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*Iconography of 'Zwiebelknopffibeln'
in the Art of the Late Roman Empire*

In Late Antiquity, Roman emperors created a new imperial system for the appointment and gift-giving of the highest-ranking military and civilian officials. It constituted numerous of public handouts (*donativa*) and imperial largess (*largitio*). While celebrating his accession to the throne, its anniversaries, the New Year, and also consular celebrations of appointment of new civil and military magistrates to office, the emperor bestowed to officials luxury items and attributes of their power.¹ In addition to expensive silver plates (*missoria*), consular diptychs, and finger-rings, the emperor also distributed richly embroidered ceremonial garments (*tunica* and *chlamys*) equipped with valuable ornaments. Among these were splendidly decorated belts (*baltei*, *cinguli*) and cross-bow type fibulae (Germ. *Zwiebelknopffibeln*).

The majority of discoveries of cross-bow type fibulae come from the western part of the Roman Empire including Italy and Gaul. They are also found in the province of Pannonia and as Roman imports in the *Barbaricum* areas.² The earliest fibulae are dated to AD 280 and the latest beyond AD 450.³ This also applies to a group of monuments and objects of Late Roman imperial art with representations of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* on their surfaces. Those depictions are dated from the times of emperor Diocletian to the times of Justinian I (from AD 284 to 565).

Cross-bow type fibulae were first mentioned in the typology of O. Almgren. They have a typical provincial-Roman construction.⁴ The fibula consists of a transverse bar, a high arched bow, a pin, and a catch. The catch is sometimes called the foot of fibula. The bow forms a right angle with the catch. Each end of the transverse bar and bow terminates in separately made large, bulbous-shaped knobs (Germ. *Zwiebel*) with pointed tips and a 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.

Zwiebelknopffibeln were made of non-ferrous metals, such as gold, silver and bronze.⁵ Some of the brooches were inlaid with precious stones. This applies to the so-called Imperial fibulae (Germ. *Kaiserfibeln*). The diversity of the material in which various items were produced confirms that the metal from which brooches were made in Late Antiquity determined the distinction of officials wearing particular items. Fibulae made of gold were given to people holding the highest offices in the imperial administration, the army, the populace, foreign envoys and kings. Other, less valuable fibulae were received by lower-ranking civilian servants. In all cases, the recipients were male. Among the archaeological material and the written sources there is no information nor any iconographical evidence of a woman with a garment adorned by *Zwiebelknopffibel*.

¹ I.M. JOHANSEN, Rings, Fibulae and Buckles with Imperial Portraits and Inscriptions, *JRS* 7, 1994, p. 225.

² G. BEHRENS, Römische Fibeln mit Inschrift, [*in:*] Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Paul Reinecke am 25. September 1947, Mainz a/Rhein 1950, pp. 1–13.

³ P.M. PRÖTTEL, Zur Chronologie der Zwiebelknopffibeln, *JbZMusMainz* 35, 1988, pp. 347–372.

⁴ O. ALMGREN, Studien über nordeuropäische Fibelformen der ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhunderte mit Berücksichtigung der provinzialrömischen und südrussischen Formen, *Mannus-Bibliothek* 32, Leipzig 1923 [= Studien über nordeuropäische Fibelformen], Pl. 7.

⁵ E. RIHA, Die römischen Fibeln aus Augst und Kaiseraugst, *Forschungen in Augst* 3, 1979, p. 169.

The weight of each golden specimen remained in strict relation to the Roman pound. It was a multiple of the nominal value, firstly *aureus*, later *solidus*,⁶ usually ranging between multiples of 5 to 15 *aurei*.

Cross-bow fibulae were decorated in different ways, depending on their production method and the place of exposed decoration on particular specimens. Various groups of patterns and small medallions (consisting e.g. of portrait busts or *chi-rho*-signs) on the individual objects were achieved by engraving, using different stamps, and also with niello-inlaid and gilding ornamental decorative techniques. Inscriptions were made by using the niello technique.⁷ With the practice of placing names of ruling emperors on fibulae, it is possible to treat these items as chronological indicators.⁸ Specific inscriptions allow precision in the exact time of production of these types of brooches. They also help us to trace and understand the circumstances of their handouts.

Representations of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* frequently appeared on monumental imperial art, including the surfaces of mosaics in Christian churches, obelisks and bas-reliefs of triumphal arches. An equally substantial group of fibulae images are shown on objects produced in the imperial *thesauri*, e.g. on *missoria* or consular diptychs. The context of their occurrence is often connected with the representation of the ruler in power, his state officials or future contenders to the highest ranks of *Imperium Romanum*, but also as the main decorative element on garments of Christian catholic church martyrs.

