

RESEARCH ISSUES REGARDING THE GRĂDIȘTEA DE MUNTE SPIRAL GOLD BRACELETS HOARDS. AN ESSAY

DANIEL DRAGOȘ SPĂNU

1. REMARKS ON THE INFORMATION STATUS

Between 1996–2001 a couple of teams of treasure hunters have detected at Grădiștea de Munte several hoards of either gold and silver coins or massive spiral gold bracelets, or even both categories in the same location. According to the information provided by a few recent contributions,¹ the gold spiral bracelets have been identified in five distinct discoveries:

- (1) The Grădiștea Hill (Dealul Grădiștii) – 1998; location: 150 meters from Terrace no. XI; inventory: 1 bracelet (Christie's), cast iron and coins;
- (2) The Grădiștea Hill (Dealul Grădiștii) – 1999; location: 25 meters from Terrace no. XI; inventory: 2 bracelets, gold and silver coins (probably Greek tetradrachmas, Koson coins);
- (3) Căprăreța-2000; location: 600 meters from Terrace no. XI, 400 meters North from the forestry road, on a steep slope; pit lined with blocks made out of local mica-schist; inventory: 10 bracelets;
- (4) Căprăreța-2001-a; location: in the area of the water basins; at the bottom of the Căprăreța mound; pit equipped with stone blocks; inventory: 2 bracelets;
- (5) Căprăreța-2001-b; location: on the slope of the Căprăreța mound; inventory: 3 bracelets.

According to the data published to this day one could come up with a couple of explanations regarding the structure of the inventories: (a) there is a fluctuating number of gold bracelets in each hoard; (b) the bracelets are not associated with any other piece of jewelry; (c) only the hoards uncovered in 1998 and in 1999 are reuniting gold bracelets and coins. Unfortunately, the numismatic features of these coins are still unknown. Most of the uncovered objects have disappeared on the international antique market. The authors of the discoveries are currently under

¹ Anghel G. 2008, 343-sqq. Ciută M., Rustoiu G. 2007; 2008.

official inquiry,² but the information that they provided are still not entirely, critically and satisfyingly, taken hold of in the professional literature.³

Up to this day, the Romanian state has retrieved 11 bracelets, while a 12th one will, hopefully, be “repatriated”.⁴ Nine bracelets (nos. 1–9) have already made the object of several debates covering their technological, morphological, ornamental and metallographic characteristics⁵. Nevertheless, the affiliation of each of these recuperated bracelets in the hoards uncovered between 1998–2001 could not still be established, in spite of the existing preoccupation, and remains a future desideratum for the on-going investigations. Only the bracelet illustrated in the Christie’s catalogue might be attributed, with a high degree of probability, to the hoard uncovered in 1998.⁶

2. THE MORPHOLOGICAL AND ORNAMENTAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE GOLD AND SILVER BRACELETS

The similarity of the majority of the gold spiral bracelets with the silver ones constitutes one of the central aspects of the study of these objects. The dating of the gold samples can be approximated and their symbolic and cultural significance can be deepened through these analogies. The similarities between the gold bracelets from Grădiştea de Munte and approximately 30 other silver spiral bracelets discovered in various hoards or in isolated discoveries from pre-Roman Dacia⁷ (fig. 1) can be caught on three distinct levels: (a) common technological processes, (b) common morphology and (c) similar ornamentation rules.

Both the gold and the silver bracelets are the result of practicing the very same goldsmith craft: forging, fire-hammering, punching, engraving, stamping and, in the case of the silver pieces, the frequent gilding of the external surfaces of the terminal plates. I shall not insist in the current approach upon the particularities of the technological process. One should mention though that the manufacturing of the silver bracelets presumed an extremely similar technological process (if not an identical one) with the one conjured up in Barbara Deppert-Lippitz’s⁸ contribution dedicated to the gold samples.

² According to Timonea D. 2005, the bill of indictment has been put together in June 2005.

³ Brilinschi V. 2007a, 2007b; Lazăr A. *et al.*, 2008.

⁴ E.g. *** “Another Dacian bracelet will be brought back at the beginning of the year 2009”, *Realitatea.net*, Thursday 18.12.2008.

⁵ Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, Oberländer-Târnoveanu E., Constantinescu B. 2008.

