

AN IVORY FINGER DISTAFF WITH THE TOP IN FORM OF A PINECONE DISCOVERED IN ISTROS

Alina IANCU*
Corneliu BELDIMAN**

Dedicated to the memory of Professor Alexandru Avram,
whose contributions for Pontic archaeology were longstanding and far-reaching.

Keywords: *finger distaff, ivory, spinning, textiles, instrumenta domestica, Istros.*

Abstract: *A small ivory rod decorated with geometrical patterns was unearthed during older excavations at Istros and it was published in 1989 by R. Florescu and I. Miclea as an "ivory hand for scratching". This paper aims to reassess the role of this object which fits into the category of instrumenta domestica being a specific type of distaff known as "Fingerkunkeln", "ring distaff" or under the more common name of "finger distaff". On the basis of both the archaeological rich evidence of similar artefacts and the iconographic representations of such tools on the funerary reliefs in the ancient Roman world, it is hypothesised that finger distaffs were strongly connected in a symbolical way with spinning, being an indication of the high status and virtuosity of their owners, which were often buried with them. Additionally, their practical utility will be questioned. Furthermore, the presence the above-mentioned distaff in Istros will be discussed in the context of the recent progress in the field showing clear patterns of circulation of such goods along the Empire. Therefore, we hypothesise that this find has the potential to show close links with the Aegean world due to the identification of direct analogies in Samothrace, Greece, pinpointing Scythia Minor on the regional distribution map of these tools and integrating the site in the circulation patterns that marked the Roman world in the first three centuries AD.*

* Alina IANCU: National Institute of Heritage of Romania, Bucharest; e-mail: alina.iancu@patrimoniul.gov.ro.

** Corneliu BELDIMAN: National Museum of Eastern Carpathians, Sfântu Gheorghe, Covasna County; e-mail: cbeldiman58@yahoo.com.

A richly decorated rod made out of ivory dating from Early Roman times is currently kept in the collection of the local museum of the archaeological site of Istros. The object was discovered during older excavations and regrettably all the information about the exact place of discovery on the site or its vicinity is lost today. To the best of our knowledge, the object is not mentioned anywhere in the old registers of finds, a fact confirmed also by the museum's curator.

The only note that is written on the object itself is the accession number B.170, and the lack of other details makes a certain identification of the context very difficult as without additional documentation to complete this note, it is of not much help. However, this accession number bears a close resemblance to the inventory numbers written on pottery sherds originating from the Lambrino excavations¹, so there are great chances that the distaff was discovered during the research undertaken on the site by the Lambrino family, between 1927–1942. Despite the missing details about its discovery, this artefact is indubitably worthy of attention, especially that such objects are rather exceptional finds at Istros².

The principal aim of this paper is to offer an extensive description of the object, to question its previous publication as a “hand for scratching” and to argue in favour of the distaff function – a textile tool closely connected with the feminine universe in the Roman times. Furthermore, a detailed technical analysis on the material, the manufacture techniques and use wear traces by the second author offers additional information about how it was produced and it gives more clues about its actual functionality.

Description of the object

The object consists of a shaft having a looped end and a pinecone at the opposite side. Despite that it was partially damaged in Antiquity, only little fragments are missing from the top pinecone and the bottom finger ring without causing much loss to the general form (**Fig. 1**). In its actual state of preservation, it has the following dimensions: preserved length – 156 mm (and around 185 mm in the original state), shaft diameter – between 9 mm at the bottom up to 11 mm at the upper part. The maximum diameter of the top cone measures 9 mm. The inner and outer diameter of the fragmentary circular ring can be approximate as

¹ See an explanation by Marcelle Flot-Lambrino regarding the inventory system applied to older and newer finds on the site (with special regard to pottery): “Vases et fragments portent le numéro qu'on leur donne en sortant des fouilles ; il constitue en même temps leur numéro d'inventaire. Les fragments accompagnés de la mention << Ancien fonds >> désignent ceux que Vasile Pârvan avait laissés pour étude” (LAMBRINO 1938, p. 7).

² The only other possible Roman-era distaffs known from Istros are three bone objects preserved in a fragmentary state, initially published as “bone pins” (SUCEVEANU 1967, p. 250, Fig. 6.3-5, unscaled, no rings preserved) and later interpreted by N.F. Fedoseev and O.D. Chevelev as Venus-type distaffs (FEDOSEEV & CHEVELEV 1999, p. 181) and a fragmentary distaff made out of glass recently reported in the literature (see PETCU & PETCU-LEVEI 2022, p. 172, note 60). See also a mention about some “baguettes en ivoire découvertes à Histria” by VAULINA & WASOVICZ 1974, p. 172, n. 78, later interpreted as distaffs, without any details about their actual identification numbers, no illustration or information about their morphological features (WASOVICZ 1987, p. 269–270, n. 15).

follows: outer diameter around 22 mm, inner diameter around 17 mm, width 5 mm (see the complete measurements in the technical section).

Even in this incomplete state of preservation, the object maintained its overall features and almost all decorative parts. The shaft is richly embellished with geometric patterns and the partially preserved ring bears a very schematic vegetal motif in form of a leaf. On the basis of similar analogies, we can certainly say that the ring should have had an identical vegetal motif on its right side and it is quite possible that some additional decoration which once existed on top of the pinecone disappeared too (see below the analogies for this find, especially the distaff W12-9b from Samothrace, Greece and another distaff from the area of the Kosmaj mountain, central Serbia, which have some protuberances on the top of their cones, both illustrated below (Fig. 10. c-d) and the hypothetical reconstruction of the distaff from Istros (Fig. 2).

The ornamentation of the shaft consists of wavy lines in its lower part and rhomboidal motifs displayed towards the top. These two parts are separated by three groups of parallel grooves that show a slight variation of design. The lower part is longer than the upper one giving an elegant, slender look to the object. It is decorated with oblique wavy lines forming a spiral-like pattern. However, the lines are not equally spaced – a typical feature for all the distaffs made out of bone or ivory which bear a similar ornamentation on their shaft.

According to some scholars, this spirally decoration symbolise the way in which the fibres are twisted during spinning³ and it might have had the practical role to prevent the wool fibres to slip off the distaff while the spinner is working⁴. The upper part is smaller, being embellished with rhomboidal motifs formed by crosshatched incisions. On the edges, some of the incised motifs are not full rhomboids, but rather triangular motifs as they fit better on the margins.

The lower part is delimited by the finger ring through a succession of three grooves, while in its upper part it is separated by the superior one through a more complex design consisting of more grooves and a trapezoidal ornamentation. Between the superior part and the top cone there is another group of grooves⁵.

Technological Analysis: Material, Production, Use Wear

General aspects. It should be noted that the data, observations and considerations presented here are based on the images (photo overview, macro and micro details) provided by the first author of this paper. Consequently, some aspects may be subject to modifications and further revisions to the extent that the piece will be examined directly and detailed observations will be made with the occasion of a future study. Therefore, the morphometry of the various elements of the piece is around 90% accurate, as it is their quantification (e.g., the number of rhombuses and the exact number of engraved grooves).

The description, which is apparently arid, consist of necessary notions, making use of standardised data and terminological conventions, acronyms and

³ KOVANCALIEV 2019, p. 127.

⁴ DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 90.

⁵ A more detailed discussion about the techniques and tools employed to manufacture these decorative elements is given below, in the technical section.

numerical codes used in the analysis of artefacts made out of animal hard materials. The precise definition of the parts, segments and morphological elements which by articulation form the distaff is necessary in order to decipher every technical detail, to specifically and completely identify it on the object or in the provided illustration.

Such an approach, which included microscopic analysis of surfaces in order to identify, analyse and interpret traces of manufacture and use wear, has been previously applied in the case of a fully preserved bone finger distaff unearthed in Capidava⁶. The paper would have provided numerous elements of comparison for the piece discussed in this paper especially that detailed approaches with use-wear analysis of finger distaffs are not common at all in the literature in Romania or elsewhere. However, for various reasons the final results of that analysis were not included in the published article⁷. On the other hand, the technological aspects of the processing of animal hard materials in the Roman times benefit from a very rich literature⁸.

Raw material. Most probably the distaff from Istros was made out of elephant ivory, a common but expensive and appreciate raw material in the Greco-Roman World. Several details observable in the photographs support this identification: the texture of the material, the dense and compact appearance on the fracture surface, fracture morphology, colour and the uniform glossy sheen of the finished surfaces.

The following technical description makes use of the conventional definitions of parts, segments and morphological elements of the piece, designated by acronyms and numerical codes which will be referred to in the text and illustrated in Table 1 and Figs. 3–4. The upper side (convex at the level of the ring and the segment above it) and the lower side (opposite) are distinguished.

The analysed object is a straight elephant ivory distaff in form of a shaft with a ring at the base and a distal end formed as a stylised pinecone. It was obtained by processing the raw material on a lathe and by hand carving and finishing with hand tools in a meticulous manner, with fine and precise execution of details, indicating that the maker was an experienced craftsman. The morphological parts (also called segments or elements) of the piece are described from the ring (proximal part) to the distal end (of the fractured pinecone). In total there are 5 parts, 13 segments and 38 morphological elements. Each is designated by a composite acronym and a numerical code (**Table 1**).

The piece is nicely milled and finished on a large part of the surfaces (a fine polishing was obtained by rubbing it with a piece of leather), with a lustre typical

⁶ BELDIMAN 2016.

⁷ RAȚIU 2016.

⁸ For the use of the hand lathe in the Roman world see MÜLLER *et alii* 2021 (with further references), BERTRAND 2008 (with further references). The lathe manufacture of spindles and spindles whorls from wood or animal hard materials is illustrated, among others at MÉDARD 2021. For the various technical solutions applied in the processing of animal hard materials and typology of artefacts, etc. in the Roman times cf. MacGREGOR 1985; BÉAL 1983; DESCHLER-ERB 1998; BERTRAND 2008; BARBIER 2016. For Romania (ancient Roman Dacia and Scythia Minor), see CIUGUDEAN 1997; NUȚU *et alii* 2014a; NUȚU *et alii* 2014b; BELDIMAN *et alii* 2015 (with further references).

of ivory, a raw material which lends itself very well to the application of such mechanical treatments, with the observation that some parts have a matt appearance, being unfinished (roughly milled, see below), preserving traces of engraving (grooves), lathe cutting or abrasion applied with a file.

Definitions, parts, segments, morphological elements, acronyms, codes and their hierarchical articulation are given in Table 1 and Figs. 2–4. The standardised notions of proximal (closer to the hand), mesial (intermediate position) and distal (further from the hand), employed in the analysis of the artefacts made out of animal hard materials, used also in this study, are frequently used being borrowed from descriptions used in anatomy (skeletal parts closer to or further from the head).⁹

Table 1. Table summarising the descriptive parameters of the ivory distaff from Istros (parts, segments, morphological elements), including abbreviations and codes.

Parts	Codes	Seg ments	Abb	Morphological elements	Codes	Abb	Codes	Number of elements
PE	1	S1	PE-S1	Protuberance left	1	PE-S1-P1	1-1-1	1
				Protuberance central	2	PE-S1-P2	1-1-2	1
				Protuberance right	3	PE-S1-P3	1-1-3	1
PP	2	S1	PP-S1	Protuberance left	1	PP-S1-PL1	2-1-1	1
				Protuberance right	2	PP-S1-PL2	2-1-2	1
				Groove left US	3	PP-S1GL-US1	2-1-3	1
				Groove right US	4	PP-S1-GR-US2	2-1-4	1
				Groove left LS	5	PP-S1-GL-LS1	2-1-5	1
				Groove right LS	6	PP-S1-GR-LS2	2-1-6	1
				Finger ring	7	PP-S1-FR1	2-1-7	1
MP	3	S1	MP-S1	Protuberance/ring 1	1	MP-S1-P1	3-1-1	1
				Protuberance/ring 2	2	MP-S1-P2	3-1-2	1
				Groove 1	3	MP-S1-G1	3-1-3	1
				Groove 2	4	MP-S1-G2	3-1-4	1
				Groove 3	5	MP-S1-G3	3-1-5	1
		S2	MP-S2	Helicoidal grooves	1	MP-S2-HG1-1-19	3-2-1	19
				Helicoidal ribs	2	MP-S2-HR1-1-19	3-2-2	19
		S3	MP-S3	Protuberance/ring 1	1	MP-S3-P1	3-3-1	1
				Protuberance/ring 2	2	MP-S3-P2	3-3-2	1
				Protuberance/ring 3	3	MP-S3-P3	3-3-3	1
				Groove 1	4	MP-S3-G1	3-3-4	1
				Groove 2	5	MP-S3-G2	3-3-5	1
				Groove 3	6	MP-S3-G3	3-3-6	1
DP	4	S1	DP-	Truncated cone 1	1	DP-S1-T1	4-1-1	1

⁹ CAMPS-FABRER 1974, p. 109; BELDIMAN 2007, p. 62–65.