Images of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* were also placed on the surfaces of objects of daily use. As an example, their presence on two artifacts from the collection of the British Museum should be mentioned. In the first case, a fibula is depicted on the marriage signet ring from the Dimitri Collection. It is clearly visible at the shoulder of an imperial official shown in the central part of the signet stone.⁹ In the second case, a brooch was presented on the coin of the emperor Gratian. A similar scheme also appears on a coin of Gratian kept in the collection of the Bibliotheque National in Paris.¹⁰ Another can be found on the lid of the Projecta Casket (made of silver), part of the Esquiline Treasure, now kept in the British Museum. A fibula presented on the object fastens the official cloak of Turcius Asterius Secundus.¹¹ On a representation on the Brescia *Lipsanoteca*, another one supports a military cloak of the Roman soldier.¹²

⁶ JOHANSEN, *JRS* 7, 1994, p. 227; A. BURSCHKE, Złote medaliony rzymskie w Barbaricum: Symbolika prestiżu i władzy społeczeństw barbarzyńskich u schyłku starożytności, *Światowit Suppl. Series A 2*, Warszawa 1998 [= Złote medaliony].

⁷ H. VON DRESCHER, Ein Beitrag zur Technik römischer Zwiebelknopffibeln, *Germania* 37, 1959, pp. 170–179.

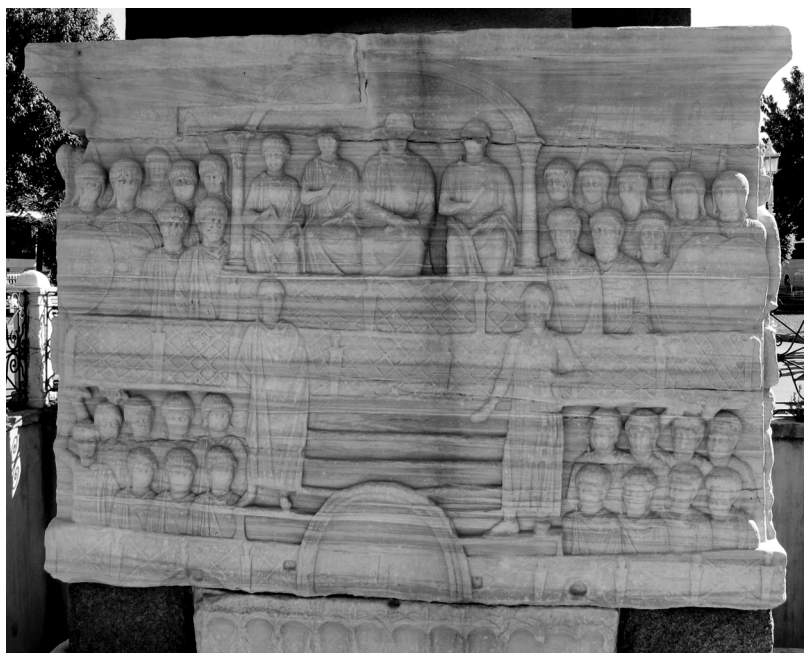
⁸ See *supra*, n. 3.

⁹ O.M. DALTON, Catalogue of the Finger Rings: Early Christian, Byzantine, Teutonic, Mediaeval and Later, London 1912, p. 21, no. 127.

¹⁰ P. BASTIEN, Le buste monétaire des empereurs romains 3, Wetteren 1994, Pl. 208, nos 2, 5; BURSCHKE, Złote medaliony, Pl. Ze-f.

¹¹ W.F. VOLBACH, Early Christian Art, London 1961 [= Early Christian Art], p. 335, Pl. 124; E. JASTRZĘBOWSKA, Studia z początków ikonografii chrześcijańskiej, Warszawa 1998, pp. 69–70, Pl. 24, no. 1.

¹² J. BURCKHARD, Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen, Leipzig 1880 [= Die Zeit Constantins], Pl. 120; W.F. VOLBACH, Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters, *Kataloge des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums zu Mainz* 7, Mainz a/Rhein 1916 [= Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike], p. 53, no. 55.



1. One side of decoration of the Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III representing emperor Theodosius I and his retinue at Hippodrome, Istanbul (Phot. R. Tybulewicz).



2. Detail of right part of diptych of the *Magister militum* Flavius Stilicho, Monza (after VOLBACH, *Early Christian Art*, p. 324, Pl. 63).



3. Detail of diptych of the consul Areobindus, Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich (after TALBOT RICE, *The Art of Byzantium*, p. 292, Pl. 22).

Furthermore, a realistic image comes from the bottom of a *fondidoro* type glass vessel held by the National Museum in Budapest. The fibula shown there fastens the cloak of the Roman official portrayed there with his family.¹³

Cross-bow fibulae were also presented on objects with a strictly sepulchral character. Good examples include images on the *Stelae* of Lepontius (Strasbourg) and *Stelae* of Flavius Augustialis (Aquileia),¹⁴ on the sarcophagus in the tomb of Silivri Kapi (Istanbul) from the middle of fifth century AD,¹⁵ and on the wall-painting from a magistrate's tomb at Durostrorum (Silistra) in Bulgaria.¹⁶ In all of the above cases, brooches are shown on the right shoulder of the men who are portrayed.

A different category of objects on which *Zwiebelknopffibeln* can be found on their surfaces are objects of a typically religious character. These include: an icon of the late sixth–early seventh century AD kept at the Monastery of Saint Catherine (Mount Sinai),¹⁷ and the Rossano Codex at the Cattedrale di Maria Santissima Achiropita of Rossano (Italy),¹⁸ dated to the sixth century AD. Fibulae presented on the icon fasten cloaks of San Demetrius and San Theodorus. Another shown on the Codex fastens the military cloak of Pontius Pilate.

