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**BETWEEN TECHNICAL-CULTURAL INNOVATION BY THE TEUTONIC
ORDER AND TRADITIONAL BLACKSMITH CRAFTSMANSHIP.
ON THE MARGIN OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE 13TH-CENTURY SPUR
WITH HINGED SIDES FROM STAROGRÓD, CHELMNO DISTRICT**

Abstract: The article starts with the description of a rare spur with hinged arms from Starogród in Culm Land, discovered during an excavation in 2018. The artifact is dated to the 2nd quarter of the 13th century and comes from the area of the probable first location of Chełmno. The main aim of the study is to describe and discuss the existing theories regarding the interpretation of this form of spurs. There are three main theories on the subject. The most probable one is that the arms with hinges were to serve for easier fixing of spurs on heavy boots and those with large decorations, such as belts or buckles. Due to the very early dating of the oldest spurs of this type, it should rather be said that spurs with hinges were used wherever it was found that it would facilitate their mounting on the leg. In none of the periods of occurrence, were these forms dominant but merely co-existed with those with rigid arms.

Keywords: Starogród, Chełmno (Culm) Land, Middle Ages, the 13th century, hinged spur

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Introduction

During excavations in Starogród (Fig. 1), in the north-western part of Culm Land, an interesting spur was uncovered. In terms of form, it is a regular prick spur with a narrow goad turned slightly downwards, the cone-shaped point of the goad is separated from the neck by a thick ring or a flattened ball. The sides or heel bands are deeply curved to pass below the rider's anklebone and near the neck they are widened upwards in a triangular form. One of the sides is preserved whole and its terminal has a rectangular eyelet for passing through a leather strap. The other side is broken off just below the terminal. What makes the spur interesting are the hinges located in the middle of each side; though, the present state of preservation of the hinges

does not allow for them to move. The spur's (Fig. 2:a) dimensions are: breadth of the spur – at the height of hinges 9.5 cm, length of the spur to the hinges 9.54 cm, length of the right side above the hinge 6.28 cm, length of the goad 3.38 cm, width of the sides around 0.89 cm, internal dimensions of the terminal's rectangular eyelet 1.5 × 0.43 cm.

Along with the spur and in fact linked with it by corrosion and sand a buckle was found. As its internal width corresponds to that of the spur's eyelet it can be assumed that these two objects can be linked as a part of a set. The buckle was probably mounted at the end of a leather strap which was used for fastening the spur onto a leg, and it was not linked directly to the spur. The buckle's (Fig. 2:b) internal width of the eyelet is 1.55 cm.

Both spur and buckle are made of iron. Near the base of the spur's neck there are traces of tin, which may have been covering the whole spur or just some

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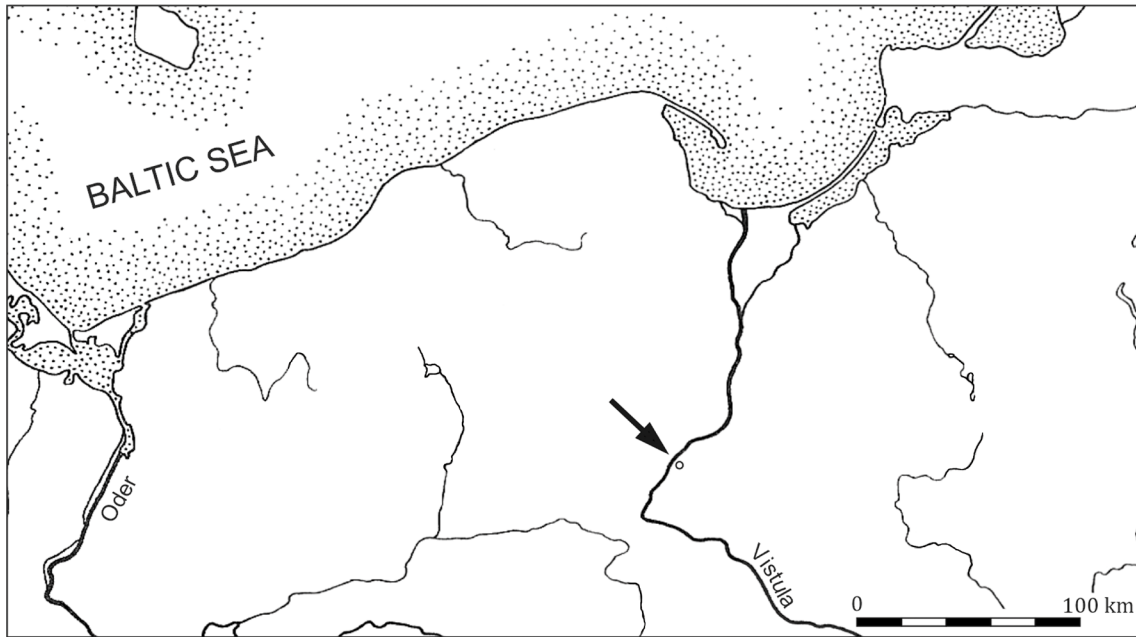


