

THE EARLY LA TÈNE BELT HOOK FROM PRAŠNÍK¹

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The Early La Tène belt hook from Prašník

The accidentally found iron belt hook from Prašník in western Slovakia ranks among exceptional artifacts of the early Celtic art. Together with the nearby centre of production and power in Horné Orešany and with the burial grounds in Stupava and Bučany, it confirms that this territory belonged to the core of the oldest Celtic settlement in the Central Danube region.

INTRODUCTION

Evidence of early Celtic artistic craft with its unique graphic representation attracts attention of experts as well as ancient fine art lovers. In the wider territory of the Central Danube region, such artifacts were very rare and this craft was represented mainly by well-known finds, a bronze belt hook from Stupava and a mask-shaped fibula from Slovenské Pravno. The image of western Slovakia as an unimportant marginal part of the Early La Tène civilization has been changed by spectacular discoveries at the hillfort of Slepý vrch near Horné Orešany, from which several artifacts of exceptional artistic quality have been published (*Bazovský 2006; Čambal 2005, 2012*). According to the results of a field survey, mask-shaped fibulae and other artistic craft works were also manufactured at the location (*Pieta 2007, with bibliography; 2014; Pieta/Jakubčinová/Šebesta 2011*). Early La Tène products arrived in the parts of the Western Carpathian territory further to the north or east with the continuous Late Hallstatt settlement. The complicated situation at the end of the Early Iron Age in Slovakia was dealt with particularly by Elena Miroššayová, who has exceptionally contributed to our knowledge of this complex historical period (*Miroššayová 2017*). This short contribution is friendly dedicated to her.

In 1999, an unknown person offered an iron belt hook reportedly discovered by searchers at the hillfort of Tlstá hora near Prašník, Trnava district, to the Museum of Trenčín. Around the same time, two axes, a spear, a knife and a fragment of a zoomorphic artifact from the same site were presented to the Institute of Archaeology of SAS. Details of the find context are unknown. The belt hook conserved and documented in the museum is nowadays deposited in the Institute of Archaeology of SAS. I would like to thank Jaroslav Somr for documenting of the find and kind provision of information and pictures. So far, the artifact has only been mentioned in literature (*Pieta 2007, 13*).

THE SITE AND ITS HINTERLAND

Two hillforts, Tlstý vrch (426 m) and Hrádok (above the hamlet U Fajnorov), are situated near the village of Prašník in the Little Carpathians. Both sites were rather thoroughly studied by the Western Slovakia Museum in Trnava in the 1970s and 1980s. Results of excavations were published by the author of the research P. Novák in several articles as well as in two monographs (*Novák 2001, 2011*). According to the documentation by J. Somr and the record of the author of this article, the belt hook and other artifacts come from the hillfort of Tlstá hora. The research confirmed presence of intense settlement

