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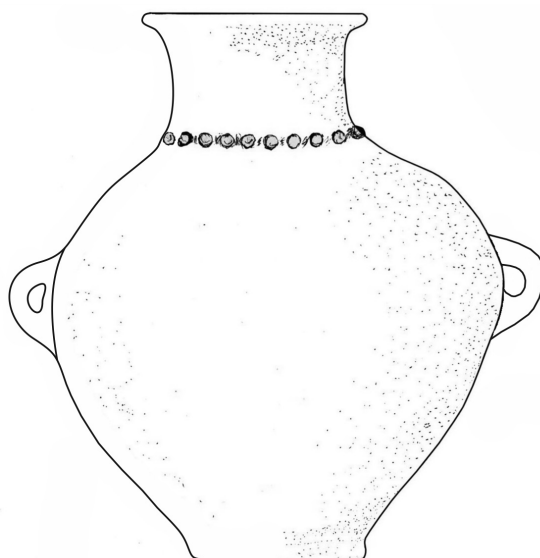
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# A “Slavic” bow *fibula* found at Rapoltu Mare – Şeghi (Hunedoara County, Romania)

**Costin-Daniel Țuțuianu, Ioan Alexandru Bărbat**

**Abstract:** This archaeological note presents a “Slavic” bow *fibula* discovered by chance south of Rapoltu Mare village (Rapoltu Mare Commune, Hunedoara County, Romania), on the ground level of the Şeghi archaeological site. According to its workmanship and decoration details, the copper-alloy exemplar belongs to Werner I H type “Slavic” bow *fibulae*. In general, brooches included in this group evolved after the mid-6th century and were made no later than the first half of the 7th century. As evidenced by the repertory of finds, similar material culture products have been attested in Transylvania only in the Târnavelor area, which is why the dress accessory from Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi may be deemed uncommon in the western part of Romania.

**Keywords:** south-western Transylvania; Mureş valley; stray find; dress item; the 6–7th centuries.

## Introduction

During a visit to the south-eastern edge of the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi archaeological site (RAN code: 90672.09)<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1/A–B) on June 9, 2023, we noticed a “Slavic” bow *fibula* (Figs. 3–4) on the surface of the ground<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, the piece was found at a time when any intrusive archaeological intervention in that sector of the Şeghi site was impossible due to agricultural crops. In the near future, we intend to perform an archaeological diagnostic of the area, similar to that conducted in 2022 which resulted in the discovery of an early medieval cemetery<sup>3</sup>, in order to clarify the presence of a new chronological horizon in the south-eastern corner of the site.

Although the *fibula* lacks any context, we note that its variant is not a common occurrence in Transylvania, unrecorded, at least so far, in western Romania. These details, combined with the scarcity of published information on the post-Roman or migration periods in the Hunedoara area of the Mureş valley, make the introduction of this item into scientific circulation a useful contribution.

## The site location

Rapoltu Mare<sup>4</sup> (Rapoltu Mare Commune) is located in south-western Transylvania (Fig. 1/A), in the eastern part of Hunedoara County. Geographically, the region lies north-west of the Mureş, specifically the Orăştia corridor section of the river’s middle basin<sup>5</sup>, while geologically and hydrogeologically the area belongs to the crystalline Rapolt island formation<sup>6</sup>.

Site Şeghi, also known by the toponyms *Also Forduló*<sup>7</sup>, *Siediu*<sup>8</sup> or *Sedi*<sup>9</sup>, is located on the southern side of Rapoltu Mare, on the north-western bank of the Mureş River, and to the south of the 107A road (Uroi – Geoagiu) (Fig. 1/B). The site’s north-eastern extremity is 500 m south of the exit from Rapoltu

<sup>1</sup> RAN = National Archaeological Repertory.

<sup>2</sup> Brooch coordinates are: 45.853912 N, 23.069370 E, 198 m elevation. Data record carried out by GPS Garmin Montana, model 650t.

<sup>3</sup> Bărbat *et al.* 2023, 749–751.

<sup>4</sup> The locality name is also known as *Nagyrapolt* or *Nagy-rápol* in Hungarian and *Gross-Rapolten* or *Gross-Rapolden* in German (Kóvári 1853, 15, 259; Luca 2008, 137).

<sup>5</sup> Badea *et al.* 1987, 360–361, Fig. 133; Ursuţ 2001, 1–3; Zotic 2007, 1, Pl. 1–2; Mărculeţ 2013, 7–9, 12–13, 109, Fig. 1–4.