Fig. 1. Location of Starogród site, near Chełmno in northern Poland. Drawing by M. Majewski.

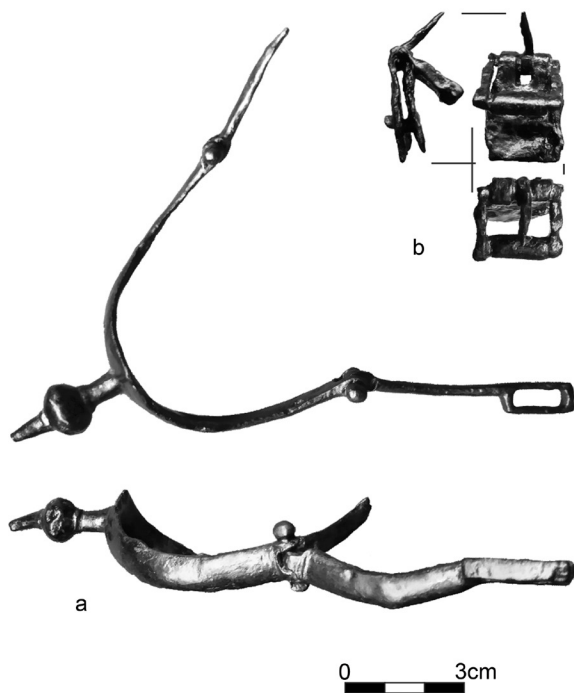


Fig. 2. Hinged prick spur from Starogród, near Chełmno:
a – spur; b – buckle. Photo M. Majewski

part – for decoration. According to the typology by Z. Hilczerówna the spur can be described as type II variation 5 according to Z. Hilczerówna¹ and dated to the 13th-, possibly the beginning of the 14th century. Although it has to be marked that spurs of this type usually have a different form of a goad.

¹ Hilczerówna 1956, 39-41.

In the case of this spur we can talk about very precise dating. The results of excavations in Starogród – on the castle in 2017 and on its presumed extensive bailey in 2018 (Fig. 3) – indicate that the easternmost element of the complex cannot be linked with fortifications of the castle and it is, in fact, the original place of Culm town's location, which was earlier signaled in a publication by B. Wasik.² The results of the latest excavations – 2017-2018³ – describing this matter extensively are being prepared for publication in 2020.⁴ Culm, earlier existing as a settlement, in 1232 received its German town law (*Deutsches Stadtrecht*) charter, which can be linked with this specific location. Later it was relocated two possibly three times, in the end to its present location in 1251.⁵ Excavations in 2018 showed that the area of the supposed lower castle was covered with urban infrastructure and the acquired material – pottery and other objects – can be dated to the 1st half of the 13th century.⁶

According to historical sources, the town of Culm in present-day Starogród was probably abandoned in favor of a new location in 1239 or burned in 1244,⁷ after which the area was not used anymore. That would mean that the town functioned in Starogród only for seven, maximum twelve years.

² Wasik 2016, 268-269.

³ Wasik 2017.

⁴ Wiewióra, forthcoming.

⁵ Jasiński 1980, 40; Chudziak and Bojarski 2015, 86, 90.

⁶ Wasik 2018, 21-31; Wasik, forthcoming.

⁷ Józwiak 1996, 88; Piotr z Dusburga, *Kronika...*, 66; Wasik, forthcoming.