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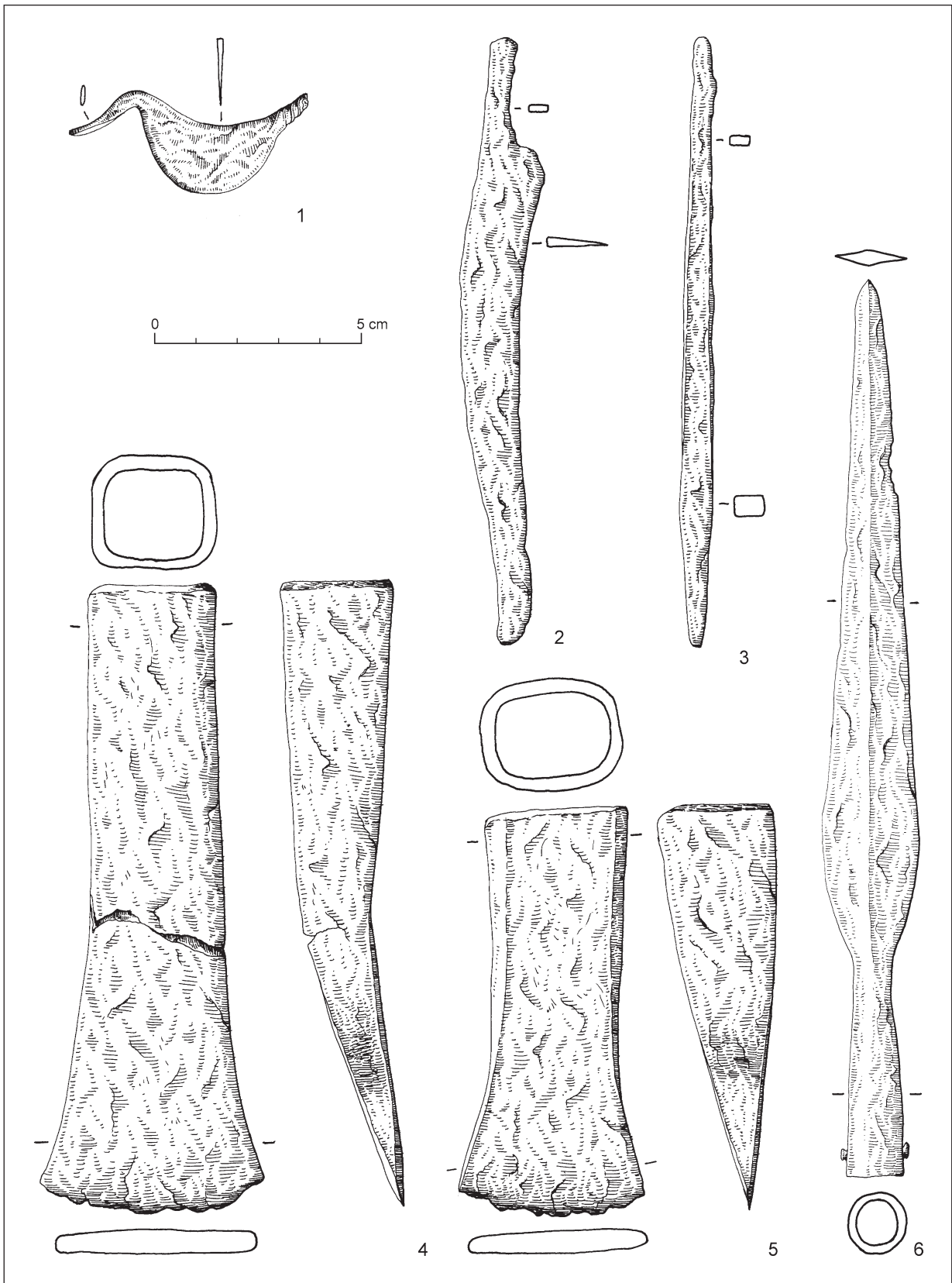


Fig. 1. Prašník-Tlstá hora. Iron artifacts from the hillfort.

in the Hallstatt period (Novák 2001). It is an upland fortification of 2.07 ha where – unlike the nearby polycultural hillfort at the site of Hrádok – finds of the Kalenderberg culture with Lusatian influences clearly prevail (Veličák/Romsauer 1994, 154). The site is located in the immediate surroundings of one of the passes through the Little Carpathians. Nearby, not far from Vrbov, a settlement with mixed Late Hallstatt, Early La Tène population is situated (Romsauer 1981). The wider territory of the western slopes of this mountain range was densely populated in the Early and Late Iron Age and several important period centres were founded there (Stegmann-Rajtár 2002). The approx. 25 km distant hillfort of Molpír in Smolenice was the centre of settlement in the Hallstatt as well as Middle La Tène periods. The fortification at Slepý vrch near Horné Orešany, approx. 30 km south of Prašník, with documented production of artistic craft products from that time was important for the Early La Tène settlement in the wider territory of the Central Danube region.

Besides the belt hook, whose evaluation is the aim of this article, a collection of iron artifacts, obtained at the same time as the analyzed belt hook, comes from the hillfort of Tlstá hora near Prašník. Judging by their narrow fan-shaped blades and closed sockets, both axes belong to older products of this type and can be roughly dated to the end of the Hallstatt period or the beginning of the La Tène period (Fig. 1: 4, 5; Benediková 2014, 19; 2017, 360). A high number of axes of similar shapes was also found at the Early La Tène hillfort in Horné Orešany. The knife with a curved blade and a higher slightly rounded tip and possibly other artifacts can be classified similarly (Fig. 1: 1–3). The long narrow willow-shaped spear point of a diamond-shaped cross-section is more difficult to classify (Fig. 1: 6). It can be only generally dated in early protohistory (Pieta 2010, 281).

