

A pictorial note on an early La Tène disk brooch from Rubín near Podbořany, northwest Bohemia

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This note is concerned with a fragmentary gold covered disk brooch which comes from the hill-top settlement of Rubín u Podbořan, a site with evidence of occupation from the later prehistoric to post-Roman phases. Previously published as Roman in date there are strong arguments for relating this piece to a class of early La Tène brooches or mounts normally associated with élite burials or other higher status locations.

Bohemia – La Tène period – Roman period – disk brooches

Obrázková poznámka k časně laténské terčovité sponě z Rubína u Podbořan. Předmětem tohoto příspěvku je fragment pozlacené terčovité spony z výšinného sídliště Rubín u Podbořan, lokality s doklady osídlení od mladšího pravěku. Spona byla v literatuře dříve označována jako římská, nicméně existují pádné důvody ji řadit do kategorie časně laténských spon, obvykle nacházených v elitních pohřbech či jiných prestižních kontextech.

Čechy – doba laténská – doba římská – terčovité spony

I dedicate this as a late birthday present for Jan Bouzek who has seen more gold than I have.

The importance of the fluvial gold resources of Bohemia in prehistory is well-known (Waldhauser 1991; Lehrberger *et al.* 1997) as is the use of gold-covered disk brooches and appliquéés in early La Tène, both simple and the more elaborate forms classed as ‘Typ Weiskirchen’ with a main distribution in the Middle Rhine. A number of overviews of both classes have been published (Haffner 1979; Echt 1999, esp. 73–77, 128, 131, Abb. 22; Hansen 2010, esp. 103–105, Karte 6 with Liste 5; Michálek – Frána 2007; Venclová 2013, 136, 141, 414 and fig. 86) and new finds of the Typ Weiskirchen have been made from time to time (Brücken 2014).

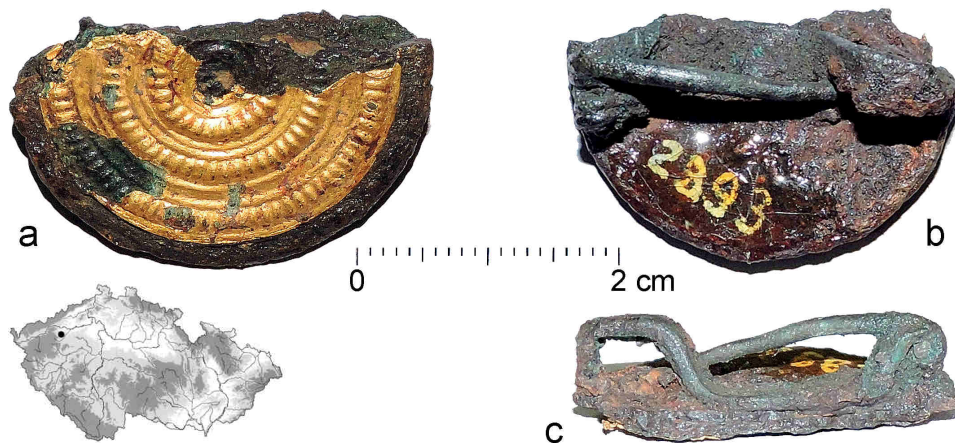


Fig. 1. Rubín u Podbořan, okr. Louny. Fragment of a gold disk brooch on an iron backing. Max. d. 30 mm. LT A/VBC. Regional museum at Chomutov (inv. no. CV-S 2393). Photos Lenka Ondráčková.

Obr. 1. Rubín u Podbořan, okr. Louny. Fragment železně pozlacené terčovité spony. Max. průměr 30 mm. LT A/VBC. Oblastní muzeum v Chomutově (inv. č. CV-S 2393).

