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# COMING BACK HOME? RARE EVIDENCE FOR CONTACTS BETWEEN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA AND THE CARPATHIAN BASIN IN THE LATE 5<sup>TH</sup> – EARLY 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY\*

Joan Pinar Gil<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *this paper propose a typological and chronological reassessment of a group of clothing accessories recorded in the Iberian Peninsula and the Carpathian basin, in order to reconstruct the circumstances and nature of the contacts between these two distant regions. The results enable to hypothesize the existence of almost invisible outbound-and-return population transfers between both territories.*

**Keywords:** *funerary archaeology, clothing, long-distance contacts, migrations, Visigothic Spain, Carpathian basin, Migration Period*

The connections between early Visigothic-period clothing accessories in the western Mediterranean and their counterparts from the middle Danube – Carpathian region has attracted the interest of numerous archaeologists throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. In most of these studies, a somewhat imprecise chronological framework –both in the “East” and in the “West”– and the lack of accurate typological examinations on the alleged indicators of supra-regional contacts concealed the basic features, circumstances and rhythms of such contacts.

A happy combination of recent improvements on the typo-chronological classification of Visigothic-period grave goods and important results in the periodization of the development of Migration Period material culture in the Danube area<sup>3</sup>, have enabled renewed approaches to this issue, leading to a reconstruction of the history of the contacts between the early Visigothic *regnum* and eastern territories. Now it is clear that the “classical” Visigothic-period grave goods in central Spain appear as a result of the evolution, throughout three or four generations, of an autochthonous cultural assemblage formed in southern Gaul during the first decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis of Černjahov – Sîntana de Mureş, Wielbark and so-called “federate” cultural components<sup>4</sup>. Nowadays it is also clearer that the links with “eastern” territories were constantly renewed, as a number of Middle-Danube imports recorded both in southern Gaul and in Spain throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> century show. In some cases, these imports – belonging almost

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<sup>2</sup> The main highlights on the issue can be found in GÖTZE 1895; ÅBERG 1922; BENINGER 1931; ZEISS 1934; WERNER 1956; KOENIG 1980; BIERBRAUER 1991, 1991a, 1994; PÉRIN 1993; SASSE 1996.

<sup>3</sup> TEJRAL 1988, 1997, 2002, 2008 with further reading.

<sup>4</sup> PINAR 2012; JIŘÍK/PINAR/VÁVRA forthcoming.

exclusively to the category of clothing accessories – would have been acted as prototypes for local mass production, the big bow brooches made of silver sheet being the clearest example<sup>5</sup>.

The nature of these mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> century contacts has to do, probably, with phenomena of personal mobility that – judging from the very limited amount of evidence and by its frequent occurrence in previously functioning settlements or cemeteries – did not involve large amounts of people. The available data, on the other hand, suggest that such contacts would have been strictly unidirectional: only imports of “eastern” manufactures in the West have been recorded so far.

In such a background, two small bow brooches cast in bronze recorded in the Carpathian basin can be of importance to complete the picture of this network of supra-regional contacts (Pl. I. 1–2). The first example was found in a small rural settlement at Sopor de Cîmpie (Cluj, Romania), it is an 11 cm long brooch with a semicircular headplate furnished with three button-shaped appendices and a tongue-shaped footplate with concave profiles<sup>6</sup>. The second one comes from grave 131 at Kiszombor cemetery (Csongrád, Hungary); sharing its major morphologic features with the Sopor de Cîmpie brooch, it reaches only 6 cm of length<sup>7</sup>.

The main features of these two brooches bring us to the wide group of cast bronze derivatives of the bow brooches in metal sheet of Černjahov – Sîntana de Mureş and (later) Middle-Danube tradition. Their formal details, instead, enable to connect them precisely with a Spanish local variant, to be identified as type Carpio de Tajo 262 (Pl. II). The type is integrated by the specimens from grave 536 at Duratón, Estebanvela and Madrona in Segovia province, by the finds from graves 102 and 262 at Carpio de Tajo and 18 at Illescas – Boadilla de Arriba in Toledo province, by two examples found at Romanillos de Atienza – Las Albercas in Guadalajara province and other two recorded in an uncertain find spot in Badajoz province<sup>8</sup>. A number of exemplars of unknown –yet probably Spanish– provenance complete the list of specimens recorded so far<sup>9</sup>. Lastly, brooches with similar forms, but having a single appendix, may be eventually included into the same type. They have been recorded at the aforementioned cemetery of Las Albercas and at Castéra-Verduzan – Mespès-Sauboires in southern France<sup>10</sup>.

