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MILLEFIORI INLAID HILTS, STRIGIL HANDLES, OR WHAT?*

Monica Gui¹, Sorin Cociş²

Abstract. *This paper deals with two millefiori inset artefacts discovered in recent years in the Roman sites at Micia and Porolissum. While the function of one of the objects, a simple plate pierced by two rivet holes, remains undetermined, the other turned out to be an almost completely preserved, slightly trapezoidal hilt. The accompanying narrow, double-edged iron blade fragment poses some problems to the correct identification of the weapon (knife or dagger?). Two other hilts of this sort are located in inaccessible private collections, but a few miniature variants, most likely penknife handles, were noted in the literature. Because the slight resemblance between these hilts and millefiori glass inlaid strigil handles can cause some confusion, a more detailed analysis is carried out to explain the differences and set them apart. Lastly, a possible association of millefiori hilts with matching belt plates is briefly discussed.*

Keywords: *Roman Dacia, Micia, Porolissum, millefiori inlay, hilt, strigil, dagger, knife*

Recent archaeological excavations brought to light two copper-alloy objects inset with *millefiori* glass: a simple plate discovered in the auxiliary fort at *Porolissum*-Pomet (Moigrad) in Dacia Porolissensis in 2010, and an almost complete implement handle found during a preventive dig executed not far from the auxiliary fort at *Micia* (Veşel) in Dacia Superior in 2012. Comparing them and trying to determine their use led to a wider discussion on the possible function of similar, previously published finds.

1. Context of discovery

a. *Micia*

The implement handle was discovered in a complex of Roman buildings located some 300 m south of the auxiliary fort at *Micia* and interpreted as a *villa suburbana*. Apart from the usual finds expected from a basically civilian site, the excavators also remarked on the surprising quantity and variety of *militaria* (e.g. arrowheads, scabbard slide, dagger chape, *balteus* fittings, belt plate, studs, harness fittings). Thus, it was inferred that the owner of the *villa* might have been a veteran. A preliminary assessment of the archaeological material indicated that most of it could be dated to the first half of the 3rd century A.D. Consequently, this timeframe was suggested for the entire complex³.

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³ COCIŞ ET ALII 2013.

b. Porolissum

The *millefiori* decorated plate was found inside building B6, which is situated in the *praetentura dextra* of the main auxiliary fort at *Porolissum*, on Pomet hill. The latest investigations have revealed that this building, contrary to previous assumptions, was a 25 × 10 m construction with two chambers, oddly located between the *porta praetoria* and the first curtain tower east of the gate. Naturally, the archaeological material recovered from within included a significant proportion of military finds. More surprising was the fact that over 90 stone artillery projectiles had been apparently deposited in neat piles in the eastern room. This strongly suggests that the building functioned as a storage for ammunition and probably also for machinery. The archaeological layer from which the plate originates was dated to the last half of the 2nd century A.D.⁴

2. Object description

a. Micia (Pls. I, II/1, III, IV/1)

A handle assembled from two pieces: a completely preserved flat plate fitted on a box-shaped component. One extremity of the latter piece is ripped off, while the other ends in a decorative knob similar to a chess pawn. The handle is slightly trapezoidal. It measures 12.91 cm in length (10.55 without counting the knob). The width tapers from 2.81 to 2.39 cm. It is 1.16 cm high and the thickness of the individual components is about 0.23 cm. Both exterior faces are divided into 8 fairly rectangular recessed panels filled with *millefiori* glass, arranged in two parallel rows. The rows are flanked by two grooves which are inlaid with what appears to be decayed enamel, preserved only on small portions. The decoration on the panels is mirrored both horizontally and vertically. Each of the four panels placed at the ends of the handle is divided into 3 registers as follows: 1) 7 up to 10 squares formed by 5 by 5 blue and white chequers; 2) 7 up to 9 white squares with a floral motif (4 blue V-shaped petals arranged around a red dot); 3) the same as no. 1. All four panels in the middle display a chequerboard pattern made up of tiny black and yellow squares. The lateral sides of the handle are lined with fine grooves.

There were two fragments of rusted iron adhering to the inside of the handle (Pls. II/1, III). Their width slightly differs, but this must be caused by corrosion, since otherwise they can be perfectly assembled into one piece. We believe that this is a fragmentary blade. It measures 5.92 cm in length, approximately 2.28 in width, and has a maximum thickness of 0.62 cm. Most likely it was parallel-edged, but it is indeed too small to be absolutely sure. Also, corroded as it is, the blade appears to have a lanceolate section, implying double cutting edges.

b. Porolissum (Pl. II/2, IV/2)

Rectangular plate, 8.92 cm long, 2.20 cm wide and 0.19 cm thick. The two long sides are lined with a perpendicular downwards border that stops shortly before the edges. The height of the piece reaches 0.42–0.45 cm. At each end there is a small circular opening with a diameter of about 0.19 cm placed in the middle, but one is slightly offset and cuts into the edge. These undoubtedly served for attaching the plate to something by means of two small rivets. The exterior face is divided into 5 recessed rectangular cells inlaid with *millefiori* glass. The decoration of cells 1 and 5 consists of a chequerboard pattern of 8 by 9 squares, alternating navy blue squares with squares made up of 3 by 3 red and white chequers. Cells 2 and 4 present a simple chequerboard pattern formed by tiny yellow and black squares. The cell in the middle is very similar to nos. 1 and 5, only there are azure squares instead of navy blue.

⁴ See OPREANU ET ALII 2013, 84–88, Figs. 4–16.