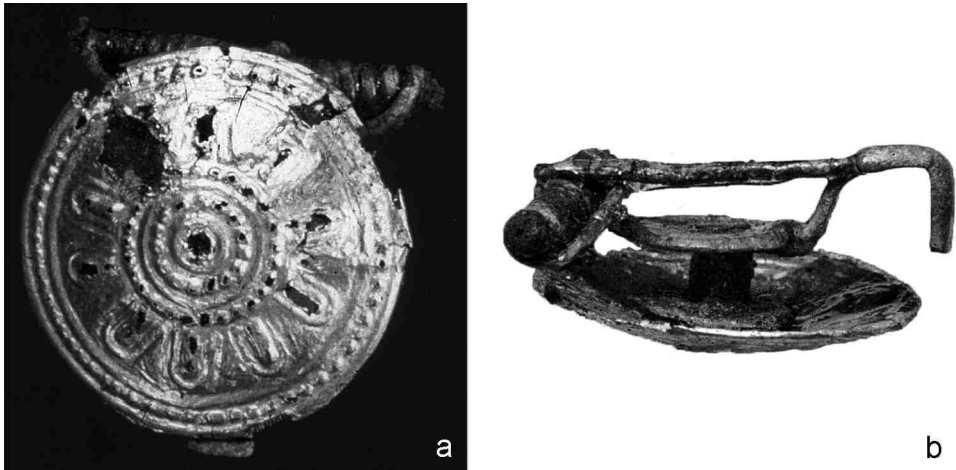


Fig. 2. Kobern-Gondorf, 'Chorsang', Lkr. Mayen-Koblenz, wagon grave 2, Germany. Gold disc brooch with bronze backing plate. D. of gold disc 20 mm. LT A/VBC. Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, Landesarchäologie Aussenstelle Koblenz.

Obr. 2. Kobern-Gondorf, Chorsang, Lkr. Mayen-Koblenz, pohřeb na voze 2, Německo. Zlatá terčovita spona s bronzovou konstrukcí. Průměr zlatého terče 20 mm. LT A/VBC. Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, Landesarchäologie Aussenstelle Koblenz.

The present note draws attention to one of the simpler forms, a chance find discovered on the hill-top defended settlement of Rubín u Podbořan, okr. Louny in north-western Bohemia, occupied from Hallstatt times into the medieval period. Small finds from the site (*fig. 1*) have so far received only brief recognition (*Preidel 1937; Svoboda 1948*, 104, *fig. 16: 6; Sakař 1966*, 609, 614, *fig. 2: 5* – describing the brooch as Roman; *Sankot 2009; Trefný 2010*). The fragment has also found its way onto the pages of the most recent major overview of the pre- and proto-history of Bohemia where once more it has been classified as Roman (*Salač 2008*, 143 and App.10: 5; *2013*, 150 and pl. 10: 5). Now located in the Regional museum at Chomutov (inv. no. CV-S 2393), the fragment, with a maximum diameter of 30 mm, fortunately retains sufficient of its construction to show that the gold leaf has been pressed onto the iron backing while the triple rings of cable or rilled ornament and probable central inlay and the 'safety-pin' fastening may be compared to that on a brooch from Kutná Hora – Karlov (*Valentová – Sankot 2000*). From Kobern-Gondorf, 'Chorsang', Lkr. Mayen-Koblenz, a similar disk brooch was discovered in the wooden chamber of wagon grave no. 2 (*fig. 2*), again fortunately with its catch mechanism intact and similar to that on the Rubín brooch. Much disturbed by badger activities, apart from the disk brooch, the only significant finds in the grave apart from remains of iron wagon fittings, were a LT A *Vogelkopffibel* missing its inlay of ?coral along the bow and in the 'eye' of the bird's head and a riveted iron ring of a type now considered to be part of the suspension system of a sword belt. While similar to the rilled decoration of the Rubín fragment, the Kobern brooch has a middle area decorated with inward turning 'U' motifs similar to one of three gold disks from the barrow on the Üetliberg above Zürich (*fig. 3; Drack 1981*). The smallest disk is similar to the group of three from Reinheim, 'Katzenbuckel', Barrow 1/A, Saarpfalz-Kreis (*Keller 1965*, Taf. 12: 8), while the smallest of three gold mounts from the chieftain's grave at Ferschweiler 'Am Büschel', Kr. Bitburg-Prüm (*fig. 4*) also has the 'U' motifs (*Jacobsthal 1944*, no. 30c; *Haffner 1976*, Nr. 4; Taf. 1: 9; 131: 2; *Baitinger-Pinsker 2002*, Kat. Nr. 63).¹

¹ See also *Jacobsthal 1944*, nos. 29 and 30b.