The chronology of this type of brooch is based on fragile evidence, for its associations with other objects are rare and, furthermore, not even one of them has been recorded inside a completely reliable closed context so far. The available data, nonetheless, appears to be rather consistent: the iron belt buckle with cabochon decoration (type Le Mouraut 104) found in Duratón 536 suggests a chronology close to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Pl. III/1A), while the thick-framed bronze buckle (type Azután) from Carpio de Tajo 102 should be dated from the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Pl. III/1C). Lastly, the morphology of the bronze bow brooch (type Benavente) recorded in Carpio de Tajo 262, evokes the last third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century or the first third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Pl. III/1B). Thus the central Spanish contexts, problematic as they may be, agree to place this type of object in the very end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century or in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. That suits roughly the dating attributed to the settlement at Sopor de Cîmpie, placed in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century according to the recorded ceramic forms. In such a background, the brooch may be regarded as an indicator of the latest moment of occupation of the settlement, eventually delaying it some years. The grave goods associated to the brooch from

<sup>5</sup> PINAR 2012, 265–273.

<sup>6</sup> PROTASE 1962, 534, fig. 7; HARHOIU 1998, 188, pl. XCII.3.

<sup>7</sup> CSALLÁNY 1961, 179–180, pl. CXXIV.7.

<sup>8</sup> MOLINERO 1971, pl. XLIX.1, XCV.2; ZEISS 1934, pl. 2.7; RIPOLL 1985, 81–84, 160, fig. 17–18, 63; RIPOLL 1994, 202, 224, fig. 7.102, 23.262; SASSE 2000, 207–208, 258–259, pl. 9.102, 35.262; DAZA/CATALÁN 2010, fig. 8.B.2–3; BERTRAM 1995, pl. 24; GOHLKE/NEUMAYER 1996, fig. 5.1–2.

<sup>9</sup> ARIAS/BALMASEDA/NOVOA 2000, 174, 178–179, fig. 15–16, 33, 37; EGUARAS 1953, 35–41, fig. 17.1–2.

<sup>10</sup> DAZA/CATALÁN 2010, fig. 8.A.6; LAPART 1995, fig. 4.C; STUTZ 1998 fig. 5.2.

Kiszombor cannot be dated precisely, but they fit well with a chronology of the late 5<sup>th</sup> – early 6<sup>th</sup> century (Pl. I. 2).

The dissemination of this type of brooch, excluding the examples from the Carpathian basin, shows an almost exclusive, central Spanish propagation (Pl. III/2). However, even in this geographically restrained background some interesting regional-based patterns can be noticed. As an example, the remarkable presence of these brooches in the area south of the Guadarrama Mountains (more than a 60% of the examples from verified find spots) should be mentioned. That is a truly significant amount, especially taking into account that the biggest cemeteries of this period are located in the area northwards. They can be identified as a characteristic production of the central-south Spanish clothing region, corresponding to the Tajo and Henares watercourses<sup>11</sup>.

In such a background, a belt buckle with rectangular, cloisonné decorated plate found in the periphery of the early medieval cemetery at Bratei, probably from a feminine grave from the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Pl. I. 3)<sup>12</sup>, might be seen as a further document shedding some light on this fragmentary evidence of long-distance contacts. Finding no exact counterparts in the Carpathian region, the general morphology of the buckle resembles the 6<sup>th</sup> century productions from central Spain. It is true for the cloisonné motives made of triangular and rectangular, somewhat irregular cells (Pl. IV/6–11), but also for the thick cast and decorated frame, reminiscent of Spanish type Azután (Pl. IV/1–5, III/1B). The latter use to combine punched and cloisonné decoration together with stone settings, but specimens with exclusively cloisonné decoration are also known, as the example from Carpio de Tajo C shows (Pl. IV/5)<sup>13</sup>.

It is evident that the belt buckle cannot be considered as a direct import from central Spain; instead, it seems reasonable to consider it as a local imitation of Spanish manufactures that circulated in the area<sup>14</sup>. A similar interpretation can be given to the brooches from Sopor de Cîmpie and Kiszombor, displaying particularly rounded and slender forms that are not recorded frequently among the Spanish finds. The Sopor de Cîmpie example furthermore, is said to be made of silver, while the “western” finds are made of copper alloy and, occasionally, silver-bathed. All these finds, whether they are to be considered as actual imports or their local imitations, outline a context of long-distance contacts with a very particular region: both the Carpio de Tajo 262-type brooches and the Azután-type belt buckles are characteristic elements of the Tajo-Henares regional female clothing<sup>15</sup>.