<sup>6</sup> Berbeleac 1961–1962, 3; Berbeleac 1966–1967, 5, Pl. I–II; Ursuţ 2001, 2; Orăşeanu 2020, 189, 191, Fig. 7.1.

<sup>7</sup> See the second military survey of Transylvania (also called Franciscan), map examined on maps.arcanum.com (accessed: 17.08.2023).

<sup>8</sup> See the third military survey of Transylvania, examined on maps.arcanum.com (accessed: 17.08.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Bassa 1968, 31; Ursuţiu 2002, 94, no. 48; Luca 2008, 137, no. 328.

Mare village, towards the Uroi and Simeria. Eastwards and westwards of *Șeghi*, the Mureș floodlands border the first river terrace, while about 500 m from the site's north-western edge the second terrace of the same watercourse rises<sup>10</sup>. Other landmarks in the vicinity are a gravel plant to the south-west, a secondary road to the west and south-east, and the *Steaua Mureșului* leisure complex to the west.

Geomorphologically, the terrace is currently affected by farming works, its elevation in relation to the Mureș riverbank being around 10 m in the highest places (Fig. 2). One detail that should not be overlooked is that the relief step provides good visibility of the surroundings, towards the hills that mark the transition between the southern of the Metaliferi Mountains and the Mureș valley, such as *Măgura Uroiului*, and also towards the Mureș plain and the nearby localities of Simeria Veche, Rapoltu Mare, Spini and Turdaș.

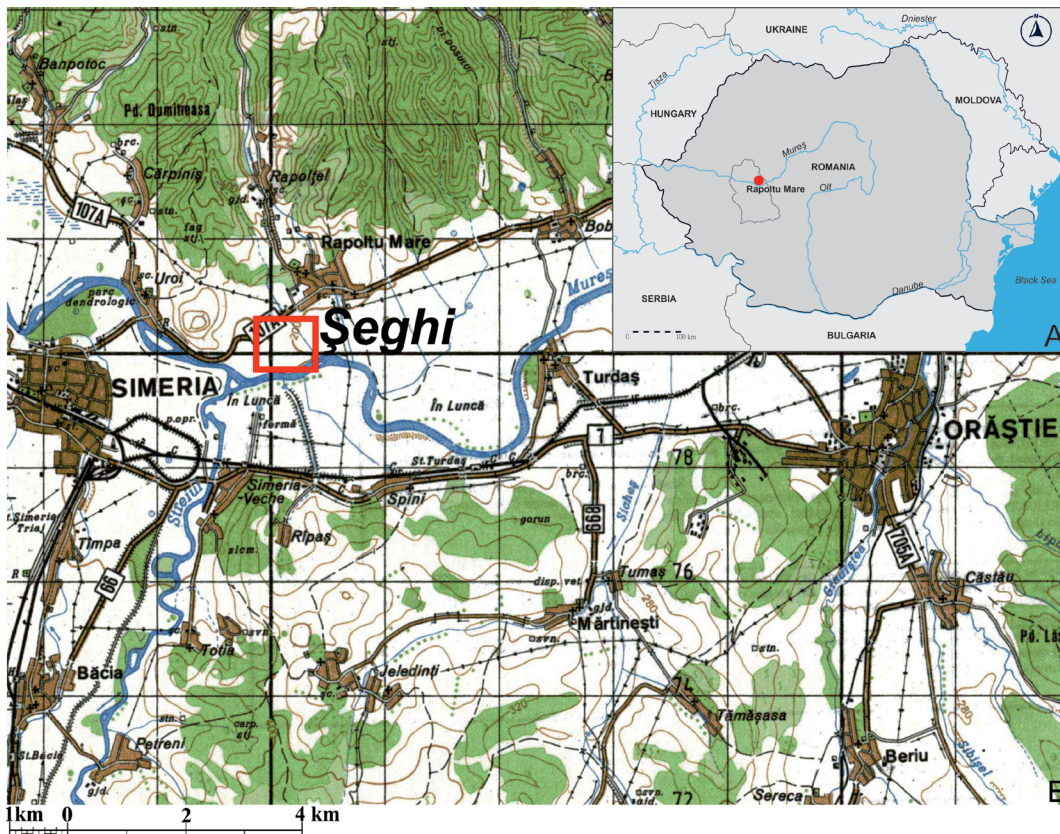


Fig. 1. Location of the Rapoltu Mare-*Șeghi* site (red point and red rectangle) on the territory of Romania (A) and the military survey map (scale 1:100000) of 1996 (B) (A – map by the authors; B – modified chart based on the Ministry of National Defence map).