Returning to the simplest of decorative forms there are no less than three from the Manětín-Hrádek cemetery, distr. Plzeň-sever (fig. 8), only the largest having an amber setting (*Soudská 1994*, graves 49, 196, 213; *Lehrberger et al. eds. 1997*, Nr. 131, 141, 142 and Farbtaf. 8). One of the most spectacular of amber inset gold brooches is that from an young woman's burial (grave 48) in the cemetery of Saint-Sulpice, 'En Pétoleyres' (Ct. Vaud, Switzerland) which has no less than 29 punched circles set between two rows of rilled ornament and an outer ring of 23 coral beads with silver spacers; the brooch (fig. 5) also has its fastening intact (*Kaenel 1990*, 110–111, 291–293 and pl. 42–44).² The clear use of a punch or hammer has produced not only the common rilled motif but a ring of circles as found on a mount from Bescheid, 'Bei den Hübeln', Kr. Trier-Saarburg, barrow 6 with again coral inlay (fig. 6; *Haffner 1979*, 288–289, Abb. 7; *Haffner – Lage 2010*, esp. 63 and unnumbered ill.). From the 'princess's' grave at Reinheim there are three small gold rosettes and a larger disk brooch formed of gold on an iron backing with an outer ring of coral mounts (*Keller 1965*, Nr.10; *Echt 1999*, 72–76 and Abb. 22: 2). Similar is the brooch formed of a large amber disk within which is a gold leaf disk with punched circles of two sizes from the barrow cemetery of 'Bois de Voivre', Haroué (Meurte-et-Moselle) (*Olivier 2002*, 99–102 and pl. IV).

Finally, two more complex disk brooches demonstrate some of the spectacular of the non-figural early La Tène gold mounts. First is another brooch from Reinheim (fig. 7; *Keller 1965*, Nr. 9; *Echt 1999*, Abb. 22: 3). This particular example of a gold-covered brooch lacking most of its coral inlays, while embodying several common motifs of other disk brooches, notably rilled or cable edged, is unique in its outline which is basically a palmette, the single leafs of which support the central disc. Indeed given the propensity of La Tène period craftsmen to disguise representations of a face within stylised foliage — one may see a long-nosed face with a moustache or possibly teeth flanked by a pair of comma-leaves. Be that as it may, the features of the oval Reinheim brooch are similar to other examples in the grave, notably the use of concentric stamped circles while the ring of balusters let alone the single baluster which forms the body of the pseudo-face, is another not uncommon early La Tène motif.³

The final piece brings us back to Bohemia, and a rich though isolated barrow grave discovered in 1904–1905 at Chlum, okr. Rokycany (fig. 9; *Jacobsthal 1944*, 136 and PP 392; *Břeň 1981*; *Lenerz-de Wilde 1977*, Kat. Nr. 2). The chief find is a brooch of gold sheet mounted on iron, the obverse with amber and coral inlays, its reverse probably tinned, with compass ornament. Situated on an ancient route between Etruria via the Salzach which flows past Western Bohemia finds of ritual services — often pairs of drinking cups in metal or pottery — include most frequently Etruscan beaked flagons. The rich Bohemian graves are close to sources of iron, salt and, at no distance, alluvial gold though LT A objects in gold are rare. The main sources of alluvial gold in Bohemia were in the neighbourhood of Písek and along the Rivers Otava, Berounka and Vltava (*Waldhauser 1991*). A wooden drain for washing gold dated to LT B2-C1 was found at Modlešovice, okr. Strakonice on the river Otava. In the case of the Etruscan flagon found in the Chlum burial this is engraved around the neck with what is clearly a local attempt to copy Italic plant motifs. The flagon was accompanied by two shallow two-handled dishes, possibly also Italic imports and placed in within a stone burial chamber.

Although the lack of certain evidence of human remains, either inhumation or cremation, makes identification of the Chlum brooch uncertain, the association with a sword and its scabbard, a knife, an axe, all of iron with a bronze cylinder decorated in incised arcs, probably a spear butt, indicates that this was the last resting place of a high status male. The brooch is incomplete but clearly originally had a symmetrical design. As well as the brooch there were three fragments of sheet bronze with an incised lyre design bordered by zig-zag leaves (*Jacobsthal 1944*, PP54-70) which can be compared with that on the reverse of the brooch itself but also both with the palmette-based lay-out and pecked

² St. Sulpice grave 40 has a disk brooch with ?enamel and coral inlay (*Kaenel 1990*, =T. 40, pl. 37 which technically relates it to the Basse-Yutz (Moselle) flagons and the belt-plaque from Weiskirchen, Kr. Merzig-Wadern, gr.1: *Jacobsthal 1944*, nos. 381; *Megaw – Megaw 1990*, 39–43 and pls. 9a and 23a.

³ See *Jacobsthal 1944*, PP 267–278.

