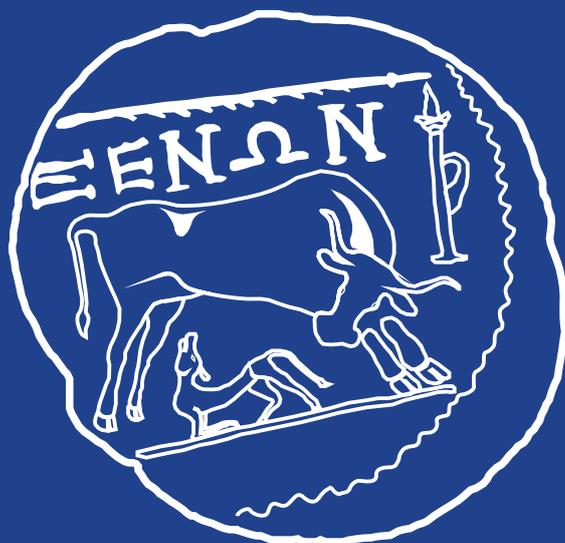


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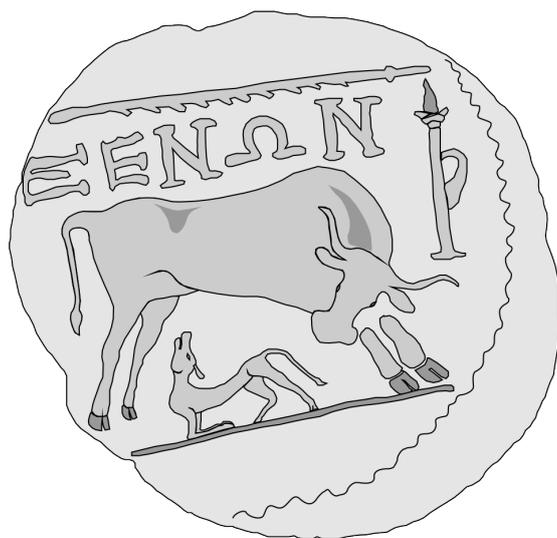
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This volume is dedicated to Florin Draşovean at 70 years

Acest volum este dedicat lui Florin Draşovean cu ocazia împlinirii a 70 de ani



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Adornment, Status and Mobility: A Hairpin from Zalău-Valea Miții (Sălaj county) and Its Place in Early Modern Material Culture

Timea Major-Keresztes

Abstract: Since the earliest times, humans have shown a natural inclination to adorn themselves and their surroundings. Jewelry has played a crucial role not only as an element of decoration but also as an indicator of social status, a medium of artistic expression, and a form of economic value. In many cases, such ornaments functioned as pledges, means of payment, gifts, or symbols of prestige and power. In the early modern period, jewelry was often passed down through generations due to its intrinsic material worth and emotional significance. Within the Transylvanian cultural and historical context, this era produced a remarkable variety of ornaments whose materials, forms, and craftsmanship reflect both high artistic achievement and the complex social dynamics of the time.

Keywords: hairpin; early modern period; Transylvania; jewellery.

Personal adornments have always been an integral component of material culture. Far from serving merely aesthetic or fashionable purposes, jewellery functioned as a social, political and even economic medium — a visible marker of rank, identity and affiliation. Their value was reinforced by the precious raw materials from which such items were made, which meant that they were not only worn, but inherited, pledged as collateral, used as means of payment or exchanged as diplomatic gifts. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, written sources repeatedly attest to the vibrant circulation of these objects across borders — they were imported on commission, traded, and exported as part of wider commercial networks.

In 2021, a passionate metal detectorist made a noteworthy discovery in Zalău-Miții Valley. The object in question is a large globular-headed hairpin dating to the Early Modern period. This is particularly gratifying, as it represents the first find of its kind in the collection of the Zalău History and Art Museum¹. There is an unpublished globular-headed hairpin from Șimleu Silvaniei-Cetate in the museum's collection, but it is an unusual pin in several ways².