### Research history

The *Șeghi* site, near Rapoltu Mare, first became known in the academic literature in the 1960s<sup>11</sup>. First references to the site mention that the archaeological objective is specific to the late Pecica, Otomani (III), Mureș, late Wietenberg and Basarabi cultures<sup>12</sup>.

In the 1980s, Ioan Andrițoiu excavated several archaeological test pits at *Șeghi*; unfortunately, little is known of the results<sup>13</sup>. From the account of someone who participated in those surveys<sup>14</sup>, as

<sup>10</sup> Point known by toponym *La Vie* (RAN code: 90672.02).

<sup>11</sup> Berciu 1960, 152; Horedt 1960, 113, no. 120; Rusu 1966, 34, note 18; Bassa 1968, 31; Stanc *et al.* 2020, 210; Bărbat *et al.* 2023, 749.

<sup>12</sup> Berciu 1960, 152; Horedt 1960, 113, no. 120; Rusu 1964, 246, note 36; Vulpe 1965, 132, no. 55; Rusu 1966, 34, note 18; Bassa 1968, 31; Lazarovici 1971, 78, 80, no. 10; Ordentlich 1971, 27, no. 48; Chidioșan 1974, 158, no. 20; Andrițoiu 1978, 66, no. II.5; Chidioșan 1980, 90; Vulpe 1986, 63, no. 152; Andrițoiu 1986–1987, 51; Andrițoiu 1992, 29, 47, 55, 61, 124, no. 79; Boroffka 1994, 68, no. 346; Ciugudean 1997, 144, no. 35; Bălos 2001, 8–9; Ursuțiu 2002, 94, no. 48; Popa, Totoianu 2010, 229, note 1384; Bărbat *et al.* 2023, 749.

<sup>13</sup> Popa 2005, 100, 167, no. 47, note 511; Popa, Totoianu 2010, 78, 167, 230, no. 47, notes 520, 1392.

<sup>14</sup> Our colleague Angelica Bălos (archaeologist, County Culture Directorate of Deva), then a school student, also participated





Fig. 2. South-east aerial photo of the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi site. In the background is the volcanic hill *Măgura Uroiului* (photo by the authors).

well as from archival data<sup>15</sup>, and the evidence of archaeological material stored and inventoried at the Museum in Deva<sup>16</sup>, it seems that at least three research areas (SI, SII and SIII) were excavated in the summer of 1983.

In the last three decades, the archaeological site has come to the attention of archaeologists at the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation in Deva, Corvin Castle Museum in Hunedoara and West University of Timişoara, which is why field surveys and archaeological test-pitting are now being conducted at Şeghi<sup>17</sup>. The most recent investigation, in the form of an archaeological diagnostic, was performed in April 2022, when a cemetery with 10–11th(?)–century inhumations was identified on the south-eastern side of the site. Unfortunately, this was destroyed by farming activity<sup>18</sup>.

Briefly referencing the chronology of the archaeological finds of Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi, we point out that the published or as yet unpublished results of past or recent research confirm that the site is very complex, with an almost continuous presence of human communities on this terrace of the Mureş River from the Neolithic period until the early Middle Ages<sup>19</sup>.

### Brooch context and description

The *fibula* appeared, as mentioned at the beginning of this archaeological note, on the south-eastern side of the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi site (Figs. 2–3). Unfortunately, because the artefact is a chance find yielded by the ground surface (Fig. 4), it is impossible to ascertain its original context. Close to the brooch we also noted a phalanx, possibly human; however, it cannot be securely related to

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in the excavations and we thank her for the amicably provided information regarding this archaeological research.

<sup>15</sup> Archive MCDR Deva, Dos. 2/1983, unnumbered page, dated 10.08.1983.

<sup>16</sup> *Registrul de Inventar General*, vol. III, no. 28384–35359, 230.

<sup>17</sup> Popa 1998, 53, note 50, no. 15; Popa 2003, 9, note 7, no. 3; Popa 2005, 167, no. 47; Roman, Tincu 2009, 332, no. 176; Popa, Totoianu 2010, 167, 230, no. 47; Stanc *et al.* 2020, 211; Bărbat *et al.* 2023, 749.