3. Function of *millefiori* decorated handles

a. Strigils

In 1939, I. Sellye published four almost identical rectangular copper-alloy pieces of an unknown function said to be from *Brigetio*. All are roughly L-shaped. Two of these measure 8.4 cm in length and 1.3 cm in width, while the other pair has an extra decorative knob at one end and a cordiform expansion at the other, the length thus totaling 11 cm and 11.3 cm, respectively. All of these have 5 recessed panels on the exterior face, inset with *millefiori* glass (Pl. V/1, 3). The decoration is identical on all four specimens⁵. It was only some 30 years later that É. Bónis realized their true purpose when assembling them in what turned out to be a pair of *strigiles* with *millefiori* decorated handles, part of a rich *palaestra* set. Each simple piece was fitted on the more complex one, forming a hollow handle with a lateral slot (Pl. V/2). The separately cast strigil blades were attached to the heart-shaped expansions. These toilet implements were carried around suspended from a D-shaped grip which passed through the apertures in the handles⁶. Based on the decoration technique and on the motifs, the strigils were dated to the last part of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd centuries⁷.

To date, these are the only complete strigils of this type known. A fragment very similar to one half of a handle was found at *Carnuntum*, but only the end terminated in a knob survives; the other extremity is missing (Pl. VI/1). It is nearly 11 cm long and 2.5 cm wide⁸. If indeed it belonged to a strigil, then it would have been a larger variant than the implement from *Brigetio*⁹, as the scale drawing of the two clearly illustrates (Pl. VII/1, 2). Another complete half of a strigil (this time the component without the knob and the cordiform expansion), comparable in size to the *Brigetio* example, was discovered in Dacia Porolissensis, at Ilişua¹⁰.

Although neither of the authors cited above gives a detailed description of the handles or a complete account of how they were assembled, the photographs they included allow some further observations which are also important for figuring out how the other objects discussed in this paper were put together. The knobbed component clearly displays a circular mark on top of the short side (of the 'L') and at the base of the expansion (both on the inner and outer surface of this expansion). A circular mark is also visible on the complementary piece, at one end on the outer surface and on both ends of the underside (Pl. V/1). The almost completely preserved, integrally cast rivet exhibited by the *Carnuntum* fragment provides an important clue as well (Pl. VI/1). Thus, we can deduce that each of the short sides of the components was provided with an integrally cast rivet which passed through a corresponding rivet hole on the matching half (Pl. VII/1). Perhaps this rivet did not go all the way through to the other side, since neither of the handles displays an evident circular opening. Because we did not personally examine them, we grant that this is just a conceivable hypothesis and may not necessarily hold true. In any case, a similar system must have been employed.

b. Small knives

A number of small knives with handles decorated with *millefiori* glass is also known from the Western part of the Empire. For instance, an almost complete half of a trapezoidal handle (Pl. VI/2c), dated to the 2nd century, was found in a rural Roman site at Campsfield, in

⁵ SELLYE 1939, 87, Pl. XVI/1a–4b; see also BÓNIS 1968, 36, no. 6, Abb. 10, 12–13.

⁶ BÓNIS 1968, 34–37, no. 6, Abb. 10–13.

⁷ BÓNIS 1968, 37–38.

⁸ SELLYE 1939, 87, Pl. XVI/5; ROMA SUL DANUBIO 2002, 232, no. Iva. 19; the images are taken from the Carnuntum 3D Kulturdatenbank, object 'Strigilisgriff': <https://www.carnuntum-db.at/objektdetail.aspx?obj=12847> (link last accessed on July 24th 2014).

⁹ It is also wider than, for instance, the strigil handles from *Augusta Raurica*, which never measure more than 1.8 cm in width (see RIHA 1986, 24–26).

¹⁰ We are grateful to C. Gaiu for this information.

Britain. This fragment measures 6.4 cm, is box-shaped and has a decorative pawn-like knob at one end; the other end, though part of it is missing, clearly displays a rivet hole¹¹. An almost identical piece (Pl. VI/2b), also dated to the 2nd century, was found at Shakenoak farm¹². The British finds were thought to be mounts of some sort¹³. However, a recent discovery from Gaul clearly demonstrates that these were, in fact, knife hilts, since this 5 cm specimen still preserves a fragment of an iron (folding?) blade attached to it (Pl. VI/2a)¹⁴. Again, this is just half of an item, but it is easy to see how a matching flat plate could be fitted on it, forming a complete, hollow handle which would encase the blade (Pl. VIII/2). The two halves and the blade were secured by a means of a rivet. Different types of similar sized knives are now considered penknives, used to sharpen reed *calami*¹⁵.

c. Knives/ daggers

The missing part of one of the halves of the *Micia* handle can be easily reconstituted thanks to a very similar find illustrated a few years ago. That particular piece exhibited a circular rivet hole at the end opposite to the knob¹⁶. It is thus striking that reconstructed implement handle from *Micia* (Pl. VIII/3) looks almost exactly like an oversized version of the penknife hilts mentioned above. Even the decorative knob is identical to the ones displayed by the much smaller British examples (Pl. VI/2b-c). In the light of this resemblance, it is clear that the object we are dealing with is not related to strigils, but to knives. The idea is further supported by the associated blade fragment (Pls. II/1, III). Unfortunately, this is too small and corroded to allow any considerations regarding the kind of knife it belonged to, but it is obviously not a strigil scraper.