WRITTEN SOURCES AND THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The earliest written sources from which we can obtain information about the cross-bow type fibulae are the Late Antique Codex of Justinian¹⁹ and the *Notitia Dignitatum*.²⁰ The subject of representations of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* in Roman art is already known in literature. The crucial publications were prepared by W.F. Volbach,²¹ R. Delbrueck,²² A. Alföldi²³ and J. Heurgon.²⁴ Primarily the interests of scholars focused only on determining the exact function of those fibulae in the Roman Empire and beyond its borders.

The first attempts to make a typological classification of cross-bow type fibulae were made by O. Almgren.²⁵ The following two systematic typologies are attributed

¹³ E. TÓRH, Római gyűrűk és fibulák, *Évezredek, évszázadok kincsei* 3, Budapest 1985, Pl. 28; F. FÜLEP, Early Christian Gold Glasses in the Hungarian National Museum, *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 16, 1968, pp. 401–412.

¹⁴ M.C. BISHOP, J.C.N. COULSTON, Roman Military Equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome, London 1993, Pl. 121, nos 1–2.

¹⁵ T.F. MATHEWS, The Cash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art, Princeton 1993, Pl. 19.

¹⁶ A. GRABAR, Le Premier Art Chrétien, Paris 1966, p. 159, Pl. 164.

¹⁷ CH. DELVOYE, L'art Bizantin, Paris 1967, Pl. 29; K. WEITZMANN, Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art: Third to Seventh Century, New York 1979 [= Age of Spirituality], pp. 533–534, no. 478.

¹⁸ WEITZMANN, Age of Spirituality, p. 492, no. 443.

¹⁹ J. HEURGON, Le Trésor de Ténés, Paris 1958 [= Le Trésor], p. 23.

²⁰ JOHANSEN, *JRS* 7, 1994, p. 230, Fig. 4a-d.

²¹ VOLBACH, Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike.

²² R. DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler, *Studien zur spätantiken Kunstgeschichte* 1, Berlin-Leipzig 1929 [= Die Consulardiptychen].

²³ A. ALFÖLDI, Insignien und Tracht der römischen Kaiser, *MDAIR* 50, 1935, pp. 1–171.

²⁴ HEURGON, Le Trésor, 1958, p. 23.

²⁵ ALMGREN, Studien über nordeuropäische Fibelformen, 1923, p. 88, Pl. 7, nos 187, 190–191.

to H.J.H. van Buchem²⁶ and E. Keller.²⁷ In 1988 the updated typology was created by P.M. Pröttel.²⁸

CATEGORIES OF OBJECTS WITH THE ICONOGRAPHY OF *ZWIEBELKNOPFFIBELN*

The majority of cross-bow fibulae representations occurs on the reliefs belonging to monumental Roman imperial architecture of the third–sixth century AD. The best examples are presented at the Arch of emperor Galerius (Thessaloniki), dating to AD 298²⁹ and at decoration of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III (**Fig. 1**) in Istanbul, from AD 395.³⁰

Zwiebelknopffibeln also appear often on consular diptychs. These items served in Late Antiquity both as richly decorated, luxurious notebooks and at the same time were a symbol of the power and prestige of their owners. Consular diptychs were used in the Roman Empire from the beginning of the fourth century to the mid sixth century AD. They were made of ivory by imperial craftsmen.

Cross-bow type fibulae representations are seen on the surfaces of the following diptychs: that of *Magister militum* Flavius Stilicho (AD 395) (**Fig. 2**),³¹ one of *vicarius* Rufius Probianus (AD 400),³² the so-called diptych of Saint Paul from Malta (fourth century AD),³³ the so-called diptych of Constantius III (AD 417),³⁴ one of consul Patricus (AD 425),³⁵ an anonymous diptych in the Museo Civico of Bologna (AD 450),³⁶ the diptych of consul Severus (AD 470)³⁷ and that of consul Areobindus (AD 506) (**Fig. 3**).³⁸

From the beginning of the fourth century AD *Zwiebelknopffibeln* start appearing in iconographical programs in the mosaics in Christian Catholic churches. They are depicted

²⁶ H.J.H. VAN BUCHEM, Romeins Nijmegen: De gouden speld van Julianus, Bijdrage tot een chronologie en typologie van de romeinse dreknoppenfibulae, *Numaga* 13, 1966, pp. 13–34.

²⁷ E. KELLER, Die spätromischen Grabfunde in Südbayern, *Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 14, Munich 1971.

²⁸ See *supra*, n. 3.

²⁹ A. RÜSCH, Das kaiserzeitliche Porträt in Makedonien, *JDAI* 84, 1969, pp. 194–195, Pl. 109; H.P. L'ORANGE, Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-Söhnen, 284–361 n. Chr., Berlin 1984, p. 109, Pl. 21.