⁶ *Christie’s New York, Ancient Jewelry*, 8. December 1999, no. 26; Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 241 and 376.

⁷ According to Medeleţ F. 1976. Other more recently discovered silver spiral bracelets: Marazov I. *et al.*, 2005, 79, No. 73; Stângă I. 1992, 151–152, 154, fig. 2.

⁸ Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 208–215/252–259.

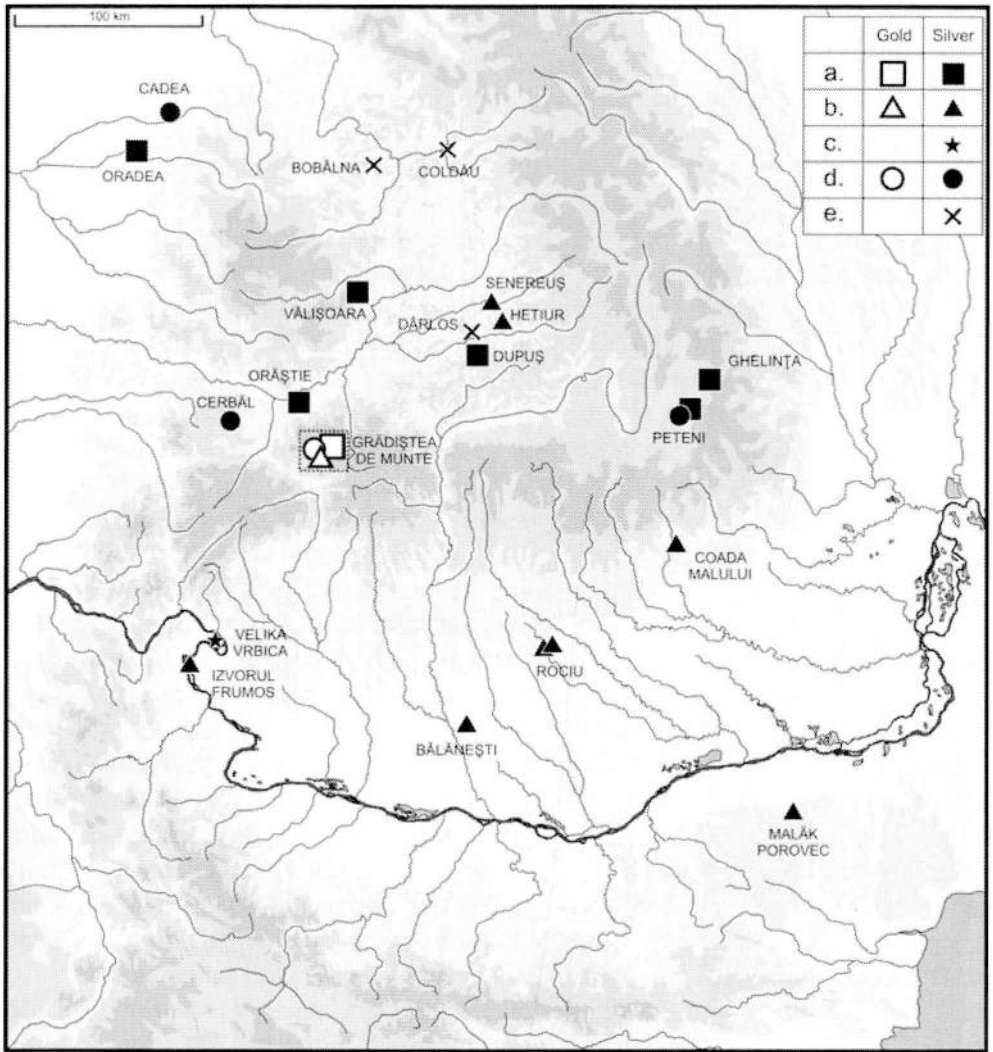


Fig. 1. – The spreading of spiral bracelets with terminal plates: a – with 7 palmettas, b – with 6 palmettas, c – with 5 palmettas, d – without palmettas, e – with an unspecified number of palmettas (fragmentary or lost pieces).