<sup>18</sup> Bărbat *et al.* 2023, 749–751, Fig. 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> Berciu 1960, 152; Horedt 1960, 113, no. 120; Rusu 1964, 246, note 36; Vulpe 1965, 132, no. 55; Rusu 1966, 34, note 18; Bassa 1968, 31; Lazarovici 1971, 78, 80, no. 10; Ordentlich 1971, 27, no. 48; Chidioşan 1974, 158, no. 20; Andriţoiu 1978, 66, no. II.5; Chidioşan 1980, 90; Vulpe 1986, 63, no. 152; Andriţoiu 1986–1987, 51; Andriţoiu 1992, 29, 47, 55, 61, 124, no. 79; Rotea 1993, 33; Boroffka 1994, 68, no. 346; Rotea 1994, 42; Ciugudean 1997, 144, no. 35; Popa 1998, 53, 80, note 50, no. 15, 25; Bălos 2001, 8–9; Ursuţiu 2002, 94, no. 48; Ciugudean 2003, 105; Popa 2003, 9–11, note 7, no. 3; Popa 2005, 61–63, 65, 100, 103, 167, no. 47, no. 511; Luca 2008, 137, no. 328; Roman, Tincu 2009, 332, no. 176; Popa, Totoianu 2010, 25, 27–28, 31, 78, 82, 167, 224, 229–230, no. 47, notes 520, 1392; Stanc *et al.* 2020, 209–215; Bărbat *et al.* 2023, 749.





Fig. 3. Aerial photo of the south-east corner of the Rapoltu Mare-Șeghi site. Yellow arrow indicates the approximate location of the “Slavic” bow *fibula* find (photo by the authors).



Fig. 4. Detail of the “Slavic” bow *fibula* at the time of discovery (photo by the authors).

the dress object since a cemetery with 10–11th(?) -century inhumations, largely compromised by ploughing during recent decades, is present in this sector<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, we report that in the

<sup>20</sup> The presence of human bone materials on the ground surface firmly prove the existence of graves, possibly of at least two or three cemeteries, one of which was confirmed by the archaeological diagnostic performed in the spring of 2022 (Bărbat *et*



south-eastern area of the Şeghi site, field surveys carried out almost a decade ago identified here and there reused Roman date tiles and grey, wheel-wrought potshards<sup>21</sup>. The latter could be connected with potential post-Roman features present on this terrace corner, which seems to be confirmed by the small dress accessory as well.

Regarding the features of the item, we specify that the *fibula* from Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi has survived almost intact (Figs. 5/A–F), although it lacks the terminal lobe and one of the sideways knobs, apparently imitating a stylized bird head or beak. In terms of the raw material type, in the absence of metallographic analyses, we assume that the artefact is a copper alloy<sup>22</sup> (similar to zinc brasses or tin bronzes), which is supported by the silvery-green patina (Figs. 5A–5B). Once the object was cast, the brooch was roughly polished, traces of this finishing process emerging as small striations on the bow, footplate and in-between the knobs.