			S1					
		S2	DP-S2	Truncated cone 1	1	DP-S2-T1	4-2-1	1
		S3	DP-S3	Helicoidal grooves left	1	DP-S3-HGL1-8	4-3-1	8
				Helicoidal grooves right	2	DP-S3-HGR1-10	4-3-2	10
				Rhombs	3	DP-S3-R1-x	4-3-3	?
		S4	DP-S4	Truncated cone	1	DP-S4-T1	4-4-1	1
		S5	DP-S5	Protuberance/ring 1	1	DP-S5-P1	4-5-1	1
				Protuberance/ring 2	2	DP-S5-P2	4-5-2	1
				Protuberance/ring 3	3	DP-S5-P3	4-5-3	1
				Groove 1	4	DP-S5-G1	4-5-4	1
				Groove 2	5	DP-S5-G2	4-5-5	1
		S6	DP-S6	Truncated cone 1	1	DP-S6-T1	4-6-1	1
		S7	DP-S7	Truncated cone 1	1	DP-S7-T1	4-7-1	1
DE	5	S1	DE-S1	Protuberance/ring 1	1	DE-S1-P1	5-1-1	1
				Protuberance/ring 2	2	DE-S1-P2	5-2-1	1
				Protuberance/Con e	3	DE-S1-P3	5-3-1	1
				Groove 1	4	DE-S1-G1	5-4-1	1
				Groove 2	5	DE-S1-G2	5-5-1	1

The following description makes current reference to Figs. 2-3.

The proximal end (PE-S1; 1-1) of the piece is represented by a protuberance (probably trilobed, unpreserved) placed on the long axis of the piece (PE-S1-P1, P2, P3; 1-1-1, 1-1-2, 1-1-3). The proximal part (PP-S1; 2-1) (**Fig. 5**) is formed by the ring (PP-S1-FR1; 2-1-7) which had the role to allow a better grip for the spinner who placed it on its finger ring. It is preserved in a fragmentary state, being fractured in Antiquity about 1/4 on either side of the base of the shank; the right-side segment (on the upper face) preserves the protuberance (PP-S1-PR1; 2-1-2) and oblique groove (PP-S1-GR-US1; 2-1-4) showing what is thought to be a stylised leaf; the same on the lower face (PP-S1-GL-LS1; 2-1-5). The grooves have asymmetrical V-shaped sections and are made by notching and engraving. Originally, the leaf motif was placed symmetrically at the base of the shaft (see the reconstruction in **Fig. 2**), as the analogies show. The ring is circular in shape, with an estimated outer diameter of about 22 mm and an inner diameter of about 17 mm, it is about 5 mm wide and has triangular symmetrical sections. The surfaces are smooth, shaped and finished with a high lustre.

The middle part (MP-S1, S2, S3; 3-1, 2, 3) (**Fig. 7**) - consists of a shaft of generally truncated conical elongated shape, with the longest length in relation to the total length of the piece, symmetrical oval sections in the proximal third and circular in the rest. Three straight segments of different morphology can be distinguished on it: at the proximal end, there is segment MP-S1; 3-1, oval in section,

decorated with three parallel grooves, made on the piece fixed on the lathe, arranged transversely to the long axis of the piece, deeply engraved, placed at relatively equal distances, with U-shaped sections (MP-S1-G1, 3-1-3; MP-S1-G2, 3-1-4; MP-S1-G3, 3-1-5), preserving two annular protuberances (MP-S1-P1, 3-1-1; MP-S1-P2, 3-1-2).

At the central part of the mesial part there is a sector (MP-S2, 3-2) decorated with about 19 rectilinear, deeply engraved grooves, arranged in a twist or helicoidal shape to the right on that surface, at about 45° to the long axis of the piece, parallel to each other, placed at slightly unequal distances, with U-shaped sections (MP-S2-HG1-19; 3-2-1-19), preserving between them about 19 ribs with the same twisted morphology (MP-S2-HRi1-19; 3-2-2-19). These grooves were made using probably a metal tool with a narrow-rounded end. Presumably the shaft was fixed in the lathe and rotated slightly. The last segment of the mesial part (MP-S3; 3-3) has a morphology similar to that of MP-S1; 3-1, with three grooves engraved transversely to the lathe (MP-S3-G1, 3-1-4; MP-S1-G2, 3-3-5; MP-S1-G3, 3-3-6), preserving three annular protuberances between them (MP-S3-P1, 3-3-1; MP-S3-P2, 3-3-2; MP-S3-P3, 3-3-3). Therefore, the craftsman's aim was to create symmetry. The surfaces were nicely finished, retaining a glossy lustre, excepting for the inside area of the grooves, which have a matt appearance.

The distal part (DP-S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7; 4-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) (Figs. 8-9) - consists of seven segments, including the pinecone rendered in an extremely stylized form. The proximal segment (DP-S1-T1, 4-1-1) is a truncated cone-shaped with the base upwards, with flat matt surfaces (on which shallow transverse fine grooves, typical of lathe processing, are visible) and circular sections, and it was made on the lathe; its distal end preserves small initial shiny surfaces of the shaft unaltered by turning. Above this segment there is another truncated conical segment with an upward base (DP-S2-T1, 4-2-1), with concave surfaces and circular cross-section, shaped on the lathe, on which also transverse striations specific to lathe processing were observed.

The central sector of the distal part (DP-S3; 4-3) has a relatively cylindrical form, circular cross-sections; being nicely finished. It has shiny surfaces similar to those of MP-S2. Its decoration consists of about 18 parallel, intersecting, straight, lathe-engraved grooves arranged in a twist or helicoidal pattern at about 45° to the long axis of the piece, in opposite directions (about 8 to the right and about 10 to the left) at slightly unequal distances, with U-shaped sections: DP-S3-HGL1-8; 4-3-1-1-8; DP-S3-HGR1-10; 4-3-2-1-10. The intersection of the grooves preserves on the surface small asymmetrical rhombuses of slightly different sizes (DP-S3-Rh1-x; 4-3-3-1-x). Above segment DP-S3, there is the segment DP-S4-T1; 4-4-1, which has a similar morphology to DP-S2-T1 in terms of symmetry, being truncated conical with the base downwards, with matt concave surfaces, on which transverse striations specific to lathe processing can be seen.

The truncated conical segments DP-S2-T1 and DP-S4-T1 form the ends of the decorated segment DP-S3, which were shaped on the lathe after the decoration was made. Above this segment, there is segment DP-S5 which is morphologically similar to segment MP-S3. It has two transversely engraved grooves (DP-S5-G1, 4-5-4; DP-S5-G2, 4-5-5), preserving between them three annular protuberances (DP-

S5-P1, 4-5-1; DP-S5-P2, 4-5-2; DP-S5-P3, 4-5-3). The last two segments of the distal part (DP-S6-T1, 4-6-1 and DP-S7-T1, 4-7-1) form an asymmetrical double truncated cone element with shorter proximal and longer distal segments, representing the stylised pinecone and having undecorated matt surfaces, both with convex surfaces preserving traces of shaping (at the lathe and then by axial scraping with a knife blade or by transverse abrasion with a file) and polygonal sections.

The distal end (DE-S1) of the part (**Fig. 9**), which overlapped the pinecone, i.e. the segment DP-S7-T1, was fractured in ancient times on an oblique plane with a concave surface; this terminal segment was most probably constituted, as seen in some analogies of the piece, by at least three overlapping protuberances, two of which are annular (DE-S1-P1, 5-1-1; DE-S1-P2, 5-1-2), of different sizes, progressively tapering from the proximal to the distal end, and a conical protuberance (DE-S1-P3, 5-1-3), with a rounded tip, separated by two transverse engraved grooves (DE-S1-G1, 5-1-4; DE-S1-G2, 5-1-5).

Stages in the manufacture of the piece (Fig. 5). The stages of manufacture of the distaff are proposed on the basis of observations made on photographs (some of them taken with a Dino-Lite Digital Microscope AM4515ZT) of the morphological elements and according to a logical model in terms of technique. The following interpretation must be considered keeping in mind the lack of direct observations on the object itself which may undergo slight changes in the description of the technological steps below.

1. cutting - by hand: a piece of ivory is extracted from the tusk (plate) by cutting with a saw; it was probably parallelepipedal in shape (a thin plate with straight parallel edges and flat surfaces) (**Fig. 5.1**).

2. carving - in several stages, using hand tools and a lathe:

2.1. by hand - thinning of the plate thickness, using the rasp (**Fig. 5.2**);

2.2. by hand - removal of the traces of the operation by finishing (rubbing with a piece of leather), on about 1/2 of the surface, on the portion reserved for the ring and the proximal part of the shaft;

2.3. by hand - cutting out the initial plate with the saw, obtaining the shape of a square plate with a long squared-section shaft (**Fig. 5.3**);

2.4. using the lathe - shaping the blank obtained by shaping the squared-section shaft (the middle and distal part of the finished part, segments MP-S1-S3 and DP-S1-S7) into the shape of a cylindrical shaft (**Fig. 5.3**);

2.5. use of lathe - finishing: obtaining a smooth surface by removing traces of the turning operation (rubbing with a piece of leather) along the entire length of the cylindrical shaft;

2.6. using the lathe - making the helicoidally decoration of the MP-S2 and DP-S3 segments (in the latter case first the grooves to the left were made, DP-S3-HGL1-1-8, then the grooves to the right, DP-S3-HGR1-1-10) by engraving the piece fixed in the lathe and rotated slowly, using a blunt thin-pointed metal tool (**Fig. 5.4**);

2.7. using the lathe - successive shaping of truncated conical and transversely engraved segments as well as the double truncated cone (the stylised pinecone):

MP-S1, MP-S3, DP-S1, DP-S2, DP-S4, DPS5, DP-S6, DP-S7, DE-S1; the surfaces remained roughly milled, i.e., unfinished, having a matt appearance (Fig. 5.5);

2.8. by hand - shaping by saw-cutting, chipping, file abrading, engraving, finishing, of the outer shape of the finger ring with stylised leaf decoration (PP-S1, EP-S1) (Fig. 5.6);

2.9. manual - shaping by punching, chipping, file abrasion, finishing, of the inner part of the finger ring, at PP-S1 level (Fig. 5.6).

Use-wear traces. The details observed on the photographs and micro-photographs, show that the upper (distal) segment of the finger ring show, on both sides, traces of intense polishing, as well as micro-striations due to specific use (Fig. 6). The shallow polishing and rounding of the edges of grooves on the MP-S2 and DP-S3 may also be an indication of use, being produced by repeated fixation of the bundles of wool (Figs. 7–8).

Fracture of the ring and the distal end (segment DE-S1) could also have occurred during use (Figs. 6, 9). The existence of the fractures, as well as the lack of traces of burning, may be possible indications of the piece's provenance outside a funerary context.

All the parameters analysed here suggests, according to the second author of this paper, that the distaff from Istros is an imitation product coming from a specialised provincial workshop (e.g., from Istros). According to other authors, at least some of the finger distaffs made out of animal hard materials discovered in regions outside Mediterranean might be brought in these distant provinces by means of trade or human mobility from Mediterranean workshops.¹⁰ Anyways, since a complete inventory of finds with the exact description of their type, material and detailed information on the manufacturing technique was never undertaken, it is not an easy task to certainly establish if the finger distaffs discovered in the Pontic area were imported, if they arrived with their owners or if these tools were locally produced in provincial workshops where bone and ivory was processed in order to obtain such implements and other tools or accessories (e.g. spindles, spindle whorls, hair pins) with a high popularity in the epoch (see below the richness of types and subtypes clearly showing that the production and consumption of finger distaffs was part of a trend the marked the first four centuries AD).

¹⁰ Alexandra Wasovicz hypothesized that the distaffs circulating in the Roman times were produced in Greek workshops in the Mediterranean world, from which they spread in all the roman provinces (WASOVICZ 1987). A similar opinion is shared by Lorant Vass (see VASS 2013, p. 66).