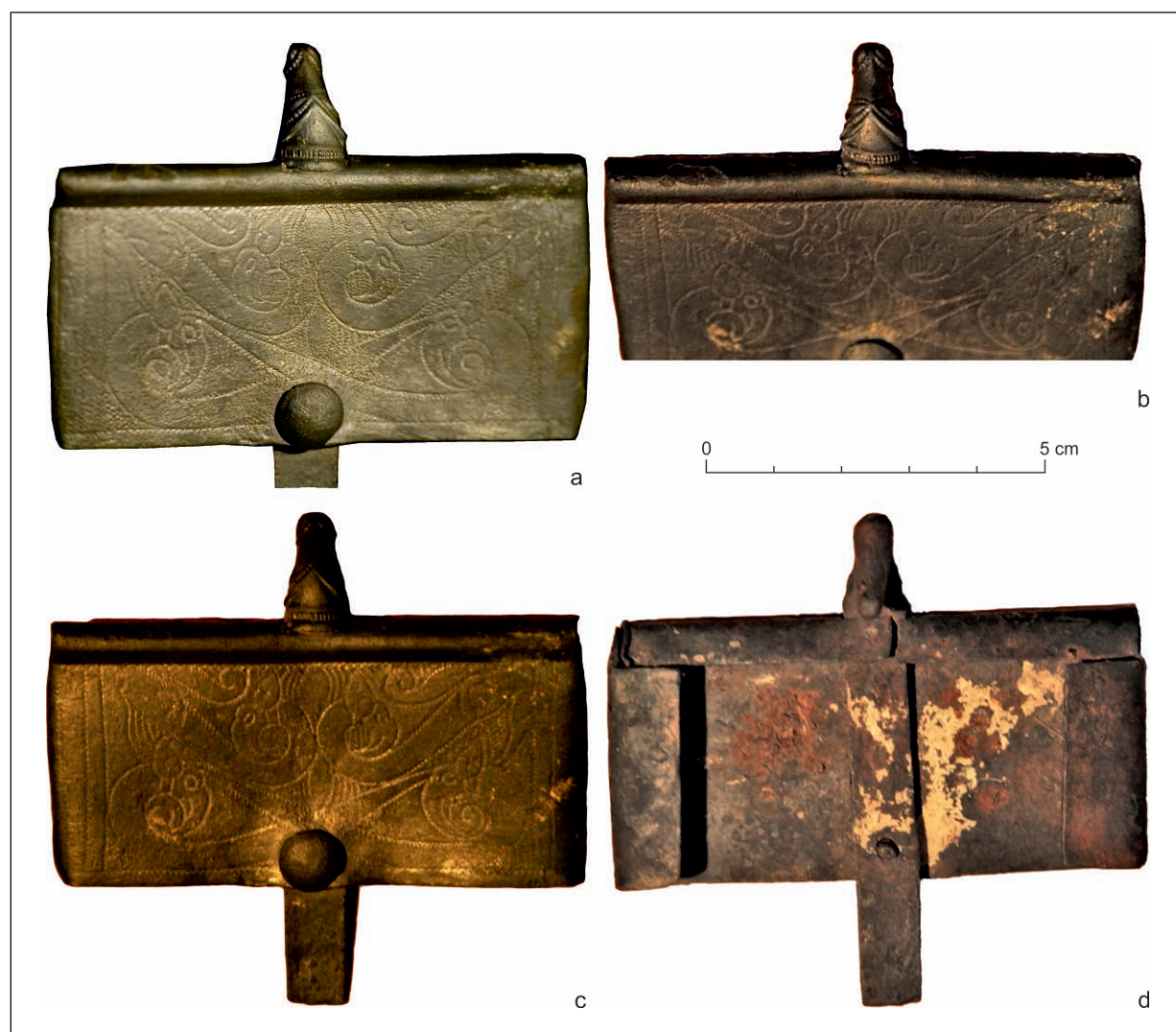


Fig. 2. Prašník-Tlstá hora. Iron belt hook.

ANALYSIS AND DATING OF THE BELT HOOK

A box-shaped iron belt hook (Fig. 2). Its functional part, the hook, is wrought from a narrow strip of iron and connected to the plate by two rivets which also attached the belt hook to the end of a belt. The jutting hook is reinforced and plastically formed into a shape of a head of a fantastic beast with large almond-shaped eyes, suggested nostrils and mouth. The eyes, nostrils and the interface of the head and neck are framed by jagged lines. The box-shaped plate of the belt end was made of 1 mm thick iron sheet inverted on three sides. On the front side with the attached hook, there is a rounded plastic cordon. Decoration on the upper part of the rectangular plate is lined with three stamped lines on the shorter sides. The area between both outer lines is filled with an engraved meandre, while a symmetrical composition of two pairs of heads of birds of prey, griffins with bent beaks, pointed ears and long necks, is situated in the central part. Heads of the outer pair face each other, while the inner pair's heads are turned away from each other. The space between them is filled with acanthi. Outlines of the creatures are engraved and later decoratively stamped. The background is partly covered with stamped parallel lines respecting the symmetry of the composition and they optically emphasise the design of both pairs of griffins. The belt hook is 74 mm long, the plate is 78–79 mm wide and 39 mm long (Fig. 3).