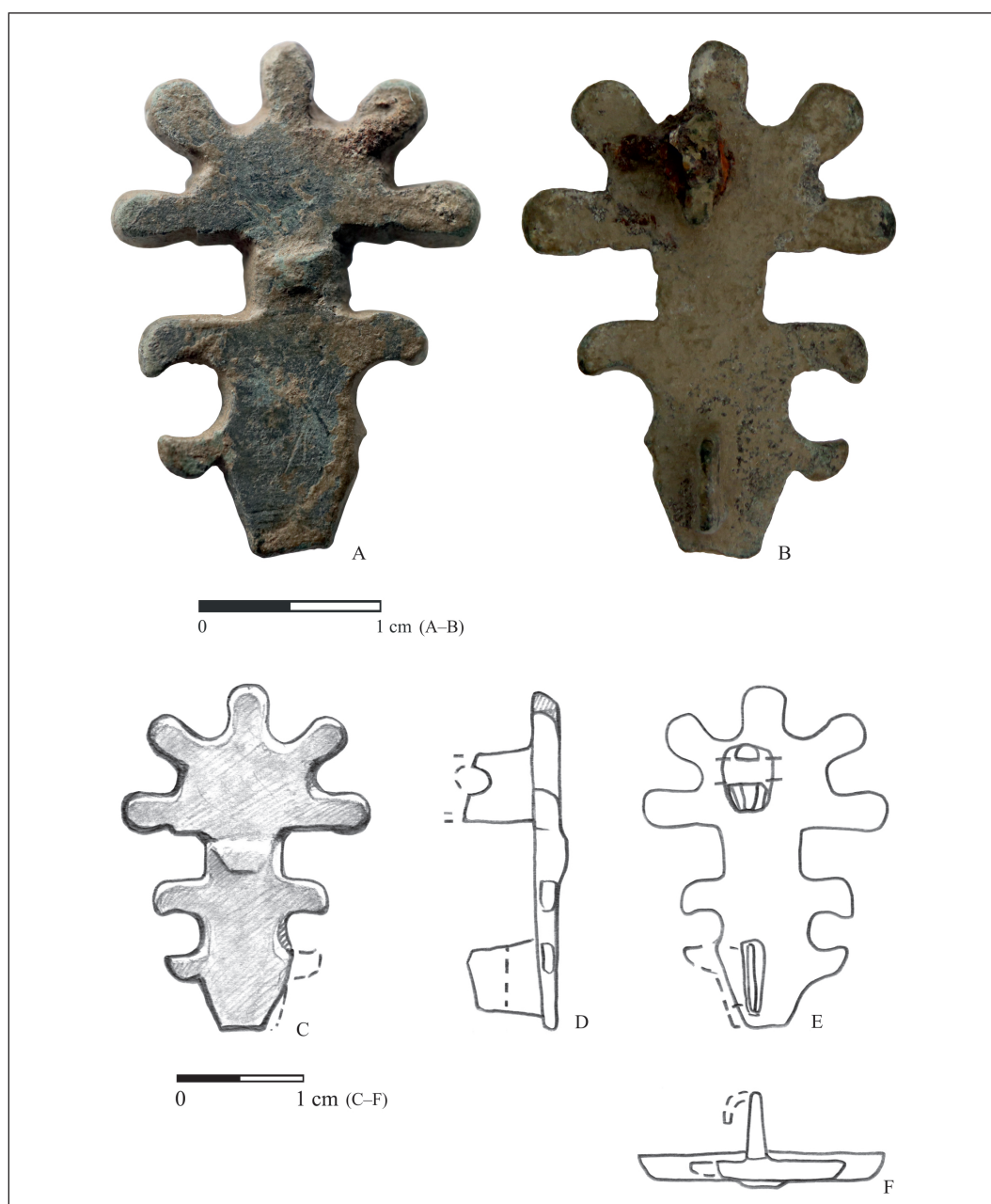


Fig. 5. “Slavic” bow *fibula* discovered in the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi site (A–F) (photos by the authors; drawings by M. Manea).

al. 2023, 749–751).

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished finds (Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation, Deva).

<sup>22</sup> Curta 2012, 29.

Description of the “Slavic” bow *fibula*: 1. Surviving total length is 2.8 cm; 2. Upper, semicircular plate, provided with five lobes, is 0.7 cm high (together with the lug) and 1 cm long. There is no visible decoration on body plate; instead, on the reverse of the upper plate, a single lug where the iron spring was attached can be distinguished (Figs. 5/B, D–E); 3. The brooch bow, 0.4 cm long, is slightly thickened (preserves a poorly finished casting burr) and makes the connection with the footplate, which lacks its terminal knob; 4. The footplate is elongated, slightly ovoid, with a surviving length of 1.3 cm. Attached to it are two pairs of projections (knobs) set sideways, reversed, in the form of stylised bird heads or beaks, one of which is broken from antiquity (Figs. 5/A–C, E). On the footplate’s reverse, the socket (with broken curved part) where the brooch pin was attached partially survives (Figs. 5/B, D–F); 5. The *fibula* weighs 4.37 g.

## Discussion

In this section we discuss the “Slavic” bow *fibula* of Rapoltu Mare-Șeghi (A) typologically, (B) chronologically and (C) contextually, with a note that discussions on the topic shall be further resumed elsewhere<sup>23</sup>.

**A.** The brooch discovered at Șeghi has typological correspondences with the first “Slavic” bow *fibulae* classification published more than seven decades ago by Joachim Werner<sup>24</sup>. The German archaeologist believed at the time that such brooch models belonged to type I H, *Pergamon-Tei*<sup>25</sup>; the only item present in this typological framing is that discovered at Bucharest-Tei<sup>26</sup>, which in fact belongs to type I D or one of its variants<sup>27</sup>.

