

# A Late Antique Crossbow Fibula in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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**I**N 1995 THE METROPOLITAN Museum of Art acquired a gold brooch of a type generally known as the crossbow fibula (Figures 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> At 11.9 centimeters in length (about  $4\frac{11}{16}$  in.), with a weight of 78.4 grams, it is a personal ornament of substantial size and value and of the highest technical and artistic quality. The object stands out both in art history and in a larger historical perspective. Dating to the late fifth or early sixth century, it evokes one of the most interesting epochs in antiquity, a period marked by the subtle, often elusive transition from Late Roman to Early Byzantine art. The strong religious elements in the decoration of this fibula, and of related pieces, allow us a glimpse into the iconographic language of Early Christian art. Perhaps even more fascinating than the art-historical, religious, and technical aspects, however, are the historical implications. Crossbow fibulae were first introduced about A.D. 200 as clasps for military cloaks but immediately became an official insignia of military and administrative rank. Thus, for more than three hundred years they were closely linked with leading historical figures and the history of the Late Roman world.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE FIBULA

Named after the medieval weapon of somewhat similar shape, a crossbow fibula consists of a transverse bar, a bow, a pin, and the catch—in our example, the sinuously ornamented container, triangular in cross section, into which the pin is slipped (Figures 1, 2; see also Figures 1–13 in P. Dandridge, “Idiomatic and Mainstream: The Technical Vocabulary of a Late Roman Crossbow Fibula,” pp. 71–86, in this volume). The catch is sometimes called the foot of a fibula, terms that we will use interchangeably. The transverse bar of the Metropolitan’s gold fibula is a hollow tube with a hexagonal cross section. Each end terminates in separately made bulbous knobs with pointed tips and

circlets of beaded wire around the base. (These are at the bottom of Figure 1, with the front of the fibula and the bow facing us—oriented as it would be worn.) The six facets of these knobs, or finials, correspond to the hexagonal structure formed by the crossbar’s planes. On the right side of the fibula, the knob is attached permanently to the bar; on the left side, it forms the



Figure 1. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 450–ca. 558. Gold, L. 11.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1995 (1995.97). See also Colorplate 1

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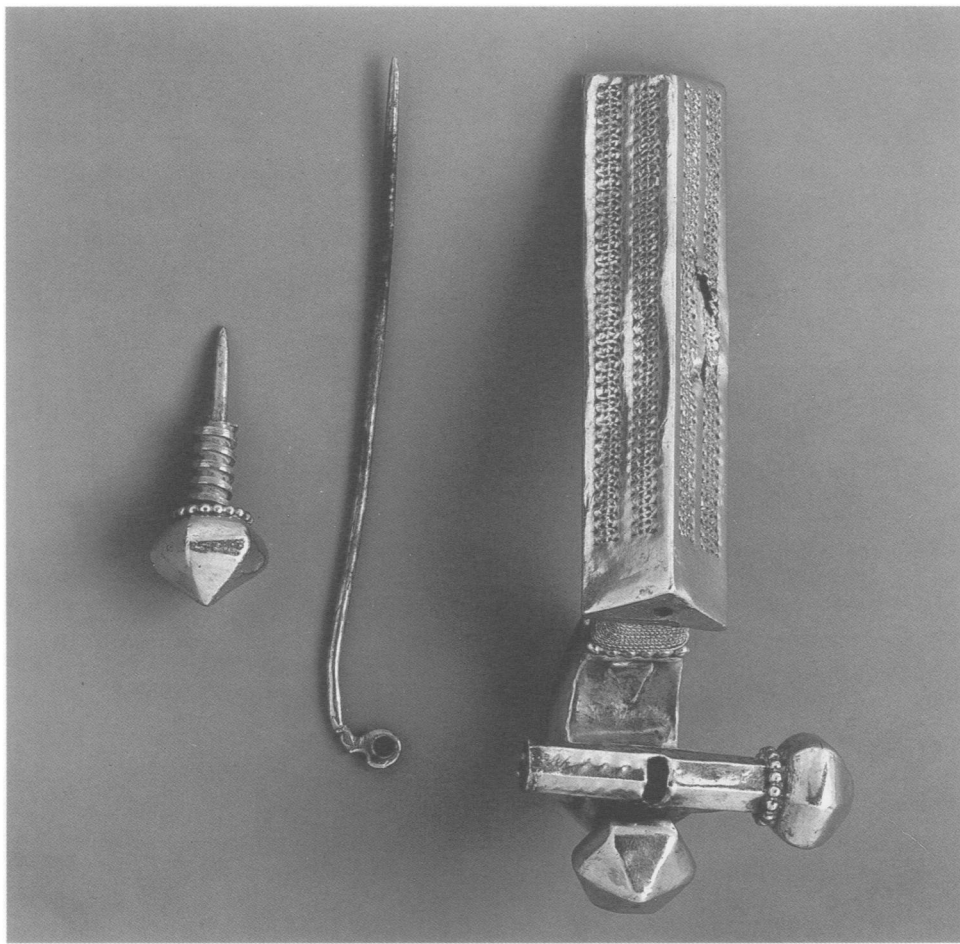


Figure 2. The screw, the pin, and the back of the fibula in Figure 1

head of a removable screw, the threads of which mate with a nut inside the bar. When inserted, the pointed end of the screw transects a slot cut in the underside of the bar (Figure 2). Once the fibula is assembled, the point of the screw passes through the pin's eyelet, which fits precisely into the slot (see Dandridge, Figure 8); the screw locks the pin in place and acts as a horizontal axis around which the pin could turn.

A third bulbous knob, identical in size and shape to the finials of the transverse bar, is attached at the center of the faceted crossbar. It is set at a right angle to its counterparts on the bar and marks the join between the bar and the bow; it seems to be an extension of the latter. On both sides of the bow and flanking it are small volutes with serrated edges set on the upper face of the bar.

The bow is pentagonal in cross section and—like the crossbar and the three knobs—is made of plain, polished gold sheet metal. A sharp, central ridge emphasizes its high arching outline. On each side, this line is repeated by an angle or bend in the metal, separating the top of the bow from its perpendicular sidewalls. A

rectangular strip of sheet gold forms the underside of the bow, where a small triangular opening, now closed with a sheet of gold, is apparent (Dandridge, Figure 8); this allowed for the introduction of a sulfur filling, which gave the elegantly shaped but hollow and therefore fragile object a necessary degree of solidity. The remarkable sculptural quality of the bow seems to have made any sort of additional ornament superfluous. Only the recessed terminus of the bow, landing on the catch like an arch on an impost, features decoration—here, of twisted gold wire. Even this, however, is primarily functional. Arranged in a herringbone pattern and framed by gold globules and granulation, it reinforces the base of the bow and its join with the catch (see Dandridge, Figure 9).

The catch or foot of the fibula is triangular in cross section. Seen from the front, with the bow facing outward toward the viewer, the flat, rectangular top panel is supported by a roof-shaped bottom. Both ends of the container are closed with small triangular panels—gablelike. In contrast to the plain, shiny curves and facets of the bow and transverse bar, the surface of the

catch facing us is textured with a dense openwork decoration. On this panel, a molded border frames an intricate latticework design dominated by a slender, elongated Latin cross. With its flaring arms and splayed ends, the cross forms a reserve in the trellislike background, which shows two symmetrically arranged floral arabesques.

The top end of the cross invites closer examination (at the top of Figure 1, and Dandridge, Figure 6). Together with the two side arms, it is circumscribed in a stylized wreath formed by two circles, one inside the other, with curled sprigs between them. Added to the right side of the shaft is a small circle that turns the top arm into the Greek letter rho and the cross itself into a *crux monogrammatica*, a combinatory image of the cross and the first two letters of the word "Christ," the chi (formed by the cross shaft and crossarms) and the rho.<sup>2</sup> Directly underneath the side arms, the letters alpha and omega are integrated into the scrollwork, a further reference to Christ as "the beginning and the end," according to the book of Revelation (1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

The cross emerges, at its base, from two large antithetically arranged acanthus leaves, which are also reserved in the pierced decoration. Chased lines, indicating the veins, are used to minimize shadow and to create a surprisingly natural, even lively impression. Flanking the cross, two symmetrically arranged floral scrolls grow out of these acanthus leaves. Each comprises eight strictly stylized whorls, animated by numerous filiform shoots.

The two back panels of the catch are decorated in the same openwork technique as the top plate but in a purely ornamental and rather cursory manner. Both panels feature ornamental bands of interlocked S-shaped volutes traversed lengthwise by a straight line of tiny quatrefoils. More attention was given to the small, sloping triangular wall at the far end of the catch (see Dandridge, Figure 4). Here, a large quatrefoil in a circular frame is set into the triangle with small floral shoots filling the interstices. In contrast, the corresponding wall at the bow end of the catch has only a small circular opening into which the pin is inserted. No decoration was deemed necessary here.

The simplest and most purely functional part of a fibula is the pin, but even this simple object, visible only when the fibula is being opened or closed, betrays the high standard of craftsmanship characteristic of all the parts. It is a long plain shaft with one end shaped as an eyelet, the other into a point. Immediately below the pierced opening of the eyelet, the shaft forms a small polygonal bead.

Except for the pin, the beaded circlets around the three bulbous knobs, and the beading, filigree, and

granulation encircling the catch end of the bow, all the parts of the Museum's fibula were premanufactured from gold sheets, then assembled and joined.<sup>3</sup> Altogether, eight separate elements were necessary to form the bow; the crossbar consists of twenty-two separate elements; and the catch is built up from eight individually made parts. Visible to the naked eye and confirmed by scientific analysis are variations in the thickness and alloy of the gold sheet used for the different parts. These differences are intentional. Harder alloys with a higher content of silver, which leads to a lighter shade of the gold, were necessary for parts that had to bear a certain physical stress, such as the bow and the pin, while the softness of a gold of higher purity facilitated the pierced decoration of the catch.

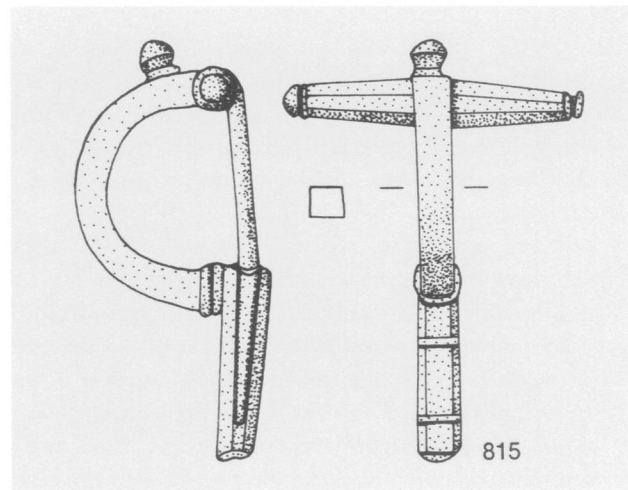
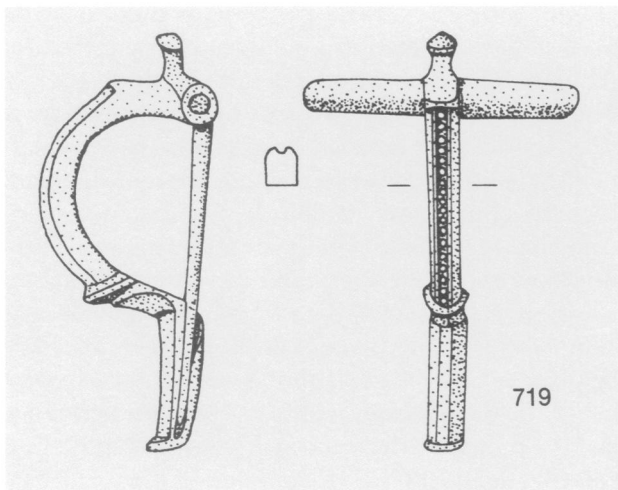
The fibula is in very good condition except for damage and loss on the catch or foot and the opened seam along the central ridge of the bow. Obviously, at one point in the history of the piece, it was exposed to vigorous pressure from above. The provenance is not known, but with a personal ornament in gold of the size, weight, and artistic quality of this fibula, a find spot is of secondary importance. The fibula does not give any indication of where it was made. In fact, such pieces cannot be linked to geographically distinct areas. Their owners belonged to the highest echelons of the Late Roman hierarchy, people known to have traveled extensively throughout the vast Roman empire and even beyond its frontiers.<sup>4</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT OF CROSSBOW FIBULAE

It is the intention of this paper to place the Metropolitan's gold fibula in its proper historical and art-historical context. An overview of the development of the crossbow fibula from the earliest beginnings to the fifth century, with particular interest in social and historical issues, will be followed by an analysis of the final stage in the history of crossbow fibulae, the period to which MMA 1995.97 belongs. This section is divided into three parts—a review of the small corpus of related fibulae, the historical background, and a stylistic and iconographic analysis.

## FORM AND FUNCTION OF CROSSBOW FIBULAE

The fibula is a functional item, designed to fasten clothing. Though certain shapes were worn by women as well as men, the crossbow fibula was exclusively a male ornament, created to hold in place the heavy woolen cloak or cape that was the outer garment of a



Figures 3a, b. Hinged crossbow fibulae, ca. A.D. 200, found at the Limes castellum Zugmantel, Germany. Tin-plated bronze, both L. 5.6 cm. Saalburgmuseum, Bad Homburg (drawings: from A. Böhme, "Die Fibeln der Kastelle Saalburg und Zugmantel," *Saalburg Jahrbuch* 29 [1972], pl. 17 no. 719, pl. 20 no. 815). Figure 3a has a single decorative knob, an ornamented bow, and a faceted catch; Figure 3b has a faceted crossbar, three decorative knobs, a filigree ring around the catch end of the bow, and an ornamented catch

Roman soldier. The *sagum*, or *chlamys*, as this cloak was called, depending on the length, was one piece of material that completely covered the left side of the body; the open ends were joined at the right shoulder. The right arm was therefore unencumbered. This was a practical garment, wide enough to be raised and draped over the elbow of the left arm, which could then move freely, and large enough to protect the wearer against inclement weather. The length varied, but, no matter if it was knee or ankle length, either fully covering the body or draped around the shoulders and loosely hanging down the back, such a cloak gave a certain dignity and even elegance to the man who wore it.

The simplest way of holding the ends of the cloak together was to tie them in a knot. Better befitting the social status of "our most noble soldiers"—as military men were officially referred to in the third century—was to fasten the garment with a clasp or metal brooch, the fibula. In its most basic form the fibula is a safety pin made from a single wire with a sharp point at one end and a hooked catch, designed to capture the point, at the other. Elaborate varieties, like the crossbow fibula, consisted of two pieces of metal: a bow and a pin, and these were joined either by a spring or by a hinge. From an early period, the development of Roman fibulae had been marked by a constant search for technical and visual improvements. As a result, the first and second centuries A.D. saw the emergence of a large number of shapes and types.<sup>5</sup> This development came to a rather abrupt halt when, in the early decades of the third century, the crossbow fibula became the dominant type. The following survey traces chronologically the

significant trends of the crossbow fibula's development. This outline is based on reliably dated examples that stand in contrast to the vast number of average bronze crossbow fibulae either because they are made of precious material or because of their aesthetic quality. The number of such pieces is limited, of course, but it suffices to create a solid typological and historical framework.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE EARLY STAGE, CA. A.D. 240–76

Present at the beginning of the crossbow fibula's evolution are the same principal elements that characterize the gold fibula in the Metropolitan: a crossbar, a bow, a catch, and a pin (see Dandridge, Figure 3). The construction technique, however, is slightly different. The pin is not removable but is permanently hinged to the crossbar, to be secured in an open slot on one side of the catch. Typologically, the early crossbow fibula exemplifies this design, and judging by the large number of examples found in garrisons along the Roman frontiers, it was enormously popular in the late second century. The transitional stages between the earlier and later designs are quite fluid, and at the outset, the changes are hardly noticeable. Initially, the main decorative—as opposed to constructional—difference is that the crossbars of the conservative hinged fibulae are plain, while those of the crossbow fibulae terminate in tiny, slightly articulated knobs (Figures 3a, b).