Table 2. Ivory finger distaff from Istros. Dimensions	
Parameters	Value (mm)
Total (original) length	185
Length preserved	156
Length PE	5.5
Length PP	23.5
Length MP	87
Length DP	56
Length DE	10
Exterior diameter finger ring	22
Interior diameter finger ring	17
Width finger ring	5
Thickness finger ring	3
Diameter proximal part shaft	9-10
Diameter medial part shaft	10
Diameter distal part shaft	11
Width grooves	1
Depth grooves	0,7
Width ring-shape protuberances	2-3
Hight truncated cones DP-S1, DP-S2, DP-S4	4-5
Hight truncated cones DP-S6, DP-S7	5-14
Hight distal end cone	8

Table 3. Technical abbreviations	
DE	Distal end
FR	Finger ring
G	Groove
GL	Groove left
GR	Groove right
HG	Helicoidal groove
HR	Helicoidal rib
L	Left
LS	Lower side
MP	Medial part
P	Protuberance
PE	Proximal end
PL	Protuberance left
PP	Proximal part
R	Right
Rh	Rhomb
Ri	Rib
S	Segment
T	Truncated cone
US	Upper side

Typology

Bone and ivory finger distaffs were discovered in many regions influenced by the Romans, dating especially from the first three centuries AD, while few others were recovered in 4th century AD contexts¹¹ or even as late as the 6th century AD¹². The up to date published archaeological data suggests that one of the most popular type is the distaff with the top embellished with a feminine figure thought to represent *Venus* goddess in various hypostasis: sometimes as *Venus Pudica*, while other times the goddess is accompanied by a child¹³.

The majority of the finds shows that the shaft of this type usually remain undecorated¹⁴. Such objects were found in vast areas of the ancient Roman world, including Scythia Minor (Dinogetia¹⁵, Capidava¹⁶ and Halmyris¹⁷; see also some potential fragmentary distaffs from Istros¹⁸), Dacia (see a fragmentary distaff at Porolissum¹⁹), Moesia Superior (Viminacium²⁰), Pannonia (on the archaeological sites of Tordas, Dunaújváros, and other unknown sites in the region²¹), in the occidental part of the Empire (see Noricum, at Lauriacum²² and Haselbach²³), Raetia (Zurzah²⁴), in Thracia (Varna²⁵), the Italic space (Aquileia²⁶), Gaul (Béziers²⁷), Dalmatia (Salona and Stobreč²⁸), Pantikapaion and other sites around the Cimmerian Bosphor²⁹. Other distaffs of Venus type were reported from many

¹¹ FEDOSEEV & CHEVELEV 1999.

¹² RAȚIU 2016 (a second century AD distaff unearthed in a 6th century AD context at Capidava, Romania).

¹³ PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011, p. 132.

¹⁴ The majority of the Venus type finger distaffs do not bear any kind of ornamentation on their shaft (IVČEVIĆ 1999–2000, p. 474). Thus, in most of the cases the only decorative elements embellishing these tools are Venus figurines placed in the top (sometimes accompanied by children) and some schematic vegetal motifs in form of leaves near or on the finger ring. See the majority of the Venus distaffs cited in this paper. Additionally, see some distaffs of unknown provenience (PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011, p. 133, fig. 8).

¹⁵ ȘTEFAN 1937–1940, p. 414, p. 417, fig. 22.

¹⁶ RAȚIU 2016, p. 137–142, pl. II-III.

¹⁷ STANC 2017, p. 144–145, fig. 2A.

¹⁸ SUCEVEANU 1967, p. 250, fig. 6.3-5. Alexandru Suceveanu described them as bone pins, while N.F. Fedoseev and O.D. Chevelev interpreted these objects as Venus distaffs (see FEDOSEEV & CHEVELEV 1999, p. 181).

¹⁹ VASS 2013, pl. 4.

²⁰ SPASIĆ-DJURIĆ 2002, fig. 82.

²¹ BÁNKI 1967–8, p. 237, fig. 13.3a-b; VASS 2013, tab. 2/5; BIRÓ 1994, pl. LXXXVI.851, PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011, p. 133, figs. 6–8).

²² KLOIBER 1962, fig. XXIX.2–2a.

²³ FARKA 1975, fig. 5.3.

²⁴ KÖNIG 1987, 134, fig. 117a, 136.

²⁵ RAUH 2006, p. 116.

²⁶ GIOVANNINI & FEUGÈRE 2000, fig. 1.

²⁷ See a fragmentary distaff kept in the collection of the Museum of Biterrois in Béziers, France (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4007&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 20.12.2022).

²⁸ IVČEVIĆ 1999–2000, p. 478, fig. 1–4.

²⁹ Distaffs discovered in the area of the Cimmerian Bosphorus are currently kept in the collection of more museum (Kerch Museum, Odessa, Hermitage and Louvre, see FEDOSEEV & CHEVELEV 1999, p. 179).

sites in Asia Minor (e.g. Ephesus³⁰, Kütahya³¹, Manisa³², Sagalassos³³, Sardis³⁴, Adana³⁵, Afyon³⁶, Pessinus³⁷) and further in Egypt (Madytos³⁸).

Many of these objects were found in sepulchral contexts, sometimes lying next to spindles and spindle whorls, a fact that determined some scholars to argue for their symbolic role, and thus to interpret them as implements with a powerful symbolical meaning, closely associated with women, motherhood, marriage and virtuosity³⁹. Moreover, their wide distribution and the identification of analogies in distant areas (see, for example, a Venus distaff unearthed in Pantikapaion with an analogy at Madytos, in Egypt⁴⁰ or a distaff unearthed in Porolissum with analogies in Dinogetia and Lauriacum⁴¹), confess either about the large circulation of this goods or about a popularity of style and motifs replicated locally, showing in any case the relations that might existed between these (sometimes very distant) regions.

Another common type is represented by the distaffs ending with a simple or more elaborate pinecone⁴² - a symbol used in many ancient cultures, thought to represent fertility, rebirth and eternal life. The pinecone distaffs usually have their shafts decorated either exclusively with spirally patterns or with an alternation of geometric motifs grouped in two or more decorative parts. However, exceptional examples of pinecone distaffs have a simple shaft.

³⁰ TRINKL 2000; SCHINTLMEISTER 2013, Fig. 56–57.

³¹ See a distaff preserved in the Kütahya Archaeological Museum, Türkiye (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4007&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 20.12.2022).

³² See a distaff in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Manisa, Türkiye (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4007&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 23.12.2022).

³³ POBLOME *et alii* 2012, fig. 3.

³⁴ See a distaff in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Manisa, Türkiye (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4009&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign>

See also some composite distaffs from Sardis with Venus Pudica in aedicula with Serapis (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4015&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 09.04.2023) and Minerva (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4014&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed at 09.04.2023).

³⁵ A Venus type distaff is currently kept in the Collection Veysel Köse, Türkiye (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4009&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 28.12.2022).

³⁶ Museum of Archaeology in Afyon, Türkiye, is keeping in its collection a Venus distaff (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4009&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 17.12.2022).

³⁷ DEVREKER & VERMEULEN 1993, p. 279, fig. 4.

³⁸ CREMER 1996, Figs. 3–4.

³⁹ IVČEVIĆ 1999–2000; PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011.

⁴⁰ FEDOSEEV & CHEVELEV 1999, p. 177.

⁴¹ VASS 2013, p. 66.

⁴² The cones are fashioned in many styles, they can be longer or shorter, simpler or more elaborate, covered in geometric decorations like crosshatched or linear patterns or entirely undecorated (see for example Fig. 11 below). Similar cones were also used to embellish other objects, as are for example the hair pins (CIUGUDEAN 1997, p. 160, pl. X; RODET-BELARBI & DIEUDONNÉ-GLAD 2008, Fig. 12).

Such objects are known from Scythia Minor (see the distaff from Istros discussed in greater detail in this paper, with its shaft decorated with a spirally pattern⁴³), Dacia (Apulum, a distaff with a similar shaft, the wavy lines are more dense⁴⁴ and Sucidava – a single find with a more complex design at the top cone and a simple, undecorated shaft⁴⁵), Moesia Superior (Viminacium, multiple finds fully or partially preserved, with spirally shafts⁴⁶, Scupi, at least two finds – a fully preserved and one fragmentary – with spirally shafts⁴⁷ and Novae, at Čezava, one fragmentary finds with spirally shafts⁴⁸), Macedonia (Stobi, more distaffs preserved fragmentary, with spirally shafts⁴⁹ and Samothrace – two distaffs having spirally shafts⁵⁰), Thracia (Chatalka, Kiustendil, Plovdiv in Bulgaria, six distaffs in total, one with a simple shaft, four with spirally shafts and the last one with the shaft embellished with parallel circles⁵¹ and Kosmaj mountain in central Serbia – at least two distaffs with sketchy spirally design incised on their shafts⁵²), Gaul (Lyon, a fragmentary distaff, spirally shaft⁵³, Saint-Fréjus at Marennes – a fragmentary find, spirally shaft⁵⁴; Rom – two distaffs, only the cones are preserved⁵⁵), Italy (Rome, one distaff with a simple shaft⁵⁶) and Asia Minor (Ephesus, one object with spirally shaft⁵⁷ and Afyon, two distaffs, simple shafts⁵⁸).

Even if most of the times the material in which they were fashioned is reported as bone (**Table 4**), no systematic technical discussion on the material, manufacture and the eventual use wear identified on the shaft of these distaffs is available, especially since many of them are scarcely mentioned in older publications and did not benefit of in debt study.

⁴³ FLORESCU & MICLEA 1989, pl. 134, discussed in greater detail in this paper.

⁴⁴ BLEOANĂ 2017.

⁴⁵ FILIP 2018.

⁴⁶ PETCOVIĆ 1995, pl. XVIII, no. 7-9; DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 85, 91, fig. 6, fig. 10, fig. 11.

⁴⁷ JOVANOVA 2013, p. 907; See also PETCOVIĆ 1995, pl. XVIII, no. 11 for another fragmentary distaff which has lost its top decoration.

⁴⁸ PETCOVIĆ 1995, pl. XVIII, no. 10.

⁴⁹ KOVANCALIEV 2019, p. 123, fig. 3.

⁵⁰ LEHMANN 1953, p. 35; DUSENBERY 1998, p. 493.

⁵¹ NIKOLOV & BUYUKLIEV 1970, p. 55, fig 5.a; RAUH 2004 with further references on various distaffs types discovered in Bulgaria.

⁵² These distaffs are currently exhibited at the National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade, in a display narrating about the life of Roman women (see one of them illustrated below, fig. 10.d).

⁵³ See a photo by Y. Teyssonneyre showing a pinecone distaff unearthed on the Edmond Locard Street, 86-92, Lyon, France <https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 21.12.2022.

⁵⁴ See a photo by Chl. Landrieux showing two pinecone distaffs unearthed in a funerary context at Saint-Fréjus, France, on the platform *Artefacts: Encyclopédie collaborative en ligne des objets archéologiques* (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 20.12.2022).

⁵⁵ RODET-BELARBI & DIEUDONNÉ-GLAD 2008, p. 150, fig. 15.

⁵⁶ VIERNEISEL 1978, p. 189, Abb. 278; CREMER 1996, p. 137, fig. 5.

⁵⁷ TRINKL 1994, p. 82, fig. 1.

⁵⁸The distaffs are kept in the collection of Archaeological Museum of Afyon, Türkiye (<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 29.01.2022).

Other types known from the literature were never or very rarely noticed in Scythia Minor or in Dacia. For example, bone or ivory distaffs with their tops embellished with animals (dogs, felines or other animals⁵⁹ and birds⁶⁰) are not known in the region (even though distaffs made out of glass and decorated with birds were discovered in Moesia Inferior being recently reported in the literature⁶¹), while distaffs with more composite decoration seem to be rather exceptional finds⁶². In other cases the bad state of preservation of some of the finds does not allow specialists to assign a specific form or type (see a fragmentary distaff from Apulum with missing top⁶³, and another one from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa having only a part of the shaft and of its finger ring preserved⁶⁴).

Even if it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a complete inventory of all known types and subtypes, it is worthy to mention that the up-to-date archaeological evidence suggests that the Venus and pinecone finger distaffs are by far some of the most popular types worked in bone and ivory and both of them are attested in Scythia Minor. It is not excluded that the pinecone type to be much more widespread than currently believed, but since its design is not so spectacular, specimens of this type were probably less published in comparison with their Venus counterparts.

However, future discoveries and the publication of older finds might update this overview in the future, defining in greater detail the patterns of distribution of the finger distaffs types made out of bone and ivory across the vast regions controlled and influenced in Antiquity by the Romans. Additionally, consideration on the material and technique used to produce them, especially a more caution technical analysis and a clear differentiation between the nature of the material (e.g. bone or ivory) will definitely shed a new light over the main trends.