From a geographical perspective, the city of Zalău is situated in the Zalău Depression, at the north-western foothills of the Meseș Ridge. The settlement is crossed by the Zalău River, and the Miții Valley stream whose terraces preserved numerous traces of human habitation across time, like Neolithic, Eneolithic and Bronze Age archaeological sites, Migration Period and early medieval settlements. The nearest archaeological site to the location of our discovery is called Zalău-Miții Valley-Old school (Zalău-Valea Miții-Școala veche), which is a 10th-11th century AD settlement³.

The object under study (inv. no. 802/2021) is a gilded silver hairpin featuring a spherical head, with a total weight of 4.3 g. The sphere measures 13.5 mm in diameter and 15 mm in height, while the pin length is 7 cm, resulting in a total length of 8.5 cm. The shaft (1.59 mm) is bent nearly at a right angle and shows signs of wear, with the original gilding largely absent.

The spherical head is constructed from two gilded silver sheet components in the forms of two semispheres, joined together at the center, with their edges ornamented by twisted filigree decoration. Attached to the shaft, the lower part has a smooth surface, while the upper portion is elaborately adorned. The decoration consists of three downward-tapering rows of small spherical beads (1.54 mm in diameter each) in the granulation technique, covering the entire semi-sphere.

¹ The hairpin was discovered by Tamás Márkus.

² I would like to thank Horea Pop (County Museum of History and Art Zalău) for showing me the hairpin.

³ Băcuet-Crișan, Bejinariu 2009, 361-363.

These beads are interconnected by a twisted-wire mesh, with each bead encircled by three looped wires resembling flower petals. The looped arrangement is further enclosed by a larger wire loop containing approximately five additional small beads.

At the center, on the top, there is a red, faceted, possibly almandine garnet stone set in a prong mount. The overall craftsmanship demonstrates meticulous filigree and beadwork typical for gilded silver hairpins. The bending and wear of the shaft suggest that the object experienced prolonged use.

We have evidence of hairpins with large spherical heads from treasure hoards and from archaeological sites as well. The first known spherical headed hairpins from Transylvania were found in 1882 in a hoard from Huedin (Cluj County). The six gilded hairpins were dated using the coins of Prince Gábor Bethlen of Transylvania (1622-1625), which were also components of the treasure hoard⁴. In addition to other objects of the hoard from Baia Mare (Maramureş County), there is a hairpin found in 1904⁵ and later between 2012 and 2014 two more were found in graves⁶, identical to the hairpin found at Zalău -Valea Mişii. There are two more large spherical headed hairpins, sadly



Fig. 1. The location of the hairpin (Google Earth capture).