These late 5<sup>th</sup> – early 6<sup>th</sup> century exchanges between central Spain and the Carpathian basin are not a completely isolated phenomenon: in a way, they may be regarded as a consequence of a long-distance network established in the precedent years. The earliest contacts between the Carpathian basin and central Spain can be dated into the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The clearest evidence is conveyed by a group of big bow brooches made of metal sheet, belonging to a variant of the central Spanish type Aguilafuente. Among their distinctive features we may mention their almost rectangular footplate with concavities – a form shared, as seen, with the much smaller, cast brooches of type Carpio de Tajo 262 – and the presence of repoussé and carved ornamental plates on the headplate, generally reproducing geometrical and volute-based motives (Pl. V/1A-C). Brooches with such carved plates have been found so far in

<sup>11</sup> PINAR 2013, 110–115.

<sup>12</sup> BÂRZU 1991, fig. 2.3.

<sup>13</sup> RIPOLL 1985, 68–72, fig. 10; RIPOLL 1994, 199, fig. 5.C.1; SASSE 2000, 196–198, pl. 4.

<sup>14</sup> The occasional presence of 6<sup>th</sup> century Spanish cloisonné manufactures in central Europe is attested by a recent find from the migration-period cemetery at Prague – Zličín; in the nearby region, “Visigothic” casted bow brooches of type Estagel 78 (morphologically related to type Carpio de Tajo 262 productions) have been also identified: JIŘÍK/PINAR/VÁVRA forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> See above, note 11.

a single site, the cemetery of Castiltierra, where they appear to be relatively numerous: seven specimens –three pairs and a single one– have been recorded at the site<sup>16</sup>, while three further pairs of imprecise provenance could have had the same origin<sup>17</sup>.

The type must be certainly regarded as a strictly local production, not older than the first third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, the carved plates witness of tight connections with earlier productions of the Carpathian basin: I'm thinking about the big bow brooches in silver sheet with carved plates of the group Tiszalök-Kosino/Barabás, dating roughly from the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and disseminated almost exclusively in the Carpathian basin (Pl. V/2)<sup>18</sup>. In such a background, the brooches from Castiltierra should be understood as later, indirect evidence of the importation of Carpathian brooches into Hispania. To this same east-west flow may belong also a local imitation of belt buckles with rhomboid plate of type Kosino/Barabás conserved in the Archaeological Museum of Granada and a silver buckle of unknown, Spanish provenance (National Archaeological Museum, Madrid) related to luxury composite buckles of type Karavukovo/Bácsordas (Pl. V/1D-E)<sup>19</sup>. Both types of buckles, although having a wide dissemination –including Pannonia, some territories of the West and the Pontic region– are by far more numerous in the Carpathian area. The Spanish finds clearly suggest that these “eastern” objects were imported to Spain (for example, the Madrid buckle), where they began to be imitated by local producers (the Granada buckle). The bow brooches with carved plates recorded at Castiltierra should be therefore considered as a later, distant outcome of this process.

The arrival of Carpathian imports into Hispania took place in the very moment of the shaping of the features defining the early Visigothic-period cemeteries in central Spain, whose earliest stage must be dated to ca. 470 AD onwards<sup>20</sup>. Apparently, they played a role –although quantitatively limited– in the configuration of the typological repertoire of the earliest Visigothic-period grave goods. The chronologies of both the imported goods and their local, “western” derivatives place the phenomenon around 470/480 AD. At that time (473), the arrival of a formerly Pannonia-based Ostrogothic army under Vidimer's command into the Visigothic area is attested<sup>21</sup>. It seems to me clear that such an episode does not explain the whole sequence of evolution of funerary clothing in the Visigothic West, but it may have favoured the introduction of some new types of clothing accessories in that area, like the bow brooches in silver sheet of the “Pannonian” type Szabadbattyán<sup>22</sup>. In such a context, the Carpathian imports might be regarded as evidence that Vidimer recruited a number of his followers in the territories east to Pannonian borders.

Generally speaking, we are relatively well aware of the material traces of “barbarian” displacements into the western provinces in the 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Good examples implicating the Carpathian basin are the so-called “Gepidic” eagle-headed brooches found in Merovingian Gaul<sup>23</sup>. Instead far less attention has been paid to evidences of contacts in the opposite direction. The compared examination of central Spanish and Carpathian assemblages may be relevant in this background, for it conveys evidence of an outbound-and-return process during the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>16</sup> EBEL-ZEPEZAUER 2000, 210; BALMASEDA 2006, fig. 8–9; BALMASEDA 2010, fig. 4; KOENIG 1980, pl. 65B; *Historia de España* 1991, 328; PÉRIN 1991, XIII.