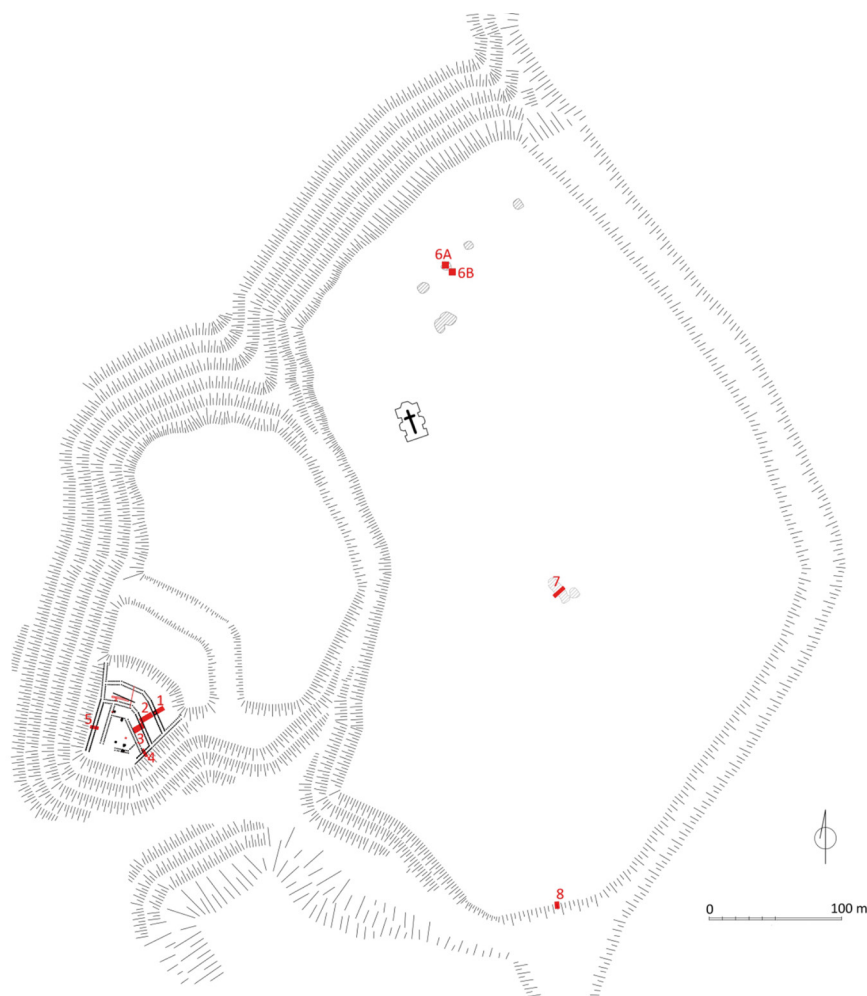


Fig. 3. Starogród, near Chelmino. Location of excavation trenches from the seasons: 2017 in the area of the castle (no. 1–5) and 2018 the area of the original location of Culm town (no. 6–8), hitherto interpreted as a lower castle or bailey. After Wasik 2018, Fig. 2.

The spur was discovered in feature 1, trench 6 near remnants of a town building of wooden construction (Fig. 4). From the feature few other metal objects were excavated, though none of them allowed for precise dating based on finds.⁸

Concerning the function of the hinges there are three theories:

1. Already at the end of the 19th century the German authors R. Zschille and R. Forrer⁹ wrote, that the hinged sides are for better fitting on a leg and are used starting from the 13th century. In 1902 Ch. de Lacy Lacy¹⁰ writes, that such spurs were popularised at the end of the 1680s; this being linked with the development of heavy boots, which become fashionable at that time. It is possible that at the beginning of the 20th century this knowledge was more obvious not just based on analysis of historical material but on everyday analogies. Even in

the year 1990 a Swiss author, G. Nabera-Sartoulet¹¹ writes, that such spurs were popular in Spain as late as in the 1940s.

2. G. Nabera-Sartoulet in his study of the spurs of the world presents a second theory, which he at the same time denies being true. According to some scholars, whom he does not name, hinged sides were for better compression of a spur in transportation and storage when not in use.¹²
3. An interesting theory on a hinged spurs' function was presented in 1998 by K. Wachowski¹³, who, based on the location of known discoveries of such spurs from the Middle Ages, suggested that these should be linked with the State of the Teutonic Order and its cultural influence. According to K. Wachowski, hinged spurs were a form of universal, non-individualised equipment stored in castle arsenals and used as needed by various lower rank warriors.

⁸ Wasik 2018, 8-13.

⁹ Zschille and Forrer 1891, 12.

¹⁰ de Lacy Lacy 1902, 52.

¹¹ Nabera-Sartoulet 1990, 52.

¹² Nabera-Sartoulet 1990, 52, cat. nos. 32, 41, 67, 140, 190, 200.

¹³ Wachowski 1998, 448-450.