The morphology of the 11 recuperated gold bracelets is subordinated to the same *rules of shape and decor organization* as in the case of the silver pieces in such a way that they *form together a unitary type*⁹ (fig. 2): (1) both terminations of the piece are identical and have the aspect of elongated plates; (2) the ornamentation of these plates is organized on the basis of a tripartite scheme of registers: (a) the zoomorphic protoma register; (b) the mane register and (c) the palmettas' register. The only significant

⁹ Horedt K. 1973, 140–141 (D5c); Spănu D. 2007a, fig. 3 (spiral bracelets type 2).

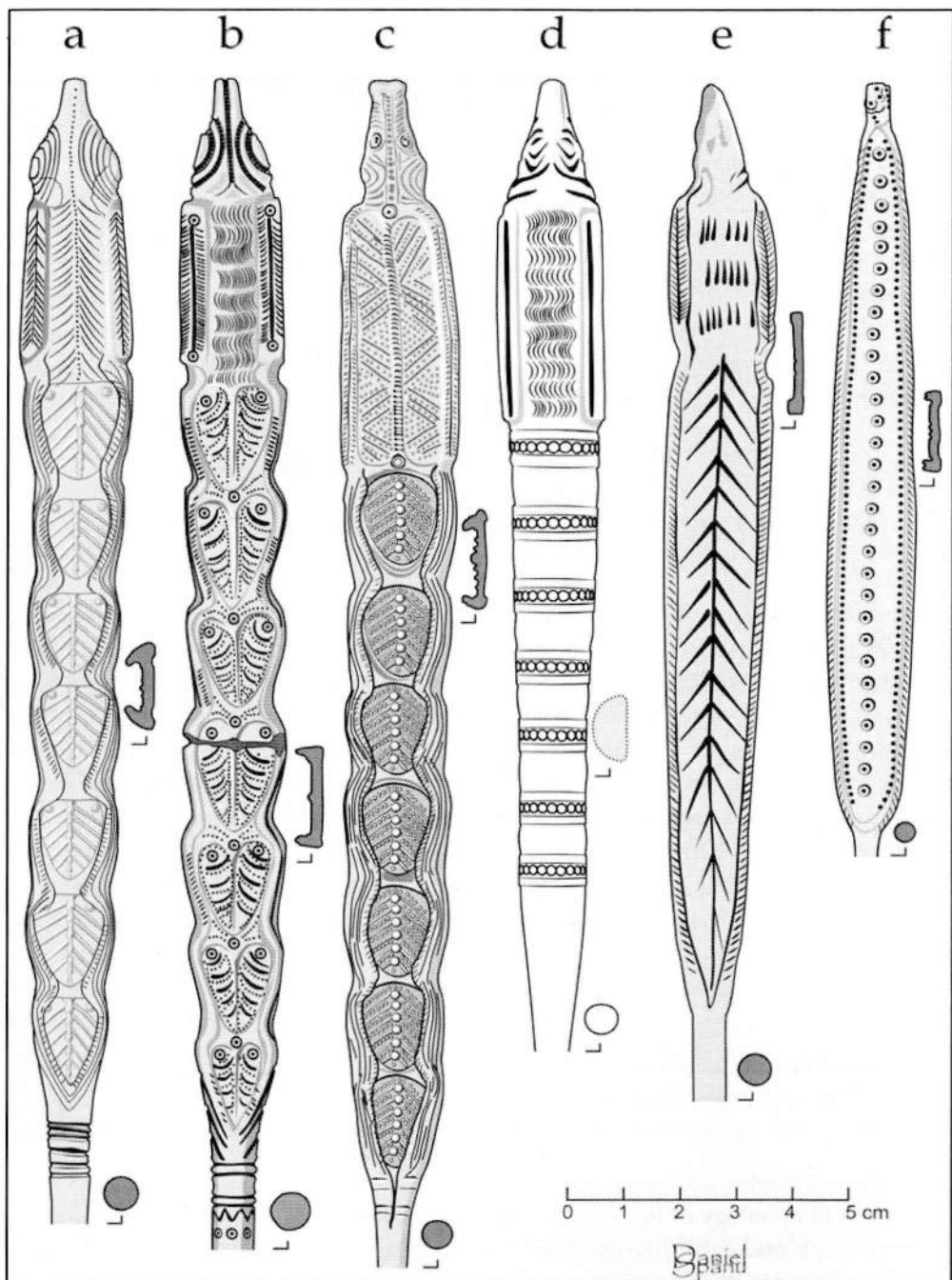


Fig. 2. – Comparison between the unfolded terminations of several representative gold and silver spiral bracelets: a – Grădiștea de Munte no. 1 (gold, drawing after the original); b – Orăștie (silver, drawing after the original); c – Grădiștea de Munte no. 5 (gold, drawing after the original); d – the “Christie’s” bracelet (gold, reconstruction drawing after photographs); e – Cadea (silver, drawing after the original); f – Cerbăl (silver, drawing after the original).

variation in the ornamental structure of the terminal plates is determined by the number of palmettas (5, 6 or 7). One should mention the fact that the variation of the number of palmettas is not at random, but is directly correlated with the pre-established length of the plate.

From the gold pieces known to this day, the seven-palmettas model are the most frequent ones (nos. 1–7, 9–10) and only two of the gold bracelets (nos. 8 and 11) exhibit six palmettas each.¹⁰ The silver bracelets with 7 palmettas (fig. 1/a) are concentrated exclusively in the intra-Carpathian basin (Orăștie – fig. 2/b, Vălișoara, Dupuș, Oradea, Peteni, Ghelinița), whereas the silver pieces with 6 palmettas (fig. 1/b) are found more rarely in Transylvania (only in Hetiur and Senereuș), but rather more frequently in the southern part from the Carpathians (Izvorul Frumos, Rociu, Coadă Malului or Bălănești). Only one of the silver pieces known to this day has only 5 palmettas and it comes also from the south of the Carpathian Mountains, more precisely from Velika Vrbica (fig. 1/c).¹¹ From the point of view of an enhanced preference for seven palmettas, one can consider that the Grădiștea de Munte gold bracelets lot can be harmoniously integrated into the intra-Carpathian group of spiral bracelets with silver terminal plates.