The early crossbow fibulae are by no means spectacular. They would hardly have attracted any scholarly attention had there not appeared, for the first time in the history of Roman fibulae, a suddenly substantial



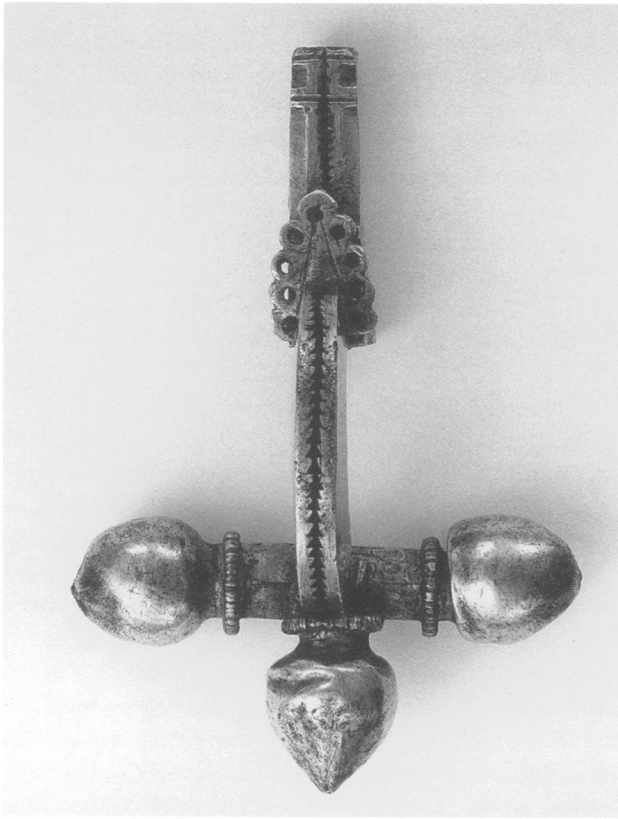


Figure 4. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 250, found in Odiham, England. Gold, L. 7.7 cm. British Museum, London (photo: British Museum)

number of pieces made of precious metal. Gold and silver fibulae were far beyond the means of an ordinary soldier, who would have had to content himself with a bronze clasp to hold his cloak. If any could, only officers would have been able to afford precious metal. Though there is no literary evidence, we can assume, therefore, that the sudden appearance of fibulae made of precious metal and worn by officers is connected with military reforms undertaken by the Severan emperors (193–235).<sup>7</sup> In a way—although not in the modern sense—the early gold and silver crossbow fibulae were an officer's badge. The later history of the crossbow fibula confirms their official nature.

The length of early crossbow fibulae varies between 5 and 6 centimeters, and the weight of those made in gold ranges between 18 and 42 grams. Even at this early stage, the bar is ordinarily hexagonal in cross section, and thus it remains until the last evolutionary stage. Tiny appliquéés, set against the bow, reinforce the join between crossbar and bow. The bow is remarkably small and, in comparison to later examples (when it is shaped like a horseshoe), only moderately arched. In cross section, the bow may be either rectangular or hexagonal; where the bow end meets the catch, it is

either encircled with wire, marked by small knoblike extensions, or fitted with a small decorative collar. The short catch is plain and semicircular in section; the flat face features simple gouged geometric ornaments.

A solid silver brooch, part of a coin-dated treasure that had been hidden in Causevo in modern Bulgaria before 244, is usually considered one of the earliest examples of the crossbow fibula.<sup>8</sup> It combines all the features described above with barely defined knobs, a small, short catch, and three tiny globules attached to the foot end of the bow. Similar examples in silver, and less often in bronze, have turned up in Roman military camps in Germany, Austria, and Hungary; two unpublished examples in gold are said to be in the National Museum in Damascus.<sup>9</sup>

The Causevo type is immediately followed by a more elaborate version with now clearly defined globular or ovoid knobs, a hexagonal crossbar, and a still short but faceted catch. A brooch that was part of a coin and jewelry treasure buried soon after 248/49 in Nicolaevo, modern Bulgaria, offers a reliable date for this stage.<sup>10</sup> It is made of silver with a partly gilt engraved decoration of superimposed triangles on both the crest of the bow and the catch or foot along with well-articulated knobs. Similar pieces have been found in nearly all parts of the Roman empire. Fibula design by the mid-third century may be represented by a gold example that was part of a large treasure discovered in 1821 in Parma, northern Italy.<sup>11</sup> Judging by the coins found with this piece and by historical events, the hoard was buried either in 268, just after the emperor Gallienus was murdered while laying siege to nearby Mediolanum (modern Milan), or in the course of Alemannic invasions in 271. The fibula, only 5 centimeters long and weighing 18 grams, is marked by a strong crossbar terminating in globular knobs, an ovoid head knob, a narrow bow, and an extremely short foot, the last two embellished by a line of gold globules applied along the center. Of similar shape, but otherwise plain, is a fibula that was found together with coins, mounted coins, and a spectacular gold bowl, in Rennes, France,<sup>12</sup> a treasure that most likely had been hidden in the course of Alemannic invasions in western France in 276.

While gold fibulae such as the pieces from Parma and Rennes impress more through the value of their medium than through fine craftsmanship or artistic ingenuity, there is evidence for the existence of more elaborate pieces. A gold fibula found in Odiham, England, holds our attention not only because of its remarkable length, of 7.7 centimeters, and weight, at 61.43 grams, but also because of an ornamental band of superimposed triangles inlaid in niello, a matte black compound of copper and silver sulfide (Figure 4).<sup>13</sup> It features all the characteristics we find on mid-third-

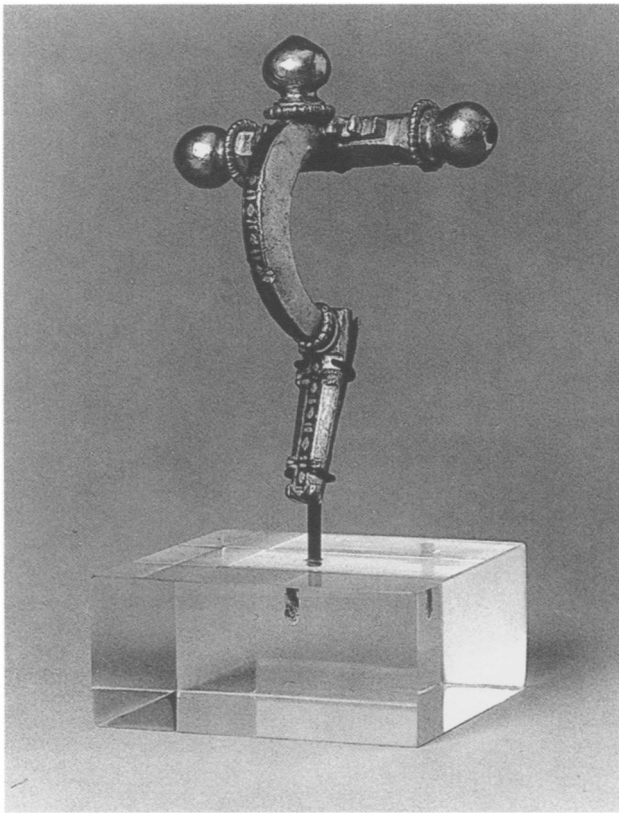


Figure 5. Crossbow fibula, 3rd quarter of the 3rd century A.D. Gold with niello decoration, L. 5.55 cm. The Collection of Shelby White and Leon Levy (photo: Sheldan Collins)

century fibulae: a combination of two ovoid and one pointed knob, the lack of appliqué, a slender bow, which is quadrangular in section, and a short catch, beveled off at the sides. Vegetal and geometric ornaments and a particular ornamental border of superimposed triangles along the crest of the bow and in the center of the foot are the favorite decorative devices found on the silver crossbow fibulae of this period.<sup>14</sup> Two pieces from a coin-dated hoard from Szalacska (county Somogy)<sup>15</sup> and a similar piece from a large coin treasure found in Balozsamegyes (county Vas),<sup>16</sup> both in Hungary, reliably date the group to a period before 259/60.

By the second century, the use of a considerable variety of inscriptions had become a popular decorative device, and, well into the sixth century, artists continued to use this unusual but most impressive decorative feature.<sup>17</sup> Wishes for good luck combined with personal names, as in *SEPTIMI VIVAS* (May Septimus live) or *CONSTANTINI VIVAS* (May Constantius live), are deployed as niello inlay on the two sides of the narrow bows of silver fibulae.<sup>18</sup> *DEOMART UT[ERE] FELIX* (Deomart, use it happily) repeats a formula often inscribed on jewelry and *objets de luxe* of this period.

Less common is the inscription *VIATOR VIVAS* (Live long, traveler), which occurs on a gold fibula in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.<sup>19</sup> The foot of this fibula is decorated with a combination of horizontal grooves and rhomboids, an ornament that is also the main decorative motif of a niello-inlaid gold fibula in a private collection in New York, one of the most elegant pieces of this period (Figure 5).<sup>20</sup>

#### THE DYARCHY, CA. A.D. 285–86

Further evolutionary development is apparent in two gold fibulae, part of a coin and jewelry treasure discovered in 1805 in Petrijanec, Croatia,<sup>21</sup> and by a gold fibula with a bronze core in the so-called Dyarchy Treasure, a coin and jewelry hoard of unspecified provenance from the Balkans.<sup>22</sup> Both hoards coincide with the rise of Diocletian, a Dalmatian of low birth who was made emperor in November 284 after a successful career in the Roman army. In 286 he decided to share power with a former colleague, Maximian, like himself a successful general of humble Dalmatian origin. Maximian was appointed caesar and put in charge of the western part of the empire, while Diocletian remained in the east as augustus. This was the beginning of the “government of two,” or dyarchy.

The gold fibulae from Petrijanec and the Dyarchy hoard are closely linked with these events. In 285, the year of the Petrijanec hoard, Diocletian defeated his last serious competitor for the imperial purple, in the battle at Margus, modern Serbia; most likely the hoard represents the valuables of a fugitive officer of the defeated army whose subsequent fate prevented him from collecting them at a later time. The coins and the fibula from the Dyarchy Treasure, hidden shortly after 286, seem to have been part of a donative to a meritorious officer on the occasion of the appointment of Maximian. We know from written sources that such donations consisted of coined gold, silverware, official clothes, and, as an accessory to the chlamys, gold or silver fibulae.<sup>23</sup>

The dyarchic gold fibulae are rather small, but heavier and thus more valuable than most earlier gold crossbow fibulae. The length varies from between 6 and 7.04 centimeters (Figures 6, 7). The Petrijanec fibulae weigh 41.4 and 54.7 grams respectively; the gilt-bronze fibula from the Dyarchy hoard is about 113 grams. The shape is still very much that of fibulae dating to the mid-third century, but the proportions have changed slightly and the details are clearly articulated.

On all three pieces the transverse bar is hexagonal with small stepped appliqué close to the bow. The

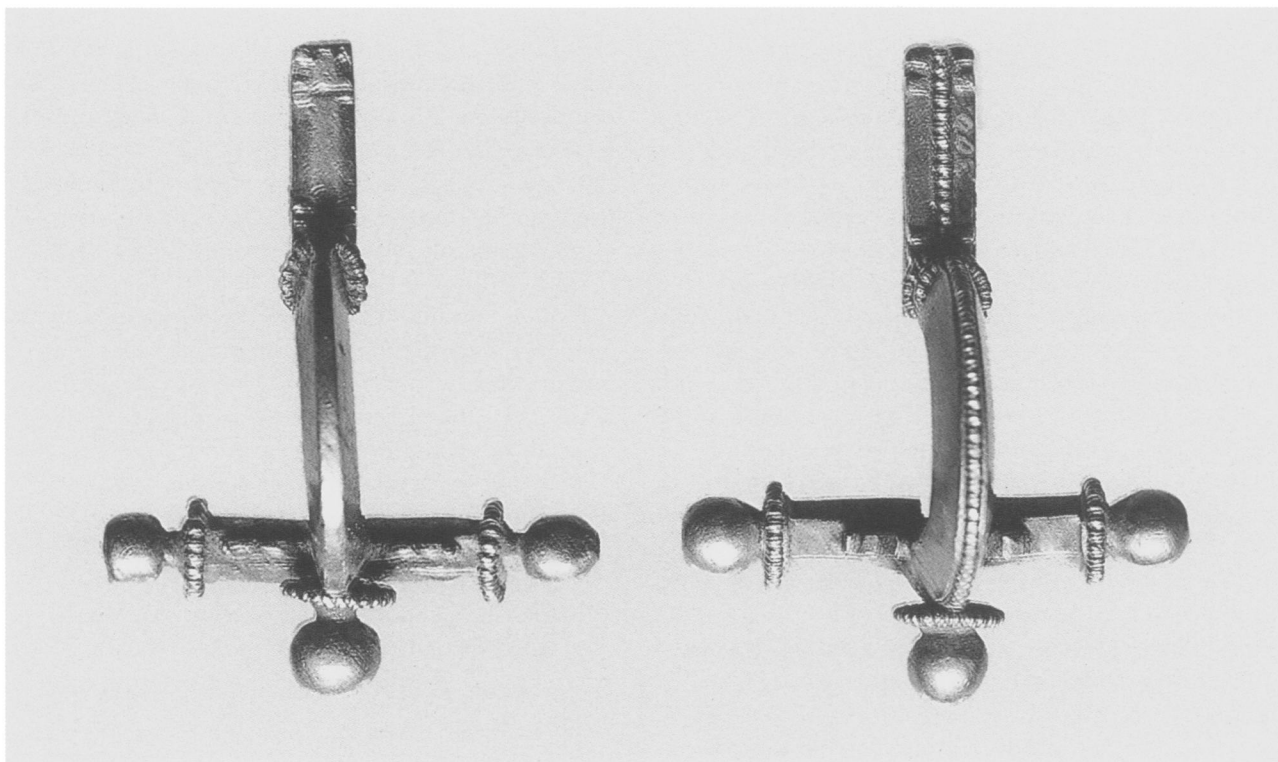


Figure 6. Crossbow fibulae from the Petrijanec Treasure, late 3rd century A.D. Gold, L. 6–7 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum)

globular knobs have increased in size and are supported by beaded collars. The narrow, high arching bow is flattened along the crest; the foot is considerably shorter than the bow and is decorated with ornamental grooves at both ends. The end of the bow, where it attaches to the catch, is surrounded by circlets of plain and beaded wire. On one of the two fibulae from Petrijanec a beaded line along both the crest of the bow and the center of the foot recalls the decoration of the gold fibula from Parma, made about twenty years earlier.

The most important evidence offered by the three dyarchic fibulae is that both hoards reflect the same social background. Gold fibulae, large numbers of gold coins, coins mounted as *phalerae*, bracelets, and pendants were military rewards or official gifts to high-ranking officers. This might explain why gold fibulae from this period occasionally were kept as heirlooms. A splendid piece, 8.4 centimeters in length, and of the most impressive weight of 167.5 grams, or half a Roman pound of gold, was found together with other gold objects and a gilt-bronze fibula of the later fourth century in a rich grave in Réka Devnia, Bulgaria. Most likely it belonged to the descendant of the original owner of the gold fibula, whose successful military career seems to have established the family fortune.<sup>24</sup>

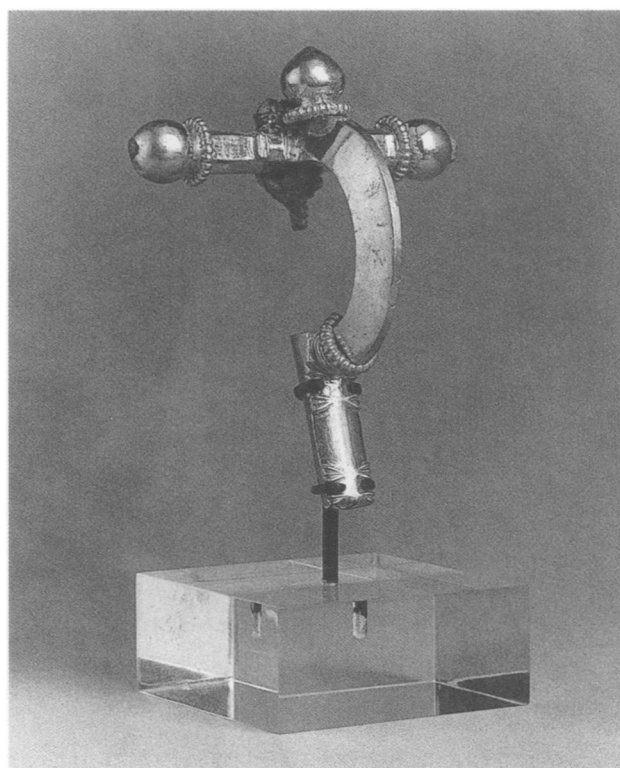


Figure 7. Crossbow fibula from the Dyarchy Treasure, late 3rd century A.D. Gold, bronze, L. 7.04 cm. The Collection of Shelby White and Leon Levy (photo: Sheldan Collins)

On March 1, 293, the dyarchy was replaced by the first tetrarchy, or government of four, when the empire was divided into four different administrative units. Diocletian, the augustus of the east, shared his power with a new caesar and his future successor—Galerius—while Constantius Chlorus was assigned as caesar to the western emperor, Maximian, who had risen to the rank of augustus. Both caesars came from the same stock as the two augusti—of humble Dalmatian origin and with successful military records. The imperial house in the east was placed under the divine protection of Jove, so that Diocletian and Galerius thus became the Jovii or Joviani, while the west was governed by the Herculi, the protégés of Hercules.

The reason for delving into these historical details is that several gold crossbow fibulae, one of them in the Metropolitan Museum, are inscribed with the names or surnames and titles of the augusti and caesars of the first tetrarchy as well as those of their successors. In their own way, these pieces track the rise and decline of the tetrarchy, and at the same time, they document significant innovations in the development of the crossbow fibula, innovations that were imitated immediately by the makers of bronze fibulae. In most cases, the inscriptions allow precise dating, which makes this group a reliable landmark in the chronology of crossbow fibulae.