<sup>17</sup> ALMAGRO 1948–49, 35–38, pl. VI.1–2, VI.4, VII.8, VIII.15–16; KOENIG 1980, pl. 64.A-B; *Treasures* 1992, 78–79.

<sup>18</sup> WERNER 1959; TEJRAL 1988; 1997; BIERBAUER 1991; BĂRBULESCU 2008; GAU 2009.

<sup>19</sup> KOENIG 1980, pl. 66A; PINAR 2005, 311, fig. 14.

<sup>20</sup> PINAR 2012, 269–273.

<sup>21</sup> KOENIG 1980, 246–247; PÉRIN 1993; PÉREZ RODRÍGUEZ-ARAGÓN 1996, 2002; PINAR 2010, 32–33.

<sup>22</sup> PINAR 2010, 28–32.

<sup>23</sup> KAZANSKI 2010.

The available evidence being extremely fragmentary, one can just sketch the main guidelines of the process: objects manufactured in the Carpathian basin arrived in central Spain, probably in the context of a military expedition; 30–60 years later, some objects produced in central Spain reached the Carpathian basin. The limited amount of the finds makes it difficult to relate them to regular trade contacts; the only available datum on the way of wearing these objects –Kiszombor gr. 131– is compatible with the clothing traditions attested in central Spain, especially in the Tajo-Henares area: a single brooch was worn on the top of the deceased's chest<sup>24</sup>.

The sequence corresponds fairly well with a phenomenon of migration and later –after one or two generations– “repatriation” of some of the immigrants (or their descendents) to the land of their (or their ancestors’) birth. Should we accept the identification of the owners of the bow brooches from Soporú de Cîmpie and Kiszombor as returned emigrants or related people, then a comparison with the Carpathian imports in Hispania may convey interesting data on the economic history of displaced populations: the “returning” accessories belong to much poorer social strata than the “outbound” ones. The latter clearly belong to the middle-Danube aristocratic milieu of the mid and late 5<sup>th</sup> century; instead, the Spanish manufactures occur only in the poorest groups of graves clothed after Ponto-Danubian traditions. That might be a sample of concealed processes behind some historically attested migration processes: a “return” of relatively poor (or impoverished?) immigrants which did not succeed to prosper in the host land. However, given the extremely fragmentary evidence collected so far, it is evident that this has to be taken only as a working hypothesis.