In the case of the “Christie’s” bracelets (fig. 2/d), transversal rows of pearlies were punched in the place of the palmettas. The absence of the latter can be also found in the case of the silver spiral bracelets from Cadea (plate ornamented with the fish-back motive) or Cerbăl (plate ornamented with a longitudinal row of punched pearlies) (fig. 2/e–f). One can suppose that these pieces reflect the search (in different precious metals creation centres) of various more simple ornamental solutions for decorating the terminal plates of the spiral bracelets. Thus, all the gold bracelets from Grădiștea de Munte illustrate the same morphological variations and the same “aesthetical” searches that are also reflected by the rest of the silver bracelets coming from the entire territory of the pre-Roman Dacia.

The numerous gold pieces discovered at Grădiștea de Munte and the manner in which all the rest of the spiral bracelets with terminal plates from pre-Roman Dacia are made of silver (fig. 1) permit the presupposition of an exceptional centre-periphery relationship between different workshops and craftsmen from all over this region. One can ask the question if the Grădiștea de Munte gold bracelets might be interpreted as artistic and symbolic models of the silver pieces from the rest of Dacia (fig. 1).

Some differences connected to the ornamentation technique of the gold and silver pieces can be caught in the case of the palmettas. All the ornamental elements of the gold bracelets palmettas have been made exclusively through

¹⁰ For the numbering and the description of bracelets nos. 1–9 cf. Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 217–233/261–280. Bracelets nos. 10–11, still a novelty, have been examined by the author of these lines in Frankfurt, on November 13th–14th 2008, and can be admired in the exhibiting windows of the National History Museum in Bucharest.

¹¹ Garașanin D. 1954, 67, No. 4880, pl. XLIV/10 and LIX/6.

stamping. Silver analogies can be found only at Senereuş, Rociu, Gheliţa, and on two of the bracelets from the Belgrade National Museum.¹² On the other hand, the palmettas of the majority of the silver pieces (Orăştie, Dupuş, Dârlos, Izvorul Frumos, Bălăneşti, Coadă Malului, Velika Vrbica a.o.) present an ornamentation made partially or completely through engraving; only the general shape of the palmettas and, sometimes, the median nervure, are the result of stamping. As such, for deepening the specificity of the gold bracelets, one should pay a special attention to the aspect of the palmettas.