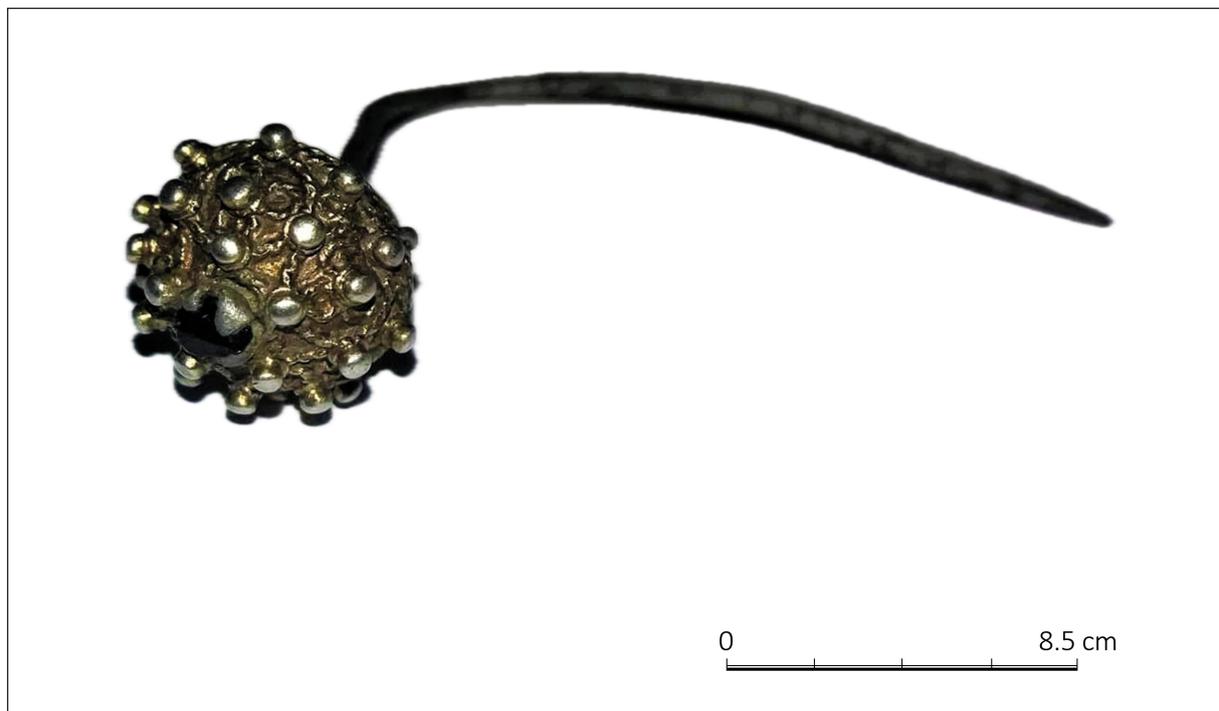


Fig. 2. Hairpin from Zalău-Valea Mişii (photo: archive MJIAZ).

⁴ Mérai 2010, 60.

⁵ Mihalik 1906, 121.

⁶ Szócs 2024, 347.

all of them are fragmented⁷. In a hoard from Visuia (Bistrița-Năsăud County) found in 1973 during agricultural work, there are four hairpins with a spherical head among other objects (ring, pendants, cloth ornament), all made of gilded silver⁸. From Vințu de Jos (Alba County), there is a similar hairpin discovered in an archaeological context. We also know of an unpublished hairpin from Râșnov (Brașov County)⁹. At Carei-Bobald, archaeologists discovered seven large headed hairpins in 1966 and 1994¹⁰. Nyáradi Zsolt and his team discovered two large spherical headed hairpins in a cemetery in Orășeni (Harghita County). His study mentions a hairpin from Brânceni (Teleorman County) which is identical to our object¹¹, in addition to a fragmentary pin from Dezghincea (Republic of Moldova)¹². Péter Levente Szócs also mentions some hairpins from the territory of Romania, more specifically the sites of Boiu, Șopteriu and Fântânele¹³.

From the territory of Hungary we must mention the hairpins from Drégelypalánk¹⁴, while in Tolna, agricultural work led to the discovery of a silver hoard that contained three silver spherical headed pins which belonged to a woman from the middle nobility¹⁵. There are



Fig. 3. Hairpin from Zalău- Valea Miții (photo: Timea Major-Keresztes).



Fig. 4. Hairpin from Zalău- Valea Miții (photo: Timea Major-Keresztes).

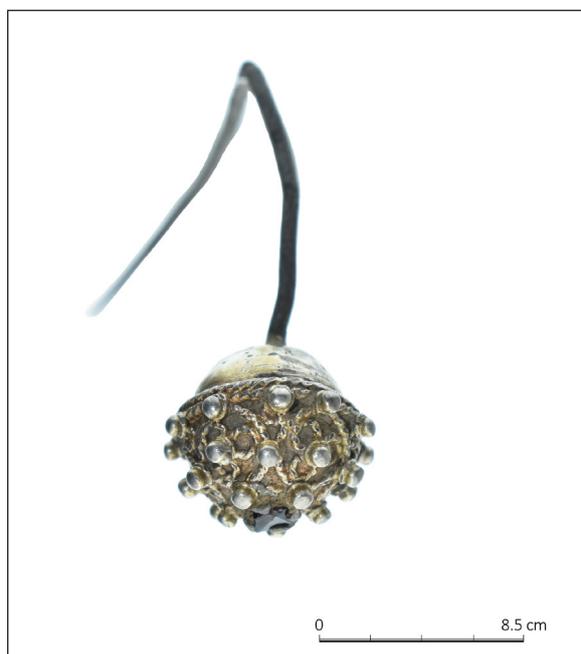


Fig. 5. Hairpin from Zalău- Valea Miții (photo: Timea Major-Keresztes).