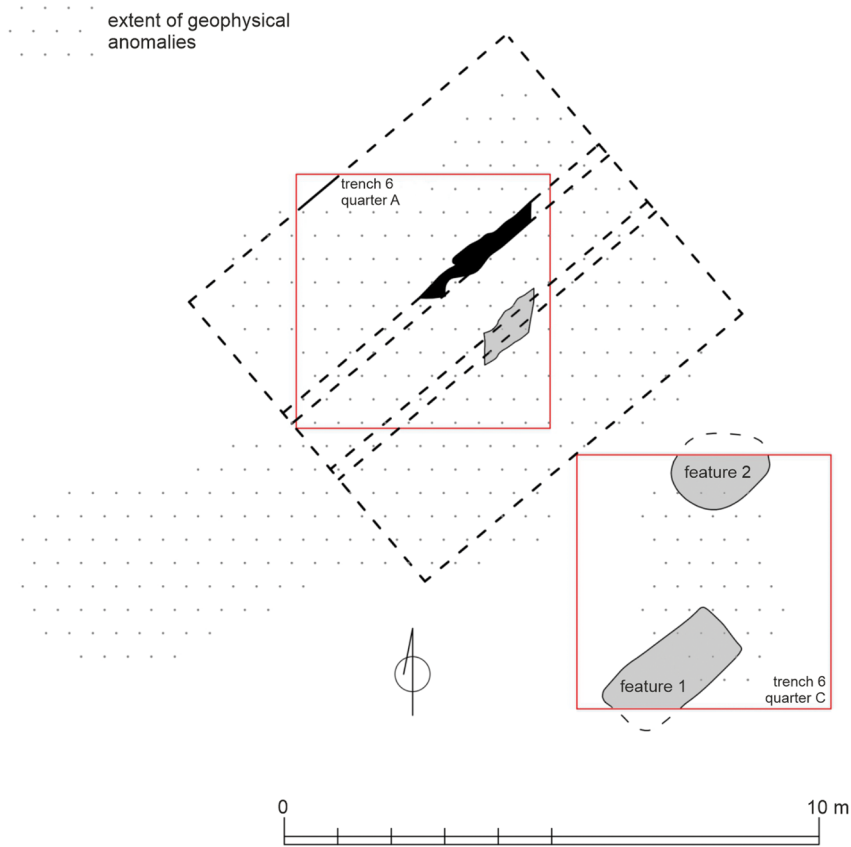


Fig. 4. Starogród, near Chełmno. Reconstruction of a townhouse and the adjoined archaeological features (storage pits?) discovered in trench 6, presented against the background of geophysical anomalies. After Wasik 2018, Fig. 14.