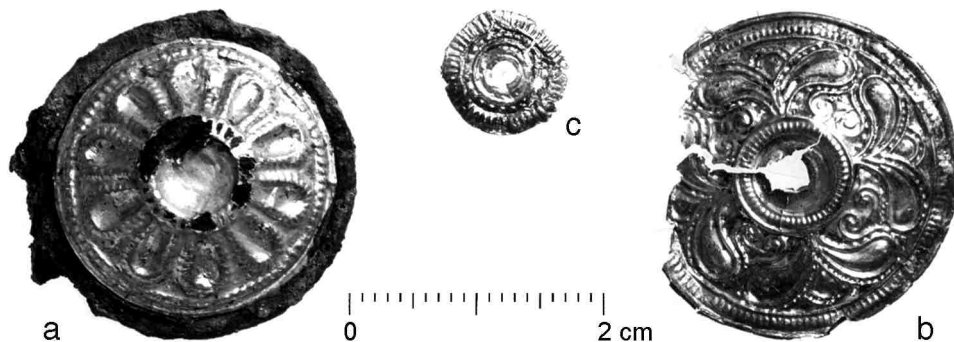


Fig. 3. Utikon, 'Üetliberg', Sonnenbühl, Kt. Zurich, Switzerland. Three gold sheet discs. D. of discs: a = 25, b = 22 c = 10 mm. ?LT A2-3. Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zürich.

Obr. 3. Utikon, Üetliberg, Sonnenbühl, Kt. Zurich, Švýcarsko. Tři terče ze zlatého plechu. Průměr terčů a = 25, b = 22, c = 10 mm. ?LT A2-3. Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zürich.



Fig. 4. Ferschweiler, 'Am Büschel', Kr. Bitburg-Prüm. Gold disk. D. 23 mm. LT A/VBC. Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier. Photo H. Thöring.

Obr. 4. Ferschweiler, Am Büschel, Kr. Bitburg-Prüm. Zlatý terč. Průměr 23 mm. LT A/VBC. Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier.

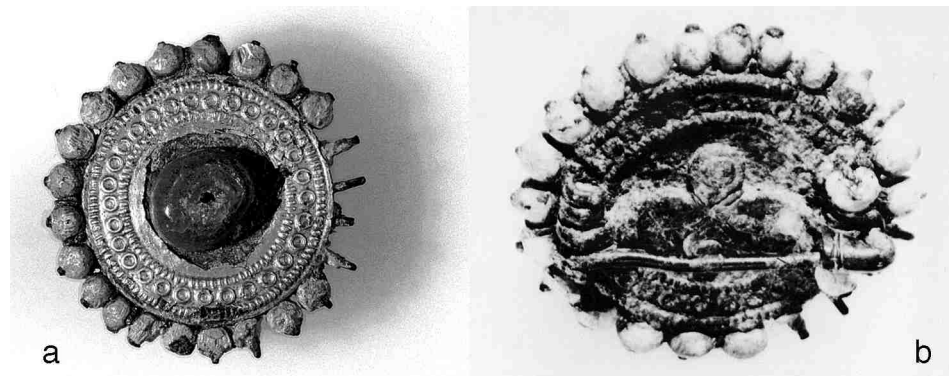


Fig. 5. Saint-Sulpice, 'En Pétoleyres', Ct. Vaud, grave 48, Switzerland. Bronze brooch with stamped gold cover. Max. diameter 40.5 mm. LT A, V/IV BC. Musée Cantonal d'Archéologie, Lausanne. Photo: Fibbi-Aeppli.

Obr. 5. Saint-Sulpice, En Pétoleyres, Ct. Vaud, hrob 48, Švýcarsko. Bronzová spona s kolkovaným zlatým krytím. Max. průměr 40,5 mm. LT A, 5.-4. stol. př. Kr. Musée Cantonal d'Archéologie, Lausanne.

