A000-Eur-Switzerland-La Tène Celtic Culture-Spectacle Brooch-300-60 BCE

Figs. 1-2. Eur-Switzerland-La Tène Celtic Culture-Spectacle Brooch-300-60 BCE

**Case no.: 4**

**Accession Number:**

**Formal Label: Eur-**Switzerland-La Tène Celtic Culture-Spectacle Brooch-200-60 BCE

**Display Description:**

The La Tène culture was a European Iron Age Celtic culture named after the archaeological site of La Tène on the north side of Lake Neuchâtel within Marin-Epagnier's communal boundaries in Switzerland, where the small river Thielle, connects to another lake and enters Lake Neuchâtel. Thousands of objects had been deposited in the lake which were discovered when in 1857, when a prolonged drought lowered the waters of the lake by about 2 m. Hansli Kopp, looking for antiquities for Colonel Frédéric Schwab, discovered several rows of wooden piles that still reached up about 50 cm into the water. From among these, Kopp collected about forty iron swords.

Among later discoveries were 385 double-spiral brooches like this one. The brooch was made from a hammered sheet of iron into a cylinder about a yard long. Then the iron was heated and curled into the spiral shapes. The significance of the design of this brooch is cosmological, because it offers a symbol for eternity and for a prolonged life of the wearer: the unending passing of the Sun through the heavens.

This brooch’s Sun imagery is associated with **Sol Invictus** or the "Sun Invincible" which on the winter solstice December 25, 274 CE, Emperor Aurelian named as an additional cult of the Roman Empire. Sol Invictus was also a cult of Roman Legionnaires because it was believed that to believe in **the invincible Sun** guaranteed *their* invincibility on the battlefield. In this respexct **Sol Invictus**  was not a reformulation of the ancient [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latins_(Italic_tribe)) cult of [Sol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_(mythology)),[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus#cite_note-3) a revival of the cult of [Elagabalus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elagabalus_(deity)),[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus#cite_note-4) or completely new.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus#cite_note-5) The god was favored by emperors after Aurelian and appeared on their coins until [Constantine I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_the_Great).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus#cite_note-6) The last inscription referring to Sol Invictus dates to AD 387,[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus#cite_note-7) and there were enough devotees in the fifth century that the Christian theologian [Augustine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo) found it necessary to preach against them.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus#cite_note-8)

This brooch is composed of two mirror image spirals that can be interpreted as depicting the shadow of the sun described by a gnomon for a year. In the summer solstice the spiral cast by the Sun’s shadow is clockwise and in the winter solstice the spiral cast by the Sun’s shadow is counter-clock wise. These two spirals were known as “the horns of the solstices” in pre-modern times. These brooches also suggest that the deposition of these brooches in Lake Neuchatel were ceremonial votive objects for a prolonged life. This interpretation explains why so many Iron Age swords both sharpened and blanks were also deposited in the Lake at this site. These were the weapons of warriors who hoped for a successful battle and a prolonged life: by throwing their weapons in the Neuchatel waters they were metaphorically baptizing them and their owners in the waters of eternal life.



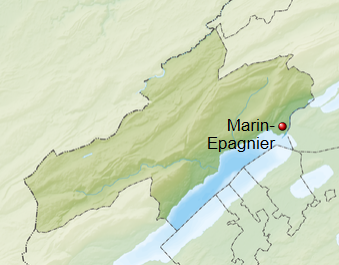
Fig, Double spiral figures of the Sun’s shadow in the winter and summer solstices cast by a gnomon over a year.

**LC Classification:** [GN780.2.L3](http://josiah.brown.edu/search~S7?/c1-SIZE+GN780.2.L3+N38/cgn++780.2+l3+n38/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CE/frameset&FF=cgn++780.2+l3+n38&1%2C1%2C)

**Date or Time Horizon:** 200-60 BCE

**Geographical Area:** north side of Lake Neuchâtel within Marin-Epagnier's communal boundaries in Switzerland

**Map:**



**GPS coordinates:** [47°01′N 7°01′E](https://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Marin-Epagnier&params=47_01_N_7_01_E_region:CH-NE_type:city)

**Cultural Affiliation:** Celtic La Tène culture

**Medium:** Iron

**Dimensions:** 3.5 in

**Weight:**

**Condition: original**

**Provenance:** The first systematic lowering of the Swiss lakes occurred from 1868 to 1883. This brooch was found on the north side of Lake Neuchâtel within Marin-Epagnier's communal boundaries probably in 1880.

**Discussion: After Wikipedia**

With the first systematic lowering of the Swiss lakes from 1868 to 1883, the site fell completely dry. In 1880, Emile Vouga, a teacher from Marin-Epagnier, uncovered the wooden remains of two bridges (designated "Pont Desor" and "Pont Vouga") originally over 100 m long, that crossed the little Thielle River (today a nature reserve) and the remains of five houses on the shore. After Vouga had finished, F. Borel, curator of the Marin museum, began to excavate as well. In 1885 the canton asked the Société d'Histoire of Neuchâtel to continue the excavations, the results of which were published by Vouga in the same year.

The Swiss archaeologist Ferdinand Keller published his findings in 1868 in his influential first report on the Swiss pile dwellings (*Pfahlbaubericht*). In 1863 he interpreted the remains as a Celtic village built on piles. Eduard Desor, a geologist from Neuchâtel, started excavations on the lakeshore soon afterwards. He interpreted the site as an armory, erected on platforms on piles over the lake and later destroyed by enemy action. Another interpretation accounting for the presence of cast iron swords that had not been sharpened, was of a site for ritual depositions.

All in all, over 2500 objects, mainly made from metal, have been excavated in La Tène. Weapons predominate, there being 166 swords (most without traces of wear), 270 lanceheads, and 22 shield bosses, along with 385 brooches (like this one), tools, and parts of chariots. Numerous human and animal bones were found as well. The site was used from the 3rd century, with a peak of activity around 200 BCE and abandonment by about 60 BCE (Megaw and Megaw 2001: 132-133). Interpretations of the site vary. Some scholars believe the bridge was destroyed by high water, while others see it as a place of sacrifice after a successful battle (there are almost no female ornaments).

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