Therefore, the find from Istros is not at all a surprising discovery, pinpointing the site on the regional map of distribution of Roman finger distaffs but also possibly connecting Istros with the Aegean world, since the closest analogies for the pinecone distaff from Istros are to be found in Greece. In 1952 on the Island of Samothrace two distaffs having similar but not identical design with the one from Istros (**Fig. 10.b-c**) were discovered in a rich tomb known as “the tomb of the diadem”, dated around 130 AD on the basis of a gold disk found in the grave⁶⁵.

One of them (W12-9a) is damaged at the top cone while the other (W12-9b) partially lost its bottom ring. The one with the complete cone ends with some

⁵⁹ For a Roman distaff with the top embellished with an animal (dog?) in the Hermitage Museum see pl. 24 in the *Atlas of the Compte rendu de la Commission Impériale Archéologique: pour l'année 1875*; for dogs on distaffs in Türkiye see ÜNAL & ÇAKMAKÇI 2021. For lions, panthers and bears see KOVANCALIEV 2019, p. 127 with further references.

⁶⁰ A bone distaff embellished with a top bird is currently exhibited at the National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade, in a display narrating about the life of Roman women (not illustrated in this paper).

⁶¹ PETCU & PETCU-LEVEI 2022.

⁶² FILIP 2018.

⁶³ CIUGUDEAN 1997, p. 33; CIUGUDEAN 1997, p. 76, 177, no. 443, pl. XXVII/6; BLEOANCĂ 2017.

⁶⁴ ALICU & NEMEŞ 1982, p. 353, p. 360, no. 52, pl. IV/1.

⁶⁵ LEHMANN 1952, p. 35.

protuberances and it may indicate that the object from Istros had similar motifs to embellish the cone, which unfortunately was broken in Antiquity. The two distaffs from Samothrace are strikingly similar with the find from Istros and they show only a slight difference of style summarised below:

- The wavy lines forming the spirally pattern in the lower part of the shaft show some variation in the number of lines, they are not equally spaced and their thickness varies – a normal characteristic for the objects manufactured by hand, worked in hard materials which cannot be perfectly replicated with traditional tools and methods.
- The upper part covered in crosshatched incisions is delimited in both distaffs from Samothrace by two incised lines encircling the shaft, while such delimitations are missing from the distaff discovered in Istros. Additionally, they are very well separated through deeper grooves.
- Slight variation of style can be observed also in the grooves that separate the different parts as well as in the way of representing the vegetal motifs on the ring. The finger ring of the distaff W 12-9a from Samothrace is decorated with leafs in its upper part, while the other one (W 12-9b) has three protuberances that might also represent stylized vegetal motifs at the bottom. In the case of the distaff from Istros, the only surviving leaf is incised directly on the both sides of the ring, without exceeding too much its margins (see the proposed reconstruction above, in the technical section). Unfortunately, the lower part of the ring, which could have been simple or with some protuberances, is currently lost.

Despite these differences, the resemblance between the distaff from Istros and the ones from Samothrace is remarkable and this remain to the best of our knowledge the closest analogy. On the basis of the chronology of the finds from Samothrace, the distaff from Istros can be securely dated in the second century AD. Therefore, it is worthy to question if all these three distaffs originated in the same workshop or at least they were manufactured in the same region, presumably in the Aegean space, from where at least one of them arrived by means of trade or human mobility in the Pontic region. Another possibility is that the design circulated in the epoch being replicated locally (see the opinion shared by the second author in the technical section).

Another similar find denoting a more simplistic design, but keeping the general aesthetic elements was found in a funerary context in the region of Kosmaj mountains, central Serbia (**Fig. 10.d**). This distaff is kept in the collection of the National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade being currently exhibited in a special display narrating about women lives in Roman times, next to other three distaffs of various designs (not illustrated here). Its upper part is similar with the distaffs from Istros and Samothrace, being covered in crosshatched incisions and having a smooth cone that ends in six rounded protuberances.

On the other hand, the lower part which generally keeps the proportions, being much longer than the upper one, is ornamented with a few sketchy oblique lines. This design looks simpler in comparison with the finds from Istros and Samothrace, which incorporate a much more detailed and rich decoration on this

part of their shaft. Therefore, this object is probably a local imitation or it represents a simpler version of this pinecone subtype that was popular in the region during first centuries AD. Nevertheless, the lack of in depth research regarding the technical features of all these objects does not allow us to undertake a detailed comparative analysis which could bring a clearer answer.

Variations of the distaff with pinecone top and spirally shaft were identified on other sites too: see, for example, a distaff discovered at Ephesus having the shaft divided in three equal segments embellished with spirally patterns, ending with a crosshatched pinecone. Crosshatched pinecone (or crosshatched upper part and simple or more elaborate cone) and spirally shaft can also be seen on some distaffs discovered at Viminacium⁶⁶ and the same design is present on some distaffs unearthed in Stobi⁶⁷, Scupi⁶⁸, Chataalka,⁶⁹ and Apulum (Fig. 11, illustrating some of them). Even if they resemble in some aspects, these distaffs have major distinctive morphological features demonstrating the wide differences of taste and style that marked the production of such tools in the Roman times.

A few considerations on the functionality and symbolic meaning of finger distaffs

Spinning was an essential step in textile production since prehistory, through which raw fibers were spun into yarn. Even if there are many techniques of spinning documented for the antiquity⁷⁰, most often it was performed with the help of a toolkit consisting of a spindle and a distaff as this was one of the most efficient techniques⁷¹. Since spinning tools carved in hard materials are rather exceptional finds, it is believed that the vast majority of ancient distaffs were made out of wood (simple rods or sticks of various sizes were probably very efficient instruments, depending on the type of the fibers which were spun) and therefore they perished in time leaving no traces in the archaeological record⁷², while more fortunate is the case of spindles that often left behind the whorls made out of pottery, stone, bone, ivory, rock and other materials.

In the ancient Roman world spinning was an indispensable craft associated mainly, but not exclusively, with women and it required endless hours of activity to ensure the garments necessary for the family and the fabrics used for furnishing the house⁷³. Therefore, beside its domestic and economic importance, spinning became a symbolic craft used since early times in literature, art, funerary epitaphs and funerary reliefs in connections with the high morals and virtuosity of women⁷⁴. Pre-Roman distaffs unearthed in the Italic space and later the Roman-era distaffs were fashioned in many different styles and sometimes artisans opted for

⁶⁶ DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 91, fig. 6, fig. 10.

⁶⁷ KOVANCALIEV 2019, p. 123, fig. 3.

⁶⁸ JOVANOVA 2013, p. 907.

⁶⁹ NIKOLOV & BUYUKLIEV 1970, p. 55, fig. 5.a.

⁷⁰ BARBER 1991, p. 39–42; ANDERSSON STRAND 2015, p. 44.

⁷¹ ANDERSSON STRAND 2015, p. 44–45.

⁷² BARBER 1991, p. 69.

⁷³ PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011, p. 127–129; HARLOW 2021.

⁷⁴ See PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011 for the epigraphic, literary and archaeological evidence on the topic.

precious, hard materials like amber, bone, ivory, glass and metal⁷⁵, mainly for those which were placed into graves⁷⁶. Sometimes archaeologists failed to recognise their functionality, especially when it comes to the very specific class of finger distaffs which started to be widely used beginning with the first century AD in vast areas controlled by the Romans, reaching places far beyond the Mediterranean space.

In the past such objects in the form of 'short sticks with looped end⁷⁷' were misinterpreted as toiletry spatulas and cosmetic rods for oils and perfumes, pestles for the grinding of cosmetic and pharmaceutical products or pigments, mirrors, strigils, fan handles, sceptres, spindles (or distaff-spindles – a type of tool which does not even exist)⁷⁸, elaborate hairpins⁷⁹, *styli*⁸⁰, handles⁸¹, rattles⁸², perforated spoons⁸³ or even as hands for scratching, as it is the case of the object from Istros discussed in this paper⁸⁴. Due to these confusions, it is rather difficult to compile a comprehensive survey of all the finds and thus to have an updated image of their distribution through time and space.

Nonetheless, in the last decades a constant effort has been made to better document their real function through a more cautious interpretation of their morphologic features and a careful analysis of the archaeological contexts which show that most of the times finger distaffs were discovered next to spindles and spindle whorls, mainly in graves⁸⁵. Likewise, the rich iconographic evidence showing representations of finger distaffs particularly in Asia Minor⁸⁶ but also in other regions closer to Dacia and Scythia Minor, like Pannonia⁸⁷, support that the

⁷⁵ GLEBA 2008, p. 109; FACSÁDY 2010; PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011, p. 127 with further references.

⁷⁶ GLEBA 2008, p. 121.

⁷⁷ TRINKL 2007, p. 84.

⁷⁸ DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 86 with further references; SOKOLSKII 1971, p. 220; KADEEV 1996, p. 193.

⁷⁹ LEHMAN 1952, p. 35; NIKOLOV & BUYUKLIEV 1970, p. 55; DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 86 with further references.

⁸⁰ POPILIAN & BONDOC 2012, p. 251, pl. CXCIV/6; PREDA 1980, p. 63, 159, pl. XXIX/pas. 1.

⁸¹ PREDA 1980, p. 63, 159, pl. XXIX/pas. 1.

⁸² ALEXANDER 1925, p. 183; DEVREKER & VERMEULEN 1993, p. 279, fig. 4. See also <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/251507?rpp=90&pg=165&ft=glass&pos=14808> accessed 21.09.2022.

⁸³ ECKARDT 2014, p. 134, p. 141.

⁸⁴ FLORESCU & MICLEA 1989.

⁸⁵ Since Early Iron Age spinning tools (distaff, spindle and spindle whorl) became common funerary offerings deposited in the burials of women in the Italic space, the finger distaffs becoming some of the most often used for these purposes. PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011; GOSTENČNIK 2012; DANKOVIĆ 2019, p. 219.

⁸⁶ See a sarcophagus discovered on the coast of the Izmit Bay showing a spindle, a distaff and a kalathos (TRINKL 1994, p. 86, fig. 2). Other certain representations of finger distaffs in funerary art are, for example, the marble funerary stele 1843,0531.3 from Crete, currently kept in the collection of British Museum, showing a woman with spinning equipment. The looped distaff bearing wool can be seen to the left of the figure (200 BC-50 BC) and the funerary stele MA 337 from Louvre Museum showing spinning equipment, including a finger distaff (3rd century AD).

⁸⁷ PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011.

role of these objects was to keep the bundles of wool while spinning (Fig. 12 showing a Palmyrene funerary relief of a lady who holds a finger distaff and a spindle in her left hand). Therefore, nowadays it is widely accepted that they are strongly connected with the craft of textile making and with the universe of the virtuous Roman women.

Finally, a close examination of the objects themselves which bear exquisite decoration and incorporate lavish materials and much manufacture skill highlights the fact that the finger distaffs were some of the most precious items from a woman's textile kit in the Roman times⁸⁸ and their often presence in graves shows the importance of these *instrumenta* as items desirable to accompany the worthy women in the afterlife, a fact which suggests their symbolical value in the narratives of the Roman society.

Despite the rich and diverse evidence which connects these objects with the craft of spinning, the practical functionality of finger distaffs, including the ivory and bone pieces which are discussed in greater detail in this paper, was the subject of a long-time debate among scholars⁸⁹. Some authors still consider that they are rather symbolic and display tools, without a practical role because of their small dimensions which presumably makes them fragile (a presumption which is rather valid for the glass specimens) and due to the precious materials that they incorporate⁹⁰. On the other hand, part of the features of these objects seems to have a practical function: their looped ends matches the size of the ring finger, thus the ring seems to be meant to secure a better grip during spinning, while their often decorated shafts prevented the unspun wool fibres to fall of the distaff⁹¹. We should note, however, that at least in the case of ivory and bone objects, not all the finger distaffs have their shaft embellished with incised decoration. This characteristic is well known for the objects with their tops decorated in a simpler manner, for example through a pinecone⁹². However, the shafts of the bone and ivory finger distaffs which have their tops embellished with sophisticated representations like the so-called *Venus* type, or the ones with animals generally remain undecorated⁹³. This observation may imply either that the spirally decoration that we see on some of the finger distaff shafts was not necessary determined by ergonomic aims related to the functionality of these tools or at least that, if used, the distaffs with undecorated shaft had the potential to keep in place the wool if the roving was placed on it by an experienced spinner.

Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of ivory and bone finger distaffs are known from sepulchral contexts where probably they were placed as new, we are aware of some discoveries which confirm that bone and ivory finger distaffs were at least sometimes used for actual spinning: a first case of study is represented by a *Venus* distaff unearthed in a young girl's burial at Zurzach in Switzerland for which the chemical analysis showed the presence, both inside the

⁸⁸ KÖNIG 1987, CREMER 1996; TRINKL 2004; GOSTENČNIK 2012.