³⁰ G. BRUNS, Der Obelisk und seine Basis auf dem Hippodrom zu Konstantinopel, *IstForsch* 7, Istanbul 1935 [= Der Obelisk und seine Basis]; T. ZOLLT, s.v. Sculpture, [in:] J. Turner (Ed.), *The Dictionary of Art* 9, London 1996, pp. 594–595.

³¹ DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 242–248, no. 63; VOLBACH, *Early Christian Art*, Pls 62–63.

³² DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 250–256, no. 65.

³³ BURSCHE, p. 212; A. TOYNBEE, Auf diesen Felsen: Das Christentum – Grundlagen und Weg zur Macht, Wien 1969, p. 286.

³⁴ DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 87–92, no. 2; BURCKHARD, *Die Zeit Constantins*, Pl. 179.

³⁵ DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 248–250, no. 64; VOLBACH, *Avori di scuola ravennate nel V e VI secolo*, Ravenna 1977 [= *Avori di scuola*], pp. 27–28, 82, Pl. 22.

³⁶ DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 186–188, no. 47; VOLBACH, *Avori di scuola*, p. 98, Pl. 37.

³⁷ DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 165–169, no. 39; VOLBACH, *Avori di scuola*, p. 96, Fig. 35.

³⁸ VOLBACH, *Elfenbearbeiten der Spätantike*, p. 18, no. 6; DELBRUECK, Die Consulardiptychen, pp. 110–111, no. 9; D. TALBOT RICE, *The Art of Byzantium*, London 1959 [= *The Art of Byzantium*], Pl. 22.

with great realism, in contexts of official garments worn by people associated with the imperial court. These include fibulae from two mosaics at the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna dated to AD 526–547.³⁹ They present the emperor Justinian and the empress Theodora accompanied by their closest entourage, wearing richly decorated official garments and ornaments.

Among the iconographical sources we find examples of fibulae constituting an indispensable part of garments of the Christian holy martyrs from the New Testament. These confirm *Zwiebelknopffibeln* shown on the walls at Rotonda di San Gregorio of Thessaloniki, built in AD 293–311,⁴⁰ the church of San Demetrio of Thessaloniki,⁴¹ the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome (Fig. 4), built in AD 526–530⁴² – and two basilicas in Ravenna – San Apollinare Nuovo,⁴³ built in AD 500–526, and San Vitale⁴⁴ (Figs 5–7), from AD 525/526–547.

Furthermore, cross-bow fibulae are shown at the surfaces of richly decorated silver vessels (*missoria*). They were large plates on low feet, made of precious metals (gold or silver).⁴⁵ In the Roman Empire from the beginning of the fourth century AD, vessels of this type constitute an integral part of the internal circulation of gift-giving in the circles of Rome's richest families.⁴⁶ An example is the *missorium* of Theodosius I from Almedralejo in Spain.⁴⁷ It is dated to AD 388. An image of a cross-bow fibula is placed on its upper surface.

THE ICONOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE APPEARANCE OF FIBULAE

OFFICIAL SCENES

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE EMPEROR

Representations of cross-bow type fibulae in Roman imperial art dated from AD 284 to 565 and connected with portraits of emperors are very rare. Analyzing iconographical sources, we notice that in almost all of the images, according to the strict canon of official imperial art, emperors wear the Imperial fibulae (Germ. *Kaiserfibeln*) as ornaments and

³⁹ DELBRUECK, *Die Consulardiptychen*, pp. 32–44; J. WILPERT, W.N. SCHUMACHER, *Die römischen Mosaiken der Kirlichen Bauten vom IV.–XIII. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1976 [= *Die römischen Mosaiken*], Pls 108–109; R. FARIOLI, *Ravenna romana e bizantina*, Ravenna 1977, Pls 138, 154.

⁴⁰ VOLBACH, *Early Christian Art*, Pl. 124; R.F. HODDINOTT, *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia: A Study of the Origins and the Initial Development of East Christian Art*, London 1963 [= *Early Byzantine Churches*], pp. 113–116, Pl. 14b; H.P. L'ORANGE, P.J. NORDHAGEN, *Mosaics*, London 1966 [= *Mosaics*], p. 75.

⁴¹ HODDINOTT, *Early Byzantine Churches*, Pl. 32a.

⁴² WILPERT, SCHUMACHER, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, pp. 328–329, Pls 101, 105–106.