The group is by no means homogeneous, and this is not surprising. In Roman crafts, shifts in shape and style never come abruptly, and long-established forms tend to continue even as new trends appear. Typologically, the most obvious innovations are the stepped appliqués along the whole length of the crossbars. They replace the small supports that had reinforced the join between the crossbar and bow. Possibly even more significant are certain subtle changes, such as the tendency to longer and heavier fibulae and to an evolution in the proportions. In the course of the three decades of the tetrarchy, between 293 and 324, the bulbous knobs increase in size and the foot in length. Already at an early stage, under Diocletian, the gouged geometric ornaments on the foot are replaced by C-volutes rendered in relief along the edges of the catch. Although geometric decoration continues for a while, the new motif becomes standard. Until the third quarter of the fourth century we find pairs of C-volutes at each end of the foot; then the foot is edged on both sides by a series of C-volutes. A similar development is followed by contemporary crossbow fibulae made in bronze.

The use of inscriptions as a decorative device is not new. First on buildings, then later in applied art, they

are one of the most interesting forms of Roman decoration. On crossbow fibulae, decorative inscriptions, inlaid in niello, had already occurred in the mid-third century, though by now the contents and the meaning have changed. References to members of the imperial families have replaced ordinary personal names. On the finest examples of this group, clarity of form and spacing enhance the inscriptions, which are displayed on both sides of the bow. The crest and the center of the catch continue to be decorated with ornamental borders inlaid in niello, but the primary motifs are no longer a line of superimposed triangles or rhomboids. These have been replaced by an elegant guilloche reserved against a niello background.

The following catalogue of fibulae with imperial inscriptions is arranged chronologically:

1. A.D. 293, Bargone, Italy. Bronze, L. 5.2 cm. Inscribed: IOVIORUM/EHRCULIORU[M]. Museo d'Antichità, Parma, Italy.<sup>25</sup>
2. November 20, 303, Erickstanebrae, Scotland. Gold, fragment, preserved L. 9.5 cm. Inscribed: IOVI[O] AUG[USTO] and VOT[IS] XX. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (Figure 8).<sup>26</sup>
3. April 286–ca. 306/7 or 308/9, Arezzo, Italy. Gold, niello, L. 7 cm, 52.6 g. Inscribed: HERCULI AUGUSTE/SEMPER VINCAS. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase by subscription, 1895 (95.15.113) (Figures 9a, b).<sup>27</sup>
4. July 25, 306–March 31, 307, unknown provenance. Gold, niello, L. 8 cm, 50.4 g. Inscribed: CONSTANTINE CAES VIVAS/HERCULI CAES VINCAS. Museo d'Antichità, Turin (Figure 10).<sup>28</sup>
5. April 20, 308–summer 309, "Caput Adriae" (Aquileia or Centur near Koper), Italy. Gold, niello, L. 5.3 cm, 46.9 g. Inscribed: MAXENTI VINCAS/ROMULE VIVAS. Prähistorische Staatssammlung, Munich (Figures 11a, b).<sup>29</sup>
6. July 25, 315, unknown provenance. Gold, niello, fragment, preserved L. 4.5 cm. Inscribed: D N CONSTANTINI AUG/VOT X MULTIS XX. Musée du Louvre, Paris.<sup>30</sup>
7. July 25, 315–November 11, 317, Niederemmel, Germany.<sup>31</sup> Gold, niello, fragment, preserved L. 9.5 cm, 75.5 g. Inscribed: VOTIS X D N CONSTANTINI AUG/VOTIS X D N LICINI AUG. Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Germany.
8. Ca. 317–24, Taraneš, former Yugoslavia. Gold, niello, L. 10.4 cm, 160.8 g. Inscribed: IOVI AUG VINCAS/IOVI CAES VIVAS. Location unknown (Figure 12).<sup>32</sup>

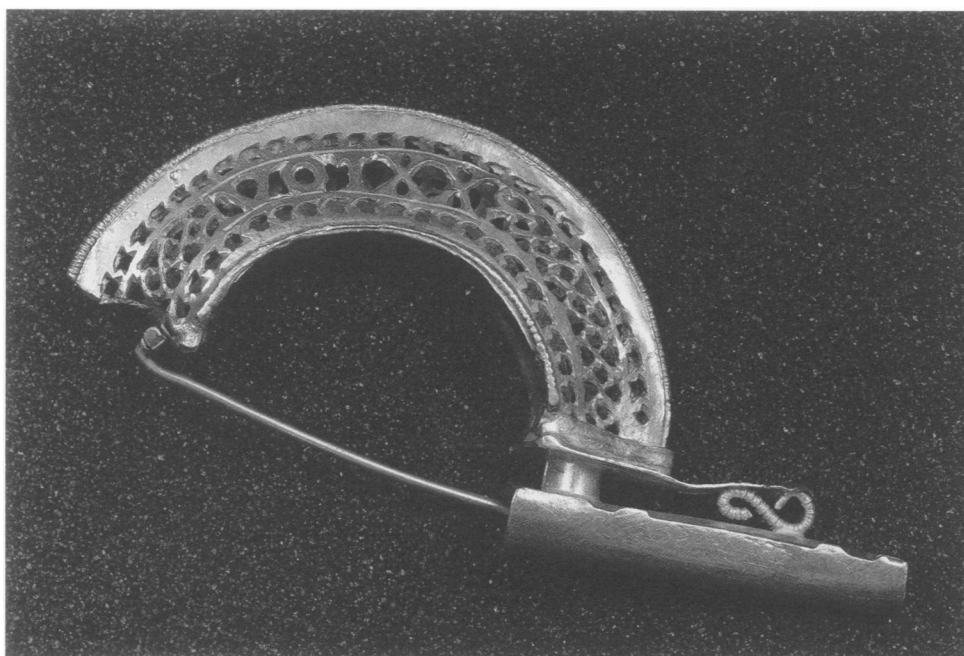


Figure 8. Fragment of a fibula, A.D. 303, found in Erickstanebrae, Scotland. Gold, L. 9.5 cm. The William Randolph Hearst Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 50.22.14 (photo: Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

The inscriptions—IOVIORUM and EHERCULIORU[M]—on the silver-inlaid bronze fibula from Bargone (no. 1, in the list above), near Parma, refer to the Jovii and to the Herculii, that is, to the houses of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, though the full meaning can be only be guessed. As the two words are given in the genitive case, one word has to be added, and “victoria,” say, or “gloria,” in combination with “ioviurum” and “herculiorum,” are likely interpretations. On March 1, 293, the two new caesars were inaugurated in simultaneous ceremonies in Milan and in Sirmium, and this could well have been the occasion the inscriptions refer to. Less likely is the inauguration of the second tetrarchy of the Jovii and Herculii in 305, when the first two augusti, Diocletian and Maximian, resigned; at that time, their caesars were raised to the ranks of augusti and two new caesars were appointed.

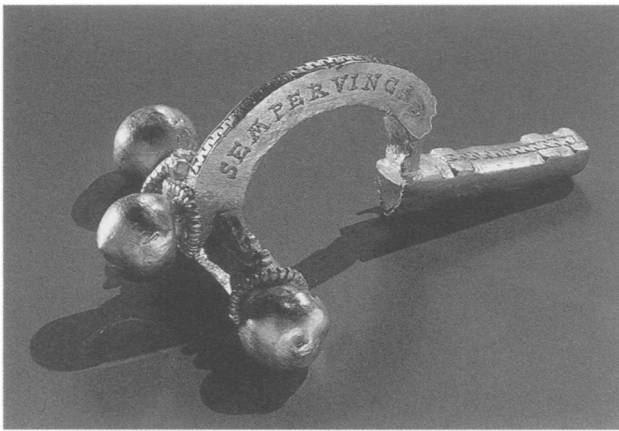
The fragment found in 1787 in the bog in Erickstanebrae (no. 2; Figure 8), not far from Moffat and close to a major Roman road north of Carlisle, Scotland, is the most spectacular piece in this group in spite of the missing crossbar. With a preserved length of 9.5 centimeters, to which the size of a bulbous knob of approximately one centimeter has to be added, it is about twice as long as the fibula from Bargone. The short foot still features the conventional geometric decoration, while both sides of the bow are decorated with a dense openwork design into which the inscriptions are integrated. Two outer registers feature a frieze of interlocked S-hooks; the central zones carry the inscriptions. A row of beaded wire, not unlike the additional decoration on one of the Petrijanec fibulae, empha-

sizes the curved outline of the bow. A noteworthy detail is a collar of plain gold sheet set around the foot end of the bow and supported by an S-shaped volute of beaded wire. A graffito PORTO or FORTO underneath the bow is most likely an owner's inscription.

The inscriptions on this piece—IOVI[O] AUG[USTO] and VOT[IS] XX—can only be a reference to the vicennialia, or twentieth anniversary, of the reign of the augustus Diocletian, which he celebrated on November 20, 303. No other tetrarchic emperor ruled that long. The celebrations, which took place in Rome, would have a profound effect on future events. Diocletian used the opportunity to secure from his colleague Maximian—Maximianus Herculus—the promise of their simultaneous retirement.

How such an outstanding fibula found its way to Scotland can only be imagined. All we know is that in 303 the original owner must have been close to Diocletian, close enough either to receive a splendid and precious gift commemorating the event or to have it made in honor of the senior augustus. In addition, we may infer that in 306 he must have accompanied Constantius Chlorus, then augustus of the west, on his campaign against the Picts and the Scots. One possible choice for an owner is, for instance, the son of Constantius Chlorus, the future emperor Constantine the Great, who had spent many years at the court of Diocletian before he was allowed to join his father on the campaign to Britain in 305. Only a year later, on the sudden death of Constantius in York in 306, the Roman armies in Britain ignored Diocletian's exclusion of Constantine from the second tetrarchy and





Figures 9a, b. Crossbow fibula, A.D. 286–ca. 306/7 or 308/9, from Arezzo, Italy. Gold with niello decoration, L. 7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase by subscription, 1895 (95.15.113)

proclaimed him augustus. This he refused, but he accepted the title and position of caesar.

In addition to its presumed historical importance, the fragment from Erickstanebrae is a valuable landmark for openwork-decorated Roman jewelry. The openwork technique applied here—conventionally called *opus intarsile*—was introduced by Roman goldsmiths in the late second century and became the hallmark of Late Roman gold work. The technical procedure is comparatively simple. The gold surface is pierced with small holes and then opened up to form the desired pattern. The particular skill of the Roman craftsmen lay not so much in the technical procedure as in the accommodation of design and decorative motifs to the technique. In the vast range of third-century Roman jewelry, decorated in openwork, the closest parallel to the *opus intarsile* of the Erickstanebrae fibula is the decorative framing of mounted coins in the treasure from Petrijanec of 285.<sup>33</sup> Here, we find similar ornaments and the same level of workmanship.

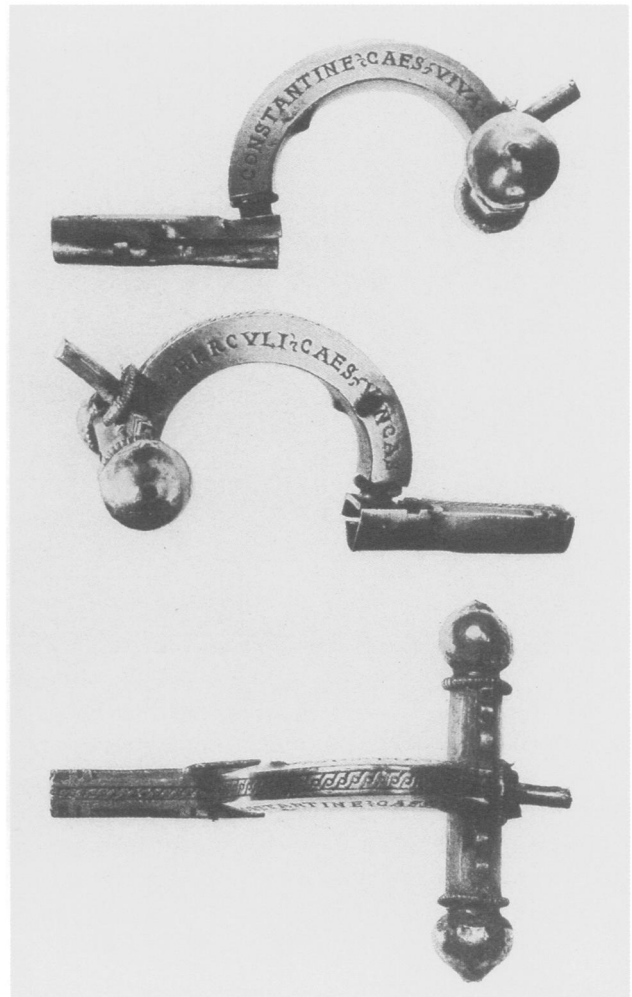


Figure 10. Crossbow fibula, A.D. 306–7. Gold with niello decoration, L. 8 cm. Museo d'Antichità, Turin (photo: after R. Knoll, "Eine goldene 'Kaiserfibel' aus Niederemmel vom Jahre 316," *Bonner Jahrbucher* 174 [1974], p. 235, figs. 16–18)

Also dating to the first tetrarchy is the fibula found in 1866 in Arezzo, Italy, now in the Metropolitan Museum (no. 3; Figures 9a, b). The shape is still in the mid-third-century tradition, and the weight of 52.6 grams—the equivalent of ten tetrarchic gold coins—relates it to the Petrijanec and Dyarchy Treasure fibulae. The knobs are still more globular than bulbous, but the appliqué on the transverse bar, in the shape of stylized dolphins, already cover the whole length of the arms. An ornamental border, reserved in gold against a niello background, follows the crest of the bow and continues on the foot, which is still short and decorated with horizontal grooves. The inscription *HERCULI AVGVSTE / SEMPER VINCAS* refers to a western emperor, and the most likely candidate is the augustus Maximian, who was as well known as Herculus as he was by his proper name. This suggests a date either between April 286, when Maximian was



Figures 11a, b. Crossbow fibula, A.D. 308–9, from “Caput Adriae,” Italy. Gold with niello decoration, L. 5.3 cm. Prähistorische Staatssammlung, Munich (photo: Prähistorische Staatssammlung)

promoted to augustus, and 305, when he and Diocletian resigned, or between 306/7 and 308/9, when he tried to regain power.

A less likely candidate is the second Herculus and, from 306, the western augustus, Constantius Chlorus. Because he died that same year, this would be a terminus ante quem. Also to be mentioned is Maxentius, the son of Maximian and unacknowledged emperor who seized power in Italy in 306 and held it until 312. Still, it is unlikely that he would have been praised as augustus. Even Constantine the Great, the son and successor of Constantius Chlorus, may be considered—for the period between 307 and 310—a Herculus, as the following fibula will demonstrate. Hercules, however, was never Constantine’s protective deity and, judging by the inscriptions on his coinage, he himself did not consider himself a Herculus.

The next two fibulae in our catalogue, one in Turin (no. 4; Figure 10), the other in Munich (no. 5; Figures 11a, b), reflect the fate of the second and third tetrarchy. The first one bears the inscription, *CONSTANTINE CAES VIVAS* (May Constantine caesar live), which is an indis-

putable reference to the emperor who was going to have a greater impact on history than any other of the tetrarchs, the future augustus Constantine the Great. More difficult is the other part of the inscription, *HERCULI CAES VINCAS* (May Herculus caesar win). When in 305 the first two augusti were followed by Constantinius Chlorus in the west and Galerius in the east, Galerius had secured the appointment of men who were primarily obligated to him as the new caesar. Maxentius and Constantine, the sons respectively of the former augustus, Maximianus Herculus, and his successor, Constantius Chlorus, had been passed over in favor of a certain Flavius Valerius Severus as the western caesar and Maximinus Daza as his eastern counterpart. As a result, this second tetrarchy lasted only one year. In 306, at the death of Constantius Chlorus, the army raised his son Constantine to the purple, and Galerius accepted the fait accompli to avoid civil war. Constantius’s legal successor, Severus, was raised to the senior position of augustus and Constantine became the fourth member of the second tetrarchy as caesar in the western part of the empire. The inscription on the fibula is an interesting political

statement, attributing to Constantine's position as caesar a legitimacy which de jure it did not have.

Constantine remained the Herculus caesar for a very short period, from July 25, 306, to March 31, 307, before he assumed the title of augustus. If both parts of the inscription refer to Constantine, then the period during which the fibula in Turin was made is limited to less than a year. If the "Herculi caes" mentioned in the second part is a reference not to Constantine but to the legal caesar, Flavius Valerius Severus, it must have been made before Severus was proclaimed augustus.

