

Decorative scabbard chapes of La Tène knives from Plavecké Podhradie-Pohanská and the chronology of the site

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we deal with the evaluation of the finds of decorative iron knife scabbard chapes from the Pohanská fortified hill fort in Plavecké Podhradie (SW Slovakia). The occurrence of this type of chape is documented at the end of the Middle and the beginning of the Late La Tène period in the oppida of Southern Germany, Bohemia, and Moravia. The area of south-western Slovakia, in particular the Záhorie region, to which the Pohanská site belongs, was an intrinsic part of this area in the La Tène period. Based on accompanying finds, as well as the chronology of the site, we can date these objects to the period of the end of the Middle and the beginning of the Late La Tène periods LT C2–LT D1a.

KEYWORDS

Southwest Slovakia; Middle/Late La Tène period; hillfort; oppida; hoard; knife sheath chape; analysis of finds.

INTRODUCTION

The Pohanská hill-fort lies on the top of the Pohanská hill near Plavecké Podhradie in the Little Carpathians Mountains (**Fig. 1**); the surface area of the fortified area is 49 ha (PAULÍK 1976, 10; PIETA 2008, 120; PIETA 2010). A hoard of iron objects originating from the site is kept in the collections of the Vlastivedné múzeum Hlohovec (Local History Museum in Hlohovec).¹ It consists of several dozen objects including militaria, tools, and parts of a cart (ČAMBAL in print). In addition, it also contains two interesting objects: decorative knife sheath chapes.

DESCRIPTION OF FINDS

1. A knife sheath chape of a triangular shape, made of iron sheet with a thickness of approximately 1.5 mm. Its outer side is made of full sheet metal, and is decorated with a repoussé lens-shape projection (1.7 × 0.9 cm) with transversal ribs. The frontal area of the chape is decorated with horizontal grooves in the upper third. The opening is rectangular and open on the inside. The chape gradually narrows from the opening to the tip and ends in a ring which deviates from the object's lateral axis towards the back. The ring has a triangular cross-section. At the root of the ring, there is a semi-spherical iron rivet (diameter: 0.8 cm). The back of the chape is open and made of folded sides. Dimensions: length: 8 cm, dimensions of the opening: 2.7 × 0.7 cm, the outer and inner diameter of the ring: 1.9 cm and 1.3 cm (**Fig. 2:1a–b**; rec. no. A-432, deposited in: Vlastivedné múzeum Hlohovec).
2. A knife sheath chape of a triangular shape, made of iron sheet with a thickness of approximately 1.5 mm. Its outer side is made of full sheet metal, and is decorated with a repoussé lens-shaped projection (2.7 × 1.3 cm) decorated on the surface with a transverse rib and with a relief rim around the circumference. The frontal part of the chape is decorated around the edge with a simple engraved line. The opening is rectangular

1 My thanks go to Mgr. Jozef Urminský and Mgr. Peter Novosedlík from the Vlastivedné múzeum in Hlohovec for enabling me to study and publish these finds.