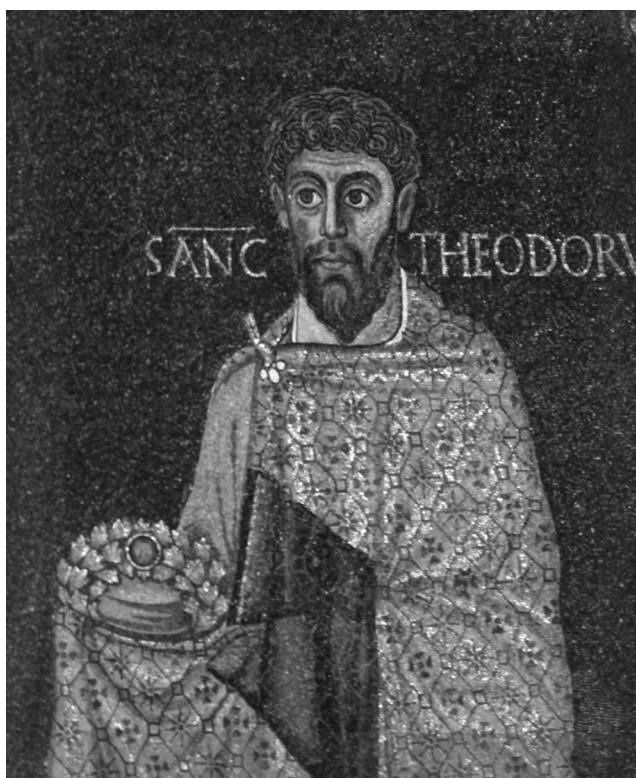
⁴³ VOLBACH, *Early Christian Art*, p. 78, no. 68b; A. LORIZZO, *The Mosaics of Ravenna*, Ravenna 1976 [= *The Mosaics*], Pl. 30.

⁴⁴ VOLBACH, *Early Christian Art*, pp. 342–343, no. 155, Pl. 158; LORIZZO, *The Mosaics*, Pl. 47.

⁴⁵ JOHANSEN, *JRS* 7, 1994, p. 225.

⁴⁶ BURSCHE, *Zlote medaliony*, p. 209.

⁴⁷ DELBRUECK, *Die Consulardiptychen*, pp. 235–242, no. 62; R. DELBRUECK, *Die spätantiken Kaiserporträts*, Berlin-Leipzig 1933, Pl. 94.



4. Detail of mosaic of San Theodore, Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome (Phot. R. Tybulewicz).



5. Detail of mosaic panel of Justinian and his retinue, San Vitale, Ravenna (after DELBRUECK, *Die Consulardiptychen*, p. 36).



6. Detail of mosaic panel of Theodora and her closest entourage, San Vitale, Ravenna (after DELBRUECK, *Die Consulardiptychen*, p. 37).



7. Detail of mosaic of San Vitale, Ravenna (after L'ORANGE, NORDHAGEN, *Mosaics*, p. 78, Pl. 70b).

also as attributes of their power. These objects were made of gold and precious stones. Characteristic features are three decorative pendants (*pendylia*) attached to the fibula bow. Imperial fibulae were reserved exclusively for the emperor. *Zwiebelknopffibeln*, on the other hand, were used by the highest-ranking Roman imperial officials sovereign to the emperor.

From the arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki comes a very special representation of an emperor, a Tetrarch, whose ceremonial cloak is fastened by a cross-bow fibula.⁴⁸ The object has the function of a decorative safety-pin, as well as an attribute of the emperors' power.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE IMPERIAL OFFICIALS

The representative group of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* includes their representations on the garments of the highest-ranking military and civilian imperial officials. The context of their appearance can be divided into three categories. The first, and also the largest, includes scenes with the officials of the retinue of court. The second group represents a collection of fibulae depicted on the cloaks of consuls and, also associated with them, lower-ranking governmental officials. The third includes fibulae shown as adornments on garments of officials portrayed singly on the particular object. In the last two mentioned categories of representations, the figure of the emperor is not depicted there at all.

Very good examples of representations classified in the first category are the images of the cross-bow fibulae on decoration of Theodosian base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III of Istanbul⁴⁹ (**Fig. 1**) and the diptych of Constantius III (Halberstadt, Germany).⁵⁰ On the obelisk, brooches fasten ceremonial cloaks of dignitaries accompanying the emperor while watching chariot races in the Hippodrome and receiving the tribute of envoys representing conquered Barbarian tribes. Fibulae also constitute a characteristic element of the garment of highest-ranking officials, accompanying the imperial couple in sacrificial processions with gifts for Christian churches. It confirms the iconography of the fibulae on the wall mosaics of the Basilica of San Vitale at Ravenna (**Figs 5–7**).⁵¹

A very unusual representation belonging to the first group is shown on the surface of the *missorium* of Theodosius I (**Fig. 8**). The most important element is a male figure of a high-ranking official of Roman administration newly appointed by the emperor.⁵² He is wearing an official, richly adorned garment together with a *Zwiebelknopffibel* on his shoulder supporting a cloak. In addition, the emperor is surrounded by the court and armed life-guards. By the gesture of touching the shoulder of a new official, the emperor confirms social status and the function of a newly appointed dignitary.

Representations belonging to second group are depicted on consular diptychs: a *vicarius* of the city of Rome, Rufius Probianus (Preussischer Kulturbesitz Staatbibliothek, Berlin) (**Fig. 9**), and an East Roman general and politician, consul Areobindus (Schweizerisches

⁴⁸ See *supra*, n. 29.

⁴⁹ See *supra*, n. 30.

⁵⁰ See *supra*, n. 34.

⁵¹ See *supra*, n. 44.

⁵² See *supra*, n. 47.



8. Detail of the *missorium* of the emperor Theodosius I, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid (after DELBRUECK, *Die Spätantike Kaiserporträts*, Pl. 64).



9. Detail of diptych of the *Vicarius* Rufius Probianus, Preussischer Kulturbesitz Staatbibliothek, Berlin (after VOLBACH, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike*, p. 22, no. 13).