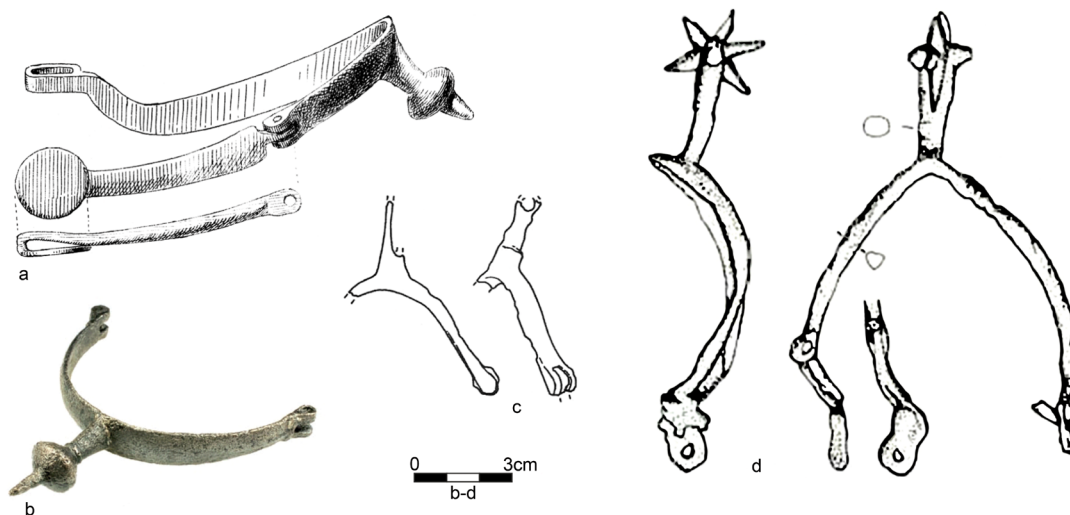


Fig. 5. Known analogical spurs of similar chronology, sites: a – Kovrovo, ray. Zelenogradsk (former Dollkeim, Kr. Fischhausen, East Prussia), Russia (Kaliningradskaja Oblast’), 13th century, no scale. After Zschille and Forrer 1891, Tab. VII: 5; b – Wrocław-Nowy Targ, Poland, 1st half of the 13th century. After Marek 2018, 576, Fig. 431:a; c – Smolna near Oleśnica, Poland, c. half of the 13th century. After Wachowski 1998, Fig. 1:b; d – Veste Coburg, Germany, 13th century. After Goßler 2011, 89, Tab. 22: 396:1.

Comparative data

Considering comparative objects, there are five known analogies of spurs of similar chronology, these come from the following sites: 1) Dollkeim near Königsberg (Fig. 5:a) in present-day Russia

(Kovrovo, Kaliningradskaja Oblast’), dated to the 13th century¹⁴; spur very similar in form but with only

¹⁴ Zschille and Forrer 1891, Tab. VII: 5.

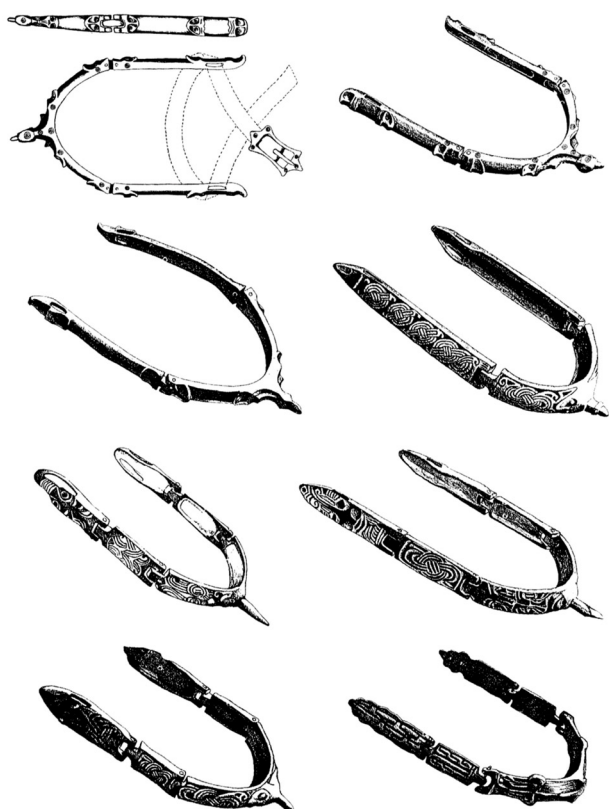


Fig. 6. Known analogical spurs of earlier chronology. The so-called charner spurs from Gotland, 10th century, no scale. After Nylén 1997, 230.

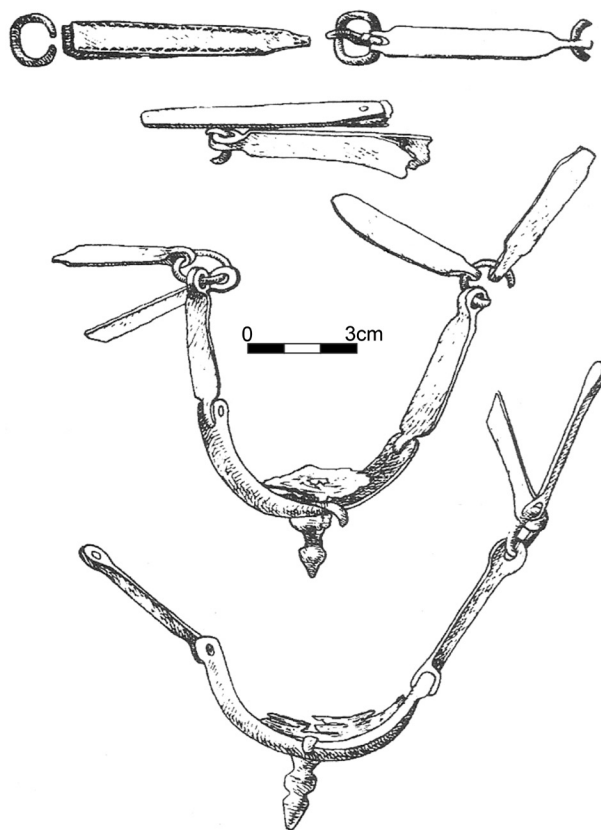


Fig. 7. Known analogical spurs of earlier chronology from burial grounds in Kalniškiai, Lithuania. Joint spurs from horseman's grave (no. 139), 5th century. After Kazakevičius 1996, 111, Fig. 12.