There is no apparent way of fixing the two hilt pieces together, since the complete upper part has no traces of a rivet or of a rivet hole. Admittedly, an integrally cast rivet could have been broken off, but there is no sign of it left. In this scenario, the system of securing the components would be similar to that displayed by the strigil handles (Pl. VIII/3). Alternatively, the two halves could have been soldered or glued together, though traces of such a binding are no longer visible. If indeed one or two rivets passed only through one of the halves and the blade, this would explain why the upper plate of the handle was preserved intact, whilst the other is torn off at the end where it joined the blade. Any of the proposed methods of assembly seem rather atypical and raise some questions about the structural integrity of the piece. As already mentioned, the iron blade is of no help for the issue, since its state of preservation does not allow comments on the type of tang it was provided with.

There is some reason to believe that this sort of hilt was used for an implement more accurately described (not without some qualms) as a ‘dagger’ than as a generic ‘knife’. Unfortunately, we were not able to find a satisfactory way of citing this evidence, since it refers to an item sold at a Christie’s auction in 2008¹⁷. Nevertheless, we feel that we must mention this

¹¹ HUNTER/KIRK 1953, 61, no. 16, Fig. 26/12, Pl. III.

¹² BRODRIBB ET ALII 1968, 86–87, no. 11, Fig. 29/11.

¹³ BATESON 1981, 57, Fig. 9/III.

¹⁴ The information and image are taken from the artefacts.mom.fr database, object CNF-4032 <http://artefacts.mom.fr/fr/result.php?id=CNF-4032&find=CNF-4032&pagenum=1&affmode=vign>. For another type of small *millefiori* inlaid knife hilt, see also the object CAC-4007 <http://artefacts.mom.fr/fr/result.php?id=CAC-4007&find=CAC-4007&pagenum=1&affmode=> (links last accessed on July 24th 2014).

¹⁵ See BOŽIČ 2001; FEUGÈRE 2003.

¹⁶ FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 537, Abb. 3/a.

¹⁷ Sale 2007 – Antiquities, June 4th 2008, New York, Rockefeller Plaza, lot 269, ‘a Roman iron, bronze and glass dagger’ <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/ancient-art-antiquities/a-roman-iron-bronze-and-glass-dagger-5079004-details.aspx> (last accessed on July 24th 2014). Our attempts to find out more about it or to get permission to use the photograph on their website were to no avail, so it is difficult to refer to an artefact which we have seen only on a web page that may or may not be available in the future.

complete so-called dagger, since its *millefiori* glass inlaid hilt is extremely similar to the one from *Micia*. The description available on the Christie's website mentions that it is 30 cm long, and that the two halves of the hilt are secured by two 'pins' in the area where it joins the iron blade. This blade is actually the most puzzling feature because it appears to be very narrow, nearly 20 cm long, has a simple midrib, is parallel-edged and abruptly tapers to a sharp tip.

d. Unknown

The *millefiori* inlaid copper-alloy plate from *Porolissum* does not resemble closely neither the knife hilts, nor the strigil handles discussed above. Hypothetically, it could represent the upper part of a hilt, although the size and shape would make the grip less comfortable. If it were, on the other hand, part of a strigil handle, then perhaps it would have been fixed atop of an elongated U shaped piece (Pl. VIII/1), although this variant does not seem too convincing either.

For the moment, the function of this plate cannot be ascertained. Due to its place of discovery and of the associated finds, we are more inclined to believe that it is connected to some sort of a military object, but this is of course purely conjectural.

From the three categories of finds which make use of *millefiori* inlaid handles, it follows that it is possible to differentiate between knife hilts and strigil handles. The former are shaped like a slightly trapezoidal box with an opening at one end into which the iron blade was inserted (Pl. VIII/2, 3). The latter are assembled from two L-shaped components so as to form a rectangular frame (Pl. VII/1, 2). The slot thus created is useful for hanging it on a ring, and this is a feature shared by many strigils¹⁸. All of the identifiable *millefiori* inlaid specimens (*Brigetio*, *Carnuntum?*, Ilişua) are built in that way. It must be mentioned that in the older literature there are references to pieces similar to the handles from *Brigetio*¹⁹, but unfortunately they could not be tracked down or checked in due time, so we were not able to attribute them to one category or another.

4. Production and dating

Although considered essentially an enameling technique, since it involved the application of a vitreous substance on a metal base, the *millefiori* decoration, as opposed to simple enameling, was created by applying thin slices of *millefiori* glass using various methods²⁰. It is considered that *millefiori* inlaid copper-alloy items such as *militaria*, brooches or vessels started being produced in late 2nd and early 3rd centuries A.D.²¹ As shown above, the dates ascribed to the finds from *Porolissum* and *Micia* based on their stratigraphical contexts are consistent with this chronological interval.

Because the evidence for workshops in which *millefiori* decorated objects were being made is insubstantial on the one hand²², and similar finds are rare and often lack a provenance on the other, it is not really possible to trace back the pair from Dacia to a particular area. However, there is an idea that the origin of most *millefiori* inset objects lies in the Rhineland and Belgium²³. One class of well-known artefacts decorated in this technique is represented by

¹⁸ BÓNIS 1968, 34–56; see also RIHA 1986, 23–24, Abb. 1.