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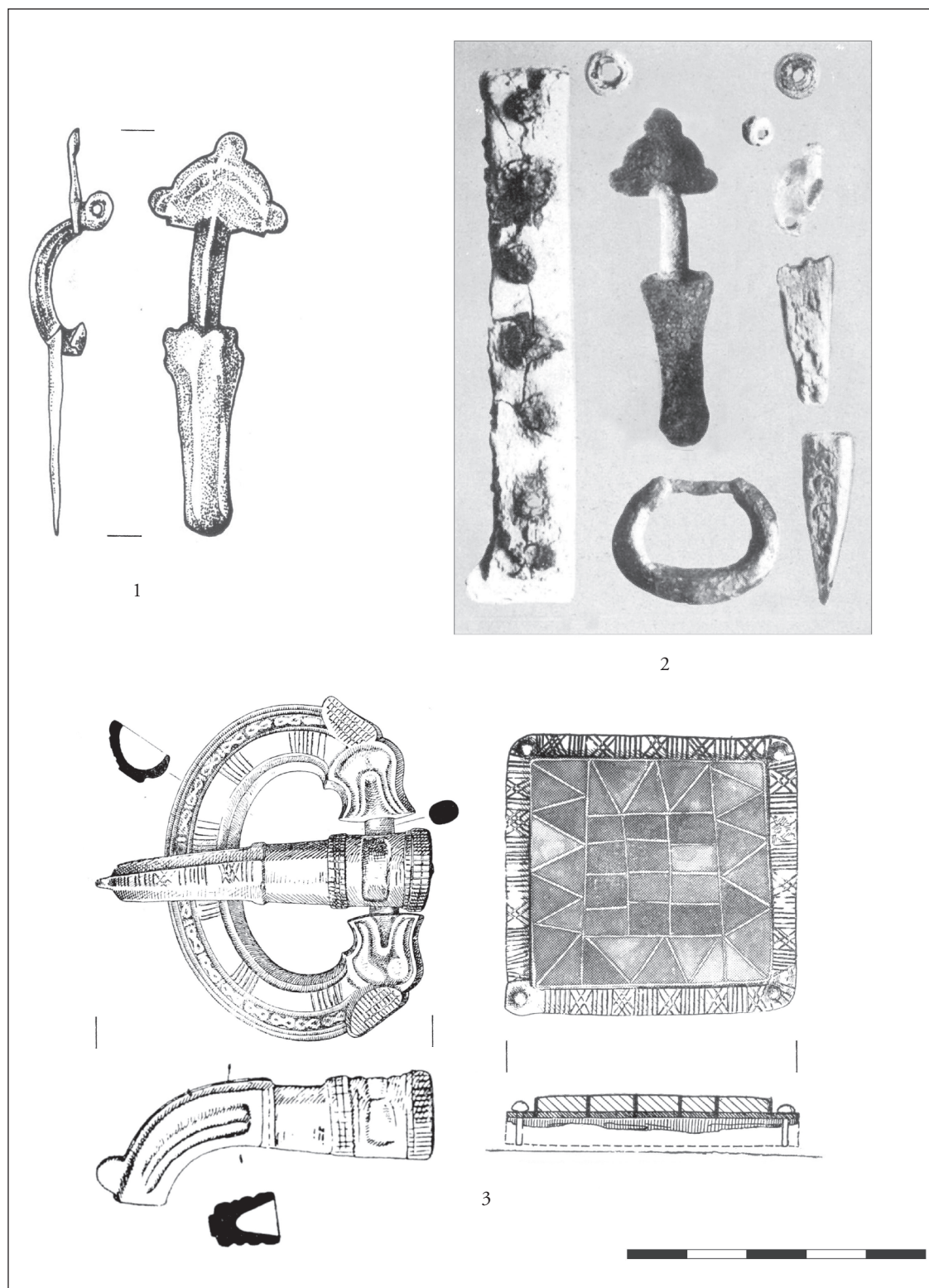
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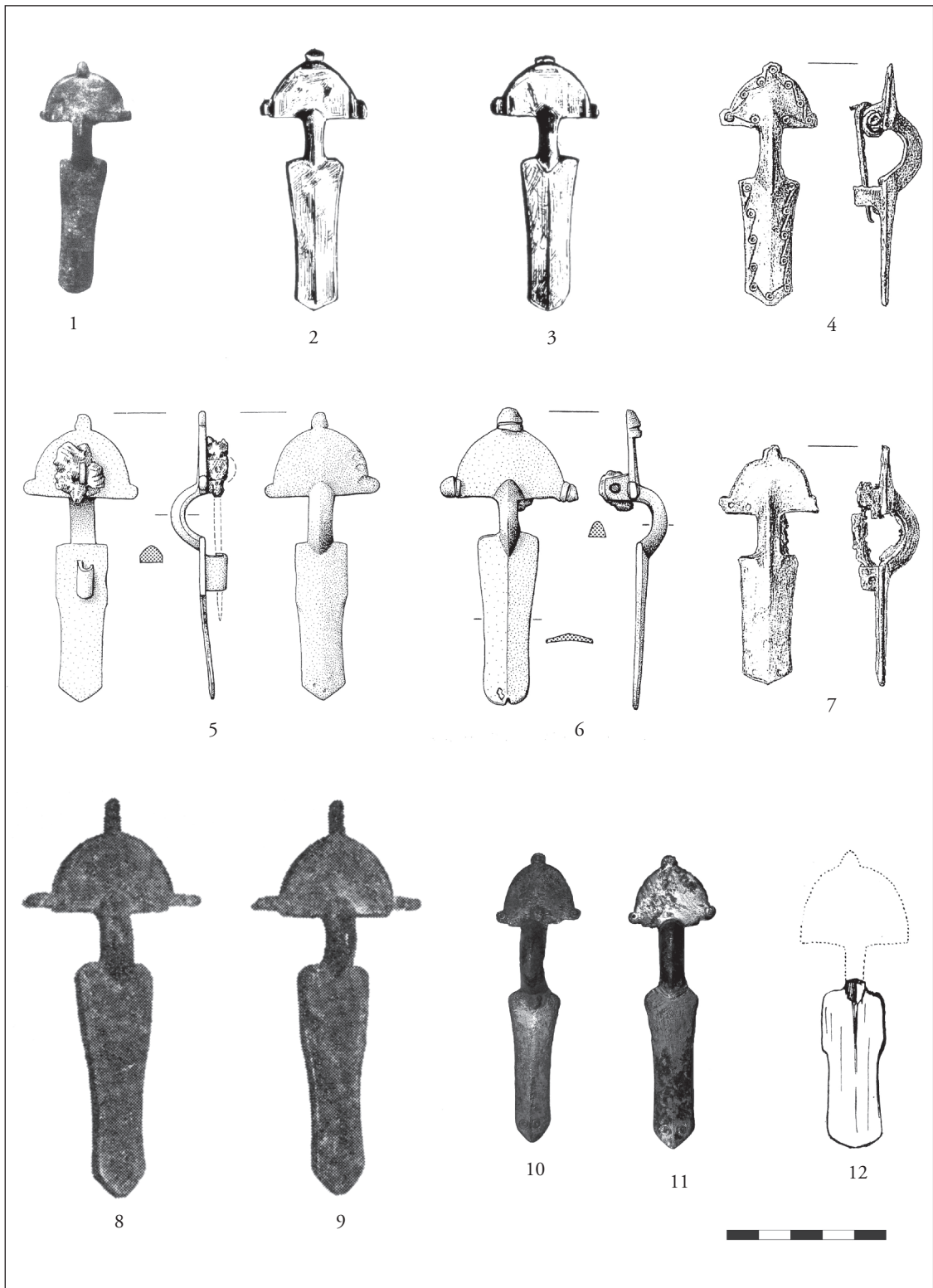
