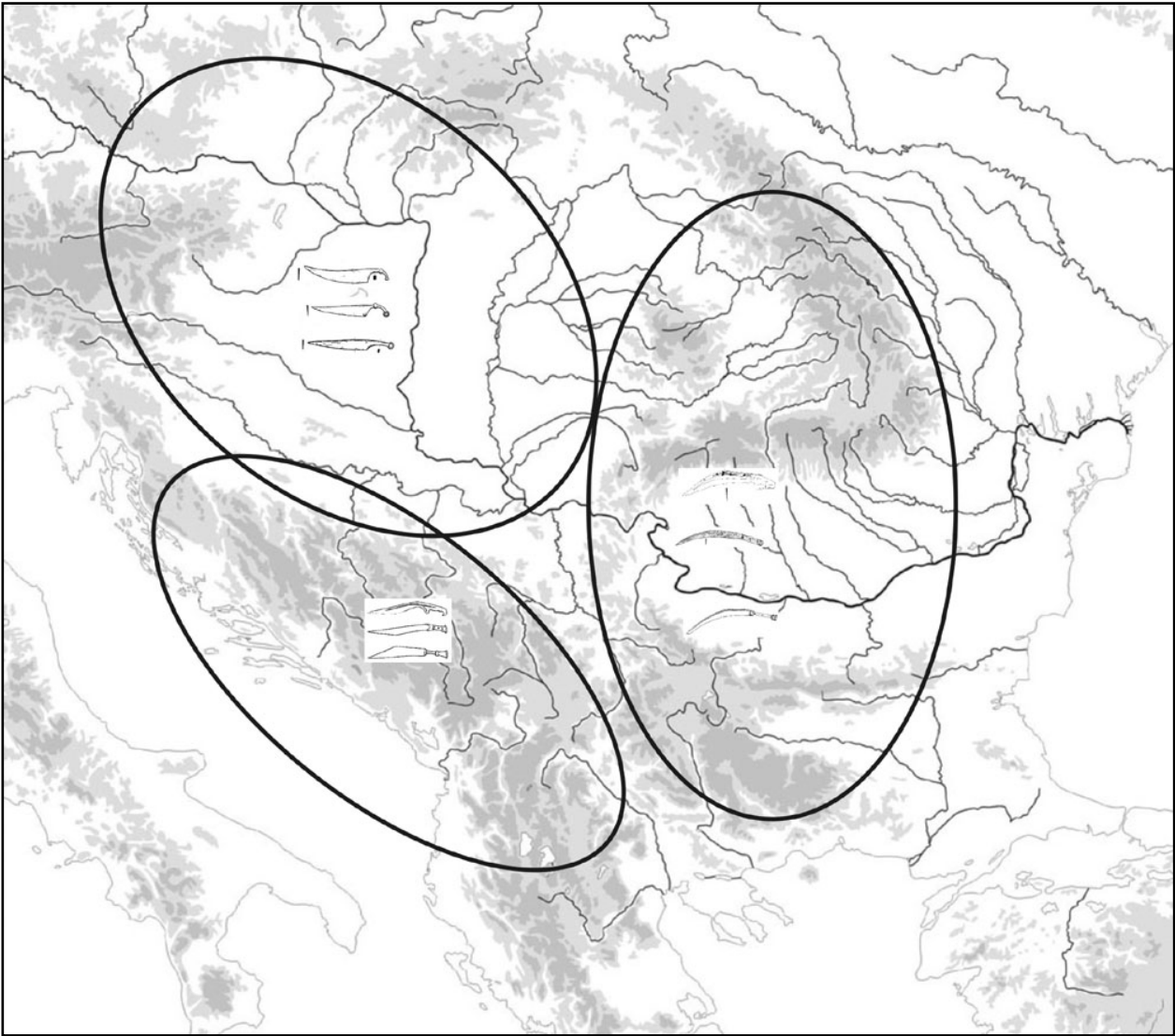
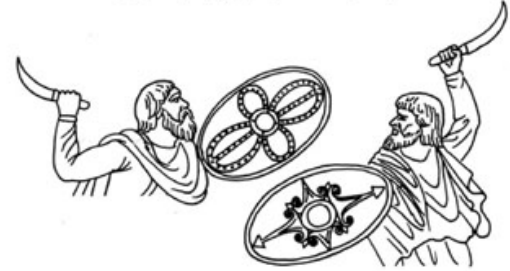


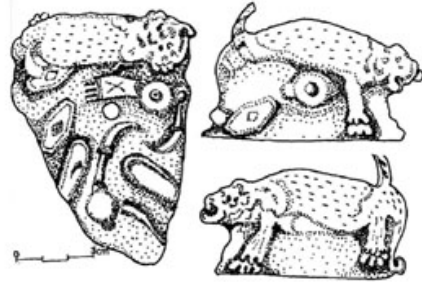
Fig. 5.