¹⁹ SELLYE (1939, 87) notes that objects similar to those from *Brigetio* and *Carnuntum* were found in *Nevidunum* (Ljubljana Museum) and *Siscia* (Zagreb National Museum). Another one, with an unknown provenance, was in the collections of the Museum für Kunst und Industrie (Vienna). Also, FLÜGEL ET ALII (2004, 538, n. 14–15) mention in passing *millefiori* decorated knife hilts from the military *vicus* of Rainau-Buch and from Frankfurt am Main, but these must be different from the dagger/ knife hilts in question, since no connection has been made between them by the cited authors.

²⁰ See BATESON 1981, 94–97; FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 531.

²¹ FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 531.

²² FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 531.

²³ BATESON 1981, 113; SELLYE 1939, 32–34.

hexagonal pyxides or inkwells. An important lot is known to come exactly from northern Gaul and the Rhineland²⁴.

Due to the relatively numerous *millefiori* inset fittings found inside the auxiliary fort at Ilişua, it was argued that these were made in the fort's (not yet confirmed) *fabrica*²⁵. Though indeed traces of bronze working are present at the site, at least for the moment this is not sufficient to support the idea. Also, it was suggested that a certain type of harness mount found only in Dacia Porolissensis and occasionally inlaid with *millefiori* glass was produced in one of the military *fabricae* on the northern frontier, either at Buciumi²⁶ or at Ilişua²⁷, but neither of the sites yielded any evidence in this respect. At *Tibiscum*, bronze and glass making workshops are attested alongside and the latter even produced *millefiori* beads²⁸, so the technique was known and possibly used for decorating copper-alloy items.

Nevertheless, we do not believe that the objects presented here from *Micia* and *Porolissum* were manufactured in Dacia. Especially the hilt displays superior workmanship, so the import hypothesis is much more plausible. A connection between the original recruitment ground of a certain troop and the source of, or taste for these objects is perhaps forced, considering that most of the auxiliary units had been stationed in Pannonia for quite some time prior to their arrival in Dacia. Furthermore, both sites were important military bases and several troops are attested simultaneously and successively²⁹.

Out of all three *millefiori* hilts of this type known to us, only the one from *Micia* has an archaeological context. The others are located in private collections and, unfortunately, it was not possible to examine them or to find out more information about their exact size and the colour schemes used for the insets. However, it is obvious that all three slightly differ from each other. For instance, the spherical knob on the Christie's dagger is not paralleled by the pawn-like knobs pertaining to the other two specimens. In turns, the knob on the *Micia* hilt is identical to the ones found on the British penknives, but not very similar to that adorning the other privately held hilt fragment. Also, the latter knife/ dagger handle is overall cruder than the other two³⁰. The specimen from *Micia* is the only one displaying enameled grooves flanking the decorative panels, a feature also present on the strigil handle from *Carnuntum* (Pl. VI/1). Furthermore, from what we were able to see, the pattern of the *millefiori* insets is different in each case. This implies that the hilts were not mass produced. Perhaps they were manufactured by different workshops and/ or at different moments in time. In addition, we cannot fail to observe the similarity between the patterns and the colour schemes used on the *Porolissum* find and on the fragment from *Carnuntum*. They are almost identical, only the former is missing the flanking red grooves, while the latter maintains the same navy blue colour throughout.

²⁴ See JOHNS 1993.

²⁵ See GAIU 2007, 181–187.

²⁶ BENE ET ALII 2006, 103–104.

²⁷ GAIU 2007, 184.

²⁸ BENE ET ALII 2006, 157–158.

²⁹ Starting at least from the late 2nd century, *ala I Hispanorum Campagonum, coh. II Flavia Commagenorum* and the *numerus Maurorum Miciensium* were all stationed in the auxiliary fort at *Micia*, but the base probably also accommodated detachments from *coh. Vindellicorum, Alpinorum*, and the *numeri Maurorum Tibiscensium, Germanicianorum* and *Campestrorum* (PETCOLESCU 1981, 112). The more permanent garrison at *Porolissum* comprised *coh. I Ulpia Brittonum* ∞ *eq.*, *V Lingonum* and *I Ituraeorum*, but troops such as *coh. I Hispanorum p. f.*, *I Augusta Ituraeorum sagitt.*, *VI Thracum eq.*, the elusive *cohors III*, and legionary detachments from *III Gallica* and *VII Gemina Felix* (and even of *XIII Gemina* at an early stage) were also attested in various ways, not to mention the *numerus Palmyrenorum Porolissensium* in the smaller fort (GUDEA 1989, 159–175). For updates on these auxiliary troops, see also the corresponding entries in PETCOLESCU 2002.

³⁰ FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 537, Abb. 3/a.

Chequers are frequent motifs on *millefiori* inset items and there were only so many colourants available in the day, so we should not read too much into all these similarities in terms of a common origin. The formal likeness between hilts and strigil handles (the most striking being the knobs), which caused some confusion in their correct identification, is not so surprising: specialized workshops surely produced a wide range of items, and not just one kind, so a certain mutual influence in the design of various categories is natural.

5. *Millefiori* belt plates with matching knife/dagger?

Ten years ago a group of *millefiori* inlaid belt fittings was published. It comprised a pair of rectangular plates hinged to D-shaped buckles with internal volutes, as well as three matching plain plates. Because they came from a private collection and the context of discovery was unknown, they were dated using circumstantial evidence (buckle type, decoration technique, dated parallels) to the last third of the 2nd century A.D.³¹ Starting from H. Ubl's theory regarding the moment when the *pugio* went out of use³², and considering that by then the sword was no longer suspended from a belt but from a baldric, the authors proposed that the *millefiori* inlaid sets perhaps adorned belts meant for hanging another type of dagger. This would have been more of a rank symbol for officers and NCOs than a proper battle dagger³³. As examples of this weapon they mentioned a couple of lancet-like daggers, one found in a *villa rustica* at Barbing-Kreuzhof near Regensburg, dated between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd centuries³⁴, the other from the Saône valley region³⁵.