Four decades later, in 1992, Dan Gh. Teodor proposed a typology for artefacts of this kind dated to the 6–7th centuries and discovered in Romania<sup>28</sup>. He found that the size and shape of the head semicircular plate remained almost the same over this period; however, the footplate changed<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, decorative elements can be useful defining features when attempting to fit such items into one category or another<sup>30</sup>. According to Teodor, “Slavic” bow *fibulae* from the “Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic” region may be divided into two main groups: I. *fibulae* with human mask on the foot’s extremity; II. *fibulae* with zoomorphic figure on the foot’s extremity, of different variations<sup>31</sup>.

Following the analysis of the *fibula* found at Rapoltu Mare-Șeghi, and in accordance with Teodor’s typology, it may be classified as a type I.5 miniature brooch with rhomboid, triangular or elongated footplate and stylized bird beak of type *Bucharest-Tei*, *Suceava-Piatra Frecăței*<sup>32</sup>. Appropriately, Teodor divides this type I.5 into 4 subvariants<sup>33</sup>, and the *fibula* discovered at Șeghi belongs to subvariant 3 (*Suceava* type)<sup>34</sup>.

Adopting Werner’s hierarchy, Florin Curta adopted a different approach in the study of this artefact class. He took the position that in the case I H-type artefacts, it is more accurate and useful to categorize them on the basis of brooch components, namely: (1) circular plate variants, (2) foot variants, (3) terminal lobe variants, (4) knob variants and (5) bow variants<sup>35</sup>.

According to Curta, for Werner I H class “Slavic” bow *fibulae* there are four circular plate variations (A to D), eight footplate variations (A to H), five terminal lobe variants (A to E), two bow variations (A to B) and three knob variants (A to C)<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, following this typology, the *fibula* discovered at Rapoltu Mare-Șeghi could be classified as type 1 – A, 2 – A, 4 – C, 5 – A.

<sup>23</sup> We intend to analyse the “Slavic” bow *fibula* discovered at Rapoltu Mare-Șeghi in more detail, in the wider context of chronologically close finds yielded by the nearby area.

<sup>24</sup> Werner 1950, 150–172.

<sup>25</sup> Werner 1950, 154.

<sup>26</sup> Werner 1950, Taf. 30/41.

<sup>27</sup> Curta 2004, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Teodor 1992, 119–152; Teodor 1997, 69–91; Teodor 2003, 267–285.

<sup>29</sup> Teodor 1992, 121–122; Teodor 1997, 77; Teodor 2003, 269.

<sup>30</sup> Teodor 1992, 122; Teodor 1997, 77; Teodor 2003, 269.

<sup>31</sup> Teodor 1992, 122; Teodor 1997, 77; Teodor 2003, 269.

<sup>32</sup> Teodor 1992, 129–130; Teodor 1997, 82–83; Teodor 2003, 277–278.

<sup>33</sup> Teodor 1992, 129; Teodor 1997, 82; Teodor 2003, 278.

<sup>34</sup> Teodor 1992, 129–130; Teodor 1997, 82; Teodor 2003, 278.

<sup>35</sup> Curta 2004, 64–65; Curta 2012, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Curta 2004, 64, Fig. 5.



**B.** Regarding chronology, Teodor maintains that miniature *fibulae* of type *Bucharest-Tei, Suceava-Piatra Frecăţei* date from some time in the early 7th century, possibly continuing to be made until the third quarter of that century<sup>37</sup>. Florin Curta offers a roughly similar dating, suggesting that items of this type first appeared somewhere after the mid-6th until the first half of the 7th century<sup>38</sup>. More recently, Curta argued that archaeological contexts yielding such items would date to a much narrower period, between the second half of the 6th century and the first decades of the 7th century, were made no later than AD 625<sup>39</sup>. In the case of the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi *fibula* (Figs. 4–5), taking into account its morphology and the conditions in which it was found, we suggest a somewhat broader dating: between the mid-6th century and early 7th century.

The chronology of the “Slavic” bow *fibula* from the Şeghi site in south-western Transylvania is also supported by its parallels. Among items discovered in the past, found in north-eastern and eastern Romania, we mention artefacts from Suceava – Şipot<sup>40</sup>, Goroşeva (Gorosheve)<sup>41</sup> and Selişte<sup>42</sup> which are morphologically similar to the *fibula* from Rapoltu Mare. More recently, on the occasion of the publication of cemetery no. 3 at Brateiu (Bratei), some “Slavic” bow *fibulae* have been introduced into the academic literature. Amongst the exemplars illustrated in the monograph (*Ein gepidisches Denkmal aus Siebenbürgen: Das Gräberfeld 3 von Bratei*), the ones identified in graves nos. 113 and 277 drew our attention, as they are almost identical typologically with the *fibula* discovered at Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi<sup>43</sup>.