1



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Fig. 6.

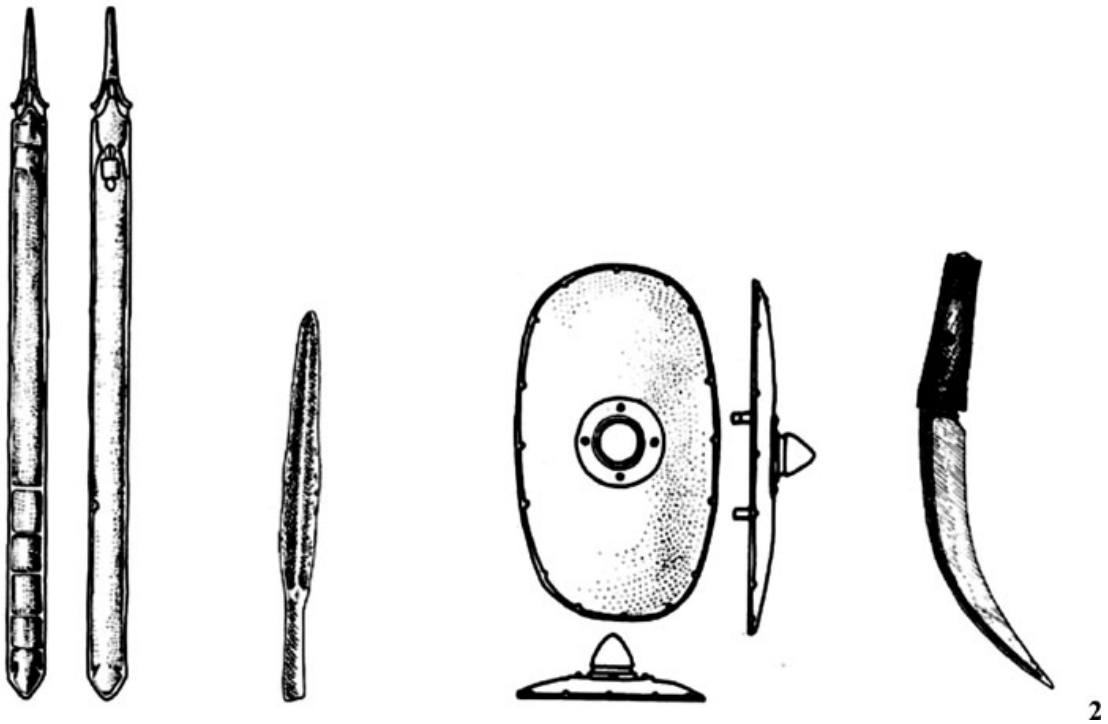
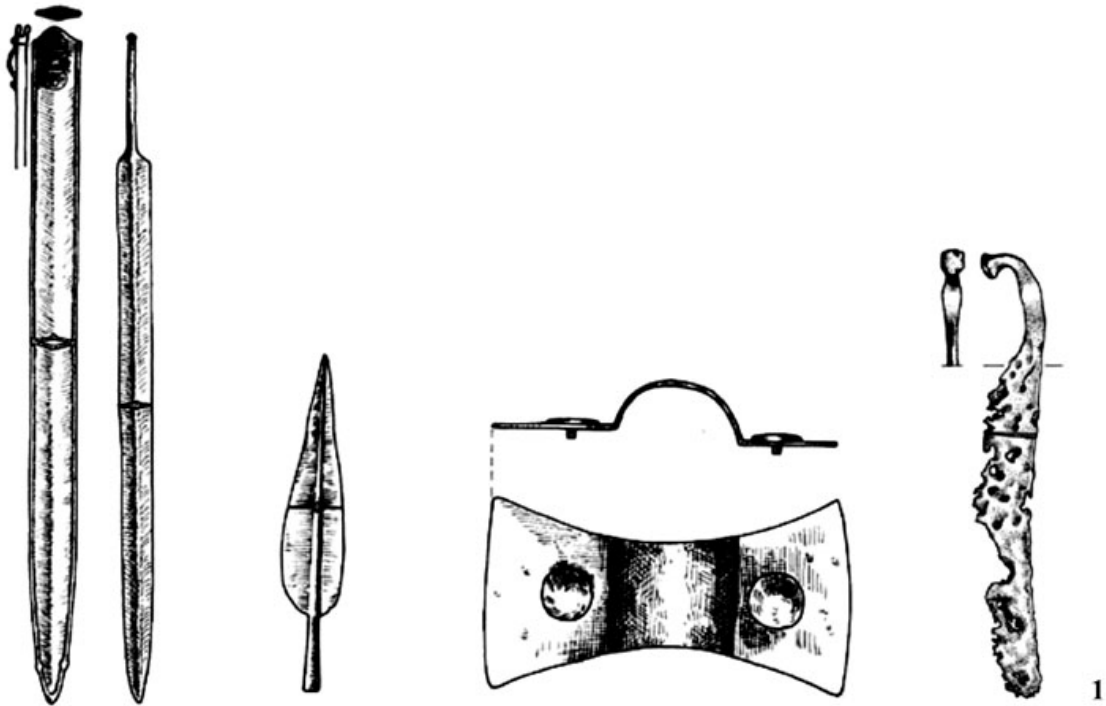