Landesmuseum, Zurich) (**Fig. 3**),⁵³ also at mosaic of the Basilica of San Appolinare Nuovo (Ravenna).⁵⁴ Fibulae are shown as an inseparable part of garment of imperial officials, presented during public governance.

The third category includes images of *Zwibelknopffibeln* on the surface of consular diptychs, where the only image is a figure of a consul portrayed alone. These include the figure of *Magister militum* Flavius Stilicho, general of the Roman army (Monza, Italy) (**Fig. 2**)⁵⁵ consul Patricus (Novara Cathedral, Italy)⁵⁶ and a depiction of an anonymous consul on a diptych in the Museo Civico (Bologna).⁵⁷

There is also an unusual iconographic context of a cross-bow fibula from a diptych of consul Severus (Museo Civico, Bologna).⁵⁸ His bust is presented in the upper part of diptych in a medallion. The lower part of the object covers a realistic representation of the complete silhouette of Saint Peter. The fibula fastens the cloak of the consul.

RELIGIOUS SCENES

Cross-bow fibulae are also presented on garments of holy martyrs of the Christian Catholic church. We find their depictions connected with San Onésiphore (Thessaloniki),⁵⁹ San Vitale (Ravenna) (**Fig. 7**)⁶⁰ and San Theodore (Rome) (**Fig. 4**).⁶¹ All of these men were Roman citizens in the service of the imperial army. They all died a martyr's death for their Christian faith. Saints were presented in the same manner as the highest-ranking officials of the Empire. They wear richly adorned garments and adornments including *Zwibelknopffibeln*. Such an iconographical representation of life and a hierarchy after death in heaven, according to Christian religion, constitutes a mirror reflection of the imperial hierarchy in the Roman Empire and among the imperial court. In such cases the social position of the emperor on earth is replaced by Christ in Heaven, and his 'highest-ranking officials' are holy martyrs. Fibulae are depicted as the distinctive attribute of their power.

ADDITIONAL SCENES

Zwibelknopffibeln adorn not only the garments of emperors, highest-ranking officials, and the martyr Saints of Christian Catholic church. Another specific and very rarely occurring context is their representation accompanying persons designated to be future emperors and officials in the service of the Roman administration. Very good examples are images on decoration of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III and the diptych of

⁵³ See *supra*, n. 38.

⁵⁴ See *supra*, n. 43.

⁵⁵ See *supra*, n. 31.

⁵⁶ See *supra*, n. 35.

⁵⁷ See *supra*, n. 36.

⁵⁸ See *supra*, n. 37.

⁵⁹ See *supra*, n. 41.

⁶⁰ See *supra*, n. 44.

⁶¹ See *supra*, n. 17.



10. Detail of decoration of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III, the emperor Theodosius I and his closest entourage at Hippodrome, Istanbul (Phot. R. Tybulewicz).



11. Detail of left part of diptych of the *Magister militum* Flavius Stilicho, Eucharius with his mother, Monza (after VOLBACH, *Early Christian Art*, p. 324, Pl. 62).

Stilicho. Two fibulae depicted on two sides of the bas-relief of the obelisk fasten a cloak of the young men portrayed as accompanying Theodosius I (**Fig. 10**). They are sitting close to the emperor in the hippodrome while watching the chariot races and the ceremony rewarding the winner with a victory wreath.⁶² The portrayed young men were to be the successors to the throne at the death of the emperor.

A similar symbolic meaning of a fibula, as a attribute of future high-ranking position in the administrative hierarchy of *Imperium Romanum*, is confirmed in its representation at the left side of the diptych of Stilicho. The fibula adorns the right shoulder of a boy, Eucherius, son of the *Magister militum* (**Fig. 11**).⁶³ The context of the object is twofold: practical (a decorative pin fastening a richly adorned cloak) and symbolic (showing the expected path of boy's political advancement).

ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF FIBULAE

LEVEL OF REALISM OF THE APPEARANCE OF FIBULAE

The realism of representation of fibulae at particular monuments of Late Roman art was variable. Realistic details included their shape, type of ornamentation and the material from which they were produced. The degree of realism also depended on the size of the object on which fibulae were presented and the type of material used for creating images on different surfaces of art objects. The variability of realism in the representation of fibulae is related proportionately to the realism of the images of the people wearing them, and in relation to the type of metal from which the real artefact of the brooch was made, compared to the material of its representation.

The most detailed and realistic depictions of fibulae come from the representations on the consular diptychs. The best examples are two images from the diptych of Stilicho. The realism of the iconography of the brooches is excellent. Even the smallest details have been marked. Each part of the construction elements can be recognized. We can distinguish a transverse bar and a high arched bow (both ended with large, bulbous-shaped knobs), a pin, and a catch. The rich, characteristic decoration along the upper surface of the catch is also clearly visible.

Another group showing realistic images of fibulae is found on consular diptychs of Rufius Probianus and Patricus, and an anonymous diptych in the Museo Civico of Bologna. Also in these cases, brooches were presented with great attention to even the smallest morphological detail. The level of visibility is very good so that it allows, in all cases, to make a typological identification of individual images.