The association between these plates and an unusual type of dagger immediately brings into mind the curious so-called dagger sold at Christie's and mentioned above. Another, yet extremely loose and circumstantial evidence regarding matching *millefiori* belt plates and knife/ dagger handles lies in the fact that the same private collection holds both the plates and half of a *millefiori* inset hilt which was not identified as such at the moment of publication³⁶.

We were not able to measure the blade of the Christie's dagger but, judging from proportions, the width must be a little over 2 cm and the length of roughly 20 cm. Even so, the only solid evidence is the blade fragment from *Micia*, which has a width of no more than 2.28 cm. This is hardly comparable with the dagger blades from Saône and Barbing-Kreuzhof, which are long-pointed, a little over 20 cm in length (the Saône specimen measures 28 cm) and, most importantly, their maximum width is around 4.5 cm. They are peculiar in themselves and it was suggested that the former, having a rectangular-sectioned tip, could have been reworked from a sword³⁷. A similar case is that of an atypical dagger from *Siscia* which is also thought to be remodeled from a sword. The parallel-edged blade measures 26 cm in length. Its width must be a little under 2.5 cm, so it is close to the fragment from *Micia* in this respect. Since this was a river find, a date could not be given for it, though it was noted that the phenomenon of reworking daggers from swords can be detected, for instance, in the Künzing hoard dated to the middle of the 3rd century³⁸. Exceptional

³¹ FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 539–540.

³² UBL 1994. Cf. BISHOP/COULSTON (2006, 164) who argue for a continued use of the military dagger into the 3rd century; PETCULESCU (2005, 405) also shares this view and considers that the rarity of daggers dated to this period might be due to the fact that they were no longer issued as part of the standard equipment, but were retained only by certain troops or ranks.

³³ FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 541–542.

³⁴ FISCHER 1990, 137, Abb. 27, 5.

³⁵ FEUGÈRE 1990, 103–104, no. 110, fig. 87.

³⁶ For all these *millefiori* inlaid objects held by the same collector, see FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004.

³⁷ FEUGÈRE 1990, 103, no. 110.

³⁸ RADMAN-LIVAJA 2004, 54, no. 61, Pl. 16/61. For the Künzing hoard see HERMANN 1969.

as they are³⁹, these examples prove that daggers with narrow and even parallel-edged blades are not utterly out of place in late 2nd and early 3rd centuries. Because the only tangible proof of a connection between *millefiori* hilts and narrow blades remains the fragment from *Micia*, which does not reveal much information, we are still reluctant to decide between assigning it (and similar finds) to an odd knife or to an odd dagger.

Even if it were actually a knife, the carefully executed and decorated hilt proves that this was no ordinary utility tool, but was intended for display. Consequently, the hypothesis of matching weapon and belt plates should not be ruled out. The fact that around the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd centuries knives were suspended from a belt and showed off is suggested, for example, by a relatively intricate openwork knife sheath found in a grave from Budapest, Bécsi road cemetery, as well as by many analogous finds from elsewhere⁴⁰. The knife blade covered by the Budapest sheath was approximately 19 cm long, yet single-edged⁴¹.

Only one certain *millefiori* inlaid rectangular belt plate is known from Dacia so far. It was found in the auxiliary fort at Ilişua, the base of *ala I Tungrorum Frontoniana*, in a 3rd century layer⁴². Generally, these are rare finds throughout the Empire and seemingly converge towards the middle of the 2nd century. As mentioned above, the ensemble of plates from a private collection was dated to the end of the 2nd century⁴³. However, Th. Fischer believes them to be earlier and places them in the interval starting from the Flavian period up to the middle of the 2nd century⁴⁴. There are several similar discoveries with a known find spot from Britannia, Raetia and Moesia superior⁴⁵. A *millefiori* inset plate was found at Caerleon, in a layer dated to the second half of the 2nd century⁴⁶, while another specimen was discovered at Newstead, in a context belonging to the phase which began with the Antonine occupation of the fort⁴⁷. Two plates from Eining were discussed together with mid-2nd century fittings⁴⁸. A pair of *millefiori* inlaid belt sets was unearthed from funerary contexts in Moesia superior, province where they are assigned to a somewhat earlier period, the latest to the beginning of the 2nd century⁴⁹. The first was found in the 2nd–3rd century necropolis from Palivodenica⁵⁰, the second at *Viminacium*, in a grave dubiously dated to the last third of the 1st century A.D.⁵¹ Interestingly, each of these sets includes a couple of plates with hinged dagger frogs. Except for the ones from Newstead, Caerleon and Palivodenica, which are virtually identical⁵², no two plates are alike in size or decorative pattern, so there does not appear to be a standard. The examples from the private

³⁹ Usually, 3rd century daggers are longer and wider than earlier examples (BISHOP/COULSTON 2006, 164, fig. 104).

⁴⁰ See SELLYE 1991.

⁴¹ SELLYE 1991, 52–53, Abb. 2.1.

⁴² BRONZES 2003, 179, no. 346, Pl. 8; BENE ET ALII 2006, 102, Pl. XIV/1, Pl. 6/5; GAIU 2007, 214, no. 104, Fig. 5/104.

⁴³ FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 539–540.