⁷ Szócs 2024, 344, 348.

⁸ Telcean 1976, 208-216.

⁹ Mérai 2010, 60.

¹⁰ Mérai 2010, 61.

¹¹ Nyáradi 2020, 182.

¹² Nyáradi 2020, 185.

¹³ Szócs 2024, 351.

¹⁴ Kövér 1892, 33.

¹⁵ Lovag, Németh 1974, 219-246.

also some hairpins discovered in archaeological features, from sites such as the one from the town of Kaposvár, Kaszaper and Balatonszőlős¹⁶. At Bárdudvarnok-Barát-domb, some small and large headed hairpins were found in grave no. 219. The pieces are crafted in filigree and item no. 4 is identical to the one from Zalău-Valea Miții¹⁷. From Csengerjánosi, there is another pin, which is identical to ours and was found in the churchyard cemetery¹⁸. Additionally, a treasure hoard from Pécs-Bányatelep contained an identical hairpin to ours¹⁹. The hairpins discovered in Balassagyarmat and Cikó-Eszterpuszta (Hungary) came from modern-era settlements²⁰.

This type of hairpins is present in Serbia, at Tomasevac²¹, as well as in Slovakia, such as the hairpins from the sites of Drazovce-churchyard cemetery²², Nesvady, from a churchyard cemetery²³, Vajkovce, also from a noble house's churchyard cemetery²⁴, and Svodin²⁵.

All the mentioned hairpins were dated to the 16th and/or 17th centuries.

These hairpins are known from Balkan treasure hoards and churchyard cemeteries, and even from excavations of castles or settlements. They were discovered either individually or among other objects, and in some cases together with Turkish-Balkan or even Arabic style jewellery. As we have seen, in Transylvania they can be found among Hungarian, Romanian and Saxon ethnic groups, cemeteries and settlements, thus they cannot be considered a specific item for either of the ethnic groups²⁶.

Women in the 16th-17th centuries often adorned their hairstyle with hairpins which functioned not just as beautiful ornaments, but also as tools to secure and structure their hairstyles, including buns or veils. They could be used either individually or in pairs on each side of the head or the bun, and may also have served to decorate a headband, *párta*, hairnet or other headpiece.

The ways in which hairpins were used can also be observed in archaeological features. In graves, hairpins occur around the skull, either individually or in pairs, on one or both sides of the head, and in some cases in larger numbers. Their quantity, position, and even the bending of the shafts may provide clues about how they were worn. They were clearly elements of hair or head adornments.

Gilded hairpins with a large spherical head were worn not just by the aristocrats and nobles. They were made after the very valuable aristocratic models crafted of gold and precious stones. These gilded silver objects were worn by the middle lower layer of the nobility, the inhabitants of the cities and the wealthy peasants too²⁷. Lenka Pajer offers two good examples in written sources, such as Anna Júlia Eszterházy's list of items bought for her wedding (1644), where she mentions three pairs of golden hairpins with large heads with gemstones and diamonds, while Judit Szilvai's inventory list contains one silver and one gilded "maiden" hairpin²⁸. There are many more good examples in the Hungarian and Transylvanian nobles' testaments and inventory lists. Michael Bécsi's wife mentions two silver hairpins in her inventory, but in Wioszka Ilona Krisztina's dowry inventory there are two pins, one with diamond and ruby and one with sapphire and emerald²⁹. The reason they often appear in these 16th-17th century documents is that they were objects used for accumulation because of their material value³⁰. Apor Péter in *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae* discusses hairpins, including their usage and their material³¹.