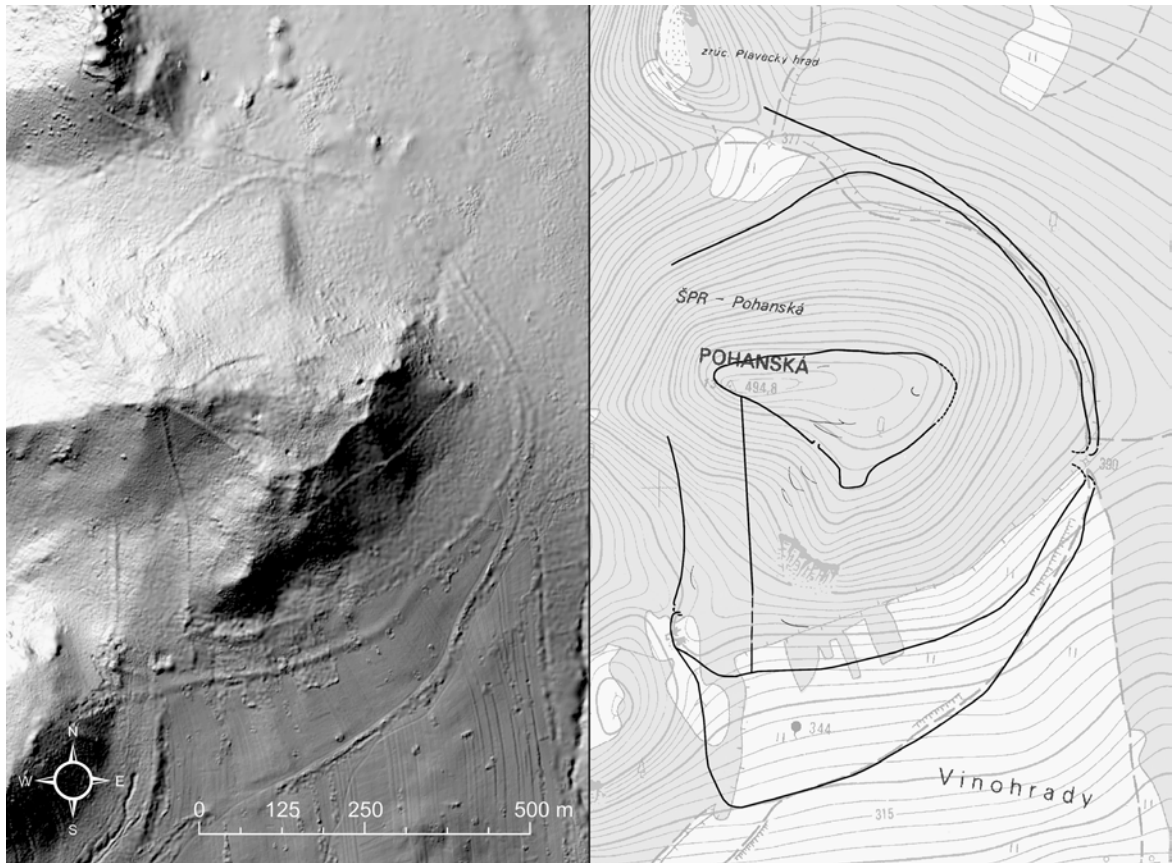


Fig. 1: Plavecké Podhradie-Pohanská, Malacky district. Left: LiDAR image of the hill-fort and its surroundings (The LiDAR image of Pohanská was provided by the National Forestry Centre - Forestry Research Institute /NLC - LVÚ/, Zvolen); Right: overall contour-line map of the hill-fort with the fortification lines highlighted (from PIETA 2008).

and open on the backside. The upper part of the opening is arranged into four arches (two on the front and one on either side) decorated on the edge with grooves. Two decorative rivets (diameter: 2×0.8 cm) are fixed in the arches, decorated with grooving into the form of a star with five rays. In the middle of the frontal side of the chape, there is a rivet with signs of engraved ornamentation (diameter: 0.7 cm), and in the lower pointed part, there is another iron decorative rivet (diameter: 0.7 cm). It is decorated with grooves forming a cross and it also has a rim around the edge. The chape gradually tapers from the opening to the point, and ends with a ring which is on the axis of the chape and which is set back. The ring has a triangular cross-section. The back of the chape is open, made of folded sides. Dimensions: length: 13.7 cm, the dimensions of the opening: 3.1×0.9 cm, the outer and inner diameter of the ring: 2.4 and 1.7 cm (Fig. 2:2a-b; rec. no. A-432, deposited in: Vlastivedné múzeum Hlohovec).