The artifact belongs to the so-called box-shaped belt hooks also called bipartite belt hooks with plate (“Gürtelhaken mit kästchenförmigem Beschlag”), which are typical parts of belts in female and rarely male garments in the Early La Tène period. They are frequent especially in a simple iron form without ornaments (Frey 1996, 202, fig. 2; 6; Stöllner 2002, 96–98). The belt hooks of this type from the hillfort of Slepý vrch near Horné Orešany belong mostly to simple iron exemplars (Pieta 2007, 13, fig. 10; Pieta/Jakubčinová/Šebesta 2011, 212, fig. 97: 10). The exemplar from Prašník belongs to the variant with a large rectangular plate and jutting hook which were part of buckles of wider leather belts. Our well-known and often depicted bronze artifact from the burial ground in Stupava belongs to such type (Čambal 2012, fig. 4; 5; Megaw 2011; 2012, 447). It seems that the exemplars with jutting hooks including the find from Prašník belong to younger variants dated to the end of stage Lt A or the beginning of stage Lt B1 (Bujna 2011, 127, 160) or a bit later (Ramsl 2011, 105).

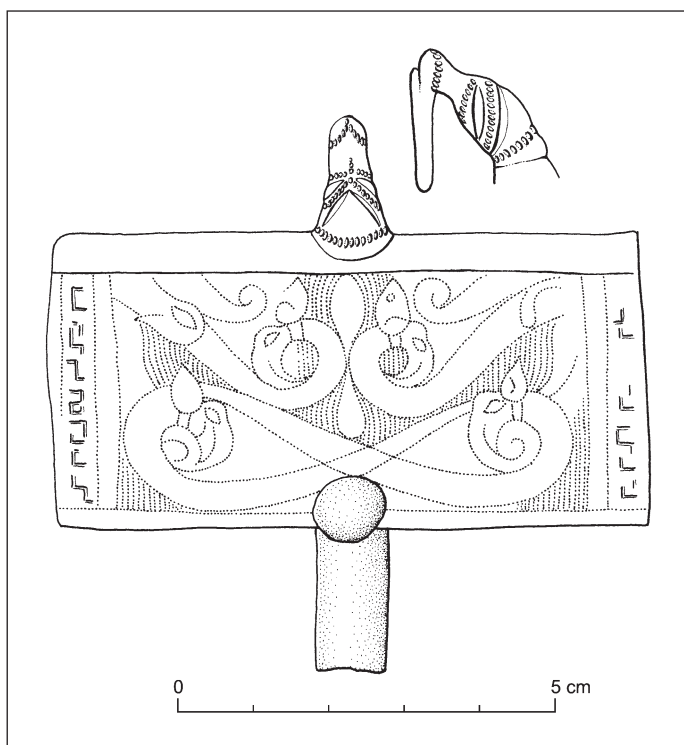


Fig. 3. Prašník-Tlšťá hora. Iron belt hook.

Decoration on the belt hook from Prašník is concentrated on its visible parts, the upper part of the “kästchenförmigem Beschlag” and the hook in shape of an animal head, mask. Typical features of the early Celtic artistic expression are found in its design, narrow almond-shaped eyes and the plastic lines emphasised with slashing similar to astragal. Round nostrils resemble a strong mythical beast, a quadruped (bull, ram, wild boar). The composition of the decorated area is very well correspondent with the Early La Tène style using antithetically (opposite) standing figures creating a symmetrical composition of the scene. The pairs of griffins with typical bent beaks, round or almond-shaped eyes and big pointed ears enter the Celtic art as an orientalizing motif in its earliest phase when they are applied on openwork belt hooks and other luxurious products. We find parallels to the details of the ornamentation on several artifacts of the early Celtic art. The lines of the meandres outlining the central scene on the short sides of the rectangular plate can be found e. g. on the belt hook from Schwabsburg (Frey 2002, 291) or on the belt hook from Želkovice, Hořovice district

(Megaw/Megaw 2001, fig. 429B). A certain model to the analyzed exemplar can be seen in the well-known bronze belt hook from burial 17 from the Austrian burial ground in Herzogenburg-Ossarn with the hook shaped as an animal head and with an antithetically composed engraved figural decoration (Frey 2002, 288, fig. 173; Megaw/Megaw/Neugebauer 1989).