Fig. 7.



1



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3



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Fig. 8.

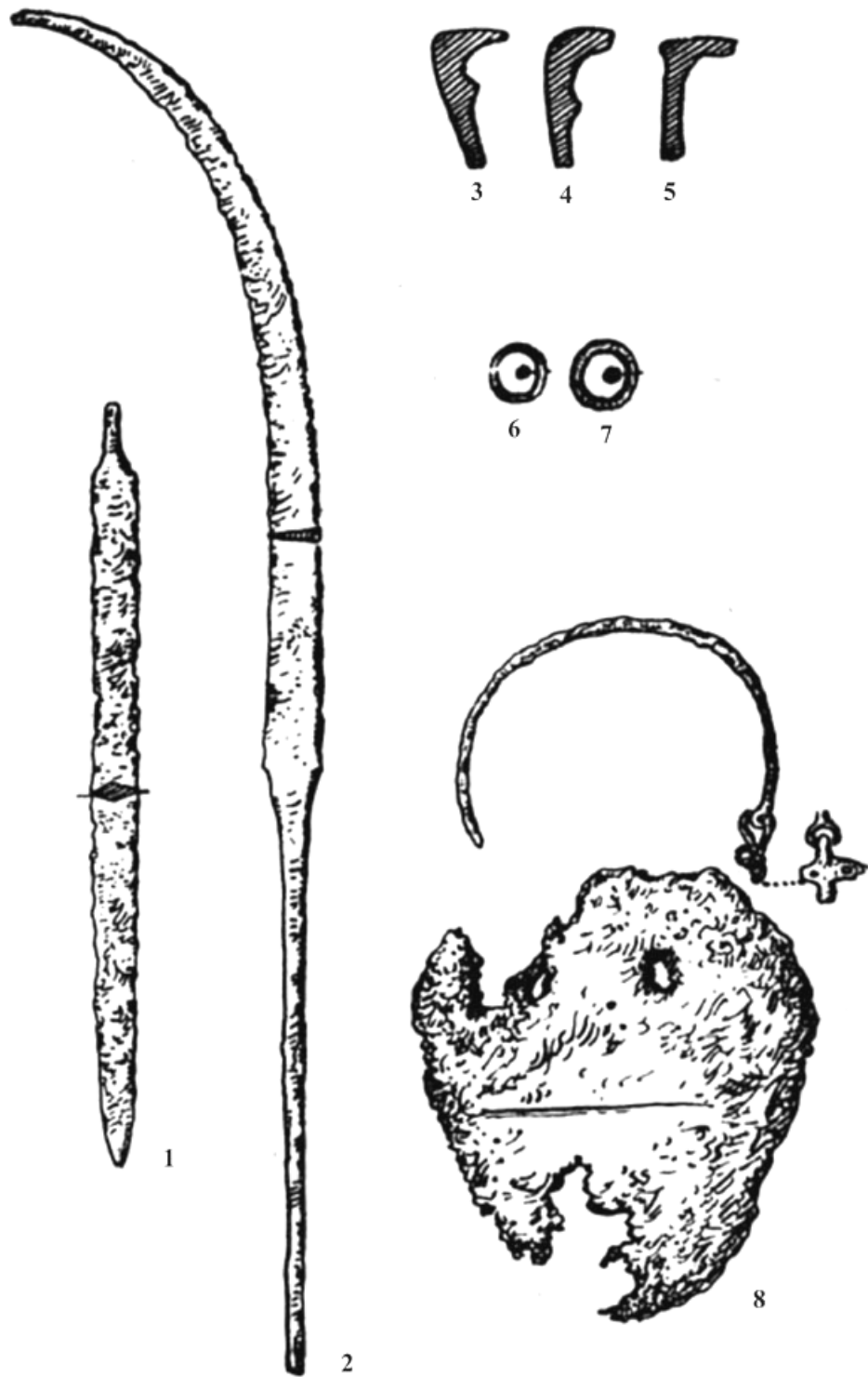


Fig. 9.