The same year, on October 28, 306, Maxentius, the son of Maximianus Herculus, was acclaimed emperor by military and civil elements in a revolt in Rome. Unlike Constantine, he was never acknowledged by the tetrarchs, and in 308 he was officially declared public enemy. Nevertheless he was able to maintain control over Italy and, for a while, even Africa, until on October 28, 312, he was defeated by Constantine in the famous battle at the Milvian Bridge.

The splendid fibula allegedly found at "Caput Adriae" (no. 5; Figures 11a, b), or, to be more precise, in Aquileia or Centur near Koper, bears the names of Maxentius and his infant son Romulus. The inscription dates the piece to a period between April 20, 308, and the summer of 309. On April 20, 308, Maxentius and the child Romulus became consuls; Romulus died the following year. Although no title is given, the combination of the two names, the expressed wish ("vincas") that can refer only to someone struggling for power, and the repetition of the standard formula of "vincas" for the augustus and the "vivas" for the caesar can only refer to Maxentius and Romulus.

The fibula features a very individual decorative scheme. A broad band with a floral scroll against a niello background covers the crest of the bow and the center of the foot. The inscriptions, MAXENTI VINCAS on one side of the bow and ROMULE VIVAS on the other, are set in fine ornamental frames. Elaborate appliqué, which increase in height from the terminals toward the join with the bow, completely cover the top of the crossarms. The large, onion-shaped knobs are faceted and terminate in clearly defined pointed tips. Both sides of the foot are decorated in relief with pairs of C-volutes that are matched by a double volute at the far end of the foot.

In the early years of his rule, Maxentius himself carefully avoided the title of augustus or even of caesar in the vain effort to appease the tetrarchs. The "vincas" seems to express the hope of a supporter that Maxentius will win the recognition of the tetrarchs. Omitting the title was either a gesture of politeness toward them or simply of prudence. The exact find

spot is not known, but "Caput Adriae" might be an indication that the fibula was hidden or lost in 312 when Constantine, on his way to Rome and the battle at the Milvian Bridge, defeated the larger part of Maxentius's army at Verona.

On July 25, 315, Constantine the Great, who had in the meantime become well established as the sole ruler of the western part of the empire, celebrated his decennalia—the beginning of the tenth year of his rule—in the tetrarchic capital of Trier. Two gold fibulae with inscriptions referring to this event have been preserved from antiquity, both in a fragmentary state. One is of unknown provenance, now in Paris (no. 6); the other is a stray find from Niederremmel (no. 7), a small village in the vicinity of Trier, Germany. Of the piece in Paris only the bow, with a niello-inlaid guilloche on the crest, and the large, bulbous head knob have been preserved. The inscription, displayed in niello on both sides of the bow, is the usual official formula for the occasion: D N CONSTANTINI AUG and VOT X MULTIS XX. These phrases announce the fulfillment of vows made for the ruler's tenth anniversary and anticipation for the twentieth.

Measuring 9.5 centimeters, the fibula from Niederremmel is in the same class as the one from Erickstanebrae, and, judging by the present weight of 75.5 grams, originally it must have equaled about a third of a Roman pound or about twenty-five Constantinian solidi.<sup>34</sup> A graffito on the back of the bow—SERVANDUS—probably gives the name of a former owner. The crossbar is missing, but the quality of the workmanship is still overwhelming. The large, globular head knob, delicately shaped with an elongated point, as on the fragment in Paris, allows us to imagine how the terminals of the crossbar looked.

Both sides of the bow are inscribed with carefully spaced letters, and a precisely executed guilloche band embellishes the crest of the bow. The foot, with a slightly trapezoidal top plate, is dominated by a guilloche, so that the grooves on both sides play a small role decoratively. The niello inlays are less ornate than those on the Maxentius fibula (our fifth example in the catalogue above) but are of exquisite quality. The inscriptions, VOTIS X D N CONSTANTINI AUG and VOTIS X D N LICINI AUG, date the fibula to the years between 315 and 317. They refer to the only surviving members of the tetrarchy, Constantine and Licinius. In 310, Maximianus Herculus had been forced to commit suicide, Galerius had died in 311, and Maxentius drowned at the Milvian Bridge in 312. Valerius Licinianus Licinius or Jovius Licinius, a military colleague of the augustus Galerius, had been adopted by Diocletian and, on November 11, 308, raised to the rank of augustus, a year after

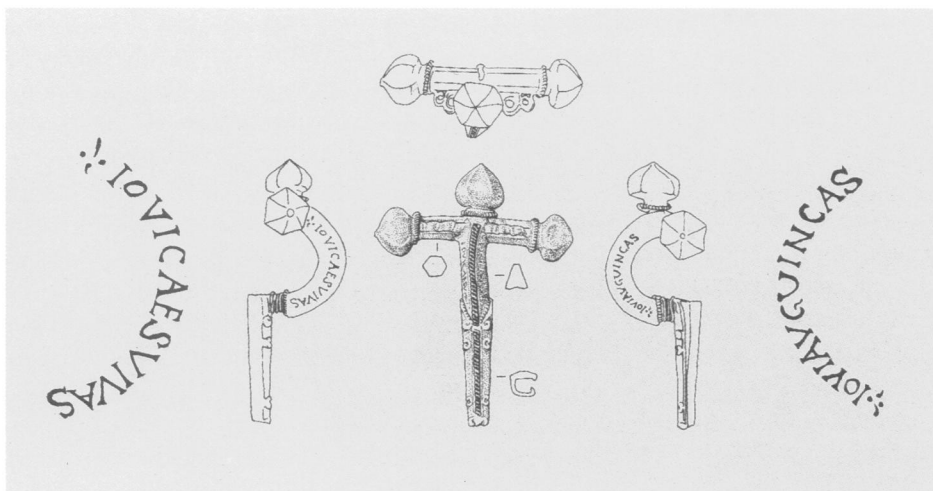


Figure 12. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 317–24 from a grave in Taraneš, former Yugoslavia. Gold with niello decoration, L. 10.4 cm. Location unknown (drawing: M. Ivanovski, “The Grave of a Warrior from the Period of Licinius I Found at Taraneš,” *Archaeologia Jugoslavica* 24 [1987], p. 85, fig. 1)

Constantine had assumed that title. The relation between Constantine and Licinius was tense from the beginning. In 314, it culminated in a civil war. Constantine’s victory terminated the brief encounter and led to the reconciliation of the two augusti. Precisely these circumstances are reflected by the inscriptions on the fibula from Niederremmel. Constantine celebrated the tenth year of his reign on July 25, 315, and Licinius on November 11, 317. Either the fibula was made on the occasion of Constantine’s decennalia in 315 and—as a goodwill gesture—it announces the decennalia of Licinius, or, alternatively, it was made on the occasion of Licinius’s decennalia in 317, commemorating those of Constantine. The second date seems to be more likely, as it is the year in which the two eldest sons of Constantine and the son of Licinius were appointed consuls, like the inscription on the fibula an expression of the friendly terms between the reconciled emperors.

In shape and decoration close to the fragment from Niederremmel, our last example (no. 8; Figure 12) is the largest and heaviest of the gold fibulae; it bears an imperial inscription and was found in 1984 in a rich grave in Taraneš, a small hamlet on the Macedonian-Albanian frontier, in the region of Debar, near the river Drin. The main difference between these two is that on the Taraneš fibula two pairs of C-volutes edge the foot, while the piece from Niederremmel still features the conventional geometric design.

Nothing is known about the person buried in the solitary grave in Taraneš except what we can learn from the grave goods. The impressive weight of his fibula (160.8 g) equals a Roman half-pound. Displayed on both sides of the bow are the inscriptions IOVI AUG VINCAS (Jovius augustus you shall win) and IOVI CAES VIVAS (Jovius caesar you shall live). On both sides an ivy leaf is

set before the first letter. A dedication to the Jovii can only refer to an eastern augustus and to his caesar. Possible candidates are Diocletian and Galerius, which would suggest a date between 293 and 305; Galerius and his nephew Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximinus (originally Daia), between 305 and 308; and Licinius and his infant son and caesar, between 317 and 324. The similarity to the Niederremmel fragment, the elongated shape, and the volute decoration favor the last possibility.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE OWNERS OF CROSSBOW FIBULAE WITH IMPERIAL INSCRIPTIONS

Two questions arise in connection with the gold fibulae bearing imperial inscriptions. Who was entitled to wear them, and where were they made? Written sources show that already in the second half of the third century, gold or silver fibulae were among the gifts army officers received as part of imperial donatives. And archaeological finds and pictorial representations confirm that at this time fibulae were worn by military officers.<sup>36</sup> Reliefs, wall paintings, and mosaics of the later third and the early fourth centuries show that the characteristic outfit of Roman officers throughout this period was the *pilleus Pannonicus*, a fur cap that had originated in the Danube area, and a cloak held at the right shoulder by a slender, medium-sized crossbow fibula, with the folds of the garment gathered underneath the bow, the crossbar resting on the shoulder, and the catch pointing upward. In shape and size these pieces resemble those from the Petrijanec and the Dyarchy hoards as well as those with imperial inscriptions. The “Great Hunt” mosaic in the corridor of the villa at Piazza Armerina, Sicily, which

dates to the second and third decades of the fourth century, confirms that officers, and only officers, wore cloaks secured with gold crossbow fibulae.<sup>37</sup>

As for the fibulae with imperial inscriptions, it is reasonable to assume that they were given to high-ranking officers by the *augusti* or *caesars* mentioned on them. In fact, the similarity in shape and decoration of the fibulae in Paris and Turin (nos. 4 and 6, in the list above), as well as the example from Niederemmel (no. 7, above), betrays a certain standardization, and this in turn suggests that larger numbers of such fibulae were officially commissioned by the emperors and that they were part of the regular donatives characteristic for this period. Constantine's path to supremacy is said to have left "a glittering trail of gold," and some of this gold might have been in the shape of elegant crossbow fibulae with guilloche borders and inscriptions referring to the donor. In the east, Licinius obviously followed suit, but once the struggle for power between the two emperors had been decided in Constantine's favor and he had become the sole ruler of the Roman empire, public professions of loyalty were no longer necessary. No fibula with an imperial inscription dates to this period.

The other possibility regarding the origin of these fibulae is that those with imperial inscriptions were commissioned by loyal supporters of the rulers whose names they bear, and that the inscriptions served as public statements of their loyalty. The official nature of gold crossbow fibulae does not preclude this. If the right to wear such a piece had been granted, still, it might not always have been accompanied by the actual fibula but, rather, by the amount of gold necessary for having it made. The fibulae from Bargone and from "Caput Adriae," with their individual decoration, seem to belong to this category.

With the grave from Taraneš, we have our first indication that, from now on, gold crossbow fibulae can no longer be automatically associated with military officers. In addition to the largest and heaviest gold fibula with an imperial inscription, this grave contained a silver ewer, a niello-decorated silver plate, a silver spoon, precious glass vessels, a silver ring, a silver belt buckle and silver spur, an iron axe (most likely an *insignum* of the occupant's position), a large cylindrical tube in bronze of a type that was used for the storage of a stylus and parchment, an inkwell in bronze, a bronze *stilus*, and a silver eraser. These objects are characteristically those of a civil officer of some standing, not of a member of the army.<sup>38</sup> The portrait medallion from the base of a gold-glass vessel in the British Museum allows us, perhaps, to visualize the officer buried at Taraneš.<sup>39</sup> It shows a beardless, short-haired

man wearing a tunic embroidered with crosshatched patterns and a cloak fastened by a crossbow fibula. He is flanked by objects indicating his professional status, a *rotulus* and a case containing three styli, exactly the writing equipment found in the grave in Taraneš.

After Diocletian's reorganization of the Roman administration, the nomenclature and emoluments of the imperial service paralleled those of the army. Officeholders held titles of military equivalence and received military stipends. Literary sources do not say if this meant that the military uniform was adapted immediately, as the official attire of civil servants, but it seems likely, and the grave finds from Taraneš confirm that already before the exclusive rule of Constantine the Great there was no longer a difference between the garments of the *militia*, that is the administration, and of the *militia armata*, the army.

#### CONSTANTINIAN GOLD FIBULAE, CA. A.D. 313–50

Only a very few gold fibulae may be reliably dated to the period of Constantine the Great and his sons and successors. The few pieces extant confirm that the changes in shape and style, first noticed on the tetrarchic fibulae, had immediately established themselves as the norms in the decorative repertory of fibula makers. Two pieces found in a wooden coffin in Hirsova (Figure 13), or ancient Carsium, Romania, and reliably dated to about 318–20,<sup>40</sup> show that the elegant C-volutes on the sloping edges of the elongated foot have replaced the geometric ornaments characteristic of third-century crossbow fibulae. Elaborate appliqué diminishes in size from the center toward the terminals completely cover the crossbar. The bow is slender, with a flat crest set in a near right angle against the sides.

The standardization is obvious; more difficult to explain, however, are the differences in size and weight. These two pieces are 8 and 12 centimeters long and weigh 50.2 and 120.88 grams. If the right to wear the *chlamys* was granted officially, it may be that the fibulae were also presented, as medals and decorations are awarded now, and thus these differences might reflect different ranks and honors. However, it is also possible that it was a personal decision by a *chlamydatus*, as one who wore the *chlamys* was called, on how much to spend on this ornament and what it should look like. This assumption is supported by a gold fibula that was part of the treasure from Starcova, Serbia.<sup>41</sup> The length is 8.8 centimeters, the weight 93 grams. The foot features the C-volutes arranged in pairs.



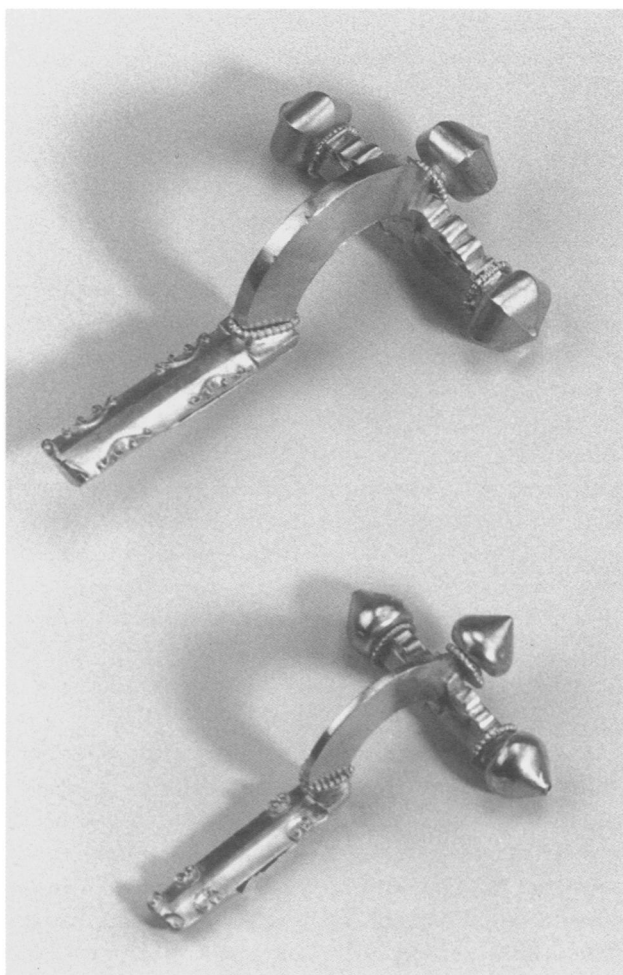


Figure 13. Two fibulae, ca. A.D. 318–20, from a grave in Hirsova, Romania. Gold, L. 12 and 8 cm. Muzeul Național de Istorie a României, Bucharest (photo: Muzeul Național de Istorie a României)

Unusual are the small gold globules attached to both sides of the bow, either as an expression of the personal taste of the owner or as an artistic experiment on the part of the goldsmith to whom we owe this piece. Numismatic evidence suggests a date for the hoard of before 337.