⁸⁹ COTTICA 2003; COTTICA 2014, p. 224; TRINKL 2007.

⁹⁰ DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 90–93.

⁹¹ DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 85, p. 90; PETCU & PETCU-LEVEI 2022, p. 168.

⁹² See above the inventory of these finds with details about their shafts.

⁹³ IVČEVIĆ 1999–2000, p. 474.

finger ring and on the shaft, of some organic matter from the skin of the hand, which suggested the repeated use of the object for a long time. Based on these results, G. G. König hypothesised that the object was used for a long time in the same position, being held with the left hand (as we see in the funerary relief of a woman and two children from Palmira illustrated above), with the face of the goddess towards the spinner⁹⁴.

Another well-known case is a recent find from Capidava – a 2nd century AD distaff discovered in a 6th century AD domestic context, bearing visible use traces on the finger ring⁹⁵. Use-wear was also identified on a few bone finger distaffs discovered at Magdalensberg (Austria)⁹⁶. Recently, an AHRC-funded project at the University of Kent, ManMet, and the Petrie Museum focusing on the investigation of Roman and late antique artefacts from Egypt and aiming to update the basic information and provide further details on some of the more understudied objects in the Petrie Collection, highlighted that the distaff UC71153 decorated with a Venus figurine bear clear use wear on the main shaft, where cross hatched lines have been smoothed away to form a shiny surface, while the inner surface of the loop is also shiny indicating that it was regularly worn on the finger while spinning⁹⁷.

Regarding the distaff from Istros, the technical analysis shows explicit use wear traces visible on the ring and the upper part, consisting of blunt areas and glossy, polished surfaces around its upper part and towards the finger ring. Most probably, these were obtained during the repeated use of those parts of the implement, where the bundles of wool were placed and the distaff was held (see above the technical section). This is a strong clue that the distaff from Istros came from a domestic context and not from a grave, or at least that its primary use was to be employed in actual spinning and maybe later it was reused as a grave dedication.

To all this evidence, we must add that more than 50% of the finger distaffs mentioned in this paper are preserved in a fragmentary state, which is an additional argument that they could have been utilized in the past (see the section dedicated to the typology of Roman finger distaffs). Therefore, it is not risky at all to conclude that at least some of the bone and ivory finger distaffs that have circulated in vast areas of the Roman Empire during the first three centuries AD have been actually used for spinning. However, for the moment the debate regarding a more widespread custom of spinning with them remains open until a systematic survey of finds and a comparative discussion on the archaeological contexts and use wear traces still visible or absent on the distaffs body will be made and – why not? – experimental studies with replicas will be conducted for better understanding of their actual role(s).

⁹⁴ KÖNIG 1987; BOZU 1993, p. 208; PETCU & PETCU-LEVEI 2022, p. 169.

⁹⁵ RAȚIU 2016.

⁹⁶ GOSTENČNIK 2012, p. 70.

⁹⁷ See the official site of the University of Kent summarising the investigation of the Roman and late antique artefacts from Egypt in the framework of an AHRC-funded project (<https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/egypt-artefacts/2018/05/11/identifying-mystery-artefacts/> accessed 23.12.2022).

TABLE 4. Pinecone distaffs across the Roman world, table summarising the up to date known subtypes (including number of finds, state of preservation, reported material – under the reserve that confusions might exist in the literature –, place of discovery, context and date of the finds).						
SUB TYPE	NUMBER OF FINDS	MATERIAL	PROVENIENCE	CONTEXT	DATE	REFERENCES
simple pinecone, spirally shaft	single find, fragmentary	ivory	Istros	unknown	2 nd century AD	FLORESCU & MICLEA 1989, pl. 134.
simple pinecone, spirally shaft	single find, fully preserved	bone	Apulum	domestic	3 rd century AD	BLEOANĂ 2017.
composite pinecone, simple shaft	single find	bone or ivory	Sucidava	funerary	3 rd century AD	FILIP 2018.
simple or crosshatched pinecone, spirally or linear pattern on the shaft	multiple finds	bone	Viminacium, Moesia Superior	amphiteatre, funerary	1 st – 3 rd centuries AD	PETCOVIĆ 1995, pl. XVIII, no. 7–9.; DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 85, 91, Fig. 6, Fig. 10, Fig. 11.
simple pinecone, crosshatched shaft	single find	bone	Castrum Novae, Moesia Superior	tower 5	2 nd century AD	PERTOVIĆ 1995, pl. XVIII, no. 10.
simple or waived pattern on the pinecone, spirally shafts	four finds	bone	Stobi, Macedonia	1-destructuion layer, 3-funerary	2 nd – 3 rd centuries AD	KOVANCALIEV 2019.
spirally or crosshatched pinecone, spirally shafts	three finds, two of them fragmentary, another one fully preserved	bone	Scupi, Macedonia	funerary	1 st – 2 nd century AD	PETCOVIĆ 1995, pl. XVIII, no. 11; JOVANOVA 2013:907.
simple pinecone, spirally shaft and crosshatched upper part	two finds	bone or ivory	Samothrace, Macedonia	funerary	2 nd century AD	LEHMANN 1953, p. 35; DUSENBERY 1998, p. 493.
simple pinecone and simple shaft or simple pinecone and spirally or linear pattern of the shaft	four finds, two of them fully preserved, another two fragmentary	bone	Chatalka, Thracia	funerary	2 nd century AD	NIKOLOV & BUYUKLIEV 1970, p. 55, Fig 5.a.
simple pinecone, spirally shaft and crosshatched upper part	multiple finds, only one is pinecone type	bone	Kosmaj Mountains region, Thracia	funerary	1 st -3 rd centirues AD	Possibly unpublished .
spirally	single find	bone(?)	Gaul, Lyon	funerary	unspecified	https://artefacts.mo

pinecone and spirally shaft						m.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign accessed 21.12.2022.
crosshatched pinecone, spirally shaft	two finds	bone	Gaul, Saint-Fréjus at Marennes	funerary	unspecified	https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign accessed 21.12.2022.
spirally pinecone (missing shafts)	two finds, fragmentary, only cone preserved	unspecified	Gaul, Rom	pit	2 nd century AD	RODET-BELARBI & DIEUDONNÉ-GLAD 2008, p. 150, fig. 15.
crosshatched pinecone, simple shaft	single find, fully preserved	unspecified	Italy, Rome	funerary	1 st century AD	VIERNEISEL 1978, 189, fig. 278; CREMER 1996, p. 134, fig. 5.
crosshatched pinecone, spirally shaft	single find, fully preserved	bone	Asia Minor, Ephesus	funerary	3 rd century AD	TRINKL 1994, p. 82, fig. 1.
crosshatched pinecone, rings on the shafts	two finds, one fully preserved the other one fragmentary	bone	Asia Minor, Afyon	unspecified	unspecified	https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign accessed 21.12.2022.

Final remarks

On the basis of the archaeological evidence summarized in this paper, ancient Roman finger distaffs appears as common funerary offerings in women graves during the first three centuries AD and their widespread presence on large areas dominated by the Romans demonstrates their popularity and the major symbolical role of these tools which were strongly connected with marriage, high morals, industriousness and virtuosity of the women in the Roman society. Because of the lack of more systematic data on the use wear traces that some of them may retain, for the moment their widespread practical utility still remains an open discussion until new discoveries and a thorough survey of their distribution patterns and contexts of discovery will be made to bring more comprehensive data on this matter. However, the fact that many of them were discovered in a fragmentary state of preservation and taking into consideration that there are certain objects which shows indubitable use-wear marks, the old view that Roman bone and ivory finger distaffs had a purely symbolic meaning should be reconsidered.

With special regard to the distaff from Istros presented in this paper some final consideration can be made, despite the unfortunate loss of the archaeological context which deprive us of precious information. The accession number preserved on its body suggests that it comes from older excavations carried out at Istros during Lambrino period (1927–1942). The rich decoration embellishing the shaft of this object denote great skill and its lavish material – ivory –, indicates that it was manufactured for a client who belonged to a rich social group. Grace

to its form and morphological features the distaff from Istros fits into a well-known type of finger distaff with a pinecone on the top, pinpointing Istros and the West Pontic Region on the regional distribution map of these tools and integrating the site in the circulation patterns that marked the Roman world in the first three centuries AD.

The analogies which were identified in the Aegean world and near it (see especially Samothrace in Greece and Kosmaj mountain region in Central Serbia) may indicate either a strong influence and a wide circulation of motifs and decorative patterns which made possible the replication of this design in Scythia Minor or its origins outside the Pontic area and thus it might confesses about the strong connection that the city still had with the Aegean and especially the East Greek world in the 2nd century AD.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALEXANDER 1925 – C. Alexander, *Jewelry and Miscellaneous Small Antiquities: Recent Accessions*, BMM 20-7 (1925), p. 180–183.

ALICU & NEMEȘ 1982 – D. Alicu, E. Nemeș, *Obiecte de os descoperite la Ulpia Troiana Sarmizegetusa*, AMN 19 (1982), p. 345–365.

ANDERSSON STRAND 2015 – E. Andersson Strand, *The Basics of Textile Tools and Textile Technology – from Fibre to Fabric*, in: E. Andersson Strand, M.-L. Nosch (eds), *Tools, Textiles and Contexts: Textile Production in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age*, ATS 21, Oxford, 2015, p. 39–60.

BÁNKI 1967-1968 – Zs. Bánki, *Későrómai sírok Tordason (Late-Roman graves at Tordas)*, Alba Regia 8-9 (1967-1968), p. 233–241.

BARBER 1991 – E. Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with Special Reference to the Aegean*, Princeton, 1991.

BARBIER 2016 – M. Barbier, *L'artisanat de l'os à l'époque gallo-romaine: De l'ostéologie à l'archéologie expérimentale*, Archaeopress Roman archaeology 16, Oxford 2016.

BÉAL 1983 – J.-C. Béal, *Catalogue des objets de tabletterie du Musée de la civilisation gallo-romaine de Lyon*, Collection du Centre d'études romaines et gallo-romaines, Nouvelle série 1, Lyon, 1983.

BELDIMAN 2007 – C. Beldiman, *Industria materiilor dure animale în preistoria României. Resurse naturale, comunități umane și tehnologie din paleoliticul superior până în neoliticul timpuriu*, Asociația Română de Arheologie, Studii de Preistorie, Supplementum 2, București, 2007.

BELDIMAN 2016 – C. Beldiman, *Furca de deget cu reprezentarea lui Venus Pudica descoperită la Capidava. Analiză tehnologică* (mss.).

BELDIMAN et alii 2015 – C. Beldiman, A.-D. Stănică, D.-M. Sztancs, *Isaccea–Noviodunum. Artefacte din materii dure animale descoperite în 2014*, Peuce s.n. 13 (2015), p. 107–136.

BERTRAND 2008 – I. Bertrand (ed.), *Le travail de l'os, du bois de cerf et de la corne à l'époque romaine: un artisanat en marge?*, MI 34, Montagnac, 2008.

BIRÓ 1994 – M. Biró, *The Bone Objects of the Roman Collection*, Catalogi Musei Nationalis Hungarici. Series Archaeologica II, Budapest, 1994.

BLEOANCĂ 2017 – M. Bleoancă, *O furcă de tors pentru deget din epoca romană descoperită la Apulum – Colonia Aurelia Apulensis*, Sargetia s.n. 8 (2017), p. 205–212.

BOZU 1993 – O. Bozu, *Obiecte creștine inedite de uz casnic. Furcile de tors pentru deget datate în secolele IV-VI e. n.*, Analele Banatului II. Omagiu profesorului Marius Moga la a 80-a aniversare, seria Arheologie-Istorie (1993), p. 206–214.

CAMPS-FABRER 1974 – H. Camps-Fabrer, *Premier Colloque International sur l'industrie de l'os dans la Préhistoire*, Aix-en-Provence, 1974.

CIUGUDEAN 1997 – D. Ciugudean, *Obiectele din os, corn și fildeș de la Apulum*, Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis V, 1997.

COTTICA 2003 – D. Cottica, *Dalla "lana altinata" al prodotto finito: filatura e tessitura in Altino romana alla luce dei resti della cultura materiale*, in: G. Cresci Marrone, M. Tirelli (eds), *Produzioni, merci e commerci in Altino preromana e romana*, Studi e ricerche sulla Gallia Cisalpina 17 (2003), p. 261–283.