The palmettas of the gold bracelets show two distinct manners of ornamental organization:

(A) The palmettas of the bracelets nos. 1–4 and 6–11 present one median nervure and 8 to 14 smaller, symmetrically disposed nervures (e.g. fig. 2/a and fig. 3). The basis of the median nervure is surrounded by two hemispherical prominences. The stylistic unity of the palmettas of bracelets nos. 1–4 and 6–11 suggest the possibility that they have been made by the same craftsman, or, more probably, by several craftsmen¹³ working in a tight collaboration relationship, presumably a master-disciple(s) one.



Fig. 3. – The spiral bracelet no. 1
(photo D.S.).

¹² Garaşanin D. 1954, 67, nos. 4881 and 4886, pl. XLIV/9 and 11 and LIX/5 and 7.

¹³ Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 234/281. In her talk “Gold Spirales from the Orăştie Mountains”, given on May 16th 2007 at the National History Museum of Romania, B. Deppert-Lippitz provides stronger arguments to the hypothesis that the Grădiştea de Munte bracelets were made by several craftsmen.

(B) The palmettas of bracelet no. 5 (fig. 2/c and fig. 4) differ fundamentally from the ones reproduced on bracelets 1–4 and 6–11. The median nervure has been replaced this time by a row of six bigger prominences. Six outlined lateral nervures are developing on both sides of this row. The spaces between the lateral nervures have been occupied by rows of 4 to 6 outlined pearlies. The general aspect of the palmetta's composition is a heavy one, with no unornamented blank spaces. These aesthetical peculiarities distinguish the creator of bracelet no. 5 as a different craftsman from the one(s?) who has (have) made bracelets 1–4 and 6–11. There are no direct analogies of such complex ornamentation with pearlies of the palmettas in the case of the silver pieces. Nevertheless, the artistic effect of the outlined pearlies placed between the lateral nervures of the palmettas has been suggested in the case of several silver pieces (Vălișoara, Orăștie, Dârlos, Dupuș) through rows of punching.

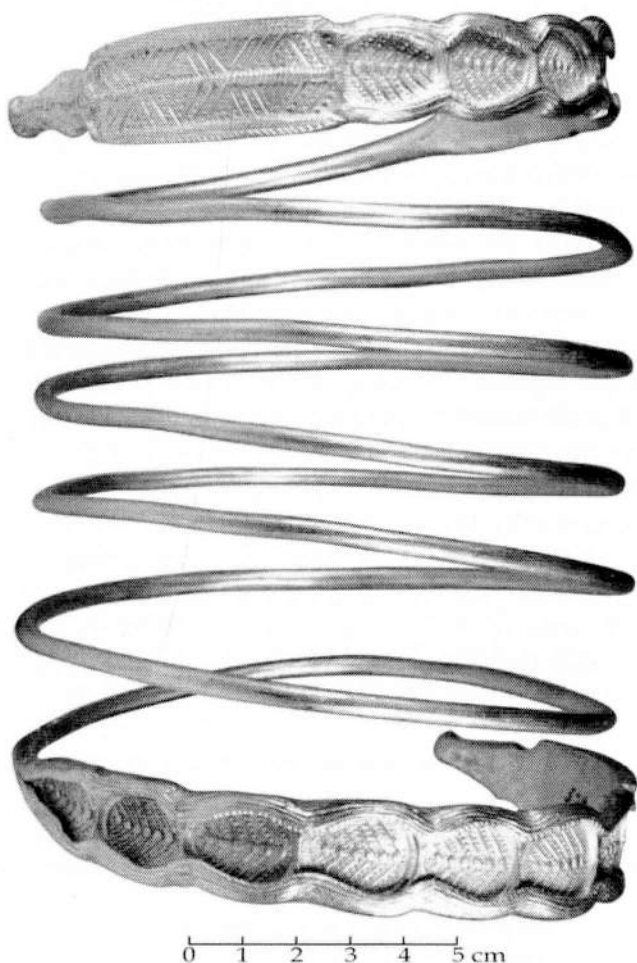


Fig. 4. – The spiral bracelet no. 5
(photo D.S.).