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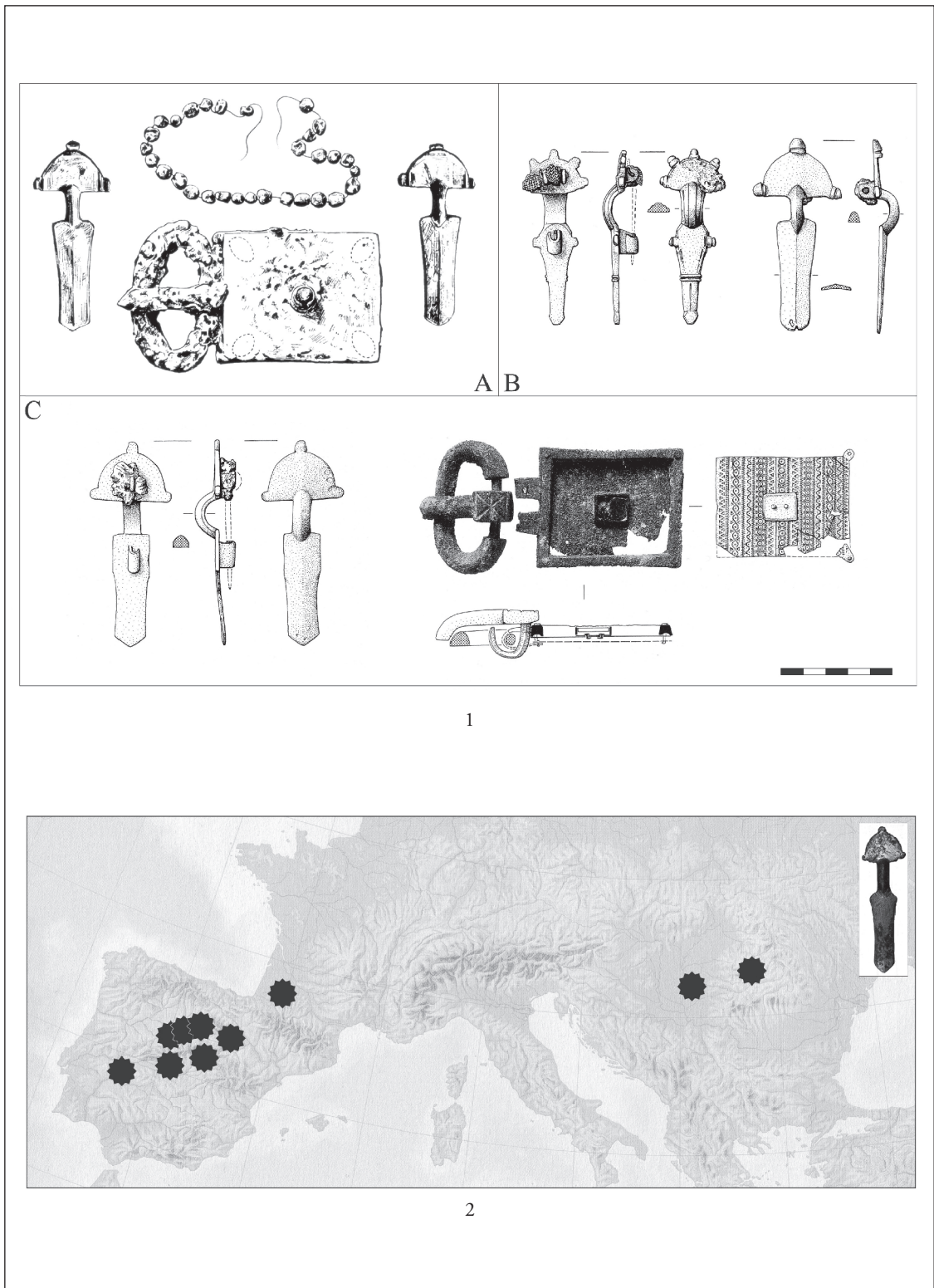
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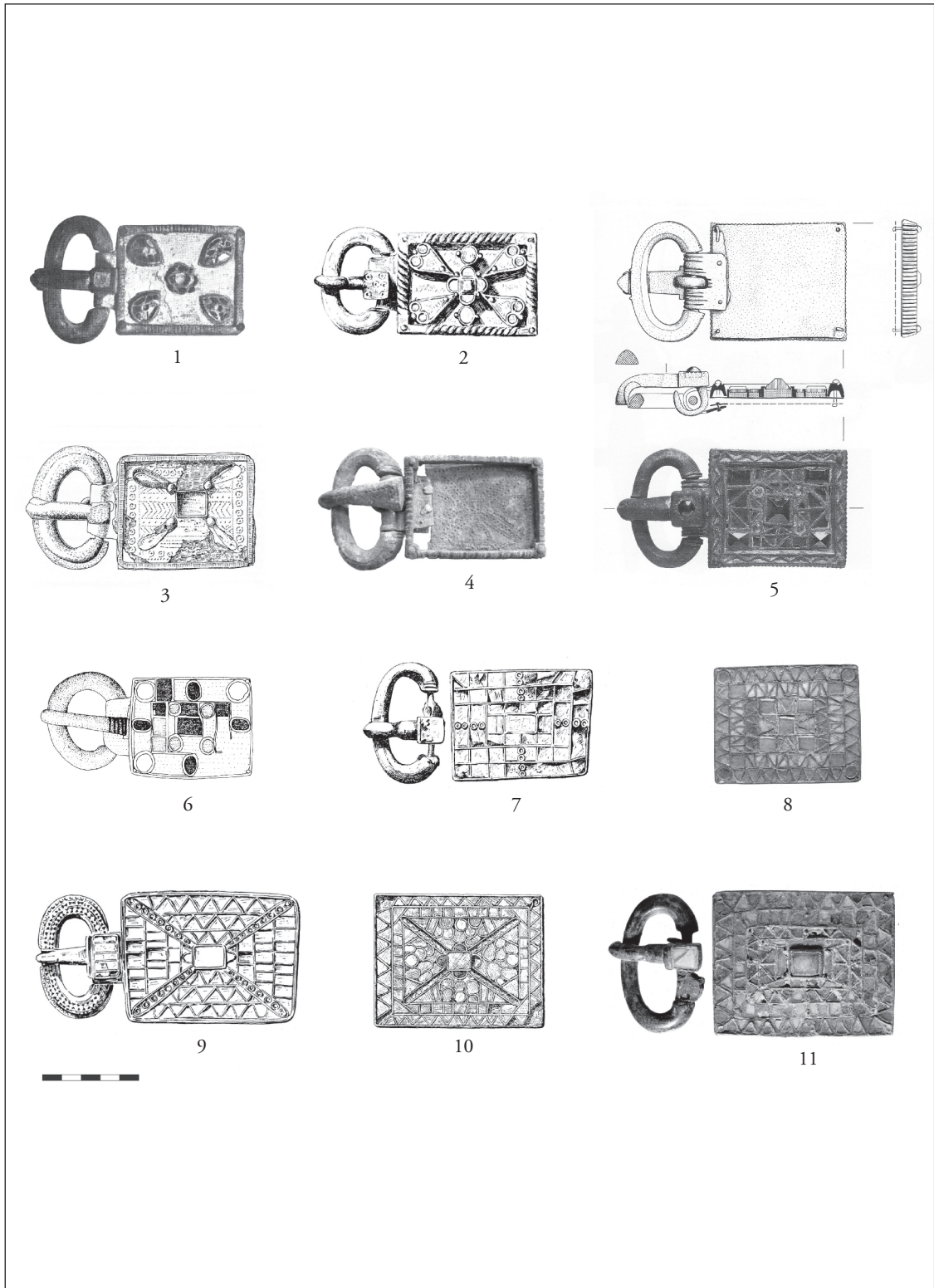
Pl. I. Indicators of contacts with central Spain recorded in the Carpathian basin, late 5<sup>th</sup> – early 6<sup>th</sup> century. 1: Soporu de Cimpie, occupation layer; 2: Kiszombor, grave 131; 3: Bratei, disrupted graves (after HARHOIU 1998; CSALLÁNY 1961; BÂRZU 1990).