COTTICA 2007 – D. Cottica, *Spinning in the Roman World: from everyday craft to metaphor of destiny*, in: M.-L. Nosch, C. Gillis, *Ancient Textiles: Production, Crafts and Society*, ATS 1, Oxford, 2007, p. 220–228.

CREMER 1996 – M. Cremer, *Venuskunkeln aus Kleinasien*, AA 1 (1996), p. 135–144.

DANKOVIĆ 2019 – I. Danković, *Burial of a woman with an amber distaff at Viminacium*, Starinar 69 (2019), p. 215–229.

DANKOVIĆ 2020 – I. Danković, *Roman Bone Distaffs and Spindles: Could They Have Been Used for Spinning?*, JSAS 36(2020), p. 79–98.

DESCHLER-ERB 1998 – S. Deschler-Erb, *Römische Beinartefakte aus Augusta Raurica: Rohmaterial, Technologie, Typologie und Chronologie*. Forschungen in Augst, 27 (1–2), Römermuseum Augst, 1998.

DEVREKER & VERMEULEN 1993 – J. Devreker, F. Vermeulen, *Pessinus (Pessinonte) 1991: Preliminary Report*, XIV. Kazi Sonuclari Toplantisi II. Ankara 25–29 Mayıs 1992, Ankara, 1993, p. 261–280.

DUSENBERY 1998 – E. Dusenbery, *Samothrace: The Nekropoleis and Catalogues of Burials*, Princeton, 1988.

ECKARDT 2014 – H. Eckardt, *Objects and Identities. Roman Britain and the North-Western Provinces*, Oxford, 2014.

FACSÁDY 2010 – A. Facsády, *Glass Distaff from Aquincum: Symbol or Tool*, ANODOS. Studies of the Ancient World 8/2008, In Honour of Werner Jobst, Trnava, 2010, p. 165–173.

FARKA 1975 – C. Farka, *Römerzeitliche Gräber aus Haselbach in Niederösterreich*, Römisches Österreich 3. Jahresschrift der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Archäologie, Wien, 1975, p. 73–109.

FEDOSEEV & CHEVELEV 1999 – N.F. Fedoseev, O.D. Chevelev, *Pryalki s kol'tsom iz Pantikapeya (A Spinning-Wheel with a Ring from Pantikapaion)*, AIB 3 (1999), p. 173–184.

FILIP 2018 – G. Filip, *O furcă de tors realizată din os, din necropola de Nord a Sucidavei-Celei*, in C. Croitoru, L. Țiganenco, *Istorie și civilizație de-a lungul Dunării*

de Jos. Culegere de studii dedicate zilei internaționale a fluviului – 29 iunie, Brăila, Ismail, Cahul, Galați, 2018, p. 87–88.

FLORESCU & MICLEA 1989 – R. Florescu, I. Miclea, *Histria*, București, 1989.

GIOVANNINI & FEUGÈRE 2000 – A. Giovannini, M. Feugère, *Aquileia. Considerazioni sul corredo funerario di Antestia Marciana*, *Instrumentum* 12 (2000), p. 36–37.

GLEBA 2008 – M. Gleba, *Textile Production in Pre-Roman Italy*, *ATS* 4, Oxford, 2008.

GOSTENČNIK 2012 – K. Gostenčnik, *Austria: Roman Period*, in: M. Gleba, U. Mannering (eds), *Textiles and Textile Production in Europe from Prehistory to AD 400*, *ATS* 11, Oxford, 2012, p. 65–88.

HARLOW 2021 – M. Harlow, *Spinning: The Invisible Profession*, in: H. Hochscheid, B. Russell (eds), *The Value of Making. Theory and Practice in Ancient Craft Production*, *Studies in Classical Archaeology* 13, 2021, p. 123–138.

IVČEVIĆ 1999 – 2000 – S. Ivčević, *Kostane preslice s prikazom Afrodite iz Arheoloskog Muzeja Split*, *OArh* 23–24 (1999–2000), p. 473–480.

JOVANOVA 2013 – L. Jovanova, *Makedonija vo rimskiot period, arheologia*, in: P. Kuzman, E. Dimitova, J. Donev (eds.), *Macedonia, Art and Culture, Millenia of cultural and historical facts*, Skopje 2013, vol. II, p. 789–930.

KADEEV 1996 – V.I. Kadeev, *Khersones Tavricheskii. Vyt i kultura (I-III vv. n.e.)*, Kharkov, 1996.

KÖNIK 1987 – G.G. Könik 1987, *Die Fingerkunkel aus Grab 156*, in: K. Roth-Rubi, H.R. Sennhauser, *Verenamünster Zurzach/ Römische Strasse und Gräber, Ausgrabungen und Bauuntersuchung vol 1, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Denkmalpflege an der Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule Zürich*, Band 6, Zürich, 1987, p. 129–137.

KLOIBER 1962 – E. Kloiber, *Die Gräberfelder von Lauriacum, Das Espelmayerfeld*, *Forschungen in Lauriacum* 8, Linz, 1962.

KOVANCALIEV 2019 – Z. Kovancaliev, *Roman and Late Roman Bone Spinning Tools from Stobi, Macedonia*, *CPAUG* 29 (2019), p. 119–131.

LAMBRINO 1938 – M. F. Lambrino, *Les vases archaïques d’Histria*, București, 1938.

LEHMANN 1952 – K. Lehmann, *Samothrace – Seventh Campaign of Excavations*, *Archaeology* 6-1 (1952), p. 30–35.

MacGREGOR 1985 – A. MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn: The Technology of Skeletal Materials since the Roman period*, London, 1985.

MÉDARD 2021 – F. Médard, *L’artisanat du textile à Pompéi au I^{er} siècle après J.-C. Vestiges textiles et outillages*, *Collection du Centre Jean Bérard* 51, Naples, 2021.

MÜLLER *et alii* 2021 – H. Müller, S. Deschler-Erb, D. Wojtczak, *Roman Bone Artefacts – First Steps Towards a New Approach*, *EXARC Journal* 4 (2021), <https://exarc.net/issue-2021-4/at/roman-bone-artefacts-first-steps-towards-new-approach>, accessed 27.01.2023.

NIKOLOV & BUYUKLIEV 1970 – D. Nikolov, H. Buyukliev, *Razkopki na mogilen nekropol pri Chatalka prez 1967 g*, *Arheologiya* 12 (1970), 2, p. 52–64.

NUȚU *et alii* 2014a – G. Nuțu, S. M. Stanc, D. Paraschiv, Niculițel. *A Roman Rural Settlement in North-East Moesia Inferior: Archaeological & Archaeozoological Research*, *Archaeologica et Anthropologica* II, Kaiserslautern and Mehlingen, 2014.

NUȚU *et alii* 2014b – G. Nuțu, S. Stanc, D. A. Stan, *Carved Bone and Antler from Northern Dobruja in Archaeological and Archaeozoological Context*, Iași, 2014.

PASZTÓKAI-SZEÖKE 2011 – J. Pasztókai-Szeöke, *The Mother Shrinks, The Child Grows. What is it? The Evidence of Spinning Implements in Funerary Context from the Roman Province of Pannonia*, in: C. Alfaro Giner, M.J. Martinez Garcia et J. Ortiz Garcia (eds.), *Mujer y Vestimenta. Aspectos de la Identidad femenina en la Antigüedad*, Valencia, 2011, p. 125–140.

PETCU & PETCU-LEVEI 2022 – R. Petcu, I. Petcu-Levei, *Glass Distaff Discovered in Roman Tombs from Dobroudja (Romania) – Moesia Inferior. Symbolism and Use*, in: S.-P. Boțan, Ș. Honcu (eds), *In medias res antiquorum. Miscellanea in honorem annos LXV peragentis Professoris Costel Chiriac oblata*, Cluj Napoca, 2022, p. 167–184.

PETCOVIĆ 1995 – S. Petković, *Rimski predmeti od kosti i roga sa teritorije Gorne Mezeje / The Roman items of bone and antler from the territory of Upper Moesia*, Belgrad, 1995.

POBLOME *et alii* 2012 – J. Poblome, D. Malfitana, J. Lund, *Scherben bringen Glück. HEROM's Editorial Statement*, *HEROM* 1 (2012), p. 7–22.

POPILIAN & BONDOC 2012 – Gh. Popilian, D. Bondoc, *The Roman and Late Roman Cemetery of Sucidava-Celei. The Excavations from 1969-1983*, Craiova, 2012.

PREDA 1980 - C. Preda, *Callatis. Necropola romano-bizantină*, București, 1980.

RAȚIU 2016 – A. Rațiu, *Venus pudica on a bone distaff from Capidava*, *CA* 23 (2016), p. 137–150.

RAUH 2004 – K. Rauh, *Votive sticks – small distaffs from the territory Bulgaria*, *Arheologia* 45 (2004), 1–2, p. 61–68.

RAUH 2006 – K. Rauh, *Fingerkunkeln aus dem Gebiet des heutigen Bulgarien*, in: S. Conrad (ed.), *Pontos Euxeinos. Beiträge zur Archäologie und Geschichte des antiken Schwarzmeer – und Balkanraumes*, Frankfurt am Main, 2006, p. 115–121.

RODET-BELARBI & DIEUDONNÉ-GLAD 2008 – I. Rodet-Belarbi, N. Dieudonné-Glad, *Os, bois de cerf et ivoire à Rom (Deux-Sèvres). Quelques éléments de réflexion sur l'approvisionnement en matière première et la distribution des objets dans l'agglomération*, in: I. Bertrand (dir.), *Le travail de l'os du bois de cerf et de la corne à l'époque romaine : un artisanat en marge ?*, *MI* 34, Montagnac, 2008, p. 145–163.

SCHINTLMEISTER 2013 – L. Schintlmeister, *Aphrodite in Ephesos*, PhD thesis, University of Wien, 2013.

SPASIĆ-DJURIĆ 2002 – D. Spasić-Djurić, *Viminacium. The capital of the Roman Province of Upper Moesia*, Požarevac, 2002.

STANC 2017 – S. M. Stanc, *Worked bone and antler from Halmyris: An insight on everyday life of a frontier post of Scythia*, *Quaternary International* 472 (2017), p. 142–148.

SOKOLSKII 1971 – N.I. Sokolskii, *Derevoobrabatyvayushchee remeslo v antichnykh gosudarstvakh Severnogo Prichernomor'ya*, Moscow, 1971.

SUCEVEANU 1967 – A. Suceveanu, *Statuete romane de teracotă de la Histria*, SCIV 18-2 (1967), p. 213–268.

ȘTEFAN 1937 – 1940 – Gh. Ștefan, *Dinogetia I*, Dacia 7–8 (1937–1940), p. 401–425.

TRINKL 1994 – E. Trinkl, *Ein Set aus Spindel, Spinnwirtel und Rocken aus einem Sarkophag in Ephesos*, JÖAI 63 (1994), p. 80–86.

TRINKL 2000 – E. Trinkl, *Die spinnen, die Römerinnen*, in: L. Dollhofer, H. Trinkl (eds), *Altmodische Archäologie, Festschrift für F. Brein*, FARCH 14 – III (2000), p. 231–236.

TRINKL 2004 – E. Trinkl, *Zum Wirkungskreis einer kleinasiatischen matrona anhand ausgewählter Funde aus dem Hanghaus 2 in Ephesos*, Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien Wien 73, p. 281–303.

TRINKL 2007 – E. Trinkl, *Artifacts found Inside the Terrace Houses of Ephesus, Turkey*, in: C. Gillis, M.-L.B. Nosch (eds) *Ancient, Textiles: Production, Craft and Society*, Oxford, Philadelphia, 2007, p. 81–86.

ÜNAL & ÇAKMAKÇI 2021 – C. Ünal, Z. Çakmakç, *Views on the Symbolic Use of Two Rare Bone Finger Distaffs with Dog Representation from Haluk Perk Museum in İstanbul*, JAHA 8-3 (2021), p. 135–147.

VASS 2013 – L. Vass, *A bone distaff depicting Venus from Porolissum (Moigrad, Sălaj County, Romania)*, DEMER 6–7 Kötet 2011–2012, Cluj-Napoca 2013, p. 59–69.

VAULINA & WASOVICZ 1974 – M. Vaulina & A. Wasowicz, *Bois grecs et romains de l'Ermitage*, Wrocław, 1974.

VIERNEISEL 1978 – K. Verneisel, *Römisches im Antikenmuseum: Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, Berlin, 1978.

WASOVICZ 1987 – A. Wasowicz, *Une quenouille attique d'un type méconnu*, Revue du Louvre 4 (1987), p. 268–273.