All of the diptychs were made of ivory. This material is suitable for gentle treatment by the craftsmen. Items produced from it are characterized by the high-quality of precision and the spectacular finish of their surfaces.

Representations of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* were depicted also on the aforementioned reliefs of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III and the Arch of Galerius. The marble

⁶² TALBOT RICE, *The Art of Byzantium*, p. 287, Pl. 5; BRUNS, *Der Obelisk und seine Basis*, Figs 44, 77.

⁶³ See *supra*, n. 31.

from which the monuments were made allowed the Roman artists to show morphological features of individual elements. Particularly useful, both for the iconographical and typological analysis, are decorations of the catch of the fibulae. Each of the decorative parts was presented with great precision.

An equally detailed image of a cross-bow fibula comes from the *missorium* of Theodosius I. The level of decoration of the plate, including the representation of a brooch, confirms a remarkably high level of metallurgical skills of late Roman craftsmen. The characteristic features are the transverse bar and a high arched bow, both ending with large, round, bulbous-shaped knobs characteristic for this type of fibula.

Furthermore, reliable representations of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* come from Christian church mosaics. These include the San Vitale Basilica (Ravenna) and the Santi Cosma et Damiano church (Rome). The use of *tesserae* of different colors gives the opportunity to identify the type of material used for the production of fibulae in real workshops. This applies particularly to *tesserae* made of yellow glass paste that were to imitate gold.

For all other categories of monuments with the iconography of fibulae (including bas-reliefs, consular diptychs and *missoria*), there is no possibility of a clear indication of the type of material used for the manufacture of particular brooches. In antiquity these objects were coated with polychrome. Nowadays no traces of painted decoration is preserved among the mentioned categories of objects.

The general style in late Roman art dealing with the iconography of cross-bow fibulae was an exaggerated representation of their size. The presence of a fibula on a certain object of art was highlighted through its visibility characteristically with the foot lifted up. Brooches were also placed in the most prominent position, above the shoulder, sometimes almost unnaturally 'sprouting up' from the shoulder of each portrayed figure. Despite cases of exaggeration, there are also images that can be considered as being of natural size.

The number of depictions of *Zwiebelknopffibeln* is dependent on the particular monument, also determined by the state of preservation and function that the object was to serve in Roman society. The majority of fibulae are seen in consular diptychs, bas-reliefs and mosaics. The smallest group includes representations on *missoria*.

TYPOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION

Typological identification of representations of cross-bow type fibulae is based on comparison of their sizes, shapes and the decoration style of the bow, transverse bar, catch and bulbous-shaped knobs with real finds of the particular type. Among the iconographic material, according to P.M. Pröttel's typology, only types 3/4, 5, 5 or 6, 6, 6 or 7, and 7 exist.⁶⁴

Fibula type 3/4, variant B, dated to AD 360–420,⁶⁵ are represented in this paper by three examples. Two of them come from decoration of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of

⁶⁴ PRÖTTEL, *JbZMusMainz* 35, 1988, pp. 342–372.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

Thutmose III, the third from a wall mosaic in the Saint Gregory Rotunda. These brooches are characterized by a semicircular-shaped, trapezoid in cross-section, narrow bow and long, full, paddle-shaped catch decorated with five pairs of stamped circles. Moreover, a quadrangular transverse bar, also with smooth, small bulbous-shaped knobs at the ends of the transverse bar and bow.⁶⁶

Among the iconographical material also exists a group of cross-bow fibulae of type 5, dated to AD 340–420.⁶⁷ Their characteristic feature is a massive, compact, semi-circular arched bow and a short, thickset, straight catch, decorated with geometric or floral motifs. Moreover, those brooches are square in cross-section, with a short, ornamented transverse bar, ending with a large, pointed bulbous-shaped knob.⁶⁸

The oldest representation of fibula of type 5, in chronological terms, decorates the Arch of Galerius. The other images of type 5 comes from decoration of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III and from the diptych of consul Rufius Probianus.⁶⁹

Three cross-bow brooches depicted on the diptych of Constantius III probably represent the type 5 variant 2 or 3.⁷⁰ Identification is based on the compatibility of the two essential features confirming this typological type.

An easily recognizable representation of *Zwiebelknopffibula* type 5, variant 3 or 4⁷¹ comes from the *missorium* of Theodosius I. The same category of type and variant probably are also represented on four fibulae from the diptych of consul Areobindus and one from the diptych of Saint Paul of Malta.

Among all of the iconographic material existing in the literature, the largest group can be identified as cross-bow brooches of type 6. They are dated to AD 390–460⁷² and are characterized by a semi-circular arched, triangular in cross-section, ornamented bow. In addition, they have a straight catch, much longer than the bow, ending at the edges with specially cut openwork patterns. The transverse bar is quadrangular in cross-section, ending with pointed bulbous-shaped knobs.⁷³

The chronologically latest fibulae type 6, with a total of twelve specimens, come from decoration of Theodosian Base of Egyptian Obelisk of Thutmose III. Two depictions of this type are characteristic. Visible morphological features of those artefacts allow us to classify them into type 6, variant 2.⁷⁴ These features include a short bow, a long catch decorated on both sides (a characteristic of this group and variant), and cut openwork patterns. They also have thin, transverse arms with pointy bulbous-shaped knobs.