An emergent stylistic change in the fibula's evolution becomes apparent in a gold example found in Lengerich, Lower Saxony, Germany, an area far beyond the borders of the Roman empire. Except for the fibula (Figure 14) and a number of Constantinian gold coins, which date the find to about 350, the context is purely Germanic.<sup>42</sup> No doubt, this small treasure once belonged to a Germanic warrior who had served as an officer in the Roman army. With a length of 7.5 centimeters and a weight of 53.13 grams (one-sixth of a Roman pound), the fibula certainly belongs to the class of medium-size gold crossbow fibulae. At a first glance, it follows the conventional pattern, with the

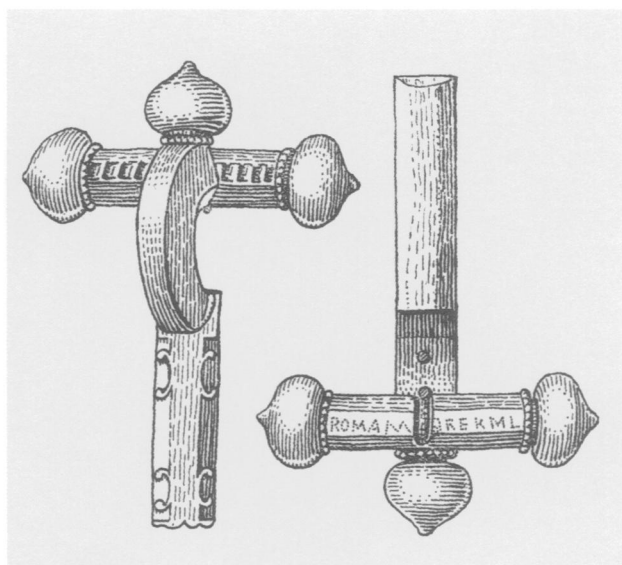


Figure 14. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 350, found in Lengerich, Germany. Gold, L. 7.5 cm. Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover (drawing: from G. Behrens, "Römische Fibeln mit Inschrift," in *Reinecke Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Paul Reinecke* am 25. September 1947 [Mainz, 1950], p. 11, fig. 14.3)

now-established C-volutes arranged in pairs on the foot. But the knobs are larger than before, heavy appliqués are attached to the top of the crossbar, and the flattened ridge along the crest of the bow as well as the foot are slightly broader. In contrast to the slender tetrarchic or earlier Constantinian pieces, the fibula from Lengerich looks sturdy and heavy. Heaviness and a certain angularity become even more prominent in a group of extraordinary gilt-bronze fibulae with silver and niello inlays dating to approximately the same period.

#### GILT FIBULAE WITH SILVER AND NIELLO INLAYS, CA. A.D. 350–90

Not one gold fibula reliably dated to the third and early fourth quarter of the fourth century is known. It is difficult to decide whether this is due to the lack of archaeological evidence or whether there are other reasons. It looks as if, during this period, the majority of those who were entitled to wear a gold fibula either did not have the means or were not willing to expend the necessary amount of gold for this purpose. In shape, there is no difference between bronze and gold, and a gilt-bronze fibula was as impressive as one entirely in gold.

Among the vast body of gilt-bronze fibulae dating to the mid-fourth century, the superior quality of one small group of pieces attracts particular attention. Unlike the ordinary bronze crossbow fibulae, which

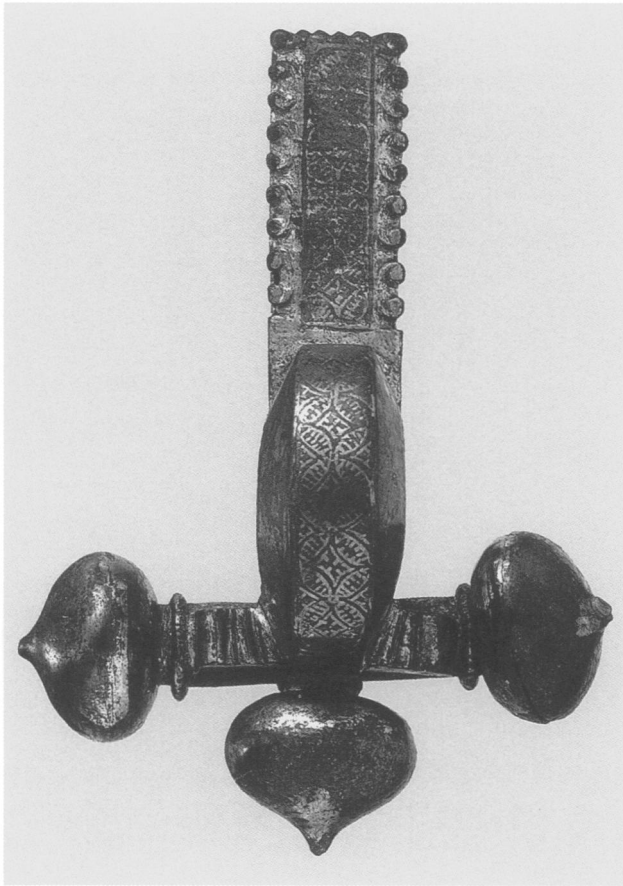


Figure 15. Crossbow fibula, mid-4th century A.D. Gilt bronze with niello inlay, L. 8.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1999 (1999.42)

are made from cast elements, these are manufactured exactly as gold fibulae are, and although none of the prototypes has survived, we can assume that gold fibulae provided the models.

The single elements are fabricated from sheet metal, and since hammered bronze sheet is much more easily corroded than cast bronze, in most cases the bronze fibulae made according to this technique are today in a rather poor state of preservation. Only a few pieces, such as an unusually well preserved fibula in the Metropolitan Museum, allow us to imagine the original beauty and splendor of these works (Figure 15, and Dandridge, Figure 15).<sup>43</sup>

These fibulae are not very large. The average length is only seven to eight centimeters, but a certain angularity to the single forms and their overall sculptural quality are very impressive. The most important innovation is that the crest of the bow as well as the catch are now much broader than before.

The broad, flat crest is set almost at a right angle to the sidewalls of the bow, which makes it quite volumi-

nous. The catch is either semicircular or triangular in cross section, its broad, flat top plate edged by sturdy C-volutes. Large appliquéés on the transverse bar and voluminous bulbous knobs add up to a rather heavy appearance. From the very beginning, Roman fibula makers endeavored to embellish crossbow fibulae with additional decoration. The crest of the bow, narrow as it was, offered space for ornamental bands, the sidewalls for inscriptions. By enlarging the crest of the bow and the catch top plate, the artists created additional flat surfaces, and they certainly knew how to exploit the decorative potential. A dense, carpetlike pattern of squares, octagons, rhomboids, or rosettes, formed by white, silver, and black niello inlays, has replaced the earlier bands. In most cases, the decoration is strictly ornamental, but occasionally small roundels with the engraved portrait busts or heads of male youths in three-quarter view are integrated into the geometric design.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes even a Christogram—the Greek initials of the name of Jesus Christ—appears on such fibulae, one of the first public statements of Christian convictions on a personal ornament.<sup>45</sup>

Coin-dated finds suggest that the type was popular in the middle to the third quarter of the fourth century,<sup>46</sup> and in fact, the decoration does reflect the aesthetic ideas and concepts of this period. Similar ornamental patterns occur on mosaics and silver plate of the Constantinian period. Various finds and pictorial representations show that the same social groups as before were still entitled to wear such fibulae, namely, the elite soldiery and officeholders, and no doubt there were proud Christians among them. Due to a change in funeral customs—the dead are no longer buried with their personal belongings—fibulae essentially cease to be found within the empire. Along the frontiers, many military officers (an estimated 80 percent of them of barbarian origin) continued to be buried with their military fittings in accordance with Germanic traditions. One of the finest fibulae of this type, similar in shape and decoration to the piece in the Metropolitan, was found among the grave goods in the sarcophagus of a Roman officer, most likely of Germanic origin, in Bonn, Germany.<sup>47</sup> Less elaborate versions occur in military cemeteries<sup>48</sup> and in the graves of civil officers along the frontiers of the Roman empire.<sup>49</sup> Pictorial representations attest to the popularity that fibulae of this type seem to have enjoyed for a short period. For instance, on a gold-glass medallion from Strbinci, in the former Yugoslavia,<sup>50</sup> the fibula holding the chlamys of an elegant young official is not only the point of focus of the whole representation but it also shows, in considerable detail, the extremely large knobs, the steep short bow, and the broad foot.

#### THE LATE FOURTH AND FIRST HALF OF THE FIFTH CENTURY A.D.

Over the course of the last decades of the fourth century, the fibula with angular bow and broad foot went out of fashion. The heavy, angular shape was replaced by a slender, elongated type with filigree-like C-volutes along the edges of the catch top plate (Figure 16). The length of this new variety averages between 7.5 and 10.5 centimeters, and the steep bow is arched like a horseshoe. The sidewalls are elegantly curved, and there is a very narrow ridge along the crest, inlaid once again with a small ornamental niello band. The appliqué on the crossbar are rather discreet, and the elegantly shaped knobs, neither too big nor too small, are now regularly faceted. The catch is reduced to an angular tube, just wide enough to hold the pin; freestanding C-volutes with disk-shaped terminals are aligned along the sloping sides of this tube. A small rectangular extension at one end of the tube allows the bow to rest on it.

Stylistically, the change in concept is most remarkable. The C-volutes are no longer integrated parts but dominate both the catch, which is reduced to a small tube, and the fibula itself. This design was possible only because of a fascinating technical innovation—the use of a screw mechanism to hold the pin of the fibula in place.<sup>51</sup> Since the early third century, the pin had been permanently attached to a rivet inside the crossbar; the rivet served as a pivot for the pin. At some point, in the late fourth century, the rivet was replaced by a removable screw, with a spindle slightly longer than half the length of the crossbar. One of the side knobs was used as a decorative screw head. Inside the crossbar, a threaded nut corresponds to the threading on the spindle. Once the pointed end of the pin is inserted into a channel in the center of the tubular catch and the eyelet placed into an opening in the crossbar, underneath its join with the bow, the tapered end of the screw can be pushed through the eyelet and rotated, thus holding the pin firmly in place (see Dandridge, Figures 3, 8).

The system is simple and safer than the original slot system used since the introduction of the crossbow fibula; still, the everyday use of the screw seems to have been considered a nuisance. The representation of a servant carrying his master's chlamys with the fibula already attached to it (on a wall painting in the tomb of a Roman official in the Balkans) suggests that it was considered easier to pull the cloak over one's head with the fibula already in place than it was to repeatedly go through the procedure of opening and closing the catch mechanism.<sup>52</sup>

Apparently, it was the introduction of the screw mechanism, allowing designers to minimize the width

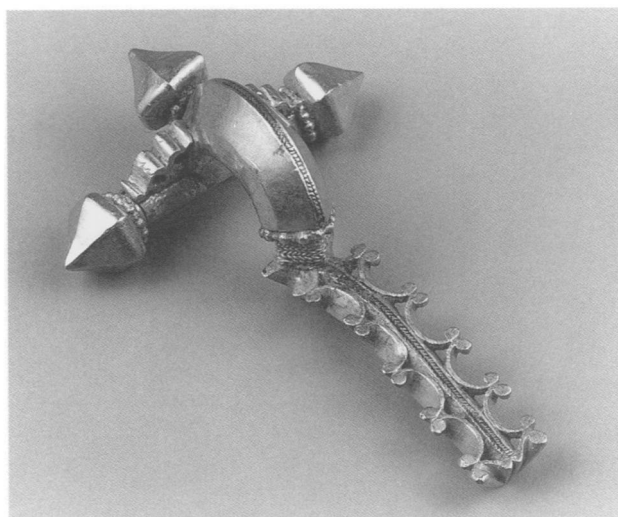


Figure 16. Crossbow fibula with freestanding C-volutes, late 4th–first half of 5th century A.D. Gold, L. 6.07 cm. Burton Y. Berry Collection, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, IUAM 76.75.23 (photo: Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague)

of the catch, that led to the rather abrupt end of the angular type. This technical innovation permitted a sensationally light and elegant reinterpretation of the basic shape.

Well-dated examples in gold, as well as in gilt bronze, are rare.<sup>53</sup> In 1866, the catch of just such a gold fibula was found, together with twenty-eight gold coins and two medallions, in the Poitou region of France.<sup>54</sup> The most recent coin, a solidus issued not later than 398,<sup>55</sup> suggests that the small hoard was buried around the turn of the century. A similar, or slightly later date, can be assumed for a gold fibula, 10.5 centimeters long and with a weight of 81.5 grams, in the Ténès treasure, a jewelry group<sup>56</sup> that was most likely hidden in 429 when the Vandals, under their king Geiseric, invaded northern Africa. Two gilt-bronze fibulae, with freestanding C-volutes, found in the Late Roman *castellum* Sucidava in Romania (destroyed in the course of Hunnish invasions either in 442 or at the latest in 447), seem to be the latest examples.<sup>57</sup>

Pictorial representations suggest a wider chronological spread. Images of fibulae with clearly defined C-volutes occur on the obelisk base of the Hippodrome in Constantinople, finished before 392;<sup>58</sup> on the Stilicho diptych in the cathedral treasury from Monza, Italy, dated to 395;<sup>59</sup> and on a late-fourth- or early-fifth-century wall painting in the hypogeum of Santa Maria in Stelle, Verona.<sup>60</sup> The latest evidence is a wall painting in the catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples, for which an early-sixth-century



Figure 17. Wall painting in the catacombs of San Gennaro, Naples, ca. A.D. 500 (photo: Museum Würth and Archäologisches Landesmuseum Baden-Württemberg)

date is generally assumed (Figure 17).<sup>61</sup> The deceased, identified by an inscription as an otherwise unknown Theotecnus, hardly a military man but a high-ranking and obviously wealthy officeholder, is depicted in an embroidered chlamys held by a gold fibula with C-volutes.

The social background of the gold crossbow fibula and its use has not changed, but never before was the wide range of those who were entitled to wear the chlamys better illustrated than by the diptych from Monza, referred to above. Represented are a military officer, with sword and shield, in a belted tunic and a richly embroidered ankle-length chlamys, and a young boy, dressed in the same way but without arms. In both cases the chlamys is held by a crossbow fibula with freestanding C-volutes, which the artist considered necessary to indicate in detail. Most likely these are the images of the “magister utriusque militiae,” Stilicho, and his son Eucherius, great-nephew of the emperor Theodosius, who was appointed tribunus and notarius in 395, an occasion which would have justified such a diptych.

Even more interesting than the haughtiness of these two *chlamydati* is the fact that the highest-ranking and most powerful man of the Roman empire, the head of the army as well as of the administration, wears exactly the same fibula as the holder of a comparatively low administrative position. At this period the cloak and the chlamys signaled not rank but government employment.

## THE FINAL STAGE, CA. A.D. 450–CA. 558

Eight gold fibulae, one of them the piece in the Metropolitan Museum described at the beginning of this paper, illustrate the final stage of the crossbow fibula’s development.<sup>62</sup> The transverse bar and bow of these pieces are very much like those of the fibulae with free-standing C-volutes, with which they also share the screw mechanism. The crossbar is slightly shorter than before, and the knobs are faceted. The hollow bow, shaped like a horseshoe, has gently curved sidewalls that expand from a narrow ridge and are flattened toward the underside. The catch has undergone a major change. Delicate construction, with a C-volute edging, has been replaced by a more solid construction that is triangular or semi-circular in cross section and has a rectangular top plate firmly encased in a molded frame. With one exception—a small fibula of unknown provenance in Stockholm (no. 1 in the list below)—the top plate always features pierced decoration. On the following list, this is the first piece cited, since it represents the basic shape. The next three fibulae, which have dated contexts, are presented in chronological order. For the fifth piece, the find spot is known and a likely date can be assumed. The last three pieces, among them the gold fibula in the Metropolitan, are presented in a tentative chronological order.

1. Unknown date and provenance. Gold, L. 4.9 cm, 14 g. Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm. Unpublished (Figure 18).
2. Ca. 454–ca. 473, Apahida, Romania. Gold, L. 11.5 cm, 54.29 g. Muzeul Național de Istorie a României, Bucharest (Figures 19a, b).<sup>63</sup>
3. Ca. 464–before 482, Tournai, Belgium (17th-century copy).<sup>64</sup> Gold, L. 6.2 cm, ca. 28 g. Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck (Figure 20).
4. Before ca. 476/77 or 493, Reggio Emilia, Italy. Gold, L. 8 cm, 31.87 g. Museo Chierici di Paletnologia, Reggio Emilia (Figure 21).<sup>65</sup>
5. Ca. 410–ca. 472, Palatine Hill, Rome. Gold, L. 7.6 cm, 32 g. Museo dell’Alto Medioevo, Rome (Figure 22).<sup>66</sup>
6. Unknown date, Asia Minor. Gold, L. 6.1 cm, 9.33 g. Burton Y. Berry Collection, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington (Figure 23).<sup>67</sup>
7. Unknown date and provenance. Gold, L. 11.9 cm, 78.4 g. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1995 (1995.97) (Figures 1, 2).
8. Unknown date and provenance. Gold, L. 6.62 cm, 20 g. Musée du Louvre, Paris (Figure 24).<sup>68</sup>

### *The Apahida Fibula*

The Germanic chieftain who was buried with his gold fibula (no. 2; Figures 19a, b) in a wooden coffin, near the small village of Apahida in Transylvania, Romania, did not leave a particularly large mark on history. Historical sources do not mention him, and nothing is known about him apart from what we learn from the possessions that accompanied him in death. His name, inscribed on one of the finger rings found in the grave, was Omharus.<sup>69</sup> He was a Christian and had received precious gifts from the administration in Constantinople in the form of silver and glass vessels and gold jewelry. The exact nature of his connection with the Roman empire is not known, but the fact that he owned a gold crossbow fibula leaves no doubt that he had held some Roman rank and title.

The history of Transylvania in the fifth century is not very well documented. Until 454 the region was under the control of the Huns, and when they were defeated by a Germanic coalition, the Gothic tribes, the Gepidae and the Ostrogoths, took over.<sup>70</sup> In 473 the majority of the Goths left for Italy. For a short while, between 454 and 473, the Apahida region must have been the seat of powerful Germanic chieftains, either Ostrogoths or Gepidae, and Omharus must have been one of them.

