

Iberian girdle fasteners in a Nijmegen Museum

A long time ago I saw in the Museum Kam at Nijmegen eight bronze objects that looked very unfamiliar to me. They had been fixed on a piece of cardboard so that they seemed somehow to belong together. Dr. van Buchem, Director of this museum, could not tell me anything about their provenance. Probably they had been acquired by a resident of Nijmegen after whose death the family handed them over to the museum.

These bronzes, most of which are depicted on pl. 1 (p. 94), consist of an S-shaped part to both ends of which a short rod has been added at right angles (fig. 1). One of these rods is longer than the other and it ends in two knobs of differing design.

I thought these objects might be girdle fasteners and when I published photographs of them I added a tentative reconstruction of the way in which they might have been used, viz. as a link between the two ends of a leather belt (fig. 2)¹. But I had no idea of their provenance nor of the period to which they belonged.

Later on I saw that they were indigenous to Spain and I also read an article of Señor de Palol's on these bronze objects, written after he had seen my short note in the *Berichten Rijkdienst*. The author called them "*Pasadores en T*" (T-shaped *pasadores*); he too believed them to be girdle fasteners, but although



fig. 1

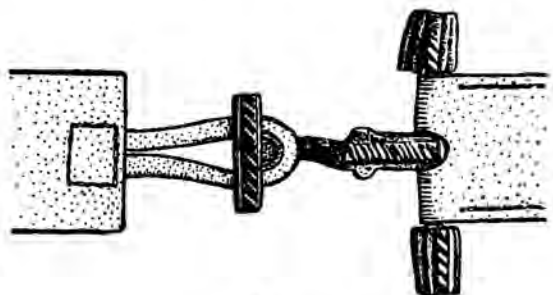


fig. 2

1. *Ber. Rijkdienst Oudheidk. Bodemonderzoek*, 1953, 31, fig. 10 and pl. IV.

he had found more than seventy specimens in various Spanish collections he had not been able to discover in what context they had been found, which made it very difficult to date them². Probably they were dug up at a time when the acquisition of antiquities was the only thing that mattered.

Señor de Palol agreed with me that these "*pasadores*" must have formed a link between the two ends of a leather girdle. But according to him the broad end was not sewn up in the leather as I suggested, but it was pushed through a large buttonhole, or cut, in the leather.

I do not find Señor de Palol's view convincing. Firstly it is much more practical to have a girdle fastener attached to one's girdle. We have hundreds of belt-buckles from different periods; they are always fastened in one way or another to one end of the belt to which they belong. The Spanish clasps with their two hooks, of "Iberian type" as Almagro calls them³, were also riveted to their belt. Secondly, the end of a much-used strap has a tendency to curl which does not improve the appearance of the girdle.

There is a further point: a small number of objects have been found resembling the wider end of the *pasador* without anything attached to them. They must have been used in combination with the T-shaped fastener. Pl. I, below, shows two examples of this type from the British Museum⁴. Señor de Palol puts them at one of the two ends of the belt. To do this he must sew them up in the leather (fig. 3)⁵, thus creating an asymmetrical combination which spoils the look of the most conspicuous part of the girdle.

Of course Señor de Palol thought he had a reason for refusing to believe in the sewing-up of part of the *pasador*. One of the Iberian statues belonging to the

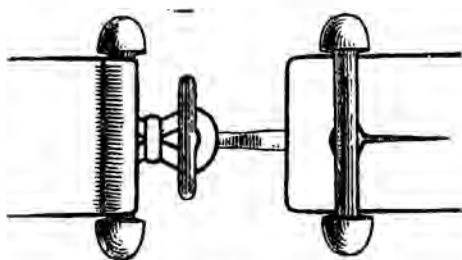


fig. 3

2. P. de Palol, *Pasadores en T.*, *Ampurias*, 1955/56, 97 ff. and pl. I-IV.

3. N. Almagro, *Las necropolis de Ampurias*, 1955, 380, fig. 345; 386, fig. 352; Déchelette, *Manuel d'Archéologie*, II, 3, 1914, 1242, fig. 529, 2-5.

4. Cf. *Ampurias*, 1955/6, pl. II at the top.

5. *Op. cit.*, 101, fig. 2e.