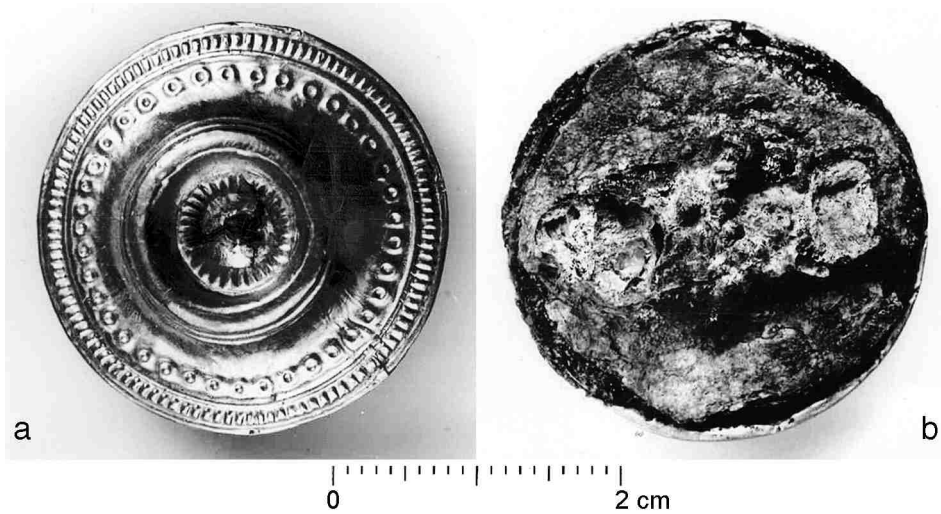


Fig. 6. Bescheid, 'Bei den Hübeln', Kr. Trier-Saarburg, barrow 6, Germany. Gold disk with iron backing plate and central coral setting. D. 20.9 mm. LT A2. Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier.

Obr. 6. Bescheid, Bei den Hübeln, Kr. Trier-Saarburg, mohyla 6, Německo. Zlatý terč s železnou konstrukcí a středovou korálovou úpravou. Průměr 20,9 mm. LT A2. Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier.



Fig. 7. Reinheim, 'Katzenbuckel', Barrow 1/A, Saarpfalz-Kreis, Germany. Gold brooch on iron backing with coral inlay. Max. l. 37.5 mm. LT A2. Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Saarbrücken.

Obr. 7. Reinheim, Katzenbuckel, mohyla 1/A, Saarpfalz-Kreis, Německo. Zlatá spona s železnou konstrukcí a korálovým vykládáním. Max. délka 37,5 mm. LT A2. Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Saarbrücken.



Fig. 8. Manětín-Hrádek, distr. Plzeň-sever. Gold disk brooch covers. a – grave 49, max. diameter 16 mm, b – grave 213, max. diameter 12 mm. LT A. National museum, Prague. Photos courtesy Pavel Sankot.

Obr. 8. Manětín-Hrádek, okr. Plzeň-sever. Zlaté terče spon. a – hrob 49, max. průměr 16 mm, b – hrob 213, max. průměr 12 mm. LT A. Národní muzeum, Praha.

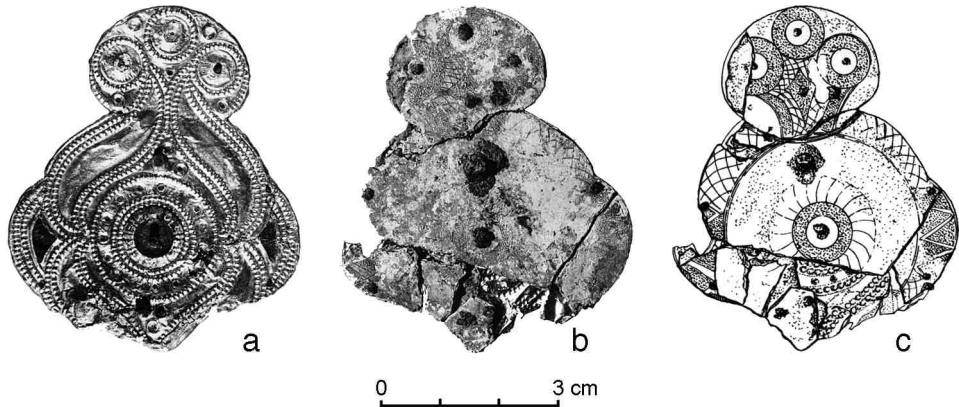


Fig. 9. Chlum, okr. Rokycany. Gold sheet brooch mount over iron backing with amber and coral inlays, the reverse (b–c) tinned. Max. w. c. 50 mm. LT A1. National museum, Prague (b: photo Olga Hilmerová). Obr. 9. Chlum, okr. Rokycany. Spona ze zlatého plechu se železnou konstrukcí a s jantarovým a korálovým vykládáním, spodní strana (b–c) pocínovaná (?). Max. šířka ca. 50 mm. LT A1. Národní muzeum, Praha.

in-fill design on the bronze scabbard of a sword from a barrow burial at Dražičky ‘v Rybníčkách’, okr. Tábor, barrow I/1939 (*Sankot 2003*, cat. No. 6, esp. 27–29).