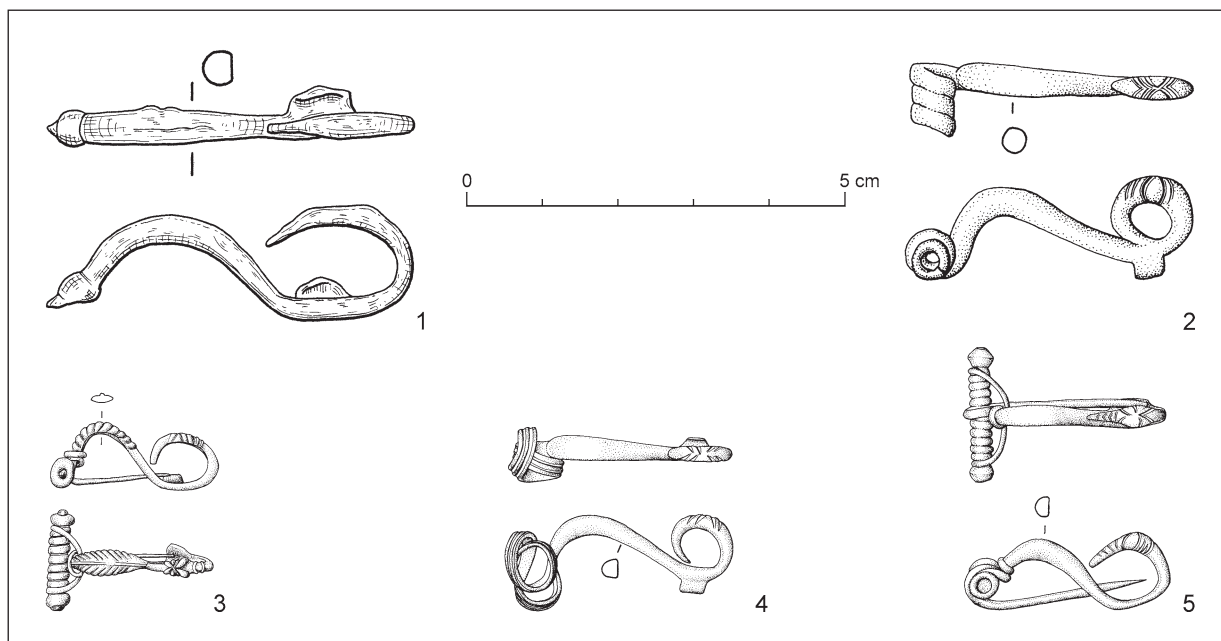


Fig. 4. Belt hooks with stems shaped as bird-of-prey heads. 1 – Blatnica; 2–5 – Horné Orešany. 1 – iron; 2–5 – bronze.

Griffin heads dominate in the decorative area of the belt hook. The figure of this mythical animal arrived in the Mediterranean and, from there, also in the Celtic artistic craft from the Orient; in a modified form (with a bird-of-prey head, eagle and a body of a quadruped without wings), it belongs to the frequently used motifs in the whole territory of the early Celtic civilisation including its eastern part (Frey 2002, 201, 202; Szabó 2012, 693). This attractive motif in a stylized form (as a so-called *Greifenleier*) is applied also in further development of the Celtic art (Frey 1995, 171, 172; Megaw/Megaw 1990; 2001, 66, 67, 133, fig. 199; Megaw 2012, fig. 7b). In the Celtic iconography, it is probably predominantly an accented image of a bird of prey, eagle which is identified with one of the main deities of the Celtic pantheon, Taranis in the mythological symbolism. The motif of a bird-of-prey's head with a distinct bent down beak belongs to frequent motifs mainly on fibulae of the Early La Tène period. They can also be found at sites in western Slovakia and rarely in its mountainous area as well (Fig. 4).

The plastic figure of griffin is applied on the handle of the decorative bronze artifact – probably a razor or a knife – discovered on the slope below the hillfort at Slepý vrch in Horné Orešany around 2010 (Fig. 5). The mythical animal connects the terminal side of the rectangular frame of the handle. It holds its head high with an open bent beak creating a ring, maybe for a string used for suspension of the artifact. The mouth and distinct round eyes are accented by enamel paste.