3. EXPLAINING THE BRACELETS' SOCIAL-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE THROUGH THEIR MORPHOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

I shall not go in-depth in this piece of analysis into the issue of the punches used for decorating the bracelets. The ornamental classification of the palmettas is enough for supporting the hypothesis that there were several craftsmen of the Grădiştea de Munte gold bracelets. As B. Deppert-Lippitz has also shown,¹⁴ the stylistic differences between the palmettas of bracelet no. 5 and the palmettas of the rest of recuperated gold bracelets allow the presupposition of a different paternity. The absence of the palmettas from the terminal plates of the "Christie's" bracelet might indicate in its turn a distinct identity of its creator. Thus, one can presume that the bracelets known up to this day have been the result of the activity of *at least* 3 different craftsmen.

If we accept the idea according to which the craftsman was assisted in his activities by helpers (journeymen, apprentices), then one can, very probably, presume that the Grădiştea de Munte gold bracelets constituted so-called "workshop works" – orders addressed to a workshop in which several apprentices were working under the supervision of a master. Without mentioning the necessary personnel for obtaining the raw materials, just the fact that a big number of gold bracelets with relative varied decorations were made might mirror the activity of a specialised professional group of goldsmiths who were active around the sanctuaries of the Grădiştea Hill.

On the other hand, the tight morphological and ornamentation analogies between the gold and the silver pieces indicate that several common technological and aesthetic analogies were respected. They also illustrate the familiarisation of several craftsmen from pre-Roman Dacia with a unique common archetype. The supra-regional spreading of the silver pieces suggests the existence of several regional clients/sleeping partners who have adopted the "central" model illustrated by the Grădiştea de Munte gold pieces. This particular relationship between a "center" and several "peripheries" (fig. 1) has been most probably intermediated precisely by the goldsmiths. They stand out as the main agents of a diffusing system of the symbolic goods and also as the bearers of the technological and aesthetical codes of shaping the identity emblems. Under these circumstances, the affiliation of the goldsmiths to the elite of the society in which they lived is an implicit one, like in the case of their fellows from the Celtic West.¹⁵

4. CHRONOLOGICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE GOLD BRACELETS

Any debate related to the dating of the Grădiştea de Munte gold bracelets involves establishing two distinct moments: (1) when they were made and (2) when

¹⁴ Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 234/281.

¹⁵ Avery M. 1997, 85–86.

they were buried. The tight ornamental analogies between the gold and silver pieces support the idea of their relative contemporary times. Through associations with late Latène scheme fibulae (the spoon-fibulae from Senereuş and Peteni, the rhombus-shield fibulae from Cadea, Cerbăl, Rociu and Izvorul Frumos), as well as by virtue of the associations with the late republican coins (at Cadea, Cerbăl, Izvorul Frumos and Rociu), the spiral bracelets with terminal plates distinguish themselves as a IInd phase specific type of the Dacian goldsmith's craft and can be dated to the last decades of Ist century B.C.¹⁶

The bracelets' burying after the organization of Dacia as a Province is not really probable and is not supported, at least for the time being, by any argument. Thus, the Traianic conquest (106 A.D.) might be considered as the latest moment before the gold bracelets could have been buried. If we accept dating the elaboration of the bracelets in the last decades of Ist century B.C., then the period when they could have been deposited basically comprises the whole Ist century A.D. The absence of wearing-out ascertained both in the case of the gold bracelets,¹⁷ as well as in the case of the Koson coins,¹⁸ suggests a very short using time and turn plausible the presupposition that both categories of objects have been buried a short while after they have been made.¹⁹ In the opposite case, one should have to prove if the cultural collective memory²⁰ from the period when the bracelets were made maintained its full integrity throughout the Ist century A.D., until the moment of the Traianic conquest.

5. THE DILEMMA OF THE BURYING OF THE GOLD BRACELETS HOARDS

The reasons for burying the bracelets' hoards, but also the Koson gold coins ones, around the Grădiştea hill will not reveal themselves easily. However, there are two main hypotheses towards which one could thoroughly focus the attention: (1) the gold coins and jewels were buried in order to be protected against being captured and against nullifying their symbolic significance in the context of either the Traianic conquest or of other previous events; (2) the burying of the gold bracelets and coins was independent of the historical vicissitudes, but has been determined by factors of ritual nature. In this latest hypothesis, the reasons for burying the hoards around the Grădiştea hill might be connected to the pre-historical votive practices in general²¹ and with the ones from pre-Roman Dacia in particular.²²

¹⁶ Spânu D. 2002, 99–100, fig. 19; 2004, fig. 4.