PARALLELS

At present, several examples of similar chapes are known. Until now, they have not been the object of much attention. In principle, they occur made of bronze as well as iron sheet. The chapes of knife sheaths are more typical of the southern and eastern Celtic area (the Balkans and Transylvania), where undecorated sheet metal specimens often occur associated with the Sica type of curved knife (ŁUCZKIEWICZ - SCHÖNFELDER 2008, 165-170, Abb. 6-9, 19, 24; RUSTOIU 2005, 153-162; RUSTOIU 2007, 67-82). In Central Europe, they are rarer and typologically

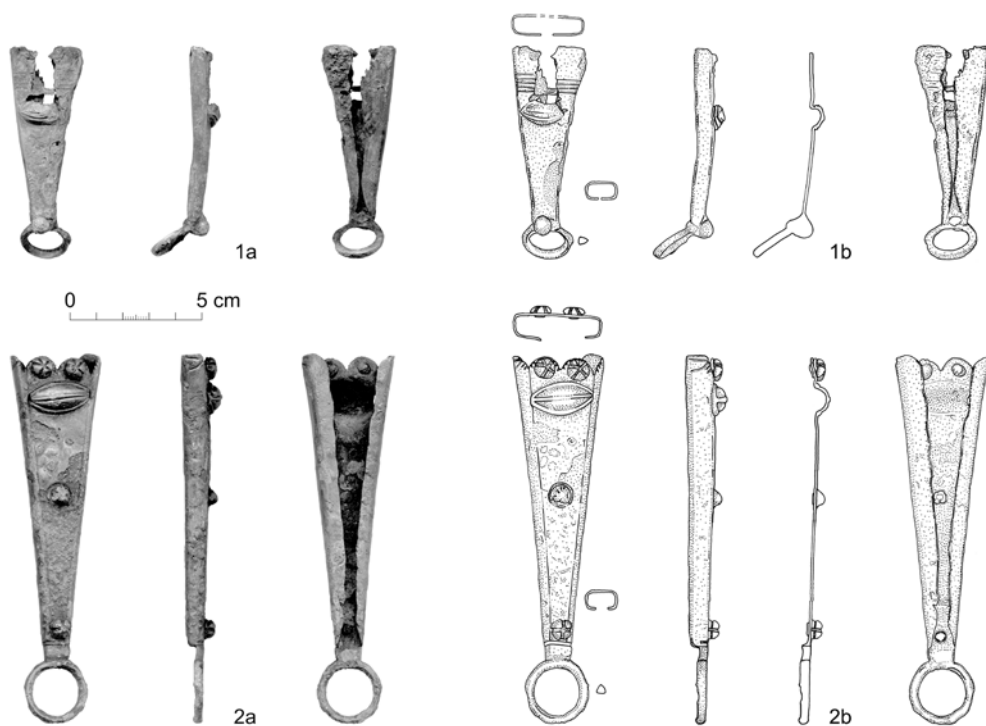


Fig. 2: Plavecké Podhradí-Pohanská. Decorative knife chapes (Photography, drawing and graphics: R. ČAMBAL).