Fig. 5. Horné Orešany-Slepý vrch. Detail of the bronze handle of a decorative artifact, probably an iron razor or a knife. Bronze, enamel and iron.

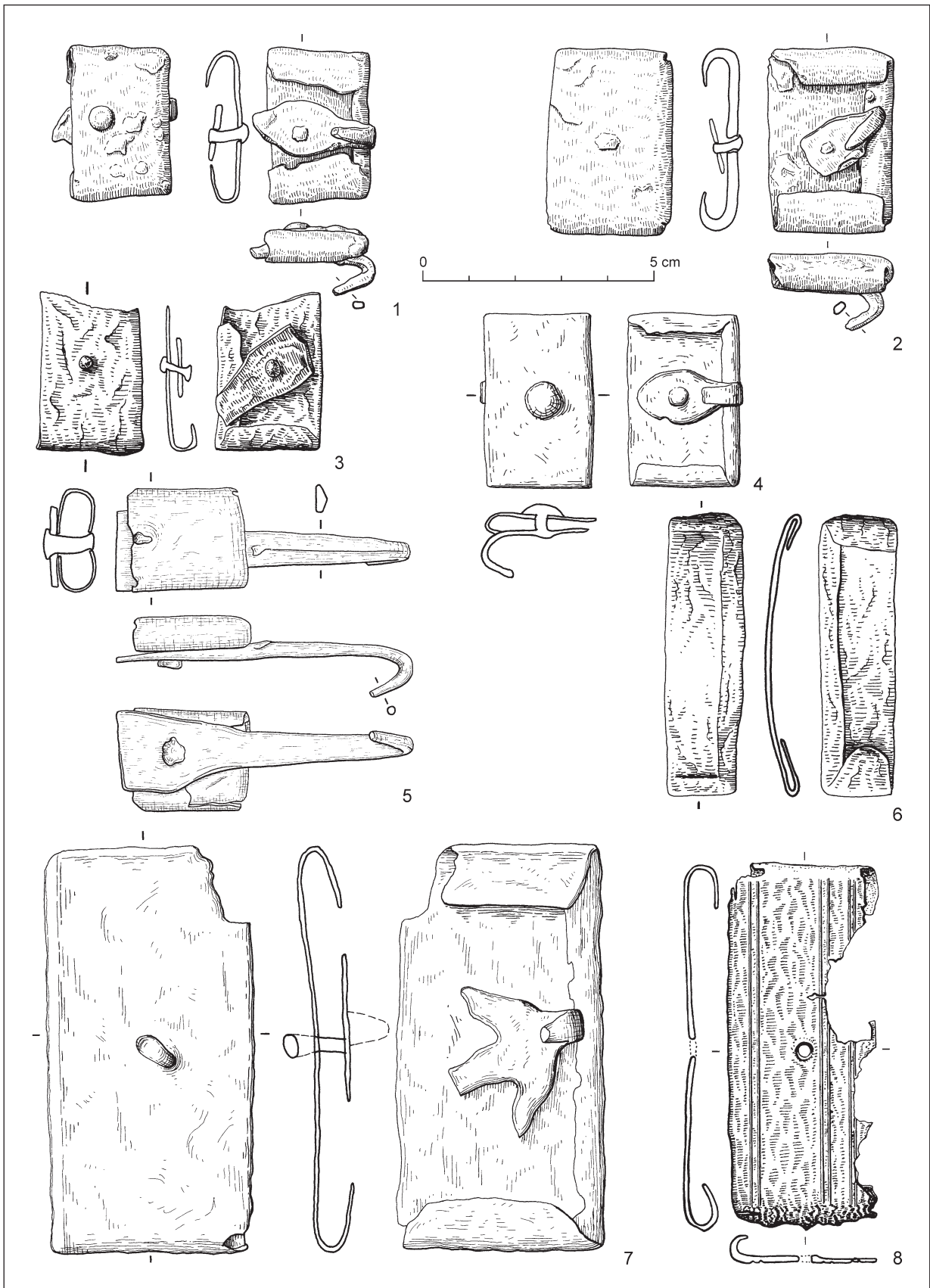


Fig. 6. Iron belt hooks with rectangular plate from western and northern Slovakia. 1–4, 6, 7 – Horné Orešany (Slepý vrch); 5 – Blatnica (Prašnica); 8 – Sklabinský Podzámok (Katova skala).