one hinged side. Probably the same spur was published by G. Nabera-Sartoulet,¹⁵ vaguely described as from the last crusades, and dated to the 12th–13th century. 2) Nowy Targ in Wrocław in Poland (Fig. 5:b), dated to the 1st half of the 13th century;¹⁶ partially preserved spur – only up to the hinges – with a similar goad, but with horizontal sides. 3) Smolna near Oleśnica in Poland (Fig. 5:c), dated around the middle of the 13th century;¹⁷ a fragment of a rowel spur with at least one hinge. 4) Unknown origin, collection in Veste Coburg in Germany (Fig. 5:d), dated to the 13th century;¹⁸ rowel spur with one hinged side and similar alignment of sides and rowel neck. 5) Skorošice near Javorník in the Czech Republic, dated to the 15th century;¹⁹ rowel spur with two hinged sides from a motte site.

Four of these analogical spurs are dated to the similar period – the 13th century, but only the first example is the closest analogy in form, although it was probably more robust in construction, possibly also smaller, it is difficult to say as the size is unknown.

Concerning material of earlier dating two cases can be mentioned: 1) A collection of 18 such finds (Fig. 6) was published by E. Nylén,²⁰ all of them come exclusively from Gotland and are dated to the 10th century. These spurs, called in English ‘charner’ spurs²¹ were made of bronze, and they had one or sometimes two hinges on each side. 2) A pair of even older spurs with joints (Fig. 7) was published by V. Kazakevičius.²² These come from multicultural burial grounds in Kalniškiai in Lithuania. Two such spurs were uncovered in grave no. 139 – interpreted as a horseman's grave, and they are dated to the 5th century.

Discussion and conclusions

Returning to the theories on the function of hinged spurs, it has to be said that the first theory is the most probable. It seems only logical that sides with the possibility to open wider and to close in on a leg are meant to fit better. This is also confirmed by modern times analogies associated with heavy footwear.

The second theory seems rather improbable. It would not be often that the spurs have to be transported

¹⁵ Nabera-Sartoulet 1990, Fig. 67.

¹⁶ Marek 2018, 576, Fig. 431:a.

¹⁷ Wachowski 1998, Fig. 1:b.

¹⁸ Goßler 2011, 89, Tab. 22:396:1.

¹⁹ Kouřil and Prix 2008, Fig. 4:4.

²⁰ Nylén 1997, *passim*.

²¹ Eliason 2005.

²² Kazakevičius 1996, 112, Fig. 12.

in luggage or stored in conditions requiring compression of the sides for size reduction. This is also testified by the modern contemporary English antiquarian and art dealer, A. Botterell (internet site²³ and personal communication), who works with later objects of this type where the sides can be moved. According to her such hinges often do not allow for a complete collapse of sides, and the form of the spur does not become much smaller.

The third theory, which seems most interesting from a cultural point of view is debatable. Basically, it comes to theory number one – a need to adapt equipment, in this case, it would be for various users, which is acceptable. The matter of use in the State of the Teutonic Order and its influence areas seems probable as even the newly discovered object from Starogród would confirm this. Unfortunately, the number of such objects is very small, as we only have six such spurs known for the late medieval times. Only two of these come from the area of the Teutonic Order State, and one more can be linked with the Teutonic influence area.

The matter of invention by Teutonic Order is denied by the fact that such spurs were in use already eight centuries earlier. At present, with such a sparse number of finds, it is difficult to establish if the knowledge of such spur form was constant from the 5th century onwards, or whether they were simply invented anew by blacksmiths, as an obvious solution whenever there was such a need.

Continual use from the 5th century onwards seems probable, as the early finds are concentrated on the islands and in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region. They were known in the land of what is now Lithuania and on Gotland, and this may suggest that hinged spurs really were adopted by the State of the Teutonic Order and popularised by them in other parts of Europe. Yet, in this case, they were probably not the inventors, and the hinged spurs would have to be considered another type of equipment adopted from the Prussian tribes conquered by the knightly order. This could be only confirmed or denied by new finds of such spurs and possibly historical sources.

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