⁶⁶ R. CHOWANIEC, R. KARASIEWICZ-SZCZYPIORSKI, Zapinki cebulowate z cmentarzyska miejskiego w Cherso-
niezie Taurydzkim (Sewastopol, Krym, Ukraina), *Światowit* 4(45)/fasc. B, 2002, p. 30.

⁶⁷ PRÖTTEL, *JbZMusMainz* 35, 1988, pp. 364–367.

⁶⁸ See *supra*, n. 66.

⁶⁹ PRÖTTEL, *JbZMusMainz* 35, 1988, p. 365, Pl. 6, no. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 365, Pl. 6, nos 2–3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 365, Pl. 6, nos 3–4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 372, Pl. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 368–371, Pl. 8, nos 1–4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 368, Pl. 8, no. 2.

Also very recognizable are two examples of brooches type 6, variant 2, that are featured on the diptych of consul Patricus, dating to AD 435.

Different from the above examples, type 6, variant 3,⁷⁵ is represented twice on the diptych of Stilicho. Each part of the construction and decoration of these brooches fully matches the morphological description of this type and variant. The fibula type 6 is also probably shown on the diptych of the consul Severus.

The difficulty of assigning the representations of brooches shown on mosaics to particular typological group is caused by the material from which they were made. Using glass and marble *tesserae* made it impossible to show in a clear way the shape and ornamentation of the bow, transverse bar, catch and bulbous-shaped knobs of each depicted fibula. They only allow the specification of a relative length and possible size of each component of the individual fibulae. A good example is the image from the mosaics of the Basilica of San Apollinare Nuovo. The brooch depicted there can be classified either to type 6 or 7.⁷⁶ Its schematic representation makes it impossible to fully conduct a typological identification.

Concerning the *Zwiebelknopffibeln* of two mosaics from the San Vitale Basilica, it can be also assumed that they represent type 6 or 7. In the first mosaic, showing the emperor Justinian I surrounded by retinue of court and high members of church clergy, three fibulae of such types are depicted.⁷⁷ On the other, presenting the empress Theodora surrounded by the court, there are only two specimens.⁷⁸

Realistic iconography of cross-bow fibulae of type 7 are located on two objects: the anonymous diptych in the Museo Civico of Bologna and in the mosaic of the Santi Cosma e Damiano church in Rome.

STYLE/MANNER OF WEARING

In Late Antiquity a standardized canon existed for the type of garments worn by high-ranking members of the imperial administration. Analyzing the iconographic material, we can conclude that cross-bow fibulae were a characteristic and indispensable element. The basic cloth was a *tunic* of variable length, color and style of decoration (*tunica dalmatica*). It was strapped in the middle by a richly adorned belt (*cingulum, balteus*). The top coat created a cloak (*chlamys*) thrown over the back of the owner. Fibulae were used to fasten cloaks. Among all of the iconographic representations, the place of their display on the garments is identical. The way to fasten brooches on each representation is always the same. They were placed on the right shoulder, covering the shoulder area, or slightly below it. There are also cases where fibulae characteristically protrude or even unnaturally ‘stick out’ over the shoulder. This manner of displaying particular brooches has been closely associated with the need to emphasize the owners’ high position in the social hierarchy and their attributes of power.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 368, Pl. 8, no. 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 368–371, Pl. 8, nos 1–6.

⁷⁷ WILPERT, SCHUMACHER, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, Pl. 108.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Pl. 109.

All of the *Zwiebelknopffibeln* on Roman art objects are presented with a transverse bar, a bow and bulbous-shaped knobs pointed downwards. The visible differences in the plastic depiction of fibulae are attributable to the representation of their owners on a particular monument. In case of images on the surface of mosaics and paintings, it is typical to underline their presence by using yellow color. This practice allows the identification of the material (gold) from which brooches were made.

CONCLUSION

Cross-bow type fibulae were indispensable attributes of ceremonial garments and also determinants of social status among the citizens of the late Roman Empire. Their presence was typical for the garments of the highest-ranking government officials, both civilian and military, as well as for candidates for these positions. There were also rare representations in which the emperor was portrayed with a *Zwiebelknopffibel* adorning his cloak.

Through the analysis of collected iconographic material, it is possible to establish the chronology of the various finds of actual fibulae discovered during archaeological field research. There is also the opportunity to date specific representations of brooches in situations in which we do not have historical data on objects where they were depicted. It is also possible to determine the type of fibulae shown on iconographical monuments of ancient art by using contemporary typologies of brooches, especially that produced by P.M. Pröttel. An excessive, or sometimes even exaggerated display of fibulae was commonly used in late antique monuments of architecture of Roman art.

In all cases *Zwiebelknopffibeln* fasten only a male garment around the right arm or shoulder. The characteristic treatment directs the transverse bar, bow, and knobs downward. The same manner of wearing the fibulae is confirmed by the find-spot and arrangement of cross-bow brooches in burials, as explored during the archaeological excavations.