Pl. II. Bow brooches of type Carpio de Tajo 262. 1: Estebanvela; 2–3: Duratón, grave 536; 4, 7: “Badajoz”; 5: Carpio de Tajo, grave 102; 6: Carpio de Tajo, grave 262; 8–9: unknown provenance, Archaeological Museum of Granada; 10–11: Romanillo de Atienza – Las Albercas; 12: Madrona (after ZEISS 1934; MOLINERO 1971; GOHLKE/NEUMAYER 1996; SASSE 2000; EGUARAS 1952–53; DAZA/CATALÁN 2010).



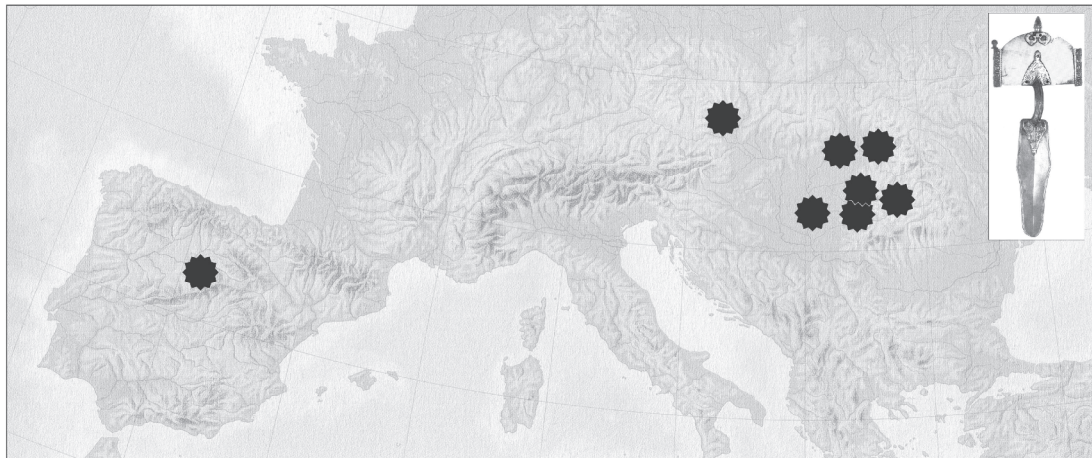
Pl. III. 1 – Clothing combinations with brooches of type Carpio de Tajo 262. A: Duratón, grave 536; B: Carpio de Tajo, grave 262; C: Carpio de Tajo, grave 102 (after MOLINERO 1971; SASSE 2000); 2 – Brooches of type Carpio de Tajo 262: dissemination map.



Pl. IV. Central Spanish analogies for the belt plate found at Bratei. 1: Madrid – Vallellano; 2: Madrona; 3: Aranjuez – Cacara de las Ranas; 4: Illescas – Boadilla de Arriba, grave 39; 5: Carpio de Tajo, grave C; 6: Castillo de Bayuela – Valdelazada; 7: Duratón, grave 485; 8, 11: Duratón or Castiltierra?; 9: Madrona, grave 71; 10: Duratón, grave 417 (after ZEISS 1934; MOLINERO 1971; SASSE 2000; ARDANAZ 2000; CATALÁN/ROJAS 2010; CABALLERO/SÁNCHEZ PALENCIA 1983; ALMAGRO BASCH 1947).



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Pl. V. 1 – Indicators of contacts with the Carpathian basin recorded in Spain, mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> century. 1: Duratón or Castiltierra?; 2: Castiltierra; 3: Castiltierra, grave 455; 4: unknown provenance, National Archaeological Museum; 5: unknown provenance, Archaeological Museum of Granada (after KOENIG 1980; Historia de España 1985; PINAR 2012); 2 – Bow brooches made of silver sheet with stamped and carved plates: dissemination map.