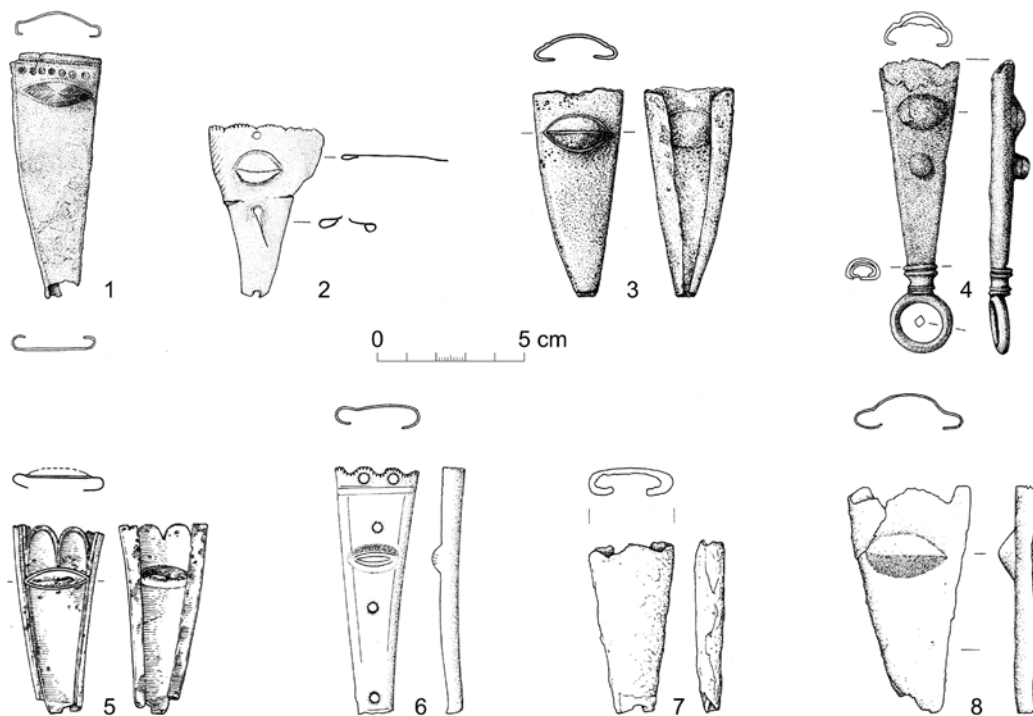


Fig. 3: Decorative knife chapes from Manching (1-4), Staré Hradisko (5) and Stradonice (6-8) (according to: SIEVERS 2015, adapted).

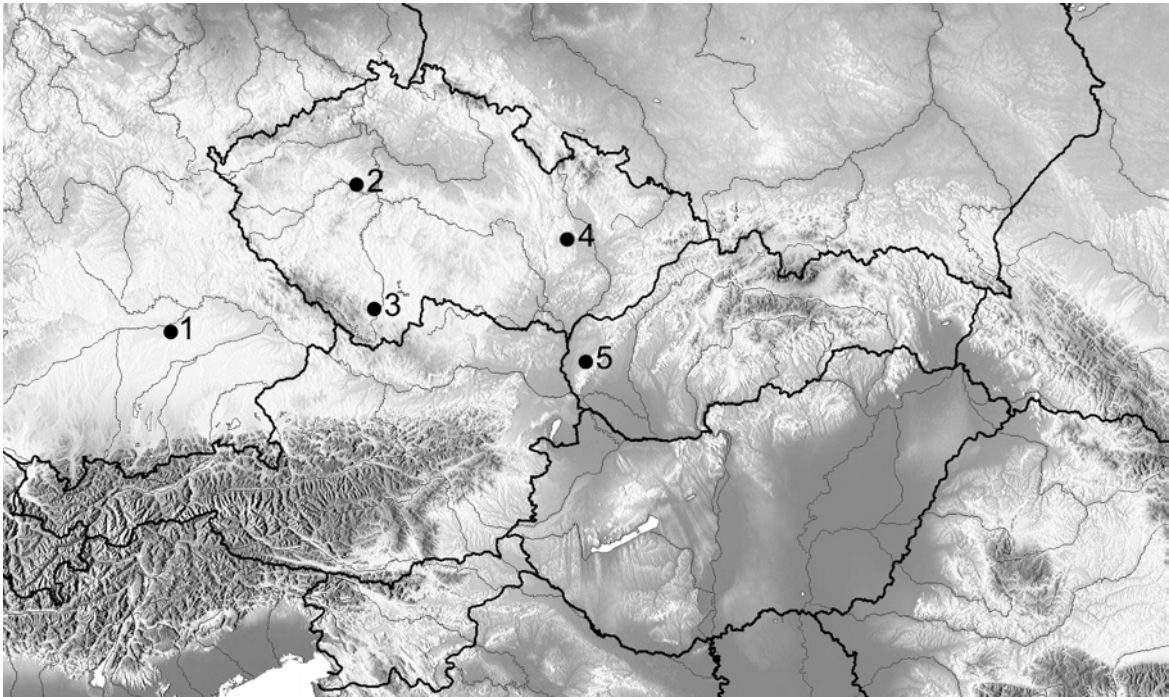


Fig. 4: Map of the distribution of decorative knife chapes in Europe. 1. Manching (Bavaria, D); 2. Stradonice (Bohemia, CZ); 3. Třísov (Bohemia, CZ); 4. Staré Hradisko (Moravia, CZ); 5. Plavecké Podhradí-Pohanská (Záhorie, SK).