¹⁷ Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 236/283; Oberländer-Tâmboveanu E., Constantinescu B. 2008, 298.

¹⁸ Petolescu C. M. 1998, 1; Chiriac M. 2002, 248.

¹⁹ See Pârvan V. 1926, 548, who was assuming a short wearing period for the spiral silver bracelets.

²⁰ Brather S. 2004, 115–116.

²¹ Gießlinger H. 1984; Bradley R. 1988; Kurz G. 1995 a.o.

²² Spânu D. 2004, 128–131; 2007a, 191-sqq.

By all means, one cannot establish a *direct* connection between the reasons for burying the gold bracelets and the news provided by Cassius Dio LXVIII, 14, 4–5 regarding the burying of Decebal's treasure, if only due to the fact that the bracelets' hoards were identified in a mountain area, with steep slopes, and not in a riverbed (Sargetia) or in a cave. The long period (over a century) between the plausible moment when the bracelets were made (the end of the 1st century B.C.) and the moment of the Roman conquest runs counter to the shallow historical-like hypothesis of burying the hoards under the sway danger represented by the Traianic wars.

The massive rock next to which the 10 bracelets-hoard has been identified might be interpreted as a useful reference point for easily recovering the buried objects.²³ However, one cannot exclude the possibility that the pre-historical mentality might have invested these geographical marks with exquisite symbolic significances.²⁴ Based on the characteristics of the of the discovery's location (a steep slope, improper for living), one can consider that this hoard has been buried in a natural environment, like other silver hoards from pre-Roman Dacia (Peteni, Ceheţel a.o.). I wrote all these explanatory notes not for nullifying the plausibility of the first hypothesis formulated above, but rather for stressing the difficulty of unilaterally supporting it.

6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INVENTORIES AND OF THE DEPOSITING PLACE

One cannot debate in an appropriate manner the reasons for burying the gold bracelets without explaining the significance of the inventories' structure and of the archaeological scenery in which they have been deposited. The various numbers of bracelets in the hoards might reflect the potential different significances of the inventories. The burial of a single bracelet or of a pair of bracelets (the hoards from Dealul Grădiştii-1998, 1999 and Căprăreţa 2001-a) might correspond to the rule of depositing individual distinguishing marks, illustrated by the silver pieces hoards from pre-Roman Dacia.²⁵ If it is uncomfortable and difficult for just one person to wear three bracelets at once (the Căprăreţa hoard 2001-b), displaying ten bracelets simultaneously (the Căprăreţa hoard 2000) is basically impossible. Together with the fourteen circular gold bracelets hoard from Haţeg/Toteşti,²⁶ the 2000 and 2001-b Căprăreţa hoards might illustrate a depositing rule that presumed burying a bunch of pieces with a common morphology. Associating ten or three pieces respectively represents the main argument for the presupposition of a collective or institutional²⁷

²³ Ciută M., Rustoiu G. 2007, 99-sqq., fig. 1–5; 2008, 177-sqq./190-sqq., fig. 1–5.

²⁴ Gießlinger H. 2002; Kurz G. 1995, 100–112.

²⁵ Fettich N. 1953, 174; Horedt K. 1973, 155; Spănu D. 2007a, 192.

²⁶ Téglás G. 1889, 59–62; Fettich N. 1951, 119, 195, pl. XXI, 2–3.

²⁷ Cf. Deppert-Lippitz B. 2008, 236–237/283–284; Ciută M., Rustoiu G. 2007, 110; 2008, 188/200.

possession of some of the sets of the gold bracelets from Grădiştea de Munte. This finding reveals its importance, especially if we take into account the proximity between the places where the hoards have been discovered and the sanctuaries and the rest of the late Latène vestiges from the Grădiştea de Munte.