No author, *Compte-Rendu de la Commission Impériale Archéologique pour l'Année 1874 (1875 et 1876)*. 3 Vols. St.-Petersbourg, Imprimerie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1877–1879.

Online resources:

<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4007&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed at 20.12.2022.

<https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/egypt-artefacts/2018/05/11/identifying-mystery-artefacts/> accessed 23.12.2022.

<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4013&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 21.12.2022.

<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4007&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed at 23.12.2022.

<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4009&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed 28.12.2022.

<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4015&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed at 09.04.2023.

<https://artefacts.mom.fr/en/result.php?id=QNL-4014&find=distaff&pagenum=1&affmode=vign> accessed at 09.04.2023.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank to the colleagues in the local museum of Istros for facilitating the study of the pinecone finger distaff discussed in this paper, especially to the museum's curator, Georgică Stan. We are also grateful to the Ephorate of Antiquities of Evros, especially to Ms. Fenia Pardalidou, head of the Department of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and Museums, for sending us a better image with the two distaffs from the *Diadem tomb* discovered in Samothrace and recommending further references on the topic and to Ivan Jovicic for providing a photo of good quality and additional information on the roman distaffs displayed in the National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade. We also thank to Harvard Art Museum, especially to Britt Bowen from the Digital Imaging and Visual Resources Department, for sending us a professional image of the Funerary Relief of a Woman and Two Children from Palmyra and giving us the permission to use it in this paper. Our gratitude goes also to the Romanian Institute of Archaeology in Athens, for offering accommodation for the study visit that Alina Iancu completed in Greece during the preparation and bibliographical documentation of the first draft of this paper. Nonetheless, special thanks should be addressed to Elizabeth Trinkl, Kristina Rauh and Alexandra Dolea for sending copies of requested studies on the topic of Roman finger distaffs.



Fig. 1. Photo (face A and face B) and drawing of the ivory finger distaff from Istros.

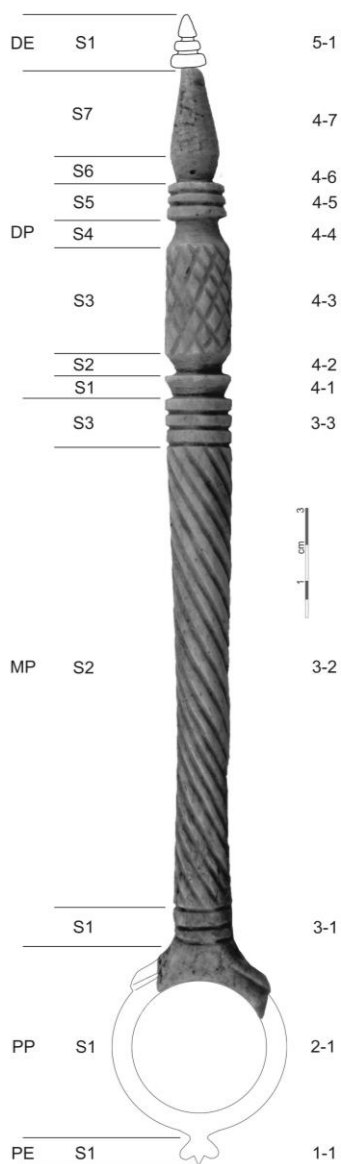


Fig. 2. Ivory finger distaff from Istros. Description. Parts, segments and codes.

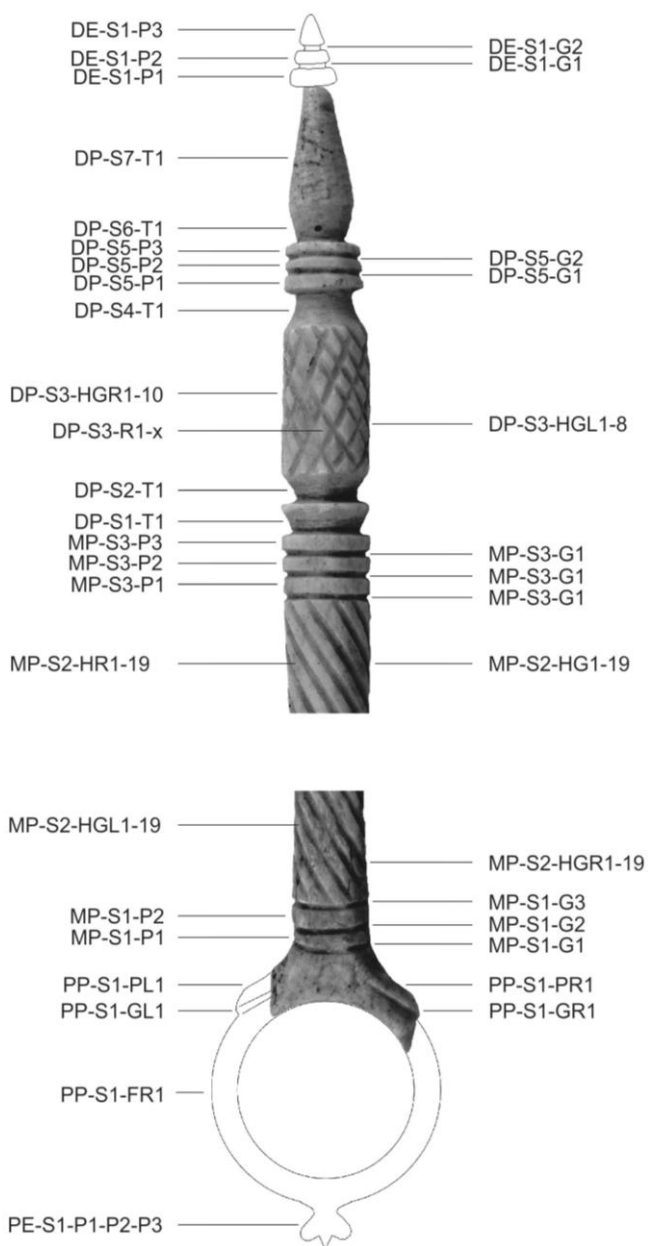


Fig. 3. Ivory finger distaff from Istros. Description. Parts and segments. Abbreviations.

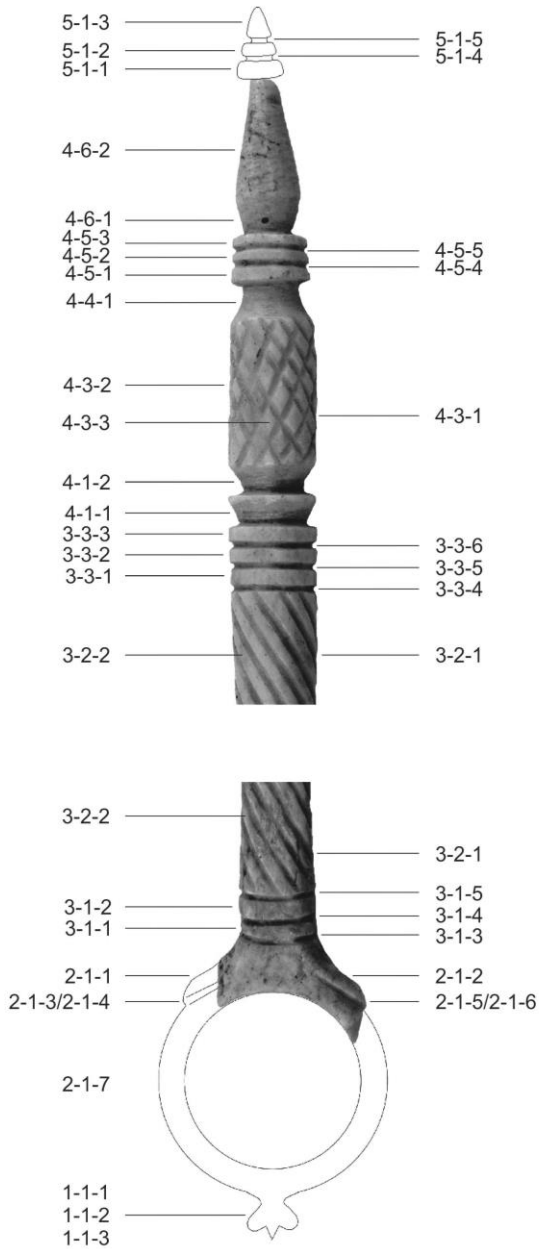


Fig. 4. Ivory finger distaff from Istros. Description. Parts and segments. Codes.

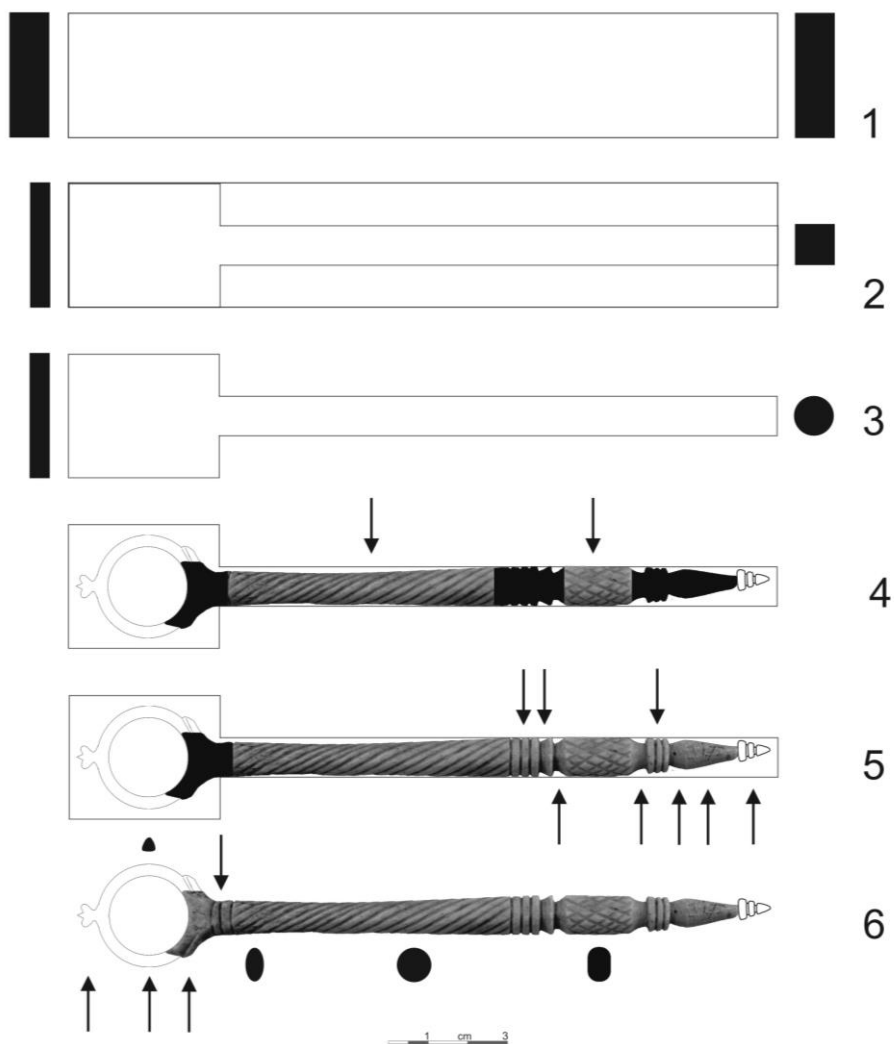


Fig. 5. „Schéma opératoire” – a proposal of the manufacturing steps for the distaff from Istros.