With a length of 11.5 centimeters and a weight of 54.29 grams (two Roman ounces), the Apahida fibula is a splendid gold object, more than twice the size of the fibula in Stockholm and nearly four times its weight. But the basic shape and main decorative motif, a Latin cross, are the same. In both cases, an elegantly shaped bow is combined with a triangular catch, and on both pieces the rectangular top panel is set in a beveled frame. On the fibula in Stockholm a plain cross, cut out from gold sheet, is set on an equally plain background, also made from gold sheet; on the Apahida fibula, the cross is part of an open-work design. It is reserved as a silhouette in a lattice-work formed by two elaborate meanders and a guilloche border.

By splaying the ends of the arms of the cross as they extend into the outer border and by ignoring the fine line that separates the outer border from the inner field, the artist has achieved the illusion of three layers of decoration. Thus, the fine guilloche border represents the basic layer supporting the larger meanders on which the silhouette of the cross seems to be imposed. A comparison with the meander bands in the mosaic decoration of the mausoleum of the empress Galla Placidia in Ravenna, built during the second quarter of the fifth century, allows us to understand the

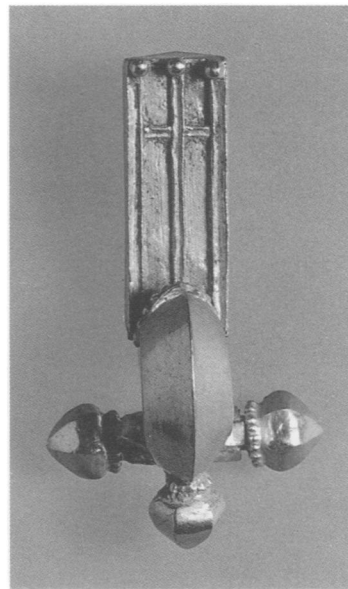


Figure 18. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 450–ca. 558. Gold, L. 4.9 cm. Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm (photo: Medelhavsmuseet)

particular form of the meander on the Apahida fibula.<sup>71</sup> In effect, the artist tried to depict a three-dimensional ornament in a two-dimensional medium.

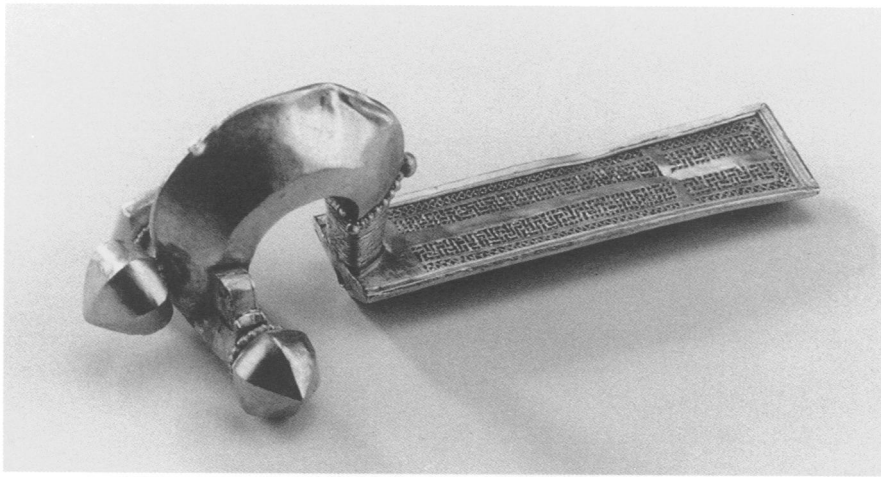
Like those of the gold fibula in the Metropolitan, the two back panels of the Apahida fibula's catch are decorated with pierced decoration. In both cases, this is remarkable, as the back of the catch was hardly visible when the fibula was worn. Each panel of the Apahida fibula features a vivid acanthus scroll, which, if seen in connection with the Latin cross on the front panel, might also have a symbolic meaning as a tree of life.

### *The Fibula from Tournai and the Fibula in the Burton Y. Berry Collection*

The Frankish king Childeric was buried in 482 in Tournai, Belgium, in full regalia according to pagan Germanic traditions (accompanied even by the bodies of several horses) and with the insignia of a Roman official, a purple chlamys, a gold crossbow fibula, garnet-inlaid jewelry originating in a Roman workshop, and about one pound of gold in the shape of Roman coins in his purse. He wore a gold finger ring with his portrait and engraved in Latin with his name and title: *CHILDERICUS REX*. He was a Germanic king as well as an ally of the Roman empire. Most likely he held the position of a protector of the Roman province *Belgica Secunda*.<sup>72</sup>

King Childeric's fibula is small and modest (no. 3; Figure 20). The length is 6.2 centimeters, the weight, which can only be guessed at since the original no longer exists, might be 28 grams, about a Roman ounce. The shape varies slightly from that of other





Figures 19a, b. Crossbow fibula found in Apahida, Transylvania, Romania, 3rd quarter of 5th century A.D. Gold, L. 11.5 cm. Muzeul Național de Istorie a României, Bucharest (photo: Muzeul Național de Istorie a României)



crossbow fibulae of this period. The catch is not triangular but semicircular in cross section, and it is completely covered by an allover design—a diamond pattern executed in openwork. It is a monotonous ornamental figure that betrays little imagination, used only to give texture to the otherwise plain surfaces of secondary elements. The straps of a diadem,<sup>73</sup> the hoop of a bracelet,<sup>74</sup> and the underside of the catch of the gold crossbow fibula from Asia Minor in the Burton Y. Berry Collection (no. 6; Figure 23) all feature the same ornamentation.

In size and shape, the fibula in the Burton Y. Berry Collection represents the closest parallel to the Childeric fibula, although the workmanship and the artistic quality of the Berry piece are much better. It is 6.1 centimeters long and weighs 9.33 grams. A carefully organized pierced decoration, with a guilloché band as an outer border and a Latin cross with heart-shaped ornaments in the center embellish the rectangular top panel of the catch. The bottom, semicircular in cross section like the Childeric fibula, repeats the guil-

loche border, which now frames an allover pattern of rhomboids like the one on the Childeric fibula.

The king must have worn his gold-embroidered purple chlamys and gold crossbow fibula with pride. Otherwise, he would hardly have been buried wearing the fibula. Obviously he was not aware of the mediocrity of his piece, suggesting that there were not many people in his part of the world entitled to such insignia.

#### *The Fibula from Reggio Emilia*

The Gothic treasure of Roman and Germanic jewelry and gold coins hidden in Reggio Emilia, northern Italy, either after 476/77 or soon after 493 at the latest,<sup>75</sup> gives us a glimpse into the situation in Italy immediately after the fall of the western part of the Roman empire. On September 4, 476, the last western emperor, who bore the significant name Romulus Augustulus, abdicated, and the Germanic *magister militum* Odoacer took over the administration of Italy. He made no claim to sovereignty. All he asked from the emperor in

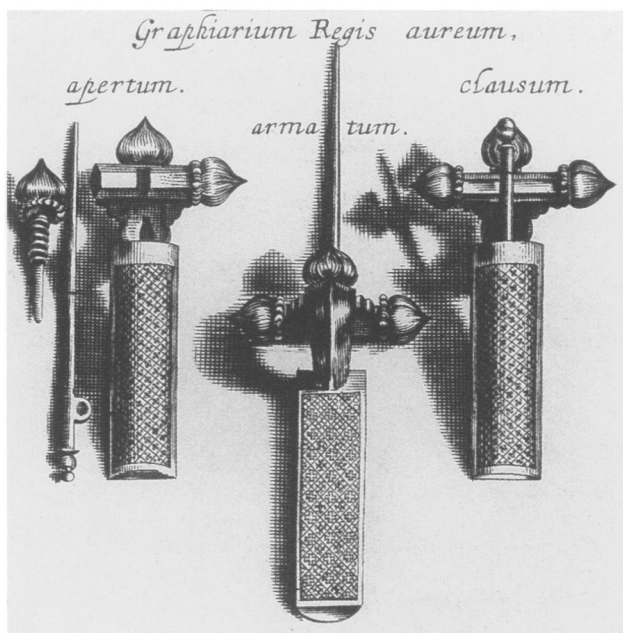


Figure 20. The Childeric fibula, ca. A.D. 464–before 482, found in Tournai, Belgium. Gold, L. 6.2 cm. 17th-century copy, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck (drawing: from J. J. Chiflet, *Anastasi Childerici I* [Antwerp, 1655], p. 182)

Constantinople was the rank of patrician; as such, he was entitled to wear the chlamys and fibula, a right he already enjoyed, of course, as a *magister militum*.

About ten years later, in 488, the Ostrogothic king Theodoric, known to posterity as the Great, led his people into Italy with the concurrence of the Byzantine government and with the intention of overthrowing Odoacer and establishing his own kingdom; it took him five years to achieve that goal. On March 15, 493, at a banquet in the palace of Ravenna, King Theodoric, also a Roman patrician and *magister militum*, killed Odoacer in person with a single stroke of his sword. Our sources do not tell us if, on this occasion, the two patricians and *magistres militum* of the Roman empire wore gold crossbow fibulae, but it is possible.

These events are the historical background for the treasure from Reggio Emilia. This locality, situated on the Via Aurelia halfway between Ravenna (the seat, successively, of the western imperial court and of the Germanic kings of Italy) and Pavia, might well have been the refuge for a wealthy Germanic family. It was here, in 490, that Odoacer had besieged Theodoric. In addition to the fibula and fifty-five gold coins, the hoard, carefully hidden in a Late Roman building, consisted of a pair of Germanic fibulae of a type exclusively worn by women; a set of the finest Late Roman jewelry; and two silver vessels. The Germanic man's name Etila and the female name Stafara are inscribed on a gold wedding

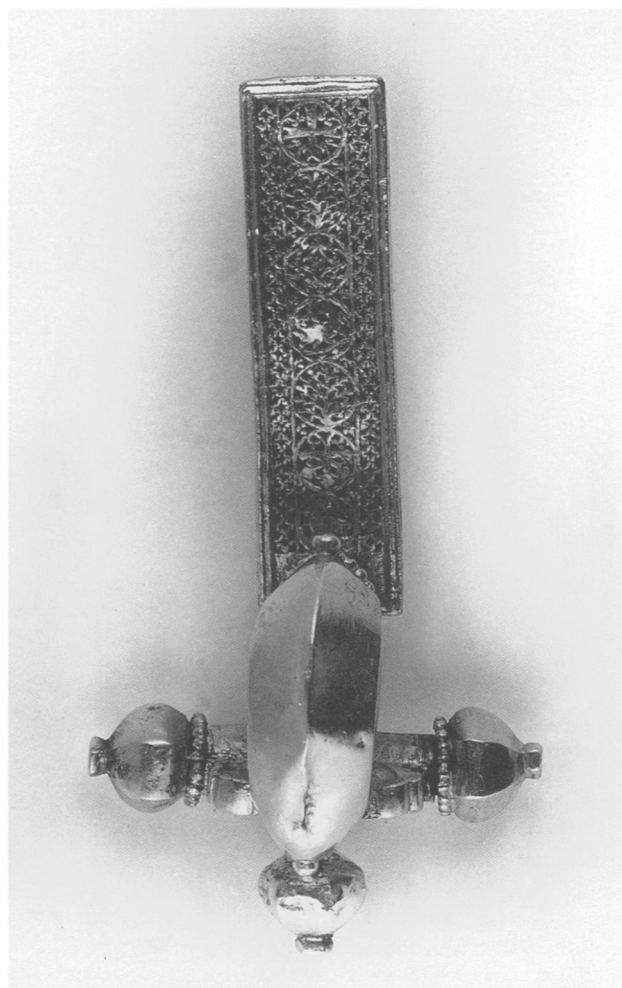


Figure 21. Crossbow fibula, before ca. A.D. 476/77 or 493, found in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Gold, L. 8 cm. Museo Chierici di Paletnologia, Reggio Emilia (photo: Museo Chierici di Paletnologia)

ring. We can well imagine the original owners of the treasure: a Romanized officer of Germanic origin who—most likely in the course of a successful military career—had received Roman rank, entitling him to wear a crossbow fibula, and his wife, who continued to wear a Germanic costume and Roman jewelry, a cultural mix often encountered in this period.

With a length of 8 centimeters and a weight of 31.87 grams, the fibula from Reggio Emilia (no. 4; Figure 21) falls, in weight and size, between the Omharus and the Childeric fibulae. The two lower panels of the catch, which is triangular in cross section, are left undecorated; the top panel, set in a beveled frame, features a dense design rendered in *opus interrasile*. An outer border of tiny cross-shaped motifs, a common *opus interrasile* ornament since the third century,<sup>76</sup> frames the central area filled with seven contiguous roundels. Each of them encircles a figural motif. From the bow to the end of the catch, these are a dove, five differently

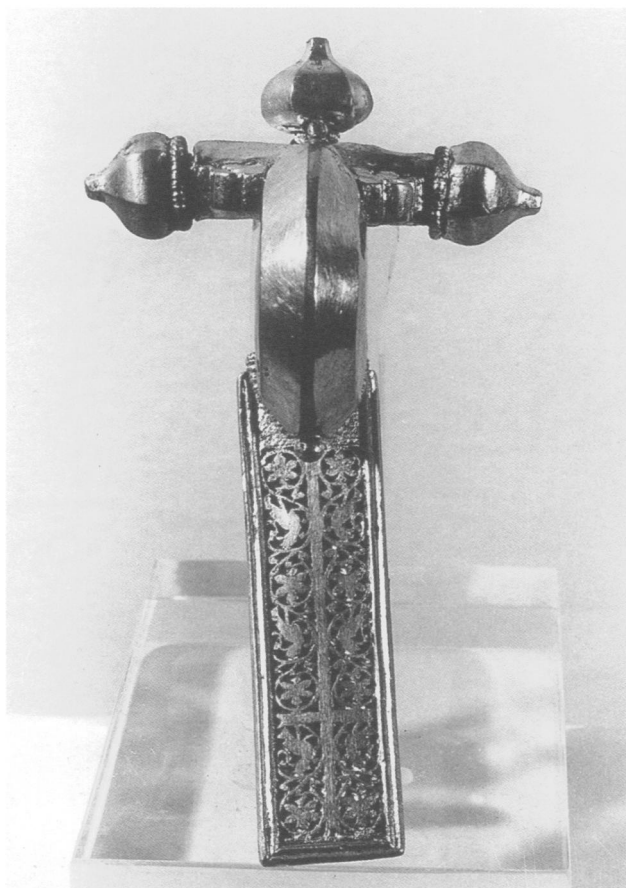


Figure 22. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 410–ca. 472, from the Palatine Hill, Rome. Gold, L. 7.6 cm. Museo dell'Alto Medioevo, Rome (photo: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Ostia, Museo dell'Alto Medioevo)

shaped leaves, and a Greek cross. When the fibula is worn and the foot points upward, the Greek cross is in the dominant position.

#### *The Fibula from the Palatine Hill in Rome*

In 1895 a gold crossbow fibula was discovered on the Palatine Hill (no. 5; Figure 22), a stray find brought to the surface by heavy rains. No other objects were found in the vicinity, and we will never know if the fibula had been deliberately hidden or if it had got lost. The sacking of Rome in 410 by the Goths, in 455 by the Vandals, and in 472 in the course of a civil war offer possible dates for hiding such an object. We know next to nothing of the original owner; whether, for example, he was of Roman or barbarian origin. The letters A and G (?), engraved underneath the central knob and at its join with the bow, might be an abbreviation of the name of the original owner.

The fibula from the Palatine Hill—7.6 centimeters long, with a weight of 32 grams—is one of the small-

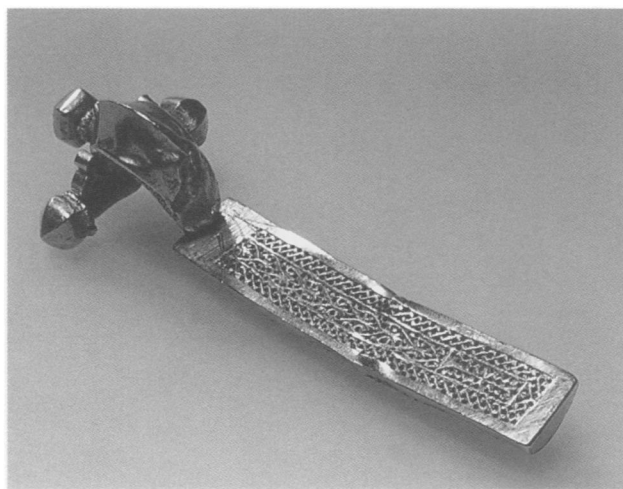


Figure 23. Crossbow fibula, unknown date, Asia Minor. Gold, L. 6.1 cm. Burton Y. Berry Collection, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, IUAM 76.75.27 (photo: Indiana University Art Museum)

er pieces. The shape is very reminiscent of both the Apahida fibula and the Metropolitan Museum's. Like those pieces, the foot is triangular, but only the top panel, set in a molded frame, is decorated in *opus interrasile*. A Latin cross determines the design. It is flanked by vine scrolls animated by antithetically arranged doves, which, their heads turned backward, are pecking at imaginary fruit. Visually and symbolically, the cross and the scrolls form a unit, like the stem and the branches of a tree. One pair of doves is even comfortably perched on the crossarms as if they were larger branches.