varied. Until now, they have only been found in a few sites, the oppida of Bohemia, Moravia, Bavaria, and now also south-western Slovakia (**Fig. 3:1-8; Fig. 4**). The greatest number of examples – four specimens – come from the oppidum of Manching (VAN ENDERT 1991, 254, Taf. 14; SIEVERS 2015, 378, Abb. 1-4). In Bohemia, there are three chapes made of iron and one of bronze² found in Stradonice (SIEVERS 2015, Abb. 5:2-4), and one unpublished find from Třísov³ while one example comes from Staré Hradisko in Moravia (SIEVERS 2015, 378, Abb. 5:1). Three of these, namely from Manching, Stradonice, and Staré Hradisko (SIEVERS 2015, Abb. 4:4; 5:1-2), are almost identical to the finds from Pohanská.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE SITE

The fortified site at Pohanská is interesting, and unique in Central Europe for the unique occurrence of numerous mass finds, above all of iron objects, mostly craft and agricultural tools (PAULÍK 1970, 31-83; PAULÍK – TOMČÍKOVÁ 2005, 85-122; PIETA 2008, 194-203; ČAMBAL 2009, 153-164, ČAMBAL 2015, 41-44). The site is considered to be the centre of iron production and blacksmithing (PIETA 2008, 142, 194-203). The hoards of iron objects are, according to the current state of research, a specific feature of the area of western Slovakia and Moravia (PIETA 2008, obr. 101; ČIŽMÁŘ 2012, 139-141, obr. 3; ČIŽMÁŘ 2014; ČIŽMÁŘ – LANGOVÁ – KOHOUTEK

2 The latter is kept in a private collection. I would like to thank Jan Kysela, Institute of Classical Archaeology, Charles University, Prague, for this information.

3 I would like to thank Tomáš Mangel, Institute of Archaeology, University of Hradec Králové, for this information.

2014). Their placement in the ground is associated both with the horizon of the end of the settlement at the beginning of the late La Tène period LT D1a, as well as with ritual and profane purposes (PIETA 2008, 210, obr. 101; DANIELISOVÁ 2015, 177, fig. 10; SCHÖNFELDER 2006, 122).

Alongside agricultural and craft tools and instruments which are not of great use for chronological purposes, the hoards also included objects which have a high testimonial value in this respect. Among the latest finds, these include weapons (long cavalry swords with an S-shaped clip), a knife of the Sica type, and implements such as curb bits and iron spurs with a button (ČAMBAL in press). According to finds known from this site so far and which can provide a solid date, the existence of the settlement in the Pohanská hill-fort falls within the period spanning from LT C2 to the earlier phase of LT D1. We believe that it was primarily in LT D, more specifically in its early phase (i.e. approximately in 125–100 BC) that hoards of iron objects were buried at this site; 14 such hoards are known to date (PIETA 2008, 194–203; ČAMBAL 2009, 153–164; ČAMBAL in print).

La Tène fibulae are easily datable. Among the finds from Pohanská there is a bronze Mötschwil fibula (PAULÍK 1976, obr. 46:2a–b, 47:4), an iron fibula of the Middle La Tène structure of the 19c group which dates to LT C2 or the beginnings of LT D (GEBHARD 1991, 19, Abb. 6:19c; PAULÍK 1976, obr. 47:1), and the fragment of an iron fibula of a Middle La Tène construction with an eight-coil spring (PAULÍK 1976, obr. 46:3a–b, 47:3). Another local find is an iron brooch with a frame-foot catch-plate and a knee-shaped bow above a long, probably six-coil spring of the group 24a. This type of Late La Tène fibula is dated to the end of LT C2 and the earlier phase of LT D1. They are contemporary with Nauheim brooches (GEBHARD 1991, 22, 86, 87, Abb. 8:24, Taf. 46:715–725). The silver fragment of a four-coil spring with an outer cord and long pin, the rest of a large silver fibula, probably of Middle La Tène construction, is a unique find (PAULÍK 1976, obr. 47:2).