Claws of both feet are leaning against the frame of the handle, the back part of the body connects the frame by a long snake-like twisted tail. The side of the animal is thickened by engraved lines and might represent folded wings. The figurine with its design (upright head with open beak, big round eyes) perfectly fits the standard artistic representation of griffins in the early Celtic art (Dürrnberg bei Hallein: Frey 2002, fig. 180; Weiskirchen, Parlsberg, Somme-Bionne: Megaw/Megaw 2001, 66). Unlike the common representation of the animal with the head turned back, the head directed to the front on the griffin figurine from Horné Orešany is a less frequent depiction.

The belt hook from Prašník has a specific feature – application of considerably complex and technically as well as aesthetically well done decoration on a simple iron product, which is, from the aspect of the used material, much more complicated. In the Celtic artistic craft, it was used mostly in decoration of sword scabbards.

Belt hooks of this type were common mainly in the central part of the area of the Early La Tène civilisation (Frey 1996, 201, 202; Pieta 2007, fig. 10). Their production in Horné Orešany, where several tens of belt hooks and their parts were found, explains their marginal expansion further to the western part of the Carpathian basin; it is documented by the above described exemplar, grave goods from the environment of the Little Carpathians (Stupava: Čambal 2012; Bučany: Bujna/Romsauer 1983), as well as two artifacts recently discovered in Turiec in the north of Slovakia (Blatnica, Sklabinský Podzámok; Fig. 6: 5, 8). The find from Prašník extended the number of Celtic artistic craft artifacts from Slovakia and pointed to the key importance of the territory of the Little Carpathians as the easternmost part of the Early La Tène civilisation again. Although the find situation of the Early La Tène belt hook at the Hallstatt hillfort in Prašník-Tlstá hora is not clear, it suggests that, like at the Slepý vrch near Horné Orešany (Pieta 2007, 3; Stegmann-Rajtár 2017, 386, 387), this upland site was also used in the time of a new rise of the Little Carpathians in the beginning of the La Tène period.

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Včasnoténska zápona z Prašníka

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Súhrn

Pohľad na západné Slovensko, ako málo významnú okrajovú súčasť včasnoténskej civilizácie, zmenili spektakulárne objavy na hradisku Slepý vrch pri Horných Orešanoch, odkiaľ boli doteraz publikované viaceré artefakty mimoriadnej výtvarnej hodnoty (Bazovský 2006; Čambal 2005; 2012). Podľa výsledkov terénneho výskumu sa na tomto mieste maskovité spony a iné umelecko-remeselné predmety aj vyrábali (Pieta 2007; 2014; Pieta/Jakubčinová/Šebesta 2011). Počet včasnoténských nálezišiek z oblasti Malých Karpát rozšíril starší náhodný nález železnej opaskovej zápony, ktorý sa spolu s ďalšími predmetmi podarilo zdokumentovať (obr. 1; 2). Podľa získaných údajov pochádzajú z hradiska Prašník, Tlstá hora (426 m), okres Trnava, s intenzívnym osídlením kalenderberskej kultúry s lužickými vplyvmi (Novák 2001; Veliačik/Romsauer 1994).

Krubicová železná zápona (dvojdielna zápona s puzdrom; Bujna 2011, 125, 127) patrí k typickým súčasťami opaska ženského, ale ojedinele aj mužského kroja včasnoténskeho obdobia (obr. 3). Časté sú najmä v jednoduchom železnom prevedení bez výzdoby (Frey 1996, 202, obr. 2; 6; Stöllner 2002, 96–98). Aj zápony tohto typu z hradiska Slepý vrch pri Horných Orešanoch patria prevažne k prostým železným exemplárom (Pieta 2007, 13, obr. 10; Pieta/Jakubčinová/Šebesta 2011, 212, obr. 97: 10). Exemplár z Prašníka patrí k variantu s veľkou obdĺžnikovou platničkou a vyčnievajúcim háčikom, ktoré boli súčasťou zapínania širších kožených opaskov. Zdá sa, že kusy s vyčnievajúcim háčikom včítane nálezu z Prašníka patria k mladším variantom, datovaným na koniec stupňa LTA, alebo na začiatok stupňa LTB1 (Bujna 2011, 125, 127), prípadne ešte o niečo neskôr (Ramsel 2011, 105).