**C.** As previously mentioned, the fact that the “Slavic” bow *fibula* (Werner I H) was found accidentally on the surface of the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi site (Fig. 4) prevents us from ascertaining whether it came from a grave or another type of feature. There have been archaeological materials discovered in the south-east of the Şeghi site that would support both hypotheses. Alternatively, this item could be correlated with other chronologically close finds from the vicinity of Rapoltu Mare. One such case is the emergence of early Slavic contexts within the site at Ciupercărie, at the foot of Măgura Uroiului, about 1.3 km west of the location of the brooch find, during rescue archaeological investigations conducted in the summer of 2007<sup>44</sup>. A second example is the chance find in 1972 of a bronze *foliis* in the Orthodox cemetery of Uroi village (Simeria town), a coin minted by Justinian I (527–565) in Cyzicus and dated between 541 and 542<sup>45</sup>.

Given the find conditions and lack of archaeological excavations or published material on this period from the vicinity of the Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi site, it is difficult to make any other supposition concerning the ethno-cultural affiliation of the “Slavic” bow *fibula* at this state of research, which is why this issue shall be resolved by future research.

## Conclusions

Despite the context in which the “Slavic” bow *fibula* (type Werner I H) was found, a preliminary conclusion that has emerged is that the artefact is another contribution to our knowledge of the 6–7th-centuries material culture from the territory of Hunedoara County. This is especially valuable, given that very little new information has been published recently on this chronological timeframe<sup>46</sup>. Most of the information we have on the period still comes from the study authored almost seven decades ago by Kurt Horedt<sup>47</sup>.

A second conclusion is that, beyond the rival typological classifications that differ in terms of approach, the Popa 2001, 117; discovered at Rapoltu Mare-Şeghi ultimately represents a dress item

<sup>37</sup> Teodor 1992, 130; Teodor 2003, 278.

<sup>38</sup> Curta 2006, 234, Table 8.

<sup>39</sup> Curta 2012, 34–36.

<sup>40</sup> Matei 1960, 383, Fig. 7; Matei *et al.* 1962, 744, Fig. 5; Teodor 1978, 172, 174, Fig. 13/2, 15/2; Teodor 1992, 147, Fig. 6/8; Teodor 1997, 90, Fig. 10/6; Teodor 2003, 296, Fig. 6/8; Curta 2004, 71, 73, Fig. 11/10, no. 5; Curta 2012, 73, no. 348.

<sup>41</sup> Baran, Pačkova 1975, 94, Fig. 8; Teodor 1992, 147, Fig. 6/7; Teodor 1997, 90, Fig. 10/7; Teodor 2003, 296, Fig. 6/7; Curta 2004, 74, no. 24; Curta 2012, 65, no. 114.

<sup>42</sup> Curta 2004, 69, 74, Fig. 10, no. 20; Curta 2012, 72, no. 325.

<sup>43</sup> Bârzu 2010, 79, 201, 264, 297, 325, 338, Abb. 146, 287, Taf. 19/G.113/1, 47/G.277/4, 60/G.113/1.

<sup>44</sup> Man 2009, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Andriţoiu 1974–1975, 137–138, Fig. 1; Andriţoiu 1979, 28, no. 38; Mitrea 1976–1980, 601, no. 322; Butnariu 1983–1985, 223, no. 167; Popa 2001, 117; Velter 2002, 35, 302, 481, no. CXVII, CCCIV; Luca 2008, 179, no. 446.

<sup>46</sup> Țuţuianu 2012, 144–145; Țuţuianu 2020, 139–145, 147, Pl. I/1a–1b.

<sup>47</sup> Horedt 1956, 105–108, Fig. 2/2, 3.

accessory of a type not previously identified in western Romania from this period. The find's importance is increased by the fact that in Transylvania, at least in the current state of research, similar "Slavic" bow *fibulae* have only emerged in the Târnava Mare valley, more than 100 km north-east of *Șeghi*, in the post-Roman sites of Brateiu (Bratei)<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Bârzu 2010, 79, Abb. 46, Typ. 15a2a/277, 113.

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