⁴⁴ FISCHER 2012, 120, Abb. 122, n. 51.

⁴⁵ Some Pannonian plates (SELLYE 1939, 82, Pl. XIV/4–5, 9) might also be decorated with *millefiori* glass, but their very brief description does not mention this, and the accompanying photographs are inconclusive.

⁴⁶ CHAPMAN 2005, 112, Sd04.

⁴⁷ CURLE 1911, 329–330, 332, no. 4, Pl. LXXXIX/25.

⁴⁸ GSCHWIND 2004, 163, Kat. C439–440, Taf. 48/C439–440.

⁴⁹ See REDŽIĆ 2013, 26, nos. 4a-d; 29–31, nos. 8a-b, T. III; 410.

⁵⁰ ARHEOLOŠKO BLAGO 1998, 301–302.

⁵¹ KORAČ, GOLUBOVIĆ 2009, 209, 2.

⁵² In connection with these, we should also mention two plates from Dacia which are of similar size, and the six recessed panels they display are arranged in the exact same way. One originates from *colonia Aurelia Apulensis* (LUX, UTIL, ESTETIC 2011, 105, no. 193), while the other was found in the fort at *Porolissum-Pomet* and was dated to the 3rd century (GUDEA/ TAMBA 1992, 319, no. 2, pl. XII/2). The publishers mention traces of white or green enamel, but one can wonder if this is not actually some sort of base in which *millefiori* slices were set.

collection and from Palivodenica display D-shaped buckles with hinges and internal volutes, while the Newstead specimen also has hinges, though the buckle is not preserved. Apparently, this type of buckle (also represented by two *millefiori* glass inlaid pieces originating from the forts at Zugmantel and Osterburken) does not go beyond the middle of the 2nd century⁵³.

It must be mentioned that another type of *millefiori* inset plate was in use in the 3rd century. This openwork class with peltiform extremities is attested in Britain, Syria, and along the Rhine and the Danube⁵⁴. Nevertheless, they were fitted on much broader belts, as indicated by the chained specimens from South Shields⁵⁵.

Since a significant number of the *millefiori* inlaid objects mentioned in this paper is part of private collections, the scarcity of similar finds might be at least partially caused by their attractiveness for collectors. Maybe there are other hilts or plates out there which could have served for a better understanding of their use (luxury goods or rank symbols), of the military taste in late 2nd and early 3rd centuries, and of their distribution across the Empire.

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⁵³ OLDENSTEIN 1977, 211–212, Taf. 74/980, 982; cf. FLÜGEL ET ALII 2004, 539.

⁵⁴ BISHOP/COULSTON 2006, 184. For example: ALLASON-JONES/MIKET 1984, 94–96, nos. 3.10, 3.11, Pl. VI/3.10, 11 (South Shields); CHAPMAN 2005, 113–114, Se01–12 (*Segontium*, Caerleon); JAMES 2004, 80, no. 90, Fig. 38/90 (*Dura-Europos*); LUX, UTIL, ESTETIC 2011, 111, no. 212 – wrongly labeled ‘buckle’ (*Apulum*); OLDENSTEIN 1977, 195–197, Taf. 63/809–812 (Saalburg, Osterburken, Stockstadt); SELLYE 1939, 82, Pl. XIV/7–8, 12–15 (Pannonia).

⁵⁵ ALLASON-JONES/MIKET 1984, Pl. VI/3.10.

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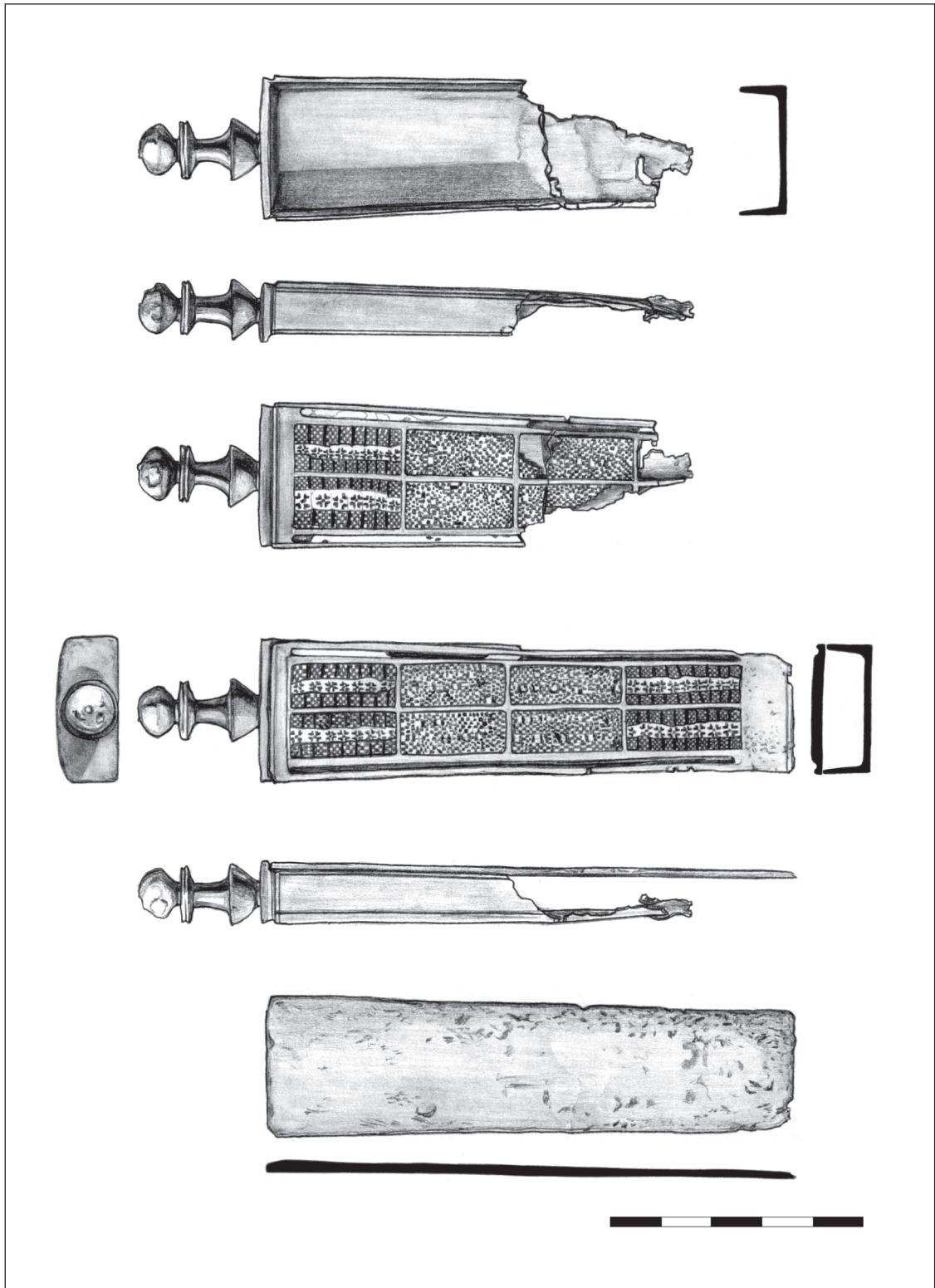
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Pl. I. The hilt from *Micia*.