The most important find for the dating of the final settlement horizon of the site, is the hoard 10/2005 which contained several chronologically sensitive objects. This mass find included above all two bronze fibulae of Middle La Tène construction with a large, four-coil spring and inner cord (group 4) dated to the early phase of the Late La Tène period, i.e. LT D1a (GEBHARD 1991, 9, 86, Abb. 1:4, Taf. 1:16–21). The most important piece is the Nauheim brooch of type I.1 with a triple groove on the bow, which is also dated according to several authors to the earlier phase of the Late La Tène period LT D1a (DEMETZ 1999, 78–79, 87–88). In Moravia finds of iron and bronze Nauheim fibulae are known mainly from Staré Hradisko dated to LT C2/D1 (where they are also assumed to have been produced) and from several lowland settlements. In Moravia, these are typical representatives of the phase LT D1 (MEDUNA 1980, 115–116; ČIŽMÁŘ – ČIŽMÁŘOVÁ – MEDUNA 2018, 47). Within the La Tène occupation of Záhorie region, finds of Nauheim fibulae mark the phase LT D1a. In the periods LT C2–D1a, the settlement and craft production in Pohanská was sustained by a series of lowland settlements. Bog iron, limonite, which is accessible on the surface, was probably extracted here. The occupation of this region is for the moment documented from LT C1 and ends in LT D1a. More recent evidence of settlement remains sporadic.

Massive ring glass beads of the types 23, 24, and 25 are dated to the end of LT C2 and primarily to LT D1. They were found together with beads of the types 162, 167, and 402 (VENČLOVÁ 1990, 137–142; VENČLOVÁ 2016, 86–87; KARWOWSKI 2004, 78, Abb. 25). The most numerous parallels are from Stradonice (PÍČ 1903, 41–42, tab. VI:1–36; VENČLOVÁ 1990), Staré Hradisko (VENČLOVÁ 2016, 86–87), and some are also present in the finds from Devín (BŘEZINOVÁ – PLACHÁ 2009, 114, 117, obr. 1:1, 2, 5, 6, 8, F34:8–12, 14). Linchpins are other easy to date items from Pohanská. There is one decorated iron specimen with three circular dimples inlaid with bronze and with an enamel-decorated rivet (PIETA 2008, obr. 116:9, F 30 bottom right). Such linchpins are dat-

ed to the period of LT C1 to LT D1 (SCHÖNFELDER 2002, 177–181, Abb. 107–108, Tab. 22). Three linchpins with a figure of eight or double spiral head and a rivet in its centre were found in hoard 6/2001 (PIETA 2008, F 27). They are typical of the Late La Tène period, i.e. LT D1 (JACOBI 1974, 219, Abb. 53, Taf. 56; SCHÖNFELDER 2002, 171–175, Abb. 103–104, Taf. 19).

Based on a series of archaeological finds, the occupation of the Pohanská hill-fort can be dated reliably to LT C2 and the end of the occupation falls at the latest at the beginning of LT D1 (LT D1a) when the site was abandoned (PAULÍK 1970, obr. 5:4, 7:1a–b; PAULÍK 1976, 145, 153, tab. LII:1; PAULÍK – TOMČÍKOVÁ 2005, obr. 12; ZACHAR 1976, 63; ZACHAR 1977; SIEVERS 2010, 16; PIETA 2008, 194; ČAMBAL 2015a, 42).