#### *The Fibula in the Musée du Louvre*

The fibula in the Louvre (no. 8; Figure 24) is one of the smaller pieces on our list (6.62 cm in length)—hardly longer than the Childeric fibula and about half the length of the fibula in the Metropolitan. Nothing is known of its provenance. The shape is very much like that of the other gold fibulae in this group, but the openwork decoration of the catch top plate differs fundamentally both in concept and in execution.

The design consists of nine horizontal registers, each one containing two antithetically arranged birds—more chicken than dove, although the latter was probably intended. From one register to the next, the birds are alternately facing and turned away from each other, an arrangement which creates a pleasant rhythm. The figures are reserved silhouettes with a few openings between them.

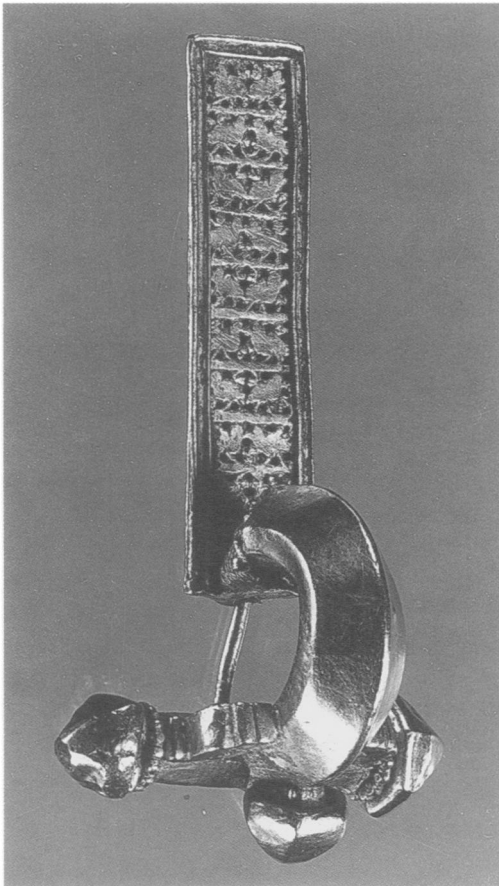


Figure 24. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 450–ca. 558. Gold, L. 6.62 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris (photo: Louvre)



Figure 25. Detail of diptych of the Vicarius Rufius Probianus, ca. A.D. 400. Ivory, each leaf of diptych, 31.8 x 13 cm overall. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (photo: Staatsbibliothek)

#### THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

One of the persons depicted on a missorium celebrating the decennalia of the emperor Theodosius in 388 is an official formally dressed in a *chlamys*.<sup>77</sup> The details of his fibula are so carefully indicated that the rectangular foot is clearly visible. Belonging to about this same period is an ivory diptych announcing the term of a certain Rufius Probianus as vicarius of the city of Rome.<sup>78</sup> It dates to about 400 and shows the vicarius, as well as two secretaries, all in the same outfit and with fibulae of the same shape (Figure 25). At this period, the *chlamys* is obviously still the official uniform of government employees, regardless of the person's actual position. This seems to have changed in the course of the fifth century.<sup>79</sup> According to archaeological and pictorial evidence, the *chlamys* and fibula apparently became the outward signs of honorary titles, such as *patricius* or *clarissimus*, meaning they were exclusively associated with the highest echelons of Roman society. This may be why there are no longer any bronze or gilt-bronze crossbow fibulae, and why

the latest representations of *chlamydati* evoke imperial connections. The finest example is that of Saint Theodore on the apse mosaic of the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, which dates to about 526–30 (Figure 26). His *chlamys* and fibula indicate his status as a Roman military officer who suffered martyrdom during the reign of the emperor Diocletian; at the same time, his posture and the elegance of his attire express the splendor and magnificence of a wealthy patrician and *spectabilis*, a member of the highest-ranking social class. In fact, the representation of Saint Theodore reflects a style and ambience similar to the slightly later mosaic panels of the emperor Justinian (Figure 27) and the empress Theodora accompanied by their closest entourage, in San Vitale in Ravenna.<sup>80</sup> On these mosaics, the courtiers feature *chlamydes* and large fibulae with rectangular catch top plates, while the clergy and the imperial guards wear their own characteristic outfits.

In sum, then, during the fifth and sixth centuries, the crossbow fibula was an *insignum* designed for Roman dignitaries, and if found in a Germanic context,



Figure 26. Detail of mosaic of Saint Theodore, A.D. 526–30. Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome (photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut)

it indicates that the original owner had held some Roman rank. Of the eight gold fibulae in this group, three are associated definitely with Germanic owners, two of them even having been found beyond the borders of the Roman empire. These pieces throw an interesting light on Late Roman policies dealing with barbarians as well as on barbarian attitudes toward Roman honors and privileges.

In late antiquity, there were several groups of barbarians entitled to privileges similar to those of officers of the Roman *militia* or *militia armata*. Romanized barbarians, in the service of the Roman empire, often held the highest office. Federate barbarian troops constituted a large element in Roman military organization, and their leaders, though not Roman citizens, enjoyed Roman honors and privileges. The owner of the Reggio Emilia treasure belonged to one of these two groups. Barbarians, whom the government tried to keep beyond the border of the empire or at least away from Constantinople, received huge sums of coined gold and precious gifts, as well as official ranks and titles.<sup>81</sup> Apparently this was met with much approval by the recipients. In 396, for instance, a clause in the peace treaty with the Goths made sure that their king

Alaric, who at this time had already spread terror in the empire and who was about to besiege and sack Rome, was invested with the title of *magister militum per Illyricum*. About a hundred years later, in 508, after his victory over the Visigoths, the Frankish king Clovis, son of Childeric, was granted the title of a consul. According to Gregory of Tours, he donned, on the occasion of celebrating this honor, a purple tunic and a chlamys as well as a diadem, obviously unaware that this was not exactly adequate attire for that position.

The Frankish king Childeric and the chieftain buried in Apahida are representative of the group of Roman allies who were bribed with gold, gifts, ranks, and titles either to stay out of the empire or to help it against other enemies. It is tempting to assume that the differences in size, weight, and design of their fibulae reflect how important or dangerous the Roman administration took them to be. Obviously, each case was treated individually. Omharus, quite close to the borders of the eastern part of the empire and a possible threat to Constantinople, might have been an actual danger and thus had to be pacified with a larger fibula than the distant Frankish king Childeric on the periphery of the empire.

#### STYLE AND ICONOGRAPHY

Unlike many other times and periods, the fifth and six centuries lack a clear art-historical profile. Unable to follow a comprehensible evolution in matters of form and style, achieved gradually over the course of time, the modern eye is confronted, rather, with an irritating variety of diverse, even contrasting styles. The striking differences in the decoration of the gold crossbow fibula, dating to this period, reflect the general diversity apparent in the jewelry of these times. Scholars have explained this, understandably enough, by the multiplicity of different regional traditions. A short analysis of the geographic distribution of the fibulae with known provenance and of a few related objects suffices, however, to prove that geographic factors do not offer a satisfying explanation for the remarkable heterogeneity.

The Childeric fibula, for instance, was buried on the western periphery of the empire, while its closest parallel, the fibula acquired by Burton Y. Berry in Asia Minor, comes from quite the opposite region. The diamond pattern used for both pieces also occurs on a diadem found in Varna in Bulgaria.<sup>82</sup> The Omharus fibula, buried in central Europe, relates to bracelets found in Egypt,<sup>83</sup> as well as—though vaguely—to the gold fibula from the Palatine Hill in Rome and, stylis-



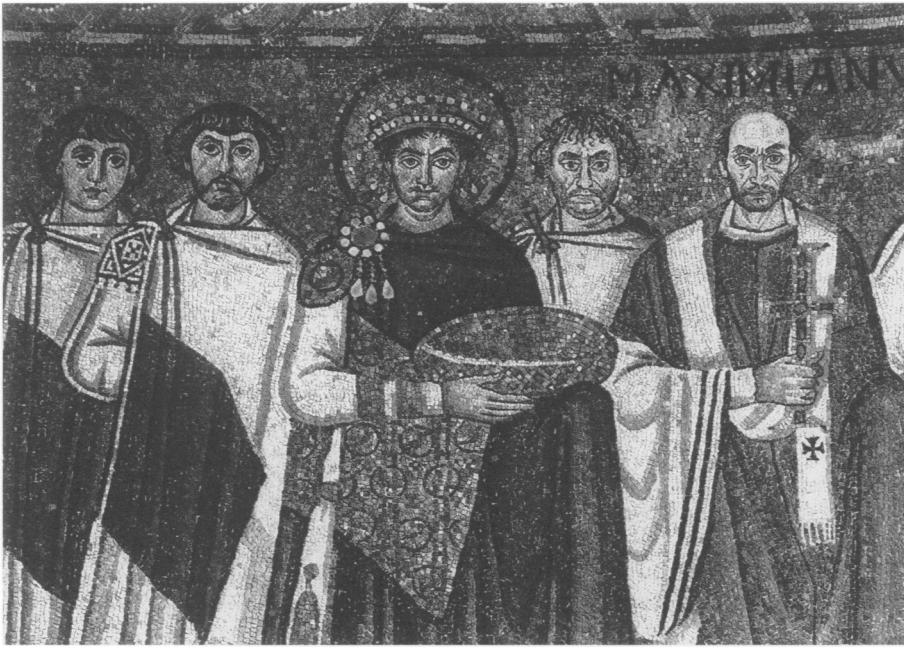


Figure 27. Detail of mosaic panel of Justinian and his retinue, mid-6th century A.D. San Vitale, Ravenna (photo: Hirmer Fotoarchiv)

tically, both to a rare and unusual meander border in the mosaic decoration of the mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna in northern Italy,<sup>84</sup> and to an architectural frieze in Qal'at Sim'an in Syria.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the fibula from the Palatine Hill can be linked to a belt appliqué found in Ténès in northern Africa. In style and execution, a gold plaque from Asia Minor<sup>86</sup> parallels the gold fibula found in Reggio Emilia, northern Italy, and, to a certain degree, a bracelet from Ténès.<sup>87</sup>

There is no hard information on where the eight gold fibulae were made. Even when the provenance is known, the location of the workshop from which a piece originated remains unknown. The owners of such fibulae were mobile and covered enormous distances, either privately, to visit their various estates in different parts of the empire—from Asia Minor to Spain or from the northern parts of France to Africa—or in an administrative or military capacity.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the fibulae themselves had covered great distances before reaching future owners, like Childeric in Belgium or Omharus in Transylvania.

The centers of power, Constantinople and Ravenna with their imperial courts, are the likely candidates for workshops producing luxurious objects serving to express the official position and standing of those entitled to own them. But, with the exception of the Childeric fibula and possibly the fibula in Stockholm, all the other pieces are individually commissioned works. As long as we do not know if the right to wear such a fibula was always accompanied by the bestowal of an actual piece or if it was up to the appointee to

have a fibula made according to his own tastes and ideas, then they could have been made even in minor local centers.

The diversity of styles in the applied arts of the fifth and sixth centuries has other-than-geographic reasons. The complex historical and social transitions of this period, during which Roman society underwent profound alterations, necessarily affected both the state and the individual. Nevertheless, in matters of art at least, the classical traditions and a long-established repertory of motifs continued to live on, having an enormous effect even on minor arts. Types and shapes, designs and ornaments, artistic conventions and decorative techniques introduced in the first half of the third century, if not before, continued to enjoy an unbroken popularity. Artists were able to draw on traditional motifs and familiar images as long as these could be adapted to new, that is, Christian meanings. At the same time, changes in artistic concepts—sometimes hardly noticeable, sometimes boldly moving forward—announce the beginning of new aesthetic ideas and concepts. Innovations, even fundamental ones, do not come abruptly, and their development is hardly ever straightforward. All this explains the stylistic discrepancies in the design and execution of the eight gold fibulae. During the fifth century and into the sixth, different trends existed side by side; some of them followed conventional traditions, others announced future aesthetic principles. And often traditional and advanced ideas were combined in one and the same piece.

With the exception of the Childeric fibula, the

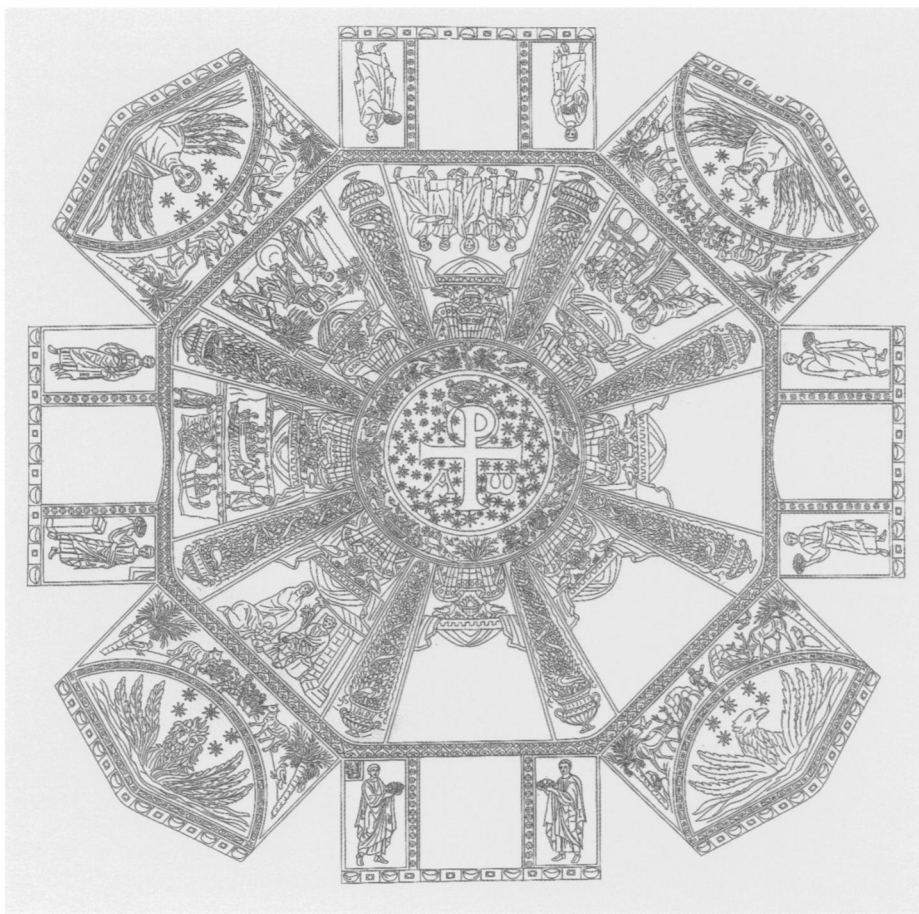


Figure 28. Mosaic ceiling, ca. A.D. 400. Baptistry, Santa Restituta, Naples (drawing: from J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* [Freiburg im Breisgau, 1917], vol. 1, p. 216, fig. 68)

imagery of all the other pieces has one aspect in common. Christian symbolism dominates. In a basic form, Christian beliefs are expressed in the plain, Latin cross, with flaring arms, that adorns the fibulae in Stockholm and from Apahida; more complex ideas are presented on the fibulae from the Palatine, in the Metropolitan Museum, and on the fibula from Reggio Emilia.

The raised cross (i.e., erected on Golgotha) without any additional symbols is primarily a straightforward reference to Christ; in fact, that is only one aspect. The inscription on a gold pectoral cross found in a grave in Rome—*MORS INIMICE TIBI* (Death is the enemy for you) and *CRUX EST VITAM MIHI* (The cross is life for me)<sup>89</sup>—illustrates that the cross also symbolizes the triumph of Christ over death, and thus, it is also a shorthand reference to the subject of resurrection. With this aspect in mind, the acanthus scrolls on the back of the Apahida fibula suddenly appear in a different light. Their function is no longer purely decorative. In connection with the cross, they can also symbolize paradise, not unlike the floral scrolls on the top plate of the catch of the fibula in the Metropolitan.

No other fibula has such a complex Christian content as this piece in the Metropolitan, with its skillfully

arranged composition of a monogrammatic cross, emerging from acanthus leaves; apocalyptic letters attached to the crossbar; a top encircled by a wreath; and flanking floral scrolls. The meaning of the monogrammatic cross is self-evident; it is the symbol of Christ. However, in combination with the large acanthus leaves it becomes synonymous with the tree of life or, to be more precise, the “tree,” or cross, on Golgotha: that is, the tree that brings everlasting life in contrast to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden that brought mortality to mankind.<sup>90</sup> The apocalyptic letters attached to the crossarms symbolize Christ as “the beginning and the end,” according to the book of Revelation in which this is mentioned three times: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (1:8); “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (21:6); and “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (22:13). The wreath, which encircles the top, is the symbol of victory; in this context, of course, it is the victory of Christ, meaning the victory of life over

death—the resurrection. To this are added the flanking floral scrolls. They indicate that the cross is to be imagined as being in paradise.