Pl. II. 1. *Micia* blade; 2. Piece from *Porolissum*.



Pl. III. *Micia* blade fragment and hilt.



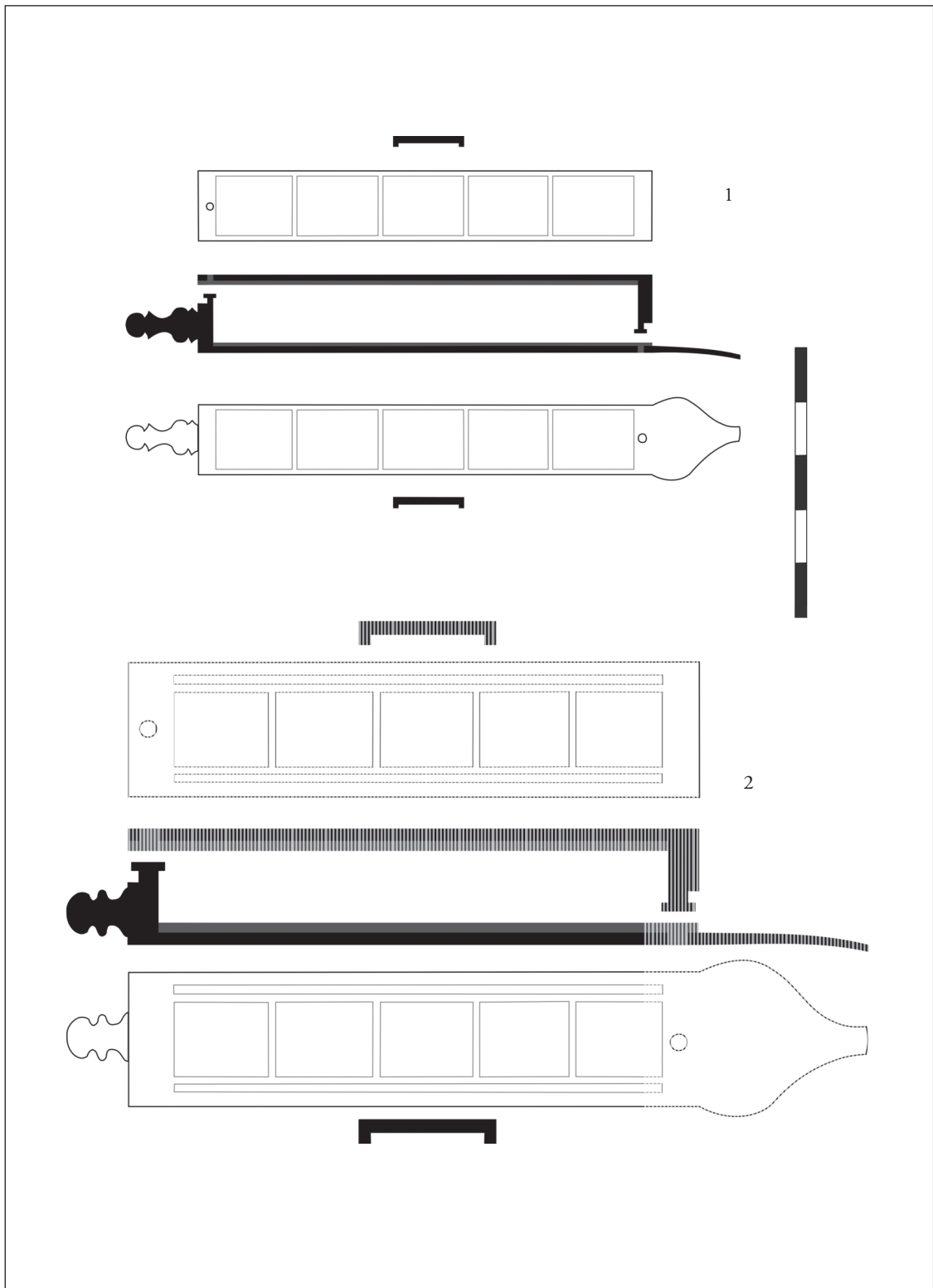
Pl. IV. Hilt from *Micia*; 2. Piece from *Porolissum*.