Recently, we have become aware of over 20 Celtic silver coins of the local Pohanská type from this site (FRÖHLICH 2012, 59–80; FRÖHLICH 2014a, 1–4, obr. 1; ČAMBAL 2015a, 41–44, obr. 1, 2), as well as coins of the Roseldorf/Němčice II type (FRÖHLICH 2011, 67–68, tab. 2:6), Staré Hradisko type, Torquesbögen/Schmied type (DEMBSKI 2009, Abb. B-21; SMĚLÝ 2017, 517–518, Abb. 8:27), a small coin reminiscent of the Karlstein type obols (FRÖHLICH 2011, 67–72, tab. II), and coins similar to the Manching I type (KELLNER 1990), and probably an imitation of them. Most recently, a small coin hoard from this site became known, in which there were coins of the Pohanská type, coins of the Břeclavsko type as well as coins of the Manching I type, and probably local imitations of them, close to the so-called Vindelican Buschelquinars, characteristic of Manching in Bavaria and belonging to the earlier phase of LT D1 (KELLNER 1990). According to the currently used chronology, the obols of the Pohanská type were struck and circulated in LT C2 and LT D1a (approximately down to the period of ca. 100 BC) and not later. The coin types discovered so far in the site are related to the apogee of the centres in Roseldorf in Austria, in Němčice and later to Staré Hradisko in Moravia. The silver coins of the Roseldorf/Němčice type, as well as gold pieces of the type Athena Alkis date to LT C1 and C2 (ČIŽMÁŘ – KOLNÍKOVÁ – NOESKE 2008, 671; KOLNÍKOVÁ 2012; MILITKÝ 2008, tab. 7; MILITKÝ 2013, 145; MILITKÝ 2015, 38; MILITKÝ 2018, 284–290). In any case, these coins evidence a clear connection between the system of settlements and fortified centres in Smolenice-Molpír and Pohanská with the pre-oppidum centres of Roseldorf and Němčice as well as with present-day Bavaria.

DATING

The La Tène settlement horizon of Pohanská in Plavecké Podhradie dates mainly to LT C2–D1a. For the moment, there is insufficient evidence of any later human presence in Plavecké Podhradie-Pohanská and Molpír in Smolenice (ČAMBAL 2014b, 3; ČAMBAL 2015a, 41–44; ČAMBAL 2015b, 57–58, 60–61; ČAMBAL 2016, 12–15; PIETA 2008, 112). In LT C1–D1, the territory of Záhorie and the Little Carpathians, in which the site is located, was an intrinsic part of the La Tène settlement area covering also the territory of Lower Austria and Moravia, with the River Morava acting in no way as a cultural border between these areas. According to the current state of research, the border was rather the range of the Little Carpathians, with the 'Bratislava gate' / *Porta Hungarica* adjoining both the above-mentioned area and the territory to the south-east of the forelands of the Little Carpathians up to Trnava. This is confirmed primarily by numerous finds of the Roseldorf/Němčice type coins in this territory.

The settlement of Pohanská belongs, to a certain extent, to an earlier horizon which is contemporary to Němčice (LT C1/C2), but the occupation here lasted a little longer, until LT D1a. The same applies to Staré Hradisko, where the occupation started in LT C2, culminated in LT D1, and faded out at the end of LT D1b (approximately 100 to 70 BC), as documented by finds, mainly of spoon-shaped fibulae and fibulae of the Almgren 65 type (ČIŽMÁŘ – ČIŽMÁŘOVÁ – MEDUNA

2018). The occupation of the hill-fort in Trenčianske Bohuslavice is of a similar date, while at the site of Oberleiserberg the majority of occupation (KARWOWSKI 2015; 2017; KARWOWSKI – MILITKÝ 2016) falls within the horizon of spoon-shaped fibulae in LT D1b, that is before the emergence of the oppidum in Bratislava towards the end of LT D1b to the beginning of LT D2a.

In any case, the selection of the chronologically sensitive objects and finds mentioned above from Pohanská points to their inclusion in LT C2–D1a. We cannot naturally exclude their survival into more recent periods, although it seems unlikely in the case of Pohanská, at least according to the current state of research. It is true also for the finds of decorated knife chapes analysed here. We date the period in which hoards of iron objects and weapons were being buried at the Pohanská hill-fort, as well as the end of the settlement of the site, to the early phase of the Late La Tène period, that is to the early phase of the Late La Tène D1, i.e. LT D1a, that is the period before 100 BC.

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