The apparently silvered reverse of the Chlum brooch is exceptional in that it combines the goldsmith’s relief work with the geometric complexity of the two-dimensional engraver – as first shown by *Jiří Břeň (1981)* – which marks a first stage in its use and is clearly constructed on the basis of carefully set-out and incised compass elements with, once more, dotted in-filling⁴; the second stage in the brooch’s use is the relief gold cover fastened with iron rivets which largely follows the earlier lay-out. Attention has been drawn to the somewhat similar but certainly cruder sheet-bronze fragment from the fortified settlement of Závist, okr. Praha-západ (*Motyková – Drda – Rybová 1984*, 382–387, obr. 37: 5; 38) where it is firmly classed as Hallstatt in date. A more likely route can be taken following Jacobsthal’s comparison between Chlum with the brooch from Kleinaspergle bei Asperg, Kr. Ludwigsburg and Weiskirchen, Kr. Merzig-Wadern grave 1 (*Jacobsthal 1944*, no. 22 and 20; *Baitinger – Pinsker 2002*, Kat. Nr. 91.8; Kat. Nr. 92.5); subsequent writers, concerned to emphasise the position of Bohemia in the development of early Celtic art, place the Chlum brooch with other sheet gold pieces from the élite graves of the Hunsrück-Eifel and Haffner’s ‘Typ Weiskirchen’ brooches (*Chytráček 1999; 2002*). Compass-designed and constructed as one of the most accomplished pieces based on the palmette-leaf, the gold leaf of Chlum has the hall-mark cable or rilled edging and stamped circles – indeed it may be regarded as the finest of its class and unlike the brooch from Rubín, certainly must be regarded as an import to Bohemia from the Rhineland, perhaps part of some gift-exchange from the former region’s natural resources. Another detail on Chlum is that the flanking triple circles from which spring the pair of supporting leaves can be read as yet another example of ambiguous imagery; at both ends, one can make out an open-mouthed beast with up-sweeping horns.

What may one make of this seemingly inconsequential fragment? There remains argument as to whether the Rubín brooch is indeed of pre-Roman date, particularly when such brooches are without association.⁵ Then in contrast there are those from north-west Bohemia whose dating to the Roman

⁴ There are of course other examples where clearly different skills have been employed on the same piece, a classic example being once more the not-quite-identical-twin flagons from Basse-Yutz.

⁵ See for example that decorated with large balls – in the manner of Chlum and the larger circular disk from Reinheim – recently identified as having been found in Praha-Kbely: *Hlava 2013*, 669–700 and fig. 6. In contrast *Echt*

Iron Age seems indisputable (*Blažek 1995*, esp. Kat. Nr. 6 and 7; see also *Svoboda 1948*, 186–189 and fig. 37; *Sankot – Theune 2012*, 152–156 and Abb. 7: 1–2). However, the simple ‘safety-pin’ catch of the proven Iron Age brooches contrasts with the extended tongues of the Roman period.

It seems that small gold brooches were introduced from the west early in La Tène period as markers of the élite and represent some of the first native examples of La Tène gold-work – where there is context all are to be dated to no later than LT A. Reliance on relatively simple typology is never wholly satisfactory; notwithstanding, in studying early La Tène art objects it is often the details which establish their stylistic association – here the rilling and the punched circles which point to the likely source of our Bohemian fragment. Discovered in a strategically located hill-top settlement, the Rubín brooch underscores its importance.

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1999, 72–73 and Abb. 21 illustrates a silver-gilt provincial Roman brooch from the area of a *kastellum* at Alphen aan den Rijn (NL) which looks not dissimilar to the large brooch from Reinheim (fig. 7).

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Obrázková poznámka k časně latéské terčovitě sponě z Rubína u Podbořan

Fragment pozlacené železné terčovité spony z výšinného sídliště Rubín u Podbořan byl dříve pokládán za nález z doby římské. Rozbor stylistického rozpětí nálezů podobných pozlacených terčovitých spon z Čech, Švýcarska, Sárska a kultury Hunsrück-Eifel – vždy v elitních kontextech – naznačuje, že fragment z Rubína je spíše časně latéský; konstrukcí se spona rovněž podobá exemplářům ze západu. Vedle jednodušších terčovitých spon s obvyklou vrubořezovou výzdobou se vyskytují také složitější kusy s korálovou a/nebo jantarovou výzdobou, zejména exemplář z knížecího mohylového hrobu v lokalitě Chlum. Složitá výzdoba tohoto artefaktu – reliéfní na přední straně a komplikovaný rytý kruhový ornament na zadní straně – naznačují, že se jedná o import, zatímco méně propracované kusy je možno považovat za první doklady zlatnictví v Čechách.

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