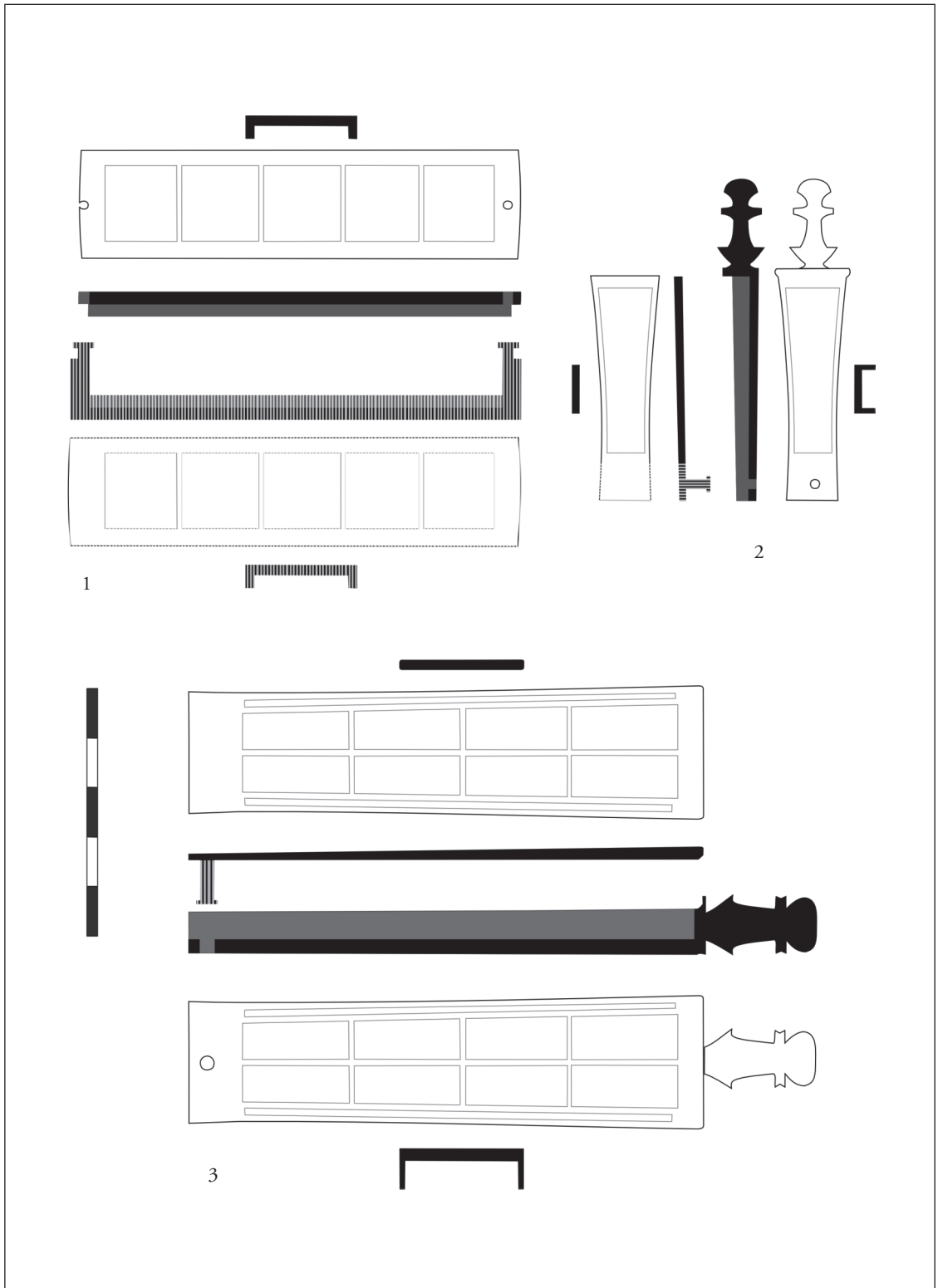
Pl. V. Strigil from *Brigetio*: 1. Disassembled handles with the discernible circular markings highlighted – not to scale (after SELLYE 1939, Pl. XVI/1a–4b); 2. Assembled handles; 3. Detail – not to scale (photos: Á. Szabó, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum).



Pl. VI. 1. Strigil (?) handle from *Carnuntum* (photo: Carnuntum 3D Kulturdatenbank); 2. Penknife hilts: a. Gallia (photo: artefacts.mom.fr, CNF-4032); b. Shakenoak (after BRODRIBB et al. 1968, fig. 26/12); c. Campsfield (after HUNTER/KIRK 1953, fig. 29/11).



Pl. VII. Diagrams of possible handle constructions (the shaded components are presumed, and not actually attested). 1. *Brigetio* strigil; 2. *Carnuntum* strigil?



Pl. VIII. Diagrams of possible handle constructions (the shaded components are presumed, and not actually attested). 1. Piece from *Porolissum*; 2. Penknife hilt; 3. Knife/ dagger hilt.