Výzdoba zápony z Prašníka sa sústredila na jej viditeľné časti, na hornú časť puzdra a na prinitovanú záchytnú časť. Háčik má tvar zvieracej hlavy, masky s úzkymi očami mandľového tvaru a plastickým orámovaním línii obrv, zvýraznených presekávaním. Okrúhle nozdry evokujú silné fantastické zviera, štvornožca (byk, baran, diviak). Kompozícia zdobenej plochy veľmi dobre zodpovedá včasnoténskemu štýlu s využitím antitheticky (proti sebe) postavených figúr, ktoré vytvárajú symetrickú kompozíciu výjavu. Dvojice gryfov s charakteristickým zahnutým zobákom, okrúhlymi alebo mandľovými očami a veľkými hrotitými ušami vstupujú ako orientalizujúci motív do keltského umenia už v jeho najstaršej fáze, kedy sú aplikované na prelamaných pásových záponách i na ďalších honosných výrobkoch. K detailom výzdoby nachádzame paralely na viacerých artefaktoch včasnoténskeho umenia. Línie meandrov, lemujúce centrálny výjav na kratších stranách puzdra nachádzame napríklad na bronzovej zápone zo Schwabsburgu (Frey 2002, 291) alebo na zápone zo Želkovic, okr. Hořovice (Megaw/Megaw 2001, obr. 429B). Určitú predlohu k analyzovanému exempláru vidíme v známej bronzovej zápone z hrobu 17 z rakúskeho pohrebiska Herzogenburg-Ossarn s háčikom v tvare zvieracej hlavy a antitheticky komponovanou figurálnou rytou výzdobou (Frey 2002, 288, obr. 173). Postava gryfa sa do keltského umeleckého remesla dostala z Orientu a v modifikovanej podobe (s hlavou dravého vtáka, orla a telom štvornožca, ale bez krídel) patrí k často používaným motívom na celom území včasnoténskej civilizácie včítane jeho východnej časti (Frey 2002, 201, 202; Szabó 2012, 693). V keltskej ikonografii ide zrejme dominantne o zdôraznenie dravého vtáka, orla, ktorý je v mytologickej symbolike stotožňovaný s jedným z hlavných božstiev keltského panteónu, s Taranisom. Motív hlavy dravého vtáka s výrazným nadol zahnutým zobákom patrí k častým motívom najmä na sponách včasnoténskeho obdobia. Nachádzame ich aj na lokalitách západného Slovenska a výnimočne aj v horskej oblasti (obr. 4). K nálezom zo Slovenska pribudol exkluzívny artefakt keltského výtvarného umenia z Horných Orešian. Je to rukoväť noža alebo britvy s aplikovanou postavou gryfa (obr. 5).

Zápony s puzdrom boli rozšírené hlavne v centrálnej oblasti rozšírenia včasnoténskej civilizácie (Frey 1996, 201, 202; Pieta 2007, obr. 10). Ich výroba v Horných Orešanoch, kde sa našlo niekoľko desiatok zápon a ich častí, vysvetľuje okrajové prenikanie tohto typu opaskových zápon ďalej do západnej časti Karpatskej kotliny, čo dokladá vyššie opísaný exemplár, hrobové nálezy z okolia Malých Karpát (Stupava: Čambal 2012; Bučany: Bujna/Romsauer 1983), ako aj dva kusy, nájdené v ostatnom čase v Turci na severnom Slovensku (Blatnica, Sklabinský Podzámok; obr. 6: 5, 8). Nález z Prašníka poukázal na kľúčový význam malokarpatskej oblasti ako najvýchodnejšej súčasti včasnoténskej civilizácie. Naznačil, že podobne ako na Slepom vrchu pri Horných Orešanoch (Pieta 2007, 3; Stegmann-Rajtár 2017, 386, 387) aj toto halštatské hradisko bolo opätovne využitie v čase nového vzostupu malokarpatského regiónu na počiatku doby laténskej.

- Obr. 1. Prašník-Tlstá hora. Železné predmety z hradiska.
Obr. 2. Prašník-Tlstá hora. Železná zápona.
Obr. 3. Prašník-Tlstá hora. Železná zápona.
Obr. 4. Spony s pätkou v tvare hlavy dravého vtáka. 1 – Blatnica. 2–5 – Horné Orešany. 1 – železo; 2–5 – bronz.
Obr. 5. Horné Orešany-Slepý vrch. Detail bronzovej rukoväte ozdobného predmetu, pravdepodobne železnej britvy alebo noža. Bronz, email a železo.
Obr. 6. Železné zápony s puzdrom zo západného a severného Slovenska. 1–4, 6, 7 – Horné Orešany, Slepý vrch; 5 – Blatnica (Prašnica); 8 – Sklabinský Podzámok (Katova skala).

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