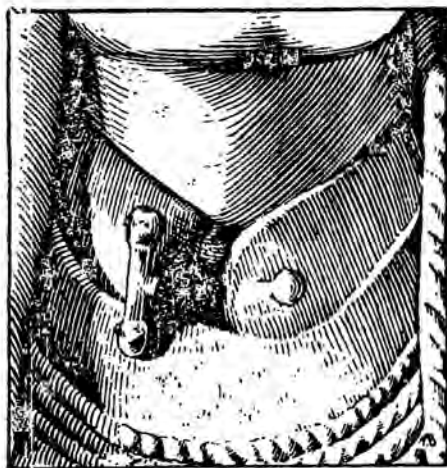


fig. 4

so-called Cerro de los Santos represents a woman with an offering who wears on the collar of her dress a brooch strongly resembling our girdle fasteners. Señor de Palol had a drawing made of this part of the statue which I reproduce here (fig. 4)⁶. It is indeed evident that the broad end of the object has not been sewn into the material of her dress. But this is only reasonable, because here we have to do with a brooch which the wearer must be able to shift from one dress to another.

How this statue's brooch was fastened is not clear, because the piece of stone which might have shown it has been lost. But one can still see the other end of the brooch on the left-hand part of the collar where it is shown shaped not like a rod but like a small ball which must have been pushed up through the material.

A piece of jewelry not being quite the same as a girdle fastener, it would be unwise to draw any conclusions from the brooch with regard to the girdle fasteners.

Taken as a whole the Iberian girdle fastener seems a very original creation. But its tailpiece, by means of which it was attached to a leather strap, has parallels elsewhere. The Hraditsch of Stradonitz produced some small girdle fasteners with the same curved bar ending in a cross-bar. Its other end, however, consisted of a rectangular bar frame through which a narrow strap may have been drawn (fig. 5)⁷.

Another country where bronze objects with the same tailpiece have been found is Denmark, where they were used for attaching reins to the horse's bit.

6. *Op. cit.*, 100, fig. 1.

7. Pič-Déchelette, *Le Hraditsch de Stradonitz*, 1906, pl. XIX, 10, 14, 15, 17; J. Schranil, *Vorsch. Böhmens und Mährens*, 1928, pl. LI, 19, pl. LII, 14 and p. 243.

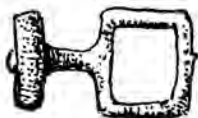


fig. 5

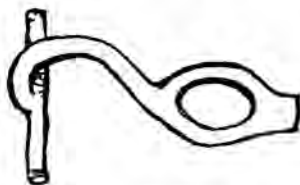


fig. 6

Fig. 6 is a sketch I once made of such an object. A well-preserved headstall of a horse has been found at Vimose; here we can see such a rein fastener dangling at either end of the bit⁸. Mr. Brøndsted dates this find to the late Roman period (200-400).

But the curious way in which metal and leather were attached to each other goes further back than that. In Hallstatt grave 196 a horsebit was found to which the reins must have been fastened in the same way (fig. 7)⁹. The bit probably got another function later on, for in the middle of it three rings of bronze wire form a chain to which a bronze rattle has been attached; a very unusual thing to put in the horse's mouth!

Another Hallstatt example has been found in a rich barrow at Hundersing, Germany¹⁰. The find included several pieces of horse furniture. Among them were two objects that must have formed part of the bit (fig. 8), like the Danish ones quoted above. There also was a four-spoked wheel, to the rim of which have been attached four curved pieces of bronze ending in a cross-bar¹¹; no doubt four leather straps held this ornament in position on the breast or the front of the horse.

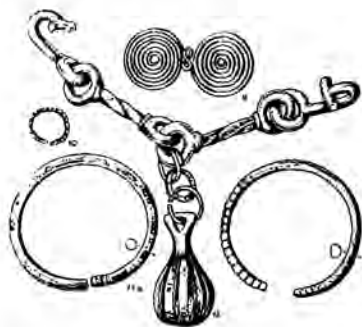


fig. 7

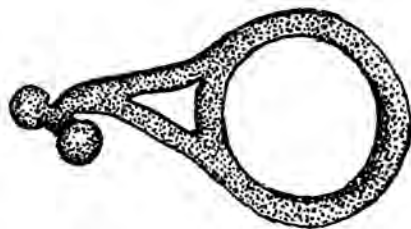


fig. 8

8. J. Brøndsted, *Danmarks Oldtid*, III, 1940, 212, fig. 211.

9. K. Kromer, *Das Gräberfeld von Hallstatt*, 1959, pl. 62 and p. 68.

10. P. Goessler, *Die vor- und frühgeschichtl. Besiedlung des Oberamts Riedlinge*, 1923, 212, fig. 11b.

11. N. Åberg, *Chronologie* II, 1931, 98, fig. 204.

This material is of course insufficient to permit an exhaustive typology of the Iberian girdle fastener; it is after all only one feature of the latter which we find in the objects quoted here. But perhaps later discoveries in Spain and elsewhere will tell us more about an interesting piece of equipment that must have been the outcome of a gradual development and shortly after was superseded by the buckle.

Sofialaan 31
Zeist

A. ROES