Of the numerous examples of Christian symbols dating to this period, mention of just one will suffice to emphasize the enormous amount of Christian ideology embedded in the decoration of this fibula. What we see on this object, in an abbreviated, codified language, is displayed in the ceiling mosaic of the baptistery of Santa Restituta in Naples, dating to about 400 (Figure 28).<sup>91</sup> A *crux monogrammatica*, with apocalyptic letters attached to the crossarms, is set in the summit of the cupola of the baptistery. It is surrounded by a circle and crowned by a golden wreath—both embodied on the fibula in the wreath around the top of the cross. Paradisiacal scenes encircle the cross and tree of life—the spiritual equivalent of the floral scrolls that support it on the fibula.

The fibula from the Palatine Hill in Rome (Figure 22) partly repeats one of the motifs of the Metropolitan's fibula—the cross of life—but with an amazingly different interpretation. A Latin cross is surrounded by vine scrolls, like the stem and the branches of a tree, and doves are symmetrically arranged in the branches. In this context, the cross out of which the vine grows is the life-giving cross that nourishes purified souls, symbolized by the doves, of the blessed in paradise.

On the fibula from Reggio Emilia (Figure 21), the single dove set in a roundel at the bow end of the catch has a different meaning. In relation to the Greek cross at the opposite end of the catch, it symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The leaves in the roundels in between can be either a reference to paradise or an abbreviated image of the tree of life. Like the floral ornament combined with a Latin cross on the fibula in the Burton Y. Berry Collection (Figure 23), they are most likely a reference to paradise. Whether this is also the meaning of the doves on the fibula of unknown provenance in the Louvre (Figure 24) is difficult to say, but it is possible.

This brief analysis of the symbolism and the meaning of the decoration of the gold fibulae leaves no doubt that they are very much in the spirit of their time. Contemporaries immediately understood the messages conveyed by the imagery of the fibulae. Most likely they were not aware that these pieces also illustrate fundamental artistic changes and the transition from Late Roman to Early Byzantine gold work.

Technically and stylistically, the fibula from Reggio Emilia is the most conservative one, with close parallels in fourth-century *opus interrasile*, which is still very much in the Roman tradition. The piece in the Metropolitan combines traditional motifs with remarkable innovations. The Apahida fibula, the fibula from

the Palatine, and, even more so, the piece in the Louvre represent various stages of the transition from Roman *opus interrasile* to Early Byzantine openwork.

The decoration of the fibula from Reggio Emilia consists of a dense grid formed by fine piercing and narrow ridges. The design is geometrically organized. A central area is filled by seven contiguous circles and is framed by two rectangular outer borders. Tiny crosses that repeat an *opus interrasile* motif (already developed in the first half of the third century) fill these borders, while figural elements rendered as delicate silhouettes are set in the circles. The compositional scheme and the dense, filigree-like pierced work, with narrow lines separating or framing the different areas, relate the Reggio Emilia fibula to a variety of pieces: a gold bracelet in the above-mentioned Ténès treasure;<sup>92</sup> a bracelet belonging to a Constantinian jewelry group;<sup>93</sup> a possibly Constantinian gold plaque from Asia Minor in the British Museum;<sup>94</sup> and the silver lock plate on the *lipsanotek* in the Museo dell'Età Christiana in Brescia.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, a Greek cross or a dove representing the Holy Spirit would be unthinkable before the fifth century.

On the gold fibula in the Metropolitan, the compositional scheme is based on the division of the catch's top plate into two symmetrical zones, each as mirror images of the other. The straight lines of the cross's shaft in the center and of the beveled frame on both sides counterbalance the rather restless texture of the pierced areas, with their dense pattern of curved and curled narrow lines and tiny openings. At the same time, they lead the eye to the encircled top of the cross, with the pendant alpha and omega. The openwork is very much in the tradition of Roman *opus interrasile*. The floral scrolls, in particular, are a decorative device especially popular in *opus interrasile*.

The main motif, a splendid example of the theme of "nature captured by art" so appreciated by Hellenistic and Roman artists, already looked back on a long tradition that began when, in the early third century, Roman goldsmiths discovered that floral scrolls were ideal for rendering in *opus interrasile*. The curves and the filiform sprigs growing out of the main stem of a floral scroll allowed the artist to lay out an intriguing yet still-solid lacelike pattern of pierced holes and small ridges.<sup>96</sup>

Unknown in Early Roman *opus interrasile*, however, is the use of figural elements reserved as silhouettes and in combination with openwork, as exemplified here by the acanthus leaves. In a very tentative way, silhouettes first occur in *opus interrasile*—decorated gold work dating to the fourth century.<sup>97</sup> On the bracelet from the Ténès treasure, as well as on bracelets from an early-

fifth-century treasure found in Hoxne, England, they are already an important element, though not as explicit as here.<sup>98</sup> There are two types of silhouettes, plain ones and those enlivened by engraved details such as the acanthus leaves on the fibula in the Metropolitan Museum.

On the Apahida fibula, a plain silhouette in the shape of a Latin cross dominates an openwork decoration that is otherwise still conventional. It is not integrated into the pierced work but, visually, seems imposed on it. The artist achieved this by ignoring the outer line around the central field, which encloses the central area, and by having the splayed ends of the crossarms extending into an outer border.

The bold design of the Apahida fibula is unique. There are, however, stylistic relations between this piece and a pair of bracelets in the Metropolitan that were part of the Assiût Treasure.<sup>99</sup> Here, we find similar decorative motifs—the guilloche and the meander—a similar organization of the different patterns, and the similar overall effect of a solid structure and firm lines. These common traits betray a shared taste and set of artistic ideas; they do not suffice, however, to make the Apahida fibula and the Morgan bracelets attributable to the same workshop.<sup>100</sup>

Only vaguely reminiscent of traditional Roman *opus interrasile* is the fibula from the Palatine Hill in Rome. The silhouettes are no longer integrated into a lacelike grid but form it. Technically, a flat, stable pattern of dense areas and spatial recession has replaced the Roman pierced work. There are still a few space fillers in the shape of short, curled shoots, but they are no longer essential. They do not have to hold the single parts of the ornament together. This is no longer the traditional Roman *opus interrasile*; it anticipates a new type of openwork—the Early Byzantine silhouette style—destined to become the hallmark of gold jewelry in the sixth to seventh centuries.

The Palatine fibula is not the only forerunner of this new style. Also to be mentioned in this connection is a gold belt buckle and a set of belt ornaments in the Ténès treasure.<sup>101</sup> Again there is a trellis of antithetically organized vine scrolls, animated by doves pecking at grapes, and compact areas set against an opened-up background. The only difference is that on the Ténès gold work, the figures are not left as plain silhouettes, as on the Palatine fibula. Stippled dots indicate the grapes and the feathers of the doves, and engraved lines the veins of the leaves.

An even more advanced stage in the transition from Roman to Early Byzantine openwork is exemplified by the fibula of unknown provenance in the Louvre. Its design is based on the silhouettes of antithetically

arranged doves. The recesses between them are no longer an integral part of the decoration but a background of secondary importance. Space fillers are reduced to a minimum, since they are no longer really necessary. The decorative elements already cover enough space so that there is no need for additional links.

The change in the stylistic concept is accompanied by a change in technique. In Roman *opus interrasile*, the decoration is built up from small pierced or punched holes that were made according to the intended design.<sup>102</sup> This process results in the dense linear ornaments of lacelike appearance that are characteristic of Roman *opus interrasile*. The openwork design of the Early Byzantine goldsmith is determined by the contrast of positive areas of remaining metal and areas where the material is completely removed.<sup>103</sup> The ornamentation is no longer linear but consists of silhouettes with comparatively large openings between them. The gold fibula in the Louvre is an early example of the openwork technique found on a number of gold ornaments in the Assiût and Lambousa hoards,<sup>104</sup> or the so-called peacock earrings of the sixth and seventh centuries,<sup>105</sup> which are usually considered the most characteristic examples of Early Byzantine gold work.

## CONCLUSION

The crossbow fibula owed its enduring success primarily to the fact that it was not merely a fastening device but also part of an official attire characteristic of a distinctive social position. But it would not have lasted as long as it did if its nature and shape had not allowed it to adjust to changing aesthetic and religious ideas.

Under the tetrarchs, gold crossbow fibulae were decorated with political statements beautifully inscribed and inlaid in niello. The mid-fourth century saw splendid, multicolored designs and the very beginning of the use of religious symbols integrated in ornamental decoration. The elongated, elegantly shaped gold fibulae of the last stage, exemplified by MMA 1995.97, with their exquisite design full of religious symbols, suited the needs of a society that was, at one and the same time, deeply religious while having an enormous sense of and feel for splendor and magnificence. Once this society was firmly established, and the traditional dress code could be changed safely, there was no longer any need for the traditional crossbow fibula.

The amount of art-historical information offered by the last group of gold fibulae is enormous. In applied art, a clear line between a series of objects that still can be termed “Late Roman” and others

that are already "Early Byzantine" is usually not easy to draw. The transition is fluid; fourth-century objects might already betray a Byzantine spirit, and later ones are sometimes so deeply embedded in classical traditions that they suggest an earlier origin. The small corpus of late antique gold fibulae, which covers exactly this period of transition, offers a rare if not unique opportunity to determine the fundamental changes in aesthetic concept and techniques from Late Roman to Early Byzantine openwork-decorated gold work.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Age of Spirituality*

Kurt Weitzmann, ed. *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*. Exh. cat., MMA. New York, 1977.

### Buckton, "Beauty of Holiness"

D. Buckton. "The Beauty of Holiness: *Opus interrasile* from a Late Antique Workshop." *Jewellery Studies* 1 (1983–84), pp. 15–19.

### Dalton, *Catalogue*

O. M. Dalton. *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum*. London, 1901.

### Dennison, *Gold Treasure*

W. Dennison. *A Gold Treasure of the Late Roman Period*. New York and London, 1918.

### Deppert-Lippitz, "Schmuck"

B. Deppert-Lippitz. "Goldener Schmuck der Spätantike." In *Die Schraube zwischen Macht und Pracht: Das Gewinde in der Antike*. Exh. cat., Museum Würth and Archäologisches Landesmuseum Baden-Württemberg. Sigmaringen, 1995.

### Heurgon, *Ténès*

J. Heurgon. *Le Trésor de Ténès*. Paris, 1958.

### Keller, *Grabfunde*

E. Keller. *Die spätrömischen Grabfunde in Südbayern*. Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, 14. Munich, 1971.

### Noll, "Kaiserfibel"

R. Noll. "Eine goldene 'Kaiserfibel' aus Niederemmel vom Jahre 316." *Bonner Jahrbücher* 174 (1974), pp. 221–43.

### Painter, "Silver Hoards"

K. S. Painter. "Roman Silver Hoards: Ownership and Status." In *Argenterie romaine et byzantine: Actes de la table ronde, Paris, 11–13 octobre 1983*, ed. F. Baratte, pp. 98–111. Paris, 1988.

## Theune-Grosskopf, "Zwiebelknopffibeln"

B. Theune-Grosskopf. "Zwiebelknopffibeln und ihre Träger-Schmuck und Rangabzeichen." In *Die Schraube zwischen Macht und Pracht: Das Gewinde in der Antike*. Exh. cat., Museum Würth and Archäologisches Landesmuseum Baden-Württemberg. Sigmaringen, 1995.

## NOTES

1. Acc. no. 1995.97. K. R. Brown], "Medieval Europe: Crossbow Fibula," *Recent Acquisitions, A Selection: 1994–1995*, *MMAB* 53, no. 2 (Fall 1995), p. 22.
2. A. Frantz, "The Provenance of the Open Rho in the Christian Monograms," *American Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd ser., 33 (1929), pp. 10–26.
3. For a more detailed explanation, see P. Dandridge's companion essay, pp. 71–86.
4. Painter, "Silver Hoards," pp. 98–111.
5. For a general survey, see R. Hattatt, *Ancient and Romano-British Brooches* (Sherborne, 1982); R. Hattatt, *Iron Age and Roman Brooches* (Oxford, 1985); R. Hattatt, *Brooches of Antiquity* (Oxford, 1987); and R. Hattatt, *Ancient Brooches and Other Artefacts* (Oxford, 1989).
6. The development of crossbow fibulae and their dating, based on grave finds, has been reconstructed by Keller, *Grabfunde*, pp. 26–53, and, also relying on grave as well as hoard finds, by H. J. H. van Buchem, "Bemerkungen zu den Dreiknopffibeln des vierten Jahrhunderts," *Bulletin van de Vereeniging tot Bevordering der Kennis van de Antieke Beschaving te 's-Gravenhage* (Leiden) 48 (1973), pp. 143–57. Keller's typology has not proved satisfying but, for reasons of convenience, is generally cited. For more recent studies, see E. Tóth, "Zur Datierung der Zwiebelknopffibeln," *Folia Archaeologica* 31 (1980), pp. 146–54; and P. M. Pröttel, "Zur Chronologie der Zwiebelknopffibeln," *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 35, no. 1 (1988), pp. 347–72.
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10. B. Filow, "Le Trésor romain de Nicolaevo," *Izvestija na Bulgarskoto Archeologicesko Druzestvo* (Bulletin de la Société Archéologique Bulgare) (Sofia) 4 (1914), pl. 4.1.
11. L. Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli, *L'Oro dei Romani* (Rome, 1992), pp. 92–95, figs. 61, 277.
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17. See E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order* (London, 1984), p. 238.
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22. *Glories of the Past*, p. 255, no. 188 f.
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26. Ibid., pp. 227–30, no. A 1, figs. 6, 7.
27. R. Noll, "Zur goldenen 'Kaiserfibel' aus Arezzo," *Bonner Jahrbücher* 176 (1976), pp. 179–81; A. Oliver Jr., "Greek, Roman, and Etruscan Jewelry," *MMAB* 24 (May 1966), pp. 283f., fig. 31.
28. Noll, "Kaiserfibel," pp. 235–36, no. B 4, figs. 16–18; M. Mowat, "Notice de quelques bijoux d'or au nom de Constantin," *Mémoires de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* 50 (1889), pp. 321–28.
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35. There is one more gold fibula that should be mentioned in this context, since its inscription—JULIANE VIVAS—has been interpreted as a reference to the emperor Julian the Apostate (r. 361–63); see H. J. H. van Buchem, "De gouden speld van Julianus," *Numaga* 13 (1966), pp. 50–104. It is a very elaborate gold crossbow fibula, decorated with niello and *opus interrasile*, but neither the shape nor the decoration suggests a date that would allow us to associate it with Julian the Apostate. In addition, the inscription is not placed on the catch but is squeezed into the center of the foot, and no title is given.
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39. Dalton, *Catalogue*, no. 605; C. R. Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library* (Vatican City, 1959), no. 300.
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41. Noll, *Vom Altertum zum Mittelalter*, pp. 69–70, pl. 41.
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43. Acc. no. 1999.42; L. 8.8 cm, W. 6.2 cm, D. 3.6 cm.
44. I. Ivanov, "Representations of Constantin Ier et de ses fils sur des fibules en forme de bulbe de Bulgarie," *Archeologija* (Sofia) 14, no. 4 (1972), pp. 9–29.
45. Dated to about the same period is a trapezoidal gold plaque that was part of a neck ornament. A combination of a *crux monogrammatica* and a chi-rho is integrated into its openwork decoration; see Buckton, "Beauty of Holiness," pp. 15–17, fig. 3.
46. Keller, *Grabfunde*, pp. 41–52, type 5; van Buchem, "Bemerkungen," pp. 154–56 (see note 6, above), group IV B and IV C.
47. D. Haupt, "Spätrömisches Grab mit Waffenbeigabe aus Bonn," in W. A. van Es et al., eds., *Archeologie en Historie: Opgedragen aan H. Brunsting bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag* (Bussum, 1973), pp. 315ff.; G. Waurick, ed., *Gallien in der Spätantike*, exh. cat., Kurfürstliches Schloss, Mainz, and Musée du Luxembourg, Paris (Mainz, 1980), no. 216a.
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50. Theune-Grosskopf, "Zwiebelknopffibeln," p. 188, no. H 4, fig. 56; *Antike Porträts aus Jugoslawien*, exh. cat., Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), no. 235.

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PLATE 1. Crossbow fibula, ca. A.D. 450–ca. 558.  
Gold, L. 11.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1995  
(1995.97). See pp. 39–86



PLATE 2. Watch in the form of a Lesser George, an ensign of the Order of the Garter, English (London),  
ca. 1600. Gold, partly enameled, with a movement by Nicholas Vallin, 3.6 x 2.4 cm. The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.1475). See pp. 137–52