

Brooch Workshops in the Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire (1st century BC – 3rd century AD)

Summary

The 59 analysed workshops lie on the territory of all the Danube provinces of the Roman Empire, Dalmatia being an exception which only through its small surface can be attributed to the Danubian basin. The workshops are located with few exceptions in civilian environment such as: towns, vici, villae rusticae, stationes etc. Almost all major urban centres in the provinces examined with this occasion account for brooch workshops ensuring the needs of both locals and surrounding areas. Some of the small workshops in Pannonia are located on the Amber road, which leads us to believe that they produced not only for local use but also for export to the north. In the case of Raetia and Noricum, they are located on the major commercial arteries. We cannot exclude the possibility that in some of these centres we can find also itinerant craftsmen. One particular case is represented by the three workshops positioned on the limes of Dacia Porolissensis, having as a particularity the production of Barbarian type brooches. Regarding the products crafted inside the Roman forts, we must stress that this activity is closely related to the production of military equipment.

The types of agencies (oficinae) known from the major cities can be divided into three categories:

A. Mixed-production workshops (brooches, appliques, harnesses, votive plates, furniture parts and other bronze-based parts) but also the production of ingots or gold, glass, and iron object production;

B. Workshops for brooches production only;

C. "Districts" of workshops and several workshops specialised in the production of brooches.

The plan of the published workshops shows that the required space to carry out the work for the casting of the bronzes as well as for the brooches is quite small: between 38-80 sqm. In the light of the large number of workshop plans (spaces), 12 by number, published from Magdalensberg and of the spatial distribution of the processed brooches or scrap material from Virunium, we can estimate that the number of workshops should be about 80.

The raw material used for the production of the brooches was bronze derived from different types of materials subjected to the process of recycling. The analyses of some brooches coming from different workshops shows that different compositions were used in comparison with the recipes known from the western Empire. The technique used for the execution of the brooches was that of 'casting upon archetype', by casting in clay molds. Therefore, the brooch production is diversified in these provinces.

Although numerous bronze workshops are known from Raetia, in what regards the brooch production, the only known evidence is the half-finished brooches, scrap metal or lead molds. The 12 Roman centers mentioned above indicate a production of the Roman brooches during the 1st-3rd century AD. Judging from the point of view of the types produced, we can state that with few exceptions (Cambodunum and Ribtissen), the types encountered especially in Noricum, Pannonia, Moesia or Dacia are dominating the Danube region. However, the analysis of fibula from different Roman sites (Roman forts, towns or vici) shows a large amount of brooches coming from Gallia. This western component can also be seen in the composition of the population inhabiting the vici, where a large proportion of the population comes from Gallia.

In Noricum, the production of highly profiled brooches, which is certified as produced in 11 centers, represents for the Roman era the largest area of production and also the irradiation center to other provinces. For this province there are also characteristic the brooches type Almgren 238 and Almgren 236. Significant evidence also exists for the production, with many variants, of the knee-brooches, flat brooches, trawled brooches, zoomorphic brooches or Almgren 15 type. The most important production centers are located at Magdalensberg, Virunum, Iuvavum, located on the outskirts of the settlements forming some sort of true crafters districts. The brooch production in the province is also made for trade with the outer Barbarian world. To conclude, the production of brooches in Noricum, through the above discoveries, provides the most important data on workshops and production of brooches in the Roman Empire during the 1st century BC – 3rd century AD.

Although there are several alleged workshops location in Pannonia (Sirmium, Burgenae and Ušće-Obrenovac (Ad Labores?)), only 17 points with archaeological discoveries attest to the production of brooches in Pannonia. From the analysis of the raw material results the production of several types of brooches such as Norico-Pannonian brooches, strongly profiled brooches, trumpet brooches, knee brooches, zoomorphic brooches, perforated brooches, and T-shaped

brooches. The most important workshops are those from Brigetio and Savaria. The Analysis of the types of brooches produced shows a massive production during the 1st century – first half of the 2nd century AD, with a possible extension until the 3rd century AD.

For the province of Moesia we have attested the production of strongly profiled brooches, knee-brooches, zoomorphic brooches, late Aucissa brooches, T-shaped brooches. The most important center is known at Durostorum. Chronologically, the production of brooches in Moesia covers the entire interval between the 1st – 3rd centuries AD.

Dacia, the last Roman province conquered by the Romans, but also deeply embedded in the Barbarian world, is characterized by a diversified brooches production. The largest produced type of brooch in Dacia are the strongly profiled brooch, the knee brooches and the anchor brooch, which form 75% of the production known from the workshops in Dacia. Alongside these types, in Roman Dacia the production of Norico-Pannonian brooches, with fins and two nodosities brooches, zoomorphic brooch, or late Aucissa type brooches are also attested.

It should be emphasized in the case of this province that we can speak also for the production of Barbarian type brooches such as brooches type Almgren 124, Almgren 138-141, Almgren group VII, I. The most important workshop in Dacia is the one discovered in the Roman town of Napoca, known by all the constructive and production elements. Chronologically, these workshops function from the beginning of the Province until the first three decades of the 3rd century AD.

After the awarding of the title of municipality to several settlements during Hadrian's reign, which also marks the start of a strong construction activity (construction of roads, temples, other public buildings), many workshops cease to exist. The disappearance of these workshops does not necessarily imply that all of them ceased to exist, but in most of the above-mentioned centers, they were most probably moved to other parts of towns or other peripheral areas.

If during the first half of the 2nd century AD we can speak of an almost uniform production of brooches types throughout the Danubian provinces, after this period we can observe a certain regionalization of the different types of brooches that were produced. Thus, in Dacia and Moesia appears the wide production of late Aucissa brooches, the knee brooches - the variant with hinge, variants of brooches with head in the form of anchor (massive); Pannonia produces trumpet brooches and brooches with the head in the form of an anchor; while Noricum and Raetia produce

numerous perforated brooches, zoomorphic brooches and variants of knee brooches with and resort in the reel.

The analysis of workshops seems to point towards a decrease in production and at the same time of the actual number of workshops during the 3rd century AD. This does not derive from the current stage of the archaeological research, but perhaps because of the fashion outflows of the brooches among civilians. Although the hypothesis of the existence of enameled brooch workshops in Pannonia and Dacia has been put forward several times, we do not currently have any evidence indicating towards the production of these types of brooches.

The production of the entire Danubian provinces is addressed to both civilians (men and women), as well as militaries, or to massive exports destined to reach the 'uncivilized' Barbarian world.


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