The significance of the gold bracelets hoards cannot appropriately become explicit without understanding the exceptional cultural characteristics of the local archaeological scenery: a highly complex and at the same time a unique archaeological landscape, in which one can find artificial terraces and fortifications, buildings with monumental aspirations²⁸, meant for some ceremonial-religious functions, and vestiges of an intense metallurgical activity (metallurgical workshops, deposits of iron tools).²⁹

If the supreme expression of the enlightening effort from pre-Roman Dacia is eloquently illustrated exactly by the elaborated architecture of the sanctuaries from the Grădiştea hill, then we can consider that in the local metallurgy the creation with the most aesthetical and symbolic valences is illustrated exactly by the recently discovered gold bracelets. The concentration of gold bracelets hoards exactly in the vicinity of the terrace with sanctuaries from Grădiştea hill is not, thus, random: the hoards' significance can be most probably correlated with the one of the sanctuaries. Maybe manufactured exactly around the sanctuaries³⁰, the orders for objects with complex aesthetical and symbolic valences were most probably responding to a desideratum with a votive content.

These votive significances of the gold bracelets and coins hoards can be explained also by comparing them to the model provided by the gold coins and necklaces with terminal buffers (*Halsringe mit Pufferenden*) from the late-Latène Celtic West.³¹ The two models have in common (1) the fact that the same precious metal was used to create unusually big objects to be interpreted as jewellery and (2) the vicinity of the sanctuaries, as well as the fact that (3) the coins were not used. The discovery near Snettisham, in England, on a hill plateau, inside a precinct bordered through a ditch, of several hoards of precious metal necklaces dating from the 1st century B.C. has been unanimously accepted in the British research (and not only)³² as an expression of a repeated votive practice of depositing goods in a consecrated area. From perspective of the Snettisham hoards, one can ask if the area, not very wide, situated East-North-East from the terrace with sanctuaries from the Grădiştea Hill could have obtained the ritual significance of a space meant for repeated votive deposits.

²⁸ Antonescu D. 1980, 1984; Ştefan A.S. 2001 (with the older literature).

²⁹ Glodariu L., Iaroslavschi E. 1979, 17; Ferenczi Ş. 1980; Iaroslavschi E. 1997; Bodó C., Ferencz I. V. 2004, 297–306 a. o.

³⁰ Clews regarding the creation in precious metals are signaled on the VIII-th terrace or on one of the terraces under the point named "La Tău": Gheorghiu G. 2005, 148–156 (with the older literature).

³¹ Furger-Gunti A. 1982. Cf. Castro Perez L. 1998, 126–129; Adler W. 2003, 49-sqq. a.o.

³² Clarke R.R. 1954; Burns J.E. 1971; Stead I.M. 1995.

7. CLOSING REMARKS

The spiral gold bracelets from Dealul Grădiștii and Căprăreța are the first representative goldsmiths pieces discovered around the late-Latène period sites from the Orăștie Mountains that could be recuperated, studied and thoroughly documented. Their discovery increases the credibility of the mentions surrounded by mystery, regarding hoards found also in this region during the Renaissance or the beginning of the 19th century.³³ These bracelets occupy a poll-position within the ranks of gold-craftsmanship of late-Latène period Dacia, not only due to the exceptional choice of gold as the raw material or thanks to their massiveness, but rather due to their technological, formal-ornamental and symbolic, complexity. The tight analogies presented by the gold and silver pieces allow, for the first time in the archaeological research of the late-Latène period, making evident the tight technological, aesthetical, and especially symbolic links between the elites from the Orăștie Mountains area and the other regions of Ist century B.C. – Ist century A.D. Dacia. These links reflect the fact that the craftsmen and the people who ordered them, although coming from a relatively wide area, were using common ornamental and symbolic codes, most probably conceived in a single centre. The reasons for burying the gold spiral bracelets hoards might be explained in two ways: either as forestalling of temple hoards, or as votive deposits meant to the wild nature divinities. Research will most probably balance between these two hypotheses. However, the vicinity of the sanctuaries, as well as the morphological analogies with the silver bracelets coming from various hoards from pre-Roman Dacia, suggest the possibility of interpreting the Grădiștea de Munte hoards as one of the exceptional votive manifestations of that era. (Text finalized by the author in April 2009 and translated by Oana Valentina Suci)

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³³ Winkler I. 1972; Makkay J. 1995; Spânu D. 2007b; Anghel G. 2008 a.o.

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