Their production likely followed this division: the finest examples were most likely made by urban guild goldsmiths operating under strict regulations, while the more modest variants were produced by

¹⁶ Mérai 2010, 60.

¹⁷ Honti *et al.* 2020, 185.

¹⁸ Jakab, Mérai 2019, 185.

¹⁹ Gerelyes 2005, 588.

²⁰ Szócs 2024, 350.

²¹ Mérai 2010, 59.

²² Ruttkay 1994, 18.

²³ Nevizánsky, Prohászka 2018, 30.

²⁴ Slivka 1978, 318.

²⁵ Lenka Pajer: *Women hairstyles and headdress in 16th and 17th century Hungarian Kingdom* https://www.academia.edu/92152264/Women_hairstyles_and_headdress_in_16th_and_17th_century_Hungarian_Kingdom (25.10.2025)

²⁶ Mérai 2010, 65.

²⁷ Mérai 2010, 71.

²⁸ Lenka Pajer: *Women hairstyles and headdress in 16th and 17th century Hungarian Kingdom* https://www.academia.edu/92152264/Women_hairstyles_and_headdress_in_16th_and_17th_century_Hungarian_Kingdom+m.(25.10.2025)

²⁹ Buza 2017, 126.

³⁰ Nițu 2005, 142-147. The material value and even the prices of these items can be found in written sources.

³¹ Apor 1736, 19.



Fig. 6. Éva Thököly, second wife of Prince Pál Eszterházy (cca. 1690), Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (source: Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest website).



Fig. 7. Eszterházy Orsolya, first wife of Prince Pál Eszterházy (cca. 1653) (source: MuseumCafé).

craftsmen in market towns³². The ornamentation showcases almost every available technique, from gilding and delicate filigree to granulation and the precise mounting of gemstones.

Based on its production techniques, decorative features, and typological parallels, the hairpin from Zalău-Valea Miții can be securely dated to the 16th–17th centuries and is likely attributable to a Transylvanian goldsmith's workshop. The publishers of the finds from Huedin and Visuia – similar and identical hairpins – assumed that the jewellery was produced in a Transylvanian workshop³³. The goldsmith's workshop closest to Zalău was in Cluj-Napoca, which was one of the most significant centres for metalwork in 16th century Transylvania, home to numerous highly skilled and accomplished craftsmen. The jewellery (as well as other objects) produced there matched the quality and artistic refinement of contemporary Italian, German, and Ottoman works³⁴.

In this discussion, we must consider the hairpin's findspot. Zalău earned the privilege of holding fairs and markets from the 14th century, given by Ludovic I in 1370, every year on St. Margarete's day. He guaranteed the merchants the free circulation of all kinds of goods and the right to trade³⁵. Later in Zalău there were weekly fairs. From that forested part of Zalău-Valea Miții there are multiple other discoveries made by metal detectorists - some of them truly noteworthy, such as a 14th century sword which was found near the hairpin's location³⁶. Considering that the findspots of the pin (and the sword

³² Szócs 2024, 351.

³³ Cipăianu 1973, 663; Telcean 1976, 213; Mérai 2010, 61.

³⁴ Tüdős 2006, 30.

³⁵ Petri 1901, 552.

³⁶ The sword was discovered by metal detectorist Tamás Márkus.

in the same area) cannot be linked to any nearby archaeological site, it should not be overlooked that the objects were located along a medieval road, still marked clearly on the First Military Surveys. This road allowed traveling from the town of Zalău through the Miții Valley, crossing the Miții River, the vineyard- and tree-covered area known as *Mitze Szőlőtető*, and passing through in the direction of Panic, Mal, or Recea towards Vârșolt, Pericei, or Șimleu Silvaniei, telling us that this specific road was in use during the 16th-17th centuries as well, ensuring the distribution of various goods in the surrounding area of the present-day Sălaj County. It also reflects that from a socio-economic and fashion-oriented perspective, the territory of the present-day Sălaj County in the 16th-17th centuries was likely comparable to the other areas of Partium, Transylvania, and even the western regions of Europe.

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