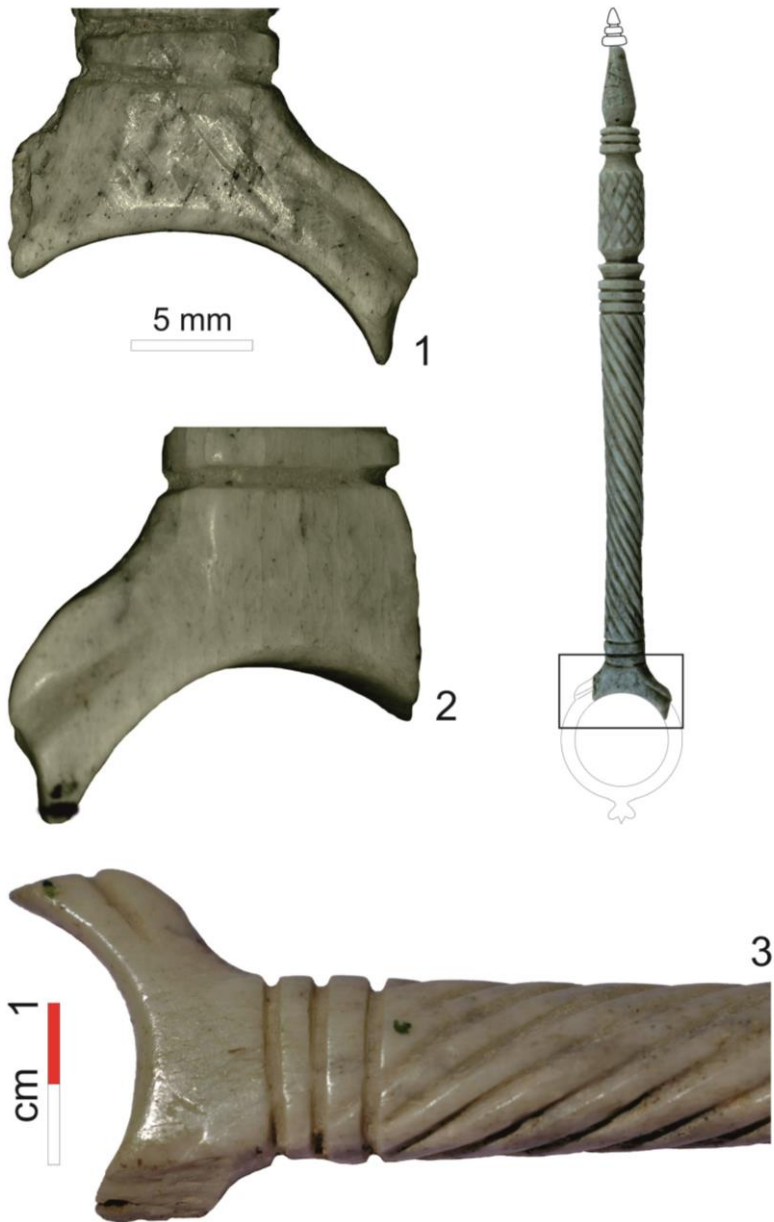


Fig. 6. Microscopic view of the proximal end (finger ring) and proximal part of the distaff from Istros.

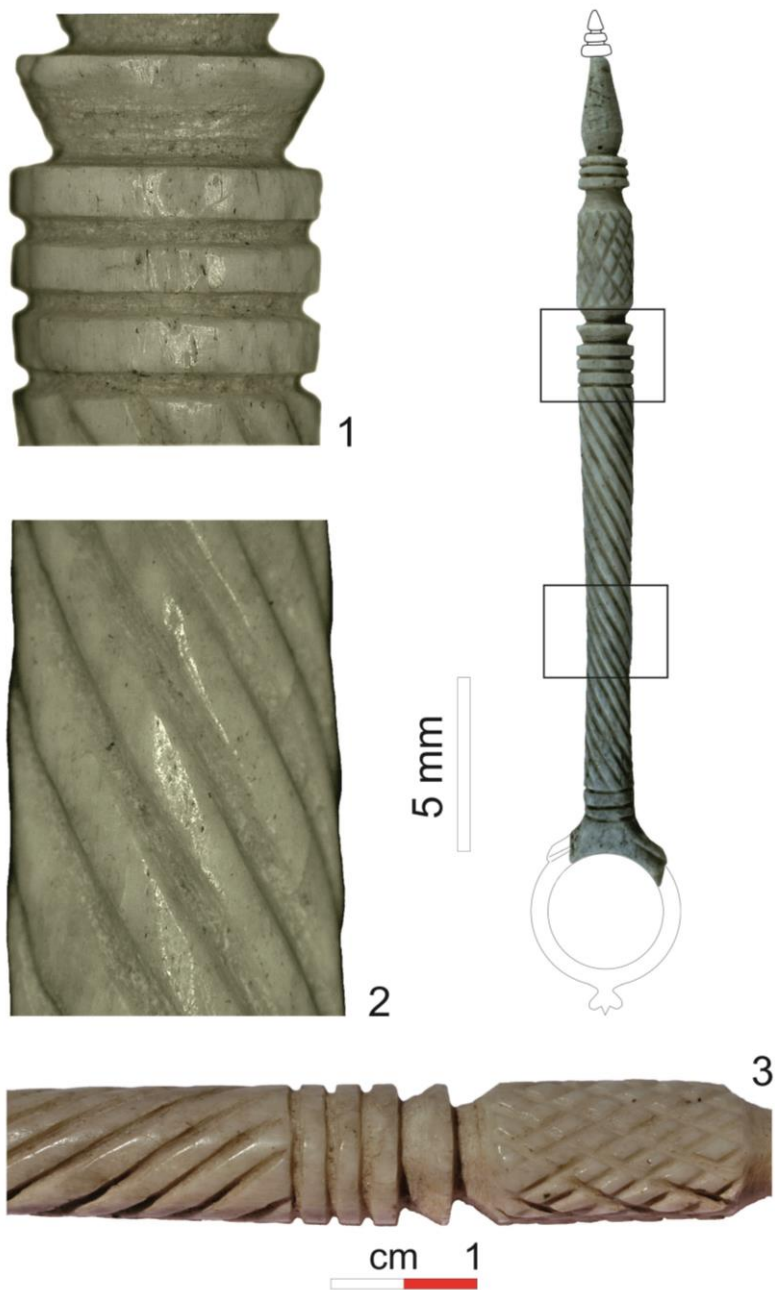


Fig. 7. Microscopic view showing the medial part and the helicoi dal decoration of the distaff from Istros.

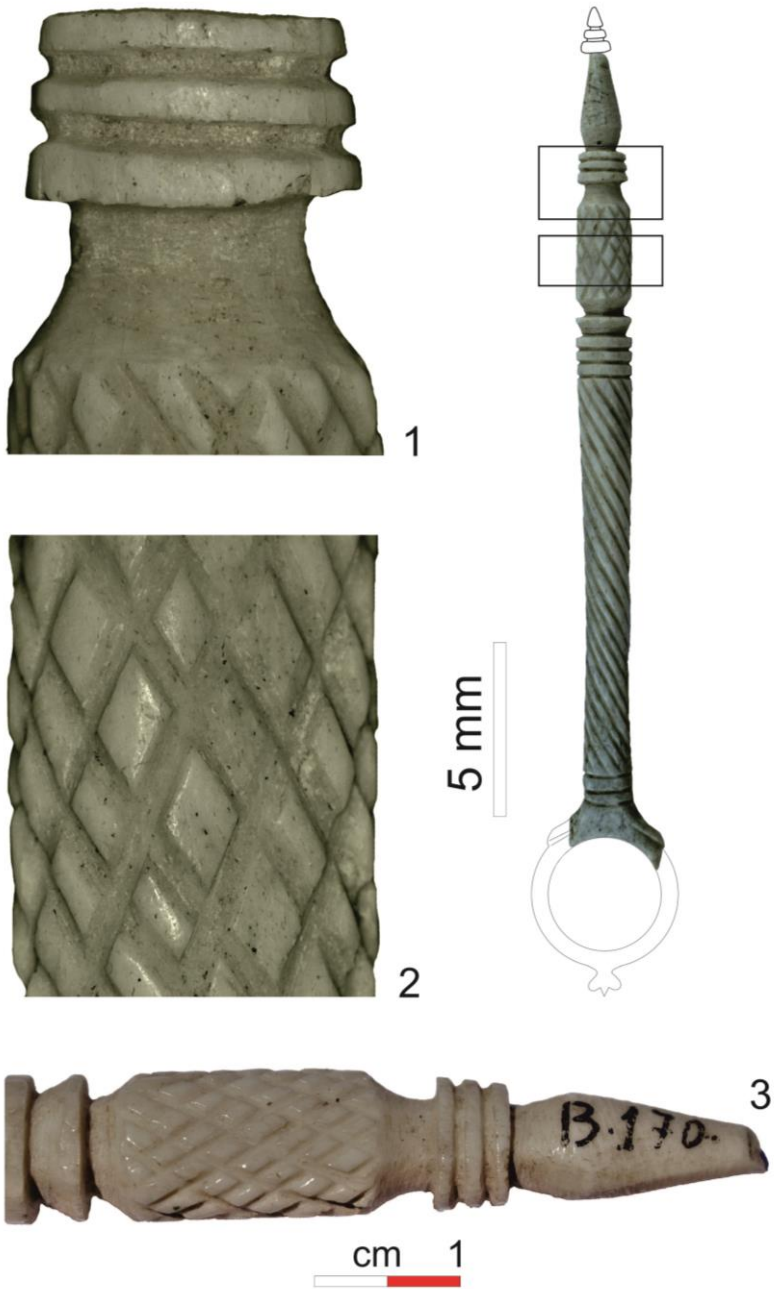


Fig. 8. Microscopic view showing the distal part and the helicoidal decoration of the distaff from Istros.



Fig. 9. Microscopic view showing the distal part and the pinecone of the distaff from Istros.



Fig. 10. Close comparison between the distaff from Istros and analogies from Samothrace, Greece and Kosmaj mountains area, Central Serbia. From left to right:

a. distaff from Istros (photo A. Iancu), b-c. two distaffs from Samothrace, Greece (@Curtesy Samothrace Museum), d. a distaff from the area of Kosmaj mountains, Serbia (photo: Ivan Jovicic).

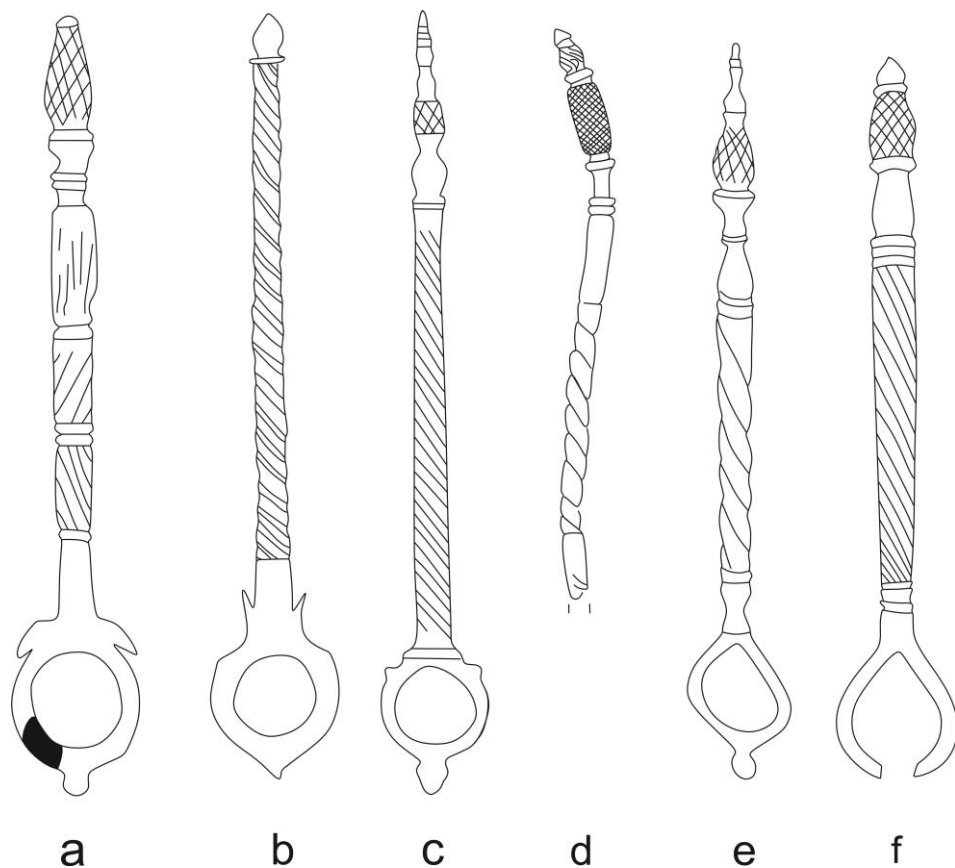


Fig. 11. Finger distaffs with spirally decorated shafts and pinecones on the top discovered at: a. Ephesus (drawing after TRINKL 1994, fig. 1; b. Apulum (drawing after BLEOANĂ 2017, p. 210, pl.I.1-b); c. Viminacium (drawing after DANKOVIĆ 2020, p. 85, Fig. 6.a), d. Stobi (drawing after KOVANCALIEV 2019, fig. 3.18), e-f. Scupi (drawings after JOVANOVA 2013, p. 207).



Fig. 12. Palmyrene funerary relief of Ba'altega, who holds a finger distaff and a spindle in her left hand, AD 150, Harvard Art Museum 1908.3. @Curtesy Harvard Art Museums.